

News of the BISHIP company, its ships and staff, its history and *histoires*, of ships and sealing wax, nautical natters, maritime miscellanies and swinging of lanterns

## FROM THE EDITOR...

Call it PHIS (Post Holiday Inertia Syndrome), sheer bloody laziness or the growing requirement to look after a new grandchild, but your Editor has been very dilatory in putting pen to paper following his wonderful trip to New Zealand after Christmas. Indeed, judging by the *cris de coeur* by Simon Morgan, Derek Hargreaves, Willie Ross *et al* on the Biship website, it would seem that quite a few of you feel a little neglected! Never mind, we're back in harness again and look forward to resuming our conversations with you all.

Whilst your editor was away, it appears that one of our number was the victim of some computer hacking, as many of us on his contact list received emails saying that he was destitute in Spain and please send money asap. But of course Nick Pearson is very much OK and is gratified to realise that so many people care about him - and please not to send any money!

Natural disasters seem to dominate our tv screens and headlines these days. Those of us who have experienced hurricanes and the like - as did your editor in the now Bangladesh in November 1970 - can only empathise and pray.

We did think of keeping this picture of Lyttelton Harbour for our competition pages, but perhaps too few of you would recognise the place now as a major logging port. The memsahib was mighty tolerant as your editor explained the various operations. Mind you, this



issue's subject is probably just as difficult! We offer our usual mixed bunch of articles this month and many thanks to all our contributors.

It's good to be back!

## FROM THE SCRAPBOOK...

Many thanks to reader Richard Henderson for this wonderful reminder of The Good Life. Richard cannot help us with any names of these stalwarts from the *Chindwara*. Your editor estimates late fifties or early 60s as a possible date and he is sure that some of his eagled eyed readers will be able to help with identifying these deck scrubbers.



## FROM THE POETRY BOOK....

*It has been a long time since your Editor first saw this elegy to our favourite shipping company and when he 're-discovered' it, he couldn't wait to rush it back into print.*

In 1847, since one hundred and fifty three years,  
That Mac and Mac were at the old Colonial Club in Bombay,  
no doubt partaking of some beers.

Now Mac the first was The McKinnon and the other  
The McKenzie ye ken,  
They would sip and talk and sip and talk in earnest  
these enterprising men.

Well the topic of their discussion is history, now it's unfurled,  
For it was to build a shipping company  
that traded to all corners of the world.

As we reflect upon that time and the foresight  
of these men of yore,  
knowing now the greatness that was achieved  
makes us hold them in some awe.

Their successes they were many and by fortune  
their failures were but few,  
So the shipping line they founded  
just grew and grew and grew.

The funnel with the two white bands,  
so famous to become,  
From America to Russia,  
from Iran to the land of rising sun.

They built their trading posts around the world  
as vessels they were buying,  
And to these agencies their vessels came,  
with flags all proudly flying.

Now the house flag was designed  
the Scots and English to forge,  
The cross it was St. Andrew's  
but the colour was St. George.

The B.I. sailed its vessels through  
both World Wars I and II,  
And as the greatest British fleet  
most losses did accrue.

There were hospital ships and troopers  
and armed merchantmen as well,  
and of many brave and daring feats  
the historians do tell.

The ship names were a history  
of expansion along the way,  
The first vessels named for Indian towns  
all ending in an 'A'.

There followed names across Asia  
and the Africk continent too,  
Through Australia and the Pacific  
the glossary just grew.

The *Molda, Kenya, Chindwara, Chyebassa,*  
*Dunera, Chakdina, Dumra, and Mombasa.*  
*Uganda, Bankura, Zaida, Kampala,*  
*Pentakota, Ozarda, Carpentaria and Chantala .*

The *Santhia, Nowshera, Dwarka, Canara,*  
*Pemba, Nuddea, Dunera and Woodarra,*  
*Aska, Bamora, Karanja, Ormara,*  
*Barpeta, Amra and ill-fated Dara.*

There are many, many others far too  
numerous to name,  
All equally well-remembered and with their  
share of fame.

But two famous B.I. Ladies  
must get a very special place,  
Because of their heroics,  
their history and their grace.

The first of these great ladies  
sailed down the African coast,  
To diplomats and gentry and  
white settlers she played host.

But when this trade depleted  
at the time "Uhuru" came,  
She went to be refitted  
to enjoy another game.

This game, of course, was cruising  
but with a different twist,  
They were children learning lessons  
she took into the mist.

They got to know and love her,  
these young people full of zest,  
And I like to think she taught them  
things on life that she knew the best.

Sure we know that between these cruises  
There was a southern war,  
And a hospital ship she became  
like her sister ships before.

The conflict passed and she returned  
to cruising once again,  
Though now she's gone a lady  
she always will remain.

The other was a grand old lady,  
yes I'm sure you know who - and yet,  
For me although was short-lived  
an experience I'll ne'er forget.

Powered by two T4 cylinder engines,  
making 12 knots with favouring tide,  
She was slow but so majestic  
a stately queen born on river Clyde.

This serene old lady, through her life,  
achieved so many feats,  
Sailing through typhoons and wars and such  
but her voyages she completes.

Even *Queens Mary and Elizabeth* both  
complements combined together,  
Could not surpass this gracious ship,  
which should have sailed for ever.

Her greater part of life was spent  
on the waters of Bengal,  
Taking cargo, crew and passengers  
to many ports of call.

Now many ships have sailed the world,  
the big, the fast, the small,  
But none can ever surpass " *RAJULA*"  
greatest lady of them all.



(continued overleaf)



## FROM THE POETRY BOOK (contd)....

As well as varied vessels  
with a mix of cargo most perverse,  
The crews of the great B.I. argosies  
came from backgrounds equally diverse.

On deck were found mostly Hindus  
from Bombay, Madras and Bangalore,  
Whilst below there were more Muslims  
from Calcutta, Jaipur and Cawnpore.

The Stewards or "Boys" as we called them,  
they answered to any old page,  
were mostly Christians from Goa  
and often three times our age.

The chippies and fitters were Chinese  
from Singers and Honkers they came.  
Hard-working, reliable and honest  
and "John" usually was their name.

The Serangs and the Tindals  
Cassabs and the Sekunnies  
toiled long hours and gave  
sweat for all their monies.

The crews were good,  
seldom causing trouble,  
whilst the Topaz just smiled  
and puffed on hubble-bubble.

Pakistanis, Brits and Africans,  
Aussies and Kiwis too,  
all have their place with many others  
in the B.I. Book of who is who.

Men who went down to the sea in ships  
and remembering ladies as bold,  
many stories have now been written,  
but there are still many to be told.

Well, the ports to which these great vessels travelled afar,  
reads as well as the list of their names, from Suez to Panama.

From Gibraltar, Bombay, Bedi Bundar, Shanghai,  
Middlesborough, Brisbane, Yokohama, Dubai.

The list it is endless, reads like adventure book,  
there's Karachi, Rangoon, and Colombo  
not forgetting on the hook .

Zanzibar, Port Said, Khorramshahr and Tanga,  
Mtwara, Kobe, Napier and Tauranga.

There's Galle, Hamburg, Adelaide and Alleppey,  
Chittagong, Hong Kong, Singapore and add to that Moji.

Calcutta, Glasgow, Mauritius, Antwerp and Auckland as well,  
Then Falmouth, Kuwait and Durban, and last but not least  
Seychelles.

The B.I. we love and remember  
could do anything that was required,  
carry freight, fuel or Haji-passengers,  
what one's heart desired.

From troopers to liners and tugs,  
King Arthur's ships with a ramp,  
*Sir Lancelot, Galahad, Tristram,*  
carry tanks and steel in tramp.

With vessels and cargoes a' travelling  
o'er all world's oceans and seas,  
it was surely a mandatory need  
to man them with skill and expertise.

So once the Great War was ended  
the company its trades to maintain,  
launched its cadet ships  
to produce qualified men of main.

There were thirteen cadetships in number  
training over ten times that number of men,  
the names I'm sure you'll remember,  
if not we'll remind you again.

The first was *Berbera* followed by *Waipara* and *Carpentaria*,  
*Manora*, *Wangaratta*, *Woodarra* and *Australia*.

*Nardana*, *Nerbudda* and *Devon* followed on this famous trend,  
with *Waroonga*, *Chindwara* and *Chantala* bringing up the end.

It's interesting to note in passing  
the practice was a success,  
because many famous companies used  
this method to show their prowess.

The B.I. had lots that was normal,  
but more that was abnormal I guess.  
Do you remember the Malim Sahib's Hindustani  
and the usual forms of address.

*Salaam*, *Kica Hi*, *Atcha*, *Tik Hi* and *Ardmi*  
were some of the words,  
But "*Tum Lakri Lakri Tum*" was the classic  
among the many absurds.

The Malim Sahib, he was all knowing,  
of course dependant on his rank.  
The Captain Sahib he was perfection,  
tho' it's rumoured some of them drank.

The Mistri Sahib was a mystery  
one never knew what he meant,  
unless you were fluent in Gaelic  
you couldn't understand his intent.

Do you remember the bridge when on stations?  
The engine-room phone would blare,  
The Chief Engineer was a'calling  
"watch out or there'll be no bloody air".

The pilot on hearing this message  
went out on the wing and was sick,  
So the master in control, as always,  
muttered something and let go the pick.

Do you remember the 1st trip apprentice,  
all decked out in new attire?  
He didn't know bowlines from sheepshanks  
but his belly was brimful of fire.

For within less than four years of joining a life  
that at first was so new,  
He'd be back to sail as an officer,  
a career person through and through .

Do you remember in the Gulf in summer,  
120° on the plates?  
No a/c around in those days,  
just an ancient fan that gyrates.



(continued overleaf)



## FROM THE POETRY BOOK (contd)....

Fixing boilers and gennies, checking all the dials  
and all in heat so severe,  
it's no wonder at all that these men of steel  
when off duty consumed ice cold beer.

Do you remember that P&O gentlemen  
to be officers tried really hard?  
And the B.I. officers equally  
to be gentlemen usually marred.

At the end P&O were successful  
in leading the world's greatest fleet.  
But there's something that they'll never equal  
and that's B.I.'s major feat.

'Twas the 16th of September in Mombasa  
and the year was 1950 and one.  
There were six B.I. ships alongside  
and one doubled in the sun.

There was *Mantola*, *Mombasa* and *Kenya*  
with *Karanja* and *Modasa* too,  
the *Tabora* alongside *Kampala*  
to be at the end of the queue.

The activity at all berths was hectic,  
not one berth was spare in port,  
Whilst other companies raised objections  
their clamouring all came to nought

It was "B.I. Sunday" and no other company  
had a ship berthed - just the seven!  
Maybe Mac and Mac smiled and raised their glasses  
as they looked down from heaven.

There is much more that could be written about this company  
its ships and personnel.  
In its century and a quarter of operations  
it has over many cast its spell.

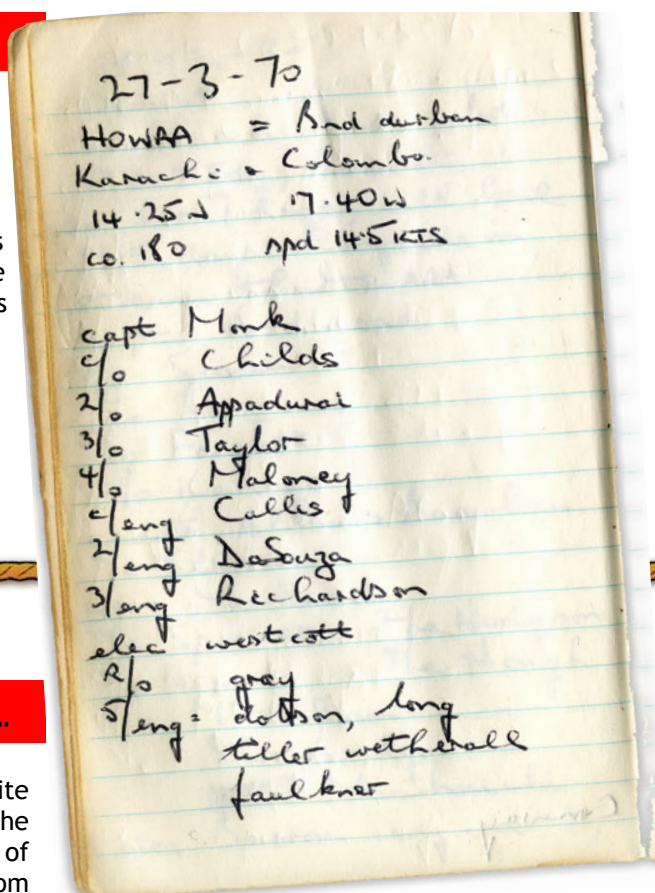
In today's world crime, piracy and wars rife  
and honest values seemingly doomed to die,  
think back with gratitude my friends  
to the joy, happiness and friendship all found in B.I.

IAN BOTELER MARR



## FROM THE LITTLE BLACK BOOK ....

We are again indebted to the wonderful David Hammond for yet another extract from his seemingly inexhaustible range of BI crew lists garnered when he was serving as a Radio Officer on BI ships. Your editor has known David since those days, but is chastened to note that he appears only once in the four book set. Ah well, obscurity probably has its benefits!



## FROM THE SUBSCRIPTIONS DEPT ....

Young Tracy has just rushed up to the Executive Suite (apparently she likes exercise) to announce that the following have recently joined our growing list of subscribers: Martin Speller, Mike Davison, both from New Zealand; Tony Henley; Sean Wedick from USA; Graham Beeby, Seamus Baragry, Colin Hall, David Kennedy, all from UK. Gentlemen, you are amongst friends.

## FROM THE COMPETITION DEPT....

The latest in our little “where are we now?” competitions posed no threat to our eagle-eyed readers, who, by their hundreds (*a bit of editorial licence there, methinks!*) correctly identified the famous tusks in Kilindini Road, Mombasa, amongst them Frank Ayers, Chris Shelbourn and Sandy Bowman. Many readers were more interested in the identities of our two revellers - but wild horses wouldn't drag their names from your Editor's lips. Your secret is safe here, Tony. The photo provoked some memories from Gordon Wood, who recalled “*having spent my childhood in East Africa (including Mombasa), my parents still retained contact with old rafikis (friends) there long after their return to England in 1967. When in port in Mombasa (as chotah sahib) I was expected to look up their rafikis. This usually entailed being invited out for dinner. Invariably I used the excuse that I was on duty later that night and they would kindly drop me off at the gangway around 2100 hrs. No sooner were they out of sight I hopped into the nearest cab to catch up with the lads ashore! Apart from the “Star Bar”*



*I recall that the night club located at the old waterfront swimming pool (“New Florida”) was another favourite haunt. For more salubrious surroundings we would head off the island to “Nyali Beach Hotel”, and even further north to “Whispering Palms”. A visit to the latter resort resulted in a palm tree “stepping out” from the side of the road and the forepeak of our Morris Minor rental car being stove-in! As it took several hours for a group of us from “Uganda” to be “rescued”, there was nothing for it but to do our best to deplete the bar of its stocks of “Tusker”! Oh Happy Days!”*



We now have Don Wood to thank for what is probably the most obscure “Where are we now?” picture that we have published to date. The ship is the ‘Ellora’, so that probably will give you a clue that it is not one of BI's more usual ports. Answers, as usual, to “[...calling BI](#)” for fabulous prizes.

If any other readers can unearth pictures that may be good for this spot, do please let us have them. All contributions are gratefully accepted.

## FROM THE ANTIPODES....

This merry band was on hand to give your Editor and his lady a wonderful time in Auckland's Mission Bay area recently. Much swinging of lanterns was done by, left to right, Martin Speller, John Buxton, Robyn Speller, Rita Johnson, Anne Gates, Marjory Buxton, Tony Gates and John Davison. John Davison in particular recalled a splendid night that your Editor enjoyed with him in Singapore back in '68, dancing away in the Tropicana night club - not with each other, of course! It was splendid to meet up with some of our readers and old friends and to hear more about the thriving social scene enjoyed by our Australian and NZ colleagues. Some of them managed to get together in April last year in Queenstown, as the smaller photograph shows. You certainly have fun, ladies and gentlemen, and your Editor for one is quite jealous!



## FROM THE GALLEY....

As your Editor sits surrounded by late winter mists, his mind wanders back to sunnier and hotter climes. And irresistibly, memories of that wonder drink, lime pani, come to tickle the taste buds of his memories. We are indebted to reader Peter Fielding for the following recipe, which he first put up on the Bishop website back in 2009:

75g. sugar, juice of 1 lime, 1/2 tsp. salt, fresh mint leaves, lemon slice.

Mix sugar with 750ml water till dissolved. Add lime juice and salt, and stir. Serve with ice. (And the mint and lemon, of course.)

Peter says that he can't remember from whom he got the recipe and doesn't know why it's in metric - we were still civilised in BI - but nevertheless it works.

Not ones to be left out, however, our cousins from the Naval tradition extolled the virtues of lemon drink in a 1830 circular, as follows:

"Lemon juice, our grand anti-scorbutic, is not issued except to the ships going on foreign stations, nor until fourteen days have elapsed after the issue of beer, fresh meat, fruit or vegetables ceased - unless, under some extraordinary circumstances, the surgeon thinks it necessary for the health of the crew.

"There is no fixed regulation as to the manner in which it is to be used - it may be either mixed with the grog or made into lemonade. The allowance is half an ounce of lemon juice and half an ounce of sugar per day, to each man. Some officers prefer serving out double

allowance for one week, and then missing a week: the pint of lemonade is thus made doubly strong, and, of course, more agreeable to the palate. It is sometimes mixed with the grog, which is converted into punch by this process; but this is not relished by the sailors.

Occasionally, it is served out in a raw state, and in this case, the men use it either as a condiment for their dough or pudding, or mix it with their drinking water. It is generally appreciated in any way, and seems to be equally beneficial in all, as far as the health of the crew is concerned".

When in the Caribbean on *Nevasa's* second cruise to those parts, we came across - and of course sampled copiously - the local rum punch recipe, which is easy to remember, being:

One of Sour, Two of Sweet, Three of Strong, Four of Weak where sour = lemon or lime juice, sweet = sugar or cane syrup, strong = rum, weak = water.

Cheers!



## FROM THE MET OFFICE....

Over the last few weeks and months, we have been made very aware of the ravages that a cyclone can wreak upon our world and our hearts must go out to our Australian readers for all the problems that they have endured at



natural forces. Most of our readership will have had first hand experience of these and pay proper respect for the immutable and terrible laws of nature.

the hands of the weather. Nor, in this regard, of course, are we any the less mindful of all the other natural disasters that have been inflicted on our friends in New Zealand and Japan. But, as these two photos of 2005's Hurricane Katrina prove, there is still something awe-inspiring in

## FROM THE HISTORY BOOK....

Two very significant anniversaries loom large in April this year, both being at opposite ends of the emotional spectrum. Fifty years ago, on 8th April 1961, the company's ship mv *Dara* suffered an explosion and fire which caused the third biggest loss of life on a British ship since the sinking of the *Titanic*. Exact numbers of deaths have always been argued about, but it is thought that some 212 out of around 819 people lost their lives. The exact cause of the explosion has never been determined, but most theories centred around a bomb planted by Omani terrorists. The Chief Officer at the time, Peter Jordan, wrote movingly about the tragedy in 2006 as follows:

*"I was in fact chief officer on board that terrible night, so am fully aware of the sequence of events.*

*The explosion occurred outside the vishiwala galley which went through to the engine room bulkhead and up through 2 decks, which were the passenger and main lounge. Having checked, as best as possible, there*

*was no way of containing the fire due to the fact that the bomb had disrupted all electrical, fire water and steering module, so we had no choice but to abandon ship.*

*Alarms by this time were already going off, crew were*



*alerted and due to the weather, which was almost gale force, the fires spread rapidly. We launched lifeboats, but due to the panic, one lifeboat in particular, I recall, was overcrowded and overturned in the rough sea. Another life boat manned by the second officer had been damaged by a Greek vessel which had dragged her anchor and collided with our bow and damaged the lifeboat and a few other parts of the ship some hours prior to the explosion! This lifeboat full of people, though almost sinking due to the damage, was rescued by a Norwegian tanker's lifeboat. This same Norwegian tanker came*

*steaming in despite the fact they were not gas free (i.e. at high risk themselves of exploding) and saved many many lives including my own. I wish to thank them very much.*

*As for, dare I say it, the Empire Guillemot, we called her by Morse light and asked for*



*help, but due to her cargo of bombs and explosives she could not and would not come close for fear of explosion; that is a fact!! She sat out there like, well I'm sorry there was no excuse, they were the nearest ship to us, and sat there, they could have steamed in, dropped some lifeboats and moved on, but alas did not. As for reports I have read, that they saved lives, well they did not, they may have had survivors picked up by the Norwegians transferred to their ship, but that is all.*

*I am 75 years of age now, so can speak freely of the events that occurred that night. I do not wish to incite any anger or change to what has been said and written, but facts are facts, and I can only say the truth as it was. I do not wish to put a damper on the *Dara* as a dive site, however, for me at least she is a gravesite for all the people who lost their lives that terrible day and should be respected as such".*

A reply by the owner of the website in which Peter expressed his views replied: "While respecting Peter's views regarding *Dara* being used as a dive site, and it may

*be appropriated to regard it as a memorial to those who died, it is my information that the ship had been boarded by US and British naval personnel, as explained above, and was in tow when it went down. As such it is assumed that all the crew and passengers had had the chance to leave the ship. There may have been the bodies of anyone killed by the blast, still on board but I can say that in almost fifty years the wreck has been dived, I had never heard of anyone coming across any remains".*



## FROM THE HISTORY BOOK....

Without endorsing either point of view regarding the diving, should you wish to view a video of the wreck go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xsjzaYqrMzU>.

The ship's crew list at the time: Captain C. Elson, Chief Officer Peter Jordan, Second Officer Charles Alexander, Third Officer P C S Jackson, Extra Third Officer - B R L J Heard, Cadet J J Grimwood, Cadet Ian Tew, 1st Radio Officer A D Sinclair, 2nd Radio Officer L McGrath, Surgeon Dr A N Banerjee, Purser J E Murray, Extra Purser J D Soares, Chief Engineer Officer G K Cruickshank, 2nd Engineer Officer R K Birrell, 3rd Engineer Officer J Edgar, 4th Engineer Officer D J McLeod, Junior Engineer Officer P Durham, Junior Engineer Officer D Bhattacharjee, Junior Engineer Officer N H M Ali.

A scant few days after this sad tragedy, a change of fortunes occurred for BI. After a £100 000 refit at Palmers Hebburn-on-Tyne yard, on 12th April 1961, the *Dunera* sailed gracefully down the Clyde on the first of the modern educational cruises that illuminated so many young lives over the years, including, apparently, your editor's future partner-to-be - only neither of us realised the significance for many long years. After many proud years of trooping and achieving some sort of fame in bringing some 2000 refugees to Australia in 1940, immortalised in the film "The Dunera Boys", the ship began an altogether happier role. This posting on a website is typical: *We left Genoa, and travelled down the Adriatic to Palermo, Sicily, then to Greece to see the Acropolis, moving back up the Adriatic we stopped at Dubrovnik in Yugoslavia, Up then to Venice, and back again to Genoa for the return train journey.*

*I remember the other school children; In particular the girls! I was a rough kid from the east end of London and they were, in my eyes, posh kids from the nice places like (the only place I can remember) RAF Chichester. I hope somebody can remember that cruise and can tell me they remember it, and maybe me.*

*I fell in love about six times whilst on that cruise and even travelled down to see one of the girls in Chichester, but you know how it is after a holiday romance? Its not the same on a rainy day in Chichester.*

*The cruise changed my life, It broadened my outlook on life, gave me standards of behaviour and speech to aspire to and made me think about bettering my education, and planning a positive future.*

*Now, I believe I have been successful in life, have successful children who have had a good university education, have four happy Grandchildren, and retired early (53). I really believe that my life was changed and has been good, in part due to the influence of that cruise. Thanks, Dunera.*



These two anniversaries are redolent with many varying memories and conflicting emotions, affecting not only BI staff but also thousands of people world-wide.

