



News of the BSN 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...

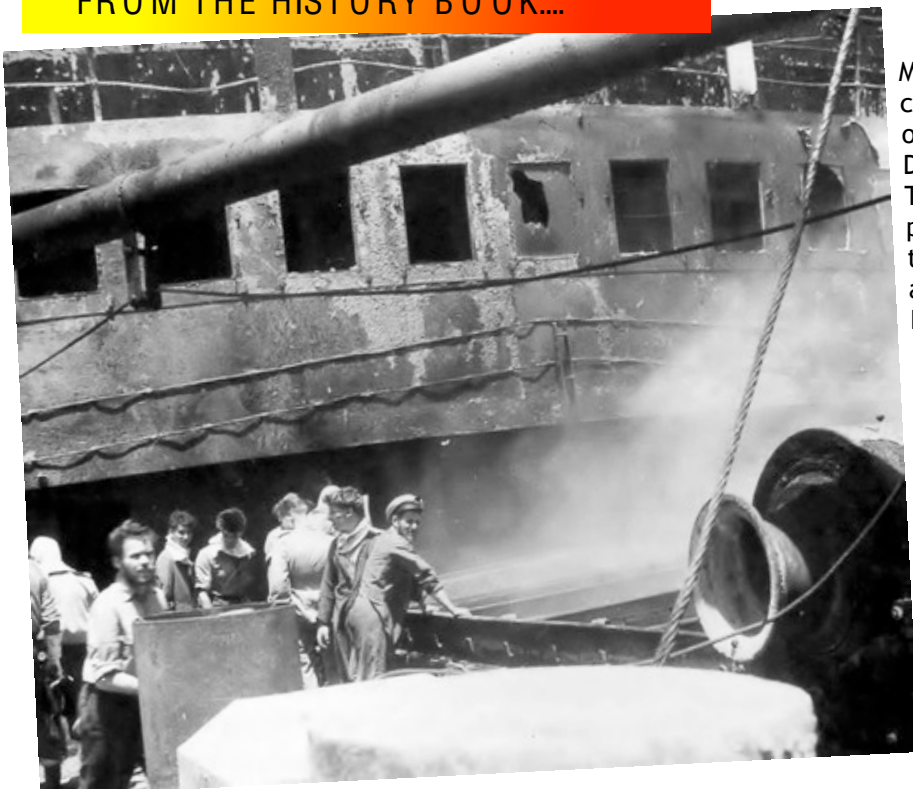
In this the first issue of 2012, we offer you our usual mixed bag of subjects old and new, if occasionally sombre. We thank our usual plethora of correspondents, without whom you probably wouldn't be reading a thing.

At time of writing, most of the UK is blanketed with that white stuff and, of course, everybody appears to be moaning about being marooned, suffering train delays, burst water pipes and the like. In light of this, your editor's daughter - who lives in Edinburgh - sent the following observation: at 50°F, people in southern England turn on the central heating, people in Edinburgh plant out bedding plants. At 40°F, Southerners shiver uncontrollably, Glaswegians sunbathe on the beach at Largs. At 35°F, cars in the south of England refuse to start, people in Falkirk drive with their windows down. At 20°F, Southerners wear overcoats, gloves and woolly hats, Aberdonian men throw on a T-shirt and their girlfriends wear miniskirts. At 15°F Southerners begin to evacuate to the continent, people from Dundee swim in the River Tay at Broughty Ferry. At 0°F, life in the south grinds to a halt, people in Dunfermline have the last barbecue of the summer. At -10°F, life in the South ceases to exist, people in Inverness throw on a light jacket. At -80°F, polar bears wonder if it's

worth carrying on, Boy Scouts in Oban start wearing long trousers. At -100°F, Santa Claus abandons the North Pole, people in Stirling put on their long johns. At -173°F, alcohol freezes, Glaswegians get upset because all the pubs are shut. At -297°F, microbial life starts to disappear, the cows in Dumfriesshire complain about farmers with cold hands. At -460°F, all atomic motion stops, Shetlanders stamp their feet and blow on their hands. At -500°F Hell freezes over, Scotland supports England in the World Cup. True, true. Don't forget the two big 'bashes' happening this year - The Australian reunion at the beginning of March, being organised by Sandy Yeats and Chris Blake and the last UK reunion to be organised by Sue Spence. This will be in Southampton in October. There is some hope that the tradition will be maintained, with Mike Feltham (along with James Slater and David Mitchell) offering to organise one in Liverpool from the 10th to 12th of October, 2014. This is great news, your editor can return to the land of his birth - book me in, Mike! There will also be the Engineers' get together in Glasgow in September, the BIER (British India Eastern region) perambulations to the pub in May and November. And no doubt there will be others.

We hope you enjoy this issue. If you have, tell your friends! If you haven't, it is possibly because you haven't sent in any material yet. We're willing to print almost anything that is legal, (consult privately with your editor if it is not!).

## FROM THE HISTORY BOOK....



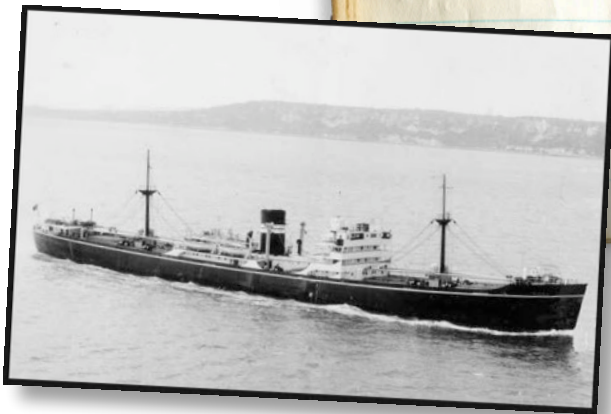
Most readers will recall the extensive coverage in this newsletter and elsewhere on the anniversary of the sinking of the Dara last year. We thank reader Steve Tilston for this previously unknown photograph taken from the main deck in the aftermath of the explosion. Can anyone identify any of the firefighters? Please let us know.

FROM THE LITTLE BLACK BOOK...



17-2-70  
SIRSA bnd Quillon  
 - Bombay for mtwara  
 - Dar es Salaam

capt	Gordon (leaving in
4/o	Lindsay
2/o	Chapstell
3/o	King
2 3/o	Partridge
4 eng	Neeson
2 1/2 eng	Chopra
3 1/2 eng	Yadav
4 1/2 eng	Porter
	Jarney
2/o	Hemtle



Once again we have to thank regular contributor David Hammond for this extract from his Little Black Book of 52 years ago. Readers may recall that in our last issue, we featured the crew list from *Bulimba* in December 1970, proceeding southwards off the south coast of Portugal. Included in that crew list was David Rutter, a green and new fifth Engineer. He writes in: "I don't know why *Bulimba* was transferred from eastern service, but I joined her about two months previously in Avonmouth as a very nervous first-time-at-sea 5th engineer.

We loaded for the Red Sea in Avonmouth, Hull and Tilbury, then completed loading in Bremen, Hamburg and Rotterdam. Departing UK about December, we bunkered in Durban and proceeded to discharge in the various Red Sea ports.

It's here my memory begins to fail me. I think we loaded cargo in Mtwara and other ports taking a cargo to Cochin and, I think, Quilon. I know we arrived in Bombay (sorry, Mumbai) and anchored for a considerable length of time. I believe *Bulimba* was sold at this time as I transferred to *Chakla* (another name from the past) And others moved to *Dwarka* and *Sirdhana*. Maybe the forthcoming sale was the reason for her to be sailing on the UK-Red Sea service.

I do hope this is of some use to you and may help explain why she was proceeding as reported.

After some 3 years spent on *Bulimba*, *Chakla*, *Jumna* (I think), *Nowshera* and *Manora*, I left BI. They were very informative (never boring) years".

Many thanks for the info, David. Many people lose their brain up the Red Sea, don't worry!  
 And many thanks, David, for the crew list.



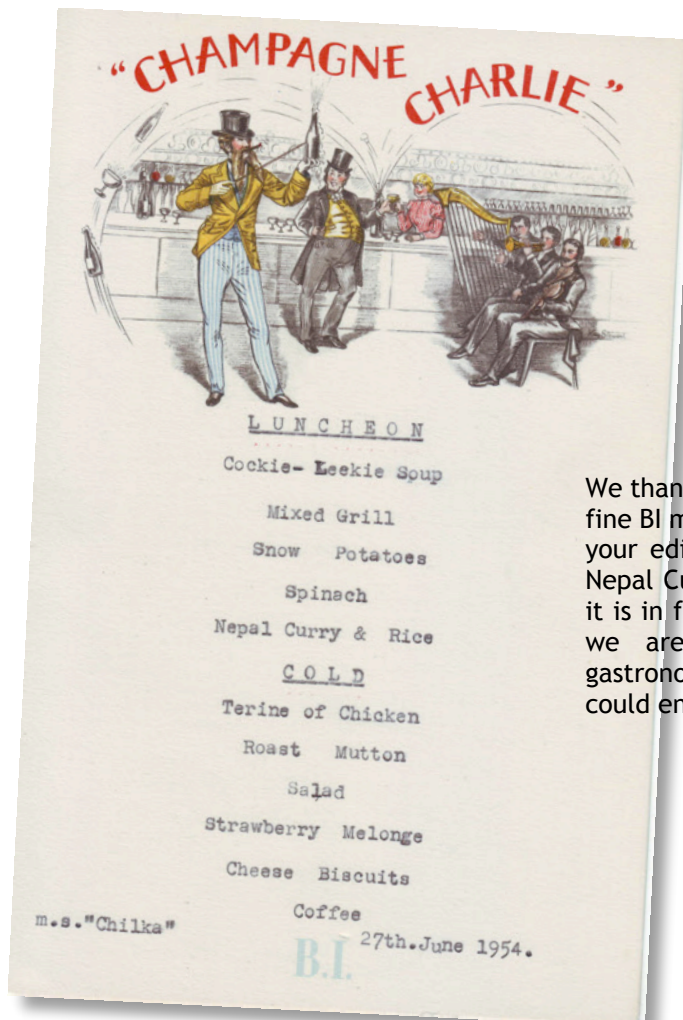
## FROM THE SOCIAL CALENDAR...

Yet more conviviality from those folk in the north-west of UK. Mike Feltham writes: "An enjoyable afternoon was spent on 3<sup>rd</sup> January at the Royal Oak, Appleby. Present were Tony Hamnett, Alisdair Macintosh, Bob Dobie, Derek Hargreaves, John Pinder, Chris & Dell Wright, David Mitchell and myself. Apologies were received from James Slater and Brian Parke.

As you can see by Tony Hamnett's photos, there was a lot of BI silverware on the table, courtesy of David Mitchell, plus a short talk on the history of two articles from a BI ship of the 1890's!". David Mitchell tells your editor that he will be attending the Freemantle reunion, so we look forward to some good stories and photos from the event. Your editor just regrets that duties at home prevent him from attending in person. Have a great time, everybody!



## FROM THE MESS-ROOM...



We thank reader Richard Henderson for this fine BI menu from almost 60 years ago. Like your editor, Richard cannot recall what a Nepal Curry tastes like or indeed, whether it is in fact a *bona fide* BI curry. However, we are sure that there must be a gastronome amongst our subscribers who could enlighten us.



## FROM THE BRIDGE...

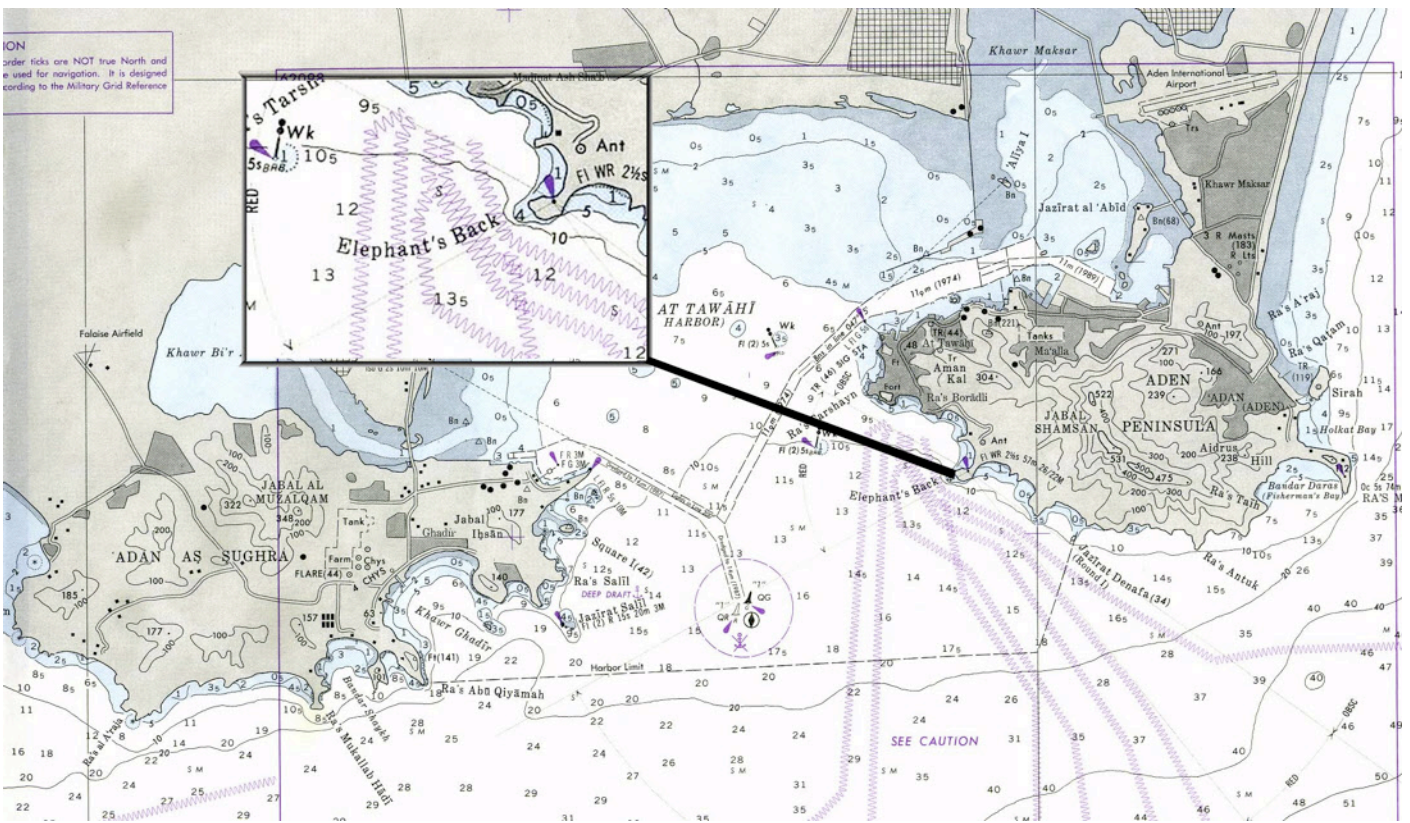


Because we reproduce elsewhere in this issue some pretty dramatic photographs of the *Sirdhana*, we thought it was apposite that we carry these reminiscences from Tony Boddy of his time on that good ship. Tony originally posted these on the BI ship website.

“With regard to the accuracy of star sights, the most crucial that I ever took was in *Sirdhana* when she was on the Haj. We had two to three months of continuous monsoon which had knocked out the radar, the echo sounder and the gyro. We were en route from Colombo to Jeddah and were due to enter the Gulf of Aden that night. Of course we had had no sights since leaving the Sri Lankan coast.

The cloud cover began to break up at around sunset and, with a rather fuzzy horizon, I took a star sight of five or six stars which put us some twenty miles NNE of our DR. For some completely unknown reason, for the one and only time in my seagoing experience, the Radio Officer decided to take a D/F position and got two bearings which crossed more or less on the DR. The Master, Captain Clive Turner, came to the bridge and asked me which position I thought that he should take. I told him that Sparks had only two bearings, while I had five or six stars and insisted that my position was accurate to five miles. He took my position and we set course to enter the Gulf of Aden in the early hours.

I came to the bridge at 0400 for my watch and nothing had yet been seen. Soon thereafter and still in pitch darkness I saw the Elephant's Back light at about twenty to thirty degrees elevation. (*Your Editor calculates that this would have put them only about 4 miles off the coast!*). What had happened was that a sandstorm ashore had blacked out all the lights and, although it was clear at sea, the shoreline was completely obliterated. I immediately altered course 180 degrees and



called Captain Turner. He told me to call out the Tindal and his gang and we rigged the trusty Kelvin Hughes sounding machine. We looked for and found the hundred fathom line. We tacked along the hundred fathom line until daylight, at which time we could see the sand storm along the shore. Throughout that Haj service we used the KH sounding machine whenever we were near to shallow water simply because that was the only navigation aid that we had that was working. Thankfully it had an electric motor, so we did not have to haul it up by hand.

Captain Clive Turner was a fantastic Shipmaster. I sailed with him for nearly two years, including the collision of *Sirdhana* with the *USS General William Mitchell* at the inner breakwater of Yokohama, which entailed us being there for five months (*see later: Ed*). He was fantastic with passengers, always affable, very approachable and totally competent.

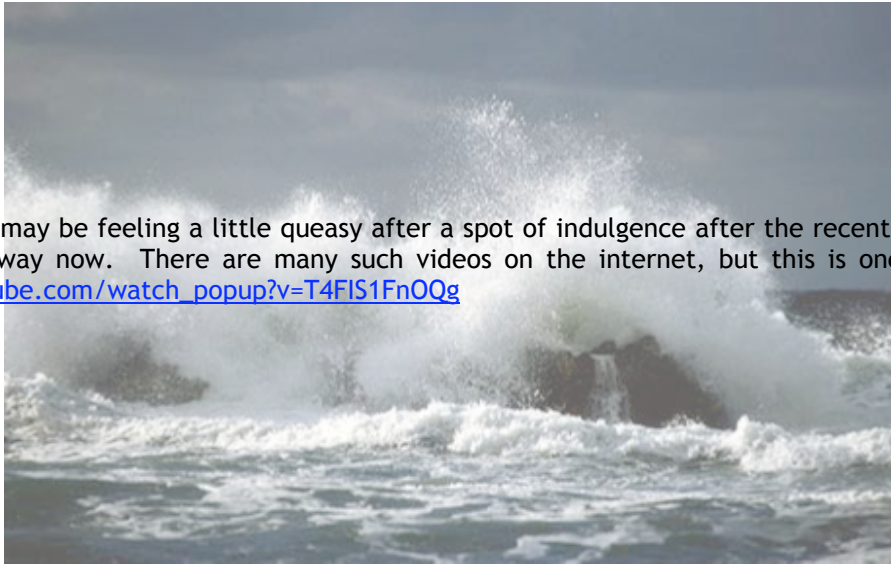
I remember leaving the Basses Lights en route for Chittagong, also on the Haj and also in the SW monsoon, with no hope of any sun or star sight and being so grateful that he was in charge instead of me. Sometimes the lot of a Master could be a very lonely one”.

Your Editor remembers well the hazards of navigating in the Red Sea. For several years, the Aircraft Radio Beacon at Jeddah was reckoned to be some miles away from its charted position and the best navigational mark was the wreck of a Greek ship on the reefs off the port!

## FROM THE STORM CENTRE...

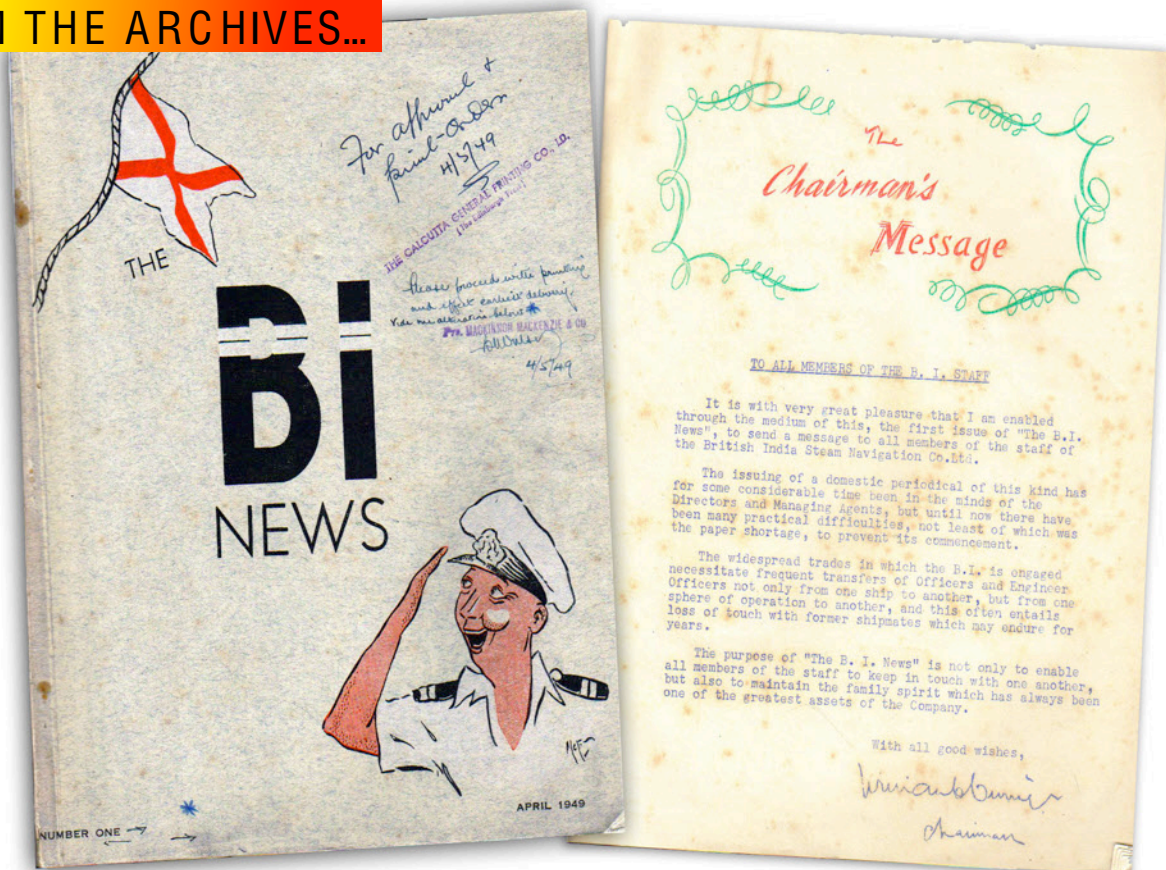


Those of you who may be feeling a little queasy after a spot of indulgence after the recent seasonal festivities are advised to look away now. There are many such videos on the internet, but this is one of the strongest yet.  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch\\_popup?v=T4FIS1FnOQg](http://www.youtube.com/watch_popup?v=T4FIS1FnOQg)



Somewhat off-topic but on the subject of strong videos and seasonal festivities, your editor makes no apology for offering this link to a video from the Transport Accident Commission of Victoria, Australia. He just wishes that it could have been seen by more people in the run-up to the Christmas and New Year party season. Click on [http://www.youtube.com/watch\\_popup?v=Z2mf8DtWWd8](http://www.youtube.com/watch_popup?v=Z2mf8DtWWd8).

## FROM THE ARCHIVES...



We thank that unofficial BI archivist, David Mitchell, for this glimpse of that rarest of all BI artefacts, the very first BI News, published in April 1949. No less than 52 pages long (which of course puts your editor's own lowly offering in perspective), it was roneo-ed off and presumably distributed throughout the fleet. The editorial was followed by an article on Calcutta, then The New Arrivals, Tales of Long Ago, Hail and Farewell, In Lighter Vein, finishing with no less than eight pages entitled Leisure Hours. This general format was followed for the first five issues, when the next two issues were printed by the Baptist Mission Press. In August 1952, when issue no. 8 was published, the size was reduced and the pages were perfect bound. The production eventually moved to London with issue 30 in January 1962 under the aegis of David Precious. Publication eventually ceased with issue 69 in September 1971.



## FROM TIMES PAST...



It is a sad and regrettable fact of life that we are perforce a diminishing band of BI-ers. It seems recently that not a day goes past without learning of yet another old colleague's departure from this life. In our last issue we told you of the death of John Rees, whose funeral your editor was privileged to attend, along with John Prescott, Barrie Sanderson, Peter Motion, Mike Wheeler, Alan Myers, Derek Ings and Barry Fleetwood.

Just shortly before John's passing, we learnt that John Smith, chief engineer officer, had also died. There were many comments on the Blship website. We offer you just three of them:

After a long illness, John Smith passed quietly away at home on 20<sup>th</sup> December. He was just a little short of 84. BISH was the only company that he worked for, despite, P & O years that he was employed by the P & O General Cargo Division. He just ignored that. His favourite ships were the 'K's, with *Karanja* being at the top of the list. I sailed with *Strathmore*, to complete education, ship held for us and friendship when I visited regular basis in 1982. By BI had a meteoric rise to Chief Engineer and was held in high regard by all who came in contact with him. When *Dwarka* sailed on her final voyage, John Smith was her Chief Engineer. A seafarer's education was not complete until he had sailed on the *Dwarka*!



John on *Strathmay* and, my BI *Dwarka*. This many memories the forged was maintained John on a after he retired standards, John rise to Chief

held in high regard by all who came in contact with him. When *Dwarka* sailed on her final voyage, John Smith was her Chief Engineer. A seafarer's education was not complete until he had sailed on the *Dwarka*!

At the celebration of John's life, his family arranged for a floral tribute in the shape of an anchor topped by a black funnel with two white bands. My wife and I laid this floral arrangement at the relatively new Scottish Merchant Navy Memorial in Leith, Edinburgh.



Eoin Bruce

I remember John (*Baby Face*) Smith as a keen follower of anything electronic and, back in the 60's, this was very new ground for any aspiring engineer. John bought an electronic kit with instruction manuals and set about teaching himself to understand and assemble simple electronic devices. One of his first achievements was an electronic fish trap. The battery powered device emitted a certain audible frequency beep that attracted fish. I am not sure if it was legal or effective, but either way, John was always well respected for his innovative ideas and jovial attitude on life. Sad to see him go.

Bill (Willy) Ross

I sailed with John (Baby Face) Smith on *Woodarra* and found him to be the complete Chief Engineer. Not only did he look after his ER with regular visits (sometimes to the annoyance of the ZEO, the late Ian McQuarrie), he looked after his engineers and was always willing to help them in some obscure engineering fact. He also looked after us in port. I recall in Sydney, he caught us one day after lunch and said, "You (except for the Panch and man 'keeping ship' can all have the afternoon off if you come bowling with me". We piled into taxis and headed off to a ten pin bowling alley ignoring the fleshpots of Kings Cross. He did the same in Brisbane, if I recall. John was a wonderful character and I was sorry I could not catch up with him at the only BI Engineers' lunch I attended in Glasgow. I found out later he was seriously ill. He gave me a fine reference when I wrote to him after leaving the sea that really helped me. John and Ian made a good team and it was a pleasure to serve with them.

George Preston

Also at John's funeral were Bob Dobbie, Colin Fletcher, Alisdair MacIntosh, Hugh MacIntyre, Ricky Maxwell, David Mitchell, James Slater, Alastair Wells, Tom Kelso, amongst others. John was also directly responsible for reviving The BI Engineers' Association in the 1990's when it was on its knees and, without his intervention, it would possibly not exist today. Certainly a man whose reputation and character was known to many who hadn't actually met him.

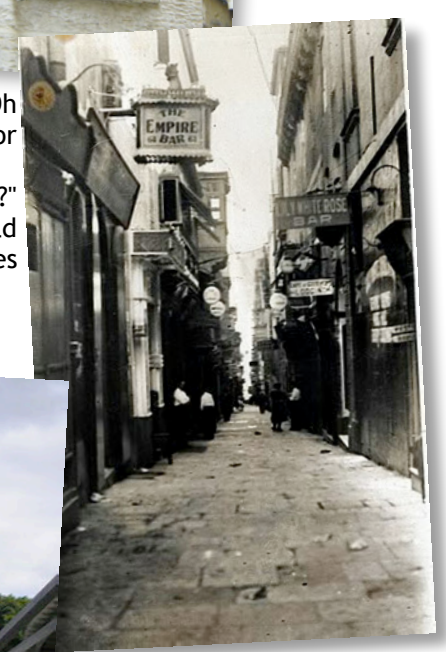
Sail well, John.



## FROM THE COMPETITIONS DEPARTMENT...

Oh dear! An embarrassing number of you got this "Where Are We Now?" correct. Why embarrassing? Because it is no other than the Street of Thousand Delights, most of them either illegal or immoral or both, more popularly known as The Gut in Valletta, Malta. Here's another view of it. Or just maybe it had been cleaned up by the time you got there. In fact, Peter Fielding tells us that it even boasts an entrance to Marks & Spencer's now! Your editor recalls - just - St Peters Bar there. Perhaps one for the "BI bars and other iniquitous places" on the B1ship website? And then there's this admission from Tony Gray - "Do you know, I don't think I actually went down The Gut in the seventies. I do remember doing stupid things like racing hired cars around the Marsa horse track at about three in the morning, which must have been during a dry dock". Oh dear, indeed. Thanks also to Gerry Hawkes and Frank McKay, amongst others, for their entries.

A fairly easy picture for you to identify in this month's "Where Are We Now?" competition. So, to make it harder, we would love to find out just why this old steam tug has a BI funnel. We thank Paul Orwin for this picture. E-mail your theories to us at the "[...calling BI](mailto:...calling BI)" address for the usual array of valuable prizes.



## FROM THE SEAMANSHIP SCHOOL...

Your editor does not remember being recommended to do this sort of thing in his seamanship classes, however elegant the solution may seem! See the whole movie at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kiv0fxFcV3I>

He can imagine that several superintendents ashore would be a little balder on receiving such a report. Mind you, he recalls reading how they used to careen ships in "the good old days", so there might just be something in it!



## FROM THE 'OUCH!' DEPT...

We had the pleasure in our last issue of carrying some photographs of the rescue of some Japanese fishermen by the *Rajula*, kindly sent to us by Mrs Rachael McBean. Another of the ships on which her husband, Elgin, served was *Sirdhana*, which suffered extensive damage in November 1960 when she was rammed by an American ship, the *General William Mitchell*, in Yokohama. Elgin is pictured here with his nursing assistant, Bunty.



We welcome any other photographs that readers may have which could be of interest to us all. Please send in slides, negatives, prints or scans - we can handle them all! Please note however that scans should be done at the highest possible resolution. If you have doubts about how to do this, please contact us. We will, of course, return any slides, etc, if you require them back.

## FROM THE POST ROOM...



All those concerned with producing "... calling BI" were delighted and flattered at the large number of kind comments and greetings that were extended by our readers over the recent festive season. The ubiquitous Tracey was so overcome with emotion that she had to take a lie down in the post room. Apparently the post boy was also similarly afflicted. That's possibly the reason why this issue is a little delayed. But many thanks indeed for your kind remarks.

