



Issue no: 4

DECEMBER 2008

News of British India, its ships and staff, the history and 'histoires', of ships and sealing wax, nautical matters and a miscellany of maritime musings

available free of charge by application to

[calling BI@biship.com](mailto:callingBI@biship.com)

## FROM THE EDITOR

Festive greetings dear reader! Is it me or are Christmases getting grumpier these days? I still recall the first Christmas I spent at sea. 'Twas on the good ship "Bankura" in 1962. Put into Singapore Christmas Day night at the outer anchorage. I woke up early next morning (well, I was only a "Chota Sahib") to the delightful twitterings of the milk girls. Having been allowed my weekly ration of four Alsop's, naturally fresh milk had its attractions. Somehow Santa never seemed the same! That was the first of eleven Christmases spent at sea. And I never really got reconciled to seeing the Goanese stewards wearing paper hats, looking slightly bemused, but going along with it for the sake of the Sahibs! Not for us the delights of plastic packaging that can't be opened, or the in-laws', whose idea of helping out is to say "don't worry, I'll pour my own G&T". Mind you, my last Christmas spent on a ship was the "Trewidden" in Salford docks of all places.

A goodly issue this, featuring some interesting reflections from one who was involved in establishing educational cruising in the 1960s. Your editor has parted

with vast sums of money to obtain the negatives of BI folk at play -- he may need them for the court case. On a sadder note, there are some graphic pictures of the death of a ship. Although there were no human casualties, one cannot fail to be moved by the inanimate one. There are links within the article to other photographs, etc and your editor has been given access to a PowerPoint presentation, which he will gladly send separately on request, if needed. Again many thanks to David Hammond for another extract from his little black book of crew lists from the festive season of 36 years ago -- he promises more.

Enough of this! Tie up the reindeer and settle down to a good read of this next edition of "... calling BI", with a suitable libation, of course. And please accept, from everybody on this side of the email to everybody on your side, our very best wishes for the year ahead. Your editor intends to follow this wise advice from an old literary friend, Lazarus Long, "to live life to the full, bite it off in big chunks. Moderation is for monks."

Cheers!



### Later in this issue....

FROM THE BI website....

FROM THE BI@Bures....

FROM THE INTERNET....

FROM THE READERS....

## FROM THE BI website....

WITHIN the online BI staff group recently has been considerable of discussion of ports away from normal BI routes, which members experienced during their time in the company. The discussion clearly evoked lots of memories. Among the dozens of ports rarely visited by BI ships and mentioned in the discussion (with varying degrees of fond memories!) were:

Blyth, UK	Maud's Landing, Australia
Bilbao, Spain	Montevideo, Uruguay
Cliffe, Isle of Grain, UK	Narvik, Norway
Coconada, India	New York
Darien, China	Okha, India
Fushiki, Japan	Panama Canal transits
Gan Island	Port Huon, Tasmania
Gdynia, Poland	Sfax, Tunisia
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada	Tobruk, Libya
Hodeida, Yemen	Tsing-tao, China
Kiel Canal transits	Weipa, Australia



And it was not just memories of ports which were brought to mind in the discussion but associated ships, shipmates and anecdotes.

In other exchanges, two shipmates recalled in rather more sad circumstances were David Harradine and Lewis Drummond, who died recently. Messages and condolences were sent by several members to the families of these well remembered BI colleagues.

On a lighter note there has been some discussion about BI kit lists and the (high) cost of outfitting the unsuspecting first tripper to the required BI standard - which was always a few pegs above the string vest, shorts and flip-flops which were de rigueur in some sections of the MN.

## FROM THE BI@Bures....

As promised on our last issue, your editor tiptoed around the back of the building and in true paparazzi style, took these shots of various BI types enjoying themselves deepest Essex. Obviously something was



wrong with his camera, because the colour of Mr Tony Gray's beer looked decidedly weird. By plying the landlord with the promise of filthy lucre, your editor was able to ascertain that amongst the revelers were former shipmates Mr and Mrs Prescott, Mr Sanderson, Mr Gray, Mr Allard, Mr Davies, Mr Colchester, Mr Rees, Mr Wheeler, Mr Myers and various ladies of most delightful mien. Truth be told, your editor probably enjoyed talking to them more.



But then, he always did gravitate to that end of the room at parties...!

Various tall stories were overheard, and some fascinating experiences. David Davies probably trained before the mast to go round the Cape, whilst Alan Myers had to switch the lights out, being the last BI employee. Clearly all enjoyed themselves, for they promised to wreak more havoc on this quiet corner of Essex in six months time.





## FROM THE INTERNET....

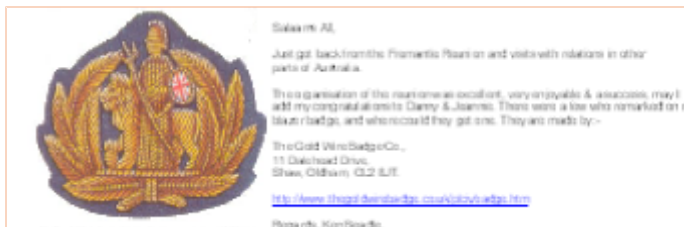
The annual Sea Vision UK photography competition, run in conjunction with Practical Photography is now open for entries. There are three categories:

- \* Commercial (including ships, oil rigs, fishing vessels etc.)
- \* Leisure (including sailing, surfing, beach games, aquariums, diving etc)

\* Maritime heritage and coastlines  
Contact is via [this link](#)



Deadline is 17th December, so you better get your boots on, fast! Even your editor has entered a couple of his favourite snaps. Surely we can do better than some others already on this site -- after all, we were there!



## m.v. Fedra -- RIP

On 14th October this year, there was a dramatic stranding of a Spanish ship at Europa Point, Gibraltar. A link to various sites offering video and photographic footage is available [here](#).

*I look toward the unseen horizon  
Spindrift obscures our pounding bows  
Black waves surge across our sinking decks  
The screaming wind, a hurricane grows  
With the wind come enormous seas  
We climb, and then burst out through a trough  
Our stern lifts from the waters clutch  
Propellers scream, and then bite again  
Is this the storm that is to much.*



emphasise on the pleasure, the enjoyment of our time at sea, and rightly so. But it is not without an amount of humility that your editor



All mariners must feel sad at the death of any ship, but when it is so graphically illustrated, it makes us aware of the power of the sea on which we learnt our trade. Our website, and indeed this newsletter, naturally tends to

reckons that a little reality check every so often goes amiss. He feels just a little bit sadder tonight.



## FROM THE READERS....

### The B.I. Five Pound Note

'Dunera' had been converted from a troopship into the first of the B.I. educational cruising ships. Sea trials and the shakedown cruise from the Tyne to the Clyde were complete and this fine ship was lying alongside Princess Pier, Greenock awaiting the embarkation of the school parties for her first cruise.

It was a glorious spring day on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1961 with blue sky which highlighted the new white paintwork on the ship. The backdrop of Hunter's Quay and the Dumbartonshire hills beyond made a quite unique and beautiful setting for this very important occasion for the British India Steam Navigation Company Ltd.

Embarkation started at 2.00 pm and the first school children, led by party leaders, emerged from the terminal buildings having passed through immigration and custom controls. They were greeted by the sound of bagpipes playing familiar Scottish tunes as the pipers marched back and forth along the length of the ship on Princess Pier.

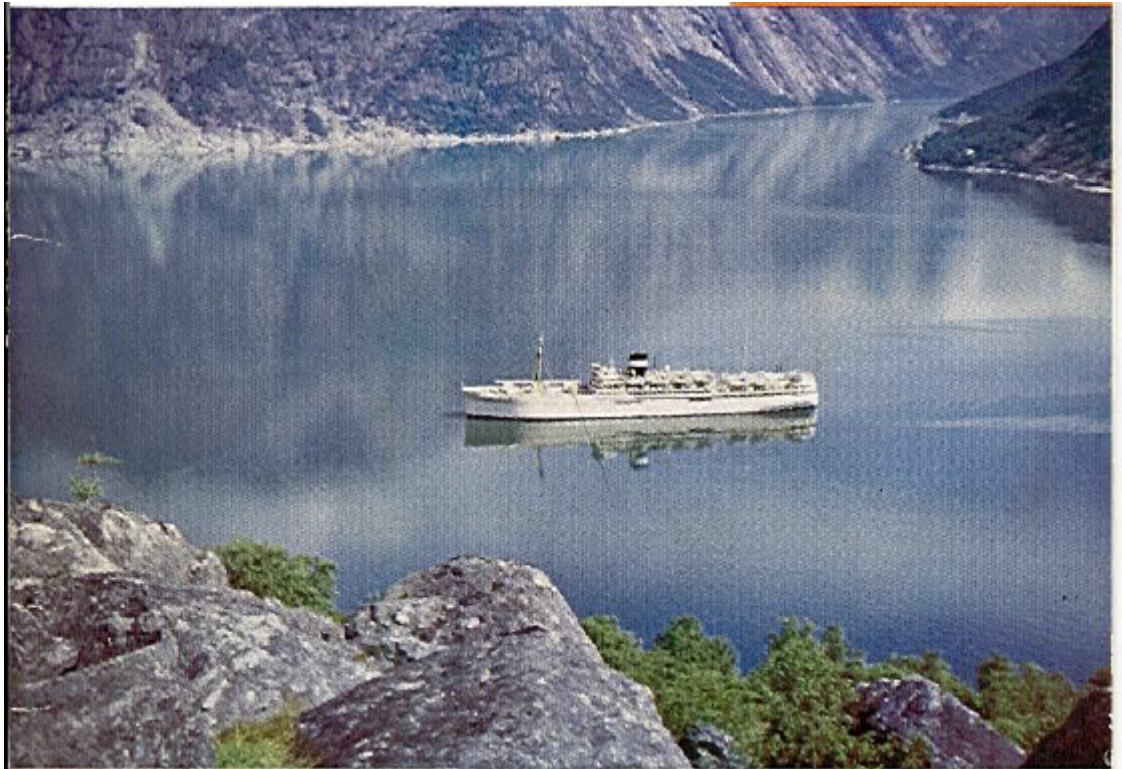
This was a truly emotional occasion for those members of the company, including the Chairman, Kenneth Campbell, who had worked so hard for many, many months to launch this new service in a completely unfamiliar market and to make this potentially great project worthy of the company's name. So much depended upon its success - director and management judgment and credibility; the employment of the former troopships and their officers and crews; employment of head office management and staff - and the justification of a very substantial investment of company funds.

The afternoon soon passed as sailing time of 4.00 pm approached. By this time the school parties had deposited their suitcases in their dormitories and the students were up on deck leaning over the ship's side rails and singing along to the pipes - 'Scottish Soldier' and other favourites which added greatly to the pre-departure atmosphere. It was at this point that the Chairman said to me as we stood on the quay and he wiped a tear from his eye - "John, never get

carried away by your emotions - always remember that every child walking up that gangway represents a five pound note with two legs as profit to the Company"! That sound advice has remained with me to this day.

At 4.00 pm the gangway was removed and the ship's moorings were released as Dunera slowly moved away from Princess Pier with the sound of the pipes still playing. This was the beginning of the first B.I. educational cruise. A small group stood in silence and watched as she got under way and very soon passed out of sight as she headed south west and rounded the headland at Gourock.

During this period of quiet reflection each of us had our own personal thoughts and feelings and mine included total exhaustion as we had worked in Scotland, based at the Glasgow Central Hotel, for twelve to sixteen hours a day, seven days a week



without a break for four months to launch this new and exciting project. Our exhilaration was accompanied with a feeling of great relief that we still had jobs and salaries! Then came the daunting realisation that the treadmill had started and the next cruise would depart in twelve days time but I experienced personal satisfaction when Kenneth Campbell shook my hand and said "Thank you John, a job well done" - a surprising change from his sometime greeting "Get your hair cut"!!

John Rees

