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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 callingBI@biship.com

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome, dear reader, to what the modern generation will no doubt call the BI blog. But in a new section this month, "From the Soap-box...", you will read how we must resist such jargon. Your editor is sure that he has fallen foul of many similar mistakes of which the writer complains. Nevertheless, he is much in tune with the general thoughts of our contributor. A discerning piece, thank you John.

Another John continues his story about the precarious beginnings of the successful BI educational cruise project -- a programme that gave much enjoyment and knowledge of the sea and the wider world to generations of children, employment for many of us and an inexhaustible fund of scurrilous stories. Your editor's thanks to them and all other contributors.

Your editor understands that we will soon be seeing copies of yet another *magnum opus* by the SS Uganda Trust.

Having published the definitive "story of a very special ship" about the *Uganda* in 1998, a similar book about the *Nevasa* will shortly be available. It has 328 pages, over 50 colour pics, and 300 b/w. Price will be £30 including p & p, but if you would like to register your initial interest, we suggest you e-mail ssnevasa@aol.com.

Your editor is already clearing his bookshelves to carry this and he is looking forward to a good read.

Your editor has been asked to run a "Then and Now" section. Basically this would be a mini-biograph, with photographs and so on. If you are willing to take part, please send whatever details you wish to the "... calling BI" offices by clicking on any of the logos in the newsletter.

Many thanks also to [Bernard Fallon](#), the Los Angeles-based photographer, for the picture on this page, taken from his book "the Long Walk Home". Hopefully, by the

miracles of modern computer technology, you can actually hear Bernard talking about this photograph by double-clicking on the picture. Make sure you have your speakers switched on!

As we go to press, news is filtering in on the next venture by Snowbow Productions. As many of us will know, Snowbow

produce the video of various BI ships (*East of Suez* in part 6 of their series, *The Great Liners*). The organisation has for some time been organising "Maritime Memory" cruises, with the emphasis on providing ex-seafarers with experiences of modern day shipping and reviving some memories. The 2010 cruise is scheduled to travel to the Far East from Europe, thus visiting many old haunts of BI staff. Precise details are not yet available, but for a foretaste, log onto their site [here](#). A special BI day is promised during the cruise.

Thus we have a varied issue but, dear reader, we still need some responses from you. Nobody has yet identified the Seamens' Mission or any of the crew from the *Merka* photograph in the last issue. We do need some answers. Also needed are your own stories and photographs, your comments and observations, and hopefully your attention for the next 15 minutes or so, whilst you read this issue of "... calling BI". Enjoy!



Later in this issue...

FROM THE BBC...

FROM THE 'HOLE' TRUTH...

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FROM THE READERS...

FROM THE BBC...

...or in other words, 'Before the Beginning of Cruising'. In the last issue of "... calling BI", we left John Rees ploughing a lonely furrow in the middle of a Glasgow winter. He was trying to drum up trade for the first educational cruise by 'Dunera', a prospect that was looking increasingly as gloomy as the weather about him. John takes up the story...

After yet another cold call at the education offices in Paisley, I made my way to Ayr. I decided to go along the coast road, past some of my old haunts Port Glasgow, Greenock and Gourock, a decision which rewarded me with clean air and improved visibility. I arrived at the Ayrshire Education Offices in Kilmarnock at 12 noon and went to reception, where a not unusual scene greeted me: an empty desk. A couple of rings on the bell push later, however, brought out a young lady from a nearby office. After introducing myself and the company and after so many negative responses, the unbelievable words "my brother works for BI" caressed my ears! Moments later I was shown into the office of James Wallis, Ayrshire's Deputy Director of Education.



Mr Wallace explained that his director was on sick leave and he was covering two jobs and was at that moment very busy signing correspondence before an education committee meeting at 2:30 pm but he said. "Sit down and talk while I am signing, I am listening". Suddenly, after all our rehearsals, here was the real thing and a critical moment for the educational cruising project. Carefully I explained to Mr. Wallace how the school ship would work, the classrooms, lecture hall, the cafeteria and recreation areas, dormitories and so on. He slowly put down his pen, looked me in the eye and said "what do you want me to do?"

At long last, a glimmer of hope! "Mr. Wallace, we need your help to get this venture off the ground. If we are not successful, the ship will go to the breakers and school children all over Scotland will never have this marvelous opportunity for organised school travel." We talked about fares -- he considered that £28 was too much for parents to find in this short time before the first two cruises. We agreed there and then that the fare would be £15. Mr Wallace called in his secretary and asked her to phone the Ayr Station Hotel and book a conference

room with dinner for 31 persons on the following Tuesday. BI was to pay the bill. When this booking was confirmed, he dictated a letter to all secondary school head teachers



"Dear Head Teacher, you will attend a meeting with dinner at the Ayr Station Hotel at 7 pm on Tuesday, 17 January when an important announcement will be made followed by a presentation. Yours faithfully, James I. Wallace"

That very afternoon, the Education Committee cleared term time cruising for the school children in Ayrshire with BI educational cruising.

My success was mirrored later that day by my colleague Tony Moores, who called at the Dunbartonshire education office in Kirkintilloch. He was sitting patiently waiting for an appointment, when by chance the Director of Education, Andrew Cameron, came out of his office and enquired if he had been attended to. A meeting was arranged for the next day and, after our presentation, Mr. Cameron was very impressed and eventually became a member of the BI educational advisory panel and a great supporter of the company. A few days later, I returned to Paisley and met the Deputy Director of Education, Mr. Hugh Fairley. He liked the idea of well planned educational cruises departing from Scotland as it would make it much easier for school parties travelling and with the wide range of facilities onboard would enhance the whole experience of overseas travel. He was attracted by our special price of £15 for the early cruises and took enough copies of our information for his education committee and all secondary schools in his area.

We certainly walked with lighter steps by the end of the week, especially as we knew that the BI Chairman was due to arrive off the night sleeper from London for a breakfast conference at 7am Saturday morning. After hearing our report, Kenneth Campbell professed pleasure, confirmed our jobs were still open and left us with the comment "once Dunera's cafeteria is underway, it will be the biggest Indian takeaway ever!"



FROM THE 'HOLE' TRUTH...

Your editor is indebted to the [New Zealand Company of Master Mariners](#) for the following:

It has been claimed that a New Zealand shipping company has been allowed to drill holes in the bow of a coastal cargo ship to get around international safety rules for a ship of that size. The unorthodox modification allows the ship to be manned by fewer crew, as it is now officially classified as smaller than it is.

Coastal Bulk Shipping's fertiliser carrier *Anatoki* is 48.6 metres long. But Maritime NZ has allowed it to be classed as shorter than 45m after holes were drilled to create a "false" bow. A new watertight bow was fitted several metres further back so the ship now officially measures only 45m.

Maritime rules say ships longer than 45m must adopt mandatory international shore and ship safety and pollution prevention systems. Ships longer than 45m are also required to have more crew, with higher qualifications. Smaller ships are subject to less stringent safety systems managed by an organisation approved by Maritime NZ.

John Mansell, Maritime NZ operations general manager, rejected criticism of the safety agency's decision, saying the ship complied with "all required New Zealand standards ... consistent with international safety conventions." The 'false bow' was stronger than the previous bow because of watertight internal modifications behind the holes, Mr Mansell said. The ship's

owners also rejected the criticism. Doug Smith, general manager of Coastal Bulk Shipping, said the ship had previously operated in Japan under a different interpretation of international shipping rules to New Zealand's. A naval architect had produced the plans to create the new



bow and Maritime NZ were "reasonably supportive" in agreeing to the modifications. Mr Smith said some in the maritime community claimed the bow change was done to allow the company to cut crew numbers. The ship operated in Japan with a crew of three, whereas in New Zealand it had four crew. Had Maritime NZ not approved the modifications, the ship would have required a crew of at least seven, Mr Smith said.

The modifications have bemused Niels Bjorn Mortensen, marine department head of the world's largest private shipping organisation, BIMCO, who said "I suggest that the holes drilled in the original bow be named loopholes". Mr Hector Munro, a local marine surveyor, expressed a personal opinion saying that drilling holes in a ship "doesn't change the length of the vessel. Rules are rules, as Maritime NZ keep ramming down our throats." He agreed with other senior maritime industry sources that the matter made New Zealand a laughing stock. But Mr Mansell disputed this, saying New Zealand had an excellent reputation for maintaining very high safety standards. The modifications to the *Anatoki* met all New Zealand's safety regulations for a coastal vessel.



Quite often within these pages we have featured photographs by Tony Lister. We feel that it is only proper to identify this generous spirit. So here he is, in the archetypal BI cabin (complete with dirty boiler suit hanging up?). Expect more of his contributions in future issues -- many thanks, Tony!



FROM THE SOAP-BOX...

Calling a spade a shovel or worse

There's been frequent discussion in the online BI group about engineering and maritime terms and their correct use, the latest being over the correct description of wrenches. It illustrates how specialists of any persuasion need a language with precise meanings with which to communicate. But just because it is specialised doesn't mean terminology has no use elsewhere. Technical terms often have absolute meanings which when abandoned or substituted with more common words, can mislead, give rise to inaccuracy and make our language grey and uninteresting.

Take reporters and television presenters who are quite happy to talk about derivatives, bonds and undiluted collateral in one breath but who flinch from using proper descriptive language in the next breath. When it comes to talking about something which is outside their sphere of experience it seems journalists are the instigators of dumbed-down language. Why, in news bulletins, do ships have a 'top part' or a helicopter 'landed on the back part'? It seems that every tanker automatically becomes a supertanker or even a megatanker. And are we are happy to accept inaccurate American hand-me-downs such as freighter to describe any ship which doesn't have the appearance of a Las Vegas hotel? Correctly, freight is the money paid to transport goods in a ship and not the cargo itself. Bring back the old *Eagle* comic and its cutaway diagrams. It had no inhibitions about using proper terms and taught us much.

What about a seeming pathological inability of media mouths and pens to mention ships' crew without appending the word member? What, in any case, is wrong with seamen? Oh no! We can't have any 'men' (even firemen have become firefighters) and no doubt the sound of the word is a shade too close to that of a bodily fluid for our

squeamish news editors, those who hate to offend listeners' sensibilities.

So can we do anything to turn the tide and bring back the spades and even the Stillsons? Firstly, we can watch - literally - our own language. Use correct terms. Maritime ropes don't break; correctly, they part. Don't follow the CNN school of language in which "the towboat's tow-rope snapped."

Secondly, colloquial language is fine and has its place. The familiar "we're getting the boat from Portsmouth to Bilboa" is completely understandable. But, at the risk of derision, gently remind friends it was a ship not a boat that had been stranded on some coast line.

We love to tell ourselves how rich English is, how the sea water in our veins has coloured the language. The nautical derivation of a brass monkey has been recounted so often, including several times in the BI group, as to have become hackneyed, but is a good example of why and how we can use language appropriately and not shy from proper use of specialist terms. Used literally or metaphorically, the words add depth to our communication.

Conversely, jargon is language of exclusion, used by specialists between themselves to keep out the layman. It is not easy to draw the fine line where the use of the correct term becomes jargon but a safe definition must be that it is the point beyond which most literate people know, or can understand from the context, the meaning of an unfamiliar word.

Here's wishing that *superstructure*, *after part*, *stern*, *seamen*, *cargoship* and hundreds more and will never cross that line. The other day a BBC radio reporter carefully explained in just seven words the meaning of a 'financial derivative' (viz: a contract by which risk is traded). It cannot be beyond any of us to do the same on the infrequent occasions when precise but unfamiliar maritime terms are used.



Your editor caught sight of this fine aerial photograph of the Royal Albert and King George George V docks on the [Portcities](#) website. Dated around 1930, it shows the entrance locks at Gallions Reach. Quite obviously, your editor was not around when the photograph was taken, but it did bring back some memories of happy times.



FROM THE SOCIAL DIARY...



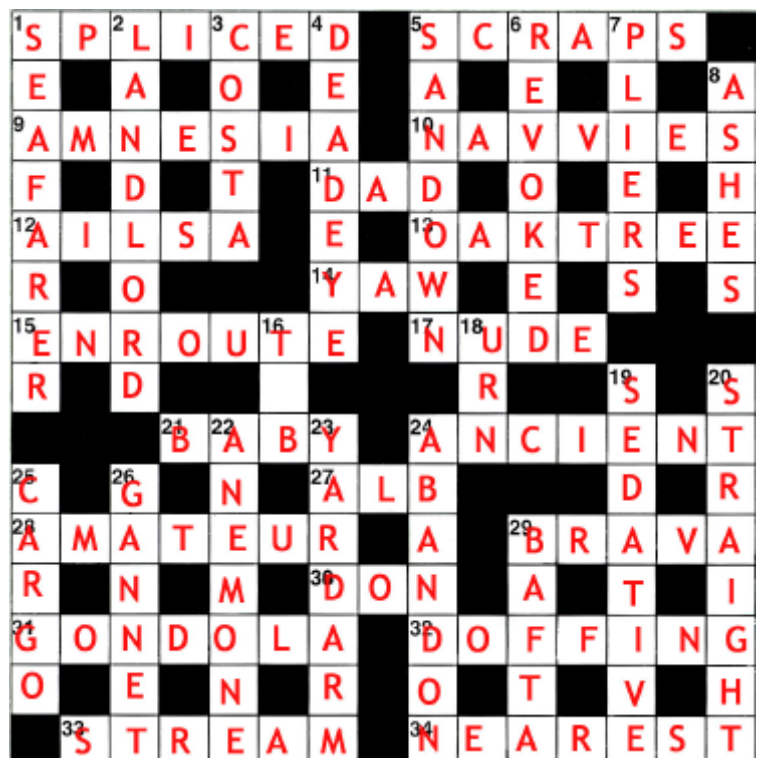
Even as we write, some 15 or so BI staffers and their partners are gathering in the small hamlet of Mount Bures in north Essex to partake of some excellent beer, some great views and probably some bad jokes from your editor. This will be the second gathering in this locale, but this mini-trend of mini-reunions is gathering pace it would seem. Your editor has been informed of a small, but very select gathering in Jersey recently (he was not invited) and of course there was the recent lunch gathering in UK's Lakeland, to which he was unable to go.

James Slater writes in to say that all mechanical and electrical officers are invited to join the BI Engineer Officers Association, especially as their main reunion will be on Thursday, 17th September in Glasgow. Membership of the association is free, but your editor doubts that James will be standing everybody a free meal and drinks at the reunion. James can be contacted at james.slater@zen.co.uk or telephone number 07702 124840 (mobile) or 01706 351190 (landline). Sadly your editor is barred by profession from being a member of this illustrious band and so will not be able to attend the reunion, but he promises to get hold of the photographs for you. There is also talk of a gathering in Manchester, of which more details to come.

It would seem that the legendary social spirit within BI is still alive and well -- indeed, how could it not be? News of any further events will be welcome.

FROM THE Competitions Dept ...

What a competitive lot you are! The crossword in the last edition of "... calling BI" excited much interest. Indeed, no more than four hours after he had e-mailed the edition to subscribers, your editor received the first correct answer from Australian reader John Butler. Impressive! No doubt that someone within the "... calling BI" organisation (which loosely consists of your editor and an ex-editor of Lloyd's List) is ensuring that bountiful prizes are descending on John's home, but if not, he's had his 15 minutes of fame here. Your editor must now rack his brains for a more severe divertissement for you all. For those of you who didn't know that a "deadeye" was an old type of rigging block, herewith the answers.



FROM THE READERS...

Following your editor's gloating in the last issue of "... calling BI" over his acquisition of the old BI jigsaw puzzle, he is much indebted to David Mitchell for further information on the series. David says that the going rate for these BI jigsaws - when they turn up - is between £25/£50 unless luck is on your side and the item is missed by a serious bidder in auction. Also they don't turn up very often. Chad Valley made four for the BI. "*Matiana* and *Dwarka*" by artist James Greig and "*Talamba*" by J (Jock) Spurling both dating from 1933 in lid type boxes. A further two followed in 1935 in book boxes. These were "*Matiana*" by Charles Dixon and "*Nevasa*" by James Greig. The latter is based on a photograph of her sister "*Neuralia*" taken on her inaugural school cruise in July 1932.

The "*Matiana* and *Dwarka*" image also appeared as a colour post card and a glass paper weight the artwork signed 1929; "*Talamba*" 1927 or 1929. Greig appears not to have dated his work. The original image of "*Neuralia*" appeared as a black and white photographic post card and much altered, as a postcard of "*Nevasa*."

Your editor seems to have made a good investment.

