

# SOUTH WEST SOUNDINGS 106

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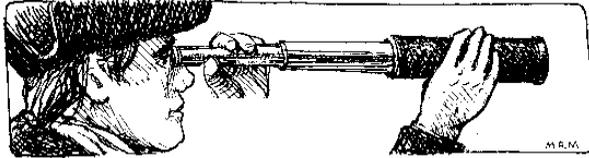
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## **WELCOME ABOARD**

Anne Pond      Falmouth

Anne has recently volunteered to take on the office of Membership Secretary

## FUTURE MEETINGS AND OTHER EVENTS



*(Italics indicate an event of interest but not organised directly by the Society)*

**Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2018.** 6.45 pm Roland Levinsky Lecture Theatre No 2, Plymouth University. The SWMHS Annual Lecture at Plymouth University. Captain Alastair Letty “Decommissioning Offshore Oil Platforms, including single lift technology using *Pioneering Spirit*” **(calling notice enclosed)**

**Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> April 2018.** North Devon Meeting, Appledore. Maritime Museum from 10 to 11.30 am and Blue Lights Hall, Vernons Lane, Appledore, EX39 1QU from 1.00 to 4.30pm. SWMHS meeting organised by Martin Hazell **(calling notice enclosed)**

*Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2018. Annual WSS Naval Meeting, Bristol, ffi contact [drosborne@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:drosborne@blueyonder.co.uk)*

**Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> June 2018.** SWMHS Annual General Meeting at Globe Hotel, Topsham. Details to be arranged.

**Confirmation of events will be published either in the next edition or in calling notices for bookings, which will be sent to members at the appropriate time.**

## EDITORIAL

It may be a little late by the time members receive this copy of *Soundings* but, nevertheless, I wish you all a happy new year. By now many of you will have seen our new website and received details on how to log into the members' section. If not, contact our Treasurer Phil Northcott for a user name and password. The members' section currently contains back copies of *Soundings* but will in time be expanded to include further information. Phil and his team have done a great job in setting up the website but in order to keep the site up to date we urgently need a volunteer to act as webmaster. Anyone interested should contact either Phil or the society secretary for further information. (Contact details are on the website and back cover of the present edition of *Soundings*).

I have enjoyed my recent role as acting editor of *Soundings* but, in order to maintain and develop the newsletter, the society needs to find a more permanent solution. In his article on the future of SWMHS, Mike Bender discusses the concept of *renewability* and I consider myself ripe for renewing! Would any member interested in collaborating with me on producing a future edition of *Soundings* contact me. All that is required is an internet connection and a minimal knowledge of word processing.

Once again, thank you to all the contributors who sent in material for the present edition some of which has been held back for later use. Please keep me fed with news items and short articles of local maritime interest

**Ray Fordham**

**Next copy date: March 17<sup>th</sup> 2018**

## ARTICLES

### **Floating about Dingle: Geriatric Dolphins and the Future of the SWMHS.**

My favourite pub in Teignmouth is *The Ship*, where Crowhurst drank while trying to get *Teignmouth Electron* ready. I used to live on the boat on days of lectures when doing my M.A and would pop in for a pint after I returned from uni. One evening, all the newspapers were being read by other customers, and I was reduced to reading the *Brixham Free Advertiser* or some such title. In it, was a picture of a group of elderly gents appealing for younger blood for their Model Engineering Society.

For the younger generation of readers – if they exist in the SWMHS ! – model engineering was very big after the Second World War. Nevil Shute's *Trustee from the Tool Room*, published in 1960, turns on the international renown of a journalist of the specialist magazine for model engineers. But now - this would have been about 2005 – the society was obviously very keen to meet and help new members, but I felt pretty certain that interest would be low.

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The original plan was to get out to the Atlantic islands – Skellig Michael, the Blaskets, the Arran islands and Innisboffin etc. But, no-one seemed to have told the West Coast of Ireland that summer was supposed to have arrived; and without light winds, the 2,000 mile Atlantic swell can't really be contemplated. So I had to hole up in Castletown Bere twice, the second time on Bere Island, the east end of which was one of the three Treaty ports, the other two being Haulbowline, Cork Harbour and Lough Swilly, on the North coast.

And five days in Dingle, a centre of Irish music. One jig can start to sound very much like another after a while; and its main attraction is Fungie, the harbour dolphin, who is continually searched for by at least three boats full of tourists. Finding him – and I speak after having paid my 15 euros – is

rather unspectacular as he is at least 41 years old and it showed, as all we saw, after an hour of freezing, was two lazy turns.

These enforced delays gave my idling mind plenty of time to try and work out if the SWMHS could or would survive and what the parameters of survival are. I will consider organisations I am or was a member of: the SNR, the Association of Lighthouse Keepers, National Coast Watch, the Cruising Association, the Association of Yachting Historians, and of course the SWMHS.

The parameters I have isolated –and the list may well not be complete, are:

1. Large membership
2. Rich membership
3. A wide age range
4. A rather vague concept of “renewability”, but which includes members wanting to get on the committee or, more generally, muck in
5. Socially useful ecological niche or monopoly advantage

I'll start with the *Cruising Association*. Formed by H.J. Hanson in 1908, I was for many years an enthusiastic member. It embodied gentlemanly Corinthian yachting, an excellent library, a superb cruise planning department and interesting talks. Then it moved from St Katherine's Dock to Limehouse and nearly went bust. Run by a small clique, it saved itself by becoming only interested in offering cruise planning. It had recognised its niche – that yachtsmen were becoming less skilled as they sailed less and this caused anxiety, which could partly be relieved by electronic aids such as chart plotters, linked systems etc.

I resigned a decade ago when it got rid of the librarian and down-sized the library. I think there was even discussion of replacing its burgee of a fouled anchor with that of a lap top with a fouled electrical cable. The CA has a large membership, across the middle to old age range, so has some 'renewability'. It also offers this detailed computer service which,

for those with the right equipment, can be accessed from anywhere in the world. High survivability.

Talking about resigning, I'll move onto the *National Coastwatch Institution*, founded in 1994 after two fishermen drowned off Bass Point, Cornwall, where the coastguard lookout had been closed, to be the eyes of the ever-shrinking Coastguard. A big organisation, since every lookout needs about 40 volunteers. When the Coastguard (MCA) closed Brixham etc. in a major cost-cutting exercise dressed up as efficiency, I wrote to the Editor of their magazine, the *Watchkeeper* and said they should seek the views of the watch keepers – some of the ideas being proposed were crazy, like an 1800 handover from Falmouth to Southampton. He wrote back saying he couldn't possibly spare the space. I told him to send his reply to the membership secretary as my resignation letter. They were effectively gagging discussion. In fact, the chair of the NCI is on record that it will never comment on Coastguard matters, which I feel is a dereliction of responsibility.

Large membership, and still expanding its number of sites. But I suspect it has an ageing membership and that its ecological niche – watching the sea and its traffic – is of declining interest. Prognosis: although at present apparently healthy, it will be greatly shrunk, if alive, in another 10 to 15 years.

*Association of Lighthouse Keepers*:. At one level, an absurd organisation, as there are almost no lighthouse keepers in it. But it thrives on enthusiasts who love lighthouses, foghorns etc. and love visiting them. Some of the more obscure trips, such as the Orkneys, are over-subscribed.

Good spread of ages – I'm guessing ages from what I could see of them on visits looking at harbour lights etc. in gales. – and good replaceability. When the Editor of its journal, *Lamp*, resigned suddenly, a group of ALK members still got the next issue out and even improved a good colour mag.

I knew a psychologist colleague who said that the fascination with lighthouses obviously had a phallic undertone. I won't go down there, but this one will run and run, although why is not obvious.

*Association of Yachting Historians*. Founded in 2005 by a yachting organisation leader, Maldwin Drummond, it seriously under-performs with no journal carrying articles about yachting history (it has a small newsletter) and two or three meets and visits a year. However, it does have a niche – anyone interested in yachting history will want to be a member; and it has digitalised the whole of the Lloyd's Register of Yachts. So, journalists etc, the few yachting history students and all the amateur yachting historians will want to be members (present membership around 200).

Future: Hard to call. Average age 70. Some newish committee blood, and members well-heeled. Prediction: slow death due to declining membership.

*Society of Nautical Research*: I am sure that Dave Clement once introduced a speaker from the SNR who thought with a declining membership, organisations had a limited life span and it might have run its course.

Since then, it has had its most valuable asset, *The Mariner's Mirror*, published by Routledge, giving it more commercial clout.

Very heavily weighted towards Royal Naval history, and heavily committed to maintaining the *Victory*, and seemingly run by retired admirals, the SNR is living somewhere in the early post-war era. However, it has a large membership (1000+), and large reserves, so can buy its way out of trouble. Also, with academic competitiveness so fierce, membership is a must for any prospective academic, and that may be even true internationally. Will survive, even if living on and in past glories.

*Southwest Maritime History Society*: Sadly, the SWMHS has almost none of the survival factors. Ageing committee. It has a relatively small,

slowly shrinking, ageing membership. Superb journal, but heavily dependent on David Clement and his links. There is a decreasing number of visits to interesting places, and, if these are off the beaten track, e.g. Appledore, will be poorly attended.

Also, as the tide goes out on interest in maritime history, the lack of a coherent identity becomes more evident. Also, what is “the Southwest”? What unity does it provide?

Its future? It is at last getting some new blood on the committee and this will be vital, if only for it to continue to be a legally viable entity. I suspect that it will have to start buying in some professional services, so subscriptions will have to go up. If it can become a focal point for the numerous overlapping history groups with a maritime content, e.g. marine archaeology, maritime history, local history of seaside towns, in short, if it can successfully re-define the meaning of “*maritime*”, it stands a chance. Otherwise....

**Mike Bender**

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Editor - You agree? In part? Disagree with all of it? This is a vital issue for the SWMHS, so please write in with your views.

## A Wreck at Gurnard's Head

Gurnard's Head is but a few miles east of Land's End and no stranger to shipwrecks over the years. The present article is but a reminiscence of a sad, unexceptional wreck when the small 300 grt West German coaster *Traute Sarnow* drove ashore on the eastern side of Gurnard's Head on a calm Sunday evening, on July 26, 1954. Many locals – the present writer included – turned out to witness the spectacle as the skipper, five crew members and a dog were rescued by breeches buoy up the 80 ft cliff. Alison Symons, the author of an evocative history of the area entitled 'Tremedda Days' (Tabb House, 1992) describes the scene thus:

*'Many locals went down the cliff to help, including the landlord of Gurnard's Head Hotel, who was so drunk he had to be sat down on a stile'.*



This was the scene that unfolded as the dawn rose that July morning:

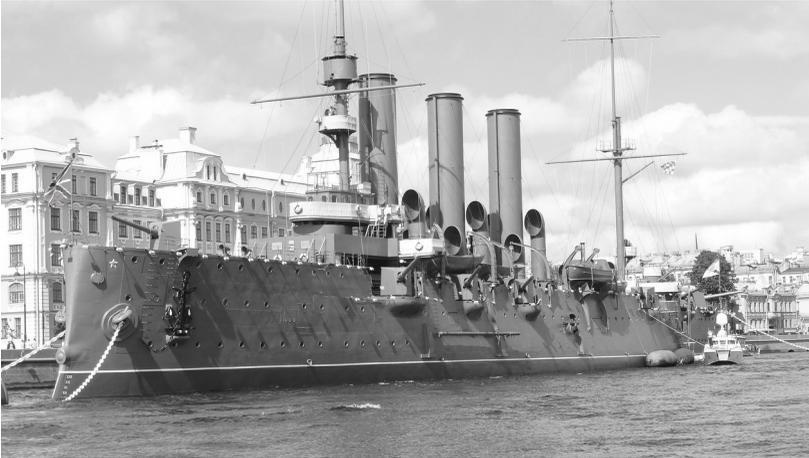
*Traute Sarnow* was just three years old and was on passage from Cardiff to Ostend with a cargo of anthracite. It seems likely that fog may have played a part in the grounding, the vessel quickly disintegrating. The coaster was Flensburg-owned having been completed in 1951 by Flensburger Maschinenbau: her dimensions were 39.4 x 7.5 x 3 metres.

Nothing of note can be reported in the coaster's short life. In 1951, shortly after completion *Traute Sarnow* was employed exclusively on the east coast of the United Kingdom though one cargo of timber was fixed when she loaded timber at Helsingborg in Sweden, for Hartlepool. In 1952 *Traute Sarnow* was again to be found mainly around the Tyne, Tees and Wear though there were passages to Hamburg and another of slight note, to Copenhagen. This latter cargo was of sea coal, loaded at Hartlepool in February 1952. This was the first ever consignment – 390 tons - of sea coal ever to leave Hartlepool. The cargo was loaded from lorries which had been used to scoop the coal from nearby beaches. Local press reports suggested that even a local vicar pitched in and bought a lorry in order to feed the frenzy of sea coal collection. Very soon afterwards the Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail in March 1952 reported that the local authority had installed barricades to prevent the fledgling trade, much to the anger of all the local entrepreneurs, including the vicar!

In 1953 not a lot changed though the coaster had cargoes fixed beyond the east coast to Hamburg, Antwerp, Wilhelmshaven and Rotterdam. The same schedule characterised the first half of 1954 except that the fateful cargo from Cardiff to Ostend was fixed, and so ended a brief, unexceptional career.

**Neil Hawke**

## ***Aurora* : the ship that fired the shot**



November 7<sup>th</sup> 2017 marked 100 years of the October Revolution in Russia (it was in October because at that time Russia used a different calendar to that used in the West). While here in the U.K. the downfall of the Romanov empire, death of Rasputin, rise of Lenin etc etc has been well celebrated, (BBC4 TV seems to have been taken over by Lucy Worsley and the costume department), in Russia it has been very low key. It would seem that Mr Putin ('Vova' to his friends) does not really want people to be stirred by any more revolutionary feelings! However, one monument still exists in St Petersburg, very popular, now a museum (shut on Mondays) and the site of many happy wedding photographs. That is the battle cruiser *Aurora*, first launched in 1900 and now permanently moored on the river Neva. The *Aurora*, awarded the Order of the October

Revolution in 1917, was reputed to have fired a blank round to signal the attack on the Winter Palace (now Hermitage Museum). Actually the Palace was not stormed by wild eyed revolutionaries as depicted in Eisenstein's film - they got in through a side entrance, and the firing of the fatal round is still debatable, but it all adds to the romance of Russia. *Aurora* was a strange name for a Russian ship. Most were named after famous admirals with unpronounceable/ unreadable names. The Czar Nicholas chose the name himself, as it heralded the dawn of a new century. Unfortunately for him it was the dawn of something very unpleasant.

## Early history

*Aurora* was designed as a 'protected' cruiser, indicating that it had deck armour but no belt armour protecting the sides. She and two sister ships *Diana* and *Pallada* were built in the Admiralty dockyards on Galerny Island just across the river where she is now moored. All three vessels were laid down on May 23 1897 and *Aurora* was launched on May 24 1900. After speed trials and adjustments she was commissioned in July 1903. Not the fastest of vessels, she could make 18 knots which was short of her design speed of 20 knots. On 8 November *Aurora*, the battleship *Oslabyabya* and the old cruiser *Dmitri Donsloi* were commissioned to go to Port Arthur (Lushun) in the far east in order to augment the Russian Fleet there. Port Arthur was a very heavily fortified Russian naval base originally built by the Krupps. Unfortunately the journey was a very tortuous one, as Russia's lack of ice free ports always placed her at a disadvantage, (hence Mr Putin's current determination to hold onto the Crimea at all costs). She was to sail to Port Arthur via Portland (UK); Algeria; Spezia (Italy); Bizerta (Tunisia); Piraeus(Greece); Port Suez (Egypt); and Djibouti. The detachment



opened fire, sinking the trawler *Crane* with two trawlermen killed. The *Aurora* was not involved in this skirmish but on closing with her own ships, she too was identified as a Japanese warship and attacked by her own side. She took four shells above the waterline and two in her funnels. A gun captain was killed and the vessel's priest had a hand blown off.

The British were furious as the Times reported. ' *It is inconceivable that any men calling themselves seamen could spend twenty minutes bombarding a fleet of fishing boats without discovering the nature of their target.*' The Navy was put on a war footing and a British cruiser squadron shadowed the Russian fleet as she sailed through the Bay of Biscay. Things became calmer when the Russians agreed to investigate the incident and eventually paid £66,000 compensation to the trawlermen and a memorial statue was erected in their home port Hull. In the short term the Russians were banned from using British ports and the use of the Suez Canal which meant an even longer trek to Port Arthur - round the horn of Africa and across the Indian Ocean and into the China Sea, to face the might of the Japanese navy. As by that time the Japanese had captured Port Arthur (January 1905) , the Russian 'plan' was to sail on northwards to Vladivostock (Russia) and deal with the Japanese navy en route if required– quite an undertaking.

### **The Battle of Tushima**

The Battle of Tushima on May 27,1905, is regarded by maritime historians as the battle which determined how future naval encounters would be fought. Up to that time no naval war had been fought by steam driven ships with long range artillery and fused projectiles. It was also the first occasion that radio telegraphy was used. It was 'the most important naval event since Trafalgar' (Semenov 1906) . For the Russians it was a total

disaster. With only 38 under-prepared ships and their travel weary crews facing 89 Japanese vessels there could be only one result. The Russians lost 4,380 men with 5,917 captured, and 21 ships sunk with 13 captured or disarmed. The Japanese lost 3 torpedo boats. Admiral Togo, on his flagship *Mikasa* (built in Barrow in Furness) was a seasoned commander with an experienced crew. The Russians were also panicked by the fact that Japanese shells containing the highly flammable shimose (melinite) exploded on contact with their ships causing ferocious fires.

The problem with any war at sea is you first have to find the enemy who will be usually attempting to ensure that you don't. If the Russian fleet could get to Vladivostock without encountering the Japanese then at least face would have been saved. Unfortunately fate conspired against the Russians. In foggy conditions, a Japanese cruiser *Shinano Maru* sailed into the middle of some Russian auxilliary vessels. The *Oriel*, mistaking the *Shinano* for a Russian ship, signalled to her that there were other Russian ships in the vicinity, the message was radioed to Admiral Togo ' *the enemy is in Square 203*' and the battle in the Tushima Strait began. The Russian cruiser division, which included the *Aurora*, was shadowing their auxilliaries and was first to give battle. *Aurora* suffered moderate damage to her hull and superstructure and was hit by 18 shells, 6 of her guns were destroyed and Captain Yegoryev was killed. Of the crew 15 were killed and 83 wounded. *Aurora's* battle was over in 2 hours as she sought protection from her battleships. The surviving Russian ships made it to Manila ( June 6 ) but were told they had to leave the port by June 9. Czar Nicholas sent a telegram allowing them to surrender and disarm. The fleet was interned in Manila till September and sailed back to Kronstadt on April 27 1906

## **The Magdeburg Code Book**

In the post war years *Aurora* was reclassified as a cruiser (from a 1<sup>st</sup> Rate Cruiser) and became a training ship for cadets, conducting voyages in the Baltic. She then made several 'tours' to foreign ports, notably to Messina where she was able to give assistance to the survivors of the earthquake of 1908, receiving the Gold Medal. Her next experience of note occurred in the early days of WWI as part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cruiser Brigade of the Baltic fleet based at Sveaborg (Helsinki). With two other cruisers she was on patrol on 26 August 1914 when they attacked and disarmed the German cruiser Magdeburg which ran aground on the island of Odensholm in Estonia, The Russians captured 56 of her crew but the real 'find' was that of the German Marine Code book S.K.M. and the encryption key, which the Russians gave to the British Navy. This code book was vital in helping the naval cryptographers (Room 40 of the Admiralty) to crack the German signals. In fact the Germans never did find out how the British knew of their plans in advance.

## **The Revolution 1917**

In the autumn of 1916 *Aurora* underwent extensive repairs/modernisations in the Franco-Russian yard at Petrograd (St Petersburg) with new guns and a sonar system installed. The crew was increased to 723 men. However the close contact between the crew and the shipyard workers brought them into the ambit of the revolutionaries. ( Russia was suffering greatly in the Great War lurching from defeat to defeat. The economy was in decline and the government was unable to cope. Tzar Nicholas did not help his case by returning from his holiday dacha and, at his wife's command, ordering the soldiers to fire on 'the mob'.) The relationship between the officers and men on the *Aurora* became very strained. On March 12, the crew

demanded that the officers release three imprisoned worker-propagandists. In order to disperse a mass meeting, two officers fired on their men wounding several. On March 13, the sailors and the workers hoisted the Red Flag over the ship, the commanding officer was killed and most of the crew left the vessel and joined the revolutionaries. Having got rid of the Tsar, the next question was who is going to rule Russia and so onto the next bit of the revolution. The new government was under the leadership of Kerensky but the power in the land was in the hands of the Bolshevics, stirred up by the firebrand Lenin, bussed in specially for the purpose by the Germans in his 'sealed train'. The aim was to prize the government out of the Winter Palace ( Hermitage) The *Aurora* was chosen to give the signal for the attack and on October 15 she fired 'the blank round' to begin the final phase of the revolution.

## **World War II**

The outbreak of WWII saved the *Aurora* from the scrapyards. By 1940 the plans were to decommission her, but the German advances caused a rethink and initially she was used as part of an anti aircraft battery at the Kronstadt shipyards. Then 9 of her 130 mm guns were taken to make up an artillery battery at Duderhof to the SW of St Petersburg. The battery was wiped out by the Germans. On September 30 1941, she was hit and sunk by the German artillery in the Lomonosov Roads. But phoenix like she came back from the flames, when the decision was taken to refloat her as a memorial to the 1917 Revolution. She was raised in 1944 and was repaired over the period 1945-7. She became a training facility for the Nakhomov Naval School and took up her berth on the Neva.

### **And today?**

From 1950 onwards she was developed as a historical museum and reorganised into the Central Museum's Branch in 1956. Much of her fixtures and fittings were replaced and 50 seamen were retained to guard the vessel and provide technical services. Her upper deck area, six inch guns and museum rooms were opened for visitors. She is indeed a fine vessel but this author's intentions to get up close and personal have been thwarted. In 1986, and more recently in 2017, she was 'Closed to the Public' . Ah well; may be next time.

### **Brian French**

## REPORTS OF MEETINGS

### AGM Meeting at Topsham September 16, 2017

On a pleasantly sunny day, some 35 members and friends attended a busy meeting.

Mike Bender kicked off with a brief resume of the two books he had recently had published– A New History of Yachting, a 400 page *magnum opus* and the shorter and punchier overview of the state of maritime history in the community and in academia, Floating about Maritime History. (Both are available from the author to SWMHS members at the special conference price of £20 and £5 respectively, plus postage).

This was followed by the main presentation, a masterly survey of diving on naval wrecks, most notably *HMS Amethyst* in Plymouth Sound by Peter Holt. Fortunate to have a six year grant, he reminded us how necessary it is that maritime history includes, once again, marine archaeology – think of Franklin’s *Terror* and *Erebus*, the Titanic, the Jutland wrecks etc.

(The AGM that followed is summarised below.)

There was a heartening number of short talks:

Chris Bell told of the *Freshspring* Steamship Society and the renovation of this water vessel, on Bideford Quay, and gave us a tempting offer of a guided tour of this vessel and Bideford Quay.

Valerie Belsey spoke on the link between the capture of a Spanish treasure ship and the building of Sharpham House, near Totnes. She is researching at present on this topic.

Joan Price described her research into the transporting of animals and plants out to European colonies, and the reverse trade in exotic plants.

Peter Lacey briefly described his new SWMHS Monograph concerning Elizabethan Lyme Regis and Sir George Summers, founder of Bermuda.

Doug Brodie talked about the loss of *M/V Tresillian* off Ballycotton in the storms of November/December, 1954

Finally, Clive Charlton appealed for information about troop ship movements in the south west at the end of World War One. He is investigating the rail disaster when New Zealand soldiers were run down at Bere Ferrers station.

It was very encouraging that so many people wanted to speak at the last minute, as in the past this was not often the case. Speakers need to have all their power-points already installed before the start of the session. They need to be given 15 time-tabled minutes, warned when 10 minutes is up, invited to stop after 12 to allow questions and their talk terminated at 15. There should be two minutes between speakers or the time table will slip.

Finally, Janie Cawthorn and Barbie Thompson gave a presentation about salty dog talk, with an accompanying power-point show of cartoons. Much of what was covered might have been known to some members but this was a relaxing way to finish proceedings.

## **Mike Bender & Martin Hazell**

### **Minutes of the AGM 16<sup>th</sup> Sept 2017. (Abridged)**

**Present:** Martin Hazell (Chairman), Peter Skidmore (Secretary) and Committee Members – Mike Bender, David Clement, Julia Creeke, Peter Holt, Paul Wright, and approximately 22 other members of the Society.

**Item 1. Apologies for Absence.** Apologies for absence were received from the following members:

Mike Duffy, Peter Ferguson, Ray Fordham, Neil Hawke, Phil Northcott, Peter Thompson, Richard Trewin and Mike Williams.

#### **Item 2. Minutes of the Previous AGM**

The minutes of the 2016 AGM were put to the meeting for acceptance.

Accepted: Unanimously

### **Item 3. Matters Arising from the Minutes**

**Item 10.2:** Report on present difficulties within the Society. The Chairman reported that the situation had improved from last year. A Treasurer, Phil Northcott, had been appointed on an appropriate honorarium and a member, Anne Pond, had recently volunteered to take the position of Membership Secretary.

**Item 4. Chairman's Report** The Chairman reported that the situation within the Society was healthy with membership numbers holding up despite losses due to bereavements. A prestigious annual lecture held at Plymouth University had become a regular feature on our calendar and the longstanding banking issues had been finally resolved, we now having a cheque bearing RBS account again.

Despite illness, family and business absence the committee was giving excellent support to the Chairman, often via e-mail and telephone. The Society is lucky to have experts in many fields (or seas?!) of maritime history and they give their expertise and support willingly.

In the period up to this September AGM we have produced a bumper Journal and a new monograph, just off the press. Thanks again due to David Clement.

**Item 5. Treasurers Report** The Treasurer had sent his apologies for not attending as a result of a family bereavement and no report, except the finance figures, had been received. However he is in regular contact with the committee and, in addition, has been able to greatly assist in the long awaited re-launch of our website – due very shortly.

Income and Expenditure Accounts to 31 March 2017 and to 31 August 2017 had been prepared and were distributed at the meeting. The reason for providing accounts to 31 August was to give a more representative

picture of the financial health of the Society. The new Treasurer had experienced difficulties in accessing all the appropriate information in time and due to transfer of responsibilities the Gift Aid claim had not been submitted yet. The good news is that three years worth of Gift Aid is due to our Society.

The accounts for the current financial year will be fully representative of the Society's affairs. The accounts as presented were put to the meeting for acceptance.

Carried: Unanimously

**Item 6. Election of Officers and Committee.** The Chairman reported that he had not been informed that any of the existing officers or committee members were unwilling to stand. It was therefore proposed that the existing officers and committee members should be elected *en bloc*.

Carried: Unanimously

**Item 7. To consider the need to appoint an Independent Examiner of Accounts on an annual basis.** The Chairman stated that the Treasurer had reported that at the level of income of the Society an annual independent examination of the accounts was not mandatory. It was therefore proposed that an independent examination should be undertaken every three years

Carried: Unanimously

**Item 8. Any Other Business.** No items received

## **Cornish Maritime History Conference, 14<sup>th</sup> October 2017**

This, the eighth Cornwall conference, organised by members Helen Doe, Tony Pawlyn, and Anne Pond, was attended as usual by a fair few Society members, and over 40 in all. The focus was firmly on Cornish connections, but as Cornishmen (and women) sailed far and wide, we had a wide spread of topics both geographically and by subject.

First up was **Victoria Jenner**, a young postgraduate who is in the process of securing funding for the novel Cornwall maritime churches project. This project aims to produce a digital interactive map of a select array of Cornish maritime churches, to enable exploration of these churches from different angles and perspectives. Using oral history, film and 3-D reconstruction to demonstrate the historical authenticity of these select case studies across Cornwall, the project seeks to reveal the authentic heritage whilst researching why certain myths and legends are so important amongst the local communities. Two particular examples explored are St Senara's Church of the Zennor Parish – where the mermaid myth obscures certain historical study – and St Materiana Church of Tintagel, which becomes overshadowed by Arthurian legend.

This project thus seeks to dig past the myth, and into the rich maritime histories that so clearly demonstrate the church as not only as a place of worship, but as a Maritime landmark which provided identity for those who were so closely bonded with the Cornish sea. The project is at early stages and Victoria is very open to suggestions, one of which, from Mike Bender, would be to include Cornish Methodism as well.

**Richard Doughty**, Director of the NMMC, then told us something of the plans for the future. He wants to future proof the museum, which struggles to attract enough visitors for viability (although 120,000 doesn't seem bad!) His plans include closer engagement in joint projects with the local museums in Cornwall, and substantial reorganisation and internal extension

within the building. Lottery money though, is becoming much harder to get. He welcomes ideas from the attendees and I am sure readers as well.

My pet favourite would be to moor a gig boat off the pontoon with a static, say five minute rowing challenge for teenagers, measured with sensors, with prizes for the best performance of the day, and of course logged on the web. It would need supervision of course, but could be a big draw for holidaymaking families with over energetic teenagers, and maybe gig clubs would help with supervision.

**Pru Wells** from Hull, then told the story of Cornish born Captain Samuel Rickard, a distant relative,. Sketchy family accounts and family treasures from far shores enticed her to complete the documentation of this nineteenth century merchant navy master mariner's seafaring career. Initial research through the internet led to further exploration in Cornwall, nationally and further afield. Once voyages and ships were traced and verified by original shipping documentation her quest was to expand and contextualise the account of Samuel Rickard's life-history as authentically as possible from his life as a 'ship's boy' in 1851, through the ranks to the master of sail and steam vessels. Research widened to many aspects of the nineteenth century shipping industry, and of the ports and countries he sailed to globally in an ever changing shipping world. Later, sailing from London, Samuel Rickard commanded vessels for David J Jenkin's Shire Line, (MP for Penryn and Falmouth, 1874-1885). The talk briefly explored the methodology of structuring Samuel Rickard's Cornish lineage and locality with the use of the internet and parish records, including the benefits and pitfalls of using the internet when tracing a seaman's career.

She included a summary of Captain Samuel Rickard's documented seafaring career illustrated with selected examples from source documents; the collating and process of analysing official shipping records such as Crew Agreements and Log Books; how gaps are filled and missing information obtained; the prominence of his Mates and Masters Competency Examinations; the usefulness of newspaper archives and the importance of visits to local and national archives, libraries, local

museums, national and international. Captain Samuel Rickard transferred from the command of sailing ships to steamships for the last decade of his seafaring career. In the concluding years of his life followed his sons and daughters as a pioneer homesteader to the Canadian prairies.

**Helen Doe** then took the stage to talk about the Cornish connections of the *Great Western*.

The *Great Western* is the least known of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's three ships, being overshadowed by the later careers of the *Great Britain* and the *Great Eastern*, and is described in detail in her new book. However, the *Great Western* was the first great success, confounding the critics to be the fastest ship to steam continuously across the Atlantic, and began the era of luxury transatlantic liners. It was a bold venture by Brunel and his colleagues who were testing the limits of known technology. She crossed the Atlantic for eighteen years and for much of the time was under the command of two Cornishmen, Captains Hosken and Mathews.

She pointed out that at the time of the famous GWR board meeting when he proposed "extending" the GWR to New York, he was still very young, with no reputation, unlike his father, and the railway was still unfinished, he had never built a ship, and this was huge for its time. He studied existing steamships very carefully, but most were quite small river vessels. *Great Western* was solidly built to carry the quantity of coal for a full steam Atlantic crossing. There were only 7 passengers on the first trip, but later she was a commercial success, though moved from Bristol to Liverpool.

The concept of an integrated route interests me as it also included a hotel in Bristol. I spent a decade working in Brunel House, built behind the original façade of the Great Western hotel. Sadly, integrated transport in Bristol has waned since then!

**Charlotte McKenzie** showed us that the extent to which individuals from Cornwall actively participated in the transatlantic slave trade is relatively under-explored. The publication of Capt. Joseph Banfield's memoir adds to the published recollections and descriptions of other British transatlantic

slave trade captains or surgeons, including those who wrote in support of the abolition of slavery. Banfield's memoir recalled the seafaring experiences of a shoemaker's son from Falmouth who spent over forty years at sea, including eleven transatlantic slave trade voyages in 1768-89. Charlotte noted there was strong opposition to abolition from Cornish MP's

**Peter Skidmore's** tale was one of mud, not very glorious and in excess. He has a minority interest, in dredgers. He took us through the history of the dredging, or lack of it, of the channel to Truro, its quays and the silting of the harbour and the sluggish decision making of the Council. The Council minutes are masterpieces of indecision. Money was eventually spent but with feeble results, by which time trade had largely disappeared.

After lunch, we heard from **Roderick de Normann** of the typically "can do" American development of prefabricated modular boxes for floating causeways and modular barges for landings in WW2. Originally modelled using cigar boxes, causeways were lashed to the side of landing ships and pushed forward on to the very shallow D day beaches, in a matter of a few minutes. Barges were able to carry tanks as well as men. Cheap and versatile, they made a significant contribution, which continued after the Americans lost their Mulberry to storms. Many left Cornwall as well as Southampton and Portsmouth for the Normandy beaches.

### **Tony Pawlyn**

Tony wound up with the story of the Dutch Master Mariners Club. During the winter of 1916-17 the German submarine blockade of the British Isles affected neutral vessels as well as those of Great Britain and her allies. At the same time British patrol vessels were also sending neutral ships bound to and from European ports for checking that they were not carrying contraband cargoes belonging to German nationals.

Falmouth was one of the principle examination ports, and the harbour and river became temporary berths for ships of many nations – amongst them a large number of Dutch steamers.

While their vessels were detained ‘for inspection,’ their masters were not confined to their ships. Having to kill many days of relative idleness, they frequently - if not daily - came together at the Greenbank Hotel. Here they formed a Dutch Master Mariners’ Club, a club which continues to function today.

After being cleared by the British, safe conduct was negotiated with the Germans. However, this wasn’t honoured and several of the Dutch ships were sunk despite producing safe conduct papers.

It was pleasing to see a few younger faces amongst the presenters. Related books a plenty are published or in the offing, listed below along with the organisers’ emails.

As always, huge thanks go to the organising trio, for an excellent day.

**Contributors, edited by Jonathan Segrave**

Helen Doe *The First Atlantic Liner: Brunel's Great Western Steamship*

<https://www.amberley-books.com/the-first-atlantic-liner.html>

Organisers:-

[am.pond@btopenworld.com](mailto:am.pond@btopenworld.com)

[tonypawlyn@gmail.com](mailto:tonypawlyn@gmail.com)

[H.R.Doe@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:H.R.Doe@exeter.ac.uk)

## **Maritime Media Awards 2017.**

More than 200 prominent members of the international maritime community and media gathered at the Institute of Directors in London to take part in the established annual event, now in its 22nd year.

The event, which was co-sponsored by the Maritime Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts, recognised those over the last year who have raised awareness of the importance of maritime affairs and the part the sea plays in the everyday life. The Awards were presented by The First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Philip Jones KCB ADC.

**Iain Ballantyne** founder of ‘Warships International Fleet Review’ was awarded a prestigious Maritime Fellowship for his outstanding contribution to stimulating public engagement in maritime issues. Iain a former reporter on Plymouth’s Evening Herald who lives in the South West is also a prolific author of naval history books. The Award citation stated; ‘Few of today’s maritime writers have his breadth of experience, his instinct for a story, or his ability to undertake a tenacious, critical and careful search for the truth.’

A second Maritime Fellowship was awarded to the Chief Executive Officer of the Society of Maritime Industries, **John Murray** for his consistent leadership delivering maritime industries back into national prominence.

More than forty books were nominated for the Mountbatten Maritime Award for Best Literary Contribution. The winning book has connections with the South West. Titled ‘Exeter – A cruiser of Medium Size’ the book was written by **Reginald Cogswell** who had served on HMS Exeter during the Battle of the River Plate. The book was commended as a unique personal record of the battle. Among other nominated books and with a South West connection was **Philip Hoare**’s, ‘Rising Tide Falling Star’. Philip an Honorary Doctor of Plymouth University and Leverhulme Artist

in Residence at Plymouth University Marine Institute is best known as author of 'Leviathan' or The Whale. 'Rising Tide and Falling Star' looks at human and animal stories of the sea'.

Originally published in 1992, but with a new Introduction in 2017 another nomination was **Paul Kennedy's** 'The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery'. The Introduction in the 2017 edition extends the analysis of British naval mastery into the twenty first century and reflects on the current America and Chinese ambitions for naval mastery.

The Gosling Award for Best Television or Film Contribution attracted 23 nominations including 'Mutiny' produced by Steven Handley of Windfall Films (see SWS 105.) The film concerned a re-enactment of Captain Bligh's 4,000 mile voyage across the Pacific Ocean from Tonga to Timor in the Bounty's longboat. Whilst Anthony Middleton was the leader of the expedition, Conrad Humphreys an alumni of Plymouth University and professional yachtsman who has competed in three round the world races, was responsible during the voyage for the navigation and safety of the longboat. Another Plymouth member of the nine member crew was 24 year old Freddy Benjafield who is now studying for a degree in maritime Science and Navigation at Plymouth University. The longboat used in the re-enactment named 'Bounty's End' is now being used with the Island Trust, based in Plymouth - an organisation which promotes sailing opportunities for young persons.

The winner of the Gosling Award for Best Television or Film Contribution was **Justin Sihera** and **Alexis Andrews** for their film 'Vanishing Sail' produced by Indian Creek Films. The film looks at one of the last boatbuilders in the Lesser Antilles where the traditions of boatbuilding once crucial to the survival of the local community have all but vanished. The film follows on of the last boatbuilders practicing a trade passed down the

generations from Scottish settlers that arrived in Carriacou in the 18th century. It describes the challenges associated with building a traditional boat from hauling trees out of the forest to the final traditional launching ceremony on the bayside. Stories of trading by sail and smuggling contraband in the Caribbean are weaved throughout the film.

Further details about the Maritime Foundation's, Maritime Media Awards 2017, including a list of all nominations and award winners can be found on <https://www.bmcf.org.uk/awards/>

The Maritime Foundation's purpose is to 'promote awareness of Britain's dependence on the sea'.

**Paul Wright**

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Isles of Scilly in the Great War*, Richard Larn, Pen & Sword Books, 2017. 176pp. Paperback, ISBN 9781473867666. RRP £12.99.

Tying in with the commemoration of 100 years since the Great War, we have seen a deluge of books about every aspect of the conflict. What can one more study add to our understanding? In the case of *The Isles of Scilly in the Great War*, the answer is a great deal.

Retired from the Royal Navy, long standing member, and now President of the International Maritime Society, the author, Richard Larn OBE is certainly well qualified to write this engaging study of the Scilly's contribution to the war effort.

It was not until 1915, when the German U-Boats seriously started to exact a toll on Allied shipping, that the Royal Navy woke up to the strategic importance of the Isles of Scilly. It became a sub-base of the Royal Naval Auxiliary Patrol Station (RNAPS). While the station's armed drifters and trawlers fended off enemy submarines, Treco Island became a Royal Naval Air Base, complete with flying boats. Larn unfolds the wartime story of the Isles with colour and compassion. Some facts on land warfare are a little shaky – the Brodie helmet was widely introduced from March 1916 (not 1915), but the author is on top form for accounts of the main actions at sea and in the air. He writes fluently and with pace and keen maritime history students will be immersed in some very moving accounts about the ships sunk off Scilly by German U-boats.

I particularly liked the end chapter '1919 onward'. It is always interesting to look at the legacy and what became of the men, machines and ships that played such an important role in the conflict. Larn leaves us in no doubt as to the bravery of the men from the Isles of Scilly. The book is attractively presented with numerous b/w images and includes an index and list of secondary sources. For a future edition, it would be good to add a list of any primary sources together with museums and newspapers to enable the reader to further explore this fascinating topic. Highly recommended.

**Jonathan Walker**

## LETTERS NOTES AND NEWS

**The lateen sail.** SWS98 (March 2015) included an enquiry on the subject of the lateen sail and we have received our first response! Joe Brumwell has recommended that members with mathematical leanings consult March, Z.A. (1987) *The Aero-hydrodynamics of Sailing* or a shorter synopsis on website [www.proafile.com](http://www.proafile.com) Thank you Joe; the correspondence is still open!

**The ketch *Ulelia*.** Martin Benn has kindly pointed out that a photograph of *Ulelia* was published in Basil Greenhill's *Merchant Schooners*.

### **Merchant Navy Monument - Plymouth Hoe**

As reported in SWS 104 fundraising is underway to establish a new monument Plymouth Hoe dedicated to all those who serve in or have served in the British Merchant Navy or Fishing Fleet in time of both peace and war. Panels on the monument will outline the history of Plymouth civilian seafaring community.

Subject to Plymouth City Council's formal agreement and the necessary planning permission it is intended that the monument will be in place for Mayflower 400 commemoration in 2020. Despite its long seafaring history, Plymouth has no adequate testament to the civilian seafarers of the United Kingdom and British Commonwealth.

The cost of the monument is anticipated to be in the region of £200,000. Substantive support has been given by the LIBOR Fund. A recent Crowdfunding project raised in excess of £10,000.

Details of Donation and Gift Aiding can be found on the Merchant Navy Monument Fund Website <http://mnmonument.uk/finance.htm>.

Plymouth Merchant Navy Monument Fund is registered as a charity: number 1167934 **Paul Wright**

**Balmoral** *Balmoral* didn't have a good season, and lost half its sailings to a variety of unrelated problems, including two unplanned dry dockings. There is now a large financial deficit, over £400,000, despite good numbers

on the days she did sail. Unsurprisingly there is an appeal for support to enable her to sail again next year. [heritagesteamers.co.uk/balmoral](http://heritagesteamers.co.uk/balmoral)

### **Know Your Place**

A project of interest to anyone looking at Bristol and SW history is “KnowYour Place”

<https://www.bristol.gov.uk/planning-and-building-regulations/know-your-place>

Web based and free, it has a series of historical maps, tithe, OS and aerials etc precisely overlaid so you can split the screen and see them side by side and easily move from one to the other. Then you can add layers with historical information and photos. Many archives have been added. You can search and explore your choice at will. It continues to accept new photos.

A quick browse of Bristol harbour showed a hive of activity in the docks when the 1946 aerial was done. I spotted 4 paddlers, and you can almost smell the coal smoke that drifts across some of the area. There are one or two atmospheric shadows of ships from what was a clearly an early morning flight. The diamonds show the location of the pictures you can call up.

Although there are many photos and also paintings of the docks and river in the city archives and museum, only some have been added systematically as yet. There are 20's photos from the port authority, the Vaughan postcard and Trelawny Ross photo collections, but there are many gaps which could be filled. The adjacent counties have been added more recently, and may not have so much information, I have yet to explore them.

It's well worth an explore. I hadn't realized there had been extensive timber yards and sawmills at Canons Marsh which preceded the tobacco bonds, and is now Lloyds bank and the harbour arena. The maps make it very easy to trace the endless reconstruction of the city.

**Jonathan Seagrave**



## **SOUTH WEST MARITIME HISTORY SOCIETY**

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Life President and Editor Maritime S.W & Monographs	David Clement The Holt, Exton, Exeter Devon EX3 0PN Tel. 01392 875604. Email: dclement1@toucansurf.com
Acting Chairman	Martin Hazell 124 Molesworth Road, Stoke Plymouth Devon PL3 4AH Tel. 07941 603097 /01752 550768 Email: m.hazell7@btinternet.com actingchairman@swmaritime.org.uk
SWS Reviews Editor	Jonathan Seagrave 10 Woodlands Rise, Downend Bristol BS16 2RX Tel: 0117 9566127 Email: Jon.seagrave@gmail.com
Editor South West Soundings	Ray Fordham 3 Ashley Court, West Yelland, Barnstaple EX31 3SS Email: rmwfordham@btinternet.com soundings@swmaritime.org.uk
Secretary	Peter Skidmore Email: pfskd@aol.com or secretary@swmaritime.org.uk
Treasurer	Phil Northcott 9 Wallaford Road, Buckfastleigh TQ11 0AR Email: treasurer@swmaritime.org.uk
Membership Secretary	Anne Pond. membership@swmaritime.org.uk
Facebook /twitter	Jo Thomas Email: joannat@ssgreatbritain.org

### **COMMITTEE**

Mike Bender, Julia Creeke, Michael Duffy, Maria Fusaro, Peter Ferguson,  
Peter Holt, Mike Williams, Paul Wright