

News of the BISI 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...

Do readers remember that old TV series "Rowan and Martin's Laugh-in"? Actress Judy Carne would say "Sock it to me", whereupon she would get hit by a custard pie. Your editor remembers one particular episode where the line was metamorphosed as "it may be a story to you, but it is a saga to me" -- SSSPLATT! Well, this issue of ...calling B-I certainly takes on the appearance of a saga. Not only do we continue the account of the early days of BISI, but the cadets in their sailing dinghy and the identification of the old Nevasa both make their third appearances. Your editor hopes that he doesn't end up with egg on his face!

We trust we have a varied and interesting issue for you this month. A variety of contributors all receive thanks from your editor -- they are all identified within the following pages. Sadly, space does not allow for the inclusion of one of Mike Bowman's curry recipes. Rest assured that your taste buds will be titillated in the next issue.

Not many of us can be unaware of the impact of fuel costs. A (fairly) recent edition [no 39] of the Unctad Transport Newsletter (which is of weightier tone than the usual reading matter used by your editor) has an important leading article dealing with rising oil prices and their impact on fuel prices and transport costs. Some of the key issues are discussed in an article on "Fuel prices, transport costs and the geography of trade".

FROM THE BOX...

TV viewers of the 'Antiques Roadshow' in Britain recently felt waves of pleasure sweep over them as they watched expert Paul Atterbury sporting a B-I blazer. Paul told your editor that he has no connection with B-I, but that he picked up the blazer in a charity shop. The name label inside the jacket proclaims it to be the property of one "Jackson". The original owner was Patrick Charles Stonewall Jackson, who was an apprentice in the mid 1950s on ms *Chantala*. In 1961 he was 3rd officer on the ms *Dara* and when that ship was blown up off Dubai by Egyptian saboteurs, he was involved in rescuing passengers. He died in his sixties. Tony Boddy was an apprentice with him.

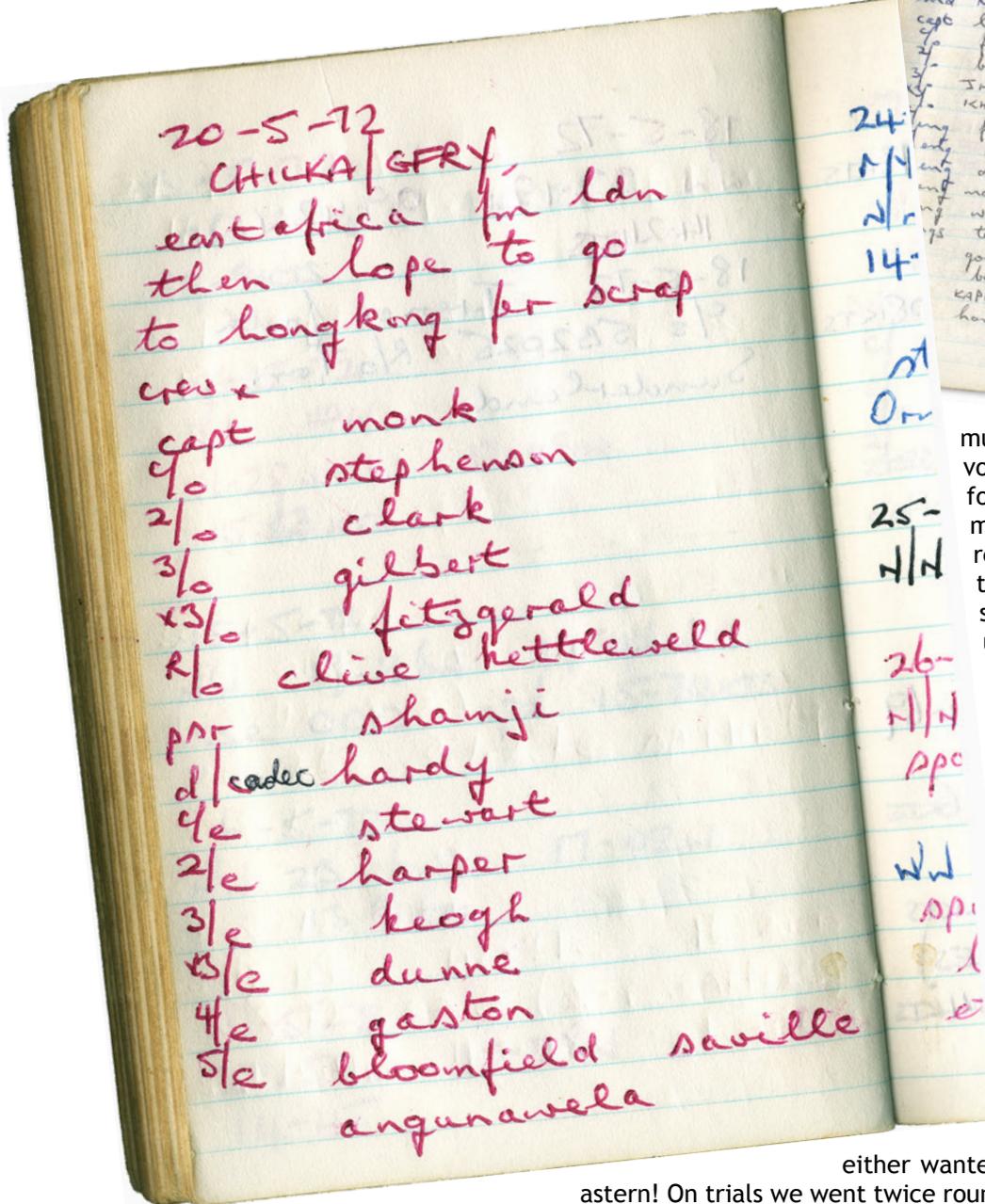
By the way, the ship models that Mr. Atterbury was discussing were of the steam tugs *Monarch* and the *Anglia*. The *Monarch* is the tug featured in the well-known painting of "*The Fighting Temeraire*" by Turner whilst the *Anglia* was the tug that brought back the famous London landmark, Cleopatra's Needle, after it had been cast adrift in the Bay of Biscay. Paul Atterbury valued the models at around £800 and £2000 respectively.

To obtain a copy, contact Jan Hoffman by e-mail or subscribe to the mailing list jan.hoffmann@unctad.org or go via the website <http://extranet.unctad.org/transportnews>

As we write, the marine environment is still suffering from the after-effects of the grounding of the *Shen Neng* off Great Keppel Island and the sinking of the Trans-Ocean *Deepwater Horizon* oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico. The preliminary report of the Australian Safety Bureau into the first of these is available from http://www.atsb.gov.au/media/1371728/mo2010003_prelim.pdf The oil rig disaster will make for no happier reading, as this photograph amply demonstrates.



FROM THE LITTLE BLACK BOOK...



True to form, Sandy Bowman has held up his hand as being the second officer in the last month's little black book of crew lists. He observed that it must have been one of 'Sirdhana's last voyages to Mombasa, as he took her for scrapping in Taiwan only five months after David Hammond received that crew list. Meanwhile the other Bowman on our subscription list has also contacted us, to prove conclusively that he is not the Bowman of the Little Black Book. Mike writes "I was not the 2/0 of any BI vessel, regrettably! On that date I was a serving as a Major with the Royal Brunei Malay Regiment, on secondment. It was all part of the Admiralty's revenge on me for transferring from the RN to the Army, I was sent off (as an Army Officer) to start the Naval arm which was part of the Regiment. Great fun, we had a Vosper Fast Patrol Boat which did 61 knots on trials (61, honest!) she was 100 ft and 100 tons, 3 gas turbines up the back end and 2 GM diesels if you either wanted to go below 12 knots or possibly

astern! On trials we went twice round the Isle of Wight in an afternoon! But all that is, as they say, a story for another bedtime!" Some people have all the fun!

This month's crew list comes from 'Chilka' thirty eight years ago. Possibly, this too features a subscriber to ...calling BI; the chief officer is listed as "Stephenson" -- we have two subscribers of that name, did either of them sail on the 'Chilka? Whatever, sadly it seems that our favourite radio officer has once again caught another BI ship on her way to the scrapyard .

FROM THE SUBSCRIPTIONS DEPT...

Young Tracey of our subscriptions department has just poked her head around the door to remind your editor to welcome the following subscribers who have recently signed up:

Ken Jones
Cameron Paterson, Scotland
James Furlong, Ireland
Ronald Thomas, France

Mike Bowman, Australia
Mike Plant, Australia
Jack Whitaker, Australia
Peter Scott, Australia

George Backwell, Thailand
Gerard Hawkes, United Kingdom

Gentlemen, you are all very welcome!



FROM THE BACK ISSUES...

We continue the early history of the British India Steam Navigation Company taken from the Geographical Review of March 1874.

In 1861-62, the present Chairman of the Company proceeded to India with the view of renewing the first contracts and of inaugurating, if possible, a general system of extension to embrace the whole coasting service along the Indian littoral. The extensions contemplated not only a scheme to connect all the ports of British India with each other, by a regular system of inter-coastal mails, but also aimed to extend to the Persian Gulf and to the Straits of Malacca and Singapore. This project seemed at the time too extensive to justify any expectations that it would be adopted in its entirety by the various Governments concerned. Eventually, the terms of a new contract were arranged which embraced the whole of the scheme submitted and also included conditions for the conveyance of troops and stores at a mileage rate and for the performance of other special Government services. By this agreement, which was concluded early in 1862, the Company undertook to run a fortnightly mail service between Calcutta, Akyab, Rangoon and Moulmein; a monthly service to Chittagong and Akyab; a monthly service to Singapore via Rangoon and Moulmein; a monthly service between Rangoon and the Andaman Islands; a fortnightly service between Bombay and Karachi; a service to the Persian Gulf once in every six weeks and lastly, a monthly service between Madras and Rangoon. The service between Bombay and Karachi had been previously worked under a small contract by a local Company, but had been performed in a very unsatisfactory manner and the Government gladly turned for relief to a Company which was rapidly acquiring a reputation for the regular and efficient fulfilment of its engagements.

In reviewing the obligations the Company had now undertaken in opposition to the opinions of experienced nautical men, it had committed itself to regular communications at all seasons of the year with ports on the coast of India, then believed to be unapproachable during the stormy monsoons; on the Persian Gulf line the steamers were to call at Maskat, Bunder Abbas, Bushire and Busreh, at none of which were there any European inhabitants, excepting the Government officials at the two last mentioned. At all the ports in the Persian Gulf it was the universal custom to suspend all shipping trade for several months in the year; further, at some of the ports and also at places in the Malay Peninsula and Straits Settlements, life and property were insecure and trade had been altogether neglected.

The first requirement of the Company was to secure trustworthy agents and in this its Directors have shown a sound policy; instead of appointing salaried agents, they adopted as a rule at all their stations the practice of paying by commission on the amount of earnings; and Europeans engaged in business as merchants were selected as agents at the various outports. These European firms have given the initiative to the

natives in breaking through old customs and opening up new industries. To some extent also natives have derived security for their operations by their presence.

These greatly extended services necessitated a considerable addition to the Company's fleet and by the end of the year 1863 they had seventeen steamers afloat and four more building and it was deemed advisable to obtain the sanction of the Board of Trade to the change of the name of the Company from the Calcutta and Burma Steam Navigation Company to the more appropriate and comprehensive name of the British India Steam Navigation Company.

During a part of 1862 and 1863 the Company's operations were crippled by the total loss of the steamer *Burma* on the Madras coast, fortunately with no loss of life; of the new steamer *Bussorah* on her voyage to India (see "...calling BI" issue 6); and by the stranding of the steamer *Coringa*, which was driven ashore in the harbour of Maskat whilst at anchor during a gale of wind. The following year a still heavier calamity overtook the Company. The great cyclone which swept over the Bay of Bengal and devastated an immense tract of level country bordering on the sea also engulfed the steamer *Persia* on her voyage from Rangoon to Calcutta and drove ashore four other of the Company's steamers, two of these being new vessels just out from home. Notwithstanding these serious disasters, the contracts services were successfully maintained without interruption.

During the years 1864-5, another peril beset the Company. Bombay, owing to the American War, having accumulated enormous wealth from its cotton production, ran wild with speculation. Companies with every conceivable object were started and two shipping companies, each with a capital equal to that of the British India Steam Navigation Company and with fleets of new and effective steamers, assailed the trade of the Company at nearly every point; it soon became apparent that sufficient traffic did not exist for the maintenance of so many competing steamers and the new companies after some two or three years of violent competition, retired from the field.

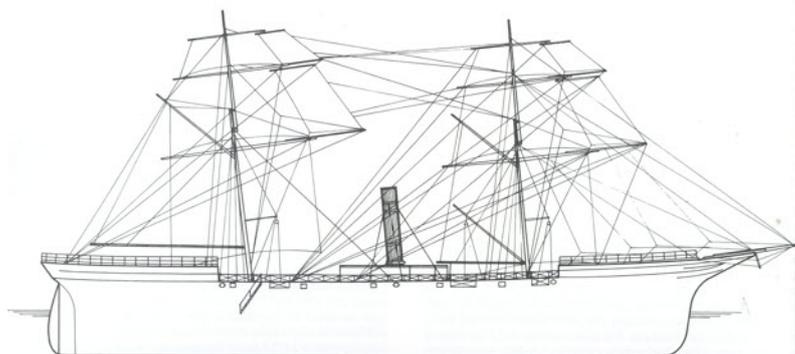
In 1864 the trade of the Persian Gulf had sufficiently developed to change the six-weekly line to become monthly. In like manner the regularity of the services on the coast of India had created wants previously unknown and the monthly coasting line between Calcutta and Bombay had to be converted into a fortnightly one.

These extensions were provided for by the Company steadily adding to its fleet. Keeping in view the growth of the trade and the requirements of the Government service, the steamers contracted to be built were of large capacity, ventilated by the most approved methods and provided with modern improvements, particularly with surface condensers (a new invention of which the Company was amongst the first to take advantage with all its steamers built after the year 1863 so fitted). This forethought of the Directors in adopting the surface condensers not only resulted in pro-



ducing the anticipated economy of coal, but proved of signal advantage to the Government on the occasion of the Abyssinian campaign. For this service transports were urgently needed and the Company at once placed nine of its steamers at the disposal of the Government, nearly all of which not only carried troops and stores, but took sailing-ships in tow. On the arrival of the troops at Annesly Bay, water was found to be a pressing want and the advantage of the Company's steamers being specially fitted with surface condensers

first steamer to arrive in London with an Indian cargo through the Suez Canal. She then received her new machinery and returned and in rapid succession as the vessels could be spared, those not provided with the economical compound engines were sent home to be so fitted, at the same time that the Company continued to add new and still more commodious steamers to its fleet in order to meet the growing requirements of the trade.



BISN Co's "India", from shipyard drawings

soon became apparent. No other chartered steamers which arrived at this time were fitted in a similar way. Three of the Company's steamers immediately commenced condensing water and delivered 30,000 gallons per day, for the support of the troops and animals and were retained for this purpose during most of the campaign, whilst the others made repeated trips to and from India. Testimony was borne generally to the immense value of the supply at such a crisis, as well as the great superiority of the Company's steamers as Indian transports. It was fortunate that this assistance was available until new sources of water supply were found; as otherwise the difficulties attending our occupation of Annesly Bay would probably have proved for some time at least, to be insurmountable.

In November, 1869, the opening of the Suez Canal produced an entire revolution in the shipping trade of India and simultaneously the invention of compound engines (the application of the high and low pressure system to marine engines), was accepted by the public. A race immediately commenced for the occupation of grounds which had hitherto been looked upon almost in the light of private preserves. The possession of a powerful fleet, instead of being a source of strength, became at once a source of weakness. The Peninsular and Oriental Company had its monopoly contested; and on all the lines which had been hitherto barred by the Isthmus of Suez, it found itself suddenly confronted by opposition in the shape of modern steamers of large capacity and the new economical machinery—steamship owners in London, Liverpool, Glasgow and the other seaports of the kingdom sent forth their vessels with the view of occupying some of the new ground thus opened to the public. The change did not find the British India Company unprepared; the steamer *India*, with cargo from Calcutta to London was waiting at Suez and she passed through when the canal was opened and was the

During the following year, proposals for a further large extension of the regular services were submitted to the Government of India for consideration, which led to the settlement of a new contract early in 1873. Under this agreement, the Company undertook several additional services and agreed to double nearly all the existing ones, thereby binding itself to run a total annual mileage exceeding 1,100,000.

In 1872 the Company entered on a new field of enterprise, by an arrangement with our Home Government, to extend its operations to the East Coast of Africa. Within six weeks of the settlement of the contract, a service every four weeks was commenced between Aden and Zanzibar, (see "*...calling BI*" issues 9-12) it being of importance at the time that it should be commenced without delay, as Sir Bartle Frere was then starting on his mission. The service has since been maintained with strict regularity. It is interesting to note that when the Company's steamer arrived at Zanzibar in December, 1872, with London telegraphic dates only ten days old, the latest previous dates were of June, 1872 and it brought the first intelligence received there



Photograph by Tony Lister

of many important European events and of the mission Sir Bartle Frere had undertaken. To the flourishing little community of Zanzibar, this communication with the outside world is of the greatest importance, but the effect it will have in gradually opening up the hitherto neglected trade of East Africa cannot be over estimated.

(to be continued in our next issue)



FROM THE HOLIDAY BROCHURES...

...and they say that integrated travel is a modern concept. This advertisement is from the Daily News of 28th December 1863



FROM THE NATIONAL ARBORETUM...

After a bit of digging about in history by a few people, we are very pleased to reveal the existence of the relatively unknown BI war memorial. Details are contained on a special page on the BI website,

<http://biship.com/people/biwarmemorial.htm>

Reference is made there of the two female casualties who were on the *Domala*. *Domala* was the first ship in the BISHIP Co's fleet powered by diesel engines. She was used on the service to and from Calcutta. In 1940, *Domala* was sent to Antwerp to collect a number of Indian seamen who had been repatriated by Germany. On 2 March 1940, she was attacked by a Heinkel bomber, setting *Domala* on fire. The

order to abandon ship was given but the bomber machine-gunned survivors attempting to escape by lifeboat. A total of 108 of the 291 people on board the ship were killed. The Dutch ship *Jong Willem* rescued 48 survivors, despite being attacked herself. Avro Anson aircraft of 48 Squadron assisted in the rescue. On fire, *Domala* was towed to the Solent where she was beached. On 19 March, she was towed to Southampton where the decision was made to convert her to a cargo ship. *Domala* was requisitioned by the Ministry of War Transport and renamed *Empire Attendant*. As a result of the attack, questions were asked in Parliament about the lack of use of the guns carried on *Domala* in her defence. Winston Churchill replied that the aircraft had been initially misidentified as a friendly one, which was why the guns were not manned.

FROM THE READERS...

Thanks to new reader Peter Maynard for the following link to a marvellous resource of ship photos. Just go to www.photoship.co.uk, click on 'browse the old ship picture galleries with thumbnails' and then 'all ships', which is in alphabetical order. A veritable cornucopia of ships; Peter himself downloaded a picture from this site and now glories in looking at the 'Chindwara' every day when he switches on his computer.

FROM THE TAP ROOM...

The next BI mini-reunion in Manchester will be on **Tuesday 15th June** 2010 at our usual venue, Waxy O'Connor's, in the Print works. This is in the city centre near to Victoria station. We have been there for the last three or four years.

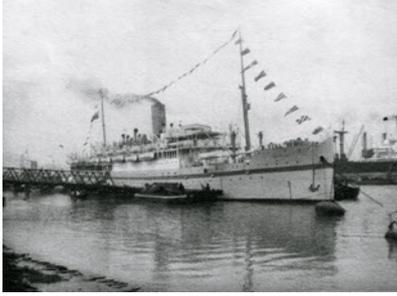
James Slater will be there from 12 noon until whenever! The meeting is open to all sections of BI and please feel free to bring your better half. James says that She doesn't have to stop if She doesn't want; the shopping in the immediate area is second to none! Please let James know (james.slater@zen.co.uk) if you are coming and/or need more information. Around 14 people are booked in already.

Also coming up soon is the East Anglian gathering on **Friday 28th May** at the Thatchers Arms - further details from [John Prescott](mailto:John.Prescott@zen.co.uk). Your Editor understands there will be about eighteen gathering there - all welcome!



FROM THE ARCHIVES...

The continuing saga of Richard Henderson's unidentified ship seems to be reaching a conclusion. You may recall how Richard was seeking clarification over the name of the ship below, dressed overall. Reader David Mitchell, the unofficial BI archivist, writes in with definitive form.



"It is very difficult to identify ships with certainty sometimes, but my money is on Nevasa (1913-1948). The answer lies in the detail:

The K's had a pair of cowl topped derrick posts on the fo'c's'l

and about the foremast whilst Nevasa only had the latter, but with mushroom tops. A unique feature of



Nevasa and sister Neuralia was the setting back of the bridge by about a lifeboat's length from the centre castle

front. The K's carried 5 lifeboats per side, whilst the N's had 6, doubled up during their troop transport days along with boats on the poop. Another distinctive feature on Nevasa in her HMT guise was a galley stack running up the foremast, terminating with an "H" cowl considerably above the crows nest.

From my collection,



here are Karoa (1915-1950), a trials photo I think, and Nevasa packed with troops in the 1930's". As always, thanks to David and thanks also to Richard for initiating this.

FROM THE AUCTION ROOMS...

Your editor always wanted to be a ship owner and he thought his time had come recently on eBay. One of his old ships was up for sale -- or so he thought. "Buy the beautiful old BI liner *Kenya*" cried the banner headline! Of course it was only a model, but a beautifully finished and detailed one, some 5 inches in length made by the German firm of Albatros.

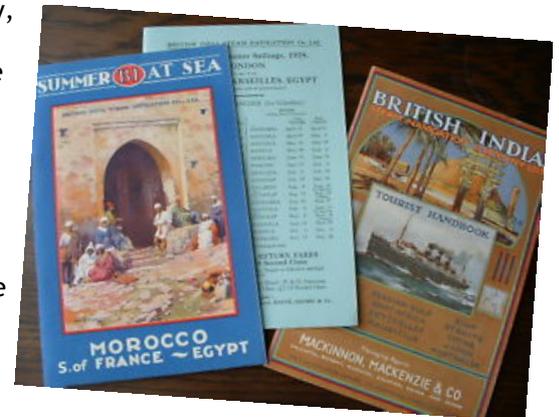


It eventually sold for £68.66, far beyond the straitened circumstances of your editor's wallet.

Also on the Internet auction sites was this collection of tourist brochures, dating from around 1929. The description reads "Two vintage British India Steam Navigation tour and hand brochures. Summer at sea.

Morocco, south of France, Egypt with timetable and prices - PLUS - tourist handbook which has map of journeys, various pictures of Burma, Tokyo, Kuala Lumpur, etc. and two ships, ss *Talamba* and M class passenger vessel."

Very worryingly, the description goes on to note that there is "age rusting of staples in centre". Your editor hopes that this does not refer to the cheap repair job done during the *Talamba's* previous drydocking.

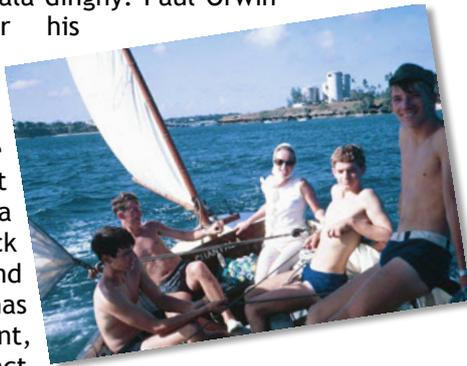


The successful winner of the six bidders paid a magnificent £53.



FROM THE CADET SHIP DEPT...

Your editor can't remember so much discussion over a photograph as that arising from the picture of the cadets sailing in the Chantala dinghy. Paul Orwin came back after his previous note in our last issue and is adamant that the cadet in the foreground is not Roger Holles, but is a "Steve". In fact Nick Pearson, an old friend of your editor, has rushed to print, opining that in fact, our search for Roger Holles was doomed to failure from the first. It seems that we should have been looking instead for Roger Hollis. So our picture of this splendidly



mustachioed in vain. Nick says that Roger in Spain, but all things BI at moment.



actor was all goes on to does live eschews the



Paul Orwin has fond memories of Bertie Miller and some of his well-known idiosyncrasies. He particularly recalls a bad crossing the Bay of Biscay in foul weather for the first time, only to hear in his misery that well-known stentorian voice yelling "who's been bilious on my deck?". All the young cadets were too busy throwing up to own up.

There must be more of you who have fond memories of this great bosun. Let's have some more Miller-isms! The usual prizes, etc etc...

FROM THE BAD SIDE OF SHIPPING...

Do you remember that United Colours of Benneton ad years ago that featured an oil-covered seabird? Here your editor reproduces two photographs that don't have the commercial overtones of that one, just a plain and simple indictment.



These photographs of albatross chicks were taken on Midway Atoll, a tiny stretch of sand and coral near the middle of the North Pacific. The nesting babies are fed bellies-full of plastic by their parents, who soar out over the vast polluted ocean collecting what looks to them like food to bring back to their young. On this diet of human trash, every year tens of thousands of albatross chicks die on Midway from starvation, toxicity, and choking.

To document this phenomenon, none of the plastic in any of these photographs was moved, placed, manipulated, arranged, or altered in any way. These images depict the untouched stomach contents of baby birds in one of the world's most remote marine sanctuaries, more than 2000 miles from the nearest continent.

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/supporting/campaigns/albatross/>

