Issue 42 March 2014

News of the BISN 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...

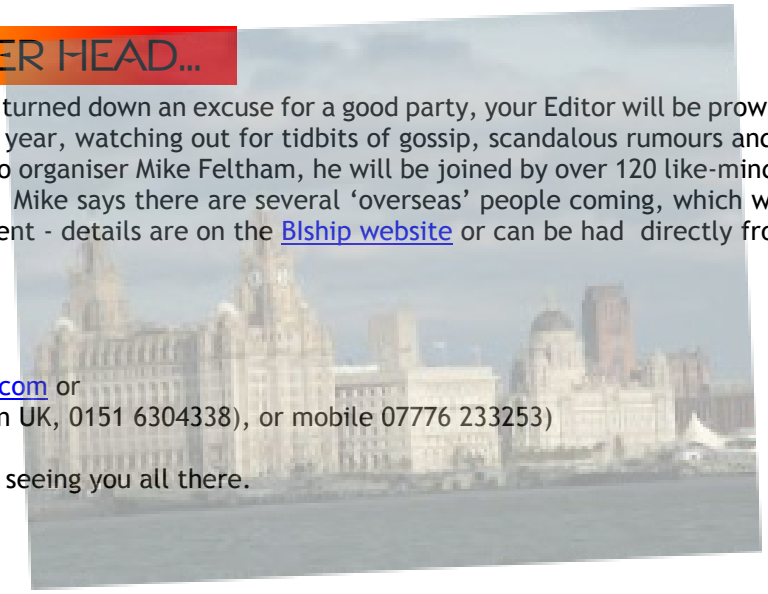
The Nautical Institute, headquartered in London, but with many branches across the globe, has offered free access to much of its information on subjects from fatigue at sea to access to enclosed spaces, from ECDIS to Spatial Planning. They have an 'Alert!' website which provides an insight into the role of the human element in shipping, with a series of videos. They also publish a free magazine, 'The Navigator' which should appeal to ...er, the navigators amongst us. Just go to http://www.nautinst.org/en/forums/index.cfm or, for the magazine http://www.nautinst.org/en/Publications/the-navigator/index.cfm. It certainly helps your editor to keep up-to-date with what is happening at sea these days. And whilst you are flicking through the videos, you may also care to cast a glance at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vK1FQmvKWg#t=466 For some pretty impressive footage of tornados at sea. The film is a bit jerky (not surprising, really), but you needn't watch it all.

We hope that we can offer you a goodly selection of reading - and viewing - material this month. We conclude the story of John Darby's round-the-world trip aboard a container ship captained by ex-BI officer Dick Turner. Added to which there's a complementary piece from an astute journalist, Rose George. There's also the answer to last month's "Where are we now" competition, together with a new scene to ponder on, another of David Hammond's famous crew lists, and a newly discovered remembrance of the *Chandpara*. We thank John Briggs, Davis Mitchell and Simon Morgan for their help on this last one. As we thank all contributors. Please be assured that your material will probably see the light of day eventually, if it doesn't immediately. Poor Dave Harrold has been waiting months for his offering to appear, which it will next month. Watch this space!

FROM THE SUBSCRIPTION Dept...

We have been a little dilatory of late in publicly welcoming some new subscribers. So, without further ado, we say 'Salaams' to Henry Thein (Australia), David Ledger, Patrick Halpin, Christopher Perry, Su Sedgwick, Graham Howard, Pam Smith, Maggie and Mike Eltham, Fred Hawkins, Gordon Farmer, Tom Wright Ian Stacey, Thomas Wilkinson and George Tierney (USA). They are just some of those who have registered over the last few months. Ladies and Gentlemen, you are amongst friends and we bid you welcome.

FROM THE PIER HEAD...



Having never knowingly turned down an excuse for a good party, your Editor will be prowling the corridors at Liverpool's Adelphi Hotel later this year, watching out for tidbits of gossip, scandalous rumours and the like at the UK's next BISN Co reunion. According to organiser Mike Feltham, he will be joined by over 120 like-minded people during the weekend of 10th - 12th October. Mike says there are several 'overseas' people coming, which will add to the fun. There's still time to book for the event - details are on the BIship website or can be had directly from Mike at:

Mike Feltham.
4B Ismay Drive
Wallasey CH44 0EU
ismay@mjfeltham.plus.com or
Tel: +44 151 6304338 (in UK, 0151 6304338), or mobile 07776 233253)

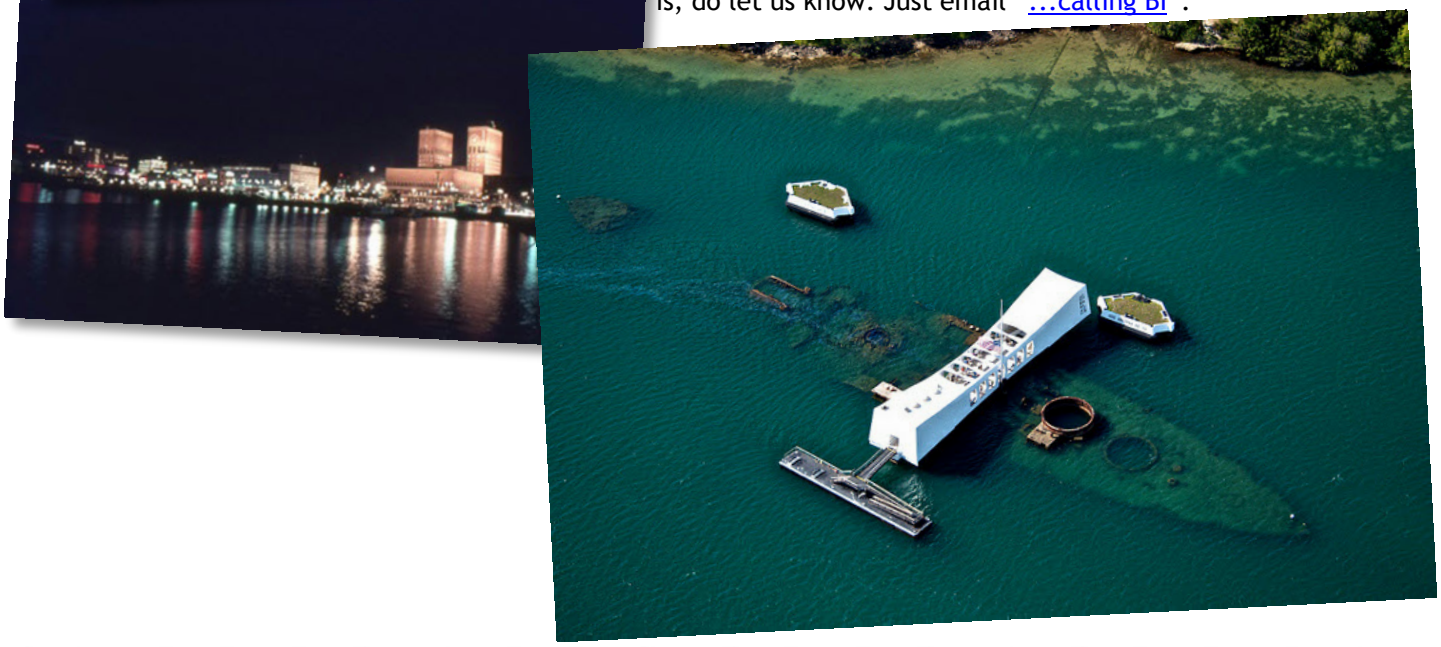
We will look forward to seeing you all there.

To send in your views, notes, photos, brickbats or spare gold bars, please click on any "...callingBI" logo

FROM THE COMPETITION Dept...

...and they flooded in! Just about everybody recognised this as Oslo in our latest "Where are we now?" competition. Our poor girl-wot-does, Tracey, was quite overcome (but then she is most nights, we hear). It was almost impossible to pick a winner, so we won't, but perhaps David Brown deserves one for his chutzpah in sending in a much better shot taken from almost the same position as your Editor's one, but this time at night.

We may have you with this latest offering, though. We are fairly certain that no BI ship has ever visited this place, so nobody has an advantage there! Thanks to Richard Henderson for this item (he's barred from the competition!) but if you know where this is, do let us know. Just email "...calling BI".



FROM THE SOCIAL SCENE...

Plans for this year's various social events are proceeding well and fast. This, from James Slater: "the Engineers reunion is in Glasgow as usual, but rooms are at a premium this year and we have had to move our reunion date from the third Thursday in to the second Thursday, 11th September .

The Mercure, our regular venue, are offering us rooms on a B&B basis at £80 per night (an extra charge will be made for a second breakfast if your better half is with you). This is against the rack rate of £120 room only, so it's not a bad deal.

The email address for the Mercure is csales.mercureglasgowcity@jupiterhotels.co.uk, phone is 0141 314 1074.

I have agreed this rate with Emma in sales so if you have a problem speak to Emma, mention my name and the BI Engineers reunion and all should be well.

Emma does urge you to reserve your room early because of the high demand.

As regards the Campanile, they have held the rate at £65, our group booking reference is 20138846 and it needs to be quoted when booking. The rate was agreed with the manager, Marika Forsgren. This is the 9th year that we have been using the Campanile and they do seem to look after us.

Email is glasgow@campanile.com phone is 0141 287 7700".

Then we had this via the Biship message board from Anthony Brooke: "I know that at least four members of the site will remember Denis Colbridge, either from time spent in Singapore around 1969/70, as 4/E/O on Galahad, or subsequent happy occasions in other parts of the world.

Denis made contact with me recently, and like the rest of us, he has been a very long way since last seen. But has now retired and moved back from exotic parts to good old Manchester, he seems keen to rekindle the old flame of friendship, what burnt so strong on the Galahad it make indelible marks on all of us. Denis suggested a Galahad reunion. So for that reason alone I have copied this to the BIship website address, in the hope there may be others out there who knew him from around that time. (Does anybody know where Tony King is now ?)

Not sure if Denis is acquainted with the various BI Groups, but was always highly gregarious and great company, so might be interesting in meetings of the NW chapter.

His email address is :- limey3537@yahoo.com

FROM THE GOOD TIMES...

We were happy to receive the following from James Lynch recently: “Pleasantly surprised to spot Bill Rigby in a couple of recent editions of “... calling BI”. It has taken me a while to dig them out but I have enclosed an earlier photo of Bill behind a beer, in Moji 17th June 1960, on the *Orna*. He was second mate. Mike Deed 3rd, I was Cadet with Dave Evans, and he may remember Jim Kinson, Sparks who went on one of the first overland trips Bombay to UK.
We built a swimming pool and a catamaran amongst other things on board the *Orna*.
Bill subdued, I think with the aid of a lifeboat tiller, a Tal Walla who ran amok and stabbed another crew member.
At one stage we had another cadet Shaikh Daij Shaikh Khalifa Mohammed al Khalifa, one of the Bahraini Khalifas destined for great things I believe.
Don't know if he achieved them. Hence the snazzy BI Cadet Gulf Rig, that's me by the way, not him.
And like many things BI a curtain best drawn over other events”

Thanks, Jim. Sounds like there was a bit of fun to be had on the *Orna*!

FROM THE WEATHERMAN...

Sad to say, but the recent storms in and around northwestern Europe produced more than the usual litany of trials and tribulations. One of the most graphic was the wrecking of the Spanish-flagged *Luno* off the French port of Bayonne. Fortunately all 12 crew were taken off before the final moments.
Watch the drama on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EuzSkFlsILc or http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYR1XrUGlQk.
Tragic isn’t the word.

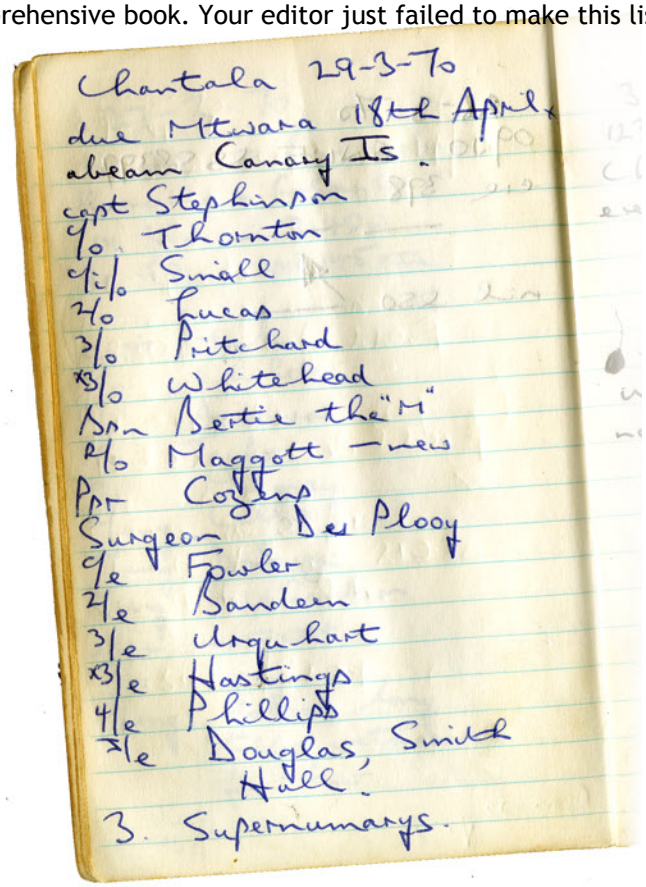
But whilst we are on the subject of ships breaking up, perhaps you also would like to watch these two videos... The overheard conversation on the first is hilarious, if occasionally expletive-ridden, whilst the second shows what was meant to happen! Your editor only took one ship to the breakers yard, the lovely old *Devonia,* and he doesn’t recall it being quite so haphazard as this.

FROM THE HUMBLE PIE Dept...

It's probably fair to say that the designers of modern passenger and cruise ships have taken a few swipes from your editor over the last couple of issues or so. It was with pleasure then that we sat down one night recently to listen to a naval architect and designer talk a bit of sense for a change. Dr Stephen Payne, the Chief Naval Architect of Cunard talking about the QM2. So interesting, in fact, that we searched for another, much longer, interview with him. Firstly, via our friends at gCaptain, we have a short, 10 minute, talk speaking about the parameters he needed to overcome to build the *Queen Mary* 2. If you can spare the time, there is a 90 minute film of Dr Payne addressing students at a naval architecture college in the USA, including a Q&A session. Your editor did sit through it all and found it engrossing. Mr Payne does make the point that, although this vessel carries passengers on long ocean voyages in luxury, the QM2 is not a cruise ship, but rather a purpose-designed liner capable of criss-crossing the Atlantic Ocean quickly and safely in all weather conditions. And, just to prove it, here's a photo of her kindly sent in by Mike Pratt. He says "I took this happy snap on a recent cruise to Shanghai and down the China sea and the East coast of Australia. It was a very memorable trip, as both my wife Myra and I spent a few years with Cunard on the North Atlantic service. The Captain of the QM2 was rather short with his comments when I mentioned to him that I had sailed on the Queen Mary in 1966 as one of the ten captains! With a comment of not having been born then, this was at one those meet-the-passengers at a Captain's cocktail gathering. Needless to say I was unimpressed with his manners.
The upside to this however is I won a photographic prize for the photo taken at Cairns anchorage and have it as my screen shot on the computer".

FROM THE LITTLE BLACK BOOK...

Once again, we are pleased to reproduce another page of crew lists from ex-Radio Officer David Hammond's comprehensive book. Your editor just failed to make this list, as he had left the trip before.


Chantala 29-3-70
due Mtwara 18th April
abeam Canary Is.
capt Stephinson
C/O Thornton
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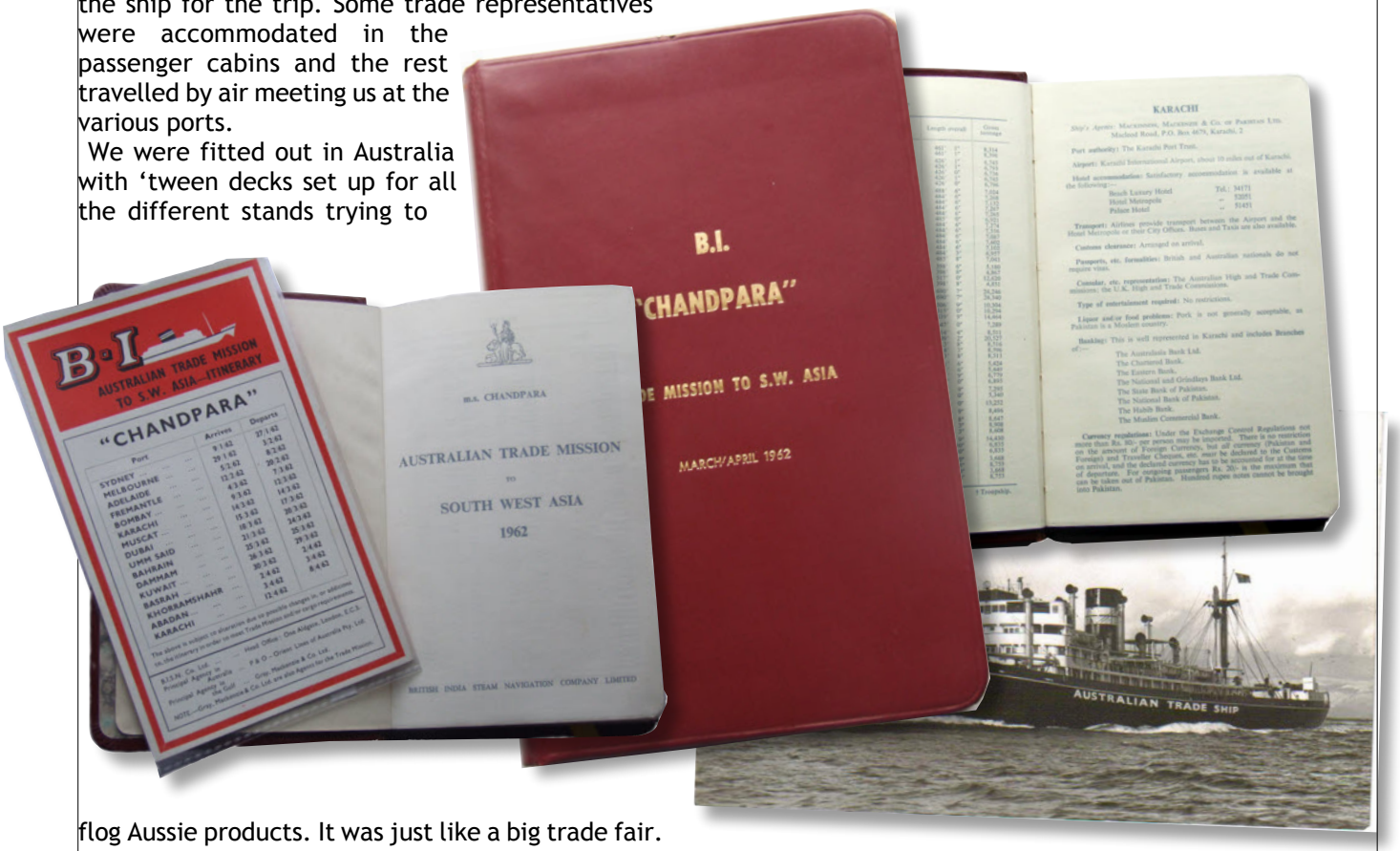
2/O Lucas
3/O Pritchard
RB/O Whitehead
Sgn Bertie the "M"
R/O Maggott — new
PSR Coggins
Surgeon Des Plooy
C/E Fowler
2/E Sanderson
3/E Urquhart
RB/E Hastings
4/E Phillips
5/E Douglas, Smith
Hall.
3. Supernumarys.

FROM THE AUCTION ROOMS...

Spotted recently on an auction house website near you was this handsome leather-bound book, outlining the role played by BISN Co during an unusual voyage charter. The story was first told in BI News no: 32 in July 1962. BI had been proposing a trade mission since 1959, the Australian Department of Trade eventually taking up the option a year later. A host of practical problems had to solved, layouts planned, scheduling to avoid religious and national holidays, etc, all before a ship had been chosen. Eventually, *Chandpara* starting fitting out in Sydney with exhibition booths, an "airconditioning system" by way of her refrigeration machinery, stairways, public rooms all to be set up for the 25 mission members, ten of whom travelled with the ship. Some 2500 visitors were welcomed on board in Karachi, the first port of call.

We alerted John Briggs now in Australia about the book and he writes: "I remember the trip quite well as we were on the regular Australia/Persian Gulf trade. It was a one off event and the Aussie Government chartered the ship for the trip. Some trade representatives were accommodated in the passenger cabins and the rest travelled by air meeting us at the various ports.

We were fitted out in Australia with 'tween decks set up for all the different stands trying to flog Aussie products. It was just like a big trade fair.



I remember a large wooden staircase constructed leading down to No.4 'tween deck. Hard to remember now but I think there was one lower hold also fitted out.

We followed our normal trade pattern around the Gulf but opened the ship to the local dignitaries after any cargo work had finished.

There was great interest in every port and the officers were even invited to a sheik's palace in one of the Emirates for a feast. Great experience, with the eunuchs carrying trays shoulder high with a whole roast lamb to deposit on the table. We had a servant each standing behind us and he would reach over our shoulder to grab a piece of fatty mutton, wool and all, and slap it down on our plate. They must have liked me as I also got an eye, yuk!

In another port the sheik's harem came down for a visit. The exhibition was closed and I got the job of escorting them around. When we got down into the 'tween deck they all removed their veils and started chatting and giggling. A real assortment of young and old but no beauties that I remember.

From memory, Peter Farrell was Mate, Spike Foreman was 1st officer, I was second mate and David Davies was supernumerary second mate.

All my photos of that time have been lost in one of our various house moves but I have attached a publicity photo which was put out as a post card. We all got a few mementos of the voyage, one I remember being a very nice bronze and copper ash tray with a medallion celebrating the trip in the centre".

FROM THE DECK ... (CONT'D)

We continue the story of John Darby's round-the-world trip in a containership under the command of Captain Dick Turner, an ex-BI officer. We left them entering Melbourne:

In Melbourne while disembarking I encountered a heavily perfumed, ample Filipina. She flashed me a bright smile, said a cheerful "good morning" and disappeared into the crew's quarters. In Auckland two more Filipinas boarded and, seven days later on the South Island, were said to have departed. As a sailor friend succinctly encapsulated matters, ports mean "singee, drinkee, girlee!"

The girls who visit ships are, by and large, less of a problem than the bars and hookers ashore. The "Mish', the various Missions to Seafarers, attempt to provide alternatives. Of all the organisations concerned with the welfare of seamen it is probably the one most appreciated by them. In Sydney, for instance, the Mission's bus picked us from the Botany Bay terminal and took us into town. There were no takers for communion and most of us then departed for shopping and sightseeing. But the Mission offered everything from bibles to billiards. There was counselling, clothing, the opportunity to make inexpensive and so important phone calls home and a friendly place to relax, a place where the Filipino crewmen wouldn't be ripped off.

From my diary: "I know what I want to do in Sydney and what I don't. A pamphlet suggests that I could climb the Sydney Harbour Bridge. "Come and feel the excitement of making your way over the catwalk to the pylon and then setting out across the arch on your way to the summit ... 134 metres above sea level". A picture shows a group, acting as though they're on top of Everest, with a ferry and Sydney Opera House a knee-trembling distance below. The small print reads that there is a compulsory breathalyser test and that, "Climbers must take into account any medical condition that may impact on their ability to climb ladders and steep slopes safely". In my case, the "medical condition" would be fear, although, for public consumption, my excuse is shortage of time.

As for the ship, there were engine stoppages, air conditioning and gyro compass problems. The chief engineer fumed "She's a cantankerous old bitch! She's constantly demanding attention and needs to be told she's wonderful. Otherwise, she breaks down". One day, it was a leaking ballast tank; the next day all the toilets give up the ghost. But even in her last months, *Palliser Bay* was well maintained; from bridge to main deck, crewmen hosed off the salt, chipped away rust and applied fresh paint. Outside the ship's office a notice read, "A clean vessel is a reflection of its crew. Let us try to make a good impression". The captain had heard of a ship that had her funnel painted on the way to the scrapyard and insisted, until the very end, that *Palliser Bay* would look her best and be run as well as possible.

Occasionally, I would bump into the captain, chief engineer and chief officer doing the weekly rounds with the master pointing out various tasks. The ship's 'Health, Safety and Environmental Committee' held regular meetings and discussed among other things maintenance problems. At one session, topics included dealing with some jammed fire hydrant caps; the refurbishment of port side funnel gratings; a report on holds 5-12, upper deck spaces and accommodation and the results of an inspection which determined that the galley was in a "clean, hygienic condition".

As for me, I spent far more time on the bridge and decks than in the engine room. Why be in a place as hot as 45 degrees centigrade in the tropics when you can be outside in a breeze watching flying fish and dolphins? One of the deck officer cadets said - and only half in jest - that he avoided the engine room because "it's noisy and it smells!" If nothing else, the remark revealed something of the old shipboard pecking order; up top there was the orderly, quiet wheelhouse and, far below, the din of the oily engine room. That said, the engine room on *Palliser Bay* looked pretty clean to me. I visited the engine room several times, but my longest stay was an entire day with one of the officers. I was kitted out with a boiler suit and issued safety boots. We descended by ladders into the depths of a gigantic, clangorous, metal cavern. There were tubes and pipes and cranes; there were wheels and dials and flashing lights. Metal catwalks zigged and zagged and vanished behind bulkheads and down passageways. Here, people shouted or gestured to be understood and familiar faces were made unfamiliar with eye and ear protectors. I am decidedly untechnical, but the young officer taught me how much the safe running *of Palliser Bay*'s temperamental engines depended, not only on dials and gauges, but also on smell, sight, sound and feel. And those are senses engineers have employed since the first steamships in the 1820s. The computers and sensors that allow modern engine rooms to be unmanned overnight will, one hopes, never entirely replace human experience and intuition.

The officer took me into machinery spaces rarely seen by visitors, including past watertight safety doors and bent double to the far ends of the tunnels where the shafts vanish beyond the hull and join the five-bladed propellers. At $19^1/_2$ knots, the shafts revolved 92 times a minute and it was the twin screws that allowed P&O Nedlloyd to operate safely on the remote 'under the

FROM THE DECK ... (CONT'D)

Capes' route. If one engine broke down there was, at least, the other to fall back on. As an aside, with all sail set, *Cutty Sark* could make 17 knots and, on very good days, some of the clippers managed 19kts.

An engine room highlight was a place that some of the crew had never even seen. We opened a submarine-type hatch and climbed down a narrow shaft. At the bottom, faint lights in a tunnel, like something from 'The Great Escape' vanished into the distance. We were in the duct tunnel at the very bottom of the ship, just above the keel. On hands and knees, we squeezed around the ladder and onto a little wooden trolley. Then, like Victorian miners, we pulled ourselves by hand virtually the length of the ship, sometimes through clouds of escaping steam. Hundreds of metres of lagged pipes and ductwork paralleled our course and to the sides were mysterious, dark openings leading who knows where. On one's own, the tunnel would have been positively spooky and, under any circumstances a claustrophobe's nightmare.

On another visit to the engine room I was taken into the port passageway within the double hull, one of two large, high-ceilinged corridors running the ship's length, so long that it was impossible to see from stern to bow. We could touch the 20mm thick outer hull, the frames or *Palliser Bay*'s ribs and hear the groans, creaking and squeaking as she 'gave' with the waves. Up this long, lonely space we advanced, past bits and pieces of equipment and spare parts, past discarded, long forgotten boxes and rarely entered spaces to the fo'c's'le and a large, gloomy chain locker filled with machinery for anchoring. Here, the bow, just feet away, cut into the waves, the shudder making the deck vibrate. We then continued down the starboard passageway, eventually emerging onto the poop deck, a partly open area at the stem used for mooring, it was like a sea cave with the clamour of waves and regular thump of the screws echoing and re-echoing from bulkhead to bulkhead. Two decks below the main deck, it was so close to the water that you felt you could almost reach down and touch it. The sense of speed and roll were accentuated and, with the ocean's roar and shifting horizon, made it one of the most dramatic places on the ship.

Late one afternoon, some of the engineering officers invited me to join them at the battered old green table by the swimming pool. Some of the containers had been unloaded, so we could see the stern. We sat and watched the wake disappear. The sun was warm and breeze comfortable. Just the time for a cold beer and chat. The talk was of engine room politics, the newer ships with fewer officers and thus less socialising. Conversation shifted to the cheap buggers at head office who allegedly cut corners, the accountants who, it was claimed, wouldn't pay for much-needed repairs. "And we're the ones", the officers said, "who, in the face of corporate stinginess, have to keep this old scow steaming through her last few circuits". But for them, the ship would be ignominiously towed into port by a salvage tug. They stared into their beers, satisfied that they were unsung heroes, which, given the hard and potentially dangerous world in which they toiled, they were.

As unexpectedly intriguing as it was below deck, I inevitably spent far more time on the bridge. Most people probably have some sense of a bridge's layout with controls, radar, communication equipment and so on, but it's the small touches that interest me. Unlike the bridge on the *Norway* which had a Norwegian troll doll, I found no mascot, but did discover some rather ancient golf clubs. These were used by a former captain who drove balls into a net set up on one of the wings. On a shelf was a cadet's can of Pringles chips, affixed to which was a note: "Keep your fingers out!!" A poster showing marine life was on one of the bulkheads and books on birds, clouds and sea states could be found tucked into a convenient corner close to the tea cups, kettle and small fridge. Another bulkhead had a piece of paper showing times and frequencies for the BBC World Service. On the bridge's two telegraphs, marked 'dead slow,' 'slow', 'half' and 'full', some wag had taped labels on which was printed "hyperspace" and "ballistic". The wheelhouse was busy when moving in and out of port with captain, pilot, chief officer, officer of the watch and helmsman, but at sea was normally quiet with only one officer who at night would be joined by a watchman.

Morning tea in hand, I would arrive to check on conditions and position and to have a pre-breakfast chat with the third officer. It was here that I would compare the readings of my $160 handheld GPS with *Palliser Bay's* various and expensive navigation systems.

From my diary: *"I feel rather stupid on realising that, for some days, my bearing has been different from the ship's. I had been on magnetic north and Palliser Bay is on true north. It's a good thing that the ship and I managed to stay together because otherwise, the GPS would have had us in central Africa. Moreover, it slowly dawns that the ship is using nautical miles, not normal miles. I couldn't understand why the ship's daily 'distance run' figures differed from mine. Given that my GPS was giving the ship's speed in miles, it should have been obvious. I switched the units and now PB and I are travelling at the same speed and covering the same distance".*

From then on, without exception, the readings were the same. I enjoyed a cautionary comment in a vessel information document. It listed the magnetic and gyro compasses, radar, satellite and Decca navigation systems and so on and then stated - and I quote - "and when all else fails, sextant(s)/chronometer/tables". Perhaps with this in mind, the master ensured that the two officer cadets had regular sextant lessons.

FROM THE DECK ... (CONT'D)

On the bridge I took informal astronomy classes, discovering the Southern Cross and Orion's Belt, meteors and satellites, so clear in skies far from land. I watched as helium weather balloons were dispatched for the British Met. Office, most successfully, but one hitting the funnel, another exploding and one or two more disappearing into the drink. And on the bridge I watched the radar screen - lit up like Piccadilly Circus - yellow, red, blue, green, purple dotted lines and triangles, diamonds, circles and squares as we made our way through the English Channel, the world's busiest shipping lane. But that was two oceans away.

Our passage across the Tasman Sea, notorious for vile weather, was uneventful. In Auckland, we delivered *GBR 52*, one of the British America's Cup training yachts which had sat near the stern all the way out from the UK. I had spent a considerable amount of time carefully examining her hull. (There had been rumours in Auckland of security measures to prevent divers from examining their rivals' boats for secret hull developments. On *Palliser Bay*, I could easily walk to the stern anytime and look as much as I wanted. That said, I wouldn't recognise a revolution in hull design if it hit me like a boom on an unexpected gybe). We lined the railings and cheered as she was gently lowered into the waters of the Southern Hemisphere. Sadly, our cheering had little effect for the British were again frustrated in their efforts to take the Cup.

Auckland inspired wardroom anecdotes of past, unauthorised passengers. On one crossing of the Indian Ocean, an African stowaway had given himself up. He was nicknamed 'Wellington' because of the big rubber boots he was given to wear. 'Wellington' was eventually allowed to get off the ship in Australia and is apparently still there. A New Zealand stowaway was less fortunate. He snuck aboard *Palliser Bay* in Auckland thinking the ship was headed for Australia. He spent eight days hiding, sustained by some stolen bread. On finally emerging, the hungry - and disappointed - traveller discovered the ship was still in New Zealand.

From my diary: "Richard Turner [the captain] has seen a lot. Just as Allan Villiers, who spoke to Richard and his fellow cadets at their college, mourned the passing of sail, so Richard regrets the loss of a less hurried, less technological era. He tells of Bombay, Cochin-China [formerly the southern part of Vietnam], Hong Kong and the smell of camphor wood in the old days. There are stories of cadet pranks, martinet captains, holystoning teak decks and polishing brass. Now, no megaphones, speaker tubes and Chinese laundrymen handwashing the officers' whites". On his watch, virtually all the old shipping companies have vanished. Where are Bibby Bros., Clan Line Steamers, New Zealand Shipping Co. and Furness Withy & Co.? Richard has sailed on "break bulk' ships, tankers, Channel ferries and container ships. He looks like a captain - tall, greying hair with an authoritative air. His public persona is calm and considered, although he admits that he can be rather anxious, not a surprise given his responsibility for a multi-million dollar vessel and its cargo.

Jenny is his second wife. Richard had been on shore for some years, but was expecting to go back to sea when they started dating. He took her for a voyage on the old P&O Canberra [the "Great White Whale' of Falklands fame and one of the most loved of post-war liners] to discover how she enjoyed it and the rest is history. It's clear that, even on battered container ships without stabilisers, Jenny has made a splendid captain's wife. She shares his life in a way that few spouses can and gives every sign of being content. They seem to make a highly compatible pair".

The Turners' spacious accommodation consists of a large day cabin, bedroom, bathroom (with a much admired tub and heated towel rail) and office. In the day cabin or lounge, there are plants on the porthole sills and a 19th century print of New Zealand's Palliser Bay, decorative touches that remain from master to master. A wall clock automatically adjusts (as do most on the ship) when time zones change. Jenny has brought along a portable organ and added family pictures - weddings, Richard's treasured old Renault soft-top and so on - that give the room a homey feel. Well-used chairs and sofas form a cozy circle and are often used for entertaining.

'"Whooppeee!!!" someone wrote on the shore leave board. We had four days in Auckland and three in Port Chalmers on the South Island which, by the standards of modern ship schedules, are unusually long stays. Certainly long enough to revive, for the master, memories of when there was time for seeing more of the world than just container terminals and the oceans between.

While in Auckland, I chanced on a volume of Kipling and found some evocative verse that seemed to be appropriate:

'Oh, where are you going to, all you Big Steamers,
With England's own coal, up and down the salt seas?'
'We are going to fetch you your bread and your butter,
Your beef, pork, and mutton, eggs, apples, and cheese".

FROM THE DECK ... (CONT'D)

"And where will you fetch it from, all you Big Steamers,
And where shall I write you when you are away?'
"We fetch it from Melbourne, Quebec and Vancouver
Address us at Hobart, Hong-Kong and Bombay.'

If extended periods in port are largely a thing of the past, other customs - the heritage of P&O and more relaxed times - survived, although only just. Every day as we sat down for lunch the tannoy squawked for the "noon chit'. "Now hear this. Now hear this. This is the second officer speaking". He would then give our latitude and longitude, the distance covered in the past twenty-four hours and our average speed. Also provided were the distance to and estimated time of arrival at our next port of call, upcoming events and other useful information. The announcement could provide for mealtime conversation after we had studied the menus placed in little stands on the dining saloon's tables. These were headed 'M/V PALLISER BAY AT SEA' or in whatever port we happened to be and offered, as already noted, a surprising range of choices. The stewards waited to make suggestions and take our orders. On many ships, stewards are no more and officers have to serve themselves and make their own beds.

No wonder that shipping companies find it increasingly difficult to persuade, in this case young British men and women that there is a satisfying career to be found in the merchant navy. One very cynical young officer cadet said, "The only good thing about this job is the commuting". Life at sea has never been a 'normal' existence. But, despite tax-free, good pay for officers, the problem is now compounded by other factors. John McPhee in 'Looking for a Ship' put it well: "Join the merchant navy and glimpse the world". Gone - or going - on the new, fast turnaround ships, where small crews so often work in isolation, is much of the wardroom camaraderie, shared anticipation of distant, exotic ports and knowledge of maritime tradition. Even on *Palliser Bay* and despite our unusual route, I could be surprised. Who, politely asked one of the young officers, was Sir Francis Chichester?

Change, clearly, is not a problem confined to the British merchant marine, but senior officers do regret the attitudes of younger entrants who, it's claimed, regard their work solely as a job and not so much as a way of life. In the 1950s, *Palliser Bay's* master could be away from home for eighteen months to two years. Nowadays, younger officers can view trips of three or four months as particularly onerous. Officers have hardly signed on when they're thinking about getting off. I overheard a remark on the bridge: "Some people say it's a small world nowadays, but not when you go around it at a frigging $19^{1}/_{2}$ knots!" Work on oceangoing ships is often seen as simply a necessary prelude to more interesting and lucrative land-based jobs and not as a career. Get your third mate's ticket, put in a year or two at sea so that it looks good on your resume and get out.

In Port Chalmers, the cozy little port of Dunedin, I climbed a steep path to the Scott memorial that overlooks the harbour. Carved into the base are the poignant words of his final message, eventually found with his and his companions' bodies. Port Chalmers was the final point of departure for Scott's two Antarctic expeditions and, in 1910, the lovely green hills and spire of the old Presbyterian church were his last sight as *Terra Nova* set sail. In his diary, Scott described the departure. "We left the wharf at 2:30, bright sunshine - very gay scene". They were pursued by a flotilla of well wishers who soon turned back, leaving *Terra Nova* alone as she sailed into legend.

Our departure was less public. In the twilight, we slipped our lines; the dockers jumped in their cars, no doubt headed for a quick pint at the pub and no one waved farewell as we headed for sea. We had eleven thousand nautical miles to travel to Lisbon. Our next landfall would be Cape Horn. How to describe adequately the immensity of the distance and extremes of isolation in the Great Southern Ocean? I turn to Conrad who, in the '*Nigger of the Narcissus*', described a ship as "a fragment detached from the earth". And Chichester quotes from Miles Smeeton's aptly-named book, '*Once is Enough*'. His 46-foot ketch had somersaulted, capsized and was dismasted near the Horn, and he writes of "the sea's great deserted loneliness".

And yet, what was there to worry about? I was aboard a nice, big boxboat, hardly a clipper ship or yacht, and more concerned about a pre-dinner drink than in an epic contest with the elements. But, even in such a seemingly secure setting, one can hardly be oblivious of what lies just beyond the porthole. In my warm and comfortable cabin, I could draw back the curtains and look at the frigid, tumultuous waters which, should I be cast into them, would take my life in minutes. There is, as Noel Mostert wrote of his time at sea, "a marvellous false security about luxury". One moment on *Palliser Bay,* you're eating Beef Wellington and possibly the next in a lifeboat bailing for all you're worth.

The Great Southern Ocean - a liquid Sahara - stimulated far more personal interest in lifeboats and lifeboat drills than I would have ever thought possible. On a passenger ship with hundreds of others you muster at your lifeboat station, demonstrate you haven't strangled yourself with your lifejacket and that's it. Before the ship has even left port, you're in the bar, oblivious to 'perils on the sea. On the *QE2,* potential problems are so far from passengers' minds that they happily crowd into lectures on the *Titanic*. Indeed, as on the *Titanic,* passengers are encouraged to forget that, should a crisis occur, they are potentially far from rescue. But, on a working ship and in such a remote setting, weekly lifeboat drills - and other safety exercises such as firefighting -are taken seriously.

While I was aboard, *Palliser Bay* suffered what fortunately turned out to be a minor generator fire in the engine room. Few things are more dangerous at sea than a fire and this one was quickly extinguished. For one of the cadets, it was his first real fire. The incident graphically demonstrated the worth of all the times, while wearing breathing apparatus, swearing and cursing, he'd lugged heavy firehoses up and down ladders and along passageways fighting simulated conflagrations.

Another illustration of shipboard dangers was the morning we lost a man over the side. I was on the bridge with the captain and a cadet when the call came. There was an initial sense of disbelief as

the 'man overboard' signal sounded on the ship's horn and bells. The third officer arrived in the wheelhouse ashen-faced and on the run. Lookouts, including anyone who could be spared from the engine room, headed to pre-assigned stations while other crewmembers mustered at the #2 lifeboat which was prepared for lowering. *Palliser Bay* was put into a sharp "Williamson turn', a manoeuvre designed to bring her back to where she was when the alarm was raised. It took us twenty minutes to return. Everywhere there seemed to be people with binoculars. But, sun on the water created a glare and, with the waves and whitecaps, it would have been well nigh impossible to spot something as a small as a head or a frantically waving arm. The captain took us back for one last look, but there was nothing. Just as well that all we were looking for was a forty-five gallon oil drum meant to represent a missing crewman. Had it been the real thing, smoke flares would have been dropped over the side as soon as the alarm was raised. Still, it was a sobering indication of how hard it is to spot someone in the water, even from a bridge thirty-two metres above the waves. The barrel, by the way, had had a small hole punched into it so that it would eventually sink.

By my cabin door was a notice stating that, 'THE SIGNAL FOR FIRE ALARM -GENERAL EMERGENCY STATIONS IS A CONTINUOUS RINGING OF THE ALARM BELLS, ACCOMPANIED BY A CONTINUOUS SOUNDING OF THE WHISTLE.' The two bright orange lifeboats could each carry 50 people. The boats had diesel motors, oars and, if time to grab one from the bridge, a locator beacon. There was a cover that could be pulled over to provide some shelter. What was carried (and this is hardly a complete list) makes for interesting - and speculative - reading. Per person there were rations totalling 10,000 kilojoules of energy and three litres of water. If food ran out, there was a fishing line and six hooks. For bailing, a manual pump was provided and among the stores were six anti-seasickness tablets for each survivor. When help was sighted, there were flares, rocket signals and a whistle.

If all went to plan, the boats would be swung out and lowered into the water. They would then stay as close as possible to where the ship went down to help rescuers searching for survivors. That was the plan, but an emergency was unlikely to occur on a pleasant day in calm waters close to European shores. It could well happen at night in distant, mountainous seas with terrified crewmembers struggling through alleyways plunged into darkness. In the Great Southern Ocean, the light shirt and shorts I often wore in my cabin would be useless. Even if there was time to pull on warm clothing, abandoning ship would likely mean getting soaked. The frigid seas *Palliser Bay* plied would soon take their toll (the lifeboats had thermal suits but, unless more could be quickly loaded, for only ten per cent of the boat's capacity). It didn't take an expert to see that the vessel's lifeboats were antique; newer ships carry fully enclosed lifeboats in which the occupants are strapped and which then slide off a stem ramp. The jolt on entering the water could be like a car hitting a brick wall, but there are no cranky davits and thus fewer concerns about the effect a steeply listing ship would have on getting away safely.

During drills, even passengers wore protective hardhats and were introduced to survival gear. I watched lifeboat inspections with more than casual interest, hanging about until the engines were successfully tested. Such a reaction might sound excessive, but a look at the chart revealed the course took *Palliser Bay* close to the most distant point on the planet from land, so a mild degree of apprehension might be excused. The Admiralty chart in question is 'Southwest Pacific Basin to Pacific-Antarctica Rise', one of the few charts with no land on it, absolutely nothing. Sailors speak of an area there in which the weather's so bad the sun only shines a few days a year. To divert my attention, I prepared a message in a bottle, a well-emptied bottle of 'The Famous Grouse - Finest Scotch Whisky'. Aboard *Palliser Bay* a one-and-an-eighth litre bottle of 'The Famous Grouse cost $7US. But why, other than as a gift for someone at home, buy a bottle? On boarding, I had found that on the highly civilised *Palliser Bay* my drink - spirits, wines, liqueurs - was included for a voyage round the world. I could have been afloat on a sea - not of water but of liquor! I hasten to add that the officers and crew had to pay for their drinks, although at bargain basement prices.

Having made off with an empty bottle from the bar, I wrote my message which was then plasticised. With ceremony in the officers' wardroom, the bottle was sealed with silicone, made airtight and then wrapped in the reflective tape used on lifejackets. The next morning, 1502 miles from the nearest pinprick of land and 2000 miles from Chile, I heaved it from the stern. I would like to report that I've had a reply, but no. The bottle, with its two Canadian flag pins, could well float for centuries in the currents that circle the South Pacific.

The message went into the water close to where *Palliser Bay* had rescued a French adventurer in 2000. In one of the passageways, a bulkhead displayed some of the ship's memorabilia and awards. Prominent was a certificate of merit for supreme seamanship from the New Zealand Coastguard. The Frenchman had been rowing from New Zealand to South America and became delirious after injuring his feet. *Palliser Bay* zeroed in on the emergency beacon. In a heavy swell and 25 knot winds, the mate went over the side. The Frenchman was hoisted to safety in a harness. Fortunately, two nurses - wives of the ship's officers - were aboard. They contained the spread of gangrene while the ship diverted for Chile where the patient was transferred to hospital. He was a lucky man. In, to use Eric Newby's phrase, "the greatest uninterrupted expanse of water in the world," *Palliser Bay* was a rare ship indeed.

Approaching Cape Horn we encountered the one ship - a tanker - we saw while crossing the Pacific, She was, as they say, 'pitching like a pig', headed west against current and wind with huge waves crashing over the bow. Our 'east-about' passage (the direction preferred by vessels since the 18th century) had been relatively easy in force eight conditions, a sprinkling of snow, reports of icebergs -which we didn't see - and rolling generally no more than twenty-five degrees. However, the rolling was enough that even officers and crew commented on the difficulties of getting to sleep; the second officer emerged from the galley complaining he'd been "chased by a sack of onions" and in the dining saloon, chairs slid and glasses toppled. Freighters do not normally have stabilisers; some early container ships were fitted with stabilisers that were

FROM THE DECK ... (CONT'D)

expensive and found to make only a minimal difference. Readjusting ballast tanks can reduce the movement to some degree, but rolling is part of life at sea, so everyone just gets on with it.

There is, to use a term I learned on the bridge, something called 'the angle of vanishing stability'. This is the point at which a ship has rolled so much that she simply capsizes. On *Palliser Bay* this would be sixty degrees and then it's "hello Davy Jones". When the rolling seemed a touch excessive, one could stare with nervous fascination at an instrument on the bridge - the inclinometer - that records degrees of roll. However, I developed another method that used the laundry. The balance mechanism in the washing machine was affected by roll and too much would shut it off. I judged the degree of roll by the number of times during a wash that I had to turn the machine back on!

'Channel fever' - a kind of 'end-of-term' giddiness - took hold in the wardroom and some replacement officers came aboard in Lisbon for a four day handover. We had a last port of call in Zeebrugge, early winter's raw wind and rain a nasty change from the recent tropical seas. The following day we were coming up the Thames - so many ships, such a contrast to the Great Southern Ocean. There was the old London Passenger Landing Stage; in 1934, 546 ships - most British registered - called at the stage and 111,000 passengers embarked or disembarked from the great liners. Now just a few cruise ships, but the Port of London is still one of the world's busiest, albeit with a high percentage of foreign flagged vessels.

The red ensign flew from the stern as three tugs helped manoeuvre us into our berth, the vessel's length briefly blocking the middle of the river. On the bridge wing, the master smiled; *Palliser Bay* was home, having once again covered a distance that is more than our planet's circumference at the equator. She had, we had, in Shakespeare's words, put "a girdle round the earth".

Palliser Bay had outlived her time. She was twenty-five years old and her unreliable engines were slow; her crew was large, her container load too small and the route no longer a money earner. She would be replaced by faster ships that might not last as long, but which would carry more containers and fewer crew. P&O Nedlloyd, as do other shipping companies, changes its routes to take advantage of new opportunities. In the highly competitive world of shipping, what matters are reliability, speed and capacity. Sending ships to sea is an expensive and risky business and even the tea clippers were built not to look beautiful in oil paintings but for getting a profitable load back to London as quickly as possible.

Not long after, *Palliser Bay* made another voyage. Using my home computer, I followed her on P&O Nedlloyd's vessel tracking service - all the old, familiar ports in Europe, Australia and New Zealand. But then, for *Palliser Bay,* a new port - Hong Kong. For it was near Shanghai that she was to be scrapped.

Why wasn't *Palliser Bay* sold? Wasn't she worth more as a working ship than simply the scrap value of her steel? The answer is that P&O Nedlloyd had no interest in selling the vessel to Third World rivals who would then have used *Palliser Bay* to compete against her former owners. Better to take the loss. And, if one is a sentimentalist, it saved *Palliser Bay* from the unhappy fate of becoming a 'ship of shame', a flag of convenience scow, owned by those with little interest in maintaining her. She would have plied the oceans with an underpaid crew, her equipment deteriorating and rust spreading like a malevolent fungus. Eventually, she might have become one of those ships that one reads about, abandoned by their shady owners, the Pakistani/Ukrainian/Filipino crew with no money, little food and dependent on charitable handouts. As part of an insurance fraud, she could have been destined for an unfortunate and mysterious accident or simply have ended up running ashore after her old engines gave a last turn of the shaft. Scrapping seems sad, but it was a quick end for a ship that had given honourable service.

A Chinese crew took her up the river and after about six weeks, to quote from a matter-of-fact P&O Nedlloyd press release, a certificate of recycling was issued "to record the fact that the ship no longer exists".

Well, not quite. Before she made her final voyage, I received a package stamped “Palliser Bay”. In it, I found a small piece of metal, rusty from ocean salt on one side, smooth on the other. Someday I hope to have a boat of my own - just a little boat for messing around in - and the piece of metal will find a home on it. I've been thinking about naming the boat *Palliser Bay*.

FROM THE LECTURE HALL ...

Many of the themes brought forward in the previous story are echoed in a very incisive lecture given by journalist Rose George in this clip from Ted.com. We thank Ted Treacher for giving us the initial link, a site that has a variety of intriguing talks on it. Well worth the visit..