



Issue no: 5

JANUARY 2009

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

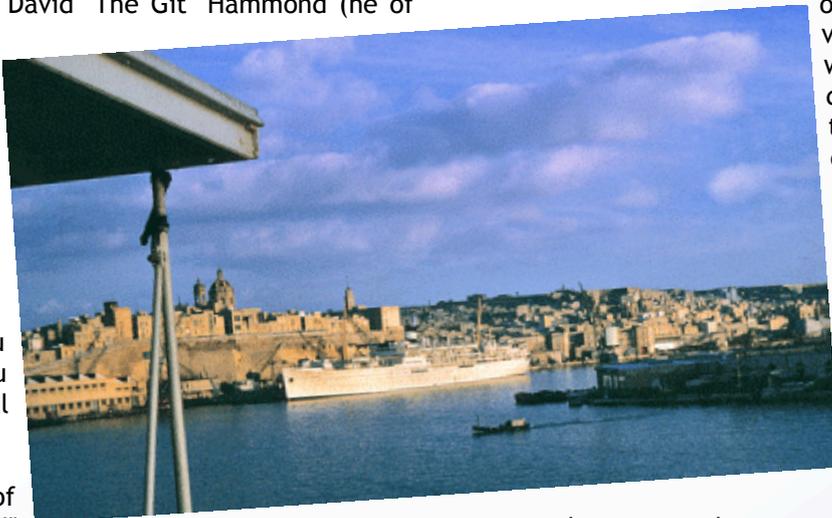
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FROM THE EDITOR

Well, dear readers, we survived the Christmas Apocalypse -- the world has not yet melted into total financial miasma, your editor's credit card seemed to stand up relatively well, he enjoyed a goodly party with his old friend David "The Git" Hammond (he of the crew lists), and his wife is still talking to him. In short, he prepares to enjoy a good new year -- and he certainly hopes that you and those you hold dear will do so as well.

This issue of "... callingBI" offers

contributions from several of our readers. they are the aforesaid Hammond, Roger "Snowy" Linbird (who wishes to be remembered to Tony Gray and Tom Allard among others and is a dab hand at cooking ducks' breasts), Gordon Thornton, Don Wood and Tony Lister, who offers us this fine picture of "Devonia" in



Malta, 1966. Expect more from him. And because he is also an old friend and because he asked very nicely, I have placed a scurrilous little ditty from an engineer friend that may antagonise many of you and place smirks on the rest of you -- thank you very much, Nigel! But your editor will not allow an oil and water divide to develop. Many thanks to them and dear reader, of course thanks to you for being there to read their offerings. Perhaps you even may be tempted to put pen to paper yourself...?! Well, figuratively speaking, that is. I much prefer e-mails.

You'll see from page 4 that your editor has been scratching his nose or twitching his fingers or whatever, as he tramped around dusty sale rooms and various internet sites. It's fascinating to see what is out there, plenty of old photographs of course, but all sorts of other items. **HE** calls it memorabilia or rather, "part of my heritage", but **SHE** calls it "more attic food". Some people obviously have little romance in their soul!

Your editor has noticed some correspondence on the main BI website about "Elf 'n' security". We have little to fear, according to the websites passed to him by his friend, David Cheslin. Some strange and wondrous working practices are out there. You must have a look at

http://www.workingmansdeath.com/pakistan_en.html
<http://www.gmb-akash.com/ship%20breaking-main.html>



Your editor took only one ship to scrap, the Dunera in La Spezia. Apart from arguments

with the captain about who was going to ring off main engines for the last time, it was not a very pleasant



experience, for all sorts of reasons. But having seen these photographs, he is very glad that La Spezia is not in Pakistan.

Later in this issue....

FROM THE READERS....

FROM THE Press pages....

FROM THE Auction Rooms...

FROM THE Logbook...

FROM THE Press pages....

The shipping insurance market stands to take a big loss, if reports from the website of *Western Australia Today* are anything to go by. The paper reported in its 2nd December edition as follows:

Storm in a C-cup - 130,000 boobs lost at sea
More than 130,000 inflatable breasts have been lost at sea en route to Australia. Men's magazine Ralph was planning to include the boobs as a free gift with its January issue. The cargo is worth about \$200,000.

A spokeswoman for Ralph said the container left docks in Beijing two weeks ago but turned up empty in Sydney this week. The magazine has put out an alert to shipping authorities to see if they have the container, but if they don't turn up in the next 48 hours it will be too late for the next issue, she said. Ralph editor Santi Pintado urged anyone who has any information to contact the magazine. "Unless Somali pirates have stolen them it's difficult to explain where

they are." Pintado said. "If anyone finds any washed up on a beach, please let us know."

Because your editor cannot think of any suitable jokes, he declines to comment further. Perhaps our Australian readers of "... callingBI" who also subscribe to the aforesaid magazine can keep us abreast of developments (requests for anonymity will naturally be respected).

On the very same day, Royal Caribbean Cruise Line conducted the keel laying ceremony at the STX yard in Turku Finland for the latest addition to their fleet, the so-called "Allure of the Seas". Due for completion in 2010, the vessel will be longer than the Eiffel Tower and weigh 12 times as much, or in other words it has 16 decks, is 220,000 gross tonnage and will carry 5400 guests in 2700 state rooms. Who said that the romance of the sea is dead?

Your editor takes a step forward...



Readers will recall the sad pictures of the *Fedra* going aground on Europa Point in Gibraltar from our last issue. Of course, this story has the usual demeaning aspects of such cases. Your editor is indebted to Don Wood for the following extract from a local newspaper.

FEDRA CAPTAIN 'REFUSED TOWLINE'

The Romanian captain of the cargo ship *Fedra* refused to take a towline before his ship ran aground against Europa Point, according to a specialist Spanish maritime publication. The captain declined repeated offers of help because his employer, Piraeus-based Dilek Transport, was negotiating a contract with a Greek salvage company.

Spanish magazine "*Transport XXI*" speculated that prompt intervention could have saved the *Fedra*, which started dragging anchor early on October 10, running aground

later that day. But by refusing all assistance and

opting to negotiate a salvage deal with Greek company Five Oceans Salvage, the *Fedra's* operator inadvertently sealed the ship's fate, the publication claimed.

It later emerged that the ship's engine had been dismantled for repairs and that the crew had not alerted local port authorities that their vessel was effectively 'dead'.

The captain, Adrian Milhailescu, was charged with

breaching port regulations and faces a small fine if convicted.

At one point in the morning the *Fedra* had taken a towline from a Crowley Maritime tug, but that line had broken in the heavy seas. Throughout the day a Spanish Government-owned salvage tug was also close to the ship and offering assistance. Initially, the crew on the *Fedra* took lines from the tug but these broke on four separate occasions, according to Spanish Government sources. On the fifth try, the crew on the tug realised that there was no longer anyone at the bow of the *Fedra* to take their line. The tug made contact with the *Fedra* and was told it was not needed, even though by this point the ship had drifted very close to shore, the report said.

A similar situation occurred with another Spanish tug, which also offered assistance but was rejected. Late in the afternoon of October 10, the captain of the *Fedra* reportedly changed his mind and asked the Spanish tugs to intervene. But by that point it was too late.

Later reports indicate that the stern section was lifted on to a pontoon by a large floating crane, and the idea was to sink the remaining fore section in 2/3000 metres of water. The price of scrap must be rock bottom. As is your editor's faith in shipowners who look at their ships as just another row of figures in their balance book.





... probably the only other advantage (of working for Marconi) was that enabled me to spend some of my time at sea with BI. My first ship was the illustrious "Orsova". My practical training was under Richard "Dick" Martin, who had previously been on "Chakrata" on Eastern service. He regaled me with so many fascinating anecdotes about his time with BI that when Marconi offered me a position on "Dunera", I leapt at the chance.

A few years were spent in between various BI ships (including the badly jinxed "Sir Tristram") when I was appointed senior radio officer on the "Oronsay" with my own juniors. And like Dick, I would tell them about my own happy experiences in BI. I used to tell them that if you ever visited a BI ship in port the first thing you would be offered would be a coldie. A P&O ship, by comparison, was an interrogation into your background, which may, or may not result in a drink.

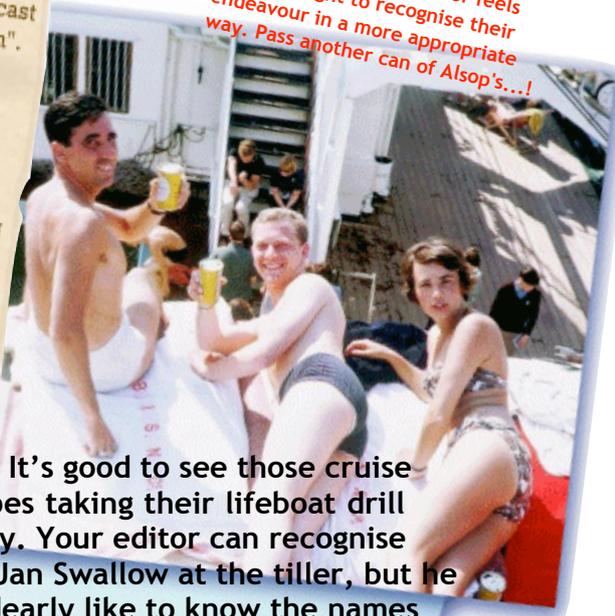
We berthed in Durban one day in 1969, and across the wharf there was one of BI's K ships, I think the "Kampala". I gathered up my inquisitive juniors and the three of us marched across the quay and boarded the "Kampala" (to my lasting embarrassment all decked out in Number 10's and caps squarely in place!). As we entered the accommodation we were accosted by one of the Mates, resplendent in the BI kilt en route to the shower. He looked us up and down and without missing a beat, he said, "G'Day, blokes, fancy a coldie?" The expressions of profound awe from my lads meant that I had told the future, but it got better!

We were initially ushered into the bar where cold cans were pressed upon us, whilst the fine example of BI officership ducked away to get changed. When he returned we all went off into the third mate's cabin. "Four o'clock is fish feeding time," he advised us and we were sat before quite a nice little aquarium with a few rocks and a little motorised unit blowing bubbles. More beers were passed and fish food liberally sprinkled on the water. Next we whisked into the second mate's cabin, which had of course, a slightly larger tank coloured stones and a little bridge. More fish food was cast across the water, another beer was drunk. "Come on lads we're off to the Mate's cabin". His aquarium had a submerged castle, real weed and a torrent of bubbles. The Mate cast his fish food across the water with abandon and we all consumed another cold can.

Back on board our own ship, my lads was still quite overawed by the experience. "That was amazing, but did you see those fish...?" ... well... no, actually. The only thing missing WAS the fish. Everything else was wonderfully in place, excellent hospitality, cold beers, great conversation, but there were NO fish!
Surely it is only BI officers who would not let such a small detail as no fish interfere with a noble tradition as "Feeding the Fish at 4pm"!

...obviously a page torn from the diary of Roger Linbird...

Good and due reward after a hot day in the engine room, no doubt. Does anybody know these hard-working types? Your editor feels that we ought to recognise their endeavour in a more appropriate way. Pass another can of Alsop's...!



It's good to see those cruise ship types taking their lifeboat drill seriously. Your editor can recognise Doctor Jan Swallow at the tiller, but he would dearly like to know the names the others waiting to hone their skills. Any offers?

Many thanks to Gordon Thornton for these scenes of dedication from his Devonian days.





FROM THE Auction Rooms...

In an idle moment sitting at the computer, your editor typed in the words "British India Steam Navigation Company." And he couldn't believe what came out -- all this BI memorabilia, all up for sale at various auctions, all bringing back memories. Your editor has positively wallowed in nostalgia. The future is just some of the things that have been on sale -- your editor really regrets that he came second for the BI decanter, which sold for only £12.50!



These two beer mats sold for only £0.99 each!



When your editor's object of love and affection saw the "Uganda" menu from 1970, which sold for only £1.70, he was informed **"NOT** to expect anything like that in **THIS** house...."



FROM THE Logbook...

David Humphreys, USA

In answer to Mary Glanville (November 8, 2008): I'm afraid I don't recall John Hine or your late husband, but what a bonus to see my old ship ss *Tairea*. I have attached a photo I took in September 1951 of *Tairea* at anchor in Penang.

I was a cadet on *Purnea* when I first saw *Tairea* at berth in Calcutta in July 1951 - it was love at first sight. The next morning I went to the Mackinnon & Mackenzie office and asked the Marine Superintendent, Captain Rankin (easy access in those days) to transfer to *Tairea*. His only comment "Naming your ship - eh?"

Two days later I was transferred to *Tairea*, I would be the last Cadet. I made three trips between Calcutta and Japan. On my first trip, we took the last of the Japanese High Command that had been in prison camps in Burma back to Japan, about 50 in all under the supervision of two British prison guards. After three voyages to the Far East I was promoted to Acting Third Officer. We made a couple of trips to Chittagong, then prepared *Tairea* for her final voyage from Calcutta



back to the U.K for scrapping. A sad voyage, even the passenger cabins were stuffed with cargo. As we approached our berth in London's Royal Albert Dock, Captain Curley Lewis asked me where I would be going for my second mates ticket, I said I would probably be transferred to another ship. "How old are you, Humphreys?" "Nearly 18, Sir." Poor

Curley nearly had a heart attack. Two weeks later, I was heading back to Bombay acting Third on *Golpara*.

It's more than 56 years since I sailed on *Tairea*, I have been a ship owner for 36 years and owned quite a few ships, but, the *Tairea*...there was a ship. A graceful three funnel - 17 knot steamer, sailing down the Hoogly, a full cargo for the Far East, 900 deck passengers for Rangoon, Gurkha troops for Penang and Singapore and assorted Sahibs and Mem-sahibs for Hong Kong. Even the cadet had a bar tab at the "Pig & Whistle", no wonder I loved that ship.





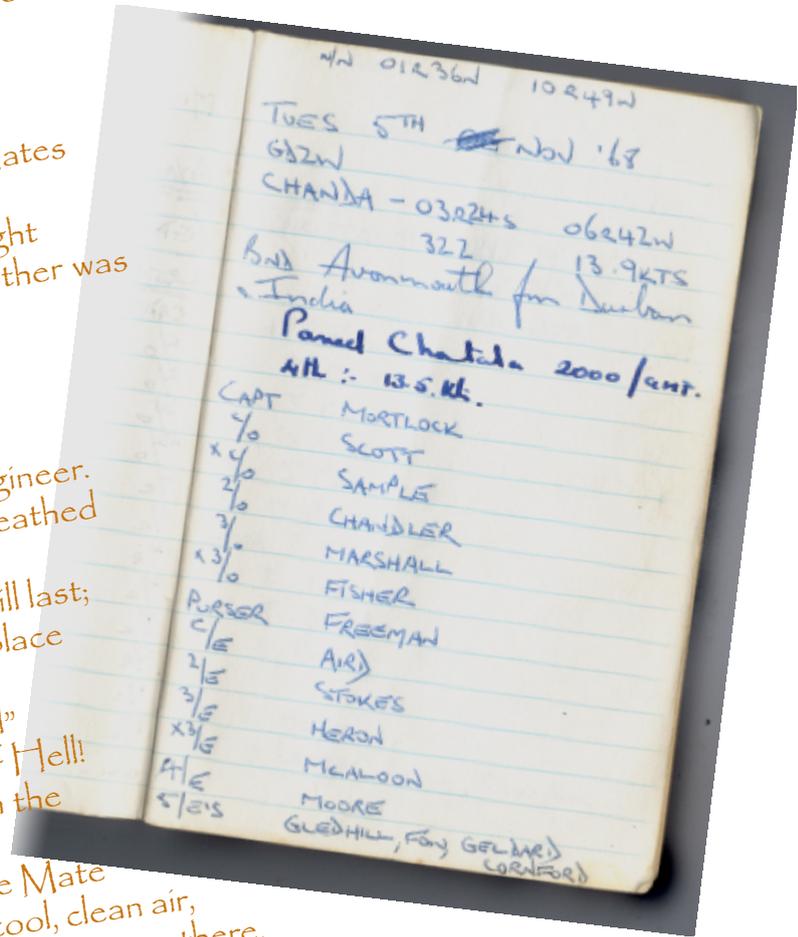
The Engineer and The Mate at the Pearly Gate

Oil soaked shoes all covered with grime
 Polished shoes with a brilliant shine
 Sweated clothes all stained with grease
 Shin and ties and pants well creased
 Oily scarred and calloused hands
 Manicured fingers, looking grand
 Thus they approached the Pearly Gates
 The Engineer and the Mate
 Saint Peter gazed at this strange sight
 He knew one was wrong, and the other was
 right.

To be sure he then did look
 In his gigantic Judgement Book:
 Then looking up he said so clear
 "I'll now pass judgement on the engineer.
 You've sweated blood, you've breathed
 some gas

The scars and bruise on bums still last;
 So come me son and take your place
 Like a king, in all his grace.
 My son, you've stood it very well"
 You've surely had your share of Hell!
 The Engineer passed through the
 Pearly Gates

St. Peter then turned onto the Mate
 "You've filled your lungs with cool, clean air,
 You've known the breezes and the sun up there,
 Pushing a pencil, you've travelled in Class
 You've been a passenger before the mast
 There is no Question yes or no
 Now it's your turn to go below."



A reader writes in to say that his young daughter will be in Mauritius and Seychelles in June and she would like some information re trips, contacts, etc. If you can help, please contact "...callingBI" by clicking the logo at the bottom. Also off on his travels is your editor. He will be passing through Cape Town in March for two or three days and would dearly like to buy any of his South African readers a drink to celebrate his return to that fair city. Again, click on the logo

