



Issue no: 7

April 2009

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

available free of charge by application to callingBI@bship.com

FROM THE EDITOR

One of the most gentlemanly captains with whom your editor sailed was Captain Pat Bidmead. He always took time out to explain his thoughts and ideas properly without bombast. One of his abiding passions was photography and I recall well a large black-and-white photograph of his daughter hanging on the wall of his cabin. We had many conversations about photography, and he encouraged me in my own endeavours.

So it is at his doorstep that your editor has to lay the blame for the time he must spend sorting the 486 photographs taken during his recent trip to Namibia and South Africa! He managed to resist taking photographs of the various shipwrecks along the coast, apart from one. This was just north of Swakopmund, which appeared to have been rigged up with some form of pulley system, which could be used to carry people out to the wreck!

Your editor also succumbed to the delights of the eBay auction site. He became engaged in the most titanic of struggles for a vintage jigsaw puzzle, manufactured by Chad Valley but published by BI. He paid an outrageous sum for this 150 piece wooden puzzle, but enjoyed the competition with his fellow bidders. If you were involved in this auction, we'd love to hear from you. The picture is unknown to your editor, and features the 1924 /1943 Talamba at anchor with an unidentified P&O ship in the background. If any of our readers have further information on these jigsaws and the

painting, do please let us know. For the record, it took your editor and his lady about an hour to assemble!

He also became the proud owner of a BI baseball cap, courtesy of [Tony Gates](#) in Auckland. It came via a circuitous route involving your editor's daughter, various of her friends and a pregnant post girl! Many thanks to Tony, who may be unaware that current fashion, as dictated by one's grandson, decrees that they should be worn back to front! Ridiculous youth!

Many thanks to our varied contributors, and special thanks to the [Seafarer magazine](#) (published by the Marine Society) for permission to use their crossword. The usual magnificent prizes are on offer, answers to be e-mailed to the [...callingBI](#) offices. The solution will be published in the next issue.

There is certainly a new slant on the Somali pirates problem just been published on the web. Johann Harri is a controversial journalist, not adverse to shooting from the hip. Like most egotists, he doesn't seem to advance much evidence for his position. See his defence of the poor downtrodden people by clicking [here](#).

I can just imagine the sympathy with which the crew of the Maersk Alabama read this story.

Later in this issue...

FROM THE HEART...

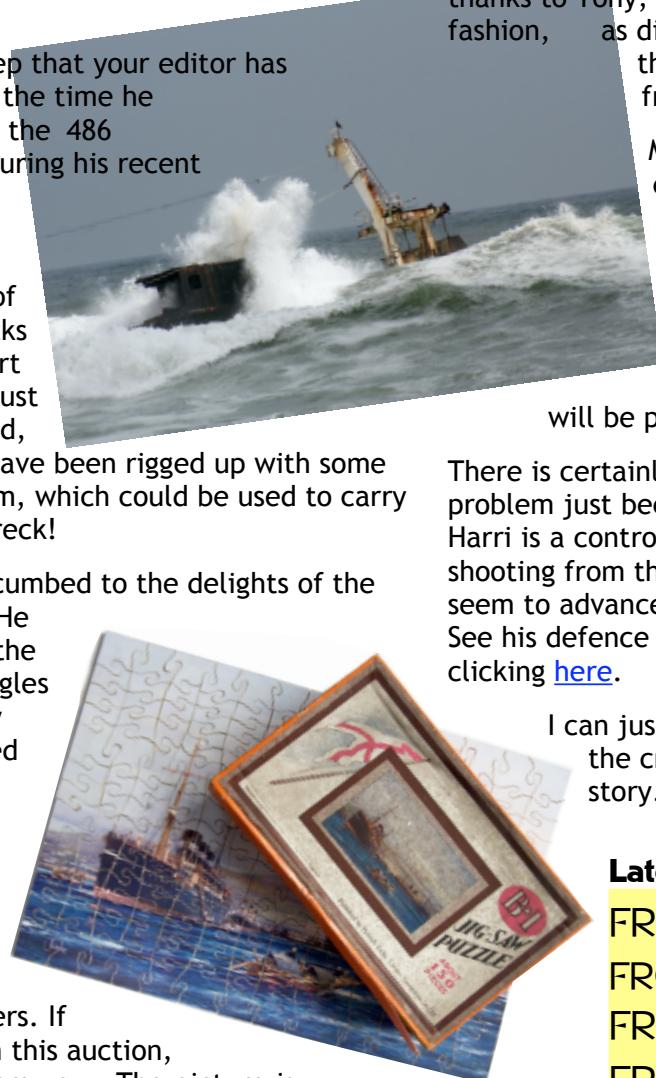
FROM THE TECHNOLOGISTS

FROM THE BBC...

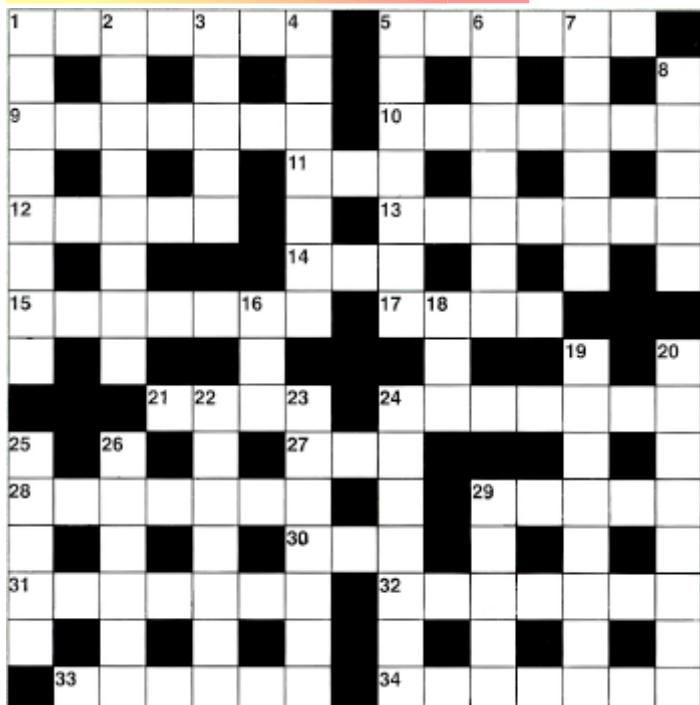
FROM THE DITTY BAG...

FROM THE DIARY...

FROM THE FLYING ANGEL...



FROM THE HEART...



ACROSS

- 1 Moved quickly around centre of slick and dealt with the mainbrace! (7)
- 5 Cuts up redundant ship, and gets bits left over? (6)
- 9 Unable to remember if it's a combination of sea and main (7)
- 10 Labourers are very short in fleets (7)
- 11 Father is in trouble, becalmed, adrift (3)
- 12 Craig in the Clyde with a damaged sail (5)
- 13 Source of the old Navy's heart- or eastern teak, perhaps? (3,4)
- 14 Turn off course on way back (3)
- 15 Cast our net to the east during the journey (2,5)
- 17 Goes back into the dunes with no clothes on (4)

FROM THE TECHNOLOGISTS

One of the most interesting websites your editor has seen in many a year is that of the Marine Traffic Project, based in the University of the Aegean in Greece. It presents a wealth of information on current ship movements with data culled from the automatic identification system now required on most ships. To quote from their press release:

This web site is part of an academic, open, community-based project. It is dedicated in collecting and presenting data which are exploited in research areas, such as:

- *Study of marine telecommunications in respect of efficiency and propagation parameters*
- *Simulation of vessel movements in order to contribute to the safety of navigation and to cope with critical incidents*
- *Interactive information systems design*
- *Design of databases providing real-time information*
- *Statistical processing of ports traffic with applications in operational research*
- *Design of models for the spotting of the origin of a pollution*
- *Design of efficient algorithms for sea path evaluation and for determining the estimated time of ship arrivals*

- 21 Able seaman is inside by new-born child (4)
- 24 Like Coleridge's sailor- nice tan all over (7)
- 27 White garment seen in all life boats initially (3)
- 28 A ship's officer takes half-hour unpaid (7)
- 29 See 3 down
- 30 Penny on river at Aberdeen (3)
- 31 Canal boat finds bottom of sand in new lagoon (7)
- 32 Removing his cap, perhaps, head of docks has region some way offshore (7)
- 33 Warm current from the Gulf has hot vapour right inside (6)
- 34 Closest to rebuilt stern, including centre of beam (7)
- DOWN**
- 1 Observe more equitably, it's said, your editor for instance (8)
 - 2 Publican, presumably not a titled member of the Admiralty (8)
 - 3 and 29 across Disturb a vast crab, swallowing centre of bow on wild coast of Spain (5,5)
 - 4 No living observer of this rigging block? (7)
 - 5 Possess beach above seaside town (7)
 - 6 Officially cancelled rise of major English Channel port involving half of Kent (7)
 - 7 Sounds like they sail back and forth, gripping tool (6)
 - 8 They are removed from the furnace he put in a steamship(5)
 - 16 Overturned objection to old boat (3)
 - 18 Vessel in Royal Navy (3)
 - 19 It will help you to be calm and see about broken davit (8)
 - 20 We hear Menai has no bend? (8)
 - 22 Name one unusual flower that's a sea creature (7)
 - 23 Put three feet and another limb on part of ship's spar (7)
 - 24 What to do with a sinking ship with a group of musicians on(7)
 - 25 Vehicle to travel as freight (5)
 - 26 Princess in sports car gets seabird (6)
 - 29 Film Academy graduate goes round towards the back of the ship (initials) (5)



- Correlation of the collected information with weather data

- Cooperation with Institutes dedicated in the protection of the environment

It provides free real-time information to the public, about ship movements and ports, mainly across the coast-lines of Europe and N. America.

The project is currently hosted by the Department of Product and Systems Design Engineering, University of the Aegean, Greece.

Like most press releases written by academics, technicians and insiders, it doesn't read at all well. But just take a look at the website, look at the ship photographs (about 1000 of them), find out where they are, what they are doing, and how fast they are doing it. Cynics may call it snooping, your editor calls it a marvellous waste of time, especially when his wife reckons he should be doing more productive things!

Click here to go to the [Marine Traffic.com](http://MarineTraffic.com) website.



FROM THE BBC...

...the Beginning of BI Cruising, that is...

On the last Friday of 1960, Tony Moores and John Rees were summoned to Chairman Kenneth Campbell's office. He told the pair that the company was in a desperate situation with the "Dunera" halfway through conversion to its educational cruising role and no school bookings had yet been made. John Rees takes up the tale...

The first cruise was programmed to sail from the Clyde In less than 15 weeks! We were to go to Scotland to find out what the Company's agents, General Steam Navigation Co. were doing and to make sure the ship was able to sail with passengers on the programmed dates. He advised that we were 'to do whatever was necessary to make this new project a success'. If we were unable to achieve this there would be no need to return to the One Aldgate Office as he would not have work for us! As we left the office he said he would come to Scotland the following weekend to see how we were getting on.

After the New Year break Tony and I flew to Glasgow and called at the General Steam office, asking for booking details for the first cruises. A few cabins only had been sold and an enquiry from The Scottish Secondary Schools Travel Trust for a summer holiday cruise. We were told that they had not approached any schools, because they had full-time jobs running their own travel department. We needed space, a desk, chairs and a telephone to be able to operate and it was clear from their crowded office that nothing would be forthcoming.

Our jobs were on the line and we decided to go to the Glasgow Central Hotel to see what we could arrange. The Hotel General Manager was very helpful and agreed to clear a bedroom at the head of the main stair case on the first floor to provide an office base for us for the

four months period that we were going to be in Glasgow. Large scale maps of central Scotland and city and town street maps were purchased, lists of all Scottish Secondary Schools were obtained and we hired two Morris 1000 cars which the Station Master allowed us to park in the railway station yard adjacent to the hotel.



Telephone sales began with no success. It was impossible to get past the school secretaries and such comments as '*no thanks, we don't require Indian takeaway*', and '*we do not deal with commercial companies - you must contact our County supply department*' and '*no we do not need any steam cleaning thank you*' did not help. When making appointments to see Directors of Education, we were offered dates two or three weeks ahead. The situation was grim and the weather was not much better with smog and driving heavy rain followed by snow. It soon became clear that cold calling to the Education Offices might be the best bet.

We decided that Tony would canvass north of the Clyde and I would concentrate south of the river as I knew the area quite well. We set off after breakfast, planning to meet that evening to compare notes. We had copies of our simple 1961 cruise brochure, a general arrangement plan of the ship (prepared by the Drawing Office), maps of the area, addresses of places to visit, no visiting cards, no mobile phones of course, just red public telephone boxes, a pocket full of small change and the gift of the gab. In what became our mobile offices we disappeared into the Glasgow smog and gloom.

The first call was at the Renfrewshire Education Offices - no one was free or available to see me, so I left copies of our Cruise brochure for the senior officers and said I would call again another day. Next stop Ayr.

John Rees continues his story in our next issue



Many thanks to Chris Shelbourn for this photograph of "some lads and two girlfriends" from the "Merkara" and taken in Australia during late 1971/72. Those who knew Chris at the time, will recognise him as the one with sunglasses (and white shirt!). Wise move, Chris -- never let people see the colour of your eyes! They can give away too much! Problem is Chris says his memory is not what it was. And your editor never sailed on the "Merkara" -- so just who are the others in the photograph? Send your ideas to ["...callingBI"](#).

FROM THE DITTY BAG...

Cannon Balls

It was necessary to keep a good supply of cannon balls near the cannon on old war ships. But how to prevent them from rolling about the deck was the problem. The best storage method devised was to stack them as a square based pyramid, with one ball on top, resting on four, resting on nine, which rested on sixteen.

Thus, a supply of 30 cannon balls could be stacked in a small area right next to the cannon. There was only one problem - how to prevent the bottom layer from sliding/rolling from under the others.

The solution was a metal

plate with 16 round indentations, called, for reasons unknown, a Monkey. But if this plate were made of iron, the iron balls would quickly rust to it. The solution to the rusting problem was to make them of brass - hence, Brass Monkeys.



Few landlubbers realise that brass contracts much more and much faster than iron when chilled. Consequently, when the temperature dropped too far, the brass indentations would shrink so much that the iron cannon balls would come right off the monkey.

Thus it was, quite literally, cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey. And all this time, you thought that was just a vulgar expression, didn't you? Or have you heard a better story?

...and while we're on the subject of old balls...

...from the clues given, can you identify the various people who appear in this "magnificent" poem? Sad to say, it was written by one of your editor's best friends. But don't worry, the doctors say he's getting better now. Well, Masefield it's not, is it, David? The usual prizes, etc etc.

Sode To The Chindwara" By The Port Sudan Poet.
Have you heard of the good ship Chindwara
That sails up and down the Red Sea?
From all good reports she travels on "shorts"
Say third officers one, two, and three.

The officers, cream of the service
Are Dave, Dick, Bill, Roger, and Luke.
When playing some tennis their shots are a menace
Their navigational powers are a fluke.

Bill steers when he feels like some action
"Left hand down a bit more boys," says he,
"Let's have some more fun, okay number one?"
Rothmans and Drambuie for me!

Have you heard of radio Sparkie?
He's switched on from morning to night,
If his radio blows he does his own shows
Singing Wagner in scouse with graast might.

Roger's the true B.I. sailor,
Why hell he's got nothing to lose.
He's says with great skill "I think I feel ill"
He's not seen for the rest of the cruise.

Luke is the man of the moment
Plays tennis, serves pancakes tres bold.
He's king pin at cricket on a short, sticky wicket,
Enjoys pulling bobs from the hold.

Dick is the large bearded Purser
Likes his whisky his beer and his rum.
If put in the drink you(a) find he would sink,
He's known as the great Moby Plum.

Just a short word from Bonk, Rick, and Nick
To all we have one thing to say state,
Wherever you meet her be sure that you greet her
The ship and the men are just great.
ooooooooooooooooooo



Your editor has discovered that the British Film Institute has released an interesting short (8 1/2 minute) movie from its archives, featuring the River Thames from Teddington Lock towards the sea. The accompanying music is a little irksome and it takes some time to get going, (unless your first love just happens to be Teddington Lock!)

It's worth hanging in there though, because the tedious journey eventually arrives at the Pool of London, and on to Dockland beyond. Sadly your editor couldn't see any BI ships, but it is a lovely snapshot of mid 1930s shipping. You can watch it by clicking on [this link](#).



FROM THE BACK ROOM...



To his chagrin, it is nearly half his life time since your editor stepped foot in the fair land of Australia. But he still retains fond memories of the good times, the welcoming nature, the great bonhomie of many people there. He remembers with affection for instance, an Australian fifth engineer on Bankura called, he believes, Mac who one day in Singapore took great delight in donating blood on behalf of the Seaman's Mission which had a head on it! Since the quid pro quo was cheap Guinness at the Mission bar he was prepared to give his all!

Similar generosity of spirit was recently extended to your editor by two of our number in Darwin. Although unknown personally to your editor, they willingly extended the hand of friendship to his daughter, currently doing a gap year trip. A similar story occurred in New Zealand as well. His unstinting thanks is extended to all. But why is it that Antipodean sportsmen seem to take a different approach? Aaah, sweet mysteries of life... ...!

FROM THE DIARY...

There is to be a small gathering of BI folk in your editor's favourite part of UK. On Saturday 2nd May. Bob Dobie, Brian Parke and Alisdair MacIntosh will be having lunch in the Bridge Inn, Santon Bridge, Cumbria CA19 1UX. Please come and join them. Your editor goes crazy if he cannot get to his beloved Lake District at least once each year. Unfortunately, however, this is not to be one of those occasions, especially as it is a Lakeland pub that has not had the benefit of your editor's wallet.

Those irrepressible revellers of north Essex and south Suffolk are also at it! Your editor hears rumours that they are to meet at the Thatcher's Arms public house near Mount Bures yet again. His informant says they have made a lunch booking on Friday, 29th May. The local residents should be warned!

All are welcome -- it is NOT a stag do -- and the pub's reputation stands high. It is known locally for excellent food, excellent beer, excellent views and being a long way from any station. Directions to this paragon of pubs can be had from their [website](#).

John Prescott is one of the instigators of this little soirée and asks that anybody wishing to attend should contact him on jprescott@ninetynorth.com. "... callingBI" will probably be skulking in the corner again, and your editor will be pleased to pass on any messages, bookings, etc to John and his fellow plotters. It may be possible to arrange pickups from local railway stations. Enjoy!

As ever, to e-mail "... callingBI" merely click on any 'flag' logo in this newsletter and you should be taken directly to the e-mail form.

FROM THE FLYING ANGEL...

...this is the year...



(...thanks to Tony Lister for this blast from the past)

...where's the Mission...?

