

Deputy Master, Commodore, Members and Honoured guests

It would be too easy tonight to recite a relentless and detailed history of the Little Ship Club, to become embroiled in the twists and turns of circumstance and fate. This is why this address is entitled No. 8!

What I can say is that we are all here tonight in this unique and most historic of institutions – a brotherhood, as much, dare I say, as is the brother and sisterhood of the Little Ship Club – a most eclectic institution – itself a sort of a “one-off”.

Ninety years ago this coming week, 27 unconnected people – men *and* women – met at the Ship restaurant at Charing Cross. By the end of the evening, a club had been formed, rules sketched out, aims and objectives identified. Within two months, a burgee had been designed, and the first journal written and published. All those initial achievements remain with us tonight, just as relevant now as they were then. Teaching of, talking about, learning of, the sea, its magnetic charms, its perils, and the way to overcome them, by navigation, by seamanship and, most importantly, by the overwhelming desire to be- as Hilaire Belloc so succinctly put it – “Out on the salt!”

Ninety years have seen many changes, for the LSC those years have produced long and lasting associations – first with “Yachting Monthly”, the successor to the magazine which launched us. Appropriately, one of our guests here tonight, Dick Durham with his wife Cathy, was, for many years, its news editor, and Paul Felder, the Editor, who were a great support when I was Commodore.

Then with the Royal Navy, first with training through the late 1930s, culminating in the Admiralty’s unique invitation for the Club to apply for the privilege of flying a defaced blue ensign. Through the war years and into the 50s and 60s, initially at the “Ship Inn” in Newgate, then at Beaver Hall, Garlick Hill, and finally – where we are today, Bell Wharf Lane, and Three Cranes Wharf. Happily, that strong naval association continues through to today with the University Royal Navy Unit, URNU, at London University.

The RYA owes the foundation of its world-renowned courses directly to this Club. In 1973, they approached the LSC with a request to have access to our own homegrown series of navigation and seamanship courses – which were unique at the time – and to which we agreed. They used, built on and developed those courses, and the rest is history, of which we are still an influential part.

The Corinthians – founded in the USA in the 1030s on a similar basis to the LSC and our sister club, closer and closer association with them have developed since the 1990s, aided by the lower cost of transatlantic flights; the latest joint cruise being to the Channel Islands during this past summer. The person most responsible for that closer association – a member to both our Clubs – is, I am delighted to say, and as they say on telly “with us here tonight, all the way from Portsmouth, New Hampshire – Mr. Clint Springer!!”

Our final great connection is with the historic church of St. Michael Paternoster, just on the inland side of Upper Thames Street. The burial place of Sir Richard Whittington, and now home to, and the headquarters of, the Mission to Seafarers. It is our Parish church, and we are privileged to have the Secretary General, Cannon Andrew Wright, as our Chaplain.

Names and places are synonymous – in 1264, Richard Whittington benevolently built London's first public convenience, over Walbrook, just exactly where our clubhouse stands. A generous 64-seater, no less. So – just remember that, when you proudly tell your friends that you are a member of “The Little Ship Club”!!

And so, here we are tonight, ninety years on and gathered together within the hallowed walls of this country's oldest institution to the sea – the Corporation of Trinity House of Deptford Strond – by Royal charter of 1514 which formalised and regulated a former, looser, Guild of Pilots, dated from the time of King John and probably earlier. This is a venerable place for seafarers, and a good place for us to be tonight.

And, what of the next 90 years? What will they bring us? Who knows? But, whatever that might be, we will continue to promote the ideals of our founding members: to teach, to learn, to embrace the sea, to experience its fellowship; and last, but most important of all: to sail in good company. Remember: the sea, it's in our blood.

Pray, be up-standing, and raise your glasses, as I give you the toast to –

THE LITTLE SHIP CLUB.

RICHARD KEEN
(Commodore 2004 – 2007)

28/10/2016