

**LITTLE SHIP CLUB
90TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER
28TH OCTOBER 2016**

Commodore, Vice Commodore, past Commodores and Club Members, thank you for asking me to speak at this, your 90th anniversary dinner.

As we are dining at the premises of Trinity House, in Tower Hill, I had a walk around the rooms earlier in the day to make sure all is in order for the occasion, and that reminds me of a Captain's inspection on one of my ships.

There was a young cabin steward who was recently promoted to Penthouse Butler, and he thought he knew it all, so the two old hand butlers on his deck decided he needed taking down a peg or two. So, unbeknown to him, or me for that matter, the two old butlers hid a chamber pot under the bed in this young butler's first suite, the pot suitably filled with cold weak tea and two well-done English breakfast sausages. In I came and started going through the suite and, upon looking under the bed, asked the young lad "what is this under here?". "Don't know, sir" came the reply, so I suggested he pull it out and have a look. As he pulled the pot out his face went ashen, and he just stood there, pot in hand, looking at me, not

knowing what to do. “What are you going to do?” I asked, “the passengers are due in five minutes!” The two older butlers looked at each other and said “There’s only one thing for it Sir”. They both dipped their hands into the pot, grabbed a sausage and began to eat. The young butler had to be revived by the duty nurse.

But what of Trinity House, London? In 2014 we celebrated our Quincentenary, 500 years since King Henry VIII created us by Royal Charter in 1514, and interestingly we are still fulfilling the role today as laid down then, to serve the mariner, to support mariners in need, to provide education and training in seamanship, and to promote safe navigation.

To that end we are probably best known as the General Lighthouse Authority for England, Wales, the Channel Islands and Gibraltar, and in that capacity we run 68 lighthouses, 10 light vessels, 538 navigation buoys, and three lighthouse tender vessels, provide the UK’s DGPS system and inspect 10,000 aids to navigation run by independent authorities. We also examine and licence deep sea pilots and provide nautical assessors to the Admiralty Court.

Probably known to a lesser extent, through the endowment of estates bequeathed to us, we are the UK's largest maritime charity, and we are able, on an annual basis, to have a charitable spend of some 4 million pounds, to help look after mariners in our almshouses, and to sponsor 30 Merchant Navy cadets every year into the industry, and supply grants to many organisations within maritime UK.

It is a sad reflection that in this maritime nation where 94% of goods come into or leave the UK by sea, the mariner goes pretty much unnoticed and is still in need of charity when times are hard.

Now, a couple of months ago the world's largest passenger vessel, 'Harmony of the Seas', visited the port of Southampton to begin her European showing to potential passengers and the cruising industry. She is some 227,000 tons, 362 m long, 66 m beam and, when all berths are occupied, carries some 8800 souls on board.

The word Harmony and European seem to be a little way apart at the moment, and I am reminded of a cruise ship that was full of English, French, German and Italian passengers and was sinking slowly.

The Captain radioed for help and was told if the passengers jumped into the sea they would be picked up immediately. So, he sent a young first officer to give the passengers their instructions.

Five minutes later the young officer came back to the bridge looking disappointed. "What's wrong?" the Captain asked. "The passengers all refuse to jump into the sea, they just will not listen sir" replied the young officer.

So the Captain went off to give the order himself. He came back five minutes later looking very pleased with himself.

"How did you do that sir" asked the young officer.

"Well" said the Captain, "I told the British it was traditional and the right thing to do, I told the French it was fashionable, I told the Germans it was an order and I told the Italians it was forbidden!"

But what is in a ship's name? Earlier this year in the considered opinion of 124,109 people, RRS Boaty McBoatface was the perfect name for Britain's new ultra-sophisticated £200 million polar research vessel

Quite naively I think NERC asked the public to name their new ship, probably assuming the winner would be James Clark Ross, Earnest Shackleton or such as Robert Falcon Scott.

It is true that the naturalist, Sir David Attenborough, received just over ten thousand votes and explorer, Henry Worsley some fifteen thousand and I am pleased to say common sense prevailed and that the RRS Sir David Attenborough had her keel layed at Cammell Laird shipyard in a ceremony last week. However, British Antarctic Survey have named their state of the art sub-sea vehicle Boaty McBoatface in recognition of the popularity of the name.

The less conventional 'It's Bloody Cold Here' came fourth and in second place, boosted by celebrity culture, was 'Poppy-Mai'.

NERC should have learned from Canada's BC Ferries, the operator's high fares prompted Facebookers to suggest 'SS Spirit of the Walletsucker' or 'SS should have been a Bridge'. Unsupportingly BC Ferries chose the names Eagle, Orca and Raven for their new vessels.

But surely no ship owner can match our very own Royal Navy for odd monikers. HMS Cockchafer, HMS Carcass, HMS Pansy and HMS Spanker to name only a few.

HMS Black Joke was an ex slaver turned into a slave hunter, but how do you explain HMS Crash, HMS Jolly and HMS Ferret?

But perhaps the oddest of all are the names Eton Musk has bestowed on their rocket landing drone ships, 'MV Just Read the Instructions' and 'MV Of Course I Still Love You'.

Inelegant maybe, but just remember the most famous sailing clipper in the world, Cutty Sark, is named after a skimpy night gown worn by a seductive witch.

Now, as it is your 90th anniversary and Her majesty the Queen celebrated her 90th birthday this year, let me tell you a story about the Queen.

After a day at anchor off the Statue of Liberty in New York following a parade of sail to celebrate July the 4th, we had an evening fireworks display and a sail by from President Clinton, and we were to move up to our Manhattan berth for seven in the morning. As we moved up river towards our pier, which is specially designed to fit us, the slip is 300m long, with a little over two ships' widths in between the piers which lie at right angles to the ebb, and the pier structure is the same height as our bridge wing, some 35m high, so as you line up to go into the slip you cannot see anything until the first 80m of the ship is inside as the bridge comes clear of the down river pier head.

The pilot assured me the slip was empty so we began the manoeuvre, stuck the bow in and started creeping ahead and lifting the stern and moving in as quickly as possible as she lifted against the ebb. As the bridge came clear of the pier head, the first 80m of her was inside the slip and we were committed to going in. I looked up the length of the pier to see HMS Manchester alongside and a Japanese frigate tied up on the outside of her. After some choice nautical phrases we had no choice but to keep going. By now both the navy ships had had their breakfast disturbed by the bulk of QE2 looming over them and edging ever closer. Now, sometimes if the ebb is really strong, we lean on a wooden dolly on the down river corner as we lift the stern and slide ahead. The Japanese could quickly see themselves becoming that dolly as the ebb held the stern and we slid ever closer, so that Japanese sailors began to run around the deck with little straw fenders, about the size of your granny's shopping basket, a dozen baskets versus 90,000 tons of Atlantic Liner. Oh well, we kept going in.

Well, of course, the ebb was really strong that day, and the only way to avoid crushing the Japanese was to push ahead as fast as we dared and hope the stern would come up in time, so all 130,000 shaft horse power was brought into action and, after a huge burst of power to get her to leap ahead, we, how shall I say, got away with

just leaning on the Japanese for just a few seconds before we lifted off, she came with us, dragging her stern out, so pulling HMS Manchester out. They now sprang into action as their stern lines parted and her gangway fell onto the dock.

By now the expertise of the USCG had appeared on the quay, having been informed by somebody that QE2 was wreaking havoc inside pier 90.

Having lifted off the Japanese I now had to get stopped and alongside before we did any further damage. Once tied up and all our passengers had packed their cameras away, I thought I had better do the decent thing and pop over and apologise to both commanding officers. With some trepidation I climbed the recovered gangway onto HMS Manchester and saluted the flag. 'Oh you must be off QE2' said the OOD, 'the CO is waiting for you'. I felt like a naughty schoolboy standing outside the headmaster's office as the OOD knocked on the CO's cabin and shouted with what seemed great glee, 'Captain of the QE2 to see you sir'. What a relief though as I stepped in to an outstretched hand of welcome with the greeting of 'G and T old chap, you could probably use one'? He then proceeded to tell me, with some element of joy I thought, that the

Japanese ship was their senior training ship with a very senior Admiral onboard, wished me well and sent me on my way.

The Japanese as we all know are very formal and, as I waited to go into the Admiral's office I had thoughts of a very stern officer proffering me a small dagger laid out on a white towel, telling me to take the decent way out of all this and save face, so as the door opened I stepped forward very nervously and, after formal introductions, he nodded to a seat and then said to me in perfect English, 'Captain, it is indeed a great honour to be kissed by a Queen'.

Now, before I get too carried away about being Captain on such a fine ship, here are the thoughts of a ten year old boy at his careers class in school:-

Why I want to be a Captain:

I want to be a captain when I grow up because it's a funny job and easy to do. Captains don't need much school education, they just need to learn numbers so they can read instruments, and I guess they should be able to read charts so they don't get lost.

Captains have to be brave so they won't get scared if it's foggy and they can't see, or, if the propeller falls off they should stay calm so they will know what to do.

The salary captains make is another thing I like; they make more money than they can spend. This is because most people think that captaining a ship is dangerous – except for captains, because they know how easy it is.

There isn't much I don't like, except girls; girls like captains and the girls want to marry captains, so they always have to chase them away so they don't bother you. I hope I don't get seasick because I get carsick, and if I get seasick I could not be a captain and then I would have to go out to work.

So there we are, a little flavour of the sea and Trinity House, London. Thank you for listening and may I wish you fair winds and calm seas for at least your next 90 years.