

POTENTIAL EVENTS for 2024

Glenlee sailing ship and
the Transport Museum
in Glasgow

Maid of the Loch at
Balloch, Loch Lomond
Maid of the Forth,
South Queensferry,
with options for the 3
Bridges tour, Jazz/Folk
evening, or landing on
Inchcolm Island

Scottish Maritime
Museum at Irvine

Union Canal boat trip
from Linlithgow.
Options for a 2 ½ hour
trip, or at certain
weekends, a trip to the
Falkirk Wheel.

Scottish Fisheries
Museum at Anstruther

Suggestions are always
welcome for new
potential visits.

At the AGM it was also
mooted that there
could/should be a
consideration to go
further afield to visit
other maritime venues.

Galley Radio



Merchant Navy Association – Edinburgh & Forth Branch

Summer 2024

Welcome to the fourth issue of **Galley Radio**, where we cover some of the events that have happened during the Summer session. It has been a quiet period, in respect of formal events, but this edition has a more nostalgic theme to it.

As always, we still need assistance with providing material for the bulletins and look to our members to offer stories, ditties, anecdotes, or any up and coming news and events for including in the newsletter.

DON'T CHIP TOO HARD

It was said during the last great shipping recession (which lasted a quarter of a century, but which some sectors seem to have barely escaped), a whole new breed of technical superintendents emerged. This was the age of “minimum maintenance”, which in reality, meant operating something until it broke and then trying to work without it.

But the recession, which lasted from the 70s to the 90s, threw up this tribe of argumentative technical supers, whose entire function in life was to minimise the scope of essential repairs which would keep a barely maintained ship staggering along. They appeared to be paid, or accumulate Brownie Points, or possibly even bonuses, by the percentage of repairs which they managed to decide were unnecessary, or could be postponed until a later occasion.

Men of natural intransigence, they were prepared to argue for hours, or even days, as to whether the wastage of some piece of plate was such that it should be cropped out and replaced. Whether it was some vital portion of the ship, like a shell plate in a bulker that had become detached from its corroded frames, or a closed hatch cover under which you could read a newspaper by the light of the sun streaming through the holes, these people would argue for the status quo, not only till the cows come home, but long after they had been milked and gone back to pasture.

They would wear down the resolve of a class surveyor like a water jet eroded the most stubborn goose necked barnacles off a laid-up bulkers bottom. They just wouldn't give up, and if the surveyor stood his ground and demanded steel replacement against the threat of cancellation of class, they would then settle down to argue that the area for replacement should be half the size that the surveyor specified.

These people acquired international reputations as they jetted around the world in the back of cheap aeroplanes, from one old wreck to the next, sitting for hours smoking heavily in airport lounges, waiting for connections to places where few passengers ever wanted to travel and aeroplanes rarely visited. They would be dispatched by the owner, because the certificates had expired, the flag state was cutting up rough or something terrible had broken and the master had refused to sail, after the chief had jumped ship.

It was not a period one should look back on with any sort of pride or satisfaction. You might suppose one of these old reprobates might reminisce about the way he had bamboozled some young surveyor in to granting a temporary certificate by showing him the only bit of deck it was safe to walk, or spend three days at a repair yard, after the ship had left arguing about the bill, until whole relays of managers were on the point of collapse.

Then, we were living in an era where a major charterer could get up in public and say he was uninterested in the quality of a ship and only the bottom line was what mattered. No, he certainly wasn't going to pay a cent per ton extra for a decent quality ship, when there were plenty of cheaper alternatives.

With a capesize bulker again currently earning a daily rate about one half of that earned by Gisele Bündchen for mincing around on a catwalk, or indeed a Premier League footballer, it might be that the cost cutters (or their young successors) will be back on the road again. It probably won't be so easy today as it was forty years ago, with state port control and Rightship on patrol, transfer of class agreements and a closer scrutiny at the real state of ships arriving on the berth to load, but doubtless, they will try their best.



SUMMER LUNCH

A few of our group met on Thursday 20th June for an enjoyable lunch event at Howies restaurant, at Waterloo Place in Edinburgh. Wives were included and it was considered a resounding success.



Designed by Archibald Elliot and built in 1819, it was a replacement for the old convening rooms used by the Incorporated Trades of Calton. Established in 1578, this was a collection of representatives, from various trades, who wanted a say in the civic management and control of the city.

Once Howies release their Christmas menus, it is a consideration for having a Christmas Lunch in December.

PLAIN SPEAKING

For many years, Indian and Chinese seamen have been enormously important in the ships of many British shipping companies. Those who have sailed with them will know they had many peculiarities, not least their use of language. In one ship we had a chippy called Ah Tong, who looked like a Macao pirate. I thought I had mastered the staccato English until one day he came up to me and reported, 'Number five, no Sunderland water in the lumber trees'. It took me quite some time to establish that there was no sanitary water in the lavatories.

REMINDER



Merchant Navy Day is on Tuesday, September 3rd. We are looking to hold a wreath laying ceremony at the MN memorial in Leith on that day.

It would be great to have as many members in attendance as possible as a show of support to the men and women, past and present, working at sea carrying 95% of our island nation's trade.

Further details will be available on the MNA Edinburgh branch website, WhatsApp group and Facebook

During wartime, the Merchant Navy became an essential part of the support, carrying servicemen and supplies, struggling against U-boats, battleships, aircraft and mines to deliver food, fuel, equipment and raw materials.

Over 14,000 died in World War I. The Merchant Navy had a higher proportional death rate than any of the British armed forces during the Second World War with more than 30,000 merchant seamen lost in World War II.



ground was covered and the agenda thoroughly discussed.

ON THE SUBJECT OF LIGHTHOUSES.....

At the launch of the lightship tender *Granuaile* for the Commissioners of Irish Lights at the A&J Inglis Shipyard in Glasgow in 1948, the sponsor was a veritable amazon of a woman (appropriately named Miss Guinness!) who literally hurled the bottle of champagne from the stand at the poor unsuspecting little ship, whereupon Sir John Craig, then chairman of Colvilles, the Scottish steelmakers, leaned over to Dr Denis Rebeck, then chairman of Harland & Wolff Shipbuilders, and said, 'Dr. Rebeck, someone should have warned your lassie that the hull plating is only mild steel.'

MERCHANT NAVY DAY 3RD SEPTEMBER

Ever wondered why we now celebrate the 3rd of September as Merchant Navy Day?

It commemorates an event on September 3rd 1939, when the first UK merchant ship, the un-armed passenger liner S.S. Athenia, was torpedoed and sunk by a German U-boat with the loss of 112 lives of men, women and children.

A highly controversial sinking on the first day of the Second World War, ending with one of the most significant convictions for war crimes at the Nuremburg trials. The story wasn't revealed until 1945.

The SS Athenia was a passenger liner built in 1923 for Anchor Donaldson Line, a joint venture between Anchor Line and Donaldson Line, which later became Donaldson Atlantic Line after Anchor line went in to liquidation and Donaldson Line bought most of its assets in 1935.



Built by Fairfield Shipbuilding and Engineering Company of Govan. She had six steam turbines driving twin screws via double reduction gearing, giving her a speed of 15 knots. 160m long 13465 tons.

Loading 900 tons of general cargo and 1103 passengers, mainly women and children looking to escape the war in Europe, in Glasgow, Belfast and Liverpool, she departed Liverpool on the afternoon of the 2nd September. It was seen as a lucky escape by many as the Royal Navy had already begun commandeering merchant ships in the weeks prior to war being announced.

Oberleutnant sur See Fritz-Julius Lemp of the U-30 submarine made one of the biggest blunders of World War II in sinking an unarmed, unescorted transatlantic passenger liner.

Once again, our MNA Edinburgh Branch meeting was held, by kind permission of the Northern Lighthouse Board, at their newly refurbished offices in George Street in Edinburgh.

The meeting extended a bit longer than expected, but a lot of

While they faced the same dangers of war as the regular armed forces as well as the hazards of the elements, they did so as civilians and volunteers.

Their vessels ranged from passenger and large cargo ships to tramp ships and coastal vessels and the sailors served on seas and oceans across the world. The Merchant Navy kept Britain afloat during both world wars and is now responsible for delivering more than 90 percent of the UK's imports & exports. Merchant Navy Day is an opportunity to honour the brave men and women of our Merchant Navy for their service and sacrifice.

Seafarers are subject to physical hazards such as diseases and injuries as well as psychological problems, including fatigue, homesickness, and loneliness. Not only do they face storms and rough weather, but they are also at risk of piracy and of being taken as hostages.

Flying the Red Ensign helps to raise awareness and show gratitude and appreciation for their commitment, as they are often regarded as the forgotten and "invisible" navy community of seafarers.

U-30 was already in her designated sector, north west of Ireland, as Hitler had wanted to take the advantage should Britain declare war. It was expected that it would take several weeks before a convoy system could be organised, giving his U-boats time to sink allied shipping. Already 250 miles out at sea and awaiting orders for immediate action, Lemp was prepared with 10 torpedoes and a surface speed of 16.5 knots, more than a match for the Athenia.

Captain James Cook of the Athenia had received secret instructions from Naval Control to steer a course well off the normal track and to adopt a zig-zag pattern at night. They also blacked out the portholes, dimmed running lights at night and prohibited smoking on deck.

At 11.15am, Neville Chamberlain announced war against Germany. By noon of that day, most of the passengers aboard the Athenia knew. At 12.15 U-30 had orders to 'commence hostilities against Britain forthwith', followed by a second message at 14.00 'U-boat warfare against shipping to be carried out in accordance with international rules'. The 'International Rules' stemmed from the London Submarine Protocol of 1936 saying it was illegal to attack any merchant vessel without having first stopped and searched the ship and to ensure safety of the passengers and crew. However, it was possible to attack without warning troopships, vessels carrying war materials, or those being escorted by enemy ships.

Although the ship zig-zagged and was in blackout conditions, Lemp had already spotted the Athenia, but was unsure what type of vessel he had in his sights. Under the Prize Regulations, he considered no warning was necessary and fired 2 torpedoes at the mid-ships, followed by a second pair. Only one of the four torpedoes found its target, hitting just aft of the central superstructure on the port side, enough to fatally wound the Athenia. Lemp had fired the first shots of World War II. Only when the Radio Officer sent his distress call did the U-30 realise this was a passenger liner and not a military troopship. Lemp was shocked. He had violated the direct orders from Admiral Karl Dönitz he had received only hours before. He had to decide whether he would rescue survivors or do nothing. He chose the latter.

With the No 5 hold and the engine room flooding quickly, power was lost and the vessel listing to port. The Chief Engineer managed to get a dynamo running to provide lights at the lifeboat stations. Captain Cook and his crew were not about to let the Athenia become another Titanic. By 21.00 it was reported that all living passengers were off the sinking ship, approximately 1350 people in 80 minutes. Wireless messages were received from other vessels in the area advising they were enroute and at 23.30, having thrown his confidential books overboard, Captain Cook disembarked Athenia for the last time.

Unfortunately, more died in the rescue attempt than in the initial explosion. During rescue operations, one of the vessels kicked their engine full ahead, dragging one of the lifeboats in to the propeller, none were saved. Another was caught under the counter stern in the swell whilst trying to manoeuvre to the leeward side, tipping nearly 60 people in to the freezing water. All but 8 survived from that incident. Other deaths were due to falling overboard from Athenia and her lifeboats, or to injuries and exposure.

Lemp returned to Wilhelmshaven on the 27th September 1939 having had his crew sworn to secrecy about the Athenia. Dönitz had Lemp eliminate all references of the attack from his logbook, which was condoned by Grand Admiral Raeder. This was their undoing.

Lemp did not live to see his secret unveiled as he was killed in action in 1941, but other crew members did. The Russian army had captured Kriegsmarine records from the naval staff headquarters near Berlin. That was the first time that the U-30 was identified as the offending submarine. Both Dönitz and Raeder were charged with war crimes and tried by the International Military Tribunal (IMT) in Nuremberg, for waging war contrary to the London Submarine Protocol of 1936. Raeder tried to blame Hitler for the cover-up. Both were found guilty with Dönitz serving 10 years and Raeder receiving a life sentence.

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FITZROY – WHAT’S THE WEATHER LIKE?

With the advent of the internet, we now take weather forecasting for granted. Gone are the days of listening to the shipping forecast, receiving weather reports from other vessels or faxed weather charts, but where did it all start? During the 18th & 19th centuries, for the want of an adequate weather forecast, ships were repeatedly driven on to rocks, capsized and sank all around Britain’s shores – a fact confirmed by the sheer number of wrecks that litter our shores (including an estimated 6000 off Cornwall alone). So serious was the problem that in 1853 a conference of leading maritime powers was convened in Brussels to discuss a coordinated approach to the burgeoning science of ocean meteorology. The result in Britain was the creation of the Met Office with Captain Robert Fitzroy at its helm.

Fitzroy took on the role with characteristic zeal. He issued ships captains with instruments to collect information on wind, temperature humidity and atmospheric pressure and used the data to produce ‘wind stars’, the forerunners of isobars. Convinced that atmospheric pressure held the key to predicting the weather, he devised a sturdy Fishery Barometer and raised money to have 100 made and fitted in fishing harbours and lifeboat stations around the country.

But the turning point came in 1859, when a severe storm hit the Irish Sea, killing 800 people and leaving a trail of destruction at sea and on land. Some 200 ships were wrecked in this one storm, including the Royal Charter which sank off Anglesey with the loss of 450 lives. These catastrophic events galvanised Fitzroy into action. He set up 15 stations around Britain to collect information which he translated in to synoptic charts from which he created a ‘weather forecast’ (a term he himself coined in 1855). His predictions were published in The Times from 1861 onwards, the first attempt at a daily forecast. He also instituted a system of signals, e.g. a cone pointing up for a northerly gale, or down for a southerly gale, which were to be hoisted at relevant stations to warn sailors of bad weather.

Born to a wealthy family descended from Charles II, Robert Fitzroy was both privileged and brilliant in equal measure, but he also had a mercurial temper and was prone to depression, so when it came to organising a round-the-world voyage on HMS Beagle (of which he became commander at the age of just 23) he made sure he had some engaging company on board. His choice was a young naturalist by the name of Charles Darwin. A decision he was later to regret, as Darwin’s theories of evolution conflicted with Fitzroy’s Christian beliefs.

Once back in England, Fitzroy was elected Tory MP for Durham and was promptly appointed governor to New Zealand in 1843. It was to prove a poisoned chalice and by the time he returned 5 years later, his reputation was at a low ebb. His appointment as the Meteorological Statist to the Board of Trade in 1854 was a brilliant move, as he transformed the mystical art of weather lore in to modern science. Not only did he publish the first weather forecast in The Times, but he put in place many of the methods used by the Met Office today. Little wonder that Punch magazine christened him ‘The First Admiral of the Blew’ and ‘The Clerk of the Weather’. Fitzroy’s dark side never left really left him, however, and in 1865 he went in to his dressing room and slit his throat with a razor.

In 2002 the Met Office renamed the Finisterre area after its founder, Fitzroy, due to avoiding confusion with the Spanish Met Office using the Finisterre name for a smaller area.

CHANGED DAYS????

The technical superintendent was bawling out the engineer cadet for lack of diligence in his studies. “I suppose it’s the old story! The fool of the family sent to sea?!”
“Oh, no sir,” replied the cadet. “I don’t think so, things have changed a lot since your day, sir.”