

“ WHERE THE ROAD TAKES YOU “

Reading from time to time some interesting articles from “shipmates” about changes of direction following the demise of the old company, I had the idea of compiling a synopsis of the experiences of others who like myself entered new territory. It may make good reading, but for the moment remains only a thought.

It is not surprising after virtually a lifetime with one company in whatever capacity, the upheaval from the “comfort zone” brings with it the need to concentrate the mind on the future. When the inevitable happens future options have to be seriously considered and unless the breakdown of the earning capacity does not immediately place you in a state of panic, then perhaps to give time to reflect is the best option. There will be priorities, both financial and domestic. Will one have to cut back personal activities to avoid a major financial problem, or perhaps give serious consideration, whether you are just temporarily unemployed or permanently unemployable.

For some the thought of spending more time on the golf course may be exciting but for others with some useful years left, a need to fill those years gainfully employed is more of a priority. I would prefer to have a purpose sufficient to get me out of bed in the morning, contribute to the household budget, and generally avoid getting from under other peoples’ feet, and also having some satisfaction from what I do.

Looking back to when the bombshell dropped I recall the emergency board meeting called over the weekend for 8.30 a.m. Monday morning when two directors gave some brief details of the Mexicans intentions to go it alone and that a company had already been registered in name, not dissimilar from that discussed by the Board over the previous weeks when efforts were being made to rescue a management company from the ashes of the old. To add to that an announcement was bluntly put that no Reardon Smith would be involved in this new set up. A meeting the following day between the Chairman and TMM in Paris obviously set the parameters. It was obvious that the lifeboat had a few occupants already and one did not have to be a genius to realise a few more would join them as part of a ‘package’ deal. Without going into the nitty gritty, it would appear some staff had already been told to keep a low profile and their own life line would be available in due course. Survival is a basic instinct so who could blame them.

There was a very unpleasant smell about the whole business and I was not alone in thinking that some of the characters involved had twisted and turned a few times. Body language tells you a lot! There are no sour grapes from me because I believe in that old adage “what goes round comes round” and I have the feeling to some extent that happened. We can speculate until the cows come home, but the truth will never be known although I am convinced TMM had inside assistance with person(s) playing two ends against the middle and if that was so, it is for their conscience not mine. Trust is hard to win, but easy to lose and should never be regarded lightly. To walk away with your integrity intact is very important.

Enough about that !!

My departure from Devonshire House was dignified but rather unceremonial. Two Tesco plastic bags contained by personal bits and pieces and the old London style taxi home, which at one stage made me wonder if we would make it together, just about put it in its right context. One day a company director the next a candidate for the job centre !! Many others had no doubt experienced this so I took comfort from that.

I like so many others had commitments particularly familywise. Two children educated and fortunately able to stand on their own feet, and a young son preparing hopefully for university after a year. My wife and I discussed all the options and agreed there was no immediate need to make a ‘may day’ call.



SHIPMATES

Reardon Smith Seafarer's Newsletter

Issue No.44 September 2007.



Reardon Smith Reunion 2002.

Photograph of the guests who attended the Reardon Smith Reunion on the 10th September 2002, held at the "Queens Head", Ockbrook, near Derby. People came from all parts of the country, Africa, Australia, Canada and USA.

I have always been interested and involved in the local community in which I live. At that time I was an elected community councillor for some eighteen years and for the whole of that time either Chairman or Vice Chairman of Council; I was Chairman of the British Heart Foundation Cardiff Committee, Vice-Chairman of a group of five Church in Wales Schools, also a minor authority representative on conservation, planning and partnership committees. For added measure I was on the PTA of my son's school, a neighbourhood watch co-ordinator, and a member of my church PCC.

Looking back I wonder how I found the time to go to work, but as anyone connected with voluntary work will know, being involved costs money - serious money. There are no expenses!

Sport had always been an interest in my life. Rugby was now my main spectator sport and I belonged to the Cardiff Club and enjoyed the matches and an occasional pint. As for golf, I had been a member of a club for a number of years and played to a somewhat average standard, but I could not see myself having a good walk interrupted by the small white object. To those who do, good luck to them. There is still an implied social standing about golf when you are asked - "Do you play golf?" as if it is "the all and end all" of up-market achievement. Are they the real "swingers"? I'll leave that unanswered for fear I alienate what friends I have left.

Raising the profile and public awareness of the British Heart Foundation was hard work but rewarding. With a small committee fundraising went from £11k to £55k in the three years I sat in the chair. I had an insight into the NHS and met some very interesting people inside and outside of the service. Little did I know at that time the experience would pave the way for another exciting challenge.

There is a long story about my first useful re-employment which I won't bore readers with, except to say that through a very close friend I became involved with some business activities in Ireland. This required several visits to Kilkenny (the Marble City) and Dublin. Two shareholders in my friend's business venture were front line politicians, both members of the opposition party at the time. One of these later became a Minister when a political change took place. It was during being entertained to lunch in Dublin at the Irish Lower House (the Dail) that the conversation turned to my own business activities prior to being currently involved in the capital venture of my absent friend.

The mention of shipping immediately brought the question of did I know Irish Shipping? This was uncharted waters and I was very wary as to making any comments. Asked what company I was with opened the flood gates when I mentioned Reardon Smith. It seemed that ISL was one of their political hobby horses and it was "open season". To say, I learned more about the ISL collapse and the reasons the government pulled the plug on them, than ever I did as a Director of RSL/SWRSS is an understatement. It was alleged the whole operation had been under investigation for some while and legal proceedings a distinct possibility. The Irish have a very special way of describing situations which offend them and I was thankful that several interruptions during lunch brought a change of conversation. A group from Cardiff would occasionally have "away days" with ISL and we back at office rarely got an update. No doubt the 'jollies' were enjoyed by all concerned. Its a small world! My meal turned out to be more digestible than the information.

Over the following year a lot of effort was put into my charity work and with the help of many others we did very well. Through someone I met during this work I was made aware that a national cancer charity were looking for an ex-businessman to set up a Regional Office for Wales based in the south and my contact suggested I might like to write to the head office and register an interest. An advertisement was due to go into a couple of national dailies and there was expected to be a lot of interest. I made enquiries about the charity, its aims and vision, and I liked what I saw. I had nothing to lose so I sent off my very first CV in modern style (with a little help from the family) and if nothing came of it, so be it. The advert eventually appeared which gave me a background to their thinking, and I waited. A reply and appointment time came shortly afterwards, the venue a city hotel to meet the Head of UK Support Staff. The night before the appointment our young son, recently back from six weeks in Ecuador, was rushed into hospital with a temperature of 104 degrees. He was slowly burning up. My wife and I stayed with him through the night, with fans blasting away to cool his body temperature. By mid-morning

there was an improvement and I was urged to keep the appointment and did so, making my apologies for not being suitably dressed for the occasion. The Director turned out to be a Welshman, born in Cardiganshire, but from a young age moved with his family to England and France. He had been an executive with Tate & Lyle and knew quite a bit about RSL - maybe he had done his homework prior to our meeting. His name was Lloyd and reminded me very much of our own Danny Lloyd. Their humour was much akin - for example and I quote "people from Cardiganshire only throw their bread upon the waters when the tide is coming in" and "when people from Cardiganshire move house they take the wallpaper with them". Both were generous in thought and spirit and I think I got some brownie points for keeping the appointment under the circumstances. I did say, if we met again I would wear a tie and have a shave. We parted company with a hand shake and those immortal words "we'll be in touch".

That was that and I thought the last I would hear, but not a bit of it.!

A few days later a telephone call asking me to come to London for a further interview, travel expenses paid and a possibility of an overnight stay if necessary. Hotel booked, all expenses paid. Day and time to suit me in relation to travel times etc. It was a sign of goodwill and I ofcourse followed it up a.s.a.p. Their offices between South Kensington and Chelsea were part of an old brewery complex and housed about a hundred or so staff. The visit went well and I was asked to stay overnight and the following morning met with the Chief Executive who later offered me the position of Regional Manager for Wales, Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund. I accepted on the basis that I would do it for five years which would see me to my state pension. I spent the rest of that day being briefed and meeting heads of departments and from then on it was all up to me. A wonderful challenge and a step into a charity business quite unlike the shipping world. It was the start of what was to be a second career which gave me so much personal satisfaction.

I had been given authority to set up an office and furnish it as necessary, employ part-time secretarial staff and free to chose where located. After careful consideration I decided to go west from my home and in the opposite direction to Cardiff. A chance meeting with Oliver Lindsay put me in touch with steel man he knew, who offered me the setup facilities I was looking for in Cowbridge (a small market town where Oliver lived and just six miles from my home.) It was a start and the appointment of a secretary followed.

For the first six months I got to know the existing voluntary committees, regional, area and local health authorities and personalities in both the press and media. I travelled widely throughout Wales and rediscovered my own country - visiting places I never knew existed. Community hospitals and existing respite centres were high on the agenda, and so my knowledge of health service grew more or less on a daily basis.

Macmillan Nurses are trained specialist nurses in the care of people suffering from cancer and are the 'shop window' of the charity. Each nurse is special in her own right and very carefully selected. They are there for the patient, the family and carers for the whole of the cancer journey. Day centres and respite care units are also part of the Macmillan provision and over the years the range of services has extended to many other avenues of patient care. Financial help for patients who find themselves in difficulty through no fault of their own including the provision of essential equipment to benefit the patients daily life is a major part of Macmillan. Macmillan has rebranded itself twice over the years and is now called Macmillan Cancer Support and is recognised as one of the top ten charities in the UK.

The appointment of a Macmillan Nurse within the NHS is pump-primed for three years by Macmillan on the guarantee the Trust/Area Health Authority takes over the funding thereafter and the service is maintained to the highest standard. The provision of day centres and in-patient units is also a partnership, whereby Appeals are organised and funded my MCS to raise sufficient to allow and bring the project to fruition for the NHS to operate.

I could go on extolling the virtue of the fund and the work it does and the benefits brought

to hundreds of thousands of cancer sufferers over the years since its original conception in 1905 by Douglas Macmillan OBE. but I want to give readers a brief insight into what took over my life after "Reardon Smith".

The charitable world attracts celebrities from all walks of life all willing to add their name and popularity to a good cause. Royalty work very hard in support and patronage and this is often misunderstood.

In the course of my time, which instead of five years became twelve with a further two years as a consultant, I had the honour and pleasure to meet Prince Charles, Diana Princess of Wales, the Princess Royal, Duchess of Kent, Duchess of Wessex (Sophie Rhys Jones worked for a time with Macmillan and I met her quite often in Head Office) and numerous others. The President was the Marchioness of Zetland, a delightful lady.

In the entertainment world Ken Dodd, Kathy Staff, Jimmeny Cricket, Harry Secombe, Michael Ball, Martin Lewis and a host of local TV and radio celebs. helped to raise the profile and funds in Wales. Nationally throughout the UK the list is endless.

I want to make special mention of Viscount Tony Pandy , former Speaker of the House of Commons and a tower of strength for me during several very large appeals for in-patient and day care centres all requiring close to £1m to be raised for each project. George and I were good friends long before my Macmillan days although our politics were not compatible. I knew his mother, spent time at his home, dined with him both locally and at his Club in Pall Mall, and on one fundraising occasion in the Speakers House. His passing was a great loss to Wales and to the many charities he generously gave his name. Despite his rise to one of the highest offices in the land he was always a man of the people and more particularly to the people of the Rhondda.

My time with Macmillan was a most enjoyable time in my working life. I worked hard, gave so much of my time during and outside of office hours, with Marjorie's support. I made a lot of good friends, met some terrific people and enjoyed helping to make a difference in my small way to the lives of those less fortunate than ourselves. What is more I think I earned the respect of those I had dealings with, which I hope in some way reflected back to my time with Reardon Smith.

There are a lot of unsung heroes out there, who have given of themselves well beyond the call of duty, who will never be seen in the honours list but more deserving than ninety percent who do. When you read that sportsmen are being paid obscene weekly sums of in some cases over £100k and given medals then there is something totally wrong with our values.

To conclude my " life after Smiths" in June 2004 at the Annual General Meeting of the Charity which was held at City Hall Cardiff with a reception at the National Museum of Wales the previous evening, the " Macmillan Cancer Relief Cancer Champion Award Winner Wales 2004 " certificates were presented to seven medical teams from across Wales for their contribution and work in the treatment of cancer. The surprise of the evening was a non-medical one which carried these words on the Certificate -

**ROY BURSTON - For outstanding services to people living with cancer in Wales
Awarded Cardiff 29 June 2004.**

That was recognition I did not ever expect. It made it all so worthwhile . I had witnessed great courage and fortitude, wonderful commitment and perhaps in some way found in myself another dimension. Macmillan had given me far more than I could possibly have given them and I was so thankful for having been given the opportunity . I am still a Councillor, the Treasurer of my church, Secretary of a Police Panel, and a member of numerous committees, and the Past President of Cowbridge Probus Club. Life still goes on and as long as my head and legs go in the same direction, so will I.

Best Wishes,
RB.

LIFE IN THE 1500'S

The next time you are washing your hands and complain because the water temperature isn't just how you like it, think about how things used to be. Here are some facts about the 1500s:

These are interesting...

Most people got married in June because they took their yearly bath in May, and still smelled pretty good by June. However, they were starting to smell, so brides carried a bouquet of flowers to hide the body odor. Hence the custom today of carrying a bouquet when getting married.

Baths consisted of a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the other sons and men, then the women and finally the children last of all the babies. By then the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it. Hence the saying, "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water."

Houses had thatched roofs-thick straw-piled high, with no wood underneath. It was the only place for animals to get warm, so all the cats and other small animals (mice, bugs) lived in the roof. When it rained it became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip and off the roof. Hence the saying "It's raining cats and dogs."

There was nothing to stop things from falling into the house. This posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings could mess up your nice clean bed. Hence, a bed with big posts and a sheet hung over the top afforded some protection. That's how canopy beds came into existence.

The floor was dirt. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt. Hence the saying "dirt poor." The wealthy had slate floors that would get slippery in the winter when wet, so they spread thresh (straw) on floor to help keep their footing. As the winter wore on, they added more thresh until when you opened the door it would all start slipping outside. A piece of wood was placed in the entranceway. Hence the saying a "thresh hold."

(Getting quite an education, aren't you?)

In those old days, they cooked in the kitchen with a big kettle that always hung over the fire. Every day they lit the fire and added things to the pot. They ate mostly vegetables and did not get much meat. They would eat the stew for dinner, leaving leftovers in the pot to get cold overnight and then start over the next day. Sometimes stew had food in it that had been there for quite a while. Hence the rhyme, "Peas porridge hot, peas porridge cold, peas porridge in the pot nine days old."

Sometimes they could obtain pork, which made them feel quite special. When visitors came over, they would hang up their bacon to show off. It was a sign of wealth that a man could "bring home the bacon." They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit around and "chew the fat."

Those with money had plates made of pewter. Food with high acid content caused some of the lead to leach onto the food, causing lead poisoning death. This happened most often with tomatoes, so for the next 400 years or so, tomatoes were considered poisonous.

Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle, and guests got the top, or "upper crust."

Lead cups were used to drink ale or whiskey. The combination would sometimes knock the imbibers out for a couple of days. Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial. They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family would gather around and eat and drink and wait and see if they would wake up. Hence the custom of holding a "wake."

England is old and small and the local folks started running out of places to bury people. So they would dig up coffins and would take the bones to a "bone-house" and reuse the grave. When reopening these coffins, 1 out of 25 coffins were found to have scratch marks on the inside and they realized they had been burying people alive. So they would tie a string on the wrist of the corpse, lead it through the coffin and up through the ground and tie it to a bell. Someone would have to sit out in the graveyard all night (the "graveyard shift") to listen for the bell; thus, someone could be "saved by the bell" or was considered a "dead ringer."

And that's the truth... Now, whoever said that History was boring !!!

John Can

---Aground in the Magellans---

Having re-read Captain Boyer's interesting article "In the Footsteps of Magellan", ("Shipmates", Issue No.38), perhaps the passage of time will permit another airing of the same subject.

I joined the s/s "Samhope" in Hull on 22nd. August, 1945 and paid-off in Middlesbrough on 6th. November, 1946 some fourteen months later, having served under the command of Captain H.W.Marshall as Third Mate. I remember him as a likeable man, who expected his Officers to be a credit to the ship in their standard of dress, and issued orders when a change from cold weather to tropical gear was considered appropriate - not always popular if one's personal body thermostat was not on the same setting!

From Hull our journeying took us to the States, Gibraltar, North African ports, Suez Canal, Australian ports, and thence across the Pacific to Iquique in Chile. Here, due to the heavy ocean swell, we didn't lie alongside and our cargo of nitrate was lightered out to the ship. The amount of marine life in those coastal waters was amazing, and one imagined the clouds of diving gulls and patrolling pelicans rarely went hungry with such huge shoals of fish about.

Finally loaded and on our way south, we passed through the Magellan Straits and into the South Atlantic. The scenery we passed during our transit of the Straits was impressive, the weather less so. Our next port-of-call was Alexandria, where we discharged our cargo before proceeding on the next leg of our mystery round-the-world tour - through the Suez Canal to Lourenco Marques (now re-named Maputo) to receive further orders.

The new orders put us back on the track across the South Atlantic to Chile again, there to load more nitrate for delivery to Alexandria as before. Entering the Magellan Straits again, this time for a west-bound passage, we picked up a Pilot at Punta Arenas and set off some time in the early evening. We thought our Pilot to be a Spaniard, a short swarthy man, who appeared to be of a nervous disposition - I remember I did not enjoy my 8-12 evening watch, with him constantly pacing up and down the bridge, chain-smoking and loudly and frequently clearing his throat like some "last-stages" consumptive, before heading for the bridge wing to spit overside. Off watch and fast asleep some two hours later, I was shocked awake with the ship jolting and juddering as though in an earthquake - sounds of breaking crockery, things falling, quickly followed by the alarm bells ringing - by then one was heading bridgeward, clutching duffle coat and lifejacket, to find a scene of comparative calm; the boat deck lights were switched on, and with their aid and that of the bridge searchlight it was possible to pick out rocks, boulders and stunted vegetation in close proximity - we were truly grounded, though the ship fortunately had remained relatively upright but with her bow pointing higher than was normal.

To keep it short - Chippy reported the forward double-bottom tanks had been flooded, the Chief tried the engines gingerly astern with no movement to the ship resulting, the Captain and Chief Officer discussed streaming the kedge anchor to pull the vessel clear, and the Pilot apparently disappeared below to console himself with some liquid anti-shock antidote (Southern Comfort??) whilst remembering he should have passed to starboard of Pritchard Island. Meanwhile Punta Arenas had been radioed about our plight, but before any aid came from there and several hours later, we were able to free "Samhope" on a rising tide and return to port without assistance. Once there at anchor, a moveable stage was hung over the bows to permit divers to inspect the hull from underneath - they reported extensive corrugation, and two fore-to-aft gashes in the bottom, seven and ten feet long approximately, into which they drove wooden wedges and, I think, oakum.

After three days at anchor we sailed for Bahia Blanca, Argentina, for dry-docking and permanent repairs. Most of the way we encountered adverse weather which caused the ship to pound heavily at times, and Capt.Marshall deemed it prudent to reduce speed and not aggravate our damage. It took about 5 ½ days to cover the 1,140 miles to Bahia Blanca, and thence to Puerto Belgrano which was used as a naval base and where we were to dry-dock. Viewed from underneath the poor "Samhope" looked a bit of a mess along a fair portion of her hull, with her corrugations, splits and indentations - and hardly a trace of any of the wooden wedges remaining!

We stayed a month before repairs were completed, during which time the ship became something of a spectacle with the local population as, at weekends when no dock work was in progress, people were allowed to come aboard and wander about the decks within defined limits - during such periods a certain amount of "porthole peering" would occur - both ways!

Sailing again (I think it was May, 1946) we returned to Punta Arenas, collected another Pilot - our previous one was "...no longer wiz us"! - carried on through the Straits and Smyth Channels and, ultimately, to our destination of Tocopilla. From here, with another load of nitrate aboard, we continued up the coast to the Panama Canal then, via Curacao to Alexandria for discharge. It was after

that the voyage drew towards a successful conclusion, which included calls to Naples and two North African ports, to pick up surplus Army equipment for return to the United Kingdom. Thus it was that we eventually found ourselves in Middlesbrough.

The main character in this tale was intended to be a Liberty ship, Hull No.2613, and thus associated with all the doubts and suspicions that circulated about the strength or otherwise of all-welded ship construction at that time. For us aboard her, "Samhope" proved she was a "good 'un" in all conditions of weather and rough treatment. She was built in Baltimore, her keel laid 25th. February, 1944, launched 25th. March, and delivered on 5th. April. After completing her service under Reardon Smith management, she passed through the hands of five other owners before being scrapped in Spain in October, 1974.

Sam Satter

Mistake in Obituary Notice.

A mistake was made in the Last newsletter issue No.43 where our deceased member Hugh Parry was named as Harry Parry. I have written an apology to Mrs. Joan Parry and very sorry for this mistake.

Mrs. Parry, Hugh's widow kindly sent me the names of the ships he sailed on and sea service during his time with the Reardon Smith Line shown below.

Hugh Parry.

Hugh, my late husband, was born on 23.9.24 and died on 30.3.07.

He was with Reardon Smith for his 4 year apprenticeship.

He joined the S/S Sacramento Valley on 15.2.1941. He was aboard her when she was torpedoed on 6.6.1941 and was in a lifeboat for 3 days. The vessel that picked them up was MV Caithness.

He joined the S/S Barrwhin early in September 1941. He left in December 1941.

After some leave he joined the Imperial Valley which was in dry dock and went for sea trials on 2nd January 1942 and set sail for North America on 4th January 1942. He left 19th May 1943.

He joined the S/S Botlea in June 1943. After a 2 years 2 months voyage he arrived home and after a few months holiday he went to Nautical College to study for his 2nd Mate's Certificate.

Seaman's Saga

Chapter One

The Beginning

I was born in Barry Dock, South Wales on the 14th April 1925. From the house in which I was born and lived for sixteen years, I could hear, when the wind was from a Southly direction, the sound of the coal tips loading Welsh coal, by day and night, into the holds and bunker spaces of ships. Then, Barry Docks' exported about 13,000,000 tons a year, the World's greatest coal exporting port. Ships arriving and sailing on tides, with whistle or siren signals sounding on the freighters and tugs and when there was fog in the channel the grunt of the Breaksea Lightship, the fog horn on Flat Holm and ships feeling their way in the channel sounding their fog signals. Enough to arouse the imagination of a young boy, to far away horizons and adventures untold, the "Lure of the sea" that cannot be denied.

I was educated at the Holton Road Boys School until I was 13, when one day the headmaster of the school learnt that I was keen on a career at sea, he suggested that I should sit the examination to enter the Reardon Smith Junior Nautical School, the intake of which was thirty pupils per year. I accepted enthusiastically, as this offered a three-year course in general education and nautical studies, at the end of which the young men who satisfactory completed the course received a School Leaving Certificate and a Six Month Remission of Sea Service Certificate. This qualification was recognized by the Board of Trade towards the required sea service to sit the Second Mate's Certificate of Competency.

The school was founded in 1921 by Sir William Reardon Smith (Bart), the well known Cardiff ship-owner and was situated within the Technical College, King Edward Seventh Avenue, Cathays Park, Cardiff. I entered the school in September, 1938 which was then under the direction of the head master, Captain Thomas Johnson, supported by an able and dedicated staff of lecturers. The standard of education was excellent and there was a strict disciplinary routine, all of which would stand the young men in good stead to meet the rigours of commencing a sea career, this was especially so after the commencement of war in 1939 and to what that was to entail. The young men who completed the three years would be aged 16/17, the majority of which then went on to become Apprentices or Cadets in the Merchant Navy. Perhaps I should mention here that in their final year they wore the uniform of an apprentice but with the school's red tabs instead of gold on the lapels. It was in this year that those who still had the ambition to become a deck officer in the British Merchant Navy commenced applying to the various shipping companies for an apprenticeship or cadetship. Of course a number would apply to the Reardon-Smith Line of Cardiff. Sadly, so many of the ex Smith Junior Nautical boys were to lose their lives at sea in the

years before the end of hostilities in 1945, an example of which were those boys who completed their third year and went to sea in 1940, most of them were to die due to enemy action within the first twelve months of commencing their apprenticeship. It is indeed a sad reflection on the Authorities after the end of hostilities in 1946 that a 'Memorial Board' showing the 'old boys' who had perished in the War was neither conceived or displayed in the School.

Sir William Reardon-Smith took a keen personal interest in the school which his father, the first Sir William founded. He usually visited the school twice a year, at such times all the young lads would be assembled and he would give a short appropriate speech, generally on some aspect of a sea going career and the opportunities it offered for those intent on studying.

On completion of my pre sea training in July 1941, I signed the necessary document to become an indentured apprentice to Sir William-Reardon & Sons Ltd., of Cardiff for a period of 3 years and 6 months (this taking into consideration 6 months remission of sea service). Wages:- £10 for the first year, £12 for the second year, £18 for the third year and £10 for the last six months. There was a bonus of £10 payable on the satisfactory completion of the apprenticeship. The wages were supplemented by a war risk bonus of £2.10s per month until the age of 18 and thereafter £5. (I have never understood why the life of a seaman under 18 was only valued at half that of a seaman over 18 years).

Chapter Two

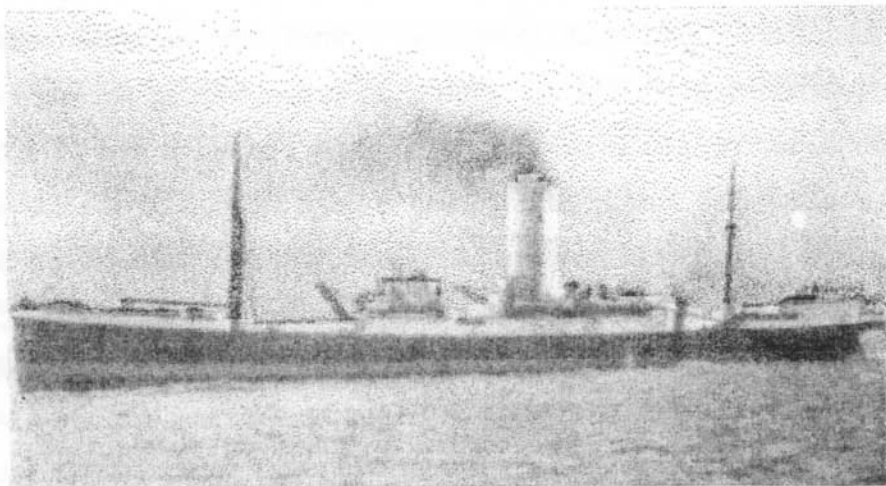
My First Ship

One morning in early August, 1941 the eagerly expected letter from Sir William Reardon Smith & Sons arrived, informing me to be ready to proceed to join the S.S. "Botavon", and that they would advise me of the port after the ship had arrived. Excitement, the days of waiting would soon be over. On the 20th August I received orders to proceed on the 23rd August to Ellesmere Port.

It was a horrible wet Sunday afternoon when I joined the vessel at the remote Bowater's Wharf, the rain was lashing down, I became thoroughly soaked walking carrying a case and seabag over a mile from the security gate to the gangway. On such a miserable day, the ship painted all-over dark grey, looked rather forlorn. After passing through the security gate and until I boarded the ship there was no sign of life or movement to be seen. The ship was quiet, the heavy rain had stopped the discharge of her cargo, which was bulk sulphur loaded at Port Sulphur, U.S.A. The deck had been made very slippery by the sulphur spillage having been made into a yellow slime which found its way into the accommodation.

On arrival on board I reported my presence to the Chief officer, Mr. S. Wheaton who handed me the keys to the apprentices cabin and told me that there were two apprentices home on leave for the weekend, Nobby Clark and Rap. Dyer and that there would be only three for the next

voyage. The apprentices cabin was situated in the starboard forward corner of the midship house and its size was about 18 feet fore and aft and 10 feet wide, divided into a forward half and a after section by a curtain. The forward section contained two bunks on either side, mounted one above the other, aft of the bunks one wardrobe was fitted either side, whilst on the forward athawtship bulkhead and fitted between the bunks was a dressing table above which were two small port-holes which looked out on to the starboard bunker pocket hatch. In the after section there was fitted a substantial fore and aft table, on the outer bulkhead there was fitted a settee which ran the length and across one end of the table, on the inner bulkhead (Engine room casing) a cupboard unit used for the stowage of our weekly rations. Over the cupboard unit was a bookcase. The deck was covered in red tiles, over which was a piece of coconut matting. There were two small port-holes over the settee. Entry to the cabin was by way of a door in the after bulkhead, access to which was by way of the starboard inside passageway. The apprentices collected their food in kits at the galley door and ate it in their cabin. After the meal the washing up of dishes was performed on the table. There was no bathroom provision for the apprentices and so buckets had to suffice using the same table to stand the buckets on. I was to learn that whilst at sea this was not always a simple operation with a ship rolling and pitching, not to overlook the mopping up of the deck afterwards. However, one had to consider she was an elderly ship of 1911 vintage and lacked more modern amenities. Having said that, she had a large beautifully furnished dining saloon and also a lounge, both paneled in highly polished hard wood each panel was inlaid with ivory and mother of pearl Chinese and Japanese scenes. The dining room was also fitted with an ornate fireplace, which for safety reasons the fire was never used at sea, large decorated oil lanterns hung over the dining tables, in case of the generates being closed down. The dining room was only used by the Master, Mates, Radio Officers and passengers. The Master's accommodation and two staterooms for passengers opened off the lounge, which was reserved solely for their use. Apprentices could only look with envy at the luxury they enjoyed.



S.S. "BOTAVON" GRT 5,848.

(Photograph taken 1912)

Chapter 3

My first Voyage.

The Master opened Articles for the forthcoming voyage at the Ellesmere Port Shipping Office on the 27th August, 1941, In addition to her normal compliment of officers and ratings there were eight Royal Naval DEMS ratings who also signed the Articles, making a total ship's compliment of sixty

Her total armaments at that time were a 4 inch gun (of 1914 vintage) mounted on top of the poop house, a 20lb-er high angle gun, 2 Marlin and 2 Hotchkis machine guns, 6 depth charges, 1 Holman projector mounted aft of the poop house and 6 rockets amidships to launch parachutes with wire attachments as defence against low flying aircraft.

On the 29th August we sailed down the Mersey past the Royal Liver Building, passengers on the Mersey ferry crossing from Liverpool to Birkenhead giving a friendly wave as we passed. On arrival off the Mersey Bar we joined up with other Merchant ships' and Naval escort vessels to form a North Atlantic convoy. I remember the day well, we headed out into the Irish Sea and into a full W'yly gale, the ship in ballast condition was rolling heavily. I was on the 8 to 12 watch and on lookout duty on the bridge, I was violently seasick over the wooden deck, the Master was sympathetic to a first trip apprentice, he recommended for seasickness a bucket of water and a scrubbing brush and to scrub the whole of the bridge deck before going off duty. The treatment was successful, I was never to be actually seasick again.

On the fourth day on passage, in adverse weather conditions and poor visibility we were to lose touch with the convoy. So steaming independently at the ship's full speed of 12.5 knots and at night with navigation lights burning brightly, with all the deck lights switched on and with unshaded cabin lights, acting as if we were a neutral ship. It was about this time that the Master let it be known that we were bound for Boston, U.S.A. Dense fog was encountered over the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, visibility was only about 40 feet, and to comply with International Regulations the steam whistle was sounded every two minutes. So dense was the fog that the steam whistle mounted near the top of the ship's mighty funnel which towered some 63 feet above the fiddle-top could not be seen. Although we were aware that Portuguese cod fishing schooners frequented the Grand Banks, even so it was a surprise to suddenly hear Portuguese voices through the fog and find a dory passing close alongside with two men aboard line fishing. Shortly afterwards we could faintly hear the dory's mother vessel's fog signal.

Another incident I remember well, very well because it affected the apprentices. Every Saturday morning as junior apprentice I collected our weekly rations from the Chief Steward. The butter ration was the well known Irish Clover brand and came in large tins, consequently several weeks

ration of butter were issued at one time. On opening, the can was kept in our food cupboard which as afore mentioned was mounted in our cabin on the engine-room casing bulkhead. Our cockroach friends with whom we shared the cabin were plentiful and always tried to take a share of the rations. With the passing of a few days and the warmth of the cabin the butter turned into a rancid oily mess, on the surface of which dead cockroaches were plentiful. One day the senior apprentice, some four years older than me, said toss the "flaming mess" over the side and ask the Chief Steward for some more. Which I did, explaining to him the reason for doing so. Funny, he turned a peculiar shade of purple, for a dreadful moment I thought I might have caused him to suffer a heart attack, when he had recovered sufficiently he rushed up the stairway to the Master's cabin to report to him the terrible crime committed by apprentice Lindsay. Soon, as expected, I was summoned to the lower bridge where the 'elderly' Captain was waiting, fuming at being disturbed over such a matter, I quote his words "The Chief Steward, Patrick, has reported to me that you have thrown butter overboard claiming it was rancid and full of cockroaches. At home people are on rations and would appreciate rancid butter. Well lad rancid butter never did anyone any harm and what are a few little cockroaches. You apprentices will receive no more butter for a month, by then you will be more appreciative of good wholesome food. Now go" So it was, he kept his word, and the name of Patrick was never to be forgotten. Milk was also a bit of a problem, the apprentices each received a standard tin of condensed milk per week, in an endeavour, not always successful, to avoid sharing with the cockroaches, we punched two holes in the top of the can one of which was to blow into and the other for the milk to appear -sometimes with the odd cocky.

On arrival at Boston on the 13th September, vessel berthed close to the Boston Harbour Bridge, it was to a young apprentice an exciting experience to visit such a vibrant city, with no rationing, no blackout. Another world from wartime Britain. Yes, the United States was still a neutral country and Pearl Harbour was yet to come. After berthing and before any shore leave was granted, the British Consul visited the ship and warned all the crew that there were a considerable number of pro German sympathizers in the Boston area and for their own safety they must not accept hospitality from anyone ashore. However, there were many kindly pro. British Bostonians too who through the British Consulate arranged parties for the crews of the British ships in port. One of which I recall was a rancher who was known as Steady Rogers, his ranch was not far from Boston and to which at weekends he invited and provided the transportation for the crews to visit and enjoy a barbecue and afterwards in the evening to dancing in an area lit up by floodlights. Some of the invited dancing partners were starlets from the theatres of New York and Boston, one of which was later to become famous and a pin up. Another incident I remember was when walking across the Boston Harbour Bridge, proudly dressed in my apprentice's uniform, I was stopped by two elderly ladies, they must have been at least thirty years old, who asked where I was

from and my age, when I told them I was 16, one said to the other "Gee, those British mothers send them away so young".

At Boston the vessel loaded a full cargo for the U.K., comprising steel billets explosives and completing with a surprise last minute deck cargo of army tanks.

After an enjoyable stay in port the ship sailed on the 1st October, 1942. I was broke after spending five dollars, all the cash I could draw.

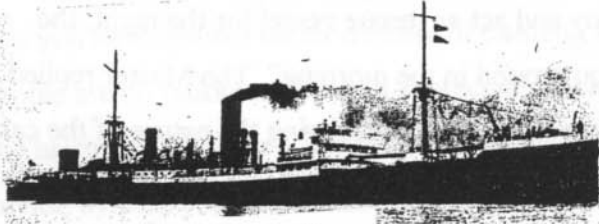
On sailing the vessel proceeded independently to Halifax, Nova Scotia, a convoy assembly port, where she arrived on the 3rd October. She sailed on the 5th October, 1941 as part of an East bound North Atlantic Convoy bound for the U.K. On passage some enemy submarine activity was encountered and the weather was at times boisterous, perhaps deterring the submarines from any determined attack. One evening in heavy weather conditions and shipping seas, one of the escorting corvettes closed the Botavon and by megaphone conveyed orders from the convoy's commodore to take up station astern of the convoy and act as rescue vessel for the night, the officer doing so cheerfully added "Hope to see you around in the morning". The Master replied "will look forward to it". Which was all quite consoling really, considering the nature of the cargo we were loaded with. The convoy suffered no casualties and arrived safely at Loch Ewe, on the West Coast of Scotland on the 16th October 1941. Two days later vessel sailed as part of a coastwise convoy bound for Leith where the convoy safely arrived on the 19th October. The ship sailed again at 0100 hours 20th in a Thames bound convoy, that evening the convoy was attacked by enemy dive bombers who pressed home their attack. At that time our anti-aircraft armament comprised, as previously mentioned, of 1 vintage high angle 20lb-er, 2 Marlin and 2 Hochkis machine guns, a Holman Projector which was more likely to kill friend than foe, and a "J" rocket launcher to fire a single rocket with two small air mines with a thin wire between them. The vessel suffered damage from three heavy bombs exploding close alongside the forward end of the vessel, rather too close for comfort, in view that No.1 Hold was fully loaded with munitions.

At about 2130 hours, 20th S.S. "Botavon" and S.S "City of Dunkirk" received orders from the convoy commodore to proceed Hull, we proceeded inwards together and shortly after leaving the convoy came under attack from enemy aircraft, it could be seen that aircraft was also attacking land targets. Fortunately, both vessels escaped damage and arrived and anchored in the Humber at 0100 hours, 21st October, 1941 After berthing we heard that the German radio had reported that both vessels had been engaged and sunk

So ended my first voyage. A voyage which I found to be exciting and was proud to be playing my small part in the war, to a 16 year old it was an adventure in which you fired real guns at a ruthless enemy, and after all you felt invincible, one had perhaps a youths false sense of security, sure that nothing was going to happen to you, -- to the other person?, well maybe, but not to you.

B. J. Lindsay.

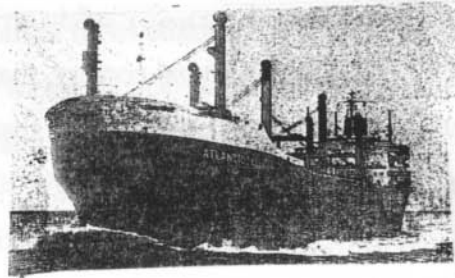
Ken Atkinson sent in this photograph with the a note saying, who mislaid this boat?. Would the miscreant own up and explain how it got there and from which "Atlantic City", with back ground stories welcome. Ken sailed on "Atlantic City"(4) the "Atlantic". Did they order new boats when they changed the ships name?.



*Atlantic City No. 2
Built 1920 Stockton
Ronnner Shipbuilders*



*Atlantic City No. 3
Built 1941 Sunderland
Wm Doxford & Sons Ltd*



*Atlantic City (No. 4)
Built 1969 Glasgow
Fairfields (Glasgow) Ltd*

New Member

Anthony Johansen (AKA "Jo") who lives in Ottawa Canada is now a member of "Shipmates". Anthony was 2nd Officer on the Indian City in 1951 he joined the vessel at Aden sailing to Moji, Vancouver and completing the voyage at Hull. He says with a few months to go on his contract when he reach the UK he bargained with Messers. Liley and Bissett, he was glad to get out of Smiths.

Obituary

I have had the sad news that William (Bill) Burge crossed the bar on Saturday 21st July 2007 at the age of 85. Bill worked in the Reardon Smith Cardiff Office before WW2, then he joined the Royal Air Force. After the war he returned to Reardon Smiths Head office working in the Management/Charting Department dealing with the ships fuel oil supplies and ships agents world wide. Our deepest sympathy goes to his family.