

The Chairman's Notes

When it came to writing my piece for the News Sheet this month I found myself in a reflective mood. I have been a member of the Society for more years than I can (or possibly care to) remember and having been in conversation with many members over the last few weeks, it occurs to me the great benefit to be gained from being a member of a society such as ours.

The best part of a society is its membership and the experience you gain from each individual member. To realise this you need only to have attended the July General Meeting in which Mike Chrisp ran a discussion on the topic of marking out. Everybody in the room had a different experience and one or two funny anecdotes.

Having reached the age that when I joined the Society I always thought of as being old (I am only 25!) conversation turned to how Kieran and I had benefited from our ties to the Society and the main point that came up, was our ability to converse with people from all generations. And this appears to be something that is not gained outside of a society such as ours.

Is there a point to what I am writing? I hope so and I may even make it! Throughout the activities of the Society, groups of members and individual members can feel that they are being isolated or worse that they are being forced out in the cold. With a society with a large membership like ours it will never be possible to please all the people all of the time, but the overall benefits will outweigh the negatives.

Last month I reported that the Video group and North American Section would be visiting Colney Heath. Well I was partially right as the good old British summer put paid to the Video group's visit, but the North American Section was not weather affected and from what I could tell they all had a great time.

At the July general meeting I reported that the 'Teddy truck' had been stolen. Luckily Peter MacDonald managed to find it, and with a little help from Jonathan Avery and myself he was able to drive it back to Colney Heath, even with a broken clutch cable. Hopefully it will be running, complete with a new clutch cable soon.

The North American and 'OO' boys have continued to tidy the outside of Headquarters by cutting the undergrowth and clearing out the gutters, Tony Dunbar also intends to carry out a survey of the building to assess any further work that may be required.

Can I take this opportunity to remind members that the August General Meeting will be held at Colney Heath, with the Stationary Steam Section entertaining us for the evening. The barbeque will be burning, so bring along some food and have a good time with friends.

Have a good August!

Donal Corcoran

Secretary's Snippets

The Calendar for 2005 is already in preparation. The Secretary would be pleased to receive dates of any events for next year. Booking dates is on a first come first served basis, so get yours in quick!

An extension to the Ground Railway is being discussed amongst interested members. The prime aspect of the current proposals is to build a joint Raised Track/Ground Railway station. These discussions are in their very early stages; once the difficulties and ideas are sorted out, a presentation will be made to the Society for comment.

David Harris

Editorial

The model press seldom if ever seriously examines the minds of modellers. (And quite rightly, you may say!!) But why do we build models? We're control freaks and want to create something that we can control. We want to escape from the reality of the world. To satisfy a natural inborn desire to gaze at a miniature of the big one. Or just because it's creative and artistic. (And I'm in no doubt the achievements of engineers, model or otherwise are artistic.) Perhaps all these reasons are at the heart of why we model and members will no doubt be able to add more. Ian Murray touches on yet another aspect of modelling this month in his lovely report, *5" Gauge Irish Mail* – it can lend itself to be great fun.

Modellers are often accused of seeing the things they model through rose-tinted spectacles and ignoring the reality of what they seek to recreate in miniature. Certainly the many railway enthusiasts wallowing in nostalgia (and I count myself among them) for the days of the steam railway prefer to ignore the hardships which went with working with steam during all those years in Britain up until 1968. And I suspect this applies to modellers of boats as well. How many models of tramp steamers have been built without the modeller being aware of conditions on board? This month Peter Kearon puts the record straight and presents reality in a consuming account of what life was like at sea in the 1950s. Peter writes, 'It is a true glimpse into sea life as it was in this particular, and unusual case, some 50 years ago and I think a reflection of sea life during the previous 50 years. Except for the writer everything has been swept away: the ship, the company and probably many of the people.'

Both Ian and Peter's tales, despite being so different will strike a cord with many members and provoke their thoughts.

Grahame Ainge

News from the Tyttenhanger Committee

In September the Tyttenhanger Committee will be taking over the Loco Section meeting. At this meeting it is proposed that the Committee will put forward various proposals to the membership for discussion. The aim of this meeting is to gauge the opinions of the membership so that plans can be drawn up and work can progress, as it will be getting close to the start of the winter work parties, we will also be asking for volunteers for the different activities at Colney Heath over the winter.

Also at this meeting an election for the Loco Section's six representatives will occur. This is your opportunity to take part in the running of the Society, so if you do not like how activities at Colney Heath are being run this is your chance to change them. This meeting would also be a good opportunity to stand for Loco Section Leader.

The September Loco Section meeting is important for the future of Colney Heath. What we should and shouldn't do will be decided at this meeting so do come along.

Donal Corcoran

The July General Meeting by OMAH (Our Man At Headquarters)

Donal started the meeting with a couple of announcements, he then went on to introduce our speaker for the evening, Mike Chrisp with a two-way talk and discussion entitled Measure Twice-Cut Once. Mike had brought along a variety of measuring devices and reiterated that he wanted audience participation, as Leonard Sachs used to say on the Old-Time Music-Hall show, "chiefly yourselves". Mike began by suggesting that it is a useful thing to plan ahead, think about the job before starting and keep a log of what you have done. Mike Collingwood thought that this was an excellent suggestion, one which he had done himself but unfortunately had been unable to read his own writing later!

Marking out. There are a number of mediums available for this and it was obvious that everyone had their own favourite, engineers blue, copper sulphate, marker pen, etc. A couple of slightly more unusual ones being using an air brush to apply a suitable colour and also, on steel, to heat up the surface so that it discolours which gives a good surface for fine lines. Ideally the medium should be fairly long lasting, or at least until the cutting is complete. An exception to this is brass platework on a clock which is going to be visible and polished, if one scribes lines too deeply it will require a lot of polishing to get rid of them. Ron Thorogood said that he was always careful to make the lines as thin and shallow as possible also to limit them to the minimum area of the point of measurement. On the point of permanence Roger Bell said that having drawn a line he always pop-marked the ends so that he had a datum to return to in the event of the marking fading. Derek Eldridge added that it was good practice to put pop-points on a curve to act as witness marks when cutting round. Mike Hodgson said that he had found it useful, having cut a thread, to paint it with engineers blue before applying a chaser so that you could be sure when all the blue had gone you had achieved the correct thread profile.

Mike showed us a variety of scribes and reminded us of the necessity of keeping them sharp, a diamond hone being an excellent means of doing this, if it should be necessary to resort to

the grindstone the barest of pressure is needed and it should be held in line with the outer periphery of the wheel with the point against the direction of rotation, this will prevent scratches and give you a hollow ground point. If you have made two lines, possibly to mark a hole, it should be possible to draw the centre punch along on line and feel a distinct click at the point of conjunction and centre pop it ready for drilling. If you are unfortunate enough to have made the mark slightly off it can be drawn over by leaning the punch at an angle and gently tapping it into the appropriate point. An alternative is to use an archimedian drill with a bit ground to a sharp angle, having found the centre point as before, you can then drill a pop which will have the advantage of being at the correct angle to suit the drill when you make the hole. Mike had a centre finder with a magnifier and centre pop built in, having set the cross hairs over the desired point you put the pop in place of the magnifier and give it a sharp crack. Mike also had a tungsten carbide scribe which had the advantage of not losing its sharp point. Dave Lawrence said that he had a tile cutter which, in addition to being a very useful tool, made the break lines on the tile by means of a tungsten carbide tip which could be removed and used as a scribe.

With regard to large drills tending to make three cornered holes three solutions were offered, one use a piece of cloth over the hole, Derek suggested a piece of emery cloth, emery side down, and Bert Mead, use a small drill first and work up.

Getting your marks in the right places. A combination square can be set to a pretty fair accuracy and provided that you tilt the scribe so that the point is running along the bottom edge of the blade end you will get an accurate mark. If marking for a hole keep the line short so that when the conjunction line is measured from the other edge they do not take up an unnecessary amount of space. If marking a cut-out, such as a hole for a loco horn, having made the marks in three places they can be picked up with the scribe point and the square used to outline the shape. As its name implies the combination square is a very versatile measuring and setting out tool, a good make such as a Moore & Wright or Starrett will be accompanied by a protractor and a vee square which can be fitted to the blade. There is a spirit level on the protractor and the base of the square enabling you to be able to check levels and uprights. Another useful device in his collection was a trammel, basically a rod with two scribes, one fixed at zero and the other adjustable so that you can set up two points via a suitable ruler. As shown it was only a foot long but you could get longer rods as required.

Jim Robson observed that, from his limited experience, if you are making a sequential series of marks, such as the frames of a loco, measuring from point to point has a tendency to build up errors. If you have access to a trammel, ideally one as long as your frames, and a three foot rule, having marked and popped a suitable point at the front end, such as one of the fixing holes for the buffer beam, you can use that pop mark as a datum for marking the rest of the longitudinal points thus halving the error. Bert Mead said that he always used a straight edge as his datum.

Mike mentioned the square, one of the basic aids to setting out in any workshop, does not take kindly to being dropped. A simple check is to scribe a line, turn the square over and check that the edge lines up with the mark.

David Harris had brought the brass cab roof from his 5 inch gauge Britannia, currently under construction. This had given him a bit of a problem which initially looked simple, ie to cut a 45° angle at the leading corners of the roof. If you cut to 45° in the flat it is no longer relatively true when the roof is curved to the required 6in. radius so it needed to be cut after bending. The first problem was holding it since any downward pressure would change the radius and making a wooden block to go under it was a bit of a chore so in the end he marked out the line with electricians tape by eye, and cut and filed it then checked that the angle was correct via a piece of steel angle held in a clamp to give the requisite 45°. (It certainly looked good to me.) Jim McDonald commented that he usually made a dummy out of cardboard

before doing a complex bit of platework, cardboard being cheaper than brass in the event of error. David agreed with the idea and had done so himself but although it showed up the problem it didn't help to solve it.

Mike Hodgson produced a dial gauge to which he had fixed what he called "an elephants foot" in place of the usual ball shaped measuring tip. This had proved to be advantageous when mounting a cylinder head on a milling table to get it level before taking a skim with a fly-cutter.

Checking the size of a bored hole. One could use; internal micrometer, telescopic bore gauge or two slip gauges rung and pushed together until they fitted the bore. This enabled a parallel check and diameter by measuring the slips after removal. He also had a rather nice internal micrometer with three tips which expanded into the bore when the thimble was turned, thus reducing the error inherent in two point readings. Another useful tip when boring, turn a gauge to the exact diameter, with a small step to check when you are almost at the correct size.

Mike Collingwood said that he had problems with telescopic gauges; he was getting different readings after each insertion until Tom Luxford told him to push it into the bore at an angle, straighten it then tighten and withdraw. After doing so he was getting consistent readings. Mike Hodgson suggested using a Morse taper with blue on it pushed into the bore until it stops then measuring at the point where the blue has not been removed.

After some further tips, both from Mike and the audience, including some anecdotes from Peter Badger, the meeting closed at 10 pm amid applause both for Mike and the participants. The next General Meeting will be at the track at Colney Heath hosted by the Stationary Steam Section.

Tyttenhanger Gazette **by Roger Bell**

I write this brief report more for perpetuity than content, for those who did not venture to the track for the July loco' meeting. Due to heavy rain throughout the afternoon I feared that my arrival at the track would be met with a locked gate, but about fifteen or so of us had come along. There was no barbecue but plenty of good company and pots of tea.

As usual a yacht sailed on the pond and an electric loco made good progress on the main line. It was pleasant to sit in such peaceful surroundings and chat freely amongst friends about all the usual and the diverse subjects.

As the chill of late evening passed over us several left but at about nine p.m. undaunted, the American style loco' 'Marie E' appeared in steam on the main line. I stood by the workshop as it passed by, the fire glowing in the fading light, the safety valves lifted just before entering the tunnel, it was running well and was after all what our interest is all about.

A New Video Section Leader

Would members please note that John Old has stepped down as Video Section Leader and we now have a new leader in Dave Lawrence who's address and telephone number appear in the list of Officers etc. on the back page of the News Sheet.

Letters Page

Many Thanks

On behalf of the children and staff from St Luke's School a big thank you is sent to the many people that made the visit a great success. The children enjoyed the day immensely. They were still asking about the trains the next day and one of the boys has persuaded his dad that he should have a small train for his next birthday. There would have been some thank you's from the children had it not been the end of term.

We would love to come again next year!

Once again thank you
Pam Corcoran

Marine Mutterings By Bernard Lambert

Our two remaining major events, the North London Regatta and the Vintage Toy Boat Regatta will occur between my writing and your reading these Mutterings. I have my fingers crossed for good weather and a good turnout!

The water has been well used on most Sunday and Thursday afternoons and we hope to see many of you there with your boats for Marine evenings at Colney Heath on the fourth Friday each month.

In my idle moments my thoughts are beginning to turn to what to do this winter to improve the boating facilities – your thoughts on this subject will be most welcome. If you have no thoughts you will have to put up with whatever the working party fancy doing!

The question of whether you want to resume winter meetings at Finchley also needs to be decided soon – so let's be hearing from you.

Enjoy the boating - Bernard Lambert

Dates for your Diary

Fri. 27th. August

Marine evening - 7 pm at Colney Heath

Fri. 24th. September

Marine evening - 7 pm at Colney Heath

The 5" gauge Irish Mail

By Ian Murray

One Saturday in June, as a result of something Deanna saw in the local paper, I made my way to the Wrexham model engineering track which is situated in the grounds of a hotel - and very pleasant it is too. What had caught my wife's eye was a re-enactment of the "Irish Mail" in an effort to raise money for a local hospice.

I arrived at around noon to find a 5" gauge parallel boilered Scot 6159 "The Royal Air Force" lapping the raised track at speed, pulling five passenger cars, all in LMS maroon. On the front car was a supplementary water tank behind the driver with a helper (? fireman) sitting on the second car ready to switch on an electric pump to replenish the tender as needed. The last car had the guard and the mail exchange apparatus for picking up and dropping off "mailbags".

Enquiries of a smiling stationmaster in top hat, frock-coat etc. revealed that the Euston to Holyhead journey had been scaled down to about 160 laps of the track, that the passenger cars represented a scale load, scale speeds were being observed and that water (in the shape of water bottles hurriedly grabbed by the fireman) could only be picked up where the troughs were positioned in reality. The journey time would be over four hours (!!!) with crew changes at Rugby and Chester.

I was offered a small brown envelope into which to make my charitable contribution. Having slipped a groat or two into the envelope I sealed this and wrote my name and address on the front. Within a few minutes I was informed that the mail was about to be collected. The envelopes were placed in a brown painted tin which was hung from a magnet on the trackside arm and I watched as the Scot, moving at perhaps a scale 50mph, came off the bottom curve and headed up the main straight towards the station. The guard had swung out the net and there was a real feeling of anticipation amongst the onlookers. The net swept by and in a twinkling there was the "mailbag" lying in the net and being swung inboard by the guard. A good natured cheer went up from the assembled throng as the driver opened the throttle and the loco accelerated through the station and disappeared round a bend.

A few laps later (and with the station's "Euston" sign changed for "Rugby") I watched the Scot roll in for it's first stop. The driver (Dave Wilson, the builder of the loco and the driving force behind the day) smiled as the loco's safety valves lifted - and this after about one and a half actual hours of continual running. The new driver settled into his seat and as Dave had arrived a few minutes ahead of time I was able to look at the finely detailed loco and admire the wonderful collection of surprised Aphids adorning the bluff smokebox door.

I stayed at the track to watch the rest of the journey which ended with 6159 whistling a triumphant arrival at Holyhead, met by the frock-coated stationmaster and cheered by all the watching crowd which had quite built up by now. Dave's begrimed face again broke into a grin as, moments after stopping, the safety valves again lifted! Talk about a job well done and not a "mailbag" dropped. .

I received my self-addressed envelope - duly stamped "Irish Mail" through the post several days later with a card of thanks from the hospice. I later learnt that over eight hundred pounds was raised and the whole event showed terrific imagination and was a great credit to all concerned.

A Life in the Merchant Navy in the 1950s.

By Peter Kearon

The grim experiences of a young engineer serving in a war-time built freighter on his first trip to sea.

Reardon Smith vessels were distinguished by a red funnel with a large black "S" on each side. Hogarths of Glasgow, a similar outfit, used "H" as its insignia. Starvation Smiths or Hungry Hogarths, take your pick but some sage had got it completely right. An anagram (8.4) of the letters Reardon Smith is extremely rude but is the true and usual description of that simply awful company.

The run-down vessels of the British Merchant Navy which had survived the war were a sorry collection but even then the gulf between the best - generally liner and tanker companies - and arguably the worst - tight-fisted owners such as Reardon Smith still embedded in a pre-war scrooge mentality is beyond understanding. As my apprenticeship had been with locomotives I had yet to realize that unpalatable fact.

On my 21st birthday I became a time-served fitter and turner or as my indentures list "Locomotive erection, fitting and turning." On that same day I was sacked as was customary. In 1951, for many young men in heavy industry the next move was to go to sea and I had already made preparations. The largest shipping company in Cardiff was the Reardon Smith Line which operated 20 or so tramp vessels commonly named after North American cities - "Fresno City", "New Westminster City" and for my pleasure "Jersey City" which I joined at the Meadowside Granary, Glasgow, where she was discharging her previous cargo.

Travelling overnight to Scotland gave me my first experience of being hauled over Shap and Beattock by a Stanier Pacific, "City of Leicester" which hauled the "Night Scot" between Crewe, where the Cardiff train terminated, and Glasgow Central. I was in a crowded coach immediately behind the tender and I can still remember how that engine slipped and slipped on the banks: the driver's arm must have ached after closing and opening the regulator hundreds of times.

From the station I lugged my suitcase on to a tram which for a penny took me along the Dumbarton Road to Meadowside where I joined the ship in time for breakfast and in time to start a day's work: no allowance for that all night journey!

"Jersey City" of 6700 tons gross - about 10,000 tons deadweight - was a rat-run, cockroach-infested utility tramp ship, war-time built at Bartrams Yard in Sunderland in 1942. Power was supplied by a triple-expansion engine with poppet valves on the HP, piston valves on the IP and a slide valve on the LP cylinder and took saturated steam from three oil-fired Scotch boilers. In good weather a speed of nine knots could sometimes be achieved.

Conditions were harsh. Such luxuries as air conditioning or even refrigerators - except for the meat room - had not been thought of for the simple reason that "Jersey City" was built to be sunk. Somehow she had survived some of the most desperate years of the war. The engine-room staff, I won't say officers, consisted of a chief engineer, 2nd,

3rd and 4th watchkeepers and two juniors of which I was one. My pay was £26 per month plus overtime. Most men on board were Glaswegians who had signed on during the previous few days, the exception being the near-permanent engine-room greasers and fuemen who were Somalis, excellent little brown men who appeared to know every valve in the ship.

I was allocated Ibrahim as my fitter's mate and we got along well together repairing pipes, pumps and endless bits and pieces. We worked the normal daytime hours, 8 to 5 and I should have been allowed Saturday afternoon and Sunday free but "for experience" I was changed to watchkeeping at weekends which meant that overtime was not paid as Watchkeepers work a seven-day week. Monday morning back to daywork.

As soon as discharge of the previous cargo (of grain) was completed we sailed down the Clyde, rounded the Isle of Man and southern Ireland and headed out into the Atlantic. to a destination kept furtively secret despite the fact that every ship charter is published daily in "Lloyd's List" for all to see. I soon learnt that rationing was the rule. Food was at minimum levels but perhaps worse was to discover that even water was held back as only a limited quantity was pumped up daily and by 5pm when I finished work the taps ran dry. There was a handpump outside the galley where a bucket of water could be drawn then heated on the coal-fired galley stove when the cook had finished his work. "Jersey City" had a minimal freeboard and took water over the deck even in quite calm weather; In rough weather getting water was dangerously impossible and recourse had to be made to washing from a bucket in the engine-room. Such was Smith's regime of economy.

In some waters it was possible to entice flying fish to glide in towards a light on a hatchcover. From landing on the deck to leaving the galley frying pan took no more than ten minutes. Tasted a little like mackerel but who cared - it was food.

On those first days of the outward voyage I met an awful example of man's inhumanity to man. For cheapness there were four deck cadets, three with some sea time but one a first tripper. It was felt necessary to-inflict on the new boy every form of mental and physical humiliation while he suffered the awful pangs of seasickness. As the vessel headed into the Atlantic seas he was sent to stand the midnight watch on the forecandle, bouncing up and down in the cold and wet, supposedly as a lookout. In truth he would have failed to see Mount Everest had it loomed up. He was supposed to report "lights are bright sir" (navigation lights) but such an action was beyond thinking and although he dutifully shouted those words he failed to notice that the mast headlight did not function and remained so until the next pilot reported this fault.

But there was a much more serious consequence. Some days later the mate ordered him to lay out and secure a rope ladder into an aft hold to allow crew access for cleaning. In his misery, sickness and exhaustion he failed to make proper lashings and the ladder collapsed with the weight of the first seaman who fell 30ft or so on to the propeller shaft casing and broke his back. The ship should have headed for the nearest port but to avoid loss of charter time an easy deviation was made days later when we reached Hamilton, Bermuda where the victim, lashed to a hatch board was winched onto a waiting tug. Who knows what became of him. And what of that young cadet?

Did he go on to become a captain and realize that a severe kicking is necessary to turn a boy into a man?

For the whole of the voyage the cook remained solidly drunk but continued to supply meals of a sort. He told repeatedly the story of a young American couple who had eloped. The boy telephoned the father to advise "I'm going to Tampa with your daughter"

It was finally revealed that we were going to Galveston, Texas to bunker and to load grain. The heat and humidity in the cabins was staggering but to open a port hole meant inviting hordes of blood-sucking mosquitos. Thankfully those Texans knew how to load quickly and we were on our way, this time to India. We crossed the Atlantic, steamed along the Mediterranean and came to Port Said. We waited for the next convoy; I took a stroll along the deck to the poop where I found a new mooring rope being passed into a dhow tied alongside. The bosun came over to me and made it quite plain that I had seen nothing and would say nothing; I obeyed!

We passed through the canal and into the sweltering heat of the Red Sea where one of the boilers suffered a sudden leakage at the back end of a furnace, about 75 tubes in all. With boiling water running out it was necessary to set up planks along the furnace and a platform at the back end for standing upon. The chief engineer insisted that pressure must be maintained at 50 lb/in² by flashing fires in adjacent furnaces. It was not a job for the chief engineer, the second remembered a dangerous kidney problem and the other junior just couldn't understand how a tube expander worked. It was just possible to crawl in, expand one tube and crawl out. We three survivors worked non-stop for 24 hours before all the leaks were sealed.

Despite the ghastly conditions I comforted myself with the thought of all the overtime I was earning. When I mentioned this my hopes were soon disabused by learning that such work came under the heading "Safety of the Ship" for which no overtime is paid. In fact overtime for the whole seven-month trip amounted to £30, just one pound per week. -

We eventually reached Bombay (as it was then known) where dockside notices announced the message "Don't hit the natives", perhaps a form of amusement in pre-1948 days. Opening the boiler doors showed that the leakage had left substantial salt deposits along many tubes; Ibrahim and I spent days with an iron bar and a flogging hammer punching out this salt until, when we were nearly finished, the chief engineer came along with a crowd of workmen. "You've done enough, Peter, these men will take over from you". My suspicious mind felt that a good part of that repair bill would end up in the chief engineer's pocket.

One of the boilers had been blown down and the bottom manhole doors removed to allow internal cleaning, by a gang of young men, of scale on the furnaces, combustion chambers and tubes. The boiler was still hot, ventilation was nil but these cleaners were fed in through a door and had to stay there. The conditions were insufferable but a sturdy boss man armed with a long cane ensured that no-one escaped and any attempt to do so was repulsed with ferocious beatings. Needless to say the cleaning was of little value but again I felt that Rupee notes made up for cleaning. I have often wondered whether that Indian boss had read the notice about not hitting the natives.

We sailed on to Colombo- now Sri Lanka- where the harbour was like a ship cemetery with masts, funnels and bits of accommodation sticking out of the water, proof of Japanese bombing already five years earlier. We were led along a narrow channel to the bunkering berth. Then on to Geraldton, Western Australia, to load more grain for India, this time to Navlaki where we berthed in a wide estuary. Scores of native families came onboard and set up homes on the deck where for two weeks they slept and ate. The grain was in bulk which was scooped into bags then hand-stitched across the top; 20 or so bags were stacked into nets then slung over the side into waiting barges.

My job, now as night fitter, was to attempt to keep the winches from falling apart from 6pm to 8 o'clock the next morning. Food was left out for the night shift, generally a slice of bacon, an egg and some bread. which could be cooked on the galley stove, every man for himself. It was impossible to keep food left out free from cockroaches as these objectionable creatures could trace any food wherever hidden; a plate with a horde of cockroaches covering it is disgusting sight but needs must, they were brushed aside and the food cooked and eaten

Again back to Australia, this time to Fremantle, where we loaded grain for the UK. Six weeks later, Christmas Day, 1951 we steamed up the Mersey and berthed that evening at a granary in Birkenhead. Drink flowed free, old grievances were remembered such that sickness and blood were everywhere. As a non-drinking coward I stayed away from the action and packed my few possessions only to find that clothing in my drawers had been gnawed by rats.

It emerged that some so-called officers had on berthing borrowed money from the careful Somalis who had the unsporting idea that it would be repaid when we signed off, the day after Boxing Day. Instead three Glaswegians, the second mate, the radio operator and the other junior engineer ran off without settling their debts. I helped the second engineer to get his bags to Lime Street station to catch the evening Glasgow train. The platform, in December gloom was shrouded in steam from leaking carriage heating pipe joints but we could glimpse the three debtors crouched behind boxes and further along a pair of Somalis carrying knives.

I bade farewell to the second engineer and made my way to the front of the train where an unrebuilt Royal Scot was making its own steam bath from safety valves and cylinder drains. I watched her slipping and skidding on the wet track as she pulled away into the great stone cutting of Lime Street leaving the platform deserted. The next day I took a train from Birkenhead to Cardiff and when I arrived home my mother asked if I had been to Belsen!

It was time to move on, time to put behind me all traces of that miserable company. I didn't know then that I would be engaged in various trades associated with shipping for the next 40 years. Good years, in fact the golden years.

The views expressed in this News Sheet are not necessarily
those of the Chairman or Council of the NLSME