

S.A.T.S.

**PO BOX 2454
DURBAN
4000**

Chairman: Derek McManus
Tel. (O): +27 (0)31 3039563
Tel. (H): +27 (0)31 7673719
Secretary: Ernest Nellmapius
ernest@bsu.co.za
Cell: +27 (0)83 253 7975
Tel (O): +27 (0)31 202 8242
Fax: +27 (0)31) 201 2458



**PO BOX 4515
CAPE TOWN
8000**

Chairman: Tony Nicholas

cptchairman@generalbotha.co.za
Tel. (O): +27 (0)21 421 4144
Fax: +27 (0)86 604 0811
Cell: +27 (0)82 555 2877
Tel. (H): +27 (0)21 788 5957

GENERAL BOTHA OLD BOYS' ASSOCIATION

<http://www.generalbotha.co.za>

May 2007

JOINT NEWSLETTER

Should your address details change, please send your updated details to:

Tony Nicholas, cptchairman@generalbotha.co.za, Cellphone: 082 555 2877, Phone (H): 021 788 5957.

Please send any articles you may wish to be included in the Newsletter to:

Dennis Henwood, mailto:dhenwood@iafrica.com, Phone (H): +27 (0)21 6716373. Fax: +27 (0)21 6713816

Greetings from a wet and cool England, from where this edition is being compiled. Which proves a point – no, not about the weather! The point is that this is truly an international letter bringing together Obies from all over the world with contributions from every quarter. Although it may be managed and distributed from Cape Town, with modern communications the compilation and editing (Scribe) may be done by anyone wherever they happen to be. You are all welcome to contribute and offer your services.

I want to make special mention of those who participated in the “Badge Auction” which was such a great success. You will recall in the February Newsletter I proposed a fundraising auction. Well I am pleased to report that there were nine bidders (Ian Appleton, Patrick Atwood, Okkie Grapow, Byron Higgins, Tony Millin, Peter Morris, John Orrock, Gordon Schoeman and Lance Tiedt). The hammer went down at the Noon Gun to the successful bidder, John Orrock at R1,500. It was subsequently suggested that the other bidders donate the equivalent of their bids in the spirit of the fundraising. Okkie Grapow and Tony Millin responded magnanimously. The total raised is R2,900. Thank you to all of you who generously participated in this exercise, and congratulations to the proud new owner of the Boat Badge, John Orrock. The original intention was to use the funds for the GB display at the SAN Museum in Simon’s Town. Subsequently there has been a renewed initiative to place commemorative plaques at Gordon’s Bay informing the public of the Bothie’s presence there, and about the origin of the Stone Anchor on the hill above. The Cape Town Committee has begun work towards this and we look forward in the near future to have further news for you.

In this May edition you will read news from the Branches as well as Tony Nicholas’ regular contributions which features SOS, Anchors Aweigh, Scranbag, The Legend Lives On and SA’s Maritime Heritage. This month is also the 60th anniversary of the sinking of the SATS GENERAL BOTHA in Simon’s Bay, and Tony has something to tell us about that. There is also the second of a series about the Clippers by Alastair Mackay. So read on and enjoy. It is also interesting the number of outsiders who find this letter on the web and call to find out more. I had one such call from a James Hutchinson in Beaufort West tracing the Dickson Obies (see SOS Dickson) for his family tree. Thank you James for making contact and putting us in touch with the surviving Dickson Old Boys. (*Scribe*)

FORTHCOMING CAPE TOWN EVENTS.

The March joint lunch with the Master Mariner's was surprisingly poorly attended. Please be assured that the new caterer at the lunch venue is proving to be a success. Good grub and pints at competitive club prices together with a presentation on a subject of interest is too good to miss. Details of the next meeting follow. Please remember to book.

- Venue: Royal Cape Yacht Club, Duncan Road, Table Bay Harbour.
- Date & time: Tuesday 12th June, 1130 for 1200, lunch served at 1300.
- Price: R37 per person for a good plate of victuals. Partners welcome.
- Subject: Lunch preceded by an interesting presentation from Old Boy Nick Sloane of a wreck removal in the Azores Islands.
- RSVP: Kathy Nicholas, phone 021-7885957 or email cptchairman@generalbotha.co.za or fax 086 604 0811 by Monday 1200, 11th June.

FROM THE BRIDGE OF s.s. CAPE TOWN – Tony Nicholas

The AGM followed by the Commissioning Day Dinner held early March, although a very successful evening was very poorly attended. But at the same time we were heartened by out of town visitors which we welcome. The continued decline in attendance by members at this highlight of our year's activities has been the subject of much debate in our committee meetings [accompanied by a number of cold ones]. It is evident that the reason therefore is not decline in the interest and fellowship of our members but rather our advancing years making more unattractive to drive at night. Thus we need to review the format of the AGM & Commissioning Day Dinner and we have a few ideas in mind. E.g.

- Hold the AGM on a Saturday @ 1100 followed by a Commissioning Day LUNCH thereafter. Invite our partners to attend although they would have to while away the 90 minutes whilst we conduct the AGM.
- Continue the present format with an evening dinner and invite our partners to join us. Again our partners would be subjected to the wait whilst we conduct the AGM.
- Hold the AGM on a different date to the Commissioning Day Dinner/Lunch including our partners in the Commissioning Day celebrations.
- Hold the AGM prior to the March lunch which traditionally excludes partners.

There are so many different combinations and proposals that it may be difficult for your committee to decide on the correct course to suit all members. Therefore we invite your comments. This is a very important decision for your committee to make and therefore we invite constructive debate from members to assist us in deciding the correct course. Please send your thoughts and suggestions on the subject to the Cape Town chairman's address details in the header of this publication. Mail, facsimile or email.

During the year I am frequently asked for the dates of the next AGM & Commissioning Day Dinner although I publish the detail in this publication at least 10 months in advance. So all take note; the 2008 dates are Friday 14th, Saturday 15th and Sunday 16th March. Although we may change the format of the meetings as discussed above, the mentioned dates are our decided Bothie dates for 2008. So place these dates firmly in your diaries and start preparing your travel arrangements and everything else in your lives around these important dates.

By the time you read this publication the first dive on the wreck of our ship shall have already taken place. This first dive is planned for the 13th May which is the exact date of the 60th anniversary of her scuttling. Should this newsletter reach you by some miracle before the 13th May please refer to our February publication for details of the lunch meeting. On this date she achieves National Heritage status, but more about this in a further publication. The dive team shall make three or even four dives on her during the coming months and shall be taking photographs and videos of her during the dives. The team shall prepare a presentation which we intend to view at the September lunch. Thus watch this space for further details. Furthermore a report from the web master of our website, Bill Scott; "Dave Powell gave me some photographs last year which were given to his Mother by Mrs. Pennington, widow of Captain Joe Pennington. They were obviously taken professionally and as far as I know are the only official photographic records of the ship in the late thirties. I have put them on the web site

under History > The Ship > Ship Photos. There are two 'albums' which I've called Captain Pennington's Photo Albums. A suitable addition on the anniversary of the scuttling." Thanks Dave & Bill. This all adds to the history and legend of our Ship.

SOUTH AFRICA'S MARITIME HERIATGE

On the subject of heritage, The Commodore of the Traditional Boat Association recently raised our awareness again of the sad situation of the Maritime Museum in Cape Town. Our first museum display was housed at the Maritime Museum in the V&A Waterfront. However, after a few successful years there the museum was left with no alternative but to reduce their foot print which would have resulted in much of our G.B. display being mothballed. Thus our GB Trustees at the time made the wise decision to relocate our display in its entirety to the S.A. Naval Museum in Simon's Town. The TBA Commodore writes; "this brings us to a sadder and not so successful situation. The maritime museum seems to be in total disarray with no clear direction at all. There is much speculation as to its future but apparently without any meaningful decisions having been made to date. As you are all probably aware, Cape Town currently does not have a maritime museum, the last one being shut down and mothballed in order to make way for more lucrative commercial ventures. A totally inadequate space has been set aside on the first floor within the old I&J building and an even smaller space at the Castle to house a token of what was the museum. The futures of the floating displays, namely Somerset and Alwyn Vincent, seems to be even bleaker. Surely this is a travesty! Are we as South Africans and more importantly Capetonians, not proud of our maritime heritage? Who is fighting for the cause? The TBA and the maritime museum have had a long association with obvious areas of mutual interest. Is it not partly our responsibility, as TBA, together with other similar institutions and associations to ensure that our heritage is protected? Even although our current national ruling party may not have a close connection with the sea, do we just sit back and, in the name of progress, watch more of our culture being destroyed for the benefit of another clothing store, restaurant or flea market manned by aliens? Clearly the national government is not interested and the timing probably not appropriate to lumber our Mrs. Zille with yet another challenge. Who has some creative ideas on the matter? Some extraordinary lateral thinking is required. What cannot be argued against is the fact that it is certainly appropriate for Cape Town to have a world-class maritime museum." No doubt this shall initiate some interesting and hopefully constructive debate among our members.

SOS

Peter Carelse 1982 last known to be somewhere in Gauteng. We are also trying to locate **Ken Brown** who previously sailed with Unicorn. **Michael Singer Stokes 1956/57** is also being sought and we have no details of him on our Muster List. Anyone out there knows of these three, let me know urgently.

We have five Dickson's on our Muster List and of these a father and three of his sons followed him on the Bothie, the father being:

Michael Arnold Dickson 1923/24. Born June 1920, son of Francis Dickson and Florentina Johanna ed. High School De Aar, Cape Province; Cadet Draft 1923-5. In 1925 Michael Arnold Dickson became apprenticed to the Houston Line, and served in the SS Hesione, gaining his First Mate's certificate in 1938. Soon after the declaration of war he became a Sub-Lieutenant in the SADF, but while on service contracted pulmonary tuberculosis and was discharged as permanently unfit for duty. He died on 17 October 1946, from the effect of pulmonary tuberculosis and enteritis. His death was confirmed by the military authorities to have been directly attributable to war service.

The fifth Dickson on our Muster List is:

James Dickson 1925/26 #233. Was coxswain of Port Watch & quarter Deck Boat Crew. After G.B. joined the stock exchange, then Dittmans as a Confectionist and later to Shabani Asbestos Mine, qualifying as an electrician. Then on to Que Que as Mine Manager and Engineer of the Primrose Mine. Returned to S.A. to work underground at Randfontein South Centicle Shaft. Later back to Chingola, Northern Rhodesia on construction of a power station. Again returned to S.A. City Deep Mines and joined the army in M.E.B. Mines Engineering Brigade T.E.C. served in Egypt and Italy in the armoured division. After WWII returned to Cape Town and joined Gearing & Jamieson as an Electrician. Active on various councils - industrial council; joint mechanics'; apprentice board; electrical union. Later joined Chrysler at Elsie's River, Cape Town and retired from there in 1973. Deceased 24/10/98.

Michael Dickson's family is now asking whether Michael and James were related. Does anyone remember them and know the answer? Any information of these two ex cadets of ours will be welcome.

WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

An unusual SOS has come in to us via the Simon's Town Museum as follows:

"I am a former ship master aged 70 now retired. I am trying to contact a lad I was a fellow cadet with on the Ellerman City Line vessel City of Oxford about 1955. My memory for names is not what it was, but he was from Cape Town, but sadly I cannot remember his name. He was a keen Springbok fan and a very good chap. City Line of course is long gone and its officers scattered to the winds. At that time I was living in the U.K. but came to Australia with a new ship for a new company as chief officer. I subsequently got my command and retired at 65. Considering the changes in the industry I consider myself lucky to have managed a full career out of it. In retirement I think of many of the guys I sailed with but the lad from Cape Town was one of the best. I am trying to find out what happened to him. He was a former Botha Boay if memory serves. But other than the above can furnish no further details. Not even his name. Captain Jim Brunton, Melbourne, Australia."

Besides sailing with Ellerman's the description fits all of us, jolly goods chaps that we are. Do you recognize yourself? Contact Cape Town chairman, details in the header.

SCRANBAG

MIKE NEILL 1958/59 #2119. Mike left Australia a few months ago to USA. There he bought himself a boat followed by a move to Rio de Janeiro. His intention is to spend his retirement [or part thereof] sailing around the world. As far as I know Mike should now be on the water sailing for Cape Town.

GERT SMIT 1957/58 #2074. Gert joined the Public Service December 1958 as a clerk in the Department of Justice. Transferred to the Department of Agriculture February 1959 and served in the Finance and Work Study divisions. Was requested to start up and run an IT function for the Department of Agriculture in 1962 and later a computer centre for central government. Joined the National Treasury in 1983 and the House of Assembly in 1989. Became Director-General for the Department of State Expenditure [now National Treasury] in 1993 and retired December 1997. Joined De Loittes as a consultant on government finances and finally retired in 2006.

PETER HALL 1952/1953. Peter was a cadet with Ellerman & Bucknall Hall Line and then joined Rickett & Coleman in Durban for six years. Then joined Royal Swazi Sugar Company on a three year contract before relocating to Johannesburg as a contracts engineer for Babcock Engineering and Howden Engineering. Retired July 2001.

JAMES TODD 1947/48 #1533. After G.B. James joined Anglo Saxon Petroleum Company [Shell Tankers]. After obtaining First Mate FG sailed with two north east coastal companies. In 1957 joined the River Tyne Police in the U.K. and served on the force until 1977 when returned to sea as Master with Effluent Services on various ships until 1991. Retired.

OWEN JOUBERT 1974 #2475. Owen went AWOL in 1993 and this week sent out an SOS for one his shipmate who is also AWOL. Thus we have finally located Owen living in England and working in IT. He mentions that he has a Jaguar sports car, thus IT must be very lucrative over there. Let me know of your next change of address Owen.

THOMAS HARVEY 1958/59 #2107. Elsewhere in this publication is a report on the recent Gauteng Commissioning Day Luncheon which brought some reflection from Thomas. "Something has prompted me to attend my first "Old Boys" get together, possibly seeing the names of some ex ship mates, or those I have had working associations with many years ago. I finally "swallowed the anchor" in 1979 after 4 years as master on tramp ships out of Hong Kong, and after a spell as MD of various companies within Leo Raphaely and Sons, wondered off into the realms of various so-called entrepreneurial ventures, mainly in the project management field, and am still consulting in this area for a crust of bread. Advancing years probably bring a degree of nostalgia, and time for the individualistic loner to get back to roots!"

Alastair Tiddy 1971 #2405. Alastair gives us "a quick heads-up - I am leaving Telstra [Australia] today and have decided to go into private law on my own. Quite exciting, but sobering as I have to go out and get the clients." Well best of luck out there mate.

Alan Haakestad 1983 #2801. Some photographs came our way recently via class mate Chris Sutton of Alan taking delivery of a brand new out of the dockyard 8,700 TEU container ship, the NYK Vesta. These photographs can be viewed on our website. Happy sailing Alan.

David Seeliger 1957/58 #2071. Some hard detective work by one of his class mates has revealed that David has recently left the fair country of Stellenbosch for the doubtful climate of England. Please keep in touch David.

Chris Sutton 1983 #2816. Chris reports: "Same job - same desk - different company name. I joined Seaboard in 2001. In 2005 Seaboard sold a portion of the company to Grindrod Limited who formed Atlas Trading & Shipping. ATS are commodity traders. We trade wheat, maize and soya bean meal. I work in the operations division of the shipping department which charters vessel on either time or voyage basis, to carry the cargoes we buy and sell." In opposition to Obies Gavin Durell and Tim McClure? I trust you are still all mates.

ANCHORS AWEIGH

D.H. CAIN 1953/54. On leaving Bothie Dan went to sea as a Cadet in the British India Steam Navigation company. He stayed with BI as 3rd & 2nd Mates until end of 1961 when he joined Union Steamship Company of New Zealand early 1962 as 3rd Mate, trading mainly on the Australian Coast, NSW to Tasmania. Served as 3rd Mate, 2nd Mate and Chief Officer until mid 1967. Then joined Waratah towage as a tug master in Newcastle, N.S.W. Remained in Newcastle as tug master until November 1992 when he took early retirement. Then bought the Stanley Hotel at Kilroy, Queensland, a small town (population 1500) approximately an hour and a half drive to Brisbane. 1998 sold the hotel and joined the Mooloolaba Coast Guard as a volunteer for a short period, before retirement. Deceased 09/03/2007.

D.J. JOHNSTON 1938/39. Desmond intended to join the Executive Branch of the Royal Navy but failed the eyesight test. However, joined the R.N. 1st May 1941 as a Paymaster Cadet and retired as a Lieutenant Commander in 1960. During his time in the R.N. served in a number of ships from battleships and cruisers to a destroyer. Also served in shore establishments. His war service included a Russian convoy and a Malta convoy which was cut short by his ship, Arethusa, being torpedoed. Also served in the East Indies and Home Fleets. Returned to the Mediterranean in 1954/5 and was involved in operations against Greek rebels. Completed his war service in operations off the French and Italian coast. On leaving the R.N. remained in the U.K. and commenced a second career in the motor trade specializing in administration, personnel and training until retirement. Deceased 14/03/2007.

Our sincere condolences to family and shipmates.

LOGBOOK ENTIRES

I was interested to read in the newsletter that some photographs received from Mrs. Pennington had been put on the General Botha web site. It is good to know that such photographs are being preserved. Before cadets were moved to Red Hill early in 1942 Captain and Mrs. Pennington lived on board the ship in Simon's Town. Consequently cadets often saw Mrs. Pennington and amongst them she was known as Flossie. Whether this was her real name I don't remember. One day I was on gangway duty on the quarterdeck where one of my duties was to answer the ship to shore telephone. A call came through for Mrs. Pennington which I duly put through to the Captain's Quarters. The OOW who happened to be Mr. MacDonald Signaling Instructor asked me who the call had been for. Without thinking and possibly being a bit flustered at handling a call to the Captain's Quarters I said it had been for Mrs. Flossington. I duly received a "bottle" from Mac for my impertinence but I do believe that he was secretly amused at the incident. Later the Pennington's moved to a house in Glencairn and I have a pleasant memory of tea at their house when waiting to board my first sea-going ship at Cape Town at the end of 1942. George MacRobert 1941/42 No. 1188.

I am very sad to hear of the death on John and Sheila Shone. John was on the Recruitment Board when I was interviewed to join the UK Department of Transport in 1977. He asked me where I did my training. On being told GB he asked what I thought of GB. 'The best training school in the world' I replied. He did not let on that he was Bothie. I got the job. In 1984 I was transferred to the Nautical

Section in HQ' John Shone was its head. I worked under him until he retired in 1988. We were sorry to see him depart and I remember his farewell party at which a fair amount of intoxicating liquor was available. I left much the worse for wear. John's time was before the Marine Accident Investigation Branch and he was one of the 'Special Squad' of accident investigators - ready to go with bags packed at short notice. I believe he was one of the investigators of the loss of ROYSTON GRANGE and all hands in a fire following a collision with a tanker in the approaches to Buenos Aires. He had a lot of survey experience and made it to Chief Nautical Surveyor in record time. A sad and wasteful loss of life. Alistair Struthers 196061 #2191.

THE BILTONG & BOEREWORS COMPANY

“South African Traditions alive and well in Canada”

Tel: 1-250-426-3596 E-mail: info@biltongcanada.com Fax: 1-250-426-3598

Together with his wife Mal, **Rod Paterson 1972 #2422** has started **THE BILTONG AND BOEREWORS COMPANY** from our home here in Cranbrook, British Columbia. “Our house has two kitchens and we have converted the one in the basement into "The Company Headquarters." We have been open for just under a year and we were really busy last summer selling boere wors rolls, biltong, droë wors and hot sticks at Farmers Markets and Trade Shows here and in the surrounding area. We had a very good response and had a lot of fun telling Canadians about the origins of our products and of course bringing back memories for the many South Africans that always appeared from somewhere once the smell of boere wors cooking on the coals, began wafting on the breeze. Cranbrook is in South Eastern British Columbia, in the Canadian Rockies. There are six ski resorts and about twenty five golf courses nearby. The area has exceptional fly-fishing and hunting and now that you can get fresh Biltong & Boere wors right here, it is a perfect getaway! Known as ‘The Serengeti of North America’ this region is well worth a visit and we hope that some of you will now consider a skiing or golfing holiday here.” [Well what about it Obies?]

THE LEGEND LIVES ON

JOHN DERING NETTLETON 1931/32 #573

During WWII only three Victoria Crosses, one of the highest military awards, were won by South Africans and one of these was our Old Boy John Nettleton. In its 150 year existence only 1,356 VCs have been awarded and interestingly five were awarded to civilians. Before Bothie Old Boy John Nettleton attended Western Province Preparatory School [known as Wetpups] and there generations of school boys have rushed past a plaque and photograph of their former pupil barely giving it a second glance. But now there is no longer any excuse for the school boys there not to know about their heroic alumnus who was awarded the Victoria Cross for gallantry in the face of the enemy. Nearly 65 years after his death, the WWII bomber pilot was remembered at the unveiling at the school of a photomontage of his school days and his war service, with a replica of the VC awarded to him for a near-suicidal daylight bombing mission over Germany. We contributed a copy of the photograph we have of John posing for a portrait in his Bothie uniform, cap at a jaunty angle of course. Cape Town chairman attended the ceremony and was very impressed by the smart turn out of the school kids and their exemplary manners.

John was born on 28th June 1917 at Nongoma, Natal. He was the grandson of Admiral A.T.D. Nettleton, Paymaster-in-Chief, Royal Navy. His family moved to Cape Town in 1928 and he attended Wetpups from 1928 to 1930. He played in the first cricket teams in 1929 and 1930 and was the athletics Victor Ludorum. After leaving Wetpups he joined the Bothie. He graduated from Bothie at the age of 16 and after some time at sea and some in employment on shore, he was appointed a midshipman in the Cape Town division of the RNVR. His commander at the time is reported to have said that Nettleton would either get a court martial or a V.C!

In 1938, he traveled to England and decided to join the RAF. He graduated as a pilot on 22nd July 1939, two months before the outbreak of the Second World War.

It is interesting to note that a fellow cadet at the General Botha had been Adolph Malan who also forsook a naval career for the air force, and as 'Sailor' Malan was to become one of the RAF's most illustrious and successful fighter pilots.

For a year Nettleton served on training units for bomber crews and in 1941 was promoted Squadron Leader. For five months he participated in day and night bombing raids over Europe, being mentioned in dispatches in December 1941.

His squadron, number 44, with many men from South Africa and Rhodesia, was selected as the first unit to be equipped with the new 4-engined bomber, the Avro Lancaster, and they started training for long-distance, low level raids.

On the morning of 17th April 1942, his squadron was briefed on their target, the MAN diesel engine factory at Augsburg in Germany. This was a target of great strategic importance as the factory made engines for the U-boats that were causing huge casualties to Allied shipping in the Atlantic. His 6-bomber unit flew at 50 feet (16metres) over the channel and Northern France. German fighters intercepted them and, flying in daylight and with no English fighter support, they were sitting targets.

Four out of six were shot down but Nettleton decided to continue to the target and he and the remaining Lancaster dropped their bombs. As they turned for home, the other Lancaster was hit but the pilot managed to land the stricken aircraft. Nettleton reached home in his severely damaged aircraft after a round trip of 11,600 kilometers. His was the only aircraft to return.

On 28th April Nettleton was awarded the V.C. for his outstanding valour in leading the raid. On 17th July he married WAAF officer, Betty Havelock. He spent the next six months training other pilots. On 4th January 1943 he was promoted to Wing Commander and returned to operations. On the night of 12/13 July, he led 14 aircraft of 44 Squadron on a bombing raid to Turin, Italy. He failed to return.

His death was not officially presumed until an announcement was made in The Times newspaper on the 23rd February 1944, the same day that another notice in the paper announced the birth of the son he never saw, John Dering Nettleton.

NEWS FROM DURBAN – Ernest Nellmapius

The KZN branch AGM and commissioning day dinner went off well and was enjoyed by the Obies who were there. The committee was re-elected en-block and is as follows:

Chairman: Derek McManus

Vice Chair: Ray Walker

Treasurer: Alistair Snyders

Secretary: Ernest Nellmapius

Committee: Colin Knowler, Dave De Wet, Tony da Silva, Dave Freeman, George Foulis, Allen Pembroke and Graham Douglas.

Unfortunately Alistair Snyders will soon be leaving us so we are seeking a new Treasurer. Any offers? Our monthly lunches continue to be popular amongst a core of old faithfuls who are always there. For those who have not been to lunch before come and join us at a wonderful venue on the bay at Royal Natal Yacht Club. We meet around 12h30 on the first Wednesday of every month.

UNITED KINGDOM BRANCH – Ted Fisher

Apologies from the UK Branch for the lack of news this past couple of months. Caroline has been through a long period of ill health with two spells in Hospital during March/April which has precluded me focusing on Bothy duties; however, we see light at the end of the tunnel with the situation improving.

Sadly, as is reported in 'ANCHORS AWEIGH' one of our elder Obies Johnny Johnston (38/39) passed away peacefully in March after a long illness. His daughter Fiona has always maintained contact with me on John's behalf responding to news on functions and never failing to apologise for being unable to attend events. Fiona will provide more detail on Johns career for the next Newsletter.

Caroline Shone (one of John Shone's daughters) had agreed to provide a piece for the Newsletter specifically relating to tales of John's life at sea – memories! Since the funeral the family have been involved with matters here and in Australia so watch this space in August.

Chris Copeland (53/54) passed through the country with Jenny – they had hoped to meet with Caroline and myself but ran out of time!!

David Hunt (1985) has I understand relocated to the UK so hopefully he will be in contact at some future date with his address etc.

Ted Fisher e-mail: tedefisher@aol.com Tel +44(0)1903 744400

AUSTRALIAN BRANCH NEWS – Peter O'Hare

An informal lunch was held in Sydney On 17th February and was attended by Alan and June Bole visiting from Liverpool, UK.

We celebrated our annual Commissioning Day Lunch in Brisbane this year on Saturday 17th March.

This was a river cruise on the Brisbane River organized by Andy Fotheringham, our Vice Chairman.

Peter and Jenny O'Hare, Robin and Elizabeth Fisher and John Mc Tavish traveled up from New South Wales. John Fisher and Mike Carrington came from South Australia while from Queensland Paddy and Jules Martin came from Hayman Island, Mike and Margaret Pomfret, Fred and Maureen More and Brian and Jill Hoatson came from the Sunshine Coast. Ian De Villiers accompanied by his son John came from the Gold Coast while Rob Lovell and Janet attended from Gladstone and Andy Fotheringham from Mackay. After the lunch we went to the Port Office Hotel and carried on the socialising until we went our separate ways. A very enjoyable and successful day was had by all. We were without our Chairman Grenville Stevens as he was cruising to UK on the Queen Mary 2. We all spared a thought for Charles Parsons who was unable to make the journey to Brisbane. This would be the first time he has missed a Commissioning day Dinner or Lunch.

Our next get together will be an informal lunch in Sydney at a date to be set in July when we will have John Mellows from Cape Town visiting.

Best Regards to all. Peter O'Hare Hon Sec/ Treasurer on behalf of the Australian Branch.

Gauteng Branch Commissioning Day Luncheon – Ivor Little

The Gauteng Branch held its usual six monthly get-together on Sunday 18 March, the pretext for the get-together being that it was the nearest Sunday to Commissioning Day. We didn't really need any pretext as we were once again able to round up 29 ex-cadets willing to attend (out of a membership of 102!) which by the time all were seated gave us an attendance of 61 guests - enough for a really good party! The function, which was hosted by Rene Poerner and his partner Karen Single, was held at the Linksfield Golf Club just down the road from their home. Karen did the catering in her own kitchen and Rene and some of his friends took care of the logistics. The result was an absolutely outstanding lunch of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, preceded by a starter and followed by plum duff and ice cream as a dessert. This last was the result of much nostalgic reminiscing at previous luncheons about the high standard of Botha cooking, particularly the plum duff and the many uses to which it could be put!. Karen put paid to these stories once and for all by providing a plum duff as it should be made, as evident by the number of people who went back for second helpings! A wide variety of side dishes, even down to chocolates with the coffee, made this the best value for money that any of us had seen for a long time. To add to our enjoyment Karen had also arranged that this meal was sponsored by Carnival City, Fedics and Fagos and was thus also able to provide two bottles of wine per table. All the proceeds of this meal will therefore be held over to cover part the costs of future meals and in this way to keep those costs down. It must also be added that the golf club had a bit of a wild time meeting the needs of the "General Botha" and the pub quite literally ran out of booze and had to send for more! To add to the excitement there was also a fire on the golf course! All jolly good fun.

On a more serious note the meeting took notice of the passing away in September of Elizabeth Robinson. The wife of James Robinson (39/40) she was one of our old stalwarts and she and her family who attended all our functions will be sorely missed.

Our Branch showed a net loss of seven members over the last six months but gained five, so our membership now stands at 102, not bad for somewhere so far from the sea!

Those cadets attending together with wives, partners, children, grand-children and guests, were Frank Wheeldon who got a bottle of wine for being the senior Old Salt present (41/42), Bill Leader and Ted

Page (44/45), Gordon Bennett and Laurie Barnes (46/47), Gordon Cross (47/48), Rene Poerner (48/49), Drummond Terry (50/51), Bob Slatter (51/52), Mike Crewe, Graham Jooste, Ken van der Walt and Jac van Leeuwen (52/53), Ivor Little, Eric Moir and Keith Quayle (53/54), Ian Morrall (54/55), Archie Campbell and Brian Glass (55/56), Donald Forbes (57/58), Thomas Harvey (58/59), Brian Carver (60/61), Kito Holz (61/62), Brian Preiss (64), and Tom Fraser (79) who once again picked up the bottle of wine for being the youngest Chum present. Apologies were received from a further 16 ex-cadets who couldn't make it and these were read out at the luncheon.
Cheers, Ivor.

“Southern” Lunch, Simon’s Town – Ian Manning

We had a successful GENERAL BOTHA "Southern" Lunch on 17 Apr 07 with 17 GENERAL BOTHAS attending. Our table was also graced by Michelle Schooling who is a welcome regular attender. She made the total 18 people.

The next GENERAL BOTHA "Southern" Lunch will be held on the third Tuesday in July 2007 - that is 17 Jul 07 - at 1200 for 1230 at the Seven Seas Club, Simon's Town. Please telephone Brad Wallace-Bradley on 021-786-1957 or Ian Manning on 021-782-1559 before 1200 on Friday 13 Jul 07 to make reservations.

DONATIONS – Treasurer B van der Meulen

We have received generous donations from the following (Sept 06 – March 07):

J. Cooke, D. Powell, B. Greenwood, I. Hare, K. Ellam, A. Malan, W. Scott, B. Dammarall, Michelle Schooling, R. Crossward, I. Dickie, Anderson & Wells, Bassette, I. Appleton, C. Davies, E. Jupp, J.F. Tully, T. Richards, C. Hyman, Bridjman, R. Hogg, A. Fotheringham, McDonald, P. Rogers, B. Greenwood, I. Harvey, J.S. Fisher, B. Broderick, B. Cullen, F. Wheeldon, O. Grappow, J. Orrock, T. Millin, E. Fisher, D. Breckon, E.S. Page, G.J. Swart, T.W. Spencer and M. Neill.

Thank you for your support. These funds will go towards the expense of this and future newsletters, as well as projects preserving our heritage such as the plaques and museum mentioned earlier. It may interest you that printing and postage is required for over 500 addresses of those recipients not on e-mail. In addition there is the cost of our website and domain address. We would not be able to do all of this without your support – thank you!

OBIES AND THE LONDON CONNECTION - B.Wallace-Bradley 1696

I wonder how many of us were members of "Seamark" the long defunct "MN Junior Officers Club", situated off the Minories, nearest tube station - "Tower Hill"? Fifty years ago it was home from home for those of us working for British companies who very infrequently, if at all, got 'home' leave - I remember being away from my home port (Durban) for periods of 4 years and then 3 years.

The Club was a four storey semi-detached pre-WW1 building adjacent to and owned by "Toc H". The other side of the club was shored-up by heavy timbers in a vacant plot - obviously a demolished building - the result of a bombing raid in WW2.

Overseen by a small group of volunteer shipping executives and managed by a resident Housekeeper/Bookkeeper - a Mrs. Kirby, I remember being on leave at various times with the likes of Jim Buchanan 45/46, 'Case' Wagenfeld 50/51 (twelve month-long resident on the top floor, known as the "Crows Nest - with it's own separate study - while studying for Extras); Dave Joyce 50/51. Conveniently located just down the road from Sir John Cass College - for 1st Mates and Masters and a tube ride to "Teddies" (King Edward V11 College) in Limehouse for chaps up for their 2nd Mates, it was within walking distance of the B.O.T. examination centre in Dock St. where we all "passed for Master" as we got our time in. Equally important within walking distance of the famous waterside pub 'The Prospect of Whitby'. The "Brit" members could generally go home for weekends so the "Colonials" would put studying on hold on Friday evenings for a "pint" down at the "Prospect". It claimed to be London's oldest Thames-side pub and attracted clientele from all over London. A resident band provided the music to accompany the almost non-stop sing-a-long - a memorable New

Year's Eve "jolly" involved shaking an escorts hand and then kissing his lovely "deb" - he couldn't very well object as he had just shaken your hand.

Back to "Seamark" - a senior member, elected quarterly to be Mess President, backed up the Housekeeper, and said grace at the evening dinner. A Barkeeper (who co-opted as an assistant) kept the bar stocked from the cellar and kept the Housekeeper informed of bar stocks. The bar ran on a "chit" (honour) system - no money involved - until the end of the week when you found your bill in the letter pigeon hole and settled up with the Housekeeper. An aside - in those days a letter from Durban took 3 days to delivery in London.

Post Script: I attribute the quadrupling of the crude oil price all those years ago and the increasing availability of air travel to the demise of the centuries old shipping companies with their subsequent reduction in staff and therefore the need for organisations like "Seamark".

THE CLIPPERS: The fastest square-riggers in the World.

By Alastair Mackay 1944/45, #1366. PART II.

MORE CHANGES IN THE WORLD

It should be remembered that the world of 1825 did not know railways or electronic communications, these startling inventions were about to be introduced. Railways were being built in Britain and U.S. after the 1840's and they didn't span the U.S. until 1879. The telegraph was developed during this same period, and also took until 1879 before it spanned the world. The thoughtful reader will now realise that shipmasters were used to conducting the whole enterprise of a voyage – from finding and disposing of cargoes, to the management and maintenance of ship, crew, and passengers. It will be deduced that every shipmaster was a part owner of his ship, and, in the Aberdeen Line, George Thompson would direct his ships to a specific trade, but, once the ship had sailed, the entire conduct of the voyage would be left to the captain.

Many seas and oceans had not been charted then, and those that had been well travelled by naval ships – which were the main authorities for carrying out surveys –were not always well done. When I was at sea, between 1946 and 1954, there were still areas where my ships went, that were suspected of having undiscovered reefs. Going back another hundred years, or more, one can readily understand why prudent shipmasters would proceed very slowly in uncertain areas, and local knowledge was greatly prized.

The array of agents, brokers, ship chandlers, transporters, mooring supervisors, and other intermediaries in the complex port establishments of today, did not exist. There were areas, like the Straits of Dover, where it was possible to engage a pilot with local knowledge; but British masters would be requiring local knowledge at their destinations in far-away seas and distant countries. They didn't always trust the locals with local knowledge. As sailings to a particular 'far-away' port became more regular, the elder masters, looking for an easier "shore job", would locate themselves there, and act as agents to secure cargoes, or assist their colleagues due to arrive.

THE GOLD RUSH AND THE TEA RACE

Now I will have to touch, again, on historic moments which had an influence on the building of the Clippers: Until 1849 there was an embargo on foreign ships (which included U.S.) carrying British cargoes to Britain – this so-called Navigation Law was repealed that year. In 1848 gold was discovered in California, and, nearly on the opposite side in Australia, gold was found in 1851. Then, the final cherry on the cake, in 1856, the London tea brokers offered a prize of GBP1 a ton for the ship carrying the first tea cargo of the year into London docks, from China.

The American ship builders were quick to react, firstly to supplying ships to make the voyage around the Cape Horn to San Francisco from New York, for the famed "FortyNiners"; popular name for the men who flocked to California to find and mine gold. It is estimated that 40 000 took the sea route in 1849 alone! American clippers were built of the soft and lighter woods proliferating in the untouched forests of the Eastern states, which made their ships cheaper to build, at first, compared to Britain, where the hardwood forests had been depleted by centuries of shipbuilding. The U.S. railroads had only reached Chicago, which meant that overland routes to California would be tough, and a good reason to take a ship. The top American clipper builder was in Boston, Donald Mckay, and his ships were outstanding:

"Lightning" had the longest day's run of any sailing ship built; 436 miles, and it was a long time before a steamship was able to equal that record. The fastest voyage by these American clippers, between New York and San Francisco, was by the "Flying Cloud" built in 1851. She was 210 ft. long at the waterline, 41 ft. beam, and probably about 1200 tons net. This clipper was renowned for fast passages, and sailed the distance in 89 days on two occasions!

At this juncture I feel that a few words on winds and weather are needed: The Forty-niners who gaily embarked on the voyage around Cape Horn, to make their fortunes, may not have known the fearsome reputation of that promontory at the Southern tip of South America. In 56° Southern Latitude, well below that region known to sailors as the "Roaring Forties", is Cape Horn, where sailing ships and seamen have disappeared without leaving a trace in the turbulent gale wracked seas. For a clipper to try and sail from the Atlantic to the Pacific, during the Southern winter months, was a terrible ordeal for everyone aboard, because the prevailing winds were Westerlies, and a sailing ship would be forced to change her course several times, in order to make progress against a wind blowing in the opposite direction to which she wished to go. Think about those intrepid seamen clawing their way across the yards, to furl a sail, while the canvas flapped in their faces, and the masts swung dizzily in an arc across the sky as the ship rolled below.

All sailing ship masters were cognisant of the wind systems around the globe, and were aware of how they changed with the passage of the seasons. However, as in nature, there were variations, and sometimes one would find, for example, that the South East Trade wind blowing between the Cape of Good Hope and the Equator was reaching well North of the Equator, and that the calms or "Doldrums", North of the Equator were minimal, before picking up the North East Trades. Near the Equator, on every ocean around the world, are areas of calms, known as the "Doldrums", which could pose quite a problem for sailing ships. If there were currents a shipmaster might be able to rely on these to help move his ship in the right direction – but it has been known for ships to launch their boats and, using oars, tow their ship towards the area with wind.

The repeal of the British, so called, Navigation Laws, which allowed foreign ships to trade to Britain with British cargoes, and, indeed, to enter the coastal trade, gave a great boost to American shipowners. They traded between the Orient and Europe, and became very successful due to having larger and faster ships than the British. This was particularly true on the China tea trade, where three of the leading American shipowners became very wealthy. The discovery of gold in Australia, in 1851, was the next stimulus to boost shipping, and George Thompson, sent his Aberdeen Line ship "Phoenician", to Hobson's Bay (now Port Melbourne) with "Diggers" as the miners going "Downunder" were called. She was quite a small clipper, compared to the Americans, at 521 tons net, but returned after a record voyage from Sydney to Plymouth in 83 days; with the first consignment of Australian gold worth GBP81000.

"Gold Fever" became an intense affliction at both the Californian and the Australian gold fields. At both places, where the ships were anchored in the adjacent bays or harbours, it was customary to find the crews had abandoned their ships. It was reported, in June 1852, that there were fifty ships lying in Hobson's Bay, deserted by their crews who were taking part in the gold rush. Between 1851 and 1856 the population of Victoria, the state in which the gold was discovered, increased from 76 000 to 364 000. The China Tea Race, which started in 1856, with its valuable prize, was a stimulus to British shipowners who were overhauling the Americans. Sadly, for the Americans, there were black clouds on the horizon. The American Civil War exhausted that nation, lasting from 1861 to 1865, after which their resources were directed at reparations and rebuilding. Ten years after it started, the Great Tea Race of 1866 saw not a single American in the fleet of eleven clippers which raced from Foochow for London. Covering a distance of 16 000 miles the first ship to the Downs, which a sailor will tell you is the place where you can pick up a Thames pilot, was "Ariel", but she was pipped by "Taeping" who was first into London, after being shaded 10 minutes by "Ariel" at the Downs. The record time was 99 days. Those inclined to fiddle with figures will note that the overall average speed would have been 7 knots.

The Aberdeen Line was steadily expanding its fleet of clippers, and those trading with the Orient and Australia went around the Cape, calling at South African ports. There was rivalry between the shipbuilders of Aberdeen and the Clyde, and the yard of Walter Hood, on the Dee, built the famous clipper

"Thermopylae" in 1868. She held the record for the outward passage, London to Melbourne, in 60 days. From Australia, George Thompson directed his ships to China if there were likely to be a tea cargo available, otherwise they would load wool, or trade between Eastern ports until a cargo for U.K. was available. One of "Thermopylae's" qualities, which helped to make record voyages, described as "Ghosting", was her ability to keep moving with steerage way, in conditions which would see other ships becalmed. During the period 1869 to 1879 she was the leading clipper in the tea races with at least two passage records. Her Captain Kemball was out-standing amongst masters, and it was said that her crew would even rig their blankets to increase the sail area!

It was inevitable that the fastest clippers were built at a time which saw the eclipse of sailing ships by steamships. As was mentioned earlier, steam engines were appearing afloat by 1850's, and it didn't matter, too much, if a steam tug's engine broke down in harbour. But cautious mariners saw to it that the early steamships on ocean voyages were equipped with masts and sails! However, the steam engines on rails and on sea were steadily improving, and the death knell of the sailing ships was sounded by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The windy route around the Cape of Good Hope became redundant for trade to India, the Orient, and Australasia. The Suez Canal saves 4,500 miles for a ship sailing between England and India, and 3000 miles if bound for the Orient and Australasia.

"Thermopylae" made her last voyage from China with tea in 1881, and then traded in wool from Australia until 1895, when she was sold to the Portugues government as a training ship. Sunk with naval honours in 1907, the "Pedro Nunez", as she was named, had not quite reached 40 years' of age. These details come from Cope Comford's book about the Aberdeen Line, whose founder, George Thompson, was my great-great grandfather.

I am indebted to my old colleague, Captain Fred Willis, of Princess Alice Drive, Nahoon, for access to Pitkins Pictorial Guides, for details on "Thermopylae's" great rival: "Cutty Sark", now lying in her own dock at Greenwich. It was Fred's great uncle; Captain John Willis, who gave the order to Clyde shipbuilders, Scott and Linton, to build a ship with the object of beating "Thermopylae". The "Cutty Sark", of nearly identical dimensions to her rival and a few tons less at 963 tons net, was launched in 1869. Her figurehead is the beautiful witch 'Nannie' wearing a linen chemise, or 'cutty sack' (as the olden day Scots describe it); from an old Scots' legend made famous in Robert Bums' poem "Tam O'Shanter". Perhaps her first masters were not dedicated enough, and maybe she was dogged by bad luck, but she never shone as a tea clipper. Then Captain Woodget took command in 1885, and he drove "Cutty Sark" as a clipper should be driven; and she made the fastest passages home, carrying wool from Australia, between 1885 and 1895. During these years she beat her old rival, "Thermopylae", with a record voyage of 69 days, from Newcastle N.S.W. to Lizard Point – the most southern point in England at the Western end of the English Channel – in 1888.

In 1895 "Cutty Sark" was sold to the Portuguese, who were able to trade with her, and if you read Laurence Green's book "Eight Bells at Salamander", he tells of her being towed into Cape Town, dismasted, in 1915. After her Portuguese owners' she returned to the British flag in 1922, being berthed in Falmouth, owned by an old sailing ship master, one Captain Dowman, who restored her to her original state as a full-rigged clipper. In 1936 "Cutty Sark" was presented to the training establishment on the Thames: H.M.S. "Worcester", where she lasted until 1954, and then transferred to Greenwich, where she is open to the public and a part of the National Maritime Museum complex there.

I must also acknowledge the following sources for pictures and research: Encyclopedia Britannica, and "The Ship" by Bjorn Landstrom. This article was prompted by a Sapa-AP article published in "Daily Dispatch" on 18.08.2005 entitled "Tall ships sail into Amsterdam harbour fest" in which the first lines were "Three-masted clipper ships, a common sight during the 17th Century Dutch golden age" indicated a far from accurate idea about what a clipper ship was. *To be continued.....*

"The Pessimist complains about the wind, the Optimist expects it to change and the Realist adjusts his sails."

"A cloudy day is no match for a sunny disposition." (author unknown).

We do look forward particularly to the Cape Town members' response to Tony's suggestions on the AGM and Commissioning Day dinner format. What do you think? *Scribe* – dhenwood@iafrica.com