

HMS Phoebé

Newsletter

APRIL 2013



Shipmate

Jim Hutchison

1920 - 2013

It is with great sadness that I begin this newsletter with a obituary for shipmate and friend, Jim Hutchison, the only shipmate that I could look down upon in height, but up to in admiration. Before Jim joined our ship he was serving on Russian Convoys aboard HMS Belfast, he maintained that his luck during this period was that he did not have to do any diving in the icy waters. Drafted to Phoebe he took up his duties as the ships diver. Jim said he liked being in the Mediterranean the water was much warmer than the Arctic, Jim had little to do for a while then came the patrol off W Africa. Phoebe had already been torpedoed and repaired in Brooklyn Navy Yard, this time it was a lot more disastrous. Jim had been on the upper-deck when the torpedo exploded in the Boys messdeck, the blast hurled him over the side into the sea, surfacing Jim saw a he was almost alongside a huge shark that was thrashing about in its death throes, its tail went below Jim, and the next thing Jim knew he was back aboard, the sharks tail had picked Jim up and hurled him into the air. Jim has always maintained that if the shark had not been there he, Jim, would not have made it back to the ship. The ship was beached for repairs and Jim was extra busy getting the holes shored and welded. The ship was sent again to Brooklyn for repairs escorted by the destroyer HMS Wolfhound. The long journey was interrupted many times for Jim to dive and weld more metal plates to cover the leaks. By the time Brooklyn was reached Jim said he was exhausted and needed a good rest. When Jim finished his time he carried on diving, always wearing that huge helmet and those equally huge and heavy boots. Jim began a diving company carrying out various deployments wherever he was called to. His son Peter took over the company when Jim retired, well that is a laugh because Jim as he said never retired he was a member of the Dover Diving Society. He carried out exhibitions using a huge tank with glass sides, still wearing the old fashioned diving suit helmet and boots. He had the tank at Whitstable and exhibited his diving prowess for the holiday-makers. Jim was well into his 80s before he stopped diving, but now he toured giving talks and attending events, he was interviewed on the Belfast during the Thames boat pageant of 2012, and later in the year he was on the Belfast again, called to another event. Jim had a lung Tumour removed nine years ago, it had returned again, but was said to be operable, Jim went into hospital on Sunday Feb 3rd ready for the operation on Monday but his condition had worsened. Sadly Jim crossed the bar at 2am on Tuesday Feb 7th. Funeral, March 7th at Bobbing Crematorium, Sittingbourne.

Shipmates and standards will be attending.

The Nelson Hotel showing where you can park your car, also both sides of the street which is like a large cul-de-sac. Entry & exit is from the left, there are 18 spaces in road centre opposite hotel You may have to unload at the hotel 1st and find a space later



Parking is Free.

This is the last month when **all payments for the reunion must be completed**, please do so ASAP. All rooms have been allocated, we hope to give you your room number with this newsletter. We do know there is a lift to all floors but as to whether there are any steps we do not know, there is, I think? a side door for wheelchairs access, I will check on this, some rooms have wet rooms and some have just showers, no bath, but there are also rooms that have both, we apologise if we have got your preference wrong. We will be travelling up on Thursday and making an over night stop half way, perhaps we will be there to greet the early arrivals, I did say perhaps??At the time of writing this I have invoked our Group representative in trying to negotiate for a £1 per drink Saturday night venue, be nice if it happens.

There are still members owing their subscriptions, we have tried to get in touch with the members owing 3 years subs. But cannot get any answers to newsletters or phone calls. Some of the phone numbers we have are wrong, or been changed, checking addresses through directory enquiries, in two instances we found the addresses no longer existed, which left us no alternative but to cancel membership, some shipmates have moved leaving no forward addresses, there was nothing we could do except cancel.. Please, if you change your phone number inform us, likewise inform us if you are moving, ask a relative to get in touch with us if you are unable to. We always say if you want to make a check on your dues get in touch with us, our phone number is in almost every newsletter edition we send out, here it is again; also my email address 01235 211501 < r.pavely@ntlworld.com

Coincidental History.

The frigate *Phoebe*, commanded by Captain Robert Barlow, captured the privateer *Heureux* in the English Channel off Bordeaux on 5 March 1800. *Heureux*, of 22 long brass 12-pounders and 220 men, mistook *Phoebe* for an East Indiaman, and approached her. *Heureux* did not discover her mistake until she had arrived within point-blank musket-shot. She then wore upon the *Phoebe*'s weather bow and hauled to the wind on the same tack. *Heureux* opened fire in an attempt to disable *Phoebe*'s masts, rigging, and sails, and thereby enable *Heureux* to escape. *Phoebe*'s broadside, however, was too powerful and *Heureux* was forced to strike her colours. *Phoebe* had three seamen killed, or mortally wounded, and three slightly wounded. *Heureux* had 18 men killed and 25 wounded, most of whom lost limbs. She had been out 42 days but had only taken one prize, a small Portuguese sloop with a cargo of wine. The sloop had been blown out to sea while on her way from Limerick to Galway. *Heureux* had intended to cruise the West Indies. Instead, she arrived at Plymouth as a prize on 25 March 1800. Barlow described *Heureux* as "the most complete flush deck ship I have ever seen, copper fastened, highly finished and of large dimensions". Furthermore, "she will be considered as a most desirable ship for His Majesty's Service."

The Admiralty bought *Heureux* and she completed her fitting out in November. She was armed with two 9-pounder guns at her bow and twenty 32-pounder carronades for her broadsides. Captain Loftus Bland commissioned her in August 1800 under her existing name. She sailed for the Leeward Islands in February 1801.

Three months after her arrival, on 28 May, some 80 leagues to windward of Barbados, *Heureux* chased down and captured the 16-gun French sloop *Egypte* from Guadeloupe. The chase lasted 16 hours while *Egypte* kept up a running fight for three hours during which she neither inflicted nor suffered any casualties. Bland reported that *Egypte* was said to be the fastest vessel out of Guadeloupe. She and her crew of 103 men had sailed 13 days earlier but had made no captures.

NB: Many years later when the Frigate HMS Phoebe was in service, she was commanded by a latter day Captain Bland, some of you probably sailed with him as your captain.

Captain Bland also joined the Association when he was the 1st Sea Lord. We lost touch with him when he retired. Reading the above history I expect, like me, you will wonder if our Captain Bland was a descendent of the earlier Captain Bland - - Coincidence??

Did you Know:

(From Bob Hobbs).

It was necessary to keep a good supply of cannon balls near the cannon on old war ships. But how to prevent them from rolling about the deck was the problem.

The storage method devised was to stack them as a square based pyramid, with one ball on top, resting on four, resting on nine, which rested on sixteen. Thus, a supply of 30 cannon balls could be stacked in a small area right next to the cannon.

There was only one problem? how to prevent the bottom layer from sliding or rolling from under the others. The solution was a metal plate with 16 round indentations, called, for reasons unknown, a Monkey. But if this plate was made of iron, the iron balls would quickly rust to it.

The solution to the rusting problem was to make them of brass-hence, A Brass Monkey. Few landlubbers realize that brass contracts much more and much faster than iron when chilled. Consequently, when the temperature dropped too far, the brass indentations would shrink so much that the iron cannon balls would come right off the monkey. Hence the saying: ***“Its cold enough to Freeze the Balls off a Brass Monkey”***.

And all this time, folks thought that the saying was a vulgar expression?

Arctic Star Medal:

At long last the government have relented to pressure and the much needed medal has been produced. There are not more than a few thousand who are alive to receive the medal, wear the medal with pride, you earned it.

The medal can be obtained by widows and next of kin, you must complete the same form. If you would like a copy of the form phone me.

01235 211501. The form requires a lot of information so have service records, dates of being in the area, and the ships name/s available. If you cannot decipher a deceased service mans records ask someone to help. Your Local RNA or RBL branch will give assistance in service matters.

If you ever need help whether its financial, medical or with burial costs etc get in touch with your local Royal British Legion, they will put you in touch with a RN society like The Royal Navy Benevolent Trust or the Seafarers (which was once named the King George 6th Fund for Sailors).

Or SSAFA... They will all help in some way with advice and grants etc.

Jim's Funeral: Found out that Jim's real names were Frederic George, don't know how he got named Jim?. The Crematorium was in a beautifully landscaped garden. Over a hundred mourners filled the chapel, the coffin was lead in by our Standard and the Standards of HMS Belfast, Birchington RNA and Ramsgate RNA branches.. Following were several other RNA members from Chatham and Gillingham and our members , Shipmates George Payne and his wife, Roy Talbot & wife Gwen, Jeff Fowler, John Barrett. Lil and myself. Our standard was carried by S/m Derek West who brought along the two RNA standard bearers. Les & Don. Refreshments were laid on at the Commissioners House Chatham D/yard. (This was once the Admirals house where S/m Lou Collier was stationed, the same time I was billeted in the Dockyard Masters house behind). As well as refreshments there was a free bar, Memory to Jim was toasted with a tot of neaters. It was a dismal day, raining all the time, and all the way back to Oxford, it was foggy too.. It is sad to think that we have lost eight shipmates during the last seven months.

For years I envied the Yanky navy and their pea jackets, but now I have got one as well and its lovely and cosy, three quarter length and a very high collar that keeps your ears warm, much better than a watch coat? It weighs quite heavy too. It cost me £57 inc delivery, The actual price is £49,95 but delivery is not included, the jacket is quite heavy; so delivery cost would be a few pounds. Delivery is next day providing your order is in early enough



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There are six buttons on the outside one inside. The coat is double breasted and it is fashioned to button up either way, left or right according to which side the wind is coming from, never heard of this before but if it works could be just the job. Buttons have a anchor motif. Mine has been really warming in this icy wind.

1941 - The Blitz

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On 3 March 1943 at 8:27PM the unopened Bethnal Green tube station was the site of a wartime disaster. Families had crowded into the underground station due to an air raid siren at 8:17, one of 10 that day. There was a panic at 8:27 coinciding with the sound of an anti-aircraft battery (possibly the recently installed Z battery) being fired at nearby Victoria Park. In the wet, dark conditions the crowd was surging forward towards the shelter when a woman tripped on the stairs, causing many others to fall. Within a few seconds 300 people were crushed into the tiny stairwell, resulting in 173 deaths. Although a report was filed by Eric Linden with the Daily Mail, who witnessed it, it never ran. The story which was reported instead was that there had been a direct hit by a German bomb. The results of the official investigation were not released until 1946. There is now a plaque at the entrance to the tube station which commemorates it as the worst civilian disaster of World War II, and funds are being raised for a memorial. It is estimated that during WWII, 80 tons of bombs fell on the Metropolitan Borough of Bethnal Green, affecting 21,700 houses, destroying 2,233 and making a further 893 uninhabitable. There were a total of 555 people killed and 400 seriously injured. Many unexploded bombs remain in the area, and on Monday 14 May 2007, builders discovered a World War II 1 m long 500 lb (230 kg) bomb.



Bethnal Green Underground Station. Beds were placed on the platforms, most were two or three tier bunk beds set only a yard or so from the platform edge, and the trains never stopped running. Nearly all the London Underground Stations became air-raid shelters. Card games were played, Jokes by comedians, all sorts of things were put on for entertaining to take peoples minds off what was going on above ground. Tea trolleys manned by the WVS or the WI were in constant use.

Slops

I have on order 'T' shirts and Caps, each has either the Cruiser or Frigate outline depicted on them, with HMS Phoebe Association above or below the ships. At the moment we do not know what price to charge, the committee will decide.. The price arrived at will cover the initial P&P from the makers plus vat. We have not received the items yet, they will be with us next Wednesday. I ordered mostly medium size T shirts plus a couple of Large size, usually T shirt sizes are hit or miss, with medium fitting most bodies. I probably have not ordered enough? but they are easy to get. Caps are a general fit-all size.

Coach Trip:

'Don't worry' it is still on, but we have been experiencing quite a bit of trouble getting a coach big enough, and at the right price for us. For the first time in 17 years everyone attending the reunion will be going on the coach and paddle steamer trip, marvelous, but at the moment we are looking at a vast increase in the coach hire charge almost twice as much as last year, we may have to hire a double-decker, no local operator seems to have a coach capable of carrying 60 passengers, we have been offered 2 x 36 seater;s, but at a over the top price, I suggested a 53 seat coach and a minibus, but the minibus would be almost as dear as the 53 seat coach. Our hotel Rep is still searching, so am I. We will succeed in the end, hopefully by the time you get this newsletter, but it may mean we will have to increase the £3 by another £2. Of course we hope the latter does not happen. But that will have to be a committee decision. Our treasurer reports that no matter what, we will still be solvent, The Steamer trip is already paid for, we can blame the government for Coach hire increases.

2014 Reunion. We are booked into Dauncys Hotel at Weston Super Mare, 1st weekend in May (Bank Holiday again).and it will be at this years prices - 3 nights HB at £139 pp. Although not on the sea front it is only minutes away. S/m Alan Dolan was asked to report on the parking facilities, and it is all free on road parking, there are plenty of streets close by to park in if the hotel area is full, and there is a Pay & Display car park about 100 yds away, we may be able to come to some arrangement for reimbursing a sum to those who have to use it. Usual coach trip, but on Saturday this time and to Bristol centre, plenty to see and do in Bristol, SS Britain is well worth a visit, we may be lucky and find something going on in the harbour. Watch out for pick pockets, they seem to be where tourists go. Zip up your pockets, and do your bags up.