

# "The Ties that Bind us"

This is the Speech by Richard Pocock (55-58) delivered to OWs, Wives, Partners, Special Guests, and our Royal Guest of Honour, HRH The Princess Royal at the Guildhall Dinner, Portsmouth, Thursday 21st July 2012.

This is not the full version but it is as edited by Richard and will give the reader a flavour of Richard's speech that we all enjoyed on the night.



*Following an introduction of great humour, Richard thanked the Anniversary committee (and their wives) for all of their astonishing efforts. He made particular reference to the Chairman, Clive Bradbury (57-61), and to Roger Boatman (62-64) for the complex planning and seating arrangements for the night.*

Over these past 150 years there have been some 8000 OWs, and there are currently 1023 members of our Association. There are 557 guests here tonight including 280 OWs of whom 66 have come from overseas. This is the largest gathering of OWs ever and may also be of Foreign Going Master Mariners. This is quite remarkable when one realises that our College closed 44 years ago. Despite this our bonds remain deep. Indeed they are growing.



We were only at Worcester for 2 or 3 years and yet attending funeral services for those of us who have crossed the bar, we are always humbled to find our ensign draped across the casket. Why is this? We were not in the Armed Forces. Our contemporaries in boarding schools were there for a decade or more but for the most part, I suspect, have no such lasting bonds. A clue can perhaps be found in the Earl of Inchcape's introduction to our College hand book. He wrote "A ship life imparts to a boy a degree of disciplined self confidence which in itself is a guarantee of success in life, and distinguishes him from the boy ashore"

Now it is true that life onboard Worcester was both harsh and spartan. We were very young, many of us war babies fresh from 13 years of war induced food rationing together with liberal doses of Rosehip Syrup. We slept in hammocks with a nightly dose of Bromide to settle us down - two on nights of Sophia Loren films. Whether it ever worked, or indeed has yet to work, remains a matter of conjecture. We endured the miseries of extreme weather conditions and were enveloped in London's seasonal smogs. In the evenings we



we slewed arm in arm around the upper deck. If we fell into the Thames we were immediately sent into quarantine for two weeks. The mighty ebb tides deposited all manner of things on our causeway. The syllabus was eclectic and for a few there were lectures on crowd control in foreign ports with descriptive instruction on how to handle attack by mad dogs. The starting point "was to look it in the eyes to attract it's attention !" .

Whilst there was much that was enjoyable, parts of our life hurt. Lawrence of Arabia on being questioned about his habit of extinguishing the lighted candle every night, using his bare fingers, is quoted as saying that whilst things may hurt, the secret was in not minding that they hurt. And we didn't mind that hurt because we lived with a common ethos and because we all had a common goal – we were all going to sea. We lived on the River Thames, the vein of a Great Britain that was at that time the pre-eminent maritime nation. When my Grandfather went to sea at the turn of the century over half of the world's shipping flew the Red Ensign and a third of all cargoes were carried in British bottoms. In 1957 there were over 2000 British foreign going vessels.



Worcester was moored between Everard's shipyard with its ever present coasters (latterly the Yellow Perils) and working spritsail barges, and Reeds paper mill. For 16 years Cutty Sark lay close by and ashore the magnificent Ingress Abbey, previously the home of a prominent British ship owner, and our verdant playing fields. Day and night ships from all corners of the world came past, bearing the liveries of the many shipping companies. At the same time as we lived and breathed ships, we spoke the language of both Cook and Nelson. We learnt long redundant skills from

morse code (remember the Johan Van Oldenbarneveldt) to worming and parcelling, and from parbuckling to rigging a bosun's chair. And much more. We learnt what futtocks, gudgeons, rhum lines and monkey's fists were. And we learnt to make and mend. In Inchcape's words we were indeed "distinguished from the boy ashore".

And then came our first trip to sea. Outfitted by SW Silver of King William House in Eastcheap, we had so many shipping companies to choose from. And then it was off. We spent our days divided (never equally) between white uniforms and covered in grime, grease and rust particles. We were always in trouble in bars, from Hamburg to Shanghai to Calcutta. Wherever on the globe we found ourselves we would always manage to find our way back to our ship despite difficulties of language and composure. Indeed, for the prudent lad, there were only two expressions we had to know in every language in the world. The first, "would you kindly remove your clothes". And the other, "my friend will pay". On 8 pounds a month, that was important. And of course we thought we knew it all, as I was reminded by my first Captain, who on observing me tapping the barometer early one morning in the Bay of Biscay, told me that if it was "supposed to be hit, it would be fitted with a punch bag. Now leave the b....thing alone".

Many of us have left the sea, some to follow the proud maritime professions ashore as pilots, port management, maritime education or fleet superintendency. Some became Examiners of Masters and Mates – our professional gamekeepers and the font of much induced heartburn from Muckle Flugga to Start Point to the Mumbles. Some, to the great benefit of the industry, have stayed at sea sharing and driving the massive changes that have taken place. But wherever we have been, and whatever we are now, we need forever to be grateful to our good and proud ship Worcester.



Mike Bartlett (57) Peter Hay (57) and Richard Pocock (58)