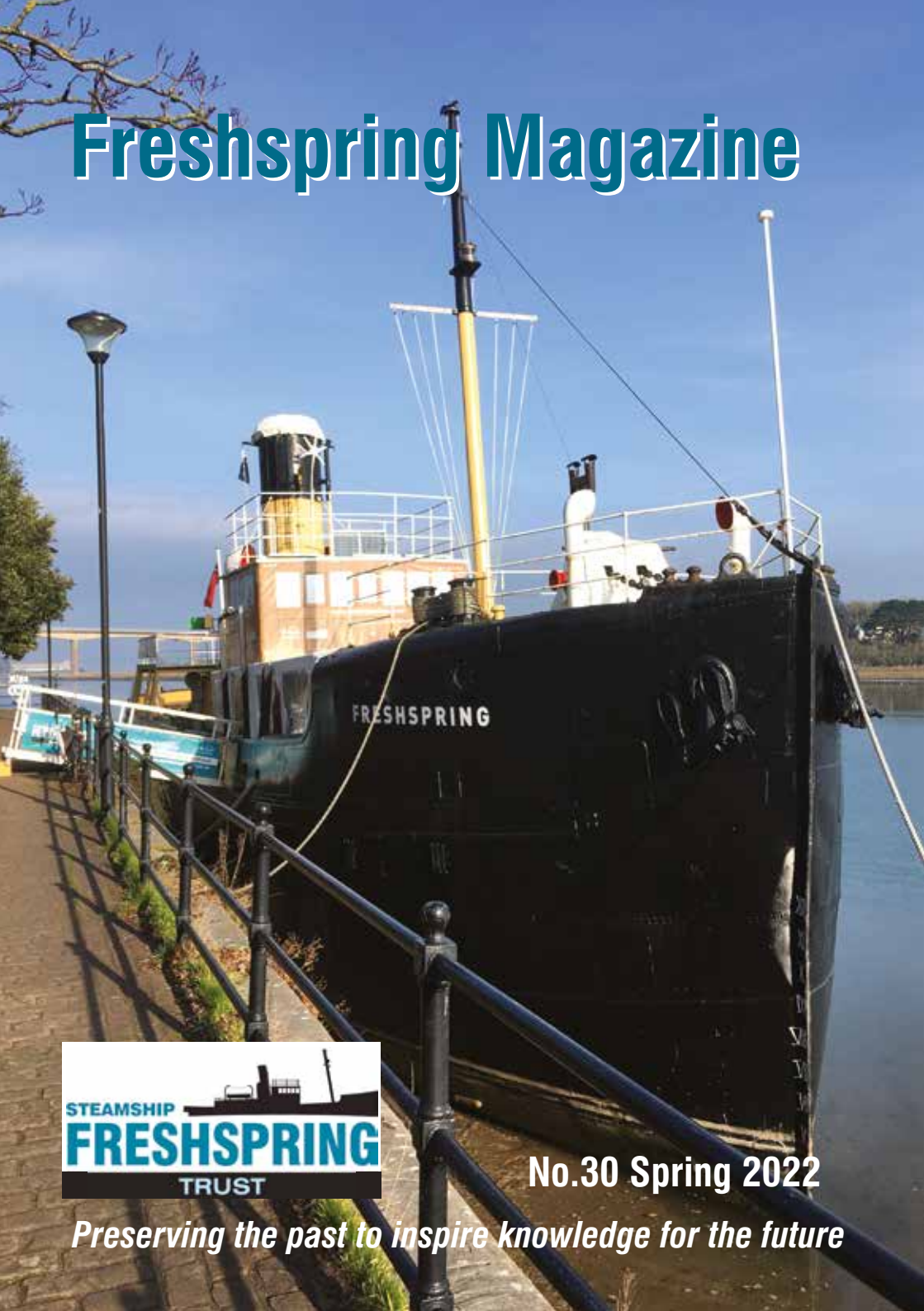


# Freshspring Magazine



No.30 Spring 2022

*Preserving the past to inspire knowledge for the future*

The Steamship Freshspring Trust is a registered charity, No.1151907.

**Objects of the Charity:**

To advance the education of the public through the preservation and operation of a historic steamship, and the promotion of maritime studies particularly amongst young people for the public benefit.

**Registered Office:** Little Cleave, Lower Cleave, Northam, Devon, EX39 2RH

**Patrons:** The Earl Attlee TD; Rear Admiral Nigel Guild CB CEng FREng;  
Captain Kevin Slade CMMar FNI.

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Keep up to date with progress/news via the Trust's website or Facebook page.

**Website:** www.ssfreshspring.co.uk  
**Facebook:** www.facebook.com/SSFreshspringTrust?fref=ts

**Membership Enquiries:** Please send an s.a.e. for a form to: Steamship Freshspring Trust, c/o Richard Ker, 4 New Street, Appledore, Devon, EX39 1QJ, or you can join online.

**Ship Visits & Volunteering on the ship:** The ship is open for public visits on Sundays. For members' visits outside this time, or if you are interested in volunteering, please call Peter Gillett, our Local Ship Manager, on 01237 237 183 (email: peter.gillett@ssfreshspring.co.uk).

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**FRONT COVER:** A quayside view of SS Freshspring at Bideford, shining in the Autumn sunshine. **Charlotte Squire**

## From the Chair

**Christmas** came and went with somewhat confused Covid requirements and was again a simple period. We had great plans for a bumper Christmas party for volunteers and members but this was cancelled only a couple of days before the event. We hope to do something to make up for this as we, yet again, move out of restrictions.

We now have the completed Viability Study, which highlights the potential operational parameters of the ship as a working vessel. Our focus has been on the Bristol Channel area to ensure that we can remain based in Bideford and our loyal volunteer team can continue to engage. The options are to operate from Bideford for much of the season with occasional forays further up channel or to spend more time away from our home port and operate in the Gloucester area. Operation fits well with our plans to introduce hybrid power. With this resource, the ship can be efficiently moved from place to place without spending time or fuel raising steam. *SS Freshspring* can be viable in operation as long as we continue to top up with fundraising.

You will see in this issue, an article provided by Nathaniel Carter. I met Nathaniel through friends and was immediately impressed with his determination to succeed. He was happy to do any work to support his aim to become a pilot. What it shows is that anything is possible if you want it enough. I hope we can follow Nathaniel's journey as he trains and ultimately becomes an airline pilot. Similarly, we have followed Matthew Wakeham who is now well on his way to becoming a Chief Engineer. When I was in contact recently, he was off to join a ship in Japan.

I have read the book, *In The Treacle Mine*, by our supporter and member, John Richardson and I strongly recommend it as a very informative and enjoyable read. It provides a real insight into marine engineering that many of us know nothing about.

I am pleased that I am now able to deliver a few talks on behalf of the Trust as this keeps our profile high and we often gain volunteers and members.

We have most of our volunteers back working now, both on a Wednesday and a Sunday. Progress is impressive on the ship with the steering gear almost back together as a demonstration of early forms of mechanical and powered steering. A team is working in the engine room, chipping and painting. This is an awful job and I am so impressed with our dedicated team who seem to relish any task.

We are fortunate and very grateful to have funds from The Association for Industrial Archaeology to complete the restoration of the ship's wheelhouse. The fund is paying for professional support to replace the chart table and other ship furniture with as original replicas.

The professionally facilitated sessions with all Trustees and Patrons was a valuable experience in that we were able to consider plans for the future of the Trust and the ship. It also brought us all together in a way that enabled all participants to express their own vision and ideas. It was heartening to see that we all pull in the same direction, an essential ingredient if we are to progress.

At the end of January, Simon Tattersall stood down as a Trustee and our Deputy Chair. However, very importantly, Simon has agreed to continue as our Financial Manager, a crucial role. Simon has been with us for four and a half years and his input has been valuable in elevating the professionalism of the Trust.

John Cooper has also stood down as a Trustee. John had focused on engineering and was a weekly visitor to the ship before Covid hit us. He oversaw engineering and taught our volunteers many skills relating to steam machinery and general engineering. John was also an early major funder, which supported the ability of the Trust to look after its ship.

As we move towards Spring, we are planning a full season of opening and hope to engage a person to manage ship open days. We are charging for access this year for the first time and we need to make sure what we offer is both appealing and provides learning about heritage. Members, of course, still have free access to the ship.

We have an excellent cabinet maker manufacturing a new chart table and other wheelhouse furniture, all of which went missing while the ship was in Bristol. Who knows where it all went as the chart table will not even fit through the wheelhouse doors. This work is funded by an Association for Industrial Archaeology grant for which we are very grateful. Each step brings more life and originality to the ship and so each year visitors can see progress.

We hope for a bumper season and already have events planned, one of which is the Bideford Water Festival on the 24th July. This is likely to be a major local event with cardboard boat races, heritage vessels, and a whole range of activities throughout the day. *SS Freshspring*, of course, will be open all day. If you are local, why not volunteer to help with ship opening; we always need Stewards.

I hope we see as many of you as possible this year when, hopefully, we will have more freedom to move around.

**John**

## Finance Manager's Report

Since stepping down as Trustee, Deputy Chairman and Treasurer at the end of December, my day to day involvement with the Trust has markedly reduced – as was expected! In my new capacity as Finance Manager – Stephen Attenborough is now the Treasurer – I will continue to look after the Trust's financial affairs and help whenever I am asked or can sensibly contribute.

January is the last month of the Trust's financial year. Over the next few weeks I shall be spending time preparing the annual accounts for the Trustees to sign off before our independent Examiner carries out checks required under the Charity Commission rules. Once these processes are complete, the accounts will be ready for presenting to the Trust's members and then formally filing with the Commission.

At the end of January, the Trust had £56,493 in the bank. We are waiting to receive grant payments totalling approximately £6,500 to cover costs already incurred to boost our funds to £63,000. Of this sum about £18,000 is set aside as a reserve against future costs and a further £15,000 (the exact amount needs to be established) is set aside for money we have received but against which no cost has yet been incurred. The result is that we have about £30,000 of unallocated funds to run the Trust.

I am comfortable that the Trust has adequate funds for the time being and look forward to hearing what the Trustees plan to do in terms of charging for entry to the ship and developing funding streams – grant aided or other – to carry the Trust forward through 2022 and beyond.

**Simon Tattersall**

February 2022

## Looking back on 2021, looking ahead to a promising 2022

**Christmas** might be a distant memory now, though as the year came to a close, we took the time to reflect on the last twelve months. 2021 was a tremendous year on board *SS Freshspring* despite a challenging and ever-changing climate. We would like to take the opportunity to thank all our visitors, volunteers, patrons and members once again for supporting us to preserve and restore our steamship.

So what were some of our highlights for 2021?

- We welcomed over 2,000 visitors safely on board.
- We hosted our first open day (August Bank Holiday Monday) with over 300 visitors, organised an exclusive 'members only' evening.
- We worked collaboratively with The Burton to celebrate their 70th birthday with a 'seafood and sea shanties' event.
- Successful dry dock visit to Harland & Wolff (Appledore).
- Mast being stepped.
- And due to the fantastic number of visitors, we were able to be open to the public until October 2021.

Of course, none of this would have been even possible if it wasn't for our dedicated team of volunteers, who have shown resilience and commitment, following Covid-19 restrictions and guidance throughout, enabling us to carry on with essential work in a safe environment. We can't wait to see you all again.

As we look ahead to this year, we have lots of exciting events, ideas and initiatives which we will share with you very soon. We plan to reopen to the public in April 2022 and until then, we are continuing to prepare the ship ready for visitors.

## Sharing the history of Freshspring with local North Devon groups

We are pleased to have started the year well, with a couple of presentations by our chairman John Puddy to local groups in the North Devon area, including the Women's Institute in Bideford and the Woolsey Society. These speaking opportunities help us raise awareness and knowledge of *Freshspring* whilst attracting new volunteers, members and ideas.

"I was very pleased to speak to a local WI and to see how enthusiastic they were. I am sure our link will be ongoing and create valued joint activity," remarks John. The group described *Freshspring* as 'a wonderful project for the people of Bideford' (we agree!).

By working with local community groups and organisations, we can connect with more people within the local area. If you would like us to provide a talk for a group that you belong to or have other ideas on how we can work, then please drop us a message on here or email [info@ssfreshspring.co.uk](mailto:info@ssfreshspring.co.uk).

**Rebecca Craft**  
Marketing & Communications Officer

## Project Manager's Report

The end of 2021 was an interesting time for The Trust, with Trustees and Patrons coming together via Zoom to share their thoughts about the future direction of the Trust. The Viability Report has encouraged healthy debate and the meeting enabled a Development Plan to be constructed from our vision, mission and objectives.

Unfortunately the Freshspring Christmas party had to be called off at the last minute due to soaring Covid cases in Torrington. We still hope to have a get together as soon as circumstances allow.

The Lottery's Heritage Treasures Day on 11th January was a social media moment set up to celebrate fantastic heritage projects. Mike Greener, one of our engineering volunteers, kindly agreed to be videoed explaining what heritage meant to him. The clip can be found on our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/SSFreshspringTrust/videos/4972673492763918>.

I would like to extend our thanks to Malcolm Allen, one of our ship volunteers, for keeping our Facebook page brimming with delights. Malcolm posts every week, keeping us informed and entertained with the volunteer crew's progress. His writing style is perfectly pitched, and available for us all to enjoy.

Much of my time recently has been spent researching and preparing for the 2022 season. This is the first year that we're charging entry to the ship, and after much discussion a charge of £2.50 per adult has been agreed. We're keen to be inclusive and in the current economic climate we've erred on the side of caution. Members are of course welcome to come on board for free.

As part of the visitor experience, we're going to offer some branded merchandise for sale. It's been really interesting researching the range of items available. We're keen to be price conscious as well as environmentally sound, which isn't always an easy balance. In time these items will also be made available via our website, so watch this space.

We're lucky to be supported by fellow heritage sites. Dave Jackson, one of our ship volunteers, has contacts at *SS Shieldhall* who have offered us guidance with signage. Captain Kevin Slade has also used his connections to arrange a day at the *SS Great Britain*, where we'll meet with marketing, education and interpretation experts.

The ship volunteers are busy preparing the ship for the visitor season. The engine room is almost ready for a new coat of paint and the steering gear is being lovingly restored. All this work is carried out under the watchful eye of Pete Gillett during the week and Stephen Attenborough at the weekends. There wouldn't be a ship to visit without the work of all these volunteers.

As part of the Technology Transfer Project, we have a work placement student with the Trust for one day a week. Harrison has helped us to get a young person's view of the Trust and is currently working on a Quick Response (QR) code to encourage donations when the ship is closed and a Linktree account so that all our social media offerings can be found in one place. Apparently this is more appealing to the younger audience.

Harrison's involvement has helped us to realise that young people may want to engage with us, but that we need to adapt our communication methods in order to appeal to this market. We've recently submitted a funding application to Awards for All which, if successful, will enable us to create a youth board and a work experience programme to encourage students to learn about heritage, tourism and customer services.

Looking forward, we have careers events to attend and a week of activities with Bideford College in March, all of which will be expanded on by Sam. We continue to work on funding applications, building partnerships with other heritage organisations and focusing on the future sustainability of the Trust. All of this work, undertaken by volunteers and staff, takes place for the benefit of our heritage steamship, and the Trust that supports her. As ever, we're determined to preserve the past, to inspire knowledge for the future.

**Charlotte Squire**  
Project Manager

## Website

It was about a year ago that the *Freshspring* website was upgraded with a view to having a members' area. This was fine in theory, but a nightmare in reality. It all worked fine for new members joining via the website using PayPal. A recurrent payment was set up with automatic access to the members' area. The problem was with existing members.

First of all, I had to individually add the details of existing members into the database, which was incredibly time consuming. Then a Transaction had to be added to each member's Membership (this is using MemberPress within the WordPress programme). The Transaction would allow the member to access the members' area. But it didn't work.

There were one or two persistent members, who were very helpful and tried to make it work. We tried everything – no success. And there was no support (only if a support contact was taken out).

This is when I turned to Andy Gooding, Brian's (the editor) son. Working together under Andy's guidance, and after about 20 minutes, he found a check box in the Permissions that had not been checked. We tested it and, lo and behold, it worked first time and access was gained to the members' area.

This was wonderful, as the hours I had spent trying to sort it out were unbelievable. But it showed the importance of having expertise (Andy) on hand. On the back of this, Andy had a look at the website, and immediately had "quite a few concerns with the layout, performance and various other aspects of the site".

This has resulted in Andy (he is a professional website developer) developing a whole new site, which is almost ready to go live. The main emphases have been to keep it simple and for ease of use, which includes being able to make payments for membership renewals and for donations.

I hope this will make using the website, with its different areas, much easier to use.

**Richard Ker**

## Harrison – a business student at Petroc

As a business student, part of my course has a work placement module where I gain valuable real-world experience with an organisation. I am involved in a project called Technology Transfer which helps students at Petroc find a suitable work placement. I was looking for something different as a work placement, as ordinary work experience is normally filing and all the general basic tasks but being on this project helped me find the Freshspring Trust, which is a charity working to restore a piece of British maritime history.

I'm currently working on the creation of QR (quick response) to build awareness of the Trust around Bideford and an easier way for visitors to donate.

With the Trust so far, I have been involved in creative idea planning, where Trustees have been asking me for my ideas on what the Trust can do to get higher engagement from a younger generation.

I'm looking forward to seeing the Trust implement virtual reality tours of the ship; this is great for the Trust to appeal to the interest of younger visitors and be inclusive of those who cannot access all parts of the ship.

I have been working with the Trust on membership ideas that they could offer their members as a way of acknowledging them for their support.

We are looking into events to coincide with special anniversaries this year which will be advertised through our website and social media.

I am also working with the Trust to help them connect with colleges and plan events which are fun for all ages. I've been creating a more visual timeline for the Trust that has a short history of *Freshspring* to appeal to people looking for a short overview.

This placement so far has allowed me to be creative in my thinking and bounce around ideas that I think the Trust should consider and they are very supportive in this and encourage a younger generation to have a say in their communities.



## Branching out...

Following a visit from a local family in the Autumn, John Puddy arranged for a STEM kit to be used as a Home Education project over the Christmas break. This was a great success, as evidenced by the family:

*"We have now completed lessons 3 and 4 which have led into the workings of the internal combustion engine. Very appropriate for us as just before Christmas we had to have a new cam belt fitted to our car so the boys now have a better understanding of what that does.*



*Investigating cams.*



*Building a balloon buggy.*

*"Our boys had a great time with the series of six well planned lessons with lots of hands on activities such as building a wind-powered car, a windmill, cams, cranks and sliders, as well as using a model steam engine. There are full lesson plans with power points and extension activities. The lessons led us on to investigating the difference between weight and mass, Potential Energy, Kinetic Energy and the internal combustion engine."*

This family is the first to use the kit independently and we have exciting plans to now engage with the wider Home Education community in Devon and Cornwall, by working with individual families and also groups, either on board the ship or in community spaces. Our continual fund raising is giving us wider scope to offer innovative experiences to all learners in the area, wherever they are being educated. Upcoming projects



*Investigating steam power.*

include creating and editing interactive film based on the ship and around the historic wharves and buildings of Bideford.

### Further education news:

This March, we are looking forward to welcoming 250 Year 8 Bideford College students on board *Freshspring*. The students will be working on different projects over the course of the week; some based on the ship and some at school. Planned activities include mast climbing, a tour of the ship, rope making, signalling in Morse code and semaphore and 3D filming. This is being planned with the support of teachers from the college and our ever supportive volunteers and is widening our educational engagement with local secondary schools. We will provide a full account of the week with participation from the students for the next magazine.

We are also attending Careers Fairs at local secondary schools. This tends to be in partnership with Harland & Wolff who own Appledore Shipyard and with resources provided by the Merchant Navy Training Board. Our aim is to make young people aware of the wide range of maritime careers available to them. The sector is not always an obvious choice, even for young people based near the sea, so we hope to inform them of the opportunities in all sorts of areas, from cooking on a cruise ship to piloting a tanker and so many more besides.

**Samantha Roberts**  
Community Learning Officer



*Park School Options at 16 + event.*



*Mast climbing.*

# Matt's Diary

## Matt Wakeham

I wrote my last diary entry in January 2021 when I was halfway through my leave, which was due to end in February. I was scheduled to join *Stena Penguin*, which is a sister ship of *Stena Polaris* on which I first sailed as a newly qualified 4th Engineer in 2019. This was exciting as both ships are identical so I hoped that I would be able to settle in very quickly. Before I joined, I contacted a few of my colleagues and was able to learn their current 4th Engineer was a classmate of mine. He was able to give me a brief description via email of the ship's condition. After I had signed and returned all the relevant documents back to the company, my departure date was set. I would be flying to JFK Airport, New York on 4th March.

On arriving in New York, the agent escorted me to a local hotel where I had to isolate for a few days. After two days, a doctor came and performed a Covid test. The doctor informed me to continue isolating and await further instructions. From my classmate I was able to learn that there was a slight delay with berthing so I would have to self-isolate in the hotel for another three days. This meant that we were not able to leave our rooms except at meal times to collect food from the reception. On the fifth day, I received a phone call from the agent; he was en route to collect me to join my ship. Whilst waiting to be collected, in the reception I met the Russian 2nd Officer and a Filipino Able Seaman who were also staying in the hotel and joining the ship.

Upon joining, I collected my personal protective equipment and was given a tour by the current 4th Engineer. The engine room was in a very good condition with no major problems. I began my handover and had a catch up with my classmate before



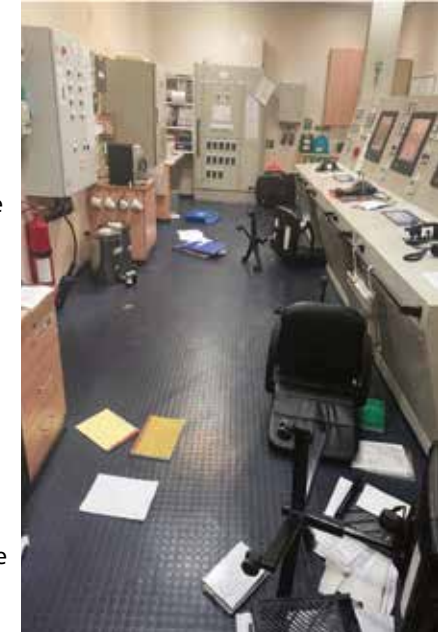
he signed off. I also became instant friends with the 3rd Engineer and Electrician, both of whom are from Glasgow.

After the first few days, we had quite a big problem with sludge that I had to deal with. Under the 2020 global sulphur cap, the sulphur content of fuel oil used on board all ships must now meet the 0.5% sulphur limit, while in Emission Control Areas (ECAs) it remains at the 2015 standard of 0.1% content. Some companies opted for the installation of an exhaust gas scrubber instead of switching to alternative fuels with a lower sulphur content, known as very low sulphur fuel oil (VLSFO). The option has proved popular for its relative simplicity and cost effectiveness, but it does come with challenges, particularly during wintertime. VLSFOs contain paraffins, or wax particles; in colder climates these pull together to create large waxy sludge masses. These masses accumulate in fuel tanks and block fuel filters.

The problem I was facing was with the sludge tank, situated underneath the purifiers in the purifier room of the ship. The purifiers use centrifugal force to separate water and solid particles (sludge) from the fuel so that it is fit for use by the engines and other consumers. However, during the previous three week sail from Skagen (Denmark) to New York, this water and sludge had been accumulating daily with only the water and liquid sludge being pumped out and incinerated. This eventually left large amounts of asphalt-like sludge, which blocked the pipelines and filters. To rectify this problem, we had to plan an enclosed space entry job, open the tank hatch, ventilate and oxygen test the space before manually removing all of the sludge. As a team, we were able to remove all of this sludge over the course of three days and were finally able to make sludge transfers for incineration once again.



*The Purifier Room.*



*Aftermath of heavy rolling.*



Generator before overhaul.



Generator after overhaul.

From New York, we began sailing back to Skagen. During this voyage, I experienced some of the worst seas of my career so far. This was mainly due to the combination of very bad weather conditions and the fact that we were not carrying any cargo! We postponed all major jobs and had to tie down any loose items at the end of each day.



Generator pistons removed.

We then found ourselves attempting to sleep with our mattresses on the floor so that we did not roll too much in bed. After loading in Denmark, we sailed to Brownsville, Texas for cargo discharging. The company informed us that we were near to one of SpaceX's launches; unfortunately, we left for the Caribbean island of St Eustatius before it took off!

Once we arrived at St Eustatius, plans began to unfold for a major overhaul of the ship's generator number 4, which was overdue, its 16,000-hour service. In order to find out what jobs needed to be carried out, we referred to the ship's manuals where it specifies what parts need to be overhauled and what parts only need to be checked for their condition. The parts that needed to be overhauled included the inlet and exhaust valve spindle and valve seat, the piston and scraper rings and the cylinder liner. We inspected all the other parts on the job cards for wear, some of which include the fuel injectors, cylinder heads, pistons, connecting rods and bearings. This was my first experience of a generator overhaul so I did my best to manage my own jobs so that I could get involved as much as possible. It greatly increased my knowledge, which will hold me in good stead for when I am eventually promoted to 3rd Engineer.



St Eustatius.



Ron and Mark.

St Eustatius was the most interesting place I visited as its population was only 3,000 and you could see the entire island while we were waiting at anchor. On the left of the island, you could see the oil terminal and on the right side, you could see the town, which lies at the bottom of a dormant volcano! While we were in port, we took on what we thought was a small amount of provisions, which unbeknown to us actually turned out to be the entire island's stock of ship provisions!

We remained in the Caribbean for a few weeks carrying out routine maintenance and repairs before we received orders to begin sailing towards Togo, Africa. We sailed through the Gulf of Guinea but thankfully did not see any pirates. When we arrived in Togo, a few crew members were signing off. However, the company has regulations in place that prevent too many officers signing off at once, which meant I had to remain on board. In the first crew change, I said goodbye to the 3rd Officer, Electrician and Chief Engineer. The 3rd Officer's replacement was a Filipino named Rod and after speaking to him, I realised that he was the Mess Boy on the very first ship I sailed on as a cadet in 2016. It is a little bit more challenging to rise your way up the ranks for Filipinos but during the time that I was studying, Rod completed two nine month contracts as an Ordinary Seaman and a Able Seaman, before attending college and completing his exams. Now we were sailing together as equal ranks. Well done, Rod!

After a short stay at anchor, we proceeded back into the port of Togo where we discharged cargo. The Chief Officer, 3rd Engineer, Chief Cook and I went ashore for Covid testing. This was the first time I had stepped on land in five months! Once we received our negative results, we were finally able to fly home. I am now enjoying my leave at home for the first time out of lockdown!



# Winter Work

A pictorial round up of some of the jobs that our great volunteers have been doing, as well as a couple of good views from the ship... Thanks to Charlotte for the photos.



# The Fire Fighting Course

John Richardson

I have been reading Tim Gibbs' stories of his days at sea with much enjoyment and his account of the fire fighting course at McDonald Road fire station in Leith brought back some not very happy memories of the time I took my own course there – circa 1972.

Before being allowed to sit a 2nd class certificate, all candidates (deck and engine alike) were required to have taken and passed a Merchant Navy fire fighting course. The one held at MacDonal Road was reputed to be the toughest such course in the country and, as Tim pointed out, 'Elf & Safety' did not appear to be on the agenda. Indeed, when we were being given our introductory talk by the chief instructor, he informed us with a sadistic grin on his face, that some of us could expect to get burnt – but only slightly!

The first couple of days were quite innocuous, consisting of classroom work, breathing apparatus instruction and some practice with hand held extinguishers out in the yard, where small fires of various types had been lit. The most impressive demonstration was to show us what happened if water was used to extinguish a chip pan fire. The pan had been allowed to burn for several minutes beforehand, to ensure the oil was really hot and then, no more than half a cup of water was tipped into it from a ladle on the end of a long handle. This caused an amazing fireball to erupt from the pan, with the flames reaching about 30 feet into the air! Our gallant instructor then proceeded to put it out quite simply by using a fire blanket – an impressive feat we thought.

The real fun and games started on day three, when we were expected to put out a fire in a mock up of a ship's engine room that had been especially constructed on the site. This creation had been made of what looked like a number of steel shipping containers welded together and stood several decks high. It had some internal partitions and proper engine room style ladders going up and down inside it. For our main exercise, we had to go in at the top wearing breathing apparatus and try and put out a fire that had been lit by the instructors at the bottom.

Our weapons to fight the fire were the standard 2½ inch hoses and nozzles with which most ships were equipped at that time. The difficulty of handling these hoses when charged with water at fire main pressure is something that has to be experienced before it can be believed – even with a three man team it took all our combined strengths to manoeuvre the wretched things down the ladders and around the corners to actually reach the seat of the fire, while our gleeful instructors were scurrying around at the bottom pouring more diesel on the flames, to ensure realism! Of course, hot air rises, so that the temperatures at the top of the structure were as bad if not worse than the hottest boiler rooms I had ever experienced before, but at least I was prepared for it, unlike some of the other candidates. One of them hadn't been inside the chamber for more than a few seconds before stepping right back out again. No amount of persuasion could get him in for another go, so he was scratched from the

course and presumably would not have been allowed to take his certificate. I felt quite sorry for him and for some of the other chaps too – I was young, fit and used to hot engine rooms, while some of the others were considerably older and were expected to handle temperatures that may have been quite outside their previous experience.

We had all been issued with fireman's jackets, trousers and gloves, but I was last in line to collect mine and the only set available was several sizes too small, which meant there was a gap between where the sleeves of the tunic ended and the gloves began. I had not been inside the 'engine room' for more than a minute before the exposed area of my arm brushed against a handrail: this was so hot it simply wiped a strip of skin clean off – our instructor hadn't been joking when he said we might get burnt!

Eventually our team managed to get into position with our hose and could actually fight the fire. Although it was an oil fire burning over an area of at least 20 by 10 feet, it was quite easy to put out with water – provided we remembered to use the spray setting on the nozzle and not the jet! When it was finally killed, we were all nearly out of air on our BA sets and were very happy to be allowed to use a door at the bottom of the chamber to get out into the fresh air again. All in all, I think the instructors had done a grand job of showing us how difficult it would be to fight a fire under real conditions, when we had struggled so hard with the simulated ones. We all agreed that the 2½ inch were real pigs to handle and the instructors told us that they had been campaigning for years to get the authorities to change to 1½ inch instead for all internal firefighting on ships – the ease and speed of handling of these smaller hoses in their opinion more than cancelled out the reduced quantity of water they could supply.



*In his piece in the last magazine, John Puddy mentioned a work photo of Freshspring which was not included, so here it is!*

## A Life At Sea: 50 Years Ago *Part 3*

### Tim Gibbs

The relatively sedate life of the 'Oxford' was soon shattered when I joined ACT 2, a new 1,500 teu highly automated refrigerated container steamship. We were six well qualified engineers but lacked the relative experience because we were a 'scratch' crew hastily put together after most of the crew, that had the training and experience while the ship was being built, had been taken ill. None of us knew much about the machinery except that it was potentially quite dangerous due to the high steam pressures and temperatures used attempting to improve the efficiency. For an added level of difficulty, it had complex automation which proved quite unreliable. This made understanding what was happening difficult, especially when things went wrong, and this was not helped by the fact that a lot of the manuals were in German and the electrical drawings were in a completely different style from that used in the UK.

We had been brought up to think that when things went wrong, they were usually not as bad as they first appeared and there was time to think before reacting. On ACT 2, however, things were often worse than they appeared and there certainly wasn't time for thinking as things seemed to happen in micro-seconds. Definitely character forming. Typical was the situation with the boilers. They were very highly rated but held relatively little water so that any problem with the boiler feed water system could almost instantaneously result in the boiler going into low water shut down, the main propulsion turbines stopping and the lights going out until diesel generators could be started. By a quirk of stupid design, it was not possible to put water back into the boilers in this condition and you had to wait many hours to depressurise the boiler to do so. It took a number of such incidents over a few years before the system was modified.

We did manage to get to Australia more or less on time despite a couple of big scares along the way but in the event, it probably wouldn't have mattered too much if we were late because this was the time of lengthy dock strikes. I think these probably

delayed us by two weeks which was very significant in what was supposed to be an eight-week voyage to Oz and back.

There was an 'event' during our first visit to Sydney. We were berthed at the White Bay Container Terminal and the local residents on the hill above took



ACT2. Exciting steam time.

exception to the noise we made when venting the boilers and they started to throw stones and rocks down on us. To appease them, we had a big silencer fitted to the offending pipe in the top of the funnel when we got back to the UK. Unfortunately, on the second trip to Sydney, when we opened the vent valve, it blew off and landed in a car park narrowly missing a couple of cars. It was pointed out to the residents that if their dockers didn't go on strike, we wouldn't have to stay long enough to have to vent the boilers but that thought didn't seem to impress them. Some people have no sense of humour.

ACT 2 suffered from severe vibrations in the accommodation. These were excited by the propeller which, in absorbing 32,000 horse power, was near the limit of technology at that time. It was so bad that they didn't lay you a place at the dining table until you were there to grab the cutlery otherwise it ended up on the floor. Also, serviettes had to be put under coffee and tea pot lids for fear of the hinges failing. We did, however, accidentally discover an unofficial 'work-around'. We inadvertently had filled the aft peak ballast tank and that made a significant improvement. The only issue with this was that, for structural reasons, this tank should only have been used when the ship was empty, which it rarely was. I believe that eventually they put some more steelwork into the structure, but that only changed the frequency and didn't do a lot to reduce the amplitude of the vibrations. No good vibrations on ACT 2.

One early morning, as it was getting light, the ship slowed down with the engine labouring. As I was rushing around the engine room to try and understand what was going on, the bridge phoned to say we were going to have to stop – there was a whale impaled on the bow. A few days later after a night of very heavy weather, the Chief Officer looked out as dawn broke and was horrified to see a big gap where half a dozen containers had been. Dangerous; not so much for us but certainly for any other

ship that had the misfortune to hit one that remained afloat, which they sometimes did for many days.

Looking back, from what I now know about these things, I would have been much more circumspect about how we handled the chemicals that we had to use; hydrazine and amine used for treating the boiler feed water, Vapreat in the fresh water



My Board of Trade First Class Steam and Motor Certificate of Competency.

generators, and Foss for treating the vanadium in the fuel. Perhaps we should have taken a clue from the fact that when there was a leak in one of the chemical drums, it stripped all the paint off the steel in the storage room but, of course, this was the era of just trying to get the job done. At the end of that second trip on ACT 2, I went back to college, this time at Poplar, and obtained my Certificate of Competency as First Class Engineer, Steamship and Motorship in December 1971. I was then, at the age of 28, promoted to Chief Engineer and spent that Christmas on the *City of Auckland* in Antwerp, immediately followed by a few weeks on the *City of Dundee* in Rotterdam.

A couple of months later I was back on the *City of Oxford*, this time as Chief Engineer and had been in Dublin for only a day when the British Embassy was attacked and burnt out on 2nd February 1972. The agent turned up and said the way things were developing it would be a very good idea to leave immediately. In the event we had a couple of problems; the Captain was 'indisposed' and we had a failure of one of the two boilers and it was against company regulations to sail with only one boiler. Efforts to contact the company failed so the Chief Officer and I decided to sail anyway and off we went only to encounter a big storm half way to Liverpool. This caused us to shelter behind the Isle of Man for a few hours but it gave us time to complete the boiler repair and contact the company to let them know what was going on. We eventually arrived in Liverpool to find a Superintendent and an ambulance to take the Captain away for a 'cure'.

It is a reflection of the attitudes of the time that, three months later, he turned up as Captain on a ship I was on sailing from Canada via South Africa to India and back to Canada. He was so 'indisposed' on the voyage to South Africa that I had him replaced in Cape Town but to my horror he returned to the ship in Cape Town on the way back to Canada two months later. This was on the *City of Colombo* again and by this time she was running reasonably well although I was very jealous of a friend, Tom Gill, who was Chief Engineer on a fast new ship, the *City of Liverpool*, keeping the same schedule and routes as us. We would limp into each port and work our hearts out until we sailed again while Tom was able to relax in the local bars and seek out the best the golf courses. He had even rigged up a driving range on the deck which he and his Second Engineer used for a couple of hours each day.

Anyway, that was going to be my last trip at sea but there was one final scary moment when we went to Chittagong. We were the first large vessel to enter since the end of the Bangladesh Liberation



*City of Liverpool. The Colombo was no match for Tom Gill's shiny new ship.*

War. There had been rumours that a mine sweeper had been blown up while clearing the channel to the port but we survived that unscathed. After returning home I was moved into management in the company's office in Camomile Street in London in September 1972. It was deemed to be promotion but as I recall it was accompanied by a significant cut in salary.

My time in the Merchant Navy was spent mainly in benign weather conditions but a few events do stand out. On a trip across the Atlantic, a storm lasted for the full 17 days it took us to complete the passage to Philadelphia and wherever we went to avoid the storm, it seemed to follow us. At times the ship was a bit like a submarine and we went a number of days when it was impossible to cook hot food. Sleeping was a problem although I did discover a relatively quiet corner of the engine room where I could wedge myself between the starting air bottles. This was surprisingly comfortable as it was near to the centre of the ship's motion, the place where the movements are the smallest. I think it was on this voyage that there was a very messy incident in the Second Engineer's cabin; he had a large jar of instant coffee and a big bottle of calamine lotion that became intimate during the storm. Messy. I recall that on the way home that trip, having been to Houston, we could clearly identify the Gulf Stream as we sailed north eastward across the Atlantic by the moment the sea temperature rose a couple of degrees and the ship gained another half a knot.

The passage between South Africa and Australia was always accompanied by huge seas but despite the hours spent trying to photograph the massive waves, I never seemed to be able to capture the majesty of the scene. We were once caught in a typhoon off Hong Kong and a number of us had our cabins flooded when the portholes were smashed in by the seas. Occasionally quite violent storms occurred in the Mediterranean with little warning as was the case in the Irish Sea but generally they dissipated quite rapidly but, in any case, in the Irish Sea, land is never far away to provide shelter.

The reader might be forgiven for thinking that the Doxford was the only diesel engine



*Walter Hayden looking 'cool' at the engine telegraph.*

that I had experience with. In fact I sailed with three different types of Sulzer for an equal amount of time but it's fair to say that that time was much less eventful. The sheer mechanical complexity of the Doxford almost guaranteed it; a six cylinder Doxford had 12 pistons and 61 bearings, 25 of which were in

spherical housings. The equivalent Sulzer had six pistons and 19 bearings.

At sea one struck up friendships for the duration of the voyage but rarely did they become lasting. I was fortunate that two did break the mould. Walter Hayden was there in 1964 when I was a Cadet on the *City of Hereford*. He was

a 'time-served' engineer from Clydeside who has worked alongside Billy Connolly at Govan Shipbuilders. It showed in his humour. So, it was an unlikely friendship but it endured for over 20 years. Walter left the sea in the late 1960s to become an engineer at Longannet Power Station in Fife as it was being commissioned.

Unfortunately, he died before he was 50 – almost certainly from a combination of the effects of life in the shipyards, serving at sea, and his time in the electrical generation industry. I also struck up a lasting friendship with Dave Hall who I first met when I was doing my 'steam time' on the *City of Oxford*. He was Chief Officer and married a South African girl then moved to Cape Town where he eventually became Port Captain. Later he went back to sea and became Ice Captain on the old *SA Agulhas*, South Africa's polar research vessel and then took command of the new vessel, *SA Agulhas II*.



*Dave Hall trying to impress some officials in Port Elizabeth.*

## New members

We welcome the following new members of the Trust:

Mrs Mirian Farr

*Bramley, Surrey*

Ian Montgomery

*Thorngumbold, E Yorkshire*

Geoff Murby

*Barnstaple, Devon*

Mr W Nunn

*Enfield, Middlesex*

## In the Treacle Mine

### The life of a Marine Engineer

*By John Richardson*

The book *Down in the Treacle Mine*, by John Richardson, a Trust Member, provides a very good and informative read. It details a period in marine engineering, which has disappeared and forms a valuable reference to the period at the end of steam and the rise of the diesel engine. John sets out his life and experiences in an attractive presentation, which includes his own interesting personal story.

John spent 29 years in the Merchant Navy, from an engineering cadet in 1964 with Esso Tankers, ending as Chief Engineer on cross-Channel ferries in 1993. He started on steamships, graduating to diesel as steam was phased out.

Life as a marine engineer was certainly interesting, and John tells it as it was as he travelled the world's oceans, often seen from the depths of a very hot and steamy engine room, a life not without incident.

As the description on the back cover states: "...There are many anecdotes about his experiences – some amusing and some terrifying..."

John moved from oil tankers to container ships, to Sealink ferries before a spell on the 'Bovril Boats', a fleet of four sludge carriers operated by Thames Water from Crossness, well known today for its preserved beam engines.

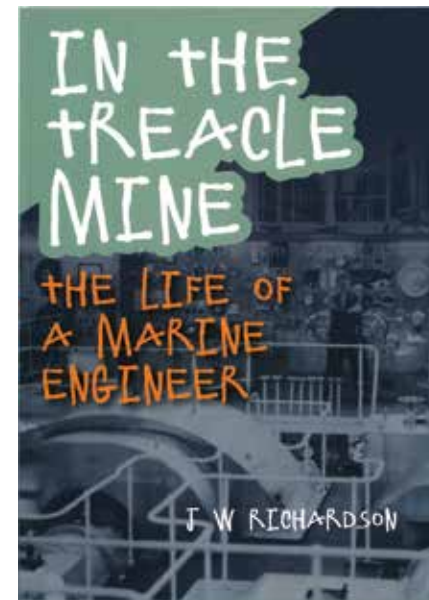
Why 'the treacle mine'? That's what Geordie marine engineers called the engine room on a ship...

As stated earlier, John is a member of the Steamship Freshspring Trust and contributes articles to this magazine.

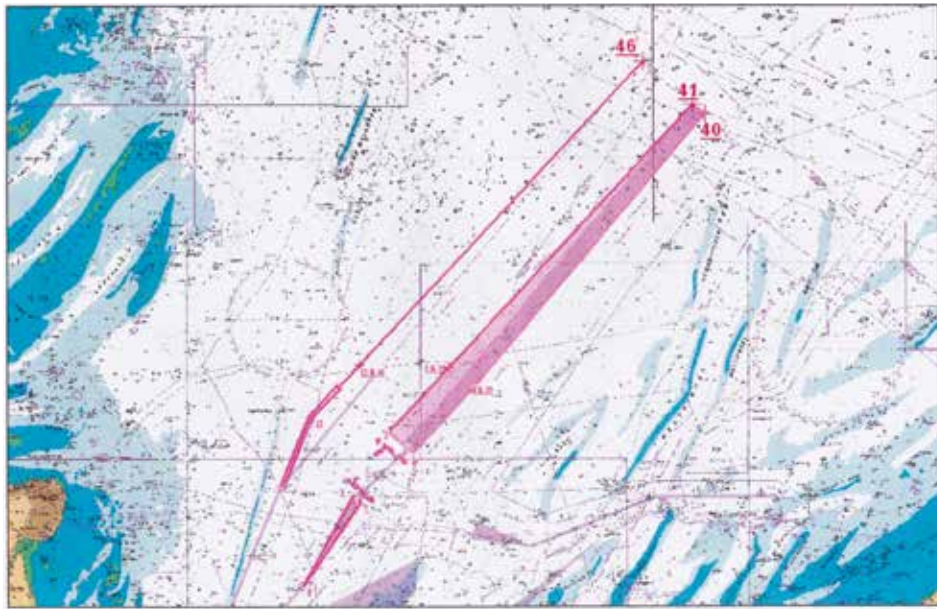
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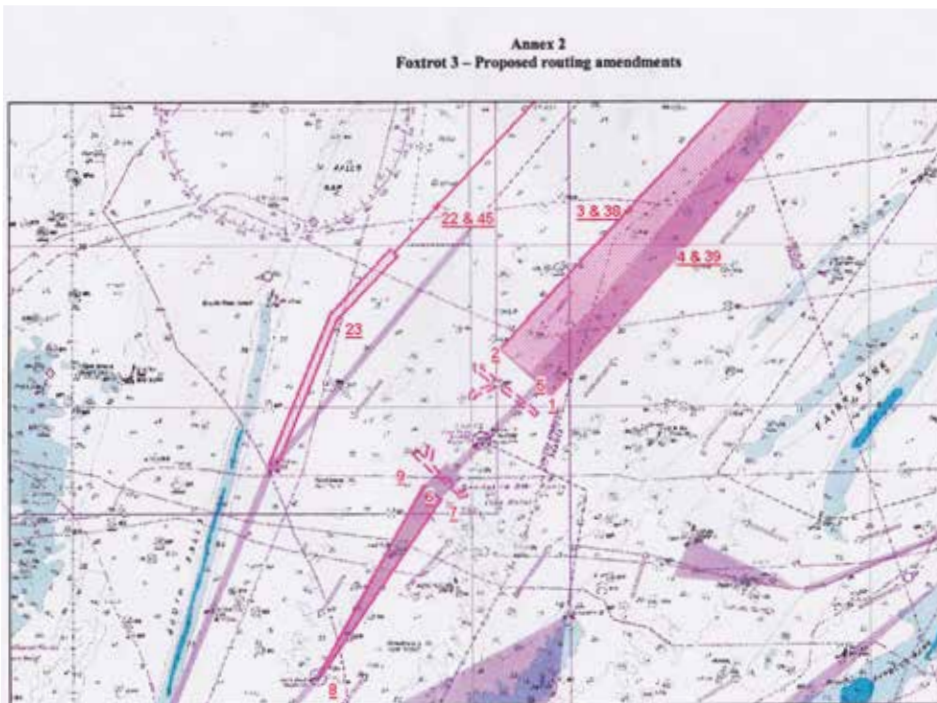
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The Hydrographic Office drawings submitted to the UKSON and the IMO.



## High flying entrepreneur



**My** name is Nathaniel Carter I am 18 years old and have just finished my A Levels studying Mathematics, Physics and Geography as well as an Extended Project Qualification (EPQ).

I thought I would start off by introducing myself. When I was 12, my older sister got a job locally and I was jealous of her making her own money and being able to spend it on whatever she wanted! I decided that I would have to find a way of making money myself.

I soon realised that being 12 meant it was impossible to be employed so I had to improvise and work out a way of earning money myself! My starting point was my two major interests – planes and cars! I decided to start my own car detailing business offering limited services to friends and family. After two years of washing friends and family’s cars, I decided to try and expand my business from washing one or two cars a fortnight to washing multiple cars a week. However, I realised that doing this could cost lots more money than I initially thought! Over my summer holiday I sat down and decided to build my own website, create social media pages and have business cards printed in the hope of attracting more customers. Through the power of social media I found myself overwhelmed with enquires online. I learnt to manage my own time and organise customers quickly and my business has continued to grow ever since, both in size and in the services that I offer. I now offer a basic wash through to a multiple day polish and paint correction procedure and have numerous customers that keep me busy every week!

Another interest of mine is the Under 17 Car Club, a charity that teaches 11-17 year olds to drive a variety cars in a variety of locations across England with a focus on road safety. I joined the club when I was 12 years old and worked my way up to the highest grade and now return as Vice Chief Marshal helping to organise and run the events.

Since I can remember, it has always been a dream of mine to become a pilot. Whenever a plane flies over my head I look up and see what it is and watch it fly over wishing I was on the flight deck. After a couple of flying lessons at aged 15, I visited my first flight school open day where I interacted with cadet pilots and learnt what being a pilot was really like and how to get into the industry – this day only made me more excited for the future.

After I had completed my A levels, I went through the application process for my dream flight school and after passing a variety of assessments and interviews, I was given an unconditional offer to commence training in both the UK and USA.

I am excited to say that I have been asked to write a diary throughout my flight school journey that will be published in this magazine so please do follow my journey to the flight deck which started in October 2021.

## Freshspring Steam Beer!

We are pleased to continue our successful relationship with Bideford's Clearwater Brewery who brew our Freshspring Beer which continues to prove popular and is a fruity, copper ale at 4.5% ABV.

Freshspring Beer comes in 500ml bottles and is 'bottle conditioned' which means some of the natural ingredients are present in the beer. This gives a more intense flavour but the bottle needs to stand before drinking to allow it to settle and requires careful pouring.

The beer is available direct from the brewery at £2.50 per bottle including VAT and can be ordered through sales@clearwaterbrewery.co.uk or by phone on 01237 420 492.

Delivery for a minimum of 12 bottles can be made for free within a 10 mile radius. Deliveries further afield will be made by courier with a £15 charge.

Payment to be made in advance by BACS (call the brewery for bank details) or by cheque made payable to Clearwater Brewery Ltd.



Clearwater Brewery Ltd  
Unit 1 Little Court  
Manteo Way  
Bideford  
Devon  
EX39 4FG



## Leaving a legacy to the SS Freshspring Trust

The Steamship Freshspring Trust has benefitted greatly from the generosity of its members and friends who have left or given money to the Trust.

Legacies provide very necessary financial support in helping the Trust to meet its stated objectives of preserving the past and inspiring knowledge for the future

If you would like to think of giving the SS Freshspring Trust a legacy, it could not be easier: The following codicil can be completed by you, witnessed, and kept with your Will.

### CODICIL

I (full name).....

of (full address).....

.....  
declare this to be the (1st/2nd/other.....) codicil to my Will dated.....

I give, free of Inheritance Tax, the sum of

£..... (.....pounds)

to the SS Freshspring Trust of Little Cleave, Lower Cleave, Northam, Devon EX39 2RH

(Registered Charity Number 1151907), absolutely for its general charitable purposes.

In all other respects I confirm my said Will.

Testator's signature:.....Date.....

Signed in the presence of:

First witness

Second Witness

Signature

Signature

.....  
Full name

.....  
Full name

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Note: The witnesses must not be your executor, your executor's spouse or a beneficiary of your Will.



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