

## The Master of the last *Sappho*.

“I tell you.... someone will remember us in the future.”

(Fragment) Sappho, poet, born 630 BCE.

### Introduction.

My story of “Sappho & her Sisters” lay dormant and without comment on my webpage from March 2021 until out of the blue, and in the same week in early 2023 (!) I received two separate responses from two men, Kurt Layson and Steve Mudway.

Kurt Layson of the USA is the great grandson of the tragic Captain Whyatt of the “Cato”. We were able to share bits of information about the Whyatt descendants, whose subsequent lives, by coincidence, like those of Captain Rex Mudway and Mrs Avril Mudway, the subjects of this postscript, partially took place in Canada. Alas, Mr Layson has not made further contact, so without his permission, I am unable to share more details about the Whyatt family.

The Bristol Steam Navigation Company (BSNC) over and over again re-cycled the random classical names of their vessels, Greek and Roman, myth and historical. Some of “Sappho’s sisters” had male names. Steve Mudway’s father was Master of the last “Sappho”.

Captain Rex Mudway’s “Chronicles” chart his working life, 1943-1980, most of which was spent “deep sea”, but from 1960 to 1966, he worked for BSNC, as First Officer, then Master, aboard various incarnations of “the sisters”, steaming with cargoes to and from the Bristol and English Channel ports. (When “butting through the Channel in the Mad March Days”, surely he must have been thoroughly fed up with remarks about his appropriate surname?)

Avril, Rex’s wife, shared some of these adventures and wrote her account too as “Avril’s Chronicles”. Neither memoir was intended for wider circulation, but Steve has kindly allowed me to use their BSNC sections in this blog.

Captain Mudway’s BSNC chapters of “Chronicles”, are “the view from the Bridge” with few portraits of individuals, apart from his fellow ships’ masters, of whom Avril adds welcome further details. Steve himself knew all the captains, “larger-than-life characters”. I have inserted a few newspaper articles which mention a few more names of mariners, including those of the lower deck.

The last *Sappho* was eventually sold by Bristol Steam to a Canadian firm, and Captain Mudway took her across the Atlantic where she was renamed “Ghislain Marie”. Steve and Avril joined Rex aboard the ship for her next lease of life in the St Lawrence Seaway, and this is included here. In the Canadian section the term “Eskimo” appears. The word is no longer acceptable, being colonial nomenclature foisted on the Inuit people from outside. I have retained the

original which was current in Captain's Mudway's time, and no disrespect is meant or suggested.

I am grateful to Steve Mudway for sharing his family history with me and allowing me to reproduce the Bristol part of Rex & Avril's story.

## **1. Rex Mudway & the *Peter Leigh***

In 1959, Rex Milsom Bowen Mudway, married, with a young son, with sixteen years of seafaring, boy and man, behind him was ashore in Bristol when his father told him a Mr Ashmead who owned a coaster was looking for a First Mate. The contrast between his previous berth, a modern, refrigerated ocean-going ship and a channel coaster would be immense, but Rex thought it would be a new experience as well as allowing him to get home more often.

Ashmead's ran mainly tugs and barges along with the small MV *Peter Leigh*, a class of ship known as a Chant, 320 gross tons, with a flat bottom which could sit comfortably on the sea or riverbed at low tide. She had a speed of 6 -7 knots and carried a crew of eight, Captain Ray Hardcastle, a First Mate, two engineers, three deck hands and a cook. Two of the deck hands were required to have AB.'s certificates otherwise the only other qualification, a Radio Telephone Certificate, was held by the captain. They had to supply their own food. This is a question which puzzled me about the *Sappho* of 1914. How did they eat? In the case of the *Peter Leigh*, the cook went ashore with cash - deducted from the wages - with two bags and came back with them full of provisions, slung around his neck. Rex says "We were lucky in the cook, Bill Peterson from Penarth. His speciality was ham-hocks, which he picked up at local markets. He fed us well at a very low cost."

First Officer Rex Mudway (hereafter shown as "R.M." for simplicity) joined *Peter Leigh*, moored on the river Usk, just below the road bridge, in mid-October 1959. She was loading sulphate of ammonia, and as the tide was out only her masts showed above the quay. The accommodation was small and like everything else on board, basic. The journey ahead, to Belfast, with only a magnetic compass as a navigational aid, and poor visibility, was hazardous. The captain and mate shared watches, five hours on, five hours off. After discharging the cargo, a leak was discovered in the engine room which they plugged with the aid of a cement box. This primitive repair did the trick and was still in place the following year when R.M. left the company.

In the frequent crossings of the Bristol Channel, Captain Hardcastle introduced R.M. to a few short cuts, like the useful passage between the island of Skokholm and St. Anne's Head, and the good anchorage to be had at Dale Roads in Milford Haven Bay, which he was able to use to his advantage when he joined the Bristol Steam Navigation Company.

At Belfast, (21<sup>st</sup> November) 1959, the Roving Reporter of "Ireland's Saturday Night", had an exciting assignment, (not?) watching the dockers loading 'about half a ton of spuds' wheeled up to the ship, hooked to the winch cable, swung aboard, and stowed neatly into the hold of

the *Peter Leigh*, 'an ordinary looking ship', formerly called the *Empire River*, which had come in with a cargo of sulphate of ammonia from Newport, South Wales.

She "was built during the war for carrying ammunition," First Officer Rex Mudway told the reporter. "In 1941 she was in the Normandy landings.<sup>1</sup> After the war she was bought by the French and worked the West African ports. Then a Bristol firm bought her. You could call her a spud specialist."

R.M. had recalled the fittings on *Peter Leigh* as "basic", but the hack was rather more impressed: 'A tidy ship, everything neat and compact, with trim cabins, a nice galley with a cylinder gas stove, narrow corridors, and steep companionways. Just right in a wee world, all its own.'

(Gosh) They even had a radio telephone. "We can phone anywhere in the UK," said Rex.

Their usual run was Belfast to Penzance, to unload half the potatoes, on to Swansea and Newport and return to Belfast with sulphates. 'They should be able to do Penzance in 48 hours, weather depending.'

That day, Rex said, there had been a gale warning for the Irish Sea, "so we mightn't sail today. No point in leaving the dock, then having to anchor in the Lough."

'He is, properly a deep-sea sailor.' "My last ship", he said, "was 7,000 tons on the River Plate meat run. I thought I'd go coastal for a change."

(I suspect R.M. might have found the questions trying. The encounter is not noted in his memoir.)

One of those he signed on *Peter Leigh* was a 17-year-old Ordinary Seaman, but after they sailed, discovered the boy had only one leg, the other having been amputated, following a fishing boat accident, "But he turned out to be willing and hardworking, so I kept him on."

They traded all around the Bristol Channel and the Irish Sea carrying potatoes from Northern Ireland to Poole, Falmouth, and Penzance. They did one trip, usually done by Ashmead's barges, with grain from Avonmouth to Dumble, on the River Parret near Bridgwater.

After three months, Captain Hardcastle took a shore job and R.M., having been examined for a master's certificate by Captain Williams, the South Wales Shipping Superintendent, took over command of the *Peter Leigh*.

During one trip they were in the Bristol Channel at full speed when the anchor broke loose and went crashing to the bottom of the sea. The full cable went out but luckily the shackle securing the end of the chain in the cable locker held. R.M.'s successor as 1<sup>st</sup> Mate, whose job

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<sup>1</sup> Rex was usually meticulous with detail and the year may have been misheard or misprinted. It seems more likely it was in June 1944. In a letter to Bristol Evening Post 5.5.1990, Merchant Navy man, Ray Buck, AB, of Portishead, states he was part of the Normandy landings, with the *Empire Capulet* (which sounds like a possible sister ship of *Empire River*) "ferrying ammunition, tanks and service personnel ashore".

was to make sure the cable lashings were in place, was a good man, but slightly absent minded. He had apparently fallen asleep during a night watch and had omitted to alter course at a certain buoy. The *Peter Leigh* was grounded on a sandbank. It was a hairy hour or so.

R.M. thought “we were going to lose the ship. We had large seas breaking over us. Luckily the tide was rising and eventually we broke free without serious damage.”

With pay and conditions poor, and the work hard, R.M. had great difficulty obtaining and keeping the two certificated AB.'s as required by law. Ashmead's was not registered with the Shipping Federation so he could not call on them to help. On one occasion he was so desperate he managed to persuade his brother (who had a 1<sup>st</sup> Mate's home trade certificate) to help him out. The brother, who was ashore preparing to get married, reluctantly complied. His bride-to-be was not thrilled either!

By 1960 the opportunity came for R.M. to move on.

## **2. MV. JUNO**

*Juno*, the fourth Bristol Steam Navigation Company ship of that name was launched at Charles Hill's Albion Dockyard on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1949. The first *Juno*, built in 1853, was a paddle wheel steamer, as was the second in 1868, which had the distinction of cutting the tape of the first Avonmouth Dock in 1877. The third *Juno* was built in 1887. <sup>2</sup>

First Officer Rex Mudway joined BSNC, one of the premier coasting companies in the UK, in September 1960. The company, with seven ships in operation, traced its origins back to 1821.

The latest *Pluto* had been launched shortly after the new *Juno* and the two ships were running a weekly service from Bristol to Dublin with one ship calling at Waterford on Saturday mornings on the return trip to Bristol. The Dublin ships carried 3-ton aluminium containers of Guinness as part of their cargo, taking the emptied containers back on the return trip to Dublin. These containers took up about a third of the cargo space.

Mrs D. McSorley of Staple Hill wrote to the Evening Post, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1996, with memories of her father, Frank Hodge, which confirmed the Guinness cargo but in the steamer *Cato* and in a previous era.

*“My father, Frank Hodge, worked on the ss. Cato for 19 years as a donkey man, one of the people who worked on the engines. The Cato went to Dublin each week to collect a cargo of Guinness. It would catch the last tide out on a Tuesday teatime and dad would be back with us on a Saturday. When I was a little girl he used to take me to the ship on a Sunday morning and I would go on board with him to see if the engines were alright. How I used to enjoy being taken down below. The docks on a Monday morning would be so busy with the dockers unloading the cargo that it wasn't safe to walk around.”*

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<sup>2</sup> “Shipping Intelligence”, showing the movements of Bristol ships “in and out”, including BSNC, was a daily feature in the local newspapers.

Frank Hodge died suddenly, aged 61, on 25 August 1939, a week before the outbreak of WW2. *Cato* was a casualty of the war in 1940 and lost at sea with most of the crew.<sup>3</sup>



In 1960, two other BSNC ships, *Echo* and *Apollo*, ran a fortnightly service from Bristol to Antwerp, Rotterdam, Plymouth and Cardiff returning to Bristol with general cargo. The other ships traded from the Bristol Channel ports to the continent, their cargoes being mainly of steel, coal or "generals". Occasionally a consignment of ammunition was loaded at Barry for Zeebrugge, destined for the British forces in Germany. Sometimes out of date ammunition was taken back to Barry from where it was taken out to sea and dumped.

The MV. *Juno* was dry-docked at Rotterdam, undergoing repairs, when R.M. joined her as relief 1<sup>st</sup> Officer on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1960 under Captain, Gabriel Murphy.

Avril Mudway recalled Captain Murphy as

"an agreeable Irishman from Dunmore East in Waterford. He was unable to go to his home as often as the others and because of his children's school commitments his wife couldn't join him frequently either. We often had his company at weekends, and he came to Cheltenham to us when he was able.<sup>4</sup> I tried to keep him supplied with homemade cakes for his kindnesses to me. Unfortunately, he died of a heart attack shortly before he was due to take early retirement to go back to Ireland. We didn't hear of this until many years later."

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<sup>3</sup> For the full story of the loss of *Cato* in 1940, see "Sappho & her Sisters".

<sup>4</sup> The Mudway family had moved to Cheltenham at about the same time as Rex was offered his new berth with BSNC. Steve remembers the other officers would often stay with them.



**MV. Juno on the River Avon.**

*Juno* had a speed of 11 knots and like all the company's ships was fitted with radar. She arrived in Bristol on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1960 and was put back on the Dublin trade. It took about 18 hours sailing to Dublin; 2 or 3 days were spent there discharging and loading with about the same time in Bristol. After a few weeks R.M.'s position with the company became permanent. Norman Llewellyn took over as captain and became a good friend.



**MV. Juno at her Bristol berth.**

### **3. MV. APOLLO**

On 19<sup>th</sup> December 1960, R.M. was transferred to the MV. *Apollo* to relieve the 1<sup>st</sup> Officer for Christmas. Captain Barnes, the Master, was the senior captain in the company.



**MV. APOLLO**

A few years before, 13<sup>th</sup> June 1955, the Evening Post had reported a heroic rescue when Captain Barnes was in command of *Apollo*. The headline reads:

**APOLLO'S BOAT BROUGHT BACK TEN LIVES FROM BURNING SEA**

The *Apollo* arrived in Bristol on the early tide on Sunday morning and most of the men who had risked "sudden and agonising death" had quietly gone home though Captain George Victor Barnes, 44, (who had been with BSNC since 1946) was still aboard. Just before 3 a.m. four nights before, off the Belgian coast and approaching Margate, the two officers saw the sky light up, three miles away. The Swedish tanker *Johannishus* was on fire having collided with the Panamanian freighter *Buccaneer*. Captain Barnes called for volunteers and ordered a boat away. All seventeen of the *Apollo's* crew stepped forward, among them 18-year-old Kenneth Jones of 11 Constitution Hill, Clifton.

"Normally I would not have allowed him to go," said Captain Barnes, "but in the hurry [his age] was overlooked." The young man went with those selected, who included AB Harry Butler of 14 Timsbury Road, Bedminster, Richard Pike of Weston-Super-Mare, Chief Officer Harry Mowat of West Harptree, 4<sup>th</sup> Engineer Don Vickers of York Road, Easton and Barry Butchers of the Forest of Dean. The boat returned after a two-hour operation having plucked from the sea eleven crew of the *Johannishus*, one of whom, sadly, was dying. Two other survivors who had swum to the *Apollo* were also taken aboard. They were taken to the port galley where all the portholes were shut and everything that would light, including hotplates, was turned on to thaw out the frozen and oil covered victims. The crew gave First Aid and supplied clothing. Soon the men who had escaped the fire were drinking tea and talking about their experience. Captain Barnes said "If we had been able to stay longer, we would have saved more. We were very lucky. We were running against time, but we worked as a wonderful team."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Harry Mowat's reminiscences appear in "Sappho & her Sisters" as does another version of the rescue.



In 1960 BSNC continued sailings from Bristol with general cargo to Rotterdam, but change was coming, for they loaded “a few containers”. R.M. believed that “these were the first the company had carried and would in a few years become the main means of carrying generals.” The next port was Antwerp to discharge and load more general cargo thence to Plymouth, on to Cardiff and Bristol to complete the round voyage.

“Rex”, says Avril, “was now running regularly into Bristol Channel ports..... BSNC ships were a dream.” He was able to get home on alternate voyages and if he could not do so, the South Wales ports were close enough for her to join him. Officers’ wives were not allowed to sail between ports but were made welcome once in port and well looked after. R.M. took over as “relief” on various ships when he first joined the company, thus Avril got to know several of the masters, officers, and shore staff in Prince Street when they visited those ships which were tied up across the road.

“Captain Norman Llewellyn had relieved Gabriel Murphy so he could take leave. He took over as permanent master. He and Rex became good friends. He lived in Cardiff with his wife Mary and their three children. Mary was an ardent Labour supporter. She and Rex had numerous political arguments that ended in whoops of laughter. She was persuaded to stand for the County Council and won a seat there easily.

“Rex was asked to stay with the company and went to relieve on the *Apollo* over Christmas week with Captain Barnes who had little to do with visiting wives, polite but distant. Rex returned to the *Juno* and later relieved Captain Llewellyn for his three weeks leave. They resumed their very congenial relationship. He remained a good friend, eventually left Bristol Steam and became a Newport Pilot. He died in about 1990.”





**Captain Norman Llewellyn**

*"He had a benevolent round face usually with a broad grin on it."*


#### **4. MV. JUNO...again**

On 7<sup>th</sup> January 1961 First Officer Mudway was back with the *Juno* and resumed the Dublin run. They were at sea when a break in the routine occurred. A strike was called by the Dublin dockers.

"We were ordered to anchor somewhere until further instructions. I told Captain Llewellyn of my experience of Dale Roads in Milford Haven Bay, and he decided to anchor there. We stayed there for about a week and had quite a pleasant time, using the motor lifeboat to visit Dale village for supplies and explore the bay."

On 17<sup>th</sup> August, R.M. took over as master so that Captain Llewellyn could take a three-week holiday. On 2<sup>nd</sup> September they were south of Carmarthen Bay when there was a drama: R.M. was called by 2<sup>nd</sup> Officer Austin at 0630 hours with the news that they had collided with a trawler.

The Bristol Steam Navigation Company Limited.

 M/V "JUNO" at Dublin.  
3rd September, 19 61.

At 0630 hrs on the 2nd September, 1961, J. Austin, 2nd Mate, awoke me with the information that we had collided with a Trawler.

On reaching the bridge I found that the Trawler was about half a mile astern of us, I altered course and put the "Juno" within hailing distance of the Trawler which turned out to be the "Lady Iris" of Swansea, and ensured that she had not been seriously damaged, was in no danger, and was carrying on with its trawling.

The Skipper of the "Lady Iris" told me over the r/t that damage was slight, the port after gallews were damaged, and she was not making water.

The "Lady Iris" was struck by our port bow and scraped down the port side of "Juno".

A. Davis, E.D.H. was at the helm during the collision.

At 0720 hrs we continued our passage. Visibility was 2 to 3 Miles.

*R.B. Mudway*  
Master

M.V. "JUNO"  
OFF. NO. 185874  
BRISTOL  
GRT. 80912  
NRT. 819.07  
NHP. 63 75

The trawler, the *Lady Iris*, of Swansea had been struck by *Juno's* port bow. A seaman called A. Davis was at the helm during the collision. The damage was slight, with *Juno* scraped along the port bow, and the *Lady Iris* was able to carry on trawling. The incident was over in less than an hour and *Juno* continued her passage. Visibility was 2 to 3 miles. [report signed by R.B. Mudway]

Captain Llewellyn returned on 7<sup>th</sup> September. R.M. was given three weeks off and signed back on to *Juno* on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1961 as 1<sup>st</sup> Officer. The routine Bristol-Dublin continued uneventfully until 19<sup>th</sup> March 1962 when he was transferred to the MV. *Milo*.

*Juno* was sold in 1967 to a Greek firm and renamed *Enarsis*. She was wrecked on the south coast of France in 1970.

## **5. MV. MILO**

R.M.'s next ship was *Milo*. She was new built in 1953 and took part in the Spithead Review in honour of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II that year. She was of a revolutionary design with no cargo handling gear, which was considered unnecessary for the trade in which she would be engaged. The hatch covers were of steel and operated with winches. She had a speed of about 11 knots. *Apollo*, built 1954, and *Echo*, built 1957, were larger, improved versions of the *Milo*.



**MV. Milo**

First Officer Mudway and the master, Captain, Wally Kays, joined the ship together on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1962, at Port Talbot. R.M. had been warned that Kays was a hard man to sail with, but in fact, Rex says,

“..... it was the complete reverse. He was about the best ship's master I have ever sailed with. He didn't suffer fools gladly but if you did your work properly you couldn't go wrong with him. He was an excellent seaman and particularly good at cargo stowage. I learnt a lot from him.”

The two men became very good friends.

Avril: "Wally Kays had the reputation of being a hard task master and chief officers were known to tremble at the sound of his name.... he looked more like a heavy weight boxer, but right in the middle of his rather forbidding face was a pair of twinkling blue eyes. He obviously didn't suffer fools gladly, but Rex was a very experienced officer by then and he seemed to suit Wally. One of his little quirks was to examine Rex's cargo plans and, however good they were, to change something in them, often one item. Usually at mealtimes you would not speak until the Master had acknowledged your presence. When Wally came in there would be a pregnant pause while he perused (his word, not mine) the menu. Then he would order his meal, beam at all of us and start a conversation. He had the most beautiful handwriting and I waited for his Christmas cards just for the pleasure of his signature!"

*Milo* was being loaded for Antwerp with steel sheets destined for the European car building industry. They were in parcels of about 4 or 5 feet square, about 2 feet deep and because of the weight they were only loaded about 3 tiers high. This low stowage gave the ship a high GM<sup>6</sup> and caused her to roll heavily in a seaway, moving the parcels. In other ships the steel sheets had arrived damaged. On the advice of Captain Kays several tons of old cut railway sleepers were obtained and loaded to make a solid stow across the width of the hold between the parcels. *Milo* made many voyages with this cargo and the steel sheets were generally discharged at Antwerp intact.

The voyages lasted 3 or 4 weeks. They carried coal, steel, or generals out of the Bristol Channel, sometimes topping up with ammunition at Barry for discharge at Zeebrugge, the main ports of call on the continent being Antwerp, Rotterdam, Bremen, and Hamburg. Then with cargo back to the Irish Sea and the Bristol Channel ports with generals or potash in bulk from Antwerp and grain. One evening in December 1962 when returning from Bremen to Avonmouth with potash, R.M. picked up a distress signal from a Dutch coaster, the *Nimrod*.

"I informed Captain Kays at once, but as we were just to the south of Tor Bay we thought we were too far away to be of any immediate assistance, so carried on our way. A NW gale was blowing at the time. We rounded Lands' End, and the *Nimrod* was still sending out distress signals. A tug had been ordered out of Swansea to attend her but had refused to sail because of the weather.

"So, as we steamed up the Cornish coast, we sent a message to the *Nimrod* that we would assist her after all. We were encountering heavy seas and had our messroom window stove in. On reaching *Nimrod* we attempted to get a line to her with our rocket throwing gear. This was not successful because of the high winds so Captain Kays took us close in and we managed to get a heaving line to the casualty. We passed heavy towing wires to the ship, but the two ships were pitching and rolling so heavily the sudden weight on the wires caused them to break. This happened about four times. Eventually the weather eased, and the Dutchmen were able to secure a wire to their anchor cable. The anchor cable was paid out a few fathoms and with the anchor acting as a spring we commenced towing the ship to Swansea.

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<sup>6</sup> The metacentric height (GM) is a measurement of the initial static stability of a floating body. It is calculated as the distance between the centre of gravity of a ship and its metacentre.

“Arrangements were made for a contracted tug to take the *Nimrod* in tow off Swansea Buoy. But as we approached the Mumbles, the first tug, which had refused to leave Swansea came out and tried to get us to pass the tow to her. Captain Kays let them know in no uncertain manner that we were not going to share the salvage money with them. We left *Nimrod* under tow by the contracted tug, and continued to Avonmouth, with her crew on deck cheering us on our way. I thought that Captain Kays displayed good and brave seamanship in the handling of *Milo* in such bad weather. Several times our stern swung very close to the *Nimrod*'s bow when attempting to pass her the lines, and the sailors and I retreated from the stern rapidly.”

DECK.						
Abstract Log M.V. <u>Milo</u> from <u>Bremen</u> to <u>Avonmouth</u>						
Sailed <u>0620</u> <u>13</u> Dec. 19 <u>62</u> Arrived <u>2100</u> <u>17</u> Dec. 19 <u>62</u>						
Draught of Water on Sailing F. <u>12'2"</u> A. <u>15'5"</u> <u>W. Kays</u> Master						
Draught of Water on Arrival F. _____ A. _____ <u>R.B. Mudway</u> Chief Officer						
DAY	DATE	TIME	Course	Wind	F.	EXTRACT FROM LOG
Sunday	Dec.	16	11.44 <sup>h</sup>	NE½E		Trevoos Hd. abn. 3½ mls
"	"	"	1200.	NE½E	NW	7/8. Very rough sea, long heavy swell ¼ rolling heavily & shipping heavy seas. Cloudy & clear. a/c.
"	"	"	1203	NE½E		12.55 Have instructed M.V. "Nimrod" (in distress), am proceeding towards her. E.T.A. 1415 <sup>h</sup>
"	"	"				1330. Port cabin window stove in by seas.
"	"	"		Course various to Master's order.		1410. ¼ manoeuvring to pass tow line to M.V. "Nimrod". Courses & engine movements various to Master's order.
"	"	"	2000	NW	6.	Numerous attempts to put line on board "Nimrod". 1 wire & 1 coil spring parted.
"	"	"	2400	NW	2/3.	20.30 <sup>h</sup> Second towing wire parted. Have informed M.V. "Nimrod" that we are still standing by her.
Monday	"	17.				Slight sea, mod. swell. Cloudy & clear. Standing by M.V. "Nimrod".
"	"	"	0400.	NW	2/3.	0255. Approaching M.V. "Nimrod" to take towing wire. 0255. Tow fast, standing by whilst M.V. "Nimrod" heaves up anchor. 0325. Commence towing. Proceeding towards Swansea.
"	"	"	0512.	NE½E		Proceeding with M.V. "Nimrod" in tow. Slight sea, mod. swell. Cloudy & clear. Engines at slow speed.
"	"	"	0710.			Hartland Pt. abn. 3 mls
"	"	"	0800.	NE½E	E. 2.	Bull Pt. abn. 6 mls
"	"	"				Proceeding with M.V. "Nimrod" in tow. Slight sea & swell. O'cast & clear. Engines at slow speed.

1<sup>st</sup> page of logbook extract.



The full report of the salvage enquiry, 11<sup>th</sup> June, 1964, in the Fairplay Shipping Journal, shows that Chief Officer Mudway was rather modest in his assessment of his part in the affair:

In awarding a total of £3,600, two-thirds of which would go to the owners, his Lordship commented that there was a danger to the crew, and said that all hands on board the *Milo* gave their best, and that such willingness to accept risks to a ship and cargo to assist other vessels in distress must be encouraged. Having this in mind, and also the fact that by the time effective towage had begun, the weather had vastly improved and another vessel was on the scene, of the remaining £1,200 the master was awarded £400. The remaining £800 was to be shared by the crew according to their basic rates, with the proviso that the chief officer would rank with the chief engineer, and the second mate with the second engineer. The chief officer, without whom, the master had said, they would not have achieved what they ultimately did, was awarded a double share.

Avril: "The ship's company received a salvage payment after they rescued the *Nimrod*. Rex used his share to buy our first car. I learned to drive, and this meant I was no longer relying on trains when I joined ships."

The winter of 1962/63 turned very cruel with gales blowing from the east and northeast and bringing freezing weather with them. The ships had a hard time especially when steaming east up the English Channel. The northern European rivers froze, and in the Scheldt Estuary, R.M. said "I couldn't get the anchor to break through the ice. Even after the anchor was dropped it wouldn't hold the ship as the ice floes were pushing us downstream."

At Zeebrugge Captain Kays would go ashore in the early morning to meet the fishing boats coming in. He would take a bottle or two of rum and some cartons of cigarettes with him and trade them for fresh fish for the ship's company to eat.

In April 1963 they were in Amsterdam loading a cargo of grain and were battening down the steel hatch covers in preparation to sail when R.M. slipped on some loose grain lying on the deck, fell heavily and injured his left wrist. It was too painful to carry on. The captain bandaged him up and sent him off to his bunk, but the agony persisted. Two days later when they arrived in Plymouth R.M.'s wrist was technicolour, deep purple and yellow. He went immediately to hospital where an X Ray showed eight broken bones.

That Easter, when Avril took Stephen to join the ship at Plymouth, she found her husband with his arm in plaster. He tried to do what tasks he could manage aboard the ship, and on Easter Sunday the family managed a short trip to Plymouth Hoe, just long enough to get Steve an ice-cream! Rex was still in such pain that he returned to hospital where he was diagnosed with a compound Colles fracture, a dorsal displacement forcing the bone fragment towards the back of the hand.

On Easter Monday the arm was reset under anaesthetic, a procedure, which took most of the day. Wally Kays who had already entertained mother and son during the weekend, took

charge of young Steve. “Wally obtained a fishing rod and suitable bait, and with others of the crew settled down for a spot of fishing - off the side of the ship! The only one of them, to catch anything, to their chagrin was the boy. He caught a red mullet and by the time his parents finally arrived from the hospital the ship’s cook was preparing it for Steve’s tea.<sup>7</sup>



Shortly afterwards “Rex was paid off, unfit to work [for] unexpected sick leave, and a pleasurable journey home.” He was told he would not be fit enough to return to work for eight weeks.

Avril really enjoyed every visit she made to the *Milo* when Wally was there.

“It was always sociable and friendly. Wally had a large family himself. He and Peg lived in Bristol in with their five children.

“Providing the work on his ship was being done well he was a very happy character. Many years before he had broken his leg when he was in Nova Scotia; he had been put ashore in Halifax Royal Infirmary before being sent home as a ‘distressed mariner’. He was expected to work on the voyage home and received no payment from the time he had been put ashore. He was saying that the conditions were still no better.

(Wally seems to be referring to the present conditions (1960s) for the “lower deck”. Rex was paid six pay after his wrist, probably because of his officer status.)

Avril: “I don’t quite remember how it came about, but one time I took Wally from Cardiff to Swansea to join a ship. I often did taxi service for people when time was short. I also carried ship’s papers back to the office, as I was trusted not to lose them! Everyone was so willing to have me on the vessels and treated me so well it was very little to do in repayment.”

## **6. MV. HERO**

In February 1963 the Evening Post reported: “The motor vessel *Hero* slid down the slipway on 26<sup>th</sup> February, the City’s gesture to the worldwide slump in shipping: a vote of confidence in the future.” Bristol people turned out in force and the dockyard band played “Rule Britannia”.

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<sup>7</sup> The flavour of this fish is considered ‘delicate’ hence chefs suggest any additions to the basic recipe, capers, oranges, olive, devilled shrimps &c 8c. I suspect the cook grilled it, hopefully with a knob of butter.

*Hero* was the sixth ship built by Charles Hill & Sons for BSNC since 1949. She was followed by a seventh, *Dido*, launched on 10th June 1963.

Despite being told he needed eight weeks to recover, after only four weeks at home in Cheltenham R.M. received a phone call from Mr Melsom, BSNC's shipping manager, asking him to join *Hero* as First Officer. The doctor at Cheltenham General Hospital very reluctantly agreed to remove the plaster from R.M.'s wrist and replaced it with an elastic bandage, so he went back to work, taking part in *Hero*'s sea trials. Apart from a brief drama when one of the anchor's cable links opened, all went well; the anchor was secured and no-one hurt. With trials completed, a small ceremony was held on board "for the office staff". Captain Cyril Knight and the Chief Engineer, Frank Yeo, did the entertaining. The rest of the ship's company were too busy getting the ship ready to sail. First Officer Mudway, who seems slightly miffed says: "We were not invited."

Avril however had a pleasant time: "We were not invited to the launching but the captain [Knight] recognised this as a slight and organised a special lunch on board for wives and some senior office personnel to make it up to us.

"Mrs Knight and some of her friends came and we had a good private party. It was also a treat to be the first to stay on *Hero*, everything being brand new in the accommodation."



**A convivial shipboard evening.**

L to R. Captain Norman Llewellyn, Captain Wally Kays, Captain Dudgeon, Chief Engineer Dennis Hyde. Sitting: Barbara (telephone receptionist), Rose Kays, Mary Llewellyn, Mrs Hyde, Mrs. Dudgeon.

R.M.'s experience of being moved about between ships seems to have been the norm and is borne out by various reports of mishaps on the company's other ships.

On 15 June 1959 the Evening Post reports a lucky escape when Captain Knight, (then aged 37), of 8 Court Road, Horfield, and the mate, Barry Martin, 29, of Glamorgan were on the deck of *Juno* in Waterford, prior to sailing when a gang plank slipped and fell on them. Both men were taken to the BRI on arrival at Bristol. No bones appeared to have been broken and they were treated for bruises.



***MV. Hero***

Mr Melsom, the shipping manager, accompanied them for *Hero's* first voyage, 1963, to Bremen. Handling gear was again considered unnecessary due to the changing fashion. Containers were the thing. *Hero* was fitted with automatic steering gear, which pleased R.M. as an extra deckhand was taken on for work at sea. They carried cargoes of steel from the South Wales ports to the continent, sometimes coal, grain or potash.

On completion of the latest trip, Captain Knight was taken ill with severe pains in his side and was forced to take to his bunk. R.M. as senior officer, decided the situation was so bad that it could not wait for the ship to get into Avonmouth. He put in at Barry Roads and called for a doctor. Captain Knight was not at all happy about this decision, but Mudway insisted.

"I told him I was taking full responsibility. I would accept the blame if I was wrong, and his thanks if I was right. I would enter a full account in the ship's official logbook. The doctor came out to us in a pilot launch and took Captain Knight ashore at once. I continued as relief captain, and we carried on to Avonmouth. We went back to Barry to load a cargo of coal where I visited him at Barry Hospital. Cyril Knight was very seriously ill with complications following a ruptured appendix. He died two days later. He was only 41.

Avril says "This was a shock to everyone. There was a close relationship between all the employees, and a death was felt by all. Rex carried on as master until Wally Kays took over on 10<sup>th</sup> January 1964."



R.M. was due to go on leave himself but was asked by Mr. Melsom to sail for another voyage as 1<sup>st</sup>. Officer to give Captain Kays a chance to familiarise himself with the ship. R.M. did not feel this was necessary but was pleased to sail with Captain Kays again.



**Captain Wally Kays**

“On that voyage we were given the ashes of Captain Knight to deposit at sea. Accordingly, we stopped the engines off the Runnelstone Rocks near Land’s End to perform the ceremony. We had a little service on deck, Captain Kays read the text from the prayer book. When he got to the verse for burial at sea, I had to empty the ashes overboard, and stepped forward. Unfortunately, as I emptied the container a catspaw of wind sprung up and blew the ashes over us. We were invited to the captain’s dayroom to wash Captain Knight down with gin. He would have been pleased with that!”

As R.M. had remarked before, Captain Knight enjoyed entertaining. I cannot help noting the youthful deaths of the men in command.



**Runnelstone Rocks**

R.M. signed off from *Hero* at Port Talbot on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1964 and went on leave.

*Hero* was sold in 1969 to S.W. Coe and converted to a drilling ship. She was laid up in 1987.

## **7. Master of *Sappho***

R.M. relieved Captain Llewellyn on *Sappho* at Swansea on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1964. MV. *Sappho*, gross tons 1,133, built by Goole Shipbuilding & Repair Co. in 1949, for Brostrom Lines of Gothenburg was bought in 1960 by BSNC. from a Danish Company. She was very strongly built and was strengthened for operations in ice. The six derricks originally fitted on the ship were placed in store at Charles Hill's shipyard. Their removal did not help *Sappho's* stability, and the GM<sup>8</sup> was quite small, otherwise, she was a well-found ship. The accommodation was quite reasonable. She was fitted with wooden hatch boards and had a speed of about 10 knots.

After a cross-Channel voyage, R.M. handed back to Captain Llewellyn at Avonmouth on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1964, and was sent home to study for his Pilot's Licence which he passed, both written and oral, "without too much difficulty." This qualified him to take the company's ships in and out of ports in the tricky Bristol Channel. He re-joined *Sappho*, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1964 in London as permanent captain with M. Grant as 1<sup>st</sup> Officer. Captain Llewellyn was set to join the new ship, the MV. *Dido* which was being built at Bristol.

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<sup>8</sup> For explanation of GM, see footnote 3.



**MV. Sappho**

By the 20<sup>th</sup> May 1964, R.M. was on the move again, now to the *Hero* at Belfast, as Master to relieve Captain Kays, who was giving evidence at the Salvage Court regarding the *Nimrod* enquiry. Accordingly, he left *Sappho* at Cardiff, flew from Bristol to Belfast on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, to pick up cargo for the continent. At Antwerp they loaded potash for Cork and then proceeded to Swansea where Captain Kays returned. R.M. left *Hero* on 25<sup>th</sup> June and returned to *Sappho* the next day at Cardiff.

*Sappho* was kept busy carrying cargoes, generally coal and steel, from the Bristol Channel to European ports. They called at Rouen a few times to discharge coal, returning with grain to Bristol. They also went to Rochefort, and other Bay of Biscay ports to discharge coal as well as frequently carrying potash to the Irish Sea and Bristol Channel ports from Antwerp.

On 31<sup>st</sup> October 1964 they were sailing from Swansea to Antwerp with coal, proceeding up the river Schelde with a pilot on board when he, the pilot, ran the ship aground on a sandbank. R.M. tried various engine manoeuvres to free the vessel and shifted water ballast from different tanks to no avail. The tide was about to ebb, which would have left them aground and perhaps broken the ship's back. R.M. called out two tugs from Antwerp which put lines on board and pulled the ship off the bank. They then carried on to Antwerp under their own power, and after discharging the cargo, the ship went into dry dock for repairs. Damage was confined to the bilge keel and some loosening of the rudder pintles with about 10 inches taken off the tip of one of the propeller blades. This was soon put right.

*Sappho* continued trading to Europe and Ireland until August 1965, when R.M. was told that the ship had been put up for sale. Some prospective buyers from Finland viewed the ship at Antwerp, but nothing further came of it.



**MV. *Sappho* leaving Swansea with a full cargo of coal.**

At about this time, a Mr Ford, an accountant, joined the board of directors. While having a drink aboard *Sappho*, R.M. was told by Ford's wife, somewhat indiscreetly, that her husband was recommending selling off the ships and putting the money into road transport. These were uncertain times, but again nothing happened until March 1966. When *Sappho* was laid up in Bristol at Bathurst Wharf, she was inspected by a French-Canadian shipowner, Mr. Bouchard. Several weeks of negotiations ensued and with terms eventually agreed. Mr. Bouchard became *Sappho's* new owner.



THE BRISTOL STEAM NAVIGATION COMPANY (SHIPOWNERS) LTD.,  
Bathurst Wharf,  
Bristol, 1.

18th March, 1966.

m.v. "SAPPHO"

This vessel, which is the oldest ship in the B.S.N. fleet and the only one not built in Bristol, has been sold, subject to contract, to Canadian Buyers.

The Directors have no present intention of disposing of any other units of the fleet, neither have they any immediate plans for shipbuilding.

GRAHAM E. LOVELL.


Distribution:

Mr. J. Ford	Mr. F.W. Probert	Mr. H.W. Gale
" A.M. Park	" K. Day	" R. Hill
" M.M. Melsom	" P. Millener	Capt. E. Hardman
" R.W. Knapp	" F.C. Fewell	Mr. G.O. Maggs
" J.H. Forsyth	" N. Fitzgerald	" G.L. Palmer
" C. Williams	" A.J. Martin	" B.T. Williams
" W.H. Sturley	" J.P. Lawrence	" G.W. Staddon
" D.S. Chambers	" J.M. Strawson	" A.G.R. Davies(50)
" R.L. Williams	" T.J. Messent	" R.B. Dawbarn
" H.J. Taylor	" R.S. Headland	
	" L.C. Harris	All Masters

R.M. was asked if he would take the ship to Quebec and agreed. So did the chief engineer who needed a dispensation from the Board of Trade as he was not qualified to sail outside home trade limits. Bouchard flew over a crew of French Canadians to man the vessel. R.M. had the difficult task of finding 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Officers with foreign going qualifications to comply with the regulations. Bouchard was not registered with the Shipping Federation. Finally, at Cardiff, R.M. signed two officers who were "elderly, but they knew their jobs". A temporary suspension of his contract with Bristol Steam was duly granted. Transactions complete, the crew signed on and stores were taken aboard, plus the derricks, previously removed, which fortunately were still in store at Charles Hill's. *Sappho* left for Fowey to take on a cargo of china clay, "very messy, dust getting everywhere" for discharge at Quebec. After a week of "a pleasant holiday in Cornwall" according to Avril, R.M sailed from Fowey without his wife and son, and carrying a full cargo plus extra food stores: "a wasted effort as most of the crew were too sick to eat anything, never having before experienced an Atlantic crossing,"

**The Bristol Steam Navigation Company Limited**

DIRECTORS: G. E. LOVELL, S. G. S. LOVELL, D. D. LOVELL,  
A. J. MARTIN, N. S. WHITEFIELD

<p><b>OFFICES</b></p> <p>BRISTOL: Bathurst Wharf. LONDON: 2 Seething Lane, E.C.3. BIRMINGHAM: 39 Corporation Street, 2. SWANSEA: Albion Chambers, Cambrian Place. NEWPORT: Mess: Equity Chambers, Dock Street. CARDIFF: Mercantile Chambers, 13 James Street. PLYMOUTH: Millbay Pier.</p> <p>Telegraphic Address, All Offices: "BESENGO"</p> <p>YOUR REF. ....</p> <p>OUR REF. ....</p>	 <p><b>BATHURST WHARF, BRISTOL 1</b></p> <p>Telephone: BRISTOL 2-4111 Telegrams: "BESENGO BRISTOL"</p>	<p><b>AGENTS</b></p> <p>THE BRISTOL STEAM NAVIGATION CO.'S AGENCIES LIMITED.</p> <p>DUBLIN: George's Quay. BRISTOL SHIPPING AGENCY S.A. ANTWERP: 111 Avenue de France. Wm. H. Muller &amp; Co., N.V. ROTTERDAM and AMSTERDAM. Keller Shipping S.A. BASLE</p>
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Date: 18th March, 1966.

Captain R. M. Mudway,  
M.V. "Sappho".

Dear Sir,

With reference to your request for temporary release from your Company Service Contract obligations for the purpose of delivering the "Sappho" to Canada, we grant your request, and expect you to report for duty on arrival in the United Kingdom from Canada when both our contractual obligations will be resumed.

Yours faithfully,



R. W. KNAPP  
Marine Superintendent.

*Sappho* immediately ran into a heavy swell. The rough Atlantic weather continued throughout the crossing. Most of the crew took to their beds until they reached Canada. Only R.M., the 2<sup>nd</sup> Officer, the Chief Engineer and a junior engineer stayed on their feet, though the cook showed up occasionally.<sup>9</sup> On the bridge the 2<sup>nd</sup> Officer and R.M. worked watches four hours on, four hours off as well as steering the ship. The fun did not end there. A day out of port all communication with shore stations was lost and though they had a radio telephone on board, it had insufficient power to be of use. They were without contact until Newfoundland. Nearing their destination, the engines started giving trouble and they had to put into Sydney, Nova Scotia for repairs. Messrs Bouchard's marine superintendent, Frank Morris, came on board to inspect the ship. He would later be of great help to R.M. With repairs completed, *Sappho* battled on to Quebec where Mr. Bouchard asked R.M. if he would like to stay on as captain. Bouchard's ran a fleet of about six coasters, mainly up and down the St Lawrence River and to the Great Lakes. R.M. replied that he would need to go home first and see how things stood with Bristol Steam and would telegram his decision within the week.

The day he was leaving the ship for the flight home Mr. Bouchard put a bottle of rum in the officers' mess room. "The Chief Engineer seemed to think it was for him alone and imbibed rather deep into the bottle. He then caused an argument with the 1<sup>st</sup> Officer telling him that his certificates were rubbish. This was rather rich, as his own (probable) only qualification was as an apprenticeship with an engineering firm. This took place in front of Mr Bouchard. I was not too surprised at the incident; the Chief Engineer's behaviour had become eccentric over the previous year. Some months later Bristol Steam disposed of his service."

<sup>9</sup> R.M.'s account of seasickness is so nearly a quote from "Three Men in a Boat" that I laughed. This is Jerome K. Jerome on the same subject. Human nature? "Nobody is ever sick – on land....." [once, he said] "..... it was so rough that the passengers had to be tied into their berths. He and the captain were the only two living souls on board who were not ill. Sometimes it was he and the second mate who were not ill; but it was generally he and one other man. If not he and another man, then it was he by himself."

They closed articles on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1966 and R.M. flew home. On arrival he went to the BSNC. offices where Mr Melsom volunteered that things were not great with the company. "He dropped a pretty broad hint that more vessels would be disposed of soon."

(*Juno* and *Pluto* were sold in 1967. *Hero*, *Dido* and *Milo* were sold in 1969. *Milo* was purchased by J. and A. Gardiner and renamed *Saint Angus*. In 1976 she was sold to Maldivian owners and renamed *Lady Maria*. She ran ashore off the coast of Somalia and became a total wreck. *Apollo* and *Echo* were retained until 1980, when the firm finally closed its shipping interests.)

As R.M. was the junior captain he was obliged to revert to 1<sup>st</sup> Officer's status. His contract with BSNC. had almost expired, and he left the company. He accepted the position offered him by Bouchard's and prepared to return to Canada with his family. Papers were secured from Canadian Immigration and their house in Bath Road, Cheltenham, was rented out on a one-year lease.

R.M. flew out to Quebec and re-joined *Sappho*, which had now been renamed the *Ghislain Marie*. His wife Avril and son Stephen were to follow him to Canada in a few weeks' time.

## **8. MV. *Ghislain Marie***

A few changes had been made to the vessel to make her suitable for the new trade in which she would participate. A derrick had been fitted to each hatchway, with to the heel of each, a small winch for swinging the individual derrick. The innovation worked very well, but the extra top weight made the ship's stability even more precarious, especially as the ship was to carry large deck cargoes of wood pulp. Extra fairleads were fitted for the passage through the locks in the St. Lawrence Seaway. By June 1966, she was ready.



**MV. *Ghislain Marie* at Halifax, Nova Scotia. Jim Ruskin is the man in the foreground.**

The new crew, apart from R.M. were French Canadians. The owner's son was 1<sup>st</sup> Officer, and a younger son, a deck hand. Most were very inexperienced. The first trip was down the St. Lawrence River, to load wood pulp for the U.S. ports on the Great Lakes. Mr. Bouchard decided to take the trip with them. When completing loading, Bouchard insisted on piling the deck cargo higher and higher. R.M. told him it was dangerous because of poor stability, and after a heated argument he ceased. But too much had been taken on the deck and as they left the jetty the ship heeled over about 10 degrees. R.M. had the crew dump a lot of the wood pulp overboard which helped a little, but they had trouble all the way up the river and the lakes. The lockmasters complained about the list going into the locks, a situation not helped by Bouchard who continually argued with the lockmasters.



To enable any progress R.M. learned to soothe ruffled feathers. Each time they put the rudder over a few degrees the ship would heel over one way or the other. It was frightening. Eventually the cargo was discharged, and they returned downriver below Quebec to pick up another load of wood pulp. After which, to R.M.'s relief Bouchard departed the ship and left him to do his job. Frank Morris, the marine superintendent, who had again come aboard for a time was a good help.



**Entering a lock on the St. Lawrence Seaway.**

Avril and Stephen arrived and joined the ship. The wood pulp was loaded to R.M.'s specifications, and they carried it to Tonawanda, where the family was able to visit the nearby Niagara Falls. Other trips took them up the Great Lakes as far as Saulte St. Marie. The Great Lakes scenery was magnificent, especially "the Thousand Islands" with their picturesque houses, with "yachts dodging around."



**Niagara Falls.**

It was enjoyable, until "a nasty experience" at Sept Isles.

"I received no word of warning, about any dangers from the port authorities. Late at night the wind picked up and a strong swell caused us to bang heavily against the wharf near the

harbour entrance. I had to get the ship out, a difficult manoeuvre with the wind and sea holding us against the wharf. Eventually we anchored a little way off the shore.

“Later that night sparks from the funnel set one of the lifeboats canvas covers on fire. Distress rockets went off before we could put the fire out, and the wooden lifeboat was badly damaged. After discharging the cargo, we crossed the river from Quebec to the port of Levis, to have dents in the hull straightened and a new lifeboat supplied.”

Bouchard had secured a contract with the Canadian Government to run a cargo to a settlement in Hudson Bay. At Montreal they loaded prefabricated buildings and carried a small tug on deck for towing the barges they would be using for discharging. From Hudson Bay to Baker Lake, they needed to navigate the Chesterfield Inlet, a stretch of water several miles wide and 200 miles long. The settlement was on the north-western shore of the lake. Up to that time no survey had been taken and the only chart available showed only the outline of the coast with no water depths or hidden rocks.

“I was to pick up an Eskimo at Chesterfield Settlement, at the mouth of the inlet. The man had local knowledge of the area and was to advise me on the passage to Baker Lake.”

After loading cargo, they proceeded down the St. Lawrence and into the Straits of Belle Isle, then along the Labrador coast to Hudson Bay. Despite a moderate swell, some of the French Canadians again suffered sea sickness.

“We encountered a few icebergs and contrary to what I had been told they showed up quite well on the radar. In the Bay we hove-to beside an Eskimo fishing boat and purchased some of their catch, fine char, a cross of sea trout and salmon. The settlement consisted of a cluster of prefabricated houses for the resident Canadians, mainly government and church people, with some for Eskimos, who spent a little time there when not roaming the tundra for hunting and fishing.”



**An iceberg in Hudson Straits.**



**An Inuit fishing boat in Hudson Bay.**

Frank Morris was supposed to meet the ship at Baker Lake to assist the unloading, but he was delayed, so R.M. was obliged to hire a barge and a gang of Eskimos. The ship's crew loaded the cargo on to the barge which they towed as far as possible up the beach. The Eskimos then discharged the cargo from the barge and hauled it up to the high-water mark.

Hard to imagine this was just over half a century ago. It sounds like a world at the height of Empire.





Entertainment at Baker Lake consisted of a club and bar in a Nissen hut with a Hudson Bay Company store run by a young Scot. The Mounted Police Officer kept a pack of huskies tethered in the centre of the settlement. Some of the residents would come out to the ship in the evening, by native kayaks powered with outboard engines. Luckily, R.M. had a good supply of their favourite tipple on board, Bacardi and Seven Up.

They remained there for a few weeks as the discharge rate was slow. The weather was not too bad but began to deteriorate by the end of the stay. They lost a few days' work because of rain and strong winds. The ship returned to Montreal with a cargo of empty oil drums.



**This beautiful coat was hanging in the company store. It was apparently not for sale. Avril took the photo.**



At Baker Lake Settlement.



## FINALE

By October, winter had set in. The St. Lawrence Seaway began to ice up. Apart from a consignment of machinery, plus generals, with a deck cargo of telegraph poles, the only consignment was from the rail freight terminus at Mulgrave, (a small port in the Gulf of Canso, Cape Breton Island), to St. Johns, Newfoundland.

The Mudways were at Mulgrave for Christmas 1966. The French Canadians, including the First Officer, Bouchard's son, went home for the holidays, and were replaced by Nova Scotians. R.M. took on an experienced First Officer which made life easier, but he states, ruefully:

"I did have a little difficulty in obtaining a good cook, or at least a sober one."



*Ghislain Marie at Sydney alongside another Bouchard vessel.*

Bouchard contracted with the Canadian National Railway for Ghislain Marie to carry machinery, plus generals, with a deck cargo of telegraph poles, from the rail freight terminus at Mulgrave, a small port in the Gulf of Canso, Cape Breton Island, to St. Johns, Newfoundland. After Christmas Bouchard's contract with the CNR expired and the ship was laid up in Sydney for a while. The weather was bitter cold by then, with heavy snow. The St. Lawrence Seaway was iced up. Very little trade could be carried on.

With a slight improvement in the weather by February 1967, R.M. was ordered to proceed to Halifax to await a cargo, but there was no cargo forthcoming. By then, he and Mr Bouchard were not getting on too well, and R.M. decided he had had enough and left the vessel on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1967. He worked for a while for a US company trading gypsum out of Halifax, Nova Scotia where the family resided temporarily, with the intention of returning home as soon as the year-long lease on their house expired. They duly returned to Britain R.M. went back to the "deep-sea" trade.

In 1968 *Ghislain Marie* took a heavy list when her cargo of fish shifted and was taken in tow and beached at McNab Island, near Halifax. Once she was righted and her hull pumped out she was chained to the pier before going back into service in 1970. Then she was purchased by a Cayman Islands company and renamed *Anik*. She is believed to have been "decommissioned or lost" by 1980, the same year that Rex Mudway retired after his last "deep sea" voyage and BSNC itself ceased trading.

Rex Mudway died in 2017 and Avril, a year later.

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#### **Postscript:**

I welcome any news of "ancient mariners", or their descendants, BSNC especially, but anybody from, by, with, or to, the ports of Bristol or Avonmouth.

I am pleased to say that Owen Taton's granddaughter, Anne Randall, has contacted me. (see ss. Echo, 1923, pages 85-87 of the original *Sappho & her Sisters*.)

Mike Waight wrote to "*Shipping Today*" magazine, <https://shippingtandy.com/features/editors-mailbox-3/> from which comes the following snippet: "In the mid-1970s I lived in Bristol and while 'up' for my Master's Ticket at Ashley Down College spent a couple of months in 1976 as relieving 2nd Mate on mv *Apollo* and again in 1977 as 1st Mate serving on mv *Echo*."

"I was offered a permanent job with BSNC after gaining my Master's Ticket but whilst keen I had doubts about the future of the organisation, rightly as it turned out as the company ceased in 1980. However, by staying deep sea only postponed the inevitable and by 1983 the Merchant Navy and I parted company for the last time. "

Merchant Seaman and Port of Bristol tugboat man Ray Buck's narrative on <http://museums.bristol.gov.uk/narratives.php?irn=13352Q>

is suitably rollicking and well worth a visit. It could do with a blog of its own.

I wrote to the Bristol Evening Post concerning the derelict Bristol Seamen's Church suggesting a memorial to the mariners who traded out of Bristol for almost 1,000 years. This fell on deaf ears. The only response was from a 97-year-old Bristol man Richard Hendy, whose seagoing experience started in 1943 with the Norwegian Fleet and the Atlantic convoys out of Avonmouth. See this website, "Richard Hendy, mariner".

For an informed history of the company and the ships of BSNC, 1822-1980, see "The Story of LOVELL'S SHIPPING" by Eric Jordan.