

Hi Steve

My name is Neil Machin and I discovered your site a little while ago and have found it very interesting in rekindling my memories of my time at sea with P&O during the period 1969 to 1972. You do a fantastic job in running your site and the compiling of all the listings and photographs must take a lot of your spare time. I don't have many photographs in printed form so have found it difficult to send my details for inclusion in your Seadogs section but the few that I have been able to find I have included with this write up.

I did send a group shot of ship's officers on the Arcadia in late 1969 which you have already listed. I joined P&O in the summer of 1969 as an Asst. Electrical Officer having just completed a 3 year degree in Electrical Engineering. As I later discovered this was slightly unusual as most of my colleague Electrical Officers had joined with Apprenticeships or more hands on experience than I had gained. For me the prospect was pretty daunting when I realised how much variety of equipment the Electrical Dept. was responsible for.

I met colleagues who had worked in domestic or commercial wiring and had never experienced motors or generators and others who had trained in repair of domestic appliances etc. It soon became obvious to me that I had a lot to learn beyond my experience in motor control gear design and manufacture with English Electric.

I applied for a job with P&O while still at College and was fortunate to receive a job offer. I had attended an interview in Leadenhall Street and after accepting the position I got my instructions to join the Arcadia. Before travelling to Southampton from my parent's home in Stoke I was to report to HO to sort out some paperwork and to order

my uniform and obtain my Seaman's Card. I can't remember the exact date but it was a Friday either late July or early August and the weather was hot. Although I could drive I didn't have a car so my only means of travel was to use buses and the train to get to London with what I could get into a suitcase. I got to Head Office at about lunchtime and was told where to go to get my uniform and my Seaman's card. When I got to the office to get my card I presented my documents to confirm my identity but was told that the certificate which I had always believed to be my Birth Certificate was in fact just a Registration certificate which wasn't acceptable. My only hope was to travel to Somerset House to obtain a copy of my Birth Certificate from there. I reached Somerset House and explained my predicament at the reception and was directed to find the relevant entry of my birth in the records so that an application could be made. Signs posted in a number of places made it clear that certificates could not be issued immediately but after some pleading from me I was told to return in an hour and it would be ready. This I did and after thanking them I set off to get my Seaman's card. I arrived at the office just after 4 o'clock only to find that it closed at 4 o'clock. Now suffering from the heat of the day I went on to order my uniform and was told that it would be despatched to the Southampton branch in time for me to collect it before sailing the following week. I eventually arrived back at Leadenhall Street where I had left my suitcase and was told that I could get my Seaman's card in Southampton so it wasn't as disastrous as I had imagined. After getting a train to Southampton I took a taxi to the docks and reached the Arcadia in the evening. I walked up the gangway with more than a little trepidation and as there didn't seem to be anyone to ask directions I went inboard to try to find the Chief Engineer's office as I had been instructed. I eventually met a guy

dressed in uniform including cap and noticed that he had 3 or 4 stripes on his sleeves. I politely asked for directions to the Chief Engineer's cabin only to be told "don't ask me I'm not on duty". I was totally deflated after the day I had experienced and couldn't believe the response I had got. I eventually found the Chief Engineer's cabin and reported my arrival and was introduced to the First Electrician and shown my cabin. As it was the weekend I couldn't get my Seaman's card until Monday but I managed to get it sorted out as well as my new uniform. The happenings of that Friday have stayed in my memory ever since although some details have faded a little. The rudeness of the individual I met on first going on board the Arcadia stuck in my memory as did his face and I was to have my "revenge" for the want of a better word when a couple of years later I was working as relief dock staff in Southampton. I can't remember which vessel it was but I was duty electrician and one of my jobs was to keep the load on the only running generator within it's output. I discovered that the person who had upset me was in fact a Chief Steward and he was in charge of the restaurant and galley. Before mealtimes I would cut power to some of the equipment like the Dumb waiters and whatever other items I could. I made sure that I caused as much inconvenience as possible to him without overstepping the mark too much.

When I joined Arcadia she was beginning a spell of cruises before doing a deep sea trip later that year and Ron Dunford was the 1st Elect.Off with Ian Hutchinson the 2nd Elect. The Dept. didn't work watches, we turned to at 7am and finished at about 5pm if memory serves me correctly. One of the A/E/O's would be on call for 24 hours every four days. After a 5 day cruise to Spain/Portugal and back we set off on a 3 week cruise to Rio de Janeiro via Lisbon and Dakar.

It was on this trip that I had one of my worst experiences when I was sent up to the Bridge a day or two after leaving Dakar to check and rectify a fault in the Stabiliser control panel which wasn't indicating that the fins were "Out". The most likely cause was a blown bulb which needed replacing. The only access to the panel was to unscrew the screws and to take the panel off. Having unscrewed the 4 screws I began to lift the panel out of it's housing quite cautiously as it was a steel plate and had a couple of Santon switches mounted on it with bare terminals to which a number of cables were attached. As I was trying to lift the panel I saw the tiniest of sparks as one of these terminals made contact with the metal casing. Within a matter of what seemed like a couple of seconds the ship did a roll (I think it was to Port) but with the passage of time this detail has faded a little, leaving the ship at about 30 degrees to the horizontal. Within a matter of a minute or so Ron Dunford arrived on the Bridge to see what had happened and as I discovered later all hell had broken loose in the engine room as they tried to retract the stabilisers manually. After what seemed like an age the ship resumed an even keel and I waited for the expected kick up the backside for causing the problem.

When Ron saw what I was trying to do and after a review of what had happened in the stabiliser compartment the expected rollocking didn't materialise and my career was allowed to continue. Apparently for some unknown reason instead of a 5amp control fuse blowing, one of the main hydraulic motors had tripped which caused the stabiliser to stick in one position and the ship's momentum and the flow of water over the fin caused the tilt. A directive quickly followed that any work on the stabilisers was to be done only when they were not being used. I was saddened to see that Ron Dunford had passed away a few years ago. He

was probably the best sea going Electrician I met in my three years at sea and was a true gentleman.

Having survived that experience the rest of my time was a lot less eventful other than the odd storm or two at sea. At the end of UK cruising I made my first trip to Aussie sailing round the Cape and across to Fremantle, Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney arriving just before Christmas 1969. We had a lot of young passengers returning home in time for Christmas with their belongings gathered while making their pilgrimage to the UK and Europe. We then did a Pacific crossing via Fiji where I bought my Akai M9 reel to reel tape recorder, then to Hawaii and on to San Francisco. I think that we did a cruise from there before returning to Southampton the way we had come.

I then took some leave for about three months at the end of which I was directed to join mv Cannanore sister ship to the Coromandel as Acting First Elect.Off. As I understand it the Cannanore was a BI ship on charter to P&O but I haven't seen any reference to it on your site which hopefully you may be able to include. This wasn't much of a promotion as I was the only Electrician on board and thankfully the range of electrical equipment under my care was more manageable. My daily routine was to check and maintain the limited number of motors in the engine room which were mainly oil pumps, most of which we carried few spares for and to clean whichever of the two generators was running. This involved cleaning the revolving commutator with the standard issue blue cotton rag to remove the film of diesel oil and carbon dust which built up daily. This helped to reduce the sparking of the brushes but would no doubt be considered completely against Health and Safety policy these days. On the outbound trip to Pakistan and India all holds were full with motor and tractor parts and it was

usual to have deck cargo as well including some inside the wooden structure which we used as a pool when it was filled with sea water.

I spent much of my time preparing the hold lights and lanterns which were damaged by the shoreside workers who used them to light the holds as they worked late into the night. All the sockets around the deck had to be checked and made good as they regularly blew their fuses with misuse.

This gave me time to do a lot of work outside in the sunshine on good days to get a good tan. Another regular job was keeping our cabin and public room fans in working order as they were our main method of ventilation as we didn't have air-con. The Wardroom fridge was also a priority to keep the tinnies cold and most of the time it was a job of "nursing" equipment to keep it going. Our trip usually lasted about 16 to 18 weeks but we didn't have fixed dates due to the uncertainty of available berths for unloading cargo. I remember being at anchor on occasions for 2 weeks waiting for a berth. We also carried a few passengers who were usually older people wanting to escape the UK winter. I believe that Board of Trade regulations allowed the Company to carry up to twelve passengers without the need to carry a doctor on board. I remember on one of my two trips to India that we had one such elderly man who was a retired Oxford professor travelling alone. He would generally take some fruit at Dinner for his cabin and had apparently complained to the Chief Steward that this was being bitten by something in his cabin. On this trip the First Officer was Colin Campbell and it was customary for me to show a film in the main dining room after dinner on Saturday evening for those officers off duty and for the passengers. While we were watching the screen I noticed that one of the Indian deck crew on watch appeared in the open doorway

trying to get Colin's attention. Colin went out and left with him and returned a few minutes later. At the end of the evening when the passengers had retired to bed I was packing up the equipment when Colin explained that he had been called away to deal with a rat which had been discovered in the passenger lounge above the dining room. Colin had armed himself with a bat and had cornered the rodent before dispatching it with the bat. This had solved the mystery of the professor's fruit but the incident wasn't reported to the passengers for obvious reasons. It was also part of my routine to set up the projector in the Wardroom for the 8 to 12 watch when they came off duty and then on Sunday evening I would show the same film to the Indian and Pakistani crew not on duty. We were usually given 12 films each trip and these were quite up to date releases and proved particularly popular with the crew who seemed to appreciate them.

I remember one film in particular which starred Michael Crawford and Genevieve Gilles called Hello-Goodbye and although the plot was pretty poor it involved a number of topless scenes which caused much discussion among the crew. By the end of each trip we had to take requests for repeat performances as we had shown all the 12 films and this film was the firm favourite for the crew. When we reached the Indian sub-continent Karachi was our first port to discharge cargo and we usually had to wait for a berth. We would generally be allowed to start earlier in the day so that we finished by early afternoon and those not required on board would go ashore. We were not allowed to take cameras ashore and sterling was not supposed to be landed. In order to get a legal drink we usually headed for the Intercontinental Hotel to use the pool and get a beer or two. This was expensive but by changing a few quid ashore we could get double the "official" exchange

rate which made the hotel prices a bit more affordable. From Karachi we went to Bombay where things were a bit less official and here apart from the sightseeing we would also visit a club the name of which I can't now recall which catered for European expats. There was a great swimming pool and a decent bar which served the local brew and by using the less official money changing methods it was possible to double our purchasing power. The other most popular pastime was to get to the Central Bombay cinemas which would show exactly the same films as on release back home. I remember seeing "Where Eagles Dare" out there at the same time as it's release in the UK. The cinemas were really good. They were air-conditioned and had reclining seats and weren't too expensive either. At the other end of the market I recall that on one occasion I set off with a young Deck cadet, a Scot K E Owens whose first name I'm sorry to say escapes me, and we had decided to go to see "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" which we had seen advertised in a local paper. We didn't know where the cinema was but picked up a taxi at the dock and showed him the details. He stopped a couple of times presumably to ask other taxi drivers where this cinema was and after a very long journey which took us very much into the suburbs of Bombay we arrived at our destination.

I had never seen a cinema like it before. It stood on a corner and was open to the street with metal grilles which were closed as the cinema wasn't yet open. Through the grilles we could see a rat running between the seats. We decided that we had come too far to go back to the ship without seeing the film so when opening time arrived we entered to see the film. Ours were the only two white faces in the place and we got a few strange looks from the locals. We got back to the Cannanore none

the worse for our experience but stuck to the main cinemas after that.

On our homeward trip we usually carried a cargo of cattle food which was loaded in hessian sacks in the holds by an army of Indian dock workers. This took us to some places where we loaded from barges while we were at anchor well away from the sight of land. We also had a refrigerated hold which was used to store prawns. The cattle food was a horrible smelling material which was made even worse if it got wet. Another incident which remains in my memory is of the R/O on my second trip, Andy Frew who was a very witty Scot from Whithorn. Andy came round to see me shortly after we had left the Indian mainland to ask if I could help with a problem he was having with the radar equipment.

This wasn't working as it should and was useless as it was. It seemed that the electronics were OK but the scanner wasn't rotating at the correct speed. Between us we stripped down the drive motor and as we had no spares it was a matter of using our most advanced kit, an AVO meter, to see what we could find. I got out my textbooks to check my knowledge of armature winding and then spent some time checking how this had been wound. I pinned my hopes of getting the thing working again on shorting out two particular segments of the commutator which we did and to my amazement when we put everything back together it worked. Andy was very pleased to have his equipment working again as I think he was getting some pressure from our Captain, Claude Cooke, to get things repaired. Andy ordered a new scanner motor to be flown out to our next landfall which I think was Durban but it was satisfying to know that our temporary repair had seen us get so far.

Life on board Cannanore was completely different to the Passenger Division and the pace was much less frantic if not boring on occasions. The old girl trundled across the seas at a top speed of 12 knots with the constant day and night sound of the scavenge of the single Doxford diesel. This was an amazing engine with twelve vertically opposed pistons in six cylinders driving a single screw. I am reminded of it whenever I hear the Fleetwood Mac classic "Albatross" being played as the dull thud throughout the track sounds identical to the Doxford. Coincidentally it also reminds me of the numerous occasions when the ship was followed by an albatross for days at a time.

My second trip on the Cannanore began just before Christmas in 1970 when we set sail from Tilbury. Our only means of laundering our clothes on board was a very old Bendix automatic washing machine which had apparently broken down while I was on 2 weeks leave between trips. A service engineer was working on it as I returned on board just before departure and he assured me that all was working before leaving. It wasn't long before I found that he was either mistaken or lying when I got the news that the machine wasn't working. As usual we had no spares and often no manuals or wiring diagrams to follow. I was fortunate on this occasion to be able to find a wiring diagram for the machine which gave me some help and after working through the circuitry with the old AVO meter I worked out that the problem was lack of oil in part of the machine which activated a pressure switch. A pint of oil borrowed from the engine room did the trick and hey presto we could wash our boiler suits etc for the trip. A more serious problem had developed in the engine room where one of the pistons in the Doxford was overheating. As a result we had to stop in the English Channel while the piston was changed. This was in fact Christmas Eve

so the mood on board was a bit tense. Seeing the piston sitting on the engine room plates was some sight. It stood about six feet high and two feet diameter and weighed about 3 tons. Once the piston had been changed we got under way again late in the day but next morning there were further problems requiring the engine to be stopped. By now we were in the Bay of Biscay and at the mercy of the weather with no engine. Fortunately this problem didn't need any drastic work to be done and after a couple of hours we got under way again. Another bad memory I have of this trip was picking up a stomach bug shortly after leaving India on the homeward leg and being battered by a cyclone. The weather began to turn worse very quickly and I wasn't able to get onto the walkway outside my cabin windows so couldn't close the metal dead lights. When the storm hit, the waves were so bad that they ripped away most of the wooden awnings especially at the stern and even pushed inwards some heavy wooden doors to the deck crew's toilets tearing the pans away from the deck. Water came into my cabin through the poorly fitting wooden frames of the windows soaking my bunk which was directly underneath. A loss of suction to a cooling pump then caused an alarm to sound in the engine room which prompted the panic alarm to sound sending all off duty engineers down below. A wave had hit us which caused this commotion but as the ship had lurched, a drum of grease had toppled from somewhere outside the engineers workshop which was at accommodation deck level and the drum fell to the plates below luckily missing the engineers on watch by inches and spreading grease over the plates. Thankfully we were able to ride the storm and after some hours things became quieter. Just as we had come through the storm I began to feel very ill with a stomach bug and with no access to medication I was laid low for a few days and when we reached Durban I was taken to a shoreside doctor who gave me some

antibiotics which helped a lot. When we got back to Tilbury I left the Cannanore to take some leave and spent about 4 months at home until I joined the Oriana for a 7 month trip. This was to take us to the west coast of America through the Panama canal then a number of cruises. We traversed the canal eight times on that trip involving the usual long standbys. I enjoyed my time on the Oriana but lost contact with shipmates when I decided to give up the life at sea at the end of that trip. I stood by for the time she was in Southampton before her next trip and then took my leave before resigning in July 1972.

At that point I had a complete change of career when I got a job in financial services from which I retired in 2006. I have many fond memories of my time with P&O and met some fantastic people some of whom I see listed on your site. I am attaching a few items with this e-mail so please feel free to use as much or little of my ramblings as you wish. It would be great to hear from anyone who may remember me from this time. Thanks again for the work you do with your site and long may it continue.

Best wishes

Neil Machin