

Hello Shipmates,

**W**e are indeed a lucky band of pilgrims. I don't think anyone felt a bump as revered volunteer chairman of recent years stood down, forced by physical pressures.

Lo! Another worthy volunteer stepped into the breach. The latter you know resides in the shadow of the Pyrenean mountains, but distance is no impediment if you have Miz Libby attached at the hip as chief protocol and admin: he inherits a further two ladies from Robin, well versed in association account keeping and versed in the needs of our relaxed social calendar. Miz Denise and Sister Caroline.

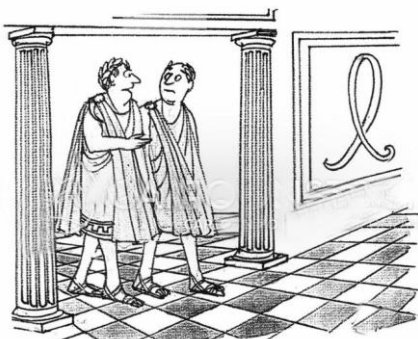
Diversity question hit on the head with no need for 'strong-arming' from 'wokery wonks'. We have heard of a 'pack of wolves' or a 'gaggle of geese', I feel our ladies fall into a category of a 'murmur of mature crumpet'. A moral question may raise its head here if the ladies decide to follow recent Yuletide fashion of getting their kit off, to pose for next year's calendar in the altogether. Gentlemen of our quality will frown on that, eh - oh yes we will.

A glance round the International scene at changes of leadership is a modern horror; example Burma, I feel Superb Association could treat them all to a master class.

Banner headline in Finance Section of the Daily Mail: **B.A.E. CLINCHES £1.8 BILLION ROYAL NAVY CONTRACTS**. Absent from the article; who else tendered? Work is maintenance, upgrades following trials, repairs etc. It covers what the M.O.D. referred to as 'State of the Art Super Carriers', plus type 45 & 23; contracts last five years. I was surprised to see a U.S. firm K.B.R. will be responsible for docks and buildings at Portsmouth for a similar period of years. State of the Art stretches things a bit following an eight year build and further two year trials. Word to fit that in 2021 must be 'obsolescent'.

But wait; following the contract closure B.A.E. gave their chief executive a pay rise plus a £2 million windfall; that to dissuade rivals trying to pirate him. I struggle with that thinking: B.A.E. and C.E.O. are one and the same.

The 13% pay rise is over two years; it makes his basic pay £1.1 million. In 2020 CEO was paid £6 million 60% more than 2019 when he pocketed £3.7 million. I fear there may not be enough cash left to renew plugs in the 'sea-woman's' bathrooms.



"What Caesar doesn't understand is that all politics is local!"

A radical departure from that boring nautical stuff. I reside in a village that's been the narrowest bit of the legendary Dover Road since Roman times. So narrow substantial steel guard rails are fitted to both sides for yokel protection; the rails are mangled, ripped out at regular intervals by monster trucks. Visiting the High Street chemist can be an interesting test of one's agility.

But! the real pearl in our Parish belly button sits just beyond The Bull pub. A public toilet - gender split by two traps per side, a splendid little structure, squeaky clean, polished copper pipe work. To one with a cardboard bladder of many decades it epitomises the advanced forward thinking of a modern state with a seat on the U.N. Security Council.

Without a clue in the Parish news sheet it was demolished, rubble removed overnight. Why? To stop it being used as a drug station and same-sex dating venue; all convinced me the nation is plot-less; thoughtful action with proper reaction - an alien concept. One can imagine the draft plan by Julius and his cohorts as they de-boat and got up the beach at Dover, sandals round their necks to prevent salt water damage, i.e. stop at Faversham for a bit of petty pillage, pasta and vino, then quick march to Newington, stop just beyond The Bull for a regimental leak, fall in once more for the march to Londinium. Village Co-op is 'conveniently opposite *The Bull*'; but I hear on the grapevine that their doorway is serving that vital function, hope the Italian army don't stage a re-enactment.

Last month's news letter carried comments from 'readers'; that's a nice addition. John Ward mentioned Pigs, used as a blanket term for officers, not really meant to be derogatory, I think. I understand it came from ships when P.A. systems were fitted, commonly a Tannoy. On the bridge, when wishing to share some gem of information, the Captain lifted the mike, pressed the switch to speak, then to check it was 'live' pursed his lips and blew into it a couple of times; that came out of the speakers as 'grunt, grunt, Captain speaking ....'.

Secondly 'Valentine'; I've forgotten the context but the name always goes through my head as taken straight from the Daily Mail several years ago. I feel it's been aired before, so excuse me if that's so:

Valentine, oh Valentine  
You are always in my thoughts,  
I'll never forget the night we met  
You gave me penile warts.

The vulgar things always seem to stick in the memory.

I took Jo to her monthly visit at Maidstone eye hospital; cross country there and back was gridlocked at any junction, large or minor, with, a very sedate pace in between; the adventurous zipping in and out to gain a yard, and popular annoyance. It may not be long before lock-down becomes a nostalgic talking point, shopping for essentials in zero traffic, all the others 'working from home'.

Listening to the wireless on Sunday I learn world population has jumped to eight billion. Southern TV lets us know how many are joining illegally on a daily basis. We may live long enough to ponder the biblical question: Death, where is thy sting?'

Even I think this effort a bit of a mishmash, maybe a reflection of my life in these past few months.

Bright spot last week was when Robin phoned; he was buoyant, upbeat, even had a small gift for me. Apart from us both being a bit Mutt and Jeff gossip flowed and I appreciated that contact.

**Stop Press:** a month ago business report related that Babcock's had posted a huge loss last year; its shares have plummeted. The firm, you will know, is a major Royal Navy contractor.

Yesterday its shares rapidly went back up, precipitated by the news of its reorganising, re-modelling the company to recover efficiency and cash flow. The news was bad for 850 workers reported as 'mid-managers' axed. One hope they and the firm survive and the likes of B.A.E and the N.H.S. monitor how it's done with their efficiency and value for money in mind.

Enough, enough -

Andy