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## Industry Viewpoint

# Twenty years of talent

## The Maritime London Officer Cadet Scholarship marks its 20-year anniversary



MICHAEL GREY

TWENTY years ago, things looked bleak in the field of UK maritime recruitment: there wasn't a lot of it about, after the huge rundown of the UK merchant fleet in the 1980s.

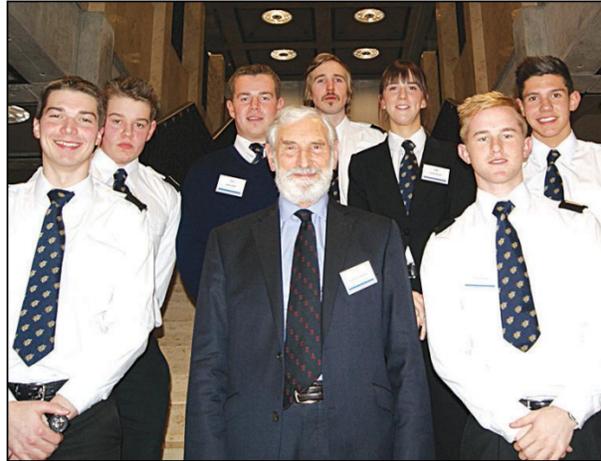
Those who wanted to hire seafarers sent recruitment expeditions to far-off lands, where very cheap hands were available, or took advantage of the fall of the Soviet bloc and the well-trained and very cheap officers that once manned the huge Soviet merchant marine fleets.

There were some people who took the time and trouble to look ahead at the ageing and depleting UK maritime skills base, not only for seafarers: both sea skill and experience had enriched the London maritime scene in so many different ways.

But what would happen when these experts — who had cut their teeth and built their expertise afloat, before coming ashore into so many parts of the maritime infrastructure — retired?

At least one successor generation had not been recruited to replace these increasingly ageing experts. Without these people, London would have only a fading reputation as the world's premier maritime city.

Despite much talk then of this grim prospect, there was not a great deal of action to remedy it. UK shipowners



Patron Lord Ambrose Greenway celebrates twenty years of MLOCS with some current cadets.

seemed content to employ cheap and cheerful foreigners, and surviving maritime colleges were diversifying.

Then, through the energies of Jonathan Lloyd Jones, who worked as a Lloyd's underwriter and who had thought the maritime skills conundrum through, the Lloyd's Officer Cadet Scholarship launched.

Now "rebadged" as the Maritime London Officer Cadet Scholarship scheme, this worthwhile charity has done an excellent job linking promising young people with maritime ambitions with firms willing to sponsor their training for up to four years to qualify as a deck or engineer officer.

Around 20 are in the system at any one time and, since the inauguration of the scheme, many of these officers have gone to do great things afloat and ashore.

I remember the celebration of the scheme's 10th anniversary, when I met a former sponsored cadet who already commanded a big anchor handler, and that was really just the start.

Firms that lay out

substantial sums to sponsor cadets deserve a great deal of praise. There is no guarantee that "their" cadets will ever elect to come ashore to work in their own company. They may stay at sea, or even work for the competition.

But that, perhaps, is not the point, as many of these firms have always depended upon former seafarers changing course and following their marine-related careers.

There are firms, renowned throughout the global maritime industry, begun by people who were apprentices or trod the engine room plates as a junior engineer.

Sponsorship of MLOCS cadets is partly gratitude, partly a sense of continuity and taking responsibility for the industry's future.

So there was a cheery party the other evening in the Lloyd's Building to celebrate the 20th anniversary of this worthwhile initiative. It was great to see Mr Lloyd Jones, who now operates out of Greece, but is still a trustee and who meets former cadets in the course of his travels who are distinguishing themselves in the maritime industry.

As the MLOCS patron Lord Greenway noted, the UK tonnage tax system has done a great deal to encourage more training, but the scheme still needs willing firms to sponsor cadets and more ship operators willing and able to make training places for them on board ships.

It is an excellent way of training because during their sea phases they serve on board different types of ship in different trades to get a better flavour of what the industry has to offer.

When they decide to specialise, they will thus have a better idea than somebody who has spent all their sea time in a containership or tanker. I met one young officer recently who had been to sea in a passengership, polar research ship, lighthouse tender, tanker and bulker during his cadetship and appreciated the variety.

We were joined by seven current cadets, up from Warsash for the evening, all looking forward to a hopefully interesting and rewarding career. With their training handled by Chiltern Maritime, they will also be unusually well-informed about the maritime world at large, as they build their skill sets in this industry.

These might be quite small numbers — in the company I went to sea in, there were never fewer than 100 apprentices in training — but the numbers do aggregate up over the period, to become an important contribution to the nation's maritime expertise.

So happy birthday, MLOCS, and pats on the back all round for the heroic sponsors, the trustees, trainers and suppliers of berths for this vital injection of UK talent. ■

[rjmgrey@dircon.co.uk](mailto:rjmgrey@dircon.co.uk)

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## The Last Word...

[lastword@lloydslist.com](mailto:lastword@lloydslist.com)

### Get knitted

ACCORDING to the Seamen's Church Institute, when grabbing a Starbucks drink this winter, you may see something out of the ordinary in the refrigerated drinks section of certain New Jersey stores: iced tea bottles topped with seafarer watch caps.

SCI wants to raise awareness of the work of international seafarers. It says that to draw attention to the work of seafarers, it has enlisted the support of 12 Starbucks stores close to Port Newark, the east coast's largest port.

Starbucks management has agreed to dress up Tazo Iced Tea bottles with miniature handknitted woolly hats like the ones that keep seafarers warm on journeys across the sea.

"Seafarers make a big difference in the lives of all Americans," says SCI president David Rider.

### A new course for ketchup

GLOBAL food giant HJ Heinz is taking tomato ketchup destined for European dinner tables off the road and on to barges between Elst and Rotterdam from next month.

Currently, containers filled with the iconic red dressing still go to Netherlands megahub Rotterdam by truck, and then by short sea shipping to the country of destination.

Heinz wants to stop its the road traffic to the port, an average of 40 journeys per working day, because of the increasing traffic on the roads and the anticipated shortage of drivers.

In the past, inland shipping was not used for these logistical chains due to the short turnaround times. As for the baked bean market, we are holding our breath.

### John Grabham

LAST Word is sad to record the death of John Grabham, who worked as a sub-editor on



Starbucks is doing its bit for the Seaman's Church Institute this winter. *Shutterstock*

Lloyd's List for many years before retiring aged 79.

Grabham's deft way with words knocked many a shipping story into shape. He performed his job with characteristic humour, imagination and indefatigable knowledge of obscure Polish accents, and had a fierce passion for the niceties of the English language.

Grabham started life as a reporter aged 16 on the Wilts and Glos Standard, in Cirencester, Gloucestershire and worked on several regional newspapers before he realised his dream to work on Fleet Street.

He spent several years at The Independent, which he joined when it started in the 1980s, and also worked on The Weekly Telegraph, The Daily Telegraph and the Financial Times.

A service to celebrate John's life will be held at 1600 hrs on Monday, December 17 at South West Middlesex Crematorium, Hounslow Road, Hanworth, Feltham, Middlesex, TW13 5JH.

Donations in lieu of flowers can be made to Princess Alice Hospice, West End Lane, Esher, Surrey KT10 8NA. ■

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