



## THE LONDON NAUTICAL SCHOOL

I came to the school at the age of fourteen, why I can't recall, most boys joined at eleven. I was attending Clapham Secondary Central School, a sort of Tech establishment for those who had dreamed their infant school years away. I had vague thoughts of being a Carpenter but couldn't see a straight line to save my life. That being said I resumed my dreaming, until, I read a circular inviting applicant to take an examination and eye test with a view to transferring to LNS. Join the Navy, see the world and get paid to do it! I was hooked.

I attended LNS from 1950, when the construction of the buildings for the 1951 Festival of Britain were underway. Captain Gibbs and Captain Harvey were our Nautical teacher, two extremely dedicated teachers. Capt Harold Beresford Harvey was so keen to see us succeed that he conducted Saturday classes when our School Certificates came due. Both Captains took use for rowing in Surrey Docks, no sails or kayaks though, wooden clinker built lifeboats were used for rowing and sculling over the stern. Later similar boats were used on the tidal Thames "Come on Muggins" was Capt Harvey's means of identifying every member in his classes.

LNS offered training for potential Officer Material and saw something in me, apparently, because I was accepted. My parents coughed up for my "manly" uniform, an officer's cap with the gold wreathed Merchant Navy badge, navy blue battle dress with MN brass buttons plus black tie, shoes and socks which I already possessed and likewise white shirt with detachable collar. I was thrilled to bits with my new appearance, it suited me and I looked great, until shortly after beginning my attendance an elderly lady approached me at the bus stop "Excuse me Inspector, what time is the next bus?" She brought me down to earth, very rapidly.



Stamford Street, Blackfriars, opposite the Eldorado Ice Cream Factory, there sat my new school. New in my perception only, condemned during the recent World War Two and supported at one end by huge balks of timber. Coal fired hearths with guarded surrounds in most rooms. A variety of formalities began the first day before we were conducted to our classroom on the top floor; 4G or was it 3G?, was our denomination and our form master Captain Gibbs.

The School boasted three ex Sea Captains in all. We didn't meet formally with the other two till the following year, by which time we were more than a little worried to be taught by Captain Harold Beresford Harvey in his classroom which took up the end of the building next to 4G. The remaining Captain had a classroom opposite 4G, very impressive with ship's wheel, engine room telegraph, compass binnacle plus other nautical items. I don't recall that Captain's name; we rarely had a lesson from him. My classmates were all new comers or "Noogies" to the school; we came from a wide range of London Suburbs and travelled by bus,

tram and train on a daily basis. It must have seemed a little odd to the conductors as they issued our tickets to ride, each of the taller uniformed "officers" produced school identity cards which qualified us for half fare.

Other teachers who taught our class for the first year were Mr Fortune Fowler taught French and organised those who could afford it, trips to France, ex R.A.F. Officer from Air Sea Rescue, a true character who parked his open sports car, the only one to do so, in the school yard. Mr Simmonds taught English, a gentleman who had spent many years in India where street barbers had been responsible for his "blue chin" being shaved so much in doubtful hygienic circumstances. Our Science Teacher was I think a Mr Scott, his laboratory was near the nautically decorated room, I lost the gold nib of my fountain pen after playing around with a ball of mercury.

Mr Stead vice principle taught us mathematics, there was no inattention or excuses at any time he was very, very strict. Mr Harry Popham taught anything athletic under impossible circumstances, his phrase "If you wish to be champions in anything you must train" rings in my ears. We did everything, except swim, in our uniforms, nowhere for gym other than the yard. On more than one occasion we took over the end of the yard, near a wooden derrick and lifeboat on davits, laid down a roll of coir matting and practised target shooting with his heavy air rifle. We had to travel by bus down toward The Elephant and Castle to use a Public Swimming pool on an irregular basis.

After one year we dropped several subjects and took up nautical matters in earnest. We entered the holy of holies Captain Harvey's classroom. He came across as a no nonsense teacher who had never had a fail in his subjects, especially in the School Leaving Exams. Any hesitation answering questions had a loud response from the Captain "Wake up Muggins" if it became necessary to emphasise a point, the Muggins in question received a pointed finger repeatedly jabbed into his arm muscle. He brought out the very best from every member of his class. "Every finger a Marlin Spike" was another of his quotes.

He and Captain Gibbs took us to the Surrey Commercial Docks for rowing and sculling lessons using old lifeboats and skiffs. As our skills developed and we grew older we progressed to the River Thames, there we rowed clinker built wooden Lifeboats, I swear they had several tons of lead ballast especially when the tide changed. The Captains acted as coxswains changing the rowers frequently so that we all increased arm and shoulder muscles. Captain Harvey's dedication to our class saw him hold additional classes in his subjects on Saturday mornings; I don't think anybody failed Navigation, seamanship or signals in the Cambridge Certificate of Education.

If I recall we did have to pass eye sight tests both in colour and distance periodically, those who failed were directed toward the Royal Navy or other occupation. My best mate Vic Chandler was brilliant at navigation and shared his methods of learning with me, recognising that I needed that extra explanation. Vic failed his eyesight test and we lost touch altogether. John Marshal, my desk mate, failed on eye sight, joined the R.A.F and worked at the Maralinga Atom Testing Site here in Australia; we met up again recently after the parting of the ways some sixty years.

This Muggins served his Apprenticeship with Anglo Iranian Oil Company. Six month was taken off my four year indenture because I had attended LNS. I gained early promotion to Third Mate, passed the Second then First Mates examination and rose to Second Mate.



I left the sea to be with my wife and our little family, migrating to Australia in 1967. So many things have change since our day, girls were admitted! a new building found. Even the MN is different two seated officers kept the watch on the last passenger ship I sailed on, no more sextants and Norries Nautical Tables. All the signals seemed to be via personal phones and radio, no more Sparkies. No charts, GPS now fixes the ships position to within a metre or two, in our day without star sights on cloudy dawn and dusk we'd be lucky to fix a position within miles. The cry of the older generation has become my cry of late, "The good old days, they were so much better".

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