



THE LONDON NAUTICAL SCHOOL

London Nautical School and School of Engineering and Navigation

Prior to the outbreak of World War Two, the London County Council provided pre sea education for day students to both campuses, the former accepting students from the age of eleven, the latter from the age of fourteen.

The School of Engineering and Navigation's primary function was the preparation of senior ranks for the relative Ministry of Transport Examinations, whilst also providing a day student programme for boys contemplating careers in either Engineering or Navigation. (It was this latter branch that subsequently amalgamated with the *London Nautical School*.)

Both Schools were evacuated during the conflict of WW2, *LNS* to Newquay in Wales, *SEN* to Bridgewater in Somerset. At the cessation of hostilities both returned to their previous sites, *LNS* to Rotherhithe and *SEN* Poplar.

Toward the latter part of the 1940's the amalgamation was finally brought into being, the pupils of the *SEN* being transferred to *LNS* which had now moved from Rotherhithe and had become established in Broadwall, Stamford Street, Blackfriars.

The transfer took place on the first day of the Autumn Term of 1948 when some thirty five pupils from Poplar, attired in School Blazers, found themselves surrounded and very outnumbered by the resident pupils of London Nautical School who were dressed 'Navy' style in Bell Bottoms, Tunic, Collar and Cap. For us 'Poplar' boys those first days were something of a culture shock, the comparison between the two Campuses was as 'chalk and cheese' – Poplar College (as it was to become known) had state of the art facilities set in a magnificent Building, all further enhanced by a sports ground in North Woolwich. Broadwall of course was a partly bomb damaged very old 'School Board of London' building, looking much the worse for wear!



The feeling of intrusion was evident during the first few days but was soon replaced by a generous welcome from both staff and pupils. Our apprehensions were soon to disappear as it speedily became apparent that the staff at *LNS* were the most dedicated and professional assembly that one could wish for.

The British Merchant Fleet was at that time the largest in the world, in which the majority of Students took the path of Apprenticeship into Shipping Companies of either General Tramp Steamers or those associated with the transportation of Oil.

The School also provided intake into the Royal Navy in the form of Artificers serving several branches in the Senior Service .

Those Students who for whatever reason did not follow a career afloat, (many due to failing the Ishihara Colour Test) made the transition into the commercial world very successfully.

Captain Claude Williams Willis (Extra Master) had accompanied us from Poplar and continued in his teaching capacity until his retirement some years later. A most charming gentleman, always immaculately dressed, never without a Waistcoat, and even protected his Shoes with 'Spats' should the weather be inclement. However, should the need arise he made his displeasure known by prefixing his address to you with '*Mister!*' – A throwback to his days as a Cadet under sail.

Captain Harvey's introduction under the same circumstances was somewhat similar but given in a rather more forceful way! "Alright 'Muggins', what is a Rhumb Line"? – And woe betide if the answer was not forthcoming. A less than gentle tapping on your forehead with his wedding ring was the sure way that you were never caught napping again!

Part of our training took place in Surrey Docks rowing or sailing a ship's lifeboat. I often envisaged Captain Harvey, when bending our backs to achieve the utmost purchase on the oars, as a throwback to the overseer of a Roman Galley – fortunately without the Whip! Our involvement with the Lifeboat also extended to maintenance and the upkeep required to keep it 'ship shape and Bristol fashion', often on cold wintry mornings when you came to realise that this might just be what the future had in store!

Visits to various ships took place on a regular basis, mostly in Surrey Docks but some occasioned a day trip to Southampton. Caronia of Cunard and *Edinburgh Castle* of Union Castle Line were two that I recall.

Captain Willis, Captain Harvey and Captain Gibbs shared the tutoring of Nautical Subjects, each having the wonderful gift of being able to explain the most complex subjects in a manner that was both interesting and informative.

Maths, in my case fell under the tutelage of Mr Stead ('Teddy') – what a tremendous privilege it was to be taught by him and those other dedicated and caring gentlemen. Those years have long passed me by, but their memories remain as fresh and as cherished as if it were yesterday.

I believe the transition from 'Bell Bottoms' to Battledress occurred in 1950

The School established a reputation for the prowess of the swimming team, winning the London Championship at least two years in succession. Other Sports were encouraged, and although space was very limited, performances on both the Cricket and Football fields were of a high standard

During the summer holidays various 'camps' were organised, some involving physically demanding activities – 'Harvest Camp' for example was a three week stint picking Fruit or Potatoes! It was certainly ideal preparation for those students who latterly went to the 'Outward Bound' School, and also gave a change of environment to some of those whose circumstances were not able to provide the luxury of a 'real' holiday.

I commenced my Apprenticeship during May of 1950 with what was then called 'The Anglo Iranian Oil Company' – better known as BP. Serving in various shipping interests through the years – mainly with London & Overseas Freighters, Fyffes and Trinity House.

In 1966 I was appointed to the Pilotage Service in London, retiring in 1998. It so happened that in my role as Senior Pilot (1987) it fell to me to conduct 'Britannia' on her final outward transit.

Other 'old boys' in the London Pilotage Service during my tenure were:-

Joe Starr, Reg Goatley, Joe Duhig, John Merrick, Peter Kelly,
Bill Batchelor, Robin Hoare, John Freestone

1950 Staffing.

Head	Mr Fuest
Nautical	Captains Harvey : Willis : Gibbs
Maths	Mr Stead (Deputy Head) Mr Owen
English	Mr Mitchell
English Lit	Mr Simon
French	Mr Bromiley
RI	Mr Fortune Fowler
Science	Mr Scott (also Debating Society and Chess Club)
PT	Mr Popham (Also involved with the coaching of the then current England Olympic Team)

Charles Parfitt (2020)