



# HAMISH ROSS

## SEA BREEZES DIRECTOR AND EDITOR 1943-2019

It says something about the energy and purpose with which Hamish Ross lived his life that two of the achievements he was proudest of came in his final decade, beyond his formal retirement in 2007: steering *Sea Breezes* magazine through to its centennial year in 2019, and successfully concluding the work started by his great friend and colleague Captain Andrew Douglas to establish a permanent memorial to the distinguished service of the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company's ships and crews during the evacuation of Dunkirk in 1940.

At the point that he stepped down from his role as Managing Director of the Steam Packet Company in 2007, Hamish had established himself as one of the most prominent figures in the UK and Manx ferry sectors. To date he remains the only Master Mariner to have led the Steam Packet in its 189 year history and his 11 years at the helm followed lengthy spells in senior positions with Sealink and Sea Containers after his first appointment ashore at Stranraer in 1976.

*Sea Breezes* was a labour of love for Hamish and reflected a fascination with the sea that began back in 1958 when he won a scholarship through Alfred Holt & Co (Blue Funnel Line) to the famous Gordonstoun School in his native Morayshire in North East Scotland. He led *Sea Breezes* Publications' acquisition of the magazine from Mannin Media in 2008, half a century on from the first time he read the magazine, and he had expected to work in harness with Captain Andrew Douglas; however,



after Andrew's untimely death in 2010, Hamish took over the Editorship.

Much of his work in that role was executed in his home office, which was already packed full of shipping posters, paintings, photographs, books and publications; and was quickly added to with numerous more books and articles to review, becoming a real treasure trove of maritime history.

Hamish was passionate about *Sea Breezes* continuing to provide a magical mix of modern news and updates across multiple sectors, along with the trips down memory

lane in the "Features" section; and he was hugely grateful for the contributions from regular and one-off correspondents – particularly enjoying the "Ships we forgot to remember" articles, provided for many years by Andrew Bell and the late Murray Robinson.

He was well qualified to lead the magazine given a distinguished career that encompassed many different eras in the history of UK and Manx shipping. Always progressive in his leadership roles, especially as a prominent advocate of fast ferries as part of Sea Containers' pioneering

efforts of the 1990s, he was also very happy to give a nod to tradition, proud of the rigorous training he received and disciplines he learned during his 11 year career deep sea with Blue Funnel, and he was absolutely resolute in his support of both the Royal Navy and Merchant Navy – with strong views often expressed in his "Message from the Bridge".

He was aghast at the outcome of the public poll to name the new British research vessel "Boaty McBoatface" and mightily relieved when the name **RRS Sir David Attenborough** was chosen instead; and he rejoiced at the success of Cammell Laird shipyard in winning the order – with the need for a stronger shipbuilding industry in the UK another of his hobby horses.

Hamish felt very privileged to have started his career and to have gained all his "tickets" with Blue Funnel during the last great period of British merchant shipping, and cherished the memories of the ships, ports and colleagues he encountered along the way. Following his marriage to Gill in 1967, and the birth of their first son Gregor in 1970 (Jamie followed in 1972), he decided to put down roots back in Scotland, joining the historic ferry service between Stranraer and Larne operated by Sealink on the North Channel of the Irish Sea. Along with many of his contemporaries, he was fortunate to join the route during a period of great expansion.

His promotion ashore as Shipping and Port Manager in 1976 followed a brief spell in command of the **MV Ailsa Princess**, one of his favourite ships (top of the list was the Denny-built TSS **Caledonian**



SS Glenaffric, 1969.



MV Ascanius, 1961 (Hamish second from right).



SeaCat Scotland, Glasgow, 1992.

**Princess**). By 1982 he was General Manager of Sealink Scotland and for the rest of that decade he presided over further growth, initially under nationalised ownership (as the shipping arm of British Rail) and then, after privatisation of Sealink by the Conservative government in 1984, under the auspices of Sea Containers led by American entrepreneur James Sherwood.

There had been great excitement at the end of the 1970s when the Stranraer-Larne route had been allocated one of the "Saint Class" ferries – of a fleet of four to be built at Harland & Wolff yard in Belfast under the last major order to be placed by Sealink in its British Railways days. The **MV Galloway Princess**, introduced in 1980, became the new flagship of the service, but it is testament to the success of the route under Hamish's stewardship, that by the time he left Sealink (by then owned by Stena Line) for a new challenge with the Clydeport Authority in early 1991, another of the Saint Class vessels, the **MV St David** (then about to become the **Stena Caledonia**) was already long established on the route and a third – the **MV St Christopher** (to be renamed **Stena Antrim**) was also secured for service on the North Channel.

After a brief spell with Clydeport, Hamish was headhunted back to Sea Containers to set up a new fast ferry operation on the Irish Sea, deploying the **SeaCat**, a wave piercing catamaran developed by InCat shipbuilders in Tasmania in partnership with Sea Containers. Taking up the challenge in September 1991, by June of the following year the new service had commenced. Travelling at twice the speed of conventional ferries, and with impressive style and service levels, **SeaCat Scotland** operated between new facilities in Stranraer and a city centre berth at Donegall Quay in Belfast.

Thus began a new chapter for the Irish Sea ferry industry, and a spike in tourism numbers to Northern Ireland, greatly welcomed after long



Hamish and wife Gill at the Steam Packet's 170th celebrations in 2000.

years of "The Troubles". When Sea Containers took over the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company in 1996, Hamish was the obvious choice to be Managing Director. He continued to display great confidence in fast ferries, deploying them to boost the island's visitor numbers alongside huge growth in vehicle and commercial traffic facilitated by the introduction of the **MV Ben-my-Chree**, the first new build for the company in over 20 years – a vessel not immediately as popular with the Manx public as its predecessors, but which has proven to be one of the highest performing and reliable flagships in its history.

As well as being a successful MD, Hamish will be remembered in Steam Packet history for the campaign he undertook alongside Andrew Douglas to bring back the anchor of the **TSS Mona's Queen III** from the seabed at Dunkirk. She was one of three vessels lost within a matter of hours as the Steam Packet crews and ships played a heroic role in *Operation Dynamo*, evacuating almost 25,000 troops.

On the 70th anniversary of the sinking of **Mona's Queen**, and in the presence of Manx, UK and French dignitaries, the anchor was raised from the seabed, and now forms a wonderful memorial at Kallow Point in Port St Mary, pointing in the direction of Dunkirk.

*Sea Breezes* and the anchor project were just two





Hamish at Mona's Queen Anchor Memorial.

of Hamish's achievements following a cancer diagnosis in 2008. If anything, his life became even more fulfilled in his final decade, celebrating his Golden wedding anniversary with Gill in 2017, enjoying being a Grandpa to Craig and Emily and discovering new holiday venues abroad such as Port Soller in Majorca (a harbour to walk around was an essential part of any holiday!).

His continued commitment to the local community was evidenced by involvement in Junior Achievement IOM, the Douglas Development Partnership and Manx BirdLife, and his final major project was to lead the successful efforts to save his local Golf Club – Rowany in Port Erin – after it had fallen into a perilous financial state.

None of this was a surprise after his unstinting commitment to the local communities he had served throughout his business life in South West Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man. As a particularly keen sportsman

(tennis and football in his younger days, followed by squash, cricket and then golf in later years), sponsorships abounded from the ferry companies he led for sporting and other good causes.

Hamish's involvement in *Sea Breezes* was a very appropriate and final port of call on a 60 year voyage through the maritime industry. His career was certainly distinguished in terms of achievement but what many friends and ex-colleagues have remembered best since his passing was his human touch and ability to engage. He was a very decent man who remained grateful for the opportunities he had been given, starting with that scholarship back in 1958 which set his life on a very exciting course.

He was also very aware of the highs and lows of any shipping career. There were memorable days such as the arrival of *SeaCat Scotland* in Loch Ryan in 1992 and the launch of the *MV Ben-my-Chree* in Rotterdam 1998; he

especially enjoyed the launch of *SuperSeaCat III*, christened by Gill at La Spezia in 1999. But there were bad days as well, such as a near disaster with the *MV Antrim Princess* in 1983, without power in storms off the Irish Coast, or the *Sea Express One* collision in the Mersey in 2007; and a particularly awful day at Enniskillen in 1984 when an IRA bomb targeted some off-duty soldiers competing in a Sealink-sponsored fishing festival.

Saddest of all were the thoughts of many former colleagues who had "crossed the bar" too soon. He remembered them all, from Blue Funnel days all the way through to Steam Packet days, with much affection. As much as he loved ships and harbours, the greatest contribution to his shipping career was made by the shipmates and workmates he encountered over the last 60 years.

Many of them turned up to Hamish's funeral at Rushen Parish Church in the Isle of Man: a packed affair, there was

strong representation from business, political and sporting sectors as well as a panoply of friends, colleagues and family members.

In delivering a very eloquent eulogy, Captain Peter Corrin, a cherished colleague from Steam Packet days, reminded the congregation that "notwithstanding the senior managerial positions and directorships he had held since coming ashore, at heart, Hamish was a mariner" and recounted Hamish's daily enjoyment of mixing with those colleagues onboard the Steam Packet Vessels or working around the harbour.

Captain Corrin noted that Hamish had achieved enormous personal and professional success, but "perhaps more than anything, he excelled at being humane".

The service, greatly influenced by Hamish's Scottish, Manx and maritime connections, was a fitting celebration of an accomplished, meaningful and very fulfilled life. 🇬🇧