



OLD CONWAYS & INDIA – PART II: CALCUTTA & THE HOOGLHY v13

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From 1859 to 1974 the British training school ship HMS *Conway* trained young boys for a life of service at sea as officers in the British Royal Navy and Merchant Navy, and in other navies around the world including India. This paper tells the story of Old *Conways*' (OCs) long and hugely influential involvement in The Hooghly River Survey Service, The Bengal Pilot Service and Calcutta stretching back to 1859. It is a companion piece to "*Old Conways & India – Part I: The Indian Navies*" which describes OCs involvement in the Indian Navy and its predecessors,. Although the Indian Navy had a base in Calcutta that is not covered in this paper.

The Cadet magazine referenced throughout this article is *Conway's* "house magazine" published from 1889 to date, see Section 8 Sources. Names in bold are the names of OCs (their years as *Conway* cadets are shown in brackets).

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1 CALCUTTA

Calcutta was one of Colonial India's, indeed the Empire's, busiest ports despite the fact that it was 120 miles from the Bay of Bengal up the dangerous River Hooghly (aka Hooghli aka Hugli, but actually the Bhāgirathi - Bengali: হুগলী নদী). It is one of the many tributaries of the great Ganges. It is a very treacherous tidal river, fast flowing, twisting and tortuous, with a large tidal bore and huge volumes of silt creating constantly changing sandbars and channels.

For nearly two thousand years before the 1530s and the arrival of the first European (Portuguese) traders Bengal was part of the Moghul Empire and the river Hooghly was a busy if dangerous river. The local men who piloted vessels up and down the river and its tributaries were probably native fishermen with local knowledge of the shoals and currents. They used neither chart nor compass and left no records behind them. The Portuguese mariner Affonso da Mello probably used them to pilot his ships up to Satgaon in 1534, but within a few years the Portuguese had their own pilots, and the first charts of the river were made by them. The Dutch supplanted the Portuguese around 1627, quickly established their own pilot service and for some years had a practical monopoly of the navigation of the Hooghly. They ran a river ferry service, did a certain amount of surveying and charting and laid the first buoys. The ever expanding Honourable East India Company arrived on the scene around 1620 and formed its earliest settlements in Bengal. British trade expanded quickly and around 1640-42 an English surgeon, Gabriel Boughton, obtained Dutch (previously Portuguese) establishments at Balasore, Orissa and "Hugli" some 25 miles above the then little village of Calcutta. The Honourable Company eventually formed the Bengal Marine to protect its trading vessels and in 1651 the BPS was founded as part of the Bengal Marine to remove the company's dependence on foreign pilots so that British vessels could safely navigate the river. They charged a considerable sum to be guided by the service's small boats. It is thought that the first English pilots were taught by the last of the Portuguese. On 20th November 1668 the first three formal pilot apprentices were appointed and the Bengal Pilot Service (BPS) began providing on-board pilots and taking full responsibility for surveying and marking the channels. By 1690 Calcutta, based on earlier small fortifications and a British "factory", had emerged as the head of navigation for large ocean going vessels. In 1693 the massive Fort William (named for Britain's new King William of Orange) was completed cementing the town's position as the premier military and trading centre in Bengal. For the next hundred years Dutch and British pilots worked together but during the Napoleonic wars Dutch trade ran down and the British eventually took full control of the river. For over 200 years the BPS was also responsible for surveying and marking the river but at some point, and definitely by 1910, the HRSS was undertaking those tasks as a separate entity.

Conways were heavily involved with the river as mariners navigating in and out of the port, in the Hooghli River Survey Service (HRSS) keeping the channels surveyed, clear and marked and in the BPS responsible for guiding vessels up and down river from the sea to Garden Reach two miles below Calcutta. They were also involved in the Calcutta Harbour Pilot Service (CHPS) handling vessels for the short transit from Garden Reach to the port. Many other *Conways* made their careers in the city and in due course expatriate boys born in Calcutta were joining *Conway* as cadets. All three services' officers were drawn from the UK. By 1890 the HRSS and CHPS were part of the Calcutta Port Commissioners organisation, itself under the colonial Indian Government. The BPS was an independent body reporting directly to the Indian Government.

Between 1877 and 1948 at least 10 Old *Conways* (OCs) served in the HRSS and at least 72 in the BPS. At least 24 OCs lived and worked in the city including the CHPS, probably significantly more given the number of local vessels based in the port by major shipping companies. Countless hundreds, perhaps thousands, of OCs visited the port regularly, Travelling to it from all over the world. This is their story and of how they contributed to the development of the river navigation, port and city.

2 THE HOOGLY NAVIGATION

This description was written for The Cadet in 1925 by "Titch" Coombs late of the HRSS. It therefore describes the situation for steamers transiting the navigation. The charts are his own.

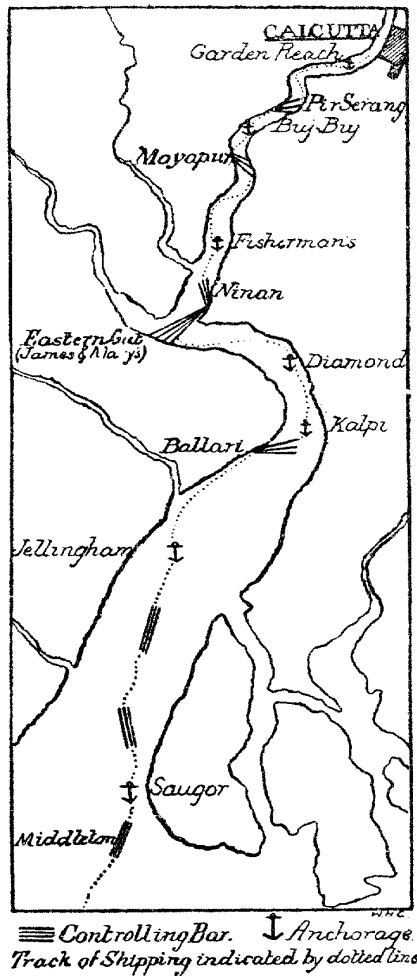
April, 1925.

THE CADET.

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THE "HUGLI"

BY W.H.C.



The "Hugli" is the Western arm of that great delta known as the Sunderbunds, and for navigational purposes can be divided into three sections, that of the Sandheads—the area between the sea and Saugor, the first land sighted—that section between Saugor and Diamond Harbour, which may be described as the Estuary, and that between Diamond Harbour and Calcutta, which we may call the Upper Reaches.

The first indication of one's nearness to the Sandheads is, apart from the soundings obtained, the red discolouration of the water, alarming streaks of discoloured water being

met with sometimes many miles out to sea. The outer lights of the Hugli comprise the Pilot's Ridge, the Eastern Channel, and the Mutlah, all approximately in the same latitude and twenty miles apart.

One shapes one's course from seaward usually from the Eastern Channel Light Vessel, which is moored in $9\frac{1}{2}$ fathoms.

The Pilot Steamer, or as it is known locally, the Brig—recalling the old days when the Pilots kept their station in their famous smart little clipper bow packets—usually cruises about three miles south of the lightship. One get one's Pilot with his large and incidentally necessary amount of baggage! for which he is famous, aboard with very little delay in spite of the extremely heavy seas often encountered. I will endeavour to describe the voyage up to Calcutta.

In fine weather navigation up to Saugor presents few difficulties. The Channel used is the Eastern Channel, and one passes from the Eastern Channel Light on a northerly course past the Intermediate Light, the Lower Gaspa, the Upper Gaspa across the Middleton Bar into Saugor Roads.

A few remarks about the Hugli Lights may possibly be of interest. They are maintained by the Calcutta Port Trust, officered by white men usually of the petty officer type. Some, however, are men who have seen much better things.

When I was an Officer in the old "Retriever," whose job it was to put these ships on Station and to maintain them efficiently, I came in contact with these Lightship crews quite a lot. One man claimed to be the brother of one of our spiritual peers. Another had held command in a well-known liner company, but had married a native and taken to drugs, and so on. The crews comprise about thirty natives in each case.

Needless to say, these ships are extremely well found—and need to be—as they are called upon to withstand the fury of as violent cyclonic storms as one can meet in any part of the world.

Each has several spare anchors and cables, and in stormy weather lie to 18 in. coir hawsers. They have special Saunders spring gear to relieve the strain caused by surging and in specially bad weather the cables are connected to a large coir spring bight which passes round the stern.

If a lightship gets adrift in a cyclone the case is hopeless. Refuge houses exist on the shores of the Sunderbunds for sailors wrecked in the vicinity, and are always visited after bad weather.

Saugor Island is the first island sighted. The southern part of the Island is covered with thick mangrove jungle inhabited by deer, tiger, wild pig, and incidentally mosquitoes.

Saugor Light was in 1913 moved further inland, owing to erosion of the foreshore. Near it is a place known as Gunga Saugor which is, during certain tides in January, considered by Hindus to be one of the holiest places in India. This, I am told, is because it is considered the meeting-place of the Ganges and the sea.

Thousands of pilgrims come from all parts of India to bathe in the sacred waters. The country craft which accumulate at Gunga Saugor Fair are in themselves extraordinarily interesting. Few Europeans seem to visit the Fair, but, to my mind, it was one of the most interesting of the many interesting things I saw in that fascinating country.

One sees the genuine fakir or jogi, whose business in life is to lie on a bed of nails. The gentry who go through this world with one withered arm poised in the air are in evidence, and all the rest of that fanatic community.

The centres of attraction are two insignificant fragments of stone, representing the gods of the river and the jungle.

I remember once when surveying the foreshore there, meeting two jogis or priests, the guardians of the gods—they seemed sleepy, half-witted sort of individuals and lived in ramshackle huts.

At the Lighthouse we found it necessary to protect the staff by means of a high and strong tiger fence. I asked these priests how it was that *they* were never attacked by tigers, and they explained that they were holy men, friends of the tigers, who came to talk with them at night.

At the time the explanation seemed to me quite as sound as any other, and I must confess that I still at times am inclined to give it a certain amount of credence.

Except for the northern portion, Saugor comprises jungle. Here and there attempts are made, and are encouraged by the Government, to clear and cultivate the land. The Government, however, wisely insists that land-owners to whom it grants concessions, must build high refuge bunds or embankments, on

which the villagers may seek safety in the event of a tidal wave, which may, at any time, follow upon cyclonic weather.

Now as to the navigation between Saugor and Diamond Harbour, the Estuary as I have called it; it is in this section of the river that the positions of the channels vary, but let me say at once that the popular idea that the positions of the channels in the Lower Reaches of the Hugli change with startling rapidity is quite wrong. I mean the idea that there are shifting sand banks, whose positions change daily, necessitating a daily change in the position of channels.

The channels *do* change, but slowly. The depths alter considerably in a comparatively short space of time, but the changes *in position* are gradual.

Fortunately for Calcutta, the practice of the Hugli is that when one channel shows signs of closing, another shows signs of opening. It is during the transition periods that the navigable depth of the river is reduced.

One leaves Saugor about two hours before low water, and in a moderately powered ship one will reach Calcutta, 80 miles up the river, shortly after the ebb is down. One, therefore, crosses the shoal and most difficult bars on the top of the bubble, with maximum water and minimum current.

The track, on leaving Saugor, wanders across the Gabtola Bar through Auckland and Jellingham Channels, till it reaches the right bank of the river, just below the junction of the Huldia river and the Hugli.

The scenery is uninteresting. One gets distant views of Saugor Island to the eastward, and to the westward equally flat cultivated land is to be seen. Here and there one sees clumps of casuarina trees, and it is pretty safe to say that wherever one sees trees in the Lower Reaches white men planted them.

One such place is Khijiri, almost abreast of the centre of Saugor Island. Kipling mentions Khijiri as the place where the corpse of, I think, "Hans, the blue-eyed Dane," fetched up, after its passage down the Hugli. As a matter of fact, this is a case of poetic licence, as these gruesome features of the Hugli are seldom seen below Hugli Point.

Khijiri now comprises a native village with a post office, a dak bungalow, and a tidal semaphore station.

Apparently in the old John Company days, inward bound ships used to anchor there, and

the passengers made what must have been a most irksome journey to Calcutta by land. The old gravestones to be seen there to-day tell dramatically of the cost of Empire. They recall chiefly the names of young officers and their wives who died shortly after landing in India, usually from cholera, sunstroke, or snake bite.

The village is some distance from the fore-shore, and it is interesting to know that after the 1864 cyclone one of the River Survey steamers found herself anchored in the compound of the Post Office!

I mentioned Jellingham Channel just now. On the port hand going up, one passes a green buoy which recalls a famous wreck, that of the "Anglia." Here, many years ago, a vessel turning in the anchorage, touched bottom and was turned over to the pressure of the current. Some of the hands were imprisoned in the fo'castle, and the porthole being too small for them to escape, they were drowned in the presence of their shipmates as the tide gradually rose.

In 1913 it was still possible to lose a sounding lead when surveying for this wreck, and I expect remnants of it still exist.

A peculiarity of this section of the river is the phenomenon of mirage, especially during the N.E. monsoon.

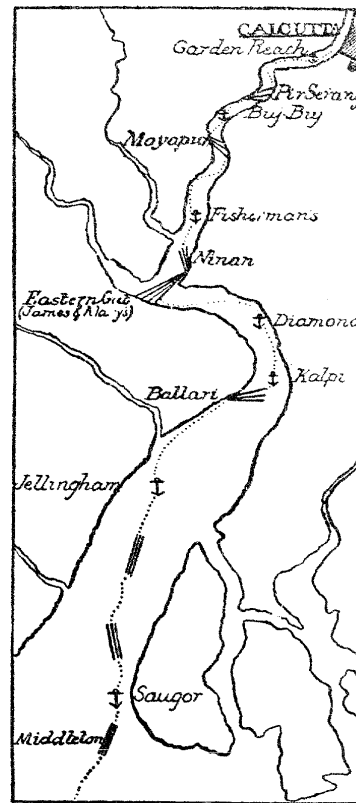
Huldia Sand was a few years ago an island inhabited by a herd of buffalo. This island formed very quickly and disappeared equally quickly.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

THE "HUGLI."

BY W.H.C.

(Continued.)



≡≡≡ Controlling Bar. ⚓ Anchorage
Track of Shipping indicated by dotted line

Passing Huldia Sand, one gets a view of Mud Point Island to the eastward. Mud Point is an island on the north end of Saugor. On it one sees two white buildings—signal stations. Over ten years ago the one existing station was threatened owing to erosion of the north point of the island. The foot of the signal mast was awash at high tides. It was decided to erect another station a few miles to the southward. This was done, and apparently erosion ceased from that day and the island proceeded to grow again, with the result that two perfectly good signal stations exist in the middle of the island.

Mud Point is an entrance of the Baratola River or Channel Creek, which runs down to the sea, making Saugor an island. Through it and the Delta the Hugli is connected with the Bramaputra River and an enormous inland traffic in jute, tea, etc., is carried by the steamers of the Indian General and the River Steam Navigation.

Leaving the Huldia, one crosses Balari Bar, which often gives trouble and has to be dredged. It comprises blue clay, which is rather surprising in a river like the Hugli.

Passing Kantabara, Diamond Harbour is reached—a place of some interest. The Royal Garrison Artillery have a battery here, and in the Survey Service we used to hold the belief that the gunners regarded Survey steamers as particularly interesting from a gunnery point of view and suitable for straddling purposes, as it occasionally happened when surveying in the vicinity that shells would whizz overhead, much to our discomfort.

It may perhaps be mentioned here an unexplained Hugli phenomena is the "Barasal guns." One occasionally hears sounds as of distant gun fire, when it is definitely established that none has taken place. All kinds of theories exist to explain it, but none are satisfactory.

Diamond Harbour is the terminus of a railway to Calcutta, but it is almost as quick to walk, I should think. A Custom House, a magistrate's house, and a telegraph and signal station exist there. At the latter is a Water Report Board, showing in large figures the latest available depths on the controlling Bars of the Upper Reaches.

Diamond Harbour was regarded as a hotbed of sedition in pre-war years.

At night one can see the loom of the lights of Calcutta bearing north-west about 30 miles.

Leaving Diamond Harbour, the river narrows considerably, and on both sides one has extraordinarily fertile land, densely populated.

Crossing Kukrahatti, which some years ago surprised people by developing "lumps," which cleared away as quickly as they appeared, one passes Luff Point into Hugli Bight. Luff Point, some years ago, was examined by a committee of experts with a view to making it a rail terminal for coal export.

How anyone seriously considered the possibility, I do not know. I understand the idea was to obviate the necessity of ships using the dangerous Bars on the way to Calcutta and to relieve congestion at that port.

Hugli Bight has some of the deepest water in the river, 130 feet at places. It is just below the James and Marys where the Roopnarain River joins the Hugli.

One gets a tremendous current swishing round the Bight, and the erosion of the fore-shore in places is very great—altogether an unlikely place for jetties.

We now come to the James and Marys, the most famous crossing on the river, and possibly in the world.

I lived ashore on Hugli Point for about a year, together with another surveyor, we two being the sole white inhabitants. Every day during neap tides we surveyed this area. In addition, a native Serang under us sounded the tracks twice daily—an extremely able man, whose father and grandfather, one Rea Juddi, after whom one of our launches was named—did the same work. He had a most uncanny skill in finding shoal water. I used to think myself no "small beer" at it, but I confess to times when I have been unable to find his soundings, but he has proved himself right when I have challenged the accuracy of his work.

Sounding these Bars is difficult. One has two leadsmen in the chains in a small launch, and one drifts down with the ebb, both leads continually on the bottom. The leadsmen call their soundings, perhaps ten a minute. The shoalest sounding may only be called once.

It was useless, for some unexplained reason, to sound on the flood tide, and men from Rangoon, Chittagong, and Moulmein tell me it is their experience on those rivers too.

At spring tides one of the Surveyors proceeds to Calcutta on leave. I remember one Sunday morning some years ago I was sitting on the verandah engaged in one's usual pastime of wondering why one endured such utter boredom in such appalling heat and humidity, when I saw the Rangoon mail outward bound ashore on the Eastern gut. I called the launch's crew away and proceeded on board, to find her dangerously ashore on the Mukraputti lumps—flood tide. The people on board naturally looked a trifle worried, and the passengers looked distinctly uncomfortable, and for good reason. They were in the unpleasant predicament of being ashore on a hungry quicksand which has proved itself a 99 per cent. wrecker of ships.

The "Arankola" was an exceptionally full-powered boat, and to this fact alone is due her presence afloat to-day. It may surprise

many to know that to my certain knowledge that ship, after her first grounding, was afloat practically the whole of the time, although surrounded by very shoal water, sometimes little more than 12 feet. Of course, her keel plate *may* have been touching, but I think it unlikely.

I had a launch constantly sounding round her and a party of men on both sides of the ship, fore and aft, constantly recording their soundings, and I fixed her position by sextant angles every minute from the bridge, and kept a careful note of the bearing of her head as she worked across the sand. As I have said, she was afloat practically the whole time, moving slightly ahead and astern, in a submerged dock as it were. Just as the sand is scoured round a pebble on a sandy beach, so the Hugli scoured round the "Arankola" as the flood tide forced her over the Mukraputti lumps.

Just after high water she floated off into the Western gut—a very, very lucky ship. You will note I said "after." It is a curious fact which has been noted several times, the explanation put forward is that the water in the central part of the river is depressed during a strong current, just as the centre of a cup of tea is depressed by centrifugal force when the tea is stirred. When the current eases, the level rises.

Had the "Arankola" not floated off when she did, the ebb would have made down, she would have stranded, and the pressure of the tide would have rolled her over and destroyed her.

The James and Marys has many little green wreck buoys which tell their own tale, the "City of Canterbury," "Overdale," "Waterloo," etc.

From Hugli Point upwards one passes hundreds of beacons and marks erected for navigational purposes. One of these, known as Fort Beacon, on the north bank of the Roopnarian, is interesting as it is stuck through the domed roof of a magazine of one of Clive's forts. The maintenance of these river marks is part of the work of the Survey Department, and is very considerable, especially after cyclonic weather, when it is no uncommon thing to have a large number of them down. Incidentally, I may say that theoretically at any rate it is possible to navigate a ship up the Hugli by means of natural landing marks. This point just opened that one, and so on.

After crossing the Eastern gut or James and Marys, one goes up Nurpur Reach as close to

the bank as when going through the Suez Canal, then through the Ninan tracks past Fulta Point. In passing I may say the origin of the name "James and Marys" is most obscure, some say a famous ship of that name was lost there in the old John Company days, while others say it is a corruption of the Venecular Jeharge Mari, the killer of ships. I have never been able to get any further than that, although I have inquired in many quarters. Incidentally, the origin of many other Hugli terms seems lost in antiquity.

The senior grade of pilot is known as a Branch Pilot. Why a *Branch* Pilot I have never been able to discover. I was told once that it followed an old Trinity House practice. I recently made an inquiry of one of the Elder Brethren of Trinity, and he seemed to think Trinity may have taken the name of the Hugli, so I have never yet been able to explain the term "Branch Pilot."

Rounding Fulta Point is a ticklish business. Fulta is now a fishing village, but in the old days it appears to have catered for Europeans, at any rate for the sailor men. Kipling describes the revelries at "Fulta fishers' boarding house."

The next reach is known as Fishermen's Point Anchorage, where particularly deep outward bound vessels have sometimes to anchor to await sufficient rise of tide to carry them over the James and Marys. Fishermen's Point Anchorage suggests fishing, and it may be interesting to hear something of the fishing of the Hugli. Below Saugor there are deep sea fish. In the cold weather the Sandheads are visited by turtles.

At certain seasons of the year one can catch in the net bomelo—a delicious jelly-like fish, which when sun-dried becomes "Bombay duck" of commerce.

The Lower Reaches are infested with crocodiles—big fellows, too. I remember shooting one once which contained two silver anklets, which would seem to suggest that he had taken advantage of a Hindu's maiden's religious devotions.

A delicious fish, known as Hilsa, comes up the Hugli during the rains, and the river, especially about Fulta, literally teems with this fish and, incidentally, fishing boats.

The native boats of the Hugli would suffice for a book, so interesting are they. Like many things in the East, they appear absurd at first, but one soon learns that the experience of ages has produced a useful type, and it is not wise

to attempt innovations. This is brought out by the boats used by the Harbour Masters in running out mooring lines in Calcutta, although efficiently built of steel, they follow the Mahommedan dinghy in line and meet local conditions admirably.

[END OF PART 2].

THE "HUGLI."

BY W.H.C.

(Concluded.)

Leaving Fishermen's Point, round Brul Sand over Royapur Bar one comes to Moyapur Bar, one of the most troublesome Bars in the Upper Reaches. All the Upper Reach Bars are the crossing channel between the two Bights of deep water. A drawing may perhaps make my meaning more clear.

Moyapur is perhaps navigated to greater precision than any other Bar on the river. The deep-laden outward bound ships crawl down from Calcutta and contrive to be at Moyapur on a rising tide. Once the tidal semaphore

indicates sufficient water, they dash over the Bar with perhaps only three inches to spare under the bottom, and proceed full speed for the James and Marys, which they take on the last of the flood.

It speaks well, I think, for the confidence placed in the Survey Department that Pilots are content to place such reliance on the information given them.

Just above Moyapur is a Chinese joss house, erected, I am told, to the memory of an illustrious Chinaman of bygone days, Achee, and to this day the Chinese community proceed once a year to pay their respects to the departed Achee. The village is called Atchipor.

We now begin to get evidence of Calcutta's industrial importance. At Poojali one passes a cotton mill, and the smoke stacks and jute mills become visible in Buj Buj Reach. Buj Buj is the "Purfleet" of the Hugli, where the tankers moor alongside jetties and large oil refineries are to be found in this rapidly expanding oil port.

Koffri Sand is passed, and one comes to Pirserang Crossing, where the "Deepdale" was lost some years ago.

Rounding Jarmakers Reach, one passes Moonikhloi, called by the Pilots "Melancholy Crossing," as many hold it to be one of the foulest crossings of the river. Here one meets huge eddies, which seem to take charge of the ship. Rumour has it that a man was once washed out of the chains here, but it seems a tall story, but many tall stories are true on the Hugli.

Rounding Sankral one crosses Panchpara into the famous Garden Reach. On one side are the wonderfully beautiful Botanical Gardens, and on the other the shipyards of the Inland Steamship Companies, and the ruins of King of Oudh's Palace.

At the Garden Reach the Harbour Master takes over from the Hugli Pilot.

Perhaps you would like to know a little about the personnel of the various Services which make the Hugli navigation the pride of the nautical world.

The conservancy of the river is in the hands of the Calcutta Port Trust, a body somewhat similar to our P.L.A. The Pilots, however, are not under the control of the C.P.T., but directly under the Government, under the supervision of the Port Officer, a senior officer in the Indian Marine.

The Pilots are covenanted Government servants, sent out by the Secretary of State.

A Pilot's earnings are divided between himself and the Government, and the service produces a handsome revenue.

The Port Trust has, on several occasions, endeavoured to get control of this fine old service, and I understand a special Commission has recently reported recommending Port Trust control.

Knowing the Hugli Pilot pretty well, I should be surprised if the change is effected, as the Pilots hold the fine old tradition of their service in great esteem, and have no desire to be handed over to the more commercial interests of the Port Trust, which has never been remarkable for the smooth running of a contented white personnel.

The Hugli Pilot is world-famous for his skill in handling vessels in this most intricate waterway. To see a slow, clumsy-steering deep-laden tramp negotiating a track on the James and Marys sideways, almost like a crab, with only a few inches between her keel and shipwreck, is indeed a sight which calls for praise from all who know anything at all about handling ships.

Needless to say, such a service comprises many "Old Conways."

2.1 A PASSAGE TO CALCUTTA

2.1.1 To The Bay of Bengal

Austen Harold (1887-89) wrote in November 1898 reporting that his ship, the sailing ship *Evesham Abbey*, had made "a very fair passage of 91 days" from the UK, the last 21 of those spent under light winds in the Bay of Bengal. In October 1898 **Charles MacDonald** (1888-89) in *Loch Ness* reported that he had sailed from Liverpool to Calcutta in 107 days and Calcutta to London in 75 days. Others report of 151 day passages. Much depended on the state of the winds/monsoon in the Bay, as shown by **Albert Edwin House** (1886-87) in his letter reproduced below.

Ship "Sindia,"
Lat. 13° 41' N., Long. 91° 30' E.
May 27th, 1890.

A THUNDER STORM IN THE BAY OF BENGAL.

It is a well known fact that the Bay of Bengal is no pleasant place for sailors at this time of the year, especially in a homeward bounder, on account of our having to tack so often against the S.W. monsoon, and of the frequent and dangerous squalls which prevail. What these squalls are composed of one can judge by their appearance: one which does not look so ugly may be full of wind, and we have to let go topgallant and even topsail halyards to it, whilst another, with a terrible appearance, may do little else but deluge us with rain. On this occasion the weather became very unsettled after four in the afternoon. The breeze dying away in a heavy shower of rain, and then springing up from N. E., we hauled the crossjack and mainsail up and squared her in. Our fair wind did not last long though; at seven it chopped suddenly to the N. W. The sky being overcast and having a very ugly appearance, all hands were called to brace up on the starboard tack and to furl the six topgallantsails, whilst three others were told off to stand by the topsail halyards. The force of the squall, however, was not more than that of a moderate gale, but the rain fell in torrents, and the thunder and lightning was simply appalling. I had seen it

pretty bad in a hurricane of the Cape of Good Hope, but this was worse, the claps of thunder coming simultaneously with the lightning flashes showed us its proximity. I find it useless to try to convey to you any idea of the noise of those awful crashes, which rolled away till they became a distant rumble, one having scarcely died away before it was followed by another. We were expecting to see some of the spars come down at every flash of the lightning, which careered about the sky almost continuously, dazzling our eyes with its pinkish glare. Whilst we were furling the mizen upper topgallantsail one flash, even more vivid than the rest, seemed to strike on the lower topgallantsail beneath us, making a sharp sound like a hiss as it passed over the wet canvas; this and the electricity playing about the steel masts and wire rigging all around us made me wish myself elsewhere I assure you. It lasted about half an hour, after which the wind backed to S.S.W., and we had to wear ship. I said above that the squalls in this locality are common, but it is a good thing such thunder and lightning are rare anywhere, or I expect our shipowners would be more particular about providing their ships with lightning conductors. I have noticed very few sailing vessels carrying them.

A. E. HOUSE.

The river was known to be treacherous but danger loomed further out in the bay as **Charles Arthur K Wood** (1895-97) reported in February 1898 "about 100 miles from the mouth of the Hooghly the captain shaped his course for Sanga Island. Owing to some unknown currents we went 46 miles to the westward of his proper course and we ran aground 18 miles from Sangos. We thought we were all done for but the captain had the presence of mind to back the yards and we drifted off again. Had he not done this we should probably have stuck fast and broken up and goodness knows what would have become of us."

2.1.2 The River: Sandheads To Garden Reach



There were two approaches to the river from the Bay; a western channel and an eastern channel. They were marked by three lightships: the westernmost, called *Pilots Ridge* positioned at 20° 51.5' N. and 87° 52.5' E. and the easternmost called *Mutlah* at 20° 57' N. and 88° 34.5' E. They were about 40 miles apart and anchored in deep water. Roughly midway between the two was Eastern Channel lightship at 20° 59.5' N. and 88° 12' E. They had lights 44 feet high with a visibility of 12 miles. Any vessel approaching the Hooghly from sea should see at least one of them. From the different patterns of their flashing lights their identity could be determined and thus the ship's position known and a course set to proceed inwards. The eastern channel was also marked by the Lower Gaspar and Upper Gaspar lightships and buoyed with paired port and starboard buoys about 3 miles apart. Pilot brigs waited north of these lightships at points marked on charts as Station B Pilots' Station and Pilots' Station SW Monsoon, together known as the Sandheads.

Pilots came on-board at Sandheads but depending on the time and state of the tide, vessels might moor off Sangos Island (aka Saugor, now Sagar Island) waiting for the tide. This might seem an innocuous statement

except that at that time the island was impenetrable jungle virtually overrun by large and vicious Royal Bengal Tigers. The island's lighthouse keepers rarely moved far without a 12 bore shotgun. There are documented cases of tigers swimming out to moored vessels at night, scaling their wooden sides and carrying off crew members sleeping on deck! Old *Conway* pilots coming aboard vessels always asking after other OCs, inviting them onto the pilot brig for a meal or to the Pilots' "Chummery" ashore at Garden Reach, Calcutta. At Sandheads sailing vessels also picked up one or two tugs for the 120 mile run up to Calcutta. In 1889 two of the tugs were the *Warren Hastings* and *Retriever*. The tugs were described by one OC in 1891 as being "more like a yacht than a tug" capable of towing a sailing ship at over 10 knots.

Sangor Island (aka Sangos) was the mouth of the river and the water was described as "the colour of pea soup with jungle on either side". About an hour after leaving that mooring ships passed the wreck of the *Anglia* with just her masts standing out of the water – proving how dangerous the river could be. Approximately two hours later they passed Canterbury Obelisk and half an hour later Diamond Harbour before arriving at Budge Budge, about 12 miles from Calcutta. Depending on the time of departure from Sangos vessels might moor at Budge Budge overnight and even here *Conways* would visit each other's ships. Vessels from New York carrying oil would unload here. Further upriver two rivers entered the river depositing huge amounts of sediment across the river in shoals know as James

Some thrilling tales are related by Mr. Chase of the ships that have been lost in the treacherous waters of the Hughli. In 1892 the "Anglia," a steamer of 5600 tons, was lost in three seconds. The channel altered entirely in two days. The vessel struck on the hidden sand bank and capsized at once, drowning sixteen out of seventeen men on the starboard side and leaving four imprisoned in the vessel on the port side, their heads protruding out of the small ports. When the tide came in four hours afterwards they were drowned like rats in a trap, though every endeavour was made to save them, cold chisels and hammers being used in vain on the steel sides of the ship. The tide was coming in, but the ebb proved too strong, running at the time about seven miles an hour.

The "James and Mary Shoal" is, Mr. Chase says, the most dangerous part of the river, and it was here where the "Anglia" was lost. When once a vessel strikes the shoal of quicksand she is beyond human control and disappears completely, even the tops of the masts going out of sight within a few days. In 1864 about 150 vessels were lost, owing principally to a disastrous cyclone which visited the country. The system of pilotage has now, however, reached such a state of perfection that the losses are but trivial, compared to the enormous number of ships which are annually guided safely to Diamond Harbour and Calcutta.

& Mary, named for an RN vessel wrecked there 200 years previously. Vessels often grounded on James & Mary but were usually pulled off without fuss by their tug(s)) but reproduced above is pilot **John Knighton Chase's** (1885-87) description of the 1892 loss of the steamer *Alice* (5,600 tons) on the James & Mary.

Captain Linklater recalled that "*Night navigation of the Hooghly was of considerable strategic benefit to the port of Calcutta. Before it was adequately dredged and lit in 1914-15, vessels could only proceed so far on each tide before it turned against them or the level of water dropped to such an extent that no further progress could be made when the vessel in question would have to anchor and await the next tide. Speaking generally, vessels leave Calcutta about two hours before low water; it is therefore necessary that the bars first to be crossed including Moyapore, should be dredged to a sufficient depth to permit of vessels crossing at low water; they then proceed on the rising tide, cross the Eastern Gut Bar as soon as they can on the rising tide, crossing Balari, again on a falling tide, and thence to Mud Point Anchorage; Balari must therefore be dredged as may be required. Vessels will then leave Mud Point, according to the draft, on the rising tide; the better the Gabtola Channel, the earlier they cross on the tide, and thence to sea. Dredging the bars and lighting the channel permitted vessels to proceed from Calcutta as far as Mud Point in one day i.e. without having to wait for high water and by lighting the river between Mud Point and Saugor, ships were enabled to proceed to sea the same night. More ships obviously meant more port dues for Calcutta, and more work for pilots, stevedores etc.*"

The earliest OCs' recollections of the transit to Calcutta come from **George Street** (1883-85) who in August 1939 described his first voyage in 1886:

MY FIRST FOREIGN PORT

G. STREET (1883-85)

The days of sail are rapidly fading away into the past and every year fewer and fewer men are left who spent their young days in going down to the sea in tall ships—days never to be forgotten. A young fellow going to sea to-day as a Cadet in a mammoth liner probably has no great impression of his first foreign port, as so many ports are touched at in a voyage. A very different matter to the apprentice of fifty years ago who joined a sailing ship and was probably four months on passage without seeing any land, and on reaching the port of destination found himself among Indians, Asiatics, or Colonials, in a different world entirely. It may be of interest to the present generation to read the impressions of a first voyage apprentice of over fifty years ago, impressions faithfully entered in a diary.

The writer, having done two years in the "Conway," joined the four-masted ship "Bay of Panama" in Liverpool, and sailed in September, 1885, bound for Diamond Island on the Bassein Coast for orders. An uneventful passage round the Cape of Good Hope followed, and on reaching Diamond Island orders were received for Calcutta, and so the diary proceeds :—

Sunday, 3rd January, 1886, 6-30 p.m.—Arrived at Sandheads, passed the lower Gasper Lightship and dropped anchor, 109 days from Liverpool, not so bad considering the time spent amongst the islands, and three days at anchor off Diamond Island at the mouth of the Bassein River. Stowed all sail and set anchor watches.

Monday, 4th January, 1886, 5-30 a.m.—Hove up anchor and the tug "Alexandra" took us in tow. 8 a.m., the Pilot came on board from the brig "Sarsuiti"; with him in the boat came two old "Conway" boys Reddie and Mellard.

Mellard went back to the brig, but Reddie stayed with us, I'm glad to say; how odd that he should have seen me off in Liverpool and be the first to come abroad in this outlandish part; he is learning his job now as a Bengal Pilot.

Hard at work all day unbending sails and stowing them away, all hands very busy and only knocking off for meals. Two British India steamers passed us, and during the day we were boarded by several natives wanting to barter fruit, etc., for old shirts, soap, or anything of that sort—goodness knows where they came from as we were out of sight of land. 5-30 p.m., dropped anchor off Sangor Island and set anchor watches. Had great yarns with Reddie when we went below.

Tuesday, 5th January, 1886, 5-30 a.m.—Hove up anchor and at 6-30 a.m. the "Alexandra" had us in tow again. 9 a.m., entered the Hooghly and passed a barque quite close, the "Inch Keith," homeward bound, and gave them a cheer. The river bank was close on our port

hand, with no vegetation to speak of, and appeared to be a country of sun baked mud ; the opposite side of the river seemed to be miles away and it improved as we went on, dense jungle until we got to Diamond harbour, and apparently the first signs of civilisation. Passed through the dreaded James and Mary shoal with Reddie heaving the lead and myself helping him. After that, about 5 p.m., we got into a most beautiful stretch of the river with the Botanical Gardens on our port hand and the King of Oudh's Palace to starboard. The Palace had a long terrace right on the river, and at each end was a large roofed cage with a large tiger in each, restlessly walking about. Overhead were myriads of pigeons circling round, and on different parts of the palace roof were four natives with long bamboos, each having a different coloured flag at the end. A native would wave his flag and a number of pigeons would detach themselves from the main body and circle round the flag, a wonderful sight when all four natives waved their flags with the accompanying pigeons circling round each flag. Then the flags would drop and all the pigeons would flock together again like a cloud and swing round and round at tremendous speed above the Palace. Reddie told me that each flag denoted a different caste, and what with the beautiful scenery, the setting sun, the gaily coloured boats of all sorts, and the variety of birds with their shrill cries, it all looked like Fairyland to me. On through the Garden Reach where a few ships were lying and where we were boarded by crowds of natives of all sorts, "bumboat" men, dhobies, money-changers, tailors, etc. etc., all shouting and jabbering at the top of their voices, which made the "Old Man" (Captain) wild—so much so that he gave orders to clear the decks and started the fun by kicking a babu off the poop. We all followed suit and bundled the crowd, willy nilly, into their boats alongside.

Past Kidderpore, where a lot of very old ships were lying moored four abreast, so old that one would think we'd slipped back 100 years, as they all had very high sterns, much gilded, and with large square stern windows. They all flew the Star Crescent, and I am told they are old English ships sold to the Arabs and trading to and from Muscat. From there on the river was a forest of masts, ships moored near the bank and four abreast.

6 p.m., dropped anchor opposite the Pepper Box just below Fort William. There were lots of swell carriages driving along the river bank, some with flunkeys standing up behind, and somewhere near the Fort a band was playing ; all very interesting. Hauled into No. 3 Prinseps Ghat, and commenced mooring ship bow and stern, a long and laborious job which kept us going until 11 p.m., when we finished and went below, thankful to do so. Hands busy all day sending down running and chafing gear from aloft, and rigging awning stanchions—a long and busy day, but we're moored at last with the "Leicester Castle" inshore of us and the "County of Haddington" outside.

Pearson, Lunt and Pomeroy, old "Conway" boys, came on board during the evening to see me ; they are in the "Carpathian," lying astern of us. They say there are a lot of old "Conway" boys of our time amongst the ships in port.

Before turning in we had a glorious supper of fried eggs, soft bread, butter, guava jelly and bananas, all of

which I got out of a bumboat alongside—the first eggs we've tasted since leaving Liverpool.

Calcutta to-day must be a very different place to those far away days, with the river crowded with sailing ships, and, as the

Diary says, a forest of masts. The present day Cadet has probably no need of the useful bumboat selling soft bread, eggs and bananas. The bumboats have probably vanished too.

Of the pilot service itself there is no need to say more than that it is the finest service in the world. Kipling has described the very arduous work of the pilots, with his usual brilliancy, in a story called "An Unqualified Pilot" which appeared in the first number of the *Windsor Magazine*.

On getting the pilot on board we shaped our course to the Westward of Sangor Island, the home of many tigers, and soon espied a tugboat approaching us. After the usual bargaining, and the expenditure of a vast amount of vocal energy on the part of the respective captains, a price was agreed on, and, as night was coming on, we anchored—the navigation of the river being too dangerous to attempt in the dark.

Whilst at anchor, we experienced one of those exciting little episodes which help so much to break the monotony of a sailor's life. One of the terrific thunderstorms, which are so prevalent in the Bay of Bengal during the south-west monsoons, suddenly sprung up without a moment's warning. The floodgates of heaven seemed to open, and lightning playing continuously around the spars, encircling them with a halo of golden and purple light, made a glorious, though awe-inspiring scene. Fierce gusts of wind swept across the hitherto placid waters, and for some minutes we were, despite the letting go of a second anchor, in extreme peril of dragging and going ashore on the island. However, the storm ceased as suddenly as it had arisen, and once more all was calm, and we retired to our well-earned rest in preparation for the hard day's work which lay before us on the morrow. Daylight saw us once more on our way. The river is fairly easy until Diamond Harbour is passed; this harbour is about 40 miles from Calcutta, and is connected with it by rail—in the old days the East Indiamen used to discharge here, but now there are only a few moorings for vessels in distress. On passing, the tug-boat slows down for a few minutes to allow a boat with native leadsmen to come alongside. From here, the lead is kept constantly going until the "James and Mary" quicksands are passed. No account of the river would be worthy of the name without some description of these notorious sands. They are named after a Royal ship which they wrecked some two centuries ago, and are formed by two rivers which enter the Hooghly at this spot, throwing their silt across that of the main stream—to touch them means certain and speedy destruction to the ship, and almost certain death to the crew, the strongest swimmer being helpless in the swift-flowing waters. Before reaching this dangerous spot our

tugboat stops to get up a full head of steam, and to enable the pilot to get the latest news of the sands, which are always shifting. This news is brought off by native boatmen from a shore station, and is imparted with the noise and gesticulation which is characteristic of the simple and guileless Bengali.

When we start again all hands are mustered on deck, to be ready in case of accident, and the carpenter stands by to cut the tow rope if the ship strikes, so that the tug may get clear. The history of disasters on the sands is so terrible, that we all felt relieved when we got over in safety, and knew that, with the exception of the Faltah Sands, it was all plain sailing to Garden Reach, which is about 8 miles below Calcutta, where we anchored to take on board the "Harbour," or, as he is more commonly known, the "Mud" Pilot.

The view at this point is strikingly beautiful. On the left, or western bank of the river, are the Howrah Botanical Gardens (famed as the home of the largest Banyan tree in the world, and only equalled in beauty by the gardens of Rio de Janeiro), and the Gothic Bishop's College, whilst on the right is the splendid palace which was set aside for the use, or to be more correct, as the prison of the late king of Oudh, and his many wives, with its beautiful gardens and terraces, and surrounded as it is by the handsome detached residences of the fashionable suburb, Garden Reach—it is as little like a prison as one can well imagine.

We remained at anchor all night, and were duly initiated into the powers of the Calcutta mosquito. There is a legend (the truth of which I cannot vouch for) of their having on one occasion carried off a first voyager, body and soul, into the jungle, whence he emerged after many days, much bitten as to the body, and telling weird tales of strange festivals and awe-inspiring deities—it was remarked that he was never afterwards molested, but this (in the words of the historian) is another story. So to continue, the next morning at daybreak, we "hove short," and commenced the arduous task of dredging up to our moorings off the Esplanade. To describe the process of mooring in vogue in Calcutta would be to deprive the intending first voyager of half his pleasure, when called upon to take part in it: I will only say that it is a task which lasts the greater part of a long and sultry day, and leaves the embryo "Nelson" in a state of physical exhaustion better imagined than described.

Our work ended at 4 o'clock p.m. The berth being what is known as No. 2 Esplanade moorings, and after a short and well-earned rest, we landed to receive our first impression of the grossly misnamed "City of Palaces."

2.1.3 The Port: Garden Reach & Calcutta

When vessels arrived at Garden Reach, just below Calcutta, the BPS pilot disembarked and the Harbour Pilot (from the Harbour Master's Office), colloquially known as the Mud Pilot boarded to take them the short run to the bankside Hastings' Moorings and Esplanade Moorings (see map below) where they might take up to 10 weeks to unload or to get alongside a wharf. These moorings were known as the Tiers

In the late 1880s the Kidderpore Docks were built and they immediately reduced the number of vessels moored in the Tiers. In 1928 The KGV Dock system opened so there was little need for the Tiers anymore, especially as larger steamers meant fewer vessels were needed in port.

Donald Piercy RNR (1890-92) on his first voyage after *Conway* described the final approach from Garden Reach: *"proceeded past the magnificent palace of the King of Oudh, now going to wrack and ruin. Shortly afterwards on turning a bend, we came in sight of a forest of masts - Calcutta"*. As he passed the *Fanny Kerr* her master called across to him and invited him to dinner, before they were even berthed *Fanny Kerr's* gig, pulled by OCs **Reginald Vincent Peel** (1890-92), **Guy Robert Fullagar** (1890-92) and **Godfrey Clements Harker** (1890-92), all his term-mates at *Conway*, with Captain Gibbons coxing came alongside to take him off to dinner. While in Calcutta he transferred to the *Fanny Kerr*. Life at sea in those days was harsh but time in port with the *Conway* family must have been a great compensation.

Departure from Calcutta was more complicated as vessels had first to turn to face downstream. Captain Arthur David Linklater described the process circa 1910-16: *"The length of vessels was limited by the room for manoeuvre at Garden Reach, the turning ground for Calcutta Port itself. It is that stretch of the river running roughly east-west (running across the map below). Space was very restricted. Garden Reach was only about ¼ to ½ a mile wide and vessels could only be turned using a combination of their own power and that of the river and tidal current. There was insufficient room for the use of tugs or lines. The principal on which the manoeuvre is carried out is that the vessel is turned by the action of the ebb tide which flows strongly along the left side of the channel; that by manipulating her engines and keeping the vessel's stern in the slack water she gradually turns as she drifts down the Reach, the manoeuvre being completed in sufficient time to enable her to straighten up before reaching shoal water. It will be readily understood that with the present breadth of turning ground (800 feet) there is very little room to spare when turning a 500 foot ship drawing 28 feet, particularly when it is remembered that this manoeuvre is carried out throughout the year and during the strongest tides."*





"We came in sight of a forest of masts", The Tiers, Calcutta





Above: The Northern End Of The Tiers - Jagannath Ghat, Strand Rd in 1885 (map page 14)
Below: The Southern End Of The Tiers From Hastings Bridge Looking Back Along Garden Reach 1860s (map page 14)



Sid Davies (42-43) describes the passage during WWII *“It was during WWII that I first visited Calcutta. In the days before radar and after some days of cloudy weather and no sun or star sights it was a case of finding the buoy off Sandheads off the low lying marshy coast which marked the entrance to the Hooghly. The pilot cutter would be hovering somewhere nearby and the pilot would come aboard with his Indian manservant and a considerable amount of luggage. This would sometimes include a set of golf clubs as they would practice putting aboard the pilot vessel. The Bengal Pilots were considered the cream of pilots. They would hardly speak to the dock pilots in Calcutta who were also British and we were told that this snobbery existed among their wives also. When it was apparent after the war that the British would be banished there was a popular feeling that the Indians could not possibly replace the Bengal pilots because of the dangers of the Hooghly river but in the event they managed perfectly well. This snobbery existed throughout India it seems. Some of the Brocklebank ships carried a dozen or so passengers who served in India, often in the Indian Civil Service, and men who would be solicitors at home might well be judges in India. Their wives were often very snobbish too. The transit of the Hooghly to and from Calcutta was quite tricky with shallow parts and strong currents. Usually in Calcutta ships would enter Kiddapore Dock but*



Kiddapore Dock

Above: In 1910 Below: Some 7 years later with the foreground dock extension complete



occasionally they would moor to buoys in the river in Garden Reach which was a mile or so below the Howrah Bridge which spanned the river. This bridge, built by Dorman Long was crammed with humanity in cars, rickshaws, buses and on foot. It was closed for four hours each night to prevent synchronism, allowing the bridge to settle. There is now a second bridge spanning the river I believe. In season there was a tidal bore in the river to a height of 12 feet or so and mooring a ship in Garden Reach took the best part of a day. The ship would first be tied to buoys fore and aft and then both anchors would be lowered out of their hawse-pipes and unshackled. A pair of barges would have two “shackles” of cable lowered into them and the barges taken to the stern. The forward anchor chains would be crossed and secured to two buoys off the bow. Brocklebank ships had hawse-pipes on their sterns and the anchor chains brought from the bow would be heaved aboard up the hawse-pipes and secured to the “bitts” and the forward end of the poop deck. The other ends would be crossed and secured to buoys. Two nine-sheaved coir roped purchases would then be fastened – one end at the bitts and the

other to the anchor cables where they came out of the hawse-pipes. Now as sailors know coir rope (made from coconut fibre) will stretch easily and when the bore was expected the purchase would be put on the winch and the anchor chain pulled back until there was a goodly amount lying on the poop deck and the purchase “two blocks”. This is a nautical term indicating that the two sheaved blocks were tight up together. When the bore came sweeping along it would throw the ship forward and the anchor cable would become tight and the purchase would stretch until the whole weight came on them gradually because of the effect of the stretching purchase(s). Unmooring took a long time also.”

In September 1946 Cadet **Robert Royan** (44-46) made his first trip up the Hooghly: *“On my first voyage at sea as the junior cadet on the Clan Line first post-war ship T.S.S. Clan Cumming. Our first cargo was of wheat and flour in bags from the U.S.A. to India which was experiencing a severe famine. We were routed round the Cape of Good Hope having bunkered at Trinidad.*

Our first port of call was at Madras where I witnessed real poverty for the first time. We then proceeded to Calcutta to discharge the rest of our cargo. We picked up the Hooghly pilot at the Sand Heads, out of sight of the land where the sea had shallowed quickly.

As junior cadet I was instructed to meet the pilot assisted by the duty secunny at the top of the pilot ladder. At that time the pilot boarded from a 10 oared cutter that brought him from the pilot vessel.

The pilot boarded and greeted me followed by his bearer (servant) in his uniform and turban followed by a chest containing all the pilots personal effects which the bridge had not told me about. I took the British pilot to the bridge in his immaculate white uniform where he was greeted by Captain Gossar.

The passage to Calcutta would take about two days due to the shallowness of the river and having to cross a number of sand bars at high water. This pilot would take us to Calcutta port where a docking pilot, British, would dock the ship in Kidderpore Dock. What amazed me on this first call at Calcutta was the routine with the river pilot. When it came to mealtime, when the vessel was underway, the pilot’s bearer would set out a tablecloth on the bridge table with his own set of cutlery and pour him a chota peg of whisky. All this accepted by the ship’s Master as acceptable. The bearer would also check out what was being cooked in the officers’ galley.

*By this time however British officers were no longer being recruited for the Bengal Pilot Service. I understand that up until out bleak of war the would offer employment to Conway Boys, with certain conditions. This pilot whose name was **Colquhoun** as I recall, Chief Officer **F H Thornton RNR** and cadet **Greenfield** as well as myself were all Old Conway’s.”*

Robert recalls his last voyage up the river in 1973 as Master of the tanker *Hector Heron*:

“Needless to say times had changed and the Indian pilot had no bearer and lived like the rest of us. Again it took a long time due to the vessels draught and the pilot reckoned at least two days giving this information to the port authority and our agent. On the first night when we anchored the pilot asked if we had films on board and could he watch one. We had films and he chose one and one of our cadets had the honour of showing it. When we were under way again the pilot said he had enjoyed the film very much and he now thought we could arrive at Calcutta about 12 hours earlier! This information was passed to our agent and port authority. We also had a crew change to make.

On arrival at the tanker berth in the river we had to make fast to buoys using our anchor cables because of the bore that comes up the river at the tide change. However our agents had not informed the Customs of our early arrival or the seamen’s union. The result was that our leaving crew had nobody collecting duty or crew members giving gifts to union officials. Needless to say the made life difficult for the ship despite the fact that it was nothing to do with the ship. Needless to say we were pleased to sail and I understand that Calcutta as a port for ocean ships has ceased and the river silting up. And new port for deep sea vessels now operates much neater to the Bay of Bengal.”



Royan 1946 King’s Gold Medal Winner Meets HM The King



3 LIFE IN PORT

Having arrived in port ships might spend 10 weeks or more unloading. This section considers OCs' experiences. The Cadet's Editorial in May 1891 observed that "Amongst the first class ports of the British Empire Calcutta takes a leading place, and its connection with the Conway is both direct and considerable, from the number of cadets who are in the Bengal Pilot Service (BPS) permanently stationed there, as well as from many others who are apprentices in the large sailing ships frequenting the port. It is well known that these youths are exposed to many temptations there, but until recently very little was done to counteract their evil influences." The temptations were apparently so great that the Hooghly River Chaplain, Rev., Charles Hopkins delivered a lecture in Conway at Rock Ferry on Sunday 12th April 1891, remarking that "many a bright, happy and manly young fellow has a made a shipwreck of his life and prospects I Calcutta". I am sure most OCs would have felt drawn to the place! He encouraged cadets to visit him in Calcutta where he could divert them to more wholesome activities. There was also a Sailor's Home and a floating church to occupy the less adventurous. Kipling wrote a poem about Calcutta, "The Ballad of Fisher's Boarding House". It conveys something of the character of the city and is reproduced in Annex A.

Study of the Old Boys' News section in The Cadet (1887 to 1895) shows that the port was so frequently visited by British vessels in the latter part of the 19th century that at any one time there were well over 40 vessels in port with at least 10 of them carrying OCs. They also show that vessels might carry between three and six Conway apprentices as well as officers who were Conways.¹ Similarly, around a dozen other vessels were regularly listed as making for or from Calcutta with OCs on board. Many vessels plied a regular shuttle route e.g. New York - Calcutta or Liverpool - Calcutta, making up to two round trips each year. I've decided not to list the names of all OCs known to have visited the port as it would be a huge and, of necessity, incomplete list. Instead I quote incidents that give some insight into life in the port for OCs.

1890 March 17th: The preponderance of Conways in Calcutta, and ships generally was shown by a letter from **Albert Edwin House** (1886-87) RNR writing from the *Sindia* in the Tiers: "I am the only Conway boy in her now, except our Second Mate **Mr Cobham** (actually *Cochran* 1874-76). **Edwards** (1886-87) has left us (for the *Belfast*) taking the place of her Third Mate, **Mr White** (1860-62)". There were similar numbers of OWs as well so it is not surprising that large numbers sought each other out. The same could be said of Chittagong, San

CRICKET AT CALCUTTA.

(*Indian Daily News*, November 11th.)

"CONWAY" OLD BOYS & THE NAUTICAL WORLD.

A most pleasant and closely contested game was played on Saturday between the above teams on the Mariners' Cricket ground, near Prinsep's Ghaut. The match resulted in an even draw, there being, curiously enough, a tie on the results of the two innings. The Old "Conways" in their first innings scored only 40, while their opponents put together 41. In the second innings the latter scored 64, making a total of 105, while the Old "Conways" just managed to get their score up to 65, when the last wicket fell, bringing their total up to 105 also. Cox and Primrose did good service in the second innings, being the only two who managed to get into double figures. Hough was in splendid form with the ball, seven wickets falling to him in the Old "Conways'" second innings, of which three were taken in one over. For the Old "Conway," Chase, Harold, and Miller played well. The former contributed his 20 in the second innings in good style. Score:—

Old "Conways."

1st Innings.		2nd Innings.	
Wood, b Hough.....	0	b Primrose.....	1
Reddie, b Hough.....	0	b Hough.....	5
Logan, b Primrose.....	1	b Hough.....	0
Chase, lbw, b Hough.....	0	b Rope.....	20
Harold, b Waller.....	21	b Hough.....	4
Butler, b Hough.....	5	b Hough.....	0
Taylor, b Primrose.....	0	c Jones, b Hough.....	1
Miller, b Primrose.....	3	b Hough.....	15
Tate, b Primrose.....	2	b Hough.....	3
Tucker, b Primrose.....	0	b Hough.....	0
Keys (sub.), not out.....	5	not out.....	0
Extras.....	3	Extras.....	16
Total.....	40	Total.....	65

THE NAUTICAL WORLD.

1st Innings.		2nd Innings.	
Cox, b Chase.....	2	b Logan.....	11
Rope, c Chase, b Logan.....	11	b Chase.....	1
Waller, b Chase.....	1	c & b Logan.....	5
Hough, b Chase.....	2	b Chase.....	7
Cooper, c Butler, b Chase.....	8	c Logan, b Reddie.....	6
Primrose, c Taylor, b Logan.....	0	run out.....	13
Jones, b Chase.....	0	st Wood, b Logan.....	0
Ditchburn, b Logan.....	5	b Logan.....	0
Pritchard, st Wood, b Chase.....	2	run out.....	2
Aspler, st Wood, b Logan.....	3	b Chase.....	0
Dryden, not out.....	0	not out.....	2
Extras.....	7	Extras.....	10
Total.....	41	Total.....	64

¹ Note that prior to 1910-20 old boys referred to themselves simply as "Conways". Our usage of "Old Conways" only started after the Club was founded.

Francisco, Chittagong, Liverpool, Iquique (often 100 vessels in port), Port Pirie, Rio de Janeiro, Sydney, New York, Philadelphia, Rangoon, Valparaiso and countless other ports around the world. In Calcutta, traditional *Conway - Worcester* rivalries continued with sporting "matches" being arranged and often reported in the press.

1889 November 11th: the Indian Daily News reported a cricket match on the 9th between *Conway* Old Boys & The Nautical World. It is replicated on the previous page.

1889 September: **Harold** (1887-89) once more approaching Calcutta reported that they were hard at work "*getting everything painted and cleaned up for Calcutta, because the captains all try to show off their vessels, which they can because the ships are moored in long lines, four abreast*" in the Tiers.

1890: Throughout the year there were concerts ashore every Thursday in the Sailors' Home organised by the Chaplain there, and supported by the local ex-pat community. **Arthur Rostron** (1885-86) and a group of other apprentices decided to stage their own concert in the Theatre Royal. A committee was formed "*Conway's to the fore as always*" including **Arthur Hodgson Nelson** (1885-87) and **George Todd Pickford** (1885-87). The story is concluded in the article on above left. From 1912 **Rostron** was known as the Hero of *The Titanic* having raced to the scene and saved her surviving passengers in his liner the *Carpathia*.



Rostron 1912 - the Hero of *The Titanic*

1890: Much longer was spent in port in those halcyon days; **George William Williams** (1886-88) in *Parthenope* spent six weeks in the port in early 1890 and "*had a very enjoyable time*" meeting several *Conways*. Having a good time in Calcutta seemed to be the norm. **Harold** wrote in November saying he and another *Conway* - **Miller** (1886-89) were going to Secunderabad for Christmas.

Fruit was to be had in abundance, one cadet reporting he was (easily) eating four bunches of bananas a day.

Well, this concert came off. The affair was represented as being a "Dog Watch at Sea" (6—8). The stage was rigged up as the quarter-deck of a vessel, and we fellows (about thirteen), all dressed in white duck trousers, blue uniform coats, and badge caps. It was a complete success, and we took nearly thirteen hundred rupees. Expenses came to six hundred; and so nearly seven hundred rupees were cleared. Not bad, I think. The proceeds went to the Seamen's Mission Fund. Well, when I tell you our charges, you'll see it was well patronised, etc. Boxes were twenty rupees, then ten rupees; five rupees and two rupees for sailors, etc. We were asked to repeat the affair, but I don't think it was repeated, for I sailed a few days after, and didn't hear that it was.

I knew a great many people in Calcutta, and enjoyed myself very much indeed all the time.



Parthenope 1897

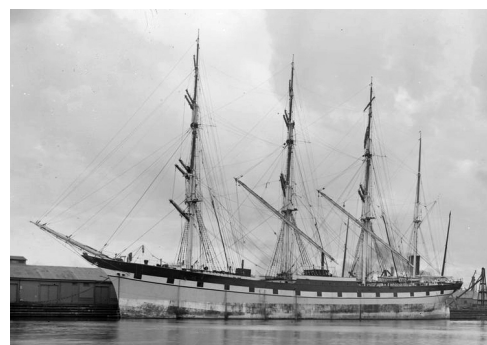
1890 February: ex CPO **Arthur Bernard Crosse (1883-85)** wrote that he was at home recuperating from a serious injury while Second Mate mooring the *Fulwood* at Calcutta on 1st January: "... I fell into the mooring boat on top of the chain ... my fall was 26 feet ... I was taken to hospital and was insensible for four days. I broke four or five ribs, and part of the hip bone, besides several internal injuries and other minor ones". He was repatriated to the UK, his place in *Fulwood* taken by another *Conway* **Hugh McNeile Dibb (1883-84)** in port and seeking a new berth. **Dibb** later joined *Conway's* staff (seen right in 1906) and was an avid sailor encouraging all cadets to maximum use of her small boats. All turned out well for **Crosse** and by February 1891 he was at Rangoon, back as Second Mate in *Fulwood*.



1892 February: **Charles Walter Stevens (1889-90)** reported that while waiting in Calcutta he had been invited, as a diversion, on a 10 day trip down river to the Soondabunds, a complex of waterways now known as the Sundarband. He travelled in one of three "flats", the *Jellinghi*, 260' long, 30' beam with a corrugated iron roof and a steering oar some 15' long. Despite an extremely detailed itinerary of creeks, islands, points, rivers and ports it is impossible to recreate his journey as all the places have changed their colonial names, apart from Budge Budge.



1891 October: **August Edward Harold RNR (1887-89)** in the *Evesham Abbey* arrived in Calcutta after a smart passage if just 83 days from Liverpool to Calcutta. They waited two months to unload a cargo of salt and then load catch, saltpetre and jute for New York.



1892 April 1st: If cadets were tired of long stays in the port the Government of Bengal made it worse by deciding that absolutely no loading or unloading was to take place on Sundays.

1893 : **Clarence Aylen (1890-92)** wrote from the *James Kerr* at Esplanade Moorings to say there were at least 50 OCs and 12 OWs in the port and that the master of the *Cairniehill*, Captain Faraday had organised a crew of OCs and challenged the OWs to a four oared boat race. Faraday offered to present a silver cup to the winning crew. The challenge was accepted and the race took place on 2nd March in the New Docks. The *Conway* crew were, Cox: **William Sandford Hoseason (1887-89)** from the *Cairniehil*. He was in *Conway* with crew member **Sinnatt**. Later in life he was Harbour Master at Bombay based in Alexandra Dock for many years around 1918), Stroke: **Albert Reginald Walker (1887-88)** from the *Slieve Roe*, Second Stroke: **M James Henderson (1888-90)**, Second Bow: **Herbert le Gross H C G Sinnatt (1887-89)** from the *Cairniehill* (He was in *Conway* with cox **Hoseason**. His family was from Jersey, CI where a street is named for them. Appointed Sub Lt RNR on 24th Apr 1902) and Bow: **Rupert Edward Moorhead (1888-90)** from the *Loch Carron*. On race day many thousands of spectators lined the banks to watch the race. It was described in the local newspaper "*The pace was very fast, the Conway cox standing up and working vigorously all the way. On nearing the home buoy the Worcester cox followed his example, both crews straining their utmost to secure the victory, which resulted in the Conway crew passing the buoy about half a*

Top: *Evesham Abbey*

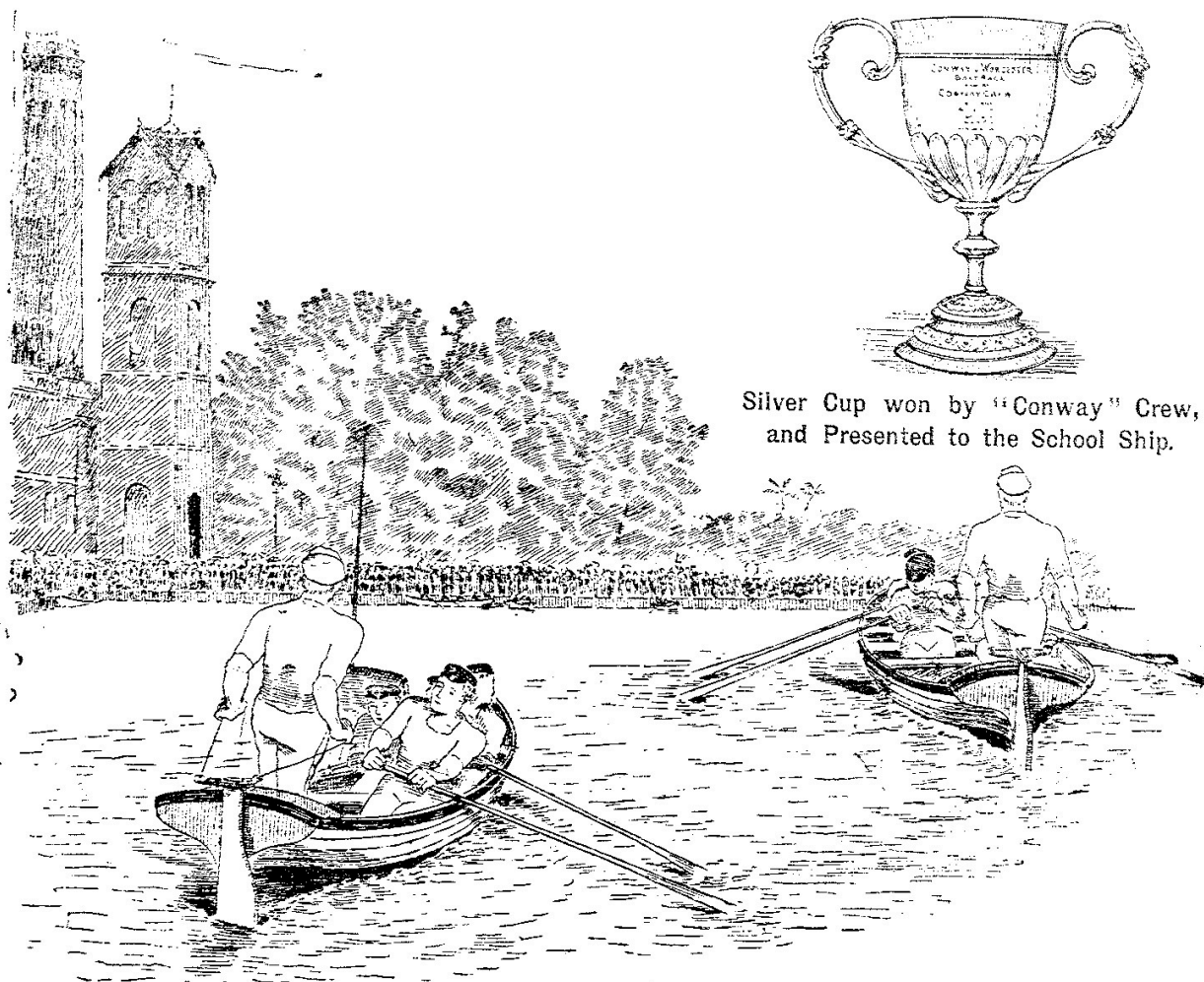
Above: *James Kerr*

Below: *Loch Carron*

Bottom: *Slieve Row*



length in front of their opponents. Both the crews were loudly cheered." The race and cup were pictured, see below. Despite the clarity of the buildings it has not been easy to determine the race's location. Researchers in Calcutta believe the towers to be of the original old Portuguese Church in Bandel, since remodeled as the Basilica Church. The river has silted and moved further away from the building since 1893. The cup was donated to the Conway Club. They loaned it to the RN Dockyard Museum at Plymouth for display for many years and then it was loaned to the Lyme Regis Gig Club for a while as a cup for junior racing.



Silver Cup won by "Conway" Crew, and Presented to the School Ship.

1893 July 30th: There were so many cadets in port **Charles Walter Stevens** (1888-90) in the *Balmoral* decided to organise a football and rugby team. On he held a meeting at No 8 Clyde Road, Hastings Promenade (now Clyde Row) at which the Officers' & Apprentices' Football Club (the O&AFC) was founded. A playing field was arranged on the Maidan (behind Hastings Promenade, now Strand Road) - possibly seen on the right of the photo of the Tiers above. The Maidan is a busy sporting venue and public park to this day. Part of his long and serialised article in *The Cadet* is reproduced below. OCs mentioned as playing are **Hugh Delvas Clough** (1888-90) and **Harry Hacking Lingard** (1886-88).



The Maidan 1868

THE PORT OF CALCUTTA.

HAVING promised to send an article to the CADET for some time past, and not fulfilling my promise up to the present moment, I am now sending a piece on the seafaring world of the above-named port, and shall thank the Editor for inserting it if he thinks it worth the space it will take.

I have visited Calcutta now three times, and on each occasion I have wondered why so little sport, or rather so few games are carried on amongst the shipping. Certainly there are two institutes next door to each other, owned respectively by the Rev. Ben Lyness and the Rev. C. P. Hopkins, which are more or less entirely at the service of the officers and sailors of the port. Such games as billiards, bagatelle, chess, draughts, &c., can be had by merely going to the institutes and asking, but the more manly of English sports are entirely left out. It is here

needless to say I allude to cricket, football, and tennis, &c. There are, I grant, several obstacles to overcome, and such questions may be asked as the following were to me when I started the Officers and Apprentices' Football Club. "How can we obtain leave to practice?" "Where is a ground?" and "Where is the money to come from to pay for the gear?" &c.

Our good ship brought us safely to Budgr-Budgr, a small village about twelve miles from Calcutta, where we had to discharge the kerosene oil from New York. We arrived in June, 1893, after a passage of 98 days. As on former occasions my first thoughts after my home letters were football. It was right in the middle of the season, and I was determined to have a game somehow. Saturday came round, and after work was over I made (what we call) "one dying rush" to the depôt, and caught the 8 p.m. to Calcutta. I soon found my old shore friends and a welcome night's lodging. The next day, Sunday (I am sorry to say this is the only day sailors find for business), I found out all I could relating to a ground, and by having the help as well as the name of Mr. Lyness to work on, I went aboard on Sunday night satisfied that the nail had been hit at last. Unluckily for me, the ship went into the Howrah dry dock after having discharged her cargo, which caused another delay of a week, as Howrah is almost as awkward a place in respect to distance as Budgr-Budgr. In the meantime Mr. Lyness kindly issued notices of a meeting to be held to form a football club, but as all seemed deaf to the request made, matters kept dead until we moored almost within sight of the intended headquarters, No. 8, Clyde Road, Hastings. Something was needed to liven the required people up, and we did it. With only a few uncertain players who had half promised to play, I challenged the F company of the Rifle Brigade stationed in Fort William for July 28th, 1893, at 5 30 p.m. Football is never started out here till the cool of the evening, therefore the first question is answered, as extra leave was not necessary for any who had the energy to play. Again, out here visiting teams expect lemonade, ice water, and limes, and as we are in Calcutta we had to bow to the rule, and supply these necessities. The ground was lent us and the ball Mr. Lyness supplied. Saturday came round and I got off early to see things in order. At 5 30 my team was made up, alas only six seafaring and five friends of mine on shore.

Everything was as it should be, lemonade, limes and ice in profusion. It was nearly 6 p.m. when the representatives of the F company appeared, and in shin guards to boot. By his time there was quite an assembly of spectators present. We won the toss and kicked from the sun, which was then low in the heavens. At half-time the score was 0 for either team, and I may truthfully add that the home team played by far the better of the two, considering that none had practised and few had played together before. Changing minds altered our form, as my fellows felt the want of practice. And had to retire, and all seemed more or less lone up. It began to get very dark about ten minutes before time, and that combined with the weight and endurance of our opponents enabled them to rush rather than to kick the first goal. The ball was now down our road all the time, and many shots would have scored but for the energy of our backs and the first-class goal keeping. And I am obliged to say here that everyone was quite surprised at the admirable way that C. A. F. Williams, hip "British Ambassador," kept goal for us. As time was called No. 2 went through, leaving the soldiers victors by 2 to 0. Three cheers were given and returned and all seemed quite satisfied with the nice gentlemanly game the F company gave us. I think I can recollect the names

of most of our team who first started our small club. A. Espino and Watson deserve mention for their grand defence at back. Goal, C. A. F. Williams; backs, A. Espino and J. Watson (civilians); half-backs, J. S. Hodson, W. C. Hicks, J. Kiernan; left wing, — Wilson, J. Crease (civilians); centre, Arthur Espino (civilian); right wing, C. W. Stevens, J. Powell (civilians). This, therefore, was the starting of the Officers and Apprentices' Football Club.

On Monday, July 30th, 1893, a meeting to form the O. & A. F. C. met at No. 8, Clyde Road, Hastings. I had the honoured post of chairman.

In opening this meeting, it was proposed to make a few rules. I cannot here remember all, but the more important were.

1st.—That each member pay one rupee subscription per month, in advance.

This, of course, was to keep us in gear, etc., as well as the expenses of each match, usually being somewhere about three rupees.

2nd.—That members should endeavour to attend two practices a week.

3rd.—That a ball should be on our ground every Monday, Thursday, and Friday, at 6 p.m. for members to practice.

4.—That all members might have an opportunity of playing, Rugby should be played as well as Association.

It is needless to give any more of the rules, and it was quite encouraging to see eight rupees put down then and there. Mr. Lyness was then voted secretary, C. W. Stevens, Captain of Association Team, J. L. Hodson, Vice-Captain of Association Team, J. Doran, Captain of Rugby Team, W. C. Hicks, Vice-Captain of Rugby Team. Mr. Lyness and an assistant then applied and obtained permission for a piece of the Hastings Maidan from the Commissioner of Police who has the full power to allot out portions of this vast extent of grass to all who can give a proper account of the use they want it for. The ground, therefore, cost nothing, and in little time we converted it into a fine ground, marked it, and put up posts, and many an English Club would envy our football ground.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Not content with forming the O&AFC **Charles Walter Stevens** (1888-90) then founded the Officer & Apprentices Dancing Club (O&ADC) - doubtless encouraged by the number of young ladies who turned out to watch the football and rugby matches. Membership cost 40 rupees to join and 2 rupees a month. There were three practice dances and one social dance each month. On 23rd August 1893 they held a their first ball, described below.

THE PORT OF CALCUTTA.

(Continued.)

THE club, of No. 6, Clyde Road, Hastings, the institute of which the Rev. C. P. Hopkins is the head, had given, I believe, several dances, and proved, I am informed, very successful. We in our, as yet, untried efforts were talking of giving our first social night, and as a committee of four sailors was to decide the question, you can be sure something would come of it. On Monday, 14th August, 1893, the committee met, which consisted of the Rev. Ben Lyness; W. Roe, chief officer "British Ambassador"; J. Doran, chief officer "Sieve Roe"; S. Stott, chief officer "Halewood"; C. Stevens, apprentice "British Ambassador." Two ladies were also present to assist in making out dances, &c. Expense was to be laid aside, and the dance to be given in first-class style. This was unanimously agreed by the committee, it being our first attempt, and therefore we must succeed. Everything was arranged after about three hours talk, and everyone had his respective share of business to attend to. Invitations, on very pretty cards (blue printing on white ground), were issued in the name of our host, Mr. Lyness, for August 23rd, single gentlemen being able to get a ticket from the club for one rupee for this dance. Mr. Hallbrook, a gentleman well known, and also who knew the management of a dance, kindly undertook the important duties of master of the ceremonies.

The eventful day, August 23rd dawned, and I think there were several anxious members up to the hour of nine p.m. when a heavy weight was lifted off their minds. The trouble and expense deserved the success that it undoubtedly was. I will now say a few words on the scene your eyes meet. On entering, which was in the rear of the Institute, your eyes would have gazed on a little scene of quite an agreeable nature, and which was also exposed to the view of all who passed up and down Leonard Road, between the hours of 8 45 p.m. to 3 a.m. on the following morning. There were 30 Chinese lanterns decorating the trees of the entrance, as well as three larger ones in front of, and three more behind the building. In addition to these there were 100 fairy lamps suspended on wire beneath the three large lanterns, and 200 more arranged around and amongst a large bed of roses in the centre of the garden. These 300 lamps were red, green, yellow, and blue alternately. Chairs and lounges had been arranged in the verandah and inner room, and also under the trees in the said garden. Beyond this was a comparatively large room, this was the ball-room. The ceiling and walls were covered with ships flags, so that not a sign of them was seen at all. On these again were placed flowers of all hues, kindly made into wreaths, etc., by some Hastings' ladies. A buttress or arch which crossed the room at its centre was hung with flags and flowers, and set the upper portion off to perfection. The floor which is of hard cement was covered with a native made mat, a sort of grass greatly used out here, and

which makes a first class floor for dancing, as it is glazed, so to speak. The buttress made the room have eight corners, these were filled with large ferns with flags round the pots. When all the lights were on, the room had quite a lively aspect. On one side of the hall a room afforded space for the orchestra, consisting of a piano and violins. The music was of the best, and the time perfect. At one end of the dance room, in another apartment the refreshments were served. Sandwiches and cakes of all descriptions, sweets, coffee, tea, aerated waters of about eight kinds were to be had and ice cream. These were going all the time the dance was on. The heat was the only thing against us, and this may be estimated when besides ice cream, etc., there were 18 dozen bottles of the above mentioned waters, and 40 lbs. of ice consumed. At 9 p.m. carriages began to come, and before 9 30 the room was full, or rather, I should say, the sitting space. All seemed surprised, more or less, at this reception, and several expressed their delight to the members. The four committee-men wore large dark blue and white roses, while the M.C. who now appeared on the scene of action with programmes, was honoured with a large white one with tails. The programmes were also pretty. A lady in evening dress, half-face, leaning on a lounge fanning herself, was on the front; the back was adorned with a barque in full sail, and the words underneath "Officers and Apprentices Club Ball." These decorations were done in print on a blue ground. Inside the programme was white, and divided into parts of 10 dances to each part. A ring in the card, with a white silk thread and a white pencil, finishes the description. The dance commenced at a few minutes to ten, eight paid at the door, so what with the members and the guests the ball-room was crowded, and more especially when the "Iolanthe" came on, for everyone seemed capable of doing the 1-2-3 kick up. This dance was quite new to us when we came into port, but now it is older than any of them. Cutting the account short, I may say that the affair went off in fine style, and three a.m. on Thursday saw Mr. Lyness' dwelling once more in quietness, after having been the scene of the prettiest and best dance, as yet given in the vicinity of Hastings. Again the practice dances commenced, and another three Wednesdays passed over, and all members acknowledged the class a success. All danced better than was to be seen at the first practice night, and many who could not at first dance at all, were now becoming first-class waltzers; and our second social dance saw old non-dancers taking the lead. It is useless to detail another of our dances, as they were precisely the same as the first, only much greater attendance. 18 rupees were taken at the door of the second dance. The third was a farewell dance for the "British Ambassador," and 35 rupees were taken at the gate. In the last-named dance the civilians decorated the rooms, etc., and very pretty they were indeed. Several Captains of vessels attended the last dance and gave subscriptions to the Club.

I think I can now close my epistle. I hope the readers are not tired of this attempt to describe what can be done by the help of a little energy and trouble, and I am sure both these are fully paid for in the long run. I sincerely

hope that the Dancing Club is still existing, and that, if it is, many who may read this may be benefited by it.

Wishing our generous host, Mr. Lyness, every success for his Institute, I will close my account of the Port of Calcutta.

C. W. STEVENS,
Ex-"Conway" Cadet.

From 1896 and into the new century the eclipse of the sailing vessel began in earnest and quickly accelerating in pace. Steamers were faster, had increasingly greater carrying capacity and did not need expensive tugs on the river. Immediately the number of sailing vessels calling at Calcutta began to drop, steamers carried only one to two apprentices and time in port shortened dramatically. There were far fewer seafarers and they had far less time on their hands. As shown below The Tiers began to look very different with their forests of masts replaced by stumps of smoking funnels.

1897: **William Stewart G D Atkin** RNR (1882-83) published a series of articles in *The Cadet* about Calcutta. He focussed on the sites, sounds and smells of the city giving an interesting but damning description of the city and its inhabitants, both native and ex pat. His un-complementary comments were strongly refuted by **Thomas Matthew Munro** (1887-89) in the July 1897 issue. In his seventh year in the HRSS Munro, who had been born and brought up in Calcutta, doubted (politely) that anything in Atkins's reports was correct.

1897 February: **Charles Arthur K Wood** (1895-97) arrived in Calcutta for the first time and thought it "a rather dirty place. I don't mean the European Quarter but in the native quarter it is horrible. They live in mud huts, no chimney pieces and 20 of a family all squatting around a charcoal fire. They are good to you if you are good to them. Some are very treacherous and would knife you as soon as look. I hope to bring a parrot back, could have a monkey but captain will not have them on-board".

Times were obviously changing as he made no mention of the high social life his predecessors had taken for granted. **Munro** was in England and so



gave a lecture in *Conway* on The Hooghly River showing slides of the many wrecks along the river caused by recent monsoons "some high up on the bank, others piled one on top of the other".

1906 April: Term mates **Lionel Nichole** (03-05) and **William Fooker Perry** (03-05) wrote from the ship *Main* in Calcutta that they had been laid up in the port for three months "and are getting rather tired of it". They had held a boat race against the engineers of the Port Defence and beaten them.

Around the same time "WG" Gibson DSO MC OBE (02-04) was waiting in the Tiers. His messmates "were in the habit of scraping all the food scraps onto one tin pate, which they would then bang smartly against the open porthole. As the pate was a little bigger than the porthole, the garbage would be shot straight out into the river, but unfortunately one day this handy operation was performed just as the Captain was going down the gangway in his smartest suit of white duck. He caught the lot, and must have taken it as a personal attack for he ordered all the portholes to be closed for the rest of the ship's stay in the river, though the temperature and humidity were terrific".

IMPRESSIONS BY THE WAY.

(Continued.)

IV.—CALCUTTA.

"She, the Sea-Captain loved, the river built,
Wealth sought, and Kings adventured life to hold:
Hail Mother! I am Asia—power on silt,
Death in my hands, but gold."—*Song of the Cities.*



ALCUTTA has been christened the "City of Palaces," why, I have failed to discover, but I formed the opinion on the very first night of my arrival that it would have been far more aptly named the "City of Odours," an opinion which was fully justified by after experiences. Over the "Maidân" (as the vast expanse of waste ground surrounding Fort William is called), floats every night the miasma arising on the one hand, from the crowded, undrained, and utterly loathsome native quarter, and on the other, from the swift-flowing, but indescribably filthy Hooghly, the reek of which follows a man even across the "great black waters." With true Oriental indifference the English resident, when spoken to on the subject, shrugs his shoulders, smiles, and turns to his task of amassing a sufficient number of glittering mohurs and rupees to enable him to leave the accursed land for ever, a land in which, I may add, his bones usually find their last resting place in spite of his work.

Before proceeding with my impressions of the city, I will just mention a few of the people who, on business (or robbery) intent, honour the ship-board with their presence. Here comes "honest Joe," the bumboat man, who, in snow white and filthy drapery, and curious head-dress (this is not cribbed from a ladies' fashionable paper), sits in state, surrounded by the many and various appurtenances of his trade, and is prepared to take anything, from money to an old shoe, in exchange for his wares. He conceals his honesty beneath a convenient bushel, lest the "Prophet" should adjudge him guilty of ostentation, and deny him the joys and society of the hours of paradise, the most terrible punishment which

can be inflicted on a "true believer." This, I may remark, is his own explanation of the painful lack of honesty which marks his every transaction.

Next comes the inevitable "snake-man," with his monotonous chant, and scarred and mangy mongoose (the rikki-tikki-tavi of the jungle-book), who, for a consideration, large or small, as he gauges the means and gullibility of his audience, exhibits the time-honoured performance of "mongoose kill snake." Unlike Mowgli, of jungle fame, our friend is careful that his pets are harmless, the snakes being deprived of their fangs "lest the sahibs be frightened."

Then we have the butchers, tailors, and shoemakers' runners, all bent on getting a share of the sailor's hard-earned rupees, and each trying to outvie his confrères in lying and flattery until his end is gained, when his bearing instantly changes to one of haughty indifference, mingled with a good deal of contempt for his victim.

Civilization, as we understand it, is with these people but a veneer, beneath which lies undisturbed the instinct of robbery and plunder, inherited from a long line of thieving ancestors. Unlike Bombay, where the sailing ships lie at anchor in an open harbour, they are in Calcutta moored head and stern, in tiers of four or five ships, close to the right or eastern bank of the river, along which extends for about three miles the Esplanade, a very fine asphalted carriage drive, where may be seen in the cool of the evening some of the most gorgeous equipages in the world. Everyone who owns a carriage drives along it, attended by what to the new comer seems an altogether superfluous number of coachmen and "caises." Adjoining the Esplanade is the beautiful "Eden" garden, which extends from the Maidan to the Law Courts in one direction, and from the Esplanade to Government House grounds in the other. The garden is laid out in exact facsimile of the "willow pattern plate," and is lighted by electricity, whilst every evening a band, native or European, plays for about an hour. Here, in the neighbourhood of the bandstand, from about six to seven o'clock, may be seen all the rank and fashion of the city, attendance being considered as much a social necessity as the inscription of one's name in the Government House book.

Calcutta as a city is difficult to do justice to, and I think I may say, that with the exception, perhaps, of the European policeman, there is no one who has a real knowledge of it. Palatial buildings, built on the latest European plan, rub shoulders, or shall I say walls, with the most primitive of native huts, in a manner which, to the stranger, is most puzzling. One moment he is amongst the so-called Palaces of Chowringhi and Circular Road, the next finds him strolling down Bentinck Street, with its Chinese inhabitants, to emerge a few minutes later in the midst of the native bazaars, where "gilded iniquity" reigns undisturbed, in sight of Government House! and so it is throughout the city. There are many noticeable public buildings, amongst which I may mention the Courts of Justice, the Town Hall, the Treasury, and Writer's Buildings, where the Calcutta Municipal Council transacts its business. There are two cathedrals, the old one, St. John's, and a new one, St. Paul's, a handsome Gothic structure, and last, but far from least, the historical Fort William, which, with its outworks, occupies an area over half a mile in diameter and mounts over 600 guns. There is also a fine racecourse and a hotel, the Great Eastern, where a man may if he waits long enough meet every Englishman in India. Since my last visit to Calcutta I am told that docks for large ships have been built, between the Esplanade and Garden Reach, but that owing to bad designing they are for

all practical purposes useless, and remain unused and uncared for, a breeding place for malaria and the different germ diseases which are prevalent in the East. Means of locomotion there are plenty, from the steam trams of Chowringhi Road, rarely used by any except natives, and the "Tikka Gharri," which is the equivalent of the homely "growler," to the humble "dinghy," the native boat, which conveys you along the river-front and which is not only the coolest, but by far the most interesting mode of conveyance. From the dinghy may be seen tier upon tier of the finest ships in the world, their newly painted sides of black, white, slate, or brown, looking strangely smart and imposing beside the unpainted and dilapidated side of the "Country Wallah," whose ungainly appearance closely resembles the "Noah's Ark" of our childhood. Spiritually I think apprentices are better cared for in Calcutta than at almost any other port in the world; lectures, concerts, and tea-fights, are of nightly occurrence, all attended by old ladies, fair young damsels, and a sprinkling of good young men of the "Private Secretary" type. Let me whisper! the latter a good deal more interested in the aforementioned damsels than in the boys. They are usually just out from home, and their preconceived idea of an apprentice is of some wild depraved creature who can only be influenced by a liberal allowance of tea and buns (followed by a pious exhortation). Whether they have ever had the occasion to change their ideas on the subject I am unable to say, but it has always seemed to me, when looking back to those days, that Calcutta people always showed a curious and inexplicable desire to change the subject when pressed for an opinion of British apprentices.

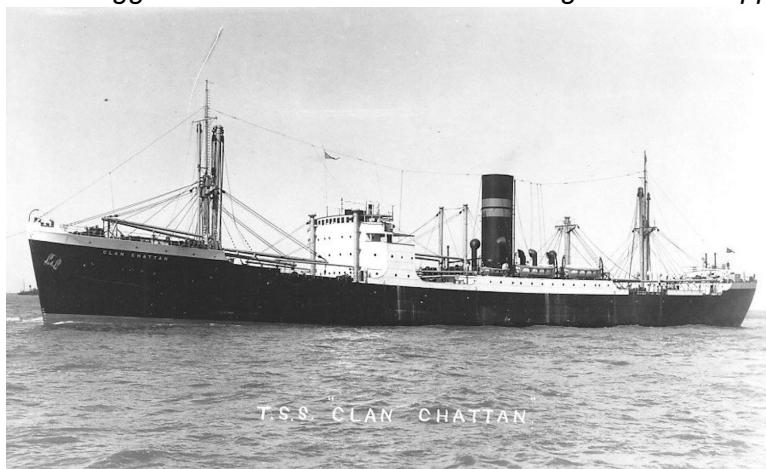
I regret to say that at these meetings there was always a decided thinning of the congregation after the tea and buns had been consumed, and so marked did this become, that I recollect on one occasion the doors being locked whilst the feeding was in progress, and we (the victorious ones) were later on regaled with the sight of a dozen or more naughty little boys struggling vainly with locked doors, and having to return crestfallen and shamefaced to their seats to listen to an address from the text, "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light."

Whilst on the subject I should like to pay a tribute to the ladies who visit the hospitals, and who, with kind and tactful words and gentle attentions, make easy the lot of the sick and fever-stricken seafarers. Only those who have been ill in a far off land, away from home and friends, can realise the true value of such attentions, and the thought of them has helped me through many an evil hour in lands where the same sweet spirit of charity was not abroad.

To return to my story. The Englishman in India is apt, after a short sojourn in the country, to take life very easily, and the English apprentice is, I fear, no exception to the rule. Why exert one's self when, for a few annas per diem, an efficient native substitute can be procured? Alas! conscience steps in and whispers of one's duty to the owner. So it was a great relief to my mind, when at the end of a five months' stay, we took in our moorings, dropped down to Garden Reach, and the next day started on the last stage of the voyage, homeward bound for Dundee. Cheerily and with a will were the "chanties" given and the prospects of a fair passage freely discussed, then later came the "Goodbye and pleasant passage" of the pilot, as his boat, manned by a noisy crew, bore him rapidly towards his own vessel, followed by the excitement and bustle

By 1911 The Cadet rarely mentioned Calcutta, steamships had finally closed down the halcyon days on the Tiers and ashore. Where once The Cadet magazine's "We Have Heard From" and "Letters" columns were full of mentions of ships en route for, in, or departing Calcutta, now the port was hardly mentioned. Old Boys serving under sail were the exception not the rule. In 1915 there was only one mention in The Cadet of an OC in port at Calcutta.

1940: **James Hume** (38-40) joined Clan Line from Conway and in May 1940 was serving in *Clan Chatten* (below). She sailed in convoy from the UK via Cape Town and thence to Calcutta. They changed Indian crews as it was Clan Line's policy to change their crews on every visit to Calcutta. Most crew members were very experienced having served with Clan Line for many years. They did not allow family members to serve in the same ship. "Orders were given in Hindi so every officer had to learn the language. The lascars suffered badly from the cold, and many had inadequate clothing for the North Atlantic until arrival in Britain when the Seamen's Mission used to provide them with woollens and an odd assortment of second-hand clothing. The crew were loyal and cheerful and good seamen but their quarters reeked of ghee, the cooking fat they used as a cooking base and a distinctive odour that permeated all Indian crew ships". They also coaled ship and loaded a cargo of tobacco and jute. "Sprawling Calcutta was an eye opener. The comparison between poverty and wealth was appalling, the heat and humidity were oppressive, and coaling ship by women carrying coal up planks in baskets seemed an incredibly inefficient means of loading bunkers but emphasised the pittance labourers were paid. Coal dust and sweat are not conducive to comfort and the dust permeated everywhere even with everything closed down, which further aggravated our discomfort. Calcutta gave me the opportunity to buy cheap tailor made tropical uniforms and although many said that it was 'half cotton, half rotten', by proving English cotton for the sewing they provided excellent wear. No one was sorry to leave Calcutta for Rangoon" and then Liverpool where they arrived in September having travelled without escorts but at 16 knots zig-zagging to avoid submarine attacks. By November he was back in Calcutta for another crew change, to coal and take on cargo before heading off to Madras and then the UK.



1941 June: **James Hume** (38-40) was in Calcutta again, still in *Clan Chatten*. They bunkered, changed crew and loaded a cargo of jute, tobacco and ground nuts. To avoid submarine attacks they returned to the UK via Cape Town, South America, the West Indies, up the US coast almost to the Arctic Circle before crossing to port in Glasgow.

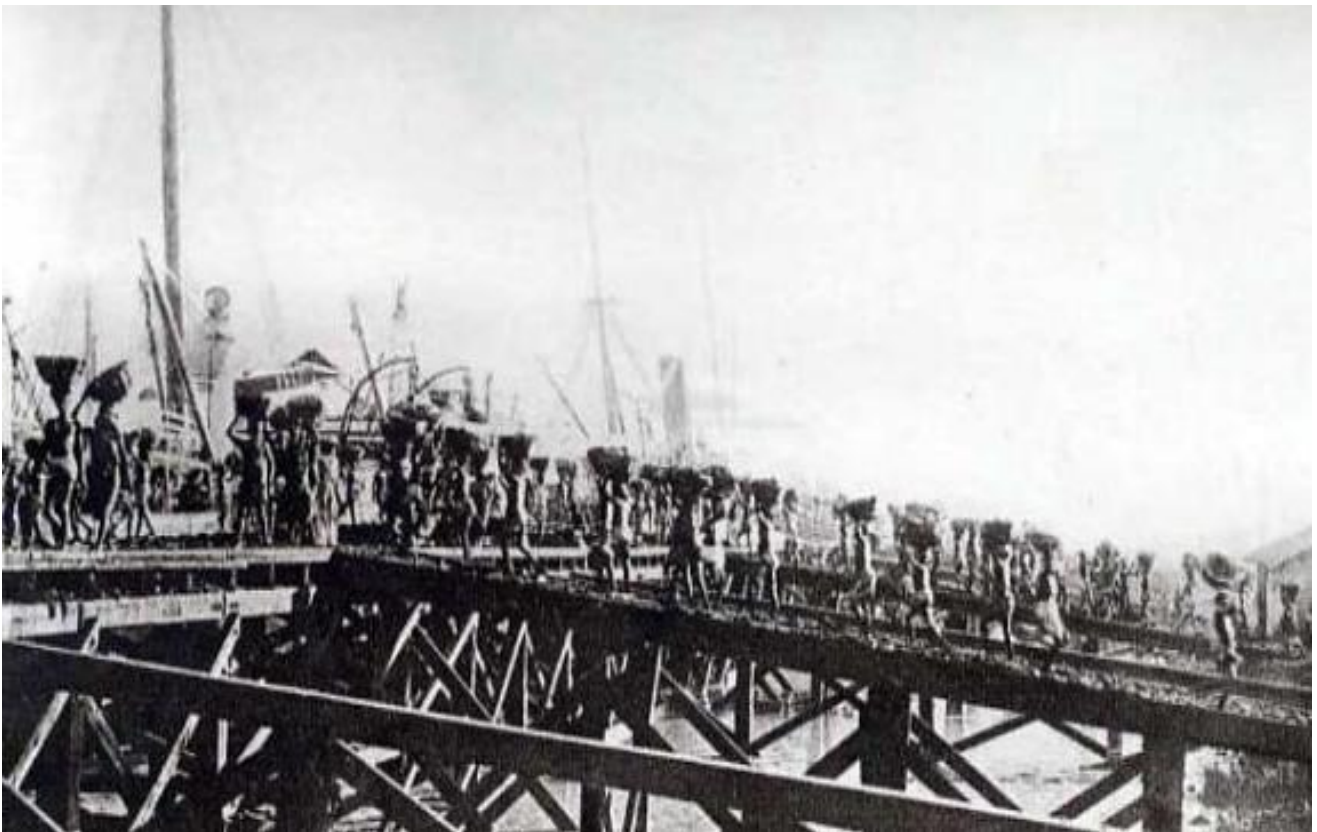


1945 August 15th: **Sid Davies** (42-43) "I was in Calcutta on VJ Day (and in Bombay when Germany packed in – went to the victory parade there). In Calcutta we painted the hull black as the old man wanted to be first ship home in peacetime colours."

Left The River in 1945



It "might take up to 10 weeks to unload"



1946: **William Ernest Peto** (41-43) was in Calcutta in the *Samesk* where he met **David Livingstone Aitchison** (32-34) (right) who was a senior officer with the BISN Co



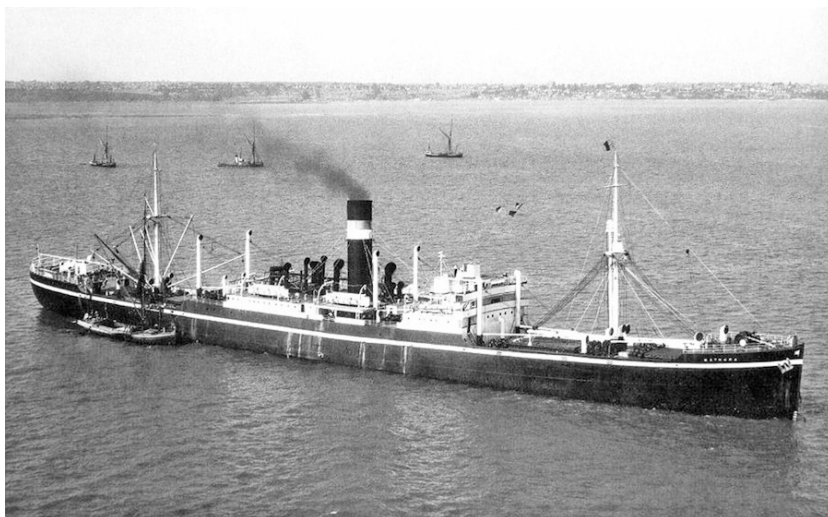
Aitchison 1934 Summer
Gig Crew

1946: **Sid Davies** (42-43) recalls: *"I was there quite a few times – mostly in very troubled times. Before the partition of the continent into Pakistan, India and Bangladesh there was a period of great instability when riots and fighting made things very dangerous. Bloating bodies of victims would be swept down the river with birds pecking at their flesh. It was dangerous to go ashore and taxi drivers for instance would only operate within their tribal areas. One Scottish passenger who was returning from leave to his job in a jute mill downriver was, we were told, thrown into the boiler of the factory where he was a supervisor."*

On a later trip *"In Garden Reach we had to free a dead body from the moorings as it got caught floating down stream. Once in this troubled period a relative by marriage wrote to me to ask if would try and find out why a carpet he had ordered and paid for hadn't arrived. He was a sparks during the war and left the sea by then. I got a taxi and got so far when the driver said he could go no further and so I had to get another and continue. When I got to the address there was no trace of the shop so I went to the local police station. There were cells there which were crammed to the gun'ls with prisoners. Looking back it was a daft thing to do as they were doing all sorts of bad things to whites."*

1947 August 15th Independence Day: At least two OCs were in Calcutta on Independence Day:

Davies: *"The last time I left Calcutta was in 1947 on the day they received their freedom from British rule and we could see the parades in the villages as we passed downstream. The ship was the 9,000 ton *Mathura* (seen right on the *Thames*), built in WWI and shortened at Smith's Dock on the *Tees* as she was too long to turn easily in the *Hooghly*. Three other ships were similarly shortened in the 1930's – they were the *Mangalore*, *Magdapur*, and *Manipur*."*



1963 January 1st: **Mike Sanders** (58-61) arrived in Calcutta in MV *North Devon* (shown right) carrying grain from Baton Rouge. On the night before he had rung 16 bells. *"We were tied to a buoy, via the anchor chain, and to this day I can see the tidal bore that came down the Hooghly River. We did a part discharge into lighters and then went into the docks at Kidderpore. The smell of the place was unbelievable. Out first night ashore we made our way to the Grand Hotel in Chowringhee Centre, now known as the Oberoi Grand, which was at the end of what was the equivalent of The Mall with the racecourse on one side and a golf course on the other with these old*



Morris Cowley Taxis, made in India as your transport. It was so cheap as well. It took the dockers about two weeks to unload as everything was done by hand. The grain was put into gunny sacks and then into netting before going over the side onto lorries or river lighters. The dockers chewed betel nuts and many of them had reddish black teeth and acted if they were on pot! 48 hrs before we were due to sail, I woke up in agony with two nearly shut eyes and a top lip that had swollen to virtually cover my nostrils. I had an abscess in one of my front teeth and I was taken by the Agent to a Sikh dentist, who was fantastic. He said that normally he would give me penicillin to get rid of the abscess, but as I was soon to sail he would extract it having put cotton wool in my mouth and warning me that the injection would hurt, and it did, after about ten minutes he extracted the tooth and I fainted! I came too and he said that if I came back the following day he would have a plate ready with a replacement. It cost under a £1 and I had it for at least 10 years before I had a bridge made."

1963 April: About three months later, **Sanders** was back in Calcutta, again carrying grain: "we went from Geraldton, Western Australia to Calcutta, and the experience was the same, apart from the Sh**e Hawks that dive bombed you. I don't know whether or not it was just the time of year, but there were thousands of them!"



KGV Dock In 1958.

4 CALCUTTA PORT COMMISSIONERS

4.1 THE HOOGLI RIVER SURVEY SERVICE (HRSS)

4.1.1 The Service & Its Work

The HRSS was part of the Calcutta Port Commissioners which was part of the colonial Indian Government Service. The river channel was constantly shifting so the HRSS existed to survey and mark the navigation. In 1894 they had three vessels, *Tigris*, *Resolute* and *Cuckoo*. By 1909 *Retriever*, *Industry* and *Guide* are listed but it is not clear if they were replacements or supplements. *Resolute* was the largest and "did all the pulling about of lightships, provisions and waters them every month, repairs and repaints all the buoys every year and does any surveying required beyond Sangor Island. The *Tigris*, about half the size of the *Resolute*, does all the surveying below Diamond Harbour and as far as Sangor, replenishes the Refuge Houses every year and surveys the river from bank to bank every cold weather. The *Cuckoo*, smaller than the *Tigris*, does all the surveying above Diamond Harbour and all the narrow channels behind islands etc." In 1907 the powerful suction dredger *Sandpiper* was put into commission, mainly to deal with the bars on the upper reaches, while the suction dredger *Balari* was commissioned in 1913 to deal with the lower reaches. In 1914, the two principle survey vessels were the paddle steamers *Diligence* for the upper reaches, i.e. from Fulta point to Pir Serang, and *Industry* for the lower reaches, i.e. Diamond Harbour to Saugor. There were also the single screw launches *Sadie* and *Waterwitch*; steam cutters *Ethel*, *Wasp*, *Gnat*, *Reajuddy* and *Bee*; and the dispatch vessel *Retriever*. A twin screw vessel named *Vigilance* was used if one of the other vessels was out of commission. Until 1904 the *Retriever* had been commanded by the River Surveyor, but thereafter had a permanent Commander appointed.

All these crafts belonging to the Port Commissioners were manned almost entirely by Muslims from East Bengal, Chittagong particularly, but also from other places like Faridpur, Comilla, etc. They were a loyal and faithful lot and very good seamen. They worked most harmoniously with all their officers, be they British, Hindus or any other. Neither politics nor religion played any part in these human relationships. This was in marked contrast to the situation as it developed some years later.

William Harry "Titch" Coombs (Conway 07-09) (HRSS 09-13) wrote the brief summary right of the HRSS in 1925 April edition of *The Cadet* (page 7).

The River is surveyed by the River Survey Department of the Port Trust under the Deputy Conservator. In my time, the Service comprised about eighteen officers, distributed on two Survey steamers, the "Industry" and the "Diligence" (known by their friendly

Captain Arthur David Linklater reported that around 1915 the whole approach from Saugor to Calcutta was surveyed once a month; the more important bars (unavoidable obstructions across the bed of the channel caused by sand banks and general silting) were surveyed at least once a fortnight. The "more important bars" were Moyapore, Ninan, Eastern Gut - also called Hooghly Point - Gabtola, Balari and James & Mary. Of these, the Eastern Gut, Ninan and Moyapore were sounded daily and the information telegraphed to Calcutta and Diamond Harbour. They produced incredibly detailed charts which, reflecting the dangers of the river, had warnings printed all over them, e.g. "heavy breakers during bad weather". Practically every crossing was surveyed once every neap tide. The resulting charts were then rushed up to Calcutta, lithographed and coloured by skilled Bengali draughtsmen and handed to the Pilot Office, sometimes within 12 hours of survey. Their work was considered second to none. The river changed so frequently that "the worst stretches had to be surveyed every day and the pilots kept fully informed of the latest conditions for which purpose a complete telegraph system was installed from Calcutta to Diamond Harbour. The results of the surveyors' work, the exact state of the river, and the depth

The job of surveying was interesting enough but tended to pall on one after a while. It was the same monotonous grind, year in and year out, not providing the zest of variety, nor encouraging initiative of ambition. Unless one took care to find other outlets for it, one's personality tended to get stilted.

Company, tells me that there was a sloop called the "Diligence" doing survey work on the Hugli before the year 1700!

Two Survey Stations at Hugli Point watch the James and Marys, and two or three in Calcutta survey the Port and superintend the drawing, production, and the publication of the charts.

of water on the several bars were kept posted at both ends". They were updated four or five times a day. These tidal semaphores and gauges also required constant attention and maintenance. They were located at Moyapore, Hooghly Point, Balari, Phuldobie, Kedgerree, Ulubaria, Royapore, Fulta, Kidderpore, Panchpara, and Gunga Saugor Creek.

Channels were also dredged to admit deeper vessels. The Eastern Gut required the most time from dredgers, but dredging could only happen under favourable weather conditions. On average the Eastern Gut was dredged four months of the year. Dredging on the lower reaches was limited to the "two fine months of the year." The alternative to dredging was the construction of 'training walls' but these were deemed prohibitively expensive. They performed an incredible amount of work and this grew year on year from 1903 to 1914 as the table² shows.

	1903	circa 1914
Navigation marks	165	210
Survey marks	25	70
Buoys - river approaches	126	Same?
Light vessels - river approaches	7	Same?
Cask buoys - Diamond Harbour to Calcutta	47	51
Gas buoys - port	4	6
Gas buoys - lower reaches	5	15
Semaphores with tide gauges	5	7
Plans & notices published	823	1,021
Soundings taken	261,648	1,245,017
No. of vessels	64,288	85,348
Deepest vessel		28' 10"
Longest vessel		520 ft

² From a report by the Deputy Conservator, Captain F.A.Lovell, published in the Calcutta broadsheet 'The Statesman', on 21st February 1914

Examples of HRSS Charts.

Below: 1910 produced by **Munroe, Coombs, O'Brien** and others.
 Bottom: Sandheads & Saugor Light Lat. $21^{\circ} 38' 40.1''$ N and Long. $88^{\circ} 2' 27.2''$ E



4.1.2 Old Conways In The HRSS

1894 May 9th: The first OC to report on life on the HRSS was **Thomas Matthew Munro** (1887-89). He had been born and brought up in Calcutta and on joining the ship in 1887 his address was 1 American Ghatt, Calcutta. In 1894 he wrote to *Conway* from his base at Diamond Harbour. He thought his promotion prospects were poor. He said he was at *(continued in letter right)*:



1896 May 7th **Munro** wrote from Hooghly Point that he had been Master of the *Cuckoo* since August 1895 having passed for Master (Home Trade) and qualified as a BPS pilot. He was also in the RNR doing his training in *Mercury* at Singapore. He claimed that *"having had to survey both in and out of the channels, and from bank to bank, we know more of the river and unused channels than any pilot"*.

present drawing 160 rupees a month, of this 35 rupees goes toward mess, leaving me 125 rupees to live on; as we are ordered to live aboard I manage to put something by every month to come in handy on a rainy day. Captain Petley, my head, has 1,250 rupees a month, and a house; this is worth trying for, but I am afraid an R.I.M. man will step into that berth. My father has gone on pension, and is now at Singapore; he may go home in 1895, but it is not settled yet.

1897 April 29th: he was in command of the BPS's "despatch vessel" *Resolute*, *"I have been constantly on the river in all directions from the Sandheads to 20 miles above Calcutta for the last 6.5 years"*.

I see a good deal of the pilots on the river, and my mother is related to two of the senior branches. They get their money easily and spend it as easily; very few of them are well off, although they make as much as 3,000 rupees in a lucky month. De Balinhard left the pilot service because he didn't like it. Of Curran, I see something every now and then; he is chief officer of the new brig "Alice" just at present. I met W. B. Wilkinson, Rutherford, Headlam, Marshall, Big Harold, and the "Cairniehill" boys.

1909 The HRSS changed its recruitment policy in a way that indicted that they might in future take all their apprentices from *Conway*. The first three to trial the system are listed below.

I am afraid I shall have to give up my R.N.R., as time in this service won't count for a chief mate's, or any other sea certificate. I can only get a master's coasting, and pass for the River up to 13 feet. The prospects in this service are fair, but promotion is slow, in fact someone has to retire or die for any promotion to be given. There used to be an old "Conway" in this service, by the name of Wood (H.R.); he died some time ago.

1909 July: Cadets **William Harry "Titch" Coombs** (07-09), **Thomas Henry Hudson** (07-09) and **Charles G H Laidlaw** (07-09) left *Conway* and joined the HRSS as Probationer Assistant Surveyors (The Cadet lists them as joining the Calcutta River Survey (CRS) although this was a mistake, they joined the HRSS.)

Remember me to Mr. Light, Mr. Ackers, Mr. Hutchinson, and Mr. Beecheno; he may recall my name if you suggest "eggs with chickens in them" to him.

Give my kindest regards to your wife and daughters, and accept the same yourself from

Yours sincerely,

THOS. M. MUNRO,

An Old "Conway" boy.

"Tigris," River Survey Vessel,
c/o Post Master, Diamond Harbour,
Calcutta, 9th May, 1894.

1909 December: The HRSS recruited three more cadets **Kenneth Douglas Lane** (07-09), **William Joseph Garnett** (07-09) and **Arthur W O Thompson** (08-09).



Laidlaw & Thompson 1909 Easter 1st XV

1910 February 10th **Lane** wrote to *Conway* recounting their experiences. He and **Garnett** had been appointed to the RSV *Industry* under her master **Munro**. Lane's letter is reproduced below left.

1910 April 29th: **Coombs** had first been appointed to the *Guide* but recently had moved to the *Retriever*. He was living in a houseboat named *Hilda* served by a steam launch and was surveying the junction of the Hooghly and Ganges. One of his letters is below right.

DEAR CAPTAIN BROADBENT,

I must first apologise for not having written to you before.

At present I am engaged in a survey extending eventually to where the Hooghly joins its connecting link with the Ganges.

This, of course, is out of the Port Commissioners' jurisdiction, but the work is for record purposes.

We live in a houseboat, the party consisting of two only, and are attended on by a steam launch.

The work is extremely interesting and varied. Up to now our work has been altogether on shore, and so has been particularly interesting, as it has been my first glimpse at the rural life of the native.

Yesterday, for instance, we were putting in the details of a large Hindoo temple.

The advent of Lane and Garnett, of course, made things far pleasanter for me. On this work, of course, I see very little of them, but I hope to see them in the course of a few days.

I believe my people forwarded a subscription towards THE CADET. I have not yet received any copies, but of course I do not know when the subscription was sent.

I have met several Asiatic "Conways." I was very interested to hear about the Marconi installation; also about Sir Ernest Shackleton's visit to the old ship.

I am afraid I must now close with best wishes for the old ship's progress.

I am, yours faithfully,

WILLIAM H. COOMBS.

Houseboat "Hilda,"
April 29th, 1910.

DEAR CAPTAIN BROADBENT,

I saw the paragraph in the December CADET, which referred to the three "Conway" cadets who have joined the Hooghly River Survey Service. As yet I have not been very long at my work, but I like it very much. I have only worked very hard for one whole day, and that was from seven in the morning till six in the evening.

The first thing we had to do was to learn the marks of the lead line, to one-eighths of a fathom in Hindustani. When we knew these we had to learn keeping the book, which consisted of translating the soundings, which are called out in Hindustani, into English and writing them down in the book; when five casts had been registered you take a fix. By the aid of the fix and station pointers you mark your position on the chart. At this point you put down the number of feet of water there is there at low water.

Coombs has just been appointed to the "Retriever," having finished his appointment in the "Guide."

Garnett and I are both on the "Industry." The commander is called Munro, an old "Conway." He came aboard the "Conway" during the Christmas term, 1909.

I have communicated with Gibb once. He is in the Asiatic Steam Navigation Company. I also saw Obo Shepherd, fourth, but he was on duty and could not come ashore. I sailed next day, so I could not see him again.

I am very sorry you were unwell when I left, as I wanted very much to say good-bye to you, Sir.

I am, yours sincerely,

KENNETH D. LANE.

R.S.V. "Industry,"
February 10th, 1910.

1911 August: **K Lane** wrote to say that he had been replaced in *Retriever* the previous April by **Garnett**, and that **Coombs** was serving in *Industry*.

1913 June: **Coombs** was back in the UK and living at 147 Station Road, Church End, Finchley, London. He had resigned from the HRSS after four years to join the MN and complete his deep sea apprenticeship. A profile of his life is below.



Captain William Henry "Titch" Coombs (07-08) CBE RNR FRGS MInstT

Titch was born on 15th July 1893 and he soon discovered his passion for the sea and began his first steps to command in 1907 when he joined the training ship H.M.S. *Conway* on the River Mersey for two years of pre-sea training. His first appointment was to India's Hoogli River Survey Service. As was common at the time he also became a part-time officer in the Royal Naval Reserve (RNR). In 1913 he left the River Survey for the merchant service but in 1914 he was mobilized into the RN for the duration of World War I. On demobilization he returned to the MN until he had obtained his Extra Master's Certificate at which point in 1921 he joined the Chinese

Maritime Customs Service as a cartographer.

He cared deeply about his profession and was very distressed that it did not have proper public recognition and that generally Master Mariners were not treated well by their employers. In 1921, incensed by the unfair dismissal of a sea captain friend he immediately resigned his post, left the sea and returned to England determined to improve the status and circumstances of merchant sea captains and to devote his time to the welfare of others.

He turned out to be a first class businessman. He formed the Navigators & General Insurance Company to enable officers to insure themselves against the loss of their professional certificates following an official enquiry into the loss of a ship, a collision or other accident. It had an immensely beneficial effect on the lives of shipmasters and officers in the British MN and, indirectly, to MN officers in many other countries. As part of that work he studied law and was called to the Bar in 1932.

On 18th August 1922, he published an article in Lloyd's List under the pseudonym "Navigatex" outlining a scheme for the formation of an institution which would draw to it navigators in the merchant service holding the highest qualifications only. It was a comprehensive scheme to create, for the senior officers of the British merchant service, a central body worthy of their professional skill and tradition. It generated huge interest and brought him into contact with the kindred spirit that was Sir Robert Burton-Chadwick. Together they shaped proposals for what became the Honourable Company of Master Mariners

In 1925 he published his book, *The Nation's Keymen* in which:

"He set out in plain language the debt that this island kingdom owes to 'those who go down to the sea in ships' and, indeed, how far it fell short in meeting that debt. It stirred the nation and gave pride to every seaman who walked a ship's bridge."³

His tireless work inspired many others and in 1928 he was influential in the formation of the Officers' (Merchant Navy) Federation (becoming its General Manager) through which many British and Commonwealth officers' associations worked together on key issues and eventually saw the achievement of unity of representation in the material affairs of seagoing officers of the Merchant Service which will ever remain associated with his name.



In 1932 he formed The Watch Ashore to represent the interests of MN officers' wives who were always left behind with little or no support from shipping companies as their husbands roamed the sea in their service.

³ Review by Captain E Hewitt RD RNR

Leaving no stone unturned, he organised a 23,000 signature petition that resulted in the creation of the Merchant Navy Officers' Pension Fund. Later he was instrumental in forming the Central Board for the Training of MN Officers. In 1936 he formed the Navigation & Engineer Officers' Union with retired BPS pilot **John Knighton Chase** (1885-87). He was elected President of the Officers' MN Federation and in 1942 returned to active service at sea for the rest of World War II.

After the war his services were in even greater demand. He became a Younger Brother of Trinity House, a member of the Baltic & Mercantile Shipping Federation, a council member of the Royal Geographical Society, Chairman of the MN Officers' Pension Fund, a member of the Worshipful Company of Shipwrights and of the Institute of Transport, a founder of the Sail Training Association and Vice Chairman of the MN Training Board. The latter re-enforced by his roles as governor of H.M.S. *Conway*, the Nautical College, Pangbourne and the College of Navigation, Southampton.

He was made a CBE in 1947 and in 1952 was granted the honorary rank of Captain RNR, a rare accolade.

He died as he would have wished, at sea on 29th June 1969, was cremated in the great seaport of Genoa and his ashes scattered at sea.

The Man

Captain William "Titch" Coombs was a quite extraordinary man; physically very short, a close friend described him as:

"somewhat lacking in inches, a fact he often referred to when he began one of his inimitably witty speeches"

but he was undoubtedly a giant of a man with a great heart and generous nature.

The two cartoons give us an impression of his character; inevitably chirpy, dapper, garrulous, cheerful and gregarious. His photo above shows us another side. The forthright, penetrating gaze of a man who sees to the heart of an issue, who will speak his mind but stand by you as an unwavering friend to the end. First and foremost an upright sea captain, proudly wearing his medals of service and an independent streak reflected in the jaunty angle of his cap. A man fashioned in HMS *Conway* and forged in The Hooghly River Survey Service.



He was a highly intelligent man and during his *Conway* training he

*"showed unmistakable signs of that alert intellect that was to manifest itself throughout his life, for in 1909 he won the Gold Medal of the MMSA for the greatest proficiency in all subjects and eight other prizes, probably a record that stands to this day."*⁴

The sea was his anchor and hope. Every moment of his life was dedicated to its cause but above all he was a deeply caring and compassionate man who would not stand by in the face of unfairness and need. Indeed he forsook his own promising career on a whim, outraged at the shabby treatment of a brother officer whose future had been unfairly ruined. He entered business to put matters right and succeeded almost by force of amiable persuasion alone. With seemingly boundless energy he filled his tiny frame to bursting with enough good causes for several men and a workload that would have overwhelmed most people. Yet he was never so busy that he could not make time to talk to anyone who called on him at his Norfolk home.

1913 June: **Matthew Fletcher Cope** (11-13) arrived in Calcutta to join the HRSS and reported that he *"likes the service very well"*.

⁴ *Obituary in H.M.S. Conway's The Cadet magazine, October 1969, pages 88 and 89.*

1913 November: **Lane** (07-09) was still in service with his address c/o Port Commissioners, Calcutta.

1914 July 23rd: **Munro**, back in the UK on leave, visited *Conway*.

1915 April: obviously unable to settle in Calcutta, **Cope** returned to the UK and applied to join the Royal Marines.

1915 October: **John William Muirhead** (03-05) was reported as serving in the HRSS. This is the first mention of him in that service. However by August 1916 he was serving as a Marine Surveyor with Norman Stewart & Co, Calcutta.

1916 December: **Hugh Benjamin Michealson-Yeates** (11-13) was serving in the HRSS although he left Conway in 1913 with the aim of becoming a tea planter in Ceylon.



*Michealson-Yeates
Christmas 1912 Rugby 1st
XV*

1922 April: **Michealson-Yeates** was in charge of the HRSS station at Hooghly Point.

1930 July 30th: The HRSS advised IMMS *Dufferin*, India's equivalent of *Conway* and *Worcester*, that they intended to start accepting their cadets. The first Indian boys taken into the HRSS were S K Roy and (later Admiral) R D Kitari. Kitari's autobiography described the service then and most importantly for the first time in this narrative he exposes in the racial prejudice of the native British and "Domiciled Europeans" against Indians, people they thought "*unlikely to make the grade*". We see the emergence of Indian mariners perfectly capable of and determined to succeed in the HRSS and the BPS.

4.2 CALCUTTA HARBOUR & PILOT SERVICE

The CHPS controlled the port and provided a Harbour (Mud) Pilot for the last mile from Gaden Reach to the Tiers/Docks. Very little is known about the service. The BPS was as separate body although plans to move them to the Port Commissioners to give the Commissioners full control over the river were rejected in 1923 the merger finally happened in 1948.

1912 December: **Henry Francis** (1898-1900) left the Asiatic Steam Navigation Company and joined the Calcutta Port Commissioners as an Assistant Harbourmaster in the CHPS.

1914 June: **Compton** and **Henry Peter Dunster** (1899-1901) were both listed as in the CHPS.

1915 June: **Compton** was listed as in the CHPS.

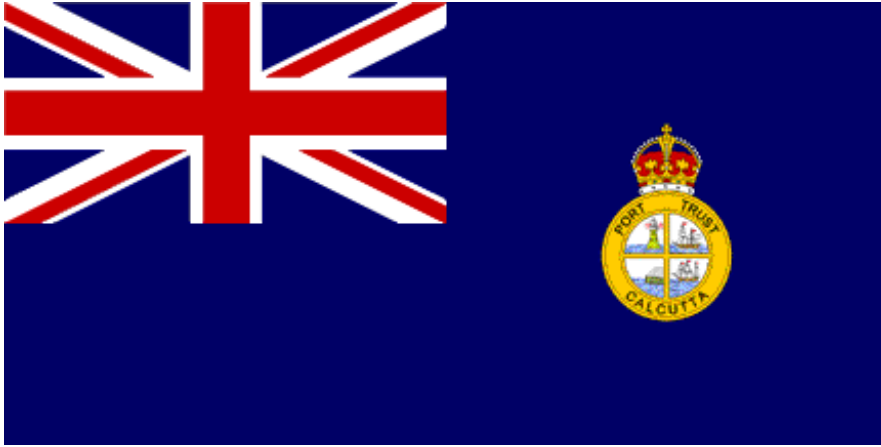
4.3 PORT COMMISSIONERS / HRSS / CHPS ENSIGN & CREST

1883 - 96, a blue ensign was used defaced with the words *Port Trust Calcutta* on a quartered roundel.

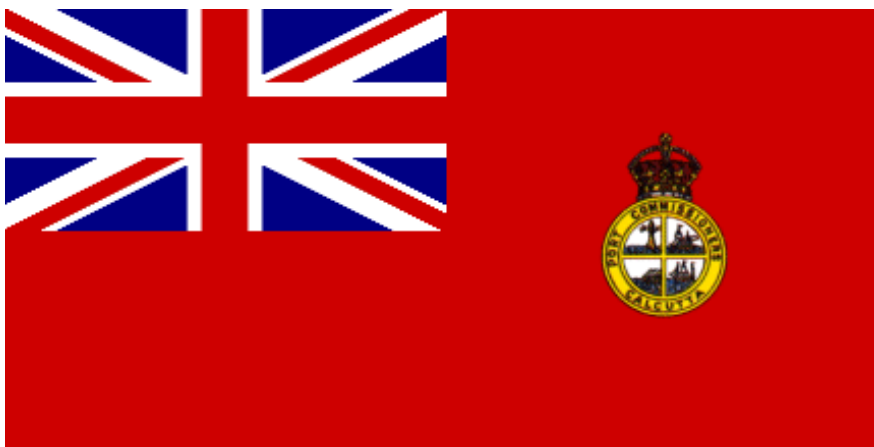
After leaving the *Dufferin* in mid-June, I went home to Secunderabad for a well deserved rest which, unfortunately, lasted less than a month. I had to report to the Port Commissioners of Calcutta on 14 July 1930, as a probationer officer in the **Hooghly River Survey**. The probationary period was for three years during which, subject to my passing the prescribed examination at the end of each year, I received an increment of Rs. 25 annually, raising my salary from Rs.100 to the princely sum of Rs.150. On successfully completing the three years and obtaining a "Pilot's Ticket" which qualified one to pilot craft up to 15 feet draft on the **river**, one started on a salary of, I think, Rs. 400 per month, which was quite handsome at the time.

The **River Survey Service** was one of three marine services operated by the Port Commissioners for ensuring safe movement of shipping in the **river** as also their docking and berthing. The other two services were the Harbour Masters and the Dredger and Despatch Services. Entry into these latter two services was confined to Master Mariners only. Until my joining the **River Survey**, all three services were manned by the Britishers only. This statement needs a little modification as far as my **service** was concerned. The top half-a-dozen or so were British. The rest were from a community known as "Domiciled Europeans" and they were recruited from the various European and Anglo-Indian schools around the country. These gentlemen, with one or two refreshing exceptions, were, if anything, more exclusive than the British. Even they looked upon the Indians as a lesser breed who were unlikely to make the grade. As the years passed they, I think, learnt, if reluctantly, how wrong they were.

The **River Survey** consisted of a cadre of about twenty-five officers whose job was to keep a continuous track of the shifting **river** bed in the channels and bars. The depths, particularly in the latter, were constantly changing, sometimes as frequently as the daily change of tides. The pilots of the ships using the **river** had to be kept posted with latest depths available to them, often displayed on a black-board on the **survey** launches. The officers, apart from three or four stationed in the head office, were deployed on what might be termed as operational tasks. Two **survey** ships manned by officers of the **service**, were continuously on the job, which was to produce bi-monthly charts of the channels and some bars which were not subject to too frequent fluctuations of depth. In addition, there were two shore-based teams, one in Calcutta and the other at a place called **Hooghly Point** about thirty-five miles down the **river**, who carried out similar surveys in their respective sections. Many of the bars needed almost continuous dredging and, for this, the Port Commissioners operated three dredgers of which at least two were always on task. Each of these dredgers had a team of two surveyors living on board whose job was to carry out soundings all the while dredging was in progress. This was necessary, not only as a guide to the dredger commander as to where he should concentrate with his dredging, but also to keep the pilots of ships actually on the move on the **river** fed with up-to-date information about depths on the usable tracks of the bar. Once a year, during the winter months, "annual surveys" which involved triangulating in the banks and carrying bank-to-bank sounding of the entire length of the **river** were carried out.



1896 - 1949 the Port Trust became the Port Commissioners and the badge shown below was used on a defaced red ensign which was therefore adopted by the HRSS.



1950 At Independence the Union Flag in the ensign's quarter was replaced with the Indian flag.



See 12.5.5 for the modern port's badge which retains the quartered roundel.

4.4 LIST OF OLD CONWAYS IN THE CALCUTTA PORT COMMISSIONERS

The following OCs' names have been discovered to date. Their *Conway* years are in parentheses.

4.4.1 List Of Old Conways In The HRSS

1. **Coombs**, William Harry "Titch" (07-09). See profile on pages 24 and 25.
2. **Cope**, Matthew Fletcher (11-13). Left the HRSS in 1915 and joined the Royal Marines.
3. **Garnett**, William Joseph (07-09).
4. **Hudson**, Thomas Henry (07-09).
5. **Laidlaw**, Charles G H (07-09).
6. **Lane**, Kenneth Douglas (07-09). Eventually left the HRSS and re-joined *Conway* as a member of her technical staff.
7. **Michealson-Yeates**, Hugh Benjamin (11-13). Moved to Ceylon to be a tea planter in 1913 but joined the HRSS instead.
8. **Muirhead**, John William (03-05). Left the HRSS by August 1916 he was serving as a Marine Surveyor with Norman Stewart & Co, Calcutta.
9. **Munro**, Thomas Matthew (1887-89). The first OC to report on life on the HRSS. He had been born and brought up in Calcutta and on joining *Conway* in 1887 his address was from 1 American Ghatt, Calcutta.
10. **Thompson**, Arthur W O (08-09).

4.4.2 List Of Old Conways In The CHPS

1. **Compton**, Henry Francis (1898-1900). Role not known.
2. **Dunster**, Henry Peter (1899-1901) Role not known.
3. **Francis**, Henry (1898-1900) Joined the CHPS as an Assistant Harbourmaster in December 1912.

5 THE BENGAL PILOT SERVICE (BPS)

“The position of a pilot in the Bengal service is surely the most splendid gift the mercantile marine can offer.”

“Perhaps the most interesting set of navigators in existence.” Rudyard Kipling (in *From Sea to Sea*). He also said *“They certainly are men and they carry themselves as such, big men, carefully dressed”*.

5.1 JOINING THE SERVICE

The BPS was a sizeable service as the table on the right from 1853 shows. It offered far better promotion prospects than most small sailing shipping companies of the period. *Conways* started joining the BPS as Apprentices (later, Leadsman) in 1877, straight from the ship. The arrangements for these appointments have not been found. However, on 11th January 1895 the India Office wrote to *Conway* and *Worcester* with new arrangements for the BPS. These were for the selection of candidates from the UK so presumably other arrangements were in place for local recruits. The main change was that candidates had to be between 18 and 22 years of age, and possess a Second Mate’s certificate. As vacancies occurred the management committees of the two training ships were specially allowed to take it in turn to nominate one old boy meeting the criteria and who had passed out “with credit”. *Conway* and *Worcester* effectively were given first refusal on most appointments to the BPS. Cadets recommended for the BPS then had to pass a stiff medical examination at the India Office, London. If they passed the medical they had to arrange their own passage to Calcutta.

Senior Branch Pilot	1
Branch Pilot	11
Senior Master	23
Master	7
Mate	30
Senior 2d Mate	12
Junior 2d Mate	12
Volunteer	46
Total Complement	142

1900 November: BPS recruits now received a signing on surety of £50, had to sign on for a five year contract and remain in India for all that time before receiving a short paid leave in the UK. If they left the service early they had to repay the surety. Travel to India was arranged by the service. Two years paid home leave was granted after 10 years service and one year’s paid leave after 18 years of service. Then three year’s sick leave was granted but not more than one year at a time. Special home leave was allowed if circumstance warranted it. A month’s local leave every year was allowed on full pay and all other leave was on half pay. Officers could retire aged 55 years with a pension. Two years of training with the BPS counted as one year’s sea time. Senior pilots might earn two-three thousand rupees per month (£130-£200). The Chief Officer of a local steamer might be paid 359 rupees a month (£23) and a P&O 5th Officer in the UK might earn £5 a month! They were very well-paid but certainly earned their money.

5.2 THE SERVICE AT WORK

The costs of maintaining the BPS were paid by the Colonial Indian Government and pilots were paid out of pilotage fees. There were 50 pilots in the service and they piloted approximately 2 million tons of shipping up and down the river every year.

In 1890 the uniform (that shown on the right belonged to pilot Robert Rust) was a double breasted frock coat of navy blue wool. The buttons and branch insignia on the shoulder feature the Star of India. The lapels are faced with blue Irish poplin and the gold distinction lace on the sleeves features woven purple silk stripes. The white shirt worn with it had a three inch deep starched collar worn at all times even in temperatures of 105° F. Junior officers served as Leadsman Apprentices



and took four to five years to qualify as a proficient pilot. Their duties were literally to spend the whole transit heaving the lead and calling depths to the actual pilot. Once qualified they were allowed to pilot small vessels – under 1,600 tons. When fully proficient the rank of Master Pilot was attained. With further experience men were appointed Branch Pilot and eventually Senior Branch Pilot.

Pilots and Leadsman lived in 300 ton pilot brigs sailing back and forth off the Sandheads waiting to pick up a vessel. The Manchester Guardian in 1905 reported that a favoured pastime while waiting was to test each other with arcane nautical terminology, e.g. *“how does your chain grow?”* and *“Don’t bite starboard!”* When they went on board for a transit they embarked *“with due state and ceremony”*, swinging over many cases of clothing and personal belongings, and bringing their own personal native servant and their apprentice Leadsman. They were well known for challenging vessel’s Masters with the same arcane nautical terminology. When they disembarked at Garden Reach they lived ashore in *“a lordly fashion”* on the BPS’s private estate on Garden Reach Road waiting for a return transit to Sandheads.

The river was so dangerous pilots took full control of vessels, rather than simply advising the master. Today only the Panama Canal has such a rule and that is a much simpler navigation. Indian Government courts martials were held for the least accident as the pilot might be taking charge of half a million pounds worth of cargo (at 1900 prices). It was a challenging task - one OC reporting on the *“anxiety of Bengal pilots”* with their treacherous river and ever moving channels. One author says: *“All river pilots have been involved in dangerous situations, and most men have narrowly survived cyclones. They had watched other vessels sink in storms. Everyone had tales to tell of hitting jetties or going aground.”*

5.3 THE SERVICE AT PLAY

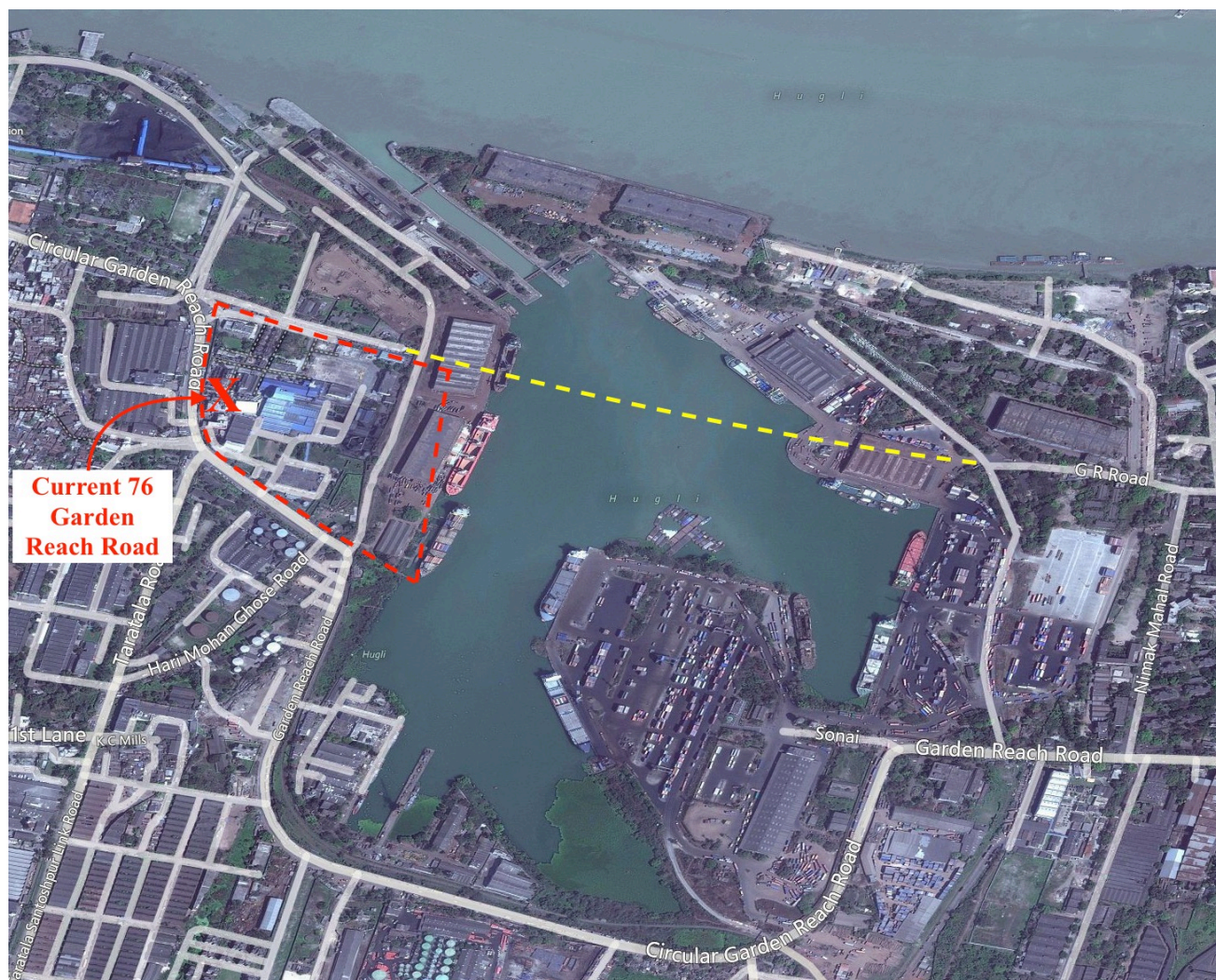
The pilots had a splendid life ashore, and **Arthur Rostron’s** (1885-86) article in The Cadet explained that at 76 Garden Reach they had *“two beautiful, large roomy houses with extensive grounds, tennis, bowling and cricket grounds about, and gardens. Their cuisine is really very good indeed, and enough to make a Conway’s mouth water. Goodness they live slightly different to we fellows at sea ... I admire their style and work very much.”* At least 15 Leadsman lived in one of these of houses - The Chummery, one wonders whether it was a Conway that gave it that name? It was *“a great house over which flew the blue ensign (see 5.4)”*. Another OC wrote the letter opposite and remarked *“... I was often (a guest) up at the Chummery and enjoyed myself immensely. I think these fellows are as nice and gentlemanly lot of fellows I ever met; they all try their best to make you comfortable and enjoy yourself, Conway and Worcester alike.”* Another OC recorded several visits *“which I enjoyed very much”*. They had a lots of servants or bearers to look after them. The ground floor dining room was dominated by a large dining table where communal meals were taken and visitors entertained as described above right. The bar contained a much abused piano.

Will the reader be very much surprised if I tell him that he might sit at that hospitable board time after time and never hear a word of the sea! “Shop” is barred when guests are present, no matter how intimate he be, unless he, seeking information, should open the subject. He will hear no conversation, but what any educated man can join in. I have heard the relative merits of Theosophy and Swedenborgism reverently discussed. I have heard Omar Khayyam compared with other Persian poets. I have heard Byron and Shakespeare quoted to the letter, and a classic quotation faultlessly rendered into English, and I have heard roars of laughter ringing through the room at some smart piece of repartee rapped out from the tongue of Mr. President. A terrible boy that Mess President! I see him now at the head of the table, supported on his left by another quiet looking man, and the whole table firing verbal pellets at them, then suddenly Mr. President’s black eyes twinkle, and out goes a sharp reply that squashes the last speaker flat, and his attempted retort is drowned in a roar of laughter, and cries of “sold!” After breakfast or dinner, as the case may be, the health of the guests is drunk in liqueurs, rarely in any other liquid, this being a point of chummery etiquette.

No images of the estate have been found but the map on the right shows Garden Reach Road in 1891. The area outlined in red is the most likely location as the BPS estate included two large houses. However, given its extensive grounds, it may have extended much further east.



The aerial view below shows the scene today and co-incidentally the modern number 76 Garden Reach Road (marked) is still in the space marked above. Part of Garden Reach Road was destroyed in 1928 to build the KGV Docks so the approximate line of the original road is marked with a hatched yellow line. A short stub of it remains to the left of the yellow line and this was the original frontage of the Chummary estate which is also marked approximately in red. The land is now used by Calcutta Municipal Corporation but perhaps some remnant of the grand houses, tennis courts and manicured lawns remain in the remaining small patches of green.



5.4 OLD CONWAYS & THE BPS

The first reference in The Cadet to OCs and the BPS was on page 4 of the July 1889 edition which reported that **J D D Kirkman** (1875-77) joined the BPS from Conway in 1877 and was back in the UK on leave. *"Mr Kirkman's promotion seems to have been rapid as he has already (in nine years) reached the rank of Master Pilot in that highly paid service."* However in later editions **Carlton Cuthbert Collingwood** (1874-76) is listed as a member of the BPS so he is the first OC known to have joined the BPS.

1884 **George Underhill Mellard** (1882-84) joined as a Leadsman Apprentice direct from Conway.

1890 May 11th: The next Conway mentioned in the BPS is a letter from **Charles Forrest Keys** (1884-87). He was living at 76 Garden Reach, and reported that *"I have got on very well out here so far ... am now Second Officer of a pilot brig"* He explained that pilots could spend as long as four months living in a pilot brig between fleeting visits to Garden Reach.

1894 July: The Cadet magazine **Hector Coleman** (1880-82) then working ashore in Calcutta wrote to say he *"had met a number of Conways out here, most of them being in the pilot service"*.

1890 September: Cadet **John Carnegy de Balinhard** (1888-90) was appointed to the BPS straight from the ship. **Munro** said in 1894 that **de Balinhard** had left the BPS because he didn't like it. In an article in The Cadet in August 1939 **de Balinhard** confirmed that he had left the BPS after three years but did not say why. He was Canadian but had lived in NW India when his father was an Indian Agent for the colonial government. Later he served in WWI in the Canadian Expeditionary Force before returning to his native Canada. In 1898 he participated in the Klondike Gold Rush crossing the Chilkoot pass on foot from Dawson. He settled in Yorktown, Saskatchewan. The Cadet observed that he was the second Canadian *Conway* in the BPS, the first being **John Francis Demoulin Ball** (1882-84) of Gant, Ontario who, in September 1890, was back in UK on leave.

1891 Summer Term: Cadet **Reginald Somerset Curran** (1889-91) was appointed to the BPS straight from the ship. He was the King's Gold Medallist that year.

1891 November 5th: a very strong cyclone was reported, the pilot brig *Coleroon* sank without trace and *Fame* had her masts reduced to six feet stumps. Many other vessels were lost but no reports have been found of any OCs being lost although an anonymous OC (but most probably **Cecil Trevor Park** (1895-96)) reported on his typhoon experiences in *Fame* in 1891 and in *Alice* in 1897.

1892 March: **Robert Adams Hopkins** (1881-83), also a KGM winner, was in the UK at Captain Moore's Navigation School studying for master.

1893 October: **John Knighton Chase** (1885-87) was master of the BPS steamer *Guide* and in Chittagong for some reason. He visited *Conway* on 27th May 1896 while home on leave - incorrectly reported as W. Chase. He was reported as *"doing well in the pilot service and appears to enjoy his life immensely"*.

1894 **Munro** reported that **Curran** was Chief Officer of the BPS's new brig *Alice*.

1894 July: **Arthur William Michie** (1892-94) joined the BPS from *Conway*. He was the Queen's Gold Medal winner that year.

1896 June 26th: Although his letter of this date is rather ambiguous it seems that **Arthur Francis Paull** (1890-92) was serving in the BPS but back in the UK at his family home in Taunton



A. W. MICHIE.
"Conway" Queen's Medallist, 1894.

on leave. Given other sources it is most likely he had been accepted by the BPS and was about to join them.

1897 February: The death of **John Francis Dumoulin Ball** (1882-84) was reported but nothing about the circumstances is known.

1897 May 5th: The death of **F H Butler**, also a pilot was reported by *Conway* but there is no F H Butler in the Cadet Registers pre 1897, only **George Daniel Webb Butler** (1881-83), **Sydney Carr Butler** (1885-87) and **Richard Butler** (1888-90). Misquoted initials and years were not uncommon in *The Cadet* at this time but none of these three are recorded as joining the BPS.

1897 October:

Edward Alfred Ward (1891-93) and **Archie John R. Cochafer** (1891-93) were appointed Leadsman Apprentices. Edward's appointment was subject to having a missing tooth replaced!

OCs and OWs "in the East" subscribed to a rowing Challenge Shield to be the prize for the annual *Conway - Worcester* gig race. Listed in the subscribers were many OC members of the BPS: **John Francis Dumoulin Ball** (1882-84), **E T Beattie** (years not found), **Harry Bent** (1875-77), **William Bryant** (1884-86), **Carlton Cuthbert Collingwood** (1874-76), **T Cousins** (1878-80?), **Robert Adams Hopkins** (1877-79), **James Drummond Dalton Kirkman** (1875-77), **E O Manning** (1881-83), **George Underhill Mellard** (1882-84), **William Henry Ridler** (1878-80), **Albert William Jowett Turner** (1878-79) and **Wilham Sutton Wells** (1884-86).



*H Bent 1876 Nov 1st
Rugby 1st XV*

1897 September 15th: **Archie John R. Cochafer** (1891-93), having been nominated by Captain Miller, announced that he was embarking on the steamer *Malta* for Calcutta on 8th October 1897.

1899 March 7th: **Arthur John William Ward** (1891-94) reported that, after being put forward by Capt Millar, he had passed his medical examination and so had been accepted for the BPS and was sailing for Calcutta on 30th.

1900 February 21st: **George Edward Woodger** (1894-96) wrote to Captain Miller asking to be added to the list of old boys suitable for the BPS.

1900 November: **Frederick Joseph Fisher** (1893-95) was appointed to the BPS and instructed to travel out in P&O's *Borneo* on 7th December.

1901 May: **Kirkman** was back in the UK on leave.

1901 December 9th: **Cecil Trevor Park** (1895-96) wrote to the Cadet from the pilot boat *Alice* at Sandhead to say he was serving in the BPS.

1903 December: **Ernest Campbell** (1898-1900) is believed to have been accepted into the BPS having been nominated by *Conway's* Committee of Management.

1904 September 14th: **Wulstan H O'Brien** (1898-1900) wrote from The Chummery, Garden Reach, Calcutta to say he had taken up his appointment as Leadsman and that he was getting settled in and enjoying the work. He had been cox of the winning gig crew in 1900.

1904 October: **Douglas Martin Seth** (1898-1900) reported that he has been appointed Leadsman and was due to travel to Calcutta in February 1905. He had joined *Conway* specifically to gain that appointment.

1906 February 2nd: The death of **Horace Cox** (1876-78) in Calcutta was announced

- 1907 June: OCs **Albert Henry Dove** (00-02) and **Evelyn R R Roberts** (01-02) were appointed Leadsman.
- 1908: **Douglas “Inky” Ingram-Halford** (1899-1900) was promoted 2nd Mate.
- 1908 December 22nd : OC **Douglas Leonard Vine** (03-05) wrote from his home at 2 Newstead Villas, Westham Weymouth to confirm that he was appointed Leadsman and scheduled to depart for Calcutta in the New Year.
- 1909 September 25th: **Francis H A “Sparrow” Lendrum** (02-04) left UK for Calcutta to become a Leadsman.
- 1909 October 5th: **Coachafer** visited the ship while in the UK on leave.
- 1910: It is believed that **George Thomas Labey** (02-04) was appointed Leadsman in this year. He was born in Jersey, C.I. in 1889.
- 1910: **Ingram-Halford** was promoted 1st Mate.
- 1911 June: **Chase** was home on leave at 397 London Road, Reading.
- 1911: **Ingram-Halford** was promoted Mate Pilot.
- 1911 September 20th: **Alexander P F Charriol** (04-07) left the SS *Geelong* in Sydney to travel to Calcutta and take up his appointment as a Leadsman.
- 1911 September 29th: **Chase**, still on leave, departed in SS *Victorian* to travel around Canada for couple of months.
- 1911 December: **Charriol** wrote to The Cadet that he was “*probably going into tea planting*”.
- 1912 June: Leadsman **George Stamper Scoby** (1897-99) was expected back in the UK on leave.
- 1912 March 2nd: **Ingram-Halford** (the younger son of the late E Ingram-Holford of Leicestershire) married Margaret Isabel Toogood at St Paul’s Cathedral, Calcutta.
- 1912 October: **Charles Huddy** (05-08) was due to sail for Calcutta on appointment as a Leadsman.
- 1913 January 19th: **Ward** home on leave from the BPS visited *Conway*.
- 1913 April 5th: **Curran** and **Michie**, both home on leave from the BPS visited *Conway* together.
- 1913 November: **William Murton Taylor** (07-09) joined the BPS and “*finds it to his liking*”. His address was given as 1 Penn Road, Allipore, Calcutta near the river, see right. It is not known why he was not in the Chummery. **“Sparrow” Lendrum** (02-04) was still in service.



William Murton Taylor's (07-09) Home At 1 Penn Road Today

- 1914: **Geoffrey Purrott** (07-09) and **Walter Ramsay McClymont** (08-09) joined as a Leadsman.

- 1914 April: **Vine** was promoted to Mate Pilot after six years' service. **Huddy, Lendrum** and **Taylor** were still serving as Leadsmen.
- 1914 June: After 30 years service **Mellard** returned to the UK on a year's paid sick leave after which time he was to be medically retired on a pension. He was living at 9 Lebanon Park, Twickenham, TW1 3DE; a red brick villa on a leafy lane.
- 1916: **Ingram-Halford** was promoted Master Pilot.
- 1916 December: **Chase** gave his address as The New Club, Calcutta. He had been awarded the Volunteer Officers' Decoration - VD.
- 1917 February 2nd: **Major W H O'Brien** (1898-1900), on loan from the BPS to the RE Inland Waterway Transport in France, was killed in action aged 33. He is buried in La Gorgue Communal Cemetery, Grave III. C. 6.
- 1917 December 28th: **Labey** was serving (on loan) as a T/Lt (A/Capt) Royal Engineers (RE) in the Inland Waterways Transport, Mesopotamia. He was awarded the Military Cross but no specific citation has been discovered. It is not know when he returned to the BPS but in December 1920 his promotion to Captain RE was confirmed.
- 1919 April: **Chase** was still serving.
- 1919 June: **Edmund Paul Bryant** (1890-92) Senior Bengal Pilot died in Calcutta "*he never properly recovered from the effects of heat stoke he had in 1918*".
- 1919 July: **Thomas Cecil Prosser** (15-17) appointed Leadsman.
- 1919 October 10: **Park** visited *Conway* while on leave in the UK. During the war he served on loan as a Lt in the Royal Engineers.
- 1919 December: **Eric Cecil (not R P) Rowllings** (14-15) reported in *The Cadet* as "*in*" the BPS.
- 1920 April: **Hudson** who had served on loan as a Major in the Royal Engineers. He was in the UK on leave "*after prolonged service in Mesopotamia*". **Edward William Bentley** (12-15) and **Robert Firgroy MacLean** (15-17) were appointed Leadsman.
- 1920 August: **John P Farquharson** (18-20) joined the BPS direct from *Conway* and was appointed 4th Officer of the ex German SS *Frien Fels*. **Albert Baker Ellis** (15-17) and **Raymond Dunlop Layard** (15-17) were appointed Leadsmen.
- 1920 August 16th: **Chase** married, see insert, and was given a long leave in the UK.
- 1920 November: **Lendrum** completed his leave in the UK and had sailed for Calcutta.
- 1920 December: **Chase** was in the UK on leave until October 1921. **Coachafer, Hudson, Paull** and **Keys** were also in the UK on leave.
- 1921 January: **Robert Palatine Ross** (16-18) was appointed Leadsman and sailed for Calcutta from London. **Vine** was recalled from leave in the UK and sailed in January.



Farquharson 1920
Easter Rugby 1st XV

WEDDINGS.

CHASE-HINDMARSH.—On 16th August last, in St. Paul's Cathedral, Calcutta, J. K. Chase, V.D., Branch Pilot, B.P.S., to Helena Alice Hindmarsh, Sister at the Presidency General Hospital, Calcutta.

1921 February: **Lionel Edward Ley** (15-17) was appointed Leadsman and sailed for Calcutta from Liverpool.

1921 August: **Chase, Keys, Ward, Cochafer, Purrott** and **Ingram-Halford** were all in the UK on leave.

1922: **Ingram-Halford** was promoted Acting Branch Pilot.

1926 July 6th: The international *Conway* old boys' association, The *Conway Club*, changed its rules to ensure that its committee should include a representative of the BPS's OCs.

1921 November 15th: **Sydney Archibald Glanley** (1891-93) "*late of the Bengal Pilot Service*" was killed when he fell into the hold of the SS *Muncaster Castle* in Liverpool Docks.

1922 August: **Ward** was reported as on leave at home at Brentwood, Wilmington Gardens, Eastbourne.

1922 December: **Farquahason, Ellis** and **McLean** were all playing for the United Services RFC.

1923: The Government of India in conjunction with the Government of Bengal decided to review whether the BPS should remain part of the Government or be transferred to the Port Commissioners of Calcutta to join the HRSS and CHPS and so give the Commissioners full control over the river. A Committee of Inquiry was established and **Chase** was voted onto it by his fellow officers to represent their views. The Times of London's report on the Committee's work is overleaf but in a nutshell the BPS strongly opposed the idea on grounds of professional standards, safety and independence. The transfer was supported by a considerable majority who also surprisingly recommended a lower of standards for pilotage. In June their recommendations were passed to the Secretary of State for a decision.

1923 August: Approaching retirement and before a leave trip to the UK, was presented with a "*handsome silver tea service by his brother officers as a token of esteem and affection on their part*". He had joined in 1887 direct from *Conway*. "*His one aim and object during this long period has been the efficiency of the service and the welfare of the personnel. In particular he invariably took a keen interest in the Leadsman Apprentices the great majority of whom, in late years, have been Old Conway like himself.*"



CAPT J.K. CHASE TOLD US HOW HE WAS ONCE REDUCED TO A SKELETON BY OVER-WORK — HE HAS NOW HAPPILY RECOVERED

1924 November 7th: **Chase** attended the *Conway Club* dinner at the Exchange Hotel Liverpool and was elected Vice President of the club. **Coombes** late of the HRSS was also present. The sketch of him on that evening is by OC A J Barnes.

His last effort on behalf of the Pilot Service was made at the meetings of the Committee appointed to consider the question of transferring the control of the Bengal Pilot Service from the Government of India to the Port Commissioners of Calcutta, on which he sat as the elected representative of the Pilots, who are strongly opposed to the proposed transference. The Committee recommended the transference by a considerable majority, but the matter is not ended yet, as the whole question has been submitted to the Secretary of State.

The following interesting article on the subject is taken from a June number of the *Times* :—

THE TREACHEROUS HOOGHLY.

NEED OF EXPERT PILOTS.

The question of reorganizing the Bengal Pilot Service has been under the consideration of a Committee appointed by the Government of India, in consultation with the Bengal Government, and the majority has reported in favour of the suggestion of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce that pilotage on the Hooghly might now be entrusted to a body of men less highly specialized than the present Bengal Pilot Service, and that the administration might be handed over to the Port Commissioners, Calcutta.

Mr. J. K. Chase, who served on the Committee as the representative of the Service, submitted a note of strong dissent, in which he

states the overwhelming majority of the Service are not prepared to serve under the Port Commissioners, and in the event of transfer would apply for their pensions and any compensation to which they may be legally entitled.

The specialized character of the Bengal Pilot Service is due to the extraordinary vagaries of the Hooghly river, and the consequent dangers to navigation between Calcutta and the open sea, a distance of eighty-six miles. Changes in the channel are frequent, and rapid tides make navigation difficult. The estuary is notorious for its dangerous sandbanks, which, like the entrance channels, are continuously changing. The chief perils to navigation are the James and Mary Sands and the Mayapur Bay, which are sounded daily, the result being telegraphed to both Calcutta and Diamond Harbour for the information of inward or outward bound Pilots.

The Service is one of the most highly skilled and best paid pilot services in the world. Every incoming vessel is boarded from a pilot bridge off the Sandheads at the mouth of the Hooghly, and remains in charge of the Pilot until he makes over the ship to the Harbourmaster at Garden Beach, on the southern limit of the Port of Calcutta.

Hooghly Pilots were originally ordinary servants of Government. In 1856 a licensed service was introduced, but twenty years later it was replaced by the present covenanted service, the members of which are entitled, in addition to a percentage of the pilotage fees, to leave allowances and pensions. Candidates appointed in England are for the most part ex-Cadets of the Training Ships "Conway" and "Worcester," while those selected in India are subjected to the test of a competitive examination. Candidates have to be between the ages of 18 and 22.

A note of dissent by Mr. H. Barton, representing the Anglo-Indian and Domiciled European Association, generally supports the objections separately submitted by Mr. Chase. Mr. Barton holds that the change of conditions proposed for the Service, making for less remuneration and the loss of pension, must tend to rob it of its attractions, and fail to secure that high class of Pilot so essential to the navigation of the Hooghly. He considers there are substantial grounds for the men's

fear of despotic control by the Court Commissioners. As a distinct body under separate control the Service now possesses an independence which leaves the Pilots perfectly free; in fact, gives them the right to express opinions on the survey and conservancy of the river and any matters involving the safety of shipping.

Mr. Chase, drawing attention to the fact that much larger ships enter the port of Calcutta than formerly, claims that their pilotage involves feats of expert seamanship, the like of which is performed nowhere else in the world. Having visited most of the large ports in the world and made a special study of the pilotage of them, he considers it to be child's play as compared with the pilotage of the Hooghly during the monsoon. He claims that the best advertisement for the Bengal Pilot Service is the wholesome respect in which it is held all over the world, especially by nautical men, and that measures tending to undermine its efficiency would be most detrimental to the shipping of Calcutta, the safety of passengers, and the interests of underwriters.

1924: **Carlton Cuthbert Collingwood** (1874-76) died in Guernsey. See right. He joined the BPS in 1895 and retired in approximately 1912 .

COLLINGWOOD.—C. C. Collingwood died in Guernsey towards the end of 1924. He was the first “Conway” Boy to join the Bengal Pilot Service under a new rule for recruiting

1926 January 12th: **Geoffrey Purrott** (07-09) died in Bramshott, see opposite. He joined the BPS in 1919 and was home in the UK on sick leave.

PURROTT.—G. Purrott died on January 12th last at King George’s Sanatorium, Bramshott, whilst on sick leave from the Bengal Pilot Service, where he had a most promising career before him. “Conway” dates, 1906-09.

1927 March 29th: **William Bryant** (1884-86) died. He joined the BPS in 1886 having previously been in Calcutta from 1891 as Chief Officer in a local steamer, see Section 6.

1928 December 1st: **Garrick George Franklin** (22-24) was appointed Leadsman. He is seen right as a 1924 finalist for the King’s Gold Medal.



1929: **Ingram-Halford** was confirmed as a Branch Pilot.

1929 November 10th: **Edward William Bentley** (12-15) died in Calcutta, see opposite. He only joined the BPS in 1920 so service in the east while rewarding was still not all plain sailing.

BENTLEY.—E. W. Bentley died in Calcutta on November 10th, 1929, from pneumonia following enteric fever. He was in the Bengal Pilot Service, which he joined after the War. “Conway” dates, 1912-15.

1932: The BPS men considered themselves the best of the best. They were bred to lead an Empire and inevitably carried with them a belief in British superiority. We have already seen similar motivations expressed in the HRSS (see 1930 July 30th). The Government Commission in 1923 had partly been motivated by a desire to see more Indians in the service but that had not succeeded. Admiral Katari describes the situation in the BPS:

Besides the three marine services under the control of the Port Commissioners, there was a fourth **service** directly under the Central Government—the Bengal Pilot **Service**. Entry into it was from sea-going personnel who had obtained their Second Mate’s Certificate. One had to serve a five year apprenticeship as “Leadsman” before he could qualify to be a junior pilot. Until about 1932 the **service** was entirely manned by British officers who considered themselves very exclusive indeed, even in relation to other British officers in the sister services, “so exclusive in

fact, that they were facetiously referred to as the “Royal” Bengal Pilot **Service**. The story used to go round that the **service** once applied for permission to wear swords with their uniforms, and they were told that they could do so, provided they wore them on the right side! That effectively killed that aspiration. Whatever may have been the truth of this story, they were certainly among the most highly paid officers in the whole country. A senior “Branch” Pilot would earn as much as four thousand rupees or more per month, which was a great deal of money in those days.

There was considerable pressure on the government from Indian legislators and shipping interests to accept Indians into this **service** also. Ultimately, I believe the government veered round to the view that they could not resist the demand any longer. This was in the very early thirties. When this news got about, the British Chamber of Commerce in India thought it fit to write to Sir Joseph Bhole, the then commerce member of the government, that if Indians were to be appointed to such services, shipping on the **Hooghly** would come to a stand still. It was to the everlasting credit of Sir Joseph that he had the courage to tell them that he would give due consideration to the question when shipping actually ceased to function on the **Hooghly**.

The first Indian to be taken into the Bengal Pilot **Service** was a person called Daniel, who joined, I think in 1932. Although they failed in their effort to prevent the entry of Indians, the British officers were determined to break the first Indian’s spirit by making life as miserable as possible so that he would quit on his own volition. That would have enabled them to say that Indians “could not take it”. They treated him like an outcaste who did not even merit a word, certainly not a polite one, from them. I know that they made him heave the lead, that is, take hand soundings (a part of leadsman’s training) over the entire length of the **Hooghly**, a matter of about 120 miles. Poor Daniel used to complete the passage with his arms sore and hands blistered and bleeding. Many were the times when Daniel visited me and, practically in tears, told me that he just could not go on. I urged him time and again that he should somehow stick it out as, by quitting, he would be playing right into the hands of the British elements and further Indianization would be indefinitely postponed. Daniel has retained my highest admiration for the way he stuck through the most harsh and humiliating treatment dealt out to him and thus made it easier for those who followed him.

1934: Seven *Dufferin* cadets joined the BPS after obtaining their 2nd Mates tickets i.e. the same qualification expected of a British Leadsman. Admiral Katari observed “*and they have done well. With increasing number, the Indian Officers were able to hold their own with great confidence, and I believe performed their duties with greater sobriety than their predecessors.*”

1936: Danile completed his Leadsman training. The first Indian Hooghly pilot since about 1536.

The list of *Conway* cadets appointed Leadsmen peters out in 1928. There may have been others after that date but no names have yet come to light. By 1936, with perfectly capable Indian *Dufferin* candidates working through the system and demonstrating that they were of the right stuff, the writing was on the wall for the British *Conway/Worcester* dominated BPS. The

remainder of this section is about old men crossing the bar not young men sailing forth or middle aged men stemming the tide, a microcosm of Empire around the world.

1934 April: **Douglas "Inky" Ingram-Halford** (1899-1900) died in Calcutta aged 50 years while in command of the PV *Lady Fraser*. He had served for 27 years. He was buried at sea from PV *Lady Fraser* off the Sandheads. His obituary is reproduced below along with a report from the Calcutta Statesman dated 10th April 1934.

* * *

The death of Mr. D. Ingram Halford, a Branch Pilot of the Bengal Pilot Service, was reported in the last number of the magazine. The following extract from the Calcutta "Statesman" of April 10th has since been received :—

"The ashes of the late Mr. D. I. Halford, Branch Pilot, were taken to the Sandheads in the P.V. 'Lady Fraser,' the vessel that he previously commanded, and consigned to the sea on April 5th at ten o'clock in the morning.

The 'Lady Fraser' stopped her engines and the P.V. 'Andrew,' just relieved, stood by.

The flags of both vessels were put at half-mast and the crews stood to attention whilst the commander of the 'Lady Fraser' read a short extract from the burial service."

* * *

1934 December 26th: **John Knighton Chase** (1885-87) VD died at Pangbourne on the River Thames aged 65. His obituary from The Cadet is on the right.

1937 November 17th: **Arthur John William Ward** (1891-94) died at Lympington, UK after a long illness. He joined the BPS in 1899.

1938 March 14th: **Charles Forrest Keys** (1884-87) retired Branch Pilot died. He joined the BPS in 1887.

1939-45: Precise dates are not known but **Ross** served for some time as Deputy Port Officer and Chief Shipwright Surveyor for the Government of Bengal. For 16 months he was also in command of various pilot vessels and for a period was Senior Officer at Sandheads.

1941 The IWT was reformed by the Royal Indian Engineers (RIE):

- **Franklin** was serving in the IWT's service at Tobruk and the Western Desert.
- The IWT also had a fleet on the Euphrates of 20 or so decrepit paddle steamers found on the Hooghly and its tributaries. They were all given a hasty overhaul and shifted to Iraq to carry supplies up river to the Russians.
- **Colquhoun** was serving on loan to the RIE's IWT service as a 14th Army river pilot in Burma, sailing "*up the Narf (Naf) River under the Japs' noses as they held the right bank of the river at the time*". He was the literally the first to land with General Stockwell at Taungup after two and a half years of Japanese occupation.

1946: The Cadet of April 1947 reported that **Francis H A "Sparrow" Lendrum** (02-04) had died in

OBITUARY.

Douglas Ingram Halford, of the Bengal Pilot Service, has died in Calcutta at the age of fifty. He had an attack of Spanish influenza, three weeks later developed double pneumonia, and after lying unconscious for several days died on March 2nd.

He joined the Bengal Pilot Service as a leadsman apprentice in 1906, was promoted 2nd Mate in 1908, Mate in 1910, and Mate Pilot

CHASE.—John Knighton Chase, v.d., died on Dec. 26th at the age of 65.

Going straight from the "Conway" with a scholarship to the Bengal Pilot Service, he remained there, except for a spell in the Hooghly Examination Service during the War, until his retirement, when he came back to England and lived at Pangbourne.

He took a keen interest in the Ship and was a Vice-President of the "Conway" Club, 1925-26. He was also the second President of the Seven Seas Club, and only retired owing to ill-health at the end of 1933.

"Conway," 1885-87.

Old "Conways" of his time who remember "Inky" Halford with affection will deeply regret his death.

He leaves a son who is at Sandhurst and a daughter who is at present in Calcutta.

"Conway," 1898-1900.

1946. He joined the BPS in 1909.

1946 June 4th: **Labey**, a retired Branch Pilot, was awarded the MBE in the Birthday Honours List.

1946 December 9th: **Thomas Samuel Earl** (1883-85) died, see opposite. He joined the BPS in 1885. **EARL, T. S. (1883-85)**. Senior Master (ret.) Bengal Pilot Service. Died on the 9th December, 1946, at Paignton, Devon, after a brief illness. Winner of many medals and prizes during his training in "Conway."

1947 April: The Cadet reported that **Albert Henry Dove** (00-02) "*had died some years ago*". He joined the BPS in 1907.

1947 July 8th: **Cecil Trevor** (1895-96) died at his home at Melahide Co Dublin. He joined the BPS in 1901. His obituary from The Cadet magazine is reproduced on the right. **PARK, C. T. (1895-97)**. Died at his home at Melahide, Co. Dublin, on 8th July. Was a great grandson of the famous explorer Mungo Park. After leaving "Conway" he served his time in sail and then joined the Bengal Pilot Service. Served throughout the 1914-18 war in the Army, but returned to the Pilot Service and became a Master Pilot. Since his retirement he was a Governor of the Hibernian Marine School and a Commissioner of Irish Lights.

1948 February 13th: **James Colquhoun** (23-25), Master Pilot, Acting Branch Pilot wrote a letter to The Cadet, reproduced below, that dropped a bombshell; the BPS was to be disbanded, probably in 1948.

August, 1948.

THE CADET.

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LETTERS FROM OLD BOYS.

The Central Govt. Hostel,
Alipore,
Calcutta.

13/2/48.

Dear Sir,

Regarding news of the Pilot Service, I am sorry to say that it is the intention of the Government of India to abolish it from or about the financial year of 1948, when a Bill has been passed by the Indian Parliament in Delhi. As you know, the Bengal Pilot Service was formed in 1669 and has a great history behind it and, if I may say so, a very proud record of service, both to the Government of India and the Mercantile Marine in particular. During the first War our Officers served in various capacities and you will see such names as C. T. Labey, who won the M.C., L. T. Macdonald and other Old Conways on the Honours Board on the Lower Deck of the "Conway." During this War we also sent many Officers to the Services, all volunteers, and G. G. Franklin served with distinction in the Inland Water Transport (R.I.E's.) in Tobruk and the Western Desert. I myself was appointed 14th Army Pilot in the Aruacoun, and as such piloted ships up the Narf River under the Japs' noses, as they held the right bank of the river at the time. Further, General Stockwell, g.o.c. to West African Division and myself were the first to land at Taungup after 2½ years of Jap occupation. During the time I was in the I.W.T. (R.I.E's.) I piloted many H.M.'s. ships and the Merchant Navy, not only in the Narf River, but to Cox's Bazaar, Akyab, Kaukpyu, and Ramice Roads without a mishap, so you see the Old Conways of our Service did their bit too. Should you wish to get

further information, I suggest you write to Captain Day, R.N., formerly in command of H.M.S. "White Bear," the Survey vessel, who I know personally. I think an article in the "Conway Cadet" might be interesting. Well, I will close now, wishing the Capt. Superintendent, yourself, Officers and Cadets my best wishes and hope they still live up to our motto, *Quit ye like men, be strong.*

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

JAMES COLQUHOUN,
(1923-25),
Master Pilot,
Actg. Branch Pilot.

1948 April 16th: The Calcutta Port (Pilotage) Act, 1948 was passed by the Indian Government.⁵ It provided for the transfer of control over pilotage on the River Hooghly to the Commissioners for the Port of Calcutta. What Chase and his colleagues had forestalled in 1923 became a reality. 16 years of Indian recruits ensured that pilotage continued unabated, commerce did not collapse as foreseen by the Calcutta Chamber of Commerce.

1948 May 15th: The seeming impossible happened and the BPS ceased to exist. It is perhaps fitting that her most senior officer at the end, the Commodore of the BPS, was **James Colquhoun** (23-25). In 1970 he donated his sextant to Conway for use by 5th Form cadets.

1959 July 6th: **Robert Palatine Ross** (16-18) died while on holiday, see his obituary on the right.

ROSS, ROBERT PALATINE (1916-18). Died from a heart attack on 6th July, 1959, while on a holiday at Llandudno. Aged 59. After leaving the "Conway," where he was one of the chosen candidates for the King's Gold Medal, he served as Midshipman, R.N.R. in H.M.S. *Coventry* until 1919, and following some service on merchant ships he joined the Bengal Pilot Service in October 1920. He eventually became a Branch Pilot and at various times during the last war he officiated as Deputy Port Officer and Chief Shipwright Surveyor to the Government of Bengal, and also commanded the Pilot vessels for a period of sixteen months as Senior Officer, Sandheads. Owing to ill-health he found it necessary to retire in 1947, but after a period of convalescence he became the Marine Representative of the Dacroid Company in New York for some time until 1949, when he returned to this country and spent most of his retirement with other members of his family in Wales.

In addition the following OCs are known to have joined the BPS but no other details are known:

- **Arthur Cuthbert Davis** (17-19).
- **Cyril Edward Davis** (19-21).
- **Arnold Robert Davis** (21-23).
- **Cyril Carlos Ellison** (23-27) who was Captain of the rugby 1st XV and Chief Cadet Captain in his last term and winner of the King's Gold Medal in 1927. The medal was presented by HM The King in person on 19th July 1927 - see photo right.
- **Michael Warren Farewell** CIE (1883-85).
- **Beresford Huey** (24-26). He was a member of the 1st XV rugby team and is shown below right Easter 1926.
- **Alfred Howard** (1880-82).
- **Ivan Read Hullock** (20-22).
- **Joseph Albert May** (1862).
- **Philip George McFarlane** (21-23).
- **Thomas Frederick Lane Reddie** (1883-85).
- **Bestiam John Thompson Simons** (21-23).
- **Albert Smith** (1886-88).
- **Jospeh Tomlinson** (15-16).
- **Oswald Denis Wilkes** (25-27). In the Easter term of 1927 he played in the Old Boys' XV to make up the numbers.



Above: Cyril Carlos Ellison (23-27)

Below Right: Beresford Huey Easter 1926)

Below Left: Oswald Wilkes (25-27)



⁵ <http://nyaaya.in/law/473/the-calcutta-port-pilotage-act-1948/>

5.5 LIST OF OLD CONWAYS IN THE BPS

The following OCs' names have been discovered to date. Their *Conway* years are in parentheses. The most senior rank known for them is listed.

1. **Ball**, John Francis Dumoulin (1882-84) of Gant, Ontario, the first Canadian OC to join the BPS. Leadsman.
2. **Beattie**, E T (years not found). Leadsman.
3. **Bent**, Harry (1875-77). Leadsman.
4. **Bentley**, Edward William (12-15). Leadsman. Died Calcutta 1929 from pneumonia.
5. **Bryant**, Edmund Paul (1890-92). Senior Pilot. 1919 June died in Calcutta *"he never properly recovered from the effects of heat stroke he had in 1918"*.
6. **Bryant**, William (1884-86), Leadsman. Died 1927.
7. **Campbell**, Ernest (1898-1900). Leadsman.
8. **Charriol**, Alexander P F (04-07). Leadsman.
9. **Chase**, John Knighton VD (1885-87). Master Pilot. *"His one aim and object during this long period has been the efficiency of the service and the welfare of the personnel. In particular he invariably took a keen interest in the Leadsman Apprentices the great majority of whom, in late years, have been Old Conway like himself."* He died at Pangbourne in 1934 aged 64 years.
10. **Coachafer**, Archie John R (1891-93).
11. **Collingwood**, Carlton Cuthbert (1874-76). The first OC known to have joined the BPS. Retired 1912 and died in Guernsey in 1924.
12. **Colquhoun**, James (23-25). **Commodore of the BPS** and in RIE Water Transport service.
13. **Cousins**, T (1878-80?).
14. **Cox**, Horace (1876-78). Died Calcutta 2nd February 1906.
15. **Curran**, Reginald Somerset (1889-91). Chief Officer.
16. **Davis**, Arnold Robert (21-23). Leadsman.
17. **Davis**, Arthur Cuthbert (17-19). Leadsman.
18. **Davis**, Cyril Edward (19-21). Leadsman.
19. **de Balinhard**, John Carnegy (1888-90). Leadsman. He was appointed to the BPS straight from the ship. he had left the BPS after three years but did not say why. He was Canadian but had lived in NW India when his father was an Indian Agent for the colonial government. Later he served in WWI in the Canadian Expeditionary Force before returning to his native Canada. In 1898 he participated in the Klondike Gold Rush crossing the Chilkoot pass on foot from Dawson. He settled in Yorktown, Saskatchewan.
20. **Dove**, Albert Henry (00-02). Leadsman. Died in the early 1940s. He joined the BPS in 1907.
21. **Earl**, Thomas Samuel (1883-85) Senior Master. Died in 1946 at Paignton, Devon.. He joined the BPS in 1885.
22. **Ellis**, Albert Baker (15-17). Leadsman.
23. **Ellison**, Cyril Carlos (23-27). Leadsman.
24. **Farewell**, Michael Warren CIE (1883-85).
25. **Farquharson**, John P (18-20). 4th Officer.
26. **Fisher**, Frederick Joseph (1893-95). Leadsman.
27. **Franklin**, Garrick George (22-24). Leadsman and in RIE Water Transport service.

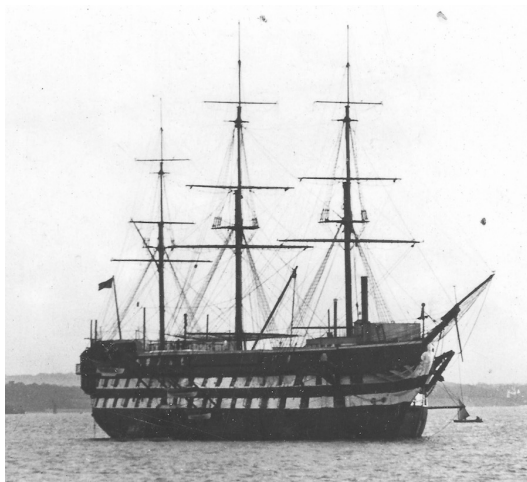
28. **Glanley**, Sydney Archibald (1891-93). Having left the BPS he died 1921 November 15th when he fell into the hold of the SS *Muncaster Castle* in Liverpool Docks.
29. **Hopkins**, Robert Adams (1881-83). Leadsman.
30. **Howard**, Alfred (1880-82). Leadsman.
31. **Huddy**, Charles (05-08). Leadsman.
32. **Hudson**, Thomas Henry (07-09). Major RE (IWT).
33. **Huey**, Beresford (24-26). Leadsman.
34. **Hullock**, Ivan Read (20-22). Leadsman.
35. **Ingram-Halford**, Douglas "Inky" (1899-1900). Branch Pilot. Died in Calcutta from Spanish Flu aged 50 years while in command of the PV *Lady Fraser*. He had served for 27 years. He was buried at sea from PV *Lady Fraser* off the Sandheads.
36. **Keys**, Charles Forrest (1884-87). Branch Pilot died.
37. **Kirkman**, James Drumond Dalton (1875-77). Leadsman.
38. **Labey**, George Thomas MC, MBE (02-04). Branch Pilot and Capt RE (IWT).
39. **Layard**, Raymond Dunlop (15-17). Leadsman.
40. **Lendrum**, Francis H A "Sparrow" (02-04). Leadsman. Died 1946
41. **Ley**, Lionel Edward (15-17). Leadsman.
42. **MacLean**, Robert Firgroy (15-17). Leadsman.
43. **Manning**, E O (1881-83). Leadsman.
44. **May**, Joseph Albert (1862). Leadsman
45. **McClymont**, Walter Ramsay (08-09). Leadsman.
46. **McFarlane**, Philip George (21-23). Leadsman
47. **Mellard**, George Underhill (1882-84). In 1915, after 30 years service, he retired to 9 Lebanon Park, Twickenham, TW1 3DE; a red brick villa on a leafy lane.
48. **Michiem**, Arthur William (1892-94). Leadsman.
49. **O'Brien**, Wulstan H (1898-1900). Leadsman, and Major RE (IWT). Killed in action in France on 1917 February 2nd aged 33. He is buried in La Gorgue Communal Cemetery, Grave III. C. 6. He was the son of Thomas and Elizabeth O'Brien, of Worcester; husband of Edith Muriel O'Brien, of Herne Bay.
50. **Park**, Cecil Trevor (1895-96).). Master Pilot and Lt RE (IWT). He joined the BPS in 1901. Died at his home at Melahide, Co Dublin.
51. **Paull**, Arthur Francis (1890-92). Leadsman.
52. **Prosser**, Thomas Cecil (15-17). Leadsman.
53. **Purrott**, Geoffrey (07-09). Leadsman. Joined 1919 but died in 1926 while home in the UK on sick leave.
54. **Reddie**, Thomas Frederick Lane (1883-85). Leadsman
55. **Ridler**, William Henry (1878-80). Leadsman.
56. **Roberts**, Evelyn R R (01-02). Leadsman.
57. **Ross**, Robert Palatine (16-18). Served for some time (1939-45) as Deputy Port Officer and Chief Shipwright Surveyor for the Government of Bengal. For 16 months he was also in command of various pilot vessels and for a period was Senior Officer at Sandheads. He died in 1956.
58. **Rowllings**, Eric Cecil (14-15). Leadsman.

59. **Scoby**, George Stamper (1897-99). Leadsman.
60. **Seth**, Douglas Martin (1898-1900). Leadsman.
61. **Simons**, Bestiam John Thompson (21-23). Leadsman
62. **Smith**, Albert (1886-88). Leadsman
63. **Taylor**, William Murton (07-09). Leadsman.
64. **Tomlinson**, Joseph (15-16). Leadsman
65. **Turner** , Albert William Jowett (1878-79). Leadsman.
66. **Vine**, Douglas Leonard (03-05). Mate Pilot.
67. **Ward**, Arthur John William (1891-94). Leadsman. Died in 1937 at Lymington, UK after a long illness.
68. **Ward**, Edward Alfred (1891-93). Leadsman.
69. **Wells**, Wilham Sutton (1884-86). Leadsman.
70. **Wilkes**, Oswald Denis (25-27). Leadsman
71. **Woodger**, George Edward (1894-96). Leadsman.

5.6 LIST OF OLD CONWAYS JOINING THE BPS BY YEAR.

From 1877 to 1895 boys joined the BPS direct from the ship. From 1895 they had to possess a Second Mate's certificate so tended to join a few years after leaving the ship.

1877	Carlton Cuthbert Collingwood (1874-76)	1897	Archie John R Coachafer (1891-93)
1877	Harry Bent (1875-77)	1899	Arthur John William Ward (1891-94)
1877	J D D Kirkman (1875-77)	1900	Frederick Joseph Fisher (1893-95)
1877	Frederick Lockyer Puttock (1875-77)	1901	Cecil Trevor Park (1895-96)
1878	George Frank Alexander (1876-78)	1902?	George Stamper Scoby (1897-99)
1878	Horace M Cox (1876-78)	1903	Ernest Campbell (1898-1900)
1879	Robert Adams Hopkins (1877-79)	1904	Wulstan H O'Brien (1898-1900)
1879	Albert William Jowett Turner (1877-79)	1905	Douglas Martin Seth (1898-1900)
1880	Seymour T Porter (1878-80)	1906	Douglas "Inky" Ingram-Halford (1899-1900)
1880	William Henry Ridler (1878-80)	1907	Albert Henry Dove (00-02)
1881	Walter Leech Cousins (1878-80)	1907	Evelyn R R Roberts (01-02)
1883	Ernest Owen Manning (1881-83)	1908	Douglas Leonard Vine (03-05)
1884	John Francis Dumoulin Ball (1882-84)	1909	Francis H A Lendrum (02-04)
1884	George Underhill Mellard (1882-84)	1910?	George Thomas Labey MC MBE (02-04)
1885	Thomas Samuel Earl (1883-85)	1911	Alexander P F Charriol (04-07)
1886	William Bryant (1884-86)	1912	Charles Huddy (05-08)
1887	S John Knighton Case (1885-87)	1913	William Murton Taylor (07-09)
1887	Charles Forrest Keys (1884-87)	1914	Geoffrey Purrott (07-09)
1890	John Carnegy de Balinhard (1888-90)	1914	W R McClymont (08-09)
1891	Reginald Somerset Curran (1889-91)	1919	John Sawyer (16-18) appointed but did not take up post
1892	Edmund Paul Bryant (1890-92)	1919	Thomas Cecil Prosser (15-17) - not T C as reported
1892	Stanley Prior (1891-92) assumed, actual year not known	1919	Eric Cecil Rowllings (14-15) - not R P as reported
1893	Joseph Hudson (1891-93)	1920	Edward William Bentley (12-15)
1893	Sydney Archibald Glanley (1891-93) assumed, see entry for 1921 November 15 th	1920	Robert Firgroy MacLean (15-17)
1894	Arthur William Michie (1892-94)	1920	John P Farquharson (18-20) appointed straight from the ship as 4 th Officer in one of their trading vessels.
1895	Carlton Cuthbert Collingwood (1874-76)	1920	Albert Baker Ellis (15-17)
1895	John Dunlop Allison (1892-95) assumed, actual year not known	1920	Raymond Dunlop Layard (15-17)
1896	Arthur Francis Paull (1890-92)	1921	Robert Palatine Ross (16-18)
1897	Edward Alfred Ward (1891-93)	1921	Lionel Edward Ley (15-17)
		1928	Garrick George Franklin (22-24)



5.7 LIST OF OLD WORCESTERS JOINING THE BPS BY YEAR.

In creating the above list I inevitably created a similar, if less precise, list for OWs. From 1877 to 1895 boys joined the BPS direct from Conway's "sister" training ship on the Thames. After 1895 they had to possess a Second Mate's certificate so tended to join a few years after leaving the ship.

1877	A J Gillman	Assumed OWs, years not known, but in order
1877	C G Stock	of recruitment:
1877	F T Paine	C E Champness
1878	E W J Bartlett	H A Cooper
1878	M H Beattie	S H Reeks
1879	E J A Shaw	W L Allnut
1879	J C M Skinner	F Lungly
1879	H V Allen	A H Mauger
1880	W Collingwood	C A D Greenland
1880	F H Butler	C B Owens
1880	L A B Mackinnon	C W H Ansell
1882	I S Wells	H L Emmerson
1882	P W Anketell-Jones	V Cooper
1882	J J Page	F T Hart
1883	J Sherman	E G Bacon
1884	H S Tozer	G Golding
1886	C G Budge	P Ridly
1886	G F Thorpe	J C P Rawlins
1886	H E Mackenzie	L J MacDonald
1887	J H Lindquist	W C Mayston
1890	W H D Allison	J S Davis
1890	R S Smyth	E E King
1890	H D Lindquist	
1891	J F Fox	
1892	H G H Bartlett	
1892	H G Fox	
1892	H Ancell	
1893	F W Moore	
1894	P J Wilson	



HMS Worcester On The Thames & Her Accommodation Ship - Cutty Sark

6 OTHER OLD CONWAYS LIVING IN CALCUTTA

- 1891 January: **George William Kendal** (1891-93) joined *Conway* as a cadet from St Xavier's School, Calcutta. His father was a Master Mariner in the BPS living at 2 Davis Lane, Calcutta. George was born in Calcutta on 28th November 1874.
- 1891 March: **George Pointon** (1864-65) was commanding a Bengal Government steamer based in Calcutta.
- 1891 March: **William Bryant** (1884-86) became Chief Officer in a local steamer "*and his emoluments cannot be less than 359 rupees per month (approximately £23) according to a Government scale as published*".
- 1895 December: **Frederick Wilsden** (1889-90) left the UK for Calcutta having passed for Second Mate "*to join one of the local line of steamers*".
- 1897 July: **Thomas Adamson** (1869-71) was living in Calcutta but his work was not mentioned.
- 1897 July: **J B Churnside** (years not found) was an Assistant Manager for the East Coast Railway.
- 1897 July: **Edward Blackwall Evans** (1892-97) was Junior Offr in Asiatic Club, Calcutta He was reported as F R Evans but no *Conway* F R Evans exists. "E B" in his letter was probably misread as "F R". The only other contenders: George Evans (1865-67), and William Evans (1887-88) are not likely to have been the writer.
- 1897 July: **John Alexander Rookes** (1869-70) was serving in the local vessel *Alice A Leigh*.
- 1900 May 7th: **Lawrence Lovell Scott** RNR (1892-94) reported from BISS *Upada* at Calcutta that he had been ferrying troops from India to South Africa since October 1899. Like Smythies and Daniel below it is likely he was based in Calcutta.
- 1911 August: **Ernest Dudley Smythies** (01-03) was in the UK on leave from the British India SS Co, Calcutta.
- 1911 December: **Rupert James L Hamilton** (06-08) was serving as 3rd Mate in the Bengal Coal Company's steamer *Sanctoria* based at 8 Clive Road, Calcutta.
- 1911 December: **Smythies** gave his addresses as Hastings Street, Calcutta and the British India Marine Services Club, Bombay. He was in their Indian Coast service between those two ports.
- 1913: **Robert Trimble** (09-10) sailed for Calcutta to seek a local post as 4th Officer for 12 months and complete his apprenticeship.
- 1914 June: **Ernest Trott** (00-02) was the Asiatic Steam Navigation Co's Marine Superintendent in Calcutta. **E O Knowles** (09) was also serving the Asiatic Steam Navigation Co's Indian Service but was home in the UK on leave.
- 1916 August: **John William Muirhead** (03-05) serving as a Marine Surveyor with Norman Stewart & Co, Calcutta having previously served for a short period with the HRSS. **Trott** was in the UK for six month's leave.
- 1916 December: **Karl Ernest Garnett** (11-13) was appointed Junior Officer of the Asiatic Club, Calcutta. He had joined the Asiatic Steam Navigation Co from Conway. At is unclear whether this means left the sea and became an employee of the club (no trace of the Club has been found), or whether he joined the club as a junior officer in the Asiatic SN Co.
- 1917 December: **Trimble** passed for Master at Calcutta and was appointed Chief Officer of BISS Co's *Quiloce*.

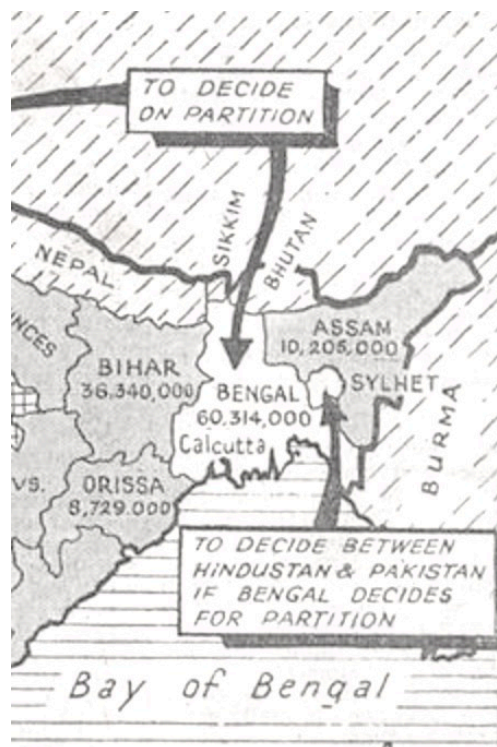
- 1921 April: **Malcolm Nicholson Kerr** (14-16) was living in Calcutta "*on business*" and **Ronald C Blair Arnold Daniel** (14-16) was 3rd Officer in the BISN Co's East India Service and apparently living at the BIMS Club, Calcutta.
- 1925 June 2nd: **Lt Col Roger Parker Wilson** (1884-86) of the Indian Medical Service was knighted for services as the Officiating Surgeon-General to the Government of Bengal.
- 1943 December 28th: Capt **John Cameron** RIN (04-06) was made a Companion Indian Empire (CIE) after 37 years service in the RIM/RIN. He was serving as Principal Officer, Mercantile Marine Dept, Calcutta.
- 1967 August 28th: **John Campbell Swift** (55-57) was Assistant Manager of Everett Steamship Corporation's Calcutta office acting as agents for Everett Orient Line, American Mail Line, Waterman Steamship Corporation and General Superintendents of Geneva. He was also their representative on the Bay of Bengal / Japan Conference.
- 1967 August 28th: **Keith Watson** (44-45) was with the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and was Secretary of the Bay of Bengal / Japan Conference.

7 THE RIVER & PORT TODAY

7.1 A JOURNEY FROM INDEPENDENCE

Independence brought rapid change to the river and port:

- a. The most obvious change was that Calcutta reverted to its Indian name of Kolkata.
- b. Partition, especially the second partition of Bengal, led to intense violence and a shift in demographics in Bengal, and especially Kolkata; with large numbers of Muslims leaving for East Pakistan, and hundreds of thousands of Hindus arriving to take their place.
- c. Patterns of trade changed so the jute industry shifted towards Narayangunj for several years. The salt trade of the river was felled by a shift in the policy of transportation according to which, it moved from river to rail, so that rail transportation took the river's place for the big movements of salt. The creation of East Pakistan and then its secession into Bangladesh meant that the huge tea trade traffic down the Brahmaputra – Yamuna system was completely disrupted. The independence of Burma, which came at the same time from the British Empire, only solidified what had begun in 1935, when Burma was made a Crown Colony outside the scope of British India's purview. This meant, of course, difference in the pattern of the rice trade which had been initially disrupted in WWII and which now was consumed by the home market of Burma. This meant a complete disruption of the Rangoon – Kolkata Port links. A regional imbalance evolved between the East Pakistan and Bengal with trade diverted to new ports.
- d. River and coastal trade moved to road and rail.



Use of the port dropped, and then stagnated. Without regular traffic to drive maintenance the river silted *“the great river beside whose mammoth bends I had grown up, was just a narrow little nullah which flowed roughly from this table up to the wall there. A veteran jumper could pole-vault across the Bhagirathi there: the water level was very low. The anchorages of the Strand Bank jetties disappeared after the first half of the twentieth century. The active port moved south in the second half. Only the Customs Warehouses, some disused jetties, and the later wall of the circular railway remain as mute testimony of a waterfront that was.”* In September 2015, the Government of West Bengal signalled the renovation of the Hooghly riverfront in Kolkata with the help of World Bank funding under the National Ganga River Basin Project Scheme.

Containerisation also had an impact. The river was too shallow and twisting for large ‘Box Boats’ which needed bigger estuarial ports.

1972 was the nadir of the port. Like all old established inland city ports worldwide, it had been forced from small city centre moorings and docks downstream to avoid river “bends, bores and bars” to custom built ports that can handle larger and larger vessels. For Kolkata this move was initially a mile or so from the Customs House to the Screw Pile Jetty area, then to the old KGV Dock, (now Netaji Subhas Dock), then down towards Haldia and finally further downriver to Diamond Harbour. There are plans now for a new deep container port on Saugor Island - Bhor Sagar Port.

7.2 THE PORT OF KOLKATA TODAY

The Calcutta Port Commissioners of the 1800s and 1900s part of the Colonial Indian Government Service is now the Kolkata Port Trust managed by the Indian Government's Ministry of Shipping. After a long period of decline and then stagnation, the port is now third in the list of Indian Ports and has two dock systems:



1. The Kolkata Dock System (KDS) which includes the original Kidderpore Docks, the old KGV Docks (now Netaji Subhas Docks), Budge Budge moorings and Diamond Harbour.
2. Haldia Dock Complex (HDC) downstream of Kolkata. The modern container port of Haldia, on the intersection of lower Hooghly and Haldi River, can handle Panamax vessels and now carries much of the region's maritime trade.

In 2015-16 Kolkata handled 3,230 vessels, paltry compared to 85,348 in 1914, but they carried 50.3 million short tons of cargo with jute and tea continuing to figure largely. Today's average turn around time per vessel is 4.18 days compared to at least 10 weeks in the 1890s. No time for dances and football or an evening at the Chummary for today's mariners.

Henry Francis (1898-1900) Assistant Harbourmaster for the Calcutta Port Commissioners in 1912 with just Kidderpore Docks and river bank moorings would be astounded at the range and complexity of docks now operational.

7.3 THE HOUGHLY RIVER SERVICE TODAY

The HRSS is now the Hooghly River Survey, headed by the River Surveyor, who is assisted by two Deputy River Surveyors, 15 Commanders and 40 Surveyors. They have a fleet of four survey vessels and 16 survey launches operated from six survey bases ashore. Its jurisdiction extends 40 miles into the Bay of Bengal. Six sea gong dredgers are employed. As always everyone is constantly at work every day. Charts are still revised and produced within 24 hours of surveys being completed. Recruits are now drawn from TS *Chanakya*, the successor to IMMS *Dufferin*, and TS *Rajendra*. They undertake a five to six year course and must pass three professional examinations before qualifying. All of which would have sounded very familiar to **Thomas Matthew Munro** (1887-89) joining the HRSS in 1894.



7.4 THE KOLKATA PORT TRUST PILOT SERVICE TODAY

The BPS ceased to exist in 1948 but pilotage never stopped. Today no seagoing vessel above 200 GRT is allowed to navigate without a qualified pilot from the Kolkata Port Trust. In 1780 the figure was 100 tons. The total pilotage distance to KDS is 221 kilometres (137 mi), comprising 148 kilometres (92 mi) of river and 75 kilometres (47 mi) of sea, and for HDC, 121 kilometres (75 mi), comprising 46 kilometres (29 mi) of river and 75 kilometres (47 mi) of sea. In May 1948 Commodore of the BPS, **James Colquhoun** (23-25) handed over an efficient, professional and effective pilot service, largely British but with a growing cadre of expert Indian pilots, the first since 1534!



7.5 EVERYTHING CHANGES, EVERYTHING STAYS THE SAME

Pilots still embark at Sandheads. Vessels approach light vessels with familiar names like *Eastern Channel*, *Lower Gaspar* and *Upper Gaspar*. There are still two approaches from the sea, the Eastern Channel and the Western Channel. Sagar Lighthouse still beams out its warning even if the island long ago lost its man eating tigers.

The same six semaphores and 500 buoys still guide vessels over the 16 sandbars to a safe berth.

The Port Trust's badge still carries the original quartered arms (see page 38).



Leadsman Apprentices are long gone replaced by modern Trainee Pilots. Recruits still execute a bond that they will serve for a period of 5 years on qualifying as Pilot. They face a long and challenging apprenticeship but there is still time for swinging the lead. And, after all this time, on arrival at Garden Reach, the River Pilot still hands over to a Harbour Pilot who takes the vessel the last mile. The Government sticks its oar in proposing changes which the pilots reject as impractical and un-professional.⁶

In 1877 *Conway's* first Leadsman **Carlton Cuthbert Collingwood** (1874-76) faced the same pilotage challenges but in sailing vessels unable to manoeuvre like modern vessels. He might be amazed at modern vessels but the river remains unchanging.

⁶ <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2001/01/03/stories/090359c2.htm>

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ANNEX A: KIPLING'S 'BALLAD OF FISHER'S BOARDING HOUSE'

That night, when through the mooring-chains
The wide-eyed corpse rolled free,
To blunder down by Garden Reach
And rot at Kedgerree,
The tale the Hughli told the shoal
The lean shoal told to me.

'Twas Fultah Fisher's boarding-house,
Where sailor-men reside,
And there were men of all the ports
From Mississip to Clyde,
And regally they spat and smoked,
And fearsomely they lied.

They lied about the purple Sea
That gave them scanty bread,
They lied about the Earth beneath,
The Heavens overhead,
For they had looked too often on
Black rum when that was red.

They told their tales of wreck and wrong,
Of shame and lust and fraud,
They backed their toughest statements with
The Brimstone of the Lord,
And crackling oaths went to and fro
Across the fist-banged board.

And there was Hans the blue-eyed Dane,
Bull-throated, bare of arm,
Who carried on his hairy chest
The maid Ultruda's charm—
The little silver crucifix
That keeps a man from harm.

And there was Jake Without-the-Ears,
And Pamba the Malay,
And Carboy Gin the Guinea cook,
And Luz from Vigo Bay,
And Honest Jack who sold them slops
And harvested their pay.

And there was Salem Hardieker,
A lean Bostonian he—
Russ, German, English, Halfbreed, Finn,
Yank, Dane, and Portuguee,
At Fultah Fisher's boarding-house
The rested from the sea.

Now Anne of Austria shared their drinks,
Collinga knew her fame,
From Tarnau in Galicia
To Jaun Bazaar she came,
To eat the bread of infamy
And take the wage of shame.

She held a dozen men to heel—
Rich spoil of war was hers,
In hose and gown and ring and chain,
From twenty mariners,
And, by Port Law, that week, men called
Her Salem Hardieker's.

But seamen learnt—what landsmen know—
That neither gifts nor gain

Can hold a winking Light o' Love
Or Fancy's flight restrain,
When Anne of Austria rolled her eyes
On Hans the blue-eyed Dane.

Since Life is strife, and strife means knife,
From Howrah to the Bay,
And he may die before the dawn
Who liquored out the day,
In Fultah Fisher's boarding-house
We woo while yet we may.

But cold was Hans the blue-eyed Dane,
Bull-throated, bare of arm,
And laughter shook the chest beneath
The maid Ultruda's charm—
The little silver crucifix
That keeps a man from harm.

"You speak to Salem Hardieker;
"You was his girl, I know.
"I ship mineselfs to-morrow, see,
"Und round the Skaw we go,
"South, down the Cattedgat, by Hjelm,
"To Besser in Saro."

When love rejected turns to hate,
All ill betide the man.
"You speak to Salem Hardieker"—
She spoke as woman can.
A scream—a sob—"He called me—names!"
And then the fray began.

An oath from Salem Hardieker,
A shriek upon the stairs,
A dance of shadows on the wall,
A knife-thrust unawares—
And Hans came down, as cattle drop,
Across the broken chairs.

. . . . In Anne of Austria's trembling hands
The weary head fell low:—
"I ship mineselfs to-morrow, straight
"For Besser in Saro;
"Und there Ultruda comes to me
"At Easter, und I go

"South, down the Cattedgat—What's here?
"There—are—no—lights—to guide!"
The mutter ceased, the spirit passed,
And Anne of Austria cried
In Fultah Fisher's boarding-house
When Hans the mighty died.

Thus slew they Hans the blue-eyed Dane,
Bull-throated, bare of arm,
But Anne of Austria looted first
The maid Ultruda's charm—
The little silver crucifix
That keeps a man from harm. ---

Link here to a short silent film inspired by the

Silent Film of the Poem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nQQOysZKnUQ>