



1934 – 2014

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2014

**Formby Hall, Southport Old Road, Formby, Southport, L37 0AB  
Wednesday 9 and Thursday 10 April 2014**

The British Tugowners Association held a very enjoyable Annual Conference this year at Formby Hall near Liverpool, 9-10 April. Forty delegates were present, including guests and member companies. The BTA was most grateful to Samson Ropes who sponsored the event and Damen Shipyards who sponsored the golf.

### Annual General Meeting

At the AGM on 9 April, the Chairman, Marc Niederer, welcomed delegates and gave a précis of his [annual report](#). He stated that whilst the industry competed on the level of service, training and safety were areas which demanded absolute standards and should not be eroded due to commercial pressures. Achieving a level playing field, whilst ensuring high standards were maintained was an opportunity for the BTA. The EU Ports Regulation had featured during the year and for the continent at least offered competition on equal terms, although further developments were in abeyance whilst the EU elections took place. He reiterated the value of being part of the UK Chamber of Shipping, which had proved a powerful ally. With just 7 companies attending the event, however, he wondered if some consolidation in the industry might be inevitable, but how and in what form was not apparent. He thanked Dai Coombes, who had been recently relocated to Svitzers operation in Sohar, for his dedication to training matters over the years. He also thanked Tom Woolley, out-going Vice-chairman for his hard work during his period in office and continue support on the Executive. During the AGM Mike Percharde of Serco was elected Vice-chairman and Caledonian Towage was welcomed to the membership, having taken over JP Knight's operation at Invergordon.



## The Conference

Following the formality of the AGM, David Brown, Chairman of the Technical Committee, introduced the 79<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference and the first speaker Guy Platten, the new Chief Executive at the UK Chamber. Guy stated that UK shipping interests were under threat from other economies in the Far East and there was a need to focus on this challenge. He was developing a new strategy for the chamber and described the vision, mission and goals, which included the need to reform the UK Flag. There was much emphasis on membership and bringing in new companies, but with this there was a requirement to review the call structure. In raising the profile of the industry, there was also a desire for the chamber to be considered at the centre of maritime business in the UK.

He was followed by Captain Andy Moll, Deputy Chief Inspector Marine Accidents, at the MAIB. He stated that investigations were becoming more consequence based and thus the opportunity to look at near misses was diminished. Statistics are largely unchanged, with noxious gases leading to several accidents recently; he advocated the carriage of a gas detector, which is not mandated in smaller vessels. He mentioned the phenomenon of VHF inspired collision where ambiguity introduced by discussions between bridges led to rather than avoided collisions. Fatigue was also a major problem, particularly where there was a master plus one on short sea passages. An over reliance on technology was leading to poor positional appreciation, as well as making watchkeepers lazy.

Colum Leggett, Area Operations Manager from the MCA's Liverpool Marine Office then gave an over view of the surveyor's task. Effort was targeted and if there was reasonable grounds to board a vessel, then it would be inspected. He said there was currently a focus on adherence to working hours and rest, as well the competence and correct certification of watchkeepers. Many surveys are now conducted by Class, although the MCA will continue to cover aspects involving the MLC, ISM and LSA. He then spoke in some detail about the introduction of the MLC.

Mark Gambell of Samson Ropes, the event sponsor, then spoke about the support offered to customers and how every aspect of an operation was needed in order to properly assess the requirement for new equipment. He said that tow ropes were now a major investment and should be regarded as capital assets rather consumables.



## Annual Dinner

Steve Jellis, the BTA's President, presided at the annual dinner that evening. He thanked the event sponsors, Samson, and then Damen for supporting the golf. He was also pleased to announce that Michel Todd, the BTA Administrator for the last 15 years and currently on maternity leave, had just given birth to a boy, Jensen. Mother and baby were duly toasted. The BTA photographic competition winner was also announced; Sam Willis of Svitzer, for his photograph of Svitzer Trimley in rough weather on the River Humber. He presented Nick Dorman, Operations Director at Targe Towing, with the 'Tug Personality of the Year' award for his huge contribution to safety in the industry through his committed leadership of the annual safety seminar, which he has now run for 12 years.



## Conference Day 2

David Huck, Ports Director for Peel Ports, opened with the first presentation. He provided an overview of the Mersey ports cluster and talked about the new £300m Liverpool2 container terminal development. The expansion of capacity will take full advantage of the good connectivity of Liverpool, but the 10m tidal range will pose some challenges.

Arjen van Elk then of Damen Shipyards, and the golf sponsor, then gave a comprehensive update on Damen tug developments.

Sadly Louise Hall of Shipowners' Protection, was unable to attend, but Nick Dorman stepped in to give a brief précis of the presentation. The majority of claims were the result of human error and operators needed to establish whether there was appropriate training and familiarisation in place and, for any particular operation, whether people were adequately qualified, sufficiently experienced and where they were able to perform in an emergency.

Scott Ward from Svitzer and the BTA's Technical Committee then talked about the BTA members' own accident statistics. As has been mentioned before, many of the slips, trips and falls occur alongside when concentration has perhaps lapsed. He advocated the 'fresh eyes approach' with others including senior management taking a look for potential problems.

The final session was an open forum led by David Brown, supported by Nick Dorman (Targe), Scott Ward (Svitzer) and Steve Gallimore (Group Harbour Master of Peel Ports). Themes included safe towing operations, winches, the tug engineer and the voluntary towage endorsement. Tom Woolley

asked why it was necessary to opt for bow to bow, which required passing a tow under the bow of the assisted ship, rather than a push / pull, which was common in most ports in the Far East. Whilst most agree the latter was safer, it was clear that if bow to bow was preferred by a particular operator in a particular port and local conditions required this, then that is what would be practiced. The competent harbour authority would generally accept the advice of the experts in this matter. For winches, it was suggested that a quick release mechanism should be part of the tug certification by a harbour authority. To progress training and familiarisation, Steve Gallimore urged tug masters to take trips in larger vessel to see how the pilots operated. The position of the voluntary towage endorsement was also discussed, the view being that it was valid for the workboat community, but for ship assist operations, the master should be STCW qualified.

The Chairman, Marc Niederer concluded the Conference by thanking delegates for their attendance and lively interaction. This had made the event most worthwhile and reiterated the value of staging it on an annual basis.

### **Sir William Crosthwaite Cup**

The traditional game of golf, kindly sponsored by Damen Shipyards, was played in the afternoon by 5 members. The Sir William Crosthwaite Cup was won by Marc Nieder.

*Adrian Mundin*

Adrian J Mundin MVO  
Secretary

28 April 2014

**Minutes of the AGM.  
Conference Programme.**

**Sponsored by:**



**Annual golf competition for the Sir William Crosthwaite Cup sponsored by:**

**DAMEN**

Firstly, welcome to this AGM and conference and thank you for supporting it. Having now been in post as your Chairman for 1 year, I am pleased to have this opportunity to update you on BTA activities and some of the key issues that are currently in hand.

### Tug safety

Maintaining and improving safety standards remains core to our activity and I was very pleased to have the opportunity to present to International Maritime Organisation delegates, alongside Don Cockrill, Chairman of the UK Marine Pilots, tug safety shortly after I took over in April last year. With the message 'saving lives in towage', the presentation covered safe speed, release of towing gear and dangerously weighted heaving lines. Judging by the questions the message was well received and a marker has been laid in this very influential forum.

Jason Woodward continues to collect comprehensive accident statistics on an annual basis from Members. Unfortunately responses are patchy making it difficult to define trends and draw conclusions. More narrative is needed to put things in context and I would urge everyone to take a close interest in this work. The annual Safety Seminar in the first week of November is of course a key part of the calendar and a valuable means of raising safety standards and awareness in the industry. The theme last year was '*report what you see – don't walk by*'. It was well attended by member companies and others, and I am most grateful to Nick Dorman for leading it and for the speakers who regularly contribute their valuable insight. With reportable incidents to the MAIB having halved over the last 10 years, it is clear that the message is getting through. There is no complacency, however, and the emphasis must now move to a more proactive culture of reporting near misses. The themes developed included the critical nature of properly structured and monitored induction training for each vessel type and towage evolution to complement existing qualifications and experience; the importance of a standard briefings; good communication during operations and calling a halt or disengaging if a situation became unsafe.

### Training and certification

Following the delay due to the Better Regulation Initiative, routes to an STCW limited Certificate of competence for tug OOW / master less than 500GT and 3000GT near coastal and tug rating proficiency were finally published last year ([MGN 495 \(M+F\)](#)). There has been a subsequent flurry of interest in this qualification route which is encouraging. Since numbers will always be small, if Members do have candidates embarking on the scheme, then it may be worth coordinating with others to ensure courses are more viable and more cost effective. Criteria for sideways entry into the scheme need to be defined and to this end the MCA have undertaken to produce a Marine Information Note, to cover for example cross training from *inshore* to *near coastal*. The BTA has been closely involved in the development of this scheme and it is considered by all to be the definitive route to becoming a professional tug master.

For the Tug Engineer, a new STCW Certificate of Competence, replacing the old Vocational Qualifications, will be set out in a further MGN. Pending this, the MCA, have issued an interim certification scheme based around the yacht engineer scheme, and a small number of trainees are on this. Further consultation is needed before the formal MGN is issued; this is overdue and the BTA will continue to press the MCA to deliver on this.

The new Voluntary Towage Endorsement scheme ([MGN 468\(M\)](#)) was announced by the MCA in March. This scheme will assist in driving up the competence of those involved in towage operations who are not properly STCW certified tug masters. There is some concern that even with a VTE there is a risk that relatively inexperienced people with a Boatmaster's License could be operating a powerful tug in complex ship assist operations. To mitigate this, the BTA has submitted revised guidance for the Port Marine Safety Code; Guide to Good Practice, to ensure that harbour masters,

when developing risk assessments, can discern between the individual with a BML / VTE and professionally qualified tug masters. We have also written to all harbour masters explaining the relative merits of the various towing qualifications. Of interest, the BTA has also applied to the MCA asking in principle to become a recognised authority for the issue of VTEs. We are currently examining how this may be managed.

With the new qualifications now in use, the training sub-committee has undertaken a mapping exercise to up date the deck Training Record Books and new trainees now will receive a revised version.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dai Coombes who, after many year of leading the training sub-committee, has very recently taken up a new post Port Manager for Svitzer in Sohar, Oman. He has seen into existence the training records books that underpin our training and has been central to the BTA's efforts to upgrade the standard of training and certification in the industry. Key to this has been the STCW tickets already mentioned. A very experienced tugmaster himself, he has been passionate about skills and training and we now wish him every success in this new challenge.

### **EU Ports Directive**

The EU Ports Directive has received much attention at Executive Committee meetings and there have been joint discussions with the Chairmen of the UK Marine Pilots, UK Harbour Masters and European Tugowners (ETA) Associations. The proposed regulation contained the following main elements: the freedom to provide specified types of port services; transparency of payments by public authorities and certain other specific accounting requirements; requirements relating to charges for port services and infrastructure; requirements for ports to consult port-users and other stakeholders. The clear consensus was that the idea behind the EU port directive of free competition was supported, but the way in which it was to be enforced was unnecessary bureaucratic and probably impossible to implement. The EU competition law already achieves the objective of free competition. It was also felt by BTA members that contrary other parts in Europe, there are no restrictive regimes in the UK ports. The legislative procedure for the Directive is currently suspended due to time constraints, the impending EU elections and the fact that the original proposal has been hollowed out with amendments. I shall let you know if it is resurrected.

### **Technical Committee**

The Technical Committee under the Chairmanship of David Brown has been the engine room of the BTA and organises this AGM and the Safety Seminar. They have maintained the momentum on the training and certification issues already mentioned and are currently looking at best practice for harbour tug winches. The intention is to strike up a dialogue with Classification Societies to establish class rules for winches. If members do have technical or training issues which you feel have industry wide implications, then don't hesitate to seek assistance from the Committee.

The Maritime Labour Convention was finally ratified by the Government on 7 August. Whilst certification is not required unless a vessel is on an international voyage, many components of the MLC do apply to all commercial ships. Tom Woolley has steadfastly represented the BTA's interests, winning equivalent standards for crew accommodation and promoting an understanding amongst the membership of what is involved, particularly with respect to Seafarer Employment Agreements and food preparation training.

Tom Woolley has also represented our interest at a meeting chaired by the Nautical Institute concerning a proposal to introduce an international tug masters qualification. This appears to be based largely on existing UK certificates and endorsements, namely the VTE, and the intention would be to fill a gap in countries where no formal training regime operates. It seems that the initiative is commercially driven, but we have agreed to join the next meeting as an observer to follow the developments..

## **UK Chamber of Shipping**

The BTA remains actively involved with the UK Chamber of Shipping. My seat on the Board ensures the BTA's voice is heard and the relationship allows us, as a relatively small Association, to influence the bigger picture either within the MCA, Government or in Europe. Examples have included my participation in a round table event with the DfT officials and Chamber to provide input to the Government's Strategic Partnership for the maritime sector and the opportunity to meet the Minister and Transport Select Committee members during London International shipping Week in September. The Chamber has been a useful ally in establishing a position with things such as the EU ports policy and is currently fending off a Commission proposal that would require all vessel above 400GT to report daily emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> and NO<sub>x</sub> emissions. I would encourage Members to take advantage of Chamber activities, including committees and the networking evenings. For more information on this or other Chamber activity, contact our Secretariat (Adrian Mundin).

## **Budget and membership**

The economic climate continues to be tough. With very keen attention to costs and the fact that the UK Chamber's fee has, over the last year, remained static, we have again been able to hold any increase to the membership fee. Indeed it will be reduced following the small surplus from last year. This is likely to change; in particular I am aware that the chamber is undertaking a review of their fee (or Call) structure which may well have implications for the BTA next year.

The towage industry has seen a lot of consolidation over the past twenty years, and I expect this trend to continue. Membership is of some concern, in that we have just two large operators (Serco and Svitzer) owning 75% of the tugs. In the second year of my Chairmanship, I would like to come up with a long term and sustainable plan that ensures the membership as a whole and the Association remain on a stable footing, such that we can continue to effectively lobby for the interests of this important sector.

Whilst we sadly lost stalwarts of the BTA JP Knight this year, their tugs are now operated by Global Energy Group under the name Caledonian Towage Ltd and I am very pleased to welcome that company and to the membership.

## **Finally**

We are also indebted to our conference sponsors, Samson Ropes, and for Damen Shipyards agreeing to support the golf. Without their generous support this gathering would be considerably more difficult.

Marc Niederer  
Chairman

[Return to top](#)