

Salty *Sea* Dog

Losing the Plot

Captain Michael Howorth suggests that it is the time we brought back pre school training schools

I hope it is not me that is losing the plot, but recently I have begun to worry about the apparently low standards of education we are giving to those who go down to the sea in ships.

I was trained at the HMS Conway pre-sea training school, which, if it were still operating, would be over 150 years old. The school trained boys for a life at sea and yes in those days, going to sea meant doing so in ships rather than super yachts but the concept remains the same never the less. The schools curriculum was similar to many boy's public schools of its time. Heavy on the science and sports field and somewhat light on the arts.

The boarding school environment with its attendant mild schoolboy bullying was said to be the stuff that turned boys into men and even now with the advantage of 20-20 hindsight it is apparent to me that underpinning the complete pre sea school training ethos was the one thing seafarers need more than anything else, and that is; common sense. Simply put, I do not believe you can go to sea in ships boats or even superyachts as an officer, crewmember or owner unless you do so having trained sensibly.

Captain Cautious

I find myself becoming angry by what I can only see as poor training requiring the implementation of puerile regulation. That very statement will have some of the crew members who have sailed with me over the years that I have been in command of various superyachts, falling over the crew mess table doubled up with laughter because to many of them, I truly deserved my nickname: Captain Cautious.

The question remains however; why is it necessary to create regulations that call for training manuals to contain statements such as:

When attempting to rescue someone who has fallen overboard, always shout a warning when throwing a life-buoy, and always make sure it is thrown to one side of the person in the water. Surely to goodness, even in this day and age where health and safety dogma seems to rule every action, it is not necessary to spell it out to professional yacht crew, that they should rescue the casualty, rather than try and knock them unconscious by scoring a direct with the buoy.



Where's that Island?

Lessons on board HMS Conway included seamanship and navigation along with lots of rope and practical boatwork. We did not realise it at the time but the reason we were taught Spanish is because it is the second most globally spoken language and the style of geography we were taught centred more on facts such as: Ceylon exported tea and New Zealand exported chilled lamb while for beef, ships went to Argentina. Everything was taught with a purpose.

While I do not consider myself to be a geography buff it is one of the essentials for those who navigate at sea. Imagine my surprise recently when on talking with a captain of a superyacht whose port of registry was Douglas in the Isle of Man, that he thought Man was an island in the Caribbean. True the captain was a Turkish national but surely as the master of a British registered yacht he should have a clue as to where in the world his vessel was flagged.

That same captain also said the reason his yacht was registered on the island was because it was an easy option; and I quote, "Like Panama, Liberia or the Marshall Islands." That said I witnessed more flag abuse at the Genoa charter yacht show where the all-Italian crew of a very beautiful 43 metre yacht had hardly a word of English between them. And while I can forgive them their offhand and carefree attitude to our request to look around the yacht, I was somewhat shocked to hear the captain explain that the reason his yacht was registered in London and flew the red ensign was because flagging a yacht in Italy was too difficult and the UK offered the best flag of convenience.

Perhaps I am after all loosing the plot or perhaps we should bring back pre sea training schools.