**Stratford sub Castle Guild – January 2019 report**

**“Safety in the Solent – An insight into the work of a Maritime Pilot “**

**Speaker - Lloyd Turner**

On 9th January Stratford Guild enjoyed a compelling talk by a local resident. Captain Lloyd Turner spoke with infectious enthusiasm on the challenges involved in working as a maritime pilot within the Southampton compulsory pilotage area. Lloyd is professional seafarer and experienced Master Mariner who has invested 5 years of hard work to gain the further qualification of Maritime Pilot. He gave us a fascinating insight into the technical complexity of the task as well as explaining the vital role of human communication skills. Even though the pilot is directing the crew to control all the details of ship’s course and speed, the ship’s master remains totally responsible for the safety and effective operation of the vessel. In practice captains are generally quite content to let the pilot take complete control through unfamiliar and demanding port approaches, but the establishment of mutual trust in the first 10 minutes is essential.

We quickly realised that Lloyd was giving us an insight into a fascinating paradox – guiding a ship through the Southampton port approach involves managing multiple risks associated with bad weather and poor visibility, very close margins on depth beneath the vessel, limited manoeuvre capability, intense commercial and leisure traffic – and tight deadlines on time of arrival at designated quay. However, the guiding principle of his job must be ‘we don’t like excitement, ever…’ so a calm demeanour is another essential skill.

A unique feature of Southampton is the wide variety of ships which require pilotage. Lloyd gave us an illustrated overview of the wide range of world commercial shipping, from cruise liners and very large commodity carriers through large container vessels down to smaller specialised ships, including sail training vessels. Each type of ship offers particular hazards to the pilot when boarding from the fast pilot launch. Standard pilot ladders can be up to 9m from waterline, and with the large vessel and pilot launch having different movement patterns the step-across decision requires cool nerves. At least our seas remain liquid, the video of a Finnish pilot transiting from solid ice was incredible. Southampton is also home to the Esso refinery at Fawley, refining 250,000 barrels daily and processing 20 different varieties of crude, requiring very large tankers to make the famous Bramble Bank turn on a regular basis.

Lloyd stressed the fact that 95% of our imported goods come by sea but most of us know almost nothing of this vital dimension of our economy. By the end of his compelling talk we all felt that we had been shown a window into an exciting and demanding profession – but one that lives by an abiding principle of ‘we don’t like excitement, thank you’.

Gift Bowl contributions of £75 went to 23rd Scouts Group, Salisbury. Our speaker at next meeting on 13th February 2019 will be Jane Glennie, ‘How do you like yours?’, a theatrical secret history of tea.

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