

# The Other Benefits of Traditional Operations

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## ■ INTRODUCTION

The real reason for raising this topic is twofold: namely, to explain how volunteers and supporters of seagoing operations may be driven by motives, other than a love of the sea or nostalgia for old ships on the one hand, and how imaginative projects can unlock purse strings, other than those of a purely cultural nature. At the same time, you can achieve several really worthwhile goals. You will recall Michael von Baur's highlighting of the important role played by social groups and associations.

### The background

I am going to take, as an example, the case of the Jubilee Sailing Trust, a charity which owns two «Tall Ships», the *Lord Nelson* and *Tenacious*. They are not «heritage vessels»; They are not even replicas. They are «new builds»; and they have modern machinery and equipment that enables them to take disabled people to sea. I should add here that I am talking about the physically disabled, as we have not yet worked out how we can safely involve the mentally disadvantaged, but I was interested to learn how Per Inge Lindquist used them to clear the island at Karlskrona. The two ships allow them actively to participate as members of the ship's crew. In particular, there are facilities enabling up to 8 crew members in wheelchairs to sail in each ship at any one time. First, let me set out the aims of the Jubilee Sailing Trust set out in its 1978 Deed of Trust:

*«To foster greater understanding between physically handicapped and able bodied people.*

*To provide the opportunity to share together the challenge of crewing a tall ship at sea.*

*To provide facilities for, and conduct research into, the design and building of vessels suitable for use by the beneficiaries, and for training such persons in the design and building of such vessels».*

This has since been summarised in its Mission Statement as:

*To bring together able bodied and physically disabled people through the medium of tall ship sailing and building.*

In other words, they are ships put to sea with crews, 50% of whom are disabled and 50% are fully able.

### The Lord Nelson

Named after a famous British admiral, Lord Horatio Nelson, who died at the Battle of Trafalgar on 21<sup>st</sup> October, 1805, having previously lost an eye and an arm, the ship was launched in 1985 and commenced her operations in 1986. She was constructed of steel by commercial contractors because the trustees at the time feared there were inadequate skills to build a wooden ship. Since then, over 17,000 have sailed on the ship. Of these, some 7,000 were physically disabled and approximately 2,800 were wheelchair users.

There are no passengers onboard the Lord Nelson or *Tenacious*; everyone works to the best of his or her ability. No previous seagoing experience is necessary. In addition to the permanent crew, both ships are crewed by 40 voyage crew, 20 of whom can be physically disabled, and of these 20, up to eight people can be wheelchair users. Their disabilities include amputation, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, hydrocephalus and quadriplegia. Their disabilities included:

DISABILITY	LORD NELSON	TENACIOUS
Amputation	303	6
Blindness	690	26
Cerebral Palsy	819	15
Deafness	329	14
Diabetes	172	14
Muscular Dystrophy	109	14
Epilepsy	345	9
Head Injury	267	7
Hemiplegia (Stroke)	483	10
Hydrocephalus	60	7
Multiple Sclerosis	602	17
Osteoarthritis	197	10
Paraplegia	297	9
Polio (old)	214	8
Quadriplegia	71	5
Rheumatoid Arthritis	189	1
Spina Bifida	481	14
Spinal Injury	139	6
Other disabilities	1,570	53

### Tenacious

The focus of my talk, however, concentrates on *Tenacious*. Why? For the simple reason that she is a wooden vessel built with traditional methods, albeit using some modern shipbuilding techniques. The Trust had considered other options, including the purchase and conversion of an existing tall ship. What persuaded the Trustees to proceed with the building in wood of *Tenacious* was the need to interest potential sponsors and donors (and thus fund the project) and their growing concern over the problems and costs associated with steel ships. Additionally, they were inspired by the idea of involving both disabled and fully abled, but unskilled volunteers, in the construction.

The details of the original proposals were set out by the project director in a paper to the Trust on 10<sup>th</sup> March, 1993 and, for us here, I think that her comments on the Heritage Aspect of the project are just as pertinent today.

### ■ THE HERITAGE ASPECT

«As well as involving many people in the project, I feel we should look at ways of attracting donors and sponsors who have an interest in our heritage.

From the point of view of funding, the heritage aspect will open extra doors. Maritime heritage can be characterised by the values which it affirms: the meaning of work and competence, of individualism and self-reliance, of co-operation, of teaching and learning, of appreciation for function and beauty, of reverence for nature. These are values too frequently mourned in our society, and yet, they are inherent in maritime culture, demonstrable today in the museums and boatbuilding projects across the country. It is this continuity of tradition -past joined to future through artefacts, skills and values- that is the meaning of maritime preservation. Heritage is but a reflection of the past; its preservation must have a purpose in the present and the future and, in my view, the end result of a working ship, accessible to people of all physical abilities, is an admirable purpose.

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I think it is true to say that all too often, when designing facilities for people with disabilities, beauty and elegance are sacrificed in favour of the functional and utilitarian. There must naturally be as high a % of people with disabilities, who are interested in our heritage as there are amongst people without disabilities. We have all found, when discussing the Lord Nelson, that the idea of a tall sailing ship puts a sparkle into the listener's eyes -this is even more true when talking about a wooden tall sailing ship.

The team involved in the project would have the added pleasure of passing on skills, learning skills, and assisting craftsmen -skills which have been passed on from generation to generation.

## ■ METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION

It is noteworthy that the last paragraph ended on the value of passing on skills. The manager of one of the venues being considered, Buckler's Hard Maritime Museum, was enthusiastic that the construction of a replica (at least in outward appearance) of a late 18<sup>th</sup> Century wooden trading vessel would help the creation of a working museum, especially as many of the original workers' cottages and marine architects offices have survived alongside. This was, after all, the yard which build Admiral Lord Nelson's favourite ship, Agamemnon. He could see the advantages for both organisations in cross-promotional opportunities. In the event, that proved difficult and she was built at Merlin Quay



(renamed Jubilee Yard) in Southampton.

I have described the method of construction as traditional. This is not quite true. Since I am not in any way qualified to speak authoritatively on the techniques used, I can only summarise the paper given to the Trust's New Ship Committee, given by Paul Fisher of Selway Fisher in December 1993. In this, he promoted the advantages of cold moulded hull

construction over the more traditional carvel (flush plank) wood construction. As I understand it, cold moulding may simply mean the gluing together of thin pieces of wood with a modern synthetic glue into a stiff structural shell, or it can include all forms of wood construction where thin laminates of wood are in some way glued together. There are examples of laminated frames being constructed in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and other more crude examples in the centuries before. Plywood, I suppose, is the best known example of cold moulding.

The advantages of adopting such a construction include strengthening the timber by laying veneers at 90 degrees to each other, and the potential for reducing weight, by decreasing the number of frames. Laminated wood also has the advantage of allowing you to use less high quality timber while conversely improving its quality, and furthermore, there is usually less wastage. The wood, being thinner, is lighter and therefore easier to handle. Furthermore, very accurate mouldings and shapes can be achieved.

Another method of moulded construction is to make

We can't forget how other benefits may spring from the promotion of our maritime heritage.

the hull skin from a series of narrow strips glued edge to edge, enabling you to produce a beautiful round bilged hull without the need to acquire traditional boatbuilding skills. This may contradict my earlier comments about the importance of passing on those skills, but in the case of the Jubilee Sailing Trust, the use of volunteers and the disabled was important to the project.

It was this use of an unskilled labour force which was a key factor in determining the method chosen. The Trust recognised that this would take longer but decided that the advantages of involving both disabled and fully abled volunteers outweighed the disadvantages. Indeed, the costs of construction were partly aided by the practice of requiring unskilled volunteers to pay to participate for a week or two. Their fees were designed to cover all direct costs of their group, i.e. accommodation, catering, transport and the expense of employing a Safety Officer. They were, of course, additional to the full time skilled labour force which would actually outnumber the unskilled labourers by a factor of 3 to 2.

#### ■ THE SPECIAL FACILITIES ON BOARD BOTH SHIPS

- Flat, wide decks which facilitate access for wheelchair users.
- Lifts between decks for those with limited mobility - these can be operated by the user.
- A stair lift of the type used in the home.



- Vibrator pads fitted to the bunks which alert people who are deaf or hard of hearing in the event of an emergency.

- An induction loop is fitted in the lower mess room to assist those with hearing impairment during the briefing sessions.

- Wide aisles below decks and low level fittings.

- Guidance track on deck to help blind and visually impaired crew remain central.

- Tactile pointers

around the handrails on deck which indicate the direction of the bow and the stern.

- Bright track radar screen.

- Speaking compass with digital readout screen which enables blind people to steer the ship.

- Signs in Braille.

- Tactile surfaces at the top of stairways to alert blind crew.

- Power assisted hydraulic steering makes it easier for people with little strength to steer the ship.

- Throughout the ship, there are Unwin fixing points so that wheelchairs can be secured during rough weather.

#### ■ THE RESULTS

The results of all this hard work is that the Jubilee Sailing Trust now has two ships sailing under her flag. Between them, they have introduced thousands to the challenges and delights of sailing the seas, most of whom, especially those who are disabled, would not have been otherwise. I trust that some of them will have learnt and understood the importance of our maritime heritage.

## ■ CONCLUSION

Let me conclude with a short anecdote: my friend, Ian Shuttleworth, who is vice-chairman of Jubilee Sailing Trust, has been paralysed below the waist since a car accident when he was 25. On one voyage, he was ordered up the main mast in his wheelchair to help furl the sails as a storm was brewing up. From the top yard arm, he looked down at the pitching deck far below him.

«We must be mad to be up here» he cried to another man out on the yard arm helping to furl the sail.

«You do not think that I would be stupid enough to be out here if I could f\*\*\*\*\* well see, do you?» his colleague shouted back. He was totally blind.

I hope that this short and encapsulated case study will have shown you how other benefits may spring from the promotion of our maritime heritage. If you remember, that was used as a key to unlock funds. In my view, this is a two-way flow. The benefits of one accrue to the benefit of another. So, I will leave you with one question: how can we find a partner or activity which can enhance our own and widen our appeal, and so increase the audience we need to seduce?