

Shipping's exclusive forum

In the early 1980s, the catchphrase of stand-up comic Rodney Dangerfield was "I don't get no respect". He wasn't the only one: Clay Maitland, a well-known maritime figure in New York and one of three founding partners of the Admiralty Finance Forum, told *Fairplay*: "My relatives were partners at Goldman Sachs, yet I couldn't get them interested in shipping deals. That's how little respect it got in the 1970s and 1980s."

During the absolute nadir of the shipping markets, spring 1986, Maitland's company, International Registries, represented Liberia (rather than the Marshall Islands, as it has since the late 1990s).

The forum was launched by Maitland, Emery Harper (then a partner at Lord, Day & Lord) and the late Marlene Daniels (then a partner at Hill, Betts & Nash). The forum was a classy outfit, holding 'by invitation only' meetings in the libraries of venues like the New York Bar Building and the Century Association.

Contrast this with the inchoate Connecticut Maritime Association, then meeting at The Rusty Scupper, a maritime gin mill, or London's eponymous Bulls Head Group, holding monthly meetings near gritty Liverpool Street Station.

"It's twenty years later," Maitland noted, "but it was a stark contrast: in those days, we used to debate questions like where the capital would come from. Now, we have to chase money away."

The meetings, usually held in the evenings, would draw lawyers and bankers from New York but also from other

shipping markets such as Hamburg and London. Invited guests were a Who's Who of ship finance: "Jim Davis, then with Kleinwort Benson, was a regular and we were joined by Herr von Saydow – he ran ship finance at Deutsche Schiffsbank," Maitland recalled.

Referring to the comradeship and mission of the group, Emery Harper told *Fairplay*: "We were trying to bring optimism, while educating the bankers that restraint was needed.

"We sought out foreign speakers. At that time, UNCTAD's Liner Code loomed large; the developing countries also needed to learn about the workings of mortgages and ship registries. We wanted to create a venue for serious discussions about ways forward," Harper added.

Other stalwarts included Phil Loree (head of the influential Federation of American Controlled Shipping) and Charles Fabrikant (a lawyer by training then but now CEO of SEACOR). Paul Slater, the first speaker, was a frequent attendee. Harper described Slater as "one of our more controversial guests".

Ole Skaarup, like Loree a future CMA commodore, was "entertaining, with his serious message of revitalising US shipbuilding", he added.

In a sign of those grim times, another organisation was spawned in the 1980s, Davis's International Maritime Industries Forum in London.

The aim of the forum was to promote ship scrapping and

restraint in ship ordering.

This theme mirrored Harper's notion of "educating" the public. But London benefited from the gradual shift away from New York.

Harper, now consulting to a select coterie of clients, said: "It was about Eurodollars – the money was over there."

As the markets picked up in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the forum was known for great parties at Posidonia's Astir Palace.

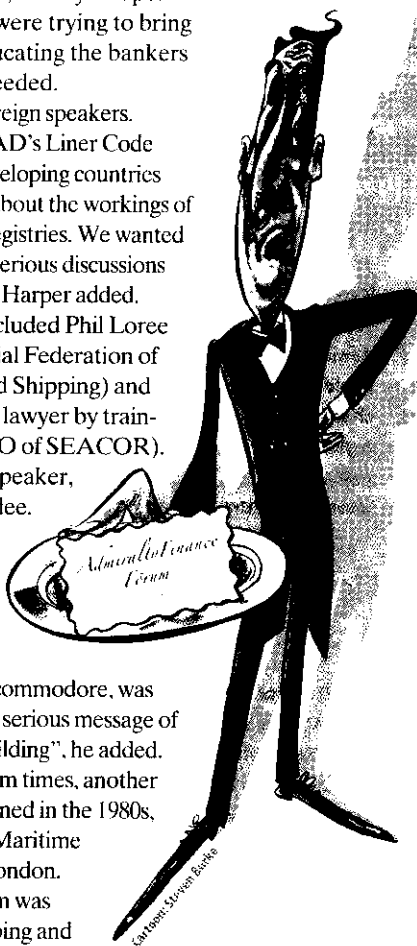
Harper remembered "a party at the Aphrodite pool, in either 1990 or 1992, where we filled the pool with balloons – it was Maitland's idea. Everybody loved it. It was a wonderfully elegant party; we had ice sculptures with Greek village motifs."

Times have changed two decades later. The forum has declined. As business picked up in the 1990s, Maitland and mortgage expert Harper both became very busy with registrations and mortgages. Daniels died in early 1997 after a two-year fight with cancer.

Harper commented: "One of the forum's enduring lessons was that the bankers needed to smarten up, and get beyond pure asset-based finance. Look at deals now – it's all about corporate finance and project finance."

The New York Maritime has meanwhile started up with "a broader mission. It includes the entire maritime cluster, arbitrators, insurance people, surveyors, all types of providers," Maitland added. "Today, we have the Marine Money Conferences and the CMA events. These are modelled after what we were doing at the Admiralty Finance Forum." Harper added: "The optimism you see now – it wasn't always that way." ■

Barry Parker



50 years ago in *Fairplay*

ANTHONY Eden lied to the House of Commons on 20 December 1956 that Britain had not plotted secretly with France and Israel to attack Egypt.

The US had already vetoed an International Monetary Fund loan for cash-strapped Britain as a furious reaction to the news of the alleged conspiracy.

Obsessed with defending the pound, the UK government pledged to pull all troops from Suez on 3 December. By 22 December, Anglo-French withdrawal would be complete. The UN had still not deared the canal of 40 vessels deliberately sunk by the Nasser government.

Fairplay reported on the reorganisation of world tanker movements to respond to the crisis, reckoning that shipments from the Western Hemisphere, added to what could be moved from the Middle East, would meet about four-fifths of Western Europe's needs. Aubrey Jones, the UK's fuel and power minister, calculated the extra cost of bringing Middle East oil round the Cape. It was about two pounds and 10 shillings per tonne, which works out at £41.82 at today's values. ■

Neil McAlister