2013 - Another year on - the Chicken & the Egg

[illegible]

Why change?

[illegible]

Message

[illegible]

What do we value?

[illegible]

What can you do?

[illegible]

Fine

[illegible]

2012: Intriguing and relevant stories

Take Tangier for example, one of those strategic and highly fascinating maritime places in the world. Over 1600 years old, this African port city opposite Europe has been a centre of commerce, clashing cultures and powers, political and military interests. After – as we all know – Jupiter's son Hercules (Heracles) formed the Strait of Gibraltar by splitting the mountain of Calpa (Gibraltar) and Abyla (Ceuta), Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Vandals, Arabs and Berbers, Portuguese, English and to some extend, French, Spanish and Americans have occupied and governed the city or at least influenced the history of Tangier.

The United States dedicated its first consulate in Tangier during the George Washington administration and in the twentieth century the city became 'international territory' (1923). In this way the main political and maritime powers of the time, including the UK, USA, the Netherlands, France and the young Soviet Union, tried to keep the Mediterranean open to all nations.

In the same period Tangier attracted numerous artists from Europe and the US who were drawn by the exotic African-oriental atmosphere. Delacroix was there and so were Matisse, James Mc Bey, George Aperley and Francis Bacon. The American composer-novelist Paul Bowles, best known for his ominous novel 'The Sheltering Sky', lived there for 52 years. Needless to say, Tangier, like Casablanca, was an international spy nest during World War II.

But there were other reasons too why the international city attracted many 'westerners'. Where did Sebastian Flyte, one of the two leading characters in Evelyn Waugh's 'Brideshead Revisited' (1945) go to, tormented as he was by family relations, a puzzled sexual identity and alcohol? Right. Tangier. There existed a forbidden, hidden, but well known gay scene, and kif, the traditional drug from the Rif area, was available in abundance. Another two decades later pot smoking rockers like the Rolling Stones and many others landed in Tangier on their way to Marrakesh.

Mette Marie B

For many years I knew Tangier only by literature and by an old photo of an interesting three masted motor schooner with the lines of a drifter and a very Scandinavian wheelhouse. I have been fascinated by these workhorses of the coastal trade since the 1970s when I became involved in tracing and preserving them and in converting some of them to the fine sailing vessels they once were.

My primary interest then was in the vessel and not in the background of the picture. Nowadays I would like to know what Alice Bryld, the Danish owner of the ship, did in Tangier, only five years after World War II. And why had the ship a ‘G’ in her funnel? In 1950 postbox companies for tax reasons hardly existed. Vessels like *Mette Marie B* usually worked in the Baltic and North Sea area. When they had became out of date technically and economically they were sold to the Caribbean and the Mediterranean, but that process first started in the 1970s.

I surmise an interesting story. A maritime story in origin, but probably much broader, given Tangier’s international status, business opportunities and multicultural climate.

Mare

That kind of interest is the core business of the German magazine Mare (www.mare.de). For over ten years now this monthly glossy is publishing very well researched and illustrated articles about ‘everything connected to the sea’, varying from hard core historical items to literature, maritime art, navy, beach culture, architecture, anthropology, marine biology and so on. Unfortunately this magazine with a global maritime scope is published only in German, but the versatility and quality of its articles make me jealous. Jealous because a magazine can tell other, and perhaps more, stories than a museum can. Many interesting maritime topics can be told by photo, written text, film, radio even, but they are, by lack of three dimensional objects, less appropriate to be communicated through an exhibition. I know, the internet has broadened our possibilities, but still. . .

Broaden our scope

Nevertheless, finding new intriguing stories which are relevant to our present and future audience, has more to do with our own scope and drive to find them, then with our means of communication. In this respect globalisation helps us. The Tangier example I mention proves that. Tangier, in its maritime aspects, is directly relevant for at least more than a handful of countries in Africa, Europe and The Middle East. In a broader cultural perspective a few dozen countries, from the US to the former Soviet Union and from Turkey to Scandinavia had, and have, their special ties with this maritime city.

And this is where ICMM and its new website comes in. There are more ‘Tangier’s’ in the world and it is up to us as maritime museum professionals to detect them; to make them known to our colleagues and to our audience. This is an invitation to broaden your own scope and to help your fellow curators, directors, educators to broaden theirs.

Send your stories to Alan Edenborough alanedenborough@mac.com in Sydney and you will find them published on www.icmmonline.org the next day.

And please, who can tell me what Alice Bryld did in Tangier in 1950?

Frits