



## Annual Conference Report 2023

The British Tugowners Association (BTA) Annual General Meeting & Conference took place at the Clayton Hotel, Glasgow, on 17 May. The event brought together over 70 industry leaders, experts, and regulators to discuss pressing matters and topics of interest in the industry.

The preceding day saw members undertake friendly competition at the Annual Golf Competition for the Sir William Crosthwaite Cup. The Conference closed with the annual dinner, address from the Chairman and the inaugural awarding of the BTA Lifetime Achievement Award.



The British Tugowners Association Conference 2023 was kindly sponsored by Damen Shipyards (Gold) and SCHOTTEL (Bronze)



## Annual General Meeting – 17 May 2023

At the 86<sup>th</sup> AGM, Mr Nick Jeffery, of Ostensjo / Solent Towage was confirmed as the Chairman to replace the outgoing Scott Baker of Svitzer who had served the BTA as Chairman for three years from 2020 - 2023 and aptly guided it through the tumultuous period of Covid-19.

The Chairman's report to the AGM is included at Annex A.

## The Conference

The BTA was pleased to welcome Kevin Stewart MSP, Scotland's, Minister for Transport, to provide a keynote on the Scottish Government's vision for the maritime industry and its significant importance to the businesses, communities and visitors of Scotland.



*(Left to Right - Nick Jeffery, Kevin Stewart MSP, Scott Baker, Sarah Treseder)*

The CEO of the Chamber of Shipping, Sarah Treseder, followed highlighting the strategic priorities of the UK Chamber of Shipping and the need for collaboration and horizon scanning among industry stakeholders. She emphasised how the Chamber, of which the BTA is a part, would be advising, advocating, advancing and amplifying the concerns of the towage industry to government and beyond to ensure the UK towage sector continues to thrive. Further details of the UK Chamber of Shipping's new strategic plan are available on the website here - [Our Mission | UK Chamber of Shipping](#).

The Conference heard from a range of other distinguished speakers including representatives from the National Shipbuilding Office (NSO), Damen Shipyards, Peel Ports and SCHOTTEL.

Rod Paterson, Deputy Director of the NSO spoke about the challenges facing the industry and UK government's ambitions for UK shipbuilding. By 2030 they aim to be at the forefront of the technological and environmental innovations driving the maritime sector. They also shared their 30-year pipeline with the attendees given an in-depth insight into the long-term future of UK shipbuilding.



Damen Shipyards presented on their plans to become the most sustainable and connected shipbuilders in the world. They provided analysis on the benefits and problems of alternative fuels such as biodiesel and methanol as well as sharing the design and build process of the world's first electric tug – Sparky.

Clydeport outlined their forward-looking strategies and initiatives to foster sustainable and environmentally friendly port expansion. Recognising the imminent challenges posed by climate change, Clydeport acknowledged its responsibility to tackle these issues head-on. It was

highlighted that both shipping and ports possessed the necessary resources, expertise, and technological advancements to offer innovative solutions, thereby addressing the global energy demands in an eco-conscious manner.

SCHOTTEL showcased their range of thruster and propeller technologies and offered insights into their unique solutions to issues such as underwater radiated noise (URN) and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Their impressive URN solutions offer live on-board monitoring and they have already established a partnership with BC Ferries, with application of this knowledge possible to the wider shipping industry.



The Conference's final session, given by SoSRep, React Emergency Response, and Targe Towing discussed the importance of the towage industry in the firefighting and salvaging of ships, the roles and responsibilities of differing stakeholders and the vitality of effective communications to be able handle an emergency rapidly and safety.

As said, it is unlikely there will be an optimal outcome, and it is often about choosing the least worst outcome. Discussion around this with the growing adoption of alternative fuel and power systems in the shipping industry drew particular attention.

The conclusion of the Conference was followed by the Annual Dinner, offering delegates a valuable opportunity to contemplate and engage in meaningful discussions on the day's enlightening presentations and key takeaways. A noteworthy highlight of the evening was the recognition given to Paul Escreet, Chairman of SMS Towage, as he received the BTA Lifetime Achievement award in honour of his contributions to the towage industry throughout his 50-year career. During his acceptance speech, Mr. Escreet reflected upon the challenges he encountered while establishing SMS Towage, emphasising the crucial importance of sustained and open dialogue to equip the towage industry with the necessary tools to overcome future obstacles.

The Golf, Conference and Dinner served as a valuable platform for industry leaders and stakeholders to discuss, horizon scan, network across crucial issues including sustainability, safety, and more. The BTA expresses its sincere gratitude to Damen Shipyards, Schottel, and Sanmar Shipyards for sponsoring the event, as well as to all the speakers for their engaging and insightful presentations.

## **The Annual Golf Competition – 16 May**

The Ralston Golf Club, in South Glasgow, hosted the Sir William Crosthwaite Cup, bringing together towage professionals, industry leaders and golf enthusiasts, for an unforgettable day on the fairways and greens.

Attendees enjoyed a day filled with friendly competition, networking opportunities, as well as a display of both excellent and dubious golfing skills. Throughout the day participants had the chance to forge new partnerships, exchange business ideas, and gain insights from industry experts. The event not only promoted professional and personal connections but also encouraged the sharing of knowledge and fostering collaboration within the towage community.



The Sir William Crosthwaite Cup was deservedly won by Josh Metcalfe, who now holds the prestigious award until 2024.

The Sir William Crosthwaite Cup was kindly sponsored by Sanmar Shipyards

*Vimal Choy – Sanmar Shipyards presenting the Cup to Josh Metcalfe*

## **Chairman's Report to the AGM 2023 – given by Scott Baker of Svitzer**

### **Annex A**

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen and thank you for joining the 88<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of the British Tugowners Association founded back in 1934. This building in which we are assembled, is the old Customs House of Glasgow. For more than 180 years it provided a direct link from the Clyde River and quayside to the city, standing as the entry point for traders to pay taxes prior to bringing goods in. And it is a reminder that those goods were carried on ships, many of which were assisted by tugs, pilots, and stevedores as part of the port ecosystem which is essential to economic prosperity and security.

My tenure as Chairman of the British Tugowners Association is finally ending. It was a considerable privilege to take on Chairmanship of the Association in 2020, albeit remotely, and at home in my garden. And I'm indebted to our Honorary President Tom Woolley for kindly recommending that I take on an extra-ordinary third year as Chairman in 2022 considering the extra-ordinary chaos and confusion caused by Covid-19. I say that, but in truth I now have a greater understanding as to why the chairmanship only lasts the two years.

I am delighted that today, I get to hand over the baton to someone that has been involved in the towage industry for many years and has brought so much to the BTA and wider towage industry throughout that time.

Last year I reported how the Association membership had expanded, and this year it gives me great pleasure to confirm that the Association celebrates the growth of the BTA member's fleet through the recent nominations and approvals of Foyle Port of Londonderry, David Ferran & Sons of Belfast, and Itchen Marine from Southampton. We look forward to working together. I remain of the firm belief that the Association should be welcoming of all operators that assist in the movement of object, or the arrival and departure of vessels, wherever they are across the UK and whatever their operations. The Association has also welcomed Polestar Publishing and Schottel into Associate membership since the last AGM and we should celebrate how this class of membership has grown into a wide network of expertise and contacts from which to draw advice and information.

The Technical Committee goes from strength to strength, with the publication of the Recovery of Persons in Water (PIW) - Guide to Good Practice for Small Vessels a case in point. Launched at last November's Annual Safety Seminar in Edinburgh, the guide has been well received across industry. The contributions received from, collaboration with the Workboat Association, recovery experts, and industry have been invaluable. To have the Guide endorsed by Professor Mike Tipton MBE, the leading international expert on cold-water immersion and environmental physiology shows the quality of the product and its importance to crews and operators alike. "In the area of cold-water survival, knowledge equals survivability."

Yet our industry continues to face challenges and experience tragedy. It would be remiss not to mention the loss of the Biter and her two crew. Our thoughts extend to the families, friends, and colleagues of those who lost their lives. Such events serve as a stark reminder of the dangers involved in towage, an inherently risky activity where there is no room for complacency when it comes to safety. There is and will remain an ongoing need to raise safety

awareness and further develop best practice in the potentially hazardous environment in which tugs operate. I sincerely hope that the industry is able to glean some valuable insight from the MAIB investigation.

Additionally, to the core tenet of safety, the Association is engaged and horizon scanning across the breadth of the industry and wider maritime areas. With rapidly increasing importance are the areas of, decarbonisation and environmental protection, digitalisation and autonomy, and future skills. The Association has never been more relevant and must challenge and inform these topics as change approaches. To best do this, the Association is and must continue to foster and nurture strong positive collaborative working relationships with other associations, groupings, and government departments.

To name but a few these include the British Ports Association, European Tugowners Association, International Harbour Masters Association, Port Skills & Safety, UK Harbour Masters Association, UK Maritime Pilots Association, and Workboat Association. Fostering collaborative relationships is easy, but it requires openness and transparency, and most importantly an appreciation that partners have their own priorities and strategic goals and that agreement on all topics is simply not achievable. And that is where the strength of such relationships is important.

Perspective is everything. And from the perspective of the BTA, towage is everything. This was brought into sharp focus recently on two topics.

Firstly, we received word from several leads that the International Harbour Masters Association wished to produce a new publication, an international best practice guide to harbour towage, and desired input and expertise from the BTA. Why? And what do they hope to achieve? Only through dialogue do we now understand the guide is not intended to show anyone how to drive tugs, but to provide Harbour Masters globally with high-level advice on towage planning, risk assessment, using tugs, and a greater understanding of training and assessment, communications, and here our expertise can be put to good use for the collective enhancement of safe operations.

The second matter concerns on the MCA's Workboat Code 3.

MCA Codes have been a vital tool in the construction and general compliance of small craft for decades and they are a credit to the Workboat Association insofar as the active involvement of WA members and experts has led a de-facto self-regularity approach to previous updates very much in line with the way Government wishes to see industries evolve. But Version 3 appears to be a step too far. Attempting to harmonise too many topics is unfortunate, but most worryingly, the draft section that concerns towage omitted, either the detail or reference to the learnings from tragic events, such as the Flying Phantom, and the years of work on towing winch performance and survey standards that the Association has worked so hard to put in place.

To be clear, these areas will be worked through and issues resolved. The Association's membership and network of associates, coupled with our wide industry stakeholders are all part of the mechanism through which we find the solution. Horizon scanning is vital, but it only becomes meaningful, even potent when it is married with decades of experience to shape and inform the future.

This morning's Annual General Meeting will follow the usual order, however as Chairman I must clarify and apologise that the normal process for inviting nominations for the Executive Committee ahead of the AGM as per the Constitution did not take place. I offer my apologies and that of the Secretariat for the clerical oversight. Instead, the same Executive Committee as last year, who have all registered their appetite and willingness to remain will be proposed for election this morning, with a full and open nominations process to take place in June. As Chairman, I thank you for your backing and support on this and look forward to a full day of interest, discussion and networking as the Association goes into its 89<sup>th</sup> year.

***Scott Baker – 17 May 2023***