

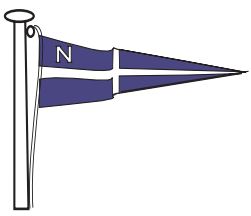
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SPRING 2005



*HMS Amethyst and a Sunderland flying boat under fire from Chinese guns.
From an oil painting by Timothy O'Brian*

**NEWPORT USKMOUTH
SAILING CLUB.**



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CLUB MATTERS

MOORING MEETING

The mooring meeting took place as usual on the 9th of February and was the usual lively affair. In spite of there being about 90 members present it was all over very quickly and most of us were on our way home by 9:30.

AGM

The AGM took place on Wednesday 23rd February and due to the bad weather was not well attended with only about 80 members present. This was the lowest turnout I remember. A number of new rules were introduced, one was modified and the club found itself in a position of being advised to introduce a child protection policy on the advice of the R.Y.A. (Not the I.R.A. as I was saying on the night). The rules are itemised on pages 6 and 7. Please take note because they may affect you. A precis of the retiring commodores address is reproduced below for those who missed the affair.

The retiring Commodore spoke of how quickly after taking office he found that a commodores life could be filled with difficulties as within a week of taking over, the problem with the bar registration certificate surfaced that caused a great deal of work and running about by a number of the committee. He also discovered the "Commodore's finger" effect, where members with an axe to grind would inevitably level their finger at you. He also spoke of his pleasure at the success of many of the projects and promised the plans were in place to complete a number of long overdue works.

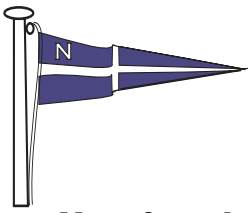
The commodore then drew the members attention to the fact that a great majority of the work done in and for the club was done by a minority of the members and asked all members to look at whether they could do more and become involved in the running of the club. The fact that we need to get on with our neighbours was emphasised, particularly the management of the power station and the docks harbour master and charged the members to do nothing to cause problems or ill feeling, mainly by staying within the bounds of rules, good manners and good seamanship. He closed by thanking all those who had helped throughout his term of office and in particular his wife, who had worked tirelessly on behalf of the membership. He then handed over to the Commodore elect.

SECURITY

Those members paying their dues will notice that the power station is reinstating the magnetic card reader system to permit automatic entry to those with the right to do so. The system will be up and running sometime in March. You will receive your card when you pay up (if you haven't already). When the clubs automatic security gate is completed it is hoped that we will be able to use the same card to permit entry into the club grounds.

NEW YEARS EVE

The new years eve bash this year was well organised by the caravan section of the club and apparently a good time was had by all who attended.



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Notes from the Commodore.

There's been some chat on one of the sailing forums recently about mooring security, and specifically the attitude of insurance companies when a mooring gives way and a boat is damaged. Apparently, an increasing number of companies require a professional inspection of moorings every 12 months, and many will demand evidence of maintenance if an accident occurs.

Our moorings are very secure - I can't remember a boat going walkabout. Nevertheless, members need to be made aware that should this happen, their insurance company might well expect real evidence of maintenance. Perhaps members should check what their insurance companies requirements are.

Also, the committee mean to address the growing problem of dead, half dead and rotting boats at the back of the compound. To this end a new rule has been passed to allow the owners of boats that have not launched, without good reason, for three years to be charged an additional storage fee.

THE LAUNCH

The main launch will be over the weekend of the 16th and 17th of April. The heavy launch will be on the 18th. Please come along to help, even if you are not going to be launching yourself. At the Club launch, members will be asked to provide their email addresses (the lowest cost method of communication!).

Work parties

Work parties for the next 3 weekends to upgrade the amenity block.

Included in this will be a central heating system for the showers, toilets, rear lounge, bar, rear foyer as well as hot water.

We have team actively looking at extending the overnight pontoon. Comprises Chris & Pete Roberts, Mike Jones-Downing and myself. We would appreciate a couple more members joining in. Ray Fradd and Jim Warrington are providing knowledge!

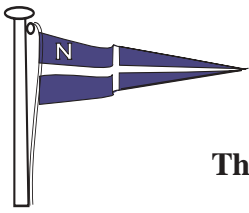
It is hoped that increased overnight capacity will encourage visitors to NUSC and our Members to attend functions.

TALK TO US

The Committee would welcome views from Members that do not attend Club functions. Any special reason? What can we do to make events more attractive?

IMPORTANT DATES

Eve of season Dinner	26th	March	Cruiser Rally	28/9th	May
Regatta	10/11th	Sept	Trafalgar Night	22nd	Oct
Laying up Supper	12th	Nov	Carol Service	10th	Dec
Childrens Christmas party	11th	Dec			



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The following changes and additions to rules were introduced at the AGM.

Rule 4.1F

In the event that the general committee membership falls below the minimum number permissible under the rules above, either through mid term retirement, sickness or because insufficient members were elected at the AGM, then the quorum will be temporarily reduced proportionally, rounded up to the nearest whole number to a minimum of six.

Rule 6.14

An amendment has been proposed to this rule that states that "This shall not apply to small vessels such as dinghies or trailer sailors 18 feet in length or less that are kept on a road trailer."

Rule 6.15 (PLEASE TAKE NOTE)

The owner of any yacht or boat, other than a dinghy, who has not launched that boat without what is considered by the committee to be a good reason for a period of three years will become liable for an additional charge for storage of £1.00 per foot per month. This rule to be applied from the first of February 2008.

By Law 9.0 Policy statement on child protection

9.0 Policy statement on child protection

The child's welfare is paramount.

All children whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, religious belief, and/or sexual identity, have the right to protection from abuse.

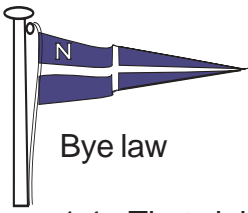
All suspicions and allegations of inappropriate behaviour will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.

As defined in the Children's Act 1989, anyone under the age of 18 years should be considered as a child for the purposes of this document.

9.1 Any member having reason to be concerned for the safety or well-being of any minor whilst on club property should do whatever he or she feels is necessary to secure the safety of that child and report any concerns or incidents to a committee member or child protection officer as soon as possible.

9.2 On receipt of such a report described at (1) above the committee member or child protection officer should adopt and follow the NUSC/RYA code of practice in investigating the matter. (A copy of the procedure is kept in the committee office)

9.3 Parents must ensure that their children stay within the confines of the club grounds at all times. Parents and children should be aware of the dangers from trains, commercial traffic and industrial vehicles that use the power station roads. The access road is for lawful access and egress from the club only, members or their families should not stray off the access road and children should never be permitted on the access road without the company of a parent or guardian.



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Bye law

1.1a That club membership cost be increased to £ 140.00 per annum plus £2.00 donation to RNLI.

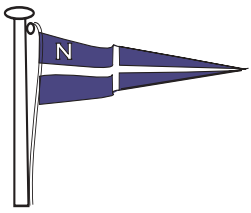
After all this serious stuff you probably need a laugh, try these gems of wisdom.

1. If you're too open minded, your brains will fall out.
2. Age is a very high price to pay for maturity.
3. Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than going to a garage makes you a mechanic.
4. Artificial intelligence is no match for natural stupidity.
5. If you must choose between two evils, pick the one you've never tried before.
6. My idea of housework is to sweep the room with a glance.
7. Not one shred of evidence supports the notion that life is serious.
8. It is easier to get forgiveness than permission.
9. For every action, there is an equal and opposite government program.
10. If you look like your passport picture, you probably need the trip.
11. Bills travel through the mail at twice the speed of cheques.
12. A conscience is what hurts when all your other parts feel good.
13. Eat well, stay fit, die anyway.
14. Men are from earth. Women are from earth. Deal with it.
15. No husband has ever been shot while doing the dishes.
16. A balanced diet is a pint in each hand.
17. Middle age is when broadness of the mind and narrowness of the waist change places.
18. Opportunities always look bigger going than coming.
19. Junk is something you've kept for years and throw away three weeks before you need it.
20. There is always one more imbecile than you counted on.
21. Experience is a wonderful thing. It enables you to recognize a mistake when you make it again.
22. By the time you can make ends meet, they move the ends.
23. Thou shalt not weigh more than thy refrigerator.
24. Someone who thinks logically provides a nice contrast to the real world.
25. Blessed are they who can laugh at themselves for they shall never cease to be amused.

Seen in a recent newspaper advertisement.

WANTED: 30 Chinese men and an airship for elaborate practical joke. Can you help?

Makes you wonder doesn't it.



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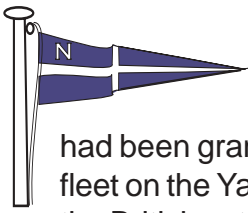
HMS Amethyst and "Simon"

In May 1948, a gangly green-eyed black-and-white Tom cat was found wandering alone and hungry on Hong Kong's Stonecutters Island by the Amethyst's captain, Lieutenant-Commander Bernard Skinner, and so it was that two year-old Able Seacat Simon joined the ship's complement. Cats had long been popular as shipboard mascots in the Royal Navy, not least for their pest-control skills, but also because of their remarkable ability to adapt to new surroundings in a manner which will surprise only those who have never chosen to share their lives with them. Even in wartime, they proved completely unaffected by the often frantic activity around them, to the point where un-neutered Toms and queens sharing the same ship were known to produce healthy kittens even under shell-fire! The sailors themselves - a notoriously superstitious breed - valued the cats for their uncanny intuition, as well as their near-miraculous survival abilities. One cat, known as "U-Boat," would immediately go ashore whenever his ship went came into port, and only return shortly before departure, often with less than thirty minutes to spare. When on one occasion he did not reappear, it was immediately taken as a bad omen by the crew, but just as the ship was casting off, U-Boat was spotted running down the jetty. Launching himself across the widening gap between pier and ship, he landed perfectly on the deck, where he proceeded to sit calmly washing himself. Legend also has it that when the German pocket battleship Bismarck was sunk, its cat survived to be adopted by the British crew that rescued it, and again when their ship was sunk. Thereafter, the cat was only posted to Royal Navy shore stations! With the war over, most ship's cats settled down to a more routine existence, and Simon's initial service was no exception, although having been found by the captain himself, he perhaps enjoyed a few more perks and a bit more tolerance than most. He slept on Lt-Cdr Skinner's bunk, and was even permitted to plod across the chart table while he was trying to plot a course, while his party trick to entertain officers and their guests was fishing ice-cubes out of a jug of water. Although on active service in a world in which Britain's declining colonial responsibilities still led to skirmishes large and small, his life should have been a relatively safe one....



HOWEVER

In 1949, as the civil war between the opposing Chinese Communists under Mao Tse-tung and Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists was going on, the Amethyst was ordered to proceed up the Yangtze River to Nanking. Although under the 1858 Treaty of Tientsin the Royal Navy



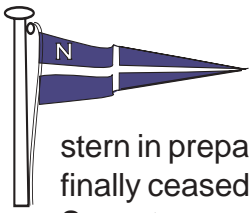
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had been granted the freedom of navigation in all Chinese waters and had maintained a fleet on the Yangtze for nearly a century, some observers have since questioned whether the British actually had any right to operate on the Yangtze by 1949. While the Nationalists tacitly honoured the Treaty, the Communists had declared otherwise. By the time the Amethyst was ordered to Nanking, the Communists had reached the North bank of the Yangtze, while the Nationalists held the South side. Although there was a temporary truce, it would expire on April 20, and if the Communists were not allowed to pass unopposed, they would make an assault crossing on April 21.

On the morning of April 19, the Amethyst slipped her moorings at Shanghai, and proceeded up-river at a leisurely 11 knots. Despite the previous antagonistic declarations by the Communists, it was not seriously expected that they would attack the ship, but even so live ammunition was prepared as a precautionary measure. By late afternoon, she was a hundred miles from Shanghai, and dropped anchor at Kiang Yin. The journey recommenced on April 20, and at 07:30 the Lt-Cdr Skinner advised the crew that they were about to enter the war-zone. At 08:31, a Communist field gun battery fired a salvo of twelve shells from the North bank, but they all fell well clear of the ship, so it was assumed they were part of a routine bombardment of the Nationalists on the other side of the River. Even so, two large freshly-painted canvas Union Jacks that Skinner had had prepared earlier were hung over the side of the ship, while speed was raised to the 19 knot maximum until they were out of range of the apparently errant battery.

At 09:20, as the frigate approached the village of San-Chiang-ying, another Communist battery opened up, and this time there was no doubt as to their intentions. As the first shell screamed closely over the ship, the Amethyst went to Action Stations, and again the ship's turbines whined to full-power, but it was too late. A second shell scored a direct hit on the wheelhouse, leaving only Leading Seaman Leslie Frank on his feet, desperately trying to hold course, even with the engine-room telegraph and the gyro-compass out of action. Communication with the bridge was also cut, as it too had been hit in the first salvo, killing or wounding virtually every man there. Lt-Cdr Skinner, bleeding profusely and barely conscious, ordered the Amethyst to return fire, an instruction which was passed on by First-Lieutenant Geoffrey Weston, even though he himself had a bad chest wound. With the wheelhouse disabled, the ship slewed out of control into the muddy bank of Rose Island at 09:35, while her antagonists continued to pound her with 75 and 105mm shells. At what was effectively point-blank range, even steel armour plating was next to useless. Shells exploded in the sick bay, the Port engine room, and finally the generator, just after 1st-Lt Weston's last transmission: "Under heavy fire. Am aground in approx position 31.10' North 119.50' East. Large number of casualties." With the main gun turrets hit and inoperable, some of the unwounded crew took up sniping positions with rifles and Bren guns, but their undeclared enemy brought up heavy machine-guns to rake the decks, further hampering efforts to get the dozens of injured crewmen below. The slaughter was almost unimaginable, the blood flowing across the deck into the scuppers.

Realising the gravity of their situation, Weston ordered the immediate evacuation of most of the crew, and everyone capable of swimming was ordered over the side, while the non-swimmers and walking wounded used the only one of the ship's boats left undamaged. Fifty-nine ratings and four Chinese mess boys made it to the Southern bank, but several more were cut down in the water before reaching safety. Those that survived were taken to a nearby Nationalist Army hospital, and afterwards trucked back to Shanghai. Back aboard the Amethyst, a towing hawser had been rigged at the

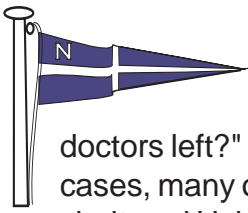


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stern in preparation for the expected arrival of HMS Consort, and while the shelling had finally ceased, sporadic machine-gun fire was still aimed at any movement on the ship. Seventeen men were dead and twenty-five were seriously wounded. Lt-Cdr Skinner drifted in and out of consciousness, while one of the Chinese river pilots who had been aboard at the time was in such intense agony from a horrific head-wound that he tried to commit suicide by swallowing his own tongue.

At the time of the attack, Simon was asleep in the captain's cabin when it took a direct hit, the shell blasting a 15" hole in the bulkhead three feet from where he was curled up. He was thrown into the air and landed heavily, lying motionless on a debris-strewn gangway. Simon was picked up and carried below. His whiskers and eyebrows had been burnt off, and his singed fur was matted with grime and the blood from numerous shell splinter gashes to his back and both his left legs. The shards of metal were carefully removed from his wounds, and he was made as comfortable as possible, though nobody expected him to last the night. Around 14:30, two Nationalist aircraft arrived and began strafing the Communist positions, and a few minutes later HMS Consort was sighted racing towards the stricken Amethyst at 29 knots - the highest speed ever recorded on the Yangtze River. Flying three Union Jacks and seven White Ensigns, and with black smoke belching from her funnel, when she too became the target of the Communists she replied without hesitation, quickly knocking out three of the enemy guns. Urgent signals passed between the ships: the Consort's captain, Commander Robertson, wanted to take the Amethyst in tow, but Weston refused to countenance it, knowing that she would also become an easy target. Sweeping past, Consort turned around half a mile downstream, but again came under fire as she neared the Amethyst. With ten men dead and three seriously injured, Robertson was forced to admit defeat, and so turned again and headed down-river. A sense of dread swept over those still aboard the Amethyst, but even amidst the human carnage, With pieces of shrapnel in his lungs and liver, dosed with morphia for the pain and benzedrine to keep him awake, 1st-Lt Weston tried to get the ship refloated. On the second attempt, at 01:15 the next morning, she slipped off the mudbank and limped slowly two miles up-river, dropping anchor out of range of the main Communist batteries. Meanwhile, Weston's signal had also been received at Shanghai by Vice-Admiral Madden, second-in-command of the China Station, who decided to take the cruiser London and the Amethyst's sister-ship, HMS Black Swan, up-river at dawn on April 21. A few hours later a Sunderland flying boat took off from Hong Kong and also headed North. The two ships arrived at 11:30 and also came under attack, but the London's powerful 8-inch guns were unable to locate any definite target, and with her captain and fourteen other crew members dead, she too withdrew. Madden signalled the Amethyst: "Am sorry we cannot help you today. We shall keep on trying."

Weston sought the help of the Chinese Nationalists, who sent one of their doctors, Chu Wei, but without anaesthetic or drugs, there was little he could do beyond change the dressings of the wounded. Having first flown to Shanghai to refuel, the Sunderland landed near the Amethyst at 16:00 with much-needed supplies and an RAF Medical Officer, but when the Communists opened fire on the plane, the ship's chief gunner and one of the doctor's who had gone across to meet it in a fishing boat were inadvertently trapped as the pilot was forced to make an emergency take-off. The RAF medic was left stranded on the boat with a fisherman who spoke no English, but a drawn revolver and a gesture towards the Amethyst got the message across. Climbing aboard the Amethyst, Flight-Lieutenant Fearnley found himself on a ship which resembled a front-line dressing station. "Good God," he exclaimed, "Doesn't the Navy have any



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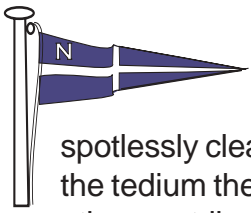
doctors left?" With Dr Chu Wei, he arranged for the evacuation of the most serious cases, many of whom required amputations. Weston then moved the ship into the more sheltered Hsiao-Ho Creek. The Nationalists had already retreated, the Amethyst was now totally surrounded by Communist forces.



Simon, meanwhile, had made a miraculous recovery, surviving that first night when he had been expected to join the list of fatalities, and though still severe, his wounds were starting to heal, while his hearing seemed unaffected by his close proximity to the shell-blast. It was not a moment too soon. Disturbed by the shelling, hoards of rats had started to raid the ship's dwindling food supplies and were even invading the sleeping quarters. Much of the Amethyst's fuel oil had had to be dumped to lighten the ship during the refloating, so what was left had to be conserved, even to the point of switching off the ventilation system. As the crewmen tried to rest in the increasingly stifling heat, the rats were literally nibbling at their toes, and Simon wasn't having any of that, so Kerans, a replacement captain for the seriously wounded Weston, who had been spirited aboard, gave him a "roving commission," as he was best-suited to deal with the vermin. Slightly-cosseted captain's cat he may have previously been, the skills he must have had good need of when a stray on Stonecutters Island came back with a vengeance. When he caught his first large rat, the boost to the crew's morale was unimaginable; in a situation in which surrender might have seemed preferable, his devotion to his ship and his shipmates was an inspiration, and he did not fail them, making on average at least one kill every day.

On April 26, the local Communist commander, Major Kung, opened negotiations for the safe passage of the Amethyst. The Major revealed that he commanded the battery which had fired on the Amethyst, and - to much satisfaction - that more than 250 of his men had been killed when the Royal Navy ships had returned fire.

During the weeks of captivity which followed, the crew were kept as occupied as possible, so much of the original battle damage was eventually repaired, and the ship was kept



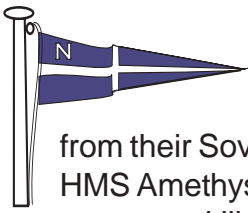
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spotlessly clean. But coupled with the debilitating effect of the constant heat and humidity, the tedium the crew faced would have had a more adverse effect were it not for Simon's other contribution. While he showed no mercy with the rats, he was often to be found comforting his shipmates, and along with Peggy, the ship's four year-old terrier (with whom he apparently got on well), he provided a vital focus of reminding the men of the domesticity of home some thought they might never see again. Simon and Peggy were invaluable simply for being themselves.

By the beginning of July, the crew was on half rations, with bread being issued only twice a week, while after every meeting with Colonel Kang, the chief Chinese negotiator, warned: "If you move your ship, every effort will be made to destroy it. If you do not, all will be well." Unfortunately, while escape was hardly the last thing on the new captain's mind, he was hampered by a Chinese embargo on new supplies of fuel oil, and what was already left in the ship's bunkers would not be sufficient for a dash to Shanghai. Unexpectedly, on July 11, the blockade was inexplicably lifted, and the Amethyst took delivery of 54 tons of oil. Kerans calculated that taking account of what would be needed to run the auxiliary equipment in situ, they would not have enough to escape after July 30. During the next nineteen days, Kerans issued some unusual orders, including that the anchor chain should be wrapped in blankets and heavily greased, and that black canvas sheeting be prepared to cover certain sections of the superstructure because of, "ineffective blackout," at night. It was only towards the end of the month that he took some of the officers into his confidence, as well as Vice-Admiral Madden by way of a cleverly-worded radio message ostensibly referring to a typhoon expected to pass close by. At 18:00 on July 30 the rest of the crew were informed that in four hours time they would attempt to slip away.

Just before 22:09, a merchant vessel - the Kiang Ling Liberation - appeared heading down-river, solving Kerans' primary worry about whether they could negotiate the deep-water channel without a pilot. Its chain muffled by the blankets and grease, the anchor was raised, and the canvas sheeting on the upper deck would hopefully disguise her outline sufficiently to fool any observers on the banks. Dropping astern of the Chinese ship, the Amethyst followed for around 15 minutes before the Communists realised she had gone, and flares arched skyward from the Taiching shore battery. A patrol boat was spotted coming out of the gloom, but it inexplicably opened fire, not on the Amethyst, but the shore battery. The guns returned fire, and Amethyst added to the confusion with her own armament. At 22:30 Kerans signalled Hong Kong: "I am under heavy fire and have been hit." Kerans ordered the ship to full-speed, and the remaining 4-inch gun to open fire. Now herself grounded on a mudbank, the Kiang Ling Liberation became the focus of the shore battery, while the Amethyst escaped. "Passed Rose Island," she signalled Hong Kong, and then: "Passed Bate Point."

At 01:00 the ship approached the shore batteries at Kiang Yin, where there was also a defensive boom stretched across the River. The safe channel through the boom should have been marked by two lights, but Kerans could only see one. As a patrol boat moved out to meet them and opened fire with tracer shells, the captain made a snap decision to steer to port of the single light on the boom. It was the right choice, and having passed through the clear channel, by 02:42 the ship was only 42 miles from the sea, but first they had to get past the forts of Woosung. Just before three o'clock, the frigate approached a Chinese junk, but at its full 19 knots a collision was unavoidable, and the vessel was sliced in two by the Amethyst's bows. Sweeping past Woosung and out of the Yangtze Estuary, the Amethyst spotted a large warship approaching - it was HMS Consort coming to greet them. Kerans signalled: "Have rejoined the Fleet south of Woosung. No damage or casualties. God Save the King." Before long, the Amethyst crew received in return a message



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from their Sovereign: "Please convey to the commanding officer and ship's company of HMS Amethyst my hearty congratulations on their daring exploit to rejoin the Fleet. The courage, skill and determination shown by all on board have my highest commendation. Splice the mainbrace." The news of Amethyst's gallant escape flashed around the world, and many of the crew put forward Simon as the real hero of the whole incident. Simon became the first cat to be awarded the Dickin medal for animal gallantry.

This article was built up from a number of reports and personal accounts taken from the internet. My thanks to all of the providers, particularly Nick Cooper and Roderick Saul.

Something for the ladies.

Girl to friend. "My boyfriend, not happy with my mood swings, bought me a mood ring the other day so he would be able to monitor my moods. When I'm in a good mood it turns green. When I'm in a bad mood it leaves a big red mark on his forehead. Maybe next time he'll buy me a diamond."

A couple are lying in bed. The man says, "I am going to make you the happiest woman in the world." The woman says, "I'll miss you."

Q: What do you call an intelligent, good looking, sensitive man?

A: A rumour.

He said - Since I first laid eyes on you, I've wanted to make love to you really badly.

She said - Well, you've succeeded.

He said 'What have you been doing with all the grocery money that I gave you?'

She said 'Turn sideways and look in the mirror you fat swine'

Q: What's the difference between a boyfriend and a husband?

A: 45 minutes.

Q: What's the fastest way to a man's heart?

A: Through his chest with a sharp knife.

Q: Why do men want to marry virgins?

A: They can't stand criticism.

Q: Why is it so hard for women to find men that are sensitive, caring, and good looking?

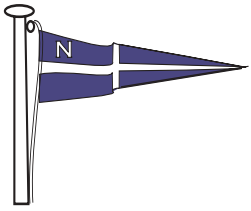
A: Because those men already have boyfriends.

Q: What makes men chase women if they have no intention of marrying?

A: The same urge that makes dogs chase cars they have no intention of driving

Q: What do you do if you see a man running around with half a head?

A: Reload and try again!



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FINALLY

I have been asked to include this in the hope that you will fill it in and return it by hand or post to the club.

Please print.

NAME.....

1st line of address.....

Please write in appropriate case.

EMAIL ADDRESS.....

SKILLS. (ie. Plumber, Electrician, Builder, Nuclear Physicist, Dendrochronologist)

.....

.....

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