

# "Cook's Dead, Skip!"

by Peter Harrison



In 1954 I was copping some grief from my current girl-friend about being away for so long on deep sea trips. On the "big ships" was her expression. So anyway, I joined a rock dodger called "Stevonia" in Goole. The ship was owned by Wharton's Shipping of Keadby, and captained by George Cross. I was signed on as an A.B. and along with the other two deck-hands, the crew was made up of the Skipper, Mate, two Engineers, and a Cook/Steward, a grand total of eight.

After loading coal we proceeded to sail from Goole to Millwall docks Plymouth. I was on the four to eight and my watch-mate turned out to be none other than George the Skipper - it was a very laid back set up on board with no officialdom. The Cook's name was Norman. He was an elderly chap (to me at that time) of some 60+ years who gave his address only as the Seaman's Mission in Liverpool. One morning while I was on the wheel, George took over, and told me to go down below to put Norm the Cook on the shake.

I went down the aft companion way, and on opening Norman's cabin door found him sitting up in his bunk, pipe in his mouth, and reading a book.

"Six o'clock Norman," I called and returned to the bridge. About an hour later, George said, "Is Norman up? Where's our cuppa?" "Well, I gave him a shout," I said, "And he was already awake, and reading his book." "Give him another shout," grumbled George, the "Intrepid Master Mariner."

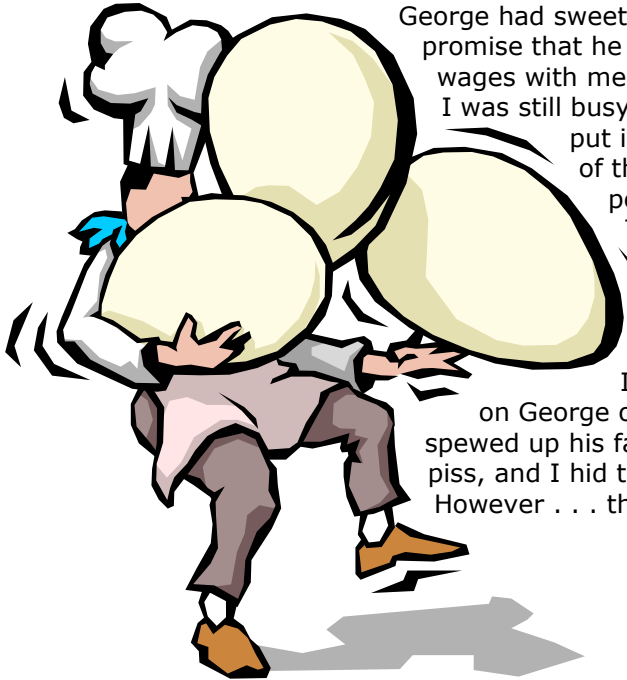
I went back down below, and once again found Norman, still propped up in his bunk, glasses perched on the end of his nose. "Are you getting up Norman?" I asked, but there was no response.

I gently shook him by the shoulder and realised that he was as cold as a five dollar whore's heart. Norman had quietly crossed the bar during the night.

I ran back to the bridge to report my findings to the Skipper. "Cook's dead Skip" sez I. "Stop fucking about," was George's grumpy reply. It took a little while for me to finally convince the Skipper that I was serious, but eventually he called down for Hooky Walker the Chief Engineer, who also happened to be his brother-in-law, to go and investigate the Cook's condition. Upon Hooky's return, and confirmation of Norman's demise, George said, "Well, what the Fuck do we do now?"

I took it upon myself to answer, thinking that George must be a little flustered, with all kinds of official things he would have to do. "Call Ship to Shore, for advice," I said, feeling pleased that I had been able to help, until I received a withering glance from George who had been wondering what on earth we would do about breakfast!

You don't get to be Captain without having an ability to solve problems, and his solution was to immediately "promote" me to the giddy heights of Cook/Steward and sent me down to the galley.



George had sweetened the low blow with the promise that he would share the allocated Cook's wages with me as a bonus.

I was still busy with bacon and eggs when we put into Brixham, to await the arrival of the Police and Ambulance to take poor Norman ashore.

Three months later I was still acting as Cook/Steward as well as covering my real job as A.B. and I was starting to get a tad 'tetchy'

I was able to get my own back on George one night in Rotterdam when he spewed up his false teeth after a night on the piss, and I hid them from him for 3 weeks!

However . . . that's another story!

- Peter Harrison