

Shipmates Reunited!

"Surrey" - 1957



And it all started with this photo from George Griffiths!

It's amazing how far and how fast the internet can reach people worldwide.

Forty eight years ago the lads on the Surrey got together for a photo session out on deck. No doubt the old photo has sat around all this time, seldom seeing the light of day.

In May 2005, George Griffiths over in Perth, Western Australia dug the old photo out of his album, scanned it and sent it in to the All At Sea website, where George's name, and that of the only other person whose name he remembered, Chris Hopkins, were added to the photo prior to it being displayed on the website.

Two days after it first went public, Peter Steele from New Zealand emailed us – not only was he also in the photo, he was able to furnish us with the names of two others.

Back at All At Sea, we included the known names, and uploaded the photo onto the web site again.

Just a few days later, Phil Hughes, Secretary of the East Kent Branch of the Vindictrix Association, took a close look at the photo. He recognised Garry Blackmore's name, and wanted to see if it was the same person that he knew. Well it turned out that it was indeed the same man, Garry Blackmore, one of the UK's most popular Country & Western singers for the last 30 years!

Phil copied the photo and mailed it to Garry's address with a note that a couple of his former shipmates had been located. Phil said that he would have liked to have been a fly on the wall when Garry opened his mail!

Only a few days after that we received word from Garry Blackmore, via Phil Hughes, that he was absolutely "made up" about having been contacted. Garry has sent a short story of his life since leaving the Merchant Navy. And would you believe it – Garry was a Vindi Boy!

"Hi Phil,

Thanks for all the info you sent which I am finding very interesting with so much nostalgia in it. It brought back so many memories of 12 wonderful years in the Merch. Seeing those photos of the boys on the "Surrey" really knocked me sideways. Pete Steele "amazing" - I must write to him, if only to apologise for the punch in the balls. I expect I was jealous because he played the washboard better than I played the guitar at the time. I'm certainly envious of him now living in the most wonderful country on earth. George Griffiths and Colin Schofield I remember well, and it is a great picture of George - I swear he gets better looking with age. If anyone knows anything about Colin I'd appreciate hearing from him.

I only had two ambitions in life, to see the world, and the Merch gave me that, then to be a Country & Western / Rock & Roll singer. This was harder to achieve but in 1967 I passed an audition for a TV programme called "Opportunity Knocks" hosted by Hughie Green. I was a winner for three weeks and I will not tell you the name I used on the show as I was too embarrassed by it. I was under contract for Hughie Green for 6 months. I then formed a group called "The Southern Gentlemen" which was successful and

we won the "Pun Entertainers of The Year" plus £2,000 which was a great deal of money then. In 1970 I formed another group called "Sounds Country" and started touring the country and winning awards. In 1976 I formed "The Garry Blackmore Band" which was a 5 piece band with great harmonies and started making records and getting lots of air time on the BBC's Country Music programmes. In 1993 I formed the Garry Blackmore Band" mark 2 and we are still together doing lots of theatres, concerts, festivals and clubs all over the U.K. We have been voted "Best Country Band" three times, radio awards for "Best Album" twice, with numerous awards from country music clubs around the country. We won an award for the most requested song on six BBC local radio stations and I wrote a song called, "I Don't Want These Memories" on our "Reminiscing" album. I'm now 67 years old and still loving every minute of it. I have been married once and divorced, due to never being home and now live in Whitstable in Kent by the sea. I'm still reminiscing though about I'd love to be in New Zealand again. I've even recorded "Po Kari Kari Ana".

If anyone wishes to contact me they can do so at: 12, Terry's Lane, Horsebridge, Whitstable, Kent. CT5 1DF. My sincere thanks to you all. Garry"

And the story didn't end there!

July 1st; Latest update - Phil Hughes' former school and sea cadet mate Eric Redman up in Mackay also sailed with Garry Blackmore on the "Gloucester" back in 1956/57, doing a couple of trips to Aussie. Eric and some mates went to Garry's house after pay off for a party, and caught a bus home the following morning. Phil will be letting Garry know that another shipmate has surfaced. Phil says: "It'll be years before Gary comes down from these revelations." Peter Steele and George Griffiths are now in regular contact via email, and they are both keen to maintain contact with Garry Blackmore.

It just goes to show that you never know when one of your shipmates will be browsing the web site and see a photo that you posted! And out of the blue, you will receive an email or a phone call to say: "Remember me?" So keep those photos coming!

- Bill Young

