

# INTERNATIONAL MARITIME HISTORY ASSOCIATION

Newsletter December 2021



## Welcome to the final Newsletter for 2021

For yet another year Covid and its variants have stopped most of us from travelling overseas to see family and friends. After Omicron there are nine more letters to go in the Greek alphabet; let's hope they are not all needed.

At the beginning of 2022 the editorial management of the IJMHS passes from the team at Hull to Catia Antunes and Michiel Groesen, at the University of Leiden. On your behalf I thank David Starkey and his team for doing an excellent job of producing our flagship journal. The administration of memberships and finances will remain at Hull under the leadership of Treasurer Martin Wilcox. The Leiden team has some great ideas for new directions and emphasises for the journal and we look forward to seeing these in future years.

While we are on the topic of passing the baton, at the General Assembly in 2022 (hopefully held face to face in Porto), the current Executive, which due to Covid, has served for an unprecedented six years, will retire and a new Executive will be elected. So, there is plenty of time for you to consider taking a more active role in the IMHA!

Just a reminder that that you can still renew your membership for 2021 via our website <https://imha.info/>.

My thanks go to Dr Ian Chambers for his voluntary help with producing this newsletter.

I wish you all a merry Christmas and a happy and safe 2022.

From the President  
Emeritus Professor Malcolm Tull

**8th. IMHA Congress**

Preparations are ongoing for the 8th IMHA - International Congress of Maritime History that will take place in Porto, Portugal, between June 28 and July 02, 2022. The organization of the event has been challenged by the enormous consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic and its toll on an event that aims to be truly global in terms of scholars, perspectives, and discussions it will gather. After two postponements we are now confident the global expansion of COVID vaccines and other prophylactic procedures will allow the Congress to take place in person next Summer. This conviction seems to be shared by prospective participants, as evident by the number of submissions received for the limited call for papers that was opened this year. The researchers are now being notified of the results of that call for papers, and we welcome everyone to complete the registration process at <https://imha2020.com/registration/>.  
Source: Professor Amelia Polónia



**Blaydes Maritime Centre**

Blaydes Maritime Centre, formerly the Maritime Historical Studies Centre, has emerged from the pandemic and lockdown with a new director, a new online presence and a string of new initiatives.

Following the retirement of David J. Starkey in late 2019, Dr Jenny Macleod has been appointed Director. Her main areas of expertise is the Gallipoli campaign in the First World War, and issues relating to memory, commemoration and national identity. She will be working to support BMC's work on research and knowledge exchange in cooperation with heritage and education organisations.

Stefan Ramsden has been appointed Wilson Family Fellow in Maritime History, replacing Jo Byrne, who has left the university for a post with Historic England. Before joining the University of Hull Stefan's career was in the local heritage sector, and he is therefore ideally placed to drive forward our engagement with local heritage organisations. He is organising a conference to bring together museums, community groups and others with an interest in the maritime history of the Humber region, which will take place in Hull on 24 January 2022. He and Martin Wilcox are working

together on a bid for funding for a project which ties together their research interests, on occupational community and economic change around the Humber during the twentieth century.

Stefan is also overseeing the work of four interns who were appointed to posts at BMC during late summer 2022. These focusing their efforts both on research, and on sorting out, cataloguing and making accessible the large collections of photographs, documents and archival material which we hold at Blaydes House, but also on public engagement.

One of their current projects is producing content for our new web presence. We have a freshly overhauled and updated page on the university's own website, and also a significant social media presence for the first time.

These are exciting times for BMC. The Yorkshire's Maritime City initiative is a £30m heritage-driven project using the maritime history and heritage of Hull to regenerate areas of the Old Town, reconnect the city centre to its historical waterfront and raise the profile of the city. Staff from BMC have been closely involved in various areas of the project, one of whose key sites is but a stone's throw from our base at Blaydes House. We look forward to being part of its continued success.

Web: <https://blaydesmaritime.hull.ac.uk/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/BlaydesCentre>

Facebook: <https://facebook.com/blaydesmaritimecentre>

Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/blaydes\\_maritime\\_centre/](https://www.instagram.com/blaydes_maritime_centre/)

Source: Dr Martin Wilcox



Dr Jenny Macleod, Director, Blaydes Maritime Centre and Head, Department of History, University of Hull



Stefan Ramsden, Wilson Family Fellow in Maritime History, Blaydes Maritime Centre



Dr Martin Wilcox, Lecturer in History, University of Hull



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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HMAS Perth in the Battle of Sunda Strait

Dr Natali Pearson has produced a podcast, in English and Indonesian, called *Perth's Stories* on Soundcloud ([https://soundcloud.com/hmasperthi\\_asharedhistory](https://soundcloud.com/hmasperthi_asharedhistory)).

*Perth's Stories* features a diverse range of perspectives on HMAS Perth (I), an Australian WWII shipwreck in Banten Bay, Indonesia, including survivors and descendants, local students who live in the area, government stakeholders, maritime archaeologists, those who've dived the site, community leaders, and those who are working to protect and remember Perth for the future.

This podcast is co-hosted by Dr Natali Pearson and her Indonesian colleague Zainab Tahir (Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries). Five of the podcasts are in Indonesian, five are in English; all have bilingual transcripts so you can read the Indonesian ones even if you can't listen to them. (The transcripts are a bit hard to find – rather than clicking the orange play button, you need to click on the podcast name, for example “Pak Wahyu (in Indonesian)” which takes you to a separate page, [https://soundcloud.com/hmasperthi\\_asharedhistory/pak-wahyu-in-indonesian](https://soundcloud.com/hmasperthi_asharedhistory/pak-wahyu-in-indonesian), where the transcripts for that podcast are available.)

The series was supported by funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through the Maritime Capacity Building Initiative.

Source: Dr Natali Pearson, University of Sydney

The Estonian Maritime Museum is holding a conference in June 2022 and the Call for Papers is open until 10th December 2021. Here is the link to the information about conference:

<https://meremuuseum.ee/en/international-conference-the-navies-of-the-baltic-sea-region-during-the-interwar-period-development-of-fleets-organizations-and-naval-strategies-1918-1939/>

And Call for Papers: <https://meremuuseum.ee/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/callopapersa4b-2.pdf>

Source: Teele Saar, Researcher, SA Eesti Meremuuseum, Tallinn

## New Researchers in Maritime History Conference 2022 Chatham Dockyard 8/9 April 2022 Call for Papers

The British Commission for Maritime History (BCMh), in association with the Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust, invites contributions to its twenty-seventh conference for new researchers. For 400 years the dockyard provided new ships and repair facilities for the Royal Navy, from sailing warships, steam warships to submarines. It is a wonderful location in which to hold this annual conference and provides a unique opportunity for new scholars to present their work in a historic setting.

The Conference, which is supported by the Society for Nautical Research, helps emerging scholars who wish to share their work in a supportive environment and build relations with other maritime historians. We encourage applications from postgraduate students and warmly encourage participation by independent scholars. Contributions can address all aspects of maritime history in its broadest sense.

Those wishing to offer a paper should complete the online form available from <https://forms.gle/EDkdT5xt5SrQKT4F6> or from the website [www.maritimehistory.org.uk](http://www.maritimehistory.org.uk)

Please direct any queries to [newresearchers@maritimehistory.org.uk](mailto:newresearchers@maritimehistory.org.uk). The deadline is 25 February 2022. Anyone interested in attending the conference without presenting a paper is also warmly invited to register an interest; further information will be sent to you in due course.

Source: Dr Helen Doe

## Global Economic History and History of the Seas: any news?

The Department of Mediterranean and Global Economic and Social History and the Centre of Maritime History of the Institute for Mediterranean Studies of the Foundation of Research and Technology - Hellas (IMS-FORTH) organises, during the academic year 2021-2022, a second annual series of seminar meetings on the «Global Economic History and the History of the Seas», using the zoom platform. We intend to re-examine the spatial and temporal framework of our collective research, in a way that can provide an optimal operational context for the adoption and use of the analytical concepts and interpretative patterns inspired by recent developments in Global History and Thalassology. Our ultimate goal is to create an academic environment with a common understanding of research priorities, fields of study and focal points that will contribute to the renovation and enlargement of the scope of Greek economic history and fully integrate it into the current debates of the international community of global economic historians.

Researchers and collaborating faculty members of the IMS/FORTH took the initiative of organizing this series of seminars but our meetings are open to all. We are planning to meet monthly, usually every Monday at 16:00 (Greek time). The seminars are given in Greek or English, according to the speaker and composition of the audience. Updated information and any additional material for our projected meetings will be freely provided by the relevant webpage of the Department of Mediterranean and Global Economic and Social History of the IMS/FORTH.

On Monday Nov.22, 2021 at 16:00 (Greek time) Alexis Wick (Associate Professor of History, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Koç University) will give a conference on «The Other Mediterranean or the Mediterranean's Other? The Red Sea in History»

In 2021 the following seminars took place:

Oct.26 at 16:00, prof. Socrates Petmezias (IMS-FORTH and University of Crete) : “Again on the Great Divergence debate: Where are we?”

Nov. 16 at 16:00, prof. Gelina Harlaftis (IMS-FORTH and University of Crete): “The “true” History of the Seas and Thalassology. Sailing on the Black Sea”

Nov.30 at 16:00, prof. Sakis Gekas (University of Toronto): “The global history of bourgeois classes in Eastern Mediterranean in the age of Imperialism, 1850-1914”

Dec. 14 at 16:00, prof. Roxani Margariti (Emory University): “The seas of the Indian Ocean: Thalassology and Global History of the pre-modern”

Source: Professor Gelina Harlaftis, Director, Institute for Mediterranean Studies, Crete, Greece.

‘The idea of freedom grows strongest in prisons.’ (Jean Cocteau)

*People often associate the sea with escapism because its immensity is an invitation to travel and blurs the notion of limits. The sea was used many times to escape from jail, among various stories told in literature and cinema. All these real stories share a common point: escaping jailers through the sea.*

### The Count of Monte Cristo

The most famous fugitive is *The Count of Monte Cristo*, a fictional character named Edmond Dantès created by French writer Alexandre Dumas in his famous eponymous XIXth century novel. Alexandre Dumas based his main character on the character of François Picaud from the *novel Vengeance and the Diamond*, related by a police prefecture archivist from Paris and based on the true story of Gaspard-Antoine Pastorel.

Gaspard-Antoine Pastorel was born 9 October 1784 in Marseille. He fought in Italy as a rifleman among the 37th Infantry Regiment, then deserted and committed various thefts under various aliases. He was arrested by François Vidocq and escaped three times from prison in Niort, Limoges and Grenoble.

The story of Edmond Dantès is quite different: he is falsely accused of treason, arrested, and imprisoned without trial in the Château d’If, a grim island fortress off Marseille. He decides to escape from his hopeless cell and digs a tunnel until he reaches the next cell of Abbé Faria, who tells him about a secret treasure. Dantès manages to escape, gets his hands on the secret treasure based on the island of Montecristo – off Italian coasts – and sets up a Machiavelian revenge plan.

His escape plan from Château d’If aims at the sea. When his friend Abbé Faria dies, Dantès takes his place in the body bag. Undertakers throw the body bag into the sea, where Dantès manages to free himself and swim until he reaches the opposite shore.

### Henri de Rochefort

Henri de Rochefort is another famous fugitive who escaped from jail through the sea. This former Communard was sentenced to forced labor and sent to a prison camp in New Caledonia.

The Paris Commune insurrection – which was violently repressed in 1871 – triggered many sentences of deportation to New Caledonian prison camps. A 1872 law set New Caledonia as a place of deportation, especially the Ducos peninsula – a sandy land stripe which closes the Northern bay of Nouméa and ends in a swamp zone closed by fortified walls.

In May 1872, the first bunch of prisoners was embarked on a frigate named *La Danaé*. The travel to New Caledonia took about five months because the ships travelled along the Western African coasts until the Cape of Good Hope with a stop at Gorée Island (off Senegal coasts). Once arrived in New Caledonia, the prisoners were oriented according to the nature of their sentence. Their head was shaved and they had to wear a specific costume. They were forced to work occasionally as stevedores (a job which consists in attaching and loading ships), or more frequently as construction workers.

Their living conditions were rough: their feet were chained, they had to endure stifling heat and bad hygiene, and their jailers had the right to punish them with whipping and thumbscrews. Some deputies from French National Assembly denounced these treatments as soon as 1875.

Henri de Rochefort was condemned to be deported to the fortified zone. Once on the spot, he set up an escape plan with some of his former Communard companions: Francis Jourde, Pascal Grousset, Achille Ballière, Olivier Pain...

During the 19th March 1874 night, under bad weather conditions, the three prisoners Grousset, Pain and Rochefort managed to swim until the small Kuauri isle. Their friends Jourde, Ballière and Bastien- who had the right to sail small boats as *free déportés* - then came to rescue them.

After a perilous travel, the six fugitives reached an English ship who had just dropped a coal cargo in New Caledonia. Captain David Law welcomed the fugitives on board against a high amount of money. The ship left the harbor on early morning, but stagnated in coastal waters until mid-afternoon

because of lack of wind. Seven days later, on 27th March 1874, the six fugitives arrived in Australia. Pain and Rochefort decided to head toward America. Solicited by the New York Herald, Rochefort testified about his deportation and escape plan. Pain and Rochefort finally joined London on 18th June 1874, welcomed by exiled Communards.

Still persecuted by French police, Rochefort had to flee to Geneva. The story of his escape was widely spread and pushed the New Caledonian jailers to roughen surveillance and detaining conditions.

### Papillon

Papillon was another famous prisoner whose escape was popularized by literature and cinema. He escaped from Cayenne prison camp, which was one of the worst prison camps in the world – even worse than New Caledonia camp. His story relates the obsessional need to escape that prisoners may feel.

*Papillon* was a novel written by Henri Charrière, himself a former prisoner, who was inspired by the stories of other prisoners such as Charles Brunier and René Belbenoit to write his novel.

In 1925, aged 19, Charrière joined the Navy. He got a butterfly tattooed on his body. As he was reluctant to any form of authority, he managed to get exempted by mutilating his own thumb. Back in Paris, he became a small delinquent. In 1930, he was accused of murdering a pimp (which he always denied) and sentenced to be sent to Cayenne prison camp in French Guiana. During his trip to Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni in 1933, he met René Belbenoit (4). He was then affected as a nurse auxiliary in a hospital where he met other prisoners who had failed to escape. He took inspiration from their stories to write his own book. He himself escaped for the first time in 1934 by trying to reach the ocean through the river Maroni on a bark, but failed in Colombia, where he was arrested and sent back to French authorities. After being tried again, he spent two years in the terrible cells of

Saint Joseph island. After several transfers, he escaped again in 1944 with four other inmates. Finally he reached Venezuela in 1945. Only in 1967 could he leave South America and return to France, because the French justice system had issued a pardon for his 1931 murder conviction.

Impressed by literary success of René Belbenoit, whose biography had become a best-seller in the United States, Henri Charrière decided to write his own memoirs – but added to his own story various lies and myths which were denounced by two other writers, namely Georges Ménéger in *The Four Truths of Papillon* and Gérard de Villiers in *Butterfly pinned*. The truth is that Henri Charrière stole some elements from René Belbenoit’s biography.

René Belbenoit was sentenced to eight years of forced labor on 20th November 1921 for theft. He became matricule number 46635, because he was the 46635 prisoners sent to prison camp since its creation in 1854 (5).

He escaped from French Guiana in 1924 with a bunch of other inmates on a pirogue. The pirogue was promptly derailed by winds, oriented towards Dutch coast and broken by waves. Once on ground, the inmates waited one night and began to march towards Dutch Guiana. Unfortunately for them, local indigenes arrested them and sent them back to French authorities. Belbenoit was sentenced to six additional months, but this did not prevent him from trying to escape (twice!) again. Unfortunately for him, he tried but failed, and he was sentenced to one additional year.

In 1930, after serving his nine-year sentence, René Belbenoit was freed from prison camp but he was restricted to Cayenne. He was then exceptionally granted permission to visit the city of Cristobal Colon, in Panama. He took this opportunity to escape to France by hiding on a boat. But he was caught and arrested at the arrival in Le Havre, and sentenced to three more years in Cayenne prison camp. That’s where and when he met Henri Charrière and told him about his own adventures.

Belbenoit was locked in solitary confinement for eleven months in a damp cell on Royal Island, where he endured the worst jailing conditions in his whole life: he was not allowed to meet anyone or speak with his guards; his only distraction was to walk back and forth in his narrow cell and to practice sport (push-ups and squats) in order to stimulate his own body. He also spoke to himself in order not to lose the use of speaking, and he tried to keep the notion of time by scraping with his nails a sign

on the wall for each passing day. After being sent back to Cayenne prison camp, he prepared another escape with a team of inmates. They escaped through a pirogue - very fragile and unfit for sailing the ocean - during one night in November 1934. The team wanted to reach the Maroni river's mouth (like Henri Charrière did several months earlier). They had sewn a sail out of mattress sheet and old shirts. They had to throw water out of the boat once per hour. Each small lapping startled the six fugitives. They used an old fuel jerrycan to cook fish and boil tea. At sunset, they had to tie supplies with twines in order to prevent the wind from overthrowing the pirogue.

After drifting for seventeen days under terrible, exhausting heat, the fugitives reached the shore near Trinidad, where – what a good surprise – the local authorities welcomed them warmly. Then they left again on a bigger, stronger boat with supplies for several weeks. They finally reached the Colombian city of Santa Maria, where they got caught – again - and sent to Barranquilla prison camp. Thanks to an internal accomplice, Belbenoit managed to escape and fled on foot through the jungle, until he reached the territory of a Panama indigenous tribe who hosted him for seven months. Still eager to join the United States, Belbenoit left the tribe, went to Salvador and clandestinely went aboard a cargo heading towards Los Angeles.

He then became a writer and wrote a book about his own adventures named *Dry Guillotine*, which met massive literary success and collective empathy for the author.

## Escape from Alcatraz

Amidst cold and turbulent waters of San Francisco Bay, Alcatraz Island used to house a maximum security prison, which was considered as impossible to escape.

Yet three inmates managed to escape during one night in June 1962. When they were found missing from their cells in the following morning, a manhunt was immediately engaged, but without any result in spite of intensive search: no trace of the three inmates was ever found.

Thus Franck Lee Morris and brothers John and Clarence Anglin succeeded to escape this prison based on the small San Francisco Bay island, despite the important risk of drowning due to strong currents and low water temperature (ocean temperature hardly ever goes above 16°C, but can get as low as 10°C in June because of upwelling – cold waters getting from the depths to the surface). San Francisco Bay's icy waters leave only few chances of success to fugitives, and their chances have to rely on the quality of the raft.

That's why the three fugitives had built an inflatable raft able to stand the weight of three adults. They had built it with more than fifty raincoats (collected among other inmates) and pumped it with a small accordion. The three fugitives' methods were later revealed through searching the cells, interrogating the other inmates and finding the remains of their draft on Angel Island. (6)

Among other traces were also fished one paddle, two life jackets and a rubber sleeve containing written notes. Five weeks after the escape, a Norwegian cargo who was leaving the bay spotted a lifeless body in the water without catching it – but whose clothes description matched with one of the three fugitives.

## Billy Hayes

William Hayes was an American tourist who was arrested and jailed in Turkey in 1970 for drug smuggling. His story inspired a book named *Midnight Express* and a very famous 1970's movie with same name. Hoping to make some money, Hayes had tried to fly back to the USA with two kilograms of hashish, but had been arrested at the airport after being searched by Turkish custom officers. He was originally sentenced to four years and two months in a Turkish prison; with his release date weeks away, he learned that the authorities had chosen to penalize him with a life sentence for smuggling, instead of possession.

The book/movie's title *Midnight Express* is a metaphoric expression used by inmates meaning escaping jail.

Having lost any hope of liberation, Hayes decided to organize his own evasion. He managed to bribe a doctor in order to get transferred to Imrali prison, located on an island in the Marmara Sea, 20 kilometers off the Turkish coasts. On a stormy evening, he finds a way to get out after the last surveillance round, as he knew that some fishing boats remained in harbor because of the storm. He entered the water and swam as silently as he could (in order to avoid being caught by armed guards) and got near a dinghy – a small boat usually aimed at joining larger ships. He untied the dinghy by cutting the rope with a knife and escaped. He rowed until he reached the Greek coasts at dawn, after sailing 27 kilometers without any visual cue. After landing and leaving the dinghy, he still had to cross a forest and swim through a river in spite of exhaustion and hunger (7). He got caught and arrested by Greek customs, who held him for twelve days before expelling him to the American consulate in Thessaloniki.

Simon COYAC  
French Lifeguard

- 1 *'Le Diamant et la Vengeance' Mémoires tirés des archives de la police de Paris, pour servir a l'histoire de la morale et de la police (1838) - Jacques Peuchet*
- 2 *Gaspard-Antoine Pastorel – le véritable comte de Monte-Cristo » - RMC Story*
- 3 *“La Commune de Paris par ceux qui l'ont vécue” - Laure Godineau*
- 4 *RTBF - Benoit Cornuau*
- 5 *Belbenoit, le forçat qui a vaincu l'île du Diable » - PARIS MATCH*
- 6 *'Les disparus d'Alcatraz' - RMC Découverte - Philip J. Day*
- 7 *“Voyage au bout de l'enfer - Midnight Express” - National Geographic Channel*