



## Captain Bernard Augustus Beavis MBE

Older readers will remember, after the end of WW2 up to the late 1950s, the sight and sound of a passing cargo ship, heading up Channel, coming in really close to Ventnor and sounding its hooter. Everyone knew what this meant – that Bern Beavis was on his way home!

Bernard Augustus Beavis, my great-uncle, was a Captain with the Clan Line Shipping Company, plying between England and the rest of the world.

He lived at *Pine Point*, at the Junction of Whitwell Road and Gills Cliff Road. Near the end of every trip he made, he would come in close to the town and let his wife and family (and the rest of Ventnor!) know by several blasts on the ship's hooter, that he would be home, either that day, or the following one, after docking in Southampton.

He was born in Whitwell in 1908, the son of Frank & Edith Beavis (nee Slaughter), one of twelve children. He spent most of his life at sea, with the latter years as Master of his ship.

On April 6<sup>th</sup> 1942 he was Chief Officer on board M.V. *Anglo Canadian* in the Vizagapatam Roads in the Bay of Bengal, India, when the vessel was attacked by Japanese torpedobomber aircraft for over two hours, eventually succumbing to a direct hit and set on fire.



The London Gazette of November 24<sup>th</sup> 1942 carried this citation:-

*M.B.E. (civil) FOR BRAVERY AT SEA* "When sailing alone, the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft with torpedoes and bombs for over two hours. She was handled with great skill by her Master and her armament was used to good effect. Although she evaded all attacks by torpedo carriers, she was hit by a bomb and set on fire. By the persistence and courage of her fire-fighting parties, well led by Chief Officer Beavis and ship's Carpenter Bergstrom, she was saved."

In addition, Lloyd's List and Shipping Gazette of December 16<sup>th</sup> 1943 quoted the following:-

*LLOYD'S WAR MEDAL FOR BRAVERY* "The ship, sailing alone, withstood attacks by Japanese aircraft for over two hours before she was hit by a bomb and set on fire. Throughout the action, Captain Williams managed his ship with outstanding skill and determination. Although they knew an unexploded bomb was somewhere nearby, and in spite of smoke and flames which overcame three of the party, Chief Officer Beavis and Carpenter Bergstrom courageously led the fire-fighters into the store room. It was largely due to their efforts that the ship was saved. Later, the Master, the Chief Officer and the Carpenter carried the bomb ashore where it was exploded"

Sadly, the *Anglo Canadian's* survival was short-lived as, just two months later, she was torpedoed and sunk by a German U-boat (U-153) south east of Bermuda in June 1942. Of the forty sailors and ten gunners on board, one person was lost and the remainder were rescued after spending fourteen days at sea in open boats.

Captain Beavis died of a sudden illness in 1961, at the age of 53, in Calcutta, West Bengal, India.

*Ventnor & District Local History Society*: Colin Beavis. Photograph from the authors collection.



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