

An Exclusive Role

We take a look at the contribution made to our business by our Correspondents and explain the special role played by our Exclusive Correspondents.

On a stormy November night in the winter of 1996, a car carrier (entered in Britannia) developed engine trouble off Papua New Guinea. An onshore wind was blowing at almost gale force, and the ship found itself in very real danger of being driven onto the nearby rocky coast. The Master radioed the authorities in the nearest large port and asked for assistance. The harbour master told him that he only had one tug available – and he could not spare that because it was needed for an incoming ship. 'By the way,' he added for good measure, 'even if you get here, I can't let you in: I don't have a free berth.'

In desperation, the Master turned to the Club's Correspondent in Port Moresby. The Correspondent immediately telephoned the harbour master, but received the same unhelpful replies. He called the major tug companies and discovered that the nearest suitable tug was a full 12 hours steaming away. Things were starting to look bleak.

While our Correspondent was scratching his head and looking for a few ideas, he received a call from the owner of a large tug, who said he was confident that he could make it to the stricken ship in about three hours – possibly less. The Correspondent, encouraged but more than a little curious, pressed for details. The tug's owner became increasingly evasive as the conversation progressed and it was obvious that he was reluctant to describe his tug in any detail. After 10 minutes or so, the truth came out. There was a tug and it was, indeed, very large. Theoretically, it was also very powerful, but it had been built in 1922, was out of class and had not actually been to sea for over 10 years. The Correspondent replaced the telephone. It was a case of 'back to the drawing board'.

Then, our Correspondent had a much-needed stroke of luck. A friend put him in touch with a local enterprise run by a church mission. They owned a small ferry and a vessel described as a landing craft. It was far from clear why the church had a landing craft – or what they used it for – but now was not the time to ask such questions. After a great deal of persuasion and some hard bargaining, agreement was finally reached with the church authorities. The Master of the ferry was contacted, and all the passengers that had just finished boarding were summarily ordered back ashore (without their luggage). He cast off and set out in search of the car carrier.

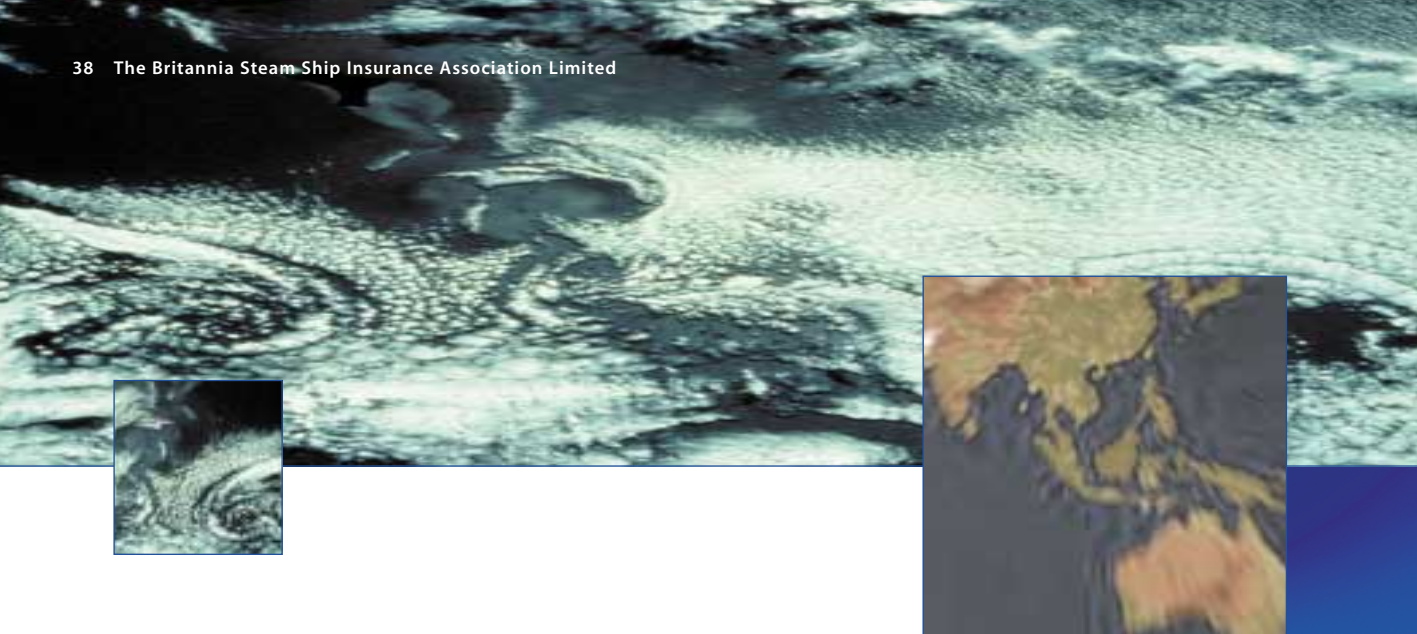
It was after midnight when the ferry finally reached the stricken ship and managed to get a line connected, despite the appalling conditions. It broke after only half an hour. Another line was rigged up and our intrepid little ferry again began tugging at the car carrier in an effort to maintain the ship's position. She managed to keep this up all night. At first light, the ferry was joined by the landing craft and the two of them, pulling in tandem for all that they were worth, succeeded in keeping the car carrier from drifting onto the nearby coast. The entire enterprise was little short of a miracle.

The next day the wind dropped; the car carrier restarted her engines, and the Club Correspondent applied himself to the task of persuading the harbour master to change his mind. The ship limped back to the safety of the port where a berth was finally found. A real disaster had been narrowly averted.

The Club is not involved in many cases offering such drama, but the story neatly highlights the qualities that the Club looks for in a Correspondent: initiative, local knowledge, experience and dedication. Club Correspondents work round the clock – providing the eyes and ears of the Club whenever and wherever they are needed to protect our Members' interests. Individually and collectively, they provide a remarkable service to Club Members, safeguarding their interests in over 140 countries and 390 ports worldwide.

Our network of Correspondents, exclusive and non-exclusive, is an indispensable part of the service we provide to Members. They are usually the first on the scene, ready to look after the Master and crew, evaluate the situation and, where possible, suggest practical solutions. Good communications, cooperation with all parties involved and expectation management are just some of the many skills that are required.

Britannia's first printed list of Correspondents (or representatives as they were then called) appeared in the 1921 Rule Book: the list contained less than 100 names in as many ports. You may be surprised to learn, however, that 15 of those firms are still listed by the Club today. The roll of honour is as follows:



List of Representatives

Correspondents who were listed in 1921 and are still listed today

Port	Correspondent
Ancona	Humbert Kane
Balboa	Panama Agencies Co
Bergen	J Martens (now Martens Services A/S)
Bremen	J&K Brons
Brisbane	Thynne & McCartney
Colon	Panama Agencies Co
Halifax, NSW	Pickford & Black Ltd
Hamburg	Claas W Brons
Hull	McAusland & Turner
Lisbon	Pinto Basto & Co
Newcastle, NSW	Sparke & Millard (now Sparke Helmore)
Oporto	Pinto Basto & Co
Panama	Panama Agencies Co
Piraeus	Georges Rediadis (now Deucalion Rediadis & Sons)
Salonica	J Nehama & Co (now G Nehama & Co)
Valletta	A Duncan & Co (became H Vassallo)

H Vassallo of Valletta must bear the privilege, however, of being our oldest recorded Correspondents. Mr C Bugeja, on a visit to the Managers in 1995, brought with him a copy of a letter dated 18 June 1864, addressed to Addison Duncan (the previous name of H Vassallo), which reads as follows:

Dear Sir,

We have today received your letter of the 10th Inst and in reply beg today that, in consequence of the death of Mr Peter Bingham, of the firm of Messrs Dalzel and Gingele, with whom we lately corresponded we will, with pleasure, correspond with you, in future, upon the business of ships, insured in our Clubs, that may put into Malta, and we will thank you to keep us fully advised of everything that may affect the Underwriters for whom we act.

Yours truly,

Peter Tindall, Riley Co

Our Correspondents are not agents, in the strict sense of that word, because they have no formal agency contract. They are merely listed by the Club in the Rule Book, having agreed to assist Members, when requested, on a case by case basis. The relationship is, therefore, essentially personal; based largely on loyalty and trust.

Britannia's Correspondents vary considerably as to size and type. Some are dedicated solely to P&I work; others, largely because of their remote location, survive principally as ship's agents; some (mainly in the US) are maritime law firms, capable of handling complex oil spills; others boast few formal qualifications – just years of experience.

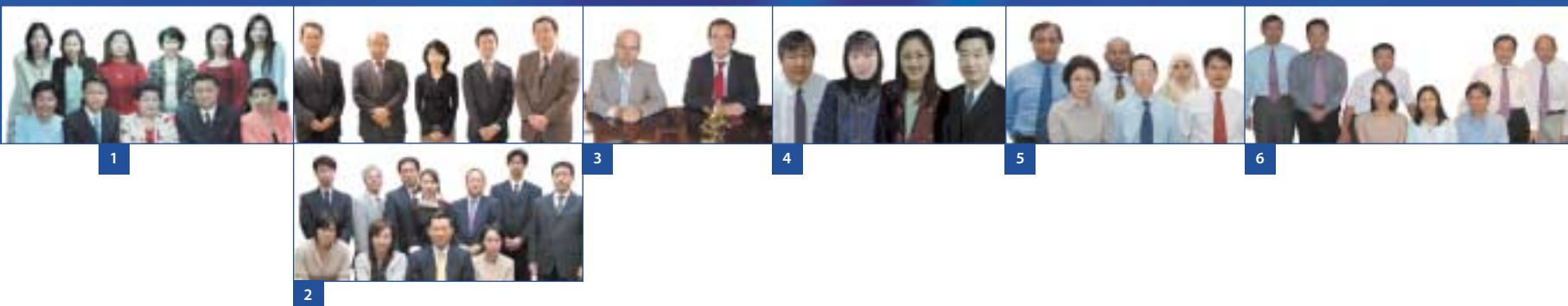
A handful of these Correspondents, however, enjoy a somewhat different status and perform a rather more extensive role. These are Britannia's exclusive Correspondents. Exclusive Correspondents are not listed for any other Clubs; they work only for Britannia and provide representation in those areas where the Club has a concentration of business. In a way, they could better be described as 'Super-Correspondents', because they are called upon to do everything that an ordinary Correspondent does while, additionally, providing a specialised service to those Members located within their country or region.

They are the face of Britannia in their local shipping communities. They assist and explain, interpret and translate whenever they are needed. With unrivalled experience of their regions and an intimate knowledge of the local membership, they help us in London to understand local needs, local concerns and local problems. Reciprocally, their training with the Club over many years and their experience of the shipping industry in its widest possible sense helps them to explain to the membership the intricacies of difficult claims and the importance of wider issues facing the whole P&I scene.

Times may have changed over the last 150 years, but the role of the correspondent remains an integral and indispensable part of who we are and what we do. Their work and dedication, persistence and expertise are admired and appreciated by shipowners and Club managers alike. They are the friend in need that is a friend indeed.

Britannia's Exclusive Correspondents

A series of profiles



1 Chiang Marine Services Co Ltd – Taipei

The 1970s saw a substantial growth in the Taiwanese fleet and Britannia's entry grew with it. In 1981, it was therefore decided to appoint Capt Mike Chiang as the Club's Exclusive Correspondent. Based in Taipei, Capt Chiang was well known to the Managers through their relationship with China Union Lines. He had been at sea with that company for 14 years – four of those as Master. When he founded Chiang Marine Services (CMS), there were just three staff (including Capt Chiang). Initially, CMS only provided a claims service for Britannia's Taiwanese Members, but after a few years, CMS took over the full role of P&I Correspondent. They now handle claims and related matters in Taiwan for all Britannia's Members. By the end of 2004, the number of staff had risen to 10 – including Mr Kenny Chiang, Capt Chiang's son, who plays a key role in the business.

2 Cornes P&I Co Ltd – Tokyo and Kobe

Cornes & Co is an old company with a venerable history almost as long as Britannia's. It was formed in Yokohama in 1861, by Frederick Cornes (born in Macclesfield, England, in 1837) and his partner William Aspinall. The company was originally known as Aspinall, Cornes & Company and its main business was the export of silk and green tea. By 1868, however, their activities had expanded and in this year they were appointed agents for Lloyd's of London.

The relationship with Britannia did not begin until 1953, when Cornes & Co were appointed as Correspondents in both Kobe and Yokohama. The listing in Tokyo finally appeared in 1974. Mr M Yagiu, who headed the P&I section and worked for Cornes from 1962 until 2001, was given the Order of the British Empire (OBE) by the Queen in 1998.

In 1994, it was decided to create a separate company; though this is still in the full ownership of Cornes & Co. Today, Cornes P&I Co Ltd is headed up by Mr Y Tajima in Tokyo and Mr M Ida in Kobe. They employ a total of 16 staff in both offices and look after all of Britannia's business in Japan.

3 Correduria General Maritima SL – Bilbao and Madrid

In 1899, the *Cobetias* became the first foreign-flagged vessel to be entered in Britannia. Owned by a company based in Bilbao, she was entered through the offices of Harris & Dixon in Bilbao. Many ships followed – including, in 1900, a ship called the *Marte*. The *Marte* was commanded by Capt Santos Lachiondo, the great-grandfather of Britannia's current representative in Spain. When he came ashore, he joined Harris & Dixon – and when Harris & Dixon decided to close their office in Bilbao, Capt Lachiondo opened his own, under the name Correduria. Since that time, Britannia has covered around 90% of the Spanish-owned or controlled fleet.

To celebrate the centenary of Britannia's involvement in Spain (in 1999), a two-day Conference was organised in the magnificent surroundings of the Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao. Bilbao was no stranger to Britannia meetings, having hosted the first Committee meeting ever to be held outside London in 1974.

Mr Jon Lachiondo in Bilbao and Mr Imanol Basterretxea in Madrid look after the Members and deal with their enquiries, ably assisted by their two long-standing secretaries, Miss Carmen Miranda and Mrs Susana Franco.

4 P&I Bros – Seoul and Busan

By the early 1980s, Britannia's entered tonnage in Korea had increased significantly. In order to ensure a dedicated service for our growing Korean membership, it was decided that it would be appropriate to appoint an Exclusive Correspondent. In 1984, Y K Park – who was working for our listed Correspondent, Eastern Shipping – was asked to set up an office. This he did, with the full agreement of Eastern Shipping, and his brother opened an office in Busan. They called the business P&I Bros! The two offices now employ a total of four staff.

5 Pandisea – Singapore

Pandisea was set up in April 1998 to meet the growth in shipping in South East Asia. As well as looking after Members in Singapore, the office also handles and oversees claims arising in the region involving Britannia Members, especially in Malaysia where they work in association with our local port Correspondents.

The office is staffed by a team of six, and is headed by Jaya Prakash, a lawyer who has had many years of experience in active legal practice in shipping and maritime law. Capt Hamdam Osman has had command experience and, subsequently, many years in dealing with commercial shipping and chartering. Laurence Corray is a trained lawyer who, prior to joining Pandisea, worked in cargo insurance. Dorothy Peters and John Lee add to the claims team, and they are supported in the administration and accounts functions by Masnah Beran.

6 Sureness Marine Services – Hong Kong

In 1963, Alister Inglis was appointed as Britannia's General Representative in Hong Kong and was listed jointly as a Correspondent. By February 1990, business had grown to the point where it was necessary to change the arrangements, and a new company was duly established by him and Mr H L Ming, called Sureness Marine Services (SMS). SMS has been Britannia's exclusive Correspondent in Hong Kong since that date.

SMS went through difficult times in 1997 and 1998 with the sad demise of Alister Inglis and Mr Ming in consecutive years. Fortunately, however, they had organised the day-to-day running of the office well, and their successors were able smoothly to effect the transition of management. Today, the office has responsibility for assisting Members in Hong Kong and also in mainland China. The volume of work at SMS has increased considerably in recent years – largely as a result of the considerable growth in the Chinese economy. SMS now has a staff of eight, headed by Mr Stephen Luk and Capt C K Kai.