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A & P WIN CRUISE SHIP CONVERSION CONTRACT



Thomson Celebration Enters Dry Dock Assisted by Tugs

The A&P Group has clinched a prestigious multi-million pound cruiseship conversion contract from Thomson Cruises to repair and refit the 34,000 ton cruiseship Noordam which the UK-based holiday company has chartered from Holland America Lines (HAL).

A classic passenger ship, the 20 year old Noordam completed her final cruise for HAL this week when she was handed over to Thomson Cruises at Lisbon. To be renamed Thomson Celebration, the 704 ft long vessel is expected to arrive in Falmouth within the next three days for the start of a four month long conversion at the docks.

Initially, Noordam may have to anchor in the bay whilst emergency repairs are carried out to the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Fort Victoria. The absence of a deep water berth on the Queens/Northern Arm has once again created logistical problems for the docks that highlight the urgency to dredge the harbour allowing A&P to have another berth suitable to handle deep draughted cruiseships and ships under repair.

A&P Falmouth commercial director David Daniel said: "A major part of the interior refitting on the Thomson Celebration will be carried out by leading UK companies who have the expertise in this field. Yard work will include painting, dry-docking and general refit work on the vessel. This contract will run concurrently with five ferry refit contracts."

The refit will see the ship fitted out for her new cruising role under the Thomson banner with four restaurants, an Irish themed pub and more public areas. Thomson has the option during the charter to purchase the vessel from HAL.

The cruiseship is expected to berth initially on the County wharf, then move to the Duchy wharf before dry-docking in February and returning to the Duchy for the final part of the conversion. The French-built Noordam has become a firm favourite within the cruising world during her 20 year career carrying over one million passengers.

David Daniel explained that the four P&O Portsmouth ferries Pride of Portsmouth, Pride of Bilbao, Pride of Cherbourg and Pride of Le Havre will be dry-docked during

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the period December through until March along with the Dover-based ferry Pride of Kent.

P&O Ferries has announced that it intends slashing its fleet of ferries from 31 to 23 ships with job losses expected to exceed 1,200. P&O say that the outcome, which includes a number of proposals which are subject to employee consultation and other approvals, is expected to benefit the operating result by £55 million a year.

The Portsmouth fleet will be down to just one ship with the closure of the Western Channel routes from Portsmouth that will give Brittany Ferries the lion's share of the market. The Pride of Bilbao will continue to run from Portsmouth to Bilbao.

November 2004 - 2005

CSO MARIANOS PERFORMS SAD TASK

On a wet and sombre morning just after dawn CSO Marianos, the ship involved in recovering the bodies of four Royal Navy airmen and the wreckage of their Lynx helicopter arrived at the docks yesterday after a two day long mission described by MOD officials as being a "delicate operation."

The MOD specially chartered in the rapid intervention diving support vessel CSO Marianos 4,200 tons to salvage the Lynx helicopter and recover the bodies of the men killed in last week's tragic helicopter crash 17 miles south east of the port. The 90 metre long high-tec vessel berthed at the docks briefly on Monday afternoon to load equipment before sailing for the crash site later in the evening.

Then on Tuesday the bodies of Lt Dave Cole, 34, Lt Rob Dunn, 29, Lt Jamie Mitchell, 29 and Leading Air Engineer Richard Darnell, 31, were recovered from the seabed.

The four men came from 229 Flight of 815 Naval Air Squadron, based at RN air station Yeovilton in Somerset, and were flying from Type 23 frigate HMS Portland. The helicopter crew had been involved in a search and rescue operation when the helicopter disappeared from the radar screen of the frigate shortly after 7pm on Wednesday, December 8. Sailors on the frigate had previously reported hearing cries for help from the water. Portland paid a weekend visit to the port in October.

A search involved RN and RAF Sea Kings, RN frigates HMS Montrose and HMS St Albans and German frigate Sachsen, aircraft carrier HMS Illustrious, a French patrol aircraft and the Falmouth lifeboat, but they could not find any sign of the helicopter or its crew until Thursday morning, when the lifeboat spotted wreckage floating in the sea.

The Royal Navy minehunter HMS Pembroke has guarded the wreck site for the past week warning all ships to keep away from the position after the UK Government created a five mile radius exclusion zone around the crash site. HMS Pembroke

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located the Lynx helicopter on the seabed in 80 metres of water using a sophisticated remotely operated vehicle (ROV).

The CSO Marianos features a twin bell, 16-man diving system rated to 450 m. The vessel is designed to provide a cost effective, multipurpose base for offshore maintenance and light construction operations. She is a sub sea intervention vessel for diving support able to work in all conditions, in any latitude, for construction works and saturation diving on offshore oil fields.

In 2000 the ship was chartered by Totalfina to survey the wreck of the sunken tanker Erika in the Bay of Biscay using the three tonne remotely operated vehicle Triton(R) XL 18. Other features include a crane capable of lifting 60 tonnes at 8 metres and 21 tonnes at 23 metres. A helipad forward can accommodate a Super Puma helicopter.

December 2004

BAD WEATHER CAUSES PROBLEMS

Bad weather has caused a few casualties this past week and disrupted planned shipping movements at the docks.

Gale force winds hit the P&P Portsmouth super ferry Pride of Bilbao in the early hours of Monday morning causing the vessel to part all of its forward mooring ropes. Held only by the stern ropes the vessel swung right off the Queens jetty. The duty pilot boat crew Mike Tuffery and Roger McClarity, who witnessed the incident at 0300 hours, quickly alerted the port authorities. Pilot David Pickston managed to board the ferry which eventually steamed to sea.

The semi-submersible barge Smit Anambas has spent several days moored to the Cross Roads buoy after a towage drama off the French coast a week ago. The barge was on passage from Egypt to Rotterdam in tow of the Italian tug Letojanni when storm force winds hit the tug and tow.

Off Ushant in mountainous seas the Letojanni parted her tow line. The barge drifted perilously close to the island with the Letojanni's master having to manoeuvre the tug to pick up the emergency tow line floating several hundred feet astern of the barge. The tow was eventually connected just eight miles off Ushant. The tug and tow made for Falmouth, where with the aid of the harbour tugs Percuil and Ankorva the barge was moored to the number 5 buoy.

The tanker Savannah arrived from Milford Haven earlier in the week to land an over carried pilot and pump ashore slops to the Falmouth Jubilee. The vessel was on passage to Southampton for repairs to her fore mast, badly bent when the ship was hit by a 12 metre high wave in the Mediterranean in the New Year.

January 2005

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DOCKS DEVELOPMENT IMPERATIVE TO PORT

The multi-million pound scheme to regenerate Falmouth Docks that will allow mega-cruiseships to moor alongside a purpose-built cruise terminal accessed by a new deep water channel from the Carrick Roads is moving along at a frustratingly slow pace.

The port is now losing trade and jobs will be at risk if this all-important scheme fails to get the go ahead. The long term survival of the port and ultimately the socio-economic impact the scheme will have on Falmouth and west Cornwall is hanging precariously in the balance. Falmouth Docks is major employer in Cornwall employing 556 staff with a further 364 staff working for companies operating within the docks.

Data collected by A&P Falmouth suggests that by 2012 over 50 cruiseships per year carrying 100,000 passengers could be using the port generating £9 million in revenue of which over 90 per cent will be pumped into the Falmouth and Cornwall economy. In addition to this comes revenue generated from harbour dues, pilotage, towage, berthing fees and ancillary port services.

It is no secret that A&P management have been holding in-depth discussions with the Ministry of Defence with a view of making Falmouth the base port for the Royal Navy aviation training ship RFA Argus, which is currently undergoing a month long maintenance period in the yard. Such business requires a major investment in dredging and the port infrastructure to provide a deep water berth.

Scientific results from the vibrocore seabed sampling carried out last year as part of the proposed Capital dredging scheme are to be explained to docks management by DEFRA within the next two weeks.

A&P Falmouth port operations director Mike Reynolds said: "We have seen the results but scientific interpretation is a matter for the experts. We will then be able to accurately calculate the final figure for dredging costs and after consultation with the proper authorities determine the correct method of material disposal."

It is known that some of the seabed is contaminated by heavy metals such as lead, cadmium, zinc, and copper from centuries of mining waste and Tributyltin (TBT) that has accumulated over decades from the sacrificial wash off of anti-fouling paints on commercial and leisure craft.

Dredging of contaminated material is considerably more expensive than normal dredging. To dredge to the necessary depths to accommodate the larger vessels a total of some 250,000 cubic metres of spoil has to be dredged.

But making headway with this project is painfully slow with DEFRA, English Nature, English Heritage and other agencies being involved at every stage. It has taken four months just to obtain the core sampling results. This comes at a time when influential port bosses from Britain's top ports are questioning whether government ministers and civil servants really understand the dynamics of global shipping.

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An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) established by European Directives will have to be carried out with an Environmental Statement being required for the necessary consents and permissions to dredge in Falmouth. The dredging site is in the Fal and Helford Special Area of Conservation (cSAC) and therefore the proposed dredging scheme comes under the Conservation Regulations 1994. English Nature has already stated that the dredging will have a significant impact on the environment.

The environmental parameters to be addressed will include: Fisheries, navigation, archaeology, air and noise levels, traffic and transportation, water quality, ornithology, ecology, heritage, hydrodynamics, marine ecology, leisure and recreation, sediment study, and economic impact.

English Heritage has recommended that a marine archaeologist carries out a desk-based study into the historic environment of the dredging site. Dredging could remove organic or inorganic remains dating from the prehistoric period.

The EIA alone will take a year to complete costing £200,000 in consultant's fees and reports. According to Steve Cuthbert, chief executive of the Port of London authority and head of the UK Major Ports Group -"the pendulum has swung too far towards conservation and away from sustainable development."

Ports projects around the UK are being strangled by lengthy and expensive planning procedures, environmentalists and EU legislation. The Dibden Bay container terminal project is a prime example of how £45 million was wasted on bureaucratic planning procedures, environmental studies and Public Enquiries.

The Queens/Northern Arm wharf when completed will provide vital wharfage allowing the world's largest cruiseships to berth alongside. An anchorage offshore in the bay or in the Carrick Roads with the resultant tendering ashore of 2,600 passengers is not an option cruise operators favour as they tend to avoid such ports.

A&P Falmouth would generate extra shiprepair contracts worth an estimated £1 million when the berth is not being used for cruiseships. A new deep water channel will also ensure that Falmouth Oil Services and Tramp Oil can maintain the high volumes of bunkers transhipped from the port in a business that has put Falmouth on the map worldwide.

Prestigious high profile events such as the Tall Ships Races will pass Falmouth by until the port can provide the necessary infrastructure.

January 2005

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TRITON FINDS NEW ROLE

The revolutionary designed research vessel Triton, the world's largest trimaran, has arrived from Portsmouth for drydocking following her acquisition by Gardline Shipping Limited (GSL), the Great Yarmouth-based shipping company...

Triton berthed alongside the County wharf on Tuesday morning directly opposite Ellen MacArthur's record breaking trimaran B&Q.

Following drydocking and conversion work Triton will begin a programme of hydrographic survey work in the Western Approaches for the Civil Hydrography Programme (CHP). The programme will commence in the UK Western Approaches for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

Triton's master Captain Mike Rose who has been on the vessel since she was launched is happy to see Triton back in service again after a year long lay-up.

GSL, parent company to the world's largest independently owned survey company, Gardline Marine Sciences Limited (GMSL), is a well-established ship owner and currently operates seven multi-role survey vessels throughout the world.

Mervyn Wooltorton, Gardline Director, who played a pivotal role in securing Triton said: 'Triton is a fantastic ship and we are delighted to have her join our already well established and highly successful fleet of survey vessels - this is a very exciting time for our company, as Triton leads Gardline into the future.'

Built by shipbuilders Vosper Thornycroft (now VT Group) at Southampton the 90 metre long trimaran warship demonstrator was launched in August 2000.. Later that year she embarked on a two-year risk reduction trial programme on behalf of the UK Ministry of Defence and the US Department of Defence. One of her main tasks was to seek out heavy weather to conduct trials in adverse conditions.

During these trials, Triton proved she has good directional stability and is far more comfortable in higher sea states than a comparable sized monohull.

February

2005

A & P HOPE FOR RFA CONTRACTS

There may be a glimmer of good news over the horizon following the obvious gloom and doom amongst the workforce in the wake of the redundancies announced by A&P Falmouth early this week..

The MOD is expected to announce tomorrow the yards that have won multi-million pound contracts to refit and repair the Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships RFA Wave Ruler and the fleet tanker RFA Oakleaf.

A&P Falmouth managing director Peter Child has confirmed that the yard has submitted bids for both contracts. "All we can do is to wait and see if we have been successful." said Peter.

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Despite a record breaking year for MOD contracts in 2004 the yard has been hit in recent months by global market forces. Strong competition from Eastern European and Black Sea repair yards, where the cost base is much lower, is proving difficult for UK ship repair yards. The A&P Group is also reeling after one of its main customers P&O Ferries announced radical plans to reduce the size of its fleet last year.

All hopes are now on winning another RFA contract to provide a period of stability for the yard in what is clearly troubled times.

* RFA Oakleaf acquired from Udavallavert in 1985 as the commercial tanker Oktanica first came to Falmouth in 1986 when she underwent a £5 million conversion for her present role. Since then the ship has undergone many refits in the yard. Wave Ruler is a sister ship of the Wave Knight that spent a 42 day period in the yard before Christmas carrying out an assisted maintenance programme.

The 31,500 ton Wave Ruler has been Atlantic Patrol Tanker (North) since April, operating in the Caribbean region in support of Royal Navy warships and those of allied navies and has been relieved by her sister ship. She is returning to the UK to take a major role in the celebrations which will mark the centenary of the RFA, including participation in the International Fleet Review, and she will undertake a tour of British ports in July and August.

February 2005

MIRABELLA V VISITS FALMOUTH



Mirabella V, the world's largest sloop slipped into port on Sunday morning for a 24 hour visit. The £30 million ultra-luxurious vessel arrived from VT shipbuilders in

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Portsmouth where she has been undergoing extensive repairs to her 150 ton lift keel damaged following an unfortunate grounding in the South of France last year.

Pilot Captain Tony Berry brought Mirabella V to an anchorage on the Falmouth Bank.

The 247ft yacht which has a 288ft high carbon fibre mast is owned by Joe Vittoria who sold the car rental company Avis Inc in 1987 after becoming chairman and CEO. Mirabella is apparently heading for Florida where Joe Vittoria has a home and then on to the Caribbean. She will return to the Mediterranean for the summer season where she already has 10 weeks of charter booked at US\$250,000 a week.

February 2005

A & P MAN IN CRUISE VISIT INITIATIVE

Mike Reynolds A&P Falmouth port operations director is in Germany meeting with leading German cruiseship operators to promote Falmouth and the southwest as a cruiseship destination.

Accompanying him on the trip is Bob Harrison chief executive of Destination Southwest, the organisation set up to promote the region to the cruise industry worldwide. Both men will meet executives from Hapag Lloyd, Sea Cloud Cruises and Delphin in Hamburg before moving on to Bremen where they hold talks with Hansa Touristik and Transocean.

“It is important to maintain the momentum by flying the flag for the southwest to the cruise industry as a whole as we have a large number of prime venues and world class shore excursions in Devon and Cornwall for cruiseship passengers to enjoy.” said Mike.

Two top level officials from the Treasury Department are coming to Falmouth next Thursday to meet with port executives heading the proposed multi-million pound dredging and cruise liner terminal scheme.

Neil Warsop and Kevin Dodds from the HM Treasury Dept will also discuss Objective One funding with A&P Falmouth managing director Peter Child and port operations director Mike Reynolds during this important meeting.

This visit comes in the wake of Candy Atherton’s trip to Brussels on Tuesday when she met with Graham Meadows, the Director General of Regional Policy for the European Commission to discuss a further round of Objective One funding for Cornwall. Ms Atherton has played an instrumental role in promoting the regeneration scheme for Falmouth Docks.

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Candy said: "It has been acknowledged that Cornwall is in line for a further round of funding, despite our outstanding 5% increase in economic performance. This has shown that government help has made a massive difference to the county.

"At my last meeting with the Chancellor, Gordon Brown MP, he fully understood the need to continue to support Cornwall's growing economic revival and gave a firm pledge that the county would not lose out under the UK's proposals to give aid directly to the region rather than through Brussels.

"The European Commission is suggesting that the EU budget is increased by 25%, which would also mean massive extra contributions from taxpayers in the UK. The government's proposal is to make sure that funds go directly to the areas that need it rather than through the EU, cutting out a mountain of bureaucracy.

February 2005

FALMOUTH BUSY WITH CRUISE SHIPS AGAIN

2005 will be another busy year for cruiseship calls with 37 ships now stemmed to visit the port equating to a passenger turnover of nearly 35,000 passengers.

Cornwall's adopted cruiseship Van Gogh will make 18 cruise calls next year starting in January when she starts the first of three, one-month long Caribbean cruises.

A&P Falmouth port operations director Mike Reynolds who spent three days in Germany earlier this month meeting with German cruiseship operators said: "Talks with German companies were constructive. Next year alone seven German-operated cruiseships are making a total of eight cruise calls at Falmouth. This is a market we are keen to explore and build on for the future."

The Deutschland, Astor, Europa, Alexander von Humboldt, Delphin, Mona Lisa, and Astoria will bring mainly German passengers to Falmouth. Other ships for 2005 will include Holland America's Prinsendam, Princess Cruises' 109,000 ton Star Princess and the ultra-luxurious vessels Silver Whisper and Seabourn Pride.

FEDOR'S VOYAGE COMES TO PREMATURE END

Round the world single-handed yachtsman Fedor Konyukhov has been forced to abandon his non-stop attempt of sailing around the globe after encountering storm force winds and heavy seas in the southern ocean. Fedor is limping along at three knots after his yacht Red Sails lost part of her rigging, sails and steering gear in a violent storm a week ago.

Fedor who left Falmouth last November is heading towards Hobart where he is expected to arrive today. Urgent repairs will be carried out before he can resume his voyage back to Falmouth.

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The intrepid Russian explorer and yachtsman has taken a severe battering by bad weather during his crossing from the Cape of Good Hope to Australia.

February 23 2005