

Our Chair attended the first Face To Face meeting for 2020 at Mersey Maritime's offices in Birkenhead. The sun had yet to rise on this cold and dark morning in January. The car park quickly filled up with delegates, over 60, who were eager to partake of the hot bacon and sausage rolls and the tea and coffee before the presentation started.

This month the speaker was Gary Doyle the Group Harbour Master for all of Peel ports, which number seven around the United Kingdom and include Liverpool, Sheerness and Ardrossan. Gary whose background is from the Royal Navy told the audience he has been with Peel Ports for 3 years and in that time they have instigated a centralised vessel traffic control system for all seven ports, based on the air traffic control premise, here in their Liverpool Seaforth offices.

He displayed a few slides of the facility which showed a room with lots of computer terminals. When they closed all the local VTS stations they invited their employees the opportunity to move to Merseyside. This offer was not taken up by many, which leads to scouse accents trying to be understood by Scottish fishermen! They are introducing a standard maritime vocabulary into the system but he maintained all local operators were taken to the other ports to gain familiarisation with them. *(NB There is a visit arranged by the Branch to the VTS operations room on 14<sup>th</sup> April – see program card for details.)*

He stated that there were a 'few' teething issues when the scheme started but the majority have now been sorted out. The system has been verified by the Department of Transport and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. To ensure vigorous independent auditing they engaged Associated British Ports, their direct competitors, as their auditors. Considered a brave move by Gary but one which has proved very positive and successful.

Gary stated there is still a lack of engagement from certain sectors of their workforce but as time moves on this is getting less.

He then enlightened the audience on other initiatives that are being considered or being implemented, they include a Remote Operating Vessel for hydrographic surveys, a wave monitoring system for L2 the river berth at Seaforth, a centralised booking system for ship's agents and a 'lock slot' booking system which having been trialled is once again under review.

Gary then changed his 'hats' and told the audience of another position he held, that of Chair of the Battle of the Atlantic Memorial Fund. The intention is to have a memorial and a heritage in place in Liverpool for the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of the Atlantic in 2023. The patron for the fund is HRH Princess Anne. The fund needs as much support as possible and that will come from businesses and individuals as well as hopefully Government. There will be a website and Gary urged everyone to become involved.

The presentation concluded at 09:00 but as there were still bacon and sausage rolls available some delegates remained.