



October 2017

Dear Supporter,

Balmoral is now safely back at her berth in Bristol after a truly rollercoaster Summer. This is a brief description of the season and explains why we are again asking for help to keep the ship in operation and to thank you for your previous support and custom.

At the start of the third season under White Funnel Ltd stewardship, we had a beautifully turned out historic ship, wonderful trips planned, excellent advanced bookings, beautiful weather, a polite and attentive ship's company and the support of our volunteers and enthusiasts.

After an initial hiccup we were on course to put our ship on a sound financial footing, largely due to the generosity of our sponsors and appeal donors. Highlights of the season saw Balmoral perform two worthwhile wind farm charters, filming contracts and sailings in good weather to the Western Isles and the Isle of Man on Tynwald Day. We ran classic cruises around Anglesey and on the Bristol Channel and River Severn. We had a reliable and happy ship, looking beautiful and running well. **Whenever and wherever she sailed the support was there. Passenger bookings were up almost 40% on 2016. At last we appeared to have turned the corner.**

Then the British weather took a hand causing a string of cancelled sailings, but we plan for a number of lost trips each season and that was not unforeseen. Sadly other factors combined to cause havoc and they were completely out of our hands. A weeping rivet required a return to Sharpness dry-dock, collapse of the Gravesend landing pontoon scuppered the Thames visit, followed by a summer storm and failure of both engine /gearbox couplings, one of them just a day after an assurance from the manufacturer that it would last the season. Then at the very last moment we were refused permission to carry passengers to the Isle of Man, although Balmoral has been a regular visitor for three decades and would have been allowed to go to Belfast, almost twice the distance on open water. This disappointed our passengers and supporters and cost us a huge amount of money in advertising, ticket refunds and lost revenue, and with no recompense or chance of making up the deficit.

Back on home waters and with excellent advanced bookings, hopes were high until, on a full to capacity Bristol Channel sailing, a rope was dropped into the water from the quayside, became entangled in a propeller, worked its way under the rope guard and damaged a shaft seal. That required divers, another trip to dry-dock and a further two weeks lost service. After urgent repairs the ship then performed perfectly, visited North Wales, Liverpool and Scotland, and ran into the worst late Summer weather for years, preventing most of the additional sailings planned to recover some of the lost revenue. To have one incident in a season is not unexpected in any operation but these unconnected problems were heart breaking for passengers, crew and staff.

Sadly economic facts can't be avoided. In 2017 Balmoral managed only 55 of her 116 scheduled sailings, fractionally under half. Despite the huge popularity and increased passenger numbers when she did operate, we have a very large deficit and serious doubts about continuing coastal excursions without financial support, - and we need that support urgently.

We need to raise £450,000 and have no more than 8 weeks in which to secure Balmoral's future for a further season. After that time it could be impossible to book harbours, connections and her annual survey. We need funds to settle outstanding accounts from the 2017 season, pay for routine maintenance and to dry-dock and prepare the ship for 2018. This seems a huge amount. It is, but the response to appeals in the past has been superb and we are making economies and the best use of our volunteers. We intend to use Balmoral as a venue and educational facility in Bristol Harbour to help with winter costs and already have a number of bookings.

Balmoral is unique in that she is a fully functional vessel, the last of her type, and in good condition after all the work and money lavished on her. Goodwill and affection is so obvious wherever she goes. Keeping active is the best way to preserve any ship. We already have charter enquiries for 2018 and there is a provisional outline timetable for next season with this letter. If we are unable to reach our target in the time needed, donations will be used to continue with planned maintenance, preserve and maintain the ship in operating condition in Bristol and settle any remaining accounts with our suppliers on whom we depend to keep Balmoral sailing. Then as soon as funds permit, she will be back in service. In 2019 some regulations affecting Balmoral change and other changes may impact all historic vessels. We are in longer term discussions about that with the Heritage Lottery Fund.

We are all her custodians for future generations. Balmoral's volunteers and helpers will do all they can, but if she is to remain operational we need your help urgently. Over 2 million passengers have travelled on her since launch in 1949 and we have a saying on board "Everyone loves Balmoral". She is a small ship with a big heart and has been part of so many people's lives for nearly 70 years.

Thank you for what you have already done to support the ship. We will do the work to keep her in operation, but we can't do it without your further help, and we only have 8 weeks to raise the money.

Please give what you can to preserve this historic ship and allow future generations to share the enjoyment that we have all had by being part of the Balmoral Family.

With best wishes,

Dave Bassett, Paul Doubler, Ross Floyd, Andrew Jardine, Richard Mills, Doug Naysmith, John Thomas.

Trustees of M V Balmoral