

FORTY YEARS AT SEA

A voyage with my father

“My younger brother and I were brought up by an elderly housekeeper and sent to boarding school at the age of seven and eight. My mother was a determined hard working career woman. My Father was a stranger, frightening but romantic, whose return home changed the domestic routine until his departure by taxi to join a new ship.”

The author changed his mind about going to sea when his father told him that “I shall throw you out of the house if you do” but on leaving school he worked his passage to the West Indies on his father’s ship and in his early twenties, whilst travelling the world, worked as a deck boy and a junior officer on merchant ships in the East Indies and Pacific and was shipwrecked crewing a schooner.

In retirement he set out to discover who his father really was by “following the paper trail which even the most ordinary person who has been in the services or the Merchant Navy leaves behind.” His search uncovered a life which began with an apprenticeship as a fitter at a shipyard on the Tyne interrupted by service in the RAF as an eighteen year old Observer Gunner on anti-submarine patrol in Orkney. In 1921 he went to sea as a marine engineer on oil tankers, an Antarctic whaler, tramp steamers, cargo liners and a Royal Fleet Auxilliary tanker.

Wartime service in the Royal Navy on a destroyer was followed by a regular run across the Atlantic to the Caribbean sugar estates of Tate and Lyle until retirement to the seaside resort of Exmouth in Devon after forty years at sea.

This book is both a personal journey of discovery and the story of ships and shipping in the last century, revealed through the life of a typical marine engineer.

William Redvers Forster (1900-75)



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