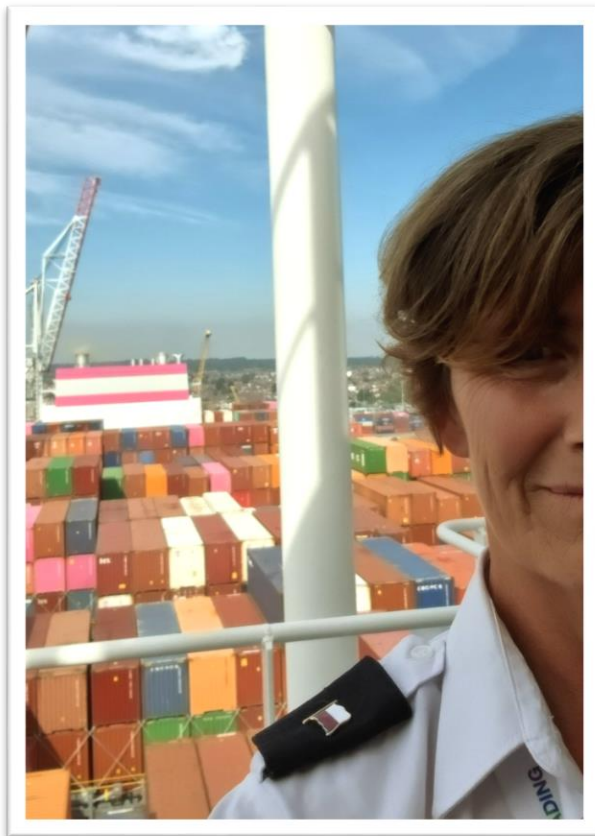




EMPA

Clare Holmes – Southampton Pilot



What prompted a sea-going career? The seed must have been planted in 1977. It was the Spithead Review in the Solent for the Queen's Silver Jubilee. I was eight years old; an only child, a loner and probably a bit feral! We were aboard the Williams workboat 'Wilbonnie' steaming around the ships at anchor, and I had disappeared (we're talking Generation X here!!). My father found me in the wheelhouse steering up Southampton water, something I now do every day I am working as a Pilot in this District.

My Dad worked for ESSO at the Fawley refinery and came home

with the Deck Cadetship brochure. I was not particularly academic but the notion of an apprenticeship where you learnt as you went along and was relevant to the occupation was appealing. I also had romantic notions of navigating by the stars and being paid to see the world.



Deep sea, I'll be honest, did have its highs and lows. Its all about finding the right Company to work for, which I did, and I gained the sea-time for my Masters Unlimited Certificate. To have experienced that night sky in middle of the ocean, smelt the spices and wood smoke coming from the shores in the Far East and felt the anticipation of waiting to learn of the next cargo and Port are treasured memories.

As the years went on, a chance agency job one leave took me up to Leith in Scotland to join one of the vessels with the Scottish Fishery Protection Agency. It was a fantastic job, like joining a family and I stayed; this is where I learnt my ship handling and coastal navigation. The work also suited my personality; we did our normal ship duties but we were also Sea Fisheries inspectors, learning the local and EU regulations and boarding fishing vessels at sea.

Having found that ship handling was possibly the best part of being at sea, becoming a Pilot was then the natural progression. When a vacancy arose at Southampton I jumped at the opportunity; I applied and got the job. However, the transition from vessels which were twin screw, twin high-lift rudder with a powerful bow thruster to basic single screw ships and no 'toys' was where the education began! The Mentorship, which is still in place at Southampton, was invaluable and I felt blessed with the colleagues with whom I worked, there was usually someone back at base to ask their opinion about a job and 'unload' to when it hadn't gone to plan!



I remember these early days vividly, and it has led me to be involved with the mentorship programme for other Women Pilots in the industry. The mentorship is part of the Maritime SheEO Community <https://maritimesheeo.com/>

Now I'm approaching 17 years in total as a Pilot and there are still professional achievements to be obtained. Recently, I have completed 4 years as Container Specialist Pilot for the Port, bringing the largest vessels in the world to DPW's terminal in Southampton. The technicality and precision required when handling these ships in confined waters has been the highlight of my career so far.

In 2023 I became an Associate Lecturer for Solent University / Warsash maritime school at the ship handling centre, where I'm able to share the knowledge gained over the years. I work at the lake 4/5 days a month in my 'off block' time and get to meet senior officers and Pilots from around the world. It's been brilliant and really is a transfer of experience (both ways). It has also given me the opportunity to meet some female colleagues and share our stories. (Pictured myself with Sherri Hickman, Kristi Taylor and Rebekah Martin, all long serving Pilots in Houston who were at the Timsbury for CPD).



Pilotage is a great profession for all genders. It provides continuing goals in one's career path, combined with a steadier home-life. Perhaps the sticking point is encouraging women, or any young person, to remain at sea long enough to get the experience and qualifications necessary.

If I could give my younger self some advice looking back, it would have been to get as much experience on as many vessels as possible, each with different maneuvering characteristics. Even for some of our junior pilots I recommend volunteering on SS Shieldhall (ss-shieldhall.co.uk). She runs trips in the summer from Southampton and as an historic steamship is very 'basic' handling indeed.

I hope my journey sparks an interest in young women considering a profession at sea and Pilotage, especially if they've not considered working in the maritime industry. Often these careers are not introduced or widely known about; in our Company we can get involved with STEM (Science, Technology Engineering and Mathematics) events which hopefully broadens horizons. After all, this is 2024, there should be no boundaries or barriers to any career or personal aspirations that a young person may have.