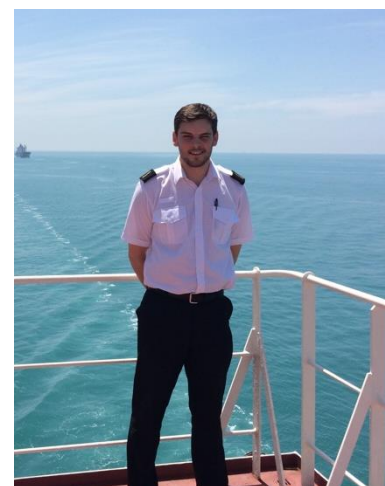


The Life of a Deck Cadet

Matthew Kenney
Deck Cadet
Maritime London/ Campbell Johnston Clark Cadet

Back in September 2015 at the age of 21 I began a new chapter in my life. Previous to this I had finished college and started a promising career in retail. There came a point however when I realised that this was not my passion or the area I wanted my future job prospects to be and I therefore focused my attention on finding something I would enjoy. I have always enjoyed the sea, spending many weekends sailing with my family or through sea scouts. I started researching jobs at sea and came across the cadetship. A three-year course mixing practical training with shore based studies. To top it all off you were paired with a sponsoring company who provided support throughout the cadetship. This is how I was introduced to CJC who became my sponsoring company.

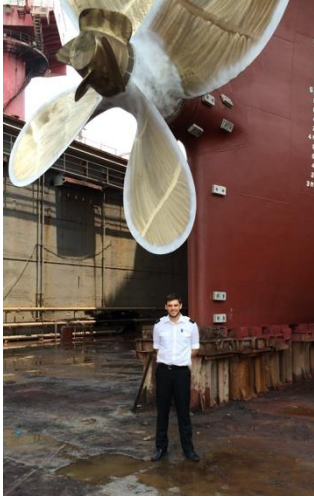


*On board the
Ardmore Sealifter*

The course is split into 5 'phases' the 1st, 3rd and 5th of which are all based at Warsash Maritime Academy totalling approximately 18 months. This is where I learn the theoretical side of the life and job of a deck officer before completing an orals examination in July 2018. This takes place in front of a Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) representative who issues the certificate of competency. The training received at the maritime academy ranges from celestial and tide calculations to simulators where you learn to use radar and manoeuvre the ship using the top of the range simulators. There are also a variety of short courses to complete including my favourite, firefighting where you have to tackle a real fire!



Warsash Maritime Academy September 2015 Deck Cadets



*Ardmore Sealifter,
Dry Dock China*

In between these college phases we complete sea time on-board a variety of working ships. To qualify for our certificates, we need to accrue over 12 months of time at sea. The first vessel I joined was in February 2016. The vessel, Ardmore Sealifter, was a 180m product tanker crewed by Univan. I joined the Sealifter with a fellow British cadet, which was fortunate because the crew on-board consisted of 21 Indians. The culture difference alone was a shock to the system, enjoying traditional Indian cuisine for the majority of our 6-month contract. Not to mention adjusting to the watch schedule. For me I worked the 0800-1200 and 2000-0000 watches. The morning I spent on deck with the pump man learning the workings of the tanker, and the evenings were spent on the bridge putting the basic skills I had learnt from college to the test under the watchful eye of the third officer.

Life on-board the vessel was very simple, and actually once I was used to this simplicity was very relaxing. During rest hours there was a small gym, TV with an Xbox, ping pong table and 200mb of data per crew member a month. I was therefore glad of my hard drive brimming with films and T.V. series to keep me entertained. I joined the vessel in Japan and from here it spent the time sailing around China, India, Pakistan and some ports near the Gulf of Aden. I was very excited by this route because before joining the Merchant Navy I had never travelled outside Europe. My fellow cadet and I managed to get ashore in pretty much every country we visited which ranged from very poor places, like India to tourist destinations, Colombo in Sri Lanka. Experiencing all this culture was very exciting and interesting from trying all the different cuisines, including an exceptionally spicy curry in India, to visiting a temple in Sri Lanka that contained a real elephant! One of the highlights however was being asked to join a Ramadan feast in Pakistan.



Baby elephant in Colombo, Sri Lanka

I feel fortunate to be a cadet with CJC as without them I would not have been able to start my career in the merchant navy. Unlike some of the larger companies I have a very personal relationship with CJC, regularly updating them on my voyages and college work and even visiting their London offices. This is yet another great opportunity for me as it gives me chance to see how other parts of the maritime industry work. They are also always happy to help out, as I found when I contacted them about a particularly confusing law assignment relating to risk management. Before I knew it I had received an email with advice about all the legal jargon which was confusing me, and even some information on the case we were studying!



On joining the Honourable Company of Master Mariners

During my two years so far of training the two most common questions I get asked by people when discussing my job are; what is it like being away from home for so long? and do you get sea sick? The answer to the second question is very simple. Yes. I feel I am very sturdy once on board however in exceptionally rough weather my stomach does still enjoy doing summersaults. The worst time so far was on my second ship sailing through the Bay of Biscay in a force 8 gale whilst the relatively small ship was in ballast and rolling about 35°. The first question is always a difficult one. Being away from home you do miss a lot. So far in my short time at sea I have missed Easter, Mother's Day, my sister's graduation, countless birthdays and other events. It is these times that I particularly wish I could be sat at home eating a roast dinner with the family or wishing someone a happy birthday over a pint. However, it always makes me appreciate what I have when a contract finishes and I finally get home and get the chance to catch up with everyone that I've missed.

I will always remember some advice that I got from one of the directors at CJC when I first went to London to meet them. Before joining CJC he had been an officer in the merchant Navy and a cadet at a young age too, he said;

"It's a hard life in the merchant navy, when you are at home you want to be at sea and when you are sea all you want is to be at home"

I didn't really understand this at first, however whilst waiting for my second contract to start, I was longing to walk back up that gangway and start working again. Even if the hours are long, the work is tiring, the risks are high and the weather is rough. For me it is the best adventure out there!



Half way there – August 2017

Well I have made it to month 2 on-board which is approximately half way through my contract. So far it has been great! We are engaged in lots of short voyages varying from 3 days to 6 hours so always busy. Our stay in port tends to be about 24 hours.

During the last 2 months we have sailed to Wales, Spain, Portugal and Morocco so I am certainly enjoying the sunshine. The crew are all very friendly and the chief always gives me chance to get ashore whenever we can. This resulted in attending a great festival in Portugal which was very fun!

During this contract I am spending most of my time on the bridge or shadowing the third officer assisting him with completing his safety inspections etc. I feel my knowledge of the 'officer's role' has increased greatly which the captain seems to have agreed with as he has given me more responsibility on-board which is great for my training.

At the beginning of the month a new British deck cadet joined as well, it being his first ship I was left to complete his familiarisation and start his training. Its nice having another cadet on-board as it gives good company during the shore leaves as well!

The ship is fairly basic on-board however they have recently purchased some basic gym equipment for the crew. Our last voyage the chief cook was not on-board for due to an emergency at home so I almost ended up doing the cooking! Fortunately one of the crew stepped in last minute. The new chief cook is great and certainly it makes a difference not having curry three times a day like on-board my last ship.

I have been informed as well that one of my reports I wrote about life as a cadet on-board the Ardmore Sealifter (my last ship) got published in the Anglo Eastern- Univan group leadership magazine at the end of last year!

Well I believe this is all the excitement so far.

The End of the contract – October 2017

I am currently enjoying the start of my vacation, signing off from B Gas Margrethe over the weekend. I was on-board for a total of just over 3.5 months. Which looking back has flown by!

Since my last report we spent most of our time darting around Spain (both North and South) which has been certainly interesting, but tiring, at one point out ports were less than 1 day sailing and the cargo operation the same! However, this has led to some great hands on experience which benefited my training.

Life on-board continued to be enjoyable, I got on well with all the crew and officers, the last couple of months we have had no crew changes as well so everyone really started bonding, and as there were a good mix of nationalities the working language was English, a lot easier to understand than Russian. I have been working the 4-8 watch with the chief officer and then a few hours after lunch as well completing inspections, maintenance, etc. for the third officer, so I have been kept very busy.

As I mentioned before due to the size of the vessel there were no leisure activities on board at the start, however about half way through my contract the captain turned one of the spare cabins into a gym, so we could utilise that in our rest period. This was very handy as the new chief cook liked spoiling us with cake! A little bit of excitement in another wise fairly bland environment.

As I mentioned we were visiting ports very often, so with that we also got a great bit of shore leave. We always seemed to head back to La Coruna in Spain every couple of weeks so I certainly know my way around there now. There was a fellow British cadet on-board which made shore leave a lot more interesting visiting the local restaurants and bars. It would appear as well that Spain enjoys a festival most weekends as we always managed to wander into one somewhere.

After my experiences of an oil/ product tanker and a gas tanker after completion of the course (end of this academic year) I am certainly leaning towards this area to work in and will certainly try to complete my tanker endorsements which will give me the option to work on these types of vessels. However, as you know the merchant navy is a very large industry and so for my next (and probably final ship in the cadetship) I will probably sail on a cruise ship! This will certainly be a change from the small coastal tankers I am used to.

Although I do not have a set date yet it is likely my next contract will commence in the middle of November, so it would be great to visit you all in my time off before this.