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## **Creating Access For All:**

Guidance for Historic Vessels

Appendix 5: The Solent Steam Packet Ltd (ss Shieldhall)

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Victoria Wallworth, 30 August 2018

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THE SOLENT STEAM PACKET LTD



STEAMSHIP  
**SHIELDHALL**

# Creating Access for All:

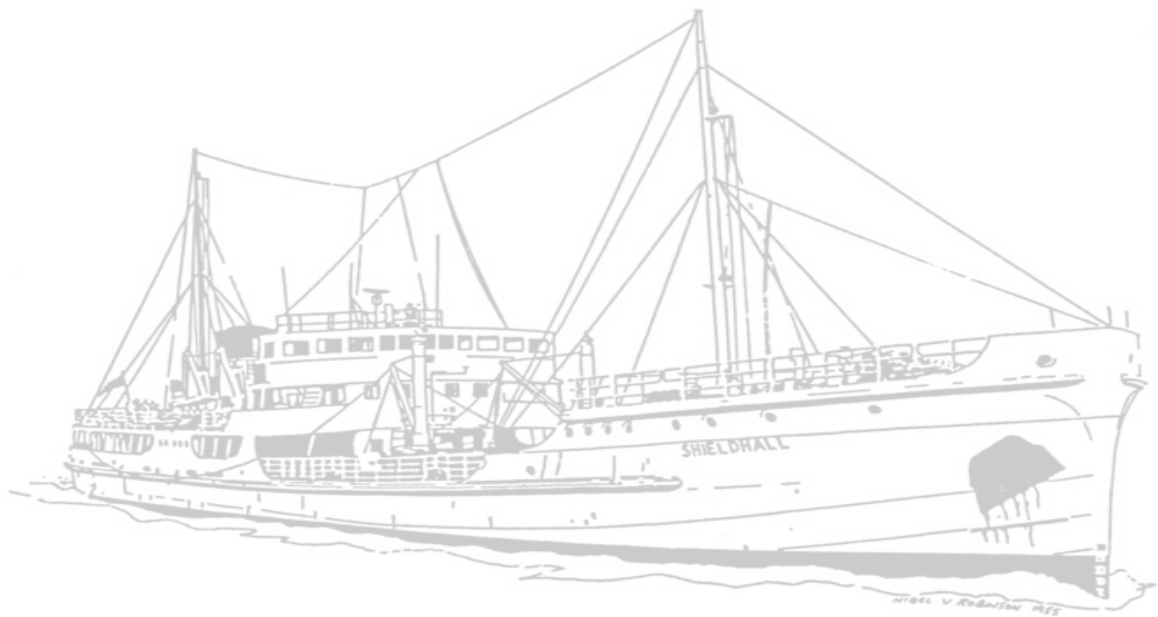
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## the “Shieldhall” experience

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This paper is written in response to a call for papers from National Historic Ships UK to share our experience so that others may benefit.



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The Solent Steam Packet Ltd

## Creating Access for All: the Shieldhall experience.



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### **1 Introduction**

This paper has been produced in response to a call for papers from National Historic Ships UK with the objectives of launching a new publication to provide guidance to those who own, manage, or care for historic vessels of the options available to them to create an environment that is welcoming and accessible to every visitor. The guidance paper shall explore a wide range of people's needs, and seeks to provide practical guidance on how these can be met in a variety of ways according to an organisation's resources, without making changes to the vessel which might affect its significance.

### **2 Some details of SS"Shieldhall"**

"Shieldhall" was built in 1955 for Glasgow Corporation and was the second vessel of that name for the organisation. Her specific task was to take treated sewage sludge to sea for dumping and in summer months had a class III passenger certificate for 80 passengers. This maintained a tradition that was unique to Glasgow where a public asset was used for the public benefit. In the early days, the passengers would be elderly people with reduced financial circumstances, so one can assume that people with reduced mobility and probably hearing and sight issues would not have been unusual. However, the ship's design made no compromises for other than fit and active passengers.

"Shieldhall" is 268 feet long, 44 feet 7 inches across the beam and has a draught of 13 feet 6 inches and gross tonnage of 1,792. No apologies for use of imperial units, they reflect common usage of the time she was built.

"Shieldhall" ran for Glasgow Corporation until 1976 and was later purchased by Southern Water who removed the passenger capabilities and ran the vessel from Southampton until 1985, when operational costs forced her withdrawal.

In July 1988, "Shieldhall" was purchased by a group of volunteers with the prime intention of preserving her in an operational condition and the legacy left by the two previous owners has resulted in a well found ship in good condition. The volunteers formed the Solent Steam Packet Ltd as a charitable concern to own and operate the vessel in categorised waters and she currently holds a passenger certificate for 200 passengers. 30 years on, the operation is still with unpaid volunteers. Over the years, "Shieldhall" has received 3 grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund and many other smaller grants from other organisations. A lot of this paper relates to the past 5 years or so and it is recognised that rules and regulations change all the time and our experience should be read with that in mind.



### 3 Salient points to consider.

As an operational vessel there are times when legislation relating to disability access conflict with safe design criteria to keep a vessel afloat and also, to provide a legacy to the days of design, build and commercial service. To maintain this delicate balance, in the first instance, we listen and heed advice from the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) who are primarily focussed on safety of lives and vessels at sea and additionally, grant giving bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and these feed into our own decision making processes regarding provision for the less able.

The umbrella of “disability” covers so many aspects, such as sight, hearing, mobility and mental health, all of which demand their own special treatment for accessing heritage aspects such as ships, built and designed before any special consideration was taken into account. So, the dichotomy for owners of historic vessels is whether to tackle all aspects, none at all or some and if the latter, which?

To help us clarify this point, during the development phase of our HLF grant in 2012, we requested that Hampshire County Council conducted an Accessibility Audit and used the findings from that audit to determine the “best” way to merge these findings into our delivery phase project.

Key aspects were:

- With an operational ship of “Shieldhall’s” age, we did not require to be fully compliant with the latest disability legislation.
- Our focus was on making some provision for the less mobile, or able
- Signage to be blue text on a white background, where possible and to use contrasting colours for those with impaired vision.
- A number of seats to have arm rests to aid people sitting in and out of them.
- WC cubicle doors to be outward opening, where possible. Design constraints precluded the use of wide doors for any wheelchair users.

Additionally, the crew are not trained to deal with disabled people specifically and as mentioned previously, to cover all aspects of disability would require a huge commitment from our volunteers to be able to manage across the whole range

During our emergency drills, we do consider how to evacuate disabled people in the event of an emergency and the advice from the MCA is that all able bodied people disembark first and



the disabled follow after. This is a common theme with most forms of transport and is not restricted to "Shieldhall", or ships.

When making a booking, if people mention that they have disabled people in their party, we advise them to make a private visit in advance and make their own minds up regarding access to the various facilities on board. As will be seen from the photographs, the trail from the gangway onwards is not straightforward.

During the time when "Shieldhall" was at a publicly accessible berth, we had started to involve a disabled group to visit the ship and to take an excursion. Due to a change in berth, visits are not now feasible but any future change of berth will allow this option to be reconsidered.

#### **4 Our customers and the issues we have addressed.**

Shieldhall has been sailing under the ownership of Solent Steam Packet for 30 years. During that time the number of fare paying passengers has increased year on year and nowadays represents our main source of revenue.

Year on year we have attracted a wider audience, young and old, enthusiasts, families, groups and international admirers of our heritage steamship. Efforts we have made to attract a new generation to become more aware of our maritime heritage and the sheer pleasure of a day at sea have extended our reach to youth groups, schools and coach parties visiting the City of Southampton.

To meet the special needs of our diverse audience we have introduced many enhancements and safety features to the Shieldhall experience:

- For parents with babies we now have an on board baby change station and private facilities for feeding.
- For families with youngsters we offer child friendly life vests to be worn on board throughout the voyage.
- For children we have an on board trail, the Shieldhall "Log Book", deck games and educational interest activities.
- For youth groups we offer seamanship and safety training events together with the sailing experience.
- For all we offer good quality on board narrative, risk assessed access to all areas and discreet management of passenger movement about the vessel.

As we have endeavoured to widen the interest and access to our vessel we have recognised the need to balance the desire for easy access and freedom of movement around the ship with the need for control and safety of our passengers in what can undoubtedly be a high risk environment.

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In some areas of our operation we have learned that careful risk assessment and modest expenditure on safety and amenities will enable us to do more. Additional and increased supervision is often key to what can be achieved. In some cases, however, the physical structure of the ship imposes a limitation as set out in the following sections of this paper.

We continue to seek ways of attracting a wider and more diverse audience. Creating access for all is an ongoing challenge.



## 5 Photo gallery and trail

This section will lead the reader from the shore to embarking on the ship and identifying typical hazards and “challenges” on board.



The first photograph shows the gangway towards high tide and although the gangway is wheelchair “friendly” it can be quite a push uphill to reach the Boat Deck.

The next photograph is under the awning on the Boat Deck. This area provides a covered area with good viewing possibilities and with sides that can be dropped in bad weather, gives a degree of

protection. However, this area is not heated and to access the Saloon and toilet facilities, it is necessary to go down some steep stairways.







Clear, colour coded signage provides direction, red to Port (left) and green to starboard (right).

Notice the angle of the stairway leading to the Main Deck. There are handrails and well found treads, but the angle is likely to be the cause of difficulty for those with restricted mobility.

At the bottom of those stairs, on the Main Deck and of note, is the covered sides and the life-jacket stowage that serves as a seat. Wooden handrails are an original fitting.





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Two entrances to the main Saloon. Note the height of the door sills, which is typical and the steps that have been fitted to make access easier. White edges and a black ground make it easier to see, although experience has shown that this is not foolproof and people do miss their footing from time to time.



Deck obstructions. These are rather obvious but nevertheless are painted in contrasting colours to make them easier to see. Typically, obstructions such as ring bolts are painted white to show up against the green deck.

Features such as valve wheels and dip tubes are kept close to the superstructure to reduce the trip hazards.

Traditional deck seats have had a minor modification to add arm rests. This is to assist the less mobile sitting in and getting out of the seats. This was a very straightforward modification that has been applied to approximately 50% of this type of seating. We have also made some purpose built seating that houses life jackets and these also have arm rests.





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One of the many interpretation panels around the ship and a classic example of using white on blue and blue on white typefaces.

This takes on board the recommendations from the Access Audit conducted by Hampshire County Council.

The style, clarity and amount of information on these panels has been well received and are now one of the distinctive aspects of the ship that provide people with information as and when they wish to read it. These panels are backed up by two others that feature video screens that show animations of various aspects of the ship, such as how it was built and how the steam plant works.



This final photograph again shows the colour coding that indicates that the reader is on the starboard side and providing clear and concise directions to other points of interest.

These photographs provide a flavour of how we have tackled the issue of making provision for those with disabilities and there are many other examples on board. As an operational ship, the prime importance is to maintain the ship's watertight integrity and design and to provide a safe place for everyone to enjoy.



## **6 Conclusions**

Matching a 60+ year old, operational vessel with today's legislation is a balancing act, at best. We have consciously tried to provide a platform that does not exclude any element of the population within our own budgetary constraints and taking into account the requirements of the MCA and grant giving bodies, such as HLF.

## **7 Recommendations**

For anyone starting off on this road and bring an historic ship back into service with a desire to carry fare paying passengers, external guidance and advice should be sought. Bear in mind that such people may have limited, or zero experience of ships that go to sea and may focus on land based projects, such as buildings.

Invariably, discussion will bring about the "right" answer and it is of paramount importance to understand the conflicting requirements and of those, which ones are "top dog" and have to be complied with.

It was very clear to us that it would be impossible to meet every aspect of the current disability legislation and we had to make some difficult and sometimes, unpopular decisions to reach a reasonable compromise.