

The Makers of Blueback Charts **A History of Imray Laurie Norie and Wilson Ltd.**

By Susanna Fisher, Imray Laurie Norie & Wilson, St. Ives, 2001, ISBN: 085288 4583, 158 pages

Those who roll around in small, cramped chartrooms with wet oilskins and soggy charts find that the next best thing to this occupation is to read about it. Small craft navigators will be found in bookshops of all persuasions looking for evidence that others do, and have done, likewise. It is a joy therefore to be attracted immediately by a cover of a book that says it all. To find then that it is written by Susanna Fisher with a foreword by the 'old chartman' himself, Steve Ritchie, makes the experience that much more worthwhile.

Charting began with a propriety stake in the information obtained being exercised, whether it was by the adventuresome State bent on exploration, or by a trading house with similar aims. Long before the advent of official State funded and controlled Hydrographic Offices, enterprising individuals like Laurie, Norie and Wilson provided the charts that were needed by the mariners of those days. These enterprises were, and are, essentially family businesses. They dominated the provision of charts during the 18th Century and are still in existence. This indicates that they were able to adjust to the introduction of the Admiralty Charts, to then survive, to find a market and to provide a service up to the present day with their sound reputation intact, which is evidence of the quality of the product.

There is an interesting parallel in that the international maritime community is today faced with the completely new concept of electronic charts and digital publications. Commercial organisations have been able to provide unofficial electronic charts of a high quality for some considerable time. Now that the official version of the electronic chart is becoming available the lessons learned by both the early Blueback Chart makers and the Hydrographic Offices of the early 19th Century should be used by their latter day counterparts. This book should perhaps be compulsory reading for all concerned.

While this is essentially the history of a remarkable type of chart that survived from the middle of the 18th Century up to the start of the Second World War and of the small craft version thereafter, it is an interesting read for anyone who has got his, or her, feet or bottom wet in a small vessel or even a not so small vessel.

Book reviewed by Rear Admiral Neil Guy