



# Masked Heroes

at home & at work

14 January 2021

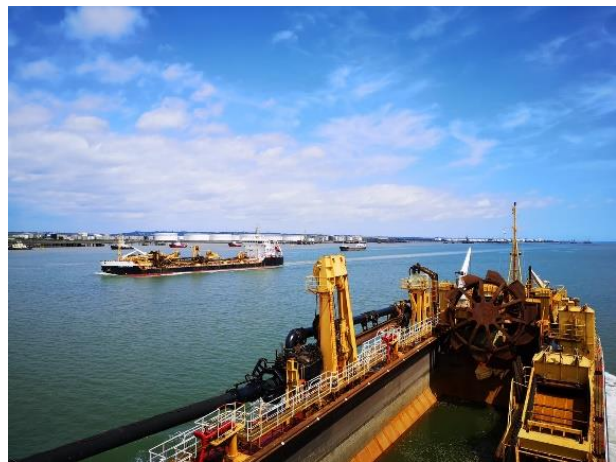
Welcome to the latest edition of **Masked Heroes**, a regular collection of testimonials from those around the business who have been affected by Coronavirus.

**This time, we hear from Kurt Cowdery, Matt Bland and Andrew Wilson from the UK Marine team. The pandemic has had a considerable impact on the marine business, and in particular the work taking place in Romania to get the CEMEX Go Innovation finished and over to the UK. They talk us through the measures they had to take to keep staff safe while operations continued.**

**1. What were the main challenges presented to the marine business by Coronavirus, and what action did you have to take to meet them?**

One of the key challenges was managing our teams. We were aware of many other ship operators keeping their crews on board for much longer than they should have been and we wanted to avoid this as much as possible; we tried to keep operations as close to normal as possible and do what we could to be flexible and support our teams, remembering the human factor throughout.

You have to remember that we are working with crews who come from all over the world; we had employees from Finland and Pakistan for instance who couldn't get home and needed to be accommodated. We are also subject to many more guidelines because operationally we are moving between different countries all the time, which have all got different requirements for dealing with Covid-19. **Our ships can be in the UK today, France tomorrow and Belgium the next day so, as well as UK guidelines we are having to work under the international and national shipping guidance, and the rules of the countries we are visiting.** This also impacts our external customers so we have had to be very engaged with them and react to changes to their businesses.



While operations reduced and we stopped two of our ships, we still needed to crew the ships and keep them maintained and operational, ready to go at a moment's notice when the market picked up. This presented a further challenge as the usual routes of travel to and from our crews' homes, across Europe and further afield, were not available and could change at short notice. Employees sometimes had to take a circuitous route to the ship and **we really saw our teams going above and beyond to get there, which we are very thankful for.**

As operations continued, we also had to manage the risk of transmission on our ships; as you can imagine with crews working closely together on a ship for weeks at a time this was a real danger.



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We put measures in place to control the situation as far as possible; for instance reducing shore leave to minimum or non-contact basis, enforcing physical distancing wherever possible and increased cleaning routines. It's not always possible to stay 2 metres apart when you're living and working together on a ship but whenever the crews couldn't maintain the distance, they wore masks and took additional precautions for instance working back-to-back rather than facing each other.

We all remember the food shortages at the start of the pandemic; well, this was obviously a real issue for us as we needed to make sure all our crews had enough food for their time at sea! We



worked with the ships' cooks to help them maintain higher stock levels of food on board so that they were less susceptible to food shortages. As the situation developed, we set up an arrangement with the ships' chandler so we could order the food, and have it delivered directly to the ship without them having to go ashore and risk exposing themselves to the virus. This actually presented other benefits to the business, such as better planning of meals and improved food safety, so this is a process we will be keeping long-term.

**We have been very grateful for the support of the teams who have been fantastic; both the senior officers and their crews, as well as the teams in the office and those working with Matt and Andrew.** Between them all they have worked tirelessly to ensure people could get to and from the ships, operations could continue, and everyone stayed safe. We established a framework for dealing with the crisis and implemented a number of regular calls, for instance looking at furlough, the ships, travel requirements, customers, engineering, speaking to GMs etc. Everyone embraced the situation and it meant we could quickly react to changes as they came in. **It was a constantly changing, complicated situation so we did what we could to make everything as simple as possible throughout.**

We really relied on employees to be flexible – what some people don't realise about marine is how much of a domino effect one change can have on whether the ship can even operate. For instance, if one person is self-isolating and can't come to the ship, can we find someone to cover that role or will it impact another vessel. Ships are operating 24/7 and our teams have had to adapt to changes that could happen at any time. Overall everybody's been very understanding of the company's position and the situation we have been put in by the virus and been more than willing to help out. We have had lots of messages of support from various members of the crew, which we have appreciated.



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## 2. What impact did the Coronavirus have on the development of the CEMEX Go Innovation? And what processes did you have to put in place to mitigate the impact?

The pandemic had a considerable impact on the progress of the CEMEX Go Innovation. Originally, we were supposed to have the handover in May, with the plan for it to be in the UK and operating by September. This obviously didn't happen! In March, we were served with force majeure by the shipyard in Romania, and the borders around Romania were being closed. So, everything was basically shut down.

It was then a process of waiting for things to change, while also agreeing the way forward with Damen and our other contractors. **As it's an international shipyard, its not just about local workers and the guidelines in Romania; we had contractors and suppliers coming from different countries who were unable to travel to carry out their work.** For instance, the engines were made in Italy, and Italy was one of the first places in Europe to get heavily hit, which had a knock-on effect to the project. It's important to remember that the delay to this project also has an impact on the business; the CEMEX Go Innovation is due to replace the Sand Heron, which is 30 years old and therefore



much less efficient, and with a far reduced capacity, compared to the new ship.

Work started again on the 1<sup>st</sup> September, which is a considerable delay! To begin work again we had to get engagement with all of the key suppliers; so, you can imagine an Italian engineer, a Dutch engineer, we had to get an agreement with all the companies involved otherwise we would not have been able to start again. Different countries have different rules – when you consider how the

situation is England and Wales isn't handled the same, imagine how challenging this can be on an international scale.

We also had to devise a new safety plan to keep those working on the ship in Romania safe; we called this the green corridor plan, which basically took employees through the yard and allowed them to access everything they needed to but closed off all other areas to minimise contact with other workers/parts of the yard. This was quite intense as we scrutinised it closely – we ended up on version 15 or 16 by the end! We also had to reduce the number of people on site where possible, and make sure that all those who were there were happy and felt safe at all times.



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**We were able to get the work in the shipyard completed before the end of the year, and the official handover happened in December.** This came with its own set of issues because we had team members in Romania who only just managed to get back to the UK before the borders were closed because of the new variant! The ship has now gone to Holland for further commissioning; this trip has had to be built into the timeline because there was some work the Dutch contractors needed to do, which they couldn't do in Romania because of the pandemic. All being well, the ship should then come to the UK for dredging trials in UK waters on CEMEX licenses, during February 2021.

**The team were brilliant throughout; particularly Mark Williams, Andrew Fairclough and Colin Ralston.** Mark has been in constant communication with Damen and worked through all the many changes that have happened, while Andrew and Colin have been incredibly committed and made personal sacrifices to stay out in Romania throughout the pandemic. Andrew has been in Romania since the project started and Colin only came back to the UK in October. **We truly appreciate their dedication; we would not have been able to get the project completed without them.**