Professor Helen Sampson really didn’t know what she was letting herself in for when, back in 1999, she was invited by the then director of the Seafarers International Research Centre at Cardiff University to come and work on one of its projects.

She welcomed the opportunity to carry out research among seafarers, and in 2011 she and her colleagues published their findings in a new book: International seafarers and transnationalism in the 21st century.

It can’t be described as a snappy title, but it’s by no means a dry and dusty academic treatise. Far from it. Sampson’s detailed description of her experiences sailing on eight merchant ships to undertake research and I saw it as a fantastic opportunity — which it was, she recalls. It was amazing to have access to a world that so few people know anything about.

However, in Sampson’s case — and indeed it’s true for many seafarers — enthusiasm had not really played a lot of thought to just how different it would be at sea and still remember vividly turning up to join my first ship in Sheerness docks and suddenly wondering just exactly how I was going to get onboard!

Helen’s shock at the gangway arrangements makes a marvellous introduction to her newly-published book: International seafarers and transnationalism in the 21st century.

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