



BOLLARD---PULL---

United Towing & Salvage Society's Newsletter



No. 3 June 2016

Chairman's View

Well everyone, we have recently finished our first full year as a bona-fide society and I think we can say it has been a very successful year.

We have grown our membership throughout the year and have had success in both raising sponsorship and promoting the society in the local and international media (Lekko).

We have good attendances at our social meetings and have great support from members on the society memorabilia front.

We have also made strides in increasing our profile within the city, with merchandise now being sold in the Maritime Museum and at the Hull at War exhibition in Whitefriargate.

We are also near to the completion and installation of the United Towing Company history that we are producing for the Hull History Centre. One copy for the public to view and another copy to be deposited in the archives.

Our web page is also nearing completion and will soon allow membership renewals and purchases of memorabilia to be done on the website via Paypal. There will be a member's section that will have additional information not viewable to the general public, for the more personal and relevant articles of more interest to members.

There was a recent trip to the History Centre to see how the centre works and the archive facility that from the feedback I received was very interesting.

We have exhibitions arranged for this year, starting with a two day event at the Veteran's Weekend in East Park on the 30th and 31st of July which I think will be really good. Another exhibition will run for four months at the Maritime Museum, November and December 2016 and January and February 2017, the Hull City of Culture year.

All of the above could not have been achieved without a tremendous amount of work by all the committee members past and present. We now have to continue our efforts to finalise our existing commitments and look forward for further ways to promote the society.

Regards,

Mike Hussey, Chair.



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Front Cover. Peter Foster's tug "Salvage" Takes the Strain in the River Humber.

Early 1950s.

SS BERGSUND - 20th May, 1949.

TIMBER GALORE!

In a scene reminiscent of the Ealing comedy film *Whiskey Galore*, which was released in 1949 and was based on the real life sinking of s.s. *Politician* in 1941 off the coast of Eriskay, (Outer Hebrides) and the unauthorised removal of the cargo of whiskey by the inhabitants of the island, and in which the residents were constantly at odds with the Custom and Excise men employed in trying to deter the ingenuity which the islanders displayed in removing the 50,000 cases, the riverside village of Paull was soon to be experiencing a similar unexpected windfall with the sinking of the ss *Bergsund* on May 20th 1949.

Built by Furness Shipbuilding Co. Ltd., and launched in 1948 for Swedish owners, the *Bergsund* sank in the River Humber off No. 10 buoy after a collision with the Hull trawler *Lord Hotham* when inbound from Stockholm via London for Hull.



With the prevailing westerly winds blowing fairly strongly, part of the deck cargo of timber was soon washed ashore onto the River bank at Paull where it was quickly collected by the residents, and was left to dry for a few days before being put to various uses in and around the homes of the village. In the days following the sinking, more and more spruce and pine came ashore until the villagers were having trouble to accommodate the windfall of new and unused quality timber - this had been unavailable previously especially so in the war years with residents having been used to salvaging used and fire damaged scorched timber, frequently after the air raids on the Hull docks, or picking up used pounder boards which had been used in the storage of fish on board trawlers.

The appearance of small wooden cases washing ashore caused further excitement, when it was realised that they contained Danish bacon and butter, so much so that rowing boats (coggies) launched to intercept them before they reached shore. It was said that it tasted fine after a good wash in fresh water. Other crates also washed ashore, clearly marked, American Sweetened Lard, but things took a sudden dramatic turn when HM Customs and Excise officers took an interest in the proceedings, this brought activities to a premature end.



At the time I was in my fourth year of working for a living being employed at Hull Distillery Co. Ltd., as an apprentice joiner, so I was conversant with the difficulties in obtaining first grade joinery timber, or any timber for that matter as it was still on licence. We would place a request to the relevant authority knowing full well that we would only receive half of it. Usually delivered by Horsley Smith and Co., of Hedon Road, Hull, it was a common occurrence when cutting timber with a large circular saw to hit remnants of shrapnel or bullet. Bullets were not too dangerous if they happened to be lead as they didn't fly through the air when hit.

With members of the Humber Conservancy Board arriving in the village, they were soon very interested in attempting to retrieve some of the timber. Paull and the vicinity took a sudden different appearance, with activities being carried out as though there was about to be a village inspection similarly efficient as a modern day clean up for Britain in Bloom Competition.

It was rumoured that on careful inspection however, stamped ends of timber still peeped from beneath garden sheds, probably extra ceiling joists had been installed in attics and loft floors were reinforced. Suggestion were rife that some lengths also having been cut to fit the width of potato rows on allotments with the tops of Arran Pilots and other varieties of second earlies concealing them.

The allotments were on the site of where St. Andrews Close is built now, so the spoils hadn't needed to have been carried far

One of the elderly residents, commenting on the quality of the netted enclosures built to protect the soft fruit such as raspberries, cultivated brambles and loganberries, had noticed that they were outstanding that particular year, said "my wod, I've never seen owt quite like it" The question whether the authorities had noticed the quality of these masterpieces, and the extensive amount of new build chicken runs in the village, remains unanswered.

J.R. Uney, Hedon.

BRAHMAN (or the BAT)

A Hull tug played a key role in rescuing one of the most famous Royal Navy ships of the Second World War.

The 230-ton Brahman was one of the little vessels that did a big job. Built by Cochranes of Selby in 1938, she was requisitioned by the Admiralty within a month of the outbreak of hostilities the following year. Her crew went too, including skipper James Richardson - one of the characters of the Hull waterfront, who neither swore nor drank.

His tug's name was changed for her new role to the Bat, as the Royal Navy was concerned about confusion with the battleship HMS Barham.



The latest addition to the United Towing Company fleet of tugs , the “Brahman”,
leaving Corporation Pier for her trials. H.D.Mail Photo 14-1-1938

The Bat was involved in the rescue of HMS Kelly, a destroyer captained by Lord Louis Mountbatten (later Earl Mountbatten of Burma). While leading a flotilla in a North Sea sweep, the Kelly was struck by a torpedo from a German E-boat, which blasted a 50ft hole in her side, killing and injuring scores of crewmen. At first she was taken in tow by another destroyer. Then the Bat took over.

Author Malcolm Barker, from Harrogate, who has written about the incident in his book *Essence Of The Yorkshire Coast*, says; “There was an immediate understanding between Lord Louis, who refused to leave his post for 90 hours, and Jim Richardson, who stood unflinching on his open bridge, despite Luftwaffe sorties. Eventually, they shared a triumph and were cheered by excited crowds as the Kelly berthed in the Tyne. Lord Louis ensured that the tug skipper’s skill was recognised. Jim Richardson was appointed MBE”.

The Hull mariner was later Mentioned in Despatches for his part in another perilous epic - the assembly of Mulberry harbours off the Normandy shore, which began on D-Day in 1941.

Walter, one of James’ sons, was making his first voyage aboard the *Empire Newton*, ferrying supplies to the beachhead after D-Day. She was bombed, shelled and machine-gunned but made it to France. Knowing his father and the Bat were in the Mulberry harbour off Arromanches, Walter sought him out.

Jim was unaware his son had given up his shore job as an apprentice electrical engineer at Reckitt’s to serve on the merchantman. “Hello dad”, said Walt, at which point Jim nearly fell into the bucket in which he was busy washing his clothes at the time.

Remembered as a steadfast father figure by his crew, Jim died in 1962 - the year after the *Brahman* departed Hull for J. H. Piggott and Sons, Ltd., Grimsby. She was subsequently renamed *Lady Vera*.

In 1969 the tug was sold to W. E. White Ltd, London, and renamed *Lash White*, later working for Thames Services Ltd., Gravesend, as the *Turbulent*, before being scrapped in 1974.

SALUTE TO RENOWN

FROM DEVONPORT TO BREAKERS YARD

With her deserted decks and superstructure wet with the drizzling rain, the former battle cruiser Renown, towed by Dockyard tugs, moved slowly down the Hamoaze yesterday. In Plymouth Sound she was met by ocean-going tugs and towed away on her last voyage - to the Clyde for breaking up.

Starting at Bull Point at 3.45 p.m. the famous old ship, even under tow, presented a majestic sight as she moved down the river. As she passed the Longroom Signal Station their Ensign was dipped - the Navy's last salute to a "gallant old lady"

In the Sound the tugs Englishman, Masterman and Seaman took over, and at 6.55 the last British battle-cruiser passed outside the breakwater.

WORLD TOURS

The Renown took the Prince of Wales on his world tours, also the present King and Queen, as Duke and Duchess of York, to Australia; and it was in her that the King and President Truman met in Plymouth Sound at the end of the last war.

In the war she was in action in the Norwegian campaign against the German ship Scharnhorst and Hipper, causing the former to stop firing.

As a prelude to her last voyage she had undergone preparatory stripping at Devonport Dockyard.

Wednesday 4th August, 1948.
Western Morning News.



THE YORKSHIREMAN.

BRIDLINGTON STEAMER READY FOR THE SEASON.

The twin-screw tug and passenger steamer Yorkshireman, built by ~Earle's Shipbuilding and Engineering Co., Ltd., Hull, to the order of United Towing Co., Ltd., Hull, for their service for pleasure excursions along the Yorkshire Coast and for towing purposes, has undergone trials satisfactorily. The vessel is now being finally prepared for her service at Bridlington, and will proceed there in time to commence her pleasure excursions at Whitsuntide.

Monday, 21st May, 1928.
Yorkshire Post.

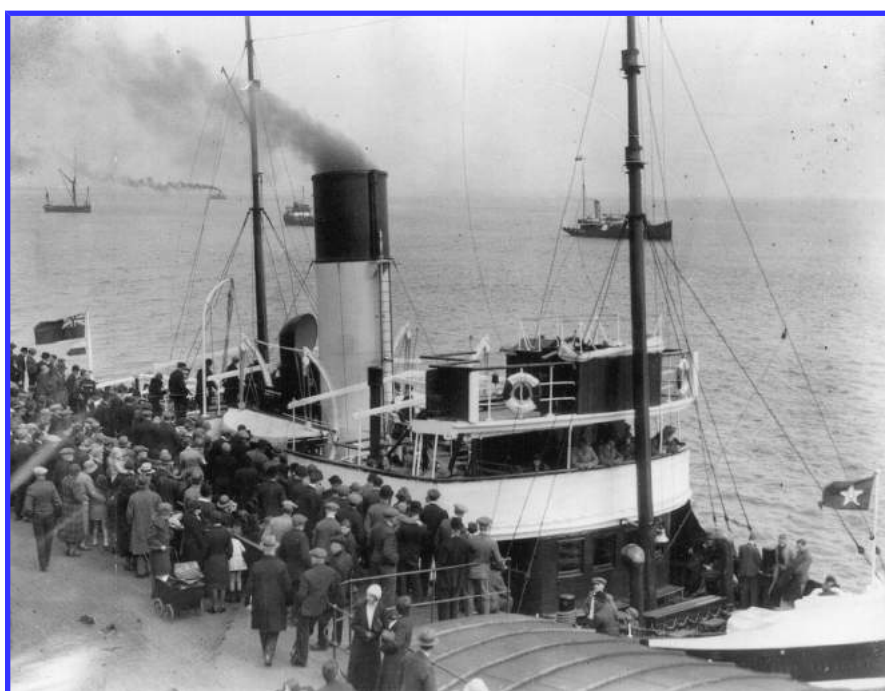


The Yorkshireman, the new pleasure steamer which will shortly proceed from Hull to Bridlington, where she will be engaged throughout the summer taking holiday makers for pleasure cruises, had her trial trip from Hull on Thursday when all concerned were amply satisfied with her performance.

She had been built by Messrs. Earle's Shipbuilding and Engineering Company, Ltd., to the designs of the United Towing Co., Ltd., and is especially adapted for the purpose intended. Her owners have, for some time, felt that the development of Bridlington as a seaside resort warranted the placing into commission of a thoroughly up-to-date ship for the purpose of catering for holiday makers who enjoy a sea trip, and the Yorkshireman makes a big stride forward.

In every respect the comfort of passengers has been studied. The vessel is 125ft. Long with beam of 27ft. And can accommodate 420 passengers. A twin screw steamer, she travels at a good pace with commendable smoothness and grace. She is fitted with electric light throughout. The forward saloon and lounge on deck are sumptuously fitted and commodious, and there is bar accommodation. The promenade deck is ideal for summer trippers and efficiency is the hallmark of the work in every section of the ship. She is fitted with the United Towing Company's patent davits gear which has received the highest approval of the Board of Trade.

Friday, 18th May, 1928.
Hull Daily Mail.



The Yorkshireman will be in charge of Captain Cowperthwaite, an experienced master mariner, late of the Blue Funnel Line and L.N.E.R. Line. Over the measured mile the ship achieved a speed of 11 knots, which was quite up to expectations.

There were occasional showers during the trial trip, but these did not interfere with the success of the voyage which commenced at about 9.45 a.m. and finished about 3.30 p.m. The journey was to and from the mouth of the Humber.

An excellent lunch was served. Among those present were:- Mr. T. C. Spink (managing director of the United Towing Company); Councillor R. W. Wheeldon, Mr. J. Robson and Mr. A. Wheeldon (directors); Mr. R. F. Holmes (superintendent engineer for the Company); Mr. J. D. McLulich (consulting engineer); Mr. J. Wheeldon (Humber Tugs Ltd.); Mr. Basil Wheeldon; Mr. J. W. Wheeldon; Mr. F. Holmes (consulting engineer); Mr. G. M. Bonner; Mr. Sanderson; Mr. J. C. Ashburn (Messrs. A. M. Jackson and Co.); Mr. A. H. Tyacke (assistant general manager for Earle's Shipbuilding and Engineering Co.); Mr. W. H. Jarrett (assistant shipyard manager).

The ship will make the journey to Bridlington on Saturday week and during the season she will make trips from that resort to Scarborough and Whitby, in addition to making short sea voyages.

Friday 18th May, 1928.
Hull Daily Mail.



Yorkshireman at Bridlington. Capt. Coperthwaite second left front row. Date unknown. U.T.S.S. Archive

OVER 300 PASSENGERS ON FIRST TRIP TO BRIDLINGTON.

The departure of the T.S.S. Yorkshireman to commence the summer season of short sea trips at Bridlington created the liveliest interest on the Hull Pier on Saturday afternoon. The vessel, which is new, only having been built to replace the Frenchman, had its trial trip some ten days ago. Full details of its engines and facilities for passengers have already appeared in our columns.

On Saturday more than 800 people joined it for the initial journey as a passenger carrier, and the decks of the Corporation Pier were full in interested sightseers. The tug Guardsman, well furnished with photographers, gave the new vessel a send off, and steady progress down the river found the passengers interested in the various points and places on either side. In particular, the younger folk were fascinated with the adventure of passing Spurn Point, but under the command of Captain Cowperthwaite, the journey was quite devoid of any adventure.

The trip up the coast gave the company full value in the way of invigorating air, for the journey from pier to pier took something like five and a half hours, and low water at Bridlington meant a further delay in landing, so that it was about 8.30 p.m. when the vessel was clear of passengers. Residents and visitors tuned out in great numbers to see the arrival of what should prove a fine acquisition to Bridlington, for the Yorkshireman is ideally fitted for the purpose in view.

Monday 28th May, 1928.
Hull Daily Mail.



YORKSHIREMAN AT BRIDLINGTON IN THE 1950s



Yorkshireman crew, front row from left, 2nd Engineer, Capt. Albert Wright, Charlie the Barman, Chief Engineer, Mate Ginger South. Back row, second from left is the cook and third from left is Norman Ivor Storey, then deck hand. Photo curtesy of Juliet Brittain



Yorkshireman oil on board painting by Hull Artist Walter Goodin 1950

Donated to the U.T.S.S. by Juliet Brittain

'HOODOO SHIP' RETURNED FROM NIGHTMARE VOYAGE

When things went wrong at sea for Hull crewmen down the decades it was often a case of hoping help would arrive in time - or perhaps praying to The Almighty to protect "those in peril" as the mariners' hymn suggests.

Flashback follower Peter Bass, of Sproatley, said; "When I was a lad I remember my father returning home from sea in the new year of 1953 after being away for several months. "Instead of him being happy to be home, he was badly shaken and exhausted." Hull salvage tug Englishman had been caught in storm force gales in the North Sea and parted from her tow.

Peter added; "The nightmare voyage started in Singapore after the Englishman had connected up to the old Royal Auxiliary tanker Olcades for the long tow home to Blyth. "My father was second engineer aboard Englishman at the time. The captain was Tim Bond - a very experienced salvage tug master - and the navigation master was Captain Chinery, of Goole.

The Hull Daily Mail used the phrase "nightmare voyage" to describe events involving the 6,891-ton Olcades, which the headline writer dubbed a "hoodoo ship" as it finally neared the River Humber. Twice the vessel had broken adrift while on her way from the Far East to the North East. There was a fire on board and loss of life when big waves struck an accompanying tug. The Mail said; "It will be a great relief to all concerned when the nightmare trip ends and the tanker, a hulk, arrives at her ultimate destination - a ship breaking yard."

The story began when the crew of the Englishman, belonging to United Towing, left home for their 17,000-mile trip to Singapore and back. They had their Christmas dinner overseas and, took the Olcades in tow, passing along the Suez Canal. But a severe gale struck in the Mediterranean.

Having broken adrift near Malta, the Olcades was eventually located by an aeroplane, taken back in tow again and brought to Gibraltar. A fire on board the tanker - blamed on a cabin lamp rolling off a table - then burned out the living quarters.

Olcades was taken into Lisbon and the tow continued without further incident until the tug and tanker ran into one of the worst storms ever recorded in the North Sea.

Once again the tow rope parted and John McMahon, bosun of the Englishman, was lost overboard. Two other members of the crew were also injured, one sustaining a broken leg and several damaged ribs.

The Olcades eventually came to rest on the shore near Yarmouth. It took two months to refloat her through the combined efforts of the Englishman and fellow tug Tradesman.

She was then towed into the Humber for examination before finally being delivered to the breakers' yard at Blyth by the Englishman.



R. F. A. Tanker "OLCADES" aground near bungalows at Walcott, near Cromer, Norfolk after parting from the Hull tug "ENGLISHMAN" during one of the worst storms ever recorded in the North Sea. 5th February 1953.

H.D.Mail Flashback 2013 Photo courtesy of Pete Elsom.

HULL TUG'S TRIP WITH BOMBED SHIP

HULL DAILY MAIL. OCTOBER 1948

When the Hull tug Masterman steamed into Barrow-in-Furness, towing the rusty hulk of an Italian motorship, a 56-day trip, which her captain described as one of the worst he had ever undertaken, came to an end.

The captain, Mr. W. Hopper, of 7 Fairfax Avenue, Hull, with his crew of 15, all but two of whom are Hull men, brought the 6,342-ton Marco Foscarini from Tripoli for breaking up. The Italian ship had a heavy list, and at one time was rolling so badly that her decks, 22ft above sea level, were nearly awash.

She was bombed in Tripoli harbour during the war, when her cargo of benzine and motor-vehicles was set on fire, and burnt out from stem to stern. A mass of floating scrap, she still contains in her hold the remains of the motor vehicles, parts of which were welded together by the heat.

The Masterman went to Tripoli from Greenock after taking the battleship Renown to the Clyde, and set off for home with her tow on August 26. Off Cape de Gata, Spain, gales were so fierce that they were blown backwards and lost 20 miles. Water leaking into the Marco Foscarini decided the captain to put into Gibraltar. While at anchor there, the crew of the tug, one night, saw their tow bearing down on them when the wind changed. The tow wires wound themselves under the tug's propellers and round the anchor cables so that they were powerless.



S/T "Masterman" towing Italian motorship "Marco Foscarini" *Photo U.T.S.S. archive*

Another tug had to be called to the rescue and spent some time circling around in case a collision should occur. Repairs completed, but still with a slight list on the Marco Foscarini, the two ships ran into more heavy gales off Cape Finnisterre, where one day's headway amounted to only four miles. More south-westerly gales at the entrance to St. George's Channel forced them to turn the opposite way and keep the ship's head into the sea.

The Masterman's sister tug Tradesman came to her aid off the Scilly Isles, but the Marco Foscarini was rolling to such an extent that nobody could get aboard her to make new tow lines fast.

Berthing arrangements made with Falmouth had to be abandoned and after some difficulty in getting into harbour at Queenstown, Ireland, it was decided to beach the Marco Foscarini whose ballast had shifted and made the list worst.

While the Masterman was taking in water, blasts from the Tradesman's siren called attention to the Italian ship whose anchor had lost its grip and left her to float towards the harbour mouth. The danger overcome, the ships eventually reached Barrow.



Captain Hopper on the bridge wing of Masterman in more clement weather

PB 63. SINGAPORE TO RIO GRANDE DE SOL.

A brief account and photographs from Joe Woodall, U.T.S.S. member who was Towing Master for the voyage leaving Singapore 15th December 2013

Had two tugs Uranus which was 303 t bollard pull which joined the convoy outside of the Malanka as she was diverted to Colombo for bunkers which was enough to complete full tow. other tug was Janus which was 220 t BP and she was connected along with Uranus.

Four days out of Cape Town we let the Janus go for bunkers .

P63 was also using her main engine but the problem was it was steam turbine and had to be set up with engine room which caused problems with trying to stop I had one problem with this when Uranus which was towing by himself lost power due to water in the fuel but luckily kept one engine apart from that it was fine.

After Cape town due to bad weather we didn't connect Janus up as we would have lost too much time as we had to be in Brasil for the 2/3rd Feb and we were making 9k with one tug power assist.

Janus kept as escort.

Once we arrived at anchorage for Rio Grande tug stood by connected until local tugs took over at the pilot station then Uranus went to Montevideo for crew change and Janus went back to Cape Town to crew change there.





A Month in the life of a Tugman by Pete Elsom

Extracts from a 1969 diary. Continued from B.P. No.2

Sunday 12th January

On watch. Dodging with "Sedneth 2", on location at 02:00, rig is jacking legs down. 03:00 positioning the "Sedneth 2" on new location, legs are down to 80 feet. 04:00 turned in for an hour. 05:00 called out to shorten in. 08:00 all tow gear recovered and stowed away. Anchored near the rig, 08:30 turned in until watch time. 11:45 called out for dinner. Still feeling a bit tired. 13:00 weighed anchor and proceeding to the "Constellation" at half speed. ETA is 16:30. On location at 16:20. Dropped anchor at 16:30 and standing by. Had tea at 17:00 read book and passed time in general before going on watch.

Monday 13th January 1969

00:01 on watch, at anchor near Constellation. Tugs "Irishman", "Masterman" and "Scaldis" due on location shortly. Quiet watch, turned in at 04:00. 10:30 called out to get the anchor up. During which the windlass clutch shattered and apparently is not repairable out here, and we have 5.5 shackles out! Rigging snatch blocks from hawse pipe, along the starboard side boat deck and down onto the after deck, so that we can haul anchor cable up with the towing winch warping drum. Knocked off for dinner at 12:00. 13:00 back on deck retrieving anchor one fathom at a time 17:00 knocked off for tea. 18:00 back on deck retrieving anchor, which is now just over half way up! 23:30 anchor now up and secured, after 13 hours work. We won't be dropping that again for a while. Had a shower, Captain sent everyone a dram of whisky down in appreciation of work done. Went on watch 00:01.

Tuesday 14th January 1969

00:01 on watch dodging on location. Could have done with some sleep. Quiet watch, nothing of interest happening. Came off watch and died for 8 hours. 10:00 cook put onto "Constellation" with a suspected broken jaw, after slipping in the galley two day ago!! Dinner was hit and miss today. 13:00 helicopter arrived at "Constellation" to take our cook to hospital in Great Yarmouth. Message from staff on "Constellation", possible move tomorrow. Message from our head office says next job is to move the rig "Orion" this is becoming a bit monotonous now, is there nothing else to tow but oil rigs? 16:00 came off watch, had a shower, relieved Terry for his tea at 17:00. 17:30 came down for mine. Catering boy is now doing the cooking. One bottle of orange cordial from bond 2/9d, turned in. 23:45 called out for watch.

Wednesday 15th January 1969

00:01 on watch dodging near the "Constellation". Quiet watch, nothing happening. Turned in at 04:00. 09:00 called out to get towing gear ready. Soft eyed pennant required. Stowed all the other towing gear away. "Constellation" jacked right down, but cancelled move due to freshening weather. 11:45 finished on deck and went for dinner. 12:30 on watch, still dodging on location awaiting orders. 16:00 came off watch and had a shower. 17:00 relieved Terry for is tea, then had mine. Wash powder from bond. After tea played cribbage for a while, started another letter, then started a new book. Turned in at 21:45, but couldn't sleep. Called for watch at 23.45.

Thursday 16th January 1969

00:01 on watch. Nothing is happening and it's getting boring dodging up and down the North Sea. Don't expect a move until Friday noon at the earliest. Then we still have to move the "Orion". 04:00 came off watch and turned in.

11:20 woke up early, so got up and did my dhobying before dinner. Really enjoyed dinner today, the catering boy is doing a good job. 12:30 on watch, nothing happening, they are giving out more gale warnings, not seen much of the "Sparky" today he has been shut up in his wireless room most of the day. 16:00 came off watch, cleaned out my cabin and then had a shower before tea. Started a new book after tea, then turned in for a few hours.

Friday 17th January 1969

00:01 on watch. Still dodging about. The forecast is pretty grim and I don't think we'll get a move today, in fact we'll be lucky if she moves this weekend. Came off watch at 04:00 had an extra large breakfast and now it's time for bed.

11:30 woke up, had a wash and got ready for dinner. 12:30 on watch, just drifting, that's something different! Starboard main engine has packed up! Message from the rig indicates we may be going into the port of Great Yarmouth, as the weather forecasts are not very favorable. Thames area is South Easterly gale 8 to severe gale 9, possibly storm 10! Not very nice. Confirmation of us going in for shelter will come at 16:30. It is now 16:20 so we are keeping our fingers crossed. 17:00 we are proceeding to Great Yarmouth for shelter, wind very fresh. We are now in a storm 10. We have lost oil drums over the side, and towing gear is adrift on the deck. At present we are just keeping an eye on it, as the skipper thinks it is too bad to go onto the deck to re-lash it. The Catering boy has slipped in the galley and hurt his side, so we are now running at full speed to get him in (these catering staff just won't have it will they?) Don't think I have ever seen so much water on our after deck before, and where it shouldn't be! Turned in for an hour before watch.

Saturday 18th January 1969

00:01 on watch, approaching Great Yarmouth. It is low water, so we are dodging about outside the port, awaiting more water, for us to enter, which should be around 06:00. Apparently the catering boy is comfortable. 04:00 came off watch and turned in for an hour.

07:00 entering Great Yarmouth. 09:00 all tied up and finished with engines. Fitters are on board carrying out repairs. Spent the morning on deck re-lashing the towing gear and squaring up in general. Went to ring Mum after dinner, then turned in for a couple of hours, as I am night watchman for tonight.

18:00 on watch in the wheelhouse. Spent most of the watch listening to the radio and eating. Most of the crew are ashore. The Skipper came back at 23:59 and told me to turn in, which I did.

Sunday 19th January 1969

09:00 got up and went to ring Jean, but on second thoughts she may still be in bed, so I'll leave it until this afternoon. 10:30 the engines have been started and we are going outside the harbor to have trials in the roads. All good and came back into port.

12:00 went ashore for a couple of beers, rang Jean, then I went back aboard, happy all day! Wonder if they have sold my record player yet?? Had tea then got ready for a night ashore, only to be informed that we are sailing at 00:01. Arrived back on board at 23:30 let go at 23:45 and off we go again.

THE ENGLISHMAN, THE IRISHMAN AND THE LADY ALMA.

“The worst job I have ever had was shifting a drilling rig from a position 100 miles off Aberdeen to a new site forty miles away,” recalled Humber tug boat skipper Peter Gibney.

The rig was of the “semi-submersible” type which means that it does not stand on the sea bed but is held in place by several huge anchors, each weighing some thirty tons and held to the rig by eight inch diameter wire ropes.

Moving such a rig is not even contemplated unless the sea is dead calm and then it is a complex operation. The rig’s tender boat is fitted with a powerful winch with which it heaves the sea anchors up until they can be stowed in special housings on the rig itself. Then the tugboats move in and take the place of the anchors in steadying the rig.

Skipper Gibney, who lives in Spring Bank, Grimsby, continued: “Three tugs got hold of the rig, my own, the “Lady Alma”, the “Englishman” and the “Irishman” and the “Irishman” as the tender took in the rig’s anchors.”

“But then the sea began to get up and soon it was too bad for the anchor-boat to work. By this time the rig had two anchors still out and the three tugs hooked up but the tugs were having a hard time because they were broadside on to the sea.”

The weather worsened considerably during the next few hours as the tugs battled to keep the rig steady and it was decided that the rig should cut away one of its sea anchors to allow it to pivot on the other. The tugs could then haul it round so that they were head-on to the seas.

For skipper Gibney and his eight man crew it was a time of great discomfort in the rolling, throbbing tug. For two days they kept on station, making no head way but keeping the rig steady in the raging seas. The weather worsened still with winds rising from gale force eight to gusts of up to force ten on the Beaufort scale. Anxiously the tug crews listened in to the latest weather broadcasts from the Meteorological Office in London.

“They said that in our area we could expect seas of fifty to sixty feet,” said Skipper Gibney. Still the tugs stuck fast to the wallowing rig, rising and falling in the mountainous seas.

“At about 1.30 a.m. I was on watch when I suddenly heard a terrible report above the noise of the sea. At the same time the helmsman called me to the wheel where he was having trouble keeping her straight. I knew what that meant at least . . . the rig was towing us!”

In tremendous seas, the rig’s last anchor cable had snapped, leaving it

at the mercy of the swell. Despite the full pulling power of the three tugs the swell was pulling the rig away from them. Loose on the tides, it was towing the tugs backwards despite anything they could do.

The rig master radioed the tugs to say that he thought the last anchor had gone, confirming Peter Gibney's fears. And by this time he had another problem. The battering of the seas was tending to push the "Lady Alma" onto the "Irishman's" tow cable. To have got entangled would have meant disaster for the rig. The rig master made a tough decision and told the "Lady Alma", a smaller tug than the "Irishman", to slip her tow. This meant rousing the crew to working on deck in seas so tall that the "Lady Alma" was being lifted high above the level of the rig and then plunged so deep that the rig's crew could almost see down her funnel. Each time she was lifted, the "Alma's" screws came clear of the water, racing wildly.

Working in the worst possible conditions, in chaffing spray and winds so strong they made shouting useless, the "Lady Alma's" men successfully slipped the tow and made fast the hook gear. To have allowed it to swing about on the deck would have been a lethal risk.

A helicopter risked a buffeting flight through the weather to pluck off all but the essential crew of the rig. By now it was being reported that the tugs were battling against the worst weather in northern waters for sixty years. Three German tugs were steaming to the rig's assistance, the seas slowing their progress.

"Irishman" and "Englishman" battled into the weather while "Lady Alma" took up station out of the way of their cables. Then without warning, "Irishman's" cable parted. The rig was far too much for "Englishman" to handle in such seas and men struggled in the bowling wind to cut her tow cable away with oxyacetylene torches. A usual unhitching from the rig was impossible in the conditions.

The German tugs arrived but none of them could risk a link up with the rig in such seas. So the six tugs bobbed about around the drifting rig. The weather raged, in all, for about a week without a break but eventually the "Irishman" and the faithful "Lady Alma" managed to reconnect to the rig.

They towed it into Nairn Bay for repairs while the tugs put into Invergordon to refuel and take aboard stores. For two deckhands this was to have been the end of the line. Heartily sick of being tossed about in the worst weather for sixty years they had had enough.

The two, however, made one more trip with the "Lady Alma" as she finished the task of moving the rig by towing it to the planned site.

Skipper Gibney and his crew had set out to shift the rig a mere forty miles. Instead they had found themselves sailing altogether four hundred

and forty miles in appalling conditions.

The Aberdeen oil rig trip was, by any standard, exceptional. For Skipper Gibney it is a highlight in a career which started eighteen years ago when he joined his first tug as a galley boy. That was another vessel owned by J. H. Piggott and Sons, the Grimsby tug firm. Peter Gibney served on most of the company's tugs, working his way up to deckhand and then, at nineteen, mate. He became a skipper ten years ago at the age of twenty-three.

In his eighteen years at sea, working mostly in the Humber, skipper Gibney has seen the river gradually attracting a greater volume of trade. As a tug man he has had a close contact with all types of heavy vessel or rig plying the North Sea. When he first started his tug would handle colliers, perhaps seventeen or eighteen of them in a two day shift, off Immingham. The tug boats in use less than twenty years ago were, many of them, small coal burners. The new "Lady Elsie" which he now sails, can handle any vessel likely to come into the Humber, including the mightiest super-tankers.

Despite the tremendous power of Piggott's modern tugs, however, they are still very much at the mercy of the elements as the drifting rig incident proved all too dramatically. A shallow water rig - one which has legs which rest on the sea bed - was another tug man's nightmare. This time the "Lady Alma" ended up towing the rig herself in heavy seas as a Dutch tug with which she was working had her propeller fouled. Then another Dutch tug which replaced her had her tow-rope part and finally the "Alma's" own gear parted. The Belgian rig-master after watching "Lady Alma" make several valiant attempts to reconnect, advised her to stand off for the weather to abate. Finally the rig was towed into Rotterdam.

By comparison, says Peter Gibney, super-tankers are easy work. Several tugs work in conjunction, acting as power and brakes and others gently nudge the tanker into the berth from the beam. The whole operation is controlled by the Humber pilots.

"I have had longer jobs berthing a 12,000 ton ship than a super tanker. Their sheer size does not make the tug man's job any harder and our tugs have the power to handle them without any worry"

Skipper Gibney's experiences also include crossing the Atlantic (in a Hull tug) to tow a tank-landing craft back to Britain because someone wanted to convert it into a car ferry; "And the thing was a right old bucket!" He has tried his hand at salvage work, bringing in a crippled Belgian trawler from twenty miles off the Humber mouth when a Hull tug turned back because the weather was too bad. "The crew worked up to their chests in water before we got him in tow."

There is no doubt that a tug man's life is as hard as it can be adventurous, and Peter Gibney is in no doubt that it is the only life for him.



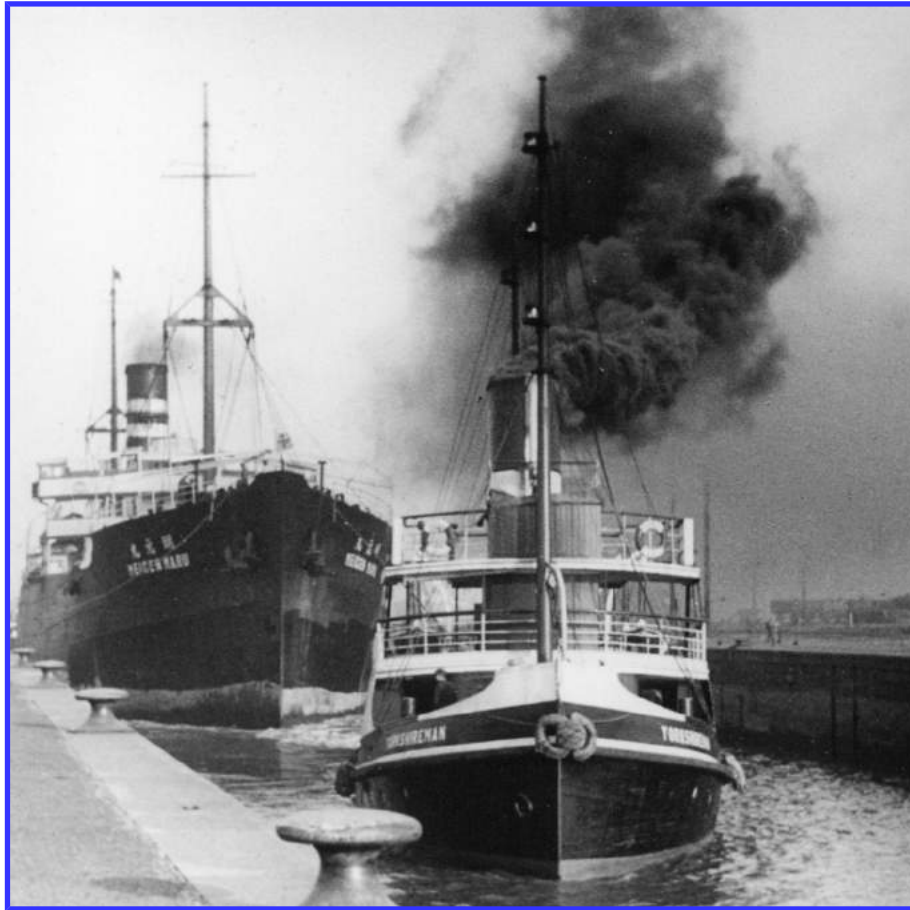
Article Grimsby Evening Telegraph 1969. Photo courtesy of Capt. Pete Gibney

YORKSHIREMAN 1946

CAPT. C.H. NOBLE M.B.E.

I spent about three months aboard the tug "Merman" as a deck boy, after that I set my eyes on the larger tugs. So one day, while collecting my pay at the office, I asked the boss, a Captain Cowperthwaite, if he would put my name down for a sea going tug because I had seen two large tugs moored inside Railway dock which was the town docks in Hull. They had just come back from war service with the Royal Navy, one was called "Seaman" and the other was called "Superman". They were still painted grey and were waiting for a refit before handing back to United Towing for peacetime working. However, I was promised a galley boys job aboard the tug "Seaman" when she had completed her refit which was to take at least three months. I was then told by the office that I could join a tug called "Yorkshireman" which was stationed at Grimsby and was still under contract with the government. I was dead chuffed - here I was fourteen and a half a fully fledged sailor! Also I owned a posh suit and most of all I was mobile. I'd purchased a second-hand bike because I thought I would have to bike to Grimsby, but no, I was given a railway ticket which would take me via the New Holland Ferry and on to Grimsby docks.

So with my belongings, which wasn't much, I made my way to the Tug "Yorkshireman". After searching the dock I found "Yorkshireman" moored outside the dock alongside the jetty which was her permanent berth. When I first saw her I thought she was a warship because she was painted all grey and had two small guns mounted on each wing of the bridge, her wooden decks were snow white. At first I was scared to go aboard - I thought I had made a mistake. I just stood there on the jetty top with my kit (an ex flour bag) that was stuffed with my jeans, shoes etc. I was wearing my war-time clogs. However, I wasn't there long before a booming voice shouted "is your name Noble?" I replied "yes sir". The voice came from the "Yorkshireman's" mate, a man called Alf Varley who in later years became a tug captain himself. He said "don't stand there all day, get yourself aboard." Once aboard I thought hell this is posh. After being aboard the tug "Merman" "Yorkshireman" was more like a yacht than a tug boat, reason being she was built to take on passengers in and out of Bridlington during the summer season then reverted back to towing duties during winter months.



I was shown to my cabin which turned out to be the ladies saloon, very posh it was. It had large settees which I used to sleep on, gee I felt like royalty, never been used to anything like this, even had a wash basin and a flushing toilet. Whilst aboard the “Merman” all we had for washing was a bucket for everything.

Next day the “Yorkshireman’s” skipper, a man called Sheriff, took me to the local shipping office in Grimsby to sign on the ships articles as a deck boy. They took my fingerprints, then measured me, five foot, six and a half inches, then photographed me. After all that I was presented with a Merchant Navy identity card complete with photo and finger prints plus a seaman ration book and also a book of clothing coupons. Clothes were still rationed. As a bonus I was given a Merchant Navy silver badge to wear in my suit lapel, gee I thought I was somebody. The reason we were given a ration book and clothing book was because seamen were given twice as much rations and clothing coupons than civilians because of the sea clothing a seaman has to buy. I found out later some seamen just sold their clothing books for booze and cigarettes.

However, back aboard the “Yorkshireman” I started to have a good look round. I smelt cooking from the galley and looked in sniffing. The cook then said “hi, have you got anything to cook?” I just stood there not too sure what he meant, then I was told that the “Yorkshireman’s” crew had to provide their own food and the cooks job was to cook whatever they gave him, but the cook knocked up a meal for me. It was two slices of corned beef and mashed potato. After the meal he lent me some money so I could go shopping. After getting permission from the skipper I ventured ashore. Whilst walking down the dock side I saw what looked like a large warehouse come shop. Royal Navy personnel were coming out carrying bags what looked like shopping, so in I went for a look. It turned out it was a naffi store and run by WRENS, Women’s Royal Navy. At the counter a WREN asked if she could help me, I in turn said “could I purchase some food stores?” They looked me up and down and said “are you in the Royal Navy son?” and started laughing. I told the WRENS that I had just joined the large tug called “Yorkshireman” as a deck boy and that I had to feed myself. They then said “sorry this store is only for the Royal Navy personnel.” I was about to walk away when I noticed the WRENS started to whisper amongst themselves. It was then they told me to go around to the back of the warehouse which I did and, surprise, surprise, they gave me two large bags of slightly damaged goods consisting of tins of you name it, it was there, even broken bars of chocolate. I could hardly carry them but did not have far to walk back to the “Yorkshireman”. On arrival I met the cook and gave his money back which I had borrowed earlier before going ashore. He was amazed at what I had. He and the crew called me crafty little so-n-so. After that I started giving the cook a pound note every week to keep me fed, mind you I shared my given spoils with him.



After a few days I settled in quite well. I liked the crew but Alf Varley was a hard working mate and expected us to follow suit. Every morning the decks had to be scrubbed clean, then breakfast. After breakfast it was painting or chipping rust with chipping hammers. So now I've got a confession to make from all those years ago! One day a wooden stage was rigged over the starboard side of "Yorkshireman's" bow, myself and a deckhand were seated on this stage chipping rust and paint. As I remember my hands were freezing cold, the other deckhand went to make some tea. I was left on the stage. I was rubbing my hands to keep them warm. I then noticed a steel ladder running down the side of the jetty, so, making sure that nobody was looking, I accidentally decided to fall in the water and grab the rung of the ladder at the same time shouting for help. The mate Alf Varley and other members of the crew dragged me out of the cold water, stripped my clothes off, found that I was not hurt in any way. I finished up sat in the galley with a blanket around me and also given a large mug of cocoa. The skipper told Alf Varley off for putting a young lad over the side on a working stage without a life jacket. No comment!

A few days later I asked a crew member, "when are we supposed to go to sea?" He started laughing then told me we was just on stand by in case the tug was needed. Apparently mine sweepers were clearing mines up and down the east coast between Flamborough head and the Humber and if any accidents happened "Yorkshireman was ideal for this because she was shallow drafted. Once when we were alongside Bull fort I got permission to go onto the fort for a look round. There were about twenty soldiers there, also a large gun pointing seawards. I noticed that the accommodation was very rough to me, the heating was paraffin heaters. I think by 1946 the forts were abandoned. They're just there now like old war relics.

I spent about eight weeks aboard the "Yorkshireman" then one day we received orders to return to Hull. The Ministry of Defence had handed the "Yorkshireman" back to the owners United Towing Ltd. On arrival at Hull the "Yorkshireman" moored alongside the ocean going tug "Seaman". Being a Friday we all paid off and went home. All the crew to report to the office for further orders, mine being to join the "Seaman" as a galley/cabin boy, gee at the time I felt honoured, but "Seaman" was still having a refit so every day was spent working by the "Seaman" cleaning and painting over the dark grey paint that she was painted in during the war years. Each day different faces began appearing aboard, the office sent tugmen aboard to work by until tugs could be found for them, and some of these men worked on the tugs during the war. During tea-breaks down in the after fore'sle, that's the accommodation for firemen and deckhands, officers lived in posh accommodation up forward end of the tug, I used to sit in a corner practically out of sight just listening to their yarns that they experienced during the war.