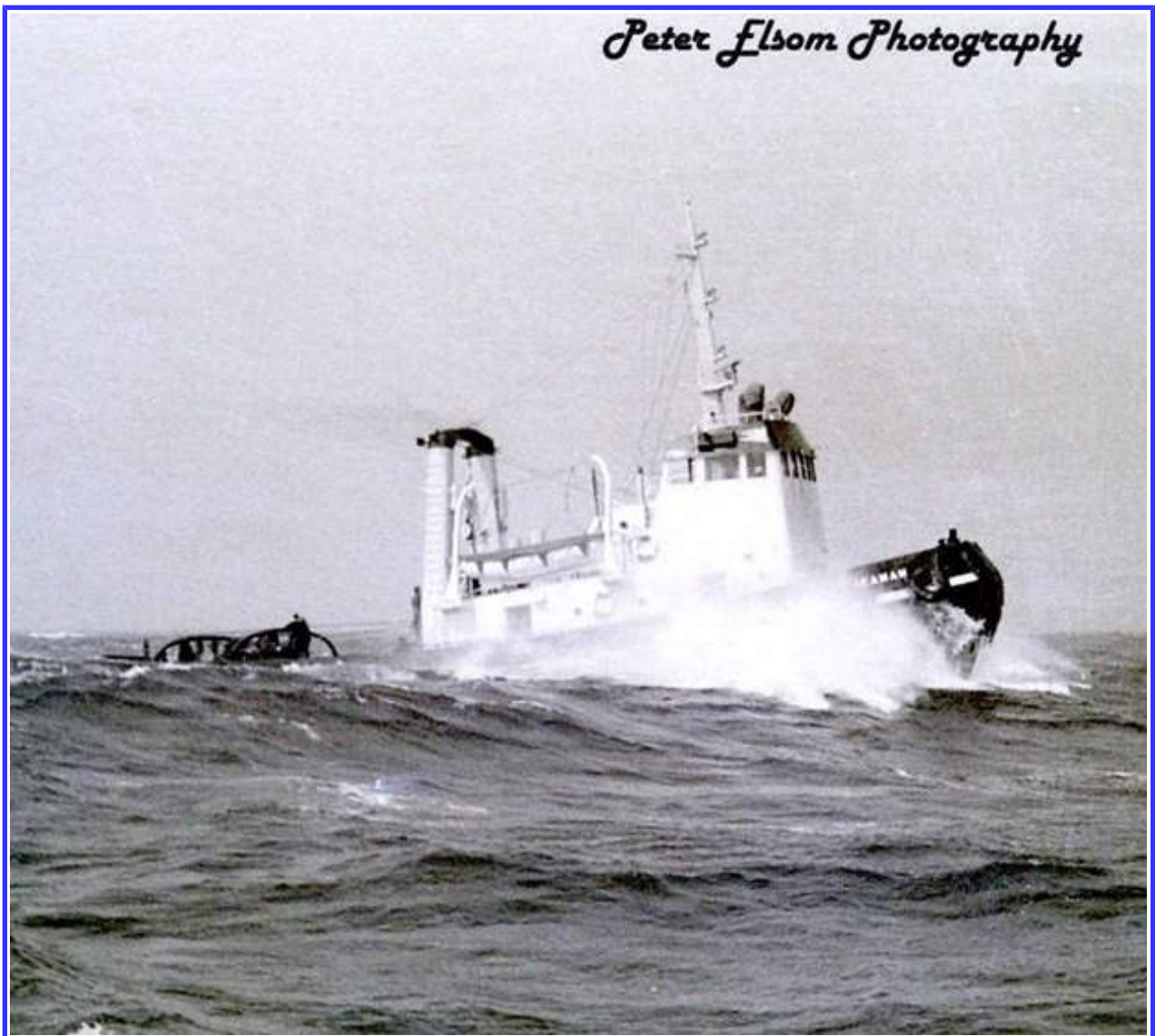




# BOLLARD...PULL

*United Towing & Salvage Society's Magazine  
Also incorporating "Galley Radio"*



**No. 6, October 2017**

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## Galley Radio

Chairman's review.

Blue plaque.

We are actively persuing the placement of a prestigious Blue Plaque at 11/12 Nelson Street, Hull, in recognising United Towing's long history in the building.

Having contacted the owners recently I have received written confirmation of their agreement to the plaque being mounted on the building.

This was one of the requirements needed to progress our objective, a further one is to get the written confirmation of support from three councillors specified by the body (Mancey, Inglis and Jones) who will authorise the application for the Blue Plaque.

I have tried to contact these councillors and I am awaiting their reply, should this not be received in the next few days I will be emailing them, to progress our objective.

(As of 6<sup>th</sup> October Mike has received written confirmation from all three councillors).

From Galley Boy to Tugmaster

"From Galley Boy to Tugmaster" the book on Charlie Noble's life on Tugs, we already have it for sale on our website and at the Peoples Memorial shop in Whitefriaregate, however I am persuing the possibility of having it featured in the Waterstones book store in Hull in their local section, this is proving a bit long winded however, I went in to see the manager today who assured me he would chase our application up, he did confirm they had a backlog.

As I write we have sold 105 copies so far.

Reunion

Following last years poor turnout at the annual reunion it was decided at the latest committee meeting to forego a formal gathering this year and leave it to individuals to arrange any activities themselves.

Best regards,  
Mike Hussey.

## Ron Whitlam

It is with sadness that we announce the death of Ronald Whitlam at the age of 83, on Saturday, 23rd September, 2017.

Apart from doing his two years National Service, his working life was spent on tugs - first on the River tugs then graduating to Chief Engineer on the ocean-going tugs.

Ron was not a member of the society but I'm sure all ex UTC crew members will remember him.

The society's thoughts and condolences go to his family at this sad time.

His funeral will take place at the Small Chapel, Chanterlands Avenue Crematorium, Hull at 14:00 on 10th October 2017.



Ron Whitlam 1934 - 2017

RIP Ron

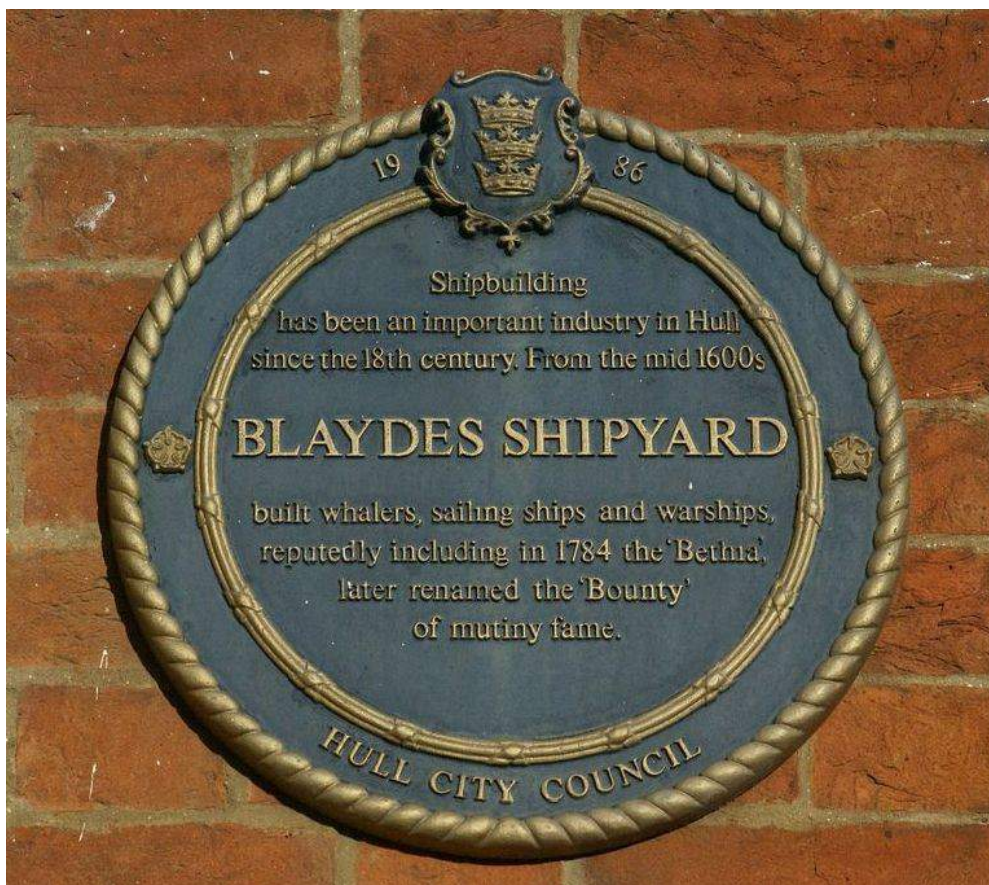
## Blue Plaque

As reported in Mikes review, we intend installing a blue commemoration plaque on United's old office building on Nelson Street.

We will be having a meeting soon to decide the wording on the plaque. If anyone has any suggestions, or would like to attend the meeting please get in touch with any member of the committee.

As an example, below is a photo of a plaque on Blaydes House, High Street, Hull. If there is anyone out there with any design ideas we will be pleased to hear.

This is your opportunity to have your say in what will become an important part of Hull's history. Just think of the stories you could tell the grand-kids!

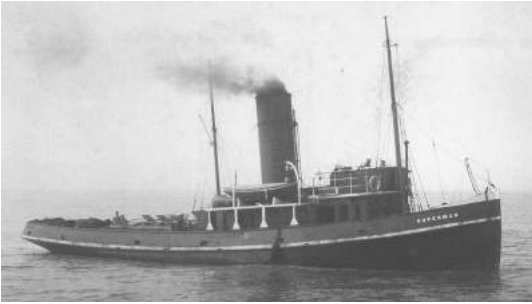


## New range of photo mugs.

We have produced a new range of mugs featuring notable tugs in United's earlier history.

The mugs have a photo of the particular tug on one side with brief details of the vessel on the reverse.

Mugs are priced at £5 each and are available through the usual channels.



### ***Superman (1)***

1923 Built by Cochrane & Sons at Selby.  
Length 96' 6", Breadth 24' 5", Depth 11' 8".

238 GRT, 84 nhp.

The first tug built for United Towing.



### ***Englishman (4)***

1937 Built by Cochrane & Sons at Selby.  
Length 143' 0", Breadth 30' 0", Depth 16' 0".

487 GRT, 190 nhp.

1939 Requisitioned by the British Admiralty for war service.  
1941 Attacked by enemy bomber and sunk with all hands  
in the Irish Sea.



### ***Seaman (1)***

1923 Built by Cochrane & Sons at Selby.  
Length 125' 0", Breadth 28' 1", Depth 13' 8".

369 GRT, 1200 ihp.

1925 The first UTC tug to make an ocean tow, the corvettes  
Stepdance & Quadrille from Boston, Lincs. to Buenos  
Aires.

1939 Requisitioned by the British Admiralty for war service.  
1941 Shot down a FW Condor aircraft.  
1944 Served at the Normandie landings.



***Brahman***

1938 Built by Cochrane & Sons at Selby.  
Length 106' 0", Breadth 25' 1", Depth 13' 6".  
208 GRT, 120 nhp.

1939 Requisitioned by the British Admiralty for war service.  
1941 Despatched from Rosyth to assist *HMS Kelly* which  
had been damaged during the evacuation of Norway.  
1944 Served at the Normandie landings.



***Tradesman (2)***

British Admiralty *Empire* tug.

1944 Built as *Empire Julia* by Clelands (Successors) Ltd.,  
at Wilmington Quay, Wallsend.  
1946 Sold to United Towing Ltd. Renamed *Tradesman*.  
1957 Completed the company's longest voyage of 18  
months away.



***Foreman***

1959 Built by Cook, Welton & Gemmel at Beverley.  
Length 107' 2", Breadth 26' 5", Depth 12' 6".  
227 GRT, 1030 bhp.

The last tug built under the stewardship of Mr. T. C. Spink,  
the first Managing Director of United Towing Ltd.



A chapter from the book "TRAWLINGS OF A LIFETIME"  
by Sir Basil Parkes, OBE.  
A Vitaly Important Buy.



Sir Basil Parkes, OBE.

One of the most important buys I ever made was the United Towing Company Limited of Hull, an old-established concern then owning forty-two vessels in all. Fourteen of these were large ocean-going vessels, twenty-six were dock and river tugs, and two were coal hulks used for bunkering the smaller tugs.

A major snag was that most were very old ships, some no less than fifty or sixty years of age, with an average age of thirty-seven years. Father had become friendly with the company's chairman and managing director, Mr W. T. Spink, through the coincidence that their vessels were insured with the Sunderland Mutual Insurance Company, of which both were directors, and father suggested to me on several occasions that we ought to buy United Towing when Mr Spink retired. In fact, he died "in harness" at his desk in 1960, just forty years after the company's formation and his appointment as its managing director.

The Boston Company and United Towing used the services of the same firm of accountants, and after Mr Spink's death I let them know we would be interested in acquiring any shares: it transpired that the chairman had held just over thirty per cent of these, and a cousin's holding brought their total to about thirty-seven per cent. Another seven per cent or so were held by a relative who became acting chairman and who, unbeknown to me or practically anyone else, began negotiating the sale of the company to Smits and Company, of Rotterdam, the world's major towing operators.

A large English concern quickly got scent of this and arrived in Hull that same week to "get into the action". When I reached home from London on the Friday evening a good friend telephoned to tell me what was afoot and advised that I should act immediately if I was to secure the company. Consequently I arranged a meeting, with the auditors in attendance, for the next morning, and before two o'clock had acquired just over fifty-one per cent of the shares. Those I bought from the widow, with whom I had kept in touch after attending her husband's funeral, cost £19.75 per share, the others (many of which were bought over the telephone, as the holders were in London and elsewhere) cost between £15 and £19 per share. On the previous day the market price had been £7 or £8, but I had to pay a high figure to ensure getting control. When I had done so I spoke to United

Towing's managing director, Hartley Vertican, and the acting chairman and asked for an extraordinary general meeting to be called for the Monday morning. The acting chairman did not attend - I understood he had a heart attack on hearing the news, and remained ill for several weeks - but all the other directors did so, and I was duly appointed chairman. Vertican was overdue for retirement, but I persuaded him to stay on to assist with the takeover in its early stages. (He was eventually replaced by Tony Wilbraham, my nephew, when he returned from running our Canadian company in 1962).

The total sum I had to find amounted to over £430,000, and the Boston Company was already over its bank overdraft limit of half-a-million pounds - a ridiculously low limit in view of the value of our assets. Moreover, the position was not helped by the fact that there was a government credit squeeze in operation at the time. The position was decidedly sticky! Our friendly local bank manager, Tom Liddle, blanched when I told him what I had done, but agreed to make an appointment for me to meet the bank's joint managing director, Len Mather, whom I had known when he was our area manager. He had once told me "Basil, if you are ever in trouble, come and see me". Well, now I was going to take him at his word, for the shares had to be paid for within a week, and I didn't know where the money was coming from.

I went to that London meeting armed with about ten of the Towing Company's balance sheets, all showing pretty miserable profits, but had an opportunity to explain my intentions so far as this latest acquisition was concerned. After lunching with some of the bank's other directors, I got the necessary extended loan facilities - accompanied by a warning "Don't do it again!".

My intention was either to acquire, or come to a sensible working arrangement with, the main rival company, J. H. Piggott and Son Ltd. of Grimsby, another old family firm, with a dozen small, and equally old, tugs operating in the Grimsby and Immingham area. The trouble had been that Harry Piggott (son of the founder of the business), who probably owned over ninety per cent of his company's shares, and old Mr Spink were daggers drawn: they were not safe to be let out in the same town! They fought like cat and dog to secure the towage of every new ship that came into the Humber, and cut each other's throats financially.

A few days after getting the money, I went to see Harry Piggott, who knew from the newspapers that we had taken control of United Towing and what we had paid. He was white with rage when I was shown into his office without an appointment, and said I must never come again, and he would not go to my office. However, he agreed to a further meeting on "neutral" territory - the Angel Hotel at Brigg - and, after several of these get-togethers, we came to a very amicable arrangement.

For the sum of £122,000, he agreed to sell us forty-nine per cent of the shares in his company, reserving the right to require us to buy the remainder at the then market value on six months' notice at any time during the next ten years; but at the end of that time he had to sell to us. We started working together, both companies began to make a profit, and both commenced building new tugs, and, though there were occasional disagreements between our Hull and his Grimsby staff, Piggott and I never exchanged a bad word.

He was enjoying himself so much that he carried on for the full ten years, by the end of which time there was not one of his old tugs left, and he had a very modern fleet. As a result, we had to pay something like £1,100,000 to complete the second part of the bargain. During this period our company also had virtually renewed the whole of its own fleet, though I still find it difficult to believe how we managed it. Anyway, after finalizing the initial agreement with Harry Piggott, Vertican and I arranged to go to Rotterdam to meet Smits' directors, in a bid to get rid of our ocean-going tugs, which were losing money. Smits' chairman lost no time in letting us know that they would buy all fourteen vessels concerned, to be scrapped, and would pay the current scrap price

plus £100,000 for our “nuisance value”. But there was a special condition – we would have to restrict all our future tows to the UK and Northern Ireland; we would not be allowed to cross the North Sea or the English Channel, or go to Eire.

We met again later in the day and turned down the offer. And during the next eighteen months we sold every one of our ocean-going tugs outside the United Kingdom: we did so at considerably more than £100,000 above scrap value. We may have lost a little money in continuing to operate them in the meantime, but all the oceans of the world were left free for us to work in, and that was a tremendous advantage.

We promptly began to sell off many of the older steam vessels and to replace them with diesel tugs, and within the next seven years the number of diesel tugs in the fleet increased from three to twenty-nine. At the end of that period, for the first time in its history, United Towing had an all diesel fleet. Except for one, our new tugs were twin-screw vessels all built in Great Britain and this gave us a great advantage in securing the large amount of work now becoming available from the gas rigs which were springing up at the southern end of the North Sea. The American off-shore operators would only employ twin-screw vessels, and it so happened we were the only British company able to meet their requirements. So for several years the pickings were ours for the taking.

We owed our good fortune in the choice of vessel we had built to my friendship - social rather than business - with Thomas Somerville Roberts, Hull's chief docks manager and Humber Ports director, who, before taking his degree, had served throughout the war as a chief engineer. One day he told me our single-screw tugs were causing considerable damage to the railway company's property, and strongly urged me to order twin-screws, which gave a much greater manoeuvrability and were capable of double the work. My directors were not enthusiastic, because of the additional initial expense and greater maintenance costs, and our skippers whom I questioned all seemed satisfied with the single-screws to which they were accustomed.

When I told “Tommy” Roberts this, he invited me to send some of the skippers up to the Tyne-Tees area - he had been dock manager for Middlesborough and Hartlepool for a decade before taking his Humber appointment in 1959 - and he would arrange for them to be given a demonstration of twin-screw vessels operating both in the open sea and the tideway. I did so, and all six skippers concerned returned wholly converted to the idea.

“Tommy”, a wonderful friend to have at that vital moment, later became port director of the South Wales ports, and I invited his wife to perform the launching of one of our new tugs, the only way I could repay him, in a small way, for his invaluable advice.

We needed more tugs of that description, and I had obtained several specifications and quotations from different builders - but, my usual problem, there was no money with which to pay for them: Then I opened my newspaper one morning only to read that the government were to allocate £30 millions to enable British owners prepared to build ships in British yards to borrow the necessary capital on low long-term rates. I couldn't get to my office quickly enough, spent most of the morning on the telephone finding out which ministerial department was dealing with the matter, and then went off to London armed with the quotations and other information I had already gathered.

The result was that I was allocated over £1 million, enough to order the six tugs I needed immediately, and later got another half-million pounds for the same purpose when the government stepped up the over-all amount available.

The restrictions imposed by Tony Wedgewood Benn when he became Minister of Energy induced a lot of the American North Sea operators to quit the scene, and this did not help our tug company's operations. By now we had only two or three ocean-going tugs, but it was very difficult to keep them fully employed and viable. Unless one or two salvage jobs cropped up in a year, the chances were they would operate at a loss.

The “cod war” which broke out when Iceland decided to impose a 200-mile line around her coastline within which the ships of other nations could not fish - this was well before most other countries did likewise - certainly brought our tugs into active use. Iceland had, I believe, only three gunboats, and our Admiralty was anxious that British fishery patrol vessels should not become entangled with them. But they kept our skippers very well informed about the whereabouts of the gunboats, and if they started to interfere with any British trawlers, our tugs, fitted with big rubber fenders, would intervene and push them off without causing any major damage.

The Falklands War found the three ocean-going tugs, the *Salvageman*, *Yorkshireman* and *Irishman*, in action in the South Atlantic, employed in all manner of work, towing naval and other ships, transporting goods and personnel from one island to another, and assisting in all kinds of ways.

They did a wonderful job during the two years or so they were there, and several crew members were decorated on returning home.



*Lloydsman* (above) was the most powerful tug in Europe at the time she was built.

*Englishman* (below) built in 1965 was the first new diesel tug we commissioned after taking over the United Towing Company.



## **Six Months on *M.T. Turmoil***

Story as told by 2<sup>nd</sup> R.O. Sean

I joined the *R.T. Turmoil* as Second Radio Officer in Falmouth early afternoon on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1962 after an overnight ferry crossing and a long train journey from London. So began six of the most unusual months, almost to the day, of my sea going career.

My first sight of the tug as she sat beside the wharf left me not all that impressed. Her towing deck was level with the quay and she looked small and a bit ugly. However, on close inspection, her raked fore and main mast masts made her look fast, her oversized buff funnel made her look powerful and her slightly flared bow and the short distance from her stem to the point where her hull reached full beam made her look belligerent. Later that afternoon when the tide had dropped, looking down at her from the quayside, she just looked ugly and untidy again.



*Turmoil* 1944

On boarding her, the bosun showed me to the Captain's cabin and over the next few days I tried to get used to life on a ship which was so much different to anything I had sailed on over the previous five years spent on much larger and more opulent vessels of the Indo China Steam Navigation Company out of Hong Kong. The first thing I did was pack away my uniforms since it was obvious they would not be “wanted on voyage” on a vessel where dress was not only informal but almost optional. It took a while to get used to a Captain who wore a trilby hat on the bridge and a Chief Engineer who seemed to live in a boiler suit which had once - probably a century previously - been white, but which was now a mass of oil and grease stains.

*Turmoil* was undergoing a minor refit at the time but officially she was on salvage station and a few days later the call came in to say that a Norwegian vessel with the unlikely English name "*Farnhurst*" had lost steering somewhere off the notorious "Minkies" (Minquiers) near Jersey. Many of the crew were ashore and for the next five minutes *Turmoil's* siren boomed around Falmouth harbour calling them back on board, most of them made it and we quickly found ourselves in a full speed race for the casualty against one of United Towing's vessels which I think was the *Merchantman*. When we arrived on scene we found a beautiful modern French tug also standing by so it was two battered British versus a French tug for the job. We all laid off the casualty for two days hopefully waiting on a Lloyd's open form which never came as the casualty's company signed a contract salvage job with a Belgian towing company leaving all us three with nothing to do but head back to port. This was something I was delighted about as I was totally unused to being almost hove too on a very small vessel in a lively enough sea. I had spent a lot of time bent over a bucket in the radio room.

When we tied up in Falmouth, the ship's agent arrived with a telegram for me saying my then girlfriend - now my wife of over fifty years – had been rushed to hospital in London with an appendix. So I headed for London by train, fortunately having first changed into my uniform, fortunately because on arrival at the hospital at ten-o'clock the following morning, one look at the uniform and any rules about visiting hours went out of the window.

My girlfriend, having been operated on successfully, I was able to catch a late night train back to Falmouth where I managed to jump on board just as the *Turmoil* was casting off and heading for Newcastle to pick up some barges for Milford Haven.

Early morning, somewhere southwest of the Isle of Wight, a coded message came through for the Captain which resulted in us making a dash for Falmouth where we dropped the barges to a harbour tug and again found ourselves going flat out for Appledore to "rescue" one of our own vessels, the *Britonia*. *Britonia* was under construction in Appledore shipyards, which, it was thought, were about to go bankrupt. The vessel had been launched and was about to finish "fitting out" but, as ownership of the vessel would be a matter of legal dispute should the shipyard go "bust" we were tasked with the job of going in and getting her out. This we did in quite a spectacular "cutting out" operation.



*Britonia* 1963

It was a beautiful sunny evening with flat calm seas when we arrived off Appledore which was fortunate as we had only an hour or so to get across the sand bar at the entrance to the harbour and get back out again. We had to traverse the entire harbour front to reach the shipyard where *Britonia* was tied up. This we did at some considerable speed sending fishermen and sunbathers scrambling up the rocks for the promenade and leaving moored yachts and pleasure craft heaving in the considerable wake thrown up by our passage. *Turmoil's* engines made quite a lot of noise at speed but so did the sound of our wake crashing on shore. Nevertheless, the sound of our passage failed to cover the choice language of those scrambling for their lives or being thrown about on their moored harbour craft. To make a long story short, we got alongside the *Britonia*, our bosun and a few deckhands sent a watchman on his way - not difficult since the bosun was waving a fire axe which might be needed to chop through mooring lines - got a towing wire on board and in a matter of minutes we were under our way again much to the chagrin of Appledorians just recovering from our previous transit.

One of our crew swore afterwards that he heard someone ashore scream "J...s C...t here she comes again and this time there are two of 'em". I do know we heard the sound of a couple of police car sirens and saw the flashing lights as they raced along the promenade. Anyway, we just about made it across the bar but it must have been a close run thing as we left a pretty large muddy stain on the sea's surface astern as we headed for Milford Haven. The weather was good enough which was fortunate as we had not had time to attach a bridle - two thick nylon lines made fast to the bows of the tow terminating in a steel ring to which the towing wire was attached and which acted as a "shock absorber" in a sea - to the tow and, being light she was pretty lively. Also, she had no lights so we had to keep her on a short tow and light her up with our search light if any other vessels came close.

On arrival at Milford Haven just before light next morning, under instructions from the ship's agent, we tied *Britonia* up to a mooring buoy - the agent put a crew on board her - possession being nine points of the law - and, having delivered some mail, sent us on our way out to sea before the authorities could get hold of us. So, we headed south towards Lands End for orders picking up a BBC news broadcast which mentioned something about piracy. A few hours later we received a radio message ordering us to Copenhagen to pick up a T2 tanker mid-section for Baltimore in Maryland, USA and we never did hear anything else about the *Britonia* incident except that we received a message from the "owners" thanking and congratulating us for our good work.

## AWARD TO HULL TUG.

(Special telegram.)

In the Admiralty Court today, Mr. Justice Hargrave Deane, awarded the owners, master and crew of the Hull tug *Englishman* £200 with £36 for damage for salvage services rendered by their tug, together with a number of Yarmouth tugs, to the Norwegian steamship *Haakor*, which on the 20<sup>th</sup> April last ran on to the Haisborough Sands off the Norfolk coast, while on a voyage from Hull to Rotterdam. The *Haakor* was got off on the 21st.

His Lordship gave to the Yarmouth tugs and a number of beachmen who were first on the scene £1,350 plus £81 for damage.

Wednesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 1910.

Hull Daily Mail.



*Englishman* 1913



## Fire fighting at the Falkland Islands

By Ray Scott

One of the many "tasks" given to the *Irishman* and the *Salvageman* during the time spent at the Falklands was to assist the Royal Navy in salvaging a general cargo vessel, the *M.V. Kracker*. She caught fire in the paint store and it soon spread.

On leaving Port Stanley, we (*Irishman*) stopped of at one of the frigates to pick up a fire-fighting team along with a couple of submersible pumps.

The *Salvageman* was already on the job, made fast to the *Kracker's* starboard side. We tied up to her port side and started to rig up and transfer our pumps and men, but our men soon started to scramble back aboard the *Irishman* as we could hear loud explosions coming from the hold of the *Kracker*.

We later found out from the vessel's Captain that some of the cargo contained a load of Mexifloats, and it was them that were expanding through the intense heat and exploding. The fire fighters brought this problem under control by cooling them down with fire hoses provided and used by the *Salvageman* & *Irishman* crews.



After a few hours, the fire was well contained, and we pumped the *Kracker* dry of any excess water, made sure that she was stable etc. and let go.



What is a Mexiflote?

They are pontoons and come in three sections; a bow, a centre and a stern, that can be connected together in a number of configurations as required.



Mexifloats

## The Diplomat 1909

### Two Selby Launches

On Thursday from the shipyard of Messrs. Cochrane and Sons, at Selby, two magnificent boats, which have been built on their premises, were launched.

The first vessel was a steel screw tug, which has been erected to the order of Mr. T. C. Spink of Hull, and was named *Diplomat* by Mr. A. Cochrane of Selby. The other boat was a steam trawler built to the order of the Mount Steam Fishing Company of Fleetwood. It was christened *Scomber* by Miss Bryant, daughter of Mr. J. Bryant of Grimsby, under whose superintendence the vessel has been constructed.

Saturday, 26th December, 1908.

Hull Daily Mail



*Diplomat 1909*



*Scomber 1909*

### Loss of *Diplomat*.

Hull vessels have suffered a great deal during the past few days, and there has been an unfortunate loss of life.

Search by naval authorities and the owners having proved fruitless, the owners of the Hull tug *Diplomat* have reluctantly to give that vessel, with Captain J. Ward and her crew of four hands, up as lost.

They are;

Captain J.W. Ward, of 9, Cromorne Terrace, Buckingham Street, Hull.

Mate H. Gardiner, 8, Ripon Terrace, Ripon Street, Hull.

Engineer J. Crawley, 6, Togo Crescent, Eastbourne Street, Hull.

Fireman H. Simons, 154, Division Road, Hull.

Cook H. Swanson, 7, Lilian Terrace Woodhouse Street, Hull.

The *Diplomat* belonged to Mr. T. C., Spink, of the Hull Associated Tug Owners. He stated that the tug left Lowestoft a week last Sunday morning for Boston, Lincs., towing the barge *Enterprise*, which was to load for coal at that port. When some distance off Yarmouth, owing to the bad weather, both vessels dropped anchor. Captain Barkway, of the *Enterprise*, understands that the *Diplomat* was going to proceed to Yarmouth to have her engines attended to. The tug, however, never reached Yarmouth, and exhaustive enquiries have failed to elicit news of her.

The *Enterprise* remained at anchor for several days and as the *Diplomat* did not return, another tug arrived and took the barge on to Boston. Mr. Spink remarked that it was a most mysterious occurrence and they were quite in the dark as to the fate of the tug. The sea passage was one of only eight hours and if any craft would have suffered, he would have thought it would have been the barge. He had had twenty years' experience and he had never known a tug founder under such circumstances.

It is regarded as not unlikely that the tug was mined. She was a craft of 100 tons.

24th February, 1915.

Hull Daily Mail.

#### The Hull Tug *Diplomat*.

In connection with the feared loss of the Hull tug *Diplomat*, Mr. T. C. Spink, the owner, informs us that he is not of the opinion that the vessel has been blown up by a mine. The *Diplomat* was never in a mine area.

Thursday 25th February, 1915.

Hull Daily Mail.

#### Tug Crew's Dependants. Distribution of Monetary Gifts at Hull.

The dependents of the crew of the Hull tug *Diplomat*, lost off Yarmouth, were the recipients of monetary gifts this afternoon at the offices of the National Seamen's and Firemen's Union in Posterngate. Unfortunately, some of the families have been let in necessitous circumstances, and the money which was handed over by Mr. J. R. Bell, would be most acceptable. Mr. Bell remarked that it was no time for speechmaking, which would only harrow the feelings of relatives.

A sum of £20 10s had been collected by the crew of the tugs *Lynx*, *Solway*, *Humber*, *Condor*, *Terrier*, *Spurn*, *Holka*, *Seagull* and *Mystic*. It was gratifying to find the crew expressing their sympathy in such a practical way, and he had great pleasure in handing over the amounts as follows:-

To Mrs. Ward, wife of Captain J. W. Ward £5 10s.

Mrs. Crawley, wife of the engineer, who leaves two young children £5

Mrs. Simons, widow of Herbert Simons, with two children one a baby, £5

Mrs. Swanston, mother of Ernest Swanston (16) and whose father is steward on the s.s. *Fullerton*, £2

Mrs. Gardner, mother of the mate, a single young man £3. He helped to support the family which comprises five children.

The recipients expressed their thanks. A collection is also being made on behalf of the dependents of the crew of the *Clansman*, lost off the mouth of the Humber.

Wednesday 31st. March, 1915.

Hull Daily Mail.

Hull Tugs Salvage Work.  
Prompt Rescue of 7,000 ton Steamer.  
Battered by the storm.  
Without coal.

Two Hull tugs, the *Superman* and the *Bureaucrat*, belonging to the United Towing Company, have returned to Hull after performing a creditable piece of salvage work by picking up the 7,000 steamship *Daska* in a badly disabled condition.

The *Daska*, which belongs to a Jugo-Slovakian firm, was several days overdue on a voyage from Algeria, and the lack of information concerning her whereabouts was giving cause for anxiety owing to the terrible storms reported in the North Sea.

Coupled together, these two facts looked like developing into a mystery which might only have been cleared up with the news of another disaster at sea, but on Friday night a wireless message was picked up from the *Daska*.

A number of tugs went out to her assistance but the *Superman* and the *Bureaucrat* were the first to reach her, and towed her, in a helpless condition into Middlesbrough. The *Daska* had run short of coal on the voyage and owing to the intensity of the storm, she was unable to put into port before her bunkers were empty. In this condition she was buffeted about at the mercy of a storm which the officers and sailors described as one of the worst they had experienced.

The tempest raged at its height for three days and three nights, during which time the Captain remained at the wheel without relief. Despite her size the *Daska* was tossed about helplessly, although her engines were running at full speed. When off Whitby she was found to be drifting landward and was in danger of foundering when the *Superman* and *Bureaucrat*, which had weathered the storm in an amazing manner, responded to her S.O.S.

Thick fog.

According to the crews of the tugs, which, after completing their fine work, returned to Hull, their task was all the more difficult because, added to the mountainous seas and icy cold atmosphere, was a thick fog, which mercifully, however, lifted in time to enable them to pick up the disabled merchantman.

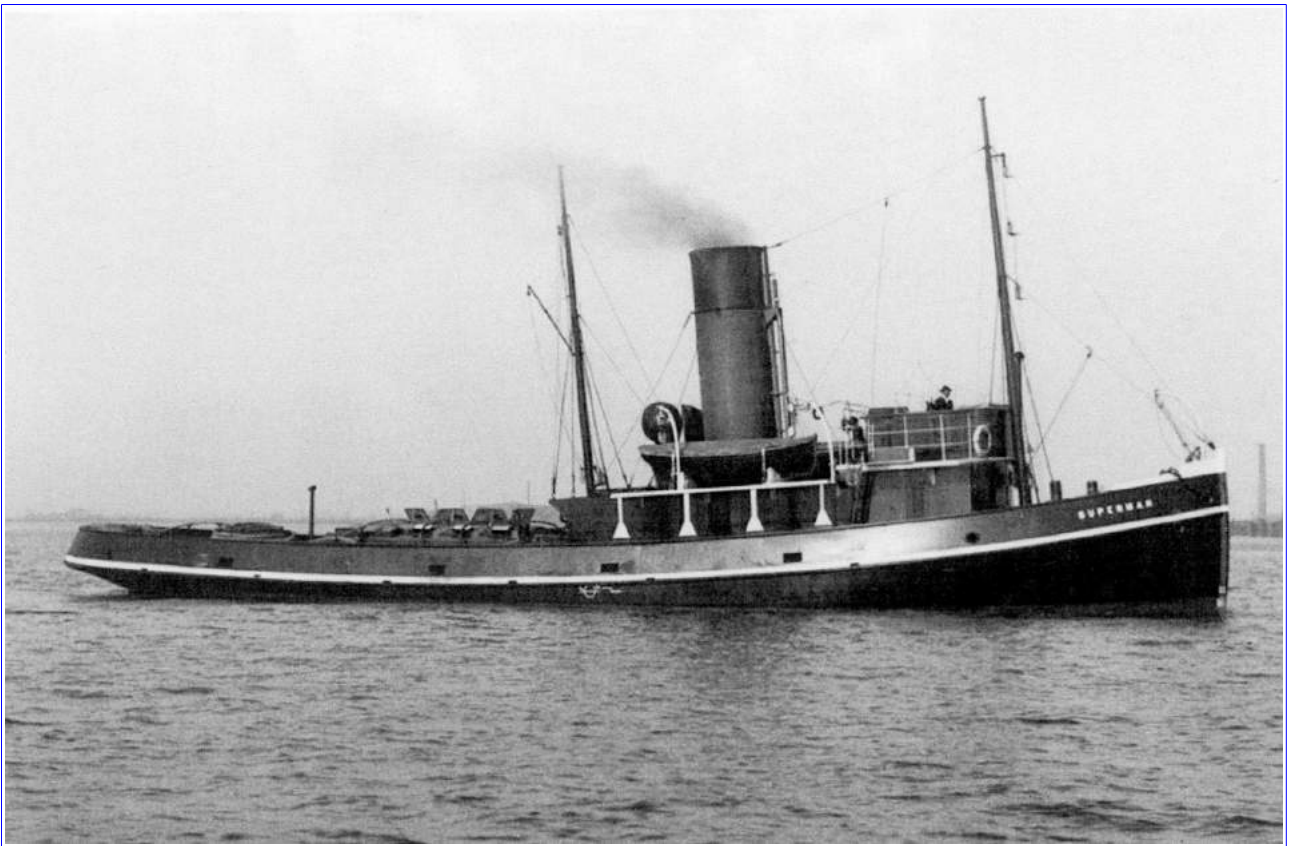
Incoming trawlers and other vessels report that the weather in the North Sea continues to be bad, although the ferocity of the gale has now subsided considerably.

The trawler *Burmah* has arrived at the St. Andrew's Dock after a very rough passage in the high seas of a few days ago. Her decks were swept by tremendous waves and the wheelhouse was damaged and the compass washed away. The *Ravla* was towed back without a rudder, this having been lost owing to the storm beating which the trawler had received in the North Sea.

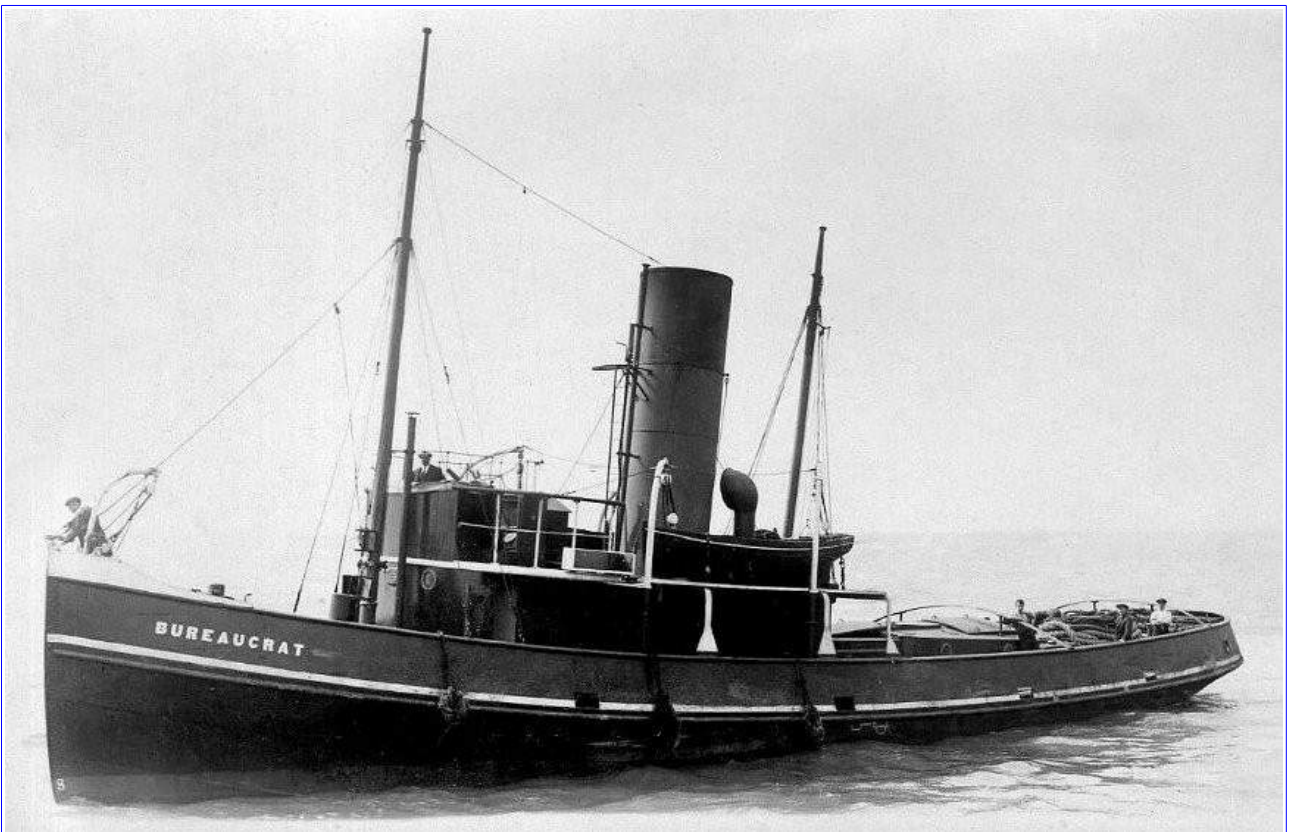
When the Ellerman's Wilson liner *Idaho* arrived off Spurn on Sunday she was showing her "uncontrollable lights." Her steering gear was stated to be out of order and she was towed up the Humber by tugs.

Monday 24th December, 1923.

Hull Daily Mail.



*Superman* 1923



*Bureaucrat* 1916

## TUGMASTER COMMENDED

The award of M.B.E. (Civil Division) had been made to Captain William Edward Gardner, of 11, High Street, North Ferriby, master of the Hull tug *Empire Jester*, owned by the United Towing Co., Ltd., for fine work at Ostend.

Capt. Gardner has served in tugs all his life and has been with the United Towing Company for more than 20 years. His war service has been varied and has taken him to the Continent and all round the English coasts.

The official citation says; "In Ostend harbour, the tug *Empire Jester* rendered conspicuous service in towing a number of craft to safety in the face of great danger caused by exploding ammunition and burning wreckage.

## COURAGE AND DEVOTION

Capt. Gardner gave prompt and effective assistance to two craft which saved them from heavy damage by fire. He then re-floated a fire boat which had gone aground and also took a considerable number of men from the danger area to the other side of the harbour. He also pushed burning wreckage out of the channel and later extinguished small fires on the east jetty. Capt. Gardner displayed courage and devotion to duty."

Commendations for brave conduct when their ships encountered enemy ships, aircraft, submarines or mines include the name of Cyril Clarke, mate of the tug *Empire Jester*, of 130, Lambert Street, Newland Avenue, Hull. Formerly a trawler-man, Clarke has joined another vessel since the incidents at Ostend.

Hull Daily Mail.  
15th August, 1945.



Capt. Bill Gardner



*Empire Jester* 1943 [as *Napia* 1946]



Letter to Pete Bass from James Killen.

Pete,

I hope you do not mind too much if I keep the photocopies you sent, I've made copies of those and scribbled some comments on them.

I joined OTS in 1966 and sailed on *Britionia*, *Neptunia* and *Salvonja* until OTS collapsed. Did a couple of trips with Big Fred. I then spent a number of years sailing on Smit International tugs.

Most of the photos you have supplied were taken on the *Salvonja*. One trip on the *Salvonja* with Fred was after she had brought a dredger from New Zealand and we joined her in Lisbon. A few wee jobs and such then a trip to Quebec to tow the laker *Parkdale* back to Spain then another few wee jobs and a tow from Marseilles to New Caledonia, then another wee job, an American in the Pacific who we towed to Hong Kong, that was then the six months up and we were flown home.

If I can remember rightly Fred didn't start the trip in Lisbon but joined us in Bilbao.

I too have wrote a few wee stories about tugs, the only bit that I can find that mentions Fred I attach underneath.

Fred, was a good tugman and knew his work well. Not the sort of fella you'd want to have a serious argument with though!

Tell me what happend to him — how did he die?

Regards,

Jim



*Salvonja 1968 [Oceaan 1951]*

Recollections of a tow of the crane barge *Cingaiaise* by the OTS tug *Salvonja*.

From Marseilles to New Caledonia 1970

By James Killen



They called it a 'Rig Tender' but to me it was just a floating crane.

A big one.

Van Gastel had been in Marseilles prior to our arrival and had given instructions about how the thing should be made ready for towage.

Christ knows where they dredged up the gang that did the work, for after Van Gastel had given his O.K. and had disappeared I had to spend the next day and a half undoing and re-doing some of their work.

Geordie Crawford, as ever, was unflustered about the delay but did mention that there was a stage when I had to accept what had been done and we'd be gone.

Myself, I'd have spent another two or three days getting everything to my liking but the Old Man is the boss and he has his bosses breathing down his neck too.

So we departed into a blood-red sunset on a warm almost calm evening with yachts and speed-boats playing around or returning to their berths, fowls flocking to roost.

The wind, when I came on watch the next morning had freshened and blew from dead ahead. Nothing too exciting, Bft 5 or 6 with a steep little swell that sent sheets of spray and some light water over the fore-part of the tow.

I had it arranged with Crawford to leave the initial inspection of the tow until just before the Straits of Gibraltar, so we could relax for a day or so and get settled into the daily routine of a long ocean passage.

Vain hope!

A day or so later, at morning stars time, the wind still just as fresh, the swell a bit heavier and the tow seems to have a slight list, difficult to say, she's at 600mtrs distance and is regularly covered by sheets of white spray. Also, maybe, she looks a bit down by the head.

Stars are forgotten and the tow scrutinized through the binoculars.

Not certain, better call the Old Man.

Geordie Crawford does not hesitate but orders power to be reduced and course altered towards the land. "We'll get her into the lee, take the boat, go have a look-see". Says he.

He scribbles a message for the sparky to send off, tells me to keep a close eye on her and goes back to his bunk for an hour or so.

Cool!

That afternoon and we are anchored in very shallow water within the shelter of the land and two diesel salvage pumps are spurting out the water that had flooded down the spurling pipes. *Cinglaise* had four anchors, each with chain cable. One at each corner.

Now, the way to cement up a spurling pipe is to first stuff a bundle of rags halfway down the pipe then fill it to the top with a strong mixture of sand and cement. A handful of soda in the mix will significantly shorten the setting and curing time.

What our French friends had done was to cut a disc of triple-plywood, slotted it over the chain and plastered the lot over with a handful or two of cement. Indistinguishable from a properly done job but much easier and quicker.



George Hatch and deck boy cement up spurling pipes after pumping out chain lockers on *Cinglaise*.

Of course breaking seas had been sweeping over the deck and had dislodged the lot and the tow had started to fill through the spurling pipes.

It took more than a full day to get her dry and re-plug the four spurling pipes.



*Salvonia* anchored in Roquetas Bay Southern Spain to affect repairs to tow *Cinglaise*.  
James Killen, Mate from *Salvonia* in boat.

It was always a pleasure working with Crawford on a job like that. He'd ask you what you were going to do, sometimes add a bit of advice of his own and finish with, "Aye, Jimmy?" and look you straight in the eye, "Aye?" You would answer with "Aye!" and he would leave you to it.

Crawford and Leggate were the only people that I ever let call me "Jimmy".

Big Fred, was the bosun, and you didn't have to tell him too much either.

He was big and very strong and knew tugs and their gear and what could be done with it, it was great working with him as well.

The for'd compartments of the tow were pumped dry, the spurling pipes properly cemented up and we weighed anchor to continue on our way.

Well, we had done our tow inspection, maybe a day or so earlier than initially planned, so the next one would be awhile after we had passed Gibraltar and so the voyage was resumed.

While we were hauling the tow offshore, in dead calm conditions, the fog set in. Thick, evil and dripping!

Thereafter, until the fog lifted, it was doubled-up watches, continuous radar plotting and, to keep us awake and on our toes there were numerous close shaves with kamikaze Spanish fishing boats. We skirted, close to the south Spanish coast, taking advantage of the occasional west-going counter

current that may be encountered there. Never did we get a glimpse of anything in the thick swirling shroud though.

The tow-wire had been kept short, two or three hundred metres or so and we, for days, could not see even a vague outline of our charge, so thick was the fog.

Very early in the morning, all is pitch black, and it feels like I've been radar-plotting for most of my life, Crawford calls me from the radar set to the starboard bridge wing.

"Look up." Says he. I look but see nothing.

"Over there!" he twists my head in the approximate direction.

Nothing! Then a red light, in the sky, flashing.

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G B            GB            GB

"Gibraltar Aero beacon, fog's about to lift!" says he.

And so it did, a few hours later and it started to break into banks then Europa light was showing clear, shortly thereafter the lights of Gibraltar too could be clearly seen and there wasn't as much as a wisp of fog to be sighted anywhere.

We lengthen the tow-wire out an extra hundred metres or so and Europa Point is just abaft the beam to starboard.

"Right, Jimmy. We can go on to normal watches again" says Crawford, "Give me a shout if there is any change in the weather" and finishes with his customary "Aye, Jimmy?" then the look, "Aye?" "Aye" says I, but he is already halfway to his cabin.

I look at the bridge clock 03:45, almost my watch – shit!

The second mate had proved to be a bit slow and uncertain with his radar plotting so had been excluded from most of that bit of fun. That meant, except for the occasional snooze, that I was almost continually glued to the radar set.

Dense fog with sometimes a dozen or so erratically moving targets on the screen is no time to start practicing the exercises taught at nautical college, there is, maybe, a wee bit too much at stake and the results of mistakes may not always have been correctable!

That was a long, long watch and Tarifa was approaching four points on the starboard bow before Crawford again arrives on the bridge.

That handover surely ranks high on the list of fastest handovers in history and I was gone from the bridge and asleep before the Old Man had wedged his tea-mug into the rack just for'd of the radar.

When I next showed up on the bridge, that afternoon, Cabo Espartel was away abaft the port beam, we were away and clear from land. The shipping was getting more scarce and by the time Geordie again took over at 20:00 that evening there wasn't a light to be seen anywhere. That was the way things were supposed to be, we could fit into the regular and relaxing fair weather towing regime.

After leaving the Gibraltar Straits there followed a few days of fresh, breezy weather then a long period of calm with a low glassy swell, scattered light cumulus, sirocco weed and flying fish.

On Saturday mornings the boat would be launched and we'd go have a quick shufti that all was O.K. on the tow. There was never anything remarkable.

The pumps would be given a turn or two with the starting handle and we'd be back on board the *Salvonja* within the hour.

Then, in Trade Wind conditions, the islands of Marie Galante and Dominique are passed, the Caribbean is entered.



Fred Fletcher, George Hatch and *Salvonja's* dog.

The wind continues to freshen slightly and cloud cover increases. The rain showers become more frequent and heavier, then we are off the breakwater to the eastern entrance to the Panama canal. Out come a pair of Yankee harbour tugs and take over the tow from us.

Seems that we will not tow the *Cingalaise* through the canal but that we will receive her once again on the Pacific side, the Yankee tugs will take her through.

It transpires that the owners of the unit had sent a couple of engineers to assess the damage that had been done by the water that had previously flooded into her.

Great!

We would not even have to look after our own tow. That means a night ashore!

Anyway, there is Fred, Hatchi, Hoofin-Loofin the second engineer and myself in a pokey wee bar well after midnight. Cuba-Libra is the drink of the night and we are all pleasantly sloshed when a couple of military police saunter in, sleep-sticks swinging.

One a Yank and the other a Panamanian, seems they have to work together.

The Yank says something to Fred who tells him to 'eff off.

The Yank takes offence, he's a big bugger - bigger than Fred who is big enough.

So the Yank and the Panamanian Military Police hustle Fred out the door.

There is no way we are going to let this go on and chairs and the table are overturned in our haste to rescue Fred.

I'm first in line as we burst through the door, the Panamanian is waiting and I get the point of his night-stick prodded into my solar plexus, rather more forcibly than the situation warranted!

Cuba Libre comes squirting out my nostrils, I cannot breathe! The rest are behind me, jostling and pushing to get out. I get a second severe jab in the same place, vomit up some juice and feebly try to take a swipe at the bastard. Then there is a stick across my throat and I'm shoved against the wall, helpless.

Seems that the Yanks work in pairs and so do the Panamanians so there are four to a patrol, we didn't know this.

I'm helpless and the rest are taken aback by the sight of the other three with their long, weighted, sleep-sticks at the ready, they all have large pistols in their belts.

There is no further attempt to rescue Fred.

Fred is forced to apologise, individually to each of them. Then each one of us has to go through the same routine.

They then saunter off to inspect the next bar, sleep-sticks swinging.

The canal was transited in torrential rain and we moored up in Panama on the Pacific side.

Transpires that the engineers from France are doing things to the machinery on the tow and there is time for a second night ashore.

This time Hoofin-Loofin stays aboard, we have to, as usual, bunker to the brim and that is his responsibility.

If Colon was pretty lawless, Panama City was dangerous, at least the bit that we ended up in was.

Each time we entered a bar the buzz of conversation would still and every black face in the place would turn our way, every face in those bars was black.

Glaring animosity visible in each pair of eyes.

A quick drink, gulped down in haste, and we'd move on.

Then, a bar where mostly the faces were coffee coloured or lighter. Still the atmosphere was tense and the feeling of eyes on the back of the neck was overpowering.

A couple of drinks, then the bar tender leans over and whispers, “Amigoes, Maybe better you go home. Maybe better you go home soon”.

We needed no second warning and so our night’s revelry fizzled out and died. In the morning we departed into an awkward, lumpy swell.

James Killen.



1979 December. *Serene Med* refloated.  
Story from “Man to Man” with photos courtesy of Mick Eves.

Last month we left the *Serene Med* stranded in an isolated pool of deep water with 5,000 tons of steel plate aboard. Over 400 metres away, across the Algerian beach, the sea was still less than two metres deep.

Preparations for lightening the vessel were already underway. Further investigation of the original plan, to lighten the vessel using small, shallow-draft barges and transferring the cargo to other vessels in deep water, proved it would have been too costly and time consuming. The decision was therefore made to use pure “tug power” in an unusual way and dredge a channel to free the *Serene Med*.

*Englishman* had to meet a previous towing commitment at Piraeus so a substitute tug, the *Santa Panagia* was chartered in to assist *Serviceman*. The dredging was in fact achieved by the tugs connecting firmly to the casualty and blasting the sand away with their propeller-wash whilst gradually hauling themselves astern on their towing winches.



*Serviceman* dredging channel

After two weeks of concentrated effort, dredging day and night, the vessel was successfully refloated on December 9th and towed to Palermo.



Connecting up.



*Santa Panagia and Serviceman towing free Serene Med*



Arrival at Palermo  
Local tugs take over the tow.

### Greasy pole

An interesting anecdote comes from the crew of *Serviceman* concerning the erection of transit markers which were vital to cutting a straight channel at night. All their ingenuity went into creating a marker which the 'locals' couldn't steal. At one point they filled a 40 gallon drum with concrete, set in which was a 20-foot pole. Then they buried the drum six feet in the ground and placed a boiler suit on top of the structure.

Finally, to discourage climbers, they lathered the pole in grease. Within less than an hour, the boiler suit was gone. The whole contraption had been excavated by hand and our crew had to concede victory to the wily denizens of the desert.

Man to Man / Mick Eves



*Superman* - The latest addition to the SMS fleet.