

The Slabline



Comrade under sail, captured by Harry Arnold Photography of Burton on Trent.

JOURNAL OF THE HUMBER KEEL AND SLOOP PRESERVATION SOCIETY

THE HUMBER KEEL and SLOOP PRESERVATION SOCIETY LIMITED

Registered as a Charity

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THE SOCIETY'S SHIPS:

'COMRADE'
Humber Keel - Purchased December 1974
Hon Sailing Master: C S Screeton
Relief Sailing Masters: J Thompson

'AMY HOWSON'
Humber Sloop - Purchased March 1976
Hon Sailing Master: C Harrison

SHIPS' AGENT (COMRADE
And AMY HOWSON) J Thompson, 218 Victoria Avenue, Hull HU5 3DZ
Tel: Hull (0482) 441227

COVER PHOTO: Comrade under sail by Harry Arnold Photography of
Burton on Trent

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

The process of transferring to a single date for the renewal of subscriptions has gone very smoothly and has made the Society's financial position look unusually healthy for early summer, when our coffers are usually depleted. Our thanks are due to the retiring Membership Secretary, Janet Lodge, and to her successor, Mary Wilson, for managing the changeover so efficiently. We hope that the change will make Mary's job easier than Janet's has been. If you have not got round to renewing your subscription, please help us by doing so promptly.

Following the Annual General Meeting, Dave Robinson was elected to succeed Cedric Lodge as Hon. Secretary of the Society. Dave is well known to many as the very active Ship's Husband to AMY HOWSON. We are particularly glad that one of our Officers now comes from the South Bank. Tom Humphries from Grimsby was elected to the Council, along with Ron Kelly who works for the American Bureau of Shipping in Hull.

The Society's Constitution allows the Council to designate Honorary Life Members of the Society. Up to now we have never made use of this power. However, it seems to us that this was one way in which we might recognise the outstanding service which Janet and Cedric Lodge have given to the Society since its formation in 1970. We are pleased to have them as our first Honorary Life Members. They are expecting to move south in July, but we look forward to seeing them again before too long.

HULL MARINA

COMRADE's berthing problems have been no less difficult this season, and the passage of the River Hull has become increasingly hazardous. It was clear that serious damage would result if the ship continued to operate from Beverley during the sailing season, and the decision was taken to berth her temporarily at South Ferriby despite the obvious inconvenience of crossing the River to work on her.

At our request, three representatives of the Society met the Leader of Hull City Council, Councillor Patrick Doyle, on 6th June to ask for the Council's help in finding a berth for COMRADE on the North Bank, and if possible in the Marina in Humber Dock. At the time of going to press we do not know what the final outcome will be. However, the meeting helped to establish communication: we were aware of a desire to help, and we very much hope that a solution, if only on a short-term basis, can be found.

240 GENEROUS TONS

Many members will know Tom Humphries who has recently joined the Society's Council. He was one of the earliest members to join and his support and help over the years has been invaluable. In the 1950's he was working on vessels transporting coal to Yorkshire power stations, mostly 200-tonners towed by tugs. On 25th May 1983, Tom was interviewed by Radio Lincoln and, by the good offices of Tom and the Inland Waterways Association; we are able to reprint a transcript of the broadcast relating to an incident of those days, concerning a vessel under Tom's command:

"It was alleged to hold 250 tons and it was supposed to be an ex-government ammunition barge and it was certainly massively built. Its plates were about an inch thick, but what I didn't know about it was that there was a crack along the base of the hatch coamings at deck level which was alright when it was empty of course; it was well clear of the water, but I took it up to a colliery to be loaded, and of course in those days and among those particular men, if one didn't load down until the water was lapping onto the deck, you were a bit of a cissy you see!

So I did just that and the result was that by the time I arrived back at the power station she was nicely sinking. I just had time to grab the most important things, my kettle and cup or mug, you know, for brewing up with, and a lamp, a red street lamp which I managed to hang on the chimney just as it settled down, and as the barge that was towing behind me drifted alongside I just managed to step aboard it without getting wet.

But when the General Manager found out about it of course he wasn't very pleased at all. Fortunately I had a weigh bill with me and on the weigh bill it said 240 tons 8 cwts so that let me off the hook. But of course the custom was to give extra weight to allow for thieving and wastage. So there probably was 250 tons on board although it said only 240 tons on the note.

Anyway, it stayed sunk for about half a week, from Friday till Tuesday, and then of course a gang arrived with planks and built up a cofferdam and we climbed into the barge and stood on top of the coal up to our waists in water, and while some powerful pumps ejected the water out, we stuffed the cracks with clay, and with two tugs pushing, one for'ard and one aft, pushing into the bank we managed to salvage that, or, that barge of coal.

But it was rather funny, when the other boats were passing, the boatmen would solemnly doff their hats and of course we had a giggle over the whole thing. The worst part was cleaning up afterwards; the cabins were filthy. Fortunately I was able to borrow a little petrol driven pump and I got that going and swilled all the cabins and washed them out, but it took me the best part of a week to clean it up. That of course was my punishment."

"You actually managed to recover the whole cargo then?"

"Oh yes, all the coal was eventually burned and the barge continued to operate as far as I know, until fairly recently."

"You didn't remember to hang the lamp back on the chimney again?"

"Oh, it stayed there until we got it afloat and then it went back in the cabin."

"Right! You were carrying coal! Would that be the main traffic that you worked with?"

"Oh yes, there were coils of steel wire and wood pulp and some of the cleaner barges carried tinned milk and cheese, but mostly we carried coal because once you had a dirty boat you know, it tends to remain that way."

"Does the trade still go on?"

"Yes, actually it does, but they use 'pusher' tugs now and the barges are more like boxes, and when they arrive at the power station are lifted bodily out of the water, tipped upside-down and emptied in one go, so that three men do what five men did before."

"Is that the Tom Pudding boats?"

"Well, they are like enlarged Tom Puddings. Yes, same idea, but much bigger."

"But they all run together so that they virtually make a boat with a bit of bow stuck on the front?"

"Well no, it doesn't need any bows on the front: the engine is coupled up to what looks like a large outboard engine, but is in fact a swivelling propeller so that it's much more manoeuvrable in narrow waters."

"Do you regret the amount of water borne traffic that has diminished these days?"

"Oh very much so! Yes. When I've been driving on the motorway and a lorry with nearly forty tons of stuff on comes past me at about eighty miles per hour, I get nervous and wish it was on the canals."

"Of course they might not have built the motorways if there hadn't been all the traffic to put on them!"

"Ah well, of course there are motorways and motorways; some of them are used a lot more than others aren't they?"

"Yes!"

"And when you think how they are being smashed up and having to be repaired it makes you wonder whether it is viable."

"Part of the argument of course is that waterways travel was always slow!"

"Yes, granted, it is slow. Mind you, it doesn't have to be four miles an hour. We used to do about seven miles an hour which is nearly twice the speed, but yes, it does take time of course."

"Did you admit to doing seven miles an hour?"

"Well, er, actually no, it wasn't prohibited on the Aire and Calder."

"Ah! It was a bigger waterway so less liable to damage the banks!"

"Yes, that's right, yes!"

"Fine! Thanks very much for talking to us."

NOTES ON HIS EARLY LIFE AND HUMBER KEELS AND SLOOPS

by

Mr JOHN FRANK of SOUTH FERRIBY

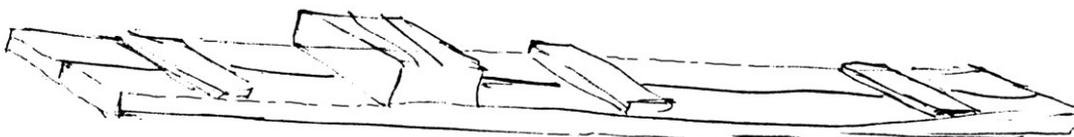
I think it would have been about 1907 or 1908 when I first became interested in water and ships. We used to play on the banks of the River Ancholme either collecting wild flowers, or perhaps watching fishermen – or anglers, as they are now called. I have heard them called 'Disciples of Isaac Walton'.

I remember somebody one day showed us how to make a boat from the leaf of a reed. This would sail well. A reed was taken from the waterside, the pointed end turned over and a small slit made about halfway down the leaf. This provided us with a board, a sail, and a centreboard-cum-keel, and gave us good sport.



This pastime developed into racing. We used to set the reed boats off from one side of the Ancholme canal and if there was anybody on the other side they used to have a stick and turn the little craft around. If we wanted these little ships to run before the wind we used to give them a longer tail end.

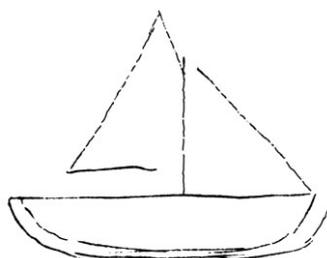
If someone came along and drifted us from the riverside we used to go to the Clay Pits which only had about 1 foot to 18 inches of water; here we used to launch a couple of planks 10 feet long by 10 inches wide and three inches thick, and on these we used to place two short pieces of 'plank packings' as they used to be called. An old fish box in the middle provided a seat.



We used to have good fun on these until we saw somebody coming, or until we got caught. When we got a little older there was always a boat moored on the canal side, used for ferrying people across, or as a spare boat moored in readiness if one of the ships had its own boat damaged, to use until it was repaired. When there was a beam wind we used to pinch a 'shelter board' which was about 5 feet long and about 3 feet across. The end batten had legs on and we used to stand in the bottom of the boat and tie them up with the 'painter'. With a beam wind we could shift at a good speed up and down the Ancholme. If it was a south or north wind we used to pull the boat up or down the river and sail back with the 'shelter board' across the boat. All this seems rather primitive but we were learning something most of the time.



As we grew older we got to making models to sail. Some boys had shop bought models but some had built-up ones made by ships' carpenters from the area. Many of these models could really sail well, but we had to make do with any that we could invent for ourselves. We would get a piece of flat board, shape it, and add a piece of tin at the bottom, a mast and sail, and then we had something like this:



The small pieces of flat board were very good but I think that the top of a barrel took some beating, and looked something like this:



The bottom of this little vessel was a piece of lead the same shape as the edge of the barrel top, and this would really go to windward.

Every August Bank Holiday we used to watch Barton Regatta; one year the Sloops and Keels used to come up as far as Ferriby Sluice, but the next year we had to walk as far as the 90-acre farm gates to see them from the top of Barton Hill. On one particular Saturday in summer the Blobbing boats had their races from Hull to Sluice and I have a picture of 15 of them at the Sluice all at once. Blobbing boats were trawler boats which had been condemned but could be bought at the Fish Docks in Hull for about 10 shillings each. They each used to have a deck put on, and a cabin, and were rigged out with a sloop rig. Some shops and businesses in Hull would buy you a sail if you would advertise their wares on the sail. In those days you could always get moorings cheap.

Most Thursdays in summer the Hull Yacht Club used to race boats up to Ferriby Sluice and all this used to teach us a little bit more.

In 1912 we started a Boy Scout movement in the Church Institute, and from this we learned a good lot about the basics of tying ropes and making knots, and Turks heads, splicing, and other mysteries.

We had good sport walking home from school along the Humber Bank instead of coming straight home. On the bank we used to find pieces of wreckage and flotsam and all sorts. These included pieces of boat hooks, stowers, tillers, and all kinds of stuff. Sometimes we found old hatches from keels, fish boxes, pound boards from trawlers, and I remember when the BAYARDO sank on the Hebble Sand in 1910: dozens of boxes of salted herring were washed up. Another time quite a lot of pit props were washed up and often old cork fend-offs came in.

Well, I had to leave school and start work in 1913. I worked at home for a while then the first War started. Somebody was short of a Mate so I had to go to Grimsby with one Ruben Hamilton in a sloop called PROVIDENCE. Hamilton joined the minesweepers, father took his ship and I had to go with him. We started running bricks to Gainsborough and Hull for two new oil mills which were being built to make margarine and glycerine. After some time my father had an accident and we got another skipper from Winteringham – one Bob Burkill. He stayed with us until 1919 and then I went skipper of the ship at 18 years of age. Believe me, that was when I started to learn how to sail a ship.

My first trip was to Brigg. I couldn't go far wrong in the canal, but was grounded at the old gas works and had to start lightening the ship, and we had a string of brick heaps right from the gas works to Springs jam factory. I remember we had only 3000 to 4000 bricks in the ship when we got to the wharf, which was close to the bridge near Brigg market place.

Our next trip was to Hull, and after that time I never had much rest, because as soon as we showed our bow into the Ancholme we were faced with a row of barrows loaded with 50 bricks apiece and we were soon loaded. We used to go anywhere there was a landing. You see, there were no motor lorries then, and there were scores of landings where we used to go. I have unloaded at Stone Creek, Hedon, Paull, Hull, Stone Ferry, Warne Ferry, Beverley, Grove Hill and most landings in four counties, including Hull, Hessle, North Ferriby, Brough, Blacktoft, Swinefleet, Goole, Earnshaw's Clough, Selby and Balby, York, Foss Basin, Queens Staith, Marygate Landing, Poppleton, Burton Stather, Garthorpe, Flixborough, Amcotts, Gunness, Keadby, Crowle, Butterwick, Ironstone Wharf, Mere Dyke, and Stockwith.

We led drain pipes to many places on the Trent bank, including Gainsborough; when we locked into Stockwith we transferred cargoes into narrow boats for Retford Hospital. Apart from this I sailed to several Yorkshire pits for coal, when the brick trade was a bit slack. I have loaded coal at Fryston, Stanley Ferry, Allerton, Keadby, Thorne and Winteringham.

I used to take a lot of bricks to Grimsby, and it was a pretty good trade. It usually took us 1-2 days to unload the cargo so we had one night ashore. In the summer we used to travel on the train and go to Cleethorpes, but in the winter we went to the pictures or the Prince of Wales Theatre in Freeman Street, or even the Palace Theatre on Corporation Bridge. There were several places where we used to unload at Grimsby, including some places which were called 'free wharves', to be used by any Freeman of the Borough. One was near

the cutting, one at the dock – called Ranters Wharf, then another free wharf at the River head. Sometimes we used to unload at the Duckingstool Haven, where the old ducking stool used to be. Grimsby is a place of great antiquity, and the old smacks used to go up the river to unload before there were any fish docks.

MOVING THE MAST

AMY HOWSON sailed for the first time since 1939 on Sunday, 14th June 1981. From that very first time it was obvious that some radical work would have to be done to make her sail, particularly stay, properly.

Hastily assembling the leeboards and shipping them on the 16th July ready for the Bridge opening on the 17th merely stopped her making considerable leeway.

We tried various possible solutions, moving the boards back and forth on their coaming travellers, raking the mast at all sorts of angles, sailing with a reef in the mainsail, then a permanent one when a cloth was taken from the leach, and finally shifting the engine start button to the deck, where a helmsman could motor her round without the anxiety of waiting for a crewman to dive below and start the engine.

Eventually during this last winter her Sailing Master, after a deal of thought and discussion with others, resolved to move the mast aft and sew another cloth in the stay sail. Which move should balance the sail effort better.

Accordingly we 'fabbed' a new lutchet from new plate, making it a little heftier than the one already in, which sadly had given its best in VIGILANT, a keel, and then tried to cope with a sloop's mast. While the mast was ashore being dressed and prepared for the spring refit, we pensioned off the old lutchet and welded in a new strongbeam, one frame behind the original and braced to it. The new lutchet was trailed aboard and stood in position while the appropriate keelson bolt and strongbeam brackets were fitted. The 'crabs' and mast way beam were also shifted to new positions and the stay sail traveller refixed.

Once the mast was back aboard and raised, which was on New Year's Day, we were ready for the Sailmaker. Duly Tom Humphries brought him and he hoisted the sail and made his measurements. Bearing in mind he was altering a sail pretty drastically by sewing a piece in (the cloth off the main leach) he has made a splendid job of it.

Eventually we had the pleasure of sailing AMY HOWSON, winter refit completed, out of Barton Haven on the evening tide on Sunday, 13th May. The wind was gusting up to force 4 easterly so we made a board across the Humber towards the LINCOLN CASTLE ferry and a second board back towards Blyth's Brickyards on the Lincolnshire bank. We didn't bother to back the forestaysail for our third and fourth board; AMY was going like a 'good un' and never once showed signs of hanging or missing stays. So after nearly three hours of crossing and re-crossing the Humber, purely for the delight of it, we made our way back to the moorings in the Haven, naturally cutting it a bit fine and shoving mud to the berth as the tide left.

So the crew left the ship in high spirits, mind you, the four of us were brought down to earth by the knowledge that we'd be taking AMY back to the Ancholme in the next day or so, to avoid being 'neaped' at Barton. Our next sailing would be with passengers and under the critical eyes of the 'yachters'.

Of course, if we'd landed in the nettles, there'd have been some hasty cutting and shutting and burning of midnight oil wouldn't there?

DAVE ROBINSON

SAILING IN THE SOUTH WEST

Scrambling up a steep footpath, which wound its way up a South Devon hillside, seemed a strange way to begin a sailing holiday, but as the crew of PROVIDENT paused for a moment to admire the view; it was an opportunity to reflect on the last thirty-six hours ...

Gill and I had set off from Hull early on the morning of Saturday, 17th September 1983, en-route for the Island Cruising Club in Salcombe where we were to join PROVIDENT, their converted Brixham sailing trawler, for a seven day cruise. We stopped briefly in Rochdale to visit a friend of Gill's, when we set off again we'd only gone 9 miles before a traffic policeman in a Range Rover stopped us on the M63 to say that Gill had left her handbag behind at her friend's house. Back we went, the first of many hiccups in the 'best laid plans' that were to bedevil is in the next week. After a brief stop with my parents in Kingsbridge, where we sat at a steady table and ate in comfort for the last time in seven days, we arrived in Salcombe to meet the skipper and the rest of the crew in the Club bar. When, later that evening, we stepped aboard the launch which was to take us out to PROVIDENT, the normally placid waters of Salcombe Harbour were being whipped up by a wind which blew with a steadily increasing ferocity, causing all the moored yachts to snub at their lines and a cacophony on frapping halliards to assail our ears.

Arriving aboard somewhat chilled we went below to the saloon which was to be our home for the voyage. Gill was assigned to the foc's'le with the other girls, I was given the upper starboard bunk in the saloon – "the one with the leak" said the skipper, bearded Rob from Belfast as he retired into his cabin, shared with the Mate, Mark (formerly an accountant). When the rain began at 3.00 a.m. I was to discover the truth of his assertion. PROVIDENT has a permanent crew of three and the apparent absence of the third member, the cook, was explained at breakfast when the Mate grumpily prepared boiled eggs, toast, cereals and fresh rolls. Izzy (rhymes with 'dizzy') was confined to her bunk in the engine room with a nasty bout of gastric flu. Offerings of toast and coffee were sent aft, along with our best wishes for a speedy recovery, as we had no desire to suffer Mark's culinary skills any longer than absolutely necessary. Luckily Gaye, one of the crew members, was not only a good cook, but more than willing to fill the breach, and she fed us for the next two days in a manner to which we very cheerfully became accustomed. During breakfast, the rich brogue of the skipper announced that the 0625 Shipping Forecast had predicted a southerly gale 'later'. The prediction was reinforced by the undiminished howl of the wind in the rigging and so, making brave remarks like "it'll be fun when we get over the bar" and "nothing like

a brisk thrash to Dartmouth" we assembled on deck for a safety talk from Rob and a 'getting to know the ropes' (and sails and the names for every bit of the boat) chat from Mark the Mate. We tried to assimilate the location of the fire extinguishers, how to inflate the life-rafts, how to let off a flare, when to wear a safety harness, the name of the thing that travelled out and back along the bowsprit (the 'traveller'), the difference between peak and throat halliards and all the other things he told us. We rehearsed hoisting and lowering the sails and made a complete hash of it all. The complexity of all the gear and the routines sobered us considerably and as we went below for lunch no more was heard of the 'quick thrash to Dartmouth'. The 1355 hours forecast was worse than ever, so we hoisted the 'Z' flag. Thereby requesting a trip to shore, and as the ICC launch headed towards us we donned walking gear, filled flasks with coffee and set off ashore. Thus our first afternoon found us walking to Bolt Head.

As we passed Starehole Bay, the last resting place of the HERZOGIN CECILIE, wrecked in 1936, the wind seemed to moderate and some of us muttered about 'wasting time walking when we could be sailing'. To prove how premature this was, two large yachts set off from Salcombe and, as they crossed the Bar, we saw them getting a very rough ride. Having been well and truly bounced around they wisely put about and fled back to safety.

From the old Coastguard Post on Bolt Head we gazed on an empty, gale-swept seascape and were all secretly pleased we hadn't elected to sail. We spent the night ashore in the pubs of Salcombe and returned aboard on the last launch. The following morning saw a slight decrease in wind velocity and we watched another ICC yacht, (CASINO, a North Sea 24), crew encased in foul weather gear, motor cautiously past PROVIDENT on her way to the open sea. Ears pressed to the VHF we all listened anxiously as her skipper gave a running commentary 'over the Bar'. Rough, certainly, but the seas were moderating and Rob said we'd have lunch and if the 1355 forecast was at all optimistic, we'd follow CASINO.

Lunch was eaten rather in the manner of the condemned prisoner's last meal, and when the smooth tones of the BBC announcer said that the sea area Plymouth would expect "gale 8 decreasing 4, occasionally 5, westerly", and Rob said "OK, we'll go", we all put on layer after layer of jumpers and socks, oilskins and seaboots and finally safety harness, and gathered on the deck with a sense of mounting trepidation.

We slipped our mooring and motored out into a confused sea in bright sunshine. Rob had said earlier that PROVIDENT tended to "roll a bit" and we soon discovered this to be something of an understatement. We lurched our way out past Bolt Head, and squared away to run for Dartmouth. Rounding Start Point the wind and seas moderated further, we put on more sail and settled down to a pleasant trip. The sun was setting and we were a mile or two from Dartmouth when Rob told me to take the helm. We tacked twice off the entrance to Dartmouth, and in the last rays of the evening I steered PROVIDENT past the old castle and everyone scurried about lowering the sails and getting under each other's feet. We moored to a large buoy and turned in for supper, feeling that at last we'd begun the holiday, no one had been ill, nothing had broken and the weather was improving. The 0625 forecast was non-committal, so at breakfast we studied the Watch List and settled down to being real sailors.

To my surprise I was Watch Leader of 'C' Watch, our first duty was polishing the brass and tidying below decks. We hurried through this and scrambled on deck as we cast off and left Dartmouth, destination Plymouth. Off Bolt Head the seas were confused, we had a lumpy ride and I succumbed to sea sickness. Nothing serious, luckily, but the VHF announced a force 9 'soon' for Plymouth. It was beginning to get dark as we hoisted the tow-stays¹ and headed for the shelter of Plymouth Sound. We arrived at the western end of the breakwater in darkness but with navigation lights of CASINO visible about half a mile astern of us. We sailed 'over the B Bridge' by Drakes Island and cautiously felt our way well up-river, far out of reach of the coming gale already tagging at our hurriedly stowed sails. By this time Izzy had fully recovered and we were grateful for an excellent evening meal having had soup and pizza for lunch, which seemed to have been at least 12 hours ago, but in reality had been only 4 hours before. The crew had settled down to a watch keeping routine, and under the eyes of our permanent afterguard had managed to sail a course and avoid major problems. We were all feeling secretly rather pleased with ourselves as we retired exhausted.

Everyone overslept, and missed the 0625 forecast, but as the gale swept over us the radio announced another close on its heels, so we headed downstream to the new Plymouth Marina for a hot shower and lunch. Rather than remain in the harbour Rob declared we now knew enough to sail out of Plymouth into the Sound without using the engine at all. Doing everything by the book, and with a close shave involving a port hand buoy, we duly emerged into a calm sea with a good stiff breeze. With the VHF squawking about yet another westerly gale we did a 'man overboard' drill using the dan-buoy and under sail alone, a most instructive (and thought-provoking) exercise.

Those of us on PROVIDENT learnt a lot about ship handling while Edmund and Gaye, slopping about in the dinghy, took literally hundreds of photographs. The outcome was, for me at least, a spectacular series of photographs showing PROVIDENT on all points of sailing, and looking elegant throughout. We anchored off the tiny Cornish village of Cawsands for the night and had another superb meal.

Pleading exhaustion, Gaye, Peter, and myself declared ourselves willing to stand on anchor watch whilst all the others went ashore in the three dinghies to sample the comforts of Cawsands' pubs. Wearing life jackets, the boozing fraternity rowed off and we spent a great evening listening to the wind humming gently in the rigging, and the inevitable gale warning on Channel 16. I went on deck at 2230 and could dimly see some figures moving on the beach but I couldn't hear anything above the noise of the surf. Putting on a large saucepan of cocoa and donning oilskin jackets the three of us awaited the arrival of our colleagues.

The first dinghy came alongside with a strangely silent crew – clambering aboard they explained how the surf had risen whilst they drank, and thus they'd had a wet and rather unpleasant time getting off the beach. A bedraggled and chastened crowd littered the saloon, gloomily drinking cocoa and trying to dry their gear. We three sat smugly as we expressed sympathy at their plight.

The following morning (Thursday) dawned fine and dry, and the bosun and I rowed ashore for fresh bread, milk and assorted extra provisions (mainly peanuts, upon which the skipper appeared to subsist almost entirely). The surf had moderated, and we managed without too much difficulty. Finishing breakfast whilst the rest of the crew washed up and prepared for sea, Rob said we'd sail round the Eddystone Light and see what the weather did.

Off we went, hoisting the main tops'l for the first time, but no sooner had we reached the Lighthouse than the VHF reported another gale, and Rob decided to cut our losses and make for Salcombe. Fighting a foul tide with the wind against it, we lurched our way eastwards, being passed by a number of small MFV's heading back into Plymouth to avoid the gale. Everyone clung on grimly as PROVIDENT corkscrewed her way through quartering seas, the afterdeck awash and ice-cold spray coming over the bows in liberal quantities. My Watch came on duty at 1500 hours and the strain of holding a course meant that I had to restrict tricks at the helm to thirty-minute spells. PROVIDENT needs a firm hand in such conditions and the bows were being pushed off course by the seas, when this was not countered quickly she would prove singularly awkward to get back on course. As dusk fell lifelines were rigged and I put two people on lookout in the bows, partly to encourage each other and also to double their chance of spotting hazards such as lobster pots. Safety harnesses were insisted upon and we of 'C' watch were all more or less shattered when 'A' watch reluctantly mustered to relieve us. I reported on the state of the sea, wind speed and direction, course to be steered, ships in sight, updated position on the chart and state of the sails and gear, then thankfully scrambling below to join my watch as they divested themselves of streaming oilskins and hugged mugs of piping hot home-made chicken soup.

Our ETA Salcombe meant that we would be on watch again at midnight so I chivvied the watch to their bunks – not that they needed much encouragement – and went to the dog-house to join the debate about whether there would be sufficient water to cross Salcombe Harbour Bar when we reached it. No-one seemed very certain, so I retired for some fitful sleep, coming back on deck about 2200 to find that we were off Bigbury/Bolt Tail and unlikely to have enough water on the Bar. As we rounded Bolt Head all hands appeared on deck to watch the lights of Salcombe appear.

Rob took the wheel and while we all discussed the total impossibility of getting over the Bar at this late state of the ebb, he, with the confidence born of knowing his ship and the harbour, quietly steered us in, dead in line with the leading lights. (The following day he admitted that the crabs which inhabit the Bar would have probably had a shock as we scraped over their holes, but we never felt so much as a tremor!)

We dined at 0200 on a rather well done chicken curry and very little was seen of anyone until lunchtime on Friday. We tidied up from the night before, put a harbour stow on the sails and borrowed three Salcombe Yawls from the ICC, sailing round the estuary and having a relaxing time. When the launch collected us at 1000 on Saturday we were all sorry to be leaving, having all enjoyed the week and learnt a great deal about sailing in a Brixham Trawler. Gill wasn't in 'C' watch, and had her own times of fun and exhaustion, and we drove back to Hull full of the excitement of PROVIDENT, and determined to repeat the experience next season if at all possible. Very different to our own ship COMRADE, but nevertheless a thrilling experience.

WHO'S FOR A SAIL?

I'm sorting through AMY's sailing dates and I see that July and August are a bit thin. If it's possible for some of you to come for a trip during those two months please give me a ring (0652-635288) and let's see if we can fix something up. Remember the ships are for the members to enjoy and you all ought to see what it's all about.

DAVE ROBINSON

THE KEEL 'DANUM'

She was built at Richard Dunstan's Yard in 1932 for T Hanley & Sons. She was possibly first registered at Doncaster and later at Thorne and finally at Hull. She was keel-rigged and seen by Eric Todd on her maiden voyage. She was one of Hanley's grain-carrying fleet along with DAYSTAR and DAYBREAK. There is a picture of her rigged in the Society's collection of documents. She worked from Hull to the mills at Doncaster and Rotherham for most of her working life, via Goole and Keadby. She was motorised in 1947 with the Widdup, possibly installed by George Trevithick, then she had a Lister and then a Gardner 5LW, which she still has. She may have traded out to Immingham in the summer months.

Her working life followed the fortunes of the grain trade in that she was transferred to B I Transport Company in 1954 (she still has one of their stencilled hatch covers) and then to RHM Flour Mills in 1976. She ceased carrying grain in that year and was used as a tug in King George V dock and up the River Hull until we bought her in 1978. She thus has a forty-six year working life.

We based her at Keadby and set about converting her hold to living accommodation (saloon/galley, two double bedrooms, shower room, stores). We renovated the after cabin with its handsome wood and glass, galleon stern and returned the forecabin to its original purpose as a boatswain's store. The engine has been overhauled with the help of Richard and George Trevithick; the former also did all the welding. It was during this period of conversion (1978-83) that AMY HOWSON motored past the mooring and we joined the Society, and have been late with our subscriptions ever since.

In 1982 and 1983 we took DANUM on 'shake down trials' – to Cromwell Lock, to York on the Ouse in flood, to Wakefield, Doncaster and Spurn (where she rolled vigorously with 30 tons of broken paving stones as ballast and DANUM caught a glimpse of COMRADE in the fog). She also squeezed under the Glory Hole at Lincoln and went down to Boston.

Our purpose was to follow in the wake of the trickle of Leeds and Liverpool short boats and keels which have sailed across the North Sea to the continental canals. We send greetings to Bill Greenhalgh and BEECLIFFE: we made it! DANUM eventually said goodbye to Keadby and the South Yorkshire canals in July 1983 and made for Boston and the sea. She made Calais in two hops of twenty-seven hours to Harwich and twenty-four from Harwich to Calais, travelling at about five to six knots. She put into Harwich because of poor visibility, bad weather forecasts, and the slight swell which threatened to make her roll badly. She

probably could have carried on, but we had no idea of just how much of a safety margin there is before a semi-laden keel would go over. While waiting for the next favourable forecast, DANUM visited Pin Mill, circled one or two spritsail barges and, well up the Orwell towards Ipswich on the South Bank, we saw what looked like a keel with a Noah's Ark superstructure marooned on the bank. The second hop was straightforward, except for an hour's stop in Ramsgate to let a fogbank clear away. DANUM's worst roll came as we were nearing Calais in the early hours as she took the wash from a car ferry on the beam.

Once in the French Canals she became the smallest barge around. The smallest French péniche is twice as long as a keel with the same beam and slightly more draught. Most are kept in far better condition than English barges at their best, I'm afraid to say. The steering and propulsion gear is much more sophisticated even in fifty year-old boats, and the living accommodation is like a bungalow rather than a boat. The canals in the North are vast. The locks can cope with 3,000 ton coal carrying barges. The big locks are automated and the barges call them up on VHF. DANUM was reputedly the fastest keel on the cut in England. She made 10 kilometres per hour on the big waterways, just about able to keep up with a fully loaded commercial craft and hopelessly outpaced by the empty ones. The commercial traffic on the Dunquerque-Etrun canal is non-stop, twenty-four hours a day. It has only ceased, as I write, on Christmas Day itself.

To date DANUM has visited Calais (of course), Gravelines, Dunquerque, Armentieres, St Omer, Valenciennes and Douai. Next year, we are pondering whether to try for Paris or Abbeville or Belgium or Holland. Meanwhile, DANUM sits in le Bassin des Quatre Faces at Aire as if she had been there forever, but she now has only her memories and some photographs of keels in her saloon to remind her of home.

ROBERT COWLEY

THE END OF THE GAINSBOROUGH PRESS-GANG

In a previous issue of 'Slabline' I mentioned some references to the operations of the naval press-gang in Gainsborough at the end of the 18th century. I have continued working through the Brace Index to the old newspapers, and have now reached the middle of the 19th century. Three further references to the press-gang have appeared, all of them being notes of the deaths of former members.

On 1st March 1839 it was noted that James Elsom, a sailor, of Gainsborough, formerly of the press-gang in that town, had died. The 'Lincoln, Retford & Stamford Mercury' for 29th October 1841 noted the death at Gainsborough of Edward Lillican, aged 80, formerly one of the press-gang there. Finally, the 'Eastern Counties Herald' for 24th December 1846 noted "died at Gainsborough, on the 14th inst., Mr Robert Wright, last of the Gainsborough Press Gang, aged 82".

From the advanced ages of Edward Lillican and Robert Wright, it can be assumed that it must have been a good many years earlier that they were actively involved in the press-gang, and I have not found any references to it after the end of the 18th century. I would assume that it did not operate after the wars against France in the 1790's.

So ended a curious episode in the history of Gainsborough!

PAUL SLATER

KEEPING AN EYE OPEN FOR HISTORICAL MATERIAL

I've been rooting about among the bric-a-brac we have for this year's exhibition, if any members have or know of any material, ships gear, preferably Sloop or Keels, or photos which we could copy and return, I'd be most grateful if you'd contact me. The start of this year's exhibition was a Bashford cabin fireplace front found among scrap!

While I'm on the subject, members should keep their eyes open for stuff which may be used out of context. We 'liberated' an Aire and Calder navigation noticeboard which was part of a ruined phone booth – it was very mucky and fixed the wrong way up, but we spotted it! Mind you the iron bowsprit of PROVIDENCE is holding someone's shed roof up, so we'll have to wait for that!

DAVE ROBINSON

SHIPBUILDING IN GAINSBOROUGH – PART 2

From the yard of Messrs. Furley in Gainsborough there was launched in May 1844 "the smallest steamboat in the Trent which ever navigated that river"; the experimental vessel was screw-driven, and not above 30 feet in length. It was named RARA AVIS ('Rare Bird' in Latin). Henry Smith & Son were the principal shipbuilders in Gainsborough at this time, and the newspapers reported the launching of an iron steamer in 1843, a small pleasure yacht for the Duke of Portland's lake at Welbeck Abbey in 1844, the brig SARAH, sold to a Scottish company from Arbroath, in 1847, and the steam-packet HARLEQUIN, for the Gainsborough-Hull service, in 1848. It was said that the HARLEQUIN was the fastest of the 20 or so vessels which Smiths had so far built to ply on the Humber. The next vessel to be built at Smith's yard was a steam-packet for the Hull-New Holland service, to be operated by the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway.

It was reported in November 1848 that Mr John Arnold of the shipbuilding firm of Henry Smith & Son, had committed suicide. The steam-packets COLUMBINE and HARLEQUIN had been amongst his last productions, and he was also responsible for the steamer being built for the Hull-New Holland service. In another year or two, by which time the railway from Sheffield through Gainsborough to Grimsby and New Holland had been opened, it was reported that Smith & Son were going out of business; it was said that this was "only one of the signs of the times, the river trade having passed to the rails". Indeed, in 1850 a large number of items from Smith & Son's yard were auctioned.

The SEA NYMPH, a large steamer intended to ply between Gainsborough and Newcastle, was launched from Furley's shipyard in 1851. Another shipyard operating in Gainsborough at this time was Turner's; a new vessel was being built there in 1852, and it was reported at the end of the previous year that the steam-packet ATLANTA, damaged in a collision,

had to be taken to Hull for repairs as it could not be got upon the slipway at Turner's shipyard.

Henry Smith's former shipyard was to let in 1852, and in the same year several vessels built by Henry Smith at Gainsborough were to be sold by auction: the steam vessel AETNA (built 1827), the brig FANNY (1838), the sloops SIBYL (1838) and WILLINGTON (1840) and four harbour lighters. R & W Furley announced that they were giving up their shipbuilding business. The widow of the late Matthew Moody, a Gainsborough shipbuilder earlier in the 19th century, died in her 79th year in 1859.

Three fishing smacks, the first two named VALIANT and UNDAUNTED, were launched from another Gainsborough shipyard, Lister & Trevery, for Hull smack owners in 1858. The partnership between Lister and Trevery was dissolved by mutual consent in 1859, but Edward Trevery continued as a shipbuilder. More fishing smacks, GAINSBOROUGH LASS, RAMBLER and INGOMAR, were launched in the years 1860-1863. In spite of the earlier note concerning Furley, a "very fine steamer", named ABERYSTWYTH and designed for cargo traffic for a firm in Wales, was launched from Furley's yard in September 1861.

A new company, the Trent and Humber Iron Shipbuilding Company, was set up in 1863, but it obviously was not a success, for in March 1867 a note on court cases at Lincoln assizes mentioned the official liquidator of the Trent and Humber Shipbuilding Company, Mr F Gamble. Gainsborough's shipbuilding industry was now very much in decline, but Fidell's shipyard was still active in 1870, when a steam-packet called BRIGHTON was launched.

This was the latest entry concerning shipbuilding in Gainsborough which I have found in the Brace newspaper notes. The industry was revived in the town for a time at the end of the 19th century when the firm of William Watson moved from the East End of London to the shipyard at Beckingham, on the Nottinghamshire bank of the Trent opposite Gainsborough, as described in a previous article of mine.

PAUL SLATER

EARLY STEAMSHIPS ON THE TRENT – PART TWO

In June 1833 a small book entitled 'The Trent and Humber Picturesque Steam-Packet Companion' was published in Gainsborough. In the same month, it was announced that a "beautiful light four-inside post coach" named THE HOPE was to begin making a daily return journey between Newark and Gainsborough, where it would connect with the Hull steamers. Although not a steamship, a vessel mentioned about this time is of interest: "a small vessel to which paddle-wheels are attached, worked by two men, has commenced plying between Lincoln and Gainsborough at a reduced fare; she runs at the rate of six miles an hour". This man-powered paddle-boat must have used the Fosdyke Canal from Lincoln to Torksey and then the Trent to Gainsborough. From June 1833 came a sad piece of news concerning the Trent steamboats: a woman named Elizabeth Martin, aged 34, died on board a steam-packet en-route from Hull to Gainsborough.

The owners of the steam-packet MERCURY were, in April 1834, involved in legal action with the owners of the sloop GEORGE following a collision between the two vessels, both of which were plying between Gainsborough and Hull. In 1835 it was stated that the Gainsborough and Hull Steam Packet Company owned the vessels MERCURY, DART, ALBION and BRITISH QUEEN.

There was a serious accident on board the Gainsborough steam-packet UNION as it was preparing to leave Hull one day in 1837; the boiler exploded while the ship had on board about 150 passengers, and at the time of the newspaper report, 19 dead had been found. The paper for June 10th carried a long account of the explosion and the inquest, a week later it was noted that three more people had died as a result of the explosion. (Full story is told in Mike Ulyatt's 'Four Hull Tragedies'.)

Another accident befell the steam-packet LORD NELSON in 1838, but this was a less serious affair, being a fire in the engine room, which was soon put out. The ship was lying at Gainsborough at the time. The LORD NELSON, according to a contemporary advertisement, was operating a weekly return service from Gainsborough to Hull and Kings Lynn.

The steamers were regularly used on excursion work, and the newspapers twice noted the LINDSEY making a pleasure trip from Gainsborough. The steamer left Gainsborough at five in the morning for a trip to Spurn Point with over 200 passengers, returning at half past eight in the evening; it was noted that on the way back from Hull to Gainsborough the steamer averaged nearly 15 miles per hour. The second excursion was to Burlington Quay, and likewise left Gainsborough at five in the morning. In 1841 an advert stated that the steam-packet FALCON was to make a Sunday excursion from Hull to Gainsborough and back. Another advert stated that the Gainsborough Unit Steam Packet Company owned the DART, MERCURY, PELHAM and LINDSEY, running between Hull and Gainsborough and between Hull and Grimsby. A weekly service between Gainsborough, Hull and Kings Lynn was in 1840 being operated by the JUPITER, described as a "powerful and rapid steam schooner".

In 1843 the DART was up for sale. She was described as a "well-known, fast and superior steam-packet, lately running between Gainsborough and Hull". Built at Gainsborough, the ship was of 119 tons, with a 40-horsepower condensing engine; her overall length was given as 80 feet 10 inches.

A new iron steamer was launched from the yard of Messrs. H Smith & Son, in Gainsborough, in 1843. It was 115 feet in length, weighed 94 tons, and was to be fitted with two engines of 20-horsepower. It had been designed to draw only 2 feet 9 inches when fully laden, and was expected to be very fast and very suitable for river work. Thousands of spectators watched the launching of the vessel.

All these items were taken from the late Mr Harold Brace's newspaper index at Gainsborough library.

PAUL SLATER

AMY HOWSON IN WINTER

Somewhere else in SLABLINE I've written about moving AMY's mast. However, this was only one of the jobs completed this winter. The decks have been a bit of a problem because of the heavy pitting which was almost impossible to chip and paint properly, apart from that chipping and wire brushing such an area is soul destroying. We've all had a go at one time or another. So Cyril hired a needle gun which we attached to a loaned compressor and we attacked the decks.

During the course of a weekend, we got the decks down to bare metal, and even did the Hold turn of the bilge plates. Floss thrashed a coat of black varnish on during the week and I picked out the fore and after decks in red oxide when the black had weathered a bit. I hope we will have done some good. The bilge plates have been primed and red oxidized.

Apart from the odd spanner and curse or two, the engine has had nothing done to it since installation. Cyril and I pulled her to bits for a quick medical and found no major surgery necessary, but one or two bits like piston rings and such needed replacement with new. So the Gardiner 5's had a physical and is sound in wind and all cylinders.

We were given a cabin of narrow tongued and groove matchboarding to strip out, so the foc's'le has been partially sealed with boarding in the berth and across her peak above the lockers.

While I was at it I raved out the woodwork in the Bosun's Locker and replaced it with more handy latted shelves, to stow the gear on. There seems to be more ships stuff than locker, so stowage has been constructed in the hold from the strong beam to the for'ard headledge on the port side, above the 'galley' which now has a sink, worktop and cupboard for the crockery next to the oven.

To finish the cooking area off Cyril has built an extension replica of the warehouse bench to go athwarts the hold between the lutchet and the ship's side.

When we had the welding and burning gear aboard to do the lutchet I took the opportunity to weld patches on the odd hole or two in the coamings and decks. Welding the plate in which carries the stuffing box on the propshaft, engine room/cabin bulkhead just about put me in a reef knot, wriggling myself between pipes, brackets and gearbox to get at it.

Stowage for the ballast had been constructed in the engine room and under the steadle on the port side. Most of the ballast has been turfed out of the cabin, so that the lockers could be finished and used.

Mary set about the fireplace panelling and putting a matchboard ceiling in the cabin, and Roy Smith came along and fitted the turned wood she'd made to the transom locker. Floss' snipmat and carpeting finishes the job off.

The table and one or two bits have still to be done but the cabin looks a bit more homely now.

Tom Humphries and his willing workers turned up after dinner one day and painted the coamings during the afternoon, a pleasant surprise when I peddled home from work at 5.

To stow the life jackets we have made seat lockers on the well deck, which also saves the chairs from destruction, everybody was using them to step on from the deck and usually ended up crashing through the canvas seat!

A new foresail boom has been made from one of Eric Burton's poles, we shall probably make a new light mast out of the first one. The steel nav light pole we have is not very handy and has clobbered crew when trying to raise it. Any one person should be able to rig it up, not two or more as at present.

That's about all we did this winter. I did attempt to make a list but gave up at job 101; I think most of them got done. Most of the jobs were 'sponsored' so there were no nasty bills to pay, which is a blessing, so hopefully we'll put a bit more in the kitty this summer and establish a sounder financial situation.

DAVE ROBINSON

HERO OF THE HUMBER

John Ellerthorpe was born at Rawcliffe in 1806. In the 62 years following he was to save more than forty people from drowning.

John Ellerthorpe learned to swim in the drains of Hessle when he was 12 years old, graduating to swimming in the harbour and then downriver in the River Humber.

At 14 he went to sea, working mainly on the North Atlantic routes and then the Baltic before returning to 'home ground' as captain of the steam packet MAGNA CARTER which sailed between Hull and New Holland.

In 1845, Ellerthorpe joined the Hull Dock Company. He devoted his life to public service, and worked unstintingly among local families in the great cholera epidemic of 1849. It is estimated he attempted to save 22 people from drowning in the Humber Estuary, including his own father.

Ellerthorpe was presented with a Royal Humane Society testimonial and a medallion in 1836 and during his lifetime received testimonials, silver medals, medallions, cash and a gold watch for his great courage.

On November 6th 1861 the citizens of Hull officially conferred the title of 'Hero of the Humber' upon him. When he died in 1868 thousands of his fellow townsmen followed his cortege to the Spring Bank Cemetery Hull where he lies in an unmarked grave. A jug commemorating his life is on display in Hull's Town Docks Museum.

THE SOCIETY'S HISTORICAL SLIDES

No.2 'On the Ancholme, Brigg'

The slide was made from a tinted postcard which bears the postmark: 'Brigg, 11.50 a.m. Ju(ne) 5 (19)06'. A keel is shown on her way up to Brigg in a light air with the topsail set. The tinting has, fortunately, only seriously affected some of the detail in the topsail. In a 16" x 10" black and white enlargement of the postcard there is an extraordinarily rich amount to be seen. The main vessel is a wooden clinker-built keel in spick and span condition. She is laden but not quite down to the top stroke amidships. The port anchor is over her bow and both leeboards are, naturally hove up. She is close-hauled on the port tack and the photograph is taken from the starboard bow. The cog-boat trails astern and the 'watter cask' stands out very clearly. A stower and sweeps can be seen on her hatches and mooring ropes are neatly coiled. The most interesting detail of all is that the gear is ready for lowering. The lee shrouds have all been let go and passed foreside of the mast. Only the lee topsail sheet remains. Whether another photograph showing a ship ready for lowering exists is very doubtful. On the foredeck, the mate keeps a careful eye on the camera as do the skipper and his wife, one either side of the cabin chimney. But the keel herself doesn't exhaust the interest. Astern of her, another vessel is moored to the bank and apparently 'livering cliff' (that is chalk). She appears to be a small keel with a spar rigged as a derricking pole. Outboard of her, there is an even smaller shallow-draught clinker-built lighter. Various other people keep a close watch on the cameraman, including a venerable patriarch with white beard and bowler hat. To the right of the keel there is a low farm house and at the left extreme another keel under mainsail and topsail glides serenely upstream. Did the card make a similar impression on the user of 1906? That is extremely unlikely. Such a scene was then common and the message conveyed would today have been more likely transmitted by telephone. The message reads, in part "... hope to be with you tomorrow ... Ada and I going to cycle to Gull Ponds with the wind at our back. Joe and David are going to ride them back, wind at their faces, alright for us, eh? The rest are going in a conveyance of some sort ..."

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