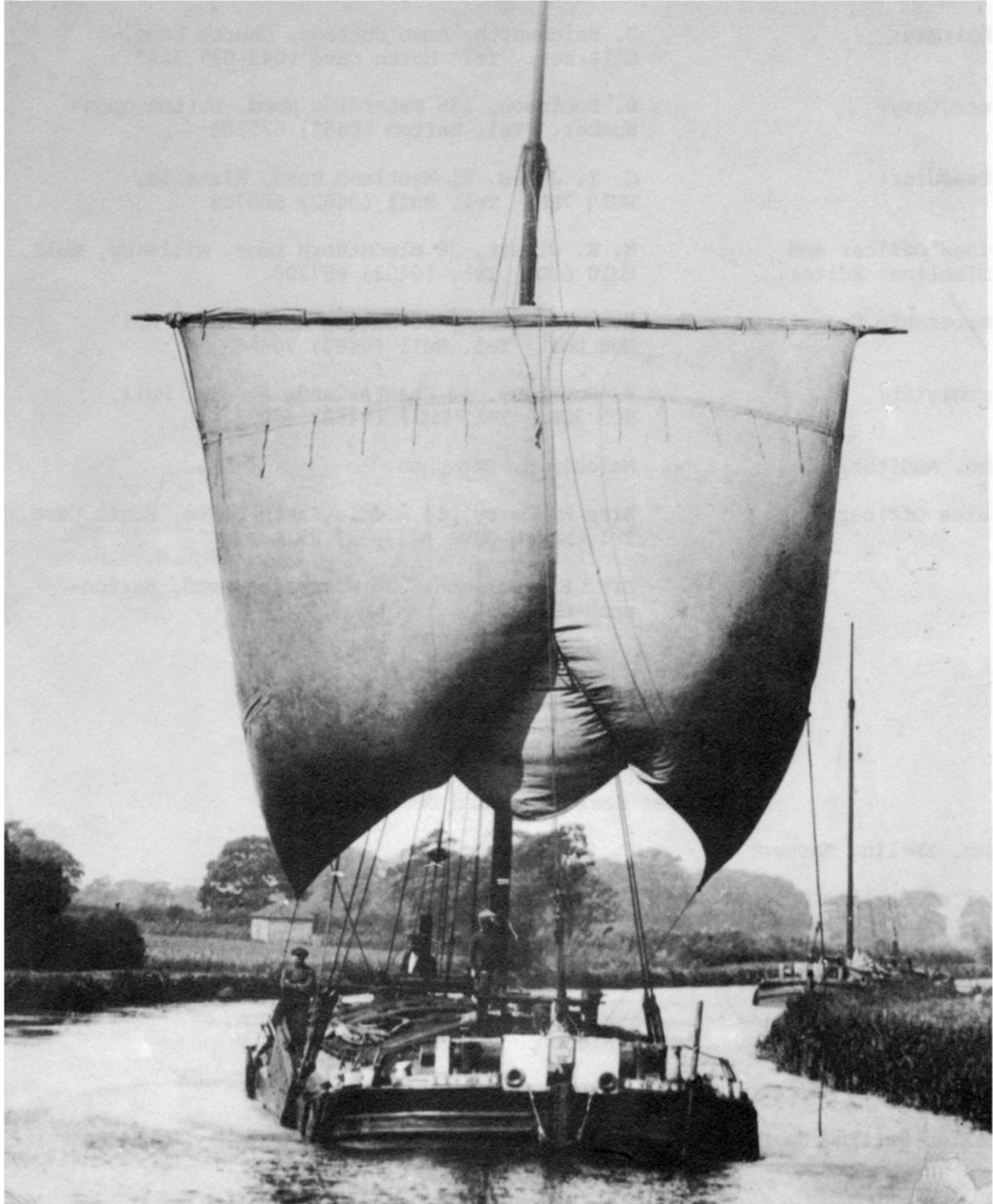


The Slabline



Keels underway at Thorne

JOURNAL OF THE HUMBER KEEL AND SLOOP PRESERVATION SOCIETY

THE HUMBER KEEL and SLOOP PRESERVATION SOCIETY LIMITED

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THE SOCIETY'S SHIPS:

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

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

SHIPS' AGENT for both vessels: J W Thompson, 218 Victoria Avenue, Hull HU5 3DZ
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COVER PHOTO: Keels underway at Thorne

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Subscriptions to the Society are due on 1st May each year. Please let the Membership Secretary have your remittance as soon as possible. The address is:

Mrs Mary Wilson
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CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Mr CHARLIE GRAY

Just before Christmas, the Society lost one of its oldest and most valued members. Charlie Gray served on our Council for most of the Society's existence until his retirement in 1982. A true professional, he gave us the benefit of a lifetime's experience, both of the sea and of the river. His shrewd advice was listened to with great respect, and our meetings were often enlivened by his humour and his fund of anecdotes. On the ships he was always available to help out, and the crews learned much from his skill and expertise.

Charlie Gray was born in Hull in 1908. His father was killed on the Somme, but his mother later remarried and on the advice of his step-father, a South African who had served on the China Station with the Royal Navy during the Boxer Rebellion, Charlie was sent to Trinity House School. While he was there he had his only experience of sailing aboard a keel, with his uncle who was a keelman.

Charlie left Trinity House, and economic pressures forced him to ship as a foc's'le hand rather than as a cadet. His first ship was the LOBOS, a twin-screw motor vessel and, we believe, the first such vessel to be owned by the Pacific Steam Navigation Company. With her Charlie made two trips to the west coast of South America, and then transferred to the steamship RIO BLANCO. She too traded to the west coast of South America, and on to Australia.

On the trip, the RIO BLANCO loaded wet coal for a South American port. Part way across the Atlantic Charlie was soojying down the white work on the boat deck when he smelt gas. He reported the fact to the Officer of the Watch who pointed out that it was a long way to the nearest gas works. After other members of the crew had made the same report the

matter was taken more seriously and a couple of hatch boards were taken up. Smoke came pouring out. An additional boiler was lit, and the ship went full belt for the South American coast. On reaching port the ship had to be taken into a shallow creek where the seacocks were opened so that the water came in and finally extinguished the fire. Eventually the clinker which had formed in the hold had to be removed with pneumatic drills. The fire had burned away many of the rivet heads and the ship had to be bolted together before continuing her voyage to Australia.

Charlie had a vivid recollection of one occasion when the RIO BLANCO was hove to in a force 12 in the Great Australian Bight. Out of the storm there emerged the magnificent sight of a battle-cruiser – the RENOWN or the REPULSE – travelling at 20 knots, slicing through the waves and taking seas right over 'A' and 'B' turrets. She was carrying the Prince of Wales on a visit to Australia.

After loading wheat at Cairns, in those days a town like the set for a western film, Charlie returned to England and signed off. He had had enough of long voyages away from home, and was looking for work which would bring him nearer to Hull. He did one trip in the CARTERSIDE from Hull to Fowey, and then joined a ship called the JOYCE LLEWELLYN trading from Hull to the continent. A little later he was working aboard the SS YORK, one of the railway boats working between Hull and Antwerp. With no refrigeration they carried freshly killed horse meat on the well decks, protected only by muslin covers.

Charlie married during the period of the Depression, and now he left the ships and went to work on the docks, lightering. He worked for Fred Hall, towing about, carrying timber and occasionally salvaging wrecks. While working for Fred Hall, Charlie took over the HALL'S AVANCE, one of the first keels on the River to have an oil engine: a single-cylinder, hot-bulb type. There was no rig.

When the war started, Charlie was needed by the Navy. He went up to the Tyne to be master of the ARROW, a steamer about 80ft long with a vertical boiler and a compound engine. She was employed by the Admiralty as a de-ammunitioning vessel, removing the shells, torpedoes and depth charges from the escort vessels when they came in for repairs.

After the war, Charlie went to work for Cook's, the tanker operators who were later taken over by Cory's. All their ships were named after birds. They were canal and river tankers, and Charlie was to spend the rest of his shipboard life carrying petrol, diesel or gas oil between Hull and Nottingham, Wakefield, Castleford and Leeds, down river to Immingham and Grimsby, or on short-hand work bunkering round the docks. The firm was based on the River Hull near the new Myton Bridge, and loaded at Air Street, Sculcoates.

One of Cook's vessels was the LAPWING, which had drowned her crew when she touched the bottom and rolled over on the River. The other captains were reluctant to take her, but Charlie took her on. Going up to Leeds on the first of the flood, Charlie and his mate were in the wheelhouse when LAPWING touched bottom and immediately broached to. The flood tide began to push her over, and Charlie gave one life-jacket to the mate, grabbed the other, and as she rolled further over they got the door open and scrambled out onto the side of the wheelhouse. They stood there putting on the life-jackets as the tide boiled round them. The engine was still running. Gradually the tide was scouring away the sand beneath the vessel and she began to right herself. Charlie and his mate opened the wheelhouse door, stepped inside, and as the ship came afloat again, picked up their course and headed on up river. They continued their conversation on Hull Kingston Rovers' chances in the Cup, though it was a while before they took off the life-jackets.

Charlie was a well-known and popular figure all along the Navigations. With his great height, his penetrating voice and his unfailing good humour, he was unmistakable. A self-taught pianist, he played piano in countless pubs between Leeds and Hull, and could be guaranteed to get a room full of people singing in five minutes. He had a fine singing voice himself, and was a natural story-teller. But he was a genuinely modest man, and a good listener too.

After leaving the River, Charlie worked for several years in the offices of the Hull Daily Mail. He used to say that he was the oldest errand boy in Hull! (Charlie often told me he wished he'd worked at the Mail earlier – he was very happy there – Editor.) Though troubled latterly by arthritis, he was never anything but cheerful. He once said that he had enjoyed every job he had ever done, and was certainly a man who derived deep pleasure from life in all its aspects, and who gave much pleasure to others along the way. We are privileged to have known him.

(Colin Screepton, Charlie's son-in-law, has recorded much of the information on which this account is based).

SUMMER EVENTS

The Sail Training Association's schooner SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL is to visit Hull in May, and the Association has invited COMRADE and AMY HOWSON to sail in company with her on the Humber on Saturday, 23rd May. It is intended that our two ships will enter Albert Dock with the CHURCHILL, and that they will be present for a visit by HM The Queen on Thursday, 28th May.

The Society's two ships will be on view to the public on the same weekend during July.

COMRADE will be making a return visit to Owston Ferry Regatta. This historic event was revived last year by the Owston Ferry History Society, and was highly successful. This year it is being held again, on a larger scale on Saturday 4th July and COMRADE will be among the attractions. There will be additional events on the River Trent and games and competitions, reminiscent of the old water sports, on the adjacent Snow Sewer, as well as a craft fair.

On the same weekend, AMY HOWSON will be on show a little further up the Trent in West Stockwith Basin. The West Stockwith Yacht Club is holding its annual regatta on the weekend of 4th-5th July, and AMY will be on view on both days. Anyone planning a trip to the Trent on the Saturday would be able to visit both events.

AMY HOWSON IN BARTON HAVEN

After the usual winter laying-up jobs such as stowing away the sails and running rigging in the hold, our Sailing Master and our Engineer, Alan, got on with the main winter time job, converting the engine from raw water cooling to heat exchanger cooling, which means that we had to obtain a decent second-hand heat exchanger unit, a suitable pump to the engine in place of the Jabsco which has been doing wonders for donkey's years after the marine conversion years ago.

Silt from the Humber had seen off several pump impellers, and had clogged up the water jackets, causing the poor engine to cook merrily when slogging back from Spurn or bumbling along canals, so an enclosed system is logical. The finest mesh filter couldn't prevent the silt. So to do the job properly, we hauled the engine right out of the ship and cast into Mr Neave's workshop (well, we're on his moorings) for a thorough rebuild by Alan, which was completed with a repaint and polish up of the bright stuff, installing the engine allowed work to commence on fitting the exchanger, pumps and pipework, which occupied Alan, Cyril and various helpers. The real welder, apart from repairing the engine manifold, completed the engine room bulkhead plates – a job which beat me last year. Our two crewmen from Louth have thrashed paint about and done several tedious jobs I'd avoided. John Gleeson and daughter also did many jobs to finish off our efforts.

The final question, does it work? Was answered when Alan and Cyril started the engine, turned on the water taps and we watched the temperature gauge – most satisfactory. Some of the other assistants were about when we tested the fire pump/deck washer, a natty little auxiliary Cyril created and installed in the engine room. The fiendish part is the pump, which is a pressure washer unit piped up to the deck, attached to the deck union is yards of high pressure hose with a hose fitting on the end. So myself is detailed off to guard the live end, Alan dives down to the engine room and starts the little engine, John our pal is there to observe progress, remarks that although the engine is cackling away and the hosepipe is twitching about, there's no results at the pipe end. Approach of Cyril, ashore, as the three of us were about to remark on the lack of success, the bunged nozzle departed from the hose at incredible speed, fortunately without drilling anyone. My attempts to tame the hosepipe did share the water about however. When resurrected, the device is a good tool, we can fire batten wedges several feet with a bit of smart manoeuvring.

Our several crew members enjoyed themselves last season, and they and several new workers are looking forward to the new season, the sailing dates are nearly all fitted so they'll not be disappointed, I hope.

DAVE ROBINSON

MY EARLY LIFE ON A HUMBER KEEL
AND
RECOLLECTIONS OF STAINFORTH 70 YEARS AGO

Mr Jim Wilson, of Silver Street, Stainforth, comes from a long line of Keelmen. He himself came ashore as a young man and went into engineering, but he remained in close contact with those who made their living aboard, and continued to live close by the canal. His recollection of his early days is very clear, and he has recorded his memories in writing, and on tape.

Mr Wilson has very kindly allowed us to publish this record, and it will be serialised over several issues of 'The Slabline'. It includes many details of everyday life, vividly recalled.

"My great grandfather, Mr J T Parish, my grandfathers, William Parish and James S Wilson, and my father, James Wilson, all worked on Humber Keels, and I am sure that they were all private owners. I know that my grandfathers and father owned their own vessels. My great grandfather, Thomas Parish, went coastwise as a young man working on Billy Boys from the Humber to Kings Lynn and Boston, and then he went on to Keels. Being private owners meant long

hours of work. They were eager to have their own Keel by the time they were 21. It took a bit of doing; of course, most young men would have to borrow some of the money for their Keels. This was often borrowed from their parents, and then they worked them off.

My father's Keel was called ENERGY. It was built at Stainforth top yard, the yard owned by Mr Elwis of Doncaster. But the men who built the Keel were the Norfolk Bros. who had previously owned the yard. The ENERGY was a Sheffield size Keel about 61ft 6ins long by 15ft 6ins beam. The main planking was oak, decks pitch pine, bottom was elm, main frame was oak. Draft about 6ft in the Sheffield and South Yorkshire Canal. ENERGY was built in 1909. Cost of building the hull was £470, cost of fitting out about £300; I have recently found the bill for the building of the hull. This was a lot of money to find at that time.

There were no engines at that time. Keels were fitted with a long mast that lowered so that they could pass under fast bridges. ENERGY had a very long pole mast, about 55 to 60ft at a guess. At the back end of the vane's wire frame was a letter E which was gilded so that it would shine in the sun: it stood for ENERGY. The vane was the flag at the top of the mast. You see, if you were looking for a Keel in the dock of about 20 to 50 acres in size with a lot of others Keels in, you would try to find the mast first before walking aimlessly about to find it. I have used that method many times. The mast was fitted with a mainsail and topsail, and some Keels had a topgallant sail but I have never seen a topgallant in use. With wind you could move very well on a large area of water like the River Humber, but in the canal you could not sail with any kind of wind: you want a fair wind or you are stopped. There is no room to tack in the canal; when this happens it is much harder work. You can move along by:

1. Pushing the Keel with a boat hook.
2. Having a boat horse, which could pull a hundred tons very well.
3. Hauling by hand.

When we hauled by hand there was someone ashore on the towpath with a length of rope fastened to them from the Keel. Sometimes when I was hauling, fishermen used to ask me if my parents fed me on horse corn. I would not say this was hard work, but it was so very slow and made you a bit fed up after a few hours. When I was hauling in summer time flies would trouble me so I would sometimes get a small branch of leaves out of the hedge and wave it around my shoulders to keep them off. I found winter the worst; you see we sometimes started work very early in the morning between 4 and 5 o'clock. When I was hauling in frosty weather I could not keep warm, at such a slow pace. I was not made to haul, but I wanted to pull my weight. My mum would often haul the Keel through a rack; probably some people would have thought this very unkind of my dad allowing her to, but he would be on board trying to set the sail to catch as much wind as possible. He would also be steering, and pushing along the deckside with a boat hook; also there was the possibility of a tug coming up or down with 5 or 6 Keels on, and you had not got to get yourself mixed up with them, so mum felt that she had the best job on the bank hauling.

When you got your cargo in your Keel, your only thought was to get to your destination and get it out, so you worked as long as you could to get there. No

stopping at 5 o'clock; you worked while the canal was open. You did not want any Keels following up to pass you, because when you discharged your present cargo you would want another one in, and if they were few in number and you got to the pit first you would get it. You nearly always carried coal on the down trip.

Keel people were very willing to help each other, but there was great rivalry between them once they had a cargo in. A few of them also attended their church at different places, some being local preachers. From my great grandfather to my son, all our family attended Stainforth Silver Street Methodist Chapel (it was Old Primitive) without a break from 1870 to 1971. I was the Society Steward when the Chapel closed. I have some old pew rent cards for the people who paid for their seats; I do not think much to that idea, it is a good job that's passed away, but sorry to say there are a lot of empty seats these days. I have said that we were Prims, but when we were in Hull Docks we went to Thornton Hall, a big Wesleyan Chapel which was quite unusual years ago. We would work with our Wesleyan friends from Monday to Saturday, but have no dealings on a Sunday. But in 1932 both Chapels became one Methodist Church so things improved. We also attended Queen's Hall in Hull, it just depended on which dock we were in as to where we went. When my father was a boy they traded to the Town Docks and he attended a Church of England which stood where Ferens Art Gallery now is. When craft of any kind were lying in docks often someone from the Mission to Seamen would come to visit us and invite us to help in some form of church work, and of course invite us to their Mission if we did not go to any other place. When we were moored in Sheffield Basin, the same thing happened there; I think it was people from Victoria Hall that came to see us.

We found our way to Thornton Hall through the water boatmen in St Andrew's Dock – this was the Fish Dock. Perhaps you will wonder who water boatmen are. Well, Kingston-upon-Hull 70 years ago was a big port. It was the third port of England, and there were a lot of large and small steamships about, a lot of tugs and trawlers, and all these ships needed water for their boilers and for drinking, which was taken to them with a boat that carried water. They also brought water to our Keels to fill our tanks or casks. In this way some of the crew found out we were Methodists and invited us to Thornton Hall.

My grandfather Wilson had two Manvers size Keels; they were a little smaller than the Sheffield size being about 58ft x 14¹/₂ft. They would carry out 80 tons of cargo. The size of the Keel was controlled by the size of the locks on the canals that they worked on. One of the Keels was called JAMES AND LUCY and the other BETHEL. He would load one of these Keels at Manvers Pit with coal, take it down to Hull Town Docks, and my grandma and some of her children would sell it to the people of Hull, and to the sailing ships for their galley fires. While one ship was being discharged in Hull, he would take the other back to Manvers for more coal. He bought the coal himself; he was not carrying for other people.

Privately owned Keels were mostly looked after very well. The ENERGY was painted ultramarine on the upper parts, i.e. coamings, timbers, long timbers, hawse timbers and stanchions. The timber heads were lined in a darker blue; this was called stringing. Fuchsia's, rosebuds, rose leaves were painted on the stanchions. Top strokes, after rails, winch posts, and taffle timbers were

'stuffed'. It was like a varnish, it allowed the grain of the wood to show. Headledges fore and aft were often light oak grained, leeboards tarred or painted red. Chock, featherings and cross-pieces were painted ultramarine on the plain wood and the carving on them was gilded. The central carving on the parts was the trade mark of the yard that had built the Keel, that was how I picked out most of the Stainforth built Keels and remembered the names. Most of the ironwork on Keels was painted red: spring timbers, bow ropes, tack roller assembly, spare anchor, batten irons, blocks, and windlass parts. Inside the hold and outside of the hull was tarred. All brass parts had to be polished two or three times a week. No polish had to mark the deck or the pitch pine cabin entrance or I was in trouble. We could not have big nails in our boots because that would scratch the deck or they could cut the hatch covers, and that could result in the cargo getting wet. Sometimes when we had moored we could be 10 to 12ft away from the bank; then a plank would be put from deckside to the bank or we sometimes put the cog boat between Keel and bank. Anyway at the place where you stepped off the plank, or out of the boat, was a mop; this was to wipe your boots on. If father happened to see you had not used it, he would ask you if you knew what it was for.

I was born on the Keel ENERGY on 23rd January 1911, in St Andrews Dock in Hull, at 9.30 in the morning. I was engaged on the after deck of the ENERGY on 25th December 1939. My young lady and myself were going round the village with Stainforth Silver Street Methodist Choir, Christmas singing, and I had worked it so we reached the canal bank just before midnight, so we could be engaged at midnight. I spent most of my early years in St Andrews Dock, King George Dock and the Old Harbour, that is the River Hull.

I think I will start this trip from Stainforth going up the canal to Sheffield, that is the farthest place up on the Sheffield and South Yorkshire Navigation. There was a basin here with cranes, and warehouses for discharging of all kind of cargo: wheat, flour, wood, iron ingots, and general mixed cargo. We never sailed much above Doncaster, only with a jury mast at times, so we will presume there will not be a fair wind. Dad would ring the boat horse stables near Doncaster Lock for a horse for early next morning. We knew these men very well, and they knew our ways and how we liked to start work early. Some of the men who hauled got their horse ready so early that they were walking their horse past Doncaster Parish Church when the clocks were striking 2 in the morning to walk to Stainforth to give us an early start.

After leaving Stainforth our first stop would be Bramwith Lock. Here we would leave our cog boat with our outside tow rope (the Humber was always referred to as outside), harbour mooring ropes and our spare anchor was also put in. You see, the canal is very shallow in places, so we took all unnecessary weight off; also because when we came down light from Sheffield we would not have been able to get under some of the bridges with the big ropes on the hatches. Some of the ropes were 5 to 6 inches in diameter and where the eye was spliced they were very thick. Sometimes, if the canal was a bit high, we had to turn on the seacock and let water in to drop the Keel a bit to get under bridges, it then had to be pumped out. We had left our leeboards at Stainforth.

Out next lock was Sandall, then on to Doncaster. Sometimes we would leave 10, 20 or 30 tons of flour at Doncaster Wharf. After Doncaster we went through a few more locks and on to Mexborough where we left our mast, sail, stay blocks

and derrick pole; we used our own derrick if we had to get a cargo in or out when no crane was available. Our day would end around Mexborough. Next day we would set off early in the morning, going through a number of locks and past Rotherham Wharf where Keels sometimes left cargo. Then more locks and on to Sheffield Basin, which was like a little dock. Here we discharged our cargo. We did not stay long in Sheffield; our cargo was often wanted before we arrived. I have known times when goods have been loaded into wagons on the rail for the same warehouse that we were going to and our Keel arrived before the train. When we got a cargo in, we were off, whereas the few wagons had to be taken from the mill to Hull Rail Terminal, then coupled to a train for Sheffield; from Sheffield Rail Terminal. It was taken to the warehouse in carts pulled by two heavy horses.

We took about three days Hull to Sheffield, so now we leave Sheffield for Roundwood, where we hoped to get a cargo of coal for Hull Fish Dock. We also loaded coal at Kilnhurst and Denaby, but we preferred Roundwood because it was the nearest colliery to Sheffield where we had just left our previous cargo. I think that Roundwood coal came from Silverwood colliery. Sometimes we might have to wait at Roundwood two or three days, because there could be a shortage of coal, or there could be a number of Keels there wanting coal for Fish Dock, or other places. These days, if it was fine, would be spent looking for rust, chipping it off and re-painting, a bit of rope whipping, and any odd job you could find. If it was raining one might go into the hold, through the trap hatch, take the hatch off, and fix the covers so the light could enter the hold but no rain could; here my father would saw firewood and chop it. A lot of the older Keelmen did this; they picked wood out of the rivers. It was a nuisance at times; it could get in-between Keels when they were moored together, and you could pick it out, because there might be large nails and bolts in it, and these would chafe the planking. Sometimes these were hefty bits."

In the next issue Mr Wilson's narrative continues with an account of the return trip to Hull, and of life in Hull Fish Dock.

TOM HOLGATE OF BEVERLEY

Tom Holgate was member of a very well-known Keel family in Beverley. Subsequent to his death towards the end of 1986, his family very kindly donated some material relating to Keels and other shipping on the River Hull, for which the Society is truly grateful. There are two framed photographs, one of David Holgate's Sloop FRIENDSHIP and one of the launching of an unknown wooden Keel. There are also items which will prove useful on COMRADE.

For a number of years in the 40's and 50's, Tom Holgate took charge of all vessels built at Beverley Shipyard for their journey down river to Hull. He kept a log of these vessels, mainly trawlers, and we are fortunate to have this document included in the Society's archives. Another item is a typed version of a newspaper article from 1917. The paper seems to have been the (Beverley?) Recorder but we have yet to track down more detail about it. Mark Holgate was Tom Holgate's grandfather and the article shows him to have had an eventful life.

4th August 1917

OUR PORTRAIT GALLERY

A remarkable career has been that of Mr Mark Holgate, a well-known personality at Becksid. Mr Holgate is now 66 years of age and he was born at Becksid. His father, Mr William Holgate, was also a Keel captain and a Recorder representative had a chat with him in the cabin of his Keel the other day and gleaned some interesting particulars of his life.

"It's a rum life is this" said Mr Holgate "taking it all through". Interrogated by the Recorder representative Mr Holgate recollected that he received a very slight scholastic education at odd times at the National Schools in Beverley under a schoolmaster known as Old Daddy Pickles. He explained that he had been on board Keels practically since he was a baby and that, as he used to travel with the Keels in his early boyhood, he had less opportunity of education than most boys. "I never went to school regularly" said Mr Holgate "but only when opportunity offered, and I was working aboard a Keel as a mate when I was twelve years old". Describing his life aboard the Keels Mr Holgate said few people knew the dangers and difficulties attendant on the life. "I would rather be going to sea than in one of these vessels for many reasons. We have all weathers to contend with you know and we have to work according to the tides. We cannot make fast just where we should like to, Sir. The Keels have to be worked at night and you have to strain your eyes and see into the darkness like a cat". Mr Holgate related how after having had an experience on the Keels trading to Beverley and York and Lincolnshire he ran away from his father and decided to go to sea. "I went as cook on board a schooner called the JOHN AND MARY owned by Mr Stephenson Owen, of Beverley, and went to France on her with cargoes of grain, iron, potatoes, and coal. After twelve months I left this ship and went three months with old Jim Needham as mate of the Keel MINERVA, and we used to go to Lund Hill colliery, which is now extinct. After this I was 4¹/₂ years in a schooner called the PILOT belonging to Mr William Sturdy, of Beverley. Mr Sturdy got drowned and his son carried on the business. We used to go all round the coast, especially the English Channel ports, and into Scotland. I went herring fishing soon after this out of Scarborough to the Dogger Bank and the Silver Pits fishing grounds.

It was rough work in those days, boarding the fish onto the cutters. We used to be fleeting for eight weeks on end and our principal catches were sole. Soon after this I went to Shields and sailed out of there up to the Baltic in a wooden barque named GEM OF THE NITH and we used to discharge coal at Copenhagen and then go to Riga and carry deals back to London.

A chum then joined a full rigged clipper called CITY OF BERLIN and we sailed for Rangoon in ballast. Our ship travelled at the rate of 14 knots and we left England in October and when 21 days out near the Isle of Palerma, just as eight bells struck, we were struck in collision with another ship which was running before the wind. It was coincidence that she was belonging to our own owners. The skipper, as it turned out later, was drunk and they lost seven men. The other ship put into a place near Trinidad and we put back to Gibraltar on January 28th and that Saturday we discovered the cargo was afire. The cargo was all coal and we had lifted the hatches up to let the gas out when we found the whole cargo smouldering. We battened down the hatches, which made it

worse, as the very next day the hatches blew up half mast high though nobody was injured. We had not seen land of any description for over two months but on the Sunday after discovering the fire we sighted the Island of Ceylon. We had signals of distress flying and soon a man-of-war vessel called the ARAB sighted us as we got near a place called Trincomalee. The bluejackets put a fire engine aboard a lighter and our crew and theirs took turns for two days and two nights pumping water into our ship. We ultimately got the cargo out and found it all burned to cinders underneath, and then we proceeded to Rangoon. The following Thursday I was painting a triangle on the fore top when the two parts slipped and I dropped forty feet to the deck. I managed to light on my feet, but they picked me up senseless. In those days they had different methods than today and the skipper ordered them to pump me with the salt water pump. I was laid up for six weeks, I was in India at the time the Indian famine was on and for which they were gathering money here in England. On the way home we had nothing but rice to eat and were nearly dead."

In 1879 Mr Holgate married the daughter of Mr Spence, of Molescroft, at Scarborough and he lived there for some time and then returned to Beverley to settle down.

He came back to Beverley to be mate of the PILGRIM belonging to Mr William Hodgson, and then became captain of the SPEEDWELL, a Driffield Keel. Subsequently he ran the Humber Regatta with the late Alderman Scaife and he won the regatta. After this Mr Holgate removed to Castleford where he ran Keels for eighteen years for a chemical works there. Now Mr Holgate has returned to his native place and lives at Beckside. He has two sons and two daughters, and a large number of his relatives are in the Keel traffic.

AUDREY

As our 'Slabline' readers should know, this writer (your Secretary) is presently employed creating a Billy Boy Ketch at Goole. Of course she is owned by the Sobriety Project, a very worthwhile organisation, but the Society's crewpersons and old hands will initially be involved in the shakedown trials and initial training. So to bring us up to date – the hull is being furbished by platers and welders ready for dry docking and fitting the propeller bearings and propeller. A Ford/Lister engine is ordered for the auxiliary power unit, arrangements are being made to get five sails made professionally, and the masts and spars have been donated to us. New wooden decking has been obtained from Cooks vast wood heap. M S C workers are supplying the labour at Aldam Dock.

DAVE ROBINSON

THE SOCIETY'S PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

SLIDE 3A/C1 'MARY JANE' OF BEVERLEY

We resume our occasional series of articles on photographic material in the Society's archives with the only picture we have of a Keel setting a topgallant as well as mainsail and topsail. She was the MARY JANE and was owned at the time by Bobby Wood of Beverley. After he retired, Bobby Wood was elected as a councillor in Beverley and later served a term as Mayor.

In the photograph, all three sails are nicely filled and the sheet has been slackened off to take MARY JANE round the approaching bend into the next rack (reach) where the wind will be even more favourable. On the cabin deck, Bobby Wood looks aft towards the photographer along with his wife and one of his two daughters, either Mary or Jane. The Keel is working in the Driffield trade, the river is full of water and she is making good progress, although deep-laden.

Those who have sailed on COMRADE may well be interested in the manner in which the extra sail was set on MARY JANE. She carried a pole mast, that is to say, a mast shaped from a single timber. We can guess that its height would be very similar to that of COMRADE for the following reasons. It was common to describe the size of sails by the length of the middle seam. Thus COMRADE has a nine-yard sail. By contrast, MARY JANE has either an eight-yard or an eight-yard one-foot sail. The main hoist, (height from the Keel to the main sheave) would then be two or three foot less than for COMRADE. The topsail would be ten feet, needing twelve feet between main sheave pin and topsail sheave pin. The topgallant would likely be a six-foot sail needing an additional sheave through the mast, just below the truck. COMRADE, on the other hand, has a 'crag' above the topsail yard, to set the burgee. Thus we conclude the two masts to be similar in height.

The topgallant was a sail for relatively light winds. It was hoisted by hand and made fast to a cleat on the port after winch post. Naturally, all the gear was lighter than for the topsail. Two small sheaves were needed in the ends of the topsail yard and the lightweight topgallant sheets passed through them, then through topgallant sheave blocks attached to the middle of the topsail yard. From there, the sheets were led down the mast to a separate pair of cleats on the coaming and made fast.

The need for a topgallant in the Driffield trade stemmed from the sheltering effect of trees in close proximity to the navigation. The topgallant not only collected top wind over the trees, but could also create a downdraught to the lower sails, causing them to draw as well.

Other vessels also were known to set topgallants. In particular, there was a flourishing trade in coals to York from, for example, pits in the Castleford district, carried in York-owned Keels. It was quite common for such vessels to carry fidded topmasts. For those not already in the know, such a mast would consist of two parts, namely, a main mast forming the lower section and a separate topmast with its heel mounted above the main oynings, foreside of the topmast. The advantage of the York Keels lay in the fact that the topmast could be unshipped, easing the task of lowering the mast. The journey from Castleford to York would take the Keels through the Selby Canal which had many fast bridges (that is, fixed bridges in contrast to the swing bridges on some of the other Yorkshire navigations. Consequently it was sensible to unship the topmast on reaching the western end of the Selby Canal, pass through the waterway and ship the topmast again on reaching the Ouse. Again, trees along the river would render a topgallant of great assistance in some conditions.

The photograph which occasioned this article was originally given to Fred Schofield by Earnest Porter of Beverley and was used in Mike Ulyatt's book 'Flying Sail'. All the information about MARY JANE and related matters was provided by Mr Schofield and we should like to record our appreciation to him for it.

THE RIGHT MIXTURE

Whatever worries the Society's Council might have had when a Sloop for the Humber was first mooted, either about the vessels ability to appeal or the enrolment of maintenance workers and crew (one and the same usually) have happily proved groundless. Each year the 'hardcore' of two or three enthusiasts is regularly swelled by old and new members and friends wishing to participate.

Last season, for instance, we had Charlie and Acker along on occasions to supplement Cyril's experience and Alan and Dave Smather as 'deckhand learners'. So, together with our Lincolnshire crewmen and one or two others, we have a fair number of potential crewpersons. However, if any member wants an induction into Sloop crewing, give me a ring. The more the merrier as far as we're concerned.

To keep our Sloop maintained in as near perfect sailing condition as possible keeps some of the crew busy most of their free time, so a fresh pair of hands is always welcome. Luckily, as we become more experienced at both sailing and the chores aboard, it gets a little easier.

DAVE ROBINSON

EXCELSIOR

John Hainsworth was recently telephoned by Mr Paul Martin who owns the wooden Keel EXCELSIOR. She is lying at Hooe on the River Medway, and is currently for sale. She is partially converted to a houseboat. Mr Martin was unable to give any information on the ship or her history, though he described her as being about 58' long by 14' beam. Fletcher's had a vessel of this name operating up the Calder and Hebble, and it seems possible that this may be the same ship. She is apparently afloat. Further information from Mr Martin, telephone 0634-724721.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

5 JULY	Start of Rixon Matthews Appleyard Cup Yacht race to Holland – a two-week handicap competition from Hull Marina
1-2 AUGUST	Hull Regatta. City of Hull Challenge Trophy; Maritime entertainment; displays; Boat Show; Parade of Boats, etc. Hull Marina and environs

A TALL SHIP EXPERIENCE

On 3rd October 1986, I was invited to join the French three-masted barque BELEM for the experience of crewing. After meeting up with the rest of the guest crew at Gatwick Airport, we flew to Lorient on the Brittany coast of France and boarded the ship.

The BELEM is, today, the only square-rigged 'pure' ex-merchantman still sailing on a regular basis with trainees or passengers.

BELEM – this is her original name – was built in Nantes in 1896 as a West-Indiaman, to trade between France and the West Indies and South America from Guyana to Argentina. Her principal trade was cocoa beans.

In 1902 she was dangerously near the cataclysmic volcanic explosion of Mount Pele in Martinique which wiped out the then capital of the island, St Pierre. Her masts and decks were covered in hot volcanic ash.

Just before the Great War she was sold to the Duke of Westminster, who had her converted into a private yacht. This unusual fate for a humble merchantman (suddenly flying the burgee of the Royal Yacht Squadron) saved her from the perils of the War and was to preserve her from the great holocaust of 1921-23 when almost all the French merchant fleet was scrapped.

In 1921 BELEM was sold to Lord A E Guinness, the brewer, who renamed her FANTOME II. She was his private yacht until his death.

She was bought out of the Guinness estate by the Italian Count of Cini in 1951 and presented to the Cini Foundation of Venice. Renamed GIORGIO CINI she was used as a sail training ship.

By 1972 the Cini Foundation had run out of money for the ship's upkeep and she was sold to the Carabinieri (the Italian police). They wanted to use her as a character building training ship for their men and as a floating recruitment centre for the force. She went for a major refit but the Carabinieri ran out of Lira and the barque was seized by the yard for sale, to pay for the work already done.

From 1974 to 1979 she remained laid up for sale while efforts were being made in France to buy her back. In 1979 a sponsor was found, the French Union of Savings Banks. She was renamed BELEM and towed back to Brest in France.

The original idea was that she would be refitted by the Navy as a sail trainer, and that the Savings Banks would have use of her for part of each year, for promotional purposes.

A change in Defence Minister meant a change of naval policy and the project was shelved. For two years the barque rusted away in the Brest Dockyard. In 1981 she was taken to the La Periere yard at Lorient for a major hull refit and then towed to Paris where she was opened up to the public as a museum ship while further work was carried out. BELEM now regularly cruises with trainees/passengers off the French Western and Mediterranean coasts under the sponsorship of the French Union of Savings Banks.

Having been directed to my bunk and detailed to Blue Watch – 8 to 12, four hours on eight hours off, the permanent crew of 12 took BELEM to sea. We were all then free to settle in for the night until 0800 the next day. Dinner was prepared in the newly refurbished galley situated on deck. This meant that hot food had to be carried along the deck and down to the mess deck by personnel detailed from our crew and referred to as 'Tigers' and

'Sallywags'. I was told these names are traditional – 'Tigers' serve and 'Sallywags' wash up. The food, prepared by a French cook, was excellent if a little heavy on the garlic!

One of our crew was Tony Davies from the Spinners folk group (the tall one with the tin whistle). He had us singing each night and although BELEM is a dry ship we all sang somewhere near the right tune.

I was on watch the first morning at 0800 hours. The stations of the watch were two men on the bow and two men on the wheel, who were spelled every half hour by others from the remaining twelve men detailed to polish, clean and trim the sails from the deck. All stations were overseen by a member of the permanent crew. The off-duty watch, if not sleeping, was instructed in navigation, rope work and the principles of sailing a tall ship. At 1200 we were off-watch and down to lunch. In the afternoon we were given advice on going aloft for which notes of encouragement had been supplied earlier, and are reproduced below.

GOING ALOFT

For newcomers, going aloft is arguably the biggest challenge offered by a square rigger. It looks and feels more impressive and difficult than it really is, and whilst no-one will be flogged or 'started' for refusing to go aloft, everyone should make a determined effort to try the experience.

The reward of personal satisfaction is well worth the effort, and is the more intense the more one felt scared to start with. Fear quickly diminishes and eventually vanishes with practice. Danger, in fact, only begins when no fear at all is left – that is when one gets careless.

Except for maintenance the only times when people have to go aloft are when sails have to be either set or furled – the rest is done from the deck.

Going aloft is made very safe and easy by the provision of ratlines, footropes and a plethora of good handholds. Going aloft is not at all like rock climbing, where climbers seek the most difficult and hairy way up.

Climbing starts with the lower shrouds. These are a piece of cake; they are wide, very steady and not very steep. Always climb up the windward shrouds and on their outboard side. The pressure of the wind on the sails and masts will make the windward rigging bar-taut, whereas the lee rigging will be slack and wobbly. The pressure of the wind on your own body will push you against the shrouds instead of away from them. The heel of the ship will also lessen the slope of the ascent.

There are rope rungs, called ratlines, stretched between the shrouds. These are for feet only. Should you also use them as handholds, someone above you may tread on your fingers, which is painful and potentially dangerous should you react by pulling your hand away. Also ratlines are only light rope and have been known to break. Should you be holding a ratline that breaks, you could fall backwards. Always grab the shrouds themselves – they will never break under your weight and no-one could then tread on your hands. Should a ratline break under your foot, you would still be holding the shrouds so you would not fall.

From the top of the lower shrouds you can get on to the lower yard. Should your destination be a higher yard you must however carry on and meet the first relative difficulty: the overhang of the 'top' which is negotiated via the futtock shrouds. These are also 'rattled' – provided with ratlines. When climbing under

the futtock shrouds, you would fall if you let go (and fetch up against the lower shrouds and ratlines, with every chance of being able to stop your fall), but there is no reason for you to let go. It is like crossing a busy traffic lane; if you stopped in the middle, you would be run over, but there is no reason why you should stop. In fact, crossing a busy traffic lane is considerably more risky than climbing futtock shrouds.

The ascent is continued above the top via the windward topmast and topgallant shrouds which are also rattled. If you do not like heights, keep your eyes on the handholds and do not look down.

When you reach the level of your required yard, move a foot across to the yard's footrope, then a hand to the jackstay, then a second foot and the second hand. At all times when climbing or moving about the rigging keep either two hands and a foot or two feet and one hand firmly secured. Do not use running rigging as handhold or foothold – by definition running rigging can run and you would not want to run with it!

You 'lay out' on the yard by sliding along the footrope, until you have reached your station. It is difficult to overtake people on the footrope, so first on goes out furthest. Once at your station clip your safety harness on the jackstay for extra safety. The old expression "one hand for the ship and one hand for yourself" in this case does not apply: you cannot make up or untie gaskets or knots with only one free hand. On the footrope you are in a stable position allowing both hands to be free, but it is nice to be secure in the knowledge that you are fastened to the yard by your safety harness or belt.

Getting back down is exactly the reverse operation. Again, the relatively tricky bit at first is getting over and under the edge of the top, on the reverse futtock shrouds. The overhang prevents you from seeing where the first futtock ratline is, so you have to feel for it with your foot – but it is there and it will not fail you.

Having read these notes, and wearing a safety harness, I apprehensively started up the foremast as practice.

The fore lower top and the fore sail had been set by the permanent crew, who were there to encourage us. The Mate was up walking on the top of the yards without a harness. Negotiating the futtock shroud concerned me, as there was no lubber hole, but on reaching this point I found it to be rigid, not slack as I had imagined. Moving on to the futtock ratlines and climbing hanging backwards at 45 degrees, felt very hairy. I then reached round the edge of the platform for a handhold on the next set of shrouds, then let my foothold go as I pulled myself on to the platform top – with great relief. Apprehension left me and I went on intending to stop at the fore lower yard.

As this was occupied, and somebody was under me, I was committed to go on to the first vacant point which was the top gallant yard. As I reached this level on the mast I side stepped out on to the foot rope, thinking how thin the one inch wire looked, and would it break? As my weight went on, the rope went down until the slack was taken up, but it still felt very loose. With both feet on and laying on to the yard with my stomach it felt much safer. Tentatively I went halfway out on to the yard and clipped on to the jackstay. Standing there I looked round for the first time and realised just how high I was – and thought what a fool I was for being there at my age!

The height was about 90ft off the deck, and looking down the ship seemed about as big as my foot! However, there was so much cordage that if you had fallen you would not reach the deck before something held you. We were sailing with every sail set except royals, topgallants and upper tops.

Once back on the mast, coming down was no problem, easier the lower you got. From the platform I had to hang over the edge and feel for the futtock ratlines with my foot, this was more difficult than going up, but I eventually found it and descended with a great sense of satisfaction and relief once on deck.

We had sailed west from Lorient with a light north-east wind, our heading now was north-west, the wind still light north-east.

Later in the afternoon it was decided to set the upper top sails, and after having had a practice run, this second climb aloft was enjoyable. I climbed the foremast with a permanent crew member to untie the gaskets on the port yard and two other crew members attended to the starboard side. Once back on deck the sail was set and braced for starboard tack.

After all was set a permanent crew member and guest assistant went aloft to overhaul the bunt lines and tie stopper knots; these stop the lines restricting the shape of the sail and are tied with light twine so they will break when the lines are hauled from the deck to furl the sail.

From 2000hrs to 2400hrs on the second night I was on watch when we changed course to east-south-east by wearing ship. All the spare watch hands were at the braces, and it seemed to take hours to go round. When on the new course, I had a spell at the wheel which was light but slow to respond. Once you had the feel, just easing it round one spoke at a time, the ship would steadily respond. You really had to concentrate on the compass and the sails, not allowing the wind behind the top sails. These were braced further back than the lower sails, to act as an early warning of being too high into the wind. Half an hour of this was enough for a novice.

On Sunday morning I was a 'Tiger' at breakfast which was easier than dinner, as everything could be put on the table before seated diners blocked the limited space.

Going on watch at 0800hrs I noticed that we had changed course from west-south-west. Our heading was now south-east. Doing another spell at the wheel was easier as we were further off the wind.

Being relieved at the wheel I was detailed to the bow. Leaning on the rail looking ahead I sensed movement in the water below. Looking down there was a sudden flash of a dolphin crossing the bow, missing it by inches. This one was followed by a dozen more and they played in the bow wave for three or four minutes then disappeared – a sight I will never forget.

We sailed south-east all day and being off watch in the afternoon we were instructed in using a sextant, chart work and rope work.

By 1800hrs our position was south-west of Belle Island, becalmed with the sails hanging lifeless.

In spite of BELEM being a dry ship, at dinner – with the Captain's approval, wine was on the table. He knew it was going to be a quiet night – watches were stood but we just drifted.

The following morning, still becalmed, the inflatable was lowered for a photographic and swimming session.

By 1200hrs we were under power returning to Lorient with all sails furled and everything shipshape. The Captain broke out two cases of pink champagne which were very refreshing on a hot day. Over the last 24 hours the ship had not been very dry!

I was aboard BELEM for four days in good weather and our course is shown on the attached chart – we covered about 280 miles. Each day was a routine as described and a great experience. I'm under no illusion though – going round Cape Horn in a storm must have been quite another story.

The only time I got wet was in a bar a Lorient on the last night. French beer taps must be under great pressure – they spray everyone when faulty!

MIKE BARTLETT

CORRESPONDENCE

Following John Hainsworth's article on Anderton's Sloops, he received the following letter from Mr S A Atkinson of Immingham.

"[Dear John]

May I add a postscript to your article about Anderton's Sloops. Moss Abley was their last skipper of HYDRO. Moss was Nick's father, he always sailed with his two sons as crew.

When Edgar Lawson got the Trent Contract he bought HYDRO for £200 and put her to work carrying chalk and slag. The late Charlie Sheppard sailed her for a while followed by yours truly. I joined her on Barrow Flats and took a brand new mainsail with me which would be the last one made by J Moore of Hull. Some two years later her spars were taken out and a small engine installed. On one occasion I took her to Howden Dyke for a load of pyrites and an old man, Bob Cooper came on board. Her cabin had gone, of course, it was made of walnut and teak, it would cost a fortune today. Bob said with a catch in his voice "I never wanted to see her like this".

Now a few lasts made by the above:

The last load of slag out of Winteringham Haven

The last load of chalk to Skeffling Shore

The last load of slag to Broomfleet Island

The last load of Paull sand to Barton Brickyard

The last load of Spurn gravel

"I did a couple of trips with Len Cook in the Sloop ERNEST for Sprun gravel, she had holes cut in her deck and Spurn lifeboat men came and loaded her. Len Cook got SARAH when his father died. I distinctly remember him having her in 1934 so there seems some doubt whether Barraclough ever had her. SARAH was the last Sloop to carry gravel from Snittersham Beach. Sailed by Len's cousin she made numerous trips in the better weather."

Proposed Sailing Programme

for 'COMRADE' and 'AMY HOWSON' in Summer 1987

Date	H W at Hull	COMRADE	AMY HOWSON		Date	H W at Hull	COMRADE	AMY HOWSON
Sat Apr 11 th	0545	N/A			Sat Jun 27 th	0753		
Sun Apr 12 th	0619	N/A			Sun Jun 28 th	0824		
Sat Apr 25 th	0533	N/A			Sat Jul 11 th	0701		
Sun Apr 26 th	0615	N/A			Sun Jul 12 th	0748		
Sat May 2 nd	0932		N/A		Sat Jul 25 th	0705		
Sun May 3 rd	1001		N/A		Sun Jul 26 th	0739		
Sat May 9 th	0400	N/A			Sat Aug 8 th	0559	N/A	
Sun May 10 th	0452	N/A			Sun Aug 9 th	0649	N/A	
Sat May 16 th	0852		N/A		Sat Aug 22 nd	0606	N/A	
Sun May 17 th	0936		N/A		Sun Aug 23 rd	0644	N/A	
Sat May 30 th	0840				Sat Sep 5 th	0449		
Sun May 31 st	0911				Sun Sep 6 th	0545		
Sat Jun 13 th	0759				Sat Sep 19 th	0449		
Sun Jun 14 th	0844				Sun Sep 20 th	0538		

Information on bookings for COMRADE from J Thompson (218 Victoria Avenue, Hull HU5 3DZ, tel. 0482-441277) and for AMY HOWSON from D Robinson (135 Waterside Road, Barton-upon_Humber, tel. 0652-635288).