

# The Slabline



*"Amy Howson" from the Humber Bridge*

**JOURNAL OF THE HUMBER KEEL AND SLOOP PRESERVATION SOCIETY**

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## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

### Hull Marina Comes Alive

Anyone visiting Hull after a few years' absence will be struck and impressed by the changes that have taken place in the old town. Where recently there was dereliction and Britain's last surviving bombed sites, there are elegant, post-modern buildings on a human scale, attractive townscaping and an air of prosperity and pride. And in the heart of it all there is water, and moreover water which is alive with boats; in fact the forest of masts is reminiscent of much earlier days, even if the modern ones are mainly aluminium and the creak of cordage has been replaced by the tinkling of wire on metal.

Humber and Railway Docks with their fleet of yachts make a stark contrast with the bleak and redundant water space of Prince's Dock, straddled by its new shopping centre. The quality of the surrounding buildings is high, yet the water itself is lifeless and depressing. The reason is evident: it has no function, because there are no boats. The thoughtlessness of the seventies still rankles: with a few extra feet of headroom and a relatively small underpass, motor boats at least could have penetrated into Prince's Dock, relieving congestion in the Marina but above all bringing life and interest to this precious space in the heart of the city. Yet the road programme was decided on in isolation, in the Department of Transport, without any thought of planning the area as a whole.

Still, we should be grateful for what has survived, and the Marina development is a model of its kind. The design of the quaysides and promenades is of high quality, Railway Dock and the East side of Humber Dock being especially attractive, and the atmosphere is stimulating and welcoming.

As recorded in our last issue, the atmosphere of welcome extends to our own ships. Along with the vessels of the Sobriety Project and the Ocean Youth Club, COMRADE and AMY have been made to feel at home: a most pleasant contrast to the frosty reception previously given to us. Both our ships, together with AUDREY, were prominent at the Shanty Festival which Hull City Council organised in September. Throughout the day on Saturday, 8th September the air resounded to shanties, sung in a variety of accents from Dutch to Geordie. The event was well enough attended to be a success - even if one might hope for more in future years - and there was great conviviality. Aboard COMRADE there was a continuous video performance of the recent documentary 'Spilling the Wind'. However, AMY was very much the star of the show, being utilised as the floating stage from which successive teams of performers sang and wisecracked for hours on end.

There were, admittedly, one or two snags which will need to be ironed out on any future occasion. The sight of twenty burly Dutchmen on the hatches, going up and down in time to the music, caused some anxiety to the crew, though there is no truth in the rumour that Cyril was down below holding them up. Certainly some kind of strengthening would be essential if the event were to be repeated. Furthermore, the Dutchmen reappeared at bedtime and took possession of the hold, which looked rather like those drawings of tube

stations during the blitz; a little warning of the arrangement would have helped. But we should not be churlish; many people were given a great deal of pleasure, our ships were seen and appreciated by all of them and, through the generosity of the Whitaker group, we were sponsored to the extent of £100 for each vessel, so that all our expenses were well covered. Altogether, a great success.

We look forward to future visits to the Marina, and hope that the presence of two historic ships will further enhance a fascinating environment.

### Alan Hartley

It is with regret that we report the death of Alan Hartley, who was always a good friend of the Society. We shall include a full appreciation and tribute in the next issue of 'Slabline'.

### The Slabline

For most of the life of our journal, it has been edited by Michael Ulyatt. As a professional newspaperman, Mike was able to bring his skills to bear on our own modest publication and its reputation has owed much to his influence.

Mike has now relinquished the editorship, and he has been succeeded by Jim Thompson, who has been actively involved in the production of 'The Slabline' for some time. His address can be found on the inside back cover. We want to stress that we welcome items for publication; please send them to Jim. Mike has agreed to stay on as our publicity officer, and will continue to use his media contacts and to send out information at our request. We are very grateful for his varied contributions over the years.

### A Register of Surviving Keels

The priority of a society like ours is properly to keep COMRADE and AMY HOWSON in good, working condition and to foster the skills to keep them sailing.

Yet 'preservation' is also a term to be interpreted more widely. No one knows exactly how many keels and sloops have survived - fifty, a hundred, or more? One consequence of the decline of trade has been the scattering of survivors, many in private hands, along the east coast and further afield. Most have been converted to a variety of uses. At least four have made the hazardous voyage across the North Sea.

In order to keep track of the survivors the Society is to establish a record of existing keels and sloops and their whereabouts in order to provide a record for the future. Robert Cowley, the owner of DANUM, originally one of Thomas Hanley's fleet, has agreed to set up the register. He would be pleased if members would supply him with information, no matter how scanty, about existing keels and their whereabouts. Members should not hold back from sending information for fear of duplication; overlapping reports confirm one another. We would like to know the location of the vessels, ideally their ownership, and where

possible any changes of name, but any information is of value. A press release is being sent to 'Waterways World' in order to attract the attention of a more general public.

It is early to say what shape the Register will take; much will depend on the quality of the information discovered. But a computerised list which can be easily updated and from which printouts can be obtained would be a first step. This could be supplemented with fuller details of each vessel, including photographs.

Please send information to:

Robert Cowley  
Register of Keels and Sloops  
25 Wharton Avenue  
Damson Wood  
SOLIHULL  
West Midlands  
B92 9LZ

#### Annual General Meeting

The provisional date for the AGM next year is Saturday, 16th February, at 3 p.m., in the Hope and Anchor Inn, South Ferriby.

#### 'Bessie'

Our member Mr. Simon Hall, of Woodbridge, Suffolk, owns the Keel BESSIE. When he has finished renovating her, he hopes to travel around the east coast and possibly through the French canal system. Mr. Hall wrote recently asking for details of her history.

Fred Schofield remembers BESSIE being built at Beverley fairly late - around the early 1930's - by Joss Scarr for Alf Holgate of Beverley. When she was three or four years old an auxiliary motor was installed. She was built Sheffield length - 61' 6" by only 14' 8" beam - to carry coal from Sharlston Colliery on the Barnsley Canal. When Alf Holgate retired through ill health he sold BESSIE to Fred Acaster at Goole.

John Hainsworth remembers going aboard BESSIE when she was working to Beverley some time during the 1960's. She had a particularly fine cabin, in an excellent state of preservation with - as far as he remembers - mahogany panelling which glowed in the light from the cabin fire. Though the ship was less than a foot narrower than Sheffield size the cabin seemed a good deal smaller.

We look forward to hearing of BESSIE's adventures.

Richard Waller

We have received an enquiry regarding Richard Waller, who was listed in the 1881 Hull Census as a sloop owner living at 47 Wincolmlee and working as a lime agent for Lockwood, Blagden and Crawshaw.

Information on Richard Waller is requested by his great grandson, Mr. Lewis Waller, of Hereford House, 32 Young's Park Road, PAIGNTON, Devon, TQ4 6BH.

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### **ADRIFT ON THE HUMBER**

In the 1930's there would be twenty or thirty Humber Sloops, most of the crews were from the south side of the River and most of them living around Barton.

In those days, sloops that hadn't a cargo or wanted a night at home used to anchor on Barton mud flats opposite and just to the west of Barton Haven. It was a safe anchorage, being well out of the main channel. The sloops used to lay on the mud about two hours after high water, and float again two hours before high water. We used to make sure the ship was safe before we left, making sure the anchor was holding, and everything properly fastened down. Then we used to take our cog boat into the haven until we were ready to sail again.

There was only one incident that I remember of a sloop getting adrift from off the Barton flats, that was the sloop, ADLINGFLEET. She was owned and skippered by Jack Simpson. I was mate with him at that time.

We had anchored on the flats one afternoon and gone home. The following day it was high water about 7pm, so the ship would be afloat between four and five o'clock. Someone on the Humber bank that afternoon saw the ship after she had floated, start to drift up the River. He knew who the sloop belonged to, so he went and told Jack his ship was adrift.

Jack went down to the Haven as quick as he could, got in the cog boat and set off to chase after her. He told me afterwards he didn't know where I would be and in any case he hadn't the time to find me. By the time he got the boat sculled out of the Haven, he said the ship was nowhere in sight.

It was winter time and was beginning to get dark. He said afterwards there was a smart breeze, S.W. and sharp tide running. He thought the ship would be drifting towards the north side. He had guessed right and after he had been sculling hard for over an hour he caught up with her at Melton. She had drifted into shallow water and the fouled anchor she was dragging had stopped her.

He managed to clear the fouled anchor, set the sails and brought her back to Barton. For a man sixty years old, as he was then, I think he would have had a fairly rough night.

The reason the ship had got adrift in the first place, was that when she first floated as she swung round, the bight of the anchor chain got a turn round the fluke of the anchor, and as the tide lifted the ship, the anchor was lifted off the bottom.

C. ATKINSON

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As promised in the previous issue of 'Slabline', we are printing the first instalment of the thesis by Stuart Broadhurst:

**HUMBER KEELS 1880 - 1920**  
**A STUDY IN THE PERSISTENCE OF A TRANSPORT MEDIUM**

The story of the sailing keel in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is the story of a transport system and technological stage of development being maintained by the economic, political and social structures around it beyond the point where that system could have been superseded.

In recent years a revival of interest has taken place in the inland waterways trade, often with the objectives of either reforming and restoring that trade as a means of economising on the use of oil, or in stimulating interest in inland waterways as a recreational pursuit. The aura of romance has largely determined the direction of this renewed interest with the more sociological aspects of the trade: the very introverted natures of the canal-side communities and their similarities to the true gypsy communities on land, being stressed disproportionately to other features. The Humber sailing trade is no exception, renewed interest has largely stressed the social side which has a greater appeal to the general public. Books by Harry Fletcher and Michael Ulyatt and articles by John Frank have centred very much upon the life-styles of the people involved in the trade, encouraging an aura similar to that surrounding the Dutch and Thames barges to settle around these little ships and their crews. And yet very little information is available as to why these vessels continued operating in the face of motorised transport until the 1930's. It is true that for the last decade and a half of its life the trade had been ever more rapidly in decline, but it is interesting to note that the sailing ships on the Humber were able to compete with technologically more advanced vessels for a considerable time and that for the period 1900 to 1913 when one would have expected the national trend of declining sailing tonnages to be repeated on the Humber, in fact the reverse was true: tonnages of sailing vessels increased.

The determinants for continued existence are largely to be found within the period around the turn of the century for as the first decade and the twenties progressed motor power increasingly shook off the last vestiges of competition from sail whose continued existence was due either to the social dimension (the men who had worked their craft for years being

unwilling to give up their trade continuing to do so or encouraging their sons to continue), or to the fact that the market for their specific service was shrinking less slowly than the supply of the vessels capable of that service. As with any human phenomenon, no doubt a combination of many factors, broadly summarised by these two statements, was operative during the years of decay, but the earlier increase of tonnages during the period 1900 to 1913 could be determined by a number of reasons:

1. The sailing barge was a viable commercial proposition at that time.
2. The sailing barge increased in number because in the few years prior to 1900 it had been a viable commercial proposition and what is observable is, in fact, a lagged response to earlier conditions which no longer pertain.
3. The tonnage figures include different categories of vessels and the assumption that sailing barge tonnage increased is erroneous, or at best overstated.
4. The importance of sail power is greatly overrated and the number of vessels operating increased for reasons other than their sailing quality.
5. In times of hardship and economic depression, entrepreneurs often revert to superseded technologies; the increase in sailing tonnage on the Humber is the observable response in such a way to the economic climate, either contemporaneously or lagged, or even to the expected conditions as perceived by entrepreneurs.

Using the limited information currently available, this paper seeks to open the discussion into the role of the sailing barge at the turn of the twentieth century up to the First World War and by looking at the change of the economy around the vessels, the economy of the vessels and the social dimension of the men and women working them plus a glimpse at the technological developments in marine transport, shed at least some light onto the apparent movement against the national trend of Humber sailing tonnages.

Hull was the largest port on the Humber estuary and whilst the fortunes of the other ports of Grimsby and Goole interacted with those of Hull and each other, Hull still retained the largest share of all the Humber traffic. Its development can be seen as a major influence on the area, perhaps its very existence attracting trade which could be creamed off by the services of Grimsby and Goole, and although the keel skipper had the option of conveying goods to any port on the system, Hull still remained the major focus for the trade. Furthermore, it is not unreasonable to assume that the development of Hull was not substantially different from the development and experience of the other ports and as such its development can be taken as typical of the area and hence of the influence upon the keeling trade.

Economically we see the demand for keel services increasing as the fortunes of Hull take a turn for the better in the late nineteenth century. Increased prosperity and the expansion of



Hull and the Humber ports inevitably reflected upon the resident transport system and its fortune - in this case the system was keels. The diversity of the waters over which the distribution of goods had to take place further enhanced the viability of keels. At that time no other single transport unit was technologically possible on the water and the railways suffered from severe organisational and political constraints which, in this area, caused the service not to reach its full potential until much later on in the twentieth century. However, as organisational technology improved - increased use of steam tugs for towing etc. - as the twentieth century progressed, it was to a great extent the social pressures which maintained the supply of keels. Keeling families and their willingness to work extremely hard for relative low freight rates maintained the demand for their services. The large monopolistic North Eastern Railway Company was distrusted by many traders who saw the competition between transport systems as a method of keeping down their own costs to a minimum by that competition keeping down freight rates generally. The highly independent nature of the keeling system - the owner/skipper being responsible for finding his own cargoes and negotiating his own freight rates - was highly advantageous to the trader wishing to transport goods. It minimised his costs in several ways: he did not have the responsibility of maintaining a transport system of his own and hence taking on the risk of having a ship not fully utilised (or not utilised at all if trade should take a downturn) his risk in that direction would be carried by the keel owner who, in turn, could minimise his risks by not being dependent upon one particular area of trade or one particular port. The trader's costs were further reduced by the competition amongst the systems exerting a downward pressure on freight rates even though his costs, if he were a large trader, in maintaining larger inventories would be higher than using a more advanced, faster system.

The increased trade through Hull, particularly the coal export and grain import trades were extremely well suited to the keeling system and for the period 1880 to 1910 the demand, in these areas, for keels increased. With the size of vessels determined by the canals over which they would trade, expansion could not be via increased productivity through increased ship size, only through increased numbers. During this period keeling and the keeling way of life was worthwhile to many, though as the twentieth century progressed, particularly after the First World War, the social aspect was less important and many of the younger men of the keeling families left the trade for less arduous work ashore.

The maintenance of the keeling trade and communities during the early years of the twentieth century, at a time when the sailing trade as a national whole was declining may well have been due to the social and economic drag existent, but one must not be too blithe in accepting the tonnage figures as either limited to or exhaustive of the sailing keel fleet. Lighters are also included in the registration category and with the expansion of Hull docks up until 1914, plus expansion in Grimsby and Goole, demand for these vessels would also be increasing. (Keels were often used as lighters which would indicate that periodically, if not totally, a situation of excess demand for lighters was in evidence.) The complicated nature of marine insurance whereby the liability of a vessel was limited to a certain level provided that that vessel was registered was an inducement for vessels to become registered, and several did register during this period that had been trading, unregistered, for some time. Nor must one stress too much the sailing capabilities as the causal factor in

the expansion (though neither must one underrate its importance). Sailing was a means whereby, often, costs could be reduced and hence freight rates maintained at a low level, and whilst speed was not a crucial factor this was acceptable; but primarily the demand was for a transport system between the inland areas and the coastal ports at low rates, so that although it would have been possible to organize a more regular, faster service by the use of steam tugs for the larger waterways with horse drawing taking over from the tugs on the smaller canals, such a system would have been more costly and would have necessitated a system the organisation of which would have only been commercially possible with a larger, more regular cargo 'pool'. Given such constraints for the trade, sailing was crucial even after its technological successor was readily available. The unwillingness of entrepreneurs to take risk in the undynamic nature of the Humber economy through investment in steam tugs and the intricate organisational technology that such an investment would imply meant that keels were the only alternative to railway haulage which was distrusted, complicated politically and economically, and circuitous. Hence the demand for keels was, if not maintained, at least allowed to decay more slowly than would normally have been the case.

Hull and the Humber ports never grew, economically, at a fast rate. Theirs is a story of steady, if undynamic, growth - a situation that engendered conservatism. Entrepreneurs did not perceive a highly prosperous future through expansion and tended to rely on tried and tested means, particularly when such conservatism satisfied their risk-averse nature and provided legitimate economic gains. Keels provided a transport medium that satisfied all of these criteria. Nevertheless, growth was apparent, though if the River Ouse Navigation figures are taken as typical, such growth was subject to sectional instability and such growth encouraged a low cost, adaptable transport system that was not subject to structural inflexibility. Keels provided this system. When technological advances had eroded the demand for the principal keel cargo, plus, almost at the same time, began to be capable of both a faster service and another transport system, the demise of the sailing keel seem assured. With price inflation making the sailing keel no longer an obvious destiny for keelmen's sons (not to mention an increased acceptance of social mobility - a factor not unimportant for people who had often been labelled as 'water gypsies'), nor an extremely low cost method, that demise was assured. It is a testimony to the shipbuilders of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and to the dogged independence of keel skippers that keeling continued, even if in increasingly smaller numbers, into the 1930s, when increasing road haulage systems, improved railway communications, and government subsidies to install engines into the vessels, finally killed the sailing trade.

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### **A BIT ABOUT BILLY BOYS**

Those readers who haven't been on the Moon for the last four years might recall that I've walked and talked about billy boys for the most of that time. Now, with one notable exception which this Society will sell you, most if not all, the available research material has been thoroughly worn out by writers over the last twenty odd years as they sought to cover the vessels in their books. Anyone, like me, who reads all these books will notice that they all are really the same bit of writing rehashed and reworked but basically all the same.

So we have the slow boat with the cheeky lad trailing a fishing line and threatening to trail another and stop the ship altogether - this is usually in magazine-type articles. We find the yarn about the billy boy sinking and the skipper with his wife and children aboard refusing to leave, some versions insist he was punched senseless to get him to safety. That is usually to illustrate how muck poor these breed of sailors were.

I suppose really any writer with a bit of 'gorm' would wonder why such skippers struggled on, when there must have been other craft and cargoes more profitable on the market. Besides, a careful study of the few available photographs, MAVIS, for instance shows them to be well found and looked after. I know pictures exist of wrecks but what happened? The other pictures of billy boys being repaired proves there must have been some cash about. I am not trying to defend these vessels, merely to suggest that a bit of critical judgement is required when reading things which cannot be tried and tested in reality.

DAVE ROBINSON

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### **A SURVIVING MERSEY FLAT: OAKDALE**

I own the 'Mersey Flat' OAKDALE at present berthed at the Canning Dock, Liverpool.

When I left school I worked on the Mersey barges as a mate and it was always sad to see the old barges towed away for scrap or burnt on Garston beach. I always wanted to keep one and I got the chance to buy the OAKDALE for £300 many years ago. I was considered to be daft and when I went round the various barge companies to scrounge the missing gear they used to smile at me, give me what I wanted, I think just to get rid of me.

Things have changed so much since the 1960's that very few people know what the OAKDALE is or what a Mersey Flat is and know nothing of the old bargees way of life. This is the main reason for me keeping her. I feel at home on her and can use all the skills I learnt as a lad to sail her and maintain her. I get no assistance from anyone and look after her with my volunteer mate Mr Roberts.

#### **A Short History of the OAKDALE**

Richard Abel and Sons were sand and gravel merchants and had a large fleet of dumb barges and dredgers. One son ran the sand and gravel side of the firm, the other son Jack Abel ran the dry cargo barge side. They owned steam tugs and both iron and wooden barges. The Castle Dock repair yard they had at Runcorn did heavy repairs and new building.

In 1929 the materials were ordered to construct 4 Mersey Flats, but the slump came along and then the Depression. In 1936 one was built called the FRED ABEL then the War came along. After the War there was a steel shortage and so the OAKDALE was started in 1949 and launched on 15 September 1951, she worked for them until 1963 when Abel's ceased

trading and was sold to Rea's who then sold her in 1966. She then passed to a man who wanted to make her into a floating restaurant but that fell through and then I bought her.

The OAKDALE is 72' 6" long, 15' 9" beam, 6' 6" moulded depth, she is 66 reg ton gross, 63 reg ton net, displacement in working order 52 tons, her official number is 183820, cargo capacity 120 tons. She is of composite construction. Iron frames run the length of her parallel body with wood frames from the forward and aft bulkhead. She has a green heart bottom and from the turn of the bilges to deck level is of oak, her decks are of Oregon pine.

I still go to the bargemens' reunion at the Cross Keys pub in Liverpool and, despite the fact she was built nearly 40 years ago, she is still a talking point. An old bargee, Billy McReedy, who is nearly 80 always tells me that he was cheated out of the OAKDALE. He was promised her when she was on the stocks, but was cheated out of her by another man who became her skipper, the bitterness is still there. Every now and then, when working on her, you can hear "What are you doing to my boat?" off Billy who stands leaning on his stick telling of any mistakes I have made.

Just to keep a boat against a wall preserved is not enough you also need the people that worked them to tell you the stories. Bargees were a tight knit group of people who knew everyone else working on the river and were a law unto themselves.

They knew the river and how to work it at all states of tide and weather and were experts. This is why I keep the OAKDALE to keep the old ways and the old skills alive and out of fond memories of my youth when you could walk from one side of the dock to the other on the decks of the barges.

DAVID KEENAN

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### **REGATTA REVIVED**

One of the dreams of this Society has always been to see Keels and Sloops racing against their sisters as they did in the past, Keels until 1890? and Sloops until 1929? As, to do this, you require at least two of each type and we possess only one per species, it has remained a dream until Sunday 9 September 1990.

To coincide with the City of Hull Shanty Festival, 'Shanty Jack' (Pete Heyseldene) asked if we would race COMRADE against AMY HOWSON if a sponsor could be found who would donate a trophy. Both crews agreed and the billy boy AUDREY also wanted to take part. The chap who built the Sprit'sl Barge yacht ROSIE PROBERT was approached and replied in the positive. This presented a handicapper's nightmare, four totally different rigs on three different hull types all with different sail areas!!!!

As the planning and organisation for this race was haphazard to put it mildly, the idea of trying to work out some form of handicap scale was very quickly abandoned, and it was

decided to all cross the line together and the Devil take the hindmost, a recipe for skulduggery if ever there was one.

Eric Hammond who builds steel fishing boats at Barton provided an attractive silverplate tray engraved to commemorate the Cockerel trophy raced for by the Barton Sloops and carrying the name of the last steel sloop SAXBY to win the Barton Regatta.

After two good shanty concerts, Friday and Saturday, both with bars and an enjoyable Saturday afternoon in the Marina, all four ships penned out into the Humber at around 0815 hours on the Sunday morning some crew members being a little the worse for wear. The four vessels with their engines running to hold them against the brisk floodtide set their sails and more or less as one crossed the start line, COMRADE with some of her gear foul quickly dropping astern of the 'fore and after'. The wind was NNW force 2 which is not the sort of wind with which to drive these ships so the little spritty gradually dropped the field astern. AMY HOWSON had taken up second place followed by AUDREY in third and COMRADE bringing up the rear. In a close-hauled race like this the square rigged keel should have been a rank outsider, but sailed right on the wind's edge, she very slowly clawed to windward of the billy boy and when Barton was abeam the two ships were in joint third place. Immediately downstream of the Humber Bridge the fluky wind caused the last three vessels to tack, AUDREY steering for the south shore and COMRADE and AMY HOWSON steering north. Fortunately the flood tide continued to carry the field under the bridge's span and once clear, the Keel tacked again and steered for the Lincolnshire side, close hauled on the starboard tack. By this time the Barge Yacht was already at the turn mark, the No. 21 float and the Sloop and Billy Boy steering towards Yorkshire (North Humberside for the younger readers).

COMRADE was now tail end charlie again, but a slant of wind appeared to be favourable for rounding the float and so she was brought round on to the port tack, steering north, but the wind god raised two fingers and the wind veered forcing the ship to head back for the north bridge tower. The flood tide, by this time almost spent, continued to carry the ships west, which meant that although ROSIE PROBERT had actually rounded the mark she was having to sail against the tide. The sloop and billy boy were well over to the north shore and tacked again, being now both on the starboard tack and heading for the mark. Fortune at last smiled on COMRADE and the tide in its last gasp carried the vessel across the bow of the green float where she was immediately tacked and just, and only just, cleared the float's stern. Crew members accounts vary from "about 6 inches" to "I just shut my eyes and waited for the bump".

There was no bump however but COMRADE was squeezed between the float and AUDREY, the billy boy being only a boathook's length away with AMY HOWSON being just beyond her. ROSIE PROBERT was now about 500 yards ahead of the other three ships which were all about tying for second place, but again COMRADE started to drop astern of the rest until the Humber Bridge was reached. Once the sloop, keel and billy boy had passed under the bridge the wind dropped away to virtually nothing until at one point the wind vane on the keel was revolving quite happily although the sails were completely limp.

The clews of COMRADE's sails were boomed out using boathooks and although there was still no wind the keel started to draw away from the sloop and billy boy and overhaul the spritty. Tensions started to appear on COMRADE as the crew who had expected to come last, and hoped for third, started to smell blood!!! Gradually the barge-yacht's stern drew nearer and nearer until details could be picked out, sails being trimmed and retrimmed, setting booms appearing and disappearing, white faces looking aft towards the keel's approaching bow.

The buoy marking the finish line started to appear more and more distinct as the two leading ships drifted towards it. Imperceptibly COMRADE continued to draw clear and conversation aboard became stilted and brittle, a nervous remark from for'ard to the effect that "We could win this race" was promptly squashed from aft by more than one voice. The ebb tide boiling round the finishing buoy could now be heard as well as seen and even the most hardened pessimist had to admit that but for an earthquake or something of similar magnitude the keel was home and dry. At last the line was crossed and the crew aboard COMRADE demonstrated their complete indifference to the whole affair by jumping up and down on the deck, shouting, cheering and blowing the foghorn.

It had been the first time that a keel had raced on the Humber since the 1890's, the first time a sloop had raced since 1929, no one knows if billy boys ever raced at all and sprit's barges never raced on the Humber.

A momentous occasion in the local maritime scene, which as usual, was completely ignored by the local press.

I think everyone aboard the four vessels enjoyed the event, COMRADE's crew certainly did, and there is lots of space left on the trophy for further ships names so hopefully the race could become an annual event.

"DEADEYES"

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### **AUDREY AGAIN**

Last winter I was able to lower the masts and overhaul all the sailing gear in one of the Sobriety Projects containers. I rebuilt the spreaders so that they could be raised when alongside high buildings and jetties.

Mark Peacock, one of our two course leaders, overhauled the gas system and got a bit of varnishing done, as well as running an RYA course for some of us and coordinating with Colin Walden, the main course leader, to find and organise the passenger groups for the season. Walden's tasks also included finding tutors and artists to teach the young groups.

Tony Catchpole was laid up with a bad knee for a long time and eventually left for other employment. This left us short of crew for a while, after we'd recruited Cyril once more to supervise the hasty re-rigging. Time as usual catching up on us.

Peacock chanced to meet Paul Cooper, one of the WILLIAM MCCANN's crew, and before he really knew it, Cooper was sailing AUDREY on the Humber, wondering if he'd made a wise move. As well as the 'hired hands' we have had several volunteer crew, one of these who is equally welcome aboard AMY HOWSON as well as AUDREY is Tony Atkin.

He and Paul were discussing the process of becoming accepted as a serious and genuine riverman by our friends on the locks and docks, and our fellow river navigators.

Tony came up with a modern expression to cover an ancient skill 'Humber Cred'. A term which has passed into AUDREY's lore. Even people who only occasionally crew on her are said to be 'Humber Cred' if we reckon they are all right.

DAVE ROBINSON

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### **WINTER IS ON THE WAY**

Each autumn, COMRADE finishes with sailing and is prepared for the winter's laying up. Not all members of the Society will know what is involved so a short account may prove to be of interest.

The last sailing weekend was set for October 6/7 but, with late tides and force 6-7 winds, we didn't pen out of Ferriby Sluice. Instead, we set about preparing the ship for winter.

What happens? Firstly the yards go ashore and the sails are unbent. Then, aboard comes the restored cogboat with the help of burtons and bods. Tack-blocks and sheet blocks are all unshipped and taken below. Sheets and tacks are coiled, made up and go the same way. The mast is lowered and off comes the vane and the truck. The topmast shrouds, foretopmast stay, burtons along with halyards, ties main sheave and pin, all are carefully stowed below. Is she ready? Not really. We have still to cross to Hull so the anchor is left ready, with the davit shipped. No matter how unlikely it is that we shall need it, the precaution is wise. Stayfall blocks will eventually be unshipped and replaced by a bottle screw but, before that, we shall need to lower the mast for the run up to Beverley. Fore and aft winch posts will be unshipped along with sheet rollers but not until Beverley.

By this time the ship is looking bare. Running gear below and just the mainshrouds, the forestay and backstay.

Two weeks later, we cross the Humber in fog, wait in the Old Harbour for flood, lower the mast and proceed steadily up to Beverley. Night falls just beyond Burton Hall (or Haworth Hall) and we're glad it's not the first time we've been up the river! At the top end, the river

has been transformed by work on the banks. It looks different, wide and neat but still seems as shallow as ever. We moor up outside the lock for the night.

The following morning, we pen into the Beck and on to our winter moorings. The mast is hove up, covers squared and lashed down, galley cleaned. All in all, the process of preparing for winter has taken many, many person-hours. Winter maintenance will take many times more but next year COMRADE will sail again, to the delight of all involved.

"PURCHASEMAN"

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### **A COGBOAT FOR AMY HOWSON**

Now then, what's all this? Well I'll tell you.

Normally when we sloop people plot something, I wait until the Council votes on it before making any rash remarks. But I can't wait until the next meeting, which will be probably before you read this, if I'm lucky.

Cyril has decided to build a cogboat. He's fed up looking around for one, and the one we have is past repair years ago, even though it gave us good service and our lad Peter spent many, many hours sculling about on the Ancholme as a child. He's twenty-one now! Eric Burton is supplying Cyril with most of the necessary timber. Various jigs and clamps are appearing. Mary has been warned to forget the new cupboard doors.

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What is a rope?

Several years ago AMY HOWSON carried Cyril and I to join THE LADY OF THE LEA at Leeds for filming of 'December Rose'. During one evening, while Cyril was captured by the Production Team discussing next day's shooting, Trev off THE LADY and I hit the pub.

Many Guinness's later we were propping each other and a crowded bar up, consoling ourselves about our lot on the foredeck. Trev launched into the following:

"What is a rope? No matter what it's called, a sheet, a halliard, or a warp, there it lies, quiet, until you want it. You pick it up. Then what happens? It finds a friend - the first thing it sees, a batten lug, a cleat, it finds itself, better still, you. Anything is its friend when you want to use it. He's looking at you, is the skipper, and the rope's found a friend."

DAVE ROBINSON

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## **DOWN TO THE MIGHTY SEA**

That title, of course, refers to the Thames - a river in the south of England, as sung by Peter Dawson on 'Saturday Night Music Hall' on the BBC Light Programme, remember? - but is equally applicable to my adventurous voyage aboard the Humber sloop, AMY HOWSON with the keel, COMRADE sailing as proudly as its Viking ancestors on the port (left) or starboard (right) beam (side), depending on which way we were facing.

My previous ventures on the billowy waves had been on Millerston Boating Pond in Glasgow, in a dingy (or, as I am informed, dinghy but it was a pretty dingy dinghy, I can tell you. Hadn't had a coat of paint for years). Prudently I investigated the sea-worthiness (a technical Board of Trade term, meaning whether a boat can float or not) of both vessels before heaving my dunnage over the bulwarks. (Technical terms, again, meaning (a) luggage, in my case, inflatable life-raft, distress rockets, K-rations and a bottle of shark repellent and (b) the bannisters which go around the edges of the boat for people to hold on to.)

Both hulls appeared to be resting safely on the surface of the South Ferriby creek, beck or burn and I turned my attention to the crews, the next most important factor in any oceanic experience.

Clearly, there were experienced mariners of the deepest dye, for Colin, Sailing Master of the COMRADE, had a beard similar to that of the grizzled old sea dog in the Player's Navy cut cigarettes logo and Cyril, Master of the AMY, was wearing blue dungarees and peaked cap, so I felt I was in safe hands all round.

Aboard the AMY, with members of the Kirklees Model Boat Club (it's a well known maritime centre, is Kirklees), we cast off, as they say in the knitting patterns, and roared out into the romantic waters of the Humber.

Passing under the Bridge we encountered shoal water - the tide was going out or coming in, one way or t'other - and the AMY pitched and heaved but without losing her dignity. Cyril steered under the giant edifice of the Bridge, allowing us a close up view of the mighty girders, on which, under the golden coating of rust, we could make out the name of the manufacturers, Dinky Toys - Meccano.

Tacking (another technical term: going sideways and back again in a zigzag) off Immingham, we were enthralled by the sight of an ocean-going freighter unloading coal, one of the many highlights of the voyage.

Turning away from Grimsby, we sailed back to the Haven in a dead calm because the tide was flowing at the same speed as the wind, leaving both vessel "all in irons" as I gleaned from the Hornblower novels.

A delightful day and a tribute to the hard work lavished on both keel and sloop by the Humber Keel and Sloop Preservation Society Ltd.

ALISTAIR WILSON

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### **A GOLD-DUSTER HULL**

Surprisingly, a hull built to the lines of a Humber gold-duster has survived into the 1990's. Built about 1930 to moulds used for gold-dusters, she was originally worked as a ship's boat for a steamer until roughly 1945 when the ship was broken up and the boat was converted to the small yacht GRAMPUS.

In 1990 she was fully restored in her yacht form at Southwold in Suffolk. Her owner, Mr. John Oliver-Budd, is offering her for sale and would be very pleased if she returned to Humber waters. Should any members be interested, they could contact Mr. Oliver-Budd at 8 Holton Terrace, Holton Road, Halesworth, Suffolk, IP19 8HH (Tel. 0986-873649).

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### **SAILING PROGRAMME FOR 1991**

The tides in the early part of the summer of 1991, particularly in May are far from being convenient for reasonable sailing trips. The programme for the two ships is, accordingly, not yet ready for publication.

However, anyone requiring a copy of the programme, when it becomes available should write to J. Thompson, 218 Victoria Avenue, Hull, HU5 3DZ (Tel. 0482-441277) enclosing a stamped addressed envelope.

In connection with next year's trips it is worth pointing out that, although most involve block bookings by parties, there are often opportunities for individuals (or very small groups) to sail. Sometimes a group booking will involve less than twelve passengers, for example. If interested, members should contact D. Robinson, 135 Waterside Road, Barton-on-Humber (Tel. 0652-63588) for AMY HOWSON or J. Thompson at the address above for COMRADE.

## THE HUMBER KEEL and SLOOP PRESERVATION SOCIETY LIMITED

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Registered as a Charity

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### THE SOCIETY'S SHIPS:

<u>'COMRADE'</u>	Humber Keel - Purchased December 1974
Hon Sailing Master:	C S Screeton
Relief Sailing Master:	J W Thompson
<u>'AMY HOWSON'</u>	Humber Sloop - Purchased March 1976
Hon Sailing Master:	C Harrison
Relief Sailing Master:	D Robinson, C Atkinson