

SOUTH WEST SOUNDINGS 129

The Newsletter of the SOUTH WEST MARITIME HISTORY SOCIETY CIO

ISSN 1360-6980

CONTENTS: NO. 129, September 2024

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EDITORIAL	2
SOCIETY MATTERS	3
FUTURE MEETINGS AND OTHER EVENTS	5
ARTICLES	
The Supply of Second-hand Vessels: A Geographical Study of the ... by John Bradbeer	8
The Mission Women who 'Homed' the Seamen by Jo Stanley	11
PS <i>Kingswear Castle</i> by Jonathan Turner	13
Bideford and River Torridge Heritage Harbour by Mike Teare	16
Writing Women into Maritime History: the Growing Waves, by Jo Stanley	20
5 Easy Steps in 'How to Start Researching Maritime Women's History', by Jo Stanley	28
Portable Soup and HMS <i>Tamar</i> , by Clive Charlton	29
The Restored Lifeboat <i>Elliott Gill</i> of Watchet, by Maggie Watkinson	31
Fragments of HMS <i>Defiance</i> , by Clive Charlton	33
REVIEWS - BOOKS, WEBSITES & PODCASTS	
Early Bristol Paddle-Steamer Shipwrecks: With an ..., reviewed by Jonathan Seagrave	35
Bucked in the Yarn. The Unique Heritage of Coker Canvas, reviewed by Bill Jones	36
Mariner's Mirror and Off Watch Podcast ..., reviewed by Hannah Hurford and Jess Clay	37
The Adventures of Phillip Gunn, DSM, RN in the Mesopotamia ..., reviewed by Keith Ball	39
LETTERS, NOTES AND NEWS	40
OFFICERS and TRUSTEES	

WEBSITE <https://www.swmaritime.org.uk/>

FACEBOOK <https://www.facebook.com/SWMaritimeHistorySociety>



FUTURE MEETINGS & EVENTS



Italics indicate an event of possible interest but not organised by the society

From now until mid-October 2024, Art exhibition, Dovery Manor Museum, Porlock, Somerset, TA24 8QB. 10 am - 4 pm, Monday to Saturday. Free entrance but donations are appreciated. The Dovery Manor Museum in Porlock is this summer presenting the first ever exhibition of an impressive variety of significant painters who have worked in Porlock, the villages of Porlock Vale and in Porlock Weir. The collection spans the centuries, with works from the eighteenth century by the Porlock-born portrait artist Richard Phelps, engravings by JMW Turner and rare local scenes painted by two nationally-celebrated exiles from the Newlyn School who came to live in Porlock in the 1890s. The exhibition celebrates the 'Lost Painter of Porlock' who in 1906 was acclaimed by London art critics as one of Britain's leading landscape artists. Also on display is a wonderful watercolour of Porlock Weir painted by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, the acclaimed architect of the Arts & Crafts movement. The museum has even discovered a pen and ink drawing of Porlock Weir by the master of northern grime and poverty, LS Lowry.

Friday 31st March 2023 to Sunday 5th January 2025. National Maritime Museum Cornwall (NMMC). Exhibition: 'Pirates. Explore Beneath the Surface'. In this latest major exhibition, explore how popular culture has shaped how we think of pirates today and dive beneath the surface to unearth the harsh and terrifying truth. For more information, see here: <https://nmmc.co.uk/2023/01/pirates/>

A Calendar of Events regarding the celebrations of the 'Birthday of the RNLI' can be found at: [RNLI 200th Anniversary Programmes](#)

Saturday 2nd March 2024 to Sunday 1 December 2024. Women of the RNLI, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. This exhibition marks the bicentenary of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI). The exhibition will celebrate the vital role that women have played in saving lives at sea, highlighting the work and success of women in a variety of roles throughout the RNLI's 200-year history. At the heart of exhibition is the photography of Jack Lowe, an artist who for almost a decade has been documenting the crews and views of every RNLI lifeboat station. His evocative images, captured using Victorian glass-plate technology, allow us to see the modern work of the RNLI through an historic lens. Together with the voices and experiences of RNLI volunteers, Women of the RNLI provides a personal perspective on a lifesaving institution. Janet Legrand KC, RNLI Chair, said, 'Women of the RNLI at the National Maritime Museum is a wonderful opportunity to commemorate and celebrate the pivotal role that our women volunteers, staff and supporters have played throughout the 200-year history of the RNLI and continue to do so to this day.' For further information, click here: <https://www.rmg.co.uk/press-release/women-rnli-exhibition-national-maritime-museum>

Tuesday 14th March 2024 to Autumn 2024. Torquay Museum. 80th Anniversary of D Day Exhibition. The most important global event to ever impact Torbay - D-Day - is being commemorated with an exhibition about Torbay during the World War II years and the extraordinary events in South Devon that formed Operation Overlord. For more information click here: <https://torquaymuseum.org/news/view/d-day-80-exhibition-opens-at-torquay-museum>

Friday 15th March to Sunday 3rd November 2024, National Maritime Museum Cornwall. Contemporary artist Kurt Jackson's work focuses on RNLI Cornwall. See here:

<https://nmmc.co.uk/2024/01/kurt-jackson-rnli-cornwall/>

Friday 31st May to Wednesday 11th December 2024, Exeter Canal Cruise, Exmouth to Exeter. The Exeter Canal Cruise will sail through 8 miles of man made waterway and make use of two manually operated locks; the boat will also cause the main Exeter to Dawlish road to come to a halt as the Countess Weir Swing Bridge is opened to allow our passage through. Sailing: Dates vary - check the timetable for 2024 departures; duration: 2 hours 30 mins (one way). Click for more information: <https://www.devonstopattractions.co.uk/events/exeter-canal-cruise-11-copy/>

Open every Sunday (11.00 to 16.00) from now until the end of October 2024, Steamship Freshspring, Landvisiau Walk at the north end of Bideford Quay, Bideford. Click here for more information: <https://ssfreshspring.co.uk/visit-ss-freshspring/>

Saturday 7th September 2024. Brixham Heritage Sailing Rally. A friendly, informal Sail-in-Company event for older vessels or those built to a classical design. More information here: <http://www.brixhamheritageregatta.uk/index.htm>

Thursday 19th September 2024, National Maritime Museum Cornwall, Lecture, Women and Navy in the Age of Sail, Dr Elaine Murphy, live or online. Click here for more details: <https://nmmc.co.uk/2024/04/women-and-the-navy-in-the-age-of-sail-lecture/>

The Somerset and Exmoor Coast Festival 21st to 29th September 2024. The festival is a celebration of our unique and diverse coastline bringing together events that offer everything from running, walking and outdoor activities to art, music, and performance alongside the food, flavours and hospitality that make this coast of surprises so welcoming. Once again we'll feature a selection of coastal walks and arts events and we will have some extra special celebrations that you won't want to miss. As Somerset's coastal businesses start gearing up for this year's festival we'll be adding events that offer everything from music to cream teas, craft gin to glorious sunsets, and performances to Porlock Bay oysters - all in the truly beautiful surroundings of the Somerset and Exmoor coast. <https://somersestcoastfestival.co.uk/>

Saturday 28th September 2024, Hermitage Moorings, 16 Wapping High Street, London E1W 1NG. The Maritime Heritage Trust AGM. Members and non members welcome. Talks include the Steam Tug Brent Project on how to develop a successful National Lottery Heritage Fund supported project, plus other special guest speakers. Please register in advance here: support@maritimeheritage.org.uk. Click here for the MHT website: <https://www.maritimeheritage.org.uk/>

Wednesday 2nd to Friday 4th October 2024, UK Maritime Heritage Forum, National Maritime Museum Cornwall. This year's annual forum will revolve around the role of museums in Britain's Coastal Experience: from small boats to the politics of contemporary collecting. Museum professionals and academics working within the maritime heritage sector will be addressing the themes of coastal communities and coastal resilience, as well as new narratives around interpreting the sea and the challenges of maritime heritage conservation via interactive speaker sessions. More details are here: <https://nmmc.co.uk/2024/06/uk-maritime-heritage-forum-2024/>

Thursday 10th October 2024, National Maritime Museum Cornwall, Lecture, Mary Broad/ Bryant - The Creation of a Cornish Legend. Dr Charlotte Mackenzie tells Mary Broad's remarkable story, from Cornish convict in Australia to escapee. Click here: <https://nmmc.co.uk/2024/04/the-creation-of-a-cornish-legend-lecture/>

Thursday 10th October 2024, The Society for Nautical Research EGR Taylor Lecture,

Captain Michael Barritt: Pathfinding for the Fleet: Front-line Hydrography 1793-1823, 18.30 at the Royal Geographical Society, 1 Kensington Gore, London, SW7 2AR. Entrance is free, but must be booked in advance. Booking will open later in the year on the RGS website:

[Events - RGS](#)

Thursday 7th November 2024, National Maritime Museum Cornwall, Lecture, Forgotten Women of the Cornish Coast, Elizabeth Dale (The Cornish Bird). Click here: <https://nmmc.co.uk/2024/04/forgotten-women-of-the-cornish-coast-lecture/>

Thursday 14th November 2024, National Maritime Museum Cornwall, Live and online lecture: Risk, Reward, Shipwrecks & Secrets. Cornish writer Clare Howdle interviews Sharon Austin; wreck diver, researcher and founding member of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Maritime Archaeological Society (CISMAS), about a life spent pushing the limits and plunging beneath the surface, in search of shipwrecks. For more information click here: <https://nmmc.co.uk/2024/07/risk-reward-shipwrecks-secrets-lecture/>

Saturday 5th December 2024, 7-8 pm The BALH Dymond Lecture, English Merchant Shipping and Early Modern Maritime Communities, c. 1588-1765, online. Speakers: Professor Craig Lambert and Professor John McAleer, University of Southampton. More information and bookings: <https://www.balh.org.uk/dymond2024>



Another view of the steam boats at the Exeter Heritage Harbour event in June 2024



The Mission Women who 'Homed' the Seamen

If you were seafarer whose ship - or home - was hell, then a mission hostel could be your solution. In the twentieth century particularly, seafarers' missions were welcome havens that

offered beds, food, friendliness, outings, movies, a chance to meet your mates and possibly even a vetted nurse to dance with. In essence, missions offered support and warmth - as an ideal home might.

And that's where the hidden history of women in maritime history comes in: women were the canteen workers, cleaners and office staff in missions.

Lady wardens like Miss Violet Wightman at Sharpness in 1946-7 could make seamen's life sweet, doing what is now



Sharpness's Mission to Seamen premises just after Violet's time. She worked in the low black corrugated iron hut in the centre of the picture. It was superseded in 1951 by the large white building with chimneys (left.) By courtesy of Mike Nash.

Unknown, c. 1955, The New Missions to Seamen, Sharpness, postcard, Frith's, SNS 2.

recognized as unpaid emotional labour. The term means work where we suppress our own feelings as we manage others' emotions; air cabin crew's soothing abilities are the classic example. But could missions recognize that their women staff, too, might need support for their wellbeing? How much attention was paid to gendered needs?

In looking for stories about missions supporting LGBT seafarers I came across the archives of what was once called the Mission to Seamen (and is now the Mission to Seafarers). The documents are at Hull History Centre <https://catalogue.hullhistorycentre.org.uk/>. References to women are few. The most illuminating I've found relates to Violet Beatrice Wightman. She worked in an old corrugated iron hut on the Sharpness docks estate by the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal, just off the River Severn. Her main customers - or should that be carees? - were scores of 'Vindi boys' training for a few weeks on the TS *Vindicatrix*. It was the evacuated Gravesend National Sea Training College.

After lessons most day trainees aged 14-17 disembarked from the dismantled hulk, a place of symbolic coldness, cockroaches and strict discipline. They went along the canal towpath to enjoy two hours recreation in a 'haven' created by friendly Christian ladies twice their age (the boys slept on the ship, which had a cook).



GS Evans, (no date) 'Sea Training Ship *Vindicatrix*, Sharpness Docks, Sharpness', postcard

Probably they were too young to take much note of Violet and her counterparts behind the tea urn; she was 39. But Violet is of interest to historians because her experiences may be typical of women mission workers. Piercing together fragments through genealogical data, and *Vindi* boys gossip in merchant navy chatrooms and on websites, I've gathered this story.

Violet's story

Violet (1907-1979) was attractive to the Mission selectors because she was the young daughter of an instructor, Captain Arthur Wightman, on the training ship HMS *Worcester*. Families usually lived in, so she understood boys. And she felt attracted to maritime Missions. 'My heart has always been very interested in this work, and I have thought if ever I was free I would like to take up this work,' she wrote. They expressed interest and discovered she was privately educated, unmarried, and been an assistant nurse in several places, most recently at St Columba's hospice in Swiss Cottage.

Violet went to Sharpness in September 1946 as an assistant. After doing the usual two months trial, a committee assessed her candidature in November. Her Sharpness boss, Miss Eileen Kerr, who shared work and home premises with her, told her own manager that 'Violet is a wonderful worker. You have said that I am tough, but she is a great deal tougher - she gets quite irritated if she cannot find enough to do.'

Violet was appointed lady warden and carried on at Sharpness until March 1947. Her nearly five-month stay was better than that of her immediate predecessor. Ex-WRNS routing officer and English graduate Rosalind Hayward had resigned after only four weeks. Their predecessor had taken six months off with exhaustion.

Violet wrote to HQ: 'I think perhaps after my experience here I should be better not to carry on in this work ... I had hoped I had found the right sort of work.'

Aftermaths

What does a lively warden do when she finds she's been on the wrong track? Violet emigrated, probably twice, living in Australia then dying in Auckland, New Zealand, in 1979.

Vindi boys went on to sail the world. Some set up nostalgic websites. Ian Martin from Hull is one of the few who mentioned Sharpness mission staff: 'If you got there quick before the other [*Vindi*] lads you could get the job of washing dishes all night and afterwards the ladies who worked there would give you a plate of beans on toast and a jam buttie as a reward.'

It seems that women like Violet lived on in seamen's minds as examples of welcome support: psychological wellbeing was often measured in terms of food and friendly smiles. But how did doing gendered work in maritime missions affect women?

Research note. I found this vignette about the Sharpness Mission when I was researching gender in the Mission to Seamen archive at Hull, mainly at UDMS/ 9/334 Misc. The women's employment history is illuminated in polite letters and memos of the usual personnel management sort. In general Mission to Seafarers records seem to offer little material about lady wardens. Digitized genealogical records on ancestry.co.uk helped me a little. Merchant Navy chatrooms and *Vindi* websites filled in the picture from the men's perspective. I would love to find sea women's memories of their mission use.

Note. Sharpness docks celebrated its 150th anniversary in summer 2024 (<https://sharpness150.org.uk/events>). Further information (it's a very good read) about TS *Vindicatrix* is here: <https://www.gloucesterdocks.me.uk/sharpness/vindicatrix.htm>

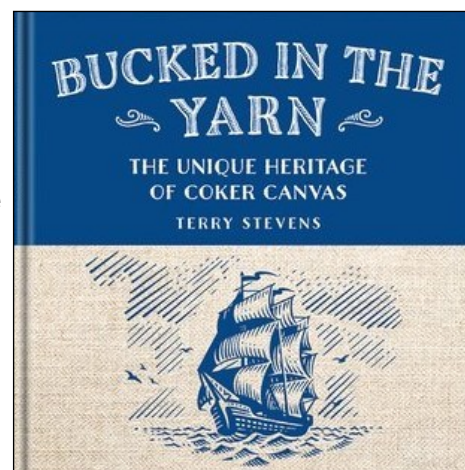
Jo Stanley

REVIEWS



Bucked in the Yarn. The Unique Heritage of Coker Canvas, Terry Stevens, 2024 Graffeg Ltd, 128 pp., hardcover, numerous images in b & w and colour, £25.00

Reading 'Bucked in the Yarn' is a revelation. It tells the fascinating story of East Coker, North Coker, and West Coker, three small Somerset villages that achieved global importance for their production of sailcloth of exceptional quality using locally grown flax and hemsps. Made in the area from the Middle Ages onwards and reaching peak production in the late nineteenth century, 'Coker Canvas' won an enviable international reputation for being the best sailcloth in the world. It was never the cheapest but was demonstrably stronger and more durable than its rivals. Its superiority led to its being adopted throughout the world by navies and merchant fleets, including those of Britain, luxury yachts, and, not least, competitors in the America's Cup. The rich history and heritage of the Coker villages is little known, and its significance deserves greater recognition and appreciation. It is a story that is well worth telling and its resonances will undoubtedly be of interest to a wider audience.



This engaging and often thought-provoking and beautifully produced and lavishly illustrated volume tells this story very well indeed. It is written in a lively, accessible style and enlivened by flashes of humour and quotations from contemporary sources, poetry, and the memories of ordinary Coker people. *Bucked in the Yarn* is an absorbing human-interest story. It is a tale of innovation, enterprise and fallibility, of achievement and failure and of scandal, intrigue and Controversy. What shines through also is the local inhabitants' pride, skills and endurance, and the determination of enthusiasts to record and preserve these villages' local history, including their successful efforts to establish the Dawe's Twineworks heritage centre.

Another great strength of the book is the way it brings out and celebrates the interplay between, on the one hand, the local, and on the other the international and the global. It shows vividly how the wider world affected the Coker villages and their inhabitants, for example, and how, at the same time, this locality and its people made an impact on the wider world. It also conveys evocatively a strong sense of place of the three villages and explores absorbingly and enthusiastically the relationship between the individual, the local and the wider world in the cases of the explorer (among other things) William Dampier and the poet T. S. Eliot.

This is an excellent book and a very welcome one so that a wider audience can learn about and appreciate the remarkable global heritage of these three small but extraordinary Somerset villages.

Emeritus Professor of History **Bill Jones**
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A tin tabernacle

The diminutive St Mary's church in Cadgwith has recently been given Grade II listed status by Historic England, both for its architectural worth and links to a famous RNLI rescue. Its first vicar was involved with the saving of all the passengers and crew of the SS *Suevic* in 1907. The following link gives more information and there are a couple of nice pictures of the blue painted church: https://www.theguardian.com/culture/article/2024/jul/11/cornish-tin-tabernacle-church-1907-sea-rescue-suevic-listed-status?CMP=oth_b-aplnews_d-5. Thanks to Jonathan Seagrave for the information.

The Newport medieval ship

The Newport Medieval Ship, which is older than both *Vasa* and the *Mary Rose* and traded between Wales and Portugal, is trying to raise money to help create a new animation video for the visitor centre. It will provide new insights into how the vessel was constructed in the Basque region, following archaeological research. To donate click here: <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/newport-medieval-ship-visitor-centre-animation>

Michael Clapp Way

Long term member Commodore Michael Clapp CB has just had a road named after him in the



Falkland Islands. He was in command of the amphibious assault group 317.0 in the Falklands War of 1982. The trustees all send him huge congratulations and thank his son James (a boat builder and also a member) for sending the information and the photograph, which was in the Fleet Air Arm Officers Association newsletter: <https://www.fleetairarmoa.org/news/naval-engineers-complete-8000-mile-move-of-vintage-aircraft-to-falklands>

The Underfall Yard, Bristol

The first event following the fire which devastated the yard in May 2023 happened in

July this year. For more information about further and ongoing plans for the resurrection of the yard click here: <https://underfallyard.co.uk/>

More Waverley news

A new book, entitled ***Waverley - 50 Years of Preservation*** (£19.50), as well as other publications to do with paddle steamers, are now available for sale here:

<https://waverleyexcursions.co.uk/product-category/books/>

Porthleven news

At the end of July the lugger *Happy Return* came to her home port of Porthleven, mooring a few yards from where she was built by Kitto's in 1904. Owned by the Mounts Bay Lugger Association she was bought by them in 1998 and restored to her original condition by 2003. When the association took her over in '98 she was the oldest registered fishing boat in the UK and still is. *Happy Return* has a distinguished history, including evacuating troops at the time of Dunkirk -

Operation Cycle, and is currently used to maintain and broaden knowledge of traditional sail, and sails frequently in Mounts Bay, Cornwall.

She was serenaded by the Cadgwith singers, seen from behind.



Interestingly, I was told the Trust has fairly recently recruited a number of active lady members, who help out with maintenance as well as sailing.

Mount's Bay Lugger Association:
www.happyreturn.org,
are always seeking new

members if anyone is interested.



The Cadgwith singers serenading
Happy Return

A Good Year: *Bessie Ellen* 1904



Another birthday boat in Plymouth, very close to where she was launched, was *Bessie Ellen*, also from 1904 and, like *Happy Return*, also 120 years old. We were lucky to go on a day sail in good weather, and have owner Nikki Alford along as captain. She is looking really good, freshly varnished, and cracked along in the afternoon breeze. The ship's dog, Dexter, is an experienced dolphin spotter, but sadly there were none.

We understand she will be in Nielsen's Gloucester yard in the autumn, along with *Kathleen and May*, for usual winter maintenance, and next season will be the Nordic countries. For details see:

<https://venturesailholidays.com>

Jonathan Seagrave

NMMC blogs

The National Maritime Museum Cornwall has a blog entitled 'Finding White Gold in Cornwall' about the China clay industry. As ever there are some wonderful photographs. To find it look here: <https://nmmc.co.uk/2024/07/finding-white-gold-in-cornwall/>

Grave Restoration Project for Captain George Peacock RN, FRGS, Royal Order of The Redeemer (1805 - 1883) - Victorian Sailor - Engineer - Inventor - Explorer

Neil Cookson has contacted us to ask if we could assist him and his cousin Chris Barton in increasing awareness of a GoFundMe campaign to raise money to restore the grave of George Peacock, which is in St Paul's churchyard in Starcross, Devon. Neil and Chris are great, great grandsons of George. They have been endeavouring to find funds for 18 months but despite approaching various grant awarding bodies have resorted to the GoFundMe route and require help to 'advertise' it to possibly interested persons. Chris and the PCC have obtained the necessary Faculty from the Church Court and found a suitably qualified stonemason to undertake the work and now need the financial resources to complete the work.

Topsham Museum is home to the Cygnet, the last surviving tender of *The Swan of the Exe*, a clinker built yacht designed by George in the early 1860s, and various other artefacts relating to

him.

George Peacock went to sea to the age of 13 and had obtained his masters ticket by his early 20s when he enrolled in the Royal Navy. He went on to join the fledgling PSNC as their first steamship commander in 1840 and opened many trade routes on the western coast of South America. He was, by all accounts, a man of many talents, known internationally in his day but now mostly forgotten.

He would not have been forgotten by David Clement, our one time president, who had close associations with Topsham and its museum, and who would surely have supported this enterprise.



For more information about George Peacock see here: <https://www.rmg.co.uk/stories/blog/library-archive/captain-george-peacock-1805-83-naval-officer-surveyor-inventor>, here: <https://hispanic-anglosphere.com/individuals/peacock-george-1805-1883/>, here: https://www.devonperspectives.co.uk/swan_of_the_exe.html and here: <https://www.devonmuseums.net/includes/documents/161127%20NEWSLETTER-%20NOVEMBER%202016.pdf>

The GoFundMe page is here: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/cm55>

Neil Cookson

Art Exhibition at Doverly Manor Museum, Porlock

I went to Porlock (a woman *to* Porlock rather than a man *from* Porlock, perhaps) to visit the art exhibition held there in the Doverly Manor Museum, which is worth a visit in itself being a beautiful, albeit small, 15th century manor house dating from 1450, which has retained many original features including the garderobe. I was shown round by Jeff Cox, the museum's researcher, who is also a journalist and historian, and had a wonderful time viewing the artwork relating to Porlock, Porlock Weir and the surrounding countryside.



The number of paintings shown was impressive, with many exceedingly well known names, one of which was attached to a drawing of Porlock Lock with several small boats within it (see below). Yes - the 'matchstick man' otherwise known as

LS Lowry. Other artists include Charles Napier Hemy (see the image of Porlock Weir's oyster catchers in SWS 128), JMW Turner, Richard Phelps and Charles Rennie MacIntosh.

The exhibition continues until mid-October and if you're in the vicinity it's an unmissable event. I would suggest it's even worth a purposeful trip if maritime art appeals to you.

Editor (photographs by Maggie Watkinson with permission from the museum)



Bristol Harbour Festival

The Bristol Harbour Festival at the end of July was blessed with good weather, and offered a wide range of interest on and by the water. Regulars *John King* and *Matthew* were busy with trippers. The *Balmoral*, moved back to M shed, looked much smarter after a recent repaint and work in the Albion yard.



There was a galaxy of rowed craft; I noted one of the Bristol club's gig boats, and, new to Bristol, dragon boats were inviting one and all to have a go. The Underfall yard held a parallel event to the main fest. There was a fine newly built dinghy, moored opposite a charred victim of the fire last year.

The slip, occupied by a Dutch barge houseboat from 1907, is vital to the ongoing maintenance of vessels old and new.

The international guild of knot tyers had a stand. I moved swiftly on before displaying my complete lack of skill. I also saw a few of the beautiful steam launches that are regular visitors.



Completely missing were larger sailing craft. Back in the day there would be half a dozen visitors. Today the only large sailing craft in harbour were the *Daniel Joseph* and a three-master, both recently resident and I think not involved. It is a shame that the impact of a forest of masts has been lost.



Jonathan Seagrave

Exeter Heritage Harbour, June 2024

SWMHS attended the Exeter Heritage Harbour event on Sunday 9th June, in force. The stall was full of publications and attracted many visitors. Subsequently new members were recruited, not press-ganged, and books sold to visitors. We lost count of the number of people we spoke to about the benefits of joining SWMHS and handfuls of membership leaflets were given out.



Jonathan Turner educating the Lord Mayor of Exeter

Although there was not a large number of heritage craft or modern sailing vessels, there was a brilliant 1940s theme buzzing around the event. Music, dancing and re-enactors were an excellent addition to the numerous stalls and displays. Steam was the overarching theme of the day with traction engines, about nine steam-driven small craft provided courtesy of the Steam Boat Association of Great Britain, steam traction engines and a diminutive steam railway.



Some of the steam boats in the basin at the Exeter Heritage Harbour event.

Overall it was quite a successful day and encouraging for those who manned the stand to undertake similar opportunities elsewhere across the south west. The location was excellent with many things to see and within an easy walk of the city centre.

Adrian Webb

Dorset shipwreck acquires special status

The wreck of *The Earl of Abergavenny*, an East India Company ship which sank off the coast of Weymouth in Dorset in 1805, has been granted special protection. For lots more information and to see an image of a wonderful painting by the marine artist Thomas Luny, click here:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cy0r5nljzv4o>

Maritime meanderings around Brighton

Brighton has never had a port until the marina was built in the 1960s. It was originally a fishing village, with boats based on the shingle beach, and now has a fishing museum. It is small, occupying just one arch under the promenade. The centrepiece is the *Sussex Maid*, with numerous photos and prints from the 19th century and other memorabilia around the walls. A couple of rather tired boats are outside, but are beginning to decay. It lacks much by way of interpretation, a brief account of conflict town v. beach. A further arch has exhibits on the piers. There isn't much fishing now, perhaps basically because there aren't many fish. Though I do recall seeing mackerel shoals breaking surface in my teens, I've never seen any on more recent visits.

The ports nearby, Shoreham and Newhaven, have a much longer and more varied commercial history. The former reminded me of a family story. My father was excise officer at Shoreham for a couple of years. It was a cushy number, as the only regular revenue activity was the oil import, where the oil company kept meticulous records. However, he did have to deal with the complexities of disposing of a dead whale, one of his responsibilities as receiver of wrecks!

The wind farm offshore is the modern maritime industry. There is a very good interpretation centre next to the 360 (degree) viewing tower, covering the development and installation of the towers by specialist vessels, and there are three maintenance vessels based in Newhaven. There will be more if the next phase gets built. This is a trade with a long term future; unlike the coastal distribution of petrol and diesel, which will surely eventually decline as EVs take over.



The Constable painting of boats unloading coal on the beach

We visited the Royal Pavilion which was proudly displaying a recently rediscovered Constable painting of coal boats unloading on the beach, from 1824-6. It must have been very hazardous; it is a very exposed coast.

Finally, the toy and model museum does boast some magnificent ship models from yesteryear, as well as a big waterline collection.



Jonathan Seagrave

Dawe's Twineworks at West Coker

On Saturday 20th July I visited Dawe's Twineworks at West Coker for the launch of a book about the history of making Coker Canvas (which for over 30 years was the global standard for sailcloth), rope and netting from local flax and hemp in three small villages in East Somerset. I attended on behalf of the society, to which an invitation had been issued. Sadly, I missed most of the music making and dancing (blame the trains!) but was able to see the rope walk and was present at the book launch (see p. 36). I also smelt and felt 'real' ropes, comparing them with modern alternatives. I know which ones I prefer. This experience connected with one of my other passions - sewing of all sorts (quilting, embroidery, clothes) exclusively with natural fibres, usually cotton but also linen



A painting of the ropewalk as it used to be

and silk and combinations thereof. If you're interested in all things sail and rope visiting the

twineworks is recommended. For more information about the establishment and history see here: <https://www.westcoker.net/home-page/ropewalk/>



The rope walk at Dawe's Twineworks, West Coker

Editor

Maritime History News from Plymouth and the River Tamar area

Plymouth advertises itself as England's 'Ocean City'! Well - compared to Portsmouth we have very little to show. There is a submerged frigate off Rame Head for divers to investigate. There are some 19th century RN warship figureheads in the 'The Box' (in a mix of art gallery plus local document, film and photographic archives). The submarine which sank the Argentinian warship *Belgrano* is somewhere in the navy base and not now in a dry dock next to the RN South Yard Heritage Centre. For many years the late Cdr. Charles Crichton (at one time a valued member of our society), with backing from the city council and the navy, developed this heritage centre telling the story of the naval base at Devonport and the dockyard.

This year the council, which now owns the South Yard, has further extended their maritime business units to leave the Heritage Centre with just two listed buildings. There is some parking opposite and the archives are now housed in two rooms in a listed building there. However, there is very little space to sort out the collection. There are, however, a number of able volunteers. The centre is only open every Wednesday and the second Saturday every month. There is a good website and the archive centre is open every Tuesday for enquiries. Much work still needs to be done to catalogue their records. From my point of view I will go there to examine the dockyard pay-book records which go from the 1840s to the 1960s as the males on my mother's side of the family were 'dockyardies' right back into the nineteenth century. The



19th c. cannon at Devonport RN base centre

grandfather I never knew started as a 12 year old 'boy labourer' before the First World War and died as a chief boilermaker from wounds received in a bombing raid in 1942.

A year or so ago there was unveiled, by Princess Anne, a new memorial to the merchant navy in World War Two on Plymouth Hoe. Our member Paul Wright, who has since sadly died, led the fundraising. He was also the Chair of the Tectona Trust which enables disadvantaged youngsters to go to sea to sail. At the Mount Batton moorings on the Plymstock side of Plymouth is situated the 'Bounty Project' led by the professional racing sailor Conrad Humphreys, who takes people out onto the Sound to experience small boat sailing. Also there is a sailing trust out of the Plymouth Mayflower Marina which gives local youngsters a chance to learn to sail small boats.

Up the River Tamar from Plymouth the Tamar barge *Shamrock*, now owned by the National Trust, lies at the quay at their Cotehele estate. She has not been sailing for two years and will not

do so until 2025 at the earliest. However, they have just appointed a new shipwright and have a team of volunteers to take forward repair work. At least she is in the water every day when the high tide comes in. This leads me to the disgusting tale of the *Garlandstone* rotting away at Morwellham Quay.



Shamrock on her slipway awaiting more repairs, Martin Hazell, 2024

Morwellham Quay is listed as a 'world heritage site' but the owners have no idea about how to look

after a valuable heritage sailing vessel. She has rotted away! Just over ten years ago *Garlandstone* was in fine condition in a dock which had a good amount of water every high tide. She had been repaired. Since then she was moved to a 'dry slipway' and is now not open to the public. She has dried up and is rotting away from the lower hull upwards and from the deck down. She used to be open to the public as a static exhibit, but is now too dangerous for people to go on. I took a photograph of her last year. From a distance she looks as if she is in an overgrown field - the weeds are everywhere around her.

Martin Hazell



Garlandstone rotting away at Morwellham Quay

Sharpness 150

On Saturday 17th August we had a table at the Sharpness 150 celebration at the Dockers club, organised by Iain McCall's Mainline and Maritime. It was a small and quiet event compared to the Ship Show we have attended in the past, but we made useful contact with the *Balmoral* team who were very much present.

Balmoral has had extensive work done to her hull, the double plating that the MCA condemned has been replaced, the bottom ultrasonically tested, and she is now insurable. The work was done at Sharpness, in conjunction with the Albion yard. The Lottery has funded part of this on the basis she will be used for educational and cultural events in Bristol, with a focus on minority

communities. Getting the heritage message across to these may not be easy. Nonetheless it may be worth exploring further links with *Balmoral*; she is always present in the harbour, with a huge footfall going past. There is still much to be done before she can once again give trips across the estuary.

There was a small exhibition of photos of the Sharpness docks over the years, and other stalls covered railways and waterline models.

Paul Barnett, doyen of the Purton hulks, is extending his researches on hulks further round the coast as far as Appledore, and may be giving us an update in a future edition. Roland Whaite of the World Ship Society was also there; the WSS is another broad based society that is becoming more electronic, and somewhere we might also look to share information.

Jonathan Seagrave

The Shipwreck Treasure Museum, Charlestown, Cornwall

The site of the museum has been put up for sale and local historians and village residents are concerned about the fate of over 7000 artefacts, some of which have specific links to the village. Others come from the shipwrecks of *Mary Rose* and *Titanic*.

For more information see here:

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4gd2p1d6y6o?fbclid=IwY2xjawE1Hj5leHRuA2FlbQlxMQABHUbGk08OfJQbJCZPRUfGRthtEF_hW_F0ORGIRaF0rVsnNwwcALE1b94rxA_aem_ed-5LpmvbkyWfdtU6-nyiw

Help wanted in identifying merchant ship photographs

SWMHS member Stephen Dent has a number of photographs featuring merchant ships in the Middle and Far East in the late 1920s, which he is using to illustrate an article he is writing. The majority of the ships have not been identified and, it should be noted, the quality of the photographs is very variable. If any member feels they may be able to help, whether it is identifying individual vessels, classes/types, or shipping lines, Stephen would be very pleased to hear from them. He can be contacted at: sfdent@dircon.co.uk

Further information found about the Purton Hulks

Upon perusing the 1971-77 deck log of a steam tug called *Stanegarth*, recently handed to Purton Researchers, several interesting details were discovered about other vessels on the Sharpness to Gloucester canal, thereby increasing knowledge about the many vessels hulked at Purton. Click here to find out what: <https://www.friendsofpurton.org.uk/stanegarth/>. There are also some wonderful images of the *Stanegarth* as she went about her daily work.

Over the Bar

The society is very pleased to announce there have been no instances of members passing over the Bar since the last magazine was issued.

South West Maritime History Society

Registered Charity No. 1201730
(Updated September 2024)

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