

STEAMSHIP

FRESHSPRING

SOCIETY

FRESHSPRING NEWS



No.9 Winter 2016

Preserving the past to inspire knowledge for the future

The Steamship Freshspring Society is a registered charity, No.1151907.

Objects of the Charity:

To advance the education of the public through the preservation and operation of a historic steamship, and the promotion of maritime studies particularly amongst young people for the public benefit.

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Website: www.ssfreshspring.co.uk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/SSFreshspringSociety?fref=ts

Membership Enquiries: Please send an s.a.e. for a form to: Steamship Freshspring Society, c/o Richard Ker, 4 New Street, Appledore, Devon, EX39 1QJ, or you can join online.

Ship Visits & Volunteering on the ship: Members' visits to the ship can be arranged by appointment in Bideford. Volunteers are very welcome to help prepare the ship for public opening at Easter. Enquiries about the ship should be directed to Stephen Attenborough 07895 953 591 or John Puddy 01237 479 730 .

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Freshspring News is edited by Brian Gooding,

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Design & Production by Steam Heritage Publishing Ltd. Tel: 01403 588 360.

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Editor's Ramblings. . . .

As many of you will know, the ship has been through the drydock at Sharpness and has been successfully towed to Bideford, no small undertaking in itself. That it has been done at all is amazing for what is still a young society, but that it has been done under budget is fantastic, and we should all be very proud of the team who made this possible, and not without a huge amount of hard work and heartache.

None of this wouldn't have happened without the dedication of our Chairman, John Puddy, Secretary, Stephen Attenborough, and Ship Manager, John Austin, in particular, who have masterminded the million and one things that were needed to get to where we are now – to have a floating ship alongside the quay in Bideford, with a plan to open her to the public at Easter next year.

Now the ship is at Bideford, it is attracting a lot of local interest, which I witnessed during a visit I made in October, which coincided with one of the local monthly members' meetings. While I was on the ship, the interest in this new arrival was obvious, with people stopping for a chat to find out more about her, several expressing an interest in joining the growing band of local volunteers. The meeting that evening onboard the floating café barge adjacent to *Freshspring* was well attended and the enthusiasm was obvious. There is no doubt that the ship is in a good home, and with local support – of which there is plenty from both businesses and individuals – and volunteers, the Steamship Freshspring Society is going places!

However, as you will see elsewhere, we have lost two trustees of the society. I guess this is inevitable as the geography of the project has changed, but we have also co-opted two local and very active trustees in Bideford who were also part of the team who helped get the ship to the town.

By the way, this is our newsletter. I would welcome contributions from members to ensure it continues to be of interest. They don't have to have a maritime bent and you don't have to be an expert writer. Just send in what you like, and we'll sort it out.

Finally, on behalf of the Trustees, I would like to wish you all a great Christmas and a Happy New Year.



Brian Gooding

DIARY DATE: The 2017 Steamship Freshspring Society Annual General Meeting will be held in Bideford on Saturday 8th April. More details in the next issue of Freshspring News.

FRONT COVER: SS Freshspring gets used to her new home in Bideford.

BACK COVER: Another view of SS Freshspring in her new home.

Chairman's Report

We have done it, SS *Freshspring* has been drydocked at Sharpness and is now berthed in her new home alongside Bideford quay. Keynvor Morlift, our very supportive towing company, towed her to Bideford at no cost to us. It is amazing to see her looking like a real ship in a very high profile public location. Our biggest problem is that we can spend the whole of our time speaking to interested people who come to see the ship. She is visible from the high level river bridge at Bideford and her tall funnel is a magnet for enthusiasts who otherwise would just pass by.

We now enter a new and very exciting phase of this project. The ship has been saved and we can engage with local people and encourage volunteering. Within days of her arrival, people have been coming forward to help, so much so that we have had to create rotas and policies for volunteering in very quick time.

Our membership is increasing now people can see the ship has actually arrived and our revised leaflet has been supported by Rob Braddick who is a local businessman and as before by Nautilus International. Indeed, *Freshspring* has been designated as one of the five important attractions of Bideford. I am so pleased about the recognition the ship is achieving, as maritime heritage is something that Bideford has not focused on in the past. The *Freshspring* is in fact kick starting interest in maritime in the locality. There are a few people who query her importance and for these, five minutes in the engine room and they are hooked. A steam ship is very different to a tall ship; with a tall ship the exciting part is above deck and with a steamer, it is below deck. Hence we are keen to open to the public as soon as we can.

The input required to manage the Trust and its activities has dramatically increased now we have a permanent public base and we are engaging local people in administration activities as well as ship volunteering. We have a new membership secretary in Appledore which releases our Trustee, Brian Gooding, to focus more on the governance of the Trust. Governance is a high priority for your Trustees as we need to stay focussed on the future, funding streams and sustainability, while the ship herself becomes a volunteer led project. This transition might take a few months but given the abilities of many volunteers, I can see we will have a very competent team in the near future.

I was recently invited to speak at the Bristol branch of The Merchant Navy Association and they presented us with a very nice ship's wheel and the promise that they would scour Bristol for items taken from the ship while she was berthed there in the 1980s.

Martyn Ashworth, an active Trustee, has stood down as a result of additional work and the increased distance to the ship from Loughborough. Martyn was an excellent Trustee, with vision and a clear business mind. We will miss his input, but we do still have him as an advisor.

Graham Mimms has also stood down as a Trustee. Graham is continuing with our education work with The University of The West of England. He created a very positive relationship with the University which we will ensure continues.

I am pleased to say that we have very good people coming forward in the Bideford area who would like to be considered as Trustees and we have co-opted two very professional people to join the team. Colin Bell and Simon Tattersall have been extremely supportive of the Trust and helped enormously in achieving our berth in Bideford and supporting fundraising and Governance matters. The Trust and its activities are bound to change as we progress and we all recognise that our skills and contribution may not be appropriate as we move forward. However, we must also recognise that the current team has got us this far and their input must not be forgotten.

We have such an exciting future with our project and the focus is now on the future. I thank you very much for remaining our members and for the amazing support we get from you in so many ways.

John Puddy

New Members – welcome

Mr J Clements	<i>Barnstaple, Devon</i>
Suzanne Dyer	<i>Barnstaple, Devon</i>
Tony Short	<i>Bideford, Devon</i>
Mark Bannister	<i>Llantwit Fardre, Pontypridd</i>
Anne Head	<i>Torrington, Devon</i>
Clive Davies	<i>Barnstaple, Devon</i>
William Grant	<i>Northam, Devon</i>
Maria Bailey	<i>Bideford, Devon</i>
Duncan Withall	<i>Bideford, Devon</i>
Stephen Herwin	<i>Plymouth, Devon</i>
Rod Thompson	<i>Camborne, Cornwall</i>
Thomas Game	<i>Northam, Devon</i>
Miss Meryl Ker	<i>Bideford, Devon</i>
Kevin Slade	<i>Lower Langford, N. Somerset</i>
Robert Taylor	<i>Barnstaple, Devon</i>
The Conservatory Service - Mr Andy Fish	<i>Southampton, Hampshire</i>
Stewart Katz	<i>Bideford, Devon</i>
F R Hooper	<i>Bideford, Devon</i>
L J Phillips	<i>Bideford, Devon</i>
Mrs Sally Meredith	<i>Bideford, Devon</i>
Don Burton	<i>Bideford, Devon</i>
David Courtney	<i>Barnstaple, Devon</i>
Alan Wilkinson	<i>Northam, Devon</i>
Mr & Mrs N R Mann	<i>Northam, Devon</i>
Dave Hocking	<i>Ashford, Kent</i>
David Sharp	<i>Bideford, Devon</i>
Denis Dunstone	<i>Wendens Ambo, Essex</i>
Bill Slipper	<i>Bideford, Devon</i>
Bill Findlater	<i>Bideford, Devon</i>
Leigh Doeg	<i>Victoria, Australia</i>

The unsung heroes

Keynvor Morlift

Without the remarkable support of Keynvor Morlift and particularly, Anthony Glover, the proprietor, we would not have our ship in Bideford. Indeed, we might not have a ship at all. The offer to tow *SS Freshspring* to Bideford at no cost to the Trust saved us over £13,000 and was classed by our Funder, National Heritage Memorial Fund, as match funding. This enabled the grant to be awarded.

I am truly amazed by this generosity and the commitment they made to save a heritage ship. They initially towed *SS Freshspring* from Newnham to Sharpness, then from Sharpness to Appledore and finally from Appledore to Bideford. The whole team who managed the tugs were so helpful and we need to thank all of them for the efforts they made.

Anthony was helpful throughout, advising us of legal requirements, what we needed to do to comply with towing regulations and finally moving *SS Freshspring* by sea. The inspecting MCA surveyor on completing his pre-tow inspections, stated that setting up for the tow was one of the best he had seen. A huge compliment to Keynvor Morlift.



Sharpness Shipyard

This was the yard that carried out the works to *SS Freshspring* in their dry dock.

Throughout the process leading up to carrying out repairs, Steve Beacham, the proprietor of the dock, supported our project. He helped us to understand the implications of the project to repair *SS Freshspring*, right through to budgeting for the works. He also provided an extremely competitive price for the work to be done.

This was just the start. Once we arrived at the dock, Steve's team were



the essence of efficiency, carrying out the works required by our surveyors to a very high standard indeed.

It is always good to compliment a contractor who goes the extra mile. However, to use the word 'mile' with Steve is a dramatic understatement. He carried out works on the ship which were very considerably beyond his brief. The result was that *SS Freshspring* left the yard looking much better than we could ever have hoped. I have to add that Sharpness Shipyard carried out all the works within the agreed budget and on time. A very high accolade indeed.

My hat goes off to Steve at Sharpness, Anthony at KML and their teams. Our heritage ship is safely in Bideford and in much better trim as a result of their efforts.

John Puddy

Martyn Heighton, Director of National Historic Ships UK



Martyn Heighton sadly passed away on Sunday evening 6th November 2016.

Martyn has worked tirelessly for NHS-UK for the last ten years and has been a key figure in the historic ships community who will be greatly missed. His immense contribution to the sector and years of experience will be remembered by all who knew him. Our thoughts are with his family at this difficult time.

From the very start of our project to save *SS Freshspring*, we were able to engage with Martyn. He was very supportive of our project and always valued *SS Freshspring* as being of very considerable National importance.

Through the years, Martyn never wavered in his support of our project and did all he could to both inform us and support us in our endeavours to give the ship a future. Without Martyn, we would certainly not be in the position we are in now.

He advised and supported us with our successful application for funding to bring the ship to Bideford and was always a very good friend. Martyn believed in the value of *SS Freshspring* and was in the process of elevating her to the Core Register of historic vessels. He was a firm advocate of collaboration and I had many discussions on this topic with him. I am a great believer that all of us in the historic vessel community should work together to ensure the survival and operation of as many historic vessels as possible.

John Puddy

Freshspring dry dock and tow to Bideford

Having gained the funds from National Heritage Memorial Fund to save *SS Freshspring*, the biggest challenge the Trust has ever had was to arrange and manage the dry docking and moving of the ship.

In the last issue, we detailed the tow and the early part of docking. This time I would like to give you more information about the works which were carried out at Sharpness Shipyard and the trip to Bideford.

Our Trustee team not only sent out tenders to a considerable range of contractors, but chose the best and instructed them to arrive at the right phase of the project. This was fundamental in the success of the whole operation. Each contractor had a slot and arrived and left at precisely the correct time, causing no delay to the next contractor. It was impressive to see such efficiency, which considerably impacted on ensuring budgets were met.

As soon as the ship was docked, SBS, the pressure blasters, arrived to water pressure blast the hull at 30,000psi. This removed paint and all scale and in places caused holes in the hull. The process left the hull completely clean, so much so that a holding primer had to be applied to prevent corrosion which could have an effect on the final painting. The primer is designed to assist welding of new plates.

The ultrasonic scan team then arrived and carried out a systematic series of



The hull has been cleaner prior to plating work starting.

measurements of the thickness of steel on each plate. This information was vital to assist surveyors and to inform future repairs. The report is a hugely valuable document for the ultimate restoration of the ship.

The surveyors then attended to determine works required to both enable the ship to gain a certificate for the tow to Bideford and to inform the longer term aims to fully restore the ship to operating condition. Thus we had a surveyor from the Maritime & Coastguard Agency and a surveyor from Graham & Woolnough, our own chosen surveyor, who informs for the long term. This surveyor, John Timms, is one of the most experienced marine heritage surveyors in the business and well respected by funders and statutory authorities.

Work then commenced to add plating to the hull as required. The NHMF funds are to only prepare the ship for her tow to Bideford and therefore all the work done was to overplate weak areas of the hull. It was found the underside of the boiler room was quite bad, much as a result of internal corrosion caused by coal firing. The forepeak and after peak tanks were also in poor condition as they were used to ballast with salt water. As with most ships, the area between water and air suffers as there is maximum oxygen to cause corrosion. A team of welders came to the yard from Russia and they were amazingly competent. With very few tools, they were able to shape plates and fit them snugly to the shape of the hull. It was actually remarkable to watch them working in the same way as generations had done so before. Plates were added to parts of the hull as required and ultimately some 100 square metres of six millimetre steel were added. Given that our estimate was 150 sq. metres, we were very pleased with the outcome. Usually in these situations it is all too easy to underestimate the job.

While we were in the dock, we repaired handrails, fitted a replacement anchor and carried out a range of tasks which would help to prepare the ship for Bideford. Once all work was completed, the surveyors arrived again to inspect the finished work. We were very fortunate that Sharpness Shipyard is an extremely competent yard, managed by



The port side bow area needed a fair bit of plating.

Steve Beacham, who is second to none when it comes to heritage ships. Our Trustees John Austin and Stephen Attenborough managed the project and I dealt with administration and the legal survey stuff. The outcome was spectacularly successful. We had taken a ship which had not been docked since 1977 and carried out

works to prepare her for a sea tow. This was all achieved within budget and on time. This achievement bodes very well for the future and demonstrates the expertise within the Trustee board.

Surveys were completed and the painters coated the hull with primer and a good quality topcoat supplied by Jotun. We made the decision to paint the hull all black as this meant we could focus on the best quality coatings in one colour only. The coatings are designed to last at least five years. The final job was to add anodes to protect the hull from corrosion.

The dock was then partially flooded to test for leaks. One annoying leak was found in the boiler room where a short section of weld has been missed. The dock was drained and the fault repaired. *Freshspring* was then given back her name and draught marks before being finally set afloat.

The final phase was to have both her and the towing vessel inspected for the tow to Bideford. It was very pleasing to hear the MCA surveyor announce to me that the preparations for the tow exceeded the requirements. This is a huge credit to Anthony Glover and his company, Keynvor Morlift, a towing company who had agreed to tow SS *Freshspring* to Bideford at no cost to the Trust, a job which was costed at £12,750. Remarkably, they had already towed the ship to Sharpness from Newnham, also at no cost.

SS Freshspring and the towing vessel *Severn Sea* then departed. It was quite



Plating has been completed and the undercoat has been applied to the hull.



ABOVE: *The drydock at Sharpness is filled to refloat Freshspring.*

BELOW: *Freshspring heads out from Sharpness Docks before heading out into the Bristol Channel.*





*Heading west under the first Severn road bridge, not long after leaving Sharpness.
Courtesy Tim Hudson*



*Making good headway with a strong bow wave in the waters of the Bristol Channel.
Courtesy Tim Hudson*

amazing to see our beloved ship proceeding to sea on passage to her new home in Bideford, Devon.

On arrival in the River Torridge, the ship was escorted by the Appledore lifeboat and a local tug to lay up temporarily at Appledore to await the preparation of her berth in Bideford. The arrival of *SS Freshspring* was an emotional moment for us as she looked magnificent and timeless as she slid into the estuary for the first time. It was particularly emotional for me as she passed the *MS Oldenburg* on passage to Lundy. I bought this 1958-built ship in 1984 to operate as the Lundy ferry, a service she still performs today. The harbour authority dredged the berth to ensure it was clear of debris and levelled. In addition, Freshspring Society volunteers worked to clear away two sunken vessels, which both impacted on the location and obstructed our berth. One of these was in excess of 70ft long and had been tidal for many years. I must compliment the dedication and skills of Stephen Attenborough who worked with myself and local volunteers for, against all odds, refloating this vessel to enable her to be towed to a location where she can quietly sit and integrate with her surroundings. We can now add salvage to our portfolio of expertise.

Anthony Glover of Keynvor Morlift yet again came to support us by providing a tug to tow *Freshspring* to her long term berth in Bideford. This was achieved on Sunday evening on 16th October to a welcoming crowd. The ship is now in her public berth and can be progressively restored by a team of volunteers. Of course, we always welcome more to join us to ensure this remarkable little ship can sail under her own power again.

I must also add that while we were focussing on the repairs and movement of the ship, a Bideford Volunteer, Simon Tattersall was working diligently with Torridge



A lovely study of Freshspring entering the Torridge Estuary.



ABOVE: Into the Torridge Estuary with the tug Severn Sea leading Freshspring.

BELOW: Severn Sea and Freshspring off Appledore, not long before tying up in the town to await the berth at Bideford.



District Council and our insurers, George Hayes of Hayes Parsons, to prepare all the legal documentation for SS *Freshspring* to safely berth in Bideford for the long term. Simon's achievement was both professional and hugely successful. Without the formalities of documentation, we would not have had the security of our berth. My only involvement was to sign documents as shown in this picture on the left.

The gravity of the project to return SS *Freshspring* to steam is an enormous one, but given the ability of our Trustees, volunteers and loyal members to achieve such remarkable results so far, I have no concerns that the ship will steam again.

I have to sincerely thank our Trustees and dedicated team of volunteers for a truly remarkable result in saving SS *Freshspring* and bringing her to her new home in Devon.

I hope you will visit your ship when you can.

John Puddy

Journey's end and Freshspring is docked temporarily at Appledore Shipyard.



Two Queens and the Glen Usk

David Gannicliff

My love with the sea started when my mother read me a story from "The Wind in the Willows", when Mole says to Ratty, "My good fellow, there is nothing better than mucking about in a boat".

So it was to be. In 1947, when called up for National Service, I was asked what my hobbies were. My reply was "Boats, Sir". I ended up in the RAF Marine Branch.

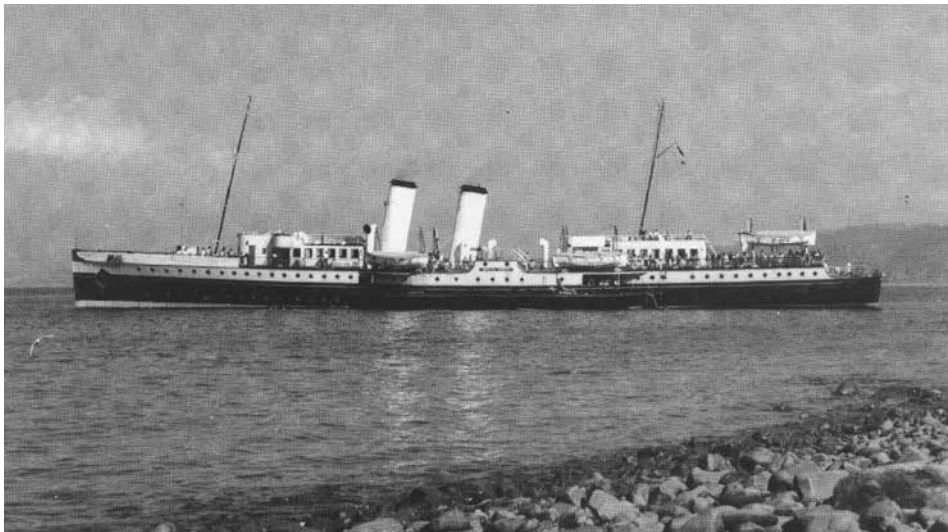
Fast forward to 1950. On 28th November, I was demobbed.

During my leaves, I met my future wife, Betty. She loved sailing and was the proud owner of a Redwing 14ft racing dinghy: with no crew, so what better way of getting to know each other? Like the song, "I've got a tractor and you have a combine harvester".

August Bank Holiday, 1951. P&A Campbell had an excursion to Lundy Isle from Clevedon aboard the *Bristol Queen*, leaving at 9.30am to call at Weston-super-Mare, Lynmouth and Ilfracombe and then on to Lundy. On the way, we both stood in the bow and looked down at the bow wave, saying I wonder what our lives would be, sailing into the unknown!

We were on the *Bristol Queen*, P&A's newest paddle steamer launched in Bristol by Charles Hill in 1946, with a service speed of 16.5 knots and, at 961 tonnes, their largest ship.

It was a fast passage down the Channel and, after a short stop at Ilfracombe, on to Lundy. We arrived to be the first vessel of the day. It was announced over the P&A system that today was a special occasion. Three P&A ships were visiting Lundy:



The *Bristol Queen* calling off Clovelly in the mid-1960s. (From a postcard)



Three paddle steamers lay off Lundy – the *Bristol* and *Cardiff Queens*, and the *Glen Usk*.

ourselves, the *Cardiff Queen* from Penarth, Barry and Porthcawl, and the *Glen Usk* from Swansea and Tenby.

As we rounded up and came to anchor, passengers were told if they wished to go ashore, to proceed to the port side, lower deck where staff would be waiting to open the doors on to the paddle box sponson ready for the launches to come alongside to take us ashore.

We were lucky as there was no swell running into the bay, so landing on the beach could take place. Now, in 2016, there is a pier to the Lundy ferry, allowing the MS *Oldenburg* to lay alongside.



The 'Marisco' pub at the top of the climb, with St Helen's Church behind.

In 1951, the landing stage was a mobile walkway platform with large wheels fixed at one end, and the other attached to a Fordson tractor. It was backed down the beach into the sea allowing the launches to come alongside.

Once ashore, the walk to the top – 400ft up a hill – but, at least, at the top was the "Pub Marisco".

We sat looking across the bay with a cool beer in our hands and then the *Cardiff Queen* appeared, dropped her anchor and within minutes the launches were alongside taking off the passengers. It was quite a sight to see them coming up the cliff road – a long string of ants!

Then, with a sound of her whistle, in came the *Glen Usk* and dropped her anchor ahead of the *Cardiff Queen*. This was a sight to see.

All too soon, the *Bristol Queen* sounded off her whistle to summon the passengers to embark. Once back onboard, we were soon underway up the Channel to Clevedon.

This was the beginning of many more happy days with "the skipper", whom I married on St Valentine's Day, 1952.



The launches bring passengers back to the Bristol Queen after a day on Lundy.



Day trippers head back to the landing stage on Lundy to await a launch to take them back to their ships.

Bideford Members' Meetings

Our latest regular members' meeting was held on Wednesday 16th November and as before, was very well attended. This time it was much more informal and a very enjoyable social evening.

This is how we plan to continue. Members had good conversations and came up with excellent ideas for promotion, volunteering and even planning the next meeting.

The next meeting will be held on the Cafe Aboard, The Quay, Bideford, EX39 2QS on Wednesday 14th December at 7.00pm and this will be our Christmas event.

We plan to have a range of entertainment, good food, drinks, challenges and general fun, so please make an effort to come along and join in. Being involved in the Freshspring Society is about having fun and meeting people, so we very much look forward to seeing you on the night.

Subsequent meetings will be held on the third Wednesday of each month, so the following dates are 18th January, 15th February and 15th March. Do please support these meetings if you can and be part of the ever-growing Freshspring Society.



Meryl, a loyal supporter in her special Freshspring hoodie.

A rare Scottish survivor

Brian Gooding

Paddle steamers were once the favoured means of going "doon the watter" on the Clyde and one of the popular ships of the period was the PS *Caledonia*, built by Wm Denny of Dumbarton in 1934. She served during WW2 as a minesweeper as HMS *Goatfell*, and as an anti-aircraft ship from 1941. She was coal fired until 1955 when she was converted to oil firing.

She was withdrawn in 1969 and sold for scrap but was saved by Bass Charrington for service as a static pub/restaurant on the Victoria Embankment in London, renamed *Old Caledonia*. Sadly she caught fire in 1980 and was towed to Kent for scrapping.

But this was not the end, entirely, as the engines and relevant auxiliaries and some other parts were saved for preservation, by Cdr John Baldock, then owner of the Hollycombe Steam Collection at Liphook, on the Hampshire/West Sussex border. The engine and parts were moved to the museum and erected in a specially dug pit, the work being carried out almost single handed by the late Eric Purver, Mr Baldock's fitter.

I joined the museum volunteers in late 1983 and was present when the engine was first steamed in preservation, steam being provided by a Robey semi-portable boiler, though that was a struggle as the engine needed more steam than the boiler provided.



Visitors gather for the first running of the *Caledonia's* engine, August 1985. Your Editor is driving the museum's Burrell Gold Medal tractor with two trailers behind, a good load!

On August Bank Holiday 1985, I was on my usual duty, driving the museum's lovely Burrell Gold Medal tractor, *Sunset No.2*, with two trailer loads of passengers behind, quite a load for a little engine! Meanwhile, after several hours of warming through, *Caledonia's* engine moved for the first time, though it was a bit inconclusive as there wasn't enough steam to get the big diagonal triple to compound. But at least it had run! The engine was run again a few times, but since then it has been enclosed in a building, fitted out to feel like a ship's engine room. A package boiler was acquired to provide the steam, but with the death of the Commander some years ago, progress has



stalled, and the engine is a bit unloved today, but it is still there and sleeping, awaiting time and money to fully restore it.

LEFT: *The Caledonia spent several years as a bar & restaurant on the Thames in London before being destroyed by fire in 1980 and scrapped.*



The first run ever of the *Caledonia's* engine on August Bank Holiday Monday 1985. The late Cdr John Baldock and volunteer Dave Dawtry are at the controls.

Starting a maritime life on a Fresh class ship

The following is an extract from 'The Royal William Yard Story' by Sidney M G Kneebone, ISM, to whom we are grateful for permission to reproduce his memoirs.

It is 25th October 1948; I have got a job at the Royal William Yard as a Yard Craft Boy. It is also my 16th birthday. At 7am, I walk through the Main Gates and I meet a group of men. At the steps of the basin, a small dinghy comes alongside and we all go on board. Then four of the men row the boat out of the basin. I am thinking to myself 'I hope I haven't got to spend all day on this boat'. Then out of the darkness I see three ships tied to separate buoys. They are the *Freshburn*, *Freshpond* and the *Freshlake*. I am to be the boy on *Freshburn*.

Once on board, we go forward to greet the lone Shipkeeper who has been on board all night. *Freshburn* is a coal burner and, although the Shipkeeper has raised steam, he is not allowed to open the valves as he is a seaman. The messdeck is lit by oil lamps and is heated by coal fires. The accommodation is made up of two adjoining spaces. In one, there is a long table with a brass oil lamp hanging over it and seat lockers around it. In the other, which is the bunk space, there are eight bunks and a cabin for the Mate and mechanician.

The Shipkeeper has made a pot of tea and we all have a cup, after which the Stokers open the valves that supply steam to the main engine and the winch on the forecastle. I go to the galley (kitchen) to make sure the kettles are boiling and the fire is O.K. The galley is also coal fired.

Now the boat has to be hoisted. This is done with a long hawser through blocks



(pulleys) from the davits to the winch. When hoisted, it is wound in on to the boatdeck with the davits (sort of hand operated cranes) and rested on chocks.

Freshburn is now ready to get underway. A slip rope is secured to the buoy and hauled tight with the winch. Then a rope ladder is put over the bow and a seaman climbs down on to the buoy and unshackles the cable. He climbs back up and the Master on the Bridge orders 'Let go'. The seamen let go the rope and haul the cable in and we steam up harbour to supply fresh or demineralised (demin as it was known) water to various ships. *Freshburn* has three tanks, two forward and one aft. Together, they hold 236 tons of water. Number 2 tank is kept for demin; it holds 100 tons. Demin has to be pure. It is always tested by the ships. It is used for ships' boilers and submarine batteries.

As we sail up river, I have to go to the galley and cook the Officers' breakfasts. The Captain has bacon and egg. When I ask him for some fat to fry it, he says it will fry in its own fat and "you had better not break the yolk of the egg either." The Engineer has tea and toast, so that is easy. The Mate, who is a big man, has a large breakfast and has started to cook it. As he fries some mashed potato, he tosses it in the air and says to me "Can you do that?" I say I don't know but I will have a go. "Not with my potato you don't," he says. After breakfast, I have to wash the dishes and help the cook to get the lunch ready. Being a small crew, each man brings in his own food. When lunch is served, you even get some of the men saying they have not got the potatoes they brought in. You just cannot win.

After lunch, the men retire to their bunks for a lunchtime nap; but not the boy. I have the dishes to wash. Then later, after they are done, I have to trim all the oil lamps (take the rough edges off the wicks) and chop the firewood. Then I go to the boiler room to get oily rags for the Shipkeeper to light the fires with in the morning. After all this is done, I report to the Mate on the bridge for training on the wheel.

When work in the harbour is finished and we return to the Royal William Yard to refill



The nameboard for the Freshburn was presented to the Society by its first Patron, the late Barry Smith, pictured here (right) receiving it from the owner of the Dutch company that broke it up.

our tanks for tomorrow, the Captain puts the bow on the wall at the lower wharf where a chain is hanging. He tells me I have to climb the wall by holding on to the chain (Health & Safety has not been invented yet) and it is low tide. Once on the jetty, I have to take the ropes. Then the hoses are sent up to be connected and the water turned on. We have to load a full cargo today, so we need the booster pumps and I have to walk to the back of the yard to the pump house. To get there I have to go past the Gun Testing Range. Just as I go near, they test a machine gun. I almost jump out of my skin. The man in charge of the Pump House is Pincher Martin. He is keen on DIY and is very handy if you want anything done.

Filling is now finished and we go to the buoy. A seaman on the bow gives the bridge hand signals to guide the ship to the buoy and another is at the break of the forecastle with a hook rope to catch the buoy. I have to turn the boat out on the davits. When we are secured, I lower the boat. This is done by turning the boat's falls (ropes) up on a staghorn and lowering gradually, having first made sure the bung is in (it has been known to be left out). Then we row into the yard and I have to secure the boat on a landing stage in the basin. The weather does not look too good so I am told to put extra ropes out but no one tells me about fenders (these are put over the side to protect the boat's side). The next morning I fetch the boat, not noticing a hole in her side just above the waterline. When the crew get in, the boat sits lower in the water and as we row out of the basin, water pours in and we have to row like the devil to get to the ship before the boat sinks.

Today goes much like yesterday except we have delivered demin, so we have to go to Number 4 Basin at the Dockyard (there is no demin at the R.J.Y.). When full, we return to our buoy. Next morning the Mate and engineer haven't arrived, so we go off to the buoy. I am told to go in and fetch them, but first I go below to change. Then I come on deck and hear them calling. I go to the boat but it is foggy. I look in the direction from which we came and rowed that way but I haven't yet learnt about tides, and the tide has turned the *Freshburn* around in the opposite direction, so I am rowing away from the yard. When I get to Ocean Quay, which is now Mayflower Marina, rather than get lost again, I row around the bay to the R.W.Y., keeping sight of land all the time. Meanwhile, the Captain has found out that I am missing with the boat and he goes to the Sound to look for me. By the time I get to the Yard, the *Freshburn* is alongside and the Captain is not happy. Life on *Freshburn* is not easy for me. I have to call the men 'Mister' and the Officers 'Sir', and the Captain and Mate do not see eye to eye. The Captain will give me a job to do and the Mate will give me another job and the Captain would threaten me with dismissal. But I survived.

Today we are going to coal the ship. The coaling wharf is at Number 9 Wharf at the north end of the dockyard. *Freshburn* has four manholes in her deck, two each side amidships for filling her bunkers. Large gantries with grabs take the coal from the heap and drop it on to the deck. Then seamen and stokers, working together (for a change), push the coal down into the bunkers with wooden poles. We are taking Welsh coal. It is best for steaming, but we take a grab or two of North Country which is for domestic use. I have to fill the galley bunker, using an old five gallon soft soap drum, which has been made into a bucket. After a while, the bunkers are full. The men say to the Chief Engineer "Is that it?" His favourite reply is "No, we could get a horse and cart down there."

After we have finished coaling the ship, it is wash down time. We are covered in coal dust and the ship has to be hosed down from top to bottom. Whilst we are doing this, the Mate comes on board. He has been to draw the pay. He gives all the crew a pay packet except me. I have to work a week in hand. When wash down is finished, we all go to the forecastle and take our oilskins off and we shower or bath. Some do it the old way with a bucket of water. One of the stokers, Charlie, had put his pay packet in the pocket of his oilskin. When he takes it out, the pound notes are all soaking wet, so

he pegs them on the washing lines in the bathroom to dry. As you can imagine, quite a lot of comments are passed. It takes a few washes to get rid of the black rings around the eyes caused by the coal dust (even to this day when I see a girl with mascara around her eyes, I ask her if she has been coaling a ship). I get some funny looks.

I have now been on *Freshburn* for a week and the Captain has told me I am going to the dockyard on Monday for a two week Seamanship Course, but today I have to get things ready for the Shipkeeper. I fill the oil lamps and trim the wicks and get the oily rags and I have found out that a labourer in the Box Maker's shop will give me a bag of chopped wood. Next we go to the buoy. The Shipkeeper tonight is Harry, a seaman, and he wants the boat (there is an unwritten rule that the Shipkeeper can go to the Butchers Arms, a pub just outside the gate for half an hour) but Harry is a cider drinker and goes to a pub further afield. Later (much later) he returns and rows off to *Freshburn*.

Once on board he lights the anchor light on the forestay and then goes below to the stokehold to check the three furnaces. Then he turns in, not noticing a stoker has hung his boiler suit by the neck, over an unused oil lamp on the bulkhead (wall) with his steaming boots underneath. During the night, the Shipkeeper wakes up, sees them there and thinks it is an intruder. He shouts "who are you and what do you want?" But, of course, there is no answer. In the morning, Harry lights the galley fire first (he must have the kettles boiling by the time the crew get on board. Electric kettles are unheard of).

Monday comes, and I report to the Dockyard for my course. I meet Hardy and Terry. They are to be the boys on *Freshpond* and *Freshlake* and I am now Senior Boy (such dizzy heights in such a short time). We are met by a Mate from one of the tugs who takes us to the naval barracks. We study all aspects of seamanship. On one of the days, the Petty Officer in charge takes us out sailing in a 27ft whaler. We all have a job to do on the boat. One of the boys has the job of pulling in the sails when we want to stop; the term for this is braid up. The boy whose job it was had his hand trailing in the water and we ended up on a mud bank and we had to prise the boat off with the oars, breaking several of them in the process. I think the Petty Officer has learnt his lesson. The next day was powerboat handling. We have a 52ft pinnace for this but we are not allowed to take it alongside. We all pass anyway.

Now we go to our respective ships. I go back to the *Freshburn*, Hardy to the *Freshpond* and Terry to the *Freshlake*. Our duties include cleaning the officers' cabins, cleaning the brass portholes around the ship and the ship's bell, as well as cooking their breakfasts and serving it to them; what you might call a busy life. In fact, without being prejudiced, the boys who came along later had a much easier life. As it was 1948, food was still rationed and once a week we meet one of the Captains at Underwoods, the grocers in Union Street, Stonehouse to get our rations. Later we were issued with seamen's ration books which entitled us to extra rations. On board our ships, we learnt a lot of rope work from the seamen and we also have school one day a week. We also have the opportunity to go to evening classes which, at that time, were at an old military hospital in Stoke, Devenport. The principle was a Master Mariner by the name of Captain Johnson.

I think I have covered our life as boys. I now have to take a test to become an Ordinary Deckhand (OD). The Master and Mate of *Freshlake* take me for this. I have to do some knots and splices, take the wheel of *Freshlake* and take her alongside the Lower Wharf at the R.W.Y. Then the Master and Mate of *Freshlake* ask me some questions. At the end, the Master of the *Freshlake* tells me I have passed, if I buy a ticket to the Yard's Dance. I was going to anyway.

Now, my boys, time is over. I have come off *Freshburn* as she has all the deckhands. So I go into the Royal William Yard on the barges. I am now in the big money. All I have to do now is get a chance of a Shipkeep (very hard to do) but it won't be for the want of trying.

Part Two is about my time as a Deckhand and Coxswain and there are many humorous moments, all of which happened.

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Ships of Bideford

Stephen Attenborough

SS Freshspring has only recently taken up residence in Bideford, but the town is also home to a number of notable heritage vessels.

Just downstream of *SS Freshspring* is a café barge, built upon the *Hindostan*, the name given to training vessels at Dartmouth College. It was originally an Aircraft Lighter with a flat deck built for carrying aircraft around the different dockyards. The after accommodation is original but forward of that is an extra superstructure, added when she became the training vessel. This café is open regularly from 10am.

Heading towards the town and upstream of *SS Freshspring* is *Endeavour*, a former Customs & Excise cutter, which is now privately owned. Built in 1966, by Richard

Duston, Thorne, Yard No.1187, she was used on the Mersey and retains her blue flashing lights.

Next one along is the fleet tender *Elkstone*, a former Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service 24.1m 'Clovelly' Class tender, built by J Cook at Wivenhoe and commissioned in 1971.

Beyond *Elkstone* is a former Thames diesel tug named *Ionia*. She was built in 1959 by Henry Scarr Ltd, Hesse, and measures 99ft 9ins long. After a spell at Falmouth between 1987 and 2001, she returned to London before being sold again and moving to Bideford in 2005. There were plans to convert her into a partial café called 'Tea on the Tug', but this has not happened yet.

MV Severn Sea is the tug which brought *Freshspring* from Sharpness to Bideford. She was built in 1947 in Sweden, was used as a mine layer and has an ice strengthened hull.

MS Oldenburg was built in



The café barge, built upon the Hindostan.



The Endeavour, a former Customs cutter.

1958 by Rolandwerft GmbH, shipbuilders in Bremen, and originally operated ferry services between the German mainland and the Friesian Island of Wangerooge and to Helgoland. After extensive modification and refurbishment at Appledore, she entered regular service in May 1986 as the main supply and passenger service for Lundy.

Across the river is the 85ft long, 94gt ex-Admiralty tender *John Adams*. Built by Richard Dunston at Thorne in 1934, she was based at Hawlbowlne Harbour, Cork until transferred to the Irish Navy in 1938. She remained in use there until 1987 when she was brought

RIGHT: *The former Thames diesel tug Ionía.*



The former Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service fleet tender Elkstone.



The 1934-built ex-Admiralty tender John Adams.



ABOVE: *MV Severn Sea towed Freshspring from Sharpness to Bideford.*

RIGHT: *The MS Oldenburg operates a regular service from Bideford to Lundy Island.*



While Stephen was working on Freshspring, he took this panoramic shot of the riverside at Bideford with the bow of Freshspring in the foreground.

to Bideford by the late Captain Peter Herbert. Her original engine was a six cylinder diesel (by Mirrlees, Bickerton & Day, 125bhp, speed 8 knots); she now has a larger diesel engine (built in 1975, and probably fitted then). She holds certificate number 244 on the National Register of Historic Vessels.

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