

STEAMSHIP

FRESHSPRING

SOCIETY

FRESHSPRING NEWS



No.10 Spring 2017

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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Keep up to date with progress/news via the Society's website or Facebook page.

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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Editor's Ramblings. . . .

A meeting was held in Bideford at the beginning of February to plan for the opening of the *Freshspring* to the public, a major milestone in her future and of the main reasons for bringing her to the town. The plan is to open her at Easter though members and friends attending the AGM the weekend before Easter will be able to have a preview tour. (Or to put it another way, you will be the guinea pigs for the public tours!) It is amazing just how much work has to be done to make this happen and the team in Bideford are working hard to achieve the target; it's not just work on the ship – that isn't too arduous, it's all the behind the scenes items that have to be ticked off.



With this issue you should have received all the paperwork for this year's AGM. Please do attend if you can. It's your chance to meet the team and for the team to meet you. It's also an opportunity to become more involved! We look forward to seeing you all in Bideford.

One of the aims of this magazine is to bring you stories from members who have a tale or two to tell. This time we have an interesting and poignant story from David Gannicliff who very nearly got caught up in the disaster that was to befall Lynmouth in 1952. Luckily he made the right decision!

We also have a long piece from our esteemed Chairman on his days as the Agent on Lundy and how the *Oldenburg* came to be the island's supply ship. This is accompanied by some interesting pictures, including a couple that show John back in the day. You haven't changed a bit, John!

There are also some excellent old pictures of Bideford's maritime history which we hope you will enjoy.

Don't forget: this is your magazine and without your contributions, it won't survive. Please send me anything you feel may be of interest. It doesn't have to be maritime related though a heritage/steam theme would help keep it more relevant. You don't have to be an expert writer either. We can turn your notes into a story.

I hope to see you at the AGM. With luck it will be a bit warmer than today!

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.

COVER: Our intrepid Chairman braved the river to get these shots of the SS Freshspring at Bideford sporting her new banners. He must have had big waders. . .

Chairman's Report

I must start by reporting that life as Chair is not an armchair existence. Since the ship has been in Bideford, life has become quite hectic and exciting. Your Trustees have been working very hard to ensure that the momentum gained by moving the ship continues. We now have to consider management of volunteers, public opening during the year, and continuing to raise the funds to progress restoration.

I am pleased to report that many people have come forward to volunteer, some on the ship and several who are helping with the most essential administrative and PR work, taking some of the load originally carried by Trustees. Indeed, we have an awareness day at a local supermarket coming up, which will help to canvass more new people. We are attending a considerable number of local events, and I am providing more and more talks about the ship and our work. I also like the fact that we have several ladies volunteering who, with rods of iron, keep us on track with our feet firmly fixed to the deck. I am totally impressed that our regular ship volunteers keep going on tasks which cannot be much fun – you chip and paint and chip some more – the result being that our ship is beginning to look remarkably smart. We value you hugely.

Our third Wednesday of the month meetings on the Café Barge in Bideford have been great and our Christmas do was very well attended. The meetings will continue as social events to bring members and volunteers together on a social basis. We aim, each month to provide a guest speaker. Although we have gained many local members, we value all members equally and I thank so many of you who add a donation to your membership fees. It all helps. We welcome all members to the ship even though we are not open to the public yet. It's all of you who keep us going and we truly recognise that.

I hope you enjoy the newsletter and can see that we are focussing some of our work on education. We would not get far without this activity as saving a ship is complex and requires a range of activities showing that we really can make a difference to the future aspirations of many young people and, of course, we can be supportive of people of all ages. We cannot just be ship fanatics; we have to create a sustainable future for the ship and the Trust. We must remember our strap line "Preserving the past to inspire the future"; let's make sure we do that. At present, The Burton Art Gallery in Bideford has an "Inspired by Coast" exhibition which runs to 6th March. I would urge you to visit if you are in the area as there are some 100 *Freshspring* works of art by local primary school children.

We do have funds coming in from various sources including our local councils and a regular flow of gifts in kind which help enormously. The pressure is always on with fund raising at many levels, which keeps Trustees very occupied.

Both Colin Bell and Simon Tattersall are very active as new Trustees; they bring valuable new skills to the Trust. Alan Freebury has resigned as a Trustee, recognising that we are moving forward and developing from a Trust trying to save a ship from demolition to a Trust with ambitious plans to put the ship back into service. We really

must thank those early Trustees who stood up to save the ship when the task seemed almost impossible. Brian Gooding and I stand down as Trustees at the next AGM in April and, although we are prepared to stand again, the members determine the future. We would like you to consider formally appointing Simon Tattersall and Colin Bell, who have been very productive since co-option. Please make sure you put the AGM in your diary and attend if possible. We will make it an enjoyable social event as we did last year. Of course, the ship will also be open at the weekend.

It is so heartening to see that our membership continues to rise, and that so many of you renew each year. We have a great project and by degrees we move towards seeing our ship in steam again. Thank you again for all the support you give to your Trust.

John Puddy

New Members – welcome

Wilhelmina Church	<i>Milton-u-Wychwood</i>
Dorothy Fielder	<i>Bideford, Devon</i>
Alan Evans	<i>Bideford, Devon</i>
Peter Best	<i>Crediton, Devon</i>
Roy Gallop	<i>Bristol</i>
Michael Ellery	<i>Wotton-under-Edge</i>
Jill Ellery	<i>Wotton-under-Edge</i>
Bruce Pollit	<i>Bideford, Devon</i>
Peter Newell	<i>Bideford, Devon</i>
Neil Baker	<i>Bristol</i>
Aubrey McKenzie	<i>Torrington, Devon</i>
Paul Gentry	<i>Bideford, Devon</i>
Adrian Attrell	<i>Westward Ho!, Devon</i>
Barbara Harding	<i>Ansty, West Sussex</i>
Mark Harding	<i>Ansty, West Sussex</i>
Valerie Barrs	<i>Rugeley, Staffs</i>
Geoffrey Cox, QC	<i>London</i>
Joff Raymont	<i>Bideford, Devon</i>
John Attlee	<i>Waterlooville, Hampshire</i>
Christopher Stirling	<i>Ottery St Mary, Devon</i>
Gail Hickman	<i>Bideford, Devon</i>
Nigel Thomas	<i>Tonbridge, Kent</i>
Donna Coombs	<i>Highworth, Wiltshire</i>
Anthony Glover	<i>Lynmouth, Devon</i>
John (Rusty) Crowhurst	<i>Barnstaple, Devon</i>
Peter Morris	<i>Bideford, Devon</i>

Freshspring art competition

A local Member and supporter, Gaston Dezart, came up with a very clever idea to run an art competition and very generously sponsored it as well; something we had not even thought of. Our Local Team, however, was keen to make something of this and set about putting together the details, the subject being, of course, *SS Freshspring*. We decided to partner with The Burton Art Gallery to make the most of the project. It tied in very nicely with a local "Inspired by Coast" exhibition at the gallery.

We were completely overwhelmed by the number of entries and our judges had the difficult task of judging some 100 pictures and some models. We invited Gaston Dezart, The Mayor and local artist Peter Newell to be our judges. As I write, we do know the winning entries, but we have not publicly announced them. The substantial prizes will be both to the schools and the pupils who submitted the best works.

This project is doing a great deal to cement the ship in Bideford and is a positive step in inspiring young people. I refer to our strap line "Preserving the past to inspire the future". We are, in fact, doing what it says on the tin. Many young people will have visited Bideford to see the ship and this is very exciting for engaging with them in the future.



Freshspring Society 'box' project

Your Trustees are proud to report that our first primary school project is now live in Sticklepath Primary School, Barnstaple. It was delivered there recently and will be in use at the school until Easter. It will then be sent to another school.

This project has been substantially funded and supported by The University of The West of England and Whitelands Engineers of Bideford. This is the culmination of a huge amount of work by Trustees, teachers and volunteers and puts the Freshspring Society firmly into main stream primary education.

The project aims to inspire engineering within schools and is based on the basic principles of steam engines. Children from 8 years old, as part of the project will visit *SS Freshspring*. Five boxed units, including full sets of lesson plans, are delivered to the school, allowing a class to be divided into small numbers, ensuring each child can positively engage. We hope many children will continue to be our engineers of the future. We are keen to hear from schools who would like to engage in this inspirational STEM project.



Treasurer's Report

At the Trustee's meeting in January, I agreed to take over the role of Treasurer, so I felt it would be appropriate to provide members with a report on the Society's current financial position and budget for 2017.

After the ship emerged from the dry dock last summer, we had about £10,000 in the bank. On the down side, Torridge District Council insisted – as part of the agreement for a long term berth – that we provide a Bond against the possibility that the ship would become unseaworthy and that Torridge would have to pay to remove it. The Bond is £9,000, payable £3,000 on berthing, £3,000 in October 2017 and £3,000 in October 2018. This money remains our property but can only be retrieved at the time the ship permanently leaves its berth at Bideford. We also agreed to have the ship surveyed annually at a cost of about £600 to verify its seaworthiness.

Cash in the bank at the start of 2017 was approximately £19,000, from which we need to pay £1,300. Excluding the cost of four magazines a year (which is covered by membership fees), to cover berthing fees, insurance, a bond payment, a survey and other essential costs, we need to find about £10,000 every year – and that's before we spend anything on maintaining or improving the ship!

How are we going to do this? We are applying for a variety of grants, some are specific to a purpose (like a new gangway) and some are for general expenses. Our major application is for a Lottery grant called 'Our Heritage' which, if we get it, will be match funded up to £30,000 by the Bridge Trust. As with all grants, the value of applications greatly exceeds the value of funds available, so there is no guarantee of success!

Excluding costs covered by grants, we have budgeted to spend £32,000 during 2017 and to end the year with at least £10,000 in the bank. To achieve this, we need to raise over £20,000! We hope that fundraising activities and appeals will provide much of it but we need help from any source we can find – one-off donations, legacies or monthly contributions are all welcome – and these help the Society with Gift Aid tax repayments. If you know of a wealthy marine enthusiast.....!

Simon Tattersall

Annual General Meeting

As you will see in the paperwork that accompanies this newsletter, the Annual General Meeting of the Steamship Freshspring Society will be held at 2:30pm on Saturday 8th April 2017 at The Royal Hotel, Barnstaple Street, Bideford, Devon EX39 4AE.

Bed & Breakfast is available at the hotel at a special rate of:
£50.00 for a double/twin room, or
£30.00 for a single room.

Please make booking direct with the hotel – phone: 01237 472 005, or email: reservations@royalbideford.co.uk, quoting Steamship Freshspring AGM.

The Saturday evening meal will be a carvery and disco at £17.00 per head. Bookings can be made the Chairman.

Daniel Adamson Society

In the spirit of collaboration, The Daniel Adamson Society, having completed the major restoration of the ship, have generously offered us a range of equipment and a diesel generator.

I was able to go to Liverpool on 24th January to spend time with the volunteers and the Chairman, Dan Cross, and to collect donated equipment. The "Danny" looks amazing now she is restored to her original condition and I look forward to a trip later in the year.

As a Trust, we believe that collaboration is a vital element of success and to have such a relationship with DAPS is both inspiring and hugely valuable. We must thank their team for supporting us with general advice, funding advice and now by providing essential equipment.

I urge members to take a trip on the "Danny" at some point.

JP

Bideford past

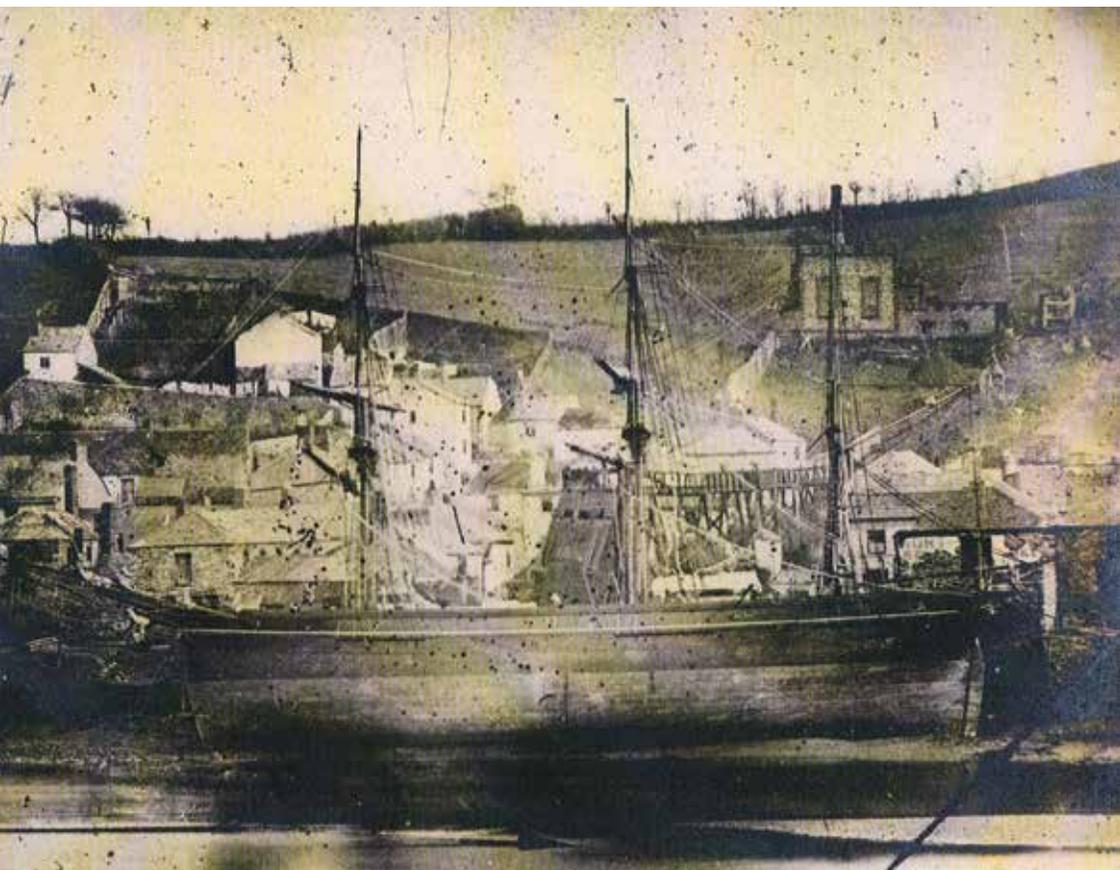
Local historian *Peter Christie* looks at how Bideford developed and retains a strong maritime heritage.

The *ss Freshspring* is now safely berthed at Bideford – and thus takes its place in the long maritime pageant of this historic Devon port. So what is this history?

The town originally developed around a ford across the River Torridge but then moved slightly downstream when the Long Bridge was constructed around the end of the 13th century. At this date, the economy of the fledgling town was based on the woollen cloth trade with small vessels loading at the Quay at the bottom of High Street.

In the 1540s, John Leland visited Bideford, noting that the area on the eastern bank of the Torridge consisted of 'a praty quik [busy] strete of Smithes and other occupiers for ship crafte'. Several decades later, in 1574, the settlement officially became a borough town when Elizabeth I granted a charter of incorporation following a request

A very early photograph from around 1860 showing a ship being loaded with culm (a form of local coal) at East-the-Water, Bideford.



by Sir Richard Grenville, then Lord of the Manor. It was Grenville who in 1585 sent out colonists from Bideford to establish the first permanent European settlements in North America, thus allowing the town to claim it founded the USA as we know it today. Three years later, Grenville sailed from Bideford with five ships to join the fleet harrying the Spanish Armada, so clearly the port was becoming more important.

Expansion into the Newfoundland fish trade developed in the 17th century – with 28 Bideford ships sailing there to fish in 1699. The wealth generated from fish and cloth led to the building of the impressive and still surviving merchants' houses in Bridgeland Street which was begun by the town's Bridge Trust in 1692. At the same time, the Trust took the opportunity to extend the Quay to what we see today.

At this time, Bideford's trade was flourishing with regular voyages to North America and Europe, with new exports of pottery to Ireland and importation of tobacco with, for example, at least 8½ million pounds of tobacco being landed in the town over the years 1722-31. In the 18th century, lime began to be brought to Bideford for burning in kilns, the resultant material being spread on the heavy soils of North Devon to 'sweeten' them.



The Quayside of Bideford around 1900, lined with wooden sailing vessels.

Unfortunately the succession of European wars in the 18th century and the loss of the American colonies in 1783 hit Bideford hard and most of its shipping shifted to coastal trading, apart from continuing timber imports from North America. At the same time, shipbuilding developed as a major industry. Ships had always been repaired in Bideford but during the Napoleonic Wars, for example, 15 warships were built for the Royal Navy in local yards. In 1824, Lord Rolle, a local grandee, began constructing a canal linking Bideford to the inland market town of Torrington which boosted agricultural exports. Also during the 19th century, Bideford acted as a major emigration port for people sailing to North America with up to 400 people at a time being carried across the Atlantic.

In 1855, the railway reached Bideford and this, and the spread of lines across the country, impacted very badly on coastal shipping and Bideford's port went into a steep decline – so much so that in 1882 the legal status of 'Port' was removed from the town and it became a 'Creek' under Barnstaple. The title was won back in 1928 following the actions of a local man William Reardon Smith who became a major shipping magnate and deliberately registered all his ships in Bideford to artificially swell the tonnage of shipping based in the town!

Co-incidentally, with the arrival of the railway, Bideford also gained a starring part in Charles Kingsley's novel *Westward Ho!*. Published in 1855 and set in 16th century Bideford, this became a Victorian publishing sensation and then, as now, people wanted to visit the locations recorded in the book. This set off a tourist boom that



The Westward Ho! steamer that used to visit Bideford bringing tourists.



The barquentine Winifred, built at Bideford in 1879, for Liverpool owners. It is seen at East-the-Water shipyard, Bideford.



Loading a clay vessel alongside Bideford Quay May 1991.

became important economically and which Bideford, with its glorious Quay, Bridge and wide tidal river, still greatly relies on today.

If shipping movements went down in the 19th century, shipbuilding did continue to thrive, however, with various large yards in the town turning out a variety of naval and civilian vessels, especially during the Second World War when the town became the headquarters of Combined Operations. Today all of these yards have gone but Bideford still sees the regular arrival of large ships involved in the North Devon clay trade. In addition, a variety of vessels including fishing boats and pleasure craft come and go – and now *Freshspring* has joined them. Another ‘must see’ in the ever changing and historic port of Bideford.

An old sailing vessel photographed at Bideford in the early 1950s.



Bideford quay



ABOVE: *Iron Duke* was a steamer which ran between Bristol and Bideford. She called at various ports down the channel. *Devonia* of Bideford is on the outside. The *Foden* steam lorry is almost certainly one belonging to Devon Trading. *Iron Duke* brought building materials such as tiles from Bridgwater for use in the area. Devon Trading was a builders merchants and coal merchants. This picture is interesting because it shows how small steamers were so important in supporting coastal communities.

RIGHT: *The Society* was represented in Bideford during the Christmas lights event. The Chairman and Secretary dressed for the occasion with John's miniature traction engine. John said, "We made £80 in rides and we had a manned gazebo. This is the way forward and we need to thank Anne and local volunteers for making it a success."



Bideford, Lundy, ships and MS *Oldenburg*



MS Oldenburg on her first trip to Lundy. Note the original electric crane.

John Puddy

In 1979, my partner Wendy and I moved to Bideford, the main influence being a lovely boat called *Diana*. She was a very attractive turn of the century motor yacht of 70 feet and was in quite original condition and provided comfortable weekend accommodation. We did, however, do quite a bit of work on her, purchased a replacement engine and ventured on some trips. I very much liked Bideford and decided that this was the place to be.

During the course of my works on *Diana*, I met a notorious local character called Tommy Ryan who lived on an old sand barge at East The Water. He was a very helpful fellow and at some point must have been a very accomplished shipwright. He helped me considerably on *Diana*, which I ultimately sold to Terry Jones of Monty Python fame. Terry took her to London and I have not heard of her since. During a discussion with Tommy at 'The Ship on Launch' pub, I mentioned that I was looking for a house. His response was, I have just the one for you and it is cheap. He took me to view the house which was in Eastbourne Terrace, Westward Ho! Its condition was appalling. Clearly one room had been used as an aviary and the rest of the building was dirty and unused. There was an excellent view of Lundy through the gaping holes in the roof and some attempt was made to stem the flow of water through the house by strategically placed buckets, which, of course, were overflowing.

I boldly asked Tommy how much he wanted for the house and he said "Give me £500 in cash and it is yours. We don't need to bother about solicitors". Ultimately we

bought the house but not for £500 and with the help of solicitors.

Wendy, and I went to work on Lundy during March 1981, me as Island Engineer, and Wendy as Secretary. It was an interesting and very challenging post and one which I enjoyed for over a year, during which time we erected the first stand alone wind turbine in England. In 1982, the Island Agent left and the Landmark Trust advertised for his replacement. I applied and was turned down, the official reason being "Island



John's Motor Yacht Diana.

Agents do not last". I persevered and eventually got the job which I kept until 1995. I still carried on with engineering work as well.

Lundy has always been a difficult place to get to from the mainland and throughout the years, a mail service has been provided by ships operated by various people. Reliability came in 1879 when a Captain Dark purchased the Pilot Cutter *Gannet*. A regular service was started and in



John delivering stores the Lundy way with Wendy walking alongside.



Devonia offloading stores at Lundy.

1888, the *Gannet* was contracted to carry mail from Instow to Lundy. She continued to ply this trade until 1911 after which the mail contract was relinquished as uneconomic. The *Gannet*, however, operated a spasmodic service to Lundy until 1923.



MV Lerina.

Lundy was also serviced by *Devonia*, a small steam coaster, which ran between Bristol channel ports and Bideford or Barnstaple. On her regular passages she would move cattle supplies and sometimes passengers.

Another vessel which called from time to time was *Iron Duke*, a Bristol steamer which plied the Channel.

Gannet was replaced by the *Lerina*, an ex-Lowestoft drifter which was modified to carry up to 40 passengers. She entered service in 1921 and broke down on her first trip. *Lerina* continued until 1951 when she was sold for £1.00. Her remains lay on the banks of the Torridge until 1958 when she was burnt.



Lundy Gannet departing Lundy.



Lundy Gannet offloading stores at Lundy.

The Campbell White Funnel Fleet made many excursions to Lundy. Trips from Wales were always popular on Sundays as pubs did not open on that day and the Marisco Tavern had the reputation of always being open. A picture of one of the *Queens* at Lundy is featured. Fuel costs and the increase in package holidays forced P&A Campbell to discontinue paddle steamers and instead they operated secondhand motor ships. These included *Westward Ho!*, *St Trillo* and *Balmoral*. In 1978, the ailing *Balmoral* was joined by *Devonia* but matters got worse and the company ceased operations in 1978. The *Balmoral*, under a new flag, struggled on for the 1980 season somewhat subsidised by Lundy, but this also failed to be economic.

The next vessel to regularly service Lundy was the second *Lundy Gannet*. She was a 28 ton North Sea trawler, originally named *Pride of Bridlington*, and came into service in 1956, operating from Bideford until 1970 when she was transferred to Ilfracombe to avoid the Bideford bar.

To move stores and luggage ashore there was a Yorkshire Coble. She was bought by the Harman family and was an amazing sea boat. Another islander and I used her for potting around the island and we were rarely stopped by weather. We could launch her in the wildest surf with my simple trailer with docking legs. She is still on the island but sadly neglected. At the time we supplied all the shellfish for the Lundy Tavern.

The *Lundy Gannet* had severe cargo limitations and in 1971, the *Adgleg* renamed *Polar Bear* and an ex-Greenland Denmark trading vessel built in 1960, was purchased.

Both vessels operated in tandem until 1974. Ultimately, the *Lundy Gannet* was sold as her services were no longer required.

The *Polar Bear*, with her three cylinder Burmeister & Wain two stroke diesel engine continued in service, primarily delivering materials for the restorations of island properties. She could, however, only carry 12 passengers, which limited the opportunity for promoting tourism on the island. She did, in 1982, sail to France to collect lime for a Landmark Trust project on the Channel Islands. Lundy was promised a cargo of equipment and materials on the ship's return voyage. It was unfortunate that on her return to Bideford, we were charged with importing materials illegally. This was ultimately resolved and *Polar Bear* resumed her regular service.

Her only other major incident was a collision with a coaster in 1983 in thick fog. Although *Polar Bear* was proceeding slowly and sounding her whistle, the other ship ploughed into her bows at full speed, effectively knocking her on to her side. Fortunately, she recovered and continued her trip.

As the damage was above the waterline, she was permitted to stay in service until she could be docked at Philips yard in Dartmouth. In 1983, I berthed the ship at Bideford for a trial period; this was successful and Lundy has been serviced from there since.

To move cargo from the *Polar Bear*, a local engineer built the *Shearn*. She was designed on the back of a fag packet, but was capable of miracles in transport. For most of the time I was the regular skipper and she was virtually unsinkable. She cleverly hauled herself out of the water on her six wheels using a wire winch. We had fixing points for the wire and she would literally pull herself sideways out of the surf.



Cardiff or Bristol Queen and Lundy Gannet at Lundy. The launch Cambria spent the season at Lundy.



Cardiff or Bristol Queen landing at Lundy.

For the 1981 season, a service was operated by the Paddle Steamer Preservation Society, with the *Waverley* and more regularly, the *Prince Ivanhoe* calling. It was envisaged that *Ivanhoe* would be permanently based in the Bristol Channel and would operate a regular seasonal passenger service to Lundy. However, on 3rd August 1981 she struck a wreck off the Gower coast and was a total loss.

Between 1981 and 1985, a helicopter service was operated to the island from Hartland Point, but this was both expensive and restrictive. What was really required was a vessel which could carry both cargo and the large numbers of passengers for

the day trip trade. Initially plans were drawn up for the conversion of the *Polar Bear* but this was not economic as the conversion was costly and the ship was very slow with some passages taking up to five hours.

In 1983, for the first time, the island also had its own island based boat, the *Islander*. I bought her new for £48,000 to provide a fast service to Clovelly. She was a 32ft,



Landing stores in the Coble.



Polar Bear.

18 knot dory and was immensely successful both for bringing people to Lundy, for diving trips, fishing trips and for round the island cruises. *Islander* was kept on a cradle on the island so was safe in the wildest storms.

I had been Lundy Agent for almost four years in 1985 and I decided that Lundy really needed its own passenger ship, and one which could provide economic stability for the island.

After considerable lobbying, the Landmark Trustees agreed to let me raise funds and look for a suitable ship.

I carried out considerable research and decided that the ship should come from Norway, Sweden, Germany or France, as the passenger ship regulations were, in theory, similar to UK. I also applied for European funding to finance the purchase. It was interesting that, as a result of my application, I was invited to the EEC office in London to discuss my application. The officer gestured towards a pile of applications and said mine was one of the worst he had seen. Nonetheless, a grant of £250,000 was offered. So much for perfect applications!

My next task was to contact all shipbrokers who might be able to help. I did this by contacting all brokers in the London directory. A few responded and some details arrived of an amazing array of ships. I whittled this down to about ten of the most promising and Humital Shipping, who were very eager to help, came up with some interesting ships. I showed the particulars to the Trustees and they were content to leave the decision to me. Our Chairman's actual words to me were "I am not running a bally shipping line". This meant I could, so I made a shortlist of vessels and set about arranging to view them.

They were located in Norway, Sweden and Germany. A Trustee, Barty Smith, agreed to accompany me and we started with a ship in Norway. It is remarkable how dissimilar ships can be from the description offered. This proved to be the case as the first ship, the *Hinna*, looked as if she had been involved in marine banger racing – she was dented all over. We moved on to Sweden, there viewing a 'Houseboat'. Ultimately after seeing six ships, we moved to Germany where we viewed *The Dyroy*; she was a powerful and handsome ship, which operated in the Tromso area so was designed for cold and unfavourable conditions. The downside of this was she had little deck space



The Polar Bear after the collision in fog,

as all passengers were housed inside. Although badly gutted by a previous owner, she had possibilities. She did have two engines which were connected to one propeller so restricting manoeuvrability. Then at Wilhelmshaven, we met an agent who said he had just the ship for us. He cleverly steered us into a waterside restaurant for breakfast and, as we feasted, the *MS Oldenburg* slipped past the window. She looked very fine in all white livery and we immediately arranged to view her. She was built in 1958 as a Friesian Island cargo/passenger ferry operated by the German railway company Deutz Bundesbahn. She was very strongly built to withstand winter ice and was 43 metres long and 288 tons, able to carry an amazing 370 passengers.

Her current role was very different. Due to a loophole in EEC regulations, it was possible to sell duty free butter and other products just offshore and was one of a fleet of so called "Butter Cruisers" operating around the coast of Germany. We embarked on one of these cruises and at last we were on a working ship. The only departure from originality was that the aft saloon had been converted into a supermarket. She was a perfect ship with much emphasis on summer trade. The decision had to be made – which ship to pursue, the *Oldenburg* or *Dyroy*. The decision was relatively simple and in a most professional way, we tossed a coin to decide. Needless to say it fell in favour of *Oldenburg*.

Negotiations started and I arranged for a Department of Transport surveyor to view the ship. He was impressed and said she had possibilities. However, we would have to convince the DOT principal surveyor that she was suitable for operation under the British Flag. This proved to be extremely difficult as it appeared that the principal surveyor held the view that the only safe ship was one which did not go to sea. I am sure this added to the decline of our once flourishing merchant navy. At this point it appeared that the *Oldenburg* would not be suitable as her construction only allowed for one compartment to flood and remain stable. The requirement imposed on us was for two compartments to flood. My friendly DOT surveyor Roy Longbottom swung heavily to my side and became determined that *Oldenburg* could be put under the British flag. He researched construction records and found "The Cargo Clause" which stated that any ship which was constructed to carry cargo as well as passengers could not be expected to comply with the two compartment rule for flooding stability otherwise the hold space would be too restrictive. Armed with this information, Mr Longbottom and I returned to the principal surveyor and fought our corner. He reluctantly had to agree that *Oldenburg* did comply with The Cargo Clause requirement and might be converted to our flag.

I slipped the ship at Wilhelmshaven. and my friendly DOT surveyor agreed to conduct a basic survey. This proved positive with only minor structural repairs required for UK operation. As a result of this, a deal was struck with Mrs Warrings, the owner of the ship, and the real work started to prepare *Oldenburg* for her longest ever sea trip. With work well under way at the shipyard, I returned to England to put a crew together to bring her back to Bideford. With two *Polar Bear* crew, two members of island staff, a Master from an agency and a retired Engineer who had spent most of his life in steam and me as second engineer, we were ready to roll.



Waverley landing at Lundy with the launch, Wendy alongside. (John is on the jetty.)

Our Chairman, John Smith, decided that while the ship was in dock we should change her colours from white and as she was considered to be the "Royal Yacht" for Lundy, she was to be painted German Schwartzblau, which means Black Blue and white superstructure similar to the Queen's yacht *Britannia*. She would also sport a buff funnel.

These colours have not been changed since. There was some debate about her name and discussions were had around a more appropriate Lundy name. However, MS *Oldenburg* was retained to maintain a link with her past. She also departed Wilhelmshaven with a Bideford registration as a cargo ship and thus flew the British flag.

Oldenburg was in dock for around two weeks and during this time we were able to familiarise ourselves with her internal structure, most importantly, the bilge pumping arrangements and her machinery. It was very fortunate that she had been fitted with full bridge controls and instrumentation as this meant that the engine room could be



The Shearn landing passengers from the Polar Bear.



The Islander passing the Clovelly lifeboat.

unmanned. This would ultimately prove beneficial with crewing in the UK. However, she does sport a full telegraph system for use in an emergency.

The ship was soon ready for sea and a final inspection was carried out by a Germanischer Lloyd class surveyor and DOT surveyor and she was launched. Trials were carried out in the estuary and we put to sea. When

we took over the ship, she was found to have an abundance of German sausages or Knockwurst on board along with a Knockwurst boiler. This was our main sustenance until the ship reached Poole. To this day, I never want to eat another Knockwurst.

Within a very short time, we hit heavy weather and the ship rolled unmercifully, both for us and herself as the rolling stirred up sediment in the fuel tanks and blocked the fuel filters within minutes. We had a supply of filters but it was certainly not enough to complete the trip. We therefore contacted our German Agent who agreed to purchase a case of filters and deliver them to Emden on the river Ems. We enjoyed a pleasant trip up the river and found our agent waiting with a huge box of filters. In order not to pay harbour dues, the Captain nosed the ship into the quay and the box was hurled aboard. With renewed confidence we set sail again. The weather was not good but the ship proved she could make good way in very poor conditions. Throughout, we were plagued by filter problems and when we anchored off the beaches of Dunkirk to avoid a rough night at sea, we decided to enter a British Port to clean out the tanks. Indeed, we had little choice and entered Poole on our last filter.

It was good to be in a familiar place and, having cleared customs, we set about our work. The tanks were opened and found to contain a foot of sludge. It necessitated all of us to take turns at getting inside and digging out the evil smelling substance.

Within a day of our arrival, the ship was swarmed by menacing looking customs officials brandishing demolition tools. I was informed that we were suspected of bringing illegal drugs into the country. There was nothing we could do and they set about taking the ship apart. I managed to persuade them not to rip down the original panelling and thus no serious damage was caused. After two days they left having, of course, found nothing. Ironically, our youngest crew member had hidden a bottle of spirits under a seat and this was never found. It was used to celebrate our new found freedom. With tanks clean, we prepared to sail for Bideford, but luck was not on our side and we were visited by a local DOT surveyor who pronounced that the ship was

not seaworthy. This was in direct contradiction to the DOT surveyor who cleared the ship as seaworthy in Germany.

It was necessary to comply with some extremely petty requirements and notices before we were allowed to leave after several days. At this point, we found the captain was missing. He eventually turned up by taxi and announced that he was having a three piece suite delivered shortly. Again we waited and eventually a van arrived with the furniture. At this point, he ordered all lines to be thrown off. It was a strange way to depart but we obliged. He went full astern up through Poole Harbour and as the ship approached Poole Bridge, he went full ahead; clearly something was wrong and after ramming a navigation buoy in the channel, the First Mate took over and the Master was pronounced drunk. This was particularly sad as he was a favourite candidate for the position of full time Master.

It was 3rd December and we were sailing for Lundy. The remaining trip was uneventful and again the ship performed exceptionally well, losing little speed in the heavy weather encountered after Lands End. On the morning of 6th December, *Oldenburg* anchored at Lundy for the first time. A party was organised by island staff and they swarmed aboard their new ship, pronouncing her to be fine.

The next day she arrived in Bideford, her new home port. The band played and many dignitaries came aboard to inspect the *Oldenburg*, the first ship to carry a Bideford registration for many years.

Although *Oldenburg* was cleared by Germanischer Lloyd, her classification Society, to sail as a cargo ship she had no passenger certificate and there was a great deal to be done to put her into service. I approached many shipyards to get the work done but all considered the vagaries of the DOT requirements to be too daunting. After careful consideration, I decided that we should do the work ourselves. After all, Bideford and Appledore had a considerable shipbuilding history. *Oldenburg* was laid up at East The Water for a while and I started to put a team together. It was remarkable that within a short while people emerged out of the local woodwork and especially local engineer John Pavitt, who gave me the confidence to proceed. John also became very instrumental in future works on the ship. The ship was returned to Bideford Quay and work commenced.

Much was to be done, including extensive rewiring, new generators, engine room fire insulation, sprinkler systems, considerable navigational equipment, rebuilding the aft saloon, new floors, a galley, shop, life rafts, anti-flood devices, bilge/fire pumps and many other more minor works. It was a tight schedule as the ship was to be in service by the following Easter. There were also battles to fight such as a requirement to have comings around her McGregor cargo hatch and to close the access to the aft saloon to prevent flooding. Fortunately both of these serious issues were overcome. The hatch by consultation with the makers and extensive hose testing and the aft saloon access was fitted with a lift up flap in the deck to prevent water flowing through.

The team was magnificent and work proceeded on many fronts at once. It was as if the ship was being completely taken apart but slowly she started to come together. A

great deal of innovation was employed throughout the works as the aim was to keep her looking original. In order to provide fire protection, the lobby planking was taken up and a fireproof material laid on the steel deck, then each plank was sawn down to reduce the thickness and re-laid; the result was no change in appearance. Interestingly, I believed the engine room was already insulated against the spread of fire and decided to prove this by removing a small piece of the insulation and trying to burn it in an ash tray. The material burst into flames immediately, much to the delight of Roy Longbottom our surveyor, who had already said it should be changed. Every task was approached with similar consideration to detail. As a result of the works, the weight and stability of the ship had changed and this necessitated an inclining test to measure her ability to recover from a roll. Fortunately she passed this easily and those who have been on her in rough weather will testify to her ability to recover from a roll.

The whole project was complete by the end of April and *Oldenburg* was awarded a class III certificate for 267 passengers and a class 2a certificate for 167 people. Interestingly the class III was arrived at by counting the number of standard bottom spaces on the seats. She made her first sailing to Lundy on 10th May 1986 with 69 passengers. One of my proudest moments was to be presented with a passenger certificate for 267 people; it was a huge credit to the team who worked so hard to make the project a success.

When she was built, she was entirely DC electricity and her two generators would only provide this power. During the refit, two AC generators were fitted in place of the aging DC sets and, because of the electric crane and winches, the DC generators were refurbished and fitted piggyback on to the new sets. The crane lasted for a season and



A rare occasion when *Oldenburg* and *Waverley* arrived together.

because of its age and doubtful reliability I changed it for a hydraulic crane which was excellent and is still in use today.

The MS *Oldenburg* transformed life on Lundy as she opened the way to a regular day trip market which was essential to the island economy. She was able to carry cargo and essentially livestock. Even our tractors and JCB were carried. Her fuel tanks were large enough to stock the island with fuel and for the first time in history, Lundy was in charge of an efficient transport vessel.

The *Oldenburg* is capable of other revenue earning activities and once replaced the *Scillonian* after she was damaged by a rope around her propeller, on the service from Penzance to St Mary's. She runs many trips on the Torridge and Taw for social events and coastal cruises. She is the last passenger ship to sail from Barnstaple and Fremington and has operated excursions to Watchet, Minehead, Portishead, Bristol and Gloucester. In addition, with support from Swansea Council, *Oldenburg* operated a weekly service between Ilfracombe and Swansea which although relatively successful, this put a considerable strain on her single crew and it was not economic to double up.

To service the *Oldenburg* at Lundy a launch named *Wendy* was fitted out by Hinks of Appledore to carry 30 people to and from the shore and a special frame was constructed to allow the Lundy barge to come alongside for cargo. All landings on Lundy were via a mobile landing stage and often made in doubtful weather conditions.



Dawnlight is a Scottish coaster (Puffer) which I bought in Hull, alongside Bideford Quay.

On the shore side, Torridge District Council provided a shore ticket office and arrangements were made with North Devon District Council for summer berthing at Ilfracombe. The ship still sails from both ports.

During the winter of 1986/7, *Oldenburg* was docked at Richmond dock in Appledore. The dock had not been used for many years and considerable work had to be done to open the gates to allow her in. During this time, the dock was closed but all buildings and machinery existed. Also fortunately many of the old hands who worked at the yard were still around, one of whom was Eddie Cawsey, who brought to life remarkable machines belonging to a distant shipbuilding past. We coaxed the old gantry crane into life and this was also a vital tool. During this docking, it was found that there was a considerable amount of very difficult work to be done to replace steel in the bottom of the ship and her tanks. A meeting was held to decide what to do. It was muted that the work was too much for us and the ship should go to a working dry-dock with resident engineers. To settle this dispute, I got a pickaxe and put it through a weak bottom plate. I said "The ship will not float now so we must do the work ourselves" and we did, with the magnificent help of John Pavitt, to a better standard than any other yard, in the process bringing life to many old local craftsmen to whom I will always be grateful.

The *Polar Bear* was sold in 1997 for further use in the West Indies, where she still operates. A project which was looming was to construct a jetty at Lundy and in 1998 I purchased a small Scottish coaster called *Dawnlight*. She was a delightful little ship with wooden bridge and a Kelvin engine. The autopilot was a broomstick, which jammed against the wheel. It was incredibly successful and the ship could stay on passage for half an hour or so without attention. Again, she was ultimately sold, when our jetty plans were delayed and still operates in the West Indies.

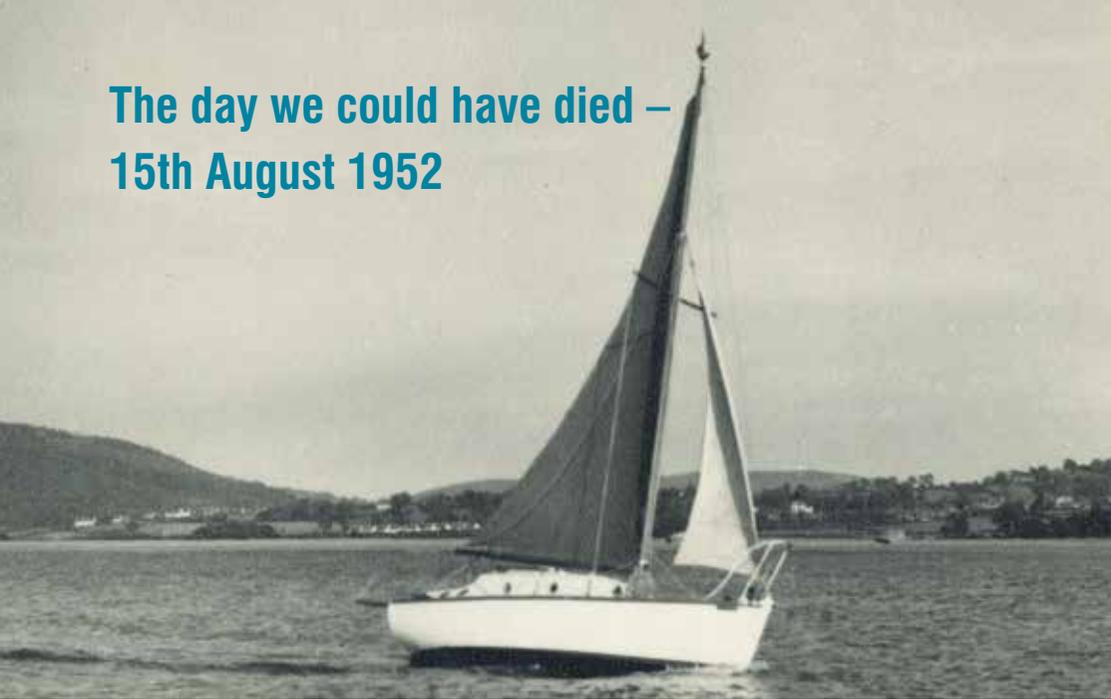
MS *Oldenburg* has proved to be a huge success and has transformed the fortunes of Lundy. Indeed, the island had constantly been a drain on The Landmark Trust and my challenge was to make it pay, or at least, break even. Within one year of owning the ship, Lundy returned a surplus of £40,000. This secured its future with The Landmark Trust who had considered returning the island to the National Trust if it continued to lose money. As the years went by, the surplus increased, allowing further investment in the island.

Today, MS *Oldenburg* is the oldest serving coastal passenger ferry in Europe and although the lovely MWM engines have been removed, she still looks very much the same as she always did.

I am delighted to think that we can now progress SS *Freshspring* in a very similar way to MS *Oldenburg* alongside Bideford Quay, and I know some of the old team are still keen to engage again. The outcome will be that *Freshspring* will be a local ship as much as MS *Oldenburg* is. She will also provide much pleasure to many people in the future.

• I would like to thank the Appledore Maritime Museum for the use of some of the pictures in this article.

The day we could have died – 15th August 1952



David Gannicliff

Undine in Porlock Bay in 1952.

Undine's log 10.30, Wind SSW 3-4, Gusting Rain, Anchored 4 fathoms off Lynmouth Harbour Entrance.

Our Holiday started on Tuesday 12th August 1952.

I had acquired *Undine*, a 3.5 ton Sloop, not fast but a good sea boat. With a large draft of 3ft 6ins, this was not suitable for the Bristol Channel with drying out harbours! We over came this problem with a pair of legs but it meant I had to pick where we could stay afloat or lie alongside a harbour wall.

Our first Port of call was Porlock Weir. This small harbour has a pool at the entrance to the inner harbour where you could lie afloat at low water, and two good pubs –unless it was full with yachts from Wales!

Arthur Lee, the harbourmaster, would open the bridge at high water and you could go in side and lie alongside the inner wall, which is what we did. Once secure, it was down to the 'Anchor Inn' for a good meal.

The next two days went by very quickly and our next port of call was to be Lynmouth, so on the Thursday evening tide we moved back out to the 'Pool' ready for an early start at 05.30 before the 'Gut' dried out. 'The Gut' was the passage from the harbour past the pebble beach out into Lynmouth Bay.

15th August started very overcast with light rain and the wind from the SW. This meant the wind was offshore so we decided to "go for it" as Lynmouth was only 12 miles down the coast. So just after 10.30, we were off Lynmouth harbour at low water.

We went to anchor and the sea was slight but with quite a swell. I remember saying to Betty we will have to wait for about three hours before we can get in.

The wind veered to the NW and freshened. We started to bounce and snub at the anchor. Poor Betty, sitting on the engine case at the entrance to the saloon, said "I am feeling sick; how much longer do we have to wait?".

The rain was becoming very heavy and the wind was gusting. Then Betty said, "lets go back to the Weir". I remember replying, "Yes, we will have water into the 'Gut' by the time get there", and it was at this point that fate saved our lives.

I set the "head sail" only, then hauled up the anchor, and we were off downwind and tide. I had to set a course to well clear of the Foreland Point as there are heavy overfalls which would swamp a small boat like ours.

We arrived back at the "Weir" at 14.30 and there was just sufficient water in the "Gut" for us to go straight in. I remember seeing Arthur Lee on the quay and him saying "I thought you'd be back". Go alongside my boat and we will sort you out when this b****y rain stops. Of course, it did not stop.

We could not get ashore. We opened some tinned food to make a meal and made the best of it. We were very damp. It had not stopped raining since we had



Looking into the inner harbour at Porlock, 1952.



Preston Lee in his launch, August 1952.



Undine's cabin.

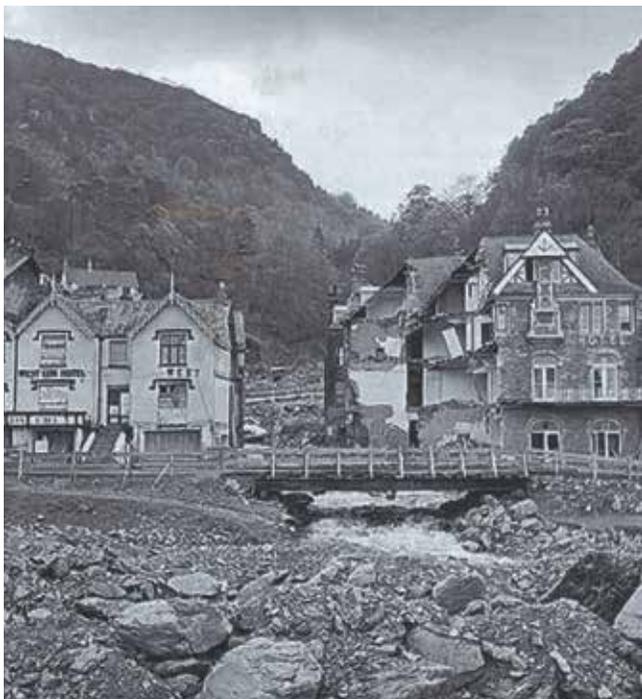
left Porlock Weir in the morning, and it was very heavy now in the late afternoon.

At 1800, we listened to the BBC news on our radio, and it was said that Devon and Cornwall were experiencing heavy rainfall with possible flooding locally.

At 1825, our bilge alarm went off. *Undine* had an open cockpit and any water that came into the cockpit drained down into the bilge. I had pumped the bilges when we



"The Gut" at Porlock.



The Lyn Valley Hotel at Lynmouth after the 1952 floods.

arrived at the weir, so we were sinking or there was heck of a lot of rain coming down; it was, of course, the latter!

Dawn broke just after 5am and the rain had stopped. I decided to make a cup of tea when we heard cars coming down to the weir; it was the police! Within a few minutes Arthur and Preston Lee were on the quay wall. Arthur called to me: "David, you need to move. We have to go out right away. There has been a terrible flood at Lynmouth and all the bridges are down."

The Lee brothers had two open launches some 30 feet in length, which they used for Herring fishing in the winter and 'Round the Bay' trips in summer, so they were ideal for getting help to Lynmouth and collect those poor souls swept out to sea.

Had we waited and gone in to the harbour, you would not have read this story.

My time aboard the *Aldington Court*

Dave Bonner

I was sent, with other crew members, from Liverpool Street Station to Harwich, on to Hook of Holland, then train to Bremen. I signed on on the *Aldington Court* as an EDH (Efficient Deck Hand) in January 1958. We proceeded through the Channel into the Atlantic awaiting "further orders". This was common practice for tramp ships, which were rarely on set routes but were in the hands of agents who chartered ships for cargoes from port to port (hence the name "tramp").



We experienced engine failure in mid-Atlantic during 'Hurricane Hazel', an unforgettably alarming situation; going beam-on to gigantic seas can lead to disastrous consequences! Now heading for Port Everglades for bunkers, we broke down again off the Bahamas and were drifting. We called for assistance but missed a tug in the darkness since the engine was restarted, and we continued towards Port Everglades. At about 4am, still in darkness, the ship struck an underwater reef. She spent three days on the reef before being winched off by the ocean-going tug *Cable*. Eventually we were towed to Jacksonville, Florida, and spent two months in dry dock having the bottom rebuilt. Unhappily, the shipyard was used to welding methods (common practice in the USA) and couldn't adapt too readily to riveting, at which point a Lloyds inspector flew out and condemned the work which had to be restarted!

On completion of the repairs, we headed for Galveston and loaded maize meal, thence to Gibraltar, through the Suez Canal and on to Karachi in Pakistan for unloading. Oddly, expecting to be trading in the Far East for another year or so, we were routed back to Europe via Cape Town and eventually paid off in Hamburg and sent home by much the same journey by train/ferry as seven and a half months earlier. We only carried one paying cargo in all that time. (It occurred to me more recently that perhaps Court Line was negotiating the sale of this vessel, hence the return to Europe.)

- *The diesel engined Aldington Court was launched in October 1943 as the Empire Lord. In 1946, she was acquired by the United British Steam Ship Co. Ltd, who became Court Line a year later. She was sold to Cosmar Shipping Corp. and renamed Anacreon in 1959. After some more owners, she was abandoned in June 1970 after beaching near Cape Garraway.*

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