

# THE SHIPBUILDER'S APPRENTICE



One man's memories, 1935-42, of  
Yarwood's Shipyard, Northwich

*by* **KEN EVANS**

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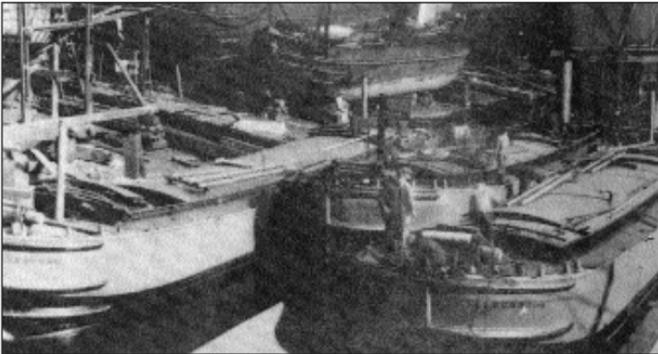
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# FOREWORD

**THE** history of the firm, W.J. Yarwood & Sons Ltd (1896-1966), Shipbuilders of Navigation Road, Northwich, has been well researched and chronicled by others, including Clive Guthrie in his 1996 publication, produced by the Northwich & District Heritage Society, and Antony J. Barratt, in "Cheshire Shipyards". I was an apprentice at the yard and now, in my 82nd year, I've jotted down a few memories, in no particular order, to add some names, anecdotes and a touch of colour and humour to those historical facts which can be found elsewhere. My particular thanks are due to members of the Pickford family who have allowed me to reproduce some of their excellent photographs.

**KEN EVANS**



*W.J. Yarwood' & Sons' yard, formerly John Thompson's founded in 1848, was purchased by W.J. Yarwood in 1896 and remained in the family until closure in 1966.*

# CHAPTER ONE



*As it was... Hayhurst Bridge and the Weaver Navigation yard.*

**O**THERS in the Northwich area may be better qualified to write about W.J. Yarwood & Sons than I am. I had a fairly short stay there (15.4.1935 - 8.6.1942), when compared to many men who spent all their working lives at the firm. Sometimes, whole families were employees - the Seniors, Dudleys, Palmers and Drinkwaters just to mention a few. This showed a lot of loyalty to the firm and I think it is fair to say that in later years, the majority who worked there, looked back at their stay with pride.

The pittance we were paid was, in some way, compensated by our training, and the general saying was that "Yarwood's trained men were as good as you could get, anywhere".

I remember riding my bicycle on the bumpy 'sets' down Witton Street on my way to work. My first day was as a skinny 14-year-old lad in a one-piece boilersuit and still wearing a schoolboy's cap. I was walking past one of the big machines in the fitting shop when the operator of the machine, a massive chap by the name of Tom Hankey, grabbed the cap off my head and threw it into the working machine. The cap landed on the cutting tool, which as it revolved cut the cap in two. Tom H. expressed the opinion that it was the end of my schooldays and I was now a man!

I was soon caught out by a very old Yarwood's joke, which I heard played out many times afterwards on fresh starters. When a heavy engine crank was being lifted out, instead of being told to get two sets of blocks off the riggers, I was told to get a sky hook. Each person that you asked passed you on to someone else, until the bad joke sunk in, that the sky hook was non-existent!

We used to get in a really dirty state, crawling about the boilers, the engine rooms, the bilges and winches etc.. My blue overalls would get caked in oil. George, my brother, started at the yard just before I left and although in the machine shop, his were nearly as bad.

My father, William G. Evans (b. 29.12.1888), who worked at the ICI works at Lostock, wore bib and brace overalls, but he never seemed to get them as dirty as ours. My mother, Mary, used to boil the overalls in a coal fired boiler in the back kitchen of our house at 25 James Street. She dolly-pegged them in a tub,

then scrubbed them on a table until my father's were nearly white, but George's and mine were never to reach that standard due to the ingrained oil.

Clocking on at Yarwood's was done before 7.30am, after 12 noon, before 1pm, after 5pm during the week, Monday to Friday, and 7.30am to 12 noon on a Saturday (47 hour week).

When I first started work, there was no canteen of any sort, not even a place to make a hot drink or warm up any food taken for our dinners. We called it dinnertime in those days, now people call it lunchtime.

Water was normally boiled on the riveters' fires or on the stoves in the fitting shop. We fitter apprentices who stopped for our dinners, would eat our sandwiches and have our cans of tea around one of the stoves in the fitting shop and would be joined by one or two of the older men. When meals had been eaten, we had to clock on again for the afternoon.

One of our group used to leave us, clock on, come back and without stopping would bend down, snatch his bag off the wooden block floor, very often knocking someone's partly emptied can of tea over. The lads eventually got fed up with this and when he went to clock on, they put a couple of nails through his bag, fastening it to the floor. When he came back, he snatched the bag as usual, but the bag didn't move and he fell back, banging his head on the stove. He didn't knock any cans over again.

Just before I left in 1942, an old brick paint store was cleared out, a water heater was installed and an oven fitted. A lady was hired to warm up pies or soup and have hot water ready for brewing up. It took the Second World War to modernise the amenities!

I remember well the yard toilets. They were in a low building

attached to the dock hole side of the fitting shop. The toilet had two end walls and a wall at the front with no door to it. It had a roof, but the front wall didn't carry on up the roof. It was about 5ft high and if the wind was driving in from the river and raining, it wasn't a place to waste any time in!

The low wall was handy also for Albert Yarwood or the yard foremen to pop their heads above the wall to see who was in there. Smoking was not allowed in the works, but passing the toilets, sometimes smoke could be seen pouring over the wall.

The toilets themselves were very primitive. Some people avoiding going there if they could help it – they were so disgusting. There were six in a row facing the low wall, two long planks of wood with oval holes cut into them and a vertical section of wood separating each oval hole. By leaning forward, all six occupants of the toilet could see each other and have a conversation.

Under the wooden seating was a long trough and the flushing system was from a large tank situated above the heads of the occupants at the far end of the toilets from the entrance. The tank was large and took ages to fill up after flushing. When full, it would automatically flush with a great roar and standing outside you would see heads raised over the low wall. The toilet seating was so low that if you didn't raise yourself up you could end up with more than you bargained for as the contents flowed below the seats.

Modern toilets do not seem to have the same togetherness or excitement. Things do change so! Once, someone got pieces of



*Albert  
Yarwood.*

cotton waste and soaked them in paraffin, then lit them and floated them down the trough!

Friday night was pay night. Everybody formed a line starting at the clock No 1 and we filed past a little office window. Fred Pickford, the cashier, would hand the envelope through the small window. When I started, I think my number was in the 280s, so I had to wait for nearly 300 people to be paid out before it was my turn to receive my envelope. When I first started it had the princely sum of 4s-10d inside it. Whether it was pouring with rain, snowing, frosty or foggy, you stood in the open until No 1 on the clock came to receive his pay. If I remember correctly, No 1 was Ned Rose, probably the oldest man on the workforce.

I remember standing at the work's entrance at dinner times watching other people going back and to, up Navigation Road. A certain girl used to ride by on a sit up and beg bicycle. The old sawyer sucking away on an old short stemmed pipe used to say: "That's young Hough's sister. She'll give somebody a dog's life some day!" I married her and we're still together after more than 50 years.



*This plaque can still be seen on the building in Navigation Road, formerly Yarwood's offices.*

## CHAPTER TWO

**L**OOKING back, I remember working outside in winter in snow, frost and rain and fog - which we used to get a lot of in those days - working on ships' winches on the fore end of a Levers or ICI boat. If we were lucky, the crew of the boat might lend us an old tarpaulin to fasten round the winch, chiefly to protect us from the wind. No protective clothing was issued to the workers. The engine room and boiler was just as cold, but it did have the advantage of being under cover. On the steel footplates in the engine room we were usually able to get a drum with holes knocked in it to light a fire with boiler coal and bits of coke from the riveters' fire.

The river in those days, although used constantly, would freeze up and the Weaver Navigation mud hoppers, the Whale, Shark and Grampus, would have steel plates secured at the bow (front end) and would break the ice up by going astern then ahead until a passage had been made.

Nowadays, I never notice the river being frozen, which makes me wonder if the large amount of salt stacked at Winsford seeps into the river when it rains and turns back to brine.

The summer time was totally different. It was a pleasure to work out on the craft. Sometimes, rowing boats or flat bottom scows were left lying alongside the craft, for painting the ship's side etc.. If an oar had been left in them at dinnertime, we would

rush our dinners and have half an hour's sculling - providing no-one in authority saw us!

One of my first jobs in 1935 was with fitter Sam Cope, an ex-MN man, assisting him in putting the engine in a small ferry boat, the Lunevale.

The ships built at Yarwood's were sent all over the world and consisted of coastal vessels, steam and diesel, survey tenders for the harbour boards, tugs, steam and diesel, tankers and oil fuel lighters for the Admiralty, lighters of all types, grab hopper dredgers, steam and diesel, inland waterway craft, steam and diesel, motor canal barges and canal barges for Fellows, Morton and Clayton, Grand Union Canal Carrying Company and Grand Canal Carrying Company amongst others, refuelling launches for the Air Ministry, shallow draft barges and sternwheel steamers for the African rivers and ferry boats. Some boats were built at Yarwood's, then stripped and sent abroad in sections and fitted



*The Lunevale, the first boat I worked on, in 1935.*

together again like a giant jigsaw.

The works occupied a site of about eight acres on the banks of the River Weaver and the firm had its own joiners' shop, carpenters' shop, engineering and welding shops, a modern foundry equipped for the manufacture of iron castings for shipbuilding, marine and chemical engineering and a slipway for lifting a ship out of the water for repairs.

All the steam engines, Compound and Triple Expansion, for the ships, were erected in the fitting shop and when completed were rolled down to the ships on big rollers and lifted into the ships which had already been launched and were lying in the river, by a large crane. The boilers were bought outside the firm, as were the diesel engines, for the most part from Widdops and Gardeners.

Auxiliary machinery for the vessels, like steam winches and steam steering engines, hand windlasses and hand steering gears were all assembled at the firm. When ready for launching, the ships were launched into the River Weaver sideways on and very successfully, too. I remember watching the launching of the larg-



*A sternwheeler, built for the West African coast.*

er craft, tugs and coasters sideways into the river. I don't think we were invited to watch, but we always managed to do so, even if it meant hiding behind convenient girders or plates. They did have one berth, however, where ships were launched into the dock hole the normal way, end on. The British Waterways tug, "France Hayhurst", was launched on that, but got stuck half-way down and had to be jacked the remainder of the way into the water.

Captain France Hayhurst's daughter Renee, from Bostock Hall, was invited to launch the tug named after her father, for Weaver Navigation (later British Waterways). At the ceremony, the vessel only moved a few feet, then stuck fast. It entered the water long after the guests had departed! During the morning of the launch, I was told, C.M. Marsh of the Weaver Navigation sent a large bottle of champagne – they said it was from the cellars of Navigation Offices – to be used for the launching ceremony. Cyril White was sent to Bratt & Evans to collect some red/white/blue ribbon. This was then plaited ready to fasten around the bottle. During this process, Albert Yarwood said leave it for the time being and went to Fernacre where he collected two large empty bottles and brought them to the office. Instructions were given to fasten the ribbons to one of the empty bottles (now filled with water). What then happened to make Albert change his mind is unclear, but he did have a change of mind and decided after all to use the original bottle.

This vessel was built under cover and end on at the extreme end of the dock hole and was one of the few vessels to be launched end on while I was at Yarwood's. From what I remember being told, the tug was reputed to have been built to the Weaver Navigation specifications and on its trials could not do

the work of the old steam tug Pioneer which it was replacing. Some 30 tons of concrete were spread in her hull to give her a deeper draft (to lower her in the water) to give her propeller more grip. She was also the first ship I remember at Yarwood's which had windows installed instead of portholes and I heard it mentioned Albert Yarwood said the yard would never build another vessel for Weaver Navigation. It was rumoured that the launching bottle of 'champers' was emptied before the launch ceremony and it was replaced with water.

Who knows? Perhaps that explained the reluctance of the vessel to enter the water. Gerald Platt set the Crossley Engine in the tug and I assisted him as an apprentice. I worked with Gerald for more than three years. I remember him kneeling on the steel footplates of a ship's engine room, working on the engine crank bearings. He had a good, if not strong, tenor voice. He was a local choir member and used to appear as a soloist at various functions. He sang in chapels and also at the old Northwich Pavilion Theatre, where performances of Gilbert and Sullivan were given at some periods of the year. My father, who was a bass singer, also took part in these performances, again both as choir member and soloist. Gerald was also a very good marine fitter and I learned a lot from him, but I did enjoy those musical performances in the engine room with only two or three of us listening!



## CHAPTER THREE

**T**HE yard, on the banks of the River Weaver at Northwich, was owned by Albert Yarwood. In 1935, he had three brothers still alive, Enoch, Douglas and Sidney.

At this time, his mother was also still living in a house on Castle, overlooking Northwich, near the Methodist Church. Tom Podmore, who also worked at the shipyard as a driller in the fitting shop, was part-time chauffeur to her. He wore a brown uniform with a peaked hat and leather leggings. The car he drove was a black Daimler and each year, before the summer season, the engine was checked and decarbonised by one of the senior fitters and an apprentice. I went twice with Gerald Platt.

The three brothers had been bought out of the firm; the last one to leave was Douglas, in 1936. Enoch had been on the woodworking side (carpentry and joinery), Sidney the boiler-making and plating shop (when the Second World War started he did return for a time in an advisory capacity) and Albert himself was an engineering draughtsman (marine).

Beside the shipbuilding, Yarwood's had a large foundry and supplied castings (machined) to a number of firms. One of the main outside companies they dealt with during my seven years there was the big Courtaulds firm in Manchester. Every week Yarwood's own lorry would deliver these large castings to Manchester (Retorts).

Outside engineering work was also undertaken by Yarwood's at: Thompson Salt Works, Wincham - repairs to pumps etc..

Duttons Tannery at Leftwich - small boiler inspection and steam engine used to drive machinery.

Northwich Gas Works - repairs to pumps and cast iron pipework. In 1935, Northwich Gas Works had a system of extracting petrol from coal. The petrol could be seen running through a glass tube into a tank.

When working on these outside jobs, no transport was provided for the workers. You either walked with your toolbag over your shoulder, or fastened it to your bike if you were lucky enough to have one.

When I was experienced enough to be sent out on my own, Thompson Salt was my favourite place. We normally had about a week a year there and at the end of the week, Mr Thompson himself, a tall slim man, would call us into his little office and thank us for a job well done and give us two halfcrowns for ourselves. These two halfcrowns represented nearly another week's wages to us. Bound apprentice's wages at Yarwood's for a 47 hour week were:

1st year: 5 shillings (25p today!);	4th year: 8 shillings;
2nd year: 6 shillings;	5th year: 9 shillings;
3rd year: 7 shillings;	6th year: 10 shillings;
	7th year: 12 shillings.

In the first two years of a bound apprenticeship, 2 pennies were stopped out of the weekly pay for some sort of insurance, and in the third year, when you reached the age of 16, 1 shilling

1 penny was stopped for National Insurance. Amalgamated Engineering Union fees also had to be paid at the rate of six-pence a fortnight up to the age of 21 when you became a full member. Pre-Second World War, Yarwood's offered apprentices coming out of their time a further 12 months employment at what was called "improver's pay", which was half a tradesman's wage. A tradesman's wage at that time was about £3 a week. At the end of that 12 months, they were normally sacked. However, when the Second World War started and labour was not only in short supply, but shipyard workers were also in a reserved occupation, this practice for the most part stopped.

I remember Yarwood's fitting shop well, with its long bench down one wall. Underneath the bench were drawers for our tools. The fitting shop was large and high. Over the long bench on one side of the shop was a crane, high up near the roof. This crane was worked manually both for lifting machinery and traversing along the length of the shop or across the shop. Long chains stretched down from the carriage the crane was carried on and you pulled at the chains to lift, lower or traverse.

On this side of the fitting shop, there was one stove for heating situated about six feet from the bench. One winter's day, our foreman, Tommy Barrow, came in the shop after being down to the river to one of the craft up for repair. He made for the stove to get warm, standing in his brown smock with his back to the stove. The pipe from the stove to take the smoke and fumes away went from the top of the stove about six feet high, across to the wall over the bench and up the wall to the roof. Ken White, an apprentice the same age as myself, was using the crane (for the most part we did our own labouring), transferring a shaft from the bench to the floor further along the shop. The

hook of the crane got under the support holding the stove pipe. Ken was talking to a younger apprentice and didn't notice what was happening. The stove pipe was lifted from the stove and a section slipped out and caught Tommy Barrow on the side of the head. He was not pleased!

On the other side of the fitting shop, the steam compound and triple expansion engines were erected. Alongside where these engines were built, was the foreman's office, which was on stilts and had windows all round so that all the work places were under constant observation. Spares were kept on the other side of the office and a compound and a triple expansion engine, which I suppose had been built on speck, stood. Before I left, both these engines had been put in boats. On this side of the fitting shop, the crane was electrified.

The machine shop was in the same building - on the Northwich side - with the tinkers shop. In another bay, behind the wall where the long bench was, castings which had been on the big planing machine were loaded onto lorries when completed, mostly for the Manchester firm of Courtaulds. In this bay was a diesel engine which had been designed and built at Yarwood's. It stood about six feet high and had two cylinders. Why Yarwood's never developed it, I never knew.

When completed, the large compound and triple expansion engines were taken from the end of the fitting shop to the river on rollers. This was quite a job. They were then lifted by a heavy lift crane into the engine rooms of the ships, which would be already launched and lying in the river.

I remember walking from a boat in the river to the main stores, we had to pass through the plating shop where all the ship's plates were cut to size, rivet holes pressed out and the

plates rolled to the shape of the ship. At the far end of the shop, on the roadway from the river, there was a big drilling machine, which was operated by little Alf Leather. As I passed, I noticed that the machine was running and the drill was turning and hanging from the drill was a glove. Alf himself was not in sight. Just around the corner from the drilling machine was the main entrance to the stores and as I entered through the door, Alf was standing by the counter. Alf said he was waiting for Alf Turton who was the head storekeeper and ambulanceman, to attend to a cut on his hand.

We stood talking until Alf Turton appeared. Then little Alf held his right hand up, which until then he had been holding in his left hand. We could then see that his thumb was missing! Alf had got hold of the chuck on the drilling machine while it was still running. He was wearing gloves to protect his hands from the cold and the steel turnings from the plates he was drilling. The glove had caught in the drill and as the drill revolved, it had torn off his thumb and his thumb was still in the glove which was still going round on the drilling machine.

It was an early lesson to me to switch off machines before touching them with your hands, especially so if wearing gloves. In later years, Alf was my mate at ICI Wallerscote, so I had a constant reminder of this incident.



## CHAPTER FOUR



*'Davenham' moored alongside the former site of Yarwood's shipyard, in May 1990.*

**S**OME of the employees I remember working with during my seven years at Yarwood's (1935-42) include: Works Secretary: George Sandbach. Time Office: Fred Pickford from Davenham.

Clerk of Works: Norman Rogers, from Hartford.

Head Draughtsman: Albert Deakin.

Draughtsmen: Sid Norman; Jack Lyon from Davenham; Harry Hopwood, from Davenham; Dudley Galliard, from Crewe, Charles Cooke (later known as Taylor Cooke) Junior

draughtsman: George Fletcher, from Paradise Street, Northwich.

Office boys: Eric Birtwisle from Castle; and Frank Lightfoot (Acton Bridge).

Accounts section: Frank Salt, from Hartford; Eric Birtwisle, Castle; Lawrence Buckley (nephew of George Sandbach), Marston, was in charge.

Commercial section: Ken Anderson and Harry Riding who after the war worked in the Labour Office at ICI Wallerscote. When Ken went into the Forces, Harry took his place and Harold Nicholas joined.

Office messenger: Cyril White who was in the Time Office with Fred Pickford.

Fitter Machine Shop Foreman: Harry Dudley, from Navigation Road. Harry was married to the lady who played the piano in the silent picture days at the Castle and later Central Picture Houses. Apparently, Harry was also in awe of Albert Yarwood. As a 14-year-old, Harry Bowers used to fetch Dudley's mint imperials from the shop on Navigation Road. He had a special place where he used to go for a crafty smoke and when he finished, he would suck his toffees so that Albert wouldn't smell his breath!

Head Tinsmith: Len Dudley, from Winnington. Len, brother of Harry, but not married, played in goal for a Northwich Vics team for a number of years. He later coached and played centre forward for Yarwood's FC. He used to say that for years, players had kicked him to bits while playing in goal, so he intended having a year or two getting his own back on opposing goalkeepers! In his younger days, he had been offered terms by Everton FC, but turned them down to stay at home to look after his widowed mother. At this time, he was also Northwich Cricket Club's first

team wicket keeper.

Joiner Foreman: Richard Dudley from Lostock. Dick, brother of Harry and Len. I remember he always wore his old black jacket and black and white striped trousers for work. Dick's son, Walford, worked under him as a ship's joiner. After the war, he went to work in the copper mining industry in Rhodesia for 23 years. He returned to Warren Lane, Hartford, and worked for Cheshire County Council. He died at the end of January 1991 at the age of 73.

Fitter Foreman: Tom Barrow, Hartford Road, Davenham.

Foundry Foreman: Fred Demain, Hartford Road, Davenham.

Moulders in Foundry: Albert Hartley, Messrs Davies and Senior, Syd Ward.

Pattern Maker Foreman: Cocky Senior, had nine sons, all of whom had worked at Yarwood's.

Pattern Maker: Harold Senior.

Carpenter Foreman: William Garner, Greenbank.

Boilermaker Foreman: William Gandy, Greenbank. Bill's son, Bert, was serving his time as a Fitter Turner. Just prior to the war, Bert played a few games for Witton Albion FC at full back and carried on playing for Yarwood's and later followed in his father's footsteps by becoming a very good crown green bowler.

Yard Foreman (over general labourers, ship riggers and painters): Harold (Lal) Moore. Lal was assisted by "Old" Bob Drinkwater who had three sons who worked with him - Jack, "Young Bob" and Jim. Jack and Jim played football for Yarwood's and just before the war started, Jim signed on for Witton and played as an inside forward. Shortly after the war started, Jim, who like all Yarwood's, and other shipyard workers, was in a reserved occupation, "fell out" with Albert Yarwood

who threatened him with dismissal, and consequently the Forces, if he didn't do as he was told. Jim said he would go into the Army rather than give in and did. Jim was posted to Scotland and although now in the Army, played football at weekends for the Scottish League club, St Mirren. After the war, he stayed in Scotland and became captain of St Mirren until shortly before retiring from football when he moved down to Torquay and played a couple of seasons with Torquay FC.

In charge of Painters (signwriting, cabins and canal barges): George Davies, Winsford.

Painters: Vic Mellor, Winsford; Mr Dykes, Winsford. The second painter, Dykes, was crippled in both arms and legs, but was probably the best artist. I was told that when they wanted to change their paint brushes, they had to go across to the main office and they were handed a new brush in exchange for an old used one. The brushes were kept in a desk in George Sandbach's office.

In charge of the smithy: Albert Evans, from Boardmans Place, Leftwich Green, cousin to my grandfather Evans; Albert Smith, Winsford, 2nd Blacksmith. There were two strikers for the blacksmiths, one named Bill Spruce who, I'm told, was the brother of Jack Spruce who was in charge of the ICI Winnington Labour Department.

In charge of Electrical Department: William Sutton.

Assistant: Cliff Deakin.

Apprentice: Douglas Tideswell, who after serving his time, moved to ICI Wallerscote and became Power Plant Foreman.

Transport: Yarwood's had one lorry driven by George Eyres who was father of Roland who served his time with me. They lived in Navigation Road. George Eyres' assistant on the lorry

was Ernie Oakes from Winsford.

Storekeeper-come-Ambulanceman: Alf Turton, Greenbank. I was reminded by Harry Bowers that Alf was also responsible for switching off the two time clocks. He did switch them off on the starting time minute which was then 7.30am and dinner time, 1.00pm and they were only switched on again for knocking off dead on 12.00 and 5.00pm. When I first started at the yard, if you didn't manage to clock on before Alf switched them off, we had to get the foreman's permission to start. Depending on his mood, we were liable to be sent back home for the day!

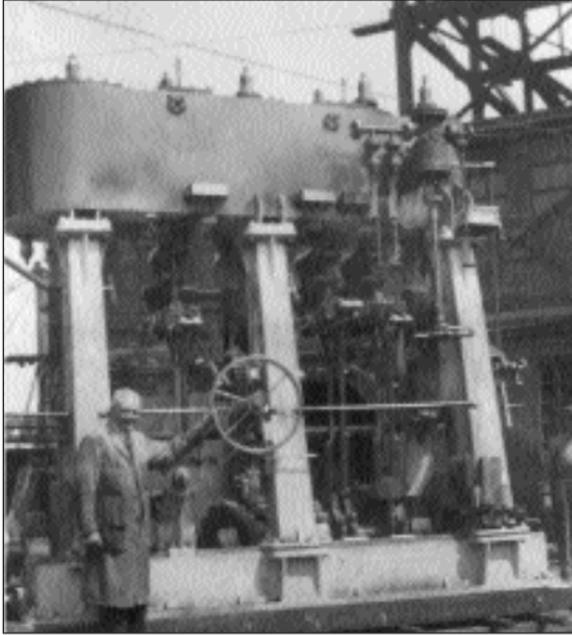
Assistant Storekeepers: Albert Kettle, Rudheath and Albert Bellis.

Fitters: Henry Postles, Winsford, had been in the Merchant Service, he built the majority of new steam engines while I was at the yard; Gerald Platt, Castle, had always worked at

Yarwood's, tenor soloist and choir member; Norman Rogers played piano for him when he sang solo; Wilf Sweatman, Davenham; Sam Cope, Castle, had been in Merchant Service; Jack Taylor, Castle, finished just before the war in 1939; Jack Smith, Castle, uncle to Arthur Evanson, emigrated to Australia just before the war started; Maurice Pratt, Castle, later left Yarwood's



*A steam-drive delivery vehicle  
...before my time!*



*Henry Postles - senior fitter in my time,  
with a steam reciprocating engine.*

to work at Henry Bates Foundry in Station Road, Northwich.

Turners: Lewis Humphreys, Leftwich, brother of my Aunt Annie Griffiths and married to Doris Bates of Bates Foundry family; Jack Dale, Rudheath, also related to the Bates Foundry family on his mother's side; Fred Goodwin, Barnton, joined the Merchant Service at the outbreak of war and was later lost at sea; Jack Rowe, Davenham.

Marker Off: Charlie Owen, Castle.

Planing Machine: Tom Hankey, Navigation Road, played full back for Northwich Vics for many years.

Fitting Shop Machinist: Jack Kennerley, Warrington Road, later Rudheath; George Watkin, Navigation Road.

Fitting Shop Drillers: Bob Walker, Castle; Tom Podmore, Leftwich.

Outside Drillers: Tommy Gara, Leftwich, later emigrated to Canada; Tommy Higgins.

Fitter and Turner Apprentices (1935-42): Philip Higham, Leftwich, left to join Merchant Service just before the war and later had a garage off London Road, Northwich; Allan Yarwood (Dally), Witton Park, distant relative of Albert Yarwood, left to join Merchant Service and was lost at sea; Harry Boden, Navigation Road, later foreman at Avenue Works, Winnington; Bill Faulkner, Brockhurst Hill, later foreman fitter at Nalfloc after spell in Merchant Navy; Roland Elmore, Castle; Harold Deakin, Castle, brother-in-law of well known local bandleader Lal Rogers, left to join Merchant Service and was lost at sea; Charlie Ollier, Lach Dennis, left to join Merchant Service and



*A group of Yarwood's employees, including Len Dudley, Joe Williamson, Gerald Platt, Alf Turton, Joe Parkes.*

later worked at ICI Wade Works, after retiring was hit by a burst grind stone in his garage; died from this accident. Peter Yarwood, Greenbank, nephew of Albert Yarwood, son of Enoch, joined Merchant Service, but was later killed in an air crash; Arthur Evanson, Castle, joined Merchant Service, then Wade Works; Ken Evans (myself), Rudheath, left to join Merchant Service, later worked at ICI Wallerscote; John Hough, Castle, (my brother-in-law), left to join Royal Navy; William Mills, Castle, left to join RAF; Ron Holland, later manager of Green Dragon Hotel, Northwich.

Cliff Roberts, Rudheath, joined RAF; Fernie Wilding, Church Inn, Forest Street, Northwich, later took over the pub from his father and married Smith's daughter from the Roebuck Hotel, later worked at ICI in Construction as Foreman Fitter; Ron Bebbington, Witton Park, had a brother who was leader and conductor of many well known orchestras, Ron played the piano well, but could not read music; Jack Roberts, Navigation Road, joined Merchant Navy, son of Lew Roberts, Boilermaker (and brother of our lifelong friend, Doris Platt); Ernie Blain, Barnton, later worked at Wade Works.

Tom Muskett, Castle, later joined ICI Winnington and became Fitter Foreman; Cliff Hamlett, Winsford, son of the engineer on the "Prince of Denmark" rivercraft belonging to Hamletts Salt Co. of Winsford; Ken White, Castle, father worked at Weaver Navigation Town and Hayhurst Bridges; Roland Eyres, Navigation Road, son of George Eyres, Yarwood's lorry driver; Harry and Herbert Goulding (twins), Northwich, father was the projectionist at the Central Cinema, Northwich; Fred Snelson, Barnton; Fred Rogerson, Leftwich, son of AEU No 1 Branch Secretary; Harry Bowers, Davenham,

joined ICI and was Fitter at Winnington Avenue Works; William Thomas, joined Merchant Navy after the war, but left and became Day Power Plant Foreman at ICI Wallerscote; George Evans, Rudheath (my brother), left to go to Rolls Royce at Crewe, Winsford Salt and Middlewich Salt; Charlie Bailey, Navigation Road (Clock House), later went to live in Scotland; George Pennington, Apprentice Tinsmith, later worked at ICI and had Brass Rods Inn, bottom of Leftwich, then Stanley Arms at Anderton.

Arthur Buckley, Apprentice Tinsmith, nephew of Len Dudley; Alan Jones, Davenham, left Yarwood's for ICI and became Power Plant Foreman at Winnington, then Wallerscote, father a Captain on ICI rivercraft; William Lamb, Leftwich, National Service in Army, then joined ICI first as Shift Fitter, then Day Foreman at Power Plant; Harry Wilson, Lostock, later played piano in dance bands, for a spell full-time; Tommy Hinks, Davenham, joined ICI and also played piano in own dance band; Charlie Whittaker, Davenham; Cyril Sproston, Barnton, father worked on ICI craft; Jack Patterson, Castle, later went contracting; Peter Davies, Castle, joined ICI, became Instrument Foreman at Wallerscote.

Ken O'Brien (Kabe), Winnington, joined ICI and died after falling into a lime mixer at Winnington Works; Arthur Cohen; Ron Higginson, Leftwich, emigrated to Rhodesia; Frank Hunter, Station Road; John Stevens, Rudheath; Cyril White, Winnington; Bert Carter, Rudheath; Bob Darlington, Castle; Ken Potts; Roy Gurney, later had a spell in Merchant Service; Cyril Murray, Spencer Street; Ellis (Tom) Gee, later worked at ICI Wallerscote; Terence Littlemore, Davenham, spell in Merchant Navy, later ICI Wallerscote, foreman, then Shift



Left to right: Len Dudley, Gerald Platt, Fred Demain, Unknown.

Manager; David Weedall, left when out of his time and joined the RAF. Later emigrated to Australia;

Eddy Wellings, Barnton (his sister, Joan, joined the office staff at Yarwood's); Raymond Bowyer, Rudheath. Norman Shannon of Broadway, Barnton, started as an apprentice fitter/turner, left and joined HM Forces in 1936. When I started work at Wallerscote in 1947, we again met, working in the same area. Norman left Wallerscote to work in hospitals as a maintenance engineer and I last heard he was in Chelmsford, Essex.

General Labourers in fitting shop:

Herbert Clarke, Middlewich. Fitters.

Fred Newton. Turners.

Boilermakers, Riveters and Mates and Welders:

Lew Roberts, Navigation Road, father of Jack and Doris; Jack Carter, Leicester Street, known as "Boxer"; Jimmy Tasker; Jack Bennion, Castle, respected Crown Green Bowling

Secretary, Mid Cheshire; Les Dutton, Castle;

Oliver Curzon, Castle, he was a ship's plate corker and very deaf, father-in-law of Frank Hood who was brother of: Tommy Hood, who worked at the yard and lived at Barnton. Tom did most of the cutting of ships' plates; Jack Parks, Rudheath; Tommy Jump, Warrington Road. Rivet Lad. Tommy Royle, Plater's Mate, later Foreman Rigger at ICI Wallerscote; Jack Hitchen, Waterloo Road, Castle, father a Castle publican; Jack Palmer, father of: Jack Palmer and Syd Palmer of Navigation Road who all worked at the yard.

Herbert Hubball, Castle, later worked at Weaver Navigation; Charlie Hayes, Barnton; Bob Penny snr and Arthur Penny; Alf Leather, Whalley Road, Boilermaker's Driller, later worked as Fitter's Mate at Wallerscote, then on shiftwork; Jack Tomlinson, Davenham, later worked at ICI Wallerscote; Cyril Williamson, Rudheath, later worked at ICI Wallerscote; Ned Rose, Castle, played football for Witton in his younger days; Harold Royle, brother of Tom; both worked at the yard. Tom was later foreman rigger at Wallerscote.

Boilermakers: Twitter Gleave, Witton Park; Charlie Dickens, Barnton;

Bill Hunter, Station Road, father of Frank, Bill played football for Witton and Frank played in trials for Witton; Harold Hancock; Horace Capper, Moulton, Boilermaker's Burner; Bill Worden Snr, (also known as Bill Hart) Davenham; Bill Worden Jnr, Davenham.

Carpenters: Sam Bennion, Castle, brother of Jack; Sam Hancock, Lostock; Bert Garner, Wincham; Stan Ashbrook, Castle; Richard Postles, Winsford, brother of Henry; Teddy Pye; Bill Corker, Leftwich; Jack Milne Snr, Castle; Jack Milne Jnr,

Castle; Cyril Yould, later took over Winnington's sweet shop in Station Road, near Methodist Church (now turned into flats).

Joiners: Walford Dudley, Lostock, son of Dick, later emigrated to Rhodesia; Joe Williamson, Navigation Road, son of "Joe de Wet" Joe Williamson; Tommy Hubble, Castle, brother of Herbert, Boilermaker, who also worked at the yard.

Sawyers: Elmer Taylor, Castle, who, apparently, had a fund of risqué jokes; Joe Williamson, Navigation Road, lived in a tin bungalow half way up the hill on Yarwood's property. Known as "Joe de Wet".

General Carpenters' Labourer: Charlie Bostock, when required, boiled the pitch for corking wooden hulls and decks. Also fired small boiler which raised steam to steam the wooden planks enabling them to bend to the shape of a ship; Sid Bull, Barnton.

Plater labourer: Jerry Findley, Lostock.

General labourer: Harold Pye, Sergeant in Home Guard.

The Yarwood's football team as I remember it in the 1930s comprised:

G. Cross (foundry)

J. Kennerley (fitting shop) H. Cross (plating shop)

J. Findley (plating shop) Ken White (fitter) T. Musket (fitter)

E. Birtwistle (office) J. Randles (solicitor) B. Birtwisle (ICI)

J. Rowe (fitter) B. Gandy (fitter)

Len Dudley (manager) A. Turton (trainer)

The team played on Chinker Parkes, Northwich, and trained at Northwich Vics.

The team picture (next page) was submitted to the Northwich Guardian some years ago by Gerald Cross, of Hartford. Gerald

played in goal throughout the years for several teams, became a licensee and finished up at the Blue Barrel. The picture shows a successful team from the 1938/39 season with the Northwich & District Workshops KO Trophy. Proceeds from this tournament used to be given to the Northwich Infirmary. The other trophies, which were kept on display in the office, may have been the Lady Nuttall Cup and the Brocklebank Cup.

This Yarwood's team played in the Cuddington League. Pictured back row, left to right: J. Kennerley (fitting shop); team captain J. Findley (plating shop), K. White (fitter), G. Cross (foundry worker), J. Drinkwater and H. Cross (plating shop workers), A. Turton (stores); front row, left to right: T. Musket (fitter), J. Randles (solicitor), J. Rowe (fitter), E. Birtwistle (office), B. Birtwistle (ICI worker). J. Drinkwater was one of the star players in the team and he later captained Scottish First Division side, St Mirren, for a number of seasons.



## CHAPTER FIVE

**T**HE first Manager to be appointed by Albert Yarwood to be in charge of all outside departments (fitters, boilermakers, joiners, carpenters, foundry workers, painters, labourers, electricians) on the works was a Mr Hudson. I found out he was a typical shipyard pre-war boss, with his bowler hat, black suit and mackintosh. He was small and slim and sported a moustache and soon acquired the nickname "Dollfuss" because of his resemblance to an Austrian Chancellor of the middle 1930s who was assassinated when in office.

When he first arrived, Mr Hudson spent a little time in all departments, acquainting himself with the methods of working and senior staff. The carpenters and yard labourers were responsible for drawing ships out of the dock hole and one morning, when one of the Levers boats was about to be drawn out, Mr Hudson appeared on the scene. They were lowering the four cradles that drew the ships out of the water down the sloping slides into the water. Mr Hudson, who was wearing Wellington boots, followed one of the cradles as it was slowly being lowered into the water.

Bill Garner, the old foreman carpenter who was in charge of the operation, shouted to Dollfuss to go no further down the slipway. Dollfuss ignored the shouts from Bill, took another couple of steps forward and disappeared into the dock hole, bowler hat,

Wellington boots and all!

Old Bill Garner, who looked very much like Moore Marriott the old comedian film star, didn't help matters by doubling up in laughter. A couple of his men dragged Dollfuss out of the water. Without saying a word, he disappeared in the direction of the main office block in Navigation Road - to the warmth of the office, but also, no doubt, the sarcasm of Albert Yarwood.

Mr Hudson left rather suddenly, and a much nicer person, a former sea going engineer, took his place. His name was Mr Rea. He was rather tubby, had a nice smile and was friendly - different to both Mr Hudson and A.Y.. Unfortunately, before I left Yarwood's, he was offered an appointment as Marine Engineer with the Moss Hutchinson steamship company of Liverpool, a job which he took.

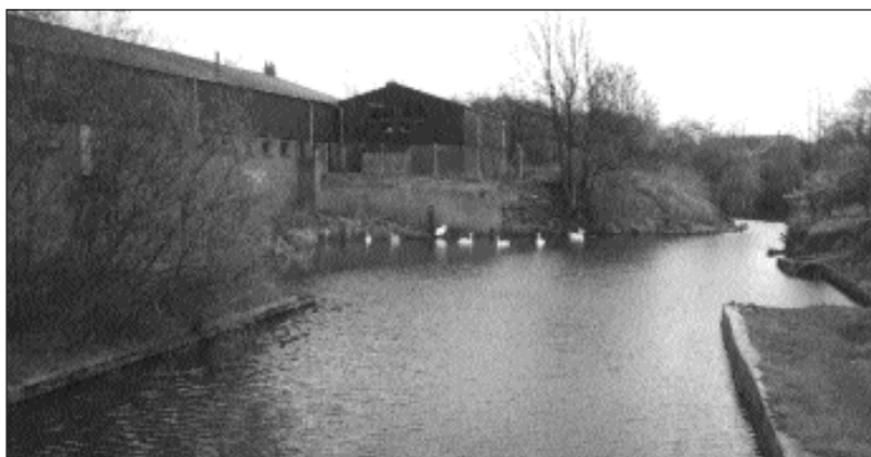
I remember a ship's painter and general labourer by the name of Wilf Lightfoot. He had a son, Frank, who was general office runabout and errand boy at that time. Looking at Wilf Lightfoot, you couldn't help getting the impression that he had been in gentlemen's service as a valet or chauffeur, more than a general labourer. One snowy day in winter, a group of apprentice fitters and boilermaker apprentices were having a snowball fight. One of the snowballs accidentally hit Wilf on the side of his head and his ear fell off! Most of the apprentices disappeared in a flash. To most of us, it was the first time we had realised that Wilf had a false ear. The ear was held in place by clips which fitted into a space where his ear had, or should have, been. Years later, I was talking about the incident with Doug Tideswell when we were working together in the ICI Wallerscote engine room. Doug, who was an apprentice electrician at Yarwood's at the time, said the only time anyone could tell the difference between the two

ears was in very cold weather. The good ear turned purple with the cold, while the false ear stayed the same normal colour!

While talking to Harry Riding - a friend and a Yarwood's junior clerk in 1936, who started at about the same time as me - he reminded me of the fire which took place at Yarwood's in 1940, causing £3,000 of damage.

The joinery and sawmill were destroyed. There were explosions caused by the overheating of compressed gas cylinders and paint stores. Northwich firemen had to fight flames (so it was reported) up to 150 feet in the air. Panes of glass in nearby houses were shattered by the detonations and the noise could be heard as far away as Sandiway, Moulton and Rudheath, causing people to think there was a German air raid. Nearby industries offered accommodation to the firm for work to continue uninterrupted while the premises were renovated.

Harry had a personal interest in this event. Harry said that one of his duties was to order, on a regular basis, supplies of oxygen and acetylene from Rock Ferry, and although he considered him-



*The dock hole as it was in April 1994.*

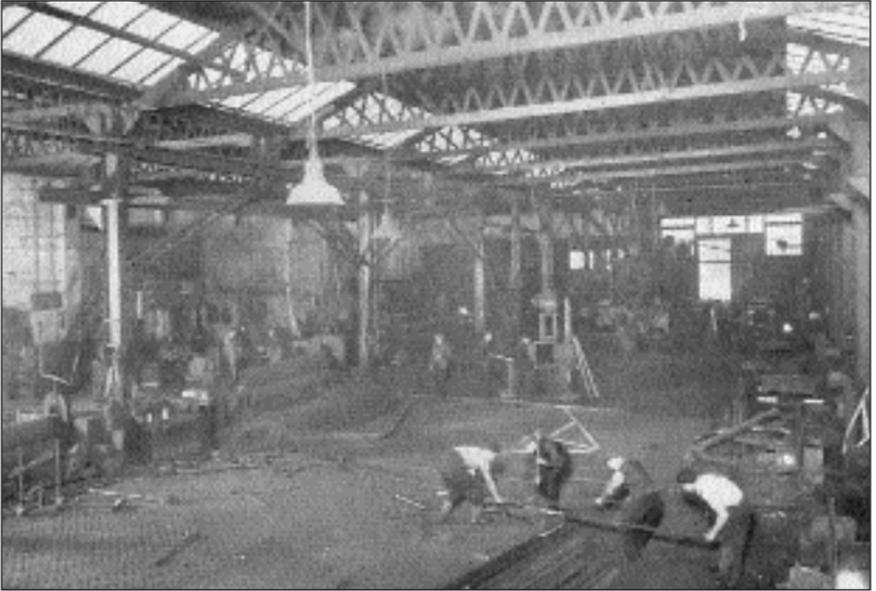
self to be conscientious, he had omitted to order fresh supplies of oxygen and acetylene the week before the fire - a serious offence if existing supplies had run out. However, Harry said that if he had ordered them, and the supplies had been delivered as normal, the results would have been totally disastrous, with possibly a large portion of Navigation Road in ruins and a possible loss of life.

Harry informed the boss about this on the morning of the fire, expecting some sort of plaudit, but instead, he was reprimanded for dereliction of duty! The fact that his 'negligence' had prevented a possible catastrophe was totally ignored. He did add that in this day and age, he would probably have been awarded a token lump sum payment, which would never have been thought of 60 years ago.



*Stern Wheeler passing Town bridge on way to Ship Canal for trials. These vessels would return to the yard so that all deck work and engines could be dismantled and put into packing cases. The hull, with the cases, were then towed to the docks at Liverpool and loaded for transport to West Africa, Brazil etc..*

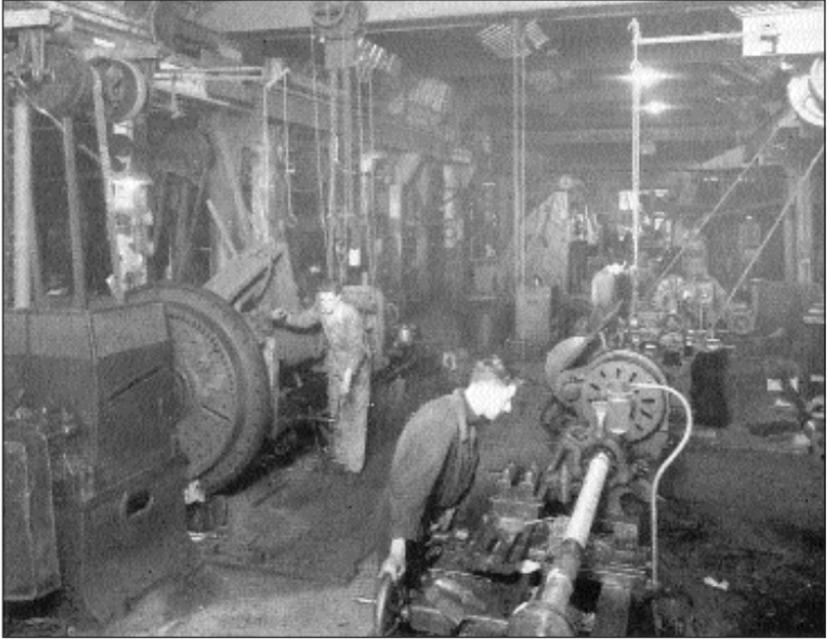
## CHAPTER SIX



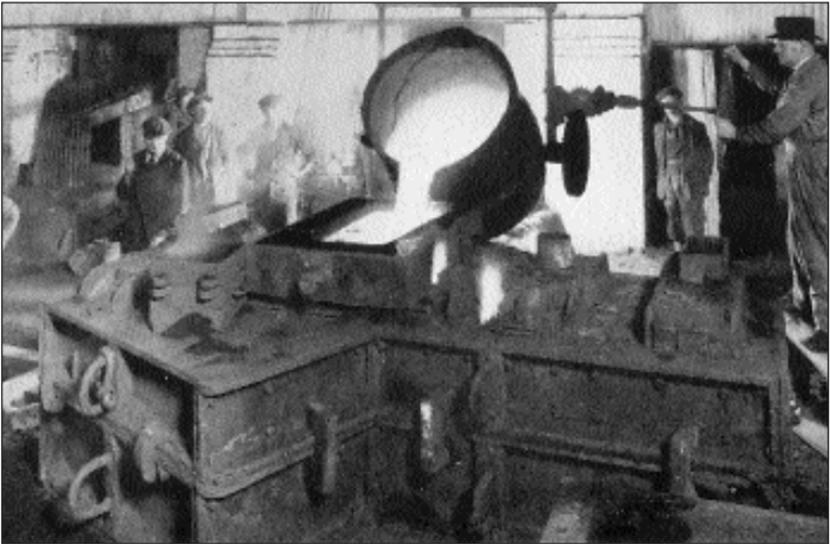
*A section of the plating shop.*

**O**THER books can give you accurate facts and figures, but I can share my "first hand" memories of what life was like at Yarwood's in the firm's heyday...

I remember watching a group of men in the plating shop, shaping a glowing, red hot steel plate with a large wooden mallet with long wooden handles each side, three men holding on to each handle. The red hot plate was gradually moulded to the



*The turners at work.*



*Inside the foundry - Fred Demain (right).*

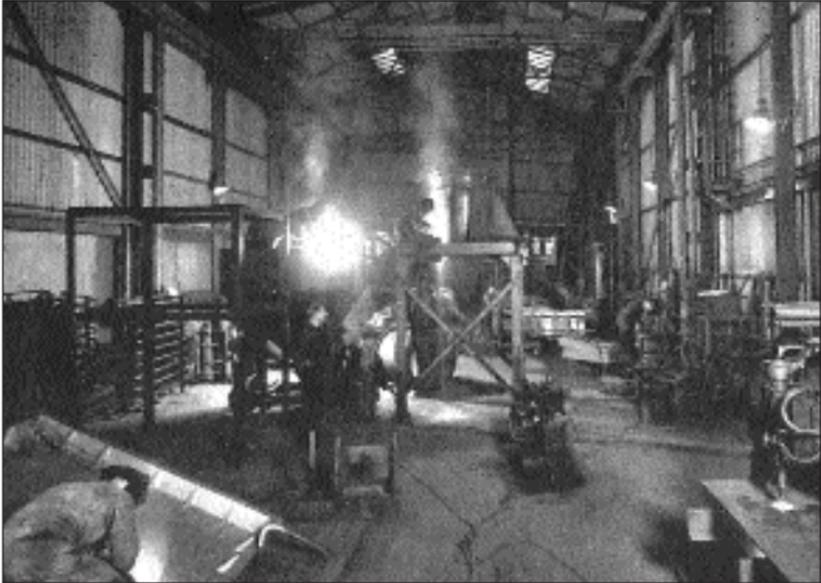
shape of a template. The plates done by this method were either for the stern or bow of ships. The side plates were done by a roller press.

The carpenters moulded the thick steaming planks of wood which had been steam heated in a wooden compartment, the steam coming from a vertical low pressure boiler fired by bits of wood. The planks would be placed along the side of the wooden ships and pulled into place, then wedged until dowelled into place.

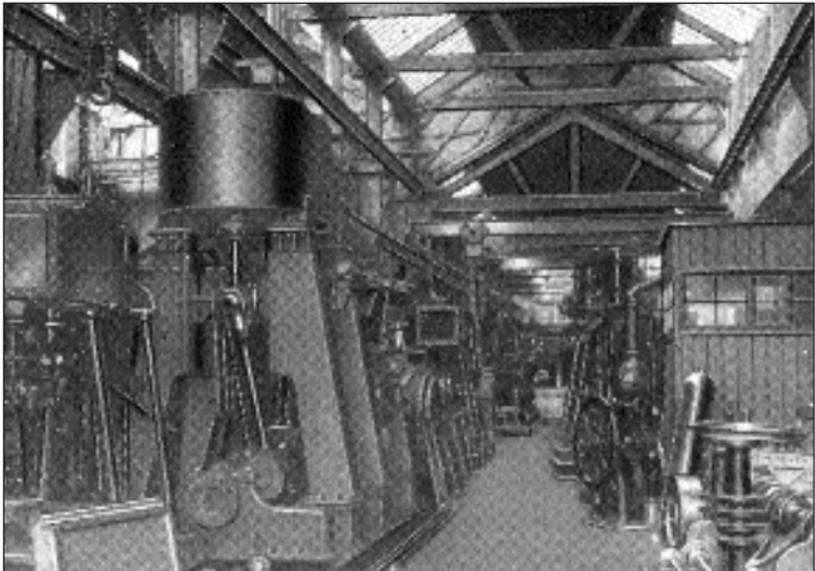
I can picture now the rivet lads with their braziers, with the burning coke nearly white hot, fanned by the works compressed air. When the rivets were white hot, they would pick the rivets up with a pair of tongs and throw them to the holder up. He would pick the rivet up with another pair of tongs, put the rivet into one of the holes fastening the two plates together, drop the tongs and pick up his steel hammer to hold the rivet in position. Then the riveter outside, with a special hammer or pneumatic tool, would spread the rivet out into a mushroom shape, fastening the two plates tight together. The noise this operation made was deafening, and subsequently took its toll on the workers.

When the riveters had completed fastening each section of plate together, the corkers followed up with their pneumatic hammers, sealing the edges of the plates together. Both of the corkers at the yard were stone deaf and when they spoke to us, it was in a very loud voice.

I remember the platers and assistants laying the keel of the ships on large wooden blocks, the stern post, the bow and then the frame work and then the plates. Once the keel and stern post were in position and the engine bed in place, a boring machine was put in position to bore out the stern of the vessel to accom-



*A section of the welding shop.*



*The fitting shop, showing the foreman's office, on the right. It was raised so that the foreman could keep a watchful eye on the workers.*

modate the bushes for the propeller shaft. When I first started at the yard, the boring was done by turning on manually a shaft with a cutting tool. Four round pieces of steel were tapped into the shaft at 90 degrees, approximately 2ft long, and two, usually big, apprentices, accompanied by a fitter, pulled the shaft round until the cutting tool appeared on the inside of the stern post. Before I finished, they did have a motor fitted to turn the shaft, which cut many hours off this really physical job. When finished, the turners would measure the finished aperture and make the bushes a good, tight fit. They would be fitted and pegged to make sure they didn't move.

A thrust bearing was fitted at the rear of the engine bed when the propeller shaft was in place, and the propeller fitted on the shaft. As the platers completed the plates on the hull, the ship's painters would be following up, the fitters would be fitting valves to the ship's side for the intake of cooling water, emergency pumps for fire hoses or washing down and other platers would be assembling tanks in the bilges of the ship for fuel or fresh water, or ballast tanks which could be filled with water to balance the ship.

Some of the deckwork would be in place. The carpenters and riggers would take over and then the ship was launched. Once in the water, the engine would be dropped into the engine room by the heavy lift crane. The tinsmiths would start making the large copper pipes. As the cabins were completed by the plate layers, the painters and joiners and the electricians would follow up. On the deck, which for the most part probably had chequer plating, the painters would be painting the plates. Usually, if the vessel had a forecastle, the carpenters would lay thick wooden strips to the deck, fastened and corked and the same round the accom-

modation. The fitters would be fitting winches, windlass or steam steering gear.

Then the ship would be painted all over before trials took place.

These then were roughly the stages of the building of the tugs or coasters, the people involved being foundry workers for the engine castings, boilermakers or platers, drillers and welders, machinists, fitters, tinsmiths, electricians, joiners, carpenters, painters, sign writers, blacksmiths, labourers, not forgetting the draughtsmen and office staff, all working together to make one ship.

Speaking of ships...

### **Why Is A Ship Called A She?**

*A ship is called a 'she' because there is always a great deal  
of bustle around her;*

*There is usually a gang of men about;*

*She has a waist and stays;*

*It takes a lot of paint to keep her good looking.*

*It is not the initial expense that breaks you;*

*It's the upkeep.*

*She can be all decked out;*

*It takes an experienced man to handle her correctly;*

*And without a man at the helm*

*She is absolutely uncontrollable!*

*She shows her topside;*

*Hides her bottom, and*

*When coming into port*

*Always heads for the buoys!*

## CHAPTER SEVEN



*The Trefoil - I was on board when she had her trials in the Mersey.*

**I** WORKED on a new 'tender' for the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board called the Trefoil. I went down the river with her to the Liverpool landing stage, stayed overnight and did trials in the Mersey the following day. The Trefoil had a triple expansion steam engine installed, and was also fitted out for fire fighting with deck hydrants. She had a large saloon and cabins, all with teak furnishing. This was done for surveys by the directors of the Mersey docks and the management etc.. We lay

alongside the landing stage overnight. After tea, the night we arrived, most of the Yarwood's crowd went into the city, leaving myself (who was the youngest) to check up on what machinery was left running. With me was our fitting shop labourer, Herbert Clark, a former fireman in the Merchant Service who was doing the job temporarily on the Trefoil during the trials.

I turned in about 10pm and remembered nothing until I awakened early next morning and found I was in trouble. Steam had been turned on in the heating system and there was a steam leak in the saloon. All the polished panelling and polished tables were running with condensation.



*A cabin interior.*

George Sandbach and Albert Deakin were the two senior Yarwood's representatives and George laid into me that when they had gone ashore they had trusted me to check that everything was OK before I turned in. I had done that. All the Yarwood's people who had gone down with the vessel were there and to be honest, I don't think any of them believed me until Herbert Clark spoke up to say that I was asleep when the steam was turned on by a young chap from Holmes Chapel. After Herbert spoke up, he admitted turning the steam on. The cabin had to be dried out and French polished again.

A small model of the Trefoil is now in the Albert Dock Museum.

On another outing, I went down to Ellesmere Port (where the Boat Museum is now) with Gerald Platt with a new diesel engine barge called the Ellespont. This entailed going down the Weaver, locking out into the Manchester Ship Canal at Runcorn, then locking back into the canal system at Ellesmere Port. The barge had been built before I started at the yard, was launched, a diesel engine installed and left the yard on February 11, 1937.

I worked on a number of the sternwheelers that were built at Yarwood's, chiefly for the West African Coast rivers. I did go on trials with one in the Ship Canal. The boiler and horizontal compound engine were on the deck, which drove the large paddle wheel at the stern. The paddle was cased in from the engine crank to keep the water thrown up from the paddle away from the engine. There was an upper deck where the wheelhouse was situated at the fore end of the vessel.

I remember watching the first of the sternwheelers in my time at Yarwood's, moving away from the bank to start her trials in the Ship Canal, piloted by an old river captain by the name of

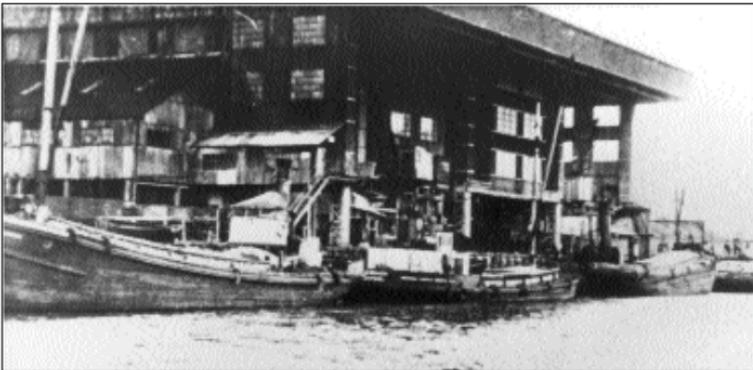
Tom Harrison. Albert Yarwood stood watching on the bank of the river as she moved off. As the engine opened up, the sternwheeler shot across the river to the opposite bank. The stern wheelers were very shallow draft boats, mainly as I have said for the West African rivers. As the bow hit the opposite bank, it tilted the sternwheeler over. A.Y. was furious!

He took his old trilby hat off and threw it to the ground in temper. Old Tom Harrison was fortunate to stay put, high up on the open wheelhouse. Tom had been used to the propeller driven river flats, with the propellers six feet below the water line when the flats were loaded. Even when the engines on these craft were opened full out on the flats seconds elapsed before there was any forward movement. When Tom gave the order to open the steam valve full ahead, he got the response immediately. I don't think it happened with old Tom again.

These sternwheelers were built on the banks of the Weaver and launched sideways into the river. They were carried across to Africa on the Elder Dempster cargo boats as deck cargo. For easy transport, the hulls were riveted as normal, but the centre section had a double bulkhead and was bolted together. All the deck work was fitted together, but instead of being riveted, had sections fastened together with odd bolts. All the deck work plates were painted red and green, port and starboard, and numbered from the fore end to the stern.

After the trial in the Ship Canal, the vessel returned to the yard, all the upper deck work was stripped down and put in cases. The vessel was then towed to Liverpool, where she was split in two to be loaded for her destination in Africa, where they were unloaded and the deckwork reassembled. One was possibly used in the film, "Sanders of the River".

I remember being sent down to the Wallerscote Wharf of ICI to an old Irish coaster which at that time was a regular visitor to the works. It went by the name of Isle of Magee. The old engineer was sweaty and wore a dirty oil rag round his neck and a black beret on the back of his head. There were no electric lights in the engine room, just smelly oil lamps. I can still remember that smell of oil and steam, plus coal dust. We did a small job on her while she was loading, then when she finished loading we had to box up whatever we were doing and she went off down the river.



*Two photographs of the wharf at Wallerscote Works.*

## CHAPTER EIGHT

**O**CCASIONALLY, Yarwood's allowed University students (Engineering) to work at the yard in order to gain practical experience. John Brocklebank of the shipping company family, spent much of a two year practical training course in the fitting shop helping in the building of steam engines. He lived at Nunsmere Hall, Oakmere.

He chiefly worked with Henry Postles who was the main new engine builder. Harold Deakin was an apprentice with Henry over this period and later joined the Brocklebank Line and was lost at sea. Later, John Brocklebank took over the chairmanship at Brocklebanks, when his father, Sir Thomas, died. He was Chairman when Cunard amalgamated with Brocklebanks. He retired early as Sir John.

At Yarwood's, he was a six-footer who had rowed for Cambridge. He always brought a large flask of coffee with him. He had a big, hearty laugh which A. Yarwood frowned on, if he heard it. Another thing which annoyed Albert, was when John came to work in his father's Rolls Royce. He would come with the seats covered in newspapers, himself wearing big, dirty blue overalls.

We started at 7.30am and John would drive the Rolls into the only vacant covered car space on the works - which was Albert's! A.Y. started at 8.30am. He never told John about it as

far as I knew, but it used to put him in a bad temper. John normally drove a small black Ford, which he used to leave outside by the cycle sheds. Most of us felt we were lucky even to own a bicycle at that time!

Another one year course was done by a chap called Roberts of Castle.

Five years was also completed by Mike Wallwork who lived at Holmes Chapel. His father was the owner of an engineering works at Manchester which made reduction gears. Later, I came across many of these gears at ICI Wallerscote, used mainly on Redler drives, Creeper drives, Elevator drives etc.. Mike Wallwork left Yarwood's early in the war to join the RAF. Later, he returned, inspecting petrol refuelling barges for the RAF. By this time, he was a Flight Lieutenant.

Each year, a sailor who must have been a time serving chap in the navy, came down to the yard when he was on leave. He came looking for one of the Yarwood's men, spoiling for a fight. He had always had too much to drink and it usually required two or three men to escort him off the works!

The first boat I worked on at Yarwood's was the "Lunevale", a ferry vessel for the river at Fleetwood. Sam Cope was the fitter and the engines were diesel.

Another boat built for the West coast was the dredger "Seiont" for the Caernarvon Harbour Board. Gerald Platt built and installed the engines, Wilf Sweetman did the tailshaft boring and I assisted Gerald. After the trials, Gerald did go round to Caernarvon with her. The engineer's name was Llewellyn Thomas. I often used to see her in the Menai Straits in later years and Llewellyn Thomas worked in her nearly all its working life into the late 1970s.



*The Aquarius.*

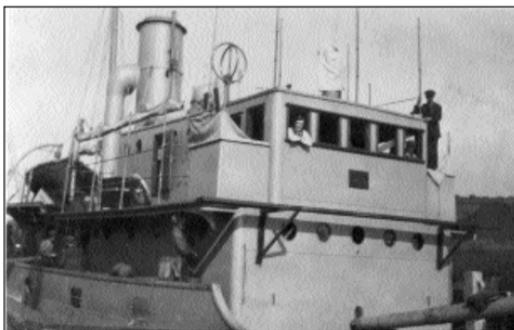
A steel screw coasting steamer built for the Air Ministry before I started at the yard was called the "Aquarius" (113ft l – 22ft 6ins b – 10ft 6ins d). I remember going to see her after she was completed. She was lying in the river behind the old Crown Hotel in High Street, Northwich. She was floodlit and dressed with flags. She was built for the Fleet Air Arm for use in Singapore Harbour. She went to Singapore under her own steam. She had a triple expansion engine; the boiler was built at Cammel Lairds. One of Yarwood's fitters, Bob Clayton, went to Singapore with her. While she was being completed at Yarwood's, the Clerk of Works for the Fleet Air Arm was Lawrence of Arabia, or Aircraftsman Shaw as he was known then. During his stay in Northwich, he lodged at the Crown. Lawrence was born at Tremadoc in North Wales and there is a plaque in a house on the left hand side of the road travelling

towards Porthmadog which states this.

Starting work in 1935, at the age of 14 as a bound apprentice, my first three and a half years was spent chiefly with Gerald Platt, one of the senior fitters. The

only new engines Gerald built in the time I was with him were the two compound engines, one for a tug called the "Redcroft" and a smaller engine for the dredger, the "Seiont".

ICI and Lever's rivercraft came up for repairs, usually while the crews went on holiday. We had spells on them doing repairs to main engines. We also built a number of steam steering



*The bridge of the Aquarius.*



*Lawrence of Arabia, T.E.Lawrence, at Yarwood's in 1934.  
He lodged at the Crown & Anchor for three weeks.*

engines for coasters, also steam winches. These were always erected in the fitting shop, which was adjoining the machine shop. Ship's condensers were also built in the shop.

When I was 18, I was put on my own with a younger apprentice with me. For the most part, I then did the same jobs I had done with Gerald, only of course I was still on apprentice's pay. I did do the occasional narrowboat, installing engines, but usually Jack Smith did them and when he left, Ken White took over. Wilf Sweetman and Charlie Ollier normally did the outside boring on the ships for the propeller shaft bearings. There again, when they were off, we did take over.

I did three Widdop Engined Diesel tugs for the West Coast of Africa for Elder Dempsters. Widdops were so pleased with the job, they offered me employment when I came out of my time, which I never followed up.

When the war started in 1939, I was 18. Being a bound apprentice and working in a shipyard, we were exempt from the call-up, although those who were a year older were at first called up in 1940-41. I volunteered for the Royal Navy at Dover Street, Manchester and was accepted, but then received by post they would not accept me because I was in a reserved occupation.

In 1941, Roland Eyres and myself were given an introduction to a Cunard official who was cousin to one of the ICI river boat captains, Archy Beech. Cunard were collecting a relief crew for the "Queen Mary". At this time, she was ferrying troops from Australia, via the Cape to the Middle East and the crew had been out two years. We both passed the medicals, but reporting the following day to the Ministry of Labour in Northwich (Albert Yarwood's brother, Enoch, was employed there), we were again stopped and told to report back to Yarwood's.



*Three vessels built in my time at Yarwood's: Top: The Trunnion, a single screw steam tug. Centre: The Nevern, a twin screw steam tug. Bottom: The Mormugao, 1938.*

Shortly after this episode, Roland and myself decided we would try to get in the Royal Engineers and went to a recruiting office on Castle. The office was on the right hand side going towards the Iron Bridge, about four doors away from what used to be Clare's grocers. The same thing happened here. When the Recruiting Sgt found we were from Yarwood's, he told us we were wasting his time.

The strange thing was that he would have accepted me for the "Guards". He called me back and put me against a measuring stick on the wall. I was above the required height, but Roland wasn't. By this time, I was nearly out of my time at Yarwood's and it would have meant giving up my trade, so I declined the offer and decided that I wouldn't volunteer again.

Later, I had a call-up medical and Ken White and myself went to Hanley for this, but we were told we would hear no more about it. Then at the end of May 1942, I received a letter from Charlie Ollier who was one of the apprentices who had got away when he came out of his time. He had joined the Merchant Service as an engineer with Ellermans, sailing on a ship called the "City of Glasgow".

The Merchant Service had lost a lot of men by 1942 and one of Ellerman's ships, the "City of Durban" was in dry dock at Newcastle and was short of engineers. Charlie told the Supers at Liverpool, Mr Wilson and Mr Stark, about me and they sent me an application form, along with a note to say if I applied and passed the medical, they would get my release from Yarwood's and I would be on the ship by the end of the week - which did happen.

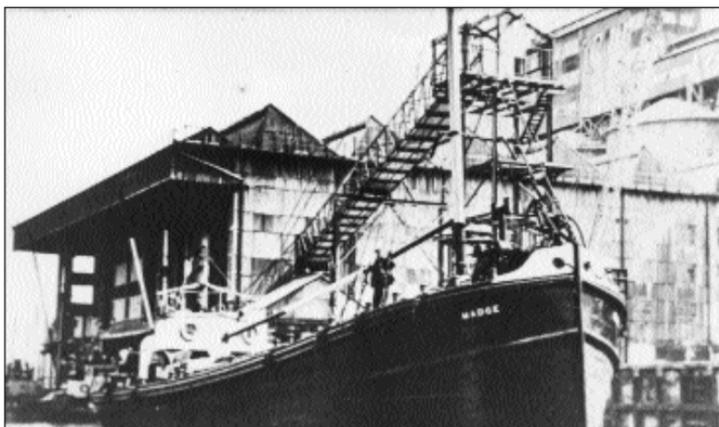
I left with the words of Albert Yarwood ringing in my ears.

He said I must have a terrible home to have caused so much

trouble to get away. This was not true. The truth was that most of the people I knew had already gone into the forces or the Merchant Navy.

My final recollection of Yarwood's is that when I eventually got my release, there was no-one I could say I disliked and I hoped they all felt the same way about me. Demarcation lines between trades were practically non-existent. Everyone would give you a helping hand if required, especially if one wanted heavy objects moved they would always knock off what they were doing to give a pull on a rope etc.. Unfortunately, this may have changed later as the unions may have taken more interest in the firm.

I left Yarwood's at the start of June 1942 to enter the Merchant Service (MN), returning to work in Northwich at the end of January 1947, starting at the ICI Wallerscote Works.



*The Madge, built in 1912 for Brunner Mond and repaired annually at Yarwood's*

## CHAPTER NINE

**S**OME of the boats built at Yarwood's which I noted during my time there, 1935-42 (See also Official Log Book record):

### **Barges:**

1935

2 small bottomed barges for Africa.

1936

New Radiant (Liverpool),  
New Exporter (Liverpool),  
New Conveyor (Liverpool),  
New Samson (Liverpool),  
Parbold (Liverpool).

1937

6 barges to go with Stern Wheel Steamers to Africa (shallow draft and two upper decks).

1938

2 barges to go with twin screw tug to the Sudan, barges having two

upper decks.

1939

2 barges for the Admiralty.

1941

13 small refuelling barges for Fleet Air Arm, Nos from C220.

2 small cargo barges.

2 grain barges named "Setter" and "Retriever".

28 Bomb scows fitted with twin-engined motor car engines 30/35 horse-power, 30ft long.

8 small single screw tanker scows fitted with Widdop diesel engines.

2 single screw barges 40ft long.

2 small tugs for Africa with 30 hp diesel engines.

Canal boats were turned out nearly every week for Cowburn and Cowpers, Bridgewater Canal Carrying Co. and were normally accompanied to Broken Cross, Rudheath, via Anderton Lift and canal, past Lostock Works, by the apprentice or fitter who had

installed the engine (usually one dumb barge and one engined). They usually took a bike on the canal boat along with their tools and then cycled back to the yard from Broken Cross.

### 1935-42

#### Tugs, Coasters, Ferries, Sternwheelers

1935

May 2 - Carbine - steam tug - Malta

Sept 5 - Lunevale - twin screw diesel ferry - Fleetwood

1936

Jan 3 - Nuneaton - diesel tug - India

Feb 13 - Viper - steam tug - South Shields

March 18 - Vulcan - steam tug - Liverpool

June 4 - Redcroft - steam tug - Liverpool

Dec 20 - Balvan - steam tug - India

1937

Jan 15 - Dilawar - Widdop diesel tug - India

Feb 11 - Ellespont - Gardener diesel barge - Ellesmere Port

May 4 - Roxby - steam stern wheeler - West Coast Africa

June 15 - Laceby - steam stern wheeler - West Coast Africa

July - Spilsby - steam stern wheeler - West Coast Africa

Oct 5 - C 405 - steam tug - Ceylon

Nov 4 - Seiont - steam dredger (Priestman grab) - Caernarvon

1938

Twin screw Gardener engined ferry boat for the Sudan - two decks (re-erection job)

June - France Hayhurst - Crossley diesel tug - Northwich

July - Mormugao - Widdop diesel dredger, Priestman electric grab - India

August 26 - Trunnion - steam tug, triple expansion.

Oct 28 - Tampion - steam tug, triple expansion.

Ashby - steam stern wheeler - Africa.

Digby - steam stern wheeler - Africa.

1939

Atta - steam paddle - Africa.

May - Suma - steam paddle - Africa.

April - Trefoil MDHB - steam tender triple ex - Liverpool

Arawai - Widdop 6 cyl. 360hp - Georgetown

Demerarra.

Ediba - Widdop tug. 1940	coaster triple ex -RN.
Jan - Balista - Widdop diesel engine - Plymouth.	Aug - Lobal (Levers) - steam compound tanker - Liverpool.
Obus - Widdop diesel.	Dec - Denham Mersey Docks & Harbour Board - steam triple expansion tug - Liverpool.
May - Sparkler - steam triple expansion tug - London.	
June - C 129 - diesel tug - Deptford.	1942
Nov - C 85 - steam coaster triple expansion RN.	Air 3A - Widdop diesel coaster - Fleet Air Arm.
1941	Air 2A - Widdop diesel coaster, bridge on forecastle.
June - Empire Bridge - steam	609 - small naval tanker.

"Empire Bridge" was a Royal Navy supply vessel. Before arriving at the Mersey Bar after leaving Yarwood's, all of the white metal melted out of the bottom ends of the steam engine and she was brought back to Yarwood's to be repaired. (Steam reciprocation engines had to be oil fed by oil can by hand.)

While visiting Cornwall after the war, we went to the Last Inn in England at Lands End and the proprietor of the inn was on the Empire Bridge when this happened. He came from Widnes and his father had worked on the Salt Union rivercraft. After leaving the Navy, he himself had a spell on some of the Mersey rivercraft before moving into the licensed trade.

### **Pimblott's**

In 1941/42, Pimblott's built three coasters, engined by Widdop Diesel at Yarwood's. They were called the Empire Kyle, Empire Grove and Empire Lily. Pimblott's also built some of the small steam driven cargo boats that worked in the Scottish lochs, called "Puffers". We saw one in Inverary in 1993. The puffer at that time

was called "Auld Reicky". Pimblott's built the hulls, but the small vertical boilers and engines were installed at Yarwood's.

### **Some of the Craft owned by**

#### **Salt Union**

#### **Steamers:-**

Albion, Arabia, Antigua, America, Bengal, Chanticlear, Ceres, Dolphin, Decempedes, Development, France, Herald of Peace, Nil Desperandum, Opus, Persia Syria, Vale Royal, Wrenbury Water Fly (tug), Fire Fly (tug)

#### **Barges:-**

Aston, Africa, Abyssinia, Australia, Charles, Corona, Escort, Lizzie, Lord Stanley, Mountaineer, Non Pareil, Robert, Riversdale, Siberia, Vale of Clwyd, Westmorland, Zanzibar

#### **George Hamlett and Sons**

#### **Steamers:-**

Prince of Denmark, Premier Weaver Navigation

#### **Tugs:-**

Pioneer - replaced by France Hayhurst

Steam Bullnosed Hoppers:-

Whale, Shark and Grampus

**Craft owned by Brunner Mond/ICI, built mainly by Yarwood's & annually repaired by Yarwood's**

#### **Steam:-**

Agnes (1912), Anglia (1903)

Britannia (1904)

Cambria, Crescent (1910),

Caledonia (1904)

Eleanor (1913)

Francis Poole (1923)

Gwalia (1907)

Hibernia

Madge (1912), Millicent (1913)

Oswald (1914)

Rose (sunk in Mersey, 1941)

Scotia, Shamrock, Thistle

#### **Diesel:-**

Eva (1913)

Cirium (coaster)

Polythene (coaster),

Paddy (1913), Persistence (1913)

#### **Barges:-**

Egbert (1911) Felix (1911),

Frida (1911), Freeda

Joyce (1907), Sheila (1917)

**Craft owned by Levers, built mainly by Yarwood's and annually repaired by Yarwood's**

#### **Steam:-**

Corbo

Erasmic (Steam V-type compound engine, Dutch built)

Glitto

Haslam  
Kinshaso  
Leverville, Lifebuoy, Lobol, Lux  
Osmium  
Rinso  
Sand Swallow (steam dredger)

**ICI craft built after Second  
World War**

**Steam:-**

Anderton (1945)

Barnton (1945)

Davenham (1946)

**Diesel:-**

Comberbach (1947)

Cuddington (1947)

James Jackson Grundy (1947)

Weaverham (1947)

Wincham (1947)

(Pimblott's built

Marbury and Marston.)

My time at Yarwood's inevitably gave me a lifelong interest in shipping and rivercraft. I have always jotted down things which have interested me and for those readers who may also be interested, here is a list of Foreign and British coasters trading up the Weaver in the 1960s and '70s. (NB these are only ships seen by me, so it is not a complete list):

Alpha - Kobenhavn -

June 24 68, 70

Adda - Kobenhavn - April 1 67,

June 13 68, 69

Andreas Boye - Marstal -

June 8, July 22, Aug 18

Admiral Nelson - Schevenin-gen -

Jan 7 67

Andrea Ursula - Bremen - 68

Avondale - Dublin - 68, 69, 70

Amely - Kobenhavn - July 69,

Nov 69, 70

Arklow - Dublin - Jan 71

Accress - Greningen - Jan 71

Britta Steenson - Randers - 68

Benvic - Ramsey - 68

Birtha Tiese - Kobenhavn - Jan 69

Butt - Hamburg - 69

Ben Veg - Ramsey - Jan 71

Ben Rein - Ramsey - Jan 72

Citadel - Greningen - Nov 66

Cherup - Marstal

Cirium - Liverpool

(later Vancouver)

Curacao - Greningen - Nov 68

Cremona 2 - Hamburg - 69

Costas - Aarhus - June 69, 72

Consten - Kobenhavn -

March 70

Codam Proctor - Kobenhavn - 71

Conlan - Kobenhavn - 72  
 Conlein - Kobenhavn - 72  
 Conland - Kobenhavn  
 Conskor - Kobenhavn  
 Delta - Kobenhavn - July 11  
 Ditte Holme - Fredrikshavn -  
 March 6 67, 69  
 Dana - Kobenhavn - 69  
 Dina - Kobenhavn - 69, 70  
 Delia - Kobenhavn - 72  
 Embla - Kobenhavn - May 9, June  
 10, Oct 8, Nov 25 66, March 21  
 67, 68, 69  
 Emerald Trader - Amsterdam -  
 May 18  
 Eiyso - Greningen  
 Edina - Stade (German) -  
 March 70  
 Eagle - Delfzul - July 69  
 Fluvius - Delfzul 24 Sept, 66  
 (sunk Dec 66)  
 Freco - Fredrikshavn 69, 70  
 France - Kobenhavn - 69, 70  
 Flora S - Svendborg - Nov 69, 70  
 Garibaldi - Svendborg -  
 March 11, 67  
 Gittelil - Esbjerg - Nov 68  
 Geert - Winschoten - 68  
 Genki - Marstal  
 Hawarden Bridge - Chester -  
 Dec 31, 67  
 Herta - Greningen -  
 July 22 67, 68  
 HI Kroker - Svendborg -  
 July 22, Aug 18, Sept 16, Nov 14  
 66, Jan 14, 77  
 Hinde - Delfzul - March 7 67  
 Hathershus - Hadddersler -  
 68, Oct 69  
 Hans Priess - Nykobing Mars -  
 69, 72  
 Hanna Drier - Hamburg  
 Indorita - Chester - 68  
 (48-years-old)  
 Irene - Amsterdam - June 29  
 Insula - Soby - Nov 68, 69  
 Inger Andreason - Kobenhavn -  
 June, July, Sept, Nov 66, Feb 67,  
 68, 69, 70, 71  
 Juno - Kobenhavn - 69, 70  
 Jill - Greningen - May 7  
 Jytte Jors - Marstal - 68  
 Ilse - Emden - Nov 68  
 Jenki - Marstal  
 Jarna - Marstal  
 Klintburg - Kobenhavn - 69, 70, 72  
 Kenitho - Dragor - 69, 69  
 Killbride, Dublin - 4 June, 66;  
 14 Jan, 67, 68  
 Kirvi - Fredrikshavnn -  
 June 4 66,  
 Jan 14 67, 68  
 Kirsten Frank - Vijle - Aug 70  
 Kim - Kobenhavn  
 Lauri - Kobenhavn -  
 Nov 68, 69

Lonni - Kobenhavn - 68  
 Lumey - Greningen - 68  
 Lucy - Delfzul - Sunk off Cornish coast Feb 67  
 Lone Krogh - Fredrikshavn - Sept 69  
 Loof Krogh - Fredrikshavn - March 70  
 Laboe - Rendsburg (German) - Feb 71  
 Louis S - Svendborg - Feb 71, 72  
 Lesum - Bremen - 71  
 Lisy Kronberg - Kobenhavn - 72  
 Manta - Liverpool - Coaster Clarebrook and Tenby lifeboat standing by in Bristol Channel, Nov 15 68 ( safe Nov 16)  
 Menna - Delfzul - May 8 66, Jan 22 67  
 Metric - Dragor - Nov 14 66, Jan 14 67, March 13 68  
 Magens Greasborg - Glyngore - Nov 23 66, 72  
 Myra - Juno  
 Mutma Fides - Delfzul  
 Margaretta A - Harnem-Ems (German) - 69  
 Makkum - Groningen - 72  
 Marie Frem - Kobenhavn - 72  
 Murell - Dublin - April 70  
 Normanby Hall - Chester  
 Nettelil - Esbjerg - March 22 67  
 Nora - Delfzul - 69  
 Nordsmark - Ulsnis - 72  
 Nomadish - Groningen - 72  
 Neermoor - Neermoor - 72  
 Olgar Andreason - Kobenhavn - Nov, Dec 66, 67, 68  
 Otte Pederson - Logstor - Sept 66  
 Opnor - Aabenraa - 71, 72  
 Otto Pries - Nykobing Mars - 69, 70  
 Othonia - Odense - Dec 69  
 Oosterdiep - Veendam - Dec 70  
 Polythene - Liverpool - ICI  
 Procyon - Svennbord - April 4 67  
 Peter Andreason - Kobenhavn - April 4, June 5, July 7, Sept 8 67, 68  
 Partener - Vordinborg - July 20  
 Pimpernel - Kobenhavn - Dec 68, 69, 70  
 Rovichmoor - German - May 24  
 River Avocca - Dublin - July 7, Aug 19 67, 68, 69  
 Romeo - Kobenhavn - July 68, Nov 68, 69, 70  
 Rigon - Gavle (Sweden) - March 70  
 Rigmor Kronberg - Kobenhavn - April 70, 72  
 Rita Dalling - Hamburg - 71  
 Susanne Jors - Marstal - Nov 68  
 Sisu - Groningen -

Staley Bridge - Chester - March 20 66	Uranus B - Delfzul - May 14, July 8, Dec 28 66
Speranza - Groningen	Ulla Barsoe - Aabenraa - Dec 67, 70, 71, 72
Scheveningen - Kobenhavn	Villa Andreason - Kobenhavn - Nov 8, Dec 18 66, 67, 68
Salthammer - Nekso - Jan 2 67	Vera - Delfzul - 68
Steady - Kampnil - Dec 68	Vaubon - Dundee - Nov 68, 70
Scaw Proctor - Kobenhavn - Dec 68, 69	Volmer - Svendborg - Nov 69, 70, 71 (Vordinburg)
Siebenburgon - Leer - Jan 70	Volent - Delfzul -May 70
Satelith - Aroskobling - Dec 69, Feb 70	Walka - Leer (German) - Oct 68, 72
Samtrans - Odense - Jan 71	Wis - London - Dec 75
Sine Boye - Marstal - Jan 71	Windsor - Liverpool
Saint Modan - Glasgow	Zanzibar - Groningen - June 20 66,
Seaforth Trader - Liverpool	March 10 77, March 20 68
Tyrronall - Dublin - Dec 8 66, 67	Zwarlu - Delfzul - July 25
Twebro - Zwartslain - June 23	
Tobitrader - Kobenhavn - Nov 68	
Unitas - Groningen - May 11	

For a period in the '60s and '70s, the coastal trade was very busy. At times, ICI Wallerscote alone had six or seven ships waiting to be loaded with bulk granular soda ash. Destinations included the Mediterranean ports, Israel, the Scandinavian ports, Eire and Scotland. Later, the trade tailed off to just the odd coaster a week. The falling off in trade was probably caused by the new bulk ash rail containers which transported ash to the major ports to be loaded onto ocean-going ships, plus the general falling off in demand for soda ash by the glass making firms because of polythene bottles.

A few years ago, there was some talk of deepening the river

as far as Winsford, to a depth of 10ft-6ins, I think. This was to allow coasters etc to travel the Weaver to Winsford.

Nowadays, I see the small craft coming down the river from the old Pimblott's yard and I've watched the bad temper shown by motorists when the Northwich bridges at Hayhurst and Town are turned off. They swivel their cars round and shoot off to the other bridge as if their lives depended on it. I wonder what it would have been like if coasters were slowly going through both bridges, two or three times a day? Or, thinking back to the old Fire Fly and Water Fly towing two or three barges, or the old steam flats, also towing a barge? Ah, well, I'm only thinking.



*The Comberbach, launched sideways into the river.*



*The Wincham, in the Albert Dock, Liverpool, moored alongside the tug, Brocklebank (17th July, 1997).*

## CHAPTER TEN

**N**OW back to Yarwood's and my reminiscences of our 'Dad's Army' or the Home Guard ...

In 1939, when the Second World War started, all Yarwood's personnel were exempt from war service. A few of the younger ones were called up because their names were already due for call-up for the two year forces training which had started just prior to the outbreak of war. Most people were directed to fire watching duties in factories and shops and others chose to join the Local Defence Volunteers (LDV), later called the Home Guard.

At Yarwood's, the two were combined. Those of us in the Home Guard in the early part of the war would spend a night,

every so often, on the works.

I remember I was not one of the first to join the Home Guard. I had visions of being called up for the Royal Navy, for in 1940 I had just turned 19. I had applied for the Royal Navy at Dover Street in Manchester, but after a medical exam and trace interview, I was told that as a bound apprentice in a shipyard, I was in a reserved occupation and to return to work the following morning, which I duly did.

As I couldn't go into the services, there were two options: Civil Defence or the Home Guard. I chose the latter of two evils - to me at any rate.

Yarwood's platoon was attached to the Drill Hall section in Darwin Street, Castle, where we were given instruction in drills and the use of firearms. Eventually, we were fitted out with khaki army uniform, big boots, tin hat and a gas mask.

Some Sunday mornings we would have a route march, usually from the Drill Hall towards the Hartford area. Sometimes, after passing the Greenbank Hotel, odd ones were found to be missing from the group, but mysteriously re-appeared again just as we arrived back at the Drill Hall!

There was a rifle range set up alongside the River Dane at Leftwich and we were occasionally taken there for firing practice. The Weaver Valley upwards to Vale Royal was often used for manoeuvres and playing army games, one section against another. Just after Dunkirk, a mixed bunch of soldiers arrived in the Northwich area. I think some were out of the Royal Norfolk and Durham Light Infantry regiments stationed here at the time of Dunkirk.

One of the army games was against these chaps. They 'captured' one of our Yarwood's blokes, telling him he was either

dead or captured. His reply was: "I'll show you whether I'm dead or not!" He lashed out with his fist and disappeared up the bank towards the then new Hartford Bridge over the river! Nobody followed him and the army blokes ignored the two or three of us that were left standing when the incident happened. So none of us were 'dead'!

In the Yarwood's section of the Home Guard, a rota was drawn up and we each did a night on guard on the works, two or three men each night.

We were based in a small room next to the works' stores. If I remember correctly, there was a small table, two or three chairs and two/four ship's bunks, one above the other. I don't recall there being much movement on the works during these watches because of the blackout. There were no lights to be shown and it was really weird as you could hear all sorts of noises, real or imaginary as you wandered past the dockhole along the river bank, or the huge, empty workshops.

The night was split up into watches with a couple sleeping, playing cards or darts, a couple keeping watch outside on the works. After the night shift was done, we returned to work at dinnertime.

Once a week, there was a parade at the Drill Hall. Most Sunday mornings there was a parade by the Yarwood's platoon led by an ex regular army Sgt. Harold Pye. Very occasionally we went on a weekend training camp, just outside Goostrey. Harry Riding remembers being drilled by Harold Pye and best of all, the excellent refreshments we had in the Home Guard – he thinks they were from Beeley's Café.

I eventually left Yarwood's in 1942 and when I returned to Northwich in 1947, I started at the ICI Wallerscote works. Very

often the talk was about the war years and I used to enjoy the tales of two former Home Guards, men older than myself, who had been in the First World War. Percy Mills and Tommy Tomlinson had both volunteered for the Home Guard and both were eventually made Sergeants.

One of their tales was about a weekend camp at Holmes Chapel. They spoke of having hand grenade lessons, throwing the grenades from a dugout. For a while everything went well. Then one of the blokes must have pulled the pin out, flung his arm back to throw it, but let go too soon. It flew behind him and fell into one of the tents. Everyone scattered. Unfortunately, it was the tent where the weekend's beer was kept. It was a dry weekend and he wasn't popular! Was it true? I don't know, but that is the tale as it was told to me.

Another tale was about one of the army games up near the old and new Hartford bridges. The leader of their group stood under the old bridge on the tow path and waved to them to come on. He stepped back and fell straight into the river! They had to fish him out.

Then there was the story about one of the games that took place in the Anderton area. They were crawling along a hedgerow, one behind the other, with their rifles in their hands. The first one stopped suddenly, a wasps' nest in front of him. The one behind, not knowing this, had kept coming, with his head down, and bumped into the first one, knocking him into the nest. With wasps buzzing all around, they both jumped up and this time they said they were captured by the opposing side.

It makes you think that "Dad's Army" was true to life.

I was still in the Home Guard in 1941, when in the June/July months, I was working on one of the ICI boat winch launches. I

had been talking to the river boat's captain and mentioned that I had tried to join the navy and been turned down because of the 'reserved occupation' business. He asked me if I would like him to have a word with a cousin who worked for Cunard in Liverpool. He did and got two of us an interview.

We took the day off and went to Liverpool where we had a medical at the Cunard Building and were accepted, provided we could get our release. We were given a telephone and rang up the Northwich Labour Exchange. A voice there told us that as long as Cunard had accepted us we were free to go.

The following morning, when we reported to the Northwich Labour Exchange, they denied having any phone call from Liverpool and we were told to get back to Yarwood's as quick as we could, under threat of prosecution. We did and went back to the Home Guard.

I learned about this time that Enoch Yarwood, a brother, was head of the Mid Cheshire Labour Department and I couldn't help wondering if he had something to do with the denial that kept us at Yarwood's for a bit longer.

Later, when I was serving in the Merchant Navy, I visited the works while on leave after a rather sticky time at sea due to enemy action. Albert Yarwood said how nice it was to see me, but that I should come in my own time in future, and led me by the arm towards Navigation Road. In many ways, that typified the man.

Douglas (W.D.) Yarwood, must have had a 'mole' somewhere in the works because whenever Albert was away, Douglas would come for firewood – though never at any other time. He always had to go to the Enquiry Window, just like anyone else!



*Built in 1955, the Athelbrae tanker was the largest ship built on the Weaver.*



*This new development around the old yard site includes tributes to the area's history. The photo taken by me in March 1999 shows Athelbrae Close, leading to Brocklebank Drive and Yarwood Close.*

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

**T**HE Seiont II Maritime Museum Trust in Caernarfon used to publish a Newsletter, the "Old Seiontist". The following article was published in the Spring 1985 edition. At that time the Yarwood's-built Seiont II was being restored at Monks Ferry. Sadly, she has now been broken up.

### *"A Visitor Remembers"*

*One of last season's visitors to the Museum was retired fitter Ken Evans of Northwich, Cheshire. He helped to build the engine for the Seiont II and remembers the launching and the maiden voyage.*

*Ken was apprenticed from 1935 to 1942 at the Northwich yard of the Seiont II's builders, W.J. Yarwood & Sons Ltd. The yard was sited on the banks of the River Weaver in the heart of an area famous for its chemical industry and salt. Ken kept a note of every vessel that left the yard whilst he was there and this records the dredger's departure on November 4th, 1937, bound for the Caernarfon Harbour Trust.*

*"I assisted one of the senior fitters, Gerald Platt, in building the engines for her," Ken told us, "and I met the engineer who was to man the ship- his name was Llewellyn Thomas."*

*Yarwood's shipbuilders, engineers and iron founders, was a family concern established in 1840 and formed into a limited*



*The Seiont II, moored alongside Caernarfon Castle, in May 1994.*

*company in 1902. The founder, William J. Yarwood, was followed into the business by his sons, Albert, Enoch, Douglas and Sydney; they all became responsible for different aspects of the business and by the end of 1935 Albert was the only one taking an active part as sole owner. Douglas Yarwood, now in his 90s, still lives in Northwich.*

*The yard and works occupied an area of just 8 acres and employed approximately 350 men in the 1930s and 1940s. It had its own engineering and welding shops, a modern foundry equipped for the manufacture of iron castings and marine and chemical engineering, a joiners' shop, carpenters' shop, blacksmiths' shop and a slipway for hauling ships out of the water for repairs. The yard's nine building berths produced steam and diesel vessels - coasters, survey tenders for harbour boards,*

tugs, tankers and oil fuel lighters for the Admiralty, inland waterway craft, refuelling launches for the Air Ministry, shallow draft barges and ferry boats, grab hopper dredgers like the *Seiont II*. Several stern wheel steamers were built for the African rivers. It is said that the one used in "Sanders of the River" was built at Yarwood's. Some of the vessels built at the yard were stripped and sent abroad in sections for reassembly at their destinations.

Compound and triple expansion steam engines for the vessels were built in the yard's erecting shop. When completed, they were rolled down to the river bank on metal rollers. The engines were then lifted into the vessels by a large crane. The vessels were always launched before the engines and boilers were fitted and most were launched sideways because of the restricted width of the river. The boilers and diesel engines were bought outside the firm. Most of the diesels were Widdop and Gardeners. Auxiliary machinery for the vessels, such as steam winches, steam steering engines, hand windlasses and hand steering gears, were all made and assembled in the yard.

The ships built at Yarwood's were for customers the world over and included the Admiralty, the War Office, H.M. Customs and Excise, the Booth Steamship Co., the Booker Line, the Melbourne Steamship Co., United Africa Co., and many others at home and abroad.

"Of all the hundreds of ships built at the yard, the RAF Auxiliary vessel *Aquarius* was probably the best known," said Ken. "This was chiefly because after Lawrence of Arabia returned home from his exploits, one of the jobs delegated to him as Aircraftsman Shaw was to stand by her as Clerk of Works to supervise her completion. In fact, the *Aquarius*, under her own

*steam, sailed from Northwich to Singapore, fully loaded. That was before I started work at Yarwood's, but I remember going to see her while she was floodlit and dressed with flags before starting her voyage.*

*"John Brocklebank of the famous shipping company, had quite a long stay at Yarwood's, training in the fitting shop with us after he finished at University. He later became Chairman of Cunard when Brocklebanks and Cunard amalgamated."*

*When Ken began his apprenticeship at Yarwood's in 1935, aged 14, he earned the princely sum of five shillings (25p) for a 47 hour working week. This was increased by a shilling a year for the next five years and on the sixth year by two shillings. For the first two years, 2d (two old pennies) was stopped out of his pay for some sort of insurance and on the third year, 1s 1d was stopped for National Insurance. A.E.U. fees had to be paid at 3d per week up to the age of 21, when one became a full member.*

<b>S. S. SEIONT II</b>	
Adeiladwyd gan gwmni W. J. Yarwood yn Northwich, Sir Gaer i ymddiriedolwyr harbwr Caernarfon.	<b>1937</b> Built by W. J. Yarwood & Sons Ltd. Northwich, Cheshire for Caernarfon Harbour Trustees.
Prynwyd gan Amgueddfa Genedlaethol Cymru.	<b>1980</b> Bought by the National Museum of Wales.
Trosglwyddwyd i ofal a meddiant ymddiriedolaeth Seiont II, Caernarfon.	<b>1990</b> Transferred to the care and possession of Seiont II Trust, Caernarfon.
Gyrrir gan beiriant ager o dân glô.	Powered by coal fired steam engine.

*The Seiont II Maritime Museum display.*

*Upon reaching the age of 21, ex-apprentices at Yarwood's were employed for a further year on 'improver's ' pay, which at that time was half of the tradesman's pay of about £3 per week, and then they were sacked. When the war started and labour was in demand, this practice stopped.*

*In 1947, the company passed out of Yarwood's hands into those of United Molasses and trade gradually declined. Finally, in 1965, the yard closed down.*

*The company took a special pride in the craftsmanship and finish of their ships and many of them, like the Seiont II, are still in service or giving pleasure to enthusiasts.*

*Ken said: "I think it is fair to say that the majority of us who worked there can now, in later years, look back at our days at Yarwood's with pride and say: 'I was a Yarwood's man'."*

## **Postscript**

Yarwood's closed in 1965, after more than 125 years of shipbuilding on the site, shortly after the launch of its last vessel (no. 950), the 170-ton single screw diesel tug, St Elmo, built for the Mid Mediterranean Towing Company of Malta and bound for coastal duties in Malta. A sale and auction of machine tools, foundry and shipbuilding plant and machinery took place at the dock in Navigation Road on Tuesday, February 22, 1966.

I thought it worth reiterating that most of these notes were first made in 1982, some 40 years after I had left the yard. They were left in a drawer and now – more than 20 years on - if some names have been associated with the wrong jobs, then please accept my apologies. Perhaps my efforts will encourage you to start your own research.

**Ken Evans**

# APPENDIX

## **1935-1942 vessels built at W.J. Yarwood's noted from the company's Official Log Book:**

Vessel No. 474 Lady Cadell – steel diesel motor tug fitted with Widdop 250hp engines launched 30.1.35, away 21.2.35 built for Robert White and Partners London SW1.

475 & 476 - two steel dumb barges launched 4.2.35 & 8.2.35 for Robert White and Partners.

477 & 478 – two steel dumb barges launched 18.1.35 and 5.2.35 for Robert White and Partners.

479 Carbine – steel tug and cargo vessel launched 19.3.35, away 2.5.35 (steam), built for Admiralty, London, Malta.

480-489 – ten iron motor canal boat hulls launched and away between 19.3.35 and 24.4.36, built for Fellows, Morton and Clayton, Birmingham.

490 Lunevale – twin screw motor ferry fitted with 275 bhp Crossley engines, built for the Fleetwood Corporation.

491-502 – 12 motor canal boats fitted with 18bhp Russell Newbury engines with 2/1 reduction gear, launched and away between 8.5.35 and 22.1.36, named Pisces, Clypeus, Saggita, Lacerta, Eridanus, Ericeladus, Delphinus, Scorpio, Libra, Bellatrix, Sculptor, Antlia, built for Grand Union Canal Carrying Co., London EC4.

503-514 – 12 canal butty boats launched and away between 9.5.35 and 22.1.36 named Puppis, Corvus, Surpens, Lepus, Leo, Lyra, Draco, Malus, Carina, Lynx, Toucan, Lupus, built for Grand Union Canal Carrying Co., London EC4.

515 – motor canal boat fitted with 10 bhp engine, named Ariel, built for Midland and Coast Carriers Ltd, 21.8.35.

516 and 517 Elm and Cedar - two motor canal boats fitted with engines for the Erewash Canal Carriers Co., Leicester, delivered 9.8.35 and 26.9.35.

518 and 519 Ash and Cyprus – two canal butty boats for Erewash Canal Carriers, delivered 9.8.35 and 26.9.35.

520-527 – all steel motor canal boats fitted with 18 bhp Russell Newbury engines with 2 to 1 reduction gear, built for the Grand Union Canal Carrying Co. Ltd., EC4 named Radiant, Sextons, Sickle, Taygeta, Theophilus, Tucana, Tycho and Zodiac, delivered between 14.11.35 and 3.6.36.

528-535 – eight all steel canal butty boats built for the Grand Union Canal Carrying Co. Ltd, named Regulus, Scales, Sarpedon, Triagulum, Thea, Taurus, Thoth, Leonids, delivered between 14.11.35 and 3.6.36.

536-537 - two steel dumb cargo barges built for Elder Dempster, launched 10.9.35 away 11.9.35, Africa.

538 Viper – steel steam launch built for H.M. Custom & Excise, launched 6.12.35, away 13.2.36.

539 Vulcan – steel steam launch built for H.M. Custom & Excise, launched 30.1.36, away 13.3.36.

540 Nuneaton – single screw motor tug, Widdop engine 150 bhp, speed 9 knots, built for Elder Dempster Lines, launched 29.11.35, away 30.12.35.

541 New Radiant – launched 16.1.36, away 6.3.36, and

542 New Exporter – launched 4.3.36, away 6.4.36, steel dumb barges built for the Grain Elevating and Auto Weighing Co., Liverpool.

543 New Samson – launched 8.4.36, away 7.5.36. and

544 New Conveyor – launched 8.6.36, away 3.7.36, steel dumb barges built for the Grain Elevating and Auto Weighing Co.Ltd.

545 Snipe and

546 Starling – steel motor canal boats built for W.H. Cowburn and Cowper Co. Ltd., delivered 22.4.36 and 24.5.36.

547 Redcroft – steel steam tug built for W. Bate Co. Ltd., launched 7.5.36, away 8.7.36, Liverpool.

548-585 – steel motor canal boats fitted with 18 bhp National engine 2dm with 2 to 1 reduction gear engine Russell Newbury F type, built for the Grand Union Canal Carrying Co. Ltd., between 3.6.36 and 23.4.37 named Halsall, Kenilworth, Kelso, Ladybank, Letchworth, Lancing, Naburn, Nuneaton, Nutfield, Otley, Oakley, Paddington, Pinner, Puton, Reading, Renton, Renfrew, Rufford, Saltaire, Seaford, Shirley, Slough, Southall, Stamford, Stanton, Stirling, Stratford, Sudbury, Sutton, Tadworth, Thaxted, Tipton, Towcester, Tarporley, Tyseley, Usworth, Whitby and Yeoford.

586 Beaty – motor wooden bottom canal boat fitted with Petter 12/14 engine, built for Samuel Barlow Coal Co., away 24.11.37.

587 Balvan – single screw steam tug built for R. White and Partners, launched 11.11.36, away 31.12.36, India.

588 Parbold – steel dumb barge built for Ainscoughs, Liverpool, away 13.10.36.

589 Dilawar – steel diesel motor tug fitted with Widdop 250 bhp engine, built for R. White and Partners, launched 2.12.36, away 15.1.37, India.

590 & 591 – steel dumb hopper barges built for Robert White and Partners, launched 7.1.37, away 16 and 18.1.37.

592 – six canal boat conversions for Fellows, Morton and Clayton, between 2.4.37 and 1.12.37.

593 & 594 – steel gable re-erection barges for the Sudan Government, away 13.5.37 and 2.6.37.

595–600 – six galvanised steel barges (in two sections), Nos 49, 80-84, launched between 16.4.37 to away 7.9.37, for John Holt Co. Ltd., Liverpool and May & Smart Ltd..

601 Roxby and

602 Laceby and

603 Spilsby – galvanised steel steam sternwheel tugs, launched between 5.4.37 to away 13.7.37, West Coast of Africa.

604 Seiont – steel steam grab hopper dredger for Caernarvon Harbour Trust, launched 14.9.37, away 4.11.37.

605 – cargo steamer tug C405 for Ceylon.

606 – steel twin screw motor ferry fitted with 2-5L2 Gardener Engines for re-erection, away 18.1.38 for the Sudan Government.

607 and 608 – steel passenger barges for re-erection, away 4.3.38 and 29.3.38 for the Sudan Government.

609-611 – steel open canal boats, Clyde, Dart and Rhine, built for L.M.S. Railway between 7.12.37 and 4.1.38.

612 – steel lighter for Elder Dempster, away 24.4.38.

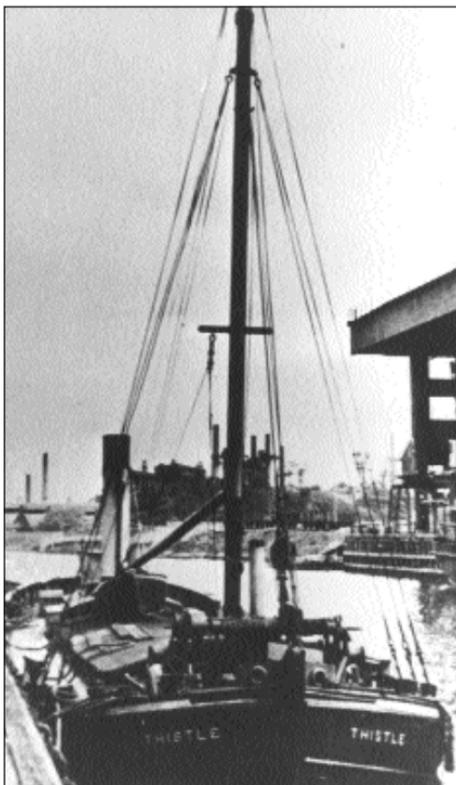
613 France Hayhurst – steel motor tug fitted with dr5 125 bhp Crossley engine for the Weaver Navigation Trust, launched 27.1.38, away 16.5.38.

614 Atta – steel sternwheel steamer for the United Africa Co..

615 Mormugao – steel diesel grab hopper dredger fitted with Widdop EMX4 type 4 cylinder marine diesel engine and Priestman grab for R. White and Partners, launched 2.6.38, away 2.8.38, India.

616 Trunion – steel steam tug, launched 19.5.38, away 26.8.38, built for the Admiralty.

617 Tampion – steel steam tug, launched 14.7.38, away 31.10.38, built for the Admiralty.



*The Thistle.*

618 Suma – steel sternwheel steamer (re-erection), away 15.5.39 for the United Africa Co..

619 Ashby – steel galvanised sternwheel steamer, launched 2.9.38, away 19.9.38, Africa.

620 Digby – steel galvanised sternwheel steamer, away 17.10.38, Africa.

621–624 – four galvanised steel barges for Hay and Smart, Liverpool, away on 6.11.38, 29.11.38, 3.10.38, 18.4.38, Nos 85-88.

625 Sparkler – steel steam tug, launched 19.2.40, away 25.5.40, built for the Admiralty, London.

626 – six canal boat conversions for Fellows, Morton and Clayton, away 15.3.38, 28.3.38, 7.5.38, 9.5.38, 27.6.38 and 24.10.38.

627 Trefoil – single screw steam tender, steam 200psi, built for the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, trials 28.3.39.

628 – wooden canal tug and ice breaker fitted with 18bhp Russell Newbury engine, built for the LMS Railways, away 23.12.38.

629 and 630 – wooden canal mud hopper barges built for the LMS Railways, away 2.9.38, 11.11.38.

631 Rollo

632 Ross

633 Rave – steel open canal boats built for the LMS Railways, away 8.11.38, 22.11.38 and 2.1.39.

634 and 635 – steel cargo lighters, NA 126, NA 127, built for the Admiralty, London.

636 Aravia – steel motor coaster fitted with 300 bhp Widdop engine for Hay and Smart, launched 27.4.39, away 26.7.39, left Liverpool under her own power 1.8.39, for Georgetown, Booker Line.

637 Ediba – steel motor lighter fitted with 90bhp Widdop engine, launched 8.5.39, away 31.7.39, built for Elder Dempster.

638 Ballista – steel single screw motor lighter fitted with Widdop BMX6 type engine 180bhp, launched 6.10.39, away 11.1.40, built for the Admiralty, Plymouth.

639 Obus – steel single screw motor lighter fitted with Widdop BMX6

type engine 180bhp, launched 2.11.39, away 5.3.40. Built for the Admiralty.

269 West Acre – re-construction of engines for Fleet Fuelling tug, away 12.5.39, for the Admiralty.

640 – five steel cane punts, shipped 23.3.39, built for Booker Bros..

641 Spaniel – steel grain barge built for Bishops Wharf Carrying Co., away 18.8.39.

642 Setter – steel grain barge built for Bishops Wharf Carrying Co., launched 13.9.39, away 26.9.39.

643–645 – steel dumb lighters launched 13.7.39, away 4.8.39, launched 31.7.39, away 4.8.39 and launched 23.8.39, away 1.9.39. Built for the Admiralty.

646 – single screw diesel tug fitted with 250bhp Petter engine, launched 21.1.40, away 29.7.40. Built for the Admiralty, Deptford.

647 – ten steel cane punts, away 20.7.39, built for Campbell and Carter Bros. & Co..

648– C85, steel steam coaster launched 12.7.40, away 26.11.40, built for the Admiralty.

649–653 – five aviation fuel carrying lighters C219, C220, C198, C337, and one for re-erection, carrying 40,000 gallons of aviation fuel, built for the Admiralty between 12.3.40 and away 26.11.40.

654–659 – six 300 ton oil fuel carrying lighters, C25, C26, C98, C99, C215, C216, built between 10.8.40 and 2.6.42, for the Admiralty.

660 Pointer – steel grain barge, launched 9.9.40, away 22, 10.40. Built for Bishops Wharf Carrying Co..

661-662 – Nos 502 and 503, steel cargo barges with hand windlass, launched 21.8.40, away 11.10.40 and launched 8.10.40, away 25.10.40. Built for the Air Ministry.

663 and 664 – SL3 and SL4 – steel motor launches with Widdop diesel engines supplied by owners 30/33bhp, away 8.12.41 and 27.3.42. Built for Elder Dempster Line.

665 Lobol – steel steam tanker, having two portable tanks, launched 5.5.41, away August 41. Built for Lever Brothers, Liverpool.

666 Empire Bridge – steel steam coaster, launched 26.2.41, away 27.6.41. Built for the Ministry of Shipping.

667 Denham – steel steam tender launched 1.7.41, away 8.12.41. Built for the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, Liverpool.

668 RN Air 2A – self propelled lighter, Widdop engine 300bhp, launched 13.12.41, away 11.5.42. Built for the Admiralty.

669 RN Air 3A – self propelled lighter Widdop 350 bhp engine, launched 14.9.41, away 10.3.42. Built for the Admiralty.

670 to 675 – six bomb scows, Meadow engines 8/24 hp, Nos S47, S48, S49, S50, S51 and S52. Built for the Air Ministry between 9.7.41 to 2.10.41.

676 – duplicate of 649/53 Aviation Fuel Carrying Lighter, sent for re-erection, away October 41. Built for the Admiralty.

677 Retriever – duplicate of 660. Steel grain barge, launched 1.9.41, away 25.9.41. Built for Bishops Wharf Carrying Co. Ltd..

678 to 685 – refuelling launches Scammell engines built between 24.4.42 and 15.12.44 for the Air Ministry.

686 to 705 – duplicate of 670/5 bomb scows, two Meadow engines 8/24 hp, Nos S106 to S125. Built for the Air Ministry between 15.10.41 and 1.11.42.

706 – C607 – self-propelled lighter, oil fired, 205psi, launched 6.6.42.



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