

From Hull to Hell and Back

An autobiographic tale of an adolescent's adventure aboard a distant water trawler sailing out of Hull in the 1960's to the Northern fishing grounds around Bear Island in the Arctic. Contrary to common belief Hell is not a hot place but it's actually freezing cold!

I was up so early it was still dark in what later turned out to be a grey overcast day, 0400 hrs to be precise and the sun hadn't yet risen, not that it would be visible through the thick blanket of murk when it did eventually raise its head above the eastern horizon. I looked out from the cosy confines of my bedroom at the thick damp fog which had enveloped Hull and the surrounding areas overnight. The atmosphere was heavy and wet hanging like a drab kitchen cloth, with light rain we in the north call 'drizzle'. Opening and leaning out of my prism like window, the tri-angular design style looked at odds with the large curved bay windows of the main bedroom and the lounge below, I took a deep breath taking in what was a foul smell akin to kippers or sour foot odour. On days like this when the air was damp and heavy the smell of fish seemed to be everywhere. It permeated from the massive St.Andrew's fish dock on the north bank of the River Humber even travelling the eight miles as the crow flies to my home just to the north of Hull in the village of Cottingham, the UK's largest village. The nauseous smell filled me with excitement tinged with anxiety and trepidation as after having a full English breakfast prepared lovingly by my mother I was about to be accompanied by my father to the malodorous St.Andrew's dock where I would be embarking on a trip of a life time aboard a deep sea fishing trawler called the 'Somerset Maugham' sailing north to the fishing grounds beyond the Arctic Circle.

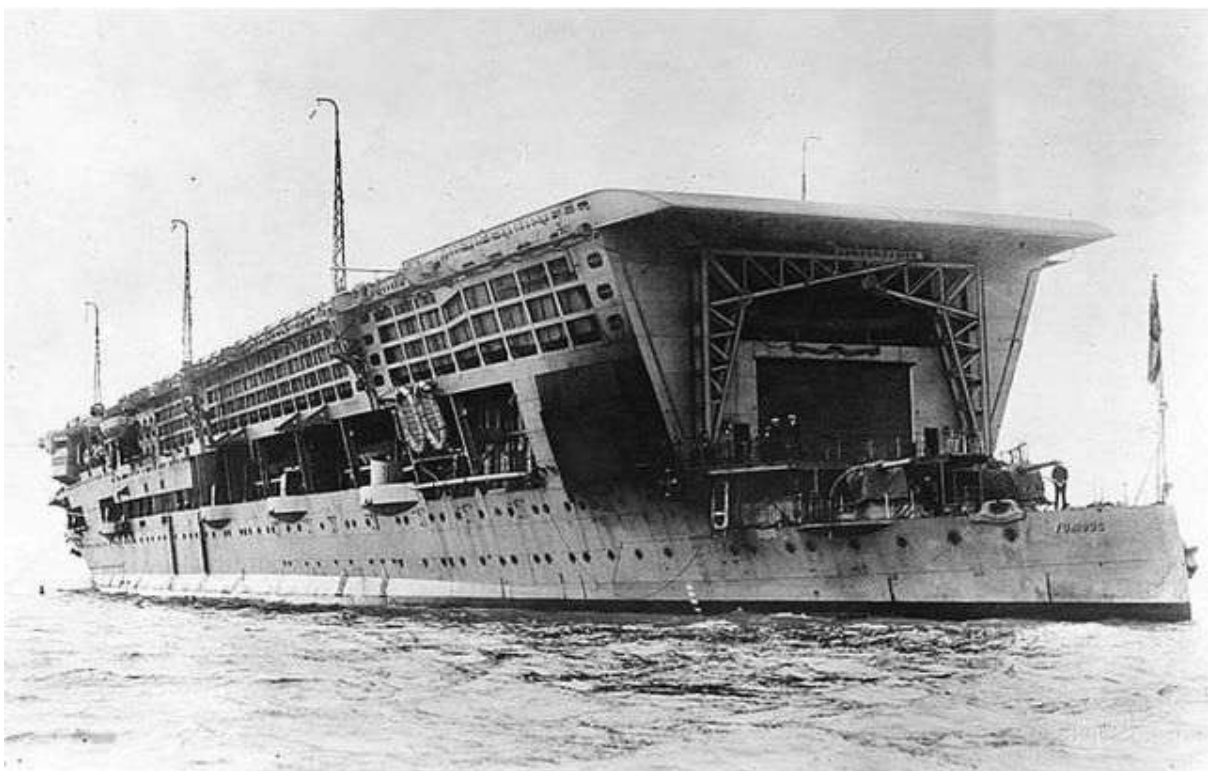
I was in my sixteenth and last year of full time education attending the Hull Trinity House Navigation School which for the uninitiated is the oldest pre-sea naval officers' training school in the world. It first opened its doors to young men in February 1787 to train them specifically for a life at sea as navigating officers. The school accepted 60 cadets a year after they had first passed an open entrance exam and then a frightening interview in front a panel of Trinity House Brethren, chaired by the Master Warden. I had found it a daunting experience sitting opposite this row of elder gentlemen resplendent in their uniforms and medals, for at the time I was just thirteen.



Hull Trinity House Brethren

It was 1964 at the height of the Vietnam War with a phenomenon known as 'Beatlemania' in full swing and the school Easter 'Hols' fast approaching. At this time I had passed the

internal examinations in six subjects, mathematics, physics, English language, seamanship, navigation and geography. This being a prerequisite requirement before being allowed to sit the same subjects at what was then GCE O'level. So whilst not completely off, the pressure had certainly eased. All I had to do was keep my studies ticking over ready for the exam dates in the summer. If I passed these exams it would have given me the additional bonus of six months remission of sea service off the three year officer cadetship requirement when entering the Merchant Navy to set course on becoming a Navigating Officer and eventually Master/Ship's Captain. At that time I was still undecided in which direction to take my career be that of a Merchant Navy officer like my Grandfather, a survivor of two World Wars and still at that time in Command of a giant oil tanker, or to develop a fledging interest in naval aviation, this seed having been planted by my father who had recently retired from a career in the RAF as an engineering officer. During his time with the RAF my father had served for 5 years with the Fleet Air Arm, initially at the shorebase HMS Daedalus, Lee-on-Solent, followed by several years' service aboard HMS Furious.....



HMS Furious

From what he told me of his Fleet Air Arm naval aviation service sounded not only glamorous but downright dangerously exciting. At sixteen with the innocence of youth I considered myself invincible and the lure of excitement conjured up images of playing an aviation hero like 'Biggles'. I saw myself as a dashing naval aviator super ace with the leather helmet, goggles and flying scarf extending from my neck, forever looking as though it was in the slipstream. The reality was, of course, considerably different with those early years of naval aviation probably creating more widows and orphans than heroes.

Anyway that was for the future. Having reached sixteen I was eligible to enjoy a taste of life on the ocean wave during the forthcoming Easter school holidays. It was what is today euphemistically called 'work experience'! It wasn't compulsory but very much encouraged by the school for us to take advantage of berths, unpaid, with local shipping companies

mainly operating around the UK coast. Either this or serving aboard one of the many deep water trawlers operating out of Hull. It was the 60's when the UK benefited from not only a thriving fishing fleet but also a vibrant coastal shipping industry transporting cargoes from near continental ports to the UK and also between British mainland sea ports with regular overnight routes such as Hull to London. Hull not only had the largest distant water trawling fleet but when added to the middle water fleet of Grimsby the Humber had a fishing fleet unrivalled by any other nation in the world. It was the likes of which we will never see again.

It was aboard a deep sea fishing trawler in which I had chosen to take my taster of life at sea rather than the coastal trade opted for by others of my peer group. Distant water trawling conjured up exciting images of heroic seamen facing the perils of storms and tempest north of the Arctic Circle. It appeared far more glamorous telling my then girlfriend of that rather than of sailing aboard a sedate dirty British coastal cargo ship on the overnight run to London. Assuming that she would see me through rose tinted glasses as some sort of naval explorer like Drake, Nelson or that famous Yorkshireman James Cook. However, it came to pass that upon my return from this arduous trip to the Arctic expecting a hero's welcome, I was to learn the bitter truth that no sooner had the ropes been cast off and we sailed away down the Humber when she threw herself into the arms of my best friend who had wisely decided to forego this supposedly man making experiment; she later ended up marrying him!

I had contacted several trawler owning companies all who seemed only too keen to offer me a berth as a 'Spare Hand,' being unpaid was of course the reason I was inundated with offers! So having been given a choice by these eager trawling companies I selected Newington Steam Trawling Co., Ltd. who owned a small fleet of modern trawlers all named after famous writers, naturalists, scholars and authors such as Joseph Conrad, Peter Scott, Conan Doyle and so on. The latest edition to their fleet was named '*Somerset Maugham*' pennant number H.329. The reasoning behind my choice was simple, after having done some door to door research within the fishing community of Hessle Road, no Google in those days! I discovered that the '*Somerset Maugham*' was commanded by the legendary Bill Brettell. I say legendary because he was one of the top fish landing skippers sailing out of Hull and regularly winning the coveted 'Silver Cod'. This trophy is, as it is so aptly described takes the shape of a large solid silver cod fish and was awarded each year at splendid black tie ball to the skipper who had landed the highest number of 'kits' of fish. Fish landings were measured in 'kits' in those days, kits were large wicker baskets. Due to record landings these trawlers were consequently the highest earning trawlers in monetary terms for both the owners and crew alike. Trawlermen were all paid a basic wage which was enhanced by a share of the catch. Trawler owners had varying ways of paying their Skippers and First Mates. For many they were only paid a share of the market sale price of the catch called 'settling' or 'poundage'.

DATE: 9.9.73 LATEST: 2.10.73

NAME: V. BARTHELE RANK/STATUS: SKIPPER.

NETT Settling Figure (as per attached Summary) £... 11282

Share of share 9.27... £ 3046.14

Leave Money £ 6.19

Total Amount Due 3052.33

DEBIT

1. Allotments (including Capt's Portage) (Net Inc - 4%)	6.21
2. Outfitting	-
3. Passenger Foodstuffs	1.20
4. Unpaided Passages	1.87
5. Children Children's Society	0.00
6. Bond	-
7. Delicacies	37.91
8. Personal Wines	-
9. Tools & Equipment	-
10. Provisions (as per attached Summary)	27.03
11. Skipper & Mate's Insurance	2.16
Swamp	50
12. Tallow Tax	1604.10
Total Debit	1691.01
Balance Due	1371.32

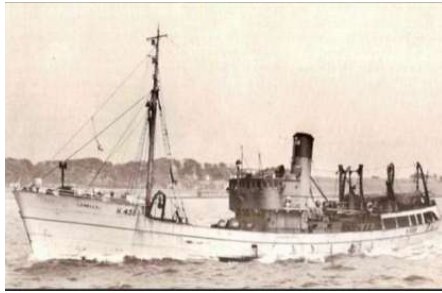
Wm Barthele

A copy of a Skippers pay slip in 1973 showing a balance due of £1371.32 after a 3 week fishing trip. In today's money this would be £20,447.00!

I immediately knew that this was the trawler I wanted to sail on. Not because I would be paid as I have already explained this was to be an unpaid berth but as I had heard from those school pals that had gone before me, at the end of the voyage the crew would always give us lads a hand out, call it a tip if you like but with each trawler man offering a small tip this could actually amount to a considerable sum for us lads still living on pocket money given to them by their parents. This would be adventure, glamour and glory; I couldn't wait. I was completely ignorant of the fact that serving aboard these trawlers was anything but glamorous. In fact it was downright bloody dangerous, at that time known to be even more dangerous than coal mining.

My eager research failed to equate with historical facts about the double trawler tragedy of 1955 which may have caused me to think again about my forthcoming daring do!

On the 26th January 1955 two Hull vessels the 'Lorella' and the 'Roderigo', whilst fishing off the North Cape of Iceland, were lost with all hands (40 men/boys) being overwhelmed after battling for three days against storm force winds and severe icing conditions; both vessels capsized within two and a half hours of each other, 90 miles off the North Cape. There were no survivors.



Lorella



Roderigo

Looking back now I'm surprised that my parents gave me permission to sail, which they had to, thereby removing the onus of responsibility from the school which as I have said actively encouraged this form of experience known ironically as 'pleasuring.' I've often wondered of my parents' reasoning, especially so following the even worse triple trawler tragedy of 1968 when three trawlers went down in quick succession due to icing.



Typical example of what could happen to a trawler in the Arctic. The weight of the ice makes the trawler top heavy (what is called tender) and then she can just turn over very quickly and easily, especially if there is a heavy sea and swell running.

The later triple disaster of 1968 did make me think back as to what could have been my fate! Icing up is a common occurrence effecting trawlers which if not dealt with can soon cause a vessel to become top heavy and literally turnover.

Trawlers by their very nature of their design are at their most vulnerable to turning over when they have just arrived at the fishing grounds. Having been steaming for at least a week to reach the fishing grounds they had naturally consumed a large amount of fuel oil stored in the fuel tanks, in the double bottoms as they are known. This is an area at the bottom of the vessel which is doubled skinned, hence the description double bottoms. Inside are the fuel tanks feeding the machinery. As the fuel is consumed the vessel's centre of gravity rises. Coupled with this as the trawler hasn't started fishing her fish holds are empty. This causes the ship to become what is termed as 'tender'. I.e. the centre of gravity is higher than its designed position. Therefore, any additional weight such as the huge build up of ice on the topsides causes the centre of gravity to rise even higher increasing the danger of the ship turning completely over if caught by a large broadside wave.

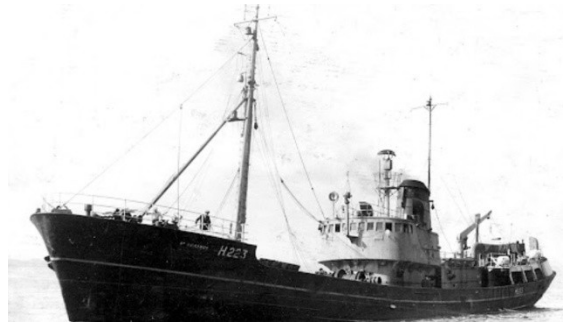
The triple Trawler Disaster as it was known involved three ships, the St.Romanus, Kingston Peridot, Ross Cleveland. All caught in the same storm that was raging up there for several days and all suffered from icing similar to what can be seen in the photos.

It was reported that there had been a hauntingly chilling last radio message from the skipper Phil Gray, of the 'Ross Cleveland' during a call to the owners back in Hull. He simply said '*I am going over, we're laying over. Help me. I am going over. Give my love and the crew's love to wives and families.*'. That was the last that was ever heard from the vessel.

There was one survivor, the mate Harry Eddom who having been up on top of the wheelhouse hacking away ice with an axe was thrown in to the freezing waters. He was able to get aboard a liferaft that had come away from the trawler along with two other crew members. Unfortunately they both later died from exposure.



St. Romanus



Kingston Peridot



Ross Cleveland

On the morning of my departure, having been given formal acceptance by the Newington Steam Trawling Company of Hull, I had to attend their dock offices already open and very busy at the early hour as crew members had to 'sign on' before proceeding on-board, my father countersigning to record that I had his permission. We were instructed to report to the 'Ship's Husband' the title given to the man on who's shoulders lay the immense burden of responsibility ensuring that the trawler was prepared in all respects to put to sea safely, and ready to face the perils of sailing in the treacherous northern waters. There was no doubt that the title of 'husband' probably frowned on today, was bestowed because of their duties and responsibilities to the vessel which was, as in the case of all ships referred to in the gender as a 'she'. This was in the days when the man of the house was usually the only bread winner.

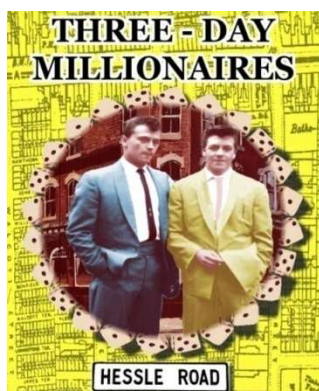


A 1953 photograph demonstrating the dramatic power of the sea. This is the Hull trawler 'Farnella' taken shortly after she had limped home to Hull having confronted hurricane force winds whilst fishing in Northern Waters. A stark example of the environment in which trawlers worked to put fish and chips on the plates of British families.

I was informed that I would find the 'Ship's Husband', a Mr Henry Jackson to be either onboard one of the two trawlers the company had in port at that time, one of which being the '*Somerset Maugham*' or alternatively in the company 'Sail Loft' as the company's warehouses were known. Here was stored everything from ropes to engine spare parts, in fact anything other than food, this came direct from the Ship's Chandler, that was necessary for supporting and keeping a trawler at sea for three weeks or more. In addition, they had everything a trawlerman would need for the forthcoming voyage, a range of clothing including such items as oilskins and Sou'westers, even mattresses known as a 'Donkey's Breakfast' probably because there were stuffed with straw! Then there was the necessary accompanying linen. Sleeping on one of these mattresses without linen would be most uncomfortable although once at the fishing grounds the work was so long and arduous that most men just flopped down on top of their bunks too tired to undress and get between in between the sheets which was hardly worth it anyway as they'd probably only be there for a couple of hours before being called for the next catch to be brought aboard. Although the time between hauls was 4 to 6 hours it was not a rest period after as each haul had been brought aboard the men had the task of gutting all the fish ready to be sent below to the fish room where it was packed in ice. Hardly anything was provided by the owners, the crew had to buy all essentials themselves. The Sail Loft even sold nappies, and many a trawlerman would be seen buying bundles of nappies for handing over to their wives before they sailed. All could of course be bought on '*tick*' to be then deducted from their earnings at the end of the voyage.

There was a lot to do in a very short time in port and the 'Ship's Husband' had his hands full getting the vessels ready for sea, bearing in mind he could have more than one vessel demanding his attention. The average turn round for trawlers was two nights and three days in port. As the old Yorkshire saying goes '*time is money*' and trawlers didn't make money tied up alongside. The average fishing voyage to the northern waters was three weeks followed by the three days in Hull depending on which tide the trawler arrived back on. Apart from the skipper, first mate, all the other crew members were casual labour '*signing on*' a trawler on a voyage by voyage basis and paid a wage plus poundage. So once a berth had been secured, and certainly in the case of the high earning trawlers, crew were reluctant to lose a berth and consequently the only leave they took were the three days the vessel was in port. Because of this and coupled with the high earnings coming from a share of the catch after it had been auctioned at the fish market the crew were well paid '*high rollers*' indeed, with lots of money

to spend in only a short time and hence they earned the nick name of ‘Three Day Millionaires’!



Thus, taking a trip off risked losing a profitable berth which naturally did happen through sickness, family commitments or just wanting a reasonable break from the relentless round of facing rough seas and freezing temperatures and long arduous hours working once at the fishing grounds. This was long before the EU work time directives limiting hours of work which in reality would be laughable today. Lucrative berths could also be lost by falling foul of the skipper through a variety of reasons such as drunkenness. Sale of alcohol on-board was strictly controlled by the skipper who held the keys to the ‘Bond Locker’ and most skippers would close the bond whilst at the fishing grounds and only open it when the trawler was finally homeward bound with the catch. Sometimes it was just a clash of personalities leading to just generally not fitting in with the crew onboard. Otherwise despite being classed as casual labour employment was plentiful and regular during the ‘hey day’ from the end of WWII right through until the 70’s.

I was growing up in the era being termed the ‘swinging 60’s’ when the youth of the time were beginning to break out of the hereditary instilled, military like discipline left over from when most of the country’s manhood were in uniform during the war. This new breed of youth started to embrace the age of ‘flower power’, sex, drugs and ‘rock and roll’ and generally question the previous generations’ standards of behavioural obedience. The only weed I had been exposed to grew in the flower beds of our back garden. Despite these supposedly new found freedoms I was still relatively naïve in the ways of the world. This was long before the information age of today when everything can be learnt from Google. The nearest thing to pornographic sites to learn about affairs of the flesh was ‘Playboy’ and sex was what the rich people carried coal in, don’t you know! The nearest I had come to being intimate with a girl was a snog and fumble on the back seats at the local cinema on a Friday night, normally ending with a slap! My pocket money wouldn’t stretch to the more expensive Saturday night seats! The pill had only just been invented and ‘Durex’ to me was a torch battery! Ironically sex education was to be one of the subjects I would be introduced to in the forth coming summer term, but then that’s another story!

I was a reasonably obedient and respectful teenager being educated at a pseudo military school, Trinity House which back then had levels of discipline which by today’s standards would appear to be reminiscent of the Nelson era, of which the uniform we wore certainly was. This consisted of dark blue naval trousers, a blue and white striped shirt complete with detachable collar. Wore betide any cadet that got their mothers to stitch these on permanently! Black tie, dark blue waistcoat with brass buttons and then finally the short ‘monkey jacket’ commonly known as a ‘Bumfreezer’ with a row of buttons on each side

topped off with a stiff white collar which had to be constantly blancoed so as to keep it smart and eye blindingly white! I mentioned mothers stitching on shirt collars was a 'no, no'. No bother to me as I did in fact enjoy putting on a fresh collar each day. To finish off the ensemble, shoes that had to be polished and 'bulled' reminiscent of the Queen's Guards. However, I did commit one heinous crime and that was to have my mother stitch in the creases in my uniform trousers! I did for quite a while think I had got away with it until one morning's inspection parade we had a change of inspecting staff. Most of our staff were ex military and Merchant Navy types. This particular morning the staff member inspecting my squad was one ex RSM who still carried his swagger stick for the morning parade. When he came to me he stood there looking me up and down.

"Very smart cadet Stevens,"....he said my chest expanding with pride until he pointed his stick at the crease in my trousers.

"But what is this?" he enquired.

"I don't know what you mean Sir," I crisply replied.

"The creases boy, the creases," flipping my immaculate creases with the end of his swagger stick.

'Oh heck' I thought, it was then I knew he had rumbled me.

Well my punishment for this terrible crime was to unpick the stitching my dear mother had so lovingly put in. My ex RAF father, when I told him thought it was a huge joke but Mum was more sympathetic. Naturally I wasn't the only cadet who had had their mum stitch in the creases on their trousers. Eventually parent power came to the fore and the Headmaster received a deputation from several disgruntled mums and the school backed down. As the mums rightly pointed out our parents paid a considerable sum of money towards the uniform costs and therefore felt it was their right to put in this stitching to keep their sons looking smart. Plus it did make the trousers easier to press.



Officer Cadet Stevens – 16 years

Thus I followed my instructions which I had been issued with by the school and that was to report aboard the trawler in uniform. Accompanied by my father I entered the company's Sail Loft in search of the Ship's Husband. Upon entering I could taste the salt air as it mingled with smell of hessian rope and tar, it was like an elixir and conjured up everything associated with the sea. I just loved being enveloped in the heady atmosphere it wrapped around me like a warm blanket. My vivid mind conjured up visions of a tall ship and a star to steer by. I felt "at home".

We found the Ship's Husband in his office to the side of the cavernous Sail Loft. My father introduced himself, shook hands and duly handed me over into the capable hands of Mr Henry Jackson. Mr. Jackson assured my father that he would look after me and invited him to come aboard the trawler for a look around if he so wished. I'd already spoken to Dad about this possibility and asked that he didn't come along. I wanted to show that I was a man and could look after myself, stand on my own two feet in this maritime world of toughened trawlermen. So my father, as agreed that I would show him around the vessel on my return from fishing, kindly declined, hence Mr Jackson suggested and directed my father to a dockside cafe where he could wait until sailing time which would be within the hour then he could wave me off as we passed through the lock gates and out into the River Humber. It was a tradition for mums, dads, wives and sweethearts to come down and wave off their men. Anyway this was good to know as it wouldn't make me so self conscious waving excitedly to my father when he'd be amongst the crowd of well wishes. Tragically for some it would be the last time they saw one another!

As it is common today to announce in any form of media communication a warning that it may contain words, expressions or a style of language that some may find upsetting or offensive then this certainly applies to the next part of my story.

It contains a lot of dialogue reflecting real conversations. The vast majority of the readers will no doubt be very familiar with the style of language they are about to read, which was abundantly used amongst trawlermen of the time. However, my apologies as I fear that there may be those who may find the language offensive or embarrassing. Some may even be horrified to know that in the sixties this type of language was common place even within earshot of the many administrative offices in St.Andrew's Dock. Offices that of course employed numerous women and young men from all social backgrounds. It went with the job and those that didn't like it would leave and find employment in more genteel surroundings. For the most part the many just ignored it, it went with the territory and was considered a hazard of the job, most of which were very well paid! Perhaps this was to salve the consciousness of the 'Bosses'...who knows?

Women in the main didn't feature in the world of tough trawlermen. Wives sweethearts and girlfriends tended to stay in the background, *'keeping the home fires burning'*. However, their women did become prominent following the triple trawler tragedy of 1968. They were stoutly led by the indomitable Lillian Bilocca, a British Fisheries worker who formed a committee to confront the trawler owners demanding better safety standards for their men. At first they were treated as busy bodies interfering in a man's world but their dogged persistence, which resulted in questions being raised in the Houses of Parliament, demonstrated that they were a force to be reckoned with. Woman associated with the fishing trades tended to wear head scarves for general day to day wear, hence the ladies that led these protests became known as the *Headscarf Revolutions*.

After gathering at 10,000 signature petition known as the Fisherman's Charter. Yvonne, Lillian, Mary and Christine marched down to Parliament. Their campaign led to a staggering 88 safety concessions for fishermen and saved countless lives. These included radio operators for all ships, better weather forecasting, training for young deck hands, more safety equipment and a mother ship with hospital facilities to patrol with the fleet. The Charter also stated that ships should report in by radio at least once a day.



Lillian Bilocca leads her protest group along Hessle Road to meet the trawler owners at St.Andrews Dock to campaign for greater safety at sea for fishermen in 1968

Eventually the reluctant trawler owners had to negotiate with them after Harold Wilson, the then Prime Minister, and his Government placed in to law their demands for better safety measures. This resulted in many improved welfare features such as the appointment of qualified radio operators and long range communications systems on each trawler. Prior to this ruling many trawlers had nothing more than standard marine VHF radio's for communications. Trawlers were never again to sail shorthanded, and the introduction of better weather forecasting giving skippers advanced warning predicating ferocious storms and severe icing conditions. Plus the provision of fleet support vessels which would follow the main fishing fleets to be there as '*standby*' rescue vessels and to provide medical facilities to injured seamen. Injuries amongst trawlermen were not uncommon and when they did occur they tended to be serious requiring expert medical attention. This left the skipper with the only option to stop fishing and land the injured seaman to the nearest port in either Norway, Greenland or Iceland. Sometimes even Russia. Trawlers often worked so far out at sea they were usually beyond the range of SAR helicopters of that era. Now there was medical help on hand. Of course transferring men between trawler and rescue vessel was a challenge but for the most part they were highly successful additions to the fleet. These ladies achievements actually pushed the Vietnam War off the front pages for a while. It was said that these women achieved more in a few weeks than politicians, unions and the fishing industry had done in 100 years. However, it was not without personal tragedies as Lillian received death threats, was sacked from her job, blacklisted and never worked in the fishing industry again.

Due to the passage of time, most of these ladies have now passed on but such was their popularity and significance in what they achieved in raising safety standards for their men, they are remembered and immortalised by various monuments and plaques strategically place in and around the old Fishing Community area of Hessle Road, Hull, and what remains of the once vibrant St.Andrew's dock, now a shopping centre.

The last of the *Headscarf Revolutionaries*, one lady by the name of Yvonne Blenkinsop died in April 2022 at the age of 83. '*The city has lost an iconic citizen*' said the headlines in the Hull Daily Mail. Yvonne was the last of one of the fearless four leaders of the Headscarf's, Lil died in 1988, then Christine in 2001, Mary in 2017. The city owes Yvonne Blenkinsop and all the Headscarf Revolutionaries a debt of gratitude. Their perseverance and passion change the landscape of trawling for ever and cemented their status as working class heroes both in Hull and throughout the nation. Sparking a revolution with protesters storming the trawler company offices and picketing the docks.



A young Yvonne protesting outside the Offices of Hull trawler owners.



A recent photo of Yvonne in her 80's

Whilst not in anyway intending to demeanour the ladylike qualities of these women suffice to say they wouldn't blush at the language generally used by their men and could if the occasion so warranted it give as good as they got in any intersocial exchange of words!!

Therefore, I offer no apology for what you are about to read as to alter or adjust any of the phrases and words used would be a distortion of history. I hope readers will excuse me for allowing me to be able to tell the story exactly as it was without pulling any punches; you have been warned!

So my story continues.....

I was standing on the dock complete with my 'kit' bag, well actually it was an old suitcase, containing working gear and some leisure clothing that I was soon to learn would be of no use to me whatsoever on this trip. The routine was to be work, eat, sleep and repeated in that order throughout the voyage. Despite being a 'Spare Hand,' unpaid, I was expected to pull my weight. After my father had left, Mr Jackson turned to me and offered his hand which I eagerly took as he looked me up and down and grunted,

"Do you really want to go aboard dressed like that? You can change in my office if you want."

Feeling slightly crestfallen as I had expected to be complimented on my smartly turned out appearance in my uniform and highly polished bulled shoes, I meekly replied.

"Yes, sir."

"Well then on your head be it tha knows don yea say I dinnin warn ya," he grunted in his broad Yorkshire accent.

"And thas no need for the sir, everyone calls me 'Jacko' but you call me Mr. Jackson. Follow me then lad." Suddenly, he didn't seem too friendly as he had been a few moments ago when in the presence of my Dad. Feelings of alienation were beginning to creep in and I was not even onboard yet! I determinedly told myself, I'm in man's world now so head up, chest out, chin up and carry on.

I followed Mr.Jackson out of the Sail Loft and onto the quay where I was greeted by the overpowering smell of fish and diesel oil mixed with the salty tang of the sea, and assailed by a cacophony of noise. The air was full of noxious fumes and smoke coming from the many old steam trawlers tied up alongside the quay. This was the 60's and the new clean and efficient diesel electric trawlers were only just being delivered from the builders and coal burning steam power was still in great abundance. There was the clattering of steam driven dockside cranes, clanking away, working furiously and exhausting smoke and steam giving them the appearance of some pre-historic monsters as they feverishly swung left to right almost in unison. A choreographed act with slings of stores lifted from the numerous lorries lining up to have their cargoes unloaded onto the waiting trawlers. Last minute essential

stores and victuals being thrown onboard, such was the urgency to get the ships ready for the impending high tide on which they must sail or they'd have to wait for another 12 hours. This was before the new rules fought for by Lillian Bilocca when it was not uncommon for vessels to sail without a full complement so as not to miss the tide. Any member of the crew who failed to report aboard at the appointed time was left behind. Time was money to trawler owners and they wanted their ships away to sea as soon as possible. This awesome sight of industriousness stretched out before me all along the quayside into infinity, eventually being enveloped like an ecclesiastical shroud of the early morning mist rolling in from the adjacent River Humber.

The scene across the dock was a mass of funnels and masts, with trawlers at various angles alongside each other interlocked like a massive jigsaw. There were trawlers manoeuvring in the middle of the dock swinging around under the guidance of steam tugs also belching out thick black smoke as they assisted trawlers lining up to face the dock entrance. It looked chaotic but I assumed it must all be orchestrated by someone. Maybe the harbour master knew what was going as he sat in his office moving models around on a board depicting the dock? In reality I was to learn that they just sorted themselves out! Everywhere I looked there was a frenzy of activity. Men known as 'riggers' were running around and crawling all over the trawlers like ants, busily preparing them for sea.



Busy scenes from St.Andrew's dock as trawlers manoeuvre to get into the queue for sailing

Mind you these riggers weren't too busy to discover me in my smart Trinity House uniform! I had hardly left the confines of the Sail Loft when the first strident wolf whistle was heard, this soon reached a crescendo as more joined in. This broke into cat calling and whooping sounds like some sort of tribal ritual or initiating ceremony. I was at an age when my peer group had come across the 'F' word but of course this was only ever to be whispered secretly between ourselves when we would snigger together as though it was some secret code word strictly forbidden to be used within the earshot of our elders. Goodness knows what disciplinary sanctions would have befallen us if we were ever to be heard uttering these foul words. Our elders would surely not use language as vulgar as this? Oh, how naive I was. I was soon to realise that not only was this word frequently used by grown ups, especially down here on the docks where it was voiced with monotonous regularity but I was soon to discover that it is probably the most versatile word in the English language and can describe anything from anger to pleasure and just about every human emotion in between!! I would never have believed it if I'd not heard this for myself.

And so it started....

"Look at 'er in that f.....g la de da sailor boy suit, looks a right f.....g tart."

Being referred to in the female gender as 'er and tart hurt my pride. I was a young man.

"Who the f.....k does he think he, is f.....g Nelson?" shouted another.

“F.....g toy soldier boy,” yelled another.

I looked at Mr Jackson for some sort of morale support being the butt of such ridicule.

“Well lad, I did f.....g warn ya,” was all he could say.

“Yes sir,” was all I could mumble in reply, now blushing red with embarrassment wishing there was somewhere I could hide but no, I was totally exposed on the open dockside for all to see.

There was no let up to the laughter and cat calling as I followed him along the quayside struggling somewhat with the large suitcase my parents had given me. Passing each vessel, the riggers or in some cases the crew busily working in preparation for going to sea started cat calling and jeering that spread like the proverbial Mexican wave, I felt very self-conscious and not so proud anymore. The case seeming to get heavier with each footstep. There were no wheels on suitcases in those days that simple but worthwhile addition had yet to be invented! Jacko, or Mr Jackson should I say, being less than helpful as he kept turning and looking at me.

“Come tha knows and keep up lad I’m a f.....g busy man. I ain’t got all day.”

Obviously emphasising that he was wasting his time hand holding me on to the trawler. Despite the excitement at the prospect of going to sea I was beginning to feel apprehension creep over me wondering what I had let myself in for. Having passed three ships along the quay, to my relief, I saw bow of the ‘*Somerset Maughan*’ towering above but no gangway to get aboard!



‘Somerset Maughan’ interlocked with other trawlers in St. Andrews Fish Dock

But seeing others jumping aboard with cases and kit bags it was the only way onboard that I could see. Alongside the ship where the ship’s side was almost level with the quay and what appeared to be the easiest route to get onboard was a cluster of men shaking hands and greeting each other with suitcases and canvas bags at their feet. A cloud of smoke enveloping them as to a man they were all smoking. As I got closer I could hear all the friendly banter.

“Now then Georgie how the f.....k are ya thee tha’ knows”

“F.....ing good ta mate.”

“How’s tha lass?”

“Aye she’s ok, in the f.....g pudding club though.”

“Well then I ‘ope you get the f.....g bastard that did it,” replied another with a burst of laughter.

“Er away with ya, ya f.....g know she’s a married woman now.”

“Aye I know that but ‘er bloke’s been away at sea a lot recently,” came the retort followed by a bellow of laughter from the assembled group.

“Aw f.....k off ya wassock” was the reply as they turned to start boarding. First passing their cases and sacks to others already onboard before jumping down onto the deck. One of them, as he stepped onto the deck spotted Mr. Jackson and me.

“Hey oooop Jacko what ‘ave you ‘er.”

“He’s the f.....g spare hand mate,’ said Jim “and ‘es all yours now....I’ve gotta go,” turning to me,

“This blokes the cook and you’ll be working wiv ‘im for the most part, so ‘ell take over ‘olding ya f.....g ‘and now lad.”

Then with a sudden unexpected expression of warmth Mr.Jackson held out his hand and said, “‘ave a good trip and keep out of trouble or they’ll thro ya overboard does ya ‘aer lad.”

“Yes sir, thank you sir” was all I could say.

After shaking my hand he looked me sttaight in the eyes, stating,

“Fa’ f.....k sake stop calling me sir, I’m no f.....g sir’, then looking up to the heavens in a whimsically way putting one hand to his chin as though deep in thought and a broad grin said, “but who knows, tha know, maybe in this years honours list”? Then suddenly coming down to earth turned to me, “Now on ya way wiv Jim.” Without a backward look raised his hand with a wave and walked briskly off down the dock side to confront his next challenge getting the company ships ready for sea.

“Reet then lad give us ya tha case,” and follow me aboard and we can get thee settled into ya bunk” Then with a loud laugh, “well not actually into ya bunk but I’ll show yea were it is tha knows I’ve got loads of jobs for you young fella me lad,” said Jim with a beaming smile offering a feeling of warmth and friendship after the initial frosty welcome from the ‘Ship’s Husband’.

Jim, the cook, having passed his bags aboard grabbed my suitcase and with ease threw it over the gap between shore and ship where it was thankfully caught by another, meanwhile taken by surprise I was praying it wouldn’t fall into the dock or land unceremoniously on the deck and burst open!

“I’ll leave it ‘er for ya lad,” yelled the guy on the deck whom I later discovered was the Mate, as he put it down on the deck, pointing at it, before waving and picking up his own luggage to make his way towards the aft end of the vessel where he disappeared through a watertight door.

Attempting at being seaman like after seeing how the joining crew just jumped aboard with ease like a circus highwire act. As lithe as a cat I safely negotiated the gap between ship and shore, willing myself not to lose balance and end up in the dirty oily waters, full of assorted detritus, gurgling between the ship and the quayside as the ‘*Somerset Maughan*’ gently moved at her moorings. Her movements created by other trawlers busily manoeuvring about the dock in preparation for sailing. Jumping down onto the foredeck without falling over. I’d arrived aboard my first ship!



Joining ship. No gang plank or hand rails...just jump!

Jim was smoking a pipe the size of a bucket and it soon became apparent that it was a rare sight to see him without it firmly clamped between his teeth, even when he was cooking in the galley it was still there giving off great volumes of smoke. I often wondered if he took it out of his mouth when he slept. Goodness knows how many of his food offerings were garnished or flavoured with ash!? But nobody, including me, complained as his food was wholesome and tasty. He was producing a cloud of smoke like a steam train. Jim was the exception to the rule when it came to smoking amongst the crew; he was the only one who smoked a pipe. All the crew smoked, in fact I was the only person aboard not to smoke. The fad for smoking at school in the cycle sheds never did appeal to me. This despite both my parents smoking...I never liked the ghastly smell left by cigarettes. Pipes and cigars were completely different, that was a smell that I did like, and still do. It was at that time when the American comedian and part singer Bob Newhart was making recordings of his sardonic take on life. One recital was of Walter Raleigh exploring the new found country of North America having an imaginary telephone call explaining how to use tobacco to an astonished Queen Elizabeth I, who replied,

“So you take these toooobacco leaves, roll them up in a piece of paper put it in your mouth and set fire to it!” she questioned incredulously.

“Yes, that’s right ma’am.”

Replying in a conciliatory voice as though speaking to a slightly senile, eccentric friend, “Sorry my dear Walter, I can’t see that catching on over here but do enjoy your stay over there.”

That imaginary conversation just about summed up my view of the habit of smoking, a pointless exercise!

Anyway, all the remainder of the crew to a man smoked and did so using tinned tobacco to make roll ups, these appeared to become permanently stuck to their bottom lips and along with their flat caps they were the image of the legendary Daily Express cartoon character Andy Capp. However, I was impressed that the crew from the skipper down to the galley boy joined the ship in what appeared to be their best *‘bib and tucker’*. Well certainly a jacket, shirt and tie, the younger ones finishing off their ensemble with drain pipe trousers and winkle picker shoes; it was after all the age of the Teddy Boy. Seeing these smartly turned out guys, some being fashionably flashy meant that I felt much less out of place in my school naval style uniform.

Jim showed me down aft to a bunk in a cabin below decks which I was to share with five other crew members. Here I was allocated one of the upper bunks and a locker to store my personal possessions. This was the space I was going to call home for the next three weeks, I dumped my suitcase onto my allocated bunk, which was yet to be made up as there was just a pile of linen sitting there, no Mum here to make my bed! I then followed Jim to the galley one deck above as I would be initially working with him and he didn’t want me to get lost! At first the ship seemed to be a maze of alleyways, ladders, water tight doors and compartments. After a few days onboard I soon realised just how small she was, especially when we sailed into the teeth of a gale! She weighed in at less than 1,000 tons gross, this might sound quite large but tons gross when referring to a ship is not the actual weight of the ship which is referred to as deadweight.

When we arrived in the galley I was introduced to Gary, the galley boy, appropriately nicknamed Elvis as he was the spitting image of ‘The King’ complete with the huge, black, heavily greased quiff like a wave at sea bouncing about on his head as he busied himself unpacking and putting away stores.

“Reet lad now ya knows ya way back ‘er to the galley go and get changed into ya working gear rig then cum back ‘er, and you can ‘elp young Elvis ‘er make the sarnies for lunch,” ordered Jim enveloping me in great clouds of smoke.

“But I must report to the Captain first,” I insisted. It had been impressed on me that it was a cardinal sin not to report and make myself known to the Captain.

Jim looked at me quizzically,

“Two things lad, first of all he ain’t a f....g Captain, he’s a Skipper, this ain’t the f...g Queen Mary, it’s a f.....g fishing boat”! emphasised Jim expelling more clouds of sweet smelling tobacco smoke almost obliterating sight in the small galley area.

“Secondly, take my advice don ya go and see him dressed like that!” he indicated with the stem of his pipe at my uniform whilst releasing more clouds of smoke from his mouth.

I was crestfallen that my moment of glory was going to be snatched from me. I was very proud of my uniform despite the cat calling I had endured from the dock riggers and I was really looking forward to presenting myself to the Captain. I ignored Jim’s advice and asked him for directions to the bridge.

“Tha ya go agin, ‘ve told ya this ain’t the Queen bloody Mary it’s a f.....g trawler, that’s a fishing boat with a wheel ‘ouse. Any roads if that’s what ya wanna do go reet forrad and climb the ladders as far as ya can go and you’ll come to tha brid..... I mean f....g wheel ‘ouse. Tha ‘uve got me saying that now posh boy!” His two words ‘Posh Boy’ were to stick!

I was eager to follow through by reporting to the Captain to make my number with him. I eventually came to the top and the door marked wheelhouse. On entering I was greeted by a thick, dense fog of acrid smoke that immediately caught the back of my throat which brought on a coughing fit as I was breathing deeply after the exertions of climbing up the ladders. I literally staggered, and fell into the wheelhouse.



A trawler skipper in the wheelhouse complete with flat cap

‘Oh gawd what an ungainly entry,’ I inwardly chastised myself.

I’d entered the wheelhouse on the port side and looking over to the stb’d side I perceived through the thick smog a group of “Andy Capps” as I privately thought of them. There stood four men gathered around a chart table covered with several nautical maps which I later discovered showed the fishing grounds, our destination. Obviously my rather noisy arrival had disturbed their musings as they all to a man turned to stare at me. Well I think they were starring as I couldn’t actually see their eyes beneath the cloth caps pulled down over their foreheads.

They were all dressed in baggy trousers and thick woollen jumpers in varying shades of grey. “Who the f...k are you,” asked one of the group in a clear authoritative voice as he stepped forward to take a closer look at me, his head motioning up and down as he took in the whole of my 5’10” frame. His expression rather like a pet owner wondering what on earth the cat had dragged in. I immediately came to attention throwing up a crisp, smart, best as I could muster salute and introduced myself.

"I'm Officer Cadet Stevens, Sir, joining as a spare hand and wish to report to Captain Brettell."

The grim looking weather beaten faces of the other three men who's hands still hadn't left their pockets suddenly broke into toothy, tobacco stained grins. One of the men displaying more gummy gaps than he had teeth. In my mind I was expecting the Captain to be one of the aged looking other three but it was the youngest looking one who had stepped forward as he offered me his hand, drawing it from his pocket rather like a cowboy drawing a six shooter.

"I'm the skipper, son, Bill Brettell, everyone calls me Billy and so can you, and, you can cut out all the captain crap...I ain't no captain and we don't stand on ceremony aboard here. You can address me as skipper, Billy, or if you want to be more formal it's Mr.Brettell, it's your choice son."

"Yes sir....I mean skipper," I replied dropping my salute and suddenly feeling self conscious but relaxing as Billy continued,

"And you can take that f.....g silly sailor boy suit off you look a right little f.....g fairy," he said with a broad grin bursting in to laughter and stating.

"Ya don't want to end some bloke's special friend do you?"

I was so embarrassed I felt my face burning as I blushed; I'd done everything wrong, what a start to my fledging seagoing career.

"I want to be friends with everyone onboard," I said bravely as I continued,

"Anyway I've got a best friend at school."

The skipper raised his eyes to the heavens saying,

"For f.....s sake"! F.....k off and come back to see me when you've changed." The skipper's words ringing in my ears as I turned to dash out of the wheelhouse and, as I had entered, tripping on the high storm sill in the doorway.

It soon transpired that I had a lot to learn about the real world and the true meaning of a 'Special Friend'!

Finding my way back to my cabin I quickly changed from my uniform into jeans and my old, green scout sweater with the badges removed. I was no longer a scout as having become a Trinity boy I didn't feel the need to belong to what I saw as gang for youngsters!

Having changed I went back to the galley to let Jim know I was going back to see the skipper but he wasn't there, only Elvis still packing away stores and he wasn't really interested. I raced back to the wheelhouse keen to make my number up with the skipper. When I entered the wheelhouse I found him leaning over the chart table talking to another man who turned out to be the First Mate who had taken my suitcase when I first came aboard. Bill Brettell turned and took one look at me with thunderous eyes.

"What the f....k! get that f.....g thing off immediately." I was confused and had no idea what he was talking about. Obviously the look of astonishment on my face made him explain, "Green laddie, ya wearing a f.....g green, don't ya know that's bad f....g luck aboard a trawler?"

I just stood there opened mouth, shocked at what I had unwittingly done. What with "Special Friends" and now not to wear green on-board I had so much to learn. I once again fled from the wheelhouse back to my bunk and hastily changed into a large, Arran sweater that my mother had knitted specially for this trip. I had visions of just wearing this for best. However, the only time the crew wore their best clothes was the day of arrival back in Hull for going home.

Having changed I sheepishly went back to the galley rather than go back to see the skipper as I wasn't sure if even white was allowed as nearly all the crew were wearing drab, grey coloured sweaters. Thankfully Elvis the galley boy and Jim the cook had changed and were wearing white jackets and aprons so I guessed that white was acceptable. Jim wasted no time

in setting me to scrubbing clean the messroom which was next to the galley on one side, then on the other a much smaller mess room where the skipper and the officers ate. Men designated as officers aboard the trawler were the skipper, mate, radio officer, chief and second engineers, the cook was also counted as an officer although he very rarely ate in this mess usually just eating on the ‘hoof’ in the galley.

“As soon as yo’ve done cleaning the messrooms lad set ya self up on one of the mess tables with loaves of bread, butter and spam from the cupboard in tha and get making sandwiches for the crew’s dinner, there’s no hot dinner on sailing day, they’re lucky to get a spam sandwich as me and Elvis ‘ere have so much to do first day....any roads they’ll get a pan shackles for their tea...ya do know what a pan of shackles is don’t you”? His pipe still stuck between his teeth producing an evocative smell that reminded me of my sea captain Grandfather and of home. As for ‘shackles’ the only shackles I knew from school were heavy, metal like ring bolts that attached the anchor chain to the anchor or wire hawsers to rings on the deck of a ship. Obviously I was giving Jim a blank stare!

“It’s a stew, meat and veg with lots of beef fat, just how the lads want it, well f...k ‘em if they don’t like!” Jim said with a laugh. “Yeah garnished with pipe ash,” interjected Elvis, “but don’t tell the lads that as they think it’s a ‘erb or sommat Jim adds for flavour.”

I soon found the ingredients and settled down to making the crew’s dinner feeling that at last I was contributing to the voyage and that it may be possible to become an acceptable member of the crew.

Note for southerners, Hull being north of the Wash, dinner is the mid-day meal and the evening meal referred to as tea and meal later than tea is known as supper.



Typical Trawler Officers' Messroom



Typical Trawler Crews' Messrooms

Unexpectedly, the ship had started to vibrate as her engines came to life and over the loudspeaker I heard a voice order,

“Stations fo’r and aft, lads.” I guessed it was the skipper, Bill Brettell.

I jumped up and asked Jim if I could go out on deck to wave good bye to my father who I hoped would still be there to wave me off.

‘Cos ya can lad, we’re coming too,” said Jim as he showed me the way to the top aft deck where the lifeboat was stored neatly in its cradle, with a small davit for launching and also the

white cylinders containing the life rafts which I had learnt about at school. Up on this deck we joined those of the crew who weren't engaged with letting go the ropes. Soon we were being pushed and cajoled by a steam tug assisting us away from the quayside and lining us up to be able to make our own way through the lock gates which were now wide open as the high tide out in the Humber now matched the water level in the dock. All around there was the hustle and bustle of other trawlers starting to move away from the quays, all anxious to get in line to steam through the lock gates and get away on the height of the tide. Stragglers would find that they would miss this opportunity and then have the laborious wait of having to be 'locked' to get out as the contradictory saying goes. This is when the vessel sits in the locks whilst water is either pumped in or out so as to match the level of water in the River Humber. Once the equilibrium has been achieved the vessel can be released. See next picture.

With great excitement I tried to take in all that was happening, my ears being assailed by a combined mixture of the sound of diesel engines, whistles blowing a deep bellowing sound like a bull and answering high pitched toots from the tugs acknowledging signals from the trawlers as they orchestrated and manoeuvred ready to go through the lock gates. The air was thick with black smoke spewing from the funnels of some of the older steam driven trawlers as their boilers blew out three days of accumulated soot having been idle since returning from the last voyage. Soon we were in the lock and I was waving madly to attract the attention of my father amongst the crowd of other families that had come down to see off their fathers, boyfriends or partners. Whistles, cheering and yells, wishing good luck and come back with a good catch. Even children in prams were on the quayside waving too. Despite the early hour, many of the offices of trawlers' owners, ship's chandlers, the White Fish Authority buildings were occupied, so many of the occupants were leaning out of the windows to wave at the departing trawlers. The whole spectacle had a carnival atmosphere all of which added to the excitement and pride I felt embarking on a great sea voyage and adventure, I was Captain Cook!



Trawlers sailing through the lock



Somerset Maugham sailing on the High Tide passing through the locks and the Bull Nose out into the Humber

Soon we had shot through from the lock entrance and out in to the fog laden Humber passing the well known 'Bullnose' at the end of the dock, as it was affectionately known. Soon all these familiar landmarks began to fade into the foggy morning as the engines picked up a beat as the speed increased and we were soon enveloped in heavy fog. Losing sight of my father, any lingering feelings of home sickness were overcome with the sense of anticipation of the voyage ahead. I was at last on a ship and embarking upon a great expedition. The nearest I had come to going to sea before was on the 'Yorkshire Bell' sailing around Bridlington Bay. With the exuberance of youth I was experiencing an amazing feeling of euphoria, dreaming of the swashbuckling challenges that lay ahead. I was ready for anything.

My day dream musings were rudely interrupted.

"Reet back to work," ordered Jim.

"Get on with those sarnies as the lads will soon be wanting a bite to eat with a mug of tea so get to it or your name will be mud."

I scuttled back down to the mess room and eagerly set too making sandwiches. Thankfully the bread was sliced so I didn't have to cut it! I soon had a mountain of delicious spam sandwiches ready as the crew came into the mess room and started grabbing my offerings then queuing up to get a mug of tea from the huge aluminum pot that Elvis prepared. I'd never seen such a huge pot before, it had two handles required for lifting and pouring but as my sandwiches quickly disappeared I realised looking at the size of each crew members mug, one of which alone would take all the tea in the pot my Mum made at home, so no wonder the tea pot needed to be as big as it was! Finally the rush was over and men disappeared as quickly as they had appeared and I was able to make myself a sandwich of spam and grab a large mug of tea to slurp.

Eager to be up on deck to see what I could of the Humber I had taken my sandwich and tea on to the aft lifeboat deck from where I could just make out all the ships in the long complex of docks that Hull had in those days. Like Canary Wharf in London most of those docks have now long gone and are adorned with luxury houses and apartments. It was whilst enjoying my dinner gazing at the mass of masts and derricks of large cargo ships shrouded in the now thinning fog that I pondered from where these ocean going vessels had returned. My thoughts conjured up such places as Hong Kong, Singapore, India, Cape Town, the Americas. Now home from sailing along the well established trade routes of the mighty British Empire bringing cargoes of timber, tobacco, tea, coffee, with wool and meat from the Antipodes. Places that I was eager to visit when finally passing out from Trinity House and setting off on my career path. Suddenly my musings were disturbed by a large bang and a clanging of a bell

as the trawler lurched to one side causing me a momentary loss of balance. Fortunately I was leaning against the taffrail which had prevented me from falling over but I lost my mug of tea as it went spiralling into the Humber. Wondering what on earth had happened, thinking blimey we've only just set sail and we've run aground! Then in the phosphorus wash of the propellers suddenly surfacing from the beneath the muddy Humber appeared a large buoy with its bell ringing madly like some angry monster from the deep as I realised we had hit one of the navigation buoys. Looking to the wheelhouse I could see the skipper and a couple of others jammed in the wheelhouse door on the stb'd side, which faced aft, with ladders that went to the deck below and one deck above from where I was standing. They were all peering at the buoy now disappearing astern of us but then seemingly unperturbed the faces disappeared and the door slammed shut. I heard later that Bill Brettell was renowned for hitting these buoys as he would cut corners in the winding channel that was laid out to direct ships negotiating the many mud banks.

Soon the trawler was rounding Spurn Point and out into the North Sea as we headed for Flamborough Head our next directional navigation aid. I was feeling rather proud of myself as I set to working in the galley and messrooms under the guidance of Jim the cook and his ever present pipe. I cleared away the mess room and left overs from dinner, washed up the crockery and cutlery put it all away and then started helping Elvis chop the meat and vegetables for the pan of 'shackles' that was going to be for the crew tea. In the meantime I was then told to go and make up the officers' cabins, first collecting linen from one of the store rooms. It was whilst doing this I realised that, as with my bunk, just how narrow they were. I was good at making beds as this was one of the chores I had to do at home so as to earn my meagre weekly allowance of five shillings pocket money.

Soon it was time for tea and the 'shackles' which despite the large globules of fat floating on the top I consumed with relish and maybe it did have the added flavouring from Jim's pipe but gosh it was good. It was whilst clearing away the messroom that the motion of the ship changed and started to become more pronounced, up and down and then side to side. At first I found it enjoyable rather like the 'Big Dipper' at Hull Fair, but unlike the rides I had enjoyed there, this ride wasn't going to end any time soon! The smell of Jim's pipe didn't seem so pleasant anymore, in fact it was beginning to smell repulsive. Yep this was the first rumblings of the dreaded '*mal de mer*' that earlier I had congratulated myself in thinking that I was going to avoid. I asked Jim if I could leave the messroom and galley to go on deck for some fresh air which I now craved.

"Aye lad cos ya can as ya beginning to look green around the gills and I donna want ya spewing up in my nice clean galley so get the f....k out of 'ere," demanded Jim who had just, together with Elvis, feverishly scrubbed down the galley deck.

I attempted to try and look cool and give the impression I wasn't going to be seasick. Despite trying to nonchalantly wander towards the aft end of the vessel but actually staggering with each roll of the trawler as she started battering through the increasing seas.



Rough seas as we head north

Did I say I wanted fresh air? Arriving down aft the air smelt anything but fresh, with the mixture of diesel fumes, old fish and the disgusting lingering smell of cod liver oil, as down aft is where the cod liver oil processing room was situated. Where as previously this has been a pleasant smell of all things nautical, it had now metamorphosed into the most nauseating, vilest smell on earth. To make matters worse the mate came cheerily walking down the deck towards the accommodation door I had just staggered out of. How was it he was able to keep so upright and steady with the trawler now swaying madly from side to side?

“Oi don’t you spew up over my deck there posh boy, I’ve just ‘ad it washed down by the lads,” he growled as he brushed passed me. Those words ‘Posh Boy’ didn’t actually register with me as at that precise moment I was desperately attempting to hold on to the contents of my stomach. That’s two who had, without a shred of sympathy, told me not to throw up over their clean decks as I staggered to the ship’s side. Actually at that moment I couldn’t have cared less if I had deposited the insides of my stomach over the mate’s nice clean deck. I did however make it to the side of the trawler just in time to reacquaint myself with not only my dinner of spam sandwiches but the minced up, half congested ‘shackles’ with its globs of white glutinous fat which I had not so long previously devoured, appearing from my mouth like a magician’s golf balls!

Having called after that fictitious and synonymous name forever associated with sea sickness, ‘Hughie’ and with my stomach well and truly emptied I made my way below to my bunk. Not before having to return once again to the side of the ship and call after ‘Hughie’ when I had walked passed the cod liver oil processing room and breathed in the nauseous, thick oily laden atmosphere of that area. Despite having nothing left to give to the sea my stomach still wanted to wretch and heave and this happening twice again before I was able to get to my bunk.

Suddenly, I didn’t want to be a ‘f.....g’ sailor anymore...

Sailing north and at the Fishing Grounds

The following morning and despite the trawler’s motion increasing we sailed north of Thurso out of the lee of the Scottish coast becoming exposed to the relentless westerlies blowing in from the Atlantic. I gingerly climbed down from my bunk and actually felt normal, had I found my mythical sea legs? I was the only one in the cabin as the other men had been up bright and early for breakfast and were now no doubt attending to the day’s work preparing for arrival at the fishing grounds. The thought of breakfast suddenly made me realise just how hungry I was and in desperate need of some sustenance. I quickly visited the ‘heads’ (*nautical term for bathrooms & toilets*) had a quick wash, well splashed cold water over my

face, and with no need to change as I was wearing the same clothes as yesterday, I didn't care, I was over the seasickness and felt like a new born spring lamb as I dashed up the ladders and to the galley.

"Arh there ye are posh boy," said Jim the cook greeting me cheerily, his pipe still in his mouth and bellowing out clouds of smoke.

"Suppose you'll be wanting some breakfast tha knows, eh?"

"Yes please," I eagerly replied.

"Well ya tough out of luck as we wiped down yon breakfast nearly an 'our ago," came the stern reply from Jim.

Then just as I was about to ask if I could at least have some bread and marmalade he smiled, how he did that without dropping his pipe I don't know but he did and said, "Cos ya can have some brekky lad but you'll have to cook it ya sen, just help yourself to eggs and bacon in yon fridge in tha corner then after you've 'ad that you can scrub out the mess rooms again. Elvis is just doing the cabins so you've missed that chore."

With the thought of enjoying some bacon and eggs along with lashings of hot buttered toast I would have willingly washed the entire foredeck of the trawler I was so happy.

After I'd enjoyed the best breakfast I could have ever imagined, I had been so hungry, I set too and started cleaning the crew mess room which I soon learnt was going to be one of my daily routines. Although I wasn't being paid by the company I was expected to pull my weight and work along with the rest of the crew, rather like working my passage. Glancing out of the port hole on the stb'd side I could see the coast of Scotland on the misty horizon as the trawler rolled from side to side with the port hole being suddenly engulfed in water.

"That's funny," I thought to myself, "Scotland should be on the port side if we are heading north."

I pondered this for sometime before I heard Jim as he put his head through the serving hatch from the galley,

"It na good starring out the port hole lad gerr on with cleaning before the lads come in off deck for tha 'smoko," he barked.

Curiosity had the better of me and even though I might suffer a bollocking I asked innocently, "Jim why is Scotland on this side, it should be on the port side." Just as his head disappeared from the hatch into the galley trailing a cloud of smoke it suddenly popped back out through the hatch again.

"Cos we're f.....g well going back to 'ull, that's why!" he said rather crossly.

It transpired that when the trawler had smacked into the buoy back in the River Humber it had gone under the vessel, hit the propeller and damaged the blades before surfacing when I had seen it from the aft deck whilst munching on my spam sandwich. The impending problem only being noticed throughout the night as other trawlers that had sailed after us were catching up and overhauling us. This shouldn't be, we were one of the fastest modern trawlers sailing out of Hull. When the skipper had asked the chief engineer to increase the revs the accompanying vibration demonstrated that all wasn't well and the Chief Engineer after a radio call to the Engineering Superintendent back in Hull had come to the conclusion that the propeller must have been damaged.

I was gutted we were going back to Hull after only two days at sea!

Later that morning whilst prepping the officer's mess the skipper came in for some coffee and although not totally prepared for the ribbing I was going to get I should have anticipated it.

"Oi posh boy, it's you and that f.....g green sweater you wore, I told you wearing green aboard 'ere brings bad luck."

It appeared that because I didn't speak with a Hull accent, probably because my parents didn't either, I had been nicknamed 'Posh Boy'! Not that this bothered me at all, I could have been called worse!

Returning to Hull only added to my feeling of despondency, not only had my fledging seagoing career been stalled but it would appear it was all my fault! My mood soon changed though when the skipper confirmed that I could come back once the repairs had been carried out in Hull dry-dock, which he anticipated would only take a day or two. The dry dock was already on standby awaiting our return.

We arrived back on the high tide in what could be described as the dead of night but the St. Andrew's dock was wide awake. A number of trawlers were arriving back ready to unload their catches for the morning fish auction markets which would be opening in only an hour or two at around 04:00. The world of supplying the nation with fresh fish never slept.



Unloading the catch

I was not sure how I was going to get home as I didn't fancy ringing my parents and waking them up at that time of night. No buses and I didn't have enough money for a taxi so I was becoming accustomed to the fact that I would have to stay onboard whilst nearly all the crew apart from the Chief Engineer went home for a day or so. Most lived within a short walk of the dock in the numerous rows of terrace houses that had been built at the turn of the 19th century to accommodate the ever expanding workforce required to support the massive Hull Fishing Industry. These were along the famous Hessle Road, the epicentre of the Fishing Industry. Although this housing by then dated and considered old fashioned by modern day standards, it was considered to be the California of Hull as the occupants collectively earned large wages. Not only by the 'Three Day Millionaires' who crewed the trawlers but equally as well were the high earning 'Bobbbers' who worked the huge market and then the Fish Merchants themselves. This was the pinnacle of the great British fishing industry which evolution has now confined to the history books. Happily, the skipper came to my rescue as he lived in my direction and he too was going to nip home, 'Ta see the missus,' he informed me with a wink and sly smile, "so I'll take you home to save you the taxi fare. But you'll have to find you own way back day after tomorrow."

Dropping me off with a misty fog swirling around; my home had taken on a ghostly appearance as I walked towards the front door. I'd been so eager to get home as although only having been at sea for a day or so. I was already feeling grown up, sailor like and looking forward to seeing my parents in the morning with tales of my fledging sea trip, only I'd forgotten to retrieve my house key from my baggage sitting on my bunk back onboard! "Oh hell," I thought to myself. Now I am going to have to wake my parents which I didn't relish at all. I really wanted to sneak in and in a couple of hours time take them both a cup of tea for a surprise wake up call. Around to the back of our home we had a small outside

bathroom and toilet in which there was a small electric radiator so I headed for there with the intention of curling up until later then surprising my mother when she arose and opened up the kitchen to prepare the family's breakfast. As I crept down the drive at the side of our house I noticed that the upstairs bathroom window was open, below which was the single story extension housing our modern kitchen. Attached to this was a brick wall between my home and that of the neighbour's, the lower part for some reason having been built in a sort of designer stair case fashion. Now inspiration took over as I realised that I could jump onto the lower ramparts of this wall, gingerly climb up onto the single story roof, cross this and I'd be able to reach in through the small open bathroom window to unlatch the larger window and 'Hey Presto,' I'd be home and dry and soon tucked up in my nice warm bed! Young, fit and agile I was soon at the bathroom window with my arm reaching in when I was suddenly bathed by a strong light from below. Turning to face it and squinting at dazzling light to the sound of a voice, "Alright son come on down, your nicked!" A policeman! "Where did he come from?" were my first ridiculous thoughts! My home was in a leafy residential suburb of Cottingham, even in those days we never saw a policeman except going passed in a car! It later transpired that this policeman lived not far away and was on his way home for a refreshment break on his commonly known 'Noddy Bike'. These were at the time the mode of transport for local beat bobbies for covering the large patches and were low powered and consequently very quiet!

So long story short, I soon found myself at the front door held by my collar whilst this copper rang the front door bell! Both parents appeared at the door somewhat bedraggled. Soon after their initial confusion at seeing their son whom they assumed was on the high seas but instead being held by the scruff of the neck by a six foot bobby. We were all laughing around the kitchen table whilst I prepared hot steaming tea but not in the way I had originally imagined!! This of course was in the days before 'wokery and political correctness' when Bobbies would give any itinerant teenager the proverbial clip around the ear.

Meanwhile the dockyard by putting on a night shift soon had the damaged propeller replaced and the company riggers along with a retired skipper had taken the trawler for a brief trial run down the River Humber to Spurn Point declaring all was well and the ship was pronounced seaworthy and could once again sail to the fishing grounds.

Once again my father took me to St. Andrew's dock for a more civilised sailing time with the high tide being 11:00 in the morning. However, this was now Good Friday and I discovered another trawlerman's superstition that of sailing on a Good Friday. Hence after rejoining the ship I found that the crew were refusing to sail until the follow day, Saturday. I did wonder however if this refusal had more to do with most of the crew suffering from hangovers as it would appear they had been living in the pub since we unexpectedly arrived back! Billy Brettell after a discussion with the owners agreed to pay the men a bonus if they sailed. The men weren't inebriated so much as to miss this opportunity and the offer of money dispelled the superstition of the harbinger of doom as a myth and hence we were soon sailing again. The only trawler that did on that Good Friday!

Once we sailed and although the weather was uncomfortable I had conquered seasickness and soon got into a regular routine of helping out where I was asked. The crew treated me as though I was one of their own. The hours were long and arduous, a fifteen hour day was normal and even at times longer when we arrived at the fishing grounds. Looking back a trawler wouldn't have been able to operate effectively if the crew had abided by what is taken for granted today when it comes to compulsory rest periods.



Looking aft towards the bridge of the 'Somerset Maughan'

The skipper adopted a fatherly attitude towards me and allowed me in the wheelhouse. I was even given the opportunity to steer whilst on passage to the fishing grounds. This is known as taking 'a trick' on the wheel but I've no idea why. I think the skipper was impressed when he discovered that due to the teachings of Trinity House school I knew a lot about navigation such as how to plot a course on the chart, take a bearing when near land and even take a star sight with the sextant. However, the main aid to navigation for trawlers in those days was a Decca Navigator, an instrument that took bearings from radio signals emitting from radio stations ashore. These were then plotted on a special Decca chart and we could work out our exact position. It was the precursor to modern day GPS plotting. As per chance we had just been introduced to the Decca system at school so I wasn't a total novice. It was then that the skipper's attitude towards me changed. I felt that he was no longer seeing me as a nuisance or even a Jonah that had to be tolerated as his company bosses had agreed to me being onboard. He started teaching me the art of navigating a trawler looking for the happy fishing grounds. Having misgivings about acquiring my sea-legs thinking that I might be like Nelson who was afflicted with seasickness whenever he returned to his ship. Fortunately the dreaded seasickness did not return and I soon settled into my daily routine of getting out of my bunk at 6 a.m. and after a quick wash I'd go straight up to the galley to prepare both the officers' and crew messes for breakfast. Each morning I was greeted with my nostrils being assailed by the wonderful smell of baking bread. We hadn't reached the fishing grounds so all hands, apart from those keeping watches, would be on day work preparing the nets and all sorts of accompanying equipment for the trawler to be ready the moment we arrived.



Preparing the nets

Once we started fishing it was non stop work, work, work, the only respite being a chance to sleep between the hauls of the net coming onboard. Once the haul was aboard and then cast again the hard work of gutting the fish started, and it was hard work especially when some of the fish were nearly as big as me! After my daily tasks in and around the mess-rooms followed by helping the Galley Boy, Elvis, cleaning the skipper's and the officer's cabins I was expected to go on to the deck and help with the gutting of the fish. For this I was issued with a well worn fish gutting knife, so sharp that with one wrong move it could have sliced through my tender young flesh to the bone! Gutting is a matter of grabbing a fish by the open mouth, turning it upside down, inserting the knife just below the lower part of the jaw between the gills, slicing all the way down to the tail and then scraping and emptying out all the internal organs of the fish on to the deck from where this sloppy ankle height mess would be washed overboard but not before a very crucial part of these organs was separated off, that being the liver. This part of the cod was like gold, an important addition to the overall earnings of the catch. The icing on the cake as it were. These small, dark red organs were deposited into a small pot with a funnel designed top, positioned on the main deck. This was connected by a series of pipes sucking the evil smelling liver all the way to the processing room at the stern of the ship, an area which stank to high heaven. I can still recall the smell! Even on a flat calm morning with a stomach full of delicious grilled bacon and eggs when coming on deck for fresh air and passing this cod-liver oil processing room could result in me losing my breakfast such was the nauseating smell. It was hard to imagine that this by product converted into the health giving an elixir of cod-liver oil. Of course, I found gutting hard and awkward especially when some of the fish were bigger than me!



Look at the size of that Cod!

The seasoned trawlermen had gutting down to a fine art and would hum and sing as they merrily went through gutting the catch like a well tuned orchestra. It was a pleasure to watch them. Of course due to my clumsiness I received a lot of stick. "Cum on posh boy, get a move on, bloody time is money. We've got to get this lot down below before the next catch is in!"

There were many hazards and traps working on a deep sea fishing trawler ranging from being thrown out of one's bunk, falling down a ladder or even getting washed overboard during bad weather. Once north of the Arctic Circle I was eligible to become a member of the 'Blue Nose Club' which meant I had a splodge of thick blue paint slapped on to my nose when we

reached north of 66° 30' the Arctic Circle. At first I was annoyed and cross that this ceremony had been performed on me unawares having been grabbed one day whilst out on deck by couple of the crew whilst another used a pot of blue paint and brush from the Bosun's store. Actually I soon saw it as a medal which I avoided washing off and wore with pride right up until arriving home to proudly display to my family as proof that I had been beyond the Arctic Circle! Back to another one of the traps for the unwary. I was told to avoid at all costs putting my exposed hand on to any part of the outside metal construction of the ship, the most obvious to avoid being the handrail. In the Arctic the steel would become so cold that the soft flesh of the human hand would stick to the steel work as though being held by the modern day super glue. Removal would require enduring excruciating pain and lost skin!



Pushing through the ice floes to get to the fishing grounds around Bear Island

Thankfully, I never did fall into that trap. I did however fall into many of those long standing jokes played on naïve first trippers. Once whilst working alongside the Mate out on the foredeck with the numerous ropes and huge fishing nets prior to reaching the fishing grounds I was sent off and spent a hour or so looking around the ship for a 'spare lash'! Eventually being given an odd looking tangle of a spliced wire hawser by the Bosun. On returning triumphantly to see the Mate who gave me a right telling off for taking up so much time. He was a busy man and didn't like being kept waiting by the likes of me! I was even more crestfallen when he looked at the wire, "Well ya know what ya can do with this?" he said looking disgustedly at my prize offering and immediately heaved it overboard. Laughing at my opened mouthed surprise, "Well there you are Posh Boy, you found it," pointing to where the lump of wire had disappeared beneath the waves, "Didn't you hear it?" My face still covered with the look of confusion. "SPURLASH," he roared as he and the others laughed out loud. "Oh yes of course," I replied laughing, when it suddenly dawned on me trying to be cool...."SPLASH!" Oh god, I had a lot to learn. On another occasion I was caught out when sent to look for a 'Long Stand' apparently required by the engineer to perform some repair work in the engine-room which was out of his reach! After this I started to wise up and can't recall being caught out again although I never did find the Golden Rivet! As I have mentioned, once we reached the fishing grounds it was constant non stop work with very little time for sleeping. This included all hands from the skipper down to the Chief Cook and Galley Boy who would work on deck in the evenings gutting fish.



Bashing through more ice floes



The haul comes aboard



Gutting the catch

After a few days at the fishing grounds the skipper relieved me of my daily helping out where and when routine and said I could join him on the bridge of the trawler and experience life from his viewpoint. Once we were fishing the skipper would hardly ever leave the bridge as there was no one to relieve him as the Mate and all the other crew were feverishly involved in gutting. One day he invited me to the bridge and then suddenly announced, "You're in charge, but just don't touch anything as I'm going below...I haven't had a shit for three days!"

"However, if you really need me, just scream down that voice pipe there," he said pointing to an ancient looking brass pipe attached to the front of the wheelhouse on top of which was a funnel with a whistle and chain stuck in the top. "Just take out this whistle and blow it near the top here," he said giving me a brief demonstration. Followed by a bellow of laughter as he said, "If you do 'ave to I will be sitting on the 'karzy' and it will scare the shit out of me, which is probably what I need I'm so bunged up, holding it in for so long!" He laughed out loud at his crude reference to a normal bowel action. And with that he was gone.

At first I was terrified but I was soon strutting up and down the wheelhouse like Nelson whilst listening to the chatter on the VHF radio between the other trawlers that were nearby. In the back ground for entertainment which was also piped out on deck to the men working there, was the then famous Radio Luxembourg, the very first pop radio station. The songs of that era still echo today in my mind today. Songs such as Helen Shaperio's *'Will you still love me tomorrow'*, Little Eva, *'Doing the Locomotion'* and *'Bobby's Girl'* by Marcie Blane.

I was on the bridge one night talking to the skipper. I'd just made us both a cup of tea. Tea made with condensed milk which when I had first tasted it I found it to be too sweet and sickly but it was an acquired taste which I had eventually come to quite like. No fresh milk in those far off days. It was then that the brutality of a trawlermen's life really hit home. During the night a storm had brewed up and the ship was rolling on her beams and taking the occasional heavy sea over the foredeck. The motion was steadied somewhat by the fact that the trawl net was down in the depths hopefully slowly filling up with fish. It wasn't due to be hauled for another 4 hours and the ship was only steaming along at a sedate 5 knots. The foredeck was awash with several tons of fish from the previous haul, being steadily gutted by the crew, all swaying in unison with the motion of the ship. Each roll of the trawler invariably brought another wave of sea water to come sweeping over the exposed deck. The foredeck was illuminated in a blaze of light from the many overhead deck lights. It was cold and had started snowing heavily when suddenly the ship took an extra dramatic roll, the sea came surging over the deck knocking some of the men off their feet. What with the huge wave breaking into white surf and the snow which was now coming down so thick it was difficult to see if the men were ok. Both the skipper and myself were holding on as the ship took more heavy rolls. When unexpectedly the loudspeaker on the bulkhead at the rear of the wheelhouse, a two way direct communications connection to the men down on the deck, screeched a tinny rattle as someone screamed "F....g 'ell Skipper the f.....g cook's gone over the wall." The skipper jumped up from his command chair, dropping his mug of tea which went rolling over the deck as he staggered across fighting against the motion of the ship to press the button on the speaker asking for more information but all he got was the screaming of a terrified man. "He's gone skipper, he's f.....g gone. He's gone, Jim's f....g gone". I grappled to the for'd wheelhouse windows and was looking out frantically searching to see what was going on the deck below. The skipper speaking again into the speaker box said, "Which side, which f....g side?" "Port side," came the frantic reply. The skipper then grabbed a large wheel like brass handle which was protruding down from the centre of the wheelhouse deckhead. First switching a large lever on the rear bulkhead of the wheelhouse. Instantly a huge searchlight on top of the wheelhouse was illuminated. The large wheel like handle was connected to the searchlight which the skipper was able to begin panning around

on the port side of the vessel. Such was the power of this light it showed the huge wall of water running alongside the ship. It was maelstrom of hell, as each wave appeared to speed passed the ship as we headed directly into the sea of waves rolling towards us. In vain we strained our eyes looking for Jim amongst this massive conflagration of broken water. It was like looking through the glass window of gigantic washing machine. Other hands on deck were also eagerly looking on the port side of the ship. All fish gutting momentarily forgotten about as they searched for their shipmate in the inky black and brilliant white mixture of the seas, bathed by the powerful searchlight from above. I repeatedly shouted at the skipper "What are we going to do, what we going to do?" He ignored me. Having lowered one of the wheelhouse windows on the portside and leaning out trying in desperation to find Jim. The open window allowed the freezing wind to come howling into the wheelhouse scattering the fishing charts all over the deck. Of course it was all in vain and later I was to learn was not an uncommon occurrence. Once in the past it had been said that a man had been washed overboard with one wave and then washed back on onboard again with another. Sadly though this was not to be the case this time.

In my desperation again I asked the skipper, "What we going to do, what we going to do?" There was panic everywhere, men were yelling on the deck and pointing at the swirling mass of water sure that they could see Jim. It was useless of course, there was nothing to see other than a mass of foaming black and white water. It was snowing, coming down so thick that it reflected back the powerful beam of the searchlight. Again I said the skipper "We've got to do something, we've got to do something!" I pleaded with him. "F.....g shut the f...k up and calm down laddie, just calm down!" he snapped angrily. Of course not fully realising that my pleadings were just adding to the pressure and stress he must have been feeling. Brushing angrily passd me, and picking up the VHF radio handset selecting channel 16 he started transmitting, "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday, man overboard this is the trawler 'Somerset Maugham' we have a man overboard, repeat we have a man overboard." He went on for what seemed like an age but what was probably only 30 seconds or so. I had seen other trawlers in the vicinity having watched their lights intermittently come and go on the dark back drop of the sea and sky as we rose up and down over the waves. I could hear many immediately responding requesting more information as to where the man had gone overboard. Not that there was much more information the skipper could give other than explaining that he had gone over the port side. All the commotion had brought the Radio Operator on to the bridge from his radio room behind the wheelhouse and he had set to on a Morse code key which controlled a large white domed light also on top of the wheelhouse. Morse code signalling between ships was hardly used. However, this light along with the skipper panning the search light would enable nearby trawlers to identify where the efforts could be directed. I shouted at the skipper, "We've got to go back and look for him, we've got to go back and look for him." Eventually the skipper said in a fatherly tone, "Na look er laddie owt we can hope for is that one of yon trawlers spots him. For me to turn the ship around I'd 'ave to let go the net and fishing gear which amounts to probably fifteen thousand pounds worth of kit which would sink to the bottom and be lost forever, let alone the value of the catch that would already be in 'em. I have to sacrifice all that in the vain hope of finding him, if by some miracle we did, then by that time we would only be bringing a body aboard because he would have frozen to death." It was at this point I started to cry. I'd been working with Jim the cook for most of the voyage and had come to look on him as an adopted favourite Uncle.

It was brutal how life carried on as though nothing had happened. Of course there was an awful sense of despondency passing through the ship. Once the fishing was over there was also considerable drunkenness amongst some of the crew as they attempted to drown out their feelings of loss. This included the Galley Boy Elvis who I found out had plans to marry Jim's daughter, they had worked together since Elvis had become a trawlerman.

A few days after the event, whilst we all still walking in a trance at what had happened, the skipper spoke to me and asked me if I could cook. "Well" I said, "my Mother has shown me how to cook the Sunday roast joint". To which he replied "Well posh boy you're f.....g cooking now so get in that galley and help Elvis."

Up until then we had enjoyed Jim's staple British diet interspersed with fresh fish and chips once we had reached the fishing grounds. Jim cooked lots of good old fashioned dishes of roast of beef, chicken and lamb. The remains he turned in stews, hot pots and the famous trawlermen's 'Pan o' Shackles'. Nothing fancy but it was good and wholesome. I had heard that many trawler owners skimmed on supplying their vessels with a variety of victuals relying on their crews to be fed fish and chips for the most of the time. Whether that was true or not I didn't know, it certainly wasn't with the owners of the *'Somerset Maughan'*. Although the crew did enjoy fish and chips.

Following a very subdued and sad homeward voyage the ship made a record catch which produced a good pay day for the crew. A couple of days before arriving home I had the sad job of putting together Jim's personal effects into his 'kitbag'. Elvis couldn't face doing it. Whether I should have been given the job is debatable, being so young and still at an impressionable age. Perhaps it was because I didn't know Jim that well were as others had sailed with him for many years and were good friends.

It is hard to describe and recall my feelings as so many years have passed since that voyage. I certainly went away as a boy and came back a man.

We arrived back into Hull on an afternoon high tide and were met by a delegation from the company offices along with officers from the British Transport Police. The police representing the Coroner for what would be an inevitable inquest. They took written statements from all those members of the crew who had been eye witnesses to the disappearance of the cook.

Once back in the comfort of my home surroundings I found it difficult to talk about it without becoming emotional. I've often asked myself were the trawlermen's superstitions justifiable? Had the cook lost his life because I had been wearing a green sweater aboard ship on the first day or was it because the ship, going against tradition had sailed on Good Friday? It was easy to see how such superstitions were created.

As tradition dictated I went down to the Company's pay office and watched the crew receive their pay and bonuses for the trip. I soon found myself having pound notes and sometimes even five pound notes pushed into my hand. All these years later I can't remember how much money I was given but it was certainly a lot more than I could ever have imagined in my wildest dreams. Still it didn't ease the pain for the loss of Jim the cook. Even Elvis, probably the lowest paid crew member onboard, gave me several pound notes with tears in his eyes. I attempted to refuse to take it as seeing his watery eyes made me start to cry as well. He insisted though and said that Jim would have wanted me to have it as he had spoken very highly of the 'Posh Boy'. Back at home my mother astonished at what I had earned wisely relieved me of some and put it into my bank account for me.

To this day, some fifty-six years later, Jim's name is on the recently created Fisherman's Memorial along with the other 6,000 names of fishermen from Hull lost at sea securing the nation's favourite dish. Elvis married Jim's daughter and had three grandchildren, one being named Jim after the lovely Grandfather he never had the pleasure of knowing.

Despite the tragedy and trauma of that voyage within a year I had left Trinity House and embarked on a seagoing career. A journey that was to take me thousands of miles across numerous oceans. A journey which would produce many wonderful memories of people and places I was to visit. A journey that not only took me back to the Arctic Circle during the ill fated Cod Wars but two other wars, a fire at sea and a near sinking emergency. Experiences I survived and shall never forget. But above all I shall forever remember my very first voyage

when I went from ‘Hull to Frozen Hell and Back’. And where ever the fish we caught that fateful voyage ended up, those enjoying this famous British dish would never know what the trawlermen had gone through to bring it to their tables. Even today whenever I enjoy a plate of Fish and Chips my mind wanders back to the frozen barren wastes of the cold waters around Bear Island and a ship’s cook called Jim. Certainly for Jim that voyage proved to be the ‘Deadliest Catch.’”



One of the memorial sculptutres to lost trawlermen on the bank of the River Humber and site of the old St.Andrew’s Dock



Trawlermen’s Memorial in the Hull Trinity House Yard.