

SURVEY AND RESEARCH OF 'NEW DISPATCH'

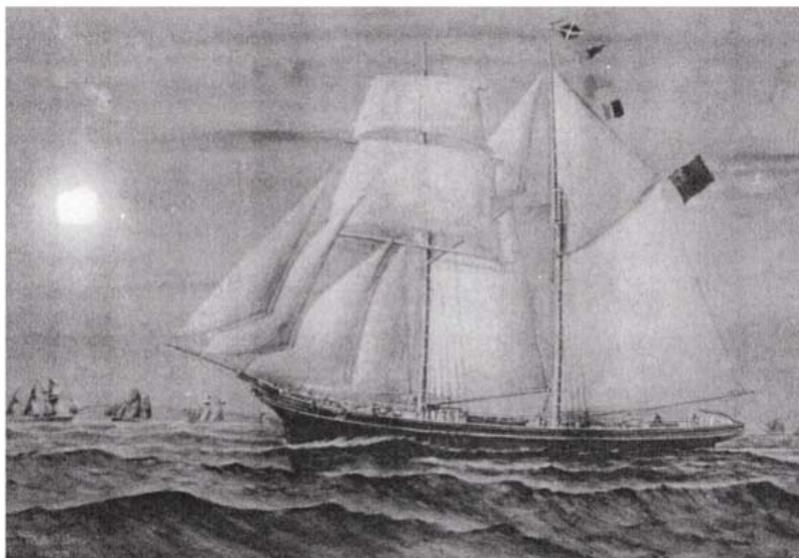


Figure 1 - 'The Dispatch' by Grigor Mackintosh

(Photograph by Jim Skelton [R8.2.8])

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1 INTRODUCTION

This study was identified by the Nautical Archaeology Society (NAS) as part of the NAS Part 2 Field School at Purton, Gloucestershire in February 2004. It details the survey and research work for the 'New Dispatch' carried out by Keith Peake and Will Tabner to meet the requirements of their NAS Part 2 certification.

Key: [R] refers to a reference in Section 8.

2 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 SITE HISTORY

Purton is situated on the east bank of the River Severn, upstream from the Severn Bridge [Figure 1, 2]. The site is located on the foreshore [Figure 3], adjacent to the Gloucestershire and Sharpness Canal at BNG SO 068357 004092.

The foreshore of the Severn suffers from erosion due to the river's fast flow and high tides, and the regular flooding that occurs. Between the 1930s and 1970s [R8.5.2], owners of unwanted ships and barges were commissioned to drive their vessels onto the shore here and to a lesser extent at other sites along the river to preserve the shoreline. At Purton this practice served to protect the structure of the canal.

During this period, the Purton site is supposed to have received 77 ships/boats [R8.5.2], although only a handful are now visible. A study by the University of Bristol [R8.1.1] identified 42.

The method of beaching was for a tug to tow the boat during high tide and at full speed that then switched direction perpendicular to the shore and towards a white marker placed on the trees. The boats were normally four man crews of which two were on shore and two remained on board. Just before the shore, the line to the tug would be slipped to allow the tug to steer out of the way so that the boat would hopefully wedge into the shore at right-angles to the shoreline. The men on shore would then winch the boat onto the land, using a tree as the anchor point. Because this was during high tide and such a difficult exercise when the river was fast flowing, the boats often rode over other boats laid earlier and also landed at varying angles to the shore [R8.5.2]. Once on land, the boats would eventually silt up and become part of the foreshore. Unfortunately, some hulks will be below ground level and not visible, others will have been destroyed during the beaching of later vessels.

2.2 SITE CONDITIONS

It was evident that the site was continually changing, for instance one wreck had settled or the ground had risen about 15 cm compared with how much the boat's name (Severn Collier) was still visible when visited last year [R8.5.1]. The degradation of the wrecks was also clear to see with woodworm and weathering taking their toll, thus surveys were needed to capture the information as soon as possible.

Fire damage was evident on some of the wrecks and was thought to be caused by barbecuers or vandals. Another suggestion was that thieves caused the fires after the boats were beached in attempts to recover the bronze bolts [R8.5.2]. It was observed though, that some of the fire damage appeared to be new.

The ground was level and firm, thus making the site easy to work on for a pre-disturbance survey. In some places though, the grass was growing tall and in clumps such that it was not always possible to obtain a direct line of sight or tautness of the tape measure between some of the datum points.

The weather was sunny and dry, though the wind was sometimes strong and extremely cold requiring us to wear gloves and several layers of clothing. Wearing gloves made writing awkward and the wind made it difficult to keep the measure from bowing over longer distances, possibly distorting some of the measurements. The wind also bowed the strings on the planning frame.

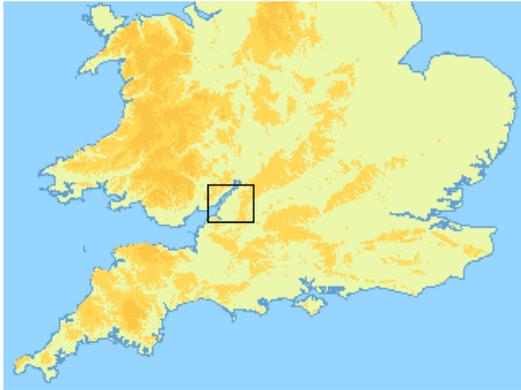


Figure 2 - National Map of Site

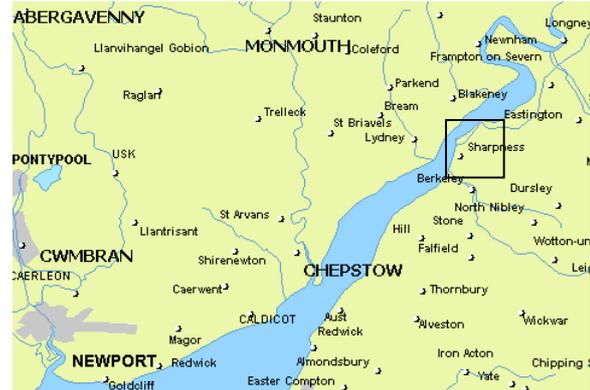


Figure 3 - Regional Map of Site

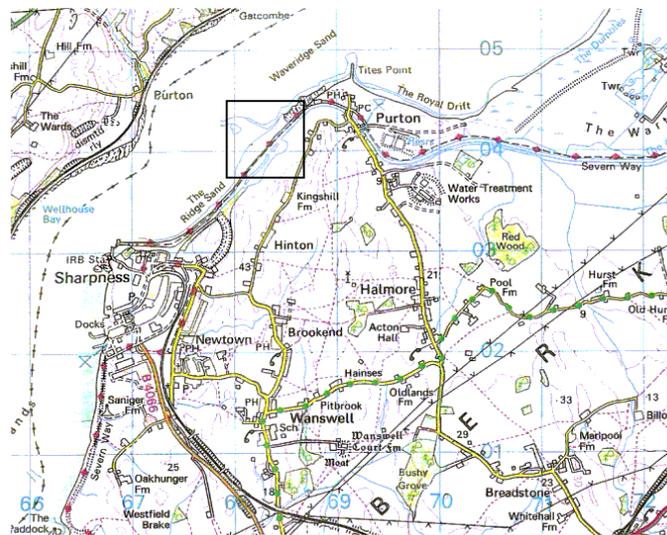


Figure 4 - Local Map of Site
(from Landranger 162, reproduced courtesy of Ordnance Survey)

3 SURVEY STRATEGY

The visible remains of the New Dispatch consisted of partially intact sections of the port and starboard hulls and stumped remnants of the bow and stern sections, with the bow slightly higher than the stern, and the whole boat nearly perpendicular to the bank.

A large section of the starboard hull was still intact amidships, although showing some fire damage on the outside. Some internal iron frames and diagonal bracing straps were visible, and some knee frames still had the hull trimming device in place. Some of the keel was showing at the bow end of the vessel.

Due to the advanced decay of the site and thus to capture as much useful information as possible, the strategy was for the whole group to work on the same project. The work was broken down into sub-groups so that each could survey a section of the vessel in more detail, eg bow section, port side, stern section, starboard side, etc.. The survey for this report specialised on the stern section. To provide check results and ensure that an area was not missed, each sub-group recorded their measurements two iron frames into the area of the next group.

The survey strategy was:

- sketch the visible remains of the wreck (to show the prominent features and their relationship to the datum points)
- lay the datum lines using 30m tape measures
- fix tags to identify datum points around the vessel (these were nailed into the structure or fixed with cable ties - green for port, red for starboard)
- mark the datum points on the sketch
- make a photographic record of the site
- take the datum offset readings (this method was possible as the vessel was partly embedded in the ground)
- take the trilateration readings (this method was chosen as a more accurate cross-reference for the datum points)
- measure the relative heights of the site using the Dumpy level
- make detailed sketches of the more interesting features using a planning frame
- remove tags and tidy up



Figure 5 - Wreck Remains of New Dispatch

(Photograph by Ian Cundy, MADU website, purton-153.jpg, 29/2/4, looking west towards the river with the port hull in the foreground)

4 SURVEY RESULTS - STERN SECTION

The visible stern section consisted of the remains of the stern post and rudder stock, and a few futtock stump remains in the grass. On the port side, the stern end of a side timber or deadwood is showing out of the ground and appears to have straightened and is no longer in contact with the stern post. The groove in the stern post (Figure 8) where this would have fitted is weather worn but still clearly visible and shows a gentle curved back to the boat.

The rudder stock could be confirmed because the bevels against the stern post to allow its lateral movement were still visible (Figure 8). Also visible were the ends of the inner stern post and the rudder main piece.

Four bolts projected from the inner stern post about 10-15 cm into the wreck. None of the other iron work, for instance pintles and gudgeons remained, although several bolt holes were visible.

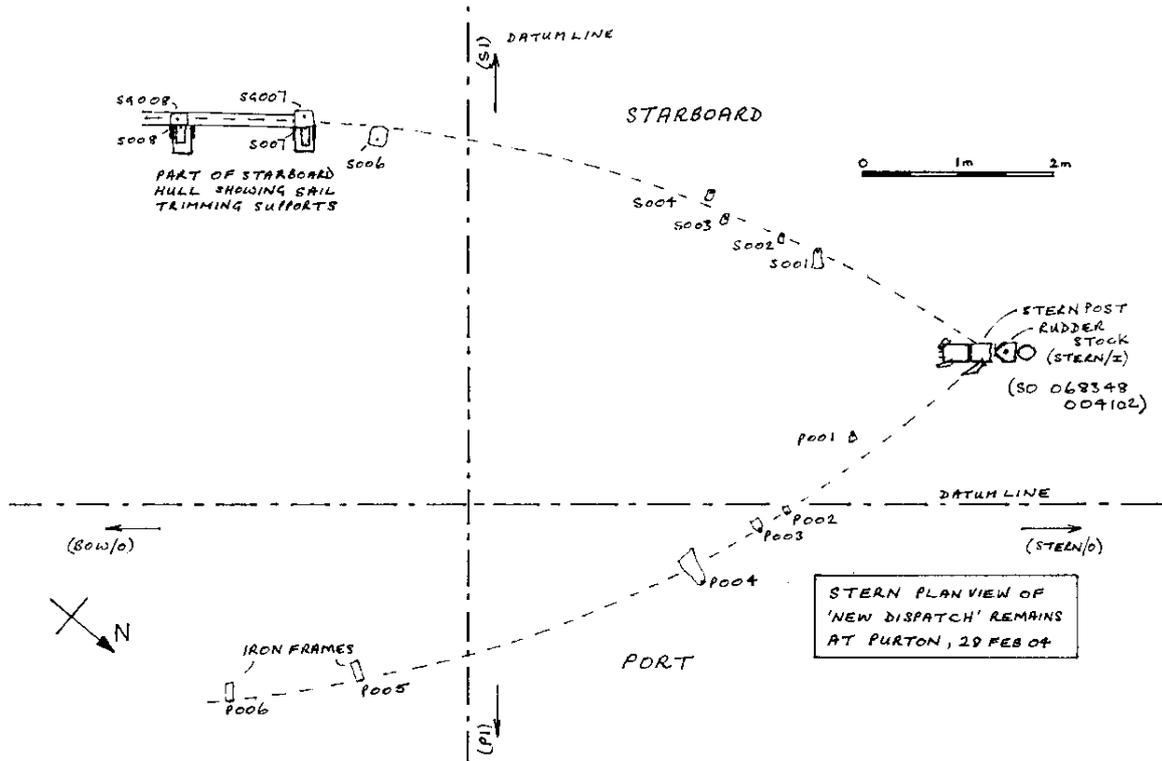


Figure 6 - Measured Plan View of New Dispatch Stern Remains



Figure 7 - Rudder Section Remains - Port View
(Photograph by Will Tabner, pict0026.jpg, 29/2/4,
scale 50x10 cm)



Figure 8 - Expanded view of Figure 7
showing the groove in the stern post and
the bevelled edge of the rudder stock

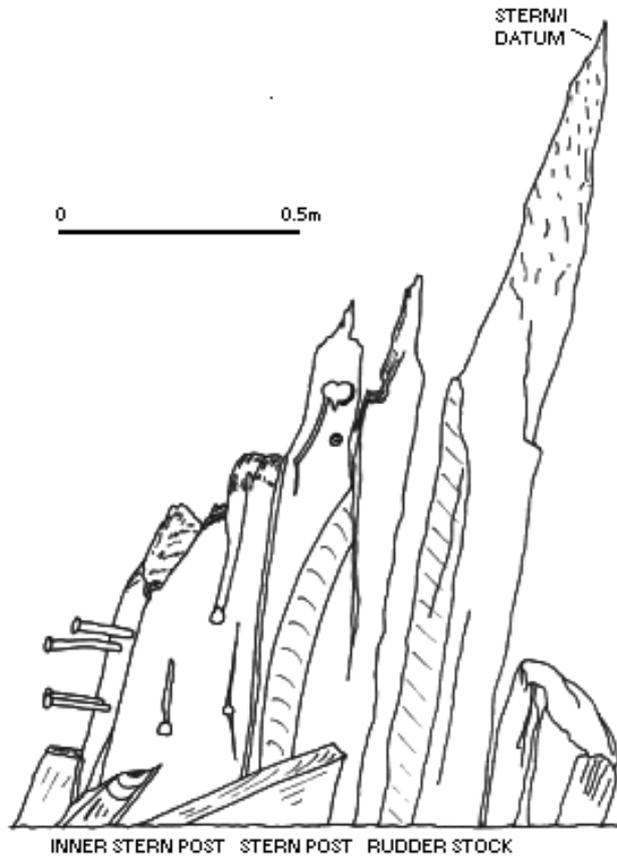


Figure 9 - Scale Drawing of Rudder Remains



Figure 10 - Rudder Section Survey using a Planning Frame
(Photograph by Ian Cundy, MADU website, purton-153.jpg, 29/2/4)

5 RESEARCH RESULTS

5.1 INITIAL INFORMATION / ASSUMPTIONS

The research is based on the initial information provided:

- (i) [R8.1.1] Extract from 'Archaeology in the Severn Estuary 9 (1998)' titled 'Remains of boats at Purton (East), Gloucestershire' by A J Parker (University of Bristol).
- (ii) [R8.5.1] The wreck surveyed was called the 'Dispatch' and later renamed 'New Dispatch'
(verbally by Mark Beattie-Edwards, NAS - 28/2/04).
- (iii) [R8.5.2] The wreck surveyed was a top-sail schooner built at Garmouth, Scotland in 1881 or 1888. It had Fell patent knees used to adjust the hull profile as it expanded to improve the vessel's trim (Figure 11). There were separate living quarters for a four man crew. The cargo was cattle from Appledore, Devon to Ireland and in its latter days, stone from Chepstow. It was deposited at Purton in 1959.
(verbally by Paul Barnett - 29/2/04).

5.2 GENERAL RESEARCH

The research on the ship, based on the above information, commenced with searches of the internet for 'Garmouth' and produced a list of ships built at the Geddie Shipyard at Garmouth, Morayshire in Scotland [R8.2.6]. Searches for 'Dispatch' gave several choices, mainly in North America - a popular name, but nothing for the renamed 'New Dispatch'.

From this List is a note from 'The Merchant Schooners' by Basil Greenhill that three Spey ships from the Geddie shipyard, along with the 'Amy' of Banff, were the only British ships to be fitted with a French patent device for reefing square top sails. They were the Lark (1871), Ythan (1876) and Dispatch (1888). The device was a brass or bronze ratchet mechanism, much like modern reefing devices, and was located at the mast position to save the sailors climbing out to the spar ends (verbally by Jim Skelton – 12/8/06).



Figure 11 - One Section of the Hull Trimming Gear - Starboard Side

(Photograph by Will Tabner, pict0034.jpg, 29/2/4)

Searches in the National Archives, formally the Public Record Office at Kew produced an entry [R8.2.4] in the Board of Trade records for 'Dispatch' which fitted the 1888 build identified in the List of Ships and the transcript of the initial registration [R8.2.5].

These two documents confirmed the ship's Official Number 95741 and indicated that it was registered in 1888 at Banff, 1889 at Barrow and 1894 at Inverness which gives the possibility for further searches.

Other items of interest from the registration are:

- a two masted schooner, ie not a barquentine (3+ masts) as mentioned in Jim Mackay's List (JM notified by email 9/3/4)
- carvel construction, one deck and an elliptic stern
- outer length 90.1 feet (27.462 m), outside breadth 21.5 feet (6.553 m), depth in hold 10.35 feet (3.155 m)
- registered tonnage 109 tons
- a 3/4 female figurehead
- 64/64 owner James Mill
- master William Marr

Other items of information and those worthy of pursuing further are shown in Section 8. The only reference to 'New Dispatch' were in Graham Farr's Index [R8.2.14] and the 1932 Sea Breezes magazine [R8.2.12] available in the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich.

5.3 DISPATCH HISTORY

The following is a brief, mainly unconfirmed and sometimes conflicting history of the (New) Dispatch compiled from the information contained in the References.

- Built with Amy, Lark and Ythan as 2-masted topsail schooner by James and John Geddie, Garmouth, Morayshire. Design noted for installation of a French patent reefing square topsail device and Fell patent knees to adjust the vessel's trim. Commissioned for the Newfoundland salt fish trade.
- 24 August 1888 - Registered (3) at Banff as 'Dispatch', official number 95741. Owner James Mill of Garmouth. Master William Marr, service number 44525.
- 1889 - Registered (2) at Barrow.
- 1894 - Registered (4) at Inverness.
- August 1912 - Owned by Donald McLemon, Avoch, Co. Ross.
- 1915-17 - Taken over by the Government for the Great War.
- 1917 - Owned by J K Cooke.
- Sometime from 1917 until 1935 - Owned by Captain Watkins.
- 1919 - Owned by William E Jenkins, Swansea.

- 1924 - Patent topsail gear not being used at this time. Dispatch altered to double topsail rig - date not mentioned.
- February/March 1932 - Version 1 - On voyage from Tralee to Gloucester, was blown off course 500 miles into the Atlantic. A Portuguese trawler saved the crew from starvation by a transhipment of stores during their beat back to land. The whole voyage took 38 days. Version 2 - Picked up 100 miles west of Fastnet by trawler Pointz Castle. Helpless in gale. Towed into Castletown, Berehaven on 3 March 1932.
- 1932 - A hulk or dumb barge carrying grain from Bristol and Avonmouth to Gloucester.
- 1936 - Owned by J K Cooke, Gloucester.
- 1940 - Renamed 'New Dispatch' at Swansea.
- 1947 - Owned by G T Beard (1929) Limited, Gloucester.
- May 1958, or 1959 - Laid up at canal in Sharpness. Figurehead at School Cottage, Saul.
- 1996-7 - University of Bristol 'pre-disturbance' surveyed the remains of all the visible boats on the foreshore at Purton, Gloucestershire [R8.1.1].
- February 2004 - Nautical Archaeology Society 'pre-disturbance' surveyed the remains of the 'New Dispatch' on the foreshore at Purton, Gloucestershire.

6 CONCLUSION

The initial impression of the site was of a collection of useless hulks, but after the survey and researching the history of this vessel, a completely different picture emerged. In its day the Dispatch was a sleek, top sail schooner that would have looked impressive when under full sail. She was also one of the few ships to use the unique sail trimming equipment and the Fell knees, and was built in a time when iron ships were becoming more popular. The present state is a poor reflection of the vessel in its prime and although wooden sailing ships of this scale are no longer produced, it is a testament to the solid construction that there are still substantial remains after over 100 years.

The survey strategy of allocating different sections of the site to individual groups allowed each group to concentrate on their allocated area and will lead to a comprehensive set of data that will allow an accurate site plan to be generated. It will also stand as a record for future measurement of the conditions of the site. Taking into consideration the state of the vessel, the site conditions and the time available, a substantial amount of information was gathered.

The identification of the hulk by students from Bristol University and verbally by Paul Barnet enabled us to use the information to carry out further research which has brought to light the uniqueness of this ship's construction together with some of its history.

For the physical survey, the next step would be for a pre-disturbance survey using ground sensing equipment. With a magnetometer it may be difficult to set a datum due to the other wrecks lying below the surface, plus the leaching of the bolts may confuse the overall detail. The one metre grid working of a resistivity meter would not give a sufficiently detailed picture within the small area of the vessel, so the better option, although expensive, would be to use ground penetrating radar. [R8.5.5]

Further work could involve a disturbance and excavation survey to discover the design, for example the joining methods for the futtocks and frames to the keel and the mast seating, plus how much of the ship's structure is preserved below ground. Unfortunately, this would mean exposing the remains to the atmosphere, which would undoubtedly lead to further deterioration and probable weakening of the remaining structure.

Because of the reason they are where they are, the materials used in their construction and the environmental conditions these hulks have to survive in, they will only deteriorate further and soon all evidence of their existence will be lost. The hulks have a place in our maritime history to help us complete our understanding and appreciation of life in those times.

7 CHANGE RECORD

Issue	Date	Changes
1	8/4/04	First issue
2	2/8/06	Updated with information from National Maritime Museum Picture Library – see further investigation section 8.4 Permission from Jim Skelton to use his photograph – see Figure 1 and reference section 8.2.8
3	12/8/06	Corrections to sail trimming gear references - from Jim Skelton

8 REFERENCES [R]

8.1 REFERENCES

- 8.1.1 Extract from 'Archaeology in the Severn Estuary 9 (1998)' titled 'Remains of boats at Purton (East), Gloucestershire' by A J Parker (University of Bristol).

8.2 SUCCESSFUL SEARCHES

Internet

- 8.2.1 ils.unc.edu/maritime Go to 'Researching a Ship', then 'Index to Ships in Books' (short cut: shipindex.org/search) {Search for Dispatch found; nothing for New Dispatch}
- 8.2.2 red-duster.co.uk Site of Merchant Navy Association - 'Days of Sail' Information
- 8.2.3 collections.ic.gc.ca/vessels 'Wooden Ships of River John' - Shipbuilding Terms

The National Archives, Kew

- 8.2.4 [BT111](#) Admiralty and Board of Trade: Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen and predecessor: Transcripts ... 1786-1907 72
/36 D Ships Names: UNITED KINGDOM AND COLONIAL {copy of entry (page 00079) attached}
- 8.2.5 [BT108](#) Board of Trade: Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen and predecessor: Transcripts and Transactions ... 1855-1889 386
/267 Scotland 1888 {copy of entry (no. 361) attached}

The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich

- 8.2.6 Internet: port.nmm.ac.uk Search for 'Garmouth' (short cut: v3space.com/a/a99/68/mackay/general/ships) - List of ships built by Geddie Shipyards extracted from the book 'Speybuilt: The story of a forgotten industry' by Jim Skelton and

located on Jim Mackay's 'Mackay Clan' genealogy web site. {note there are 2 versions on the web}

- 8.2.7 Internet: nmm.ac.uk (Search for 'manuscripts' and go to the library and manuscripts catalogue) - actual copies available in the Library Reading Room:
- 8.2.8 Book - Speybuilt: the story of a forgotten industry by Jim Skelton, 1995
Call no. 629.12(412.5), Item id. PBP4447
Reference page 98 - Photograph of painting courtesy of Grigor Mackintosh {Permission to display the photograph on the NAS website kindly given by Jim to Will Tabner/NAS by telephone 2/8/06}
Reference page 100 - 1888 "DISPATCH", Barquentine, 197 tons. Builder, Geddie. Yard No. 58. 90'1" x 21'5" x 10'3". For Inverness.
- 8.2.9 Book - The merchant schooners: a portrait of a vanished industry, being a survey in two volumes of the history of the small fore-and-aft rigged sailing ships of England and Wales in the years 1870-1940, with something of their previous history and subsequent fate by Basil Greenhill, 1968
Call no. 629.123.135, Item id. PBE1259
Reference pages 182, 185 - Dispatch
- 8.2.10 Book - The merchant schooners by Basil Greenhill, 1988
Call no. 629.123.135, Item id. PBA4083
Reference page 113 - Dispatch {Same reference as in [R8.2.9]}
Reference page 24 is of a different 'Dispatch'
- 8.2.11 The (Caird) Library:
- 8.2.12 Bound copy of Sea Breezes Magazine No 157, Volume 16, December 1932
Reference page 194 - 2 articles
- 8.2.13 Bound copy of Sea Breezes Magazine Volume 4, July - December 1947
Reference page 120
- 8.2.14 Graham Farr Card Index
Reference 'Dispatch'

8.3 UNSUCCESSFUL SEARCHES

Internet

- 8.3.1 Irfairplay.com {Lloyd's Register}; shipyardnews.com; square-sail.com; tallship.co.uk; theshipslist.com

The National Archives, Kew

- 8.3.2 BT99 Board of Trade: Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen and predecessor: Agreements and Crew Lists, ... 1861-1994 7875
/6531 Merchant 1978 {N/A - registration numbers start too late}
- 8.3.3 BT 107 Admiralty and Board of Trade: General Registry and Record Office of Seamen: Transcripts and Transact ... 1786-1854 601 {dates too early}
- 8.3.4 BT 100 Admiralty and Board of Trade: Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen and predecessor: Agreements a ... 1835-1999 1526 {selected ships only}
- 8.3.5 BT108 Board of Trade: Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen and predecessor: Transcripts and Transactions ... 1855-1889 386

/37 ENGLAND AND WALES Ports: A - I 1855 {N/A - looking for Scotland}
/260 Scotland 1881 {initial information that registration may have been 1881}

- 8.3.6 BT109 Board of Trade: Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen and predecessor: Transcripts and Transactions ... 1855-1892 943

/878 UNITED KINGDOM MANAGING OWNER AND CERTIFICATES OF SALE 1 - 395
1884 {nothing found}

/941 Colonial transactions 4501 - 4750 1880-81 {N/A}

/942 Colonial transactions 4751 - 4893 1881-82 {N/A}

- 8.3.7 BT111 Admiralty and Board of Trade: Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen and predecessor: Transcripts ... 1786-1907 72

/18 Ships Names: C - D UNITED KINGDOM AND COLONIAL 1827 - 1907 {nothing found}

/23 Ships Names: M - N UNITED KINGDOM AND COLONIAL 1827 - 1907 {looking for New Dispatch - nothing found}

/45 N - O Ships Names: UNITED KINGDOM AND COLONIAL {nothing found}

- 8.3.8 BT162 Admiralty and Board of Trade: Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen and predecessor: Annual Lists ... 1786-1955 37

/33 Plantation 1880 {N/A}

The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich

- 8.3.9 The (Caird) Library:

- 8.3.10 Book - The merchant sailing ship: a photographic history: 127 photographs from the National Maritime Museum depicting British and North American sailing vessels and the lives of the people who worked in and around them by Basil Greenhill

Call no. 629.123.13/.16(42:73)"18/19", Item id. PBC4637 {Dispatch not mentioned}

- 8.3.11 Book - Out of Appledore : the autobiography of a coasting shipmaster and shipowner in the last days of wooden sailing ships by W J Slade, 1972

Call no. 656.618.2(423.5), Item id. PBE8458 {Dispatch not mentioned}

8.4 RECOMMENDED FURTHER INVESTIGATION

The National Archives, Kew

- 8.4.1 BT108 Board of Trade: Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen and predecessor: Transcripts and Transactions ... 1855-1889 386

/37 ENGLAND AND WALES Ports: A - I 1855 {try for Barrow}

/268 Scotland 1889 {for Banff registration}

- 8.4.2 BT110 Board of Trade: Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen: Transcripts and Transactions, Series IV, C ... 1890-1998 2189

/23 NAME OF SHIP: DEF - DIS 1891-1900 {for Dispatch}

/1458 NAME OF SHIP: NEW - NGU 1946 - 1955 {for New Dispatch}

- 8.4.3 BT111 Admiralty and Board of Trade: Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen and predecessor: Transcripts ... 1786-1907 72

/55 Ships' Official Nos. 85005 - 98999 {for Number 95741}

/62 Ships' Official Nos. 95451 - 104990 {for Number 95741}

-
- 8.4.4 **BT155 Board of Trade: Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen and predecessor: Indexes to Ships' Names 1855-1889 10**
/10 Indexes to ships' names 1886 - 1889
- 8.4.5 PRO Reader's Guide No 20 - Records of Merchant Shipping and Seamen by Chris Watts (extension 2088)
- The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich**
- 8.4.6 The (Caird) Library:
- 8.4.7 Book - Severn traders: the West Country trows and trowmen by Colin Green, 1999
Call no. 629.123.16(423.8), Item id. PBP8177 {not available in Library when visited}
- 8.4.8 Book - Coastwise sail: a record of the schooners surviving in the British coasting trade, and of those lost in recent years by John Anderson, 1948
Call no. 629.123.135(42), Item id. PBE7169
- 8.4.9 The Picture Library:
Reference: Historic Photographs Catalogue (internet) and Picture Library Manager
- 8.4.10 Photographs – Dispatch (Br) 30.41 1806: two-masted topsail schooner; John Knaggs, Whitby
Images: G2392 (4S) B ca. 1887 Moored at Broadstairs. Distant. Francis Frith negative No. 19716.
G2394 (4S) B ca 1887 Moored at Broadstairs. Slightly distant. Stern out of picture. Francis Frith Negative No.19720.
- 8.4.11 Photographs - Dispatch (Br) 30.41 1888: two-masted topsail schooner; George A Watkins, Frampton-on-Severn
Images: P190 (3) B, under sail, with main topmast
P2564 (5) B, 1931 under sail off Waterford, with a square sail made from a tarpaulin. No main topmast.
P2565 (4) B, under sail, main topmast struck
- 8.4.12 Photograph – Dispatch A7970 (negative) – not scanned hence no information readily available {information direct from Picture Library Manager}

8.5 CONTACT INFORMATION

- 8.5.1 Nautical Archaeology Society, Portsmouth
Telephone: 023 9281 8419
Internet: nas@nasportsmouth.org.uk
- 8.5.2 Paul Barnett
via The South West Maritime History Society
Internet: swmaritime.org.uk
- 8.5.3 National Archives, Kew
Internet catalogue: catalogue.pro.gov.uk
Document order telephone: 020 8392 5200 (option 0)
- 8.5.4 National Maritime Museum, Greenwich
Maritime Gateway internet search: port.nmm.ac.uk
NMM Library and Manuscripts Catalogue internet search: nmm.ac.uk Search for 'manuscript'

NMM Historic Photographs Catalogue internet search: nmm.ac.uk Follow menu to
'Collections & research' then 'Historic photographs catalogue'
Telephone: E-Library 020 8312 6516
Email: library@nmm.ac.uk

- 8.5.5 Surrey Heath Archaeology & Heritage Trust, Bagshot
Telephone: 01276 451181