

## BOAT BUILDING ON THE RIVER WELLAND

### A Declining Industry.

WHILE much has from time to time been written regarding the rapid disappearance of the smith and his smithy from our country towns and villages, little has been said of the equally rapid decay of the even more picturesque industry of boat and barge building which formerly was such an interesting feature of our coastal and river ports. It is notable however that as the musical clanging of the blacksmith's anvil is now so seldom heard, so also have gone the sounds of the shipwright's yard, such as the ring of the caulker's quaint mallet and iron, the rhythmic swish of the pit sawyer's long saw, the chop-chop of the carpenter's adze and the various other characteristic noises which were heard in the numerous busy yards wherever there was navigable water.

Lincolnshire, with its long coast line and its several rivers, has perhaps suffered more in this respect than most of our counties, for directories of the early nineteenth century show that boat and barge building flourished at such places as Gainsborough, Lincoln, Boston, Spalding, Grimsby, Louth, Burton Stather, Winterton, Ferriby, Barton, Barrow, and other places.

Every vestige of most of these has long disappeared, but among the few which still gasp a languishing existence is one at Spalding which has been carried on unbroken in one family for upwards of 120 years—that of Mr. Joseph E.

Pannell, a septuagenarian, who is the last of his line connected with the trade. Pigot's Directory, dated 1822, gives the name of Mr. Pannell's grandfather as the occupier of the "Jolly Crispin," in the yard of which premises he commenced the boat building business.

At this time, there was on the River Welland a very flourishing shipping trade, there being then, of course, no railway to the town, and the greater part of the inwards and outwards carrying was accordingly done by numerous sloops, ketches, schooners, brigs and lighters, it not being unusual for as many as forty such small vessels to be counted in the river at one time between Fosdyke Bridge and Spalding High Bridge.

The lack of proper facilities for the proper repair of such craft appears to have become a matter of some concern amongst the owners and captains, as is evidenced by the following 100 years old minute of the River Welland Trustees :

*Town Hall, Spalding,*

*Monday, 17th April, 1837.*

The general annual meeting of the Trustees of the Outfall of the River Welland, holden pursuant to advertisement.

Present :—

Rev. Wm. Moore, D.D., in the Chair.  
Theos. F. Johnson, Esq.

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Henry Hawkes, Esq.  
Rev. W. Wayet.  
Mr. Smith.  
Mr. Farr.  
Mr. Goodale.  
Mr. C. Green, Jun.  
Mr. Calthrop.  
Mr. Frankish.

Received a memorial from the Owners and Captains of the vessels trading up the River Welland, praying the Trustees would grant to John Pannell permission to lay down a slip in the River Welland Bank, for hauling up vessels for the purposes of repair.

Resolved that the desired permission be granted upon such terms as the Clerk shall think advisable, and that the slip be laid down under the superintendence of the Harbour Master.

*Signed, CHAS. BONNER, Clerk.*

The slip was duly laid down by Mr. John Pannell, and carried on until his death in 1843, his son, Ellis Pannell, succeeding him. He died in 1877, and was followed by his son John Ellis, who died in 1888, in his fortieth year, whilst president of the Spalding Y.M.C.A., at that time a very flourishing institution. Mr. Joseph E. Pannell, who had assisted his brother, but who had gone to Boston for further experience, then returned to take up the reins and has continued the business ever since.

As in all trades, success of a new venture brought competition, and some few years after the first slip was built, permission to lay down a further one was granted to the father of the late Mr. Smith Dring, and that also did well for two generations, chiefly in the repair of lighters, of which there were quite a number trading up the river as far as Stamford and also to the

Peakirk gravel pits to bring to the town gravel for road repairs.

Decay of the river trade and with it, of course, the ship repairing business, is attributable to several causes, first of which was the extension of the Great Northern Railway, which brought down the freights for the carrying of coal and corn, &c. Then came the introduction of iron for ship building and though this did not make much effect for several years, the late Mr. G. F. Birch saw its possibilities, and introduced steel-built vessels and lighters for the carrying of corn, hay or straw, etc., it being found that on the same draught of water—a very important condition in shallow rivers—much larger cargoes could be carried. Thus there was no further demand for wooden ships, and no new ones were built. Motor lorries also contributed to the competition, till, when the new sugar beet factory was erected at Spalding a few years ago, the shipwright's trade on the Welland had become practically "a dead letter." This new factory caused so much road traffic that a new bridge over the Welland was necessitated, and a site near Mr. Pannell's slip was considered the best place for it. Realising the inevitable, Mr. Pannell would not stand in the way of progress and gave his consent and the slip was thus rendered useless.

The type of boat shown in the illustration is still being built by Mr. Joseph Pannell and has always been a useful side-line at the boat building yards. The boats are used by the wildfowlers on both the inland waters of the Cowbit Wash and the tidal waters of the Fosdyke Wash. They are known locally as gunning "shouts." For the tidal waters, which are often very rough, a better-finished, stronger and lighter type is used and the feats performed in them by some of the

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*Wild-fowling on Cowbit Wash, about 1901.*

*Photo by the late G. M. M. Smith,  
Stained Glass Window Artist.*

inshore fishermen are at times really marvellous.

A photograph, in the writer's possession, giving some idea of the shipwright's business 55 years ago, shows on the slip a ketch named "Watson," owned and sailed by Mr. Joseph Royce, who later became a Fosdyke pilot; also three sloops alongside the workshop awaiting repairs viz., the "Sarah" (owner Mr. John Turner), "Aurora" (owner Mr. W. Royce) and "Laurel" (owner Mr. T. Royce). Other similar vessels owned and trading

to Spalding at that time were ketches—"Sarah" (Mr. T. R. Hack), "William and George" (Mr. J. Gostelow), "Breeze" (Mr. J. Vine), "Mary Catherine" (Mr. John Hayes), "John" (Mr. C. Atkin), "John and Elizabeth" (Mr. J. Dunn), "W.S.R." (Mr. S. Dunn). Several vessels from other ports of course also traded with the town, but now, alas, Messrs. Birch and Son's motor lighters are practically all that are ever seen above Fosdyke Bridge. G.E.P.