

The 'Lynher' History. Author: Mr. Jan Carpenter written in the year 2000, all copyrights reserved.

Just ahead of the limekiln at Poldrissick, inside a small man-made harbour, the faint impression of a large vessel is just discernible in the river mud, bows to north-west. This fading symbolic epitaph translates as:

'Here, once lay the bones of the Lynher, a 19th century Tamar sailing barge.'

Although no longer a fixture of the River Lynher, the story of her construction through to abandonment and an unlikely renaissance is worthy of detailing, especially as she is aptly named and her future appears precarious once again.



The impression left by the Tamar sailing barge 'Lynher' visible at low water in 2000.

Courtesy of Mr Charlie Force

The Lynher was built at Calstock between 1895 and 1896 on the Devon side of the River Tamar by James Goss and was sold on completion to a Mr Cox, presumably Captain Cox the first skipper, at a build cost of £400.

She was over 50 feet in length, 17 feet at her beam and with a draft of just over 5 feet, her displacement was 19 tons, reaching up to 60 tons when fully laden. She was flat bottomed, constructed using massive timbers with an almost impenetrable double skin, enabling her, like other Tamar sailing barges to lay on a stony river bed alongside antiquated quay walls. A large skeg is formed by the hull tucking upward toward the

transom, enabling her to hold steady in a following sea, a design feature for her anticipated coasting. The Lynher was sailed into the early 20th century, carry cargoes such as coal, timber and sand and no doubt market garden produce given the proliferation of such ventures.

In 1924 at 28 years of age, the Lynher was purchased and registered by Captain S Daymond of Saltash for an unknown sum. She was very much involved in shipping stone from the quarries at Poldrissick at this time and is even recorded in the National Maritime Museum's The Shipping and Trade of the River Tamar Part One that she was part owned by the proprietors of Poldrissick Quarries; the Steeds. Also in 1924 she was due to be renamed as the Britannia, but was not done so due to a trawler from Plymouth already bearing this name.

In 1928, still under Captain Daymond, the Lynher was fitted with a sturdy 27 horse power engine of an unknown make and model, which ran on tractor vapourising oil, or TVO as it was often abbreviated to, a common fuel before the proliferation of the motor car. A one-and-a-half horse power Hamworthy engine powering a winch fixed to a crane was installed at the same time, replacing the need for labouriously hand operating the derrick, thus speeding up the loading/unloading process.

During a bitterly cold December in 1930, the Lynher is recorded as sailing from Plymouth to Fowey, whilst living memory remembers her during the early 1930's sailing the River Tiddy to St Germans Quay and on Polbathic Lake, berthing alongside Haddy's Cellars to offload stone from Poldrissick Quarry. The Lynher is one of the barges that is remembered to have dragged chains over her stern when she left a berth on an ebb tide. The idea, which is well known, was to continually check the build-up of silt in the navigable channels and from around the working quays.

Captain Daymond sailed the Lynher for a total of 16 years, the vessel and crew no doubt a familiar sight at coastal havens such as Pentewan, St Mawes and Fowey, just as much as they would have been inside the backwaters of the Tamar.

Soon after the outbreak of WW2, sometime during 1940, the Lynher was requisitioned by HM Government for use as a barrage balloon platform and anchored in Plymouth Sound for

the duration. Many of these old wooden barges were used for this purpose, trade had fallen away during the war years and the owners/skippers were left with little choice. Several years at anchor with minimal maintenance contributed to the inevitable demise of most of the commandeered Tamar sailing barges and their contemporaries. After the Lynher had completed her war service and at almost half a century old, she was returned to civilian life once again in the stone trade.

Now owned by Mr Kimberly Foster, the proprietor of Treluggan Quarry on the River Lynher and skippered by Captain Hampton with one crewman 'Kinger' Allen from Forder, the Lynher worked exclusively from Treluggan with cargoes of Blue Elvan road stone. Personal accounts by the late Captain Hampton's son place her all along the south coast from Dartmouth to Penzance.

The customs register states the Lynher as being 'broken up' at an unspecified time in 1948 after 52 years afloat, although it is locally known that she continued to work up until sometime into the 1950's. Independent testimonies place her alongside Haddy's Cellars on Polbathic Lake on a regular basis, no doubt continuing to offload stone from Treluggan Quarry during the first half of the 1950's. Living memory suggests that the Lynher was not hulked until early 1956, which is not entirely improbable. A possible indictment of her working into the mid-20th century comes from the 1955 Port of Plymouth tide tables, regularly listing times and heights of tides and mast clearance needed for 'Treluggan Quarries, Saltash' in the 'Stone Loading Berths' section of the tide tables. The following year, the 1956 edition of the tide tables ceases to list Treluggan Quarries without explanation, indicating the final closure of the quarry, suggesting the services of the now 60 year old Lynher were no longer required. Old and outdated as a mode of transport, the Lynher was stripped of everything still of any value, notably her engines, shafts and propeller, before being unceremoniously abandoned at Poldrissick Quarries.

Laying hidden amongst the creeping undergrowth of the river bank, the Lynher had not been forgotten. A letter written in 1973 to the editor of a local newspaper argued in favour of her resurrection. The newspaper had previously reported on a discovery of a vessel from King Alfred the Great's time in Kent in 1970. The story ran with the idea that it was to be brought to Morwellham Quay and saved for future posterity. The letter to the editor states that whilst this is a wonderful idea, is it not better to:

'Let our river "set up" have its own relics; in a 'few years' time this will be quite impossible due to all those old barges that went as logs a few years ago.

The letter went on to say:

Lynher served until this time [World War 2]. She is a local, a worker, not a Kon-Tiki; so let our future generations have her to see.

This letter was written by Douglas C. Vosper whom published several local history booklets.

Assuming the Lynher was abandoned sometime in 1956, it was not until 1979, nearly a quarter of a century later, that a glimmer of hope dimly shone for a possible restoration project. Enquiries were made for the restoration of the Lynher by the trustees of Morwellham Quay, it is not known if it was because she is an authentic representation of a 19th century Tamar sailing barge or because it looked like a viable project! Naval recruits with but little choice at HMS Raleigh in Torpoint were earmarked for the digging out process, though lucky for them she was deemed to be beyond repair. Considered uneconomical to rebuild, the Lynher was overlooked as a project, whilst the ketch Garlandstone was chosen instead, another James Goss built vessel dating from 1903, plucked from abandonment at Aberamfra Harbour in North Wales. There it seems, was the final word on any hope of raising the Lynher from her slow demise.

Exactly a decade later, the plight of the Lynher came to the attention of Mr Charlie Force, with thoughts of an accurate restoration, thus preserving the 19th century Tamar sailing barge for future generations. It was through his indefatigable foresight that the decision was made to try and re-float her.

Charlie regarded himself as the custodian of the Lynher, rather than the owner, an unselfish attitude difficult to replicate in the modern world. Inspiration for the project was drawn from the very informative book: Lost Ships of the Westcountry by Martin Langley and Edwina Small published in 1988. The book was initially bought by Charlie for a friend, whom after a period of time mistakenly returned it. Whilst perusing the book half-heartedly, Charlie noticed the Lynher in her undignified pose, eventually leading to excursions to try and locate her remains on the back of business trips to Plymouth.

The only previous attempt at restoring a sailing barge of this age was by a private individual, saving the Shamrock from Hooe Lake off the Cattewater in the early 1970's. The National Trust acquired her shortly after and much has been written about her since. Only 3 years younger than the Lynher, she was built by F Hawke of Stonehouse in 1899 and worked out of Torpoint. Restored back to her former glory, she is now berthed at Cotehele on the upper reaches of the Tamar.

After making contact with the landowner where the barge remains lay, a few exploratory visits ensued, where the remains of a 19th century schooner also lay abandoned, adjacent and almost touching the Lynher. The question was put as to why the Lynher was chosen at all. The response mused that the Lynher was not actually chosen over the schooner, moreover, and in Charlie's words, he had: 'already fallen in love' with the Tamar sailing barge. Although it is also true to say that the schooner was deemed to be too far gone by this time. It is merely a fortunate coincidence that the Lynher represents the last and only true representation of a 19th century Tamar sailing barge.

In September of 1989, after 33 years hulked at Poldrissick, the momentous decision was made to raise the Lynher from her mud berth. With a little help from his friends, Charlie began the daunting task of digging the unchecked river silt from her hold, engine room and crew accommodation. This labourious process took a character building fortnight, no matter what time of day or night, once the tide had ebbed, digging commenced, until the flooding waters forced temporary retirement to a nearby campervan! It is worthy to note at this time that during this process, the name 'Britannia' was found to have been carefully carved into the transom, presumably in anticipation of a change of name, which was never actually approved back in 1924.



The pitiful state of the 'Lynher' when she was first visited by Charlie in 1989.

Courtesy of Mr Charlie Force

During the digging out phase, concurrent investigations were being made as to where to put the barge whilst she underwent an anticipated lengthy restoration process. A high shingle bank was identified just below Notter, only accessible during an equinox, as one possibility. This was never actually attempted, fortunately at the eleventh hour a surprise offer was made by the trustees of Morwellham Quay. A dry berth and use of all facilities free of charge was waiting for as long as the restoration took.

Captain Hampton's elderly son came to see the Lynher in her abandonment before she was freed from the mud. He remembered sailing on her regularly as a young boy, remarking that he: 'regretted not taking more of an interest in her at the time.' Like many common sights around us today, they are very likely to be taken for granted.



Digging out the vessel was a laborious, thankless task.

Courtesy of Mr Charlie Force

Even after the mud from below decks had been cleared, the weary Tamar sailing barge refused to budge from her retirement. The mud from around the outside of the hull began to be cleared and a trench was dug through the mud toward the low water line, the intention was to siphon water along the trench from inside the hull via a 4 inch pipe. A

friend remarked that these efforts were in vain by boldly predicting that she would 'float on the next tide!'

She did in fact float on the next tide, sluggishly rising on the flooding waters without the aid of pumps or floats! A lasting tribute to the craftsmanship of James Goss and his workforce of boat builders almost a century prior.

From the inception of the idea until the point of re-floating the barge, Charlie was always aware that the Lynher was not actually his property. Lengthy legal searches were commissioned, culminating after several months of research with an official bill of sale, drawn up with the co-operation of the original owners. This prudent foresight was designed to save any potential embarrassment in the future. The Lynher was eventually purchased for £1 from ARC, the Amey Roadstone Company, a well-known name on the river half a century previous. This was after a staggering legal bill of £1500 to establish ownership!

Preparations were soon underway for the much anticipated transit to Morwellham Quay's Great Consols Dock. Immediately after clearing out the barge, it became apparent that the original engine, shaft and propeller were missing, presumably sold for scrap or utilised aboard another vessel or vessels. If the Lynher had been laid up in 1956, then the engine and ancillaries fitted from new would have been 28 years old when she was finally abandoned, no doubt having totted up many working hours.

An old dumper truck engine found to be in good working order was temporarily fitted to the vessel, as was a salvaged shaft and propeller. The propeller was coincidentally purchased by Charlie some years previous for no particular reason at the time! The temporary machinery was found to work perfectly, although due to the pitch of the blades, the engine had to be run in reverse gear to achieve ahead propulsion! An iron pipe was bolted to the rudder as a makeshift tiller arm in the final preparations for the passage to Morwellham. At low water, the river was painstakingly walked, noting landmarks and transit markers along the navigable channel, pre-empting an eventless passage to the mouth of the River Lynher at least.

In the spring of 1991, the Lynher got underway for the first time in 35 years, bound for Morwellham Quay 10 miles up the River Tamar. It is remembered with fond memory that the first time they got underway a chap unfamiliar to Charlie clambered aboard unannounced to help navigate until the confluence of the River Tiddy. He was a cheery well-mannered chap whom freely offered up his knowledge of safe navigation as the Lynher was steered downstream. After the fellow had disembarked at East Waters Turn onto a small clinker, Charlie turned to his friend still aboard and asked how he knew the nice young chap that had helped them down the river. Charlie's friend retorted that he didn't know him from Adam and thought he was your friend!

The Lynher making her way past Wacker Lake, Scraesdon Fort is on the high ground.

Courtesy of Mr Charlie Force



The barge 'Lynher' about to negotiate Saltash Passage and the Royal Albert Bridge.

Courtesy of Mr Charlie Force



The relatively short passage to Morwellham Quay took 3 anxious days and did not pass without incident. As a precaution, fifteen 40 gallon drums were lashed alongside the inside of the bulkheads, these were deemed suffice to keep the barge afloat in the event of a

serious ingress of water. This theory was thankfully never realised and it is not known to this day if it would have actually worked!

The last time the Lynher would have seen the view of the Royal Albert Bridge, Elvis Presley would have been in the charts for the first time singing Heartbreak Hotel and Sir Antony Eden was Prime Minister of Great Britain.

On the approach to Cargreen, the un-laden Tamar sailing barge proved cumbersome to manoeuvre for inexperienced hands. A wide 'Admiralty Sweep' was necessary to narrowly avoid colliding with leisure craft on their moorings, the second approach was decidedly more successful. Good fortune occurred further upstream on approaching Halton Quay, with the discovery of the rotting remains of the barge JNR lying alongside. (The JNR abbreviated from John Nicholas Roose was also a Tamar sailing barge named and owned after a prominent ship builder/merchant of the 19th and early 20th century, she was described as a 'mess' during the early 1990's). Enquiries were made as to ownership and the possibility of salvaging the cleats for use in the resurrection of the Lynher. In the event, 3 were salvaged, 2 of which were eventually utilised whilst 1 remains aboard as a spare to this day. After 3 days and 2 nights aboard, the Lynher finally arrived at Morwellham Quay.

The tide temporarily claiming the Lynher on Morwellham Quay.

Courtesy of Mr Charlie Force



Washing out the 'Lynher' after the tide had ebbed.

Courtesy of Mr Charlie Force



Steady progress was made during the restoration. Courtesy of Mr Charlie Force

The first year she lay on the slip, the tide was allowed to rise and fall throughout her



frames. This natural process was an aid to washing out the stubborn mud from between

her skins, as well as stopping the timbers from drying out completely, which could have irreversibly damaged any sound framework. A water pump and fixed pressure hose was used to wash her out when the tide permitted.

The first year of restoration comprised of replacing the entire length of the deck beams, bow to stern on both sides. Working alone, it took another 3 years just to reframe her in oak, each double frame had 7 pieces of timber, at least 4 of these and sometimes 5 were replaced. Fortunately for the Lynher, the great storm of the late 80's had brought down many ancient oaks overlooking the Tamar and in adjacent farmers' fields. On hearing of the project to restore the sailing barge, much of this oak was offered to the restoration process either for free or at a fraction of what it would cost to buy commercially. Large sections of trunk were floated and then towed to Morwellham for this purpose. A new mast, gaff, bowsprit and boom were all made from larch or a similar timber. (The original mast was actually found in one original piece at a boatyard on Cuddenbeake Quay on the River Tiddy and was utilised as a template for the new mast).

After some enquiries, a professional boat builder, Mr R Mitchell from Penryn, originally working out of Portmellon, near Mevagissey, was recruited to oversee re-planking the restored framework. A careful look around the restored bones of the Lynher, the retired boat builder remarked to Charlie that: 'the job done so far was good.' A great compliment for a man who had never reframed any boat, let alone a 19th century Tamar sailing barge!

The original planking would have been elm below the waterline and oak above, but owing to the recent devastation caused by Dutch elm disease, combined with the expense of oak, alternative timber was sought. Larch was eventually brought down from the Lincolnshire side of the Humber for use as the planking, whilst pitch pine was used for the deck. A small keel was purchased from Penryn, around which a punt for the Lynher was built by Mr R Bird and a team of students.





The sails had to be made commercially in Penryn from a colour material that closely matched the original, whilst the rigging of the Lynher was done by a professional rigger after a chance meeting at a ships festival at Bristol Docks.

The engine fitted is an air cooled Lister 3 cylinder, electric and hand start, retired from the Boddinnick Ferry crossing the River Fowey. The ships anchor was unexpectedly salvaged from the Helford River, half buried in silt. On trying to establish to whom the anchor belonged, the trail led to the Falmouth Harbourmaster whom willingly sold it for £25.

The crew's table in what was the hold was made from planks brought in by boats from Newquay. The seats that complimented the table were salvaged from an old cinema, also in Newquay, North Cornwall.



The 'Lynher' after restoration in full sail south of Plymouth Breakwater 1998

Courtesy of Mr Charlie Force

It was hoped to launch the Lynher in 1996, marking her centenary and unlikely renaissance, although this was soon realised to be a little too optimistic. 2 years later however, in the spring of 1998, the fully restored ketch rigged Lynher was finally launched, 102 years after her original construction and amid a great furor of media interest and public display. The whole process had cost £71,000 and 9 painstaking years to get to this poignant moment. On her maiden voyage and under her own power since restoration, she took 3 hours to motor from Morwellham Quay to the western entrance of the breakwater in Plymouth Sound, reaching a maximum speed of 10 knots. Once she was proven, the Lynher coasted to her old haunts at Fowey, St Mawes, Penryn and the Helford River and attended classic boat rallies at Plymouth.

It is ironic to note that the Garlandstone had been restored with National Trust backing right alongside the Lynher on Morwellham Quay, the majestic schooner had been 2nd choice to the Tamar sailing barge almost 2 decades previous.

Charlie sailed the Lynher for 2 summers after her launching ceremony, but unfortunately became unwell and as a result was unable to man the tiller for any length of time. Independently valued at £270,000, the Lynher was reluctantly sold privately for an undisclosed sum in the summer of 2000 to a lady whom had the intention of living aboard whilst cruising the coast. In 2005 the Lynher went up the slip at Mashfords boatyard on the River Tamar for a re-fit and has remained there to date. At present she is in dire need of re-planking and various other major tasks. Due to a series of unfortunate events and circumstances, the only true representation of a Tamar sailing barge anywhere in the world now faces another uncertain future ...

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