ELEVEN

Memory on the Waterfront in late Twentieth-Century Hull

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Coming into Port

At the close of the Second World War, as the port-city of Hull faced the challenge of rebuilding an urban fabric shattered by wartime bombing, its maritime industries prepared to return to business as usual. Hull's trawl fishery and commercial docks had both been disrupted by the years of conflict and now, in line with Britain's maritime sector, Hull companies were keen to get things back to normal.[1] In the west of the city, as Britain enjoyed a post-war golden age of rising wages and full employment, Hull's distant-water trawl fishery experienced a boom. Reduced fishing effort during the war years had allowed fish stocks to recover and with the nation still facing food shortages, supplies of non-rationed fish were in demand. Yet by the mid-1950s the boom was proving transitory, as overfishing, changing consumer preferences and most significantly, shifts in international policy, sent ripples into the semblance of calm. Meanwhile, away from the fish quay, cracks were more immediately apparent in the city's extensive commercial docklands. The huge post-war growth of the international economy had increased seaborne trade, stimulating demand for shipping and port services. However, like other large British ports, post-1945 operations at Hull were marred by out-dated cargo handling practices, a dire need of capital investment in new facilities and ongoing industrial unrest.[2] In the decades that followed, waves of legislation, reforming policy and disruptive technologies changed established practises irreversibly. Accordingly, along Hull's expansive waterfront, the late twentieth century saw the breakdown of structures and rhythms that had once seemed immutable. For those caught up in the transition, old certainties would come to an end.

Rhythms of the Waterfront

In the wake of the Second World War, men and women along Hull's waterfront returned to patterns of living that had endured for decades. In the nineteenth century the port of Hull had extended along the shores of the Humber, with various activities shaping the docks and the communities that served them. The north-south orientation of the River Hull served to emphasize a dual urban character, giving the compelling, if somewhat imprecise impression of a city divided in two. With commercial docks to the east of the River Hull, and fishing to

the west, contrasting rhythms of work, life, environment and culture seemingly moulded Hull into a city of two ports.

The duality of the east-west city continued into the post-war years. At the spacious eastern docks increasing quantities of oil arrived from both foreign and domestic refineries, while timber and agricultural produce were imported from Scandinavia and the Commonwealth.[3] In parallel, coal was shipped along the coast and to Europe, alongside machinery and manufactured goods destined for markets across the globe.[4] To the west of the River Hull, fruit, vegetables, meat and other foodstuffs lined the quays of William Wright Dock, Albert Dock and the central Town Docks.[5] Such commercial activity took place downwind from the odour of smokehouse and fishmeal, as in St Andrew's Fish Dock Hull's distant-water trawl fishery continued to thrive. All along the waterfront, commerce and commodity kept pace with supply and demand, and as cargoes arrived, they were unloaded, processed and dispatched by armies of workers from the port-city's shoreside communities.

There were similarities between the neighbourhoods and networks of Hull's commercial dockworkers and those of its fishing community; between the east and the west of the city. With concentrations of people with close social and occupational ties and limited mobility, both shared characteristics with other post-war working class districts.[6] Both also shared the influence of the sea upon their lives and livelihoods. There are, however, divergences. At the commercial port, ships would arrive and leave, bringing the world to Hull's doorstep and conveying a myriad of British products to all corners of the globe. On the dockside, however, the workforce was sedentary and firmly rooted in long-established practices. The seasonal and fluctuating nature of seaborne trade meant that Hull dockers were casually employed, like those at other large British ports. A degree of labour reform had been implemented across the ports following the introduction of the statutory National Dock Labour Scheme in 1947. The scheme was designed to better regulate the supply of dock labour via the national registration of dockworkers. However, it simply built upon and served to formalize, existing and long-established organization within the industry.[7] Dockworkers continued to be hired individually or in gangs by a variety of employers, including stevedores, shipping companies and merchants, with the rate of pay determined by cargo type and method of handling.

The survival of casualism preserved long-standing working practices on Hull's docks into the 1960s. Employers at liberty to hire and discard dockers as needed had little incentive to invest capital in the new mechanized equipment that had become increasingly available after 1945. As a result, cargo-handling practices remained varied, manual and labour-

intensive. Cranes, grabs and hoists were provided by the port authority for bulk cargoes. However, general goods were handled by conventional break-bulk methods, which involved the carriage of man-sized boxes, barrels, sacks and packages from ship to shore. These were then transferred to sheds or to waiting inland rail, river or road transport. The shipment of goods followed the reverse pattern.[8] Docker Mike described the arduous process of timber discharge:

> It all had to be carried off, it had to be slung onto the ship then landed onto these stages and carried off… I used to look down and think they'd 'ave been doing this job 200 years ago. In fact, they wun't let you alter cos you was on piece work and I know one particular ship we could have used long derricks and "whoa stop the job, - you can't do that, they've got to be lifted and carried" cos we'd have gone through the roof with our wages.[9]

Unchanging organizational and working practices meant that the character of Hull's dock labour force in the early 1960s differed little from a century earlier. Such continuation preserved a distinctive subculture on the waterfront after 1945. The survival of casual employment and strong unionization was unusual and registration (passed strictly from father to son) encouraged exclusivity, making dock work a closed shop.[10] The long tradition of occupational inheritance was part of a clannish culture, likely derived from the Irish-Catholic origins of the workforce. It has been suggested that comparatively low immigration into Hull during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries made ethno-religious distinctions on the Hull waterfront negligible. [11] However, oral testimony provides evidence to the contrary. Docker Paul explains:

> You'd go on the dock and there was like Hegarty, Geraghty and Phee - all Irish families all come from Irish people. Probably from centuries ago like eighteen hundred and odd like my family. A lot of the foremen had Irish names like Hegarty and Flannery - them old Irish names or O'Leary.[12]

A strong Irish presence suggests that the origins of Hull dockers compared closely with that of large ports such as Liverpool and London where migrant labour from Ireland stayed on to work the docks that they had dug out, with their children and grandchildren absorbing, embedding and continuing their culture and beliefs.

Narratives also reveal an occupational bond that extended beyond the dock wall, with many Hull docking families continuing to reside in terraced streets close to the dock gates after 1945.[13] Fluctuating wages associated with casual employment and piece work, produced a

culture of interdependence within tight-knit dockside communities. The child of a dockworker recalled:

> The men… used to have to be there before eight o'clock to get a job. The women used to stand at the top of the terrace and watch the men coming home and they'd say: Oh Albert hasn't got a job or Ted hasn't got a job… Then they'd turn to me mother and say: Ooh, Chuck must be working. She said: Oh, that's good, he'll get 12 and six tonight. Well all these women had no money for their dinner, so she lent them all half a crown and she took half a crown and went and got a rabbit and veggies. So she gets this rabbit all ready to put in the oven, and sure enough Chuck come walking down the street. He'd been dawdling. So she gets this rabbit and she says: you can't have it! I thought you were working! Oh, what am I going to do for my rent? She's loaned all her money out so the women in the terrace could get a dinner in![14]

Although dockworkers and their families continued to live close to the docks, after 1945 most lived a distance from the waterfront. The slum clearance and creation of new housing estates to the north and east of the city during the inter-war years and the destruction of much dockside housing by bombing had caused the dispersal of many dockworking families.[15] Nevertheless, a sense of occupational community appears to have endured amongst those who resided away from the docks, particularly at the Willows Sport and Social Club, established during the 1950s under the National Dock Labour Board. Shirley, whose father and husband were dockworkers, recalled how the Willows had been central to her social life from childhood:

> I met a lot of dockworkers' families, that's where I met [my husband] George… In the archery club!…. me dad…me and me brother would go as kids and go in the archery club… George had the rowing and the rugby…. the Willows it is….was great for the sports because of the social life of the dockers.[16]

Like so many aspects of dock work at Hull, the culture of the wider docking community bore traits that were founded almost a century earlier and memories of the early post-war period likely reflect those of previous generations who had lived or worked on Hull's eastern waterfront.

A similar constancy prevailed in the west of the city, where life for many was tuned to the comings and goings of Hull's substantial distant-water trawling fleet. Fishing in Hull was

strongly place-centred. Studying the industry in the late 1950s, sociologist Jeremy Tunstall observed that, 'fishermen see themselves in a curious way as working in Hull'.[17] Although trawling predominantly off the coasts of Iceland, Norway and northern Russia, vessels and processing facilities were Hull owned and Hull based. Trawlers steamed from and returned to the city, with 92 per cent of fishermen living within four miles of the Fish Dock in 1955.[18] Indeed, some 57 per cent of fishermen and 72 per cent of fish landing crew, known as bobbers, lived within a one-mile radius of the dock and therefore men traditionally sailed or worked predominantly with other men from within a narrow locale.[19]

Within Hull, fishing was synonymous with Hessle Road: a long, urban thoroughfare running parallel to the fish dock. Dock and district had become entwined from the earliest days of trawling and continued as such into the decades after the Second World War. Not everyone here engaged in fishing, yet the industry pervaded the neighbourhood. Arctic trawling was demanding and dangerous, defined by Tunstall as an 'extreme occupation'.[20] Until the 1970s, the fishery remained largely structured around the 21-day trip of the traditional side trawler, which from the late nineteenth century had shaped not only life at sea, but also that on shore. In the late 1960s side trawlers spent an average of 60-72 hours in port and home-life for the fisherman was compressed into three days. It took on a hectic and celebratory nature as Michael describes:

> Well in three days you had to cheer the family up, and the little 'uns and spoil them for a bit cos they don't see their father for three weeks… you'd take your wife shopping up town and spoil her for a couple of hours and sit in shops fed up. And then the kids'd come home from school and you'd've bought them some presents or you'd take them up town… and the next day you relaxed a little bit and then the day after that you was away to sea again.[21]

As fishermen stepped ashore, portside workers swept aboard vessels to unload, process and dispatch fish and to prepare for the next voyage. The practices of trawling, not least the limited shoretime and the unsocial working hours required to unload and dispatch a perishable produce, encouraged fishermen and ancillary workers alike to live close to the fish dock. Working in the fishery became a neighbourhood tradition and the families of trawlermen and fish dock workers clustered into a tight-knit community able to support a distinctive way of living.[22] As a result, a recognizable local culture emerged in the streets of Hessle Road, more defined and contained than that of the eastern Hull port. For here was 'Trawlertown',[23] a district of fishermen's pubs, clubs and pawnshops, ships' runners, flamboyant spending, loan systems known as backhanding and outfitters 'open to suit all

tides'.[24] Former residents of Hessle Road in the 1960s recall it as exceptional; 'a wonderful, wonderful road', where the people were 'a breed of their own'.[25] It was a place of endless bustle. 'Hessle Road was full of people', reports Gill and amidst the everyday activity of a busy working class district, were the movements arising from the fishing fleet.[26] Pubs were 'constantly alive with people coming and going and ships coming in and coming out'.[27] Taxis darted about, for fishermen home for just three days did not waste time walking: '...it was a taxi' says Ivy, 'even though it was only next street'.[28]

A visitor to the area would have recognized a connection with fish. There were filleting factories, rows of slender kipper house chimneys and women wearing the 'wellies' and 'turban' headscarves of the fish processor. At the hub of the fishery stood St Andrew's Fish Dock. Just as on the commercial docks, work here was labour intensive and arrival on the dock met with profuse activity. Jim describes an efficient disarray:

> It was dangerous walking... You'd have clogs, because there was water and fish slime and ice... you would have the bobbers landing the fish and at the same time they were bringing up the fish room boards... board scrubbers... there would be shore-riggers splicing wires, there'd be electricians, the Marconi man would be going round all the wireless and the electronics... The cod liver oil boat would be alongside, pumping out... organized chaos, everybody knew what they were doing.[29]

Along the western waterfront, St Andrew's Fish Dock, together with the Trawlertown of Hessle Road, forged a landscape of connected activity that was distinct, yet located within the wider city. It was the product of the Arctic trawl and hosted a community where everything was 'geared to the rhythm of fishing'.[30]

DISRUPTED

In the post-war era, as Hull's waterfront communities returned to their time-served rhythms, fractures were appearing beneath the semblance of 'business as usual'. The years after 1945 were marked by serious problems at Hull and other commercial ports. Gross inefficiency was, in part, attributable to outdated cargo-handling practices and heightened industrial unrest. Strike action at Hull during the period was frequent and often unofficial due to the Transport and General Worker's Union's (TGWU) inability to control its membership.[31] In fact, the TGWU's power and influence was further undermined in 1954 by the arrival of the rival London-based National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers' Union, to which many dockers defected.[32] Although poor relations between labour and employers had been a prominent feature in Hull and other ports since the late nineteenth

century, industrial unrest heightened significantly following the introduction of the National Dock Labour Scheme. Despite the scheme's progressive nature and its administration by jointly controlled national and local boards composed of labour and employer representatives, it proved highly unpopular with both sides of the industry. It facilitated decasualization, which was unpopular amongst many dockers who cherished their freedom to pick and choose the best paying work on the docks.[33] The extent to which some Hull dockers were prepared to defend the casual system was evidenced in early 1961 when, following the increase of 'regulars' to 40 per cent of the workforce, a series of unofficial one-day strikes against decasualisation occurred in the port; a situation that forced employers to cap their permanent staffs at 35 per cent of the total workforce.[34] Poor working conditions were also a longstanding source of discontent amongst the workforce. The casual system had preserved primitive and dangerous working practices, placing little obligation upon employers to provide facilities for employees. The Hull and Goole Dock Labour Board was responsible for the Hull docker's welfare. However, it had done little to improve amenities by the early 1960s. One docker recalled:

> There was these two little brick places with the toilets in and I don't know if they ever got cleaned… I mean it was frozen solid [in the winter]. The toilets was atrocious and the coffee shops like the Black Hole of Calcutta it was terrible - filthy, mucky places. They had a little fire in the middle and the auld dockers used to stand gerrin' warm round it.[35]

Conversely, many employers were aggrieved by the Scheme's ineffective disciplinary mechanism. A 1952 inquiry found a serious lack of discipline amongst the dockers at Hull where harmful restrictive practices were particularly widespread.[36] Alongside worsening relations between the labour force and employers, the scheme also exacerbated deep-rooted divisions amongst the dockers themselves. Grievances within the labour force primarily related to the allocation of work under the casual system. Prior to the 1939 the hiring process at Hull, known as the 'tinpot system', had been conducted at the gangway end of a vessel.[37] However, under the scheme new purpose-built hiring halls or 'controls' were erected at each of the docks. Here, dockers were forced to fight each other for the better paying jobs. Those not hired at the morning 'call' were often transferred or 'shanghaid' to another dock or paid a retainer known locally as 'dint' money and expected to return for the lunchtime call. The fight for work could feel degrading and favourites known as 'blue-eyed boys' were widely resented. Dockers Dennis , Barry and Clive describe a typical scene at the controls:

Barry: Yeah it was the pen, what they called 'the pen'.

Clive: Like a cattle pen!

Barry: There was a wall and behind that wall was a stand and the foreman used to come up out the office and onto the stand so they were above you. Way down below in the hall were the dockers fighting for bloody jobs and you'd all have your docker's book in your hand and the foreman comes up. If it's a good job everyone one puts their hand up with a book and he picks who 'e wants.

Dennis: I had a right barney with 'em one time cos it was a bad job and all the blue-eyes never used to put their books in.[38]

Like the grievances between labour and employers, internal divisions within the labour force itself were a deep-rooted feature of the casual system; a system that the National Dock Labour Scheme failed to eradicate.

By the early 1960s the need for extensive reform within the British port industry had become alarmingly clear. Conventional break-bulk operations were increasingly outmoded by the rapid development of unitized and mechanized cargo-handling. While the movement of palletized cargoes by forklift trucks improved efficiency, the introduction of new types of ships, such as the container and roll-on-roll-off vessel, enabled the carriage of metal boxes and ready loaded commercial road vehicles.[39] This cargo-handling revolution triggered a major inquiry into British dock labour by a committee chaired by former High Court Judge Lord Devlin. The Committee's report was published in 1965 and recognized that the successful operation of new equipment required a stable and reliable labour force. It recommended that dock labour be decasualized and wage systems reformed.[40] Phase I was implemented on 18 September 1967 (D-day) and, with all Hull dockworkers being permanently assigned to a single employer, the long-established casual system was ended.[41] After extensive local negotiations and a three-week national dock strike (the first industry-wide stoppage since 1926), Phase II was completed in September 1970, placing Hull dockers on a fixed wage.[42] Within five years the port's dock labour force had been transformed. One docker reflected:

> All this happened in my eight, nine years on the dock from 1964 to 1970 - *everything* happened! That was the period of 3000 men... years unloading ships.... cargo went to a ship and it was loaded and then it was unloaded it *stopped*. The whole world stopped in ten years... I [still] can't believe it.[43]

As this recollection indicates, organisation and working practices that had prevailed on the Hull waterfront for generations had been transformed by 1970 as the labour force was obliged to adapt swiftly to the demands of unitisation and the container age.

To the west of the city, Hull's fishery faced its own challenges. Although the industry had enjoyed a post-war boom, from the mid-1950s, overfishing and falling consumer demand increasingly impaired the performance of the industry. From 1960, subsidized by the British Government, trawler owners moved towards a revolutionary new technology. The freezer trawler initiated a break with the rhythms of the past. Freed from the bind of bringing perishable wet fish to port, freezer vessels worked further afield and stayed at sea for up to three months. The ships were bigger, safer and carried larger crews. Whereas fish was gutted on the open deck of a side trawler, men worked below in a freezer vessel, sheltered from Arctic winds. Ashore freezer trawlers precipitated change in the life of the fishing district. Frozen fish needed cold stores, mechanical landing and new sales methods. On the home front, life could relax a little, for although freezer trawlermen spent longer at sea, they also stayed ashore for a week. Into the 1970s, the impact of the freezer ship was yet to disrupt the established rhythms of Hessle Road. A significant number of side trawlers remained and Hull's trawling fleet now assumed a dual form. As trawling reconfigured for the future, however, more significant upheavals were to come.

From the early 1950s fishing grounds across the globe were becoming increasingly subject to the territorial ambitions of nation states. The Truman Proclamation, which was issued by the United States of America in 1945, pushed the idea of coastal limits onto the international stage. It advocated the extension of territorial rights over sea space, a notion readily embraced by Arctic nations, keen to develop their own fishing industries and alarmed at the expansion of efficient foreign fleets working off their coastline. In 1951, Denmark extended its coastal territory from three miles to four miles, a measure followed by Iceland in 1952. In 1958, Iceland moved its limit further to 12 miles. This shift was contested by Britain, leading to the first of three seaborne conflicts between Britain and Iceland known as the 'Cod Wars'. Protest, however, proved futile and Iceland proceeded to extend its Exclusive Economic Zone to 50 miles in 1972 and 200 miles in 1975. In December 1976, as the third Anglo-Icelandic Cod War came to a close, British trawlers were forced to leave Icelandic waters for good. By the end of 1977, 200-mile exclusion zones had been established by Norway, Russia, Faroe and Canada. For Hull's distant-water trawling fleet, fishing in the North Atlantic ceased to be the uncontested source of income and employment that it had been since the late nineteenth century.

Despite the escalating conflict, there is little evidence that Hull's fishery was prepared for the impact of the final Cod War. Fishing has been described as a 'culture of the moment'.[44] Fishermen could be fatalistic and little inclined to engage in forward planning. Whilst some chose to leave the industry in the uncertain years of the early 1970s, many held on. For those accustomed to the freedom of the high seas, there was a sense of disbelief that nations could claim large expanses of water as their own. John, a trawler deckhand, remembers:

> I don't think we ever dreamt of it declining like it did... with Iceland only being as small as it was and England being as big as it is and then our gunboats going down there, we thought we'd be ok, but... we just wasn't.[45]

Even those less optimistic had at least harboured the hope of a fishing agreement with Iceland and the prospect of a managed process of change. The speed with which fishing opportunities diminished, therefore, came as a blow.

In parallel with the crisis surrounding fishing limits, the British distant-water trawl industry was facing other difficulties. Rising oil prices in the 1970s were straining the economics of fishing off distant shores. A greater challenge, however, lay closer to home. In 1973 Britain had joined the European Common Market, compelling the UK to adhere to a hastily compiled European Common Fisheries Policy. In the ensuing decade, wrangles over revisions to this policy hampered the British distant-water industry as it struggled to adapt to an uncertain future. With seeming duplicity, as Britain had contested the Icelandic 200-mile fishing limit, under its new partnership with Europe, it had simultaneously prepared to extend its own 200-mile exclusion zone. The zone declared by Britain in January 1977, however, was to be a 'common pond' shared by the member states of a European union. As Iceland's coast was closed to British distant-water trawlers, Britain's own fish-rich waters were open to the fishing fleets of other nations.

For the Hull trawl fishery, the result of this perfect storm was the rapid decline of its catching sector and the contraction of its fish merchant and processing industry. In a new context, vessel owners and skippers had to contend with the state control and management of fishing grounds, which increasingly took place under a system of allocated fishing quotas. To skipper Peter, quotas ended the freedom of command. Peter loved the thrill of the hunt, using his own judgment to decide where to fish. Quotas took away that liberty and with it the buzz of the chase. Now, he laments, it is the man behind the desk who is the skipper.[46] Faced with quotas, trawling firms steeped in a cod-based tradition, turned towards more flexible fishing. Trawler owner Tom Boyd explains: 'we did everything we could to keep the

ships operating... they might go to the North-East Arctic one trip and then be going off herring fishing and going off mackerel fishing at the next trip'.[47] But for trawling firms and trawlermen alike, fishing within limits made it hard to earn a living. Dave eventually found it impossible to make ends meet:

> ... you didn't catch enough fish to make it worth going... You come and settle up and you get about five pound. That's not good. You felt your life'd ended basically. You think, where do you go from here? Do you carry on going to sea? Or do we just go back ashore, y' know, call it a day?[48]

The struggle to fill large ships with fish from diminishing seas, eventually took its toll upon the Hull trawling fleet. In popular memory the sight of trawlers being scrapped at Drapers Yard, at the confluence of the Rivers Hull and Humber, has become an enduring symbol of decline. Scrapping ships had been a regular part of fish dock life, as one new technology replaced another. But from the mid-1970s, departures from the fleet were no longer offset by new arrivals. Michael P. witnessed trawlers up for scrap each time he returned from a trip with Hull's shrinking fleet. The sight, says Michael, was 'really demoralizing' and others echo his sentiment.[49] Worse was to come. The adverse economics of trawling were soon forcing the sale and conversion of Hull's advanced and modern stern freezer fleet. To deckhand Thomas, this was a sure indication of the end:

> … We started selling ships to different places and that's when you knew, we won't gonna come back. It was always on a decline… the slide was there and there was no stopping the slide.[50]

As ships left the dockside, so too did the men who sailed them. Trawlermen in Hull were engaged on a casual basis. Fewer ships meant less chance to sign back on for a trip, forcing hundreds of trawlermen to search for employment elsewhere. The spectre of older redundant fishermen beached on the shores of Hessle Road is embedded in local memory. Yet it was not only trawlermen who were affected by decline. Across the fish dock, from landing gangs to trawler engineers, there was no option but to look for work elsewhere. However, the demands of trawling and the rigours of the fish dock had bred a workforce that was willing and able to work hard and there began a tenacious pursuit of new opportunities. These were not always successful. Margaret tells a story of her brother Harold's futile dash to Fleetwood in the hope of getting a ship. He and two friends followed a tip picked up in a Hessle Road pub. Margaret narrates:

> … And off he trotted, they went, the three of 'em. And they said no, we don't want no Yorkies [Yorkshire men] here. So they jumped in a taxi - no money to

> pay the taxi driver - and when they got to Harold's house, Harold emptied the gas meter in ten pence pieces and paid the taxi driver in a sock.[51]

In other instances, however, the quest to keep working paid off. Long-term unemployment continued to plague the former fishing community. However, for some, the dogged hunt for work brought results, and in the wake of the 1960s and 1970s, as familiar chapters were closing, new episodes were poised to begin.

Moving to a New Beat

Alongside the shock of disruption, there emerged novel patterns of working and alternative careers that heralded new lives and broke from the routines and rhythms of the past. Following the Devlin reforms, life and work on the commercial docks was drastically altered. Casual employment and manual cargo-handling had been cornerstones of dock work for generations. Devlin's reorganisation transformed the dockers' occupation. Answerable to a single employer, dockers now spent working days operating machinery. Docker Mike's memories reveal how mechanisation altered the routine of dock work:

> [After Devlin] you went as a tug driver but you got a job for a couple of days, they used to try and vary your jobs – put you on a different ship, you used to do one or two days on roping and you used to drive a little forklift and do all the fork lifting jobs… And then we had a couple of days in the shed which was like the crane shed and these gantries used to run up and down the shed and the lorries would come in and we'd transfer the container off the lorry onto our own… tug and trailers.[52]

Although less physical and varied than traditional methods, new practices ensured that dock work was safer and more efficient. Aside from decasualization and wage reform, Devlin had also recommended a rigorous branch overhaul of the TGWU, which greatly increased union control within the port.[53] New amenities further improved conditions on the docks. Most notable was the erection of new purpose-built restaurants for dockworkers at each of the docks which included showers and lockers.[54]

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, traditional working patterns and practices were eroded, giving way to a more orthodox contractual terms akin to other modern mechanized industries. Re-organisation and new working patterns at Hull, however, did not bring industrial peace. Increasing mechanisation led to many redundancies and, despite the success in paving the way for containerisation, Devlin's reforms heralded a new era of widespread unrest across the industry. Devlin's Phase II had inflated labour costs, significantly raising operational

expenses. The Committee also failed to remove or reform the National Dock Labour Scheme. Ongoing registration caused over-manning. Employers could not successfully reduce the size of their workforces in line with increasing mechanization and the preservation of an ineffective disciplinary system allowed restrictive practices to continue. [55] Combined, these factors caused shipping customers to divert business from Hull and other scheme ports to emerging 'non-scheme' sites such as Felixstowe, where cheaper un-registered labour was employed to operate new cargo-handling machinery. The loss of trade greatly exacerbated unemployment. On D-Day, September 1967, the number of registered dockworkers at the port stood at 4,057. By 1971, this had fallen to 2,784.[56] Hull dockers engaged in a militant campaign to protect their work, taking a leading role during the national dock strikes of the 1970s and 1980s.[57] However, their protective action served to drive more traffic from the port. Not until August 1989, following the abolition of the National Dock Labour Scheme by Margaret Thatcher, was industrial peace secured.[58] The consequence, however, was further unemployment as hundreds of dockers accepted redundancy and left the industry.

Over on the fish dock, those battling for Hull's beleaguered distant-water industry were also seeking urgent solutions. Spurred by the closure of open seas, trawling firms steeped in a North Atlantic tradition of fishing mainly for cod for a UK market, embarked upon a hunt for new opportunities. They pursued possibilities with energy and on each venture they took their Hull crews. Even before the end of the final Cod War, Hull firms were engaging with the booming mackerel fishery off the coast of Cornwall. As opportunities in the Arctic declined, the south-west of England threw a lifeline. Trawlermen accustomed to working icy seas, adapted to warmer climes and to handling oily pelagic species. In this new fishery, for the first time, fish caught by Hull ships was intended primarily for overseas markets. From 1977, fishing fleets from outside the European Union had been excluded from the British coastline. In response, fish caught by British trawlers was transferred at sea to colossal factory ships, originating mainly from the Eastern Bloc. Known as klondyking, this new way of fishing became a mainstay of the emerging mackerel economy. Bob, a trawler skipper, recalls:

> Russians and Poles was anchored in a bay... the company used to say, go to so-and-so ship… then you went alongside him and he just took all the fish off you and then you left that one, went and caught some more fish… and that's how we carried on.[59]

Mackerel was also carried ashore for transshipment, mainly to Africa. Hull trawling firms invested in facilities at Milford Haven and, in a break with tradition, for the duration of the mackerel season Hull trawlers no longer returned to their homeport. Hull crews travelled to

join ships by coach or taxi, occasionally accompanied by Hull maintenance engineers, familiar with the vessels. The result was a growing Hull colony in the Welsh port. It was, says radio engineer Ben, 'like little Hull down there sometimes'.[60]

Alongside mackerel, the British distant-water sector experimented with fishing for new species found in very deep water off the UK continental shelf. However, these new species, described unhelpfully by one industry representative as 'bog-eyed monsters from the deep',[61] were difficult to market to the notoriously conservative British consumer. An emerging blue whiting fishery enjoyed a measure of success, but did not progress to become a viable commercial operation. Despite all efforts, experimental fishing was unable to assist the struggling distant-water ports and in the words of fish merchant Chris, the pursuit of species such as monkfish, scabbard and orange roughy proved to be a 'red herring'.[62]

Away from home waters, Hull trawling firms engaged in partnerships or 'joint ventures' with newly emerging fishing nations, which were keen to take advantage of their own 200-mile limits, but who lacked the skills or markets to develop. Joint projects in North Africa and Australia often proved problematic. One Hull company, the Boyd Line, enjoyed better fortune in the Southwestern Pacific, managing the giant freezer trawlers *Arctic Buccaneer* and *Arctic Galliard;* vessels once owned by the firm but sold to New Zealand owners in the crises years after the Cod Wars. Ultimately, these new projects were unable to sustain the industry. By the early 1980s, overfishing and quotas had diminished Hull's involvement with the UK mackerel fishery; experimental species had failed to become commercially viable and overseas ventures had proved unpredictable. Amidst the struggles, however, there were two notable successes that significantly extended the life of Hull's disappearing trawler fleet.

From the mid-1960s, the exploration, discovery and extraction of gas and oil in the North Sea stimulated British maritime activity. The offshore industry developed rapidly throughout the 1970s, bringing an urgent need for ships for platform supply, safety standby work, anchor handling and surveying. Until specialist vessels could be built for these roles, the rugged distant-water trawlers, build to withstand treacherous Arctic seas, fitted the bill. Most Hull trawling firms redirected redundant ships to the new North Sea industry. The Hull-based Marr Group was particularly energetic, progressing into survey and exploration as a new facet to its business. Victor, a former trawler skipper working on supply ships, notes how crews in the offshore sector were often 'refugees from the fishing industry'. For oil companies, trawlermen were a welcome addition, able to endure the challenging

environment of the North Sea. In a climate of disruption, the rise of a British offshore industry proved to be a gift, as former skipper Ken reflects:

> Oh, you could sit and think that if [the oil] industry wasn't there, it would've been a complete disaster. We would've had something like four, five thousand men around with nothing to do... so it really was an answer to everybody's problems.[63]

Another perhaps unexpected new arena for Hull companies lay 8,000 miles away in the South Atlantic. In 1976, an economic survey of the Falkland Islands proposed developing a fishery as a means to boost the Island's economy. However, troubles in the wider British economy, followed by the 1982 Falklands War served to delay progress. In Hull, by 1985, the continued struggles of the distant-water industry had finally brought long-established fishing firms to an end. Yet two tenacious companies, J Marr and Son and Boyd Line, remained in operation and when Britain announced a 150-mile limit around the Falklands in 1987, both companies and their crews prepared for business in ever-distant waters. Marr and Boyd Line operated fishing ships, entered into joint ventures, explored new catching opportunities and managed licences. Marr also took a policing role, diverting ships once engaged in the northern trawl to fisheries protection around these southern islands. The protection role continued into the 1990s, even after a change in Island policy had brought significant fishing opportunities for Hull firms to a close. For a while, however, the Falkland Islands had provided an opening amongst closed waters and the skills and knowledge of Hull trawling companies and crews had been instrumental to the development of a new British fishery.

As ships and men dispersed, back on Hull's Fish Dock, foreign caught fish was arriving at the quay. In 1975, the fish dock had relocated from St Andrew's to the adjacent Albert and William Wright Docks, which had closed to commercial traffic. But the £1 million facilities, intended for the unloading of fish from Hull trawlers, were increasingly engaged in landing and processing a critical supply obtained from overseas. If Hull trawlers could no longer catch sufficient fish, then new suppliers must be attracted to the port. Fish for UK markets was offloaded from foreign trawlers or was imported in containers. The change marked a new and growing independence between Hull's fishing fleet and its fish trades. As a result, although the merchant and processing sector contracted, by forging new relationships it was able to continue successfully. The fish trades survived by breaking old ties and because, in the words of fish merchant Chris, 'there's always somebody, somewhere wanting to send fish'.[64]

By the end of the 1980s, the maelstrom of change that had blown into many working lives across Hull's extensive waterfront had given way to a period of relative calm. However, transformations to seafaring and dockside practices had produced ripples that were felt in the networks and rhythms of the portside districts and communities. In the fishery, the struggle for survival had seen Hull's once 'local' industry turn global. As trawlers no longer departed and returned to the city and as foreign caught fish arrived on its quays, the longstanding bond between industry, workforce and port district was severed. For those still serving at sea, arrival in port no longer meant arriving home. When Gill's husband took a job in the Gulf, travelling to his ship by aeroplane made the distance seem unbearable. She remembers her initial reaction:

> ...I went *[said],* oh going all them miles. And he went - well, it's no further than going to, like, Canada, off Newfoundland and all that. But it was, cos I was taking him to a plane. It won't like going away *[when]* I used to take him to the ship…[65]

Those going to work in other sectors could find that they missed the independence of the trawler skipper, the daily challenge of fishing or the assurance of the familiar. When Ken took a job ashore, he says 'I missed it. I think it took about four years before I thought to meself, well, it's out your system now…'.[66] Working in a local factory, Christine's husband Paul, a deckhand, got 'itchy feet' and secured one of a dwindling number of fishing jobs with Marr. 'He said he'd never go back to sea,' recalls Christine, 'but I knew that he would. I knew he would. It was always there'.[67]

Adjusting to Change

There are some commonalities that can be detected in memories of change across Hull's waterfront. East and west, the labour intensive port industries had given birth to dockside environments that teemed with people and life. In the final decades of the twentieth century, increased mechanisation and restructuring at the commercial docks and, decline, contraction and adaptation in the fishery, saw fewer people engaged in the dockland workforce. An accompanying loss of social connectivity, shared networks, familiar faces, camaraderie and collective encounters is common to narratives both east and west. At the commercial docks, where large numbers of dockers had once worked in gangs to load and discharge a variety of goods, the shrinking workforce was increasingly tied to terminals and berths where machinery rather than muscle was used to handle cargoes. Those who worked on the dockside narrate a growing sense of disenchantment as men were increasingly replaced by machines:

> Me elder brother 'e was at King George Dock on the containers – a really easy job. You just made sure everything was going smooth. You din't do any physical work cos he was used to real hard physical work and he wasn't keen on it and I said - don't you think it's time Bill? The docks have gone - it's changed. Don't you think it's time you packed it in? And he did. And then all me mates they give it up…. [they missed] the physical side of life.[68]

Similar sentiments were shared by those trawlermen who, transferring to work on oil rig safety vessels, found the work tedious compared with the rigours of fishing. Reorganization also effected the social atmosphere of the docks. Although Devlin was responsible for creating unemployment, his reforms brought financial stability and much improved working conditions, making dockworkers the elite of the working class. New found affluence, however, came at the expense of the earlier bonds between dockworkers, as one docker recalls:

> You din't have so many men. Say you had six men in a gang, you had 'undred men on a ship [before modernisation] you was all talking to each other – coffee shops, muggers, pubs! Whereas it went down to maybe two or three men… it just seemed to stop… You still got a little bit of comradeship in [the new restaurants]... but the men were gerrin' less and less. Whereas before there was a queue a mile long and you was all packed tight like sardines - all of a sudden there was maybe twenty or thirty people in there... [it was] completely different.[69]

As the sense of community disappeared on the docks, communal ties beyond the dock wall were also weakened, as regular and vastly improved pay encouraged more dockers to relocate away from the waterfront, to more affluent suburban and rural areas.

During the 1970s and 1980s the physical landscape of the waterside was also transformed. New cargo-handling practices, developments in sea and land transport and the loss of trade to other UK ports contributed to a relocation of activity to the larger, deeper docks further east and the closure of older upstream facilities. Deemed obsolete, the Town Docks and Victoria Dock had already closed to traffic by 1970, while a second wave of contraction during the 1970s and 1980s saw the closure of the Albert, William Wright and Alexandra Docks.[70] Having long formed the nucleus of the port's dock system, the Town and Victoria Docks were left to dereliction and decay before being sold to the local authority. Humber

Dock and Railway Dock were remodelled into a marina complex in 1983, Prince's Dock was converted to leisure and retail use during 1991, whilst Victoria Dock was redeveloped as an 'urban village' from the late 1980s.[71] In the fishery too, the move to the refurbished Albert and William Wright Dock had disrupted the familiar. Although the new facilities delivered much improved working conditions, some, like deckhand Thomas, lamented the lost character of the bustling old dock:

> ... there was no atmosphere there. Not like there was... y' see, everything happened on [St Andrew's] Fish Dock. Everything. Y' know, your trawlers were landed on fish dock, you signed on on Fish Dock, you signed off. Everything happened on Fish Dock. So to move it to another dock... it was all wrong.[72]

For a while, certain functions continued on the old St Andrew's estate, splitting up the collective activity and encounters of the past. But as these gradually ended, decay set in, windows were smashed and wind and tide did its work. For many, the transformation was difficult to witness. Lily, a fish dock secretary, describes with emotion her return to the dock after 1981, saying, 'oh, it just looked derelict. It was awful... it was just so sad to see it... when I was always used to [there] being so many people about and so many things happening'.[73]

On Hessle Road too, the district that had grown around the rhythms of trawling felt the pace of its decline. From the late 1950s, the area had experienced housing clearances that continued into the 1980s. While the new homes provided better living conditions, just as in the eastern port redevelopment disrupted the close-knit ties of the fish dock community. On top of this, in the 1970s came the contraction of trawling itself. The combined impact took its toll. Many recall the disappearance of familiar faces, as inhabitants moved out to new estates and as fewer came to work in the fishery. Fewer people and less money in pockets was felt in local pubs and shops. 'The shutters were going up,' says Jim, 'shops that you'd used for years… all of a sudden, one by one, they'd be closing'.[74] It was not only the shops. Michael reports the disappearance of fish houses, fish box suppliers, fish lorries and the fishermen's taxis. The distinctive hustle of Trawlertown came to an end. It was, he says:

> …like half of Hull had gone to sleep and just left. Just like, I suppose like California in the gold strike, when it'd gone and you just had towns with all the doors swinging empty… and that's like Hessle Road was. All the factories closed down, cos they didn't need fitters for the trawlers any more. That was it. It was horrible.[75]

Out of the ruins of decline and contraction, however, adjustment to new circumstances brought compensations. Following the abolition of the National Dock Labour Scheme, those dockers returning to work were liberated from the strict union controls and ongoing industrial conflict that had regulated life and work on the docks for decades. Furthermore, once pervasive restrictive practices that had been designed to protect jobs, but which had also disrupted the natural rhythm of the workforce routine, were eradicated. Andrew recalls a new sense of freedom following the removal of the scheme:

> There was no shop stewards and the men were so happy - it was like a great weight taken off their shoulders. There's nothing worse than driving a forklift truck slowly all day, doing it very carefully, working to rule - it's a nightmare. Men want to get on with the job and those guys took pride in their work but [under the scheme] they were being held down by shop stewards! [76]

The merits of labour deregulation and more flexible employment soon became apparent. The rapid recovery and growth of trade after the scheme's abolition was such that Alexandra Dock was re-equipped and re-opened to traffic in 1991.[77] Reversing the pattern of decline, the opening of the refurbished dock heralded a new chapter in the port's history. In the fishery too, the hard work ethic and the old networks of the fish dock helped many to forge alternative lives. For trawlermen, in particular, work ashore or in other maritime careers brought freedom from the pressures of filling large ships with fish. Released from the relentless cycle of the 21-day trip, Michael took up hobbies that he could not manage with just three days at home. John learnt to drive. Those who had not seen their own children grow up now enjoyed more time with grandchildren. For some, exciting new careers took them all over the world. Michael illustrates a process of transition:

> I was skipper for over twelve years, so you get used to it – the good and the bad – and you feel happy in yourself at what you're doing. So I was really disappointed when we got thrown out of Iceland... But after a while, it was like a novelty, meeting all these people on the ships who'd been to university, cos I'd never met people like that... so that was interesting. And then when I went to Ghana and saw sunshine and palm trees, I wished I'd been there 50 years before…[78]

At the close of the century, decades of turbulence along Hull's working waterfront were giving way to new routines. During the late 1980s, the commercial docks entered a new phase characterized by industrial peace, the recovery and growth of trade, and diversification of interest. At the same time, people were adapting to the collapse of

trawling. The industry had been massively reduced, but there were survivors, in the fish trades and in a much-diminished catching sector, that ensured some continuity. In the years of transition, much had been lost, but some things had been gained and as the waterfront entered a new millennium, there was a real prospect of a more stable future.

A Place for the Past

The story of change along Hull's waterfront does not end in the past. The focus of this chapter has been on memory and this is something that exists in the present. How the waterfront has been remembered and represented in the modern city is part of its history. Here again, there have been stormy waters. Initially, in the wake of crisis and adjustment, the heritage of Hull's dockland communities was often overlooked, as civic bodies and image-makers, keen to reinvigorate the city, chose to focus upon other elements of Hull's past.[79] In response, grassroots action sought to anchor memory against a torrent of change. Here again, there are differences between the commercial docks and the fishery; between east and west. On the commercial docks remembering could be a complex and at times contentious process. A legacy of strikes and disputes could make the past a difficult terrain to revisit. During times of conflict, the media had often portrayed the dockers as over-paid industrial bully-boys whose selfish actions were responsible for the country's economic ills.[80] As the world of the dockworker was hidden behind the dock wall and largely unknown to outsiders, there was little to alter this negative image. Within the haven of Hull's dockside, however, the docking community forged its own modest private heritage. The Marfleet collection is an assemblage of docker's tools, photographs and other paraphernalia, which throughout the 1980s and 1990s was displayed on the walls of a barber's shop close to Alexandra Dock. Walter Oglesby, barber and curator of the collection, had been disappointed by the lack of reference to dockers at the Town Docks Museum when it first opened in 1976. In response, Walter began gathering and displaying items donated by the many dockers who frequented his shop.[81] Within a short space of time, he had accumulated a vast collection of dockland memorabilia that transformed his shop into a shrine to docking heritage.

As books, plays, community murals and other grassroots projects forged small pockets of remembrance along the waterfront, west Hull witnessed an outpouring of memory that exploded into open protest. From 1988, moves to demolish the redundant and derelict St Andrew's Fish Dock spurred a wave of action aimed at preserving the emotive spaces of the very hub of Trawlertown. Here the surviving networks of the fishing community were

mobilized into a sustained campaign to defend and highlight their own heritage. The efforts of local heritage group STAND saw the basin and buildings at the entrance to the fish dock protected as a conservation area. The designation marked the beginning of a long struggle to find a meaningful new use for the old dock and to secure a permanent memorial to thousands of Hull trawlermen lost at sea. It is a struggle that still continues. However, a happier outcome was achieved for the *Arctic Corsair,* the last of Hull's sidewinding trawler fleet. Following a partnership between STAND and Hull Museums, the *Arctic Corsair* secured its final berth as a museum ship, moored within the shelter of the Museums Quarter. In a similar coming together of civic and community remembering, the tools of the Hull dockers, so carefully collected by Walter, also finally found a home in Hull's Maritime Museum. Dockers tools, the *Arctic Corsair*, books, murals and plays, the concern for the fish dock and the continued quest for a memorial have all served to keep the past alive and relevant in the present. Collectively, these developments demonstrate the power of community memory in the face of a wider forgetfulness, as well as the continued pull of old rhythms that once shaped life on the waterfront.

Looking Forward

Established as a medieval wool port*,* in its subsequent history, Hull has looked seaward. Remote and isolated by land, Hull makes sense from the sea. From the Continent and the Humber, the city is a gateway, while its landward aspect is more of a back door. Yet in the late twentieth century, the city's maritime anchor drifted as modernization, national strategy and international policy and practice brought turbulence to its quays. As its portside communities struggled with contraction, decline and adjustment, in terms of civic identity and cultural heritage, it can be argued that the city turned its back on the water. By the early 1990s, the storm was beginning to pass. Hull's commercial port - privatized, mechanized and decasualized - looked forward to a new era of stability and growth. In the much-depleted fishery, those who had weathered the years of crisis faced, for the time being anyway, a period of modest recovery. Port historian Gordon Jackson has shown how the fortunes of ports and their cities can come and go, buffeted by the vagaries of supply and demand.[82] In Hull, wool's commercial primacy was supplanted by cloth, which gave way sequentially to lead, timber, manufactures, coal and so on; likewise whaling was superseded by fishing. This ability to adapt to the ebb and flow of trade and resources is testament to the port's striking resilience over the long term. Today there are new portside opportunities on the horizon. In the early twenty-first century and with the Green Port

development in the offing, it is perhaps time for the city to turn back to the water with confidence and to embrace its maritime past as an inspiring exemplar of what might be achieved in the future.

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