The Last of the Cutters – The Years at Sea

by Lieutenant W B Hunkin

Lieutenant Walter Benson Hunkin was born in 1862 and came from a long line of sailors. He joined the Royal Navy in 1874 and served aboard a variety of small vessels employed on anti-smuggling, fisheries protection and coastguard duties over the turn of the 19/20 centuries.

The primary task of these ships was 'To enforce the Sea Fisheries Act, 1883' (as amended by the Act of 1891) 'inside the British Exclusive fishery limits'.

Offences were wide-ranging including:

- *'Causing injury to any person belonging to another boat, or damaging another sea fishing boat, or damaging gear belonging to another sea fishing boat*
- *Improperly shooting nets on a drift net fishing ground*
- *Not conforming to the international rules for lights at sea*
- *Throwing missiles*
- *Using threatening language, fighting or brawling'*

His diary was written in old age. It was transcribed by Lyn Wills, a volunteer in the Bartlett Maritime Research Centre at the National Maritime Museum Cornwall.

Further notes are available at https://www.maritimeviews.co.uk

Introduction

Some four years ago, having reached the age when one is apt to recall the past, the thought occurred to me that as my service career afloat had been spent in that branch of the Royal Navy known as the Coast Guard Cruiser Service, and that to the best of my knowledge no-one from the earliest days of the Revenue Cutters had even left the records of the story of their personal experiences, and that if I jotted down some of my recollections, at some future date it might fall into the hands of someone who, regarding it as a glimpse into the past, will consider it worthy of correction and a place on a library bookshelf. The following pages are the outcome of a literary effort by one with no pretention whatever to letters. It has been written from time to time filling in an idle hour now and again. Like many autobiographies, some of it is rather futile and probably without general interest, other items possibly amusing, entertaining and informative, and if were set out in print may help to fill in a dull hour for any casual reader.

Early Recollections

In the year 1862 I first saw the light of day, and beheld the sun, moon, and stars from my father's home overlooking the bay in that old world shipping and fishing port of Mevagissey, which during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was a rendezvous of smugglers and licensed pirates – privateers – sailing under letters of marque, armed and ready to seize any craft showing the colours of the enemy.

My earliest recollections are of three schooners riding at anchor in the bay – evidently caught in a strong south east breeze – straining at their cables in a rough sea. One of them was the *Uzella*, my father being the master and owner, and my exclaiming to my mother as I lost sight of the vessel's hull between the waves, "that one is gone under, that one is out of sight".

My grandfather in 1806 at the age of twenty-three was taken by the press gang and introduced to service in the King's ships of the Royal Navy, eventually obtaining his discharge by the payment of a ransom, his sister walking from Mevagissey to Plymouth with the money for this purpose. For some years following he gave his time to the more remunerative and venturesome occupation of privateering – encouraged by the government and appealing to the younger seaman. At a later period during the war with America in 1812 as ship's master, this ship and crew were taken by the enemy.

My father, a hardy and fearless seaman, of the old wind jamming school, who made his first voyage with his father at the age of eleven, and his last voyage at seventy-one, stirred my boyish imagination as I listened to his stirring tales of the sea, of banian days, salt-horse and hard tack, scurvy and yellow fever, the common enemy of the old time sailor.

When guano was first discovered on the island of Ichaboe, by a ship's captain making a casual landing on the island, and bringing home a cargo. The hue and cry of 'guano for nothing' very soon spread and ships innumerable were very soon running down their southing in quest of a cargo of this valuable manurial fertiliser, the deposit of sea birds from time immemorial. He was a young seaman in one of those ships.

At anchor near the island lay hundreds of craft of every description, all the crews keen on collecting a cargo. The men landed in the ship's boats, provided with picks, shovels and bags, they would seek out a pitch, fill the bags and ferry off to the ships, slow and laborious work, to fill the ship's hold, taking several months. Under the circumstances, there being no controlling authority, with hundreds of men hustling for the best site for bag-filling, there was frequent quarrelling and fighting, order being eventually restored by the arrival of one of His Majesty's Ships.

Bleeding at the nose was a frequent occurrence among the men, probably due to the phosphorous and ammonia contained in the guano. Numerous egg shells, the contents dried to the size of a pea were found in the deposits.

One of the crew having died, the master decided to take the body to the mainland for burial, and accompanied by the crew from another ship, they set out for the shore. In

attempting to land on a beach, the boat capsized, throwing men and corpse into the sea. Their mission was, however, in due course accomplished and their dead shipmate laid to rest on the inhospitable shores of South Africa.

As a seaman in a ship waiting cargo at a South American port, yellow fever prevalent, sailors dying like flies, and the black flag hoisted daily for the undertakers boat to come alongside. All the crew in their ship were laid down with the exception of the boy. The boy nobly did his best to carry out the doctor's orders, attending to the wants of each one, as necessary, in his endeavour to nurse his shipmates back to health. Fortunately all but one man recovered. Even to his old age my father always had a feeling of thanks and friendly respect for this boy shipmate, whom he always declared nursed him back to health. I am sure in later days they must have often recalled that eventful voyage.

On a voyage when traversing the southern seas, and having to fall back on the reserve water casks in the hold, it was discovered that all the water was putrid, but it was drink that or die of thirst; even after being boiled the smell was so foul that a sup could only be taken by pinching the nose. This continued for three weeks, when a tropical shower renewed the water supply. And yet there were no ill effects on the health of the crew.

At a later period when Master of the *Minion* of Liverpool, the owners had fixed the ship for the Canary Islands to bring home a cargo of fruit, and to load in an open roadstead. An altercation arose with the superintendent as to the amount of ballast required for the safety of the vessel, if it became necessary to leave the roadstead. The superintendent refusing to comply with his request, he declined to take the ship to sea, consequently he lost his employment. What he foresaw might happen did happen. The *Minion* had to leave the anchorage in an approaching storm and being under-ballasted she never returned.

The call of the sea is in my blood in as much that I am descended from a stock with a long seafaring record and an ancient Cornish pedigree. It is recorded of one William Hunkyn of Liskeard from whom we trace our descent, as being mentioned in a deed conveying to him a grant of land bearing date 27 Henry the VI 1449. A descendent, John Hunkin of Liskeard and South Kimber, mentioned in Vivian's Cornish pedigrees and in the history of Liskeard was appointed under a charter of Elizabeth to be the first mayor of Liskeard.

With the coming of the Commonwealth and the civil communions, his son John Hunkin of Gatherley, who married Jane, second daughter of John Canrock, Lord of the Manors of Treworgy, Harwood, Woodhill and Liskeard and his family took sides with the Parliament; one son, Major Joseph Hunkin becoming Governor of the Isles of Scilly. After the Restoration they, like many others, paid the penalty and were stripped of their honours and their possessions. Down through the generations this family has produced several men of courage and grit who have made good and shown themselves worthy of responsibility and leadership.

Not so many decades have passed since the latter was vividly demonstrated, when one of our kin standing on the quarter deck, threatened by a mutinous crew, fearing not to play the part of judge, jury on the other man, he declared the first man passing the mainmast would pay the penalty. Being put to the test, he kept his word, and was exonerated.

Boyhood

At an early age I commenced my education at a dame's school. I can only remember the names of two boys who attended this school at the same time. After a time when we had been taught to read, the three of us day after day read the fourth chapter of St Mark until we could repeat the forty-two verses off by heart.

Having outgrown the dame's school I was transferred to the church school. The master was a very good teacher of elementary subjects and had no scruples about the use of the cane. For offences real or imaginary he laid it on freely, on all alike. On two occasions, when flogging a boy with a heavy cane, the boy jumping over the desks, the master following him and punishing him to such an extent, he made us quake with fear. Consequently my parents moved me to another school kept by a man who had been obliged to give up his business in London on account of ill health.

At this age my mischievous boyish spirit commenced to show itself, both in the school as well as outside. Frequently I found myself falling into trouble, often through the prompting of others less spirited and venturesome than myself. The master's patience very soon became exhausted; he could tolerate me no longer. My exuberant spirit was too much for him, with the result that I was expelled, a humiliation indeed for me and an annoyance to my mother.

My next educational establishment was conducted by a retired shipmaster, Capt. William Ball. The Captain was very good at mathematics, well versed in history and geography. In addition to the usual school subjects, he taught navigation to those launching out on a nautical career. Numerous men have looked back with pride, and thanked the old Captain for starting them on an educational foundation on which they built successfully.

After some little misbehaviour on my part I was allotted a seat close to the Captain. There, I was compelled to pay more attention to my books. From the windows there was a good view of the harbour and the bay, and the Captain never losing his interest in ships and sailors would frequently lower the window and, through his old fashioned long telescope, sight a ship passing or coming to an anchor. Often calling out the name of the vessel: "that is the *Sunflower* bound from Leghorn to London", the *Freedom,* the *Roseland,* or any of the local owned craft all readily recognised by the Captain.

The Captain was an indifferent writer, my own writing not being any good. One day when sitting by his side he said to me: "Walter do you see that telescope? That belonged to my schoolmaster, a retired sailing master - navigator - from the Royal Navy, who fought at Trafalgar and after the battle, when writing home, mentioned that he had been wounded but it was not on the right side, the front side or the left side.' He made me a present of that telescope for being the best scholar in the school, with the exception of writing, remarking 'that writing was only an imitation and a monkey could imitate'.

At the age of fourteen my school days were over but my education by no means finished. In my home town there was not much to choose from by way of a career. There were fishing boats, an apprentice to one of the small tradesmen, or the sea. My brother after

leaving school had gone to sea with father. But my father, who always declared that a sailor's life was a dog's life, was rather inclined that I should learn a trade. The sea had the stronger call for me. While waiting for my father's return, instead of idling my time, in the spring of 1877 I made one of the crew of a mackerel drifter, the *English*, the skipper being also the owner. At first I was very sea sick and one of the older men, Shadrick by name, helped me in many ways, his kindness I always remembered.

In the month of June the skipper decided to try his fortune by fishing for mackerel from the port of Newlyn. The first night of fishing from that port was attended with such unheard of success that it is spoken of in Mevagissey to this day. Probably the skipper had never been to the eastward of Start Point, or westward of the Lizard before, so this venture to the western port of Newlyn was to him almost on a par with the voyage of Christopher Columbus sailing forth into the unknown.

On leaving Newlyn for the fishing grounds for the first and only time, we sailed along the coast in the direction of Land's End, eventually at the sunset hour, the time of casting out the nets; the boat was a few miles to the westward of the Longships. I am certain there was not a man in the boat who had the least idea of the tides and currents at this spot.

Overboard were shot the nets, and the usual time given for the mackerel, if any, to enter the mesh. In due course, as customary, the end of the net was hauled up to ascertain if there were any indications of fish and to the astonishment of all hands it was found that a quantity of herrings had been netted. After an hour or so it was decided to haul the nets and to the skipper's great joy they were full of fine fat herrings, as much as the boat could carry. Such a catch of herrings at this spot and at this time of the year had never been known before. This remarkable catch was spoken of by Mevagissey fishermen fifty years after. At daybreak two well-known rocks were sighted, and I remember the skipper saying he knew it was the Brisons as he had seen a picture of these rocks in a paper showing the loss of a ship with all hands except the captain's wife and a Negro who had helped her on to the rock.

A course was set for the Land's End, eventually passing inside the Longships and so on to Newlyn; there being very little wind. the boat did not arrive at Newlyn until ten pm. The fish were auctioned and sold for sixteen shillings per hundred, but the buyer, when he came to pay up, would only pay eight shillings, as he said the fish were broken. At that price it was a good night's work. The boat remained at Penzance for a few days, the skipper not daring to risk his gear in these unknown waters again. He had made a good week's work and decided to return to the home port, thus ended this eventful and historic voyage.

A week or two later I joined another fishing boat, the *Bessie*, skipper Richard Pomeroy, a man that I always respected for his kind manner and encouraging words to me. Many years after, when I had reached officer rank, skipper Pomeroy was apt and I think proud to say "that is one of the boys I helped to train".

Early in July the boat set sail on a voyage to Whitby for the North Sea summer fishing, I little thinking what the North Sea fisheries held in store for me at a later period in life. The

voyage was completed in pleasant summer weather and fishing from the port of Whitby commenced in due course attended with fair success.

The work proved very harsh, especially when landing the fish on the beach, and off to sea again immediately after, with consequently much broken rest for all hands. After being there for about two months, one night the nets became so heavily laden with herrings that they could not be got on board, the line parted and the whole train of nets were lost.

On the day of leaving Whitby in the empty boat for our home port, I remember the men saying that was enough of the North Sea for them. Silently in my own mind I determined that the North Sea nor any other sea would be visited by me again in a fishing boat; in fact that I had no intention of becoming a fisherman.

In October I joined the schooner *Gitana of Mevagissey* at thirty shillings per month. A cargo of china clay was loaded at Charlestown for Dunkirk. In Dunkirk docks no ship was allowed to have a fire on board without permission when a watchman was placed on board and whose expenses had to be borne by the ship. Consequently nearly all the cooking from ships in the docks was done on shore in cook-houses provided for the purpose. It was my job to take the food to and from the cook-house.

The man in charge would make a note of the name of the ship and attend to the cooking. It was a strange experience for me, seeing that these were rough and hardy sea dogs jabbering in every language but one's own, each getting excited over their own pots, containing every conceivable delicacy according to the nationality. Sometimes when the cook in charge had failed to do his job well, there would arise heated words. The men from the ships with their sheath knives in their belts, wild and fearless looking fellows, Italians, Greeks, Negros, Scandinavians etc., made me feel very small and frightened.

The old cook appeared to speak any and every language, and would say "what ship boy?" Giving him the name, he would produce the dinner all steaming hot to take on board. There was the climbing over other ships with a boiling kettle or pot, the right of way disputed by a ship's dog. This was anything but fun for me, although the kind-hearted sailors, British or foreign, would always be ready with a helping hand. I was not sorry when we pulled out of Dunkirk dock. There being no cargo available, the captain decided to return home in ballast. On the voyage the ship took shelter in Portland and remained two weeks weather-bound.

The Captain, who was fond of a glass of beer, would take me in the boat with him, row ashore, go into a pub and leave me to mind the boat awaiting his return. That was anything but a pleasure to me.

Eventually with a fair wind, sails were set for the voyage to Falmouth where, on arrival, the ship was moored for the winter and the crew paid off. No time was lost in making my way home.

I am still undecided as to what my career is to be. I am inclined toward the sea. Two of my school mates just about my own age going to sea with their fathers for the first voyage never returned, the ships being lost with all hands.

In February ‘78 my father, now being at home, it was arranged that I should become an apprentice to Mr William Body, a house carpenter. I went to work with a good will doing odd jobs and working with the older apprentices. The senior apprentice was a fine helpful young fellow but the second apprentice was very fond of ordering the master’s son Charles – about my own age – and myself to perform any job that he did not like himself.

The master having orders to carry out certain repairs to some old property, taking this apprentice with him, set out to examine these old houses and make the repairs necessary. They soon discovered that although the human element had departed they left behind quite a number of inoffensive wingless insects. These, no doubt thirsting for blood, made a dead set on the master and his assistant, from which assault they were compelled to beat a hasty retreat, accompanied by unlimited numbers of the attacking army. Charles and I had the laughing side on that occasion. After a few months I found that so many dirty disagreeable jobs fell to my lot that I became discontented.

My apprenticeship was to continue for six years, and the question that arose in my mind was, what then? Answer - London, America, or Australia. If I have to leave Mevagissey to earn a living, why not go at once?

The urge of the sea is still with me. In September Mr Body was doing the woodwork of new fish stores opposite the King’s Arms public house. These stores were to have a flat roof – an idea worked out by the owner which proved a failure – of wood boarding, coated with a composition of pitch, tar, sand and cement, the apprentices doing the work. This dirty labourer’s work thoroughly disgusted me, but while the master’s son was helping I had no room for complaint.

One morning Mr Body and myself only appeared on the scene, and when ordered to commence work, I politely asked who was to lay on the pitch and tar? The master answered, you and me, to which I replied, not me, whereon he said I had better go. I promptly took him at his word, put on my coat and departed. My father at the time being on a deep water voyage, my mother concluded that I was quite unmanageable.

My career is again in the balance, I must come to a final decision for myself. The call of the sea is strong; shall it be the Royal Navy or the Merchant Service? My forefathers for generations had been merchant sailors and ship masters and yet they had to continue it for long years. Why not break the chain of tradition and enter the Royal Navy?

I join the Royal Navy

On the eighth of October 1878, with my mother’s consent and blessing, I kissed her goodbye and set out for Devonport to join the Royal Navy. I had come to this decision myself and made up my mind; there was to be no turning back.

My aged grandfather, with whom I was a favourite, and my sainted uncle, Walter Libby, for whom I had the greatest admiration and affection, each foreboding anything but a prosperous career for me, concluding that I was too self-willed for a disciplined service.

On arrival at Devonport I had five shillings, enough to pay my fare back in case my heart should fail. It is an important moment in my life; I must sign to serve for ten years from the age of eighteen.

Making my way to Mutton Cove, there came into view the two old line of battle ships, the *Royal Adelaide* depot ship for men and the *Impregnable* training ship for boys. Here, I must confess, that I hesitated before taking the decisive step. At last I got into a waterman's boat and he rowed me off to the *Impregnable* for sixpence.

On ascending the accommodation ladder, I was met by one of the ship's police, who enquired my business. My reply: "Come on board to join the Navy". "Have you any papers?" I produced the papers furnished me by the coast guard officer. He took the papers and then left me standing for a long time. This being the dinner hour the boys were at liberty running about as they pleased. First one came and spoke to me then another, many of them advising me not to join and enumerating the disagreeable things that awaited me if I did.

After this long wait I was conducted by one of the police to the ship's office where I was plied with various questions and eventually marched off to the sick bay for a medical examination by the surgeon, who pronounced me sound in mind and limb and fit for Her Majesty's Service.[1]

In the first few days the new entries were not kept on board the *Impregnable* but were accommodated on board an old frigate until such time as they were fitted out with clothes etc.

After a further long wait, it being now 3.30pm, I was hustled down the ladder into a boat and taken on board the old frigate *Circe*. There I was further questioned, then conducted to the bathroom and ordered to take a bath.

Eventually I was given a hammock and claws for hanging it up, the claws first to be attached to the hammock. A friendly boy came to my help, showing me to the best of his knowledge how this was done. A bed and blanket was also handed to me. Thus I am set up for the night's repose. It is now tea time and with about thirty other new entry boys I am handed a joint of bread and a basin of tea. The evening was passed with the usual boyish frolics until nine o'clock when everyone had to be in his hammock.

The following morning all hands were roused from their slumbers at 5.45am, the boys mustered and decks scrubbed. At 7.50am, breakfast, a basin of cocoa and a joint of bread, rather a new experience for me as a new boy.

There was very little to occupy our time other than cleaning already clean brass work and sweeping already clean decks. I remember hearing one boy – I think he had been a farm boy in Devon – accustomed to real work, say when ordered to sweep the deck "I've bin over'm three times already".

[1] 8 October 1878 Boy 2nd Class HMS *Impregnable* – Walter Hunkin Service Record

After a week or so and now being fitted out with a complete kit, with a number of others I am sent on board the old three deck line of battle ship *Impregnable* – at one time mounting one hundred and twenty muzzle loading track guns – now a training ship for boys – to commence my training as a naval seaman.

The day commenced at 5.45am by the sound of the boatswain's mate's whistle and the deep bass voice calling along the decks "all hands, rouse out, rouse out, rouse out, lash up and stow, lash up and stow, lash up and stow" (hammocks), sometimes varied by "show a leg, show a leg, show a leg". The police were soon on the move, canes in hand, and woe betide the lad slack in slipping over the side of his hammock.

My billet was in number nineteen mess on the lower deck, containing about twenty-six boys and at food time the stronger ones got the lion's share. A slippery little pock-marked fellow came to my help for the first few days and saw that I did not go short. The bully of the mess, known as Napoleon, kept the smaller boys on the run. Being well-grown and developed, he thought that he had better let me alone, contenting himself with an odd threat now and then. One day Napoleon fell afoul of a boy named Sullivan and, the police being absent, he got a thorough good hammering.

About twelve months after, Sullivan struck a petty officer – a man not much beloved by the boys – a serious offence for which he was punished and discharged from the service.

Realising the importance of the step I had taken in entering the Royal Navy as a second class boy, with a starting wage of sixpence per day, I decided to do my best to make my career a success, to follow it up and take the rough with the smooth.

The change from my village home and the separation from my pals, with the constant hustle at every order passed along the decks by the boatswain's mates, did not at first tend to make me very cheerful. On the contrary I was rather homesick, but there was no turning back, the situation had to be faced with a brave heart and cheerful spirit.

Amongst the eight hundred boys on board there were many recruited from the labouring classes of our great cities, with nothing to learn in trickery and mischief. My determination was that this element should have no influence over me, that I would go my own way and steer my own course.

Having determined on my life's work, I was impressed with the necessity of taking as my guide the teaching of the New Testament, and not to cast on one side the Puritan teaching in which I had been cradled, with the conviction that this would be a safe course and probably save me from many pitfalls. On looking back I have no doubt that this decision was in no small measure a factor in my successful career.

In passing through the various classes of instruction I found that I could hold my own with the majority of the boys. My knowledge of boating, swimming, etc. stood me in good stead. At the instruction in knots and splices I got on so well that Tim Daly, the instructor, a good hearted kindly Irishman, one day remarked that with such progress I would soon be a boatswain (warrant officer). Many years after I met Tim, then a labourer in the dockyard,

who was pleased to see me an officer, and to know that his instruction had not been in vain.

The first two months soon passed away and with others I boarded the train bound for home on Xmas leave. My father, now at home, and my mother were proud to have me back again, if only for a brief period; my father approving of the step I had taken during his absence. My companions put to me a hundred questions, how I liked it, what food did we get, could I put up with the discipline etc. etc.

On the expiration of my leave, and returning on board the *Impregnable*, I gave my best attention to my instruction and very soon passed from one class to another. The compass instruction with its cardinal and half-cardinal, false points, by points, half points and quarter points, proved a difficult subject to the majority. Seeing that my father, at an early age, had taught me to 'lose the compass' or to repeat the thirty two points, in this class I had the advantage of those that had never seen a compass.

Every boy was allotted to a part of the ship, such as forecastle boys working in the fore part of the ship, fore top, main top, mizzen top and quarter deck boys. My station was among the forecastle boys.

After I had been there a few months, the petty officer would sometimes call me out to the front and with him look after the scrubbing of the decks etc., giving me a sort of leading boy's position. In due course I was promoted to a petty officer boy and granted a good conduct badge. Being a petty officer boy gave me authority to order the forecastle boys, when scrubbing decks or other work on the upper deck, and helping the petty officer in charge of the forecastle. There were privileges too such as a special afternoon leave now and then.

The boatswain of the ship, a bluff sea-dog very well-liked by the boys, named Jones, always had the names of a few of his favourite boys ready on his tongue, to whom he would call if he wanted anything special done. That would mean his handy boys would be kept at it, clearing up odd jobs after the others had been dispersed; unfortunately after a time my name was added to his list.

The time passed merrily by. I had completed nearly one year of training and by good luck had run clear of the defaulter's list. On the 30th September 1879 I was advanced to the rating of a first class boy and passed on to the higher classes in seamanship.[2]

In the month of April with about one hundred others, I joined the training brig *Pilot*, quite a new ship commissioned for the first time, for training the boys in seamanship with cruises in the channel. This, to most of the boys, was quite a new experience; the motion of the ship lifting and falling to the ocean swell very soon prostrated the most of them with sea sickness. Having found my sea legs; and gone through the stage of seasickness in my previous short experience afloat, gave me a sort of superior feeling. The usual time allowed to the boys in the training brig was six weeks. In June, our training brig course

[2] 8 October 1879 Boy 1st Class, HMS *Impregnable* – Walter Hunkin Service Records

completed, all the boys returned to the Impregnable. Being now fully trained, we were considered fit and ready for discharge to a seagoing ship.

On the subject of punishment meted out to defaulters, it usually took the form of caning or birching on the buttocks. On most days at noon there were usually a few boys for punishment for such offences as chewing tobacco, skulking, slovenly in dress, slackness at the sound of the bugle, etc., one and a hundred offences that called for six to twelve cuts with a heavy cane.

The more serious offences, twelve to twenty four cuts with the birch. Several birch rods bound together at one end to form the handle or grip, the other end of the rods being loose. By the time a boy had received twenty four cuts on the bare buttocks, laid on by a ship's police with his heaviest swing, his flesh was like a piece of liver, black and blue. It was a relic of the cruel days of flogging with the cat. There were two out of the six ship's corporals, or police, who took a fiendish delight in lacerating the flesh of those unfortunate lads whom they were called on to punish. The punishment was frequently out of all proportion to the offence; often just a boyish prank magnified by one of the police into a crime, against which the offender was quite unable to defend himself.

There was one boy in my mess, a mischievous, simple sort of fellow, but without guile. The police got on his track, his first offences brought forth a caning, then twenty four cuts with the birch followed within a few days by another eighteen cuts. It struck me at the time as being cruel beyond words.

All punishment was carried out in the presence of the whole assembly, the ship's surgeon being present to witness the same.

On Draft for Sea

On the 14th of June 1880 I counted one of thirty boys drafted to HMS *Valiant*, a coast guard ship of that period, included in the first reserve; an ironclad with muzzle loading guns on the main deck.[3] The living quarters of the men, with their mess tables, were between the guns. This ship was stationed on the west coast of Ireland, headquarters at Tarbert in the River Shannon, at that date in the dockyard hands at Devonport for the annual refit. After a few days the ship proceeded to Berehaven to join the reserve fleet for the summer cruise. This brought me into my first contact with the working of a fleet of man-o-war. After carrying out certain exercises at Berehaven the fleet put to sea in order to carry out fleet manoeuvres.

On the second night at sea, after helping to stow the jib – the fleet being under steam and sail – not taking care in coming inboard over the bowsprit, I lost my balance and narrowly escaped going overboard.

On the day following I witnessed for the first and only time a burial at sea, that of an able seaman who had died on board.

[3] 15 June 1880 Boy 1st Class, HMS *Valiant* – Walter Hunkin Service Record

At the expiration of the summer cruise the ships disbursed to their several ports, the *Valiant* to Tarbert in the River Shannon where moorings were taken up for the winter.

One Friday when the usual weekly general gunnery exercise was being carried out the fire bell rang, whereon the guns were secured and everyone rushed to their fire station. At first it was taken to be exercise. When the word was passed: "fire in the magazine", it sent a thrill along the decks that made everyone move. The pumps were rigged and hoses got along in double quick time.

The magazine being open as a part of the gunnery drill something had taken fire there. The captain of the forecastle, his station being at the scene of the fire, on arriving at the magazine entrance saw the smoke arising through the hatch. The men stationed in the handing room having come up. He immediately rushed down the ladder, entered the magazine, followed by the commander. Promptly seizing the wooden magazine curtains and blankets, they succeeded in smothering the fire and bringing it under control. It was a nasty few minutes for all hands and a relief to hear the word passed that the fire had been caught in time, the captain of the forecastle being highly commended for his prompt action.

At this time the Land League agitation, the 'pay no rent' cry, was at its height in Ireland, with many evictions and prosecutions, a few gunboats being employed in taking the Irish Constabulary from place to place to the scenes of some of the evictions.

On account of the trouble in Ireland it was decided by the government that the crews of the coast guard ships stationed in Ireland being only half manned during the winter, should now be brought up to the full complement. A large draft of petty officers and men arrived from the receiving ship at Devonport.

On the 18th of November, my eighteenth birthday, in accordance with the King's regulations, I was advanced to a man's rating of ordinary seaman, with a wage of 1/3d per day.[4]

With the closing days of 1880, and the approach of Xmas, fourteen days leave was granted to the crew one watch at a time. The distance and cost to get home was too much. I had to remain on board and make the best of it.

1881

The early months of 1881 proved to be very severe with frost and snow and, as there was nothing in the way of a fire or other means of warming the men's quarters, there was not much comfort for anyone.

In the matter of messing and cooking in this class of ship, there were about twenty-five men in each broad side mess. Each day one of the men acted as cook of the mess and held responsible for the preparation of the dinner, taking it to the galley, fetching the bread, the

[4] 18 November 1880 Ordinary Seaman, HMS *Valiant* – Walter Hunkin Service Record

breakfast cocoa, dinners, rum and tea at the meal houses and keeping the mess and mess traps clean etc.

The ship cook had his work cut out to cook for all hands. The cooking gallery had two ovens and two coppers, in which coppers the salt beef or pork, pea soup, vegetables, cocoa, water for the tea (brewed in the copper) and sugar added ready for drawing off into the mess kettles, was all done. The preparation of the food and class of cooking can be imagined, under such conditions.

The rations for each man per day were 1 lb of beef or pork, 1¼ lbs of biscuit, of soft bread 1 ½ lbs, ¾ lb of vegetables if obtainable, 1 oz. of cocoa, ¼ oz. of tea, 2 oz. of sugar. If a part of the meat or bread was left behind, four pence per lb for beef and three halfpence per lb for bread was allowed in lieu thereof. This, with a contribution from each man, would go to buy flour, potatoes etc. According to the regulations there was always one salt provisions day per week, even in harbour, where fresh meat was obtainable.

In the small town of Tarbert there was no room or attraction for the men to spend much time on shore. The only doors open to them were the licenced houses, with their vile whiskey and Irish Porter. There was not much amusement on board and the long winter evenings hung heavily.

As a volunteer I join a cutter

Aboard the *Fly* around the Irish coast

Attached to the *Valiant* were four coast guard cruisers, the *Imogene* (steam), *Victoria*, *Stag* and *Fly*, sailing cutters, usually employed in the protection of the revenue, removing coast guards and their families, carrying stores etc. In the month of February 1881 these tenders arrived at Tarbert for the annual inspection. The parent ship being fully manned, it was decided to lend a few extra hands to each tender. Volunteers were called for. As there was not much comfort in the *Valiant*, I offered myself for service in one of the cruisers and with three other ordinary seamen was transferred to the *Fly*, a cutter of sixty tons, the smallest of the three, with a crew of twelve and brought up to sixteen for the time being.

On joining the *Fly* I had no idea of the nature of the employment of this little craft. To my surprise I found that the commander had risen from the rating of an able seaman and held the rank of Chief Officer Coast Guard Cruiser Service, with corresponding rank, uniform and pay of a junior lieutenant. This interested me very much, for it opened up to my vision a possible career. The commanding officer was Mr Samuel Jenkins, a person of few words, a strict disciplinarian and a trusty officer, the second in command, H. Smith.

After a day or two the *Fly* set sail for the removal of a few coast guards and their families; it being a hard winter month, a rough time was experienced. Well I remember my first few days and nights on board this small cutter on the west coast of Ireland and how wretched I felt. Fortunately I had provided myself with an oil coat and sea boots and in this sense was better protected than the other men joining the *Fly* at the same time as myself. They suffered from the exposure and lack of sea clothing.

Very soon I got accustomed to the work and settled down to the conditions of service in small ships. On the whole there was more comfort than there possibly could be in the *Valiant*. The living quarters were clean and dry and enough room for all hands without overcrowding. The cooking range was in the centre, so that in the watch below there was the comfort and warmth of a fire.

After a few months we were again in company with the parent ship and, being anxious to become an able seaman as soon as possible, I made a request to be taken on board the parent ship for examination. I believe my commander spoke for me, but the staff commander, before whom I appeared to answer questions put to me by the boatswain's mate did not speak to me or test my intelligence for himself, expressed his dissatisfaction and turned me down.

Within a day or two an order was given that I was to return to the *Valiant* for discharge with others to the receiving ship at Devonport.

During the four months that I had been in the *Fly*, I had become impressed with the possibility of early promotion in the Cruiser Service and had decided that the small ship service would suit me much better than service in the fleet. And that to become the commanding officer of a cruiser would suit me much better than a warrant officer either gunner or boatswain.

I was sorry to hear that I was to be discharged and promptly made a request to see the Captain of the *Valiant*, to be allowed to remain in the *Fly*, and to my joy my request was granted. The *Fly* was ordered to Galway, the usual headquarters, where moorings were laid down inside Mutton Island for the use of the cutters. The ship was placed under the orders of the divisional officer who used the cutters for visiting his coast guard stations work on Arran Islands and in Galway Bay.

1882

In the early months of 1882 the commanding officer was superseded by an officer new to the west coast of Ireland. The crew very soon discovered that he was a very eccentric man with a peculiar nervous habit of winking or blinking. He was soon dubbed with the pet name of Flick.

In July orders were received to proceed to Devonport for general repairs, the Admiralty tug *Seahorse* towing us across the channel. On account of strong weather the tug sought shelter in Valencia harbour. The following day on leaving the harbour, the sea being high at the narrow entrance, with the speed of the tug the *Fly* shipped somewhat heavy water and to our amusement our friend Flick blinking more than usual and shouting "let go, let go" went to show his lack of ordinary courage.

On arrival at Devonport the ship was placed in the hands of the dockyard authorities, and the crew turned over to the *Royal Adelaide* receiving ship – for victualing and accommodation only – going to work about our own ship daily.[5]

After a long wait for an opportunity to be examined for able seaman I passed on board the *Royal Adelaide* and was rated AB on the 19th of October 1882 with a wage of one shilling and seven pence per day, providing one's own bedding and clothing.[6]

In the middle of November the crew re-joined the *Fly*, and toward the end of the month set sail bound for the west coast of Ireland with a load of stores for coast guard stations, arriving at Killybegs in Donegal, all stores distributed, about the 20th of December.[7]

Orders were received to proceed to Galway, but strong south west gales detained us wind bound for many days. On Xmas day our bold commander ordered sail to be set and preparations made for getting underway, thus keeping the crew in a state of uncertainty all the day. This was apparently done on purpose to annoy the men.

1883

During the third week in January 1883 the *Fly* sailed from Killybegs bound for Galway with a strong fair wind from the north east. Not many hours after leaving the smooth water of the harbour, Flick, who had no nerve, went below complaining of a pain in his back, leaving the navigation to Smith the chief quarter-master. A good run was made under small canvas with plenty of wind and sea. On reaching the vicinity of Arran Islands at the mouth of Galway Bay a winter gale from the north east freshened to hurricane force that gave our little craft a severe testing and the crew a bitter night riding it out under storm canvas. Our gallant Flick remained below in his cabin throughout the long dark winter night, probably coward-like comforting himself with hot drinks. After the storm had abated, and the vessel within the smooth water of Galway Bay, he was on deck once again in full command.

In the early summer of this year a word came that I was to be sent to the *Valiant* by the steam cruiser *Imogene* for draft to Devonport. By this time I was fully determined that, if possible, I would continue in the cruiser service. On my arrival on board the *Valiant* I lost no time in requesting to see the captain to be sent back to the *Fly*, explaining that I wished to become permanent in the cruisers. This request was granted and in a few days I was on passage to Galway to re-join the *Fly*. I am by no means sure how long I shall be allowed to remain as no rating below a leading seaman can become permanent for cruiser service.

The *Fly* was under the orders of the divisional officer all through the year with nothing very exciting or interesting. A very monotonous job for the commander, absent from his home and family and nothing attractive or of interest in the town of Galway. The only open door was the public house so there was at least some excuse if a person at times went over the mark.

[5] 2 October 1882 Ordinary Seaman, HMS *Royal Adelaide* – Walter Hunkin Service Record
[6] 20 October 1882 Able Seaman, HMS *Royal Adelaide* – Walter Hunkin Service Record
[7] 20 November 1882 Able Seaman, HMS *Valiant* – Walter Hunkin Service Record

Flick was seen on shore by the captain of HMS *Valorous* in a condition unbecoming an officer. The *Fly* was ordered to cruise in the vicinity of [the] Arran Islands by way of a punishment until further orders. It so happened that the weather was fine and fish abounding; by dropping a line over, a large pollock or cod would be hooked. This pastime gave us some sport as well as a welcome addition to our daily ration. After a period of three weeks we were ordered to return to Galway. The crew being all young men at a care-free age, always found something that Flick had said or done to bring about a laugh or a joke.

On one occasion with the Divisional Officer on board, going down to visit the islands, Flick had arranged with the Captain of a coal steamer to give us a tow, getting underway at four am. At this early hour he did not appear to be in a very happy frame of mind and was consequently tantalising and harassing the watch on deck.

The Divisional Officer, a really fine type of an officer, usually referred to by Flick as "Harry Bluff," cautioned him not to go too far. His reply was rather insolent and as he had nothing else on which to play off his temper, he threw the ship's pet overboard, a splendid young retriever. That annoyed me very much to lose our dog in this cruel manner.

As Xmas was approaching, we were wondering if we were to get leave. About a week before Xmas an order came for fourteen days leave for each watch. On a Saturday afternoon a bad time to start on a journey from the west of Ireland, Flick gave the order that the first watch was to proceed. Another man and myself set out for Cornwall knowing very little about the route. That night we slept in Dublin, awaking on Sunday morning wondering how we could get to Holyhead. Eventually we were advised to go to Kingstown and cross by the evening mail boat. Making our way to Kingstown harbour, a kindly Irishman hearing our talk, assured us that Captain Slaughter, who was an old navy man, would give us a free passage, and that he would be coming down very soon. In a very short time the Captain hove in sight and our friend not waiting for us to speak pulled up the Captain himself. "Beg your pardon your honour these men would be wanting a passage to Holyhead if you please sir". The Captain asked us a few questions and very kindly told us to go on board at which stroke of luck we felt very happy. Arriving at Holyhead about midnight there was nothing to do but hang about in the waiting room until seven am, that being the next southbound train suitable for us.

The holiday was all too short but pleasant to spend the Xmas at home. The few days having expired, in company with my shipmate, we set out on our return journey. On our arrival at Plymouth we fell in with our Chief Petty Officer, who told us that our worthy officer who had been keeping up Xmas, had got himself into trouble by threatening to shoot one of the crew with a revolver and that the man so threatened went on board the gunboat that was moored in the dock and reported what had taken place, consequently Flick was placed under arrest.

The senior officer not wishing to press the case against him raised no objection to the doctor placing him on the sick list and sending him into the local hospital from whence he was sent to a naval hospital where in due course he was pronounced unfit for further service and invalided out, securing his full pension according to his rank. We were not

surprised to hear what had happened as this strange man always kept a revolver in his cabin and we sometimes wondered if he would use it on one of us or on himself.

One night when I was the watchman, and he being in a rather bad mood was calling me anything but my name, and threatening what he would do, as everyone was asleep below, I must confess that I did not feel very comfortable and placed a handspike handy in case of an attack, fortunately it was not required.

1884

In due course another officer was appointed and took command early in 1884; an Irishman with a kindly genial disposition and with every consideration for his men. After this officer had been in charge a few months the vessel was ordered for duty in Clew Bay, the bay of islands and rocks. The mate having left and his successor not yet joined, the next to the commander was a young petty officer.

Scarcely had we got clear of Galway Bay, when our genial skipper was noticed making frequent visits to the rum locker. There being no-one to check him in any way, before nightfall he had gone well over the mark and the petty officer looked after the navigation to the best of his ability.

The next afternoon a gunboat passed us very close and our officer under the influence and dressed in plain clothes was seen waving his cap to the commander of the passing ship. I was sorry to see this good officer – that could be trusted with anything but the keys of the rum store – so degrading himself.

In a small vessel there was usually quite a good comrade feeling between those comprising the crew, with the introduction of one disturber of the peace it made it uncomfortable for everyone.

About this time an AB joined the vessel, an Irishman, who had been dis-rated from a petty officer. He had not been with us long before he showed himself a perfect nuisance and a pest, detested by all hands. If there was any drink to be found he had it and was at these times capable of doing any wickedness to anyone.

One Sunday afternoon Mike, who had been on shore to mass, came back in a rather quarrelsome mood and started annoying a young fellow, Taff Evans. Taff was cleaning a heavy brass candle socket. He stood Mike's annoyance as long as his temper would permit, when he let fly and struck Mike on the side of the head with the socket and down went Mike before he knew what had happened, that quieted him from that day.

On the 20th of March I underwent a successful examination for leading seaman and was promoted to fill a vacancy in the *Victoria* on the 1st of September.[8] The days passed merrily by and Xmas drawing near, we were looking forward to a couple of weeks leave, but in this matter there is nothing sure.

[8] 1 September 1884 Leading Seaman, HMS *Valiant* – Walter Hunkin Service Record

About the middle of December we set sail with the divisional officer on board on his round of visits. In standing in rather close to the shore for one of the coast guard boats to come alongside, the vessel took the ground. This caused a bit of excitement; there is nothing so disagreeable for a seaman as feeling the ship's keel touching the bottom. Fortunately the tide was rising and after an hour or more we got away without damage.

The officer visited all his stations, with the exception of the south Arran Island, as he was doubtful if he could land. After waiting off the island for two or three hours, he decided to make the attempt and signalled for the boat to come off. At this station the only landing place was on a sandy beach and the station was specially provided with a canvas canoe similar to those used by the local fishermen, light as a cork on the water, and safe when skilfully handled. The canoe on coming alongside, the coast guard assured the officer that it would be all right to land. He boarded the canoe and set out for the shore. On nearing the beach he could see that the heavy swell was breaking on the shore. In attempting to land, as the canoe drew near to the beach a breaking sea caught her, rolling her over like a bladder and throwing the occupants into the water, they landed with nothing worse than a wet suit.

The next evening, on returning to the anchorage in Galway Roads it was pitch dark and blowing strong, not fit for the boat to land. It was therefore decided that when the tide suited, to run the vessel into Galway dock. A tricky undertaking with the winter flood waters from Lough Corrib coming down the river running past the dock entrance. When the dock gates were opened the vessel was got underway. It was a wild and dirty winter night. The attempt was made to sail into the dock but unfortunately the Commander made the mistake of not setting sufficient canvas to have the vessel under perfect control and to shoot across the running stream when approaching the dock, consequently we failed, the tide setting down the river drove the vessel to leeward onto the rocks.

This was far more serious than taking the ground the day before, seeing it was high water there was no chance of getting off again until the next high water. She was bumping and grinding heavily on the jagged rocks, and as the tide receded was left high and dry. It could then be seen that there was considerable damage to the keel and bottom of the ship. It was a question if she would fill or float on the rising tide. I was despatched with a message, across the rocks and swamps into Galway, to order a tug to come to our aid at the next high water.

With the rising tide fortunately the pumps were just sufficient to keep the hold free of water. With the straining and grinding the vessel was leaking badly. The tug succeeded in towing us off and into the dock, where extensive repairs had to be carried out before the *Fly* was again seaworthy. There was no Xmas leave for the crew that year and so closed the year 1884.

1885

Toward the end of January 1885 the ship was ordered to Bantry and the headquarters of the district ship. The voyage was commenced with moderate weather and a fair wind. As the day advanced, dark and threatening clouds were arising over the western horizon with

a freshening wind, the prospects not very good for so small a craft exposed to the full force of the Atlantic Ocean.

About midnight, being then off Loop Head, the wind veered to the south west, increasing in force to a strong gale with a high sea. Reefs had to be taken in and the sail shortened. With the increasing sea in the turbulent waters at the mouth of the mighty Shannon, much heavy water was shipped, fittings washed overboard, and canvas blown away.

After being hove to for several hours the commander decided to run for shelter in the River Shannon, coming to an anchor in Scathery Roads. South west gales such as are prevalent on this coast during the winter months continued with greater or lesser violence for three weeks, keeping us weather bound. At this time the expedition for the relief of General Gordon was on the move and daily at all risks a boat was sent to Kilrush for newspapers.

On arrival at Bantry an enquiry was held on board the district ship as to the stranding of the *Fly* in Galway Bay. The outcome of the enquiry was to the effect that no blame was attached to the Commander. Fourteen days leave was granted, and I made my way home, glad to be clear of ship routine if only for a few days. Money being scarce, the cheapest route had to be taken, Cork to Plymouth by the weekly trader commonly known as the "pig boat," paying a deck passage fare of ten shillings and giving a sailor half a crown for the use of his bunk for the night.

On my arrival in Plymouth on a Sunday evening and making my way into Union Street, and to see the crowds of young people apparently full of fun and enjoying life brought home to me all that I was missing when compared with the loneliness of the West of Ireland, and to think that after a few days off I must return to it for a further period was to say the least rather depressing.

After a few pleasant days with my friends I found myself once again returning to re-join my ship at Bantry. Unlike the merchant seaman, there is no such thing as staying ashore for three months and then seeking another ship; in my case the day and hour of returning on board must be observed, or be treated as a leave breaker or deserter. On arriving in Cork on a Sunday morning I found the next train for Bantry was four a.m. on the Monday. My leave expired on the Sunday so in this case I was bound to be charged with leave breaking. In making my way to the railway station in the early morning hours, two constables trying to be funny stopped me, cross-questioned me as if I were a felon and threatened to take me to the police barracks. Of course I knew they had no right to interfere with me, so I thought that I would be funny as well, so I acquainted them with the name of the ship at Bantry and said "now I will take your numbers and when I get on board I will report you". They soon altered their tune, "sure we didn't mean anything, we know ye are a decent sailor, for God's sake don't speak about it when ye get back or ye'll have us spoiled entirely". I passed on, leaving them in doubt as to how their fun might come back on them.

On my reporting myself on board the district ship, the commander, an understanding officer, allowed my four hours over leave to pass. I was immediately transferred to H M Cutter *Victoria*, a much larger vessel than the *Fly* with a crew of twenty eight, all told.[9]

I Become Permanent for Coast guard Cruiser Service

Aboard the *Victoria* on the Irish station

Within an hour or two we were underway with a list of coast guards for removal from one station to another with their families and effects. The railway facilities in the west of Ireland were not very convenient for this purpose. In many instances a coast guard station would be as much as forty miles distant from the nearest railway station; consequently practically all the removals were carried out by the cutters.

It would sometimes happen that a batch of new entries from the fleet for stations on the west coast would arrive at Queenstown on route to their appointed stations, accompanied by their wives and children and such effects as they had decided to bring with them. A cutter would be there to embark them and, as wind and weather permitted, would eventually land them at their station. Very often their changeover from the fleet to the coast guard service was anything but a pleasant introduction. For many of them on joining a coast guard station would mean ten, fifteen or even twenty year's isolation at these backward stations, never being in a position to afford the passage money for a holiday in England. To get a removal to a station in England or Scotland would not be considered for ten years and, should it ever be granted, it was considered a great favour bestowed on the best behaved.

The Admiralty, in the interest of economy, always jibbed at the cost of removing men to England. On the other hand, it was quite common to send an officer or man from an English station to the west of Ireland for punishment. By this reasoning, surely it was a punishment to the man appointed to an Irish station in the first instance. Should an officer or man reach the age for his pension he would have to pay his own expenses to the place where he intended to settle. Such were the secrets of the coast guard service at that distant period.

The coast guard personnel had no knowledge or training in signals, nor was anyone on board the cutter able to make a signal by semaphore. On arriving at a station to embark a man, a flag would be hoisted from the coast guard boat to come off, when they were informed why we had come. In many instances the station would be many miles from the nearest telegraph office and sometimes the cutters would arrive at a station to remove a man and his family before the order had arrived at the station for his removal. There would be no time to lose, the opportunity of embarking in moderate weather and a smooth sea had to be taken advantage of. Sometimes a chance lost meant waiting for days or even weeks for another chance.

[9] 23 August 1885 Leading Seaman, HMS *Gleaner* – Walter Hunkin Service Record

With the help of his mates, he packed up with all haste and with his wife, family and effects, bundled on board in the least possible time. The only landing place at some stations was a rock bound cove or an open beach and with the ocean swell it was not uncommon for the boats crew, the coast guard and his effects to come on board swamping wet. At the best of times this method of removal was always rough on women and children, but after getting them on board we always did our best for their comfort. I have known them to be on board anything from one day to four weeks. Once on board no-one could say when they would land again.

Under the most favourable conditions, this embarking and landing from the open stations was anything but a picnic either for the coast guards or the cutter's crew. There was no real accommodation provided other than one small cabin, but usually the petty officer gave up his cabin to the second family taken on board and so on, and sometimes the commander would allow them the use of his cabin.

Very soon I settled down to the routine of my new ship and my new shipmates. The commander, a north of Ireland man, was a splendid west of Ireland pilot, a kindly good shipmate but a poor disciplinarian.

Up to that time I was not sure that any day I might be sent back to Devonport for general services. Now that I am a Leading Seaman and on the permanent list for the cruiser service I can look forward with a contented mind and hope of promotion in due course.

In March the ship was ordered to proceed to Devonport for general repairs. After the monotony of the west coast of Ireland, the prospect of spending a few months at Plymouth during the summer, and a possible few days leave, was a prospective pleasure not anticipated.

During the period of the repairs the crew were billeted on board the receiving ship *Royal Adelaide*, working daily in the dockyard on board our own ship.

For a few days I was deputed coxswain of the *Royal Adelaide*'s cutter, a twelve oared rowing boat. On one occasion, the boat being moored at the town boom, with a strong tide and fresh wind, I was experiencing some difficulty in getting from the boom into the boat when, who should appear at the gangway but the officer of the day, a salt house lieutenant. Very soon he was shouting his orders to me, not in the most select language, finally calling me a b** useless article. In silence one wondered which was really the useless article.

During our four month's stay at Devonport I had the opportunity of spending several weekends at home, notwithstanding the fact that there were cases of smallpox in my home town. Had this been known to the authorities, it is not likely that I would have been allowed to go.

As the time passed and the day arrived for returning to the west coast of Ireland, I think that the crew, with the exception of the Irish men, all felt very sorry. However, we had all had a good time and enjoyed the change of a few weeks in harbour.

Laden with stores for distribution to coast guard stations, in August we set sail bound for our home district, and with the fair weather at this season of the year effected good landing right up the west coast, arriving at Lough Swilly about the tenth of September, where orders awaited us to proceed to Queenstown. On the fifteenth we sailed with a favourable breeze, making a good run south.

During the afternoon of the 17th of September the ship was running through the Blasket Sound, on the coast of Kerry, with a fair wind and a fresh breeze, under plain sail with the square sail set, it being my watch on deck. A man was sent aloft to a job at the mast head and for some unexplainable reason he lost his balance and fell striking the crosstrees, the boat and falling into the sea. Everyone was startled, both on deck and below, by the cry 'man overboard'. With the instant thought that he would be drowned if left without help, I ran along the deck and plunged over the stern to his assistance. The Commander, at the same instant, threw over the lifebuoy. I first get hold of the lifebuoy then swam and got held of the man, pulled him over on his back with the lifebuoy under him, and holding him in that position bade him to keep quiet, assured him that he was all right, and that we would be picked up very soon.

On board of the vessel canvas was shortened in quick time, the vessel hove to, the boat lowered and manned by a willing crew straining at the oars was soon making towards us with all possible speed. They had not only to contend with the wind but also with the rapid tide running through the sound.

For the first few minutes the distance from the ship was forever lengthening. Then one saw the canvas lowered, the vessel hove to, then the boat in the water pulling towards us. It was a hard pull, were they making any progress? How long could I hold on? Would the boat reach us in time? And such like thoughts flashed across one's mind as every five minutes felt like an hour. After twenty five minutes, to feel the saving grip of the chief petty officer on my shoulder and to see my injured shipmate - Daniel Kidney, a young Irishman from Whitegate - pulled into the boat was an experience not to be forgotten, and looking back through the years I regard it as the most delightful moment of my life.

After regaining the ship, the boat hoisted, we were underway again. Mr Greenham, the mate, applied first aid, found that the man's leg was broken and his chest much bruised. He ordered the carpenter to make some splints and then he set and strapped the leg making the man as comfortable as possible. Putting into the first harbour, Valencia, the man was landed the same evening and taken to the cottage hospital where the doctor pronounced the leg to be well and truly set and only required to be re-bandaged. After three months in the hospital he re-joined the *Victoria*. Kidney, a nice quiet shipmate, was ever grateful for my help rendered that afternoon.

In October we were again back at Rathmullen - where the commander had his home - and there fell in with the parent ship. After a few days, orders were received that the *Victoria* was to proceed to the North Sea for fishing duties. Such a thing had never been heard of before, as a cruiser to be sent from her home station on the west of Ireland for duty in the North Sea!

On the receipt of this order the commander was very much disturbed. The majority of the ship's company were rather pleased at the prospect of going across to England for a change. He did all he could to delay our departure and when, eventually we did sail, tried his best to carry away one of the spars, such as the main boom or gaff, by repeatedly allowing the mainsail to gybe over in a strong breeze, but nothing gave away. Eventually a small spar, the mizzen boom broke; now he had the desired excuse to go back to Rathmullen to report and obtain a new boom. This caused a further delay of a few days. At last, there being no more cards to play, we took our departure on passage for Harwich, calling at Blacksod Bay to embark a station officer for removal to Scilly Islands. The time was spun out by calling at various ports for no particular reason.

On the morning of our sailing from Blacksod, just after getting underway, when running down the bay with a fresh wind, the lookout man reported "*Imogene* in sight sir". After a little while the 'close' signal was run up on board the *Imogene* and a couple of guns fired to attract our attention. Our commander took no notice knowing the district captain to be on board visiting his stations. Being at the helm, I saw him give a wink to the petty officer and heard the order to set more sail. The square sail was soon set and with the fresh wind, the Imogene, a slow steamer, was soon out of sight; probably our commander chuckling to himself that he had done the 'old man' that time.

In crossing the channel, on sighting Scilly it was found we were some miles to leeward, consequently the vessel had to be hauled close to the wind in order to round the Seven Stones. The sea being very high, we had a most lively time for three hours with as much water sweeping the decks as one could ask for.

On arrival, and taking up a berth in the usual anchorage, the first job was to land the passenger and his effects and after a hard pull against wind and tide he was dumped ashore on the rocks, no doubt glad once more to have the solid ground under his feet after the discomfort afforded on board of a coast guard cutter. There we remained weather-bound, rolling and tumbling about in St Mary Roads for a week. With the weather moderating we proceeded on our passage, calling at Devonport to land condemned stores etc., remaining there two days then sailing for our destination at Harwich.

North Sea Fisheries duties

As we proceeded up Channel the wind drew down from the eastward bringing a large fleet of sailing craft that had been wind bound in The Downs, running down with a fair wind while we were turning to windward back and tack. The night was pitch dark and to fall in with so many craft was rather perplexing to the Commander who, on the west of Ireland, would not sight a sail in a month. About the middle of November we arrived at Harwich, where orders awaited us to proceed to sea on fishery protection duty with the herring fleet working from Yarmouth and Lowestoft.

Our commander, a most capable west of Ireland pilot, had no experience of the east coat of England, and was unacquainted with the dangerous banks and tides and unaccustomed to the company of hundreds of fishing craft and the numerous quantity of shipping forever

passing and repassing. It was all very perplexing for him; consequently he had to fall back on an extra dose of his favourite tonic to keep his heart up.

By this date the herring fishery was drawing to a close. After one month, by the middle of December, the fishing fleet had withdrawn and the fishing cruisers were ordered to return to their respective districts. This, my first experience of North Sea fisheries protection was by no means the last.

No time was lost by our Commander in getting away. On or about the twentieth of December we sailed from Harwich making a good run down channel and arrived at Queenstown on the 24th of December. The first thing was to land the caterers, to obtain some extra Xmas fare. The Xmas pudding was made and cooked during the night in preparation for the Xmas feast, provided out of our own pockets.

Xmas day was free and easy, everyone doing his best to make the other happy. The Xmas festivities now finished on the 27th, we were underway again, bound up the west coast and arrived at Bantry on the 28th December 1885. With the opening of the New Year 1886 we were in company with the parent ship in Bantry harbour.

At the end of every year a report of every man's character and ability was rendered to the district captain for the Admiralty records. Against my name for the year closing 31st December 1885, my commander had noted 'recommended for saving life'. When the report was laid before the captain by his secretary, he, not having heard of the incident afore mentioned, demanded an explanation. It was found that the report forwarded in September had been pigeon-holed. Our commander was ordered to appear on board where he found the captain making things rather lively for the office staff until the missing report was found.

Then a signal came over: 'send Hunkin on board'. In due course I appeared on the quarter deck. The district captain commended me for my action in saving the life of a shipmate, expressed his regret that the incident had not been brought to his notice earlier and that he would lay it before the Admiral without further delay, after which I was dismissed and returned to my own ship.

1886 - Back on the Irish station

After a few days we sailed once again on passage to Rathmullen carrying out a few removals en route. There was one removal from Dingle to Achilbeg. It was the middle of January, a bad time of the year for landing at any of the exposed stations. Arriving at Achilbeg I suppose the commander wished to get to his home as soon as possible, although the prospects of landing this man and his effects were not very good. The two boats were lowered and loaded with the man, his wife and children and goods. The first boat put off and on nearing the landing place it was seen that the sea was rather rough on the shore. The petty officer in the boat hesitated but finally made the attempt to land; on reaching the beach he thought to get the gear ashore all right but, before the last packages were out, a sea more weighty than before filled the boat swamping men and gear. With the help of the

coast guard and other willing helpers the boat was freed from water and eventually came back, the men none the worse for having got a wet shirt. It was all in the day's work.

On arrival at Rathmullen 14 days leave was granted to each watch. My leave came with the second watch, making the best of my way home in company with two others going to Plymouth. In due course I reached home and spent my all too short leave comfortably with my friends.

Going to London for a few days I must confess, at the expiration of my leave that for once and the only time I deliberately overstayed my leave by one day. When I arrived back in Rathmullen in the evening, I found that the vessel had left the anchorage that morning for sea. Happily for me there was very little wind and the *Victoria* had to anchor a mile or so down the Lough. The *Stag*, a sister ship being at anchor, I reported myself on board and the officer in charge manned a boat and sent me on board my own ship. Of course I was very delighted not to be left behind. My kind hearted Irish commander, who disliked punishing people, did not even reprimand me but presumed that I had missed the train.

The busy season for carrying out removals was close at hand and for several months we were employed up and down the west coast removing coast guards and their families, collecting old stores and the coast guard men for passage to the district ship for the annual summer cruise.

On the first of April 1886 I was promoted to petty officer, remaining in the same ship.[10] This promotion was awarded me over five other leading seamen my senior, as a reward for the act of life saving. In due course I was awarded the bronze medal of the Royal Humane Society. The district captain, wishing to make the presentation of the medal himself on board the Shannon, retained it for a time but we were so many months absent from the parent ship that the medal was sent on and presented to me on board of my own ship in presence of the ship's company.

In October we were at Rathmullen in company with the district ship. The other tenders arrived, including the *Fly*. The annual inspection was carried out by the captain. Our commander left us for a better command, taking charge of a steam cruiser stationed on the English coast.

My old shipmate, the commander of the *Fly*, usually known by the pet name of Jimmy, was transferred to the command of the *Victoria*. In due course sailing orders were received and preparations made for getting underway at four a.m., scarcely daylight at that season of the year. On raising the anchor, there being a fresh breeze, unfortunately we fell afoul of the *Fly*, carrying away her bowsprit and other damage. Jimmy did not come on board until midnight, so possibly his vision was not very clear at four a.m. No damage was received by the *Victoria* and disregarding the recall signal from the senior officer, proceeded to sea.

Our first port of call was Killybegs where, on arrival, orders were received to return to Rathmullen. Jimmy's home being at Killybegs, he hung on there for a few days. On the day of sailing the weather was fine with a moderate breeze from the south west. It being

[10] 1 April 1886 promoted Quartermaster aboard HMS *Gleaner* – Walter Hunkin Service Record

my afternoon watch, I was left in charge of the deck, waiting out of the bay and reaching in rather close to the cliff, I experienced a very nasty few minutes. The vessel narrowly missed stays - that is she was sluggish in answering the helm and coming around on the other tack. Had she failed to come around I could see her thrown up on the rocks and my career finished. The man himself was below, probably bracing himself for the ordeal that awaited him.

It being my first watch, I relieved the deck at eight p.m. By eleven o'clock the wind was freshening, veering to the north-west and weather threatening. At midnight the watch was relieved and very soon after the officer of the watch could be heard shouting his orders to shorten sail. The vessel was snagged down to close reefs in the canvas and preparations made for stormy weather. By four a.m. we were a few miles to the westward of Tory Island. The wind still freshening flew to the north coast, increasing to a strong gale with a high sea. The mate now in charge of the deck decided that there was no alternative but to heave to and ride out the storm.

The gale raged with unabated fury all that day and night. The forenoon following, it being my watch, about ten o'clock, a heavy curling sea broke on board, breaking the stanchions, carrying away the bulwarks on the starboard side and splitting the mainsail. Even this failed to bring the gallant Jimmy on deck. On the third day the storm moderated and under the skilful navigation of himself - who had not left his cabin since leaving harbour - we arrived at Rathmullen somewhat battered by the storm. A court of enquiry into the collision with the *Fly* was held on board of the district ship and the finding of the court as is usual forwarded to the admiral.

In due course the *Victoria* and *Fly* were ordered to Londonderry to make good damages. After a few weeks a word came that Jimmy was to be suspended and to work to the command of a small cutter stationed on the south coast of England. That was punishment enough, seeing the *Victoria* was the very vessel he most desired to command.

For many weeks we remained in Londonderry extending over the Xmas, and for some unknown reason no Xmas leave was granted. It almost appeared that it was a punishment of the ship's company on account of the offence of one. During our stay, the anniversary of the siege of Londonderry and the locking of the gates by the apprentice boys on the seventh of December 1688 was celebrated by the decoration of the streets, processions by the Orangemen from the masons' lodges, with an indulgence in merry making and feasting. All our men had the time of their lives, their 'blue jackets' gave them an entrance anywhere and a welcome on every hand.

1887

With the coming of the new year 1887, there was a heavy fall of snow and heavy frost; consequently, as is customary in Londonderry at these times, a great deal of winter sports were indulged in. The favourite game, tobogganing down that very steep incline, Ship Quay Street. Our men were always welcome to a run on anyone's scooter or sleigh. The weeks passed pleasantly, all our men having had an enjoyable time and escaped some of the winter gales, the latter being appreciated by all hands.

In due course, another officer was appointed in command and Jimmy walked over the side.

In February we sailed with a long list of coast guards with their families for removal. The new commander had no experience of the west coast of Ireland and was consequently quite at a loss to decide whether it would be safe to attempt a landing or not, and being a bluffer, was forever in an indirect manner pumping the Mate and Petty Officers for information. He very soon discovered the difference in this work compared with the south coast of England.

Among these removals there was a man to be landed at Seafield on the coast of Clare and another to be taken off. This station, having such an extended rocky foreshore, a landing there was never attempted, but was done in the River Shannon and the men or stores sent across by road. The Commander would make the attempt, consequently one of the boats got holed on a sharp rock and nearly filled before reaching the shore. That caused delay and fault-finding when the boat returned. Of course someone had to be blamed for the stupidity of himself.

It was no uncommon occurrence dodging off a station for days, awaiting a chance of a smooth sea to land or take off a man and his family.

The Commander was very fond of the sporting gun and never missed a chance of a day's shooting. Often he would land on one of the numerous islands and bring on board a bunch of rabbits, a very acceptable addition to our service allowance. Of course he must keep a dog or two and appeared to be all the time buying or exchanging dogs, generally having four or more - Irish setters, terriers, spaniels, pointers or mongrels. Personally, I detested those dogs, especially if one had to go into the cabin at night with a snappy terrier at the foot of the ladder.

Our favourite, the ship's dog 'Sailor', a fine black retriever, resented the intrusion of these strangers very much. He was the pet of the crew. When turning to windward against a head wind and the watch below were stretched off on the lee lockers 'Sailor', who was always seasick in rough weather, when the ship was hove about on the other tack, would always be the first across and take up a comfortable billet. He was ever ready for a run ashore if anyone would take him. On one occasion, landing with the mail, I took the dog with me and crossing a field where there were a number of sheep, missing him from my side, I discovered 'Sailor' mauling one of the sheep. Luckily for me the farmer was not in sight. When the vessel was at Rathmullen, 'Sailor' would, when left on shore, instead of waiting for the boat, swim off, barking when nearing the vessel to call attention. The watchman dropping the bight of a rope over the side, the dog would get into it and so be hauled on board. If the ship should be swung to the ebb tide he would go well up the shore before taking the water, so that he would not be carried past the vessel and have to swim ashore again, taking the same precautions with a flood tide.

The early months of the year passed and early in June we embarked a number of coast guards, conveying them to Bantry to join the district ship for the annual cruise.

On the 21st of June, when the whole country was making merry on Queen Victoria's jubilee day, we were carrying on as usual taking advantage of a smooth day to land a coast guard at Ballyheigue in Kerry, then proceeded to Galway to work under the orders of the divisional officer for a few weeks.

During this time, one of our seamen got a bit wrong in the head, rushing about the deck, beating his head against the bulwarks, etc., eventually jumping overboard. He was picked up and the medical officer ordered him to be sent to the naval hospital Queenstown. It fell to my lot to accompany him. On the journey we passed a mental home and seeing the inmates in the grounds, he remarked "those are my future shipmates". His trouble turned out to be the result of a little love affair. He soon recovered and returned to us once again.

By the end of the summer cruise of the coast guard and reserve fleet we were at Bantry in readiness to embark a batch of coast guards for passage back to their stations. Once on board the cutter they had no idea when they would land. There was no bedding for them, the best we could provide was a sail and stretch out on the lower deck. What with foul winds, calms, or bad landing conditions, they would sometimes be on board as long as two weeks or more before the last of them were landed.

In September the vessel was deputed for fishing duties in Donegal Bay. After about six weeks, during which time the commander took every opportunity of landing for a day's shooting and the crew amused themselves fishing for mackerel. The strange part of it was there were no fishing craft of any sort sighted in the bay.

With a few weeks on removals, in November we found ourselves at Bantry in company with the parent ship. Taking this opportunity I underwent an examination and passed for a chief petty officer.

Early in December two coast guards with their wives, families and effects and the furniture of a third man who preferred to pay his own fare to England, was embarked for conveyance across channel to Dartmouth and Portland; a cruel method of conveying women and children in the dead of the winter in such a small craft. Supposedly it was in the interest of economy; the country must have been poor and could not afford to send them another route. There was furniture and effects as much as could be stowed on deck and below, with two coast guards, their wives and twelve children.

From the Fastnet to the Longships we had a fair passage, with the wind about west north-west. Making the land about four p.m. with heavy rain and the wind falling light, there being a long December night ahead, sail was shortened to a single reef mainsail. The mate, having been promoted, had left the ship and we were without a mate this voyage. The commander was to keep the first watch and my middle watch. About eleven p.m., the wind freshening from north-east, in my bunk I could feel that the vessel was making bad weather of it and was being driven under too great a pressure of canvas. I called the Chief P.O. and told him I was going on deck to see what was taking place. Donning my oilskins and sea boots, I went on deck. The staysail had just been hauled down, thus easing the vessel a little. It was quite time that she was hove to and sail shortened. The commander

with his Dutch courage kept her going, tearing through the water, the wind now at gale force.

As soon as I got on deck I went aft and remarked to the commander on the force of the wind. He ordered me forward to help in reefing the staysail. Within a few minutes - I had just cautioned the men to look out they were not washed overboard, the wind burst on us with hurricane force laying the vessel over on her beam ends, the water pouring down the skylights and hatchways in tons. Every one of the crew rushed on deck thinking the ship was going down, the chief petty officer shrieking with fright and the coast guards terrified knowing the danger to their wives and children. I found myself on the lee bow hanging on to the chain cable to prevent myself floating away over the lee sail.

Among the crew there was an able seaman that had been in the vessel several years. He, without orders, lowered away the mainsail by the throat halyards thus easing the vessel immediately. The helm was put hard a starboard. She came up head to wind and around on the starboard tack, with the deck full of water. To free the deck I unshipped the starboard gangway; it slipped from my hold and went overboard. An able seaman unshipped the port gangway - that also went overboard, the seaman narrowly escaping going overboard himself. The vessel was now safe and quiet, hove to, and sail was further shortened.

The commander very soon decided the vessel was heading toward the shore and must be brought around on the port tack. The wind was so strong and the sea so high that it was impossible to tack ship. The vessel was then wore around, kept away before the wind, and the mainsail allowed to gybe over from one side to the other, a dangerous manoeuvre in a gale with the risk of carrying away any of the spars. Fortunately no damage was done. In a very short time he updated the manoeuvre and came back to the starboard tack again. The crew were then mustered to find if anyone had gone overboard; happily they all answered their names.

To show the quantity of water that got below, it took three hours with our four inch Downton pump to free the bilges. A quantity of the furniture on deck, with loose ship's fittings, was washed away and the boat stowed on deck stove in.

It is not for me to comment on the ability of himself, but I think the endangering of the vessel and neglect to shorten sail in time was probably due to the 'poteen' or, as Paddy would say, 'mountain dew' brought on board by one of the coast guards.

It being my middle watch, I had to carry on in my wet clothes as I came out of the water, just emptying the sea boots and pulling them on again. Such were some of the delights of service in small ships.

With approaching daylight and the gale moderating, the voyage was continued, anchoring in Falmouth harbour. Within the sheltered waters of the harbour the able seaman and myself were paraded on the quarter deck by our gallant officer - possessed with more bluff than brains - and charged with the offence of throwing the gangway pieces overboard. One might have attempted to defend oneself, but as I was looking for a recommend for promotion and not wishing to get on the wrong side of the gentleman, decided to say

nothing and make no defence. Consequently the able seaman and myself were ordered to pay the cost of new fittings, amounting to one pound twelve shillings for each of us. This was pure bluff and we might justly have refused to pay. Had the matter or loss have been logged and reported as storm damage it would have been made good without a question.

In due course the coast guards were landed and loading up with coast guard stores at Devonport, we sailed once again for Bantry, the rendezvous of the parent ship. At Devonport, several of the seamen were relieved by new hands from the depot. All of these men unaccustomed to small craft and the exposure and hard weather that the crews of the cutters had to put up with. Not a man among them possessed an oil coat or a pair of sea boots to keep himself dry. Before we reached Ireland they had their first taste of life on board of a coast guard cruiser.

On the passage in the middle of December the wind north east with a rough sea, the vessel was under a double reef mainsail and labouring heavily. Having kept the first dog watch, just before six o'clock, I was just thinking of being relieved, going below, and taking off the oil clothes for a few hours, when by a most unusual lift of the mainsail the middle peak halyard block at the mast head became unhooked, a very rare thing indeed to happen under any circumstances. The consequence was the sail had to be lowered and the block re-hooked. No easy job of a pitch dark night with the vessel rolling and pitching like a cork. It was useless to order one of the newly joined seamen aloft, he would have no idea what was required and might possibly be flung overboard.

The newly joined mate, a small insignificant officer with no personality, who had served in steam and in a small cutter only, was entirely without hard winter weather experience such as we were having at this time and had little or no idea how to proceed to re-hook the block. I undertook to go aloft giving this officer a hint to see that the block was triced up clear of turns ready for hooking.

Climbing to the masthead, in a few minutes the block was sent up. My first care is that it does not hit me in the head and send me down faster than I came up. It is one hand for myself and one hand to the block; at the same time being violently swayed about that it was only the monkey in our make-up that enabled me to hold on at all. Try as I would the block could not be hooked with one hand. After a while I became exhausted and sea sick and returned to the deck.

Then another man was sent up. Telling him why I had failed and to take a small piece of rope with him and to lash himself to the masthead in order to use both hands. Going aloft and lashing himself in order to free both hands, in two minutes the block was hooked, the sail reset and we are underway once again. That half hour at the masthead on that dark night, being jerked through space with every roll of the ship, was one of my worst experiences.

In due course we arrived at Bantry, remaining a few days, from thence [we] proceeded up the west coast, calling at various stations with stores, not a very pleasant job in the dead of the winter. As to shipping; it was a deserted sea, not a sail or craft of any description in sight. The mountainous Atlantic sea expending its fury on the rocky islets and the

ironbound cliffs of the headlands was enough to strike terror into the heart of the bravest seaman.

A few days before Xmas we arrived at Killybegs, a snug little land-locked harbour in the county of Donegal. Orders awaited us to moor up and given fourteen days leave to each watch, with a couple of days over for travelling. As I had not had any leave for just on two years I took this opportunity to get away, if only for a short time, from ship's life, ship's food, sea boots and oilskins, and the eternal monotony of the west of Ireland.

In order to reach the railway we had to drive nineteen miles through the wild and mountainous district of Donegal in a jaunting car. Long before daylight four of us set out on this uninviting journey, the rain falling in torrents. Our ardour was not dampened on this account, for we were homeward bound, if only for a brief two weeks. What cared we for a few spots of rain, with the solid ground under our feet? After a four hour drive, we arrived at the town of Donegal and in due time boarded the train for Gourock where we expected to catch the steamer crossing to Holyhead that night.

At four p.m. the train came to a standstill at Strabane. After waiting for a very long time we were informed that we could not go any further that day on account of a block on the line. This was disappointing as it meant the loss of twenty four hours, which we could ill afford out of a bare sixteen days.

The station master directed us to an hotel where the railway company would defray our expenses. A kindly Irish traveller staying in the hotel, in sympathy with us, prompted us to demand something more than our expenses, by the way of compensation for the delay. "Indeed", he said, "ye should be after getting twenty shillings each of ye". So back we hastened to the station master and laid our demands before him. He failed to see that we were entitled to any compensation for delay, but after some argument and bargaining he eventually handed us fifteen shillings each.

The day following we proceeded on our journey and arrived at home in time for the Xmas dinner. Needless to say my parents were very pleased to have me with them once again after my long absence.

One of the pleasures of a holiday was the fact that there was no turning out at the call of the watch. Consequently one morning I was rather late in getting down for breakfast when my mother brought me a letter. It was from one of my shipmates with the good news that I was promoted to Chief Petty Officer[11] and was to be transferred to the *Squirrel* in the Clyde district.

This news was very pleasing to me; I had served seven years and six months on the west coast of Ireland and was only too glad of a change of scene and service. Service on the west of Ireland, scarcely ever touching at any town of importance was nothing more than stagnation, being deprived of all forms of amusement, social life or elevating company.

[11] 19 December 1887 - 13 January 1888 Acting Chief Petty Officer, HMS *Gleaner* – Walter Hunkin Service Record

1888

Early in January 1888, my leave now drawing to a close, I start on my return journey, leaving Mevagissey on a Saturday, travelling in the horse bus to St Austell, from thence boarding a train en route for Holyhead. At Plymouth one of my shipmates joined me and at Exeter another joined our company. Arriving at Chester very late at night the boat train for Holyhead had left, leaving us stranded for twenty four hours. It being so very late and every place closed, we were at a loss to find accommodation. The guard of the train took us to his home, offering us the accommodation of one bed. Three in a bed was rather close quarters, but we did not mind, and treated it as a joke. It was all a part of the holiday fun. As the time came to resume our journey we were not sorry to board the train for Holyhead. Catching the steamer across to Ireland that night and arriving in Donegal town the following morning where a jaunting car was hired for our nineteen miles drive to Killybegs.

After a brief and varied holiday, with the delay on our homeward and return journey, we were truly glad to board our ship where there were cheery shipmates to bid us welcome. I was at once informed of my promotion and that the *Squirrel* was ordered across from the Clyde to Ireland to make the exchange, a petty officer from the *Squirrel* taking my place.[12]

Farewell to the Solitude of the West of Ireland

Squirrel on the Clyde

In the course of a few days I bade my shipmates - good fellows all - farewell, left the *Victoria* at Killybegs, proceeding by road and rail to Moville to join the Squirrel, a small cutter with a senior mate in command and a chief petty officer as mate. I had not been on board very long when I heard one of the crew remark, "a young fellow for a Chief Petty Officer". I was twenty five and as promotion went in those days attained the rating early.

The *Squirrel* left Moville in the middle of January returning to the headquarters at Gourock where moorings were laid for the use of this little vessel when not otherwise employed. The battleship *Ajax* stationed at Gourock was the parent ship. To find myself, after so many years solitude on the west of Ireland, in a busy river such as the Clyde, with headquarters at the pleasant little town of Gourock, within easy reach of Greenock and Glasgow was quite a change, much appreciated, and like the opening of a new chapter in one's life.

There was very little work outside of the Firth of Clyde and very little exposure to hard weather. During the winter we swung around and around the moorings week after week; quite an easy and comfortable existence compared to that of knocking the tops from the Atlantic seas off Tory island. No-one could say that I had not earned this little respite.

In the spring of this year the commanding officer was promoted and his place filled by another - a rather slack disciplinarian and not in the enjoyment of the best of health or even

[12] 14 January 1888 – 30 June 1889 Acting Chief Quartermaster, HMS *Ajax* – Walter Hunkin Service Record

taking usual care of himself. A few months after his taking up his first command, he was taken suddenly ill with violent haemorrhaging and immediately had to be sent to hospital for treatment. When sufficiently recovered to travel he proceeded to his home on sick leave never to go afloat again. He gradually became worse and passed away. During this time and until another officer was appointed, I was in charge altogether over four months.

One very dark and stormy night, when rounding the Mull of Galloway, while all hands were on deck reefing and shortening sails, the candle, by some means, was thrown off the table setting fire to the cabin cushions and woodwork. Fortunately I went down into the cabin before the fire had got a thorough hold. Raising the alarm, the help of willing hands very soon bundled the burning cushions on deck and the burning woodwork with a liberal dowse of water was checked and brought under control; an exciting half hour for everyone. Being in temporary charge, it was well for me that the fire did not get the upper hand so burn the craft to the water's edge.

Senior Mate George Horner was the next commanding officer; a good shipmate, kind and considerate to all and highly respected by his crew. It was my privilege to sail under him for more than two years, during which time a lifelong friendship was formed.

The extent of our duty was the removal of a coast guard and his family now and again and a voyage down the Forth as occasion demanded carrying stores etc. to the coast guard stations.

Mr Horner made his home at Gourock having a good time while the circumstances permitted.

The opportunity of a run ashore and a visit to Glasgow now and then was much appreciated after the uninteresting existence in my last ship. And so the weeks and months passed quietly by, bringing us to the period of Xmas leave and Xmas festivities. It was my luck to remain on board and consequently had no leave for another twelve months.

1889

The early months of 1889 drifted away with nothing of particular interest from one day to another. In the early summer the vessel was deputed for fishing duties with headquarters at Campbeltown. This was a fine weather and smooth water employment and could very fittingly be described as a pleasure cruise.[13]

In the early days of October sailing orders were received to proceed to Stornoway with stores etc. The Commander, not having any experience of the western islands, and it being so late in the year, did not relish the idea of the intricate navigation entailed. We sailed down the Clyde under favourable conditions, in due course passing through the Crinan Canal, from thence plotting our course through the Firth of Lorne and the Sound of Mull, Sound of Sleat and through Kyle [of Lochalsh] with the tide running with a velocity of four knots. The coast scenery and the mountains - at this season of the year cloud capped - was unsurpassable in its grandeur.

[13] 1 July 1889 – 29 January 1891 Chief Quartermaster, HMS *Ajax* – Walter Hunkin Service Record

After sheltering, as occasion required, in several of the splendid landlocked harbours we eventually cast anchor at Stornoway. After a delay of several days with strong winds and gales, we sailed for Lochinver, there to embark a large flagstaff to be erected on Rhu-Stoer Head.

The idea of the district captain – in order to save expense – was that we should embark this flagstaff, seek a convenient place for landing as near the headland as possible, land the flagstaff and take it to the top of Rhu-Stoer – an impossible suggestion with such a few men and lack of appliances. It would never do to report to that effect, or to suggest the incurring of any expense. Finally the Commander decided the better plan would be to take the flagstaff by road. He accordingly arranged to leave me on board alone as ship keeper, and to set out with himself and the crew to drag this heavy forty-five foot spar, a distance of fifteen miles over rough and heavy roads.

An ordinary farm cart was borrowed, the spar loaded and lashed into position, and taking two day's provisions, away they started on a job that should have been done by three good horses. The first day a distance of ten miles was covered, the men spending the night in the schoolhouse kindly lent by the village schoolmaster. The day following, the journey to the headland was completed and the spar deposited as near the top as they could get. On the return journey, reaching the schoolhouse, by the kindness of the schoolmaster the second night was spent there, making themselves as comfortable as possible. The next day, after tramping the ten miles back to Lochinver, they were all glad to return on board very hungry and tired out. And all this in the interest of national economy?

In due course orders were received to return to the headquarters at Gourock. With the first opportunity of weather permitting we set sail from Lochinver, only to meet with strong head winds and gales, through which we were compelled to seek shelter in the many landlocked harbours, prolonging the voyage for several weeks and we eventually arrived back in the River Clyde a few days before Xmas.

Sixteen days leave was granted to each watch, and seeing that I had not had long leave for two years, or leave of the ship except for a day now and then, no time was lost in getting my travelling kit ready and starting on my homeward journey. The proposal of a brief period of two weeks only was quite thrilling to me after the long spell of ship routine. I arrived home in time for the Xmas dinner and enjoyed my all too short holiday in the company of my friends. At the expiration of my leave the train was boarded at St Austell for my return journey to Gourock, my father now getting old coming to see me off.

Speeding along at the usual rate, pulling up at the various stations, with passengers embarking and disembarking, all went well, and so the hours passed bringing us to midnight and into the middle watch, during which period the traveller is apt to become drowsy and to succumb to the embraces of Morpheus. This being the condition of myself and my travelling companions, about three a.m. we experienced a somewhat rude awakening, by those of us facing the engine being shot violently forward, onto those passengers sitting opposite, the baggage from the racks falling on us. Looking through the window and seeing the line strewn with the wreckage of the front carriages we realised that it was the result of a collision.

The train was due to stop at Carlisle but for some reason the brakes failed to act, the train passing through the station and colliding with a shunting engine, telescoping the three front carriages, killing four passengers and injuring several others. Fortunately my carriage was in the middle of the train and escaped without injury. A squad of men was soon on the scene clearing the wreckage and getting out the injured and those killed. A few of the passengers including myself rendered all the assistance possible in this work. After a delay of several hours the journey was resumed, eventually finding myself at my journey's end and on board my ship once again, none the worse for the unusual disturbance from my middle watch slumber.

1890

For the first four months of the year 1890 the most of the time was spent swinging at the moorings with nothing more exciting than an odd run down the River Clyde distributing stores at the coast guard stations.

During the summer the vessel was employed on fishing duties in Loch Fyne; nothing very exciting about that. Duty in this small cutter was of a very sheltered nature, what might well be termed a soft job. I was becoming soft myself and desirous of a change to a larger vessel where there would be better chance of promotion.

It happened one afternoon when cruising down the Firth of Clyde just having passed Ailsa Craig, without much warning the wind commenced to freshen, increasing rapidly to gale force. It was necessary to shorten sail as quickly as possible and while in the act of reefing the main sail one of the able seamen, a very indifferent swimmer, fell overboard. Fortunately one of the reef casings was hanging over the stern, which the man grasped, holding on, until we got a bowling over him and so pulled him on board.

On returning to our moorings in Gourock Bay a Glasgow constable came on board with a deserter from another ship, for whose arrest a reward had been offered, following the custom of handing the man over to the nearest naval authority. After a few days orders were received that he was to be sent to the naval barracks at Devonport where he would be dealt with.

As a general rule two marines – one a non-commissioned officer – would be sent as an escort for a prisoner about to be transferred from one place to another. In this case I was ordered to escort this deserter to Devonport single handed, a job that I did not very well like. As I did not wish to treat the man as a common felon and put him into handcuffs, I told him that if he gave me his word that he would give me no trouble the handcuffs would not be used, although I should take them in my pocket. No doubt but that he was well aware that ninety days imprisonment awaited him and that any further trouble would add something more to his punishment. I was rather glad to arrive at Devonport and hand my charge over to the naval police at the barracks without any trouble. After handing over the prisoner, instead of returning immediately I decided to take a few hours and go home for a night. It was a pleasant surprise for my people to see me if only for a brief period.

On my return journey a most annoying thing occurred. Getting out of the train to give a begging guard a tip – the fellow had done nothing for me – the train departed leaving me behind, taking my coat and other things. These I recovered at the next station, costing me the price of a telegram and a further tip. A lesson to one, in tipping those deserving only and at all times to ignore spongers.

On the eighteenth of November, my twenty eighth birthday, my first period of ten years from the age of eighteen for which I had joined having now expired, I was at liberty if I so desired to sever my connection with the service. But having taken this up as my life's work, I signed on for another ten years or to complete time for pension. It was now my aim to secure my future by obtaining promotion to officer rank as soon as possible and so consolidate my position.

Xmas drawing near, sixteen days leave was granted, and I had my Xmas dinner at home. With the coming of the New Year, eighteen hundred and ninety one, at the expiration of my leave and my returning to duty, orders came that I was to be discharged from the cutter Squirrel. This was a pleasant surprise for me. Three years in this small craft was quite sufficient.

A Prospect of Promotion

1891 – aboard the *Mary* on the Portland Station

A transfer to HMS *Northumberland*, coast guard ship at Portland, for service in the thirty tons cutter *Mary* as Chief Petty Officer[14] in charge with an extra nine pence per day charge money, was always looked on as a sure step to promotion to officer's rank. Needless to say that it gave me pleasure to learn this was to be my next duty.

In due course I found myself on board of this small craft. The duties were of a pleasing nature and child's play when compared with the duties of the cruisers on the west of Ireland; a run to Portsmouth now and then, or the removal of a coast guard when the stations were not far apart.

In March[15] the south of England was visited by a terrific storm from the south east accompanied by an unprecedented fall of snow afterward known as "the great blizzard". Telegraph wires, trees and buildings were brought down. The roads were blocked, railway and other traffic hung up for several days. On the sea the loss among shipping was very heavy. Fortunately we were moored in Weymouth harbour.

During the afternoon as the wind was freshening, before the gale had reached its full fury, a call having been made for the lifeboat, I landed and went over to the lifeboat house to render assistance if required. On returning on board I found that the *Mary* had parted her ropes and broken adrift and with difficulty with the aid of the crew of the cutter *Delight* had been re-moored.

[14] 30 January 1891 – 7 March 1891 Chief Petty Officer, HMS *Northumberland* – Walter Hunkin Service Record
[15] 8 March 1891 – 23 June 1891 Chief Petty Officer, HMS *Alexandra* – Walter Hunkin Service Record

The following day at the height of the storm with blinding snow, and visibility about two or three hundred yards, a London sailing barge running before the gale taking his chance, hit or miss, by a stroke of luck ran right in between Weymouth pier heads and up the harbour. Letting go his anchor to bring his vessel to, in swinging around he fouled another craft with consequent damage to both vessels.

I now decided to prepare myself for an examination for second mate, and set to in earnest to make myself more fully acquainted with the necessary subjects, navigation etc. On the day appointed for my examination I presented myself on board the district ship, there to appear before the board of officers, composed of the navigating commander, the gunnery and senior lieutenants. The Commander, a breezy gentleman, greeted me with a cheery word putting me at ease. That of course was helpful to me.

First came the oral part of the examination with the usual questions to which every sailor would be expected to know the answers. After which the navigator set the papers and questions in his particular subject leaving me to do my best. Finally the gunnery lieutenant gave me a test in drilling a squad of men etc. Thus the best of one's knowledge was completed.

After a period of waiting I was called in and informed by the senior of the examining officers that the board had decided to grant me instead of a second mate's certificate, a senior mate's certificate, thus covering the two examinations in one. Needless to say this gave unexpected pleasure and satisfaction.[16]

The district captain was a very pleasant and considerate gentleman with whom I got on very well and my period of service in this small craft was very comfortable.

A Step Forward

Hind - back on the Irish Station

On the twenty third of June I was promoted to Second Mate and appointed to the sailing cruiser *Hind*, second in command[17] - Senior Mates were only borne in the steam cruisers – attached to the district ship at Kingstown. I was sorry to be sent to Ireland again, but it was promotion and there was no picking or choosing. This promotion gave me the handsome sum of five shillings per day, a portion of which had to be spent in food to help out the navy rations, and to keep oneself in uniform clothes. On promotion to officer's rank, a sum of twenty five pounds was granted to obtain new uniform suitable to one's rank. Nothing further was ever allowed for the upkeep of clothing; that had to be met out of the daily wage and it is easily seen that married men had little surplus at the end of the month.

Being granted three weeks leave before taking up my appointment I made my way home and had the pleasure of spending, for the first time, a summer holiday with my friends.

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[16] Passed for 2nd Mate aboard HMCr *Mary* Walter Hunkin Service Record

[17] 23 June 1891 – Chief Quartermaster attached to HMCr. *Hind*– Walter Hunkin Service Record. His regular service record then breaks until 20 July 1915
24 June 1891 – 2nd Mate aboard HMCr *Hind* – Walter Hunkin Coastguard Service Record

Having reached officer's rank with the possibility of further promotion and serving to the age of fifty five I felt that my future was somewhat secured.

During my leave it so happened that I made the acquaintance of a young woman who, after a few brief meetings and partings, became my partner for life.

At the expiration of my leave, in the middle of July, I uprooted myself for duty on board the *Hind* at Kingstown. On hearing of my appointment to the *Hind*, I was not very thrilled, pleased as I may have been to receive promotion. The commanding officer, a man over fifty who had been slow in promotion, did not bear the name of being a pleasant shipmate or tactful disciplinarian. He had been removed from the command of two vessels on account of so much trouble and punishment with the crew. He was known to his contemporaries as Old Stormy.

The story was told that on one occasion when 'Stormy' was sitting in his cabin, the vessel being moored in the middle of the dock at Hartlepool, one of the lads who had overstayed his leave arrived down to the dock to come on board. Finding the vessel moored off from the dock wall and wishing to get on board he decided not to wait for the next boat. Having had a drink or two and no objection to a cold dip, he plunged into the dock and swam off. It being a dark evening and the watchman probably down below for the moment, he got on board without the knowledge of anyone. He marched down to the cabin – contrary to all rules – opened the door and reported himself "just come around Flamber Head sir". The silent indignation of Stormy can be better imagined than described.

On reporting myself on board I was greeted by the commander in anything but a welcome, cheerful, make yourself at ease manner. He questioned me in the most uncouth manner as to the vessels I had served in, who I sailed under etc. He was probably wondering if I had been in steam and was possibly lacking in experience in the handling of sail. He soon found that with an apprenticeship on the west of Ireland the latter art had been fully mastered.

In a few days we sailed from Kingstown with a list of coast guards for removal with their families. This work on the east coast was easy when compared with the west coast.

I very soon discovered this was not to be a happy ship for me. I found the skipper to be an uncouth, gruff, disgruntled, silent, broody individual who never wasted words with anyone. For instance, the King's harbourmaster at Kingstown sent his boats alongside with an order to take up another berth during the summer months. He only gave the briefest indication that he heard the message as delivered by the coxswain of the boat and totally disregarded the order. The message was sent again and again before he would comply.

He seldom addressed a word to me other than the briefest order and persistently treated me with silent contempt. I was his next in command. The next below me was a chief petty officer, a man of a low mind, lacking in self-respect, with no personality, or sense of authority or discipline and always hand in glove with the crew - summed up by the commander in a few words "only fit to look after one man".

The crew of twenty four seamen had a fair sprinkling of Irishmen among them. They usually responded to good discipline but in this case, from a lack of support from the proper quarter, the general trend of things and conduct of the crew was other than what I had been accustomed to. Gambling was not prohibited or discouraged. When in harbour a boat was allowed for the crew to fetch beer on board every evening. This privilege only led to slackness in other respects. This was quite new to me. I had never been in a vessel where beer was obtainable by the crew in this manner.

It was quite evident that the Irishmen had the greater influence with the crew; the two leading seamen being 'sons of the sod'. At dinner time the pot of potatoes was usually placed on the deck and in true Irish custom the men gathered around and partook direct from the pot. With a chief petty officer such as I have described – who was responsible for the cleanliness of the men's quarters – and the general slack discipline, I was powerless to alter it. These conditions were simply impossible for me and placed me in a rather isolated position.

On the day that Kingstown regatta was to take place the *Hind* happened to be in the harbour. The committee of the Royal Yacht Club had made a request for the use of the vessel by the committee for the starting and regulating of the harbour races and sports. This request had been granted by the captain of the parent ship. During the forenoon the stewards from the yacht club came on board bringing a liberal supply of food, refreshments etc. and without any question took charge of the skipper's cabin.

This being the event of the season the racing committee usually made a day of it. In due course the committee arrived on board and immediately commenced preparations to start the first race for sailing boats. They, with their friends and followers, literally took charge of the vessel, Stormy not being able to find even an entrance to his own room. Silent contempt did not save him on that occasion. He was kicking himself in that he was ignored, the contempt for once being against himself. This was partly his own fault and lack of sociability.

Back to the North Sea Fisheries

In early October the *Hind* was detached from the Kingstown district and placed under the orders of the senior fisheries officer at Lowestoft for North Sea fishing duties. Sailing from Queenstown we made a good run across channel, the commander making a call at Portland in order to spend a couple of days at his home in Weymouth.

Arriving at Harwich – our port of call – orders awaited us to commence the fishing duty by cruising for the protection of the herring fleets fishing out of Lowestoft and Yarmouth, working a week at sea and a week in harbour. This continued with the usual gales, fog and other discomforts of the North Sea at this season of the year until the middle of December.

The herring season was now drawing to a close and the date not far distant when the extra cruisers that had been detached for this special work were usually disbursed to their regular districts. We were all hoping and expecting orders to return to Kingstown and anticipating a few days leave but, instead of that, orders were received to proceed north

and take on the duty of cruising in company with, and for the protection of, the trawling fleet working on the Dogger Bank a week out and a week in, making Grimsby the headquarters.

1892

With the opening of the New Year eighteen hundred and ninety two came hard weather with strong gales, frost and snow and storm canvas. Not the type of weather one would choose for a picnic.

We returned to Grimsby for rest, provisions, water etc. What with the weather conditions and Stormy's orders that the lower deck was to be scrubbed every morning, below decks with the moisture and condensation, everything was wet and saturated. The crew were very soon laid up and on the sick list with severe chest colds, myself included. This kept us in harbour for three weeks resuming our duty as soon as the men were fit. The petty officer and myself had the worst of it, for us there was no fire. The commander had a fire in his cabin. The cooking range was in the men's quarters.

The skipper, poor fellow, was very moody and disgruntled and one afternoon he ordered that the lower mast was to be scrubbed down. That was new to me. I had never seen it done and it annoyed me as it was probably intended to do. The order was passed to the petty officer who mixed the water with so much soda and soap that as it dropped on the varnish and paintwork every drop left its mark. Stormy was not very well pleased but failed to waste any words in making that known. He gave the order and it had been obeyed.

With the closing days of March the *Hind* was relieved and ordered to Devonport for repairs and replenishing stores. On arrival at Devonport the vessel was placed in dockyard hands. Himself had twenty one days leave and the crew fourteen days to each watch. In the meantime I was kept busy refitting and preparing the ship for service. Unfortunately the Petty Officer came on board under the influence and, using threatening language towards me, had to be reported. He was dis-rated and discharged from the ship. That, I think, was partly due on the outcome of slack discipline in general. Stormy prolonged his leave to twenty eight days and when he returned we were due to sail a week later.

Wishing to have three weeks leave I made out the usual application giving seven days' notice. The regulations said ten days – not always enforced – it had to be altered before he would send it on. It was pure obstinacy. Before the expiration of ten days the ship was due to sail. The district ship was at Devonport and, on the seventh day all ready for sea, he went on board for the sailing orders. I requested him to ask the captain if I could commence my leave that day. When he returned on board he uttered not a word but just ignored me. On asking if my request was granted he replied "your leave is approved". As the ten days' notice had not expired he did not allow me to land and commence my leave but got underway and sailed for Strangford. On arrival he asked if I wanted to go on leave. My reply was "yes sir" and at once. No time was lost and I was very soon on shore and on my journey home. This shows the type of man under whom I was serving; a big burly six foot of depressing gloom with never a cheery word, a smile or a jest, casting a blight

wherever his shadow might fall. At the expiration of my leave I was reluctant to return to such conditions. However there was no alternative and I reported myself on board at Queenstown.

In several weeks we were employed in attending to the vessels of the coast guards, carrying out removals between stations.

In preparation for the naval manoeuvres, orders were received to proceed to Belfast Lough where the *Hind* would become the repeating ship for signals, thus playing a small part in the sham attack of the supposed enemy. After the close of the manoeuvres fourteen days leave was granted to each watch of all ships having taken part. This order included the *Hind*. This special granting of leave was quite unexpected so I decided to be first in the field this time. Immediately, I handed in an application for three weeks leave. My leave was approved and I was soon over the side – leaving himself to look after things in the meantime – with that delightful feeling of being equal with Stormy in regard to the little incident when sailing from Devonport.

I boarded the passenger boat from Dublin to Holyhead of a late September morning, with the sky cloudy and threatening and the wind freshening. Before leaving the river I could see that we were in for a rough crossing. By the time the vessel had got clear of Dublin Bay it was blowing a whole gale from the north coast.

Among the passengers there were about fifty soldiers who at first were standing about under the whale back deck. One by one they succumbed before the fury of Father Neptune, some finding their way down below, others prostrating themselves on the pile of parcel post baskets stowed in the fore part, all in the grip of seasickness and terrorised by the shrieking gale.

Before passing Bailey Head into the open sea there was a well-dressed gentleman and a sergeant in conversation standing just under the break of the whale back fore deck. I overheard the gentleman speculating that we were to have a rough time, that he had crossed the channel numerous times and did not think that he would be inconvenienced very much. While they were still passing a few pleasant remarks within the smooth water of Dublin Bay nothing was likely to happen.

Leaving the smooth water of the bay astern, the rough sea of the Irish Channel opened up. With the ship still travelling at a high speed – not having yet been slowed down – when she lunged into a heavy sea, boarding the vessel on the port bow, falling over the whale back onto the main deck in tons, the ship quivering from end to end by the violence of the impact. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the well-groomed gentleman in his silk hat and the six foot sergeant in his polished accruements were on their backs struggling in the water way. Assisted by one of the sailors, the gentleman was soon on his feet again consoling himself with the thought that he had got away with nothing worse than a slight blow to the head and a wet suit. Making myself comfortable in a snug corner, one could only feel sorry for the seasick land-lubbers.

One of the passengers, who appeared to be a good sailor, at least not laid out with sea sickness, was heard to remark to one of the sailors "I suppose you often get it worse than this?" "Worse than this" repeated the sailor, an Irishman, "I don't know what the divil ye want worse". The crossing took six hours instead of three, with wind and sea enough, rather too much to be comfortable.

After the expiration of the special leave, in which the skipper to his great chagrin had no part, the vessel was employed on the old familiar job of removals.

The attitude of the commander toward me was still that of silent contempt. He never addressed me by my name only 'Mister'. I had to remind him that I had a name but that made no difference.

Sometimes of an evening, when it was my duty to report at 8pm for orders, he would start talking at me – not conversing – and expect me to stand at his cabin door and listen to something that [had] no interest whatever for me. I resented standing at the cabin door to be talked at just as long as he felt inclined to keep me and very soon decided, after hearing the orders, politely to turn and walk up the ladder.

One morning this unhappy officer gave forth a fault finding grunt at me. That caused my pent up anger to break all bounds of naval discipline, opening fire and letting myself go. He heard in plain and unmistakable language all that I thought and felt of his attitude toward me. I cared not for the moment for the consequences. Any words of mine did not appear to make any visible impression but he then knew that he had gone as far as he dare go if he wished to avoid a quarter deck enquiry and that, if it came to reporting me, conclusions might not be altogether in his favour.

I was aware that I had laid myself open to a charge of gross insubordination. Finally I challenged him to report me adding "and then look out for yourself". Had I been reported, I should in all probability have had to face a court martial which might have done me irreparable harm. For certain it would have done himself no good and he was well aware of that.

Having relieved my mind I felt a bit more comfortable. As days passed and there was no reference to the matter I became aware that it was not to be a case of reporting to a higher authority. Concluding that I had quite enough of this and that I should never be comfortable or at ease sailing under such conditions I decided to seek for ways and means of getting removed from the *Hind*.

In the autumn the customs authorities became aware of the presence of a Dutch coper cruising off the south coast of Ireland disposing of tobacco etc. – which was quite in order outside of the three miles limit – and suspected that quantities of it were being landed. Orders were received to proceed south to watch the movements of this suspicious craft and to intercept him if found within the three miles limit.

A customs officer was billeted on board presumably to see that preventive measures against smuggling were properly carried out. This procedure was quite unusual and seeing that the commander, myself and the petty officer held warrants with power to arrest and

detain any person violating the laws relative to smuggling, was resented by Stormy who adopted his usual attitude of silent contempt and simply ignored his presence. The customs official did not feel very happy and I could very well sympathise with him.

There was an empty cabin but no bedding which, on hearing that this official was coming, should have been immediately obtained. He was given a cabin cushion, a rug and a couple of blankets on loan. As to his food, he joined with me on the usual navy rations scale to which something more had to be provided from one's private purse. This was something new to the customs man which he could not quite understand.

One day this official wishing to board some of the fishing boats suspected of having dealings with the coper ventured to make his wishes known to the commander. At first he took no notice but just ignored the request. This aroused the anger of the official who in the end threatened to report the matter to his department. That made the skipper think. And with that the boat was lowered and the customs man allowed to carry out his duty and board the fishing boats. Happily for the fishermen no contraband was discovered on board. For six weeks this continued, the Dutchman being careful to keep outside of the three mile limit. I felt sorry for the man and did my best to make him comfortable in his unenviable position.

In November I arranged with the mate of the *Rose*, a sister ship to the *Hind* – employed on North Sea fishing protection – whose home was at Kingstown, to ask permission to exchange ships.

The year was drawing to a close and himself had gone home on three weeks leave leaving me in charge.

1893

Early in the New Year eighteen hundred and ninety three a signal was made from the parent ship that my application to exchange with the mate of the *Rose* had been approved by the admiral commanding. To know that I would very soon step over the side of the *Hind* where my position had been so impossible and uncomfortable gave me the greatest pleasure and satisfaction.

In the middle of January orders were received to proceed to Grimsby for North Sea fishing duty. Stormy had prolonged his stay at home on the sick list. Instead of waiting for his return I was ordered to take the ship to Weymouth. Sailing from Kingstown about the twentieth of January with a fresh north east breeze it soon freshened to a strong gale with a high sea, quite enough for us in running down to the Longships. Considerable damage was done in the carrying away of spars and gear. Calling at Devonport to make good defects gave me the rare opportunity of a weekend at home.

In three days we were underway again, calling at Weymouth where the Commander re-joined, thence proceeding on passage to Grimsby. On arrival at Grimsby there was a few days delay awaiting orders when, happily for me, the cutter *Rose* arrived, thus giving me the golden opportunity of making the exchange with my opposite number without expense to ourselves.

I was inclined to show my contempt for such a charming shipmate by going over the side without speaking to him but, on second thoughts, went to his cabin and wished him good bye. He responded with his usual minimum of words. Poor fellow, I suppose he could not help himself and, quite possibly there was a reason behind it, unknown to me. It was a happy relief to me to be clear of such an undisciplined crew and such an impossible Commander, with whom I did not hit it. Whether he was glad to get rid of me I never knew. Nor did I ever see his face again.

It must be admitted that he was a hardy, fearless and dauntless seaman. Let the weather conditions be never so bad, it never appeared to disturb his equanimity. He was apt to say, if we put to sea in a gale, it would be moderate before we completed the voyage. Yet on one occasion on nearing a harbour after a hard day, thrashing to windward against a stinging north-easter he remarked "if I had my time to go over again, I would rather go down in a coal mine". He had joined the cutters when they were under the customs before being transferred to the admiralty and could therefore serve until the age of sixty. He had been late in obtaining promotion and was over fifty-five with no prospect of any better appointment.

Eventually when employed on North Sea fishing work he was warned that a captain was coming from the London office to Lowestoft to carry out the annual inspection of the ship. He immediately placed himself on the sick list and on the day of the inspection he would not come on deck to meet the inspecting officer. All the mate could get out of him was "I am sick". The inspection was not satisfactory. He was ordered to a naval hospital where he was surveyed by the medical board, pronounced unfit for further service and placed on the retired list.

1893 North Sea Police

Aboard the *Rose* in North Sea Fisheries Protection

My transfer to the sailing cutter *Rose* attached to the district ship *Galatea*, headquarters at Hull, took place on the sixth of February, eighteen hundred and ninety three.[18] This vessel was employed almost all the time on North Sea fisheries protection. The commanding officer was a free and easy person who did his part to make his crew contented and happy. It was quite a different atmosphere for me and I fully appreciated the change.

In April I was sorry to hear that the commanding officer was to be superseded by an officer with whom I had been shipmate. And knowing his weak point I did not look forward to his appointment with the greatest of pleasure. Notwithstanding his one fault, he was a free hearted, free handed, good sociable shipmate and in every way a through sailor man. He took over his command at Hull, the ship being under sailing orders for Sheerness with condemned stores.

[18] 6 February 1893 – Transfer from the *Hind* to the *Rose*, Coastguard sailing cutter – Walter Hunkin Service Record

The following day we were underway running down the Humber on passage to Sheerness, making a good run and discharging the stores at the dockyard. During the few days at Sheerness awaiting orders I had a weekend leave. In the meantime he had been indulging. A boat from a liquor store had called on board and secured an order for twelve dozen bottles of beer. On my return at midday on Monday, to my annoyance, I found this stuff had been delivered. I think if I had been on board I could have persuaded him not to make such a heavy purchase at one time.

New sailing orders were received to cruise for the protection of the trawling fleets working in the eastern part of the North Sea between the latitudes of Jutland and the Texel, the usual summer fishing grounds of the Hull, Grimsby and Yarmouth fleets.

After drawing three months' supply of provisions and stores the vessel was underway as per orders.

It was found that the bar was being consumed rather freely so that steps had to be taken to place it under lock and key. During the night I stole quietly into his cabin and placed all the bar in the spirit room of which I held the key. The next day when looking for a bottle of his beer I had to confess that I locked it away for safety. He did not express any displeasure, as he knew my motive was to exercise a little check, in that where at all times he did not control himself.

In the course of a few days we fell in with Hewitts Yarmouth fleet commonly known as the Short Blues or Barking fleet, Barking Creek in the River Thames being the original home port before making Yarmouth their headquarters. This, the largest fleet of trawlers in the North Sea numbered about two hundred smacks.

In company there was the mission ship with medical and other comforts, the inevitable Dutch coper, licensed by his government to dispose of tobacco and light wines but no spirituous liquors. Now is added the police cruiser for the maintenance of good order and discipline as between the fishing craft of different nationalities. While in company with this fleet there was a good supply of fish daily which helped out and added a little variety to the navy rations.

With large sailing fleets of trawlers working together it was absolutely necessary that there should be a leader and a system of uniformity between them in carrying on their work. That is to say the trawls should all be shot over the side about the same time, all vessels spaced out on the same tack and the trawls hove up at the same time. In order to do this an experienced skipper was deputed and recognised to act as the leader and was known as The Admiral. His movements and orders by signal were strictly followed.

After the smacks had been towing all night, their trawl net sweeping the ocean's bed, collecting a display of food for the fishmonger's stall, must reach him at the earliest possible moment.

In the middle or morning watch the signal from the Admiral would indicate "heave up"; sail would immediately be shortened on board of every smack, the warps brought to the winch and the trawls hove up. The large bag of the net was opened and its contents –

seaweed, sand, crabs, coarse oysters, all kinds of shellfish, sometimes a sea boot or some other gruesome reminder of a mate that had made his last voyage together with numerous small fish of no market value, all mixed with the prime marketable fish – shot out on deck. The crew would then sort out and pack, in fish trunks, according to quality, ready to be passed on to the retailer by the Billingsgate merchant, all saleable fish. All immature fish, still alive, together with all silt and valueless fish would be thrown back into the sea to be caught another day.

Then came the ordeal of loading the small boat and ferrying the trunks to the fish carrier, always attended with great risk and frequent loss of life, especially with strong winds and a rough winter sea. To see the small boats alongside of the carrier like ants around a beetle, clustered as close as possible with two men to a box standing well poised and ready to bang the box in on the carrier's deck as she rolled over and gave them the opportunity, was always a thrilling sight with exciting moments.

The admiral, whose smack was denoted by a special flag, after boarding his fish would sail away to the fishing ground decided on for the next haul, to be closely followed by all the smacks numbered in that particular fleet. On meeting the ground that that had been decided on for shooting the trawls the admiral would indicate to start on the port or starboard tack, as found most suitable to the direction of the wind and tide.

While the smacks were hove to near the carrier and boarding their fish we usually took the opportunity of lowering a boat and boarding some of them for particulars required for our weekly report, sent by fish carrier to the Senior Fishery Officer, at the same time receiving a few fish which the skippers were most liberal in passing over.

After cruising in company with this fleet for two weeks and requiring water and fresh meat a course was set for Heligoland. The island at this date had been conceded to the German government, the governor being a rear admiral. On arrival, as usual our commander waited on the governor who paid a return visit in person. He spoke good English, was very free and easy and offered any assistance and a welcome to such requirements as the islanders could supply.

The island has no good natural springs of fresh water. For domestic purposes the population depended on tanks. At the brewery there was an indifferent supply of a poor quality, possibly good enough for the beer. From this source we were glad to fill the water tanks.

After a couple of days, having obtained fresh provisions from Cuxhaven, together with a supply of cigars and perfumed waters for sweethearts and wives, the anchor was weighed and a course set for the fishing grounds to the northward, off the coast of Jutland.

On the second day out, the weather moderate and a smooth sea, the gunboat *Bulldog* hove in sight, also on fishing patrol. The lieutenant commander known by the pet name of Tim; a vain sort of man given to boasting and sounding his own trumpet, apt to throw his weight about should an opportunity occur, made a signal that he would 'come on board'. He was senior to our officer so there was no alternative but to accept the signal. I was sorry to hear

that Tim was coming on board as our commander was a little flush with the stuff obtained at Heligoland. Not so bad, but bad enough, as I suspected, to be unguarded in his words.

Tim paraded and inspected our ship's company, inspected the lower deck and the cabins; in fact, carried out a sort of general inspection, possibly exceeding his duty. Told our men what a smart crew he had in the *Bulldog* and how well they figured up at their last inspection, showing his inspection book which he had brought with him. No-one on board of the *Rose* was much impressed by this bit of showing off. At last Tim raised the question with our commander of handling vessels under sail – probably he had never served in a sailing ship – but he knew all about it and could box about any craft under sail under any circumstances and as no-one could teach him anything in seamanship.

The *Bulldog* was steam with fore and aft sail and Tim declared that he could take his ship into Gemunden harbour under sail alone. After listening to this braggadocio, our commander became somewhat incensed and replied: "You sail the *Bulldog* into Gemunden harbour? You go and hang your ** self". Tim remarked: "Take care you don't hang yourself", stepped into his boat, shoved off and returned to his own ship.

It may be mentioned that the mission ships, under the auspices of the 'Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen' supported by voluntary contributions, sailing in company with the trawling fleets, served a very useful purpose, attending not only to the spiritual needs but also the material wants of the fishermen. Tobacco could be obtained duty free and comforts in the way of sea clothing at a moderate price. If any of the fishermen fell sick or received an injury – the latter a very common occurrence – there was usually a doctor who had volunteered his services for a voyage – and a sick bay with medical comforts and willing attendants to nurse them back to health.

On a Sunday, divine worship was held on board and, weather permitting, any of the smack- men wishing to attend would assemble on board and enjoy the free and easy service conducted by the skipper or a clergyman who had come out for the voyage. This gave the men an opportunity of meeting with their old shipmates and friends and a friendly chat, a welcome being extended to one and all.

The smacks usually remained at sea for eight to ten weeks, obtaining water and provisions from the carrier. The crews were separated and cut off from the comforts of home, the company of wives and sweethearts, with little or no social intercourse with their fellow man, leading a hard and exposed life, rarely free from danger. Neptune was for ever letting loose his fury on their frail crafts and Davy Jones never weary in lifting the cover of his locker and claiming them in ones and twos, yea in hundreds. Fog and the snow storm, the latter their greatest enemy, always disastrous in its results, when collisions became inevitable with frequent foundering of the smacks with all hands. The ferrying of the fish during the winter, always attended with danger, had been known to claim the sacrifice of eight lives from one fleet alone on one morning and this ferrying continued day by day, week by week, through the long dreary winter season.

In the great March gales of 1893 no less than 360 smacks men and boys paid the supreme sacrifice. This disaster was always spoken of as the Great March Gale. Another disastrous

storm remembered by the smacks men of Yarmouth and Lowestoft claimed 165 lives from Yarmouth alone. An able nautical writer once declared "that of all the forms of seafaring life there is absolutely none comparable in severity, exposure, hardship and storm peril to that of a smacks man".

"The fishing fleet is driven to and fro,
Their sails are torn in ribbons by the blast
Which smites the trembling vessel on the bow,
And lays upon the deck the falling mast.
Amidst the roar of winds and crash of waves,
Swept by the billows' fury from the deck,
The smacks men sink to deep unfathomed graves,
While drifts their boat, a storm tossed, helpless wreck".

About 1850, foreign businessmen in Germany, Holland and Belgium, seeing the lonely and isolated conditions under which these men spent their lives, conceived the idea of fitting out small vessels and sending them to sea for the purpose of trading with the men of the fishing fleets. At first they appeared to have dealt fairly with the smacks men in the sale of various articles of clothing, food and tobacco at one shilling and sixpence per lb. As trade increased and a greed for gain on the one hand and a thirst for strong drink on the other, the commodities for sale were increased in the form of strong drink. A bottle of rum at eighteen pence, brandy two shillings, gin at one shilling, aniseed brandy two and three pence, all vile stuff correctly termed 'firewater'. Honest trading was very soon superseded by barter, first of rough fish, of little value in the English market, but considered as prime by the foreigners. If there was no money the foreigner would take their fish, spare sails, ropes, or nets; that was all 'monish' to him. In many instances the smacks men became so degraded and incapacitated by the vile liquor supplied by the coper that the result was that of considerable loss to the owners.

In 1892 this question became one of public interest and one Mr E J Mather put forward the suggestion of fitting out a mission ship – already mentioned – as a counter-attraction to the coper. This was carried into effect the same year.

Eventually an international commission sat for the consideration of the sale of commodities on the high seas. An agreement was reached that any vessel wishing to trade in tobacco, clothing, food, light wines etc. – spirituous liquors forbidden – must first obtain a licence from their government and that a flag should be flown with the letter S on a blue ground thus indicating that they held such licence. This, together with the influence of the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen, wrought a great change for the benefit of all smacks men and, in fact, sounded the death knell of the foreign coper (grog ship).

On reaching the northern fishing ground the Great Northern Fleet of Hull were sighted. The mission ship and the coper were present. The fleet worked on the same system as the Short Blues, a carrier arriving daily with general supplies including ice, fish trunks and the mails, loading and returning to Billingsgate with the hold full of trunks of fish. As there were no foreign trawlers or drifters working on this ground, the Hull men had it all their own way, and nothing happened needing the special attention of the fishery cruiser.

All the trawling fleets regarded the Sabbath as a day of rest, all work being reduced to a minimum. After boarding the fish the trawl remained on board until evening, giving the crews the opportunity of taking it easy, and if so inclined, to visit the Mission ship.

Remaining in company with this fleet for two weeks, in compliance with orders reaching us by the fish carrier out from Billingsgate, a course was set for Harwich. With light winds and summer calms we were several days in crossing the North Sea, the somewhat brackish drinking water obtained at Heligoland running short before reaching port.

After a week in Harwich and having replenished with provisions and water, orders were received to proceed northward, the North Sea herring season now about to commence with the drifters working between Berwick and the Tyne. The *Rose* and other cruisers were deputed for duty in company with the drift fleet, making North Shields the headquarters and working alternate weeks at sea. It was now summer, and the most pleasant time of the year for the monotonous patrol duty of the fishing cruisers.

Very soon the Dutch coper arrived on the scene with his supply of tobacco etc. for sale, open to all wishing to purchase, flying his flag with the letter S denoting that he was conducting a lawful business on the high seas and that no customs or naval authority could interfere. The fishermen could obtain tobacco at one shilling per pound and who would blame them for filling their pouches from this source.

It was, however, suspected that those with the spirit of venture and a touch of the smuggler in their blood would chance a few pounds and run the gauntlet of the customs man when returning to port with their fish. The only thing that a cruiser could do was to take the numbers of those boats making repeated visits to the coper and send the numbers for the information of the customs, whose duty it was to arrest any attempt at smuggling. Trade was not always so brisk with cruisers hovering about.

On returning to North Shields for a week in port, the vessel was moored just under the High Lighthouse, really a private house on which was erected a small light tower, from which was exhibited one of the leading lights for entering the river. This house was the property of the Tyne Commissioners who were responsible for the river navigation lights.

The light keeper in this case was usually one of the Elder Brethren, appointed to the post more for the honour than for its remuneration. In addition to the salary he had the use of this rather commodious house rent free. At this time the light keeper was an aged retired ship master, a widower and very much of a puritan, his house being run on strictly regulated lines, the door locked and lights out with great regularity. There was apt to be a very attractive and charming young lady acting in the capacity of house-keeper for the old captain now nearing eighty. Our clean and smart looking little craft, moored just under the drawing room window from whence the movement of anyone on deck could be seen, attracted the attention of the charming young lady.

HMS *Castor* was moored ahead of us; the officer in charge and his wife were on visiting terms at the lighthouse. The young lady expressed a wish to go on board the *Rose*. Our brother officer very quickly arranged this little matter with our commander. On the day

appointed the officer from the *Castor*, his wife, the young lady and her lady friend – staying with her on a visit – duly arrived on board. Everything was polished to look its best and gave our craft a yacht-like appearance. A pleasant hour was spent, a sociable cup of tea handed around and in due course, the visitors took their departure evidently well-pleased with their visit.

This was followed by an invitation to the commander and myself to visit the lighthouse to meet the old captain. On meeting the old gentleman, we found him very jolly, entertaining and hospitable. He regaled us with deep sea sailors' yarns of icebergs, whales and sharks, sea elephants and sea serpents. On the whole with the entertaining captain and the attention of the charming young lady and her friend, a pleasant afternoon passed all too quickly. Our commander, a widower, was doubtless most favourably impressed.

Being desirous of a little respite from the sea and ship routine, an application was made for three week's leave which was approved, making my way home glad of the privilege of a summer holiday.

On my return it was found that the commander had been placed on the sick list with an injured foot and not able to walk. The medical officer, an admiralty agent, had ordered his removal to sick quarters on shore for his attention, a rest and a cure. It was conveniently arranged by the doctor that he should be accommodated at the lighthouse under the care of the accommodating captain and the charming young lady. Orders from the senior fisheries officer were that the mate was to take charge, proceed to sea and carry out the patrol duties as usual.

With four weeks on shore in such comfortable quarters and no doubt special attention from the medical advisor with good nursing and landsman's comforts, he returned on board in the best of health much benefited by the change. This no doubt had the desired effect of clinching matters between the charming young lady and her patient.

The herring drifters were now fishing further to the southward and making their landings at Grimsby. It was quite time that we had followed the fleet southward and changed our port of call from Shields to Grimsby. Under the circumstances it was quite excusable if the commander was induced to make Shields the port of call as long as possible.

September now drawing to a close there was no further reason for returning to the Tyne. All hands had enjoyed the time spent at North Shields and were sorry when the day came to say goodbye to the good people that we had met there.

Making Grimsby the port of call and taking advantage of a week in dock to overhaul and refit our rigging and running gear in preparation for the winter gales, on a fine bright autumn day, with the close of the holiday season, the last of the trippers were taking advantage of a day at the seaside. The vessel was moored alongside of the dock wall and quite a number of trippers stood admiring our trim little craft and watching the blue jackets at their work on deck and aloft. The work was going on quietly and orderly. I was standing on the deck giving instructions to the petty officer when, for some inexplicable reason, one of the able seamen working at the mast head lost his balance and came hurtling down onto

the deck - a sickening sight and one long to be remembered by the bystanders. First aid was rendered; an ambulance and a doctor were soon on the spot who ordered his removal on shore.

Before reaching the hospital he had died of his injuries. Such an accident would naturally cast a gloom over the ship's company for several days. After the usual inquest and verdict of accidental death the funeral was carried out with naval honours. This having delayed us in dock over the date due for sailing, immediately on returning on board preparations were made for sea, leaving the dock on the next tide.

The most of the herring fleet were now making Lowestoft and Yarmouth the ports for marketing their fish. With Dutch, Scotch, Lowestoft and Yarmouth boats, the North Sea from Smith Knoll to the Gabbard Lightship was crowded with drifters riding at their nets with their riding lights exhibited. It was lights and more lights in every direction. It was always up to the cruisers not to be caught in the midst of the numerous drifters at night if avoidable. When this did happen it would mean hours of sailing and dodging one boat after another before reaching the outer edge of the fleet. With the steam cruisers there was always the risk of the propeller becoming entangled in the nets. Sometimes when the fleet had reached the fishing grounds and before sunset started to shoot their nets, after lighting up time the cruiser would find herself surrounded. Not a desirable position in case of a gale arising. It took us all our time to keep clear and the humble trawler was simply driven from the grounds for many weeks.

In the week in harbour, Harwich was now the port of call for all fishing cruisers employed with the drift net fleets.

With the early days of November shortening, the long and uneasy nights lengthening, our periods at sea were not quite as enjoyable as the bright days of June with the trawling fleets.

At this season of the year the drift fleet being so numerous, the admiralty had eight vessels employed, policing the fisheries from steam and from sailing cruisers. There were also Dutch and Belgian cruisers employed on this patrol.

A Great Storm 1893

On the fifteenth of November, this being the date for relieving our opposite number and resuming the patrol for a week at sea, we proceeded from Harwich with the weather moderate, passing the relieved cruisers on their way in to take up the berths vacated that morning. The fishing ground from twenty to ninety miles from Harwich was reached in comparative comfort, the weather continuing moderate until the evening of the seventeenth.

We were then cruising about fifteen miles to the south east of Smiths Knoll Lightship, with a fresh wind increasing as the night came on to a moderate gale with a rough sea. The day following, the wind having moderated and the sea gone down, the sun shining brightly and the prospects pleasing, opportunity was taken to have a good clean up both below and on

deck. It was a quiet and pleasant day, just such as that so much appreciated by the butterfly sailor, the yachtsman. It being Saturday and no Sunday market for herrings, as usual there were comparatively few drifters at sea. As it was customary for the Scotsmen to leave for home about the middle of November, some had taken their departure that day, no doubt embracing the prospects of a fine passage.

Thus the fishing ground was comparatively clear of fishing craft, and well for us it turned out that such was the case. There was a very large fleet of Dutchmen further to the eastward. These Dutch drifters were of considerable beam in proportion to their length and constructed on the lines of an oblong box, rounded at the bow and stern, very flat in the bottom, with a large hold for storing the fish in casks, which were salted on board ready for the markets. They were propelled at a slow speed, with one sail, and were designated by the English fishermen "Dutch bombs". The crews were composed of a hardy race of men, who commenced the herring season at Shetland in June, and followed the fish to the southward, continuous in their work in all weathers until the close of the season in late December and making for their home port as often as they had a well-filled hold.

On the night of the 17th the commander had not had much rest and was looking forward to a little better night. After an unusually fine day the sun went down behind a bank of cloud and the darkness of a November evening came on, with a gentle breeze and a smooth sea. Our position was about forty five miles E.S.E. of Lowestoft Ness. Sitting in the cabin with the Commander enjoying the pipe of good fellowship, with every expectation of a moderate night; about 10 p.m. he remarked that as he had a broken night on Friday he would very soon be seeking the comfort of his bunk.

Within a very few minutes the wind commenced to freshen and we soon heard the order from the deck "shorten sail". "Time to move" remarked the commander, hastily pulling on his hard weather clothes. I went through to my cabin, pulled on my sea boots and oilskin coat and hastened on deck. Faster than I write, the wind was rapidly freshening. Word was passed for all hands and rouse out the watch below. There was evidence of an approaching storm, sail must be shortened, boats got in on deck and everything made snug and secure in preparation for the worst – knowing that after a North Sea winter gale there is usually a tale to be told. With the greatest difficulty the small sail we were under was further reduced, the topmast housed, boats secured, bow-sprit run in, and all made ready for whatever might come. By the time this had been done the full weight of the storm was on us from the north coast, accompanied with torrential rain and blowing with hurricane force. The jib had not been shifted for a smaller sail, a matter of some importance. With the force of wind, the Commander was afraid to meddle with it, thinking it would soon blow away, when, if possible, the storm jib could be set. The expected seldom happens. It held on through the gale, to the discomfort of the vessel, which would have stood up to the punishment much easier under the spitfire.

We were now being driven away, before the gale, as helpless as a raft. In reality, a hundred miles an hour hurricane – over fifty two pounds pressure to the square foot – buried in sea, spindrift and rain, and as dark as pitch. For an instant a bright light appeared right ahead, probably a flare, shown when quite close by a poor fellow as helpless as ourselves. Then

again a craft passed under the lee, close alongside, just cleared each other and nothing to spare. It was felt that the risk of collision was one of our greatest dangers. Would we drive afoul of another craft and batter one another to pieces?

And as hour after hour passed without any abatement of the storm, not knowing what might happen from one minute to another. A night of fury and terror; Neptune was doing his uttermost to sweep the sea clean of every craft afloat. The eighteenth of November was my birthday. There was a passing thought that it was quite possible it might prove to be the last of birthdays.

As soon as the vessel was snugged down and nothing more could be done, the Commander's one weakness immediately became apparent by his ordering me to draw him a pint of rum from the store locker. His ration was a half a gill of rum a day, the same as any man. Knowing quite well that if that order was obeyed what would happen, he would soon require more and the responsibility would be left with me. Under the circumstances I said "no, but you can have a gill". That proved sufficient for several hours. The keys of the spirit room – by his approval – were always in my possession and he knew that I was acting in the best interest of himself and all hands by declining to draw unlimited drink for himself.

The storm raged with unabated fury all through the night. The refit of running gear at Grimsby stood up to the storm. Not a rope or a pin gave away and the little craft behaved very well. The weight of the wintry blast pressed her lee bulwarks under the sea thus far and no further and when apparently she was at her last and could suffer no more, with a super effort she would lift and free her deck only to be pressed under the following minute. Thus it continued until the break of day.

Shortly after daylight the first craft sighted was a Scotsman, like ourselves hove to under a rag of canvas. As we passed at no great distance a heavy breaking sea curled right over the drifter which led the Commander to remark "there is nothing movable left on her deck". Drifting past she was soon lost to sight. Other craft were sighted, some hove to, others running away before the wind and sea – one a Dutch steam patrol. With the poor visibility …… the chance of sighting a lightship or a mark buoy on the shoals or sands and so round the South Foreland to the more sheltered waters of the channel. Our companion cutter for the week out was driven away to the southward and eventually found shelter at Newhaven with loss of canvas, spars, and other damages.

In company with the Commander we kept the deck ready to act in any emergency – until daylight when the Commander went below for a meal and a couple of hours rest. At ten a.m., the nineteenth, he relieved the deck and I had a couple of hours rest. The storm was still raging with a high sea and our position uncertain. To bear away for the shelter of Harwich harbour would be attended with too great a risk. So far we had no loss or damage. There was no alternative but to ride it out to a finish.

During the afternoon the wind lulled a little. Naturally we thought the worst had passed but, alas, in the first dog watch it had again increased and by eight p.m., the commencement of the first watch, had reached storm force. The vessel had throughout the

gales made so much leeway and had been driven so many miles to leeward that by midnight the Gabbard Light was in sight. This did at least give us our position and was estimated to be distant five to six miles, dead under our lee. With the Gabbard sand – which in its long history had torn the deck from many a storm tossed craft – right to leeward of a pitch dark night blowing a whole storm, and the sea lashing your frail craft with increasing fury, to say the least, was not calculated to induce the most pleasing thoughts even in the most stout-hearted.

What with the sea finding its way below into the living quarters and the difficulty of keeping a fire or preparing hot food we all had a pretty bad time. In the middle watch – twelve to four – some of the men now showing signs of strain through the heavy washing we had experienced for so many hours – the Commander ordered "splice the main brace", an extra allowance of rum was issued to each man.

At daybreak on the Monday, being then about one mile to windward of the light ship, with no sign of any abatement in the gale, orders were given to slacken the sheets and allow the vessel to move through the water in order that she would fetch inside the sandbank. As soon as this was done and she gathered a little weigh with the high sea running, she completely buried herself, the water going over her as it would over a half tide rock. This was attended with the risk of losing the mast or other damage. Very soon the vessel was again hove to and fortunately drifted inside between the Gabbard and Shipwash sands. During this bit of manoeuvring a sea swept the Chief Petty Officer off his feet, throwing him against the skylight injuring his leg and causing him to stay on shore for several weeks.

By noon our hearts were cheered to find the wind moderating with the prospect of making a harbour before nightfall. As soon as the conditions of wind and sea permitted, a decision was reached to put the helm up and run for Harwich harbour. The wind was still blowing with the force of a gale. In due course the anchor was dropped within the sheltered waters of the desired haven between four and five p.m., after fifty six hours as tough a gruelling as any sailor could meet with in a lifetime. A strongly built vessel, good canvas and good gear, stood up to the strain bringing us safely through where many craft not so well found were lost. For loss and destruction in shipping around the British islands the gale was reported to be without precedent with a recording of one hundred and seventy one wrecks.

With us the wind was steady north east, but near the coast line the wind veered around the compass, bringing ships at anchor for shelter in the Downs, Dungeness Bay, Portland, Falmouth, Penzance and St Ives bays on a lee shore. The coast was strewn with wrecks, ships riding at anchor in shelter being driven ashore with the change of wind, with appalling loss of life. In St Ives this storm is well remembered and to this day forty four years after is spoken of as the "Century" gale. Three steamers were driven ashore, one named "Century", in the case of two with the loss of all hands. Several of the Scots drifters that left Yarmouth on the Saturday failed to reach their home ports.

Many, many there be, oh, greedy sea,
Who have found their grave and all in thee;
And many more who pace thy shore

Wearily wishing their life were o'er.
Thou heedest them not, cruel sea,
It concerneth thee not the sorrows that be –
The many wrecks, and the widows' weeds,
Memorials sad of thy cruel deeds.
Call them not cruel, the deeds are thine,
But neither wish, nor will, nor act of mine.
Here we pass to the Ruling Power
Which shapes the life and the little hour.

Rev. W Johnson

A Sneak

After the usual turn in harbour and the storm forgotten, the patrol with the herring drifters was resumed, and so the days of November and December passed, the number of drifters dwindling daily and everyone on board looking forward to a few days leave at Xmas.

The vessels employed on the fishing patrol were dismissed by the senior fishing officer on the 20th of December with orders to return to their respective stations. On this date the *Rose* was at Harwich, the weather rather stormy. There was however no time to lose if we were to arrive at Hull and home in time for the Xmas dinner. On the 22nd, although the outlook was not very inviting, an order from the senior officer present, received by signal "proceed in execution of orders" brooked no further delay. Accordingly we were soon unmoored, the sails set and underway. With the weather moderating and a fair passage the Queen's Dock at Hull was entered on the morning of the 24th. The Commander, after reporting to the senior officer, returned with orders that the first watch could immediately proceed on sixteen days leave; I, having been granted twenty one days, no time was lost in boarding the train and setting out for home. Arriving at St Austell the following day, my lady friend joined me and together we journeyed to her home where the Xmas dinner awaited us.

After four days of my leave had expired, on a Saturday afternoon a telegram was received "return to your ship immediately". Guessing that something had gone wrong on board the *Rose*, in accordance with orders I set out forthwith on my return journey to Hull, feeling rather disappointed that my long expected leave had been so abruptly terminated and having to leave my honoured father who was nearing his end and whom I was never to see again. The long and dreary train journey through the night landed me on the following morning at the colliery village of Normanton. Not a very cheerful situation, seeing there was no train for Hull until Monday morning. There was no hotel, not even a place for a cup of tea, so there was no alternative but to hang about and make the best of it. The hours passed slowly and wearily but it gave me my only chance of seeing a colliery village. About eight p.m. a couple of railway officials hove in sight, who informed me that a theatrical party passing through to Hull by special train would stop at Normanton and possibly they might allow me to take a seat. This cheered me considerably seeing that I had expected a night in the station waiting room. On the train drawing up at the station I

modestly approached the theatrical manager, who lent a sympathetic ear to my story and kindly consented to my sharing his coach for which kindness I was most thankful.

Arriving at Hull at the close of a very depressing journey I wended my way to the Queen's Dock got on board my ship and to my own room, glad of such comfort as that afforded. It was certainly preferable to a railway station waiting room.

The Commander, who remained on board with one petty officer and part of the crew, intending to take his leave at a later date and fit in the wedding at the same time, had apparently during my absence been celebrating his birthday.

A day had been appointed for certain officers from the parent ship to come on board to carry out the annual survey of stores, repairs required etc. In the morning that these officers came on board the senior lieutenant, a hard stern man with a sallow complexion and piercing dark eyes, one of those men apparently always ready to pounce on a weak stumbling subordinate, brought with him the doctor whose duty by the way would be to examine the medical stores.

When they arrived on board the stores were not ready, the Commander was in his bed and not able to get out when called by the petty officer. After waiting some time the senior lieutenant ordered Sawbones to go below and ascertain the cause of the non-appearance of the commander. On the medical officer returning on deck and making his report the surveying officers immediately took their departure.

The outcome of the visit of the surveying officers to the cutter *Rose* having been laid before the district captain, he ordered the placing under arrest of the Commander and of his removal to the district ship. Certain charges were laid against him and the case submitted to the Admiral Commanding Coast guard and Rescue, who, after a few days, without even informing him of the offence with which he was charged or giving him an opportunity to offer a defence ordered that he was to apply for his pension. The application having been prepared he was allowed to proceed on leave to await its award. His marriage to the charming young lady took place very soon after. This early ending to his service career was naturally a great blow – more especially as he was awarded a petty officer's pension instead of that of his rank as he expected; an unusually severe punishment for the first offence.

Let us turn back to the incident in the North Sea previously mentioned when Tim came on board.

In the same sense as the *Rose*, the *Bulldog* was a tender to the district ship at Hull and when at that port the officers were apt to be on visiting terms with the officers of the parent ship, spending time in the ward room and smoking room. I have not the least doubt that on the *Bulldog* returning to Hull, Tim must have told the story in the smoking room of his meeting with the cutter *Rose* and boarding her in the North Sea, enlarging on his impressions of the Commander, thus prejudicing the first lieutenant against the day that the *Rose* would return to Hull and the lieutenant commander remembering this, when coming on board for survey brought with him the medical officer and that for an express purpose.

Mr X thinking his treatment unfair made representation and opened up correspondence with the proper authority with the result that the Admiralty proposed to reinstate him and to try him by a court martial. But this proposal he declined to accept. That was a fair proposal on the part of the ruling authority and as he declined to accept nothing further could be done. I think it would have been wise to have accepted the court martial. It was a first offence. He would have appeared before a board of naval officers – a guarantee of justice – in all probability dismissed his ship and very soon reappointed elsewhere. If he then thought that he could not trust himself, an invaliding trick could have been tried – under such circumstances by no means unknown – leaving the service with a pension according to his rank.

1894 A Comfortable Ship

The ship was now due for general repairs and was placed in the hands of a shipbuilding firm for that purpose. That gave us a few weeks in dock and wore away the hard months of Jan, Feb and March. After a few weeks another officer was appointed to the command of the cutter *Rose*, joining early in March. He was an officer with whom I was well acquainted having been shipmates and I was sure of having a comfortable time under his command.

Under ordinary conditions it had been my intention to ask for a few days leave in February for the purpose of making one at a wedding party. But being in temporary charge and responsible for the refitting this was now out of the question. It was arranged that my fiancée should come to Hull and that the nuptial knot should be tied there. In due course she came along and our first move was to look up the registrar in order to make the necessary arrangements. On making enquiry for the office of the said official I was informed it was in the land of "Green Ginger". Never having heard of the district it was concluded that my informant was jesting. Enquiring still further it was found that my first informant was correct, "The Land of Green Ginger" being a certain street in the city of Hull. Interviewing the chief clerk, he asked the question what day we desired the ceremony to take place. And when informed on Friday, the sudden change of expression on his countenance was a study, denoting that he was sorry for us proposing to take such a step and so much risk as to wed on that day. We explained that there was no time to lose and that we wished to get the job over. His reply was "no-one ever got married on that day" and further that it would inconvenience the registrar as he usually took the day off. Arrangements were then made for the necessary official to present himself at the place appointed on Saturday. The Rev John Elsworth officiated. It was a plain and private affair but nevertheless Elsworth made such a good job of the splicing that the ends have never drawn asunder in the least, standing the strain perfectly.

In early April, the vessel having undergone a thorough refit, we sailed from Hull with orders to take on the patrol with the trawling fleets on the eastern fishing grounds of the North Sea. Having ascertained the grounds on which the smacks were working, within a couple of days we made contact with a large Hull fleet working to the northward of Heligoland. The Mission Ship and the Dutch coper had already appeared on the scene. Day by day the routine went on – shooting, and heaving up the trawls, packing and ferrying the

fish to the carrier with visits to the coper for tobacco, and the Mission Ship for attention to injuries of various degrees -poisoned hands, sea boils and other troubles common to the smacks man. This was the fine weather season and the police patrol was carried out with no great discomfort to anyone.

After eighteen days out, a course was set for Heligoland for a supply of water and fresh provisions. On arrival the usual courtesies were observed and the authority of the governor attained to remain for that purpose.

It was of the greatest interest that one observed that the fortification of the island under German control was now going on apace. Vast sums of money were being expended on the construction of a breakwater to make the anchorage safe at all times. Strong concrete facing was being built where the face of the cliffs was crumbling. Heavy gun platforms and encasements were in course of erection. The island had undergone a considerable change since our visit the previous summer. It was evident that it would soon be a stronghold to be reckoned with - as we truly discovered in the Great War. The visits to the island by the fishing cruisers did not continue to find favour with the German government for long. Probably they thought that notes might be made of all that was going on, and more seen than they would desire. Consequently the following year the port of call was changed from Heligoland to Esbjerg in Denmark.

After leaving the islands a visit was paid to the 'Short Blues', a Yarmouth fleet of smacks working on the Borkum flats, a very prolific ground in medium size plaice at this season of the year. In certain patches on this fishing ground the trawls were apt to entangle and bring up quantities of oysters of a large coarse variety of no market value. Frequently our men would secure a bucket or two and fish out the most edible which they were glad to have by way of a change. The previous summer one of the men had found a small pearl in one of the oysters which he succeeded in selling for a great price. Now the more oysters they could get the better they were pleased. Everyone prizing open the shells diligently searching for the coveted prize which alas they failed to find.

One Sunday afternoon the search for pearls having gone on without any luck, and the oysters looking so tempting, a tub of the smaller ones was selected for consumption, the men devouring them rather freely. After an elapse of time Murphy, an Irishman, came to my cabin complaining that he was not feeling well.
"What's wrong with you?"
"It's a pain I have below here sir".
"Ah that's nothing; you will be all right after a while".
Murphy, certainly looking a bit woebegone, added "It's sick I am sir"
"Go to the cook and get a good drink of hot water, that will put you right".
As suggested, he obtained and drank the water and soon afterwards became violently sick. Others followed, changing their sunburnt brown appearance for that of a sallow green, very soon to hang their heads over the side feeding the fishes. A drink from the 'fore-topman's bottle' – number one in the medicine chest – set them all right by morning. There was evidently something disagreeable in these deep water oysters to upset the men as they

did. Or possibly it was the result of oysters for nothing 'struck them down'. That day was long after remembered as Oyster Sunday.

Having completed the usual period with the fleet of smacks a course was set for Harwich. Owing to light winds and calms our progress in crossing the North Sea was very slow, with the result on the last day out we were down on the last case of biscuits.

On the expiration of our week in harbour fresh orders were received to proceed northwards and cruise for the protection of the herring drifters working between Berwick and Hartlepool; making the later port the headquarters for mails and supplies. With fine summer weather there was nothing to complain of in this duty.

Under the commander, Mr H. Smith, the crew had settled down comfortably and we were what is generally termed 'a happy ship'. He was of a quiet genial disposition, never got flustered, most conscientious in carrying out his duty, a firm disciplinarian setting an example in himself, genial with his men – by whom he was highly respected – without losing dignity or authority.

By the commencement of October Grimsby had become our headquarters. One particular afternoon, it being the date for putting to sea, it was flowing strong with an angry and threatening sky. The vessel was towed out of dock and under such weather conditions it was fully expected the Commander would bring the vessel to an anchor in the river, but with A. S. orders were orders, and although sailing craft of all descriptions were running into the Humber for shelter, we proceeded to sea. I ventured to remark that "I would hesitate to put to sea on such an evening, even to please a king". He replied it was his duty and he saw no reason to the contrary. In the first watch the vessel had to be snugged down under close reefed canvas and hove to, to ride out a strong north east gale when we might have remained in the river without a question from anyone.

The next week in harbour was at Harwich, this being the port of call during November and December. These rest periods gave me the opportunity of spending a little time on shore with my wife, an agreeable change after sixteen years and very little of that time clear of the ship.

The herring season now drawing to a close had passed with nothing of importance calling our attention.

In the middle of December after a week at sea, the *Rose* was dismissed, proceeding direct to Hull – the port of the parent ship – to give Xmas leave and to refit. We arrived at Hull and berthed in the Queen's dock on the 17th December. The crew were granted the usual annual leave, the Commander took the opportunity of taking three weeks leaving me in charge.

On Xmas day the watch on board were allowed the usual liberty for merry-making and enjoyment. The Xmas dinner composed of goose and turkey with the usual trimmings followed by a plum duff – made from a recipe known only to the cook – having been disposed of, and the mess deck cleared up, a few friends came on board for tea. Everything was carried on orderly and everyone having an enjoyable time.

Immediately after tea the visitors landed, some of the men who had been granted leave landing at the same time. Seeing there was nothing out of the ordinary going on, about 7pm leaving the petty officer in charge, I landed to join my wife at our rooms. At 9 pm a man came to tell me that one of the crew had fallen into the dock and had not been rescued.

Proceeding on board immediately, it was ascertained that the man had been on shore for a short time. On his way back to the ship, in the darkness and deceptive light, he had walked into the dock. It happened quite close to the ship and the watchman hearing the splash gave the alarm of "man overboard". The petty officer and others rushed to the spot with the lifebuoy and lines but they were too late. He sank immediately and nothing could be done. By grappling, the body was soon recovered, life being extinct; a sad ending to the Xmas festivities. There was a verdict of accidental death and the funeral carried out with naval honours.

1895

Early in January the North Sea and the northern counties were swept by a very severe hurricane accompanied with a heavy fall of snow. A number of smacks that had probably been in port over the Xmas holidays had put to sea from Hull and Grimsby that day. They soon fell right into the teeth of the storm with the result that ten Hull and three Grimsby smacks foundered with all hands. The damage to house property in the city of Hull was very considerable. This was succeeded by a severe frost that continued for several weeks, the dock being frozen to a great depth and the River Humber full of floating ice, hanging up shipping and making navigation difficult. This great frost was general over the country and nothing to equal it has been experienced since.

An unusual sight in this country was that of a steamer from the Baltic that had encountered the blast of the snow storm and the freezing conditions while crossing the North Sea. Where the sea had been skirting her on the starboard side, together with the frozen snow, the vessel was a solid mass of ice from stern to shore. Such a sight being so rare, thousands of people visited the dock to see the ice ship.

In connection with the loss of the smacks already mentioned, a subscription list had been opened in the interest of the dependents of those lost. At this time there was a noted theatrical party holding the board for the pantomime season. It was arranged that this party – in costume – should play a noted football team, the gate money to go to the lost smacks fund. On the appointed day many thousands of people assembled in the grounds to witness the game which was carried out under anything but the orthodox rules and full of amusing incidents unknown to football.

The snow which had been lying on the ground for three weeks was still frozen and very slippery. The enclosure was crowded. Mr H.S., my wife and myself were standing where the ground sloped a little. By some means I slipped and losing my balance brought down Mr H. S. and my wife, they in turn bringing down several others. This caused great amusement to the more fortunate and added to the fun of the fair. To see one after another prostrating themselves and that quite involuntary!

My First of Steam – the *Seamew*

In February word came of my promotion to Senior Mate and of my appointment to HMS *Seamew*, a steam cruiser attached to the Harwich district built in 1852.[19] Fore and aft rigged on three masts and intended with low power engines for steam and sail combined. As a schoolboy I had been friendly with the son of the coast guard officer who would allow us the use of the boat when it was afloat in readiness when the *Seamew* was expected. Often I saw this old craft creep into Mevagissey bay to embark the coast guards for their drill or annual cruise on board of the district ship, little thinking at the time that I should one day join the navy and serve as one of her officers.

On the 22nd February I bade farewell to my shipmates including Mr H. S., my highly respected commander with whom I had spent two very pleasant years, and proceeded to Harwich to take up my appointment. The Commander who appeared to be quite affable extended to me a hearty welcome. That impressed me as being a good start and promised well for my comfort as his senior mate. He was a dapper little man with a very red face. His skin was tender and sometimes, with the combined effects of the sun and sea spray, his face was the colour of a boiled lobster. He was a kindly disposed, quiet, good-tempered and sociable shipmate. Easy to live with – that stands for much on shipboard – but a weak disciplinarian, lacking in personality, a timid and faint-hearted seaman.

Seeing that I had served in sailing cruisers from the age of eighteen, the changeover to steam was a new and pleasant experience. Although the primitive, low power, horizontal engines would only drive the 'old bus' seven knots in smooth water, and that conditional that it was not necessary to waste steam in sounding the whistle too frequently. With her finely built lines and the help of sail, with a fresh breeze she would easily do ten knots.

She had a clean and spacious deck and excellent cabin accommodation. The Commander occupied the main saloon cabin, the senior mate right aft to himself, with a sleeping berth off his main cabin. The second mate had a roomy cabin on the forward side of the engine room. There was a clean and open mess deck with ample room for the petty officers and men; a really comfortable old craft.

In the first two months after taking up my appointment the vessel was employed in the removal of coast guards with their families and effects from one station to another. Quite a comfortable employment and work easily carried out when compared with removal by a sailing cutter. On completion of this round of duties the vessel was ordered to Lowestoft for general repairs, the contract having been given to a private firm at that port.

We berthed at moorings close to the ship building yard in readiness for entering the dry dock.

On a Sunday afternoon when the yard was closed, everything quiet, nothing moving in the harbour and very few people about or on board of the various craft moored above the bridge, the wind suddenly commenced to rise, rapidly increasing to the force of a storm,

[19] 22 February 1895 – Joined HM Steamer *Seamew* as Senior Mate – Walter Hunkin Service Record

carrying everything before it. A new house in course of erection within sight collapsed, a workshop in the builder's yard had its roof torn off and carried a considerable distance like an umbrella. Boats and yachts broke away from their moorings. Vessels' sails not securely furled were soon torn adrift and beaten to rags. A thirty foot yawl on the shore rolled over and over like a barrel. I was anxious lest we might break adrift, extra ropes and chains were soon got out, thus enabling us to hold on in safety. This storm, which lasted for two hours, was rather remarkable in that it was quite local in its extent, only covering a few miles but leaving a lot of damage in its track.

On completion of the repairs the vessel left Lowestoft under orders for Sheerness, there to embark sundry stores for distribution to all coast guard stations in the Harwich district.

Sheerness, the headquarters of the Commander in Chief of the Nore, was under the command of a most exacting officer. He was well-known in the service for his accuracy in dress and pride in his personal appearance. It has been said that, when in his office, an officer would never be admitted until he was first attired fit for the interview and that he kept a pair of trousers in which he never sat down, thus maintaining the straight line of the crease in perfection! Consequently everyone under his command had to be always on their guard with special attention to detail.

It was the custom every Sunday morning at the church parade of all naval ratings for the ships' companies of all small ships in the harbour to land for parade and inspection by the Admiral. At these inspections he was most particular as to the correctness of uniform, both of officers and men. No detail, however small, would miss his eye. Some few months previous the regulations had been altered in reference to officers' sword belts. Being a little slack in this respect, I had not as yet had my belt brought up to date. After arriving on the parade ground with the men all ready for inspection and knowing that my uniform was incorrect and that it would probably call for a snub from the Admiral, I was not feeling very well pleased with myself. After a short time, a fellow officer – a perfect stranger – one of the barrack staff, spotted my belt. He remarked "you'll be for it directly, old man. The admiral will be sure to spot that belt. Anyway I am not on duty this morning; you had better have mine, that will save you". Gratefully accepting his kind offer I passed the muster without comment - a trifling incident, but under naval discipline counting for very much, and showing the spirit of comradeship in the service.

With the distribution of stores and a few removals thrown in, the fine summer months soon passed, bringing us to September when the senior fishing officer would be asking for extra vessels for the drift nets patrol. The *Seamew* was detached for this duty, making Harwich the port of call for the week in. The large fleet working from Lowestoft and Yarmouth were attended by the usual number of patrol vessels, the duty continuing until late December with nothing of special interest to record.

The commencement of the New Year found us at Harwich giving annual leave to the crew. On the expiration of the leave-giving period orders were received to proceed with the removal of a batch of coast guards with their families occupying several weeks. In early April the vessel was ordered to Yarmouth for annual refit in a private yard. By the middle of May we were again on fishing duty cruising for the protection of the herring fleet. One

fine morning after the usual muster and inspection, the commander ordered the carrying out of cutlass drill. Instead of leaving it to the petty officer, I took charge of the drill party carrying on with the drill on the quarter deck. After a few minutes one of the ordinary seamen turned sulky and threw his cutlass on the deck – under the Naval Discipline Act a very serious offence, bringing a sure three months imprisonment. I was sorry to see this and not wishing to see the young fellow punished, and to give him a chance, gave the order 'ground swords'. I then approached the youth and whispered to him not to be foolish and when the order was given 'take up swords' to obey the order, reminding him of the seriousness of disobeying. On resuming the drill and giving the order 'take up swords' he remained defiant disregarding the order. The commander who was on the bridge making a note of this little incident descended from the bridge and ordered me to fall the man in on the quarter deck. He simply gave the order 'about turn' and returned to the bridge leaving the man standing facing the bulwarks. There the fellow stood hour after hour, mute and silent, probably considering what the end would be. At nightfall he was dismissed and thus the incident was closed. The commander, not wishing to injure the young fellow, took this simple course of punishment, instead of the more drastic according to the regulations.

This ding dong of a week out and a week in continued until the middle of September when the vessel was withdrawn from fishing duties for the purpose of embarking the District Captain for the inspection of his coast guard stations. During his time on board I was sorry to see the Commander – a pleasant and sociable shipmate – liable to an occasional lapse, in such a condition that he could scarcely stand on the bridge. The captain, who was on deck took no notice, at least he did not appear to do so. Of course while you can stand and carry on no-one can accuse you of being unfit.

In October the commander, not being well, was placed on the sick list and remained ashore for treatment for several weeks during which period the senior mate was authorised to take charge and continue with the fishing patrol to which we had returned. During one week out in November we struck a heavy south west gale which gave the old craft and the engines a severe testing. The engines were not powerful enough to keep her head on to the wind and sea, consequently it became necessary to set the storm canvas and heave to, thus riding out the gale in that way.

December – the commander now being back to duty – brought with it severe gales and heavy snow storms, making the drift net fishing very trying for the fishermen. Like ourselves, they were not sorry to reach the close of the season. About the 20th the patrol vessels were dismissed, the *Seamew* returning to the headquarters at Harwich from whence the crew were granted the usual Xmas leave.

The smuggling of liquor on board of HMShips is always considered a serious offence and to show to what extent men will try it on the following little incident will show. The assistant ship's steward, who had been a petty officer and had been dis-rated in another ship, on one occasion when returning from leave, coming off in a shore boat, instead of coming inboard by the gangway – the deck being clear except for the watchman who turned a blind eye – he climbed in over the bow. It so happened that I came on deck just at the moment that he landed on the deck. Seeing this little irregularity the chief petty officer

was sent for and ordered to fall the steward in on the quarter deck, suspecting there was a reason for not using the gangway to get inboard. The chief petty officer was ordered to search the man. Doing this casually there was no result. When ordered to try again, a bottle of whisky was produced. He had laid himself open to severe punishment. I am sure the CPO was sorry for the unfortunate steward and would screen him if he could. Having no desire to see him punished and to give him a chance, the C P O was ordered to break the bottle over the side. With a mild caution he was thus dismissed, the matter to go no further; the watchman, only, being a witness of this little episode.

The second mate, a man of great stature and broad shoulders, with a deep stentorian voice, cultivated on the hills of Devon, had no way of getting the best out of the men. He was for ever rubbing them up the wrong way and yet he would never press a charge against anyone for punishment but his deep-toned voice and strong language would be apt sometimes to turn the men sulky. It was on these occasions that the senior mate was called on to play the part of peace-maker and smooth things out. This was easily done, as the men regarded his outbursts as so much froth and bluster and all on the surface.

He was the greatest authority on the theory of navigation that I had ever sailed with and by figures could prove any problem. The influence of tidal streams or ocean currents could be ascertained by a simple sum in arithmetic. Error of the compass from whatever cause arising could be most easily adjusted. There was little that he did not profess to know about the safe navigation of the ocean highways from all and every aspect.

In due course promotion found him in command of a very fine steam coast guard cruiser. In the first year of his command – with all his professed knowledge of the science of navigation – he placed his vessel on the rocks twice with the result that he lost his command. So much for theoretical against practical navigation!

It must be said that this officer was a comfortable mess mate, always willing to help the senior mate in every way, consequently there was no disagreement and the days passed pleasantly.

The second mate who relieved our friend from Devon – a perfect stranger to me – was a native of Wales. Quite a different type of man with a dark sullen expression, silent, aloof, sulky, appeared to be without a ray of sunshine in his make-up. Resented any order from the Senior Mate and was more of a hindrance than a help in carrying out the ship's routine. This became so pronounced that I found the conditions so intolerable that I could not possibly sit at the same table to take a meal. That was not very pleasant and I was not sorry when the time came for us to part company.

In the chief engine room officer we had another type of man to deal with - a Scot by birth. One of those sea lawyers that would like to question any authority the senior mate dared to exercise over the engine room staff, maintaining that he was responsible to the commander only, fond of quoting the King's regulations in all things; just one of those men that would get on the back of any officer if he had half a chance. He had to be kept in his place by a firm hand, given direct and concise orders – without a second word – that had to be obeyed

or take the consequences. Some are apt to make life and duty stiff and strained, when it might well be free and easy. This man was one of those.

1897

The early months of 1897 were spent on the usual coast guard work followed by a period in dock at Yarmouth for annual repairs. During our stay at that port celebrations in connection with the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria were carried thorough by the civic authorities. The *Seamew* being the only naval ship in the port, the Commander, officers and crew attended representing the navy.

In July orders were received that the vessel was placed at the disposal of the senior fishing officer for fishing duties. After a period at sea, on returning to Harwich I became aware of my appointment as senior mate in command of a second class cruiser stationed on the east coast of Ireland.

My two years and five months service in the *Seamew* was really a very pleasant time. I was on the best of terms with the commander. There was no trouble with the crew; they always worked well and never once grumbled when called on to put in some extra or special work. On the whole there was a mutual good feeling and those days long past one can now recall with pleasure. Some of the petty officers and seaman that I had the pleasure of meeting years after did well, rising to officer rank; two of them, J H Feadon and James B Newman obtaining the rank of lieutenant commander.

My First Command 1897

Aboard the *Flora* off the Irish coast

On 12th July, bidding goodbye to the *Seamew* I boarded the train en-route for Kingstown, the headquarters of the cutter *Flora* to which I had been appointed. Arriving the following morning, the *Flora* not being in the harbour, I reported myself on board HMS *Melampus*, the coast guard ship. That evening the *Flora* arrived and the next day the Senior Mate in command turned over his responsibilities to me and left to take up his new appointment.[20]

Within a few days we were underway distributing coast guard stores along the east coast of Ireland. This district extended from Lough Foyle to Crook Haven, a long stretch of coastline and only two tenders for all the work, one gunboat and one cutter and the gunboats frequently on detached duty. Consequently there was always plenty of work and very little idle time. No sooner would one list of orders be executed than another was forthcoming. This appointment turned out to be very tiresome work, seeing as there was far too much for one small cutter and a gunboat and for me it meant long and wearisome watches and much broken rest.

At the end of the year when the usual period for submitting a list of repairs required, and it being a good many years since heavy repairs were carried out, a long list was prepared that

[20] 15 July 1897 Assumed command of HMCr *Flora*, sailing cutter as 2nd Mate – Walter Hunkin Service Record

would lead into hundreds of pounds, at the same time pointing out that a general survey was long overdue and suggesting that the vessel be sent to Devonport for that purpose, with the hope that the repairs required would not be considered worth the expense and that the old craft would be condemned. Unquestionably the time for abolishing the sailing cutters and replacing them by steam had fully arrived but the gentleman sitting on the office stool at the Admiralty, always averse to change, was not yet convinced that such was the case.

With the approach of the Xmas season the usual annual leave was granted, myself remaining at my post of duty.

In due course the submission that the *Flora* be sent to Devonport for survey was approved and orders received to that effect.

For some weeks there had been a succession of south west gales and Kingstown Harbour was packed with wind bound coasters. Having orders for Devonport, like the wind bound coasters, we were waiting for the favourable opportunity. In company with a number of other windjammers two attempts were made to get away with the result that on account of the bad weather all had to hard up and run back to Kingstown.

On the second occasion of running back an attempt was made to pass through Dalkey Sound inside Dalkey Island, but miscalculating the set of the tide and losing the wind, for a few minutes there was a danger of going up on the rocks. The end of the *Flora* appeared to be in sight causing me to experience an unpleasant sensation. However by prompt action and a little manoeuvring we got clear of a tight corner.

1898

After further delay bringing us to the middle of February with indications of an improvement in the weather, and the wind north west, all the wind bounders were setting sail. With the clanking of the windlass – a sound that has passed into history – the mud-hooks were soon raised and the skippers with a light heart and more cheerful outlook were sailing gaily to the southward. But, alas, the cheerful outlook was of brief duration; by nightfall the promising north-wester had expended itself and the wind backed to the south west, the coasters turning back one by one. During the day's run good progress had been made, out-sailing the black diamond carriers. There were now only two three-mast schooners ahead of us which were soon lost to sight.

By midnight the Tuskar light was in sight, but none of the coasters in view. The wind was now back to south west and not much prospect of a run down to the Longships. Being disinclined to run back to Kingstown it was decided to heave-to while it was still daylight. At 4 a.m. the wind veered to the north west, the sheets were eased and a course set for the Longships. Making a good day's run with wind enough, before darkness set in the mainsail was stowed and the storm trysail set in preparation for any strong wind that might arise during the night. At 4 a.m. the Longships light was in sight and soon we were running away for the Lizard with a free sheet. By increasing sail at daylight, anchor was dropped in Falmouth harbour that evening. After a stay of three days, sail was set for Devonport; on

leaving the harbour one of the three mast schooners mentioned was sighted, she had just then arrived.

On arrival at a naval port it is customary after making the number to await instructions as to where you are to moor. After waiting some time without receiving the signal, I ventured to proceed up the Hamoaze, with a fresh wind and strong tide and not much room to play about under sail, made fast to a buoy. Not having received permission so to do, this constituted an offence under the port regulations. Immediately there was a signal to appear at the office of the King's Harbourmaster, who laid down the law in no uncertain terms, giving me a real dressing down.

The following day the vessel was taken into the dockyard, shipped to a gantline, and all stores returned for survey. The boats were condemned and most of the stores consigned to the scrap heap. Shipwrights came on board testing the timbers by the boring of numerous holes. To my disappointment not a rotten timber was found, the surveyor deciding the vessel was fit for further service and worth the expenses of the necessary repairs. By the time the estimates were prepared and authority obtained to proceed with the repairs, several weeks had passed. In due course orders were received that the repairs were to be carried out by the dockyard.

The men of any of HM ships when in the dockyard are not only subject to the discipline of the ship. They are also subject to the yard discipline as enforced by the yard police and when leaving or entering the yard anyone infringing the rules is liable to be detained by the police guard at the gates.

On my returning from a weekend leave an order awaited me to appear on board HMS *Melampus*, our parent ship that happened to be in dock, to be informed that the chief petty officer of the *Flora* was on board under arrest. That when entering the yard gates he was noticed by the police to be under the influence, was detained and searched and found to have a bottle of spirits in his possession. A clear case of intoxication and attempted smuggling spirits into the yard. He would be kept there to be dealt with under the King's Regulations. I was glad to think that it was entirely out of my hands and would be directly dealt with by the district captain. As usual the case was reported to the commander in chief with the result that the man was dis-rated to a petty officer and discharged to the naval barracks for general service. He was never very dependable. Consequently I was not sorry to see the last of him.

As another chief petty officer was not sent until the vessel was almost ready for sea, all the work of refitting the rigging and gear fell on me keeping me very busy every day.

By midsummer we were clear of the dockyard hands and sailed for Queenstown to embark stores for naval reserve batteries and coast guard stations, this keeping us busy for several weeks.

In the late summer we apt [sic] to be at Kingstown and the district ship was also in the harbour. It should so happen that a regatta sponsored by the Dublin pilots was taking place, one of the pilot cutters being used as a committee vessel.

My boat's crew, thinking they would like to enter the gig for one of the races, requested permission so to do. After some little hesitation the request was granted by me. A boat's crew from the district ship was on board of the committee boat about to take part in a race, in charge of a warrant officer. As so frequently happens on regatta day, drink was being handed around freely and after a time my men commenced to show its effects. If the warrant officer had been anything of a man instead of an officious busybody, he would have ordered the men into their boat and back to their ship, but instead he returned to the *Melampus* and reported that the men from the *Flora* were drunk and disorderly. I was immediately sent for to explain the meaning of this and the names of the men were entered on the defaulters list. The next day they were paraded before the captain and punished with a few days blacklist. After the defaulters had been settled with the captain turned on me and gave me a dressing down for allowing the men to be there. But that was not the end of it as will be seen later.

In the autumn a fleet of mackerel drifters were working off the south coast of Ireland. The *Flora* was detached from the parent ship and placed under the orders of the inspecting commander at Kinsale for fishing duties; at sea during the week and in harbour over the weekends. This change of duty was most agreeable and not nearly as tedious as that of waiting on the coast guard stations.

In a few weeks the inspecting commander was superseded and when his successor turned up, whom should it be but our friend Tim of the *Bulldog*! On my waiting on him he at once recognised me as the mate of the cutter *Rose* when he was employed on North Sea work. He mentioned the commander of the *Rose* and remarked that something must have been known about him in the parent ship. To myself I answered "yes" and you were the sneak that gave him away.

In seniority I was now second on the list for promotion to chief officer. Calling at Queenstown late in the year, the cutter *Fly* attached to the district ship at Bantry happened to be there swinging at the moorings week after week with nothing to do. Going on board for a friendly call, to my surprise the chief officer in Command was none other than a Senior Mate who had not before been in command and had jumped over three officers his senior. Apparently, when as an ordinary seaman serving on the Cape Station he was the bowman of the captain's gig – and in other ways handyman – with whom he became a bit of a favourite and had used his influence in the promotion of Mr Snips. I made no comment but thought the more.

Having finished with the fishery duty and again working under the orders of the District Captain, when taking a rest over the weekend in Kinsale harbour, the *Fly* bound for Bantry came in on Saturday for shelter. On Sunday morning Tim, the inspecting commander – already mentioned as a vain sort of man – caused a signal to be made to the effect 'that church parties from the cutters were to land and join the military party at a given point, taking up a position – as the senior service – in front of the military. He would be present'.

Snips in the *Fly* immediately set sail, raised the anchor and left the harbour. There remained four men and the chief petty officer available from the *Flora*. These were landed as a church party and I had no doubt that Tim being there to meet them in his uniform must

have felt rather disappointed in not being able to make a better show before the military officers as he undoubtedly intended to do.

The following morning I was commanded to appear at his office. His opening remark was: 'I ordered church parties to land yesterday and the *Fly* put to sea".
"Yes sir".
"Why didn't you put to sea?"
"I carried out your orders sir. If anyone else put to sea I would put to sea. I steer by my own compass sir and not follow others".

Respectfully, I added if Mr Snips had been at sea as many days and nights as I had during the last year he would not be so eager to put to sea and would be glad of a day's rest.

Tim wanted to find fault or to have it off on me because the church parade stunt had not palmed out as he intended. His orders were obeyed so there was no opening for a reprimand on that point. Then he fell back on the appearance of the men, saying their uniform was untidy, they were slack in their movements and that the chief petty officer did not know his duty. And so the interview ended. This, one of the little annoying pinpricks that one is apt to get now and then from a fussy superior wishing to impress one with the weight of his authority.

Later, when working under the direct orders of the district captain and ordered to be at Kinsale by a given date, the captain coming there to inspect the Royal Naval Reserve battery would carry out the annual inspection of the *Flora* at the same time.

On the day of the inspection the captain came on board accompanied by Tim, the inspecting commander. The captain ordered the commander to inspect the men's clothing. This he did and reported favourably with the exception of two men recently joined from the naval barracks in Devonport. The captain immediately caught on to that – men from the naval depot where everyone is expected to be fitted out complete to the last button – in this case sent out with their kits incomplete – now was his chance to have one back on the commodore at the naval barracks. He would have it represented through the proper channels. How small, how petty, even the senior officers of the senior service can be – never losing an opportunity to have their own back on one another.

The captain was about to retire and as it was not likely that I should see him again I took the opportunity of asking him if he would recommend me for promotion. He replied "the admiral asked if I wished you to be promoted. I told him I thought it would do you good to miss a turn. I will ask him to give you the next." That gave to me the sequel of the regatta incident at Kingstown, his reprimanding me, and the promotion of Snips. My promotion did not come about until twelve months later. I was tired of the constant work in this small craft, not very thrilled to know that I had been jumped in promotion and must spend another winter in the same command but there was nothing to do but to carry on and keep on smiling.

After knocking about on the south coast for a few months, arriving at Kinsale on 20th December, orders were received to remain and give Christmas leave two weeks to each

watch. I was granted twenty-one days and Tim feeling a bit sporty and to show his authority gave me 48 hours for a start before commencing the twenty-one days. Of course I was pleased at that and thanked him for the concession. At the expiration of my leave, returning to Kinsale on a dark, dreary winter day to a lonely cabin and an empty cupboard, to say the least was not very cheering but it was all in the game of life and with patience the change would come. Leave having finished, and the crew back to duty, orders were received to proceed with the distribution of ordnance stores to coast guard stations along the south coast; a rotten job at the season of the year with endless waiting for an opportunity to land.

1899

Spending a few days in Crookhaven, and there being little variation in our diet, it was proposed to visit the sandy cove at the head of the harbour in order to obtain a supply of cockles, where they could be found in abundance. The distance to the nearest railway station was far too great to think of marketing them as a paying proposition and there they increased year by year until they could be collected in sacks full with very little trouble.

As the men were enjoying themselves digging the cockles out of the sand, a man from a nearby cottage appeared on the scene somewhat amazed at our collecting the shellfish. He enquired what we intended doing with them.
"Eat them."
"Eat them?" he repeated. "The Lord save us, they are not fit to eat."
The men replying with a few jocular remarks, Paddy added "the dogs won't eat them, the pigs won't eat them, the goats won't eat them, and ye are going to eat them. If ye eat them, it's poisoned ye will be".

Nothing that we said would convince the man that they were good for food and sold at a good price in Dublin. Thus showing what little value is placed on a thing when it is there for the taking.

And so the days and weeks passed with very little idle time. Spending a Sunday at Kinsale after a tiring week, in the afternoon when everyone felt that the time was his own, who should appear at the coast guard station but Tim the commander – his wife not being with him he was apparently at a loose end – accompanied by a military officer. To show to this officer his authority as the senior naval officer present, he ordered the coast guard to make the following signal: 'inspecting commander to *Flora* – proceed in execution of previous orders at 4 a.m." After a little while he came on board. The sails, as usual when remaining at anchor for a brief period, were roughly furled. Throwing his weight about, in order to impress the soldier, he started with petty fault finding, about this, that and the other. Remembering his unofficial visit on board the *Rose* in the North Sea I was on my guard to keep silent. Finally he took his departure, threatening to report me to the district captain. The latter was merely the threat of a blustering busybody whose head was slightly swollen with his own importance.

Apparently this charming officer was acquainted with the inspecting commander at Queenstown who had promised to give him a donkey. Seeing that we had a few runs to

make between Queenstown and Kinsale fetching projectiles for the Royal Naval Reserve battery, he sent an order, if his scribble on a scrap of paper can be so described. The writing was not very clear so I read it to be 'call on Captain N__ of the *Howe* for a donkey and fetch it back for me on your next trip".

HMS *Howe* was the flagship at Queenstown and I thought that possibly Captain N__ might have a residence on shore and have a donkey that he no longer required. To go on board the flagship - in my endeavour to track down the whereabouts of a donkey - most certainly seemed ludicrous. However that was as the scribble was interpreted and on board the *Howe* I proceeded to make enquiry for Captain N__ informing the lieutenant of the watch the purpose of my call. He replied, "Better come down and see the navigator, he will be able to tell you". Accordingly he conducted me to the smoke room and there introduced me to the Navigating Commander. There were quite a number of officers there taking it easy.

Unfolding to the navigator the reason of my coming on board, by whom I had been sent, and had he a donkey for the Commander at Kinsale, threw him into a fit of laughter. He was highly amused and quite jolly with me at the idea of coming to him on such an errand. Apparently Tim was well-known to him as well as to some of the other officers. As he called aloud to another officer: "I say Jones that idiot Tim X__ at Kinsale has sent this officer here for a donkey". This called for various remarks and suggestions as for what purpose he required the animal, the officer suggesting that he might require it for a mate. It was really too funny for words. There were roars of laughter and josh, in which I presumed to join. The scrap of paper was then produced and after close perusal the navigator deciphered it: "Call at Captain N__ house for a donkey etc." that is the Inspecting Commander here, he said, I can give you his address.

The unheard of errand, such as coming on board of the Flagship for a donkey had caused so much merriment and fun for the navigator and the other officers in the smoke room that he said: "Now you must join us in a drink before you go". Finally wishing me luck in tracking down the ass, I took my departure. Eventually the donkey was found, taken on board and conveyed to Kinsale, the Commander being quite pleased with his present and pronounced the animal to be sound in mind and limb.

In August orders were received to be at Kingstown by a given date. It turned out that the *Flora* was to be placed at the disposal of the Dublin Pilots Regatta Committee, to act as the committee vessel on the day of the regatta. As ordered, the *Flora* was at Kingstown in good time and on the appointed day the usual procedure was followed. In the first place the caterers arrived with a liberal supply of eatables and the wherewithal to keep the company well lubricated and merry. Then the committee, all dressed in holiday attire, and bent on making a red letter day of it, arrived on board soon to start the first race by firing the *Flora's* three pounder cannon thus denoting that the sports were now on.

Friends of the committee were soon coming on board in unlimited numbers – no doubt with a view of sharing in the feast so liberally provided. Until by sheer weight of numbers they took charge below in my cabin, also the men's living quarters. We were powerless to control them and the committee mixed up in the crowd were powerless to carry out the

programme or start the various races in time. Small boats were so crowded around the vessel – heedless of the warning to keep clear of the starting gun – that when firing one of the blank charges to start a race, one fellow standing up in the boat, fortunately with his back toward the gun but so close that the force of the explosion – and possibly fright – sent him forward overboard. Lucky he got away with nothing more than a wet suit. As the hours passed everyone was more or less merry, not to say excited, arguing and shouting their opinions, of the sailing of the yachts, or the boatmen in the pulling races and whether the prize went to the "roight bhoy" in the swimming race. In the end all were agreed that it was the "foinest" regatta to be held in Kingstown.

After the fun was over, myself and the crew were able to find our feet in our own quarters. In my sleeping cabin I found a couple of bottles of whisky, a bottle of wine, a cooked chicken and some cakes. No doubt placed – and forgotten – by someone as a bit of extra for himself. Having occasion to remember the pilots regatta I was not sorry to see the last of them.

Mad Drunk

Remaining at Kingstown while awaiting orders the usual night leave was granted, but sometimes a man not wishing to stay on shore overnight would come on board in a waterman's boat.

Included in the crew was an Irishman – not the only one – a muscular strongly built sturdy young fellow, somewhat of a bully in his way and after a drink was apt to be troublesome and always ready for a fight.

One calm night – about midnight – I was aroused by a terrific racket alongside – something quite unusual. Going on deck to ascertain the cause it was found that this able seaman, decidedly under the influence, had apparently come down to the harbour wishing to come on board. A boatman, consenting to bring him off, took him into his boat. On the way, the boatman, paddling the boat along steadily, seemingly annoyed his passenger, that he was not making more speed. Then he became quarrelsome using abusive and threatening language against the boatman. As soon as the boat came alongside instead of getting out of the boat, he turned on the boatman attacking, punching, and thrashing him. For safety the boatman climbed on board. By this time the drink was working on the fellow. He pushed the boat away from the vessel's side, drifting down the harbour, shouting and yelling that he would drown himself. The night being so still he could be heard all over the harbour. At last we heard him take the plunge overboard. Fearing that he might be drowned, the boat was manned and, in charge of the chief petty officer, sent to pick him up. By the time they reached him he was back in the boat assuming a threatening attitude to anyone coming near. At last our boat got hold of the painter and towed the waterman's boat back alongside.

Immediately – the man now mad drunk – jumped inboard and spotting the boatman, gave chase after him around the deck, the boatman screaming like a pig about to be placed on the block. Fearing what injury he might do to the boatman, watching our opportunity, the

chief petty officer – a strong man – and myself laid hold of him, others coming to our help. After desperately struggling and narrowly escaping going overboard through the open gangway, a rope was passed around him, securing him to a stanchion and holding him there until the fire in him had died down. Of all the men that I ever saw with a little drink taken, I never saw one to run amok as on this occasion. As an officer I should not have laid a hand on him – it is never done – but have left it to subordinates.

The next day when reporting the matter on board of the district ship, my friend - the warrant officer of the regatta incident - said that he heard the noise during his watch and thought of sending a boat. Had he done so it would have been himself first in the field with a report on the conduct of the men of the *Flora*. That would have possibly reflected on me. The captain, after hearing my account of the conduct of the man, awarded him with the full scale of punishment permissible under the regulations and ordered that he was to be taken back to the parent ship, the first lieutenant assuring me that the captain of the forecastle would keep him in his place in a manner not practicable in the *Flora*.

In the next few weeks our employment was that of distributing stores. As far as I was aware there were no prospects of early promotion with the outlook of spending another winter in this hard pressed little vessel. However my promotion did not tarry so very long. To my great satisfaction on the sixth of November my advancement to the rank of Chief Officer – according to the regulations – a corresponding rank to that of a Lieutenant – for command of HMS *Fly* stationed and attached to the district ship at Bantry, appeared in the list of promotions and appointments.[21] That raised with me the expectation that I would have a little less knocking about during the coming winter, as the *Fly* was not so constantly employed as the *Flora*. An old shipmate and friend came to relieve me. I did not envy him, seeing that the vessel was under sailing orders for Queenstown.

There was scarcely ever breathing time in harbour and my two years and three months was more than enough. The navigation and care of a small vessel is the same as a larger one, but in the former there are not so many competent watch keepers to share the duty.

Leaving the old *Flora* without any regrets and wishing my old friend and shipmate the best of luck I took my departure to take over the *Fly* at Bantry.[22]

Chief Officer Snips in command of the *Fly* now appointed to a first class cutter had served a considerable part of his time in steam, with only a few months experience in the class of cutter to which he was now appointed. It is a well-known fact that the judicious handling of a sailing vessel can never be acquired under steam. Neither can it become an acquired art in the space of a dog watch. In this case – as will appear later – it worked out with dire consequences.

My friend who superseded me in the *Flora* was unfortunate in that he grounded his vessel twice within twelve months, lost his command and reverted to Senior Mate.

[21] 6 November 1899 Advanced to Chief Officer, Coastguard aboard HMCr *Flora*, Coastguard sailing cutter – Walter Hunkin Service Record
[22] Harbour duties aboard HMS *Fly* for 3 months Winter 1899 – Walter Hunkin Service Record

1900 - Back to the *Fly*

Off the Irish coast

Having taken up my appointment, with the prospects of spending much of the winter in harbour, I sent for my wife to join me, occupying temporary accommodation.

Day after day the *Fly* swung leisurely at her moorings and for three months the most of my nights were spent on shore; a new experience for me and an agreeable change after the previous two winters in the *Flora*.

Captain Sir William Fisher of HMS *Collingwood* was the Senior Officer of the Western Coastguard District. In February the three tenders being in company with the parent ship, Sir William decided to give a little dinner party to some of his "salt house" junior officers. Accordingly the chief officers in command of the tenders *Amelia, Argus* and *Fly* and two Royal Naval rescue lieutenants serving on board the *Collingwood* were invited to join him at dinner on board the battleship. He received us in a jolly sailor-like manner without any formality whatever, putting us at our ease and regaling us with some of his deep sea yarns of which he had an unlimited store, many of them of a very thrilling nature. Then he listened to the less exciting reminiscences of his guests, thus giving to the party a free and easy atmosphere and a very enjoyable evening.

The cutter *Fly* was at the moment riding by the moorings of a channel mark buoy that had been taken on shore for cleaning, by no means heavy enough to hold the vessel with any force of wind. When the guests were about to take their leave he enquired if "I was going on board to sleep or going ashore?" Replying that I was going on board, he said: "Oh don't mind going on board, go home and if you find her up on the beach in the morning, clean her bottom!" Very sport y of him, I thought.

HMS *Collingwood* having departed for Devonport for the annual refit, orders were given that the *Fly* was to make certain periodical visits to Berehaven. One morning when sailing down the bay, it was noticed that the mast head was leaning over a little to leeward. Sending a man aloft to ascertain the cause, he reported that the mast was sprung just above the eyes of the lower rigging. With the lower mast sprung, it was necessary to return to the harbour without delay, report the defect to the parent ship and await instructions.

It was fully expected that one of the steam cruisers would be ordered to tow the *Fly* to Queenstown for the fitting of a new mast, but Captain Fisher thought otherwise and ordered the Argus to call at Bantry with instructions that the *Fly's* mast was to be lifted out using our own spars and gear for the purpose; the old mast then to be taken to Queenstown as a pattern when a new mast would be made in the dockyard, by no means an easy job with the spars and tackles available. Fortunately a battleship – one of the Atlantic fleet – came in and the Commander kindly consented to lift the mast out with his derrick. And so the job was done in a few minutes that would have taken days by manpower only.

After swinging at the moorings for some weeks, in due course the *Argus* returned with the new mast. Again a battleship came into the harbour, the Commander consenting to lift the

new mast into its place, saving us much labour and leaving us merely to set up the rigging and refit the running gear.

It was afterward discovered that during the time of my predecessor, the mainsail had been allowed to gybe over in a strong breeze. In all probability accounting for the springing of the mast head, of which probably he was not altogether ignorant.

The few months that I had been in the *Fly* covering the winter was the most sheltered that I had experienced for some years – and much appreciated – giving me the opportunity of enjoying the company of my wife and children. As it was possible that I might be in this little craft for a long time a house was rented and our furniture brought over. The time passed pleasantly and although Captain Fisher was considered by some to be rather stern, he was always very considerate toward me.

On one occasion when returning to the harbour with a nice fresh breeze, in passing close under the stern of HMS *Collingwood*, Sir William happened to be walking the quarter deck. As luck would have it, when putting the helm over, the distance from the buoy was well judged, having just sufficient weigh to reach it when a man jumped over the bow and made fast the rope.

When reporting my arrival to the captain, he remarked: "Picked up the buoy very nicely."
"Yes sir".
"A bit of poetry about that" he added, meaning that the manoeuvre was well executed.

On the next occasion of my attempting the same manoeuvre, it was a good job that he was not a spectator, for it was anything but well executed. The distance was wrongly estimated, the buoy missed and over-run, entailing a second attempt.

The summer days passed pleasantly in this very sheltered appointment, with a trip to Berehaven occasionally. On the first of August this soft job came to an abrupt conclusion. I was removed to the command of one of the North Sea fishery cruisers.

The Cutter *Victoria*

North Sea Fisheries Protection

There was certainly a satisfaction to receive an appointment to a larger and more able cutter,[23] but on a gentleman congratulating me I could only say there was nothing very thrilling about it, seeing it was a change from the sheltered waters of Bantry Bay to that of facing the coming winter in the North Sea when oilskins and sea boots would become the usual "rig of the day".

Once again I found myself standing on the deck of the first class cutter *Victoria* with a crew of twenty eight all told; a vessel in which I had served as a leading seaman and petty

[23] August 1900 1st class cutter HMCr *Victoria* tender to Hull coast Guard Ship on fishery duties, Hull – Walter Hunkin Service Record

officer and experienced many a hard day's washing from the ever restless Atlantic Sea on the west coast of Ireland, but now as the Commanding Officer.

She was a very comfortable vessel with a fine roomy cabin, the fittings of mahogany and maple wood, with beautifully upholstered settees and easy chairs. Built on fine lines and a fast sailor, according to records on board. On one occasion when under the control of the Customs House a race was arranged by that department - to test the sailing qualities of ten of the first class cutters – from Kingstown to Holyhead and back, a distance of one hundred and twenty miles, the *Victoria* coming in first at an average speed of twelve knots.

She was now a tender to the coast guard ship at Hull, for pay, clothing, discipline and certain stores, but usually detached and employed under the orders of the senior North Sea fisheries officer.

On joining and taking over command it was found that the vessel was employed cruising for the protection of the herring fleet, working to the northward of the River Tyne and calling at Hartlepool for supplies.

In September, the fish now moving southward, followed by the drifters, the port of call was changed to Grimsby. With this appointment it was decided that Grimsby would be the most suitable place in which to set up a home. The first thing was to set about and find a vacant house. This having been done, arrangements were made for the removal of my family and effects. On the date due to sail for the week out, the furniture arrived. After seeing it placed in the house I hurried to the dock leaving my wife with two small children to do her best. Everything was ready for sea, but thinking of my wife, a new arrival to the town and in a strange house, even at the risk of leaving myself open to a reprimand from the senior officer, I decided to moor up for the night and go back. This I did; naturally my wife was glad to see me. The following day after settling things and making my wife comfortable, I took my departure feeling somewhat more satisfied, making my way to the dock where the tug was in readiness to tow us clear and into the river, then proceeding to sea for the week out.

The weeks at sea and the weeks in harbour came around with routine regularity with nothing exciting to record. With the crew, discipline was good, the mate and petty officers handling the men with decided tact and discretion – a satisfaction to me to have them contented and comfortable.

By the middle of October the port of call had been changed to Harwich and the cutter *Rose* that had been employed with the trawling fleets now joined the herring drifter patrol, with the same week at sea as the *Victoria*.

The herring fleet were now fishing from twenty to forty miles to the eastward of Lowestoft-ness. There was the usual assembly of drifters – Scots, Yarmouth and Lowestoft men working to the southward and eastward of Smith Knoll Lightship, the Dutchmen keeping outside or to the eastward of the British boats. This fishing ground was about ninety miles distant from our nearest port of call, Harwich. A good day's run with favourable conditions, when relieving for the week out. The cutter returning to port would

usually be nearing the harbour by the time the relieving cutter was underway, leaving a clear berth.

The officer commanding the *Rose*, my senior by a few months, was one of those smart dapper sort of men, very particular in his dress and appearance, his vessel also always spick and span, very ambitious, always fond of being first and foremost in all things and not averse to the limelight.

Leaving Grimsby on the morning tide in company with the cutter *Rose*, although she was far ahead of us, the *Victoria* reaching through the water faster and making more speed, very soon commenced to shorten the distance between us. The commander, who could not bear being second in anything, apparently did not relish seeing his vessel being overhauled by another cutter and in order that we should not sail past him, he hauled his fore sheet to windward thus choking the weigh on the vessel until we came abreast. Then, after exchanging a few words, altered his course to the southward and by nightfall was far astern and out of sight.

In the last dog watch the weather was rapidly changing and the wind freshening from the north east. We held our course to the westward seeking sea room outside the sand banks – discovered later – but the *Rose* returned to the Humber for shelter. After reaching a good offing, in order to make contact with the drifters the course was altered to the southward thus sighting the fleet at daylight.

A few days previous, a ship with a cargo of timber had grounded on the Hasboro Sand, the deck cargo having been jettisoned, the whole sea was scattered with floating planks. To attempt the salvage of this flotsam and turn the same over to the receiver of wreck was not worth our while, a sufficient quantity for a few weeks firewood satisfied our needs.

Our duties with the herring fleet were of a ding dong routine, accepting the wintry weather conditions of strong winds, fog, sleet, and storms. Frequently on the day appointed for putting to sea to relieve the inward bound cutter the conditions would be anything but inviting, but there was no grumbling. Ours was the policeman's job – not nearly so hard and disagreeable as that of the fisherman, in the shooting and hauling of their endless train of nets and the handling of the fish, making for the harbour each morning and sailing again immediately after the landing of the catch.

In the middle of November when cruising about twenty miles off Lowestoft, the cutter *Rose* hove in sight. She had apparently been far away to the eastward on the fringe of the drift net fleet and was standing in to make the land. After speaking and giving him our position we gradually separated, each following their own course.

It being Saturday, the most of the fleet had returned to harbour and would remain in for the night putting to sea on the Sunday for the night fishing ready for Monday market. As the day advanced, with a falling barometer, there was a change in the appearance of the weather followed by an increasing wind from the north, north east. The anchorage in Hollesley Bay offered some shelter, it was then distant fifty miles and in the afternoon the *Rose* hove up.

Not caring to run away to leeward, after full consideration, in preference to riding out a gale under canvas, it was decided to go into Yarmouth Roads and trust to the anchors and cables. For safe riding under the threatening weather conditions a long scope of cable would bring less strain on the anchor, consequently we brought to with seventy fathoms on a single anchor. The *Seamew* had already come to an anchor in the roads.

By midnight the wind had increased to the force of a storm, with a rough sea, the vessel riding bows under. I had never before witnessed any vessel straining so heavily at her cables and questioned if it would not have been preferable to have remained at sea under canvas. As the hours passed, and the gale having apparently reached its height, although still riding heavily, with good cables there was nothing to fear.

On Monday the gale having subsided and the fishing boats putting to sea, the anchor was weighed following in their wake. The *Rose* found shelter in Hollesley Bay riding out the gale in company with the black diamond carriers bound for the coal ports in the north. On Wednesday the day for returning to port, our outward bound relief passed with a cheerio.

In our next week out, the fishing fleet having by this time dwindled, the fishing slowing down and – Saturday – the most of the boats were in harbour. Both the *Rose* and ourselves were at anchor really having a quiet day, hoping that the *Sergeant* would not appear around the corner.

Late in the afternoon, about an hour before lighting up time, a fishing patrol gunboat in passing, the Commander playing the part of the funny man, made the signal: 'The senior officer is coming onto Harwich'. The Commander of the *Rose* responded, and not wishing to be caught dodging, or to lay himself open, immediately weighed anchor and stood away to sea. Knowing that it would be dark in an hour, it was decided to remain at anchor and take the chance.

By the 16th of December – at Harwich – the herring season now drawing to a close, orders were received from the senior fishery officer containing our dismissal from the fishery patrol to proceed to Hull, the headquarters of our parent ship.

Xmas was drawing near and with fourteen days leave awaiting the crew, no time was lost. The following morning the anchor was weighed at daybreak, and making a good days run, came to in Yarmouth Roads for the night, in anticipation that the wind would favour us for crossing the Wash the next day. The following morning weighing at an early hour, with a fresh breeze, after passing Cromer the wind veered to the north-west, increasing to a fresh gale. Although anxious to get across the Wash, the sea becoming so turbulent and high there was no alternative but to hard up and run back into Yarmouth Roads for shelter to await more favourable conditions.

The next day, with a favourable breeze, another attempt was made, and the run across to the Humber completed under favourable conditions, coming to an anchor in Grimsby Roads for the night. Weighing with the morning flood, by noon we had reached and moored up in the Queen's Dock, Hull, the first watch immediately proceeding on Xmas leave.

1901

January brought with it snow, ice and strong gales. We were not sorry to be in dock as a change from the North Sea.

After inspection by the district captain and everything found satisfactory, a list of necessary repairs was submitted and about six weeks labour taken in hand by a local shipbuilding firm, taking a further six weeks to complete, thus giving one the opportunity of seeing a little of my home at Grimsby.

On completion of the refit the vessel was again detached from the parent ship for fishing duties under the orders of the senior fishery officer. The first orders were 'to sail from Hull on a specified date, proceed southward and take on the patrol with the small trawling fleets working between Orford Ness and the Texel, with Harwich as the port of call.' This duty was by no means tedious and the weeks passed away with nothing interesting or unusual to report.

The commencement of the herring season now drawing near, the orders were changed: "Proceed to the north and join in the patrol for the protection of the drift net fleet, working between the Farne Islands and the Tyne, making Shields or Hartlepool the port of call".

Returning to North Shields for the week in, I had the pleasure of renewing my acquaintance with my old shipmate Mr X of the *Rose* now settled down as a landsman, all his seagoing worries at an end.

The men after having had a few days in harbour were ready for the week out and all appeared to be happy in the duties of the fishing patrol.

The next week in was spent at Hartlepool, at least that was the port of call. Having been granted a few days leave, I made my way home to Grimsby. The next day a telegram arrived from the mate: "Ship ordered to Shields". The first train was boarded for my return journey, leaving the dock on the next tide for passage to the Tyne.

In connection with the salmon fishing at the mouth of the Tyne, there had been a dispute between the inshore fishermen from South Shields. The orders were to investigate into the nature of the dispute and report accordingly.

The salmon fishermen had disagreed on the methods lately introduced as to the class of net used by certain of the fishermen. Those who held that the net always used – according to custom – should be adhered to, others that a new class of net lately introduced should now be used. The outcome of the dispute was that those holding the former views, taking the law into their own hands, attacked with stone those holding opposing views, ending with a free fight between the rival factions. On the arrival of a fishing cruiser and a little pacifying talk the dispute was very soon amicably settled.

During the next week at sea, although a summer month – August – when strong gales are not usually so prevalent, while in company with the drift fleet working between Hartlepool and Flamborough Head a very strong north west gale was encountered. At the time we

were in company with a numerous fleet of Scotsmen. When the gale came on they were in the act of shooting their nets, no doubt thinking it was just a summer breeze that would soon blow itself out. The shooting of the nets was continued, with the result that they had to wait for the abatement of the gale which lasted thirty six hours before they could be recovered.

Standing in to the mouth of the Tyne, it was decided that if a tug could be attracted, we would pass the tow rope and return to port. The usual signal failing to entice a tug out of the river, there was no alternative – with nightfall coming on and blowing a strong gale with close reef canvas – but to stand away to sea again.

By September all the herring landings were being made at Grimsby and usually by that date our port of call would have been the same, but on account of a dispute between the owners and crews of the Grimsby trawling fleet – the whole of the fleet being stopped and in harbour the fishery cruisers were, for fear of trouble, forbidden to call there but rather return to Hartlepool.

Towards the end of September the orders were: "Return to Hull for week in". On the date of our return to harbour, while waiting in Grimsby Roads for the morning tide to proceed to Hull, when the fish dock gates were opened, to my great pleasure the Grimsby steam trawling fleet put to sea. It was evident that the dispute had been settled. Seeing no reason why the order to proceed to Hull should not be disregarded, a tug was engaged entering the dock for our turn in.

By October the general fishing was conducted from the ports of Yarmouth and Lowestoft and the port of call for the fishery patrol transferred to Harwich.

An International Convention

The prime duty of the North Sea fisheries patrol was that of preventing the clashing of interests between British and foreign fishermen and between British trawlers and British drifters. That stretch of the North Sea between the latitudes of fifty two and fifty three degrees was at that date a most prolific trawling ground and constantly worked by sailing trawlers both foreign and British; those from Lowestoft, sometimes those from Brixham and Ramsgate. Also trawlers from Ymuden, Ostend and other continental ports – the Ostend men always said to be the worst offenders. In the past, with no controlling authority, there were frequent depredations caused by the trawlers coming across the drifters' nets, causing no end of damage and loss of valuable fishing gear, leading to friction, hostile feelings, quarrelling and lawless trawling. And when the boats – as they sometimes did – came side by side there had been cases of open conflict between the opposing crews, with never-ending complaints to the government authorities from both the trawlers and drifters. The trawling could only be prosecuted with safety - to trawler and drifter gear - while the sea was clear of the drift nets.

During October, November and a part of December the great shoals of herrings were to be found in this part of the North Sea and the great fleets of British, Dutch and Belgian drifters were there in hundreds reaping the harvest of the sea, practically excluding the

trawlers from fishing during the night while the drift nets were in the water, their only chance was a spot clear of drift nets, or trawling during daylight. This condition of affairs becoming so intolerable the governments of the interested countries were compelled to appoint an international convention, with the object of drawing up a set of rules for the guidance of fishermen of all nations working in the North Sea.

The recommendations put forward by the Convention and approved by their respective governments contained a considerable amount of detail, embracing every aspect of the deep sea fisheries as prosecuted in the North Sea, with rules meeting every conceivable happening between fishermen on the high seas. Rules without an authority to enforce the same were of little or no use. It was therefore agreed that a police force should be established for patrolling and enforcing the rules as drawn up by the said Convention, each country to provide a certain number of patrol vessels. The major part of the expense of the patrol fell on the British government, seeing that the Royal Navy provided by far the greatest number of patrol vessels.

At the time of which I write, the North Sea was so very well policed that it was very seldom that special action had to be taken. Occasionally a foreigner would be arrested for fishing within territorial waters, or a coper selling his tobacco within the prescribed limits. A better understanding between the fishermen of the different nationalities and between trawler and drifters, combined with the presence of a police patrol, was usually sufficient to maintain order.

During the periods at sea, weather permitting, fishing boats were boarded – British only – detailed particulars obtained and tabulated for the information of the senior fishery officer in a weekly report, keeping him fully informed and prepared to answer any question that might happen to be fired at him by the powers that be.

In the matter of small expenses, some senior officers – probably pressed by the Keeper of the

National Purse – were forever cheese-paring, cutting down expenditure by the saving of a shilling or two here and there.

With the sailing cruisers it was not always advisable to enter or leave the narrow docks and harbours under sail. Sometimes with the traffic of fishing boats and other craft it would be attended with risk of damage to your own vessel or to others. It was therefore customary in such cases to employ a tug at a charge of seven and sixpence or ten shillings to tow in or out.

It happened at this time that the Senior Officer disapproved of this usage, insisting on entering or leaving port under sail and, that if a tug was employed, to state the reason for so doing and noting the direction of the wind.

The Senior Officer had given us the option of spending the week in harbour at Lowestoft instead of Harwich and for certain reasons it was decided to spend a week at Lowestoft.

This harbour, with the narrow entrance and the strong tide running across its mouth, was always a tricky place to enter, especially for a vessel of the size and tonnage of the cutter *Victoria* with a draught of thirteen feet. If left to my better judgment, instead of running a risk in order to save ten shillings, a tug would have been employed.

The orders were: "Sail in if possible". As the Senior Officer was in the harbour, he would probably have said there was no difficulty in entering under sail, or reason for hiring a tug. The attempt was therefore made to enter the harbour under sail. Waiting – as far as my judgment would allow – for the most favourable moment, "high water slack" with a fresh breeze, after setting sufficient canvas to have the vessel – as I thought – under control and to give her a plenty of weigh to shoot the pier heads, the anchor was weighed and the vessel proceeded.

Fishing boats under sail were racing in one after another. Seizing what I considered to be the opportune moment, the harbour entrance was attempted. On approaching the south pier and expecting to shoot straight in, as the fishing craft were doing, the strong tide running to the northward caught the vessel by the heel and twisted her right across the harbour mouth.

What of the craft following astern? For a minute or two the question gave me a nasty sensation. I contemplated fishing craft bunching up side by side between the pier heads. There was no alternative for the smack following but to come on. It was impossible to see how he could clear. Nearing the south pier he put his helm down and shot around the pier head across our bows with barely room to clear. Fortunately – as it happened – the smack's rigging caught the end of our bowsprit, pulling us around heading straight into the harbour and clear of the tidal influence. The smack's rigging then skipping clear without damage. To say the least that was a relief to me. A few minutes such as one would not wish to experience every day and all to save the Chancellor of the Exchequer the sum of ten shillings, when it might easily have run up a bill for a hundred pounds.

After that experience I was very wary not to attempt leaving or entering any of the tricky harbours without a tug, let the wind be fair or foul, knowing full well that a mishap might bring about a court of inquiry and a reprimand for jeopardising the vessel.

A Would-be Hero

After a few days leave – from Lowestoft – returned to duty in readiness for sailing the following day. Toward the evening the wind commenced to freshen – necessitating the use of extra mooring ropes and hawsers – increasing to a violent gale.

A vessel having grounded on one of the sands, the Caistor lifeboat was launched in a vain endeavour to rescue the stranded crew. After buffeting against wind, sea and tidal currents for a considerable time the crew undaunted in their mission of mercy; it proved to be more than the boat could contend with, eventually capsizing with the loss of the gallant crew. At the enquiry into the loss of the boat, the former coxswain, an old man, was asked if under the circumstances he would have turned back. To the everlasting honour of the men of Caistor, his reply was swift and concise: "Caistor men never turn back".

King Edward the VII hearing of this old hero of many a storm commanded his appearance at Buckingham Palace. After the interview and the old coxswain about to be dismissed, he was reported to have ventured in his homely fashion to thank His Majesty for all his kindness and expressed the wish that he might reign in heaven.

By the following evening, although the wind had somewhat abated, there was still a very angry sea breaking on the shore. One of the fishing smacks in running for the harbour missed the entrance, going in on the beach on the back of the south pier.

There apt to be a steam cruiser in the harbour. The commander, a gentleman standing about six feet with a sharp hatchet face, a red nose and eyes with that faraway look, as if forever peering into the future. One of those ever ready to play at any game of make-believe if it would in any way appear well and exalt him in the estimation of the senior officer. Probably thinking this was a chance of gaining honours, manning the ten oared cutter, he proceeded out of the harbour. By the way, with the intention of carrying a line from a tug to the smack in order that the tug could pass his bow rope on board. Knowing the reputation of this gentleman, that of never missing a chance of appearing in the limelight, our interest being aroused, it was decided to land and watch his manoeuvre from the pier.

The line was first secured on board of the tug and the boat then backed in under oars toward the smack. So far so good; then arose a little curl on the sea, between the boat and the smack. The order to the bowman to "hold onto the line" was distinctly heard. After a long pause "slack away the line" was the next order. The sea between the boat and the smack was breaking a little. "Hold onto the line". The heart of the would-be hero had apparently failed. The smack must be left to her fate and the smack's men left to be rescued by the LSA. No doubt the gallant one remembering that discretion is the better part of valour, he very soon coiled in his line and returned to the sheltered and smooth water of the harbour. The next morning the sea having gone down the smack was hauled off by a tug.

The following day, going on board to wait on the Senior Officer for orders, the hero of the life-line was there before me, no doubt with the intention of getting his interview over first and presenting his written report of the gallant attempt at rescue of the previous evening. It so happened that I arrived in time for the both of us to be ushered into the Senior Officer's cabin at the same moment. After the Senior Officer had discussed the weather conditions and given his orders, as we were about to retire, my contemporary drew from his pocket and handed to the Senior Officer a written report of the smack stranding on the beach and of his attempt to render help. The SO did not appear to show any interest whatever nor did he pass any congratulatory remarks. In fact it fell very flat indeed and I felt sure was rather disappointing. Seeing through this little bit of sham, naturally I was inwardly amused.

In this gale of which I have made mention my old ship the *Flora* parted her moorings in Kingstown Harbour and drove ashore becoming a total wreck, all the crew being saved.

My predecessor in command of the *Fly*, of whom mention has been made, commanding the cutter *Active*, had brought his vessel to an anchor in the Firth of Forth, taking up an

inshore berth, with a short scope of cable, sufficient for a temporary anchorage in fine summer weather. With a freshening wind and an approaching storm no attempt was made to find a safer anchorage. The vessel continued to ride with the comparatively short cable. With the result that the anchor failing to hold she drove ashore becoming a total wreck, two seamen only being saved.

By the 20th of November hundreds of Scots boats had left for home. Consequently the sea off Lowestoft was not quite so congested at night. The men were now counting the days when they would finish with the herring fisheries and enjoy the privilege of a few days leave.

On the 18th of December we were dismissed by the Senior Fishery Officer and ordered to proceed to Hull and report arrival to the captain of HMS *Galatea*, our parent ship.

At daybreak on the 20th of December the vessel was unmoored and every preparation made for the voyage to Hull in the least possible time, in order that the first watch could partake of their Xmas dinner at home with their friends. Sails were set. The spirits of every member of the crew buoyant as we left Harwich harbour under all possible sail, with a fair wind and a fresh breeze, increasing as the day advanced. Every stitch of canvas was crowded on in order to our making a good run during daylight. At four pm, eighty miles had been covered in eight hours, a very satisfactory speed, and everyone pleased in anticipation of a good run across The Wash.

What a marked change was this day on the sea, in the matter of traffic, when compared with the days of September and October. Then it was fishing boats in endless numbers; the usual traffic to and from the Baltic ports and the ceaseless stream of black diamond carriers between London and The North. Looking in any direction there was always plenty of company, but on this dark December day, only one sail was sighted – that of a timber-laden barque from Sweden bound south, battering against a strong head wind, who attempted to speak. But the passing was so fast that there was only time to shout the bearing of Orfordness and no more. The waters off Lowestoft that had been so crowded had now taken on the appearance of a deserted ocean. The loneliness reminded one of the words of Coleridge:

"The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew
The furrow followed free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into the silent sea."

Daylight, now rapidly giving place to twilight, to be followed by a long winter night, preparations were made for whatever might befall in the way of wind or storm. Sail was shortened, boats secured on deck, topmast housed and every movable thing secured. By midnight Cromer had been passed and the Dudgeon Light was in sight, with every prospect of making a good passage across to The Humber by daylight. With the turn of the tide against us and the wind veering to the north west for the next six hours, no ground whatever was gained. To hold our run was as much as we could do.

The days that are now recalled were those in which glass houses for the protection of the officer of the watch and the helmsman – in general use today – were unknown and impracticable with sail. There was no alternative but to face all weather and trust to a good waterproof and sea boots.

After being on my feet for sixteen hours my back had become rather tired and painful. Inside the sandbanks in somewhat narrow waters of a dark winter night one could not think of going below for sleep. Remembering that I had a plaster in my cabin which was said to relieve any pain, be it due even to toothache or corns, going below I promptly clapped it on my back, returning to my watch on deck. After a time the pain commenced to shift from my back, travelling down and down finally into my sea boot or rather my leg below the knee. That was even worse for me, as now I had only one leg on which to stand.

At four a.m., now under a double reef mainsail with a plenty of wind and sea the wind having headed us, the mate, one of those smart sort of men, completely educated, with nothing to learn, more inclined to dictate than obey, relieving the deck to keep the morning watch, on sighting the Dudgeon Light to windward, wanted to know what we had been doing all night – he had been in his bed probably asleep for seven hours. My reply to that was: "You will soon find out what we have been doing". Then giving the necessary orders went below for a rest. With the turn of the tide and the wind again favouring us, in a few hours we were across The Wash, had entered The Humber and came to an anchor in Grimsby Roads, very glad that the short voyage from Harwich was finished with.

At the close of the herring season the fishing cruisers attached to the Harwich district were, when dismissed, at their home port whereas those belonging to the Hull and Scottish districts had a voyage to make back to the port of the parent ship and generally pinched up to the last day or two before Xmas.

The river Humber rarely free from traffic, particularly on the flood tide, was not at all times the most desirable stretch of water for the handling of a vessel under sail. Proceeding up the river on the following day, when nearing the anchorage abreast of Alexandra Dock, tugs were in the act of pulling out a large steamer and right across the fairway, the wind being right down the river and working up back and back with a strong flood tide. There was not much room to play about. The river pilot and tug skippers were not indifferent to the situation and putting forth their best efforts allowed us just enough room with a little manoeuvring to pass under the steamer's stern.

After the rough passage everything below as well as on deck was disorderly. Wet sails, wet clothing, in fact everything wet and well-washed. It would require a full day and fair weather in order to make things presentable. The annual inspection was the last thing that one would think of, yet before the anchor was down there was a signal from the captain of HMS *Galatea*: "Proceed into the Queen's Dock, the captain will inspect ship at three p.m."

Just the one hour in the year when it was desirable that ship and men should be at their best and now the annual inspection, without any time whatever for preparation, was rather disappointing. The captain however must have reconsidered that order, probably thinking it was hardly fair. The inspection was deferred until ten a.m. the next day. That was a little

better; at least it gave us the chance to shake off our sea boots and oilskins. Carrying out the inspection according to custom, the Captain, making an allowance, pronounced his satisfaction and gave an order that the first watch could proceed on Xmas leave immediately. Thus the holiday season now at hand, with the opportunity of a few days relaxation all hands appeared to be well pleased.

1902 – Two Hot Heads

The work in connection with the annual refit was placed in the hands of Earls Shipbuilding Company, it being necessary to take the vessel from the Queen's Dock to Earls Yard and slipways, the contractor providing a tug for the purpose. The tug pulled us out of the dock and around to the yard. It was the intention of the dock foreman to place the cutter in a cradle and then heave her up on the slip clear of the water. They were however late on the tide; consequently she caught the ground at a most awkward spot close to the head of the jetty. There she stuck. The tug could not pull her off.

To what extent the responsibility now rested with the shipbuilders or to what extent I was still responsible for the safety of the vessel was not defined in the contract. I had visions of her falling over on her side and filling on the next flood so commenced hustling the dock foreman to place blocks of wood at the pier head, get out tackles to keep her from falling outward and so on. Fearing that serious damage might arise, it was for me a very anxious hour. But "all's well that ends well". She settled quiet as the tide receded but by no means on a satisfactory bearing. I was not sorry to see her once again afloat and removed to a safe berth.

After the repairs were completed the vessel was again placed at the disposal of the fishery officer from whom orders were received to take on the patrol with the trawling fleet working between the Outer Dowsing and Borkum making Grimsby the port of call. At this time it so happened that my chief petty officer and petty officer were from the land of bog and blarney - a land whose people are noted for their kindness, sympathetic nature, fine sense of humour and ready wit, usually unselfish and good shipmates. Unfortunately these two did not always work amicably together, the petty officer resenting any orders from the chief petty officer. Having that hot germane blood in their veins it was only the discipline ruling their daily lives that prevented them from showing it in a manner more forceful than words.

The vessel moored in Grimsby dock. Leaving the chief petty officer in charge I went ashore for the night. In the evening a messenger came to my house to say that my presence was required on board. Arriving at the dock and going on board, it was only to find that these two hot heads – to whom one had to look for the maintenance of order and discipline – had been having a hand at fisticuffs (or in plain language been fighting). There was evidence on the both of their faces that a real game had been played, the chief petty officer having a mark or two on his nose and cheek and the petty officer – quite a common outcome of a free fight – a lovely black eye. This was a grave misdemeanour and if reported would bring in its train punishment to both. Not wishing to make a case of it, it was allowed to slide. I, however, decided for their own sakes and my peace of mind, to get

rid of one. The petty officer was eventually passed on but he did not reign for long and was very soon – not being fit for the Fishery and Revenue Service – discharged from general service.

For a couple of weeks the port of call was changed to Harwich. Eventually orders were received to proceed north and take up the patrol with the herring drifters, making Hartlepool the port of call. On the voyage strong northerly winds were encountered, compelling us to shelter in Yarmouth Roads for several days. Day by day the number of coasters – all bound north – was on the increase, until the company numbered about three hundred. There were three-mast schooners, brigantines, Yorkshire Billy-boys, schooners, ketches and a brig or two - now almost an obsolete rig – making up every rig of sailing craft imaginable. These miles of sailing craft – rapidly waning and giving place to steam – were a fine sight not to be forgotten and rarely if ever to be seen again. Although it was a summer month the weather was very unsettled and stormy. About one half of the coasters declining to trust their anchors in this roadstead got under weigh running back to Harwich or Hollesley Bay for a more sheltered anchorage. Although the riding was rather heavy, those who remained at anchor held on without loss or damage.

With the return of moderate weather all the wind-bounders were soon under weigh. Sailing much faster than the heavily laden coasters and reaching ahead we were very soon taking the lead and in a few hours had left them miles astern. After falling in with the herring drifters and dodging about on the fishing ground for a few days, another cruiser arrived to take over the duties.

Aimlessly cruising about as we so frequently were it was always necessary to be on the lookout for carelessly navigated tramps. On one occasion we had a very narrow escape of being run down. The night was fine, a smooth sea, clear atmosphere and a light breeze. We were just moving through the water on the starboard tack.

At eleven p.m. I had retired leaving the chief petty officer in charge of the deck. Awaking about four bells in the middle watch, I got out, went on deck and spoke to the officer of the watch who reported all correct. I returned to my cabin. After some little time, not having fallen asleep I heard an order to slacken the sheets to get weigh on the vessel, then the order ‘starboard the helm’ followed by ‘hard a starboard’. What does that mean? Now a remark by the officer of the watch that conveyed to me that another craft was approaching on the danger line. Time to move! I jump out of bed and rush on deck. An approaching steamer not keeping a good look out was at first showing his green light to our red – a danger angle. The officer of the watch not observing any indication of the steamer altering his course decided that it was time to get out of the steamer’s way and put his helm to starboard. Almost at the same instant – now very close – the steamer altered his helm to port showing his red to our green, reversing the danger angle. Seeing the position I immediately reversed our helm to port in order to show our red to his red – safely. The officer of the watch remarking: “You will hit him Sir.” My reply to that was: “I don’t care as long as he does not hit us!” Fortunately the steamer passed across our bow with nothing to spare, almost touching.

Rousing in the sheets and trimming the sails the commotion for a few minutes was rather pronounced. The watch below hearing the unusual racket on this quiet still night jumped out of their hammocks, rushing on deck, to see a steamer close enough to throw a biscuit on board. Had I not been awake and instantly on deck altering the helm, I feel sure nothing would have saved us from being run into - an experience that one would not wish to have repeated very often.

With the cramped conditions on shipboard it is the little happenings from day to day that make life merry or otherwise and a trifling matter is sometimes seized on for a little amusement or mirth even though it be at the expense of the finer feelings of another.

While in harbour it was found necessary to send one of the men to the doctor – the admiralty agent. Having diagnosed a form of skin disease rarely fund attacking 'Blue Jackets' and not wishing for him to be taken on shore and placed in sick quarters, he ordered that the man was to be kept on board, isolated and a certain form of treatment applied. The only isolation available was inside a canvas screen in the space outside the cabins occupied by the mate and petty officers. The mate, who was always very spruce, clean, precise and particular in his dress and appearance, resented this arrangement. Seeing the isolation order was given by the medical officer, it was unquestionable. He therefore dared not put up any definite opposition.

The petty officers – not quite so fastidious – who did not appear to care where the man was isolated and seeing the attitude of the mate in the matter, were rather amused and together decided to have a little innocent fun out of it. The chief petty officer was made responsible that the remedy was used regularly in accordance with instructions. The concoction supplied by the doctor, with which the man was directed to anoint himself twice daily first having a warm bath, was the most vile smelling stuff imaginable, penetrating into the cabins and the men's living quarters and although the skylights were opened for the smell to escape, it was pretty pungent while in use.

When the Chief PO, who to all appearances was very particular and conscientious in the matter of carrying out his duty and to effect a cure in the least possible time - prompted by the Petty Officer grinning in his cabin – standing outside of the screen directing the man to remember the doctor's orders and lay the stuff on freely. The Mate became simply furious, just exactly what the Petty Officers were playing for. On the second day he lodged his complaint with me, enlarging on the enormity of using this vile stuff just outside of his cabin. When asked if he had any proposal, he could only say the man should have been sent on shore. It was pretty obvious why the Medical Officer ordered the man to be treated on board. I must confess, looking at the funny side, I found myself amused at the attitude of the Petty Officers in playing up to a very exacting officer.

In June the port of call was changed to Grimsby. Arriving at that port, a communication awaited me from the Admiralty with my appointment to HMS *Fanny*, in command.[24] I was at a loss to know what class of vessel this could be as none of the cruisers now bore that

[24] 1 June 1906 appointed to command HM steam vessel *Fanny*. Joined at Falmouth summer 1902 to be tender to HMS *Melampus*, Kingstown – Walter Hunkin Service Record

name. Apparently some four months earlier the Admiralty had – after their officials had inspected several vessels on the sale list – decided on the purchase of two steam yachts for conversion into fishery cruisers. The *Fanny* was one of these. The former owner had this vessel built according to his own design, quite apart from the usual lines followed by the yacht builder. His design combined the sea keeping qualities of the steam trawler and tug – the model favoured that of a tug, even to the heavy belt outside – with the comfort and accommodation of a yacht. She certainly was a handy and seaworthy vessel.

With my appointment, information was afforded me that certain alterations were being carried out by a shipbuilding firm at Falmouth to which port I was to proceed and take charge. Seeing that all my service had been in sailing craft - with the exception of a brief period in the *Seamew* – naturally I was very pleased at the thought of a change from sail to steam.

In the course of a day or two my old shipmate, the nautical expert and blustering second mate of the *Seamew* came to relieve me. The following day I bade goodbye to the *Victoria* and her crew, thus finishing with the North Sea Police Patrol once and for all.

1902 – An Irish Station Again

Aboard the Fanny

As the *Fanny* was undergoing certain alterations, in passing through London I decided to call at the Admiral's office to ascertain if there were any special orders for me. The secretary conveyed to me the wishes of the Admiral – who had himself recommended the purchase of this particular vessel – in the matter, to do my best and get ready for service as soon as possible, and be certain not to raise any contentious questions. He also informed me that the hot-blooded Irishman, the Chief P O of the *Victoria* mentioned earlier, who had left that cutter some months before, was to be the Mate, my second-in-command. I was rather sorry to hear that as I had hoped to have a more dependable man. The secretary did not fail to see that I was not very favourably impressed with this arrangement. The appointment however had been approved by the Admiralty and nothing could be done to alter it. An Irish station for me again. The *Fanny* was to become a tender to HMS *Melampus* at Kingstown. The Petty Officers were drawn from other cruisers and engine-room staff and seamen from the naval depot.

After the alterations were completed at Falmouth it would be necessary to go to a naval port for certain fittings in accordance with the regulations and complete with stores and provisions. For some reason the Admiral Commanding Coast guard and Reserve did not approve of Devonport and gave orders that we were to proceed to Queenstown for that purpose. The Commander-in-Chief at the latter port appeared to resent the *Fanny* being sent there instead of Devonport and accorded me scant courtesy.

When in all respects ready for service, orders were received to proceed to Kingstown, the headquarters of the parent ship. On arrival, the Captain of HMS *Melampus* inspected the *Fanny*. Apparently he had been ordered by the Admiral to inspect and report on the suitability of the vessel for coast guard work. He expressed to me his dissatisfaction with

the vessel in certain respects, but as she had been selected and recommended for purchase by no less a person than the Admiral Commanding Coast guard and Reserve, the disapproval of the District Captain did not count for much.

Our first employment was to carry out the removal of a certain number of coast guards and their families. With a handy vessel such as the *Fanny*, this was child's play when compared with one's experiences in carrying out removals by the sailing cutters. Frequently a man would be embarked in the morning and landed at his new station the same day. Only with stormy weather when landing might be difficult would they be on board for more than forty- eight hours. A change for the better fully appreciated by the coast guard, officers and men generally.

In October the *Fanny* was detached from the *Melampus* and placed under the orders of the captain of HMS *Collingwood*, headquarters at Bantry, with orders to proceed to that post and report. Arriving at Bantry and reporting to the Captain of the *Collingwood*, he informed me that we were to be employed in fishery duty and that the patrol would extend from Bury Head at the mouth of The Shannon to Cape Clare. This was something new and strange to me, seeing there were never any fishing fleets working along this coast at this season of the year. There was usually a mackerel fishery by French drifters in the spring and hitherto an early summer fishery by drifters from the Isle of Man but no deep sea fishery so late in the year as this.

1902 – A Lonely Patrol

In due course the sailing orders were sent on board and the patrol commenced accordingly. An aimless, dreary and monotonous business it proved to be with never a fishing boat in sight. The orders did not tie us down to calling at any particular port; consequently we put to sea from one port and to make the log read anew, would steam for a few hours and enter another port as most convenient, rendering a weekly report accordingly. And so the days and weeks passed without any questions or interference from anyone.

Throughout the dark days of November and December, with the never ceasing rainfall common to the south west of Ireland, all hands appeared to have partaken of the surrounding and depressing gloom.

The coastline at this season of the year, forever lashed by the towering and roaring Atlantic swell presented a most forbidding appearance and woe betide the craft whose keel should be apt to come into contact with any one of the numerous islets and sunken rocks.

The cliff scenery of the bold headlands of Mizzen Head with its sharp peak 755 feet in height; Sheep Head, a remarkably bold and rugged headland standing out in supreme and gigantic majesty defied throughout the ages the fiercest assaults of Neptune, king of the seas. Dursey Head, the western extremity of Dursey Island, with an elevation of 915 feet, surmounted by an old watch tower, most bare and uninviting, even for a mountain goat. Bolus Head, 930 feet in height - the extremity of bold mountainous land 1,340 feet high terminating in a precipice of 600 feet, capped by an ancient tower from which brave and stout-hearted watchers of ages long past kept their constant vigil. All these rugged cliffs,

with the teeming sea bird life again and again smitten by nature when in the most destructive mode, yet standing still unconquered, serene and defiant, were awe inspiring in their strength, majestic in their setting and a reminder of that power of the Creator of all things. The Atlantic rollers driven home by a strong south-wester, or a storm possibly a thousand miles to the westward, spending their strength against this rock bound shore and sending their white crusted heads to unbelievable heights was a sight that only the few have the privilege to behold and contemplate at leisure.

Patrolling along the shore, here and there one would discover a cluster of cottages perched high up, apparently sitting on a shelf in the side of the cliff such as those at the fort of Brandon, a bold headland backed by Brandon Mountain 3,126 feet in height, down the side of which gusts of wind would sweep with destructive and terrifying violence. A position, dark, dreary, barren and inhospitable in the extreme is where the peasant cottager in the humble cabin that he called home would, throughout the long and dreary winter, eke out his meagre supply of potatoes scratched from the small plots of earth between the rocks of the mountainside, making the best – cheerfully – of such comforts as his turf fire gave forth and over which the good wife prepared the griddle cake with its raising agent of sour milk and soda bicarbonate. The comfort or discomforts of man are all by comparison and exposed as they were to the full fury of the Atlantic storms, often accompanied by torrents of rain, once could not but pause and ponder over the discomfort under which fate had doomed these humble but cheerful folk to spend their lives.

About 4 pm of a December evening a Milford trawler hove in sight, just about to commence a night's fishing at the mouth of Ballingskelligs Bay. Fishing in this bay was not permitted by this class of trawler. He had moored a light fixed to a pole – known as a dan - just at the mouth of the bay, on a line inside of which fishing was forbidden. It was quite apparent that he intended to steam around and around the dan, taking a good sweep into the bay over forbidden ground. Drawing near to the trawler, he was plied with certain questions as to his intention in dropping his dan in that position. Of course, he assured me, it was his intention to keep outside. But it was quite apparent that he intended to follow the usual procedure and steam around the light. It was no intention of mine to stay and see that this procedure was not followed. After a time he made the offer of some fish, which offer we were pleased to accept. Then, getting a line across, a basket of 'prime' turbot, sole and plaice was passed over followed by a couple of baskets of what the skipper called 'rough' but all good edible fish.

The thought occurred to me, that any man with the courage and grit to spend a December night trawling close home to such an iron bound and inhospitable shore – rules or no rules – deserved all the fish waiting there to be caught. Now growing dusk and bidding them goodnight and good luck, we left the skipper to follow his own inclination and proceeded on our course.

Lying in Valencia Harbour, weather-bound with strong winter gales, it was my custom to land for walking exercise over hill and dale and at times found it very fascinating to stand on this hill top and watch the mountainous Atlantic waves expend their fury against the distant cliffs and to note every few minutes a huge wave towering along, heavier and

higher than others, roll home, striking the headland, sending the foam heavenward hundreds of feet.

In my rambles, liberty was frequently taken of calling at a wayside cottage for a word with the good man of the house, or lingering on the road for a chat with the farmer, homeward bound with his load of turf for the fire on the hearth. On calling at a cottage door one usually gave the customary salutation "God bless all here" bringing a reply "and yourself, son" followed by an invitation to enter and take a seat, with an assurance "you are welcome, son". They were invariably polite, kindly disposed, sociable, hospitable and cheerful, sometimes in very depressing surroundings. It was usually found that the most intelligent interest was taken in the most important topics of the day and they were always ready and interested in discussing the question then uppermost in their minds – their claims for self-government – often showing a thorough knowledge of the subject. However depressing their story of the past may have been especially under the Landlord System, with rack rents and other oppressions, there was always the hope and expectation that the clouds would one day disperse and the full sunshine of prosperity await them at their door. From the cheerful outlook of these kind-hearted peasants there was a lesson worthy of a place in one's book of remembrance.

On 24th December, the weather having moderated, steam was raised, and leaving Valencia Harbour in order to resume the patrol, there being no fishing craft of any sort calling our attention, a course was set for the Bull Rock – a bold rock, steep too, standing two and a half miles from Dursey Head, 290 feet in height, surrounded by a lighthouse with perpendicular cliffs and perforated by a large arched cavern with a depth of five fathoms of water. In days long past the commanders of some of the King's ships were apt to attempt the unusual, such as that of throwing the Logan Rock, near the Land's End, from its delicate poise. According to tradition, the commander of a man-o-war brig, after striking lower yards and topmast, got all boats ahead and towed the brig through the arch.

Steaming around the rock, a few friendly remarks were passed with the light-keepers by semaphore. The compliments of the season and, could we be of any service or take a message on shore, thus we took our departure, leaving them to their lonely watch and the polishing of reflectors and prisms.

Then onto the Great Skellig, a jagged rock a few miles to the westward of The Bull. This rock, on which stands a lighthouse, is half a mile long, a quarter of a mile wide, 704 feet in height and about one and a half miles from the shore. On it there are the remains of a monastic establishment of the early Christian ages, consisting of a walled enclosure unbroken after the lapse of centuries. There is a small building said to have been a church. The highest peak named the Needle's Eye has on it a work of dry masonry in the form of a horseshoe, erected by the monks as a place of prayer. A spot named Christ's Valley has several ancient graves and rude crosses. Before the time of monthly reliefs for the light-keepers, it was customary for one man to live permanently on the rock and he was held responsible for the light. Quarters were provided for the accommodation of the light-keeper, his wife and family. Under these conditions, to a certain light-keeper, for twenty

one years this lonely rock was home and I have been told that two of his children were buried there.

The Little Skellig, not far distant, 430 feet in height, is of interest as being the most southerly resting place of the gannets where, during the hatching season, they congregate in great numbers. A shipmate – keen on egg collection – once informed me that he landed on this islet and scaled the heights where the birds were sitting. Unperturbed by the presence of man, they refused to move and had literally to be beaten from the nest.

As we steamed around this rock on the eve of Christmas we thought and spoke of those men of the early Christian era who. from their religious convictions, elected to take up their abode on this rather barren rock, where in sincerity and simple faith on many a Christmas eve must have bowed the knee and reverently by their prayers have made their requests known unto heaven. The beehive cells, in which the monks slept, cut from the solid rock, can be seen to this day. As we pictured the isolation of the monks and spoke of the lonely watchers of the light keepers – with seldom a passing ship in sight – in our hearts there was a feeling of fraternal sympathy. In all probability the light-keepers were sorry for us, rolling and pitching about in the ocean swell on Xmas eve and would be loath to exchange their solid foundation, that stood unmoved, and unmovable, for that of the deck of any ship. Life after all is diverse, and we are sometimes apt to think the other man's job to be much worse than it really is.

Returning to Valencia Harbour that evening the steward was landed, with the idea of supplementing the navy rations at the festive season. The fat poultry had been despatched to the markets and there was very little selection left. After much searching and inquiry, at last a goose was run to earth and procured for the sum of two shillings and sixpence. True, it had not had any special feeding, but it served its purpose and provided a sumptuous Christmas dinner.

It being holiday time, and nothing important outside for the next few days, the anchor was allowed to retain its hold in the mud.

1903

As the New Year opened we were still employed under the same orders – protection of fisheries – and no fishing boats in sight. There was nothing very eventful from one day to another: changing the anchorage from one harbour to another, writing up the log and tendering a blank weekly report.

Putting to sea of a moderate morning in the second week of January, there being nothing special, we steamed away to the Great Blasket Island for no particular reason other than to view the island at our leisure. This island, one mile from the mainland, is three miles long and half a mile wide. From this narrow base, it rises to the height of 950 feet. The precipitous cliffs, lashed by the ever surging Atlantic ocean, are of an inspiring and stupendous character and on this dark winter's day the island did not appear to be very inviting or desirable as a spot for a permanent residence, yet there were a number of people

that called it home. On numerous occasions I had passed this island but never before had I noticed its wild but charming grandeur.

When closing the island, near the landing place and village, a large pile of timber came into view, flotsam that had been recovered by the islanders. After waiting for some little time and remarking on the isolation of those dwellers on the island, they, thinking that we had come in connection with the timber, came off in a canoe manned by four lusty, hardy looking men. These canoes have a framework of very light wood over which is fitted and stretched to the exact model of the framework a stout canvas afterwards coated with pitch and tar, thus making a perfectly watertight boat or canoe. It swims lightly on the water, drawing but a few inches and when skilfully handled will ride a rough sea like a seagull. It is only the native of the west of Ireland who can handle this frail but safe class of boat, always showing great skill in manoeuvring them, even in rough and tempestuous weather.

As the canoe drew near, the senior man saluted at the same time calling out "God bless ye, God bless ye". The thought occurred to me, what better salutation than that could anyone desire, and where else would anyone receive such a greeting?
Replying: "Thank you, thank you, God bless yourself, you are welcome on board".

The canoe came alongside and the men came on board and very interested we became as we listened to their accounts of their mode of living on the island with a visit now and again to the mainland for food and tobacco and to trade the eggs, chicken and pigs. The chief food is the potato and fish – the fish caught in the summer salted and dried for use during the winter.

Truly the happiness of man consisteth not in the abundance of his possessions. If it did, I am afraid these islanders would stand very low down the list. The mode of living kept them healthy and consequently contentment and happiness followed. A friendly contact having been made it was proposed to muster a couple of pounds of tobacco, some tea, and a few pounds of corned beef for them. Nothing could have been more acceptable and to show their appreciation their thanks were profuse and crowned by all the blessing in their vocabulary bringing to one's thoughts the words of the psalmist: "It is more blessed to give than to receive".

These were the early days of wireless and experiments in transmission across the Atlantic were being carried out from a temporary station on Brow Head. When sheltering in Crookhaven, and having landed for a little exercise in my wanderings, I found myself near the wireless station on the headland. Very soon the official in charge appeared, apparently not displeased to see a visitor and probably like myself, glad of a little conversation with anyone by way of a change. Eventually I expressed a wish – if there was no objection – to see the instruments when working. Although it was all private and confidential he permitted me to enter the instrument room, knowing full well my inability to collect any inside knowledge, and demonstrated the method of sending out the electric waves. It did not reveal very much. The electric sparks were shot forth from an instrument onto a revolving drum connected to an aerial going out into space to a receiving station on the other side. I was more impressed by the noise than anything else, it was of an ear-splitting

character and I was glad to be once again in the open; so much for the early days of wireless.

At a later date a terrific storm swept over Southern Ireland doing considerable damage afloat and ashore. Fortunately we were in Valencia Harbour, riding with two anchors ahead, a good scope of cable, and steam on the engines moving slowly to take the strain from the cables. A yacht on passage to Limerick and, in for shelter, drove from the anchorage, passing us very close, blew away to leeward landing on the rocks and becoming a total wreck. Fortunately the crew managed to get ashore and so save their lives. Over a thousand trees blew down in Phoenix Park, Dublin.

The *Fanny* still continuing on this so-called fishing duty preceded to Bantry for a further supply of victualling stores from HMS *Collingwood*, arrived at dusk after a day's steaming against a cold north-easter. On entering the harbour, a signal was made from the *Collingwood*: "Commanding Officer need not report". With the fading light, the signal was not correctly read. Following the usual procedure, I went on board to report arrival.

Ascending the accommodation ladder and passing onto the quarter deck, the lieutenant of the day – quite a junior officer – who was in charge awaited me, to all appearance not in too good a temper.

Saluting, I said: "Commanding officer of the *Fanny* to report my arrival".
Reply: "A signal was made that you need not report, the captain in not on board".
A pause, followed by a question from me: "Will the captain be on board in the morning?"
The lieutenant sharply: "You are only casual, go back to your ship and await orders".

Without another word I obeyed, went down the ladder and into the boat, feeling very much annoyed. On the second day following I am ordered to appear on board HMS *Collingwood*. My suspicions were aroused that the lieutenant had reported me and was quite prepared to defend myself. This officer had really been rude to me, as an officer holding a corresponding rank with himself. Arriving on board, the officer of the day informed me that the captain would see me on the quarter deck. After a few minutes I am beckoned toward the captain's cabin. Passing in, there stood the captain, the first lieutenant, and the lieutenant.

Captain calls on lieutenant to state his case.
Lieutenant: "This officer, sir, after a signal 'you need not report' came on board. He said that he was the captain of the *Fanny* to report his arrival and was disrespectful, sir; he did not say 'sir' to me. He was told to go back to his ship. He then asked if the captain would be on board in the morning."
The captain turning to me: "Do you know that the lieutenant was my representative, during my absence?"
"Perfectly well sir. Am I not allowed to make a statement, sir?"
Captain: "Oh yes".
Myself: "There is not a man alive that ever heard me make use of the word captain in reference to myself. My words were 'Commanding Officer of the *Fanny*".
Captain: "What authority have you?"

"My appointment, sir."
Captain: "I should like to see it."
"The lieutenant was rude to me, sir, and ordered me out of the ship. I am the officer that should be making a complaint. I try to remember my manners and if I neglected to say 'sir' I will apologise to the lieutenant. I am appointed by the same authority as Lieutenant X and entitled to civility." I am afraid that I was a little heated and indignant in defending myself.

The Captain thinking that I had said enough turned the table on the lieutenant and said: "I am sure that you did not intend to be rude" and placed his hand on my shoulder and guided me to the door.

Before leaving the ship, the lieutenant, who I had reason to think had a straight word from the captain, sent for me to join him in the smoke room, invited me to join him in a drink, said he was sorry, that he did not know of my equivalent rank and let it pass. A few times that I met the lieutenant afterwards he was always very agreeable. I suppose in all walks of life men are subject to pin pricks. This was one.

Resuming the patrol which was so very dull, any little variation was welcome by way of a change. There are two things that the sailor least likes to hear: 'abandon ship' and 'fire in the hold'.

A large ship, *Manchester Merchant*, bound to Liverpool with a general cargo including cotton, when about three hundred miles to the west of Ireland was found to be on fire in the hold where the cotton was stowed, with every possible appliance being brought to bear on the fire without avail. It became a race against time - on the one hand to reach Ireland, spreading of the fire and "abandon ship" on the other.

Eventually the light on the Blasket Islands (Tearaght) was sighted from the burning ship. There were two alternatives: "abandon ship" and trust to landing in the boats or try and save the ship by scuttling in Dingle Bay. The latter was decided on. The captain, plotting his course into Dingle Bay scuttled his ship in seven fathoms – forty two feet of water just covering her upper works, the crew leaving in their own boats and landing at Dingle. Without delay salvage officers from Liverpool were readily on the spot, to examine and report on the prospects of salvage.

Steaming into Valencia Harbour these officers were found somewhat stranded, not being able to find a craft other than a small fishing boat to take them out to the ship. Begging of me to render them a service and take them out and seeing that we were not in any way pressed for time, their request was complied with. Steaming out to the ship, it was found that the hatches had washed away and that the cargo – more particularly the cotton – was floating out and that boats and canoes were busy recovering the flotsam.

The salvage officers, weighing up the position in which the ship had been scuttled, open to the full force of the Atlantic Ocean, with the sea breaking heavily, as it were, breaking over a sunken rock, making it impossible to go very close, to make their examination as they wished to do. That had to be postponed for another day. A couple of days later the

officers were again taken out to the wreck. The wind and sea now abated, the boats and canoes were making a good thing out of it collecting the stuff as it floated out of the holds.

The salvage boat had brought with them half a dozen men, a diver and his assistants included. The officer in charge wished the diver to don his diving suit, descend and examine the hull from the outside, but the sea being so much disturbed and the groundswell surging around the wreck with the pull of the wide, wide ocean behind it, the diver was reluctant to make the attempt.

After waiting for the flailing tide to uncover the upper works of the wreck, the diver at last consented to get into his suit and try it. Giving his attendants careful instructions, he descended but I don't think that he could have reached the bottom, for the sea carried him along the side of the ship as it would a bag of sand. It did not take the diver very long to discover that the sea had begun its work of destruction by breaking the ship in two and that any prospect of salving her was hopeless.

Those residents on the shores of Dingle Bay had not had such a time for many years – if ever before – collecting the cargo as it washed out of the holds, gaining in salvage alone many pounds for their labour. The wreck was abandoned and in all probability her frames are there to this day.

[Walter Hunkin's first journal ends here]

1903

February passed and the fishing patrol discontinued; orders were received to report at Queenstown. It later came to my knowledge that the so-called fishing duty was only a blind; that the real reason for the patrolling of the south west of Ireland at that season of the year was to have a vessel on the spot and ready to deal with any attempt at illegal landing of arms.

A submission had been forwarded suggesting a removal of certain yacht fittings and that further alterations should be carried out to the *Fanny*. The Admiral in command of the Home Fleet, whose command included all coastguard ships and coastguard cruisers, who had recommended the purchase of the *Fanny*, desired to see for himself the further alterations suggested. The orders were: 'Proceed to Milford Haven' where the Home Fleet would rendezvous, arriving by a given date.

On arrival of the fleet and my going on board to report, the late Captain of the *Collingwood*, Sir William Fisher, was on the quarterdeck. The officer of the watch somewhat amazed with the breezy manner with which he greeted me, remarked: "I presume that you have met Captain Fisher before. You must have been one of his favourites". Agreeing that I was known to the breezy captain, having served under him, he added: "It is not everyone that is received as you were". With that I was passed on to the Flag Lieutenant, he announcing my presence on board, I was ushered into the Admiral's cabin. Answering the questions addressed to me, the alterations suggested were explained. As a yacht, he knew the *Fanny* very well and clearly understood my wishes. He did not

raise any objection and said that he was sorry that he could not give the time to come on board and that he would send an officer to report. Eventually three officers came on board, agreed with my suggestion, and reported accordingly. The alterations were approved and in due course carried out by a firm of shipbuilders in Dublin.

After a few days the Home Fleet put to sea, the *Fanny* being ordered to proceed to Kingstown. After leaving Milford and setting a course for the Blackwater Lightship, the wind commenced to freshen with a following and rising sea. It was very soon apparent that we were in for a strong March gale. Before reaching Dublin Bay the wind and sea were as much as the vessel could contend with - torrents of rain and visibility very poor. I was not sorry to sight the light on Bailey Head and the lights of the Home Fleet at anchor in the bay exposed to the full force of the storm.

The following day, going on board of the parent ship for orders, the Commander remarked that we must have had a rough time coming from Milford. My answer: "Yes sir, and you would like to feel the same as I did when I sighted the Bailey Light". He, to show his agreement, laughingly remarked: "I expect you are right".

I had been away from home for a year and on the return of the parent ship to Kingstown made an application for twenty-one days' leave. Proceeding to my home in Grimsby I saw our youngest child for the first time. The company of my wife at our own fireside with our children was enjoyed to the full. But, alas "the sweetest moments are ever briefest in their stay". My leave expired and the hour to say farewell came all too soon.

If I desired to see anything of my home, my only plan was to remove my family back to Ireland. Vacant houses were scarce. I however eventually succeeded in securing a house at Dalkey, a very pleasant spot, a mile or so below Kingstown. In due course my home was set up there, thus giving me the opportunity of seeing my family when the *Fanny* was at our home port.

All through the summer we were kept constantly on the run, removing coastguards and their families and distributing stores to the coastguard stations and Royal Naval reserve batteries.

Changes were now following in quick succession. In 1857, the date when Revenue Cutters and the Coastguard Service were placed under the control of the Admiralty, the whole coastline of the British islands was divided into districts. One ship, known as the District Ship, was stationed in each district, the Captain of which became known as the District Captain, having under his supervision all coastguard stations and coastguard cruisers in his district. These district ships were now to be abolished as such and utilized as sea-going training ships for the Royal Naval reserve. The District Captain, no longer captain of a ship, performed his duties from an office on shore. Coastguard cruisers were still attached to the Naval Reserve training ships for pay, provisions and accounts but under the District Captain for working orders. All Royal Naval reserve batteries were now closed and coastguard stations no longer considered necessary were being closed one by one.

The *Fanny* was now placed in the hands of a shipbuilding firm at Dublin for alterations and repairs taking several weeks which gave me the opportunity of spending a little time at home, a privilege much appreciated.

The usual removals and attention to the requirements of the coastguards brought us to the close of the year, the men having the usual Christmas leave from Kingstown.

1904

With the closing of naval reserve batteries and changes generally there was not a great deal of work by which the District Captain could keep the vessel employed and in order to keep us from rusting out at the moorings gave us a little weekly job to bring the coastguards and their families from Lambay Island to the mainland for provisions etc., taking them back again in the evening. It would sometimes happen that fair weather when setting out in the morning would by evening have changed to a gale. More often than not it would prove to be anything but a pleasure outing for them.

The officer of the station was a cockney – full of fun and nonsense, never missing an opportunity of having a joke at the expense of one or another of his crew or their wives. One day the cat followed one of the women down to the boat and our friend, the funny man, would have the 'darling cat' – his expression – taken on board to accompany its owner on her market outing to her great annoyance and embarrassment. I was later informed that the cockney's practical joke with the 'darling cat' led to unpleasant scenes at the station a few hours later.

In the middle of February orders were received to report at Queenstown. On arrival and reporting at the Commander-in-Chief's office I was informed that the *Fanny* was to be employed on fishing duty on the south-west coast under the direct orders of the Commander-in-Chief.

At this season of the year, the French fleet of sailing drifters were usually found working off the coast of Cork and Kerry in search of the early spring mackerel and, when caught in great quantities – which was of no unusual occurrence – and taken home to France in time for the early market, would result in large dividends for the owners. The skippers were keen to be numbered amongst the first boats back with a cargo.

Completing with provisions and stores we proceeded according to orders cruising to the westward. On account of boisterous weather a great number of French drifters had been at anchor for several days in Crookhaven and Schull harbours. Having been hung up ourselves in Berehaven, with moderating weather we lifted the anchor, steaming to the eastward, calling during the afternoon at Schull for the despatch of mails etc.

The Frenchmen were then putting to sea to make their first trials for the season, eager to make a beginning - even to lose one night's fishing might mean the loss of what might otherwise mean a good season. After transacting our business we got underway again and as we proceeded down the bay sighted one of the drifters shooting his nets a mile inside of a line between the headlands forming the bay. The three mile limit was that of an imaginary line joining the headlands, prohibited to foreign fishermen. There was no

alternative but to order him to recover his nets, take the boat back to Schull, and place him under arrest.

The matter was reported to the Commander-in-Chief who ordered the usual proceedings to be taken. The first move was to communicate with the public prosecutor in Dublin who ordered the line of procedure and instructed a solicitor to take action. The French fishery cruiser in company with this fishing fleet soon arrived on the scene. In the interest of the arrested vessel the officer commanding the cruiser tried – with a message to the Admiral – to beg him off, but without avail. On the third day – it having taken more time than usual with the preliminaries – the local court assembled. After hearing my evidence and extracts from the log, the accused having nothing to offer in his defence, the court found the charge proven and imposed a fine of £1 and £1 costs. Although it was a court of justice I could not help but remark that it appeared to be a farce. The chairman retorting: "that is the finding of the court". A gentleman, near to me, seeing that I was annoyed with the small fine imposed, whispered into my ear: "Remember Captain, this is not England, this is Ireland where we are a little less severe with a stranger". The small fine may have been prompted by the kindly Irish nature but I was inclined to think there was a leaning towards the foreigner seeing that about a month earlier a Milford trawler fishing within the prohibited waters off Bantry Bay was fined £50 and his gear confiscated. The solicitor conducting the case was most happily patting himself on the back to know that the accused was fined – if only a small sum – and that he was successful in securing a conviction.

The French skipper shook hands with me to show there was no ill feeling. I remarked to him that the got off very lightly. He thought otherwise - the loss of three nights' fishing was the greater consideration and the greater punishment.

By the end of April, the spring mackerel fishing having closed, the patrol was withdrawn and the *Fanny* again placed under the orders of the District Captain. With the recent changes and closing of naval reserve batteries, there was not quite so much work awaiting us thus giving a little more leisure time at headquarters.

In the late summer orders were received to proceed to Queenstown. On arrival at that port the cruiser *Julia* from the Western District together with the *Fanny* were deputed for examination duties at Berehaven in connection with the exercises of the fleet.

Connected with the examination service, a Divisional Officer of Coastguards – a senior lieutenant – was the senior examination officer, with quarters on shore, under whose orders we were to carry out our duties and to whom we were to report on the number of vessels examined at the entrance. This officious and fussy officer boarded the *Julia* at Queenstown for the passage to Berehaven and, as far as I could make out, took complete charge out of the hands of the Commander, going on the bridge and issuing orders. This I had never seen done by any officer and in my opinion he was overstepping his authority. Had this happened with me, I think that I should have respectfully questioned his authority to take the navigation of the vessel out of my hands.

On arrival at Berehaven the Lieutenant took up his quarters on Bere Island, issuing verbal orders to myself and the Commander of the *Julia*. I respectfully suggested the orders might

be given in writing. He disagreed with this suggestion, saying: "you have your orders, carry on".

Our duties were at the eastern entrance of the haven, to intercept any vessels attempting or wishing to enter, each vessel relieving the other every twenty-four hours. There was not much room for playing about and one day the weather being thick we dropped anchor. On the Lieutenant becoming aware that we had been at anchor he became very angry, had me on the carpet, gave me a dressing down and threatened to report me to the Admiral of the Fleet. Then, ordering me to give my reasons in writing, I was dismissed. Seeing that I was acting under verbal orders I gave my reason – interpreting his orders to my own advantage – for coming to an anchor. That it was understood when receiving orders in connection with the nature of our duties, it was laid down that in thick weather when the towers on Bere Island became obscured, there would be no objection to our coming to an anchor and that I was under the impression that I was acting in strict compliance with the wishes of the Senior Examination Officer. And so this little incident blew over without a report to the Admiral.

At the close of the manoeuvres and returning to Queenstown the vessel was taken in hand by the dockyard authorities at Haulbowline Naval Yard for repairs. With other items for survey, the steering compass was included. The latter came under the jurisdiction of the Navigating Commander of the dockyard staff. He came on board, fiddled about, and told me to hang a magnet – which he provided – in a certain position and to report after a few days. The magnet made no difference and when I went to report he started to lay into me about the cost of a new compass and scold me just as if I were to blame. He was really budging at the expenditure of a few pounds or, in other words, being difficult. He declined to issue the orders for a new one and said I must do with the same. He would get it adjusted. But I had no intention of leaving the harbour with a faulty compass on the authority of the Commander.

The time was going on and nothing having been decided I had reluctantly to approach the Commander again – a rather weak personality, not always the easiest to deal with – and respectfully mention the matter. Result: further orders as to the hanging of magnets, without results. At last I ventured to suggest that I might appeal to the Commander-in-Chief. That was quite enough. He did not wish for that to happen, the tune was very soon changed. He supposed that I must have a new one. He would issue an order. The raising of obstacles in such a small matter, one was sometimes apt to find most irritating. What a difference in the two officers, when compared with the jolly commander of the flagship at Berehaven.

Now under the orders of the District Captain, our first job picking up condemned stores for return to Queenstown commencing in the north and working down the coast. When we got as far as Kingstown orders awaited us to "proceed to Queenstown immediately". On the passage after passing the Tuskers we fell in with a very strong gale compelling us to seek shelter in Waterford River. Apparently the *Fanny* was required at Berehaven by a certain date to run despatches for ships of the fleet carrying out gun practice. Being a day late in

arriving at Queenstown the *Julia*, that had arrived in the meantime, had been despatched instead.

The District Captain, residing at Queenstown, who was also the Flag Captain, was then acting as Senior Officer – the Commander-in-Chief of all naval units on the coast of Ireland being absent from his headquarters. This District Captain was junior to the District Captain at Kingstown and the latter claimed that during the absence of the Commander-in-Chief from his station the duties of senior officer were his by seniority. It was therefore plain that there were strained relations.

On arrival at Queenstown the Flag Captain was very angry that I had not got there earlier. I ventured to remind him of the gale the day before and to add that I did not know another man that would have come around the Salter islands in such a sea. He then ordered me to land all the condemned stores, complete with coal – two days' work – and be ready for sea in the morning.

The next morning I was commanded by signal to appear at his office bringing my sailing orders with me. There was a mistake in reading the signal and I appeared without the sailing orders. For this I got a dressing down and was ordered to get back, do this and that, and be ready to sail at eleven o'clock. "You will receive fresh sailing orders". The new sailing orders, cancelling those issued by my own District Captain, instructed me to proceed as far as Wicklow, embark condemned stores and return to Queenstown.

We had a sick man for the hospital and the Medical Officer would not admit him without the usual formalities that took over an hour to get through. After more signals and orders from the Flag Captain the question came over: "Why are you not underway?" Reply: "Waiting for the boat to return from the dockyard with stores". At last we slipped and proceeded. After being harassed by the Senior Officer all the morning although it was blowing hard and very boisterous I was not sorry to get out of signal distance when I could use my own discretion and promptly decided to seek the first anchorage in Waterford River remaining a few days and going up to Waterford Quay for supplies. After leaving Waterford fortunately we came to an anchor in the river, for that night it blew up to a terrific gale with much damage to shipping, the Barrels Lightship being driven half a mile from her usual anchorage.

Reaching Wicklow on a Saturday afternoon and remembering the send-off I had before leaving Queenstown I was in no hurry to go back and decided to chance the consequences of going to Kingstown and having a Sunday at home. On Monday I reported to the District Captain, taking the sailing orders issued by the Flag Captain at Queenstown. He read the orders and asked a few questions. It has been mentioned that he was the senior of the two and, apparently not liking the idea of the *Fanny* being given orders without his knowledge, ordered me to remain in the harbour. I had not returned on board many minutes before a messenger from the office stood on the pier and made the signal: "Flag Captain asks why *Fanny* has not returned to Queenstown as ordered?" My reply: "Need for replenishing supplies". My District Captain took it all right and whatever passed between him and the Flag Captain, I remained in the harbour.

That did not finish it. On account of the mistake in the signal mentioned above, the Flag Captain probably to have his own back, reported to the Commander-in-Chief that the *Fanny* was slack at signals. Consequently my District Captain was called on for a report on the question, and replied to the effect that when using the *Fanny* in visiting coastguard stations he had never experienced any difficulty whatever in communicating between ship and stations by signal.

On our next visit to Queenstown the Flag Lieutenant was sent on board to examine the men in signals. The Flag Lieutenant, to all appearances a decent sort of fellow, wanting to know what the fuss was all about, sent for the man – Leading Seaman – that made the mistake in reading the signal, gave him a test, asked a few questions bearing on signals, generally expressed his satisfaction and said that he would report accordingly, thus ended this little irritation through an officer making a mountain out of a mole hill. It shows the petty jealousy, apt to arise between officers of equal rank, clinching onto any trifle in order to test one another.

1904 The Ship's Ghost; Revenue Cutters.

About this time the story of a ghost on board had cropped up among the men. The cabins for the commanding officer, officers and accommodation for coastguards were in the after part of the ship, abaft the engine-room with a gangway down the centre, the cabins on each side approached by a stepladder leading down from the deckhouse at the foremost end of the corridor and a ladder from the deck at the after end. The method of lighting was by candle and lantern, the candle burning in a spring socket would last for six hours. It was the duty of the watchman to renew the candle as required. If the candle should burn out, it was then pitch dark and rather creepy. On the strength of this a wag set a story going that when descending by the after ladder to renew the candle in the middle watch, he saw a ghost at the foot of the fore ladder and that it had an eye in the centre of its forehead. The fellow was one of those jesters playing up to some of his more sensitive shipmates. The story took on and consequently we were frequently left without a light. On making enquiry into the reason why, the ghost story was revealed.

Included in the crew was a man from Belfast – a fat good tempered simple sort of fellow - usually addressed by his mates as "Fatty". After the start of the ghost story nothing would induce Fatty to go down and trim the lamp during the night. Lofty Jenkin had seen the ghost himself and that was all sufficient for Fatty.

Discussing the story of the ghost on the lower deck:
Chippy, a man from Cork, said: "Shure it was only a story, there is no ghost in it at all".
Fatty: "Lofty saw the ghost himself".
Chippy: "Lofty must have had a dhrop taken".
Lofty: "I only had my tot at dinner time, haven't had a pint for a month".
Chippy: "You must have been after getting the smell from the rum locker".
Lofty, indignant: "Rum locker! I tell you, I saw a ghost there".
Chippy: "It's after dreaming ye are or walkin' in your sleep".
Chippy, after saying: "Fatty is afraid to go down".

Fatty: "You are afraid to go doon yourself".
Shipmate: "Well done Fatty. Chips is not game".
Fatty: "I heard a queer noise doon there".
Chippy: "Ach shure, it was the stoker in the engine room you were after hearing".
Fatty: "I'll make a bet you are no game to go doon yourself now, there is no-one there".
Chippy: "What's the bet, shure?"
Fatty: "Two bob".
A voice: "Cookie will hold the stakes. Stakes placed in the hands of the cook".
Chippy: "I must be after saying a prayer for myself." (Produces his prayer book and reads the prayer).
Fatty: "And now, you are no game to be going doon".
Chippy: "It's no fear I have". (Proceeding aft he descended the ladder, explored the corridor, returned and claimed the stakes).
Fatty: "You haven't been doon".
Chippy: "Indeed I have. I am after going down the stern ladder".
Fatty: "See anything doon there?"
Chippy: "Shure, there is nothing there, there is no ghost in it, I tell ye".
A pause.
Chippy: "Come along Fatty, we'll be after going down together".
Fatty: "No more ghosts, for me, Chips".
Shipmaster: "Go on Fatty, Chips can take his mallet with him".

Fatty, after further banter from shipmates, agrees to go down, accompanied by Chippy. Taff Jones, the funny man, creeping aft, enters the deck house, waiting at the top of the ladder leading down to the corridor. Chippy descending the after ladder, followed by the fat one.

Fatty: "Very dark Chips, doon here".
Chippy: "Where the divil is the ghost?"
Fatty: "Wait a wee while".
Chippy: "The divil a ghost is in it at all".
Fatty: "Listen Chippy".
Chippy: "Faise, that only a stoker below there".
Fatty, holding on to Chips: "What's that?"

Taffy, a bit of a ventriloquist from the deck house, making strange sounds deep in his throat, was quite enough. Fatty making a bolt for the after ladder, followed closely by Chippy who is a bit superstitious and after all not very sure 'there is no ghost in it' and who in his haste brings the fat one to the deck rather near to a ventilator giving him a black eye.

Shipmaster: "See the conquering hero … Well, what news, any ghost about?"
Fatty: "Yes, hand over the stakes".
Cook: "Wait a bit, not so fast Fatty".
Fatty: "Chippy heard him. Didn't you Chips?"

Chippy, not very sure of himself, but not wishing to be branded as fainthearted, said that he was after seeing nothing. The cook thinking there was something funny and mysterious about it decided that he had better hold onto the stakes and they could have a glass the next time they landed.

The ghost story as told by the quartermaster held good for many a day and was told with much solemnity to every new shipmate. Consequently we were frequently without a light in the corridor.

At this date, with the progress in steam and the coming of the motor engine, all classes of sailing craft were rapidly being superseded. The utility of the sailing cutter had long since passed and their extinction was not far distant. Writing of the cutters, it is well to refer back a few decades. The Coastguard Cruiser Service, as it was known until its abolition after the close of the Great War, had its origin in the Revenue Cutters dating back to a period of over two hundred years.

During the 18th century the protection of the revenue on shore was in the hands of the Board of Customs. Lacking in an adequate number of officers to deal with the ever increasing number of smugglers, the only organised force for the suppression of smuggling was that of the revenue cutters under the control of the Lords Commissioners of H M Treasury. They were vessels built on fine lines for speed, very heavily sparred and carried a vast spread of canvas including a flying squaresail, and topsail for use in a following breeze. Every fitting was remarkably strong in order to stand the strain when pursuing a vessel in a chase or in pursuit of a smuggler. The living quarters for the men were clean and comfortable; a commodious cabin for the commander and separate cabins for the mate, gunner and boatswain.

There were different classes of cutters ranging from 40 to 180 tons. The commander of a first class cutter was usually one who had held the rank of a lieutenant in the Royal Navy, the smaller cutters being commanded by those promoted from mates, gunners and boatswains.

The code of discipline was of a low standard. In the nature of their duties strong drink was easy of access and with so much cheap liquor obtainable there followed resultant drunkenness, insubordination and desertion. The crews were recruited from the ordinary run of seaman. There was no continuous or binding agreement between the department of HM Treasury and the men and, with all too frequent recurrence, those guilty of misbehaviour found themselves promptly discharged to the shore.

The duties of the revenue cutters were protecting the revenue and the suppression of smuggling. For the running of contraband, principally from the French ports, specially built fast vessels were used including yawls, cutters, luggers and gigs. The aim and object of the revenue cutters was at all times to checkmate the smugglers and if possible seize ship and cargo.

Each cutter was allotted a stretch of coast for which they were responsible that no smuggler effected a landing. Their patrol in the channel was more or less confined to the coastline limit, other cutters being responsible for the adjoining guards. The duties, to be effective, demanded vigilance and a constant watch on every movement of any craft suspected of making an attempt to land an unauthorised cargo.

The crews needed to be men of fearless mettle especially when some of the armed smugglers turned on the cutter engaging in deadly combat. There was one outstanding inducement, both to officers and men that acted as a stimulant, encouraging them to face up cheerfully to all the discomfort of the patrol and an occasional brush with a smuggler. That was the prize money arising out of smuggling vessels and contraband goods seized by the cutter and confiscated. There was a special incentive to their exertions in an endeavour to capture a smuggler in person as there was a special monetary reward for everyone captured and convicted.

The duties were exacting and dangerous, wages low, and with prolonged periods without prize money it was by no means unknown for a cutter to run a little consignment of contraband on their own account. During the war with France in the latter years of the 18th and the early years of the 19th centuries smuggling had increased to such an extent that the number of revenue cutters employed were quite inadequate to cope with or check the ever increasing number of men and vessels engaged in the unlawful traffic in contraband (such as silks, tea, tobacco, brandy, wines etc.) having acquired proportions beyond control.

With the introduction of the Preventive Water Guard, the Revenue Cutter Service was re-organised and their numbers increased to about 55 vessels. In 1822, by a consolidation order from the department of H M Treasury, the Revenue Cutters as well as the Preventive Water Guard were handed over to the control of the Board of Customs. The customs flag was flown and the officers and men placed on the footing of civil servants. In 1831 the Preventive Water Guard who were recruited from all classes – not necessarily from the seaman class - were disbanded and their places to a large extent taken by men from the revenue cutters under the title of coastguard.

The second quarter of the 19th century may be regarded as the heyday of the Revenue Cutter Service. With the new and faster vessels better armed, they were able far better to deal with, overhaul, search, and seize more smuggling craft than ever before in the history of the Revenue Cutter Service. With the liberal distribution of prize money ranging in proportion from 100 shares to the commander, to five shares to the boy, sometimes amounting to as much as £50 to a seaman, it had become a remunerative and much sought after service. Discipline had improved and recruits were obtained from a more dependable class of seaman.

With the vigilance and close co-operation of the revenue cutters and the coastguard, smuggling eventually became less remunerative and those, who in times past, were apt to provide the money and charter a vessel to run a cargo, were now less prepared to play a gambler's chance in the handling of contraband. Consequently many habitual smugglers lost their employment and their living.

Round about 1850, probably through a little slackness on the part of the preventive services, there were renewed attempts of dealing in smuggled goods but this was of short duration; these illicit practices as a paying proposition on an extended scale gradually declining until its final suppression.

With steam now the acknowledged form of propulsion, four steam vessels of about 400 tons were added to the fleet of revenue cutters. They were built on fine yacht-like lines. One of them, HMS Seamew, built of iron, continued in constant commission to the close of 1904.

With the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1850, the Admiralty being in need of an additional number of seamen, in order to bring the personnel of the fleet up to its fully required strength, called for volunteers from the revenue cutters. Many hundreds of men responded, volunteering for five years or the duration of the war, their places being temporarily filled by casuals. After the close of the war the majority of these volunteers were reinstated in their former service.

The naval authorities having had experience of the valuable services rendered by these men were impressed with the desirability of placing them under the direct control of the Admiralty as a naval reserve. After the elapse of some little time, arrangements were concluded between the Admiralty and the Board of Customs whereby all revenue cutters were to pass under the control of the Admiralty. In 1857 this transfer was accomplished, the coastguard and revenue cutters becoming absorbed into the navy. The customs flag which had been hitherto flown was now replaced by the white ensign. Revenue cutters were eventually known as coastguard cruisers. In future the Commanding officers and mates were to be promoted from the petty officer class with equivalent naval rank.

Rank	Equivalent Naval Rank
Chief Officer in Command	Master
Senior Mate	Master’s Mate
Second Mate	Assistant Master’s Mate

With the abolition of the naval rank of Master and Master’s Mate, the equivalent Naval rank became:

Chief Officer in Command	Lieutenant
Senior Mate	Commissioned Boatswain
Second Mate	Warrant Boatswain

The seamen were now drawn from the ordinary naval ratings; promising petty officers being retained for permanent coastguard cruiser services with the possibility of reaching command and eventually becoming Divisional Officers of Coastguard on shore.

In the sixties the Coastguard Cruiser and Coastguard services having been reorganised, smuggling on an extensive scale had been suppressed, it therefore was no longer necessary to retain the same number of vessels for the protection of the revenue. One half were withdrawn from active service and paid off, some of the officers being pensioned, others

absorbed into the Coastguard Service, leaving in commission twenty sailing and four steam cruisers.

Since the heyday of the revenue cutters, with cheap tobacco, liquor plentiful, exciting pursuit of smuggling craft, with a sharing in the prize money, the work and duties of the Coastguard cruisers had entirely changed. With the revenue cutters, their duties were of a local nature, and their crews were frequently local men. They were rarely called on to proceed beyond the limit line of their own particular patrol. The coastguard cruiser now attached to a coastguard district ship became the drudge of all work within the limits of the district; at all times bearing in mind the importance of the primary duty of protecting the revenue. In the early eighties it was deemed expedient to utilise coastguard cruisers on duties of quite a different nature, still combined with their original duties, the protection of the revenue.

Following the International Fisheries Convention, under which the government undertook to provide a certain number of vessels as a North Sea police patrol for the better ordering and supervision of the fishing fleets, such vessels came under the control of the Admiral Commanding Coastguard and revenue coastguard cruisers were the first to be detached for this duty, the nature of which has been mentioned earlier.

From time to time, as the older vessels were condemned or lost, they were replaced by gunboats that had been withdrawn from foreign service, the officers appointed being those from the coastguard cruiser class and regarded as specialised fishery officers. With the Admiralty changes were usually very slow and, although the sailing cutters were long ago outclassed and fishing boats had changed over to steam or motor, there still remained thirteen in commission. Competent officers capable of handling this class of vessel were diminishing annually and the officers in command experienced in sail were having their worries with incompetent mates and petty officers.

There were indications of a move in the direction of superseding the old sailing cutters. Two vessels had been purchased and two steam cruisers built but not yet in commission. More gunboats were being brought forward and there was every prospect of the coastguard cruiser service being brought up to date.

In 1904 there were heated discussions over the navy estimates with a desire in some quarters to keep the figure as low as possible. A happy thought struck Lord Fisher, the First Lord of the Admiralty, by which it was estimated a saving of one million pounds could be effected. Figuring on the navy list were a number of small craft of little or no fighting value such as admirals' yachts, special service vessels, obsolete gunboats, steam and sailing coastguard cruisers etc. The First Lord, not without pre-thought and vision of the rapidly approaching change in the speed and fighting qualities required in all classes of naval craft, proposed that these small and out of date vessels, in the interest of economy, instead of being kept in commission at considerable annual cost should be stripped to a gantline, paid off and scrapped.

To those coastguard cruisers to be paid off, the final order came without warning. About Christmas time telegraphic orders were received by each vessel to proceed to the nearest

dockyard and pay off. It was a hurry-up job. The North Sea sailing cruisers were not given time to proceed to Chatham under sail but were taken in tow by the senior officer's ship and piloted on their last voyage at the end of a tow line.

The old cutter, Squirrel, making the best of her way from the Clyde to Devonport, called at Kingstown when I heard the news of the last of the cutters.

Some officers were appointed to the two new cruisers, some paid off with a bonus and pension, others absorbed into the coastguard. Thus came about the passing out of the last of the original revenue cutters whose primary duty to the end was the protection of the revenue.

In a last word of the cutters, it may be mentioned, to the best of my knowledge the Adder was the last cutter in which an attempt was made to smuggle a little packet on their own account. Calling at Heligoland for supplies before it's cession to Germany, a considerable quantity of tobacco was purchased, evidently with the idea of landing at their home port, but the fact becoming known to the coastguards on the island, word was sent informing the customs who boarded the vessel immediately on her return to port. On being questioned, the tobacco on board was declared, the customs officer then placing it under seal. This seal could not be broken without permission until the vessel had passed out of the harbour and beyond the three mile limit. For a very long time some of this tobacco was on board, the customs officer boarding the vessel and placing it under seal on each occasion of returning to port.

1905

The District Captain on Board; With the Atlantic Fleet; Odd Jobs; A Deserter; A Dutch Coper; The Dover Fishery; The French Trawlers; Decline a North Sea Appointment; A Shore Appointment.

With the lengthening days and finer weather, the *Fanny* was taken in hand by the Garda authorities at Haulbowline for the annual overhaul. This work having been completed a couple of months were passed carrying out the usual drudgery of the district.

The longest day having passed and fine summer weather now cheered both those on land and sea bringing forth the butterfly sailors from their winter hibernation. The District Captain decided on carrying out a round of visits of inspection of coastguard stations on the north west coast making use of the *Fanny* for this purpose.

This was quite a new experience for the captain, dodging in and out of the small harbours and creeks, landing, inspecting the station and moving on again, so that it became as much a pleasure cruise as that of exacting duty. After visiting the island of Arranmore and other stations in the division, with the threat of becoming benighted among the numerous small islands and rocks of the Rosses, by permission of the captain, it was decided to enter Rutland harbour, the approach to which is through a narrow and difficult channel and never resorted to by coastguard cruisers during my experience. After having negotiated the channel and taken up a berth in the harbour, a boat came alongside, the senior man asking

the question: "Would ye be after wanting a pilot your honour?"
"Too late now, you should have come off when we were at anchor in the bay".
"It's meself didn't know ye would be wanting a pilot sir".
"Too late now anyway."
"May I be after taking ye out sir?"
"No thanks we shall find our way out".

The District Captain appeared to be highly amused and it struck me as being extremely funny to ask if we would take a pilot after the dangers were passed and the vessel safely at anchor.

The Captain with an eye to the beauty in nature expressed his admiration of the wild romantic scenery of the cliffs and rocks never scaled by man and, when opening out, that bold overhanging cliff about 600 feet in height to the west of Horn Head resembling in profile the head and prominent nose of King William the fourth, he had the thrill of his life.

Having finished with the District Captain and his inspection of coastguard stations, there being a new coast cruiser building in one of the Clyde shipyards, orders were received to proceed to Greenock and confer with the commissioned shipwright superintending the building of the new vessel and to consult on certain fittings considered necessary as in the case of the *Fanny*. This was more of a pleasure trip and a visit to Greenock and Glasgow appreciated by way of a change. This little matter being finished with, once again we returned to the drudgery of the coastguard district of Northern Ireland.

My servant, who had come with me from the last ship, had decided to leave the service and take his chance on shore. In order to fill his place a youth from Kingstown was entered as a servant. He was quite a raw youth with no particular qualifications whatever and no idea about this duties - that of keeping the cabins clean and attending to the officers' food. For instruction in cooking he was handed over to the cook, an A.D. who was paid sixpence per day extra for performing the duties of cook, the Petty Officer taking him in hand for a few lessons in the use of a scrubbing brush and deck cloth, together with the necessity of keeping himself clean. He had a good tempered disposition and was very willing and anxious to please. However much one might be displeased, it was difficult to find fault or use harsh words. His cheerful smile and his ever ready reason for any untoward happening always had the effect of dispelling one's displeasure.

After a time, the cook had taught him a little plain cooking - preparing a bowl of soup, roasting or boiling a portion of beef, preparing vegetables when we had any. He excelled chiefly in the preparation of a dish of rice.

It was well that one's appetite was stimulated by the ozone from the sea for daily we proved the truth of the old adage "God gave the food but the other fellow provided the cooks". Paddy struggling along from the galley to the pantry with the fish clasped to his breast never failed to call forth a jest and a laugh from the more hardy sea dogs.

On one occasion, it being well past the time for him to report "Dinner ready soon". Instead of "Dinner ready", he came and reported: "The pot is after hopping off the galley sir".
"What do you mean?"
"The pot hopped on to the deck sir".
"You mean that you have let the pot fall and there is no dinner?"
"Shure it was meself, sir, that gave it no reason to hop off, sir".
"Well what are you doing now?"
"Boiling some rice, sir."
"Anything else?"
"Yes sir?"
"All right, hurry up."

Given sufficient time, along came the dinner. A sea-pie that, as Paddy put it, had hopped off the galley onto the deck, been collected, washed and brought along garnished with a liberal supply of rice. It was no use in being faddy over such a trifling matter. No doubt Paddy had done his best and better sailors had been known to allow a pot to slip from their fingers. Our appetites by this time were somewhat sharper than usual and, stimulated by the waiting, we fell to doing justice to this dainty dish, hoping for better luck tomorrow.

In the autumn our orders were: "Proceed to Berehaven" and join the Atlantic fleet carrying out fleet exercises. On joining the fleet and reporting on board the flagship, the *Fanny* was deputed to run the mails and despatches between Berehaven and Bantry. Frequently, there were a few passengers, officers and men joining or leaving the ships. On one occasion, before daybreak, after receiving the mails at Bantry and about to depart, two young officers appeared on the scene, both in plain clothes, enquiring the whereabouts of the fleet, some at Berehaven, some at sea. "What can we do for you please?"
"Give us a passage to Berehaven. We wish to join the *Repulse*".
"All right, come on board if you please".

They were from the staff of a London bank and as Royal Naval reserve officers had volunteered to serve in the fleet for a month.

The weather conditions were what might be described as dirty – wind SW with a rough sea, accompanied by heavy rain and, muzzling down the bay, the vessel was rather lively. The young gentlemen had taken up a berth in the deckhouse feeling rather thrilled with their first contact with the real thing but Neptune, who is no respecter of persons, soon laid them horizontal. It certainly was not a very cheerful introduction to a holiday cruise.

Arriving at Berehaven, the cutters from every ship, manned by twelve lusty seamen, swathed in oilskins, some of them after leaving their ship having had a long and hard pull before reaching the *Fanny*, were soon clustering alongside in readiness to receive the mail bags etc., each taking their departure after the last bag had been handed over.
"Any boat from *Repulse* alongside?"
"Yes sir", comes the answer from the midshipman, the young officer in charge of the cutter. "Two officers here to join *Repulse*, don't leave without them".

The midshipman trained in the tradition of the navy to act according to orders ventured to say that he had no orders from the commander. "Please give the Commander my compliments and say these two officers were stranded in Bantry looking for *Repulse*, the *Fanny* had brought them down". The midshipman having no orders from his commander reluctantly allowed them into his boat. And so the young gentlemen from their London office were introduced to life in the Royal Navy.

The manoeuvres having terminated, orders were received to embark a coastguard for passage to Whitsands (near Plymouth), call at Devonport and embark certain stores for Queenstown. Arriving at Devonport there were further orders to proceed to Milford and await orders from the District Captain at Liverpool. His instructions were to proceed to St Bride's Bay, take down and remove a flagstaff from a closed coastguard station and return it to Pembroke dockyard. An officer was sent on shore with a party of men and gear to lower the flagstaff, get it down to the beach and bring it on board. Although I had told him how to proceed, I am afraid he was not very well acquainted with the safe method of lowering a forty foot spar. Having my doubts, I watched the procedure with the aid of my glass. At last it was noticed that all the gear had been placed in readiness to lower away. Then it was observed that the mast was moving - an interesting movement - and I was not surprised to see it suddenly topple over and fall to the ground - in such a happening usually breaking at the mast head – I had to laugh, seeing that happily the mast was intact. Had it broken I would have been called on to answer for the bungling.

On the open beach, with the wind freshening and sea rising, those sent on shore had to beat a hasty retreat and return on board half filling the boat with the sea before getting away. The job was completed the following day.

Arriving at Queenstown, orders awaited me from our friend the Flag Captain to attend at his office. No scolding this time. The *Fanny* had been placed at his disposal. One of his coastguard stations had been closed in the River Shannon, one man remaining in charge. The lease of the station would expire in three days. If the station was not cleared of the stores with the man and his effects, another quarter's rent would have to be paid. Could I manage to get this done in time? Assuring him that I would do my best and, if possible, clear the station in time. Immediately filling the bunkers we left the harbour and arrived off the station the next day. With an encouraging word to the men they set too in good heart, got the flagstaff down and on board with better luck this time, brought off all the stores and the two boats, then the man with his wife, family and effects and, the day before the expiration of the lease, I was able to report: "The station all clear". With two boats, the station furniture and stores piled up on deck, there was far more stuff than we could convey to Queenstown. It was therefore decided to leave one of the boats and some of the more cumbersome gear at the next station.

On reaching Queenstown the Flag Captain was so well pleased to know that the station had been cleared in time that he ventured to offer – something very rare – a word of appreciation and approval.

1906

The annual leave having expired and a new year opened before us; the usual coastguard work was resumed. Calling at Belfast and taking up a berth alongside the quay it so happened that we had a native among the crew – not Fatty – who was undergoing punishment for a trivial offence with consequent stoppage of leave. I had it in mind to give him permission to go on shore for the night but before I had spoken to the mate he had taken French leave and departed. Our business completed, the next day we took our departure leaving the man behind. After three days – according to the regulations – he was treated as a deserter and his description with a warrant and the offer of a reward for his arrest was forwarded to the police. After an absence of three weeks he was arrested by the police and accompanied back to the ship, for which they received a reward of three pounds chargeable against the deserter. He was really a very good seaman and in favour with his shipmates. I was sorry to see that he had been so foolish and in such trouble. Being reported for desertion, he was awarded the usual punishment of ninety days imprisonment with forfeitness of time and pay.

On his return, I thought that he might like to leave the ship, go back to the depot at Devonport and make a fresh start. On the question being put to him, whether he wished to stay or leave, he replied that he was quite contented in the *Fanny* and wished to remain in the ship, thus showing that the folly of desertion was not due to any dissatisfaction with his ship or his shipmates.

After a few weeks in dock for the annual clean-up and a short round of visits with the District Captain, in compliance with an order from the Commander-in-Chief, we made the best of our way to Queenstown. Reporting at the office, I was informed that a Dutch coper was known to be cruising off the south coast disposing of tobacco etc. Orders were issued for the *Fanny* to proceed without delay and to deal with this craft in the best interest of the revenue and in compliance with the customs regulations that was the prevention of smuggling or, if found within territorial waters, to arrest and bring into port.

This appeared to be employment, more or less of unusual interest. Seeing that if this craft should lay herself open to arrest by encroaching within the three mile limit, and should we succeed in making a seizure, it might bring in a few pounds in the form of prize money. To my disappointment, after a few days during which time the coper had been sighted and our plans had been formulated to lie in wait for the opportune moment to reveal our presence, an order was received to return to Queenstown, a gunboat taking over our duties. The gunboat did eventually arrest the coper, brought her to Queenstown, handing her over to the customs authorities. In due course – but not before many months had passed – the case was tried before a court of justice in Cork. The finding of the court was in favour of the prosecution with confiscation of the vessel and all contraband on board at treble value and duty. Presumably the money arising therefrom – as usual in such a case – was handed over to be divided between the officers and men of the gunboat in the form of prize money.

The *Fanny* was now directed to proceed to Dover and await orders from the Inspecting Commander of Coastguard at Folkestone. His orders were to the effect that we were to

take on the patrol for the protection of the fisheries, making Dover the port of call. There had been a little trouble from small French trawlers working rather close to the shore between Brighton and the North Foreland, doing damage to the gear of the local fishermen. The authorities, wishing to put a stop to this, had deputed us for this duty of policing the Straits of Dover. It being fine summer weather, the work was by no means of a tedious character, the days passing pleasantly beyond the vision of an eagle eye of a senior officer. The Frenchmen were not long in discovering that a policeman was on the beat and were careful afterwards not to venture within the prescribed limits.

My second in command, who had been with me four years, was an officer with whom I had to exercise much forbearance, who had not been recommended for promotion and had seen the length of his rope. It was decided that in the best interest of the service and all concerned, a change was desirable. I therefore took action with this end in view by asking for an interview with the Admiral's Secretary at the headquarters in London. At the interview, simply stating my reasons for suggesting that this officer be transferred to another ship and leaving it to him to do the necessary.

The Admiral, a fine type of a British naval officer, with an aptitude of making a subordinate at ease when in his presence, was in his office and the secretary informing him that I was on the premises, he ordered me to appear in is room. With the paying off of so many of the Coastguard cruisers there were many applications for appointments to the Coastguard. I had heard that the admiral was not altogether drawn toward those officers that were so anxious to get ashore.

On appearing in his room his first question was: "Why have you not applied for the Coastguard?" I respectfully replied that I had descended from generations of sailors, that I loved the sea and had no desire to go ashore yet. With this answer, he expressed his appreciation. He then spoke of the work at Dover and added: "There are a lot of complaints from the West Country fishermen in regard to foreign trawlers. I am sending you there instead of back to Ireland". Seeing that I had been so long employed on the coast of Ireland I was not sorry to hear that.

Off the South West coast

The fishing ground, over a radius of twenty miles, between south east and south west from the Eddystone, over which the driftnet fisheries had been prosecuted by the fishermen from Plymouth, Looe and Mevagissey for many years with varying success, had now become the favourite ground for the French trawlers, to the inconvenience and loss of the West Country men. The boat owners had lodged their complaints with their respective members of Parliament who had, in turn, brought the question forward in the House of Commons; the Secretary of the Admiralty passing it on to the Admiral Commanding Coastguard and Reserve in order to provide fishing cruisers to patrol these waters.

With the closing of the inshore fishery season, the service of the fishery cruisers being no longer required in the Straits of Dover, orders were received to proceed to Devonport complete with stored provisions etc. and report for duty to the District Captain of the Western District. HMS *Julia* from the Northern Ireland District had taken up her duties on

the western fisheries and HMS *Fanny* was to take on as her opposite number, working under the orders of the District Captain at Liverpool, with Falmouth as the headquarters.

After the great sweep by Lord Fisher there remained only five coastguard cruisers – two more were subsequently built – two of which were withdrawn from the Irish station to take over this duty.

The orders from the District Captain were to work in forty-eight hour reliefs, one ship at sea, one ship in harbour. This routine was not very acceptable, as it scarcely gave the fires sufficient time to lie down before we were underway again. This was respectfully represented and a suggestion made that the North Sea routine of weekly reliefs be allowed. This submission not being approved, the shorter reliefs continued.

Notwithstanding the patrol, the foreign trawlers were still the cause of occasional damage to the West Country driftnet men and the interested Members of Parliament – in particular those from the opposition benches, in my opinion out to make political capital in readiness for the next election, were not slow in making their voices heard in the Commons.

The Commander of HMS *Julia* being ordered to appear at the Admiral's office in London for a personal interview as to the actual state of affairs between the trawlers and driftnet men, seized the opportunity of mentioning the matter of weekly reliefs to the Secretary with the result that an order was very soon received from the District Captain at Liverpool to make this change. I feel certain that he never knew why this order emanated from the head office.

The local newspapers now having a subject on which they could write from local knowledge, worked up quite a little agitation with reports of damage to the local fishing interests, interviews with fishermen, boat owners, and would be champions of the fishing community, enlarging on the enormity of the foreign trawlers fishing in these waters, which were regarded somewhat as a local preserve.

After the newspapers had done their part, it became the turn of the Members of Parliament to carry it still further, to the House of Commons, there questioning the Secretary of the Admiralty as to the efficiency of the patrol and the methods adopted to guard the local interest. Passing through the usual departments, the Admiral Commanding Coastguard and Reserve would be called on to furnish the reply for the Secretary of the Admiralty, the Admiral obtaining his information from his officers on the spot; consequently the fishery cruisers were compelled to keep a diligent patrol in order to be prepared to answer any question that might come through. Frequently when all local fishing craft were in harbour, on account of strong weather or other reasons, the fishery cruiser would remain at sea, otherwise the newspaper men might give us a headline.

During the winter herring fishery, unusually severe weather for the West Country was experienced, with heavy snow storms and gales, yet from the policeman's point of view we considered it a soft job, when compared with the North Sea patrol.

The spring mackerel fishing having commenced, agitation against the foreigner became intensified, the would-be champion giving expression – through the press – to his

indignation with the powers that be, over the question of foreign trawlers fishing in local waters, enlarging on every rumour or complaint wither genuine or imaginary. In most, cases on boarding a fishing boat and asking a few pointed questions, it was found that so-called complaints were imaginary and could not be substantiated. With all this intensified agitation, the cruisers had to be on the alert following up the movements of the foreign trawlers and the drifters very closely.

1907

Waiting off Plymouth of a Sunday and watching for the boats putting to sea, in order that we could keep in touch with them, it was noted in the log that one boat set out on quite a different course from the other boats. Naturally the greater number were followed. On the boats returning to harbour the following day, the boat taking an independent course reported the loss of nets cut away by a steam trawler.

That was something for the newspaper reporters to get on with, enlarging on the inefficiency of the patrol and emphasising that the fishery cruisers were conspicuous by their absence. This was immediately passed on by the champions to the Member of Parliament who brought the question forward in the House of Commons as a matter of the first importance, calling on the Secretary of the Admiralty for an explanation and to give the whereabouts of the cruiser on duty on this particular night. Immediately on our return to Falmouth an order was received to forward a copy of the log for the last week at sea that would show our movements during the night in which the drifter received certain damage to her nets. Fortunately, we had paid particular attention to the writing up of the log, noting every movement of the driftnet fleet, together with the number of foreign trawlers sighted, and were therefore in a position to furnish the Admiral with full details concerning the vigilance and efficiency of the patrol.

It was however decided to send a third cruiser, a late contemporary, now in command of one of the latest new cruisers, who had been confirmed in the rank of lieutenant and was credited with having a special knowledge of deep sea fishing laws, was sent as senior officer to superintend the western fisheries, having under his orders HMS *Julia* and HMS *Fanny*. It was our decision to render unto him the usual loyal support in his newly found responsibility. He proved himself a most reasonable and considerate senior officer giving honour where honour was due and appreciating the cooperation of those hitherto his contemporaries.

Seeing that the *Fanny* was likely to remain employed on the western fishery duties no time was lost in removing my wife and family and setting up a new home at Falmouth. This was a change much appreciated.

About this time the officer mentioned earlier, received an appointment to another ship. Not having been recommended for promotion he was transferred with the same rank. On the discharge of an officer it was the duty of his commanding officer to hand him a certificate as to competence with special reference to sobriety. As to the latter, I was not quite clear so took the unusual and non-committal course by compromising in these words: “has

conducted himself with sobriety in my presence". Whatever the officials at the head office, to whom a duplicate was sent, thought of this I never knew, but Mr X was well satisfied with what I had written.

The rocky ground off the coast of Cornwall had for a long time been a favourite fishing ground with the French crabbers from Brittany – during the summer months a great number being engaged in this class of fishery. The crabs were caught in pots, specially designed as a trap, from which the crabs once in found it almost impossible to escape. These vessels were of about thirty tons, fitted with a well open to the inflow of the sea in which the crabs were placed and kept alive. After the well had become sufficiently stored, the boats would proceed to their home port, there market their catch and so on, making repeated voyages throughout the season.

Three miles from the shore was the prescribed limit for crab fishing by foreigners, the same as driftnet or trawl fishing. Occasionally one might venture closer in. For my part, although frequently very near to the boundary line, never was a crabber sighted within the limit but our newly appointed senior officer made frequent arrests obtaining convictions. Presumably, the French government becoming aware of these frequent arrests had communicated with the foreign office. In any case, special orders were received that the exact position of crabbers suspected of fishing within the three mile limit must be most carefully checked and verified by not less than three cross bearings instead of two that hitherto had been accepted as sufficient proof.

Fatty, mentioned earlier, who was still with us, on one occasion when at anchor in harbour, lost his cap overboard. I happened to be on the quarterdeck with the newly joined mate and was amused to hear the chaff of his messmates: "Over you go Fatty and fetch it back. It's the price of a new cap, over you go!" But Fatty tried another method, that of a boathook; the cap drifting toward the stern, Fatty was outboard holding onto the rail with one hand and a boathook in the other. At last his hand slipped and overboard he went; being an indifferent swimmer he started splashing and spluttering to the amusement of his chums who were calling "man overboard". He was making such bad work of keeping afloat that I was wondering if the boat would reach him in time or if another man would need to go over and secure him with a rope's end. The boat just coming off was nearing the ship and just in time to haul the fat one out of the water, the boat's crew being much amused at having performed the gallant rescue of a favourite shipmate. I could not help but to share in the fun and laugh at Fatty's involuntary bath but suspected that someone must have touched his fingers to see if he had a good holdfast.

The pilchard seine fishing had for many years past been gradually failing and becoming less remunerative but a few seine boats were still kept afloat at St Ives and, being at anchor in the bay during the pilchard season, I saw the last school of pilchards caught by seine landed and sold at that port; my friend, the late Mathias Dunn, being the purchaser at 20/- per thousand. Thinking of the days of 5/- per thousand, I remarked to him: "You have paid too high a price". He replied: "The Italian market will permit of that price this year". For several years afterwards some seine boats at St Ives were kept afloat during the season but

to the best of my belief, and from local information, the school of pilchards mentioned above was the last caught in this way at St Ives.

The months passed pleasantly. Newspaper men, fishermen's champions and Members of Parliament had gone quiet on the question of foreign trawlers and the fishing patrol had settled down to a recognised routine under very pleasant conditions. Those were the days of sailing boats and often of a calm morning we were apt to give some of them a rope's end and pull them into the harbour, thus saving their market at the top price.

In the last two months of the year we found ourselves working with the herring fleet between the Eddystone and Start Point. An insignificant fleet when compared with the number of boats with which we had to deal in the North Sea, especially in the months of October and November. This patrol continued into the early months of the New Year. There were no foreign trawlers to disturb the peace of the herring drifters and the Secretary of the Admiralty was spared the cross-questioning in the House of Commons.

The weekly patrol was kept with regularity and, in this case of the channel fisheries being no distance from the shore and within easy reach of a harbour, together with the fact that the West Country boats remained in harbour for long periods during stormy and wintry weather, our duties could by no means now be considered as of an arduous nature. There was a good spirit among the men and the days passed pleasantly.

A private communication was now received from the Admiral's Secretary informing me that the Admiral proposed appointing me to the command of HMS *Thrush* – a sloop once commanded by the late King George V on the North American station – now employed on North Sea fishery duties. Did I desire this appointment? Knowing that within another year I would stand a chance of an appointment on shore and not wishing to leave my home at Falmouth to spend the winter in the North Sea – although the *Thrush* was a more important command – I replied that I desired to thank the Admiral for this offer but begged – if convenient to the demands of the service – to be allowed to remain in the *Fanny*. This request the Admiral was pleased to grant.

Knowing there would be a vacancy for a Divisional Officer of Coastguard in Ireland in June, for which I was scarcely eligible on account of my age, I commenced to ponder over the advisability of making an application for this appointment. Having had so many years' service on the coast of Ireland, I had always thought that I would not go back if it could be avoided, even to an appointment on shore. In this case the emoluments were on a most liberal and tempting scale. I should have the pleasure of living at home. Hard weather and the discomforts of small ships – that had been my portion for so many years – would be finished with. On the other hand there was the education of my children to be considered.

According to the regulations, to become eligible for this appointment one must have reached the age of forty six. In June, when the Division would become vacant, I would be forty-five and six months. It was a question if this would debar me. I was now the senior of the officers in command of the coastguard cruisers and had a faint idea that some of the reports and information tendered concerning the complaints of the West Country fishermen and the foreign trawlers had given satisfaction, that my name would be known

to the Admiral and that I might stand a chance. It was therefore decided to submit an application through the senior officer, whom I have reason to believe, supported it with most favourable remarks. At the same time writing privately to the secretary concerning the age clause, drawing his attention to the fact that I had attained my seniority by early promotion through risking my life in saving a shipmate from drowning. That it would no doubt be found in the records and that I hoped that the age bar would not turn me down. In due course my name appeared in the list of appointments and promotions as the successful applicant for the post of Divisional Officer of Coastguard in County Clare, Ireland.[25]

Returning to Falmouth after a week at sea, as the order was given to let go the anchors, I realised that my seagoing days and close association with ships and sailors were now at an end. Naturally, I was pleased to receive an appointment that would give me a substantial increase in salary even though it meant taking my family to the west of Ireland. On the other hand, I was sorry to sever my connection with the service afloat with which I had been so long associated. My life had been full of change and uncertainty, never knowing what the next order would bring. Sometimes with hard weather, discomfort, exposure, or from pricks from a disgruntled senior officer, one was apt to feel like our friend 'The Skipper' of the cutter *Hind* that a coalmine was preferable. Even so there were compensations and always the comforting thought that there was smooth water within the sheltered haven.

An old shipmate had come to relieve me and the following day, after going through the usual custom of turning over the stores, the *Fanny* was formally handed over to my successor.

Having a few days leave before taking up my new appointment and the date of the *Fanny* putting to sea, I went on board to take farewell of my shipmates – good fellows all – that I was so sorry to part company with. As I pushed off in the boat for the shore the officers and men all assembled on deck gave three hearty cheers for their departing commander. That demonstration of respect meant far more to me than any word of commendation that I had ever received from any superior officer.

From 1857 onward an officer in command of a coastguard cruiser was eligible for appointment to the coastguard as divisional officer and although the cruiser service continued to function as such until the close of the Great War when it was finally abolished, I was the last of the cruiser officers to receive such an appointment.

[25] June 1907 appointed Divisional Officer of Coastguard in County Clare, Ireland - Walter Hunkin Servcie Record