

*A Romance
of Export.*

WITH THE COMPLIMENTS
of
JAMES HARGREAVES & SONS
(LEEDS) LTD.



BLACK CARGO

**The Story of a Journey Overseas
with Yorkshire Coal**



FOREWORD

COAL is one of the blessings of life we take for granted. The miner digs it; the coalman brings it; and that, to most people, is the whole story. A little mythical history of the carboniferous age may tinge our conception slightly, but the naive realism of the *Man in the Street* forbids him even to entertain the notion that there is anything romantic about the darksome contents of the coal cellar.

I was no better than the rest. Attempts had been made, through the medium of the screen, to impress me with the romance of coal, but I smiled about them as I smiled when anybody mentioned the romance of the sardine-canning industry, or the romance of soap. To me, the thrilling serial story contained in the coal export trade figures did not then exist.

The following pages represent a conversion; or rather, the enlightenment of an individual, brought about by an instructive trip made possible by the courtesy of James Hargreaves and Sons (Leeds) Ltd. and the Aire and Calder Navigation. They made their own "serial story" in "*The Yorkshire Weekly Post*."

I am conscious of numerous reasons for apology, especially to experts. I shall make none. I saw, and I have written, as a plain man.

H. E. CLARE.

MINERS, in crouching attitudes, hacking and hewing at the coal face; tubs rumbling under the earth; cages going up as the wheels at pitheads spin in the sky; trucks, wagons, lorries, barges, ships, all taking Yorkshire coal across the world.

I call that romance. Some might call it the cursed business of industrialism, but to me it is the romance of hard work, of cargoes and commerce.

And I want to tell you a romantic story. Baldly it might be called, "What the Coal Trade means to Yorkshire"; with more truth, "The Exciting Adventures of a Cargo of Yorkshire Coal, and what befell the men who accompanied it."

My story starts at a pit staithe at Castleford, and ends with a Belgian housewife putting Yorkshire coal on her stove; and between these two points is told the exciting yarn of the coal export trade of a great mining county. For I have just been on a voyage from Castleford to Bruges, by barge, by collier, and this is the account of it.

Coal to the North has been more precious than diamonds during the past century. It represents our chief wealth; but what have we heard of it? Who has ever told the story of the mighty work that goes on, year in, year out, despite slumps and handicaps, in all weathers? Who has ever men-

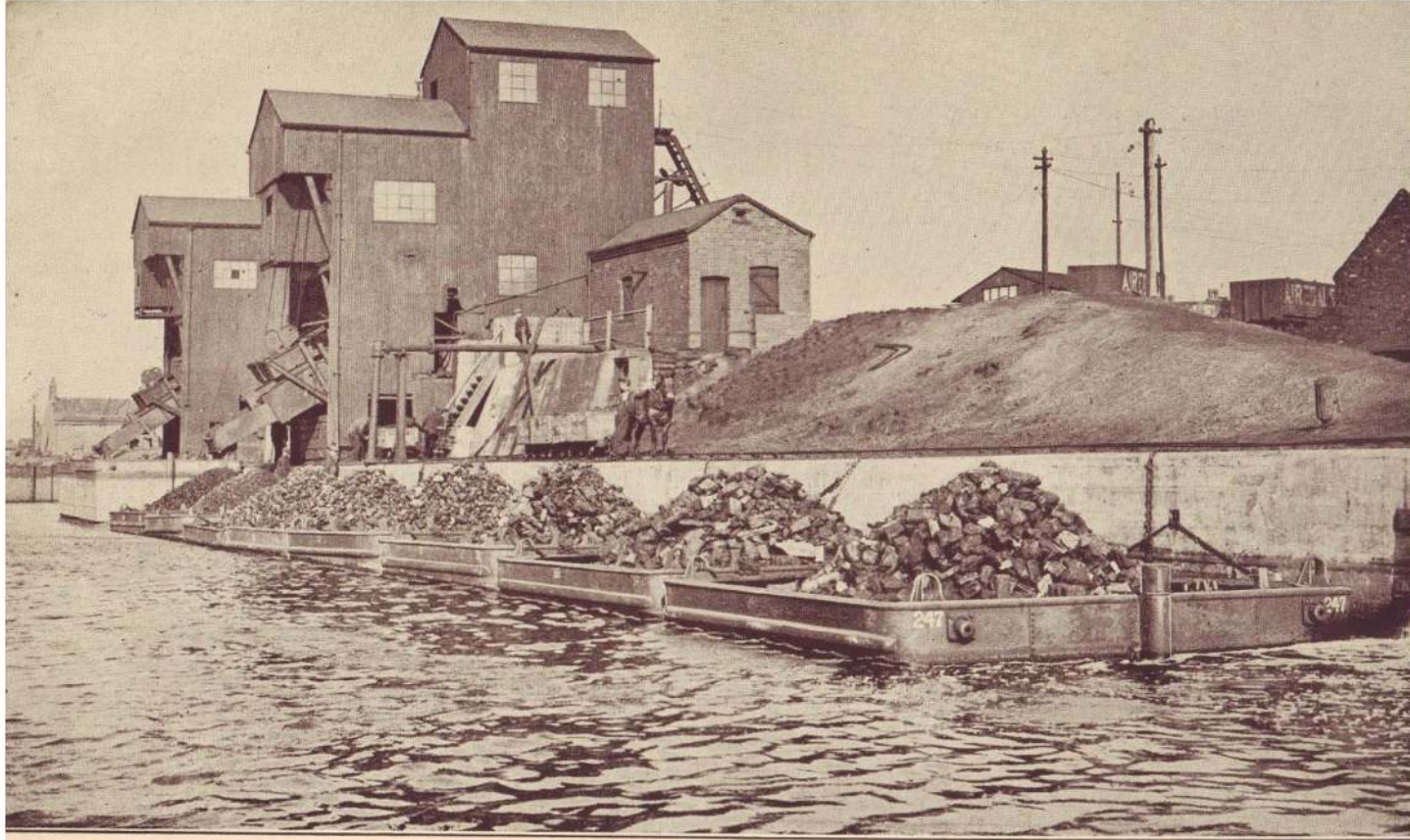
tioned the men who work on the wonderful waterways of the Aire and Calder Navigation, and the men who carry our Yorkshire coal in trim little boats along the coast, making voyages of adventure every week?

All we have heard lately has been in the form of dreary statistics showing the decline in the trade. Closed seams, unemployment, work-sharing quotas, foreign restrictions—these have all told a sorry tale.

BETTER DAYS.

It is now time to be more cheerful and more explanatory, for trade is on the mend. The increase in British coal exports in 1933 compared with 1931 totalled 2,789,356 statute tons. Then, in February of this year, a further increase was reported; while at Goole, our great coal-exporting port in Yorkshire from which over a million and a half tons are shipped in a year, the decline is being checked, and trade is mounting once again to prosperity figures. If only the 10 francs tax imposed by Belgium, one of our biggest customers, were removed we should all be laughing aloud.

What happens to these millions of tons of coal that go from Goole? With optimism uppermost in our minds we set out on our journey of discovery—"we" being used, not in the editorial sense, but to cover myself and the man-with-the-camera, who speaks for himself in the pictures he has taken.



Loading
a "Coal-
Train" at
Castleford.

We went to Castleford; for at this point, among others, one gets a broad view of our mighty transport system that carries the coal. Moreover, our cargo began its voyage here.

Castleford, that busy town between Leeds and Selby that lives on its coal and power, is a "main-line station" on one of the most amazing inland waterway systems in the world—the Aire and Calder Navigation. Spreading like a net over the West Riding, these waterways link every big industrial centre, and all the principal collieries, with the coast. Leeds, Bradford, Castleford, Otley, Shipley, Saltaire, Bingley, Wakefield, Dewsbury, Huddersfield, Cleckheaton, Elland, Brighouse, Selby, Doncaster, Barnsley, Rotherham, Sheffield—all are given a corridor to the sea, either directly by the Aire and Calder, or by other canals that wind across the North of England from coast to coast.

WONDERFUL WATERWAYS.

To all intents and purposes they make an inland city like Leeds a port. Seven hundred miles of waterways there are, of which the $85\frac{1}{2}$ miles of the Aire and Calder Navigation are the most important, collecting all the traffic of the tributaries and bearing it to Goole and the open sea.

Down these water communications comes coal, hundreds of tons at a time, both for the factories and hearths of home towns and for those over the sea. They are like huge veins, through which the coal, moving ceaselessly, gives life and warmth, power and health.

Some idea of the value of them will be gained when I mention that Leeds receives no less than one-third of its coal supplies by water.

At Castleford we found cargo waiting to swell this traffic. It was a cold morning when we arrived, with wind tugging at the surface of the water and slapping into our faces in a way that told of adventure. Sea breezes, almost, in a place surrounded by wide meadows and wild March countryside; for we were already in touch with the sea.

We made our way to Allerton Bywater pit staithe to see boats being loaded for the initial stage of the journey. Coal-black men, pushing trucks, shovelling coal, and nudging the boats into position under the coal chute look strange in the daylight, as though they had come up from darksome continents underground to gaze with amazement at the sun. On one side, the dark buildings of the pit staithe, coal dust flying about, and ponies hauling trucks; on the other, the choppy water and the fields.



Yorkshire
Coal
on its way
to Foreign
Homes.



Inset—
Delivered
by Dog-Cart
(Bruges).

The boats were rapidly being filled. I call them boats, but they are more like big, square iron boxes, a construction of plates and rivets. Each is capable of holding 40 tons of coal, and nineteen of these "compartment" boats (as they are called) are linked together, attached to a tug, and sent sailing merrily down the canal from Castleford to Goole, some 25 miles away.

We watched them shuffle into position, saw the tug arrive and take charge of them and form what is in actual fact a train; the tug is the locomotive, and the square boxes are the coaches, making what is a unique, economical, and fascinating system of transport.

Come a little closer and study the boats. They seem more like railway coaches when you notice that each is fixed with buffers, to enable them to follow the tug easily, without bumping and banging. But see, even more surprising, these boats are veritable amphibians, for they can be lifted from the water, placed on bogeys, and run on rails as easily as any railway truck. Simple and economical.

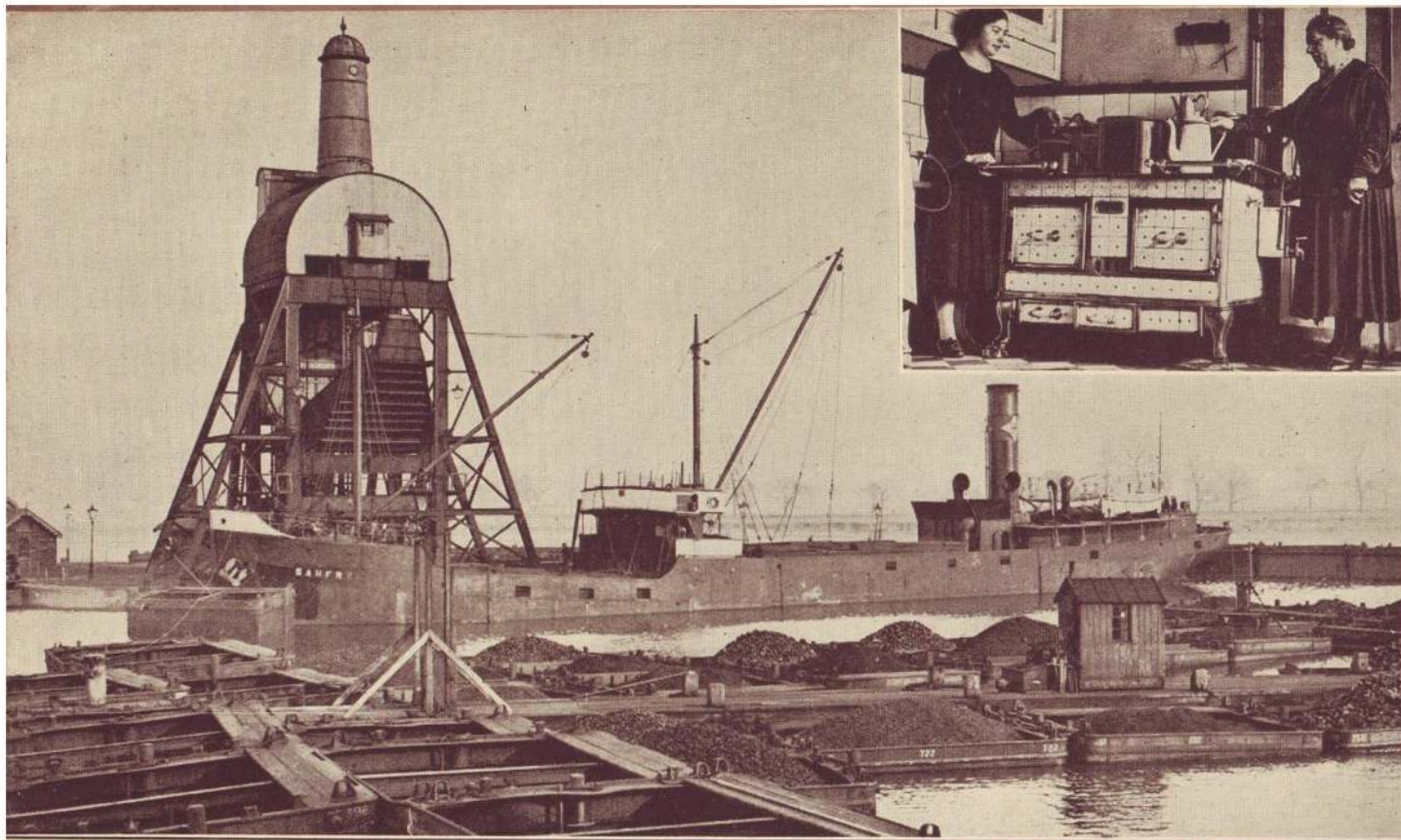
For as we went aboard, and went sailing down the canal for Goole, we had some 800 tons of coal trailing behind us as easily as if the boats had been a string of dingies attached to a motor-boat. Gently the "tail" wagged, gracefully it took the bends. And all this coal was being taken by one tug manned by four men.

The work of loading was done so easily and so quickly that I was surprised when I saw Castleford fading in the distance and realised I was on the way to the sea.

Take this fact into account: it is by no means unusual for coal to be at the colliery in the morning, and be shipped the same evening at Goole by means of the compartment system. And when the compartment boats start from Castleford, the ship may be miles from Goole, returning after a voyage.

If you should ever get the chance, make this trip, for you see Yorkshire from a new angle. Yorkshire's industrial life takes on a new glamour when you sail away down the water-thoroughfares, passing towns, meadows, bridges. Here the meadows stretch away, and cows come down to gaze at you with wide eyes; there in the distance, a "station" is approaching, jutting up with its towers and its chimneys. It was, indeed, a real pleasure cruise for me.

The canal was busy, for beside the fact that the Aire and Calder Navigation owns over 1,000 of these compartment boats, barges and other craft were to be seen, carrying their cargoes to and from the coast. Here we meet a cargo of petrol, and I am told that the transport of petrol on the canals is increasing on account of the economy and safety of this transport. All trade here is in fact, on the upgrade, for on such a system of canals the trade recovery is felt immediately; for have we not a



Inset—
Cooking
with
Yorkshire
Coal
in Belgium.

s.s. Sanfry
Loading at
Goole
Docks.

perfect way of sending goods, without fuss and bother, without delays? It is Yorkshire's best arterial road.

It is not necessary for me to trace every mile of the way along the canal, or to take you through the huge locks capable of holding the tug and its nineteen boats at the same time. I must say, though, that the size of the locks enables the train to get on its way speedily, without any delay due to disconnection. Let us get on to Goole.

Arriving at the Port, the compartment boats find their way to the docks, where sea-going ships are waiting under coal-hoists to receive their cargoes.

I must confess amazement on my arrival. Previous visits to Goole have shown me a busy town with masts and cranes peeping over the roofs of houses and shops; but you must get right down among the ships to discover the true heart of the place.

There is no port in the world like it, for it is seaside, riverside, and countryside in one. Looking one way you see meadows; another, the shelving bank of the Ouse; another, the forest of cranes and the funnels of ships.

It is Britain's most inland port, and the very nerve-centre of the system of waterways I have described. Here come cargoes from the whole of the West Riding, and here, too, ships of 2,000 tons can come up from the coast and from the Continent

to take those cargoes aboard. The whole busy bustling place, with its three miles of quays and its splendid basins and locks, is evidence of the enterprise of the Aire and Calder Navigation who own it.

The Port was busy when we arrived. Merchant ships of all nationalities, with their strange names and variously-coloured funnels—butter boats, coal boats, and boats carrying stone; barges, small craft, and dingys—all gave an air of lively trade. Could there have been depression? Surely not.

A fresh salt breeze, tasting strange so far inland, gave an adventurous touch to the afternoon, and I went down to see huge bales of merchandise being lowered into the holds of ships, and the stacks of goods which had just arrived—for contrary to the general impression, Goole's imports are considerable.

Amid all this was my cargo of coal, destined for Belgium in the *Sanfry*, a spruce little boat already waiting. In such surroundings coal took on a glamour which was to increase at every stage of my journey. It was a precious cargo, and part of the world's business, to be reflected later on in weighty statistics and Budget figures.

I studied the *Sanfry* from the quayside for a while, knowing she was to carry me. Marvellous, when you come to think of it, the work these boats

do. She is owned by James Hargreaves and Sons (Leeds), Ltd., coal merchants, exporters and ship-owners; a fine and old-established business. It is rare that you find coal-merchants with their own ships; but that's Yorkshire enterprise.

I made my way to the coal hoists where ships were loading, and had a further glimpse of engineering wonders of which I had not even dreamed. The coal hoists, with their vast girders, stood with straddled legs on the quay, looking down patronisingly on the ships below, knowing that they fed them and gave them work.

The compartment boats, now like cockle-shells by comparison with the mighty structures of the docks, were marshalled into line and driven under the hoists like sheep into a pen at sheep-dipping time.

What a time they were having! No rest, even after the journey from Castleford. They floated, one at a time, on to a huge cradle under the water. Then, at a brief command, they were lifted sheer, with their 40 tons of coal, into the air, as I might lift a matchbox. A whirr of machinery, a rattle of chains, and the boats were tipped, shooting, their loads into the holds of ships below.

But wait. A drop of many feet, from the coal hoist into the iron hold of the ship is not, to say the least, going to do the coal any good. Breakages are

to be expected, and this has been one of the major problems of coal exporters for many years. But not to-day, for at Goole the Anti-Breaker is at work.

You probably remember the occasion of its installation at Goole last year, but did you realise its significance? For here you have a device, attached to the end of the chute, that carefully conveys coal from the hoist to the ship, placing it at the exact spot where it is required, and lowering it gently.

Defying a gale of coal dust caused by a keen wind, I went on board one of the boats to examine the Anti-breaker at closer range, and found an intricate system of rollers and levers. The thing seemed to have intelligence for it obeyed the man in the cabin of the coal hoist in an uncanny manner.

Below on the boat, stands a man with a microphone, directing the flow of coal. A short command, and the Anti-breaker swings left, depositing several tons; another command, and it turns right, perhaps putting down no more than a few hundredweights. Perfect synchronisation between man and machine.

Rapidly the ship's holds were filled. One after another the compartment boats nudged their way under the hoist, were lifted, emptied, and set down. One after one they moved away, to await a return journey on the canal.

The hoist ceased work and its chute was lifted. The ship's hold was covered with boards and tarpaulin, and the craft made ship-shape. All was ready for the boat to move away on its sea journey.

As I clambered back on to the quay and wiped the coal dust from my face, I marvelled. All this work had been going on, month in, month out, and I had known nothing of it.

I went along to tidy myself a little for the next stage of my journey, from Goole to Bruges, a very much enlightened man.

CHAPTER 2.

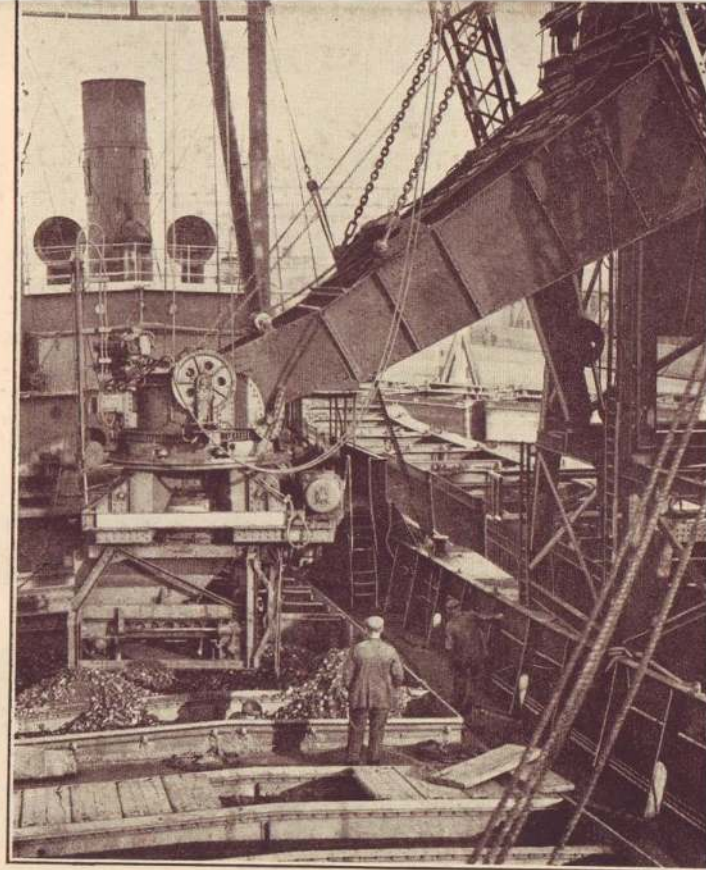
ADVENTURES ON NORTH-SEA COLLIER.

How We Shipped Our Cargo from Goole to Bruges.

The Sanfry had over eleven hundred tons of good Yorkshire coal aboard her when we found her in her "basin" at Goole docks at two in the afternoon. She was ready to move off, and we went below to see the skipper, Captain Lawson, and to get our traps moved in.

Let me introduce you to the Sanfry. A spanking little boat of 946 tons gross, she carries coal, with her companion boat, the Harfry, for James Hargreaves and Sons (Leeds), Ltd., the big coal merchants, exporters and shipowners, to whom the vessels belong. These two tidy little boats are probably the best workers on the North-East coast.

The
Anti-Breaker
at Goole
Docks.



The Sanfry is no

*Dirty British coaster with a salt-caked smoke-stack
Butting through the Channel in the mad March days,
With a cargo of Tyne coal, road-rail, pig-lead,
Firewood, iron-ware, and cheap tin trays,*

but a neat little craft which works not only along the coast but across the North Sea, bravely, defiant of all weathers.

A GOOD SHIP.

Launched about four years ago, she has been hard at it ever since, and this year in particular is earning her keep. Her owners tell you with just pride that she made seven journeys in January.

She had just come back from London River when we first saw her, and being always in demand, and always willing to go anywhere for her cargo, it was not surprising that she was not coming back to Goole, but would be going up to Blyth to pick up an urgent cargo there.

I laugh when I think of those Merseyside fellows scoffing at Goole and saying that no decent ship ever comes into the port. They can never have seen the Sanfry. She's no lazy, luxurious craft, but a hard and efficient worker.

We found two comfortable bunks ready for us in a tiny but cosy cabin, which opened into a lounge made jolly by a bright fire burning in the stove.

That was all the accommodation for passengers. The man-with-the-camera and myself tossed up for bunks, and I won the top one.

We experienced a delay. Owing to dense fog in the morning, ships had been unable to get away, and we found that the Sanfry would have to wait her turn to go through the locks. As the skipper described it, we were in the third pen, a phrase I did not understand until I went ashore again to look round.

The ships presented a fine sight in the sunny afternoon. Flying the Blue Peter to show that they were sailing on the next tide, they edged their way towards the locks, going in two at a time. The gates closed behind them, and the water sank to the river level, allowing them to get away.

OUT TO SEA.

I now understood the skipper's phrase. We were to be in the third batch of ships to go into the lock, where we would be "penned in" until the water had sunk.

The port was busy. Eighteen to 20 ships went out that afternoon, carrying cargoes to Copenhagen, Oslo, Bruges, Rotterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg. Their very names spelled romance—Guelder Rose, Dragon, Douglas, Essonite, Solskin, and Thyra.

Cargoes, cargoes, cargoes; rushed from places all over England, stowed away, set out on their journey. I know no greater thrill than to see them and to hear the ships hooting as they go out of the locks—glad, it seems, to be away; and then to watch them churning down the river into the Humber and the long waters of the North Sea.

Eventually we, too, got away, to the shout of the man on the quay—"All ready, surr," and the waving of handkerchiefs from a crowd of women and children. I was proud, I can tell you, to see this demonstration (though perhaps it wasn't for me). Still, it was a good send-off.

Oh, the sailor's life for me, I thought, as we went down the river. Nothing like it—especially when the steward popped his head up and asked if I'd like a cup of tea. Comfort, content, with the *Sanfry* going like a yacht, with never a sign of coal about, for it was all stowed away under boards and tarpaulin.

Pardon me if I strutted a little, watching the traffic in the river; pardon me if I was also proud of myself as we got into the tideway, and I gazed upon Hull and its ships with a patronising air (for was I not already a sailor who had travelled far?). Pardon me also if I seemed a little disconcerted when the sea hit the ship after we had left the Spurn. For that's where the true test of seamanship comes,

when you leave the placid river waters and start the struggle with the plunging, untamed waves of the North Sea.

You will have stood on the beach at Bridlington, Scarborough, or Whitby, and watched the coasters going past with streams of smoke flying from their funnels. You will have wondered where these ships were going, what kind of men were aboard them, and what cargoes they carried. Strange voyagers they always seem, trudging up and down the coast at their work, ignoring holiday folk. A ceaseless traffic.

Had you been a little farther down the coast the other day, you would have seen the *Sanfry* on her way to Bruges, moving at a speed of ten knots, with myself aboard (though I may not have been so much in evidence).

Way down the coast we went, carrying our cargo of coal, past Grimsby, past the Wash, past Cromer, Yarmouth, Lowestoft, then across the sea.

After a good night's rest in my top bunk I woke to a grey and chilly North Sea morning. The cabin seemed steady enough, but I wondered if that was due to the fact that I had got my sea legs. Surely, I thought, a boat so light must have a lively time? But, no; when the steward served me with a cup of tea about seven o'clock, there was not a wave on the surface of it.

I ought really to have expected as much, for the skipper told me that Leeds passengers always bring good weather—if they are men, for a woman aboard as sure to call down wind and rain on a boat. That's a sailor's superstition.

We were well out to sea, with not a ship in sight; a wide empty sea with a haze of mist in the distance. It began to rain; and, oh, what a waste of good water when the folks back home were needing all they could get!

“HOWLING HOUNDS.”

There were a few gulls about, riding the waves; and then one by one ships began to go by, ships from many European ports—English, Norwegian, Belgian, Dutch. The first officer acted as my guide, giving me information about the ships, their possible cargoes, and their histories.

The weather was holding; and then, I suppose just out of spite, the waves took on an oily, subtle appearance, precluding fog.

I made a tour of the ship that morning, asking the men on board silly questions about the lee scuppers and the dog watch, and popping my head into the steward's galley to see what was for lunch. It was beef.

In fact, the skipper practically gave us the ship.

We could go where we liked as long as we kept out of trouble; and I want to pay tribute to every man aboard that boat for the kindness they showed to us.

The skipper, by the way, is a charming and romantic character, though he is as modest as you like. Captain Lawson is usually captain of the Harfry, but has taken over temporarily. Captain of a ship at 32, he first went to sea as a boy, celebrating his 13th birthday while on a trip from Goole to London River.

I tried to make a fuss of him because of it; but he would have none of it; smiling disarmingly. To him it is work; and such work these men do, mixing up night and day in a hideous manner! No eight hours a day and an evening by the fireside for them. Four hours work and four hours off, day and night, is their programme, and they have to work right through in bad weather.

When darkness came I had a new experience, meeting the howling hounds of the North Sea—the lightships, blaring their fog horns on account of the haze. Masfield's lines occurred to me—

*“She bayed there like a solitary hound
Lost in a covert.”*

And bay they did. There is the East Dudgeon, blaring balefully in the empty seas. A hideous,

terrifying noise, shouting disaster, and yet the men on the lightships put up with this racket for days on end!

East ship has its own cry—one a harsh shout, another a long drooling moan, another a hollow whistle; another a monotonous high and low hum. These ships, like traffic signals, guided us down the North Sea. We passed them lightheartedly, feeling the noise of the horns in the deck, but I could imagine how weird and foreboding they must be when the sea is a hidden mystery of fog.

At 6.30 in the evening the ship began to pitch a little. At 7.30 we could just see the light of the Out Gabbard lightship, ten miles away, for the weather had cleared. We sat in the lounge and listened to a radio programme, and thought it magic.

Later we spotted the lights of fishing vessels bobbing up and down, and winking strangely in the faint illumination which is night at sea. A moon broke the clouds, turning the wake into a furrow of shining silver, only shadowed by the darksome banner of smoke that clung to the smoke-stack. Then stars, coming out one by one. We turned in.

But sleep dodged us that night. This was a working boat, and some noise was to be expected, but I had not anticipated the Bombardment of Bruges.

Firstly, there was the thunderous noise of the dropped girders and grinding donkey-engines while

the decks were being stripped. That signal told us we were in the locks at Zeebrugge, which we entered in the dark. Then, after a short interval of peace while we moved up the Bruges canal, the real bombardment began.

Our worst fears were realised. We knew that the Sanfry would be going back to Blyth, but we did not expect her to sail home again the very same day as she arrived. But she was a worker, and had her job to do, so the cargo had to be discharged there and then, never giving the boat a rest.

My dreams of being a seaman began to fade. The job was all work. I had thought the crew would be having a jolly time that night in Belgium; but when work is waiting, the ship is the only consideration. The Sanfry must be off again.

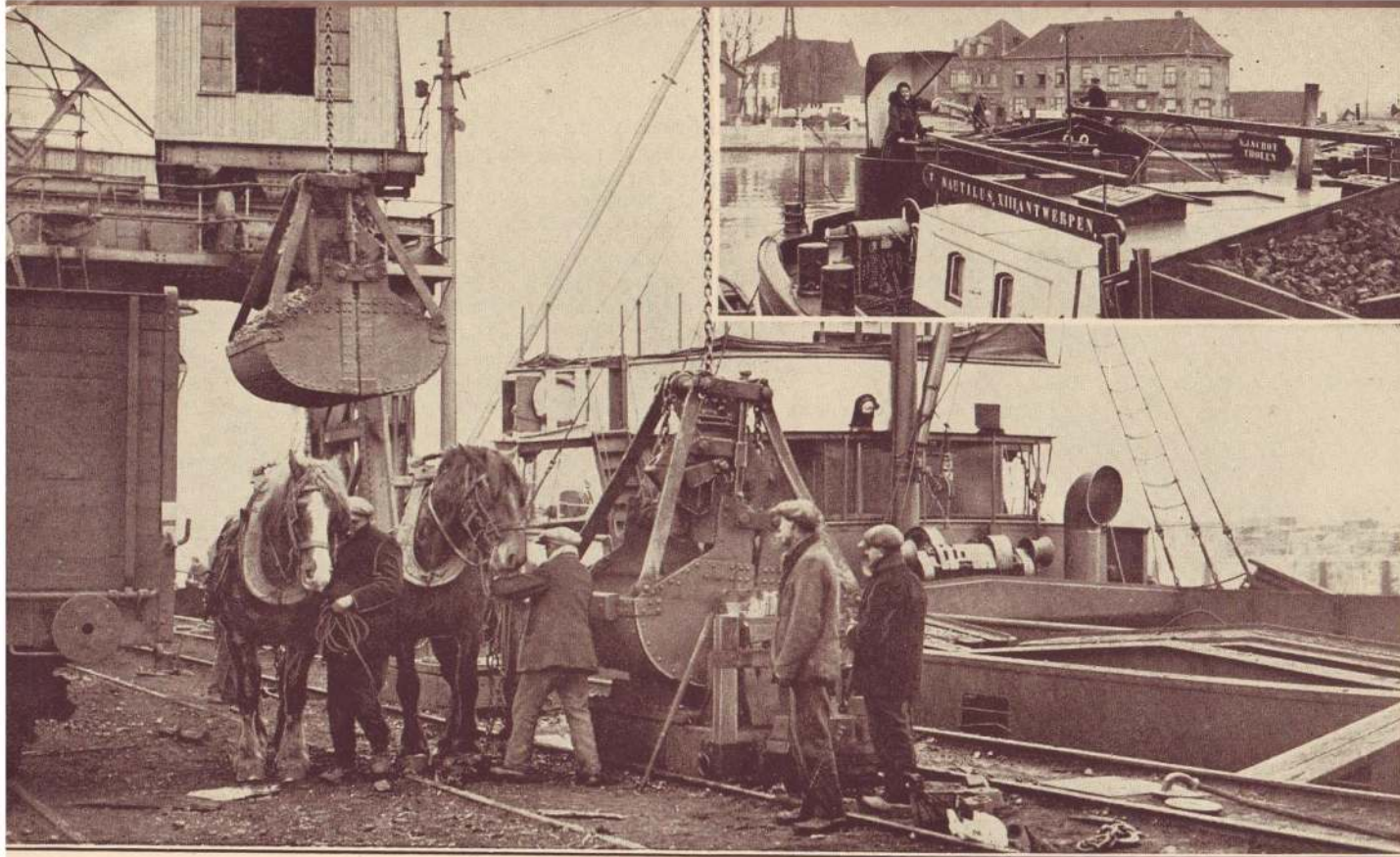
I have brought you from Castleford to Bruges, across the 240 miles of sea, with our cargo of coal.

CHAPTER 3.

IN THE LAND OF BARGES AND DOG-CARTS.

One characteristic of the Belgian must be caution, for although the Sanfry had about 1,100 tons of coal aboard her, they weighed out every scrap when we were discharging at Bruges.

The discharging of a Yorkshire coal boat in a foreign port is a sight never to be forgotten. We



*Inset—
Bound for
Holland.*

*Quayside
Scene
at Bruges.*

started at 4.0 a.m. owing to the fact that the Sanfry must be ready for sailing again at 8 o'clock the same night, and the work went on throughout the day, the same men carrying on with only a few brief rests.

We woke to the noise of rattling chains, clattering shovels, clanking cranes, and shouts, and went on deck to find the air full of dust. The giant arms of the cranes looked weird in the light of lamps, and the "grabs" that plunged into the hold were like the tentacles of a fearsome monster. Down they went into the coal, routing among it and taking something like a ton each time in their grip. A shout from the men below—men as black as niggers in the coal dust—and the "grabs" lifted and swung away, bumping down again on to scales on the quay.

I stared in astonishment. Surely, with all this coal to shift, they need not be so cautious about the weight? It would waste many valuable hours, this bumping up and down on the scales. But, no doubt about it, there they were—men putting on weights like grocers, and regarding the scales with critical eyes. There, too, was the checkweighman, a Belgian, in velveteens, sabots, a woollen cap pulled over his ears, and an umbrella! He was coolly making notes of each weighing in his little pocket book.

And that same checkweighman stood in practically the same place, making notes, from 4 in the morning to 7 at night!

We waited for the light before we went ashore to investigate. When it came we met an impressive sight. Other boats were also discharging, and all the way along the quay the giant cranes were working, moving about like things of sense—stooping, grabbing, swinging, and plunging the cargo into waiting trucks.

The noise was amazing. Bruges, which has been hit badly of recent years, is full of excitement when the boats come in from England; hence the men shout when they need only speak, and run and scramble when they need only walk. What a day for them indeed, with work in plenty on the quayside! And what a strange mixture, the Yorkshire accent and the Belgian tongue made!

First we loaded into ordinary railway trucks, drawn up along the quay. Backwards and forwards went the cranes, bump went the scales, silently "Velveteens" made notes in his pocket-book. Then horses came to haul the wagons, which meant more shouting and more scrambling, so we were glad to get down into the lounge for breakfast.

It began to rain, bringing down the coal dust from the air like black snow, and blotting out Bruges altogether. Gone was the sight of the grey



Discharging
Coal into a
Lighter
at Bruges.

Inset—
Captain
Lawson.

Belfry; gone the mediæval town. All that remained was a line of cranes, heaps of coal and wood, and the noise. We turned on the skipper's radio set as a kind of antidote, but soon gave it up. How anybody can sing love songs and play wind instruments at 7.30 in the morning was beyond my understanding.

Outside, we found coal being discharged into a lighter drawn up alongside. She was bound for Holland, and bore on her sides the charming words, "Hoop Op Welvaart. Biervliet."

She would not be alone in going to Holland, for something like 20 per cent. of the Yorkshire coal that comes into Bruges, I was told, finds its way to Dutch grates and stoves.

We saw coal boats on the Ghent-Damme canal; we saw them making their way between the tall Belgian houses and warehouses carrying to other parts coal won from the earth by our own miners in Yorkshire. And there, steering a barge bound for Antwerp, was a Belgian woman, looking as unconcerned as you like, and apparently quite unmoved by the fact that the cargo had come across hundreds of miles of sea. Some people are like that.

Our cargo seemed to put life into the dockside at Bruges that day; for not only had we set barges and lighters moving through the old canals, but had also provided work for the "Puffing Billies" that run on rails through the streets.

We decided to track down some of the coal, just to see what happened to it finally. We took up our stand in what is known as the "coal park," a large space on the dockside stacked high with coal—piles of coal that grew and grew as the day went on. Black, like a pit yard; and yet, through the entrenchments of coal we could see those towers and turrets which have made Bruges famous. There we waited our prey.

But coal-men with their horses and carts did not arrive; instead there came boys with hand-trucks hauled by dogs. And that is the way the Belgian housewife gets her coal.

Dogs are not mere pets in Belgium; they must work for their living. Harnessed to the underside of the small cart, they haul the load through the streets, urged on by the young Belgian who takes charge of the cart handle.

We followed one of them, along the quayside, over the narrow cobbled streets that are painful to the Englishman's feet, used to the macadam of their own country. Rackety-rackety-rackety went the cart, through the Grand Place of Bruges, with its belfry and innumerable cafes, through squares, where statues are wrapped up in straw all the winter against frost, by the beautiful Chapel of the Holy Blood that lies close to the Town Hall where one can get married, and to the Law Courts, where

one can get divorced. All shoulder to shoulder are these buildings, where marriages are made and broken, and where christenings and burial services are also held.

And finally we found our way to a cosy little *pension*, lying but a short way from one of the dark canals that run in and out, lacing Bruges with water. Emboldened by our adventures, we marched up to Madame and requested to see her kitchen.

Why, she asked? Because, we explained, we wanted to see the place where Yorkshire coal met its end—if, that is, she used Yorkshire coal.

Madame smiled. Of course she used Yorkshire coal. Fryston. There was plenty of Polish coal to be had, but, oh dear! "it's so dirty." Yorkshire coal, she told us, is the finest in the world—so clean, so warm.

She invited us in, and, for our benefit, made up the fire in her stove that was already roaring in a jolly way. Look; how bright it was. Polish coal? German coal? Ugh! So full of ash.

And we found the same thing elsewhere in Bruges. If you asked an English housewife what coal she was burning she would probably say, "Fitzjones'. One-and-eight." Never would you hear her say, "Silkstone" or "Fryston" as they do in Belgium.

Out there Yorkshire coal is held in high esteem,

and they buy it according to its brand. No one-and-sixes and one-and-eights for them: not even "large" or "kitchen nuts." They must know where it comes from.

I did not know the Flemish word for coal, but I had no difficulty in making housewives understand what I meant. One mention of the name "Fryston" was enough.

In fact, all good coal in Bruges is called "Fryston," which is practically a synonym for coal. I came across one amusing notice which read "Poolische Fryston," put up, obviously, by a man who wanted to tell the world that his coal was first-class.

That's a tribute, indeed! No wonder there is a rush to the docks when the ships come in, for Yorkshire coal is in demand. Foolish is the ten francs tax, for it discourages Yorkshire collieries from exporting, for they can get a better profit by selling at home. It is high time the whole question of this foreign restriction was reconsidered.

We met one or two Yorkshiremen in Bruges. They told us the same story of the foolishness of the tax. For centuries the old town had been called "Bruges the dead," and the restrictions on foreign imports have prevented life coming in by way of ships. However, they were hopeful, for ships from Old England are getting to be more frequent visitors again.

And they told us that "coal days" were always red-letter days for them, for did not the ships bring in pieces of Yorkshire itself—coal brought up from under the very fields and woods of the old country?

Time was getting on, so we decided to make our way back to the Sanfry. She had almost finished discharging when we arrived once more on the quay. The last shovelsful were being scraped up from the hold, and her work on that trip nearly over—or so we thought.

For then we received the news we were least anxious to hear. The weather had not held. With a bland smile the first officer presented me with the weather report:

"Gale warning. Northerly gale, expected in squalls; east coast, north of S. Foreland, including Orkneys and Shetlands and Dogger area."

The Captain, too, smiled at us. "There it is," he said. "Northerly gales, without a bit of west. It'll be an education for you." Cruelty: for it meant that the Sanfry would have to fight every step of the way up to Blyth, another 12 hours further than the Humber—given good weather.

I mention it because you may have thought that these voyages made by the coal boats are pure pleasure trips. They are far from that, though we were fairly lucky on the way out. The Sanfry has to do its work whatever weather threatens, and

though she meets gales and cannot make any headway at all, she must persist. That is where the dogged courage of the men who carry our Yorkshire coal comes in. That is where their fine seamanship is proved.

Next time a gale is blowing, just think of the coasting vessels striving from port to port, and then ask yourself whether there is not adventure and courage in the coal export trade of Yorkshire.

I must admit that we did not smile with the skipper and the first officer. The Sanfry was going home light, without a cargo to keep her down in the waves. She was a vessel of less than a thousand tons. Moreover, we had seen some grim signs that morning—a funeral procession, a hearse, a shop full of coffins. To cap it all, there were 13 men in the crew.

But hush; let us draw a veil over the rest. Do you understand the word "pile-driving" in reference to a ship? How her bows hammer down on every wave, and her screw leaps out of the water and sends a horrible shudder through every bone in your body? That is all I need say.

H.E.C. in "The Yorkshire Weekly Post."

THE END.

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