TUG-BOATS OF THE BRISBANE RIVER

[By A. A. JORDAN, formerly officer in charge of Water Police]

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Before commencing this talk it may be of interest to convey some mental picture concerning the development of tug boats. The towing of sailing vessels was the purpose of most of the earliest steamboat inventions, but it was not until well into the second decade of the nineteenth century, that the tug became really practical. For many years after that her functions were limited, for, as a rule, she was a tiny vessel of low power. Often she could not pull a sizeable tow over the tide, and had to anchor until the tide changed. More than one instance is recorded of the tug having run short of coal before her job was finished, and having to go alongside her tow to borrow enough to keep steam up. For getting a vessel down the river until she could find a fair wind, or moving ships in and out of dry dock, the pioneer tugs were useful, but it was many years before they would undertake a job of more than a few miles.

The Crimean War boom of 1854-56 provided a great opportunity for tug owners. Transports could not afford the time to wait for a favourable tide and breeze, and the demand for tugs exceeded anything that had been known before in the history of shipping. The standard of tugs improved rapidly. They were still wooden-built paddlers. Their engines were more powerful, and they increased in size until tugs of between 120 and 150 tons were not unusual. About this time began the custom of fitting tugs with two boilers, generally side by side with the two funnels placed abreast abaft the paddle wheels. The tugs were all fitted with a certain amount of sail, so that they might economise in coal whenever they were not towing.

The construction and design continued to improve. All the early tugs in the fifties and sixties were paddle driven. They were marvellous sea boats in rough weather. They could not put their power to the same effect as the screw tug, but for many years the sailing ship master preferred them. Between 1870 and 1875 some fine paddle tugs were in existence, which were big enough to face any sea, and long ocean tows.

The paddle wheel tug "Anglia" towed Cleopatra's Needle, weighing 180 tons, in a steel cylinder from a Spanish port to London. It had previously been abandoned during a storm in the Bay of Biscay. The "Anglia" was owned by William Watkin & Son. This company commenced business in 1803, and is still maintaining a modern fleet of tugs on the Thames.

The terms "Dutch and Ocean Salvage" up to 1939 was practically synonymous. Britain had never seriously competed in ocean salvage and rescue work, and when the unrestricted U. Boat and aircraft warfare of the last war made it vital to save every ship, however badly damaged, Britain was short of ocean-going rescue tugs. An energetic building programme was begun, and the autumn of 1943 saw the commencement of a larger and more efficient class of tugs.

A Competitive Trade

Almost from the first days of "Taking Steam" as the practice of using a tug to avoid being wind-bound in port was described in the advertisements of sailing-ship owners, towage has been a competitive trade. Up to the time when shipping intelligence began to arrive by wireless, tug boats went "seeking" as it was called, the rope of some inbound ship. Much of the romance as well as the discomfort of towage work went out when "seeking" was supplanted by the modern method of pre-arranged contract.

Tug masters working in close collaboration with the pilots, must be fully knowledgeable about the set of tidal currents, and other hazards of port movement. Success in their work lies in the uncanny co-operation between the skipper and his engineer. Steam is still largely employed for this class of work, principally because of the long proven reliability of the steam engine. Diesel tugs are being increasingly used for ship towage, and this type of propulsion has a number of advantages.

With the introduction of wirelessed shipping intelligence, the work became easier, but the tug owner was still handicapped by the difficulties of passing urgent orders to craft scattered up or down the river. The post war development of short wave wireless telephony solved the problem, and orders are now sent direct from the towage company's office to individual tug masters. The design and horsepower of tugs continued to improve to meet the demands of the ever increasing

tonnage of present-day shipping. The modern ocean-going tug is between 1,000 and 1,500 h.p., equipped with radar, salvage and fire pumps and latest navigational aids.

The Brisbane fleet of tugs controlled by Macdonald Hamilton & Co., are vessels of this type, and their record is indeed one of which Brisbane can be proud.

Early Brisbane Tugs

The depth of water on the river bar in 1862 was four feet at low water and only shallow draft vessels were able to enter the river. Ships of any size anchored in the Brisbane roads near the old Pile Light. Cargo and passengers were brought to Brisbane by lighters and tenders. After commencement of the removal of the bar in that year, two tugs appeared on the river. These vessels were owned by J. & G. Harris, merchants and steamship owners, who had their wharf at Short Street, built in 1862. The tugs were the "Emma," and the "Nowra," a paddle-wheeled ship without surface condensers, which we are told made her a very noisy craft. No other particulars are available concerning these tugs, as is also the case with the "Francis Cadell," a tug owned by Bright Bros. (Now Gibbs Bright & Co.)

The steam tugs "Brisbane," "Diamond," "Rainbow," and "Settler" in 1862 were employed removing spoil during the cutting of Francis Channel by the dredge "Lytton."

At late as 1882 a paddle wheel tug. "Sea Horse," 80 h.p., was built by the Queensland Government.

The first detailed information appears when the paddle-wheeled tug "Boko" arrived on the river. She was owned by the then Bright Bros. Captain J. S. Gibson, Master of the "Beaver" for many years, and Gibbs Bright & Co. have supplied the following information:—

"Boko" was built at Newcastle-on-Tyne in 1877, by A. Leslie & Co., and left for Brisbane some six months after building. She took six months to reach Brisbane due to the fact that she sailed the full distance, and the engines were not used.

Dimensions: Gross tons 203, length 125ft. beam twenty-one feet, depth ten feet, net tons, seventy. The engines driving the paddles were of ninety-nine nominal horsepower, steam being supplied by two boilers work-

ing on a pressure of thirty-five pounds. Salt water was used in the boilers.

The first master was Captain James Davis, formerly of the "Francis Cadell." Second master, Captain Farmer, for a period of five years, followed by Captain J. S. Gibson, between the years 1909-1912. In 1903 when the Brisbane Tug Coy. was formed, "Boko" was bought by this Coy. from Gibbs Bright & Co. In 1912 during a general strike, "Boko," was laid up, and apart from a short commission in 1913, relieving the "Beaver," did not see further service. She was later purchased in 1917 by Mr. H. Peters, of Peters Slip, Kangaroo Point, and was stripped and purchased by a syndicate, which proposed to use the hull as a lighter. This was never carried out, and the hull was abandoned in Doboy Creek. Her remains can be seen there to-day.

Some Notable Tugs

The Brisbane Tug Coy. was registered on August 28, 1903. The fleet consisted of the "Beaver," ex Webster & Co.; "Boko," ex Gibbs Bright & Co.; "Greyhound," ex James Campbell & Co.

The "Greyhound" was built at Balmain, Sydney, in 1898, by Allan & Hunter.

Dimensions: Gross tons, 76.71; net tons, 52.16; length, 96.2ft., beam 21.4ft., depth 8.6ft.; engine compound condensing by McKay & Baster.; cylinders, fourteen and twenty-eight inch; stroke, twenty; N.H.P., 30.

The vessel was with James Campbell & Sons until 1903, when she was transferred to the Brisbane Tug Coy. The "Greyhound" was a pretty model with beautiful scroll work around the bow. Captain Bedford, a well-known resident of Kangaroo Point, was master for many years. The "Greyhound" when coming up the river on the night of May 18, 1920, collided with the dredge "Hydra" anchored in the Lytton Reach, and sank. She was later salvaged and the forward part rebuilt. She was employed on the river until 1935, when she left Brisbane, having been purchased by the Geelong Harbour Trust. The tug proceeded to Geelong under her own steam. On arrival at Geelong she was used for towing and general port work. In 1943 she was sold to the Allied Works Council, and taken to Melbourne for overhaul. Early in 1944 she proceeded under tow for port construction work in N.S.W., but

shortly after leaving Port Phillip Head she sank. She was not salvaged on this occasion.

The "Beaver" was built by Ramage & Ferguson of Leith, Scotland, in March 1886, for Webster & Co., and arrived in Moreton Bay, June 25, 1886, after a seventy-seven day passage. The "Beaver" was ordered to replace the "Otter," which had been taken into the Queensland Naval Brigade in 1885. The "Otter" was used as a gunboat during the expected Russian invasion of that year. The river was mined and all incoming vessels were forbidden to enter until they had been inspected by a State gunboat. When the "Beaver" arrived in Brisbane the tug had two raking masts and a spacious bridge deck, the tow hook being well aft. After some experience the main mast was removed, and the bridge deck shortened by some sixteen feet to bring the tow hook forward to a better towing position. In later years the funnel was lengthened and a wireless cabin constructed on the forward end of the bridge deck with an enclosed wheelhouse above.

Dimensions: Gross tons, 222, length 135.2ft., beam 21.6ft., depth 10.6ft., draft 8ft. Compound engines of ninety-six N.H.P.

The crew which brought the vessel to Brisbane consisted of:—

Captain	Alexander Watson
Mate	Thomas Mitchell
Boatswain	John Mitchell
Cooks	M. B. Roberts
	W. Gibson
Steward	F. W. Docherty
Able Seamen	W. Williams
	E. Ainscough
Deck Boy	H. Mitchell
Chief Engineer	John McDonald
Second Engineer	George Douglas
Third Engineer	Peter Proconis
Firemen	Robert McCormack
	A. Murray
	R. A. Findlay

Captain John Mitchell, who made the trip out as bo'sun, took charge of the tug for the first three years in Brisbane, and then returned to England. Captain John Mitchell, after his return to Liverpool, served as master of the paddle tugs Cruiser and Kingfisher

and later of the famous screw tug "Blazer." He died in 1873. He was followed by Captains McGaw, Rawlston, W. Bruce, a dour Scot, and J. S. Gibson, who is at present living in retirement at Southport. The "Beaver" was the first vessel in this port to have a siren whistle, and the terror it aroused in the clear air of the morning doubtless is still in the recollection of some residents. During the last war it was so often taken for an air raid alarm that its use was discontinued.

Famous Ocean Tows

The "Beaver" had a proud record of ocean towing. Included in the long list was the salvage of the Japanese freighter "Ujima Maru," which carried away her rudder in North Queensland waters. Captain Gibson had with him on this occasion Captain Ledley as navigation officer. In 1940 on October 1, Macdonald Hamilton, purchased the "Beaver" to replace their tug "Coringa," which had left to join the Royal Navy. In company with the "Carlock," she towed a 2,000-ton floating dock to Darwin, and in July, 1942, with the "St. Giles," towed the war damaged American steamer "Portmar" from Thursday Island to Brisbane. Captain Owen Tuesley was master of "Beaver" during her last two years of service. She was sold in 1948 and finally broken up.

The early tugs of Macdonald Hamilton & Co. were the "Mabel" and "Vera." They were mostly engaged in towing coal lighters, although the "Mabel" frequently assisted to berth the "Arawatta," "Aramac" and other vessels of similar tonnage. Macdonald Hamilton & Co. started as a tug coy. in 1910, when the "Chesterford" was built by the A.U.S.N. Coy. workshops, Kangaroo Point. Captain Harry Mitchell was master of the "Chesterford" for many years. It will be recalled that Capt. H. Mitchell, arrived as deck boy on the "Beaver." The "Chesterford" was sunk in the Hamilton Reach, October 23, 1913, when getting into position to take a tow line from the "Kyarra." The engineer and fireman were drowned. The master on that occasion, Captain T. Anderson, was recovered from the water by Mr. Rodney Macdonald, the present Brisbane resident partner of Macdonald Hamilton & Coy. The "Chesterford" was sold in 1932 to Daley's, tug owners of Sydney. She is still in service in that port.

Dimensions of "Chesterford": Gross tons 128, beam 19.8ft., depth 11.8ft.

The original tug "Fearless" was built at Newcastle in 1895, and for some years was employed in towage between Sydney and Newcastle. She arrived at Brisbane in 1910. She was a wooden vessel, and did good service until October 7, 1952, when she was sold for breaking up.

Dimensions of "Fearless": Gross tons 120, length 112ft.. beam 20ft., depth 9.6ft. The engines of the "Fearless" were of the compound condensing type built by Ross and Duncan, Glasgow.

The Coy. in 1917 purchased from W. R. Black the "Champion II," "Sir Charles Cowper," and "Mystery." The "Champion" was built for W. R. Black by Evans Anderson & Phelan, Kangaroo Point. She is at present giving service on the Tweed River as a sand and gravel barge. These were small vessels and mostly were engaged in towing lighters.

The "Coringa's" Record

In May 1914 the tug "Coringa" arrived in Brisbane. She was built for Macdonald Hamilton & Coy. by Denny's, Dumbarton, Scotland. The "Coringa" had two funnels and at the time was the most powerful tug in Australia, with engines developing 1,500 h.p. Dimensions: Gross tonnage 294, length 135ft., beam 25ft., loaded draft 15.8ft.

Soon after her arrival she towed the disabled steamer "Carnhill" from New Ireland to Sydney, 3,500 miles. She had a long record, including a tow of the "Atonic Padre," Newcastle to Brisbane, 450 miles; "Mutlah," Brisbane to Sydney; "Juana," Townsville to Sydney; "Coquitlam City," Brisbane to Newcastle; "Fairlight," Sydney to Brisbane; "Kinrosshire," Townsville to Sydney; a dredge from Dundee to the Malay States, "Arawatta," from a reef off Mackay; "Sveajarl," off Central Bank, Moreton Bay; attempted to refloat "Pruth," ashore at Port Moresby, February, 1926; with the tug "Forceful" attempted to refloat "Cooma" off North Reef, July 1926; towed off "Rio Claro," Scotts Reef, Cairns, September 1926; "Halle," Pelican Banks, March 1927; "Kowarra," Venus Banks, Moreton Bay. 1928; "Tango Maru," Ghibber Rock, near Thursday Island; and refloating Largs Bay, Freeman's Channel, Moreton Bay, January 1930.

The tug was almost lost in 1929 during an attempt to salvage the E. and A. vessel "Arafura" en route to Australia from Japan. The "Arafura" was disabled during cyclonic weather off the Queensland coast. The master of the "Arafura," when off Townsville, called for the assistance of a tug. The "Coringa" went to her assistance, and was successful in getting a tow line on board. The cyclone continued and after twenty-four hours of heavy weather her steering gear carried away. The tow line was cut, and the "Coringa" was left to herself. The engine room was half flooded, the pump room full of water, and with a heavy list was last reported going north. The tug survived the cyclone and returned to Brisbane. Most of her forward deck fittings were missing, life boats and bridge badly damaged.

The tug "Forceful" left Brisbane to search for "Arafura" and also ran into bad weather. She later arrived in Moreton Bay with the "Arafura." The two tugs towed her to Sydney some days later. Captain Syd. Neill, in charge of the "Coringa," by his seamanship and navigation under adverse conditions contributed in no small measure in bringing the "Coringa" safely into port.

"Coringa" some years ago assisted to put out a fire on the "City of Kansas" at Birts Wharf, South Brisbane. The vessel was loaded with case kerosene, and a fire broke out in the lower holds. A hole was cut in the side of the vessel, and "Coringa" with her powerful salvage pumps pumped water into the vessel. The decks of the ship were almost red hot. The plates buckled and it was almost a week before the fire was completely put out.

"Coringa" returned to England in the early days of the 1914-1918 war, serving for three years as a mine sweeper and submarine destroyer. When the second war broke out in 1939, "Coringa" was again called into service with the Royal Navy. She left for England on January 5, 1939, in the command of Captain W. J. Cowling, a well known ship master of the A.U.S.N. Coy.

H.M. Tug "Coringa" was lost, cause unknown, in the southern end of the Irish Sea near the Bristol Channel, June 23, 1940. It is said the armament plate on board affected her stability, as she developed a sudden list and capsized. Captain Tom Anderson, a well

known Scot along the waterfront, was master of the "Coringa" for many years.

Career of the "Forceful"

The tug "Forceful" arrived in Brisbane in 1926. She was built in 1925 by A. Stephen, Glasgow, Scotland. Dimensions: Gross tonnage 288, length 113.1ft, beam 27.1ft., depth 13.3ft., H.P. 1,100.

Captain Walter Mitchell was master of the "Forceful" for many years. He was a son of Capt. John Mitchell, who was master of the "Beaver" after her arrival from Scotland, and a brother of Capt. Harry Mitchell, of the "Chesterford." Capt. Walter Mitchell had a fine reputation as a tug master. He had a perfect understanding with his engineer, David Jolly. I have heard "Jolly" boast that he could anticipate Walter Mitchell's telegraph signals from the bridge.

"Forceful" took part in many deep sea tows, apart from bringing the "Arafura" into port. She was handed over to the Royal Australian Navy, January 22, 1914, where she served until 1943. She did most of her war time service at Darwin and salvaged many war time casualties. "Forceful" and the Customs launch collided off the Sugar Refinery Wharf, July 19, 1932. The Customs launch was sunk, and unfortunately a Custom House officer was drowned.

"Carlock" and "Fearless"

The tug "Carlock" arrived at Brisbane in 1929. Dimensions: Gross tonnage 301, length 121.1ft., beam 27.1ft., depth 13.2ft., draft 12ft. H.P. 1,100. She was also built by A. Stephen, Glasgow, Scotland.

The "Carlock" has proved a most successful tug. In addition to salvage work she made a 750-mile dash to aid the 5,000-ton hulk "Mombah," which was cut adrift from the tug "St. Giles" when the latter broke down whilst towing the ship from Newcastle to Noumea. When the "Carlock" left Brisbane June 14, 1948, the hulk was drifting 150 miles N.W. off Noumea. She has many other records to her credit.

The oil-burning tug "Coringa" was the former Royal Naval tug "Empire Peggy." The vessel arrived Brisbane March 10, 1949. "Coringa" was built by Cook, Wellington and Gemmell Ltd. Dimensions: Gross tonnage 259, length 105.9ft., beam 30ft., depth 12.4ft., draft 13.5ft. The new "Coringa" has a fine record to follow to the credit of her former namesake.

The new oil-burner tug "Fearless" was formerly the Royal Naval tug "Duckwing." She was later taken over by the Arabian American Oil Coy. and renamed "Abqaiq III." The vessel was built in Ontario, Canada, and purchased by Macdonald Hamilton & Coy. in 1953. She arrived Brisbane December 23, 1953. She is equipped for modern ocean going towage and salvage work. Captain Owen Tuesley, formerly commander of the tug "Carlock" and other tugs of the Macdonald Hamilton fleet, is her present master. Captain Tuesley has had long experience of the tidal conditions of the Port of Brisbane. He graduated from the small type of towing vessels on the river and this has been of great advantage in adding to his reputation as a successful tug master.

The "Fearless," with Captain Leighton in command, and Captain Tuesley as towing master, left Brisbane October 11, 1957, to render assistance to the Japanese freighter "Eifuku Maru," ashore on Wreck Reef some 344 miles north of Brisbane. The attempt to refloat her was not successful. The vessel was later refloated after repairs were made by Japanese salvage experts. The "Fearless" again returned to the "Eifuku Maru" on December 29, 1957, and although experiencing adverse weather conditions succeeded in towing the vessel to Moreton Bay, where she arrived on January 4, 1958.

Brisbane's fussy but modern tugs always provide interest when seen bringing overseas vessels up the river on the flood tide, or assisting departing passenger ships from their berths in the lower reaches.

Tug masters are mostly philosophers, and in their quiet, unassuming approach to their problems there is a hint of the persistent power of tides which they serve.