

AN ITEM OF INTEREST FROM THE HERITAGE CENTRE

S.T. (STEAM TRAWLER) SHERATON (NHER Number is 34507)

This month's OBJECT is far too large to have in the Heritage Centre, but we do have a collection of different pictures and its history in our files.

The OBJECT is "The Wreck of the Steam Trawler Sheraton."

Most people know that her remains lay on the shore below the Lighthouse.

It was built in 1907, by a ship builder based in Beverley, called Cook, Welton & Gemmell Ltd and was powered by a single screw propulsion made by Amos & Smith of Hull.



The Sheraton was 130 ft long, 23 ft wide and had a draught of 12 ft. She had a carcass of wood, probably oak and then clad with steel.

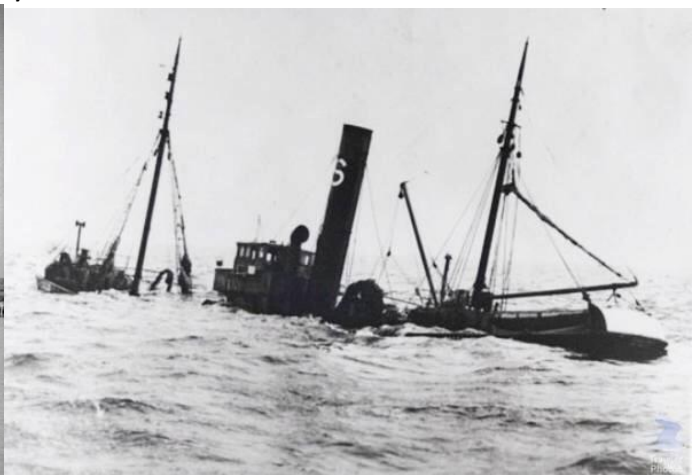
She was built so strong as her first duty, as her name suggests, was as a Trawler in the North Sea. This environment has some very rough sea conditions, so it was right to have that in mind in the design stage. Also with Germany flexing her muscles it was unsure if a war would start in her lifetime, in that case she would be requisitioned by the Navy in a non-Trawler roll, that being a Minesweeper or anti-Submarine duty.

The remains of the wreck photographed in 2002

When WW1 broke out in 1914, some 800 Trawlers from the east coast ports were requisitioned and the Sheraton was one of them. Her new duty was as a Boom Patrol Vessel.



S T Sheraton in working order



S T Sheraton in c1947

Once WW1 was over I assume she went back to Trawling, being based still at Grimsby her home port. As I found no reports to the contrary, until WW2, when in January 1942 she was again requisitioned by the Royal Navy.

This time she was to be part of the Nore Command which patrolled the North Sea, a large task, but with many other ships this command looked after over 200,000 square miles of sea.

Before the Sheraton could start her new job, she had to be fitted with a six-Pounder Gun on her bows and then registered as an Armed Patrol Vessel.

After the Second World War ended, and now nearly 40 years old she was stripped of all valuable equipment and painted bright Yellow. Her destiny had been decided by the Admiralty for her to be a Royal Air Force Target ship. She was towed and anchored off Brest Sand in the Wash, and there she stayed until in 1947 on the night of April 23rd/24th she broke loose from her anchors in severe Gales and drifted across the Wash and got beached on the shore against the cliff near the lighthouse – and what is left of her is still there today.



S T Sheraton beached at Hunstanton 1947



A Local boy with S T Sheraton in the background



S T Sheraton c 1948 – a dangerous playground

One of the rewarding things when working in the Heritage Centre, is when visitors talk to us about an article because they have a story to tell you, or they've heard a story from a relative or friend. These stories are like a piece of a jigsaw, and to us they are all helpful in trying to complete that jigsaw.

For instance :

We had no idea what the Deck was made of, but whilst talking to a visitor about the wreck, she said she had a photograph of her Father in uniform, home on leave and standing on the Deck. She returned a while later with the picture and we now know it was wooden planks with Hemp and Tar in the joints.

From older local residents we learnt that for the first few days after coming to rest on the shore, it was guarded by armed soldiers, and nobody was to go near it until 'some equipment' was removed from the ship by the Ministry of War ??.

When it came to its salvage, the first thing that disappeared was the mast. Masts were a very saleable item from any wrecked ship. The ship then laid there for some time.

Another gentleman visited us who told me that his father had a contract to salvage what was left, remember she was metal clad.

It was going to be difficult to salvage the ship, being it was along the coast from both access points, Hunstanton Old or New.

But this man had done his homework, he had bought a 4 wheeled drive lorry from the American Military after the war which made his job much easier. No doubt it was the steel he wanted, not the wood, or we would not have the wreck we see today.

On another day we were open, a lady came in to say she had found what looked like a 'manhole cover' near the Wreck. But this cover had some lettering in the casting. This spelt out the name of the shipbuilder who built the Sheraton in 1907. A few volunteers went to see it and possibly bring it to the Heritage Centre. They managed to retrieve it, with the aid of a sack barrow, to the bottom of the steps up to the North Promenade, but no further, age was against them as it was too heavy.



But help was nearby, a healthy and much younger male Wrestler saved the day. He not only lifted it, but carried it up the steps and into a volunteer's van. Oh what it was to be young!

Help is being sought through a Trawler Museum to identify this item which we hope to have on display soon.

The 'manhole cover' retrieved from close by the wreck of the Sheraton

It just goes to prove, that however small the stories we are told it's another piece of the big jigsaw that we can record for others to learn from.

We have in our files a copy of the 15 page Marine Archaeological Survey carried out in 2007 on S T Sheraton should you wish to learn more about this vessel's history.

Researched by Heritage Volunteer Tony Armstrong.