

Sylvia Sharples – Crew member of the Manx Beauty

Taken from her book and other writings

CONTENTS

Joining the boat.....	1
A stitch in time	2
A typical day aboard a trawler, written May 2010	3
Port Penrhyn – North Wales 1975 – Re-engining the Manx Beauty.....	5
New Year’s Eve – 1980’s	9
1993 My husband dies.....	10
Sylvia’s understanding of the history of the Manx Beauty.....	12

JOINING THE BOAT

An opportunity came to buy a business in Wales consisting of a guest house, holiday flats, a caravan and enough left over to buy a boat to take angling trips. We decided to go for it and moved there just before Easter in 1973. I was a complete novice but soon got to grips with looking after guests, servicing the flats for the next paying guests and all went well. Angling trips were booked from the guest house and surplus trips were given to an old guy who lived on a boat in Bangor who didn’t have a telephone.

At Easter of our second year our relationship began to fall apart, there were issues between my partner and my daughter which I won’t go into. I then realised I would have to do something. As my parents had brought my daughter up for the early part of her life, I asked for them to care for her permanently* It was a very difficult time and I needed space to decide my future. I could not stay in this relationship so I asked the guy on the boat if I could stay there until I sorted my head out. He agreed I could for a trial period, so I packed a few possessions – my sea boots, my oilskins and my pressure cooker. I left a house full of stuff but that wasn’t important, I was in a state of indecision, hurt furious and very confused.

This was the start of a new way of life albeit for a few days or maybe longer?

I did eventually stay for 18 years, working as crew on a trawler. We lived aboard and worked hard from morning till night when out fishing, 16-hour days were the norm. I ended up with big muscles from pulling ropes, climbing a rope ladder several times a day when in port – no two days were the same there was always something to do even if it was only keeping warm. Several layers of clothes during the winter. When snow was on the mountains and the wind was blowing it was like a big freezer door opening.

I learned a lot about life, boat terminology, net mending, gutting fish, mending engines and coping with emergencies, as the skipper used to say “money is no good out at sea, there’s no hard shoulder, it’s up to us to sort it out”. The sea is one of the greatest things to sort the men out from the boys. You have to be real shipmates to spend 24/7 with each other living together in a small cabin, and be self-sufficient. A generator provided the electricity, water was carried in a five-gallon container, and you were always on duty even in port, when bad weather was around. In the bad winters when the

ice formed you had to keep an area round the boat free or it would crush the wooden planks. Sometimes tree trunks or large pieces of timber came in with the tide. These had to be fended off the tides have no mercy.

I soon found another philosophy on life – my priorities were different from the rat race I had been in. It was a huge learning curve, no fancy clothes, no make-up, everything had to be sensible. Whilst fishing your clothes got wet through hauling the catch aboard, no food until the catch was gutted and put below, as that was our wage packet.



Then the disappointment when fish went to market and the bottom had fallen out of the market for your fish. Sometimes it cost you more than you got back with landing charges, cost of ice, diesel, nets, dock dues etc.

Our main payment was the way of life and happiness at doing something you enjoyed, despite the hardships. Money passed through your hands like quicksilver. We ate fish “8 days a week” during the fishing season and lived mainly on smoked fish during the winter. All money had to be earned between March and November. The fish are migratory and you would have to travel many miles to make a living. Winter time was spent getting the nets ready for the next season, overhauling the rigging, engine servicing and keeping healthy. You had to be tough.

Sadly, my husband the skipper as he had become, passed away in 1993 he was 28 years older than me. I was devastated, I had nursed him for some years, not easy with basic facilities but we made light work of it. I had been so privileged to have had this way of life for that many years. People said it wouldn't last “a woman on a boat” but we proved them wrong, we were soul mates so much in harmony.

I had nowhere to live but my parents invited me to stay with them. This again was difficult as I hadn't lived at home for over 30 years. Quite a culture shock! My father was 80 years and my mother 77 years, already set in their ways like myself.

The boat had to be sold which took some doing as the market wasn't good. I the had to get used to living ashore which was very difficult to adjust to. Back to the rat race! So much had changed since I last lived in society but I vowed not to lose those values I had learned.

They also took my ships cat in too who had never lived in a house. He was 16 years old and had only lived on fresh fish which was readily available but now he had to be coaxed with tin food! What a come down..... Oct 2011

A STITCH IN TIME

When I was living on a boat, a fishing trawler, down in North Wales, my husband, the skipper, fell against the bulkhead in the foc'sle one night and cut his head. It was quite a nasty gash and really needed a few stitches. However, he needed a lot of coaxing to go to the A&E.

We eventually went to hospital and as thought he needed three stitches. These happened to be bright blue in colour. The next day we were sat on the quay side, above where our old boat was moored, in our old van watching the world go by.

It wasn't long before one of the fish hawkers, who used to buy our surplus fish which wouldn't have sold on the open market, came along. He asked if we had any fish he could buy, when suddenly he saw that the skipper had three bright blue stitches on his head. He asked what had happened, we told him and he said, "Isn't Sylvia clever to have sewn the wound up!" presumably he had seen us mending nets etc. and thought it was natural for us to do what was necessary without going to hospital.

After he went we couldn't stop laughing because we never told him we had been to hospital and I'm sure to this day he thinks that I had got the needle and thread out to sew the skipper's head.



A TYPICAL DAY ABOARD A TRAWLER, WRITTEN MAY 2010

All the fishing gear checked the day before, engine oil and fuel checked, store cupboard, water container filled. Now we had to wait for the tide to come into the dock so that we could get underway.

Warm clothes essential, it's always cold at that time of the morning. The tide arrives, we didn't need a clock, as soon as the water reached the fourth stone on the wall, we had enough water to cast off the ropes

The trip to the fishing grounds would take about 2 hours. One hour from port to Puffin Island off the coast of Anglesey, distance about six miles against the incoming tide. It would take another hour to reach the fishing grounds. The skipper would now be thinking where nest to shoot the gear, me the deck hand would stow all the things in the foc'sle, the galley and on deck ready for action. It was now time to go down to the galley to make tea and toast for breakfast, not knowing when we would next eat. It depended how much fish was in the first haul.

At this hour of the morning, if it was summer, we often saw a pod of dolphins making their way down the bay, coming out of the water two at a time, really enjoying themselves. It was a wonderful sight.

At the fishing grounds the net was shot and the first tow started. The next two hours seemed to drag waiting to see if the skipper had chosen the right place to fish. During this time, the engine was checked and the bilges for any leaks, you never know with a wooden boat. The engine room is only about 3ft 6inches high and smells of oil and diesel and is very hot.

Time up and ready to haul, oilskins donned, winch started and slowly the gear came up, once the net was up to the blocks the stern of the boat was turned in a circle so the cod end (the money end) was alongside amidships. Ropes were pulled tight to keep the fish in and the lifting strop fixed to the gilson to heave the bag aboard. It was suspended just above the deck so the cod string could be opened to let the fish onto the deck.

At this point there were gulls everywhere, on the gunnels, on the radio aerials between the masts and the noise was deafening. Any small fish which went over the side were soon gobbled up. The skipper kicked through the fish to see if it was worth shooting again at the same patch or we may have to steam a bit further out. The cod end was tied and blessed (a quick spit) and the boat was straightened ready to shoot again.

Once the gear was in the water, the task of grading and sorting the different types of fish ready to be gutted began, minimum sizes checked. You were only allowed two undersize fish in a 5 stone box (about 400 small plaice) and if the fishery patrol came aboard, it could be a £2000 fine. European rules, had introduced logbooks. This had to be filled in after each haul, you had to guess the live weight, the gutted weight and how many discards. This was quite a tall order for a two-handed crew. It was unbelievable the amount of rubbish in the form of plastic cups, cans, empty bottles, small stones, starfish, etc come out of the cod end. Not exactly the image of Captain Birdseye!

Speed was now essential to gut the fish, get it down below out of the sun and wind, or it would not be marketable. Ice it up stacking the boxes so they wouldn't roll or move around with the motion of the boat. "No rest for the wicked!" as the saying goes, it would be time to get the deck ready for the next haul, which wouldn't be long. Not much time for a Cuppa!

I used to gut into a bucket and when the fish was attended to, used to throw it behind the boat and the gannets came from near and far diving down for the titbits. It was a wonderful sight they are magnificent birds.

We mostly had two or three tows then it was time to get the gear aboard and stowed ready for ort. Usually a 2-hr trip, during which time the last haul was sorted and put down below into the fish hold. Decks had to be washed with the deck hose ready to land the fish. If we were in time to catch the fish house open, we would land on return to port, if not, we had to land on the tide the next day. If the tide was too early next day we would have a couple of tows and then land the two lots together on the afternoon tide.

At the end of the first day, the net had to be strung up so that we could clear all the weed and rubbish out of the net for the next day. We had to check there were no holes in the net, if there were these would have to be mended. If the damage was too great, we had to bend another net on and mend the other when we weren't out fishing.

This day would be about 14 or 16 hours long before I could get t the foc'sle to wash and make a meal, inevitably our own fish, nothing ever tasted so good. We would then talk over the day's events, have a couple of glasses of cider, wait for the shipping forecast around midnight so to bunk up again fo9r and early start weather permitting. Then the process would start all over again.

A couple of days later we would find out what our fish made at market. Some would be bought locally by the chefs of the big hotels on Anglesey, the rest would be transported by the merchant to Grimsby for the open market. If we had skate wings these would be sent by train to Billingsgate for auction.

No matter what fish we caught, we only ever seemed to average£10 for a five stone box of fish across all varieties, after taking out expenses, including ice, fuel, landing charges both ends and berthing fees.

Trawling is a way of life, the elation of being at sea, hunting an unseen quarry, the highs and lows, nature in the raw etc, more than made up for the money side, as long as we had enough to survive the winter when we did not go to the fishing.

PORT PENRHYN – NORTH WALES 1975 – RE-ENGINEING THE MANX BEAUTY

In the summer of 1975 I ran away to sea to serve as crew on a commercial trawler. I was a learner “deckie”, being shown how to gut fish and a whole world of marine jargon. I had always wanted to go to sea and now it had become a reality. My Personal life was in tatters and I needed space and time to sort myself out.



I was a 32 year old woman – superstition stated that a woman on a boat was trouble and bad luck. This did not deter the skipper who liked a challenge. He ignored all the comments about teaching me “the ropes”.

I had left all my possessions where I had lived and arrived with a suit of oilskins, my sea boots and a pressure cooker. The only things I thought may be of some use on a boat.

I learned net mending, all about engines, pumping the bilges, scrubbing the boat's hull and all manner of different aspects of life afloat. Commitment had to be absolute to make it work. I had no shore base so this was now my home and my work place.

We went fishing whenever tides and wind allowed. Money was always tight as fish markets go up and down but we still had other financial commitments. The boat had a small mortgage which was almost paid up with Lombard North Central a commercial bank. The work was hard and very physical but very rewarding mentally. A way of life I had dreamed of.

One day in September we were coming back to port after a day's fishing, the engine spluttered and made a big bang and then complete silence. We were adrift in the middle of Puffin sound with a flood tide and were between rocks and a lighthouse on one side and Puffin Island full of rocks on the other. We were in danger of being wrecked.

The skipper an ex lifeboat mechanic ran for'ard and literally threw the large anchor over the bows and managed to kedge (steer) the boat between the rocks. When the anchor just touched the bottom, the boat went round in a circle, and so we pirouetted to safer waters where we final dropped anchor.

The Menai Straits is full of shipping hazards and we now had to get help and be towed to port if there was anyone listening on the radio. It was a Saturday and there were not many other large vessels working. Our boat weighed 30 tons dead weight so we needed a boat with enough power to take us in tow.

After several calls on the VHF radio, we faintly heard a reply. Our ships batteries were running down as we had no power from the main engine. We managed to get the message across that we were stranded in the Straits. The skipper of this private yacht radioed us that he would be with us in about an hour as there wasn't enough water for him to get out of the dock at the moment.

We kept anchor watch and waited for what seemed an eternity. Time was running out for us to get into port as the tide would soon be turning. The other boat came alongside and once we had a tow rope aboard, we were able to haul the anchor by hand, a difficult task as the boat weighed 30 tons dead weight and of course we had no power to the winch as we were broken down.

It's every skipper's dread to come back to port at the end of a tow rope, and usually it meant very costly repairs. In the past we had been the tow boat so this was reverse roles.

Once we were safely moored we took stock of the situation and it was soon evident that the old engine had literally died. Our Options were few, we had to get mobile as soon as possible as without an engine we would get no wages, and there would still be a couple of months of the year left before the winter arrived.

We went to our bunks with heavy hearts. We hadn't landed our fish it was still iced up down the fish hold but would have to wait until Monday before we could off load it. In the meantime, we had to make plans to replace the engine.

Monday came and we had to haul the fish up a 12 ft wall onto the quay by hand. By this time tongues were wagging round the quay saying it was proof a woman aboard a trawler was trouble and we would never set sail again. We ignored the comments and set about finding another engine. We searched the appropriate papers and found a place in Wrexham which dealt with ex admiralty engines. A phone call later we were on our way to see if it was suitable. We had some rough measurements but also had to find someone to take the old engine away once we had lifted it onto the quay.

We were working on a shoe string budget and we managed to deal a deal for another engine with ours being taken in part exchange. We arranged delivery and had about a week to get the old engine out of the engine room and onto the quay Getting a two-ton engine out of the engine room and into the fish hold for a straight lift was a mammoth task.

The dock had been built in the 1800's and next to our berth was a fixed hand operated crane which we planned to use for the task. We couldn't afford to hire a crane. We set to work with the help of blocks and tackles we slowly inched the engine up a 9 inch step from the engine room into the fish hold. We got the handle for the crane and it took tow of us to turn it slowly and the engine was brought ashore.

Our engine arrived and we had to winch that aboard onto the deck and put the other one on the wagon. We were shattered but at least we had another engine. Without being too technical we found to our dismay that the gearbox wouldn't fit the propellor shaft so it was thinking caps on again. We thought another gearbox would do the job. More phone calls and we set off in our bright orange mini for Yorkshire. On the way there we were stopped by the police who thought that we had too much weight in the boot. When it was opened it was completely empty. We went on our way and the bonnet of the mini came open and we almost crashed. The police hadn't shut it properly and we hadn't checked it. When we got to Yorkshire despite our enquiries we found that the gearbox was nothing like the seller had said over the phone.

So we decided to go see a firm in Southampton who had gear boxes for sale. We arrived late evening and parked off the road near some trees and decided to sleep in the car and planned to set off early next morning. It was a very cold night and the condensation built up in the car and we ended up wringing wet. We were also awoken by the noise of things hitting the top of the car. We scrambled out and found all the acorns were falling off the large oak tree we had parked under.

WE then headed for Southampton Railway station to get a bite to eat and a wash and brush up before we continued with our mission. It was a bout 6am in the morning, we didn't usually bother with breakfast, but we had bacon and eggs which tasted so good we both had another helping.



We found the firm and bought another gearbox. We decided to put it in the well by the passenger seat in the mini. It was heavier than a person but we had no option to get it back to the boat. Many hours later we arrived at our berth and when we went to get the gearbox out we noticed the tread on the nearside tyre had "walked" off the tyre with the weight. We were so lucky we didn't have an accident.

We had a couple of hours sleep and set to work to see if the gearbox would fit but once again it was only about an inch out so the engineering costs of altering everything would have been prohibitive. Our only option now was to throw ourselves on the mercy of Lombard, the commercial bank whom we still owed money to. We put our best gear on and headed to Llandudno to see if we could raise

the funds to buy the proper engine and gearbox. We explained without the boat we would end up in arrears but given the chance we would pay back all the money. We were aware we were not a good risk, the only asset was the boat which was useless with no engine. We were also water gypsies with no fixed address.

Eventually the manager agreed but said the interest rate would be the commercial rate of 25%. So be it, it was our last chance to get out of the mess we were in.

It was November now, we had spent 2 months trying to resolve our problems without going into debt but we now had to use the money wisely and find a complete engine which needed no adaptations. After many calls from a telephone box (we did not have a shore line or a mobile in those days) we located an engine and a part exchange deal for the other engine.

WE had to hire a wagon and load the engine on and we set off for Abingdon which meant a journey across the Welsh mountains. We set off about 2 am thinking there would be little traffic. To conserve petrol our top speed was a steady 50 mph in the interests of safety because we had quite a weight on the wagon.

We hadn't gone more than a few miles along the mountain road when we saw a stream of headlights and we seemed to be leading a convoy of vehicles, there must have been at least a dozen. They couldn't pass us as there were no passing places. WE carried on about twenty miles or more and at the first opportunity one by one they whizzed past us. Further down the road we came to a check point for no other than the mountain leg of the famous Lombard Car Rally. We were signalled to pull into the layby and let the rest of the cars check in so that we wouldn't hold them up any further. The irony was that we were on our way to spend Lombard money on the engine. We think it must have gone down in the records as the slowest mountain leg on record!

We arrived at Abingdon, conducted our business and with the new engine secured on the wagon we set off for home. It had been a very long day. The forecast was not good as snow and ice had been forecast. We crossed the mountains again but without a convoy of cars following us. About halfway home we stopped at a pub in the middle of nowhere to get something to eat and stretch our legs. The place looked deserted but all the lights were on and we could see the glow of a log fire. We tried the door, it was unlocked and there was nobody behind the bar. WE shouted and thought it a bit strange there was no reply and not a soul in sight. We stood for a few moments not knowing what to do. Suddenly we caught sight of a person sitting in a wing backed chair. The figure slowly rose and came towards us. It was a very old lady dressed in long black clothes. If we had been drinking, we would have thought we were seeing things. It was very spookie. We were quite scared. However, she did have some food for us and a cup of tea, and she was very pleasant.

Suitably refreshed we went on our way and arrived back at the boat. We were too tired to take the engine off the wagon and decided to leave it until the morning, hoping that the scrap dealers would not visit in the middle of the night. Thankfully the engine was still there in the morning.

The next four months was full of hard slog, working late into the evening every day to install the engine. The doubting Thomas's came every day shaking heads and tut-tutting and still blaming the fact there was a woman aboard.

However, in March 1976 we were ready to take the boat out on engine trials. Everything had been checked a thousand times. We waited for the tide to come in and hoped nobody would notice us leaving the quay, but the jungle drums had been working overtime. We think they came to see us fail, but they were disappointed. We looked like a Chinese junk ship with all the scrap on deck, not at all

ship shape and Bristol fashion. We proved them all wrong and the and the engine was still in good condition some years later when we sold the boat to get a smaller one with less maintenance. The boat earned us a pretty penny, paid Lombard back and was free from debt, and as far as I know she is still working for her living today.

If the boat could only tell the tale of two people, one a woman who defied all the odds. With dogged determination against the odds, we had completed the daunting task of putting a new engine in the boat, with few resources, to win through to a happy conclusion.

March 2012

NEW YEAR'S EVE – 1980'S



Every year on New Years Eve, at midnight someone would fire a canon or a twelve-bore shotgun somewhere down the Menai Straits. Sound travelled a long way on a cold and frosty night. The dock was very quiet not a soul around only us, no lights on the quay but the loom of lights from the main road and very frosty. This particular night in the 1980's we waited for the signal and went through our rituals the skipper bringing me a piece of coal, piece of bread and some coinage. These items were to bring prosperity for the coming year, good fishing, good markets and food on the table.

We then checked that our mooring lines were intact and none of the winter rubbish, tree trunks, branches etc. which had come in on the tide were not anywhere round our boat. The skipper went below and I was just going down

to the foc'sle to have our nightcap when I heard a big splash. I stood listening for a few minutes to make sure I had heard right. Sure enough someone was floundering in the water and faint cries of "Help, Help". I could vaguely see someone on the other side of the dock in the water. (We did not have mobile phones then, they were the size of a brick and not affordable to us).

I shouted top the skipper that someone had fallen in the water, he said I was imagining things. He then listened and could also hear someone. We got the old Moggy 1000 pickup keys and rushed up the rope ladder to see if she would start – no good walking – it would be too late. So faithful – despite the heavy frost she started first time, but we had to drive with both doors open as no time to defrost the windscreen, and time was of course the essence, also being careful we didn't end up in the dock ourselves as the road was like a sheet of glass.

When we reached the boat (an 80ft long steel mussel dredger and weighing about 90 tons), the watchman was trapped between the dock wall and the boat. With the tide movement the boat was pinning him to the wall and could have crushed his head. We shouted to him to hang on and between us we managed to tie the boat in at the bows which made her stern move away from the guy and also enabled us to get aboard. Good job the tie tide was at slack water or it would have been difficult to shorten the bow line.

Strong words were used to help keep him fighting but we could see he was weakened with the cold and no doubt the booze. (We found out later he had fallen off the gangplank). He kept saying "let me go" choice language again, like "your mother never raised a quitter" etc. Eventually we found a life rig by the mast, pulled it off and in so doing set off a mass of orange smoke from the flare which was attached to it. We were almost choked and hoped that somebody might see the smoke flare and come and help, not a chance! As well as orange the air was blue with expletives!

The skipper as ex RNLI so had training. He threw the life ring to the guy and had to be ordered to get a hold of it. The distance between the water and the top of the gunnel was about 10ft so a long way to rescue someone who couldn't help himself. The skipper climbed over the bulwark and stood on one of the huge tyres that stopped the boat hitting the wall. He managed to get the life belt round the guy's head and after a lot of effort both his arms through. He climbed back inside the boat and we had to secure the life ring to a cleat and physically started to heave him out of the water vertically about a foot at a time. By this time the guy was unconscious and a dead weight and his waterlogged clothes made it worse. With great effort it took us over half an hour to get him into the boat. We nearly collapsed and were running out of breath.

The guy was just lying there, I thought he was dead. Next was to get him don the foc'sle, but we had no lights, and didn't know the layout of the boat. We managed to find the hatch and didn't know how far down it went, but it was about 12 feet down a vertical ladder in the dark. We managed to find a light switch and then manhandled him down into the galley. We laid him on the floor and stripped all his clothes off and started to bring him round by putting a blanket on him and rubbing his arms and legs. It took about an hour and he regained consciousness and suddenly started singing a folk song of the time. We couldn't believe our ears. He was smiling and singing the same words over and over. We left him to recover from his ordeal, lucky that we lived aboard and heard him shouting or there wouldn't have been a story to tell. A job well done though frightening at the time.

The next few days we kept looking out across to the boat but never saw the guy. On the third day, he came o deck and he walked round to see us. He was very sheepish and said, "what do you say to someone who saved your life?" He then walked on and several days later he told us that he was going home to his family as his near drowning had made him realise his family was important. He had been on the verge of leaving them but was now going to sort his problems out.

Word got round the quay via jungle drums that we had done this rescue and said it should be reported for a bravery reward but we said we didn't want it, sufficient that the guy didn't drown.

We never saw him down the quay again. He will be in his late 50's now and I often wonder if he thinks of us on New Years Eve and how it changed his life. For better or worse – we will never know - Written 2018.

1993 MY HUSBAND DIES

This year, my husband a trawler skipper, aged 78 years, passed away and as a widow I came ashore after almost 18 years living and working aboard our trawler out of Bangor, North Wales. I was 50 years old.

It was a shock to the system to say the least. I had opted out of normal society in 1975.

I was invited to stay with friends until I sorted my affairs out. They were a very successful business couple who lived in a very large house. I lived as one of their family and was included in their lives. This was my first taste of life ashore. I was a lost soul and without their help and support I would have found it difficult to cope.

My husband had eight children from a previous marriage who were all of my generation. They rallied round and between them they agreed to help with the funeral costs. I had very little in the way of funds as we hadn't worked for a couple of years due to my husband's illness. So far so good.

It wasn't long before I was told that two of them wouldn't pay and that the boat was legally theirs. There was no will and I had to apply for letters of administration to be able to sort out the affairs and state my claim to the boat. My friend had influence and my claim was confirmed as valid in a couple of weeks. Quite a record as it often takes months when someone dies without a will.

I needed to buy some suitable clothes for the funeral but only had limited funds. My clothing was only suitable for a boat. Time was short so my friend took me to Llandudno and straight to M&S for underwear, black trousers and a top. She was a regular customer there and she just clicked her fingers and staff came running and were asked to take measurements. I had no idea what size I was. Purchases were made which took quite a bit of my meagre savings.

The next place to go was a shoe shop. It was an old-fashioned shop with staff to match, and I wondered if I could afford the shoes. I was wearing my friend's shoes which were a size six. The staff were very attentive and one of the older male assistants was dispatched to bring a variety of shoes. The shop was very long with steps halfway down and the store room was in the basement. After about ten minutes the assistant came back, out of breath, with a selection of different styles. I was getting quite agitated as it was the first shopping expedition I had been involved in for many years. I was told to take my socks off and put on a 'pop sock' (something I'd never heard of). I was wearing three pairs of socks, the norm for living on a boat in winter time, there was a gasp and my friend said in shock and amazement "you've only got little feet!"

The assistant was sent away again to bring the correct size. Anyway, he went down the shop, down the steps and into the basement and came running back with another selection of shoes. It was like a sketch from a farce. You could not have made it up. My friend took it all in her stride, I nearly collapsed laughing at the situation. Needless to say I came out of it with only a few pounds left.

The funeral was looming and the undertaker was a friend of my surrogate family so he had been instructed to provide his very best hearse a Rolls Royce for the journey to Anfield Cemetery in Liverpool. I expect the skipper was looking down in amazement. His comments would have been unrepeatable!

The day arrived, which ironically happened to be Red Nose Day. There was to be a graveside service by the Chaplain of the Port of Liverpool as simple service with a few readings. On the way I looked out over the water on the coast road and poignantly there was a beautiful rainbow in the sky.

The family had wanted him to be buried at sea but he had told me that he didn't want that so I decided to put him with his mother and father which was not controversial. We arrived and met up with my family who came to support me. His family were all congregated at the bottom of the plot. Nobody spoke to me they all just stared, despite having been accepted by them over the years. I think these occasions bring the bad out in people. The two sons had enormous black overcoats on and they looked like gangsters. You could have cut the air with a knife. My father was quite worried and took no chances and positioned himself with his back to a tree. There was a lot of tension nobody knew it wasn't going to 'kick off'. There were about 100 people there, many from the fishing fraternity. He had been a very special person, a fisherman for nearly 50years and very well respected.

Once the service was over everyone from my side beat a hasty retreat as there was no 'do' afterwards.

I had to start a new chapter in my life. I knew it would be difficult as I now had to integrate back into the big world outside after nearly twenty years being a water gypsy.



Figure 1 Jingle the cat

SYLVIA'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE HISTORY OF THE MANX BEAUTY

Built at the East Fife Boat Building Company in Scotland.

- Hull - pitch pine on grown oak frames
- Dimensions: 6ft 6in aft, 5ft for'ard,
- beam 16ft
- Length just under 50ft

Her original engine was a Kelvin K3, 66 shaft horsepower with a hand start which was built in Glasgow Scotland

Commissioned by the Manx Government in 1937 along with three other vessels. 2 were built in Scotland and 2 in Ireland. Those built in Ireland ended up over 50 ft (There are a couple of mistakes here – the sister ships in 1937 were built in Sandhaven on the Moray Firth. The Irish boats were built to replace the original vessels when they were requisitioned for WW2)

The Manx other vessels were the Manx Fairy Manx Belle, and Manx Maid. Manx Fairy was used as a pleasure boat and was berthed opposite at Port Penrhyn., She was eventually destroyed by fire after she was sold. (The Belle and Maid are not the correct names. The Fairy did have a serious fire but was restored again and went to Sweden as a yacht)

They were all varnished boats

When war broke out the Beauty and one other were requisitioned by the Navy, and the bows were strengthened with metal plates for installation of a Beaufort gun which was never actually fitted. They were both then sent as deck cargo to Africa as part of the war effort. The old harbour master at

Penrhyn actually saw them during his war service. Said it was like a breath of fresh air. (War records show the Beauty and Fairy served mainly at Workington, the boats the old harbourmaster saw must have been similar ring netters)

She never came out of the Navy until the early 50's when she was put back to her original specification and returned to the Manx Government and eventually sold.

She was next working out of Tobermory in Scotland. She was then sold and went to Conway in North Wales owned by a family called Barr. Her next owner was Alfie "the oz" in Padstow, Cornwall, whom Arthur purchased her from in h about 1974. He took her back New Brighton on Merseyside. He rigged her out ready to fish but she was over the size to work in Liverpool Bay. He then headed for Port Penrhyn in Bangor, North Wales

He lived aboard and I joined him in 1975. Towards the end of 1975 the old Kelvin engine died and we had to put another engine in. Finance was a bit of a problem but as she was part 1 registered we were able to get a loan from a commercial bank.

We eventually found a Gardener 6LW with a marine gearbox, which we brought back to Wales and installed it ourselves (Arthur had been lifeboat mechanic full time for 12 years on the Corlett based at New Brighton, Merseyside) so was well qualified. It took us about 4 months and a lot of hard work. Everyone on the quay said the Beauty would never sail again because there was a woman aboard! How wrong they were. We then had to get power to the winch so bought a Petter engine which was run by a system of belts and pulleys. The first good weather day we went out on trials which were successful and we were back in action. The following year 1976 we marinised the engine with a heat exchanger so she ran on fresh water instead of salt water. This is a brief history of what I know about the Beauty.

Sylvia Sharples written in 2020.