

# HARBOURING HERITAGE – A HISTORY OF FORTROSE HARBOUR PART 4



## CARGO SHIPS FROM SAIL TO STEAM

While the regular steamer service may have been short lived, general cargo ships used the harbour for many more years in total. A famous Fortrose ship was the schooner the *Annie of Inverness* owned by John Henderson and skippered by Captain Donald Paterson who lived in Academy Street. A typical load for her would consist of props for the wood merchant, barley and potatoes. *Annie of Inverness* was built in 1883 by Geddie shipyards on Speyside (Kingston & Garmouth) as a Schooner of 116 tons measuring 84' x 21' 6" x 10' 3".



This water colour of the *Annie* showing her rigging in great detail was given to George Taylor by George MacFarlane (see the story of the *Young Fox* below).

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Detail of the *Annie* showing the steersman and possibly Captain Paterson.

The *Annie* was wrecked at Swona, Orkney, on June 7th, 1925. All crew were saved.

Another vessel was the *Dispatch* owned from 1892 to 1919 by Donald McLeman, the coal merchant from Avoch. Her story is a long one and her bones still survive.

The *Dispatch* (official number 95741, code MGQK) was built in 1888 by Geddie's as a 2 masted wooden topsail schooner of 120 gross tons. She was the penultimate ship that Geddie's built as steam was taking over from sail and iron and steel from wood (helped by the Bessemer process). She was 90.1 feet long with a 21.5 foot beam and drew 10.3 feet<sup>1</sup>. She was rigged by Alec Irving of Carny Sail & Ropework. She was very sturdy being cross-braced and featured Jonathon Fells patented movable iron knees (adjustable knees to maintain the tension between the hull and decks). She also exhibited an extremely rare example of a British registered topsail schooner utilising the French Roller Reefing design 'hunier à rouleau' which enabled her to set her topsails from the deck removing the need to go aloft (by the 1880s it was becoming ever harder to find seamen wanting to serve on tall ships when they could earn similar wages on steamers). This feature which involved a very long cross spar on the foremast helps identify her in photos and separate her from her near relative the *Annie*.

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<sup>1</sup> Lloyd's Register of Shipping via [plimsollshipdata.org](http://plimsollshipdata.org)

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It is believed that *Dispatch* made her maiden voyage to Morocco, probably with salted fish from Newfoundland, and spent the first period of her working life running across the Atlantic with salt fish from the Grand Banks in Newfoundland. McLeman was her 3<sup>rd</sup> owner (buying her when she was still young) and had her converted to a collier.



The *Dispatch* in Fortrose Harbour with the crew 'bending on' sails. Just visible to the left is the bowsprit of another vessel – probably the *Annie*.

1919 saw the *Dispatch* leave Scotland and pass into the hands of Welsh owner WA Jenkins who retained her original Inverness registry while employing her to transport Swansea coal. The 1930s saw her shrug off two major collisions and live through a hurricane in open sea without supplies for some five weeks. In 1935 she was de-rigged and converted in to a towed barge (the Lloyd's Register for 1935 is stamped 'now a lighter') known as the *New Dispatch*. Incredibly she continued in service until 1958 – some 70 years after she was built - before being finally beached in 1961 at Purton on the Severn Foreshore (with other hulks to stabilise the shore line) where her bones still remain.

The *Young Fox* was another vessel which visited Fortrose and the McLeman family had an interest in her too. She was still working as a sailing boat in the 1920s. On a voyage to Northumberland for coal George Macfarlane who lived on the Shore (cottage now called Fuchsia) was co-opted as crew. He was not needed on the last part of the return voyage and found his own way home from Burghead by train – fortunately for him as the *Young Fox* was lost with all hands on 6 December 1928 – her wreck is believed to have been found off Tarbat Ness in 43 metres of water in 2008.

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While not really a ‘fishing harbour’ although there is plenty of photographic evidence of small open fishing boats beached East and West of the harbour and of posts on the mole (East wall) used to dry nets, the harbour was occasionally used by larger fishing boats as shown in this photo of around 1919.



The 3 fishing boats ‘rafted’ together appear to be ‘Zulus’ or ‘Fifies’. The wooden posts holding them off the Eastern mole have gone today but it is possible to see where the sockets were in the wall for the braces. On the mole 3 posts for drying nets are quite clear.

*The first ‘Zulu’ was built in Lossiemouth in 1879 and was named so because of Anglo-Zulu war ongoing at the time.*

The photo below, taken shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, shows the *Jesmond* (left) and *Fernside* unloading.

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This is the same scene from a different angle:



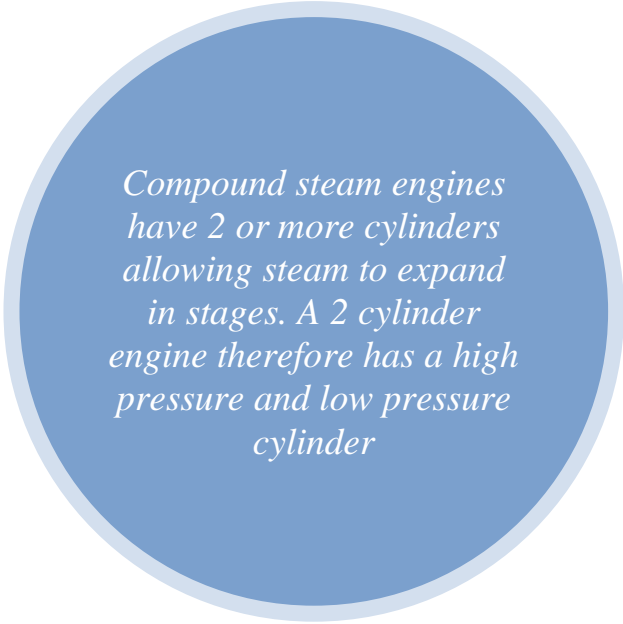
The Scaffie's tin shed is in the middle ground.

The *SS Fernside* (official number 144834, code KJFQ) was built in 1921 by R B Harrison of Newcastle for T Rose. She was 117.1 feet long, 22.2 feet in the beam and drew 9.1 feet and

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was 269 gross registered tons (grt)<sup>2</sup> and was owned by the Rose Line Ltd of Sunderland. She had a compound 2 cylinder steam engine built by the Shields Engine Company Limited and was rated at 57 RHP ('Register' horse power). Her last voyage was from Hartlepool for Wick with a cargo of coal on 26 February 1942. The ship was never seen afloat again. A Joint Arbitration Committee considered the vessel lost on 27 February 1942 by 'War Risks'; she was possibly bombed by German aircraft. All 8 crew and her 2 DEMS (Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships) gunners were lost.<sup>3</sup> She was found by sports divers in 2007 four miles off Stonehaven. Her bell has been recovered by the Deeside Divers who reported that this armed collier lies on her port side in 58 metres of water and is fairly intact till you reach the bridge area where she is a little more broken up.<sup>4</sup> A subsequent dive found her hold still to be full of coal.<sup>5</sup>

The *SS Jesmond* (official number 122823, code HDBN) was both older and smaller than the *SS Fernside*<sup>6</sup>. She was built in 1905 by Smith's Dock Company Limited of North Shields and was 112.7 feet long with a beam of 20.2 feet and a draught of 9.1 feet with a grt of 192. Her engine was from the same company as *SS Fernside* but with a power output of 55 RHP. In 1939 her owner was listed as I Milne and her home port as Newcastle. Unlike the *SS Fernside*, the *Jesmond* survived the Second World War and is still listed as working in 1945 (by then owned by the Tay Sand Company Limited with a home port of Dundee).



*Compound steam engines have 2 or more cylinders allowing steam to expand in stages. A 2 cylinder engine therefore has a high pressure and low pressure cylinder*

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<sup>2</sup> Lloyd's Register of Shipping via [plimsollshipdata.org](http://plimsollshipdata.org)

<sup>3</sup> From a post by Bill McGee Mercantile Marine ([mercantilemarine.org](http://mercantilemarine.org))

<sup>4</sup> From the Deeside Sub Aqua Club

<sup>5</sup> Post by Rod Macdonald

<sup>6</sup> Lloyd's Register of Shipping via [plimsollshipdata.org](http://plimsollshipdata.org)