



ULVERSTON CANAL – correctly termed a ship canal – has a fascinating history. This book specialises in the ships built there and their surprising life stories as they sailed across the Atlantic and beyond. Their builders, skilled men, fashioned timbers to shape them into sailing ships of beauty and use – for fighting, for general trade and for ore-carrying.

From the smallest sloop to the largest brig Ulverston men were capable of designing, building and commanding these vessels and we should be proud of them and the legacy they have left us.

£19.00

ULVERSTON CANAL - ITS SHIPS, SHIP BUILDERS AND SEAMEN

JENNIFER SNELL

ULVERSTON CANAL

ITS SHIPS, SHIP BUILDERS AND SEAMEN



JENNIFER SNELL



Painting by Edward Paget-Tomlinson

JENNIFER SNELL

ULVERSTON CANAL

ITS SHIPS, SHIP BUILDERS
AND SEAMEN

A TRIBUTE TO
FURNESS FOLK & FACTS
BY WILLIAM WHITE

Copyright © Jennifer Snell 2020

The book author retains sole copyright to her contributions to this book.

Jennifer Snell has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as author of this book.

PREFACE	7
ULVERSTON CANAL - THE BEGINNINGS	
EPHRAIM SWAINSON	9
JOSEPH HART & CHRISTOPHER ASHBURNER	15
PETTY & POSTLETHWAITE	29
E. J. SCHOLICK	49
JOHN and WILLIAM WHITE	69
CHARNLEY BROTHERS	85
JOHN and WILLIAM BROCKLEBANK	93
OTHER CANAL SHIPBUILDERS	99
LOCAL MASTER MARINERS AND SEAMEN	103
SKETCHES OF SAILING SHIPS	121
THE NORTH LONSDALE IRON & STEEL COMPANY	137
ULVERSTON PILOTS	143
GREENODD PORT	149
CARK BECK	159
APPENDIX - MISCELLANEOUS NEWS ITEMS	

PREFACE

I read my first copy of *Furness Folk & Facts* by William White in the early 1970s when Mrs. Murphy, the old lady who lived across the street from my place of work asked me if I'd like to borrow it. I devoured every historical page and enjoyed it so much that I couldn't bear to part with it, I offered her £2.10s. (a fifth of my weekly wage) which she accepted.

Being already deeply interested in Ulverston's history and living adjacent to the canal which was built in 1796 – the main subject of the newly purchased volume – I hadn't actually considered its origins until then. *Furness Folk & Facts* fired my imagination for maritime matters which led some fifty years later to writing this book.

When I first began researching the Ulverston built ships and shipbuilders mentioned in William White's book I couldn't have imagined all the extra 'unknown' ships awaiting discovery and the amazing tales attached to them, their builders, and those seamen of iron who battled daily with the elements to sail those vessels and deliver the goods. Not forgetting the mariners who didn't make it safely back to their home port.

Over two hundred sailing ships were built on Ulverston's canal side and passed through the lock-gates into the Leven Estuary, their destinations as diverse as Valparaiso, St. Petersburg, the Arctic, New Orleans, Cork and Yarmouth. At first small single masted vessels transported coal and cotton to Ulverston to feed our mills, they were followed by burly gun-carrying tall ships to face the warring French and the Atlantic Ocean. Then some fifty years later, from the mid-1860s, our strong schooners played a large part in the industrial history of the area by shifting thousands of tons of ore

and pig iron to fill the ever hungry iron furnaces of the North West.

As will be appreciated, photographs of our Ulverston vessels are few and far between and the costs involved in purchasing a photographic copy of those that are in existence from the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich are prohibitive, so I decided to paint my own pictures to illustrate certain vessels and give the reader an idea of what our local shipping looked like. I hope they serve to illustrate what beautiful vessels the town produced.

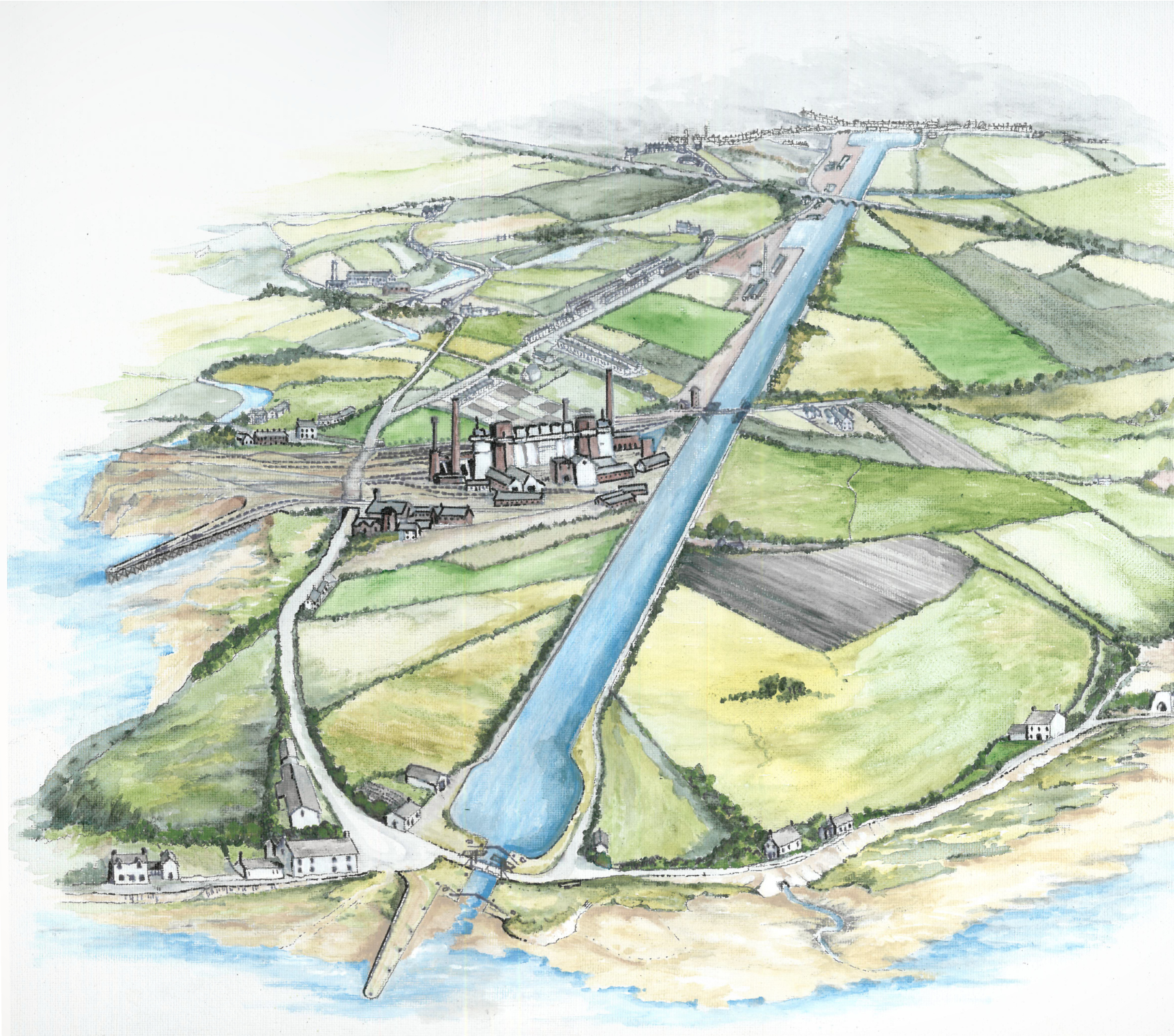
Eventually time ran out for our canal, overtaken by the coming of the railway and the larger port of Barrow-in-Furness. Overwhelmed too by gathering sand-banks and channel changes in the Leven Estuary she faded away. I have taken this chance to record the shipbuilders, ships and seaman before they too fade into the mists of time and are forgotten.

My thanks to my husband Maurice for supporting me during the making of this book, for snapping photos of various scenes and subjects to illustrate it and urging me on when I became word-weary. We both thank Ian Dixon who entered the scene like a knight in shining armour when the computer storing the near-completed book crashed, he transferred all the work and provided another computer to get us going again. We were extremely lucky too to have Ray Elmitt to guide us through the maze of printing this book which he did with unending patience and enthusiasm for which we thank him so much.

Jennifer Snell, Ulverston 2020



Ordnance Survey Maps - Six-inch England and Wales, Lancashire XVI surveyed: 1846 to 1847



Ulverston is an ancient market town mentioned in the Domesday Book. Its charter for the right to hold a weekly market was granted in 1280, some 169 years after St. Mary's Parish Church was founded in the year 1111.

The town's situation is sheltered, about a mile from the shores of Morecambe Bay and snugly sited below the Low Furness Fells. Its main trades in the 18th and 19th century were cotton-spinning, leather tanning and the mining of the nearby iron-ore. Apart from other lesser trades, agriculture was the principle employment at this time. But as new and larger iron ore deposits were discovered in the surrounding areas some way of exporting this bulk to buyers in various parts of the country had to be found. As it was, long slow-moving lines of horses and carts transported ore from Dalton-in-Furness and Lindal-in-Furness to the nearest seashore, a journey of around four miles, where it was tediously loaded into waiting vessels beached on the sands. At high water the ships sailed away to their destinations. While they were away the ore was tipped onto some convenient piece of ground in readiness for loading, thus the first 'iron floors' were born.

Opposite page: Ulverston Canal.
Painting by Jennifer Snell

ULVERSTON CANAL.

The Beginnings

The loading into beached vessels mainly took place at Conishead Bank, on the shoreline between Brick Kiln Lane, Oxenholme, Ulverston and Red Lane, Bardsea (so-called because the soil and mud of the lane was stained red by oxides from the ore). Along a section of the Conishead shoreline, closest to Ulverston, the remains of a neatly constructed sloping sea-wall of limestone blocks can be seen disappearing under the shingle. Recent shallow excavations revealed that this 'wall' extended many metres towards the tide-line and was probably built to provide a firm footing for horses and men as the ships were loaded.

Relying on the sea state to be ideal was not good enough for the business of loading ore into ships and other ways were being sought at a time when canal mania struck the country.

In the seven years 1790-1797 almost forty-two newly formed canal companies applied for Acts of Parliament to build their own waterways.

The great and the good of the area (and beyond) decided to meet to discuss the possibility of building a canal or cut at Ulverston. Here we have to thank James Park's *Some Ulverston Records* (published 1932) for many interesting details regarding the start of it all, through the papers of William Burnthwaite, a solicitor, who was employed by the budding Ulverston Canal Navigation Company. Burnthwaite recorded that in July, 1791:

Several gentlemen having proposed a canal to be made from Hammerside Hill to the Weint End (now known as Canal Head. J. S.) as an advantage to the town of Ulverstone, and the country adjacent, and desired me to make a survey of the same, and to call a Meeting of the Gentlemen to take the same into consideration. Making survey and a clear plan - £1.1s.0d.

The survey was completed quickly because the meeting of the 'Gentlemen' took place on August 8th, 1791. A month later, William Burnthwaite reports

the same was taken into consideration and resolved to be carried into execution and a subscription was then opened and I appointed to get the same.

So off the 'Gentlemen' went, excited and possibly rubbing their hands together at the thought of the new canal making them loads of money! What they failed to take into account (or were ignorant of) were the two main problems to a successful waterway: difficulty of shipping access in the Leven Estuary due to the sandbanks and ever-shifting channels approaching the proposed lock-gates and the shortage of water entering the canal to replenish that lost through usage of the lock-gates.

All subscriptions were collected by May, 1792 and an estimate of £2,000 received which covered the building costs including acquisition of land. Possibly the committee felt uneasy at this low figure because John Rennie was asked to make another survey and estimate. He came up with a figure of £3,083.16s.2d., and the committee increased the subscription to £4,000.

After this, permissions were sought from various Dukes and Lords - along with the co-operation of the promoters of Lancaster Canal- and by 1792 the petition to the House of Commons was completed.

Solicitor William Burnthwaite who accompanied the petition to London for the 'Gentlemen' received good payment for his attendance:

February 9th to May 14th.
95 days at a guinea per day= £99.15s.0d.
Expenses £74.3s.0d., coach hire and expenses to and from London a further £12.15s.0d. A total of £451.12s.6d.!

The new company took the official title of The Company of Proprietors of the Ulverston Canal Company.

Contracts for work were advertised for tender in June, 1793, the contract covering digging, puddling, banking, constructing the feeder stream, the masonry for the lock pit, the draw-bridge at Canal Foot and the back drain. Very quickly - by October 1793 - John Pinkerton and John Murray, both of the Lancaster area, were awarded the contract. It could have been a case of *act in haste and repent at leisure* for the Canal Company because a few months later their troubles began: more money was needed, the workmen, named navvies, were difficult, there was vandalism and work on the waterway was not progressing as hoped. This rumbled on and finally eleven days before Christmas in 1795 Pinkerton & Muray and their entourage of muddy employees downed tools and left the job.

This, one would assume, would be a difficulty extremely hard to overcome for the Canal Company, but luck was on their side when one of their number named Mr. H Baird stepped into the dragon's den and offered to complete the project for a payment of £1,510. Mr. Baird completed the work in October, 1796 and the sea water let in 'satisfactorily' on November 7th, 1796 by members of the committee assisted by Mr. Stephens and Mr. Miller of Lancaster. The canal was formally opened on November 18th, 1796.

This was no ordinary little canal only suitable for narrow barges: this was a full-blown ship canal into which most brigs, brigantines, schooners and sloops could sail and reach the outskirts of the town itself. Its dimensions were: sixteen feet deep, over sixty feet wide with a towing-path on either side and dead straight for the full mile and a third of its length, earning itself the unofficial title of the shortest, straightest and widest in Britain (of its day). Unfortunately it cannot be said that it was a roaring success mainly due to the shifting sands of the Leven estuary which made actually getting as far as the lock gates very hazardous because of the uncertain and ever-changing depth of water beneath the keels of the vessels. The first dividend to shareholders was paid on June 15th, 1836, when most of the original subscribers and shareholders would have long passed away!

This is not to say that the canal was a flop: in due course it brought in coal to power the local cotton and flax mills, and indeed the cotton and flax itself. Shiploads of timber arrived from Quebec. Right from the beginning hundreds (eventually thousands) of tons of iron ore was exported from the quays at Canal Head and Low Yard, also copper ore from the Coniston district, later gunpowder from Lowwood and Blackbeck Powder Mills at Haverthwaite and Bouth. Leather and slate in smaller quantities was also shipped.

The most unusual cargo to arrive in the canal must surely have been after the death of John Wilkinson, the ironmaster, who was a native of Backbarrow but who made his fortune in the furnaces of Bradley and Broseley in the Midlands. The local newspaper of September 3th, 1808 reported:

A few days ago an iron coffin to hold the remains of the late John Wilkinson the iron-master arrived at Ulverston canal in a sloop from his foundry at Bradley, together with an iron tomb and a

pyramidical obelisk with iron letters for the inscription he had composed previous to his death. The whole of them were to be removed to his house at Castle Head, Grange-over-Sands.

These funereal items were transported to Grange by horses and carts where they awaited the arrival of the body of John Wilkinson. The iron obelisk still exists at Lindale.

By this date, 1808, the ship builders Hart & Ashburner at Low Yard had already launched around twenty-seven ships of various sizes into the canal, from huge brigs (for their day) to travel the oceans to small coasters which spent their days mainly shuffling between the ports of Lancaster, Liverpool and the Furness coastline. The canal had a life of some hundred and twenty years before the last vessel - the steam coaster CLARRIE - left the lock-gates behind her on July 18th, 1916 after bringing a cargo of flour from Silloth to the warehouse in the middle basin.

Below: A warehouse in Middle Basin





CHAPTER ONE

EPHRAIM SWAINSON

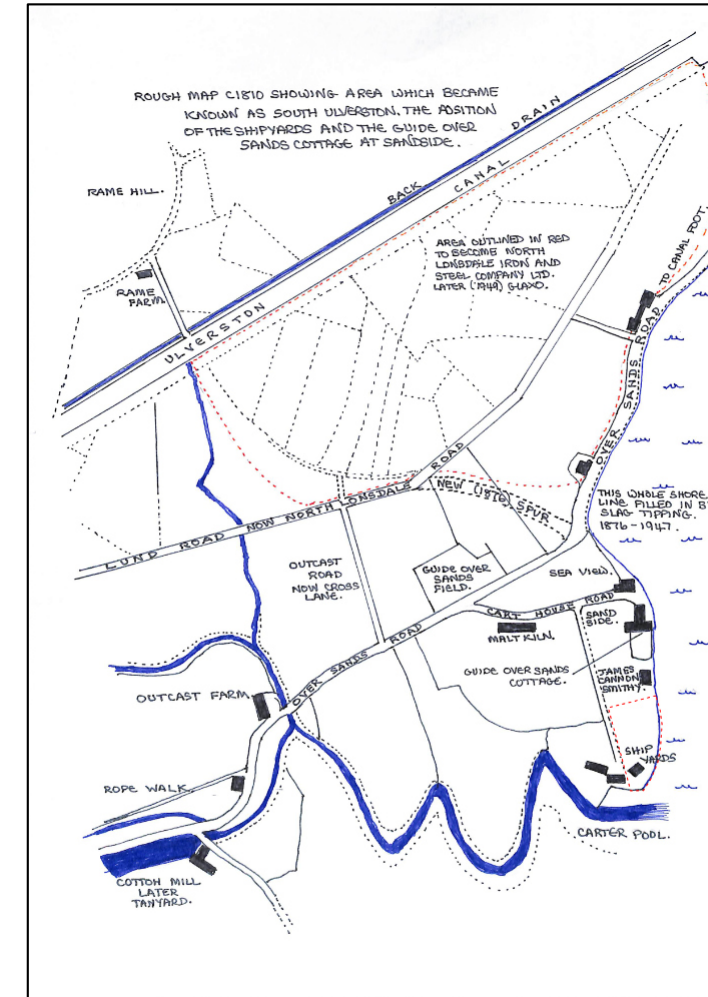
1745–1805

Ephraim Swainson, although not a shipbuilder on the banks of Ulverston canal deserves his place in this book as probably the first prolific Ulverston shipbuilder who produced numerous well-built smaller vessels of around fifty to ninety tons. His output was mainly sloops – single masted cargo carriers – and doggers, a term describing a blunt-nosed usually single masted vessel. Each type of craft had a certain hull shape and was rigged differently, if only slightly in some cases.

Almost all that is known about Swainson is recorded in William White's *Furness Folk & Facts*:

The first Ulverston shipbuilder of whom any record has been found is Ephraim Swainson, whose death entry in the register is:- "April 3rd. 1805 Ephraim Swainson, ship-carpenter, aged 60 years His wife Jane "widow of Ephraim Swainson, Sandside" died June 20th, 1822, aged 78 years They had at least five children: - Isaac, an infant who died; Hannah; Edward; and the last traced record thus: - March 10th, 1813 Jane, daughter of the late Ephraim Swainson, shipbuilder, Saltcoats, aged 28 years.

Swainson lived at Saltcoats, probably in the property now known as Saltcoats farm where he owned or was tenant of several fields including the small triangular paddock presently known as Sea View field, once attached to the Sea View Hotel which was demolished in recent years. The whole landscape around Saltcoats has changed completely since the arrival in 1876 of the North Lonsdale Iron and Steel



Opposite page: The NEWLAND, LIBERTY (background) and MARY near Canal Foot, Ulverston.

Company (the Ironworks) which proceeded to fill in the marshland and reclaim more for use as a slag tip and it is very difficult to imagine now the sandy shoreline with tides lapping the then-named Oversands Road leading to the *Bay Horse Inn* and the crossing to Cark, Flookburgh, Grange-over-Sands and beyond. Here at Sandside prior to the arrival of the Ironworks was the Over-Sands Guide's cottage, after which a new house was built at Canal Foot, called *Levens House*, and still used by the present day Guide.

Swainson's shipyard was practically on the shoreline and adjoining Carter Pool, and if we take it that his first recorded ship was the UNITY of 1770 then we must assume he started his business at the age of twenty-five years old. Although appearing young for such a business he would no doubt be supported by experienced employees Perhaps he didn't transfer to the banks of the new canal because in his later years he had sufficient orders for his vessels,

The approximate site of Swainson's shipyard at Saltcoats, before the slag banks appeared.
Author's collection.



almost exclusively from the Newland Iron Company.

The Lancaster Gazette of April, 1804 states:

'On Wednesday a fine new dogger was launched from Mr. Swainson's yard near Ulverston called the GLORY, Captain John Towers, being the twentieth he has built for the Newland Iron Company. She is about 120 tons burthen.'

It seems Swainson and the adjoining shipyard of Hart & Ashburner were business friends even after Hart concentrated on his new yard on the canal side. Swainson continued to buy various supplies from him such as poles suitable for yards or oakum for caulking ships hulls. Hart's total invoice to him in 1802 amounted to £20.5s.2d.

The following list which covers most of the vessels launched by Swainson has been arrived at by research and some guesswork and I can only apologise for mistakes and omissions. Swainson must have produced vessels between 1770 and 1778 though there are no available records.

1770 UNITY, dogger of 54 tons.
1778 LIBERTY, sloop of 55 tons. Sold to Whitehaven owners in 1797.
1781 FORD, sloop of 40 tons. Lost in 1799.
1786 FANNY, dogger of 54 tons. Sold to Gloucester owners in 1800.
1789 MOLLY, flat of 55 tons. Lost in 1797.
1793 BENSON, sloop of 78 tons. Sold to Liverpool owners in 1800.
1796 WILLIAM, sloop of 81 tons. Lost in 1810.
1796 ENDEAVOUR, sloop of 29 tons. Sold in 1819 and broken up in 1852. See advert of 1802.
1797 ANN, sloop of 93 tons. Sold to Irvine, Scotland in 1820.
1798 NEWLAND, sloop of 51 tons. Sold 1815.

1799 ELLEN, sloop of 72 tons. Lost in 1811.
1800 MARY ANN, galliot of 89 tons. Sold to Whitehaven in 1832.
1802 KITTY, sloop of 85 tons.
1803 HERO, sloop of 38 tons. Lost in 1822.
1803 JAMES, sloop of 33 tons.
1804 GLORY, dogger of 120 tons burthen.
1805 MARGARET, dogger of 99 tons. Sold to owners in Drogheda in 1826.
1806 GEORGE, sloop of 93 tons. Lost Swansea Bay July, 1821.
1806 JAMES, sloop of 62 tons. Lost near Port Patrick, Scotland in October, 1811.

The last two vessels were probably completed after Swainson's death.

Possibly the following vessels were also built by Swainson:

1783 TRYALL (also written as TRIAL), sloop of 64 tons.
1786 INDUSTRY, sloop of 54 tons.
1797 SARAH, sloop of 43 tons.
1798 BARDSEA, sloop of 52 tons.
1799 MARY, galliot of 101 tons.
1801 MARIA, sloop of 75 tons.
1804 ELLEN, sloop of 66 tons.
1805 MARY, sloop of 69 tons.

So it appears that Ephraim Swainson built approximately twenty-seven ships in his working life time and quite possibly more which are not recorded.

Printed in the Lancaster Gazette of July 11th, 1807 is an auction notice announcing the following:

TO BE SOLD BY PUBLIC AUCTION.
On Thursday 23rd. Day of July, 1807 at the house of
Mr. Joseph Sharpless, Innkeeper in Ulverston.
All that sloop or vessel
THE MARIA OF ULVERSTON.
Of which Geo. Thompson is at present Master.
Being of the burthen (per register) of 76 tons and
now on her voyage from Liverpool to Ulverston and
expected to arrive before the day of sale. The vessel
was built at Ulverston about six years ago and is well
adapted for the coasting trade.
For particulars apply to Mr. Edward Coward slate merchant,
Kirkby Ireleth, Mr. Patrickson, Surgeon or Mr. Robert Johnson,
Grocer, Broughton or Mr. Dickinson, Attourney, Ulverston.

Very little is known about the above listed vessels but there are a few words to add about several of them:

NEWLAND Reg. no. 19103. She had a very long life after being sold to Scottish owners in 1815, when she was owned by Robert Oliver of Kirkcudbright.

TRYALL (or TRIAL). Worked up and down the north-west coast for many years. It is not clear if the vessel's name is actually TRIAL or if the owner/master was poor at spelling!

INDUSTRY of 1786 is recorded as taking 'sundries' to Whitehaven for C. Lowndes from Lancaster under Captain Wright just after the turn of the 19th century.

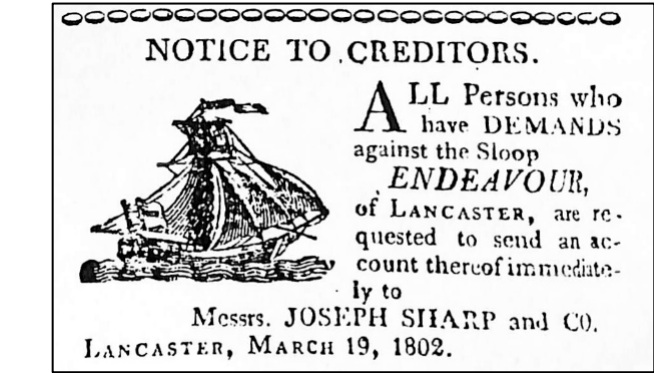
Bibliography

Furness Folk & Facts by William White is a most valuable source of information for anyone researching shipping in and around Ulverston. *The Lancaster Gazette* shipping lists and public notices.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Peter Sandbach whose papers about the Newland Iron Company vessels, of which he gave me several decades ago, was a wealth of information and without which the above list would not be so complete or detailed.

Thanks to Sally and Phil Lister for showing us the wonderful little carvings of sloops on several of the wooden pews in St. Cuthbert’s Church, Aldingham. No doubt executed unofficially by bored (but knowledgeable) youths, who were perhaps inspired by seeing the vessels sailing past the church windows at high tide



Things of Interest

which happened in the District around this time

1805

May 11th

This day the Ulverston Volunteer Infantry commanded by Lt. Col. Sunderland marched to Kendal where they halt till Monday, on which day they march to Lancaster to remain on permanent duty for three weeks.

August 3rd

The non-commissioned officers of the Ulverston Volunteer Light Infantry have presented their commanding officer Lt. Col. Sunderland with an elegant sabre and highly enriched scabbard

Left: The pew carvings at Aldingham church. Author’s collection.

with the following inscription: ‘From the non-commissioned officers of the Ulverston Volunteer Light Infantry to their worthy Colonel, as a mark of respect and gratitude’

August 17th ADVERT

SUN INN, ULVERSTON.

J. WORTHINGTON.

With gratitude for the favours received since he entered upon the above INN he respectfully informs Nobility, Gentry, and Public in general that considerable alterations, additions and improvements have been made in the same; and as he has laid in a stock of the best WINES, SPIRITS, etc., and by using every exertion in the comfort and accommodation of the public, he hopes to merit their patronage.

NEAT POST CHAISE with CAREFUL DRIVERS on the shortest notice.

December 28th

DIED On the 20th inst. in the 29th year of his age EDWARD BROOKS Esq., late Major of the Liverpool Fusiliers

FATAL DUEL On the 20th inst. a duel took place in Liverpool between Colonel John Bolton and Major Edward Brooks The latter was shot through the head and died immediately

The above dispute between two Ulverstonians (Brooks being the clerk of Bolton) resulted in an illegal duel taking place in Liverpool where Bolton resided and had his offices. He had become very wealthy and important in the city through investments in the West India Trade. No action was taken by the authorities over the incident J. S.

1806

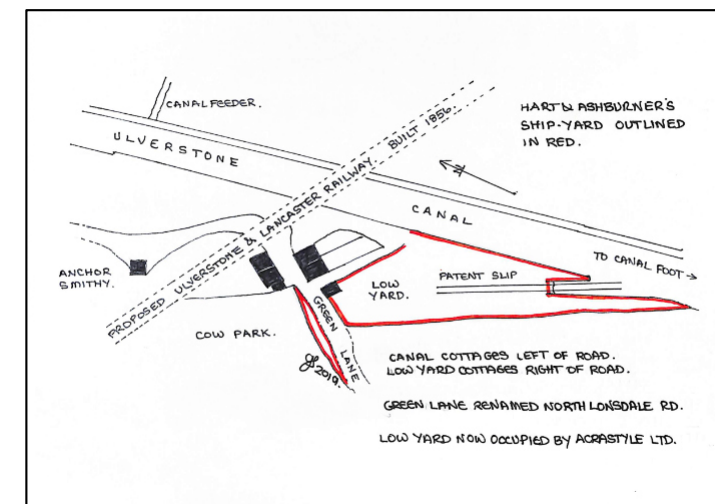
May 31st A letter has been received from J. Newton, T. Smethers, T. McNevine and J. Kitchin, four seamen belonging to Ulverston, prisoners of war in the Castle Valenciennes dated April 15th, 1806 and gratefully acknowledging the receipt of £236s.0d. contributed to their relief by their commiserating townsmen.

The above from *Soulby’s Ulverston Advertiser* and the *Lancaster Gazette*.



CHAPTER TWO

JOSEPH HART & CHRISTOPHER ASHBURNER



Above: Position of Hart and Ashburner's Yard

Joseph Hart (1770-1813) was the second son of Thomas and Eleanor Hart. Thomas was descended from a long established local family and had been a sea captain who later inherited land at Ireleth, near Askam-in-Furness which had been in the possession of the family for more than three hundred years. In fact one of the Hart forebears, Sir John Harte, had been Lord Mayor of London in 1589. Thomas's connection with the sea might explain why Joseph was drawn to shipping and indeed Joseph's younger brother Richard (1773-1803) became a sea captain in Lancaster. Richard made several voyages between 1794 and 1803 to the West Indies. It is said that he was in command of the WILLIAM when she was captured by the French and was held for a while until an exchange of prisoners of war freed him. He died in the course of a voyage in 1803. Their older brother William (1764-1827) also lived in Lancaster and could possibly have been a sea captain for a short while, as this notice in the *Lancaster Gazette* might suggest:

For Barbadoes.
The fast sailing copper-bottomed ship

PARAGON

William Hart Master.

Burthen 295 tons, will carry 20 carriage guns, twenty-four and nine pounders, and men answerable, intended to sail in three weeks.

For freight and passage apply to said Captain or Ridley & Dobson, Lancaster
June 10th, 1803.

Left: THE BELFAST launched in 1797, a snow of 266 tons, seen here passing Carrickfergus Castle (background left) on her way to new owners in Belfast.
Painting by Jennifer Snell



About the author

Jennifer Snell spent the first few years of her life in Flookburgh, a small fishing village on the edge of Morecambe Bay. Her father shrimped and cockled on the sands in his horse and cart along with many other fishermen from the village. Therefore perhaps it is not too strange that she has an interest in the coastal waters around Furness.

After moving to Ulverston in 1954 she became interested in two main hobbies: ponies and local history both of which still dominate her life today. She has been involved with - and had published - several books all relating to history subjects based in the Furness area. This particular book has been around 50 years in the making: collecting and researching facts, old photos, documents and - in the 1970s - speaking to people who actually remembered some of the ships at the end of Ulverstone's life as a port. Jennifer saved from destruction HEARTS OF OAK built in Ulverston in 1912 the last remaining vessel connected to the shipbuilding era through John Randall McLeister, formerly employed in William Whites shipyard. After restoration in 2008, HEARTS OF OAK still sails in her home waters today. Jennifer lives with her husband Maurice in the same home she moved to in 1954 which overlooks the Ulverston Canal.

