



Above left: John Townley and the Press Gang perform on board the Kaskelot at the Bristol Sea Music Festival. Above: Bristol chanteyman Erik Ilot with cabin boy Robin Townley.

Summer in England, 1986

A travelogue

by John Townley, Historical Music Interpreter
All photographs by John Townley

England is an idyllic travel land for any American tourist, but for the maritime buff it holds especially rich treasure, as The Press Gang discovered during Summer 1986, on our second singing tour of summer tall ship festivals. The shores are dotted with a variety of special maritime treats—many in the guise of historical sea museums both old and new, and many just special spots awaiting the open-eyed visitor with some time to explore the wonders of the sea coast.

Merseyside Maritime Museum

We began our tour at the Merseyside Maritime Museum in Liverpool, which though quite young as museums go, is probably Britain's brightest rising star in the maritime history world. Established in the restored warehouses surrounding the famous Albert Dock, it boasts both old ships and nautical seaport flavor and the latest in high-tech, hands-on exhibition design.

It has real, working docks (in the old

definition—huge, square enclosures with locks to admit and hold both ships and the Mersey's 17-foot tides), with ships both ancient and modern coming and going with the daily tides. And it has an abundant store of fascinating artifacts, paintings, ship models, and the like.

It even has one of the nicest, most comfortable little shopping and eating malls we saw, nestled inside the nicely restored brick warehouse archway promenades.

What makes the museum most special, however, is its incredible Emigration Exhibit, which takes the visitor on a recreated voyage of emigration to America during the 19th century.

After passing a number of displays explaining the history of European emigration, you wind your way through a narrow brick street lined with period shops and boarding houses until you reach the hull of an outward bound sailing ship. Inside, the ship teems with emigrants both flesh and wax, dressed in

tattered waistcoats and worn pelisses, bullied about by petty ship's officers looking for stowaways or carriers of the pox.

As you weed your way through the crowded scene of visitors and actors, sudden psychodramas burst out around you—a suspected fever victim is dragged off for expulsion, her screaming children desperately clinging to her skirts, begging the officers to leave her alone; an altercation breaks out between two card players that requires some mariners to restore order; a stowaway girl cringes beneath a bunk full of grubby children, hiding from the prying eyes and stick of the threatening boatswain.

The chilling understanding of the chaos and sometime terror of the emigrant experience shivers your spine—because you're not just hearing about it, you're right in the middle of it, the scene swirling all around you.

Never, in our experience, has a maritime museum brought visitors so close to the history it portrays, and the actors, craftsmen, and staff are justifiably

proud of the striking combination of drama, exhibition, and hands-on computer genealogical research opportunities afforded the visitor at this dynamic new museum.

A must if you're in Liverpool—you can catch the Beatles museum some other time . . .

We saw a lot just on our singing tour alone—London, Bristol, Newcastle, all with maritime museums and dockside delights—but a couple of out-of-the-way treats bear special mention.

Dockside Museum

The first was the Dockside Museum in Hull by the Humber River on England's northeast coast. Ensclosed in the old City Hall (not particularly near any dockside), it is a jewel featuring displays on the whaling and fishing trades that centered on the Humber.

Every whaling and fishing device imaginable is on display, along with whalers' journals, tusks and skeletons of all sorts of marine mammals, and a very large collection of paintings that range from homegrown sailors' efforts to some of the best classical and romantic artists around.

Quite a surprise in a heavily industrialized commercial fishing town—but just one of many in Hull, where the hotel we stayed at featured an astonishing *nouvelle cuisine* French restaurant, complete with 1914 vintage cognac, the best eating we encountered in all England!

Lindisfarne Castle

For breathtaking scenery and soul-nourishing ambiance, however, Lindisfarne Castle on Holy Island just below the Scottish border took the cake. The prime place of retreat for English monastics since 600 A.D., the island is accessible by causeway twice a day at low tide and presents a wind-blown seascape of gulls, lobster boats, and ancient ruins that is like no other anywhere. There is a radiant and unshakable peace that resides in rocks and residents alike making it easy to understand why it has long been considered the chief place of spiritual rest and restoration in the British Isles. Even the graveyard is mute testimony to Holy Island's powers—the average lifespan on the gravestones is well over eighty! Of all the places we visited, it was there we most wished we could have remained . . .



Cedric, the Bristol woodcarver, at work with the pirate bark Kaskelot in the background.



Sheds fashioned from lobster boat hulls, on the hills near Lindisfarne Castle, Holy Island, Northumbria.



"The Illustrated London News" April 16, 1864, from the Museum's collections.

Touring Maritime England

A checklist of favorites

For two weeks this past August, Assistant Curator Kevin Foster toured the major maritime museums and landmarks of Great Britain, and discovered some great out-of-the-way pubs, antique shops and book stores with that Old World nautical atmosphere. He's provided us with a checklist of his favorites:

London

- HMS *Belfast* - The largest of the Royal Navy's WWII cruisers is now floating upstream from Tower Bridge in the Thames River and is open for visitation.
- St. Catherine's Dock Maritime Museum - Floating fishing craft, sailing barges, steam tug, steam coaster, nearby maritime antique stores. Museum closes too early in the afternoon.
- British Museum - Among its collections is material recovered from the burial ship of an English king from Sutton Hoo (an ancient custom, to bury the entire ship along with the deceased monarch).
- Tower of London Armouries - Huge firearm and cannon collection of British and captured weapons.

Fantastic guides! (Beefeaters) Don't miss the Puckle repeating cannons.

- Trafalgar Square - Nelson's memorial column and "The Victory" pub.
- St. Paul's Cathedral - Admiral Nelson's crypt—other admirals too!
- Science Museum - Located in South Kensington; tremendous ship model and marine engineering collection, also ethnic boat models from around the world.

Greenwich

- Take a tour boat down the Thames from downtown London to Greenwich. Fascinating commentary, unusual view of London.
- *Cutty Sark* - Last surviving clipper ship, built in 1869, permanently dry docked. Sir Francis Chichester's yacht, *Gypsy Moth*, is alongside. Nice pubs and good maritime bookstores in neighborhood. Anthony Simmonds bookstore is great.
- National Maritime Museum - Housed near the old Royal Observatory in the beautiful former Royal Navy Hospital Buildings. This may be the finest

maritime museum in the world. *Huge* collections—models, portraits, uniforms, medals, seals, navigation and astronomical instruments, figureheads, charts, royal barges, cut-away paddlewheel tugboat *Reliance*, archaeology exhibits of ancient craft found in bogs and under the water. Fantastic library and archives too, but write ahead for appointment to see them.

- After leaving the National Maritime Museum, take the foot tunnel under the Thames to the Isle of Dogs, then take a taxi to "The Gun," a pub where Nelson reputedly hoisted a few. This little trip is recommended for daylight hours *only*.

Bristol

- SS *Great Britain* - She resides now in the dry dock where she was built. This is the large iron ship designed by the engineering genius Isambard Kingdom Brunel; she is undergoing restoration. Interesting historic craft often tie up at the quay side nearby.

continued

Ellesmere Port, South Wirral, Cheshire

- The Boat Museum - Gaily painted canal boats; equipment and documents.

Portsmouth (south of London)

- Portsmouth Royal Navy Dock Yard Museum - Activities of this important Royal Navy base are interpreted at this interesting museum. See Admiral Nelson's funeral barge and a wonderful diorama of the Battle of Trafalgar. Portsmouth is still a major base with active Royal Navy warships usually in port.
- *Mary Rose* - Tudor warship raised from the sea bottom with a hold full of fascinating artifacts. She is undergoing conservation treatment in a huge tent that visitors enter through airlocks. A museum interpreting the artifacts is also in the dockyard.
- *HMS Victory* - Launched in 1765, this was Admiral Nelson's flagship at Trafalgar when he was killed. She is under continuous restoration in a very old stone dry dock.
- *HMS Warrior* - Built in 1860; the huge ironclad steam warship with full auxiliary sail rig is soon to join her older sisters in the dockyard. This will allow visitors to this one museum to visit an example of a sailing warship in its earliest state, another example of a vessel at the peak of development, and a third ship at the end of the era of fighting sail.
- Conventional and air cushion ferries leave from several blocks away for the Isle of Wight.

Isle of Wight

- First America's Cup race was held here.
- Several small museums dedicated to the shipbuilding and smuggling activities of the Isle.

Glasgow

- Museum of Transport - has a large, fine model and plan collection.
- Paddle steamer *Waverly* is based in Glasgow and makes cruises on the Clyde and around the coast.

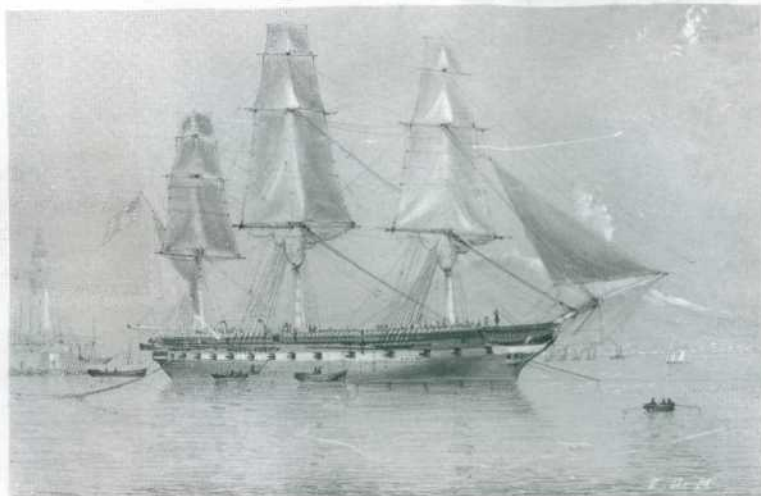
Cambridge & Oxford

- For a romantic cruise, you can rent a "punt," a flat-bottom boat built wide enough so that you don't fall over too easily while you stand at the stern and push along with a pole, your sweetheart seated at your feet.

Recent Acquisitions

Richard C. Malley, Associate Curator

USS *Constellation* Drawing



Sometimes objects tell more than they seem to at first glance. A case in point is this pencil and gouache sketch of the USS *Constellation* drying sails in the Bay of Naples. The artist, Eduardo di Martino, called this view a "Souvenir" when he

drew it in 1864 for Samuel Kay, a member of the ship's crew. And for the artist and sailor alike perhaps that was all it was.

In fact, this tranquil scene in far off Naples had a direct link to the bloody fratricidal struggle then being waged in the United States. For two years *Constellation* cruised Mediterranean waters for the specific purpose of protecting Union merchant vessels from attacks by Confederate commerce raiders. Were it not for this overseas extension of the American conflict the ship would almost certainly have been found on the Union blockade line that, in 1864, was slowly tightening its grip on the coastline of the Confederacy.

The "Souvenir" descended in the Kay family for generations until it was acquired recently by the Museum. It now joins our growing collection of material related to the naval aspects of the Civil War.