

SOME GLEANINGS FROM THE SHIP REGISTERS

By Richard Kelham

For all that we may complain about it, bureaucracy is the raw material of history. Yet those who study the history of ships in north Norfolk are especially poorly served. The Muster Rolls and the Port Books give some information, but often no more than the master's name and the burthen, and the Blakeney/Cley Port Books finish in 1780. Not until the 19th century do we get systematic detailed information about local ships from the Ship Registers: those for the Glaven ports survive from 1826 to 1855 when Blakeney & Cley cease to be a port of registration. This article presents a selection of entries from the Registers.

The Ship Registers¹ give much information useful to the marine historian, including (sometimes) changes of master or owner, as well as the physical dimensions which after about 1840 were expressed in metric feet, and the burthen. This latter was arrived at by a formula which changed over the years - at one point the burthen was calculated to the nearest 3500th of a ton. For convenience all burthen figures have been converted to decimal to match the figures used from the 1860s onward, even though the actual method of computation, and the accuracy, may be different.

In all the following dimensions "depth" refers to the depth in the hold - between the top of the keelson and the underside of the deck. Ownership was divided into 64 shares and the number of shares held by each owner is given in brackets after their name.

Original spellings are used throughout (hence "Clay") and authors comments are, usually, confined to square brackets. In some of the later entries, where ships' masters are changed, the location of the ship at the time of the change is given. This can give a good guide to the trade the ship was engaged in, though it might also be reasonably safe to assume that ageing second-hand brigs, like the *Cruizer*, would have been involved in the coal trade. For the most part the numerous smacks and luggers of the local fishing fleets are excluded.

No.1 **Blakeney Packet** of Blakeney 57.14 tons burthen
of 1826 R J Brereton (32) and Randle Brereton (32) of Blakeney, merchants
 Wm Baines, Master

Built 1826 at Louth, Lincs, by Thomas Wray
One deck, one mast, Sloop, topping-up bowsprit, round stern,
carvel and clinker built, no gallery, no figurehead
Length 56' 11" breadth 15' 2" depth 7' 4"

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|----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Other masters: | James May | 18 July 1826 |
| | John Johnson | 7 Aug 1826 |
| | Robert ?? | 7 Nov 1828 |
| | James Spooner . | 2 Nov 1830 |

| | |
|-----------------|-------------|
| John Jary | 20 Nov 1830 |
| James Spooner | 21 Oct 1831 |
| John Bainbridge | 24 Dec 1831 |
| Wm Mitchell | 19 Jun 1835 |

New Certificate issued 6 Aug 1836 (no.16).

No.2
of 1826

Cleopatra of Blakeney 15.73 tons
Thomas Stone (64) of Stiffkey, baker
John Murrell, Master

Built 1806 at Mevagissey (had been condemned in 1825)
One deck, one mast, Sloop, running bowsprit, square stern,
carvel built
Length 31' breadth 11' 7" depth 5' 6"

Other masters: R M Stone 1 May 1833
James Jary 5 Jun 1834
R M Stone 27 Jun 1836
R Rolling 7 Oct 1837

Certificate cancelled at Boston 3 May 1838 - fishing vessel.

Fishing vessels, of which there were quite a few, will be omitted. This one is fairly typical of the breed, except that most were either smack rigged or luggers. The name of James Jary crops up in connection with a couple of other fishing boats, relatively few of which seem to have been owned by their masters. That this vessel had previously been condemned is interesting - normally such a fate only befell those vessels impounded by the Excise, but there is no trace so far of a *Cleopatra* in the Cley Customs books. It could of course have been condemned elsewhere and/or had a change of name.

No.5
of 1826

Gough of Blakeney 126.65 tons
Thos Drozier (58) of Blakeney, yeoman, and Doyle Custance (6) of Blakeney, master mariner
Doyle Custance, Master

Built 1819 at Blakeney
One deck, two masts, Snow square rigged, standing bowsprit, square stern,
carvel built, no figurehead or gallery
Length 71' 10 " breadth 28' 9" depth 11' 7"

Drozier mortgaged his share to Wm J Brereton 11 Jan 1827
Re-registered 10 Dec 1827.

No.6
of 1826

Cruizer of Morston 75.19 tons
Wm Buck (60) of Morston, yeoman, and Robt Crask (4) of Morston,

Built 1802 at Yarmouth (registered Blakeney & Cley 1816)

One and a quarter decks, two masts, Square rigged, standing bowsprit, square stern, carvel built, no figurehead or gallery

Length 60' 7" breadth 17' 5" depth 8' 6"

Re-registered 27 Mar 1827.

No.8
of 1826

Blakeney Trader of Blakeney 88.30 tons
R J Brereton (32) and Randle Brereton (32) of Blakeney, merchants
John Brown, Master

Built 1826 at Blakeney by Thomas Claxon [sic]

One deck, one mast, Sloop, running bowsprit, square stern, carvel built, no figurehead or gallery

Length 61' 2" breadth 18' 5" depth 9' 8"

Re-registered as a Schooner 19 Nov 1830 (no.5), and again in 1836.

No.1
of 1830

Rising Star of Blakeney & Clay 82 tons
George Coleby (14) of Colby, clerk, Charles Clarke (22) of North Walsham, gent, Thomas Cubitt (14) of Bacton, farmer, Elizabeth Pank (7) of Cromer, widow, John Stephenson Cairn (7) of Wrampingham, clerk
Wm Kennedy, Master

Built 1785 at Yarmouth. Last registered Clay 1825 (no.4)

One deck, two masts, Square rigged, standing bowsprit, square stern, carvel built, no figurehead or gallery

Length 65' 5" breadth 17' 6" depth 9' 1"

No.3
of 1830

Rolla of Clay 115.63 tons
Corbett Cooke (32) of Clay, merchant, Robins Cooke (16) of Thornage, miller, John Blyth Bayfield (16) of Clay, master mariner
John B Bayfield, Master

Built 1803 at Yarmouth. Last registered at Yarmouth 1824 (no.99)

One deck, two masts, Square rigged, standing bowsprit, square stern, carvel built, no figurehead or gallery

Length 68' 3" breadth 20' 3" depth 11' 6"

Re-registered 1832 (no.2).

No.4
of 1830

Ramsden of Clay 46.94 tons
John Lee (64) of Clay, miller
Samuel Bastard, Master

Built 1825 at Huddersfield. Last registered at Hull 1825 (no.119)
 One deck, one mast, Sloop, topping-up bowsprit, round stern, clench
 Length 54' 11" breadth 13' 11" depth 6' 1"

Other masters: Wm Gibbs 14 May 1831

"Vessel lost at sea with the certificate per quarterly list 10 Oct 1832."

No.6
 of 1830

Ouse of Blakeney & Clay 123.89 tons
 Beeston Wright (64) of Langham, gent
 William Davey, Master

Built 1794 at Thorne, Yorkshire. Last registered at London 1826
 (no.737) - change of ownership
 One deck, two masts, Square rigged, standing bowsprit, square stern,
 carvel built, no figurehead or gallery

Length 68' 9" breadth 21' depth 10' 5"

Other masters: E Wickham [?] 9 Jul 1831

Re-registered at Wells 1833 (no.2)

No.1
 of 1833

Isis of Blakeney, Port of Clay [sic] 84.66 tons
 R J Brereton (32) and Randle Brereton (32) of Blakeney, merchants
 John Matthew Wells, Master

Built 1833 at Wells by John Lubbock
 One deck, two masts, Schooner, standing bowsprit, round stern,
 carvel built, no figurehead or gallery

Length 62' 6" breadth 17' 6" depth 9' 3"

Other masters: Wm Ward Nurse 22 Nov 1834 (London)
 Henry Ellis 1 Dec 1834 (Cley)

Re-registered 8 June 1836 (no.6).

No.3
 of 1833

Faith of Clay 51.50 tons
 John Lee (32) of Clay, miller & merchant, Charles Smith (32) of
 Southwark, London, corn factor
 Samuel Barstard, Master

Built 1826 at Knottingley
 One deck, one mast, Sloop, topping-up bowsprit, round stern,
 carvel & clinker built, no figurehead or gallery

Length 57' 7" breadth 14' 2" depth 6'

Other masters: Wm Gibbs 15 Nov 1834

No.5 **Charlotte** of Clay 20.44 tons
of 1833 John Pleasance Starling (64) of Blakeney, miller
Murrell Baines, Master [described elsewhere as Fisherman]

Built 1807 at Wells

One deck, one mast, Sloop, running bowsprit, square stern, carvel
Length 33' 6" breadth 12' 10" depth 6' 1"

No.6 **Susanna** of Clay 23.06 tons
of 1833 Thomas Wm Temple (64) of Blakeney, merchant
Amos Warnes, Master

Built 1822 at Blakeney

One deck, one mast, Sloop, running bowsprit, square stern, carvel
Length 34' 9" breadth 12' 9" depth 6' 4"

Sold Dec 1833, re-registered (no.9), new owners Robert Vince Jnr (4) of
Blakeney, mariner, and Mark Cullingford (60) of London, gent

Sold again Nov 1844 to Francis Plumb of Blakeney, mariner

Mortgaged Mar 1844 to John Bundom [?] of Holt, gent

Re-registered April 1845 (no.2)

Other masters: John Claxton 26 May 1840 (Clay)
Henry Beck 17 Dec 1841 (Clay)
John Spooner Jul 1843 (Clay)

No.8 **Spero** of Blakeney & Clay 77.15 tons
of 1833 R J Brereton (32) and Randle Brereton (32) of Blakeney, merchants
William Bowle, Master

Built 1803 at Stockton. Later owned at Aberdeen

One deck, two masts, Schooner, running bowsprit, square stern,
carvel built, no figurehead or gallery

Length 57' 5" breadth 18' 3" depth 10'

No.1 **The Lady Sondes** 99.67 tons
of 1840 R J Brereton (32) and Randle Brereton (32) of Blakeney, merchants
William Bowle, Master

Newly built at Wells by John Lubbock

One deck, two masts, Schooner, standing bowsprit, square stern,
carvel built, female bust figurehead

Length 63.6' breadth 16.8' depth 10.7'

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|----------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| Other masters: | George Dew | 11 May 1846 (Clay) |
| | Henry Ellis | 25 Aug 1846 (Clay) |
| | George Dew | 10 Jul 1850 (Newcastle) |

Sold to new owners in Wells and re-registered 8 Sept 1856.

No.3 **Louisa** of Clay 306.75 tons (242.64 under old system)
of 1840 Joseph Muskett (9) and William Muskett (10) of Holt, shipowners,
Howard Ramm (3) of Clay, shipowner, Sophia Hawkes (2), Mary
Wright (2), Matthew and Joseph Hawkes as Trustees (2), Clarke
Painter (4), J & W Muskett as Trustees (3), Mary Blomfield (2), George
Nurse (2), Daniel Newton (4), Francis Pank (6), Samuel Smith (3),
Wm Norman Frost (8), and Samuel Reynolds (4)
Joshua Pallot [?], Master

Built 1823 near Calcutta, registered in Tasmania 1838
Two decks, three masts, Square rigged [Barque], standing bowsprit,
square stern, carvel, woman's bust figurehead
Length 86' breadth 23' depth 16.4'

Following a complex series of transactions Norman Frost of Wapping,
sailmaker, ended up with 33 shares following which the vessel was re-
registered in London 25 Mar 1845.

This was a large vessel by Glaven standards, and indeed probably never entered the
harbour, trading instead to Lynn or Yarmouth, or wherever there was a cargo to be had.
With ownership spread between 15 partners the individual exposure to risk was greatly
reduced.

No.5 **Commerce** of Clay 63.12 tons
of 1840 Henry Sandford (64) of Cromer, merchant
William Rigden, Master

Built 1800 at Wells, last registered at Clay Oct 1836 (no.22) - vessel
altered
One deck, two masts, Schooner, standing bowsprit, square stern,
carvel built, no figurehead or gallery
Length 59.8' breadth 16' depth 8.3'

Re-registered at Stockton Nov 1845 (no.34)

Presumably the new owner in Stockton took the vessel in part-exchange as a new
Commerce was built there the following year - see 1846 (no.4).

No.8 **Isabella** of Clay 71.64 tons
of 1840 Francis Wheatley (64) of Mundesley, merchant
Richard Newton, Master

Built 1827 at Newburgh, Aberdeen. Last registered at Aberdeen 1837 -
change of ownership
[1 deck, 2 masts] Schooner, standing bowsprit, square stern, carvel
Length 56' breadth 16' depth 9.4'

Vessel lost - rundown off the Humber, per Lloyds List 26 May 1843.

No.12
of 1840

Two Brothers of Clay 42.14 tons
Wm Cooke (32) of Glandford, Robins Cooke (32) of Thornage, millers
Edward Utton, Master

Newly built at Lynn by Anthony Richardson [?]
One deck, one mast, Sloop, topping-up bowsprit, round stern, carvel
and clench built
Length 56.8' breadth 13.1' depth 6.1'

Other masters: John Spooner 12 Jan 1850 (Clay)

In Aug 1841 W & R Cooke each sold 5 shares to Ed Utton, mariner
Sold to John & George Smith of Bacton, mariners, May 1855
Re-registered at Yarmouth Mar 1858 - change of ownership.

No.13
of 1840

Duke of Wellington of Clay 98.58 tons
Margaret Moore (24), merchant, Thomas Beckwith (24) of Clay, clerk,
Clarke Painter (8) of Holt, shipowner, Robert Platten (8), shipowner
Robert Platten, Master

Newly built at Hull by John Wright & Son
One deck, two masts, Schooner, standing bowsprit, square stern,
carvel built, male bust figurehead [guess who]
Length 64.4' breadth 17.7' depth 10.6'

Other masters: Robert Mann 22 July 1840 (London)

Platten sold his share to Margaret Moore 24 Oct 1843 who passed them on
to Robert Mann the next day. Mann also obtained Painter's share in Jan 1845
giving him a total of 16. The vessel was stranded on the Swedish coast
(Lloyds List 30 Oct 1845, Clay Customs letter 9 Apr 1846). Robert Mann
and his son were drowned.

The late Patrick Kearney once did an excellent copy of an old pierhead painting of this
vessel which was still in the possession of the Mann family. Unfortunately he, and they,
were under the erroneous impression that this vessel was a prize captured from the French
during the Napoleonic war - clearly not the case. There was an ex-French prize in the Mann
fleet, but she was called *Hebe*.

No.14 **Ann** of Blakeney & Clay 101.89 tons
of 1840 R J Brereton (32) and Randle Brereton (32) of Blakeney, merchants
Edward Fenn Waller, Master

Newly built at Wells by John Lubbock
One deck, two masts, Schooner, standing bowsprit, square stern,
carvel built, female bust figurehead
Length 64.7' breadth 16.8' depth 10.6'

Other masters: Peter Kitwood 12 July 1851 (Clay)

Re-registered at Wells 29 Oct 1856 (no.16).

No.17 **Jane & Maria** of Clay 78.48 tons
of 1840 Wm Kennedy (23), master mariner, John Bayfield (10) of Cromer,
Tailor, Charlotte Crook (10), spinster, Henry Harrison Jnr (21) of
Kingsdown, Kent, mariner
William Kennedy, Master

Built 1833 at Sutton, Yorkshire. Last registered Hull, April 1833
One deck, two masts, Schooner, standing bowsprit, square stern, carvel
Length 59.6' breadth 15.5' depth 9.3'

Bayfield sold his share to Kennedy 11 Feb 1851
Re-registered Yarmouth March 1855 (no.13).

No.18 **Mary** of Clay 68.44 tons (87.94 tons old style)
of 1840 John Lee (32) of Clay, merchant, Thos Sykes (32) of Bristol,
shipowner
James Bix, Master

Built 1817 at Sunderland. Last registered at Cley Jan 1838 - vessel
altered.

One deck, two masts, Schooner, square stern, carvel
Length 57.7' breadth 16.5' depth 9.9'

Other masters: Jeremiah Moore 4 Feb 1847
James Rix 6 Mar 1847
Robert Claxton 15 Mar 1848
Jeremiah Moore 5 June 1848
David Parlett 18 Nov 1852

No.19 **Ariel** of Blakeney & Cley 98.13 tons
of 1840 Charles Temple (16) of Blakeney, merchant, Thos Hurn (16) of
Blakeney, master mariner, Charles Buck (8) of Clay, surgeon, John
Smithers (8) of Blakeney, master mariner, Hannah Nurse (8) of

Blakeney, wife of Wm Ward Nurse, William Purdy (8) of Witchingham,
gent
John Smithers, Master

Newly built at Rye by James Hepell [Hassell ?]
One deck, two masts, Schooner, standing bowsprit, lute stern, carvel,
female bust figurehead

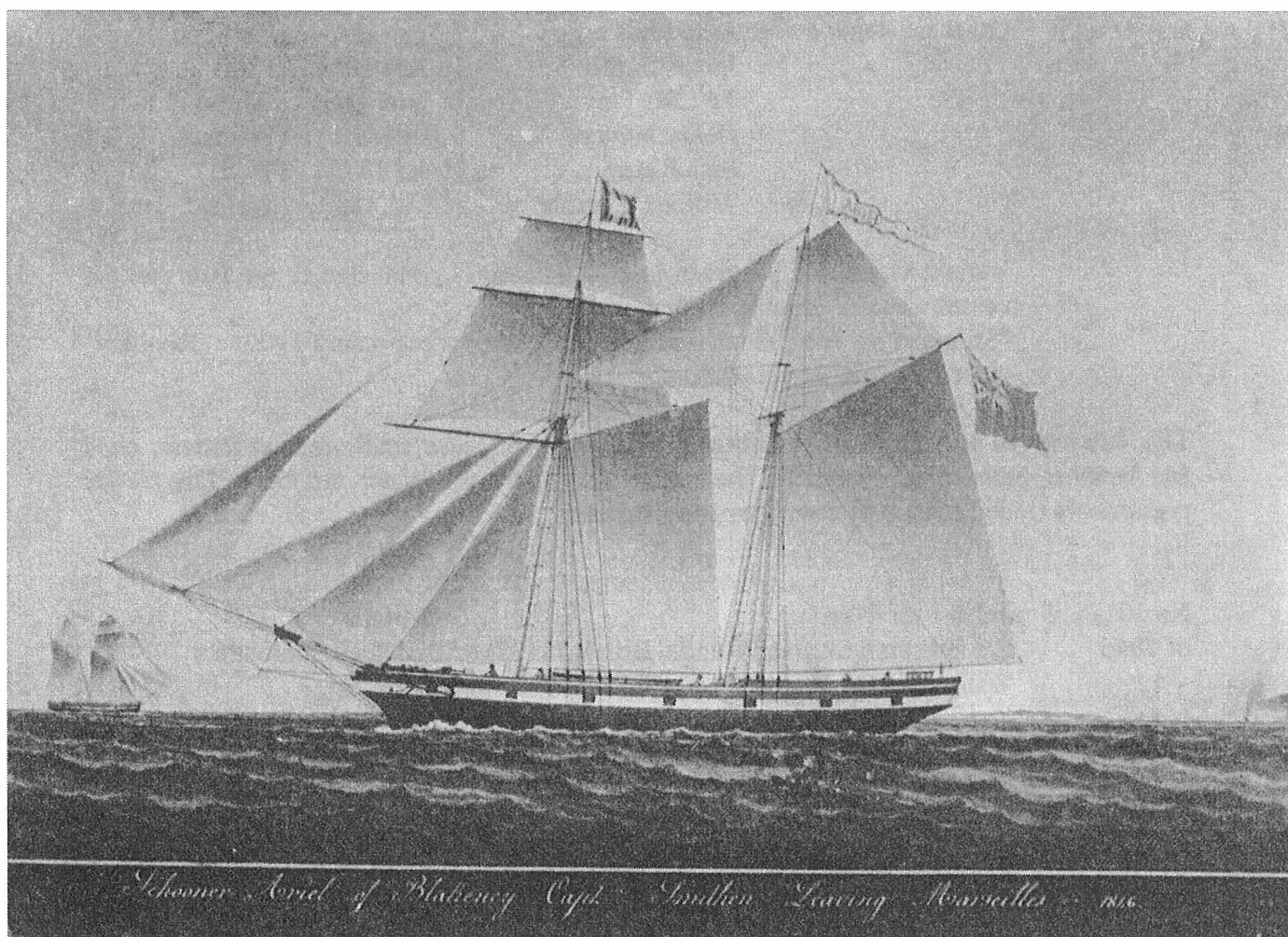
Length 63.3' breadth 18.4' depth 11.1'

Other masters: William Grant 4 Mar 1854 (Newcastle)

John Smithers' share sold to Wm Isaac Bensley of Blakeney, master
mariner, July 1850.

Re-registered at Wells 10 Mar 1859.

In 1994 the Blakeney History Group received a request for information about John Smithen (not Smithers) from his great great grandson. The enquirer sent a copy of a painting in his possession showing the 'Schooner Ariel of Blakeney Capt Smithen Leaving Marseilles 1846', an illustration which brings life to the entries in the Registers. John Smithen appears not to have been in Blakeney for long, although he and his wife – formerly Mary Ann Butters whom he had married in Blakeney in 1846 – did play an important part in the life of the Methodist Chapel.²



No.4 **Commerce** of Clay 65.48 tons
of 1846 Henry Sandford (32) and Wm Rigden (32) of Cromer, shipowners
William Rigden, Master

Newly built at South Stockton by Wm Grafton [?]
Schooner, square stern, carvel
Length 61.4' breadth 16' depth 8.9'

Registration transferred to Lowestoft 12 Jan 1858

No.8 **Hopewell** of Clay 51.17 tons
of 1846 Thomas T Much (21) of Burnham Thorpe, Merchant, John Savory (21) of
Burnham Overy, merchant, James Smith (22) of Burnham Overy, master
mariner
James Smith, Master

Newly built at Wells by Henry James Tyrell
Sloop, square stern, carvel built,
Registered no. 4704
Length 53.9' breadth 15.1' depth 8.2'

| | | | |
|----------------|------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Other masters: | John Phillip Fox | 7 Sept 1853 | (Hartlepool) |
| | James Smith | 18 Apr 1854 | (Hull) |
| | Thomas Parr | 16 Nov 1861 | (Wells) |
| | Henry Howell | 6 Jan 1879 | (Wisbech) |
| | Josh Ransom | 19 Jul 1879 | (Wells) |
| | William Temple | 19 Oct 1883 | (Wells) |

Variant weight 45.97 given in 1879, possibly connected to the fact that the vessel was re-rigged as a ketch in June 1880

"Stranded on Wells Sand and became a total wreck 4 Aug 1900. Registry closed 15 August 1900".

This entry gives some idea of the potential longevity of these small coastal traders, wind and weather permitting. Note also the use of the national register numbers. This vessel presumably traded mostly to Burnham and its creeks.

No.10 **John** of Clay 61.84 tons
of 1846 R J Brereton (32) and Randle Brereton (32) of Blakeney, merchants
William Dew, Master

Built Wells 1818. Last registered 1836 (no.5) change of rig from Brig to Schooner. Square stern, carvel
Length 54.2' breadth 14.7' depth 8.7'

"Vessel lost - foundered off Folkestone after being in contact with another vessel per Lloyds List 14 Dec 1846".

No.11 **Ulysses** of Clay 54.4 tons
of 1846 Wm Cooke (64) of Wells, master mariner
Wm Cooke, Master

Built 1840 on Prince Edward Island. Last registered Lynn 1842 (no.3)
Two masts, Schooner, square stern, carvel
Registered no.21206

Other masters: Richard Empson 8 July 1854 (Newcastle)
Wm E Loynes 7 Nov 1854 (Sunderland)

Mortgaged to John Lubbock, shipbuilder, 8 Oct 1846. Paid off 1848
Vessel lost in 1860.

There was a major expansion of shipbuilding on this Canadian island in the early years of the nineteenth century, many of the vessels being sold to British owners, mostly in Devon and Cornwall, which area had strong kinship links with PEI. Especially popular were the schooners fitted with a square topsail which is probably the rig carried by *Ulysses*. Both of the other masters were from north Norfolk so it would seem reasonable to assume that they, and the ship, were involved primarily in the coal trade.

No.3 **Euphemia** of Clay 140.74 tons
of 1851 Thomas Mitchell (32) of Blakeney, merchant, William Mitchell (32) of
Blakeney, master mariner
Wm Mitchell, Master

Built 1839 at Leith. Last registered at Kirkwalder 1839 (no.5)
One deck, two masts, Brig, trysail masts, standing bowsprit, square
stern, carvel built
Length 71.3' breadth 19.5' depth 13.2'

Thos Mitchell sold 11 of his shares to William Mitchell Dec 1851
Vessel foundered at sea off Aldborough, per Lloyds List 6 Oct 1852.

Another elderly brig probably engaged in the coal trade, though with the master being part owner it may well have been better found than most in that trade.

No.7 **Lady Ann** of Clay 75.59 tons
of 1851 William Harman (64) of Wells, shipowner
Thomas Lake Harman, Master

Built 1822 at Wells. Last registered Lynn 1848 (no.8)
One deck, two masts, Schooner, standing bowsprit, square stern,
carvel built. Register no.23803

Length 62.2' breadth 17.1' depth 8.5'

| | | | |
|----------------|------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Other masters: | Edward Loynes | 9 Jan 1854 | (Hartlepool) |
| | Wm Harman Jnr | 4 Jun 1855 | (Hartlepool) |
| | Thomas Smith | 7 Sep 1865 | (Wells) |
| | George Cook | 18 Sep 1866 | (Hartlepool) |
| | Thos Lake Harman | 5 Jan 1867 | (Wells) |
| | Wm Ransom | 2 Jan 1869 | (Wells) |

Vessel wrecked 29 Nov 1874 on Seaham Rocks.

Most, though not all, of the gaps in this list are the locally registered fishing boats, the smacks and luggers that in many cases worked off the beaches at Cromer, Runton and Sheringham. Most of these were removed from the register when the lower limit of 15 tons was imposed.

This sample from the Ships' Registers for the port of Blakeney & Cley gives the flavour of the sorts of vessels to be found trading along this coast in the nineteenth century - in essence not much different from those to be found a century earlier. Most of their coastwise trade was to be lost to the railway network as it expanded and consolidated in the latter part of the century. Coastal trade didn't disappear altogether as some west country ports were still handling coal imports (from south Wales) in the second half of the twentieth century - coal for Torre power station was still being brought into Kingswear in the 1960s. The last trading vessels to enter Blakeney Harbour were the 'billyboys' who finally left around the end of the first World War, though the last sailing vessel trading into Wells was the *Albatross*, which made its last visit in 1992.

Richard Kelham is a potter and a partner in 'Made in Cley', and a transport historian.

References

- 1 Public Record Office BT 107/182 (onwards).
- 2 Mary Ferroussat (Ed.), *Blakeney Methodist Church 1812-1997*, Blakeney History Group, 1997, page 12.