

In the March 2014 edition of “Heritage” the Quarterly Journal of Sittingbourne Heritage Museum, there appeared the following question:

Ken Levy of the Coalhouse Fort Project writes ‘I am trying to get any data on a twin screw motor ship built in 1920 by Wills and Packham at Sittingbourne, who I also believe to be brickmakers. I have a certificate of registry No. 169756 with the name of the ship ‘JASTA’ and possibly renamed ‘MARGO NEWMAN’ that was broken up at Rochford, Essex in the past 1 -2 years. I do not know positively if Jasta was its original name. It is believed to have been at Dunkirk in 1940 but records so far have drawn a blank on the little ships that sailed. It was reregistered at Gloucester docks in 1973. I understand that Wills and Packham was taken over by Sittingbourne Shipping Company. I realise this is a long shot but it would be most appreciated if you are able to assist me.’

There’s lots of ‘stuff’ to get your teeth into here. Do write in and let us know some answers.

On the following pages I set out some notes which provide the answer to this question and, for good measure, some background material for those who are interested in this aspect of our community's history.

Some of this comes from the records, & some from my own recollections. I am grateful to my son, Edward J H Peters, for his work on the history of this branch of our family, researching & outlining the history of Wills & Packham & their barges

Michael H Peters  
February 2015

# HENRY WILLIAM HARVEY MARINE SURVEYOR

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- Henry William Harvey (an Essex man, son of a Police Constable) was employed by Daniel Wills & Henry Packham (one of my great-grandfathers).
- Wills and Packham were brick-makers 1858 – 1969
- Throughout its existence, the company was owned & run by the founders & members of their families
- Between 1889 & the 1920s they built spritsail barges to carry their bricks
- They enticed Mr Harvey from Essex, in his twenties, to serve as a shipwright & they retained his services (latterly as marine surveyor) until they ceased building barges.
- The ship-yards of Wills & Packham were near their offices at the north end of Crown Quay Lane, where they succeeded John Taylor in 1888.
- In 1908 the firm owned 28 barges, all insured by the Kent Barge Owners' Association (founded 1873) The Directors included Jabez Wills and Henry Packham's second son Ernest (my great-uncle). Ernest's elder brother, Henry, had died some years previously of tuberculosis in South Africa. Mr Harvey was one of the Society's appointed surveyors.
- I do not know the names of all the Wills & Packham barges but I list some of them below
- Amongst the first barges which Wills & Packham built there were:  
***H T Wills*** (Mrs Wills) and ***W & P***
- In the following year appeared ***M M Packham*** (Mrs Matilda Maria Packham) & ***Henry & Jabez*** (sons of Packham & Wills, respectively)
- At least two more barges were named after family members:  
***Herbert Gordon*** (the Packhams' youngest son)  
***Five Sisters*** (the Packham sisters, Hannah, Lizzie Maria (my grandmother) Alice, Edith & Mabel) This barge was the subject of a book by Peggy Larken (Robert Hale 1970) With her husband Tom, Mrs Larken bought the vessel after World War II taking advice from old Henry Harvey.
- Perhaps the barge ***Samuel*** was named after Henry Packham's father & grandfather, or quite possibly, the Hebrew prophet of that name. Another barge name with an echo of the Bible's Old Testament was ***Ebenezer*** – the name given by the prophet Samuel to a

stone which he erected at a place in Palestine called Mizpah, to commemorate an Israelite victory over the Philistines. In those days this Biblical reference would not seem so obscure as it does to us today - the name Ebenezer was in common use by Nonconformist Christians – for their children and their chapels – such as the tiny derelict structure still surviving on the corner of West Street and Cockleshell Walk - once known as the Ebenezer Gospel Hall. More relevant to this tale, Ebenezer was the name of the chapel in Chatham where Henry & Matilda Packham were wed. As devout Baptists, the Packhams & the Wills families would have been more tuned-in to all this than most of our current readership. The names of several members of their families (including my grandmother “L M Packham”) appear on foundation stones on the front & flank walls of their church in West Street Sittingbourne (on the corner of Denmark Road).

Let's get back to the barges.....

- As well as the Bible, several vessels owned by Wills & Packham bore names reflecting the owners' attitude to alcoholic drink & public figures who led the movement for abstinence – or “Temperance” as it was known:



*fragments of Teetotaler photographed in October 2005*

*at the Sittingbourne Barge Museum - of happy memory*

- ***Teetotaler***
- ***Band of Hope*** (whose members were all abstainers)
- ***Good Templar***, (The Independent Order of Good Templars was a Society devoted to abstinence)
- Four vessels were named after “Temperance” campaigners:  
***Samuel Bowley***      ***J.B. Gough***      ***Sir Wilfred Lawson***      ***Joseph Livesey***
- Among other public figures celebrated by Wills & Packham were two assassinated American Presidents, William ***McKinley*** (1843- 1901) after whom they named one of their barges & James A Garfield (1831-81) after whom Daniel Wills named his house in Park Road – made distinctive by its tower – tall enough, it was said, for Mr Wills to watch his barges in the creek.

- They were Imperialists too &, because Henry Packham junior had been invalided to South Africa, in a desperate & vain hope that he could recover from tuberculosis, the company had a particular interest in that part of the world.
- In 1898 they launched the *Rand* (a South African word for a ridge) The ceremony was performed by my father (aged 7) “*under the coaching of his father*” He broke the customary bottle over the bows – we may be sure that, rather than wine, the ceremonial bottle contained some innocuous fluid. Reminding us that he grew up in a community where barges played a large role, I recall that my father's nickname at school was “lee-boards” - poor chap, when young, his ears were rather prominent.



*Lee boards were hung either side of the vessel. Either could be lowered to serve as a keel on the lee side – opposite to windward*

*The barges were flat-bottomed to maximise the cargo capacity in shallow water*

- In the following year the second Boer War began and, in 1901 when it ended, Wills & Packham launched the barge called **CIV** standing for City Imperial Volunteers – one of the regiments which had fought in South Africa for Queen & Empire.
- Some barge names related to parts of the United Kingdom: ***Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Llandudno, Scotsman & Shamrock***
- In “*Barge Building & Barge Builders of the Swale*” (Meresborough Books 1990) Don Sattin tells us that ***Ivy*** was named after Miss Ivy Gull, of whom I'm sorry to say I know nothing.
- The classification of some of the other names is more of a challenge: I know nothing about ***Arthur Blake*** or ***Ada Mary*** or ***Flora***, or ***Omega*** or ***Red Lancer*** or ***Rover***.
- ***Unique*** was the first of Wills & Packham's barges with a composite construction, having metal frames and a wooden skin (outside planking) When built, it was literally unique but in “*A Handbook of Sailing Barges*” (Adlard Coles, Southampton 1955) F S Cooper records that the same design was used for the ***McKinley*** (see above) which was built soon afterwards.
- In World War I the company built torpedo boats & hulls for flying boats.
- After the war, vessels produced under Henry Harvey's supervision included: ***Harparees*** (see below) & ***Heather Pet*** (which both went elsewhere)

- **Olive May**, (1920) was named after one of the daughters of the owner, Captain Arthur Wenban (*Sattin page 42*) Leslie Williams in “*The Past Glory of Milton Creek*” which he co-wrote with Alan Cordell, (Meresborough Books 1985) records that this was the biggest spritsail barge of all time & the only one ever launched with an auxiliary motor already installed. Mr Sattin tells us about this barge's “Harban” Patent Windlass which, with input from H. Green a local engineer, was designed by Mr Harvey & the vessel's owner Captain Wenban – hence the windlass name. F S Cooper (see above) records that it was built as a motor barge.



- **Olive Mary** (1921) - note the similar names, which must have caused confusion sometimes – hence perhaps this vessel's change of name to **Arcades**. According F S Cooper (see above) this barge was converted to motor in 1938 & was burnt out in 1947 en route to Ridham, laden with straw for the Paper Mill.
- **Raybel** (1921)



Form No. 9

**CERTIFICATE OF BRITISH REGISTRY**

**PARTICULARS OF SHIP**

Name	OLIVE MAY	Year of build	1920
Builder	Wills & Packard	Place and date when completed	Wilton, Essex 1920
Number of decks	One	Length from foremast to stern, to the aft end of the last of the stern poles, less mainmast and foremast	100
Number of masts	One	Main length to extreme of mainmast	100
Keel	Steel	Depth in hold from keel to ceiling	10
Keel	Steel	Depth in hold from keel to ceiling, in the case of two-deck and open	10
Keel	Steel	Depth from top of upper deck to top of lower deck	10
Keel	Steel	Length of keel on upper deck	10
Keel	Steel	Length of keel on lower deck	10

Particulars in Particulars (Schedule 1) of 1917, as applied to British, Colonial, or Foreign Masts

Particulars	Material	Material	Material
Keel	Steel	Keel	Steel
Keel	Steel	Keel	Steel
Keel	Steel	Keel	Steel

**PARTICULARS OF TONNAGE**

The tonnage of this ship as ascertained with her British Tonnage Certificate are—

GROSS TONNAGE 100 TONS

REGISTER TONNAGE 100 TONS

This ship is assigned with a tonnage mark on each side of the ship which is—

GROSS TONNAGE 100 TONS

REGISTER TONNAGE 100 TONS

A detailed summary of the tonnage for this ship is shown on The British Tonnage Certificate.

Wills & Packard

- And finally **Phoenician** (1922) This vessel won many prizes in barge races in successive years; it is said by many to have been the last spritsail barge built on Milton creek.

- Mr Harvey came to Sittingbourne in the 1890s soon after Wills and Packham began building barges. Throughout his life he retained an interest in & fondness for the port of Maldon in his home county – still regarded as the leading centre for the barges to which Mr Harvey devoted his working life. I recall going to Maldon repeatedly with him in the 1940s.
- His wife Alice was a Miltonian; as far as I know, 14 Ufton Lane was their first home together. In those days Ufton Lane, as we call it now, was in Milton Urban District. They produced two children: Bessie (born 1895) who married Stuart Wright & lived latterly at the Walnuts, in Greenstreet on the corner of Cellar Hill. Doris (born 1900) married Harold Newman. In 1908 the local directory of W J Parrett lists the Harveys as having moved up to 45 Ufton “Road”. In 1911, according to the census, they were, for a while, living in Sittingbourne - at 63 Park Road, (Peter Morgan, founder & President of the museum, lives at 65) In 1926 W J Parrett records that they moved back to Milton - St Margaret's 97 Park Road - the upper section of Park Road was within Milton Urban District.
- The Newmans' only child was christened Marguerite – Margot – the name given to the barge which triggered the enquiry reported in “Heritage” - giving rise to these notes.
- My mother Winnie Peters (née Harris) & Doris (Harvey) Newman were life-long acquaintances – both grew up in Park Road & both began their education at the Butts School in Milton – because they lived within the Milton borders.
- Alice Harvey, a woman of strong will, made her own way in the community, including, if I remember correctly, becoming a magistrate.
- On his retirement Mr Harvey gave me this model of a Medway barge which he had fashioned in mahogany; the sails (white in colour, not red like real barges) were made from bed-sheets by Margot Newman & my sister Patricia.



- In their latter years, the Harveys sold their house in Park Road & moved round the corner to Craigmere, 96 Albany Road, which they shared with their daughter Doris & Harold, their son-in-law, who had been running the sub-post office & general shop at Loose, near Maidstone. The arrangements were unorthodox: Mrs Harvey, crippled with arthritis, was accommodated lived in style in the principal bedroom, with its great circular bow window on the corner, from where, playing the *grande dame*, she ruled the household.

- Old Henry, who was going blind, was tucked away in a semi-attic at roof level – intended originally for children or servants; his poky little room was given the appearance of a barge cabin complete with portholes & a built-in bunk. I hope that he found it cosy rather than cramped.
- Doris, Harold and Margot occupied the rest of the house. I could say more but I shall not.
- When Margot married Keith Bailey, a school teacher, they bought a house just a few doors away from Margot's parents - Charleville, 86 Albany Road, on the corner of Connaught Road (where incidentally my sister had been born). The Baileys had a son called David, who, I believe, became a musician.
- In due course, Craigmere was sold & Doris & Harold moved to Hill Brow on the Ufton Court Estate. After Harold died, Doris moved to Chelsfield, near Orpington to live with Margot, Keith and David.
- Henry Harvey's Sittingbourne Ship Building Company, meanwhile, had been taken on by one Leslie Strevens, a name still remembered hereabouts.



In 1969 under John Wills, the last managing director, Wills & Packham closed down, leaving their last remaining brickfield – in Crown Quay Lane - to be developed as Sittingbourne Industrial Park. The old office built in 1835 by John Huggens who started the brickfield was pulled down some years ago. Nowadays most of the land is derelict open space but one survival, up the lane beside the creek, is the Wills & Packham sail loft, dating from 1917 during World War I when the company was extra busy building vessels for the government. Despite the almost total destruction of buildings in this district once associated with our great barge-building industry, English Heritage have declined to add this building to the statutory list of buildings of special historic or architectural interest.

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