

SHIPS MONTHLY

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Last of the Bideford schooners
Somerset port : Island wrecks
Sixty years of the Coriolanus

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Last of the Bideford schooners

To the end of her Appledore days she carried a prayer inscribed over the saloon: 'God protect the *Kathleen & May*'. For three-score years she had served nobly in the coastal trade of the British Isles. Now, soon after her return to Appledore with a promise of a new career, RICHARD J. SCOTT pays her homage as one who sailed in her under a superb Master since retired in this Devon port not far from the old home of Drake.

IN April 1900 the three-masted double-tops'1 schooner *Lizzie May* took the water from Ferguson and Baird's yard at Connah's Quay near Chester. She was built to the order of Captain John Coppack for, it is said, £2,700, and in pursuance of widespread coaster practice was named after two daughters of her owners. As the *Kathleen & May* she was to become the very last wooden schooner trading in home waters.

When built she measured 98.4 ft. by 23.2 ft. by 10.1 ft. with a gross tonnage of 136 (99 net) and a cargo capacity of 226 tons. After having been completely rigged, she was launched stern first and then fitted out with locally-made sails. In May, under the command of Captain Thomas Hughes, she completed her first fixture, 226 tons

of firebricks from Connah's Quay to Rochester in Kent. She carried cement to Plymouth, pitch to Cardiff, coal to Falmouth, and clay to Weston Point before arriving light back at Connah's Quay in August. By the end of the year she had covered an estimated mileage, port to port, of just under 3,000 miles.

Until 1908 this attractive little vessel was employed in a rôle typical of scores of coasting schooners, taking cargoes where they conveniently offered. Her trading areas extended from Oban to London River and the Channel Islands, with an odd trip to Irish ports.

Of these sail coasters much has been written lamenting their departure from the maritime scene. Were it not for the valuable writings of men such as

Basil Greenhill, Michael Bouquet and Captain W. J. Slade, much of the economic aspect of their history might well have been lost. Perhaps a few cold facts and figures may cast an additional light on the contribution of a coasting schooner to the economy of her day. An analysis of the work of the *Lizzie May* as a sailing ship will provide some practical illustrations of the small-parcel cargo levels for which these ships were designed. I am assuming the *Lizzie May* to be typical of the coasters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century without deep-sea commitments. The following tables may inspire further comparisons. I would suggest that if similar results are examined for a Dutch motor-coaster of, say, 400 to 450 tons d.w.t. (operating on a draught not greater than that of the schooner) the comparison would demonstrate starkly how high the demands of today's industrial scene have risen.

LIZZIE MAY: cargo tonnage
May 1900 to August 1908

Coal	4631	tons
Cement	3671	"
Stones	3454	"
Bricks	2731	"
Scrap	2453	"
Pitch	2406	"
Blende ore	1080	"
Manure	812	"
China clay	665	"
Pig iron	660	"
Whiting	445	"
Burnt ore	443	"
Copperas	435	"
Machinery	308	"
Chains	220	"
Steel	216	"
Copper ore	150	"
Gunpowder	6	"

Total 24,786 tons

Average 249 tons per month

LIZZIE MAY: passages
May 1900 to August 1908

Year	Light	Loaded	Total
1900	1	10	11
1901	3	14	17
1902	1	15	16
1903	5	14	19
1904	2	15	17
1905	4	16	20
1906	1	13	14
1907	2	13	15
1908	1	9	10
Totals	20	119	139

*LIZZIE MAY: Estimated port-to-port
distances sailed*
May 1900 to December 1904

Year	Nautical miles		
	Light	Loaded	Total
1900	35	2930	2965
1901	110	4440	4550
1902	15	4375	4390
1903	415	4790	5205
1904	25	4190	4215

The ratio of light to loaded passages indicates the steady flow of coastwise cargo available to tramping schooners at that time. As the *Lizzie May* was a new vessel then, it might be assumed that she could make passages when schooners of much earlier vintage might well lay windbound. I therefore think that these figures are fairly representative of an active coastal schooner's work under sail at the turn of the century.

Let us see how she fared in later years. In September 1908 she discharged a cargo of Welsh firebricks at Rochester when she changed hands in passing to M. J. Fleming of Youghal in County



Stern view of the KATHLEEN & MAY
off Drogheda in 1954

Cork, who also owned the ill-fated *Nellie Fleming*, the engineless three-masted double-topsail schooner lost in 1936. As the *Kathleen & May* (renamed after the daughters of her owner), she loaded 209 tons of cement at London for the Bristol Channel.

Trouble followed when she went ashore on the Goodwins, but fortunately she was refloated and taken into Dover, where her cement was discharged. She was being towed to Appledore when she broke adrift near the Longships, and was sailed from there to Cardiff Roads. By the end of November she reached Appledore under tow. There she remained for repairs until the end of January 1909. Under the command of Joe Aherne she then entered her owner's coal-trade between Bristol Channel ports and Youghal, a trade in which she was employed almost exclusively until 1931.

While owned in Youghal, she made only four passages south of Hartland Point, to Hayle, Plymouth, Southampton and Jersey. Her cargoes outward, when they were available, consisted usually of oats or pit-props, with coal back. The following tables give an interesting picture of this period, her last under sail without auxiliary power.

KATHLEEN & MAY: cargo tonnage
September 1908 to April 1931.

Coal	31,730	Tons
Oats	7,574	"
Timber	3,770	"
Barley	752	"
Flour and bran	491	"
Cement	259	"
Scrap	208	"
Manure	206	"
Burnt ore	206	"
Old sails	200	"
Bricks	198	"
China clay	197	"
Salt	123	"
Linseed and oil cake	20	"
Generals	19	"
Soda	10	"
Iron	10	"

Total 45,973 tons

Average 169.6 tons per month

KATHLEEN & MAY: passages
September 1908 to April 1931

Year	Light	Loaded	Total
1908	2	1	3
1909	9	16	25
1910	7	19	26
1911	4	18	22
1912	9	14	23

Year	Light	Loaded	Total
1913	6	11	17
1914	7	16	23
1915	4	13	17
1916	6	16	22
1917	6	13	19
1918	3	11	14
1919	7	12	19
1920	2	12	14
1921	5	6	11
1922	3	10	13
1923	3	12	15
1924	3	13	16
1925	5	7	12
1926	1	7	8
1927	3	11	14
1928	2	11	13
1929	1	6	7
1930	8	8	16
1931	1	2	3

Totals: 107 light; 265 loaded, 372 passages.

In 1910, her busiest year of this period, she covered an estimated port-to-port mileage of 3,440 loaded and 1,260 light, a total of 4,700. Overall there was a considerable decrease in profitable mileage or, to be more precise, revenue-earning passages. Her cargo records reveal a considerable loss of time in port, when she was laid up awaiting work, undergoing normal repairs, or lying weatherbound. Taking only such periods as were longer than a month at any time, I estimate that she lost the best part of four years between 1908 and 1931. The depressed state of freight markets in the Twenties had its repercussion in no fewer than fifteen laid-up months between August 1926 and May 1929. Certainly it was a struggle to keep a sail coaster trading after the boom of the war years.

On April 23 1931 the *Kathleen & May* arrived at Youghal with her last cargo under sail, 202 tons of coal from Cardiff. Shortly afterwards she was purchased for £700 by Captain Tommy Jewell and his father William, well-known Appledore coasting men who formerly had the ketches *Dolphin* and *Ketch*. With forty tons of gravel ballast, she sailed on the first of June and arrived on the third in the Torridge, where her topsail yards were sent down for the last time. An £800 refit followed with the installation of an 80 b.h.p. Beardmore engine. Her fore yard was retained and the topmasts were reduced in height, but otherwise little outward change was made. The tonnage figures altered slightly, to 138 gross and 95 net. In September she began trading as an auxiliary.

We often associate a schooner with a particular personality, usually a skipper. There come to



Captain Jewell with the schooner's terrier Mick. The companion hatch to the saloon is a little aft of the mizzen mast

mind the *Result* and Peter Welch, the *Irene* and Bill Schiller, the *Emily Barratt* and George Welch, the *Brooklands* and John Creenan, the *M. E. Johnson* and Jack Kinch, and many more. So it is with the *Kathleen & May* and Tommy Jewell. As the years rolled by, ship and man became synonymous. From the outset the partnership was

a success, setting a standard by which other auxiliary schooners were often judged. The clever blending of sail and power made for more passages while the schooner still retained all the charm of atmosphere that belonged to these wooden vessels.

Let us see how she responded in her years as an Appledore craft.

Kathleen & May: number of passages, September 1931 to September 1960

Year	Light	Loaded	Total	Year	Light	Loaded	Total
1931	5	5	10	1946	17	22	39
1932	13	22	35	1947	30	31	61
1933	15	23	38	1948	32	39	71
1934	15	17	32	1949	12	17	29
1935	16	16	32	1950	9	17	26
1936	17	22	39	1951	9	15	24
1937	15	16	31	1952	12	14	26
1938	15	15	30	1953	15	16	31
1939	17	15	32	1954	15	20	35
1940	19	18	37	1955	25	29	54
1941	5	15	20	1956	36	34	70
1942	25	33	58	1957	35	32	67
1943	18	21	39	1958	39	40	79
1944	27	40	67	1959	47	47	94
1945	16	28	44	1960	27	25	52

Totals: 598 light, 704 loaded, 1302 passages.

Cargo tonnage for 1933, 1942 and 1959.

1933			1942			1959		
Coal ...	...	2,656 tons	Wheat ...	...	2,988 tons	Coal ...	...	3,569 tons
Pitwood ...	...	678 "	Coal ...	...	1,412 "	Cattle food ...	...	2,881 "
Manure ...	...	201 "	Pat. fuel ...	...	784 "	Wheat ...	...	799 "
China clay ...	...	197 "	Pitwood ...	...	456 "	Maize ...	...	386 "
Malt ...	...	150 "	Bran ...	...	291 "	China clay ...	...	194 "
Scrap ...	...	138 "						
Cement ...	...	70 "	Total ...	...	5,931 "	Total ...	...	7,829 "
Generals ...	...	20 "						
Total ...	...	4,110 "						

The persistent high relative numbers of light passages were caused, in the main, by the economic conditions of trade. But overall, with the assistance of the auxiliary, the *Kathleen & May* was covering much more ground than in her days of pure sail. Up to 1939 she continued serving the Welsh coal trade to Youghal with further passages to small west Cork harbours. She took occasional cargoes of coal round the land to Torquay, Falmouth and Kingsbridge, with some china clay back to the Mersey. In December 1933, while bound for Garston with pitprops from the Youghal river, she had an engine breakdown a few miles north of the Tusker. In a fresh easterly Captain Jewell sailed her on to Dublin, where he berthed without a tug.

During a bad spell of South East weather in February 1936, she was caught on a coal passage from Lydney to Youghal and forced to shelter at Angle, Milford Haven. The wind rose to storm force, and for several days her crew were unable to launch a boat. A lull one moonlit Saturday night tempted Captain Jewell to "have a look outside". But on clearing St. Ann's Head the schooner ran into fresh South East wind and plenty of sea, which forced them to put back. The gale blew up harder than ever for two whole days, and when eventually they got clear they arrived at Youghal nearly four weeks out from Lydney.

Then they heard of the tragedy which occurred, possibly even on that same Saturday when they were forced back to the anchorage at Angle. The *Nellie Fleming* had left Lydney on Saturday morning, also bound for Youghal with coal. She was never heard of again. A schooner's mast was later picked up off the entrance to Milford Haven; although this piece of evidence was not positively identified, Captain Jewell reckoned that the *Nellie Fleming* probably met her sad fate even before she would have passed St. Ann's.

One of the *Kathleen & May's* very few accidents occurred in 1937; when she was outward bound from Youghal she got ashore near the lighthouse. Engine trouble was again the cause. Fortunately she was refloated on the next tide with the assistance of the Arklow schooner *Happy Harry*. She was later dry-docked at Appledore for bottom repairs which cost about £200.

For the first two years of the war, armed only with a Lewis gun and rifle, she still worked across the dangerous western approaches to the south coast of Ireland. The increase in passages in 1942 arose mainly from her work in the short-haul Bristol Channel coastal routes, with a comparatively low port-to-port mileage for that year of 1915



Top: The after deck. Note the wheel-house
Centre: The galley/winch-house on the fore deck
Below: Near St. Govans in 1958. Note the preventer
tackles rigged to leeward on the booms

loaded and 737 light. We can imagine the ceaseless labour involved in 94 passages for the peak year 1959, again in the Bristol Channel.

In February 1943 the *Kathleen & May* made her first passage with china clay from Fremington to Crosshaven in County Cork, a trade in which she became well known in later years. In July she returned to Appledore for the installation of a secondhand 125 h.p. Deutz engine in place of the old Beardmore. Delays while she was awaiting



This view taken from Pembroke Castle shows the attractive Ferguson and Baird hull of the KATHLEEN & MAY

engine parts held her up until September, when she returned to the same local coast and Irish trades.

The war years passed her by unmolested. Some of her well-known colleagues from the estuary of the Taw and Torridge were never to sail again—the *M. A. James*, *Donald & Doris*, *Margaret Hobley*, *Hobah*, *Earl Cairns*, *Welcome* and others. But

Tommy Jewell's schooner continued as before, and was indeed as well maintained. Her only serious accident happened in July 1947 when she was involved in collision with the trawler *Tenby Castle* at Swansea. Her bowsprit was carried away and she received considerable damage to her bows. Two days later, in a calm spell, she made it to Appledore under her own power and there the experienced Harris yard took over.

A full refit over three months included new gingerbread decorative work under her bowsprit.

The short topmasts were removed, the lower masts were poled off, and a new 36 ft. bowsprit, now setting two jibs was fitted. She still looked neatly balanced with five fore and afters in regular use and the main and fore gaff tops'ls when required. With a fair wind and motor she could maintain eight knots, and on one occasion in 1958 with the tide under us off the South Wales coast I recall twenty-one miles slipping past her keel in two hours.

Tommy Jewell was without peer in ship husbandry. His vessel was noted for her smartness; he tolerated only the soundest in gear and sails.



At Crosshaven in 1960. The last two 3-masters in port together, the KATHLEEN & MAY and the steel-hulled DE WADDEN. A year later both had finished trading

Few vessels in the last years of auxiliary coastal sail had as much attention lavished on their upkeep. As late as 1952, a new £3,000 Crossley diesel (133 b.h.p.) was installed in her. With a Lister powered winch abaft the foremast, a radio telephone in the Master's room, and gas-cooking facilities, the engine marked her as an efficient compromise, still retaining a practical fore and aft rig—not merely steadying canvas. She even had two radio receivers—one in the fo'c'sle and one aft. All the engine controls were in the wheelhouse, and Appledore roller-reefing gear was used on her fore main and mizzen.

To the end of her Appledore days in 1961, she

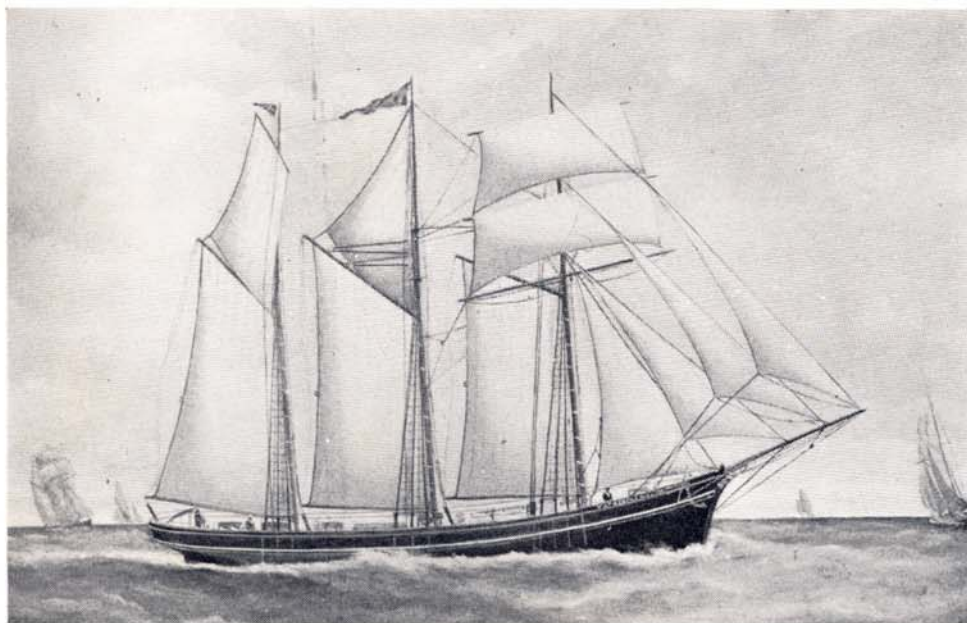
carried a prayer inscribed over the saloon, "God protect the *Kathleen & May*". Forward, her original bell with the name *Lizzie May* was still proudly polished over her old-style windlass. Although the crew accommodation was traditional, the grub certainly was not; and she must have been unique in the variety of delicacies that frequently appeared on the mess-table.

Her trading in the Fifties took her all over the Irish Sea and to the south-west coasts of Ireland and England, from Dundalk to Union Hall and from the Mersey to Par. Always she was a source of much interest to quayside visitors and old salts

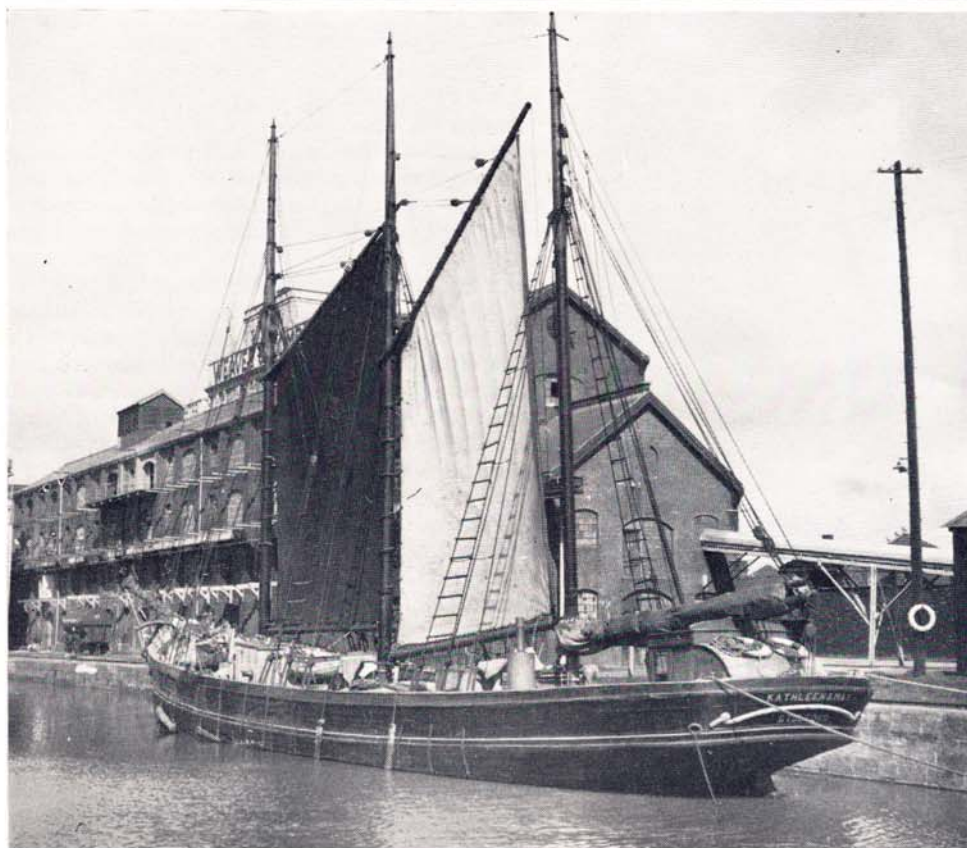
who knew such vessels in their prime.

In April 1953 she made history by shipping the first cargo of Irish coal to Britain. She loaded at Cork, and after being diverted by Customs from Ilfracombe she discharged at Fremington in the Taw estuary. Then in October 1956 she had a half-hour B.B.C. Home Service programme all to herself; this was, I think, a unique record for an old coasting schooner.

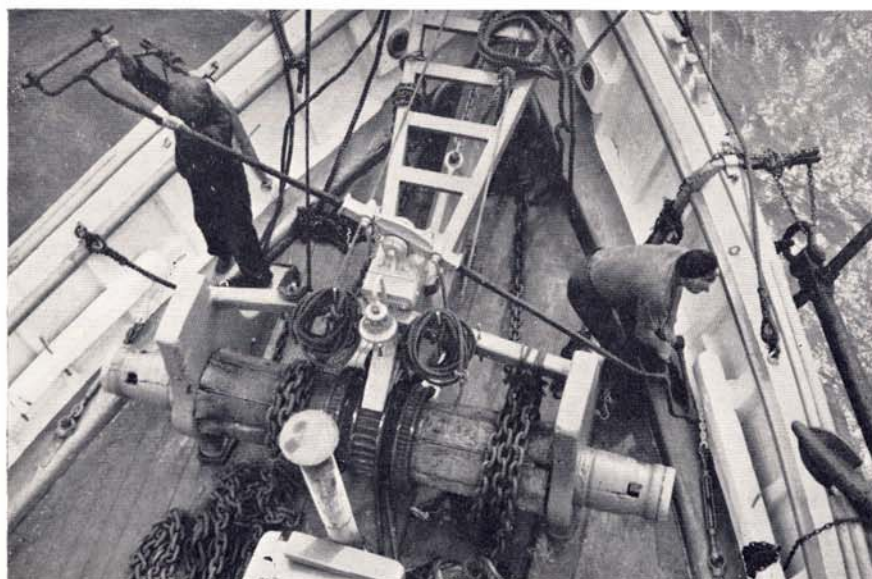
During the dozen or so passages which I made in her between 1954 and 1959 I never ceased to wonder at the ideal combination of ship and skipper. One very pleasant memory is of a summer evening anchored off Milford awaiting a Spring



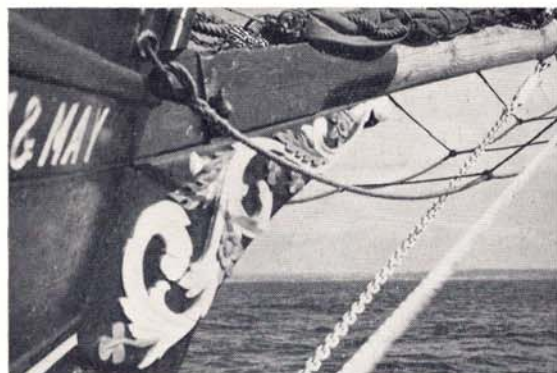
*KATHLEEN & MAY
as a double topsail
schooner previous
to 1931. From a
painting in the
possession of
Captain T. Jewell*



*At the North Dock,
Swansea in 1960,
drying her fore
and main sails*



Heaving up anchor in traditional style, Dale Roads, 1955. Generally a tackle was led from this old-fashioned windlass to the motor winch. The starboard anchor is here catted ready for sea



*Above: The gingerbread decorative work
Below: The original bell of LIZZIE MAY*

tide to get through the winding channel to Pembroke. I was keen to visit Angle, at the other side of the Haven, to have a look at the laid-up ketch *Progress*. Tommy Jewell had the lifeboat rigged in a few minutes with a dipping lug, and off we went in much the same fashion, I suppose, as many a schoonerman before us, complete with steering oar.

Another occasion which comes clearly to mind was when Tommy discovered an interest in photography. We were coming up from Hayle with scrap for Swansea on an overcast and thundery August night. The mate, Philip White, was at the wheel. Unknown to him, Tommy suggested that I should try a flash shot from the bowsprit. I duly eased out under the jibs and fired the first bulb. Suddenly we heard a clatter of boots as poor Philip came running up the deck calling to the skipper that he thought we had been hit by lightning!

Before the war Philip was skipper of the Appledore schooners *Earl Cairns* and *Donald & Doris*. In 1958 he died suddenly aboard the *Kathleen & May* at Swansea. His tragic death cast a gloom which was reflected in the blue mourning band painted round the hull of the schooner for some time afterwards.

By 1960 the Appledore fleet was reduced to only two craft, the *Kathleen & May* and the lovely-lined ketch *Irene* (although owned in Bridgewater she was based at and manned from Appledore). The *Result* of Barnstaple was employed almost constantly on the south coast, and Bristol Channel freights were hard to come by. Captain Jewell had



Captain William Jewell at the age of 75

passed the age of 65, and so in September he reluctantly laid up his schooner for sale. I had visited her at Par a week earlier when she discharged coal there for the last time.

Early in 1961 she was sold for £4,500. The *Irene* also went to the same owners. Both were taken to the Southampton area to be fitted out for cruising, but unfortunately this scheme was not fulfilled. After a number of ownership changes, without venturing further afield than Littlehampton and Cowes the *Kathleen & May* was purchased last year by Captain W. P. Davis. He is an active motorship skipper who plans to put the schooner through a survey for further trading. With this in mind, he sailed her round to Barry in South Wales and then to Appledore. It is hoped that a sales-promotion sponsorship featuring the schooner, and a role in a big film now being made, will provide the necessary funds for the survey. With a professional Master Mariner now her owner, I sincerely trust that plans work out which will see the *Kathleen & May* back in her element again. Meanwhile Captain Tommy Jewell, now a retired but sprightly 72, is still taking a lively interest in the maritime scene of his native Appledore, where he has been able to see the *Kathleen & May* again.



*Top: Captain Joe Aherne of Youghal
Centre: Another Captain from Youghal:
Tom Brown with Tom Jewell, right
Below: Crew of KATHLEEN & MAY, August 1955*