



*“A TRIP TAE THE SANNIES”
or hoo ma fry got forfit.*



A TRIP TAE THE SANNIES

“The mannie wints us on the Loch o Skene first thing the morn tae hae a go at the pumps”.

This wis the wurd fan Bill Ruddiman cam back fae spikin tae Jim Allison, the ootside foreman. We wis gaan oot o the yaird the morn tae dee a repair on een o thae aul scratchers that sat roon on Pint Law.

Smashin! Anither skive. We wis fair scunnert o workin inside the yaird on the new boats on bare time. Haein a day or mair oot of the yaird, an awa fae thae gaffers, wis jist fit we’d bin wintin. We micht even get a darker, wirkin aa nicht tae get the boat ready tae sail. Darkers wisna tae be sneezed at fan ye coontid up the overtime. Nae as good as a Saiterday an Sunday wikender, bit even at time an a third ye wis deein aa richt.

Even better, we wis awa fae “Dick Barton”, thon security mannie. He wis an ex-Bobbie, wi a “flasher’s” raincoat, an a drip at the enn o his nose an wis aye snuffin about seekin tae catch ye gaan oot fer fags, or a cup o coffee at Joe Colleta’s café. Joe’s café, far ye sat at the back on thae bint plywood benches wi tables atween them. The back o the bench as heich as naebody cood see ye, unless they lookit aneth the seats an saw yer buits. If Dick Barton cam intae the place, Joe wid gees a signal, an ye sat wi yir buits up affa the fleer until he’d gaen.

Dick Barton an Russell’s security, noo thon wis a laach. Did he nae see the jyner gaan oot wi a stiff leg maist denner an stoppin times? Hirpilin oot wi a bit o the chair he wis makin at his bench in the jyner’s shop stuck doon his trooser leg. He wis gettin mairriet an hid filled the maist o his new flat on Castle

Terrace, courtesy o Hall Russell. An early days – an an affa lot cheaper – Ikea flat-pack. I still wunner fit happened ti aa thon furniture, did it outlast the mairrige? They cood still be usin it the day?

A jobbie at Pint La mint freedom tae work the wie we winted till, or tak a cup o tea an a rowie at ony hairber café. Nae aye haein tae be lookin ower yer shooder. Wir journeymen, Strath an Ruddiman, they wid gan awa tae hae a pint at denner time, leevin us twa apprentices tae finish fit we wis deein. Jist a wee reminder afore they wint, *"An better hae it deen richt fan we git back, or ye'll ken aa about it"*. An we kint fit that mint, fir Ruddiman hid hans on him lik number 10 shovels, an he wisna feart tae use thim.

Mind yoo, dinna get it wrang, workin on the scratchers wisna a push ower, fer some o thim wis fool orra boats. Fitever, thae fishers that took thim awa tae sea wis relyin on us. If we didna get it richt, the hale crew cood be in trouble an micht lan up amun thae traalers fit jist disapeert, wi a their crew. *"Sailed an niver heard fae agin"*. We aye did the best we cood, tae hae aathin jist richt, bit geein fit we hid tae wirk wi, it wis a gey sair fecht files. Maist o thim biggit cheap fer the First War, or afore, they wis jist aul, clappit oot, an ready fir a last trip tae the breakers.

Bit they wis still a livin fer an affa lot o fowk in Torry an ither places. An nae jist the crews, bit the fish hooses, the cairters, an aa the rest o thim. Sayin that, the wie the aul boats wis gaan tae the scrappers, wi jist a few new eens comin in, there widna be mony left afore lang, an fowk wid hae tae look somewie else tae mak their livin.

Nithin's perfect, an there wis ae coorse thing aboot wirkin oot o the yaird. It mint beein on the Mairkit at six in the mornin. Ye hid tae tak ower the traaler tae let the engineers an the fireman awa tae hae a spell at hame. Bit fits an early turn tee, fan yi hid the pick o the catch, an could tak a fry fae the boxes being hauled up tae the mairkit fleer? Nae ower muckle tho, jist enough fer the twa journeymen, the ither loon, an yersell. An nane o thon cod, fer Ruddiman coodna thole a thae worms int. Ye lookit at the halibut, bit that wis ower big an ye coodna slip that intae the toolbag fer gaan ashore at lowsin time. Stick tae a bonny bit o sole, fit ye can fillet on the injin cylinder heids. If yer nae greedy, thin ye'll aye get again.

So that's it, doon Mairkit Street on the bike afore there's eneuch licht tae see faa's gaan aboot. Nae that ye'd wint ti see faa's aboot roon there at that time o the day, fer yir best nae tae ken fit's gaan on wi thae fowk ...

Ye wis fully riggit fer a day on the boats, wi the toolbox strappit tae the crossbar (fa'm I kiddin? Aa we iver hid wis an aul bolt sack fit we'd cadgit fae Jimmy Third in the stores), an yir moo bag slung ower yir shooder. Dodgin roon the cairts, across the cobbles, aa skitterie wi fish bree, an steerin clear o thae railway lines fit grabbit at yir front wheel an threw ye aff, richt intae a thae fish fit hid drappit aff the cairts an unner the wheels. Doon in amun a thon muck fit the horses hid left ahint thim. I wonner fit thae fowk ridin in the Tour de France wid mak o a course roon Sooth Mairkit Street, ower tae Crombie Road, an doon Cabel's Lane on a weet day. I think there wid be a few o thim coupit, their bonnie lycra fool wi them rollin in the skitters, an gaan aboot yomin wi the smell o the mairkit.

That's it, yer there, an it's up the steps tae the mairkit fleer. There's the salesman in his bonnie fite coat (fit wie did they

Bit yer nae here fer the sale, far's thon boat fit ye wis needin? Ye hiv tae seek oot the *Loch o Skene*? Aye, there she is, lyin tee tae the quay an lookin lik fit she is, patches o rust helt thegither with fish scales. A trail o smoke cumin awa fae her lum. Aw na, nae agin! Dinna tell me that's steam yomin oot fae her waste pipe? Thon's nae anither leakin biler safety valve. Fit wie is it aye me thit gits landid up lyin on tap o the biler amun a that asbestos, grindin in a valve that's bin leakin fer mair days than I've haen hot brakfists? If it is, then I'll be deein it afore the bilers caal, an the damp gits intae the monkey dung ower the biler tops. Bad eneuch beein stappit in there fan its waarm, bit its even war fan aathin's caal an weet.

Haul the bike across the fish boxes tae the boat, an git aathin aboard. It widna maiter fit time ye got there, Ruddiman or Strath, files baith, wis aye there afore ye an hid chatted up the chief. *"Its gaan tae the Torry Dock is it, nae jist tae Pint La? Dinna you worry yersel, we'll tak it roon ther nae bither. Awa ye go an see the wife an bairns, an we'll see it roon there an blaw her doon afore we mak a stairt tae sortin yer pump"*.

Twa wiks the *Loch* hid bin awa up tae Icelan, an only twa days in Aibirdeen afore it wis awa again, bit the Chief wis still kinna sweert tae gan awa an leeve the boat wi us fowk.

Niver mind, fit cood ging wrang? Aye weel, we wis aboot tae fine that out, wisint wi.

That's the catch aa landit, we kin get oot of here noo an awa tae Torry. The Skipper wis champin at the bit, fer he wis needin awa hame tae his faimly up Victoria Road, an thon ship's husban, fa wis mair lik an aul grunnie, would likely be deavin him aboot, *"hae'in tae hae words aboot the settlement aifter the catch wis selt"*.

Afore this tho, the twa appentices hid deen the maist important job o the day. We'd pickit the fry an deen the fillitin. There wis aye a knife in the toolbag, keepit jist fer the fillitin, wi a bit o hose ower the blade tae keep it keen, so it wis soon a ready fir takin hame tae the hoos. The pick of the catch, fit mair cood ye wint? Oh aye – chips.

“We’ll be needin steam afore lang, ye’d better get yir shovels gaan”. There wisna muckle needit, for the fireman hid left a fair level bed in baith furnaces, an the biler wis sitting fine at 180 pun. That’s it, the first clang on the telegraph. Fit wie wis it that Alec Strath wis aye on the hannel, an Bill Ruddiman’s muckle han on the telegraph? Aye, thae twa kint each ither weel, for they’d workit thegither for mony a day, fae the Torry Dock tae Pocra Quay, an a the wie back agin. There wisna a lot about injins fit they didna ken, and fan they wis minded, the stories cam thick an faist.

Fit iver, slow astern, an the steam jist stairtin tae drap on the gauge. Jist a wee bit fresh coal ower at the side there faur there’s a hole keekin through the bed. Then we’re aff the mairkit an turnin tae ging up the Albert Basin. Half ahead, an mair steam needit. It’s jist as weel that we wirna gaan oot the channel tae Iceland, nae wi us twa gowks tryin tae stoke the biler. The pressure is nae fit it shood be, an the mannie Strath is shoutin tae sort it oot. Ye’re thinkin, *“I’m an apprentice engineer, nae a stoker”*, but ye widna spik back tae thae twa, that wid hae earnt ye a clap roon the side o yir heid, that wid hae gottin it dirrlin a day, an files fer the ine aifter that.

The *Loch o Skene* wis biggit awa back in the days o the widden bilers, roon aboot 1900, but 50 years in the North Sea didna stop the engine tickin awa lik a Singer sewin machine. Aye, there wis a thoughtie of steam cumin fae the glands, an we micht hae tae dee sumthin aboot aa thon waater fleein aboot roon the air pump, an ye cood see fit wye they wis needing something deein wi the pump crossheed, but fit wid you be like aifter 50 years if ye hid never hin a spare mek spint on ye a thon lang time? I dinna thik ye wid hiv yer sorrows tae seek – that’s if ye wis still gaan aboot.

There we wir, gaan up bye Albert Quay tae ging roon the end o Pint La an up the Dee tae the Torry Dock. I think there’s fowk up in the Hairbir Board ca it the River Dee Dock, but that wis niver a name thit onybody workin roon there caad it, an there’s mair o us than there is o them.

Up past aa the tied up traalers, aa bows in tae Albert Quay, an their baachilt sterns out intae the basin tae git mair dints in them. Past Isaac Spencer’s ile works, wi thon wee whiff o cod livers. Or wis that cumin fae the ISCOR, Spencer’s barge fit collected aa the barrels o cod livers fae the traalers. Thon wis the only boat in Aiberdeen hit niver rusted, it was as claired wi ile, that the water jist ran affa o it. I coodna stan the smell o the cod livers at aa, it aye took me back tae the wartime, an ma mither dosin me wi thon broon clarty cod liver ile fit cam in thae wee flat bottles. Wis it the Ministry of Health, or the Ministry of Food that pit thon stuff oot? Fit iver, it wis a test, if you could swalla it there wis nithin rang wi ye, an ye wid live to be a hunner. That’s probably why there’s as mony auld fowk the day. The same Ministry fowk pit oot concentrated orange juice.

I niver kint fit an orange tasted like then, but I div ken noo, an thon stuff tasted nae mair like orange juice than fleein in the air.

Spikin aboot fruit, faither hid fowk in America, an een o thim cam tae see us durin the waar. He wis in the U.S. Navy on the Clyde an turned up in his fancy uniform wi a white top on his cap, an as mony medal ribbons, as I thocht that him tae be an affa hero. Turns oot he wis a clerk. Fit I div min aboot him cumin tho wis that he'd brocht we him queer yalla bint things, an that wis the first time I hid iver seen a banana, but its funny, I canna mind on etin thim.

We wis still gaain up the basin, an up an doon wint the legs o the injin, lik a kinna dance, bit nae een lik fit ye see up at the Palais on Diamond Street, or at the Beach Ballroom. They legs wisna gaan een aifter anither, but ae rod wid start gaan up, fan the rod aside it wis half wise doon, an anither een wis stoppit at the tap. Ye wid mak yersell cross-eyed tryin ti work oot fit wie fit aa the bits wis gaan.

Weel, we wisna gaan onywie faist, but fan we got tae the end o the basin an gid roon the end o Pint La, fit div we find, bit the Mount Battock cumin doon the Dee fae Lewis's coal yaird. She'd be headin oot fer Methil tae tak on anither load of coal fer fowk tae pit on hoos fires aa ower Aiberdeen.

Full astern rings the telegraph, an the mannie Strath he jumps tae the engin wheel.

Noo, here's the thing, he wisna aquint wi this injin, fer it hid com fae Glasga tae pit intae a Duthie o Torry boat. It wisna een o wir ane Aiberdeen biggit machines fae Fittie or Torry. On this injin, the wheel didna ging a the wie roon, but hid tae gin back the wie tae mak the injin ging astern. Bit Strath, he disna ken

this, an he furls the wheel, only fir it tae com tae a dead stop wi the injin still gaan ahead. Foo faist kin he git the thing back the wie tae pit the engine astern, for wir still gaan at a fair lick?

Noo the sjkipper up in wheelhoos up top, he disna ken fit wie tae ging, for he's gotten us heedin fer Torry, an nae fer the Dee, far the Mount Battock's comin doon, stracht fir us.

Aye weel, div ye ken thon fine stretch o san fit the Torry fowk caa the Sannies? Faur aa the bairns play fan the sun shines, an files fan it disna, an the ice fae the Dee piles up on it. That's far were headin, wi the mannie up top ringin the telegraph as if it's the bells o Hogmanay. Straicht across the river, an even wi Strath finally gettin the beastie tae ging astern, we wisna gaan tae stop in time. So, there we are, glidin smoothly intae the Sannies, with jist a saft bump an the san taking an affa hud o' us, so that we wisna gaan tae be gaan onywie mair.

The Mount Battock by this time, it's gotten doon the river, an there's nithin in its wie, so her skipper jist gid us a toot on the whistle as she sailed majestically past. Maybe majestically is jist stretchin it a bit, but it wis fairly gaan as weel as ony pot-bellied Lewis's coal boat cood.

There we wir, up on the beach, an nae a bucket or spade atween us. The Skipper, he wisna amused, an wis kinna deein a version o the highlan fling up in the weelhoose, but he cam tee faist enough fan he twiggit that the pilots at the Roondhoos wid be seein fit wis gaan on, an they wid be takin interest if he didna dee somethin aboot his trip tae the beach seener, raither than later. An there wis ae thing certain, if the Hairbir Board took an interest, it wid cost money, an the boat's owner widna hae been keen on that. There's nae doot that he wid be

seeking tae tak back onythin it cost him fae the skipper's settlement for the trip.

Div ye min thon tug the Hairbir hid, the Ness? Weel, she wis the same as the boat fit we wis on, an hid bin biggit in Torry awa back faniver, fir Hartlepool. So she wis weel aquaint wi the Sannies, haein bin launched ower thim on the slipway fae Duthie's yaird, fit sat far SEPA hings oot noo. The hivins must surely hae bin shinin on us, for does she nae appear oot o the Torry Dock an cum chunterin doon the ditch headin fer Pocra. The mannie up on oor bridge sees his chance, an he's waving lik mad tae her an shoutin, "*Gee's a pull affa here, an Ill gee ye a decent fry fer yer supper.*" Nae seener said thin deen. Jist ae wee rug fae the Ness, an we wis aff an free tae gan up the Dee tae the dock.

Bit faurs the fry comin fae? Aye weel, you've guessed it. If there's fish fer supper at oor hoose the nicht, it'll be fae the chip shop, an nae the fryin pan!

This wis ay time that we socht tae dae the crew o the traaler a favour, bit it kinna gid gite. Ae thing wis sure, it wis the last time that we wis left tae tak the boat affo the mairkit on wir ane, for anither time we micht hae lannit in the 19th Hole, or coupit thon leedin licht.

So that's the fable on fit wie the *Loch o Skene* took a trip tae the beach, but didna bide fer a cappie.

An as ivery fairy tale his tae hae a moral somewie, I wid tak it as a lesson that you shood niver furl a wheel, if ye dinna ken foo far it's gaan tae tak ye.