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David J. Starkey & Hugh Murphy

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Preface

The chapters published in this volume were originally presented as research papers to an international conference organised by the University of Hull's Maritime Historical Studies Centre, and held at Blaydes House, Hull, on 10-12 July 2003. This meeting was the brainchild of Hugh Murphy, whose contention that Britain's ancillary maritime interests, despite their collective significance to the nation's sea transport sector, had largely escaped the attention of historians, provided the rationale for the event. The conference, and the publication of these proceedings, were generously sponsored by the Baltic Exchange, Lloyd's Register, the Society for Nautical Research and the British Commission for Maritime History. Kingston upon Hull City Council also supported the meeting by hosting a reception at the Guildhall, at which the Deputy Lord Mayor, John Fareham, welcomed the 50 conference delegates to the port-city of Hull. In acknowledging the contributions of these individuals and institutions, the editors also record their gratitude to Josephine Affleck for typesetting the manuscript, and to Steve Wilson and his staff at the University of Hull's Central Print Unit for their efforts in producing this volume.

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Prologue: Beyond Shipping and Shipbuilding

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Shipping and shipbuilding are distinct industries. While the former entails the ownership and operation of vessels, a service activity whereby cargoes and passengers are transported over the seas, shipbuilding involves the design, construction and equipment of ships and is therefore located in the manufacturing sector of the economy. Nevertheless, in a British context, strong links between the two industries have long since existed, mainly by virtue of their engagement respectively as buyers and sellers in the market for new-built ships. Moreover, broad similarities can be discerned in the long-term development of the two industries. With regard to the character of their services and products, for example, shipowners and shipbuilders generally adapted successfully to the complex and protracted technological changes which led to sail power being supplanted by steam propulsion, and wooden walls giving way to metal hulls, during the course of the nineteenth century. The contours of their business performance were also broadly similar. Whereas British shipping and shipbuilding experienced substantial growth, and assumed world pre-eminence in their respective markets, down to 1914, the uncertain demand conditions and increasing competition ushered in by the First World War saw both industries lose momentum and market share until the late 1940s. At that point, an era of renewed expansion, but continuing relative decline, set in and lasted until the mid 1970s, when a sharp fall in the demand for tonnage precipitated rapid contractions in absolute as well as relative terms, leaving both industries on the verge of extinction by 1990.¹

A further similarity lay in the reliance of shipowners and shipbuilders on a host of independent and semi-independent manufacturers, agents, brokers and administrators for the provision of countless goods and services that were essential to the operation and construction of British merchant vessels. These “ancillary” activities, which form the central theme of this book, are difficult to analyse for a number of reasons. First, this is a topic which embraces an extremely broad range of activities. A glimpse of the diversity of the ancillary “sector” is revealed in the occupational breakdown of the census of the population; in 1911, for instance, as well as the workers enumerated under the various sub-headings of the shipping and shipbuilding industries, those engaged as “ship surveyors,” “pilots; boatmen on the seas” and “cooks, stewards and others (subsidiary services)” are listed.² Trade directories and the classified advertisements of newspapers give the same impression, with services as varied as “ships’ paint & composition specialist,” “shipping & forwarding agent,” “compass manufacturer,” “marine radio supplier,” “ships’ launderer” and “ships’ scaler; boiler clearance” advertised in a single issue of the *Port of Hull Journal* in 1960.³ Second, ancillary activities were spatially dispersed. While most were concentrated in the ports where ships were built and based, some were located inland and are therefore both difficult to identify as ship-related and to integrate into any quantitative analysis of the extent of ancillary activities at any point in time. Into this category fall activities such as the manufacture of seafarers’ clothes, the provision of marine insurance cover, the supply of pre-fabricated components used in the outfit of vessels, and the procurement of high-quality cutlery

¹ See Lewis Johnman and Hugh Murphy, *British Shipbuilding and the State since 1918: A Political Economy of Decline* (Exeter, 2002); Alan G. Jamieson, *Ebb Tide in the British Maritime Industries: Change and Adaptation, 1918-1990* (Exeter, 2003); David J. Starkey and Alan G. Jamieson (eds) *Exploiting the Sea: Aspects of Britain’s Maritime Economy since 1870* (Exeter, 1998).

² *Census of England and Wales, 1911: Volume X, Occupations and Industries*.

³ *Port of Hull Journal*, 48(1), January 1960.

for the tables of the more prestigious passenger liners. Arising from such functional and spatial diversity is a third difficulty, the absence of a corps of primary source material pertaining to this array of support and service provisions. Whereas the scale and performance of industries such as shipping and shipbuilding can be assessed by virtue of specific measures of the inputs and outputs of a clearly defined activity, such indicators do not exist, and cannot readily be compiled, for a multi-faceted sector with imprecise and pervious boundaries. In itself, this problem begets a fourth difficulty, for there are very few published analyses of Britain's ancillary maritime interests. As each of the chapters in this volume attests, there has been a dearth of scholarly research into the character and significance of these activities, either individually or as a sector on a local, let alone a regional or national, scale. In essence, this book is designed to help fill this gap in the literature.

Given the nature of its subject, a selective approach has been adopted in the compilation of this volume, with each constituent chapter focusing on a particular type of ancillary activity. The discussions range widely in terms of their spatial scope and depth of coverage. In the first four chapters, attention is afforded to activities that were largely ancillary to the shipbuilding industry. Here, there is a mix of case study analysis and national overview. Adrian Jarvis adopts the former approach in his assessment of the contribution made to the science of marine engineering by the debates and publications fostered by professional societies established in Liverpool, Glasgow and Newcastle from the 1850s. Lewis Johnman and Hugh Murphy provide overviews of the development of Britain's marine engineering and ship repair interests, the latter being complemented by Ian Buxton's analysis of the performance of four of the larger ship repair enterprises during the first half of the twentieth century. In many ways, these ancillary activities constituted industries in their own right, but were generally treated as divisions of the shipbuilding industry, partly because of the complex ownership structures that prevailed in this sector, with many of the major shipyards accommodating marine engineering plants and ship repair facilities alongside their ship construction sites. Shipbuilding also features prominently in Martin Bellamy's chapter, although his concern is the assembly of works of art by the owners of the yards (and some shipowners) rather than the production of ships and engines. He concentrates on the experience of Glasgow, arguing that the city's late twentieth-century cultural renaissance was a direct legacy of the wealth generated by the port's shipbuilding and shipping interests, a significant proportion of which was spent on the art collections and buildings that are now in the public domain and collectively provide Glasgow with a new identity and a major tourist attraction.

The remaining four contributions offer insights into activities that were ancillary to shipping. Alston Kennerley's chapter focuses on the various agencies that were responsible for the recruitment of seafaring labour. Operated variously by shipowners, trade unions and the government, these bodies were integral to the working lives of British seafarers and an important regulatory device in a labour market that was not only diverse in terms of skill and experience, but also spatially dispersed. The lobbying of government by shipowners is the subject of Chris Ware's chapter. Confronted by adverse market conditions in the interwar period, owners of British tramp ships, who were renowned for their individualistic, competitive approach to business, sought financial assistance from the state. In this quest, which virtually became an adjunct to their business, they were confronted by the economic orthodoxy of the Treasury, an obstacle that was only overcome with the aid of shipowning "friends" in the Board of Trade. John Golding's case study of a London shipbroking firm also sheds light on the role of government in shaping business strategy. In this instance, the monetary and fiscal policies adopted by Labour and Conservative governments from the mid 1960s to the mid 1980s encouraged shipbrokers to diversify away from their core business and to invest in speculative activities — including shipowning — that were initially profitable but risky and financially unstable over the longer term. This diversification, rather than the contraction of the British shipping industry, led to the demise of the shipbroking interests of Eggar, Forrester, a firm that may well have continued to

flourish had it opted to serve as broker in the increasingly international shipping industry. As Jim Buckley's epilogue demonstrates, the provision of the financial and commodity brokering services that underpins flows of cargoes across the world, notwithstanding the collapse of the British-flagged fleet and the virtual eradication of Britain's shipbuilding capacity, has ensured that long-established institutions such as the Baltic Exchange, like the city of London in which it is located, continue to prosper. In essence, this points to the principal conclusion of this volume: that is, the ancillary services that perished during the late twentieth century were those which depended largely on servicing the needs of Britain's maritime interests, with marine engineering and ship repair perhaps offering the best examples of this fatal reliance. At the same time, the ancillaries that survived the massive contractions of the 1970s and 1980s were those which were able to reach beyond British shipping and shipbuilding to the global markets for ships, cargoes and cultural products.