

U DX182

Photographs of a model of the Screw Tug Plato

1987

Historical Background:

The Screw Tug Plato was built in 1901 by Cook, Welton and Gemmel of Beverley. She was first owned by Thomas Wilson & Son of Hull, later the Ellerman Wilson Line but was sold in 1939 to J.A. White & Co. of North Queens Ferry. A condition of the sale was that her name would be changed, which it was, to 'Pleto'. Pleto was requisitioned by the Royal Navy during the war for a period of five years and when it was handed back a survey of damage found 293 defects which took seven months to repair. She returned to Whites at St David's Harbour on the Firth of Forth and was used to tow ships to breakers yards. By the early 1960s, Pleto was becoming too expensive to run and was having boiler problems. She was broken up at St David's Harbour in 1962.

The firm of Thomas Wilson Sons & Co (TWSC), later Ellerman's Wilson Line (EWL) was founded in Hull by Thomas Wilson. This single company helped to make Hull Britain's third largest port by the beginning of the twentieth century.

Thomas Wilson was born in Hull on 12 February 1792. He went to sea as a boy but then became a clerk with Whitaker, Wilkinson & Co., importers of Swedish iron ore, later becoming their commercial traveller in the Sheffield area. On 1 September 1814 he married Susannah John West and they eventually had 15 children. In 1820 he chose to set up in business for himself, relying on various partners for the provision of capital. By 1830, Wilson and his partners owned two ships and in 1841, with the withdrawal of his business partners, Wilson took his eldest son David as a partner in the renamed Thomas Wilson Son & Co. (becoming 'Sons' in about 1850 when Charles Henry and Arthur, the two youngest, joined). By this time the firm had 9 ships, operating mainly to the Baltic in the iron trade, but with other commercial interests in timber and from 1840, the mails for the United Kingdom, Sweden and Norway. New technology was quickly adopted, including new steam vessels.

Expansion followed in the 1850s, with the spread of services to Stettin, Riga, and St Petersburg. When Thomas Wilson died on 21 June 1869 aged 77, his firm had over 20 ships and passed into the hands of his sons Charles and Arthur Wilson. Under the stewardship of the Wilson brothers the firm grew even faster. During the 1860s and 1870s routes were opened to the Adriatic, Sicily, the Black Sea and India. Services to North America were started in 1875 and were quite successful. By 1876, the company owned 43 steamers thus dwarfing the competition in Hull and began buying some of the smaller companies. Services were expanded by the new acquisitions to Hamburg, Antwerp, Dunkirk, Lisbon, St Petersburg, Konigsberg, Copenhagen, Reval, Venice and other Mediterranean ports.

By this time both the brothers had made their mark in society as well as business. Charles Wilson (1833-1907) had married Florence Jane Helen Wellesley, daughter of Col. W.H.C. Wellesley, a descendant of the Duke of Wellington, in 1871. In 1878 he bought Warter Priory near Pocklington (with 300 acres) from Lord Muncaster. By the turn of the century he owned nearly 8000 acres, with an estate near Balmoral, a chalet in Nice, and a London home in Grosvenor Square. He was Liberal M.P. for Hull between 1874-1906, and was created Baron Nunburnholme of Kingston upon Hull in 1906. He died at Warter Priory on 27 October 1907, leaving an estate valued at nearly £1m, and three sons and four daughters.

He was succeeded as Chairman of TWSC by his younger brother, Arthur Wilson (1836-1909). Arthur had bought land at Tranby near Hull and built a mansion, Tranby Croft, completed in 1876. He eventually owned some 3000 acres, was Master of the Holderness Hunt and Sheriff of Hull in 1888-89. The celebrated Baccarat Scandal and libel case occurred

Hull History Centre: Photographs of a model of the Screw Tug Plato

following alleged cheating by a member of the Prince of Wales' party whilst staying at Tranby Croft for the Doncaster St Leger races in September 1890. Wilson himself was untainted, however, becoming High Sheriff of Yorkshire in 1891. He eventually died of cancer on 21 October 1909. He had married Mary Emma Smith of Leeds in July 1863, and left three sons.

Business continued to prosper in the latter years of Charles' and Arthur's reign. But all was not well within the Wilson dynasty, for the sons of Charles and Arthur were disinclined to participate in active management. Oswald Sanderson (1863-1926), a distant relative by marriage, was brought in as General Manager in January 1901, and was soon elected to the Board of Directors, becoming Managing Director in August 1905. After the death of 'Mr Arthur' in October 1909 the job of Chairman passed to his son, E. Kenneth Wilson, while Charles Henry Wellesley Wilson, 2nd Lord Nunburnholme, became Deputy Chairman. At the outbreak of the First World War there were still 92 vessels, of which 7 were operated by WNERSC. In 1916, however, the business was sold to Sir John Reeves Ellerman and was renamed Ellerman's Wilson Line.

Custodial history:

Donated by WH James, Beverley, June 1988

Description:

This small collection contains photographs of a model made of the Screw Tug Plato (later 'Pleto'), built by Cook, Welton and Gemmel of Beverley, and related documents, including plans and a brief history.

Extent: 6 items

Related material:

Records of the Wilson Ellerman Line [U DEW]

Material relating to the Ellerman Wilson Line and company [U DX368]

Records of Earle's Shipbuilding and Engineering Co Ltd. [U DEA]

Earle's Cement manufacturers, ship owners, merchants [C DBEL]

Records of Associated Humber Lines, ship owners [C DBA]

Other repositories:

1884-1971: registers of ships launched and shipyard photographs, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives [ref. DDX/1235]

Cook, Welton And Gemmell, Shipbuilders, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives [ref. DDCO]

Access conditions: Access will be granted to any accredited reader

U DX182/1	Photographs showing Rod Preece's model of the Screw Tug Plato and related documents Includes photocopies of drawings, plans and photographs of S.T. Plato, originally owned by Thomas Wilson and Son of Hull. There is a brief description of the S.T. Plato and its history as well as a sectional elevation plan and plans of its decks. Also includes a review of British Steam Tugs by P.N. Thomas. 6 items	1987
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