

BRITISH-BUILT
BLOCKADE RUNNERS
OF THE
AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

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- before -

The Liverpool Nautical Research Society
on November 7th, 1942.

AT a time when State and local records are generally inaccessible, it may seem presumptuous to put forward any lengthy treatise on this subject, and the following pages merely represent a review of notes collated casually during the past two years.

No comprehensive work relating to the blockade-runners has ever been compiled. Indeed, such a task would be difficult, for their trade was often clandestine, they changed names and ownerships many times, and on occasion were quite indifferent as to the national flag they wore.

On this side of the Atlantic, official lists of seizures and losses are not available, and so the historian must content himself with a discerning scrutiny of contemporary newspaper files, shipbuilders' lists and fleet lists.

At the outset of the war, when Federal cruisers of moderate speed only were in commission, the blockade proved rather lax, and by June, 1861, the "runners" had got into almost full stride, Charleston and Wilmington being then considered relatively easy trips.

Those who have read Captain Bulloch's Secret Service of the Confederate States will recollect the object of his mission to Europe and his use of Liverpool as a base for his activities.

FAST BRITISH CRAFT

It was from that port that he negotiated the purchase and construction of the armed raiders Oreto (re-named Florida) and Alabama, which were soon to prove so costly to Anglo-American friendship and to the British taxpayer. The Confederate Government also appointed the firm of Fraser Trenholme and Co., Liverpool, as European financial agents, the resident partner being then Charles Kuhn Prioleau.

No time was lost in the acquirement or construction of fast British craft for official Confederate account for the purposes of running the blockade. Bermuda, the Bahamas, and Havana were fixed as the chief entrepôts for the trade.

Swift, spick and span paddle steamers, loaded down to their rails almost with cargo and bunkers, were despatched from British ports under the British flag for some such rendezvous as Nassau, where, after filling empty bunker space with additional cargo, they would make a swift run into Savannah or other blockaded port and then return laden with cotton, &c., often arriving with masts shot away and hulls battered after encountering Federal ships of war.

Nassau developed particularly as a base. Coal depots were established on Hog's Island, in addition to construction of a dock in which damaged "runners" could be repaired; and scarcely a night

passed but a speedy craft, painted white or grey (forerunner of our Admiralty grey) sped stealthily into the blackness towards one of the Confederate ports.

This clandestine traffic, however, was not due merely to the plans of Bulloch and his European agents. Enterprising British merchants, mainly associated with the American cotton trade, finding that the war was destined to kill their normal trade for the time being, were quick to discern the financial benefits which might accrue from a contraband trade with the Southern States.

FABULOUS FREIGHT RATES

The hazards of the venture were great, and increased with the growing vigilance and efficiency of the blockading forces, but the prize was valuable. Fabulous freight rates prevailed, and abnormally high rates of pay attracted many skillful and intrepid British mariners, as well as highly qualified engineers.

Thus, the Confederates paid dearly for such importations as reached them by this method. Fortunes were made and lost by merchants and shipowners who owned the vessels, and some indication of the naval and maritime risks involved may be gained from the fact that, in 1864, of the 71 blockade-runners which used one base alone, Bermuda, 43 had been lost by the end of November of that year.

One of the earliest blockade-runners to be constructed in the United Kingdom was the iron-screw steamer Bermuda, 897 tons gross, built by Pearce and Lockwood, in 1861, at Stockton-on-Tees, and fitted with engines of 135 h.p. by Fossick and Hackworth. She was completed in August and moved round to Liverpool, where she was registered in the name of Edwin Haigh, a local cotton broker.

Within a few days of the registration, however, a certificate of sale was executed in favour of A. S. Henckel and George Alfred Trenholme, of Charleston. She made several successful trips, and was manned by a crew of 30 under command of Captain Eugene Tessier, and later Captain C. W. Westendorff, until seized and condemned by the Federal Government towards the end of 1862.

Her sister ship, the Bahama, 887 tons, was launched "by torch light" from the same yard on January 24, 1862, and eventually fitted out on the Mersey, where she was registered in the name of Edwin Haigh, who later transferred her to Frederick Chapman, of London.

Both vessels were barque-rigged and measured 215ft. length by 29.2ft. beam and 8.98ft. depth. The Bahama made many trips, and acted as a tender to the raider Alabama

during the latter's armament on the high seas. In August, 1862, she is shown as clearing from Liverpool for Nassau, with a crew of 45 men under Captain E. L. Tessier, her agents being M. G. Klingender and Co.

The name of Melchior George Klingender appears many times as registered owner or pseudo-owner of vessels employed as blockade-runners, and in 1860 he was agent at Liverpool for the Galway Line of steamers to St. John's, Newfoundland, and the United States.

Neither the Bermuda nor the Bahama had a speed exceeding 10 or 11 knots, and indeed at this early stage of the war little more was needed to elude the vigilance of Federal cruisers.

During these early months, the aggregate tonnage of the blockade-runners was not considerable, and consisted mainly of small, though fairly fast, cargo vessels purchased from British owners. By the spring of 1862 the blockade tightened up, and so swifter craft were needed.

In April of that year the iron paddle steamers *Anglia* (456 tons gross) and *Scotia* (462 tons gross), built in 1847 at West Ham and Blackwall respectively, were purchased and despatched from the Mersey for Nassau. Both had been employed for years in the Holyhead-Dublin mail service and were capable of 15 knots per hour. They were each schooner-rigged and two-funnelled.

EIGHT SUCCESSFUL TRIPS

The *Anglia*, which was commanded by Captain A. Newlands, is shown in the Liverpool registry as owned by Alexander Duranty, a local merchant. She was captured in 1862 by Federal warships.

The *Scotia*, under Captain R. H. Eustace and later Captain Lilly, of Charleston, made several voyages until captured in 1862. She was registered at Liverpool in the names of J. Dorrington, merchant, of Manchester, and W. B. Forwood, a prominent Liverpool merchant.

The first Liverpool-built blockade-runner was the little steel paddle-steamer *Banshee*, 325 tons gross, 217 tons nett, built by Jones, Quiggin and Co. in 1862. Her construction consisted of steel plates on an iron frame, and for this she is remarkable as being the first steel steamer ever to make the North Atlantic voyage.

She measured 214ft. length, 20ft. breadth, and 8ft. depth, and had extraordinary fine lines, with an elliptical stern and a turtle-back deck forward, while her rig consisted of two pole masts without yards. She was fitted with engines of 120 h.p., which gave her a speed of more than 11 knots.

She was registered under the ownership of John Toulmin Lawrence, a well-known Liverpool merchant . . . but within a few days a certificate of sale was executed in

favour of Thomas E. Taylor, one of Lawrence's employes, and who became his agent at Nassau, for whence she cleared from the Mersey on March 2, 1863, with a crew of 36. Her plates were $\frac{1}{2}$ in. and $\frac{3}{4}$ in. thick, and she proved so leaky at the outset that she was compelled to put into an Irish port and, after repair, reached Nassau safely.

The *Banshee* made eight successful blockade-running trips which returned her shareholders 700 per cent. of their capital, until she was captured in 1863 by a Federal gun-boat and converted into a ship of war. The story of the *Banshee* is well told in Tom E. Taylor's "Running the Blockade."

She was followed, in 1863, by the iron paddle steamer *Wild Dayrell*, of the same tonnage and from the same yard, with engines of 150 h.p.

This vessel was registered at Liverpool in the name of Edward Lawrence, and on November 17, 1863, cleared for Nassau, with a crew of 26 under Captain T. Cubbins. Her career proved short, news reaching the Mersey early in February, 1864, that she had been destroyed off Charleston.

Meanwhile, a sister ship, the *Lucy*, a steel paddle steamer, fitted with 150 h.p. engines by Fawcett, Preston and Co., was completed by Jones, Quiggin and Co. in 1863 and registered as owned by E. J. Lomnitz, of Manchester. She cleared in October of that year for Nassau, with a crew of 32 men under Captain J. A. Duignid, but was captured three months later, while off Wilmington.

ANOTHER BANSHEE

A second and larger *Banshee* was built in 1864 for the Lawrence firm. She was a steel paddle vessel of 628 tons gross and 438 tons net, from the yard of Aitken and Mansell, on the Clyde. She measured 252.6ft. length, 31.2 beam and 11.2ft. depth and, fitted with engines of 250 h.p., attained a speed of 16 knots. Built at a high cost, she carried a crew of 53, and proved a most efficient blockade-runner.

Once she ran into Wilmington through a fleet of 64 vessels, the last part of the journey being made in broad daylight and in full view of the Federal fleet.

On another occasion the *Banshee* made a wild bid for Galveston over a notorious shoal, during which she was exposed the whole time to Federal fire. With funnels riddled with shot, however, she bumped her way over the shoal and got safely into port. This vessel was last heard of at Havana at the close of the war.

Among the Mersey-built blockade-runners was the famous Colonel Lamb, a steel paddle vessel of 1,132 tons. She was a rakish model, schooner-rigged, with two funnels

and an elliptic stern. her measurements being 279.5ft. length, 35.95ft. breadth, and 15.35ft. depth. Built by Jones, Quiggin and Co., she was launched in 1864 and christened by Mrs. Tom Lockwood.

The largest steel-built vessel up to that date, she excited much attention and there existed great speculation as to her vocation, particularly since she was fitted with engines of 350 h.p. by James Jack and Co., Liverpool.

Her paddles, equipped with feathering floats, had a diameter of 25ft., and for a trial trip she was raced against the Isle of Man Steam Packet Co.'s steamer Douglas (II.), attaining a speed of 16½ knots against heavy seas and head winds. She was registered at Liverpool in September, 1864, in the name of William Quiggin, who later assigned her to J. B. Fafitte, of Nassau.

Named after the valiant commander of Fort Fisher, whose guns had so often saved blockade-runners from the fire of pursuing Federal ships, she was obviously designed for the blockade service, but she appeared so large that much suspicion was aroused in the minds of Federal representatives here.

BLOWN UP AT ANCHOR

A report from the Consulate at Liverpool dated September 7, 1864, states: "Enclosed is a description of the new steel steamer Colonel Lamb just finished at this port. This is one of the largest and best built steamers that has been constructed in this country for running the blockade.

"I understand that this steamer has been built for the Confederacy and now belongs to them, but no doubt Fraser Trenholme will take out a British register for her. . . . I regard her as a very superior steamer. If armed with one or two guns she would be able to do much mischief as a privateer."

After leaving the Mersey she proved quite a bogey to the Northerners, and on October 5, 1864, was reported from Halifax to be leaving for Wilmington, being described as a "long, low, rakish vessel, at present light lead colour."

A letter from the Secretary of the Navy to Rear-Admiral Porter even went so far as to state that a European State, possibly Poland, would send some 30,000 soldiers to help the Southern forces, and that 50 steamers of the Colonel Lamb class would be built to run these troops through the blockade. A later despatch mentions a belief that the vessel would be converted into a privateer.

The Colonel Lamb was commanded by the famous Tom Lockwood and proved one of the first vessels to get back to the Mersey at the close of the war. She was

then sold to the Brazilian Government and chartered to take a cargo of explosives across the Atlantic, but was blown up while riding at anchor in the Mersey on the night before sailing.

One of the first firms commissioned, through Captain Bulloch, for constructing blockade-runners was William C. Miller and Co., who also constructed the famous armed raider Florida, ex Oretto, and the less successful gun-boat Alexandra, seized by British authorities while outfitting at Liverpool.

One of this firm's blockade-runners met a terrible fate. She was the Lelia, a steel paddler of 640 tons, 300 h.p., built in 1864, with a speed of over 18 miles an hour.

She was registered at Liverpool in the name of Henry Elias Moss, and left the Mersey on January 16, 1865. Like all the "runners," she lay very low in the water, being loaded down by bunkers and cargo.

Under the command of Captain Thomas Buxton Skinner, of Virginia, she carried a crew of 49, which included 20 in the engine-room staff, in addition to the Cork pilot and several passengers, among whom were Thomas Miller, son of the builder, J. B. Cropper, a Liverpool merchant, and a Captain Arthur St. Clare. Captain Skinner was 38 years of age.

The vessel herself was insured for £32,000, and leaving Liverpool she headed into a fierce storm outside the Mersey and foundered. Passengers and crew made for the boats, but 47 lives were lost, this heavy toll (according to subsequent inquiry findings) being due to the fact that the Lelia's four boats were found in the emergency to be without rowlocks. The captain and all his officers lost their lives.

While the existence and activities of the blockade-runners proved a costly business to both belligerents, there can be little doubt that the seamanship, courage, engineering skill and innovation in ship design and construction must have influenced the subsequent development of the North Atlantic liner, for it is hard to realise that the speed of these paddle-steamers sometimes reached 20 knots—a speed which our large ocean "greyhounds" did not achieve until some 30 years later.

Just a few of the hundreds of blockade-runners, built in this country, have been selected from my records, but it is hoped that such as have been mentioned are sufficient to permit us to appreciate the wide extent of this clandestine traffic and to distinguish firmly between blockade-runner and armed raider, for it is notorious that such cruisers as the Alabama, Shenandoah, Florida, &c., are popularly mentioned as being "blockade-runners," which they were not!