

Occupation: Master Mariner

Edmondson commanded Jervis's J H Barrow for 14 years and Walton's Mary Sinclair for 21 years, and in between these two ships he took the Mary Ashburner on her first voyage.

Edmondson, like his brothers, had probably no option but to follow the sea. In those hard days the children did as the fathers commanded and as the father earned his living piloting ships in and out of the ports of Barrow and Ulverston there is no doubt that his sons would be put to helping on the pilot boat as soon as they could row the dinghy or wield a paintbrush.

With other children coming up to take his place and money being scarce, Edmondson Charnley, after elementary schooling, joined the coasting schooners as a boy at the age of 12.

#### EDMONDSON'S REPUTATION EARNS HIM PROMOTION TO CAPTAIN AT 17

Serving for a pittance of wages, Edmondson Charnley had to make meals for the crew, clean the ship and help work cargo, in addition to being on call to assist in the working of the ship.

By the time the local firm of James Fisher and Sons had come into ship owning and ship management in 1855, he was already a seaman of some repute.

Working in the coastal trade carrying iron ore from the growing port of Barrow to South Wales and Scottish ports, often returning with cargoes of coal, the seamen in the coasting schooners had a hard life but there was opportunity for anyone who could work hard and was able to read and write.

Not many seamen could in those days, but Edmondson had all these qualities and he rose to be mate of a small vessel at the age of 15 and was acting as captain at the age of 17.

Although schooner masters at the age of 19 were not unknown at the time, Captain Edmondson at 17 must certainly have had some other outstanding qualities to be promoted at such an early age. Possibly he was, at first, master of one of the small smacks or sloops, which only carried a crew of two men and a boy.

James Fisher built up his fleet in conjunction with the growth of Barrow, beginning with the ships such as the schooner, Leo, built in 1848, Amelia built in 1850 and Furness Miner built at Barrow in 1855.

Captain Edmondson Charnley was one of the first local masters in the James Fisher fleet and served on some of these vessels with which he was always associated.

In 1876 James Fisher was still expanding his fleet to keep up with the trade to and from Barrow and he ordered a schooner of 116 gross tons to be built by Barclay's of Ardrossen.

Named the Mary Sinclair (who the original lady has been lost in the mists of time) this new schooner came to Barrow and was immediately placed under the command of one of the most experienced and successful masters - Captain Edmondson Charnley.

From then on, the partnership of Captain Charnley and the Mary Sinclair was well known throughout the ports of Britain and amongst the shipping fraternity of the day.

Although Mary Sinclair was not really a big schooner - her dimensions were 88 ft 8" overall length, 21 ft 4" of beam and 10 ft 5" of draught - this smart little two masted vessel was reputed to be one of the fastest schooners afloat. Even carrying her 100 ton cargo of iron ore, there were few coasting craft that could catch her in a good breeze.

Once, only a few hours after Mary Sinclair docked at Barrow, the Captain's wife gave birth to a son after she had made the passage up the coast from Liverpool.

This son, Pilot "Uncle EB" Charnley comes into the story with his elder brother, William Kelsall Charnley, at a later date.

It was said of Captain Charnley that he "looked after his ships and his crew" and that his knowledge of the coasts and harbors of Britain was second to none. In consequence, Mary Sinclair was sailed hard but safely and usually paid a good dividend to the holders of her 764 shares.

The schooner was sold out of Fisher's ownership in 1890 and although then owned by J Walton and Company of Barrow, she was still managed by Fishers and commanded by Captain Charnley.

On September 10th 1890, Mary Sinclair was in Glasson Dock awaiting a cargo when her long serving master died in his sleep, aged 60.

When word of the Captain's death reached Barrow, the Pilot Cutter Abicore, manned entirely by Edmondson's sons, brothers, uncles, nephews and cousins, sailed across the Bay to bring the body home for burial at Rampside.

So great was the esteem in which the late Captain was held that several years later the wife of Pilot Curwen of Roa Island, penned the poem in his memory.

It may be of interest to record the fate of the Mary Sinclair. During the 1914-18 War she was going about her business as usual, carrying general cargoes to the smaller ports of the British Isles when, in 1918, in company with the Mary Ann Mandall, she was attacked by a German U-boat off Littlehampton.

Both Schooners had recently been armed and returned the submarine's fire. Moving further away, the U-boat increased her attack, firing with her heavier 4-inch deck gun. Upon the approach of an armed trawler the U-boat dived and escaped.

Damage to the sailing vessels was slight. Mary Sinclair escaped unscathed but Mary Ann Mandall had her topmast shot away.

Both ships survived until the 1930s. Mary Sinclair, still purely a sailing vessel, owned by Grounds of Runcorn and used in the china clay trade from Cornwall, was damaged in the Mersey and became a sand barge under the name of Rennerdale. She disintegrated at Runcorn about 1950.

A sad end to a fine little ship that will always be associated with her first Captain, Edmondson Charnley.

A memento of Captain Edmondson Charnley is still in service to this day.

A Book of Common Prayer, bearing his name and that of Mary Sinclair, and dated September 1879, is in the possession of Coxswain Bob Charnley of the Barrow Lifeboat and is used by him on the occasions that a burial at sea or scattering of ashes is conducted from the lifeboats.

Poem written in memory of Edmondson Charnley by the wife of Pilot Curwen of Roe Island

Over the sunlit waters of the Bay  
Under the blue and white Sabbath skies  
Homeward the Pilot Cutter makes her way  
On deck a weary Skipper lies  
The sportive waves around the vessel play  
O'head the Flu'ttring Flag at half mast Flies

Soundly the Skipper sleeps, the Flapping sail  
Disturbs him not nor yet the creaking mast  
The Rattling shrouds he hears not nor the hail  
Of Friendly voices when the anchor is Cast  
For his barque has weathered its final Gale  
And the old Skipper's last voyage is fast.

No adverse winds now check his Progress where  
No rocks obstruct and no neap tides delay  
The Tide is full, the balmy winds are fair  
Which waft the spirit back upon its way  
No mists arise no gathering darkness there  
For in that region it is always day.

O Land O Promised Land, Land of the Blest  
We turn wistful tear dimmed eyes to Thee  
For life is but a troubled dream at Best  
From which we wake when Kind Death seats us Free  
And in thy clime the Mariner may Rest  
For there - Tis said there shall be no more Sea.

Annie Isabel Curwen