

Steam Drifter Peggy

Built by Fran Oakey



The prototype Peggy was a steel-hulled herring drifter, typical of the drifters built during the early part of the twentieth century. She was built by Hall and Russell of Aberdeen in 1907, for W. H. Leask and J. Strachan and powered by steam. She was 86ft 4in long, with a beam of 18ft 6in, her gross tonnage was 100 tons, net tonnage 39 tons, and she was fitted with a 38 HP steam engine. Her Official no was 119617 and her port number was PD 149, PD being the registration letters for Peterhead. There were hundreds of these boats built in boat yards in Scotland and England. The first two steamers, the “Waterwitch” of Leith, and the “Alpha” of Wick appeared at Wick in 1880.

During the First World War Peggy was used by the Admiralty as an Admirals barge and she was also used to lay a cable from Peterhead to Russia, for the British and Russian governments. In fact, during both world wars many of these hard working and seaworthy drifters, and trawlers, were requisitioned or chartered by the Admiralty for naval use and many were damaged or lost at sea. Those boats that survived the war were returned to their owners with the offer of a refit or a grant. A building programme to a standardised plan was initiated to replace the boats that were lost, and the new boats became known as Admiralty Standard drifters. Peggy was finally broken up in 1938.

To complete the story, a drifter is a boat that fished for herring using long nets that hung vertically in the sea. The mesh was about an inch and at that point in time they were made of cotton, which was about a third the weight of the earlier hemp nets. This meant that boats could carry longer nets for the same weight, and therefore increase their catch ability.

The model Peggy, as depicted by Caldercraft, was probably after the First World War, as the kit model shows many features of the Admiralty Standard boats. The printed deck supplied in the kit ends at the front of the superstructure which is as shown on the Admiralty Standard drawings. The deck on my model has been planked from bow to stern, as is the last surviving steam drifter Lydia Eva. When I photographed her at Lowestoft she was in a very sorry state of repair.

My model was built from the Caldercraft kit after a great deal of research and with many modifications so that my model of Peggy should look, as near as possible, like the original full size boat in her earlier years. I was able to buy a photograph from the Scottish fisheries museum, so my Peggy was built as she was at the time of the photograph, c. 1912. Items such as deck lights, the shape of the bow etc, have been remade or reworked to achieve this end. Fully functional lighting has been installed, but at this point in time they are not controlled from the transmitter, may be at a later date.

The model, like the full size, is powered with a steam plant, a Cheddar Puffin boiler supplying steam to a Maxwell Hemmens double acting two cylinder steam engine. The boiler is gas fired using a Butane and Propane gas mixture from a refillable cylinder. Control of the boat is from a JR 388 transmitter and a PPM receiver.