

Neptune's Prefabs – the TIDs, CHANTs and Fabrics

Winston Churchill made his 'The end of the beginning' speech in November 1942, when Britain had tasted of victory for the first time in the war. Now it was time to think about landings, rather than retreats; but that brought about an even greater requirement for ships of all types.

Every estuary and harbour tug that could be transferred to coastal work had been, but the country was still short by several hundred. Among the places where the shortage was felt were the docks. A order went out to 'design, organise and start work immediately toward achieving, in the shortest possible time, the delivery of one tug per week, using in the process, little or no shipyard labour.'

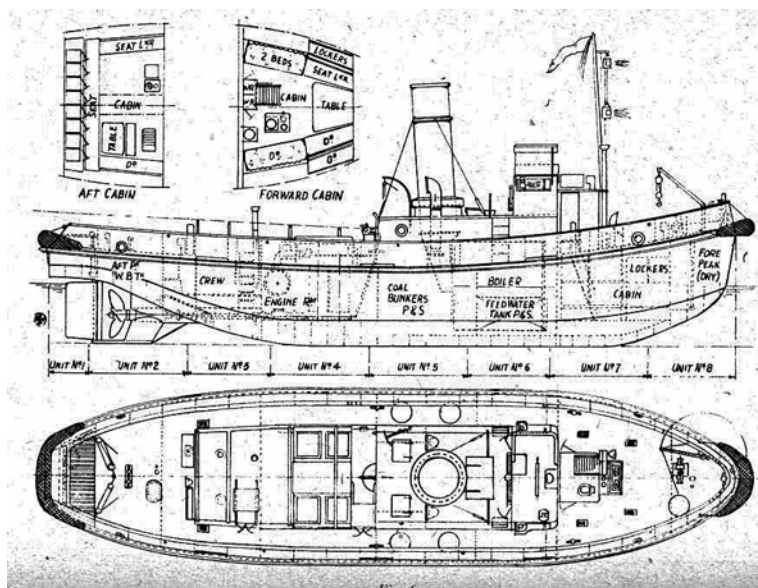
Those who received this order decided on a chine hull form, which could be built using only flat plate. A model was made and tank tested; during the testing a second chine was added. The hull was to be fabricated in eight sections, the heaviest weighing eight tons. These were to be welded inland and road-hauled to a shipyard. The last ten inches of the plate laps were not welded, allowing for minor adjustments on assembly at the yard.

The TIDs were 65 feet between perpendiculars, 74 feet overall, with a beam of 17 feet and a depth of 8 feet. The displacement was 124 tons. For shipment the tugs could be loaded as deck cargo, athwartships. The tug was propelled by a 220 ihp compound engine, with a vertical boiler; the earlier versions were all coal fired. The bollard pull was two tons. No one can agree where the TID name came from, I prefer the idea that it was short for tiddler.

The first order was for 12 to be assembled at the Dunston yard at Thorn. This quickly increased to 25, then as soon as production began, to 50 and then 100. The average assembly time was five days, the record being four.

Dunston's routine was to tow the completed hull to Hessle, where the engine and boiler were fitted. The new tug would then steam back to Thorne, and tow the next hull to Hessle, before going into service. This extraordinary rate of delivery went on week after week. Separate, but smaller, production lines were set up at the Pickersgill yard in Sunderland and the Henry Scarr yard at Hessle.

In all 182 were built, 90 were coal burners and sixty were oil burners. The final 32 also burnt oil, these were shipped to the tropics. They were also operated by both the Navy and the Army. After the war they were carried all over the world, with significant numbers going to Finland, France and Asia. Three were bought by Risdon Beazley's Lloyds Albert Yard MP Co and later sold on to United Towing in Hull. Husbands shipyard had a couple and one became the Alexandra tug Ower. A few still exist.



TID 75: ADHERENCE

12.12.1952: British Mercantile Registry belatedly closed, consequent of transfer to the Admiralty.

10.10.1960: Sold to Henry George Pounds, Portsmouth.

1965: Resold to Husband's Shipyards Ltd., Marchwood, re-engined and renamed *ADHERENCE*.

18.10.1996: Purchased covertly by H.M. Customs and Excise and believed unofficially renamed *ADHERENCE II* for use in a drug smuggling investigation.

22.10.1996: Sailed as a decoy vessel to rendezvous in Bay of



Biscay with yacht *FATA MORGANA*, believed to be carrying cannabis.

23.10.1996: Fuel supply problems necessitated the temporary transfer of an engineer, by helicopter from *HMS CHATHAM*.

24.10.1996: *ADHERENCE II* rendezvoused with *FATA MORGANA* and 145 bales of 'cargo' were transferred to the tug next day.

25.10.1996: During her homeward passage in rough seas, took on water and at 15:40 UTC, sank at 47.27N., 08.43W., in the Bay of Biscay. The crew of four, all undercover Customs & Excise men, were rescued from their dinghy by the German mv *HORNCLIFF* (12,887g./92) and transferred to *HMS CHATHAM* later that day.

The MAIB did not learn of the loss of the tug until the 9th June 1997 and the result of their subsequent enquiry, along with a whiff of disapproval, can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/maib-reports/flooding-and-sinking-of-tug-adherence-in-the-bay-of-biscay>

During the Overlord planning process, it became obvious that it would be prudent to design a coastal tanker that could carry either bulk or cased petrol, at least until the PLUTO system came into operation.

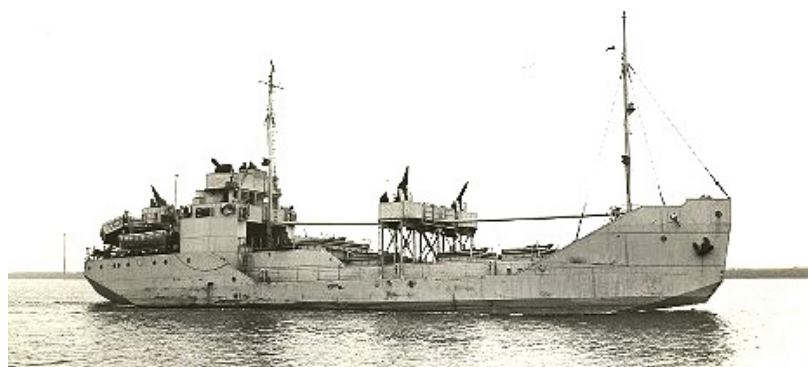
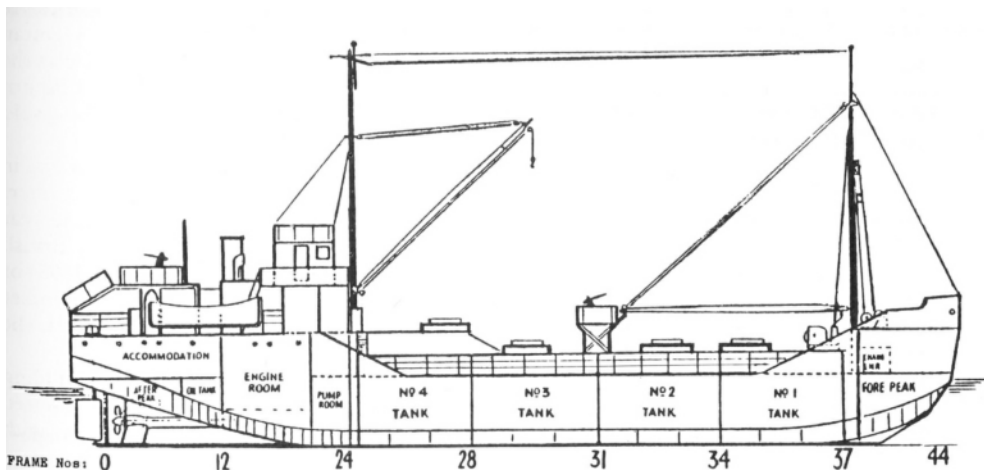
After tank tests it was decided that a second chine should be added. A skeg was also added. Mitchell and Sawyer say that this was 'of aerofoil shape' and was, therefore, the only plating on the ship that had more than a single curve. They were longitudinally framed.

With the shipyards working at full capacity, it was decided that the 28 component parts of the ships should be built by inland fabricators and road hauled to the ship builders for assembly. This method had already been used for the TID tugs. The weight of the units did not exceed 13 tons. While primarily designed to carry petrol in bulk, they also had steel hatch covers, rather like those on a deep tank, to allow for case petrol to be transported. For this reason two thirty hundredweight SWL derricks were fitted.

The engines came from a number of manufacturers, including: Crossley, British Auxiliaries, Blackstone, Lister and Ruston Hornsby.

The sections were assembled in five shipyards, all on the Humber, between February and July 1944. In all 43 were built; most were managed by coasting companies, plus General Steam and Ellerman Wilson.

The ships were 148' overall, with a beam of 27'. They were just over 400 grt and 450 dwt. Various diesel engines in the range 220/270 horse power were fitted, giving a service speed of about 7 1/2 knots. The hulls were made up of flat plate, with a double chine (the corner at the bilge) and double skinned. Forty-three were built and a further 25 were completed as dry cargo coasters. The latter were initially called Fabrics; they went into service with Empire names, each beginning with F.



presented for Special Survey. Several were converted into barges, and one to a floating restaurant – so somewhere in the blue yonder, one may still exist.

Roy Martin

As your editor I was pleased to find the picture on the opposite page on the website of Medway Maritime Trust. Pleased because it not only shows the ADHERENCE off the Dockhead in Southampton (that's Hythe Pier top right) but also includes one of the old Red Funnel ferries (Carisbrooke Castle or Osborne Castle?) on which I worked when I first came ashore in the early '70s. And the smaller vessel in line with the ferry may well be the Harbour Patrol vessel SHB Triton, on which I also worked as a Marine Officer from the mid '70s. So many memories in one small photograph. Ed.

The result was not as ugly as it sounds, though they seem to have been somewhat unstable and were apparently a nightmare to steer. The *Chant 63* had capsized and sank off Flamborough Head on 5 June.

A further 25 were completed as dry-cargo ships. At first these were to be named Fabric, followed by their intended CHANT number. Before delivery they were given Empire names, all beginning with Fa – no comment!

After the war British owners were not interested in the CHANTs, so most were sold overseas. The Fabrics were better liked and a number remained on the British register, with others going elsewhere, including Canada. Few, if any, were



Chant 60 and Chant 61, J Readhead and Sons, South Shields.

Tyne and Wear Archives via Wikipedia.