

CASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

PHILIP BECHERVAISE  
CASPÉ CHIPBUILDER  
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KEN ANNETT

PHILIP BECHERVAISE - GASPÉ SHIPBUILDER

FOREWORD

The copy of the letter that lies before me is dated April 26th., 1808 and was written from Jersey, Channel Islands, by Philip Bechervaise Sr. to his son, Philip Jr. in far distant Gaspé. The letter has a number of references to the difficult situation then prevailing in Jersey, which lay, in 1808, in the very shadow of France which was then dominated by Napoleon at the apex of his might and power. England and France had been at war for five long years and though the British, by virtue of their superb naval tradition, were dominant at sea, Napoleon had made himself master of the continent of Europe. Nor was any early end to the struggle between Napoleonic France and Great Britain in sight - it would prove to be a test of endurance for seven more long years and for the people of the Channel Islands fraught with constant threat and anxiety for their maritime trade and very freedom. It is not surprising, therefore that the father, Philip Sr. urged his son to remain in Canada while war prevailed overseas. He wrote:

"...You are where money is to be earned; whereas here your youth would be wasted. There isn't a cent to be made, and we are constantly harassed. How often would you regret not having taken my advice...You are now earning your own money; you are making good wages... You would be twenty years in Jersey before you would make the money you do now in a year. Now you can put away £ 900 a year, and when peace comes you may find employment with some fine person in Jersey or elsewhere..."

However, Bechervaise family history holds that Philip Jr., disregarding his father's advice, did attempt to return home to Jersey but was taken captive and spent some ten years in prison before regaining his freedom. It was not until c.1820 that he returned to Gaspé Basin. There he married Margaret Coffin and established his home and shipbuilding business. The descendants of Philip and Margaret Coffin Bechervaise, linked by marriage with such Gaspeian families as Languedoc, Tuzo, Patterson, Stewart, Eden, Guignon, Coffin, Annett, Vardon, Vibert, Boyle,

Robson, Miller, Clark, Dumaresq, Eyr, Cunnings, Journeau, Hall have bound the Bechervaise family name inextricable into the social and economic fabric of Gaspesia.

### BACK-TO-SCENE

Let us, by the modern concept of time-warp, go back in time to November 11, 1824 to find ourselves, together with Philip Bechervaise of Gaspé Basin and the notary, Laughton Thomas McPherson in the latter's office in the old City of Québec. Before turning to business the two men would, would, no doubt, have talked of Gaspesia—for McPherson, as a son of Daniel McPherson who had been prominent in the Gaspé fishery at Douglastown and Point St. Peter, was Gaspesian by birth and had lived there from the time of his birth in 1790 until his father had purchased the Seigniory of Crane Island (Île aux Grues), off Montmagny, in 1802. In November, 1824, Daniel McPherson, still hale and hearty, was living in his Manor House on Crane Island and would continue to do so until 1829 when he went to live ashore at St. Thomas de Montmagny until the time of his death in June, 1840. Philip Bechervaise likely knew the notary's brother, John, born at Douglastown in 1783. John would become the Seigneur of Crane Island following the death of Daniel. A sister of Laughton Thomas and John, Charlotte McPherson, was the wife of Colonel Henry Johnston who was well-known in Gaspesia.

Conversation between Bechervaise and McPherson may well have recalled other contemporary Gaspesians who were clients of the notary. These included:

- . Joseph Stowe Tuzo for whom McPherson had drawn Deeds as early as 1817 when Tuzo was sailing from Québec to the West Indies, including Jamaica and Rum Key, on trading voyages and who had settled in Gaspesia in the early 1820's.
- . The sea Captains, Benjamin Tuzo of the Brig "SUPERB" and Henry Haffey Tuzo of the schooner "SARAH" trading between Québec and the West Indies and Bermuda.
- . Robert Sherar, prominent Merchant Trader and Shipbuilder of New Carlisle.

- . The Annett Brothers of Gaspé Bay, George, John, Richard and William, Shipbuilders and Mariners. Their schooner, "FOUR BROTHERS", built in 1808, was in 1816 under the command of Capt. Andrew Fass after having previously been commanded by Capt. Charles Stewart of Gaspé.
- . The Miller Brothers of Gaspé, Edward, John, Richard and William partners in the trading firm of John Miller and Company.
- . James and William Baker, owners of the schooner "SEAFLOWER" built at Gaspé in 1819.
- . George Sivret, Master of the schooner "CLIVE" of Gaspé, previously under the command of Capt. John LeGresley.
- . John Lodridge, Ship Carpenter for Joseph Lente at Lancton in Bay Chaleur.

#### TO THE BUSINESS AT HAND

Turning to the business at hand Notary McPherson began to draft a Deed of Procuration by Philip Bechervaise to Charles William Ross, a Merchant of Québec with respect to a contract with Edward O'Hara by which Bechervaise would build a ship or vessel at Gaspé Basin in accordance with terms agreed upon and annexed to the Deed of Procuration. As it is this annex that provides us, 160 years later, with a remarkably clear and detailed insight into the shipbuilding enterprise of Philip Bechervaise at Gaspé, its text is reproduced below:





On the \_\_\_\_\_ day of November  
 in the year of Our Lord one thousand eight  
 hundred and twenty \_\_\_\_\_ Before us the  
 undersigned Notaries Public, duly admitted  
 and sworn for the Province of Lower Canada  
 and residing at the City of Quebec in the  
 said Province, personally came, appeared  
 and were present M<sup>r</sup>. Philipe Bechervais,  
 of the place called Gaspe, in the District  
 of Gaspe and Province of Lower Canada,  
 Master Shipbuilder, represented here to by M<sup>r</sup>.  
 Charles William Ross, of the City of Quebec,  
 Merchant; his Attorney duly constituted and  
 appointed for the ends hereof in and by the  
 Letter of Attorney hereunto subjoined, of the  
 one Part; and M<sup>r</sup>. Edward Pitavan, of the  
 City of Quebec, Merchant, of the other Part:  
 Which said parties, in the presence of us the  
 said Notaries, did and by these presents do  
 declare, admit, promise, covenant and agree  
 to and with the other of them, for them-  
 selves and their respective Heirs, Executors





as to Shift without ballast. The said Vessel  
to be built entirely of black birch, Juniper,  
Elm, Cedar and Pine Timber, each of the  
said kinds of Wood to be used and put  
in the parts of the said Vessel where the  
same may be most suitable, and the whole  
to be good, sound, merchantable and well seasoned,  
the said Vessel to be copper fastened to twelve  
inches above her light water mark, planked  
in the bottom with three inch Elm or Black  
Birch, the ~~boards~~ the plank of the ~~boards~~ and  
top sides to be of Juniper, boards five inches  
thick, and top sides two and a half inches  
thick, the Deck's to be of white pine, Deals  
three inches thick, free from louse and bad  
knots, and half Deck's ~~free of water~~, the  
said Vessel to have one Coat of priming paint  
outside and inside upon Deck, the said  
Builder to furnish two Boats with a set of  
yards, masts, gaffs, booms, spars, caps and  
cross-trees, complete. The scantling frame of  
Timber and other materials to be full and  
sufficiently large for a Vessel of the size herein



3.

10 described, the said Builder to furnish and provide all the materials, articles and things of every kind and description necessary to complete the said Carpenter and Joiner's work of the Hull and Spars of the said Vessel, including her Cabin, which shall be built up and furnished in a neat and convenient manner, and also including all iron and spikes, bolts &c and all Smith, Plumber and Glazier's work, but not including any Block-maker or Smith's works whatever concerning or regarding the rigging of the said Vessel, as also the Copper bolts necessary for fastening the said Vessel, as aforesaid, with Rudder bands and Dove tail plates and Dead eyes and chains, the whole of which shall be furnished and delivered by the said Edward O'Hara to the said Builder, ~~at the Shipyard~~ The whole of the said Work and materials to be subject to the approval, examination and inspection of experienced and disinterested

persons. The said Vessel to be finished and completed ~~and finished~~ according to the tenor, meaning and intention of these presents, caulked and paid with proper stuff, and launched and delivered afloat to the said Edward O'Hara, his Agents or Assigns, at Gaspe aforesaid, with her lower Mast and Bowsprit in and fixed, in the month of July in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and twenty six, and with the necessary certificate of her built (Builder's Certificate) in order to enable the said Edward O'Hara to cause the said Vessel to be registered, according to Law.

And it is further agreed between the said parties that the Hull or Body of the said Vessel and all her materials, while the said Vessel shall be building and until she be safely delivered afloat, as aforesaid, shall be at the sole risk and charge of the said Builder, and should fire or any other unforeseen accident or event occur and

prevents the delivery of the said Vessel in the time and manner aforesaid, that in such case the said builder shall and will, and he doth hereby bind and oblige himself, forthwith on such accidents happening, to refund and repay to the said Edward O'Hara the entire of the monies received by him the said Builder from the said Edward O'Hara under and by virtue of these presents, as also the full cost, value and amount of all and every the materials, articles and things furnished and delivered by the said Edward O'Hara to the said Builder under and by virtue of these presents.

The Present Contract is thus made, and entered into for and in consideration of the rate or price of Six Pounds, ten shillings, Halifax Currency, for each and every Ton the said Vessel will admeasure according to her Register, regard being had to her dimensions aforesaid, for and on account and in part payment whereof the said Philip Bechervais doth hereby acknow



ledge and confess to have received from the  
 said Edward O'Hara, before the Execution of  
 these presents, in Money and goods, the sum  
 of  
 said Current Money, and as to the residue of  
 the Amount of the presents Contract the said  
 Edward O'Hara doth here by promise, bind and  
 oblige himself to pay the same to the said  
 Builder from time to time as he may  
 progress with the said undertaking, in manner  
 following, that is to say, in and by such  
 reasonable sums as may be necessary to enable  
 the said Builder to go on with the said Works  
 and the building and delivering of the said  
 Vessel, as aforesaid, not however to exceed the  
 sum of

and so to continue till the said Vessel be  
 launched and delivered, as aforesaid

And it is hereby further agreed that the  
 said Vessel shall be finished upon Deck in  
 a similar manner to the Brig Cherub, of  
 Greenock, Rayside, Master, Gallows wurch  
 excepted, that the said Vessel's Masts shall



be of the fullest size, lower mast & be of white pine, topmasts and lower yards to be of spruce. And lastly, that the Iron bolts and nails which the said Builder may require for the building of the said Vessel, shall be imported from England for him (should he require) by the said Edward O'Hara in any charge for Commission by or on the part of the said Edward O'Hara, who shall however be entitled to Invoice cost and charges and such other costs and charges as the said articles may be subject to, the whole amount or cost of which <sup>said</sup> articles shall be repaid on account of the monies to be paid and advanced to the said Builder, as aforesaid, and on account and in part payment of the last payments to become due on account thereof.

And for the due performance and observance of these presents by them the said parties respectively, they do hereby bind and oblige themselves the one towards the other in the sum or

penalty of Two Thousand pounds, said currency, and for the payment of which, in case of default, the said parties, do hereby bind and oblige themselves the one towards the other, firmly by these presents. And for the execution of these presents the said Philip Becherwaie hath made election of Domicile irrevocable at the residence of the said Charles William Robt. at the City of Quebec, and the said Edward Pitars at his usual residence aforesaid.

Thus Done and Passed at the said City of Quebec, at the Office of S. J. Macpherson, one of us the said Notaries, on the day and year first above written. In Faith and Testimony Whereof the said parties have to these presents, first duly read, set and subscribed their respective names and signatures, in the presence of us the said Notaries, also hereunto subscribing.

Wm Lindsay N.O.

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Philip Becherwaie -

R. M. Plesco N.O.  
O.D.

PROPOS OF CONTRACT REFERENCES

The reader will recognize Edward O'Hara, for whom Philip Lechervaise was building the vessel, as a son of the Gaspé Basin pioneers, Felix and Martha McJormach O'Hara. His career has been outlined by CASPE OF YESTERDAY in the article, THE O'HARA FAMILY OF CASPE [ CASPE, June 21, 1982 ] Born at Gaspé Basin in 1767, Edward O'Hara had distinguished careers in business, politics and the military. His death occurred in 1833, nine years after this contract with Philip Lechervaise.

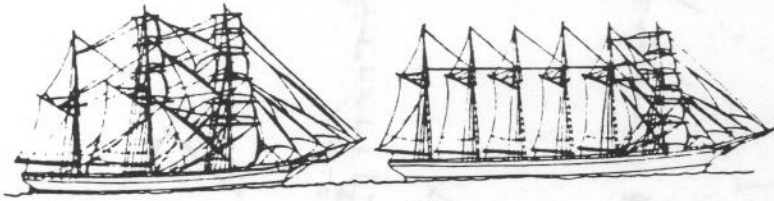
The provisions of the contract concerning possible damage from fire during the building of the ship were far from pro forma. Only three years previously, in 1821, the settlement on the shores of Gaspé Basin had almost been wiped out by a raging forest fire in the month of June. Dr. A. Von Iffland of Québec, then on a visit to Gaspé, wrote:

"...the fire was so violent that it menaced the woods of all the land bordering Gaspé Bay. The Protestant (Anglican) Church was burned to the ground four hours after the congregation had met in it for Service and had it not been for the efforts of the populace, a vessel in the shipyard would have suffered the same fate..."

. "to be Bark rigged". Three-masted vessel with fore and main masts square rigged, and mizen fore and aft rigged.

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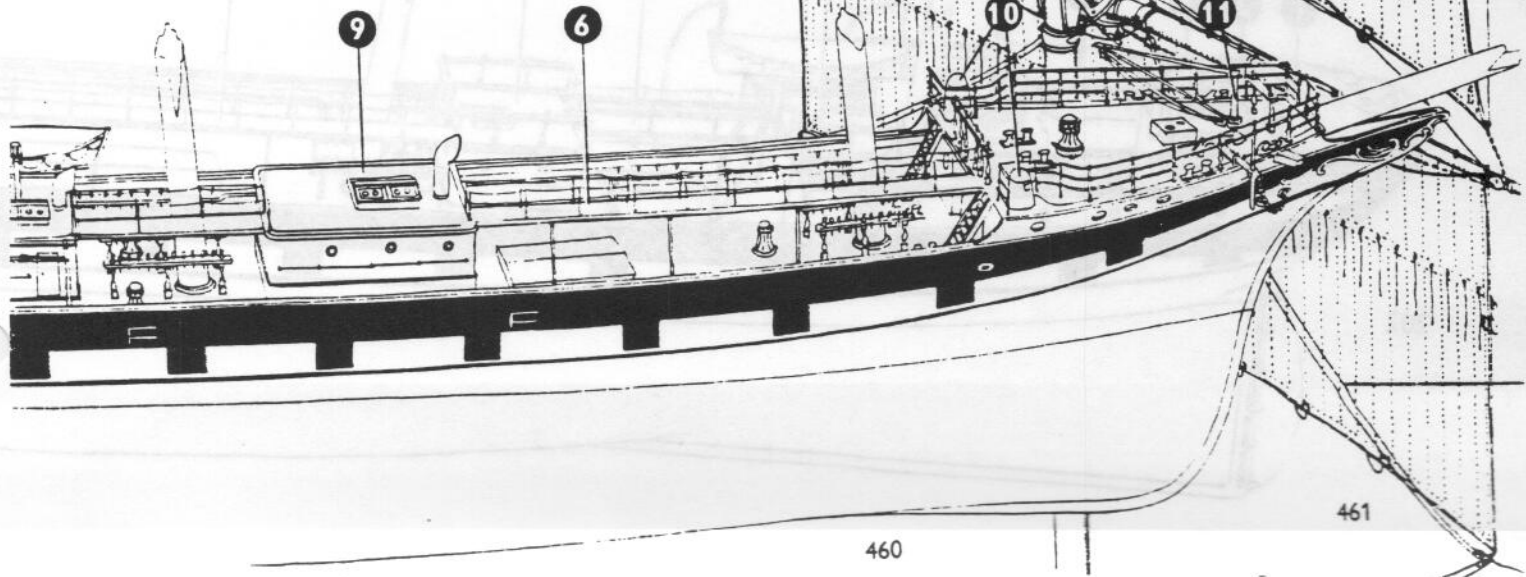
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## Barques and barquentines

The three-masted *barque* (456) was the most important vessel in the northern merchant fleets at the end of the nineteenth century. When the steamship came into general use and competition increased, many earlier barques were riggered so that maintenance would be cheaper and the number of crew reduced. Yet the *barquentine* did not come into existence merely by riggering the barque although no more was necessary than that the mainmast was fitted with fore-and-aft sails for the barque to become a schooner-type ship. The French vessels that still fished the Newfoundland banks after the First World War were often riggered as barquentines (457). The masts retained their old names and the only new sail was the *main gaff topsail*.

But it sometimes occurred that a ship was riggered for example with a fore-and-aft sail on the lower mainmast and square sails on the top and topgallant masts (458), the usual terminology then not covering the new type. In England all such types of pseudo-barques were called *jackass barques*.

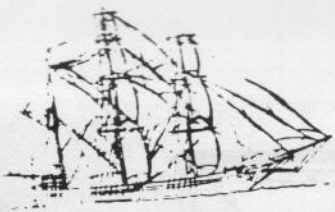
Twentieth-century full-riggers and barques were only built for really long-distance trading and as school ships. In order to make seafaring under sail at all profitable even for coastal work, large barquentines were built which could be manned by a very small crew. Thus came the four, five and six-masted ships (459) to continue the battle against the steamship.



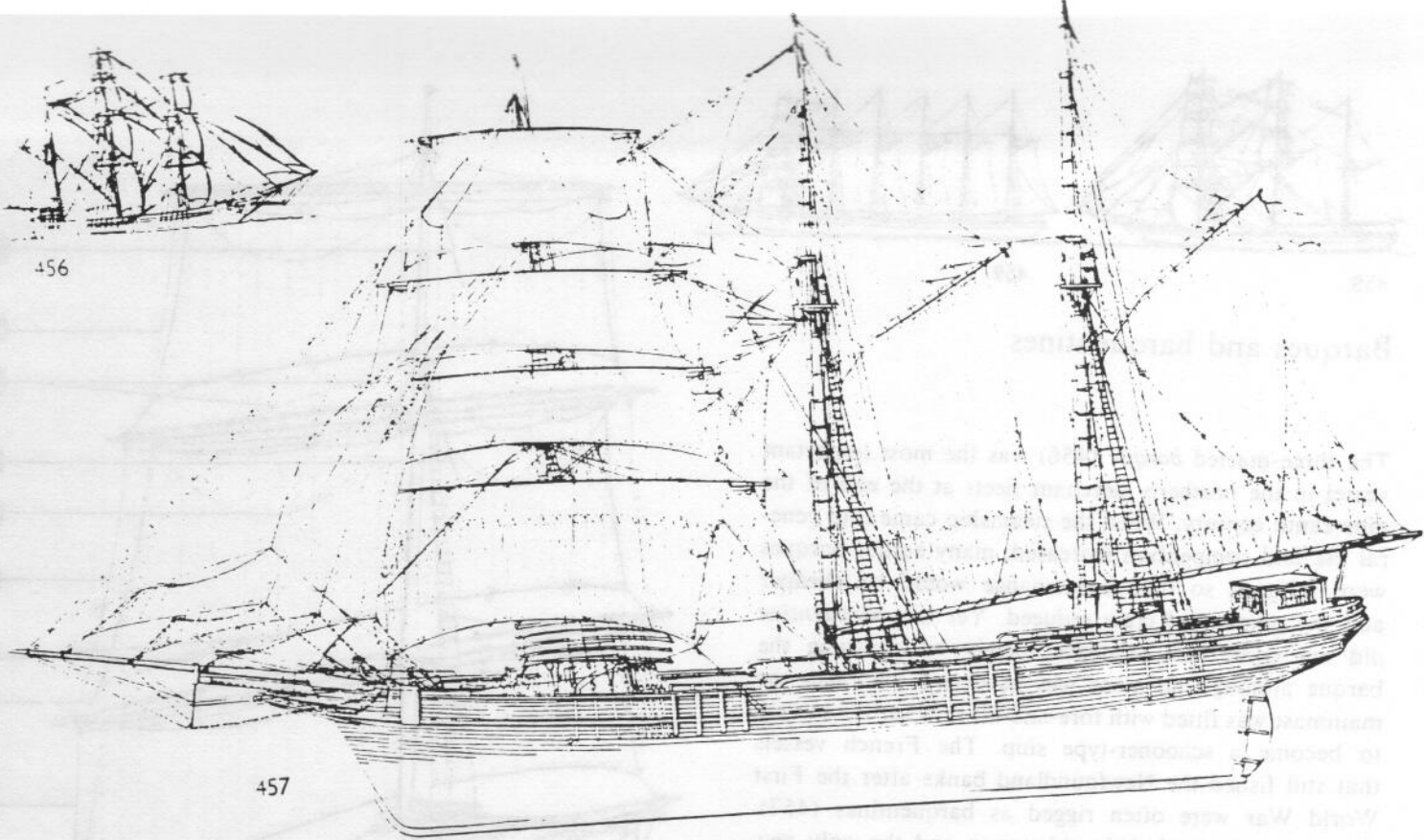
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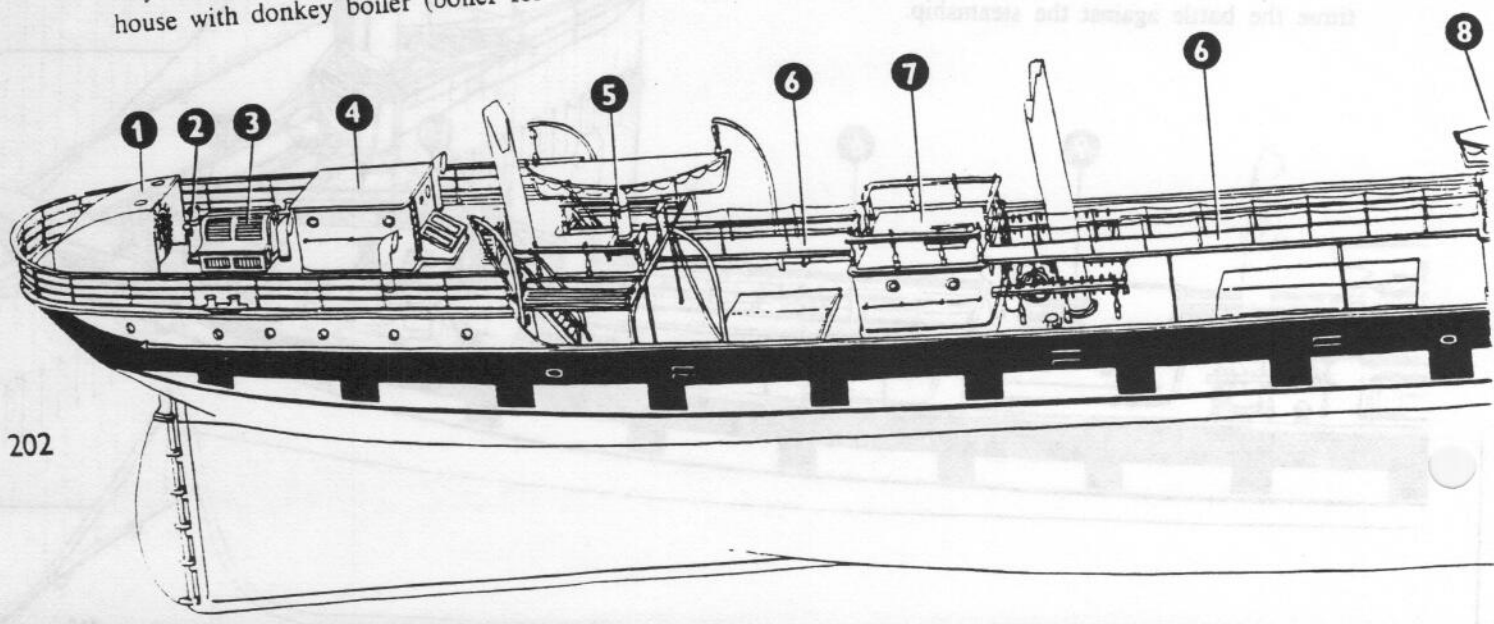


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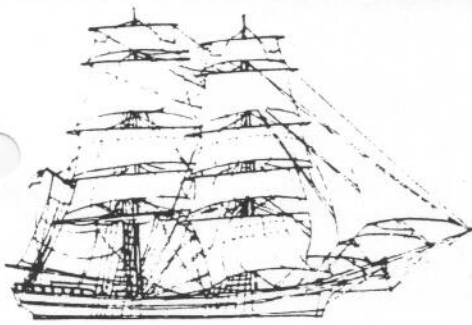
### The Archibald Russell

In the hull drawing of the *Archibald Russell* (460) the numbers indicate: 1. Wheelhouse with steering-wheel. 2. Steering compass in binnacle. 3. Skylight above the captain's cabin. 4. Chart house. 5. Standard compass. 6. Monkey bridge leading over the deckhouses from poop to forecastle. 7. After deckhouse with accommodation for petty officers and apprentices and companion way leading down to the "tween decks". 8. Midships house with donkey boiler (boiler for winches etc.) and

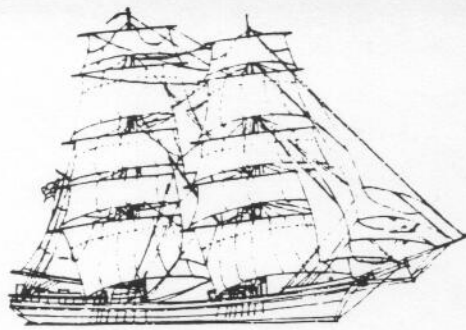
galley. 9. Seamen's house. 10. Port and starboard lanterns. 11. Anchor davit.  
 In the picture of the square-rigged mast (461) the numbers indicate: 1. Royal halyard. 2. Royal clewline. 3. Upper topgallant buntline. 4. Upper topgallant halyard. 5. Upper topgallant topping lift. 6. Upper topgallant downhaul. 7. Upper topgallant foot with buntlines. 8. Upper topgallant sheet. 9. Lower topgallant clewline. 10. Lower topgallant sheet. 11. Footrope. 12. Upper topsail halyard. 13. Upper topsail downhaul. 14. Lower yard topping lift. 15. Lower topsail clewline. 16. Lower sail clewline.



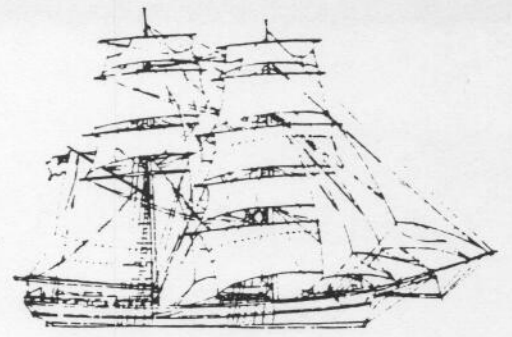
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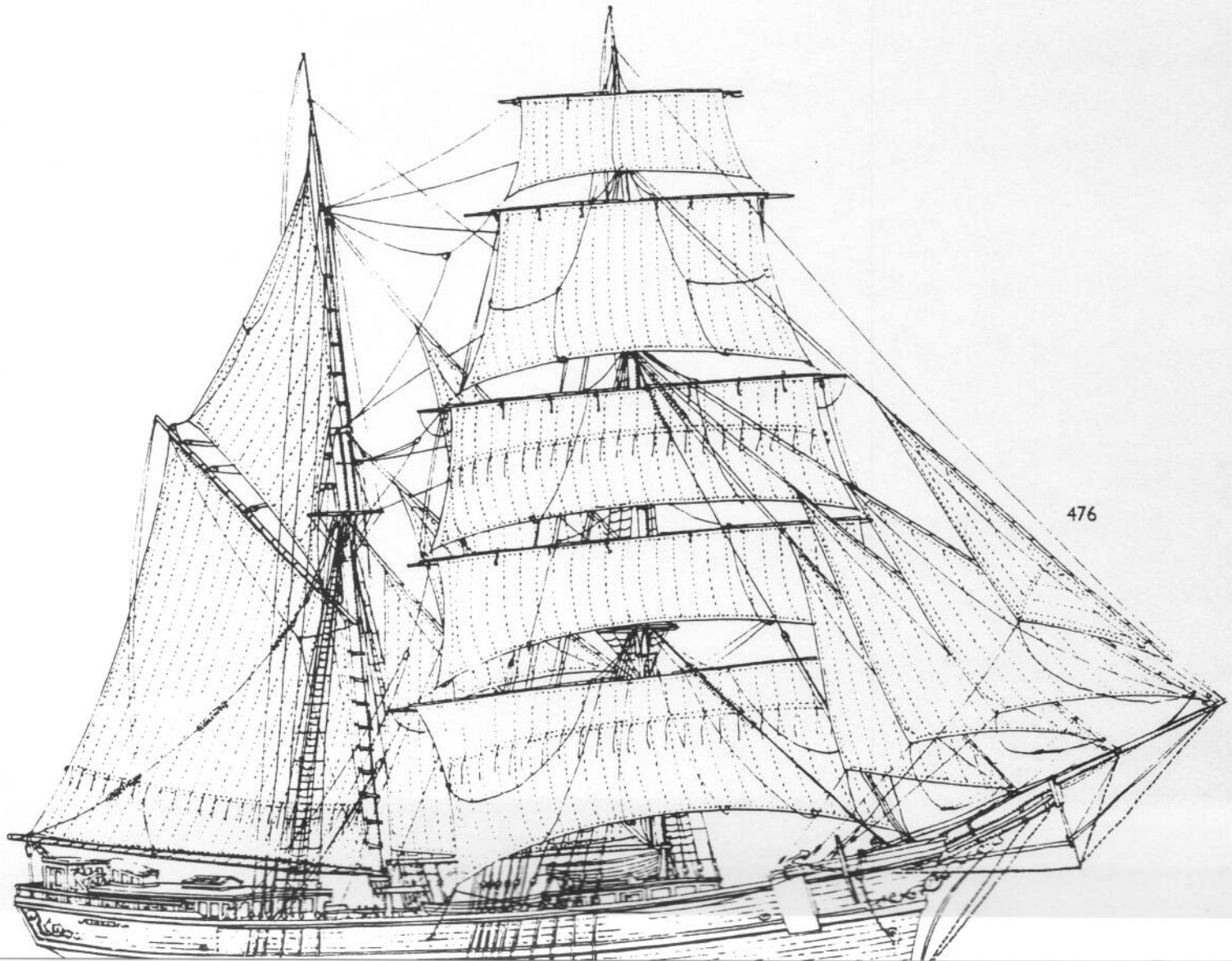
475

gest of them was the *Thomas W. Lawson* of over 5,000 tons and rigged with seven masts (470). She was 385 feet long and 50 feet wide and sailed with a crew of only sixteen.

The brig was a two-masted vessel rigged as the fore and mainmast of a barque were with the addition of a large main gaffsail. About the middle of the nineteenth century the brig was still common as a small vessel on long ocean routes, but, for the same reason as the full-rigger and barque were rerigged, the brigs proper also began to disappear towards the end of the century. But

the snow-brig with brigsail on the snowmast aft of the mainmast (473 and cf. 407) was still sailing in this century, and the common brig (474) has long remained as a collier transporting coal from the English mining towns to London, Scandinavia and Spain.

The true brigantine (475) had no square mainsail. The mainmast often consisted of two parts and always carried a square topsail. When the square topsail on the mainmast was later replaced with a gaff topsail the vessel continued to be called brigantine by some. Others called it a hermaphrodite brig (467).



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