

HEYSHAM OIL JETTY

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(Photographs by the authors)

"Admiralty Notices To Mariners No. 982 of 1976, England, West Coast-Morecambe Bay-Heysham-Ocean Oil Jetty demolished . . . etc".

The above chart correction notice recorded the demise of one of the most prominent landmarks in Morecambe Bay, the 3,000 feet long Heysham Oil Jetty, which had been a feature of the bay for 35 years.

By normal standards it was not a very suitable site for a tanker berth, being half-mile from the shore, north of the entrance to Heysham harbour, and lying in a narrow channel between sandbanks, and made more difficult by a maximum tidal range of 37 feet, tidal currents of up to 4 knots, and being fully exposed to onshore gales from the Irish Sea. The original intention was to hold tankers in a buoy mooring, and discharge ashore via a submarine pipeline to a storage depot, but after an inspection of the site in gale conditions, it was decided that a pair of dolphins would be required as a safeguard against tankers breaking out of their moorings and grounding on the edge of the channel. In view of the narrowness of the channel, and variable tidal streams making manoeuvring difficult, special protection against damage from ships berthing had to be provided, and resulted in the development of the heavily-built dolphin "bells".

Test borings into the seabed began in June 1939, and a contract for the dolphins and decking between them was placed in October 1939. Pile-driving from floating craft started in December 1939 (speed of construction and winter working being required by the outbreak of WW2), but was delayed by the severe winter of 1939/40, during which Morecambe Bay froze over for the first time in 80 years, and floating ice piled by wind and tide against the piles caused them damage, requiring some replacements.

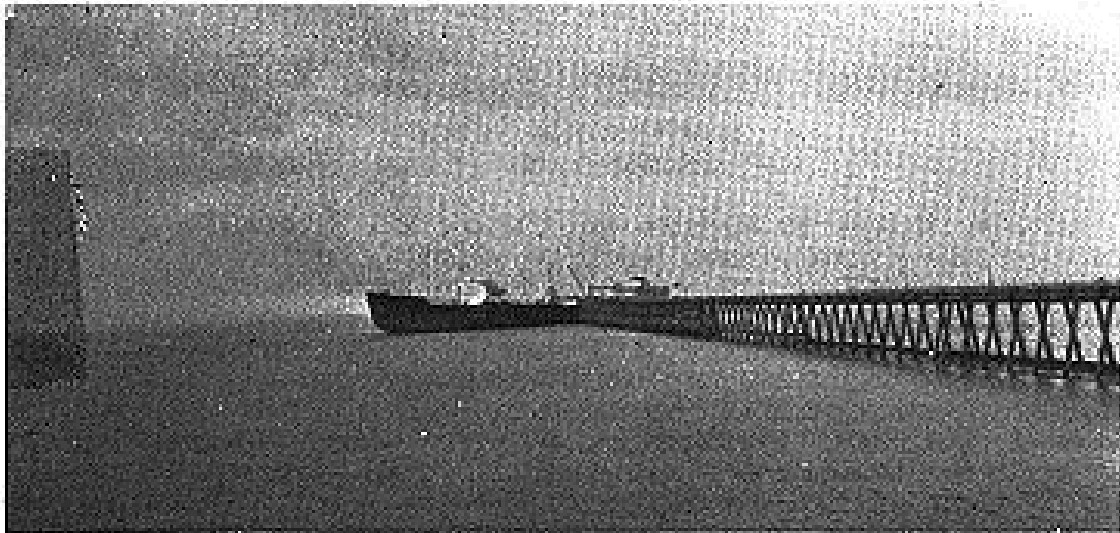
Because the site gave submariners difficulty in pursuing tankers to their berth, and was in convenient proximity to a refinery site, the shore project was enlarged from a storage depot to a refinery, and in May 1940, it was decided to build an approach jetty out to the dolphins, as its construction was now justified in view of the increased frequency of planned usage. The jetty was built for the Air Ministry, with Trinidad Leaseholds (Regent Oil Co.) acting as agents, and Norwest Construction Co. performing the principal construction work. The Air Ministry were involved because the refinery ashore was designed to produce 100-octane aviation spirit from gasoil, and the plant was brought into operation in August 1941. The first tanker to discharge gasoil feedstock ashore was British Tanker Co.'s BRITISH CONFIDENCE (8494/36), but from buoy moorings, and via a submarine line, and the refinery began production after Eagle Oil's SAN DARIO (1137/18) discharged 1,010 tons of fueloil on September 8, 1941, to fire the refinery boilers.

The first tanker to berth alongside the jetty was LAURENT MEEUS (6429/30) on October 24, 1941. Most of the early arrivals during 1941-43 were British and Norwegian tankers of up to 12,000 dwt, bringing gasoil feedstock from the U.S.A., and sometimes backloading part cargoes of finished product. Small tankers, such as Bulk Oil's PASS OF LENY (795/28), Hadley Shg's DAXHOUND (1127/31), and Shell-Mex's SHELLBRIT 3 (460/34), however, usually shipped most of the finished product out, loading at the North Wharf oil berth inside the harbour, increasingly helped by "Empire Cadet" and "Chant" types as the war progressed.

By the end of 1943, T2's began arriving, the first two being WINCHESTER and KITTANNING in December. Several arrivals in 1944 carried deck cargoes of fighter aircraft, or only had part cargoes of gasoil feedstock, having used the other cargo space to carry fueloil to refuel escort warships in the convoy across the Atlantic, whilst December 1944 saw the arrival of two "Liberty" tankers, JACOB THOMPSON and REGINALD A. FESSENDEN.

After WW2, the refinery was closed down, B.T.C.'s BRITISH RENOWN (7066/28) loading the last cargo from the jetty in March 1947, but the coastal tankers ESSO TIOGA (797/44), BEN HENSHAW (377/33) and others loaded numerous times thereafter from the storage tanks until they were empty.

The refinery was purchased by Shell Refining as part of their post-war refinery expansion in U.K., and the jetty reopened in February 1948, with the delivery of the first Kuwait crudeoil by the "La Corona" GADILA (8068/35) from Mena al Ahmadi. Most of the post war cargoes were delivered by T2's, either by Shell's own "T"-

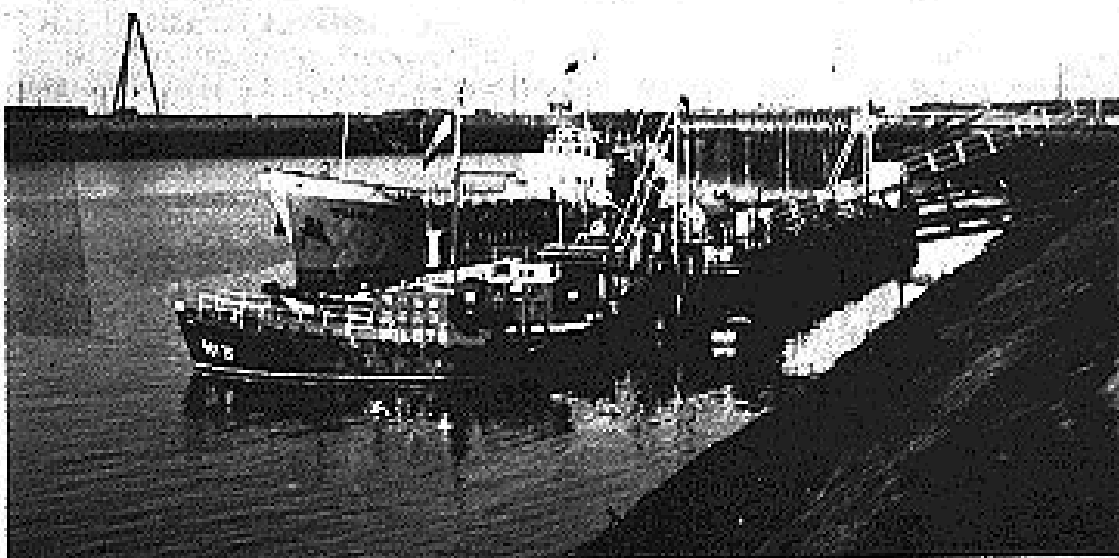


Norwegian tanker **BARFONN**, 10,928/56, at Heysham jetty, 1962.

class acquisitions, or chartered T2's under other flags, and such a one was the Italian **FRANCA FASSIO**, which arrived in November 1948 with the first Venezuelan crudeoil. Tankers bound for the jetty picked up their pilot off Lightning Knoll buoy, off Barrow, then steamed several miles through Lune Deeps and up Heysham Lake channel to off the entrance to the harbour, where tugs took charge, turned the tanker around, and towed it stern-first to the jetty for berthing. Three tugs were used, and after the jetty reopened, towage was carried out by the two "Empire" type tugs **FISHERSHILL** (282/46) and **FISHERSTOWN** (232/44), assisted by the Railways tug **WYVERN** (215/05), or its later replacement, **RAMSDEN** (188/34).

Refined products resumed being shipped out by coastal tankers, such as Eagle Oil's **SHELL MEX 5** (423/31) and Metcalf's **CAROLINE M** (1598/35), mainly to the Mersey & Clyde, and these were assisted by the provision of another oil berth inside the harbour in July 1948, when a large ex-"Mulberry" pontoon was moored in the harbour, connected to the quay by two hinged arms carrying the pipelines. Hemsley-Ball's **HEMSLEY 11** (1176/18) was the first to load from it in August 1948, and as well as tankers, regular users were large numbers of steam trawlers bunkering on the way from Fleetwood to their fishing grounds.

To increase the speed of discharge of one-grade crudeoil cargoes, a new 12in pipeline was fitted to the jetty, coming into use in 1950, when the T2 **STROMBO** discharged through it. The desired use of the jetty for bringing crude in for the refinery prevented its full use for shipping out refined oils, and late in 1949, teams of coastal tankers plied between Heysham and Liverpool, loading ocean tankers at anchor in the Mersey. For example, twelve loaded Eagle Oil's **SAN VULFRANO** (8167/42), and eleven loaded Anglo-Saxon's **CLAM** (7404/27) in this manner in the autumn of 1949.



Dutch coastal tanker **THEODORA** (600/58) loading at the pontoon berth inside Heysham Harbour, 1963.

SAN DARIO loaded fueloil in November 1949 to bunker the new P. & O. liner HIMALAYA across the bay at Barrow before its trials, and another cargo of fueloil for a new ship left for Liverpool in November 1950 in REFAST (2370/44) to bunker the recently completed Anglo-Saxon "supertanker" VOLSELLA, of 28,000 dwt.

The largest tankers ever to use the pontoon berth inside the harbour were Shell's GLESSULA (5437/49) and GEMMA (5439/49) in 1950, but generally much smaller tankers loaded there, the largest regular callers being Eagle Oils SAN CASTO (2446/28), Anglo-Saxon's FRAGUM (2926/52), and Rowbotham's POINTSMAN (1174/34) (also a regular caller under its previous name of BASSETHOUND).

The T2's were the largest tankers on the jetty until the early 1950's, when the 18,000 to 20,000 dwt ships became the "standard" size, and Anglo-Saxon's HARPA (12,127/53) was one of the first in 1953. Between two and three 18,000 dwt tankers per week became the usual average of tankers using the jetty.

Because of the limited depth of water off the berth (about 30 feet at low tide), larger tankers were not able to use the jetty. Another reason was the inability of the jetty to withstand stresses from larger ships, and in later years, as the jetty became more fragile, tankers did not lie alongside, but were held about 6 feet off the jetty by twelve 5½in wires anchored to the seabed.

To try and overcome the disadvantage of shipping crude long distances by smaller tankers, a series of lightening operations took place in Lune Deeps, off Fleetwood, in 1960, where larger tankers were offloaded by 18,000 d.w.t. ships, and the oil delivered to Heysham from the smaller ship. Shell's PATRO (28,410/58) and ZENATIA (24,790/57) were among tankers lightened, but because of delays caused by the exposed site, operations were not continued.

After Tranmere Oil Terminal, on the Mersey, came into operation, cargo was transhipped via Tranmere jetty, either by transfer between tankers via the jetty pipelines, or from shore tanks. By the mid 1960's, oil was transhipped from Rotterdam also. The largest tanker ever to berth on the jetty was the Norwegian H. M. WRANGELL (16,027/50), still diminutive compared with the large crude carriers of even that time.

Eventually, a pipeline was built from Tranmere to Heysham refinery, completed in 1967, and Heysham jetty became redundant, the LINDA GIOVANNA (9985/40) being the last tanker to sail on October 24, 1967.

After lying idle for nine years, demolition of the jetty commenced in May 1976, and work was completed by August, rubble from the demolition being floated on barges to the harbour West Wall berth for disposal. The planned closing of the refinery for 1977 led to a reduction in coastal tanker trade from the harbour berths, and instead of taking oil away, tankers began bringing refined oil in for local use. The pontoon, in poor condition, was last used for oil when Shell's ARDROSSAN (1529/69) discharged gasoil, and after washing-through the shore pipelines with water, sailed on Sept 30, 1976, the pontoon then being advertised for sale.