

## MONEY FOR OLD ROPE

### The log of a life-boat inspector

#### Chapter One: A flying start

I celebrated the end of the war in Europe with our Russian allies in Moscow, where I was serving as naval staff officer to Admiral Archer, head of the British Military Mission to the USSR. Oddly enough, the Russians did not immediately subscribe to the fact that the Germans had capitulated, probably because some isolated groups of the enemy were still fighting and our allies were happy to oblige them. In Moscow the salutes announcing a battle victory were still being fired at frequent intervals. Great showers of coloured rockets illuminated the night sky and threw buildings into sharp relief. Later, when it had been decided that hostilities really were at an end, the illuminations were even more impressive. Great silken banners suspended from barrage balloons were brilliantly lit by searchlights, so that they appeared to be hanging mysteriously unsupported in the night sky. A gigantic picture of Stalin, with the nearest thing to a benevolent smile that his massive moustache would allow, may well have gone a long way towards convincing the more susceptible that he had other than earthly powers.

Mrs Churchill was in Russia at this time and so was the so-called Red Dean, Dr Hewlett Johnson. Mrs Churchill was on a visit representing the British Red Cross Society. What the Red Dean was doing I have no idea but he seemed very popular with the Russian public and I remember seeing him tossed in the air by enthusiastic citizens during the victory celebrations. This was a favourite way of

showing appreciation and not dangerous if they remembered to catch you as you came down. In Gorky Street I earned generous applause for a series of victory cabrioles in Bolshoi ballet style but in general I thought that the Russian admiration for the efforts of their allies was very restrained.

Mrs Churchill was shortly to return to Britain and the Prime Minister's Skymaster was coming to take her home. As I was now also due to return and would normally have had to take the long sea route via Archangel or Polyarnoe, I thought it might be worth while trying to thumb a lift in the Skymaster. I approached Tomkins, one of the Embassy secretaries who was looking after Mrs Churchill during her stay, and suggested that he might care to put in a word for me. Being a good-natured fellow he did so and at a party not long afterwards presented me to Mrs Churchill who kindly said that she would be pleased to have my company on the flight home. Several other members of the staff of the mission were similarly honoured amongst whom I remember Brigadier 'Pop' Hill, Murray Mathieson and David Floyd. I believe the last two were skiing casualties with broken limbs.

There was a farewell performance of 'Swan Lake' for Mrs Churchill at the Bolshoi theatre the night before we left and that afternoon I took my leave of my Russian colleagues, Captain Egipko and Commander Mike Kostrinsky. We got through two bottles of vodka and I was not really in a condition to appreciate the finer points of the ballet or the fact that Stalin had graced the occasion with his presence. The main effect of the latter was the fact that the intervals stretched out to an hour or more, which is a long time even for a Russian theatre.

(3)

During this period the rest of the audience promenaded round the foyer, up and down the staircases and along the corridors, apparently quite happily, no smoking being strictly enforced. One can imagine how a British audience would have reacted.

As there was another farewell party after the ballet it is not really surprising that I awoke next morning with a nasty headache and drove to the airport feeling very frail. Mrs Churchill was given an impressive send off by the Russians, with mountains of flowers and masses of high ranking officials and their wives. At one time there were so many sightseers in the tail end of the Skymaster that the nose wheel began to lift and they were hurriedly ushered forward by the crew.

We took off about mid-day in bright sunshine and flew south over the Ukraine, which in May looked remarkably barren from the air. Our route took us over the Crimea and across the Black sea to the Bosphorus, the Russians having decided that it would be too dangerous to fly across Europe on the direct course as the situation was still uncertain. The British view seemed to be that the enemy were most unlikely to interfere but that some of the Russian pilots might still be trigger happy.

We flew along the length of the Bosphorus and had a clear view of Istambul, having had a glass of sherry and an excellent lunch served by RAF stewards - very different from any of my other war-time flights, which were strictly economy class. Then along the Dardanelles with not a cloud in the summer sky to impede the splendid view from 15,000 feet or thereabouts. It was a memorable experience and, perhaps because of my hangover, I had some difficulty in believing that it was happening



to me. How did I come to be travelling in the Prime Minister's private plane in VIP luxury instead of returning the way I came, in one of the escorts of a Russian convoy ? All a matter of luck, I suppose.

As the sun disappeared below the western horizon we were crossing the Aegean, with inviting islands set in the bright sea. Dusk fell and away ahead the lights of Malta glittered like fireflies against a velvety background. Soon we touched down at one of the airfields and Mrs Churchill was whisked off to the Governor's residence while we settled down in the RAF mess, regaling the members with up to the minute news from Moscow. I produced my programme of 'Swan Lake' from the previous night and this was promptly displayed on the mess notice board. The programme was strictly of the war-time utility type and looked like a rather scruffy throw-away handbill, as will be seen from the illustration of a similar one on page .

We took off again about one o'clock in the morning and I regret that I was fast asleep in a comfortable bunk when we flew over the Alps, as I believe it was a wonderful sight. But I ate a hearty breakfast of eggs and bacon over Paris with the Eiffel tower an unmistakable landmark. Within minutes the Channel and then the English coastline were in view, looking peaceful and pleasant in the summer sunshine. It was a wonderful homecoming.

Our Wing Commander pilot had told me that we should be landing at Northolt and when I remarked that my house was about a mile from the airfield he kindly offered to fly low over it for the benefit of my family, before landing. In fact I was quite unable to identify the



the house from the air and as my family had no idea that I was coming home that day they were not disappointed at not witnessing my rather splendid arrival.

We were timed to land at precisely 0900 and our pilot was quite upset when we touched down on the runway at about five minutes to nine.

'Winston will slay me for being early,' he said. 'He likes to be on the tarmac to greet Mrs C and he usually arrives dead on time himself.'

Sure enough, as we came to a standstill by the airport buildings there was no sign of the Prime Minister. Lord Chatfield, Mr Gromyko and the Churchill daughters Sarah and Mary were there with a group of senior officers. The steps were rolled up to the aircraft and Mrs Churchill descended, greeted her daughters and the welcoming committee, watched by our now obviously lugubrious pilot, who was very unhappy at having arrived before the great man. At that very moment a car came speeding along the road from the main entrance with a door open and Mr Churchill half out of it already. He had his arms round Mrs Churchill in a flash, paused a moment to shake his fist at our pilot, and then urged his wife up the steps and into the plane again. Before closing the door behind them he turned to the spectators and with a broad grin made the V sign.

An RAF car with a rather dashing WRAF driver took me home in time for a second breakfast but still with the remains of my Moscow hangover. At the end of our road my daughter Jill was waiting for a bus to take her to her ballet class. She called out 'Hallo Daddy,' as if I had been away a few hours instead of seven months and ran to

board the bus as it came along.

After some leave, during which I gave a lecture on my experiences in Russia to a rather distinguished audience at Combined Operations Headquarters, I received an appointment as commanding officer of a naval establishment on Hayling Island, for of course we were still at war with Japan. It seemed unlikely that this situation would last for long and my main preoccupation now was with the problem of earning a living when I was released from the navy. My very comfortable pre-war job had become a war casualty and at the age of forty the prospects for starting all over again did not seem very bright. At this point fate took a hand, I feel sure, for events moved in a way which I would normally have considered highly improbable.

One of my wartime jobs had been connected with the experimental work on the Pluto pipelines and in the course of this I came in close contact with many senior officials in the oil industry and in particular A.C.Hartley, chief engineer of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and John Jameson, the managing director. This seemed a likely possibility for a job as it was clear that there would be enormous expansion in the industry after the war. I wrote to A.C.Hartley and received a very encouraging reply which was later followed by an invitation from John Jameson to have lunch with him at Britannia House. Much to my surprise, he offered me the job of personal assistant to himself. When I asked what the prospects were for such a job he replied shortly that he had been personal assistant to a previous managing director. For a moment I thought that I had hit the jackpot.

But like most things in life, there was a snag about the offer. This was that I could not start the job immediately on my release from the navy because, as John Jameson pointed out, employees returning from war service must be reinstated first and he thought that it would be a year or eighteen months before he could take me on. Could I defer my release for at least part of that time ? I thanked him and said I would see what I could do.

I had also written to the Admiralty asking if they could give me details of any jobs available for officers on release from the navy. Again I got a very friendly reply, this time from Captain T.D.Manning who suggested the Control Commission in Germany but also went on to say that he had made an appointment for me to see Commander Vaux, Chief Inspector of Lifeboats of the RNLI, as there was a vacancy for an inspector of life-boats.

This was where fate appeared to be taking a hand. Fifteen years previously I had applied for the post of district inspector of life-boats, had reached the short list and seemed likely to be appointed. Just as the decision was about to be announced, a cablegram arrived from the Prince of Wales, homeward bound from one of his tours aboard the Rawalpindi. Was it sheer coincidence that I had left that same ship at the end of her previous voyage ? HRH asked that the decision on the appointment of an inspector be delayed until T.G. Michelmores, second officer of the ship, returned to England and was available to be considered. As we had been shipmates I knew Michelmores well and thought I should not stand much chance against his much greater experience. In any case, it was pointed out by an RNLI official that Michelmores was extremely likely to get the job in view



of his illustrious sponsor who also happened to be President of the RNLI. I was told that I might appear before the selection committee again when Micheltore made his bow but felt pretty strongly that this would be a waste of their time and mine, under the circumstances. I left with the idea that nobody quite liked the way things had turned out and from then on I endured all the trials of the early thirties, with ships being laid up in hundreds and any sort of employment scarce and wages miserably small. Very, very different times from the present, when the world is held to owe everyone a living, whether they are prepared to work or not.

But to revert to 1945 and my appointment with Vaux. On receipt of his letter I wrote at once to Manning and told him the tale of my earlier experience with the RNLI, pointing out that what I had considered to be a reasonable job at twenty-five was not going to satisfy me at the age of forty. Also, that although I could understand the difficulties of the situation at the time of my first application it had not left me with any enthusiasm for a much later attempt. Therefore would he please cancel the appointment? The reply was a blunt 'no' plus the remark that I was not bound to take the job and indeed I had not yet been offered it. The appointment had been confirmed and please would I keep it? I went.

As I entered his office I explained at once to Vaux that I had no intention of seeking a post as district inspector and told him precisely why. There can be no more certain way of getting a job than to say you will not have it at any price. Vaux went out of his way to give reasons why he wanted me for the job and why I ought to take it. He made the point that there were vacancies for two inspectors and he wanted an older

and more experienced man for one of them, although the advertised maximum age had been thirty-five. The reason for this was that he and the existing inspectors were all within a year or two of the same age and he felt that it was necessary to have a someone suitable to take over from him when he retired in seven or eight years time. In fact he had rather longer than this to go to retirement but the idea made sense and I agreed that it did alter the situation somewhat. I went on to point out that the starting salary of £540 a year would make life very difficult for me as I had been earning that before the war and my pay now as a commander was over £1,000. Vaux countered with the remark that salaries were under review and would undoubtedly be increased in the near future. This was true, but it was a long time before an inspector got his thousand a year.

I still had a great love of the sea and was quite prepared to make some sacrifices in order to do a seaman's job, but I had to think of my family. I was rather dubious about both the other jobs which had been suggested. The one with Anglo-Iranian obviously had great possibilities but there was the long wait before I could start and the fact that people might change their minds in the interim. The Control Commission I did not fancy at all as it was bound to be a comparatively short term appointment and I had doubts about living in a defeated enemy's country. I told Vaux I would think it over and let him know within a day or two whether I would like my name to go forward.

After a good deal of hard thinking and discussing the pros and cons with my wife, I phoned Vaux and told him that I was prepared to let my name go forward and see whether I was offered the job or not. He promptly replied that he would only add me to the list of candidates if I would promise to accept the post if it were

offered to me. Still with some misgivings as to whether I was doing the right thing but quite certain that at my age I could not afford to throw away any chances, I gave the assurance that was required.

After all this it would have been something of an anti-climax if the selection committee had not chosen me for the post, but they did. When I appeared before the full committee of management for final approval there were two incidents which kept me from nodding off to sleep in the staid, stuffy atmosphere of the rather gloomy committee room. One was the remark that I did not seem to have spent much time at sea during the war. I assumed this referred to my staff jobs and suggested that it was only because of my seafaring experience that I had been appointed to them. Then another seamanlike figure asked whether I had ever met a Captain Strong during my apprenticeship in the Union-Castle line. This presented no problem as I well remembered that the Balmoral Castle, Captain R.D.Strong, RD RNR, had been in Durban on more than one occasion when I had been there in cargo vessels. I said so, adding that as a cadet in a very humble cargo vessel I had not had the pleasure of making Captain Strong's acquaintance.

'Humph,' ejaculated the nautical gentleman, 'I am Captain Strong'.

I am glad I avoided the temptation to say I knew him like a brother.

A few minutes later I was asked to retire and the chairman, Sir Godfrey Baring sent for me again after a suitable pause to say I had been appointed Western District



(11)

Inspector of Life-boats - for a probationary period of six months. At the same meeting Lieutenant-Commander W.L.G.Dutton RD RNR was appointed Irish District Inspector and we retired together to a local pub to celebrate what we hoped was our good fortune. It is nice to be able to record that we have been firm friends ever since, in spite of some vicissitudes during our years of service.

All this happened in November 1945 and the RNLI immediately applied for my release from naval service, which in any case was now due according to my group. I was released about the beginning of December and enjoyed three or four weeks leave before commencing my new duties on 1 January 1946. I did not quite know what I had let myself in for and when I found that Michelmore, who had duly been appointed to the post I had applied for fifteen years earlier, it emphasised the fact that my age was likely to be a considerable handicap. Everything really depended on whether I really did step into the chief inspector's shoes in eight or nine years time. If I did not my pay and pension as an ordinary inspector would keep me and my family on short commons for the rest of time. There must of course have been a great number of people who suffered equal financial loss because of their war service and I dare say most of them consoled themselves with the thought that at least they had come through the war alive, as I did. No doubt today there would be compensation for such loss, paid by the state, but after World War II men who had lost everything due to their joining the forces got exactly the same gratuity as those whose employers paid their wages for the whole war period. And many who remained in civilian employment did very well financially.

was now Deputy  
Chief Inspector,

It was arranged that I should spend some time in my district being shown the ropes by Captain Innes who had come out of retirement to look after it during the war. He was a gallant but venerable old gentleman of seventy-two years of age and had just been awarded the OBE for his services. He introduced me to committees, coxswains and crews at a number of life-boat stations including those at Barmouth, Pwllheli, Hoylake and Fleetwood and we took some of the boats out on exercise. This was a wet and chilly performance in January in that part of the world and it was clear to me that my new job was not going to be a soft one. I had no car - nor had Innes - and there was very little likelihood of getting one at that time. Carrying station files, a change of clothing and oilskins and seaboots by train and bus all over the country could be a weary process, often with a long walk and a rough, cold trip in a life-boat at the end of it. I still remember the occasion when, after the long train journey to Pembroke, I asked when the next bus to Angle was due. 'Tuesday' was the reply. As the day was Wednesday it was evident that the service ran once a week. It took a little time to get used to the vagaries of travel arrangements in the wilds of Wales but it added to the interest.

Innes, no doubt wisely, gave me very little advice on how to do the job but contented himself with a practical demonstration of how he did it. Hotels were still operating under wartime austerity, mostly with poor food, poor service and lacking in comfort but Innes had built up some goodwill at various places of his choice and this was of value to me later when on my own. But life on the coast then, and for some considerable time afterwards, was pretty spartan. After about ten days Innes

said that he proposed to go home and that the district was now all mine. He turned over to me a great stack of files and little booklets containing all the relevant details of each life-boat station and returned to retirement once more. He lived for about another twenty years, most of it in his native Cromarty. I went home to study the paperwork and was very glad to have a day or two by my own fireside with my family.

In fact I was probably suffering from the immediate post-war depression which was by no means uncommon at the time. Indeed, many ex-servicemen suffered severe mental strain in a difficult period of re-adjustment, from which some never recovered fully. The increasing severity of rationing tended to make life unbelievably bleak instead of the joyous time to which most of us had so long looked forward. There was also a growing feeling that although we had been credited with the victory we had not won what we were fighting for. Later, the young generation, instead of being grateful to those who had fought to save democracy, made it clear that in their opinion the whole thing had been thoroughly mismanaged. You cannot please everybody.

Having done my homework I departed from the coast once more, this time to make systematic visits to all the life-boat stations for which I was responsible. These ran from Minehead in Somerset to Barrow-in-Furness in Lancashire and there were thirty-one of them. Many were in places not easily accessible by land as being necessary for the proper launching of the boat. Very often local inhabitants did not seem to know where their life-boat was, or even if they possessed one.

On my own, and with time to think and to study my new



colleagues, I began to take a more cheerful view of things. Each life-boat station has as its executive officer an honorary secretary, who was supposed to have a committee to assist him. Some did, and some did not for all practical purposes but in any case the honorary secretary was the boss man and he, and he alone, had the authority to launch the boat or not, as he might decide. It was a big responsibility.

I soon found that my hon secs, as they were usually called, although from all walks of life and representing a wide range of trades and professions, had one thing in common - a deep and enduring love of the life-boat service and a particular loyalty to their own boat and crew.. No doubt because of his connection with the RNLI, hon secs extended their friendship and support to a new inspector in heartwarming fashion and as I made my way along the wintry shores from one life-boat station to the next I began to realise that I had been privileged to join a real band of brothers. Not all these new friends were happy and contented with their life-boat and station by any means. Now that the war was over there were lots of things they wanted done and a new inspector was the man to do them. At the same time their friendliness was unmistakable and although some were single-minded to the point of dogged obstinacy, most were satisfied with 'I'll do my best', as long as it was clear that this promise was being carried out.

In the western district few of the hon secs were seamen and those that were rarely surpassed their landsmen colleagues in efficiency in running a life-boat station. Amongst my hon secs were a land agent, a chemist, a grocer (he had been to sea), an organist at a cathedral, a boat-

builder, a retired Guards colonel, a farmer, a dentist and a schoolmaster. Seamen or ex-seamen were few and far between but I did have a harbourmaster and a retired Bristol channel pilot. 'What on earth could people like that know about running a life-boat?' would be a reasonable question. The fact is that all were residents of long standing, highly respected, and most of them had been born and brought up in the district. They all knew their particular stretch of coastline intimately and were well acquainted with each member of the life-boat crew. If they needed advice they had their coxswain and the coastguard to help them but in general they rarely needed to call on outside assistance to assess a situation. They gave their services entirely voluntarily and carried a great burden of responsibility. A burden which must have been almost unbearable when it meant sending the boat to sea in conditions of extreme danger. I have never heard of an hon sec flinching when called upon to make a heart-rending decision. It will not be considered surprising that I have the most profound admiration for this select band of unpaid, unsung stalwarts. It would be a sad day for the rescue services if the local control of life-boats was removed from these enthusiastic and efficient volunteers and given to a paid servant of the state, however experienced he might be.

With comparatively few exceptions the life-boat crews are of course all volunteers also. These men are nearly all rugged individualists. They do not take kindly to un-necessary orders or any form of officialdom, however well intentioned. It is the combination of the familiar hon sec and his Tom, Dick and Harry crew which works so well and produces such sterling steadfastness and courage in the face not only of danger but of many frustrating

and disappointing services.

Now and then, of course, a crew or a local committee or both will disagree with some decision made in the upper reaches of the RNLI. When this happens the district inspector might be described as being between the devil and the deep blue sea. At all costs he must strive to keep on friendly terms with his crew and committee and at the same time head office would be making it clear that their wishes must be carried out. If the situation became very fraught a high powered official or even a member of the RNLI committee of management might descend upon the station and try their hand at persuasion. In my experience this rarely proved successful. If the inspector had done his job properly he would have put forward all the arguments in favour of the head office point of view and because of his close contacts would be sure to get a sympathetic hearing. But a stranger from London, however charming and conciliatory, would be on an entirely different footing and very lucky if he did not make matters worse rather than better. An actual incident is described later in this narrative. Of course, there are some decisions to which the RNLI management must adhere and if a local committee and crew refuse to co-operate it may even come to the point where the station is closed down. Fortunately this very rarely happens and when it does the breach is usually healed by time and a change in the people involved.

An inspector was required to live in or near his district and the original RNLI instructions said that the western district inspector must reside within ten miles of Bristol GPO. This order stemmed from the days before telephones were in common use and the quickest means of



communication was the electric telegraph. I was told that I could live where I liked, in or near my district, but in 1946 few houses were changing hands and prices were already beginning to rocket. Moving was not looked upon with any degree of enthusiasm by my wife and daughters who were loath to leave Ruislip and their friends. There was also the matter of schooling, as both girls were at an age when a change was unlikely to benefit them as they were doing very well where they were. We found a charming cottage in the Cotswolds, had our offer accepted and paid the usual deposit. Not long afterwards when I went there to measure for curtains I found a requisition notice from the local council pinned to the door. The agents said they would get this straightened out but eventually came up with the information that the property had been sold for a couple of thousand pounds more than my offer and returned my deposit. I daresay gazumping goes back to the stone age. I went on looking for a house.

Meanwhile I was getting to know my district and a little bit about life-boats. I found that my seafaring was if anything rather more hard-case than anything I had experienced before and decided that it was really a job for a younger man. On the other hand the administrative and social side needed all the tact and experience that age can, but not necessarily does, give. No doubt an old head on young shoulders was the answer but failing this the older men had to harden their hearts and put up with the physical discomforts. The Isle of Man was in my district and somewhat to my surprise I found that this little island possessed five life-boats. In the middle of a very busy and at times extremely turbulent stretch of water, the Isle of Man is in a key position and in the days of sail the life-boats were in frequent demand.

I found the island a most attractive place but at first my Manx crews seemed taciturn and wary. I wondered how long it would be before I could break through that tough outer skin to the undoubtedly warm hearts beneath. In fact it seemed to me to be a very long time but I was later assured by a hon sec that his crew had accepted me very quickly by Manx standards. But all this was way out in the future and I had a lot to learn about the island before I could say I was really at home there.

About the beginning of March 1946 Michelmore announced that he wanted to make a tour of the Welsh stations as he had not yet visited any. We set off for Rhyl in his car on a cold but bright sunny day. When we reached Llangollen there was an AA notice advising the use of chains on car wheels and a warning of deep snow on the mountains. Neither of us had any previous experience of that part of the world and assuming that the warning applied to some earlier bad weather we set off confidently up the Horseshoe pass. A few miles of hill climbing brought us into the snow belt and as we went on the drifting increased and we ran into thick fog or cloud. On one side of the road there appeared to be a sheer drop right into the valley and on the other the drifts were pretty well bonnet high. We could not turn round so the only course was to try and keep on. At what we judged to be the summit the visibility was a bit better but the snow so thick that we could not see the road at all. We stopped to consider the prospects which looked distinctly unpromising.

Suddenly we saw a figure trudging towards us and as he got nearer we could see that he was wearing a sort of arctic version of a postman's uniform. This gave us a ray of hope as he at least ought to know something about local conditions and the possibilities of the road ahead.

We were therefore somewhat taken aback when he got his word in first and asked if we had seen his post van as he seemed to have lost it in the snow. Apparently there was an isolated cottage some distance from the road and in view of the depth of snow he had decided to make the delivery on foot. Returning, he had obviously got off the path and started ~~going~~ round in a circle. When we met him he was in fact walking away from the van which we found neatly camouflaged with snow.

The visibility had improved a bit more and it was possible to discern the general direction of the road by the hump on one side. Our friend assured us that the going was easier in the direction we <sup>were</sup> ~~wished~~ to take so we wished him good luck and moved off. A few hundred feet lower we ran into bright sunshine and spring-like weather which we carried right through to Rhyl.

Although Michelmores and I had been shipmates for some considerable time it was now many years ago and our experiences in the intervening years had been so different that we ~~now~~ had some difficulty in finding common ground. He had been completely absorbed in life-boat work for fifteen years; I had battled through the years of the depression as an advertisement copywriter with Harrods, helped to run an art studio and then settled down as a printer until the war sent me back to sea again. On the experimental side of Combined Operations I had been in close contact with many of the war-time inventions and been responsible for trials of landing craft on beaches and in surf. Few of the improvements in design and technique developed by the navy had filtered through to civilian organisations for security reasons and I got the impression that the RNLI were in no hurry to adopt them, anyway. New boys were not encouraged to



make suggestions. All the same, we got on quite amiably as seamen usually manage to do and our visits to the stations on the Welsh coast were interesting and valuable.

Travelling was generally rather spartan, with pool petrol strictly rationed, most of the hotels rather threadbare and food also rationed and not very appetising. I remember Micheltoreau remarking at one rather pretentious place where we stopped for lunch,

'When you see a waiter in a boiled shirt these days you know the grub will be shocking !'. He was quite right. It was bitterly cold that day and with a no calorie lunch it took two stiff drinks to keep the blood circulating, as we were going afloat that afternoon. Later on, when I began to find my way around I did rather better and was even able to take home a dozen eggs or a pound of butter occasionally. I was a bit taken aback when one old lady who kept a few cows told me that the only reason she had any butter was that the cows had TB and she was not allowed to sell the milk !

So we made our way round the coast, calling at most of the life-boat stations, meeting the hon secs, crews and committees and taking some of the boats afloat. At one station the mechanic made the fatal mistake of starting the engine of the life-boat before we arrived, no doubt in the hope that this would ensure an easy start for the inspection. The result was that we launched off the carriage into a strong ebb, the engine failed to show any sign of life and we were carried rapidly seawards with every prospect of needing assistance ourselves. As the tide slackened a breeze sprang up and we were able to sail home in good style. In fairness it must be said that it was an old boat and the engine one of the early

temperamental variety. Michelmores remarked philosophically that at least his visit had been of some benefit. It had taught the mechanic not to start the engine just before going afloat and also may have prevented the failure happening when the boat launched on service.

Having worked our way right round the coast as far as Mumbles we made our way home. I was soon on my way back to my district however, as the regulations limited our days at home and in any case there was a lot of work to do. Every one of my thirty-one life-boats had to be taken afloat by me every half year and I was going to have to steam to get them all done, plus some inevitable special visits to settle problems, and inspections of reserve life-boats. But I felt that I was beginning to get the hang of it.