

# The Blake Museum and the Docks

by Tony Woolrich

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*Very many thanks to Mike Searle for help in assembling the information.*

The museum has a very extensive photo archive about the port and the docks from the mid C19 onwards, and there have always been gallery displays about the maritime past since the beginning of the museum in 1926.

Mr John StJohn Earl, who ran the Museum on behalf of the Sedgemoor District Council between 1975 and 1983/4 was a fine model maker who produced a series of constant scale waterline models of the sailing vessels once common on the Bristol Channel (BWRAB:1979/13-33)



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He made 21 models – they were:

1) SHIP RIGGED CLIPPER – Square rig on three or four masts – a clipper, however, could be any rig. The name 'Clipper' came to mean any extremely fast vessel.	2) BARQUE RIG – Square rigged on two or more masts with fore and aft rig on the rearmost mast. The rig of the deep-sea world wide trading and cargo vessel.	3) BARQUENTINE – Square rigged on the foremast only, with all other, two, three, or four masts fore and aft rigged. Needed a smaller crew than the barque
4) JACKASS BARQUE - A barque with a fore and aft sail on the main mast in place of the usual main-course square sail. A rig between the barque and the barquentine.	5) BRIG-SNOW – A square rig vessel with two masts. The term 'snow' describes the fitting of a 'snow' mast behind the main sail to carry a fore and aft sail.	6) BRIGANTINE – A two masted vessel, square rig on foremast, fore and aft rig on mainmast, with square topsails above – sometimes called a 'true brigantine'.
7) HERMAPHRODITE BRIG – So called when a 'brig' had square sails on the foremast and fore and aft sails on the mainmast. Later referred to as a brigantine.	8) HERMAPHRODITE SCHOONER – A fore and aft rigged vessel having square topsails. In England she was simply called a topsail schooner.	9) TOPSAIL SCHOONER – A two or three masted fore and aft rigged vessel with square topsails. Very fast and needed a relatively small crew.
10) SCHOONER – An American word meaning 'skimmer', the schooners were very fast little ships for the perishable citrus trade.	11) STAYSAIL SCHOONER – The fitting of a staysail in place of the gaff and boom on the foremast made her easier to handle with a small	12) KETCH – Rig differs from a schooner in that the foremast becomes the mainmast with a smaller 'mizzen' mast, and so easy to handle with only three men.
13) SEVERN TROW – A ketch-rigged sailing barge. Her open 'box' holds were used for the transport of coal, quarry-stone, bricks, etc.	14) TRAWLER – The ketch-rigged Brixham trawler was used to trawl fish from the sea bed, flatfish such as plaice, sole and other sea -bed living fish.	15) YAWL – Similar to a ketch except that the Mizzen or 'jigger' is smaller and to the rear of the rudder. Used for drift net fishing of surface fish, herrings etc.
16) LUGGER – The lugsail is neither square rig nor fore and aft. It is of medieval origin, simple and efficient, Used in Cornwall for drift net fishing of fish such as mackerel.	17) POLACCA BRIGANTINE - An ancient rig of Mediterranean origin, a west-country rig which lasted into the twentieth century. A square rig 'pole' mast.	18) CUTTER – A single masted vessel having more the one foresail and jib. Extremely fast and so used as a revenue cutter to catch smugglers.
19) BARGE – This west-country barge is cutter rigged although originally called a sloop. Used in Cornwall for the coastal transport of clay or stone.	20) SLOOP – A gaff rigged vessel having a single mast and a single foresail.	21) BERMUDA SLOOP – A modern 20 foot boat is shown to the same scale in order to give some idea of the relative sizes of all these vessels.



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The Museum Society, the predecessor of the present Museum Friends, commissioned a scale model of the docks in its heyday. The brass plate on it reads: "*Bruce Kelham Coombes, Model maker, Lamyatt, Somerset, 1984*". There is an archive collection in the museum of some 30 specially taken photographs to aid in the design. These are a valuable record of the state of the Dock structures at a particular point in time – (1984)

The Museum held in 2010 a symposium for schools about the *Irene*, the last Bridgwater built ship (1907). There was a month-long exhibition as well. Documentation from this are included on this web page as further information for the restoration of the docks.

The Museum has in its archive a series of ledgers recording vessels using the port 1864-1948 and also prints of GWR drawings of around 1900 for dock repairs. There are also GWR plans for repairs to the telescopic bridge. Also the proposal for the ship canal, 1894.

## Dock registers

BRWAB: 1981/47            1864-1871

BRWAB: 1981/48            1894-1900

BRWAB: 1981/49            1900-1908

Somerset Heritage Centre DD/BWD: Daily record books of ships using Bridgwater docks 1905-1924. 11 volumes.

[Though in the same date range they are not the same as the museum series. Perhaps the museum series are fair copies derived from books like these.]

BWRAB : 1987/64            1914-1916.    Great Western Railways record book of docks.

[This appears to be one of the Heritage Centre series, where there is a gap at this point]

BWRAB : 2021/1/92        1920-1948

## GWR drawings

BWRAB:2006/25/1. Plan/die-line drawing of GWR Bridgwater Docks 'Drawing No. 1' produced by the Engineers' Office Paddington 25th February 1907.

BWRAB:2006/25/2. Plan/die-line drawing of GWR Bridgwater Docks 'Drawing No. 2' produced by the Engineers' Office Paddington 25th February 1907.

BWRAB:2006/26/3. Plan/die-line drawing of GWR Bridgwater Docks 'Drawing No. 3' produced by the Engineers' Office Paddington c1907. Sections through inner and outer gates.

BWRAB:2006/25/4. Plan/die-line drawing of GWR Bridgwater Docks 'Drawing No. 4' produced by the Engineers' Office Paddington c1907. Showing elevations of sluice and a section through the sluice.

BWRAB: 2006/25/5. Plan/die-line drawing of GWR Bridgwater Docks 'Drawing No. 5' produced by the Engineers' Office Paddington c1912. Elevation of chain gear and detail of wall casting

## Other

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BWRAB: 2010/1/139 Bridgwater Docks 1966 / DVD from 8mm film x2

BWRAB: 2017/1/20 Plans and estimate for proposed ship canal from Cannington Brook to Bridgwater and Taunton Canal south of the docks in 1894

BWRAB : 2017/1/34/11 GWR Plan of winding gear of Telescopic bridge

BWRAB : 2017/1/34/12 GWR plan of Telescopic Bridge

The archive of the Heritage Centre, Taunton, is a most important resource. It has:

§ Various photographs;

§ Material relating to the docks railway and the telescopic bridge;

§ Records of Carvers the Bridgwater shipbuilder;

§ County Architects drawings from after the Dock was commercially viable (c1970),

§ Ideas for the later Marina , etc.

The Blake Museum library has a series of binders with information about the port and the docks. A reference catalogue to maritime history was compiled by Blake Museum staff in 2002. It is an alphabetical listing of Bridgwater-associated vessels for which objects exist in the Museum, with references to printed sources in the Museum's library. It is dated 19 March 2002 so does not include anything accessioned after that date. It is not a comprehensive list of all Bridgwater vessels, nor is it a list of all the maritime exhibits the Museum possesses.

Details of the Ship index can be seen from page 20 onwards in the Reference Index on this web site. <https://bridgwaterheritage.com/wp/research/>

Since the Ship Index was compiled, a very extensive collection of research papers by the maritime historian, Graham Farr, have been deposited at the Somerset Heritage Centre. Ref: DD/FA 1-12. They comprise transcripts from the Bridgwater and Minehead Ship Registers, 1786-1834, and include material about Sullys, shipowners, and Carvers, ship repairers : <https://somerset-cat.swheritage.org.uk/records/DD/FA>

The Centre for Maritime Historical Studies at Exeter University is a valuable resource: <https://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/history/research/centres/maritime/>

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