WARRENPOINT PORT

NEWRY MARITIME ASSOCIATION
Giving the canal back to the people of Newry

Comhairle Ceantair an Iúir, Mhúrn agus an Dúin
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

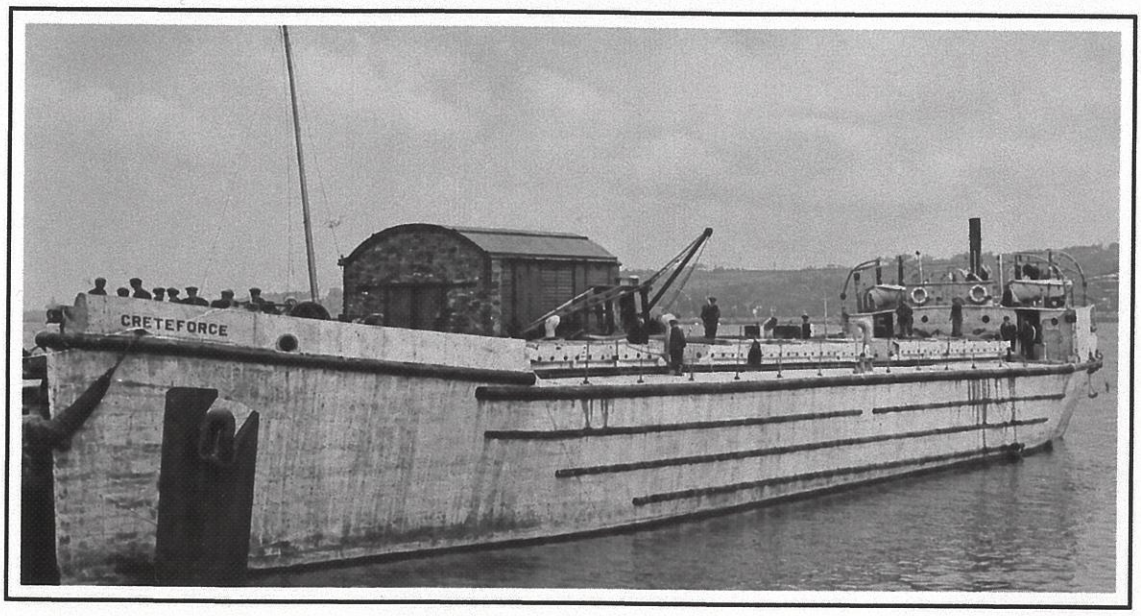
Civic Heritage Tribute

Remembering Warrenpoint Wartime Ship Yards

The Square, Warrenpoint.
10th October 2026

Compiled by James Mc Arevey.

WW1 The Old Point Shipyard.



16. The Creteforge, Warrenpoint (1919)

THE NOURNES
REMINISCENCE AND RECALL

For most people of a certain vintage, a mention of Warrenpoint conjures up thoughts of the seaside, the Baths, amusements, ice cream in the Genoa,a drink in The Crown, and trips to Omeath on the Red Star Ferry. For many, it was an escape from humdrum life to an idyllic tourist mecca. Warrenpoint was far from an industrial hub, but in the first half of the 20th Century it hosted an industry now long forgotten. SHIPBUILDING !!

In the North of Ireland, when you think of shipbuilding, you instinctively picture the world-famous Harland and Wolff shipyard at Queen's Island, Belfast, and the litany of famous ships launched there. However, just over 50 miles south, on the shores of Carlingford Lough, a fledgling enterprise was operating in Warrenpoint.

As WW1 progressed, vital raw materials, particularly steel, were in short supply, and so the Government decided to build concrete barges which could be towed to Spain to collect iron ore. The shipyards were at capacity with new builds and repairs, and this was really a job for the construction industry.

The Government set up 21 regional shipyards across the UK tasked with building 154 reinforced concrete ships, 24 steam tugs and 130 barges. These became known as the "Crete Fleet". Warrenpoint was a chosen site and the firm of J & R Thomson was awarded a contract to build 10 barges.

WW1 The Old Point Shipyard.

Francois Hennebique

Pat Durkin,

Work commenced in February 1918 to prepare the site for the shipyard, and the firm entered into a partnership with McLaughlin & Harvey, a high-profile civil engineering firm, to deliver the project. Such an unusual method of shipbuilding material required expertise in concrete and an advanced knowledge of concrete chemistry. Work began immediately using the "Hennebique" monolithic reinforced concrete system. A French inventor, **Francois Hennebique**, had created and patented this process in 1892, which is a staple of construction across the world today.

Because ferro concrete ships were poured into wooden moulds, the shipyard did not require traditional workers. Instead they employed men from the construction industry, mostly carpenters and joiners, to build the 200 ft long frames. A workforce of 400 men was recruited from Warrenpoint, Newry and the surrounding areas. One Warrenpoint man, **Pat Durkin,** quickly established his credentials and was promoted to the post of "Official Draughtsman", helping map out the complex steel frameworks for the "Cretefleet" hulls.

WW1 The Old Point Shipyard.

The pouring of a concrete hull using the "Hennebique" system required a non-stop physical effort, and the precision needed was staggering.

Once the concrete pouring process had started, it could not be stopped until a section was complete or the seams could weaken and crack under sea pressure. The men worked long, grueling, continuous shifts pouring heavy barrows of concrete into the iron mesh frameworks. Four barges were built in Warrenpoint, the remaining six having been cancelled due to the cessation of hostilities.

The Barges.
The barges were built to a standard design.
Length 200ft.
Beam 35ft.
Draught 15ft.

The First Launch.
"Cretefarm", 18th December 1918. O/N 143180

Good cheer would have been in abundance for Christmas 1918 around Warrenpoint as the War had ended just 6 weeks previously on 11th November. Along with this, the shipyard had celebrated its first launch on 18th December. The concrete barge, "Cretefarm" was launched broadside, watched by a large crowd. Unfortunately, she broke her anchors and drifted ashore, damaging her hull. The barge was towed to Dublin for repairs and relaunched in June 1919. After several years of work, she was laid up on the River Tyne in 1924

The Second Launch.
"Creteforge" 5th March 1919 O/N 143194.

Following some years of activity, she too was laid up. In 1929 both sisters were sold to Banco de Crédito Gijón and towed to Candas, a small fishing village in Asturias in the North of Spain. Here they were used in the development of a harbour far from Warrenpoint and Carlingford Lough.

WW1 The Old Point Shipyard.

The Third Launch.

"Cretefield" April 1919 O/N 143359.

This barge is of particular local interest. Following her launch in Warrenpoint, "Cretefield" was deployed on the River Mersey. She was sold to a Waterford coal merchant, Geoffrey Spencer, in 1922 and berthed at Grattan Quay in the port. Waterford was home to "Cretefield" for decades with various owners and performing differing roles, including that of a pontoon. Finally, the Port of Waterford put her up for sale in February 1990 and she was purchased by Louth businessman Padraig Moneley. The grand old lady was towed back to the very body of water where she had been launched 71 years earlier, Carlingford Lough. "Cretefield" was sunk at Carlingford Marina as part of an outer sea defence wall and lies there today.
In 1988, Mr Moneley had purchased a concrete steam tug which forms part of the pontoon and jetty system at the Marina. "Cretegaff" is the sole surviving British concrete ship still afloat.

The Fourth and Final Launch.

"Creteforest" June 1919 O/N 143396.

After 5 years of varied commercial service, a Blythe-based firm, Hughes Bolchov, bought the vessel in 1924. The barge carried a crane used in the demolition of HMS Lion, a battlecruiser built in 1910. When this task was completed, "Creteforest" was dismantled and her hull was sunk in the North Sea. All four barges built in Warrenpoint now lie buried beneath the waves with 3 serving a meaningful purpose.

The shipyard closed and over the next year there were many rumours and false dawns regarding a revival of the shipbuilding industry. These hopes were quashed in August 1920 with the news that John Kelly Coal Importers had purchased the property from the Hall Estate for a reputed £16,000.

Shipbuilding remained the remit of Harland & Wolff.....for now.

JOHN KELLY LIMITED
EST. K 1840
COAL IMPORTERS
SHIPOWNERS
2 High Street, Belfast
BT1 2BH

WW2.Warrenpoint Shipyard Company Ltd.

Barely 21 years since the end of WW1, Britain and France declared war on Germany in September 1939. This bloody conflict escalated in a devastating manner never previously seen. WW2 would last for 6 long, hard years, with heavy casualties incurred on both sides. Often referred to as the "Fourth Force," the Merchant Navy played a crucial role in Britain's war effort. They paid a heavy price with over 37,000 men killed and over 1,400 ships lost.
The biggest threat came from the dreaded German U-Boats.

As the war intensified, the Allies continued planning what would prove to be the turning point of the campaign: the Normandy Landings in June 1944. A key part of the planned invasion was landing troops and their equipment onto the beaches of Normandy at 5 sites. To support this operation, they needed to build shallow landing craft.

Accordingly, the Admiralty decided to set up a network of small regional shipyards across the UK for this purpose as all the major shipyards, including Harland & Wolff, were working at capacity.

Due to the shortage of steel in the Irish Republic, a Dublin-based engineering firm, Smith & Pearson, had set up in business at Merchants Quay, Newry, and engaged on Admiralty work. Mr James Brown, Unionist M.P. For South Down and Warrenpoint native, lobbied hard to have Warrenpoint chosen as the site for a shipyard, and his efforts paid dividends. Warrenpoint was chosen, and Smith and Pearson were awarded the contract, and the Admiralty requisitioned Kelly's coal yard

WARRENPOINT URBAN COUNCIL MEETING.

M.P.'S WORK COMMENDED.

'This council extends its heartiest congratulations and best thanks to Mr. James Brown, Unionist M.P. for South Down, {'Sherburn', Well Road, Warrenpoint.} on the success of his efforts in bringing about the advent of The Warrenpoint Shipping Co., Ltd., which marks an outstanding achievement in his vigorous and sustained drive for industrial development, and assures Mr. Brown and the new company of its fullest support and co-operation in any action by which it can facilitate the enterprise.'

The Chairman seconded the resolution and added that Mr. Brown was doing a great deal of good work. He hoped Mr. Brown would have continued success.

The resolution was unanimously adopted and the Clerk was directed to forwarded same to Mr. Brown.

Newry Reporter 7th August 1943.

Courtesy of Hugh Heatley

WW2.Warrenpoint Shipyard Company Ltd.

Photo of Fred Cartmill and colleagues on crane (1946) Courtesy of Hugh Heatley

They registered a new company, Warrenpoint Shipyard Company, in July 1943 with a nominal capital of £5,000 and a registered office at 16 Donegall Square South, Belfast. Work began immediately, and the first LCT was launched broadside on Monday 7th August 1944. The operation proved to be skilled and highly efficient, with 2 slipways continually occupied. The shipyard was also a key economic driver and at its peak was the largest employer in South Down, employing 1,200 men. On several occasions, the yard had broken records across the UK for the speed with which these vessels were constructed.

By the end of 1945, and the war ended, 16 LCT vessels had been launched in Warrenpoint, with 2 remaining in the yard. The Admiralty deemed these surplus to requirements and it was then decided to convert these into small oil tankers. The first, Petronave 1, (LCT 4149), was launched in March 1946 for Eagle Oil Co. The little tanker was just 231 ft in length with a beam of 38ft and draught of 14ft. She was to be based in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, and deployed on coastal operations. "Petronave 1" remained on Lloyds register until 1992.

Courtesy of Hugh Heatley

Seaman Raymond Kelly GC

One of the crew recruited for the voyage to Brazil was Raymond Kelly, an 18-year-old seaman from Newry. Raymond remained on the ship for some time in Brazil before signing on to a bulk carrier, "Empire Plover" for a voyage from Rio De Janeiro to London. On 18th March 1947, the ship answered a distress call from a sinking ship, "Famagusta" in the Bay of Biscay. On arrival, in the early hours of the 19th, they saw an upturned lifeboat they saw an upturned lifeboat with people in the water. Raymond dived into the water and rescued 2 men before tragically drowning whilst trying to save a woman. He died on his 19th birthday and was awarded the George Cross and the Lloyds medal for Gallantry. Sadly, his body was never recovered

The second tanker, "Juanita Beazley" (LCT 4150), was launched in October 1946 and towed to Harland & Wolff for completion, after which she was sold to a company in Ecuador and was scrapped in 1980.

House Flag Eagle Oil

Raymond Kelly

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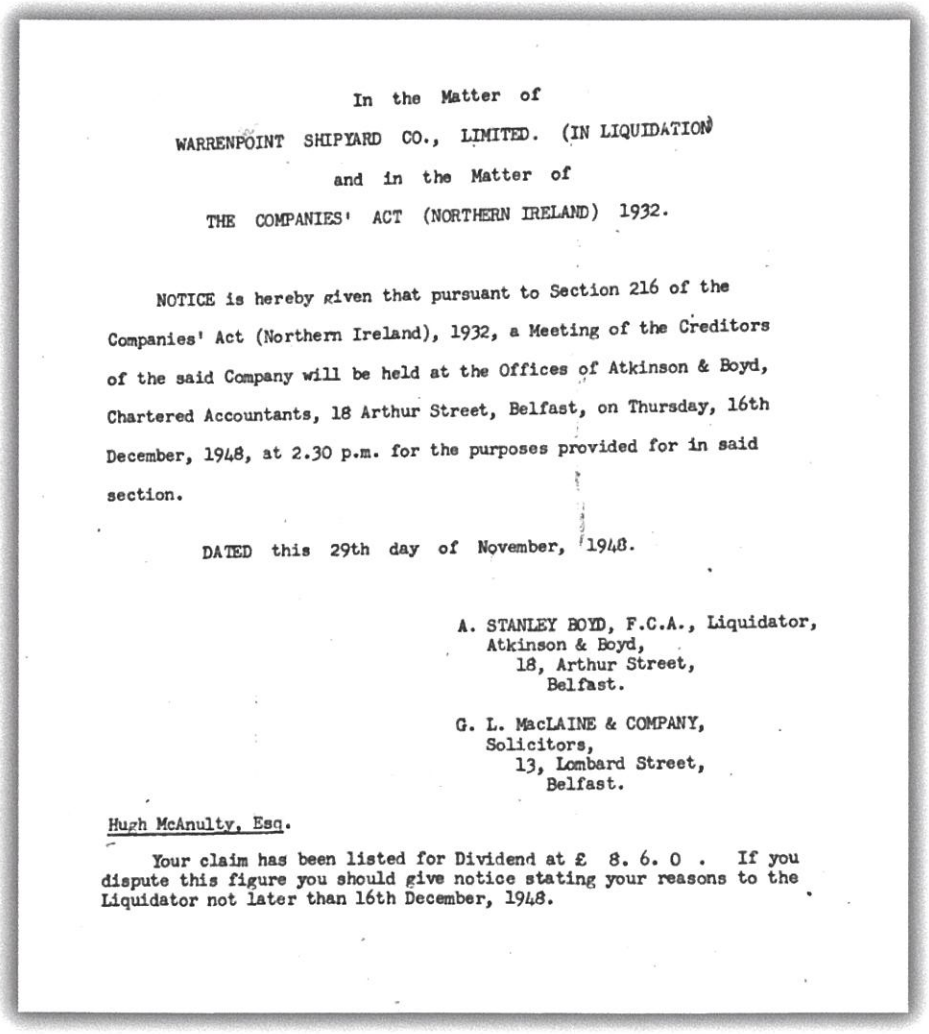
Closure



In the Matter of

WARRENPOINT SHIPYARD CO., LIMITED. (IN LIQUIDATION)

and in the Matter of

THE COMPANIES' ACT (NORTHERN IRELAND) 1932.

NOTICE is hereby given that pursuant to Section 216 of the Companies' Act (Northern Ireland), 1932, a Meeting of the Creditors of the said Company will be held at the Offices of Atkinson & Boyd, Chartered Accountants, 18 Arthur Street, Belfast, on Thursday, 16th December, 1948, at 2.30 p.m. for the purposes provided for in said section.

DATED this 29th day of November, 1948.

A. STANLEY BOYD, F.C.A., Liquidator,
Atkinson & Boyd,
18, Arthur Street,
Belfast.

G. L. MacLAINE & COMPANY,
Solicitors,
13, Lombard Street,
Belfast.

Hugh McAnulty, Esq.

Your claim has been listed for Dividend at £ 8. 6. 0 . If you dispute this figure you should give notice stating your reasons to the Liquidator not later than 16th December, 1948.

Courtesy of Cathal McNulty

The Warrenpoint Shipyard Company closed on Friday 11th October 1946 and was liquidated in the Chancery Division of Belfast High Court by Mr Justice Black in March 1947. A Norwegian company, Storship Trading Company, ran a very limited operation until early 1948 . They converted 2 LCT craft built by Stockton Construction, Thornaby on Tees, which arrived in Warrenpoint in early 1947. "Brattheim" (LCT 4003) was launched in late 1947 and sold to a Norwegian firm, Skips A-S Brattheim. Over the following 23 years, she had several different owners and name changes. She finally arrived in Panama, where she was broken up in 1970.

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Our Thanks to

Newry, Mourne & Down District Council and Warrenpoint Harbour Authority for their financial support of this project.

The Chairperson, Cllr. Glyn Hanna, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.

Kerri Morrow, Community Engagement and Development Manager, Newry, Mourne & Down District Council.

Hugh Heatley.

Maud Hamill.

Chris Cassidy.

Cathal McAnulty.