



# Heswall Area

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## Continuing our serialisation of Geoff Andrews' fascinating book, *Memories of a Lifetime Past*, about the life and times of Parkgate fishermen, Chris and Jim Peters



I took Chris and Annie to see Alan one day, he was residing in a boat called the *Scharhorn*, moored at Penrhyn dock, as caretaker. When we arrived we just saw a pair of feet sticking out from under a car. I shouted: "Alan Kitchen!" "I'll be with you in a minute," came the reply. This man was six-foot tall and over eighty years of age. He was so pleased to see us; he gave us a guided tour of his charge,

fed and watered us and didn't want us to go. Alan's boat the *Lassie* has been completely restored and he is a member of the Nobby Owners Association.

After an embarrassing collision with the seldom seen buoy, one dark morning during the war, one of the fishermen, said on coming ashore: "I hit a German submarine this morning."

Another incident involved a Heswall fisherman who had a habit of loosening off the chain before starting the engine (which apparently was a devil to start) and drifting down, side on to the tide. While he was occupied under the cabin top trying to start it in the pitch dark, all of a sudden a dirty big bowsprit crashes through the side of his boat, narrowly missing his head and nearly capsizing him. Shouting and bawling, he clawed his way up in the cockpit, only to see another boat has impaled him. I don't know the outcome of that.

Bill and Ben Evans worked a nobby called the *Cricket*. She was very low in the water – if you saw them from a distance, you would think they were standing on the water. Chris told me once that someone had said: "When the *Cricket* was steaming, a sparrow could drink off the counter (stem)." Bill and Ben finally sold her and bought the *Helen III* the very finest example of a 32-foot nobby I have ever seen. She had a 15HP petrol/paraffin engine. She was worked on the Dee for a good few years and changed ownership three or four times. Gordon Armitage worked her in the river last, then moved up to Isle of Skye and took her with him (by then she had a 46HP Lister diesel installed).

After a few years passed she became surplus to requirements and was sold to Joe Pennington in the Isle of Man. Joe retired her and rigged her for sailing and comfort. He joined the Nobby Owners Association and brought her to Liverpool for the annual nobby race.

He also sailed her to Brest in France, to take part in the traditional boat festival. Joe owned the *Helen III* for about four years, then sold it recently to Gordon Armitage's son Andrew, who is working it back on the Dee – so that's full circle! She's since been sold again, still local.

The Evans families of Heswall numbered about 13. There was Bill and Ben (Bill was known as 'Billie doctor'), and they owned the *Cricket* and *Helen III*. Then there were four brothers: Dick, Laddie, Henry and Jack, and also some sisters. Between them they owned *Silver Foam*, *Foam*, *Ada*, *Mary*, *Betty* (the *Betty* was the biggest nobby in the entire fleet), *Polly* and latterly the *Josephine*, bought from Monty Smith about 1950 something. Henry's son, Young Hen as he was known, now owns the *Venture*, a 28-foot nobby which is working from Dawpool.

Then there is Ronnie and Maurice. Ronnie practically owned all the boats on the Dee for a short while before selling them – he even owned *Welshgirl* once. He gave up shrimping and moved to North Wales. Maurice had the boatyard at Heswall, for many years. He was a fine boat repairer and I believe he built one or two as well. Maurice was forced to sell the yard, owing to bad health. There are probably boats that I've missed but this is how I remembered it.



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