

## John (Jack) Doust

Jack Doust was born in Rye (Rye Harbour) on St. George's Day, 23rd Apr. 1905, the third son of James Albert and Elizabeth Jane Doust.

His father was a mariner, and James together with his brother Charles Edwin Doust, (They both came originally from Udimore.) married sisters from Seaham Harbour, just south of Sunderland/Newcastle. James married Elizabeth Jane Curry, and Charles married Dorothy Curry. Charles and Dorothy had five children, and James and Elizabeth six. Charles was a Master Mariner, so I presume he was a Captain. Both brothers sailed the east coast delivering all sorts of cargo including coal as far south as Rye. Father's older brothers were James Albert, born in Seaham 1899, and Wilfred Charles born in Rye 1902. In father's family there two sisters, Lillian Nora, and Alice May born in Rye during 1907 and 1910 respectively; a younger brother George William Curry was born 1912.

Calbrooks Bros who owned a cordial business on South Undercliff Street, Rye, at the southern end of Strand Quay, also owned fishing trawlers. They built a new boat at Rye, which was named "Naomi Lizzie" and given to James Albert to skipper. On its maiden voyage out of RH on the 13th May, 1912, it was rundown by the German barque "Lawhill" while they were fishing and had their trawl down, in Rye Bay. There were many trawlers out fishing that day and the Lawhill cut inshore toward Fairlight, sailing through the fishing fleet. Apparently the German Captain was drunk and despite pleading from the 1st Mate, he would not alter course. What was even more outrageous, it failed to heave to after the collision as required under normal maritime rules to give assistance. It continued its passage to Freemantle Australia, where the Australian Police board the ship to arrest the Captain on manslaughter charges. As they approached his cabin, he shot himself! Grand Dad Doust (James Albert) was buried along with his Mate a Mr Cutting in Rye cemetery; the third member of the crew, I'm afraid that I do not know his name, may have not drowned in the collision, but, I cannot be sure on that point.

Some years ago I had a photo of Grandma Doust with her fourth baby son in her arms standing with Great Grandma Naomi Doust, wearing their 'widow weeds' together with either Lillian or Alice at the graveside in Rye. Grandma did eventually remarry three years later, Mr James Harman, a Master Gardner from Winchelsea, and went to live with her family in "Platt Cottage" alongside St. Thomas's church, Winchelsea. However, she never forgot James Albert, and throughout the whole of her life, regularly every month she renewed the Roses on her first husband's grave in Rye. She pointed out the spot where she was going to be buried to me when I was a small boy, "Michael that's where I will be buried in that spot just the other side of the church wall, ' it was just fifty yards in front of her Winchelsea home. There she lies today alongside her daughter Lillian who died following an army truck accident in WWII in which she was knocked down and severely injured. And alongside her is James (Jimmy) Harman.

When father left school at the age of 15 yrs old, he went farming but just didn't like the job, and then he arranged a job aboard a trawler as deckhand and cook. When Grandma heard about it, she was beside herself with worry and anger. "I don't want another member of my family going to sea and ending up like their Dad!". In those days the trawlers had a 'donkey boiler which was used to provide steam for the winches and anchor capstan. As cook, he quickly learnt how to cook bacon roolly polly and spotted dick puddings. I can remember as a young boy how he would roll the pastry at home, then lay on it thick pieces of bacon, onions and other goodies, roll it all up, place it in a cloth, tie it with string and place the package into a steaming hot saucepan of boiling water for about an hour. When it was served up with mashed potatoes, carrots and peas or cabbage, it was one of the most delicious meals one could ever have! The same with his 'Spotted Dick' he made the pudding mixture heavily laden with raisins and currents, tied up in a cloth and immersed in a pan of

boiling water for about an hour. When served up with creamy custard, it was one of the most greatest of sweets one could ever have.

Father would slowly work his way up the marine ladder and he eventually became the Mate of the old sailing barge "Katherina," sailing out of Rye, trading along the south and east coasts of Britain. Then he was offered the job of Deputy Harbour Master of Rye, which he jumped at. Whether he replaced Bert Hedgler's father who had been the Deputy HM or not, I do not know at this time. The Harbourmaster was Mr Coote who lived with his family in the small tarred cottage alongside the 11th Green of Rye Golf Club. It was close to the cart track which the local fishermen used to haul their nets and catches down to the main Rye/Camber road. Dad eventually superseded Mr Coote as the HM during the early 1930's probably about the time I was born, 1933.

Dad met my mother at Rye Harbour when she used to visit her uncle or maybe grand father Mr Tillman. The Tillmans were from Hastings, but old Mr Tillman used to keep a small fishing boat at RH, and he lived in a cottage next-door to the Conqueror pub, and then in that row of cottages at right angles to Gordon Place. Mother's name was Marjorie Anne Georgina Lee, and she was the daughter of William and Elizabeth Annie Lee from Teddington, Middx. Grandma Lee's maiden name was Tillman. After their marriage, Mother and Father rented a cottage at the bottom of Stand Hill Winchelsea. While he was the Dep.HM, he also ran a small fish business, selling fish from a motorbike and side car, until he became the HM on either the retirement or death of Mr Coote. I was born August 1933, and the Winchelsea cottage was my first home. Great Grandma Doust's house, "Strand House" was just around the corner from us and is still there today. Before I was a year old Dad and Mum moved to RH into No1 Coastguard Cottages, and then into No1 Inkerman Cottages next-door to the "Inkerman Arms." Mother was quite 'straight laced' and didn't like the idea much of being next to a pub where there were rowdy gathering both Saturday night and Sunday lunchtimes! Eventually, the Rother and Jury Gap Board built a new detached house and office for the HM on the opposite side of the river to the Conqueror Pub, and during August 1939 the family moved across to its new home.

Although there was an office built into the new house, Dad still had his tarred office shed alongside the light tower, which has now long since gone. The RGGB offices were in Rye on Ferry Road, and each week Dad had to cycle up to Rye on harbour business, and to collect harbour dues from boat owners. He would not have a car until after WWII. Groceries he would collect from Bert Hedgler's shop and post office, and on occasions mother would go over with him. There were no buses to Camber, but you could catch a bus from RH to Rye and return. If mother didn't go by bus she used to walk from the new house up to Rye with us kids with her and pushing a pram with the youngest sibling, Jacqueline in tow.

I was with my father in Uncle Jim's RH Garage on Sunday morning the 3rd of Sept, 1939 when Jim's youngest daughter Joy, ran in to say that the PM, Mr Neville Chamberlain was about to make a speech at 11am. Jim switched on the garage radio and the PM spoke. "As you know ,I have been having talks with Herr Hitler and the German Government. On the 1st of Sept, Germany invaded Poland and together with the French Government we issued an ultimatum, that if Germany did not withdraw its armed forces by 11am the 3rd of Sept, a state of war would exist between us. I regret to say that I and the French Government have had no reply, and consequently we are now at war with German. God Save the King!" Joy burst into tears all the men looked glumly at each other, and without a word being spoken they all hurried off home. About a week later a German Dornier bomber flew along the coast, turned inland toward Winchelsea, then right again over RH and released a bomb which hit the old tarred Rye/Camber tramway station at Camber, blowing it to pieces. Fortunately there was nobody there at the time, the tramway having closed down for the winter. Our war had started in earnest!!

RH had become of prime importance to the Royal Navy and the Government, and it was decided to build a new jetty which would become known as the "Admiralty Jetty" from opposite where the new coaster terminal is located now to just short of the old light tower. This jetty would be used to berth landing barges for the forthcoming invasion of Europe by the Allied Forces. There had existed several jetty berths along the eastern side of the Rother opposite RH, but they were rather old and dilapidated so the new jetty was just constructed over them. Father was brought in at every level of construction for his advice. Then the new jetty was connected to the old Rye/Camber tramway for bringing stores and armaments down to the water's edge. The naval officer in overall charge of this project was Admiral Sir Algernon Willis. He and father got along fine, just like "blood brothers." Eventually, the landing barges arrived, father now had a new task, testing all the new 'Buckie trawlers coming out of Nichols Boat Yard in Rye. These boats would be used around the world by the Royal Navy for harbour duties and tasks. Also about this time Father was told that he would be receiving an RNR commission and would be appointed to Lagos, Nigeria, as the King's HM. Admiral Willis put his foot down and said "NO!" So Father stayed at RH, much to his delight.

RH had by this time become a prime target for the Luftwaffe which was just across the Channel at Abbeville. Daily they attacked all types of targets in what became known as "Hit and Run Raids." In these raids they strafed any target and released a bomb at any structure or building. In addition to the new jetty, "Pluto" fuel tanks had been installed at the harbour near the Conqueror pub, and across the river in Rye Golf Course. Minefields were built to the edge of the Rother from both the east and west being just a hundred yards from our back yard. Father could no longer stroll along the harbour wall to refuel the harbour entrance navigation lights, however, they were extinguished now for the period of the war. In addition to mine fields, a scaffolding barrier was built all along the coast from Fairlight to Dungeness, and mines were hung on it so that if any vessel touch them they exploded.

One morning, Mr Crampton was leaving in his fishing boat "Mizpah" for a day's fishing in Rye Bay, when an ME-109 flew down the river and shot his boat up. Poor Mr Crampton was hit in his backside by a cannon shell and became a cripple for the rest of his life. The boat sank in the entrance gap of the pile fencing which had been erected across the harbour to prevent German E-Boats making a possible attack up the harbour during high tides. Father now had the job of raising the "Mizpah" all by himself. He went down river with his longboat and several huge lifting buoys which he attached to the fishing boat at low water. Then as the tide started to rise, the buoys lifted the boat off the harbour bottom and father brought her up river on the flood tide to lay her on the old careening slipway alongside the ferry steps on the Camber side of the river. There the old "Mizpah" would lay until she was broken up after WWII.

Before the war Father had a great relationship going with the owner of a converted Thames sailing barge, the La Toquette (I may have the spelling wrong here!). She had been converted from sail into a motorised luxury motor yacht - the owner a Scottish gentleman name MacGregor. The RN commanded the vessel and she acted as a naval wardroom for a while. Father removed the Hunting Rifles and ammo from the vessel - the owner used to go hunting in South Africa quite a lot before the war. In payment MacGregor gave father the yacht's old 14ft sailing dinghy, which he turned into a motorised fishing boat by installing an Austin 7 engine and extending the stern by about 3-4ft so it looked very much like a Hastings' beach boat, as well as building up her sides an extra 18 inches She was christened "Anthea" after my eldest sister.

With the Allied Forces now ashore in Europe, the 'Hit and Run Raids' rather tailed off to be replaced by 'Night Intruder' attacks, by mid-1944. One night during 1943/4, a FW-190 fighter bomber dropped a bomb on the Chemical Works, but it fell in the mud alongside the jetty next to the works. It was subsequently shot down by one of our night fighters and crashed on Camber Sands just to the east for the harbour eastern entrance light. The following morning father together with a Police

Sergeant went to look at the wreckage. The aircraft was completely burnt out and nothing left of the pilot who died in the inferno. The next aerial phase of Nazi bombardment of the RH area, was by the V-1 "Buzz Bombs." This started on the night of the 13th of June 1944, and lasted about 4-6 months until the RAF and the USAAF bombed the launch sites in the Pas de Calais. Finally, on the 8th of May, 1945, the European War came to an end, and everybody tried to return to normal.

The new Jetty helped father a great deal in coping with the influx of fishing boats from the East Coast during the war. They had been driven off their regular fishing grounds by German E-Boats. Daily these new boats would come in with their decks piled high with boxes of fish, and at the rate they were going, sooner or later Rye Bay was going to be fished out!! Then after the war, the French boats from Boulogne started poaching our waters, making matters worse until the Naval Fish Patrol arrested them and took them to Court and confiscated their nets.

Throughout the war father did have a deputy to help him, Mr Smith from the Tram Road. Unfortunately, his house was bombed and his wife was killed in the attack. He, fortunately was away at the time, but after the war father more or less soldiered on by himself. He was very popular with the fishermen who often dropped off a box of fish for him and the family. He always had the Dover Soles, mother the 'Maids Wings' (Skate), and us kiddy winks had the plaice and white fish. I used to and still do love fish and much prefer it to beef or pork.

After the war, the RH Sailing Club re-established itself and dinghy racing took place every weekend if the tides were right. Also private sailing and motor yachts began to appear and became a permanent feature at the harbour. Then, because of the increase in coaster trade to Rye, it was decided to construct a new unloading wharf on the west bank of the Rother just up river from the old boulder and railway terminal, and just downstream from the Beach Works. Father had a great say in exactly where it should be built, and soon he was piloting coasters into the new facility with lumber, bricks, you name it. By this time I had left home and joined the Royal Navy, a great deal had happened during my absence. The old light Tower had gone, and a brand new very imposing HM's Office was built where the tower used to stand. The HM house had been extended by two additional cottages and the old "Maltings" cottage had disappeared in a mysterious fire. By 1970 father had reached retirement age, and he moved with mother to a cottage in Peasmarsh just north of Rye. He had been in the job almost 40 yrs. He was Rye Harbour and Rye Harbour was him, and this was so obvious when he died at my sister's home in Essex where he had gone to live following mother's death in 1981, and was brought south for his funeral in RH Church, the church was chock-a-block with mourners, old friends and acquaintances. Initially, he wanted his ashes scattered in the entrance of the harbour on a falling tide, but changed his mind at the last moment for them to be scattered with his wife Marjorie up on the ridge at Hastings.

Michael Doust, February 2007