

ABERDEEN'S SHIPBUILDING HERITAGE

Stanley Bruce

Rainbow Warrior / Sir William Hardy.

It was 6th July 1954 and the workers at Hall Russell shipyard laid the keel for their latest contract. It was to build a new Research Vessel for the UK Government Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), and the hull form was based on a conventional trawler design. Hall Russell in 1951 built a smaller ship 'Cape St. Mary' (242 GRT) for the West African Fisheries Research Institute, which was paid for by the UK Government. On the 29th November of the same year their latest new build ship was on the launch-ways, and with the smash of a bottle on her bow Mrs G. A. Reay wife of the superintendent at Torry Research Station named her 'Sir William Hardy' after the British biologist and food scientist (1864 to 1934). Little did they know that this relatively small ship would in her later life be given a name that would be known all over the world.

She was the first 'diesel-electric' trawler built in the UK. This at the time was an innovative design that uses a diesel engine to run a generator, which then provides the power to an electric motor which turns the propeller. Nowadays this is standard design on most ships.

Statistics

Hall Russell Yard No.: 846.

Registration No. A45. (A for Aberdeen).

Gross Registered Tonnage (GRT):

418 tons.

Length: 40m (131ft, 3in).

Depth: 4.6m (15ft).

Breadth: 9m (27ft, 7in).

Propulsion: 2 engines.

Speed: 12 knots.

Accommodation: 16 crew members and 4 scientists.

Cost: £250,000 approx.

Sea Trials: 30th March 1955.

Delivery Date: January 1956.

Decommissioned by MAFF: 1977.

MAFF - Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.



Launch of the Sir William Hardy, Aberdeen, 29th November 1954. (Hall Russell archives).

Government records state that during her engine room trials with Hall Russell it was found that there was insufficient air entering the engine-room when the propulsive machinery was operating at normal power resulting in higher temperatures than anticipated. This problem took six months to resolve and an additional cost of approx. £3,000. Costs included a study to determine how much ventilation was required, and the design and installation of a larger ventilation system.

Registered in Aberdeen with Fishery registration number A45, she worked for the Torry Research Station, Aberdeen, which was established in 1931 to study how best to improve the preservation of fish.

In 1977 after being decommissioned by MAFF she was lying idle, berthed in the in the Isle of Dogs, London. She was found there by Denise Bell of Greenpeace (who was later to become a crew member). Her instinct told her that this ship was perfect for what they needed, and Greenpeace put an offer in to buy her for £42,725. The price was later renegotiated down to only £36,872 as per the bill of sale dated 26th January 1978. At the time, she was referred to as a 'rust bucket', however Greenpeace volunteers managed to make her ship-shape in only 3 to 4 months, so perhaps her condition wasn't so bad and the rust only cosmetic, after all she was a government ship and usually they are well maintained. As Greenpeace's first ship, she was re-launched on 29th April 1978 and renamed the 'Rainbow Warrior'.

Her name came from Greenpeace's Paris office. Remi Parmentier (A founding member of Greenpeace) after reading Hugo Verlomme's book *Mer-mère* liked the idea of "Le Combattant de

l’Arc-en-ciel”, and Susi Newborn of Greenpeace UK simplified Parmentier’s Gallic to “Rainbow Warrior”. Many believe her name was given after a North American Cree Indian prophecy: “*When the world is sick and dying, the people will rise up like Warriors of the Rainbow*”, however this connection was made a few years after her naming ceremony. She was painted with a rainbow pattern on her hull, a dove of peace carrying an olive branch on her bow to symbolise Greenpeace’s mission, and on her funnel a motif of two whales forming the infinite cycle of nature.

29th April 1978, she sailed out of London onward to Amsterdam, then Copenhagen, and then to Hamburg, she was greeted by large crowds at each port. In Hamburg, local environmentalists lowered a piano onto her deck, rigged up some spotlights and held a welcoming party and concert on her deck with a popular German jazz band. Quite appropriate as some of the men who built this ship played in Hall Russell’s male choir.



Rainbow Warrior berthed in Amsterdam in 1981. (Hans van Dijk).

Her first real mission was to protest against the hunting of whales by Norwegian and Icelandic whaling fleets. The aim of the campaign was to highlight the plight of the whales and attempt to force the International Whaling Commission to introduce a moratorium on whaling. Ironically, during her refit in 1981 it was discovered that some of her hydraulics were filled with whale oil, which had been fitted before Greenpeace’s purchase of the ship, probably when built.

In 1985, she had sails fitted, and had a new mission to protest against nuclear testing in Moruroa Atoll in the French Polynesia, South Pacific. The plan was to escort a flotilla of smaller yachts from Auckland in New Zealand to the island and monitor past and present impact of nuclear testing. It was revealed later that the French Government knew all about Greenpeace’s intentions and on 10th July 1985 French Intelligence Service agents took action to stop the planned protest and planted explosives on her hull while berthed in Auckland Harbour. Just before midnight an explosion rocked

the ship and she began taking water. Most of the members of the 11-man crew left the ship only to hear a second explosion. It is recorded that a French scuba diver planted two packets of plastic-wrapped explosives to the ship's hull; one was sited near the propeller, and the second outside the engine room. Sadly, 35-year old Portuguese photographer and father of two young children Fernando Pereira never made it off the ship and died during the attack. The hole in the hull adjacent to the engine room was approximately eight feet in diameter.

The French initially denied responsibility, however the New Zealand police apprehended two French agents, Major Alain Mafart and Captain Dominique Prieur, and charged them with arson, conspiracy to commit arson, wilful damage, and murder. The French Defence Minister Charles Hernu resigned when the truth about the scandal became public knowledge.

On 22nd September 1985, French Prime Minister Laurent Fabius held a press conference and admitted: *"Agents of the French Secret Service sank this boat. They acted on orders."*

The two French agents were brought to court and both pleaded guilty to manslaughter. They were both sentenced to ten years in prison. They were both confined to the French island of Hao but they only served less than three years before being freed by the French Government.

Rainbow Warrior was re-floated for forensic tests, and later deemed uneconomical to repair. On the 12th December 1987, she was scuttled in Mātāuri Bay, near the Cavalli Islands, New Zealand (34.9748°S 173.9349°E) and now forms an artificial reef, which is frequently visited by divers.

The French Government wrongly thought that sinking the Rainbow Warrior would stop Greenpeace protesting against its nuclear testing in the Pacific, but it had the opposite effect. The loss of the ship and the death of Fernando Pereira put Greenpeace on the news worldwide, and strengthened support against nuclear testing in the Pacific (which ceased in 1996). The Aberdeen built trawler played her part in the Greenpeace story, which started from a small group of volunteers in 1971 to now being represented in 55 countries and having an incredible 2.8 million supporters worldwide.

Stanley Bruce, 2017.