

GLOUCESTER DEAL PORTERS IN THE 1920s - 1930s

Major C.S.N. Walker, retired partner in Price Walker & Co., in conversation with John Rhodes on 27.6.92. As a young man Major Walker worked at the Gloucester office of his family's timber-importing business before opening a branch office at Bristol in 1933.

Unloading deals was done by subcontract. We dealt with three or foremen porters. We would tell the foreman the specification and he then picked a gang of (say) twenty-five men. We simply divided the value of the work by twenty-five, and that was what we paid to each man.

The deals were stacked in the lighter in layers, crosswise. There would be one or two tally-clerks, always keeping one layer ahead, calling out 'seventeen nineteen eighteen twenty seventeen' (lengths in feet). The numbers were written down and sent up to us in the office. We checked the totals against

the Russian or Swedish bills of lading and the same totals were used for paying the men.

We didn't limit the hours that the men could work, and if they knew another load was coming up they would work long hours and very fast indeed.

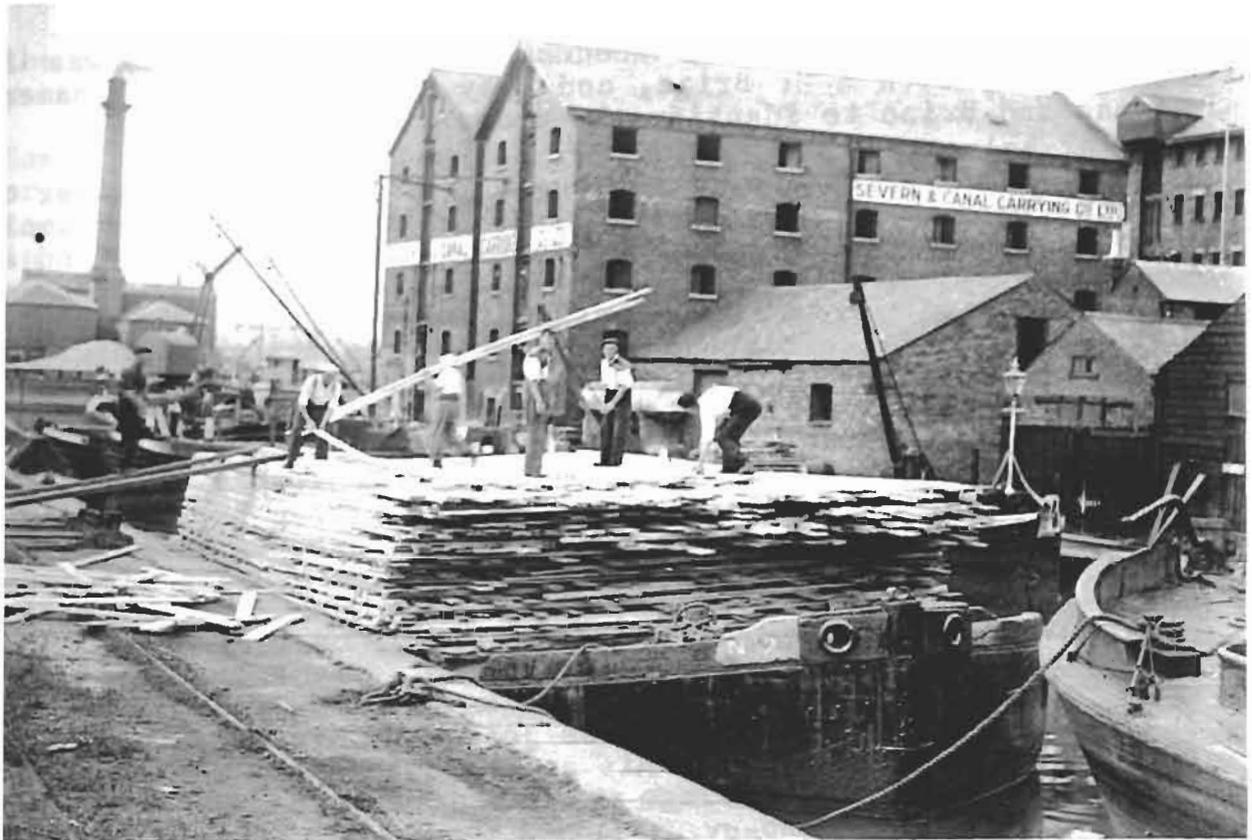
Two men swung the load onto the deal porter's shoulder - there was a knack in that, too - and he started running. There were trestles of various heights, and the stacks went up to a height of eighteen or twenty feet, but the runs were only one plank wide. There was a rhythm to it. Try it when you get home, running along a builder's plank. The plank bounces, and if the plank is coming up when your foot goes down it will throw you off. You need short steps at the ends and longer ones in the middle.

Deals ranged from $2\frac{1}{2}$ x 3 up to 7 x 11 and mostly weighed about a hundredweight each, such as 3 x 7's 18 feet long. Smaller sizes of timber were called battens and boards, boards being up to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick, and the men would carry them two or three at a time.

The wages could be extremely good. I often paid out £40, and at that time the usual wage was between £2 and £3. The men used to beg us not to pay them in £5 notes because they couldn't change them. We insisted that if the wage was over £20 they should accept a £5 note because it was hard on the clerks - that's to say, me - to count it all out in £1's.

Once an American took some photographs and said 'When I tell them back in the States that I've seen deal porters running, they won't believe me.' Gloucester was one of the few ports where deal porters ran. I don't know about the Surrey Commercial Docks, but certainly in Bristol the pace was more sedate and the stacks were not as high, either.

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Unloading a lighter at Romans' Yard in the barge arm of Gloucester Docks. From left to right, A is picking up boards and putting them into piles of two, three or four, B has got his load and is running off, while C and D are getting into place ready for A and E, one at each end, to put loads onto their shoulders.

A SHORT HISTORY OF NEWMAN HENDER & CO

Roy K. Close

1 Beginnings

Samuel John Newman, the founder of Newman Hender, was born in the Crimea in 1845 during the time his father, also Samuel, was engaged as an engineer and architect on the creation of the docks there. Brought to England in 1856, he took up residence at Nailsworth after receiving his education at several schools in south east England. He began his business career in engineering at Stroud. He then ran an ironmongery business on the Cross at Nailsworth before establishing a small engineering