

PLACES: GOOLE

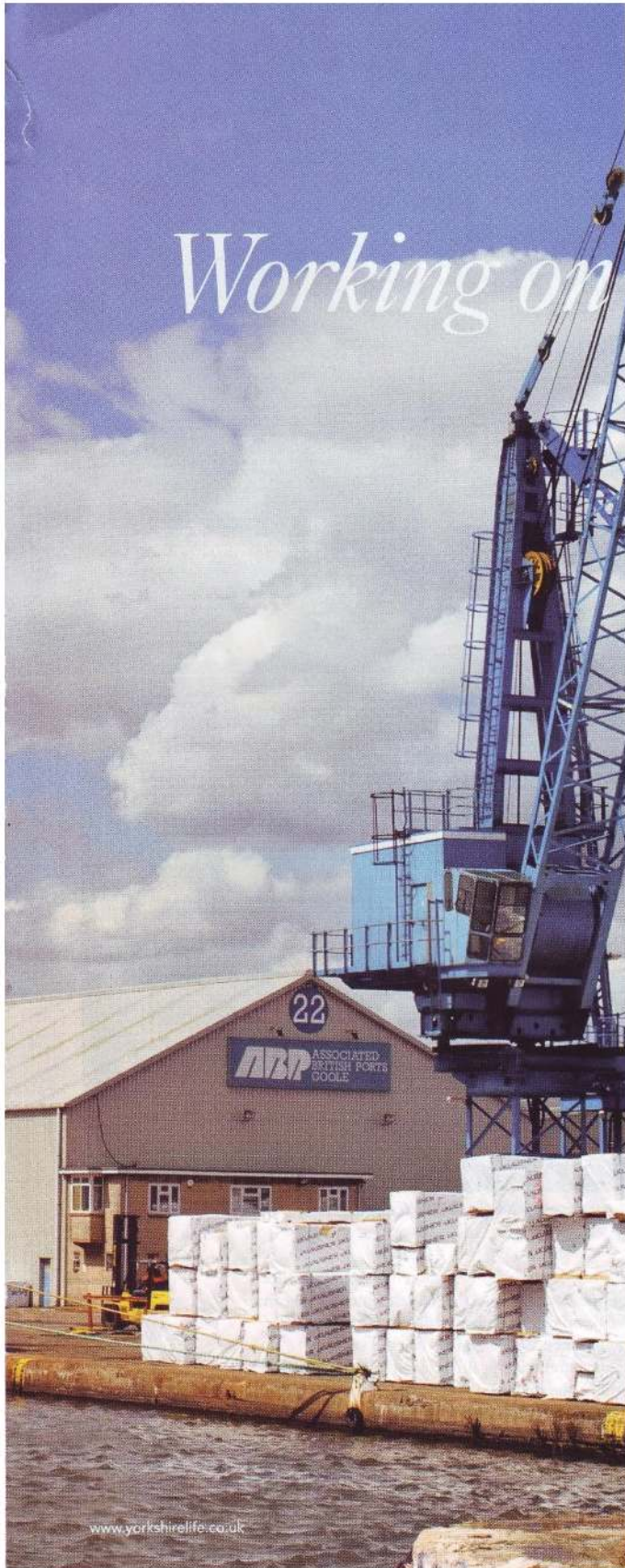


Scot Isles unloading  
timber in West Dock

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# Working on WATER

Chris Titley sails majestically into Britain's most inland port and is fascinated by the place and charmed by its people

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NEIL HOLMES

**T**here's something wonderfully surreal about Goole. One moment you are driving your car past fields and houses, the next you're overtaking a great hulking ship.

A double take out of the side window confirms it: yes, you are gliding past a vast bulk carrier as it sits in the dock waiting to return to who-knows-where. Imagination then transports you on to the vessel's bow, as the proud weather-beaten skipper stoically leading another perilous expedition across the oceans... and you miss your turning.

Goole has that pleasantly unsettling effect. Traversing earth and water, it's neither coastal nor landlocked, but in a place all of its own. If you wanted a word to describe the slightly odd feeling of half-walking, half-floating around this singular town, it's very, well, Goolish.

With its centenary clock tower, bustling Boothferry Road, pedestrianised shopping centre and handsome Victorian brick buildings, it has a very down-to-earth Yorkshireness about it. Yet no other patch of sky is quite like that over Goole, with its cranes, the 'salt and pepper pot' water towers and church spire.

More than anything though, this is a place that works on water. The land only became inhabitable when the River Don was diverted into the Ouse at the behest of Charles I. That feat of engineering also enabled small barges laden with Yorkshire coal to navigate to the sea along what became known as the Dutch River, in tribute to Cornelius Vermuyden who engineered it.

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Goole marina does bustling business

When the Aire and Calder Navigation Company extended the canal to Goole and built the docks in the 1820s, the town as we know it was born. Nearly 50 miles from the sea it's Britain's most inland port, but that didn't stop Goole from being a key player in Yorkshire's international trade links.

'It was very much at the hub of the industrial revolution,' said Clare Hunt, of Goole's Yorkshire Waterways Museum. 'Of course the demise of the pits severely affected the industries of Goole. It's now containerised shipping, whereas before it was shipbuilding and coal transportation.'

The award-winning museum tells the story of the port and the lives of the families bound up with it. Part of that tale is the invention of a fascinating form of integrated transport – the Tom Puddings.

These floating compartments could each carry about 40 tons of coal. They were linked together and pulled along by barge, and together resembled a large water-borne black pudding, hence the name. They were then hoisted up and their contents poured into sea-going ships at the docks. The system was efficient enough to compete with rail freight up until 1985.

The museum's collection began a year later – and that turned out to be in the nick of time. 'There were 13,000 Tom Puddings and now there are only three and we've got them here,' Clare said. 'Everybody went short of money and scrapped them. We're doing a big Heritage Lottery Fund conservation project on the Tom Puddings and the coal tug right now.'

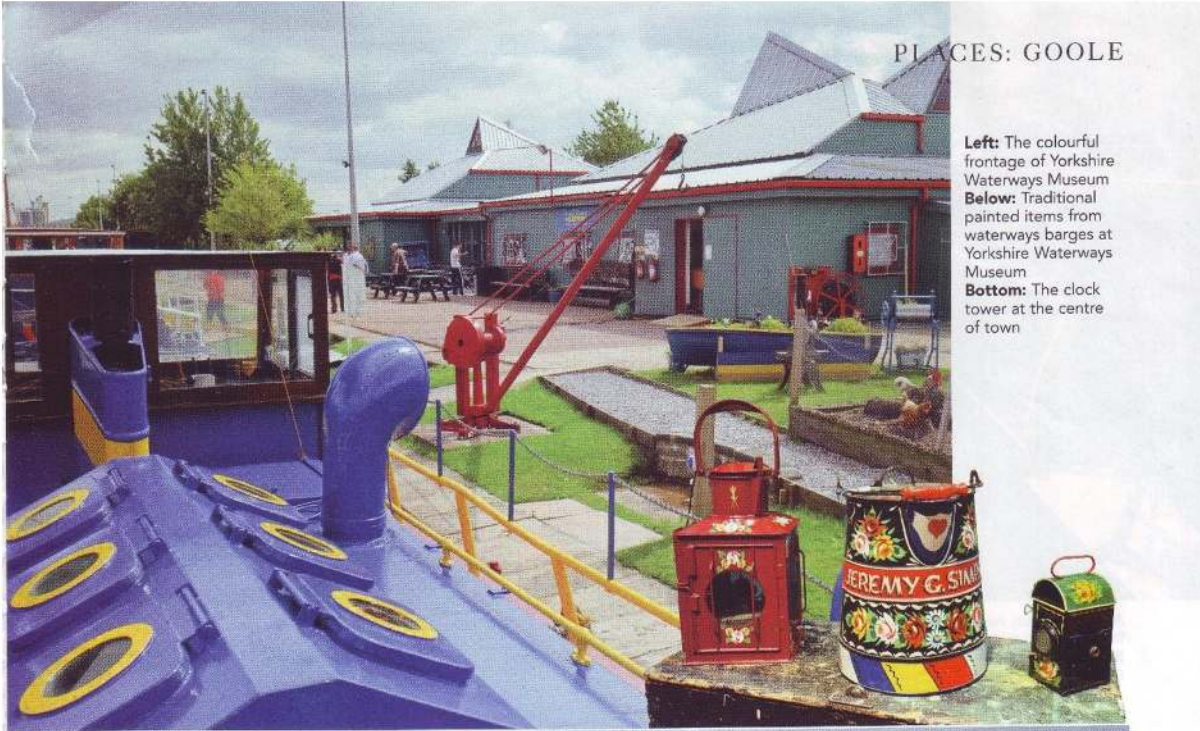


Telethon Louise, a converted lifeboat that provides tours of the docks

The successful conservation of this unique slice of industrial heritage will be celebrated during the weekend of September 19th and 20th. 'There's going to be a huge Shanty Festival with demonstration trips of the Tom Puddings, which will be the first time they've been on the water since they stopped working. There'll be music, boats, food, events – lots of activities going on.'

The museum also hosts history tours around the docks by boat at weekends or, if booked in advance,

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**Left:** The colourful frontage of Yorkshire Waterways Museum  
**Below:** Traditional painted items from waterways barges at Yorkshire Waterways Museum  
**Bottom:** The clock tower at the centre of town

during the rest of the week. But apart from being an excellent way to discover what Goole is all about, the museum has another important role: 'It's using the waterways and museum collection to tackle social exclusion. We're very much a project about helping disadvantaged people as well as a visitor attraction.'

This seems very much in keeping with Goole's friendly, inclusive ethos. 'It's a close-knit community,' said Clare. 'We all know each other reasonably well.'

'We've now got the Renaissance initiative from Yorkshire Forward in Goole. I'm on the board for that and it's going to do a lot of capital improvement and improve civic pride.'

Renaissance Goole is the umbrella organisation tasked with continuing the town's revival. It has hosted workshops asking townspeople to 'see Goole in a new light'.

Another board member is Roger Millar of the Goole Development Trust. This has helped create 300 jobs, generate £1 million in business loans and transform the old Goole shipyard into the Phoenix Business Centre since its inception in 1997.

It's enabled Goole to see beyond the modernisation of the docks, he explained. 'The port's very significant. It's still a major feature in the town. Something like five million tonnes goes through Goole. But as with an awful lot of ports, containers and mechanisation led to a massive loss of jobs for people here.'

Many more improvements are in the pipeline, including a new arts and cultural centre and



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**Above:** Old sits happily with new at Goole marina  
**Right:** The traditional redbrick Victorian market hall  
**Below right:** Goole's new shopping centre off Edinburgh Street

redevelopment at Goole College. So the mood is one of upbeat optimism?

'Yes. That's not to say it was pessimistic before,' said Roger. 'I've been here for 10 years. When I first arrived I was impressed with the optimism in the place. There's even more of that about now.'

Mel Lockwood would agree with that sentiment. For 21 years he's been landlord of one of the town's best pubs, the Macintosh Arms, named after the man who commissioned the docks, Sir Hugh Macintosh. Part of the grade II listed building was once the magistrates' court.

Today it's a lively place where you've a choice of proper beer and the chance for a competitive game of dominoes or a chat with one of the Wobbly Goolies, as the motorcycle club which meets here is colourfully nicknamed.

'Most people are really friendly round here,' said Mel. 'Yorkshire folk are, I think.' Visitors should check out the marina, he suggests. 'There's a nice marina down the Dutch riverside. It's full. There's a waiting list of about a hundred. We could do with a new marina opposite this pub.'

Mel is Goole born and bred, but thanks to the government's boundary changes, he's not entirely sure where he's from. 'There's one thing about Goole – nobody really wants us.'

'I was born in the West Riding of Yorkshire, then they told me I was in North Humberside, now I'm in East Yorkshire. I've never flitted and I've been in three different counties.'

That's Goole. Surreal to the end. ☺



