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**5 THE SHORT HISTORY OF THE NOSS  
SHIPYARD  
IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup>. CENTURY.**

**By**

**Ivor H Smart C.Eng M.R.Ae S M.I.E.E.**

**Description and Location**

The Noss shipyard is located on the small headland, known as Noss Point, between Higher and Lower Noss Creeks on the Kingswear side of the River Dart, between Hoodown and Maypool. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup>. century it had no connection by road to the surrounding area and was a popular picnic site for the local population, who if they lived in Dartmouth travelled to the spot by boat. From 1831 the road communication improved when the turnpike road from Hillhead to the Floating Bridge Ferry was built by the Company of that name. In 1862-4 the line of railway built by the Dartmouth and Torbay Railway Company crossed the two creeks over the Longwood and Noss wooden viaducts and over the short distance between these two works the line was taken through a cutting on Noss Point<sup>1</sup>.

**Description of Noss in 1891.**

In 1891 when Simpson and Strickland surveyed the site for their new works the broad-gauge railway line bisected the site from north to south and, apart from a single farmhouse besides the cutting, the land was virginal. Prior to 1891 Noss was completely unspoilt, an area of outstanding natural beauty, not having been used for other than rural pursuits except from about 1795 until 1807 when the north side of the small headland had been the site of the Noss shipbuilding yard of Benjamin Tanner. Higher Noss Creek, however, was used as a timber pond from 1795 onwards; firstly by Benjamin Tanner and then by William Ashford of Dartmouth. Tanner in the early 1800's had started to build a small settlement of houses at Noss for his workmen and their families, but the work had hardly started in 1807 when Tanner went bankrupt and the materials and components for the houses were seized by Capt. Tomlinson RN, Tanner's principal creditor<sup>2</sup>.

The area purchased for the new works was commodious, stretching eastward from Noss Point along Noss Plantation, which wood formed a backdrop to the area to be developed. Initially, starting in 1891, the design and management office block was built on the south side of the headland and where a fitting-out quay was built. The cut-away on the north side, at the point where Tanner's slipways had been, was left as it was. Nothing more was erected east of the railway cutting. West of the cutting all was different as, between 1891 and 1893, a modern engineering works and boat building establishment was erected

### **The Noss Works described**

Robert Cranford toured the works in April 1893, by which time all but the foundry hands had transferred from the Dartmouth side of the river, and summarised the work in progress and described the layout of the buildings so far erected. Access was gained from the Floating Bridge via the Bridge Road and an access path; a walk of about 6 minutes. The two-storey office building referred to above had been designed by E Appleton & Son of Kingswear and Torquay. The whole structure, which still stands, was built by the company's workforce. The lower storey contained the partners offices, the board room and toilet accommodation. Along the southern front was a veranda. Upstairs were the design and drawing offices, clerk's offices with telegraph apparatus, cashiers office and timekeepers office.

On the eastern edge of Lower Noss Creek was the steel boat building shed and a similar shed for wooden boats had been built on the south side of Higher Noss Creek. Here too were the sawmill, carpenters and coppersmiths shops. Adjacent was a small wet dock. To the west of the GWR main line which ran north-south through the site were the engineering, fitting and boiler shops, the latter containing five forges. The whole works were circumscribed by a tram line and overhead crane passing between the workshops so that raw materials and finished components, such as engines and boilers, could be transported between site locations as required. The Great Western Railway cutting which formed the eastern limit of the Noss works was removed in 1927 when the Longwood and Noss viaducts came to the end of their useful life and a deviation line around the base of the Noss peninsula was built. Long before this time the works had expanded to the east beyond the line of the cutting; many shops were built here by 1904. Thus the cutting split the works in two.

The machinery was driven via line shafting and belts or, in the case of the large presses and flanging machines by hydraulic power. Motive power was provided by two Kingdon vertical tandem compound steam engines with a common boiler. One engine drove the line shafting whilst the other pumped water from a reservoir situated behind and above the works. Water from this reservoir provided hydraulic power to the presses, riveting and flanging machines. A large stores building completed the complex. The works were capable of building and refitting of boats and ships, both in steel and wood and manufacturing and erecting engines and boilers of several types<sup>3</sup>. Initially, engine production comprised mainly Kingdon Engines and 'Turkey' boilers in the 1890's.

In 1892 when the Engine works were transferred to Noss from Sandquay the output was of the D<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>A type, of which, as has been mentioned examples still exist however, in 1893 the firm produced an ordinary two-crank compound engine to meet Admiralty standards. In 1895 a three-throw crank triple expansion engine was introduced. and shortly after an in-line four-crank quadruple expansion engine designed by W. Cross. Boiler design had been developed from the earliest days commencing with the Kingdon 'Turkey' boiler, so named from the turkey trademark on the works plate. In 1886 a new type of Turkey boiler was patented and appeared in the 1889 catalogue. This was followed by the 'Crabpot' boiler in 1901, which was produced in several variants. From 1890 onwards a locomotive type boiler with horizontal tubes was produced, particularly for Admiralty pinnaces and in 1896 the company brought out their lightweight water tube boiler utilising Thorneycroft patents. In 1901 the company produced their first oil engine and thereafter the production of Kingdon engines was phased out. The last Kingdon engine was manufactured in 1912. The last steam engine was made in 1917<sup>4</sup>. However, some steam engines and boilers in the course of construction were stored by Philip and Son Ltd after they took over the Noss Works in 1918 and remained in store until World War II when they were broken up for scrap<sup>5</sup>

It was at Noss Yard in 1900 that the first automobiles in Dartmouth were designed and built. The steam cars were designed by Harry Hinder, who was the chargehand fitter in the Engine Works, and was the man who invented the Hinder Reversing Gear. The basis of the car was a Kingdon engine and boiler mounted on a 'ladder' chassis. Three cars were built and each cost £100 to build. The first car was used by Simpson himself, the second car was sold to Major Hockin, probably Percy Roe Hockin son of the erstwhile Town Clerk, and the third car was sold to Dr. J H Harris, Dartmouth's Medical Officer of Health. The car had a maximum speed of 16 mph and on a trial run up the Victoria Road it travelled at 5 mph<sup>6</sup>.

### **The demise of Simpson, Strickland and Co. Ltd.**

The end of the company was sudden and the reason given subsequently was that despite of lucrative wartime contracts the financial health of the firm was deteriorating and the banks had threatened to foreclose. Rumours began to circulate in Dartmouth. At the end of 1916 or early 1917--there was no report in the local papers due to wartime security--Simpson-Strickland ceased business and closed down. No reasons for this step were ever released, but rumour has it the company's bankers had refused fresh credit, or that orders for the company's products had dried up due to the War, or that large amounts of money had been lost on attempts to build a rocket propelled launch (There are some drawings to be seen in Brixham Museum), and in attempting to develop a marine multi-cylinder Diesel engine such as those being offered by Doxford, Harland & Wolfe and Continental manufacturers. Others have it that Simpson was aged, in his seventies, and could find no successor. His eldest son was a clerk in Holy Orders, the second left the Army and inherited lands and property from his mother's side. His youngest son was killed in action in 1915. One of his daughters had married the son of Sir John I.

Thorneycroft, the famous shipbuilder and inventor of the water tube boiler that bears his name, but he too decided against entering the business.

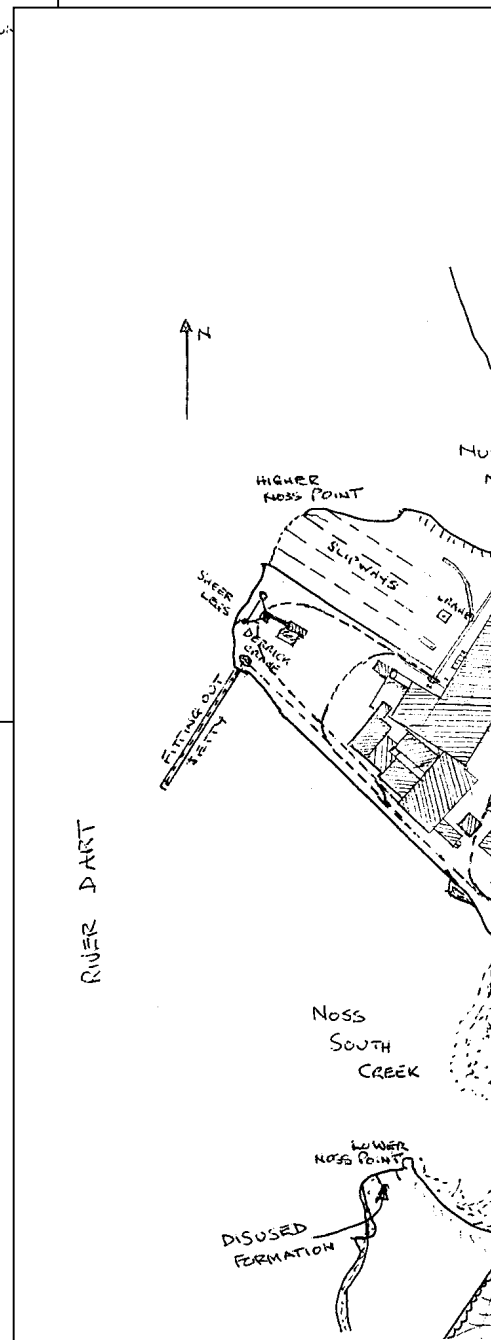
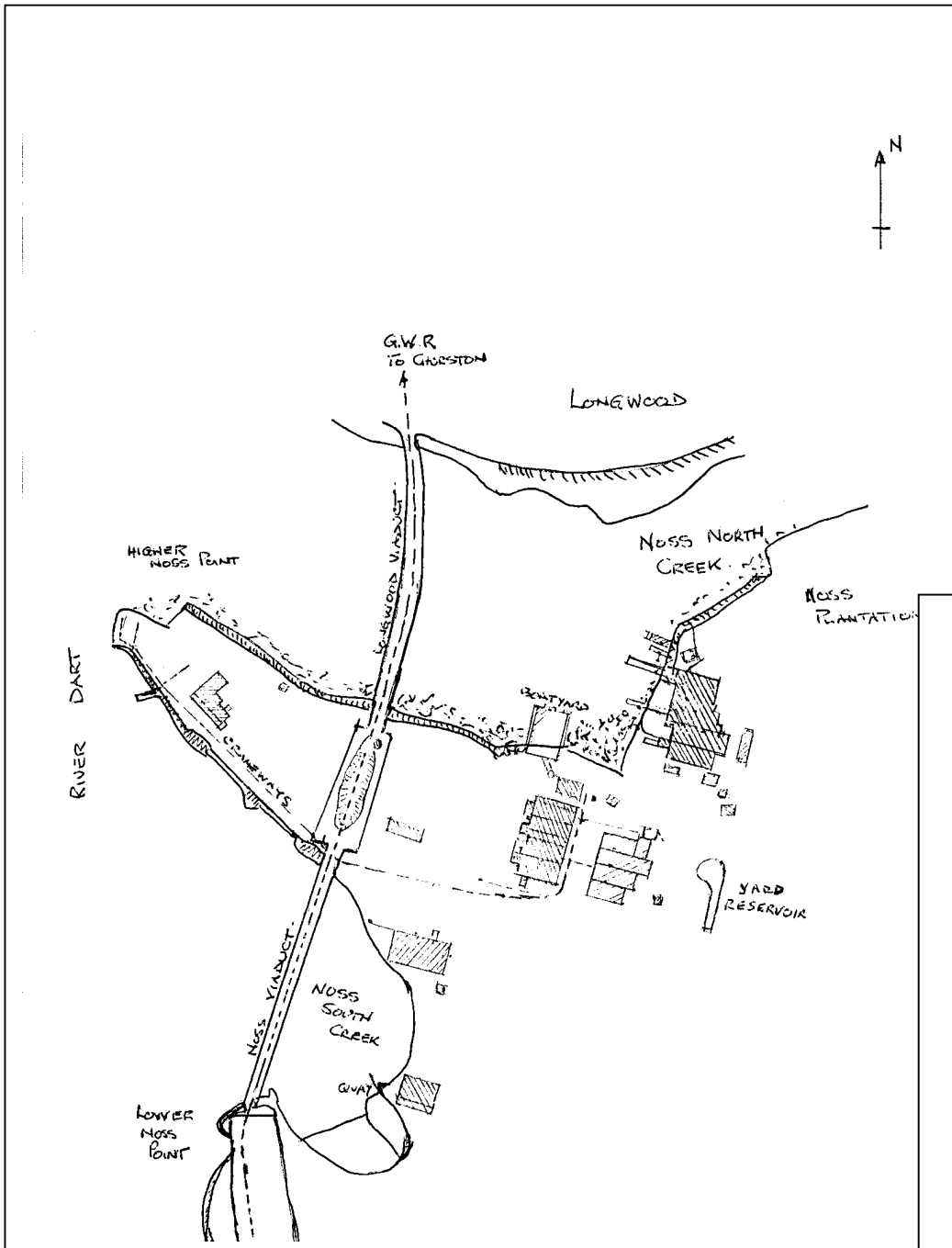
In March 1917 it was reported in the Dartmouth Chronicle that nearly all the Simpson, Strickland workforce had offered themselves for service under the terms of the Voluntary Services Act. Opting to serve with the Colours under this Act was preferable to waiting until conscripted with all the unfavourable comments to which young men in good health were subjected. On 19<sup>th</sup> July 1917 the Noss Works were offered for sale at a London venue, but there were no bidders. As the notice of the sale was signed by Mr West, the company secretary, it can be assumed that no Receiver or Liquidator was appointed. Rumour now swept the town to the effect that the works had been sold to Swan, Hunter and Wigham, Richardson of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. This rumour was superseded by another claiming that a Dr. Purves of Exeter was negotiating the amalgamation of both Dartmouth shipyards. It was to this end that Swan-Hunter had purchased the Noss yard. Plans for the new development produced by Dr. Purves were said to be under consideration by the Admiralty and the Ministry of Munitions.

An article published in the *Western Morning News* in August 1917, quoting a Swan-Hunter source, stated that the Newcastle company had not bought the Noss Works, but were only considering the matter. The spokesman went on to say that the problem was the location of the shipyard at so great a distance from the steel producing centres. Carriage of goods by sea was expensive and the company would want a subsidy to build in Dartmouth. He said also that a lack of available labour would restrict expansion<sup>7</sup>.

In 1918 the Noss Yard was sold to Philip & Son Ltd who moved part of their operations across the river from Sandquay. They enlarged the complex by building workshops west of the railway cutting and carried on their business whilst running down what remained of the Simpson, Strickland activities<sup>8</sup>. The launch and engine designs were run down, but the building of boilers continued for some years albeit with Philip's engines. Simpson, Strickland were finally dissolved on 20<sup>th</sup> June 1922<sup>9</sup>.

In 1921 Philip & Son purchased for breaking-up two vessels of the late Imperial German Navy. These were the **TBD 12** and the light cruiser **Stuttgart**. Whilst the cruiser was broken up the Torpedo-boat destroyer had a much longer life. This was because in March 1924 the Company purchased a floating dock, believed to be **AFD** (Admiralty Floating Dock) **24**. This floating dock was moored at

Simpson &  
 Strickland Co.  
 Noss  
 Engineering  
 Works 1904  
 showing the  
 wooden railway  
 viaducts – traced  
 by Ivor H. Smart  
 – 1987



*Philip & Son Ltd., Noss Yard, circa 1950 showing the rail lines and the Deviation Embankment – traced by Ivor H. Smart – 1987.*

first to the north of Noss Point secured alongside 2 vertical piles as guides. In August 1924 this floating dock sank and was eventually raised two months later and towed to a position just offshore at Sandquay. Access to this dock from the yard was across a two span bow-girder bridge. The centre ends of the two spans rested on the stripped out hull of **TBD 12**, still with its turtle-decked fo'csle. After the Second World War when the dock became obsolete the hull of **TBD 12** was beached on the Kingswear side of the river between Waterhead Creek and Noss Creek where it could be seen from the railway.

### **Notes and References**

1. *The Railway from Newton Abbot to Kingswear*, C.R. Potts, Oakwood Press, 1989
2. *Benjamin Tanner, Shipbuilder*, I. H Smart, Unpublished.
3. A detailed description of this work was published in the *Dartmouth Chronicle* of 28/4/1893.
4. I am greatly indebted to Mr. Brian Hillsdon of the Steam Boat Association of Great Britain for the use of his notes which were prepared for an article on Simpson, Strickland propulsion units in an engineering magazine but which article was not published.
5. Conversation with the late John E Horsley, Founder Curator of Brixham Museum and erstwhile Chief Buyer of Philip & Son Ltd.. Many of Simpson, Strickland drawings were discovered by Mr. Horsley during a search of the stores of Simpson, Strickland and these are now in Brixham Museum, including those of a rocket propelled launch.
6. Tape of conversation between Mrs E.R. Freeman, historian, and Mr. Tom Blamey. Mr Blamey was born in 1902 and for many years was employed as a 'lumper' by the Dartmouth Coaling Company Ltd.
7. Files of the *Dartmouth Chronicle* for 1917, Cookworthy Museum, Kingsbridge.
8. Ibid 1918
9. op. cit Ref 4

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