

Speed was never Herbert's strong point. It was impossible to create a sense of urgency, especially in his old age when he was dogged with bronchitis. Clara's last refit took six years, which must have been a record by any standards. But the delay was largely caused by illness. Previously he had been strong as an ox, in spite of a limp attributable to polio in his childhood, and skilful with his hands in spite of losing the end of a finger in an accident. Although only 5' 6" in height and slim of build, he could manhandle a rudder twice his size and more than twice his weight.

One job for which he had to have help was steaming planks. The curves in a boat's hull do not come naturally, and an oak plank 2 ½ inches thick, nine inches wide and 20 feet long does not bend easily. The solution was to heat it inside a metal tube, connected to a steam boiler, for about four hours. When it became malleable, the plank was taken out using sacking as protection for the hands, carried at top speed to be fitted into position and held there with G-cramps the size of tennis rackets (and a lot stronger). In 10-15 minutes the scalding hot planks had cooled and become rigid. If they were fitting nicely in place, they kept their shape. If not, they were useless.

The boiler was inside one of Herbert's 'shops' along with an assortment of saw benches and lathes, all connected to an overhead belt-driven power system which would have terrified any safety inspector. Next door stood the paint shop whose door was encrusted with paint an inch thick, where countless brushes had been cleaned for a century by being wiped on the door. Next to that was the third shop where Herbert worked at his bench amidst rows of tools – 20 chisels, 10 hammers. 15 saws, spanners and screwdrivers of all shapes and sizes. Always the right tool for the job.

Inside the shops was organised chaos. Outside it was just chaos. The whole yard was full of things that might come in useful. There was something for most eventualities, and if not Herbert could improvise. Stacks of timber were lying there being seasoned. Drums of creosote, old gooseberry bushes and scrap metal added to the debris of an ancient blacksmith's shop.

In the middle of it all stood the caravan in which Herbert lived for 25 years after his house in Factory Street was compulsorily purchased and demolished in about 1960. For three years he lived on Clara, as our visitors' book records. He repaid us by keeping her pumped out with a stirrup pump of his own construction. He was unmarried and largely self-sufficient, accepting some domestic help from my mother in the shape of washing, and many slices of chocolate cake for which he had a great liking. If we invited him