

**Skyline Merseyside...
Big ships, small ships...**

**chugging away day in, day out
a small, busy pilot boat...**

This is the story of The 'Puffin' and



THE 'PUFFIN' PILOTS

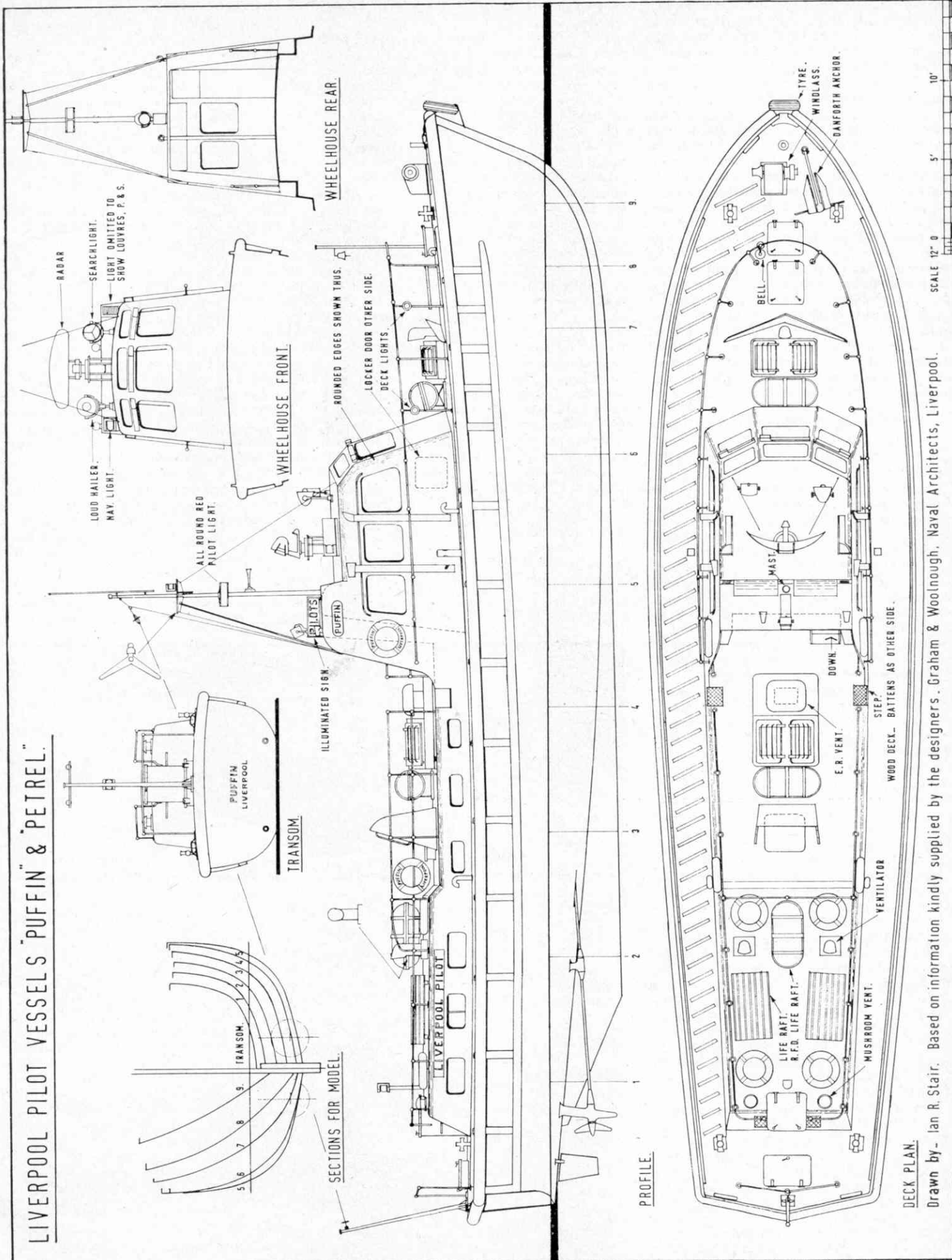
by Mike Rickett

LIVERPOOL, now famous for one of the longest under-river road tunnels in the world, its cup winning football teams, and its two Cathedrals, was renowned long before any of these, for its great docks and shipyards. Since the time of King John, in 1207 to be exact, when the Borough of Liverpool was created from a tiny hamlet within the Parish of Walton, the city has made a name for itself as a port. Although originally created solely to help King John in his war with Ireland, the Port of Liverpool is now one of the most important in the country, with a dock system that extends for over seven miles on the Liverpool side of the River Mersey.

The never-ending activity in a port has always fascinated me and the sight of ships—from majestic liners with their flotilla of fussing tugs, to busy tramps—is one that I cannot resist. The apparent ease with which ships glide along the river and into dock is deceptive and one tends to forget the enormous amount of work done behind the scenes, as it were, by a host of highly trained people.

Running a port the size of Liverpool, handling the 60 million tons of shipping that use it annually, can be unbelievably complex, especially where a river like the Mersey is concerned. In common with other rivers of

LIVERPOOL PILOT VESSELS "PUFFIN" & "PETREL".



Drawn by - Ian R. Stair. Based on information kindly supplied by the designers. Graham & Woolnough, Naval Architects, Liverpool.

SCALE 12" 0 5' 10"

its type, silt is constantly building up and it is necessary for shipping to navigate down deep channels specially dredged at the approaches to the river. Currents in the Mersey are also extremely strong and together with the 30 ft. tide, navigation could be a hazardous matter for any captain attempting to enter the port without a comprehensive knowledge of local tides, channels and weather conditions. Obviously, captains foreign to the River Mersey cannot be expected to have this knowledge and it was made compulsory, as early as 1765, for all ships entering or leaving the port, to have on board ship, pilots specially trained and familiar with local conditions on the river. Before this, pilotage was done by local men, often unqualified and untrained with no central authority to regulate their activities. Pilots, in those days, competed for the work and it is not difficult to imagine the hard, tough life that these men must have led in those far-off days of sail. There is evidence in fact that many of the early pilots engaged in smuggling activities and remains of tunnels used for this purpose can be seen to this day in Egremont on the south bank of the river.

200th ANNIVERSARY

As a result of this lack of organisation a series of serious accidents occurred in 1764, which involved a disastrous loss of lives, crews, pilots and ships. Public opinion was outraged by these events and it was this that resulted in the regularisation of the Pilot Service. The Liverpool Pilot Service celebrates this year, the 200th anniversary of organised pilotage in the port, now done through the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board—the Pilotage Authority for the port who administer the service through the Pilotage Committee. Since the first Acts of Parliament in 1766, pilots have been thoroughly trained in local conditions and are required to sit comprehensive examinations.

The launch illustrated on our front cover and Ian Stair's drawing on page 7, is one of two used by pilots for boarding or leaving ships approaching the river. Named 'Puffin' and 'Petrel', these are manned by four crews working in 12 hour shifts and consisting of a master, engineer, and two A.B.'s. Capable of carrying up to 16 pilots in after accommodation, they are powered by Rolls-Royce engines giving a speed of 16 knots. The launches have the astonishing fuel consumption of 26 gallons of high quality fuel oil per engine hour—upwards of one ton per day! In the field of electronic equipment they carry radar, radio telephones, V.H.F. radio and an echo sounder. The V.H.F. equipment is used for port operations and also for contacting the Pilot Office, other ships and dock entrances, and the radio telephone for distress calls and for contacting the G.P.O. shore stations and other ships. All controls are duplicated in the wheel house and the launches are equipped with a galley, master's cabin and crew quarters. In the Pilot Service for 3½ years, the launches weigh 46 tons and were designed by Graham & Woolnough of Liverpool and built by Phillips and Son, Dartmouth, Devon.

Basically, the duty of the 178 pilots, trained from boyhood for the service, is to meet incoming ships at the outer approaches of the port, and to guide them to their destinations in the river—usually the docks. A clearing office is maintained by a Shoremaster who allocates pilots to individual ships and who makes certain that a pilot is awaiting a ship on its arrival at the Western Station (Point Lynas), the Bar Station, or alternatively, if a

ship is leaving the port, at the place where she lies.

The majority of pilots in the service hold First Class Licences. Apart from 46 appropriated to various shipping companies, they work on a rota system, taking it in turn to pilot ships inwards or outwards as they are required.

In addition to the two launches, 'Puffin' and 'Petrel', the Pilot Service has three diesel electric Station Keeping Pilot Boats for taking pilots on and off ships. The two stations are maintained at Point Lynas, Anglesey, where the majority of ships receive their pilots and at an inner station near the Bar Lightship, 15 miles from Liverpool where the main buoyed channel into the Mersey starts.

Each of three pilot boats in turn does seven days duty at the Bar Station, followed by a similar turn at the Lynas Station, and then six days for maintenance. The boats, which are fitted with all modern aids for navigation, are manned by a crew of 22, which includes 10 boathands, and are each capable of accommodating 12 pilots. In addition to the two launches and the Pilot Station boats, the service also has a small river launch used for general duties in the river itself and particularly for conveying pilots to and from ships anchored in the Mersey.

An interesting and exciting career, entry into the service is usually by application on reaching the age of 16. The applicant must hold four 'O' level G.C.E. passes and the names are placed on a preliminary waiting list. As vacancies occur, applicants are called before an examination committee which, if he is suitable, transfers him to the official register

of applicants. When selected, the applicant is placed with a shipping company for a period of usually 6-12 months, or until a vacancy arises in the service. The apprenticeship is a long one, generally lasting 5½-6½ years, necessary to familiarise the potential pilot with the moods of the weather, tides, lights, depths, signals and the seamanship required over the Liverpool Pilotage District, which encloses an area from St. Bee's Head in Cumberland, east coast of the Isle of Man, to Anglesey and as far up the River Mersey as Eastham Locks or Garston.

During his apprenticeship, a boathand will progress through the duties of Junior Boathand, Junior Boathand on Deck, Puntman, Boatswain, Second Boathand, and Senior Boathand. Towards the end of his apprenticeship he is required to obtain a Ministry of Transport Certificate of Competency. When a vacancy occurs, the Senior Boathand in the service is called before the Examination Committee for licensing as a Third Class Pilot, which allows him to pilot ships not exceeding 600 tons net. After two years he is called for a further examination, resulting in a Second Class Licence allowing him to pilot ships of up to 3,000 tons net and, after a further two years, a final examination for a First Class Licence, which allows him to pilot ships of any tonnage.

Like the Royal Navy, the Pilot Service is full of tradition, to be seen even in the painting of the two launches which, in addition to the white superstructure and black hull, have a white line on the water line, an inheritance of the days of competition, when this was painted on to make speed assessment more difficult.

The map below shows the complex coastline of the Liverpool Pilotage District. Most ships are met by the pilot launch at Point Lynas. Bottom: Pilot boat 'Puffin' on the Mersey. One of the two high speed river launches, she is used by pilots for boarding ships approaching the river

