

# BY THE OLD HYDROGRAPHER

## 'As it Was'

The late Professor Taylor, a former Registrar General for Scotland, whilst researching the Balfour Collection of documents at the National Library of Scotland, came across a set of early sailing directions for the entire coasts of Scotland. They were written on a dozen foolscap pages in the Scots language, together with a chart of the whole Scottish coastline.

The early Kings of Scotland frequently had problems with the chieftains of the clans in the Western Isles. A Scottish Navy had been established during the reigns of James III and IV, who had used the ships sailing from a naval base at Dumbarton on the Clyde in attempts to control the nobility of the islands, who fought among themselves and ignored laws decreed in Edinburgh.

So King James V decided in the late 1530s that the time had come for him to lead a major expedition to bring the Lairds of the Isles under his jurisdiction. Accordingly, plans were devised at Leith, the port of Edinburgh, under the direction of Lord Maxwell, the Admiral of Scotland. The King and his consorts were to sail in the well-found Salamander, recently presented to him by King François I of France. A dozen or so other vessels were made ready for various "lords and gentlemen" taking part in the voyage, and for victuals, baggage etc., all to be led by a well-trimmed bark described as a "scurior", in which the chief pilot would probably be embarked.

One of the main requirements for the voyage around Scotland to the Western Isles would be a skilful pilot with a well-prepared "rutter", a word derived from the French "routier". This was a book of sailing directions for a coasting vessel in which could be found details of the courses to be steered from one headland to the next, the tidal streams to be encountered, safe anchorages, and offshore dangers to be avoided.

The pilot chosen for the voyage was Alexander Lindsay. There were local pilots for various parts of the Scottish coasts and it seems that Lindsay must have contacted a number of them when preparing his rutter, for he could not have personally investigated the whole route to be followed.

It is interesting in examining the whole of Lindsay's rutter to note that it begins at the Humber Estuary and works northwards along the coast of England to the Scottish border. Some sources believe that the King's intention was to visit King François with his fleet before setting out on the expedition. In fact, no such visit was made. The fleet sailed northwards from the Firth of Forth on 12th June 1540 along the coasts of Aberdeenshire, Moray Firth, Caithness, and into Scapa Flow. Here the King landed to be entertained by the Bishop of Orkney.

Thence the voyage continued past Cape Wrath to the Isles of Lewis and Skye, and then southwards, visiting many of the islands and eventually arriving at Dumbarton. Here the King left Salamander to travel to Edinburgh overland to await the return of the fleet, with a number of prisoners he had taken on the Islands embarked. Navigationally the whole voyage had been a success, which must be attributed to Alexander Lindsay and his rutter.

In 1546 peace was declared between Henry VIII of England and François I of France at a meeting of diplomats at Ardres near Calais. It was during these negotiations that one of the French delegates, Nicolas de Nicolay, first met Sir John Dudley, Lord Admiral of England and father of Sir Robert Dudley, who fled from England to Italy in 1606 (see Hydro International Vol. 9 No. 5 June 2005). Nicolay was a man of many parts: self-opinionated, a writer, artist, diplomat, spy and collector of cartography of many lands, who was very happy to accept an invitation from Sir John Dudley to accompany him to England, and with whom he stayed for nearly a year.

Among his many other assignments the Lord Admiral was Warden of the Scottish Marches, so it is not surprising that he had obtained a copy of Lindsay's rutter from one of the Scots nobles with whom he was associated. During his stay with the Lord Admiral, Nicolay was able to borrow this copy long enough to make a duplicate, which he took with him when he returned to France. Nicolay's copy was still in the Scots language, but in Paris he found a learned Scot named John Fraser who was able to make an acceptable translation.

Early in 1547 King François passed on, to be succeeded by Henri II. Nicolay made a fine fair copy of the rutter and presented it to the new king. The king in turn passed it on to Leon Strozzi, Captain General of the Navy, who was assembling a squadron of carracks and galleys to sail for St Andrews, Fife, in Scotland. They planned to besiege the castle there occupied by prominent members of the Scottish Protestant Party implicated in the recent murder of the Catholic Cardinal Beaton. These included the fanatical reformer John Knox.

Strozzi sailed for Scotland in June 1547 taking with him the rutter which Nicolay had presented to the king to assist him in navigating to St Andrews, where the castle fell to the French on 31st July. The victors took away with them a number of Protestant prisoners, including Knox, who remained chained to an oar in French galleys for eighteen months. He eventually got back to Scotland in 1561, where he was able to harass the young Catholic Mary Queen of Scots throughout the six short years of her reign.

When Nicolay presented the fair copy of the French translation to King François in 1547 he made a second such copy for himself. Thirty-six years later, shortly before his death, he presented this fair copy in a slim, vellum-bound volume to the Duke of Joyeuse, Admiral of the

Fleet to whom it was dedicated. The book is entitled The Navigation of the King of Scotland. It is stated that the work is by Nicolay dâ€™Arfeville, followed by a list of his many attributes, including “Cosmographer to the King”. There is no mention of Alexander Lindsay.

Further Reading:

- Alexander Lindsay. A Rutter of the Scottish Seas; edited by I. H. Adams and G. Fortune; Maritime Monographs No. 44. Published by Trustees of National Maritime Museum, Greenwich (1980).

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