

Clark's anchor

In any batch of Mauchline Ware boxes there are usually a few with an advertisement inside extolling Clark's threads. The logo on the advert is an anchor, a natural choice for a firm whose vast output went overseas by ships from the Clyde, but also because the Clark family were fanatical yachtsmen for generations.

One summer in the 1930s one of the Clark family went to Canada on business. He sailed on a trans-Atlantic liner out of the Clyde and carefully arranged matters so that when he returned by ship, he would get back home on a Friday afternoon. There were no trans-Atlantic flights in those days!

The return time and day is significant, because yacht racing takes place on a Saturday, usually starting before lunch. On the return trip the ship was delayed by fog in the middle of the Atlantic for a few hours. Once clear of the fog, the captain announced that the ship would sail up the Clyde at mid-day on Saturday. Mr Clark hated the idea of wasting time going through Customs and missing his Saturday race, so he sent a carefully worded radio-telegram from the ship to his home.

On the Saturday morning the liner slowed as she entered the Clyde estuary. Mr Clark put on his yachting cap, which as was usual in those days had a white top, so it was easily seen from a distance. He walked aft along the liner's lengthy deck until he reached the stern where he looked round. There, a quarter of a mile off to starboard he saw his yacht's tender, a smart varnished launch, with his paid hand at the helm.

Mr Clark jumped over the stern of the liner into the sea.....a rather long way below. As he surfaced he saw the launch coming towards him. He was only in the sea a few minutes. Once in the launch he changed into the dry clothes the paid hand had brought, and in no time Mr Clark was taken to his racing yacht, in good time for the Saturday's race. What the Customs and Immigration people said about the matter is not recorded, but then in the 1930s a senior industrialist running a



batch of factories could get away with a lot, especially if they had the courage to jump the great height from the stern of a moving Atlantic liner.

The family certainly have what might be called an adventurous spirit. The *Alan Clark Diaries* chronicle the extraordinary life of one of the family. There are occasional mentions of shares in the firm called Coats, a source of the Clark family's considerable fortune. This is because Clarks' family firm amalgamated with the Coats family firm, the Coats also being enthusiastic yachtsmen. Alan Clark's father, Lord Clark, was the internationally renowned art historian who produced the famous TV series *Civilisation*.

There is one feature of the Clark logo, the anchor, which brings a smile to the face of anyone who knows anything about the sea. The anchor has a rope twisted round it and this is artistic licence gone awry. An anchor entwined in a rope is called a "foul anchor" because it means that the ship tethered to the anchor is about to drag ashore and perhaps be wrecked.

An anchor only works when the rope attached to it leads clear away from the ring at the top of the anchor. If the rope winds round the length of the anchor, the flukes (the end "spikes") will not dig into the sea bed and the anchor will not secure the ship. Either the

Clark family were too busy running their big company and did not notice this defect in their logo, or they appreciated that the Royal Navy also sometimes uses the same logo of a foul anchor. Maybe they reckoned that what was good enough for the Navy was good enough for the Clarks.

Ian Nicolson

Note by the Editor. *The hallmarks on Dumfries silver include a foul anchor, along with the head of a stag or unicorn. Greenock's hallmarks include a standard anchor, with a ship and a green oak. I have also seen a mark ascribed to Peterhead which includes a foul anchor. After 1836, hallmarking of Scottish provincial effectively came to an end. After this date all Scottish silver had to be sent to the assay houses at Glasgow and Edinburgh. The examples of Dumfries silver with the foul anchor date from about 1800 to 1836. I do not know whether any of this has a bearing on the origins of the use by Clark's of the foul anchor, but it is interesting!*