

Salters' of Oxford: a History of a Thames Boating Firm over a Century of Evolution (1858 – c. 1960)

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SUMMARY

In 1858 the brothers John and Stephen Salter founded a boat building enterprise on the banks of the river Thames at Folly Bridge in Oxford. This grew to become not only one of the foremost inland boat builders but also one of the largest river boat operators in the country. Furthermore, in just over a century the Salter family would boast two mayors of Oxford, one Member of Parliament for the university and a Waterman to the Queen. The business is now one of the city's oldest family firms still under the management of those directly descended from its founders.

The firm survived in an era of immense change in Oxford. When the business began, the city was essentially still pre-industrial in character, with a large proportion of employment revolving around the fluctuating demands of the university terms. During the first half of the twentieth century, Oxford underwent a drastic transformation after William Morris relocated his motor works to Cowley in the east part of the city (1911). This industry grew quickly to become the country's largest producer of cars from 1925 to 1938 and was largely responsible for doubling the city's population between 1911 and 1951 (predominantly in the eastern suburbs). This caused a fundamental shift in the nature of employment in the city as Morris' insistence on paying his largely unskilled workforce a high wage threatened many older trades which relied on lengthy periods of low paid apprenticeships. Nevertheless, behind the long shadow cast by the motor works, a number of smaller firms survived and in the case of Salters' even outlived the Morris brand.

The river Thames in the nineteenth century was a thriving hub of both business and leisure. Rowing in particular was emerging as an increasingly popular pastime (as typified by Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*), as well as a burgeoning sport. In Oxford, inter-collegiate competition began in 1815 and quickly expanded to become the first of all sports in its repute in the university. By the middle of the nineteenth century the vast majority of river craft in the city was being constructed by one of the two Folly Bridge boat building firms, Thomas Hall's or Isaac King's.¹

THE FAMILY

Before arriving in Oxford, John and Stephen Salter were both building boats at another Thames location, Wandsworth. It is likely that they inherited their woodworking skills from their father James who was a carpenter.² He and his wife Elizabeth had moved from Fulham (where John and Stephen were born) to run the hostelry 'The Feathers', on the Thames by the mouth of the river Wandle. Here, John became a 'boat builder and letter',³ whilst Stephen specialised in racing craft (being a keen oarsman himself).⁴

¹ Hunt's Oxford Directory, 1846, p. 55.

² Salters' archive (SA) Marriage Certificate John and Harriet Salter, 1853.

³ Jackson's Oxford Journal, 25 January 1890.

⁴ A. Salter, *Memoirs of a Public Servant* (London, 1961), p. 15.

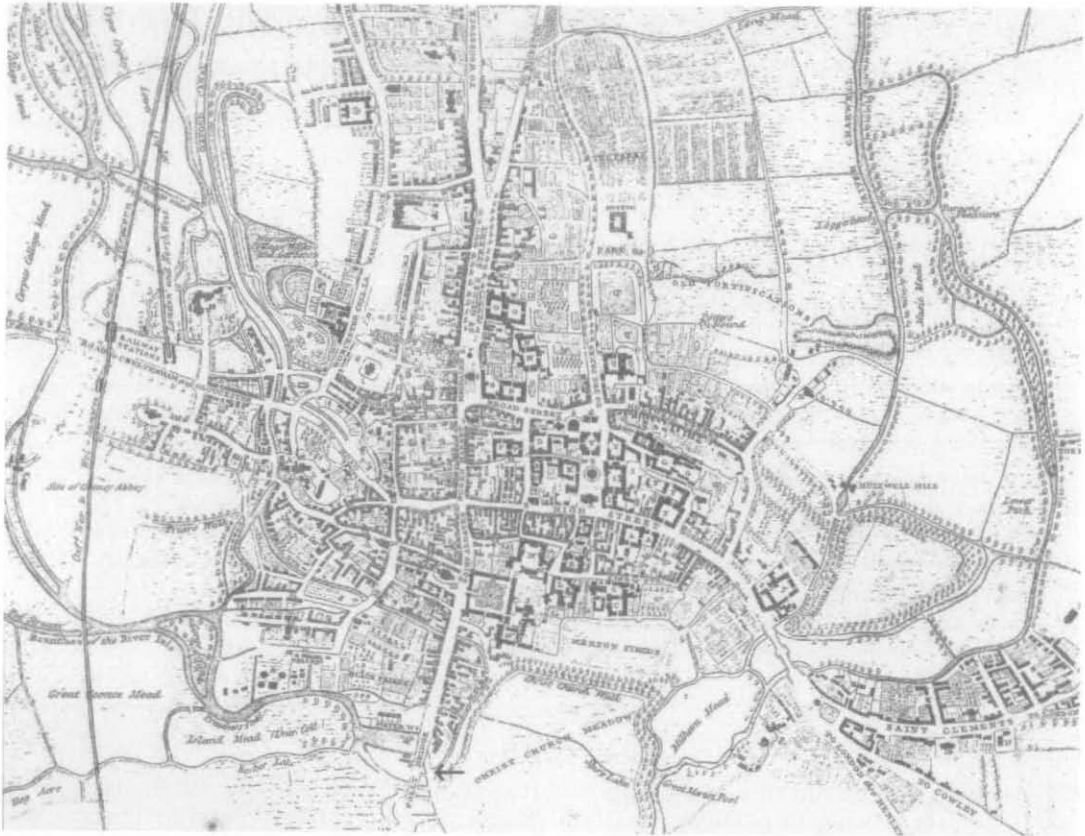


Figure 1: Map of Oxford in 1856 (arrow showing location of Folly Bridge)

It was probably through their existing trade connections on the river that they came to know about the sale of King's boat yard in Oxford. When they took this over in November 1858, they had already gained quite a reputation, as *Jackson's Oxford Journal* recorded:

From the high position occupied by Messrs Salter, in the aquatic world, there can be no doubt that Mr King has found worthy successors in that well known firm.⁵

Although the business started as a partnership known as 'J. and S. Salter Boat Builders' the lives of the two founders soon diverged. By 1875, both brothers had 'achieved sufficient success to provide each of them with a modest fortune.'⁶ Stephen had worked so hard in the process that his doctor advised him to retire from the business as it was having a detrimental effect on his health.⁷ As a result he stopped working at the age of only forty to 'enjoy his remaining years' which turned out to be sixty-two years of retirement.⁸ He relocated to the

⁵ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 10 November 1858, p. 5.

⁶ Salter, *Memoirs*, p. 15.

⁷ Conversation with Roy Brinton, 26 August 2005, based on his research on Stephen Salter Jr.

⁸ Salter, *Memoirs*, p. 15.

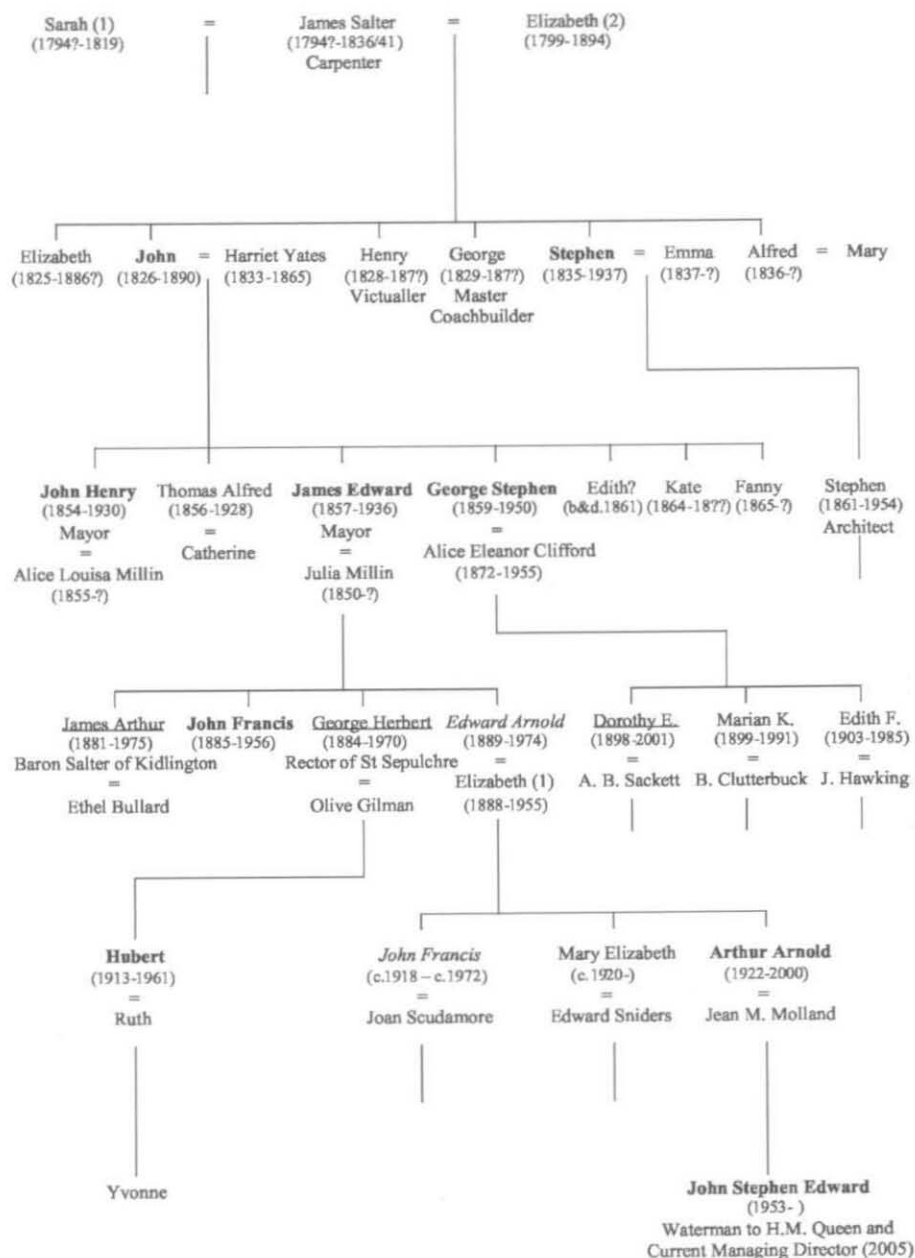
**KEY:****Bold:** Family members with a managerial role at some stage of their life.Underlined: Non-executive directors.*Italic:* Family members involved primarily in the catering side of the business.

Figure 2: The Salter Family Tree.

Isle of Wight and when he died in 1937, he was remembered more for being a 'great breeder of fancy pigeons' rather than one of the co-founders of the Oxford-based boat firm.⁹

After the departure of Stephen, the firm became known as 'John Salter Boat Builder'. Although John remained in Oxford, his wife Harriet (the daughter of a Wandsworth butcher) had died in 1865 at the age of only 30, probably during the birth of their seventh child Fanny. By 1871, John had acquired a housekeeper named Hannah Long, an appointment which was significant as she was responsible for educating the children according to her own strict Methodist beliefs.¹⁰ As a result of this upbringing, the next generation of the family emerged with the same faith and this affected the way in which the business was subsequently run.

By 1871, all four of John's sons (John Henry, Thomas Alfred, James Edward and George Stephen) were boat builders.¹¹ However, Thomas chose to leave the business and by 1891 was shown in the census as 'living by his own means' (before eventually returning to Wandsworth). As would be expected, the sisters did not play a role in the firm and the company was passed along the male line.

On 21 January 1890 John Salter senior died (of gangrene of the foot) at the age of sixty-four. The Salters' archive contains his will and this provides an indication of how wealthy he had become. In just over thirty years of business he had acquired a large number of freehold properties (listed in Table 1).¹²

TABLE 1: TABLE TO SHOW THE PROPERTY OWNED BY JOHN SALTER (ACCORDING TO HIS WILL)

38, 39, 40 and 49 St Aldate's
8 Isis Street (House, Boathouse and Shed)
Isis Lodge and Cottage
Shop at Brook Street
1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 Brook Street
Yard and Shed, Buckingham Street
23, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33 and 3 other 'unfinished' houses in Buckingham Street
1, 2, 3 and 5 Pipemaker's Yard
4 Pipemaker's Yard (Warehouse)
4 acres of ground in Wells Close
Allotments, Wootton, Berks
3 cottages on the Green, Wootton
1 cottage, Wootton
One blacksmith's shop, Wootton
8 Cottages (Henwood Cottages) in Wootton
Gross Total Capital: £7728. Rents and Interest: £86 6s 8d. Total: £7814 6s 8d

⁹ Oxford Monthly, October 1937, p. 2.

¹⁰ From family memoirs in possession of the Sackett family.

¹¹ 1871 census.

¹² SA Inland Revenue Document, 21 January 1890.

The business was passed down to his three sons John, James and George, and under their stewardship it became known as 'Salter Brothers'.¹³ When it eventually became a private limited company in 1915, each was given an equal share of the business. However, in practice, John was the head of the firm, as he was not only the oldest but also because his temperament made 'an active and equal share in the conduct of the business, neither necessary nor altogether easy'.¹⁴ The workforce were aware of this pecking order; as ex-employee Len Andrews recalled they were told to follow instructions from the brothers 'according to seniority', and that as 'John Salter was the oldest ... any orders he gives, come first'.¹⁵

After the death of John (1930) and James (1936) the firm continued for a further fourteen years under the command of George, with assistance from his nephew Frank (John Francis). By this stage the ownership of the firm had become spread across nine individuals from the extended family. In 1938 just over half of the shares (55%) were owned by the four sons of James Salter, with the others on George's side of the family, split between himself, his wife and his three daughters.¹⁶

Frank succeeded his uncle in 1950, whilst his younger brother Arnold (who was a poultry farmer and land-owner in Kidlington) dealt with the catering side of the business.¹⁷ Although they remained non-executive directors, their brothers followed different paths. Herbert became Rector of St Sepulchre-without-Newgate, the largest church in the city of London whilst Arthur became an Oxford University professor, national politician and eventually a peer. Although he never took an active role in the management of the business, Lord Salter's seniority and considerable social status ensured that when he did attend company meetings his opinions tended to go unchallenged. He even occasionally summoned his younger brothers to his rooms at All Souls if he judged something to be amiss.¹⁸

By 1960 the firm had passed to the fourth generation and was being run by Arnold's youngest son Arthur, assisted by his cousin Hubert (the son of Bert). The shareholders now represented seven different families and although relations on the whole were good, there were some disputes as to how the firm should be run.¹⁹ However, this was merely indicative of how the business had developed from an enterprise under the direct control of a small nuclear family, to one that became owned and managed by a more complicated network of extended kin (each with varying stakes in the business).

THE PROPERTY

The firm began operating on the north bank of the Thames at '43½ St Aldates' (shown as 1 in Figure 3).²⁰ On the island directly opposite this site stood Thomas Hall's rival firm (shown as number 3), which remained their only local competitor, until 1870, when it too was taken over by Salters'.²¹

¹³ This remains the trading name to this day.

¹⁴ Salter, *Memoirs*, p. 18.

¹⁵ Interview with Len Andrews, 31 August 2004.

¹⁶ SA List of Shareholders, 1938.

¹⁷ This generation were all referred to by their second names (e.g. John Francis was known as 'Frank').

¹⁸ Conversation with John Salter, 16 August 2005.

¹⁹ *Idem*. The shareholders were (James) Arthur, Hubert, (Edward) Arnold, Arthur Arnold, Dorothy (Sackett), Marion (Clutterbuck) and Edith (Hawking).

²⁰ *Hunt's Oxford Directory*, 1861, p. 4.

²¹ It eventually became the site of Salters' headquarters.



Figure 3: Aerial view of Folly Bridge (c. 1989) showing original site of: 1. St Aldate's Yard 2. Salters' barge 3. The Island 4. Grandpont Yard 5 and 6. Brook Street Workshops

The extent of this early expansion can be seen in the firm's Insurance Book dating from 1887 to 1945, which lists the various properties that they owned. By 1887, the firm occupied four main sites at Folly Bridge: St Aldate's Yard, Grandpont Yard, Brook Street and 'The Island'.²² In 1901, these sites were complemented by the construction of a much larger workshop near the Iffley Road and a year later a new 'boathouse, with offices and a waiting room' was erected for the firm on the island at Folly Bridge (see Figure 4).²³

The boatyards of Salters' appear to have survived the summer of 1913 unscathed, after the Women's Social and Political Union (a radical wing of the suffragettes) targeted a number of Oxford boatyards (such as Rough's at Long Bridges).²⁴ However, in 1920 the Iffley Road workshop was burned down, and although the suffragettes were rumoured to be involved, George Wyatt, who was brought up in the area, recalled a different story. He claimed to have met a man thirty years later who had confessed to the deed, recalling that 'he and some others were playing with matches, started a fire in the lee of one of the walls of the building and it went up like a firework'.²⁵ The culprit was never officially found and the workshop was subsequently rebuilt to a new concrete design.

²² They later acquired workshops at Edgbaston, Reading, Pangbourne and Windsor.

²³ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 12 October 1902.

²⁴ K. Bradley, 'The Suffragette Movement in Oxford 1870 – 1920' (Oxford Polytechnic, MA thesis, 1993), p. 53.

²⁵ Written account from George Wyatt, sent to the author.

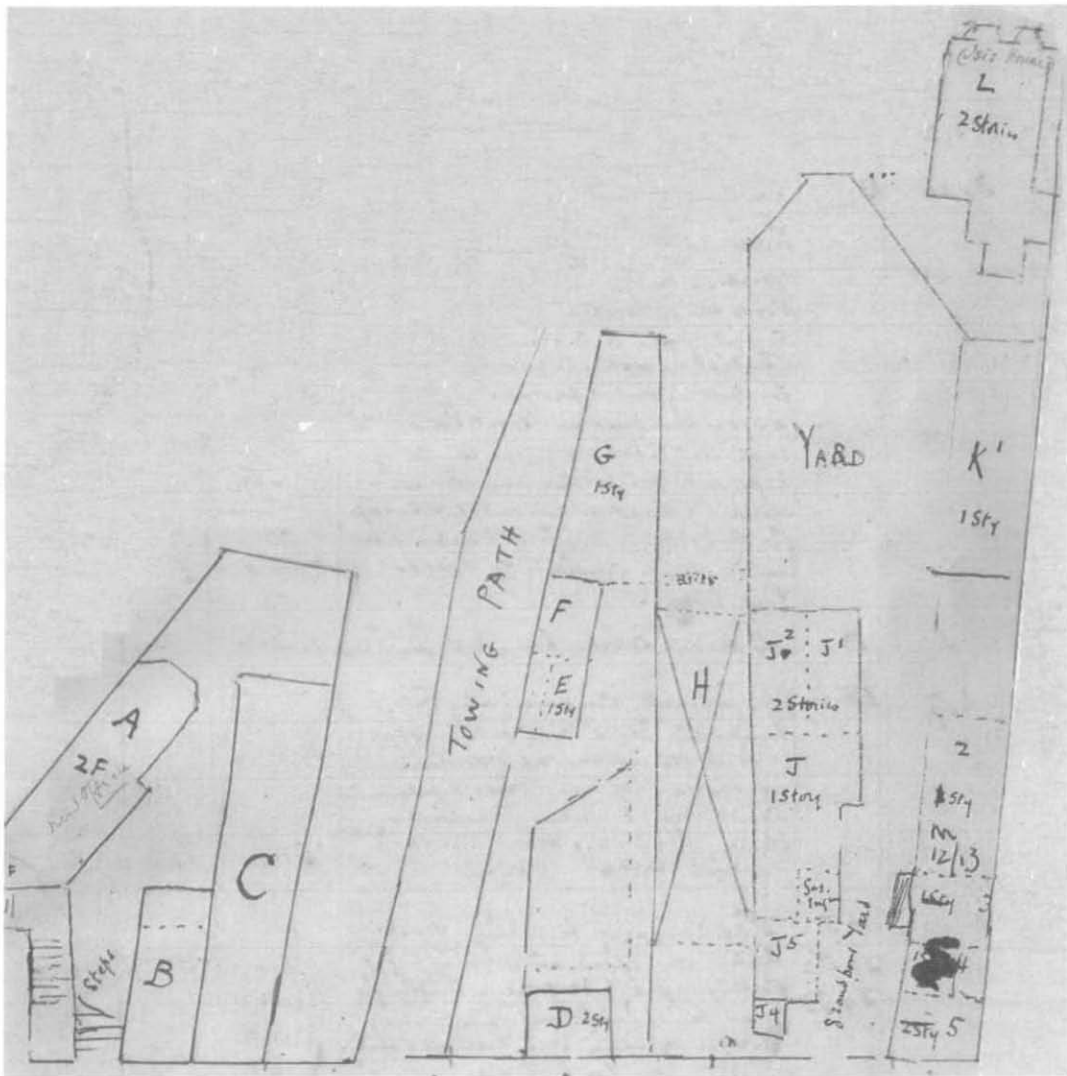


Figure 4: The property at Folly Bridge in 1901 (as drawn in the Insurance Book):

- A. Office, stores and dressing room
- B. Stores, office and upholstery workroom
- C. Boat stores (ground floor) and boat building workshops (first and second floors)
- D. Private dwelling
- E. F. G. Engineer's shop and stores
- H. Boathouse
- J. Boatbuilding sawmill
- J1. Boatbuilding sawmill (ground floor) and punt building shop (first floor)
- J2. Engineer's workshop (ground floor) and timber store (first floor)
- J4. Unoccupied
- J5. Cartshed and loft containing fodder
- K. Timber store, barge building (hand) sawmill, scull maker's shop and general store (e.g. nails)
- L. Isis House
- M. Stables

Many of the Salters' workshops were built by the employees themselves. In addition to these, they also built a number of private houses, which were used as an additional source of rental income.²⁶ The Insurance Book shows that by 1910, the firm already owned over sixty properties, including one whole side of Buckingham Street, which in turn backed onto their property in Brook Street (see Table 2).²⁷ Some of these buildings had also appeared in John Salter's will of 1890, which shows that the firm had retained much of this property, although the insurance dates do not tally precisely.

TABLE 2: TABLE TO SHOW SALTERS' HOUSING (AS SHOWN IN THE INSURANCE BOOK)

Property	Insurance Dates
4,5,6,7,8a and 8b Isis Street	1879-1920
Henwood Cottages, Wootton (6 in total in 1887, 8 in 1896)	1887-1896
7,9,11,13,15,17,19,21,23,25,27,29,31 and 33 Buckingham Street	1892-1920
4 Cottages near the green (Wootton)	1895
40,42,44,46,48 and 50 Marlborough Road	1897-1920
House by Grandpont Yard	1901-1920
Pipemaker's Yard (4 cottages)	1903-1920
4,6,8,10,12,24,26,28,30 and 32 Chilswell Road	1906-1914
Fulham Villa (Folly Bridge)	1906
38,39 and 40 St Aldate's	1910
15 Thames Street	1910-1920
1,2,3,4 and 5 Brook Street	1912
House by Salters' Workshop in Reading (Caversham Road)	1945

The archive still contains a number of the rental agreements and in 1921, for example, a house in Buckingham Street was being rented for £2 10s per annum.²⁸ According to David Nutt and Merlyn Coates, whose parents lived in Salters' housing, the firm eventually sold off most of this property *en masse* in the early 1950s. They recall that their parents were offered the opportunity to purchase their houses and that 1 Brook Street, for example, was priced at £400.²⁹

THE BUSINESS

Although we know about the various sites that were occupied, there is much less information about the type of work that the firm was doing during the earliest years of its development. According to Lord Salter, from the outset the company was constructing racing craft for the university under the direct supervision of Stephen Salter and these formed the basis of the firm's early reputation.³⁰ This would seem to be supported by the earliest document in the archive, which lists the delivery and collection of boats that the firm made between 1862 and 1870.

²⁶ They also had houseboats for rent.

²⁷ SA Insurance Book 1887 - 1945.

²⁸ SA Various rental agreements dated 25 December 1920.

²⁹ Emails from David Nutt, December 2005, and Merlyn Coates, February 2005.

³⁰ Salter, *Memoirs*, p. 15. By 1899, they were described in Ward, Lock and Co's guide to Oxford as 'those princes among builders of river rowing craft'.



Figure 5: Two-abreast racing 'twelve' (1926)

The source, entitled 'Carman Boat Works', is significant as it not only shows what craft they were building, but also what their geographical sphere of influence was. Deliveries were made by horse-drawn cart and most of the orders were made in the spring and summer months from within a 100 mile radius of Oxford. The majority of these came from either Cambridge or one of the various Thames boatyards or clubs between Oxford and Putney. There was also one international order of '2 cases of boats for New Zealand' delivered to East India Docks.

Although the document shows that a variety of craft was being built (including punts, skiffs and gigs), the most popular boats were the racing craft. This was mainly due to the repeat orders from various rowing clubs across the country such as Oxford University and Leander.³¹ Ex-employee Len Andrews recalled that they had a long-standing agreement with many clubs to provide a boat on a three-year lease. At the end of this period they would then build a new boat and the older craft would be passed down to the lesser crews at a reduced rent.³² By this process, the design of the racing boats slowly evolved over the years from the heavy clinker 'inrigged' design to the much lighter, narrower, 'outrigged' craft (with sliding seats) that predominate today. The firm also pioneered a number of rowing innovations, such as a craft designed in 1926 to have two crews rowing abreast with a central gangway upon which the coach could move up and down (see Figure 5).³³ Although this

³¹ Carman Boat Works, 1862 - 1870.

³² Interview with L. Andrews, 31 August 2004.

³³ *Oxford Mail*, 1 July 1955, p. 19.

particular design did not catch on, the firm's association with racing craft lasted well over a century. Even as late as 1974 the record-breaking Oxford crew was rowing in the university boat race in a Salters'-built eight.³⁴ This association would end a few years later when 'high-tech' materials (such as carbon fibre) eventually rendered the heavier wooden craft uncompetitive.

During this early period, as well as constructing racing craft, the company was involved in the building and upkeep of the Oxford University college barges that were once moored at Christ Church Meadows. Clare Sheriff described Salters' as being 'firmly established as barge builders to the colleges', although she noted that the documents relating to these craft had all been destroyed by fire (presumably at the Iffley Road workshop).³⁵ However, the earliest surviving Book of Estimates in the archive (from 1873 to 1917) contains a number of quotations relating to these clubhouses. The document shows the huge variety of interior furnishing that the barges had, including cocoa matting, tables, slating, stoves, piping, chests of drawers, lockers, seats, muslin blinds, curtains and basins. They also show the labouring costs involved in installing this equipment from ironmongers, upholsterers, plumbers, smiths, carpenters and painters. Perhaps the most interesting quotation was that of £600, for the construction of a whole new barge for Hertford College Boat Club (including labour and furnishings) made in 1873.³⁶



Figure 6: Salters' green barge (c. 1870)

³⁴ C. Dodd, *The Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race* (London, 1983), p. 283.

³⁵ C. Sheriff, *The Oxford College Barges* (London, 2003), p. 54. She estimates that there were thirty-six barges in total.

³⁶ SA Estimates Book 1873 – 1917. Salters' did not win this particular contract.

Whilst the Book of Estimates provides an insight into the cost of building and maintaining the college barges, it does not show how many boats the firm owned at this stage. The earliest surviving quantitative data of this nature is the Inventory Book of October 1877, which lists all of the craft that they had in their possession. This shows that although they had been in business less than twenty years, they had amassed a flotilla of nearly 600 boats, including 227 gigs (randan, eights, fours, pairs inrigged and outriggers), eighty-four racing boats (forty-six of which were eights), seventy-five dinghies (outrigged and inrigged), seventy canoes (extra large, rob roy and doubles), fifty-two sculling boats, forty-nine pleasure skiffs and thirty-five whiffs.³⁷

The sheer number of craft they owned was due to the sizeable hire fleet that they operated. By 1888 the firm was offering a huge range of craft for hire including a small steam launch named Isis 'with cabin available for 10 to 20 persons'. For the hand-powered craft they offered a delivery service to places upstream of Oxford (such as Cricklade and Lechlade) as well as a retrieval service from any downstream boatyard between Oxford and Putney.³⁸

It is likely that Jerome K. Jerome was referring to this service in *Three Men and a Boat* when he commented that it was 'common practice to get a boat at Oxford and row down[stream]', although he considered this 'exercise' to be reserved for those who were either 'too constitutionally weak, or too constitutionally lazy ... to relish upstream work'.³⁹ The paired-oared pleasure skiffs were particularly suitable for these longer one-way trips as they were fitted out with tent covers and mattresses, with other equipment (such as a cooking stove) available at an additional cost. Although, it is not clear which Oxford company supplied the boat to Jerome K. Jerome (or indeed whether *The Pride of the Thames* actually existed), Salters' owned a large selection of boats, both new and second hand. In practice the hire fleet and the boats that they sold were interchangeable as they were kept in readiness 'for sale or hire' [italics added].⁴⁰

Even at this early stage Salters' was one of a small number of Oxford industries to target the international market, advertising that 'especial attention [was] given to foreign orders'.⁴¹ The firm exhibited at various international (as well as domestic) boat shows and in 1886, for example, they won a silver medal at the 'International Exhibition of Navigation Travelling Commerce & Manufactures' held in Liverpool.⁴² Although the order books show that the majority of business came from England, even in the 1890s the firm was exporting up to ten craft per year abroad (with foreign orders peaking in the 1920s). James Morris described Salters' as an 'infinitesimal cog in the imperial machinery', as the majority of foreign orders came from the British Empire and in particular India.⁴³ In 1924, for example, they received seventeen orders from abroad (approximately 10% of the year's total), with boats delivered to Durban, Calcutta, Montevideo, Karachi, Rangoon, Lucknow, Madras, Bombay and Kodaikanal.⁴⁴

³⁷ SA Boat Inventory 1877.

³⁸ Advertisement, 1888. They also offered to send boats to any place 'on English and Continental rivers'.

³⁹ J. K. Jerome, *Three Men in a Boat* (Penguin, 1994), p. 176. No evidence has been found that Jerome K. Jerome had any dealings with Salters'.

⁴⁰ Advertisement, 1888.

⁴¹ Idem.

⁴² Idem.

⁴³ J. Morris, *Oxford* (London, 1965), p. 258.

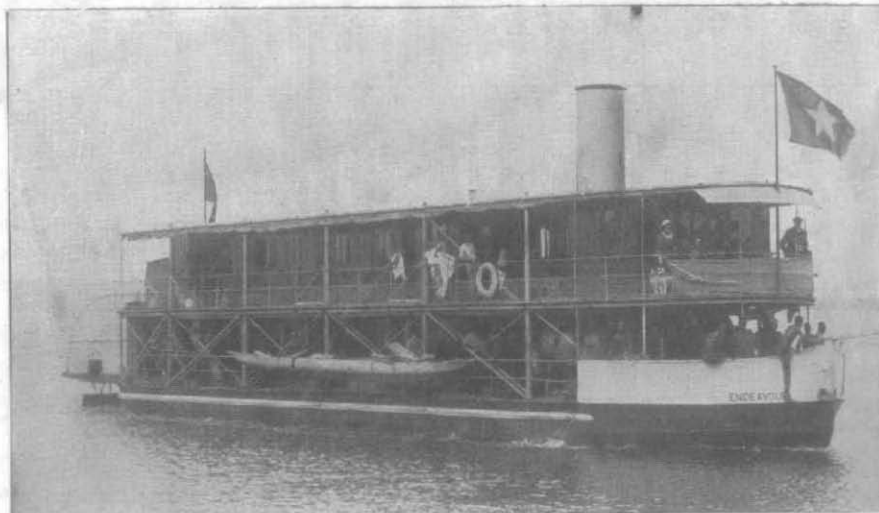
⁴⁴ SA Order Book 1924 - 1925.

SALTER BROS., LTD.

18

Folly Bridge, OXFORD.

No. 41. Stern-Wheel Steamer.



This is an illustration of a Stern-Wheel Steamer built for service on the River Congo.

Length, 101ft. Beam, 19ft. 6in. Depth, 5ft. 6in.

HULL of steel, galvanized throughout, main deck of steel: Upper and Awning Decks of oak on steel beams. Cabins are of oak, varnished.

MACHINERY consists of two Sisson-Yarrow Water Tube Boilers and Condensing Engines with cylinders 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. and 24in. and 42in. stroke. Two stern wheels with special feathering floats.

Figure 7: *Endeavour* shown on the River Congo (c. 1905)

Perhaps their most famous overseas order came in 1905, when they competed with ten other 'well-known firms' to win the contract to build a 105ft stern-wheeler paddle steamer. Commissioned by the Baptist Missionary Society, the craft named *Endeavour* cost around £5,800 (including spare parts) and was launched on 20 March 1905 (to the missionary hymn 'From Greenland's Icy Mountains'). Four months later, its dedication service attracted large crowds and the boat underwent three days of trials between Folly Bridge and Iffley Lock (tickets costing 6d. a head) before being dismantled, crated and sent to Liverpool for shipment. At its destination the boat was reassembled with the help of engineers from Oxford and would eventually ply the Congo between Kinshasa and Kisangani, carrying doctors, nurses and teachers (see Figure 7).⁴⁵

The foreign orders would suggest that the firm had gained quite a reputation for their boat building, but the archive contains no quantitative data to show how well the company was faring financially. One can gain some idea about the levels of output by examining the Inventory Books, as they list the four or five digit reference number that was assigned to every new boat that the firm built. The first and last numerals represented the year that the craft was constructed and the middle digits the order number. Therefore, for example, the

⁴⁵ *Oxford Mail*, 19 November 1974. The route was pioneered by the missionary George Grenfell. Published in *Oxoniansia* 2006, (c) Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society

fifteenth and 150th boats built in 1874 would be numbered '7154' and '71504' respectively, and if these were listed in an Inventory Book, this would indicate that the firm had built *at least* 150 boats in this year.

By using this method, one can see that by the 1870s the company was already constructing between 150 and 200 boats a year. Between 1872 and 1919 the figures fluctuated more widely from year to year between a high of 209 (in 1913) and a low of 103 (in 1904). The firm's 'Golden Age' for boat building appears to have come between the wars. For six consecutive years between 1926 and 1931, they built over 220 boats a year, the zenith being 1930 when at least 358 craft were constructed. Orders appear to have dropped off dramatically during the Second World War and, although the data is far from complete after this period, it does seem that in the post-war decades (the 1950s and 1960s) the numbers failed to regain the heights of the pre-war years, with figures ranging from sixty-six to 104.⁴⁶

The wars inevitably had a huge impact on the type of work that the firm was doing, as they constructed a huge range of craft for the Admiralty. During the First World War the firm built steam pinnaces (both oil and coal-fired), harbour launches, cutters, whalers, hydroplanes, mine layers, buoys, picket boats, coastal marine boats, collapsible craft, launches, dinghies, barges, as well as pontoons for bridge building, sails, life floats, oars and paddles. In the Second World War the firm constructed picket boats for destroyers, motor cruisers, coastal marine boats and launches. They also built a number of landing craft that were tested at Nuneham Courtenay before being sent to London and used in the Normandy assault.⁴⁷

By 1960 Salters' had a vast portfolio of virtually any kind of small craft from those that were 'hand' driven (such as canoes, skiffs and racing craft) to those that were motorised (such as lifeboats, launches and cabin cruisers). Many of the engines for the motorboats were supplied by the British Motor Corporation factory at Cowley (Morris up until 1952). Between 1901 and 1931 the firm also built a number of much larger steel craft (up to 110 ft.) from their purpose-built slipway at Iffley Road. Perhaps the most famous of these were the eighteen passenger boats that they built in conjunction with the engine supplier W. Sissons, many of which still ply the Thames today. Eight of these were supplied for the fleet of Joseph Mears of Richmond, whilst the remaining ten were retained for Salters' own passenger boat fleet.⁴⁸

The firm's decision to start operating passenger boats could be viewed as a natural progression, as Salters' acted as agents for the Abingdon-based Thames and Isis Steamboat Company, between 1879 and 1882. In this capacity they managed to take ticket sales amounting to £165 19s. 3d. in 1880, £148 13s. 6d. in 1881 and £152 3s. 9d. in 1882 (although it is unclear what proportion they kept as the agents).⁴⁹ The Thames and Isis Steamboat Company went out of business in 1883, and there is no record of any further passenger service from Oxford to Kingston until it was re-established by Salters' in 1888.⁵⁰

The boat that they acquired for this service was the 60ft *Alaska*, a propeller-driven steamer bought from Walton-on-Thames. The first journey to Kingston was on 21 May 1888, a round trip which took five days to complete (two days downstream and three days back). The single fare to Kingston was 18s and the first trip took a total of £10 16s 6d in ticket sales.⁵¹

⁴⁶ SA Various Inventory Books.

⁴⁷ *Oxford Mail*, 1 July 1955, p. 19. Salters' had been at the forefront of the design of fast hydroplanes, which they tested on Edgbaston reservoir during the 1920s and 1930s.

⁴⁸ One craft built for Mears was the ill-fated *Marchioness* (1923).

⁴⁹ SA Fare Book 1880-83 & 1888.

⁵⁰ F. Dix, *Royal River Highway* (Newton Abbot, 1985), p. 104.

⁵¹ SA Fare Book 1880-83 & 1888. Places en route were less (e.g. Henley 15s.) and meals and overnight hotel costs were added to the bill.



Figure 8: Painting of *Oxford* opposite Christ Church Meadows, Oxford by W. Matthison

In order to expand the services the firm commissioned another six steamers between 1889 and 1898 from Edwin Clark of Brinscombe.⁵² These new craft were all named after places on the Thames, with the first two fittingly christened *Oxford* (1889) and *Kingston* (1890).⁵³ After Clark went out of business, Salters' began building its own craft with the 85ft. *Reading* being the first (1901). A number of these early steamers were depicted in a series of watercolours that were commissioned around 1902 (see Figure 8).⁵⁴ Over the next thirty years, they produced three different generations of successively large craft for their fleet, with the 105ft *Mapledurham* (1927) and *Cliveden* (1931) being the largest.

One can gain an indication of how successful the services were by looking at the number of steamers that the firm owned and operated. During the first two decades of their operation the fleet quickly expanded from just one boat (*Alaska*) in 1888 to eleven by 1905. There was further growth after the First World War with the total number of steamers reaching fourteen by 1923. The additional steamers allowed the firm greatly to expand its services. By 1892 they were providing a daily return trip from both Oxford and Kingston (with an overnight stop in Henley) and by the turn of the century they were also offering short round trips from various locations.⁵⁵

The services flourished partly owing to the close ties that the company forged with various travel companies and in particular the Great Western Railway. As early as 1896 the GWR was offering a whole range of 'circular tours', which included a boat trip as part of a larger sight-seeing tour of various attractions. Although we do not know how many people they were carrying, by 1955 the western region alone was putting on 133 'special trains' for Salters'.⁵⁶

The early growth of the services was achieved even though the firm did not operate on Sunday nor serve alcohol on board. Although this was in keeping with the family's Methodist

⁵² These were delivered in two sections via the Kennet and Avon canal.

⁵³ *Kingston*, *Windsor* and *Cliveden* (I) were eventually shipped to Mesopotamia.

⁵⁴ H. McKnight, 'Salter's Steamers', in *Canal Boat and Inland Waterways*, April 2005, p. 82.

⁵⁵ By 1896 they were offering dark room facilities on board (perhaps the crew's quarters) and facilities for luggage. By 1920 the dark room facilities were no longer provided. Luggage was limited to '1 cwt' (112 lbs or 51kg) and there was a charge for bicycles and for dogs.

⁵⁶ SA Minutes of Meeting, 9 August 1954. You could also buy joint river and rail tickets.

beliefs, 'a host of rival firms got their start through the fact that Salters' resolutely refused for many years to let boats, or run steamers on that day'.⁵⁷ It was not until 1933 that the company started operating on a Sunday, and even then the decision was made 'very reluctantly' under pressure from the younger generation of the family. Fortunately, the company by this stage already had a monopoly on the Oxford to Kingston route and the ascendancy was quickly regained.

During the Second World War, the passenger boat services continued although the firm's three largest boats (*Mapledurham*, *Cliveden* and *Grand Duchess*) were requisitioned by the Admiralty and fitted out as hospital ships for use on the tideway as part of the Thames Hospital Emergency Transport Division.⁵⁸ After the war these were returned to Salters' and the company embarked upon a programme of modernisation with the boat's engines changed from steam to diesel (a process which took from 1946 to 1966 to complete). The fuel costs were much lower in the marine engine, which was by this stage as reliable as the steam engine without requiring the expertise of a steam engineer.⁵⁹

In the post-war period the fleet grew further from fourteen to peak at seventeen in 1956, which represented one of the largest fleets on any river in the country. Although this would suggest that the services were at their height by this stage, the firm made a series of losses in the early 1950s.⁶⁰ The post war era was a time of decline for many passenger boat operators and Salters' were not exempt, although they managed to expand by taking over some of the smaller firms that were struggling such as the Reading businesses of E. Cawston (in 1945) and J. Maynard (in 1949).⁶¹

Although Salters' was finally forced to downscale its fleet after the 1960s, the firm by this stage was focusing more heavily on the private charter market. This was a potentially large source of additional income as the parties not only paid to hire the boat but they might also pay for onboard catering. This side of the business was dealt with by Thames Catering Company, a subsidiary of Salter Bros Ltd, which was set up to provide for the burgeoning needs of the passenger vessels. Over the years, this branch of the firm would diversify greatly and would even produce 'Salters crisps' and 'Salters ice-cream'.⁶²

In just over a century the firm of Salters' had grown almost beyond recognition from the small boat building enterprise that had been founded by John and Stephen in 1858. Through a combination of hard work, ambition and favourable market opportunities the firm forged a position of dominance, with the boat building business peaking at the end of the 1920s and the fleet of passenger boats reaching its height three decades later. Lord Salter described the rise of Salters' as 'typical of the stuff of Victorian England. Energetic enterprise carving a new business out of the undeveloped opportunities of the time, unhampered by restrictive regulations or elaborate industrial or labour organisation'.⁶³ Although the firm experienced some losses in the early 1950s, by this stage they had already constructed thousands of craft for both civilian and military use, and their customer base stretched to various parts of the world. Their hire fleet and passenger boats dominated the Upper-Thames and despite the financial difficulties they were still carrying approximately 350,000 people per year.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Salter, *Memoirs*, p. 20.

⁵⁸ Dix, *Royal*, p. 154. The majority of boats in this division were built by Salters'. The firm did not send any to Dunkirk.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 159. Steam engineers were becoming more difficult to find at this time.

⁶⁰ SA Minutes of Meeting, 9 August 1954. Perhaps why they sold off their property at this time.

⁶¹ B. Hillsdon, 'Salter's Steamers', in *Old Glory*, March 1996, p. 30.

⁶² Interview with B. Dunckley, 17 August 2004. The crisp factory was in Wallingford and the ice-cream factory in Reading.

⁶³ Salter, *Memoirs*, p. 22.

⁶⁴ SA Minutes of Meeting, 9 August 1954. This estimate was made by Arnold Salter.

However, although its influence was far-reaching, Salters' was always an Oxford firm and it was here that its impact was undoubtedly at its greatest. As well as providing employment (discussed below), it was also responsible for changing the physical landscape of Oxford, in the construction of housing and various boatyards. Furthermore, as the company grew in stature, this in turn facilitated the emergence of a new notable dynasty within the city.

THE SALTER FAMILY AND THEIR IMPACT ON OXFORD

During the 1880s an increasingly wealthy and independent local middle-class was beginning to emerge in Oxford and leading individuals such as mayors Walter Gray and Robert Buckell had a significant and long-lasting impact on the politics of the city.⁶⁵ This elite group of tradesmen contributed to Oxford's growing civic pride and played a key role in the city's drive to gain county borough status, which was achieved in 1889 following negotiations with the university. By this stage, the firm of Salters' had risen to considerable prominence, being described in 1890 as 'gigantic' and ranking as 'one of the largest in the kingdom'.⁶⁶ It is not surprising therefore that the owners of the firm had gained not only material wealth, but also considerable social status within the city. This section describes the social, religious and political contribution that the Salter family made to life in Oxford.

It is unclear what drew the Salter family into municipal service. John Salter was a self-made man, who believed in bringing up his children in the same manner in which he had been brought up. As a result, instead of sending his sons to a good school (which he could well afford to do), he started them working for the firm at the age of fourteen on an artisan's wage.⁶⁷ Although he did not have the benefits of a lengthy education, the eldest son John Henry became interested in local politics in his twenties. His obituary recalled that he had supported the reformer T. H. Green of Balliol College in the negotiations which had led to the town-gown entente.⁶⁸

His interest in local politics may have been aroused by the fierce and protracted political dispute which broke out over the future of the Thames, during this same period. In 1871, the Thames Valley Drainage Committee announced a number of schemes to help reduce the risk of flooding and improve the public health of the city. This involved the dredging of the Thames, the creation of a new mouth for the Cherwell River and the removal of Iffley Lock. By 1883, when sufficient funds had been accumulated, objections were raised by the Oxford Waterworks Company, who claimed that removing the lock might jeopardise the city's water supply. The dispute came to a head in 1885, when fierce lobbying broke out on both sides, each supported by a cross-section of town and gown. A number of boating men decided to set up their own rival scheme to outbid the vote, as they were concerned that the beauty of the river would be destroyed and its suitability for boats impaired. The dispute was finally resolved in 1885, in favour of retaining the lock.⁶⁹ Although there is no record of the Salters being involved in the dispute, it is likely that they would have made their opinions felt on so important an issue.

⁶⁵ A. Howe, 'Intellect and Civic Responsibility', in R. Whiting, R.C. (ed), *Oxford* (Manchester, 1993), p. 34.

⁶⁶ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 25 January 1890.

⁶⁷ Salter, *Memoirs*, p. 19.

⁶⁸ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 25 January 1890. T.H. Green died in 1882, three years before John Henry became a councillor.

⁶⁹ Howe 'Intellect', in Whiting, *Oxford*, p. 26. The lock at Folly Bridge was removed instead.

In the same year John Henry was elected to the Town Council as a Liberal representing the South Ward. He was subsequently made an alderman from 1898 to 1903 and served as mayor in 1903. Lord Salter described him as 'a man of exceptional and varied talents ... for over a quarter of a century one of the three or four leading figures in Oxford's municipal life.'⁷⁰ Like T. H. Green, John was a temperance advocate who took a keen interest in education, serving as vice-president of the City Education Committee and, following its rearrangement, as chairman in 1927. He was an advocate of efficient secondary education and favoured a scheme to build new schools in Cutteslowe and the White House Ground.

Perhaps his most significant work was on reforming the financial working of the Council, by revamping the system for collecting the district and poor rates (which had previously been gathered separately) as well as overhauling the out-dated commission system. His obituary recalled:

His was the brain and the influence behind those dramatic changes in municipal financial methods which have lifted Oxford from a system that was antiquated, parochial and amateur to one which is regarded as a model of efficiency.⁷¹

John Henry's influence also extended to controlling the Liberal press in the city, as chairman of the Oxford Chronicle Company.⁷² Despite his strong political beliefs he appears to have been widely respected. His obituary recalled that 'it is not often that a man of strong political views enjoys the confidence and affection of all classes of his fellow citizens' and that a 'great deal of his popularity might be traced to the delicate sense of humour which found a cause for smiling even when serious business was afoot.'⁷³

He also enjoyed 'warm respect' from the university and was awarded an M.A. *honoris causa* for his civil work and part in cementing town and gown friendship. He was a deeply religious man, being a circuit steward at Wesley Memorial Church on New Inn Hall Street. He also served as chairman of the Thames Boating Trades Association and director of the Oxford photography company Gillman and Co, the Gloucester engine company W. Sissons and the Edgbaston Reservoir Company (where Salters' had a boat yard). Furthermore, he was the author of the first *Salter's Guide to the Thames*, a publication that became the definitive guide to the sights and sounds of the river Thames, with over fifty subsequent editions (see Figure 9).⁷⁴

With the eldest brother deeply involved in politics, the second generation of the Salter family was very much like the Hobbs family of the other Oxfordshire boat company at Henley. In their case the founder of the firm Harry (another owner of a waterside tavern) had six sons who assisted in the business, and again it was the eldest, William, who became a councillor and eventually mayor (twice in his case).⁷⁵ However, amongst the Salters it was not merely the eldest who entered political service: James Edward, the third oldest brother, was also elected to the Council in 1896, representing the South Ward as a Liberal. Like his brother, he became mayor of Oxford in 1909 (a year after serving as sheriff) and an alderman in 1922. He was deeply committed to the plight of the poor and was a member of

⁷⁰ Salter, *Memoirs*, p. 18.

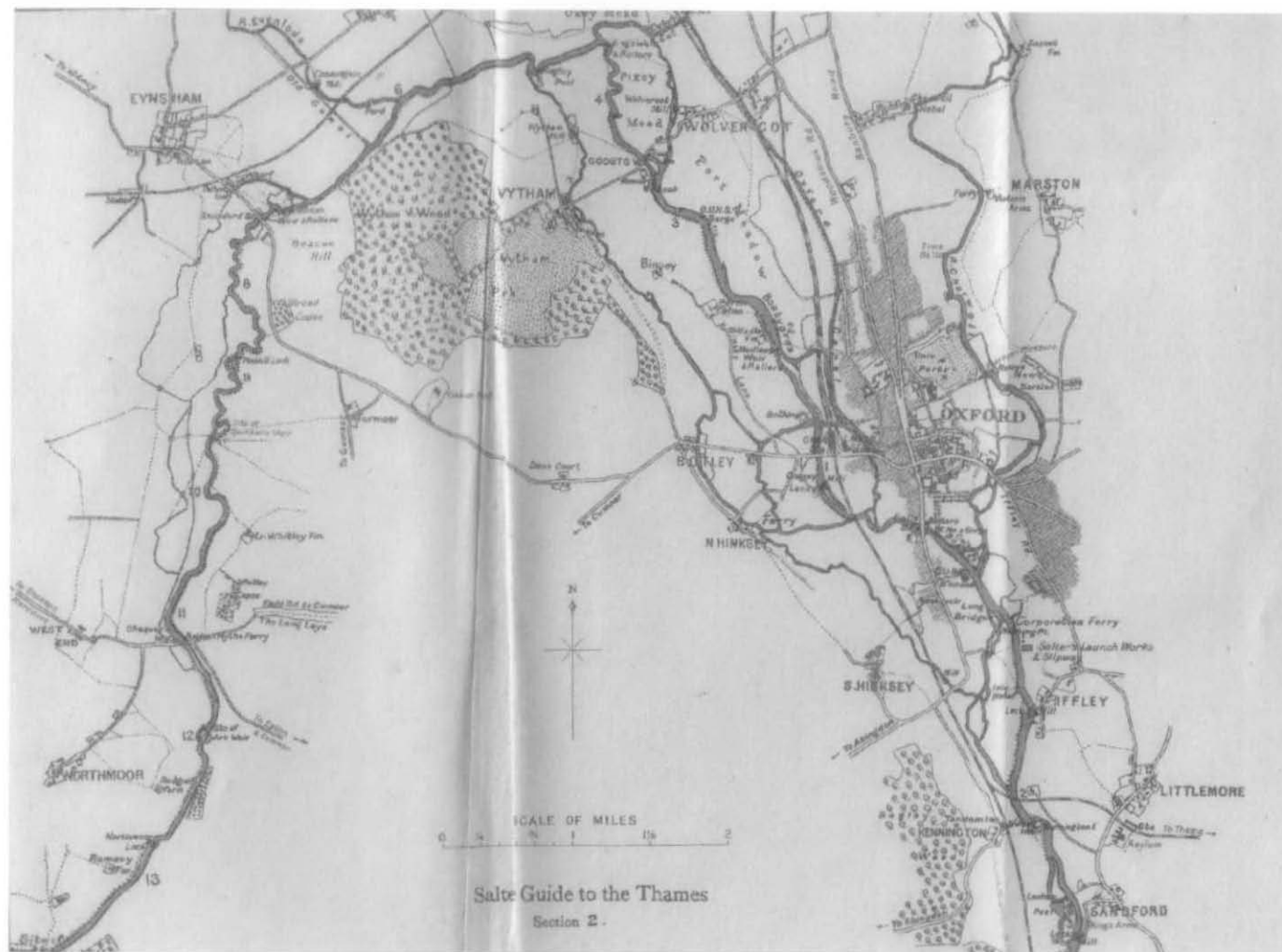
⁷¹ *Oxford Monthly*, November 1930.

⁷² The papers from the liquidation of the firm in 1932 remain in the archive.

⁷³ *Oxford Times*, 17 October 1930.

⁷⁴ J. H. Salter and J. A. Salter, *Salter's Guide to the Thames* (Oxford, 1911), p. 32. The book was subsequently revised by various family members.

⁷⁵ Telephone conversation with Tony Hobbs, 18 July 2005.



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Figure 9. One of eight fold-out maps contained within the *Salter's Guide to the Thames* (1911 edition)

the Public Assistance Committee (later The Board of Guardians) and governor of the Radcliffe Infirmary, and helped found Oxford's YMCA (of which he was vice-president).⁷⁶ Despite his prominence in municipal affairs, he was 'intensely reserved' and 'reticent'. Like his brothers he was 'a sincere and consistent Christian', a 'saint-like character' with whom 'it was impossible to live ... without seeing what he was, [and] what he believed in.'⁷⁷

The overt religious convictions of the three brothers make them stand out from other notable families such as the Hobbs or the Morrells, the famous brewery family. Like these other families the Salters originally came from a Church of England background, but the second generation became Nonconformists, as we have seen, owing to the influence of a Methodist housekeeper. They became strict sabbatarians and adopted a temperance lifestyle far removed from their upbringing in a family previously associated with the drinks trade.⁷⁸ According to ex-employee Len Andrews the brothers were well-known for being 'charitable' and inevitably Wesley Memorial Church 'did very well out of them'.⁷⁹ However, they provided much more than just financial assistance; one only has to look at the *Oxford Chronicle* during this period to see how active they were in promoting Methodism. In 1903, John Salter as mayor of Oxford chose to attend many Wesleyan social events and clearly represented a powerful ally for their cause.⁸⁰ The Salters were also at the heart of the Methodist social scene and their passenger boats were often used to entertain chapel groups. Furthermore, on a Sunday the entire congregation would be invited back to the Banbury Road house of George Salter (who was himself responsible for running the Sunday School).⁸¹



Figure 10: The Salter Brothers (left-right: John Henry, James Edward, George Stephen)

⁷⁶ *Oxford Times*, 2 April 1936.

⁷⁷ Salter, *Memoirs*, pp. 19–20.

⁷⁸ Various family members have suggested the father's drinking may also have played a part in this decision.

⁷⁹ Interview with L. Andrews, 31 August 2004.

⁸⁰ *Oxford Chronicle*, 1903.

⁸¹ Conversation with Robert Sackett (grandson of George Salter), 15 August 2005.

Although the Memorial Church contained many who were associated with the university, the Salters were still very much a 'town' family, with all three brothers marrying wives from within the trading community of Oxford. John and James married the sisters Alice and Julia, the daughters of a tailor named George Millin (who owned a small shop in Walton Street). In an interesting twist of relationships, Julia and Alice also had an older sister named Elizabeth, whose marriage to John Clifford (another tailor based on High Street) would produce a daughter named Alice who would then marry George Salter.⁸²

The gap between town and gown was well and truly bridged by the third generation of the Salter family, the first to receive secondary education beyond the age of fourteen. James was insistent that his sons should receive the type of education that he himself had lacked. Therefore his eldest (Arthur) was sent to Oxford High School (a school set up to provide for the needs of Oxford tradesmen, at fees within their means), whilst the other three (Frank, Bert and Arnold) attended the Leys School in Cambridge. As a result of their education, Arthur (Brasenose), Bert (St John's) and Arnold (Lincoln) all went on to study at Oxford University, whilst Frank remained at the family firm. Arnold also joined the business after a combination of 'family responsibilities' and an early illness cut short his university career.⁸³

As in their father's generation, it was the eldest brother (Arthur) who entered political service. After graduating from Oxford University with a double first, he left the city in 1903 to pursue a career in the Civil Service. He was able to draw on the expertise acquired in the family business by working for the transport department of the Admiralty (from 1904), as director of ship requisition during the First World War and chairman of the Allied Maritime Transport Executive (involving travelling to Washington to lobby for a new US programme of construction). He was also involved in a number of financial bodies, being head of the economic and financial section of the League of Nations Secretariat (1919-1920) as well as being on the Supreme Economic Council in Paris (1919).

After returning to London in 1930, he spent four years working as a journalist and author, before returning to his home city.⁸⁴ In 1934, he was appointed Gladstone Professor of Political Theory and Institutions at Oxford University and a Fellow of All Souls College. In 1937, he became the first family member to progress to national government, as one of two Members of Parliament elected by the University of Oxford (standing as an Independent). He was once again involved in shipping during the Second World War as Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Shipping (1939), heading the British Shipping Mission to Washington (1941-43). He was also Deputy Director-General of United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (1944).

After the university lost its parliamentary representation, he returned to the Commons as a Conservative MP for Ormskirk (1951-53). He became Minister of State for Economic Affairs at the Treasury, until 1953, when he received a life peerage and became Baron Salter of Kidlington.⁸⁵

The Salter family thus had a long-lasting impact on the city of Oxford, with each generation contributing differently to the political, religious and social landscape of the time. Lord Salter described his family as exhibiting 'the main strata' of the nineteenth century 'in miniature ... Socially below the professional, rising beyond the manual to considerable, but still limited and individual, business success. Of such families was the main strength and

⁸² This caused much hilarity amongst the family as well as a degree of confusion as to what relation they were to one another.

⁸³ Salter, *Memoirs*, p. 22.

⁸⁴ To be more precise he settled in Kidlington (three miles north of Oxford).

⁸⁵ *Oxford Mail*, 18 September 1975.

support of Gladstone's age.⁸⁶ From the ranks of the middle-class trading community, the second generation emerged to become leading local Liberal politicians, at the forefront of many social reforms. They were also a major Nonconformist family, at the centre of the Methodist social scene. It is also worth noting that at the same time their cousin Stephen Salter (the son of the co-founder of the same name) was also producing a lasting legacy for the city. Geoffrey Tyack described him as 'the most eccentric of Oxford's turn-of-the century architects' responsible for designing a number of notable landmarks, including the Lloyds bank building at Carfax and the striking Elm Tree pub in Cowley.⁸⁷ By the third generation, the Salters were a family moving from town into gown, an educated group equally at home in the upper echelons of university and civic life. James Arthur Salter was perhaps the most notable example of this progression, managing to bridge the gap between the two, representing both the interests of the university (as a lecturer and Member of Parliament) as well as the family firm (as a non-executive director).

THE 'SALTERS' NAVY'

The Salter family's rise in wealth and status was not the result of their own exertions alone, but also the work of a whole host of employees. Unfortunately, few employment records have survived. The only two documents in the archive that come close to providing a 'full' list of employees date from the First World War period and the 1950s. Although these provide only two snapshots of the workforce, they give an interesting insight into the social composition of the workforce and how it evolved over this time. They also correspond with a number of social studies that were conducted on Oxford employment during this time, for example C. V. Butler's *Social Conditions of Oxford* (1912) and J. M. Mogey's *Family and Neighbourhood* (comparing the changes in the city's working population in both 1911 and 1951). Using these as a comparative framework, one can begin to understand how the Salters' workforce fitted within and contributed to the changing social and economic framework of Oxford.

Very little is known about the Salters' workforce in the nineteenth century. We do not have any information about its size, until 1881 when the census records that John Salter was employing '43 men and boys.' We saw earlier that the number of boat orders fluctuated year upon year, and it is likely that this would have affected the number of staff members employed, at least on an *ad hoc* basis. According to Lord Salter, during the early years the firm had an ingenious and adaptable system of labour, where the employees involved in the boat letting side of the business (i.e. those working the summer season) were retained during the winter in order to build houses for the staff. Once it became too cold to do this, they had an arrangement with the local gas company to 'lend' them the staff for their busiest period, before welcoming them back again for the summer months.⁸⁸ Although it is unclear how long this system operated for, the firm would have needed an increasing number of summer staff as the fleet of passenger boats grew from 1888 onwards.

Unusually for a small Oxford firm,⁸⁹ the company had a sick fund. This shows that by 1906 there were fifty-five employees contributing to this, suggesting that the number of staff had risen since 1881. Over the next three decades the number of employees on the scheme

⁸⁶ Salter, *Memoirs*, p. 22.

⁸⁷ G. Tyack, *Oxford: An Architectural Guide* (Oxford, 1998), p. 269.

⁸⁸ A. Salter, *Memoirs*, p. 17. This explains why the firm amassed so much property early on.

⁸⁹ C.V. Butler, *Social Conditions in Oxford* (London, 1912), p. 240.

would remain around fifty, irrespective of the number of boats that were being built each year. This would suggest that this represented the number of full-time workers only, and that the part-timers (including the summer workers) would not have paid into this.⁹⁰

First World War

The first surviving comprehensive list of employees dates from the First World War period and no doubt owes its existence to the legal compulsion to collect detailed information about employees, in order to assess their eligibility for war service. The source lists the names of 313 staff members employed between 1916 and 1919, documenting their dates of employment, address, badge number (or other form of exemption from war service), age, marital status, past employment, usual work, wartime work and whether or not they were 'skilled'.⁹¹

Taken as a whole, the list provides much information about the nature of employment at the firm as well as the social composition of the workforce. The document lists the home addresses of 302 of the employees and this shows that nearly 95% of them lived in Oxford itself (282 in total).⁹² Twelve of the remaining twenty came from either London or the Caversham area, with the others from nearby towns and villages or other Thames locations.

The addresses of those living in Oxford show that a large proportion lived very close to Folly Bridge. Many of these lived in South Oxford (seventy-five in total), with more employees coming from Marlborough Road (in Grandpont) than from any other street (sixteen in total). There was also a heavy concentration of workers living in St Ebbe's, just north of Folly Bridge (thirty-five), with five staff members living in Friar Street and Cambridge Terrace respectively. Although not grouped in such a small area, there was also a large number of employees living in east Oxford near the Iffley Road slipway (fifty-four), with five workers living in Bullingdon Road, East Avenue, Charles Street, Percy Street and Hurst Street respectively. Smaller numbers also lived in Jericho (nine), Headington (thirteen), North Oxford (twenty-two) and around Botley Road (twelve). Surprisingly there were also five employees living in Islip Road in the very north of the city, possibly because there was a boathouse there on the river Cherwell.

The names and addresses show that a number of those working for the firm were members of the same family. The surnames suggest that Salters' had not gained employees from Oxford's other boating community at Fisher Row (on the canal). Mary Prior's work on this community showed that as commercial trade declined on the canal (particularly during the nineteenth century owing to the rise of the railways) many of the families associated with the area were forced to leave and find alternative employment.⁹³ However, it is more likely that these bargemen and boatmen would have chosen to go to similar jobs moving commercial freight elsewhere, rather than going to Salters', which was associated with passenger services and boat building.

Of the thirty-five surnames that were shared by more than one of Salters' employees, thirteen of these were shown as living in the same address, indicating that they were almost certainly of the same family. David Nutt for example was shown as living at 3 Brook Street (a Salters'-owned house) with his sons Lionel and William, all of whom worked for the firm. Where there was a father and son shown as working for the firm often the former was in

⁹⁰ Salters' archive (SA) Sick Fund Book.

⁹¹ SA Employment List 1916 to 1919.

⁹² 'Oxford' includes the bordering villages of Marston, Cowley, Headington and Iffley, which are now within the modern ring road.

⁹³ M. Prior, *Fisher Row* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 259 - 324.

direct charge of the latter. The 'sawmill foreman' J. Shaw was shown as living at 28 Norreys Avenue with his son Cyril who was a 'woodworking machinist'. Likewise the 'oar and scull maker' B. Collar lived at 29 Chilswell Road with his son Frank who was the 'assistant paddle maker'.

A number of staff members appear to have arrived at the firm already possessing relevant skills. The previous places of employment for 213 of the staff are listed and the most common occupations are shown in Table 3. As one would expect they drew staff from a wide range of occupations. Many of these were directly relevant to the job with the largest occupational group being joiners (sixty-six staff members). Other such occupations with transferable skills included boat builders, engineers, skippers, painters and those in the carpentry trade. J. Heiden, for example, had been a sail maker before joining the firm and was employed in the same capacity doing work for the Admiralty. There was also a large number who came from the armed forces or from trades that were wholly unrelated to boating. Arthur North, for example, went from driving the Corporation refuse cart to crewing on the Oxford to Kingston steamers. A further five employees came from jobs associated with the university, such as J. Bourton the college porter. This shows that Salters' was one possible source of summer employment for those who were not employed outside of the university terms (a perennial problem in Oxford until the 1920s).

TABLE 3: TABLE TO SHOW THE MOST COMMON PREVIOUS OCCUPATIONS OF THE SALTERS' EMPLOYEES ACCORDING TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR DATA (QUALIFICATION: THREE OR MORE FROM A PARTICULAR PROFESSION)

Joiners	66
Army / Navy / RAF	20
Errand Boys (various trades)	14
Assistants (various trades)	9
Painters	8
Boat Builders	7
Grocers / Grocer's Assistants	7
Carpenters (or related trade)	6
Engineers	6
University Employees (inc. Porters / Assistants)	5
Tug Skippers	4
Builders	3
Great Western Railway Workers	3
Publicans (or those in the Brewery Trade)	3
Drivers	3
Scholars	3

Approximately forty employees swelled the workforce every year in order to work on the passenger boats (between May and September). Although around 25% of the total workforce was involved in jobs relating to the passenger boats (including those coaling the boats), a far greater proportion of staff was employed in the boat building side of the business. Oxford was known for having a high proportion of skilled craftsmen,⁹⁴ and Salters' was no exception with over 50% of the workforce classed as 'skilled'.

If one includes the staff who were building both pontoons and collapsible craft for the Admiralty, over 40% of the workforce was employed on projects for the war effort. This shows that the data does not provide a typical depiction of the 'normal' workforce. This is supported by the fact that on 10 March 1918 over half of the employees were in their forties and fifties and many of those in their teens and twenties were shown as leaving to serve in the army. However, although the composition of the workforce was inevitably affected by the war, the document shows the date at which each person joined the firm and crucially what job they 'normally' did for the firm. Therefore one can use the source to show how large the workforce may have been before the war and what jobs they were involved in.

If we analyse the workforce on 1 December 1913 we can see that fifty-eight employees were working for the firm. By this stage there were few major employers in Oxford and only 17% of the working population was in industry (compared to 74% in Coventry).⁹⁵ Although it was small compared to those of the University Press (c. 750 employees) or the Morris Works (200),⁹⁶ the data shows that Salters' had a 'self-sufficient' workforce with a wide range of skills. Boat builders were predictably the largest occupational group with thirteen employees, the second largest group being clerks (presumably dealing with steamer bookings) and painters, with seven workers respectively. They also required staff with more specialised skills such as plumbers and riveters, and in a number of cases there was only one employee with a specific trade. Thus David Nutt was the designated 'punt and barge builder' whilst J. Arnold Baker was the sole slipway foreman. The latter was the expert brought in to supervise the construction of the steel craft at the Iffley Road workshop (including the passenger vessels) and the term 'Baker-built' became associated with exceptional craftsmanship.⁹⁷

1950s

The First World War sample can be contrasted with information from the 1950s, and some of the differences are striking. The source consists of a card index of every employee who left the firm in a ten year period between 1950 and 1959 (662 in total). It lists their name, address, starting and finishing date, their job for the firm and in some cases their wages and a comment about their reason for leaving. The major problem with this document is that it lists only those who actually left the firm and therefore the seasonal staff (i.e. those who left every September) appears disproportionately large. However since the source covers a whole decade it is likely to have included a large proportion of the workforce.⁹⁸

Perhaps the most dramatic change between the two sources was that, by the 1950s, the majority of the workforce no longer lived in Oxford. Although it was still the most common place for the workforce to come from, it only accounted for just over a third of it. Many

⁹⁴ J. M. Moge, *Family and Neighbourhood* (Oxford, 1956), p. 5.

⁹⁵ R. C. Whiting, *The View from Cowley* (Oxford, 1983), p. 8.

⁹⁶ D. Scargill, 'Response to Growth in Modern Oxford', in R.C. Whiting (ed), *Oxford* (Manchester, 1993), p. 111.

⁹⁷ T. Betjeman and D. Vaisey, *Victorian and Edwardian Oxford* (London, 1971), Figure 39.

⁹⁸ SA Employee Card Index 1950-1959.

workers came from either nearby towns and villages (such as Kennington) or other Thames locations (such as Windsor). Perhaps the most surprising statistic is that over 10% of the workforce (sixty-eight employees) came from an altogether different boating area, Southampton. Another change was the number of workers from Wales, with 2.5% coming from Barry or Cardiff (seventeen people in total). This could be a result of gaining staff from the Cowley Motor Works, which recruited extensively from Wales; as a result by 1938 around 10% of city's insured workforce was Welsh.⁹⁹ However, according to Bill Dunkley, Salters' was themselves advertising in Southampton and Wales, although this was only for the seasonal staff.¹⁰⁰

As well as being more spread out on a national basis, the staff members living in the Oxford area (243 in total) were also more dispersed around the city than they had been forty years earlier. The largest concentration of staff still lived in the close vicinity of Folly Bridge. Again, many lived in South Oxford (forty-four), with Marlborough Road once more the most common address (eight staff members). Several lived in St Ebbe's (fifteen) and the Jericho area (eight), whilst many more lived in east Oxford (forty-seven) near to the Ifley Road slipway. Four employees were even listed as living at the slipway itself, two shown as living on board the houseboat *Wanderlust* and another on board *The Santiago*. Others lived slightly further a field in some of the rapidly growing areas of Oxford, such as Headington (twenty-four employees) as well as the newer developments of Florence Park (fifteen), New Marston (seven), Rose Hill (six) and Barton (ten).

Again there were a number of families shown as working for the firm, and seventy-six of the 247 surnames mentioned in the First World War source (30.8%) reappear in the 1950s source. Although a proportion of these would have been coincidental, this does suggest that various families had continued to work for the firm since the First World War. The document shows that there were fourteen addresses providing more than one employee for the firm and three of these were husband and wife. The employment of female staff was a major shift from the First World War period, when only one was listed as working for the firm (a 'typist and junior clerk', named Miss Taylor, who may have been the first female employee). By contrast, the 1950s source lists fifty-nine female employees in total, a figure that represented around 9% of workforce. However, the jobs were gender specific as the vast majority were employed in administrative tasks rather than on the boats.¹⁰¹

The workforce as a whole (male and female) had a much more varied range of occupations. The number of seasonal staff had increased from the earlier source, with between sixty and ninety new employees taken on every summer. This meant that the total workforce of Salters' at its summer peak was between 110 and 140 employees. Although they were not all employed in Oxford, this was still a much smaller workforce than the numbers employed in the dominant industrial businesses of the city. By this stage both Pressed Steel and the Morris Works each had over 4000 employees, whilst the University Press (which had been the largest industry twenty years earlier) was employing around 840 staff.¹⁰²

Owing to the nature of the source, the seasonal staff appears disproportionately large, with around two thirds of the employees working on the passenger vessels. The most common occupation was the deck hand, accounting for nearly a third of the entire workforce. There were also a number of 'onshore' jobs that were directly connected to the

⁹⁹ J. Moge, *Family and Neighbourhood* (Oxford, 1956), p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with W. Dunkley, 21 September 2004. This is supported by the sources.

¹⁰¹ The occupations of only fifty-eight were listed. Female staff would also have been caterers on board the boats, but as Thames Catering Company was a subsidiary company they are not in this data set.

¹⁰² R. C. Whiting (ed), *Oxford* (Manchester, 1993), p. 8.

passenger boats. There were twenty-four guides (4% of the workforce) living in Windsor who were employed to take passengers on walking tours around the town and castle. Again there were many specialised jobs including two accountants, three sign writers, three couriers and three lorry drivers. A number of jobs only had a single employee assigned to them, including blacksmith, bricklayer, cabinet maker, coalman, electrician, fitter, handyman, petrol pump attendant, rigger, sailmaker, scull maker and a plumber's assistant.¹⁰³

The source reveals the wages for the different jobs in 1951, and these are shown in Table 4. Skippers and engineers were at the top of the scale with pay of £8 per week, whilst brush hands were at the bottom with just over £2 8s a week. The wages of apprentices were also low, but these would have risen in yearly increments. The indenture of Bernard Grossman, dated 5 May 1949, shows that his apprenticeship as a ship's plater and general marine engineer received a starting salary of just £1 4s 1d per week. This rose by 6s 1d in his second year and then by around 10s every subsequent year until reaching £3 2s 3d per week by his fifth and final year of his apprenticeship (which would have correlated with the pay of a boat builder).¹⁰⁴

TABLE 4: TABLE SHOWING THE DIFFERENT WAGES OF THE STAFF PER WEEK IN 1951
(* DENOTES 1952)

Skippers / Engineers	£8 0s 0d
Pursers	£7 10s 0d
Clerks	£5 5s 0d
Typists	£4 0s 0d
Deck Hands / Mates	£2 19s 0d to £3 9s 0d
Boat Builder*	£3 2s 3/4d
Carpenters	£3 0s 0d
Brush Hands	£2 8s 5/8d
3rd Year Apprentice / Trainees	£2 0s 0d
Guides	15s per day

TABLE 5: TABLE SHOWING SALTERS' YEARLY WAGES COMPARED TO THE MORRIS MOTOR WORKS (1951)

Semi-skilled Machine Worker at Morris Motor Works	£486
Average Skilled Worker	£444
Salter's Skipper or Steam Engineer (Skilled)	£416
Salter's Boat Builder (Skilled)	£161.36

¹⁰³ A plumber is not mentioned.

¹⁰⁴ SA Apprenticeship Deed, 5 May 1949. However, they did supply 'board, drink, lodging, clothing and proper clothes'.

In 1951, £10 per week was considered a very good wage and therefore some of Salters' pay was certainly on the low side.¹⁰⁵ In Oxford, a skilled boat builder who had done a five-year apprenticeship or an unskilled deck hand were on about a third of the wage earned by a semi-skilled machine operator at the Morris Motor Works (see Table 5).¹⁰⁶ Even the highest paid Salters' employees (the skippers and steam engineers) earned about 16% less than their counterparts at Morris, despite working a seven-day week. During the 1950s around a third of all workers in Oxford were employed in the motor industry and this caused a shortage of staff for many other employers (such as the bus companies) as they could not match the high wages.¹⁰⁷ This explains why Salters' recruited from other areas outside of Oxford, as they could not get the necessary staff from the local population.¹⁰⁸ Although the source does not allow us to assess the long-term impact, it is likely that the Motor Works may have affected the recruitment of skilled labourers in particular (such as boat builders). However, the source does show that in spite of the low wages they received, many of the summer staff seemed happy to return year after year.

The document provides an insight into some of the staffing problems that they experienced as it gives the reason why some of employees left the firm. Six people joined the armed forces, sixteen were 'deceased', whilst no fewer than thirty left because of disciplinary problems. The deck hands accounted for nearly two thirds of these with fifteen sacked and a further three 'walking out'. Of the five skippers / drivers who left the firm, two were 'sent to prison' and another sacked for 'failing to refuel the *Mapledurham*'. Finding reliable steam engineers seems to have been a particular problem, since in 1958 three were employed on a trial basis and all were dismissed (one for being 'undesirable', another for having 'no knowledge of the work' and the last for being a 'thorough nuisance'). However, the departure of the great majority of employees occasioned no comment, suggesting the parting was amicable.

By the 1950s the Salters' workforce had changed dramatically from what it had been forty years earlier, becoming more national in composition and less male dominated. The types of jobs that they did reflected the state of the business, and whilst the number of full-time employees may have remained fairly constant, the number of seasonal staff had increased dramatically by the 1950s in order to crew the enlarged fleet of passenger boats. By this stage the firm could not match the large wages offered by the big industrial powers of Oxford, but the fact that many employees were prepared to work for lower wages suggests that the job may have offered certain non-pecuniary attractions.

THE NATURE OF THE WORK

A history which only considers the company from the point of view of its management and products would be incomplete. However, it is almost impossible to write a comprehensive account about the experiences of a workforce that encompassed such a wide spectrum of trades and occupations. Nevertheless, a number of employees past and present have provided detailed personal accounts of their experiences in the 'Salters' navy'.¹⁰⁹ The earliest recollections come from Len Andrews, who began working for Salters' in 1930, and

¹⁰⁵ J. Moge, *Family and Neighbourhood* (Oxford, 1956), p. 132.

¹⁰⁶ H. Lydall, 'Personal Incomes in Oxford', *Bulletin of the Oxford University Institute of Statistics*, XIII, 1951, p. 388, in Whiting, Oxford, p. 150.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁰⁸ Conversation with John Salter, 16 August 2005.

¹⁰⁹ This term was used by many of the workforce.

¹¹⁰ Len Andrews's son Graham also contributed.

his brother Albert, who worked for the firm on both a full-time and part-time basis between 1936 and 1992.¹¹⁰ As the longest serving current employees both Bill Dunckley (who began working for the firm in 1944 and is still in full-time employment), and his younger brother Bryan Dunckley (who began working for the company in 1947 and is now part-time) are perhaps the best qualified to remark on the evolution of the firm. The interviews were accompanied by a number of written accounts about their work experiences by Alan Smith (who worked for the firm between 1936 and 1940) and John Springer (who worked as part of his National Service in 1947). Although the majority were not based in Oxford itself, their accounts are representative of the boat crews in general.

For the full-time staff, the job was sharply divided between the winter months spent ashore maintaining boats for the forthcoming season, and the summer when the crews took to the waters and lived on board their passenger vessels. The accounts of many employees centred predominantly upon the latter period, which was more enjoyable and eventful. Nevertheless, the winter months were important as a preparatory period. Bill Dunckley recalled that various staff members canvassed travel companies and offered local schools money-off vouchers for the steamers.¹¹¹ During this period he and Len Andrews were employed in one of the workshops maintaining engines, work that was dirty and required a considerable understanding of engineering.¹¹² Albert Andrews was employed in the boat building shop, whilst Bryan Dunckley's first winter was spent painting and varnishing.¹¹³

The staff greatly looked forward to the summer as this was an opportunity to work and live on board the passenger vessels. The crews consisted of a skipper, steam engineer, purser (on the scheduled cruises only), waitress and one or two deck-hands (depending on the size of the boat).¹¹⁴ All were expected to remain smartly dressed at all times, in a shirt, tie, suit and hat. Len Andrews recalled that 'when John and George [Salter] was alive, you wasn't allowed to go on the boat with your coat off, however hot it was! They'd pull you up over it.'

The skippers were ultimately in charge of the whole boat. They took great pride in their craft and the crew were expected to follow their orders. The steam engineer was more senior than the deck hands (in terms of wage) and they were in charge of keeping the engine stoked and operating the throttle according to the commands of the skipper (as relayed via the telegraph). The deck hands were responsible for operational duties such taking the funnel down when approaching bridges and manning the ropes at the locks and embarkation points. The pursers sold the tickets onboard, whilst the waitresses served tea and coffee from the saloon. Both of these came onto the boat to work during the day time, whilst the others slept onboard in the forward cabin, the engineer and skipper in the roomier and lighter section by the ladder, and the mates in the narrower darker section near the bow. The cabin was kept warm by the steam boiler, and sleeping onboard was the most practical way of ensuring the boiler was lit early enough to gain steam for the morning as well as protecting against vandalism.

The work was hard and the hours were very long, with the steam engineer surfacing at five or six in the morning in order to light the boiler. On the scheduled services the day would normally finish at about 7 o'clock, but it was often not until around 10pm that they

¹¹¹ Interview with Bill Dunckley, 21 September 2004. All subsequent quotations from Bill are taken from this interview.

¹¹² Interview with Len Andrews, 31 August 2004. All subsequent quotations from Len are taken from this interview.

¹¹³ Interview with Albert Andrews, 26 March 2005, and Bryan Dunckley, 17 August 2004. All subsequent quotations from Albert and Bryan are taken from these interviews.

¹¹⁴ In addition to these some boats also had drivers.



Figure 11: Two steamers moored outside Salters' office in Windsor (1929)

finished all their chores including scrubbing the decks, polishing the brass and cleaning the boiler. Even after returning in the evening, occasionally the work would continue into the night if the boat was needed at a different location the following morning.

With the amount of time they spent in each other's company the crews became inevitably close-knit. The relationships between the different staff members varied from boat to boat, but on the whole there was a good camaraderie. Crews might often race one another in friendly competition and then socialise in the evenings when the boats would moor up together. There was a strong loyalty to the firm and often staff members served for many years on the same boat, becoming associated with that particular boat. However, the deck hands by contrast were a more transient workforce. This was partly due to their age, as they were mainly teenage boys who might work for a season before finding another profession. However, this was also because they had more disciplinary problems (as shown above). Bryan Dunkley recalled that although the majority were well-behaved, the job did attract some of the rougher elements of society. This was one of the reasons why sleeping onboard was eventually abolished in the 1960s, to try and reduce the time that the crews spent onboard unsupervised.¹¹⁵

The firm also had disciplinary problems of a different nature with the pursers, who were in charge of handling the money from the public. A number of these were known for 'skimming' from the takings, by issuing tickets in pencil which could subsequently be altered. This forced the management to bring in a number of initiatives to try and prevent this, such as employing ticket inspectors and issuing ticket machines.

¹¹⁵ Conversation with John Salter, 16 August 2005.

Although the majority of staff did not handle the takings, complaints about wages were commonplace. Len Andrews recalled that when any Salter family member used to visit them, the staff would whistle the tune to the following song:

We are the little children weak,
We only earn three bob a week,
The more we work the more we play
It makes no difference to our pay

Bryan Dunckley was one of a number of employees that left the firm to work at the Cowley Motor Works, which offered higher wages, a shorter working day and more time off for holidays.

The boat crews were not members of any trade union and, unlike the Cowley Motor Works where industrial disputes were common, Salters' did not experience any strike action. However, Bill Dunckley recalled one occasion in 1947 when the Oxford to Kingston skippers signed a round-robin petition to ask for a pay rise of 10s a week, in order to bring their wages up to the psychologically significant total of £7, or £1 per day.

Despite such complaints, the relationship between the management and the staff appears to have been very good. Keeping a track of a highly mobile workforce was a considerable challenge for those in charge, although the close-knit nature of the firm ensured that they usually found out from someone if anything was amiss. Although employees might be summoned to the office, the majority did not cause any trouble and sackings were not common (as shown above). The management were respected for being fair in their treatment of the staff, and provided a worker could do the task for which they were employed, the firm offered good job security. Furthermore, the Salter family and their duty managers (in Oxford, Reading and Windsor) would help their staff in times of need. This benevolent paternalism extended to providing financial aid, medical help, letters of introduction and even sometimes getting employees out of prison. Bryan Dunckley summed up the relationship: 'They didn't pay you a lot, but I'll give 'em their due. They did back you up ... Can't fault 'em.'

Although the wages were not large, as Bryan pointed out, the job provided free board and lodging:

In those days, you had a hot dinner, both the ways, you had people in the kitchens up at Oxford here making a hot dinner and down at Windsor. So you had a good cooked dinner, you had enough tea on board so ... even if you had no wages, you were made up really.

John Springer recalled that even in the days of rationing, the crews were 'fed marvellously'. During large private parties, a gang of waitresses would come aboard and they would work hard to ensure all the passengers were fed, often in a number of separate sittings (when they could not all fit in the saloon at once). Any food that was left over was then distributed amongst the crew:

After party trips we would find leftover lobster, chicken, loaves, seven pound tins of creamed Russian salad, a pound or so of butter, tea and sugar. We thrived on it.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ J. Springer, 'National Service aboard Queen of the Thames', in *Canal and Riverboat*, November 1981, pp. 39–41. All subsequent quotations from J. Springer are taken from this article.



Figure 12: Private party onboard a steamer with onboard piano visible (c. 1940s)

The private parties not only provided the staff with food, but they would often tip the crew. Although the skippers were paid the same amount, the larger boats received the greater tips as they were given the best parties. Bryan Dunckley recalled that they provided enough money to live on and that as a result he did not even open his pay packets, which he collected in a suitcase. This explains how Alan Smith managed to work for the firm for five summers (1946-1950) without ever officially receiving a wage, as he had been (in his own words) 'smuggled on board' as an 'illicit crew member'.¹¹⁷

However, for most of the staff, the appeal of the job was nothing to do with the pay, but it was to do with the alternative lifestyle that it offered. Staff enjoyed working in the outdoor environment and there was never a dull moment on board. John Springer remembered in particular the lively private parties with entertainment provided by the piano that was standard issue on all of Salters' larger boats. He recalled the many songs that were sung on the boats including most vividly a party of 500 Welshman who did a joint rendition of *Cwm Rhondda* ('Guide Me, O Thou Great Redeemer') whilst on board two separate steamers.

¹¹⁷ Letter from Alan Smith to Brian Hillsdon, 2 November 1992.

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Therefore, for the staff it was more a way of life than a job.¹¹⁸ As Bryan Dunckley explained, you worked a seven-day week without any days off and it was easy to become divorced from the rest of society:

Living on a boat down at Windsor...you'd been cut off from society and all of a sudden you'd come out in the traffic. It was like being in another world... So we never used to come ashore really. Didn't read papers, so you didn't know what the other side of the world was doing! It was a life of its own!

Bryan also recalled that there were other attractions to the job. Like all sailors, the crew were renowned for having relationships with women at their various ports of call. He described the job as a 'young man's paradise' and that the crews enjoyed 'the life of Riley'. However, these relationships could also shape the job that they did. When the skipper of *Hampton Court* started courting a nurse from Windsor, for example, he wanted to end his shift there instead of Kingston and therefore asked Bryan whether he would swap boats with him. Likewise, once staff married there was also further pressure from the partners to come ashore.

The staff also fostered relationships of a more pragmatic and professional nature. The firm had an unofficial arrangement with the lock keepers to give them preferential treatment over other river traffic. When a boat was approaching a lock, the skipper would pipe the steam whistle so that the lock keeper could get the lock ready for them. As Bill Dunckley explained, this system was mutually beneficial to both parties:

At the end of the season Salters' always used to give the lock keepers a little bonus. If you were trusted you'd get all these envelopes to give out to all the lock keepers. They used to look forward to it you know.

Although this arrangement was very much at 'nod and the wink of the lock keeper' the system was important for helping the boats keep to their timetable. However, as the number and size of private craft on the river slowly increased (particularly after the 1960s), there were lengthening delays at the locks and this caused a growing intolerance from other river users to this system of preferential treatment. However, as Bill Dunckley pointed out without it the timetables became increasingly hard to keep to, particularly on the weekends:

You were due in at 7 and you were getting in at 10, half past 10 at night. It just wasn't viable you know. I remember turning up at Kingston ... 10.30 quarter to 11 at night, when you were supposed to be in at 7! I mean people are going squirmy ... the timings were very tight to start with.

Eventually it became impossible to run the whole Oxford to Kingston route and the services had to be cut into shorter sections (in the 1970s). By this stage the workforce no longer slept on board and although the boats continued to operate as before, the work experience was never quite the same. However, for many the appeal of the job was undiminished and the lifestyle was perhaps best summed up by Bill Dunckley, who remains the firm's senior engineer:

When I was on the boats it was the best thing since sliced bread, you know, it was brilliant...couldn't get enough of it. Still can't.

¹¹⁸ B. Eade, *Along the Thames* (Stroud, 1997), p. 32. This lifestyle was summed up by the Thames poem: *Time goes by,/ they say it alters/ not at all if you work for Salters'/ Ring out the bell from every steeple,/ it makes no difference to boating people.*

CONCLUSION

As the first academic account of the history of Salters', this article has helped to fill an important gap in the commercial history of Oxford.¹¹⁹ It has presented material that has not previously been published and makes a start at relating this to the wider story of the city's development between 1858 and c. 1960.

In many ways the firm's evolution over its first century represented a microcosm of the wider changes that were occurring on the river, in the city of Oxford as well as society at large. The company rose to prominence at a time when a number of other specialised businesses were prospering in Oxford.¹²⁰ Although fortunes fluctuated year by year, this was a 'Golden Age' for boating and through the exertions of family members and a skilled workforce the business grew to become 'for a time [perhaps] the foremost of its kind in the world.'¹²¹ It was one of only a few Oxford industries to export globally at this time as well as providing an important source of summer employment in a city that had recurring problems of unemployment outside of the university terms. The company's economic success allowed the family members to rise to prominence and join an elite group of middle-class reformers, who came to dominate local politics at the turn of the century. This political legacy would continue into the third generation, with Arthur Salter being the first family member to cross the town-gown divide and represent both the interests of the firm and the university (as a lecturer and Member of Parliament).

Although the early part of the twentieth century was a time of dominance for the firm, the enlargement of the Morris Motor Works after 1920 threatened the future of the business. Like many other smaller city employers, Salters' was unable to compete with the high wages offered in the automotive industry and they were forced to recruit staff from further afield, relying upon the unique appeal of the job and the loyalty of their staff.

However, the rise of the motor industry was merely one symptom of the country's rapidly developing transport network. As trains, buses and cars became dominant forms of transport, the commercial importance of the Thames slowly declined and the passenger boats became associated with weekend leisure rather than as a viable means of getting around.¹²² In 1927 John Salter was already claiming that:

the old 'pleasure boating' is dead...In the old days it was crowded with boats whose occupants were reviewing the delights of a river once more untravilled by the exactions of coach or cox...The old boating man is extinct in Oxford.¹²³

However, while the changes caused the ruin of many smaller firms, Salters' did manage to continue operating although increased traffic from private boats eventually forced them to shorten their scheduled services and rely more heavily upon income from private charters. Likewise, the boat building business also survived by diversifying greatly, although it was never able to return to the levels of output that had been enjoyed in the boom years before the Second World War.

¹¹⁹ This article is based on an MSc thesis submitted to Oxford University in September 2005 entitled *Slipways, Skiffs and Steamers: Salters' of Oxford: a History of a Thames Boating Firm over a Century of Evolution (1858 – c. 1960)*. This was the first academic history of Salters' and some changes have been made for journal publication. This study concludes in c. 1960 as the vast majority of material in the archive relates to pre-1960.

¹²⁰ A. Howe, 'Intellect and Civic Responsibility', in R. Whiting, R.C. (ed), *Oxford* (Manchester, 1993), p. 21.

¹²¹ A. Salter, *Memoirs of a Public Servant* (London, 1961), p. 15.

¹²² F. Dix, *Royal River Highway* (Newton Abbot, 1985), p. 206.

¹²³ W. Sherwood, *Oxford Rowing* (London, 1900), p. 24.