



Left to right: Dave Earwood, Alf Ely, Ron Mitchelson and Jim Barnard (photos courtesy of 'Lynn News & Advertiser').

# JOB PROFILE

## The Chief Dock Foreman/Stevedore

The smooth running and efficiency of any port relies on good teamwork between a wide range of shipping interests and individuals. At King's Lynn there is one team of seven men who form a vital link in the chain of operations. Perhaps it might be said they are at the hub of the operations.

These men are the stevedores, headed by Ron Mitchelson, chief dock foreman, and include a shed foreman who supervises operations in the transit sheds, and receiving and forwarding work on the quaysides.

Ron's team are stevedores Alan (Mac) McLaren, Jim Barnard, Les Stevenson, Dave Harwood, Alf Ely and shed foreman George Dowdy. They are responsible to the traffic superintendent, Albert Christie whose job also

involves consultation with ships' agents, ships' captains, the shippers, importers/exporters, hauliers and dockworkers - a lot of people to satisfy.

There is no room for errors in the shipping business. A mistake on the stevedores' part

could prove very expensive.

They need to think ahead and to have a sound knowledge of all types of gear required, such as for handling unusual and extra heavy items of cargo.

Mike Fell, assistant docks manager, says: 'Lynn's reputation as a port is dependent upon the speed and efficiency of our cargo handling operations. In the forefront of these operations are the stevedores. Their knowledge and experience is of paramount importance in maintaining our reputation for fast turnround and good stowage.'

Arrangements for daily work are made the day before when Ron meets with the traffic superintendent to discuss the shipping programme and berthing arrangements. Ron then gives instructions to the stevedores at 7.30 each morning.

The immediate concern of the stevedore is then to arrange for the necessary gear for discharging or loading a cargo, speaking to the ship's captain to ask if he has any particular instructions for the handling of the cargo, and communicating directly with the ship's agent to arrange necessary transport.

During the handling of cargo the stevedores are constantly on duty at the ship, keeping a watchful eye on the proceedings, both on board and on the quayside.

After Ron has instructed the stevedores in their daily duties, he then meets the registered dock workers at the National Dock Labour



Ron Mitchelson at the Call Stand allocating dockers to ships.

Board call stand to allocate the jobs to be done on various ships.

Another aspect of the overall operation concerns co-operation with H.M. Customs & Excise. No cargo is allowed out of the port until Customs clearance certificates have been issued to the traffic department. If a ship is loading, the stevedore also has to ensure that he is in possession of an 'authorised loading list' issued by H.M. Customs under the new export procedure.

Ron also has a lot of other paper work. A log is prepared of each operation from start to finish and it is on this information that the registered dock workers' wages are determined.

Any damage to equipment, cargo or ships, and any accidents involving personnel require various forms to be completed.

Safety is vital and there must be no slackness in the constant checking of cargo handling gear for possible defects.

The duties do not rest with loading and discharging cargoes at the quaysides. Into the transit sheds goes valuable cargo for storage, pending re-delivery by road or rail. This is where the cargo comes under the direct supervision of the shed foreman, George Dowdy, and his staff of checkers. Movement of cargo in and out of the sheds is done only on special orders via the chief dock foreman.

Another responsibility which concerns the warehouse foreman is car and tractor imports which have to be checked and any damage noted.

Container traffic, which increased more than tenfold in 1981, has also to be organised on the quayside to ensure efficient loading. The 20ft boxes have to be separated from the 40 ft boxes, and the lightweight boxes separated from the heavies. Not an easy task when boxes are arriving at short notice by road and rail with Lynn's limited resources for the secondary handling of containers.

During busy periods the stevedores' hours can be long. This often involves them supervising work on two or three ships at a time and working late into the evenings to get ships finished for sailing on a particular tide.

Stevedores' memories are long and they have had problems in the past, but facilities are now very much improved and quayside floodlighting has proved a big asset. Says Ron, 'At the moment we have the finest gear we have ever had for the great variety of cargoes now being handled at the port.'

It is a busy life and a responsible one, but also one full of variety. As Ron says, 'One of the most interesting things about our job is that every day produces something different and a new challenge.'

The stevedores all agree that one of the compensations is the number of friendships they make. They have, perhaps, more foreign friends than most people working permanently in one place. They number among these captains and officers of ships from all over the world, particularly Europe. On occasions, some of the group have taken advantage of invitations to visit abroad and have returned the hospitality by inviting their foreign host to holiday with them in Lynn.

Friendships are also well established within the port and there are excellent relations with the registered dock workers. Ron comments, 'We have our grievances from time to time, but these are well aired and usually resolved very quickly. Next day they are all forgotten. No-one bears any grudges.'

**Linda Thomas, King's Lynn**