

January-March 2011 email interview by Lin Hines with Tony Fleming

Glad to hear that wood boats we built so many years ago are still going strong!

Tony Fleming

Passagemaker Magazine in its April 2010 issue featured a great story by Bob Lane about 3 of the Chanteyman yachts homeported in the Puget Sound area. The following issue had a Letter to the Editor from Tony Fleming telling his connection to Chanteyman. An email to Bob Lane connected me to Christine Alhambra, editor of Passagemaker who forwarded my email requesting information to Tony, who was then on an amazing cruise on his personal Fleming 65 from Britain to Western Scotland, the Outer Hebrides, the Faroe Islands and finally to Iceland! Tony was kind enough to respond to my queries in the early months of 2011 and forwarded some incredible photographs of the Hong Kong yard then building Chanteyman yachts and surviving the terrible Typhoon Wanda. Read on! Lin Hines

1. Would you know of anyone who might still know or have the records of the total number of Chanteyman yachts manufactured at the Hong Kong factory? When I bought my boat 5 years ago, the previous owners told me that 36 were built and we know of at least 6-7 Chanteyman, all here in the Northwest except 1 in the California Delta town of Rio Vista and Hull #24, Sea Chanty, purchased new in 1962-3 by Tory and Trish Vizzini of Stevensville, MD. Currently, we've found Hull # 2,9 (mine), 10, 20, 24 and another near Port Townsend, WA with unknown Hull #. Several others are reported to be in CA but no info known. FYI, Hull 10 "Salty Quacker" owned by Mike Wessel for 23 years was sold in late Fall 2010 back to the daughter, Mary Reade Larson, of the original buyers of the boat, Dr. C.W. Reade, close to Olympia!! The original name was Sing Ton and will be again in its newest reincarnation! Imagine that serendipity nearly 50 years later; she saw Mike's boat on this website and wanted it back in the family!!

TF- I am not sure that I will be able to provide meaningful answers to your questions. It was a long time ago and much water has passed under many bridges since then. I don't know anyone who might have definitive records on the boats built in HK. The yard was closed down in the early 1970's at the time when American Marine barely escaped full bankruptcy. The US equivalent would be Chapter 11. The Newtons lost control to the bank and left the company and I assume all records were lost. I did say in an earlier mail that I thought that 26 boats were built but it could well have been 36.

2. Your Fleming website says you were the Technical Director for American Marine, HK 1961-1983. Could you explain your job with American Marine so we can acknowledge your contributions on the Chanteyman website?

TF- I was Technical Director at American Marine for many years but I think it is rather over-stating the facts to give me that title at the time that the Chanteymans were built. I left the company in 1985 - not 1983. When I joined in 1961, I knew very little about boatbuilding. The Newtons wanted a young guy with an engineering background. I had this but it came from an engineering apprenticeship at De Havilland Aircraft in the UK. I was working in HK as a Technical Representative for a British trading company. My connection with the Newtons was through their bottling plant and also through sailing at the HK yacht club. At the time I joined American Marine I had never been on a boat that was big enough to stand up on without the risk of it capsizing. I was pretty much left to figure out things for myself. We had many, many boats under construction at the time - both sail and power - and the Chanteyman was just one of them. I really don't think I deserve any special credit relating to that boat. The main thing I recall is that the hulls were so limber and the shaft so long that when pulled up on the railway, the shaft failed to line up with the gearbox flange by a full 2". At that time I had no idea why it was so far off and just hoped it would line up again when the boat went back into the water - it did! I was put in charge of all engineering aspects of the boats and just muddled my way through. I have always considered that boat building is mostly applied common sense but experience is of course a vital ingredient which can only be acquired by....experience. Catch 22!

3. I've always been amazed that Chanteyman was offered in 3 different layouts--Newport, Barnagat (ours) and Olympia. How could you do this radical customization on a relatively small, inexpensive (\$25,500) boat?

TF- Each boat was built one by one without any mass production techniques so it was no problem to make changes to the interior.

4. On our website, we've linked to Shing Kong's photo collections of the HK factory just after the Chanteyman production years? Can you think of anyone who might have photos of the Chanteyman production days or any other documentation?

TF- That is an amazing collection of photos - most of which I have never seen before. I do have photos taken at the time of the boat yard but I don't remember whether they include any of the Chanteyman. The immediate problem is that I moved house a while ago and still haven't unpacked all my stuff so I don't have a clue where they might be. However, I will keep a look out for them when I get all my stuff organized.

5. Can you help us add to the Chanteyman history on the home page of the website--especially the reasoning in selecting this design?

TF-I really was not in a position to know why the Chanteyman design was selected as I was low on the totem pole. At the time, American Marine was represented in the US by a company called Products of Asia - specifically in the person of Bill Shaw who later went on to be the president of Pearson Yachts. Bill was a naval architect and he died several years ago. Orders for most boats came from this source and American Marine built several Sea Witch sailboats designed by Angelman & Davies. My guess is that the initial orders came via this route but I don't know that for sure. Balboa Marine (not marina) was the dealer for American Marine in Newport Beach, California. As far as I am aware they had no connection with Products of Asia. They - or at least a company with a similar name owned by Stewart and Ullman - went on to sell GB's when they became available. The person who sold most of the boats was Chuck Hovey. Chuck Hovey Yachts was Fleming Yachts first dealer and are still our West Coast dealer today. The company is now run by Chuck's son Brian but Chuck still comes into the office most days. He might be able to tell you something about the early days.

5A. The boat spec sheet we put on the website says "Distributed by Balboa Marina, Newport Beach, CA--John Granath, sales manager." I have heard of Products of Asia before too and in fact found Bill Shaw's obit on the web a year or so ago which mentioned Pearson Yachts. So I don't know what the relationship between the 2 companies might have been, but I know that quite a few of the first dozen or so boats were delivered to owners in Southern California.

6. The only negative we ever hear when displaying our boat at venues like the Wooden Boat Festival in Port Townsend in September of each year is that the boat sleeps 7+ according to the specs but the only private berth is the V-berth in the forward cabin and not a separate aft cabin, like you see in the 70s in GBs, CHBs etc. Any comment on that design decision? We really love our huge salon, though.

TF- It was a bit of a strange design with just the small private cabin in the forepeak but, having it not all chopped up into small spaces, makes the boat look quite large for its size. The design would be fine for a family with children because the kids could have the fwd cabin and the adults the rest of the boat.

7. Our boat, WANDRIAN, has an interior "sailboat" type semi-circular divider between the aft end of the salon and the main salon--we've never seen that on any other Chanteyman--could that be an owner special order finish touch or did more boats have that? If I'm not being clear, see picture on website--Existing Vessel--Wandrian--Click on WANDRIAN Picture for more info--second photo down shows "arch." We saw an almost identical structure on a Sea Witch sailboat (same designer-Hugh Angelman) based in Coupeville, WA.

TF- I have no idea why your boat has the arch. I suspect it was to special order.

8. The wood used in the 1-3/4" square frames is called "IPOH" in the specs. None of the hardwood people around here know this wood. Are there any other common names you know of?? It's terrific wood--after 49 years, there is no deterioration in frames or the mahogany planks throughout my boat, based on our survey in Port Townsend last spring by a very well known "buyer's" surveyor, Alain Vilage!! You folks built a remarkable boat!

TF- The wood you refer to is IPOL - not IPOH. Ipoh is listed in the specs and ipoh is the name of a town in Malaysia. I don't know much about ipoh as a wood but here is a link I found on the internet.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intsia_bijuga

8A. IPOL, IPIL, IPOH??? Your referenced Wikipedia article calls it "ipil" and mentions termite resistance and flooring uses. No marine applications mentioned. Thanks for correcting my poor eyesight reading of the specs--I see now it's called IPOL. The spec sheet also mentions yacal for the engine beds. I found an article on the web discussing the Philippine forest industry saying "The hardest and strongest member of the lauan family is yakal. This wood is resistant to decay, which makes it particularly suitable for structures exposed to the weather. ...best results can only be

obtained when it is well-seasoned before using. It is an excellent substitute for ipil for house posts and bridge timbers, and is recommended wherever great strength and durability are required." Interesting that both different woods were used in our boat.

9. We have a page on the website about the name Chanteyman and its spelling and its meaning in the days of sail. Any idea how that name came to be attached to this boat and who named it?

TF- My guess is that the name Chanteyman came from the designers: Angelman & Davies.

10. On the website page "Boat Plans" at the bottom, we have 2 drawings of bow decorations for the Chanteyman. Do you know if either (or both) were ever painted on the boats or was that a special order? All these plan pages (over 40 pages) were given to us by Hugh Davies in LA, the son of Charles Davies, who has all of his father's papers. A fabulous find for a very limited production boat!!

TF- I don't recall the bow decorations ever being applied to the boats - although they do look familiar.

11. Do you remember the production time for a Chanteyman in the Junk Bay factory and was the hull built upside down as apparently the early GBs were?

TF- I do not recall the production time for each boat although I don't think it could have been all that quick and I'm sure the boats were built right side up. The reason I say this is that the frames were bent and applied inside a temporary skeleton of "moulds" and "battens". The frames were placed in steam box and when softened by this process they were pulled out one by one and carried by carpenters running over to the boat. The unbent frames were tossed up to others inside the temporary structure who bent and clamped the now-flexible frames to the inside of the battens. Subsequently the temporary moulds were replaced by bulkheads and the battens were replaced by planks.

12. Do you recall a bronze "manufacturer's plaque" being installed in these boats? Mary who bought Mike Wessel's boat has one in a picture frame from their first ownership of the boat. I'm "attaching" a photo of her plaque.

TF- I don't specifically remember the plaque but it definitely looks like something that was made in HK in those days and I would be surprised if a similar plaque had not been on each boat. Maybe previous owners took them off and kept them as souvenirs.

13. Hull numbers are an interesting mystery too--Mary's plaque does not have one and none of us have ever found one anywhere carved into the hull etc. Any idea of a place to look that we may have overlooked? We got a list of initial buyers when we bought our boat but it only went to Hull #15.

TF- In those days there was no requirement to put any identification number on each boat and I don't recall there ever being any other than in the form of a plaque.

14. Our boat has beautiful bronze "dolphin" swim platform brackets. On the website's plans pages, we show a plain triangular bracket---again, a special order addition or???

TF- I have a very vague memory of the dolphin brackets. I am sure they would have been standard so I don't know why some boats did not have them unless it was to cut the cost in the later boats.

15. Did all the boats have a flybridge? Mine and several others have been removed. Also on the website plans pages, some designs show a high mast with boom and another show a small low "yachty" mast with cross piece and no boom. Any idea of what was actually produced?

TF- From the standard spec mention two steering stations. The flybridge in the pictures is what is normally referred to as a "chariot" bridge on the aft end of the p/house roof. It is not a full flybridge. I would say that the chariot bridge was probably standard. The Fleming 55 also has a chariot style upper station. I have no recollection of what mast was provided.

16. Was the end of the production run of Chanteyman due to slow sales or ??

TF- The Chanteyman was not an easy boat to produce for mass production because of the round bilge requiring bent frames. Also, I am sure that many people were not all that keen on the open plan referred to in your para 6. The GB addressed all these issues. Being hard chine, the frames could be pre-made on the loft floor and then set up on a jig so the hull was built upside down. The jig cycle time for a GB36 was just one week and the fastest we ever planked a 36 was one day. The construction time for a 36 (prior to launch) was 3 weeks and we could build four boats a month from a single jig. The company was going through its first bankruptcy about this time and they had to get a production boat going or the bank would have shut them down. There would have been no point in continuing with the Chanteyman under those circumstances - to compete with the GB - so that is probably why no more were built.

17. Can you help us pin down the production years of the Chanteyman--1961, 1962, 1963??

TF-I cannot be certain when the last Chanteyman was built. For sure it was not 1961 because I joined American Marine well into that year and I know I saw quite a few Chanteyman boats. I am pretty sure there were some Chanteyman boats damaged at the yard by typhoon Wanda which struck HK on September 1st 1962. So my guess would be that boats were being built through the end of 1962.

17A. The Chanteyman manufacture dates are really one of the biggest missing links in the story! When I bought WANDRIAN it had been registered as built in 1963 but a lower hull number with some owner documentation was built in 1962 so I'm sure my boat was too! Of course, when I documented her, I could not produce a builder's certificate so the USCG would not allow Hong Kong as the manufacture site but they did take American Marine Ltd. and 1963!! Next year, WANDRIAN will hit the big 50 in age! Maybe your pix have a clue of the years produced. GB 36 production started in 1964, right?

TF- I know I have some photos of the yard damage during Typhoon Wanda. It's just a question of locating them and that may take some time. The damage was extensive. There were waves breaking through the yard and all the roof was torn off but no boats written off.

17B. This was fascinating! I've never heard about Typhoon Wanda hitting the Hong Kong yard and damaging boats. I imagine that was a scary experience! it would sure be interesting if you have any pictures of damaged Chanteyman! By wild coincidence, I was in the US Navy at that exact time, a 21 year old Navy ensign assigned to a landing ship dock, the USS Catamount LSD-17. We got orders for a 17 day port visit in Hong Kong for maintenance and R&R for the crew; we were coming up from Subic Bay in the Phillipines. We were caught in both Typhoon Wanda and Amy and headed south to avoid damage. These 2 typhoons were the most violent of 5 typhoons we encountered during this cruise on a World War II vintage flat-bottomed 458' ship. We were in Hong Kong 9/10-15, 1962 only 5 days but we sure enjoyed Hong Kong including the Aberdeen Floating Restaurants that were pretty close to your Yard, I believe. We visited HK several more times--a beautiful place!

TF- You were lucky to have avoided Typhoon Wanda. I don't believe there has been a typhoon of equal intensity to strike HK since Wanda. The figures on Wikipedia are lower than those I remember from being there. The wind speeds I remember were 168 mph over Kowloon and 186 mph on the hills behind before the anemometer blew away. The tidal surge was 24 ft above chart datum (datum was 0 ft). a normal spring tide was just 9 ft above datum. There were over 20 ships sunk or wrecked in the harbor including one that finished up on Kai Tak runway. There was 16" of rain in 12 hours. Nobody was at the yard when the typhoon struck. In fact, the yard was in the sea and had waves breaking right through it. Happily, no one was injured at the yard. It's extremely unlikely that I have any photos of Chanteyman's under construction in more normal circumstances.

TF- Robert Lane has written that the first GB36 came out in 1963 and was called Spray. This was not accurate. The date might be correct but Robert Newton, the Dad, saw a DownEast fishing boat called Spray in the East Coast and it was from that boat that he got the idea and asked the designer Ken Smith to design the boat that became the GB. I remember the first GB being built but I don't remember what time of year it was.

18. Tony, thanks very much for all the info. It's a shame that so much information has been lost on American Marine's HK operations. In an era where almost anything can be found on the Internet, there is virtually nothing, except a few magazine articles, like Bob Lane's.

TF- There was a very good and accurate article about the history and problems at American Marine in a magazine called Nautical Quarterly. I have a lot of old copies but not the one that has the article in it. Issues #4 and #15 have articles about the GB 42 and they say that the first GB's came out in 1963. There was probably some overlap between the last Chanteyman and the early GB's. I looked up Nautical Quarterly on the internet but could find nothing that would identify the issue with the article. The other people who might know something would be Whit or John Newton but I could not find them on the internet and they might not want to help as they always blamed the bank (unfairly in my opinion) for their losing the company. Cheers, Tony.