



"Tiny" Moore's home is aboard a wherry beside the River Yare.

Photo. A. J. Seymour & Co., Ltd., Norwich.

'Tiny' Talks of Wherries

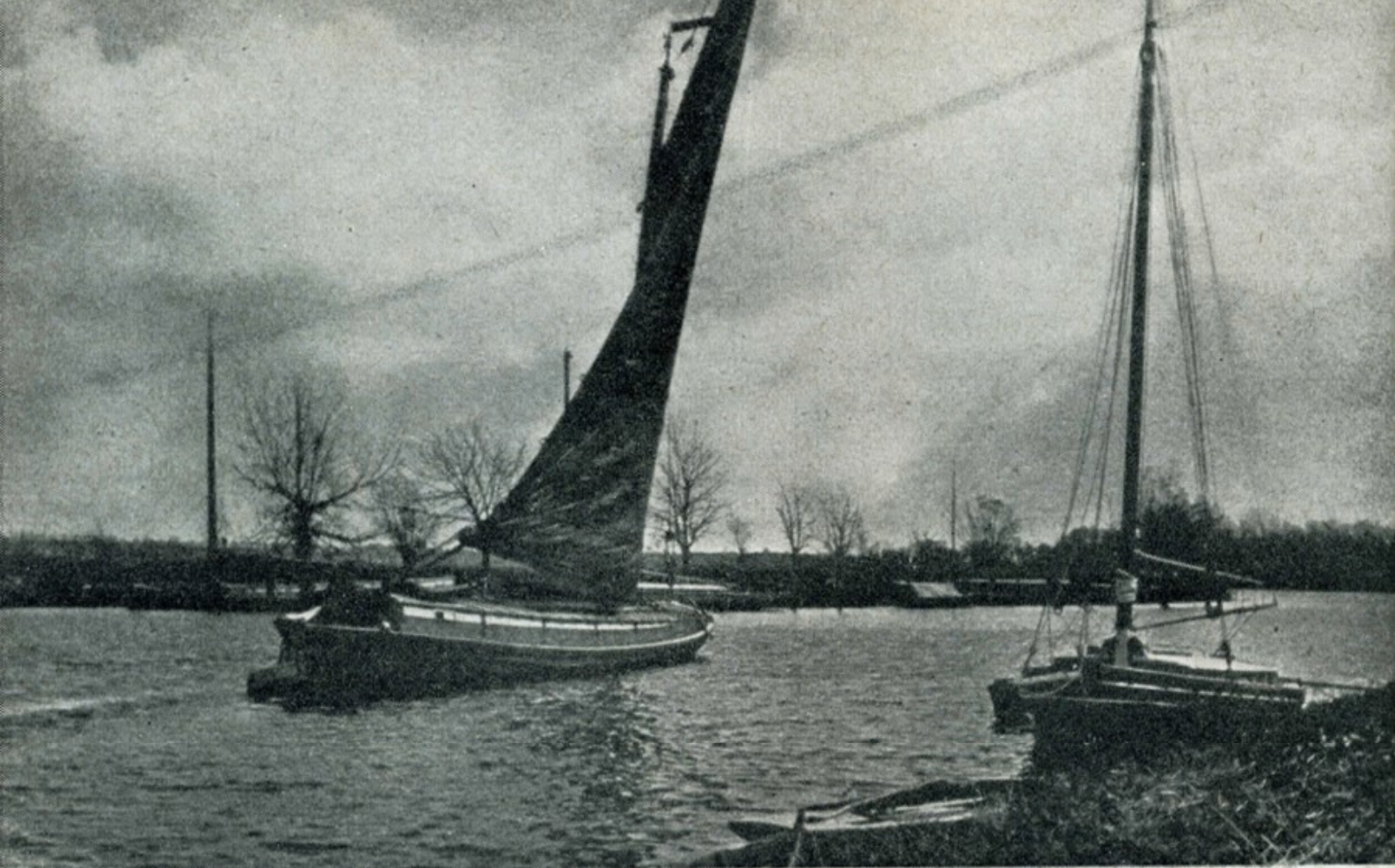
By C. F. FISKE

WHEN the conversation in the bar of the Red Lion at Thorpe St. Andrew turned to wherries, "Tiny" Moore did most of the talking. This was quite natural, for what this seventy-three-year-old craftsman doesn't know about the Norfolk wherry is hardly worth troubling about. Upright and broad shouldered, he has an infectious laugh and can hit the "treble top" on the Red Lion dart board with as much certainty as can the youngsters.

He was born in the Norfolk village of Ludham, on the river Thurne, a tributary of the larger river Bure. In his young days there were about three hundred wherries on the Norfolk waterways.

"Oh yes, let me see now, there was the *Violet*, the *Harriett*, *I'll Try*, *Onward*—oh, I used to know scores of 'em, but that'll be enough for that there article you're a-writin' of."

Tiny spoke of a wherry called



With sail close-hauled, this Norfolk wherry is bound for Gt. Yarmouth.

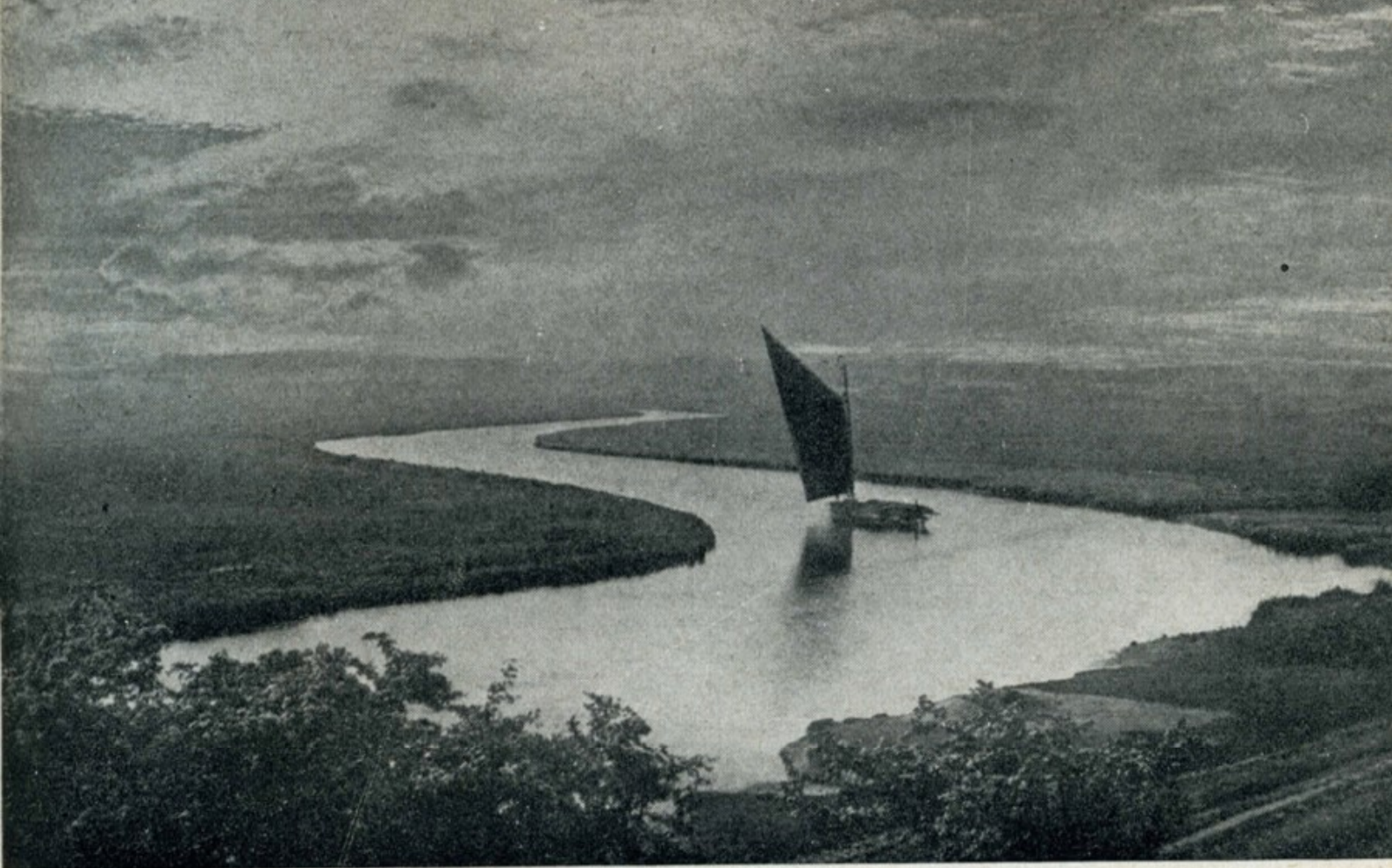
Wonder, the largest ever designed, her weight being about eighty tons. *Wonder* was built at Great Yarmouth and she had a special purpose. At that time, some of the larger cargo boats were unable to get into Yarmouth harbour owing to a lack of water over the "bar." *Wonder* used to meet these ships outside the port and would take off some of their cargo to lighten them.

Going to the other extreme, there were wherries weighing as little as five tons. One of these (Tiny has forgotten her name) invariably carried vegetables and was known as the "Cabbage Wherry."

THE main trade routes of the wherries were the three rivers Yare, Waveney and Bure, and at places like Stalham, Barton, Beccles, Wroxham and Coltishall

they were a part of the general scene. Corn, timber and flour were just a few of the many commodities they carried. Coal, too, was a predominant cargo. Tiny Moore says it was carried from Yarmouth to Norwich for one shilling and eightpence per ton.

God's good wind filling a huge black sail provided the motive power for the wherries and if this admirable fuel failed, or came from the wrong direction, the skipper would continue to make headway with a long pole known as a "quant." The quant, anything up to twenty-five feet in length, was carried to the fore deck. Here, it would be plunged down to the river bed and with a shoulder against the "button," or top end of the quant, the skipper would move toward the after end of the wherry, walking it away from him. Surely a



Sailing leisurely through Whitlingham Vale into the misty distance.

laborious method, yet many miles were covered in this fashion. These wherry men seemed to have a way of getting over all their problems. Low bridges were sometimes negotiated by the skipper lying on his back on top of the hatches and pushing with his feet against the underside of the arch.

Our friend Tiny learned to sail a wherry at a time when holiday-making aboard them, converted for that purpose, was a popular pastime. A young lady and gentleman were anxious to sail their wherry from Wroxham to Norwich, but were not quite sure of their own ability to do so. Then, just as they were about to forget the idea, Tiny Moore came along and with all the self-assurance that comes of being fourteen years old, offered to be their skipper.

Perhaps it should be mentioned that, although only seven miles of road separate

Wroxham from Norwich, the distance by river between the two places is fifty-five miles. Young Tiny's help was gratefully enlisted and off they went, the young couple having every confidence in their juvenile pilot, who found it necessary to stand on an upturned bucket in order to see over the cabin top.

Tiny deviated from the recognized route and took the wherry up the Thurne to Ludham. After all, it wasn't often that he got the chance to "show off" to the old folks at home. The latter were horrified when they heard what their son was up to. But Tiny finished the job, though for the remainder of the journey he had to suffer the indignity of being accompanied by an elder brother.

THE building of wherries must have been hard and heavy work.



The old wherry "Gipsy," waterborne no longer.

Photo. A. J. Seymour & Co., Ltd., Norwich.

the wood used was mainly English oak, and Tiny says it often took a day to shape and fit one plank to the timbers. In his apprenticeship days there were, of course, no mechanical planers, electric drills or band saws. Smoothing or planing was done with an adze (an efficient tool in the hands of a craftsman) and holes were bored with an auger.

Heavy sawing was done over a "saw-pit," which was nothing more than a hole in the ground about the size of a garage's inspection pit, though rather deeper. Stout battens would be laid across it and on these would be rolled

a whole tree trunk weighing anything up to three tons. One man stood in the pit and his mate stood on the tree, and with a large saw similar to a cross-cut, and with a chalk line as a guide, the tree trunk was ripped into planks.

Tiny also explained the method of shaping the planks to fit the curve of the wherry's side. The plank would be wetted and bent to the required shape over an iron bar beneath which was a fire of rushes and oak chips. Sometimes, when only half its length was fastened to the timbers, the plank would become cold and stiff. When this happened, more water would be dashed

on it and a lighted bundle of reeds held against the part where pliability was needed.

IT is fitting that craftsman Tiny Moore should live on a wherry. *Gipsy*, though no longer waterborne, has an interesting history. Nobody knows her exact age, but it is known that in the year 1888 she was towed across the North Sea to Holland where a Mr. H. M. Doughty used her for exploring the Friesland Meres. *Gipsy* is the only wherry ever registered as a ship for "going foreign." A book written about her by Mr.

Doughty, entitled *Friesland Meres and through the Netherlands in a Norfolk Wherry*, is still obtainable. To-day, *Gipsy* stands in a garden beside the river Yare. Her hull is patched and on her decks is a thick layer of concrete, but at least she is a home.

Norfolk is wondering now if her wherries can survive. The old ones will not last indefinitely, and perhaps the real question is "Can new wherries be built?" Well, there are many craftsmen around these parts and they, like Tiny Moore, have lost none of their skill.

