Stanley, Jo (Hull University. Maritime Historical Studies Centre and Lancaster University Centre of Mobilities Research, CeMoRE), *When the ‘ladies’ took to loading: a preliminary survey of gendered stevedoring practices in history*

Women’s work on docks has a tiny and usually anecdotal place in history. Their labour, worldwide, is more frequently represented in picture postcards of ‘colourful characters’ in ‘exotic locations’. These include, for example women c 1910 carrying baskets of coal on their heads up ships’ gangplanks, and travellers’ tales of frighteningly burly Soviet women stevedores c1930s-1960s. The few academic studies are small and place-specific rather than comparative: Bergholm and Keras (Finland 1900-75), Bjorklund (Swedish lathwood lasses) and Stanley (Liverpool WW1).

This paper aims to acknowledge the wide and unsatisfactorily fragmentary sources. And it suggests that this very incomplete jigsaw may reveal certain patterns in women’s dock labour. For example the principal types appear to be: coaling at stations where women’s labour was routinely used for certain types of cargo; loading exceptionally e.g. in wars and strikes where women were a reserve labour force appropriately controversially; as part a family labour team.

Using the UK case study of women dockers in Liverpool in 1916 and the union’s opposition to them, this paper suggest that the findings of other scholars working on women dockers indicate that the pattern is that men opposed women, partly on moral grounds. When women had to be accepted, they were often corralled into lighter, cleaner, lower-status and lower-paid tasks. More positively, women were in some cases were respected as more able to arrange loads (e.g. of laths in Sweden); protected as ‘pets’ by family members from desirous male seafarers; and earned wages that were higher than those usually available to women.

New technologies and new legislative steps towards equality will be referred to, including US and Australian feminists doing such work post-1970s; the renaming of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union to include women in its title, in 2012; and Hamburg’s inclusion of  women dockers in 2006.

This is an opening exploration. It is hoped that it will lead to other scholars contributing their fragments and suggestions about possible comparative patterns. The aim is to eventually understand both the difference women made to gendered attitudes in stevedoring, and the difference that doing stevedoring work made to women’s sense of their potential in the maritime industry.