



Peasholm Park Naval Warfare Display

In 1927, Mr George Harrocks, Scarborough Corporation Entertainments Manager, came up with the idea of re-enacting, in miniature, First World War Deadnought sea battles. The model ships were 20 feet long and paddled by the operator inside. Electric motors powered by 5 car batteries were introduced in 1929. During World War 2, the models decayed and were later replaced with ones based on the naval battle of the River Plate. In 1960 aircraft were introduced running down a long wire suspended over Peasholm Park Lake. Several other ships have been added since then. These days, each ship would cost around £10,000 to build, fortunately they last about 25 years and spend the winter in a nearby shed. Inside each “cockpit” the operator has a set of foot pedals to steer the forward and aft rudders. He has a 16 position switch to fire the array of explosive charges which imitate the guns and underwater explosions of near misses. The underwater charges are actually powerful enough to damage the thin plywood hulls and are therefore mounted on arms about 18 inches long.

The “Operators” are usually University Students who work for the Council during the summer months, from May to September. They perform 30 shows a year and preparations start at 6am for the 3pm show. Occasionally the show has been cancelled due to extremely bad weather and strong winds. Several times the boats have sprung leaks and sunk during the show. In 2005 a German Television Channel came over to film the display. Families come back year after year and have even included survivors of the original sea battles.

Thanks go to Richard Thompson, engineer, who maintains the Naval Warfare boats for SBC Tourism and Leisure Services.