

= Girl Pat =

Girl Pat was a small fishing trawler , based at the Lincolnshire port of Grimsby , that in 1936 was the subject of a media sensation when its captain took it on an unauthorised transatlantic voyage . The escapade ended in Georgetown , British Guiana , with the arrest of the captain , George " Dod " Orsborne , and his brother . The pair were later imprisoned for the theft of the vessel .

Built in 1935 , Girl Pat was the property of the Marstrand Fishing Company of Grimsby . On 1 April 1936 , Orsborne , with a crew of four and his brother James as a supernumerary , took the vessel out on what the owners authorised as a routine North Sea fishing trip of two to three weeks ' duration . After leaving port , Orsborne informed the crew that they were going on an extended cruise in more southerly waters . Nothing more was heard of them until mid @-@ May , when the owners , who had by then assumed the vessel lost , received invoices relating to its repair and reprovisioning in the northern Spanish port of Corcubi  n . Subsequent sightings placed her in the Savage Islands , at Dakar in Senegal , and   les du Salut off the coast of French Guiana in South America . The captain 's main means of navigation during a voyage of more than 6 @,@ 000 nautical miles (11 @,@ 000 km) was a sixpenny school atlas and a compass . At one point Girl Pat was reported wrecked in the Bahamas , with all hands lost . After the vessel 's capture and detention following a chase outside Georgetown on 19 June , Orsborne and his crew were hailed as heroes in the world 's press .

Charged with the theft of the vessel in October 1936 , Orsborne maintained in court that the owners had instructed him to get rid of the ship , as part of a scheme to obtain its insurance value . This claim was dismissed by the court . Years later , in his memoirs , Orsborne told a different , uncorroborated story : in absconding with Girl Pat he had been carrying out a mission on behalf of British Naval Intelligence , connected with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936 .

After his release from prison , Orsborne took part in further maritime adventures and served in the navy in the Second World War . He died in 1957 . In Georgetown Girl Pat was acquired by new owners who returned her to Britain , where she was displayed as a tourist attraction in several resorts . In 1939 she was sold to the Port of London Authority for use as a wreck @-@ marking vessel and , after being requisitioned by the Royal Navy during the war , was returned to the authority in 1945 . There is no public record of her subsequent career .

= = Background = =

= = = Orsborne = = =

George Black Orsborne was born George Black on 4 July 1902 , in the small north Scottish coastal town of Buckie . He assumed the Orsborne name when his widowed mother remarried and moved the family to Aberdeen , where George , nicknamed " Dod " , spent his formative years . When he was 14 , Orsborne lied about his age and enlisted as a Boy Seaman in the Royal Navy ; in his memoirs he wrote : " I never did have an adolescence " . He served in the Dover Patrol , and was wounded during the 1918 Zeebrugge Raid . After leaving the Navy in December 1919 and working ashore for a brief period , he was persuaded by a former captain of the Cutty Sark , Captain Wilkins , to go back to sea . He joined the merchant navy , sailing mainly in small ships based in Liverpool .

At 21 he passed his master 's ticket examinations and took over his first command , a Grimsby trawler . During the following ten years , Orsborne said his career included " a bit of everything ? rum @-@ running , whaling , deep @-@ sea trawling in the Arctic " . In November 1935 , back in Grimsby , he became skipper of the former seine fishing boat Gipsy Love , which its owners , the Marstrand Fishing Company , had converted into a trawler .

= = = Crew and vessel = = =

In March 1936 , for his second voyage in Gipsy Love , Orsborne attempted to engage the services

of an experienced seaman , Alexander MacLean , to whom he confided that the trip might go further afield ? perhaps to Bermuda or South America ? but MacLean declined the opportunity . Orsborne offered the mate 's berth to Harry Stone , a local seaman who did not possess a mate 's ticket but was told by Orsborne that he could use MacLean 's number . The other crew members were a Yorkshireman , Hector Harris , and a 17 @-@ year @-@ old Scottish cook , Howard Stephens . The formal crew was joined by Orsborne 's younger brother James , a grocer , who had no formal status on board and was later classified as a stowaway . Gipsy Love left Grimsby late in March 1936 , supposedly to fish in the Dogger Bank area of the North Sea , but within hours had returned to port with engine trouble . With the consent of the owners , Orsborne transferred stores and crew to another Marstrand vessel , the small trawler Girl Pat ; James Orsborne again joined them .

Built in 1935 in Oulton Broad , Suffolk , Girl Pat was a vessel of 55 gross registered tons (GRT) , 19 NRT . She was 66 feet (20 m) long , with a beam of 18 @.@ 7 feet (5 @.@ 7 m) , a hold depth of 8 @.@ 7 feet (2 @.@ 7 m) , and accommodation for six . Some sources refer to her as a " seine netter , " suggesting that like the Gipsy Love she had been converted to trawling . She was insured with underwriters for £ 3 @,@ 000 . Her regular engineer , George Jefferson , was added to Orsborne 's picked crew for the forthcoming voyage .

= = Voyage = =

= = = First phase : Grimsby to Corcubión = = =

Girl Pat left Grimsby on 1 April 1936 . According to Stone 's later account , when they entered the open sea , Orsborne assembled the crew ? except for Jefferson ? in the wheelhouse and told them that this would not be a normal fishing trip . Instead , he proposed to take the boat south , first calling at Dover where he would get rid of Jefferson , who was not included in his further plans . At this stage Orsborne was apparently undecided as to his longer @-@ term intentions , but indicated that they would be sailing into southern waters and might go fishing for pearls .

On 3 April the craft reached Dover , where Jefferson was taken ashore and given food and drink . When he returned to the harbour , Girl Pat had departed ; the engineer returned in some confusion to Grimsby . As Girl Pat sailed into the English Channel , Orsborne revealed to his crew that the vessel contained no charts , and that future navigation would be dependent on a cheap school atlas that he showed them . He changed details in the boat 's log book , entering himself as " G. Black , " Stone as " H. Clark , " and James Orsborne as " A. Black " . After anchoring off Jersey in the Channel Islands to await calmer weather , Girl Pat proceeded southwards through the Bay of Biscay . Orsborne ordered changes to the boat 's appearance : the bowsprit was altered , and the fishing registration number on the side of the hull was blacked out . According to Stone , Orsborne indicated an itinerary that included Madeira , the Canary Islands , the African coast and , eventually , Cape Town . They might then sell the boat and share the proceeds . Severe weather in the Bay of Biscay hampered progress and battered the small vessel , and on 12 April they took shelter in the small northern Spanish port of Corcubión , where they stayed for around 14 days . Necessary repairs were carried out , and the boat was reprovisioned . Orsborne instructed that the accounts for these services , totalling £ 235 , be sent to Marstrand 's in Grimsby , as their punishment , he later said , for letting the boat be taken out with inadequate stores and equipment .

Following Jefferson 's return to Grimsby , Marstrand 's were puzzled by Orsborne 's actions , but initially thought that he had taken on another engineer in Dover and had gone fishing , perhaps in new grounds . There were unconfirmed sightings of Girl Pat in the Baltic Sea and elsewhere . As weeks passed with no definite news , the Marstrand directors assumed that the vessel was lost , either through foundering or barratry , and claimed insurance . They had already received sums totalling £ 2 @,@ 400 from the underwriters , when they were surprised by the arrival of bills from Corcubión , together with the news that Girl Pat had sailed from the port on 24 April , her destination unknown .

= = = Second phase : Corcubión to Dakar = = =

After Girl Pat left Corcubión , there was speculation in the port that Orsborne intended to fish in the waters around Gibraltar , but there was no sighting of the vessel in that vicinity . Stone later recalled that after sailing for some time , they arrived at some uninhabited islands ? this is consistent with a probable sighting by the British liner SS Avoceta , which on 17 May reported seeing a vessel closely matching the trawler 's description , anchored in the Savage Islands . This small uninhabited archipelago , roughly 170 nautical miles (310 km) south of Madeira and roughly the same distance north of the Canary Islands , had long been associated with stories of pirates ' buried treasure , and news that Girl Pat had been seen there gave rise to press speculation that she was engaged on a hunt for treasure . Lloyd 's of London sent a representative to Las Palmas , to investigate the sighting ; meanwhile Girl Pat made an unobserved call at Tenerife in the Canary Islands , where she was repainted .

Leaving Tenerife , Girl Pat continued her journey southward , following the African coast . According to Stone 's account , the crew went ashore at Port Etienne in French West Africa (now Nouadhibou , in Mauritania) , leaving the boat unguarded . While they were away , marauders stole gear and provisions , leaving the crew almost destitute : " All we had left to eat and drink were four bottles of water , a tin of corned beef , a bottle of lime juice and a tin of condensed milk " . Leaving Port Etienne , they ran aground on a sandbank and were stranded for three days . Eventually they managed to refloat the vessel , and on 23 May were picked up by a pilot boat which brought them into the harbour at Dakar , starving and exhausted .

Stone had fallen ill with appendicitis during the previous leg of the voyage ; he was hospitalised in Dakar and took no further part in the adventure . Orsborne was able to obtain further fuel and water , but Girl Pat 's arrival attracted the attention of the local Lloyd 's agent , who had been on the lookout for the vessel . On 26 May he saw Orsborne and inspected the log book , where he discovered the false names and other inconsistencies . Orsborne was asked to present the ship 's papers at the British consulate but , on the pretext that he needed to test the engines , he rapidly put to sea . The appearance of Girl Pat in Dakar ? the first confirmation since Corcubión that the vessel was still afloat ? was widely reported . Relatives of the crew members were relieved that those aboard were safe but were apprehensive about what might lie ahead .

= = = Third phase : Dakar to Georgetown = = =

The level of public interest in the Girl Pat affair was enough for Gaumont British to consider making it the subject of a feature film . In the House of Commons on 29 May , the Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade stated that no requests had been made for the detention of the vessel in foreign ports ; two weeks later , Walter Runciman , the President of the Board of Trade , confirmed that , on behalf of the underwriters , the Foreign Office had asked that Girl Pat be refused credit and detained on entering any port .

On 2 June the French liner Jamaïque reported a small boat , flying the British flag and steaming southwards , near the Bissagos Islands 250 nautical miles (460 km) south of Dakar . Although this was at first assumed to be Girl Pat , the next reported sighting , on 9 June , was more than 2 @,@ 000 nautical miles (3 @,@ 700 km) to the west , on the other side of the Atlantic . Captain Jones of the Lorraine Cross , an American ship , cabled Lloyds ' agents in Georgetown , British Guiana (now Guyana) with an account of a small ship flying a distress signal off the South American coast , 47 nautical miles (87 km) north @-@ east of Cayenne . There were apparently four men on board . The boat 's name and markings had been painted out , but she claimed to be the " Margaret Harold " bound for Trinidad from London . Jones thought the crew 's behaviour suspicious , and when he asked to see the ship 's papers , the ship lowered the distress signal and sped away . Jones said the vessel was " undoubtedly a British fisherman " , and thought it was Girl Pat . In Grimsby , a Marstrand spokesman expressed little surprise at this new location , and confirmed that the ship had sufficient speed to have crossed the ocean in the time since her last confirmed sighting . A check with Lloyd 's indicated that there was no registered ship named Margaret Harold .

A report from the Îles du Salut , a few miles off the coast of French Guiana , indicated that a vessel similar in appearance to Girl Pat had watered there on 10 June . An air search , by a Pan @-@ American aircraft , covered over 1 @,@ 000 miles (1 @,@ 600 km) of coastline around Georgetown , without sighting the craft . On 17 June several newspapers carried reports of the discovery of the wreck of a small boat , and three bodies , at Atwood Cay , a small island in the Bahamas . Much of the press assumed this to be Girl Pat ; one headline read " Did School Atlas Course Lead Crew to Death ? " . The reports proved false when , early in the morning of 19 June , a police launch towed Girl Pat into Georgetown harbour .

= = = Capture , detention and arrest = = =

On the evening of 18 June the British steamer Arakaka had spotted a small ship a few miles outside Georgetown , and radioed this information to the shore . An unarmed police launch left Georgetown to investigate ; as they approached , the crew of the as yet unidentified vessel became hostile . They denied that she was Girl Pat and threatened violence should officers attempt to board her . The launch retreated to Georgetown , where the police armed themselves and obtained authority to seize the suspect vessel . They returned early the following morning to find that their quarry was departing . A two @-@ hour chase ensued , which The Hull Daily Mail glamorised as a sporting contest : " Like some coursing greyhound the faster Government ship stuck to the tail of the fleeing suspect which , harelike , doubled back on her course to dodge her pursuer " . According to the British Daily Worker , the chase " [outdid] the most spectacular efforts of film directors " . Finally , while manoeuvring at close quarters , the vessels collided . The stern of the suspect boat was severely damaged , whereupon she surrendered and was taken in tow . The name displayed on the vessel 's hull was " Kia @-@ ora " , but Stephens quickly admitted to their captors that the ship was Girl Pat .

With Girl Pat secured and under guard in Georgetown harbour , the Orsborne brothers , Harris , and Stephens were taken to police headquarters in the City Hall . The police issued a statement that the four were there " at their own request . They are under no form of detention " . In London , officials struggled to establish the exact legal position , and issued confusing statements . Meanwhile , Orsborne and his companions were widely hailed as heroes . The German newspaper Hamburger Fremdenblatt asked : " Is this not a bit of British tradition , to do the unconventional out of love for adventure , if great personal risks , audacity and romance are connected therewith ? " . A man from the town of Hull thought the adventure demonstrated " the spirit of Drake " , and called for a public subscription to meet the crew 's debts and expenses . An alternative view , expressed in the Hull Daily Mail , was to question whether the men should be regarded so favourably , or merely as " men who have run away with someone else 's property " .

Once released by the police , Harris and Stephens returned immediately to England , where they arrived on 13 July . The Orsborne brothers waited in Georgetown for their position to be clarified ; George Orsborne told the press he was anxious to return home where , he insisted , many job offers were open to him . On 27 June , following further discussions in London , the brothers were arrested on a warrant issued under the Fugitive Offenders Act , and brought before the Georgetown magistrates , where they were charged with the theft of Girl Pat .

= = Hearings , trial and sentence = =

= = = In Georgetown = = =

The brothers were held in custody , awaiting a deportation hearing . On 4 July they were remanded for a further week , and bail was again refused . Although the brothers declared their willingness to waive the deportation process and accept immediate transfer to England , they continued to be detained . On 22 July the hearings in the Georgetown magistrates ' court finally began , with the formal identification of Girl Pat . On 24 July the magistrates ordered that the brothers be sent to

England to face trial , once the formal approval of the colonial governor , Sir Geoffrey Northcote , had been given . The governor was in no hurry to act ; the Orsbornes finally left Georgetown on 13 August , when they boarded the cargo liner Inanda .

While the Orsbornes were in Georgetown , Harold Stone , Girl Pat 's erstwhile mate , made his way home from Dakar and arrived in Liverpool on 20 July . After interviews with the police , Stone spoke to the press of the hardships suffered during the Girl Pat voyage , especially the shortages of food and water : " I would not want to go through the experience again " . He confirmed that they had navigated using a school atlas , but added that they had possessed a compass .

= = = Bow Street , London = = =

Early on 2 September Inanda docked at Gravesend , Kent . The brothers were immediately driven to London for a formal appearance at Bow Street Magistrates ' Court , where they were charged with theft and conspiracy . Against police opposition ? because , they said , " certain developments " might arise ? the magistrate bailed each defendant in the sum of £ 500 , and required them to surrender their passports .

When the hearing resumed on 10 September , the court heard from Marstrands ' managing director that George Orsborne had not been given authority to operate Girl Pat outside the North Sea . Stone testified that Orsborne had made plain his intentions to take the boat south from the outset , and also gave evidence concerning the changes to the ship 's log . The court heard from Jefferson and other Dover witnesses , from Alexander MacLean , and from the Lloyd 's agent in Dakar . The defence counsel did not answer the detailed aspects of the prosecution 's case , but stated that at the forthcoming trial , " very serious allegations " would be made against certain of the prosecution witnesses . The brothers pleaded not guilty , and were remanded on continuing bail for trial at the Old Bailey . In the interval between the Bow Street hearings and the trial , which was set to begin in October , Girl Pat was sold .

= = = Old Bailey = = =

The Old Bailey trial began on 19 October 1936 . The prosecution opened by stating that this should not be considered as " a cheerful buccaneering adventure , " but as a breach of trust on the part of George Orsborne , to whom the owners had entrusted their ship . The objective of the voyage had not been to benefit the owners , but to make money for the defendants .

MacLean testified that in his discussions with George Orsborne , he had formed the impression that the captain was part @-@ owner of the vessel . Orsborne had mentioned to him the possibility of engaging in profitable activities such as gun @-@ running and smuggling . John Moore , the managing director of Marstrand 's , stated that he had expected Orsborne to take Girl Pat fishing in an area of the North Sea where another Marstrand vessel was fishing successfully . When Moore was cross @-@ examined , the defence 's " serious allegations " were revealed . It was put to Moore that he had instructed George Orsborne not to go fishing , but to get rid of the vessel so that the company could claim its insurance value , of which Orsborne would be rewarded with a share . The defence alleged that the company was in poor financial shape , and that its ships were heavily mortgaged . Moore denied that he had made any such suggestion to Orsborne . The company , he insisted , was financially sound , the mortgages on its vessels were relatively low , and he had never discussed insured values with Orsborne . The defence further alleged that when taken out Girl Pat had been in an unseaworthy condition , inadequately provisioned and unfit for a normal fishing voyage . This suggestion was also denied by Moore .

After Stone and Jefferson reprised the evidence they had given in Bow Street , George Orsborne took the stand . He said he had not agreed to Moore 's proposal to " lose " the vessel , and after departing with Girl Pat had still been undecided about what he would do . He had left Jefferson in Dover because he was a poor mechanic and a drunk . Moore , he asserted , was mistaken in claiming that the boat 's provisions and equipment were adequate . Orsborne said that while the boat was sheltering in Jersey , he had suggested to the crew that they " may as well make a holiday

of it ", and then proposed that they make a circle of the Atlantic Ocean before returning to Grimsby . There was no intention to fall in with Moore 's scheme or to steal the vessel ; they would " thank the owners for the loan of the ship " and return it . Orsborne added that while they were in port at Corcubión , he was offered money for Girl Pat , but turned it down . Orsborne denied that he had tried to conceal his or the boat 's true identity in Dakar , or had left the port to avoid enquiries ? the sudden departure was due , he said , to troubles with the natives . Nor had he attempted to evade the authorities in Georgetown ; his movements there had arisen from concern for the safety of his vessel , which was being jeopardised by the manoeuvres of the police launch .

James Orsborne , giving evidence , said that he had learned from his brother about Moore 's proposal to get rid of the boat , and had told George that he would be " a darned fool " even to consider the suggestion . He had stayed with his brother because " I thought that if he was going to do anything crazy I might manage to prevent him " . Recalled to the witness box , Moore said that he had refused to employ James Orsborne because he considered him dishonest .

In his closing speech , defence counsel said that the key to the case was whether the Orsborne brothers intended to deprive the owners permanently of their vessel . The evidence , he said , was more suggestive of a " joy @-@ ride half @-@ way round the world " , than of theft or anything more sinister . Prosecuting counsel argued that if the month 's joy @-@ ride was the innocent explanation , why had it been necessary to introduce into the case the unfounded allegations of proposed insurance fraud " against men whose reputations were above suspicion ? " . In his summing up , the judge condemned the arrangements whereby the Orsbornes were receiving money from the press for the rights to their story . This was unwarranted and undesirable : " Whether the two prisoners be guilty or innocent [of theft] , the property of someone else was being used by them without permission ... George Orsborne clearly knew that he was acting directly against his employer 's interests " . The jury was out for only 35 minutes before returning guilty verdicts against both defendants . On 22 October George Orsborne was sentenced to 18 months ' imprisonment , and James to 12 months .

= = = Orsborne 's alternative account = = =

Thirteen years after the trial , in a memoir entitled *Master of the Girl Pat* published by Doubleday , George Orsborne provided a new context for the Girl Pat voyage . According to this narrative , he had been recruited in 1935 to work for British Naval Intelligence . The Girl Pat venture was a secret assignment , connected with the imminent Spanish Civil War . Between the stops at Corcubión and Dakar , Orsborne claims , he carried out a mission to blow up a railway bridge in Spanish Morocco . The stops at Port Etienne , Dakar and elsewhere had been to receive further instructions from Naval Intelligence . In this later account Orsborne changes crew names and other details : Stone becomes " Fletcher " , and his leaving the voyage in Dakar is recorded by Orsborne as a " desertion " . Some of Orsborne 's dates are inconsistent with the boat 's known movements ? he gives 26 June as the date of arrival in Dakar , and the account he gives of his Old Bailey trial bears no relation to the published record . Orsborne describes his stay in Wormwood Scrubs prison as " a wonderful experience . I wouldn 't have missed it for anything " .

= = Aftermath = =

After the trial , the press and public remained broadly sympathetic to the Orsborne brothers . During the committal stages *The Spectator* had commented that the adventure " had given romantic satisfaction to the whole world " and that her captain had become a national hero . On the day after the sentencing , *The Times* leading article noted the public 's sustained pleasure in the escapade . Nearly 30 years later , in his social history of the between @-@ the @-@ wars years , Ronald Blythe portrayed the affair as an anti @-@ establishment gesture , " a colourful snook cocked in the face of some of the most soul @-@ crippling officialdom ever experienced by ordinary men and women " .

While in prison , George Orsborne lent his name to a ghost @-@ written account of the Girl Pat adventure , which repeated the claim that the vessel had been sent out inadequately equipped and

provisioned . Marstrand 's successfully sued the publishers , Hutchinsons , and two newspapers which had repeated the details . On his release , Osborne planned to make a single @-@ handed transatlantic crossing in an open boat , but the trip was delayed , and finally cancelled when war began in September 1939 . Likewise , nothing came of an announcement in 1938 that Osborne would lead an expedition to the Caribbean and up the Amazon .

During the war , Osborne worked as mate on a trawler which formed part of Britain 's anti @-@ invasion force , before rejoining the Royal Navy . His wartime exploits included service as a beachmaster during the Normandy landings of June 1944 , a spell as a commando in Combined Operations , and service in the Far East , where he records being captured and imprisoned by the Japanese . In September 1947 Osborne was one of two men rescued in mid @-@ Atlantic from the abandoned ketch *Lovely Lady* ; the other was a stowaway , a Spanish greengrocer .

In his 1949 memoir *Master of the Girl Pat* , George Osborne records briefly that Stephens went straight back to sea after the adventure , that Harris drank up his share of the crew 's newspaper money , and that " Fletcher " (Stone) emigrated to Australia . James Osborne worked for a while in the Mediterranean , assisting refugees from the Spanish Civil War . Later he went to Canada . He was in Singapore when it fell to the Japanese in February 1942 , and was not heard from again . George Osborne died on 23 December 1957 , at Belle Île off the Brittany coast , while delivering a motor @-@ cruiser from Nice to England .

= = = Later years of ship = = =

Girl Pat was repaired and refitted in Georgetown by her new owners , the Grimsby @-@ based firm *Girl Pat Ltd* , and was brought back to England , arriving at Portsmouth on 9 May 1937 . She remained there for two weeks as a tourist attraction , before moving to London on 28 May . Her new owners declared that they were still undecided as to the ship 's longer @-@ term future , but for the time being she would be displayed at Blackpool and other holiday resorts . On 17 February 1939 *The Times* reported that *Girl Pat* had been sold to the Port of London Authority (PLA) , to be used as a wreck @-@ marking vessel . After the outbreak of war in September 1939 , she was requisitioned by the Admiralty for naval use , and is listed as one of the " minor war vessels " in service in July 1940 . By 1945 she had been returned to the PLA ; there is no public record of her subsequent history . The name *Girl Pat* was adopted by at least one later registered vessel ; in August 1966 a 60 @-@ ton yacht of that name was arrested by Greek coastguards in the Gulf of Corinth and its occupants charged with the theft of antiquities .

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