

WEAR WELCOMES RETURN OF SUPER BARGE

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A giant barge, built at Southwick 26 years ago, has returned to Wearside after the Port of Sunderland was chosen as a base for completion of onboard engineering work.

Named AMT Explorer, the 5,689 gross tons barge, measuring 91.72 metres by 30.76 metres, arrived from the Tees on June 30, under tow by the Svitzer tug, Ormesby Cross.

She is berthed at the deepwater Corporation Quay, where Newcastle-based electro-hydraulic specialists, Fraser Hydraulic Power Ltd are now engaged in final commissioning of a 7,000-tonne cable storage turntable.

Owned by Anchor Marine Transportation Ltd (part of the Augustea Group), the barge is on long-term charter to Global Marine Systems Ltd, the largest independent provider of submarine cable installation, maintenance and related engineering services worldwide.

Global Marine Systems Engineering Services Manager (Marine Operations), Simon Yardley, said: "The Port of Sunderland was selected as a base due to cost, port security and mooring arrangements."

Once commissioned, the vessel will transport subsea power cables and other flexible product for projects, such as offshore wind farms.

Mr Yardley said: "The turntable was mobilised within the past two months at Haverton Hill on the River Tees, close to the manufacturing site. It is also possible to modify the vessel to a lay barge."

Port of Sunderland Director, Matthew Hunt, said: "Everyone at the port is delighted to welcome Global Marine Systems and their contractor Fraser Hydraulic Power.

"Having such an operation underway at our Corporation Quay river berth provides a great opportunity to showcase the port's facilities, with available quay space and close proximity to open sea being just some of the services we offer to support such projects.

"We look forward to working with all parties involved to ensure work is completed in a timely fashion.

"It is always good to welcome a vessel back to the river where it was built. Its future use in the subsea cabling market for renewable and other industry sectors is one where the port is working hard to position itself and attract future vessel calls."

AMT Explorer was launched as Abeille 902 from Austin and Pickersgill Ltd's shipyard on December 17, 1984.