



The Never Setting Sun



# Smack Dock Soundings

THE JOURNAL OF THE COLNE SMACK PRESERVATION SOCIETY

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One person working, three watching- some things don't change! Dennis Heard keeping a watchful eye on Malcolm Macgregor as he shaped a new mast in the late 1960's.

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The opinions expressed in this journal are those of the individual contributors and are not necessarily the views of the CSPS or its committee.

### From the editor...

Here goes with my first effort on the newsletter, I hope you find something of interest. My great thanks to the many people who have contributed towards the contents- there wouldn't be a newsletter without you! As ever, all articles, photos and suggestions etc very welcome- my contact details are on the left.

Fitting-out time is here again, and it's nice to see the smacks in the dock coming out of hibernation and being prettied up ready for the summer. Here's hoping for a fine season.





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### Chairman's Report- Simon Fox

Since the last letter the Society has held the Shanty Night, which was again successful and made a profit of £264.53 after all expenses were paid. This year it will be given out to 4 Youth Club (£100), The Deputy's Christmas Lunch Fund (£100) and the Brightlingsea Museum (£100). I would like to thank Valerie Waters and all those who helped put the Shanty on and who helped or performed on the night, but particularly Judy Lawrence who put a huge effort in.

On Sunday the 13<sup>th</sup> of March we had a work party on the dock the main purpose of which was to start changing the head ropes for the moorings in the dock. This was a hard and muddy task and I think those involved were pleased when it was over. Jon Brett seemed to have invented the new pastime of mud swimming. We also had a clear up on the dock. Thanks to everyone who turned up, but it would be nice to see a few more members come along to the next one, which will be before the barbeque (see elsewhere).

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of March the Society took part in the Community Information Day organised by the Council. This seemed to generate a lot of interest and hopefully we will get a few new members from it. Thanks are due to Judy Lawrence, Tony Brett and Jim Lawrence for manning the stall and to Brian Webb for displaying his model smack.

Just to remind you all we have the Sail and Picnic on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> of June. Anyone who would like to come should contact either Jim Lawrence or me to book a place. Please let us know as early as possible so we can organise the places on the smacks. All the Brightlingsea smack owners will be contacted

by Robin Page shortly and we would be grateful if as many of you as possible could come along. Any other smack owners who are going to be in the area at the time and who could come would be very welcome. Please contact either Robin or me.

On Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> of July we are having the barbeque on the dock, more details elsewhere but it would be nice to see a good number of members come along.

Hopefully we will have a good summer of sailing and fine weather for the Colne Match on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September.

### Annual Shanty Night, 2<sup>nd</sup> April- Jim Lawrence

This year the Shanty Night was held at the Brightlingsea Sailing Club, and our first treat was a fantastic sunset seen through the large full length windows of the club house, a really good choice of venue.

The club was comfortably full for the night and the music was excellent. Gerry and Wendy arranged the programme and as well as their own polished performance including Peter Scott on the spoons, they also brought in the Motley Crew who is a really good local shanty band.

Mike and Penny Verrier, who loyally turn out to all our events, did some lovely numbers; the Pirates were really funny. Jim Lawrence also did a couple of sea songs.

There was a knot board and members were asked to guess the names of the knots displayed; this was won by Graham Sheward



who (a mountaineer) named 22 from the 29 on display. Another high scorer was young Emily Verrier with 17, but she spent a long time “chatting up the umpire” and people seemed suspicious, how dare them! After all who wouldn’t fall for a pretty face and lovely blue eyes?

But the star of the evening without any doubt was Judy Lawrence, Judy had been seconded with Valerie Waters with the shanty night and the two of them got things going, but at the last moment on the fateful day Valerie had to move home. A nerve racking experience for anyone; we hope the move went well Valerie, and we are sorry you had to miss a good night.

Judy went into first gear and was at the sailing club as soon as it opened. There was much to do, twenty tables, one hundred chairs to move, plates, table decorations, fish platters from the fishmonger, prepare the sweets, salads and a host of other things that go with such events.

### **It was thiiis big... or, The ones that didn't get away**

Malcolm Macgregor has provided these remarkable photos, taken aboard the *Georgiana* some time in the fifties. *Georgiana* had been built as a Brixham trawler, and converted to a yacht; she was owned by Mr M Wild who was Aldous's yard's last proprietor. Mr H Polly was her skipper and Mr S Death her mate, both men originating from Brightlingsea. Nothing is known about the rest of the crew.



By the time the first guests arrived everything was perfect and the hall looked beautiful. Judy hosted the evening throughout; by the time the evening ended she had been on her feet for thirteen hours.

Well done Judy and thanks for a wonderful effort.

Thanks also to the guests who answered the appeal to clear the hall and wash up afterwards- we were finished in thirty five minutes (many hands make light work!)

It is obvious that the shanty night is a great success and brings the society immeasurable good will, but more help must be sought, even had Valerie been there the task is too much for just the two girls.

Finally we hope that Valerie will be happy in her new home.





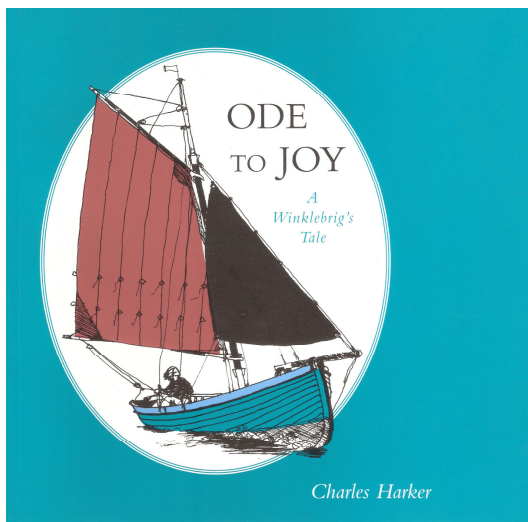
On Friday 6<sup>th</sup> September 1946 the Whitby Gazette reported:

*Mr Michael Wild had gone over the side of his yacht into the dinghy, and almost immediately had a tunny on the hook. His fish, which was larger than the one caught by Miss Lees, gave him a hectic thirty-six minutes before it gave up the fight. Mr Wild said it was very heavy going, and the tunny made four desperate runs to get clear of his pursuer. Mr Lees had landed the first tunny of the season at Scarborough, from Georgiana. This fish weighed 530lbs and took thirty minutes to land. It was hooked about sixty miles east-north-east of Whitby. The fish Miss Lees and Mr Wild caught were weighed at Whitby Railway Station; Miss Lees's was 507lbs, Mr Wild's 592lbs. The British record fish is 851lbs caught by Mr L Mitchell-Henry on rod and line off Whitby in September 1933.*



### Book review

'Ode to Joy' by Charles Harker



When I bought a copy of this magical little book, I put it aside to look at that evening. But- "Just a quick peek," I thought- and was lost for an hour and a half, reading it from cover to cover.

A deceptively simple story, this is the tale of an ordinary clinker barge boat's life, told through her own eyes. *Joy* takes the reader out of the shed where she was built at Maldon, into trade with the barge of the same name, and out of it into the hands of oystermen at Mersea. Converted into a winkle brig, she collected a new family (the Harkers and their various other boats) and went on all manner of adventures, from Cornwall to the Solway Firth, through various rebuilds and getting lost in quicksand, to her twilight years in the Norfolk Broads. The yarns are interwoven with sketches, and there are some photos at the back; this book is a delight for anyone who loves a humble working boat.

Janet Harker published this last year and it makes a fine tribute to Charles, her late husband. You can get a copy from Janet- her number is 01206 827637.



*Woodrope Hard, Tollesbury.*

### **Emma CK369 and the Harris family of Tollesbury- Peter Harris**

In the previous issue of the "Smack Dock Soundings Magazine," Richard Pattison set out the need to record the memories of the fishing industry families, particularly located in the Blackwater/Colne area. As a 60-year-old "Northerner," born and bred and still living in Lancashire, this may seem at first sight to hold little relevance to myself, but you would be very wrong!

A distant family member has traced back the history of the Harris family in Tollesbury to the early 1700's. Abraham Harris (senior) was a Yeoman Farmer and was Clerk of the Parish and is recorded along with his son to have donated 4 pence to the "Briefe for the Poor Palatinates" in 1709. But all my dad's (Frederic Abraham Harris 1926-1996) side of the family had strong local seafaring connections, with their occupations being recorded variously as Oyster Dredgers, Fishermen, Mariners and Yachtsmen.

In 1908 my great-grandfather, Abraham William Harris, commissioned Aldous of Brightlingsea to build him a fishing smack for dredging and trawling. Propelled only by sails (mainsail, topsail, foresail and jib) she had a Kelvin motor installed in 1929. This smack was called *Emma* and was registered as CK 369.

She was 37 feet in length, had a 30 feet keel and a gross tonnage of just over eight and half tonnes. She was crewed initially by three men. In 1933 ownership of the *Emma* was passed on to my grandfather William Abraham Harris but due to the Second World War and the impact this had on my grandmother, who suffered from a debilitating nervous condition, my grandfather sold the boat in 1942 to the Frost brothers of Tollesbury, as he and his family, including my father, had by then moved to Stamford in Lincolnshire.

Here ended nearly 300 years of association with the Tollesbury area and the smack *Emma*. However since the death of my dad I have been extremely anxious to try and trace if possible her fate. The Ships Register's last entry has that in 1967 the *Emma* was no longer used for fishing and I presume was restructured for pleasure sailing. Can anyone help me in filling in the missing years?

Clearly with the passage of time my own memories of my dad's stories about his days in Tollesbury have faded. Yet with the aid of my 85 year old mum we have recalled a few!



Although he was only about 15 years of age when he left Tollesbury, having been born in the house on Station Road which still sticks out into the street, my dad had very fond memories of his time there and was very disappointed that the family fishing smack could not now be passed on to him.

He recalls the real joy he had of taking time off school to help out on the boat and going out to assist his brother Ken and father crew the *Emma*. At a very early age he would have to stand on a box in order to be able to reach over and boil the shrimps in the "copper." After offloading the "peds" to the fishmongers in Clacton it was the task of my young dad to take the leftovers from the catch, in a wicker basket and walk around selling what he could to the residents of Tollesbury. As the *Emma* was berthed in the Leavings, near Woodrup, and the tide dictated arrival and departures, it was my dad's task to stand in his bedroom in Washington Terrace, Tollesbury and with the aid of his telescope watch for the return of the boat. If she had a "ped" tied at the mast top then dad knew this was a sign to take a trolley down to the saltings in order to help offload the catch.

Dad also recalled the time when the *Endeavour* returned safely in 1937 from the America's Cup after her towrope had been broken. It was the proud boast of Tollesbury that there has been at least one man from the village aboard every America's cup challenge since the *Genesta* with only one solitary exception. Three times he and all the other pupils at Tollesbury School had to run out onto the playground cheering wildly for the various Newsreel cameras present! (The Gaumont British News 30/9/1937 still has available footage to be downloaded from the Internet).

My dad's memories were almost inevitably all happy ones. How in the darkness he would leave jellyfish on the narrow footways across the saltings in the hope that someone would stand on them and slip, or the fun of squelching over the mud wearing snowshoe-like "splatchers" or swimming in the tidal Tollesbury swimming pool. However, my granddad, Abraham William Harris, had another take on events. He would remind my dad that he only remembered the good times.

As with many other fishermen, in order to survive financially my granddad crewed on the yachts in summer. Like his father my granddad crewed the schooner *Heartsease*. He was

Bosun and my great grandfather was First mate. The *Heartsease* belonged to Sir Henry Seymour King and was formerly known as the *Adela*. Designed by William Storey she was built in Southampton in 1903 and was roughly 140 feet long. This ship was a predecessor to the J class America's cup class which were first built around 1930 following the introduction of the Universal Rule which governed size and performance of yachts built to compete in the America's Cup. They could be crewed by 30 people or more.

Clearly life as a fisherman in the early twentieth century was a precarious living both financially and in regards to danger. My granddad, who also served on a minesweeper off Italy, consciously never learnt how to swim so as not to prolong the possible death prospects always present from drowning. He was himself nearly killed when the sails he was mending blew out across the deck over the sea as he frantically hung on. His father's immortal advice was to "keep your toes turned up boy so you don't lose those new water boots!" He also saw a crewmember washed overboard by a giant wave only to watch the same man washed back on board by the next wave.

Like many fishermen my granddad was a very superstitious man. Being self employed and only earning money for the catch he sold, nevertheless he would return home and not take the boat out if a black cat crossed his path, and he would never sail on any Friday if it was the thirteenth of the month!

As a child from the mill town of Preston, Lancashire, I was enthused by my dad's strange vocabulary, talking about "fivefingers," "sprats," "stowboating," "fathoms," and on our frequent visits to Essex I was struck by the contrast of the huge expanses of flat seamarshes and the muddy estuaries and the large open skies. But as I have grown older I have come to recognise more and more the unique and dangerous occupations my dad's family have endured over the generations as fishermen.

I have had passed on to me a few surviving shares from the Tollesbury and Mersea Native Oyster Fishery Company, and in many senses this is my last direct link to the area. I do hope to find out more about the fate of CK 369 *Emma* and as long as possible I hope to keep returning to the Blackwater area and being involved with the Colne Smack Preservation



Society. Such an organization has a vital role in preserving the memories of all the families who eked out a life in the particularly trying circumstances of the fishing industry but also, in preserving the memories of their humour, hardships, skills and courage, it enriches the

lives of all of us with or without direct family connections or whether we live in the Essex area or far away. The fishermen's family's stories enrich our knowledge of humankind and for this we should all be very grateful.

## Oral History Project

Also in response to Richard Pattison's article, Brian Percival pointed out that the Brightlingsea Museum is running a project which he is actively involved in, interviewing local people. More than thirty local people have already been interviewed, including fishermen Dick Harman and Malcolm Macgregor, as have others with maritime connections such as John Pitt.

Anyone wishing to be involved in the project, or wanting further information, please visit the Museum (near the top of Duke St), or call Brian on 01026 304870.

## Crew Wanted...

*Electron* CK36 is looking for crew for the Pinmill Smack Race, 11<sup>th</sup> June.

Please call her new owner,  
Andy Abrahams, on  
07721 325898

## Smack *FLY* – MN17

36ft Essex oyster smack.  
Built in Maldon pre 1855.  
Complete rebuild during 1980's. New laid deck 2008/9.

Location: Brightlingsea

Contact: Martin Worth 01206 302877 for further details

Email: [martin.worth1@btinternet.com](mailto:martin.worth1@btinternet.com)

Price £35,000



## For Sale- 12ft GRP smack's boat



This locally built dinghy comes complete with combination trailer, mast & spars, fitted cover, oars, fenders, anchor, etc.  
Ready to sail away.

GRP hull by Brian Kennel; fitted out by Colin White; sails by J Lawrence Sailmakers. Excellent condition.

Price £4,500    Mobile 07803011951



## Summer Barbecue on the Dock

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> July at 12 noon



You are all welcome to come and join the CSPS committee on the dock for an informal summer barbecue.

To keep things simple we will provide the heat to cook your own food on. You might like to bring something to sit on too. If weather permits we plan to have some smack's boats on the jetty so that people can get out for a short sail.

Please come along and enjoy a nice afternoon; if you have a smack's boat and can bring it, please do.

Contact Robin Page 07768522957

### Sail and Picnic- 19<sup>th</sup> June 2011.



The 2006 sail and picnic

The Sail and Picnic is due to take place on the 19<sup>th</sup> June- we are looking forward to another great event. We are changing nothing from previous years, as we see no

need to alter a winning formula; the plan is to have a good sail and then moor in the Pyefleet or the Colne for lunch and a sing-song (bring your ear plugs).

This event is open to all, if you haven't been along before why not give it a go. Please bring your own food and drink.

To book your place, please call Jim Lawrence on 01206 304204. Make Jim aware of any needs/or preferences that you have.

#### Boat owners-

#### Why not attend the sail and picnic?

If you are free and would like to make your boat available for the sail and picnic on the 19<sup>th</sup> June please let me know:

Robin Page 07768522957.





# The East Coast Old Gaffers Race



July 1st-4th

Brightlingsea

For more information visit  
[www.eastcoastoldgaffers.co.uk](http://www.eastcoastoldgaffers.co.uk)





## **EAST COAST RACE**

**WEEK-END 2011**

### **OUTLINE PROGRAMME**

#### **Tide Times (Brightlingsea B.S.T.)**

**Friday July 1<sup>st</sup> – 12.54**

**Saturday July 2<sup>nd</sup> 13.37**

**Sunday July 3<sup>rd</sup> – 14.19**

**Monday July 4<sup>th</sup> – 15.00**

#### Friday July 1

1. **Passage Race to Nass Beacon – self timed**

Seafood lunch at Packing Shed Island

Race Office open for entries for East Coast Race at Brightlingsea Marina (early evening 17:00 – 21:30)

#### Saturday July 2

2. **East Coast Race**

Starts from Bateman's Tower  
(Long course to Wallet Spitway – Clacton Pier)

Competitors Reception on the CSPS Quay

Race Prize-giving outside the Race Office in the Marina  
Evening food + Music entertainment in CYC

#### Sunday July 3

- 3 **Open boat race from CYC to WSC**  
Start from Bateman's Tower
5. **Parade of Sail to Wivenhoe S.C.**  
Hog Roast + Home-made cakes + Tea at Wivenhoe Sailing Club.
- 6 **Evening entertainment at WSC / Nottage for berthing crews.**

#### Monday July 4

Fleet returns home.