



The Never Setting Sun



Smack Dock Soundings

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Mersea Dredging Match 2012

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

From the editor...

This winter has been particularly testing for boat owners as it's been too cold to do anything, followed by a spring that thinks it's winter! Hopefully summer will remember its true identity and we can all look forward to some good sailing and racing. As you can see from the calendar, there's plenty on offer. But if you blink it'll be Colne Match time before you know it!

Please make a few minutes to jot down a few lines, or take a snap of something that catches your eye, that way the next newsletter will have a few more pages...Next issue comes out in four months, so there's plenty of time for inspiration.





Varuna CK442– Richard Pattison



An 'artist's impression' of *Varuna* with superstructure?....

I had been looking semi-seriously to buy a smack for some years, but on each occasion sense had prevailed and I'd found a plausible excuse for not buying "this one". I still blame Jon Brett for changing that; his casual comment that *Varuna* was for sale and lying at Johnny Milgate's sent me off on another search. (Actually I confess that I didn't know exactly where I was going and had to ask for directions a second time).

Looking over the sea wall I found her and after a while walked around the head of Peldon creek to look at her bow on. It was as if a pretty girl had just turned my head, not such that I wanted to stand and stare, but to go so far as to talk to her. I was smitten by her curves and the rest is history.

Built in 1895, she is an Aldous class II smack. She rates a mention in Hervey Benham's 'The Salvagers', when she and the Clacton Lifeboat rescued the crew of a grounded schooner on Gunfleet Sands. The next day *Varuna* returned to salvage the schooner and brought her into Colne. Her working life was not untypical of her day and class. She was still fishing under engine in the 1980s, and over the next 25 years went through the well-known cycle of layup and recreational aspiration once reconverted to sail.

Jon Jacob and I did the dirty money thing over a pint in the 'Peldon Rose'. Just like any blossoming romance I was on cloud nine and told everyone about it, but now the reality of life has kicked in. I keep telling myself how lucky I am and that she will be worth it, but just now she sometimes feels like a millstone around my

neck and the prospect of divorce has at least a tinge of appeal.

David Patient, the Maldon-based shipwright, now trod that difficult line of chastising a friend for succumbing to foolhardy romantic illusions and simultaneously relieving me of my worldly wealth. Fortunately we have managed both facets of our relationship.

David had previously surveyed *Varuna* and was under no illusions as to the scale of the job. On the other hand I was naively optimistic about-well, just about everything. *Varuna* was towed out of the creek and down to Maldon before being stripped bare and lifted.

The next task was to erect a tent over her and provide a workspace. My optimism took a knock as I began to appreciate the reality of the task. Much has already been written about rebuilds, restorations, originality and the like and I won't reignite the debate. Suffice it to say that this project starts with the keel and finishes with the truck.



Keel, stem, apron and knee. Original planking and battens preserve the original shape.

At the time of going to press she is almost "planked up". Now many have a very clear idea of what that means and has entailed but equally many will not. I am not an authority and for those with greater understanding of the process please excuse my layman's account. (In fact even better pen an article for the next newsletter that explains the process and terminology more accurately than what follows).

The original oak keel has been replaced with an iroko one and to this is fastened the new oak stem and stern. At the bow the stem is reinforced with the apron, a solid timber



immediately behind it and to which the hood ends of the planks are fastened. The whole is further braced by a large knee. Aft a similar process adds strength to the stern post and the whole structure is reinforced by the keelson, a sort of internal keel that is bolted to the keel. Oak frames complete the skeletal structure that give shape and form to the hull.

Now, if this makes sense to you, then you probably don't need to read what follows. For those who might be less familiar then a brief illustrated explanation might be in order.

The construction of frames merits further explanation and consideration. Generally frames are either steamed or sawn. The former tend to be smaller lighter boats such as tenders or smack's boats. (*Hope*, my 17' Shuttlewood open day boat lying in the Smack Dock, has steamed frames). Sawn frames, typically, and in *Varuna's* case of oak, derive their strength from the correct run of the wood grain to the load. Consider the curvature of a smack's (or any other boat's hull and you will be struck by the grace, beauty and complexity of her lines. In order to accomplish this, the frames are constantly changing shape and thus the curvature of the grain needs to reflect this.



Looking forward, showing keelson and the change in curvature of frames and role of futtocks

Whilst a single change in direction can be accommodated by skilful forestry and selection of timber, more abrupt and double changes cannot. Hence frames forward can be of one piece, but running aft it becomes necessary to create more complex shapes and these frames are made up of pieces called "futtocks".

Futtocks are of indeterminate lengths but allow the correct alignment of grain and hence the construction of strong frames regardless of required shape. The skill of the shipwright in selection and construction is very evident.

A one-at-a-time replacement of frames, combined with temporarily fastening either the old planks or battens to them, ensures that the original shape is maintained.

Finally, when the frames have been replaced it is time to start re-planking. The lowest plank, called the garboard, is fitted first, and initially planking proceeds upwards, but thereafter can be up or down. In *Varuna's* case, since some of the counter planks have been retained, there is a further complication in marrying up old and new.

Much is often said about the correct timber for specific parts of the ship. I don't claim to be an expert but in an era when many of us pop to the hardware store to buy "a bit of wood", we have lost awareness of how complex and remarkable a material wood is. It is undeniable that some types of wood are best suited for different uses, so (and away from shipwrighting) English longbows were of yew, because of its strength and flexibility. However I believe it equally true to recognise that smacks were workboats and just like workboats today were often primarily constructed to a budget and therefore what was to hand. The men who commissioned smacks expected them to pay for themselves and provide a living to their crew over a working life of some 30 years or so before being scrapped.

Of course there are exceptions and these are the vessels that today we spend so much time and money in preserving, I imagine much to the bemusement of our forefathers. It is also true that today we build to a far higher work standard than ever before. Just one example might be the current Lloyd's regulation over the frequency and closeness of butt joints. I suspect that we get rather more hung up on questions of "larch on oak" than ever our forbearers did. So *Varuna's* planks are a mix of larch and iroko- the later may not be "smack traditional" but it was available on site. The keel is also iroko because it was more available than a suitable piece of oak.



Spiling out

The process of placing a plank is a remarkable combination of fine carpentry often to within a $1/16^{\text{th}}$ of an inch and agricultural brute force as $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick planks are encouraged into the required shape! The process starts with the construction of a pattern. Plywood is temporarily fitted onto the frame, and a pattern is spiled out, which involves the accurate drawing of the shape for the plank. This simple centuries-old process uses a pencil and a block of known width to mark out the required shape on the plywood pattern. It takes account of how width varies between the narrow aft and forward requirement and the wider requirement amidships. Once this pattern has been created the construction process is reversed to transfer the pattern onto a suitable plank of timber. Great care is needed since a pattern cannot be accurately returned to the ship and the finished transfer must take account of the grain of the wood, avoid sap wood and minimise wastage. When all is ready, including the addition of appropriate margins of error to allow final shaping, the plank is cut out from the timber.

It is now steamed so that it becomes sufficiently flexible to allow it to be bent and twisted into the required shape. After steaming for 90 minutes (an hour per inch of thickness), there is a 10 minute window of frantic activity whilst it is “encouraged” with cramps, mauls, props and wedges to adopt its required shape. It is then left for a minimum of 24 hours to take and hold its shape. The plank is now ready for fairing; this is the process of ensure a tight and accurate fit into its final precise shape and place. It is now repeatedly offered up and at each fitting minor adjustments are made, some times it might be to shave off a $1/16^{\text{th}}$ of an inch over a 5 inch run. This simple sentence masks the reality of offering up a more than 30’ long, $1\frac{1}{2}$ ” thick plank, which must be accurately cramped and edge-set into place so that its shape and length can be accurately finessed.

Eventually it will be ready for final fastening but before this can be done there is a final check that the frames are also correctly faired so that taking account of bends and twists the plank runs flush over them. A liberal quantity of ‘wug’ is then applied to the frames; ‘wug’ is a secret recipe of goo that bonds and protects. Now comes the final fixing. Driving in the spikes through countersunk holes with predrilled pilot holes in both frame and plank, requires at least two people and sometimes three if the frame needs to be backed up.



Partly planked up.



Richard Pattison has temporarily gone north for the summer to skipper a sailing Herring Drifter in Shetland. *Swan*, launched in 1900, is a 67', 65 ton ketch based in Lerwick and today has a similar role to *Pioneer*. Both boats are iconic of their region and fishing heritage and today provide opportunity for youngsters (and others!) to benefit from an understanding of their nautical heritage as well as developing as people. Richard is writing a blog of his exploits and whilst not exclusively about sailing, might be of interest to members. The *Swan's* website is www.swantrust.com and the blog address is www.rwtpattison.blogspot.co.uk or it can be accessed through the CSPS website.

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Summer 2013 - Events Calendar



Medway Barge Match	18 th May
Blackwater Smack and Barge Match	1st June
Brightlingsea Regatta and boat show	8 th and 9 th June
Pin Mill smack race	15th June
Barge Passage Match	22 nd June
Heybridge Basin Regatta	22nd June
OGA Swallows and Amazons	22 nd and 23 rd June
Rowhedge Regatta	29th June
Pin Mill Barge Match	29 th June
CSPS Sail and Picnic	30th June
Wivenhoe Regatta	13th July
150 th Thames Barge Match	13 th or 27 th July
Old Gaffers' Brightlingsea race	27 th July
Swale Smack and Barge Match	3rd August
Whitstable Match	10 th August
Mersea Town Regatta	24th August
Southend Barge Match	25 th August
Tollesbury Regatta	7 th September
CSPS Smack Dock Barbecue	8th September
Colne Match	14th September
Maldon Regatta	21 st September
Harwich Sea Shanty Festival	11 th – 13 th October
CSPS AGM and Photo Competition	16th November