



The Never Setting Sun

Smack Dock Soundings



THE JOURNAL OF THE COLNE SMACK PRESERVATION SOCIETY

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Iris CK67 racing in 1969; Hervey Benham standing by the shrouds. Hervey was popular as smack crew, particularly as he came with a large headsail which was much in demand!
Photo Janet Harker

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From the editor...

Another summer season is upon us, and already there have been a couple of events, starting off with the Medway Barge Match at the end of May. The Smack Dock is relatively quiet, although the sound of Rory's sander could often be heard aboard the *Ellen* of a spring weekend; she is now out on her summer pontoon berth. *Iris Mary* has emerged from her winter cover, and *William and Emily* is round at West Mersea being given a birthday, but *Fly* is still hibernating, and the *Edith* is still looking for a new owner. Pyefleet has seen the return of *Maria*, *Alberta* and *Harriet Blanche* to their moorings, and the first two were taking part in the Blackwater Match as this goes to press, as was *My Alice* with her new (longer) mast.



The CSPS has had several functions over the early spring period, and below are reports from the Membership Secretary, **Martin Doe** -

Cheese and Wine, and Vintage Film evening Held in the Colne Yacht Club, 30th January

A healthy crowd of forty-eight attended this popular evening, hosted by Martin Doe with assistance from Judy Lawrence on the raffle. After being welcomed, the evening started with a short film, 'Smackheads', showing the contrast between a traditionalist and a more progressive owner, who held a race to determine which craft fared better. At the finish there was less than 18" between them!

The CYC staff then provided their excellent platters of cheese and biscuits, along with bottles of wine for each table. After the sale of raffle tickets (popular due to the large number of prizes available) the next film, 'The Lost Sailors', was quite emotive in charting many areas around the world where the crude fishing craft have disappeared due to the growing popularity of fibreglass hulls and outboard engines.

Once the raffle had been drawn (which took quite a long time), the finale was a short but complete contrast on the subject of gun punting. Included were the home manufacture of the shells being fired, and watching a two-man craft being rowed and paddled into position, climaxing with the loud report of firing.

Altogether a pleasing evening, which realised a profit of £182.50; there are still more films, or strictly speaking DVDs, in the locker for future occasions.

Fish Supper and Shanty Night Held in the Colne Yacht Club, 26th March

Only thirty-one people were involved in the end, including the talented Verrier family, due to four cancellations owing to illness. Presided over by Martin Doe, the evening commenced with the serving of a first class fish pie and vegetables, followed by a delicious raspberry pavlova. Raffle tickets were sold before the shanties began, and then the four Verriers plus a member of their Harwich group gave a great selection of shanty songs, all with a chorus for audience participation.

During the interval the raffle was drawn; Judy, many thanks again for your help- even two Easter bunnies were among the prizes! The Verriers then gave another rousing range of songs, culminating in the fantastic hornpipe from Penny, to much accompaniment on the tables from the audience.

The event had been booked as long ago as last August, when few knew Easter was so early this year, which probably contributed to the small attendance. We can gladly say that our President, James Lawrence, who was one of those who had fallen ill, is now much better. With exhortations that all of any profit from the event goes to local charities, there was an overall profit of £141, which will be dispersed. Thank you everybody!!

Smack Dock working party Sunday 27th March (yes, Easter Sunday!)

The morning after the Shanty Night, couple with the clocks going back one hour, was probably not the finest omen, but at least the weather had improved somewhat with a southerly gale propelling mainly sunshine along with one or two light showers.

Jon, Lucy and Chris were on hand for work, the main part of which was to coat the 'Smacksman's Return' with black tar varnish, and the window frames had a lick of white Sadolin after a quick rub down. Apart from the problem of roller trays making a somersaulting bid for freedom whenever they were nearly empty, work progressed well; the more weathered end of the hut even got two coats of black.

We are most helpful for this help – on such a day – and Martin Doe was ready with refreshments for the workers, and indeed any visitors, who were curiously conspicuous by their complete absence.

There will be another work party planned for the autumn.

Anyone intending to participate in or follow the **Pin Mill Smack Race**, please note that it has been moved forward a week and will now be held on **2nd July**.



Sail and Picnic – Sunday 17th July 2016

You know the format - meet up on the Hard at 10am, bring your own food and optional musical instruments. People are divided up amongst the participating smacks, who usually go for an hour or two's sailing before finding a snug place to stop and eat, drink and be merry. Weather notwithstanding, the emphasis is on enjoying the boats and the company rather than careering about at top speed!

If you would like a berth, please contact Martin Doe on 01206 272000.

Priscilla's rebuild at the Pioneer Sailing Trust – Mark Allen



Progress on Harker's Yard's latest rebuild project, *Priscilla* MN76, a Colne oyster smack, has now reached the half way mark with planking firmly underway. The *Priscilla* was built in Brightlingsea in 1893 by Stones Boatyard to a length of 36ft, later lengthened to 43ft and now being rebuilt back to her original size.

The Lottery Funded project hopes to be launched next season and will become available to those wishing to sail and learn the ropes of a gaffer. She will be rigged conservatively to inspire confidence but it is hoped will enter the various local races to help to teach seamanship rather than to go trophy hunting.

The project has been helped on a regular basis by several local very experienced club members for which I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their support, and please may it continue; if any members happen to have any photographs of the *Priscilla* that they

would be happy for us to have copied could they please contact Pioneer Trust at Harker's Yard. Many thanks...

Sea Dogs – Charles Harker

The following story and photos were provided by Janet Harker; the smack Iris CK67 mentioned in the story was built by Aldous in 1902, and came into Charles's ownership in 1967.

They tell me that the two most useless things aboard a fishing smack are a pair of step ladders and a Naval officer. To these I would add a third - a dog.

When I bought the *Iris* I set about restoring her to her original working state. The engine came out. The new mainsail was dressed with red ochre and the lanyards were smothered with stockholm tar. No matter that all who came aboard left as red as Indians and reeking of tar. It was all part of sailing a traditional vessel. The other thing I learned from my study of old sepia photographs of smacks and barges was that more often than not they had a dog aboard. I decided that I would always sail with a dog aboard the *Iris*.

The most famous dog upon the East Coast then was Stormy. His pedigree was impeccable. He had been born aboard the *Cambria* in a gale of wind off the Suffolk coast. He was always described as a 'Suffolk Barge Hound'.



Stormy could even climb ladders



When I first met Stormy he lived aboard the *Sallie* with her owner, Peter. Stormy was tough and wiry with a curly tail arched over his back. There are still dogs about Mersea with the same jaunty spring to their step and I guarantee they can trace their ancestry back to Stormy. My dog was called Benbow- and although he didn't have the same good breeding I loved him dearly. He was a large and boisterous Labrador. I spent two years on Wyatt's slip refitting the *Iris* and Benbow came every weekend. Actually shipwrighting bored Benbow and he was left to his own devices while I worked aboard. He would wander into Wyatt's shop with muddy paws only to be chased out by an angry Polly. Harold took a more relaxed view sensing, I feel, a kindred buccaneering spirit. I tried tying Benbow to a shore under the smack's bilge but after he walked away with it I felt it safer to let him roam. He would beg ice creams from the day trippers and join in the crab fishing at the causeway end. Benbow was much happier sailing and when I took the *Iris* back to Tollesbury he always ran down behind my bike as I pedalled down the sea wall to the smack lying off the Leavings. Benbow would be in and out of the Fleet chasing moorhens so by the time we arrived he was soaked. Worse would follow. I had built a narrow hard across the mud so I could get aboard at low water. Benbow always ignored this and careered across the mud chasing seagulls. In desperation I would make him swim to the smack to get him clean. He would then be swung aboard with the staysail halliard hooked in his collar and left a while to drip dry.

I was without a mate at that time and Benbow was my constant companion. One day we turned the *Iris* up Woodrope to put her on the hard under the Granary. It was one of those days when everything went right and I was secretly pleased to have an audience. A little fellow was painting his dinghy on the beach as I made fast, exactly where I wanted to lay. "Did you sail that big old smack up here on your own?" he asked. "No," says I, nonchalantly, "I've got the dog with me!"

Occasionally the beautiful Diane would join Benbow and me aboard and sail on the *Iris*. One day she came aboard in a brand-new sheepskin jacket. She took this off and carefully stowed it below. We set off and spent a cosy little day 'a trois' up the back of Osea. On the way home it started to rain and blew easterly. After getting wet and thoroughly miserable, Benbow disappeared down below. Finally we picked up

the mooring and as I started to stow up, Diane went below to put the kettle on. There came an unladylike shout- "BLOODY DOG! GET OUT!" I looked fearfully down the hatch. There was a wet Benbow carefully curled up on Diane's new coat, chewing away thoughtfully on the fleecy collar. "Either that dog goes or I do," said Diane. She was as good as her word too. Three weeks later she announced her engagement to David and never did sail aboard the *Iris* again.

I will admit nights aboard the *Iris* were a trifle restless when Benbow was aboard. He insisted on sleeping at my feet. Frequently there would be loud biting and scratching noises as Benbow dealt with a flea. The worst night of all followed an evening's mullet bashing. We had shook out on deck and Benbow had helped us clear the crabs from the net. This he did with gusto, first stamping on them with his paw and then crunching them into little pieces. Alas, he must have got a bad one. I was woken in the middle of the night by the unmistakable sounds of a retching dog. "On deck, on deck!" I screamed. Benbow leapt for the open hatch, missed it and fell back with a crash into the frying pan which lived (unwashed) at the foot of the ladder. He was then copiously sick all over David in the other bunk. That was the only time I saw David upset aboard the *Iris*, but he did take on that night.

Benbow has now gone and I remember him fondly. Things were never dull when he was aboard. He was always keen, didn't mind the cold and never answered back. What more could any skipper look for in a mate?



Benbow supervising scrubbing proceedings



Joseph T (excerpt from an unknown publication)



The Maldon smack Joseph T MN9, photographed in 1960, sitting comfortably on her bilge on the shore just down river of the wharfe, her boom swung out to ensure that she lists into the hard. She has all the typical clutter of a working vessel: the oyster dredges on deck, peeler nets hung up to dry on the mast, and sacks over the starboard pinnacel, which might serve as aprons for the crew or for carrying the oysters. (NMM, Oliver Hill Collection, neg no P75422)

smack, she is a handy vessel. The lute stemmed *Mary* of around 1860 still survives. After World War I the Maldon *Polly* and one or two others had counter stems added. The Maldon smack of the Victorian period seems to have had a topmast and topsail, but by the 1920s a pole mast with larger main-sail and high cut peak was adopted as more convenient.

After World War II there were still fourteen smacks kept on the Mill Beach at Maldon and although most used sails while they dredged they also

had old car engines. Ernie Pitt's *Polly* was working under sail until 1956 and Alf Pitt's *Sylvia* and the Claydon brothers' *Joseph T* were still working until 1964. After this Alf Claydon bought the 27ft smack *Happier Days* to use in his retirement. In 1968 he sold her to sixteen-year-old Michael Emmert who fished with her and he eventually had the transom stemmed Maldon smack *Osma Rose* built in 1980.

PAGLESHAM SMACK

The Paglesham smacks were smaller than the Colne smacks in order to work in the narrow River Roach and the adjoining network of creeks. They had a high bow and more hollow entry and a very long counter stem. Paglesham-built smacks still sailing include the 36ft *Mary* built before 1862 with a 10.5ft beam, a 5.3ft draft and a rim V transom with a lute stem above it which seems to have been called a 'tucked' stem. The lute stern was replaced by the elegant counter stern by

the time the 32ft *Qian*, built 1872, and the Hall-built 36ft *Kate*, built in 1883, joined the oyster fleet.

The smaller Essex smacks were among few of the working boat types – along with the Irchen ferry (gc) and the Bristol Channel pilot cutter (gc) – which were happily adapted to yachting, as witnessed by the two pretty little smack yachts, the 28ft *Serra* and the 30ft *Bird of Dawning*, built at the Paglesham yard of Frank Shuttlewood in 1932 and 1937 respectively.

WINKLE BRIG

Open, clinker boat with a centreboard, 15ft to 18ft long, rigged as a gaff sloop and used as a general runabout. These boats, which were originally old ships' boats with a gaff rig added by the Essex fisherman, were called winkle brigs at West Mersea and bunkins on the Colne. In about 1912 Charles Kidby built a new type of boat to work in the creeks and on the flats to replace the 20ft 'haul and towing' boat at West

Mersea. The new winkle brig was clinker built, but sometimes had grown frames so that they could carry the weight of oysters and winkles in bags. The last one working under sail seems to have been the *Boy George* from which 'Snowball' Hughes used to work oyster layings at Mersea until about 1964. By then the winkle brig had been replaced by the oyster skiff, a low sided motor boat built with grown frames. In 1996 up to seventeen brigs were racing, divided into high performance and the others who wanted to keep as near as possible to the traditional rig used by fishermen.

Source: Herys Benham, *Last Stronghold of Sail* (London 1948) and *Seawater* (London 1967), and John Leather, *Gaff Rig* (London 1970) are the best sources of information on the Colchester smacks. Arthur and Michael Emmert, *Blackwater Moa* (Maldon 1992) covers Maldon smacks. John Leather, *The Sails Show* (Lutterham 1975) and Robert Simpson, *Essex Boats and Crafts* (Ramsholt 1995) touch on winkle brigs.

Due to ongoing health problems and other commitments, her owner, Kerry McSwann, won't be able to work on the *Joseph T*. If anyone who would like to take over the restoration please contact the Editor (details on front page), and I will put you in touch with Kerry. The hull is free to some one to carry on the work. She is at Maylandsea boatyard; he did do a lot of work and would like her to go to some one willing to finish the job. The hull will be free and other useful bits can be bought by negotiation.



Member **David Watts** has lent a large bound volume of *Brightlingsea Parish Magazines*, dating from the latter years of the nineteenth century, the main attraction of which is a regular column entitled **Gossip From From The Hard**. Below are some extracts, which I have transcribed exactly as originally printed...

May 1892

There seems to be quite as much activity as usual amongst the yachts here this season, though we miss some of the big ones, which used to count for a good many hands. In addition to the work going on at home, perhaps there are even more Brightlingsea men than ever employed this year in yachts hailing from other stations.

The following may be mentioned amongst those now fitting-out:- *Creole*, *Vol-au-vent*, *Latois*, *Dolphin*, *Fleur-de-lys*, *Violet*, *Otterhound*, *Diana*, *Rover*, *Linnet*, *Gertrude*, *Alceste*, *Sula*, *Kitty*, *Ianthe*, *Louie*, *Erne*, *Swift*, *Seaward*, *Ghost*, *S.Y. Peri*, also *Semiramis* at Wivenhoe.

The owner of the *Undine*, Mr. W. H. Meyer, has added to her the accompaniment of a beautiful little steam launch, built by Messrs. Simpson & Strickland, of Dartmouth, and which figured in the Paris Exhibition the year before last.

A new and distinguished arrival in the Colne is Baron O. Dickson's schooner *Adventuress*, from Gosport, in charge of Capt. C. Bates.

Highly appreciative accounts are given of Capt. Towers-Clarke's new 40, *Varuna*, and in the hands of Capt. E. Gould, she is confidently expected to make some history this season. Capt. Sycamore is fitting out the rival 40-rater, *Corsair*, at Southampton, for Rear-Admiral Montague.

Amongst other yachts fitting out away from home, in the hands of Brightlingsea Skippers, may be mentioned the *Heron*, yawl, at Cowes, (Capt. B. Wenlock); *Daring*, schooner, at Poole, (Capt. B. Wenlock); *New Zealand*, barge yacht, at Gosport, (Capt. G. Gilders); *Doreen*, 10-rater, at Fairlie, (Capt. G. Gilbert); *Irene*, at Gosport, (Capt. Maskell).

The St Andrews Waterside Church Mission yacht, *Sapper*, which has received some further improvements this winter, through the renewed generosity of Mr. F. C. Capel, of the S.Y.

Thalatta, is under weigh again, and has been recently visiting some of the lightships round the

coast, where such visits, implying also a supply of books, &c., and a Service when opportunity permits, are we need scarcely say, extremely welcome.

June 1892

The Skilling season is now virtually over, though a few of the well-boats will probably keep on a little longer.

During the past month, and especially just previous to the Harwich Regatta, there has been a fine show of yachts in the Colne.

Amongst those who are fitting out late are the *Hyacinth* and the *Yolande*.

The *Adelaide* is out of it this year, owing, we are sorry to hear, to the serious illness of her owner, Mr. S. W. Clowes.

The *Samphire* which, it will be remembered, met with such a sad disaster in the blizzard of March, 1891, was offered for sale by auction on the 20th ult, and was knocked down to Mr. G. Tabor, for £130. She has been hauled up on Messrs. Aldous's slip for repairs.

Mr Fieldgate's water tank steamer is proving useful as a tug, as well as for water supply. In the former capacity she towed out the *Vol-au-vent* the other day, and in the latter she waited on some of the yachts at the Harwich Regatta.

Capt. C. Woodward, of the schooner yacht *Asteroid* laying in the Colne, sustained a serious accident on the 19th ult. The crew were getting the yacht under weigh; Mr Woodward went forward, and as they were heaving up the anchor, one of the capstan bars struck him, fracturing his thigh. He was brought ashore at once, and taken home, where the fractured limb was attended to by Mr Parker.

We have a sad postscript to add, on going to print. A telegram has been received by the Vicar, Thursday Evening, June 2nd, from Capt. Eade, of the yacht *Ghost*, stating that Thomas Lamb was washed overboard and drowned that morning, off Llandudno. Deceased, a fine strong young man of 21, was the 3rd son of Capt. E. Lamb, of the Mission Yacht *Sapper*.



COLNE SMACK PRESERVATION SOCIETY
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION (*= optional information)

Name:

Address:.....
.....

Post code: Date of birth:.....

Telephone: Home/*Work/*Fax.....

Email address:

I would prefer to receive the CSPS Newsletter by post /email (please delete as applicable)

Do you own a smack?..... Wish to/have crewed on a smack? Have history of a smack?

*Details of smack- Name: Number:

Builder: Date:

I wish to apply for membership of the Colne Smack Preservation Society. If elected, I will abide by the Rules.

Signed: Date:

Proposer: Signed: Date:

Secunder: Signed: Date:

Both Proposer and Secunder must be Members of the Society. Leave blank if none known to you.

Your application will be considered at the next Committee meeting.

The Standing Order will not be submitted to your bank until you have been elected.

Return this form to Martin Doe, The Cottage, Straight Road, Boxted, Colchester, Essex CO4 5QX.

STANDING ORDER

To: (the name of your bank) Sort code:

Bank address:

Name of your account:Account number:

Please credit the account of Colne Smack Preservation Society (Barclays Bank PLC, Brightlingsea, Essex; A/c no. 00100498 Sort code 20-21-73) the sum of **£12.50** immediately and thereafter on **1st November annually**, until this order is cancelled in writing. This supersedes any previous order.

Please notify with payment- Subs from (your name)

Signature: Date:



Events Calendar 2016

Rowhedge Regatta	25 th June
Heybridge Basin Regatta	25 th June
Wivenhoe Regatta	9 th July
Pin Mill Smack Race <i>(please note revised date)</i>	2 nd July
CSPS Sail and Picnic	17 th July
Brightlingsea Regatta and Boat Show Weekend	23 rd – 24 th July
East Coast Old Gaffers' Race	30 th July
Swale Match	13 th August
Mersea Town Regatta	20 th August
Whitstable Harbour Match	20 th August
Colne Match	10 th September
Mersea Dredging Match	11 th September
Thames Festival Barge Parade and Oyster Race	17 th September
Maldon Town Regatta	17 th September
Harwich Sea Shanty Festival	7 th – 9 th October
Harris smacks' rally (Rowhedge)	6 th November

Event details listed above are believed to be correct at the time of going to press.

Please notify the Editor with any changes or corrections as soon as possible for inclusion in the next issue of Smack Dock Soundings.