



The Never Setting Sun



# Smack Dock Soundings

THE JOURNAL OF THE COLNE SMACK PRESERVATION SOCIETY

May / June 2017

ISSUE 77



A classic East Coast scene- smacks racing in 2009. Photo by Ralph Merry

**Chairman** Martin Doe  
The Cottage, Straight Road, Boxted,  
Colchester, Essex CO4 5QX  
Tel. 01206 272000  
E-mail: martindoe@hotmail.co.uk

**Journal Editor** Lucy Harris  
22 The Waterside, Brightlingsea,  
Essex CO7 0BB  
e-mail: lucy.pangolin@gmail.com

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

## **From the editor...**

Well, it's all change in the Smack Dock; *Ellen* is away having some TLC out of the water just up-creek at Morgans boatyard, but *Fly* has already left for her new berth in Arcachon, France. *Edith's* new owner has had a bit of early spring sailing here before he takes her home (also in France, Brittany this time), whilst *G&A's* new owners have got her winter cover off. Meanwhile *William & Emily* has been on the receiving end of a paintbrush, *Iris Mary* has come out from underneath her winter cover and strange noises emanate from *Nellie* at weekends. These last-named three will be the only smacks left permanently resident in the dock for the time being, but the dock is a precious asset and although quiet these days, will hopefully be home to many more smacks once again in the future.





## From the Chairman – Martin Doe

Our only **Cheese, Wine and Vintage Film evening** took place on 23<sup>rd</sup> March at the Colne Yacht Club, where a jovial crowd of 38 enjoyed a variety of films coupled with the usual excellent cheeseboard provided by CYC.

The first showing was mainly monochrome film of American J-Class yachts competing before the America's Cup races of 1934 against *Endeavour* from the UK; later the inspiring *Ranger* beat *Endeavour 2* in 1936. We then saw a longer film of the construction at Wivenhoe, commissioning and trial voyage of the *Lord Nelson*, a square-rigged vessel fully equipped for handicapped sailors, and coping with a force 9 gale down the Solent.

The final eclectic helping comprised Bembridge Redwings in different guises and the Victory-class dayboats, followed by Portugese seaweed-gathering boats. We finished up seeing the Douro River in Portugal, with the formidable port-carriers on their final voyage down 150 miles of the river before dams prevented further passages and meant that all the pipes of port were then transported by road or rail. A fascinating film.

The event raised a healthy profit of £186.50, aided by an excellent raffle, ably run as usual by Judy Lawrence- thank you Judy.

## Smack Dock working party

We were blessed with good weather on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, and had a good turn-out of workers. Jon, Andy, Bill, Max and Richard nobly laboured to fill holes and spray the whole of the solid area of the dock to kill all the grass and weeds.

Sadly no visitors joined us, so only the workers were able to swallow tea, coffee and biscuits provided by the Chairman.

A new bench has been purchased to replace the one on the dock comemorating Cyril White, which was sadly vandalised in the spring. It will be installed as soon as an opportunity presents; it is a heavy object and will require a couple of helping hands to shift it about.

## Recently Arrived...

*Shamrock*, CK174, built by Aldous in 1900, has recently returned to Brightlingsea. After a spell with the now-defunct Exeter Maritime Museum, she was taken to Lowestoft. She languished there for many years; CSPA members went to inspect her in 2004 and those of you with long memories (or archives!) will remember a mention of her in SDS Issue 39 in regard to their visit. She has now been taken on by Paul Winter and, after being made ready to travel by him and his trusty gang of *Maria* crew, was brought back here. She now stands in Morgan Marine's west yard, well propped and braced to hopefully prevent her losing her shape while she awaits the next phase of her life.



## Has anyone heard of *Care*?

In spring, your editor received an email from Bob Fawkes, owner of the smack *Lizzie Annie* MN23; his friend Paula, whose family, the Wrights from Maldon, once owned the *Lizzie Annie* and fished her for a living.

She says:-

'I have been trying to research an old Maldon smack called the *Care* (because that's apparently where my grandad's name came from) but without success.

I know that she was built by John Howard in Maldon probably in the late 1800's and was owned by my great grandfather Richard Wright. He apparently sold her when he bought *Lizzie Annie*. After that we have only heard that she fell into disrepair, I assume that is why we have never seen any pictures of her.



The other problem is that we don't know her number; I assume she came before MN20 but can find no record of her on any smack list. I wondered if anyone might have heard of her or maybe even seen a picture of her in the area somewhere, any nugget of information gratefully received.

Yours hopefully,  
Paula Hawkins (nee Wright)'

If any of you have some information, please contact the Ed. (details on the front cover) and I will pass it on.

### The return of *Priscilla*



*Priscilla*, seen here some time before being taken to The PST for her rebuild.

The Pioneer Sailing Trust, which has been rebuilding *Priscilla* in their shed at Harker's Yard, are planning her official re-launch on Thursday 29th June. The restoration of *Priscilla* MN76, originally built by Stone's in Brightlingsea in 1890, has been the focus of a major Heritage Lottery Fund project for the trust over the past 4 years. After the launch, she will be used to deliver sail training experiences to young and old.

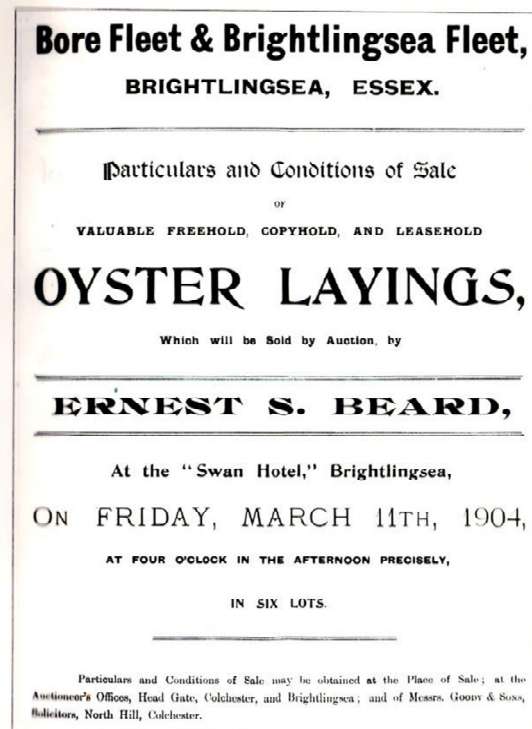
When *Priscilla* arrived at the yard in 2013, she was in a poor state. Had she not been sheathed in cement in the past, she would probably not have survived at all. However, she is now in fine shape, probably better than new, and her future looks safe for many years. We look forward to printing photographs of her in her regained splendour in the next issue of SDS.

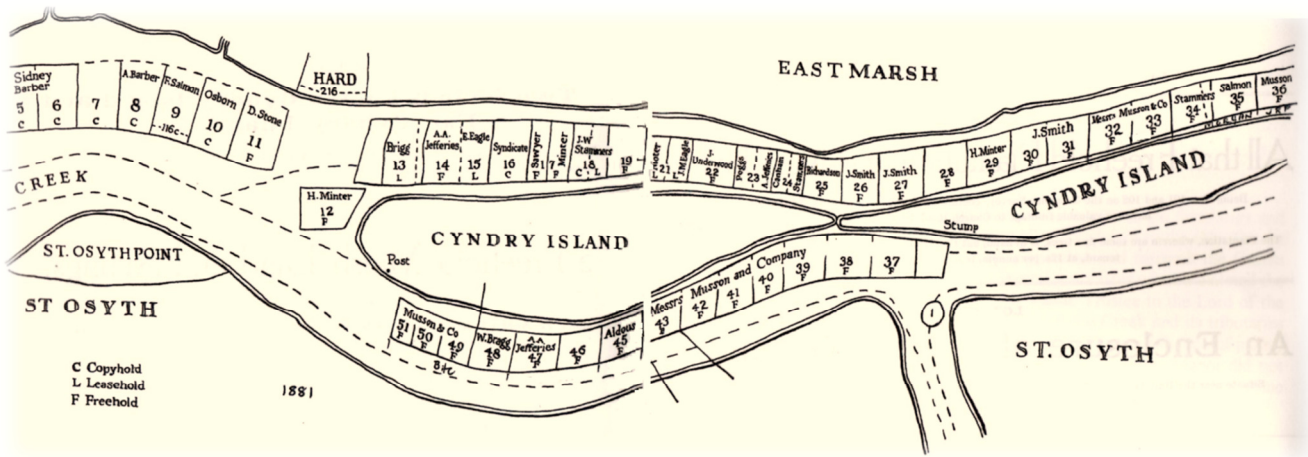
### Some thoughts on celebrating Brightlingsea's maritime heritage – John Pitt

Having recently received my copy of Smack Dock Soundings (Issue 76), and having read with interest 'Brightlingsea Blessing and Reclaiming of the Waters', I felt compelled to follow up the article and bring into perspective the reality of what once prevailed, and the current steps that are taken to highlight an event enabling the various factions of our local society to parade as commendable as some may be.

History can be delightful and it is nearly always a pleasure to reminisce, but it can be a little sad that notwithstanding Brightlingsea's fascinating maritime past, little is known of what is being done to revitalise, in some small measure, what was once a major industry- namely our oyster industry, in which the Brightlingsea smacks played a meaningful part. I may be dubbed a cynic but no amount of blessing and dressing up will in practical terms bring about its resurrection!

Some 40 years ago, in conjunction with what was then the MAAF Research Station in Burnham-on-Crouch, and having been fascinated by oyster cultivation since my parents became neighbours to Billy Day, an oyster merchant, I carried out





trials with seed oysters purchased from Sealsalter's Hatchery (then in Whitstable). It was at the time when I had acquired my first freehold oyster laying from the late Bob Lord, Brightlingsea's most popular solicitor who, in 1974, had purchased all those layings in the South and North Channels from Mussons oyster merchants, now leased to Morgan Marine for yacht moorings. In respect of these, the Crown Estate Commissioners challenged Bob Lord's legal title.

I acted for Bob at the time, concluded in 1977, having successfully acted for my cousin Victor Gray in respect of a similar situation that had arisen at West Mersea, upon his purchase of the bed of the creeks and foreshore around Packing Shed Island and adjacent land from Charterhouse, whose title commenced with a Grant by Charles II in 1667. The Crown's claim was successfully rebuffed with the assistance of the County Landowners Association. When the Crown challenged Brightlingsea Harbour Commissioners' title in 1997, who had purchased from the Lord of the Manor all that foreshore and bed of Brightlingsea Creek which had not already been disposed of

(ie. all those layings in the North Channel from the Hard to the eastern end of East Cindery, together with numerous layings in the South Channel) on 23rd February 1937. It had to be proved that the then Lord of the Manor's title had commenced with a royal Grant by Elizabeth I on 22nd July 1576 to Thomas Hennage (Lord of the Manor at that time) and others. Subsequent action in Chancery proceedings on 4th December 1700 substantiated the Brightlingsea Commissioners' claim.

If the rebuttal had not succeeded in-so-far-as Brightlingsea Creek, the Harbour Commissioners, and those of us who had subsequently acquired title to the layings in good faith, things would be vastly different and dare I say it somewhat cloud the festivities now being celebrated.

Returning to the trials carried out in the 1970s, the outcome was disappointing, and after some years they were abandoned. The reason at that time was not known, either to MAAF or ourselves, who had come the conclusion that the heavy concentration of silt in suspension was the major contributory factor. Not so: several years later, prior to 'gigas' oysters making their appearance in profusion, it became clear that it



Native oysters (*Ostrea edulis*)



Pacific or rock oysters (*Crassostrea gigas*)



was a result of two major factors. One, being global warming, and the other arising from a component used at that time in the manufacture of antifouling paint, namely tributyl tin (TBT). This was confirmed to me by a Professor Richardson of the University of Wales, Bangor.

The years have rolled by, and having acquired further oyster layings in the North Channel, which I let subsequently to Richard Haward (7th generation oysterman) and his son Bramwell, of West Mersea, They having worked the original laying over the past four years, this and others are now becoming a vibrant working oyster fishery. Ecologically, the most important factor is the return of the flat Native oyster (*Ostrea edulis*).

With my grandson being the freeholder of the majority of the layings in the North Channel, and Richard and Bramwell working them under a tenancy agreement, the future is hopefully encouraging. Brightlingsea oyster fishery is on the way back, and this is what should be celebrated.

*John Pitt was CSPA Honorary Secretary in the 1970s, and Clerk to Brightlingsea Harbour Commissioners for more than 20 years from the 1970s to the 1990s.*

*He is author of 'Reminiscences and the Oyster', a small booklet privately published by Peter Fisher in 2006, from which the map and sale advert printed above are taken. –Ed.*

**'Gossip From The Hard' - Excerpts from Brightlingsea Parish Magazine** (an antique volume on loan to the editor from David Watts. I have copied these out faithfully following the original spellings and punctuation).

### May 1895

It is unmistakeably spring-time now amongst the yachts, and in the shipyards, and migration is almost as much the rule with our seafaring people as with the martins and the swallows, numbers departing each week by train, besides those who sail in the yachts hailing from this port. Brightlingsea men have been pretty well known round the Mediterranean during the past winter, and we suppose that there will be few ports in

the United Kingdom, or in the neighbourhood of New York, on the other side of the Atlantic, where we shall not thus be represented in the course of the summer. We trust that the reputation of Brightlingsea men for good seamanship and good conduct will be maintained throughout this coming season, and we wish them heartily good luck, and a safe return.

THE OYSTER TRADE. – The consignments of American oysters that arrive weekly, are far more than in any previous year. Messrs. Musson & Co., the importers are freighting steamers weekly to this part from Southampton via the American line of steamers. The first to arrive brought 850 barrels, the *James Tennant* followed with 1007, and this week, the *Speedwell* one of Messrs. Paul's steamers arrived with 600 barrels. These are received by their manager, Mr. Stammers, where the many oyster merchants are supplied direct from the boat and are then put on the layings to fatten. Beside these consignments, barges arrive from London weekly, laden with baskets of oysters ex-steamers, from Spanish ports.

### June 1895

The Brightlingsea Contingent of the new *Valkyrie's* crew left here to join her on the 13th ult., and she was successfully launched on the midnight tide of 26th. The Daily Telegraph says :- The new *Valkyrie* is much larger than the Prince of Wales's yacht *Britannia*; her length overall is 130ft, on the waterline 90ft; beam 27ft. [...] The mast is of great height compared with the *Britannia*, being nearly 160ft. long. Immediately she is rigged, she will undergo her trial on the Clyde.

Mr. J. Sawyer received information by telegram on Saturday, 28th ult., that his smack *Olive*, which had been dredging in the North Sea, and was bound with her freight of oysters, to FredericksHAVEN in Denmark, was ashore near Lodbjurg on the Coast of Jutland, some 130 miles short



of her destination. No full particulars are to hand as yet, but the probability is that the vessel through the extraordinary thick weather which has prevailed of late at sea. The vessel's freight has been salvaged, but there is small hope of ever getting her of again. We are extremely sorry both for the owner and crew, for the vessel though insured, was not anything like covered as

to her value, and the crew will we fear, have lost best part of a month's earnings, to say nothing of the hardships and further loss of time involved. Several of them too are men with large families at home. We must be thankful however that there has been no loss of life in the occurrence.

## Events Calendar 2017

Rowhedge Regatta	10 <sup>th</sup> June
OGA Swallows and Amazons weekend	10 <sup>th</sup> and 11 <sup>th</sup> June
Blackwater Smack and Barge Match	17 <sup>th</sup> June
Wivenhoe Regatta	24 <sup>th</sup> June
Pin Mill barge match	1 <sup>st</sup> July
Heybridge Basin Regatta	8 <sup>th</sup> July
Old Gaffers' East Coast race	15 <sup>th</sup> July
Thames barge match	15 <sup>th</sup> July
<b>CSPS Sail and Picnic</b>	<b>23<sup>rd</sup> July</b>
Swale Match	29 <sup>th</sup> July
Harwich Sea Festival	30 <sup>th</sup> July
Whitstable barge match	5 <sup>th</sup> August
Leigh on Sea Heritage Day (Strand Wharf)	6 <sup>th</sup> August
Ipswich Maritime Festival	19 <sup>th</sup> and 20 <sup>th</sup> August
Mersea Week	20 <sup>th</sup> – 25 <sup>th</sup> August
Mersea Town Regatta	26 <sup>th</sup> August
Southend barge match	27 <sup>th</sup> August
<b>Colne Smack and Barge Match</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> September</b>
Mersea Dredging Match	3 <sup>rd</sup> September
Pin Mill smack race	16 <sup>th</sup> September
Thames Barge Parade (West India Dock, London)	16 <sup>th</sup> and 17 <sup>th</sup> September
Maldon Town Regatta	23 <sup>rd</sup> September
Tollesbury Regatta	7 <sup>th</sup> October

