

SMACK DOCK SOUNDINGS

THE JOURNAL OF THE COLNE SMACK PRESERVATION SOCIETY



Chairman Martin Doe
The Cottage, Straight Road,
Boxted, Colchester, CO4
5QX
Tel. 01206 272000
Email.
martindoe@hotmail.co.uk

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Bringing memories to the old and lessons to the young

THE CHAIRMAN MARTIN DOE - A FOGGY OUTLOOK!

All the wind is out of our sails for an indefinite time and thereafter for however long it takes to get back to normal. Will there be queues to get afloat, or even the antifouling applied? We may have had many benefits from China, but certainly not coronavirus, the nuisance-or worse-of which is not fully known, and whether it will reappear. I am glad I have a garden, to be cooped up inside all the time must be particularly trying.

Obviously, we are not holding any meetings and any matters needing attention are being treated on an ad hoc basis. While our Treasurer has and I am sure will keep us up to date on our finances-which are healthy- the one busy person is our Newsletter Editor Elly. This is her second issue, full of variety and content (and length!) and in addition to which she has overhauled our website which should mean it will be more up to date generally but with many new pictures appearing. A great job Elly!!



Committee Members;

Paul Winter, Andy Harman, Caroline Canham, John Gillard, Martyn Bradfield

Editor; Elly Howlett - elck222@whoever.com

If you would prefer to receive Smack Dock Soundings via email rather than post, please provide your email address to the editor and we will update your preferences.

Events coming up;

August 15th	Swale Match
August 16th-21st	Mersea Week
September 12th	Colne Smack & Barge Match <i>*CSPS event</i>
September 13th	Mersea Dredging Match
September 19th	Maldon Regatta

Events which have been postponed until 2021 at time of printing;

March 21st	Vintage Film Night <i>*CSPS event</i>
April 19th	Smack Dock working party <i>*CSPS event</i>
June 6th	Rowhedge Regatta
June 7th	Blessing of the Waters
June 13th	Blackwater Match
June 20th	Wivenhoe Regatta
June 21st	Sail & Picnic <i>*CSPS event</i>
July 4th	Heybridge Regatta
July 4th & 5th	Brightlingsea Regatta
July 25th	East Coast Race
August 22nd	Mersea Regatta

Cover; Jim Lawrence sailing onboard Blackbird on New Years Day watching Maria sail past Mersea Stone. Photo credit; Brian Croucher.





SAXONIA LO32 BY JAMIE BELLAMY-BOOTH

Saxonian on the Colne



There are 3 shareholders of Saxonian – Allegra, Rolando and me, Jamie.

I was 14 when I found out about Saxonian. I asked Pinky (owner of the smack Gracie CK46) why Saxonian had been left for a year and he said the owner Crispin had passed away. Crispin had sold little Mary CK252 to Pinky so that he could buy Saxonian.

I waited until I was 16 years old, which I thought was a sensible age to own an old sailing vessel, as I will be able to get a small income, go to college and specialise in something.

I met a guy called Alan Bird through Pinky down the hard and one day I asked him if 16 was a good age to own an historic vessel like Saxonian and Alan said yes! Alan said he was

only 14 when he had his first smack - Maud MN21. He said she leaked badly but that's because they're old and he used Sikaflex to seal up the leaks on the inside but it is expensive stuff to use.



Alan Bird

Whilst Dad, Pinky, Nick and I were on the hard with Gracie for several weeks working on her Alan was on the hard again and he said to me "you should definitely take on the Saxonian!" He mentioned he would help me do some work on her and provide a mooring. He was the one who inspired me to take her on. I asked him who had previously owned Sax and he said a man called 'Jim Lawrence'. I was confused as Pinky had said it was Crispin who had owned her, but he explained that Jim had sold it to Crispin and took good care her. He then mentioned someone called 'Chris Kerrison' who owned it before Jim and he owns land at East Mersea where Pyefleet is. Alan told me Chris spent about £100,000 on Saxonian to race it after her working days and that's why she was quick back then because she had new rigging but he sailed her too close to others when he raced so caused a few issues amongst the fleet!

Alan inspired me to own an old vessel at 16 years old ... which has now come true! Cheers Alan. Our quote "ain't no one gonna stop me".

Saxonian passing Wivenhoe



I got in touch with National Historical Ships and emailed them asking who owned Saxonian and they emailed me two numbers – a lady called Allegra (Crispin's sister) and Rolando (Crispin's wife). I asked them if I could take on the Sax and they said yes! They both were hoping someone like me would come along. I also got told I suited the same background as Crispin because when he was younger, he wanted to sail and own an old vessel that's why he spent all his time down at London docks. I also told them about my background and they said I was just like him! They told Jim Lawrence about me and they all agreed that I was an absolute gem to take her on!! I have now become great friends with Jim.



Jamie aloft on Saxonía



Allegra and Rolando help me as a team to get her sailing again and they're doing everything they can to help me achieve my dream.

Jim is also my inspiration! He helps me when I'm stuck doing some jobs on her when I am unsure of what to do. When I started to find out about Saxonía's history (with thanks to

Heather Howard) - she was built in 1937, last fishing craft built by Aldous Yard. She broke adrift in a gale from her mooring at Leigh-on-Sea in 1946 and was found safe three days later adrift seventy miles out in the North Sea. Info in Traditions of East Angles by Robert Simper.

So, I have a 3rd share on Saxonía and maintain her and I'm going to race and charter her. Before Crispin passed away, he said to Allegra that Sax would last 100 more years - and now it will!

I have brought Saxonía up to a good condition, secured her in the mud berth by replacing all the chains with Pinky and I have enough knowledge on how to maintain an old vessel. I learnt a lot helping on Mary having burnt the paint off her decks, replanked, caulked, sanded, painted and serviced her engine and more. Every little job is a big job on a smack! I have definitely learnt the basic knowledge.

Why would I want to take a bawley on? You may well ask... I think Bawleys are something else and they have a lot of advantages over a smack and Saxonía needs saving so that she can last another 100+ years and nothing can replace the 19th century now so these old vessels have to last as long as they can into the future.

My plan is to join Pioneer Trust and learn how to boat build, so when the time comes to rebuild Saxonía I will have more knowledge than I will ever have and that she will be completely saved. These old vessels are beautiful and can't be replaced.



Saxonía in her West Mersea mud berth

At the moment I'm going to make the most of Saxonía and race her at Pin Mill this year and then round the East Coast including Mersea Week. So, by then, I would have had enough time to sail her before it comes to rebuilding her which will take a few years so it'll be a while before she comes back onto the water and then I'll charter her after that!



THE PELDON ROSE BY TOM COCKLE

The Peldon Rose is an historic inn on the entrance to the causeway separating the mainland from Mersea Island. The Rose Inn, as it was formally known, was originally a coaching inn first registered in 1454 but dates back to 1380. The pond was used by smugglers to hide their booty.

There is a smugglers tunnel to Ray Island. In 1750 the other pub, The Dog and Pheasant, was a thatched cottage which is still standing and was the original Peldon's village pub. It was later used as a restaurant but converted again to a holiday let in 2009. It was a 17th century tavern.

Around the year 1870, the Excise Men were getting more aware of the possible comings and goings.



The Rose circa 1900



The smugglers all got together and spread the word that these Excise Men were getting too close for comfort and visited the area too often so they set about gossip that a big landing of contraband was happening on a certain night. All the Excise Men got so excited that they banded together in the long boat to catch the smugglers

in the act. Oh no, the smugglers, a brutal lot, stood guard and waited for the authority to all get in the long boat and when on the water, the smugglers all descended on them with their weapons and slit all their throats from ear to ear and left them all for dead, 24 of them.

If locals saw smugglers, or even one, they would tell their wife and children to 'watch the wall' so they did not see the smuggler, called a tubman, pass by with possibly a half anker tied to them. A half anker carried spirits from the coast, they were small oval barrels tied together in pairs, one on his back, one on his chest with straps over his shoulders. The spirits in the smugglers barrels was stronger so the cargo could be watered down to make one and a half furkins (barrels) out of one furkin. The Rose Inn was damaged by the 1884 earthquake.

Mersea is an old English word - Meresig - meaning island of the pool. The smugglers got a lantern on the coast and swayed it back and forth to make it look like another boat nearer to the coast and thought that they could venture closer, it would be safe from rocks underwater but as soon as the boat got stuck on these rocks, the smugglers were good and ready to take over the boat. It was not just whisky that was to be had, it was silk, tobacco, anything that sold. The silk was used in people's coffins if not for the rich to purchase for clothing.



Now called The Peldon Rose



BONA LO178 BY JOHN ARCHER

Bona at home

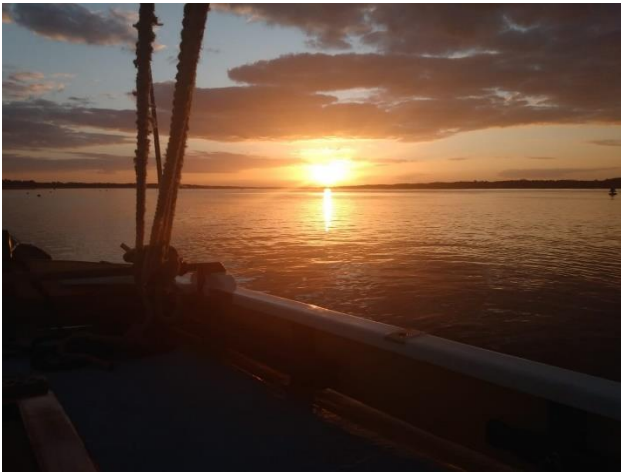


I never had the chance to meet Ian Smith but I am very aware of what kind of man he was. When the task of the moment is at hand I find myself talking to Ian asking him why did you do it like that? After 4 years of ownership there is only one answer to this 'I did it like that because it works and someone someday will be able to fix it!'. They say boats have a character... this boat not only has a character it has the omni present deceased previous owner making sure work is accomplished in a manner lead by example.

Sailing a Bawley is the most rewarding, satisfying, dangerous, scary and fun thing I have ever done. Some days it seems like Bona



Bona at Wrabness



and I have been arguing and she definitely does not want to come out and play. Other days it's like being with your best friend after a couple of pints of the good stuff in glorious sunshine. I put the former squarely on Bona and not my lack of sailing ability. I keep Bona at Walberswick and for those of you who hail from south of the Orwell that is a place near Edinburgh. She and I are very happy there, we have enough water to float, a harbour master that disapproves of sailing in the harbour and many good pubs.

Since owning Bona I have experienced some of the trials and tribulations that are inherent to owning a 1903 wooden boat. My woodwork, metalwork and painting ability are very slowly improving and my admiration for the effort of other wooden boat owners has increased immensely.

Bona and I have had some adventures. Two years ago, we made it onto the Rhine and very almost got to the German Border. Last year she chose to re-enact the plot from Riddle of The Sands, doing all the German Friesen Islands and spending a few days weather bound in Heligoland. Heligoland is famed for the largest TNT explosion ever set by man. After the war the royal engineers took it on themselves to destroy the German Submarine bases. On doing so they left a rather large hole in the island and reportedly the explosion could be heard from Oxford. Now the place is like Bicester shopping village is to the people of Oxford, the Germans visit for tax free cigarettes and alcohol along with discount designer wear, a very strange place indeed!



Bona at Heligoland

Bona at Heligoland



Some have said that a Bawley is an estuary boat and does not belong in a NW 5-6 in the German Bight. I would totally agree with this although at no point did Bona share the same view. 81 miles and 50 hours later she arrived at the first Netherlands Wooden Ships festival having kept her crew safe and well - almost to the point of enjoyment - and was given pride of place and enjoyed the admiration of many.

I do not think I will ever learn to sail Bona in the manner of Ian Smith or Abraham 'Bona' Kirby. The more time we spend together on the water the less apprehensive I become and the more I enjoy it. Hopefully one day in the distant future I will earn the right to call myself a Bawley sailor.

Yours Faithfully, John Archer, Custodian 'Bona'



THE PIONEER FOOD PROJECT BY PENNY YOULL

What did smack crews eat in Victorian times?

The team from Brightlingsea U3A and the Pioneer Sailing Trust, which researched and reproduced the clothing of the Pioneer crew in late Victorian times (written up in the book 'Oysters and Oilskins') is now turning its attention to their food! We would like to understand more about how offshore seafarers looked after themselves in tough and basic conditions in the 1880s.

We know the oystermen were away dredging in the North Sea for up to two weeks at a time - sometimes more. What provisions would they have had on board? How were these stored and preserved? Who was responsible for supplies - or did crew members have to provide for themselves? Did they have a range or open fire? What did they cook? Were there particular recipes? What equipment and utensils? What about fuel? Who did the cooking? And so on!

If you have information, contacts, references - anything which might help us or would like to know more - do please get in touch with Penny Youll youwalk@btinternet.com



www.u3a.org.uk



www.pioneersailingtrust.org.uk



LILIAN LO158 BY TOM CURTIS

Lilian is a 30ft clinker Thames Bawley built in 1869 at Waters, Gravesend of Oak on Oak. I was given ownership of her in the spring of 2017, at the age of 15. I had spent many evenings after school tarring up her sides, but quickly got frustrated that I didn't know enough about shipwrighting to do any of the larger scale woodwork on her. Because of this I was very



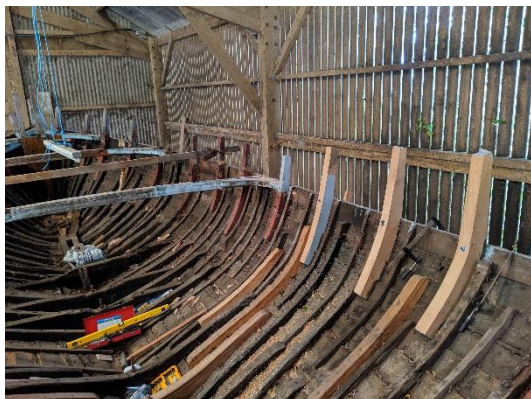
interested in getting some kind of boat building training. Around the time of thinking about this, it was time for me to do work experience for my school. My parents had suggested Pioneer Sailing Trust and after looking them up on the internet and seeing their current project at the time (Priscilla), I knew I wanted to go there. I did get the place and completed a week long work experience, making a wooden paddle,

amongst other things. At the end of the week I got called into the office and told that they would like me to come back as an apprentice once I left school. This was the perfect scenario for me. It is local to where I live, I was going to get paid and it is much more of a working yard than other boatbuilding courses, something I thought was important as I wanted to get work in a working yard once I finished the course. I am now two and a half years into my four-year apprenticeship



there, and I'm loving it. I have learnt so much, not only about boatbuilding but about sailing as well. Mick Allen (the former head shipwright) was an excellent shipwright and a very good teacher. He taught me from knowing very little to taking on the role of Gig manager in the beginning of March. Mick has since retired and will be sincerely missed.

Since learning all my new skills in woodworking I have been slowly making progress on Lilian starting with the deconstruction of the deck and deck structure, as it was all too rotten to keep. I have replaced a number of stanchions and a few frames and floor timbers. I have recently cut out a new beam shelf ready to steam into the boat and just brought enough wood for all of the full width deck beams. I plan to keep all of her planking as her former owner David Patient had already done this work. Other than that, I will need to replace all of her floor timbers, a few more frames and all new deck structure, bulwarks, spars and rigging. I don't really have a plan on how long it is going to take me to do all this work but hopefully in the near future she will be on the water taking part in all the local events.



Since working at the trust I have been involved in some sailing on 'Pioneer' starting as bosun and working up to mate. Luckily due to this my name got mentioned to Cyril (The skipper of the Thames sailing barge 'Thalatta') and I went away for a week as 3rd hand with him. I absolutely loved my time on board and wanted to come back again as soon as possible. The season after I got asked if I would like to be mate for a weeks trip. As you might expect I was quite nervous as the only experience I had was the week trip I had done previously, but I took the

opportunity. I had so much fun that week and loved to be learning all these new skills. Cyril is a brilliant skipper and patient enough for me to be learning on the job. I really have learnt an incredible amount with him, from never stepping foot on a barge to sailing along as mate under full sails in just 2 weeks. Not only this but recognising that sailing is a very small part in the grand scheme of running a charter barge and that entertaining and looking after the guests is far more important. Of course, my Dad (Gus Curtis) is also very happy that I have gained all these skills in sailing as I am now far better crew for him on our family Bawley Gladys.

Gladys will have been sailing 10 years this May since my Dad and Step-Grandad (Joe Dunett) rebuilt her. Looking back, it is amazing to think how much we have all learnt. Obviously being 9 years old when we first sailed her I wasn't much use, but over the years me and my dad have made a great team together and think nothing of it to charge out the Orwell under full sail just between the two of us, something we would have never dreamed of only 4 years ago. Always having Gladys around to sail and hone my skills on has been amazing. I love the slow process of setting up a boat just right to get it as efficient as possible. It had been great taking part in all the races on the East Coast and although I love sailing around as a family and exploring the coast which is ultimately what I prefer to do, there is nothing better than racing to get a boat as



efficient and set up properly as possible. Learning all the little details that make or break a race has been amazing fun and winning the 2019 Pin Mill Smack race really put the icing on the cake. Hopefully before too long we will all be allowed out of the water to race again!

VARUNA CK442 BY RICHARD PATTISON

Varuna's Progress: Day Dream or Nightmare

It was May 2013 when Smack Dock Soundings last carried news of Varuna's rebuild so more than 6 years later it is time to update readers on her progress. In May 2013, she was partially planked up and I had just departed to Shetland to skipper the 1900 Herring drifter Swan. Swan LK243 is as iconic to the Shetland fishing as Pioneer is to ours. Both are similar length and ketch rigged and both were rescued and preserved by men and women of vision. Swan is of heavier construction and her gear is heavier making for a harder pull when hoisting sail. Today both act as iconic reminders of their respective fishing heritage and each introduces youngsters not just to this heritage and the sea but also a range of life skills and lessons for life ashore or afloat. I had a wonderful time skippering out of Shetland with passages to Norway, Orkney, Fair Isle and Portsoy to name just a few.



Whilst away work continued on the planking in much the same vein as my last article describes. I left Shetland at the end of October and was back as the full-time labourer for Caroline and a month later we came to the day of the shutter! This has always been something of a milestone in any build or rebuild and so a couple of friends turned up and after driving home the final spike we headed to the pub for a small celebratory lunch and beer.

For me this was a significant day and moment but of course David and Caroline knew better and the

following day we started work on the beam shelf. In essence, not a significantly different process from fitting a plank - if anything a little easier and faster than planking up. It was completed before the Christmas festivities and the silly party season.

In January 2014, I had the chance to return to South Georgia. Friends had bareboat chartered a Challenge 67 for a year and taken her to Antarctica. I had the opportunity to fly out and join them for a month or so. I could either fly to Ushuaia in Terra del Fuego or the Falkland Islands. I elected the latter and returned to some old haunts before slipping for the 900-mile passage to South Georgia where we spent a wonderful fortnight but that is another story. This was not a significant impact because over the winter work slowed whilst the yard focused on winter maintenance jobs. This had always been the agreement that Varuna was worked on around other jobs.

It was late summer before we returned to focus on her and when we did work progressed quickly and was tangible and evident. Caroline and I were getting the stringers made and fitted.



Originally, Varuna had not had stringers but since the timber was available, it seemed sensible that she should have them now.

Then it was time to start on the deck beams. With an eye to budget and the availability of suitably grained timber, we elected to laminate the majority of the beams. Whilst David did the skilled work of determining curvature and building the jig, I had the labourer's role in rough cutting the planks. These were then finished and scratched up before gluing them into shape on the jig. Of course, I was itching to get on but the reality is that they needed to be built one at a time and left in clamps on the jig before the next one could be produced. Finally, we were ready to start fitting them. Once again, I was to stand in awe of the shipwright's skill. Not only must

the beams have a consistent curvature thwart ships but so too must they produce a run to the waist so that water clears and doesn't collect where there are no scuppers to clear them. From my earliest days in my father's workshop where I was supposedly helping (in reality watching and getting in the way) with his amateur carpentry building bookshelves and cupboards, it had been driven into me to



“cut to a line”. Now I watched as David and Caroline eyed up and took a little from here and there so that batons ran true and consistently. Gradually the lattice of beams, half beams and carlings took shape. I watched, as David would appear to casually create a joint but in reality, each was a masterpiece of accuracy and simplicity. As the lattice grew and took shape, she strengthened and my spirits rose. All too soon, winter was on us and once again work slowed.

In late spring 2015, we started work on the stanchions and covering boards. The now complete lattice of deck beams, half beams and carlings made for an easy platform and whilst work continued apace, progress appeared slow. All that changed in the second half of the year when the deck planks were prepared and we started to lay the deck. There was a momentary regret that the beauty of the lattice was being sealed in and all that intricate precision work was being locked in for ever. On the other hand, there was an undeniable joy at being able to walk on an ever-increasing area. Once the deck was laid, the knees to brace the bitts were fitted and fixed and then the windlass was fitted. It had been hoped to use the original one but in the end it proved too rotten to save and so a new one was made. The rest of the deck furniture was also made up and the combings fitted and hatch covers made.

In 2015-16, the services ran a circumnavigation and although I had left the Army, I was eligible for consideration of a berth – not least, because I had some tickets that helped meet the minimum manning criteria. I applied for the only leg that I could really justify taking time away for – The Southern Ocean leg, Auckland to Punta del Este in Uruguay. I was laughed out of court and told no chance and whilst they would add my name on a reserve list, I was not really in with a chance. Anyway, I had asked and at least I had tried. 8 weeks before departure, I thought it might just be worth a phone call but I was thanked and told no thanks. Not to worry it meant I could get on with Varuna and work. Then 4 weeks before departure I received a phone call asking if I was still available and so once again Varuna took a back seat to going sailing and I



flew out to New Zealand for another sailing adventure and joined the vessel as a watch leader; lots of adventures but not for retelling today. On return, I was full of enthusiasm and excitement. However, I was not prepared for the news on my return that David would retire in a year's time. It was like a body blow and an air of gloom descended on me and across the project. Quite rightly, David was now focused on closing a business and Caroline on securing other opportunities. Work slipped and other priorities took over. The team started to fall apart. Finishing Varuna morphed into launching Varuna. Meanwhile there were about 1500 plugs to make and fix so that the deck could be finished. The capping rail and bulwarks appeared.

Whilst in Shetland I had sailed a couple of times to Fair Isle. The small harbour sits below the RSPB lodge which doubles as a community centre and in the evening, there were three or four ladies sitting chatting as they spun wool on their treadle driven hand spinning wheels. It led me to wonder if spinning oakum was a possibility and I discovered that it could be spun but the next challenge was to find someone who could spin it in the volumes needed. A couple of quick calculations suggested that for hull and deck Varuna would need 7000 feet of oakum. After several false dawns I found someone who could do the work and to start with we got a range of samples spun up and selected the correct diameter for what was needed. Several weeks later, I went to pick up bags of spun oakum produced to a far more consistent standard than it could be rolled, at far less cost of both time and money.



In fact, David worked for more than a year and in summer 2017 we finished caulking and stopping both deck and hull. A flurry of activity saw the deck painted and the hull tarred. In September, she was launched at David's retirement party, a gathering of east coast smack "worthies". Varuna's launch was a moment of obvious celebration and ought to have been a high

point of progress. In many ways it was also the end of an era and the team that had rebuilt the hull dissolved. Caroline headed to the Pioneer Trust and although it was also David's swansong moment and marked the start of his retirement, he went on to shape the mast. Although I had very generously been offered options on old masts I eventually settled on a tree and a new one.

I did not really know what to do or how to do it. Following the launch my 80 year old mother and I chipped at some rusty ballast blocks, it was an illusion of progress because I did not know what to do. People were ready with their advice and wise words of "won't be long now" or "nearly there". Progress slowed, I felt alone and utterly ineffectual, head to wind and no way on her. Sometime between Christmas and New Year, I took a phone call telling me that the tent had been blown down. I did not believe it and thought it an exaggeration. I remember arriving at the yard in the rain one evening and seeing it for myself. It was utterly destroyed. I drove home more depressed than ever. Financially I was broke, there was no team, it was beyond my





skill set and I had no idea on how to progress. I prevaricated because Varuna had become a millstone. I had neither money, expertise nor any idea on how to move forward. Winter turned to spring and still I could not find the will to work on her. I knew ballasting would be the next task and everyone had some advice for me and told me how easy it would be and what I should do.

I decided to cut my losses and settled my mind on what was the minimum price that I would sell her for. Yes, I would lose but at least the root of all my problems would be gone. Three people came to see her, one couple made me an offer it was just below what I had decided to accept and so I played it long, they were not in a rush and I wondered whether to just to take the hit and walk away. Varuna would be an expensive mistake but at least the worry would be gone and I might be able to enjoy Hope without worrying how the next bill would be paid. Winter turned to spring to summer to autumn.



My friend Stuart Martin who has volunteered more time on Varuna than anyone else was chomping at the bit to be involved in the next job whatever that was. Therefore, I told him there was not going to be one and that I was resolved to sell her. He enlisted a couple of other friends and together they provided a lift and the carrot. The other source of help was the stick, characteristically delivered by Noddy Cardy, who made it quite clear that my “crap” clogging up his yard was unacceptable and that unless there was a tangible change then he would simply crane it aboard Varuna and that would be that. Between them it seemed to work.

Varuna’s article is to be continued in our next Journal SDS85....



JOHN MILGATE

Society members and the wider traditional boat scene will be greatly saddened to learn of the death of John Milgate. John died at home on the 22nd March. His death was not Covid related but in the current situation his life could not be commemorated as might have been anticipated. A skilled shipwright with a passion for all matters related to traditional wooden boats, he will be greatly missed. The Society sends its deepest condolences to Pat and his children Angus and Charlotte. A full obituary will appear in the next issue.



JOHN MILGATE
14.01.31 - 22.03.20

John passed away peacefully at home after a long and full life building, restoring and racing wooden boats

Beloved Husband, Father, Grandfather, Brother, Uncle, Cousin and dear Friend

He and his skills will be greatly missed