

# SMACK DOCK SOUNDINGS

THE JOURNAL OF THE COLNE SMACK PRESERVATION SOCIETY



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[www.colnesmack.co.uk](http://www.colnesmack.co.uk)



Bringing memories to the old and lessons to the young

## THE CHAIRMAN - SPARSE WORDS • MARTIN DOE

Well...it's been a strange season...

and we managed the Colne Match on September 12th, superbly run by Paul Winter again and with, understandably, a low number of barges attending. We can only look forward to next year, albeit with some trepidation, and meanwhile will hold a 'virtual' AGM to conform with requirements.

Keep safe everybody.

Notice is hereby given that **THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** of the Society will take place on Saturday, November 21st at 2pm.

Due to the Government restrictions on the number of people who may congregate at any one time, this year the Meeting will be run as 'virtual', meaning that papers will be circulated in good time to you all, whether by email or post, and we hope you will forbear from posing any questions. It has been a largely negative year, with the exception of an unofficial race on September 12th, but we will conform to the requirement that an AGM will be held.

Martin Doe, Hon Secretary.

### A NOTE FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY – JOHN GILLARD

This year we have welcomed into membership of the Society seven new members including Josh Danziger, Steve Nesbitt, Thomas Curtis, Shariana Manning, Jane Harman & Colin Singleton. We hope you will enjoy a long relationship with us.

For any membership enquiries I can be contacted on [members@colnesmack.co.uk](mailto:members@colnesmack.co.uk)

Committee Members;

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

Editor; Elly Howlett - [elck222@whoever.com](mailto:elck222@whoever.com)

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

### Events coming up;

**October 31st** Turkey Race

**TBC** Harris Rally

Cover; Gracie CK46 on her way to the start of the Colne Match. Photo credit; Mark Whittaker.



## VARUNA CK442 BY RICHARD PATTISON

Continued from SDS84...

The first job to be tackled was ballasting her. An entirely lead based solution was unaffordable, internet searches led to some sources of punchings but finally I found some old ballast at a scrapyards in Cornwall and ordered a couple of tons. I had previously been collecting the odd bits of lead from friendly builders. Stuart and I started to bash it into some form of compactness with the idea of stuffing between keel and keelson. As we worked and started to make some tangible progress - my attitude started to change. I realised that the bashed lead was an illusionary progress and that my old friend and shipmate "windy" Gale was right with his often-repeated adage "do it nice or do it twice". I need to smelt it properly. I was nervous but Noddy



and others reassured me that it was not that difficult and he talked me through it. It seemed simple enough but for me it was all new. I got some moulds made and the Pioneer Trust kindly allowed me the use of a burner and over about a week I smelted the lead and formed ingots. They were long days; I would typically make just under 30 ingots of about 20 lbs each day. Loading the car to the limit of suspension, driving from Mersea to Brightlingsea, smelting at best pace, loading the car with ingots, driving to Maldon and then carrying them below and stacking them. Not for the first-time... little steps made big steps. Two tons of iron ingots arrived from Cornwall. They needed to be cleaned and painted. They too had to be stacked below. I could carry one at a time and getting them aboard and below was time consuming and back breaking but it was progress.

"Just concrete it in" was the comment from just about everyone but I had never even mixed a

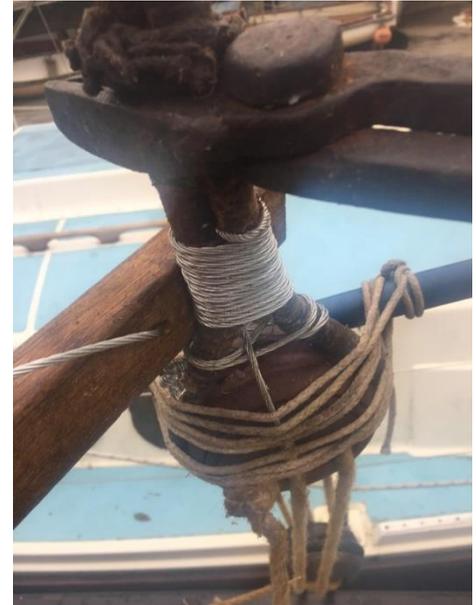
bucket of concrete before, understood nothing about consistence, levelling or working with it. Once again Noddy strengthened my back bone and talked me through it. He also put me in touch with a source of punchings to add to the mix. My fear of the job was twofold - my own capability being one but the other being by ability to make a monumental mistake that would be permanent or at least difficult to rectify. The greatest fear was Noddy sensing a return to inactivity and a lack of progress. I hired a concrete mixer and as the rain started - so did I. I completed the first batch got it in buckets and somehow got them below and into the first prepared bay. I was mixing my second batch when Dougie Scurry walked by with his dog. We chatted and he asked who was helping me, "no one" I replied. Twenty minutes later he was back in his oilskins. For the next two days Doug cheered my soul and mixed concrete, between us we got it across the gangplank a bucket at a time and below. Slowly the securing of the fixed ballast started to take shape. Like a lot of jobs, it was the first steps that proved the most daunting and gradually Varuna started to settle down.

Ten months after the despair of the destroyed tent, there was some tangible progress. I'd acquired some heavy lead blocks encased in steel from a boat that was being broken up. I knew they were heavy and I could barely move them and certainly couldn't lift them. Rory Howlett



and George Hutley appeared one Sunday morning and made me look very old and weak. They shifted the lead as if it was balsa wood and stacked it below. With now about 5 tons of ballast aboard, she started to behave less like a displacement sailing dinghy and more like a smack. With her now sitting lower and sufficiently stable we could step the mast – it was shaped but had no fittings but just dropping it into the keel and rigging temporary shrouds made her look different and from a practical perspective allowed a makeshift boom tent to protect her over winter.

In 2019 the mast came out and the hounds and caps fitted. I got another couple of tonnes of ballast from Cornwall and these too were cleaned and painted before being carried below and stacked. The experts declared her correctly trimmed and we measured up for the standing rigging. Tom and Jasmin from TS Rigging took me under their wing and I became a labourer as I learnt more about parcelling, serving and seizing but they oversaw the work and made up the standing rigging whilst I did some of the more menial jobs but I was learning and getting involved. The traditionalist in me won out and notwithstanding the ease of splicing, the upper deadeyes are seized in. There are 18 seizings to secure them and having been shown how to do them I was let loose with regular inspections confirming my progress (or otherwise). More often it was otherwise and even I started to tell when my efforts were below par. To get 18 seizings I suspect that I must have done more than 25. With the finished main mast now stepped and the basic standing rigging in place Varuna started to look the part. It was possible, without too much imagination, to think she had been stripped for the winter rather than still on an initial journey of fitting out.



By late 2019 we had temporarily rigged the essential running rigging to hoist the gaff and run out the bowsprit so that she could be measured for sails. I had hoped that we would sail last year but it became clear that that was unrealistic.

And then there was Covid. My paid employment came to an end and I became the carer for my vulnerable mother and went into shielding mode. Work on Varuna halted and when lockdown eased, I still felt reluctant to re-engage whilst mum remained vulnerable. But on 12 July and against the odds, she managed to get onboard Hope - the 16ft Shuttlewood Oyster skiff that she and Dad had commissioned in the late 50s and on which I had first sailed aged 3. We had a



memorable afternoon sailing up Peldon Creek. She came alive and came back to shore with a renewed confidence and optimism. We bent our minds to how we would get her aboard Varuna for a sail. On 1 August she returned to her home and I was able to start back on Varuna. A friend helped me the following weekend and we knocked up some temporary sole bearers and stacked timber below freeing up the deck and allowing work to start on a pattern for the horse, sheer poles, table and pin rails. The light at the end of the tunnel was becoming brighter even if challenges remained and then the bombshell; Mum cut loose her painter in mid-August. There is no point in regrets but it is a huge sadness to me that she will now only sail on Varuna in spirit. My unspoken desire to finish Varuna so that she could sail on her has now been replaced with an overwhelming



desire to finish Varuna in tribute to her because without her support and encouragement restoring Varuna might never have been more than a pipe dream.

So, there it is, warts and all. Of course, Varuna is not a nightmare and neither has been the project but there has been some heavy weather, long watches and sleepless nights on passage but so too have there been some wonderful sunrises and sunsets. The heavy weather has been lightened by two things - firstly the thought that Varuna will be around for another 100 years as a tribute to our forefathers and our maritime heritage and secondly the kindness of people who have kept me going, and kept her going, without them this rebuild would have foundered long ago. When she finally sails it will be in no small measure thanks to them that another smack joins the fleet of these iconic but perhaps endangered vessels.

I'll keep you posted and welcome you aboard.

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## OYSTERS AND OILSKINS REVIEW BY G MORLEY

The book positively advances readers general knowledge of the subject. Little work has previously been attempted to collect data on the clothing of fishermen from head to toe and hints towards the social and working lives of their families back home. Wives knitting by the quayside anxious for their safe return whilst others in their cottages knitting and sewing to send parcels of Gunsey's (or Knit Frocks in Polperro or Jereys) all over the country for much needed income in case their husbands come home with a poor catch for their efforts. It certainly shows to be male dominated.

I found the book so easy to read cover to cover but oh so interesting taking it chapter by chapter to read once again bringing family life, the clack of knitting needles up and down the lanes and the empty chair by the open fire. It certainly made my mind drift. A truly lovely book to have on a shelf in your own home and a good discussion topic. Congratulations to all involved.

*£9.99 available from Spirals in Brightlingsea, Red Lion Books in Colchester, Wivenhoe Bookshop and on eBay. All proceeds go to the Pioneer Sailing Trust.*

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## GAMECOCK F76

The Gamecock is one of only two or three remaining examples of a Whitstable Oyster Yawl still capable of going to sea. Gamecock was built in 1907 in Whitstable, is 42 feet long, and has most of her original fittings. She has been registered as a National Historic Vessel and is currently



Gamecock - photo credit Seamus Masters

undergoing a painstaking restoration thanks to the efforts of our expert team of volunteers and to the generosity of Whitstable Maritime supporters.

In the late 19th century and early years of the 20th century there were up to 80 oyster yawls dredging the Whitstable coastline and at one point these ships were responsible for supplying London with half of its oysters.



Gamecock's working life was spent dredging in the Swale Estuary where she was moored to a metal screw driven in to the hard sea bed. Storms and collisions were part and parcel of her working life and the Gamecock herself was hit twice while under previous ownership. She was repaired, as was the custom, by adding a second layer to the hull. Similarly, money was saved by storing sails and other gear below deck in the months when oysters were out of season. This cost-saving practice led to damp-rot on the underside of the deck as the air did not circulate. So, the boat and its owner struggled on. Now, it has fallen to Whitstable Maritime to keep her away from the deadly embrace of the soft silt of The Swale where many a craft has found a grave!

In order to carry out this restoration we are looking for more volunteers. If you think you can help us please get in touch with Peter Kalopsidiotis at [peter@ptgengland.com](mailto:peter@ptgengland.com) / 07899 846123.

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## PORTRAIT OF A SPECIAL PERSON BY JIM LAWRENCE

Crispin Yarker was, without doubt, a man of special virtues and talents, he was a passionate and extremely accomplished musician and had, at one time, been First Violinist in a top Italian orchestra. He could also speak that language fluently. When Crispin played that violin, everyone stopped what they were doing and just listened.

He also loved the sea and first arrived in Brightlingsea in the Brixham Trawler Regard (ex Our Boy). The vessel, at that time, was owned by a Mr Pearson and made her home here in our dock. With Crispin in command she attended our Sail & Picnic events and made a very useful contribution. Sadly, Mr Pearson died and Regard was sold away – back to Brixham in fact – where her old name was restored. Crispin was also a highly skilled computer operator and so got a very good job in running the whole computer complex for St Thomas' Hospital in London, this shows the talents of the man.

Crispin, was at heart, a countryman and did not enjoy city life so for his recreation he bought the little smack Mary CK252 which at least got him back to Brightlingsea. I was sailing Saxonia at the time and was building up a small charter business. Crispin would sometimes come as mate with me and we discussed whether he should buy Saxonia from me and take on the small but growing business. He could then leave London forever. Also, he was madly in love locally – so why not? Crispin had no trouble in selling Mary to Pinky at West Mersea.

Then a lovely daughter was born and named Gabriella (Ria) whom he adored and she, likewise, adored Crispin. They were so good for each other. But unfortunately, the association with his partner broke up and it became a long and protracted separation. Crispin then began to let Saxonia get into a bad state of repair and sometimes not turn up for a charter. I was quite tough with him about this and tried to keep him up to the mark.

It is only now when I read his lovely letter to me of the 14<sup>th</sup> May 2017 that I know that he respected me for this and that our friendship (which never faltered) meant so much to him. He met and married- in his own words now – “the beautiful Rolanda” and moved away to Wales. He had, by this time, contracted terminal cancer and died on the 24<sup>th</sup> December 2017 aged 63.





This story seems so incomplete, I know so much, yet so little but I do know that Crispin was a kind, warm hearted and loving person and that he died loving and being loved by his beautiful Rolanda.

Fairwell shipmate, Jim Lawrence.



## PRIMROSE CK273

Photo credit primrose\_pilgrims



Primrose is currently circumnavigating Britain with owner Josh, son Ben and crew Ash. They had experienced quite rough seas on their way to the Orwell, experiencing thunderstorms and the need for drysuits... They have now made their way down to Falmouth after



Photo credit primrose\_pilgrims

many stops on the way for maintenance, rest and being weather bound.

You can follow them on their Instagram page [primrose\\_pilgrims](https://www.instagram.com/primrose_pilgrims) or follow them live on [share.garmin.com/primrose](https://share.garmin.com/primrose).



## COLNE MATCH

It was touch and go whether it would happen or not this year, but after careful consideration the CSPS committee decided to go ahead with the match on the 12<sup>th</sup> September. All barge, smacks and MFOB's (Mersea Fishing Open Boats) were invited to race but there would be no activity ashore like the usual supper and prize giving.

First start at 9.30am were the barges, three arrived although five were expected but Repertor was neaped in Faversham having attended the (sadly cancelled due to weather) Swale Match a couple of weeks prior and Marjorie had last minute work commitments. Blue Mermaid was the first



Lady of the Lea & Ironsides  
Photo credit James Hamilton



ADC CK431, Priscilla CK437 & Kate CK52 Photo credit Sandy Miller

barge over the start line, followed by Lady of the Lea and Ironsides. A good westerly breeze saw them fly off to Colne Bar. Next up were the smacks at 10am. Ten smacks and bawleys made it to Brightlingsea, with Bona L0178 wanting to sail the course rather than race, left nine to start. First over the line was Gracie CK46, hotly persued by the others. The breeze was still a good 4 so they too, shot off to the bar.



Next up at 10.30 were the MFOB's, due to the gusty wind and sea state, a shorter inshore course was given. Seven turned up, and had a seamless start with Gipsy being the first over the line.



From L to R Joanne OZ1, Faith, Gipsy CK79, Victoria, Thrift WM3 & Jack CK91. Photo credit James Hamilton.

Transcur - Photo credit Seamus Masters



Victoria - Photo credit James Hamilton

Priscilla - Photo credit Seamus Masters





MFOBs rounding the first mark - Photo credit James Hamilton



ADC reaching to Colne Bar - Photo credit Seamus Masters

All the classes seemed to be enjoying the breeze until the smacks and barges started to head for the Wallet Spitway mark.... then the breeze died off... all were becalmed. This made for fantastic photography, great rib riding but frustrating for the crews who had been experiencing what was some of the best sailing weather this year.

Blue Mermaid had made it round the spitway mark, followed by Alberta. Kate and ADC were having fun over the Buxey sands but Kate eventually made it past first and headed back towards Colne Bar. Mary Amelia and Gracie decided to retire and Pioneer was bringing up the rear.



The wind in the Colne, however, stayed a constant 4, the only thing changing was the sea state so the MFOB's were zooming around in flat conditions, with varying coloured spinnakers and the fleet separating out.

Gipsy had a clear lead and finished in 1<sup>st</sup> place, followed by Joanne in 2<sup>nd</sup> and Thrift taking 3<sup>rd</sup> on the water. Faith was the last to cross the finish line.

With the breeze beginning to fill back in, Blue Mermaid raced up the Colne to take 1<sup>st</sup> place. Ironsides followed later taking 2<sup>nd</sup>, then Lady of the Lea took home 3<sup>rd</sup>.



Gipsy - Photo credit James Hamilton



Blue Mermaid - photo credit Sandy Miller

As the smacks started to head back around Colne Bar towards the finish line, Alberta had a clear lead. Storming past the committee boat on the start line, she took 1<sup>st</sup> place and the much wanted Cock of the Colne trophy. As we looked out for the 2<sup>nd</sup> smack... along came Kate, enjoying a fresh afternoon breeze with all smiles on deck.

ADC then came home 3<sup>rd</sup> going like the clappers with a very happy Joe Harman at the helm. She hasn't raced since 2003, so to come out and race after only a few test sails, they did really well to take home a cup without too much drama onboard.

4<sup>th</sup> home was the beautiful Gladys who took home the Rose Bowl which is for the 1<sup>st</sup> bawley home.

Transcur was the next smack home closely followed by Priscilla who was sporting her lovely new topsail. Pioneer was the last to

finish winning the Vernon Scott trophy.

We all needed to see these vessels gathering together again, albeit under stranger circumstances than normal. It may be the only race to have gone ahead this year due to government restrictions and bad weather stopping any other racing going ahead.



We would like to thank all those that came and safely crewed, skippered, admired, volunteered and photographed these wonderful vessels. A huge thanks to Mark at James Lawrence Sailmakers who gave us our winners penants for Blue Mermaid, Alberta & Gipsy – beautifully made and built to last and are always flown with pride. Without all of you, none of this would have happened and a big well done to Paul for organising it all.



Alberta - Photo credit Seamus Masters



Joanne, Faith, Thrift & Victoria -  
Photo credit James Hamilton



Gladys  
Photo credit Seamus Masters





Kate – photo credit Seamus Masters



From L to R - Kate, Priscilla, ADC, Alberta, Gracie & Transcur at the start of the Match  
Photo credit James Hamilton