

# SMACK DOCK SOUNDINGS

THE JOURNAL OF THE COLNE SMACK PRESERVATION SOCIETY



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Bringing memories to the old and lessons to the young

## THE CHAIRMAN • MARTIN DOE



We thought that 2020 began well and another vintage film night, sail and picnic and of course the Colne Match were in planning when everything but the latter went West. The AGM was deferred as you know.

As I write we have descended into Tier 4 with a full lockdown expected, However with the vaccination programme under way we may be able to

salvage more in 2021 and while a film night is very unlikely I hope a Sail and Picnic day would convince our members - and what a growth in numbers we are seeing - that we are still there, although the splendid Christmas Tree and lighting overall on Saxonia might have shown many of you that we still exist and you should have good reading in this issue of Smack Dock Soundings. Keep safe until at least Easter.

Photo credit to Colm O'Laoi for the wonderful Christmas smackdock picture.

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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;

- TBC Vintage Film Night
- TBC Smack dock working party
- TBC Rowhedge Regatta
- May 30<sup>th</sup> Blessing of the Waters
- TBC Sail & Picnic
- July 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> Brightlingsea Regatta
- July 17<sup>th</sup> Blackwater Match
- July 31<sup>st</sup> Swale Match

Cover; ADC chasing Alberta at the start of the Colne Match 2020, with Kate & Priscilla in hot pursuit. ©Sandy Miller Photography



## PHOTO COMPETITION

We decided to run a photo competition to raise the profile of the CSPA & Essex Heritage Workboats, and the prizes pulled in the entries. Some fantastic photos were entered, and a huge thanks goes to Sandy Miller & Seamus Masters for judging the top three;



Photo credit Geoff Watkins



Photo credit Cally Stubbs



First Prize, a day trip for 6 on SB Dawn, went to Geoff Watkins. His entry is the SB Edith May leaving her rather beautiful mooring in Lower Halstow, Kent.

Second Prize, a day trip for 4 on Maria CK21, went to Cally Stubbs. Callys entry was taken in 2019 onboard Maria at Mersea Week, so winning a day trip on a boat she already crews on probably isn't ideal but at least this time she can put her feet up!

Third prize, a day trip for 2 on Gipsy CK79, went to Colm O'Laoi. He took this beautiful picture of SB Dawn coming back from her sail cargo mission to Kent.



Photo credit Colm O'Laoi

Well done to the prizewinners! A huge thank you goes to all those that sent in their fantastic photographs, there was such a wide variety and it was a pleasure to look through them all.



## NATIONAL HISTORIC SHIPS



We are pleased to say that we are now part of the National Historic Ships Shipshape Network. This project aims to highlight all the historic vessel owners, skilled craftsmen, businesses, heritage organisations, training bodies and all those with an interest in Britain's maritime heritage and ship preservation.

We are at the top of their projects list for the East section;

<https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/shipshape-network/region/east>



## TRADITIONAL vs MODERN BY RICHARD PATTISON

Jim Lawrence offered to draw up a sail plan for Varuna and I was delighted to benefit from his experience and he to be included. For this he would need to come and take some measurements and use his eye and experience to consider the hull shape and so forth. We fixed a date when he would come down and take the measurements and I would take him and the team for a beer and lunch. Separately I was also approached by a software engineer from Kent University, who was developing a 3D laser programme, to model the hull shape and produce 3D virtual imagery that could then be entered into a computer programme to determine such qualities as stability curves and so forth. The project was primarily aimed at non-standard production vessels and Varuna seemed to fit the bill - would I mind if he came to use Varuna as a test piece? Well, I was delighted.



By coincidence, he asked to come on the same day as Jim and fortunately my corporate hospitality bill could stretch to an extra pint and pub grub. Whilst Jim and David sat over a brew in the workshop, the laser tripod was carefully levelled and positioned so as to allow a sweep of the hull. Eventually Jim said he ought to make a start and armed with his notebook and a tape measure headed to the tent. There was a lot of banter between Jim and David about who precisely had been responsible for

damaging the tap 30 years ago and that measurements now needed to start at the 7-inch mark. In the tent, care had to be taken to avoid disturbing the laser. Jim set to work with such comments as “do that look level?” or “no no that’s not at right angles” and the like, each subsequent measurement being carefully recorded in his notebook. An hour late we strolled down to the Queen’s Head leaving the laser to do its thing. On return it was buzzing away and I think needed to be repositioned. Late afternoon, we gathered round as the results were downloaded and sure enough there was the image. The difference between its measurements and Jim’s was less than a quarter of an inch. Slightly unfair, because they were doing different things but equally an interesting contrast on the pencil and ruler versus modern technology.



## PRINCE OF WALES

We are in need of some information on the Prince of Wales, a 30ft Colne River Police boat. The Colne River Police patrolled from 1890, having replaced the anchored watch smacks. These very nippy vessels would patrol the river, protecting the Oyster fishery and upholding law and order. The Oyster fishery had grown in numbers so it needed policing. Forty plus smacks



would dredge the area.

Their patrol area spread from the mouth of the river to the fishery buoy. At the peak of the season there could be as many as 200 fishermen, also known as dredgers, working the Oyster beds. Extensive research has been done on the

Victoria, who is moored up the creek in Brightlingsea, but little is known about the Prince of Wales. We have kindly been given a lot of information by Victoria’s previous owner, what we are looking for is her original layout and rig setup, and anything which can help us restore her



back to how she was when she was working. Any information on Mr Polly and how he designed them at Aldous would also be of interest. If you could email any information you have - that would be great. What was recommended was The Water Guard by Peter Fisher - a good read!

Prince of Wales is on the hard at Iron Wharf boatyard, I made a start but haven't been able to do much this year. The plan is to get her in the water in 2021, and then move her back to the Colne and rebuild her there. Thank you, Ben Staines [benstaines@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:benstaines@yahoo.co.uk).



## THE DOCK

For those who are unable to come and see us, this lovely bird's eye view was given to us by Colm O'Laoui, who is often seen flying his drone around the East Coast. This picture is extra special because we haven't seen such a wonderful dock brimming with Heritage for a long time!

From L to R – Pembeth, Fairy, Nellie, Dorana, Saxonia, Victory, Varuna, Ellen, Electron and SB Dawn under cover alongside the quay.



## POLLY BY JASMIN KLIMCKE

Jas - photo credit Lyndon March



As the new custodian to Polly, I would firstly like to say a huge thank you to everybody who has helped me and the kind words I have received, it has been overwhelming. The most common question I have been asked is whether I am going to put an engine in her. For me, owning these types of vessels is all about keeping their story alive. Polly was the last fishing smack to work commercially without an engine, it's almost like taking a bit of her history away by putting one in. To be able to sail without the luxury of an engine, I feel improves your

ability as a sailor. Anyone can turn a key and put a boat alongside, but to do this using only the elements and your skill skill is what can separate you from others. I plan to race Polly and fish her, I would love to bend her old flax mainsail on and open her original wet well for the Dredging match next year.



Jas, aged 16, on the bowsprit of Charlotte Ellen at the Tollesbury Smack Race 2015



Owning Polly is such a huge achievement for myself as I have been sailing smacks (mainly the Charlotte Ellen) since I was 10 years old so have always had a passion for them. I intend to maintain and care for Polly as well as her previous owner, Mandy, as she did such an amazing job.



Jas sailing Polly home



I hope to see you all out on the river next year. Fair winds, Jas

Jas, aged 13, on the bowsprit of Charlotte Ellen at the Tollesbury Smack Race 2012

## DOWN CHANNEL BY KIM MATTHEWS

'Down Channel, Smacks & Mariners of the Shoreham Oyster Fishery' - the work covers the story of first-class Essex smacks that dredged in the English Channel in the 19th century. With the book in its design phase, the author is seeking pre-production orders. Much like historian Henry Cheal, who sought subscribers for his highly-respected 'Ships & Mariners of Shoreham' in 1909, Kim Matthews is asking you to subscribe to this book.



A brief outline of the book;

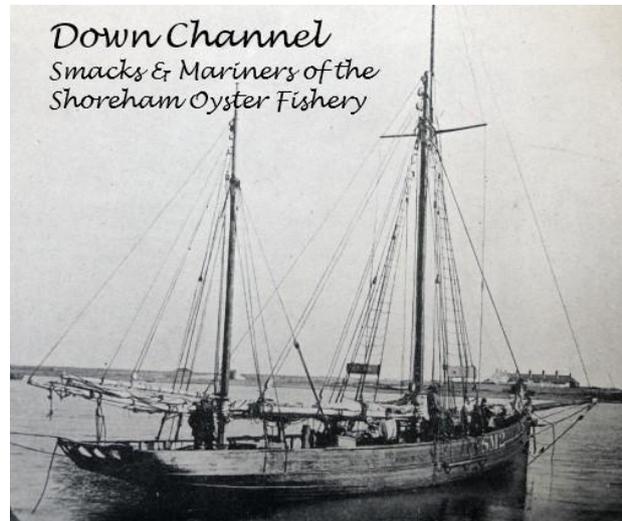
Introduction - Description of my great great grandfather, Samuel Earthey sailing from St. Osyth and Brightlingsea to Shoreham in Sussex aboard a first-class smack. My other great great grandfather, David Sampson from Tollesbury also crewed on an Essex smack. Rhetorical question....why are Essex boats dredging for oysters in the English Channel.

1. A Peck of Oysters - biology of oysters, spatting, survival rates. Consumption of oysters historically in Britain, particularly in Essex and Sussex. Cheap food for poor, Mrs Beaton's recipes etc.

2. Hoggies, Luggers & Smacks - design of Sussex beach boats, Brighton fishing fleet, unsuited to fish for oysters in winter. Design, sail plan of first-class Essex smacks, dredging specialists.

3. Fights, France & Fence months - Jersey oyster fishery, conflict with France, Channel Convention. Constant attempts by smacksmen to circumvent regulations. French arrests and political protests.

4. Down Channel smacks - Jersey smacks, Essex smacks. Shift from Jersey beds to mid-Channel grounds. 1860s & 1870s Essex smacks landing directly into Sussex, names, numbers, rig, tonnage, masters, crews. Collapse of Jersey fishery. Smack owners, share system etc.



5. Life aboard an oyster smack - Crews of 6, masters, apprentices. Essex families migrate to Shoreham. Crews earnings, families suffer feast and famine, clothing, food, back-breaking work. Technical descriptions of dredges and dredging deep-sea oysters, size of catches etc.

6. Ponds and Periwinkles - description of Adur storage ponds, work of pond labourers, thefts from ponds, harsh punishments and accidents. Dispute with Duke of Norfolk about ownership of river bed.

7. Lines to London and locks - LBSC Railway. oyster trains to London market. Kingston Wharf and Shoreham seamen's strike. Economic contribution of oyster fleet to Shoreham & Southwick. Comparison to shipbuilding and merchant fleet. Opening of Horsham line, shift of landings to Shoreham station. New canal created at Southwick, used by Essex smacks in 1880s. Lock collapse in 1907.

8. Life Ashore -life of apprentices, pub fights between smacksmen and locals, attempts at moral reform. Fighting fishwives and thieving. Griggs, oyster merchants, Bareham's rise from apprentice to smack and yacht master. Links with yachting. Brazier family, oyster merchants in Southwick. Eades (from Thorpe-le-Soken) grocers and smack owners. Maritime legacy of families.

9. For those in Peril on the Sea - losses amongst the oyster fleet, welfare funds set up for



unsupported children and later losses due to being rundown by steamers. Salvaging particularly Vandalia. Losses of Essex men continue in Emsworth fleet.

10. Smuggling - Organised smuggling in Sussex, Blues Gang. Numerous incidents of capture and conviction of smacksmen for smuggling, small amounts up to whole cargoes hidden under oysters.

11. Decline of Fishery - Falling landings. Example of collapse of Jersey fishery. Larger Essex smacks, lengthened, ketch-rigged, more experienced crew continue fishery into 1880s and 1890s. Cause of declining landings over-fishing or natural causes? Sewage scare 1902 at Emsworth and Shoreham. Collapse of demand.

12. Last Survivors. - Some first-class smacks survive up to and beyond WW1. Guide, and others. Lack of capital investment, motors and steam capstans. Stowboating. Pioneer is last first-class smack to survive, her history, excavation and restoration.

Appendix 1 Extensive list of smacks recorded in Shoreham fishery, name, home port, owners, masters, Reg. number, rig, tonnage, year in port, incidents.

Appendix 2 List of people and families involved in the Shoreham oyster fishery, names, place of birth (mostly Essex) relationships, ages, streets, vessels, year of record. Illustrations.

Over 90 old photographs, some never published in books before. Photographs of first-class smacks are surprisingly scarce and this book tries to counter this situation.

#### Bibliography

Deep-sea oyster fleet is mentioned in Leather, Benham, March, mostly 'Skillingers' but there has never been a book solely devoted to first-class oyster smacks, particularly in the English Channel. Lastly, some errors from these authors are corrected.

Size: 240mm x 170mm, 90 old photographs, £27.50 Hardback and £23.50 Softback.

If you wish to be a subscriber and have your name listed in the book, contact Kim at [anjinsan127@hotmail.com](mailto:anjinsan127@hotmail.com) or TEXT to 07704 478383.

PLEASE, NO MONEY YET, EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST ONLY.



## REMEMBRANCE 2020 BY JOHN GILLARD



A tradition, in Brightlingsea, is for one of the wreaths laid at the War Memorial on Remembrance Sunday to be from the CSPS. In 2020 that wreath was laid jointly by Jim Lawrence and John Gillard. The card reads "Colne Smack Preservation Society for the Fishermen and Little Dunkirkers". In both World Wars, local men served in Royal Naval vessels, including the many converted from their previous uses in fishing. Eighty years ago, civilian fishermen and yachtsmen were involved in the evacuation from Dunkirk, where the flat-bottomed Thames Barges, in particular, were able to get close inshore. Several of the craft are still to be seen in local waters. Many others, including sailing barge 'Dawn' were made ready but were stood down.





## FAIRY BY TOM CURTIS

Fairy is a 32ft Howard built smack built in 1880. Fairy was picked up by a low loader from Falmouth and taken to Brightlingsea, she was then launched and towed round to the smack dock. I became her custodian mid-October and since then have completed some much-needed work, most of which was completed at Underwoods Hard Boatyard in Brightlingsea where I replaced the majority of her port side topside planking. This work was done so she is in good enough condition to tow her up to Harry King and Sons yard, of Pin Mill, on a calm day next Spring. Once she arrives, she will go into the workshop for a full rebuild.



Photos show the temporary repair work undertaken before being towed to Pin Mill next year.



## PIONEER TRUST BY ALANNA CAMERON

As a new arrival at the start of last year to Brightlingsea and the East Coast, I was overwhelmed by the welcoming traditional sailing community. I began working as Pioneer's trainee bosun last February. I have learned so much since then, gained some unforgettable experiences and made many a firm friend. I was compelled to apply for a traineeship with the Pioneer Sailing Trust because of the charitable work they do. The previous vessel I crewed on worked closely with Sail Training Ireland. Those trips with people from diverse backgrounds were some of the most rewarding experiences I have enjoyed to date. After one season, I knew I wanted to stay in the world of sail training and when I was accepted at Pioneer, I was thrilled.

I was quickly initiated in the rites of passage: blacking the rig, wire splicing, sail repairs, and of course, painting, painting and painting. Pioneer's finest, Shari and Tariq, showed me the ropes



Photo Credit to John Green



(pun intended), soon enough, I was settling into the rhythms of the winter refit. Our hard work was brought to a halt with the start of lockdown, and even though disappointed to be away from work, I enjoyed a few months of beautiful seaside strolls and small woodwork projects at home. As soon as restrictions allowed, work was back in full swing and Pioneer took off for the Scilly Isles for

a family charter. I was very lucky to crew on such an extraordinary trip. With lovely weather and wonderful company, the trip was a guaranteed success. I learned so much and was grateful to have had the time to understand Pioneer; how she sails and handles. Upon our return, we were kept busy with day sails and constant maintenance.



I feel so lucky to be in Brightlingsea, where I have access to such a substantial and vibrant sailing community. Between Smacks, Thames barges, and Bawleys alone, there is so much diversity and quirks to learn. While the season was dampened by Covid this year, there were still opportunities to see everyone coming together. The Colne match was a brilliant chance for me to experience the community I am now part of, and what a spirited one it is! Even though the Swale Match was cancelled due to bad weather this year, there are far worse places to be than holed up in the Shipwrights Arms in Faversham with good friends! I am looking forward to things returning to normal when I can see an East Coast sailing season in its full glory. Sailing out of Brightlingsea is an entirely new experience for me. Whilst I have sailed wooden boats before, emphasis hasn't been put on the historical significance of the vessel. Sailing Pioneer, the heritage



of the boat is part and parcel of the day-to-day operations. Traditional maintenance is used where possible. The sails and lines look authentic and most importantly she still uses the same design of trawl that has been around for hundreds of years. Granted it is tiny in comparison to its ancestors, and it's now used to show the kids on board baby spider crabs, anemones and oysters. The more people who get to experience these vessels in their historic context the better



chance the vessels have of surviving. The majority of the previous sailing I have done was in and around the Irish Sea. Something that still seems entirely strange to me on the East Coast is the constantly shifting sand banks that are a maze to navigate. Whilst running aground is never desirable, it's rarely the end of the world around here, in fact, many of the historic vessels are designed to be beached for a scrub

and antifoul. Running aground off the Irish coast would be a much rockier affair!

More than anything this year, my time so far at Pioneer has been so enjoyable due to the people I have been fortunate enough to meet. Felicity, the Operations Manager, has been so kind to me and made sure I got the most out of my traineeship. I took in so much information from the expert skipper, Cyril, on the Scilly's voyage. In the times this year where I couldn't be on the water, I spent time in the boatyard at the Trust, where under the guidance of the shipwrights and apprentices I learned so much about fitting out boats and the processes involved in boatbuilding. Everyone was extremely generous with their time and knowledge. I can't mention generosity without mentioning Elly Howlett and Brian Croucher, both of whom put so much effort into training me. Elly brought me out sailing on Priscilla, helping me with boat handling. Brian showed me how to manoeuvre his bawley Blackbird and bring her alongside.

I could never have foreseen what this year would bring but despite its challenges there has been many wonderful things to come out of it. I am excited to be spending the coming year at the Pioneer Sailing Trust and furthering what I have learned and having brilliant fun while doing so.

