

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 • A SUMMER AHEAD!

After a lockdown since December 26th, we are all looking forward to much greater freedom from June 21st...

In anticipation of which, we have been busy arranging (conditions permitting) the Sail & Picnic on July 25th, meeting on the Town Hard before 10am wearing soft shoes and bringing your own picnic. I have done this for several years so this time the duo in command are;

Martyn Bradfield - 07787 877764 or Steve Nesbitt - 01206 307602

It is essential to book in advance with one of the foregoing, if you wish please indicate a preference as to which boat you would like to be on.

Smack Dock news: Nellie CK276 has been sold and transported to Cornwall whilst Fairy MN1 is waiting for a really calm day to be towed to Pin Mill. Good luck Tom!

Almost inevitably there will be some disruption to the racing season for the smacks, but again, conditions allowing, the Colne Match is on September 11th. Always a magnificent sight from Batemans Tower to witness one of the great combinations of smacks and barges in the same race, now also with an inner course for the MFOBS or Winkle Brigs as they are affectionately known. Barges will start at 7am, smacks 7.30am & the MFOBs at 9am.

Again, if allowed, the AGM will be on November 20th at 2pm in Brightlingsea Sailing Club, while a new lease with Brightlingsea Town Council for our Smack Dock should be signed shortly.

Remain safe.



Committee Members; Andy Harman, Caroline Canham, Martyn Bradfield, Paul Winter, Stephen Nesbitt & Tom Curtis.

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 Elly and we will update your preferences.

Events coming up;

May 30 th	Blessing of the Waters	August 21 st	Pin Mill Match
July 3 rd	OGA East Coast Race	August 28 th	Mersea Regatta
July 10 th /11 th	Brightlingsea Regatta	September 11 th	Colne Match
July 17 th	Blackwater Match	September 12 th	Mersea Dredging Match
July 25 th	Sail & Picnic	September 25 th	Maldon Regatta
July 31 st	Swale Match	October 23 rd	Turkey Race
August 8-13 th	Mersea Week		

Cover; Priscilla CK437 on one of her training days in summer last year



A TRIBUTE TO NICKY ENNION BY PETER ALLEN

21st May 1951 - 6th January 2021

Way back in 1972 a maritime organisation was formed on the waterfront at Brightlingsea. All the ingredients were there, they just needed bringing together. We had the remains of a jetty, which in days gone by, was part of Aldous' shipyard and a bit of mud so we were definitely in the right place. We all refer to it now as the Smack Dock. It was around this time that I became acquainted with Nicky Ennion.

One of the first smacks to take a berth in the dock was the Mary CK252, which was then owned by Charles Morse, an antique dealer. She was frequently crewed by Nicky and his brother Robin. Mr Morse lived at Earls Colne Priory and I seem to remember an oak tree or two being felled from the grounds, machined and taken to St Osyth Boatyard, where a skilled shipwright named Tony Tearle used the material to fit a new keel and garboards.

This work would be the start of a much-needed restoration. Nicky and Robin gained a lot of knowledge from Tony and soon realised how great a task they were undertaking. They became more involved in the Mary and went on to own her before other commitments would take them away from the East Coast.

Nicky served on the CSPS committee, joined work parties on Saturday morning to repair the jetty and sort out the moorings and he certainly didn't mind getting a bit of mud round his feet! It was around this time that the seed of interest was sown which would stay with him for the rest of his life. Nicky worked in sales for Clarke and Carter at Woolverstone

Marina before moving to the West Mersea office but he decided he wanted to spend more time sailing so in 1984 he joined Oysterworld Sailing School as a junior instructor. He subsequently became a senior instructor after obtaining his RYA Yachtmasters Certificate. I gather he met his wife Jo on such a course.

Many years later, Nicky and his wife returned to the area and bought the Electron CK36 from my good self and promptly fitted her out to accommodate his family making them as comfortable as you can on board an old smack. I know they had some great times afloat and he would have used all his experience to get the best out of her - as we all know smacks can be a bit of a handful sometimes! Nicky was as kind a person as you could wish to meet - always enthusiastic, upbeat and great company. All these qualities would stand by him when he was diagnosed with cancer which he fought so hard for many years, but sadly succumbed to the illness in January this year. We have all lost a good friend, a man who shared our interests and love of the East Coast, but the loss to his family will be the greatest. We can only send our condolences to his nearest and dearest whilst sharing our happy memories of past times.





BEE CK212 BY ELSA CHANCE

You only had to look at Bee next to the other boats on the smack dock to see that she's a bit different. Her fore part resembles that of a pilot cutter, her aft section that of a smack, and her draft is neither deep enough for a pilot cutter nor shallow enough for a smack.

It wasn't long after we first saw her that we were told the well-known story that she was built in Jersey in the 1830's, before being rebuilt by the Drake Brothers of Tollesbury in 1886 and worked as a smack. Her history from then on is known, but what of her early history? Was the story true? It would certainly explain her differences from the rest of the fleet.

With no idea how I was going to do it, I vowed to research her full history. Sooner or later a friend of a friend put me in touch with a marine historian who pointed me in the direction of an archivist in Jersey - without whom none of this would have been possible. We quickly ascertained that for a time in the mid-1800s there was a strong link between the two communities, with many East Coast smacks heading over to Jersey for the dredging season and several Jersey boats sold to the East Coast or employed as cargo vessels when the oyster fishery dwindled before collapsing completely in the 1870's. Bee's story seemed viable, so the work began.

A year or so later, and countless hours spent trawling through pages and pages of catch and cargo records, family trees, birth and death records, marriage certificates, historical weather and tide reports, registration and tonnage documents, personal letters, official correspondence and more - the story is complete. Countless people helped along the way, drawn in by the story as the search widened, to them I am truly grateful, as it wouldn't have been impossible to piece the story together without them!

So, for anyone who is interested, here is a summary of the story of Bee; like all good classics she's been sunk and recovered, been a houseboat, confined to a mud berth, sat in the sun, forgotten at the back of a yard and had her fair share of drama.

The States of Jersey commissioned two pilot cutters to be built to serve the island, romantically named Number One and Number Two! The Number One was built in St Helier and placed in the hands of three trustees for the Customs Service who registered her and appointed her master in the early summer of 1830. She worked as a pilot vessel until August 1836 when she was sold to the harbour master and a merchant seaman in equal shares.

They sold her just three months later to a local woman, the wife of an oyster man who had settled on the island after moving from Itchen Ferry. She dredged for oysters until his death in 1845, after which she was reappointed to carry oysters and other cargo to the mainland. She was sold to the owner's eldest son who continued to work her as a cargo vessel and registered her in Cardiff in 1855. In 1858 she sold again to his brother-in-law, an East Coast man, who had previously worked on the islands, for a time, as her master. He continued to work her as a cargo vessel from his home port on the East Coast, until she foundered on the Sunk Sands in squally South Westerlies and was declared a total loss and her register closed. Having sunk within the port authority limit the responsibility of recovering the wreck lay with the owner. With growing spring tides and conditions improving over the following days she was recovered to James Drake's yard, who was then based in Tollesbury and serving the working boats of the area. She languished there until the Great Depression of the 1880's, by which time the yard had been taken on by James Drake's sons James and William and became known as The Drake Brothers yard. She was rebuilt whilst work was quiet, renamed William and Emily after their grandparents, and re-registered CK212 in 1886.



She was fished for many years by Navvy Musset, who also took her up the Thames for two Royal Jubilee celebrations, before passing through the hands of various private owners and eventually coming to rest in the mud of St Osyth creek as a houseboat before being sold and returned to the smack dock.

Bee now lies afloat on the Helford River in Cornwall but is in need of extensive work. With her history complete we would like to raise the money to rebuild her in the hope of seeing her into her third century! If you are interested in supporting the project or finding out more, please contact Elly for contact details – thank you! (elck222@whoever.com)



QUICK NOTE TO THE EDITOR...

May I use your pages to reassure any concerned readers still having sleepless nights over the “Traditional v’s Modern” article in the January 2021 edition of Smack Dock Soundings (SDS86).

A number of readers contacted me direct to express concern, even alarm, over the inaccuracy of modern computer and laser technology. I can reassure your readers that the computer algorithms have been updated and laser technology recalibrated so as to agree with the accuracy of Jim Lawrence’s plumb line and tape measure, and that there is no truth in any circulating rumour that Jim’s rule is not in good working order, or the malicious inaccuracy that the lead in his pencil is blunt and needs sharpening.

I hope that concerned readers will be reassured and will therefore sleep more soundly. I apologise for any unintentional distress.

Richard Pattison



SMACKSBOAT FOR DORIS



Tom Curtis was commissioned to build a smackboat for the lovely bawley Doris LO284, and to say the owner is ‘chuffed to bits’ is quite the understatement. The skilfully carved out name was done by the wonderful Lucy Harris who is now working hard at Pin Mill where Helen & Violet is now moored. We can’t wait to see the finished boat alongside Doris.



NELLIE CK276 BY CHARLIE NICHOLLS



Why a Smack? Short answer is I've got a serious soft spot for old working boats and I hope this doesn't make it back to the West Country but smacks are easily the best looking. I have found myself working at a small saw mill so would be silly not to have a boat to work on. Then I came across Nellie and fell in love!

She is the perfect size for me and the right amount of work. My plans for the refit are... I'm going to keep it simple which means keeping her as she is and should be. Having spent the last couple of months sourcing the logs I just need to get milling. Work list from

top down; new mast, top sides, stanchions, deck, rebuild counter, couple of hull planks, rebuild rudder then back in the water!

Sailing plans. Of course, I have promised to bring her back to the East Coast for a couple of races so this will be a priority! I have always fancied exploring the West Coast of Scotland and if I could time it with the Islay Festival - ideal.

Other than that, I'm not sure, however I'm certain I will make lots of plans and dreams whilst working on her. The project will take me a couple of years so any sailing invites in the meantime would be much appreciated!





SMACK CHARTER

Very exciting news that the smacks Priscilla CK437 & Maria CK21 are now available for charter from Brightlingsea.



Priscilla can take up to 4-5 guests onboard whereas Maria is able to take up to 8.

If you would like more information please contact Quayside Network

hello@quaysidenetwork.co.uk



SMUGGLERS NOW BY TOM COCKLE

It was on a very still and dark night, no moonlight whatsoever but the smugglers knew that a ship was passing their creek to deliver tea and nutmeg. The smugglers lit their lantern in the creek to enable the ship to think that it was near to their delivery point, a legal off loading at the port in Maldon. The smugglers seized the boat and outmanned the crew, killing many of the men onboard and converting the ones who were willing to join the smuggling gang with the promise to earn double their money.

They were known as The Press Gang - they knew how to sail their large ship and with enough smugglers to unload and load to make up a realistic crew number approached the Maldon Docks. They renamed their boat to Salthanger and was accepted into Maldon Docks to unload the tea and nutmeg and load up with local salt, rum and tobacco. The odd barrel was pinched from the dock side when no one was looking and off they sailed when the next tide was in.

Duty Excise Men wrote in their registers that tax had been paid by the original boat owners, who are by now dead. The smugglers came into the creeks of Mersea, perhaps Ray Island and unloaded, their smuggler gang hauled it through the tunnel from Ray Island to the Rose Inn where there were the rest of the smugglers ready to receive it and sell their freely gained booty or to distribute it to local farms and manor houses for storage. Even churches were a secure location for storage.

Salt in the late 1600's was heavily taxed as every farmer salted their beef to preserve it. The farmers paid so much less to the smugglers for their salt. The farmers still sold their salted beef far and wide to pubs and the rich living in Manor Houses for a top price. This is how the smugglers were increasing in numbers. On top of the free booty, they broke up the ship now falsely named Salthanger and sold the parts, bowsprits, sails, whatever they could salvage like wood for open fires - another income making them all quite wealthy.

Locals turned their back and let the smuggling carry on and the clergy could not say and did not say a thing if questioned. Other clergy not involved did not tell on their church colleagues. They all received cheaper meat to live a high lifestyle. If the stolen boat had a heavy load, they sailed onto the Naze and unloaded some of their booty where they had a sledge with long rope attached to haul it up the steep cliffs to the farm for storage. A farmer or his daughter rode a white horse to receive word that a cargo was coming into the Naze, rode back again at speed to pass the word to awaiting smugglers. The white horse was a known legitimate news carrier. The horse with cart was waiting to receive their booty.



What a well organised industry with good pay too - Customs and Excise had no clue this was going on!



JOHN MILGATE & PURITAN BY CHARLOTTE COCK

John Jeffrey Milgate was born in Smugglers Way, West Mersea on 14th January 1931. The eldest of five children to Edward and Rose, he passed away peacefully at home, Shell Bungalow, Peldon on the 21st March 2020.

Dad spent his whole life on and about the water as a keen sailor and competitive canoeist as well his craft - shipwright/boatbuilder. He was a member of Dabchicks Sailing Club, Tollesbury Sailing Club, Marine Curator for Mersea Museum Trust, a long term West Mersea Regatta committee member and the Vice Chairman of the Endeavour Trust. I can't remember how many times I would ask Dad to write down the things he had done as he had the memory of an elephant and had such wonderful tales to tell. Luckily, we still have Mum to help with the memories and Angus has come up with a few I had forgotten.

Dad never forgot a name or face and easily recalled every facet of the boats he worked on or helped with or just took interest in. Shell Bungalow was and still is a treasure trove of boat belongings "No Charl, don't throw it away as it may be useful" was a constant part of the conversation if I was tidying up in the shed. We always had ties with the Classics through Dad's father Ted, who was Mast Headman of Lulworth; and after seeing Partridge racing among the other beautiful yachts at Les Voile d'Antibes, Dad explained with pride that one of those bits used to be in our shed and was part of her bobstay which was gratefully donated as part of her restoration; so, it really was useful after all.

We all know that sailing teaches us resilience and Dad certainly had that in spades. My husband's uncle Allen recalled a lovely story. Dad had built a "Toy" racing dinghy, cutting edge at the time and fitted with a sliding seat. He took her out in a strong breeze and capsized three times in Besom Creek and according to Dad many more times before the start...., "well she is a handful" was his only comment and he was laughing the whole time! I love hearing stories like that as I can see his expression. We feel great comfort and pride in what he has left us, a constant reminder of lovely times, however small and the silly little things are the most special now.

The oyster smack Peace CK171 (built 1909) was a huge part of our childhood. Dad skippered her after Hugh French bought her in 1970 and when we were old enough, we joined in as crew and now Angus owns and races her with his family, passing down what we learned and long may that continue through the generations. Mum reminded



Peace at the Turkey Race in 2019
©Seamus Masters



me of my early endeavours as crew when I was told that I was too young to go to the big race on Saturday, so I took it upon myself to sneak out of my bedroom and stow away on her for the early start. You can imagine my indignation to wake up in my own bed with Dad long gone but to be fair - I was only four years old!

Dad left West Mersea Primary School at 14 to start his apprenticeship at William Wyatt's Boatyard, Coast Road West Mersea, earning 7/6 pence per week. He started by helping out on Saturdays and after school 'holding on' for Admiral Wyatt which as a job is a lot of people's introduction to boat-building, including Angus and I. 'Holding on' involves (the apprentice) holding a dolly on the head of a copper nail on the outside of a plank, whilst (the Master) Dad peined (rounded) the inside end over a copper washer (rove) to rivet and clench the plank together. As it was during the war and as there was a shortage of men, he ended up working on all sorts of boats, including Dad's much loved Duck Punts which he brought back to life with a jig and a twist on the original design so people could build their own (cheap) version out of three sheets of marine ply. He really wanted this to be another opportunity to get the youngsters on the water which also gave him the fond nickname - The Punt Father!

In 1948 Dad took three months leave from Wyatt's to do the race circuit onboard Kismet for owner Mr Wright on the agreement that he would pay his Wyatt's wages whilst away. Kismet is now owned by Richard Matthews and my eldest son Hamish races on her. Dad gave a word or two of advice with a little chuckle "don't let go of the jib sheet" - he knew Hamish was in for a swim when down to leeward if he did!

At 17 years old Dad was 1st mate to Mike Frost on Boadicea CK213. He was also racing locally in his International 14 Fly, his BOD Sabrina and also raced Hugh French's Osprey and Enterprise.

Dad completed his apprenticeship at Wyatt's and served his National Service 1952-54 with the R.E.M.E where he became an armourer and part of the Smalls Arms Inspection Team which travelled to colleges inspecting guns. He loved it and said it was good to have another trade.

In 1954 Dad returned to Wyatt's and in 1956 applied to The Thames River Police and became a shipwright/ boatbuilder on the river launches at Wapping. He had many happy years at Wapping and picked up tips from the other trades which stood him in good stead for everything to do with boats and engines. The Gravesend to Greenwich Smack race was a big event and although Dad had left Wapping many years before, the launches would still come to say "Hello!" whilst we raced up-river. I remember the year the smacks stayed in St Katherine's Dock for the Queens Jubilee which was a big event. It was lovely to join in ashore at the prize giving with such a lovely group of friends from the other smacks and bawleys and listen to the sea shanties.

I know Dad had fond memories of the Heineken Regatta (I have seen the photos and it looks wonderful) when they sailed across to Holland in 1974. I would love to retrace that trip one day. 1988 Brest/Douarnenez was the last overseas race Dad took part in and transported Boy George by road on the back of a good friends' old Volvo... she is rather beamy so it must have been an interesting trip. He had loved joining Charles Robson on Moonraker (from Dr Pye's books) at the previous festival and was excited to take his Boy George whilst meeting a big contingency of Essex boats there including the smack Sunbeam.

During 1956-1960 Dad and Percy, a launch engineer and life-long friend from Wapping, completed three "Devizes to Westminster Canoe Races". Their best result being in 1957 where



they finished 11th overall and 4th civilian crew in 39 hrs, 43 mins for the gruelling 125 miles course without any technical clothing to protect them against the elements. They built their own canoes at lunchtimes in the Wapping boatyard and at weekends at Wyatt's Old Boatshed which is now Dabchicks Sailing Club.

In 1968 Dad returned to Wyatt's when Angus was born and in 1970 bought the Shell Works at Peldon now 'Shell Bungalow' where he became self-employed and worked on many boats from fishing smacks to Colvics, to Canal boats to GRP Catamarans and just about everything in between. The most memorable for me being the rebuild of Charlotte Ellen CK258 and Sunbeam CK328 both owned by John Rigby. Charlotte Ellen came back to Peldon for a second restoration after she had ended up on Barrow Sands following a rough voyage. It took a huge effort to retrieve her but with the help of David Stoker and a team of many others they managed to re-float her which allowed him to bring her back to her former glory.

Living at Shell Bungalow our childhood was an eclectic one. There was a variety of visitors, many of whom became life-long friends and Shell Bungalow was a safe winter berth, especially for Smacks but also an end point for a weary sailor. Mum and Dad were always welcoming to whoever turned up.

1980 Essex County Council approached Dad to set up an evening school for boatbuilding. Needing a project, he bought the Oyster Bumkin, Boy George CK28, for a nominal fee of £1 from George Stoker's daughter, Eileen and rebuilt her over several years teaching the class as he went. One evening an inspector stopped by and on asking "Where's the blackboard?" was told by the class that drawings or instructions were usually on the back of a piece of sandpaper or offcuts of wood! Boy George was launched in 1988 and Dad raced her until his mid 80's teaching us and his grandchildren a few tricks along the way and introducing many people to gaff rigged sailing during his summer cruises.



Puritan

In 1990, Dad purchased Puritan CK395, built by Aldous Brothers in 1892 for £1,500 from Mac Fisheries as the next big project.

The evening class had grown in popularity (there was even a waiting list to join) and was now held twice weekly. Dad spent the days getting ready for the next class and supplied

all the materials and was always on the hunt for wood and other bits and bobs she would need to get her back on the water.

Flushed with enthusiasm during Puritan's rebuild and the interest it generated, Dad



ABC



said "I know where there is another smack we can get and it will only take a bit of digging". After some herculean digging over a few weekends of long freezing days by a growing gang which included the Mersea Fire brigade and their pump, out popped ABC, floating on the back of Boy George and several 40-gallon oil drums ...to be continued!



Dad handed down Puritan to me for my 40th Birthday. The evening classes had stopped in 2000 but he carried on working on her and was still working on her the summer before he passed away, working with the help of my eldest sons which was lovely to see. Dad knew he had to get her to a stage so he could

hand her over, as he sadly knew he would not get her finished. Dan of Hollowshore, Faversham, with the help of Nick, have done a tremendous job and have been very respectful to Dad's memory which you can see and feel in their work. We launched her last week, "a pretty little ship" that will be home soon. It is a shame Dad didn't see her looking so smart but he never doubted that she'd be pretty!

Now we have our own families, Angus and I can see how hard Dad worked but with Mum's support they made an incredible team. He gave his love, time and experience freely and was always also busy making anything and everything from amphibious dinghies, to go karts, to annual Regatta floats which were a favourite as he did this with a particularly dear gang of old friends.

A little note from us Dad - you set a high mark for how to live a life, thank you and all our love.

Charlotte & Angus xx





Puritan in the shed at Hollowshore, all photo credits to Charlotte.

