



The Never Setting Sun



Smack Dock Soundings

THE JOURNAL OF THE COLNE SMACK PRESERVATION SOCIETY

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Photo competition winner: *Polly* MN12 well-reefed, competing in the 2012 Pin Mill Smack Race, passing Shotley. Photo taken by David Chandler.

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

From the editor...

Well, now the days are getting longer and smack owners will be thinking of fitting-out soon. The more organised folk have been overhauling rigging and sails over the winter, whilst the rest of us will be caught out by the start of sunnier weather and be rushing around madly with sandpaper, paint and bits of wood. It is an enormous amount of effort and we wonder why we bother when arms ache and mud gets everywhere, but somehow all the pain is forgotten after the first sail of the season. Hopefully the weather will be kind this spring, but for those on a limited timeframe, fitting-out time can be frustrating particularly when it starts raining as soon as you open the tin of gloss paint and you still haven't finished covering up the primer in August...



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Keepers of history: in memory of Dick Harman 1925-2012 – Peter Allen

If I can turn the clock back forty years or so, picture an early October day on the Colne- a chilly blustery day, a day when the spray whips over the rail and stings your face; the *Bona*, with yours truly on board and the *ADC* racing to the gas buoy (Inner Bench Head) and back to Pyefleet. The *Bona* was badly in need of ballast, a new white mainsail and just about hanging together so she must have looked a bit odd. The *ADC* on the other hand was well fitted out, and after trimming all her sails was off and back in Pyefleet and all clewed up before we got back! Lots of witty comments ensued from Dick Harman aboard the *ADC* as he was never stuck for words! It would be the last time the *Bona* was under sail for many years as she was well overdue for some serious repairs. She was taken to St Osyth boatyard and blocked up on the port side of the slipway waiting for something to happen. At that time, the boatyard was owned by Dennis Barnes who, luckily, was very sympathetic to our cause. I felt the yard was just ticking over and that proved to be the case as not long after it was sold and the new owners were not so accommodating. So here we were, the *Bona* and the *ADC* laid up for the winter. John Hickman had the *Polly* at the time and she was run up in a rill on the marsh opposite the boatyard. He stayed on board some of the time, working on her hull and had a great love affair with cuprinol! He was always good for a cuppa tea as long as you weren't in a hurry as the kettle took forever to boil.

Another smack that used the yard at that time was a little smack called the *Mary*. A very skilled shipwright called Tony Tearle worked on her during the winters and it was

good to watch an expert at his trade. He kept himself to himself and would go on to partially rebuild the *Sunbeam*, and make all the spars for the *Soren Larsen* which was an impressive Baltic ketch owned by the Davies brothers – a familiar sight in the area at the time. Sadly Tony Tearle died a young man, a great loss to us all.

Dick would bring the *Nemo* up the slipway during the winter for DTI surveys and repairs and I would listen to him moan about how much the surveys cost and what he had to do to get the next ticket. Dick worked the *Nemo* from Clacton pier during the summer months taking out day trippers, probably to Walton pier and back.

It was at this time the seeds were being formed to lease a bit of ground at Brightlingsea and bring the smacks together. Malcolm McGregor was refitting *George and Alice*, David Gowing had the bones of the *Sunbeam*, Cyril White was working on the *Helen and Violet* and Tom Gray had the *Alberta*. At the time, these smacks were in the former Aldous' shipyard which was being sold so they were all in need of a new home. We noticed a disused dock just outside of Aldous' shipyard, and still belonged to the council. This looked a good proposition and after much lobbying of councillors, many letters and meetings the first lease of the Smack Dock was finally drawn up. Late autumn 1972 saw the arrival of the first smacks, starting with my own boat, *Bona*, which was lovingly brought back to Brightlingsea by road, courtesy of the late Joe Dunnett who was working for Debbages of Pin Mill at the time. She was soon followed by David Gowing's *Sunbeam* which was anticipating some hefty renovation, John Hickman's *Polly*, Malcolm MacGregor's *G and A*, and Tom Gray's *Alberta*. Future years



would see the arrival and departure of many other smacks taking advantage of the facilities until the money or the right person to come along.

On my birthday this year I was given a publication called 'River Colne Shipbuilders'; on the eleventh page there is a small piece of text and I quote "Dedicated to all those who keep the history of the river Colne alive."

Well, all the afore-mentioned fall into this category, but I would like to take this opportunity of mentioning Dick Harman in particular and his input into our maritime heritage. In the past he was a very active committee member, not just for the CSPS but at Maldon, Kent and London and his name is synonymous with the East Coast. I

purchased the *Electron* from him, a lovely little robust smack. When I had her on the slipway at St. Osyth, he came on board just to see if I had changed the curtains! As you can tell, I have a great affection for Dick; he could always see the issues and almost always with a great sense of humour.

(Ed-) Peter was writing after hearing that Dick had suffered a stroke last summer; sadly Dick died peacefully a few months later on the 13th December.

One man and his boat of 50 years- Jim Lawrence



On the 24th November last, Christine and Dick Norris threw a party at Gillingham to mark the fifty years of Dick's ownership of his smack, *Stormy Petrel*. About 75 people turned up to drink the future health of Dick and his ship.

When Dick bought 'Stormy' just over fifty years ago she was tired and work-worn but she still carried that bold professional air about her. Dick saw that at once and has been her owner and caretaker ever since.



Each year in Dick's ownership the *Stormy Petrel* has improved and today she stands as one of the finest restored traditional smacks in existence. An inspiration to any young man who wants to do it right, "Shipshape and Norris-fashion" could well be the watch-word. A truly lovely buffet feast was laid on by Christine and her pals. The party was very relaxed and without the 'race fever' that is so apparent at most of our meetings being present, much yarning was done. Thanks Dick and Christine.

SPAR FOR SALE

Topmast, built 2012 by Dan Tester. Very well made from close-grained knot-free Douglas fir. Hollow, light and stiff for size.



30'6" long, tapered from 5" at heel to 3.5" at head.

Contact Robin 07768522957 for details/price.



The re-rigging of *Alberta*- Robin Page



As many of you will know I have owned the beautiful smack *Primrose* since early in 2005 and have enjoyed cruising and racing her. Early this year I decided that it was time to move on and try another boat. The appeal of a bigger boat with more accommodation and some creature comfort is obvious and the extra work and expense was deemed to be manageable, in addition and increase in waterline length should put me on a more equal footing with the competition.

I put *Primrose* on the market and waited. We had a cracking season in 2011 and I was beginning to feel fortunate that I had no takers. Late in the year that all changed when she sold to her new custodian, Josh.

Performance- does size matter?

For those of you who don't know there is a relationship between the waterline length of a boat and the maximum speed that it can travel at before the drag rapidly increases. The formula that gives this is; hull speed in Knots = 1.34 x Square root of the waterline length in feet. This means that in theory a boat with a waterline of 32 feet and one of 41 feet should have hull speeds of 7.58 and 8.58 knots. For the shorter boat to increase its speed from hull speed to the hull speed of the longer boat it would have to have approximately double the power generated by the rig. Naturally there are other factors that come into play, the smaller boats have less windage, are lighter and accelerate

faster after tacking and they have less draft- this means they generally work better in the confines of the rivers when short tacking. Big boats have taller rigs and can catch the high wind in light conditions, and are better at punching through waves, so on balance do better on longer sea courses like the Colne Match.

Which boat?

I then had the task of finding another smack; I convinced myself that I could always have a year or two without a boat, but as it turned out I only managed 3 days of non-smack ownership.

2 boats that fitted the bill were potentially on the market, *ADC* and *Alberta*. Both boats had lots of good points and some bad.

ADC is no doubt a beautiful boat and has a name for being a fine craft with a good turn of speed. At the time of looking she was laid up at St Osyth boatyard where she has been for several years, following a rebuild. She has a cruising rig, but for my purposes would need a set of spars, rigging and sails; she also needed re-commissioning.

Alberta was very well presented and has recently had an inboard engine fitted. The biggest drawback with *Alberta* was her racing record- since her rebuild she has only lost one race to my knowledge, and that was due to running aground; a tough act to follow. Also at 45 feet long, many people feel that her pole mast rig was not appropriate and gave her an unfair advantage.

As the article title suggests, after much deliberation I decided to take the plunge and buy *Alberta*, but to re-rig her as a topmast smack.

Pole mast verses Top mast

The photos show a selection of pole mast and topmast boat rigs; perhaps the photo of the boats rafted up for the Sail and Picnic shows the differences most clearly. Forgive me for explaining this to those of you who know, but some readers may not understand the differences. A topmast boat carries a retractable wooden topmast; the wooden topmast is supported by shrouds, a forestay and a pair of running backstays. This topmast can be lowered so that its top is just above the top of the main mast, but it is not practical to lower it any further when sailing.



Headsails can be set from the top of the topmast, as can running sails.

In contrast the topsail of a pole-mast boat is set on a yard which is un-stayed and can be lowered to the deck when not in use. Due to the fact that the yard is unstayed, no headsails or running sails can be set from it.

The long and the short of this is that the topmast rig offers the ability to set more sail in light winds, but suffers from much more windage and weight aloft.

The plan

Having decided on *Alberta* with a topmast, the next thing to do was to work out how to do it and what would work. I took time to look at hundreds of photos of other smacks and scaling from them I could start to work out what was typical of the breed. It was an interesting exercise and it was clear that there is a great deal of variation in the fleet, but that it would be possible to make *Alberta's* rig fit within the range of dimensions in the fleet. After a meeting over a cup of tea with the talented shipwright Dan Tester and Paul Martin the sail maker a plan was made. We would cut the main mast down, cut a strip off the head of the mains'l and add the topmast. The hope is that with these changes and the addition of the inboard engine since *Alberta* last raced she would be more representative and hopefully we will get some close racing with the other topmast boats, *Maria*, *My Alice*, *Charlotte Ellen*, *Ellen* etc.

Dan and I shook hands, swapped cars, (all part of the bargain), and the deal was done. I was then faced with a few nail-biting months waiting for the alterations to be made to sails, rigging and spars.

The rigging.

Finally the day arrived when the work had been done and it was time to step the mast and see what we had done. I must admit that it came as a bit of a shock to find out just how much extra rigging was needed. I ordered around 400m (1,340ft) of rope and wire for the change of rig, all of this was just for the top mast; one day I will work out how much rope I have on the boat, but it will be measured in kilometres no doubt.

Dan Tester had made a fantastic job of making the topmast, crosstrees and other gear; it all fitted, with the exception of the new forestay (which I supplied). We managed to

fully rig the mast, topmast, step the mast and finish rigging the boat in a day... we had a good meal and a beer at the 'Shipwright's Arms' at the end of that day. Once more the sheer amount of rope was mind blowing-after *Primrose's* 'simple' rig I was starting to wonder what I had done.

Sailing

It took us a few sails on the boat to become accustomed to the size. *Primrose* is 37 feet long and weighed in at around 9 tonnes, *Alberta* is 45 feet and nearly double the weight. For the first half a dozen outings we didn't have the topsail to play with, and at the time of writing (July) have only had 3 outings with the topsail. Now that we are getting more proficient the topsail seems to be less of a drama, but there is the constant worry of keeping that long thin topmast supported, it is only 5 inches in diameter at its thickest and is 30 feet long- without the correct tension in the forestay and runners it bends at alarming angles. We don't yet have a running sail that sets from the topmast, when we do I am sure that it will focus my mind on running backstay management.

We have had the chance to compete in 2 races so far, Rowhedge and the Blackwater Match. Rowhedge was a disaster for us as I parked *Alberta* on the mud before the start....oops! The Blackwater was better and we had a good race, it was clear that *Maria* had the legs on us upwind, so we have a bit more tuning to do to get the performance back in *Alberta*.

Opinion

It has been a costly process to convert *Alberta's* rig from pole mast to topmast, and some would argue that she was originally built as a pole-masted smack. However I have been very pleased with the positive comments that other owners have made about the changes. I think that she looks great and I am sure that we will have some cracking races over the seasons to come.



Pin Mill Smack Race, 23rd June 2012- David Chandler

Typically for the early part of this summer, Saturday June 23rd was a sunny but very wild day (force 4-5, occasionally force 6). As a result only nine boats took part, others having been prevented from coming from Brightlingsea by strong winds. The course was also restricted to the Orwell and Stour. The start gun seemed to catch some boats unprepared and facing the wrong way! However the race soon settled down with *Charlotte Ellen*, *Transcur*, and *Sunbeam* going into an early lead. By Lower Reach, *Pioneer* had moved ahead of *Polly*, *Transcur* and *Gladys* and almost caught up with *Bona* and *Sunbeam*.

Positions changed regularly as we entered the Stour, where conditions were extremely choppy- a real test of boats and crews. *Charlotte Ellen* maintained her lead throughout, with *Bona* and *Gladys* pressing her for a while and *Sunbeam* not far behind. Much tacking ensued, and *Pioneer* gradually moved into second place and closed on *Charlotte Ellen*.

Sail and picnic

22/7/2012

Electron

We boarded the *Electron* with great trepidation wondering what sort of sailors we would be having never sailed on a smack boat before. Andy & Fiona made us very welcome, the crew as well. We had a wonderful time and were able to have a go at tacking which was very exciting. We then had a picnic and music, the weather was lovely so what more could you ask for? It was a 'Perfect Day' thank you so much.

Kay & Pam.



The Electron



Dancing on the pontoon

Alberta

16 people including five children and six musicians enjoyed a wonderful trip on this lovely smack.

The day was warm and sunny with a good breeze and we all enjoyed a sail on the river and back to the smack pontoon for music and dancing with other returning seafarers.

The calm, cheerful and attentive Robin, wife and crew did all they could to make us comfortable and welcome. Keith's first trip on a smack - he loved it all!

Many thanks

Madelaine.



The Alberta

On the way back up the Orwell, we found *Mary Amelia* had retired. *Charlotte Ellen* and *Pioneer* battled it out all the way, with *Pioneer* edging home by just 33 seconds!

However, after handicaps were applied *Charlotte Ellen* was adjudged the overall winner; *Pioneer* was down to 6th!

As a layman, I admit I miss out on the finer points of seamanship, but I do enjoy photographing these wonderful old vessels. Many thanks to the Pioneer Sailing Trust and skipper Cyril Varley for having me aboard.

Final revised positions:

- 1 *Charlotte Ellen*
- 2 *Bona*
- 3 *Polly*
- 4 *Transcur*
- 5 *Gladys*
- 6 *Pioneer*
- 7 *Sunbeam*
- 8 *Electron*



George and the Ancient Apprentice-Sid Smith

The dawn had come and gone. The mist that hung over Brightlingsea Creek began to thin. My sailing and other gear packed, I made to leave *Deva*, my resting place for the night. As the stern warp was released to give a free hand to grab my bedroll and other effects from the counter, so *Deva* surged back across the Smack Dock. Returning to the dear old vessel for a suitable length of line began. "Can I give you a hand Sid?" came a cheery cry from above accompanied by an infectious grin- a rarity at 6.15am in any company, it must be said.

George and I made muster with Skipper Stear at the yacht club pontoon and soon we were aboard *Polly*. A bustle began to prepare the elegant smack and in short order we dropped down harbour under 'shunt' and staysail. Turning up Colne we found the sailing barge *Edme* and joined her at anchor a cable or so clear ahead. During these operations smacksman George Humm had stepped about the deck with all confidence, competence and familiarity. It was time for the 75-year-old to ask the 12-year-old to literally 'show me the ropes'. This was done most courteously and thoroughly (I know it won't go to your head, George!).

Mandy disappeared below to prepare bacon rolls and tea. Suddenly Ralph Merry rounded up under our lee with dipped gaff. Ralph had seen three new gigs in action on the river and had business to discuss with the skipper.

Then the clink and clank of *Edme's* windlass could be heard; she eventually stood away under all canvas towards the lower Thames for a barge match. What a glorious and stately sight she made!

We put two reefs in *Polly's* mainsail, then made sail, weighed anchor and were away for Maldon. Our smack made good progress, wind and tide being fair, and ignoring a passage off Mersea Flats we looked for Bench Head buoy. By this time the chop had become turbulent and white caps were everywhere. "Are we tacking through the wind, Skipper?" I enquired from the help. "Yes, we'll do that. Use plenty of helm!" came the reply. With a call for yet more helm we went from port to starboard tack and surged away towards Bradwell, broad reaching with

the headsails somewhat sulky from time to time, leaving Bench Head buoy to starboard. As we approached Bradwell at the bottom of the tide, taking care we were in the channel, conditions became much flatter and the wind lighter. We achieved a tidy gybe and steered for Thirslet spit. George, having played a full part throughout, felt the sun on his shoulders and began to talk about swimming. He was sent below to brew tea, but quite naturally was not going to give up that easily!

Eventually, having passed the Doctor we anchored below the South Double where, after more tea, and alas the consumption of George's ultimate pasty, we made for Osea Island beach with the aforementioned George at the helm again. We were soon on the gravel and then the sand, playing ducks and drakes and who can throw the furthest. Meanwhile *Polly* waited at anchor, with three trees in transit on Northey Island, looking her usual picture.

Once more aboard the third and final reef was put in the mainsail because we needed a slow and stately passage to our next anchorage to afford us sufficient depth of water. We entered Colliers Reach with a sense of occasion, two spritsail barges coming out from Maldon under sail, two more at anchor towards Northey Island and its causeway. It seemed impossible that a gory violent battle had occurred between Saxon and Dane here over a thousand years ago, but a statue of Byrtnoth stands to tell the tale of his sad fate and that of his band. A fate awaited, certainly, two members of our crew. We dropped anchor in the shallows opposite Herrings Point and tidied ship. According to an undertaking previously given by the Skipper, we prepared to swim. George it seems is a social swimmer and likes everyone to share his water pleasure. We streamed a large buoy astern on a long warp. In my present days I enter outdoor waters by a process of slow osmosis. This was to be denied me as I left the rope ladder in an unexpected hurry. Dressed for serious swimming in single-reefed hiking shorts and a very colourful teeshirt, the Skipper hit the water like an air to surface missile. George and I watched the seething bubbles in some dismay. After what seemed an unconscionable length of time the skipper reappeared without a splutter, much to our relief. After all we had been promised a meal



ashore, George and I! Forming line astern we circled *Polly* removing all the disfiguring mud stains round the waterline. Some 25 minutes later and after an involved struggle with the rope ladder I regained the deck, as did Skipper Stear but without the struggle. Speaking with Humm senior on the mobile, Mandy was congratulated on the swimming, but told that we would need a very large set of tongs, as George would never come out of his own accord! Indeed he was grampus-ing around in Humm heaven for some considerable time after, but a form of justice was in the wings.

Quickly we prepared to go ashore, and conveyed by our usual helmsman on the outboard we gained the waterside pub at Maldon. Having secured our initial refreshment, I was making for the bar to place the order for vittles. At this point the ever-alert George spotted small areas of mud emerging near the dinghy- time for a sharp exit. Thus the moral compass had come into play and we were condemned to tinned new potatoes, tinned hotdogs and something else that perhaps fortunately I can't remember. Actually it was very enjoyable, George's skill with a tin opener and his knowledge of how to boil hotdogs proving most apposite.

Eventually the question of allocated berths for the night was discussed. G Humm soon put a seamanlike conclusion forward- "If I sleep astern I can make sure the dinghy doesn't become trapped by the counter as the boat settles." In the meantime however *Polly* had decided, despite all our efforts to the contrary, that it was time to settle down somewhat wearily at a list of 20°. It was pointed out that George might be subject to a sudden, unpredictable Smith avalanche, during the chime hours, or in the same fashion the ancient apprentice might be target for a similar Humm happening. George sensibly decided to go forward to an individual bunk opposite the Skipper; thus any avalanche from either party would be abruptly arrested in the bilges. We all settled in, the stars came out and we slept.

The following day was one of 'shunting', drifting, and ghosting. There was little wind, and eventually, warm and comfortable sun. On leaving Herrings Point we were hailed by a yacht making for Heybridge Basin but nursing a groggy engine. We passed his stern as requested. Hearing that the smack's

name was *Polly* the skipper stated that he had crewed aboard during the last days of *Polly's* commercial reign. Skipper Stear quickly lined him up for a visit and suggested that he might care to sail in *Polly* again. At last we came abeam of Bradwell power station, and pinpointing our position, set a course to clear Mersea Flats and the wreck of the *Molliette*; George reckoned he could see the beacon, his eyes were young and mine dim but he seemed about right. Soon he was enthusiastically swinging the lead and finally using the sounding pole. On passing the *Molliette* beacon we hung in the tide for a time but then made our stately way to enter Brightlingsea creek. As we passed the Hard Gary Humm came alongside in the harbour master's launch to inform his son of his obligations during the coming weekend. As George was planning a short cruise with his mates aboard his own vessel he was a little downcast, but that's life, as the song says. The making tide increased our speed over the ground, and a clean pick-up of the mooring with the boathook proved impracticable. The Skipper turned *Polly* neatly into the mud to port, where we found the tide delivering the buoy and warp quite quickly to us. Although a couple more inches in height would have pleased my vanity, I was gratified not to have become a human connection between 10-ton *Polly* and the mooring.

Then back to a familiar routine once the smack had been tidied. After a careful briefing as to the speed of the tide, *Polly* was rigged for swimming once more and George released into the briny where he remained for the next thirty minutes.

The cruise had been delightful in all respects and George had proved to be an excellent crew and great company. I told him so as I shook his hand as we left the Colne yacht club pontoon. Thanks were also expressed to the irrepressible Skipper Stear for her kind inclusion of the ancient apprentice.



Maldon Regatta 2012 in pictures- David Chandler



Tight at the turn



Sunbeam CK328 relaxes after the race



Fly MN17, Alberta CK318 and Lizzie Annie MN23 near the finish at Maldon

Obituary: Frank Thompson- Jim Lawrence

Frank, sharp as a needle right up until the last, had enjoyed a pint of Guinness on Christmas Day and died peaceably on Boxing Day. He told his daughter Rosemary that he was happy and had enjoyed a good life. What an epitaph; Frank was aged 91.

Frank has been a personal friend of mine for sixty years; he once told me that if you get six real friends in your life then you are doing well, but Frank had many friends as was proved by the great number of people at the funeral. We sung him out with a rousing sing-song of 'Windy ol' Weather'.

The major passion in Frank's life has been the Thames sailing barge, and he helped form the Association of Bargemen; in the very early days he wrote the original syllabus for the Barge Master's examination, much of which is still included in the one in use today. Frank raced with the famous Jack Spitty in the *Edith May* and was a very reliable historian on the subject of the sailing barges. When he reached the age of sixty he came to work at the sail loft and we had together a very enjoyable five years. A typical dialogue between us might be:-

Jim How's that job coming along Frank?

Frank Alright, it's near enough.

Jim I don't want it 'near enough', I want it perfect!

Frank Well it is perfect.

Jim That's near enough then...

Frank then joined our race team in the bawley *Helen & Violet* (or the 'Violent Helen', as we used to call her). Besides this Frank spent more leisurely days sailing his little brig *Moonshine*.

As well as the Colne Smack Preservation Society, Frank was a long-time member of the Thames Barge Club (now Trust), the Wivenhoe Sailing Club and the Wivenhoe and Rowhedge Yacht Owners' Association; he was also a regular contributor to the journals of the Society for Spritsail Barge Research.

Well done Frank, you'll long be remembered.



The Colne Smack Preservation Society's annual

Shanty Night

6th April 2013

Colne Yacht Club, 7pm for 7.30

New venue, new menu and new music- Jasper Ceilidh. Same price though!

Tickets £12.50 per person- profits go to local charities

Tickets available 1st week of March from Spirals, Brian House and James Lawrence Sailmakers, or call Judy 01206 304663 or Madeleine 304802

Call Judy for a vegetarian option.

Some more dates for your diary...

Smack Dock working party

Medway Barge Match

Brightlingsea Regatta and boat show

Pin Mill Smack Race

Barge Passage Match

OGA Swallows and Amazons

Rowhedge Regatta

Pin Mill Barge Match

CSPS sail and Picnic

Blackwater Match

Wivenhoe Regatta

150th Thames Barge Match

Old Gaffers' Brightlingsea race

Swale Match

Mersea Town Regatta

Southend Barge Match

Colne Match

31st March

18th May

8th and 9th June

15th June

22nd June

22nd and 23rd June

29th June

29th June

30th June

1st July

13th July

13th or 27th July (tbc)

27th July

3rd August

24th August

25th August

14th September

Photo of Maldon Regatta 2012 by David Chandler