



The Never Setting Sun



# Smack Dock Soundings

THE JOURNAL OF THE COLNE SMACK PRESERVATION SOCIETY

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Mersea Dredging Match 2015 - winkle brig *Bumble's* crew sort through their catch.  
Photo 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 CSPA or its committee.

## From the editor...

This issue of SDS seems to be a backward-looking sort of affair, with David Chandler's coverage of the final events of last summer, Bob Kemp's reminiscences of the early '60s and, from much longer ago, an eye-witness tale of the Knock John wreck.

However, there is the fitting-out season just around the corner, and a full list of all the usual events to look forward to. Also, the barges have been invited to be involved in the Thames Festival in mid-September, an event which looks likely to be including the smacks as well. Difficulties with navigating the Thames (both natural and man-made) notwithstanding, this should be a highlight of the season, well worth joining in either as a crewmember or a spectator. Watch this space for more details!



## Chairman's Ramblings – Bill Williams

I hope you all had a Merry Christmas and I would like to wish you a Happy New Year. November 2015 saw us have our AGM. For practical reasons we moved the venue to the ground floor of the University Sailing Club. What was particularly pleasant was that on approaching the meeting we were greeted by the sound of Jimmy Lawrence and his group performing nautical melodies. This was a lovely way to start. The meeting was well attended, with all the seats being taken and standing room for others. Ian Muckle, the manager, made us welcome and should we able to use this building again in 2016 it would suit the Society. Following the official business there was an interesting discussion session. While at The London Boat Show, I heard the sad news that Steve Chick our Harbourmaster had passed away during the night. Only a few days previously, he had asked me into his office to explain the forthcoming Harbour dredging operations and how our Smack Dock would benefit. He was a good friend to the Society, and his help and support will be sadly missed.

At the time of writing we are in a wintery cold snap, but looking forward to 2016 this should be an interesting year for the Society. We have a programme of land-based social events and the usual sailing events to look forward to. There are some new people on the Committee with new ideas, and the Race Group are already thinking ahead to the Colne Race. The Smack Dock will continue to be a meeting place for us all and we have some work parties planned to keep it ship-shape. All very welcome.

Every member of the Society is important to us including smack owners, sailing members and non-sailing members. Please participate in whatever you can as much as you can, even if it is just to sit on the Dock seats and criticise the Chairman and Committee!! It is your Society, so make 2016 the year you get the most out of it.

## Forthcoming events

This issue will probably not make it through your letterbox before the Vintage Film Evening on 30<sup>th</sup> January, but don't forget the annual **Shanty Night** on **26<sup>th</sup> March** at the Colne

Yacht Club. Tickets and further details can be had from Judy Lawrence (phone 01206 304663). This long-standing tradition is not only a fun evening, but its proceeds are donated to local good causes, so help your Society continue its support amongst the town by joining in.

## Abuse of the Smack Dock – Bill Williams

Recently the problem of dog fouling on the Dock has been brought to my attention. Obviously this is a health hazard and cannot be tolerated. I have discussed this problem at length with our Berthing Master and Dock Master. It would seem that in the main, the problem is caused by unsupervised dogs being released onto the Dock by irresponsible owners, under cover of darkness. Realistically there is little we can do about this.

Practically, what every member should do, if they see dogs faeces on the Dock, is get the shovel from the shed and dispose of the mess in the appropriate way. Many of the Committee, the Race Group and members have dogs. All those I have spoken to tell me they act responsibly, carry bags, bag up their dogs mess and dispose of it as required by the local authority. What we all must do is if we see an irresponsible dog owner letting their animal foul our Dock and not clear up after it, is to take a photograph, obtain as much relevant information as possible and pass this on to the Council to pursue a prosecution and subsequent conviction. Our Dock is a fantastic resource so every one of us needs to act responsibly by being vigilant and looking after it.

The majority of waterside rats are a problem, carrying Weil's disease (leptospirosis) and goodness knows what other nasties. We all praised Nikki Ennion's dog Jasper when he killed a rat from the Dock, and we do need dogs and the scent of dogs to deter rats. I personally will be making a doggy poo bag holder and screwing it to the Smacksmans Return so anyone who is short of dogs' mess bags can retrieve a sack.

I make no apologies for ranting on about caring for our Dock. I care passionately about our Dock and believe it should be valued highly. We are fortunate to have such a functional resource so let's all use it and not let a minority abuse it.



## Sail and Picnic 2015

Although last summer's Sail and Picnic seems an age ago now we are in the middle of winter, Margaret Gladley sent in the following which is yet more proof of how much our non-boat-owning members enjoy this event:-

*This day turned out to be a real treat with much thanks to Paul Winter, our skipper and Peter Hickman, his mate. This article should have gone in the previous edition so apologies for the delay, but still a huge thank you for such a brilliant experience.*



On the day, the sky looked a bit grey and the wind was up too; the forecast was good though so we were hoping it would stay dry and there were two smacks going out, *My Alice* and *Maria*. Most people sailed on *My Alice* and I'm sure they enjoyed getting a taste of what it is like to be on a smack. I didn't get a chance to chat with them afterwards although we all chatted before departing.

We left the jetty at about 11 am and from *Maria*, we didn't get ashore until after 4, having had a perfect day!!

I had been assigned to *Maria*, with skipper Paul Winter and mate Peter Hickman. Jimmy Lawrence was with us too. I was in good

company! Well, expert company I'd say! Oh what a boat! We sailed around in the creek and then out to the Bench Head & back. Having owned a smack in the dim and distant past I was given the chance to helm. What a pleasure! *Maria* sails so beautifully, to me she seemed so well balanced but then Paul & Peter obviously know the boat so well and it looked to me to be in top condition. I know!! I'm not an expert by any means but the vibes sure were good.



A huge thank you for such a lovely day.  
Maggie Gladley

## Through the photographer's lens – David Chandler

### Colne Match 5<sup>th</sup> September 2015

For me, the highlight of this event is always the start, when the smacks and barges are massed together. After that, as they spread out, it is always difficult to get more than one or two boats in the frame. My results this year were patchy, to say the least, as the sky remained obstinately grey until the end, we got soaked by



*Edme* overhauls *Edith May* soon after the start

spray as we tried to keep abreast of both races, and an engine problem meant that we had to tie up at the Colne Bar and await rescue! Better luck next year!



*Maria* leads *Alberta* 10 minutes before reaching the outer mark

### Mersea Dredging Match 6<sup>th</sup> September 2015



A hive of activity on board *Gracie*, *Mayfly* and *My Alice*

The following day was completely different- full sun and a calmer sea. I was photographing this event for the first time (thanks to Jane Barnes and friends for my 'lift'). Although we missed the start, we had plenty of time to observe at



Dredging in progress: *Bumble*, *Peace*, *My Alice* and *Jack*

close quarters the dredging procedures and the sorting of the catch. A good turn-out saw 8 smacks and winkle brigs taking part. [Sadly,



*this is only about half the number of entrants compared to just a few years ago – Ed.]*

### Maldon Regatta 19<sup>th</sup> September 2015

*Fly* heads a group of nine smacks just after the start

Another lovely day and with 12 smacks competing, what could be better? This year I was able to follow the whole race (though leaving my car at West Mersea meant that I had to return by bus via Maldon and Colchester!) A good breeze made for an exciting race and the light was excellent for photography. At Osea, where the race ended, there was only a minute separating the winner, *Maria*, from *Alberta*. A thoroughly enjoyable day.



*Fly, Sallie and Polly round the Bench Head together*

Finally, a very big thankyou to all those who have helped me obtain many of my photographs this season.

### **Story of the Knock John wreck (Taken from 'Stories of the Colne' by L W Southern)**

*Thanks to Jon and Helen Brett for transcribing this tale, which makes present-day smack activities look pretty tame!*

About a hundred or so years ago, a full-rigged ship was wrecked in the late winter-time, on the Knock John sandbanks and the crew and passengers (if any) were totally lost.

She had on board a general cargo of all kinds of merchandise, and was bound out from Hamburg to China, or somewhere in the Far East, on a bartering expedition, and had the greatest variety of articles ever known on one ship, in the history of wrecked cargos in the district.

She had gone out of her reckoning, probably through the inset current.

The story of the finding of the ship, wrecked beyond hope, and without a sign of life, was told by a very old man who was the first person on board after the crew had left.

"We were fitted out for sto'boating," he said, "working in the Thames Estuary with three other vessels about our class, as partners. Each vessel carried a crew of five hands all told, the smacks being of the burthen of thirty tons.

We sailed from Brightlingsea after a hard gale had been blowing from the eastward, and went up Swin to Shoebury Knock, just below Shoebury Ness.

There we found thirteen ships, mostly colliers with coal for London, ashore on the sands. On making enquiries we found our services were not required in any way, so we beat down the Swin under close-reefed canvas, and brought up in the bight of the Barrow Sands, so as to be in a good position in case anything amiss more seaward, or as we say 'lower down'.

A little before midnight our lookout man went to the skipper, and reported that right away to the south'ard, a very large light was being exhibited.

The skipper turned out, and made it out to be a signal from a ship ashore, or in trouble, on the south side of the Barrows, or in the Knock John, the next sand south of the Barrows, and made all arrangements to be under weigh as soon as possible.

The weather was still the same, blowing hard easterly.

We got under weigh with our smack, and beat down to the windward, and about daybreak brought up again and came to anchor nearer the Heaps Sand where we could see the ship from which the signals had been given by means of burning tar barrels, always a sign of great distress at sea.

We got as far back as the north edge of the Barrows, and almost through the broken water, when our mast suddenly carried away, taking the sail with it and nearly capsizing the boat.

We waited until the tide eased a bit, and then getting the smack under weigh again with storm canvas set, we went with our vessel across the flat of the Barrows, passing on the way, two boats in a damaged condition, which we reckoned belonged to the wreck, and the people, in attempting to leave her, had evidently been washed away. We also passed other flotsam which evidently came from the vessel.

A heavy sea was running when we crossed the bank, but we managed to get to the north side of the Knock John sandbank, and sailing as close to the wreck as we could, had a good look at her.

She was a very fine and beautiful ship, but not a living soul was to be seen on board. Her head was lying towards the south-west, and she had a list to starboard, while all the masts and wreckage were lying on the lee side.



After a lot of manoeuvring, we got close to her starboard side, and the skipper and two more of us scrambled on board.

Hardly has we got onto the wreck, when another skipper and his crew from another The two old salts went round the deck of the wreck, but the only living things they could find were a cat, a dog, and a cockerel. They noticed that all the boats were away, except a damaged one which was hanging onto the wreck.

We proceeded carefully to explore the cabin as far as the water would allow, and very soon came across some of the cargo. First we discovered a quantity of unblocked beaver hats, or as we put it, gentlemen's long-shore felt toppers, all packed one into another. Large quantities of ladies' hats, and headgear of different kinds were all stowed away in various places, and then we stumbled upon a lot of small German brass clocks, in oval covered glasses, packed beautifully in wooden cases, a dozen in each case. These were carefully placed in our own boat alongside. Most of the stuff was dry, having been kept in the top part of the cabin house.

The crews of other boats began to come on board, and one of the skippers proposed that two of them should join in partnership, to which our skipper declined. No sooner had he declined the proposal however, than an unlucky sea broke under the lee of the wreck where our boat with one caretaker was placed and sent her onto one of the topgallant yards alongside the ship, ripping her side out. She sank almost immediately with the clocks and other goods, and our little boat was smashed up among the wreckage.

Seeing this calamity, we had to make a virtue of necessity, and accepted the proposition to join in the salvage with the skipper whose boat had the good fortune to remain uninjured.

After this we went to the main hold and found it full to the hatches with cargo, which we were there to salve, or as much of it as we could get while the opportunity offered before the gale increased.

We found, on removing the hatches, that they were blocked by large wooden cases containing pianos. We had no time to remove these, nor gear, nor appliances, at hand, the masts having been cut away, so there was nothing left to do but to 'up axes' and break them up out of the way, to get at the more handy part of the cargo below.

smack joined us. Many other smacks had been vying with each other to see who could first get on board, and now the two skippers faced each other, asking what was best to be done.

With these out of the way, we found in the main hold, bales of canvas and cloth of various colours and quality, including splendid scarlet, evidently for military purposes, and when we had broken a bit into the hold we came across large quantities of cheese, packed in separate cases, and stuck on top of the cargo. In other parts were small cases and hampers packed with cordials, liqueurs, champagnes, all kinds of wines, spirits and perfumes, whilst below were large quantities of gunpowder in barrels.

As the salvage proceeded, we were joined by men from other smacks of the entire neighbourhood, the weather having become a little finer during the night. The cases of liqueurs were placed on deck for removal in the small boats when the rush came, and the men, for the most part, tackled the spirits, breaking and smashing a good many things needlessly. It was a terrible sight. Many of the men were mad with drink, and otherwise excited amongst this fanciful and valuable property. Some worked properly, but others roamed about in the most disorderly fashion."

The clearing-out of the ship lasted some four weeks, as the weather only allowed of operations at certain times, and the news of the celebrated cargo was of course noised abroad in the regions round about.

The cargo gave up, in cases, guns of every description and make, pistols, swords, daggers, rolls of silk, tons of pocket knives, bags of shot, bales of cotton, china, ornaments, oil paintings, copper plates, and hosiery, and it was common enough to say she had everything but a pulpit.

The greatest confusion was created in all places where the cargo was landed, and although the authorities did their best to control matters, it was an impossibility. So many boats, people, and places were engaged in the exciting business, that a good deal of bad blood was engendered, resulting in a big riot at Brightlingsea in the High Street between some of the roughest of the men who had secured some of the property and officers of the Crown. A free fight took place, and both sides got a lot of broken heads and noses, although fortunately no lives were lost in the melee.



The notorious wreck and its cargo have ever since been spoken of as the 'Knock John ship', and events in Brightlingsea were referred to as having happened before, or after, the time of the Knock John. Hardly anyone engaged really profited by the business, as other work was neglected, but many queer tales are told of how some of the lucky ones made exceptional finds and lay low over them.

## Memories of Blackwater boats – Bob Kemp

*I stumbled across these photographs (and many more) on the internet whilst looking for something else, and wrote to Bob and his cousin Rob Kemp to ask permission for them to appear here. They were taken by Bob's father, Ted Kemp. Bob kindly wrote the following memoir to accompany them.*



*Sallie's crew enjoying a brisk sail*

Lucy has asked me to write a few lines to go with my father's photographs, but actually, I think they speak for themselves. Many of the events and people I recall appear in 'A Fair Wind for London' [by John Kemp, published 1983 by Sailtrust Ltd].

Over 50 years has passed since this all happened, but I'm not going to apologise for any inaccuracies! My father, John Edmund Kemp - always known as 'Ted' when he was in Maldon, was brought up in Heybridge and lived there until he went to London to find work before the Second World War. He married my mother, whose family also lived in Heybridge, but she was born and brought up in Balham. I was born in 1948 and brought up in London.

My grandmother, Lucy Kemp, lived in one of the sea wall bungalows at Mill Beach, so many summer weekends and holidays were spent there. It was just over an hour from Liverpool Street (if one of the new 'Britannia's was at the head of the train, oh joy!), change at Witham, on to the Maldon train and, if we were lucky, one of Osborne's buses was running to something like time, so we were saved the trudge along the Goldhanger Road. Lucy lived in fairly primitive conditions; there was gas and cold water and Mr Vango came once a week to change the toilet bucket. It must have been a trial for Mother, but I never heard her complain. I loved it. The tide sloshed up underneath and on calm nights you could hear the smacks' and barges' engines thumping downriver. The era of working sail was over.

Dad's half-brother, John Arthur Kemp, lived next door to Grandmother Lucy. His first boat was *Torment*, about the size of a winkle brig. Dad took me out in her a few times, but I think she was a bit of a brute and I believe that she capsized off Osea with Dad and Uncle John in her.



*Polly off the Mill Beach Hotel*

Then there was *Polly*. I sailed in her a few times; Dad more often. I seem to remember quite a lot of pumping: she'd sat on the beach at Maldon prom for over 60 years on her port bilge, so it's not surprising. I quite enjoyed pumping and one afternoon, tearing along off Mersea, I took it on myself to try the pump. Over went the bucket for a drop of water to prime it. The inevitable happened but I didn't let go of the rope - I dursn't - and I fetched up heavily aft. "You won't do that again, then," was the sum total of the sympathy shown. I was

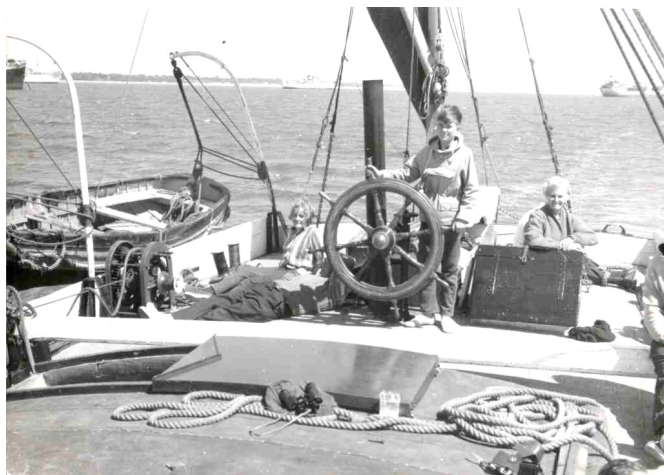


about 10 I suppose. When John Kemp put *Polly* up for sale, Dad had the opportunity to buy her. If only.....



S.b. *Memory*, Heybridge Basin. L-R: Sid Budd, Hob Keeble, Bob Kemp

Dad, being sociable, a local boy and well-remembered knew a lot of people on the waterfront, so evenings we'd set off to see John Otter aboard the barge *William Cleverly*, just above the Basin: bit by bit the barge was fitted out and one evening she had her mainsail bent on and it was set. I can't recall when John died or even whether *William Cleverly* ever sailed. I was very young, but I think there was the occasional evening aboard the barge *Clara*, Captain Banyard. A bit later, Peter Light had his smack *Sallie* at Mill Beach. Peter was endlessly cheerful and given to dangling me over the side, much to Mother's horror. Dad spent more time aboard *Memory* than I did and occasionally went as mate on the weekend trips. I sailed with Hob Keeble and Hervey Benham, who were god-like figures; I was too



*Memory* with laid-up ships off Bradwell, 1963. L-R: Jane Benham, Bob Kemp, Mrs Farrington

young and shy to feel confident to approach them, although Hob, beyond his bluff exterior, had a ready wit and was always willing to show you how to do things - once! I really liked Hedley Farrington and we had a great weekend up to Harwich and back soon after the 1963 Blackwater Match. He and Mrs Farrington, who spent much of the time knitting, taught me a lot about the barge and getting the best out of her. That, unfortunately didn't help much when, on another day out, at the helm, I put *Memory* ashore on St Peter's Flats. The barge was well out from the land and I knew no better! John Kemp shot up from the cabin, shouting and carrying on. I left the wheel in a hurry and, as Dad and Mother were also aboard, there was a certain family tension for a bit.

Later, *Memory* was replaced by *Thalatta*, I'd gone to college, Grandmother Lucy moved away from Mill Beach and spent her last years at Heybridge. My links with the Blackwater were broken, apart from the very occasional visit over the last 40-odd years.

When I was about 14 or so, Dad had bought a 16-foot clinker ex-Navy dinghy, built in 1933, called *Puffin*. I was now independent, so I was able to sail around with the barges, trying to keep out of their way. Looking back, I should also have taken notice of the motor barges which were still occasionally up and down on the tide, but they didn't have sails! I was there, however, when *Cambria* left Maldon for the very last time - 1970? - but sadly didn't have my camera. It was a warm summer evening: my Triumph 6T had failed to restart in the East End, so I only just got to Mill Beach in time. Am I right in thinking that *Cambria's* topsail was torn right down the leech?

And dear Jim Lawrence, [pictured right] who of all the sailormen and smacksmen is possibly the best-known and respected of all! The last two trips I had with him were aboard *Marjorie* in 1972 and '73. Endlessly





cheerful, full of dry wit and wisdom, never flustered or given to shouting and with a fount of knowledge about the Essex coast.

"Do you know why Brightlingsea is so called? (you probably do). It's because when those old Viking chaps came through the Spitway and saw the coast shining in the sun, one of them said 'What bright land do I see?' Now just put on the kettle mate and we'll have a nice cup of tea. All kinds of everything reminds me of you..."

I hadn't seen Jim or Pauline for over 40 years until I met them at Maldon Quay after the 2013 barge match. I introduced myself as 'Ted's boy' and of course he still knew who I was!



*Virtue Fidelis* under sail, presumably when new

I'm lucky enough to have a pretty little Stebbings-built Vertue, *Virtue Fidelis*, that I bought in Brightlingsea 10 years ago and sail on the Tamar and out of Plymouth. I've hardly been back to the Blackwater in the last 45 years, but we've started making occasional visits to West Mersea and an annual trip aboard s.b. *Reminder* so old memories are being revived. The smacks and barges look more handsome and cared-for than they ever did in work and compared to the Tamar, where

there's scarcely a traditional craft or yacht to be seen, the Blackwater is an eye-opener!



Ted and Bob Kemp

Ted Kemp died over 30 years ago. Sadly, his huge collection of negatives were destroyed: I suspect many of them had never been printed.



*Polly and Puffin*

Bob and Rob Kemp's website can be found at [www.copwick.net/jekemp](http://www.copwick.net/jekemp); it has a wealth of photos of smacks and barges, as well as some of the people mentioned above (and the trains!) – well worth a visit if you have internet access and time for a good sidetrack...



## Events Calendar 2016

Old Gaffers Association film night – Pin Mill Sailing Club  
 CSPS Shanty Night and Fish Supper  
 Brightlingsea Reclaiming of the Waters ceremony  
 Medway Barge Match  
 Blackwater Smack and Barge Match  
 Rowhedge Regatta  
 Heybridge Basin Regatta  
 Wivenhoe Regatta  
 Pin Mill Smack Race  
 Pin Mill Barge Match  
 Brightlingsea Regatta and Boat Show Weekend  
 East Coast Old Gaffers' Race  
 Swale Match  
 Mersea Town Regatta  
 Whitstable Harbour Match  
 Colne Match  
 Mersea Dredging Match  
 Thames Festival Barge Parade and Oyster Race  
 Maldon Town Regatta  
 Harwich Sea Shanty Festival  
 Harris smacks' rally (Rowhedge)

13<sup>th</sup> February  
 26<sup>th</sup> March  
 8<sup>th</sup> May  
 28<sup>th</sup> May  
 11<sup>th</sup> June  
 25<sup>th</sup> June  
 25<sup>th</sup> June  
 9<sup>th</sup> July  
 9<sup>th</sup> July  
 16<sup>th</sup> July  
 23<sup>rd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> July  
 30<sup>th</sup> July  
 13<sup>th</sup> August  
 20<sup>th</sup> August  
 20<sup>th</sup> August  
 10<sup>th</sup> September  
 11<sup>th</sup> September  
 17<sup>th</sup> September  
 17<sup>th</sup> September  
 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> October  
 6<sup>th</sup> November



*Looking beautiful as she heads up-river, Fly approaches a Mersea racing mark during last year's Maldon Regatta*

*Photo by David Chandler*

Event details listed above are believed to be correct at the time of going to press.

Please notify the Editor with any changes or corrections as soon as possible for inclusion in the next issue of Smack Dock Soundings.