



The Never Setting Sun



Smack Dock Soundings

THE JOURNAL OF THE COLNE SMACK PRESERVATION SOCIETY

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Pin Mill Smack Race 2016 – from left to right: *Ethel Alice*, *Sunbeam*, *My Alice*, *Maria*, *Iris Mary* and *Gracie* fetching down the Orwell soon after the start. Photo 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...

Looking at the photo above, with its beautiful autumn sunlight, reminds me that the cold easterly weather that has already lasted nearly a week as I write will not last forever. It seems unimaginable at the moment, as the smacks languish ashore or in their winter mud berths, but soon enough it will be time to start coming out of hibernation and getting ready for the forthcoming season.

Hopefully the two smacks in need of new owners mentioned in these pages will also find new homes, and live to see another spring. I needn't remind you that the P in CSPS stands for Preservation- I hope that we can at least keep the vulnerable ones in hibernation, as once lost, they are gone forever...



From the Chairman – Martin Doe

Looking out now it is difficult to remember a warm breeze, no frost or fog, or even rain in a seemingly interminable winter. Take heart though as even if we have another cold snap, spring is not far away and by the end of the month there will be flecks of green in the hedges and happier birds and soon after the hum of the lawnmower again.

Now is the time to sharpen the plane blades and chisels, check over the brushes, etc, because suddenly spring will have arrived in its usual hurry. Just after the clocks change we are celebrating with a **Smack Dock Working Party** on **Sunday April 2nd** to clean up generally and particularly scrub the green walkways. Come for a walk, maybe with a dog, and join us, even to help distribute tea or coffee and join us for a cup yourselves and make it a small morning social party. I really hope to see a good number of you visit then.

We will just have had our cheese and wine/vintage film evening, with some fab J-Class footage (sadly the event for the end of January was cancelled due to inadequate ticket sales); and we will be looking forward to the fish pie and **Sing, Say and Play evening** on **May 6th** at Colne Yacht Club at 7 for 7.30 pm. Do join us for the latter, a different evening to recent shanty nights.

We will be assisting the annual **Blessing of the Waters** on **Sunday 28th May**, with smacks to carry the dignitaries to 'beat the bounds', always a spectacular sight...

An early warning for the annual **Sail and Picnic** day, booked for **July 23rd** at 10am - we really want to make this a bigger event this year, which means more attendees, whether members or not, for a sail on these powerful craft. Just come in soft shoes and your own picnic. The more who book to come, the more smacks will attend for a fabulous free day. All names to me, please, on 01206 272000.

Priscilla's progress, an update – Mick Allen

So far the hull planking is finished, 50% faired-up but not yet caulked, and the deck planking has been started.



Priscilla, taken in late December by Mick Allen



Anyone for a bawley? – Thistle RR2





In contrast to the preceding, and following on all too soon after the sad demise of the transom-sterned smack *Joseph T*, Paul Winter has passed on the following message:-

FREE TO A GOOD HOME

Should anyone wish to take ownership of the Rochester bawley *Thistle*, please contact Mark Jones as soon as possible: 0771 0057 294 mark.jones.2@aonhewitt.com

Thistle is at Hollowshore, Kent and may be destined for breaking up shortly if not moved on. She is one of the last (if not the last) of the Rochester bawleys, which were built with some differences to the Leigh and Harwich bawleys; some had their masts in tabernacles in order to be able to pass under the Rochester Bridge.

John Samuel Rigby 1935-2016 – remembered by Jim Lawrence

It was with great sadness that the Tollesbury church filled to overflowing to say goodbye to John Rigby on 10th January 2017. The service was conducted by the Reverend Keith Lovell, who really made the service very personal and brought us great comfort. John was born on 8th August 1935, and died 10th December 2016. He was an extremely popular man, having saved both the *Charlotte Ellen* and then the *Sunbeam*, and also was the sole organiser of the Tollesbury Smack Race, which he made one of the loveliest races of the yearly sailing calendar. The first smack he fitted out was the *Charlotte Ellen*. Later, on a voyage up Swin, she unfortunately foundered on the West Barrow sands, and would under most circumstances have been considered a total loss. But John, with great energy, hired air bags and rounded up a crew to go and save the ship, which within two or three days, had virtually filled with sand. He was successful in raising the *Charlotte*, and brought her on to Mersea foreshore, and thence to Johnny Milgate's for rebuilding. His second venture into smacks was the lovely *Sunbeam*, which had partly been rebuilt in Brightlingsea by Cyril White and Tony Terle. He had *Sunbeam* removed to Peldon, where Johnny Milgate finished the work.

John was without a doubt one of the friendliest and one of the most generous people in the smack community, and is a great loss to all who

think saving these historic vessels and our maritime heritage worthwhile.

Brightlingsea's Blessing & Reclaiming of the Waters



Blessing of the Waters 2016 – photos supplied by Roger Tabor

An invitation to all smack owners/captains:-

The Deputy of the Cinque Port Liberty of Brightlingsea invites you to attend & take part in Brightlingsea's Reclaiming of the Waters event, that will follow the historic Brightlingsea tradition of Blessing of the Waters.

The Blessing of the Waters, fish & boats will take place this year on 28th May, which is the nearest Sunday to Ascension Day, consequently it is later than last year so fortunately most smacks will be back in the water. Due to the date, this year it is able again to be part of Brightlingsea's Regatta & Boat Show weekend activities.

The Blessing will take place in the early afternoon at the Hard on the Hammerhead and on board *Pioneer*. The Blessing will again be given by the Bishop of Colchester, supported by the clergy of Brightlingsea, led by Rev Anne Howson.

The Deputy, accompanied by the Bishop and clergy, Cinque Port mayors from Kent and local Essex mayors and others will then go aboard *Pioneer* & the smack flotilla.

The Reclaiming of the Waters is a procession of Brightlingsea's historic sailing smacks followed by sailing barge *Edme* and other vessels along Brightlingsea Creek. As they leave the Hard they are accompanied by cheers and noise! Their destination is off Bateman's Tower,



Brightlingsea's West Ness (the old name for West Marsh Point).



Ascension Day is a traditional time to 'beat the bounds', and Brightlingsea's historic fishing fleet of smacks parading along the creek re-assert Brightlingsea's rights to its own waters in its own Liberty.

Brightlingsea joined the Cinque Ports over 650 years ago to gain support to counter challenges to its rights on its waters. Across many centuries Colchester and Brightlingsea claimed a different location for West Ness, the limit of the borough's Colne fishery. As a result of the determination of Brightlingsea's oystermen, protective actions of Lord Wardens as Admirals of the Cinque Ports plus those of particular Lords of Brightlingsea manor, Brightlingsea remained the only independent fishery connected to the Colne. What had been a matter of heated dispute became an issue of the past when Colne oystermen and the borough came to co-operate with a company that regulated the oyster industry of the Colne.

The Blessing is a great way of showing off Brightlingsea's historic maritime heritage to an appreciative audience. The CSPS chairman has advised it is best to assume smacks will be dressed, and not under sail for the procession!

If you would like to take part in this event please contact the chair of the Blessing of the Waters committee on 01206 306900, or inform the CSPS Chair, Martin Doe. High tide on 28th May is due to be at 1.51pm (5.3m), so the event will be taking place from earlier. Blessing Service

begins at 12.45, & lasts about half an hour, with the boats away around 1.30pm

The event has the support of:-
The Deputy & the Cinque Port Liberty of Brightlingsea, The Mayor & Council of Brightlingsea, The Brightlingsea Boat Show & Regatta Committee, The Colne Smack Preservation Society, The Pioneer Sailing Trust, The Vicar of All Saints & St James, the Colne Yacht Club, the Brightlingsea Sailing Club, Brightlingsea Harbour Master, The Motley Crew, The Band of the Church Lads & Church Girls Brigade, The Scouting Movement in Brightlingsea, The Royal Naval Association, Brightlingsea, Guild of Brightlingsea Freemen.

A letter from France...



Dear Sir,

We're organizers of an international maritime festival called La Semaine du Golfe du Morbihan, which takes place every 2 years in south Brittany, in the waters of a 'little sea', the gulf of Morbihan. This event attracts around 1000 boats of character (traditional & classic), split into 10 flotillas according to their type & sailing profile. Each flotilla has its own sailing programme for the week, hosted in the evening in one of the 16 harbours of the area. Festivities are organized by communities each time they welcome a flotilla.

Our next rendez-vous will take place in May 2017, from the 22nd to the 28th. You'll find information on our website:-
<http://www.semainedugolfe.com/Home-1074-0-0-0.html>

We've been fans of Essex Smacks for years,



admirers of their lines, velocity and seaworthiness. One of them is now based here, *Unity of Lynn*, who now berths in Auray. We would love to host some of them for the event, and see them wandering along the 'little sea's scenery with the rest of the fleet. For sure, they would receive a special welcome.

I found your email address on the internet & thought you might be able to pass them the information. If ever some of them feel up to join us next year, they're cordially invited. Please feel free to ask me for any further details.

Sincere regards,
Anne Morice
Maritime coordinator

The Mersea Dredging Match 2016 – William Baker

This year we had 10 boats entered, with 9 smacks and bumkins dredging on the day, and yet again we had a fine sunny day with the sea breeze picking up to finish the event. On shore at the Packing Shed Island there were seafood platters from the Company Shed, beer and wine from the Mersea Island Brewery for sale and also a raffle, which raised £268, which will help with costs for next year's Dredging Match. The winner of the oyster opening competition was Sel Yazen from the Mersea Oyster Bar. *Gracie* CK46 won the John Frost trophy for 'the smack judged to have dredged and been handled in the most seamanlike and professional manner', and *Maria* CK21 was the smack with the greatest average weight of native oysters.



Light conditions at the start of the 2016 Dredging Match.

The judges, Alison Debeny and Philine zu Ermgassen, in a thank you by email said, 'We

had an amazing time and felt really privileged to be there.'

The West Mersea Mayor Carl Powling, in a hand-delivered letter wrote, 'We both agreed that the day was fantastic and everyone on board and at the ceremony afterwards was great, we enjoyed the sorting the oysters on the smack and pulling in the dredge. Also the seafood platter was second to none. I must say I am so chuffed with my own Mersea Dredging Match mug. We really couldn't have had better company or a better day out.'



A busy crew aboard *Iris Mary* CK105

Many thanks to the competitors of the Mersea Dredging Match for coming this year, and please encourage more smacks, bawleys, bumkins and brigs to come next year.

Jolie Brise CK 6, a Colchester smack in foreign parts - Carl Öhrström



The last of her kind built by Kidby of Brightlingsea, 1938. Her first owner was Ben



Chaplin. This boat is also mentioned in Edgar J March's book 'Sailing Trawlers'.

Rebuilt to yacht in 1953, with teak deck and mahogany details in the interior. Length about 30.5' excluding bowsprit, beam about 10.5', draft about 4.5'. Oak and Oregon pine on oak, with copper sheathing in the water line fitted 2009 at Patrikssons boatyard in Sjöhed (as a prevention measure against ice when she was brought into the Baltic Sea). Most of the planking was replaced during the eighties. Hull is in good condition, except for the bow timber which is decayed and needs work within the next 5-10 years. Work on deck is also needed due to neglected maintenance the last 2-3 years.

The original Lister engine was replaced 2001 with a Volvo MD22P 4 cylinder diesel 59 hp (based on a Perkins Prima). This work was professionally made in the boatyard of Ellös, Orust. The engine is well maintained and runs good. New tanks were fitted 2013-2015 (water 100 L, fuel 100 L, septic 50 L)

Traditionally rigged with solid wooden mast, spars and retractable (and erectable) bowsprit. Sails from James Lawrence, 1990 (Main, jib, outer jib, storm jib, topsail). Main & Jib refitted with new boltropes 2015 (McIntosh segelmakeri/Stockholm).



A lot of original details are included, amongst others the original kerosene lamps and lanterns

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Winter price: £12,000

That wreck on the Mersea shore – from Peter Fisher's archive

Those of you who know the Colne opposite Brightlingsea creek will be aware of a small tangle of decaying ironwork visible on the East Mersea shore, poking up through the deep mud that has built up inside the Stone. It is marked by a red buoy; perhaps less well-known is what this wreckage once was.



The *Lowlands* was built in 1888 by William Gray and Co., W Hartlepool. She was a steel single-screw steamer of 1789 tons gross (1165 tons nett), with the signal flag hoist KRJP, and official number 92925. Dimensions were 260.5' x 36.6' x 18.2', and she had a 150hp engine. Owners were Northumbrian Shipping Corp'n, Newcastle (J Crass and Co I think actually managed her for this firm). Master at the time of her loss was Capt. F.W. Major.



She sailed from Hull on March 16th 1916, loaded with timber-deals, boards and battens, destination not stated because it was wartime. On the 18th she was torpedoed without warning by a U-boat in a position off the Kent coast which was eight miles NE by E of the North Foreland. Being timber-laden, she did not sink and was taken in tow by the tug *Java*, then under Admiralty service and named HMS *Carcass*. She was towed to the Thames, and beached on Mucking Flats, on the Essex side, below Gravesend. During WW1 a number of ships were beached here until it could be decided whether they could be effectively repaired and returned to service. Here her timber cargo was removed.

Lloyds List had a regular feature for ships in the Port of London showing whether they were 'In Dock', in which case they gave the number of the dock and shed number etc, or 'In the River', in which case they gave the location - wharf, etc. Up to the 28th December 1916 she is listed as Beached at Mucking.

She is not listed in the 1917 issues, which were very heavily censored, and contain only a small proportion of the ships actually lost, which got worse and worse in 1917 and 1918.

The issue of 16th February 1917 states that the vessel's owners, in response to questions, stated on February 9th that *Lowlands* was a Total Constructive Loss.

Thereafter she vanished from Lloyds List. Information of subsequent history is from several people, and lacks things like dates and other facts one would like to know. She was apparently patched and towed away to the River Colne. Why, when, and who bought her, and why they bought her, is not known.

Apparently the patch shifted and she made a lot of water, and was put ashore on the Gazelet so she could be pumped out. When she was refloated she was towed into Colne by the tug *Girl Guide*, with Basil Steady's father in charge, and with Harry French piloting her. At this point her pumps packed up and she was beached to save her from sinking. French wanted to put her ashore on the Brightlingsea side of the river, but was over-ruled, which is why she was put ashore at East Mersea where she slipped off and broke her back. There is a possibility that she was to be broken-up at Wivenhoe; she was too long to get in the drydock.

'Gossip From The Hard' - Excerpts from Brightlingsea Parish Magazine, 1892 (on loan to the editor from David Watts)

January 1893

The new year opens gloomily enough, we are sorry to say, for all industries represented here. Never before have we seen all the stowboat gear brought ashore before Christmas, and the vessels fitting out for something else. It was however quite time to do so, for the catch of the whole fleet this winter would not make a decent return for one boat, and no earnings whatever have been coming to the wives and families at home. Indeed almost all the fishermen are taking leave of the stowboat season, by settling up in debt for the food on board.

"Skilling," too, owing to the depression in the deep-sea oyster trade, does not afford a much brighter prospect, to say nothing of the rigours of the climate, which always render expeditions to the North Sea anything but pleasure trips at this time of year.

Lastly, we find that the channel fleet had scarcely realized the very moderate success with which we credited it last month. For several weeks previous to their return home for Christmas, the weather had been so bad that it was a matter either of lying in harbour, or knocking about under three reefs, and nothing could be done.

Happily, however "Hope springs eternal in the human breast" of fishermen as of other folk, and it is westward that they are now almost all directing their course, either for oysters or for scallops in the English Channel. We heartily wish them God speed. There is of course always a risk of spoiling the market when a large number of boats are at work in the Channel together, but that cannot be helped.

It is satisfactory to see that some stir is being made against the pollution of the waters of the Thames estuary by the discharge of the London sewage, to which we referred last month, as one possible cause of the disappearance of sprats from our Bay.

[There follows a long extract from the Kent and Essex Sea Fisheries Committee, describing a meeting between them and the First Lord of the Admiralty, Earl Spencer, regarding discharge of 'mud' into the Thames.]



Events Calendar 2017

Blackwater Match film night (7pm, Maldon Town Hall)

CSPS cheese & wine, Archive film night

Smack Dock tidy-up morning

CSPS Sing, Say and Play

Brightlingsea Regatta and Boat Show

Blessing of the Waters ceremony

Medway Barge Match

Rowhedge Regatta

OGA Swallows and Amazons weekend

Blackwater Smack and Barge Match

Wivenhoe Regatta

Pin Mill Barge Match

Heybridge Basin Regatta

Old Gaffers' East Coast Race

Thames Barge Match

CSPS Sail and Picnic

Swale Match

Whitstable Barge Match

Mersea Week

Mersea Town Regatta

Southend Barge Match

Colne Match

Mersea Dredging Match

Pin Mill smack race

Thames Barge Parade (West India Dock)

Maldon Town Regatta

Tollesbury Regatta

25th February

25th March

2nd April

6th May

27th – 28th May

28th May

3rd June

10th June

10th – 11th June

17th June

24th June

1st July

8th July

15th July

15th July

23rd July

29th July

5th August

20th – 25th August

26th August

27th August

2nd September

3rd September

16th September

16th – 17th September

23rd September

7th October

All details believed correct at the time of going to press.

Please contact the Editor as soon as possible if you know of any additions or corrections.

Alberta and Maria on the Hard for a pre-race scrub – photo by Peter Fisher.