



The Never Setting Sun



Smack Dock Soundings

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With her cut-down rig, the Cann-built bawley *Hilda Marjorie* was still working under engine in the Medway until the latter part of the 20th century: August 1976. She is seen here off Bee Ness jetty.

Photo by Charles Dance, from the SSBR Archive.

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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...

As you will have no doubt noticed, there was a distinct lack of a Jan/Feb issue of SDS; entirely my fault and I apologise for the omission, especially if you missed out on either the film evening or the working day as a result of my not having published the dates. Having done the last 21 editions, I feel it is time for me to retire as Editor, and let some fresh air in. Please get in touch with Martin Doe or myself if you would like to have a go. It needn't take up much of your time, and does not need a fancy computer or skills, and I will of course be happy to help with your first attempt if you need it. Meanwhile, hope you are all enjoying the fine weather and maybe even getting some sailing in!



CSPS Chairman, Martin Doe, would like to draw your attention to the following events:-

2nd June: Blessing and Reclamation of the Waters. Finishes with a grand pageant of barges and smacks ferrying the dignitaries to 'beat the bounds' from Batemans Tower to North Creek.

30th June: CSPS Sail and Picnic day at 10am at the top of the Hard. Free of course but wear soft shoes and bring your own picnic for a good few hours afloat. All bookings IN ADVANCE with Martin Doe, 01206 272000.

Advance Warning: **Saturday September 7th** for the Colne Smack and Thames Barges Match, hopefully this year with a new fleet, the West Mersea Winkle Brigs, sailing a shorter inshore course and giving an almost constant spectacle while competing. Start time still to be finally determined, hope for 10.30 from Batemans Tower.

Smack for sale – *Alando* CK178



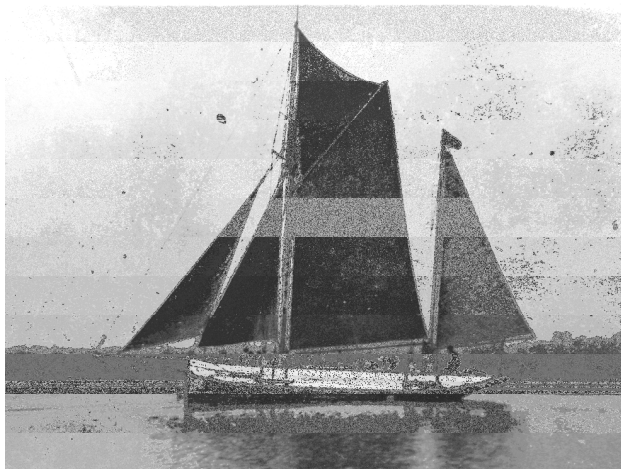
26 ft Essex Smack *Alando* CK178
Built by Aldous, Brightlingsea 1923.
3 berths, Inboard diesel engine.
Owned since 2003 and much work carried out by owner.
Recently refitted.
Looks great, sails beautifully.
Currently located Gillingham River Medway
For details / viewing 07971 933150

Smack *Waterlily*

During the winter I had the pleasant surprise of an email from Trevor Chatting, whose initial article is printed below.

Re-building the counter stern of the *Waterwitch* – Trevor Chatting

Waterwitch, launched *Waterlilly* in 1886, was a Colchester smack used mainly for fishing but occasionally for a little coasting, carrying explosives and small guns to the Continent. By the time I began to crew on her, the cutter rig had been altered to what was technically (I think) a ketch-rigged yacht. The mainsail had been reduced in area by shortening the boom and gaff, and a bermudan mizzen was added at the stern of the smack. The extra weight of the mizzen mast, and conversion to wheel steering (from a very long tiller), by 1960 had proved too much for the wooden jointing holding the over-hanging counter stern.



I had sailed the East coast in *Waterwitch* for six years, increasing my biceps each season by hours spent operating a semi-rotary bilge pump because she DID leak!! One year, we left Whitstable harbour with a strengthening south-westerly wind, sailed down the Black Deep and arrived at the Deben entrance near high water. We picked up a pilot, and with more than enough water over our decks, gained smooth water. Sailing on to an anchorage at Waldringfield, we all took a spell on the pump, and a passing yachtsman inquired, "Did we have a bath on board?" seeing the constant discharge overboard!



At Thurrock Yacht Club, we had recently built a slipway, and reinstated a causeway to low water, so we dug the bottom of a wooden lighter free of mud as a resting base for *Waterwitch*. The lighter bottom was flat with 12"x5" cross-members at 18" spaces. On a high water spring tide we manoeuvred the bottom as high up the slipway as was possible, within the two wing walls formed by the boatyard and slipway.



Now, the principal owner of *Waterwitch* was a First Engineer on the *Electo*, a powerful tug solely used to pull loaded petroleum lighters from Shell Haven in the lower Thames to a depot at Wapping, returning with the empties on the next ebb tide. The old Surrey Dock on the south side of the Thames handled the majority of imported timber for the Capital; when unloaded wood was taken from the docks in sailing barges and lighters, it was not at all unusual for timber to fall from them into the sometimes rough tidal Thames. For some months a useful stash of suitable planks was collected and stored on the road lighter, *Electo's* home berth.

From memory it was October, and evening time, when we tied *Waterwitch* quietly to the road lighter to transfer the timber across, temporarily held up by the Thames River Police inquiring the nature of our business, and returned to a mooring at Grays to plan the reconstruction of the stern. The first task was to position a chain from the top of the mainmast, to incorporate a pull lift, and take a chain round the fallen counter stern, and then jack up the whole set-up to give a sweeter deck line. All the clever work was carried out by two carpenters, my job was to clear and clean rotting timber frames, rainwater from deck leaks being the

cause of the rot. And of course make the tea! Within the rotting timber were the fattest longest white grubs I had ever seen.

Did we cure the leaks? Well, it was better!

I enquired whether Trevor knew any more about what became of the Waterwitch, and he was kind enough to send me several more photographs and the following article written by the daughter of the principal owner, Victor Dines. In it, she refers to her husband and 2 sons, John and Matthew.

Some history of the *Waterwitch* - Eleanor Dines

This Christmas Matthew gave John the book 'River Colne Shipbuilders' by John Collins and James Dodds. The following quotation caught my eye.

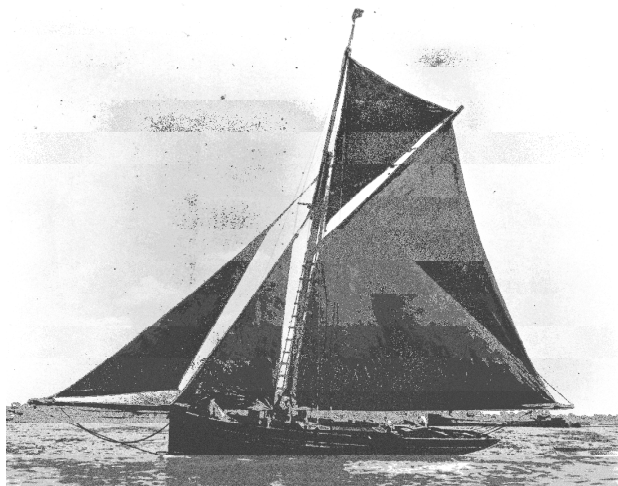
(Reproduced from River Colne Shipbuilders, Collins and Dodds, p.222)

We remembered *Waterwitch* had originally been called *Waterlily*. Might this be her? Matthew encouraged me to email James Dodds, whose family papers had provided the quotation; he is well-known as an artist of maritime subjects mostly working in linocut. I asked him whether he knew what had become of the *Waterlily*, and if not, perhaps she had become the smack my family knew. He kindly replied that he knew of two boats of that name, and believed a derelict at Tollesbury to have been his great-grandfather's, but he forwarded my email on to John Collins, who is the archivist at the Nottage Maritime Institute at Wivenhoe. His reply was quite exciting.

"There is another *Waterlily* which is the right size to be the one your father owned, and *is* the one owned by James Dodd's great-grandfather. I do not have any news of her since she ceased fishing in 1936 but it is quite likely that she became a yacht as many of the old CK smacks did.



"*Waterlily* CK298 20GRT (13 net) cutter smack. 40.3x11.6x5.5 C6/1885 by Root & Diaper at Brightlingsea, Colchester for £165. ON 87297 (and then details of owners up to 1931)"

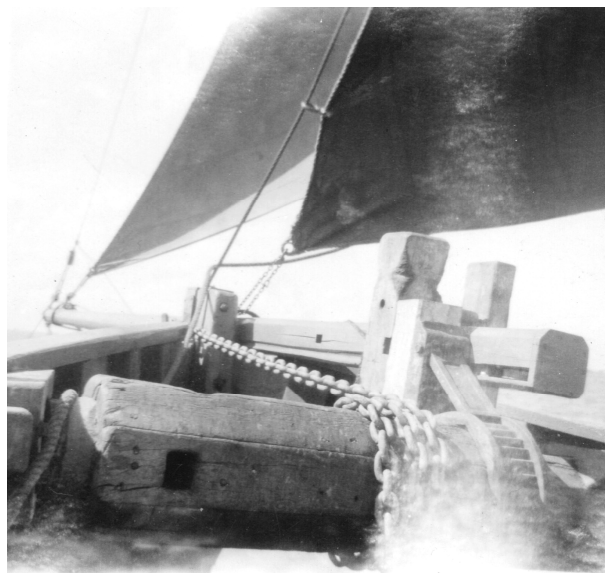


I sent a copy of our one photo of *Waterwitch* with cutter rig which interested them both but saw no way of finding out whether the two boats were the same. John knew that a registry number was inscribed on the main bulkhead in *Waterwitch* but of course we could not recall it. He thought however of phoning Trevor Chatting who remains very interested in all boat matters and sailed on the *Witch* often as a boy.



I asked him if he recalled her CK number but he went one better as he had recorded the ON number from the bulkhead on an old photo and had been looking it up only recently as he was trying to find her on the mercantile register. He phoned back almost immediately and there was the matching number: ON87297, our

incontrovertible proof that the *Waterlily* taken across the Channel with small arms in the early twentieth century is the same boat as our *Waterwitch* of many fond memories.



I hope to find out a bit more by one means and another boosted by this extraordinary sequence of events.

Ed.- Trevor says Waterwitch was sold and sunk at Thurrock Club and finally broken up.

From the archive: photos of *My Alice's* rebuild - Brian Kennell



This was taken at John Milgate's yard, at Peldon, when 'Nautical' Norman Childs still owned her. He had been using her in Paglesham, oyster dredging, until she would no longer stay afloat.

John Milgate's yard and moorings have helped save many smacks, amongst them *Iris Mary*



CK105 and Puritan CKxxx. This last has been lovingly rebuilt by John and helpers as a 'retirement project', and many hundreds of hours and quality materials have gone in to make her a top notch job.



Having changed hands, here we see *My Alice* laying alongside Rick Cardy's tug, off the Prom at Maldon.



Her deck was a shambles, but we can still see many of her original features amongst the later additions.



The smack coming ashore at Downs Road Boatyard; the beginning of the rebuild commencing.



With the hull carefully set up to retain the original shape, the work of stripping off the deck began. Here new aft deadwoods have been fitted, the new timber contrasting starkly with the original.



New framing replaced the old; drilling the frame off is Lawrence Weldon, who helped me in the earlier stages of the rebuild.



This view shows the new horn and quarter timbers going in to form the counter. This is always a delicate stage, as a fair sheer and pretty stern are crucial to the looks of the boat, but with no space to stand back and view the boat as a whole it is a fraught process.



Pete Graham checking the run with a batten to see how the planks will land at the sternpost. He and Shaun White helped in the latter stages.



Here the deck structure nears completion. *My Alice* received a painted plywood deck, rather than the original laid one which can be seen in the earlier photo. This is strong and watertight, with few of the maintenance issues a traditional deck would entail.



At last, the hull is completed, and with a sharp new paint job freshly applied, the smack returns to the water.



Safely moored in a mud berth at Downs Road Boatyard, *My Alice* awaits fitting out and rigging up. Ready for the next century!



‘Gossip From The Hard’ - Excerpts from the Brightlingsea Parish Magazine, from the Victorian era (on loan to the editor from David Watts)

January 1892

The last of the boats to return home from the North Sea, of those which were out in the November breeze was the *Austria*, belonging to Emsworth, but manned by a Brightlingsea crew. She had become considerably overdue, and great uneasiness was felt for her safety, up to Thursday afternoon, Dec. 10th, when a telegram reported her arrival at Harwich. The fact was thankfully referred to by the rev. J. Kemp, who was the special preacher at Evensong that night. It need not be said that the *Austria* had had a sufficiently rough time of it at Skilling. Her delay, however, was due to the length of time it took her – a whole fortnight – to *turn* home, against foul winds. She had indeed experienced a most narrow escape, but this adventure occurred close by home, and an uncommonly strange one it was. As the *Austria* was beating up the Wallet abreast of Clacton, on the stormy night of Wednesday, Dec. 9th, and her weary crew were anticipating the rest and safety of home in a few hours’ time, they had the misfortune to touch the Gunfleet Sand, and immediately found themselves stuck fast amongst the breakers. It was about dead low water at the time, 11 p.m., and at first they hoped that the vessel would come off again with the rise of the tide. The flow however seemed only to lift the sand, instead of the ship, and the depth of water under her grew less and less. A big flare was lighted and kept burning for more than an hour, in the hope of attracting the Clacton life-boat, but in vain, for although the signal must have been seen at Clacton, it appears that the life-boat regulations only recognise rockets as calls for help. There seemed to be nothing for it now, but to take to their rowboat, and abandon the ship to her fate, together with the freight of 32,000

oysters, for which they had worked so hard. To launch the boat however proved a fearfully hard task. It was a very heavy boat, and was on the weather side. The breakers were constantly flying over the vessel, and as often as they managed by a desperate effort to get the boat on to the rail, a big sea would come and knock it off again, half filling the boat, and sending the men sprawling backwards. Then there was to bale it out, and to try again. For no less than two hours and a quarter did they weary themselves in this apparently hopeless task, ere they succeeded at last in launching the boat, and jumping into her. They then pulled as well as they could for the shore, keeping her as much as possible head to wind, and shouldering the seas, which they also tamed a good deal by means of oil dropped over the stern. Hour after hour they thus toiled on, and like St Paul and his mates in their shipwreck, “wished for the day,” which seemed as if it would never come. In the first glimmer of the dawn, the skipper fancied he could sight some craft to leeward. Yes, it was so! As it grew lighter, all hands could make her out. –What was she? A barge, very likely. Would she see them? Yes; she was evidently laying herself out for them: they will easily fetch her. Presently the long stare at her gives place to a stare in one another’s faces. “Why, as true as I’m alive,” sings out one, at length, “if it ain’t the old gal herself come after us!” And so it was, Being very strongly built, she had stood all the knocking on the sand, and at high water had come off again. She was now heading for Frinton Low-way, and in another half hour would have gone ashore. With a cheer of delight, they pulled their hardest towards her, in spite of the seas they shipped, came alongside, and boarded and took possession of their own derelict ship! No easy task was even this, drenched, and chilled, and benumbed, as they were. Once on board however, they put her before the wind, and made for Harwich,



which they reached about 10 o'clock. Fortunately the Mission Ship *Sapper* happened to be there, and the Rev. G.C.M. Hall at once kindly welcomed them on board, and provided them with the refreshment which they stood so sorely in need of, utterly worn out as they were, and looking very much as if they had been dredged up themselves from where they got their oysters. Finally they arrived home here about the middle of Friday night. We are glad to be able to add that the *Austria*, on inspection, proved to have sustained no damage from her adventure. The *Austria's* flare on the Wednesday night had been seen by some of our Stowboats, which reported afterwards that on going to look on the Gunfleet in the morning, they had found nothing, the vessel in distress, whatever she might have been, having no doubt broken up!

A very remarkable phenomenon was witnessed that same night, viz., a lunar rainbow. It was about 1 a.m. A heavy squall of rain had just passed, and the moon gleaming out beneath a black cloud in the west, threw a very distinct and weirdly beautiful rainbow on the eastern sky.

Pictures from last year's Blessing of the Waters ceremony – Roger Tabor



Liz Artindale

This one is of bawley-yacht *Blackbird* with Brian Croucher as skipper; standing proud at the prow is the Mayor of Fordwich, one of the Cinque Ports (a fellow Limb with Brightlingsea

of Sandwich our Head Port) & his mayoress sitting beside him. Sailing barge *Edme* is behind (to right in the picture) with the Motley Crew aboard singing!



Jon Sturdy

Bishop Roger Morris, Bishop of Colchester, aboard *Pioneer*, blesses a passing Jim Lawrence & his boat.



Liz Artindale

Some of the flotilla as viewed from aboard *Ellen*, seen Beating the Bounds; *Edme*, *Pioneer*, Jim Lawrence's little lug-rigged smack's boat, and *My Alice*.



Jon Sturdy

Aboard *Pioneer*, with all making the traditional toast of "Gang-ho" with 'gang-beer' (beer that was used when Beating the Bounds).

The VIPs making the toast, and the crew led by skipper Josh (far back right).

At front, Mayoress of Sandwich, then Lord Lieutenant of Essex (Mrs Jennifer Tolhurst), behind her (and to the left) is Mayor of Sandwich (in the black gown). Behind and to left again is the Lord Lieutenant's consort (Mr Philip Tolhurst); immediately behind & part hidden are the Deputy & Lady Deputy of the Cinque Port Liberty of Brightlingsea. To the right in a pale hat is the Mayor of Brightlingsea, then to right forward is Bishop of Colchester, then the consort of Brightlingsea Mayor, the Senser, Sue Wills (in white), and lastly, on the right in a black gown is Roger Tabor.

Behind *Pioneer* are smacks: (closest) *My Alice*, then next *Ellen* & (at right) *Maria*.



This atmospheric shot shows the Cann-built bawley *Mollie* in her latter days as a yacht. Photo from Bo Walker, provided by Don Wright/SSBR.



Forthcoming Events...

Blessing of the Waters Ceremony	2nd June
Blackwater Match	8th June
Rowhedge Regatta	22nd June
CSPS Sail and Picnic	30th June
Heybridge Basin Regatta	6th July
Wivenhoe Town Regatta	6th July
Pin Mill smack race	13th July
Brightlingsea Regatta	20th – 21st July
Pin Mill barge match	27th July
Harwich Maritime Festival	27th July
Whitstable Harbour Day	3rd August
Swale Match	10th August
Mersea Week	11th – 16th August
Mersea Town Regatta	17th August
Ipswich Maritime Festival	17th – 18th August
Colne Match	7th September
Mersea Dredging Match	8th September
Maldon Town Regatta	21st September
Tollesbury smack race	28th September
Harwich Shanty Festival	11th – 13th October

My Alice CK348 at Brightlingsea's Blessing of the Waters ceremony 2018
 Photo by Liz Artindale

All dates believed to be correct at time of going to press.