

SMACK DOCK SOUNDINGS

THE JOURNAL OF THE COLNE SMACK PRESERVATION SOCIETY



Chairman Martin Doe
The Cottage, Straight Road,
Boxted, Colchester, CO4
5QX
Tel. 01206 272000
Email.
martindoe@hotmail.co.uk

The opinions expressed in this journal are those of the individual contributors and are not necessarily the views of the CSPS or its committee. This newsletter is the intellectual property of the CSPS and it is forbidden for it to be reproduced or distributed without written permission from the CSPS.

JANUARY 2020
ISSUE 83



THE CHAIRMAN LOOKING AHEAD - MARTIN DOE

A new decade, a new era, a new Editor!

You will already have spotted a considerable change to the front page of Smack Dock Soundings, while the inside is much the same. It seemed the right time to update our 'visage', you will read later that the Pioneer Trust has done the same, going further with a new logo! We hope you approve; it has received unanimous enthusiasm from the entire Committee.

We welcome Elly as our new Editor, who has begun her role with great energy, already with enough articles for at least two issues and I am sure you will enjoy her slightly different style. Go to it, Elly!

Work is under way for the Vintage film night and supper on **March 21st** at 7 for 7.30pm. I need someone else to take over this function in future, so any volunteers PLEASE step forward. In our haste to get all social aspect in Smack Dock Soundings, issue 82, we omitted to spot that April 12th is Easter Sunday so the Smack Dock Working Party is moved forward to **Sunday 19th April**, from 10am. Mea culpa! The Reclamation and Blessing of the Waters is on **Sunday June 7th** from about 12.30, a fantastic spectacle especially when the dignitaries board the ornate wooden barges and smacks to 'beat the bounds'. A great sight from the end of our Smack Dock.

Soon afterwards it will again be the Sail and Picnic day, on **June 21st**, boarding at 10am, wear soft shoes and bring your own picnic. You have to book first, email or call me, remembering I will be away 6-13th June. We are always grateful to the smack owners for providing their vessels for this great trip out. Happy days ahead as the evenings lengthen!



Committee Members;

Paul Winter, Andy Harman, Caroline Canham, John Gillard, Martyn Bradfield

Editor; Elly Howlett - elck222@whoever.com

If you would prefer to receive Smack Dock Soundings via email rather than post, please provide your email address to the editor and we will update your preferences.

Events coming up;

March 21st	Vintage Film Night <i>*CSPS event</i>
April 19th	Smack Dock working party <i>*CSPS event</i>
June 6th	Rowhedge Regatta
June 7th	Blessing of the Waters
June 13th	Blackwater Match
June 20th	Wivenhoe Regatta
June 21st	Sail & Picnic <i>*CSPS event</i>
July 4th	Heybridge Regatta
July 4th & 5th	Brightlingsea Regatta

Cover; Mayfly sailing on the Turkey Race.

Photo credit; Seamus Masters



PIONEER SAILING TRUST & HARKER'S YARD

What a wonderful bustling yard. Tariq and Shari were putting the cover on Pioneer in the drizzly November rain and Priscilla was behind, already tucked up for winter. Tariq is not only the crew onboard Pioneer throughout the season but also trained through Pioneers apprenticeship scheme so it's back to the tools whilst Pioneer is laid up unless there's any jobs on there to be completed.

The Trust is currently undergoing a big rebrand – new logos, colour schemes, websites and social media to appeal more to their target audience and update the look of the Trust. An exciting but busy time ahead for Felicity and her team.

They usually lay up on the last big tide nearing the end of October. The new season usually starts in April or May depending on the weather. Nobody needs to start their sailing adventures getting freezing cold and wet in the uncertain weather in Spring.

Their target groups generally come from the Tendring and Colchester areas, being an Essex based Trust their aim is to make a difference to local people from the surrounding areas. Approximately 1000 people have enjoyed sailing on Pioneer this year, from charities, schools and corporate charter. On some of these days they have taken up to 30 children out on one day on a rotational basis 10 at a time! Pioneer has such a positive impact on young people, that a huge 75% of all apprentices who have come to train with the Trust started by having an adventure onboard Pioneer first. They have 3 full time apprentices with 2 leaders and yet train a further 8 in the classroom from other yards from across Essex and Suffolk. Paragon Skills actually undertake the training now and the Trust act more as a workshop venue rather than do the training themselves.



'Regardless' pictured here is the last wooden gig built as they move over to the GRP models although they are still able to build the wooden gigs but by special commission only.

The apprenticeship they currently offer is a City & Guilds 4 year scheme. In the future they would like to offer more apprenticeship pathways and maybe reintroduce the short courses like a 10 week basic skills course which could give new trainees an insight as to what to expect in the more full on apprenticeships provided by the Trust. Ideally the apprentices would come straight from school at the age of 16 and once qualified, they are encouraged to stay working for the Trust or are supported in finding alternative employment with

the skills and new qualifications they've earned. The Trust also take on private projects. With each apprentice who comes in they have to learn certain skills which need to be signed off by the project leader. They usually start on gigs and once their skills meet a certain requirement, they'll be transferred onto other projects so the skill set is rotated.

At the moment they have the beautiful Lady Nancy who is undergoing a full refit and the attention to detail is inspiring. The apprentices were just matching up her new garboard ready to be fitted and once that's in place they will continue to move up and finish the planking. Once completed she will compete in the Mediterranean where I'm sure she will easily pick up more than a few trophies.



Lady Nancy



Lady Nancy



We had a look at the new GRP moulds which are now starting to be fitted out. Moulded at White Formula down the road in Brightlingsea, joined by the apprentices to learn the process, the boats are laid up and then transported back to the yard. This is when the team get on and start the finishing touches to these light and buoyant craft. They were fitting the gunwale whilst we were there and doing a superb job. The smell of wood was just delightful. You can see the new gunwale being fitted (pictured right) and one without (left). Those eagle-eyed readers will see that they are also enjoying new lifting gear on the brand-new beam so the gigs can be moved and handled with ease.



This year Pioneer took 11 children from the Royal Association of the Deaf with their interpreters to France. It is known as a 'Challenge Trip' and one which was thoroughly enjoyed by all. They were joined by the sailing barge Thalatta.

Since Felicity joined Pioneer in 2010 and when the apprenticeships begun - they have trained 42 apprentices in just under 10 years!

Thank you so much to Felicity and the team for showing me around, I cannot wait to see what you've achieved in the next few months!





HARRIS RALLY TO ROWHEDGE



L to R; My Alice CK348, Pioneer CK18, SB Dawn, Maria CK21 & Ellen CK222

The Harris Rally is an annual event at the latter end of the sailing season to celebrate the smacks built by the Harris brothers at Rowhedge. This year it was on the 13th of October. It used to be exclusive to Harris boats only but now all smacks are invited and it does make for a better spectacle for those ashore. A blustery day was forecast so many smacks were unable to get round from Mersea but the local smacks all made an appearance! The three

Harris smacks Pioneer, Maria and Ellen all sailed upriver to Rowhedge and were greeted by a welcoming crowd ashore. The Thames Sailing Barge Dawn was awaiting our arrival. Thistle also made her way up the river with a barge full of guests from Brightlingsea! My Alice motored up just in time for the fantastic spread laid on by the locals of the village which was thoroughly



Maria CK21 & Ellen CK222



SB Thistle



SB Dawn, Pioneer CK18 & My Alice CK348

enjoyed by all and it was well needed for the bumpy ride we had home. Homemade soups, bread, cakes and more coffee and tea then you could ever drink – it was more than enough to entice us back next year. Thanks to all the organisers, bakers and cooks for such a delicious spread and another wonderful event.



FAIRY MNI ARRIVES IN BRIGHTLINGSEA

'Fairy' is a 32' smack, designed and built in 1879 by John Howard in Maldon, Essex.



She arrived safely in Brightlingsea in mid-November and will soon make her way to the smack dock where she will hopefully find a new owner to restore her to her former glory.

All enquiries should be directed to our Chairman Martin Doe.



THE TURKEY RACE

When this race was first bandied around the smack sailors to join the Mersea winklebrigs on their annual Turkey Race, I thought you won a turkey for Christmas, so when the invites went out, I immediately said yes. It seems we will do anything for free food. On the 16th of November, a hardy bunch of sailors ventured out of their pits to endure what was possibly the coldest and yet stillest day of 2019. Barely a breath of wind at the start but seven smacks drifted against the tide on their way to Bench Head buoy from the Nass Beacon off Mersea.



Peace CK171 photo credit Seamus Masters

The course given was Bench Head to port, Thirslet to starboard then back to the Nass to finish. Gracie, Peace, Maria and Kate headed over to the Bradwell shore to get out of the tide, My Alice and Mayfly stuck to the Mersea shore and in true Ellen spirit, we sailed right up the middle.



L to R; Peace CK171, Maria CK21& Kate CK52
photo credit Seamus Masters

All we could see was My Alice and Mayfly falling back, Maria with her own wind generator steaming ahead and Kate and Peace having a very close and sociable sail over the Bradwell shore. Gracie decided to retire as a few hours in we had barely made it past St Peters flats.



Now normally, in light airs, I find it extremely frustrating and get a bit grumpy, yet the crew we had onboard had been laughing their heads off since they arrived onboard at 6am when we set off from home so our spirits remained jolly, the banter was ongoing, yet one crew member still managed to fall asleep on the water sail!



Ellen CK222 photo credit Seamus Masters

The course had now been shortened. It was to Bench Head and back to the finish. It was now past lunchtime and yet what breeze there was seemed to be easing off entirely. Maria had managed to get around the mark but by now Peace had retired too. Do we retire? A crew discussion of whether the turkey would be wafer thin packet or proper roasted turkey kept the time passing and before we knew it, we were near the buoy.



Kate CK52 photo credit Seamus Masters

Now for the most exciting bit of the race. Mayfly and My Alice were coming up on our leeward side and were going to cause us a few issues at the buoy. The tide was still coming in pushing us onto it so with barely any wind we needed to be well above it before gybing. Kate was coming on the windward side but it looked like we were well clear of them.



Luckily for us... My Alice just crept ahead of Mayfly then took all of her wind, stopping her completely. Our spinnaker decided to relieve itself of the sheet so we went for a quick gybe in front of the two smacks heading directly for the buoy. We thought we had gone too soon and were going to miss it completely. My Alice and Mayfly were now to windward of us but somehow our sails fluttered some more and we just sneaked ahead getting around Bench Head with inches to spare and were now heading back. Mayfly also managed to get round but My Alice took a couple of gybes before getting enough clearance and we wondered if they gave the buoy a little cuddle on the way past... it looked very close. Last to round was Kate and we all started the slow return to the finish.



Maria CK21 photo credit Seamus Masters

After a couple of tacks My Alice decided to retire too and headed back home. Ellen, Mayfly and Kate all continued. We could see Maria was still tacking towards the Nass and as the tide was due to turn and the wind falling lighter, we wondered if we would get back to Mersea before dark. Mayfly then came motoring past us saying they have ended the race at Bench Head and we can all return to Mersea. We got to the prizegiving half way through but we were welcomed by the most amazing table full of food including proper roasted turkey - it was well worth the endurance challenge! After having a celebratory pint and eating way too much food, we headed back to Ellen to take her home to Brightlingsea. Well done to Maria who was the only smack to finish the full course.

The winklebrigs were kept inshore around Mersea island and they too had their course shortened twice. It made for tactical decisions and close racing but everyone seemed full of cheer at the prizegiving and they all managed to finish!



Winklebrigs racing
photo credits Seamus Masters



Thank you to Mark and his team for organising a fantastic race and for putting on the most incredible food spread which was a welcome sight!



ODD TIMES CK212 BY ELSA CHANCE

For anyone who has been wondering where Odd Times (William & Emily) has disappeared to, here's a quick update to be followed up in more detail in Spring. John and I took ownership of her on the 1st January 2018 and the 800 mile round trip from our home in West Cornwall to Odd Times on the East coast began to feel like a fairly normal weekend activity as we readied her for the long sail home. Whilst in Brightlingsea we lived between the boat, our van, the yacht club and the Indian take away. Of all our memories of our time on the East coast it's the mud, the cold and above all the kindness of the people we met that stands out. At the end of May a reasonable forecast coincided with the spring tides we needed to reach her new berth, so we hired a van for the final (this time one way!) journey East.



Odd Times fought hard not to leave her home of almost 150 years (more on that next time), but despite everything she threw at us we made it through the Wallet Spitway and out across a glassy Thames Estuary in limited visibility with muddy water swirling around us. We passed through South West Sunk and Fisherman's Gat, crossed the shipping lanes as the fog lifted and turned at the Elbow to pass inside the Goodwin Sands. Having ridden the tide for most of the day we cleared Dover in daylight as planned and Dungeness loomed ahead as the hazy sun set and clouds built on the horizon. The wind increased through the night and I was given a show of phosphorescence as we passed the Royal Sovereign, followed by distant lightning and some heavy rain. The following morning Odd Times and I made friends on a long watch in an awkward sea with the wind on the quarter. John took the helm as we passed close to Isle of Wight and made the best speeds of the passage, once again in favourable tide. By nightfall we were well on our way to Start Point and as the wind and visibility decreased, we took short watches through the night with a keen eye on the radar.



As I took the helm for the dawn watch I was joined by dolphins and by lunchtime home was on the cards. As we approached the Eddystone we took the decision not to rush to head up river on that evening's tide but to anchor for the night and spend the following day getting ready. That gave us a couple of hours to play, so we hoisted full sail and hardened up to a close reach for the first time. She heeled over and off we went with a balanced helm and big smiles, before bearing away to head West again. As we passed into Cornish waters the

sun came out and the dolphins returned to play in our bow wave. Perhaps Odd Times was warming to the idea of her new home after all. We passed into the familiar waters of Fowey and finally my home waters of Falmouth, before anchoring off Durgan in the mouth of The Helford River at dusk. We rowed into the beach for a welcome beer and enjoyed the view of Odd Times finally here in her new home after many months.



The following afternoon we hauled anchor and headed slowly upriver, soon to be joined by an old friend who rafted alongside. As we passed Tremayne Quay more friends appeared and by the time we passed Bishops Quay we were casting people off in order to navigate the narrow bends at the top of the river. We passed the Old Mill with less than a metre either side of us before taking a wide starboard turn into our mud berth alongside Sunny Quay. Lines and bottles of wine were passed as more people appeared alongside

and on the quay. Once again, we found ourselves overwhelmed by people's kindness and by a homecoming we could not have expected. We drove home late that night, tired, thankful and happy.

Little did we know this was not to be our biggest adventure of the year... A few weeks later and we have a baby on the way! The best possible news for us but not necessarily for Odd Times as the pressure to finish building our house and move in was now on. That said, at least now she has one more crew!

Our son is six months old and loves being on the boat, although it will be a little while before he can reach the tiller! The house is coming along nicely and in quiet moments I turn my attention back to Odd Times because she is not actually an East Coast Smack - she was built in Jersey in the 1830's. She was both a fishing smack working the Normandy Oyster beds and a cargo vessel transporting early flowers and vegetables to the London markets. If you know the boat you will know that she is deeper and beamier than the East Coast fleet, with a high plumb bow and broad shoulders. You can see similarities with French boats of the time, which makes sense considering her history. In the late 1870's when the Channel Islands fishery collapsed, she was sold to the Drake brothers in Tollesbury and her history from then on is well documented. We are trying to piece together her early history as it seems that she is the last remaining Channel Islands smack in existence and the second oldest vessel still under sail in the UK. If you have any information or suggestions then please email elsachance@hotmail.com or get in touch with the CSPS. If we can put her story together, we hope there may be interest in supporting a restoration or rebuild.

So, Odd Times' new home is the Helford River in Cornwall and she also has a new name, 'Bee', after my Grandma.



GIPSY CK79 BY GÉRARD SWIFT

Built at Brightlingsea by Stones for Henry & Fredrick Banks Bros, she cost £80 complete in c.1925. Her registration CK79 earliest surviving record at Essex Records Office is from 1930. It describes her as a sailing oyster bumkin with an auxiliary outboard motor. She was fully motorised in 1959 when she lost her sails, with the installation of a Brit Engine which she retained right up until she sunk in the 1987 gales.

The Banks Bros company was established in 1895 at West Mersea by the brothers. They operated a successful oyster company for over hundred years. The company still exists and oysters are still dredged from their layings by a new generation of oystermen.



The oyster bumpkins were an important part of their industry as they were able to dredge in both the river and the creeks. They were also an invaluable aid in transporting oysters from the layings to the hard where they could literally step out in short boots to unload.

Gipsy is the last of two original sailing oyster bumpkins left. She was built to work alongside an earlier bumpkin that Banks Bros had called Wave. Gipsy is very different to the norm of the day, with a wide stern and fine entry unlike rest of the fleet with a wine glass stern and bluffer bow. This allowed her more buoyancy in order to carry more weight.



Gipsy as a motorboat



Able to carry under sail up to three tons of cargo, one of early jobs was to sail up river bringing back oysters from the Maldon smacks back to the Mersea hard. She stayed with the Banks family up to the early 2000's, when she was sold and totally rebuilt by Gérard Swift in 2008.

Gipsy now sports a very tall lofty rig complete with topsail and races in the Mersea Fishermen's Open Boat Fleet at West Mersea. This is a large active racing fleet that compete from May to November each year. This year for the first time, the Colne Match very kindly invited the fleet to join them. A small flotilla set off from the hard and took part in a most enjoyable day with Gipsy proudly flying her winner's pennant all the way back to Mersea.



Gipsy at the Colne Race 2019
photo credit Seamus Masters

Hopefully next year more brigs will join us at Brightlingsea to compete for the very generous array of prizes on offer.