

# EastCoastSailing .co.uk

Issue 6 Christmas and New Year 2011-12

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Photo: © Dick Holness

- **CRUISING** Concluding Cornsilk's Dutch cruise ● How moorings are made
- **BOAT TEST** A big classic and her 'tender' ● **A WINTER'S TALE** Murder afloat!

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## WELCOME ABOARD

the online magazine for East Coast sailors



**D**ecember! Where did the year go? Yes, I know it's a facet of increasing age that makes time seem to fly by ever more swiftly, but really, this year has rushed past, particularly the last six months or so, while we've been getting *East Coast Sailing* underway.

For me, the creation of these six issues has been the fulfilment of a long-held ambition to provide a magazine exclusively for East Coast boat owners,

but it has also been terrifically therapeutic during a long period of rather intense medical treatment. It began with some life-changing surgery prior to launch and has been followed by continuous outpatient treatment since. Now, although I've reached a point where there is a bright light at the end of the tunnel, there will, unfortunately, be a few months during which I know I will not be capable of working on the magazine and, although Garth, Dick and Roger are still able to beaver away, it's me that brings all their work together each month. We also

feel that the success of ECS so far means that we need to take a more serious look at its future and how to make it the best product we can over the long term.

The result of all this is that we have decided to make this Christmas and New Year issue the last one until March. I'm sorry to disappoint people, but it's a pragmatic decision that should see us return with a better and stronger magazine.

While the magazine is laid up, we will still be sailing the website, so please visit regularly and see what's happening. Please also keep in touch with us. We enjoy and need your contact with comments, ideas, contributions and photos, so keep the emails flowing.

In this issue we have the conclusion of *Corn silk's* pleasant meander through Holland, a slight miscalculation while trying to get through the Rays'n Channel and an insight into how swinging moorings are constructed. Our boat test covers a grand old classic and a contrasting small estuary cruiser, while we also have some dark and mysterious winter reading – not for the faint hearted. Heave to and enjoy!

Colin Jarman

## Let me introduce to you... the ECS crew

Photos © Colin Jarman



### Colin Jarman

Colin grew up in the East Coast mud and his heart still lies there, despite a career of over 40 years in marine photojournalism that has taken him far and wide across the sailing world ([www.colinjarman.co.uk](http://www.colinjarman.co.uk)). He has written numerous books on ropework and seamanship, but is at his happiest when sailing *May Morning*, his 20ft junk rigged bilge keeler wherever the tide flows and the curlews call.



### Garth Cooper

Garth first went afloat on the Broads, but now sails his Kim Holman designed, carvel built, 34ft *Ngairé* from her home berth on the River Orwell. A boatbuilding apprenticeship at Whisstock's yard in Woodbridge somehow led to a job with the BBC as a broadcast journalist, but now he combines his sailing and writing with a busy schedule as the vice chairman of the RYA Eastern Region.



### Dick Holness

Dick is a Man of Kent who began sailing at Herne Bay where he was afflicted with the racing bug. Recovered now, he ranges far and wide across the Thames Estuary aboard *Corn silk*, his immaculate Moody S31. A part-time Coastguard, Dick also spends much of his time working as webmaster on the *East Coast Pilot* website. Dick, Colin and Garth are co-authors of *East Coast Pilot*.



### Roger Gaspar

Roger has followed a successful career with the Police by combining his cruising aboard the carvel-built *Tiller Girl* with devising and writing his remarkable book *Crossing The Thames Estuary* and undertaking an on-going series of surveys of some of the East Coast's shifting banks and swatchways. The results of these labours can be found at [www.crossingthamesestuary.com](http://www.crossingthamesestuary.com).

Photo © Dick Holness



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# Cornsilk in Holland

Having reached the halfway point in their holiday time, **Dick and Angela Holness** decide to head for home.

By the end of Part 2 of this saga (see *ECS05*) we had reached Willemstad and decided that this would be as far from home as we would venture, already being halfway through our allotted five weeks away. Progress had been slower than we'd hoped, because we suffered the same mixed 2011 'summer' as everyone back home, but we'd made the most of it.

On the first night at Willemstad, we demolished a splendid meal in a quayside restaurant whose prices were not as eye watering as some and stayed another day while a strong northwesterly buffeted the town and Andy Murray played in the semi-finals at Wimbledon. Departing early next morning, we performed dodgems through the heavy barge traffic that passes close to the harbour entrance and looped round to the SW into the lock for the Volkerak. Amazingly for Saturday, 2nd July, there were only three other boats in the lock and we were quickly through, finding the Volkerak much more sheltered as we creamed along on a close reach under full sail.

The Volkerak turns NW after six miles and we short-tacked through the narrow cut past the island of Noordplaat before reaching the Krammersluis again, the lock that would return us to the Oosterschelde. Here there was a long wait, for one of the pair of locks was out of action.

For the first time ever in Holland, we saw some pretty appalling manners as skippers tried to queue jump – it was a very small minority who transgressed and obviously greatly offended the rest of the locals. We heard quite a few Dutch words we didn't recognise. Once in the lock, the occupants of the boats around us were shaking their heads and apologising to us for what had gone on.

## PART 3 – THE WAY HOME



Photos © Dick Holness

Above: Social life in the lock or "We're all in this together."

Normally, the queues for a lock seem to magically manage themselves, everyone has a pretty good idea where they are, even if they didn't berth on the waiting pontoon in order of arrival.

By this time we had agreed to meet up again with most of the crowd from Hollowshore at Bruinisse, in the SE corner of the Grevelingenmeer and through one more lock. I was amused to see one of the queue jumpers being very effectively blocked in this second lock, as a silent majority saw him charging from the back when the gates opened – as one they moved out into the middle and stopped him passing. Good stuff.

The huge new marina at Bruinisse (say 'brownisser') is not a place I will rush back to, I'm afraid. It is undeniably clean and tidy, and the 'facilities' are first rate. The pontoons at the northern end, where we all lay, were brand new and squeaky clean. It's just that the whole

place seems soulless, a vast 'boat park' that Orwell (George, not River) might have imagined. There's room already prepared for it to grow even larger, too. Our pontoon stretched straight out from the shore with 100 berths on fingers each side. From berth 87 it was so far to the loos that I used my bike, figuring that if I walked I'd need to go again by the time I got back. Frankly, if we hadn't been meeting up with the exuberant crowd from home, I would have made my excuses and left to find a quiet anchorage elsewhere.

But, as ever, we made the best of it with a lot of yarns being exchanged, a good look round the enormous (but pricey) chandler and at last I discovered a restaurant in town (a bike ride away) that offered my favourite – *gebakken mosselen* (fried mussels with many trimmings added), at a reasonable price.

Our next hop from Bruinisse was to



Above: The marina in Bruinisse where a trip to the heads meant getting the bicycles out. Forget it during night!

be a 27-mile run to Veere, which ended up taking an extraordinary 10 hours. The trouble started about five minutes after departure, when we found the lock out of action and awaiting an engineer. We waited a while, then decided to give up and go for a sail instead. Eventually, the road bridge pointing skywards in the distance signalled that the lock had been fixed and, three hours later than planned, we were through and ghosting sou'westwards in light airs. Tidal strategy has a part to play in the Oosterschelde, but we had plenty of time in hand despite the delay and actually reached the point to turn south just at low water, the new flood carrying us on towards the Zandkreek.

By mid-afternoon we were moored again waiting for the lock into the Veersemeer, where a charming Dutch couple rafted alongside and gave us slices of their homemade cake. This kind of thing just happens in Holland! We departed good friends, they with our last two slices of English fruit cake.

Three hours later, we slid into the pretty harbour at Veere to raft up with the Hollowshore mob who produced

cold beers for us as soon as mooring was completed.

My specs are a few metres down in Veere harbour. I blame the beer. I bent over to take one as I stood on the edge of the landing stage and my glasses slid quietly out of my shirt pocket and into the 'oggin. Quite a few happy hours were spent fishing over the next day or two, both with a magnet and with a loaned shrimping net lashed to two boathooks, all to no avail.

We stayed three nights. Veere is a delightful place, but if you need provisions other than bread, you must get yourself to Middelburg on the bus, or bike it if you're feeling energetic. There are regular markets that are pretty interesting, many of the stall holders dressing in traditional costume, and the town is a nice place to wander around in the evening. We had a good meal *en masse* in the popular yacht club, we climbed the 240 steps to the top of the tower of the Grote Kerk, Angela was sent up the mast again to try to fix our reluctant wind indicator, and she also made the bus trip to stock up with groceries. And with the weather now hot

and sunny, we did a lot of sitting around as well.

One entertaining diversion was to track down the town's webcam, which is on the wall of a house on the west side of the harbour beyond the wooden footbridge, where we displayed ourselves for inspection by family back home. Needless to say this prompted the arrival of several uncomplimentary text messages.

The bulk of the fleet headed off to Middelburg, while we and one other boat couldn't understand the rush homewards and headed back out onto the Veersemeer, eventually anchoring in two metres on the west side of Schuttersplaat, just north of Veere. That evening a mighty line squall came through – I ended up veering 20m of chain to stay put (a 10:1 scope), while our friends dragged about 100m before our yelling alerted them. As the storm passed and the setting sun reappeared beneath the dark clouds, we sat in the cockpit admiring the extraordinary light.

Next morning was cold, windy and grey and we headed east again to De Omloop, meeting up with our two



**Above:** Beachside life in Blankenberge. **Below:** Light on the Veersemeer after the storm.

Moody friends last seen in Steenberg. Helping one of the skippers to straighten his bow roller fitting (don't ask) I kept up my dropping-stuff-overboard habit by losing a hefty tyre lever (a really useful tool to have on board), but this time managed to find it again with the magnet. De Omloop was its usual quiet

and sheltered self and the rest of the day passed with swimming followed by drinks and natters.

Needing to be home the following Saturday, we hoped to be in a French port for Thursday, Bastille day, so headed back towards Middelburg for our final night in Holland. Meeting the rest of the

gang yet again, next morning we all slid down the canal towards Vlissingen and were disappointed to be directed into the vast ship lock rather than the smaller one designed for leisure boats. The trouble with the big lock is that the mooring cleats in the wall are about 60ft apart, making them tricky to cope with on a 30ft boat. Best to raft up with someone else who's already secured, if you can...

Back out at sea just before midday, it was seriously good to



feel the boat alive under our feet again as we beat sou'westwards in 20kn of breeze towards the distant walls of Zeebrugge. By mid-afternoon and approaching Blankenberge, the wind was starting to fade; a VHF conference resulted in most of the fleet bashing on under power, while we and one other boat called it a day and spent a very pleasant afternoon sunbathing, back in the Blankenberge Visserhaven. Late that evening we were among thousands who enjoyed a huge firework display on the beach and we were struck by the good behaviour of the crowds, all intent on having a good time without some of the excesses we seem to see so much at home these days.

Catching the tide next afternoon, we reached Nieuwpoort after a glorious sail, collecting another Hollowshore boat along the way, who popped out of Oostende as we passed, and one of our Moody friends who turned up as well during the evening, having made it direct from Vlissingen. From the plethora of marinas at Nieuwpoort, we chose the Royal Belgian Air Force YC, a bit of a trek from town, but a peaceful place with a friendly club HQ.

Bastille Day ambitions were starting to fade in view of a grim forecast for the next few days and, next morning, it was indeed howling from the north, fuelled by a small, deep low centred over southern Holland. We tramped into the old town and enjoyed a great set lunch in a café on the square, amazing value at €11. We rode the tram to the beach in the new town, wandered round and trammed it back, getting soaked for the final walk to the boat. Stuck down below for the rest of the day while the rain hammered on the coachroof, I discovered a fast and free WiFi connection from the marina next door and caught up with emails and trip reports for the *East Coast Sailing* website 'blog' section.

The low pressure stayed put overnight, and so we all hopped on the tram again (a brilliant cheap service along the Belgian coast) for a trip to Oostende, where amongst other things we peered at other stranded matelots on boats at the RNSYC marina as the wind shrieked in the rigging.

Next day, Bastille Day, dawned pretty much the same, so that was that. However, the forecast promised a change by evening and it was spot on as the wind dropped at 1800, almost literally with a dull thud. At sea by 0700 next morning, we headed straight for Ramsgate, slow sailing to start with

but eventually closehauled in 20-25kn from the SW. The sea state was horrible, with a south-going swell left from the previous bad weather and a brisk chop in the other direction from today's wind. It didn't take us long to decide to pop pills – not a common need on our boat these days, but certainly necessary for me that morning.

Nine hours and 50 miles later, we berthed in Ramsgate, feeling a bit weary and battered but satisfied with a good day's sailing, having fetched the Ramsgate Approach buoy exactly without deviating from port tack closehauled. The forecast for the next day was worse again, however, and we decided to carry on home after a short rest. We motorsailed the rest of the way along the Kent coast, using the Copperas Channel off Reculver again just for practice – it will become the buoyed route in February 2012.

Just after midnight we slid up Oare Creek and into our berth, and fell into bed, mission accomplished, having arrived home on the exact day we had planned.

My wife, Angela, summed it all up in her diary as follows: "Wind, rain, cold, three days of summer, but lots of enjoyable social occasions both with Dutch people and with the crowd from Hollowshore. Even managed a few good sails too!"

Fair enough, I think.

**A few basic tips for beginners**

- You don't need a CEVNI ticket in Holland if your boat is less than 45ft LOA. You must, however, carry a copy of the CEVNI regs on board.



*Above: The busy, but pretty and delightful, harbour at Veere.*

- You are also required to carry the Dutch *Wateralmanak Part 1* on board. It's in Dutch! Buy this and local charts once you are there.
- You are not allowed to pump a toilet overboard in any Dutch waters. This doesn't mean you must have a holding tank – you can always take a small chemical toilet on board.
- There were documented instances of Belgian (usually) and Dutch (very occasionally) officials taking exception to red diesel in boat tanks during 2011. Ensure you keep all diesel receipts and log your engine hours so you can prove fuel usage. Do *not* take red over there in

cans, this is illegal.

You can keep up with the current requirements in Holland with the excellent information on the RYA website. As with any country it is wise to fall in with local rules and requirements, but these are hardly arduous and Holland and its people really are very welcoming and hospitable.

Above all, if and when you go to Holland, do try to set aside enough time. It's much better to pace yourself, don't set yourself stretching targets every day, slow down and enjoy the pace of life. Two weeks is definitely not enough.

**ECS**

*Below left: Lacemaking on a stall in Veere market. Below right: Beautiful pots for sale in the character-laden market at Veere.*





# A greyhound...

A boat that turns heads wherever she goes has just been sold. *Gimcrack* was, for 37 years, the love of Martin Deighton's life, but now she's in new ownership. [Garth Cooper](#) recalls sailing this greyhound of the seas – plus her little sister.

**I**n my job I get to sail some truly wonderful boats and one that sticks out a mile is the 50 year old yawl, *Gimcrack*. Recently she was sold by her owner of 37 years, Martin Deighton. Throughout his ownership of *Gimcrack* he maintained her in A1 condition – so well, in fact, that you don't pump out the bilges, you vacuum them instead.

Martin, who lives in Suffolk, had

sailed her just about everywhere in the Northern Hemisphere. "I'd been thinking of selling *Gimcrack* for a while, I'm nearly 70 and I bought her when I was 34. I always said I would keep her until I was 70.

"I refitted at Arzal this year and realised that she is still as good as new, because we've maintained her diligently over the years. Well built boats are a delight to look after. When the surveyor finished his report he said: "Unbelievable and magnificent" – just about sums it up really."

*Gimcrack* is a delight to handle. Steady as a rock, she's close-winded when you want, despite having un-battened sails, she answers the helm in a totally unfussy way; none of this slamming round or skidding you can get with modern hull forms. Her deep, long keel coupled with a proverbial barn door of a rudder means she's always under control. It also means you don't have to wind on the power when going astern out of a marina berth; gently does it and she overcomes the

natural desire to prop walk to port going astern. She also spins round in little more than her own length at the right speed.

With sails set and the engine off, she picks up her skirts and starts eating the miles. *Gimcrack* is a cutter rigged yawl, one of the most flexible rigs around. Varnished Oregon pine booms complement her white painted aluminium masts by Proctor. She still retains her roller-reefing mainsail and Colnebrook headsail furling system. The main has no battens – on long-haul trips, says Martin, it's the batten pockets that wear most and then battens get lost overboard. When not in a hurry, her owners often sail under the genoa and mizzen. But she'll also hold to the wind



Photos © Garth Cooper



**Left:** *Gimcrack* sailing quietly on the Orwell.  
**Right:** Wide side decks, easy working space.



## ... and her little sister

and make reasonable way under main alone. It's a wonderfully flexible yet powerful rig.

*Gimcrack* was designed by David Simmonds and built by Port Hamble Boatyard in 1961. She's 38ft LOA, 10.2ft beam and 6ft draught, and displaces 10.5 tons with a TM of 13 tons. She has a working sail area of 675ft<sup>2</sup>.

She was built to be +100A1 at Lloyds with pitch pine below the waterline and African mahogany above, on Canadian rock elm frames. She has oak floors and an iroko backbone with everything else in teak. She's copper and bronze fastened throughout and has a 4.5 ton lead keel attached with bronze keel bolts. With her fine lines and gentle sheer she's everyone's idea of the perfect cruising yacht.

She was built for the directors of the Port Hamble yard. They named her

after the famous racehorse *Gimcrack*, described in the encyclopaedia of racing as "the sweetest little grey ever bred" and immortalised forever in the *Gimcrack Stakes*, which are run at York every year. A painting of the famous racehorse is on the bulkhead over the pilot berth.

From 1965 to 1975 she belonged to General Sir Robert Bray during the period he was commodore of the Royal Cruising Club. He and his wife, Lady Norah, cruised in *Gimcrack* from Brittany to Norway with several voyages to the Baltic and into the Arctic. Sir Robert sold *Gimcrack* to Martin in 1975.

Since then she's cruised European waters from Norway to Gibraltar, to North Africa (three times), the West Indies (twice), the east coast of the USA (twice), the Azores (twice) and the Canary Islands (once); she's yet to go 'round Britain'. She returned

in September 2005 from a slow circumnavigation of the Bay of Biscay, exploring the north coast of Spain and the islands and coast of western France, completing her first 100,000 miles as she sailed back into Harwich in September 2005.

Her decks have also been well thought out: they're 15mm laid teak strips on 20mm ply. Clear of obstructions they make a good working platform. The coachroof is wide and flat, which makes sail handling much easier (although Martin often had the inflatable dinghy lashed down on it with the fenders stored inside). The cockpit is deep and well sheltered, even with the sprayhood down.

### BELOW DECKS

Below, the accommodation is bright yet cosy, achieved by careful use of white paint broken up with the varnished



**Above left:** Well appointed chart table. **Above right:** The unpretentious galley. **Below right:** Gimcrack under full sail. Note the battenless mainsail.

utile wood. Forward is a double berth in the forepeak (which is varnished throughout); a pilot berth and settee to starboard in the saloon, with a dinette that converts to a small double to port, and two pilot-quarterberths in the doghouse. Between the forecabin and saloon there's a full width heads compartment with a Blakes marine toilet and washbasin, plus a massive hanging locker.

In the saloon, there's a fixed table with drop leaves, centre stowage and cutlery drawer. There are a well stocked bookcase, cocktail cabinet and lockers to port. There's a large chart table to starboard with chart drawer and lockers, while the galley, with two-burner gas

cooker with grill and oven, and stainless steel sink with manually pumped water, is to port. Steps lead up to the doghouse with pilot berths and seats both sides. These steps contain the boat's ready-use toolbox and under-floor storage compartments.

Under the doghouse sole and abaft the companionway, is a Bukh DV24 two cylinder 24hp diesel engine, which Martin installed new in 2002, her original Perkins having been replaced with a Bukh 20 in 1984. Removing the steps and doghouse hatch gives generous access to work round the engine, while hatches in the cockpit sole give access to the shaft drive and stern gland as well as steering gear and after bilges, plus space for an extra 25 gallons of fuel in cans.

The main 25 gals fuel tank is sited beneath the cabin sole. With a total of 50 gals of fuel she'll do 900 miles at 6kn cruising. Maximum speed under power is 7kn.

There's self-draining stowage for two gas bottles in the cockpit and 30 gals freshwater capacity with stowage space for an extra 16 gals of bottled water.

### NANCY D

Martin now consoles himself after the sale of *Gimcrack* by sailing Suffolk's estuaries in his second boat, a YM Senior called *Nancy D*, which has already proved a big hit with the grandchildren.

"I believe that I first saw the YM Senior in 1952 at the Boat Show, when it was a small part of the London Motor Show at Earls Court. *Yachting Monthly* had sponsored the design of home build pocket cruisers and Ken Gibbs won with his designs of the Junior (14ft) and the Senior (16ft).

"I was 11 years old and had been



*Nancy D in light airs and (right) in her home berth.*

sailing with my dad since as far back as I could remember. I remember climbing on board the Senior and speaking to Ken Gibbs who was on the stand. I explained that I wanted one of these boats, as it would mean that I could escape from dad who was always shouting at me!

"Mr Gibbs explained that is what dads are for. Nevertheless, he agreed that it



would be an ideal first boat for me,” explained Martin.

But he didn't get his Senior. “I carried on sailing with dad and enjoyed learning all his bad habits. I would not have missed those years with dad for all the boats in the world,” he added.

He finally bought his own boat – a little plywood Gazelle that leaked like a sieve and sailed like an unbroken horse. He then progressed to one of J Francis Jones' 22ft wooden Kestrels built by Clapson's at Barton on Humber. She was a great boat, but unsuited to the trips he did to Holland, Belgium and France.

Then came *La Simpatia*, one of Alan Buchanan's Spanish-built East Anglians, finished by Dixon Kerley at Maldon. “She was fabulous – we did over seven thousand miles in three years. She had one of Blondie Hasler's first vane steering gears, which worked like a charm and enabled us to do our first non-stop 500-mile voyage. She also had a Stuart Turner petrol engine – those engines taught us to sail!” he commented.

In 2005 Martin's cousin Nancy died. “She left me a small legacy. I considered a memorial park bench overlooking one of the Broads, but then I spotted an advertisement for a YM Senior.”

He bought the *Nancy D* a few years ago as a fun daysailer when *Gimcrack* was left overseas and he wanted something on which to take the grandchildren sailing; she has, he says, taken him back to his own childhood days exploring the creeks and rivers where *Gimcrack's* greater draught wouldn't let her go.

She was for sale at Waterbeach in



Above: Nancy D enjoys a quiet sail. Below left: The simple galley and store on Nancy D.

Cambridgeshire and when he went to see her, she was perfect. She'd been built by Ron Lovett, a skilled engineer and carpenter over a 10-year period whilst attending a boatbuilding course. Ron launched her in 1990, but she had been little used when Martin bought her, so he repainted and varnished her and named her *Nancy D*.

“And so, at 65 and after waiting 54 years, I finally bought a *Yachting Monthly* Senior. Children and grandchildren love her. We all get cold and wet in her. We've sailed in waters so shallow that seagulls were walking. We've explored secret waters that big plastic boats could never dream of,” declared Martin.

And she is fun to sail. She's pretty in a chunky sort of way and, although she's a gunter-rigged bilge keeler she's both remarkably quick and points up well. She really is a super boat in which youngsters can cut their teeth, a real Swallows and Amazons boat. She's also ideal for crotchety old chaps like Martin and me to take out for an afternoon's potter.

With her roomy cabin with raised bunks giving generous sitting headroom,

galley box with Gaz burner and storage to port and a small 'chart table' with storage under to starboard, and a large cockpit tent, coupled with the ability to take the ground upright, she's an ideal East Coast weekender. She's a complete contrast to the greyhound *Gimcrack* – but what fun!

**ECS**



# Our little ray of sand-shine

“We left a few minutes late...”

Photos © David Lewin

It takes a certain mind-set to enjoy running aground, but [David Lewin](#) managed it while trying to sail through the Rays'n channel.

**T**he plan for the weekend was to visit Brightlingsea. In the six years we've lived in Burnham on Crouch and the many miles we've travelled and countries we've visited with *Red Magic*, we'd never actually sailed to and stayed in Brightlingsea. It also happened that we had a free weekend and the tides were right, so if we didn't do it that weekend we could see another season going by without visiting one of our local destinations.

However, when I said the tides were right – the optimum departure time (HW) was a bit early – 0600 – and I felt I just wouldn't get a green light from the First Mate if I threatened to set the alarm for 0430! Anyway, our Red Fox 200 only draws about 200mm, so I was quite blasé about it all and

calculated that if we left the mooring at about 0730 we'd get down the river with a full ebb and have enough water to cross into the Ray Sand Channel on our way north to Brightlingsea.

We left a few minutes late in fact, but at once started to fly along with the tide when the Mate exclaimed we'd left all the booze behind. Food we had a-plenty, but not a bottle of beer between us!

Tide is only good when it's going with you – it just seemed to take forever to motor back the quarter mile to retrieve the errant bottles. By now we were about 25 minutes later than planned, but there was something of a breeze and with a little help from the motor we were doing over 7kn over the ground.

We were very impressed with the new buoyage on the Crouch and it was straightforward picking up the yellow Ray Sand Buoy as we turned northeast over the swatchway.

Generally, when we see 1.1m on the echosounder, or even 1.0m, there is no cause for any sort of worry, but as we got towards the north end of the Sands the sounder was constantly showing 0.8m or less, by which time we were definitely in shallow water mode – both bilge boards up and only a vestigial amount of rudder.

Eventually, the inevitable happened, the sounder decided there was nothing left to measure and went on holiday and the rudder had been retracted so far that we had no steerage left. We were aground!



After the initial cursing and kicking and blaming everyone else, there was absolutely nothing to do but enjoy it. We could see a group of seals to one side of us and a fresh flock of oystercatchers had just alighted on the mud to pick off the delicacies left by the tide.

Once the water had receded, we also saw that we had not taken the best route and that it would appear that the deepest channel has moved a bit to the east. Too late now though, we were sitting high and dry with the sky from one horizon to the other.

It was so peaceful and what's more we knew it would remain so for a few hours to come, so we just settled down to a gentle day. No stress and nowhere to go! Because the boat is flat bottomed with two teak runners on the underside of the bottom chines, she takes the ground at exactly the same attitude as sitting in the water, so there is no tip-toeing around or sitting at an angle to worry about –

just carry on with life as normal.

Somehow the four hours aground just seemed to rush by; we'd started with a cup of coffee, then read a bit, done a few small maintenance jobs, managed a short kip, taken a walk on the sands, laid the anchor out, opened the bar at mid-day and were just into our crab sandwiches when the water came back. Soon we were swinging to the anchor and, after another 20

minutes for good measure, we were on our way again.

The breeze was fresh and from the west, so we had a glorious reach right to Brightlingsea harbour entrance. It had taken us four hours longer than we had originally planned, but in retrospect we wouldn't have changed the day. We might even do it again – on purpose this time!

**ECS**





Photo © Collin Jarman

# 'Mooring-ology'

'Mooring-ology' or the science of laying moorings is more complicated than you might think, as Roger Gaspar discovered when he talked to those in charge at West Mersea.

**M**OST of us will have laid up for the winter by now and the sight of boats hauled onto hard standing or with extra covers in place only confirms the onset of shorter days and damp mornings at best; snow, ice and freezing conditions at worst. But for boatyards everywhere this is the start of a chilly and muddy winter maintenance programme that includes an overhaul of swinging moorings. Apart from sundry bales of warp, hefty chain, swivels and shackles

in the corner of the yard, how it all works is a bit of a mystery. And yet we have all come to rely on that work so that we can remain in blissful confidence when the elements do their worst.

Swinging moorings might be viewed by many as 'old technology', such is the apparent dominance of marinas, even here on the East Coast, but for a good number they are still the norm. At West Mersea, in a harbour consisting of creeks, they are generally the preferred choice for residents and visitors over the alternative of the pile moorings.

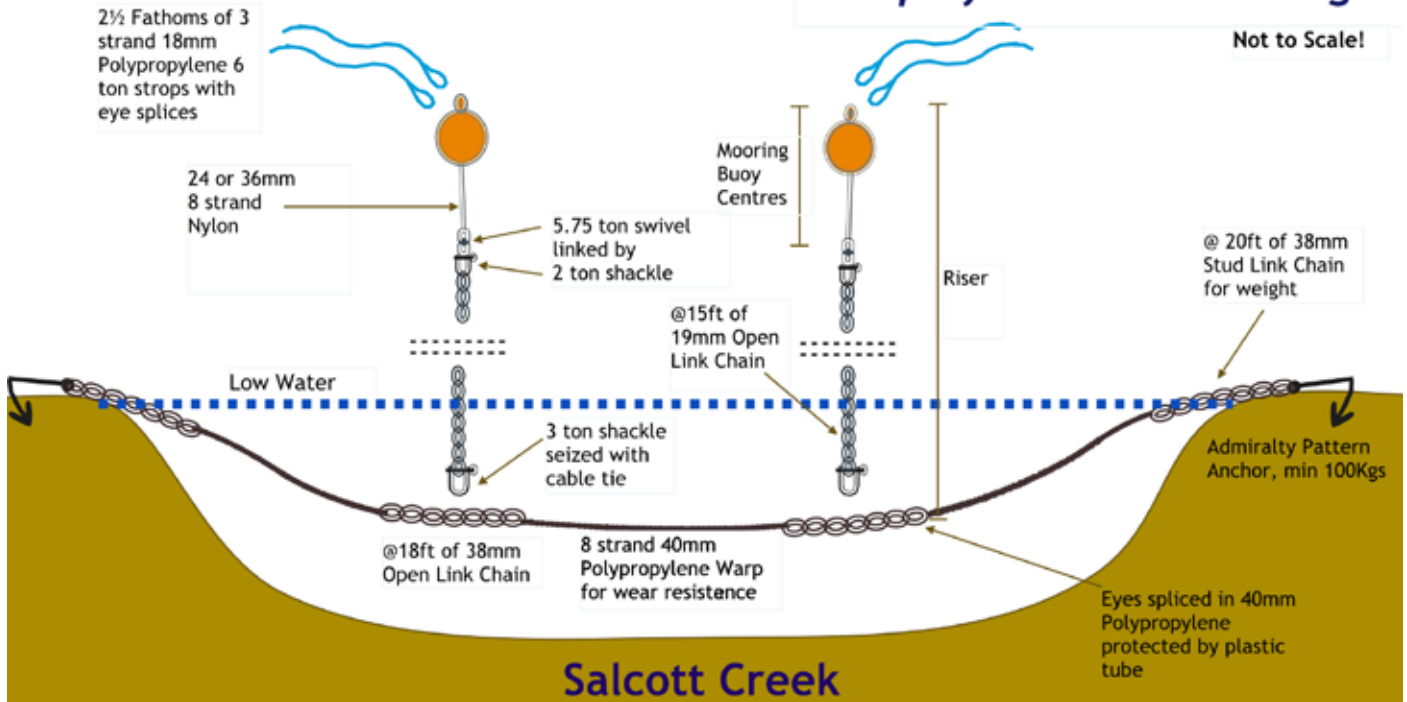
But how difficult is it to lay a swinging mooring? Those more used to marinas may wonder about the

safety of moorings – what are their safe limits, when were they last checked, will I touch my neighbour as the tide turns or my boat lies wind rode? Surely it's just a case of a large enough weight, some chain and a mooring buoy? Actually, no, it isn't! Not if you want to maximise the number of moorings in a restricted area



Photos © Roger Gaspar

## Set up of the Club Moorings



Above: The layout of ground tackle athwart Salcott Creek, West Mersea. Below left (previous page): 38mm stud link chain for ground tackle.

and be confident about safety.

Moorings in West Mersea are laid and owned by a number of different companies and individuals and practices vary, but we have our own expert in Alan Bird who lays his own moorings and also the 70 owned by the West Mersea Yacht Club. His expertise predates the autumn ‘hurricane’ of 1987, which saw marina pontoons go adrift and swinging moorings lift their sinkers or part their risers.

West Mersea probably fared no better or worse than any other place during that storm, but to prevent a repetition of the damage that was caused, Alan has thought through the design of each mooring he lays, those considerations being affected by both the need for

security and increasing pressure on space. What we have today is the product of 25 years’ experience.

### The need for more moorings

It is pretty obvious that moorings need to be spaced to allow boats to swing safely at low water when there is maximum slack in the riser. This needs to take into account the maximum tidal range that can be expected and the fact that different boats can lie in different directions: a flat bottomed motor boat can lie wind rode in quite a different direction to a deep keeled yacht and there can even be substantial differences between a modern and more mature yacht.

The spring tidal range at West Mersea

is generally a little over 5m, which requires at least 11m + boat length between moorings. Or does it? To prevent excessive swinging, reducing the scope of the riser to the minimum necessary is essential.

And, have you ever wondered what that enigmatic sign ‘moorings laid athwart the creek’ means?

### Local practice

Each pair of moorings in Salcott Creek has ground tackle athwart the stream. On each side of the creek, an Admiralty pattern anchor (but with a single fluke, making it a ‘rond’ anchor) weighing a minimum of 100kg is laid. That is not uncommon practice, but instead of just chain between them, Alan uses a mixture

Below left: Plenty of swinging room and channel width at half tide. Below right: Not so much space to be found at low water.





Above left: Race marks gathered for winter maintenance. Above right: 19mm chain, 2 ton shackle, 5.75 ton swivels of old and new design.

of chain, both open and stud link and polypropylene warp. There are two reasons for the warp: first is the high corrosion in Salcott Creek, said to be because of the oyster layings that have been there for 2000 years, and second,

the use of warp enables Alan to tighten up the ground tackle so there is minimal slack. This takes scope out of the system to prevent excessive swinging.

Some chain is necessary in the ground tackle and we have 38mm stud link

Below: One of the shorter, smaller buoy centres (for a RIB), showing the link to the riser.



chain attached to each anchor. This is for weight and this length of chain runs over the ground at each side of the creek, just past the LW springs mark. The chain is linked to eight strand, 40mm polypropylene warp, the connection being protected by plastic pipe, and this is used to tension the tackle; that tension digs in each anchor and leaves virtually no slack in the ground chain.

It follows that the only scope for swinging left lies in the riser and that is why, coupled with a careful allocation of moorings to match similar boats to neighbours, the moorings can be as densely packed together as they are. However, the result of these arrangements is that the ground tackle does not lie on the bed of the creek. If you donned scuba gear and walked the centre of the creek you would encounter the ground tackle at chest height for each mooring, which is one of the reasons for those warnings not to anchor in the presence of moorings laid athwart the creek bed.

**Connections**

A chain to chain connection between riser and ground tackle is necessary. Underneath each riser, the ground tackle includes two lengths (of approximately 18ft) of 38mm open link chain. Each riser comprises a 3 ton shackle linking it to the ground tackle chain, about 15ft of 19mm open linked chain and a 2 ton shackle linked to a 5.75 ton swivel. At the top is the mooring buoy with 36mm 8-strand nylon (24mm for upper Salcott) linked to the swivel. It's matched for length to the riser chain and runs through the buoy's centre to complete the required length for the tidal range. From there, fresh each season, two 18mm polypropylene strops, two and a half fathoms in length, complete the tackle.



**Above left:** Final year for this chain already recycled to a racing mark. **Above right:** Another year? Borderline for reuse on a racing mark.

### Maintenance

The WMYC moorings are designed by Alan Bird, but the servicing and maintenance of them is a partnership between Alan and the club's senior launchman, Andrew Twidell, known to all visitors by his VHF callsign *YCI*.

During the winter, Alan lifts each mooring, which does not require removal of the mooring, rather the use of his specially designed workboat at low water springs to bring the ground tackle to the surface so he can inspect all parts for wear and tension. Components that need replacement are identified and details passed to Andrew, whose task is

to prepare these replacements for fitting before the next season.

The ground tackle is generally expected to have a life of about 20 years, although the age of each varies, so there is a steady pattern of renewal, hence the annual checks, also required for insurance purposes. Risers have an average service life of about three years.

This maintenance takes time and the cost will be obvious. Each spring Alan has 70 of our moorings to lift and check at LW springs – those requiring replacement needing two lifts, one for inspection and a second for renewal once Andrew has prepared the components.

The task of preparing the components is equally time consuming and not without moving some heavy gear!

In addition, Andrew has to lift and refurbish the club race marks. Where possible, chain is recycled from the moorings onto the race marks to save costs, but splicing is the most persistent task of the winter with eyesplices needed for 140 mooring strops, each connection between the 40mm warp and ground chain, and both the top and bottom of the buoy centres. One outcome is that Andrew can start and finish an eyesplice in a mooring strop in about two minutes. Anybody quicker out there? **ECS**

**Below:** Only another 139 eyesplices to go! Andrew Twidell speedily turns in one of his many, well-practised splices in a mooring strop.



# Death on the Bermudan sloop

*A winter's tale by Bowsprit – with apologies to Agatha Christie.*

**T**he hard beat out to the Bench Head should have been a warning to the crew. But, once they were in their stride it wasn't too unpleasant, despite the wind over tide conditions. The old sloop with her 6 tons of wood and long keel had a pleasant motion over the steep seas and only occasionally dug her nose in.

The first thing that made the crew think was just after he had taken over the helm. The skipper, now in front of him, unerringly ducked as the boat took a small sea on her nose and remained bone dry as the crew, unable to move because of the vicious weather helm that had forced him to brace himself across the cockpit, took the brunt. "Bad luck," said the skipper with a bit of a grin.

Well, the first time didn't annoy, but by the twentieth it did.

"Any chance we can reef her to ease this weather helm?" risked the crew.

"Don't want to really," was the response. "We've got the tide with us, but we'll lose it by Walton on the Naze if we don't keep her flat out."

Flat out was a bit of a joke. She did 5kn to windward and that was that; too much sail and it was arguable how much to windward it really was. The broad slick of the wake to weather was evidence that the skipper was blind to the sailing faults of his command.

"Hope your bunk is not getting too wet," said the skipper charitably.

"What?"

"Well, that starboard bunk gets a drip from the corner post and, what with the leak in the hatch, the starboard side will get wet whether we're on port or starboard tack. You could steer better and she'd be drier."

"Couldn't I sleep on the port side?" was the crew's rather obvious response. The skipper gave him a look that conveyed that he thought he was first bad, then mad but finally just sad.

"Weeeeell, it's been done, but I like to keep that side for the bits."

The crew, suitably mystified, wondered what was so sacred about the bits, indeed what were the 'bits', but not wishing to show his ignorance



of wooden boats, he shut up. In the deep silence that followed, the first stirrings of discontent were formed.

A little later, the skipper went below to make a cup of tea. This impressed the crew, because, sound though his own modern boat was, making a cup of tea in this seaway would have been a trial. Indeed, this charitable act made the crew feel a little bit guilty at the resentment for the wetting he was getting and going to get that night. This, however, was premature!

"You'll be OK to tack her, while I look after the kettle, she'll come round as sweet as a nut, just give her a slight backing of the headsail in this sea."

So the skipper leant back against his chart table – his pride and joy really, as it was large enough for a full Admiralty Chart and had prompted his only published letter in a yachting magazine criticising the new boat reviewers for their over generous comments about chart tables that could barely hold a chart plotter. The crew thought about that letter and reflected ironically that there was no way that a chart plotter could survive the level of humidity that the deck permitted on this boat. He then thought about the skipper leaning against the chart table as he tacked

the boat.

Easing the genoa sheet, his foot slipped on the varnished grating of the cockpit sole – lethal whenever it was wet – and found three distressing and painful consequences. First his

nose hit the top of the winch. This pain caused the second consequence, for the blow quite let his grip slip and the coarse sheet removed at least one layer of skin before he instinctively snatched back at it. This caused the third pain as, off balance, his hand grasped the genoa sheet, which was now coping with the backed sail. In a trice, it hauled him into the winch and jammed rope and hand together as the boat came round and settled with

headsail backed.

"Handy that," said the skipper. "Leave her hove to a second, I'll pour the tea." A minute later, "Right, get the genoa set."

The crew removed his hand from the rope and winch combination and finished his exertions getting the boat on the new tack when the skipper handed him the newly boiled cup of tea. None of the pain so far quite matched the agony of near boiling water in a china cup applied to the skinless palm of the crew's right hand. The pain struck him dumb, apart from a sharp intake of breath, during which the skipper bounded into the cockpit and took over the helm, remarking that the crew had to let him share some of the fun.

A moment's silence followed. Well really it was about two nautical miles long until the crew grunted that he was ready for the next tack. By now they had tacked over the shallows south of Mersea Island and had reached the Colne. The next tack was still silent as the crew brooded. Generally, he thought himself level headed, certainly not homicidal, indeed not usually given to violent thought at all. However, he now



wondered whether three days of this was not more than he could endure.

But we all know that football is a game of two halves and that sailing changes by the moment. They reached the Eagle, went about and, almost in the same instant, the wind veered and they found themselves on a beam reach. This was the old girl's best point of sailing; indeed some had said it was her only point of sailing. The skipper revelled in it. The sun came out, the seas moderated and the sailing was good.

"I'd like to try her now," suggested the crew, noting the ease of the skipper's job compared with his arm lengthening exercises he had endured during the beat to windward.

"Nope, you don't want to do that," said the skipper with an appalling imitation of Harry Enfield. "The autopilot can't cope with the weather helm to windward, so I always like to put it on when we're like this."

Once fitted, that was it. Nothing to do. The crew did not feel like talking at the moment. His hand throbbed, his arms ached, he really couldn't think of anything he wanted to say and there was nothing about the Clacton shore that inspired deep thought or comment. He lapsed into reflection. Indeed, that reflection continued for some eight miles or so until a noise so loud as to cause further physical pain exploded three inches from his left ear. He was sure it was his left ear even when asked about it three days later, because there was still a peculiar numbness and ringing sound in it.

Following this explosion of sound, the skipper stood up and waved his

arms frantically at a small but old motor yacht chugging past the other way about half a mile to seaward. The motor yacht carried on its way.

"T'ish," said the skipper. "That's Clive." In fact, that's what the crew assumed he said, because that's what the skipper said when the crew asked him to repeat what he had said. At this point, the crew realised that the skipper was holding his fancy mouth-driven fog horn in his hand. Now these things get blown into in the middle, but the sound comes out on one side, the right hand side, the right hand side next to the left hand ear of the daydreaming crew.

It took a little while for the shock to go, but frankly the resentment grew when the skipper dismissed the incident with "startled you, did I? Ho-ho."

By now the crew was waiting for the

next thing and, like the beginnings of the tea, he got lulled into a sense of complacency. The skipper took them into Hamford Water and, anchoring at the western end, he made another cup of tea for them with ginger cake.

The wind almost completely dropped and the sun put the day into the 90s. The crew decided to go for a swim and, having got ready, he went to hunt out the boarding ladder.

"You won't need that," said the skipper. "I'll get it ready for getting out."

The crew stood on the bulwarks and jumped into the inviting water.

Perhaps it should be explained at this point that the old girl was a shallow draught boat designed for the East Coast, but the modern sailor will have deduced this earlier from the description of the sailing qualities. However, it should also probably be explained that Hamford Water is better visualised as a creek – a muddy creek – that has its holes and its humps. Now the anchor was in a hole. The crew knew this, because he put the anchor down, but the boat was over a hump. The skipper knew this, because he was reading the echosounder as he took way off. And then he had turned off the power, because on a wooden boat it's always a good idea not to squander battery power.

Now, everything would have been all right if the crew had followed the anchor into the hole – well, perhaps not, because the anchor was already there, but as it was, the crew took off from amidships. He probably did not help himself with the little leap upwards into the air, but as it was it





was remarkable that his drop was arrested by his legs entering the mud of the bottom to such a depth that he was up to his knees in mud whilst at the same time his nose was just above the then mean sea level. Well, 'just' if he tipped his head back, which meant that the ripples of his undignified entry rebounded from the hull of the slumbering vessel and tried to drown him. It is from facts such as these that yachting magazines invite their readers to deduce the draught of the vessel using the mean height of males in their 50s in the first decade of the millennium. But we'll leave them free to make use of this example and move on.

The skipper did his best to stifle his giggling. And in fairness he was quickly on the case. He had some brand new polypropylene rope out of the locker, a noose on it and over the side before you could say *Mayday* three times. His first attempt lassoed the crew firmly about the neck, which wasn't much appreciated. The second time, the crew got the rope under his bare armpits. Quick as a flash and before you could say *Pan Pan* three times, the skipper had leapt to the starboard genny winch, wound on the rope and started grinding as hard as he had a week earlier to impress the new Club Commodore. It worked, of course, as the thud of the crew's head on the topsides evidenced.

"Hold on, I'll get the ladder right away," said the skipper.

Returning with the device, he apologised for the over vigorous winching.

"Don't worry," said the crew sarcastically. "The weed softened the blow."

"Weed? Weed?" said the skipper, now doing a Woodentops impression as poorly as it was misplaced.

"Yes, there's quite a lot on your

bottom," remarked the ever faithful crew, much to his bitter regret as the skipper passed down a deck brush with the suggestion that while he was down there...

An hour later, the crew emerged from the water. He made a curious picture. His bare shoulders had the beginnings of a nasty spot of sunburn. Then there was the white of his untanned upper chest above a broad red stripe where the polypropylene rope had tightened across his chest. The rest of him was white, apart from his feet, which now had best Essex mud ingrained under their toenails.

"T'ish," said the skipper.

They upped anchor in another silence and went round into Titchmarsh Marina for the night and a good shower.

It seemed to the crew that things got a bit better when the boat was tied up, although he did feel rather vulnerable when the skipper carelessly splashed him while unravelling the fresh water hose as he plugged in the shore power. However, this passed uneventfully and after a pleasant dinner in the clubhouse, they retired early to their bunks.

Peace descended – well, for an hour anyway, until the skipper's arrhythmic snoring woke the crew. It was a curious thing. Most people snore in a rhythm as they breathe in or out. Not the skipper: he could snore as he breathed in and he could snore as he breathed out, but not consecutively, nor in a pattern. The result drove the crew wild as he sought silence. But then a wooden boat has much in common with a guitar. They float, they have strings and this boat also shared a bridge for the skipper and a fret board for the crew. But the body of a guitar is to amplify the sound: so did the cabin! The skipper even added a "T'ish" every now and then in his

sleep, as though striking an imaginary cymbal.

By morning, the crew was red-eyed and care worn, which suited the day. The sun and 90° of the previous day had given way to a bleak, windswept day where the fastest things in the marina were the clouds passing overhead. The wind blew strongly on their starboard quarter and presented the skipper with the challenge of extraction from the berth.

"No problem," he said over an encouraging breakfast of Canadian Maple cured bacon, extra large free range eggs and grilled baby plum tomatoes accompanied by toast with tangy, thick cut marmalade and Blue Mountain perked coffee. "I've been reading up on this in one of those magazines. We put her into gear, rev her up until the prop wash is flowing, let slip quickly and we get immediate steerage."

The crew opined that the space between berthed boats was 45ft; this boat needed to reverse out 25ft before she could turn clear, which required her to have the turning circle of a London Taxicab.

"T'ish," said the skipper. "Stand by aft with a fender or two."

The trouble with this plan was that the crew had to be forward first to let the lines slip. The boat throbbed on full astern, the crew let slip and, at a roar from the skipper, threw himself towards the pushpit where he just had time to insert his body between the outside of the pushpit and that of a new 40ft yacht opposite.

"T'ish," said the skipper.

The resultant rebound was quite useful, for the skipper got the boat turned into the lane between the pontoons and reversed towards the exit. However, the skipper hadn't read what to do next as the strong wind blew the bow off. They were trapped by the wind. The wind was coming through the exit; their stern was facing the exit and there was neither turning space ahead nor enough power to turn through the wind astern.

"T'ish," said the skipper. "Get a line from the bow and I'll drop you on the hammerhead from the stern."

Now Jonathan Edwards was never expected to do his hop, step and jump having just been crushed against a 40ft Bavaria. Nevertheless, it was clear that the skipper was never going to get the stern close to the

hammerhead, so the crew perched in the cockpit and launched himself. He hopped over the cockpit coaming, stepped on the gunwale and jumped for the hammerhead.

His landing was not elegant. There was sufficient moisture on the planks for his ill-shod feet to fail to gain that adhesion for which he hoped. His feet shot out forward and he braced for the severe and painful impact on his nether regions.

"You're a lucky chap," called the skipper. "Never jump onto a pontoon. Still, now you've done it make fast."

Securely held by the bow, the old girl obliging spun round, now head to wind, and the skipper motored gently towards the end of the hammerhead.

"Don't want to get too close," he called. "Grab the pulpit."

Quite why the crew did what he was told, we will never know. The sane man would have tied off the head rope and headed for the surprisingly welcome sight of Walton railway station. Nevertheless, the crew reached for the pulpit, taking the head rope with him and, while the skipper motored now calmly out of the marina, the crew held on grimly to the pulpit and scabbled desperately to hook his feet over the rail of the spoon bow. Some 50 or so curious spectators looked silently on while the owner of a new Bavaria wiped some skin and blood off his pushpit.

By the time the vessel had reached Stone Point, the crew had regained the bow and sorted warps and fenders. The wind blew viciously and the skipper suggested that they just plug round to Shotley.

"I'm going to have to get some more bits for the first aid kit, the way you're going through it," said the skipper.

Curiously silent, they plugged round to Shotley and lined up for entry into the lock.

"Get the warps and fenders out will you?" asked the skipper. "Both sides just in case."

When the crew returned to the cockpit, the skipper gave instructions for docking.

"The important line will be the stern one. Once that's on the cleat on the floating fender in the lock, she won't go anywhere even in this wind."

The manoeuvre was perfectly executed, thanks to the crew. Having safely hooked on aft, while the skipper merely held the helm and dabbed a



couple of times at the throttle, the crew realised that he had to do the bow rope as well. His clue was the stare from both skipper and lock keeper.

"Do you want a windward or leeward berth," asked the lock keeper.

"Windward, I think," was the response. "I think you can get rid of the starboard fenders while the lock fills," was the next instruction.

Once through the lock, they approached the visitors' berth. No finger berth this, just 100ft of pontoon to windward. Given the strength of the wind, this required (or so the skipper thought) a speedy approach, rapid exit of the crew and a quick turn on the cleat and, so instructed, the crew did as he was bid and tied off the head rope. Looking up, the crew saw the skipper holding up the stern line with an expectant look. Muttering under his breath, the crew went along the pontoon and tied that line up as well – and then for good measure did the two springs while the skipper looked at the sky, into the wind and then eyed the boat.

The crew thought he had her nicely moored.

"I think we'd better warp her round now while there's plenty of room and the wind's blowing her off. It'll be better for the morning," opined the skipper. Which meant out with the starboard fenders again, off with the springs and the stern rope. The skipper started the turn with the engine in astern and the crew completed it by hand. Quite why the skipper couldn't edge her forward on the motor as she came round to ease his burden, he didn't understand, but eventually it was done. Fore and stern warps and then springs. At this point the fatal moment occurred. The crew in his folly passed the last spring to the skipper standing in the cockpit to

make off.

"T'ish," said the skipper. "It's all work being the skipper."

He missed the stare of the crew. By anybody's view this was murderous. This calm, pleasant man had reached that point where his nature was changed forever.

*Work? Work? Work?* What had the skipper done? Nothing, nothing heavy, nothing difficult, nothing to help. The skipper's mistake at this point was to have nothing to take the crew's mind off his intentions. Previously it had been bandaging his fingers, getting his breath back or cleaning himself off, but on this occasion, in the calm of the marina, there was nothing to compete with the sense of injustice.

Silence descended once more, even through the skipper's next culinary preparation of fresh beef strips pan fried and marinated in black bean sauce (with a hint of ginger and garlic) served on a bed of chow mein.

The next day dawned silent on board. The wind had abated and was a reasonable northeasterly. Good for a run up the Wallet.

Even more Canadian Maple cured best back bacon did not displace the murderous thoughts of the crew. The skipper was as oblivious to the currents within the vessel as he usually was to those outside.

As they rounded the Naze some two or three miles off, the sun came out and all looked set fair.

"We'd best get the spinny up," said the skipper.

"Never done that," said the crew with a finality that caused the skipper to stop and look at him for the first time in three days.

"T'ish," said the skipper. "Well you'd better pay attention while I rig the lines for you."

The skipper bustled forward and back with uphauls and downhauls



and suddenly the crew saw an opportunity as large as a win on the lottery. The skipper was reversing backwards down the windward side deck. The crew, who up to now had been following the last command to steer straight, noted that the wind was almost dead astern, so it only took a little touch on the helm to backwind the main. That silent assassin, the boom, slowly but fatally swung over. The crew enjoyed the *'thwack'* of pine on cranium and the resultant splash. He could have sworn he heard the skipper say "T'ish".

Up to now, the crew would never be convicted. Who could say that this was deliberate. How guilty can you be for merely turning the helm a few degrees? But the skipper surfaced behind the boat and there was some movement. And what if we were seen from the shore thought the crew. Quick as a flash, he gybed the old girl and headed back for the skipper in the classic man overboard manoeuvre.

Nicely on starboard tack, six tons of wood, steel and material were moving at 3kn when the oak forefoot of the spoon bow parted the skipper's hair with a satisfying *'thwunk'* and he disappeared from view.

The crew's work was not done yet, for although somewhat uncomfortable, the skipper still lived. He was thinking clearly but oddly. The clear thought was that this was a good time to clean the log impeller as he passed by underneath the boat, but one must admit that this was an odd thing to think about at this particular time, given that he rarely thought about it when he was on board. His next thought was one of annoyance as the

flange on the bottom of the starboard bilge keel caught him on the chin as he spun underneath his boat. It was not the blow that annoyed him, because anybody passing under a boat must expect the odd jostle, but the blow dislodged his new set of false teeth, which sank to the bottom of the Medusa Channel. He reflected that he had been right, not his dentist. They hadn't been tight enough.

Things weren't looking too bad for the skipper up to now, or so he thought, but it was the very end of the boat that became the very end of the skipper. The old girl had a large heel fitting for the rudder, one that protected the end of the wooden part of the keel. Whilst it protected the timber, that same fitting met the skipper's cranium for the vessel's third and finally fatal strike. The skipper slowly sank in the muddy waters to start a lonely vigil, ebbing and flowing with the tide, disturbed only by catching on an occasional lobster pot.

On deck, the crew looked for signs of life and surprised himself by the clarity of his murderous plans. He must protect himself from blame. First, he went below and, removing the digital handheld VHF from its cradle, where it had sat unused for the whole journey, he turned it on. He remembered the skipper saying that he had last had it on while talking to a chum while crossing the South West Sunk swatchway a couple of weeks earlier. That meant the GPS position in its memory would be there, some 15 miles away. Sliding back the distress button cover and pressing the button, he could not stop himself saying "T'ish".

He then did an impression of Jim Davidson with an intermittently working microphone as he put out a mayday. Just enough words: *"Mayday, skipper overboard, while en route for River Blackwater"*. The crew knew about direction finding and here he was only a few miles from one of the Coastguard sites.

Next, he turned from channel to channel, discharging the battery by depressing the PTT switch, taking care only to use intership channels for brief periods until life in the batteries gave out.

Finally, while the vessel plugged on autopilot towards the Blackwater, he dismantled the main VHF and, getting access to the microphone socket, he waggled a wire until it broke, as though from age. Replacing the cover, he returned to the cockpit and continued on his way up the Wallet.

Five miles later he saw the Air Sea Rescue Helicopter heading out across the estuary. Best send up a flare, just to show willing, the crew thought. Here the skipper's meanness helped. Not one flare was in date and the crew genuinely tried three flares before one made a pretence of climbing into the sky. Not surprisingly, the helicopter didn't see it and carried on.

By the time the crew got the vessel safely into Brightlingsea, the nearest port of call, the search was hours old, but all in the wrong place. He was impressed by the optimism of the harbour staff who immediately put to sea in their patrol boat, but he smiled inwardly as he saw its name on the transom – *Dracula*. Quite appropriate.

Next came the police, but that was easy really. He explained he didn't know that much about sailing, having gone crewing to learn. In the end he was congratulated for having managed to bring the vessel into port safely. He thought it was a nice touch for the police to provide him with a trained counsellor for the shock he had gone through.

A month later and the inquest concluded death was accidental. The crew returned home and turned on his computer and logged onto the internet. What now? He logged onto the Yachting Forum and found what he was looking for on the Yachting Monthly Scuttlebutt Forum – *Crew wanted*. Reaching for his mouse to send a private message, he just couldn't resist saying "T'ish".

**ECS**

# The Boat Clinic

Boat therapist, **Garth Cooper**, gets out his tool kit, stethoscope and rubber gloves to find, fix and fettle.

## CLEANING AND WIRING

This summer just gone saw *Ngairé* out of the water in June for a professional re-varnish, a general spruce up and a delayed annual attack on the bottom. It meant the boat had to be virtually stripped.

It gave me a chance to take the sprayhood and dodgers home for a clean. I'd been doing some product testing for a chum of mine, Jim Herculson, who runs a chemical research and development outfit in Norfolk called Ensearch. He was the chap who developed and franchised the GRPro-Clean system of professional heavy duty boat cleaning. You need special training to use the aggressive chemicals involved.

With that business up and running, he turned his ever inquisitive mind to developing a range of environmentally friendly cleaning products for use by the likes of us. He came up with a range of GRP cleaners, hull cleaners, deck cleaners and, more recently, a super polish. One of his latest introductions is a product for cleaning covers.

The key to all the products is that they are safe for amateurs to use and are entirely biodegradable.

The sprayhood had started to collect that horrible green slimy stuff round the edges, on the stitch lines and round the edges of the windows. Having spread it out on clean gravel, I gave it a good wetting with a hosepipe and applied the Cover Clean with the pump spray (no

gas pressurised containers) and gently worked it in with a soft hand brush before washing it off.

The edges and the edges of the windows needed another couple of goes, because the sprayhood had not been cleaned for two whole seasons and an intervening winter. The top section was green on the lee side, but a couple of applications and it was all but clear. Only regular, twice-a-season cleaning will get it back to anything like its required condition, but as the product is so easy to use it can be done regularly when the boat is washed down, using the Ensearch All-Over Boat Cleaner.

With the boat out of the water I had a golden opportunity to clean down the topsides using Ensearch Hull Cleaner; wipe on with a damp cloth, leave for a bit and go back and wipe off with a clean cloth. I then applied Ensearch's Boat Shine and Protect, a blend of pure carnauba wax and a hard co-polymer. The effect was brilliant.

Last month I mentioned the problem of achieving professional looking wiring. As the boat was in the boatyard shed, the mast was down, so I grabbed the chance to do some maintenance, including checking the wiring. The deck/steaming light was on its last legs, so I removed it and fitted a new one. The old one was fed by two separate wires and switches, but to reduced chafe and the rattle of wires inside the mast (most of the foam lining has crumbled and fallen out) I swapped

them for a single three-core cable.

As with most masts that are deck-stepped there is a waterproof deck gland through which the cables for the deck/steaming light, the masthead tri-light and the VHF aerial pass. Joining the wires tidily and securely inside the boat is something of a problem as, unlike modern GRP boats, wooden ones don't have an inner lining behind which cables and cable joins can be hidden.

A newly introduced piece of kit from Scanstrut – the 'fit and forget' junction box – solved the problem. It's basically a waterproof junction box that uses easy fit wiring connectors. Each houses a pair of wires (in and out) and is mounted on a carrier bar. You can add as many of the connectors as you require up to 10.

The connectors were a bit fiddly at first, but judicious use of a small screwdriver to prise open the jaws solved that problem. The version we fitted cost just over £26 and makes a really neat installation.

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www.ensearch.co.uk

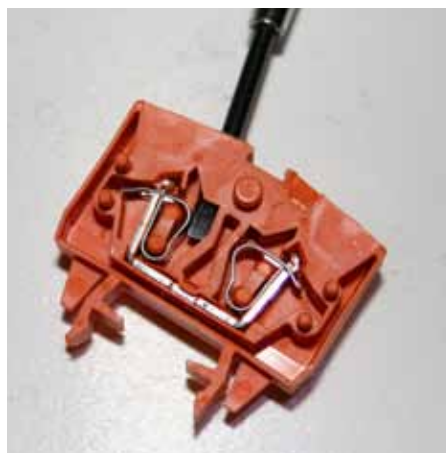
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**ECS**

**Below left:** The sprayhood was wetted, the cleaner applied with a pump spray, then left to work for a short while and hosed off.

**Below centre:** The Scanstrut easy fit connectors showing the stainless steel spring clip opened on the left (by a screwdriver) and closed on the right. Once in place, the wire 'in' is electrically connected by the bar screwed down at the bottom to the wire 'out'. Up to 10 of these connectors can be 'stacked' inside the junction box.

**Below:** The new junction box is smaller and neater than the old, as well as being properly waterproof.



Photos © Garth Cooper

Got a problem? Need a quick fix? Unsure how to avoid a bodged job? Email the details to the Boat Clinic: [garth@eastcoastsailing.co.uk](mailto:garth@eastcoastsailing.co.uk)



# Gear Tried and tested

## Standard Horizon CP300i chart plotter

£619.95

**When I sailed** halfway round Britain with a friend a couple of years back I was introduced to chart plotters with a vengeance. I'd used them occasionally and they'd proved accurate and useful, but I still wasn't convinced I needed one on my own boat.

Some years ago I bought a Yeoman Plotter when Precision Navigation launched the Compact version. Our editor Colin Jarman had been successfully using the Sport version, which you can use in the cockpit, for some time. For me it was quite a revolution and complemented my then recently purchased Garmin GPS, which is difficult to add waypoints to. The Yeoman makes it simple.

As I've got older I've found that bouncing up and down the companionway to check the chart something of a chore. I wanted something with me in the cockpit that was easy to use, easy to read and gave me a chart-like presentation that I could understand, that didn't take up a lot of space or need special waterproofing and would reduce the companionway cavorting.

I should point out that I still run a paper chart in my Yeoman and update it hourly, but thanks to NMEA-linked self-steering and other 'modern' gadgets, I also take time to make tea or coffee or go to the heads.

It was a trip from Orkney to our home port of Levington that finally convinced me of the advantages of a cockpit mounted chart plotter. With just two in the crew and some pretty atrocious weather for a lot of the time, the hatch garage mounted chart plotter was a joy. Finding our way into Fraserborough in the dark in a cold, wet and blustery F6 proved a doddle and again entering Hartlepool, were the lifeboat crew on their regular Sunday morning get together stood on the headland and watched us come creaming in on a belting F7.

On both occasions my skipper, Tim Thomas, and I were hanging on grimly and going below to check



Photos © Garth Cooper

charts was a definite no-no. However, a quick duck under the sprayhood to the plotter and our position relative to various sand banks and rather solid obstructions was easy to discover.

Tim had fitted a Standard Horizon CP180 chart plotter with a separate GPS aerial mounted on the coachroof. Our only complaint (at the time) was the sensitivity of the joystick toggle.

Over the years most of the chart plotters I have come across have been Raymarine. All singing all dancing and able to display huge amounts of data, they are no doubt a benchmark to aim for, but I couldn't afford one and didn't want all that extra gubbins; the AIS and radar overlays are useful, but I have serious doubts about radar on small yachts. Engine data I find superfluous. Why, if all this sort of data can be shown on one unit and worked up into any number of permutations do we insist on having separate wind, depth, log, speed, water temperature etc gauges as well?

No, I wanted a straightforward plotter that gave me a readable screen, a clear chart, was easy to operate and could be connected to my NMEA multiplexer or work alone if other instruments went down. I have an AIS unit at the chart table, I don't have radar, I have a comprehensive engine panel full of dials, but prefer to use my ears and eyes (one checks the sound, the other the amount of water or not from the exhaust).

I'd been impressed with Tim's

Standard Horizon CP180 and after some research plumped for the SH CP300i with its bigger screen. I also went for the version with the built-in GPS aerial, because I didn't want to have a length of cable running across the coachroof for the aerial. There's too much wiring trailed round the boat and I didn't want any more! I've even installed TackTick instruments to reduce the amount of wiring.

It did, however, present me with a challenge. The idea of the separate aerial is that it allows the unit to be flush mounted on a fascia, while the 'i' version with the aerial built in is normally mounted on a swivel stand. I didn't want it sitting on the coachroof to one side of the main hatch under the sprayhood, because it's an ideal area for keeping the additional sweater or lifejacket and harness, or important things like a couple of packets of biscuits or a tin of fruit cake. In any case, the port side area contains the galley solar powered vent and this leaves no room to mount an instrument.

I removed the hatch garage, which is heavily constructed of mahogany, made a new blank face and sited the plotter dead centre with the two TackTick heads either side. I then cut a section out of the top edge of the body of the garage to accommodate the aerial 'bulge' and the slightly raised back moulding of the plotter itself. This raised moulding meant that the new face also had to have a hole cut in it to



*With the mounting bracket fixed to the garage, the wiring was clipped down neatly.*

take the unit.

The plotter is held flush with the fascia by modifying and fixing the swivel mount to the inside of the garage, also replacing a couple of casing machine screws with longer ones.

We used the single cable fitting as we were coupling to the multiplexer, feeding it through the conduit and cable run used by the original instruments – this was perhaps the most awkward part of the whole job. This cable feeds NMEA data in and out of the plotter to the Yeoman, the tiller pilot and other instruments (should the Garmin 80 ever go down), as well as receiving data from the TackTick instruments. The second cable, which I left coiled away tidily in the garage is for attaching a video camera – not too sure why one would want to do that.

The plotter sits bang in the centre of the hatch garage under the 2in wide canvas centre strip between the windows in the sprayhood and it has no problem whatever in finding and identifying satellites.

I chose to use the European Atlantic Coasts C-Map Max chart cartridge (£109.95). I still dream of taking *Ngairé* up into the Baltic when I would need to buy another cartridge. The other advantage is that over the winter the cartridge goes back for updating at a percentage of the original cost.

The plotter comes with a 138-page

manual written in understandable English and I found that even I could follow it without difficulty. One word of warning though, the manual covers both the 180 and 300 series plotters, so pay attention and don't get them muddled. There are differences between the two sets of software.

Setting the plotter up proved simple. Insert the chart cartridge in the secure slot on the left hand side, lock the waterproof cover and switch on. It takes a few moments to 'warm up' and find the satellites, but then automatically finds your position and displays it on the chart.

The whole operating process is menu driven. From a master menu you can enter a wide range of sub-menus covering all the tasks you'll ever need, nearly all a question of simply highlighting with the 'shuttlepoint' joystick and pressing enter. For example, it took only a few minutes for me to grasp setting up a route: place the cursor on the position of the first waypoint, press the 'route' button in the array of buttons on the right of the screen and then press enter, move the cursor to the next and repeat. You can review the route and move or delete waypoints at will. You can enter up to 3000 waypoints and 50 routes.

There's only one grouse I've got so far with using the SH CP300i and that is the sensitivity of the joystick control. In a bouncy sea you need a very steady hand to make small and accurate adjustments. However, the screen is easy to read even sitting a couple of metres or so away at the helm and adjusting the backlight for night or dark conditions is quick and easy. You can also read the screen in strong direct sunlight, though there is some degree of useful shading from the sprayhood if we leave it up.

When singlehanded or shorthanded or with a weak crew, sailing with a



*The cutout in the garage houses the GPS antenna and is covered when the sprayhood is erected.*

cockpit mounted chart plotter is a boon. I wouldn't say it's essential, but I feel more confident knowing I haven't got to keep dashing down below to check my position or review marks or coastline features.

In dirty weather with limited visibility or at night or in fog it's a good tool. *But* I will continue to run a paper chart updated hourly – just in case!

The SH CP300i does everything I ask and probably more, but like a GPS it's a back-up tool as to where I am and does away with the need for complicated calculations, such as tidal drift, and shows me clearly and pretty well precisely where I am. And that alone is worth the investment.

*Garth Cooper*

**PS.** I have used a CP300i on my own boats for a few years now and believe that, in certain circumstances, a plotter in the cockpit can be a true safety aid as well as a navigation aid and tool. If you are alone on watch (either sailing singlehanded or with a seasick crew), to be able to see and use a plotter while at the helm is clearly adding to your safety.

Whether you want to use them as your primary navigation tool or not is still a matter for debate, but in safety terms they are fantastically useful and the CP300i is a good, not too expensive choice when compared to touch screen devices. *CJ*

## Trouble with Wind Instruments

**We reported** in ECS04, October, on the tests to isolate the fault in my Raymarine ST60 Wind & Close Hauled instruments where we deduced that the failure lay with the masthead unit.

Having dropped the mast for the winter lay-up, I removed the masthead unit and, deciding that trying to package it safely to survive despatch

to Raymarine was too difficult, I took it in to Mantsbrite in Maldon.

On arrival, the receptionist summoned an engineer who disappeared with the unit to return a few minutes later having tested it. "There's nothing from it," he said. Leaving it with him on 2nd November for repair, I received a call on 4th November to say it was ready.

Repairs consisted of a replacement

windvane pod and a replacement anemometer pod and it is reported as now functioning correctly – we'll see next season. Total repair cost was £146.58 – £72.15 for parts, £50 minimum labour charge, plus VAT. Not cheap, but better than a new masthead unit at around £250.

Good, speedy service from a local company. © 01621 853003 Email sales@mantsbrite.com.

# Book reviews

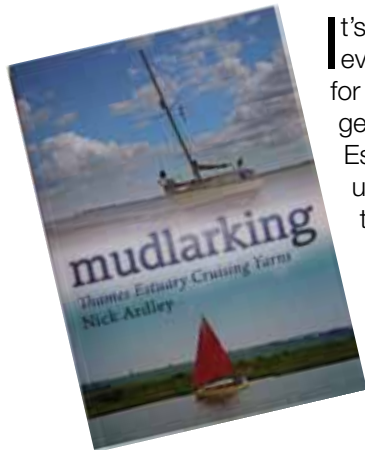
**Titles:** *Mudlarking and Jottings of a Thames Estuary Ditch-Crawler*

**Author:** Nick Ardley

**Publisher:** Amberley Publishing

**ISBN:** 978-1-84868-492-8 (*Mudlarking*),  
978-1-4456-0100-7 (*Jottings*)

**Price:** £16.99 and £17.99



It's winter, it's cold with dark evenings and it's a good time for curling up and reading about gentle cruises around the Thames Estuary to keep your spirits up and help you look forward to next summer and all the voyages you hope to make.

The simple tales in these two books will help you to plan such cruises or at least to list the places you would like to visit or re-visit.

They span the waters from the Thames and Canvey Island to the Suffolk rivers and provide thumbnail sketches of the rivers,

anchorages, moorings and marinas along the way.

The *Jottings* book includes a large section on the history of the Finesse class of clinker-built cruiser by A F Platt at Benfleet. Why? Because the author has owned one called *Whimbrel* for many years and it is she that carries him on the cruises described.

The stories are peppered with little snippets of local history, mainly to do with the Thames barge trade, and are illustrated with many black and white photos of barge remains. These diversions add extra interest to the tales.

It is a pity that the author uses the irritating device throughout of writing in the third person, referring to himself as the Skipper and his wife as the Mate. Despite much contrived speech, it makes for a remote, dispassionate feel to the text, which is also made difficult to read by being on pages that are too wide for easy scanning. Still, the subjects are good and the tales enjoyable enough. CJ



**NEW**

## Imray 2000 Suffolk and Essex Chart pack 2011



The new August 2011 edition contains revised charts to show changes to the buoyage in the River Crouch and approaches, Woodbridge and Orford Havens and Roger Gaspar's new survey of Mersea Quarters. The charts are also available as separate sheets.

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