



# Thames Sailing Barge Trust

## NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 49

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### SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2008

First of all a big thank you to those who responded to my appeal and sent me a cheque! Another big thank you to those who very kindly added a donation. All very much appreciated!

I should also apologise since as was pointed out to me I did not give you an address, which did not really help! So, you will find me (and Jane the Membership Secretary) at..... 8, Birch Close, Ely, Cambs. CB7 4TJ.

With this valuable information can I now ask you, if you have not already done so, to send your subs just as soon as you can manage. In case you are unsure the rates are as follows:

Full Maritime Membership  
£30.00  
Joint Membership  
£45.00  
Veteran/Youth  
£15.00

Cheques payable to The Thames Sailing Barge Trust .

Thank you, and the  
Compliments of the  
Season!

Brian Dawson



Stan at the wheel of *Centaur*

## STAN YEATES

Stan was born on the 26th of April 1915 in Kentish Town, London, according to hearsay during a Zeppelin raid. The family lived at 18 Lawford Road. He was the youngest of the family, with five sisters and two brothers. He never knew his eldest brother as he was killed at the Somme aged 18, six months after Stan was born. Despite the size of the family, his parents ran the house as a boarding house for Theatrical and Music Hall artists and from this Stan developed his musical talents, including his love of the piano. His father was a groom and then a horse tram driver.

He started work at the age of 14 in a small engineering factory and then went to a garage as an apprentice for 5 bob (shillings) a week. This was not enough money for his mother so he went to work with his brother Les in art metalwork. This was for a pound a week, but in a dingy workshop under the pavement of Percy Street W1. He stuck at that for several years, getting fresh air by walking and cycling in the countryside. His interest in shipping came from hanging around London Bridge watching the craft below. The workshop shared the space with a large central heating boiler for the showrooms upstairs. They had to feed it with the rubbish that was sent down. From that he salvaged a yachting book to read at lunch time and that really started him off. Fascinated by the great Windjammers, of the then Gustav Ericson fleet, he set to learn all the names of the sails and rigging, with the British Square Riggers, Vol 1 & 2 as his bible.

Cycling was his main way of getting around until he collided with a car. Later he bought a car and started to travel further a field before his second road accident and motorcycles became the mode of transport.

Barging started as a result of sailing on the East Coast in an 18foot boat called 'Spindrift'. He met up with two barges and hitched a lift up to Battlesbridge on one, the 'Dorothy'. He ended up using a sweep for four hours, rather than sailing but proved his worth. Not liking working under the pavement, he enquired after a job as mate. As the mate was leaving the 'Dorothy' for his own barge, ten days later he started his first barge mate job.

When WW2 started he was in the Merchant Navy on the barges 'Glenmore', 'Duplicate' and 'Ninety Nine', watching the war played out overhead the Thames and Medway Estuaries. Whilst mate on the 'Duplicate' he was recalled home from Sheerness only to find the family home had been bombed. Both his parents and one of his sisters were killed, but another was saved. All family photographs and documents were lost. Stan regretted never knowing his parents when he was old enough to appreciate them. Straight after the funeral, it was back to wartime duties, later becoming an Engineer on a small Tanker.

## STAN YEATES, CONT...

He met his wife Chick when she was nineteen (she didn't use her name Maude) They married in 1941, in St Paul's Church, Camden Square, followed by a wartime austere reception in her parents house and a honeymoon in Queenborough! The marriage lasted for 57 years until Chick's death in 1998. Both carried on in their wartime roles, living first in Gillingham and then Dovercourt.

In February 1943 he was drafted into the Army. 961 Coy IWT (Inland Water Transport) although he thought that Inland meant inland, it did not. After six weeks Army training it was off to the West Country for preparations for D Day. Experiments and trials with various types of invasion craft and Rhino barges proved an interesting time for all. D Day saw Stan crossing the Channel with the Canadians to Juno Beach and then unloading ships in the Mulberry Harbour. Eventually he made it to an Inland waterway, the Rhine crossing in Germany. Returning to England he ended up in Sandwich with a boring land based job. Seeing others of his 961Coy afloat, he made the mistake of requesting a move back to tugs. Two days later he was in charge of one, the TID Tug 72 in Scotland for six months before de-mob.

Back in Civvy Street he and Chick had to work and find somewhere to live. The matter was resolved in January 1947 when Stan went as Mate on the 'Veravia' and Capt. George Battershall agreed to take Chick as 3rd hand. 1946/47 was a hard icy winter. All went well for the next year but after a change of Skipper, six months later they left after Stan was

I first met Stan and Chick during that long, cold winter of 1947. Stan as mate of the 'Veravia' and Chick as Third Hand, they sailed up to Colchester with a cargo for R&W Paul.

Me and my mate (still at school) Minnie, who would soon be mate with Stan, met the 'Veravia' coming up the Colne with just her topsail set. It was dark, the wind failed completely at the swinging berth and Stan ran the dolly wire out.

We were on the opposite side of the river and had a bike between us which had a powerful dynamo, so we lifted the back wheel off the ground and wound the pedal like mad, thinking the powerful beam shining on them would be of help. We soon learned a bit more of the 'Anglo-Saxon' tongue and decided the best thing was to bike round via the bridge and lend a proper hand. Three boys on one bike was quite normal.

The two things I remember most about that occasion was the happy atmosphere on board and the delicious smell of Chick's dumpling stew wafting up from the Forecastle hatch. Stan was back in Colchester some time later to take charge of Francis & Gilders' barge 'General Jackson'. My pal Minnie, now a proper bargeman, went mate with him. Chick always sailed with Stan of course.

'General Jackson' was cut down in the Thames by a steam boat and though she was beached, she never sailed again.

Stan then took the 'Saltcote Belle', mostly doing East Mill work as had the 'General Jackson' and later the bigger, and therefore better earner, 'Centaur'.

To me and undoubtedly to Minnie, Stan was an inspiration and a link between the old school and the new.

offered a Skippers job with Francis and Gilders on 'General Jackson'. So they started barging as Skipper and Mate, employees and owners.

In 1955 he went to work for Laphorns, whom he stayed with for thirty years, first in the MB 'Nellie, followed by ten years in the 'Mary Birch' a story on its own. The 'Mary Birch' was a converted X lighter (Beeetle), the 1915 forerunner of modern day landing craft. Whilst working for Laphorns he was volunteered for practically every task there was to do. Skipper of every vessel in the fleet, painter, decorator, engineer, driver, you name it Stan did it. Having had the experience of wartime tug work, he had some interesting times with Laphorn's Tug 'Hooligan'.

Relaxation in those days took the form of sailing barges for pleasure, crewing for the Laphorn or Brice families. In 1969 he bought the converted smack 'Pembeth' and then in the summer of 1973, the converted barge 'Anglia'

During his working life, in the 1950s he became a Founder member of Hoo Ness Yacht Club and was a Trustee of that Club up until a year or so ago. He spent many enjoyable times sailing with the members and engaging in interesting conversations over a pint in the Club. He was a long-time member of the Thames Barge Sailing Club (Now Trust) and sailed as Skipper on 'Centaur', one of his former work craft, and 'Pudge', more frequently after his retirement in 1985. He was always willing to pass on his knowledge to his crew and was a patient teacher. He carried on sailing as Skipper into the start of this century at the age of

85. In 1998 he and Lew Fowraker arranged a one day charter for early TBSC members. To qualify for a place you had to be over 65. The total age of the crew was 780 years. The Skipper was 83 at the time. They couldn't find a Mate over 65 who was fit enough; a younger one was therefore permitted on board. His last trip out on 'Centaur' was as the Charterer in August this year. Hoo Ness Yacht Club was formed from the foundations of the Marina Club, started by the residential and pleasure barge owners based at Hoo after the war. Stan was keen to carry on the links between Sailing Barges and the HNYC and arranged several annual rallies to Stangate Creek. Very social and entertaining events!

Between 1985 and 1994 he sat on the SBA/AOB Qualification Board examining the skills of new skippers, including those he had sponsored.

He was employed as Officer of the Day to the Southend Match Committee for many years. When accommodation was not available, or provided, he had his VW Camper Van to sleep in. No doubt it brought back wartime memories of his time in Southend.

Stan's Van, the VW Camper went many miles in his retirement. With Chick it went around England and Scotland, across the Channel through France and Spain. Not content with local travel, following retirement at 70 from full time paid employment, they got the Travel bug. Chick said they were retired people not pensioners. Cruise and Passenger Cargo ships took them to Bangkok, Saigon, Australia, Bali, Jakarta, and the Pacific Islands. Nearer to home, Barbados and of course, up the Amazon!

After Chick died on Christmas Day 1998 he carried on sailing. He also decided to update his computer skills for his writing. You don't see many 80+ pensioners buying books on Windows and Word. Even in his last week, a bad day was not his health but 'that bl\*\*dy new computer (a Laptop) isn't as good as my old one'. The extension leads were out and the old one was in use again, on his lap!

His life spanned 92 years. From the era of horse drawn trams and sailing barges, to space travel and the modern digital computer age. David Laphorn said at Stan's funeral, 'It is a sad fact that one learns much more of a person once they have gone, and one is deprived of the opportunity of hearing it from the horse's mouth. It would be an understatement to say that his life was full, and I cannot do justice to his memory in the short time I have available'. Who could disagree?

*Jim Lawrence*

*Roger Newlyn*

## TSBT DIAMOND JUBILEE YEAR.

The Thames Barge Sailing Club was incorporated on the 6th of March 1948. In the previous autumn Hugh Vaudry had written letters to The Times, The Observer and The Daily Telegraph asking anyone interested in preserving the Thames Sailing Barge to contact him. The response was encouraging, and the TBSC was the result. Frank Carr the then Director of the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich was the first Commodore. Arrow with no engine was the first club barge. The present day Thames Sailing Barge Trust is the direct descendant.

We would like to hear from you if you have any ideas for celebrating this significant landmark in the Trust history.

We would also like to hear reminiscences that we have not previously seen in print.

It is no mean achievement to preserve in seaworthy condition and sail two large wooden traditional craft and train skippers and mates from resources raised entirely by volunteer members.

So far we have plans for three events and urge you to put the dates in your diary and make every effort to attend.

LONDON Union Jack Club – Friday 15th February 2008

*NOTE DATE CHANGE.*

We would particularly like to welcome any new members to this meeting for a social chat and a glass of wine. The Union Jack Club is close to Waterloo main line and Underground station. Speaker TBA. Look out for full details in the next Newsletter.

GREENWICH Diamond Jubilee Lunch – Saturday 8th March 2008.

We have booked the King William Restaurant in the Old Royal Naval College. Skipper Mick Lungley will be our guest of honour. We expect about 100 guests, members past and present and friends of members. The cost of a ticket will be £19-00 in advance, Buy your own wine. Greenwich has many attractions. You can easily spend the day there. See the enclosed flyer. An application form will be enclosed with the next Newsletter.

MALDON Diamond Jubilee Sponsored Walk – Sunday 4th May 2008

For the Joint Benefit of the TSBT and the RNLI.

The date is the Sunday of the May Day bank holiday weekend.

The sponsored walk has the objective of making some money for Trust funds and the RNLI, and raising the Trust profile. We are very pleased that the Mayor of Maldon has accepted our invitation to welcome and thank the walkers for their efforts.

We will need many volunteers to act as marshals and numerous other tasks. We also want lots of walkers young and old, with friends that will sponsor them. Look out for more details in the next two Newsletters.

*John Morgan*

TRIP TO ROYAL DOCKS: On Sunday 13 th January. Meet at 12:00 midday at West Silvertown DLR station.

A conducted tour by TSBT member Peter Finch, on foot and by DLR. This is a River Thames Society event.

Contact Peter direct on 0208-969-9941, or John 01252-512848. I would like to get a TSBT group together for this interesting trip.

*John Morgan*

It is with further sadness that we report the recent passing of long-time member Mr. Royston Walker.

A regular sailing member with a passion for Barges, he always took great interest in the Club/Trust's activities.

Our sympathies go to his family.

## JOHN WOODMAN

We have received the sad news that John Woodman has died, he was in his early eighties.

John sailed for the Club in the 1980's. He came then from Gillingham and with brothers Bob and Jim had gone sailing with his father in Goldsmiths of Grays SCOT. His father had also sailed in their SATANITA, HER MAJESTY and TROJAN. The family had moved to Gravesend around 1937 and as soon as he left school John crossed the river and joined the SPERANZA, later joining his father in SCOT.

Years later he wrote of his wartime experiences, much of the work carrying wheat from ships in London to millers in Ipswich, with stories of wartime restrictions and perils. He later sailed in ESTEREL, then when sailing finished he worked for MB Dredging, but his first love was always sail.

Ill health forced him to give up sailing for the Club, but we continued to correspond over the years and I have recently found a letter of his from November 2000 when he wrote about his happy times with the Club. "I always tried to look after the barge as if it were my own. Pity I had to finish owing to ill'ness. I always thought I'd carry on till my engine packed up but I was wrong". He much enjoyed receiving news from the Club and if he was late receiving his Bulletin I would receive a letter or in the last few years a telephone call fretting as to whether he had missed an issue.

Former Vice President Lew Foweraker typed up John's own recollections and a family history which he had always hoped to see published. There are vivid passages of long gone incidents and people with whom he had sailed and it was a privilege to have shared his memories.

John Woodman's Funeral was on Tuesday 20th November 2007.

*Elizabeth Wood*

# BARGING

An article by Don Rainbird that first appeared in a West Mersea Regatta Programme.

I was lucky to get a glimpse of the era of commercial barging under sail, although in retrospect, I should have made more of the opportunity.

In the early 50s, Francis and Guilders had acquired perhaps the biggest remaining fleet of sailing barges, and Hervey Benham arranged for me to make several trips aboard the *Centaur* in the summer holidays with freights from Felixstowe, Colchester and Maldon to London Docks.

The *Centaur* had fallen on hard times at this period, with no mizzen - "that blew clean away last year down Swin" - and several long rents -up the luff of the mainsail. She was driven hard however by that - to me - fierce skipper, Fred (Nelson) Wilson, so called because of the childhood loss of an eye. His judgment in close quarters however seemed particularly fine, despite this handicap.

There was still a competitive spirit between the other barges in the fleet - *Kitty*, ("Watch the mate aboard there, boy he's handy with a knife") *Mirosa*, *Dawn* and others, but lying alongside in the Docks it was the yarns and determination of the sailormen ("She's gotta go") that made barging what it was.

Nelson and the mate didn't get on very well and things came to a head one night, anchored for flood tide off Shoebury. The mate was a bit lazy and hadn't bothered to stow up the foresail which remained around the windlass. Heaving up in the dark caused the foresail downhaul to become wound hard round the windlass gears. Armed with knives and feeble torches, Nelson and the mate swore terribly at each other as they cut the line free, and the mate whose voice broke under pressure, kept squeaking, "it wasn't my fault!"

Nelson's temper usually recovered quickly and I think it was later the same night, that he thought to have a bit of fun with his sprog third hand. Turning away up Sea Reach, another boat seemed to be hovering close up on the weather quarter. Nelson started a yam about how piracy was still rampant in the less salubrious areas of Dockland, concluding with, "if they come up along the deck, kick 'em hard between the legs". When we stowed up next day in, I think, the Albert Docks, skipper and mate cleared off home for the week-end, leaving me in sole charge with the warning, "lock up if you go ashore, and always check your change."

Another trip we'd anchored in Gravesend Reach with sand from Fingringhoe. It came on to blow hard, but Nelson wanted to get away up on the flood. I was confounded when, trying to drop the foresail down (stowed properly this time) the whole lot blew up to the hounds. It was got down somehow and with foresail and brailed mainsail, rents and all, the *Centaur* drove hard to windward with the weather going tide. Being loaded, the steep little seas swirled along the lee decks and sometimes up around the wheel. Nelson, still in carpet slippers, and enjoying himself immensely, would then jump up on the main horse with a grin and "She's ago-in', boy!"

In the Docks it was really hard work with no engine and it was my job to run the dolly wire out to the lighters. A P.L.A. tug would get behind 20 of these lighters and shove them through the lock gates regardless. I remember one rusty swimhead riding up over the recently painted rails and learning a few more swear words from Nelson.

Despite all the ragging, I think that Nelson and the mate appreciated the extra assistance, albeit in summertime when barging was at its best. It was different again trying to make a living in winter but these difficulties made sailormen have a unique character, in a way of life which has virtually disappeared.

Sent in by Andrew Berry

## FROM THE EDITOR

As you may have noticed, the Trust will be celebrating reaching 60 next year. The organisation has witnessed many changes in the Barging world and gone through its own to ensure its survival. This process goes on and I intend to keep you all informed of your Committee's deliberations and decisions during the coming year.

I will also be plundering our vast store of historical material to bring you a few gems from the past each month.

I do hope you continue to find the Newsletter enjoyable and useful. May I take this opportunity to thank everyone who has sent items for inclusion. It is your contributions which ensure its continuing existence, so please don't hesitate to send something!

With that, I am pleased to extend the warmest Season's Greetings to you all from your Committee, our thanks for your support this year past and our hope that you will enjoy a happy year to come.

Ali Mercer

## SUBMISSIONS.

Particularly out of season, we are in need of articles, pictures, poems, sketches etc. for the newsletter. Do you have something you'd like to share? If you have, you can send it via e-mail or post: see contacts below. I'm happy to type up handwritten or typed copy and scan photos or other pictures. If you'd like something returned, please supply a S.A.E. Please don't post anything valuable or precious!

## USEFUL CONTACTS...

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