

Gaffers Log

Issue 119: Winter 2025



OGA 

NEWSLETTER OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR GAFF RIG SAILING

OGA helps Younger Gaffer to secure her RYA Day Skipper ticket

Recently, Thomasina Mallett, aged 18 and from Yell, Shetland, was awarded a Youth Fund grant by the East Coast OGA to complete an RYA Day Skipper Course in preparation for her to play a bigger role aboard the gaff ketch *Excelsior*

From Left to right: Howie Houbold, Thomasina at the helm, Clive Moore, Yifan Bao, Steindor Hall (taking photo)

The 23.5m (77ft) former Lowestoft sailing trawler Excelsior was built in 1921 and used extensively for youth work including participating in Tall Ships races. A major part of Thomasina's RYA training experience took place on the Clyde in June. This is her (abridged) log of that week.



LOG 01/06/2025

Introduction and briefings

0600-1800 – Started out on the 12-hour overnight Northlink ferry from Lerwick, Shetland to Aberdeen, then took the bus from Aberdeen to Glasgow, and from Glasgow I caught the train to Largs.

Once at the marina, I dropped my bag off at the Go West office, bought an RYA logbook from the chandlery and met the others who I would be sailing with, plus skipper Howie Houbold. We then took our things to the boat: a Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 42.2 called *Perseus*. Decidedly not a gaffer.

1900-2000 – Time for briefings. We were told how the boat would run, for example, how to do engine and bilge checks, how to turn the equipment on, etc.

We looked over our weather forecast for the week and made a rough plan of where we'd want to be going with the wind. We were to get southerlies for a day, followed by westerlies for most of the week.

LOG 02/06/2025

Getting to know the boat

0700-0900 – Everyone awake and straight into planning out the day's sailing. We decided to set off early to beat the high winds due to arrive later in the day; and that we were going to sail to Tarbert, Loch Fyne from Largs using the southerly to advantage.

We were taught how the winches worked; which rope did what; where the flares and life raft were and how to use them.

Perseus' mainsail unfurled from the mast rather than the boom, so we used an outhaul and furling ropes instead of a halyard to draw it out horizontally rather than vertically. This makes reefing easier and safer, as we just let out less sail, rather than having to leave the cockpit to lace, tie or roll a reef at the bottom of the sail. *Perseus* was a Bermudan sloop, so she had just a mainsail and a genoa (plus a spare storm jib stowed away).

We learned how to release the mooring ropes, as we were berthed with both our bow and starboard side to the marina, and boat to our port, meaning we had to leave the pontoon backwards.

1000-1600 – We headed out to sea, taking turns at the helm and setting the sails. We headed between the two Cumbrae islands and around the bottom of Isle of Bute, with the Isle of Arran to port. A couple of us made sandwiches for everyone but some were feeling seasick. After lunch, we reduced sail as the wind was picking up. And, as we headed up Loch Fyne, there was some gybing as the wind was now to our stern.



Perseus a Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 42.2

Thomasina Mallett (cont'd)

I was at the helm when we entered Tarbert Marina, and it was time to bring in the sails and tie up at the pontoons. Then, once clear of the helm, I practiced knot tying, especially the bowline and barrel knots.

It was important that I got the hang of the winches, helm, etc, of the yacht; all of which was in sharp contrast to the gaff-ketch *Excelsior's* massive tiller, and sweating and tailing the ropes, rather than using winches for everything. It was convenient to have all the ropes in the cockpit, but I also missed running around to do the ropes of traditional gaffers, although they both require teamwork and communication.

1700-2100 – Once berthed in Tarbert for the night, we made dinner and did chart practice with tides. Largs area tides tend to be small and of little significance, so it was good practice to plot a route that required taking tidal currents into account. For this practice, we plotted a route from Campbeltown to Fair Point in Northern Ireland.

LOG 03/06/2025

Tarbert --> Rothesay

Berthing practice, Merlin as skipper

0700-0900 – I woke up earlier than the others to stretch my legs and explore Tarbert. I went around the marina and up to the castle. I was back before breakfast and the planning of today's route on the charts. Each passage was to have a different skipper, and this segment was to be skippered by Merlin. Rothesay was chosen as the next destination as it would mean negotiating the Kyles of Bute including passing through the passage at their head... the very tidal Burnt Islands Narrows.

We determined that we should pass through the narrows before HW +5 when the tidal flow was southerly and in our favour. Also, we had no idea of likely sea conditions at the top of the Kyles (*Log Ed: usually flat conditions*).

1000 – Before leaving we did some parking practice in Tarbert marina, learning how to use springs and using ahead-astern on the engine to advantage. Happily for me, skipper Howie said I had good approach when it came to my turn.

1200-1900 – Whilst still berthed, we decided to have lunch and then set off. When we did the wind was at first behind us and slow; but then it headed the boat and we found ourselves on a beam reach to being close-hauled. I was on the helm from the bottom of Loch Fyne (rounding Ardlamont Point), then up the West Kyle across the top of Bute and swinging south into the Burnt Islands Narrows. We took the sails down to motor through in case of gusts blowing us onto the rocks and eventually arrived in Rothesay at around 1900. Then it was my turn in the galley to make dinner.



The Lowestoft sailing trawler *Excelsior*, a contrast to *Perseus*

LOG 03/06/2025

Rothesay --> Holy Loch --> Loch Goil --> Rhu:

Anchoring practice, Stan as day watch skipper, me as night watch skipper.

0700-0900 – Ate breakfast and planned our day. We were to sail from Rothesay to the Ardentinnny anchorage in Loch Goil, stopping at the Holy Loch for lunch along the way. The anchorage depth was to be watched as the chart datum depth was 1.3m, and low tide added only 0.6m; our draught was 2m. Therefore, we needed to make sure we were confident we had deep enough water before we anchored. However, our anchorage wasn't overnight, therefore we could watch our depth, and make sure *Perseus* was happy.

1000-1200 – Set off from Rothesay on a beam reach, skirting Toward Point then out into the Firth of Clyde headed roughly north-northeast. The gusty wind made sailing harder as we kept fluctuating between 8kts SOG (speed over ground) and 4kts. However, we made a good average speed as we were able to keep above 5kts most of the time (we used 5kts for our estimated distance in a certain time period). I was on the helm as we tacked the entire way up to Holy Loch which was super fun, and I think I improved my helming each tack we did.

1300 – We berthed in Holy Loch and made lunch before practicing picking up a mooring. We had to motor towards a buoy heading into the wind and then have someone at the bow with a boathook to grab the tail rope of the buoy, get it aboard and then cleat it. I had to make sure I went closer to the chosen buoy as I had a habit of going too far away because I thought I was going to run it over. When I had to catch the buoy's tail and secure it, I got covered in seaweed and some kind of sea lice.

1400-1500 – We headed up Loch Long for the Ardentinnny anchorage. It didn't take us long as it was only 6nm away. And on our way we passed the Faslane Nuclear Submarine Base to starboard.

1700-1800 – Arriving at Ardentinnny, our skipper thought the swell looked too bad for an anchorage so shallow. Therefore, we motored half an hour further upstream to the entrance of Loch Goil, where there was a lovely, sheltered anchorage. One of the other people onboard had brought a drone and it was calm enough to get some footage. However, the birds kept trying to attack it so we couldn't use it for too long.

1900-0100 – We planned our night passage. I made a list of all the lit navigation marks we would encounter on passage. It was twilight as we headed down Loch Long. But before we could set any sail we had to negotiate the extensive restricted area associated with Faslane using the boat's engine.



Anchoring practice

DITTY BAG

Younger Members' Spot



The Norfolk wherry Albion. Photo by Howard Alcock

One of The East Coast Area's key events, staged on the Norfolk Broads September 6-7 broke new ground with the wherry *Albion* clearly the star. Organisers were Shona Fairchild with Julie and Martin Hills. But it was new Younger Gaffer member Charlie Alcock who penned this report having arrived with his dad Howard and dog Flora in tow.

The Old Gaffers weekend on the Norfolk Broads was a great first event for us to meet some great people and stylish boats. From the very first pint of ale to the final sail home, it was packed with good food, great company and some very enjoyable sailing.

Things kicked off on the Friday night with a warm welcome aboard the preserved Norfolk wherry Albion, a pint of Albion ale fittingly enjoyed on her deck and a great home cooked chilli-con-carne served in a rather wherry looking shaped tortilla bowl.

Saturday morning saw the small boats sailing upwind and up tide towards the Black Mill. The wind was fair, which meant some typical tacking up the Broads, close to the reeds, and in the reeds at some points. It was great to see all the gaffers in full sail in the sun. Gybing round we set off downwind to South Walsham for lunch.

Of course, Albion had to provide some mischief on the way. At one point she somehow came storming past us at full speed during a long lull in the wind, her sails drawing beautifully. I couldn't help but shout "Where's the wind?" The answer came soon enough when the tender appeared at her stern, engine running, with Carl shouting back: "I am the wind!"

Taking the helm was a real treat, amazing to feel the wherry respond as she moved along. On the way back, Dad provided the final smile and photo opportunity of the weekend.

While we were carefully handling the wherry, he came chugging past us with a grin, powered by a little and now vintage Seagull outboard clamped on the back-end of his recently acquired Smack's Boat. Sometimes it seems horsepower, no matter how small, has its advantages.

Charlie Alcock – Younger Gaffer

Coming this Winter! A brand new Younger Members Winter Learning Programme!

For the first time in OGA history, there will be programme dedicated to building the skills and knowledge of Younger Members and help to break down any barriers to asking the questions you've been wanting to ask or didn't know who to ask! Sessions will be over Zoom and will last for 45 minutes.

Cost:

FREE = All OGA Younger Members

One session free for prospective OGA Younger Members

£5 - Non-Younger Member OGA Members that will be paid to the Youth Fund

About:

All sessions will be recorded so if you miss a session, you can catch up in your own time!

Topics are:

- Working in...
- Historic Ships & Conservation – Hannah Cunliffe (Director National Historic Ships) & Maddie Phillips (Ship Keeping Technician, *Cutty Sark*)
- Commercial sailing – Anna Masters (Professional First Mate), James Woodford (Professional Crew on *Pellow*)
- Shipping Industry (i.e., Insurance, Maritime Law)
- Boat design and boat building
- Learn...
- Racing tactics
- To tie knots – Sue Pennison (International Guild of Knot Tiers)
- To do Winter Rigging Checks – Sue Pennison (Founder of 'Rigging and Ropework')
- To crew (Clare Roberts)
- To passage plan and navigate – Grant Morris (RYA Instructor)
- To sail a gaffer
- To sail single handed
- All About the Gaffling 4.1
- Younger Members Q&A Forum – Ask Anything!

Upcoming Events:

- **November 15** – Laying Up Lunch & Prize Giving, 1pm, The Anchor, Bankside, London - Come and celebrate the end of the sailing season and the approach festive period with a lunch in London. The new Younger Member prizes will also be awarded!
- **January 31 2026** – AGM Harwich. (See page 53). Younger members gathering
- **March 21** – Fitting Out Lunch – Bristol – further details will be announced on the website
- A drinks gathering during the 30th Yarmouth Gaffers Regatta (May 22 to May 25 2026), Yarmouth, Isle of Wight

Ditty Bag is prepared by Georgina Tall, Younger Members Secretary

