



EASTCOASTER

The Newsletter of the East Coast Old Gaffers Association

May 2021 Issue 127

Forestay

Despite COVID and the lack of fortune tellers on the committee we have decided to go ahead with as many events as possible this year. There will be an East Coast Race and a Summer Cruise in a simplified form with social distancing in mind, as well as a Swallows & Amazons rally that includes the “wet launch” of the Gaffling 4.1 class and at least one of our own EC Gafflings. Other events on the Calender include the Tollesbury Rally, the President’s Race, and a possible Burnham Dinner in the Autumn.

Our second ZOOM Pub meet up went as well as the first, with a different set of people, some of whom were new to the area, and happy to get to know the rest of us before meeting up “in the flesh”. That was the last of our winter events for this year, and we hope to have a wider programme next year.

Just in case you do not know the writer of the “Toosie” article, Sue and her partner Howard Wheelton were the previous owners of gaff cutters *Bonify* and *Victoria* and are now part owners of *My Quest*. Sue felt that without knowing this the first word of the article needed explaining!

Richard Giles is now well on the way to recovering from his bout of Meningitis but convalescing gave him a chance to look back on some of his earlier sailing exploits. With the East Coast Race due to take place on 3rd July this seemed like a good time to revisit the joys and perils of passage making on a tight timetable to reach the start.

Andrew Osbourn reflects on why he remains a member of the OGA despite it “not being the same anymore”, and there is a round up of the next few planned events.

Alison Cable Editor



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Memories of Toosie

Words and pictures by Sue Lewis

Howard first visited the boat yard on the tidal creek at St Osyth (Toosie to the locals) by road when he was looking to make his first boat purchase. Having left the Air Force he had found himself with no boat to sail! Lovely though the old wooden Essex smacks are he decided against buying the *William and Emily* (built Tollesbury, 1886) which he had gone there to view.

The boat he did buy in the end was not in Essex but on the west coast of Scotland. It was the ferro-cement double ender *Bonify* (design by John Hanna 1924, home built by David Carter 1993) and Howard had to make a decision about where to keep his new boat. The little yard at St Osyth seemed to fit the bill. There was the appeal of its' being a working yard not a marina, with correspondingly lower prices, and the fact that there was such an array of different boats being worked on there from MTBs and fishing boats to Thames barges and elegant old gaffers. There was even a pub next door, though sadly that closed a few years ago.

So *Bonify* spent her first couple of years in Essex on a mud berth at Toosie full time, with access from the shore via wooden staging. She was hauled up the slipway or dried out against the quay once a year for anti-fouling and only really left the creek on high days and holidays and for a few major expeditions (to the



Bonify on the wall at Toosie

Brest Festival in 2000 for example). In 2002 we found we wanted to use the boat more regularly so we moved her to a less tide dependent location for the summer seasons (Ipswich then Pin Mill and later also Woodbridge) returning each winter to the mud berth at Toosie. *Victoria* too enjoyed some winters safely tucked away on the mud here when we owned her.

The yard is run now by Joe Harman who, when we first knew him as a youngster, used to have as much fun at low tide, together with his siblings and other kids, cavorting messily in the mud and swinging gleefully from the crane jib, as they did in and on the water when the creek was full. Joe, now with a family of his own, is the third generation Harman to be involved as his grandfather Dick was, together with his father Andy, one of the three men to take the yard on in 1987 and bring it back into service. There is a website for the yard at <https://www.stosythboatyard.co.uk/> with practical information including a chartlet of the creek and services offered. St Osyth Creek is tucked away beyond Brightlingsea and unless you fancy spending the duration of a tide watching the wildlife from a drying mudbank we would recommend paying good attention to the details on the chartlet when venturing up there.

I did notice that every photograph I saw on the website showed the creek full of water, so I have found an old photo of *Bonify* dried out alongside the key for mast removal which shows the channel at almost its driest. There used to be a tide mill on this site and the old mill pond is still there just opposite the yard on the other side of the Point Clear Rd. This body of water now hosts a Watersports and Aqua Park but, thanks to the dam and the road that runs over it, users of that have no access to the creek. During the winter months when this “pond” is not in use for watersports a sluice in the dam can be operated at the top of the tide to drain off excess water accumulated from drainage of the surrounding land - and due to the narrow bore, the water shoots through, with the beneficial effect for the yard that it moves some silt and help maintain the channel.

There has been a port on this site since 1214, Thames barges used it in their heyday and many boats were built here: several barges, the first British folkboats and Stellas too. A very well known OGA boat to have been built here is *Avo/a* (designed Francis Jones, built 1965). During Brian and Lorna Hammett’s ownership (strictly Lorna’s she will tell you!) they used to say that *Avo/a* was the last wooden yacht to have been built at the St Osyth boatyard as it closed down for quite a few years after that - before being brought back to life in 1987. However that situation has now been rectified: a full-sized wooden boat has been built here by her owner in recent years: the lovely gaff-rigged yacht *Fable*, launched here in 2009.



Many more boats have spent time here for restoration, refit or just fitting out. My photos show a collection of classics on the hard standing fitting out here in 2005. The 5 classic gaffers in my photos are, from left to right after *Bonify*: the smack *Ethel Alice* (built Aldous, Brightlingsea, 1897), *Gwenili* (built Bordeaux, 1910), *Ayesha* (built Aldous, Brightlingsea, 1922), *Sauntress* (built Wright and Harris, Cardiff, 1913), and the smack yacht *Katrine* (built Whitstable, 1910). Fine company for a modern built ferro-cement gaffer to keep!

Had a similar photograph been taken last year the line up would have been 100% different: *Polly* (oyster smack, built Maldon, 1889), *ADC* (smack, built Aldous Brightlingsea, 1885), *Fable* (built St Osyth, 2009), *Bluebell* (Falmouth working boat), *Rose of Arden* (Harrison Butler design, built Whisstocks, Woodbridge 1939) and *Victoria* (built Aldous, Brightlingsea 1897).

Victoria's new owners have had extensive restoration work done in one of the sheds here to preserve her – she has been rebuilt from the inside out! Shaun White and Brian Kennell have performed the near impossible feat of replacing her entire centre line (new transom, stern post, keel and stem) without dismantling the rest of the boat or

replacing the original planking of the double-skinned hull. She has also been epoxy-sheathed so she'll live forever now!

We got to know quite a few other notable east coast sailing boats in our time spent at the yard. The Thames Sailing Barge *Edme* which lives here and is run as a charter and accommodation business by the group of friends (including Harmans) who own her. Another Thames barge *Thalatta* was rebuilt here in 2012 so she was a familiar sight at that time



Victoria in the shed

and is now in use (or will be again post pandemic) for educational adventure voyages for school and youth groups.

Many east coast sailors will have seen the 70 ft steel 3-masted gaff rigged schooner *Trinovante* on the water. She was built by her owners and arrived here by low loader in 2 parts to be assembled and launched in 1994. She too winters at Toosie between charter cruises, and at approximately 60 tons she is the heaviest boat to be hauled up the slipway with the yard's hefty ex-Admiralty electric winch. Her usual cruising grounds include the full extent of the North Sea, the Baltic and the Norwegian coast to the Arctic circle and beyond, although in 2021, like most of the rest of us, she will stay in the UK waters. (See schoonersail.com for pictures and itineraries).

The list of classic wooden boats to have received some TLC here is a long one, too long for inclusion here, but next on the list will be the smack *Shamrock* who is due to come into one of the sheds for a rebuild this summer. Long may the tradition continue! The tradition of youngsters cavorting in the mud when the tide's out apparently does ...

If you're considering a change of scene then winter mud berths are available and visitors are also welcome at the yard by pre-arrangement.

Contact details on the website stosythboatyard.co.uk.

A Voyage to the East Coast Race

By Richard Giles

Reading and enjoying Ben Collins article “A small boat adventure about crossing the Solent in his open boat *Arielle* reminded me of an adventure in my Colne Gaffer over 30 years ago.

Soon after purchasing my gaffer, *Sara*, I decided it would be nice to sail her in the OGA East Coast Race at Steeple Stone. My brother Tom said he would join me but did not have time to join the boat and sail all the way from Wivenhoe on the Colne to Stone on the Blackwater. I agreed to pick him up at West Mersea on Saturday morning and sail over to Stone for the race. I managed to sail *Sara* single handed around to Mersea and collect Tom without incident. We also performed well in the race, judging our result against several Shrimpers out that day. Tom pressed me to take him straight back to Mersea and drop him there, leaving me to return the boat to Wivenhoe .

As the day progressed the wind slightly increased, so that I was faced with sailing single handed on a falling tide around the exposed Cocum Hills back to Brightlingsea. This is when I made my mistake. I decided that it would be easier to use the outboard and motor sail with the staysail rather than sail with a reefed main. By the time I reached the Molliette wreck mark on the falling tide and began to punch the ebb up the Colne, it became obvious what a mistake I had made. The outboard had no chance to power the boat over the ebb and was frequently jumping out of the water as we climbed the increasing waves. On the run out from Mersea down to the entrance to the River Colne, the outboard performed well but the open boat still shipped water which needed to be bailed out.

At this point I had to heave to and hoist some of the mainsail. I was delighted to find how stable the boat became when I came up into the wind and pinned the staysail to hold the boat while I rigged the main.

As soon as I brought *Sara* around onto the wind, she began to perform like a well trained lady; yes sailing was demanding with wind being wasted as we went, but we started to make sensible progress into the river. I soon decided that it would be better to dispense with the outboard and just sail with reefed main and staysail. Tacking a light open boat in a lively sea can sometimes be a challenge and I was pleased when I slowly started to make progress up the Colne. I was able to abandon my emergency plan to call in to Brightlingsea and sail on to my home port at Wivenhoe.

Having completed the voyage from Brightlingsea to Mersea and stone, participated in the East Coast Race and sailed home to Wivenhoe all in one day left me exhausted. I quickly told myself not to attempt such a thing in the future – but this did not stop me enjoying many single- handed voyages around the Colne & Blackwater.

Letter to the Editor

By Andrew Osborn

I received my copy of Gaffer's Log this morning and my wife and I began discussing why I bother with the OGA as I rarely go to any gatherings and keep moaning about it: "Not being the same any more." "Don't know anybody." "Old friends have died or left." "Should be named the Essex Creeks OGA." "Hate beards and Breton hats!"

And then I started browsing through the booklet. I came across the objectives. The first one is:

To encourage interest in and sailing of gaff, lug and sprits'l rigs and their development.

Every day of my post-retirement working life I do this, as I will explain.

When I retired from teaching, I began a small business that John Owles named Summer Boats. My sailing base is on the River Blyth. After WWII, the disabled swinging railway bridge that joined the communities of Walberswick and Southwold was temporarily re-built using a Bailey bridge, which made it a fixed bridge. People could still row or motor up the river to Blythburgh. But the fashion for Bermudan-rigged, small racing craft that resumed in the 1950s and grew more popular with the introduction of GRP in the 1960s necessitated a tall, fixed, aluminium mast, which is difficult to step for a solo sailor. The local sailing club raced mostly at sea, retaining two "White Hart" races up to Blythburgh at the beginning and end of the season. But with our exposed coastline, racing a small boat at sea is the domain of experienced, confident sailors. Gradually, over the years, the membership has dropped off as that "Corinthian" membership began falling off their perches. Also the permanent population of Southwold is now less than 800, with few children to take up sailing. Property speculation by wealthy townies has all but destroyed our communities.

In order to build up a new sailing base, it was decided to teach youngsters to sail up above the Bailey bridge. A number of Laser Picos were purchased by the club as well as a few old Wayfarers. The RYA offered grants and a couple of the younger members became dinghy instructors. But the tall masts of the bigger boats were always a problem. The smaller boats could be left on the bank, the masts and sails being transported by the club safety boat. Altogether a bit of a palaver. Clearly no place for a cantankerous, independent old so-and-so who sails mostly single-handed in order to get away from people and who shuns safety boats.

My life took an unusual turn due to the tender that I used for my old Rummer Yawl, *Tinkatoo*. *Frog* was built by Melvyn Fox many years ago. When I bought her she had a lash up of a rig that comprised mostly of a Mirror main complete with boom and gunter spar. When I came to sell *Tinkatoo*, I found myself boatless for the first time in twenty-odd years, with no funds to buy another cruiser. So I set about designing a lug rig for

Frog. After much experimentation and several "bits of string" parties, *Frog* turned out to be a thoroughly decent little lugger, ideally suited for rowing under the Bailey bridge following which I could raise her rig in a couple of minutes. She could also be sailed safely at sea and I could beach her on my own at Covehithe.

When I took early retirement, I bought an old Leigh-on-Sea Walker 14, (now known as the Tideway), that had been knocking around the harbour for a few years. This had been bought by a retired naval incomer to Southwold who fancied a sailboat, then found he had bitten off more than he could chew. She had been chained and padlocked to one of the huts in "Smurfland" (the local fisherman's name for the area of wooden huts that now sell for thousands and no fisherman could possibly afford!) Whenever the Blyth flooded, the tide used to run in and out of the Walker which, I discovered, was named *Wildcat* from new. Pete Simmons, the Harbourmaster,



photo Andrew Osborn

supplied me with the owner's name and I made him an offer he couldn't refuse.

Surprisingly, there was no rot in the mahogany planking. She had sprung a few hood-ends and leaked like billy-oh between her planks, and garboards, which were also split in places. However, her standard Tideway Gunter rig and sails were completely shot. Now, although a certain John Wainwright had nagged me to join the OGA for years after I first met him in 1997, I was into classic, wooden Bermudans, owning the sweetest little cruiser-racer, designed by Raymond Wall, called *Amberjack*. I had never actually owned a gaffer. So I designed a high-peaked gaff rig for *Wildcat*, based on the sail plan of a Herreschoff 12 1/2. As I was flush with a lump sum from my retirement, no expense was spared on her rig which contains all the bells and whistles one might expect and continues to drive the old Walker at an indecent rate of knots, given that she is well over 40 years old. Also, using a system of bungies to secure her rigging, I can raise and lower her mast without too much trouble and with no assistance from anyone - just how I like it.

Summer Boats will re-rig in Gaff, Lug or Gunter. Our new builds, to John Owles' designs are state of the art high peaked, high performance luggers. Our current historic build, more of a replica than a restoration, is an Uffa Fox 30' airborne life boat. (overgrown International Canoe.) In addition to it's "leg 'o mutton" lifeboat rig, she will also sport a sharpie (gaff) rig, similar to the one with which she was fitted after she was bought out of commission.

When I sail for pleasure in my own boat, whether up the River Blyth or out at sea, I try to set an example of how traditional sail and oar would have been used; rowing out to sea on the strong ebb; out through Southwold Harbour to set sail at sea, just like my Gt Grandfather, Gt Gt Grandfather and so on, back into the eighteenth century, did as Walberswick fishermen. Sailing back in on the flood, no outboard, usually no oars, is always pure exhilaration.

The example has been taken up. Last year I sold *Frog* to an old friend and former Commodore of the Southwold sailing club. He spent more time sailing that little tub with his Grand-children than he did sailing his beloved Sadler 34 that he has owned for 30 years!

We now have four gaff- or lug-rigged boats regularly going up the Blyth and sometimes out to sea, including John, the new owner of *Bona*. This year I will add *Windchyme*, a brand new Summer Boats 15' lugger. With her bluff bow and her generous beam she can comfortably seat six, so that I can use her to encourage even more interest in and sailing of gaff, lug etc. . .

So you see, we think alike and work towards the same goals, maybe even share the same values. That's why I persevere with the OGA, despite my petty prejudices and grumbles!

Upcoming events

As ever the first sailing event of the year is the Tollesbury Rally. The date for this is the **15th May**, rather than on a bank holiday weekend. Coronavirus restrictions are still in place, and the place where the dinghies are launched is a public hard, so it seemed sensible to avoid the potentially busier dates. Due to the tide times this will probably only be a one day event, but Camper vans are welcome overnight at the Sailing Club for some socially distanced socialising on Saturday evening, and if you want to relaunch on the Sunday afternoon for another sail that will be possible. If you wish to bring a "mother ship" please contact Tollesbury Marina for a berth.

We will assemble for a briefing on Saturday at the club at about 11:30 before taking the dinghies to the public slip for launching. After a race which would normally finish around high water at 15:11 we will reassemble at the Club where the Bar will be open.

Covid regulations are still in force, so the prize giving will be outside following which there will be an evening al fresco meal of some type available.

Car parking is to be at the Sailing Club, NOT the Marina, which operates a strict berth holders only parking policy and issues punitive fines for infringement.

Fill in the entry form online, or contact the organiser (me) on 07961333775. Payment of £5 is to be by BACS transfer once you have been notified that your entry has been accepted as numbers may need to be limited.



Racing at Tollesbury 2015

There is no Crouch Rally this year due to concerns about COVID.

The **East Coast Race** is planned to run this year from Stone Sailing Club on Saturday **3rd July 2021**. On the **Sunday** a Small Boat Race is scheduled, again kindly hosted by Stone Sailing Club. This is the first “big boat” event in the area this year, and should be late enough for the boats to be in the water.

The entry forms and Notice of Race will be published on the website in due course, as will more details of the weekend's programme. Obviously, COVID restrictions which prevail at the time, may impact on the form the weekend takes, but we are definitely planning to hold the 2 day event with further details to follow. We very much look forward to seeing as many competitors as possible on the water.

The **Swallows & Amazons** weekend at the Walton and Frinton YC is being arranged as I write. It will be held on **July 10th-11th**, with parking up for camper vans and space for tents on site. One of the days will see the launch of the East Coast's own Gaffling 4.1, which will serve as a “wet launch” for the newly named class. We hope to have the press in attendance, and offer opportunities for sailing in “our” Gaffling. There have been suggestions of a race for Seagull engines, but this is not confirmed, and might make for a very busy event!

This year's **Summer Cruise** will commence on **Saturday 24th July** and complete on Sunday 1st August 2021. In the light of the uncertainty remaining over COVID rules, we are planning a fairly flexible program this year, with the emphasis on being a 'Cruise'. This will allow a more adaptable itinerary, without a dependence of pre-arranged hospitality etc.



The Summer Cruise off Osea in 2019

The event will commence at Stone Point, with the fleet gathering on the Walton Backwaters on Saturday 24th July, going ashore at the Point for a BBQ. Trailer Sailors will be able to launch at Walton, and please email if you would like any help with this. We do hope to run some fun events during the week, but without the 'serious' races and organised prizegivings etc. The programme of the week will be largely dictated by weather and tides.

Further information, entry forms and other details will be available on the website in due course.

The Swale Match is scheduled to take place on Sunday 1st August. This is not an OGA event, but our participation is always encouraged.

Backstay

I am excited at the prospect of sailing this year. Although I attended 2 dinghy events last year it will be great to get out on *Robinetta* again. 2020 saw her in port for the whole year getting a new rudder, and I missed sailing her.

This may be the last season that Julian and I sail on the East Coast, as we have put our house on the market and intend to move to Scotland. That means that I am looking for a new editor for Eastcoaster. Ideally I would co-edit the August issue with the new editor to give a feel for the job, but there is no pressure to keep Eastcoaster in the current format and any one who want to have a go should get in touch with me ASAP



Eastcoaster is a members' newsletter, and as such it relies on contributions from the members. If you have any news you wish to share, reports of events you have been to, stories about your boats, or pictures, then please get in touch with me at alison.margaret.cable@gmail.com, or through the post to 146 Stortford Hall Park, Bishop's Stortford, Herts, CM23 5AP.

I hope you have enjoyed this issue, and look forward to your contributions to the next one, which should reach me by 24th July.

Here is hoping for some great sailing this year, and no need for more COVID restrictions.

Alison Cable, editor