LSC QUARTERLY REVIEW

Easter 2023

Hove-to

Welcome to the first issue of the **LSC Quarterly Review**, the new name for what was previously known as the club Newsletter. The name change is to better reflect the style of publication which we have become, a gradual change which has progressively developed over many years, and we are delighted that the change has the approval of General Committee.

And now we must apologise that because of unexpected technical difficulties it has not been possible to format this edition with the sort of visual presentation we would have wished. Because of those difficulties we are now somewhat behind schedule, and rather than delay this edition even further we are now publishing it in its raw form, "as is", rather than in a fully formatted layout. We hope to be back to normal service with the Summer edition.

That apart, and looking backwards in time, as I was driving through Conwy on New Year's Day, en route to some hill-walking, I was pleased to see a substantial number of yachts still on their moorings in the river. It was the wrong state of tide for anyone to be sailing, but the number of boats still out suggests that a healthy number were very probably sailed fairly regularly over the winter, so full marks for that. Some of the hardier amongst our own members have of course done likewise, particularly the fishermen, although our moorings are too exposed for us to leave boats out over the winter; meanwhile the rest of us are now looking forward to what we hope will be a good season afloat in the warmer months that should now be arriving imminently.

For my own part, I looked regularly at the weather forecasts over the winter, hoping to find an occasion when tide and wind strength and temperature were all viable, and preferably when they were actually tempting, and when in addition it was not raining and when I was free of other commitments; but matching up all five requirements proved to be a tall order. Although there have been a small handful of past years when I have enjoyed the occasional sail

on a sunny January or February afternoon, this year those occasional days when it might have been attractive just did not work for me. In particular, New Year's Day and the following day were both good for a spot of warm and sunny hill-walking, but not for sailing; the tides were such that there was no water here during daylight hours.

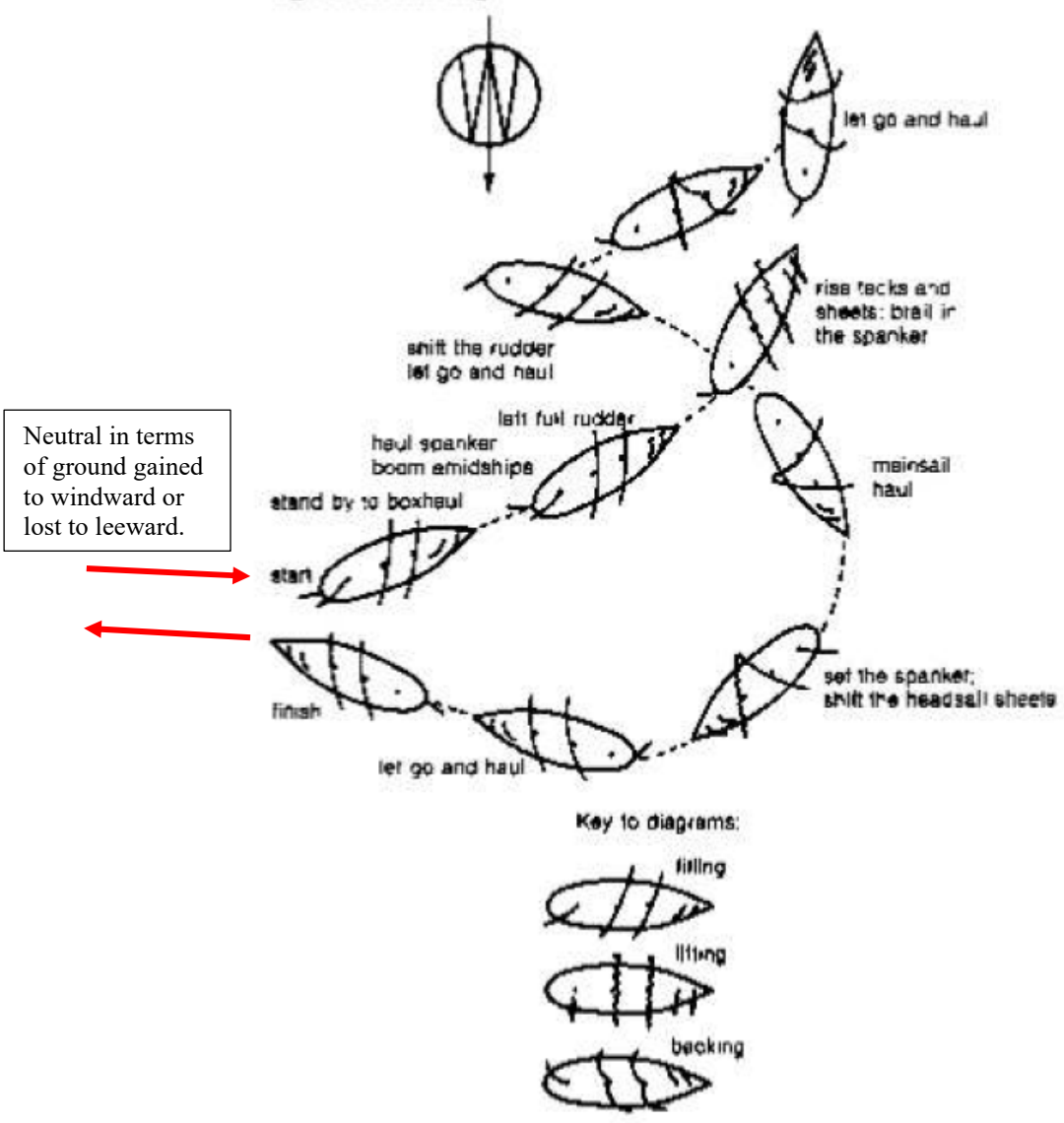
That apart, now that we are emerging into warmer weather may I take this opportunity to wish you all a great season on the water this year; and of course above all an enjoyable and safe season.

CHANGING TACK

Once a student has mastered the basic rudiments of sailing, tacking a dinghy becomes a very simple and intuitive process that one can perform without any requiring more thought about it that one needs for changing gear when driving a car. And it is not much more difficult on a yacht.

Spare a thought, then, for those doing the equivalent job in the days of working sail, on a square-rigged ship. That does, of course, require a very substantial number of seamen, working in close co-ordination. There seems to have been a choice of four methods available:

Fig. 40. Boxhauling



Neutral in terms of ground gained to windward or lost to leeward.

Fig. 36. Tacking

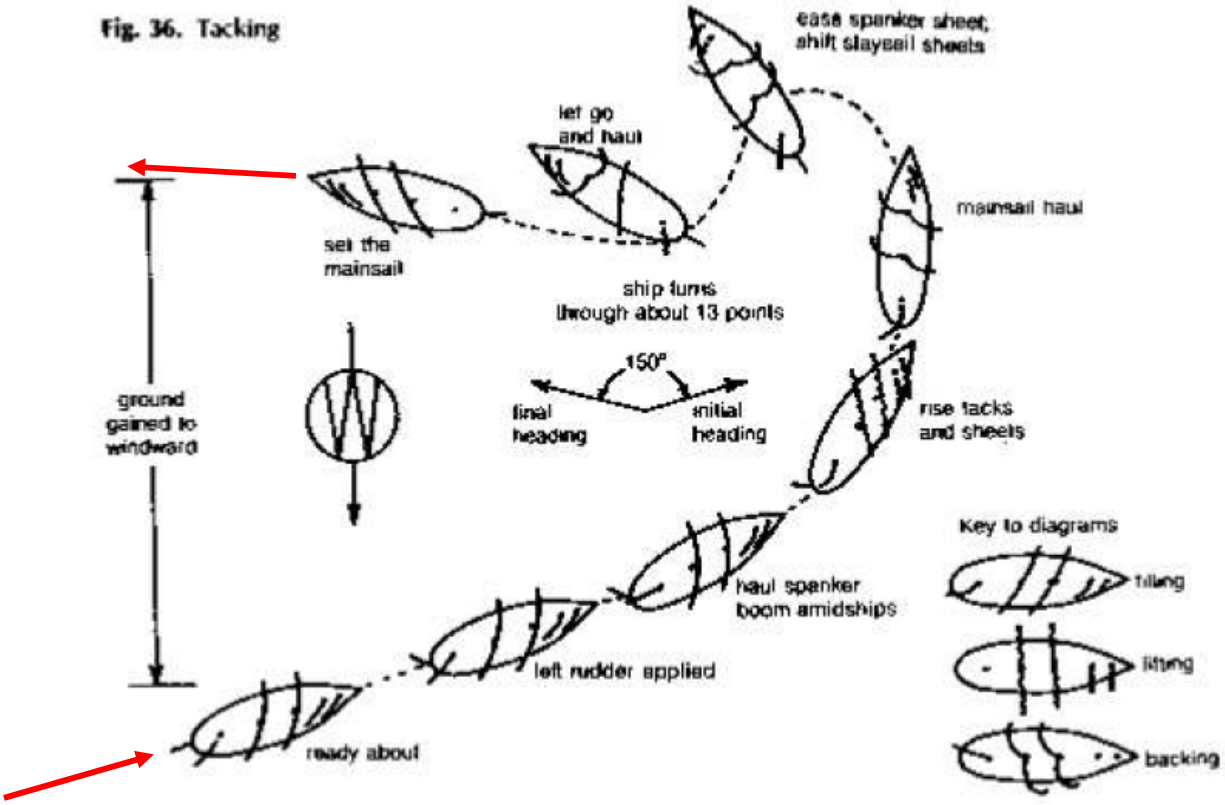


Fig. 38. Wearing ship: progressive bracing

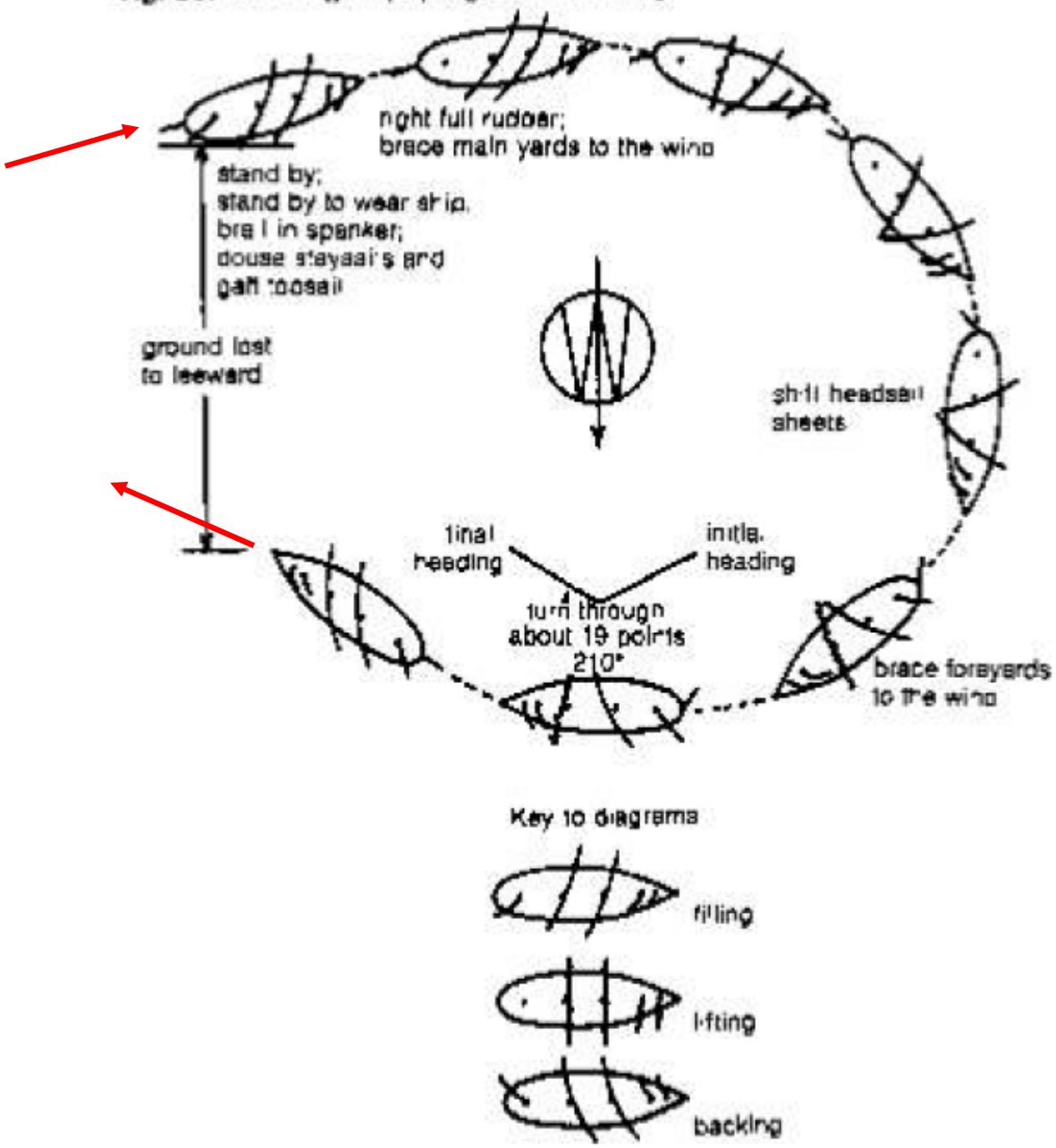
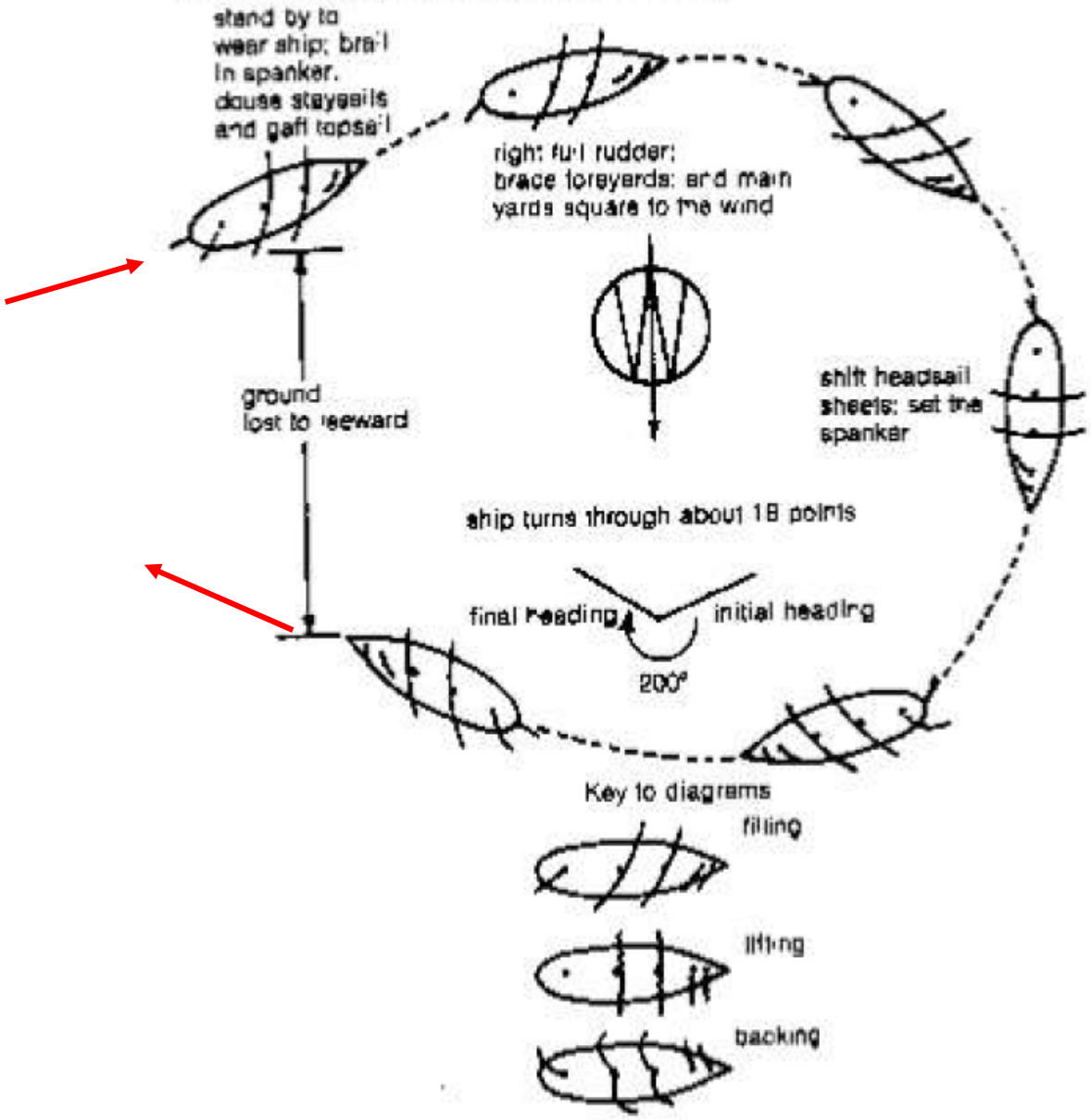


Fig. 37. Wearing ship: simultaneous bracing



It would appear that wearing ship was the easiest method, but at the expense of lost ground to leeward; and that tacking and boxhauling were more difficult, but that tacking had the benefit of modest ground gained to windward. Against that, I would expect that tacking a square-rigger dramatically slows the ship, and box-hauling virtually stops her, and she then needs time to gather way again; while wearing ship allows her to keep moving at or near full sea speed throughout the manoeuvre.

In terms of the angle between initial and final course there is little to choose, but don't be confused by the numbers; an **obtuse** angle of 150° (second option) is effectively the same as a **reflex** angle of 210° (third option). Although the fourth option is only 200° it seems almost

certain to me that once the manoeuvre is completed and the ship is sailing steadily on her new course, that course will be the same whatever manoeuvre was used to make the turn.

Incidentally the first two of those figures suggest a close-hauled course of 75° to the true wind, which is even further off the wind than the 70° that I had previously understood was achievable under square rig.

So which is the best method overall may perhaps depend on the handling characteristics of the particular ship, and the strength of the crew, and the circumstances. Probably no one right answer, and a matter for either the captain or the sailing master to decide in each case.

On a long ocean passage the potential gain to windward or loss to leeward may well have been insignificant, but very much not so when tacking down-Channel, and especially so if doing it against a foul tide. But even in comparatively restricted waters the benefits of gaining ground to windward, or of at least avoiding losing it to leeward, would have had to be weighed against the alternative benefits of keeping the ship moving forward at a good speed.

All the above diagrams were obtained from the Openboat forum, but because of the closure of the original host platform (Yahoo Groups) some years ago all records of the original source or of who posted them have been lost. They appear to have been taken from an instructional manual, but beyond that we have no idea what that might be. If anyone is ever able to advise us of the original source we will gladly acknowledge it.

A QUESTION OF PILOTAGE

Readers will (I hope) recall the problem posed in the last issue; a passage from Clovelly, North Devon, intending to enter the Taw-Torridge estuary, in fog. I told you that Bideford Bar is notoriously treacherous in the wrong conditions; Jennifer has unearthed this engraving, which illustrates it only too vividly!

WRECK OF THE "WOOL-PACKET" ON BIDEFORD BAR.

Source unknown

The problem that I set was an incident that had occurred in fog, in the course of one of my own cruises 40 years ago, long before the days of GPS chartplotters. Having successfully found Bideford Fairway Buoy, in the fog, we had then altered course to enter the estuary on a compass course that we believed to be keeping us on the leading line, but were unable to see anything to verify that. We then found our depth dropping unexpectedly rapidly; and then we met a fishing boat outward bound, with radar scanner rotating, steaming at full sea speed and on a westerly or south-westerly heading at perhaps 45° to our own course.

So we were going in effectively blind, in fog, and had no way of knowing our precise position. We were relying on steering a compass course from our last known position, and monitoring our depth. Then the depth was not as expected, and was rapidly reducing. Also we would have expected that the fishing boat we met would have been in the same channel as ourselves, but instead we were crossing each others' tracks at about 45 degrees. So we were effectively lost, in a potentially very dangerous location, and the tide was dropping.

So what to do? Your call … …

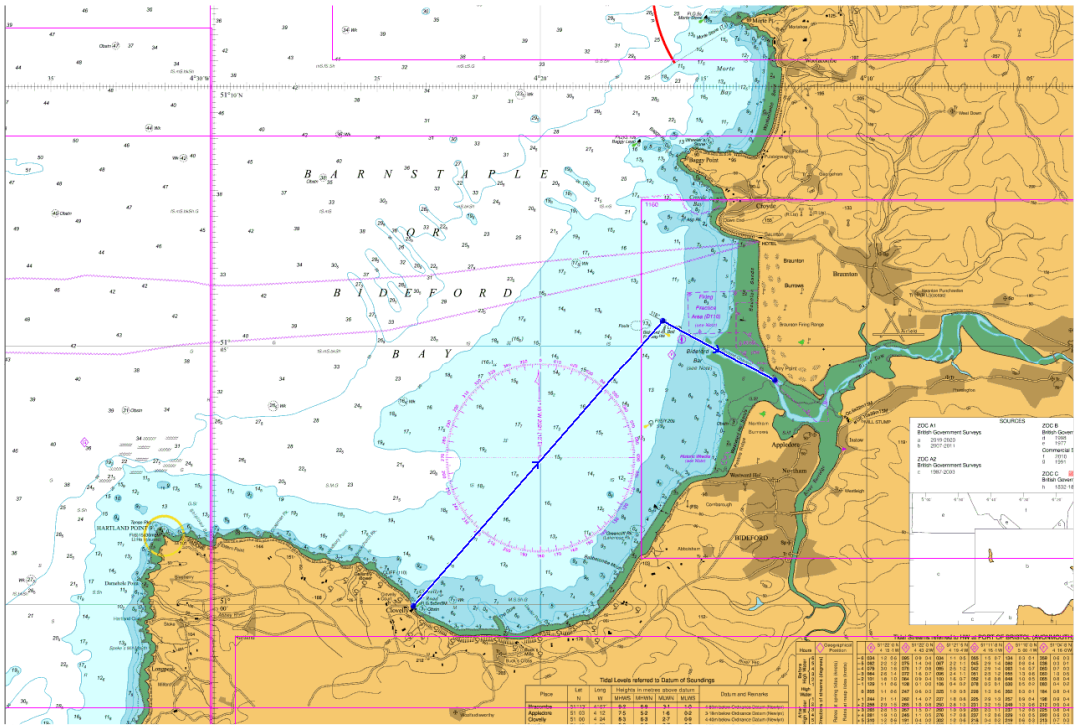


Chart Extract BA1164 from Memory-Map

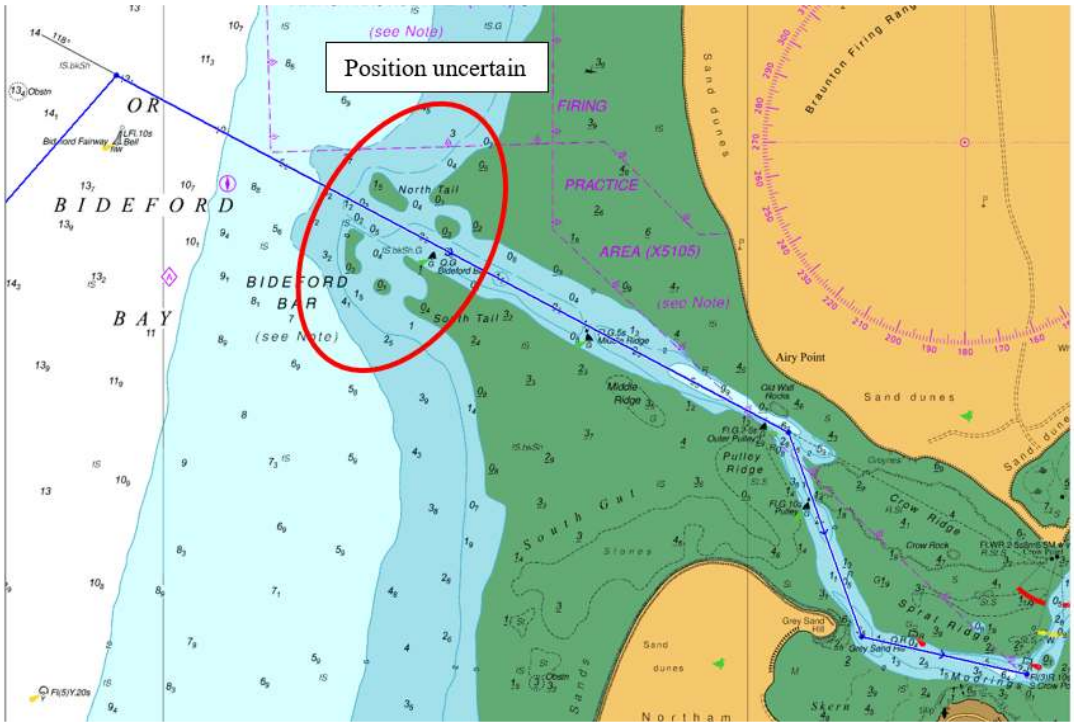
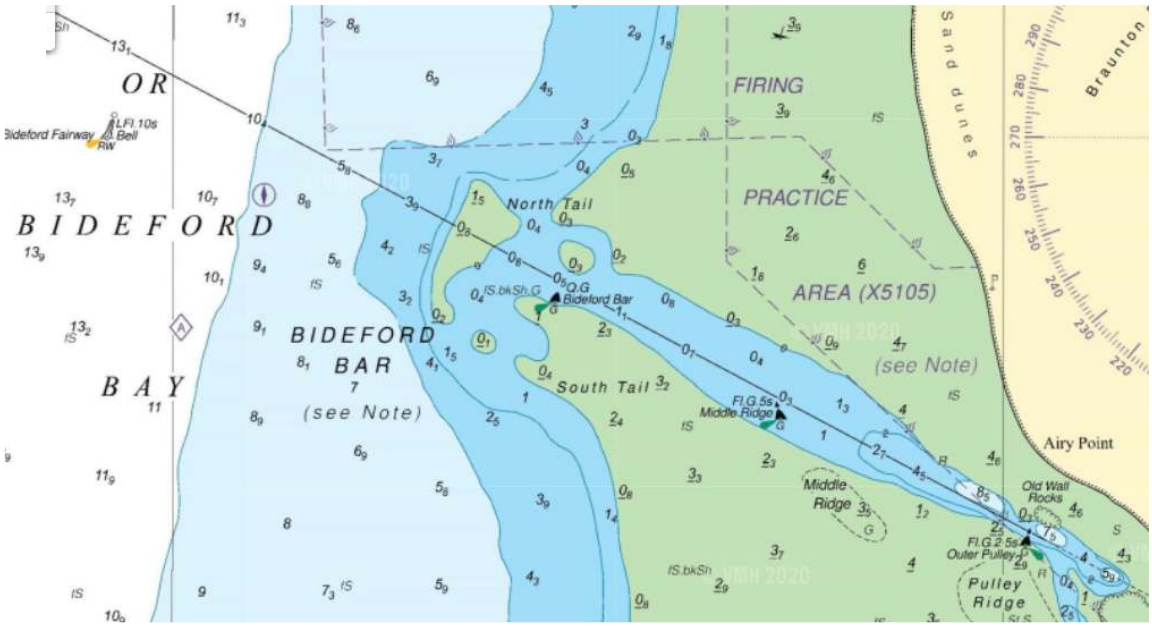


Chart Extract BA1160-6 from Memory-Map

I should say at this stage that although not apparent from the (current) chart extracts above, the Bar sometimes moves. The Notes in the CAUTIONS panel make that instability adequately clear. On occasion it has stretched fully across the transit as a drying bank, blocking the straight line transit at Low Water, with exits to both the north and the south of it, as on the somewhat older chart below - which is nonetheless more recent than the incident in question.



Date unknown, but believed to be post-2000

It was entirely possible that we were safe, and exactly on the transit (which was invisible because of the fog), and that we were at that moment crossing the Bar, and that the outward bound fishing boat had originally (and fully correctly) been on his starboard side of the channel, had just cleared the Bar buoy, and had then altered hard to port. That would fully explain everything, and it was reinforced by the fact that when the fishing boat first appeared out of the murk he was fine on our port bow, thus suggesting that he had come from somewhere to the north of our present course.

But we could not be sufficiently certain of that explanation for safety; we could equally have been either side of the transit.

A very good rule of seamanship is not to blindly and automatically believe that the situation is what you would like, just because that happens to fit the observations, if the evidence is inconclusive. To do is is a classic example of wishful thinking!

There was still the risk that we were south of the transit, heading towards the potential hazard of South Tail. That, too, would fit all the observations.

Or we could even have been to the north of the transit, heading in to the potential hazard of North Tail and that potentially deadly surf beach (and Firing Practice Area). If we allow that the fishing boat could have previously been well inshore of the channel, for whatever reason, which we had no way of checking, that would also fit the observations.

What I actually did was to chicken out.

I did not yet have VHF at that time; at that stage it was seriously expensive, although prices were slowly starting to come down, and it was quite usual for smaller vessels not to have it. I think I actually bought my first set, only an entry level model, the following year, for about £300; that is equivalent to something approaching £1,000 today. Today, of course, one can buy an entry level handheld set for about £60, and an entry level fixed set with DSC - vastly more sophisticated than the first set that I bought - for about £100.

But even if I had had VHF available, calling up the fishing boat to ask for a position was not in my mindset - then or indeed ever! Solution by our own unaided efforts if at all practicable was what was wanted; and it was indeed practicable.

The first, and pressing, requirement was deep water; a general rule of thumb is that **"Deep water is safe water"**. Alright, there are certain exceptions, such as tide races, or the edge of the continental shelf in Biscay, but this is a broad generalisation. Contrary to the mistaken belief of some landsmen, deep water is usually safe, while shallow water - at least in the wrong conditions - can be very hazardous.

I like the comment that I heard many decades after this incident from our own John Leguen: **"It's not the sea that kills you, but the hard bits round the edge!"**

There is a very useful rule of thumb for safety, although not all boating people realise it; if in potential danger when close to land, heading into deep water straight out to sea is almost always a good call, and a safe option. (Just avoid known tide races, and similar hazards.)

If in this instance we could couple deep water with a known position, that would be even better.

And finally, a matter purely of convenience; a safe route to a comfortable and convenient anchorage would be a bonus.

So in the first instance a reciprocal course back to the Fairway Buoy, which you may remember was a bell buoy, so we stood a reasonable chance of being able to locate it by sound despite the fog. And should we not be able to locate it, for whatever reason, we would at least have been in safe deep water; and the water depth could be verified by the echo sounder. (And in the event of electrical failure, the depth could alternatively have been verified by sounding lead - and we did indeed carry one; in fact I still do, although in over fifty years of cruising I have never yet had occasion to use it.)

Once we reached the buoy we were in safe water, and had we wished we could have safely anchored there for the night; it is a recognised anchorage for vessels awaiting the tide, in safe water of around 13 m charted depth Although that is a little too deep for reliable anchoring in a yacht carrying only 15 fathoms (say 30 m) of chain, a good shallower anchorage - still in deep water by yacht standards - can be found a short way inshore of the buoy. I have used it from time to time for that purpose while awaiting the tide to enter the estuary, but on this occasion I chose instead to return to Clovelly. Several reasons included that we would then have access to shore facilities if we were stuck for any length of time; and it aslso enabled my two schoolboy crew to be collected by car the following day by the parents of one of them.

So in the first instance make for the Fairway Buoy, using sound to locate it if necessary. Then, once found, a course roughly south-south-west from the buoy, to intersect the coast somewhere reliably to the east of Clovelly, (then we know which way to turn once we intersect the coast).

What is not a good idea is to head directly for our destination once we leave the buoy, because if we get it wrong (which is entirely possible in fog) then when we reached the coast we would very possibly not know whether to turn to port or to starboard. So if visibility were not good enough to actually recognise where we were, we would have a perhaps 50% chance of going away from our destination without realising it.

Even in first class visibility, before the days of GPS that was a standard technique for longer open water passages, for the same reason; and if a significant tide was running one aimed to make landfall on the uptide side of one's destination. However I confess that nowadays, with the benefits of GPS, I normally plan a route to hit my destination almost on the nose (with due allowance for tides over the passage as a whole), and then alter just slightly uptide only as I near the coast.

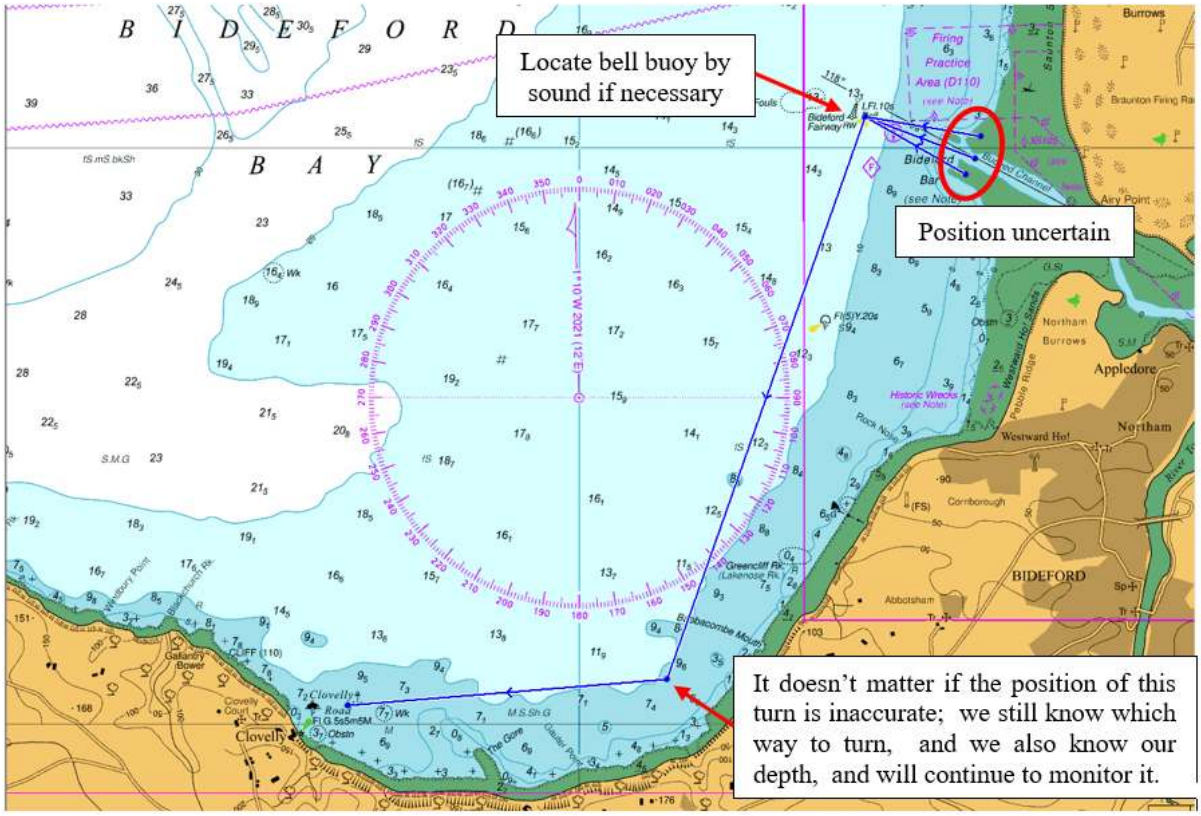


Chart Extract BA1164 from Memory-Map

Once we intersected the coast we then turned westward and kept an appropriate distance offshore by monitoring the depth, until we arrived at Clovelly Roads. We were too late on the tide to go into harbour, so we anchored for the night in the Roads.

I do not claim for one moment that this was the only safe option; there were of course others, including anchoring for the night moderately close to the Bar Buoy but a little inshore of it, as

has already been mentioned, and the question is worth debating. But this was the solution that occurred to the man on the spot - yours truly - at the time.

So, what was your decision?

CRUISING; CUMBRIAN CRUISE

Part 3:
Ravenglass, and Hurricane Bertha

During the course of my summer cruise the previous year (2013) I had had one quite extensive day out on the Isle of Man in which, after only a modest amount of walking, my feet were telling me in no uncertain terms that I had walked more than far enough in lightweight footwear. So this time, with the specific intention of some serious walking, I packed my walking kit.

The second lot of that planned walking, if I managed to get there at all, was to include Snaefell, on the Isle of Man. However the first was the primary reason for coming to Ravenglass; one (or more) dates with the Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway, a narrow gauge (15-inch) steam railway from Ravenglass up into the hills in Eskdale, coupled with some superb fell walking at the far end before catching the train back again.

Having arrived on the evening of Thursday 7th August, when Friday dawned it was clear that this was a day for low altitude activities; weather pleasant enough in Ravenglass, but the low cloud was blanketing the hills, and it looked like heavy rain up there. So Friday was spent exploring ashore, mainly the estuary at low tide, and the village, coupled with lazing, and a bit of shiphusbandry. There is always plenty to do on a boat, and this was the occasion to reconfigure the topping lift and lazy jacks; we would see next time we are at sea whether the new configuration worked better than the old, but I thought it would - and in the event indeed it did.

Thursday was also the day when Ed Wingfield sent me a text message "Are you aware of ex-hurricane Bertha? Might be Sunday, when we need to be somewhere safe."

So I duly checked the relevant maritime forecasts, but nothing desperately alarming - yet; that was all to come later. However there were only two options available, the exposed sea passage towards safety in Whitehaven marina, or alternatively staying put and preparing to ride out the storm where I was. And it was abundantly clear from the forecasts already available that in order to move to the near-total shelter of Whitehaven Marina the passage along the coast would expose me to significantly strong winds, and along a lee shore at that, even though I would of course have made sure of a safe offing; so I decided that on balance I was safest to stay put.

Saturday was the day for my long-awaited day out with the narrow gauge railway and the walking boots. Whenever I am up in the Lakes, always previously having travelled there by road, I aim to do some fell walking, and if the timetable permits I also always have a date with this very attractive railway.

The engine above, originally named Muriel but renamed River Irt when acquired by this Railway, is claimed to be the oldest working 15" gauge loco in the world.

This engine, Hercules, was on loan (from, I think, Romney & Dymchurch Railway), pending repairs to several of R&E's engines as a result of a disastrous workshop fire during the winter. When coupled to her tender she is too long to fit on the R&E turntables, so at the end of the line she has first to be uncoupled, then the two units turned separately, then coupled up again; worth watching.

Driver's mate

After an enjoyable trip up to the head of the line, followed by lunch in the station café, I walked part of the track across the shoulder of Eskdale Fell towards Wasdale Head. What I really enjoy about fell walking is of course walking more or less on the level, but at high altitude, and there was plenty of that to be had; getting up to that altitude in the first place is of course a hard slog!

I got as far as the summit of the track, but decided not to start the descent into Wasdale; it was very nearly time to turn round anyway to catch the train back, and to descend at that point would necessarily entail more climbing in order to then return.

There were superb views of Harter Fell, amongst others.

On my route back I diverted along the dismantled stretch of the original railway (which originally led to the erstwhile iron mines at Boot); this was to the original 3-foot gauge. I was a little surprised to see that just the occasional sleeper had been left in place, complete with about 6 inches of its two rails, one on either side, apparently as a permanent memento. I also found one sleeper which had been inscribed, and with at least some of the inscription still legible; " ~~GARTH COTTAGE (and a date, which I could not read clearly) IRON MINERS" (Or was it, on reflection, perhaps "IRON MINES"? I am quoting from memory, and memory may perhaps be at fault.)

That brought me out at the row of dwellings known as Dalegarth Cottages, with a superb opportunity to photograph the train as it came round the bend out of Dalegarth Station.


HERCULES

Despite the forecast, Sunday brought occasional showers, and little wind - at first. That persisted for most of the day, until early evening, but the forecast was nonetheless ominous, so in preparation I took the opportunity while the tide was out to shift my anchor to give me near maximum scope, and attached an anchor weight (variously also known as an anchor dolly, or anchor chum, or anchor angel) about 10 m along the rode. I also deployed the kedge anchor, for what it was worth; this is a generic plough type (around 4 kg perhaps) which had come with the boat as the best bower when I bought her, but I thought so little of it that I lost no time in both replacing its rode and relegating its status to that of kedge. The original kedge is a medium weight folding grapnel; utterly useless as an anchor, but it does occasionally have a role purely as a weight - that is now my anchor dolly for use when needed.

I went ashore for dinner, and as I was walking across the beach at perhaps 1830 the first puffs of Hurricane Bertha suddenly and abruptly arrived. Only about force 5 at that stage, but it was a portent of a lot more to come. Then, while I was in the pub, the rain arrived, with a vengeance, and some of it was indeed torrential.

After the meal I walked back to the boat, still dried out, checked that the good Rocna anchor was well dug in, and the kedge dug in at least as much as I could achieve, and repaired on board to await her lifting with the tide. The wind had now strengthened, and there was more or less continuous rain with it.

One testimony to the wind strength was immediately apparent. When dried out on a hard bottom she leans slightly to one side, sitting on her keel and one or other bilge runner. When I had left her, high and dry, she was heeled to port, but when I returned she was heeled to starboard; she had been blown across by the wind, and was now sitting on her other bilge runner. That is seriously impressive.

Indeed I was concerned whether the impact as she landed might have damaged the bottom, but I subsequently found no evidence of either visible damage or leakage.

In due course she lifted with the tide, and there followed one of the wildest nights I have ever experienced at anchor; possibly the wildest night ever. Well before it peaked I checked the XC Weather site on the smartphone for current conditions at St. Bees Head, just a little further along the coast from me; current winds reported as up to 44 mph, the very top end of force 8. That was well before it peaked, and I am fairly sure that at its height we got force 9, and that is in line with what I heard from Ed Wingfield who was holed up in Nairn, Scotland; he also reckoned that they had force 9.

From time to time during the night I freshened the nip on the two anchor warps, main and kedge, and for the only time ever (thus far, at least) I declined to risk going out on deck, and particularly to risk working my way past the spray hood in such extreme conditions; instead I did if from inside the cabin, by opening the forehatch.

I also more or less continuously monitored our position on the chartplotter. On a high magnification this gave me a little concern that we were dragging, albeit very slowly, but I was reassured that in extremis the Rocna will keep working even if it is slowly ploughing its way through the seabed. However that concern proved to be unfounded; we were merely exploring the full extent of our swinging circle, coupled with the elasticity in the anchorplait warp. Not only did an inspection of the Rocna the following morning (once the boat had dried

out) show it to be solidly dug in and with absolutely no sign of having moved, but when the yacht refloated on the next tide she came right back onto her original position mark.

The very highest marks therefore to the Rocna, as it had held firm on a somewhat difficult bottom in fairly extreme conditions; I award it a massive vote of confidence. That is a lot more than can be said for the kedge, which pulled out, and thereafter just lay on its side and dragged, and dragged, and dragged ... ...

I was reminded of a then recent comment on Openboat, regarding choice of ground tackle. It was along the lines of "You hope you will never need it in earnest, but if you are ever caught out in storm conditions you will be immensely thankful that you invested in the best possible ground tackle."

Nonetheless I subsequently upgraded the rode, by adding yet more chain, in order to give still more security.

I did however suffer one casualty of the storm; the tiller had been snapped. I had, as usual left the rudder blade fully raised, and the tiller lashed central; that leaves the blade half in the water but clear of the bottom when the boat dries out, and lashing the tiller central is then essential to keep her lined up fairly to her anchor rode, as well as preventing the tiller from bashing the casing of the outboard. Subsequent inspection once the boat had dried out showed no other damage, and in particular there was not a mark on the rudder blade, so I can only guess at how the damage might have arisen. Either it was due to the violence of the wave action against the raised rudder blade, or it was the violence with which the inflatable rubber dinghy had been hurled by the storm against the rudder blade. In either case this implies fairly extreme violence, but then we did have a pretty extreme storm.

On the following tide the wind was still gale force, but appeared to have eased slightly; my estimate was force 7 to 8. I watched heroic rescue efforts by a group of men on the sea wall, armed with long poles, who for the duration of the tide (some hours) were using these poles to fend off a small cabin cruiser which had broken adrift the far side of the estuary, and had ended up over on our side and in danger of being dashed to splinters against the sea wall. I had enough problems of my own, and there was absolutely no way in which I could safely move my boat, so there was nothing useful that I could do to help; I could only watch.

When I later dried out I walked across and talked with one gentleman who had been asked by the owner's wife (both of them ashore, and in a different part of the country) to do what he could for the boat, and we discussed options. Not looking good at all; short of assembling a gang of a dozen or more men to bodily carry her away from that sea wall and then anchor her or put her on a safe mooring there was nothing to be done. I didn't think a repeat exercise with poles on the following tide, in pitch darkness, would be viable, and I feared that on the next tide she would be wrecked.

Meanwhile I had a boat which I could not move until I had a usable tiller, except by perhaps using the outboard as a means of steering; I have done that once before, but in less extreme wind conditions. But that would not be viable as a means of taking her on to Whitehaven, not least because I had had no opportunity to replenish my petrol since leaving the Ribble, and there was none to be had in Ravenglass; so relying on motoring all the way to Whitehaven would be a hostage to fortune, although I thought that in fact I still had plenty remaining in the tanks.

And there was no way in which I could safely weigh anchor single-handed in those conditions; quite apart from the hazards of moving between cockpit and foredeck in extreme conditions, by the time I could get back from the foredeck to the cockpit the boat could very well be aground.

Given that situation I phoned my insurers, initially first thing in the morning to alert them to the incident, with a likely claim pending, and then again in the early afternoon to advise that I proposed to return home to make a replacement tiller. I have a well equipped workshop, and happened to have plenty of suitable mahogany already in stock. That would be stronger than any repair to the broken tiller, probably just as fast, and less hassle than finding a local shipwright or professional woodworker to do the work locally and to do it reasonably quickly. (Indeed, 9 years later the replacement tiller that I made in 2014 is still in service …)

However in the absence of any professionally laid moorings available, that would entail leaving the boat unattended - with their permission - lying to anchor, although it would be to two anchors. They promised to pass on my request, marked as urgent, and said that they would get back to me as soon as possible, but it was around three hours later and just about at the close of the business day when I finally managed to speak to Rod Daniels, their Chief Underwriter, who explained that it had been manic there today. I told him that I was not surprised; it was called Hurricane Bertha! Rod immediately gave permission, and marked up the policy accordingly, as I was sure he would; but I needed to have that confirmed before I could leave the boat.

Meanwhile I needed to do what I could to prepare the boat for leaving her unattended in severe conditions. First thing was to take off the rudder and place it inside the cabin, and ensure that all sails were well tied down; a rope gasket round both the main and the staysail, and a securing line right round the furled yankee jib. Topping lift, lazy jacks, mainsheet, and line between boom and port side of pushpit all tautened and secured.

The inflatable dinghy was secured to the yacht by three independent lines, with three independent securing points on the dinghy, but I decided not to deflate it and bring it onboard. I know from past experience how difficult I find fully inflating it with just a hand pump, and that is exacerbated by the fact that I am an asthmatic; that is precisely why I bought an electric inflator some years ago. But that electric inflator was in Liverpool, and even if I were to bring it back with me I didn't know whether I had sufficient battery capacity left, and I had no means of recharging the batteries until I reached a marina or other harbour with shoreside electrics, whether Whitehaven or elsewhere.

Then it was time to prepare the ground tackle. The Rocna was already well dug in, and I tightened up the lashing for the anchor dolly. I did my utmost to also dig in the kedge plough, and backed this up by strategically placed heavy stones from the beach.

That Rocna had not moved even during the peak of the force 9,
apart from perhaps the first few inches while it was digging in,
so I am confident that it is not going to move now that winds are easing off ...

... which is more than can be said for the kedge,
but I have attempted to dig it in, and have backed that up by
heavy stones on the tip and the shank and the start of the chain.

Then I applied anti-chafing gear to all chafe points on the nylon rodes. I had not done so in preparation for the previous night, but I had then several times freshened the nip; and that is

clearly not an option when leaving the boat unattended, so I had to rely instead on anti-chafing gear.

Although the risk with the greatest probability, were I to do nothing, is that the rodes would hold but would become badly worn, even that was an unacceptable risk; Octoplait in particular is just about the most expensive anchor warp known to man, so I wanted to protect the warp.

More serious, however, was the risk which had a lower probability but which would be an absolute disaster were it to materialise; the warps might chafe through and fail, and the yacht would then be driven ashore and wrecked. That would be even more unacceptable.

So anti-chafing gear had to be improvised, and fitted.

A deck cloth was wrapped tightly around the warp where it passes through the bow roller, and then tightly served with a length of line (around 4 mm), with clove hitches at frequent intervals so that if one part of the line chafes through this does not result in the rest of it falling apart.

Then more of the line is used to serve the part of the warp which might bear on the bobstay, again with frequent clove hitches for the same reason.

Yet more of the 4 mm line is used to serve the kedge warp, both where it passes through the fairlead and where it bears against the pulpit stanchion.

Finally, with the boat fully prepared and locked up, I packed up the bare essentials of personal kit, plus the broken tiller, plus the laundry (may as well make use of the opportunity which had unexpectedly presented itself), and caught the train home. Turned out to be the last train of the day; got me into Liverpool at about midnight, after three changes, **and with no opportunity for a meal - or even the most basic of refreshments - anywhere at all on the 5½ hour evening journey!**

Made the replacement tiller on Tuesday morning, completing it by lunchtime, and then varnished it over the remainder of Tuesday and Wednesday.

The broken tiller (left) and the new emergency tiller (right).

The original was curved and laminated, and it would have taken too long to make a similar one at this stage in the middle of my summer cruise, so the emergency one is a simple straight piece of solid mahogany.

At some point I will make, or commission, a curved laminated replacement, and the present new one will then become the onboard emergency spare, just as the original rudder blade has long ago become the onboard emergency spare.

Then the aim was to complete the varnishing the same day (Wednesday), and if I could achieve that - which all depended on drying times for the varnish - the fittings could go on on Thursday morning and I could then immediately return to the boat. Failing that, if not Thursday then at least Friday.

To be continued

NAUTICAL DEFINITIONS

Reintroducing this section, after a prolonged break

Worm, Parcel and Serve; also, **Serving Mallet**

The term "serve" was used in the previous article, describing how I protected my anchor warp when leaving the yacht unattended at anchor in the aftermath of ex-Hurricane Bertha.

The combination of all three steps forms a coherent strategy to protect a 3-strand rope where it is at risk of abrasion; and it is also used to protect sections of hemp and other natural fibre ropes from water, which can cause them to rot. In my case I was protecting multiplait warp, so there was no need for the first stage, worming, and indeed it would have been inappropriate; but the parcelling and serving were fully appropriate to the rope, and both were done. Having no suitable canvas at hand, the parcelling had to be improvised; and finally a serving was applied to the improvised parcelling, albeit with (deliberately) somewhat heavier line than I would normally have used.

The serving was deliberately modified by adding frequent half-hitches, so that in the event of it chafing through at any point - which did not in fact happen - the rest of the serving would survive intact.

Worming, the first step, is running a length of thin rope along each of the three the spiral "grooves" between the main strands of the rope, in order to fill in these spiral "valleys".

Then narrow strips of canvas (preferably tarred) or other cloth are wound tightly (and spirally) over the now wormed rope, still in the same direction as the lay of the rope, to give a reasonably smooth surface, and also to keep water out. This stage is known as parcelling.

Then a very tight wrapping, effectively a very long whipping, of spunyarn or other light twine is laid on top, going round the rope in the opposite direction, to bind it all together. This is known as serving, and it should be pulled tight by means of a serving mallet.

"Worm and parcel with the lay; serve your rope the other way."

The phrase "worm, serve and parcel" is sometimes heard, but that actually puts the three steps in the wrong order. "Worm, parcel and serve" is the correct order, and by happy coincidence that actually corresponds to non-nautical uses of the last two words; a legal document should never be **served** on someone until it has first been put into an envelope, a form of **parcel**, (not least so that the server does not see its contents); and a supplier cannot "**serve**" goods to a distant customer (by post or courier) until they have first been **parcelled** for transit.

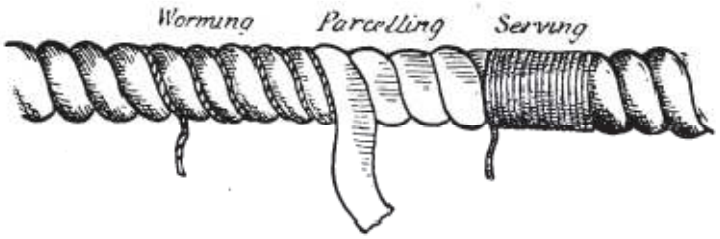
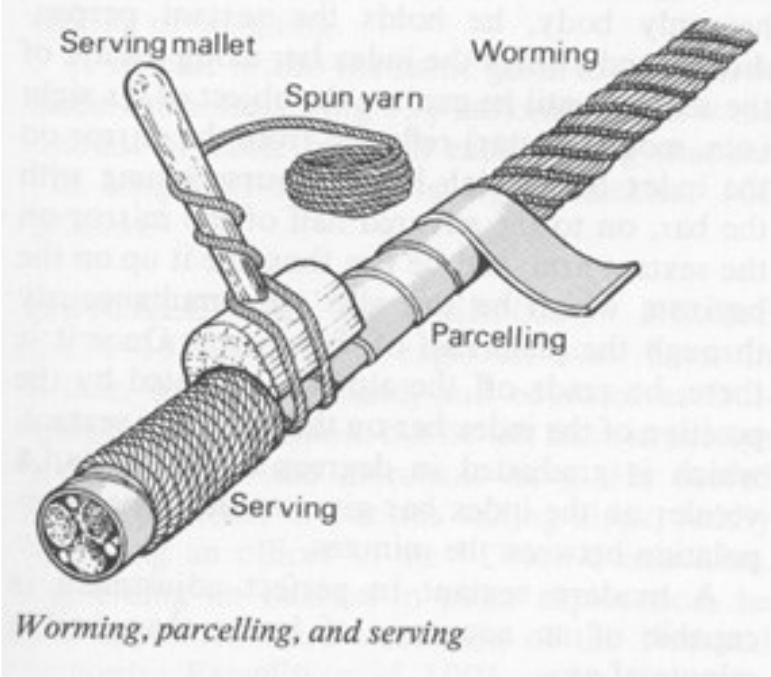


Illustration from "Sailing" by E. F. Knight, published 1925;
although the ends of the worming and parcelling seem
to be shown as brought out in the wrong locations.
This book was for a long time regarded as the "Yachtsman's Bible"



A serving mallet in use.
Note that purpose-designed serving mallets have a concave face
in which the rope rests, but if a proper serving mallet is unavailable
it is possible to improvise (albeit with difficulty) with a plain mallet.

Worm Parcel Serve - San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov)

BAR CHAT

More than a little longer than usual, but we hope you enjoy it!

UPDATE on Withdrawal of UKHO Paper Charts

We presume that most members will have already seen the email that Phil sent out in February, alerting you to the update on this. In case you missed it, the primary piece of news, and very welcome news it is, is that UKHO have listened to feedback, and have extended the timetable for the withdrawal of paper charts; "so (they) will continue to provide a paper chart service until at least 2030."

For the full article see Paper chart withdrawal (admiralty.co.uk)

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The second paraghraph of our article on Changing Tack opened with the words "Spare a thought, then, for …". Re-reading those opening words in the course of editing reminded me of a glorious anecdote in the Barclays Bank Pensioners' Magazine during my late Father's retirement.

The gist of it, from memory, was "Spare a thought for the recently retired doctor in the Highlands with the somewhat unfortunate name of Dr. Donald Duck. Having endured being the butt of jokes throughout his long professional career, including being regularly called a quack, even he was lost for words when a patient whom he referred to hospital in Edinburgh was sent to a psychiatrist because he insisted that his GP was Donald Duck!"

He was born 10 years before Disney's eponymous character was invented, but that did not stop Disney's lawyers chasing both him and his father during his youth - and one incident that really attracted the lawyers' attention was when his father exhibited some work at a craft fair, with a label "Painted by Donald Duck". However his father produced his birth certificate, which confirmed that he had the name first. He died in 2006, in his eighties, of complications arising from Parkinson's disease.

Donald Duck (bmj.com)

BBC NEWS | Health | Living life as Donald Duck

Dr Donald Duck has last laugh on his Disney rival; NOW HE'S A TV STAR. - Free Online Library (thefreelibrary.com)

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We possibly stand corrected on one aspect of the "Unusual Boats" article last time, featuring a modern yacht on the lines of a Viking ship. We wrote "Clearly with this rig she won't tack, so beating to

windward in confined waters is a non-starter, but I presume her twin engines are powerful. In more open waters, beating to windward will presumably involve wearing ship (the equivalent to gybing) at the end of each tack; or alternatively furl the sail, motor round onto the new tack, haul the (furled) rig round onto the new tack, and then re-set the sail."

However in response to this piece, Tom Cunliffe sent me a link to a video of a team sailing a reconstruction of a Viking ship, and with the original rig they were indeed able to tack her, albeit with some difficulty.
http://redirect.viglink.com/?key=71fe2139a887ad501313cd8cce3053c5&subId=3387254&u=https%3A//fb.watch/i1LgIHaqyp/%3Fmibextid%3D6aamW6

However that was with a reconstruction of the original rig, not with the modernised rig on *Valtýr*, and from what I could see of the modern version (seen only in harbour, moored alongside, with the sail stowed) it appears that this one won't tack. However I now accept that I could be mistaken there. It would be interesting to know!

Incidentally Tom is very complimentary about this publication; "Another grand newsletter. They really are a cracking read." Many thanks, Tom!

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Members may recollect the case of the RIB helmsman who was charged with manslaughter following a fatal accident in Southampton Water in 2020, when the RIB collided at speed with a navigation buoy, and a teenage passenger - Emily Lewis - was killed. The owner of the RIB was also charged.

It appears that the RIB was being used commercially at the time, to take fare-paying passengers on "thrill rides".

The helmsman, or driver if you prefer the term, was not an incompetent and careless amateur; he was immensely experienced and professionally qualified, was the Principal of a Training Establishment that offered powerboat courses, had served for 20 years as an RNLI lifeboatman, and had a reputation for being ultra-safe and ultra-cautious. His defence was, in part, that "he had lost his vision in what felt like 'a split second'".

The jury brought in their verdicts on 14th February, and found him not guilty of manslaughter by gross negligence, but found him guilty of failing to maintain a proper lookout and safe speed.

Michael Howley, 52, the owner of the RIB involved in the crash, also a former lifeboatman, was found guilty by majority verdict of failing to operate the boat safely.

Emily Lewis: Speedboat skipper cleared of teenager's manslaughter - BBC News

https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/speedboat-driver-cleared-over-death-of-15-year-old-girl-in-crash-xc95gwwgh

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An advertising email received in February from one of the train companies offered weekend breaks in a number of different cities. Under the heading "Our Best Fares" the very first one on their list offered £10 Advance tickets to, er, Liverpool.

That reminded me of a WW2 exchange of signals which nicely illustrates the very genuine and reasonable difficulties that the Admiralty had in keeping fully up to date with everything in a hugely complex and rapidly changing situation:

Admiralty to destroyer:	PROCEED AT FULL SPEED
Destroyer to Admiralty:	WHERE TO
Admiralty to destroyer:	ADEN
Destroyer to Admiralty:	AM AT ADEN

Quoted in the book "Convoy Is To Scatter"
by Capt. Jack Broome, 1972

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Yet more from *Cruising in Seraffyn*, this time on the serious deficiencies of (at least some) production boats:

"A month later, we had to fly to Miami to deliver the first two of the three boats we had agreed to handle. It was a jolt to fly from the cool, rural atmosphere of Urbanna straight into the heat and humidity of Miami without the "padding" of a sailing voyage in between. Then there was the shock of delivering a new production boat. I'd been on several delivery jobs before, but all of them had been racers, tested and outfitted by their owners, or motor cruisers on their way home against wind or current after a long cruise.

"It's frightening to step aboard a new, fresh-from-the-factory boat and take it to sea. The ads look great, but they don't tell you that most of the things you see in them are "options." Our first boat had no anchor, no bucket, no chain, no door latches, no bilge pumps, loose hose clamps (leaky hoses), no cotter pins in the rigging. It took us two days of shopping and inspection to get that boat ready for sea.

"The owner had bought the most boat $35,000 could buy; to us, it was no bargain. We made a 1,200-mile beat in her, in winds of up to 50 knots, and by the time we reached Puerto Rico, we had a list of 28 broken items, including poorly installed chainplates, a structural bulkhead that fell out when we started going to windward, and household electrical fittings that became damp and shorted out after three days at sea.

"The second delivery was a different boat from a different builder, but the same story. It made us feel that when you buy any new boat, particularly production fibreglass, it's a case of "buyer beware." A beginner, buying a boat for the first time and lacking experience, certainly should hire someone who knows how a boat should be put together to survey the boat beforehand. It may seem like an added expense, but what the buyer learns will save him money in the long run and help him get a good boat."

Personally I would hope that today, nearly fifty years after that was written, and this side of the Atlantic, standards might be better. They certainly should be, but I wish I could be confident that they always are! A case of "buyer beware"!

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In the previous issue I mentioned Lord Dufferin's 1856 book *Letters From High Latitudes*, and commented that at that stage - when I had read only the first 20% of the book - it was more of an enjoyable travelogue than a sailing yarn, although there was nothing at all wrong with that. Later on in the book is some real sailing, including a harrowing account of approaching Jan Mayen Island, and subsequently leaving it, as the ice was closing in and there was real risk of their being beset by it. And in the latter part there is also a potted version of some of the Icelandic and Norse sagas. Overall a very enjoyable read. However, rather than quoting excerpts, I will leave you to enjoy the complete book for yourselves; it is well worth it, and is currently available FREE (as of mid-March) on Kindle.

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Splicing; one day we may perhaps extend Howard's occasional rope work sessions to include a session or three on splicing.

On *A Capella*, my erstwhile cruising GP14 dinghy, which I passed on to my godson a few years ago, but which I have recently greatly enjoyed having back on loan for a few months, I have a main anchor rode (2 m chain plus 30 m of warp) whose bitter end terminates in a soft eye splice; for no particular reason (other than very minor convenience) this eye is longer than it needs to be. There is then a fixed short rope secured to a strongpoint, which is tied onto the eye splice with a becket hitch (very like a sheet bend, but tied into the soft eye of a splice instead of just a loop); that short rope secures the anchor warp to the boat, but is never intended to take any load, although it is amply strong enough (and is probably in fact stronger than the anchor rode). This short rope securing the bitter end is readily untied when necessary, such as when I wish to extend the warp. Separately I also carry a 30 m extension anchor warp, one end of which terminates in a similar soft eye splice, and the other terminates in a seriously long eye splice. The question is how to connect the two, at sea, if the extension warp is ever required.

The two warps are joined when required by simply interlocking the splices. The very long splice in the extension warp is first passed through the soft eyesplice of the main warp, and then the entire skein of the extension warp is passed through the emerging extra-long eye.

Eyesplice in bitter end of anchor warp tied to fixed rope, which is untied if ever I need to extend the warp. Also showing very long soft eye in extension warp

Long eyesplice on extension passed through eyesplice in bitter end of anchor warp. Skein will then go through the emerging loop, as shown by arrow.

Ready to pass entire skein of extension through the extra-long eyesplice

The two interlocked splices pulled into line

Once interlocked, the pair of splices cannot possibly come undone unless a splice fails - and that is something which should never happen if the splices are made properly in the first place.

Separately, the working end of the anchor warp likewise terminates in an eyesplice, this time a hard one, which is shackled to the chain; so there are no knots underwater anywhere in the system.

Although my ropework is fluent I will still not trust knots underwater, particularly in modern synthetic rope, where I can alternatively use splices!

And on the latter note, something over fifty years ago I witnessed an object lesson in splicing, by a professional.

When I was in my twenties I was on the staff of a boys' tented residential sailing school in Milford Haven, which operated during the school summer holidays, and while sailing my then GP14 I fell in with an inexperienced but keen young couple who had just bought a trailer-sailer. They had arranged a mooring at Llangwm, a few miles upriver of where she was currently lying on the previous owner's mooring, and the three of us took her up to her new berth, under power for at least the final stretch. *En route* we were to call in at Llangwm Quay to pick up a "local harbourmaster", for want of a better term, who would take us out to our designated new mooring and see us safely established there.

We picked him up, and then at his direction we moved over to the mooring. On arrival at the mooring we found it had a large polypropylene mooring pennant trailing from it, but with no eye splice in the end. Undeterred, while I held the boat steady under engine against the growing ebb he sat on the foredeck and rapidly put an eye splice in the end of the rope so that he could hook it over the bitts. Not bad seamanship on his part. Also not bad teamwork by the helmsman, though I say it myself!

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Nice One!

Culled from the website of a club in another part of the country which I plan to visit this summer, in their Yacht Racing section:

"Divisions 1 & 2 are for the quicker yachts, or those who generally wish to sail with spinnakers. Division 3 is for the Gentlemen's Class or those wishing to sail with white sails only."

I like the idea of calling that division the Gentlemens' Class!!

But that wording ("those who wish to …") also reminds me of something delightfully tongue-in-cheek which I read many years ago during a previous economic crisis, and which is once again sadly topical:

Notice seen on a grand piano in a college

We regret that due to the current economic situation only the centre octave is being tuned this session.

Students requiring to use both hands for practice are requested to keep to the extremities of the instrument, leaving the centre octave clear for Recitals.

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A news item in February that there is unlikely to be a traditional Naval Fleet Review for the Coronation highlighted the much reduced size of the Royal Navy today.
King's fleet won't sail to mark coronation | News | The Times

The latter is a political question, and we will not trespass into that contentious ground in this publication; we may each hold our own opinions, which may or may not agree.

But irrespective of your political opinions you may enjoy this bit of satire. Proclaimed as the future of the Royal Navy, this vessel epitomises the flexibility and modernism of the 21st century Royal Navy. She is almost invisible to radar, and is therefore a true "stealth ship"; and because she carries no offensive armament she offers no threat to our adversaries, and is unlikely to antagonise them, so we can reasonably hope that it would be very unfair for her to be attacked by them. She is totally "green" in terms of environmental concerns and operating costs, and her required manpower is reduced to only the three remaining members of the Royal Navy; the last surviving Admiral in a hut ashore, the last surviving Captain sitting in the sternsheets, and the last surviving Able Seaman at the oars.

To quote from the third of the websites below, "Although £1.2 Billion over-budget and 3 years late, Secretary of State for Defence, William Bragg says we can all be proud. "The Type 48 programme has sustained 10,000 British manufacturing jobs in addition to 30,000 civil servants in the MoD project team. She will represent the leading edge of British manufacturing wherever she goes and is worth every penny." Bragg also says he is hoping to see export orders soon although as yet there has been little interest. Some observers have commented that her lack of any armament could be a problem but the MoD answered robustly "The Foreign Office advised us that carrying weapons can be seen as provocative and that actually firing a weapon at someone would definitely infringe their human rights."

2038- a vision of the future - ClydeMaritime Forum (clydemaritimeforums.co.uk)

Future Royal Navy! | Navy Net - Royal Navy Community (navy-net.co.uk)

Future of the Royal Navy - Shipbucket

And several other online sources.

(And in passing, as a retired physicist I am well aware of the real William Bragg; indeed he and his son, Lawrence Bragg, were both hugely important physicists. Uniquely, as a father-and-son duo, they shared the 1915 Nobel Prize for physics, for their work on X-ray diffraction and X-ray crystallography.)

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We announce a light-hearted competition, and we hope to publish the best entries (if any) in the Summer issue.

There is a long history of trading firms being named after their founders, plus a few occasional instances where this is only apparently so. An example of the latter is the highly respected classical music publisher **Stainer & Bell**, dating from 1907 and still thriving; they proudly explain from time to time that there never was either a Mr. Stainer or a Mr. Bell associated with the firm, but that the original founders just thought that this sounded a suitably distinguished name.

Mildly interesting, and unusual, examples of firms apparently named after their actual founders - genuine so far as I know - are our local (Speke) tyre dealers, **Tom Tully & Daughters**, and (in the wider Northwest region) the Carnforth hardware shop **Moore & Wife**, nowadays renamed **Moore "N" Wife**.

Some names are clever plays on words, and one that very nearly happened, just not quite (but see later for what did actually happen), was the Sligo firm of solicitors that could so very nearly have become **Argue, Phibbs & Cheetham**.

Those isolated exceptions apart, one is tempted to question whether the partners or founders were ever in fact called that. One which comes to mind is the long-established West Midlands firm of estate agents, **Doolittle & Dalley**, founded in 1893 and still trading, with offices in Bridgnorth, Kidderminster and Bewdley. In my student days, and subsequently as a young teacher, before the motorway was built, I used to regularly drive past them on my way to Bristol and points south and/or west from there. With a name like that, they are probably in fact just as expeditious as their competitors; but you could hardly have grounds for complaint if they do turn out to be slow in handling your business when their very name had forewarned you!

The firm **Smith & Locke** - another firm which genuinely exists - are glorified locksmiths, who manufacture safes, locks, padlocks, keys, door handles, etc. for eventual retail sale. But, confusingly, there is also an apparently unrelated financial firm of the same name, who are capital brokers.

The firm **Taylor & Wright** - "the right tailor" - again a firm which genuinely exists, manufacture budget price gents' tailored clothing of all sorts, also for eventual retail sale, and they are long-established suppliers to Matalan; but again there is an apparently unrelated firm of almost identical name, who are a scaffolding firm in Yorkshire.

Then I am indebted to the late and great journalist, Bernard Levin, for pointing his readers in the direction of the splendidly named and apparently entirely genuine Irish firm of solicitors whose offices were located directly opposite Sligo Courthouse, **Argue & Phibbs**. According to one reputable website, "Once a long-established law firm in Ireland with a name famed around the world, Argue & Phibbs has since been incorporated into the Sligo law firm of McTernan MacGowan."
https://www.overlawyered.com/2020/05/argue-phibbs-solicitors/

And according to the Sligo Town website "This unlikely sounding professional partnership is not a name which was … at all fictitious or made up for a laugh; these names belonged to two real men, Mr W. H. Argue and Mr Talbot Phibbs.

"Mr W. H. Argue's father was a policeman who came originally from County Cavan but upon retiring from the R.I.C. moved to live in Sligo.

"His partner Mr Talbot Phibbs was the second eldest of four sons and one daughter of local landlord William Phibbs of 'Lisheen' (formerly known as Seafield House) which is in the Kellystown Area. …

"It has been reported by a newspaper that in the 1920's "**Argue & Phibbs**" were actively considering taking on a third member of staff, a solicitor from England by the name of "**Cheetam**""

https://www.sligotown.net/47

Sadly, so far as I can ascertain, the other splendidly named firm of solicitors, **Soo, Grabbitt & Runn**, is only fictitious, superb though the name is, and was very possibly dreamed up by Private Eye.

Then my godson's father, a retired vet - who is my oldest friend, (we go back over 65 years, to when we were at school together) - tells me of the two medical students, and good friends, who decided that with their particular names they would just have to go into practice together, which they duly did - **Chambers & Potts**; and apparently the two original partners successfully continued in practice together until eventual retirement.

Indeed both Colin and I have a personal connection there, which I learned from him only very recently. His slightly older brother, Roger, my exact contemporary at school, and also a good friend until he lost his battle with cancer some years ago, joined the practice when he qualified, and worked for them for several years until he eventually moved out of general practice in order to specialise in opthalmics, and later to work for one of the drug companies.

At a much more mundane level, an inland waters online forum reports "When travelling to the boat by train … … I always notice the building next to one of the stations (Dewsbury?) with, picked out in different colour brick:

SHODDY & MUNGO MANUFACTURERS

Image purchased from Alamy, 8/2/03; invoice no. IY03282198

"Shoddy is a kind of cloth made from old cotton garments. I'd guess it was used to make things such as cleaning and polishing rags. I can remember my parents mentioning it.

"I looked up "mungo" and it's similar, but made from old wool."

And a little later on the same forum, "Reminds me of the builders firm on Jolly Butchers Hill, Wood Green – Cakebread & Robey."

"More than a builders firm, they have a boating connection as makers of Belle Portable stoves."

Forgotten canal side business and trade - History & Heritage - Canal World

And while not a trading name as such, a few years ago I used to occasionally enjoy seeing the car/s of a certain local driving school, whose advertising on the car/s offered **CRASH COURSES**. Er, … …

I never did learn whether that last one was intentionally humorous, in order to catch one's eye; it may have been, of course.

But only one of these has even the most tenuous nautical connection. **So the competition is to come up with the most entertaining business name/s, whether actual or fictitious, for a firm in any area of the nautical field.** We hope to publish the best entries in the next issue.

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UNUSUAL BOATS – 30

This somewhat eclectic series, featuring vessels which have often seemed more than a little bizarre, has been running almost continuously from Easter 2015, with the exception of just one single issue (when the series was held over for reasons of space). However we are now, at last, starting to run out of ideas!

There are just three more Unusual Boats in the pipeline, some splendid vintage passenger tour boats in four very different locations, the Sydney Harbour 18-ft Skiff, and Liverpool's own "Little Liner", the *Daniel Adamson*, a.k.a. *The Danny*; but apart from that we are now extending the concept of "Unusual" to include a small handful of different types of (largely) working craft which were once ubiquitous in their own time and place, but all the examples today are historic survivors, many of them restored survivors, and with only a limited number of them - and the latter makes them unusual today, at least in the country at large. These have rightfully earned a place of great affection in the nautical community. In no particular order these are Thames Barges, Essex Smacks and Bawleys, Morecambe Bay Prawners (a.k.a. Liverpool Bay Nobbies), Brixham Trawlers, possibly Severn Trows, and Dunkirk Little Ships. We have already recently featured the Falmouth Oyster Dredgers, but if we had not already done so these could also have been included in this "Supplement" to the series.

Thereafter I am inviting suggestions from our Members and other readers for other Unusual Boats to add to the series. Failing that, the series will end as it began, probably at Easter 2025, with a repeat of No. 1, "The Ultimate Open Boat" (from Easter 2015); and for newer readers, or those of shorter memories, that is something utterly bizarre - but from the photographic evidence we can conclude that it works!

Thames Barges

Normally if someone refers to extreme sailing craft one naturally thinks of a boat designed for extreme speed; but not these particular vessels, which were designed as extreme load carriers. They are perhaps the maritime equivalent of the 38-tonne HGV, except that their average size was 120 tons, with the smallest at around about 70 tons, and some of the largest are known to have carried 200 tons. They were the workhorses of the Thames estuary and the neighbouring waters in the days of commercial sail, and the last of them still trading under sail, the *Cambria*, owned and skippered by Bob Roberts, made her final commercial cargo-carrying passage in 1970.

Cambria, a wooden Thames barge, "was built at Greenhithe, Kent, in 1906, and is famed as the last British registered vessel to carry commercial cargo under sail alone … …, and as such forms a unique part of our industrial and maritime heritage." She is now owned by a registered charity, the Cambria Trust, and "following a four-year restoration project she is again sailing in Thames barge matches and is now preparing for her new career in sail training and educational activities", and the Trust believe her to be the most famous of all the Thames barges - although I suspect that officianados of certain other barges might dispute that particular claim.

cambriatrust.org.uk

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r785dfa_PKQ

These barges were characterised by very shoal draught, usually with leeboards (rather than a keel or drop-keel) to provide lateral resistance, typically a (shallow) wineglass-shaped transom, and a unique rig; the mainsail is a quadrilateral shape, with the peak held aloft by a diagonal spar called a sprit (a rig which saw a modern resurgence with the development of the Optimist dinghy for young children), and the mainsail was normally left permanently hoisted, and it was brailed up to the mast when not in use. The mainsail was loose-footed, with no boom, so this rig had the great benefit for a cargo-carrier of leaving the deck area unencumbered when not sailing, which made it much easier to handle cargo. It also allowed certain types of cargo (e.g. hay) to be stacked high on deck, for what were known as the "stackie" barges, with the rig then set above the cargo.

Above the mainsail was a topsail, which was normally the first sail set and the last one taken down; that was high enough to operate in clear air, which gave a considerable advantage. They also carried a (low aspect ratio) foresail, and usually a small mizzen sail. They were normally sailed by a crew of just two men, or even sometimes a man and a boy.

The larger barges were very seaworthy vessels, fully capable of both coasting and cross-channel passages, while the smaller barges were particularly suited to the shoal draft channels within the Thames estuary. They were also unusual in that the combination of wide beam and shallow draught enabled them, when not actually carrying cargo, to sail without ballast; this saved them considerable time in loading and unloading.

Amongst the regular cargoes were building materials, ranging from materials produced ashore and then carried to other locations, such as bricks, to sand collected from the estuary drying banks, where the barges would dry out over Low Water while they loaded up. In passing, in my erstwhile home waters of the Taw estuary, North Devon, when I was living there in the seventies and early eighties, a similar trade in sand was plied by a small group of motor barges, which used to dry out on Crow Point near the mouth of the estuary and load up, and then ferry the cargo up the river on the flood, to discharge at Rolle Quay in Barnstaple. Often they would be so heavily laden that they made the upriver passage with the decks awash, and only just the bows and the wheelhouse and the coamings round the hatches above the water. Local rumour had it that there was one occasion (at least) when they misjudged the loading, and the barge failed to lift off at all.

North Devon sand barge approaching Rolle Quay (top right of waterway);
note how little freeboard she has - and the Editor has occasionally seen worse!

https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/658721882970792236/

Anyway, returning to the Thames barges, the late Bill Skutil used to tell the gorgeous story of the yachtsman, lost in the Thames estuary and on a falling tide, who spotted a Thames barge, and decided that here was a local skipper on his own patch, who therefore must know the waters, so he followed in his wake. In due course both vessels ran aground. When they were both high and dry the yachtsman strode over in high dudgeon to give the bargee a piece of his mind, for sheer incompetence. "What do you mean, leading you astray?" asked the bargee; "I've come here to load sand!"

Thames sailing barge - Wikipedia

Thames barge, *Edith May*, sailing on topsail and foresail on the River Medway
Edith May-Thames Barge at Chatham cropped - Thames sailing barge - Wikipedia

Thames Barges-Canthusus - Thames sailing barge - Wikipedia

The hay barge 'Unity' passing Wapping Dock Stairs bound up, with Lower Gun Wharf and New Crane Wharf on her starboard broadside - Thames sailing barge - Wikipedia

[salebargepicsPage 50 (merseaislanders.co.uk)]

Topsail Barges at Anchor on the Thames, Some with Topsails Lowered

Topsail Barges at Anchor on the Thames, Some with Topsails Lowered, London, C1905' Photographic Print | AllPosters.com | Barge, Thames, Topsail (pinterest.co.uk)

Thames Barge Match

Today, a substantial number of Thames barges are preserved, and owned by heritage societies and others, and are used recreationally and for sail training; and in particular for racing. The Thames Barge Match, dating from 1863, is the second oldest sailing competition in the world, second only to the America's Cup (1851); but unlike the latter it is still sailed in essentially the same types of vessel as the original event. It is the proud boast of the Match Committee that their event is the longest running, regularly organised, national racing event for traditional sail in the world. This belief is based on the view that, although the America's Cup started 12 years earlier, it has now changed out of all recognition. In contrast, The Thames Barge Match remains true to the original vessel design and sail plans of the 1860's.

Thames Sailing Barge Match | Port of London Authority (pla.co.uk)

Other Barge Matches

There are a substantial number of other events, all of them in the Thames Estuary and/or the East Coast, including the well-known Medway Barge Match, and the Colne Smack & Barge Race. There appear to have been seven matches sailed last year, and eight are scheduled this year, with points counting towards the Sailing Barge Championship, under the auspices of the Sailing Barge Association.

Sailing Barge Championship – Sailing Barge Association

See also *Down Tops'l*, Hervey Benham, (Harrap, 1986), **ISBN-10 :** 0245544879, **ISBN-13 :** 978-0245544873

Down Tops'l: Story of the East Coast Sailing Barges : Benham, Hervey: Amazon.co.uk: Books

NEXT ISSUE

Press Date will be 15th June, please