

OGA

EAST COAST GAFFERS

EASTCOASTER

Newsletter of the East Coast OGA



There's been plenty going on in our Area since the last Newsletter at the end of April, despite some inclement weather before the heat wave struck. Members who made the passage to St Malo to join the French OGA, despite the challenging weather, were rewarded with an enjoyable event, albeit without much sailing. The storms also affected those boats joining the Association of Dunkirk Little Ships 85th Anniversary Return, who found themselves stormbound in France for a week.

We have three more featured boats in this issue representing the wide range of vessels amongst the East Coast membership. I seem to keep finding more volunteers to 'feature'. Will your boat be next? Do contact me with suggestions.

We bring reports from five events and the Calendar is full of more events for the rest of the sailing season and into the Autumn with a bike-ride, our own AGM and the Association AGM at the beginning of 2026 in Harwich.

Thankyou to everyone for your contributions!

Cover photo. James Gilbert: 'Cachalot' crossing from Ramsgate to Dunkirk with the ADLS 85th Anniversary Return, May 2025.

IN THIS ISSUE

- ◇ Diary dates 2025 - 2026
- ◇ Featured boats
- ◇ Stour Rally report
- ◇ Return to Dunkirk
- ◇ Swallows & Amazons
- ◇ Ipswich Heritage Harbour
- ◇ St Malo reports
- ◇ Norfolk wherry 'Albion'
- ◇ East Coast Race
- ◇ EC Gaffers: online & in print

Summer sailing and Autumn events: 2025

Your Committee has been working hard on the sailing Programme. Keep updated by visiting the Events page online: www.oga.org.uk/areas/east_coast/east_coast_events.html

27 July - 3 August, 2025: East Coast Summer Cruise

This issue is published as the Cruise is taking place. Look out for reports and photos online later this month.

16 August: West Mersea Town Regatta, OGA Flags!

There's still time to enter for the President's Race which takes place during Mersea Week.

23 - 25 August: NWOGA Ullswater Rally & Gaffling Championships

The NW Area is planning this event for August Bank Holiday. It will include the second Gaffling 4.1 Championships with five boats expected to be there for members to try out.

6 - 7 September: Wherries, Windmills & Waterways

NEW EVENT Join us on the Norfolk Broads for a small boat rally with Norfolk Wherry 'Albion' as our 'mother ship'! Find out more online, booking opens soon.

18 or 19 October: Autumn bike-ride

Join us for a ride around the Harwich or Shotley peninsula. Watch out for more details later in the summer.

8 November: Area AGM, RHYC

Once again, we'll be at the Royal Harwich Yacht Club for our Area AGM and dinner. Put the date in your diary now, booking will open later in the summer.

2026

Your Area Committee is organising the Association AGM for 2026 and following extensive research has decided on Harwich as the venue.

31 January - 1 February, 2026: Association AGM

The National AGM in 2026 will be held in Harwich. Full details published in the Winter issue of Gaffers Log: meanwhile, put the date in your diary for a great weekend of events here in the East Coast Area.



'Papa Little' at Swallows & Amazons 2025
Photo: Tarquin Wildridge

Gaffers gather at St Malo, 2025
Photo: Ben Collins

Flying the flag at St Malo, 2025
Photo: Marion Shirley



Featured boats

Our three 'featured boats' for this quarter reflect the wide range of vessels sailing with the East Coast Gaffers. 'Songbird' is an 18' trailer sailer hailing from Heir Island, Baltimore, 'Concord of Mersea' a lovingly restored classic yawl originally built in 1937 and 'Lærling', only launched a couple of years ago, a new-build steel 'blue-water' cruiser built by apprentices at Downs Boatyard.

Please contact the Editor with ideas for more boats to feature in 2025.

'Songbird'

'Songbird', an 18ft Heir Island Sloop, no 23 and the last to be built. She was built in England by a boatbuilder in Totnes, Devon. The others were built by Gubby Williams of Heir Island and are raced and cruised in Roaring Water Bay near Baltimore, south west Ireland. The blurb from Gubby reads: "The boat is fast and well mannered. The decent displacement, a third of it amidships makes her powerful and buoyant. Hollow waterlines forward maybe be villains responsible for a stew of evils from hellish imbalance and buckets of drag when heeled, to depletion of the ozone layer but they keep the foredeck dry and, best of all, they look sharp and sexy!"

'Songbird' has a GRP hull, everything else is wood. She has a large mainsail (137 sq ft) and two jibs, larger and smaller, let's not get too technical. She is ballasted and weights three quarters of a tonne. She has a ply centreplate, so draws very little and crossing the Deben bar at LW has never been a problem.

She is lovely to sail, speedy also tippy but she feels safe out at sea in a moderate chop. We camp out on her, sleeping beneath a custom made boom tent. It's not high luxury but the simplicity makes up for the lack of homely comforts. She has an electric outboard, good points are that it's clean and silent, cons are that the battery may run out whilst crossing the shipping lane.

'Songbird' is the only HIS in England, so if you want one you'll have to wait for mine to come up for sale. You can always request a trial sail, I'm sometimes looking for a crew!

Words: Shona Fairchild

Photo: Beverley Yates

'Concord of Mersea': part 1

James Boyd tells the story of our featured boat 'Concord of Mersea', in two parts. In this first instalment he tells how he was drawn to Scotland where he found her, then known as 'Penelee'.

I was on passage from Fowey to Falmouth when I first saw her: a grainy photograph in the back pages of a dog eared Classic Boat magazine. She was leaning to a press of wind on her starboard quarter and she looked powerful and pretty. I peered more closely but the capture concealed as much about her as it revealed; an enigma, just out of my budget but calling to me with a siren song from where the advert said she now lay on the West Coast of Scotland.

A shout from the skipper brought me to the moment and I trimmed the mainsheet of Pilot Cutter 'Eve of St Mawes', scanned the horizon and found my eyes slipping back toward the page now lying on the side deck. There was something about that boat . . . 'Penelee' she was called . . . an unusual name . . . I clambered down below to the galley and brewed tea. 'Eve' gave her little pigeon nod along a wave crest and I rolled with her motion watching the boom swing above the gull wing skylight as I fell into a reverie . . .

I'm a musician; a concert guitarist, producer and director. I had recently emerged from a recording project at Snape Malting's Concert Hall and had sold my international 5 metre yacht 'Indian' to help underwrite the production costs of the album. The recording had been a success with great reviews in the national press and now, with a few collected laurels of my profession and the satisfaction of a creative dream made real, I was yearning for a boat of my own. I dreamed of going to sea in carpet slippers, having the west in my eyes and becoming the happy bargee and £200 millionaire of Weston Martyr's short stories that were waiting for me in my pilot berth.

A few days later I was on the sleeper train rattling towards Loch Creran and the vast sheds of MRC marine where 'Penelee', dismasted and forlorn, was lying in the shadows amongst the detritus of industrial shipping. My first view of her was like a jolt between the eyes. She was painted a horrible blue and festooned with loops of wire, a broken spar jutting out from her stern. And yet I barely noted this for nothing could hide the poetic beauty of her sheer line and the power in her shoulders. That bow was made for long voyages and when I went down below there were salt crystals everywhere; evidence of recent rough passages to Norway and Orkney.

On a shelf, water stained and bent, was a small greenish book 'Pitmans Guide to Sailing'. I didn't know it then but that book would send me on a trail to the golden age of yachting in the tideways and byways of East Anglia. It had been illustrated and penned by a man called Archie White and, underlined in ink, were passages detailing adventures in Brittany with a boat called 'Concord of Mersea'. The drawings looked very like the yacht I was now aboard and that was winding herself into my heartstrings. Fate watched me and winked. I threw caution and common sense to the winds. A surveyor was engaged who proclaimed her to have many problems. Undeterred I travelled to the other end of the country and bent the ear of Bodinnick boatbuilder Peter Williams.



'Penelee' nee 'Concord' was casting her spell and Peter drove up to Scotland to look at her on the strength of my excited babbling and the photograph that had sent me on the trail. I met him at the yard, bum up with his head in the bilge. When he emerged he said one thing, "Just buy 'er! She's bloody brilliant!" Time compressed. I packed a sleeping bag and spent a week living on a rocky outcrop on the edge of the loch while I prepared 'Penelee' for her journey via low loader to the West Country. At night a sea otter, irritated by my invasion of his domain blew bubbles at me through his whiskers and I would lie with eyes half closed watching him posturing on a rock silhouetted against a vast moon. When I left the camp to work aboard, the little devil came and marked his territory with great vigour on all my equipment.

And then it was time. 'Penelee' began her road journey, I jumped back on a train, my family drove down from Norfolk and eventually we all convened at the China Clay docks just outside Fowey, ready to launch her and take her over to Tom's of Polruan for the winter before moving her to Bodinnick for work to begin. For the next two years I lived in the sail loft of Peter Williams yard. As I removed everything that was standing in the way of her original beauty 'Penelee' became 'Concord' again. Her name boards were hung up in the rafters, and that wandering period of her history where she had sailed from the Clyde to the Golden Horn was replaced with a restoration to bring her early spirit to life.

'Concord of Mersea': part 2

James Boyd continues his story of the transformation of 'Penelee' back to 'Concord of Mersea', eventually becoming a concert.

The work of course was huge but Peter was right; she was 'Bloody Brilliant' – not a single sister frame in her, all floors and timbers original English Oak and Rock Elm. We only replaced a few feet of planking in one pitch pine quarter. She still, of course, cost me as much as a small house and the rebuild of the interior, re-engining, re-decking, re-masting, stripping, re-caulking and re-painting were a Homeric epic that left me, at her launch, looking like Robinson Crusoe in threadbare trousers while she slipped with a sigh into the waters of Fowey Haven gleaming in her new paint. We had aimed for a restoration that would capture something of a Percy Woodcock illustration and there she lay like a model ship poised on her own reflection. Peter said in hushed tones, "I've never seen a boat of her size that beautiful". As for me, I could only grin in delight.

Working alongside a master boatbuilder was a dream come true. I was also on the road giving concerts and returning to my 17th century eyrie between times so it was inevitable that music, sailing and the emerging story of 'Concord' would combine. She was rapidly becoming a muse. I had followed the trail in the much thumbed book and it had led me to West Mersea where Archie's daughter Jenny had a house. I would go often and take tea with her. This ritual would end with her taking out her dad's logbooks from 1937 to the 1950s. They were, they are, extraordinary records of a time before the world darkened, full of exquisite illustrations and beautiful copperplate writing in that particular blend of school boy humour and delight that one finds in a PG Wodehouse novel. I found myself looking down





into the eyes of a man who exuded joie de vivre; owlish glasses, a pipe, one foot on a barrel of 'Concord' triple X brewed by Tollemarche specially for her launch at Harry Kings Yard. The logbooks held me enthralled and as I read his accounts of voyaging in the Thames Estuary and beyond, music and poetry and the 'Concord' story began to entwine themselves into a counterpoint that would eventually become a concert. 'Stolen Years' was performed for the first time when we launched Concord' with Jenny reading her father's words and telling her own memories. The audience arrived by boat and, with 'Concord' dressed overall alongside, and a good barrel of St Austell Ale to oil the proceedings I felt that Archie was looking on with a smile. Of the many places I have given that performance her unique history has never failed to make people laugh and cry in equal measure. I even gave a broadcast of 'Stolen Years' from her cabin during the dark days of lockdown when ordinary concerts were an impossibility. A few years ago I embarked on a concert series, travelling with 'Concord' and commissioning some of Britain's most exciting composers to write new works for me inspired by her story and by the sea. We began at the Aldeburgh Festival and gave performances all along the East Coast.

For a while I continued to keep 'Concord' in the west country, making the long journey to see her every other weekend but in 2010 I realised it was time for her to come home. We left Fowey haven early one morning. Lester Simpson, a renowned folk musician and fellow sailor, had shipped aboard and he emerged without warning on the foredeck claspings a set of bagpipes. I can hear the skirl of them even now, echoing back from the steep cliffs as we headed for the shallows of the Thames. 'Concord' now lies opposite the park where the great elms were felled that made her keel. There is a comfort in her old timbers, a kind of wisdom born of having seen such a passage of time, of having weathered one world war and watched families grow up aboard her. I have been fortunate to be friends with Archie's daughters Julia and Jenny and to hear first hand their memories and to see the light in their eyes kindle into flame as they told their tales. When I found her in Scotland another family had grown up aboard her and with similar love had described their adventures with their father; idyllic voyages in Greece and violent storms off the coast of Norfolk as they baled with a frying pan and hoped for the wind to abate. . And now my own children clamber in her rigging and she has become part of their ever widening world. Every time I row out to her it feels like coming home. For the man who dreamed her into being she was a symbol of hope when the second world war made sailing the summer seas a distant memory. In his barracks in Hartlepool, confined to the shore after a hellish stint on the North Sea Convoys he painted a picture of a model he made of her. There is a poem written alongside that says it all. It now hangs on the bulkhead of her main cabin.

Words and photos: James Boyd
 @jamesboydproductions
 www.jamesboyd.co.uk

“The little vessel here portrayed
Sails o’er the tumbling wave
a splendid wind fills all her sails
The flowing tide to save

She keeps her course
She holds her poise
Forever sailing on
She keeps alive the memory of pleasant days gone

Of all that was
And all that is to be when war shall cease
And we shall sail the seas again
In Concord and in peace.”

In 2010, ‘Concord’ won the Classic Boat Restoration of the Year Award.

‘Lærling’

‘Lærling’ was commissioned as a training project to develop the skills of young people in the conservation, maintenance and operation of traditional vessels of all types. Designed by Paul Spooner and Jim Dines, she was built by the registered charity Heritage Marine Foundation. ‘Lærling’, a powerful gaff ketch, takes her inspiration from the classic Colin Archer design and other famous double enders. Built over four years at Downs Road Boatyard in Maldon, Essex with young people honing their skills under the supervision of Jim Dines and Ernst de Groote, she went on to be the winner of the 2025 ‘Spirit of Tradition’ Classic Boat Awards.

In the owner’s words

“For several years I have been gradually planning a future life world-cruising, starting with scoping out current production yachts for their suitability in handling extreme weather, something likely to increase with climate change.

Simultaneously, I had fallen in love with classical yacht designs, in particular ‘old-gaffers’ and had gotten to know Jim and Catherine Dines at Downs Road Boatyard who helped me consummate this love in 2015 by becoming the proud owner of ‘Lily’, a 28ft Essex Smack built by Peter Herbert on the Blackwater to lines of an original Smack called ‘Secret’.”

“In hindsight, I now realise this love started as a child growing up in Clacton-on-Sea watching Thames Barges and Smacks pass along the East Coast. More practically, however, I now appreciate first-hand why these robust and efficient historical working-boat designs first came about and crucially why they maintain their relevance today for modern cruising: with full-keel hull forms that can withstand hitting semi-submerged shipping containers, sea-kindly heavy displacements and perfectly matched (and beautiful) low-aspect gaff-rig sail plans to drive them effectively and safely. Moreover, the self-sufficiency of being able to maintain such classical and robust engineering, is a major plus for me.”

“Seeking these enduring benefits from the classical world, while integrating modern creature comforts and multiple layers of redundancy into the engineering systems, required designing an entirely new ‘modern-classic’ that I hoped would be an ideal blend for world-cruisers, and above all beautiful to the beholder.”





“Enter the expertise of Paul Spooner and Jim Dines and their design for 52ft LOD ‘Laerling’, which I believe captures all these desires tremendously, with an easily driven and stable double-ender hull-form and a flexible cutter ketch sail plan, along with topsail, topsail jib, mizzen staysail and even a square sail for downwind sailing. ‘Laerling’ has a retractable bowsprit and topmast, twin hybrid electric plus diesel engines with variable pitch props for recharging 1700Ah of Lithium Iron Phosphate batteries, internal and external helming positions, 1000L of fuel and water storage, an R/O plant, workshop, dive compressor and a wealth of other mod-cons all in a spacious 3-cabin pilot house layout.”

“The final point of note is the choice of name: ‘Laerling’ is Norse for ‘Apprentice’. It is a deliberate nod to Colin Archer and reflects the biggest reason why we embarked on this endeavour, which is to provide an exciting project for a new apprenticeship scheme at Downs Road Boatyard. ‘Laerling’ was built by inspirational young trainees, providing a legacy that we hope will continue to preserve and pioneer the benefits of classic yacht designs for many years to come.”

Words & photos: Chris Torrance and Jim Dines





Stour Rally Report: 23 - 25 May

New OGA member, Peter Smith brings us a report from the first sailing event on the East Coast this summer following cancellation of our Easter Egg Rally. Typical of the English weather, our early spring sunshine and gentle breezes turned against us for this Bank Holiday weekend!

What a blistering introduction, as a new member, into to the East Coast OGA. I know that I'm preaching to the converted, so this is just a reminder to all you members of what a fabulous Association you are all part of. Like any voluntary organisation, it really is only as good as the enthusiasm of those prepared to give it their all. I have a Norfolk Gypsy, no.1 'Dream Catcher', home port, Manningtree. I met the East Coast Secretary & Vice President, Pete Elliston, during the spring launch of the Stour Sailing Club's cruiser lift-ins. Pete's enthusiasm and passion for anything 'gaff' was glaringly unmistakable and it took little persuasion when he invited me to come along to the forthcoming Rally with one little proviso: I join the OGA. Whilst resistance was futile, I couldn't be happier about the outcome.

Friday 23 May

The easterly winds that had been persistent for a couple of months or more had finally shifted westerly in the last week creating a far more favourable playground on the River Stour. The forecast, however, was a little less friendly with strong winds and varying degrees of precipitation. The 'plan', whilst as fluid as the Stour itself and possibly as rough, was for every 'rallyer' to meet ashore at or near Hut 31 under the cliffs at Wrabness for a social gathering, and to smooth out the rally's itinerary for Saturday.

I arrived from Manningtree around 20.00, took up a vacant mooring and apprehensively came ashore, to meet all those gathered there. I was instantly welcomed and introduced to all, even though I could feel the enthusiastic commotion of various conversations, broken momentarily to acknowledge me. The warmth of chatter was only equalled by the warmth of the evening and an established bonfire on the beach, with a cackle of red faces in the glow of the fire. The outlined plan was confirmed that the flotilla should leave around 0830 next morning and head up river to Mistley quay for bacon rolls and coffee arranged with and supplied by 'Tea at the Quay' café. After breakfast, we would return to Wrabness, to initiate a weather dependant passage plan for the rest of the day. As the embers faded on the fire, and the rising tide threatened to quench any remaining ashes, all those around the fire headed up the steps to join those in the hut. Conversation continued until late into the evening.

Saturday 24 May

0830, and nobody was left abed. The enthusiastic 'bunch of boaters' prepared to head up river, aware of the weather forecast, but spurred on by the thought of bacon rolls and hot drinks waiting for us all at Mistley Quay, courtesy of Nancy & Derek Bell. The fleet consisted this morning of 'Transcur', 'Daisy

Bell', 'Morag', 'Lady May', 'Penelope', 'East Breeze', and 'Dream Catcher'. There were some 16 hungry mouths to feed and drink. Full marks to 'Tea at the Quay' café for the mouth-watering feast! After an unusually well-orchestrated rafting up at the quay, (what a difference a bit of forward planning makes!), breakfast passed along the line at what looked like an equally well rehearsed wave of rolls and drinks. Incidentally, it was very interesting, and heartening to see and hear just how many onlookers at the quay shared all our thoughts regarding the futility of the fence along the quay, and the fact that our breakfasts had to be served through a small hole in it. Our presence appeared to some as a kind of waterborne protest of this 'fortification'!

So revivited, the democratic decision took us back to 'Hut 31' at Wrabness, to wait for the near end of the ebb to sail down to Harwich, where we were to rendezvous with 'Ostara' and 'Rhapsody'. By then, the increasing westerly wind was fighting the flood, and a challenging sail for some was had on the return to Wrabness moorings, blowing the cobwebs out of the rigging. Fresh air, and there was plenty of that about, not only gave one an appetite, but also stimulated the brain. Both were now to be satisfied! PTK fired up the BBQ, and soon hungry faces were again filled to capacity with a generous selection of good grub. Drinks flowed along with the conversations of the success of the day so far; the weather and disruption to the 'Little Ships' taking part in the 85th Anniversary of Operation Dynamo 1940, (including a couple of local boats) return from Dunkerque; and just what impact the weather was to have on the remaining plans for our 'rally'. Saturday evening became a relaxing affair of satisfied bellies and a steady flow of drinks and chat, in the comfortable and cosy surroundings of 'Hut 31'.

Sunday 25May

The 'Stour Rally' due to conclude tomorrow, Monday, looked this morning likely to fizzle out, so with the ever increasing threat of poor weather, the general opinion was to 'cut and run'. For myself, a short run up river to Manningtree, meant far less of an issue than for others travelling greater distances. However, on reflection, the Stour Rally had lived up to its name, having an orderly cluster of craft travel just about the full length of the river in both directions. Hugs and embraces over, and the band of jolly sailors slowly dwindled as the wind increased. HHA Erbarton weather station was recording gusts of just under 30 knots and wave heights of 1.3 mtrs on the river, so common sense prevailed. 'Dream Catcher' and 'Rhapsody' were the last to depart leaving 'Morag' on her permanent mooring to sit it out. In conclusion: This commentary illustrates a memory of my first event as a newly embraced member of the OGA. For most of those involved it had been an opportunity to get together with like-minded friends. For me, an opportunity to make new friends and share the fulfilling and unparalleled joy of sailing.

Report: Peter Smith, 'Dream Catcher'

Photo: Sarah Adie

Participating boats and crews

Smack, 'Transcur' CK 365, Orwell YC; with Pete and Clare Thomas

Smack, 'Daisy Bell' CK 451, Stour Sailing Club; with Will Harvey Will Roberts Ed Roberts, Evie Roberts and a Uni friend, Jess Slater

Drascombe Coaster, 'Morag', Stour Sailing Club; with PTK and Sarah Adie

Norfolk Gypsy, 'Lady May', Stour Sailing Club; with Kevin Misslebrook and Lloyd Davies

Open lug yawl, 'Bel Ami', Walton & FYC; with Des Trollip

Winkle Brig, 'Penelope', (Walton); with Yvonne Mitchell

Tamarisk 24, 'East Breeze', Orwell YC; with Melvin Fox

Centre board Classic Bermudan Yacht, 'Ostara', with Rory Howlett, Kitty, and the future of the OGA: Max, Henry and Edith all under 11 years old!

Anderson 22, 'Rhapsody', with Liz Reynolds from Pin Mill

Norfolk Gypsy, 'Dream Catcher', Stour Sailing Club; with Peter Smith and Shona Fairchild ('Songbird', Heir Island Sloop sailed to the Deben on Friday so could not attend!)

Thanks are extended for our breakfasts, supplied by Tea at the Quay 'through the fence' assisted by Nancy and Derek Bell from 'Free the Quay'.



EC Gaffer 'Cachalot' takes part in the Return to Dunkirk, May 2025

2025 marks 85 years since Operation Dynamo, when a fleet of 'little ships' evacuated over 300,000 Allied soldiers from the beaches of France. The ADLS (Association of Dunkirk Little Ships), founded in 1965, has run an Anniversary Return to Dunkirk every five years. It took place this year for the first time since 2015 and there were several East Coast boats in the 65-strong fleet. 'Letitia', who made the crossing in 2000 with East Coast members Mike and Sue Feather was there, with her new owners Don and Linda. The Cornish fishing boat 'Our Lizzie' has a remarkable history and tales to tell, including use on a spying mission in 1939 and of course, Operation Dynamo. She was built in 1919, converted into a yacht in the 1930s and fully restored at IBTC Lowestoft a few years ago. 'Maid Marion' is another centenarian, also built as a fishing boat in Cornwall, 1925. The Leigh cockler 'Endeavour' also joined the fleet, fully restored in 2005 and managed by the Endeavour Trust. Two Thames sailing barges arrived in Ramsgate ready to sail, SB 'Greta', the oldest boat in the fleet, built 1892 and SB 'Pudge' the second largest boat at 92'. Ipswich-based 'Glala' was not ready to make the crossing but her owners arrived in Dunkirk aboard DLS 'Riis I'.

The Little Ships were accompanied by a Royal Navy escort of seven P2000s from the RN Coastal Forces Squadron, the Ramsgate RNLI lifeboat, four members of the Nelson Owners Club and MVS East Sussex providing vital support to the fleet of historic vessels ranging in size from the 26' motor-yacht 'Firefly', the diminutive 1911 sloop-rigged racing yacht 'Moonraker' and Lifeboat no. 8, known as 'Lady of Mann', both just 27', to the steel-hulled 'Bluebird 1938', LOD 107' who arrived in Ramsgate from the Mediterranean having crossed the Bay of Biscay.

'Cachalot' makes passage for Ramsgate

Friday 16 May dawned and North Wales OGA member Mark arrived with plenty of time to do a last trip to the shops for fresh provisions. With high water mid-afternoon Steve and Mark planned to leave Woodbridge at 1530, motoring down to Waldringfield to spend the night on a mooring buoy. After a leisurely morning in the river, they set out across the Deben bar at 1245 in light winds and not too much surf. They enjoyed the sail down to the River Orwell, although Troublesome Reach lived up to its name. Spending the night in the shelter of Suffolk Yacht Harbour had the added advantage of fish and chips at The Lightship. 'Cachalot' departed Suffolk Yacht Harbour at 0730, Sunday 18 May to take the ebb from the River Orwell out to Medusa. Their passage took them across Black Deep and south to Ramsgate where they arrived at 1800, having motor-sailed all day! On passage they were caught up (and overtaken) by Harvey in DLS 'Else II', a 32' Thornycroft motor cruiser built in 1929. He had left Harwich at 0930 and sent Beverley some great photos of 'Cachalot' with the comment, 'I caught up with a beautiful sailing yacht! See you in Ramsgate.'

By Sunday evening many of the boats based along the River Thames had already arrived or were expected into Ramsgate by Monday afternoon.

Monday morning found Beverley at the station waiting for the train to Ramsgate, arriving 1500 to stay at the Bedford Inn, an excellent small hostelry close to the harbour. There would not be room on 'Cachalot' for her once Simon arrived from Dundee on Tuesday afternoon to crew with Steve and Mark. Also arriving on Monday was 'Maid Marion', a 39' Cornish lugger celebrating her 100th anniversary this year and in David Hunt's family since 1965. She reached Ramsgate just as the sea state began to deteriorate after her passage from Harwich, having left Ramsholt on the River Deben on Sunday. There were parades and an air display in Ramsgate to entertain everyone as visitors gathered in the beautiful sunshine to admire the fleet and remember what happened 85 years ago.

Wednesday 21 May: Ramsgate to Dunkirk crossing

"Good morning everyone and I hope you slept well. Dunkirk Little Ships we are a green for go this morning." The fleet had been preparing since dawn, waiting for the official 'go, no go' order which arrived at 0600. The fleet lists had been circulated and crowds had begun to gather since sunrise along the quays and harbour walls to see off the boats.

Steve, Mark and Simon motored out towards the harbour entrance with the rest of the boats from the inner and outer harbours taking up position to form the long flotilla four vessels wide. There were three groups, based on speed capability, with 'Cachalot' in the 'Vanguard' fleet along with the sailing barges and other smaller vessels who could not be sure of maintaining more than 5 knots. The weather was fine but all the yachts and barges had to motor sail for most of the 40 miles to Dunkirk. Mid-afternoon the wind picked up allowing 'Moonraker', a beautiful 1911 racing yacht and 'Cachalot', at the back of the fleet, to have an excellent sail for the last few miles.

This change in the weather was not as welcome for the smaller motor cruisers, especially those without steadying sails, who were buffeted by the waves as they approached Dunkirk. After a long but exhilarating day everyone tied up in the two locks to finish the voyage through two lifting bridges before mooring up in the Bassin du Commerce.

ADLS fleet stormbound in Dunkirk

There were rumours of a brief weather window on Friday 23 May. 21 boats including 'Cachalot', decided to go, planning to depart at 0700. However, by 0800 there were reports of a pretty wild sea and more stormy forecasts beyond the locks and bridges, only two boats departed Dunkirk with the rest returning to their berths. At 1100 the planned reception for ADLS and the Royal Navy took place in the Town Hall, presided over by the Mayor of Dunkirk and attended by Prince Michael of Kent, ADLS Honorary Admiral.

As the wind increased even within the harbour all the flags made a colourful display as visitors came to look at the fleet. The Bassin du Commerce was used for shipbuilding and shipping companies in the 19th century. Now it is the permanent home to three historic heritage vessels: the three masted tall ship 'La Duchesse Anne', the lightship 'Sandettie' and the tugboat 'Triomphant'.



On Saturday evening there was an Anniversary Supper, a rather splendid occasion allowing plenty of mingling over canapés and champagne before sitting down for a three-course meal.

Sunday, planned to be the fleet's last day in Dunkirk, was clearly going to be the start of another week of visiting boats and exploring the area since the weather was consistently too stormy for anyone to venture out.

On Monday, 'Challenge' the steam tug left for Chatham with a small group of other sturdy boats and Simon returned to Scotland. Beverley took the train and a bus home on Wednesday leaving Steve and Mark to plan their passage back with 'Cachalot'. The main fleet was hoping to sail on Saturday but 'Cachalot' left early on Friday 30 May, arriving into Ramsgate at 1530. She sailed the whole way in what were sometimes challenging winds and sea state but skipper and crew were both very happy, describing the crossing as 'exciting'. They had an uneventful passage back to Woodbridge on Saturday before the poor weather returned with a vengeance.

Report and photos: Beverley Yates

Ipswich Heritage Harbour Project launch

Ipswich was awarded the Heritage Harbour designation in January 2024 and joins a network of 14 heritage harbours and inland ports in the UK. Ipswich Maritime Trust (IMT) has received a National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) grant to launch the Ipswich Heritage Harbour Project.

"Ipswich is the oldest continuously occupied port in the country. Even today, it is the UK's leading agricultural export port, and, with some 2,000 yachts on the Orwell, is at the heart of a thriving recreational boating scene. We have appointed a five-strong Project Team who are working with local schools and communities to bring alive awareness of the town's maritime heritage," says Ben Good, chair of the Ipswich Maritime Trust

The Ipswich Heritage Harbour Project is headed up by Judy Harrison, a highly experienced project manager who recently coordinated the Skippers of the Future project on board the engineless Thames sailing barge 'Blue Mermaid,' on a tour of 11 ports. She also organised the maritime activities for the Gloucester Tall Ships Festival and Bristol Harbour Festival, and was staff skipper on board Sail Training Vessel 'Pioneer'. In 1983, Judy was the first recipient of IMT's annual bursary for young people, enabling her to join a sail-training voyage with the Ocean Youth Club – and setting her on course for a life on the water!

"I sailed on the Orwell as a child, started out from the Wet Dock on the Ocean Youth Club voyage, and regard Ipswich as being very dear to my heart. I look forward to the opportunity to enable more people of all ages and background to connect with the waterfront heritage of the town."

She is joined by Lyndon March as Head of Sailing. Lyndon is a qualified Thames barge skipper and has worked for Topsail Charters, Heritage Marine Foundation, the Pioneer Sailing Trust, amongst others, and also as a freelance shipwright. He will be working on board Sailing Barge 'Victor', an Ipswich icon moored alongside the Old Custom House on the Waterfront.

Ipswich Maritime Trust Press Release



Swallows & Amazons: 27 - 29 June 2025

We bring extracts of articles from the East Coast Gaffers 2025 edition of Swallows & Amazons. Find full versions online . . .

Smacks boat 'Joy' enjoys her first Swallows & Amazons

Boat trailing for me this June has been quite epic. Firstly the comical chaos of La Semaine du Golfe du Morbihan followed by the French OGA St Malo weekend. Then only a couple of weeks later the drive to Essex from landlocked Wiltshire. Three and half hours the satnav said, pah. Anyhow, some six hours driving on a Thursday afternoon was little price to pay for an absolutely fantastic weekend.

I really enjoy any East Coast event and it was great to meet up with the 'old' familiar faces, who are always most welcoming, and meet many new ones, especially the Blackwater Boys, Steve Johnson and Clint Swann. The hospitality from the Walton and Frinton Yacht Club and Titchmarsh Marina was refreshing. Outstanding service and great facilities in a somewhat timeless location. The three days sailing was at times challenging for me single handed but was duly rewarded with fantastic creek crawling in company and the abundance of wildlife.

The Sunday trip to Beaumont Quay was truly memorable. A fantastic introduction to Walton Backwaters! Special thanks go to the Organising team for a great event. Swallows and Amazons forever.

Steve Mitchell, Solent OGA

A weekend cut short for father and son

What a fantastic two days – unfortunately, as we were all geared up for the last day going to Beaumont Quay my son got a phone call to go back to work at the Hospital (he works in bloods). He said he'd take the train but I felt a bit bad so decided to give him a lift home as fathers do! Apart from that slight blip for us, the atmosphere was amazing.

I can't really explain it, maybe the combination of weather and sheer enthusiasm from everyone who was there. It was so lovely to see the many different types of dinghies, yawls, smacks boats and more enjoyed afloat by such a cross section of ages, from toddlers to those who hide their age . . .

Tarquin Wildridge, East Coast OGA

Young Gaffers Alfie & Evie report

On Saturday, Mum, Dad and Grandma went off to do the race on 'Janice' and we stayed with Grandpa and the dogs. We sailed and rowed and discovered a creek which we called 'Maze Creek' and we found a shipwreck. 'Chase' survived rowing and quanting up 'Shipwreck River' to 'Shipwreck Island' and didn't get shipwrecked. After the race we all went for a swim and Alfie discovered he could make a big splash jumping off the quay and jumping off 'Sietske'. In the evening we all went to the prizegiving and found that 'Janice' had won the race and we had won the Eel Totem trophy for being the youngest participants. We also got some sweets and water pistols which came in handy the next day!!

Alfie & Evie Harman

*Photos from top:
Steve Mitchell, Tarquin Wildridge & Sally Harman*



An international affair at St Malo: 6 - 8 June

EC Gaffer, Marion (latterly of 'East Breeze') crewed on the SW Gaffer boat 'Ester' and penned us an update with photos of the OGA fleet gathering in St Malo at the start of the Vieux Greements Rally. She reported that, sadly, the weather was not looking great but some larger boats may venture up the Rance whilst smaller ones enjoy fun and games in the Vauban Basin.

EC Young Gaffers Will and Ed Roberts crewed aboard 'Cygnet of London', the beautiful gaff rigged yawl, built in 1906 by the Burgoyne brothers of Kingston on Thames. 'Cygnet' was stormbound on passage at Cherbourg, having met up with 'Cachalot' skipper and crew in Ramsgate (pictured right) as they returned from Dunkirk. Another well-known member of the EC OGA fleet to arrive in St Malo was 'Rely', having line honours for arriving first. She was built in 1911 by Nobles of Fraserburgh, commissioned as a 'Zulu' pilot vessel without an engine and two lug sails.

EC Area Secretary, Pete took a trailer across with 'Dirty Girty' and Gaffling no. 1 'Linling' while John and Clare Roberts trailed a double stacker with the gaff-rigged Wayfarer 'Papa Little' and Smacks boat 'Papa Stour'. Ken and Carey trailed a Smacks boat, 'H2O' from Harwich while Solent member Steve Mitchell brought his Smacks boat, 'Joy' to St Malo after attending La Semaine du Golfe du Morbihan. Several other boats also arrived including: 'Moon River' (South West), 'Nona Me' (Bristol Channel), 'Alice', 'Little Stint' (Solent), 'Meagan' (Solent), 'Cynthia' (South West), 'Bryony' (South West), 'Susan J' (South West), 'Jan Blank' (Netherlands) with 'Tarka', 'Fox Hound' and 'Syrix' (Channel Islands). Several East Coast and Solent skippers and crews had to resort to taking the Portsmouth to St Malo ferry.

Set against a backdrop of the city's great granite walls and ramparts, tall masts, bowsprits and tanned sails cut a festive profile, imposing their spirit against the grey scudding skies. Rain dominated the first acts but the folk bands, dancers, sea shanty groups, bagpipe players and costumed drummers jointly smothered the gloom spreading a blanket of good cheer. Along the old quay an instant white tented village of stands had been erected. Town workers and an army of gaffer benevolés (volunteers) had toiled to get things ready. Even more 'benevolés' cooked sausage and crêpes, sold wine, beer cider and whatever else popped your fancy. Sizzling grills sent saucisson smoke spiralling in the wind.

A memorable event of the weekend was the big indoor cathedral ceremony, all bells ringing and priests a-fluttering to bless the OGA fleet and join the big crew parade through the streets of St Malo down to the quayside to bless the first timbers of the 'Nouvelle Hermione', a replica boat building project of the Malouain ship that took Jaques Cartier across the Atlantic in 1536 to discover the St Lawrence River and open the path to the foundation of French Canada.

Thanks must go to the French OGA organisers, Anne Metel and Julien with all their willing volunteers, Ben Collins, Solent OGA, for co-ordination and Pete Elliston, East Coast Area Secretary for organising alternative events in St Malo.

Report by Ben Collins and Marion Shirley



Chance meeting in Ramsgate of Old & Young Gaffers: Mark, Steve, Ed & Will



*'Dirty Girty' at St Malo, 2025.
Photo: Philippe Ferrand*



Younger Gaffers at St Malo

Younger Members of the OGA were well represented in St Malo. Eight crewed on 'Rely' and 'Cygnet', crossing the channel from the East Coast and another six arrived by ferry.

Everyone enjoyed the festivities and sampling cidre, biere, vin rouge and moules frites! The weather wasn't too favourable to sailing but during a brief break in the rain, I went out in the smacks boat, 'Papa Stour', for a little meander around the harbour. It was lovely to see the festival and St. Malo from a different angle and enjoy a little peace and quiet away from the hustle and bustle. On Sunday, the sun was shining and many boats went out for a sail including smacks boat, 'Papa Stour', gaff-rigged wayfarer 'Papa Little' and 'Dirty Girty' (with me as a lucky crew member!) It was a perfect way to end the festival; a brilliant sail, a lunch stop in Dinard for delicious sandwiches and sailing in front of the walls of Saint Malo.

Ed & Will Roberts joined 'Cygnet of London' to sail to St Malo. Setting off after work on Friday we caught the train to Faversham, before travelling by road to Ramsgate to catch up with Simon Harding and 'Cygnet' who had a head start. After bumping into the skipper and crew of a returning Dunkirk Little Ship and OGA member 'Cachalot', we boarded 'Cygnet' and swiftly departed. After safely navigating the inner passage we steamed south dodging lobster pots in the dark. Having lost the tide on the corner we put into Dover for the briefest of stops. At dawn we were back out under engine pushing through fog, lobster pots and into the wind. It was a surprisingly lengthy trip round the corner and over to Eastbourne. Once on the dock we followed the skippers motto of 'gear before beer', hastily tidying up and rushing out in search of a pint or two.

With a foul forecast (and prior engagements) on Sunday, boat work and planning were top of the agenda. Fair weather windows were patchy but the chances of crossing the Channel were on the up. As our confidence in the forecast grew, the intended target moved west along the French coast from Fécamp to Cherbourg. Locking out from Eastbourne as Sunday became Monday we set off with sails up immediately, making slow progress into wind and tide. As day came, the wind veered, we passed ships (eventually) and an uneventful crossing became exceedingly welcome as the sun shone. We made Cherbourg in nightfall, navigating a myriad of entry lights.

Another portion of a lay day allowed a restock and catch up on rest as we planned a passage through the Alderney Race following an inside route of the Channel Islands down to St. Malo. The final stretch of the journey saw us benefit from the tidal back eddies out of Cherbourg timing the corner to Alderney Race at slack water, before a storming sail (no power assistance necessary) past Jersey. This gave us the jump start on the distance, gaining hours over our expectations and allowed a stress free afternoon as the tide turned and progress slowed. Nonetheless we made St. Malo by 22:30, with a final quick nap to await the first lock-in of the day 00:34, Thursday 5 June. The only other East Coast Gaffer to have managed the passage across was 'Rely' who had been in the harbour for over a week.

Words: Georgina Tall, Will and Ed Roberts

'Rely', first East Coast boat at St Malo Photo: Marion Shirley



*French OGA HQ, St Malo, 2025.
Photo: Georgina Tall*



*'Rely' crew at St Malo, 2025.
Photo: Georgina Tall*



Norfolk wherry 'Albion', July 2019

On 6 – 7 September, 2025 the East Coast Gaffers are holding an event where the Norfolk Wherry 'Albion' will act as a 'mother ship' for a gathering of small boats to enjoy sailing from Bureside Campsite on the Broads. This article is reproduced from one written in November 2019 for Gaffers Log, the Newsletter of the OGA.

The Norfolk wherry 'Albion' is one of just two survivors of the 300 'black sailed traders' which once sailed the waterways of the Broads. In Edwardian times wherry skippers would scrub out the holds of the boats in summer and take holidaymakers for trips. There I was quietly working out my timings to take the wherry 'Albion' down the River Bure, through Great Yarmouth, across the old estuary of Breydon Water and onward up the River Waveney to Oulton Broad, when a stray comment during a phone call alerted me to the news that the wherry 'Maud' was also making the Breydon crossing on the same tide. With only a couple of days before the planned crossing there was no time to lose to take maximum advantage of this now rare occasion of trading wherries, in the plural, crossing Breydon in company.

In the golden days of wherries, the ebb and flood of the waters around Great Yarmouth would have been the time for dozens of black sailed traders, as they are known, to set off on their journeys heavily laden with cargoes. Back then, as now, a passage through Great Yarmouth and across Breydon Water should not be taken lightly. The times of tides can, of course, be worked out beforehand but only in theory. Other factors to be taken into account are the wind direction and speed, and whether there has been heavy rain inland that has fed into the rivers emptying into Great Yarmouth en-route to the North Sea. The computations are almost endless.

This was to be a poignant trip for me as it was to be the last time I would take 'Albion' across Breydon – a halt to my skippering days being called by insurance age restrictions. For the others it was an exciting and slightly daunting learning experience, being the first time they were taking 'Albion' through this potentially hazardous stretch of water. Also aboard was Jayne Tracey, daughter of Major James Forsyth, who was one of the rescuers of 'Albion' in 1949, when she was a stripped out dumb barge being used by Colmans.

'Maud' set off from Acle Bridge and 'Albion' from her base at Womack Water near Ludham, keeping in contact by mobile phones. What on earth would the old wherry men have made of that? As we sailed towards Yarmouth, we checked our progress against landmarks and slowly 'Albion' came up to 'Maud'. A call to Steve Hiscox as we entered Yarmouth and the run of bridges across the river, brought Mike Page overhead in his 'plane just as we entered Breydon Water. Steve had proved a useful man to know, being volunteer crew on both 'Albion' and 'Maud', as well as a flying compatriot of Mike Page – but then it's not what you know but....etc. Mike and Steve took some wonderful pictures but weren't able to get as low as they would have liked, owing to buffeting cross winds. 'Albion' and 'Maud' sailed on in company across Breydon and up the River Waveney to our separate destinations. Our plan had come together and everyone had broad smiles on their faces.

*Words: Henry Gowman:
past skipper of the Norfolk Wherry 'Albion'
Photos: Norfolk Wherry Trust, Mike Page & Steve Hiscox*



East Coast Annual Race: 5 July, 2025

This year was my first OGA East Coast Race, Saturday 5 July, 2025. I was thrilled to be sailing on the Aldous smack 'Hyacinth' built in 1900. She's a 36ft oyster smack built in Brightlingsea and currently skippered by James Frankish. We left Heybridge at 7:30pm on Friday night and were firmly on the pints at Stone Sailing Club by 9:15pm, having had a lovely sail down the river. The rest of the evening is a bit of a blur but was huge fun.

We headed for breakfast ashore in the morning and the race brief from OGA organiser, Ed racing on 'Dirty Girty'. As the morning went on the wind got up and we decided to head out with a reef in the main, the working jib and the tow staysail. After some confusion over timings on the start we set off downriver. We flew down the river to the turning buoy tacked and were hit by some serious wind. 'Hyacinth' handled it well and we set about the two hour tack back to the Thirslett turning mark. Harry Bowman was a stalwart on the bilge pump below, pumping on every tack as we beat upriver. After a long beat we made it to Thirslett and zoomed back downriver for the second lap.

We rounded the final turning buoy before heading for home and the wind increased. We dropped the tow staysail and rigged a smaller one to stop 'Hyacinth' becoming a submarine. She flew home, crossing the finish line just five hours after we started. We were all absolutely knackered and relieved to get ashore for a beer.

What a great race it was and I'm looking forward to being back next year. Thanks must go to the OGA organisers, Stone Sailing Club for hosting us and of course all the participants for making it such an exhilarating Race.

Words: Ash Faire-Ring

Photo credits:

this page from top, by Sandy Miller

'Hyacinth' with Ash, racing smacks and 'Martha II'

overleaf clockwise from top left, by Seamus Masters

'Yet', 'Transcur', 'Gracie', 'Lahloo', 'Charlotte Ellen' and 'Alberta'

RESULTS

First overall: 'Yet' Essex smack followed by
'Lahloo' Crabber 26
'Droleen II', Classic Bermudan Brittany Class
'Dirty Girty', one-off Modern Racer
'Transcur', Essex smack
'Nesta', Gaff cutter
'Gracie', Essex smack
'Bluebell', Falmouth workboat
'Shamrock', Norfolk Gypsy
'Alberta', Essex smack
'Martha II', Essex smack
'Hyacinth', Essex smack

DNF

'Charlotte Ellen', Essex smack
'Concord of Mersea', Kings of Pin Mill
'Florence', Oyster Catcher 16





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The EC Gaffers Facebook page is updated regularly and there are WhatsApp groups for social 'chat' and events. Events information and booking forms are on the main OGA website:

www.oga.org.uk/areas/east_coast/east_coast_events.html

The Association website provides access to 'East Coast Gaffers Online': Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and EASTCOASTER. All Newsletters from 1994 may be downloaded to print at home

www.oga.org.uk/areas/east_coast/east_coast_online.html

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If you and/or another family Member in your household has an email address and would like to receive the monthly mailings, or you have changed your email address, please contact Colin Stroud, Association Secretary to confirm your details.

Contact Colin by email: secretary@oga.org.uk



*Above: Swallows and Amazons, 2025
Photo: Steve Mitchell*

*Below: Gaffers gather in St Malo, 2025.
Photo: Philippe Ferrand*

