



Back At The Swale, *Bird of Dawning* Lives

Racing the Swale Smack and Sailing Barge Match, sponsored each summer by the Kentish Sailing Association, a sprightly younger cousin joins the stackies, stumpies, barges, smacks, bawleys, Whitstable oyster yawls, Humber keels, Itchen ferries, and other wizened workhorse relics. It's *Bird of Dawning*, a spry 30-foot wooden yacht, turning 88 years old come July, dancing along this sandy edge of the English Channel with our friend Julian Mannering at the helm.

We say that *Bird of Dawning* shares a common pedigree with those brawny, bygone wooden River Thames work boats; bygone thanks to the advent of steel.

In 1880 steel officially nudged wood aside with Argentina's *Almirante Brown*, the first all-steel battleship. By the end of the WWI, the switch was on on the River Thames. After centuries of building and maintaining the thousands of sturdy, wooden barges serving the deep draft ships confined to the river's thalweg, its deep middle, the trade traded oak for carbon steel.

"And the thing is that in the 1930s," says Mannering, "a lot of these boatbuilders were finding that there was no more demand for barges and smacks made of wood. They had their skills, their knowledge of ships and ship shape and rigs, and said, 'Well, we've got a yachting community of people in London wanting to get afloat. Why don't we build smack and barge yachts?' So they started building boats, a little bit smaller than the originals, with a cutaway bow for speed, and fitted them out with galleys and bunks."

This is age in which *Bird of Dawning* was launched at Shuttlewood's Boatyard on the River Roach in July of 1937.

Not so old a boat. At the Swale Match there are several sailing barges past the century mark. Still, the day came when *Bird of Dawning* was due for a serious rehabbing.

"Time inevitably takes its toll and considerable work had to be carried out this winter on her decks, covering boards, stem and stern to bring her back to strength," says Mannering. Tie bars were fitted under the side decks. Some 500 bronze screws employed to refasten her original decks which were then re-caulked with oakum and payed with a locally-made pitch.

"The materials before the war were



undoubtedly hugely superior to anything you could get hold of after the war. The iron fastenings had all gone, but the wood was as good as new. It is extraordinary. The covering board was English oak, and that had to be replaced. But the hardwoods from Russia and America—they're almost indestructible. The pine still feels as good as new. And the decks were made of Siberian Larch. When we took all the paint off, there was not a sign of rot anywhere.

The work was carried out at Hollowshore Moorings in Faversham, Kent by Dan Tester and Nick Relf. Hats off to both who between them did a brilliant job finding solutions for tricky problems wherever they were encountered. As Mannering noted, they truly breathed new life into an old ship. "She looks like a new vessel now and is fit and ready for many more years sailing."

With *Bird of Dawning* back in commission, Julian and Amanda Mannering are game for some East Coast cruising, a summer cruise to the near continent, and of course the Swale Match in July. Last time around Mannering's took third place honors and the Sand End Trophy in the Large Gaffers Over 25 Feet class. Tally ho!

A warm-up drill: Take a chill pill on varnishing.

March Madness. Sunny days. How cool is that! It's nearly fitting out time, and boaters can't wait to launch. But! If you're thinking of sneaking in some varnishing; thinking oh cool temps mean it'll just take longer to cure—chill out. Standard dry times for Epifanes Clear Varnish are taken at 68°F and 65% humidity. With temps too low, drying and hardening take longer and dubious results may occur. The varnish will be thicker and harder to apply. And you'll wind up using more than you would in optimal conditions. So if working conditions are poor, don't rush it. Better to do it right than overnight. Be cool. Await the warmth of the sun. Then let it flow.



P.S. Can't wait? Our Epifanes Easy-Flow can give you an edge on flow and saturation with one-part varnishes, paints, and primers on hotter or colder days. Also good on its own to prevent rust on steel and as an impregnating oil on wood.

Mudlarks on the River Thames

We wiled away the winter messing about in Thames River boats and on the lookout for mudlarks along the tidal flats between high

and low water. Oddly, mudlarks are not birds but humans who have for centuries searched the mud for anything of value. Over time, they have turned up Roman coins, Saxon knives, medieval jewelry, Victorian buttons, pottery shards—the list is long. In April, this muddy pastime's history and its archeological contributions are celebrated in [Secrets of the Thames](#), an exhibit at the London Museum Docklands featuring 350+ mudlarked objects from London's intertidal lost and found. Something to keep in mind, if you're in the neighborhood. And oh, to be in England now that April 's there.



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