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NEWSLETTER OF THE KENTISH SAIL ASSOCIATION



Swale Match Report 2025

The 52nd Swale Smack & Sailing Barge Match, organised by the Kentish Sail Association, took place this year on Saturday 2 August. For one day the Swale showcases a wonderful collection of Thames barges, Essex smacks, other traditional sailing craft as well as vintage motor vessels. The usual course was followed this year: out towards the wind farm and then into Herne Bay before sailing back via the Whitstable Street buoy to Hartly Ferry. As usual the fleet provided a great spectacle for those on the water and others who watched from the shore.

Niagara is a regular visitor from Hoo on the Medway. Her restoration was completed in 2012 and since then she has been one of the most regular attendees at barge matches. (Photo: Seamus Masters)

The weather needs to be kind to all these old vessels, and after what had been a windy summer, the race was blessed with gentle breezes. The fleet awoke to a brisk west-nor'westerly but it was beginning to die away, and by the time the barges set off at 8.40am it was blowing a steady Force 3-4. Indeed, later in the morning a clutch of craft found themselves in the doldrums out by the – ironic it must be said – wind farm.

The turnout was perhaps a little disappointing this year. No barges from

Faversham took part and only a handful of barges and smacks came from further afield. But it was good to see our regulars from the Medway, the barges *Marjorie* and *Niagara* and the little *Seagull II* attended, it being one of her first outings. The regulars in the smack class, *Yet*, *Emeline* and *ADC*, came as usual and *Bonita* and *Bird of Dawning* were amongst the local gaffers; the *Memory 19 Greensleeves*, has been a regular visitor from Essex for many years and her owner Roy Hart came this time with a new trophy to be presented to the youngest skipper to complete the race. Also on the start line was the recently rebuilt gaffer *Mayhi* from Faversham Creek, a speedy skimming dish built by apprentices at the Purifier Building under the guidance of Simon Grillet.

Despite the becalming of a few vessels the fleet sailed round the 22-mile course in quick time. The barge *Edme* and smack *Yet* took line honours in their classes; *Mayhi* won the large gaffers class, with the *Crabber 24*, *Gloria*, first in the gaffers under 25ft. The staysail class was won by *Niagara* and the slow coastal barges class by *Will*, a newcomer to the Swale. The barge *Pudge* had a magnificent start, crossing the line one second after the gun, but a broken topmast rather spoilt the day. The classic bermudan class was won by *Alligin of Oare* which just pipped *Tivoli* on corrected time.

It's always a pleasure to welcome the motor barges and *Selby Ellen*, the big Humber barge, won both the Baltic Cup for being first to steam around the course, and also the Eastling Cup for best turned-out vessel. And the Dutch barges added yet further variety to the river on race day.



The beautiful yawl *Bonita* was built more than 130 years ago at Arnside on the Kent estuary in Cumbria.
(Photo: Seamus Masters)

The prize-giving, the music and the Goachers beer all contributed to a party atmosphere in the Tester yard in the early evening, but soon the crews made their way down the creek while there was still water, and that corner of the marsh which is Hollowshore returned to its quiet and peaceful atmosphere for another year.

☀ For information on the Kentish sail Association visit: www.kentishsail.org

Skippers of Tomorrow

In September the Kentish Sail Association organised and funded a day's charter on the sailing barge *Mirosa* for young trainee skippers. Mick Nolan, who runs the training scheme reports on the day spent on the Swale.

“The Thames Sailing Barge Trust have been training barge crews since 1948. In 2016, as part of the Thames sailing barge *Pudge* Heritage Lottery Fund restoration project, the Barge Trust launched an ambitious scheme to recruit ten new trainees each year, in an attempt to plug the shortfall of skilled

crew. It's a big commitment for the Trust and the individuals. Since 2016, the Trust has developed six new skippers and fourteen new mates. We have a diverse group of trainees, and it's great to see people from all walks of life progress to become highly valued crew members. An unexpected bonus of the training scheme is that the Trust has also supported fourteen trainees into full-time employment within the maritime sector.

The Thames sailing barge community is very close-knit and survives mainly due to the unwavering passion of those who work tirelessly to keep the barges sailing. There are an impressive twenty-four barges willing to take trainees aboard, and it is encouraged that a trainee sails on as many different barges with as many different skippers as possible. They all have slightly different ideas and life experiences, and they are more than willing to share them.

In September, the trainees were lucky enough to be invited to sail aboard the

engineless *Mirosa*, owned and skippered by Peter Dodds for the best part of half a century. Peter was also joined by fellow barge Masters Geoff 'Frog' Ingle and Steve Mallet. The trio split the group into three and talked about some of the many lessons they have learnt over the years.

The day was spent tacking up the narrow channel of the East Swale, with each of the trainees having a go at the wheel under the ever-watchful eye of her regular crew.

Mirosa is a very handy barge that responds well to every puff. This can contrast with some of the other barges, which are much more sedate in their responses. The trainees gained valuable knowledge and enjoyed listening to a lifetime of anecdotes from some of the most experienced skippers in the fleet.

We are grateful to the Kentish Sail Association for funding the day and it's a relationship we hope to build on in the coming years, as we continue to invest in the skippers of tomorrow. 🙏

The 2026 Swale Match

Will be held on Saturday 25 July 2026. To see the estuary full of such an array of historic craft is to witness a genuinely unique event on the East Coast.

For more details contact the Match Secretary, Alan Gimes at:
SwaleMatchSec@outlook.com

Oare Frost

Winter weather permitting, this year's Oare Frost will take place on Saturday 4th January. The plan is for small craft to set off from Hollowshore at 11.30am and take the flood up to the head of Oare Creek. High tide is at 13.00hrs. There'll be time for a pint or two in the Three Mariners before taking the ebb back down the creek. Those who'd like to come by foot will be more than welcome.

Calendars

The beautiful 2026 KSA calendar is now available. It can be bought at the Faversham Information Centre, or the Fleur de Lis bookshop. It's priced at the very reasonable price of £8.00 and will bring the sparkle of summer seas into your house during these grey winter months.

Membership fees

It's that time of the year again when annual membership fees are due. Members will hear from our Membership Secretary, Olivia Tulloch, with details shortly. Anyone wishing to join for the first time, or indeed reinstate a lapsed membership, can contact Olivia at: geedels@gmail.com

Every membership really helps to maintain in a small way the traditional craft that sail these Kentish waters.

Craft of the Creek: *Mayhi*

The KSA were delighted to see the *Mayhi* take part in this year's Swale Match. *Mayhi* was built in Ramsgate before the First World War, apparently in accordance with Victorian rating rules for racing vessels established by the Royal Yacht Association. The purpose of the rule was to enable yachts of different sizes to race together fairly. *Mayhi* was thus built with a shallow draft, a centreboard and a broad beam enabling a large sail area for optimal racing performance. She's 27ft overall on a waterline length of 21ft and 8ft beam.

Beyond this, much of her history was lost until she became a Faversham vessel at the end of the last century. We know that by 2010 she had fallen on hard times at her Standard Quay mooring; she was no longer seaworthy and her original shape was badly distorted. Her owner at that time, Eldon Hinchcliff, can be credited with a decision that changed her fortunes, for he donated her in 2010 for a full rebuild through Simon Grillet's shipwrights training programme. The work for this major project mostly took place in



***Mayhi* sailing past Shellness during July's Swale Match.**
Photo: Seamus Masters)

the Purifier Building, led by Simon and apprentice Bert Pengelly and with the finishing touches done at the Iron Wharf.

Launched in 2022, today *Mayhi* is beautifully and traditionally reconstructed from a wide array of different timbers: oak frames, Sitka spruce for the spars, stringers and beam shelves of Oregon pine, planking of iroko and deck beams of spruce, for lightness. She is also said to have three thousand hand-tapped rivets! Simon did make some concessions to the original design, for example using a modern technique when constructing the cabin top by sheathing fibreglass with cedar planking.

The effort has paid off. Not only did *Mayhi* win her class in this year's Swale Match, she also scooped up the Concours d'Elegance trophy, testimony to the beautiful workmanship and her original design. We do not know if she took part in earlier Swale matches, and if so, how many. If any of our members know any more of her history, particularly in relation to the Swale Match we would be delighted to know. Our dear Lena Reekie would no doubt have been able to tell us much more.

Two Crank Craft

Erratum. In the last issue of *On the Mud* we mentioned that one of Pollock's concrete barges, the *Molliette* was still in use as a pontoon at Hoo. Our eagle-eyed member, Dick Holness, has pointed out that she actually lies on the bed of the Blackwater and the wreck is clearly marked on charts just south of Mersea Island. She was the clubhouse for the West Mersea Yacht Club for a spell in the 1930s and then used for target practise by the US Air Force in 1943. There is possibly more than you'll ever need to know about concrete ships at www.thecretefleet.com. Additionally, there is a Pathé News clip on YouTube titled *Concrete Boat* which shows *Molliette* being launched into Faversham Creek in 1918.