

The Cargo Carrying Thames Barge Under Sail – Our Vision, Our Philosophy. From the Trustees of “Sea-Change”.

Experience has shown that young people growing up in our society pass through turbulent years. During this time they face a number of challenges:

1. The challenge of choosing a career often coupled with a change of location away from home.
2. The challenge of the transferring and application of existing skills/knowledge and the acquisition of new skills/knowledge.
3. The challenge of greater independence and spending power; greater range of potential interests, involving choice and the exercise of discretion.
4. The challenge of meeting new people of the same age and of all ages in different societal roles.
5. The challenge of new loyalties, different hours, different activities, changed relationships, changed disciplines.

The World into which this young person is entering is also constantly changing and that rate of change is speeding up. This World bristles with the challenge of social adjustment, as well as the applications of new techniques and new skills and the complexities of increasingly large-scale global organisations. The answer has to be education. ⁽¹⁾

In order to educate people there have to be clear objectives. There has to be a philosophy. There has to be a shared vision. There also has to be a realisation that learning is a lifelong adventure. Most people are ‘practical’ people. They prefer to overcome their problems by undergoing them. The truth of the matter is that, despite protestations, no civilised community can afford to ignore the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of the past. Nor can it afford to ignore the character and personality of its people. However, with respect to the latter there is still much to learn as due to the lack of

investment, there is a dearth of tried and accepted measure in the realm of practice. How do you develop the character and personality of young people?
(2)

'Pioneers' have carried out much notable work in this regard, with adventure at the heart of it – most notably Kurt Hahn at Gordonstoun School, the Outward Bound movement and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, and the Ocean Youth Club and Sail Training Association have also long regarded the sea as the means for education and learning, but these are in the minority. The mainstream has always aimed at producing young people with the necessary pieces of paper that will result in gainful employment. The home and the church were expected to provide the rest. One of the major challenges that we face today is that in our government's desire for accountability only those human attributes that lend themselves to the 'ticking of boxes' and the application of behavioural psychology come to the fore. Those attributes that cannot be easily measured and yet are fundamental to human growth and happiness are unfortunately forgotten. In other words the answer lies in what has become termed 'Experiential Education' – the means of learning through the cycle of direct experience followed by guided reflection. (3)

One of the ways of achieving this is to bring together multi-disciplinary teams – social workers, teachers, doctors, nurses, police, community workers etc. and make decisions on the basis of what is needed and what is in the best interests of the person. But of course, the young person must always be at the heart of this process; to be 'done with', not 'done unto'.

We now come to the specifics of the creation of a Thames Sailing Barge to carry cargo under sail in the 21st century. This barge will provide a vocational opportunity, which will test young people's endurance, courage, and sense of responsibility and initiative. The programme, which they will undertake is based on a series of challenges which in their acceptance demand concentration of mind, body and spirit. The activities are designed so that each young person can respond in accordance with his or her capacity and,

by sustained effort under guidance and encouragement, meet the challenge of bettering their own performance. Trevelyan says *“without the instinct of adventure in young men (and women), any nation, however enlightened, any state, however well ordered, must wilt and wither”*. ⁽⁴⁾ If this is true it should become a duty to give suitable expression to this instinct in our young people and foster and develop it along with its associated qualities of courage and enterprise. What matters is that the boy and girl discover themselves and something of their potential, and that a deep satisfaction comes of successful achievement. It is not so much as winning against the sea as winning against oneself. In other words, training under sail offers an educational experience, which affects the whole texture of the boy or girl’s personality. Such a young person goes back to the wider world fitter and more ready to cope with day to day problems – because he or she is not quite the same person as he or she was when they commenced their time on the barge. He or she will go back, possessing some knowledge and skill about seamanship; but that will be the least of it. ⁽⁵⁾

It would be to misrepresent the barge experience completely if it were thought that the emphasis would be placed entirely on encouraging and developing the most robust human qualities to the exclusion of all else. It is true that physical activity in some form or other is a large part of the programme. Participants must be reasonably fit, must abide by the rules and regulations for their own safety and those of others, and must (maybe) fight against fatigue or weakness. However, apart from the fact that a measure of physical fitness is necessary for the full expression of the personality, the essential challenge involves the young person’s physical resources only indirectly: the real battleground is in the realm of the spirit.

It is a large claim to make that a voyage of three days; one month or three months can affect a person’s character. There is no doubt that the longer the time spent on the barge (within reason) the more worthwhile the experience will be. However, if a working sailing barge is to gain recognition, a variety of opportunities will have to be offered which will suit the training requirements of young people in colleges, industry and commerce, and most importantly from

areas of social deprivation. The length of time spent on the barge will no doubt reflect the demand by those willing to pay. And they must pay for the working barge has to be self-financing if it is to make a significant long-term contribution.

A sailing ship---any kind of sailing ship---will not tolerate sloppy-mindedness. It is a challenge. The function of the proposed cargo carrying sailing barge is to provide adventure and soul searching experiences for young people---to provide a broadening influence for them, to give them a jolt in life, to let them discover for themselves the inner strength which can arise from hard but successful voyaging which is in part achieved by themselves.

Much is made of the age of technology, but in some ways technology is an insidious thing. There has been a tendency in recent times to concentrate on the 'measurable' and the problems of computers to the neglect of the problems of men and women. A student of human nature soon realises that any activity, which is too easy or too comfortable defeats its object. The participant must return feeling that he or she has been tested---preferably mentally as well as physically---and has achieved something which, if not very exceptional, is at least distinctly unusual. Technology has a tendency to make life appear deceptively easy. It is a profound truth that there is nothing surer than that, sooner or later, the world won't provide anything that isn't earned. In a sailing ship, a young person comes to realise something of that. The furling and un-furling of sails, the loading and discharge of cargo, the working of the tides. The young person learns quickly to harness nature and not work against it. He or she becomes part of the environment not apart from it. Some would say that this wholeness with nature is divine and has the power to change him or her forever. ⁽⁶⁾

The joys of working cargo---the sense of contribution predicated on doing a useful job, which serves the larger community cannot be underestimated. Gravel from the Colne to London to help in the building trade; Beer from the brewery to the consumer; Rubbish to the recycling plant. All of this enhances the environment and the greater whole.

In a sailing vessel the crew are fully involved in making it 'go'. They have a sense of achievement when they arrive at their destination, which is largely absent when crewing a powered craft. They are thus in the right place at the right time. Your safety and the safety of your shipmates depend on eternal vigilance---this is indeed good training for the mind, body and spirit. There is plenty of labour involved in a working barge!

Richard and Hilary [The Captain and Mate of our barge] have ideas, they have something worthwhile to give and they know how to give it. They have that quality of personality, which enables them to get alongside each young person so that he or she may be helped to solve their problems in their own particular way. Under such conditions every minute of the trip can be an educative experience. Young people must have a stable and secure base from which to adventure and this is provided for by disciplined living to the extent of a strict regime of physical exercise and sufficient food and hours of sleep. The physical and psychological benefits of disciplined living are fundamental to any measure of success achieved but it is the spirit, which raises us to the highest level. As Masefield says:

*"I must down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea's face and a grey dawn breaking."*

The poet was not only thinking of the challenge to the spirit of adventure in mankind but also of the affect of quiet contact with Nature upon Human achievement and quality. To him this contact had a refining and strengthening influence. Pericles, although written in the sexist language of the time, gave one of the best descriptions of an educated people, in speaking of the Athenians of his day:

"We are lovers of the beautiful yet simple in our tasks: We cultivate the mind without loss of manliness".

... This is our vision of the cargo carrying Thames Barge under sail!

Notes Concerning the above [delineated in the text by superscript in bold]:

NOTE (1) Although somewhat dated the following highly respected authors strongly support the above:

ERIKSON, E. (1968). *Identity, youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.

ERIKSON, E. (1963). *Childhood and Society (2nd Ed)*. New York: Norton.

ETZIONI, A. (1997). *The new golden rule: Community and morality in a democratic society*. New York: Basic Books.

GALBRAITH, J.K. (1996). *The good society: The humane agenda*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

[For a more recent exposition of psychology, sociology, brain science, philosophy and economics leading to the same conclusion see:

LAYARD, R. (2005). *Happiness: Lessons from a new Science*. Penguin Books: London.]

In addition these tenets are supported by the literature surrounding Family Therapy. See, for example, the seminal work by:

CARTER, B and MCGOLDRICK, M. [Eds] (2004). *The Expanded Family Life Cycle: Individual, Family and Social Perspectives. (3rd Ed.)*. Allyn & Bacon.

NOTE (2) See, for example:

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York: Macmillan.

NOTE (3) See:

ROGOFF, B. (1993). Children's guided participation and participatory appropriation in socio-cultural activity. In R. Wozniak & K. Fisher [Eds]. *Development in context: Acting and thinking in specific environments* (pp. 121-153). Hillsdale, NJ. Erlbaum.

NOTE (4) This is a quotation taken from a speech made by George Trevelyan, the noted English Historian, and Master of Trinity College, Cambridge at the launch of the ketch the *Garibaldi* at Aberdovey for *Outward Bound* in 1943.

NOTE (5) See:

WALSH, V. & COLLINS, G.L. (1976). *The exploration of the Outward Bound process*. Denver, CO: Colorado Outward Bound School.

NOTE (6) For an expansion of this point see:

BANKS, F. (1994). *Teaching Technology*. Routledge.