

The View from the Wheel

Sea-Change Sailing Trust Annual Report 2019

By Richard Titchener

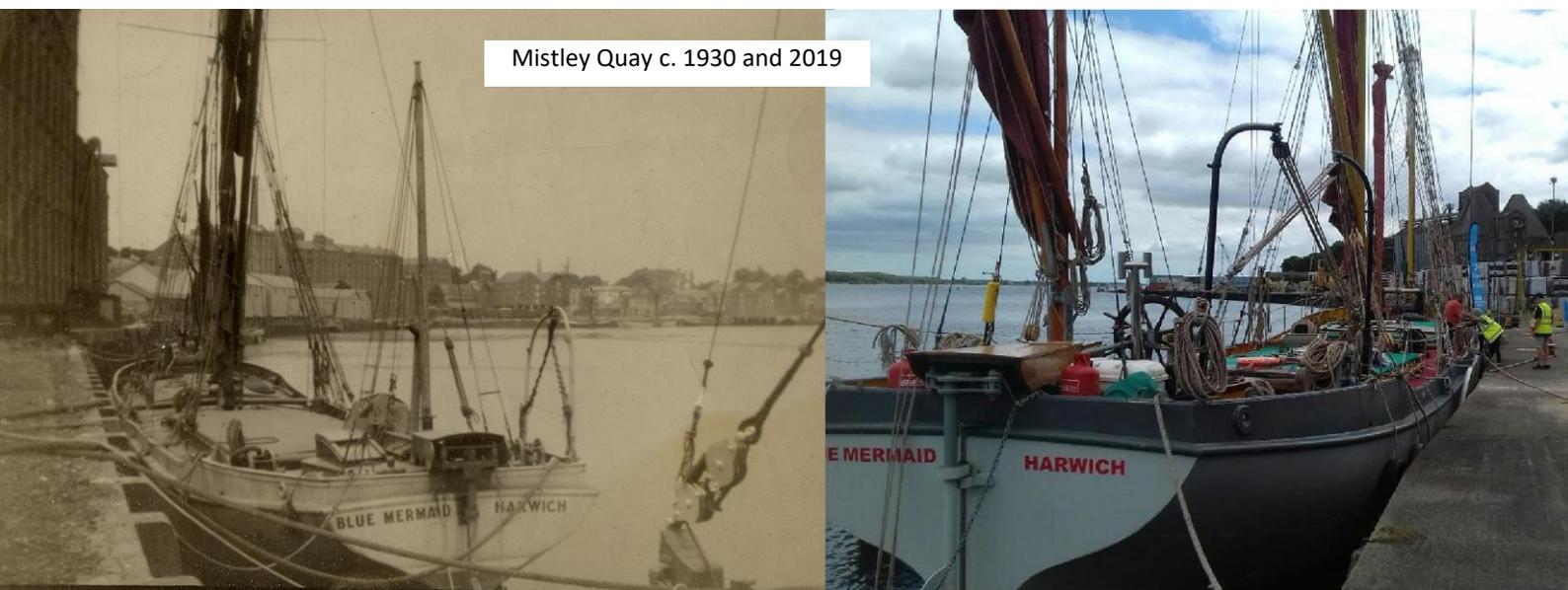
Blue Mermaid - The First Season



In April 2019 the new barge towed away from Downs Road Boatyard for the first time to have the compass swung and undertake sea trials. Onlookers would have wondered at the several slow circles off the Basin while Peter Garrod worked his magic on the beautiful compass he has refurbished for us. He then presented the deviation card and climbed aboard the tug to return ashore. Under the lee of Millbeach in the lightest of easterly breezes the sails were set, and the barge lent ever so gently on her leeboard and came alive. This brought to fruition the work of the appeal committee under Rear-Admiral David Snelson, with the help of many others.

The *Blue Mermaid* is a replica of the last Thames barge built, of the same name and of steel at Mistley in 1930 and lost in the Second World War to a magnetic mine. The loss is commemorated on the Tower Hill Merchant Navy Memorial. Launched in May 2016 at Polruan in Cornwall and fitted out by TS Rigging at Maldon, she is built engineless to cargo ship rules with the intention of carrying cargo and trainees. she entered service during May 2019 under the General Exemption for Thames Barges carrying up to twelve passengers, while work continued to obtain a load line with MCA Colchester Marine Office.

The first charter was to Mistley Quay where special permission enabled *Blue Mermaid* to lay on the quay where the original barge had operated and near the yard where she was built. The visit was in support of the new Stour Blue Pass Trust for youth sailing on the river, so the voyage crew for the passage from Maldon was a group of young people from the Trust and the barge was then used to host a reception for seventy people to celebrate its formation. This was a wonderful start to the season, enabling the new barge to link with her heritage.



Sea-Change is an educational charity that exists to develop young lives and those of vulnerable adults through positive shared endeavour using the vehicle of traditional sailing. The youngest we work with are aged seven and there is no upper age limit for our work with Dementia Adventure. We believe in the benefits of working in harmony with nature through engineless

sail and oar providing the kind of basic experience it is possible to miss these days in entering a maritime career.

Since 2014 Sea-Change has been a member of the Shipshape Heritage Training Partnership run by National Historic Ships and is now in the final year of the second two-year programme. By 2020 this Lottery Heritage Fund project will have given 18 young people twelve months of training in maintenance and operation of heritage vessels, many run by members of the Association of Sail Training Organisations, and 8 curatorial trainees the same but with an emphasis on conservation techniques.

Our first trainee became a rigger with TS Rigging and has rigged the *Blue Mermaid* five years on. The second benefitted from a Trinity House ASTO bursary to obtain a Yachtmaster Certificate and is now studying for OOW while working for Robin Knox-Johnston. Earlier this year our third trainee was the first of the group to find a job and is a maintenance technician with the Royal Yacht Britannia. Our last trainee joined us in February 2020. It is a fantastic scheme and it is hoped to give it a sustainable future.

Young people who have enjoyed their time aboard are encouraged to stay involved in our Youth Sailing Scheme. In August 2019 three weeks were devoted to this. One aspect is being mature enough to work with other young people and for the first three days we also welcomed aboard four young people and staff from Inclusion Ventures at Jaywick. Their planned trip the previous weekend had been postponed because of gales so they were fitted in. Jaywick regularly scores the highest or among the highest on government deprivation indices in the UK and is a target area for our trustees. For one aged fourteen it was the first time he had left the village and he was extremely anxious. After two nights and departing in Suffolk he was asking if he could come again.

This year one young person now 18 who has sailed with us since 13 commenced a three-year apprenticeship in boatbuilding and the charity funded him to do a Day Skipper Theory Course completed successfully. With *Blue Mermaid* we are examining ways of developing this approach into a scholarship scheme based around extended experience aboard.

High points in the season were five-day charters for Gravesend Sea Cadets with Ian Dunkley and sixth formers from London Nautical School with James Bullar. In June the Port of London Authority sent their Boatmaster apprentices aboard for the passage from Maldon to Gravesend prior to the Thames Match (where the PLA sent a crew for the event). They were supplemented by two from City Cruises and trainer Simon Jinks came as well. At the prizegiving when asked by Michael Everard how the trip round had been, one of the apprentices told him it had been brilliant at using in practice some of the skills they had been lectured on but which are used infrequently on the Thames, and she said how great it had been to do it all without turning on an engine!

There is a lack of new Sailing Barge Masters as the age profile increases and a great deal of work is being done by the associations and charities involved to address this. The Sailing Barge Master qualification is an MCA certificate examined by a panel of experienced barge skippers. Given the pattern of work within the sector it is often difficult for new people to obtain actual sailing experience, and this is essential to be able to be examined. We were delighted when an application to Trinity House resulted in a grant to assist with a course designed to deliver this kind of experience to aspiring mates and skippers.

Oliver Evans joined *Blue Mermaid* as Mate in March and is seen in the photo below on the left.



During 2019 Richard Robinson became a trustee. Richard has sailed with the charity as a mate since its early days and sponsored the new barge boat. Treasurer Peter Maynard suffered a stroke towards the end of the year and will be standing down from trusteeship in 2020. Peter has been a stalwart supporter and will be much missed.

After the success of the capital appeal, the entering of the barge into service reminded us how indebted we are to the continuing support of trusts, groups and individuals for our clients to sail with us. Thank you also to Maldon Little Ship Club whose logo appears in the topsail and for being Commodore's charity.

2019 was also notable for other successes. In May the Society for Sailing Barge Research presented Sea-Change with the Colindell Award for services to Thames barges for commissioning *Blue Mermaid*. The season ended with a fantastic first place in the Colne Race to be defended next year. Thanks to Den Phillips for the photo heading this report. As the accounts are being finalised the barge has been nominated best traditional replica in the forthcoming Classic Boat Awards.

Plans for 2020 are taking shape with increasing charitable work and entry in several barge matches, while it is expected the loadline arrives in time to load cargo this season.