

Paglesham Built

George Pattison

Article on *Hope* and other boats from *About Boats* (1961)

Sometimes when the class are reading or the drudgery of marking demands relief, I think of her, in the sun or in the rain, afloat or on the shining mud amongst the other boats between Paglesham Creek and Shuttlewoods big shed, which was put up after the great gale of 1881 had blown down its predecessor. This is a corner of Essex maritime history that still keeps something of the character all these creeks and yards must have had before the motor car and the diesel train and the outboard runabout appeared.

Alongside the shed lie the remains of the old *Runwell*, built in 1834. In this same shed, Frank Shuttlewood's father began as an apprentice, and here built in 1903 the barge *Ethel Ada*. She was just one foot shorter than the shed, so it must have been a short squeeze. She was the last Paglesham-built cargo barge.

Frank's own boat is called *Memory*, and there are several others rather like her, open, clinker built, bluff bows, fine underwater sections forward, but fairly flat floored for the rest of their length. Our *Hope* is the latest of the fleet. She is 16ft long with 6ft 6in beam, a gunter rigged sloop with heavy iron centre plate. Her timbers are all mahogany on American elm, with oak stem and stern posts, pine thwart, and parana pine stern seats. The spars are grown solid spruce. The lower edge of the stretcher which supports the stern seat is always carved in a butterfly shaving which has been the yard's trade mark for at least fifty years. The names are carved on the transoms, and the rudders are no deeper than the keels, but long and shallow like those of sailing barges. A special peculiarity is the doubling on each garboard strake which, with a slight rocker given to the keel, enables the boats to be pushed easily across the mud. Single-handed they can be moved up or down hill, and a mud berth is reached at all states of the tide. except when at very low water the stony margin deters one from the experiment.

All these features give the boat character, and some of them clearly grow from the experience of centuries around the Essex estuaries. Hope and her sisters have that fitness for purpose, the beauty of traditional and evolved local design which one recognises in the building of farm wagons and the thatching of houses. "Design" is really the wrong word for these boats are built to eye on a half midship mould. There is no one man with a pencil and a drawing board and a slide rule and another who must follow his instructions, forcing the materials to conform, and an accountant watching both of them. There is only Frank in the big shed, littered with spars and gear, glancing along a plank, working with the wood, easing a little there, forcing a little here. He knows the traditions of his craft as it has been practiced along this coast for generations, as his father learned it in the days when builders like the great Shruballs of Ipswich and Greenwich were setting the pace. When Frank looks at the lines of his boats as they come along he must be seeing not only the timber, its grain and its nature, and not only the picture of the hull as he intends her to be, but the seas and the tides and the winds which are her element, for he knows these too as he knows his trade and keeps his hand in by sailing most Sundays in the local races. There is no club at Paglesham, but then you would not expect one in a village where this notice can appear on the boat shed:

Owing to next Saturday being the Village Fete there will be no no small boat racing but a race will be held on Sunday.

The Produce Association will provide a race officer.