

Race at Paglesham on 16th September 1961
Boatshed to Mill Creek buoy and back
Wind galeforce - westerly
Start at 3:pm

The Last Race

The smoke-filled "Public" of the Plough and Sail
is crowded with "the Brethren", this dark Sunday morn
of late October as we sup our ale, in little groups
we stand around; - the voices rise and fall -
"Memory's cried off", Bill says, "his bottom's foul",
"Is that his reason?", "Jack says we call it off"
"It's been a lousy season".

From round the paneled walls the ships of yesteryear
Listened, watch perchance suppress a tear for times long past,
Our eloquence, our wit; our deep contention,
Novel development, ingenious invention,
Do not impress; "Have done" they seemingly implore,
"You talk too much, we've heard it all before".

Mine host calls "time"! The issue's undecided,
We straggle out, un-hurrying to the lane
Full hard the wind and scurrying clouds still hurry
Across the watery sun that shines in vain.

Now on the hard - like gagging gees assemble
The dinghy racers, - Paglesham's "ghost club",
Sans Commodores, Race Officers, Committees,
Adjudicators, Treasurers- or Subs.

For, gentle reader, you must be aware
This village - which e'en spurns a Parish Council,
Nurtures the last true Englishmen
Who care naught for the Bureaucrat, the High Official,
Ucase, Decree or legalistic snare!
Heirs of Watt Tyler and John Bull!
Decision taking must be shared by all!!

Time moves slower, Not for these the craze
Of fickle fashion whiz-kids of insolent gorge,
They're not yet sure they accept the "Act of Union",
Even the race flag's still the Cross of George.

Up spake King Varcoe - Lord of Handicappers,
"Wind over tide will make your launching grim,
Wind's getting worse, so when the flood's abated
Conditions, I fear, make your chances slim".
It's the very last race of the season
And twice postponed, sadly some move away,
Still keen, some shuffle undecided,
For many have come miles to race today.

Then out speaks Bunny Richards - "Coral's" master,

"A ducking is the worst - and that's no care,
We will set forth - a challenge to disaster,
Come lads. Who'll follow a single dare?"

So Coral, Heron, Swan and Kraa make ready,
Their prowess and their seamanship to match,
Surging excitement tempered by judgment steady,
Watchful each crew, advantage quick to snatch.

Now near the "line", seeking out the best station,
Foaming confusion, wind-swept pitch and toss,
Tense and tight-lipped they're waiting the gun,
(Though - truth to tell - we've a preoccupation
Not to capsize 'ere the race has begun).

At last through the turmoil of breakers and tempest,
Comes the faint boom of Brown Bess from the shore,
Heron's away! fairly riding the wave crest,
Kraa! Coral! then Swan! - give a cheer for these four.

Heron's still leading - close hauled on starboard,
She'll take the best water by Wakering Creek,
Cunning old Ulysses! Coral is closing her,
Straining the windward position to keep.

But - woe to the brave - in a welter of spindrift
That treacherous spit there is hidden from view,
"Heron's stuck on the putty. She's over, they've bought it",
One less to compete, now we'll chivvy those two.

Thus I shout to the skipper, for we all know our chances
Of winning depend on our windward attack
For once running free, our small size makes it certain
They'll surely outsail us before we get back.

So about and about, as we press her to windward,
Swan and Coral by-passed, we are well in the lead.
Soaking wet, and both bailing, but happy as schoolboys
We'd hate to have missed this, it's living indeed.

Oh! Beware of conceit and of pride overweening,
Upon the port tack, Kraa is struck by a squall!
Harold luffs-up to save her, the halyard has parted!
Down comes the mainsail, the gaff, boom and all!

Oh deep consternation! Woe! Alas our chances!
This is a blow which is hard to survive!
"Quick, old lad - go to the shallows, jump out and keep bailing,
Whilst I clear the mess and new halyard contrive".

So with a will, in less time than I've taken
To pen these crude lines, we are back in the race,
To catch Coral, who's leading, with Swan closely after,
There's still just a chance if we keep up this pace!

Then, ah, luckless Coral, she's started a plank!

She's obliged to heave-to and bale out by the bank.
When at last into Millcreek - we're rounding the buoy!
First Swan, second Kraa, we're still in, what joy!

So we goose-wing our foresail, and ease off the mainsheet,
Shift our weight aft, see she's up on a plane!
Helped by the ebb which by now is well started,
Running for home with the speed of a train.

Relax! Swan's ahead like a bird on the wing,
Running free with her much bigger canvas outspread,
"With some luck we'll be second", so says my good skipper.
The race to the swiftest! The race is the thing!

On high, clouds have lifted, breaks out the bright sun,
Salt encrusted, we're drying out, limbs all benumb,
Time to take stock of our gear's wear and tear,
"Never taken such a pasting before", I declare.

Nearly home now. wind's still force 6, gusting 7,
There's the big shed, just a mile to go!
"Never before did I see", quoth old Harold,
"dinghy mast bending to shape like a bow".

Scarce had he uttered, when comes fearful crash,
Strikes our good Kraa, surging home with such dash,
Splintered mainmast! Seas strewn with the wreck,
Plunging green seas, we're awash to the deck!

Shouts the skipper, "This looks like the end of the trip,
We're left with small option to abandon ship,
If the buoyancy holds, we may yet reach the line,
It's been a great race, though our luck's out this time".

"But hold on. keep on bailing, I'll clear up the wreck,
And lash up the gaff to that stump on the deck,
Now hoist up the jib-see, that gives us fair drive!
Hurrah for a jury rig, boy we'll survive!"

And so to the finish, for a gun and three cheers!
That memorable race earned us lots of free beers!
For Paglesham sailors are quaint, they're non-U.
Their garb is outlandish- their language is too!
They've some splendid eccentrics, and never one bore,
They love "guts" and good sailing - well, need I say more.

But, if ever, God forbid it, you're on a lee shore,
Your rudder is busted, gale buffeted sore,
In such straits may I pray most devoutly you can,
Always have at your side a stout Paglesham man.

*By P.W. "Perry" Perryman August 16th 1975
(Harold Winterbourne Skipper)*

Extract from the Southend Standard, October 1961

Boat Race

The last race of the season for small boats took place at Paglesham on Saturday in a strong SSW wind. Four boats started with Swan late on the line and Heron giving up quite soon, after running aground. Kraa took the lead from Coral until she had to run ashore for repairs. This left Coral ahead of Swan and Kraa until she filled up and had to heave-to in order to bail out. Round the buoy at Mill Creak the order was Swan first followed by Kraa and Coral. During the run home a squall dismasted Kraa which carried on well under jury rig. Final order was:

1. Swan (P. Bishop), 16.49.30
2. Coral (A. Richards), 17.01.50
3. Kraa, 17.04.50.

Swan, after starting late, was sailed very well in particularly heavy weather.