Snipe

Tony Hudson (ed. John Langrick)

The main part of this story was also published in Tony's letter to the OGA and also published in the 1989 fourth quarter OGA newsletter. Tony's letter was inspired after an account in an earlier OGA newsletter about the loss of the small yacht 'SNIPE' on Margate sands. Tony remembered SNIPE as a yacht he used to own and wrote an account of those early years. Tony writes:

'I was sorry to hear of the tragic fate of 'SNIPE'. As a young lad I purchased 'SNIPE' with a friend in 1947/8 for £75. She was laid up at the head of a long narrow rill off Paglesham Pool. I well remember it was down to me having a day off work and with the spring tide to pull her stern first down to the deeper water in the Pool. Having fallen in the various small creeks on the way I finally anchored her overnight at the junction of the Roach and Pool…..'

What Tony didn't describe in the article is how he had had to carry a Seagull outboard on the bus from Leigh to Paglesham and then carry it down the lane and across the sea wall.. What labours we have all in the name of boating! Anyway to return to Tony's letter.

'…..The following day I set off down the Roach and into the Middleway en route to the bridge at Havengore with the ancient seagull clamped to the bracket on the starboard quarter. It being my first trip through the maze of creaks to Havengore it was very much trial and error navigation.

On arrival at the bridge and stemming the tide the bridge keeper informed me he would not be opening the bridge that day. Unknown to me at the time, the tide at Havengore flows for part of the time from the Roach and then changes direction near high water and flows from the Thames estuary. After high water the procedure starts again. My arrival at the bridge coincided with this change of tide and before I knew what was happening I was proceeding head long towards the bridge with no room to turn. Fortunately the mast was down and despite the bridge keeper shouting at me first from one side of the bridge and then the other that I could not come through, SNIPE and I shot Havengore Bridge with me ducking down in the cockpit with just inches to spare. I was then ordered to anchor and come ashore.

I had to leave SNIPE at the bridge overnight whilst I was detained by the special Police of the top secret establishment on Foulness. Having been searched I was escorted off the island and again back on board, the following day by a very irate policeman, apparently as a suspect spy as Foulness was very much involved with Atomic Energy at this time.

I eventually found my way out over the Broomway and took the rest of the flood past the Shoebury boom, Southend Pier and finally spent a cold night in the Ray off Leigh-on-Sea. Next day I moved SNIPE into Johnson and Jago's yard at Leigh as she needed some urgent repairs. Removing the deck canvas revealed the decks were rotten, these and the cabin top and some deck beams were renewed. The hull was in quite good condition which I understood was built of American Yellow Pine. The inside was gutted and I took piece by piece all the bunk boards, floor boards etc, on my bicycle to my house in Leigh to be burnt off repainted and returned by the same transport. New sails were needed which Turidges made and the big day came when SNIPE was sailing again. She sailed very well and with her long bowsprit looked very much longer than 18'

I had many enjoyable sails to the Medway and around the Thames Estuary during the season and with the coming of winter SNIPE was again laid up in a mud berth at Johnson & Jago's for further work to the interior.

I think it was in the spring of 1951 whilst fitting out at the yard that most weekends two men always seemed to appear for a chat and to see how my pal and I were getting on with the work. Finally they enquired if we would be prepared to sell. My pal had seen a very nice 23' ¾ decked gaff cutter he liked at Maylansea and as I could not afford to run SNIPE on my own I reluctantly had to agree to sell her….'
And we all know what happens next!