

Newsletter of the OGA Western Australia

The Association for Gaff-Rig
and Traditional Sailing



July 2021

www.gaffrigsailinginwa.org



Photos from the OGA Regatta by Stef van den Hoek

Walpole 2021

A strong fleet of gaffers made the trip to Walpole this year for our annual raid and to participate in the legendary Walpole Yacht Club Regatta. Most of the fleet checked into the Coalmine Beach Caravan Park on the Wednesday afternoon taking up their camping spots that had been carefully reserved from the previous year. The next two days were spent exploring up the Frankland River, making a run out to the mouth of the inlet, navigating the channel into the Walpole Inlet and across to the town jetty. We would have to agree that the weather was not the sunniest and the winds were sometimes challenging but it was wonderful to enjoy the south coast scenery and all trees around us.



On Saturday our fleet assembled for the first day of the regatta. Our strong fleet was enough to justify having our own start - Woohoo! For once we did not have to play chicken with the tonnage of the trailer sailer fleet (not to mention the dreaded trimaran). The regatta programme had been tweaked slightly to give us three races on the Saturday and two on the Sunday morning. The aim being to avoid the stronger winds forecast for Sunday afternoon. This proved to be an excellent move. What followed were two fantastic days of racing in classic Walpole weather, typically one reef in, spray flying, boats from different fleets in all directions, and a wild time was had by all. In all this Michael Arthur on *Arapaoa* blasted away on his Goat Island Skiff leaving the rest of the OGA fleet a distant speck in his wake.

The revised regatta programme left us with the Sunday afternoon off giving everyone time to leisurely pack up their boats and generally recover from the exertions of the last two days. Then it was off to the presentation and dinner in the town community centre which, as always, is a major event. The innovation this year was a streamlined presentation process which I think we all appreciated. It gave more time for eating, drinking, chatting, and for Michael to show off all his pennants!



Photos by Walpole Yacht Club and Stef van den Hoek

The EStar Hitch and the Bull Clove Hitch

A story featuring ‘Estarzinger’, ‘Dogbark’, ‘Allene222’, ‘Xarax’, ‘SS369’, ‘Seaworthy Lass’, ‘Knutern’ and a whole lot of Dyneema.

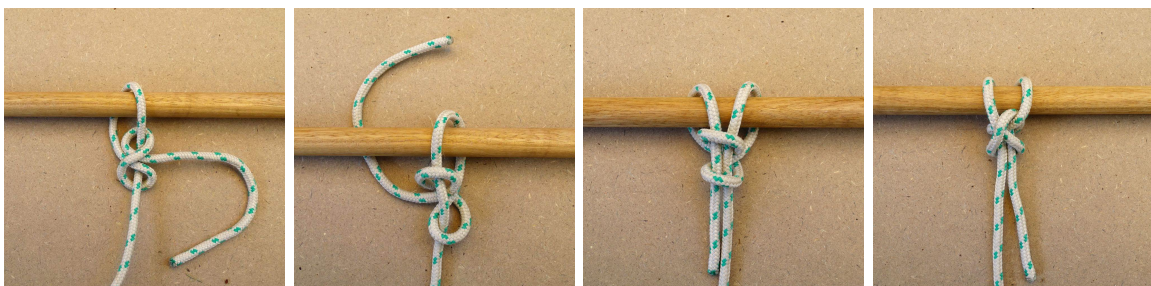
The EStar Hitch and the Bull Clove Hitch are two very closely related knots that were independently devised in January 2014. The key attribute of these hitches is that they do not slip when tied in Dyneema. When loaded the rope will break before the knot slips. Dyneema is very slippery and hard to tie securely with traditional knots. Astonishingly, an independent construction of the EStar Hitch was also simultaneously devised in January 2014, and the Bull Clove Hitch was then independently devised again in late January 2014, and then yet again in June 2014.

My interest in the EStar Hitch arose when I spotted it on Grog’s Knots in the discussion section of the Buntline Hitch. It is mentioned only briefly and its tying instructions just consisted of a small animated GIF that I found a bit difficult to follow. In fact, when I first tried to tie it I did it incorrectly and produced what I now know to be the Bull Clove Hitch. As you will see I was not the first person to do this. Searching for more information on the Web I was struck by the fact that there did not seem to be a definitive description of the hitch, all the information on it seemed to be buried in on-line forum discussions. As I picked my way through these forums a fascinating story of collaboration, invention, queries, suggestions, and independent re-invention revealed itself. Here is my attempt to describe it all.

How to Tie the Hitches

First, in order to explain the history of the hitches, it is useful to see how they are tied.

EStar Hitch



Start with a Buntline Hitch and lift the tail across to the left, this rotates the Clove Hitch of the Buntline to the left and turns it face-down. Then pass the tail around the back of the object and bring it down through the two loops at the back of the Clove Hitch. The final image on the right shows the back of the knot.

Bull Clove Hitch



Start with the Buntline Hitch again but this time leave the tail on the right and pass it around the back of the object bringing it down through the loops at the front of the Clove Hitch. Again, the final image on the right shows the back of the knot.

History

The EStar Hitch

The EStar Hitch was devised by Evans Starzinger in January 2014. Its design evolved fairly early during a long running discussion thread entitled ‘Rope/knot/splice load testing’ that he started on the Sailing Anarchy ‘Gear Anarchy’ Forum on December 31st 2013 under his forum handle ‘estarzinger’. In the thread he set out to test and report on the strengths of various splices and knots in a variety of ropes using a hydraulic test rig equipped with a load cell. The thread quickly gathered a lot of interest. By the next day, January 1st 2014, the thread already had 30 posts and Starzinger was reporting that when testing Dyneema almost every knot he tried slipped rather than broke. The only exceptions he found were the Figure-Eight Loop, the Figure-Nine Loop, and the Alpine Butterfly.

A large number suggestions of knots to try, and modifications to existing knots to try, flooded in. A significant number of useful suggestions and comments were made by Allen Edwards (forum handle ‘allene222’). Unfortunately everyone’s suggestions were largely unsuccessful with a wide variety of hitches and bends, and their modifications, all being found to slip.

On January 2nd in post #53 user ‘dogbark’ suggested “... a Buntline hitch with the non-standing end tucked back into the loop around the shackle in the opposite direction.” However he did not include an illustration of the knot he intended.

On January 3rd in post #76 Starzinger posted images of his interpretation of this modification of the Buntline and reported in #77 that it it was a good hitch that did not slip.



Starzinger’s images showing his new hitch.

It turned out that Starzinger had misinterpreted ‘dogbark’s’ suggestion. Later that day in post #83 ‘dogbark’ posted an image of the knot he intended. When tested by Starzinger it

was found to slip. In misinterpreting ‘dogbark’s’ suggestion Starzinger had invented a new hitch which was quickly dubbed the EStar Hitch from his nickname on the forum.



‘dogbark’s’ image showing the knot he intended.

The thread on ‘Rope/knot/splice load testing’ carried on for some time considering many other aspects of ropes, knots, splices, sewing of webbing loops, and all manner of related topics. It finally went quiet about a year later after a total of 1771 posts. Much of the thread was dominated by long collaborative discussions between Evans Starzinger and Allen Edwards. Starzinger’s testing, and the discussion it attracted, revealed a lot of information that was not generally known and, in some cases, was quite surprising. If all the information in the thread could somehow be organised by a heroic editor it would be a very valuable resource.

Starzinger published his testing results and a description of the EStar hitch on his website at www.bethandevans.com. However, he eventually took his website down because he got tired of answering all the questions people had of his results (see this post). In doing so the definitive description of his hitch was also removed.

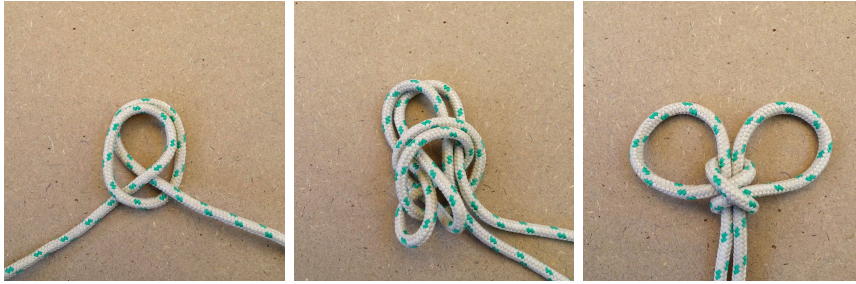
The Bull Clove Hitch

On January 18 2014, two weeks after Starzinger devised the EStar Hitch, user ‘xarax’ on the International Knot Tyers Guild Forum started a thread titled ‘A variation of the Bull Hitch’ where he introduces what he calls the Bull Clove Hitch. In this knot he replaces the one-and-a-half turns around the neck of the Bull Hitch, with a Clove Hitch.

The following day on the forum user ‘SS369’ pointed out that ‘reversing the loops’ of the Bull Clove Hitch also produces a pleasing hitch. It turns out that this ‘reversed’ hitch was the same hitch that Starzinger had created two weeks earlier. ‘SS369’ also alluded to the fact that the hitch could be tied in the bight but did not explain how. In a subsequent post, when comparing the two hitches, ‘xarax’ offers the opinion that the Bull Clove Hitch is better because it is ‘tighter’.

In April some posts appear on the forum noting the similarity (and indeed, confusing the knot) with the EStar Hitch. In September 2014 in post #14 ‘xarax’ identifies and clarifies the distinction between the Bull Clove Hitch and the EStar Hitch, and points out and explains some of the confusion that has arisen in the discussion of the two knots. Indeed a bit of frustration in his post becomes evident here!

A little later in September 2014 in post #17 Nissen Nordpolen (user ‘Knutern’) showed how the Bull Clove Hitch (and hence the EStar Hitch) can be tied in the bight and posted a video of his method on YouTube. The close relationship between the two knots is very readily seen when they are tied in the bight.



Start with a Clove Hitch. Form a bight with the two tails and pass it through the Clove Hitch. Holding onto the two loops of the bight that has been passed through the Clove Hitch tension the ropes and work the knot into the form as shown on the right. As part of the working process you will need to roll the Clove Hitch over itself, turning it inside-out.



If you bend the two loops downwards, as shown on the left, you form the Bull Clove Hitch as devised by ‘xarax’. If you bend the two loops upwards, as shown on the right you form the EStar Hitch as (re)devised by ‘SS369’. From this we can see that the topology of the two knots is the same, they just differ in their geometry.

Reinventions of the Bull Clove Hitch

In late January, back on the ‘Rope/knot/splice load testing’ thread on the ‘Gear Anarchy’ Forum, attention had turned to finding a stopper knot that did not slip in Dyneema. Again, Starzinger found that all the standard knots slipped. In a post on January 25 2014 he presents ‘A better stopper knot’ with its description given at a link on his (now defunct) website. We no longer have his original description but fortunately Grog’s Knots has a description of the EStar Stopper.



Image from Grog’s Knots of the EStar Stopper.

Looking at the structure of the knot one can see that Starzinger had, in fact, constructed a Bull Clove Hitch and passed the tail through the hitch’s loops to form a stopper. Perhaps the knot should really be called the Bull Clove Stopper. No doubt one could construct an EStar Hitch and pass the tail through its loops to produce an equally effective knot.

The hitch was devised yet again in June 2014 when ‘Seaworthy Lass’ started a thread on the Cruisers Forum ‘Presenting a New Hitch: the EStar-XX (based on EStar Hitch)’. In her initial post she noted that Grog’s Knots’ presentation of the EStar Hitch seemed strange

and questioned whether it was indeed correct. She then went on to present how she thought the hitch should be tied. She pointed out that her version of the hitch clamped the tail and standing parts of the knot more effectively and would be more secure when the object being tied to was larger than the rope diameter.



The hitch presented by ‘Seaworthy Lass’.

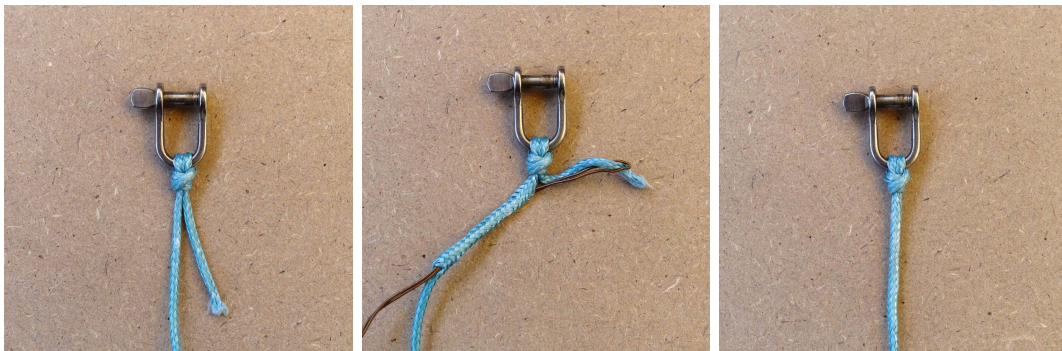
‘Seaworthy Lass’ posted her queries about the correctness of Grog’s presentation on the International Knot Tyers Guild Forum. Subsequent discussion finally concluded that Grog’s presentation was correct, and matched Starzinger’s original description, but agreed that the presentation of the knot was odd and confusing because it used a ‘left handed’ Buntline to form the hitch. If you carefully inspect Starzinger’s original images presented earlier you will see this is the case. The discussion on the Knot Tyers Guild Forum also revealed that her version of the hitch was a reinvention of the Bull Clove Hitch.

Which Knot Do I Prefer?

I am in agreement with ‘xarax’ and ‘Seaworthy Lass’ I believe the geometry of the Bull Clove Hitch produces a much better knot. As they both point out the clamping of the tail and working parts of the knot by the loops of the Clove Hitch is more effective in the case of the Bull Clove Hitch. This clamping force is unaffected by the diameter of the object that the knot is tied to. This is not the case with the EStar Hitch. I also feel the Bull Clove Hitch is the more natural knot to tie.

A word of warning, once loaded the knots should be considered permanent. The key reason for the effectiveness of these knots is that they are designed to clamp up tightly as they are loaded. Thus they will be very difficult, even impossible, to untie.

Finally, if you are tying the knot in Dyneema, and have a piece of bent wire handy, you can splice the tail into the standing part to give you a neat, and even more secure result.



Who is everybody?

I wish I knew! It would be nice to attribute everyone's contributions appropriately.

- 'estarzinger': Evans Starzinger's handle on the Sailing Anarchy Forum, nickname 'EStar'.
- 'allene222': Allen Edwards' handle on the Sailing Anarchy Forum. Allen also runs the website L-36.com
- 'dogbark': Someone on the Sailing Anarchy Forum in the San Francisco area.
- 'xarax': A senior member of the International Guild of Knot Tyers Forum.
- 'SS369': A moderator of the International Guild of Knot Tyers Forum.
- 'Seaworthy Lass': A moderator of the Cruisers Forum living on a yacht somewhere off Scotland.
- 'Knutern': Nissen Nordpolen, a member of the International Guild of Knot Tyers Forum.

Peter Kovesi



Photos from the OGA Regatta by Stef van den Hoek

Wear Your Buoyancy Vest and Your Life Jacket?

In the February 2019 newsletter Jim Black and I wrote an article entitled “Carry a Life Jacket but Wear Your Buoyancy Vest?” where we discussed some of the issues with inflatable life jackets. The main difficulty with them is with respect to your ability to self rescue from a capsized boat. If you have capsized, an uninflated life jacket will weigh you down by somewhere between 650g and 800g as you attempt to swim around the boat trying to right it. However if you inflate your jacket your ability to swim is basically removed, you are largely incapacitated and all you can really do is float which is not good for your ability to recover from a capsized boat either.

An option that was discussed was to wear a foam buoyancy vest, rather than an inflatable life jacket, so that if you capsize the vest will provide reasonable support while minimally hindering you as you recover your boat. Of course you would also need to carry a life jacket on board to satisfy DoT requirements. This also assumes that you are a competent swimmer and reasonably fit. Another option to consider was wearing an inflatable life jacket and partially inflating your jacket using the oral inflation tube to provide you with a small amount of supporting buoyancy that hopefully does not hinder you as you set about recovering your boat.

Neither option is entirely satisfactory. After some discussion we decided that perhaps the ideal was a foam buoyancy vest that was fitted with a supplementary inflatable jacket that could be activated should the situation require it. Searching around on the web James Bennett did find such a jacket, the Baltic Hybrid 220.



The combined buoyancy of the foam vest and inflatable jacket is 220N which is perhaps more than one needs and might make it a bit bulky. However the main problem is that when I tracked down a local distributor who could supply them the quoted cost was \$495. The high price and not having a jacket available to inspect and try for size effectively eliminated that idea.

Recently, as I wandered around a marine store, I spotted the Marlin L100 Adult Waistbelt. These are mainly marketed at standup paddle boarders, and wind and kite surfers. Looking at its neat compact shape I realised that it could be worn around your waist just below a buoyancy vest. Maybe I could wear a buoyancy vest *and* an inflatable life jacket at the same time. At \$100 I thought it was worth a try.



The Marlin Waistbelt packed and unpacked.

My buoyancy vest provides 50N of floatation and the Waistbelt provides an additional 100N giving a total of 150N. This matches the floatation of a typical inflatable life jacket. Here is the operation sequence of me trying it out by manually inflating it with the inflation tube, fitting it over my buoyancy vest, and jumping in the water. It all seemed to work very effectively.



Some things to consider:

Some ‘assembly’ is required, you need to pull the jacket over your head. However you do have the benefit of already wearing a buoyancy vest to support you while you do this. Given that one has the support of the vest it might prove easier to get the jacket over your head before one inflates it.

I was worried that some issues might arise in wearing both a buoyancy vest and a jacket but this did not seem to be the case. Some more testing in the water is probably needed to properly determine that no unwanted interactions might occur. No doubt the addition of a crotch strap would probably be useful.

A constraint of any waistbelt design is that you only have a strap around your waist. There is no additional strap that goes up your back to the rear of the collar around your neck. I wondered if there was a possibility that the collar could slide off back over your head. However, in my brief test I found that I had to bend my head over a fair way in order to get the collar over my head and once I straightened up just a little it was clear that there was no way the collar could slide off. In fact this jacket design is widely used, most aircraft life jackets only have a strap around the waist.

I thought everything was perfect, but not quite. If you want to wear a safety harness and lifeline one has a problem with the routing of the lifeline. With a normal inflatable jacket you wear the harness under the jacket and route the lifeline through the middle of the jacket to the harness. With a waistbelt this is a bit problematic. If you deploy the waistbelt with

the lifeline connected the jacket ends up over the lifeline which now has to exit out sideways. Should the lifeline get loaded it will lift the jacket and possibly damage it. You could unclip, and reclip your lifeline through the jacket but this is obviously not ideal. It is possible to pre-route the lifeline through the waistbelt jacket when you pack it into its pouch but this means that if the lifeline is loaded it will open up the waistbelt pouch which may not be what you want.

This made me think of something that should have been obvious from the start. If the conditions warrant using a lifeline why not wear your standard inflatable lifejacket over a buoyancy vest? A bit bulky but possibly the safest option for heavy duty expedition sailing, especially if your inflatable jacket incorporates a safety harness to start with. The buoyancy vest provides support while you recover your boat from a capsize and if things go bad you can deploy your inflatable life jacket.

However, for conditions that do not require a lifeline, the waistbelt worn with a buoyancy vest is a very attractive option. This is now my standard sailing setup.

Peter Kovesi



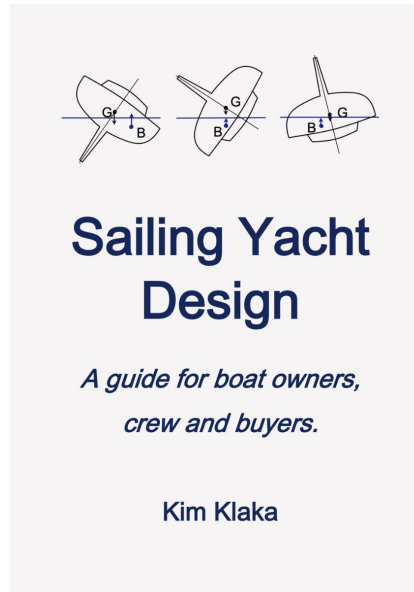
Dave Cliff and *Iolanthe* at Walpole

New Books

Sailing Yacht Design

A Guide for Boat Owners, Crew and Buyers

Kim Klaka



Kim Klakka, who many would know as an occasional crew on *Wee Birlinn*, published this eBook in September last year. Kim is a naval architect who has worked as a professional yacht designer and yacht builder for many years, establishing his first yacht design consultancy in 1970. He holds a Masters degree and a PhD in sailing yacht performance, and was the Director of the Centre for Marine Science and Technology at Curtin University, Australia. He has conducted research for America's Cup syndicates. In addition to all this he has sailed over 30,000 miles.

This book has been written in response to the many questions he has been asked by yacht crews, owners and buyers about their yacht. It is intended for the reader who wants to know more about the way a yacht behaves, but does not have a strong scientific background. It explains a lot of subjects that a yacht owner will face, but it does not cover every aspect of yacht design. References are provided for those who wish to read in more depth. It explains things in ways that can be understood by the lay person, using the minimum amount of science; it does not provide comprehensive scientific explanations of what is a very technical subject. Whilst the main focus of the book is on modern cruising yachts, much of the content is also applicable to racing yachts.

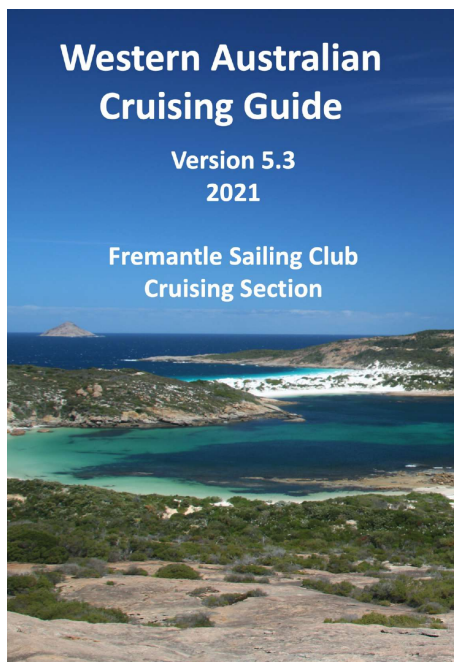
The book comprises five chapters: stability, hull resistance, foils, seakeeping and design evaluation.

For me I found there was lots to learn from this book. You can dive into the book pretty well anywhere, start reading, and you will learn something. The section on how the stability of your boat is affected by the free surface effect will perhaps make you think about how the interior of your dinghy, and its placement of buoyancy tanks could be better designed. It will also make you realise how important it is to keep your buoyancy tanks dry. The chapter on seakeeping will make you understand why, when you are running in a breeze, your rudder goes soft just at the crucial moment as your stern is lifted by a wave and you are about to broach. It is not just your helming, there is a reason! The chapters on hull resistance and

foils will get you sanding your hull with 360 grit paper before the next OGA and Walpole Regattas, and will get you thinking about shaping your foils (much) more carefully. You will also get an appreciation of the loads on your rudder and why you should not skimp on the strength of your pintles and gudgeons.

If you want to understand what makes a sailing yacht perform the way it does, but are sometimes baffled by the science, this is the book for you. It is available for purchase at a very reasonable price from all good on-line bookstores, or from: Books2Read.com

The Western Australian Cruising Guide



Kim Klaka is busy! He is also the current editor of The Western Australian Cruising Guide. This is the coastal cruising bible for WA, covering the coast from Darwin to Eucla, including the Christmas and Cocos Islands. The latest edition, version 5.3, has just been published. It contains more than 100 changes and updates since version 5.2 was issued in January 2019.

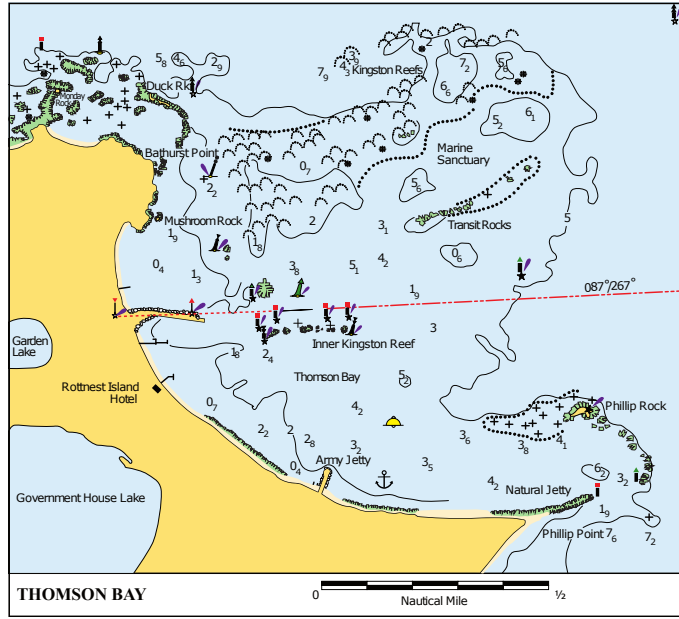
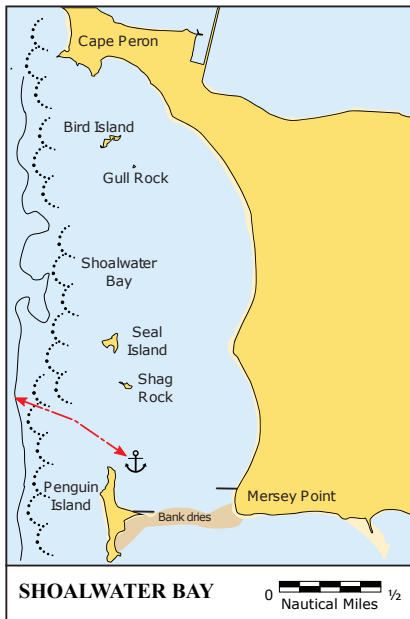
Even if you do not go cruising this book is a definite must-have, it is such a great thing to dip into and sample the cruising possibilities of our coast. If you do go cruising of course you must have it especially if you are cruising the Kimberley. It has over 600 pages, 220 chartlets and many colour photos. To download your free copy of this invaluable resource go to:

www.fsc.com.au/wa-cruising-guide/

For those of us who might only sail around the local Perth coast, Geographe Bay, or Albany there is much to be picked up from the guide. I find the chartlets extremely useful giving you a clear guide as to how any particular anchorage should be approached. Once you have familiarised yourself with the chartlet you are in a much better position to efficiently interpret a standard chart of the region.

For example Chartlet 167 on page 497 shows a track into Shoalwater Bay that we might consider the next time we visit. You would need to carefully follow a series of GPS waypoints provided in the guide to follow the track.

And we must do a trip to Rottnest on a nice day sometime...



Crazy Bird at Walpole

Yet another great adventure extracted from Mike Igglesden's first book

**Autobiography of
Michael John Igglesden
A mix of memories and anecdotes
0 to 25 Years**

Pages 49 – 62

1947 “THE RESTORATION”

An article originally written for 'Bygone Kent'.

Two teenage boys are scrambling down the old iron runged ladder set into the slimy tidal basin wall. Upon reaching water level the first boy hooks the bow mooring line of his boat with his left foot and then pulls her towards him. After neatly stepping aboard he holds the line taut to enable his companions to follow his lead. From above, a small canvas bag descends, lowered on a light line by a third boy and which is then neatly stowed into a locker built under the centre thwart. Boy number 3 then joins his mates in the 16' x 5'6" plumb stem and stern ex ship's boat. Long before World War II she had been converted into a gunter rigged sloop, and was now the pride and joy of the eldest boy, having spent many months using very limited skills and finances, restoring the wreck he had found in the back garden of a bombed out house in Dover in late 1944. All his spare time for the next couple of years was utilised endeavouring to put some of the counselling of Arthur Ransom, Percy Woodcock, Adlard Coles and a dozen more of his nautical mentors into practice. Here he was, with his younger brother and a friend, off for a sail in the harbour - or such was their intention.

The tide was ebbing. The rudder shipped, the moorings slipped, then, since no wind was apparent under the lee of the dock walls, the two younger members of the crew pulled strongly on the oars, whilst the skipper commenced the preparations for the days sail. The heavy steel dagger board was lifted off its stowed place on the floorboards and carefully lowered into its case. Then, in anticipation of a following breeze, a nail pushed through a hole halfway down the plate prevented it from falling into its fully down po-

sition. The mainsail's throat and peak halyards were bent on, the jib unstowed from under the little fore peak, hanked onto the forestay and the sheets set up.



'Seafarer' has just rounded Prince of Wales Pier.

Halfway down the length of the Prince of Wales Pier the boat was luffed into the light northerly. Sails were hoisted, their thrashing around subdued by paying the boat off onto a broad reach, heading for the end of the pier. This was the point of sailing 'Seafarer' really enjoyed. Her long Park Avenue boom (which never really fulfilled its designed function of giving the foot of the sail an aerofoil shape) holding out the large tie-dyed looking main, with the bamboo gaff falling to leeward just enough to match the angle of the boom. The capacity of Mum's copper had proved to be just a little too small to take the complete immersion of the mainsail in a rather belated tanning process. The hand sewn patch the boy had put in the full length of the luff (about 20) feet bore tribute to the soundness or otherwise of the sails material. But still it had, until then, served the boat well and given many hours of fun. By the time the end of the pier was cleared the breeze had picked up to a beautiful 10 knots. Sunshine

touched the little white horses and life was good.

Discussion arose as to just how to spend the day. A beat into the outer harbour, or, how about venturing outside? The closest they had previously been to venturing outside - an area often fraught with strong tides and large waves - was the fishing spot over the block ship sunk in the Western Entrance during the war. How about sailing outside through this entrance, now only a few hundred yards ahead, and then beating up to the Eastern Entrance, a distance of less than a nautical mile, to return inside the harbour in time for an early tea. Food was never far from their thoughts. "We will do that."



'Seafarer' in Dover Harbour.

In order to clear the block ship, with its breaking waves around the jagged remaining superstructure, the boat was headed for the end of the detached mole, which, together with the end of the Admiralty Pier, forms the Western Entrance to Dover Harbour. This *was* an adventure and one, which, half a century later, is still vivid in the skipper's mind.

The huge granite blocks forming the mole towered above the boat, its skirt of seaweed swaying and lifting to the greeny grey three foot swell. The sails suddenly became limp spreads of cloth as they came into the wind

shadow. They filled again as the tide pushed the boat, destined to be for her last time, out into the Channel. Sea conditions were perfect for small boat sailing.

The light northerly gave a relatively flat sea and good sailing breeze. The irresponsibility of the exercise had not yet dawned upon any of them.. There were no life jackets on board. The boat was ballasted with cast iron sash weights so any capsize would be a sinking. No one had been told of the intended destination of the voyage or of its probable duration. In fact, they should not have even been sailing in the harbour under those conditions, of course, but attitudes to safety were, to say the least, casual in 1948. Indeed the intended destination changed every few minutes. "Why don't we sail down to Folkstone? It's only six miles and we could be there and back in four hours. Twelve o'clock now so there is plenty of time." The boat was gybed over and a course set for Folkstone.

The canvas bag which had earlier been stowed in the ship's locker was broken out and its contents of sandwiches and chocolate distributed. From about half a mile off shore the chalk outcrop, which is Shakespeare Cliff, The Warren (a marvelous stretch of untamed foreshore which had been their camping site a few days earlier), and other familiar landscapes slid past all looking so different and exciting from a seaward viewpoint. There were a couple of ships out to sea and a fishing boat putting out from Folkstone, but otherwise the seascape was their own.

Absolutely beautiful - although nagging doubts had already begun to spoil the day for the oldest boy. But nothing could spoil the incredible feeling of achievement and excitement upon entering Folkstone Harbour. The first landfall they had ever experienced. A foreign port! The breeze was just strong enough for the little boat to stem the ebbing tide into the Outer Harbour. By 1330 hours she had been made fast to the railings lining the stone steps, a stern line put out to an anchor, and the crew, after giving their ship a harbour stow, climbed ashore to 'explore' the town. That they travelled by bus

or bicycle at least once a week during the summer months from Dover to the swimming pool below the Folkstone Lees, and that they knew this town almost as well as their own, did not diminish to any extent this excitable pleasure.

“We will just have time to check on any interesting boats in the Inner Harbour, buy an ice cream and then we must set off home again.” Two of these worthy aims were accomplished and by 1415 hours the boys were back at the steps. Mud patches were appearing on the harbour floor. Mooring lines and chains which had spent the previous hours restlessly see sawing narrow trenches in the mud were now visible and still. All the fishing boats were lolling to port or starboard and little streams of brown water were cutting steep sided channels towards the harbour mouth. ‘Seafarer’ was just afloat, but it was obvious that she was to be in her present berth until the beginning of the next flood tide.



‘Seafarer’ in Folkstone Harbour.

What to do?

Go home on the bus? The Harbour Master would have to be found to obtain permission for the boat to be moved to a more suitable berth for an overnight stay. Contact with officialdom was in itself somewhat of a deterrent, with the strong possibility, of at least a reprimand for their exploits. There was also the probability of a weather change from the light to moderate conditions being enjoyed, to that of a more boisterous nature - not unusual in the English Channel.

The advice of an ‘old’ fisherman (he probably

was at least 40) who was leaning on the railings and had been regarding the boys with a somewhat whimsical smile was sought. “She’ll be afloat again in a couple of hours. Weather will hold until tomorrow morning. You will have a foul tide up to Dover. Take you three hours in this breeze which is getting round to more of a southeaster.”

Discussion arose. “Lucky with the wind shift. If we leave at 1530 hours we should be home by 1830 hours. Lets do that.” None of the boys had telephones at home and, even if they had, it would have been doubtful if a call would have been made. “With some luck we’ll be back before we are missed.”

By 1515 hours, punting with the oars, rowing and paddling slowly, ever so slowly, ‘Seafarer’ was eased towards the harbour mouth. None of the fishing boats were stirring on their moorings, still held hard and fast in the black mud. The mud also held hard and fast to the oars and on the boy’s arms and hands as they pulled themselves along any convenient mooring line which would help their progress. The dagger board was lowered about 50 yards from the entrance and sail was made. Some difficulty in clearing the moles against tide and wind was experienced, but by about 1545 hours they were in the open sea heading for Dover.

By keeping inshore it was hoped the adverse tide of about 2 knots would be minimised, and with a 10 knot southeaster blowing they could just lay their course on starboard tack. This is a very rock strewn foreshore and the swell of about four feet capped by two foot waves made for exciting sailing for the inexperienced. Every now and then a cheeky wave would slop aboard, some of which was returned by means of a large biscuit tin bailer which was scraped along the floorboards as the boat rolled and the water sloshed towards the bailer boy.

In spite of the warm sunshine they were all getting cold. None wore water proof clothing and their lumbar jackets and long grey school trousers were by now very wet. The mood aboard was apprehensive but cheerful. Although keeping well out from the surf line,

every once in a while a larger wave would rear up and carry the boat a few yards towards the beach. On each of these occasions the skipper found himself gripping more firmly the ash axe handle, which he had selected for its pleasing shape as much as for its strength, when making up the boats tiller. Concern for the safety of his young crew, for whom he rightly felt responsible, and, of course, the fate of his beloved boat, was rising rapidly. It would only take the shipping of one of those extra menacing waves to spell the end of the voyage and, possibly, the end of them all. He considered running through the surf and attempting a landing on the steep bank of stones and pebbles of Shakespeare beach. The boat would be lost, of course, but since they could all swim well enough to probably survive such a landing, it was a real option. Now was the time to make the decision.



Shakespeare Beach.

The towering grey wall of the Admiralty Pier was looming up three quarters of a mile ahead. The roar and suck of the pounding waves on the beach could now be clearly heard. To make the harbour entrance a tack would have to be made out to sea for about half a mile and then the Western Entrance, with its hazard of the block ship would be visible. "Ready about." The boat was swung onto port tack and headed away from the beach, her motion changing as her new course took her more squarely into the waves. The wind had increased and 'Seafarer' was over canvassed. They had never ever attempted to reef down whilst sailing, let alone in these conditions. The long overhanging boom touched the wave tops to lee-

ward more and more often as the sheet was eased to relieve the wind pressure on the mainsail. Should have reefed an hour ago, too difficult now. To hand in the jib would result in the boat having too little drive to punch through this head sea. The skipper could not hide his concern, which, anyhow had been shared by his shivering crew for half an hour now. It was two and a half hours since they had left the safety of Folstone and the wrong decision to sail had long ago been uppermost in their minds.

The design of the boat with its narrow forward sections and straight stem gave little reserve buoyancy, causing her to shovel into the waves, some of which were breaking over the starboard bow. Bailing was now continuous. The boy not bailing was sitting out on the windward gunwale using the tail end of the lee jib sheet for support. The skipper, due to the short length of the tiller, was unable to do likewise. He was occupied in trying to ease the boat over the most menacing waves and control the mainsheet to keep the boat moving towards their immediate goal - to clear the Admiralty Pier and enter the Western Entrance. Time dragged on. Each minute took at least an hour to pass. The next go about would be critical. Look for a flat spot between the waves. "Ready about." 'Seafarer' with her long straight keel always took an age to respond. Very slowly she came into the wind. A wave smacked her port bow and her swing onto the other tack was aborted. She gathered sternway. The boy on the helm pushed the tiller away from him towards the port side of the boat. The next wave struck the bow head on and pushed her further astern. "Back the jib!" She swung round and was safely on her new course heading for the entrance.

What relief. Surely now we will make it. Three hundred yards from the entrance the boat's motion changed as the waves were now broadside on. The full force of the south west setting tide was now in evidence and was running down both sides of the detached mole at two and a half knots and pouring out of the entrance. Impossible to make it through the gap without fouling the block

ship. "We will have to sail along the outside of the mole and come in at the other end." The respite from bailing which had been enjoyed since the last change of course was shortlived. Fear gripped the crew. The skipper was the most calm of the three since he had a job on hand which called for complete concentration. This was the first time in his short life he had been really frightened - even the worst part of the London blitz had not been this bad. Then it had been the luck of the draw. Now he had a chance to control his destiny, and that of his terrified crew. Backs and arms were in agonising pain from the incessant bailing.

The sounds of sobbing became apparent. Bail, bail, bail. An endless succession of white capped seething waves came roaring down from windward, passing under the boat to be rebuffed with a solid 'womp' by the detached mole, which was now only fifty yards down to leeward. The sea from the resulting backsurge was very confused. Broken water, grey green peaks and troughs of unpredictable size and shape rising up from nowhere and cascading back into the valleys, occasionally tumbling across the leeward gunwale into the boat. The outboard end of the boom was now continuously in the water with the sail shuddering and cracking as it was eased off to relieve the overpowered craft.

A jumble of thoughts surged through the young skippers mind. He had roved a new main halyard a couple of weeks ago but most of the other gear was definitely suspect. It would have been nice to have some money to spend. Didn't matter now. Surely the people fishing on the mole, watching three boys about to drown, would run to the Harbour Control people and get help? No. One even waved to them. If we capsized would the sash weights and the bags of shingle ballast fall out of the boat? If this were to happen it would at least give the boat enough buoyancy to provide some support until help arrived. If it arrived. Bail, bail, bail. Later in

life the skipper was to realise that here was a classic situation confirming the old adage that the world's most efficient bilge pump was a frightened boy with a bucket - but in this case a biscuit tin.

The bilges were now a foot deep in the sloshing cold water and the floor boards were responding by lifting and surging around substantially hindering the efforts of the boys to fight the loosing battle to keep the sea outside the boat. With aching backs and blanked minds, where survival was the only thought, progress towards the Eastern Entrance was hardly noticed and seemed of little consequence. Eyes stinging with salt, the skipper made out the Eastern end of the mole. "We just have to clear that and then we are safe." Wind and tide then controlled their destiny and the little boat was swept through the entrance, round under the lee of the mole and within a few seconds was in calm waters. An indescribable mixture of feelings - joy, remorse, exaltation, thankfulness and relief then engulfed the exhausted boys. Memory is able to recall those feelings, and savour them, completely undiminished, even after the passing of more than fifty years.

Inside the harbour the citizens of Dover were enjoying a beautiful summer evening. A mixed fleet of dinghies was engaged in a round the harbour race. People were fishing from rowing boats, in the distance could be seen deckchairs on the beach, and brave souls were swimming and diving. 'Seafarer' was not sailed back to the tidal basin. The closest possible place to leave her was on a groyne outside the submarine pens. They moored her as best they could, allowing for a tide range of about 16 feet. Then, a group of wet, shivering and very shaken boys had to face both a two mile walk home and the music to follow. Next morning 'Seafarer' had sunk. All loose gear, floorboards, rudder, boom, oars were gone. Not a total wreck but...

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Save the Dates!

The OGA Annual General Meeting

7.30pm Wednesday 28th July
Royal Freshwater Bay Yacht Club

The OGA Quiz Night

Monday, 9th August
Royal Freshwater Bay Yacht Club

For details visit
www.gaffrigsailinginwa.org