

Cambria Newsletter



May 2010, No. 32

From Cambria's Cabin

We are delighted to announce that Mr David Suchet, OBE, FRSA has kindly agreed to become Patron of the Cambria Trust. As someone who has long played an active role in helping to preserve British Waterways and other Maritime interests, as well as having lived on board a boat himself, David's patronage is greatly welcomed, and most timely. A Freeman of the Company of Watermen and Lightermen of the river Thames, his support comes just as our fundraising efforts to complete the restoration enter their final year.

The AGM was held in Faversham Town Hall, early in February 2010. In total, 15 members attended. Required by the constitution to retire at this AGM, all the existing Directors had indicated that they were willing to stand for re-election and were voted in en-bloc. In addition, Captain Roy Stanbrook was proposed, seconded and duly elected as a Director. Roy is currently the PLA, Harbour Master, for the lower Thames. A keen sailing enthusiast, he brings many special skills and a wealth of operational experience to the management team.

Following the AGM, the Directors of the Cambria Trust are now:

Rear Admiral Bruce Richardson, RN (Retd.), CB, FNI (Chairman)
 Basil Brambleby (Honorary Secretary)
 Chris Snelling (Honorary Treasurer)
 Frank Spice
 David Walsh
 Robert Simper
 Captain Roy Stanbrook

Meanwhile, William Collard remains our very busy Project Manager of the restoration and apprenticeship scheme, and Captain Martin Littleboy, RN (Retd) spearheads our fund raising efforts.

Whilst AGMs are rarely exciting events, they are, nevertheless, crucial to the running of any charitable company. My thanks to everyone who supported the proceedings thus enabling the statutory functions and duties of the Trust to be fulfilled. The meeting ended at 12.50 after which refreshments and a visit to Cambria were enjoyed.

The extensive and ongoing efforts being put to secure the necessary funding to complete the project recently met with considerable success, namely the award of a grant of £20,000 – a most commendable achievement in the current economic climate. The outstanding funding gap to complete the restoration now stands at £40,000. This equates to 4% of the total restoration cost, with 96% now secure. We will, however, also need a further £40,000 to prepare the barge for its first operational year.

The Apprenticeship scheme continues to go well with several of the participants achieving a “distinction” grade in their respective examinations. Meanwhile preparations continue apace for Cambria's future role as a mobile educational centre providing “out of classroom” instruction in support of the national curriculum. As part of these preparations, information packs are being designed, and a new brochure has been commissioned describing the Cambria project and its intended future activities, including sail training. It can be downloaded in pdf. format from the Cambria website (<http://www.cambriatrust.org.uk/index.htm>)

Finally, I am pleased to be able to report that the restoration remains on track and on programme, thanks to the skills and dedication of Tim Goldsack and his team. They are doing a remarkable job, as anyone who has visited the barge recently can testify.

Bruce Richardson

Project Manager's Report: Restoration News January - April 2010

Looking back at my last report of January 2010 I see that we have once again made tremendous progress in many areas. Snow and extreme cold did not help but the shipwrights pressed on and the covers held out during the worst of the winter gales.

With preparatory planning work on the upper frames and wales completed, two teams then started fitting the 12" wide covering boards that form the outer edge of the deck area. These planks have to be shaped to follow the curved line of the outer wale. Once completed work then started on the main decking. This is now complete and looks quite stunning. Each plank is fastened to adjacent beams and frames with galvanised spikes. Counter sunk holes allow for the head of the spikes to be positioned well below the finished deck level. These holes are later plugged with a filler compound.

In the forward deck area, 3 substantial vertical timbers were fitted through the decking (see picture). The after pair will support the double barrel windlass, the left side of which is used to support and lift the anchor. The forward post supports the heel of the bowsprit on the right side and on the centre face the very substantial 3 pawl clapper plate mechanism which stops the windlass from running forward.

Work continues apace on the planking up of both sides. This is of a double skinned overlapping construction giving a final thickness of some 3". Adjacent planks are bedded onto a hot felt, tar and horse manure mixture.

Again reference to my pictures illustrates the progress being made with various sections of steelwork. Both mast tabernacles have been rebuilt using some of the original fittings and work has commenced on a pair of aerofoil style leeboards. This subcontracted work is all being carried out at sites close to the Cambria restoration. The main mast and sprit noted in my last report have been finished and are now in store.

Our contracted sailmaker, Steve Hall of Tollesbury, Essex has started making some of the smaller sails based on our 1960's drawings. He will not start on the larger sails until the masts are in place, when accurate dimensions will be taken.

The four shipwright apprentices have successfully completed all parts of their on-line City & Guilds examinations and are nearing completion of the NVQ sections. The course is supported with finance from the Shipwrights Company, Swale Borough Council and National Sea Training Centre.

The grandson of Cambria's builder, William Everard has very kindly lent the Trust the complete trading records of the Everard sailing fleet covering the period 1936 - 1955. This includes the final cargo details of the Ethel Everard and the Royalty, both barges being lost at Dunkirk. The journal further expands our Cambria trading records, which now cover the period 1936 - 1970.

William Collard

Project Manager's View of Work in Progress



Newly fabricated mast tabernacles

Headledges join the coamings

Sweeping deck lines looking aft

Felt and tar mix for the side planking

Steel leeboards under construction

Foredeck receiving its finishing touches

Fleur de Lis Photographic Exhibition



In March this year the Cambria Team were invited back to the Fleur de Lis exhibition centre in Faversham for a 2nd run of weeks, following our successful 2008 show. Many of the exhibits from 2008 are now on regular show at our own Visitor Centre and are much admired by all the visitors. Rather than simply move this collection back up to the “Fleur”, it therefore seemed sensible to try a very different approach, one which we called “less is more”.

The volunteers have, in the intervening months amassed quite a collection of beautiful pictures of the rebuild, many taken from positions and angles not accessible to the visiting public. The latest exhibition had a number of these pictures, printed at a large size and mounted, at its core. The pictures, originally the work of Membership Sec Mark Chapman, Director Dave Walsh and Volunteer Matt Care, were an impressive sight on display.

We were also able to draw upon some specially produced stained glass as a result of a generous private commission on our behalf. The stained glass artist is Amey Dalton, who recently completed her studies in stained glass at Edinburgh. She is now working in Glasgow, but completed this work while living near Sandwich. She has a website named <http://www.ameydalton.com/page2.htm>. She reports having “really enjoyed the commission” for which she used images supplied to her by our photographers, of the restoration.

Combine that with a very nice barge model and some Barge Match pennants and traders’ flags, plus a very interesting oil painting by Stephen Richards detailing significant events in the Cambria Trust story and we had the makings of a fascinating exhibition.

We must not forget, however to thank the Fleur de Lis for the invitation, and in particular we must thank the Fleur’s own volunteers, who not only sit keeping watch over our “treasures”, but also helped enormously in deciding the final layout of the content in the room. Their unique experience of where visitors look when first entering the room, and how they work their way around enabled them to suggest the need for “something big, bright and eye-catching here” or “something to linger over, there”.

We hope you visited the exhibition in March and enjoyed it.

Matt Care, Cambria Volunteer

A Freight to Maldon: by Ron Watts

Seeking a vaguely recalled piece of information, I recently browsed through a number of books on my shelves. Riffing through the papers of "The Last Sailor" by Dick Durham (Terence Dalton Ltd 1989) did not produce the snippet of information I sought but did remind me of something that had completely escaped my memory. This was that 'Cambria', the last Thames barge to trade solely under sail, went up the Roach to Stambridge Mills with 150 tons of wheat in June 1970. This was almost certainly the last freight ever to go up the Roach under sail as 'Cambria' came out of service just a few months later in October 1970. In her last few months in service 'Cambria' took freights up the Colne to Colchester, up the Stour to Mistley and up the Orwell to Ipswich as well as up the Roach to Stambridge. Thinking about that set me wondering when the Crouch above the Branklet saw a laden barge under sail for the last time. There could, I suppose, have been 'sea-walling' traffic undertaken by sailormen in the aftermath of the 1953 floods but other than that the obvious candidates for postwar involvement in sailing barge trade were the timber wharf at Wallsea and Matthews' mill at Battlebridge. Although I was then based on London River, I sailed with friends from Fambridge a lot during the late 50's and the early 60's, and have no recollection of ever seeing a trading barge under sail on the Crouch and obviously bound to or from either place. Whilst on the face of things the timber wharf, entirely dependent on waterborne traffic, seems the most likely to have had continuing visits by sailing barges, in fact timber as a sailorman freight seemed to die out well before bagged and bulk cargoes such as cattlecake and grain went from the sailing barge scene so perhaps it was Battlesbridge that saw that last freight in the Crouch under sail. I do, though, wonder because if memory serves me correctly even in the 50's there was no formal fairway through the moorings at Fambridge to suggest any great degree of continuing waterborne commercial traffic to Battlesbridge of any kind. Nevertheless, at least a trickle of commercial traffic must have continued since I have in my possession a newspaper clipping of January 1970 with a picture of the motor coaster 'Jubilation' having difficulty getting away from Matthews' mill because of ice in the river.

"The Last Sailor" is not, as might be inferred from the foregoing, a book about 'Cambria' but is a biography of Bob Roberts: seafarer, bargeman, author, journalist, musician, etc, etc. Bob, who was a good friend of mine from 1948 until his unexpected and untimely death in 1982, was master of the 'Cambria' 1956-1966 when she was under Everards' ownership then owner as well as master from 1966 until her ultimate retirement from service in 1970. It was in October 1960 whilst the barge was still under Everards ownership that Bob contacted me to say the barge was loading out of a ship in the King George V dock in London and suggesting I might like the trip with them down to the Blackwater, the freight being destined for Greens Mills at Maldon.

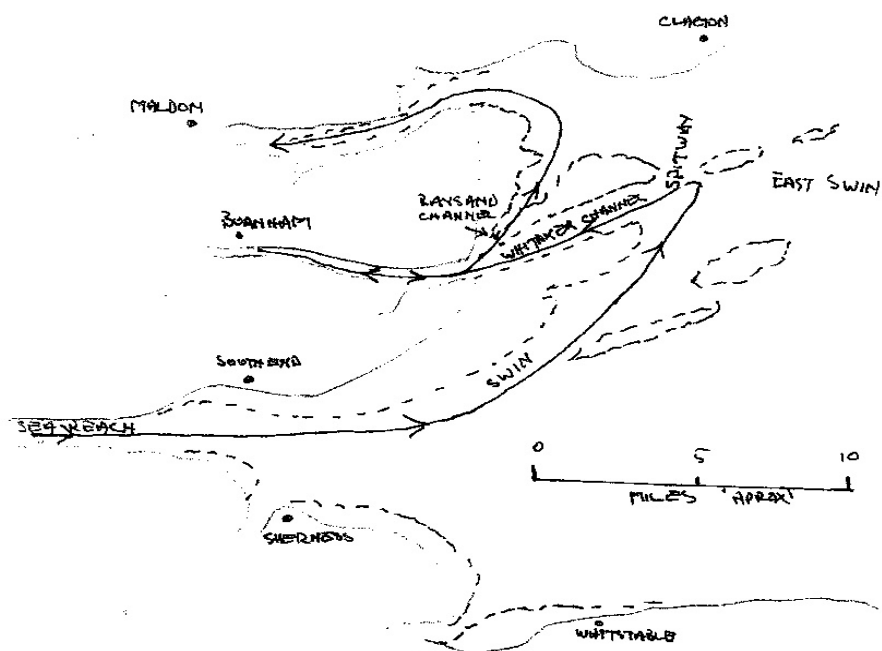
By the time I joined 'Cambria' in the afternoon she was already loaded, the hatch covers were on and the last few chocks to secure the hatch cloths being knocked in. As soon as squaring up on deck was complete, we cast off and, with a westerly breeze; there was enough windage in the furled gear to give us steerage way down the dock. This was a new experience for me as whenever I had been aboard before for a move within a dock it had been with a cadged tow from a dock tug or through use of muscle power on the dolly winch and I must confess to becoming worried as the closed road bridge and lock gates came ever nearer. Just how were we going to bring something well in excess of 200 tons deadweight to a stop in time? With the closed road bridge seemingly yards ahead Bob steered the barge parallel to and only a foot or two away from the quay wall, the mate jumped ashore with the end of a heavy warp and this he surged round the quay bollard until the barge came to rest just short of the bridge. Whew!

There was a short delay before the bridge opened. A warp from a power capstan on the lockside then plucked us forward into the lock. Another short delay, the lower lock gates opened, the topsail was set, and we were on our way downstream with the ebb to help us.

The light was fading by the time we were entering Sea Reach and, with the last of the daylight, Bob worked the barge inshore of the West Blyth buoy, the anchor was let go, and the riding light lit and set.

The dawn had yet to come when we turned out and got under way in a westerly breeze just after high water the following morning. However, as the daylight strengthened, gradually but steadily the wind veered. It was, nevertheless, possible to hold the port tack all the way down the Swin but by the time we were approaching the Swin Spitway buoy a little before low water the wind had veered so far it was quite clear that it would be a peg to windward through the Spitway. With a loaded draught of 8' or more it was obvious it would be some hours before there was sufficient water for us to risk the turn to windward through the Spitway: that time would have to be wasted in some way. Thus, it came as no surprise when 'Cambria' was brought round on to the starboard tack and we stretched away up the Whitaker Channel.

Arrowed track showing Cambria's passage from London Docks to Malden



The sunken Buxey came and went, the Outer Crouch passed astern. The flood was by now running very strongly yet still we held on Shore Ends, the Inner Crouch, and the Branklet Spit. The sheets had been eased for the reach up the Whitaker Channel but by now they were being hardened in although we were, with the tide under us and giving that extra push to windward, able to hold up well into the Burnham Fairway. All good things do, though, come to an end and, finally, the helm was put down, we came round on to the port tack and eased the sheets to go back down river.

With two-thirds or more of the flood gone and the mudflats well covered we were once more at the Outer Crouch. The barge was then put hard on the wind on the port tack to make a long leg away down through the Raysands passing close to the North Buxey buoy and on towards the Knoll. A hitch then back to the west before another tack to take us across the mouth of the Blackwater. The ebb had by now set in and with the tide our enemy it was a long slow sail before Sales Point slipped astern and, with the daylight gone, the anchor could go down a little downstream of The Stone.

By the morning the wind was back in the southwest. We let the floodtide run a good part of its course before getting underway as we needed as much water as possible for the final few miles up to Maldon. At Haybridge a motorboat sent down from Maldon to help us up the last stretch, came alongside to enable a warp to be passed over and the gear was then stowed. However, it quickly became apparent that the motorboat was not sufficiently powerful to do more than hold the bow up into the wind and it was only the tide that was giving us way forward over the ground. Collier Reach, straight into the wind, crept by agonisingly slowly so it was with some relief the mooring warps went ashore at Greens Mills just a matter of minutes before the time of high water. The 'Phoenician', a fast sailing barge in her time but by now a full blown motor barge completely devoid of any gear except a derrick to enable the boat to be swung aboard, vacated the berth at Greens Mills as we crept up towards it, disappearing away downstream quickly with a white flurry of water under the transom, a haze of engine fumes in the air. Bob looked but made no comment.

This was not, admittedly, a freight for the Crouch but could this, I wonder, possibly have been the last time ever that the town of Burnham had the treat of the sight of a laden sailing barge under way?

Fund raising luncheon at the Watermen's Hall

On 17th March, a very successful presentation and luncheon was held in the historic surroundings of The Hall of The Company of Watermen & Lightermen of the River Thames, organised and presented by the Chairman of our Trustees, Bruce Richardson and Project Manager William Collard.

A full report will be given in the newsletter of September 2010. To date a considerable sum has been raised along with much additional interest in the project.

Basil Brambleby, Secretary

Late News

Amongst our Sunday volunteers at Standard Quay we have a student from the Queen Elizabeth's Grammar school who, together with her Father man the Visitors Centre and escort visitors on to the barge. As well as doing their stint for the month of May, Hannah and her Father, along with her younger sister, participated in a cycling event organised in Faversham for anyone wishing to fund raise for a charity of their choice. In the very heavy and persistent rain last Sunday they completed the 10 kilometre circuit and raised £73 which they have donated to the rebuild of Cambria. Hannah is a pleasing breath of youth in our otherwise traditional crew; she and her Father are an inspiration to the educational principles of Cambria which I hope will lead the way for others.

Basil Brambleby

Newsletter Postings

When the Newsletter is posted on the website we e-mail all of our members for whom we have an e-mail address. We would like to increase the number as much as possible to save on production costs. If you are happy to receive it this way please send me your e-mail address, we are, of course, only too happy to continue posting the newsletter where necessary.

I will be away for the month of June and early July so there may be a delay in responding to you. I do try to make a point of answering all queries. While I am away I plan to pick up all e-mail communications.

Basil Brambleby

cambriatrustsecretary@live.co.uk

Useful Information: Cambria Trust

Cambria Trust Secretary: Basil Brambleby, 32 Pilgrims Way, Cuxton, Kent ME2 1LG

Tel. No. 01634 710721.

e-mail: cambriatrustsecretary@live.co.uk

Treasurer:

Chris Snelling, 118 Pixmore Way, Letchworth, Herts SG6 3TR

Membership Secretary:

Cathy Chapman, 13 Beauvoir Drive, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 2TQ

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