



Cambria Trust Newsletter

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September 2009, No. 30



From Cambria's Cabin

It hardly seems possible; we are nearly through our second year at Faversham. The Project Managers report will bring you up to date with latest happenings aboard Cambria, and detail the excellent progress being made.

Visitor numbers to Cambria continue to build, we have people coming from places as far apart as London and Dover with a few from the continent, and some are on their fourth visit to the site. Fortunately Faversham is a good tourist attraction, with our unique and impressive shipbuilding project adding further to the Maritime Heritage of the Quay. This combination proves to be very popular and Cambria is getting quite a following.

On matters of business, the first AGM of the Charitable Company will be held towards the end of February 2010. The relevant papers will be sent out under separate cover in plenty of time for your response. Appreciating the wide area from which our supporters come, we look forward to seeing those who are close enough to attend the meeting.

Included with these papers will be a new 'Bankers' Order Form' enabling you to change your bankers' order details to our new account which had to be opened on the inception of the Charitable Company.

I do appreciate the extra burden but please take the time to do this as it will simplify matters for our treasurer whose workload, you will appreciate, is increasing. Thank you for your co-operation.

Fundraising, not unexpectedly, in these constrained times is slow, but thus far, adequate. We do have some possibilities in the pipeline which we hope will be successful. At a local level we had a stall at the weekly flea market, eight weeks ago, and raised £140. There are plans afoot to repeat the exercise very soon. The donation boxes aboard Cambria and in the Visitors' Centre are proving a very helpful source of income having raised £2000 + in the past year.

Basil Brambleby, Cambria Trust Secretary

The Mate's Return

Phillip (Ginger) Latham served as mate with Bob Roberts on Cambria. We have been in touch with him for short visit to Cambria some months relatives in the North, Phil stopped ports to visit with William Collard. We spent a lengthy time aboard date with the most recent aspects William had a prior engagement good fortune to spend considerable



(February 1964 - October 1968). quite a while and he made a ago. On a more recent visit to on his way back to the ferry and myself aboard Cambria. while William brought him up to of the rebuild. Unfortunately, and had to leave, it was my time talking with a real Cambria

crew member. It had the added advantage of being carried out over a drink in the pub. I spent a fascinating time listening to Phil recount, in detail, some of the aspects of which we already had some knowledge, even as far as the content of one of our newsletter stories recounted by Richard Weekes. Another episode was his filming experience aboard Cambria in “King of the River”, perhaps more of this another time. After several stories about Cambria he went on to talk about his life in motor ships. One such story entailed taking a somewhat larger vessel through the Spitway Channel, quite acceptable in a barge, but unusual in a larger motor coaster. I will try to prevail upon him to recount some more stories, by his hand in a future, newsletter.

Most importantly during this visit he passed on to William a fair copy of the personal log which he kept while serving in Cambria. I believe this gives quite a detailed account of the barge and her activities during this time. It is, of course, a very valuable document relating to the life of the nations last sailing trading vessel, and I’m sure you will be hearing much more of this later.

Philip keeps in touch with events by e-mail and assures us that he will visit again. We wish him well and thank him for his valued interest. He is, after all, one of the few sailormen remaining from the last days of trading sail.



‘Ginger’ serving his time

Basil Brambleby

The Apprenticeship Scheme

When Cambria Moved to Faversham with an HLF grant to help rebuild her, it was in no one’s mind that a Shipwright Apprenticeship Scheme would be part of the event.

Our team of shipwrights started work on Cambria, with the not inconsiderable task of clearing her hold and deck. With the onset of framing and flooring it soon became apparent to all onlookers that this was a massively interesting project, so much so that we put in a viewing platform with spare material which we had to hand. Running concurrently with the start of the rebuild the Trust were invited to hold an exhibition in the town at the Fleur de Lis Gallery. This proved to be very popular, and with the kind donation by Standard Quay Ltd, of a building on the quayside this exhibition was set up with Cambria close by. The Standard Quay and SB Cambria Centre came into being in Baltic House.

Of course none of this is news to you. Along with the public, pupils from teaching establishments were interested, and invited to come along. One such group were participating carpentry students from North West Kent College where there is a Sea Training School, and were well acquainted with SB Cambria. The College lecturing staff immediately realised

potential of the project and an initial pilot study was considered with the Trust. It was soon decided to go ahead and lengthy discussions took place between the College Staff and the Cambria Team comprising the Cambria Project Manager and Chairman (Director).

Accordingly a syllabus was put together with input from the Cambria Trust, National Sea Training School, North West Kent College, Rochester Independent College, and two master shipwrights from the Faversham area acting as instructors. This course, which has been formally approved by the Learning Skills Council, provides each successful participant with an NVQ level 2 qualification, together with a City and Guilds technical certificate. Complimentary Key Skills including Mathematics and English are being taught by Rochester Independent College.

In order to facilitate the formal training requirements close to the respective worksite at Standard Quay, Faversham, the Cambria Trust with the financial support of the Shipwright's Company and other benefactors has set up and equipped a classroom and a workshop in the Listed Buildings on the adjacent quay. A comprehensive Health and Safety risk assessment has been undertaken at these facilities, as well as at work sites, and a formalised Safety Management System has been installed.

Five apprentices have been engaged, one by the Cambria Trust and four others by local Faversham boat yards. All five have signed up as apprentices, and are now undergoing their formal instruction in addition to working at their respective NVQ worksites.

It cannot be overstated how important an undertaking this is for the Maritime community, the town economy, and traditional ship restoration in general. It has the blessing of Heritage Lottery Fund, and Swale Borough Council.

Many of the visitors to the SB Cambria ask about the personnel involved in the rebuild. I can say that without exception comments about the Apprenticeship Scheme are always positive and a surprise to the public that it has been implemented.

Tim Goldsack & Tom Browning (Shipwright & Apprentice)



Restoration News

May – September 2009

Progress since my last report has been most encouraging with shipwrights working in several areas. All the main deck beams are now in place having been individually located to take into account the position of watertight bulkheads and companionways. These beams will now support the first of the deck planks that are being fitted this month. These planks will form the supports for the hatch coamings and the short deck beams called carlings.

The main keelson has now been extended both forward and aft by the addition of pre-fabricated steelwork, with each piece being formed from templates. Steel sections have been welded and through bolted into the adjacent timbers to form a rigid support for the ends of the vessel, something that was missing from the original construction.

The fitting of the outer after planking, which started in April, has continued at a pace with each length of timber being cut, steamed and fastened in sequence. Planks of 1½” have been laid to a double thickness bedded onto felt and a tar and horse manure mix. A similar process has now commenced at the bow end following frame preparation by the master shipwright.

A major landmark was reached during July when the stem was fabricated and fitted. This is a substantial piece of timber with many angles and shapes. The backside of the stem has to be gently curved to fit the outer face of the apron. Templates were taken from the apron to assist with the preparation, and after careful final planning the timber, was lifted by crane and fitted first time. The structure was then through bolted to the apron and the inner steelwork.

The outer wale planks have been extended from the transom towards the bow and now mirror the sweeping lines always associated with the Cambria of old. With the fitting of the stem these planks will now be extended to the bow.

To give added strength to the deck beams and transfer some of the stresses generated under sail, timber knees are fitted in way of each beam. These are called lodging knees and have to be individually made to fit each space. Again templates were used and by early September over 20 knees were in place.

The barge hull has three key points that are susceptible to contact with other vessels and need extra heavy strengthening. These are the stem and each aft quarter. Heavy- duty steel sections are being fabricated to fit these areas and will be through bolted into adjacent timbers.

September also marked the placing of the order for the Cambria's sails with North Sea Sails of Tollesbury, Essex. The sailmaker wishes to commence making the smaller sails during this winter with the larger sails being measured once the mast and sprit are in place.

William Collard, Project Manager

Project Managers Pictures of progress



Top L. First outer wale plank entry runs.

Top M. Fitting the deck beams.

Top R. Shaping the forward

Mid. L. Extending the steel keelson beams.

Mid. M. Sweeping wale lines.

Mid. R. Lodging knees fitted to deck

Low. L. Stem timber ready for fitting lodging knee.

Low. M. 10" camber on deck beams.

Low.R. Shaping an after

Member's Contribution

I recently received this interesting item from Alan Sporne, one of our very long standing supporters. The article gives a very good idea of "how it was", and I notice with interest, similarities with anecdotes from Jimmy Lawrence's talk, not at all surprising since they were all following the same water trail.

Thank you Alan for a good yarn, the second part will appear in the January 2010 newsletter.

Basil Brambleby

"Work Experience"

I lived in Maldon and played on the river Blackwater, pottering about on anything that would float, surrounded by barges and smacks. At the age of 14, I coerced my family, to let me become a bargee. Mum had already met Jerry Mann, the skipper of the "George Smeed". He was a great chap, about 30 years old, and he needed a third hand. She was a three handed barge and they had just come from the barge yard after a big refit. She looked beautiful, all new paint and varnish, newly ochered sails, as far as I was concerned she was better than the Cutty Sark.

They were off to London to pick up a cargo of sugar from Tate and Lyles in Silvertown. I was to join her there when the skipper sent a telegram. At last the cable came and Mum and I set off to the office of Francis & Gilders in Fenchurch Street to meet the skipper and sign on. After signing the ship's papers the skipper said its best for you to leave your Mother here and we will go down to the river. Mum was in tears, I was not far from it but the excitement kept me going. So with kit bag on shoulder I swaggered off with the skipper and left Mum on the steps of the office. We arrived at Tate & Lyles and there she was jammed in between iron lighters loaded with unrefined sugar. We were unloading not loading as I had thought; I was introduced to the mate, Ian Hazelton.

I was immediately told to put the kettle on, and shown how to light the primus stove, all brews were done on the primus in the summer as the coal stove, down the forecastle, was only flashed up to cook meals. In winter it was lit 24 hours a day. There was no problem with coal, as it was part of my job to fill up the coal bunker any time one came across the stuff on the decks of merchant ships while bunkering, or put off in the boat and steal it from loaded lighters lying at buoys in the river. A barge boat was a work boat about 18 feet long, very strong and heavy. It had to be, as it often got nipped between steel lighters and scraped against stone dock walls. It was propelled by one oar over the stern. This was called sculling; you could really get it moving if you had to. After I made the tea I was given the job of sweeping the hold, it was like a barn! The sugar I swept up was kept in a sack along with the 2-3 sacks that had been pinched and was kept in the Forecastle, which was my new home. It was a large space that had been divided up to make me a cabin on the port side, consisting of a bunk with a straw filled mattress made of canvas and a pillow of the same design with 4 Army blankets. I had a bucket to wash in and a cupboard to hang clothes and a couple of shelves for jerseys etc.

The starboard side had shelves full of large pulley blocks, shackles, wire, fenders, wooden wedges and huge piles of sails and rope. The pointed bit in the bow contained the coal stove with an oven and three rings on top. This had an iron rail round the top about 3 inches high to stop the pots sliding off.

After I swept the hold we put on the wooden hatches and covered them with one of the heavy tarpaulins, this was tucked behind steel batons and wedges driven in pointing aft. Then we set

sail for the Victoria Dock to load Mustard seed for Norwich. This was one of the best freights one could carry. Mustard seed and Linseed were top paying cargos. Barges worked on Freight money. If the freight made £150 the owners had £75 and the skipper and the mate had £75 between them, the skipper £50, and the mate £25. I was paid 24 shillings a week. The skipper and the mate paid me 12 shillings cash out of their own pockets and they paid for all the food, and I did all the chores, cleaning, cooking, and shopping, plus working on the deck and learning to be a sailorman. That is what bargemen were called by the river and dock fraternity. I used to be very proud when I went through the Dock gates to go ashore shopping. The Police at the gate said "What ship?" and you answered sailorman, you could go anywhere, it was handy when you were dockyard scrounging for coal or a particular piece of timber, or going aboard an American cargo ship to scrounge some white bread. Their white bread was as white as snow; our bread that we bought in the shops was called white but looked like Hovis brown. The best thing you could get from American and Canadian ships was meat. Beautiful Beef and Pork, it didn't happen often, but it was nice when it did. All our food was kept in cupboards in the after cabin, where the skipper and mate lived, bread would go mouldy after 3-4 days.

To supplement our diet we traded with farmers and fishermen along the coast. Publicans also came into the chain, especially after I left the George Smeed and joined the Clara as mate with Bob Gosling: sugar for rabbits, milk, and corn for fish, and timber for money. Peanuts were good currency; we used to carry 150 tons of loose peanuts to a margarine factory in Woolwich. Everyone liked peanuts.

Anyway, back to the George Smeed and my first trip. The London Docks were fascinating.

It was still war time and the Battle of the Atlantic was still in progress and all the berths were occupied with ships from all over the World. Some of the exotic cargos were beginning to return, oranges and grapefruits besides the usual grain, timber, sugar & wool, meat, hides (smelly!). We loaded mustard seed. It was like black dust and went everywhere. We battened down and all the ropes and ladders, two large oars called sweeps, 2 bearing off poles, and the skipper's bike were lashed down on the hatch and then we washed down; using a dip bucket is quite an art. The mate was showing off how good he was at it and managed to get me soaked, and then we set sail for Norwich. Before we left I went ashore with the Mate to do the shopping with our ration books. The bargemen used a shop in North Woolwich that sold all we needed. There were a bakers and butchery there as well. Back onboard and off we went. We set the foresail, mainsail, topsail and mizzen, what a sight as we hauled and heaved. She was beautiful, deep loaded with the deck amidships only 3 inches clear of the water. The river unfolded before us, round Saint Katherine's Point (where the London Dome is), because the river is all bends around that area, the sails were on one side one moment and then gybed onto the other side, then back again. The wind was quite strong and we were bowling along, even the Mate was happy. Once everything was snugged down, I was sent to cook the dinner, but first tea up, and time to have a fag. The Mate was teaching me to roll my own, I felt like Jack Hawkins in Treasure Island (and they tried to make me work in a Chemist) no chance!

I don't remember what I had to cook for dinner, it was probably a disaster, but I got better at it as time went on, and my figgy duff and spam fritters were much sought after. Later that evening we anchored at Southend pier. There was a boom across the Thames downstream of the pier and it closed at night. There were about twenty barges anchored there, all bound down to Essex, Suffolk, and the Norfolk ports. Most of them were loaded with corn or timber. When there was a gathering of barges like this there was a lot of visiting, boats to-ing and fro-ing and gathering of news and gossip. As soon as the boom was open in the morning we were off! It was like a regatta, everyone was trying to look casual but they were actually trying their damndest to be first away. The tide was ebbing and helping us on our way. We had had a cup of tea and all sails were set.

Our barge had a bow sprit, which we lowered and set our jib and staysail. We were creaming through the water. The sea was boiling along the deck and spray flying off to leeward, because the boom gate was only about 100 yards wide we were all squeezed into the gap and sailing feet apart: lots of swearing and laughing; but deadly serious. I have never forgotten it, it was a wonderful sight.

After we were through the boom we spread out more and as some barges were faster than others, the twenty or so barges were spread over a couple of miles. We were well up with the leaders, the George Smeed had just had a refit so the hull was clean and smooth with fresh tar and the rigging was tight and sails newly stretched. We were romping along until the tide turned and things nearly came to a stop. The tide up the East coast is strong and a bluff bowed barge has a struggle against it. When the wind is light barges anchor until it turns, but this time the wind had freshened up so we kept going. As the wind was against the tide it causes an increase in wave height and everything was shining wet and as there is no wheel house, one stood there and got wet. Evening came and the compass light was lit (oil wick) and I cooked tea. Darkness fell and it was magical.

The port and starboard lights showed red and green reflections off the sea and the face of the man at the wheel was lit up with a yellow glow. We continued through the night. Other barges peeled off into the Black Water estuary for Maldon, others into the Colne estuary for Colchester. When I woke in the morning we had just passed Harwich and there was only us and one other barge left as the rest had turned into the river Orwell for Felixstowe dock and Ipswich.

After breakfast and being shown how to clean the oil lamps, I had time to sit on the hatch and watch the Suffolk coastline go by: Orfordness lighthouse, Aldeburgh, Thorpeness, and Dunwich. It was great, it was a lovely day, sunshine, white wave tops and sea gulls swooping about, (work in the ministry of food?!) rubbish! I wouldn't have swapped this for anything.

Eventually we get to Yarmouth, which is the mouth of the river Yare, which goes up to Norwich. We had to heave too for a couple of hours to wait for the floodtide to get into the entrance. It's a wicked place to sail into without an engine, but this time wind and tide were favourable and we sailed in (lots of banging of sails and flailing of ropes). The anchor was eased down to skip along the bottom as a brake and we were there, tied to the wall and snugged down. The skipper went ashore and arranged for us to join a tow up the river for the next day. The skipper took me to the board of trade office where I was given a merchant Navy identity card. It had to have a full set of my fingerprints on it and a photograph. I was also given a small lapel badge; it was silver with M.N. and a crown on top. I asked the skipper why the fingerprints. He said when a body has been in the sea a long time, they are the only way to identify it. The shrimp and crabs have had the rest! It was about 20 miles up to Norwich and the river was very narrow and twisty, we were tail end Charlie behind two other barges. Next morning at the start of the floodtide the tug arrived, and the bridge was swung and up the river we went. Some of the way I sat on the mainmast head with my legs rapped round the topmast, counting windmills. We unloaded at Coleman's wharf and were towed back to Yarmouth. We did several trips carrying corn and flour, and one trip with potash from Tilbury to Colchester.

Then came the fatal trip to Yarmouth with wheat for Marriages Mill. I'd been in George Smeed now for about 5 months and it was winter. We loaded at Bellamy's wharf near Tower Bridge. This is the birth where the Canadian Beaver boats unloaded. There was Beaver Glen, Beaver Dale, and a few others. They carried the grain from the Canadian prairies. This was an important part of our food during the war. We loaded and battened down. In atrocious weather we flew down the Thames. When we got to Southend the boom was open and away we went. By this time I spent a lot of time on the wheel and it was thrilling to control a vessel like the

George Smeed in bad weather. We got as far as Harwich where we went into shelter and got some rest. The forecast was S.E. 5-6. I remember this so well because of what happened next.

At daylight the skipper and mate conferred and decided to go for it. We had a fair wind and if we timed it right we would get to Yarmouth about an hour before high water. We were tearing along with green water over the lee deck but making good time. The wind then started to shift, through east to north east and we could only just fetch Yarmouth. We arrived at the pier heads like a submarine, half mainsail and topsail sheet only. She wouldn't take any more canvas, but we needed what we had set to heave too head to wind. The skipper was just about to go about and run back to Harwich when we spotted a huge sea going tug coming out. She was the "Lee Barber" by this time the ebb tide had started but the sea had eased down but was still very awkward as it would be on starboard quarter as we approach the pier heads. After a struggle they got a rope aboard us, it was a huge manila rope. We put two turns around the windlass and stopped it off round the mast. When the tug took the strain the rope halved in diameter with the stretch. By this time the ebb tide was pouring out of Yarmouth pier heads. The tug lined up for the entrance and took off. We were worried with the water pouring over the bows like a waterfall that the forecabin hatch cover would be torn off and we would go down head first in the entrance. There is a right angle turn after you get into the entrance. The tug went round the corner but the tide forced our bow the other way.

The tow rope broke and we were careering towards the stone quay. The mate let go the anchor to take the way off her. The skipper had the wheel hard to starboard but she didn't answer her helm. I rushed forward with a large fender to put between the quay and the barge before she hit. I was too late, as she hit with a loud crunch and tearing of wood, I was thrown forward over the fore horse (a large wooden beam that the foresail sheet runs on) I smashed my left shin on it but at the time felt nothing. We moored up and the mate and I started to use the two hand pumps as she was leaking badly, the fire brigade was called and they soon relieved us with their big pumps. When the tide went out, the barge sat on the bottom and was high and dry enabling some shipwrights to put a patch over the damage. By now my leg had swollen up to fill the leg of my trousers, an ambulance took me to hospital, and I was told I had osteomyelitis and they would operate and scrape the bone, and that I would be in hospital for two weeks.

That was the end of my time in the George Smeed. She was unloaded in Yarmouth (her cargo was damp so the corn was used to make cattle cake instead of bread). They sailed her to Pin Mill, a repair yard on the river Orwell where I met her two weeks later. A barge called the Clara was on the blocks next to the George Smeed and needed a mate, as the present mate was 72 years old and wanted to retire. The Clara was owned by the same Company as the George Smeed and I was asked to transfer my gear and take over the mate's job. This is exactly why one or two barges in a firm were three handed, so young lads could be trained to fill the positions of mate as older men were retired or injured which was not uncommon.

Written by Alan Sporne. (To be continued).

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