

Shuttlewood Barge Yacht Tiny Mite

Tiny Mite - the Early Years

John Whittingham Jan 2005

As with many decisions in life the selection of a yacht is often as a result of experience and situations at a point in one's life. So it was with my father (also John) and "Uncle" Bill Stout his lifelong friend and business partner. Together, they jointly owned cars and by 1952 a couple of boats- the smack "Joan" (lost on the Maplin Sands and another story!) then the "Wastrel".

The "Wastrel" was a 39 ft Luke design built on the Hamble in 1891. She had a lovely clipper bow and a panelled cabin. The bad news was she was exhausting to sail, being a "plank-on-edge" design of 8.75 ft beam, having an under-powered engine and drew 6 ft of water.

As we had no echo sounder and relied on the old lead line we seemed to spend most of our sailing time on the mud! As an 11 year old I found it very worrying. Her bowsprit was another concern both to Dad and Bill and other users of the Rivers. Lastly she had huge main boom, which frightened the life out of everyone in a jibe.

We kept her at Paglesham and came to know Frank Shuttlewood quite well. We often visited the old Shed in the winter for chats with Frank on things nautical. "You boys ought to have a little barge yacht, she floats in a puddle and sits upright if you do go aground! With a spritsail rig there is no boom and a staysail version does not need a bowsprit!" Dad and Bill were convinced. I always thought a small bawley would have been perfect, but as an 11/12 year old I did not get a vote!!

Therefore Frank got the commission to build a staysail barge yacht. He went off to Sadds in Maldon to select the timber. Her size was completely determined by the longest suitable oak timber he could find for the keel. This turned out to be 35ft and all other hull scantlings came from this dimension. Frank used no plans as such, except a small half model with loft lines and frame offsets drawn on the shed floor. "Tiny Mite's" keel was laid on 1st February 1955.

Frank and his sole worker, "Young" Jack Thorogood had an almost silent working relationship. They just seemed to know what each had to do for the job at hand, but used little or no verbal communication. Frank had his bench and tools on the left, with Jack and his tools on the right side bench above. They met in the middle to work together.

Frank took the lead in virtually every activity and decision. Although Jack was a skilled shipwright, his only individual contributions to "Tiny Mite's" construction were the fore hatch and a bench seat on the port side of the cabin opposite the fire.

"Tiny Mite's" construction was very heavy and typical of Frank. She had double-skinned topsides of oroko on sawn and grown oak frames. The bottom planking was over 2-inches thick elm. Inside she had two massive oak keelsons for hull strength, which also served as the bunk side supports. This was in place of a central timber, which would have been inconvenient. Construction continued during 1955 and the first half of 1956.

Financial arrangements with Frank were relaxed and on a "pay as you go" basis. Dad and Bill provided the engine, stern gear, electronics and electrics. Frank then fitted the equipment provided. The Shuttlewood's account, rendered in December 1956 was for a total sum of £1484-12-7d including sails, rigging and gear from sailmakers Mr Turnnidge of Leigh.

“Tiny Mite” was christened by Mrs Stout and launched on 11th June 1956. That is Jack, hands on hips watching her enter the water. I was allowed to be on-board, but my brothers David and Peter, were deemed to be too young and had to stay on dry land.

She floated clear of the ways then local oystermen Alf and Hubert Keeble acted as the recovery crew. I am in the cockpit in the next picture. In the background is C J Moorehouse’s yawl ”Cee Jay” fully dressed for the launching.

Two things became quickly evident. She was leaking badly, but floated well above her marks. For the first, “Tiny Mite” was put into a mud berth and she took up in a few days; for the second, we put over 2 tons of lead and pig iron in her bilges!

Over the coming weeks she was fitted out; leeboards attached, masts rigged and the sails bent-on. The sails came in their white state and were served with a mixture of red ochre and fish oil, this being done in the grass car park where the big building shed is now. I always seemed to have red-tanned hands in those days.

We believe the barge yacht in the foreground is the “Doreen”. Dad applied to have Tiny Mite surveyed and registered with the Registrar of British Ships. Her gross tonnage was approved as 11.07 tons and after allowances for working spaces, her Registered Tonnage is 6.15 tons. Frank carved her deck beams to indicate the various spaces and then sent “rubbings” back to the Registrar to prove it had been done.

The maiden sail took place on a foggy day in September/October 1956. It shows Bill and me in the cockpit with Dad on the foredeck.

Many great days sailing and longer cruises were yet to come and “Tiny Mite” lived up to Dad and Bill’s expectations. The postcard photograph shows the “Tiny Mite” on her mooring at Paglesham. “Kulu” is on the hard and more of the wreck of a Leigh bawley the “Moss Rose” is visible than today. Mr Daley, a teacher from Rochford Primary School owned the white yacht nearest and to the right, but I cannot remember her name.

Finally I wish to thank my brother Peter, who archived all the photographs used and collected most of the material on barges generally that he and I now share. Thanks also to the late Clem Harris, a family friend and a great photographer who took the photographs, except for the “Wastrel” and the postcard.

Don McDowell

Don McDowell and family, who had previously had Dormouse built by Shuttlewoods, bought Tiny Mite in 1969. They sailed her in all the Essex & Suffolk rivers as far as Snape.

Fred Cousins

In 1983 she was sold to the present owner Fred Cousins, who keeps her at Benfleet and has sailed her in the Thames a lot. In 2004 she was ashore at Leigh Motor Boat Club.

