

A First Sail

A lockdown project

Henry Clay

The first chuckling at the bow followed by the gurgling of the quarter-wave as a boat, new to the owner, heels to the wind is an exciting time. Only then do you begin to find out how well she sails, to learn how she will handle and what, if any, idiosyncrasies one has to manage. On 31 October, I took my first sail in *Kestrel*. My voyage (if it qualifies for such a title) was from Bosham Creek to Chalkdock Beacon and back, a total distance of perhaps a mile each way. This hardly merits inclusion

but, in a year of such restricted sailing, I hoped that a brief log, albeit of the maintenance and restoration of a boat, might just find a place.

I purchased *Kestrel*, a 27ft 3in Tumlare built in Stockholm in 1934, four years ago as a project for my retirement and a boat for local cruising. The Tumlare is a beautiful boat that is reputed to sail like a witch and handle like a dinghy. Uffa Fox described them (in the same book that reprints the 1934 log of Commander Graham's *Emmanuel* from the Journal) as 'a very advanced type of cruiser, in fact, I should think she is the most advanced in the world' and also explains how 'The sections show her high, powerful yet easy bilge, which is actually above the



Henry helming *Kestrel*, a Tumlare built in 1934

waterline, and this it is that gives her the power to carry her tall mast and sail'.

But Tumlare are not comfortable cruising vessels. As my daughter-in-law, Megan pointed out, there is barely sitting room in the cabin. Being considerably taller, finding my way forward requires a sort of commando crawl and, with a maximum beam of 6' 3" and long ends, coming out involves reversing the process.

For far too long *Kestrel* has sat under a cover in the garden. During this time various wooden boat experts (a former Commodore and the previous editors of *Roving Commissions*) have commented on the odd appearance of her keel. They

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Replacing the garboards (above)

Crafting a new rudder (right)

workshop we removed the garboards. Goodness, I was glad to have his confident reassuring presence!

Although restored by the International Boatbuilding Training College at Lowestoft, it was apparent that the garboards had not been bedded properly into the rabbet. Thick layers of mastic were removed until we could find the original rabbet line. We also discovered no bolts through the stern knee, that the repaired sternpost was coming apart and some far-from-tight nuts on the keel bolts. Resolving these

even suggested that the lead might have shifted. Although she pricked my conscience every time that I saw her, I remained in denial, telling myself that I had simply to build a new rudder and then go sailing to see what else might need doing.

But you can kid yourself only for so long. Late in 2019 I approached Alastair Garland (adviser and shipwright to a number of wooden boat-owning RCC members) and came to an arrangement that he would assist and oversee the work, undertaking the skilled tasks as necessary. Perhaps he could see a decent project coming his way! Having moved her to Alastair's



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issues defined one major strand of her rebuilding and resulted in a much fairer keel to hull profile. But we also removed the existing mast step (which turned

New cleats awaiting varnish (right)
Scarfing a new section into the mast



out to have no fastenings either), fitted an extra floor board at the front of the keel and built a new step to form

an I-beam that extends across five floors, strengthening the keel at the front of the lead.

Alistair scarfed a new section into the mast, we turned it the right way round and I dressed it appropriately (returning closer to the configuration as designed). All this as well as building a new rudder and many other tasks associated with the ownership of any boat.

Aside from a gap during the lockdown period (and, if truth be told, less time than I should have supporting Louise preparing for the wedding of our daughter, Bridget), this kept me occupied several days a week for much of 2020, even though we postponed many non-essential tasks until after sailing the boat. Finally, with her mast rigged and burgee flying, she was towed by tractor through the centre of Bosham to be launched in late October.

Ahead of me I can see that there are jobs to re-model the cockpit (the changes to the original design don't work) reconfiguring the tracks for genoa and jib (again to the original design) and quite a lot of winter work to fit in at least some of the practicalities and comforts of a proper cruising boat. This will include reefing arrangements that can be put in place without lowering the mainsail; a stove, though hardly a galley and improved locker arrangements.

I am looking forward to using her more widely. I do ask myself 'Is she just a new toy?' But that first sail under reefed main and working jib proved to me just how easy she is to handle, it gave me confidence in the work that we had done and has me anticipating next season with enthusiasm. She certainly felt witch-



like, but other boats to compare performance with are thin on the ground late in the evening on a windy last day of October.

She may be a fun toy – but she is far from JUST a toy. I am sure that my enthusiasm will last.