

Brian and Wendy were first introduced to the ancient port town of Maldon, Essex County, England about 14 years ago by a cousin who lives in nearby Chelmsford. Essex County extends from the north shore of the Thames Estuary to the South, up to Suffolk County to the North. The history of the area goes back to pre-New Testament times, beginning with the Celts, who were pushed out by the Romans, who were later replaced by the Anglo-Saxons, and in the case of the Maldon area, the Anglo-Saxons were badly beaten by the Vikings, who launched a raid from nearby Osea Island in the Blackwater Estuary.

Whenever they return to Maldon, they stay in the 17th century pub, "The Jolly Sailor," which is located on Hythe Quay, and only a few hundred feet from the base of the Thames Sailing Barge Trust, on the Blackwater Estuary. The entire lowland southeast coast of England is punctuated with estuaries like the Blackwater, which are fed by shallow creeks and rivers, that were the highways over which about 2,000 Thames Sailing Barges transported goods, to London and the many growing towns in southeast England. They were the transport trucks of that part of the country from the mid-1800's to the mid-1900's, carrying everything from bricks to build London, to horse manure that was produced by London's main mode of transportation, the horse. There are about 50 sailing barges that have been restored or kept up, and likely that many again that are under restoration, On average, they run from 85 to over 100 feet in length, with a beam from 19 to 23 feet, a draught of 4 feet, and carry between 3,000 and 4,000 square feet of sail, mizzen, mainsail, topsail, jib, staysail, and on those with a bowsprit, a lower and upper job. A normal crew consisted of a Skipper and a Mate, with some also carrying a 3rd Hand.

The Thames Sailing Barge Trust has spent a lot of money restoring and maintaining their two barge; "Pudge" and "Centaur." Pudge, built in 1922 was part of the "Little Ships" flotilla that rescued allied soldiers from the beaches at Dunkirk. Centaur, built in 1895, and underwent a restoration two years ago. In addition to receiving heritage funding, the Trust depends very much on its 300 odd members and their annual membership fees, as well as private donations, revenue from weekend and day cruises, and other charters, as well as the sale of hats, t-shirts etc.

On at least seven or eight occasions, the barges took part in matches, or races, at various locations off the southeast coast, and these matches became annual traditions, and are still held each year. This year as part of their trip to England, Brian and Wendy, along with six other Trust members took Pudge into the "Colne Smack and Barge Match;" so-named after the Colne River that empties into the lower Blackwater Estuary, just before it reaches the North Sea. So after her crew boarded on Thursday afternoon of Sept. 3, Pudge and its crew set off down the Blackwater from Maldon, anchored off the village of Brightingsea overnight, and headed out into the North Sea for the match Saturday morning. This was a true co-operative arrangement; everyone on board shared the workload, i.e. each took his/her turn cooking meals, washing up afterwards, and also certain jobs on

deck, like handling running gear as the ship came about, steering, etc. The winds for this particular match started off somewhat light, but increased to Force 5 to 6 breezes as the day progressed, and we were treated to some great sailing. One little fly got into the ointment; at the time when winds were light, we were gybing around a buoy, and the tidal currents were trying to push the stern in the opposite direction to the helm, and as she slowly gybed, one of the clew lines on the topsail fouled on the topmast. In order to sort things out, we had to take in all sail, and as Murphy's Law would have it, we drifted into the shallows. However, the Mate went up the mast, unfouled things, we set all sail again, and carried on, but by this time, well back of the pack. However, as we knew Pudge was likely the slowest of the lot anyways, we just enjoyed the day.

First group of three photos....(1) the ancient port of Maldon, Essex County, (2) Sailing Barge, "Centaur" under full sail...one of two vessels belonging to The Thames Sailing Barge Trust (3) Pre-sailing safety briefing; Syd, Dave, Ian, Chris Martin (Mate), and Wendy

Second set of four photos (1) Early in the match, relaxing in light airs; Ian, Dave, Martin Phillips (Skipper) Wendy, and Syd (2) No lack of help winching up the anchor at Brightlingsea; Syd, Chris, Martin, Ian, and John (3) Brian takes his turn cooking in the galley (4) The awards dinner at The Brightlingsea Sailing Club; Wendy, Chris, Ian and Martin