

## Westmacott, Woodnutt and Wild Wind:

### A Personal View

Paul Rawlinson

*Author's Comments: Manuscript on Classic Boat based the Westmacott article – only 50% published.*

*Copy to RLYM YC Archives July 2000.*

*Also Authors corrections in Blue*

**Archivist Comments:** *Written thus:*

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Our hearts again ruled our heads when Jenny and I bought a New Forest cottage in need of 'some' modernisation and renovation, through auction in 1975. This followed ownership of a succession of classic motorcycles and cars used as daily transport around the London suburbs of Surrey.

By 1980, now with two young daughters to amuse, we (I?) planned to escape for the first time over the piles of building debris, through the haze of brick dust towards the Solent for some clean air. After an excellent and exhilarating course of dinghy sailing techniques in Wayfarers at the Calshot Activities Centre, (once home of the passenger-carrying Flying Boats, the RAF High Speed Flight and venue of the Schneider Trophy) the need to sail became insatiable.

Our first boat, Nereid (Sea Nymph) was a classic - or, as some pointed out, just old - Oxeybird One Design fourteen foot dinghy, which we sailed out of Keyhaven in the Western Solent, She was built of mahogany on Canadian rock elm with

Egyptian cotton sails. This class was formed by the Lymington Town Sailing Club in 1947 and totalled forty boats, no longer raced, but ideal daysailers and fine sea boats. Virtually uncapsizable, I assured Jenny, as Nereid entered the white-horsed Solent for the first time, with a novice at the helm. On one of those 'spirit-soaring' summer afternoons in 1983 when sailing Nereid, we noticed a shapely 5 ton canoe sterned Bermudan stem head sloop on her swinging mooring between the marshes on Keyhaven River. From the spoon bow, along a graceful sheer to that exquisite stern; over the

curvature of the coachroof with generously radiused corners which balanced those in the cockpit; to the three graded oval brass deadlights on each of her tapered deckhouse sides; she was a joy to behold, with one's eye being led seductively over those endless curves. Jenny knew then that I was lost forever, and hopelessly, this time.

Her name was Susan, 26.1' (8m) overall x 22' (6.7m) waterline x 7.2' (2.2m) beam x 3.7' (1.13m) draft. She had been beautifully and sympathetically restored, we later learnt when Michael Hope and his late brother, Steve, offered her for sale. Designed by Alfred Westmacott and built at Woodnutt & Co, St Helens, Isle of Wight in 1929 to a very high standard and of superb materials, giving her a reluctance to decay, she carried a long lead ballast keel affixed to an oak backbone with bronze keel bolts; Pensacola pitchpine planking on Canadian rock elm steamed frames; Kauri pine tongued and grooved planked deck and similarly planked coachroof on Burma teak sides/cockpit coamings, as was all the brightwork. The mast and boom were of solid Canadian spruce with bronze roller reefing gear and all other fittings were of noble metals. Her iron sail was a Brit E, 10hp, 2-cylinder petrol engine, although when originally built she was fitted with a 2-cylinder Brooke.

The name Westmacott was thought to be only associated with the various pre-war one-design keelboat classes such as the X fleet (Classic Boat no 12), whose Lymington division has always impressed me, moored to attention side-by-side, eager to be off and play with the elements. Other well documented classes being the Victorys (Classic Boat no 31), Solent Sunbeams (Classic Boat no 45) as well as the Seaview Mermaids, Bembridge and Yarmouth One Designs. Although Susan was worth her asking price, the long arm of commonsense this time dragged me back to reality and our [New Forest](#) cottage renovation, as one financial abyss did not need compounding by another. So the research began into the lost world of Alfred Westmacott, Woodnutt & Co and those fine boats, which would eventually uncover a restorable example seven years later, named Wild Wind.

In 1986, I received a letter from Alec Metier MBE, stepson of Alfred Westmacott, who joined Woodnutt's in 1921 as an office boy and took over as manager of the yard in 1935 from the popular Reggie Pook who had just resigned after thirty years service. Alec Mellor recalled that many cruising yachts from 3 to 29 ton were built, as well as One Designs, during his time up to 1950. These included the war years when, of course, they were not building yachts. Alec remembered that Woodnutt's was sold to a large

engineering group around 1960 and that, unfortunately, all the design information was lost in a fire in one of their yards at Warsash on the Hamble. He suggested that if I looked through issues of Lloyds Register of Yachts, it would be possible to trace most of the boats. Alee, who lived in a cottage at Newtown on the Isle of Wight, died in 1988 aged 77 years.

Alfred Westmacott's father, Percy G B, is listed as a subscriber in the 1891 edition of Lloyds, living at Benwell Hill, Newcastle-on-Tyne and Creagmoraig, Oban, Scotland. He owned a 99' (30.2m) schooner, named Blue Bell, built by Nicholson of Gosport, Hampshire in 1866 and designed by a B Nicholson. It is interesting to note that some sails were by Ferguson, others by Laphorn, and that no engine was fitted Percy was the managing director of the shipbuilding and **engineering** company, Armstrong, Whitworth in Newcastle, [Mitchell & Co at Elswick on the Tyne](#), into which the eighteen year old Alfred was apprenticed in 1886, being released for three years in 1888 to study naval architecture at Glasgow University. Alfred's grandson, William, recalls that his grandfather became number two on the design team and worked on the Dreadnought Class warship. Although Alfred won a design competition at the firm and was later offered the Chief Designer's post, he declined and it was awarded to a colleague named Tennyson - D'Eynecourt.

Alfred apparently had other plans, for in 1899 the firm of Westmacott, Stewart & Co was formed and based itself on the sheltered sand dune, Duver, (pronounced as in "dove") at St Helens, Isle of Wight, on the northern side of the harbour entrance and opposite Bembridge. The site had business connections before this, Alfred recounted in an interview given in 1908 that a company known as Kirby Bowen and, subsequently, Vrill Ltd, had been in existence for a considerable number of years. Westmacott, Stewart & Co took over control. Alfred had by this time moved home to Princes Mead, Nettlestone, Seaview, a popular Edwardian holiday retreat. The Brannon engraving of 1836 shows the Duver in the middle ground with a yawl beached by three dark sheds where the Woodnutt slipway would give birth to many a thoroughbred offspring. Access to the yard was over the golf links, between the high dune to the left and the cattle grazing by the water's edge.

By 1904, Westmacott, Stewart & Co Ltd, designers and builders of yachts, launches, engine manufacturers suppliers and repairers, had taken over control and adopted the name of Woodnutt & Co of Bembridge, sailmakers, riggers, chandlers and agents for Sawyers oilskins.

Alan Coombes, a Woodnutt shipwright from the mid-1930s until the war, still lives with his wife, Eileen, in St Helens on 'Coombes' Corner', as his home is fondly referred to by locals. Alan kindly loaned the Westmacott, Stewart & Co bronze nameplate (see photos) which was attached to Black Gnat a 13' (3.96m), a sailing dinghy built by the young Company in its embryonic days. Alan can still be found sailing her in Bembridge Harbour.

Only seven boats are listed in Lloyds of 1904 under the Westmacott, Stewart & Co banner, the earliest irr-1900 being Shahrazad, a 26' (7.93m) electric launch for Captain G B Preston, followed by the linear rater, Fatima, a 25.8' (7.87m) cutter for A E Moore. In 1901, Red Rose, a 21' (6.4m) centre board yawl for Sir H Earle and Swiftsure, a 43.8' (13.3m) waterline steam yacht for Percy Westmacott, were built; followed in 1904 by Brownie, a 40' (12.2m) electric launch, also for Percy who now lived at Rosemount, Ascot, Berkshire.

Other designers' work was also built, such as Beaver in 1902, (see Beken photo BX 86/1), a 19' (5.8m) linear rater by Fred Shepherd, owned by Alfred; and Chaha, a 27' (8.24m) sloop by P Pearce and N D Deakin for Norman Deakin. Under the Woodnutt & Co banner in 1904, two 5 ton linear raters by E R Tatchell, named Amorelle (see Beken 10651 photo) and Yo San were built, as was a 19.5' (5.95m) centre board sloop by Alfred for Captain Wilkes Jolliffe, aptly named Little Moon, as he also owned Moonrise. a 57.5' (17.54m) ketch by S J Dewdney of Brixham in 1900.

From 1905 until the outbreak of war in 1914 approximately thirty craft, which included launches, sloops, cutters and motor yachts from 18' (5.49m) to 75' (22.9m) are listed in Lloyds, although there must have been many others, mostly designed by Alfred and one for his own and the Company's use in 1905, Saint Helena, a 35' (10.67m) launch., which won the gold medal for paraffin engined boats in the 1906 race between Gravesend and Cowes, In 1906, Walrus, a 19' (5.8m) C B sloop designed by and for E C Cockburn, with whom Alfred had collaborated, after winning a Bembridge Sailing Club design competition, to develop a new clinker built One Design ([Bembridge Old Design](#)) for the club, which later became the Victory Class in 1934. Also in 1906, Vilja, a 21' (6.4m) sloop was designed for Miss M C Campbell by Captain Edward Du Boulay, who invented the roller reefing headsail (1878) and in 1889 had designed the earlier 16' (4.88m) Bembridge One Design which was clinker-built, straight-stemmed, transom sterned and carried the 'Bembridge rig', a combined main and topsail. He was also founder member of the Bembridge Sailing Club formed in 1887.

In 1908, Zut, a Woodnutt sloop, 18' (5.49m) x 6.1' (1.86m) b x 31' (0.95m) d, was owned by Senator Guglieimo Marconi of Collegio Romano, Italy and Eaglehurst, Fawley, Southampton one year before he was awarded the Nobel Physics prize in recognition of his invention, radio telegraphy. This-modest sloop was dwarfed by his impressive schooner based in Genoa, the 198' (60.39m) Elettra (ex Rovenska), built in 1904 by Romage and Ferguson of Leith, Scotland. He was also a member of the Motor Yacht Club of Netley.

Also in this year, Trident (see Beken photo 10031 - lines and deck layout in John Leather article in Boatman), a 75' (22.9m) motor yacht for his father, Percy. The part finished hull was reported in that year as being a trend-setter in its class with a sharp entry and an exceptionally clean run aft due to the rounded stern. The construction was of specially selected teak of two skins, the outer being 1" (25.4mm) and the inner 0.5" (12.7mm) and she was 75' (22.9m) x 14' (4.3m) beam x 5.3' (1.98m) draft, allowing her to negotiate most of the canals in Holland and France. She was powered by three Woodnutt 4 cylinder paraffin engines driving three propellers which were protected by bilge keels, giving speeds of seven, nine or eleven knots, dependent on the use of one, two or three propellers. An additional engine generated power for lighting and cooking and the accommodation below decks was described as comfortable and lavish.

The Woodnutt Company at this time was a hive-of industry -efficiently managed, modern and dynamic - with a spacious sail loft, well lit by natural or electric light. Sails were produced in white canvas and the Bern bridge colours of scarlet, red and yellow. A tanning service was also offered for white canvas, ideally after a year's careful use, which increased their weight by less than ten per cent.

Enormous quantities of fittings were stocked, suitable for the smallest dinghy or the largest motor yacht, which supported a new chandlery at Seaview, plus a thriving prompt despatch mail order service, especially to Finland and Sweden. All these items were manufactured to a high standard by their own blacksmiths who knew exactly what was required without having to refer to drawings. There was also a galvanising shop.

Roomy, well ventilated small yacht and boat stores with concrete floors were comfortably filled with all types of craft. At the top of the slipway was the main building shed, spacious and well appointed as the other buildings, which housed at this time the Trident, as well as a 26' (8m) auxiliary yawl.

Interestingly, a few motor launch hulls had been left with Woodnutts in this

shed by clients who were unable to fulfil their contracts. A comforting thought for us dreamers of today that even in those times kindred spirits were bewitched by these fine boats only to find them finally out of reach. Boats like this would carry a government health warning if built today.

At the rear of the building shed did thirty skilled engineers and their apprentices manufacturing components for the Woodnutt marine engines and the Westmacott patent vaporiser man a humming machine shop, which housed eleven machines.

It seems that Woodnutts also developed their own wet weather gear and these oilskins were very light in weight 'being only a few ounces and guaranteed not to stick.' Alfred, had personally tested this product in extreme conditions when delivering one of his designs which had been shipped out by steamer, through two hundred miles of backwaters from Cape Coast Castle, Ghana, on the West African Gulf of Guinea.

As a courtesy to visitors, several sets of light moorings were laid in the harbour with no fee asked for their use, although local watermen sometimes dishonestly demanded payment. These mooring buoys were clearly marked with the Woodnutt trademark of a white circle crossed by a horizontal white line on a black background.

Jackdaw, a 20.8' (6.34m) x 6.2' (1.89m) b x 3.1' (0.95m) d cutter with a small cuddy, was designed by Alfred in 1909 and although built for S A Hermon, JP, was later owned in 1922 by Donald Straker of Bembridge and by Alfred in 1924 and renamed Badger. (See Beken photo 16974), It may appear that her dimensions are similar to that of an X Boat, but Lloyds frequently listed only the waterline length without stating so. Unfortunately, this boat was not listed after 1928 in Lloyds after being owned by General Sir Walter Congreve VC, KCB and based in Malta. Amadis, a 40.1' (12.23m) auxiliary yawl was built in this year for J S Spry of St Mawes, Cornwall and also two motor launches.

By 1910, the gaff rigged One Design X Class prototype (known until 1921 as the Motor Yacht Club One Design, when X numbers were assigned) [See Beken photos 12902/13498] had been designed by Alfred and trialled. This was followed in 1911 by a small fleet of five boats, priced at £48.60, whose names were prefixed by an M, namely Mistletoe, Mayfly, Mischief, Merrymaid and Madcap for the Motor Yacht Club at Netley on Southampton Water and other local clients. The first X race was organised by the Motor Yacht Club on the 3rd June in this year, and the fleet of five mentioned

competed keenly. Alfred's other grandson, Richard, kindly loaned me a photograph in 1986 which shows his grandfather standing on the Woodnutt slipway in 1932 alongside one of his designs, the 21' (6.4m) sloop, Gib Cat (later Lodestar). Richard and William Westmacott are keen X Class sailors with the Lymington fleet. Their boat, Xanthus, X56, celebrating her sixtieth birthday this year to co-incide with Richard's, also enjoyed a very successful Cowes Week. Their father, Commander [John](#) Westmacott, Alfred's only natural son, sailed in Xanthus and also Anitra X52.

Charles T Ricardo owned a launch named Catapult in 1913 which had just been re-engined with a single cylinder 4.5" - 6" petrol Thorneycroft. She was built at Woodnutts in 1908, perhaps one of the launches left on their hands. He also owned an Albert Strange 22' (6.71m) centreboard ketch? (yawl), Catalone, built by the Ray Motor Co, Maidenhead in 1909. He must have been a lover of felines as he renamed his Bembridge home, Catlands. I also wondered if he was related to Sir Harry Ricardo, the famous motor and aero engine combustion specialist who started the Ricardo Consulting Engineers in 1922 at Shoreham-by-Sea, Sussex.

One of the last boats built before the first war was Mab (see photos), a gaff cutter with counter stern and bowsprit designed by Alfred for Colonel E Hollway in 1913. 27.9' (8.5m) x 7.6' (2.32m) bx 4.25' (1.3m) d with 500 square feet of sail. She was built of the same long-lasting materials as Susan and was engineless until 1928, when owned by Lieutenant H A Littleton DSO, RNVR who based her at Keyhaven. John Hill of Clonakilty, County Cork, Eire has fond memories during his ownership between 1960 and 1970 when Alan Buchanan (who Walter Easton instructed in yacht design) redesigned her rig to Bermudan. Although she had a cabin, John thinks that she may have been an open boat originally. I believe she is still somewhere in the Republic and John tells me that there is a photograph of her in the Irish Cruising Club Centenary publication.

Shortly before hostilities began, Shilluk, a 21' (6.4m) sloop was built and later owned by Mrs L C Rawlence of Weybridge, Surrey.

Alfred Westmacott served his country during the first war, when Woodnutts were undoubtedly supporting the war effort, as a Captain in the Royal Navy. A sad time for many families and Alfred's as his father Percy died in 1917 at the age of 86. This was also the year when the artist and gifted amateur yacht designer, Albert Strange, died. He will always be remembered as father of the beautifully proportioned canoe stern.

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Harry Brickwood, the local brewer, is listed in Lloyds as owning two Woodnutt boats. The first, in 1919, a 17' (5.2m) wl centreboard sloop named Silhouette. The second, in 1922, a 17' (5.2m) wl sloop, named Coquette, built at Woodnutts in 1910. He was known as a very accomplished X Boat sailor and was nominated the first X Class captain by the Motor Yacht Club in 1921.

In 1920, Walter Easton owned a Woodnutt 18' (5.48m) centreboard Bermudan sloop named Chin Chin. He became a respected yacht designer in the same class as Strange, Westmacott and Harrison Butler, all lovers and masters of the canoe stern. Walter's later Rona, a 24.5' (7.47m) centreplate canoe yawl of 1928 has Humber Yawl Club influences, of which he was a member with George Holmes and Albert Strange. He sailed Rona with his two sons, Ian (who was later knighted) and Alistair, (a retired Royal Naval Lieutenant Commander and renowned yachtbroker), who is still enjoying X racing with the Lymington division. Many of Walter's designs are to be found in the absorbing cruising books, written between the wars by Francis B Cooke, such as Cruising Hints, Pocket Cruises and Small Yacht Cruising.

Production was slow to pick up after the war due to shattered lives and a shortage of materials but by 1922 things were much healthier, especially with the introduction of the Seaview Mermaid One Design (see Beken photos 11135, 11113, 11048, 13536, 11046, 11114), followed by the Solent Sunbeam One Design a year later.

For his own use, Alfred sailed Riviera (ex Banstiee), an engineless cutter 35.8' (10.92m), designed by W S Luke and built by W G Luke & Co of Southampton in 1891.

Donald Straker of Melody, Swains Lane, Bembridge was so impressed with Alfred's designs and the yard's work that he took over ownership of the mentioned Jackdaw in 1922 and Irene, a 1921 22' (6.71m) auxiliary Bermudan sloop, in 1924. Also in this year Donald commissioned Alfred to design the shapely canoe yacht Hazel, (later named Oxeybird, Wild Cat and, finally, Wild Wind) 25.4' (7.75m) x 20.6 (6.28m) wl x 7.6' (2.32m) b x 4' (1.22m) d. (See Beken photos 32306/07/08).

She was the first of three yachts of this type, the second being Susan of 1929 and the third, Elfin, of 1930. Unfortunately, all design records have been lost but her lines are similar to the 1910 Albert Strange design, number



110, Norma, as illustrated in Part 53 of W P Stephens' book, Traditions and Memories of American Yachting. (See photocopies). Hazel was built to the usual high standard demanded by Alfred's fastidious attention to detail. He took over ownership of Jackdaw and renamed her, Badger, in this year probably in part exchange for the new yacht. Hazel had a sail area of 330 square feet, but was also fitted with a single cylinder petrol "Watermota" by W D Fair & Co of Hampton Wick, driving a propeller through the port quarter.

Although she retained this name when owned subsequently by Leonard Hill of Hawkhurst, Kent, Thomas Porter of Chilworth, Surrey and Alan Page of Ryde, Isle of Wight, by 1936 she was renamed Oxeybird by Captain H H Nicholson, a J Class sailor of Creek Cottage, Woodside, Lymington. By this time she had been re-engined by Woodnutts with a 2 cylinder Stuart Turner, from where she was collected by Captain Nicholson and Monty Knight, the Captain's mentee and later to become a much respected marine design engineer. Monty continued to sail his Lymington Pram, 14' (4.27m) Greenfly (sail no 19), on Lymington River until six weeks before his death at the age of 85 in 1988. Captain Nicholson owned the original Lymington Pram sailing dinghy, Oxeybird, which had been built for him by Dan Bran of Lymington in 1926 (sail no 1). Dan had also built the first 11' (3.36m) Pram in 1912 (also Sail No 1) for the Captain, which later became known as the Lymington Scow. Captain Nicholson was responsible for the formation of the Lymington River Sailing Club before the first war, but a new Lymington Yacht Club was formed after the hostilities which later became the Royal Lymington Yacht Club. The Captain \*\* was not involved in this development but formed the Oxey Lake Sailing Club at a local creek.

**Archivist Comment:** *Capt H H Nicholson did serve on the first 2 periods of the General Committee under Major Potter in 1922 but later stood down to make way for one of the 2 ladies who under Club Rules were to be on the Committee.*

In 1938, Oxeybird was sold to Captain E R Corson (later Rear Admiral) who renamed her Wild Cat as he and his two sons were avid readers of the Arthur Ransome books, Wild Cat being a boat in the Peter Duck story. Their voyage, in company with Arthur, from Pin Mill to the Walton Backwaters in Suffolk just two weeks before the outbreak of war is recorded in Arthur's diary and sea logs (held in the Brotherton Collection at Leeds University). There is also mention of Corson and Wild Cat in Hugh Brogan's autobiography of Arthur and in Roger Wardale's excellent recently published book, Nancy Blackett -Under Sail with Arthur Ransome, which includes Arthur's favourite photograph (see photograph) of his canoe yacht, Selina

King, taken by Corson from Wild Cat's cockpit in 1939. Wild Cat is mentioned as a cutter; although the 1952 Beken photographs show a reduced rig, there is an eyebolt near the waterline indicating that she once had a bowsprit. Subsequent owners commented that she definitely needed this bowsprit to assist going about. She would also have had a longer boom, the mast being supported by running backstays similar to the Beken photograph of Elfin in 1930. Bringing the rig inboard may have been the fashion after the war for one reason or another, but these yachts lost much of their appeal for me.

Wild Cat was laid up for the war at Kings Boatyard at Pin Mill and sold in 1946, being briefly owned by H P Birchenough, followed by R Dutton-Forshaw, an agent for Rolls Royce, Bentley and Daimler cars. Norman Bartlett, a retired army major, moved her to Hamble in 1951 and registered her at the Port of London as Wild Wind in 1953. In 1956 her sale was handled by Mr Morgan Giles to A P R Nicolle, an estate agent of Torquay, Devon, who's son remembers summer excursions to Salcombe. Subsequent owners from 1959, (when sail no R19 was added) based her on the River Fowey, Cornwall, including W J Pierre Hunt from 1963 to 1970, now in his late eighties. He fondly remembers sailing her single-handed to Lands End, Carrick Roads on the River Fal and across the Channel, visiting St Peter Port on Guernsey, St Helier on Jersey, Sark, St Malo and Douarnenez, in addition to other ports on the French coast. W J Pierre Hunt also had a bronze keelbolt removed each year for inspection.

Her last entry in Lloyds was 1972 when owned by Dr J E B Randies, who became quite sentimental about her on seeing photographs again.

Eventually, after much detective work, she was traced in 1989 to Golant on the River Fowey (see photos). I engineered a family holiday at Polruan and took them on a pilgrimage, via the Bodinnick ferry, to see her. She was not offered for sale until 1992 when Basil Towell and family decided that with increasing years he needed something he could sail single-handed more easily and that custody should be passed on to us after fourteen year's ownership. Jenny's eyes dimmed as the white hull squeezed past her kitchen window, over the beloved flower beds coming to rest on the lawn where I began to assess the extent of the work to be done.

Returning to 1927 at Woodnutts, Alfred designed an engineless bermudan sloop for his own use. Reveille. 29' (8.85m) x 19.1' (5.83m) wl x 6.5' (1.98m) bx 4.5' (1.37m) d, narrow gutted and with a generous spread of sail, 385 square feet, indicating that she had the grace and speed of a gazelle! She

must have been quite a handful, as her next owner, R T Cooke of Ventnor, Isle of Wight reduced the sail area to 350 square feet. Her keel was lead, planking of pitchpine, decks of Ceylon pine, teak deckhouse with one oval deadlight forward and one each side. By 1950, based at Portsmouth, a single cylinder Stuart Turner had been fitted by Commander E C Wrey, RN, and in 1962 she was being raced in Dublin Bay by R T Large, whose daughter remembers Reveille's long stern with rounded ends and a long bow; apparently she was a very wet boat! A metal mast was fitted some time ago and she is believed to be still in the Dublin Bay area, although damaged in Hurricane Charlie of 1986.

By 1928 Donald Straker was owner of his fourth Woodnutt yacht, Melisande, which Alfred was commissioned to design. (See Beken photos 15456.15457). She was an auxiliary Bermudan sloop with a gently downward curving bowsprit and upswept spreaders at the hounds and again with a canoe stern. 30.5' (9.30m) x 25.0 (7.63m) wl x 8.5' (2.59m) b x 4.5' (1.37m) d. Her sail area was 387 square feet and her auxiliary engine by W D Fair & Co of Hampton Wick, Planking was teak on Canadian rock elm and very well appointed with teak below, 6' (1.83m) headroom and an almost flush deck. In 1930 her rig was modified to a cutter of 547 square feet, which her heavy construction demanded in order that she could lift her skirts. A four cylinder Brooke petrol engine replaced the original, in 1931. By then her new owner was Isaac Bell of Poole. Her most devoted owner for 30 years was a dentist from London, K S Bacon, who bought her in 1954 and kept her at Hillyards Boatyard, Littlehampton. She was wintered afloat in a covered shed which no doubt contributed to her state of preservation, as commented by her owner in 1989, Carl Soper of Truro, Cornwall. She has been completely refitted (see photos) and I believe may now be in Italy.

Mr R A L Broadley commissioned Alfred to design two canoe stem Bermudan sloops, Susan, 26.1' (8m) of 1929 and Susan Ann, 28.5' (8.69m) of 1937. One of his four daughters, Mrs Edwards, remembers sailing in Susan from their Seaview holiday home to Cowes during 'the Week' in the 1930s and felt comforted by the buoyant canoe stern in an increasing following sea. She also remembered that Susan did not have a bowsprit. Her mother was expecting in 1929 while Susan was being built; Mr Broadley, assuming another girl would be born, liked the name Susan, but Murphy's Law prevailed and a boy, to be named John, emerged.

Dr A G Proverbs of Chandlers Ford, Southampton remembers cruising in Susan with his growing family to Newtown, Isle of Wight and as far as

Falmouth, between 1950 and 1953. He recalled a conversation with Commander Westmacott who commented that his father, Alfred, considered that one of the few yards that could build a boat straight was Primmer and Snook, near Bursledon Bridge on the Hamble (sited where Deacons is today). This is interesting because Susan's previous owner, Lt Col M Ormonde Darby, OBE had a 30" (9.13m) yacht named, Searigs, built at this yard in 1937 to a Laurent Giles design. He was a member of the Royal Thames Yacht Club, as was Alfred Westmacott, and both it seems having a passion for fast, narrow gutted yachts with long overhangs as Searigs was not unlike Alfred's Revielle in this respect. In 1957, Susan's motor was replaced with a 2 cylinder 10hp Brit E by her owner, H W B Seitz of Bournemouth.

A beautifully proportioned auxiliary Bermudan canoe yacht named, Elfin, 27.85' (8.5m) x 22.15' (6.79m) wl x 7.6' (2.32m) b x 3.6' (1.1m) d. with her lavender topsides, graced the Woodnutt slipway in 1930. (See Beken photo 15206). She was based on the lines of her two predecessors, Hazel and Susan, "but with greater length her waterlines are sweeter and her shapely little hull has gained in sheer and sea kindliness", as reported by Maurice Griffiths in the 1931 March issue of Yachting Monthly (which included her lines), after being invited to sail aboard by her proud owner, Mrs G N Findlay Smith of Hamble. She was light on the helm, extraordinarily quick at gathering way and fast without being wet. Rigged as a sloop of 395 square feet with a long boom, running backstays and roller reefed foresail at the end of a short curved bowsprit following her pleasing sheer. A jib topsail of 85 square feet could also be set in light winds and an old Solent Sunbeam mainsail was used in heavy weather, which rarely required reefing. Her engine was an Ailsa Craig 4 cylinder petrol unit, fitted entirely under the cockpit sole.

In Yachting Monthly a year later, Mrs Findlay Smith recounted a cruise with a lady companion for one week which their husbands needed some persuading to trust them with such a fine boat. They sailed from the Hamble to Bembridge in order to collect Elfin's 'too shiny to use' sailing tender from Woodnutts. This was to be towed astern Gales and rain bound for three days in Bembridge harbour, moored to one of Woodnutts visitors' buoys, they enjoyed drinking hot Bovril or tea in the snug warmth of Elfin's cabin, cooking meals on the Rippingille paraffin stove, reading, visiting the yard and collecting provisions. Once underway, off Cowes they witnessed the King's J Class, Britannia, under full sail abandon her race due to the strong squalls. Elfin was giving them a thrilling sail but, as she was over pressed they ran for shelter of Calshot and her Hamble mooring where they decided on a shopping trip to Southampton. The cruise then continued, stopping

over at Yarmouth en route to Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour, where they explored in the new Woodnutt sailing tender. On the return trip, they visited Keyhaven by sliding over the bar, Beaulieu, Cowes and then home, having enjoyed the 'freedom of the sea'. Peter Gregson of the Wooden Ships Yacht Brokerage in Kingsbridge, Devon has handled her sale several times in recent years and has accumulated a gallery of Elfin images.

Maurice Griffiths kindly replied to my letter recently in which I enquired if he had any knowledge of, or had sailed in, Hazel or Susan. Although he is now in his nineties, he remembers coming across several Alfred Westmacott's canoe yachts, but the only one he sailed in was the Findlay Smith's, Elfin. He remarked that she was a 'charming and beautifully behaved little sloop.' Maurice admitted that he had never become infatuated with the canoe stern, but admired its potential to make a pretty boat "with a few anything but admirable examples."

Another interesting report by Maurice appeared in Yachting Monthly of February 1932 in which he described a yacht whose design was inspired by the owner's wish to have a yacht like Elfin. She was to be built by Hillyard's of Littlehampton to the drawings of Fred Shepherd and to a low budget. Evidently, there seems to have been some difficulty experienced in executing the double curvature of the canoe stern. A Scottish gentleman, Mr A T Turquand-Young, of Sunningdale, Berkshire commissioned Alfred Westmacott to design three yachts from 1932 to 1937, all to be named Wee Mac. During this period, three apprentices joined Woodnutts, Mike and Gordon Attrill and Alan Coombes, who all worked on the yachts for this client and others.

The first Wee Mac, built in 1932, was an auxiliary Bermudan sloop with an attractive short counter and a raked transom. Her cockpit was very spacious and a small deckhouse, nicely shaped with a long sweeping curve forward and two round ports per side. 26.2' (8m) x 20.7 (6.31m) wl x 7.6' (2.32m) bx 3.7' (1.13) d of pitchpine planking with, as usual, no butts, teak brightwork and a lead keel. Her sail area was 367 square feet and a 4 cylinder Thornycroft engine was fitted. She was sold a year later to Herbert Flower of London, renamed Windflower and based at Bembridge. The photograph shows her before a refit in 1985, with a gaff rig. She has subsequently been seen at OGA rallies looking very beautiful.

A particularly fine example of Alfred Westmacott's artistry was evident in the stylish lines of the next Wee Mac in 1934. (See Beken photo 19093). An auxiliary Bermudan ketch. 43.3' (13.2m) x 30.25' (9.23m) wl x 10.5' (3.2m)

bx 6' (1.83m) d of teak planking on English oak frames with floors of gunmetal and brightwork in teak, all to the highest yacht standard. Only bronze and copper were used for her fixings, the lead keel was affixed with bronze keelbolts and the self-draining cockpit was lead lined. She had wheel steering positioned on the aft cockpit coaming and a Brooke 15-30 hp Nu-Six engine was fitted, giving 6.5 plus knots. She carried 938 square feet of sail, which gave her a very satisfying performance on her maiden cruise to Falmouth and back. (See Yachting Monthly report in 1934, which includes her lines). After the war, she was renamed Flicka and given a racing sail number 160Y. (See Beken photos 42130/42131). She competed regularly in races when based on the Solent in the 1960s and, after a recent major refit, Robin Gates ( editor of Classic Boat) sailed on her in Antigua in April last year.

A development of the Elfin type was launched in 1934, named Beagle, (see Beken photos 22930/22932) for Phillip Gardner. Her name inspired by Charles Darwin's exploration ship for his Origin of the Species. Her dimensions, 28.5' (8.69m) x 22,8' (6.95m) x 7.85' (2.39m) b x 4.9' (1.49m) d, are interesting as they resemble the proportions of the later Gauntlet Class started in 1937 by the Berthon Boat Company of Lymington. The thoroughbred lines and high specification of her build are apparent in the photographs of 1938 with Phillip at the helm. He wrote a letter to subsequent owners, Mr and Mrs Wilson, in 1967, eight years before he died aged 75 years, which illustrates how emotive the love of one's boat can be. 'I noticed in Lloyds that you are the current owners of Beagle. She was designed for me by Westmacott and built at Woodnutts, Isle of Wight in 1933. My late wife and I have very fond memories of her and were able to sail her for a whole month each summer until the outbreak of war.'

A later owner, Chris Gould, said, 'She was a beautiful yacht. I loved her dearly and would happily buy her back. I only sold her because I took a three year contract abroad.' These sentiments were echoed by many of her owners over the years. I believe she left these shores for San Francisco on the Pacific seaboard of the United States in the mid 1980s and wonder if she is still feeling the water stream past her keel and has the attention of a devoted lover. Sadly, Alfred Westmacott died in 1936, aged 68 years. He was affectionately remembered by his workforce as 'Westo'. Alan Coombes recalled that he was paid five shillings (25p) per week as an apprentice and placed under the supervision of Fred Bull, a skilled shipwright who was paid one shilling, two and a half pence (6p) an hour. Boat hulls such as the X Class were built in three months by 'one man and a boy' from start to finish, on a piecework basis. A complete X Boat was sold for £250. As a

comparison, in 1938 a small cruiser similar to a Harrison Butler Z4 tonner would have cost £450 but only £250 at other yards. If Alan or any of the other apprentices preferred to play football instead of working Saturday morning, the five shillings (25p) weekly wage was reduced by one shilling and six pence (7.5p). Needless to say, most worked. Alfred Feltham was foreman at the yard at this time and his brother, Harry, ran a Portsmouth yard building the Victory One Designs.

The late T Harrison Butler, ophthalmic surgeon and much respected designer of cruising yachts between the wars, once owned a boat of the X type and commented in his illuminating book, *Cruising Yachts; Design and Performance*, published in 1945 'that she was finger light on the helm on all points of sailing, even when heeled to the rail.' Her name was Moyerzerka (Arabic for Blue Water and Cataract of the Eye, which manifests as a blue film). THB's daughter, Joan Jardine-Brown, disclosed some information from her father's sea log. It seems that THB bought Moyerzerka in 1922, in good faith, as a gaff rigged X boat, which he did not race, but used as a daysailer. In 1927 the rig was modified to Bermudan (the photographs are of this date and show her on the River Hamble and on the slipway at Moody's Boatyard below Bursledon Bridge). Both of these rigs sported mainsail luff mast hoops as THB mistrusted the myriad of screws in a soft wood mast which affix the more modern luff mast track. She was sold in 1929 to a gentleman who raced X Boats and who claimed that she was not an X, although her lines were very similar. THB was taken aback by this, being a very honest man, but maintained that she sailed beautifully, probably better than a Class boat. Woodnutts supplied this brilliant man with X Boat drawings as he was fascinated by the motion of a sailing boat at sea. He became an enthusiastic supporter of Rear Admiral Turner's metacentric shelf theory of hull balance from the mid 1930s. Also at this time, Harrison Butler was converted to the canoe yacht form, using his design, *Sinah*, as an example in his book to illustrate his theories. The largest yacht designed by Alfred Westmacott was the third *Wee Mac* in 1937, a striking auxiliary counter sterned Bermudan ketch (see Beken photos 22210/22213) and carried her tender in davits on the starboard side, amidships. Her dimensions were 54.5' (16.62m) x 38.2' (11.65m) wl x 13' (3.97m) b x 7' (2.14m) d, with a 1,350 square feet of sail and a 4 cylinder Parsons engine fitted below. She was a fitting testimony to a gifted designer. After the war she was renamed, *Rose Sailer*, and modified to a Bermudan cutter (see Beken photos 27304.27306.31364/36559) with no mizzen and shortened boom, loosing some of her appeal, as would a mare without a tail.

*Susan Ann*, an auxiliary Bermudan sloop with a canoe stern and short

bowsprit, was also built in 1937, the second yacht commissioned by R A L Broadley, owner of Susan. 28.5' (8.69m) x 22.8' (6.95m) wl x 7.8' (2.38m) b x 4.9' (1.49m) d of pitchpine planking on English oak, teak brightwork and a lead keel. Her sail area was 424 square feet. A 4 cylinder Gray petrol engine was fitted and the companion way was offset on the port side.

The name, Ann, was added to remember one of Mr and Mrs Broadley's four daughters who died in infancy. Susan Ann was not sailed until 1947 as war seemed imminent. Mr Broadley sailed her for only one year after the war ended as he was killed in a hunting accident in 1948. She is now being cared for on the West coast of Scotland.

Roamer, later Roamer of Beaulieu, is also now based in this cruising man's dream archipelago and aptly renamed, Roamer of Lochaber. She was built in 1938 at Woodnutts, the last design by Alfred and a slightly heavier displacement but the same construction as Susan Ann. There is a puzzle in Lloyds as the early dimensions for her were almost identical to her sister craft, but she does appear to have fuller sections; later in Lloyds as 28.3' (8.63m) x 25' (7.63 m) wl x 8.1' (2.47m) b x 4.75' (1.45m) d. Perhaps the yard modified Alfred's design at the client's request, or the designer, Fred Parker of Poole, Dorset, as there are revised sail plan drawings signed by him. She was not launched until 1946.

Woodnutts were accredited with the design of one of the last yachts built before the war (1938). Her name was Phyllida (see photographs), a transom stem Bermudan stem head sloop for Mrs Shirley Adams of Regents Park, London. 24.7' (7.53m) x 22.0' (6.71m) wl x 7.5' (2.29m) b x 3.7' (1.13) d with 340 square feet of sail and a single cylinder Stuart Turner petrol engine fitted. For many years she has been well cared for and based on the Hamble.

As the war approached, the yard became very busy as Alan Coombes remembered building Admiralty RNSA 14' (4.27m) sailing dinghies, whalers and 112' (34.16m) motor launches (MLs) which were to be used as U Boat chasers. Laurent (Jack) Giles was a frequent visitor, as he was the official X Class measurer and two of his early Vertues (sail no 7 - Kawan and sail no 8 - Caupona ) were built there in 1939. Alan and Gordon Attrill are proud of their work on Pactolus of 1938, an auxiliary canoe ketch, 41.3' (12.6m) for Percy J Temple of Worthing, Sussex. She had 750 square feet of sail and was fitted with a 6 cylinder Lycoming petrol engine. She has been spotted recently by them in Chichester Harbour.

Alan and Gordon left Woodnutts in 1941 to join the Royal Navy and did not



return to the yard after the war.

During the war the yard was at full stretch with Mike Attrill in the thick of it building airborne lifeboats, as designed by Uffa Fox (see *Rescue from the Skies*, recently published by HMSO), motor torpedo boats and other admiralty craft. The yard does not seem to have suffered any war time damage, but according to Mike, an armour piercing bomb\* created such a deep hole on the dune nearby, that the roof of his house close to Woodnutts received a six inch layer of sand.

\* [Mike Attrill says that this bomb has been incorrectly described as a land mine by some.](#)

After the war and the country's climb back to prosperity, Woodnutts again began to flourish, building yachts, One Designs, motor cruisers - some for other respected designers such as Laurent Giles and Fred Parker. Between 1948 and 1960, as recorded in Mrs D B Payne's *History of the X Class 1908-1981* (later edition 1908 - 1991), Woodnutts built ten X Boats for export (XK 1-10) to a very high specification for use by the Cumberland Yacht Club in Kuwait, although owned by the Kuwait Oil Company. These hulls were of teak planking to withstand the climate in the Persian Gulf and were fitted with buoyancy tanks. The sails were by Ratsey and Lapthorn, which were later set on metal spars. These boats were sailed throughout the year up to the Gulf War and I wonder if they are sailing today. Heaven forbid, as spoils of war by Saddam Hussein. Later in the 1950s, ships' lifeboats were also built. (See Beken photos 38939 of 1957). By 1961, Woodnutts had been sold to Stone and Platt Industries who adopted the name for one of their other yards at Stone Pier, Warsash on the Hamble. This expansion was short-lived as Lloyds Register of Yachts for 1965 informs us that Woodnutt and Co had ceased trading.

But the shipwright skills honed at the pre-war Woodnutts yard were in the safe hands of the Attrills, Coombes, Feltham and, later, Perry. Mike and Gordon Attrill have been building fine boats and refitting at their yard on the Duver next to the old Woodnutts site since soon after the war. Many of the post war Solent Sunbeams have been crafted by their hands. Mike is particularly fond of his Laurent Giles yacht, *Silhouette*, a 23' (7.02m) auxiliary Bermudan sloop, built at Woodnutts in 1946 for Harry Brickwood.

Alan Coombes also started his own boatbuilding business at this time on the Bembridge side of the harbour. He has built some Laurent Giles Normandy Class yachts among others and the 15' (4.58m) Swan Class sailing

dinghies, but his speciality was the Bembridge Scow (see sales leaflet). Over the years, he has built two hundred and twenty Scows for use locally, twelve for the late Captain Adams of Keyhaven, one for the Rothschild family and a few for national customers (i.e. Wales). Although retired, he still amuses himself building the odd Scow for his grandchildren. (See photos).

The Feltham boatbuilding yard at Portsmouth was renowned for its high quality, building such Westmacott designs as the Seaview Mermaids and, especially, the Victory One design. One of their apprentices, John Perry of Southsea, Portsmouth, has for many years taken up the Victory baton, amongst others, and a beautifully crafted X Boat being completed recently bringing the total built since 1909 to nearly 200.

There are many other craft of all sizes and forms built at Woodnutt & Co out there somewhere, all with a story to tell, as the history of Alfred Westmacott and Woodnutts is far from complete.

I would like to thank all who have helped with this story, sharing their fondest memories and showing patience and humour towards my investigations.

Now, back to the task ahead - the restoration of Wild Wind. I have begun to realise that the custody of a classic boat requires more than just love and enthusiasm. As Tom Cunliffe so wisely put it, "As time runs out for these boats, it is vital that they are properly organised now and taken in hand by people who care and have the resources to look after them. That may be labour, it may be skills, or it might be money. It doesn't really matter which. Different people have different ways and everybody is a combination of all three; the attitude to these boats should be that of respect.'

*March 1995*

*Paul Rawlinson  
Heatherlea  
Pitmore Lane  
Sway Lymington  
Hampshire S041 6BW*

*Telephone 01590 683133 Facsimile 01590 683727*

Updated February 1998

Useful addresses:

Albert Strange Association.

~~c/o Bill James~~

~~Maestcoed~~

~~S Harewood~~

~~Molescroft~~

~~Beverly HU17 7EF~~

Pete clay

Honorary Secretary

Saxon House

83 Ipswich Road

Woodbridge

Suffolk, IP12 4BT

<http://www.albertstrange.org>

Harrison Butler Association

C/o O Joan Jardine-Brown

2 The Chestnuts

60 High Street

Theale

Reading

Berkshire RG7 5AN T: 0118 9302 945

<http://www.harrisonbutlerassociation.org>

w te@ globalnet.co.uk

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