

Red Sails Over The Estuary

Thames Sailing Barge Trust Exhibition in association with Southend Museums.

May 19th to August 15th Priory Visitor Centre, Priory Park, Southend-on-Sea Southend

Southend Barge Matches – additional information

Surprisingly, in the world of sailing, races (or matches) between sailing barges is one of the oldest sailing races in the world. They are not sleek racing throughbreds, more basic box-shaped hard-working cargo carriers. They needed to get their cargo to its destination as quickly as the tide and weather would allow. In their heyday, sailing bargemen knew that if they could deliver their cargo ahead of other barges heading for the same place, they would get unloaded sooner, and would then be free to load more cargo. The more cargoes they delivered, the more they earned. There was therefore an element of competition in their sailing as a matter of course. The owners too liked to be able to demonstrate that their barges were quicker at delivering cargoes than their competition, and some of them kept barges specially for racing.

The first records of barge matches relate to the Thames Match which was first run in 1863, organized by William Henry Dodd the “Golden Dustman”, and it still takes place every year. The Thames race used to come down the Thames, and past Southend, out to the Nore lightship (no longer in existence, but still marked by the Sea Reach Number 1 buoy in the estuary off Havengore Creek) and then back up the Thames. Barges from Southend were also keen competitors in this match, although not always amongst the fastest.

Southend barge owners were also quick to want to show off their craft locally, and barge matches were incorporated into the local Regatta. It is probably no coincidence that some of the local barge owners, were pro-active on the Regatta Committee, so it was also in their own interests to promote local trading vessels in this event, when they were available to take part. The records show that barge races did not take place every year, and the attendances were variable.

The first Southend Regatta was run in 1867. It comprised a whole array of events usually starting with the barge races, but including a variety of sailing boat races, rowing races, Pig in the Box competition, Water Derby, swimming races, together with a variety of land sports, including bicycle races. The event was ended with a grand display of fireworks. It is not known exactly when barge races first became a feature of the regatta, but 1873 seems to be the first year for which information can be found. This coincides with the beginning of the Southend Standard, as a report of the regatta in their first year of operation, shows two classes of barges and a total of 4 locally owned barges taking part.

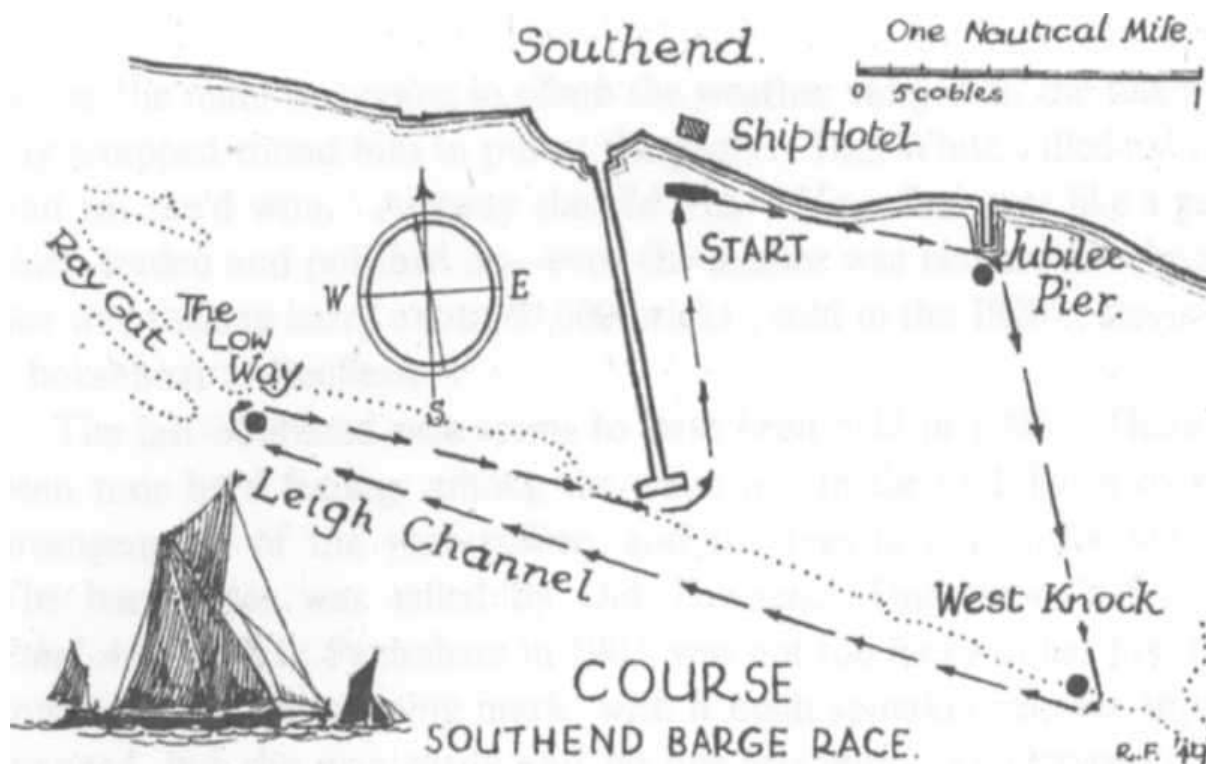
The regattas were mostly for local craft, and the numbers taking part varied quite considerably, most likely because delivering an urgent cargo may have been a greater priority. In 1876 barges from further afield were allowed to attend the regatta races, but this did not go down very well when

they soundly beat the local craft, and the prize money went outside the area. This led to the adoption of classes specifically for local craft, in addition to an open class for all comers, this this did not last very long, and seems to have discouraged all but local craft.

The regatta usually started with a breakfast at the Hope Inn, owned by local business man and barge owner John Bell Brasier. The barges were raced in classes based on their hull form. A lot of early local barges were called swim-heads – having a wedge shaped bow and stern in the form of a Thames lighter. Later barges moved to a rounded bow shape, which became more universally adopted, and is seen in most of those that have survived. The Swim-head form seemed to be favoured in this area, but they were slower against round bowed barges. In the Southend Regatta therefore, they were raced in separate swim-head, and round bowed classes.

This was different to the Thames match where there were larger numbers of barges racing and more variation in rig. They worked out classes to select barges with and without a topmast, and those with and without a bowsprit. So a topsail barge class described barges with a topmast, and sails for use with it, where a barge without a topmast was described as a river barge or stumpie. A first class barge would have a bowsprit and the sails to set on it where a second class barge did not have a bowsprit. There could then be classes for first and second class topsail barges, and first and second class river barges. As barges increased in size, but were not necessarily any faster, some were classified as coasting barges, and occasionally a separate class was run for them too. As barges were not normally built to a defined plan, they were essentially all different, and this was the best way to try and make them competitive.

Occasionally, at Southend, a race for the barge boats was added as part of the regatta. These were the small boats that would hang in davits, or be towed behind the barge, to allow the crew to get ashore when anchored off. They could be rowed with two oars, or more commonly sculled with just one over the back. Considerable skill is required to scull with one oar, and it is likely this race would allow the barge crews to compete against each other.



Barge race course for Southend Regatta.

The timing of the Regatta depended on finding suitable tides, and on occasions was spread over more than one day, or had to be postponed due to bad weather.

The course in all sailing matches in the Regatta was roughly the same. The start was from anchor off the Ship Hotel, just east of the Pier, where the committee barge was moored. The first longshore lap ran eastward to a mark boat off the Jubilee brickfield (near the Half Way House), then round to starboard and out to the Knock, starboard again and on to the Swatch buoy, with a return passing the Pierhead inshore to the committee barge. The length was generally 10 or 12 miles, and it varied in later years, when the Low Way buoy was used as the westerly mark.

The barge racing as part of the regatta eventually came to an end in 1904, as the barge owners were giving up many of their craft, and it was becoming difficult to get enough to make it worthwhile.

Southend Regatta results for Sailing barges:

Year	Date	Results	Owner
1873	26 th or 27 th August	Round bow or 1st class barges 1 st West Kent Vandervord Swimheads or 2nd class barges 1 st Runwell, Brasier 2 nd George Canning Vandervord 3 rd Emily Vandervord	
1874	August	Swimhead class only 1 st Honest Miller 3 hr 7 min 30 sec Brasier 2 nd Perseverance 3 hr 14 min 15 sec Brasier 3 rd John & Jane Brasier	
1875	20 th August	No results found.	

1876	August	Round bow 1st class barges 1 st Conqueror Sam Burford of Chatham 2 nd Challenger Sam Burford jnr. of Chatham 2nd Class barges 1 st Catherine W. Howard 2 nd Quartus		
1877	29/30 August	Round bow class 1 st Challenger Sam Burford jnr. of Chatham Swimhead class 1 st Rogue in Grain Potter & Hodges		
1878	2 nd September	Open class, course approx. 18 miles 1 st Saucy Kent Mr. Watson 2 nd Conqueror Mr Burford 3 rd Plantagenet Mr. Stone 4 th Challenger Mr. Burford Essex round headed barges: course approx. 16 miles 1 st Essex Farmer M. Vandervord 2 nd James T. Brasier 3 rd Caroline Ambrose Ellis 4 th Factor E. Brasier Essex Swim headers - Course approx. 6 miles 1 st Perseverance E. Brasier 2 nd Rogue in Grain Mr. Potter 3 rd George Canning Mr. Underwood 4 th Runwell T. Brasier Barge boat race 1 st Runwell 2 nd George Canning 3 rd James		
1879	3 rd September	Swimhead class 1 st John & Jane Brasier 2 nd William & Mary +10 mins Brasier 3 rd Two Brothers Brasier 4 th Rogue in Grain Henry Ward Round bow class 1 st Henry & Annie George Howard Waking 2 nd West Kent + 5 mins Vandervord 3 rd Matilda & Amy Mr. Bush(?Ellis) 4 th Mary Ann Mr Potter Barge Boat Race 1 st William & Mary Brasier 2 nd Palmerston 3 rd Factor Brasier		
1880	8 th September	First Class 1 st Three Friends Brasier 2 nd James Absalom 3 rd Mary Ann Potter 4 th Joseph & John Ellis Second Class 1 st Maid of the Mill Underwood		

		2 nd Gregory 3 rd Two Brothers	Brasier Brasier	
1881	13 th September	First Class - Course approx. 10 miles 1 st Three Friends 2 nd Lord Palmerston Royal William Swimhead or second class 1 st Sarah & Elizabeth 2 nd John & Jane 3 rd Gregory	E. Brasier (Moss from Vange?) 3h 48m 0s J. Vandervord 4h 18m 0s Coling Disqualified for passing the wrong side of a mark Finished second J. Gregory John Bell Brasier John Bella Brasier	
1882	14 th September	Barge Boat Race 1 st John & James 2 nd Lord Palmerston 3 rd Gregory (H. Mason) No barge races in report.	Osborn Gausling	
1883	5 th September	1 st Alma 2 nd West Kent 3 rd James	Mr Underwood Messrs Vandervord H. Absalom	
1884	23 rd September	Course approx.. 8 miles. 1 st Essex Farmer 2 nd Three Friends 3 rd James	1h 25m 52s Vandervord 1h 19m 30s Mr. Brasier Mr Hagger – not timed	
1885		No swimheads 1 st West Kent 2 nd Lord Palmerston 3 rd James also George & Alfred, Alfred & Elizabeth (lost both topmast & sprit)	2h 20m +35 mins +61 mins	
1886		1 st Alfred & Elizabeth 2 nd Alfred 3 rd Emily	3 hours 20 mins J.E. Potter 3h 23m John Howard 3h 28m J.E. Potter	
1887		1 st Alma 2 nd West Kent	Vandervord Vandervord	
1888		1 st = Alma 1 st = Essex Farmer 3 rd Walter Hawthorn 4 th Factor (Vandervord) 5 th Ness	2 ½ hours Underwood Vandervord + 1 min Underwood + 3 mins + 7.5 mins Gundy	
1890-1898		No barge races in regatta report		
1899	12 th September	1 st Mary Jane 2 nd Rachel & Julia 3 rd Hawk Deerhound	S.J. Peters George & Emanuel Vandervord W. Borman George & Emanuel Vandervord disqualified for fouling the mark	

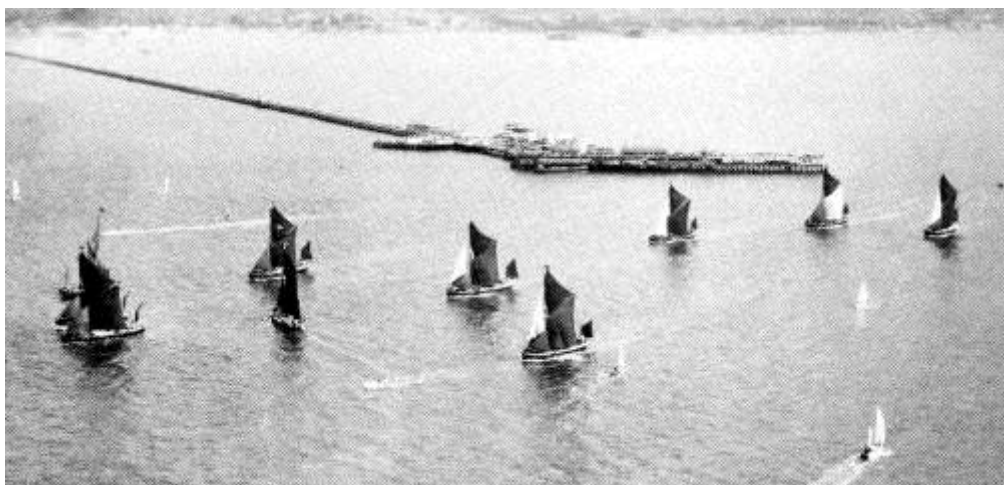
1900		1 st Mary Jane 2 nd Luddesdown 3 rd Gannet George & Emanuel Vandervord	S.J. Peters jnr Mr J. Gundy	
1901-1903		No barge races in regatta report		
1904		1 st Ethel Ada (lost topmast) 2h 51m 35s Underwood 2 nd Jane 2h 55m 30s Vandervord 3 rd Bras de Fer 3h 6m 30s Goldsmith		

Note: There may be some variation in whether the name associated with each barge refers to the owner(s) or the master for the race.

Once sailing barges ceased trading, many were bought for use by private individuals or companies as yachts, and with the renewed interest in the craft, sailing barge matches were revived for these vessels in the early 1960's, including Southend where a barge match was instigated as part of the Boroughs Diamond Jubilee celebrations, becoming an annual event until very recently. Barges would race from the pierhead to the North Shoebury buoy, then to the West Leigh Middle buoy and back to the pier. This could be done in the opposite direction if tide and weather were more favourable for it. In due course the event moved to August Bank holiday weekend, and the courses became much more variable. The timing of the race start would be made to make best use of the tide on the day, and it would always be different. Taking weather conditions into account too, the course could then be set by the Officer Of The Day to include any of the buoys indicated on the course chart, starting and finishing at the pierhead, with the barges being fully visible for onlookers for the duration of the race.

The race would normally take from 4 to 6 hours, allowing time for the crews to finish the race, anchor up, and get ashore for the evening supper and prizegiving.

The barges normally race in 3 classes, Class A for barges with bowsprits, Classes B and C for barges without bowsprits – referred to as staysail barges, with class B including the faster vessels and class C the slower ones. Variations could be applied to suit the numbers entering each time. As with the Thames race, Class C is often called the Coasting Class.



Start of the 1964 Southend Barge Match. (From the Racing Horlocks by R. Weyda and R. Horlock)

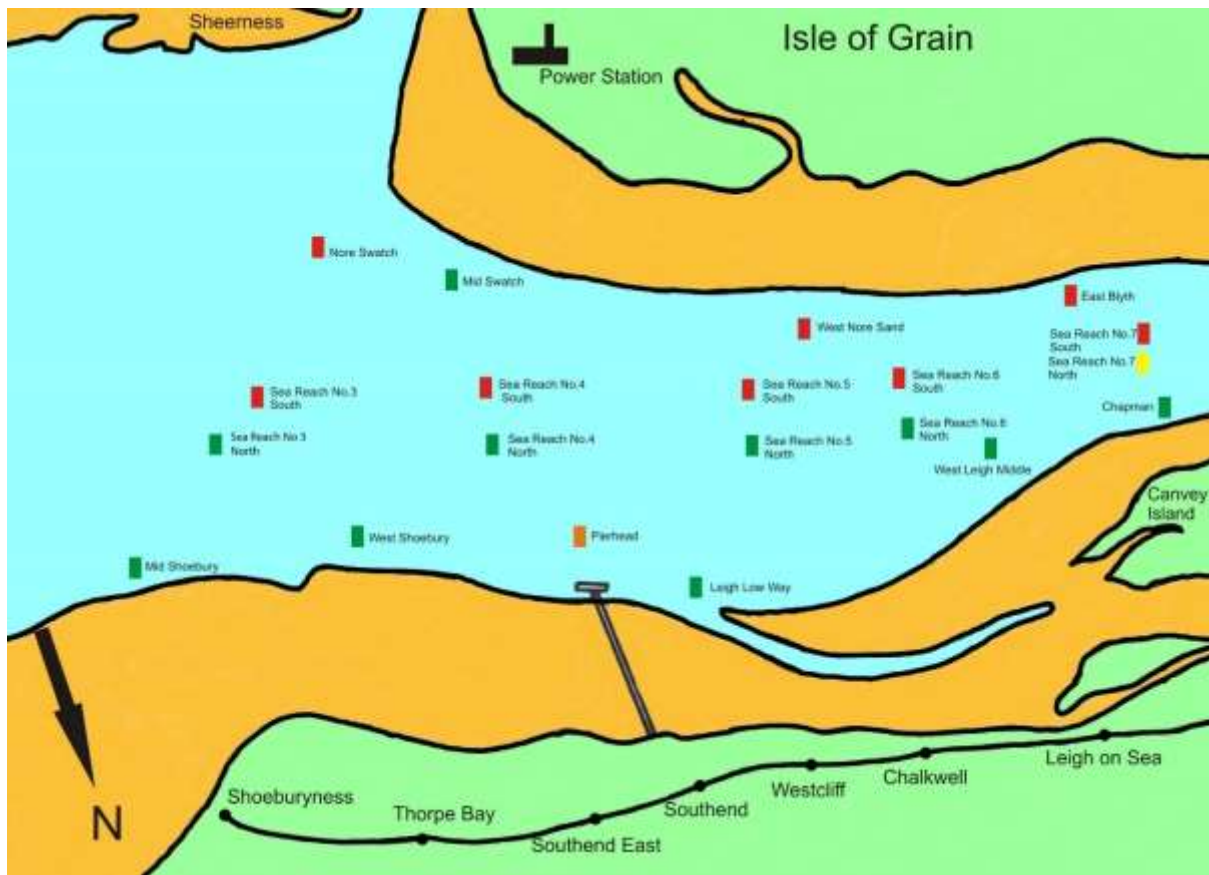
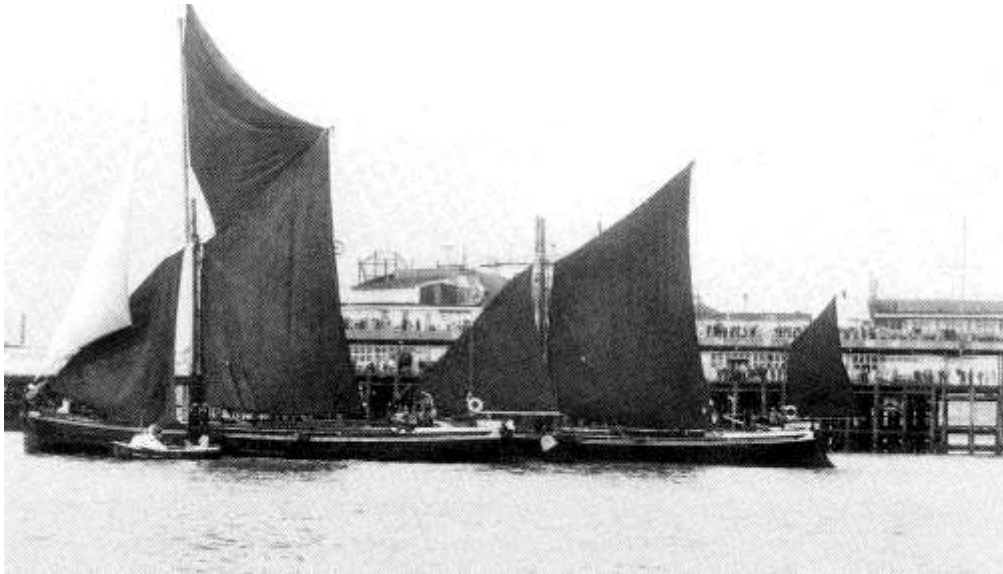


Chart from Barge Match Programme indicating buoys in the estuary used in the match courses.

Southend Barge Match Winners:

Year	Class A	Class B	Class C
1964	Memory		
1965	Edith May		
1966	Mirosa		
1967	Mirosa		
1968	Mirosa		
1969	May		
1970	Edith May		
1971	Mirosa	Centaur	
1972	Match cancelled due to bad weather (twice)		
1973	Edith May	Redoubtable	
1974	May	Mirosa	Ironsides
1975	Kitty	Mirosa	Orinoco
1976	Kitty	Mirosa	Victor
1977	May	Ironsides	Victor
1978	May	Ironsides	Xylonite
1979	May	Ironsides	Beric
1980	May	Ironsides	Scone

1981	Mirosa	Ironsides	Reminder
1982	Mirosa	Ironsides	Ardwina
1983	May	Reminder	Convoy
1984	Wyvenhoe	Ardwina	Oak
1985	Gladys	Ardwina	Marjorie
1986	May	Reminder	Jock
1987	Mirosa	Ironsides	Greta
1988	Mirosa	Ironsides	Thalatta
1989	May	Victor	Lady Daphne
1990	Mirosa	Ironsides	Orinoco
1991	Mirosa	Ironsides	Lady Daphne
1992	Mirosa	Victor	Centaur
1993	Edme	Wyvenhoe	Ethel Ada
1994	Portlight	Wyvenhoe	Marjorie
1995	Portlight	Wyvenhoe	Centaur
1996	Edme	Marjorie	Ena
1997	May	Marjorie	Lady Daphne
1998	Portlight	Marjorie	Lady Daphne
1999	Xylonite	Repertor	Lady Daphne
2000	Xylonite	Repertor	Pudge
2001	Edme	Marjorie	Ardwina
2002	Edme	Marjorie	Phoenician
2003	Marjorie	Repertor	Lady Daphne
2004	Edme	Repertor	Phoenician
2005	Xylonite	Repertor	Lady Daphne
2006	Marjorie	Repertor	Phoenician
2007	Marjorie	Repertor	Lady of the Lea
2008	Adieu	Reminder	Lady of the Lea
2009	Marjorie		Lady of the Lea
2010		Edme	Phoenician
2011	Edme	Melissa	Lady of the Lea
2012	Marjorie	Niagara	Lady of the Lea
2013	Marjorie	Niagara	Lady of the Lea
2014	Adieu	Edith May	Lady of the Lea
2015	Adieu	Niagara	
2016	Xylonite	Niagara	Lady of the Lea
2017	Edme	Niagara	



1964 Southend Match. When the **May** was beaten into 3rd place by **Edith May**, after breaking her topmast early in the race, when leading by 25 minutes. (From the Racing Horlocks by R. Weyda and R. Horlock)

Barge racing has never been without its potential for mishaps. Weather conditions can change, rigging components can fail or jam, breakages can occur. Trying to avoid such problems is part of the skill, whilst trying to be as competitive as possible, and when a problem does occur, how the crew manage to deal with it can affect the outcome. In the 1964 Southend Match, for example, sailing barge **May**, who was leading, broke her topmast. She managed to sail the full course, but had dropped to third place by the finish

Match report, Southend Barge Match 2017

Adieu, Cambria, Edme, Lady of the Lea, Marjorie, Niagara and Pudge.

We decided to make a change from the expected division into classes, and have two classes, class A Bowsprit barges (**Adieu, Cambria, Edme, Lady of the Lea and Marjorie**) and class B Staysail barges (**Niagara and Pudge**). To try and balance according to potential performance we looked to provide a handicap for **Lady of the Lea** and **Pudge**, and decided to try and do it by sending them on a shorter course.

With variable light winds forecast and a strong flood tide for most of the race period, the first challenge was to set a suitable course, so to hold the barges up-tide as much as possible. The course set was:

Start Pierhead West to East

West Shoebury (to starboard)

Mid Swatch (to starboard)

Pierhead buoy (to starboard) (Outer mark)

Mid Swatch (to starboard)

Pierhead Buoy (to starboard) (Finish West to East Lady of the Lea and Pudge)

Mid Swatch (to starboard)

Finish West to East Pierhead buoy.

The Mayor of Southend-on-Sea Councillor Fay Evans was present for the start of the race, and sounded the horns with great enthusiasm.

The staysail barges started at 1000 with **Niagara** making a good approach, crossing the line 5 ½ mins after the start signal. **Pudge** misjudged her approach to the start line, and had to tack in closer to the pier to make her start 13 mins later. (Maybe she just wanted to get closer to the TV camera on the pier).

The bowsprit barges started at 1015 with **Edme** making the best start of the day 2 min 32 secs after the start signal, actually starting ahead of the **Pudge** in the staysail class. **Adieu** started second in this class 5 mins after the start with **Lady of the Lea** 2 minutes behind her. **Cambria** started 17 mins after the start with **Marjorie** tailing the field 7 minutes later.

In the meantime **Niagara** was making good progress down towards the West Shoebury buoy ahead of the fleet, but shortly after most barges had crossed the start line, the wind shifted more easterly, and the barges then had to tack towards the first mark.

Niagara rounded the West Shoebury buoy first and set off across the river towards the Mid Swatch buoy, with **Edme** chasing her.

We were able to watch most of the barges rounding the West Shoebury buoy, before getting instructions to evacuate the pier due to a security alert.

The committee took to the trot boat in order to be able to continue monitoring the race afloat, if necessary. Fortunately the alert was promptly dealt with, and we were able to return to our position on the pierhead, in time to watch the approach of the leading barges to the pierhead buoy - designated the outer mark at this part of the course.

Edme managed to pass **Niagara** and round the mark first, with **Adieu** following them closely. They all turned to sail back across the river, back to the Mid Swatch buoy, passing the mark within 8 minutes of each other.

Lady of the Lea was next to make the outer mark, but the flood tide was now running quite strongly now, and turning immediately after passing the buoy had to bear away to avoid hitting it, and failed to pass it at this attempt. She was taken further up river by the tide, and spent the rest of her time trying to tack back up to the mark again.

Marjorie was next to try to round the mark and again turned too soon after passing it, and being carried below it by the tide.

Having seen what had been happening, **Pudge** passed the mark, and held her course much longer before turning, which should have improved her chances of rounding the buoy, but again the tide was too strong, and she was carried past the buoy. **Cambria** had trouble making the buoy, and eventually anchored between the pier and the Low Way buoy, to wait for the tide to decrease. The other barges battled on.

At this point the committee decided it might be best to move the buoy further away from the pier, and this was done by the trot boat.

This worked to help **Marjorie** round the mark 55 mins after the **Adieu**, but she then made good progress across the river chasing the other barges.

It became very difficult to work out from the pier how these barges were progressing against each other, as the tide was not helping them either.

Eventually **Edme** managed to round the Mid Swatch buoy ahead of the other barges and headed back toward the pierhead. She was followed by the **Marjorie** who had managed to pass both the **Niagara** and **Adieu** on this leg of the course.

At this point it seemed possible that **Edme** might manage to sail back out on another leg to the Mid Swatch buoy and back to the pier, but unlikely any of the others would do so. Equally those that had not yet rounded the pier mark for the first time were unlikely to make the second leg of the course in time. It was therefore decided to finish the barges the next time they crossed the start finish line rather than make them sail until the official 1630 cut off time.

The handicapping system did not therefore work out, despite our best intentions, and no-one completed the full course.

Final positions were declared as follows:

Class A Bowsprit barges:

- 1st **Edme**
- 2nd **Marjorie**
- 3rd **Adieu**
- 4th **Lady of the Lea**
- 5th **Cambria**

Class B Staysail barges:

- 1st **Niagara**
- 2nd **Pudge**

First over the start line **Edme**

First barge to the outer mark **Edme**

The Committee awarded the trophy for overall merit to **Pudge**.

What future for the Southend Barge Match?

The race has formerly been run by volunteers for the Council. We still have barges keen to race at Southend and volunteers willing to provide a link, but changes in the way events take place at Southend, mean that the volunteers need to work with a local organisation that can provide them with a base through which the financial and organization elements can be channelled. Costs are increasing, and a group of volunteers cannot themselves deal with issues of insurance, sponsorship, etc. as individuals.

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