

MEMORIES OF CUTTY SARK AND HMS WORCESTER

By Alan Bridger OW 50-52

Pictures and links added by Colin Thurlow OW 62-65
My comments in blue,

Referring back to 2011, Alan has sent in reminisces about his involvement with the Cutty Sark when she was alongside HMS Worcester during his time on the ship as a cadet. Alan would like to stress that his recollections are his own and no proof is offered or available to support the information.

Lots of stuff about the Cutty Sark on site - Click [HERE](#)

A few years ago, in answer to an advert, I contacted someone in the Cutty Sark Trust in Greenwich who was preparing an oral history of the Cutty Sark, telling him of my memories concerning her. She was one of my Saturday cleaning tasks (1950-52), I must admit, unwillingly, whilst doing my "time" on the Worcester. I recall a cadet named Brandon (I think) was in charge of her during that period. Anyway, the contact, a Simon Schofield, said he would be in touch with me shortly after my writing (in 2003) but I heard nothing further.



Cutty Sark by Roger Morris OW 51-52

I have distinct memories of her. I can still picture the furnished cabins, holds full of artefacts, remember when 2nd officer

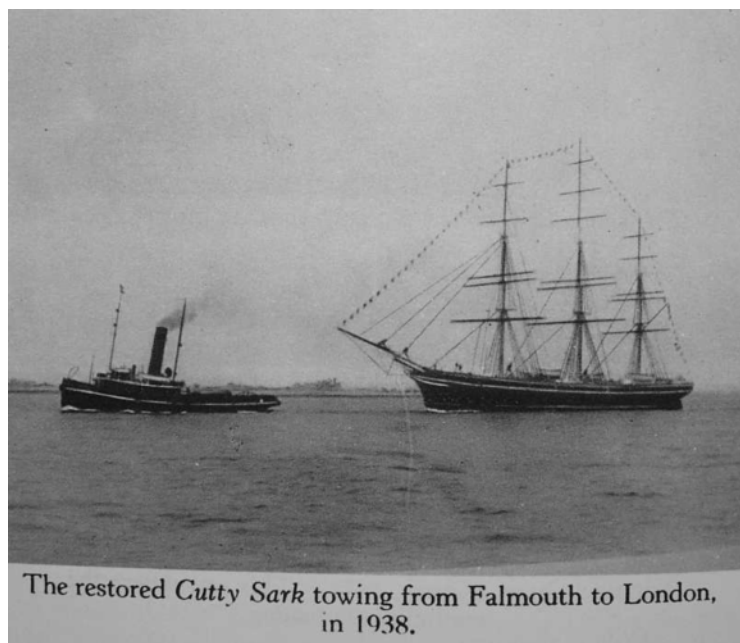
Donner, demonstrating a Schermuly rocket, fired one into the mainmast of the poor old girl, setting her main shrouds on fire ! And which cadet captain tried to smuggle the "Weel Done Cutty Sark" plaque off of her before she left for the 1951 Exhibition ? Who went on leave with two belaying pins from her main deck ? No names will ever pass my lips of course, but memories exist even after so long.

Shortly after the 2007 fire, there was some adverse press discussion over if she was worth saving. Incensed, I wrote to the newspapers, one of which, the Daily Mail, sent a photographer down to see me, and published a brief part of my letter. A copy is enclosed as proof of my interest at the time. As not too many of us ex cadets read such papers as the DM in our advanced years, it

was published, unseen and unrecorded ! Personally, going to the Worcester was the making of me, and I am rather proud of it, although I did nothing whilst there to leave any mark. My interest in sailing ships of yore was also instigated by the Cutty Sark, and I have pictures and models of her still.

Here are some other snippets of information of life on the ship at the time. Rationing was in force and the food was, shall we say- standard for the time!! I think most of us lived on bread and marge!!

The Saturday morning work on board consisted of scrubbing the decks. Each division had a different section to clean. I was in Forecastle (or Foc'stle Port) and we always did



The restored Cutty Sark towing from Falmouth to London, in 1938.

the main deck. The 1st & 2nd termers were lined up across the breadth of the deck, armed with scrubbing brushes, and we just move together, backward and forward, controlled by some SBC cadet with nothing else to do but be a casual bully.

Being a member of the rugby fraternity then allowed me to go ashore every Saturday with the rest of the team to "clean" the pavilion and Swimming Baths. A chance to have a cigarette or two, away from prying eyes!

Some of the time we were sent over to the Cutty Sark however to just dust around generally and pretend we were cleaning her !! On the windier days she would move around a bit, and then I would just climb out onto the flying jib to see her rise and fall, often exaggerated by a swell from passing ships. Brilliant to see her so alive!!

We need cash float to save Cutty Sark

Daily Mail 29 May 2007

FROM 1950 to 1952 I was a cadet at Thames Nautical Training College, a public school which trained officers for a seagoing career, on board HMS Worcester.

It was moored off Greenhithe, Kent. The Cutty Sark was moored 50 yards away.

As an occasional member of unwilling cleaning gangs, my fellow cadets and I were often boated over to her.

She was afloat and moved gracefully for the slightest wind-driven wave.

One foggy night, in 1951, a coaster hit the Cutty Sark at her moorings, breaking off her Nanny The Naughty Witch figurehead. Cutty Sark drifted down the Thames but was secured and anchored.

It was thought the figurehead had been lost but it was found a few days later washed up in Essex, near Grays.

This period, when she was owned by HMS Worcester, was the last time Cutty Sark floated free. But her rigging was disintegrating and the College couldn't afford to replace it, so it was a blessing when the Duke of Edinburgh took an interest in her.

I recall her holds contained a multi-

Link to the article - [HERE](#)

tude of what are now artefacts including oil lamps, ropes and sails, as well as gear from the Discovery and Scott's Antarctic expedition.

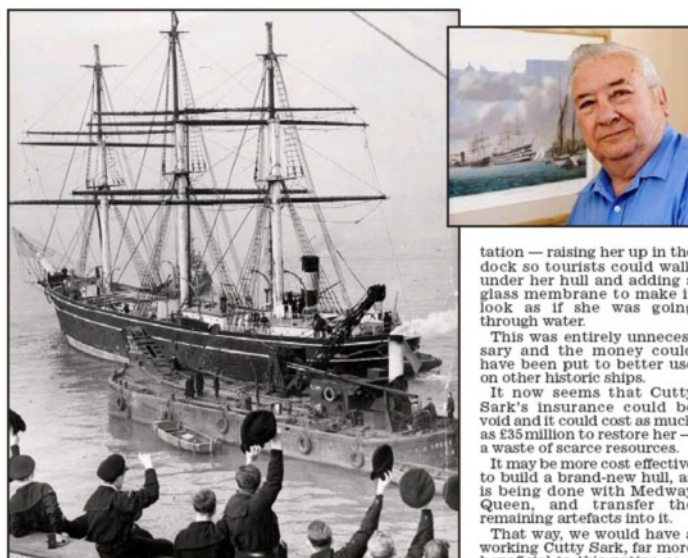
We cleaned her from bow to stern, explored her from truck to keel, and, 50-odd years later, imagine that we made a small contribution to her survival.

After the disastrous fire, she must be rebuilt. The money must be found. This beautiful sailing ship is an important part of our heritage. Capt A. BRIDGER,

Ferndown, Dorset. AS AN historic ship enthusiast, who worked hard to save HMS Cavalier, in the evidence I gave to the Select Committee for Culture last year, I questioned giving so much Lottery funding — £11million — to Cutty Sark when so many other historical ships are being lost for the sake of tiny amounts of money.

Much of the £11 million granted to Cutty Sark wasn't for restoration, but interpretation — raising her up in the dock so tourists could walk under her hull and adding a glass membrane to make it look as if she was going through water.

This was entirely unnecessary and



History: The Cutty Sark in the early 1950s, seen from the deck of HMS Worcester on which Capt Alan Bridger (inset) served

the money could have been put to better use on other historic ships.

It now seems that Cutty Sark's insurance could be void and it could cost as much as £35 million to restore her — a waste of scarce resources.

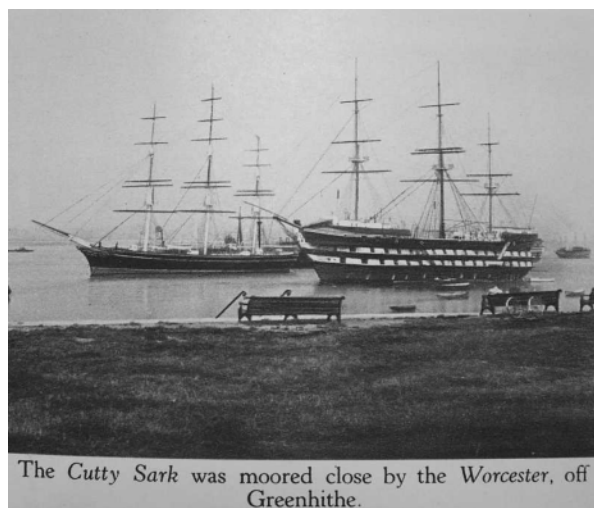
It may be more cost effective to build a brand-new hull, as is being done with Medway Queen, and transfer the remaining artefacts into it.

That way, we would have a working Cutty Sark, far more beneficial to this nation as a training ship. She could take part in the Tall Ships race.

I do want to see Cutty Sark restored, but not at any price. One has to be realistic and consider which would be most beneficial to our heritage: a ship which is constantly in need of Lottery grants or a proper seagoing ship.

The Captain's cabin was as she had been donated, and had all the original oil lamps, drinking glasses and plates and cutlery. The whole ship was an antique collectors dream before being moved to London for the Festival Of Britain (Late 1950 or 1951). Of course we cadets in general, as most of the population of the time didn't know, care, or were concerned about the future value of every day objects!! However. A selective few (whose parents possibly were collectors) did.

The belaying pins were made of hardwood, and were slotted into their rack at the base of every mast. Two were missing on the morning she left. Being towed away she also "lost" a port/wine decanter, and goodness knows what else. Our 1st, 2nd, & 3rd Officers were all over her before she left, and one senior cadet, who shall remain nameless, had actually unscrewed a large plaque from the companionway leading from upper to a lower deck. It was a blue long piece of wood inscribed "Weel Done Cutty Sark" (from Burns Tam O'Shanter). If I remember rightly this was so heavily discussed by the rest of the cadets that the culprit was apprehended and it was returned? We all thought in those days it was a bit daff for anyone to want to take anything away from her. HOWEVER; when she was



The Cutty Sark was moored close by the Worcester, off Greenhithe.

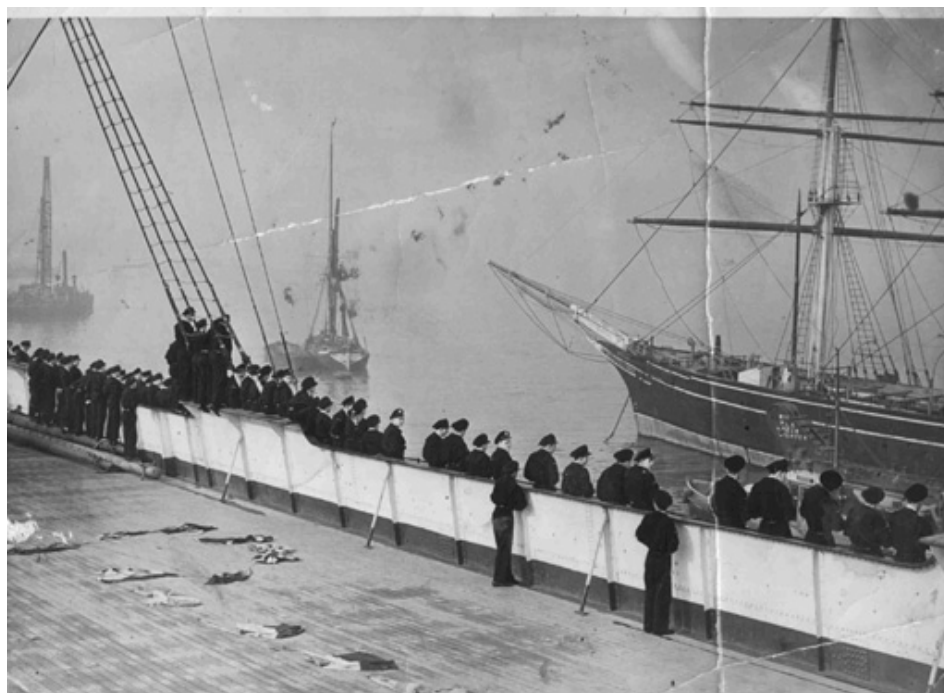
returned to the Worcester after the Festival she was practically bare! All the pile of gear, said to be from the Scott's Antarctic 1912 expedition had gone, including the very large stuffed Emperor Penguin in a glass case, dog sleds, belaying pins, blocks, tackle, harness, drinking bottles, etc.

As a anecdote. We had at the time an Australian school teacher named Wright, six ft and more, built like a proverbial, who was a little eccentric, had a broad Aussie accent, and who, every night, climbed the main mast rigging to see if he could see the London Festival lights!! We also had a NZ rugby coach (he said he had been a scrum half for the 1936? All Blacks) who, apart from being obnoxious, spoke with a pronounce NZ accent! I learned earlier in life to differentiate between the two accents on the Worcester.

Melville, the New Zealander, used to try and teach us French as well. At the time we had an old gramophone wind up and he used to put on the same record, which he would get us to repeat after him. So ! Keskey Vooley Voose Allay, meant "where do you want to go" Auckland style!!

In late November, early December 1951, the ship held an "at home" where parents, siblings, and guests were invited for the day. Someone thought it a good idea for Mr Wright, our Aussie, to dress as Santa Claus, and come down the ratlings from the mainmast with two sacks of toys for the children. He duly climbed down with difficulty, white beard askew, perspiring like mad, and the kids lined up, one sack for the girls toys, and one for the boys. He managed distribute his pressies to all except the last little boy, a lad of about 4 yrs old. Bearing in mind he was very tall, very young to be Santa, and was sweating away in his hot suit, the kids were a bit frightened of him. So up comes the last lad and our hero hold out a boxed toy and says "Here

you are". The lad shied away and looks for his Mum. " No, you not Santa, " " Oh yiss I am, here's your present" was the impatient answer. The lad still wouldn't approach this imposing, rather angry Santa. So in front of a large group of amused cadets, smiling parents, and right next to him, in full uniform, VC to the fore, "Diddy" Steele, this ambassador from Sydney, Australia, in a loud voice said "Take It You Little Bastard, Take It For Christ's Sake". We cadets had to go elsewhere to kill ourselves laughing, leaving our four ringed captain supremo to sort it out.



I have many more memories to pass on, if anyone is interested of course. Some of them may stir the memory cells of my peers of the time!

Kind Regards. Alan Bridger

Trevor's Cutty Sark booklet is to found [HERE](#).



It was quite fascinating to find out about the articles that were on the Cutty Sark. I had the following to say and the replies from Clive Bradbury (OW 57-61) who has done lectures on the Antarctic Expeditions in the past, John Prescott (OW 60-63) and Martin Tregoning (OW 58-61) follow after my initial inquiry.

"Hi Clive,

I have been having a bit of a conversation with Alan Bridger about his reminiscences concerning the Cutty Sark while she was at Worcester in the 50s.

He tells me about the fact that there was a whole lot of stuff on board when she was towed away to go to the Festival of Britain. Included in this was a hold of gear from the Scott's Antarctic 1912 expedition including a very large stuffed Emperor Penguin in a glass case, dog sleds, belaying pins, blocks, tackle, harness, drinking bottles, etc. All this and other items were removed or stolen, it seems, while she was at the Festival. Sad really.

As you have a special interest in Scott, would you know anything about why the gear for Scott's expedition was on the Cutty Sark in the first place? Seems really weird to me.

Regards
Colin"

"Dear Colin,

In between the two World Wars the Chief Examiner on the Worcester was Captain Albert B Armitage (OW 1878) who had been Scott's second in command on the

Discovery Expedition of 1901-1904. He was already a seasoned arctic explorer when appointed to Scott's expedition having been 2nd in Command of the Jackson-Harmsworth Expedition of 1894-7. Whilst on the expedition he led the first expedition up to the Antarctic Plateau (9,000 feet) and pioneered the route that Scott was to take eight years later on his ill fated attempt to be the first party to the South Pole. He gave lectures on board Worcester about Polar exploration and when I was investigating the Bower's memorial plaque at Chatham I came across a lot of glass slides of the Discovery Expedition. These were given to the Scott Polar Research Institute (part of Cambridge University) at the time that the Bower's Memorial Plaque was permanently installed outside the SPRI Library.

Between 1929-31 he was President of the 'Worcester Old Boys Association'. He died in 1943.

It does not surprise me to hear that the Cutty Sark had on board some items for Antarctica (and possibly from the Arctic) as Armitage would, in an age when images were in short supply, have probably used them as interesting props for his talks. They may well have been from the earlier Discovery Expedition and not the Terra Nova. The Victorian and Edwardian ages were very keen on killing and stuffing animals. Birdy Bowers, having been taught the skill on board Worcester by Sir David Wilson-Barker, the Captain Superintendent, spent a lot of his first voyage catching sea birds, killing them and stuffing them to give to his family on returning home. There were reports the presents were not always well received in that the taxidermy process was not always successful and in a few cases decomposition was restarted by the warmth of his family's house!

Regards,
Clive"

For further info on Armitage: [HERE](#)



"Dear Clive, John & Colin,

I have nothing at present although it seems to me logical that Capt. Armitage might in his later years ask if he could keep his slides onboard Worcester between lectures and perhaps the other gear as well. Then when Worcester was sent to war what better repository for such artefacts than aboard Cutty Sark. In the haste to restart Worcester on the short period between the arrival of W3 and Cutty Sark leaving for the Festival it probably all got forgotten. Anyway plenty of opportunity for conjecture !

Best regards
Martin"

"Dear Colin

I agree with you Colin. It is strange and fascinating that Scott's or any other antarctic gear of, say, the turn of the century period was on board Cutty Sark in the 1950s, or indeed at any time!

Cutty Sark was sold by Jock Willis in about 1895 to the Portuguese. Thereafter she traded mainly in the Atlantic basin, and under two Portuguese owners. The triangular trading pattern was between Portugal and Portuguese colonies in S America and Africa. Even if CS had carried antarctic expeditionary gear in the years she was employed by Willis on the

Australian wool trade (1885-95), why on earth would anything still be on board when the ship was sold to the Portuguese? And, frankly, I cannot imagine the latter having so much emotional attachment to old ice gear that they would give it valuable space in their ship for years on end. Remember she's in



Ferreira, ex Cutty Sark, under Portuguese Owners

Portuguese hands as a commercial trading vessel for nearly 30 years, before being sold back to the British flag. Hardly any demand for dog sleds and stuffed penguins in Brazil, I'd wager.

I suspect the answer is a little more convoluted. I can see a 1920-30s scenario of these antarctic explorers returning to Britain and hanging up their snow shoes and either they or the 'watch ashore' wondering where the hell they're going to stow gear that is probably past its best. "Why not the Cutty Sark?" "She's there in Falmouth not doing an awful lot and owned by someone who clearly has a nostalgic streak." Otherwise why did he, Capt Dowman, buy a 50 year-old ship?

Worcester's own records must surely contain some mention of this gear being on board and how/why it got there.

Kind regards
John"

"My apologies for not clarifying my theory of how the polar artefacts found their way to the Cutty Sark.

None of the items have any direct connection with the Cutty Sark but were part of what was used by Armitage for his talks and possibly by Steele who occasionally gave talks on the subject.

In 1939, with war looming and the impossibility of making Worcester 2 gas-tight, the interior of Cutty Sark was sealed and made gas-tight with scrambling nets over the side so that in the event of a gas or bomb attack the Worcester could be rapidly evacuated and cadets ferried to Cutty Sark. (The Story of the Worcester by Gordon Steele) In the event Worcester 2 was handed back to the Admiralty for use in the war and would probably have had everything of value removed. Cutty Sark on the other hand still remained the responsibility of the college and Mr H. E. Read, Chief Instructor was put in charge for the duration of the War. Since Foots Cray was only a temporary home during war time for the college, it would have been very tempting when planning the move to put many of the less valuable items in storage less than 100 yards away on the Cutty Sark rather than transport them all the way to Sidcup. By the end of the war Armitage had died, Worcester 2 was clearly unsafe and the ship was scrapped after breaking her back at Erith. There were more important things to dwell on than polar exploration with the high mortality suffered by the Merchant Navy and the re-establishment of the college on a new ship loaned by the navy, T.S Exmouth.

So it is my theory that they were put on Cutty Sark in 1939 for storage and never returned to Worcester 3.

Clive"



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John Prescott informs me that there is a project to build a brand new, fully working replica of the Cutty Sark
What good news and here is the link to the site.
<http://cutty-sark.org/>