

THE HERITAGE OF A SEAFARING NATION



Cutty Sark

LAST OF THE CLIPPERS



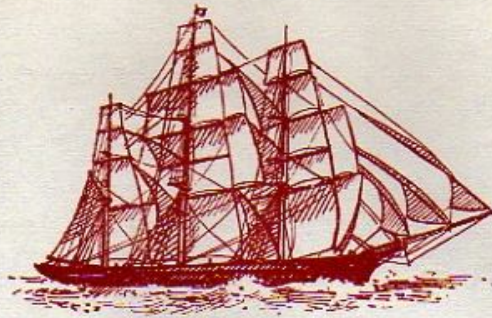


Cutty Sark

*A brief description
of the ship, her voyages and
how she came to
Greenwich*

1957

THE CUTTY SARK SOCIETY



The story of the Cutty Sark

The story of the *Cutty Sark* begins on 23rd November, 1869, when a beautiful clipper ship of 963 tons gross was launched from Scott & Linton's shipyard at Dumbarton, on the Clyde. This little ship (she was only 212 feet in length) was destined to win fame such as no other merchant ship in the world has enjoyed before or since. The full record of her exploits has been well told elsewhere, and the barest outline of her career must here suffice.

The *Cutty Sark* was built for a Scottish shipowner, Captain John Willis ('Old White Hat'), a sailing ship master who had settled in London and who cherished the ambition of winning the great annual tea race from China. The curious name he chose for his new ship was taken from the 'cutty sark', or 'short shirt', of Nannie the witch in Robert Burns's poem, *Tam O'Shanter*.

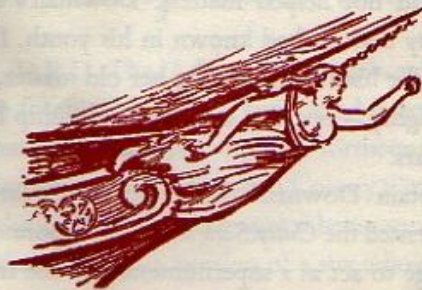
The *Cutty Sark* made many fast runs, of which perhaps the best was seventy-three days for the outward passage to Sydney in 1875, and on more than one occasion she covered 363 miles within twenty-four hours. Runs of 2,164 miles in six days and of 3,457 miles in eleven days were among her more remarkable performances.

In spite of these achievements, the *Cutty Sark* never succeeded in

fulfilling her owner's ambition to win the tea race, and even victory over her great rival, the *Thermopylae*, was denied her. The two clippers met only once on equal terms, in 1872, when the *Cutty Sark* built up a lead of 400 miles, only to lose her rudder in a gale in the Indian Ocean.

The increasing competition from steamers, which could make a fast homeward passage through the newly built Suez Canal, soon drove the clippers out of the tea trade, and in 1877 the *Cutty Sark* carried her last tea cargo home from China. Thereafter she was to carry Australian wool, and it was as a wool clipper that the *Cutty Sark* really came into her own and outsailed all rivals, including the *Thermopylae*. Her success was due in no small measure to the sailing genius of her most famous master, Captain Richard Woodget, who was appointed to command in 1885 and drove her hard for the next ten years.

By 1895 'White Hat' Willis had found that the *Cutty Sark* was no longer a paying proposition, and in that year he sold her to the Portuguese brothers Ferreira, under whose name she sailed on for another twenty-six years. Then, one day in January, 1922, she met a gale in the English Channel and sought shelter in Falmouth.





The Cutty Sark comes home

The *Cutty Sark*, though she did not yet know it, was at last homeward bound after her wanderings. While sheltering at Falmouth she was seen by Captain Wilfred Dowman, who had admired her ever since he first set eyes on her as an apprentice in the *Hawksdale* in 1894. She sailed again for Lisbon, but by the following autumn Dowman had made his dream come true and bought the old clipper back from the Portuguese. She was towed home to Falmouth, where Dowman and his wife – who shared his enthusiasm – restored her to her former glory. The Portuguese had maintained the ship to the best of their ability, but times were hard and a world war had not helped matters. Dowman's devoted efforts re-created the *Cutty Sark* he had known in his youth. It must have been a proud moment for him when in 1924 her old master, Captain Woodget – then nearly eighty – boarded once again the ship he had not seen for twenty-nine years.

In 1936 Captain Dowman died, and two years later his widow generously presented the *Cutty Sark* to the Incorporated Thames Nautical Training College to act as a supernumerary to the training ship *H.M.S. Worcester*, anchored off Greenhithe. Here she remained throughout the Second World War and the years immediately following.

By 1950 it had become necessary to house the cadets in a larger *H.M.S. Worcester*, and the *Cutty Sark* was no longer required. In March of that year, therefore, the Incorporated Thames Nautical Training College approached the London County Council in order to explore the possibility of the ship being taken over by the Council and preserved in a more suitable berth. Realizing the *Cutty Sark's* unique position as the sole survivor of the famous clipper ships, the London County Council sought expert opinion on her restoration and preservation. It was found that the ship was in good shape and could, after reconditioning, be preserved indefinitely in a dry berth similar to that in which *H.M.S. Victory* lies at Portsmouth.



How the Cutty Sark was saved

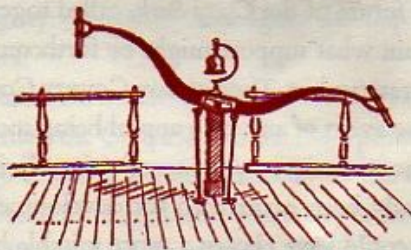
In December, 1951, H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh, who had taken an active interest in the future of the *Cutty Sark*, called together an informal committee to ascertain what support might be forthcoming for a public appeal for funds to preserve her. The London County Council generously undertook that, in the event of any such appeal being successful, it would make available, without charge, a portion of a site adjoining Greenwich Pier which had already been earmarked for development as a riverside open space. No one could have chosen a more suitable home for the last

of the clippers than Greenwich, a borough already so rich in nautical tradition.

The informal committee thus established formed itself, early in 1952, into a Steering Committee, which in turn organized the formation of what was at first called the Cutty Sark Preservation Society. This Society was registered under the Companies Act in October, 1952, and the Steering Committee itself became the first Board of Governors, under the chairmanship of Mr. Henry Barraclough. The Chairman of Lloyd's agreed to accept office as President, and a distinguished list of Vice-Presidents gave their support to the Society's aims.

Private inquiries had already met with a most encouraging response, and the stage was now set for the launching of a public appeal. The Board therefore informed His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, whose early enthusiasm had done so much to inspire the project, that there was already sufficient support to justify confidence in the outcome. His Royal Highness was pleased to accept office as Patron of the Society, and on 28th May, 1953, the *Cutty Sark* was formally handed over to him at Greenhithe by Sir William Currie, the President of the Incorporated Thames Nautical Training College.

Response to the appeal was immediate and generous. Following the magnificent example of the Shipping Industry, donations poured in from all over the world, and by the end of the year a total sum amounting to over £170,000 (towards the target figure of £250,000) had already been received or promised. The *Cutty Sark* was saved.





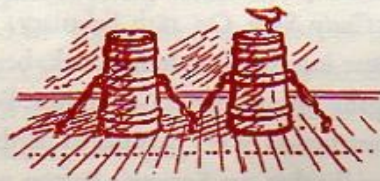
Reconditioning and Refitting

The Society was now in a position to undertake the preliminary overhaul and refitting of the *Cutty Sark*. On 18th February, 1954, the ship was moved for this purpose into the East India Dock, being saluted from all sides as she passed regally up river from Greenhithe. Four days later work was begun on the construction of her permanent berth at Greenwich, and this proceeded so rapidly that the Society's Patron was able to visit the site on 3rd June to inspect progress and lay a commemorative tablet. On 10th December the hazardous task of moving the ship into her berth was successfully completed.

Space does not permit any detailed account of all the work that has had to be done in reconditioning and refitting the *Cutty Sark*. For more than three years the Society's Technical Committee has dealt with one problem after another, and many willing helpers have contributed to their solution. The hull planking has been cleaned, caulked and painted, and about one-fifth of the original sheathing replaced. Large areas of the deck have had to be renewed and recaulked, and a new lower deck has been built. Rails, deckhouses and companionways have been restored or

renewed. Masts have been lifted, lengthened, or replaced altogether. Upper masts, yards and other items have been refitted, and the ship has been rigged to conform as closely as possible to the original plan of her clipper days. A new figurehead has been carved to echo the original design (long since lost), and the old scrollwork at bows and stern has likewise been made good. Accommodation for master and crew have been provided, a sprinkler fire-extinguisher system has been installed, and the ship has been wired for electric lighting and heating.

The list is almost endless, and endless, too, the list of those who have given generously of time, effort and material in restoring the last of the clippers. Their sufficient reward is that to-day, from flying jib-boom to spanker-boom, from truck to keel, the *Cutty Sark* is re-born for us in all her original beauty. By day and night (for the ship is to be floodlit) she will be a stirring sight for all who come to Greenwich by land or water.



To-day and To-morrow

In the *Cutty Sark* to-day there is much to see and to admire. Even the veriest landlubber can appreciate the beauty of her lines, the majestic height of her presence in the riverside setting that the London County Council has so generously provided for her in a borough already rich in maritime tradition. The story of her past takes on a new meaning for those who have seen her for themselves in all her glory.

Below decks the visitor will find a small exhibition which tells the story of the *Cutty Sark* and the days when she reigned supreme. Here, too, is the unique collection of figureheads and other maritime relics presented

to the Cutty Sark Society in 1953 by Mr. Sydney Cumbers ('Captain Long John Silver'), and now at last given a permanent home in appropriate surroundings. It is dedicated to 'the Merchant Seamen of Britain and the men of the little ships who went to Dunkirk'. The part played by the Merchant Navy in the history of our nation is likewise commemorated in a wreath specially designed by Maurice Lambert, R.A., and built into the wall of the dock at its landward end.

But it has never been the wish of the Society that the *Cutty Sark* should become a museum piece. With this thought very much in mind, the Society from the first proclaimed its intention to devote a part of its funds to establishing a series of bursaries for boys who might have the ambition, but not the means, to go to recognized Merchant Navy training establishments. Thanks to the sponsorship of various helpers, such bursaries have already been financed at the Nautical College, Pangbourne, at *H.M.S. Conway* and *H.M.S. Worcester*, and the Society's Education Committee continues to be very active in promoting this valuable side of our work.

Meanwhile, the *Cutty Sark* herself is making her own active contribution towards nautical training. In co-operation with the London County Council's educational service, evening classes in navigation and seamanship are to be arranged on board the ship by the Deptford Men's Institute, and, if there is sufficient support, classes will also be held in Astronomical Navigation and Meteorology. The lower hold has been specially adapted for this educational work, and the *Cutty Sark* will thus realize the Society's ambition that she should be a living ship, and not simply the relic of a bygone age.

The maintenance of the *Cutty Sark*, and the continuance and expansion of the Society's educational work, involve a heavy financial commitment. The Society appeals to all lovers of the sea to make such contribution as they can, large or small, towards these costs. By so doing they will be playing their own part in making the future of the *Cutty Sark* no less rich than her past.

Acknowledgements

It is impossible to list here all those to whom thanks are due for their help in the moving and restoration of the *Cutty Sark*, and in the preceding Appeal. The Society is most grateful to all who have contributed so generously in so many different ways.

The Society owes a special debt to the London County Council for its sustained interest and active help in the preservation of the *Cutty Sark*: to Sir Robert McAlpine & Sons Ltd, who constructed the dry berth; and to Messrs R. & H. Green and Silley Weir Ltd, who have been generally responsible for the ship's restoration.

The Society also wishes to record its appreciation of the valuable contributions of work, materials or services made by the following firms and organizations:

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