

# Gamecock is now a visitor attraction

Gamecock could not wait. Having worked her way down the tortuous twists of Faversham Creek, she lifted her bow and raced down the Swale with the out-going tide, keeping in tow with her tug. Aboard was a small team of volunteers from Whitstable Maritime, the local charity that had stripped her second skin and replaced the damaged timber of the hull.

The tide across the narrow mouth of Whitstable Harbour was running fast so the tug master took his charge downstream, swung her through 180 degrees, and lashed her alongside as they went back up, against the tide. A smart turn to port and the 43-foot Oyster Yawl was making a graceful entrance in to the harbour.



*Photograph Alex Hare.*

Watching from the quayside were three generations of the Collar family. The Gamecock had been built on the beach at Whitstable, Kent, in 1906 by Collar Brothers who ceased trading in 1910. She is now registered as a National Historical Ship as she retains most of her original features, has strong provenance, and is judged to be of national significance. The charity is using like-for-like materials and traditional techniques to restore her to full working order.

The master shipwright supervising the charity's volunteers trained at Alan Staley's boatyard in Faversham. Alan was himself an apprentice at another former Whitstable boat-yard. One of the volunteers has been inspired to study as a shipwright at Lowestoft's International Boat Building College. So the traditional skills are being handed down the generations.

Through managing a successful maritime festival the charity has gained the confidence of the Harbour Board and the respect of the community. Consequently in January it was offered a permanent berth in the harbour and a site on the East Quay to complete the Gamecock's restoration.

With the help of friends and supporters Whitstable Maritime raised sufficient funds to make the craft seaworthy. Prior to leaving her mud-berth at Faversham, a large Lister bus engine had been removed and once in the

Harbour, iron ballast was also removed in preparation for lifting the craft on to the East Quay of the harbour.



Several days later a large mobile crane manoeuvred its way on to the quay. Hanging inside two slings, the Gamecock quietly rose out of the water, was slowly swung through the air, and gently deposited on the quay. The knowledgeable part of the crowd observed how graceful were the sheer lines of her hull, emphasised by the counter-stern. Although a working boat, she had been built for speed, and won several competitions prior to World War One.

*Photograph by Chris Davey*

The Gamecock now forms a visitor attraction as the centre-piece of a new 5km coastal trail created by a specialist team of volunteers with the support of English Nature. Selected shops in the town carry stocks of Whitstable Maritime's very popular free guide to the Trail.

The remaining tasks are the replacement of the deck and rigging, and the fitting of a new engine, stern and galley. Volunteers have removed the old engine and rotten decking, and the iron that formed a large part of the ballast, leaving a floor of concrete between the trusses. The exposed timbers and concrete all seem sound. However she has no mast or rigging because the solid timber mast had been penetrated by rainwater at deck level and snapped.



*Photo 3 by Alex Hare*

An initial marine survey had indicated that the oak frame was sound. So the charity's volunteers will now work with the shipwright and technical advisers on a detailed reconstruction plan. This will take account of the type of engine and any adaptations required if the craft is to meet the needs of future users and current legislation. For example, stanchions will be needed around the deck when sail training but not when dredging for Native Oysters. Berths and a galley, as well as navigation aids, need to be incorporated for chartering

and glamping holidays. The rigging will need to be accessible to disabled crew members for a NHS social prescribing programme.

This is perhaps the most interesting phase of the reconstruction when the charity will draw on skills in boat-building going back to the nineteenth-century, as well as using more recent technologies such as power tools, specialist glues, and computer graphics. Readers can follow Gamecock's final voyage back to a working life by clicking on:

<https://www.facebook.com/WhitstableHeritageCraft>; and

<https://www.instagram.com/whitstableheritagecraft>.

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