

The “Ripple”

The Ripple was built in 1925 by well-known boat builder, Jimmy Smith. She was built for L W Smith, then proprietor of the Universal Stores sweetie shop in Lerwick. Mr Smith had a disability from an injury sustained in the First World War, so the boat was skippered by another local shop keeper, W Robertson, who owned a grocer shop on Commercial Street.

The boat was the second big first class racer Jimmy built. The first one for himself was the Foam and, as these boats had what was known as double garboards resulting in a deeper keel area to provide more lateral resistance and improve performance to windward, they proved no less controversial at the time than the maid class boats of the present day.

All Jimmy’s boats featured narrow boards and displayed the fine craftsmanship for which he was well known. In addition, most of his big racers featured a locker aft, with the boats name on a lifebelt on the door, and curved slatted seats round the stern for the helmsman. When new, the Ripple was supplied with extra removable “cruising” seats between the aft seats and the mid taft for extra crew/ passengers on Sunday excursions to the likes of Mousa.

LW Smith sold the boat about 1930 to L Smith of Cullivoe. She sailed in the North Isles for many years, but in 1958 was bought back to Lerwick by George Johnson. George sailed her until about 1963, then Ian Smith sailed until the present owner purchased her in 1970 and sailed her until 1999.

The fore and aft rig was changed from the original standing lug to a Gunter rig in the late 1950s. Ian fitted a Bermudan rig with a wooden mast in the 1960s. I changed it back to Gunter in 1970, and finally reverted to the Bermudan rig with an aluminium mast in 1980.

Sail area has varied over the years, but was latterly about 265sq. ft., reefs were provided to shorten sail and often used in hard weather.

Lead ballast in the early days all had to be stowed under the tilfers, but later shifting ballast was permitted. Latterly she sailed with about 8cwts (406Kg) of which some 3cwts (150Kg) was shifting ballast. It was permitted to remove some ballast in light wind conditions.

A long handled bailer was an essential piece of gear to permit the middle man to bail out water in rough conditions. The later addition of two venturi type self-bailers was a godsend. These were locally made by Brucie Williamson to an Australian design.

Except for inevitable replacements over her long life and, of course, adaption to take the Bermudan mast, the hull of the boat is virtually all as originally built. A real credit to her builder!