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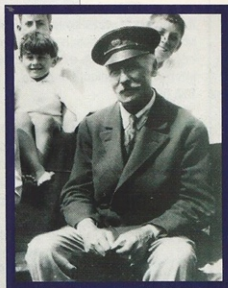


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The pre-war designer Alfred Westmacott is today remembered for his dayboats, the X-boat, the Seaview Mermaid and the Sunbeam. But his yard, Woodnutts at Bembridge on the Isle of Wight, turned out a string of sensibly-designed and soundly-built craft which included electric and steam launches as well as large cruising yachts. In the first of a two-part article, Paul Rawlinson introduces us to...

The Wonderful World



COURTESY OF RICHARD WESTMACOTT

Left: The lug-rigger two-tonner *Beaver* was designed by F Shepherd and built in 1902 by Westmacott, Stewart & Co. She was owned by Westmacott himself, seen in relaxed mood, pipe in hand, above. *Opposite page:* *Amorelle* was built as a five-ton liner later in 1904, designed by ER Talchell and owned by CH Cook.

It was in 1983, one of those late summer afternoons which make the spirit soar, when we first encountered *Susan*. Jenny and I were sailing *Nercid*, our 14-foot Oxybird one-design dinghy, on the Keyhaven River when we noticed her: a shapely, canoe-sterned, bermudan stemhead sloop swinging on her own mooring between the marshes. From the spoon bow, along a graceful sheer to that exquisite stern and over the curvature of the coachroof with generously radiused corners, to the three-graded brass oval deadlights on each of her tapered deckhouse sides, she was a joy to behold. I was lost forever.

Susan was 26ft 1in overall, 22ft on the waterline, with a 7ft 2in beam and a 3ft 7in draught (7.95/6.7 x 2.2 x 1m). Later, when she was offered for sale, we learnt more about her. She had been designed by Alfred Westmacott and built at the Isle of Wight yard of Woodnutts & Co in 1929. She carried a long lead ballast keel affixed to an oak backbone with bronze keelbolts, Pensacola pitch pine planking on Canadian rock elm steamed frames, canvas-covered Kauri pine tongue-and-groove planking on deck and coachroof, with Burma teak cockpit coamings and coachroof sides. All the brightwork was also teak. The mast and boom were of solid Canadian spruce with bronze roller-reefing gear. All the other fittings were

of noble metals. Her 'iron sail' was a Brit E, 10hp, two-cylinder petrol engine, although when originally built she was fitted with a two-cylinder Brooke.

Although *Susan* was worth her asking price, the long arm of commonsense this time dragged me back to reality. We were in the midst of renovating a New Forest cottage, and one financial abyss did not need compounding with another. So instead, I began to research the lost world of Alfred Westmacott, Woodnutts & Co and those fine boats. Seven years later this was to uncover a restorable example of a Westmacott design, a sister ship to *Susan* called *Wild Wind* (see Part II next month), which I was eventually to own.

A Battleship Beginning

The name Westmacott is normally associated with pre-war one-design keelboat classes such as the X-Boat fleet (see CB12), Victories (CB31) and Sunbeams (CB45). But it was in the world of battleships that Alfred Westmacott first served his design apprenticeship.

His father, Percy Westmacott, was a founder and managing director of the great Tyneside shipbuilding and engineering company Armstrong Mitchell & Co at Elswick. Sailing was in the family: the Westmacotts had a home in Oban and the young Alfred must have

Part I of Alfred Westmacott

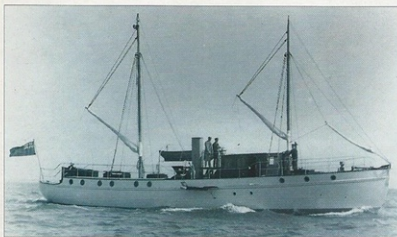


sailed on *Blue Bell*, the family's 99-foot (30.2m) Nicholson schooner. In 1886 the 18-year-old Alfred was apprenticed into his father's firm, where he seems to have been a model student. In 1888 he was released for three years to study naval architecture at Glasgow University, and on his return to the company rose swiftly to become number two on the design team, working on the Dreadnought Class warship and winning a design competition at the firm. According to his grandson William, Alfred was eventually offered the Chief Designer's post, but declined it in order to branch out on his own.

In 1899 the young designer left Armstrongs and, presumably with financial help from his father, founded the firm of Westmacott,

Stewart & Co. The new company took over existing business premises on a sheltered sand dune at St Helens on the eastern end of the Isle of Wight called Duver — pronounced as in 'dove'. An 1836 Brannon engraving shows the Duver in the middle ground with a yawl beached by three dark sheds where the Woodnutt slipway was to give birth to many a thoroughbred offspring. Access to the yard was over the golf links, between a high dune and the cattle which grazed by the water's edge. Alfred, meanwhile, took up residence in the nearby Edwardian holiday retreat of Seaview.

The firm aimed to provide a diverse range of services to yachtsmen: designing, building and storing yachts and launches, as well as manufacturing, supplying and repairing engines.

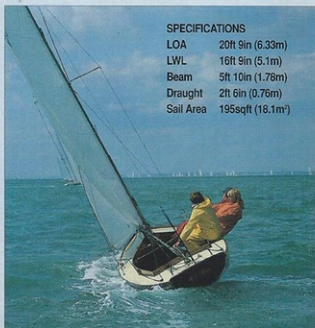


Victory salute

The two distinctive features of the Victory one-design class are the clinker hull and the black finish. Otherwise, her lines are not dissimilar to those of the X class, with the short ends and half-heart shaped rudder being pure Westmacott. The several clubs which race the class are distinguished by their differently coloured boot-tops.

Although the first race for the class was in 1934 the design can be traced to a much earlier period, and to an amateur design by Mr EC Cockburn for what became the Bembridge One-Design. Cockburn had entered the design to a competition run by *The Yachtsman* in 1904, and Westmacott had been on the judging panel. He and his committee tweaked Cockburn's lines and added a centreboard to suit Bembridge Sailing Club, and the resulting half-decked gaffer began over two decades of racing.

When the 1904 fleet was sold in the 1930s some boats crossed the Solent to Portsmouth where the lines were lifted by the Portsmouth Harbour Racing and Sailing Association. The centreboard idea was dropped, a new bermudan rig was drawn by Charles Nicholson and, lee-ho, the Victory class was born. By 1935 there were 21 boats racing. The usual modifications in updating old one-designs have taken place since then: spinnakers were introduced, running backstays replaced by a standing backstay and the boom shortened to give a higher aspect ratio rig.



SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	20ft 9in (6.33m)
LWL	16ft 9in (5.1m)
Beam	5ft 10in (1.78m)
Draught	2ft 6in (0.76m)
Sail Area	195sqft (18.1m ²)

Alan Coombes, a Woodnutt shipwright from the mid-1930s until the war, still lives with his wife, Eileen, in St Helens on 'Coombe's Corner', as his home is fondly referred to by locals. Alan still sails *Black Gnat*, a 13-foot dinghy built by the young company in its early days, around Bembridge Harbour. She still sports the original 'Westmacott, Stewart & Co' bronze nameplate.

By 1904, the firm had added to the range of its activities by taking over Woodnutt & Co, the established Bembridge sailmakers, riggers and chandlers, and adopting its name. Woodnutts were also the agents for Sawyers oilskins. Only seven boats are listed in the 1904 Lloyd's register under the Westmacott, Stewart & Co banner, the earliest in 1900 being *Sharazad*, a 26-foot (7.93m) electric launch for a

Captain Preston, followed by the linear rater *Fatima*, a 25ft 8in (7.87m) cutter for one Mr Moore. In 1901 *Red Rose*, a 21-foot (6.4m) centreboard yawl, was built for Sir H Earle.

Alfred seems to have benefited from his father's patronage in the early days. He designed and built *Swiftsure*, a 43ft 8in (13.3m) waterline steam yacht for him, followed in 1904 by *Brownie*, a 40-foot (12.2m) electric launch. Alfred did not insist the yard built only his own designs, and in 1902 Woodnutt's built the *Beaver*, a 19-foot (5.8m) linear rater Westmacott himself commissioned from Fred Shepherd. *Chaha* was a 27-foot (8.24m) sloop by P Pearce and ND Deakin for Norman Deakin. Under the Woodnutt & Co banner in 1904, two 5-ton linear raters by ER Tatchell, named *Amorelle* and *Yo*

COURTESY OF PAUL WARDLOR



Opposite page. Above left: View from St Helens towards Bembridge over the harbour entrance, showing the Duver in the middle ground. Lower left: *Trident*, designed by Alfred Westmacott and built for his father in 1908. Right: *Badger*, ex-Jackdaw, in 1932. The designer renamed this three-ton 20-footer when he owned her in 1924. Right: *Zest* and *Mistress* of the Victory class on a blustery run in the Solent in 1946. Above: Hallmarks of a much-respected yard.



BOOTH OF COVES



BOOTH OF COVES

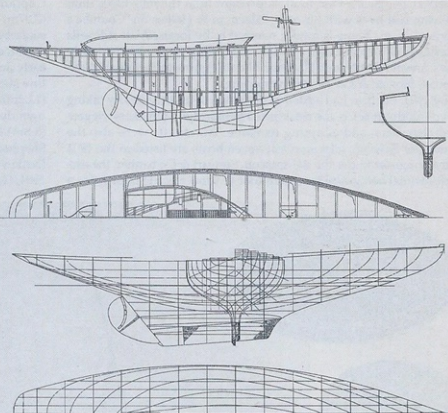
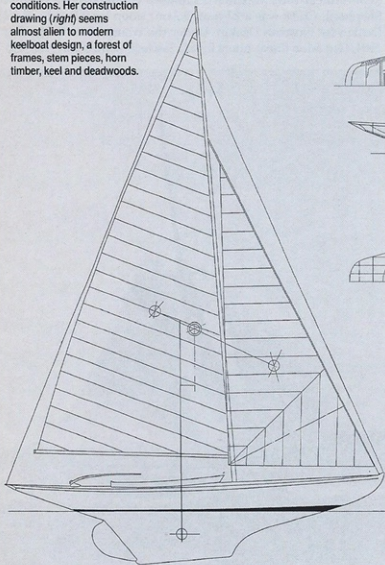
Today, Old Portsmouth boatbuilder John Perry continues the tradition of building this handsome clinker one-design begun by Hampers of Fareham, Harry Feltham, AW Clemens and Woodnutts themselves. John was an apprentice of Harry Feltham — a brother of Alfred Feltham who was the foreman at Woodnutts — so he has more than just professional interest in the class. "I've got several Victory boats to prepare for the season," John told us in the spring. "They're a lively bunch in this class and they run into each other now and again, but I don't mind because it gives me something to do." He has built several new boats in the last few years, and reckons the class still needs more because some of the older boats are losing their shape. The new boats have been built stronger, with extra floors, sidebench supports, redesigned rudder fittings and beefed up stemhead fitting. Iroko planking on American elm timbers with iroko keel, pitch pine stem timber and aframosia stem are typical of the new construction.

Being long-keeled, with nigh-on 12cwt (610kg) of ballast and less than 200sqft (18m²) of sail they are not at their best in light weather, and, as with other Westmacott boats, the small rudder can make them difficult to tack with little way on. But in boisterous conditions the Victory sparkles, when a wet and hard-heeling ride can be expected. The strength of the clinker construction permits slightly thinner planking than the X class, which is an inch (25mm) shorter, carries less sail and draws three inches (75mm) more. This makes the Victory a livelier boat than the X, and many find the plank lines of her clinker hull an added attraction.

There is plenty of effort from the fractional rig of the Sunbeam (below) carefully balanced with the centre of lateral resistance of the sloping keel and its long cutaway to produce a little yacht which handles well even in boisterous conditions. Her construction drawing (right) seems almost alien to modern keelboat design, a forest of frames, stem pieces, horn timber, keel and deadwoods.

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	26ft 5in (8.05m)
LWL	17ft 6in (5.33m)
Beam	6ft (1.83m)
Draught	3ft 9in (1.14m)
Sail Area	300sqft (27.9m ²)



The Sunbeam shines on

Many regard the Solent Sunbeam as Alfred Westmacott's most lovely creation. Her long ends and generous bermudan sail area epitomise the concept of the yachtman's day racer. The first boat was built in 1923 to form a new class on the River Hamble and that boat, *Dainty*, originally for class captain Basil Lubbock, is still racing from Itchenor Sailing Club. With wooden mast stepped further forward, *Little Lady* sails with the original sailplan, typical of the 1920s, with large mainsail and handkerchief foresail. Unlike the X-Boats, whose committee has defeated the change from wood repeatedly, alloy spars are *de rigueur* in this class. Also unlike the X Class, the Sunbeams are a *restricted* class in which the rigging and distribution of sail area can be to owners' likes, within reason.

There are two divisions, one based at Itchenor known as the Solent Sunbeams and one at Falmouth. The only difference is that Solent Sunbeams race with spinnakers whereas the Falmouth boats stick to the earlier idea of running with the headsail boomed out by the tack. Woodnuts built 39 Sunbeams and all but one of these survive. Five boats built in recent years have been to re-drawn lines taken off an old Sunbeam hull, the original drawings and moulds

having been destroyed in a fire. *Penny*, *Honey* and *Lucy* — all boat names end in a 'y' — were built by Mike and Gordon Atrill at St Helens on the Isle of Wight. Their boatshed is next door to the old Woodnuts yard where they did their apprenticeship with Westmacott in the 1930s, building some of the original boats.

Competitive spirit and modern rigging materials wound up tight have strained the old 1920s hulls so that some refastening and repairs to broken timbers have been necessary, some boats becoming increasingly banana-shaped under serious backstay tension. Where mast compression has tested the juncture of the garboards and fore end of the keel, some old boats now have a stainless steel space-frame of rods and wires which spreads the load between the chainplates, stem, a tray under the mast step and the beamshelves.

Sailing a Sunbeam can be a wet ride. On the same waterline length as the X-Boat, they stack up 61 per cent more sail area, and it is the helmsman's feet jammed against the leeward bilge which contribute as much wear to the timbers as age itself.

Given the enthusiasm of the owners for these exciting wooden boats from the roaring twenties, Sunbeams should still be sailing well into the next century — complete with allotted "one mop" and 6-foot (1.8m) bamboo sounding rod!

San were built, as was a 19ft 5in (5.95m) centreboard sloop by Alfred for Captain Wilkes Jolliffe, named *Little Moon*.

From 1905 until the outbreak of war in 1914 the yard turned out around 30 craft, including launches, sloops, cutters and motor yachts from 18ft up to 75ft (5.5-23m), mostly designed by Alfred himself. One of the first of these was the *Saint Helena*, a 35-foot (10.67m) motor launch for Westmacott's own and the company's use. She won the gold medal for paraffin-engined boats in the 1906 Gravesend-Cowes race. In 1906 came *Walrus*, a 19-foot (5.8m) centreboard sloop designed by and for EC Cockburn, with whom Alfred had collaborated on the Bembridge One Design, later the Victory class (see panel pages 32-33). Also in 1906 the Woodnutt's

A well-run yard

The Woodnutt Company at this time was a hive of industry: efficiently managed, modern and dynamic, with a spacious sail loft, well lit by natural or electric light. Sails were produced in white canvas and the Bembridge colours of scarlet, red and yellow. A tanning service was also offered for white canvas, ideally after a year's careful use, which increased their weight by less than ten per cent.

Enormous quantities of fittings were stocked, suitable for the smallest dinghy or the largest motor yacht. All these items were manufactured to a high standard by Woodnutt's own blacksmiths, who knew exactly what was required without having to refer to



Left: Pictured soon after the start of a race in 1934, the Solent Sunbeams, each with distinctive house racing flag, focus on the first mark. Note the high, looping tiller and narrow panelled sails of the era. The boom of the nearest yacht is sheeted almost over the centreline and she is making good ground to windward with her tall rig.

BRIAN OF COWES

yard built the 21-foot (6.4m) sloop *Vilja*, designed by one of Bembridge's most memorable characters, Captain Ernest du Boulay, the inventor of the roller-reefing headsail. Captain du Boulay was a founder member of the Bembridge Sailing Club, of which Percy and Alfred Westmacott were members.

In 1908 the 18-foot Woodnutt sloop *Zut* was owned by the inventor of radio telegraphy, Guglielmo Marconi, just a year before he was awarded the Nobel Physics prize in recognition of his invention. Also in this year Alfred designed the 75-foot (22.9m) motor yacht *Trident* for his father Percy. The part-finished hull was reported in that year as being a trend-setter in its class, with a sharp entry and an exceptionally clean run aft due to the rounded stern.

The double-skinned construction was of specially-selected teak, the outer skin being 1in (25mm) and the inner 1/2in (12mm). She was 75 x 14 x 5ft 3in (22.9 x 4.3 x 1.98m), allowing her to negotiate most of the canals in Holland and France. Accommodation below was said to be lavish. Auxiliary power was provided by three Woodnutt four-cylinder paraffin engines driving three propellers which were protected by bilge keels, giving speeds of seven, nine or eleven knots, depending on whether one, two or three propellers were used. An additional engine generated power for lighting and cooking.

drawings. There was also a galvanising shop, supplemented by a prompt despatch mail-order service, particularly to customers in Finland and Sweden. Roomy, well-ventilated small yacht and boat stores were comfortably filled with all types of craft. Interestingly, a few motor launch hulls had been left with Woodnutt's in this shed by clients unable to pay their bills — it is a comforting thought for us dreamers of today that even in those times kindred spirits were bewitched by these fine boats only to find them finally out of reach.

At the rear of the building shed was a humming machine-shop where 30 skilled engineers and their apprentices operated a battery of machines, manufacturing components for the Woodnutt marine engines and the Westmacott patent vapouriser. It seems that Woodnutt also developed their own wet-weather gear, "being only a few ounces and guaranteed not to stick". Alfred had personally tested this product in extreme conditions in Ghana, West Africa. One of his designs had been shipped out by steamer, and he delivered her personally to her new owner through 200 miles of African backwaters.

As a courtesy to visitors, several sets of light moorings were laid in the harbour with no fee asked for their use, although local watermen sometimes dishonestly demanded payment. These moorings were marked with the Woodnutt trademark of a white circle crossed by a horizontal white line on a black background.

Pre-war expansion

Jackdaw, a 20ft 8in x 6ft 2in x 3ft 1in (6.3 x 1.88 x 0.94m) cutter with a small cuddy, was designed by Alfred in 1909 and although built for SA Herman, was later owned in 1922 by Donald Straker of Bembridge and by Alfred himself in 1924, renamed *Badger*. In 1932 the boat went to Malta, where she was owned by General Sir Walter Congreve VC KCB, and is not listed in Lloyd's after that.

Charles T Ricardo owned a launch named *Catapult* in 1913 which had just been re-engined with a single-cylinder petrol Thornycroft. She was built at Woodnatts in 1908, perhaps one of

customers after the war, as it began to return to normal. He is listed in Lloyd's as owning two Woodnutt boats. The first, in 1919, was a 17-foot (5.2m) waterline centreboard sloop named *Silhouette*. The second, in 1922, was a similar-sized sloop called *Coquette*, built at Woodnatts in 1910. Harry was known as a very accomplished X-Boat sailor and was nominated the first X Class Captain by the Motor Yacht Club in 1921. He held this post right up until 1950.

In 1920, the yacht designer Walter Easton owned a Woodnutt 18-foot (5.48m) centreboard bermudan sloop named *Chin Chin*. He was in the same class as Strange, Harrison Butler and Westmacott himself, all lovers and masters of the canoe stern.



Main picture: A shoal of Seaview Mermaids reach for home during Cowes Week, 1930. U4 has one turn of the mainsail on the boom, and her crew are perched on the weather deck, while U7 has two rolls reefed and her crew are sitting comfortably in the cockpit: two opposing philosophies of racing. Inset: The 1913 Woodnutt sloop *Mab* in the 1960s.



the launches left on their hands. He also owned a 22-foot (6.71m) Albert Strange centreboard ketch, *Catalone*, built by the Ray Motor Co, Maidenhead in 1909. He must have been a lover of felines as he renamed his Bembridge home 'Catlands'.

One of the last boats built before the first war was *Mab*, a gaff cutter with counterstern and bowsprit designed by Alfred for Colonel E Hollway in 1913. She was 27ft 9in x 7ft 6in x 4ft 2in (8.5 x 2.32 x 1.3m) with 500sqft (46.5m²) of sail. She was built of the same long-lasting materials as *Susan* and was engineless until 1928, when owned by Lieutenant HA Littleton DSO RNVR who based her at Keyhaven.

Mab went to Ireland in the 1960s, where she was owned by John Hill of Clonakilly, County Cork, and her rig switched to bermudan. Although she had a cabin, John thinks that she may have been an open boat originally. I believe she is still somewhere in the Republic and John tells me that there is a photograph of her in the Irish Cruising Club centenary publication.

Alfred Westmacott served his country during the first war as a captain in the Royal Navy. Woodnatts, meanwhile, quietly supported the war effort. Alfred's father died in 1917 at the age of 86.

Harry Brickwood, a local brewer, was one of the yard's first

Production was slow to pick up after the war due to shattered lives and a shortage of materials but Westmacott is credited with the first British post-war one-design. He was asked by the Seaview Yacht Club to produce a new design for the Mermaid, the 1907 GV Laws-design, when the fleet of that name was sold off to the Medway Yacht Club in 1921. It seems the club insisted on a number of changes to the resulting design, against Westmacott's advice, which made the boat difficult to handle in heavy weather. So when Basil Lubbock of the Hamble River Sailing Club invited him to design an 'improved' Mermaid, he must have been delighted. The new class, two feet longer and drawing four more inches than the Mermaid, was to become one of Westmacott's most popular designs: the Solent Sunbeam (see panel on page 34).

Interestingly, Alfred's personal boat was not one of his own designs. He sailed *Riviera* (ex-Banshee), an engineless 35-foot (10.9m) cutter designed by WS Luke and built by WG Luke & Co of Southampton in 1891 (see CB40).

Part II next month covers the history of Woodnatts after 1927, including the design of the X-Boats and some of Westmacott's cruising yachts.

curved bowsprit which followed her pleasing sheer. A jib topsail of 85sqft (7.9m) could also be set in light winds and an old Solent Sunbeam mainsail was used in heavy weather, which rarely required reefing. Her engine was an Ailsa Craig four-cylinder petrol unit, fitted under the cockpit sole.

In *Yachting Monthly* a year later, Mrs Findlay Smith recounted a memorable week's cruise she undertook in *Elfin* with a lady companion — a couple of spirited yachswomen going for a jolly jaunt around the Solent in high winds. Their husbands, by all accounts, needed some persuading to trust them with such a fine boat. They sailed from the Hamble to Bembridge in order to collect *Elfin*'s "too shiny to use" sailing tender from Woodnuts, which they towed

astern. Gale-bound for three days in Bembridge harbour, moored to one of Woodnuts' visitors' buoys, they enjoyed drinking hot Bovril in the snug warmth of *Elfin*'s cabin, cooking meals on the Rippingillie paraffin stove, reading, visiting the yard and collecting provisions. Finally under way, they witnessed the King's cutter *Britannia* off Cowes under full sail, noting that she abandoned her race due to strong squalls.

A Scottish gentleman, Mr AT Turquand-Young of Sunningdale in Berkshire, commissioned Westmacott to design three yachts between 1932 to 1937, all to be named *Wee Mac*. During this period, three apprentices joined Woodnuts: Mike and Gordon Attrill and Alan Coombes, who all worked on the yachts for this client and oth-



Left: No expense was spared in the building of *Wee Mac*, the second of that name, and only bronze and copper were used for her fixings. **Below:** As *Flicka* she now races in the Caribbean. **Right:** Meanwhile the first *Wee Mac*, now sails as *Windflower* in OGA rallies. **Opposite page, Left:** The largest of Westmacott's yachts was the third *Wee Mac*, a ketch now converted to cutter rig and renamed *Rose Sailer*. **Right:** *Beagle* was a development of *Elfin*.



Wild Wind: A Westmacott of one's own

Hazel was commissioned by Bembridge resident and keen sailor Donald Straker in 1924. He already owned two Westmacott designs, *Jackdaw* and *Irene*, and it seems he returned *Jackdaw* to Westmacott in part exchange for the new yacht. She was the first of three yachts of this type, the second being *Susan* of 1929 and the third *Elfin* of 1930. Unfortunately, all design records have been lost, but her lines are similar to the 1910 Albert Strange design *Norma*.

A succession of owners retained this name, but by 1936 *Hazel* belonged to the Lymington-based Captain HH Nicholson. Nicholson, a J-Class sailor and founder of the Lymington River Sailing Club, re-named her *Oxybird* after his sailing dinghy, the first Lymington Pram. In 1938 he sold her to Captain (later Rear Admiral) ER Corson, who renamed her *Wild Cat* after a boat in Arthur Ransome's *Peter Duck*. Corson was friendly with Ransome, having been at school with him, and his two sons were avid readers of the Ransome books. Two weeks before the outbreak of war the Corsons voyaged, in company with Ransome in his canoe yacht *Selina King*, from Pin Mill to the Walton Backwaters in Suffolk. It was from the aft quarter of *Wild Cat* that Corson took Ransome's favourite photograph of *Selina King*.

Wild Cat was laid up for the war at Kings Boatyard at Pin Mill and sold in 1946. She migrated to the Hamble in the 1950s, becoming re-registered as *Wild Wind* in 1953 before a spell in the West Country.



ers. The first *Wee Mac*, built in 1932, was a bermudan sloop with auxiliary engine, an attractive short counter and a raked transom. Her cockpit was spacious and a small deckhouse swept in a long curve forward with two round ports per side. She was 26ft 3in overall, 20ft 8in on the waterline, 7ft 7in wide and 3ft 7in deep (8 x 6.3 x 2.31 x 1.1m), of pitch pine planking with, as usual, no butts, teak brightwork and a lead keel. Her sail area was 367sqft (34.1m²) and she sported a four-cylinder Thornycroft engine. She was sold a year later to Herbert Flower of London, renamed *Windflower* and based at Bembridge. She was re-fitted in 1985 and still turns up today at OGA rallies looking very beautiful.

A particularly fine example of Westmacott's artistry was evident

in the stylish lines of the next *Wee Mac*, launched in 1934. An auxiliary-engined bermudan ketch, her dimensions were 43ft 4in overall, 30ft 3in waterline, 10ft 6in beam, 6ft draught (13.21 x 9.22 x 3.2 x 1.83m). Her construction was teak planking on English oak frames with floors of gunmetal and brightwork in teak, all to the highest standards. Only bronze and copper were used for her fixings, the lead keel was affixed with bronze keelbolts and the self-draining cockpit was lead-lined. She had wheel-steering and a Brooke 15-30hp Nu-Six engine which pushed her at over 6.5 knots. She carried 938sqft (87.1m²) of sail, and made a triumphant maiden cruise to Falmouth and back. After the war, she was renamed *Flicka*, given the racing sail number Y160 and competed regularly in Solent races



BRIAN GOWES



BRIAN GOWES



COURTESY OF THE BROTHAFON COLLECTION/LEESA UNIVERSITY

This panel, left to right: Paul Rawlinson's *Wild Wind*, built in 1924 as *Hazel*, sailed as *Wild Cat* in the 1940s; it was from her decks that Arthur Ransome's favourite photograph of his beloved Selina King was taken; the restoration challenge begins.

By 1989, she was at Golant on the River Fowey, where I engineered a family holiday to see her. She was not offered for sale until 1992 when her current owner, Basil Towell, decided that with increasing years he needed something he could sail single-handed more easily, and custody passed to us. My wife Jenny's eyes dimmed as the white hull squeezed past her kitchen window, over the beloved flower beds, and came to rest on the lawn where I began to assess the extent of the work to be done. The task ahead? The complete restoration of *Wild Wind*.



PAUL RAWLINSON

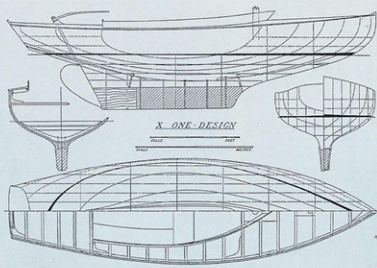
SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	25ft 4in (7.75m)
LWL	20ft 6in (6.28m)
Beam	7ft 6in (2.32m)
Draught	4ft (1.22m)
Sail area	330sqft (30.7m ²)

Westmacott's finest: The X-Boat

"A sound, sensible, sturdy and seamanlike little vessel" is how Uffa Fox described the X-Boat. Perhaps this is why, of all the Westmacott designs, more racing certificates have been issued for the X One-Design than any other — notwithstanding a minor hitch a couple of years ago. When Phil Husband, in his 80s, decided to sell his Folkboat and have a new X-Boat built, it somehow got built with a double-skinned deck. This was strictly against the rules for the class, which dictated a single skin, and there was some hot discussion before the boat was allowed to race.

Right: The lines that spanned a hundred ships. The first boat was built in 1909 — and they're still coming. Far right: May Day flies along with everything up. Centre: A fleet of X-Boats short-lacks up the Cowes waterfront. Below: The old gaff rig seen here on *Senex* in 1927 was giving way to bermudan by 1939, when 30 boats competed in the Solent. At Cowes Week up to 90 now cross the line.



SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	20ft 8 1/2in (6.3m)
LWL	17ft 6in (5.3m)
Beam	6ft 1in (1.83m)
Draught	2ft 9in (0.85m)
Sail Area	186sqft (17.3m ²)



The difference in years between old and new boats generates some problems. Although of the same shape and rigged the same way, the older boat will carry a lot more water in her wood and suffer a weight disadvantage. Introduction of aluminium alloys has been another topic of debate, with the suggestion that alloy spars carry internal penalty weights to equate with wooden spars during a proposed transition period. The idea of compensating weights is not new. When the specified pitch pine planking became scarce after 1945 mahogany was allowed — but the lighter mahogany boats had to carry 60lb (27.21kg) of weights.

The prototype gaff-rigged X-Boat *Mistletoe*, now on display in Poole Maritime Museum, was built at Woodnutt's yard in 1909. Her performance stimulated orders for five boats for the Netley-based 'Motor Yacht Club' at £48.12s each. The first race was won by the local brewer Harry Brickwood in a field of seven boats on 3 June 1911. Brickwood's early competition included the famous aviator and America's Cup challenger Sir Thomas Sopwith, and the eminent small boat designers Tom Thornycroft and Uffa Fox.

The class quickly expanded as other builders besides Woodnutt's were allowed to build to the class rules. Newmans and Napier, both at Poole, the Berthon Boat Company, Kemp & Co of

Hythe, Percy Sea of Fareham, and Harry Feltham in Portsmouth all built X-Boats. By 1939 there were 30 boats fighting for honours in the Solent, mostly with the new bermudan rig. This more weatherly rig was further tweaked by shortening the boom to allow a standing backstay which eliminated the need for runners. More recently a parachute spinnaker has superceded the old 'leg of mutton'. Hampers of Fareham, Burnes of Bosham, Souter and Clare Lallow, both of Cowes, and, more recently, Ken Latham at Poole have all built fine boats to the class specifications. Customers just keep on coming back for more — one Captain Steele Pilcher is famous for having had seven boats built!



X-Boats have been transported to Kuwait — ten were built specially built in Tel Aviv and sailed to the Mediterranean. With new boats being built and old ones restored almost every year, the fleet continues to grow.

Thanks to Mrs DB Payne, Class Historian.

during the 1960s. Following a recent major refit, April 1994 found her racing hard in the warm waters of the Caribbean during Antigua Race Week (see CB73), complete with redesigned cockpit, new doghouse, modified rig and re-designed interior — even carrying off the *concours d'élégance* prize.

The third *Wee Mac*, launched in 1937, was the largest yacht designed by Westmacott at 54ft 6in (16.61m) overall, a striking counter-sterned bermudan ketch carrying a tender in davits amidships on the starboard side. Her waterline length was 38ft 2in, with a 13ft beam and a 7ft draught (11.65 x 3.97 x 2.13m), 1,350sqft (125.4m²) of sail and a four-cylinder Parsons engine fitted below. She was a fitting testimony to a gifted designer. After the war she

was as appreciated today as she was then.

Westmacott's last design was *Roamer*, later *Roamer of Beaulieu* and now *Roamer of Lochaber*. She was built in 1938 at Woodnutts, of slightly heavier displacement but the same construction as *Susan Ann*. Again, the war delayed her launch until 1946.

Although his designs were built at the Woodnutts yard up until 1938, Westmacott himself died in 1936 at the age of 68. The yard which he had founded and made famous continued to flourish, however. During the war, Woodnutts turned out motor torpedo craft and Uffa Fox-designed airborne lifeboats (see CB78) among other craft. After the war, the yard returned to building yachts, one-designs, and motor cruisers for respected designers such as Fred Parker and Lau-



Left: The Woodnutts yard near Bembridge, where most of Westmacott's boats were built until 1938, two years after his death. The yard carried on trading successfully for nearly 30 years, building these ships' lifeboats in the late 1950s. Inset: An Alan Coombes-built Bembridge scow, circa 1990. In 1951 the cost would have been £75. Alan, one of the Woodnutts old guard, has built over 230 boats to this design.



was renamed *Rose Salter* and modified to a cutter, but with no mizzen and a shortened boom she looked like a mare without a tail and lost some of her appeal.

A development of the *Elfin* type was the *Beagle*, launched in 1934 for Phillip Gardner. She was named after the ship in which Charles Darwin voyaged while researching *The Origin of Species*. Her dimensions — 28ft 6in LOA, 22ft 10in LWL, 7ft 9in beam, 4ft 11in draught (8.69 x 6.95 x 2.39 x 1.49m) — are interesting as they closely resemble the proportions of the popular Gauntlet Class built only three years later by the Berthon Boat Company of Lymington (see CB82). The thoroughbred lines and high specification of her build are apparent in photographs of her taken in 1938 with Gardner at the helm.

Although all Westmacott designs inspired affection in their owners, *Beagle* seems to have been appreciated more than most. As late as the 1960s, her first owner, then aged 75, corresponded with subsequent owners, Mr and Mrs Wilson, recalling pre-war summers sailing with his wife for a month every summer in those sunny years before the outbreak of war. A later owner, Chris Gould, described *Beagle* as one of the most beautiful yachts he had ever owned. "I loved her dearly and would happily buy her back."

These sentiments were echoed by many of her owners over the years. I believe she left these shores for San Francisco on the Pacific seaboard of the United States in the mid-1980s and wonder if she is

rent Giles. Jack Giles, as the official X-Boat measurer, was a frequent visitor, and one of his early Vertues — sail number three — was built at Woodnutts. Ships' lifeboats were also built here during the 1950s.

In 1961 the yard was sold to a large engineering group. The name was used briefly by a yard at Warsash on the Hamble, but by 1965 the company had ceased trading. Much of the precious design information accumulated over the years was lost in a fire around this time.

The shipwright skills honed at the pre-war Woodnutts yard, and many of the designs of Westmacott himself, are carried on through the work of the men who started out there: the Attrills, Coombes and Felthams, and others whose names are so well-known in the boatbuilding world. Mike and Gordon Attrill have been building fine boats at their yard next to the old Woodnutts site since soon after the war. Many of the post-war Solent Sunbeams have been crafted by their hands. Alan Coombes also started his own boatbuilding business at this time on the Bembridge side of the harbour, specialising in the Bembridge Scow, of which he has built over 230. Felthams at Portsmouth were also renowned for the high quality of their work, building Seaview Mermaids and Victory one-designs.

And there are many others out there somewhere — the history of Westmacott and Woodnutts is far from complete. **CB**