



OGA East Coast visit to James Lawrence Sailmakers Brightlingsea

On the evening of Friday 28th. March members of the East Coast area accompanied by a couple of members of the Holbrook Boat Owners Association attended a sail making demonstration at James Lawrence in Brightlingsea.

The team consisted of Mark and Sara Butler Steve and George.

The evening began with Mark and Steve giving a practical demonstration of how sail shape and curvature are attained when making new sails. They were able to demonstrate how seams are progressively drawn together to enable sail shape, curvature and set to be achieved satisfactorily.



Mark then pointed out a gaff sail that they were currently working on. This sail (although carefully folded) occupied about a quarter of the available floor space. Mark informed us that at 3,500 sq ft, it was probably the largest traditional sail currently under construction in the U.K. and that it took a team of sail makers to pass it through the sewing machine in order to stitch up the seams. He estimated that it weighed around 1/3 ton and that when in use it would require 10 crew members on the peak halyard and 10 crew members on the throat halyard (20 crew members in all) to hoist it.

George was then able to show us a very traditional style lug sail destined for the Outer Hebrides that he and Mark had been making. This sail had been made with an external bolt rope. George had made several robands that (after they had been passed through the bolt rope) would be used to attach the sail to the spar thereby obviating the need to cut into the sail to insert eyelets.

In this day and age most of the materials that they use are 'man made' and fabric 'stretch', UV degradation, inclement weather and bolt rope to sail tension all have to be taken into account if a sail is to set and perform to its maximum capability.

Mark then passed round a sample disc of 10 layers of sail material that had been cut from a sail in order to insert a 55mm eyelet. He also showed us several items of hardware (reefing rings, grommets etc.) that were constructed to a very high standard of quality from aluminium bronze.

The evening was concluded with a visit to the Colne Yacht Club for an informal chat with Mark Butler's team.

We would like to thank Mark, Sara, Steve and George for giving their time and to the Colne Yacht Club for their kind hospitality.

