

a celebration of

Norfolk Punts



1926 - 2006

by
Jamie Campbell

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Cover photographs by Anna Gill.

Front: Traditional, Morrison and Wyche & Coppock designs racing together. Mike Evans, crewed by Donald Forbes in *Swallow II*, Mike Morrison in *Cormorant* and David Houghton in *Firefly*.

Rear: Norfolk Punts tied up on the Norfolk Punt Club pontoons in 1999.





A watercolour of 'Scientific' Fuller, painted in his punt at Rockland by Frank Southgate in about 1900.



A watercolour by Arthur Batchelor dated 1924, showing a punt being 'showed'. The caption is AB to HL. A note on the rear of the painting reads "To Her Ladyship, in spite of having her hair bobbed." HL was Auriol Wingard.

This painting has been reproduced by kind permission of Arthur Batchelor's granddaughter, Mrs. Karen Curtis.



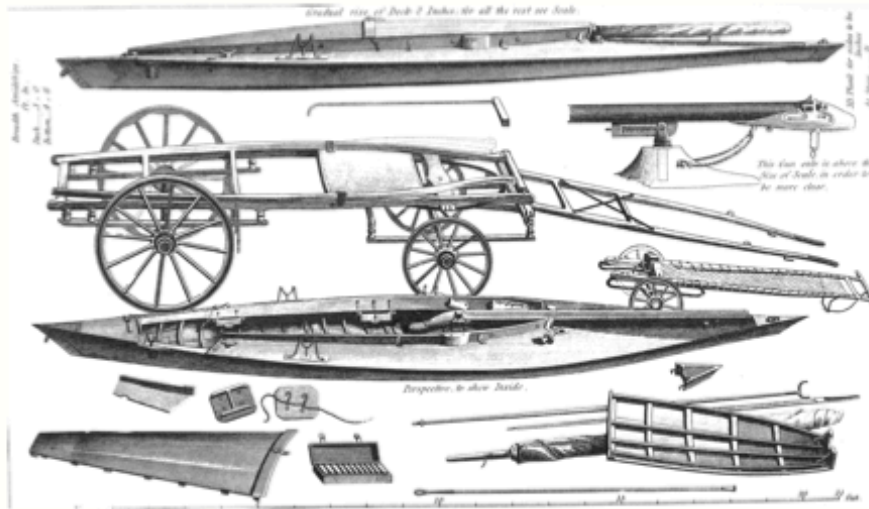
A watercolour of the Norfolk Punt Club pontoons at Barton, painted for the Author by Adrian Taunton (Punt 38 *Sandpiper*) in 1994 and reproduced with his kind permission.



This painting of *Swallow II* and *Decey* was presented to J.M.Evans on his retirement as Executive Director of the International Yacht Racing Union in Hamburg in November 1995. This is another painting by Adrian Taunton and has again been reproduced with his kind permission. The rear of the painting is signed by the entire IYRU Council, including HM King Constantine of Greece and HM King Harald of Norway.

Chapter One

Roots



“Punt and equipment for a 200lb gun.”

Instructions to Young Sportsmen by Lt. Col. Peter Hawker, first published in 1833

Walter White wrote in 1866 that hovels occupied by agricultural workers near Potter Heigham were at least as bad as any he’d seen in Ireland but from their overcrowded towns and cities, the Victorians managed to overlook the most abject poverty and viewed the Broads as a rural idyll. Broads dwellers did enjoy a certain freedom; game was protected but fish and fowl were free. Punts were the usual craft employed for wildfowling and fishing. Punt gunning is a stalking art and the craft were painted matt grey, “the colour of a kittiwake’s back” to provide minimum notice of their approach. The punt would often be hand-paddled to the quarry, with the gunner lying prone in the bottom. When a shot presents itself, the gunner bangs his hand on the side of the punt and fires as the duck take to wing. Those fowl not killed outright by

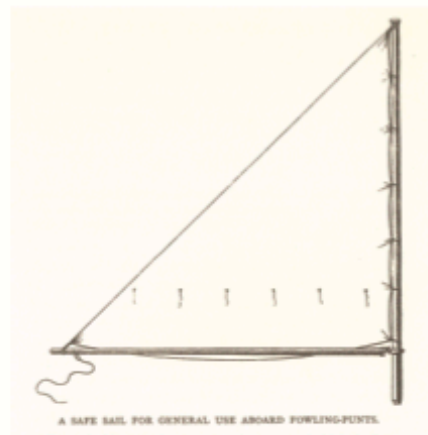


P.H.Emerson used a full plate (24”) camera in 1886 and exposed three separate plates for each photograph, as early chemicals provided insufficient range of exposure. The photograph is inevitably posed but shows just how a gunner might approach fowl.

WildLife and Landscape. pub. 1886

the big gun were trimmed up with a shoulder gun carried on board and rather unfortunately known as a 'cripple-stopper.' Punt gunning gets bad press today as something approaching a weapon of mass destruction but the the old guns have a range limited to about sixty yards. Later, breech loaders and more sophisticated, double barrelled four bore shot guns were mounted on punts but the early muzzle loaders were limited to a single shot per outing. Stalking packs of wary, wild duck in mid-winter requires great skill and patience. Large numbers of fowl to a single shot usually owe more to the tap room than the estuary. It has always been illegal to go in direct pursuit of fowl using any kind of artificial power and rather than rowing long distances, the gunners began to set 'leg o' mutton' sails. Their punts, without keel or lee boards and steered with an oar off the quarter, began, under some conditions to sail surprisingly quickly.

right
Sir Ralph Payne-Galway's recommended rig for a gun punt, first published in 1882.



A Fowler in Ireland.



Mr. Richard Fielding Harmer in punt-gunning costume.

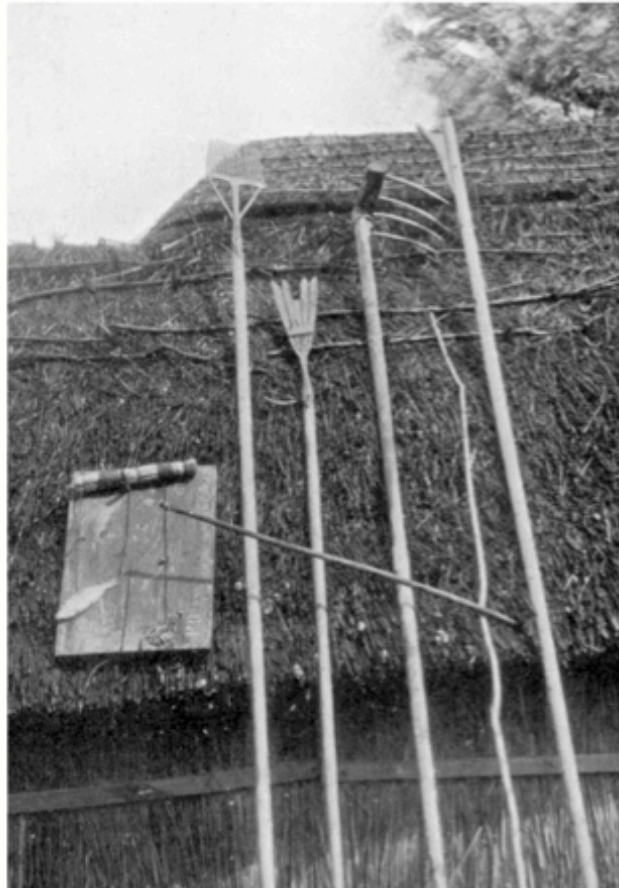
Broadland Sport 1902

far right
Two photographs of Arthur Patterson in his punt *Yarwhelp*, taken for his book *Through Broadland in a Breydon Punt*. pub. 1920.

Breydon Water is the spiritual home of Broads punt gunning. Many of the old time Breydon gunners; 'Short'un' Page and 'Pintail' Thomas were made famous by Great Yarmouth naturalist Arthur Patterson, who wrote for the Eastern Daily Press under the pseudonym 'John Knowlitt'. In the market gunners heyday, Breydon Water was brackish, not saline as it is today and much of the bank was lined with reed and weed that provided ideal habitat for their quarry.

Their punts were typically double-ended; long and low in the water, flat bottomed and slab sided - easy and cheap to build. Overall length would vary according to the weight of the gun - a nine or ten foot gun might weigh 180lbs. The Breydon market gunners were often joined by 'gentleman gunners', shooting for pleasure and it wasn't long before gun punts began to set lugsails and eventually copied the gunter sloop rigs that Frank Morgan Giles developed for his sophisticated fourteen foot, West of England Conference dinghies. Structural alterations designed to increase scour and save Great Yarmouth Port & Haven Commissioners' dredging costs caused the Breydon mudflats to pile up and increased salt incursion. Patterson always maintained that Breydon was the price paid for Yarmouth harbour.





left

Essential equipment for punts. Left to right: ligger and bait (for pike) stick and eel bab (worms threaded on wool) eel dart, eel pick, weed rake, pole and quant.

photo: Life and Sport on the Norfolk Broads. Oliver G. Ready. pub.1910.

far left
close up of an eel pick.

Photographed by courtesy of John Mauger.



left

Bob Parker of Rockland photographed in 1914 with his punt gun over his shoulder and his "cripplestopper" in his right hand. He died in 1930 at the age of 101. Once a wherryman, he used to fish and shoot Rockland Broad, selling his ducks "to the gentry in the Close."

photo: Robert Malster

far right

A Broads reed lighter.

photo: Author

right

'Shoving' a Hickling punt.

photo: Richard Belson



The punts used at Hickling enjoyed a much gentler environment than their Breydon sisters and began to evolve quite separately. Calmer waters enabled a larger, more open cockpit. Quanting was easier than rowing around the shallow, tideless waters and reed beds and to support a man standing upright, the Hickling punts developed a wider floor at the rear of their cockpit. By around 1910, hard chines had begun to evolve into the pleasing curves seen on local reed lighters. They developed a little shape to their keel and bow and sterns became gently rounded for ease of manoeuvring. Hulls began to be built with clinker topsides and carvel bottoms. The Hickling punts of yore were the direct antecedent of the traditional Norfolk Punt.

Lord Desborough's punt
Pochard, outside
Whiteslea Lodge, near
Hickling Broad.

photo: unknown



Lord Desborough KG,
GCVO

Lord Desborough and his famous 'keeper Jim Vincent were past masters of the art of 'shoving' a punt. Gerald Sambrooke Sturgess recalled: "His Lordship was a familiar sight on a summers day, dressed in white flannels, a Leander club blazer and a straw hat with the club's hatband, standing erect in the stern of his punt; 'shoving' her with a beautifully easy, slow and rhythmical but deceptively powerful action. She moved through the water with scarcely a ripple, smoothly, swiftly, noiselessly and apparently effortlessly, in a way that no modern punt could ever hope to emulate!"

Lord Desborough and Jim Vincent both died in 1944.



Jim Vincent shows his sister Ida Grosvenor, a double barrelled, four bore punt gun.

Mrs. Grosvenor shot for Great Britain at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin.

photo: Grosvenor



left

***Blue Quill* on the Thurne in about 1922.**

photo: NPC Handbook

far left

Prawn.

photo: Stewart Morris Collection

A thirteen year old Stewart Morris won the first Norfolk Punt race ever recorded, at Hickling regatta in August 1923 sailing his father's old punt *Prawn*, built in 1908. The Morris family hailed from Reigate Heath in Surrey but spent most of their summers on board their wherry *Sundog* at Broads regattas. Father, Harold Morris owned a number of boats, including the punts *Shrimp* and *Prawn*, several fourteen foot dinghies and from 1919, the Yare & Bure *Bath White*. Younger son Stewart had been taught to sail by a Hickling man from a large and well known local family. Cubit Nudd was employed as the Morris family skipper and had earlier taught the well-known naturalist and photographer Emma Turner to sail on Hickling Broad. Later in his life he was employed as a sailmaker at Herbert Woods boatyard at Potter Heigham.



Cubit Nudd

photo: Broadland Birds, E.L.Turner. pub. 1924

Walter Woods builders plate in *Shrimp*.

photo: Mike Evans



A.T.Chittock with his daughter Betty in 1923.

photo: Judy Macdonald (nee Sturgess) and Peter Sturgess

The following year, Hickling Open Regatta offered the Wortley Rose Bowl for a punt race. A group of sailors from Brundall fancied their chances for the new trophy and took their punts around to Hickling for the event. The 'Brundall Boys' punts were often amateur built and usually encouraged by George Marshall. Jim Vincent fitted out Lord Desborough's *Pochard* and Harold Morris won the event with William Jermy second with *Venture*. Gerald Sambrooke Sturgess reported that the "Brundall punts were well beaten" but W.F.Jermy in a letter to Dr. Tracey in 1960 had an entirely different recollection; claiming that he had taken first place in *Venture*, with *Prawn* second, Jack Edge third in *Hetebe* and brother Jermy in fourth place, "the rest of the Hickling punts were not in it." The trophy wasn't engraved for several years so we'll probably never know the true story but the differing perspectives provide an interesting basis for a thriving class.

In 1925, *Prawn* again beat two Brundall boats. The following year, Jim Vincent borrowed a large rig from the half-decker *Never Mind* and carried off the Wortley Rose Bowl in *Pochard*. At about the same time a young boatbuilder who had been apprenticed to his father at Potter Heigham also took *Pochard* for a sail. She was a punt that his uncle had built. Almost unnoticed, the foundations of the Norfolk Punt class were beginning to fall into place.

Arthur Batchelor taking Pull's Ferry across the Wensum.

photo: courtesy Mrs. Karen Curtis



Arthur Batchelor lived in Albermarle Road, Norwich and was a privileged young man, able to indulge his wide ranging artistic temperament. He was a talented painter and collected folksongs with his friend Vaughan Williams. Batchelor was also a skilled angler and one of a group of friends (including Russell Colman) who were invited to fish with Tod Corbett at his fishing 'hut' at Evanger in Norway. Tod and his brother Frank Corbett were both keen sportsmen. They founded the Broads One Design class in 1901 and found time whilst in Norway to teach the locals cricket.

