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## 75 YEARS OF THE Folkboat

The most popular and versatile pocket  
cruiser ever – still going strong



VIKING SHIP CROSSES ATLANTIC ★ ANCHORING UNDER SAIL ★ LEATHERING OARS  
AEROPLANE-INSPIRED BOAT ★ WHALE DIVING ON A TALL SHIP ★ FESTIVAL OF OZ

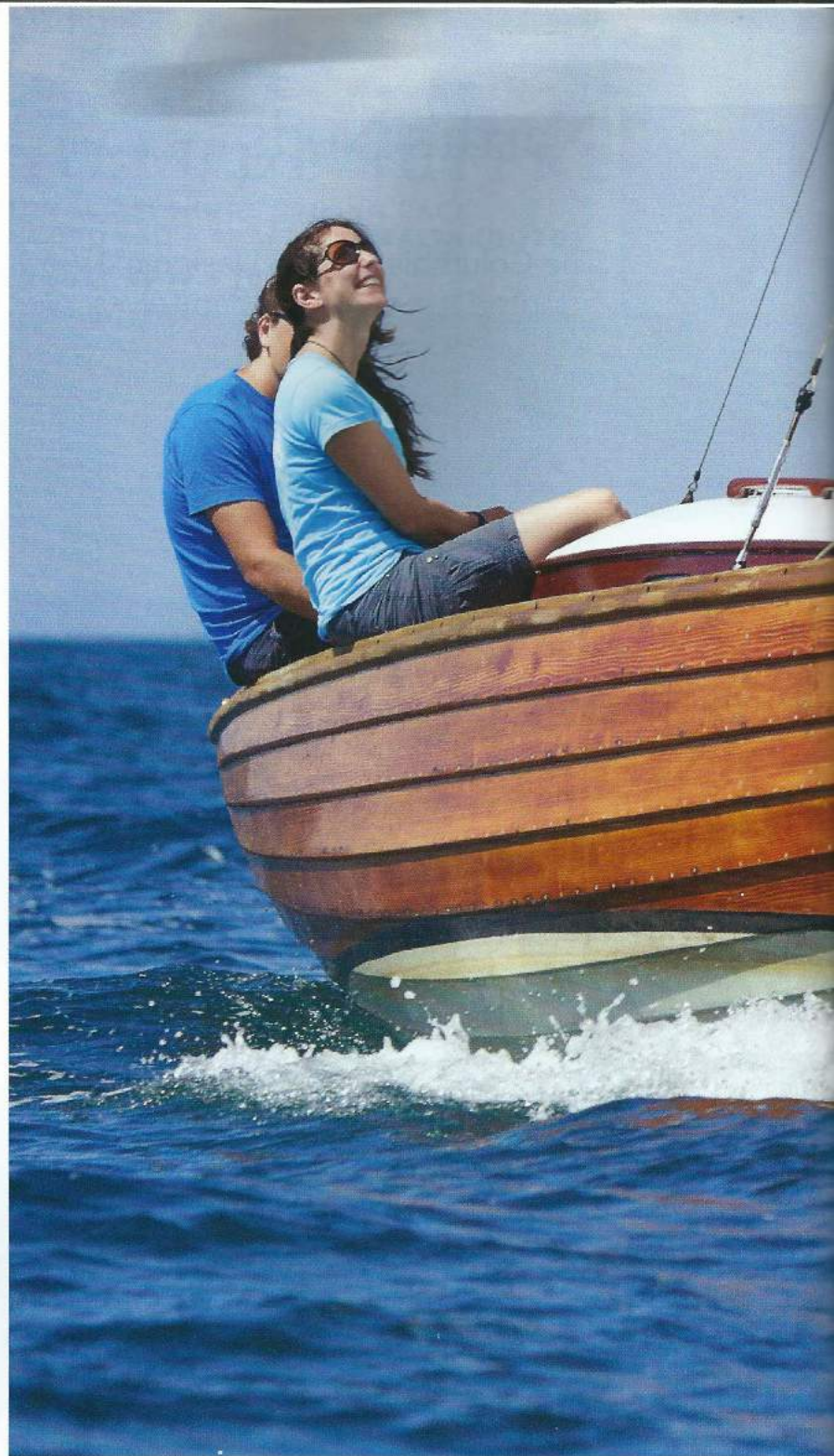




# 75

YEARS OF THE  
Folkboat

Born to be all things to all sailors – fun to race, pleasant to cruise and above all affordable – the Folkboat was evolved from a distillation of design ideas to create the ideal ‘people’s boat’. That’s exactly what it still is – and there are plenty to choose from, writes **William Loram**



**I**n 1942 the world was in turmoil as war raged in Europe, Russia, Africa and Asia. This was the year of the surrender of Singapore, the loss of 23 merchant ships on the Arctic Convoy PQ-17, defeat for the 8th Army at Tobruk, MacArthur retreating with US troops from the Philippines, and the Nazis and the Soviets getting stuck into the hellish battle of Stalingrad. The good news was Monty’s victory at El Alamein... and the birth of the Folkboat.

That’s right. While the rest of the world was slugging it out, the fun-loving Swedes had set about bringing into the world a yacht for the ordinary man’s leisure hours. And 75 years on it is still a top boat on many different levels,

with an estimated 6,000 built in a number of different variations. And the Nordic Folkboat International Association alone has a global race fleet of over 1,500 boats. Not bad for an old lady.

To be fair to the Scandinavian Sailing Association (SSA), World War Two had not really got into its stride when it published its competition in 1940 for a boat that was cheap to make, cheap to race, and seaworthy enough for family cruising on weekends and holidays. It was a popular concept, and got a popular response with 58 yacht designs submitted. The problem was the SSA could not decide on a winner. Instead they commissioned a young amateur designer, Tord Sunden, to amalgamate





the best features of the six best designs. The result was the Nordic Folkboat, (plus a dispute over who should take credit for the design that lasted until Sunden died in 1999).

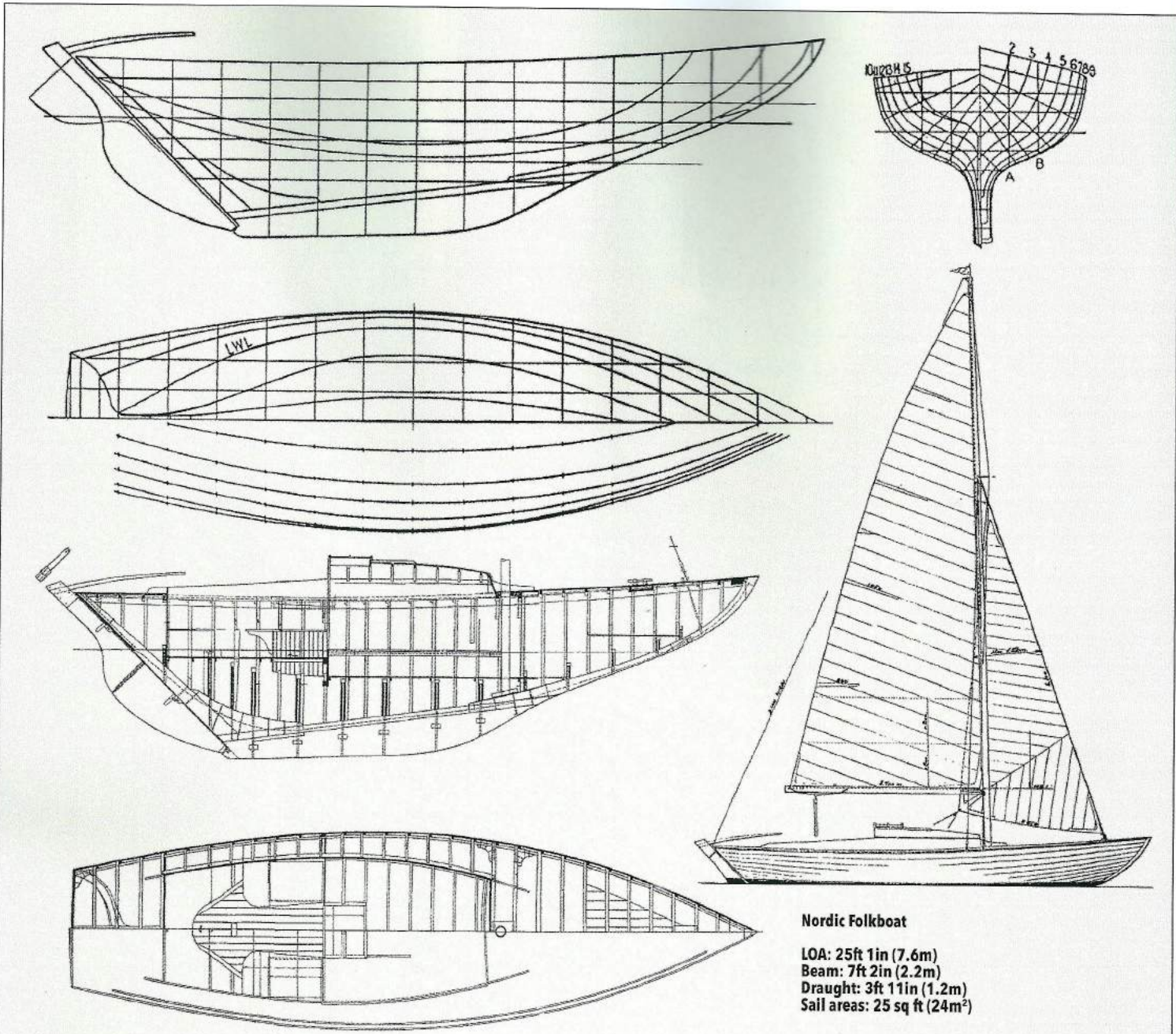
The finished boat was a 25ft long-keel copper-clenched clinker yacht, relatively lightly built, but well ballasted to allow a good turn of speed, while the lines, weight distribution, construction materials and sail plan were strictly controlled to enable uniform racing.

With a price tag of around £400, the Swedish fleet got off to a running start with 65 boats sold by the SSA chairman. After the end of World War Two Denmark and Finland quickly took up the Folkboat, and the good news about this tough little pocket yacht with



**The classic Folkboat look - gleaming varnished planking, as supplied by Meerflair for charter in the Adriatic (above) and Karlskrona Folk Yachts in Sweden (left)**





**Nordic Folkboat**

LOA: 25ft 1in (7.6m)  
 Beam: 7ft 2in (2.2m)  
 Draught: 3ft 11in (1.2m)  
 Sail areas: 25 sq ft (24m<sup>2</sup>)



**Far Left: Tord Sunden, who co-ordinated ideas from the original Folkboat design competition**

**Left: The original Folkboat, S1**

**Right: Blondie Hasler's Jester**

**Opposite page: Folkboat sailing on the Slovenian coast with Meerflair**





## Folkboats UK

From strict one-designs to family runabouts, **Tony Smee** knows the Folkboat world inside-out

**T**ony Smee, who owns and runs Folkboats UK knows a thing or two about Folkboats. After all he has got three of his own, as well as the business of being chandler in chief to the UK Folkboat community. He has a Nordic, a British, and a Varne Folkboat, and so can appreciate all angles of sailing as well as supply the necessities for these small yachts with a big performance.

Most of his work involves the strict one-design fleet of Nordic Folkboats, with the biggest UK fleet sailing out of nearby Lyminster.

"People ask me if they are racy boats, and I have to say it is not. It is in a very different league to the Dragon and the Etchell. But because of the strict class rules it is quite nice because it is not cheque-book sailing," he says.

But they are also a lovely sea boat, because as the keel is just over a tonne in weight, and with the long, narrow hull, she just slices through the seas.

The delight of the Folkboat is not only its seakeeping qualities, but on the whole the people who come to the class. This ranges from the top class businessman who wants to have a second boat that he can just jump in and race around the cans without the hassle of large crews, to those who are relatively new to sailing, or ex-dinghy sailors, or those wanting a safe boat for a young family. "It can handle like a dinghy because it is so simple," he says.

But problems can come when people buy a project – often on eBay – and then discover that they need to spend more time and money than they budgeted for. When that happens Tony is often contacted when to pick up the pieces, and then if it is a wooden boat, the bow section becomes a garden feature, and the rest is salvaged for parts.

Tony says the wooden Folkboats probably had their day in the 1970s in the UK, when a lot of yards would use them to train their apprentices, as the construction involved everything that was needed on a larger design, but was all much reduced in materials needed.

The GRP Folkboats had their day later – 2005-8 when a new Nordic would cost £28k. With a new Folkboat being a victim to disadvantageous exchange rates at the moment, the £60k price tag is a bit steep, away from its origins as a cheap family cruising boat. So the business is focused on servicing and selling the existing UK fleet.



a dandy performance started to spread. The Germans may have had a people's car with the VW Beetle, but this was a people's yacht to get people out enjoying family racing and cruising on the water.

The Nordic Folkboats were designed to be built with fir planks on oak frames, with a low coachroof over a small cabin with a couple of bunks, and open cockpit. The sail configuration is a simple fractional rig, with fore and back stay, two lower shrouds and two jumper shrouds. Despite the simplicity, the mast is easily tuned to get the most out of light airs and heavy weather. The heavy iron keel is over half the Folkboat's displacement, which makes it very stiff and an ideal sea boat.

In 1949 permission was obtained for British builders to produce carvel Folkboats, instead of clinker. To recognise the difference these carried FB on their sail instead of the Nordic Folkboat F. But it was not just the B on the sail that was the difference. British builders started fiddling with the design to give longer and higher coachroofs for better accommodation, inboard engines, and watertight bulkheads, as well as more frames, thicker planking, and a proper foc's'le with heads.

It has been the Folkboat's seakeeping qualities that made it an ideal cheap yacht for long distance passages.

In 1953 Harry Feltham of Portsmouth built a carvel Folkboat for Blondie Hasler, which





## Racing in the Solent

David Fox chose a Folkboat 'for its seakindliness and safety in the short sharp seas of the Solent'

The Royal Solent Yacht Club in Yarmouth, near the Needles end of the Isle of Wight has been hosting Folkboat events for quite a while now. The club website says for over 40 years, but it has been hosting Folkboat Week in August since 1966 when Cowes Week refused a class start for lack of numbers, my maths puts that at nearer 50 years. But the point is that the Yarmouth regatta has never been short of numbers.

The club has a fleet of 12 Nordic Folkboats, but only half of those can be relied on for regular participation in the full racing season – usually because owners do not live on the island, and so it is not so easy to participate, but they will all turn up for Folkboat Week and the big events.

The ages of the boats range from the oldest at 36 years to the newest out of the mould in 2006, but according to David Fox, owner of FB 685 *Bossa Nova*, the age does not matter. And the owner's age does not seem to matter either, but is generally 55 up, with people who have done the whole progression from dinghies into racy yachts, and family yachts, and the Folkboat seems to be the perfect boat for active over 50s.

"The attraction is that the racing is a short sharp burst, where you know that even if you are going to get a bit wet and uncomfortable in the process, three hours after leaving the moorings you will always be back, and in the bar," David says.

At 71 he is not exactly slowing down. Having retired to the Isle of Wight, he joined the Royal Solent and bought a Folkboat eight years ago. As well as racing in the RSYC fleet, the more enthusiastic members also race on a Wednesday with the Royal Lyngington fleet, which can boast 30 boats. He admits to two main reasons why he chose a Folkboat. Firstly, he was very aware of its seakindliness; and then when he first sailed one at the Royal Solent the boat just felt safe in the short sharp seas of the Solent.

"And the other factor is that you cannot throw lots of money to win, and an old boat is as good as the newest in the fleet," he says, adding that apart from new sails there is no other factor that can affect the chance of winning apart from the ability and experience of the helm and crew.



was to become famous as *Jester* with her junk rig, coming second in the first OSTAR Transatlantic race in 1960, following Francis Chichester in *Gypsy Moth II* into New York. And *Jester* continued to compete in the Transatlantic Race until 2000, despite the original sinking in the 1988 race, and a replacement having to be built.

The Folkboat's simplicity and stability – and its comparative low cost – made it a firm favourite for long-distance cruising, including a circumnavigation, a passage from the UK to New Zealand via the Panama Canal in 1962/3, and the first British woman to sail singlehanded from Britain to Russia in the 1960s, while another intrepid woman,

Sharon Sites Adams, sailed her Folkboat from California to Hawaii in 1965.

More recently young boatbuilder Leo Golden sailed his self-restored 1947 Swedish Folkboat *Lorema* from Cornwall to Antigua, and picked up a clutch of prizes including a first in class at Antigua Classic Week in 2015.

In the 1960s the Soviets got in on the Folkboat action, not as a boat for the comrades, but to earn hard currency to pay for essential imports to prop up Communist planned economies. So East Germany, Hungary and Poland undercut British and Scandinavian boatbuilders, while giving a bit more comfort. And in 1966 in an official evolution of the original design Tord Sunden designed the International





Folkboat, or officially IF, which was carvel rather than clinker, and had more space in the cabin for more cruising comfort.

In 1965 Jeremy Rogers and his customer and Folkboat owner David Sadler created the Contessa 26, a very successful derivative, which he lengthened for the iconic Contessa 32. But it was not until 1977 that the carefully weighed and replicated GRP Nordic Folkboat, taken from a plug of a successful Gold Cup winner, was allowed to race against the existing wooden fleet. The Danish Folkboat Association had taken the move to counter the rising costs of wooden boats, and keep costs low, and in doing so kept the Nordic Folkboat as a competitive one-design fleet. And there is

no doubting the performance capabilities of this small yacht, with it dominating the leader board with the most wins for the Round the Island Race – the earliest in 1948, the latest in 1999, not to mention three wins by Jeremy Rogers in his Contessa 26 *Rosina of Beaulieu*.

To put it simply, the Folkboat touches all bases. It can provide close and competitive racing without the need to break the bank. If it is cruising that floats your boat, then cramped accommodation can be augmented with a boom tent as you explore creeks and estuaries. And small can be beautiful for young families. And then if you want to engage in a bit of mindfulness-spiced optimism and take on a wooden project, there are plenty of interesting

**Above and opposite: keen racing at the Royal Solent YC's Folkboat Week; photos by Peter Spink**

boats with long histories waiting to be given new life, that will keep the stresses and strains of wired modern life at bay, and your wallet and carpentry skills constantly engaged.

With three Folkboats on the UK Folkboat Association website ([www.folkboats.com](http://www.folkboats.com)) for sale at £5,000 or under, it is probably one of the best value classes available, and still as relevant today as it was in 1942.

And if you would like to sample Folkboat sailing, there is the genuine Swedish experience from Karlskrona Folk Yachts, [www.kf-yachts.se](http://www.kf-yachts.se), or for Folkboats in the Adriatic contact Meerflair, <https://meerflair.at/en/classic-yachts/folkboats> based on the Slovenian coast at Izola. ★



## The Folkboat that came in from the cold

The author's own Folkboat restoration project was a dream of an idyllic childhood made real... eventually

**A**fter nearly a decade of looking for an appropriate family yacht to brave the Bristol Channel and explore the coastlines of West Wales and Devon, I finally stumbled upon something that fitted the bill. Having been brought up on the East Coast with family holidays of six of us stuffed into a 26ft 6in gaff cutter – the last wooden boat built at Woodham Ferrers – I wanted to recreate some of that warmth of rose-tinted childhood. And a 1964 mahogany on oak Folkboat built in Communist East Berlin was the answer to my dreams – sort of.

As a former cosy live-aboard there were a host of added extras that ticked my wife's list of things she would like on a boat – like fridge, heater, hi-fi system, sprayhood – and despite the unexplained hole in the cabin sole, all the neglect seemed skin deep, and the cockpit had a fantastic feeling of space, while a lovely swan neck tiller added an air of impoverished elegance to this pleasing yacht that seemed to have everything – apart from a good fit out.

The cosmetic faults – like the topsides paint that was peeling so badly it looked like a mouldy old rug – seemed to be easily doable, and I was looking forward to the challenge of trying to recreate that childhood wooden den of warm varnish, oil lamps and primus stove cooking.

The price was very appealing as well. I paid £1,500 in two instalments to the owner, who had holidayed in Cornwall with no sailing experience, but had been seduced by the allure of dolphins in the bow wave, loud music through the sound system, and the thrill of a sea spray sailing.

With *Guy Stannair* (thought to be Manx for goshawk, but unconfirmed on Google) overstaying the initial estimate of 4 weeks in the yacht club yard for a strip back to wood and re-varnish, I sometimes felt I was spending more time talking than stripping or painting as people stopped to tell their Folkboat stories. And as the coats of varnish started to make the mahogany gleam again, I caught someone running their hand down the length of the topsides in an almost sensual manner.

A word for the unwary with a project – projections on time and cost are immediately multiplied uncontrollably, so the best way to deal with it is roll with it, and enjoy the expe-



Top: William Loram sitting pretty aboard his "Commie" Folkboat. Far left, upper: The mess before stripping back – the paint was crazed with bare patches. Far left, lower: Stripped back and ready for a good soaking of eight coats of varnish in various states of dilution. Left: a wooden Folkboat stripped back ready for repainting at Folkboats UK, Lynton.



rience, while constantly looking at cheaper ways of sourcing what you need. Which led me to Folkboats UK, the base for all things Folkboat down a country lane just outside Lynton, for second sails, a new tiller and most recently a new boom that will fit the new mainsail.

### Potential issues on a project Folkboat are:

- Cracked or fractured frames, especially in the wineglass rear sections.
- Iron or steel keel bolts can be a problem and should be checked every 10 years.
- Brass screws used in a 1960s should be doubled.

- Eastern European Folkboats need to be checked that the nails fastening the planks have not rusted if the planks have opened out during a long spell ashore.
- Non-stainless ferrous fastenings can generate rot in main timbers, planking or coamings.
- Look out for rot if water penetrates under deck sheathings, damaging the deck and deck beams.
- Floors were fastened with iron dumps, which tend to rot.

As an added note, be prepared to have a good bailing arm in certain sea conditions if the cockpit is not self-draining.