

## IN SLOCUM'S WAKE

Towards the end of December 1887 the small barque Aquidneck came to grief on a sand-bank, off the coast of Brazil. This left Joshua Slocum, his wife, and her two sons from a previous marriage, marooned!

From the wreckage of his ship Slocum constructed a boat, or canoe, as he preferred to call it: “*Her dimensions being 35 feet in length overall, 7 feet 6 inches breadth of beam, and 3 feet depth of hold.*” She was modelled from recollections of Cape Ann dories, and from a photograph of a very elegant Japanese Sampan.

She resembled both types of vessel to some degree.

*“Her rig was the Chinese sampan style, which is, I consider, the most convenient boat rig in the whole world. Who shall say that she was not large enough?”*

Indeed, who? For he successfully brought his family back to New York after a voyage of 5000 miles.

The boat was named *Liberdade* (Liberty) as she was launched on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May, the date on which the slaves of Brazil were set free!

Nearly one hundred and ten years later, Welsh sailor, and Aberaeron Yacht club member, David Sinnett- Jones found himself marooned without a boat.

In the summer of 1995 David was sailing his yacht *Zane Spray* around southern Ireland, on passage for the Azores, for a meeting with other Joshua Slocum Society members, when, on the western approaches and 240 miles off shore, the yacht started to take on water.

The pumps failed to cope with the flooding, and a 'mayday' was sent out. *Zane Spray* managed to remain afloat, and drag her way back to within 34 miles of Ballycotton, before David and his companion had to transfer to the supporting lifeboat.

*Zane Spray* sank to the bottom, leaving them with only the clothes they stood up in!

This mis-adventure would be enough to deter lesser mortals from contemplating ever setting sail again; but David, who had lost an eye

whilst motor racing as a youngster, and lost a lung with other affected organs through being diagnosed with cancer, was used to adversity and surviving against the odds!

After his illnesses, David made an astounding recovery in his health, and was doggedly successful with his sailing:

His first expedition had been in 1981/82 which took him to the Cape of Good Hope, for his daughter's wedding.

That memorable voyage was later surpassed when on 17<sup>th</sup>. September 1985, David set off again on another remarkable voyage that was to take three years to complete. On 12<sup>th</sup>. August 1988, he returned to Aberaeron, having achieved a successful circumnavigation of the world.

David later competed in a Solo Trans-Atlantic Race (1992) and had many other 'long-haul' voyages to his credit. In 1998 his achievements were finally recognised and David was awarded the *Terra Nova Award* from the Capt. Scott of the Antarctic Society, for his 'spirit of adventure!'

The loss of Zane Spray was a singular tragedy for David in many ways.

He had built the boat with his own two hands, out of steel, in the redundant farm outbuildings that once housed his cattle, before he was taken ill and forced to sell up.

The *Zane Spray* was modelled on Joshua Slocum's renowned yacht, the *Spray*, and as with Slocum, had seen David safely through his formidable voyages.

The boat was rightfully his pride and joy, and a sad loss also to the residents and locals of Aberaeron, who delighted in seeing the boat in the harbour, and shared in the honour of David's achievements.

Immediately after the loss of Zane Spray, David spent much time and a great deal of his energy and savings, in trying to raise the yacht from the sea-bed.

Early hopes of success were dashed by the change in weather, and finally, damaged inflicted unwittingly by a trawler passing over the sunken hulk, made further attempts futile.

True to his spirit, David did not give up!

Inspired once again by the journals of Joshua Slocum, in his hour of need,

David Sinnett-Jones began to conceive a new plan. He constructed a small model of his concept, and then set about the task of creating the reality.

On the 25<sup>th</sup>. October 1997, in the inner harbour at Aberaeron ( Pwll Cam) in a ceremony presided over by the Brazilian Embassy's Naval Attache' - Captain Max Herschefeldt, a replica of *Liberdade* was launched.

According to David's specifications he built the boat out of 12mm marine ply, with the hull sheathed in glass cloth, and epoxy sealed. The coach-house roof was cedar wood, again epoxy finished. Trimmings were mahogany and teak.

The boat had three masts, all of which were without stays. The main, mizzen and a forward mast, were made from Douglas fir, shaped by David himself, and, like the original, she was junk rigged!

The keel was constructed of 6" by 3" Douglas fir, with ballast of lead ingots glued and sealed into position.

A Mitsubishi three cylinder diesel engine was placed in position during the yacht's construction.

The original *Liberdade* had bunches of large bamboo poles tethered together alongside, to act as additional buoyancy. David, who did not have access to such plentiful natural resources as Slocum, had to make do with a slightly inferior amount of bamboo; but, as he said, 'they made great fenders!'

At 10.30 am. On Wednesday morning the 15<sup>th</sup>. of April, *Liberdade* set sail from Aberaeron harbour, and headed for Goat Island and Newport Rhode Island in the United States of America.

The departure had been deferred from Easter Sunday due to bad weather, and David incurring a mild bout of influenza; but on this morning, a small crowd of locals and other well wishers who had been waiting all week-end to see this extraordinary departure, waved and shouted their best wishes as the boat headed out into a stiff breeze and lumpy seas.

Accompanying David was Tony Burriss of Bristol Channel Marine Insurance, who was co-opted as crew at the last hour, after David's previous crew member was forced to drop out.

The two sailors opted to take the Southern route, via the Azores and Bermuda, as, at sixty eight years of age, David preferred a milder climate!

Their intention was to arrive at their destination around the week-end of 25<sup>th</sup> /27<sup>th</sup>. June 1998, in time to meet up with the Joshua Slocum Society, where David was to be guest speaker at the centenary celebrations.

Such was David's notoriety that he had also been approached by the Blackburn Voyage Group, of Gloucester, Massachusetts, who invited him to sail single handed a replica of the '**Great Western**' to celebrate the centenary of the voyage of 'Iron Man' Howard Blackburn.

Blackburn, who lost his fingers through frost-bite, and survived against the odds by rowing sixty five miles, to the Newfoundland coast, sailed a thirty foot 'Gloucester' sloop single handed from Gloucester, Massachusetts, to Gloucester, England, arriving on August 10<sup>th</sup>. 1899. The centenary was to coincide with those dates.

*Meurig Jones*

### ***CODICIL :***

Following various mechanical setbacks and a couple of minor injuries, they arrived 24 days later at Horta in the Azores. Several days later they set sail for Newport. Rhode Island.

A thousand miles out, after being battered by storms they found the steel rudder plate had been bent into a right-angle by a large wave and they had to return to Horta, arriving thirty days after leaving. They then flew to Boston and made their way to Newport, just in time for the celebrations.

In his usual determined way, David flew home, made a new rudder, and flew back alone to the Azores. Having made all necessary repairs he sailed ***Liberdade*** back to Aberaeron in fifteen days.

All the while, he was thinking of what had been said to him in America - 'You should take the ***Liberdade*** down to Brazil and re-enact Slocum's great voyage for the millennium, David!'

So, in September 1999, after a thorough refit, David set sail alone again.

After a long and difficult passage, during which he broke a rib, David tied up 32 days later in the Azores.

The plan was to rest up, then sail to Recife in Brazil where he was to meet Mike Austin, who would crew with him to New York.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> November he set sail on the 3000 mile trip to Recife, arriving 32 days later.

David and Mike then sailed 1450 miles south to Paranagua where they would begin the re-enactment - sailing back northward to New York via Antigua.

While there David developed kidney stones and had to fly back home. Mike sailed the boat solo to Virginia where David, now recovered, took over and brought her to New York and then on to Menemsha Harbour in Martha's Vineyard.

At this point David felt his health was deteriorating and he didn't think he was up to sailing back across the Atlantic, so the *Liberdade* was stored in a friend's barn.

After flying home he was diagnosed with heart problems, and realised his sailing days were over.

He later wrote:

*“ What have I learnt on my journey? - Live for the moment as the last second has gone, and is history, and the second to come may never arrive. Life isn't fair, but there is always a silver lining. Spend time in solitude, as the prophets did, and you will learn much about life and never give up. ”*

*Nigel Wells*