

# **Swin, Swale and Swatchway**

by HL Jones MA

## **The inspiration for *The Magic of the Swatchways* and other Maurice Griffiths' titles**

One of the many delights of cruising in small yachts is the marvellously descriptive literature from the pens of the pioneers. Henry Lewis Jones was one who wrote of the Thames Estuary and east coast rivers when solitude in these river anchorages was the order of the day. Jones was a well known London surgeon. He cruised with medical colleagues in the 2-ton cutter "Wild Rose" then the 4-ton yawl the "Teal".

Like many cruising yachtsmen I always return to the books of Maurice Griffiths, my particular favourites. So what inspired him? In "The First of the Tide" MG says how the foreshore at Leigh-on-Sea always reminded him of a book he found in a library when he first started sailing. "It was a modest volume of short cruises in these waters in a little 4- ton cutter with the title 'Swin, Swale and Swatchway', published about 1894, but I cannot recall the author's name nor have I seen another copy".

In fact the author was Henry Lewis Jones and the book was published in 1892. It was quarto size, with embossed cover, well illustrated and ran to 203 pages. From the dedication page "To the Commodore, the Officers and the Members of the Cruising Club" one supposes he was a member. The Cruising Club, founded in 1880, became the Royal Cruising Club in 1902. MG's inability to find another copy demonstrates its rarity. After much searching I had only located two copies, both in national libraries. Applying for a reader's ticket and obtaining conservatorial clearance to photocopy the book, I made a complete copy. Reproduction was permissible under copyright law as the author had been dead for more than seventy years.

One of Jones' sailing companions was the equally eminent surgeon Charles Barrett Lockwood who assisted with the compilation of "Swin, Swale and Swatchway". Both Jones and Lockwood had died during the First World War. It is conceivable they were casualties, perhaps in forward dressing stations on the Western Front. Certainly when Lockwood died (8 November 1914) the first battle of Ypres was well under way with its thousands of casualties only a hundred miles from London.

Comparison of "Swin, Swale and Swatchway" with Maurice Griffiths' work reveals how influential this book was to the young MG. Within its pages, particularly the first chapter, one finds earnest

description of the benefits and delights awaiting sailors of small vessels, “their numbers are naught compared with those who might become good sailor-men if only they knew how to take the first step, and could be made aware of the fun to be had in pottering about in those nooks and corners of the Kent and Essex coast which are to be found by those who care to look for them”; surely a prompt to MG to write “Yachting on a Small Income”.

In the following chapters Jones returns to the “picturesque, novel and delightful” anchorages and backwaters with accounts of short cruises. Location and subject tally with “The Magic of the Swathways”, life afloat portrayed down to the “hateful petroleum stove”, Griffiths’ detail. Indeed the familiar formula of lessons learned from adventures, enlivened by phonetic spelling of Essex dialect and features of interest is all there. The interests included powder hulks and coastguard watch vessels.

Being pioneering stuff, “Swin, Swale and Swathway” contains a good deal of pilotage information. In this respect it differs from MG but of course in the late nineteenth century yachtsman’s sailing directions were far fewer in number and Admiralty pilots were not much concerned with shoal waters. Cowper’s “Sailing Tours” were not published until 1896.

Jones also considered the kind of boat best suited for cruising at the mouth of the Thames and the advantages of three foot draft. This question of suitability and shoal draft occupied MG throughout his designing years. Continuing on design, Jones wrote “One must have shelter and live with some approach to comfort while away on a cruise, therefore cabin room and good sleeping accommodation, dry and warm, are essential”. This accords with Griffiths who designed in space under the cabin stove to keep his slippers warm.

MG having moved to London to try his hand at journalism full-time, a recurring question for him was where to keep a boat. This was Jones’ second problem, “What is the best place for the Londoner to keep his boat?” Like MG he reflects on the nature of the train services as much as tidal access.

In one respect Jones was ahead of Griffiths and that was photography. As Head of the Electrical Department of St Bartholemew’s Hospital, later named the Radiology Department, he was well versed in the technicalities of photography and was using a dry plate camera. This was an Eclipse, made by J.F. Shew of Newman Street, London. Internet searching brought further detail and pictures of this equipment:

<http://www.photographica.nu/shews241.htm>

MG definitely preferred what his nautical illustrators could capture with a pencil and their names read like a hall of fame, Fid Harnack and Charles Pears to name but two. Jones lived a busy life and with his camera would “snatch visions of the fleeting hours for use on winter evenings with the magic lantern”. Nevertheless whilst the illustrations are mostly photographs there are a few sketches in his book. MG on the other hand being a writer could work on his boat, sketching and bashing out copy on a portable typewriter in the stillness one of his river anchorages, dried out on the mud. Jones didn't have that luxury, having a busy hospital department waiting for him whenever he was away.

It was a natural that Jones would use a familiar publisher Waterlow and Sons Limited, an up market printer of legal and medical texts and postage stamps. As a premier legal printer one would expect the profession to have noticed Waterlow's other titles. Interestingly this has left a legacy, library stamps on the Scottish copy of “Swin , Swale and Swatchway” show that it originated from the Edinburgh Advocates Library.

Self evidently “Swin, Swale and Swatchway” was influential and a link in the evolution of shoal water sailing literature. So why is it so little known? The main reason must have been the size of the original print run, perhaps no greater than the number of members in the Cruising Club. It was very much a minority pursuit in those days and even fewer of the participants would have bought a relatively expensive book. There was less interest in cruising than racing and the description of the Thames estuary would have tended to localise the market. All the upheavals of two world wars have since intervened, doubtless with further loss of copies.

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