

# A shining example

Silverleaf by class, and chrome-plated by her first owner, Chinda was built on the Kent coast, and has now been restored in Suffolk. **By Peter Willis; photos by Gill Moon**

**T**he immediate thing that struck me when I first set eyes on *Chinda*, nearing the completion of her restoration in Harbour Marine's main shed, was the unusual amount of chrome trim bouncing back the strip lighting. *Chinda* is a classic Silverleaf 46ft twin-screw motor cruiser, designed by John Bain of J & A Silver, of Rosneath in Scotland.

They are handsome craft but go in for an almost Presbyterian level of restraint when it comes to decoration, the main concession to showiness being a signature broken sheerline encasing varnished mahogany panelling towards the after end of the hull.

So all this bling – chrome porthole surrounds, ventilators, deck fittings, door

handles, rails – anything metal really – seemed distinctly out of character. As if someone had demanded, in the modern vernacular, “Pimp up my Silverleaf”. And, it turns out, that is exactly what had happened, back in 1946 when *Chinda*, or *Lady Dot II* as she was then called, was first built.

The fact that she wasn't built by Silvers themselves might also have been a contributory factor. Her builder was the Whitstable, Kent, firm of Anderson, Rigden and Perkins. Harbour Marine's John Buckley suggests that, as well as the trim, a “southern softness” has crept into her lines, when compared with Rosneath-built examples, such as *Meridies*, which he'd previously restored and which still lives at Harbour Marine's Southwold yard.

One can see what he means – there's a more pronounced fore-and-aft curve to the

wheelhouse roof, a gentler sweep to that broken sheerline. As for all that chrome, there is an even simpler explanation: her original owner also owned an electro-plating business. “It's said that even the propellers were chromed,” says present owner Nic Seal with much amusement. “They aren't now, of course,” he adds.

Nic and his wife Bertie found *Chinda* a little over three years ago, on the Isle of Wight, in Island Harbour, Cowes. “She had terrible electrolysis problems – rotted wood around the shaft logs and the A-frames. When she was brought out of the water, a lot of other problems were discovered. The Cascover nylon sheathing had stopped her from sinking but it had concealed a lot of problems,” says Nic. They kept finding more and more things wrong with her, “and that was another several

*Chinda* surges up the Orwell towards Levington at the end of her maiden voyage from Southwold

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thousand pounds each time.” They talked to other owners, including Jonathan and Helen Lewis of *Gralian*, the Saunders-Roe motor cruiser also restored by Harbour Marine.

At one stage they thought about suing the original surveyor, who had failed to spot all these problems pre-purchase, but decided not to, after advice from Jonathan and Helen – “two years of hell, they told us”. They got in David Cox from Cornwall to do another survey, and decided to follow Jonathan and Helen’s example and talk to John Buckley at Harbour Marine. “John came down to Cowes, and said she’s got her problems, but they’re all repairable and she’s a good boat, well-built.”

So up to Southwold she went, John and his team got stuck in and Nic passed the time researching her history. One link that particularly pleased him was the discovery that one of the HMS shipwrights, Laurie, who did a lot of the work on *Chinda*, had been apprenticed to Faversham boatbuilder Alan Staley who himself had worked at Anderson, Rigden and Perkins. Alan has done a lot of research on the

yard, and was able to tell Nic that his boat had been washed ashore at Whitstable in the great flood of 1953. A gantry fell on her and she then fell onto another boat.

Nic has also inherited correspondence about the boat, passed down from the original owner, Mr R A Swinnard of Tunbridge Wells. Much of it is carbon copies of his side of a perhaps typical exchange between owner and yard: April 1948: “I am rather concerned regarding the news you gave me about *Lady Dot II* the previous figure was not too bad but with the addition you now state the ship will be a very expensive one and not at all in keeping with your original rough estimate.”

In May he queries the “considerable increase” in estimates for labour, materials, overheads and electrical work, and the yard’s attempt to land him with its own insurance costs on the ship. He also complains “The plumbing on the ship is absurd” with some apparent justification – “no stop cock or drain plugs are provided anywhere, consequently in the event of a leak the water cannot be shut

**Above:** Owners Bertie and Nic Seal relax in the wheelhouse. **Right:** There’s a period feel to the saloon



**Below, from left:** Bookshelf, owner’s cabin with stern window and twin (infillable) berths; original light fitting

off from the tanks nor can they be drained in frosty weather”. The deck needs to be recaulked and properly pitched, due to “bad workmanship” and at the yard’s expense.

And the cost of the carpets and upholstery is excessive. He is particularly bitter about the saloon seats: “very poor and unsprung and are naturally going out of shape, I contend they should be sprung and shaped deeped (sic) in the front than the back to avoid the feeling of slipping off, perhaps you will take the matter up with these people as one should surely have something good for £68. 6. 6.”

In the end he gets a deduction of £138.2.10 on the final settlement and thanks the yard for “having produced such a very nice ship, she is admired by everyone who has seen her

particularly by old hands who ought to know”.

There is also a letter from John Bain himself, on Silvers’ headed notepaper, with some detailed advice on ballast. “I note that the yacht behaves well in a heavy sea but that the angle of roll is rather excessive. A slight addition to the ballast would probably improve this but care should be taken to wing it out as well as possible; do not have it all in the centre of the bilges: if, for instance, you could get some in the angle space beneath the bottom drawer below the beds in the aft cabin, this would be a most suitable position.”

Possibly in the early 50s, she was sold to a Mr Holland, who did a lot of trips to the Channel Islands, to buy cheap beer. In 1962, he sold her to a Brinley Stewart, who changed

her name, but kept her for just a year. Then she went to a Mr Temple, who took her to the Medina at Cowes to use as a houseboat, and where she was left to rot until Nic found her.

John Buckley describes the state of her when he went down to inspect: “Some badly-informed chap had put anodes on the A-brackets, causing severe electrolysis, not only to the brackets themselves and the shaft logs, but also to the first four planks, of oak, either side of the garboards, as well as to some of the floors, timbers and frames.”

All of this had to be replaced, as well as the garboards themselves. A new laminated floor was built right across the stern to support the frames, new stern tubes added and new keel bolts fitted. New bearers were built for the two

**Chinda (ex-Lady Dot II)**

**Construction:** Larch on oak  
**Length:** 46ft (14m)  
**Beam:** 11ft (3.35m)  
**Draught:** 4ft (1.2m)  
**Displacement:** 20 tonnes.  
**Engines:** Originally 2 x 30hp Coventry  
 Now 2 x 72hp Yanmar  
**Builder:** Anderson, Rigden & Perkins, Whitstable 1946-7  
**Restored:** Harbour Marine Southwold 2013-15



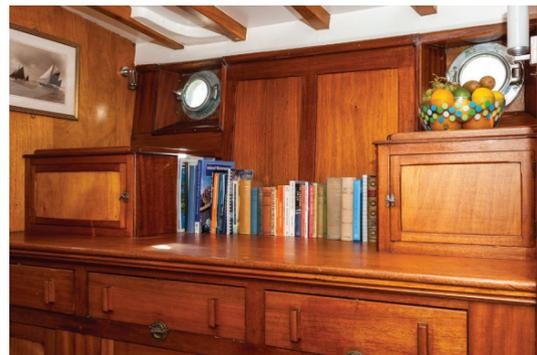
**Above:** Under restoration in Harbour Marine’s yard

new 72hp Yanmar engines. These replaced two 52hp units which had been there since 1962 and themselves had replaced the original 30hp pair. Three new tanks, diesel, water and holding, were installed, with the fuel tanks relocated to the engine room, leaving space for a cavernous lazarette below the afterdeck, and the boat was completely rewired.

Externally, the portlights were all re-chromed and reseated, and all the planks in what John Bain would refer to as the “fake break of sheer” were replaced with Brazilian mahogany, of which HMS holds a stock. And below the waterline, for the aftermost 26ft (7.9m), the Cascover sheathing has been replaced – with Cascover. “About a year ago,” relates John, “we bought the last roll of Cascover, down in Southampton. It was the right thing to do – she’s now exactly as she was in 1946. And we’ve still got some in stock.”

But the main work was the new deck. When John learned that Nic planned to take *Chinda* down to the Mediterranean, “That knocked a teak deck on the head.” Instead they

**Below, from left:** Topsides, more chrome, the external steering position, and the mahogany dining table on the afterdeck

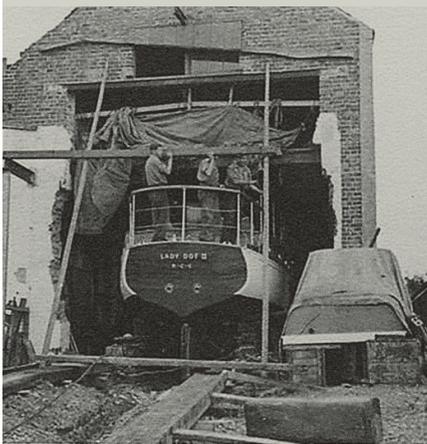


## Anderson, Rigden & Perkins

Described by its biographer and former apprentice Alan Staley as: "The last proper shipyard that operated from the Whitstable foreshore," Anderson, Rigden & Perkins was formed by local shipowners in 1917, following the demise of the Whitstable Shipping Company. Most of the initial work was on the workhorses of the coast: barges, freighters and oyster dredgers. *Stormy Petrel*, see CS1, p10, built by Charles Perkins, one of the partners in ARP, and his brother Richard, came in for some work in 1920. But as working sail faded away in the 1920s and 30s, yachts became the mainstay. An Albert Strange gaff cutter, *Ariel* was built there in 1925; Claud Worth had a yacht built there in 1929, and the yard built a great number to the designs of Dr T Harrison Butler. It also built dinghies including National 12s, and the Essex One Designs.

The outbreak of war in 1939 saw this kind of work disappear, but it was eventually replaced by Admiralty contracts, including HDMLs and motor fishing vessels. Post-war, the business of fishing vessels and leisure craft resumed – including *Lady Dot II* in 1946-7. The yard took an active part in the new London Boat Shows; Bob Anderson became president of the Ship & Boat Builders National Federation in 1958, and later chairman of National Boat Shows.

The yard's latter decades reflect the decline and consolidation of the boatbuilding industry: in 1962, RJ Perkins went into liquidation and some of its staff transferred to AR&P, and in 1969 AR&P took over the premises next door. But in 1973 a disastrous fire destroyed the main yard. Production moved along Island Wall to what became known as No 2 Yard – back to the site of the original Whitstable Shipping Company. The end of the business came amidst cheap overseas competition, planning delays over the new sea wall, where the yard needed gaps to launch its boats across the beach, and an unsuccessful effort at a merger with Conyer Marine. Anderson, Rigden and Perkins went into liquidation in 1983.



**Above: Stern view. Below left: *Lady Dot II*, as she then was, ready to emerge from the boatshed of Anderson Rigden and Perkins in 1947**

installed a ply deck with epoxy recesses, "a complete monocoque structure for strength, and still very attractive". It was laid on top of the original triple-diagonal teak deck, "still structurally sound, as were the beam shelf, hanging knees and lodging knees". Nic's verdict is that the new deck "has done her the world of good – stiffened her considerably".

"We also rebuilt the rear of the wheelhouse to accommodate an external helm," adds John. Inside the wheelhouse they've gone to some lengths to conceal what John calls the "nasty electronics" – or at any rate their dials and switches that tend to clash with the classic ambience. As Nic says, "We wanted the wheelhouse to look as original as possible," so all the dials have been cleared from the dashboard and put behind a low-level mahogany panel.

Below decks, the saloon also remains, very elegantly, 'as was', and though the adjacent galley is completely new, it has been designed to blend in. The aft cabin, however, which boasts a splendid stern-facing window, has been remodelled so that the original double bed has been replaced with a V-shaped 'occasional double' which can serve as two singles if needed for crew accommodation.

Finishing touches include moving the mast to the after deck – "It should be there for the steadying sail, and it keeps foredeck clear," observes Nic. There are new deck boxes, and a splendid mahogany table for the after deck, plus a resplendent boarding ladder, found by David Worthington, owner of fellow Silverleaf *Meridies*, at a boat jumble.

And a little tailpiece – on the *Chinda* name, painted on the stern, the dot on the letter I has been replaced by a discreet leaf, a tribute to how Nic earns his living. And before your imaginations get to work, I'd better explain that it's the rather elegant leaf of the

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Japanese knot-weed plant, scourge of gardens and countryside which Nic spends his working days eradicating.

Photographer Gill Moon and I met up with *Chinda*, along with Nic, Bertie and their son Freddie, at Levington Marina in July, after what was in effect their maiden trip down from Southwold. "Bit scary at first," admitted Nic. "It was, 'Oh my god, I'm going to break this expensive new toy.'" But he hadn't, and he manoeuvred her with confidence for the camera, talking confidently of the next leg, across the Thames estuary, and his long-term plans to eventually take her through the French canals to the Med.

"The rebuild took about one and a half years," he estimated. "Two people, full-time. If I'd known how much work was needed I'd probably not have started, but now we've finished I'm glad we did."

From Levington, they went down to the Thames, and then upriver as far as Chelsea, then down to Ramsgate, and via Brighton and Portsmouth back to Cowes, where they'd found the boat, and on to Weymouth.

"Then we turned round and did it all in reverse, stopping at St Katharine Dock for the Classic Boat Festival which was a great success, before reaching Southwold after a long wet and cold trip fighting wind and tide! Knackered but still alive!" ★