

CHAPTER 2

A small canoe yawl

Extract from "Sail and Oar" by John Leather
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George Holmes was one of the leading designers and users of the seaworthy and practical canoe yawl, of which he owned several and designed many others. One of his favourites was the 13ft *Ethel* which he had built for him in 1888 by J A Akester, a boatbuilder at Hornsea on the Yorkshire coast who constructed many similar craft, by the mere, a lake just inside the coastline which was then much used by the Humber Yawl Club for their canoe and dinghy racing. The *Ethel* was designed for cruising and proved herself during a one month cruise in Holland soon after her launch. Holmes slept on board her each night under a cockpit tent. She went well to windward and as he wrote,

She has succeeded beyond my expectations. . . . I do not think anyone in want of an 'all round' small cruiser could greatly improve on her. Her shortness allows her to be put in an ordinary railway guard's van [greatly to be desired in those times of limited means of transport]. Her beam enables her to dispense with outriggers for rowing; and affords room for two to cruise and even sleep on board. She is very lightly built of willow and can be hauled ashore by one man when the ballast (112lbs of lead in four pigs, with handles) is removed. With my weight on board (about 11 stone) on the floor just abaft the centreboard - the best position for sailing - she draws 6½in aft and 5½in forward.

The principal particulars of the *Ethel* were:

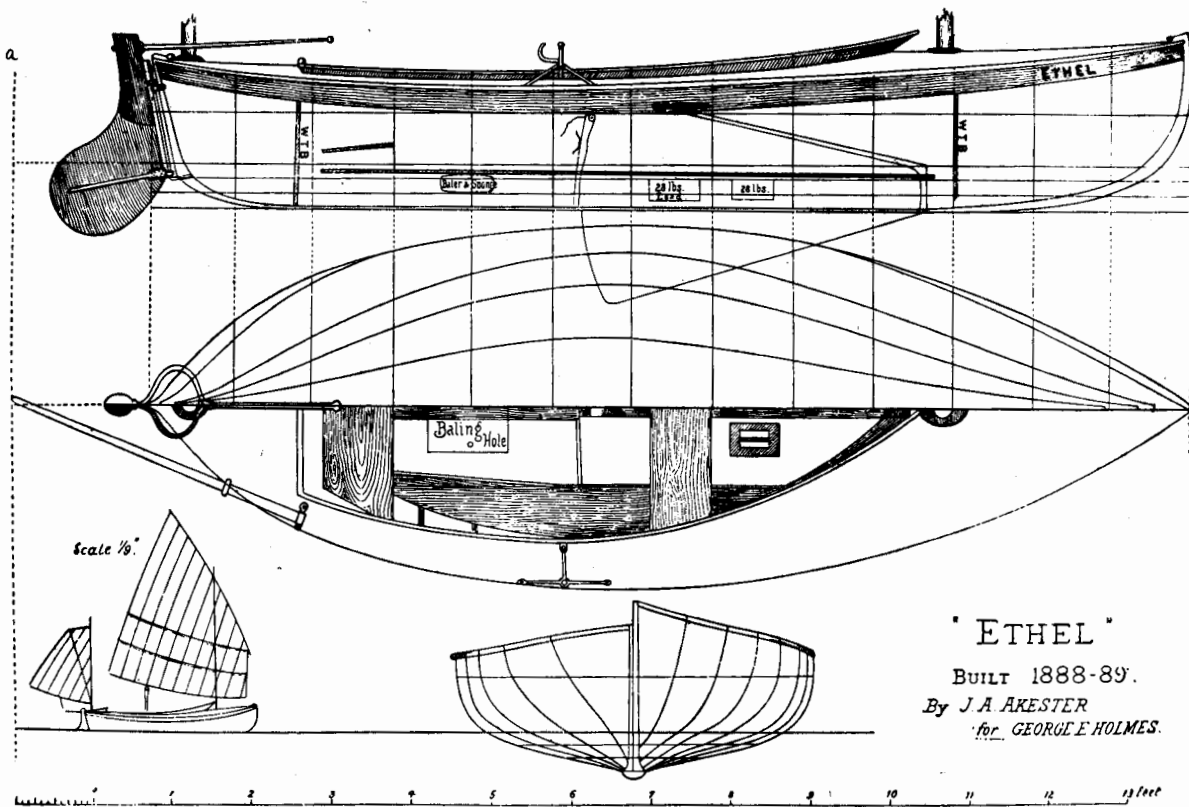
Length overall	13ft
Beam	4ft 6in
Depth at bow	2ft 2in
Depth amidships	1ft 6in
Depth at stern	1ft 11in
From bow to mast	3ft
From bow to fore end centreplate	3ft 3in
From bow to aft end of centreplate	7ft 6in
From bow to aft end of well	11ft 2in
Weight of centreplate	22lbs. Of ¼in thick brass
Weight of lead ballast pigs	114lbs
Area of foresail	87sq ft
Area of mizzen	19½sq ft
Total sail area	106½sq ft

The plans require little additional comment. The original hull was clinker-planked but the same form may be satisfactorily built with a cold-moulded skin. The hull and its arrangements are old fashioned in appearance but practical in such small craft. The centreplate is relatively long but is advantageous if much sailing in really shallow water is to be done, when the long forward edge is effective. A shorter, narrower plate which would have similar area but drop further would enable her to spin more quickly; but she is not a racing boat, though Holmes frequently entered her with success in races against others of her size and type.

The return curve of the stemhead is not pleasing to my eye and one would prefer a drop plate rudder, though the area of the one shown is adequate. The two watertight bulkheads were a feature of many contemporary canoe yawls and canoes and were usually of one piece of mahogany about ¾in thick; a sensible method of construction as it is possible to satisfactorily edge nail into it, unlike plywood which would require a ground for such fastenings. The rig shown is awkward, though it was simple compared with many in canoe yawls of the time. The balance lug foresail and sprit mizzen might appeal to some who like playing with strings but I would prefer a standing lug forward and a triangular mizzen - a modification which would preserve her ability and make her easier to handle, while maintaining the low centre of area so desirable in these craft.

Tiller arrangements are always difficult in small yawl- (technically ketch-) rigged boats and the arrangement shown, with a metal tiller incorporating an eye around the mizzen is the best solution, being direct, strong and simple. It can be unshipped if desired and will then lie on deck, secure from loss overboard.

A close-fitted cockpit-cover tent of Terylene, fitted over three portable tubular hoops and having a zip-fastened flap at its after end would convert the *Ethel* into a primitive overnight cruiser for those hardy enough to emulate Holmes and his contemporaries, who were content with minimal comforts and derived immense pleasure from their spartan 'cruisers'.



' ETHEL '

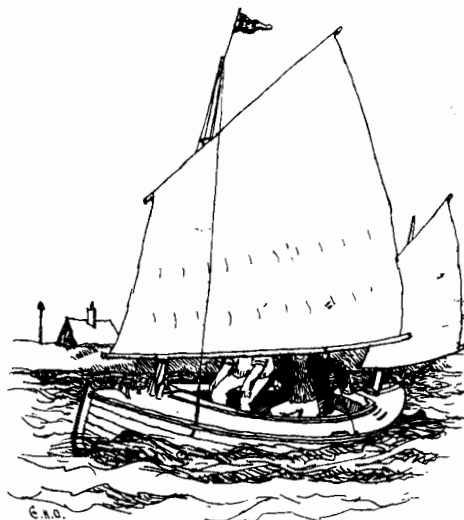
BUILT 1888-89.

By J A AKESTER
for GEORGE HOLMES.

ABOVE:
Lines and sail plan of the 13ft canoe yawl *Ethel* designed by George Holmes. Craft of this type with cold-moulded wood hulls, alternative cockpit arrangements and rigs are now built by David Leather.

RIGHT:
A canoe yawl similar to the *Ethel* drawn by Ernest Hicks Oliver, another ardent canoe cruiser of the period.

FAR RIGHT:
George Holmes' sketch of the *Ethel* and the *Nan* in Denmark in 1896 captures the spirit of cruising in canoe yawls.



Typical of the adventurous and amphibious cruising which canoe yawls were intended to undertake was George Holmes' summer visit to Denmark in 1896 in the *Ethel* and in company with the 13ft x 4ft 6in canoe yawl *Nan*, owned by a friend. The yawls were shipped across the North Sea on the steamer which carried their owners. They were discharged at the Danish port of Aarhus, on the east coast of the Jutland peninsula, where the yawls were put on the train for the inland town of Skanderborg, situated on one of a series of lakes. There the voyagers rigged the boats and set off, well reefed, down the lake to moor for the night by its shore. The lake ended in a shallow river and after portaging past a mill, with the help of its staff, the yawls were rowed to a larger lake of MoSo, which was rougher and reed bordered. This lake was linked by a stream to the larger Guden So, amid scenery reminiscent of the Norfolk Broads. They traversed the Ry Molle So and moored at the village of Ry before continuing westwards over the lakes of Lille So and Birkso, set amongst woods. A narrow channel led to lake Julso, where the yawls moored in secluded Hanens Krog Bay, then coasted down the lake past wooded islets and through narrows leading to Bras So. The Kluvers Canal led from this to Aun So and on to the town of Silkeborg where they moored away from the town in

reeds bordering the Silkeborg Langso. A river passage followed for some distance, rowing and poling, to the town of Randers, further north, where the yawls were taken by rail to the town of Aalberg, on the narrows of the Limfjorden, the delightful series of sounds and bays which cuts across the northern part of Jutland, linking the Baltic with the North Sea for small craft, without the need to pass around the stormy Skaw.

Afloat again on salt water the yawls enjoyed a sparkling sail to Logstor, where the Limfjorden expands to an inland sea. They spent the night in harbour and then had a brisk sail westward across the wild windswept and rough Logstor Bredning, then coasted under the lee of the large island of Mors to Nykobing, its capital. In the morning the *Ethel* and *Nan* beat down Salling Sound and squared away around Jegindo, bound west-south-west for Struer, where the cruise ended. The yawls were again put on the train, for the North Sea port of Esbjerg, en route for Hull and home.

That experience was typical of the sort of mild adventure which made canoe yawls attractive to small boat sailors almost a century ago. If they could accomplish so much with limited means of transport how much more ought we to be able to enjoy similar cruising?

