



The Consuta Trust

The advancement of education in the history of steam launches, by preservation, maintenance and exhibition of the steam launch **Consuta**

Consuta Trust Newsletter - Winter 2022

Seasonal greetings everyone,

There have been no Consuta operations to report this year apart from the very satisfactory boiler steam test and certification by SBA Services in June. So I have been looking back at the very beginning of all the work restoring Consuta, and what a fascinating tale it is.

The Trust do have some great proposals for 2023 steam operations possibly into 2024 as well. We could launch ready for some steaming on the Thames, then once all systems are proven working well, take Consuta onto the Kennet & Avon Canal moor her at Kintbury for the year, with short outings and maybe a visit to Crofton during one of their steam weekends.

Consuta's Hull – the story following purchase by Graham Lindsay



Consuta after craning out showing hull interior when used as a passenger boat with the petrol engine; note passenger hand rail

Note the 3 strap lifting Consuta at Nick Knights yard on the Medway We have an early photo showing two cranes carefully lifting Consuta out of the water using two strops each.



Graham Lindsay bought Consuta in the mid 1970's when she had been last used as a Thames tripping boat by F & B Boats (Balchin) at Surbiton, and was finally being kept under cover of the Twickenham road bridge, unfortunately the Gray Marine six cylinder petrol engine had suffered cylinder block frost damage by then. Consuta was finally lifted out of the water and kept in open storage at Nick Knight's boat yard on the River Medway in 1975, Nick was SBA chairman in the early 1970's. Not sure how long she was kept here but Consuta was then moved to the Kew Steam Museum in 1981.



*Two photos show Consuta in the Kew museum workshops after all the internal hull frames, seats and fittings had been removed
The bottom photo shows the last Conservancy licence*

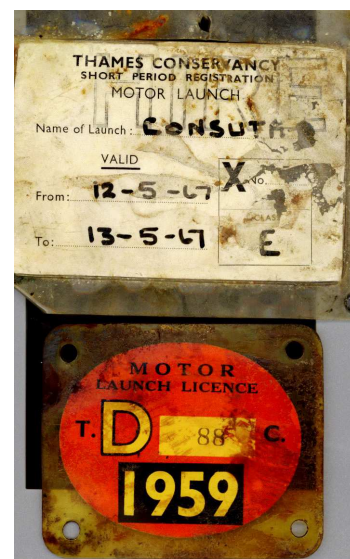


I remember first seeing Consuta in the early 1980's when the initial restoration work had just been started by Tony Cundick (Tony was general manager at the Kew museum). I was rather naive and was quite bemused at the strange method used for the hull construction at the time, four layers of thin mahogany stitched using 1/16 inch thick copper wire – how strange. I don't think Graham or anybody else at the time realised the true historical significance of Consuta. I was more interested in moving home from the New Forest to Kintbury and was trying to get my own historic steam launch San Toy back into operation on the K&A canal.

Graham had just completed the restoration of the Thornycroft steamer Eva in 1985 and this lovely launch could be seen in operation at many Thames event including a visit to an SBA Windermere rally.

These were indeed exciting times for those interested in the plethora of historic steam launch restorations currently being undertaken.

Last Thames registration



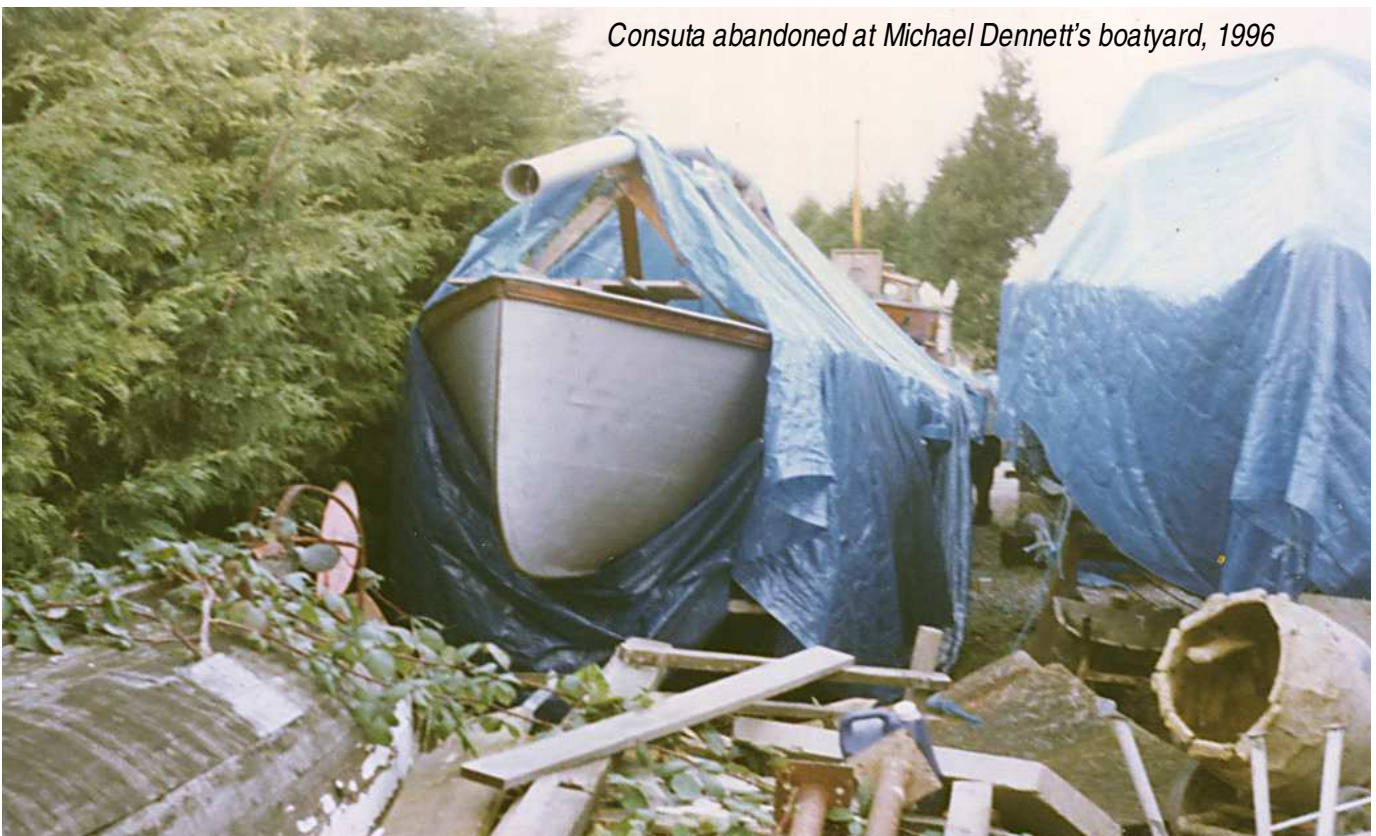
The start of my involvement with Consuta.

The closure of the SBA archive room at the Kew museum brought me into closer contact with Graham and I ended up by taking responsibility for storing some of the SBA archive documentation currently kept at Kintbury, Graham used to like visiting the SBA's archives at Kew, accessible to all members. My son Paul persuaded me to buy an interesting small Victorian Thornycroft single cylinder steam marine engine from Graham which had been on display at Kew but now needed a new home, this engine was later to be used in our own steam launch Arlette, first steamed in 1997.

Some time around the 1980's Graham had changed his mind about how and who would restore Consuta, it seems he wasn't happy with the restoration progress at Kew. Now Graham was a rather secretive person so just arranged for Consuta to be moved to Michael Dennett's yard without telling Tony about this change of plan.

Graham had agreed a deal with Dennett's who would carry out the hull stitched plywood restoration, and the charges would be based on the number of individual re-stitches carried out. Possibly not really a sensible arrangement (Consuta is reputed to have about 48,000 stitches). After a couple of intermittent years this work had been completed, however the hull still didn't have any internal frames, bulkheads or seats required for a completed hull restoration. I think Graham had run out of funds at this point, so Consuta was then just stored outside at Dennett's yard under tarpaulins.

Graham sold Eva (1997/98) to the newly opened Henley River & Rowing Museum, and we were sorry to learn that Eva was never to be displayed in steam operation again, this was such a great shame because she had been specifically restored to be steamed and certainly was not intended just as a static museum exhibit. This end seems to be the fate of so many historic steam launch exhibits held by Museums, and is probably more to do with the additional running costs than anything else.



Consuta abandoned at Michael Dennett's boatyard, 1996

In 1996 Paul asked me to visit Dennett's to see what was happening with Consuta while we were at an SBA event close by. Consuta looked very sad and seemed to have been abandoned for some time, the covering tarpaulins had become ripped, the hull sides had spread and were now resting on the trailer support frame.

Now that is a tight fit turning into Mill Bank



Graham convinced me that we should take Consuta to Kintbury and complete the installation and launch her here, Graham had already acquired a twin cylinder DesVignes steam engine and also commissioned a new boiler for Consuta, so said he would now get Dennett's to put in bulkheads, plus several stiffening frames, plus two full length machinery support beams and paint the exterior with a few coats of appropriate undercoat. So very early morning on Sunday 9th Feb 97, the Smith family, using Bob's Land Rover (friend of Lucy), made an exiting journey moving Consuta from Michael Dennett's boatyard to Kintbury.

The trip was a bit of a challenge with the long 60ft load especially managing to get into my garden. Unfortunately once at Kintbury it was quite obvious that the hull shape was not right and major works were still needed before any thoughts could be considered of putting Consuta back into the water, this would just have to wait.

By this time Graham, myself, Derek Brown and Tony Cundick got together with Colin Henwood to consider the best way to proceed and how to obtain the funding required. Colin agreed to carry out a major review of the restoration work needed. Colin suggested that it would be necessary to remove all the recently fitted woodwork in the hull and explained the best method to restore the hull to provide Consuta with a long future afloat. Consuta plywood stitched hulls are very difficult to repair.

Tony offered to see if it was possible to obtain funding from a new HLF grants scheme recently launched in the London area, Graham also agreed to put up further funds towards the new work and I agreed to remove the frame, bulkheads, machinery bearers while Consuta was at Kintbury,

How on earth did we get Consuta in here?





This deconstruction work was a rather sad and seemingly a backward step but quite necessary. The work was finished and all the old interior paint was scraped of the hull while Consuta remained at Kintbury for nearly two years. Colin had meanwhile devised a special way of injecting a very thin resign mix into all sections of the hull and it was agreed that this work would be carried out at The Henwood and Dean boatyard.

Consuta while on its trailer had then to be turned around in the garden and made ready for the tow to Dairy Farm. This trip was made late evening (in the dark) when traffic was



*Above:- boats including Consuta in the garden
Lightning sold, Arlette completed and Oberon started*

Below:- Consuta being turned, Mill stream is just on the right.

expected to be light, we arrived at Colin's yard late evening (my notes say midnight), fortunately with no towing problems at all.

The first task at the boatyard was to remove all that recent paint from the outside of the hull using hot air guns – no nasty chemical strippers.

The Consuta trust had now been formed and we had large numbers of SBA members volunteering for this work and all were supplied with lovely snack lunches by Lyn.& Lucy

Once all the paint had been removed the hull was turned over with keel now on the floor,





*The two photos here show the major paint scraping work carried out Henwood & Dean boatyard
The top one probably an indication of which planking had been replaced and which is the original?*

then chocked up at several places to see if it was possible to get Consuta's hull back into it's original shape. At this stage the hull sides could easily be flexed in and out by over a foot each way without the stiffening frames or bulkheads. With careful chocking Colin and Andrew Wolstenholme managed to obtain a lovely shear line, the details below the waterline were not considered too important and were just left a little misshapen.

Over time Graham had collected a great number of early photos and information about Consuta and her builder, thanks to help from Peter Turvey, also Raymond Wheeler's had published two books about the History of Saunders provided some additional historical information. In more recent times Paul has pointed out that the original hull in the early photos didn't seem to have as much shear as

now, so we think the hull probably had less beam when first built. This is easier to see now that we have so many more historic photos. We had been wondering why the engine seemed taller now than in those early photos. Clearly if the sides had been pushed in a bit more during restoration then this probably would have given the hull more depth? Too late now though and it doesn't really matter.

Brian Smith

*Trustee and Chairman of The
Consuta Trust*

See P7 for social and more about
future activities.



Tea break time

More of Consuta early restoration story to be continued in the next newsletter ...

Other news update

A lack of active supporter interest at present and other issues has resulted in Consuta being laid up for 2022, however we have been looking at various possibilities for a future Consuta base on the Thames. There are some options, but there would be restrictions or limitations which have to be factored into any decision to be taken, this work is still ongoing.

As mentioned in the last newsletter it was suggested that we might look at the possibility of moving Consuta onto the K&A canal during 2023 and then over winter in the water at Kintbury 2023/24). The K&A is a wide canal with many locks, but would provide a stress free opportunity to train new operational crews to manage the new boiler, provide some secure moorings and also be able to visit interesting new places along the canal such as the Crofton Beam Engines. Another advantage is that the eastern part of the canal does have excellent train service nearby where several stations are within easy walking distance from the canal, so avoiding those complicated crew relocation car trips of previous years. Who knows if there were suitable support maybe Consuta could even head even further west, anything is possible.

Consuta following a stay on the Canal would of course return to the Thames in due course, which after all is her true home water.

Please let us know if you will be able to help re-launch and operate Consuta during next year on the Thames or the K&A canal. Please SEND ME an Email message to let me know ASAP. All the emails submitted will be kept on a list of supporters who would like to be actively involved in any steaming.

Annual Winter Social

If you would like to attend a Consuta social luncheon at the “Lock Stock and Barrel” pub in Newbury sometime late Jan or February 2023, please let me know so that I can include you for further details. We’ve looked at quite a few alternative places, but think this pub is quite charming.

We have two potential future Consuta trustees which is great news but still require more active supporters. The Trust finances are healthy and we have a large quantity of Welsh steam coal, so all we need now is the right future base on the Thames for a secure future.

Brian Smith

Lyn asked me to mention that the lovely Consuta sketch on our Xmas card was provided by Michael Vicary and painted from historic photos so shows the lower boiler casing we have now been able to achieve with our new boiler.



Kempton Park Steam Museum

Something different and well worth a visit

A few of us had a visit to this waterworks museum. There are two massive triple expansion steam engine pumps built in 1920's and were in service until 1980.

One of the two engines is operate on a weekend each month, the top photo shows the sheer size of one engine.

One of the museum helpers recognising my Consuta cap gave us some interesting additional information. His father had worked here when the waterworks was in service, so he was able to visit frequently as a youngster so had learnt much about their operation.

The two enormous engines require a special starting procedure using a twin cylinder barring engine, which gear drives the main flywheel, see the right hand photo. The little engine turns the main engine over very slowly a couple of turns, to clear out any condensate before steam is opened up, then when the engine picks up speed, the barring engine is automatically thrown out of gear.

There are two steam turbine driven centrifugal pumps which were used in emergencies, apparently they used twice as much coal and were rather noisy so weren't used much.

