

THE MOLE

design

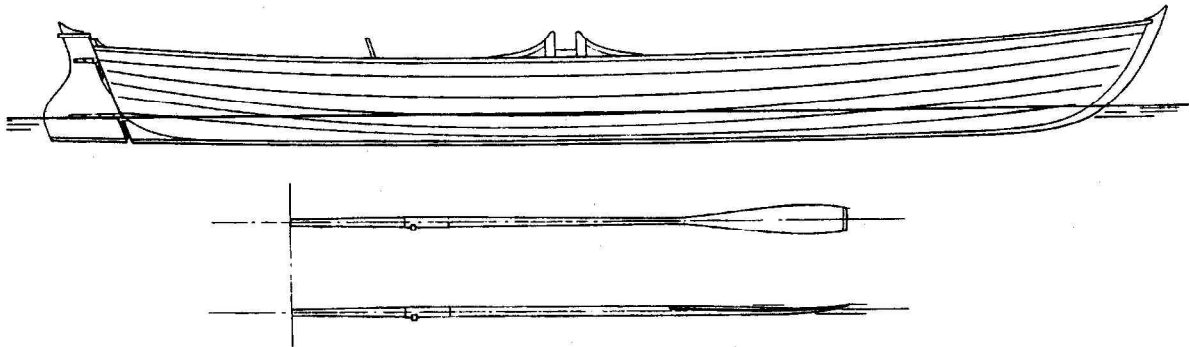
no. 52

LOA: 16'-0"
4.875m

Beam: 44'- $\frac{1}{2}$ "
1.13m

Depth: 15"
380mm

Weight: 115lbs
52kg



Type: Lightweight Thames skiff Capacity: 1 to 3

BUILDING INFORMATION

CONSTRUCTION: glued lap clinker plywood
OPTIONS: none
BUILDING TIME: 180 hours

COST:
Materials £650
Plans: 5 sheets with instructions

The MOLE is named in honour of that friendly creature in *The Wind in the Willows*, who found such delight in discovering, so unexpectedly, the joys of 'messaging about in boats'.

The Thames skiffs are certainly one of the most elegant of small craft. They evolved from working river boats of the mid-19th century; already light and fast, they were made even finer for pleasure use, with a modest beam with a high deadrise and slack bilge, which when combined with a long waterline length gave a hull of extraordinarily low resistance. Most single skiffs were between 20 and 24 feet overall, and the doubles up to around 26 feet.

The skiffs reached the peaked of their development in the 1880's. Although lightly built, with planking about 5/16" and frames sided 1/2", some boats of this time still survive, and are in steady use as hire boats. So well maintained are they that it is a surprise to find that they are more than a few years old. They are living proof of the principle that a good-looking boat can last a lot longer than an unattractive one; the people who look after and use these boats feel obliged to treat them with the care and respect they deserve.

However, their construction is quite sophisticated, with many light frames; usually sawn frames down to the bilge, with separate floors in between. The finish and detailing is also complex, and to build a new one these days requires a very close familiarity with the type and an exceptional level of craftsmanship. Such boat builders do exist, in very small numbers - two or three as far as I know - but the boats have to be very expensive.

So, apart from being out of reach of the average owner, the size of the skiffs makes them impractical, unless you happen to live on a suitable river with a suitable boathouse. So it was thought to be a good idea to produce a design which could be easily built by an amateur, and could be stored in a garage, and be light enough to transport on top of a car. Thus she would be a far more useful boat for most owners. So although it is possible that a real traditional skiff builder may regard the MOLE as a bit of a toy boat, she certainly has some measure of the grace and beauty of the old skiffs, and offers the delights of 'messaging about' in style to many more owners.

The shorter length and light weight make the boat very much handier and more manoeuvrable than the traditional hulls. Though obviously a smooth-water boat, the very fine entry and constant flare enable her to handle a bit of wind-blown chop or the wake of a large power boat, going a little too fast, with surprising ease. The low freeboard and long keel minimise the effect of a side-wind. With the fine lines and narrow waterline beam she moves through the water astonishingly fast, with practically no effort on the oars.

Construction is according to the basic Acorn procedure; the light scantlings and easy curves make this a relatively easy project. Drawings for a pair of suitably light spoon oars are included. Likewise a traditional steering yoke, operated by the passenger with light lines. A simple wood back-rest is provided; this is easier to put together than the usual wrought-iron construction, or heavier looking wood-framed cane back- and arm-rests, which could appear top-heavy and obtrusive on the smaller boats. Also included is a plan for a pattern for cast bronze rudder fittings; which if affordable will suit the style of the skiff better than available stock fittings. These are now available to order.

Traditional iron fittings, hot-dipped in pitch, can also be obtained from Thames boatbuilders. They last well in fresh water but probably not in salt.

