

KNOT



NEWS

INTERNATIONAL GUILD OF KNOT TYERS - PACIFIC AMERICAS BRANCH

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Joseph Schmidbauer-Editor

Issue #19

Swinging the Lead

BY GEOFFREY BUDWORTH

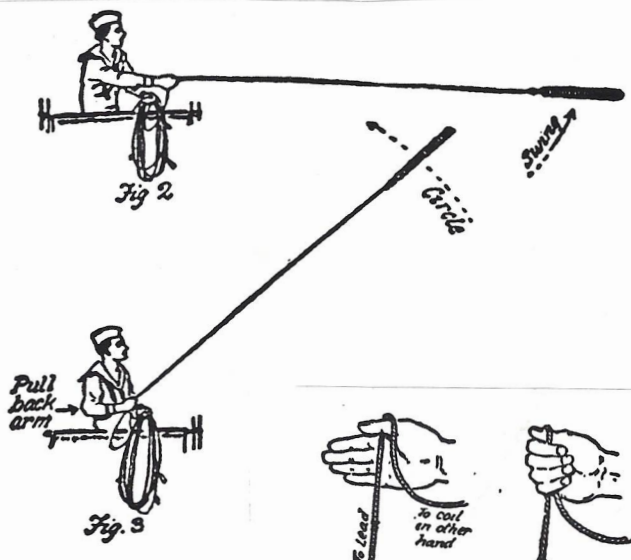
THIS ARTICLE FIRST APPEARED IN KNOTTING MATTERS #10 AND IS HERE REPRINTED BY KIND PERMISSION OF THE AUTHOR

An able seaman's work aboard sailing ships must have been arduous indeed when "swinging the lead" could become a term for pretended sickness or failure to pull one's weight: leadsmen needed strength, skill and endurance. They stood on a plank (later a hinged platform) projecting outboard from the "chains" or ledges which spread the shrouds of a forward mast. Their body weight leant upon only a canvas apron. Wet, wind and cold all went with the job.

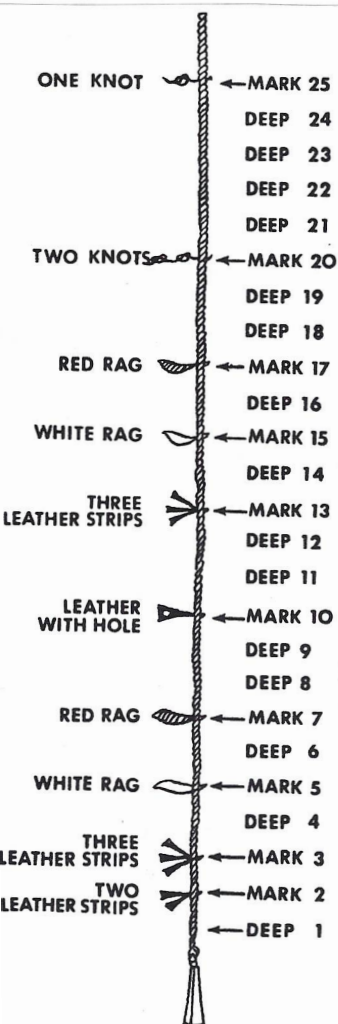
The lead, which weighed from ten to fourteen pounds, was swung like a pendulum. One hand gripped a round turn of some one-and-one-eighth line, the other holding the remaining twenty-five fathoms coiled. After working up to two or three complete backward circles (which some thought unnecessary flamboyance) it was released smartly to fly ahead in the direction the ship was heading. Judged right, it sank and touched bottom with the line straight up-and-down as the ship's way brought it back level with the leadsmen.

This method was varied for deep sea soundings so that the lead could be placed sufficiently far forward to reach bottom before the leadsmen was carried past it. Men had to be stationed along the ship's side, each holding his part of the coiled line. The first man dropped the lead, then each man in turn let go his coil as the strain fell

on it. A "lazy leadsman" stood by to coil the incoming line, right hand over and left hand under to make a right handed coil and thus prevent kinking. A lighter, shorter lead-and-line was used in small boats.



As chains do not exist on modern warships, the present day lead cannot be hove. Should boat hooks or hitchers, oars and spars, or echo sounders not do the trick, then sounding is done with the vessel slowed or stopped from abreast the bridge. The 50 meters of line of 9mm special waxed hemp line is hauled in and the depth is read off by means of an odd yet effective system of marks which have changed little since Nelson's day. Leadlines are these days marked in meters as follows:



2 meters = 2 strips of leather

3 meters = 3 strips of leather

5 meters = a piece of white duck (i.e. Light sail fabric)

7 meters = a piece of red bunting (coarse woolen flag fabric)

10 meters = a leather washer

13 meters = a piece of blue serge (twill weave worsted)

15 meters = a piece of whit duck, once more

17 meters = a piece of red bunting, again

20 meters = two knots

This sequence is repeated to forty meters.

On a dark winter's night, when hands are benumbed with cold, marks are put to the lips which can distinguish instantly canvas from bunting, bunting from serge.

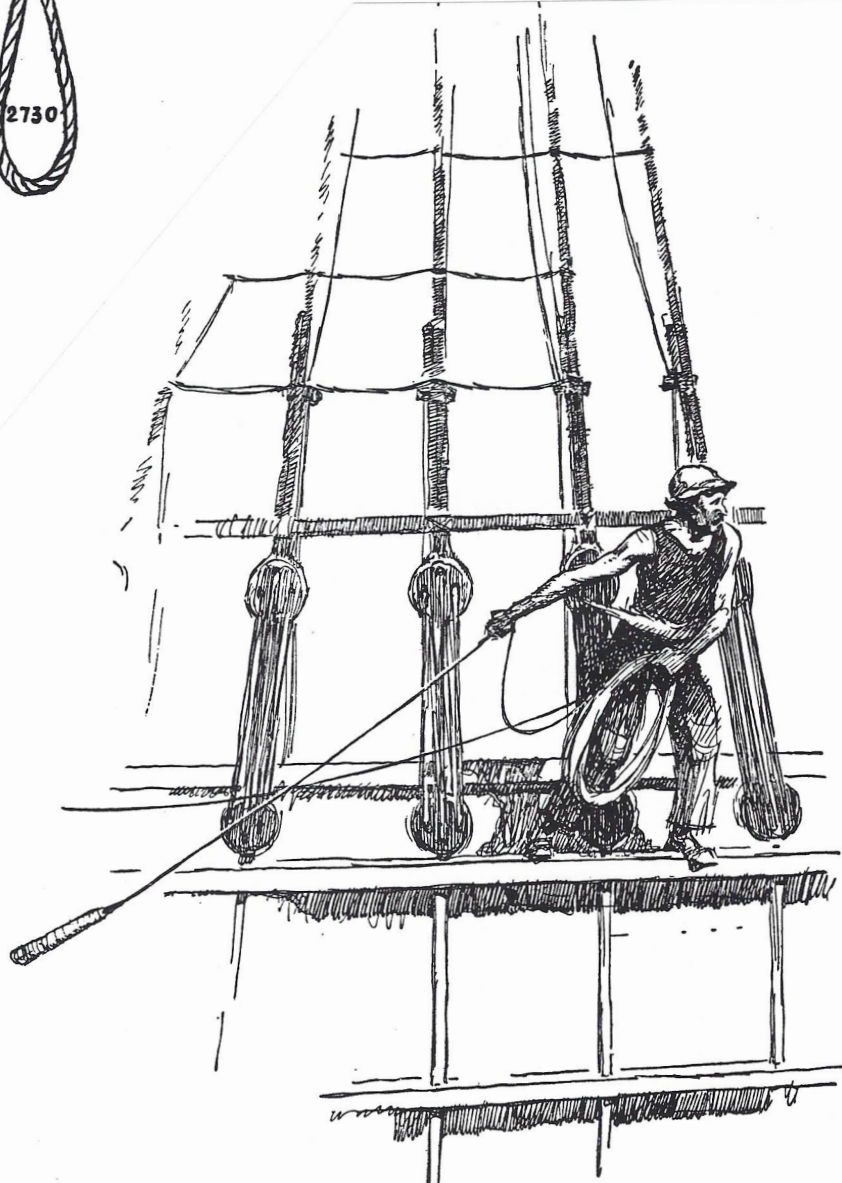
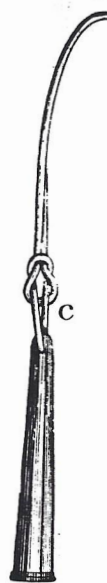
Depth markings (2,3,5,7 meters, etc.) are sung out by the leadsman to the bridge in time honored fashion, thus for red bunting (7 meters) "*By the Mark Seven.*" This is the source of American humorist, Samuel Clemens's, pen name "*Mark Twain.*" He was a young pilot on Mississippi-Missouri stern-wheeler riverboats who knew the leadlines worth. Once, when asked by a passenger if he was the man who knew where the mudbanks were, he replied, "*Madam, I'm the man who knows where they ain't!*"

Unmarked intermediate depths (4, 6, 8, 9 meters, etc.) are called "*deeps,*" e.g. "*Deep Nine,*" but even these can be identified with short ends of marline thrust through the leadline. Fractions of meters are called thus: "*And a Quarter Six*" (6.25m); "*And a Half Six*" (6.5m); "*A Quarter Less Seven*" (6.75). This is where scope existed for disgruntled leadsmen in my day to get away with calculated impertinence. Certain captains liked leadsmen in the chains

when entering harbor just to create an impression, although their soundings were unneeded and unheeded. So, a hand could call anything which sounded right... and a frequent offering was "*It ain't 'arf cold, Sir!*"

Leadlines have a long eye splice at the working end, and the lead has a hide becket through it. These two loops are "throughfooted," forming a strap bend. The standing end of the leadline is back spliced. A hollow recess in the bottom of the lead can be "armed" with tallow to bring up samples of the sea-bed (sand, shingle, mud, etc.) to help the navigator fix his position in the chart.

It is prudent not to over-estimate the depths into which you are heading and seamen advisedly call a quarter of a meter less than the actual soundings. Lines are also measured and marked without the lead weight attached, to gain a few extra centimeters of safety margin.



The ridge of his backbone made a chain of small hills under the old shirt. His face of a street boy, a face precocious, sagacious, and ironic, with deep downward folds on each side of the thin, wide mouth - hung low over his bony knees. He was learning to make a LANYARD KNOT with a bit of old rope."

Joseph Conrad

The Nigger of the Narcissus

The Secretaries Blotter

I am sure that everyone by now has had a chance to read the letter that I sent out. Happily, the causes of my frustrations have all been removed and everything has returned to its normal course. The response from the membership to my letter was very surprising and heartwarming. It is from all of your good wishes that I have decided, instead, to reverse my decision and continue as Secretary of the Pacific Americas Branch.

Those observant individuals with a clear eye and a sound sense of numerical progression, may have noticed that the last issue of *Knot News* (with the Blackjack lead story) should have been #18. I corrected some of them at the time but soon grew bored with that. Please change your copy to keep from getting the issues confused in the future.

I have sent Certificates of Membership to all current paid up members. If you didn't get one or if your name is misspelled, please let me know and I'll send a new one out to you pronto. There are also back issues of *Knot News* still available to Guild members for the asking.

Remember, the Secretary has a new zip code **92880**. I have also had some complaints about people having email returned so here, again, is my correct address: **Koolkatz@prodigy.net**

From the Mail Bag

Tillie Easton from , California wrote this letter: "Your insert re: Ashley's comments on Chinese Decorative Knotting gave me the impetus to write. Among many, I began lessons with Daisy Lee (from Taiwan) in 1987. Her mission was to carry on this beautiful art form, and to teach the Chinese community in Southern California. Of course, by 1987, those

of us (the non-Chinese) were excited with the opportunity to learn.

Having just retired, I was delighted to discover this wonderful passion, which has given me hours of pleasure. In 1989, fortunately I found an avenue to pass my knowledge on to others by teaching at a LAUSD community school in Westchester.

p.s. Ashley's Book is a gold mine!!

Karl Bareuther of Germany sent us this letter: "Thanks a lot for sending your always interesting *Knot News*. You have made a very nice little story on the blackjack and I am sure that now one or another knot tyer of the Guild will try that historical piece of the old days of sail. There exists another very interesting item of the old sailor. It is a tobacco pipe which is made out of cow's horn. It was made by the sailor himself and decorated with fine needle hitching. As far as I know there is one in the collection of the Salem Maritime Museum in Massachusetts. The Museum sells a postcard with a sea chest on it and such a pipe is to be seen among the contents of the chest.

A few weeks ago I got a letter from a friend who lived in Georgetown by Washington, DC. At the time he was preparing his move to San Diego and he owned the "largest naval collection outside the Navy Yard in Washington, DC". He wrote to me that he donated his collection to the San Diego Aircraft Carrier Museum and that the entire collection is to be moved to San Diego in October this year. While living in DC I have made some ropework for Richard and it will be in the display on the ship. Anyway, it is a very interesting collection but I think it will take some time until it is installed."

Gary Sessions of Texas had this to say: "Just finished reading the latest *Knot News*. It was interesting to read about Karl Bareuther. I, too, was very impressed by his work in '97. I spent some time talking to him about his chest beackets, especially one with a bar of metal and a lock attached to it. He explained that it was used to secure the top of a sailor's sea bag. Sometime during the weekend I saw him selling some of his stuff to another guy. And guess what? That guy showed up in New Bedford this year and at some point, when everyone was showing off some bit of work, he pulled out the

locking becket with the lock as if to say, "See what I did?" As nearly as I could tell, everything he had were items purchased from Karl! He also pulled out an unfinished becket that Karl was working on at the Museum. I hope he isn't one of your members because I really couldn't help myself when I told him I had seen the two items in '97 in someone else's collection.

Tacky of me, I guess.

But that is one story from New Bedford." **MM² Stephen Wolf** at sea: "I got your *Knot News* #17 and was doing a Blackjack for you, but people here on the ship said, "No deal!" so I had to break it back down into line again.

I am looking for new books out here to get more information but no deal yet. I dropped in to the Singapore Maritime Museum, no luck there, but not a bad place to see. I haven't had a chance to look around here in the Persian Gulf but I could find something."

Stuart Grainger of Warwickshire, England sent this letter: "Your lanyard, with boatswain's call and drawings are on their way back to you. [See drawing next page]

I was intrigued by the bo'sun's call, which seems to be of Scandinavian origin, the Swedish navy perhaps? I have an ex-Royal Navy one, which is far more common. Did you know that in out navy they were known as 'Spithead Nightingales,' Spithead being one of the navy's principal anchorages and nightingales being birds that sing through summer nights in the woods of southern England, or used to.

Also, I have just finished a waste-paper basket in hemp and sisal, mostly half-hitching, also a hemp covered Paul Masson jar, filled with fine sand to replace the original contents, used for a door-stop, the latest in a long line made over the years. They are just the right weight and size for the job."

Y2Knots

There has been much discussion among the membership about what the Branch can do to celebrate the coming Millennium. At the last monthly meeting in October, it was decided to try and have a "Knotting Extravaganza" in nearby Long Beach, California. There is an

open, grassy area that would be perfect for our use down in the Queen Mary and Aquarium area. One idea was to show "Knots From Around the World" (or the Pacific Rim) with members demonstrating their specialty or particular interest in knotting. This could include Traditional Nautical Rigging or Modern Yacht Rigging; Chinese Knotting, Macramé, Theater Rigging, Leather Braiding, Ornamental Knotting, Sailor Fancywork or any other kind of knotting anyone would care to contribute.

To make this idea work, though, we will need to get as many people involved as we can. Other ideas for a location are welcome. There is a need to organize the pre-show publicity as well as how to organize the show itself. Any and all feedback is welcome about this project. It is not too early to send in your ideas and help to get the ball (of string!) rolling.

The time we are shooting for all this to come together would be mid-summer in 2000. The time is still a bit vague because we need to get more of an idea about other members schedules to help pin point the best dates for everyone. So please fill let us know what you think about all this and join us in helping to make it a real kick off to the new century.

Branch Library

The library continues to grow with more very generous donations:

DONATED BY TOM MORTELL

String Figures and How to Make Them by Caroline Furness Jayne.

DONATED BY MIKE BOWMAN

Encyclopedia of Knots and Fancy Rope Work by Raoul Graumont and John Hensel.

DONATED BY JOE SCHMIDBAUER

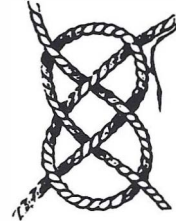
Fisherman's Knots and Nets by Raoul Graumont and Elmer Wenstrom.



FLEMISH EYE



TURK'S HEAD



CARRICK BEND



BOWLINE



John Hensel: A Truly Notable Knot Tyer

The most used book in my knotting library, after the *Ashley Book of Knots*, has to be *The Encyclopedia of Knots and Fancy Rope Work* by Raoul Graumont and John Hensel. Although it is not as "user friendly" as the ABOK, it is still quite a wealth of information on knots and knotting design.

Some time ago I began to be curious about one of the authors, Mr. John Hensel. I was hoping it might be possible to invite him to lecture at one of our future AGMs. After some fruitless searching, I finally got in touch with a nice lady at Cornell Maritime Press by the name of Charlotte Kurst. She is the Managing Editor there and remembered Mr. Hensel well. She had the sad duty to pass on the news that he had passed away some years ago. To help us honor the memory of this worthy gentleman, she sent along copies of the biographical information that Mr. Hensel provided when Cornell Maritime Press reissued his *The Book of Ornamental Knots* in 1989. I reprint it here with their kind permission.

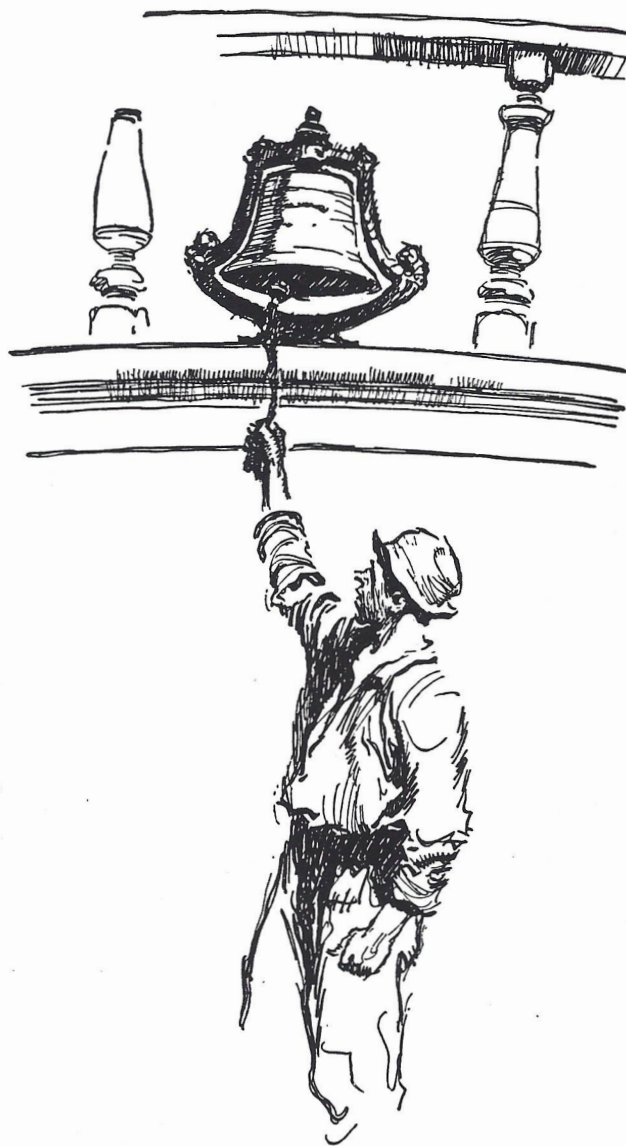
Having tied more than a million feet of rope and cordage into knots and ornamental designs since I first began practicing the art, it gives me a great deal of satisfaction to find a resurgence of interest in the once almost forgotten art of seamanship and fancy ropework. I find the ladies are just as proficient as the men in this work. It is a pleasurable craft and everyone can learn a few simple basic knots. To the yachtsman, they are indispensable, and if you add some fancy rope work to your vessel it will be a thing of beauty and pleasure.

Fancy rope work did not disappear entirely with the clipper ships and certainly has not been relegated to the museum world. It is still much in demand today and a yacht decorated with coxcombing, turk's heads, manrope knots etc., is the envy of the fleet.

The art has also moved ashore. Public places and homes are decorated with plant hangings, ornamental hangings of oriental design, deadeye blocks and tackle nets and hawsers and similar articles made of rope. There would be more of this type of work in evidence afloat and ashore if people realized how simple this work is to do. I frequently am told after one of my workshops,

"I never tried to do fancy work because it looked so complicated and am pleasantly surprised to learn how simple it is."

I first became interested in knot tying and fancy rope work when I was a young man in the merchant marine aboard a Canadian tramp ship. A decorative bell rope on the bridge caught my eye during my first trick at the wheel. I became interested in the knot work and curious as to how it was made that the ship wandered far from its course. A sharp nudge from the mate quickly brought me back to reality and the ship back on course. I was determined to learn more about how this work was done as I found it fascinating. There were a few old salts aboard whom I had been watching do drawn thread and tassel work. I selected them as the most likely ones to help me. After much persuasion on my



part, they told me with a twinkle in their eyes, that it was made of a three strand running coxcomb, a four strand doubled reverse crown sennit and finished with a four strand doubled footrope knot. They continued on with something about throat seizings and turk's heads, concluding with "that's all there is to it and any boy should be able to learn this with a few years practice."

The effect of this was like honey to a bee. I pestered those poor fellows for days until they finally agreed to demonstrate (not show me) how it was done. After about one our of watching, I had the technique pretty firmly fixed in my mind and proceeded surreptitiously to duplicate what I had seen. The next day I asked them to repeat a few steps which had escaped me, which they did. You never saw a happier lad than I, when that afternoon I held up my bellrope to two astonished seaman.

To me ornamental knotting and fancy rope work was absolutely fascinating and, contrary to my original belief, found the work not too difficult to master. From that time forward anyone who I discovered had any knowledge of knotting, splicing or fancy rope work became fair game and found no peace until they revealed their secrets, such as a secret recipe. There are several families of rope work; among them: splices, coxcombing, pointing, turk's heads, sennit braids, square knotting etc. , and hundreds of variations within each family. I had to learn the basic "keys" and intricacies associated with each family in order to duplicate designs which I had seen, and which some of the men in possession of such knowledge were willing to reveal. At times we would trade knot for knot, or sometimes I would find it necessary to trade as many as five knots to learn how to make a newly discovered prize.

Needless to say, I was most fortunate in going to sea at a time when sailing ships were rapidly disappearing and the sailors who manned them were moving to steam vessels leaving their art behind. However, even at this time there were only a few men left who had a good grasp of marlinespike seamanship.

With the passing of sailing ships, fancy rope work was left to those who where proficient at and appreciated the art. The new breed of

steamboat sailors were generally looked down upon by their Cape Horn counterparts as being ignorant of all except the most rudimentary basic knots and as for turning in a splice well ----. Eventually my travels brought me in contact with a French sailor, Raoul Graumont, who I soon discovered was also proficient in knot tying. We began to pool our knowledge and write a book. It was titled *The Encyclopedia of Knots and Fancy Rope Work*; without realizing it at the time, we had undertaken a monumental task which took two and a half years before it was completed. It was almost 600 pages long and had over 300 illustrations covering every branch of the art. It was indeed gratifying to read reviews on publication such as: "Nothing less than a Britanica of the subject, the most thrilling, fascinating and hypnotizing product of typewriter, pen or pencil," in addition to winning the highly coveted American Institute of Graphic Arts award as one of the fifty books of the year. After the *Encyclopedia*, came *Splicing Wire and Fiber Rope*; *Square Knot, Tatting, Fringe and Needle Work* and later *The Book of Ornamental Knots*.

During World War II, having had prior sea experience as an Able Seaman, I was able to enter the Officer Training School in Fort Trumbull, Connecticut. Upon graduation, much to my surprise, I received an award for the highest standing in seamanship for the graduating classes. I then shipped out as a mate aboard Liberty ships in convoys on the North Atlantic and later in the North and South Pacific, where we ran alone without benefit of a convoy.

At the end of the war, I entered the construction business where I remained for the next 40 years and retired as Vice president of the firm. I am still actively engaged as a consultant in this field.

I presently live in a waterfront home with my wife, Dorothy, on the eastern end of Long Island. I have three daughters and one grandchild. I still give knot tying demonstrations at fairs and have the opportunity to demonstrate the art of practical and ornamental rope work. The mothers and fathers are delighted when I show them how to tie their

shoelaces by a new method. Yachtsmen are amazed when they see how simple it is to do coxcombing or turn in a splice, in addition to see the practical use of a stopper knot.

I have my own boat (in front of my house) still do some sailing, and love to go to the ocean nearby and surf cast for fish."

I was reared in a town that was steeped in nautical tradition and the youth of my town scorned almost any activity that was of inland origin, unless perhaps it had to do with the pioneer, the cowboy, or the Indian. So, although "store" baseballs were preferred in practice, every boy felt the urge at some time to make himself a ball, in a manner that was undoubtedly handed down from an older generation of seafaring ancestors.

Around a hard round core of ivory, stone, rubber, or even glass alley (agate) spun yarn or cord was wound meticulously, round and tight, to form a ball. And this was stitched over with hard fishline and soaked in thinned shellac or rigger's tar. I remember many such balls being made, but few ever being played with. In late years I have conducted a search for one, but have failed to find a single survivor. The puppies of the last two score years must have accounted for all of them."

Clifford Ashley
The Ashley Book of Knots

A World Full of Knots

A speech by Willie Willaert at the opening of his Knot Exhibition at Bornem, Belgium.

I like to welcome everyone who is present today for the opening of the exhibition "*A World Full of Knots*." Some people came even from England (Des & Liz Pawson) and from the Netherlands (Ineke de Kok, Bram Plokker and Jan Hoefnagel).

First of all I want to thank the members of the council of the museum, for their permission, to hold the exhibition in their museum. And of course I'd like to thank the museum's staff team

for helping me to build up the exhibition. Honestly, they're a dynamic, hard working team.

My next word of thanks goes out to the sponsors. Without their financial support, the exhibition couldn't be realized.

Now something more about the exhibition itself:

The idea of organizing an exhibition in 1999, was started growing in the summer of 1998. After the knot exhibition in Breskens, Netherlands in 1997, it became quiet again in the Belgian knotworld. Luckily we had still *The International Guild of Knot Tyers* and *Het Knoopeknauwertje* to stay informed of what's going on in the world of knot tyers.

Now almost a year later, the exhibition has been realized, and this for the first time in Belgium. I have to admit, I had a very good internet backup with Pieter van de Griend (Netherlands) and Dan Callahan (Alaska).

For me it was obvious to choose the museum "De Zilverreiger" (The Silver Heron) as a place to be for the exhibition. Because their theme is about to life and work at the borders of the river "De Schelde." Their fisherman, willow basket makers and navigation on the river.

Making knots is the oldest technology we use. Although the fast developing modernization, we still need those good old knots in our daily life, work, sports and recreation.

On the one hand we have the boatsmanship and fancy ropework, who's becoming more and more rare; and on the other hand we have few knots we use daily.

The goal of this exhibition is to create a liason between the art of knot tying and our few knots we use on daily bases. At the same time I want to show there exists something as *The International Guild of Knot Tyers* and *Het Knoopeknauwertje*. Both these organizations bring people together with the same interests and thoughts. Which gives the possibility to transmit the skills and knowledge to the younger people, avoiding them to disappear.

So, may we hope that this exhibition interests you and learn you more about knot tying.

To end, I'd like to thank everyone, all over the world, who helped in some way to the realization of this exhibition.

Thank you."

List of Contributors

USA

Daniel Callihan, Alaska
Deuce Audette, Alaska
Mike Storch, Colorado
Carl Osborn, Georgia
Brion Toss, Washington
Susan Manning, Maine
Dave Barrow, Florida
Martin Combs, Oregon
Clifford Case, California
Tom Hall, Texas
Randy Penn, Florida
Dean Westervelt, Pennsylvania
Willard Salmons, California
Joe Schmidbauer, California
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Geert Dijkhuis
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Philippe Casteleyn
Ronny Wouters
Gert "Willy" Willaert

Karl Bayreuther-Germany
Georg Schaake - New Zealand
Joaquim Paulo Escuderio - Portugal
Yngve Edell - Sweden
Thorsten Nielsen - Sweden
Kaj Lund - Denmark
Sten Eriksen - Denmark
Ole Sonne - Denmark
Sonne Johannesen - Faroer
Isak Matras - Faroer

Rope cost a lot of money in the old sailing ships, so ship owners wanted sailors who could save line by splicing together bits and pieces. It gave us the vernacular phrase "to make ends meet."

Early in the 17th century, guns aboard warships were supported by heavy planks fastened to the vessel's side. Seaman harnessed with lines hung from them to make hull repairs. It was dangerous duty in rough weather. That particular sort of plank was called a "devil." The sailor clinging to the woodwork out there gave us the idiom that survives: "Between the devil and the deep blue sea."

Many thanks to **Bob Schwartz** for these tidbits

Monthly Meeting Schedule

Rear classroom of the
Los Angeles Maritime Museum
San Pedro, California
7:00 to 9:00 PM

1999

November 9th

December 14th

2000

January 11th

February 8th

March 14th

April 11th

May 9th

KNOT NEWS

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