



## The Mariner's Mirror

Publication details, including instructions for authors  
and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmir20>

### CUTTER AND SLOOP

S. Goodwin

Published online: 22 Mar 2013.

To cite this article: S. Goodwin (1911) CUTTER AND SLOOP, *The Mariner's Mirror*, 1:11,  
306-312, DOI: [10.1080/00253359.1911.10654551](https://doi.org/10.1080/00253359.1911.10654551)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00253359.1911.10654551>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

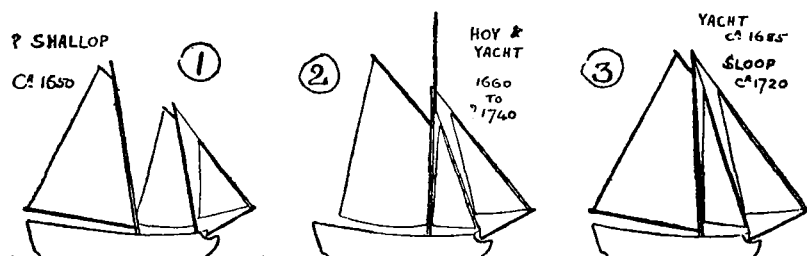
This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is

expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

## CUTTER AND SLOOP.

By S. GOODWIN.

NOWADAYS it is generally accepted that there is a cutter rig, and that there is a sloop rig; but when an attempt is made to describe in precise terms the difference between the two, unanimity ends. The alleged difference is in fact a perennial source of debate, and is likely so to continue until disputants make up their minds to turn to ancient history instead of being content with little more than the usage of their own generation. In the sketches which accompany this article only the essential points of the rig, as it has appeared at different times, are shown. The hulls are mere indications; and, for the sake of clearness, all topsails are omitted. It is enough here to say that from the 17th century onwards all the larger vessels of this type (it is essentially one type) have had topsails, which were square until about 1800, after which gaff topsails became common.



The vessel shown in Fig. 1 is believed to have been called a shallop or sloop, though we of course would call her a schooner. [See the MARINER'S MIRROR, Jan., p. 28.] The earliest instances of this rig belong to the first quarter of the 17th century, though the jib does not seem to have been used with it until some 50 years later. The dates have not yet been exactly determined. The important point here is that these vessels set a fore and aft sail with a boom and gaff, being the first to do so. It is at least suggestive to notice that both Falconer (1769) and Lescallier (1777) describe shallows of their day as being schooner rigged. If I am right in calling Fig. 1 a sloop, it would seem that from the first the essential of the sloop rig was the gaff and boom mainsail. Until nearly the end of the 17th century it probably existed in no other rig.

In Fig. 2 a yacht of Charles II.'s reign is shown. The yacht rig varied somewhat, both in England and in Holland, for sometimes the mainsail was set with a sprit instead of a gaff, usually there was a square topsail, but sometimes not; and the jib seems to have been set almost indifferently on a stay or flying. A great deal of nonsense has been talked about this rig, especially as to its Dutch origin. Its real origin is not determined; but this much is clear, that it is only a slight modification of the common hoy rig which was in general use, certainly in France and England, and probably all over Northern Europe, in the reign of Elizabeth. The point to which I wish to direct attention here is that the mainsails shown in Figs. 1 and 2 co-existed for a long time, probably for nearly a century. During that period when there was a boom the gaff was exceedingly short, a mere head stick in fact; and when the gaff was long there was no boom. Incidentally it should be mentioned that the long gaff of Fig. 2 was not called a gaff until well into the 18th century. At any rate as late as Sutherland's time (1717) it was called a *half-sprit*, and the sail set by it was still regarded as a spritsail, as it had originally been.

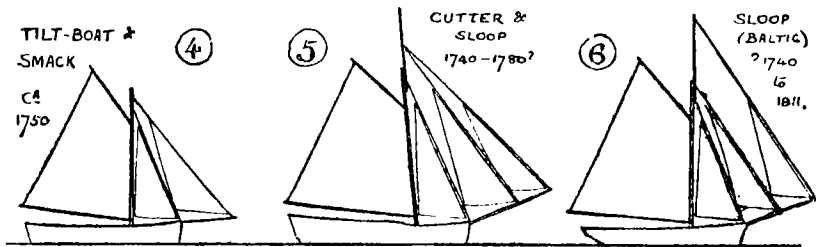
In Pepys's list of Charles II.'s Navy (N.R.S. Cal. Pepysian MSS., I., 292) there is a list of 22 *sloops*. The majority of these were very long and narrow; three were 60 ft. by the keel by 12 ft. beam, others 44 ft. by 11 ft. Obviously such vessels cannot have been rigged like Fig. 2, but they may very well have been rigged like Fig. 1. One of these narrow craft is called elsewhere a *shallop*, a term still to be elucidated. The list is complicated, however, by the inclusion of a brigantine, which was four beams long, and of a few short broad vessels, whereof one was 50 ft. by 16 ft. The inference seems to be that at this date, as afterwards, the description *sloop* was used as a rating rather than as a substantive term of rig. By a prophetic coincidence one of these Caroline sloops was named *Cutter*, perhaps with reference to her sailing qualities. She was five beams long on the keel, 60 ft. by 12 ft., and drew only 4 ft. 6 ins. of water.

The rig shown in Fig. 3 was in use at the end of the 17th century. Dudley North used it, though it does not appear whether his jib was set on a stay; and in the early 18th century it became common. This was the rig of the boats of the Cork Water Club, but they, like North's little packet, seem to have been called neither sloop nor cutter, but merely yacht. The rig in this form, however, soon became common, and would seem to have taken strong hold in North America and the

West Indies. At a date which may tentatively be placed about 1720, or a little later, vessels rigged in this way began to be spoken of as sloops. They were seemingly used both for yachting and for coasting in America, at a time when the small coaster in England was still rigged like Fig. 2.

I do not know exactly when the term *cutter* was first used, but such evidence as I have noticed shows that it was already well known in England soon after 1740. In "Roderick Random" for instance, which refers chiefly to 1740-1, the year of Smollett's sea-experience, cutters are mentioned both as smugglers and as passage boats in the English Channel. Again, a number of cutters were employed with the Channel Fleet in 1745 (Hist. MSS. Com. Papers of Lady du Cane, p. 84), and Lord Hawke had cutters with his fleet in 1757, these being presumably hired vessels, as there were no cutters on the Navy List (if Charnock is to be trusted) until 1761. Oddly enough, Blanckley ("The Naval Expositor," 1750) does not mention cutters, while as to sloops, he says in effect that they were miscellaneous small craft, including everything that had no particular class name of its own.

I have a note, though unfortunately I cannot recall the reference, that by 1750 the Gravesend "tilt-boats" were rigged as in Fig. 4, that is in what we would call true cutter fashion, the bowsprit being reeving, and the jib set flying. But they were never called cutters.



We now get on to fairly sure ground. In 1769 Falconer described a sloop as a small vessel with one mast and a gaff and boom mainsail; but he said nothing about her head sails, nor did he think her worth illustrating. But he did illustrate a cutter, showing a short gaff, square topsail, and very long standing bowsprit in one piece with jib and flying jib set on stays. The only description he thought she needed was that she was "rigged as a sloop."

Lescallier, in 1777 (*Vocabulaire*), was much more precise. He said that the cutter "in her rig and sail plan is like a sloop or American boat, with this difference, that her mast usually rakes more aft, she has heavier spars and larger sails. She also carries a ringtail. The cutter also differs from the sloop in having a low freeboard, and a good hold of the water to help her to carry sail." He adds that cutters "are very fine sailers" and are used in consequence both by smugglers and by the English revenue service. He gives the following dimensions of a cutter of the British Royal Navy:—length between stems, 50 ft.; beam, 21 ft.; mainmast and topmast in one, 71 ft.; topgallant mast, 26 ft.; boom, 49 ft.; bowsprit, 49 ft.; gaff, 24 ft.; and, of course, square sail yards. His drawing (Fig. 5) is certainly not to scale. In it both jib stays come in above the topsail yard, and the top gallant is set above them.

Lescallier is also particular in his description of a sloop. He says, she "is also called *Bermudian boat* or *American boat*, and is much used in the American colonies, especially by the English. She is round bowed, with a square stern, and carries from 20 to 100 tons, and sometimes more." He next describes the rig in detail, and gives a drawing of it. Both the description and drawing agree precisely with his description of the rig of the cutter, Fig. 5. He then goes on to say that sloops are sometimes armed as privateers, "but then they have to be built for sailing, and are called cutters."

This seems interesting and conclusive. So too does his final note under *sloop*. "Vessels similar to the sloop or American boat are used for fishing and coasting both in England and Scotland, and are called *smacks*. They differ from sloops only in being more solidly built, and in having a movable bowsprit, which can be run in very easily." Falconer confirms this, saying that a smack "is rigged as a sloop or hoy, and used in the fishing or coasting trade."

In addition to the tilt-boats we have therefore by now a certain description of the true cutter rig, as we understand it. But at this time it was called the smack rig, and cutters were rigged exactly the same as sloops. There will be no need to refer again either to smacks or hoyes, and they may be dismissed with the observation that they retained the "cutter rig" till at least the middle of the 19th century. I have heard of a Margate passenger hoy of the early sixties which was still rigged thus with the old square topsail. When steam came in the passenger smacks of course went out, but the name was retained for cutter rigged fishermen until fairly recently, and

can indeed be heard occasionally, even at the present day, in the mouths of old seamen.

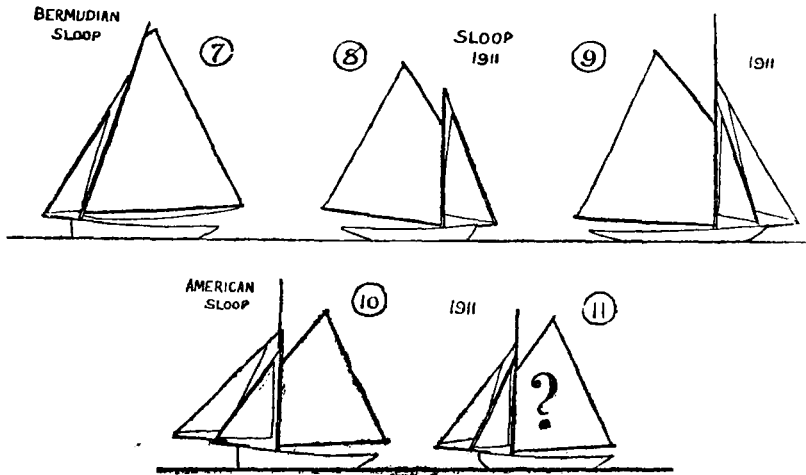
Steel, 1794, gives in detail the spars and sails of both cutters and sloops. He continues the Falconer-Lescallier tradition, describing the two classes as rigged alike, essentially as Fig. 5; but he adds a few flying kites to the inventory. The only difference he makes between cutters and sloops is that the former are much bigger, up to 200 tons, while a representative sloop measures 70 tons.

It may be doubted, however, if Steel was quite up-to-date. The old standing-bowsprit cutters were still in use in the Royal Navy during the War of American Independence (see for instance Rossel's picture of the burning of the *Quebec*); though the cutter with the reeving bowsprit seems to have been by then also in use (see C. N. Robinson, "The British Fleet," a picture opp. p. 192); but by 1800 or so the running bowsprit was general. J. J. Moore in 1801 wrote that a sloop had a fixed steeking bowsprit and a jib-stay, differing in this from the cutter, as well as in being smaller.

In the "Naval Chronicle" (1799 sqq.) the cutters, smacks, and Spanish and Italian gunboats, are all cutter-rigged with the reeving bowsprit; and the Custom House cruisers of the same period were similarly rigged. (See *e.g.*, Atton, "The King's Customs," a picture opp. II., 234).

This practically finishes ancient history, and brings us to modern usage. To quote a few recent authors. Smyth (published 1867), says that "a sloop in general parlance is a vessel similar to a cutter, but *the bowsprit is not running, and the jib is set on a standing stay*. In N. America the sloop proper sets only a mainsail and foresail, the latter jib-shaped, on a short standing bowsprit, and has no topmast." He says that the cutter has a running bowsprit, and no jib-stay, the jib hoisting and hanging by the halliards alone. His cutter is Fig. 4, increased in size; and Fig. 8, which represents the ordinary little English yacht of 3 to 4 tons, is precisely his idea of a sloop. Fig. 7 represents the famous Bermudian sloops of the beginning and middle of last century. They too would be true sloops by Smyth's definition. Fig. 6 shows a type of sloop practically identical with Lescallier's (Fig. 5), and represents the square rigged sloops which still survive in the Baltic. The long-lived *Constance* is rigged like this; so too is the *Gjoa* which recently made the North West Passage.

Douglas Frazer ("Practical Boat-Sailing," Boston, 1879) shows a sloop as drawn in Fig. 10. He calls the head sails jib and outer-jib. Captain Slocum, who made a voyage round the world single handed some 15 years ago, used a sloop rigged exactly like Fig. 10. He called his head sails the jib and flying jib. On the way he added a mizzen, but still retained the name sloop. Folkard, 1854, agrees exactly with Smyth.



Dixon Kemp (1900 edition) says that a sloop "usually has a standing bowsprit. Small sloops have only one head-sail set on a stay"; and under *cutter* he says that "a sloop, as now understood, differs from a cutter in only having one head sail, properly termed a foresail." When there is only one head sail it seems to me that it does not matter whether it is called foresail or jib, but Americans, who use bigger sloops with one head sail than we do, call it the jib.

Fig. 11 is a rig sometimes seen even in England, where she is generally called a cutter, which it seems to me she is not. Fig. 9 is the ordinary large racing cutter, which Americans call a sloop.

Possibly I have by now succeeded in confusing some of my readers; but I think the matter can be fairly easily explained.

By origin and history there is no essential difference in rig between the cutter and the sloop. What is now known as the cutter rig, when first introduced, was known as the smack rig. Sometime about 1780 this rig began to be used also for those vessels which, though hitherto sloop rigged, were already called



cutters. By 1800 at latest the change was complete, and the two rigs were recognised as distinct, the difference being that the sloop had a standing bowsprit and a jibstay, while the cutter had a reeving bowsprit and no jibstay.

Towards the middle of the 19th century large American sloops began to combine the foresail and standing jib of Fig. 6 into the single jib of Fig. 10. Vessels in which this was done were undoubtedly sloops, as also were the various modifications of this type, such as Fig. 7; Fig. 8, in which a roller is often used instead of a jibstay; and probably Fig. 11, which must have a standing bowsprit.

The next American step was to bring the jibstay right inboard again, so that it became the forestay, and to leave the bowsprit standing (Fig. 9). Practically all large racing cutters both in England and America are now rigged in this manner; but here we call them cutters, because the jib is set flying, while in America they call them sloops because the bowsprit is fixed. Logically if Fig. 9 represents a sloop, her head-sails, according to Douglas Frazer, &c., should be named jib and flying jib; if she is a cutter, they should be called foresail and jib.

The curious point is that, after a century or more of undoubted divergence, the two terms sloop and cutter have, in their higher manifestations, once more come to imply the same rig, thus causing some inconvenience. With small craft the distinction effectively, though not in name, is settled by the presence of one head-sail or two.

There is much more that could be said, but I will not attempt to say it now; both because space fails, and because controversy is almost certain to give me a further opportunity of returning to some of the points at which I have but glanced.

---