



# SEUTE DEERN

A Landmark with an Eventful History

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# SEUTE DEERN

A Landmark with an Eventful History

Seute Deern

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# A Symbol for Bremerhaven

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The *Seute Deern* (i.e. sweet girl) has become a landmark of Bremerhaven. Visible from afar, the distinctive masts dominate the skyline of the city at the mouth of the Weser. There are only a few timber-built ships from this age left worldwide, which makes the three-masted a traveller from another time.

The *Seute Deern* is the largest of all the ships under the auspices of the German Maritime Museum (DSM) in the museum harbour. A ship whose image even made it onto one of Germany's special edition postage stamps. A ship that epitomizes strong maritime tradition, not only transporting people, but also moving them, for more than a hundred years.

Since she was first launched in 1919, the *Seute Deern* can look back on an exciting history. She made a captain despair on a trip to the south, sailed with timber from Finland to England, became the prestige project of a Hamburg shipowner and was converted into a youth hostel in the Netherlands. Christian Ostersehlte, archivist at the German Maritime Museum, explains what twists history has taken and why the ship is a godsend to anyone interested in history.

Even though she was a new vessel, the *Seute Deern* had a problem with leaks from the very first day. And what modern technology needs to do to keep the old lady afloat in the coming decades is not explained by any shipbuilder. Thomas Kowalik is a chemist at the Fraunhofer Institute and one of the experts developing a special new material for the *Seute Deern*.

Nils Schnorrenberger explains the emotional significance this ship holds for the people of Bremerhaven. The head of the Bremerhaven Economic Development Company sees many parallels in the lives of the city and the ship. Golden times, hard times. "The *Seute Deern* epitomizes the maritime heritage of Bremerhaven", he says.

A maritime heritage which shapes the future. We hope you enjoy this booklet about a special ship.







**“I remember how  
she impressed me as a  
child.”**

Dr Christian Ostersehlte

# An Anachronism under Sail

## Dr Christian Ostersehlte

This ship has quite a story behind her. The *Seute Deern* has been a cargo sailing ship, training ship, Hamburg hotel, Dutch youth hostel – today, she's a city landmark. Head of Archives at the German Maritime Museum, Christian Ostersehlte talks about the turbulent history of an exceptional ship.

The *Seute Deern* is a floating godsend for historians. Historical changes can be explained by looking at her past. She is unique. One of the last timber-built cargo sailing ships to have survived in Europe, even worldwide. She was already an anachronism under sail when her keel was laid, actually.

Built on the Mississippi, sailed off Finland, she was then used as a training ship for a shipowner with a special sense of mission. After the Second World War, she became a hotel in Hamburg, a youth hostel in the Netherlands and a fiasco in Emden. Today, she is the landmark of Bremerhaven and something of a worldwide peculiarity. Historical timber-built ships such as the *Seute Deern* are exceedingly rare, for instance, there's the *Sigyn* in Turku, the *Constitution* in Boston and the *Charles W. Morgan* in Mystic Seaport.

The *Seute Deern* is also a part of my childhood memories. When the sailing ship came to Bremerhaven in the 1960s, my family and I drove our VW Beetle

down to the pier to take a look at her. She was one of the reasons for our Sunday trips. I remember how she impressed me as a child.

Originally named the *Elizabeth Bandi*, the *Seute Deern* was built in 1919 as a four-masted gaff schooner at a shipyard in the small town of Gulfport, not far from the mouth of the Mississippi. She was commissioned by a shipping company in New Orleans that operated for a timber wholesaler from Gulfport. Her construction was a kind of entrepreneurial act of self-defence, because speed was of the essence. Countless ships had been sunk during the First World War and the economic boom created a huge demand for cargo ships. Materials were in short supply back then, so experiments were even made into building ships from concrete.

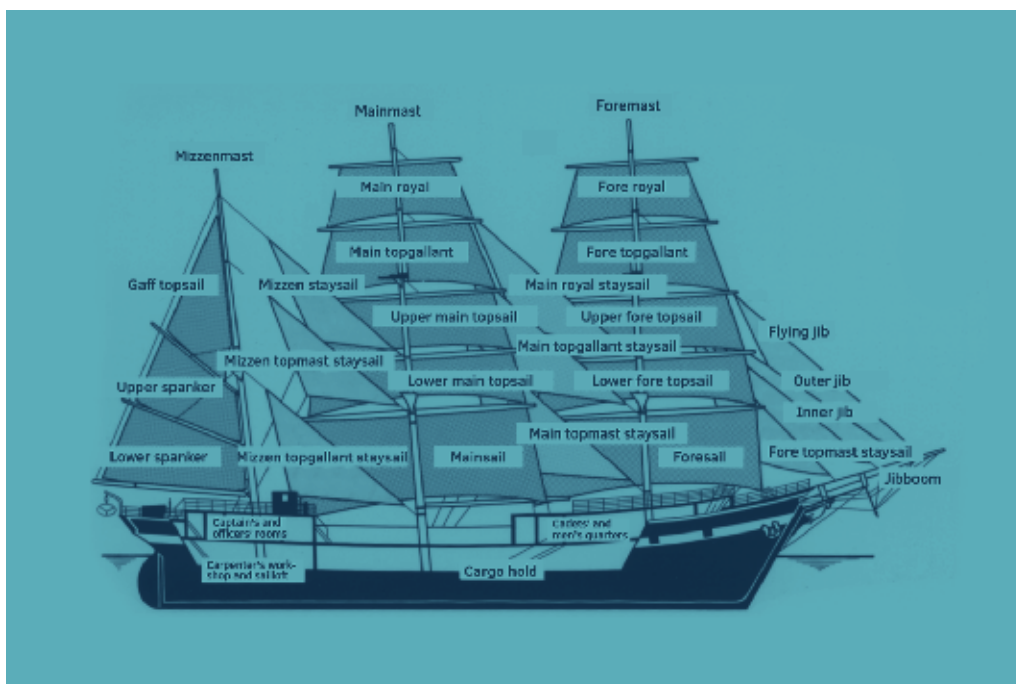
The overall economic situation was the reason why a wooden ship was still being launched under sail at a time when steam-powered steel ships were sailing the seas. People remembered a tradition

they were familiar with: building gaff rigged wooden schooners. They were easy to sail – even against the wind – by a comparatively small crew. The ships promised both efficient construction and cost-effective maintenance. A ship like the *Elizabeth Bandi* appeared to be a practical solution.

Built from pitch pine lumber in a caravel design, the ship is 61.45 metres long, 11.03 metres wide, with a draught of 4.57 metres. The ship could load 900 metric tons and had cargo ports at the bow, which meant she could also transport long logs. A sail area of 1,107 square metres propelled the ship forward, there were also two auxiliary diesel engines on board: for sailing

manoeuvres, the anchor windlass and cargo winch and the pumps. Equipped in this manner, the ship set sail on its maiden voyage to Bahia in Brazil. During the first voyage, however, a problem arose that was to follow the history of the ship: the ship leaked.

The planks were not sufficiently seasoned and too soft, so they had warped. And on top of that, there was a massive woodworm infestation – in a new build, no less. The leaks were so severe that the captain decided to interrupt the voyage and head for an emergency port. The water situation was supposed to be brought under control in Bridgetown, Barbados. However, the captain and the crew apparently had so little





confidence in the ship that they decided to leave. A replacement captain and new crew brought the *Elizabeth Bandi* to her first port of destination with something of a delay.

The ship was taken to a dockyard in Philadelphia a little later, but the problems, especially the woodworm damage, could not be resolved. The crew also struggled with intruding water on the second voyage, transporting coal to the West Indies. Not even an experienced sailing ship captain like RJ Peterson was able to overcome the design faults. Anybody sailing with the *Elizabeth Bandi* had to be prepared for problems. It seemed as though a curse was on the ship. The sailing ship collided with a tanker in the port of Tampico and was hit by a hurricane on her way back.

In just a matter of voyages, the supposedly economical *Elizabeth Bandi* became an expensive headache for the shipping company. In 1925, she was sold to a shipping company in Maine on the east coast of the USA. The company hoped the new acquisition would bring wood to the flourishing coastal towns of Florida. But the Great Depression put paid to this plan a little later. The ship was bought by a Finnish shipowner and she reached Garston near Liverpool with a batch of timber from Canada in August 1931.

The new owner removed the word “Elizabeth” from her name. As water temperatures in the new shipping area were much cooler, the woodworm stopped

being an issue. The ship was used mainly for Baltic Sea voyages between Finland and Denmark, but also to transport timber to the north of England.

A new chapter in the sailing ship’s history began in November 1938 when the Hamburg shipowner John T Essberger bought the ship for the sum of 26,500 Reichsmark. Purpose of the “leader of German maritime shipping” with the best political connections: a sailing training ship for the nautical offspring of his shipping company. A prestige project that involved converting the ship from a four-master to a sleek barque in the Blohm & Voss shipyard in the heart of Hamburg.

Reconstruction work and repairs lasted six months. This revamped ship was now 14 metres longer and the outer hull was reinforced with a copper and tin metal plate. She was given a new deck, extended superstructure and her rigging was altered, now comprising three masts. The outer hull was painted black with a white stripe on the bow. A figurehead was attached to the stem: a woman with a red dress and a headscarf, designed by a Hamburg artist. A “Seute Deern”, as the natives say, a sweet girl. This became the ship’s new name from now on.

And now 28 sailors made up the crew. Beside the captain and his officers, the crew consisted of the bosun, a carpenter, a sail maker, a cook, a steward, two able seamen and four ordinary seamen. There were also apprentices. Since this

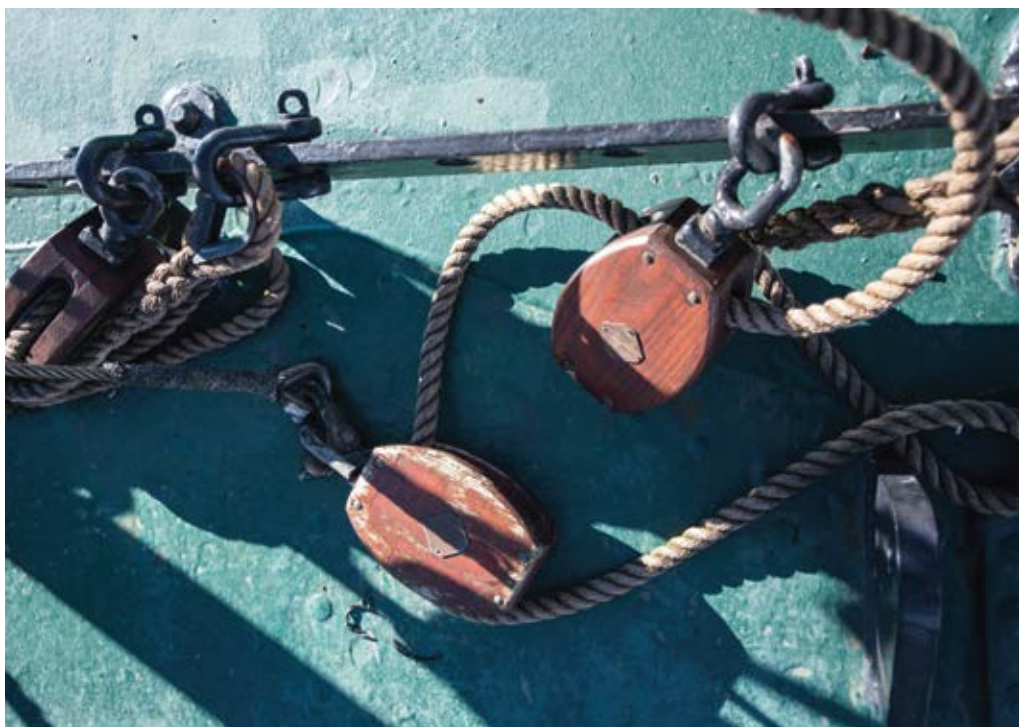
crew were supposed to learn, all the work on board had to be done by hand. Auxiliary engines were waived during the conversion phase. But luxury for the shipowner's and captain's chambers was not; they were panelled in mahogany from Honduras like the ship's saloon.

The barque had been reconstructed for sailing all over the world, but the threat of war thwarted all travel itineraries for a sailing ship. The first training voyage was taking potash from Travemünde to Trangsund in Finland. Sailing trips to Scandinavian ports were also undertaken during the first months of the war; sometimes with sawn timber, sometimes with salt. Only when the Wehrmacht invaded the Soviet Union did these trips have to be cancelled for security reasons. Up until 1944, however, training voyages took place in the sheltered Bay of Greifswald, lasting around four weeks. The last intake of ship's boys, who were supposed to undergo two years of training, was in 1943. From September 1944 onwards, the *Seute Deern* was moored in Lübeck, her last berth was Schuppen 1 in Holstenhafen, where she was used as a guard station by British soldiers after the end of the war.

Shipowner John T Essberger regained the *Seute Deern* from the Allies, unlike his fleet of freighters and tankers. A new destiny awaited the ship. The shipyard in Travemünde converted the ship into a floating hotel and restaurant (where she

lost her room supports and seaworthiness). Eight years after she left Hamburg, the *Seute Deern* returned to the Hanseatic city. She was now moored at the ferry VII near the St. Pauli landing bridges and temporarily became a sort of new landmark in a devastated city. Nearly 300,000 guests stayed on board by 1953, but the hotel in the harbour could no longer be run profitably. In the spring of 1954, the shipping company sold the *Seute Deern* to a foundation in Delfzijl, the Netherlands. Now she was a youth hostel called *Pieter A. Koerts*.

The new owner – Delfzijl-born American Jan Albert Koerts – paid tribute to his father by naming the ship after him. Initially things went well for the youth hostel, but as a result of expensive maintenance and repair costs at the end of the 1950s, the hostel ran into financial problems. The town received no state subsidies, so the ship changed hands once again in December 1964. Her name reverted back to the *Seute Deern* and she was supposed to grace the city centre of Emden as a floating restaurant. This never came about, though. Although the new owner had bought the ship, he apparently had not discussed all the details with the city. Where she was to be moored, for example. Instead of being anchored in the city centre, the ship was moored at a wharf pier in the inland port where, for some unknown reason, she took on water and sank to the bottom in June 1965. It was possible to raise her and plug the leak, but gastronomic use was now out of the



question. The *Seute Deern* was up for sale again.

When Gert Schlechtriem – later director of the German Maritime Museum – learned of her sorry past, he set up an initiative group with the aim of bringing the *Seute Deern* to Bremerhaven as a museum ship. His reasoning: the rise of the city of Bremerhaven had begun with sailing ships of this type, and Schlechtriem and his comrades-in-arms wanted to preserve this maritime heritage. The initiators of the project saw the purchase of the ship as a unique opportunity. They managed to win over politicians and businesspeople, and after a couple of teething problems and a temporary purchase by the Helgoland hotelier Hans Richartz, the ship

finally moored in Bremerhaven on 23 June 1966.

The city of Bremerhaven became co-owner and the German Maritime Museum undertook to take care of the repairs. In 1974, when the harbour basin was filled during the extension of Columbus Street and the construction of the Columbus Center, the harbour channel became too narrow. Today's museum harbour was built one year later. The *Seute Deern* was anchored on the south-western shore of the museum docks, where she still lies today.

The constant round of repairs and shipyard overhauls repeatedly led to debates, criticism and a number of tricky moments in the ship's history.





The barque was extensively restored in 1978, when, in addition to new timber, around 60 metric tons of steel plate and protective copper plate were added. In 1981, the original figurehead was moved into the downsized on-board restaurant and a weatherproof plastic replica has stood in her stead ever since. Preserving the old lady is a constant challenge.

A fire broke out in the galley area in February 2019, which was the start of her jubilee year. The fire brigade quickly got the fire under control, but the damage badly affected the heavily battered ship. An outpouring of public sympathy on the pier and in social media proved that after her long and turbulent history the *Seute Deern* is the landmark of Bremerhaven.

A ship with a truly eventful history.

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**Dr Christian Ostersehlte** was born in Bremen in 1959. After studying in Kiel, he made his mark as a historian specialising in German and international shipping of the 19th and 20th centuries. Since 2016, he has been in charge of the archives at the German Maritime Museum. He lives in his hometown.

**Dr Dirk J Peters**, born in 1949, is a former long-standing member of staff at the German Maritime Museum and published a thorough study of the *Seute Deern* in 2000.



**“The old lady  
is giving us quite  
a headache.”**

Dr Thomas Kowalik

# The Lignification of the *Seute Deern*

## Dr Thomas Kowalik

Trim the wood, replace, done. Unfortunately, restoring an old ship is not as easy as laymen might imagine. The old ship not only needs shipbuilders, but chemists to save her. One of them is Thomas Kowalik.

I'm not a shipbuilder. I'm a chemist. I know a lot about adhesives and polymer chemistry. One of my tasks at the Fraunhofer IFAM in Bremen is to find new compounds we can use to stabilise and conserve materials.

There are around 250,000 speciality adhesives on the market at the moment. They have different viscosity, elasticity, durability, and harden differently. Their use includes aircraft construction, the automotive industry and medical technology. Not one of them can help us with the *Seute Deern*.

The old lady is giving us quite a headache.

There are a number of problem areas on the ship. We have to approach each one in a different way. With old ships, you sometimes ask yourself, are these important parts causing problems? Or just pretty pieces that need to look good on a museum ship? With the *Seute Deern*, I would say the problem is on both sides.

When we climbed down deep into the belly of this old sailing ship, we were quite shocked at some parts in the keelson. The "structural integrity", to use technical jargon, is compromised. The same applies to the bulkheads – the scaffolding of the ship in laymen terms. In some places, the condition of the wood is tragically bad. Fungi and microorganisms have got inside the wood and are destroying it. There is a real danger of the ship rotting from the inside out.

All experts involved with the *Seute Deern* concur on one point: that stabilising the ship is the first thing we need to do. There is no known method of restoration we can easily fall back on. A "classic" approach is unthinkable. Sawing out wood, replacing wood – this may be possible in the deck area or in sections of the rigging, where skilled craftsmanship can replace them relatively easily, but this won't work on parts of the hull. There's no material, no known remedy we can use. To a certain extent,

saving the *Seute Deern* will become a research project in its own right.

We must discover something that doesn't yet exist.

As far as preserving old ships is concerned, hardly any other museum has a reputation quite like that of the German Maritime Museum. That's been the case since the cog was preserved. The timber of the medieval cog has been soaked in a chemical bath for decades, protected and preserved for posterity. We also have to look for ways to penetrate and stabilise the timber of the *Seute Deern*. But we don't have a lot of time in which to do it.

Plus, we may have to work underwater – because moving the ship out of position is too risky. Towing this ship somewhere is totally out of the question. Load-bearing parts of the tall ship are in such bad condition that they could break apart.

One thing's for sure, we work in the wet. Tons of water seep into the *Seute Deern* every day. We have pumps working around the clock to get rid of all this water. But this volume is extreme, of course, and presents us with problems.

We are developing a substance that needs to contain a fungicide to stop the wood from decomposing. The *Seute Deern* wouldn't have a chance otherwise. The beams in question are thick and solid. Do we work with pressure?

Or drill small holes? We'll have to see.

The ship has some stability at the moment thanks to the retrofitted metal struts. However, metal and wood have different properties. Metal doesn't swell. The material we are looking for must take this into account. If not, we'll have a big problem with the first heavy frost. We'll hear a loud "crack" then, and see huge splits appear.

I estimate it will take around two years to develop such a material. It will partly be uncharted territory, so it's hard to make an accurate prediction. We already have lots of ideas. We are thinking of lignin-based solutions. These are phenolic macromolecules composed of different monomer building blocks. They are solid biopolymers stored in the plant cell wall. They cause the cell to become "woody", which is called "lignification".

So you could say that one hundred years after her launch, we are re-timbering the *Seute Deern*. One thing is for sure, renovating the *Seute Deern* is going to be a challenging job for everyone involved. But it's fun, isn't it?





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**Dr Thomas Kowalik**, born in 1968, has a woodworking connection: his father was a carpenter. The PhD chemist has been working as an adhesives specialist at the Fraunhofer IFAM in Bremen since 2001. In his spare time, he likes to work on model ships and enjoys travelling at home and abroad. He is married and lives in Bremen with his partner.



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**“The *Seute Deern*  
symbolises the  
economic rise of  
our city.”**

Nils Schnorrenberger



# These Three Masts

## Nils Schnorrenberger

The *Seute Deern* is not only a museum ship and a floating restaurant; she has become a landmark of Bremerhaven. Nils Schnorrenberger, Managing Director of the Bremerhaven Business Development, explains what the history of the city and its three-master have in common.

The three masts of the *Seute Deern* signify a lot for our city. They have become a landmark of Bremerhaven. For nearly fifty years, these three masts have been part of the urban image of the city by the sea. It's hard to imagine life without them.

The way people reacted to the fire on board – in her jubilee year as well – tells you just how fond everybody is of the ship. A fire broke out inside the *Seute Deern*, and the next day crowds of people came down to the docks expressing their sympathy. People set up social networks groups to help with the restoration. For Bremerhaven, the *Seute Deern* is more than just a floating museum or a restaurant ship nowadays. She's become something they identify with.

These three masts reach into the sky at the heart of the city of Bremerhaven. It is a young city, founded in 1827, when the Weser became increasingly silted up and Bremen needed an accessible port. The land and dyke embankments were

handed over on 1 May 1827 and the old harbour was completed over the next three years.

The new harbour was built shortly afterwards. Bremerhaven became the largest emigrant port in Europe. Millions of people set off from the quayside with suitcases filled with dreams of a better life. Bremerhaven is home to the Norddeutscher Lloyd, which has evolved into the largest shipping company in the world. Fast steamships such as the *Bremen* started from Bremerhaven to New York, Baltimore and New Orleans. Even though the *Seute Deern* was not built in Bremerhaven, but on the Mississippi, this type of ship symbolises the economic rise of our city.

The three masts tell visitors that Bremerhaven is a city with a great maritime heritage. Some tourists even feel as though they are setting sail between the Columbus Center and the German Maritime Museum and sailing off into the sunset. The Havenwelten (Harbour Worlds) is the place for imaginary jour-

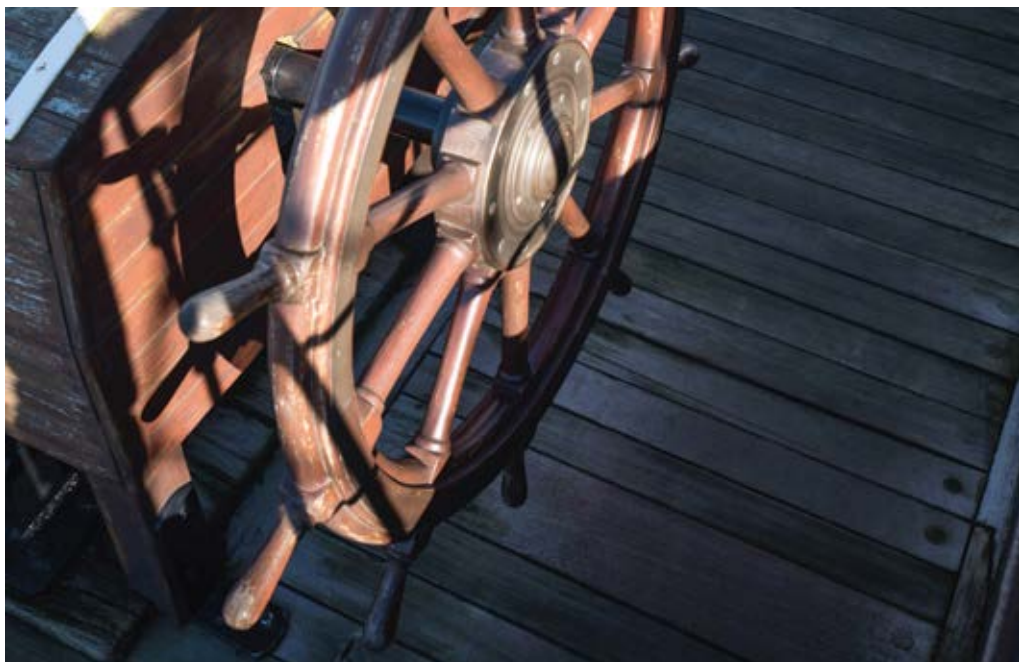
neys, this collection of museums on the North Sea is possibly unique. The German Emigration Centre, Climate House, Zoo by the Sea and German Maritime Museum together attract more than one million visitors a year. The *Seute Deern* sits right in the heart of this and also symbolises a longing. She is a memory of a bygone age of the windjammers, the Flying P-Liners, of adventurous voyages across the seas.

Bremerhaven has shaped Germany's maritime history. The first German deep-sea fishing steamer was put into service here and where the German deep-sea fishery was co-founded. Groundbreaking concepts such as the "Railway station by the sea" were designed and built here. The *Grönland* returned to Bremer-

haven from the First German Polar Expedition – and still sails out to the North Sea as a legend under sail. This is where the *Germania* and *Hansa* ships departed for the Second German Polar Expedition in June 1869. The *Polarstern*, a research vessel of worldwide renown that supplies the research station Neumayer III in Antarctica, bears the home port of Bremerhaven on her stern.

Bremerhaven was once a city of shipyards. A few shipbuilding companies, including Lloyd and BREDO, have survived the structural shift. The age of container shipping began in 1966. On 5 May 1966, the first steel container deposited in Germany came to Bremen with the *Fairland*; a historic event that hardly anyone noticed at the time.





The container terminal at the Stromkaje north of the Nordschleuse lock opened in Bremerhaven just two years later. This part of the harbour has been expanded time and again. By 2010, the Stromkaje – almost five kilometres long with 14 berths for freighters – was the largest connected container terminal in the world. For many years before the rapid rise of the Chinese ports, Bremerhaven was one of the 25 largest container ports.

Every place where maritime tradition is fostered is also home to maritime know-how. Nowadays, Bremerhaven is one of the foremost locations for the future technology of wind energy. And the symbol of the *Seute Deern* – navigating the waves solely by wind power – embodies this perfectly, too. We have a dynamic industry, which is essential if

we are to master the challenges of the future. As a coastal city, we are directly affected by climate change. We want to play our part in ensuring that it can first be slowed down and then stopped.

Bremerhaven witnessed a golden age. The fishing industry was booming in the late 1970s when the American barracks were still around, shipyards were running at full capacity and full employment was the order of the day. I vividly recall a scene I saw in front of a school. Back then, young people didn't ride bicycles, they rode Zündapp mopeds.

Bremerhaven has gone through some difficult times with many people leaving the city. Some would say we're missing a whole generation. The name of the city became synonymous with poverty and unemployment. But a structural



transformation is in full swing. Things change.

Nowadays, the city portrays itself as young, maritime and authentic. The dynamics are good. Bremerhaven is no longer just a city of dock workers and fishermen. It is also a city of scientists who do research at the Alfred Wegener Institute or the German Maritime Museum, for example. Young people like living in the seaside town, where distances are short and housing is affordable. Bremerhaven is a city of engineers in promising sectors such as the offshore industry.

The *Seute Deern* is a ship with an eventful life. She has weathered many a storm. Again, this is a good fit for our Bremerhaven.

**Nils Schnorrenberger**, born in 1964, studied agricultural sciences in Kiel after graduating from high school and then went on to work as an organic farm administrator in North Frisia. Although friends advised him against it, he moved to Bremerhaven in 1993 to work as an environmental officer. Six years later, he became head of the Business Development Division of the Bremerhaven Economic Development Company (BIS Bremerhavener Gesellschaft für Investitionsförderung und Stadtentwicklung). He has been Managing Director of BIS since 2010. Schnorrenberger is married with three children and lives with his family near Bremerhaven.





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### ***Seute Deern***

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**Editing:** Erik Hoops, Deutsches Schifffahrtsmuseum

**Concept & idea:** Ankerherz Verlag GmbH

**Texts:** Stefan Kruecken

**German-English translations:** transmit-Deutschland

**Cover illustration:** Hans Baltzer

**Photos:** by Andree Kaiser

**Graphics:** Daniela Greven

**Corporate design:** GfG / Gruppe für Gestaltung



# VOLUME 05 / SEUTE DEERN

## A Landmark with an Eventful History

In a state of change: the German Maritime Museum – Leibniz Institute for Maritime History – is presently redesigning its exhibition in close correspondence with the research and exhibition programme “Man & The Sea”. A number of important objects play a key role here and are also featured in a series of booklets.

In each booklet, experts take a look at the respective object from three research perspectives – “Interests – Materiality – Perception” –, ask it questions and shed light on its fascination.

### German Maritime Museum

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