

*Journal of the* Association  
of Yachting  
Historians



[www.yachtinghistorians.org](http://www.yachtinghistorians.org)  
2026

The Association of Yachting Historians has long set itself the goal of scanning and making available materials which are difficult to find, but which cast an important eye over the history of yachting in the British Isles. What we are now delivering has only come about as a result of a protracted effort involving many parties, including the Royal Yacht Squadron, Royal Thames YC, New York YC, British Library and the National Maritime Museum and more.

We have already released scans of the complete works of *Lloyd's Register of Yachts* from 1878–1980 as well as *The Yachtsman Magazine* from 1891–1940. We have now set ourselves the more ambitious target of scanning the whole of *Hunt's Universal Yacht List (HUYL)* that ran from 1850–1914 which pre-dates *Lloyd's Register of Yachts* (commenced in 1878.) Indeed, *HUYL* supplements *Lloyd's Register* since yachts missing in one often appear in the other.

As *The Yachtsman* did not start until 1891, we decided to try and fill in the gap for the earlier period by scanning *Hunt's Yachting Magazine* (1852–1887). What will be of particular interest to researchers are the compendiums at the back of each volume which detail all the yacht races of that year, showing the entrants and results. They also provide a break-down of the total prize money and major cups won by each yacht and the name of its designer. Those interested in the history of a particular yacht club will see the growth in numbers taking part in their annual regattas and the sums offered as prizes.

With the demise of *Hunt's Yachting Magazine*, *The Field's* editor, Dixon Kemp, decided to produce *The Yacht Racing Calendar* (published 1888–1895 and 1902–1904) which reprinted the yacht racing reports published over the last year in *The Field*.

## Summary of Availability

1850 - 1914	Hunt's Universal Yacht List
1852 - 1887	Hunt's Yachting Magazine
1878 - 1980	Lloyd's Register of Yachts
1888 - 1895	The Yacht Racing Calendar
1896 - 1901	The Field Magazine Reports
1902 - 1904	The Yacht Racing Calendar
1905 - 1914	The Field Magazine Reports
1891 - 1940	The Yachtsman
1898	Yachting Monthly

Available by download from:  
[www.yachtinghistorians.org](http://www.yachtinghistorians.org)

We have tried to address and acknowledge the question: What is history, and what should we track, or identify as markers to show 'history in the making, in the 1890s or 1990s'?

You will find serious claims for early leadership in small boats from Dublin and Norfolk, and some pointers about where to find the right material in Scottish archives.

Nowhere, prior to 1945, could claim to be a source of mass participation so the nearly 2,000 Graduate dinghies that were produced from the late 1950s reflect something historical going on, along with the 20,000+ Enterprises that accompanied the myriad expansion of classes and clubs at the same time. The photos of Norfolk and Graduate sailors reflect their times and enthusiasms well.

Tucked away up a narrow hand-dug dyke, you will find a fleet of wooden boats whose express purpose was to preserve sailing in a location that by the 1930s was beginning to be dominated by motorboats. The Hunter fleet survives to this day, and might well satisfy the criteria for 'historic' attention.

The report from Scandinavia indicates there is plenty of room for historic claims, in a context where life on the water is matter of fact, not one specific example; so there might be a claim there for the earliest known example of small boat sailing and racing.

The Association continues to expand its digital resources; there is news here of recent acquisitions, but we might also spend some time creating a national list of available resources; we'll be talking to the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich about this some time this year.

There remained gaps between 1896–1901 and 1905–1914. We have remedied this by scanning *The Field Magazine's* annual end of season reports, usually broken down by class and sometimes differentiating between what was happening on the Solent and the Clyde.

In short, we are now providing a comprehensive narrative of yacht racing from 1851 through to 1914, as well as data on individual yachts from 1850 through to 1980 (when *Lloyd's Register of Yachts* ceased publication).

The final item in this plethora of delights is a scan of the short-lived monthly publication of 1898, *Yachting Monthly*, not to be confused with the later publication of the same name which is still going strong today.

# Journal of the Association of Yachting Historians

## Contents

Sailing started in Dublin	4
Dying wish	5
Obituary: Mikkel Thommessen	7
Sweden in 2025	9
20 Years in Classic Yacht Scene	10
The Price of Nothing	12
Hunter's Yard	14
Norfolk 14ft Restricted Class	17
Scottish Yachting Archives	22
Graduate Dinghy	25
Yachts at Risk	27

Editor: Steffan Meyric Hughes, RINA  
steffan@aquamarinesurveys.co.uk

Designed by David Elliott, BNYA  
david.elliott@bnya.org.uk

Published by Association of Yachting  
Historians ©2026

Photos: see articles for credits where available  
Cover photo: Supplied by Graduate Class  
Association/Dick Johnson



## Chairman's Welcome

You are opening this issue of our Journal as we make a welcome return to the expected operations of the Association.

The Association is gradually recovering from the impact of various external challenges that have affected our level of membership, an ability to travel for visits, and the costs of printing and postage. However, we now have sufficient funds to resume production of this popular Journal, formerly edited by AYH member, Henrietta Smyth, in association with M+IM Frost Design Consultants. After Henrietta decided to step down, we felt it was time to bring the design in-house, and we are delighted that Steffan Meyric Hughes, former editor of *Classic Boat*, accepted our invitation to take over as editor.

It also marks the 21st birthday of the Association, emerging in 2005 backed up by the vision of a group of sailors who recognised there was a history to be told. The two words 'history' and 'yachting' do not always sit easily together, as sailors have an unerring desire to move on to 'the next best thing' with hardly a backward glance. We see this all around us in the abandoned corners of boatyards and clubs where owners have given up their once shiny boats to natural or unnatural decay. The consequences for the environment of GRP decay are only now being addressed. Our article on Yachts at Risk highlights the current perils facing both *Lulworth* and *Clarion of Wight*.

The Association seeks to bring these very different worlds together, to make a point about the need to appreciate how we got here, and it is fitting that our 21st Anniversary edition of the Journal sets out the challenge in answer to the question: Just where did small boat sailing and racing really start?

At the moment our considerable digital resource is focused on the 19th and early 20th century. One of those sources is the *Yachting World Annuals* (available online to members) which were published right up to 1939. Post-WW2 copyright may still hang over us, but there is one wonderful section in the 1939 edition, worth downloading for that alone: the report on 'small boat' activity states that all those 'Bertie Woosters' sailing 14 foot dinghies (now called International 14s) have had a very successful season. It reads as if the author really has no clue (why would they?) about the tsunami of development that will take place between 1939 -1945, and the impact this will have on the nascent Rockets, Fireflies, Enterprises and many more. Moulded plywood, aerolite glue, and terylene have a deal to answer for.

What our history can tell us, though, is where we might find the roots of this amazing development from 1945 onwards. You will find in our Journal evidence of where some of those roots lie, wonderfully apart in Dublin and in Norfolk. I know there was activity on the Seine and on German lakes; it would be extraordinarily exciting to establish just which and where the first of these small boats took to the water across Europe and also in North America. You will find the first claim on the next page.

We hope you enjoy the Journal, which we intend to use as a key promotional vehicle to future possible members, both individuals and organisations, and we relish what we hope will be the subsequent correspondence.

John Evans, AYH Chair

# A challenge: Sailing started in Dublin

by Hal Sisk

My challenge is this: after reading this list of the achievements of the sailors of Dublin Bay, can yachting historians identify any other sailing centre which can equal or surpass the lasting contributions to our sport by the yachtsmen of Dublin Bay?

*Forget King Charles II, forget Holland, forget Cork even. The sport of sailing was born in a suburb of Dublin*

Many of our organisations have deleted the word 'yachting' in their names and replaced it with 'sailing'. This better describes the active amateur sport, contrasting with mere yacht ownership, which for many is a pastime. Meanwhile, the term 'yachting' has acquired an increasingly elitist connotation. So it is timely to consider when did our sport really start and, in doing so, leave aside many earlier histories of yachts and yachting. It happened not in Holland in the early 1600s, nor in England in the 1660s, nor in Cork in 1720. It happened only when it was adopted by men drawn from the commercial and professional middle classes with leisure time. They took the initiative and decided to found a club with the stated purpose 'to encourage the practice of seamanship and the acquisition of the necessary skills in managing the vessels'. Obvious today but radical at the time. The founders were happy to 'learn the ropes' and physically to pull the lines. So much so that in one sailing centre, over the two decades 1857

to 1877, they went on to pioneer, publicise and popularise the following innovations: a full season of races instead of just a single annual regatta; single- and double-handed races; the now-universal 'flying starts' instead of starting from a line of individual moorings; amateur crewed offshore races, not just coastal; even a swimming race for yachtsmen in the clothes they wore crewing.

All these innovations marked a sea change from everything that went before. Previously it was standard practice that paid crew did all the physical work for all cruising and racing yachts.

The club's most significant innovation was the first comprehensive rules of competitive sailing, later adopted by the first national authority, the Yacht Racing Association, later the Royal Yachting Association. And the club actually triggered the founding of the YRA. The club promoted the general adoption of their rules by making them available to other clubs at 100 copies for £2.

It started in the mid 1850s when races were held in Dublin Bay created exclusively for Corinthian crews, the term then used for amateurs, and which has now come back into use. The 1854 and 1856 races were well reported in Hunt's Yachting Magazine, with all the individual crew members listed.

How did Irish sailors get such a start? The answer is simply social geography. With a very early railway that started service in 1834





Druid

Published in Hunt's Yachting Magazine, February, 1855, p. 53.  
Nimrod. Water Wyvern.

Ros.

"VEER" AND "HAUL" OR FROM S.W. TO N.W. WITH A VENGEANCE.—DUBLIN BAY, 1848.

sailors could work in Dublin yet live in nearby Kingstown (now Dún Laoghaire), thus creating the world's first commuter suburb. There they enjoyed immediate access to clean, open water and three splendid clubhouses, facilities we still enjoy. Sailors in other port cities would struggle for years to enjoy similar advantages, away from crowded and dirty estuaries. Many sailing centres only achieved such circumstances 30 years later, by which time the Dublin Bay sailors had already taken the lead in shaping the sport.

The club that was founded in 1857 eventually became the Royal Alfred Yacht Club, commonly called 'the Alfred'. It never had a clubhouse and much later it was united with the Dublin Bay Sailing Club. In the two decades after the founding of the Alfred it grew so far in prestige that in 1877

it was ranked first in the world, measured by the yardsticks of the number of races per season and the value of the trophies awarded.

It is easy to imagine that the formation of our sport just happened as a universal social trend, an inevitable outcome of more leisure time. This period featured the codification of rules and the establishment of national governing bodies for several sports: football, rugby and hockey all acquired agreed rules in the late 1860s and 1870s, initially in Britain. Competitive sailing was no exception. But for our amateur sport, whether racing or cruising, its true origins are in Dublin Bay. No other yachting centre can equal or surpass its specific, seminal and lasting contributions to the sport of sailing.

All sailing and yacht clubs worldwide now follow in the wake of the pioneers of the Alfred Yacht Club!

## Dying wish of intrepid sailor will be granted by student boat builders

by Debbie Granville

The dying wish of an adventurous, sea-faring lawyer is being granted by students at the Boat Building Academy (BBA) in Lyme Regis.

When Richard Coleman (pictured) died on 1 May 2024 – two days before his 90th birthday – his enduring wish was that his beloved 18.5 ft yacht *Decibel*, in which he had sailed for over 60 years, should not end up at the back of a boatyard slowly decaying, as had



*Dulcibella*, the yacht in his favourite book *The Riddle of the Sands*.

Thanks to the hard work of Richard's former colleague, friend, and the executor of his will, Tony Vlasto, *Decibel* is now safely housed at the BBA, where students on its boat building course have meticulously stripped her paintwork and internal parts and carried out a detailed examination of her damage. Every salvageable nail, plank and porthole has

been removed and catalogued, and will be used to restore her to as-built condition, using as much of the original vessel as possible.

BBA Director Will Reed explained:

“Tony Vlasto is a Past Prime Warden of the Shipwrights’ Livery Company (which provides donations for student bursaries and the purchase of tools at BBA) and is a much-valued supporter of the BBA. When he told us of the remarkable adventures Richard Coleman had shared with *Decibel*, we knew we wanted to renovate her.



“She came to us with several broken and rotten ribs, rot in the transom and a Vire 2-stroke petrol engine that had probably not run for some years. But she is fully rigged with sails in good condition.”

*Decibel* was built by Hillyard’s in 1935 (the same year Richard Coleman was born), to a Harrison Butler design for Admiral Sir Francis Turner KCB DSC. Originally named *Isobel Joyce II*, she was sold in 1939 to a Merchant Navy officer, Captain Mitchells, who registered her as a fishing vessel, apparently so he could live onboard at Bosham when he wasn’t at sea. Richard Coleman bought the boat from a Captain Emden in 1956 and renamed her *Decibel*. He moored her at Hornet Services Sailing Club in Gosport, and voyaged for the next 60 years.

Will continued: “Richard’s adventures in *Decibel* were legendary. In 1958 he completed his first big cruise to Holland without an engine. It took him 10 days to get from Chichester to Dover. Apparently, en route, he anchored in Folkestone and rowed ashore for dinner. On his return he found an irate cross-Channel ferry who had to reverse between *Decibel* and the jetty! From Dover he made passage to Vlissingen.”

In 1962 Richard completed a Round Britain Cruise without an engine, just sailing at weekends between work as a lawyer for Clifford Chance. In 1967 he undertook his famous ‘Riddle of the Sands Cruise’, when, now with a Stuart Turner petrol auxiliary, he sailed *Decibel* over several weekends from Gosport to the North of Holland commuting by rail every week to his office.



Will said: “Richard gradually worked

his way past Hoorn to Ems in two days. Then, using three weeks holiday, he cruised inside the Frisian Islands and on to Emden and Wilhelmshaven in Germany. This singlehanded cruise, in a boat with a 16ft 10in waterline and no navigational aids earned him the Royal Cruising Club’s Exploration Award.

Another adventure, starting in the Fleet behind Chesil Beach in Dorset saw Richard sail to St Malo, into La Rance, through the canal past Dinan and Rennes to La Vilaine River, Roche Bernard, and on to Belle Isle. Cruising westwards along the South Brittany coast, to Lorient, Concarneau, Glenans, Benodet, La Rade de Seine, past Brest, and along the North Brittany coast, he completed a circumnavigation of Brittany.

Unsurprisingly, Richard became a Life Member of the Royal Cruising Club (RCC) who still hold the records and accounts of some of his voyages.

Tony Vlasto said: “Richard’s adventures are so well-known that HRH the Princess Royal inspected *Decibel* on 23rd May 2024, on the 60th anniversary of the Hornet Services SC, of which she is Patron.”

*Decibel* had already undergone some renovation work prior to reaching the BBA; her keel bolts were replaced in 1967 and 2019, and the deck canvas is believed to have been replaced sometime around 2005.

Tony added: “Richard wanted *Decibel* to be given to a young cadet of a yacht club or similar so that she could be restored and protected going forward.”

The enduring legacy of Richard has also resulted in a wonderful addition to the RNLI fleet: *Decibel Too*, is a new all-weather lifeboat, funded by a gift left by Richard, now stationed at Falmouth.

*The BBA is situated in Lyme Regis, Dorset, and trains students in the craft of wooden boat building. Many graduates go on to work at the UK’s leading boatyards.*

[www.boatbuildingacademy.com](http://www.boatbuildingacademy.com)

## Mikkel Thommessen, 1945-2025

Many at the AYH have benefited from Mikkel's help over the years. Mikkel believed that if you showed a real interest, he would take an interest in you. He will be so sadly missed.

### From his workplace the *Sailmagasinet* (Norway's version of *Yachting World*):

It is with great sadness that we announce that our dear colleague Mikkel Thommessen is no longer with us. He lived and breathed sailing right until the end, and passed away on the morning of Tuesday, April 22nd, while handing over sailing literature to the Royal Norwegian Sailing Association (KNS) library collection. That same morning, he had already managed to publish a news article about Norwegian regatta results in Hyères.

Mikkel Thommessen had recently turned 80 years old (on March 21st). He was full of ideas and plans when the editorial staff celebrated his birthday at a sunny outdoor venue in early April. Little did we know that his life would be over within the month.

Mikkel Thommessen lived to a ripe old age, but he never grew old. A few years ago, he started a podcast here at *SEILmagasinet*, which became increasingly popular. In February, he invited Olympic sailing winners from the 1960s to the present day to talk about their achievements at the Oslofjord Museum in Vollen. And earlier this month, he invited well-known top sailors to a dragon boat race in Son, and wrote an article about it under the title "The Nursing Home on an Outing."

We take comfort in the fact that Mikkel was in full vigour until the very end, and there is something symbolic about his life's journey concluding as he handed over his precious sailing literature to the members of KNS. He was a walking encyclopedia of sailing history himself, and had a large network in the sailing world both here at home and out in the wider world.

### Mikkel the yacht broker

When Mikkel became a full-time sailing journalist in the 1990s, he had a background as a shipbroker. After completing his Examen Artium in 1965, he started working for the shipping brokerage firm R.S. Platou. He later worked as a shipbroker in Montreal, New York, and Tokyo before returning to Oslo in 1973. Until 1986, he worked as a broker, the last few years at Fearnley Finans. He was a board member and later



vice-chairman of the Royal Norwegian Sailing Association from 1980 to 1990 and has been the chairman of the organizing committee for several international regattas and championships. As a competitor, he has two silver and one bronze medal from the Norwegian Championships, and two 6th places in the World Championships in the 5.5 metre class in 1990 and '93, in addition to a silver medal in the Japanese Soling Championship in 1972. He has participated in the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers (ARC) and has cruised to the UK, Svalbard, Iceland, the Shetland Islands, the Faroe Islands and the Mediterranean.

We don't know if Mikkel was born into journalism, but his mother was the composer and folk singer Caroline Marie ("Mimi") Thommessen. His father, Olaf Dobloug Thommessen, was the editor of *Tidens Tegn* and later a bookseller.

### Mikkel the Olympic commentator

*SEILmagasinet's* sailing editor was hired by NRK on several occasions as an expert commentator for all Olympic Games from 1996 to 2008. Many people probably also remember that he, along with Jon Herwig Karlsen, was the announcer at Aker Brygge during the start of the Færder Race for many years. Mikkel Thommessen also wrote several books about sailing and sailors, most recently about the 8mRyacht *Sira* which both King Olav and King Harald have sailed.

"I haven't been to the regatta course as much as I would have liked this year, but I hope to come back strong when I turn 80." he said when the book about *Sira* was released.

This is how we colleagues at *SEILmagasinet* remember Mikkel, smiling and optimistic and full of ideas right until the end.

Many of us have enjoyed Mikkel Thommessen's numerous stories and reports from the world of sailing. Now he has put an end to it for good and is deeply missed.

**From the Royal Norwegian Sailing Association  
(KNS, Norway's RYA):**

The well-known and beloved sailing journalist Mikkel Thommessen (80) passed away suddenly and unexpectedly on 22 April. Mikkel was a highly respected sailing expert with extensive knowledge and a vast network within the sailing community built up over a long life in the sport.

When I started at KNS in 2019, Mikkel was quick to reach out to me. The experienced sailing journalist from *SEILmagasinet* wanted to know more about the new addition to KNS's communications team and about potential collaborative projects. As a complete newcomer to the sailing world, I quickly perceived Mikkel as very knowledgeable and a man with great respect among sailors and generally within the sailing community.

We immediately hit it off, and that was the start of a friendship and professional collaboration that lasted until the day Mikkel collapsed and died while delivering his large collection of books about the America's Cup to us at KNS. He wanted to donate his beloved collection so that it would be preserved for the future and made available to all KNS members.

Over the past six years, we at KNS have used Mikkel in major regattas as part of a collaborative communication team between KNS and *SEILmagasinet*. Most recently, during the Dutch Sailing Race last year, where Mikkel did some of what he enjoyed most – walking around and interviewing sailors on the dock. Always well-prepared, always with relevant and good questions, and with a natural and nice flow to the interview. He was an eloquent and excellent communicator, whether speaking on TV, in his podcast, or as a writer. It's not without reason that he was an expert commentator for NRK during several Olympic Games.

Mikkel could describe events and episodes on a regatta course in a way that everyone understood, even those who weren't completely familiar with sailing. Of course, he was hired as the live speaker by the organizer during the start of the Hollønderseilasen, in addition to the media work he did for KNS and *SEILmagasinet*.

Earlier this summer in 2024, Mikkel was a central

figure during the Soling World Championship in Hankø, where he contributed his comprehensive daily press releases, reports, and interviews.

When the Færder Race celebrated its 75th anniversary, we hired Mikkel to help us create a digital anniversary book – the website [www.færderhistorien.no](http://www.færderhistorien.no). Mikkel's work in this comprehensive summary of the history of the Færder Race was absolutely essential for the website to achieve such high quality. His archive of images and articles, and his knowledge, laid the foundation for us to create a documentation for posterity that we can be very proud of.

We naturally used Mikkel for TV interviews with key figures within the Færder Race, including His Majesty King Harald.

Mikkel just turned 80 years old. He was one of the most vital and youthful people I knew. He wasn't idle; he completed several major book projects in parallel with all his media work. He was happy and looked positively toward the future, and had many plans and projects ahead of him.

I will miss Mikkel, who always greeted me with a big, warm smile, a handshake, and the words "How are you doing?"

It's sad that we at KNS can no longer benefit from Mikkel Thommessen's knowledge and expertise. At the same time, we are grateful for everything he contributed, and that most of it is documented for all time to come. In that way, Mikkel's spirit lives on.

Thanks for everything, Mikkel.

Christian Ruscetta  
Editor at *Seilas*

We could not have said it better, with any deeper feeling of loss.





## Classic sailing in Sweden: summer of 2025 roundup

*Gustaf Holgersson, Secretary, Historical Committee of the Swedish Sailing Association*

It has been an intensive summer for the Swedish owners and sailors of classic yachts, such as Metre Class yachts, Skerry Cruisers and other traditional boats.

We have had classic yacht festivals on both the east and west coasts of Sweden. The largest has been the Classic Boat Festival in the Wasa harbour in the Stockholm Center and at Skärhamn on the island of Tjörn on the west coast. These two festivals attracted some 70 yachts and approx 70,000 visitors each. We also had 16 classic yacht regattas, mostly in the Stockholm archipelago. For the traditional boats there has been five arrangements. The most popular events among visitors



*S1 Beatrice Aurore SK 150*

*August Plym 1920 Sandhamn Classic*

The Norwegian yearly assembly of Classic Boats in Risör did, as usual, attract many spectators as well as boats.

The summer was a triumph of the classic yacht associations of Sweden: Gaff Yacht Society, Sail Yacht Society, Motor Yacht Society the West Coast Wooden Boat Association, The Association for Traditional Boats, The Swedish Association for Veteran Boats and the Historical Committee of the Swedish Sailing Association.

The Swedish Department of Transportation has newly presented a research study of the Swedish private boat sector which showed that we have approx 1,290,000 pleasure boats in Sweden. Mostly these are small boats



*Marstrand 12 mR Cup*

and attendees are the Albert Race close to the Norwegian border and the Postrodden Grisslehamn – Eckerö on Åland. We have also had a 12mR cup at Marstrand on the Swedish west coast with eight participating 12mR yachts built to the third rule (1933-1939) and one built to the second rule (1920-1933).

In Scandinavia there have been some spectacular events such as the Classic Yacht Symposium in Helsinki which attracted som 350 participants from all over the world.



such as surf boards, rowing boats and canoes. Of the total figure small boats represent about 16%. Boats built before 1970 correspond to approx 12%. However, there is no reference in the material to classic yachts with no questions on boats older than 55 years.

However the interest for our floating culture heritage is thankfully increasing as yachts earlier sold abroad are now coming back and our institutions for culture are now starting to take interest in our cause.



# 20 Years in the Classic Yacht Scene

by Steffan Meyric Hughes

Twenty years ago, the first great wave of yacht restoration was riding the last of its crest. This was the big yacht scene that had started in the late 1980s with rebuilds of great inter-war sailing yachts like the J Class *Endeavour*, driven by the enthusiasm of American sailor Elizabeth Meyer; and *Altair*, funded by the Swiss Ferrari collector Albert Obrist. There followed a stream of impossibly expensive restorations for the few among the global rich who had the taste to back it up: they have included fashion entrepreneurs and heirs like Allegra Gucci, Miucci Prada and Patrizio Bertelli, and Silicon Valley kings like Jim Clark. It was a crazed time that was bound to run out of steam, and about two decades ago it was starting to; but not before the rebuilt Fife III 19mR yacht *Mariquita* was launched after a benchmark restoration by global leaders Fairlie Restorations. Two years later, the largest single-masted gaff cutter in the world, *Lulworth*, was relaunched after a restoration so complete that it triggered the Classic Boat Awards.

Then, it seemed, there was a silence, and into it stepped AYH member and sailor Hal Sisk, who took the same, meticulous, no-holds-barred approach to the restoration of the 36ft (11m), one-off, 19th-century GL Watson yacht *Peggy Bawn*. After that,

there was a steady stream of high-budget, best-practice restorations of smaller sailing yachts. The Fife-opoly was over, and the world of yachting conservation had opened its eyes. It all started changing again, about a decade ago, when people started taking classic GRP yachts more seriously. Yachts like the S&S Swans from the 1960s (34 and 36), Contessa 32s, the early Nicholsons (32, 43, 55 and others), glass Twisters and so on, started getting ‘the treatment’, their owners knowing that in heavy solid lay-up glass, these boats, the same beautiful shapes as their wooden ancestors, might last as long as the Pyramids – whether they wanted them to or not. The movement reached near-critical mass in 2024, perhaps as a result of some quite heavy campaigning by Classic Boat magazine, which included finally admitting for the first time that the Westerly Centaur might be considered a classic. That was the year that the handicapping body CIM in the Mediterranean, probably the world’s most religious in their fervour for wood, started accepting GRP yachts at its regattas.

Almost the reverse has been seen in motor yacht restoration: since the 1980s, or even further back, there has been a very active restoration scene for Rivas



## Bosham Revival

*Celebration of early dinghy designs including prototypes of iconic classes*



## Cowes Classics Week

*Where all the keelboat classes get together: 6mR, 8mR, 12mR Sunbeam, XOD, Daring, Dragon, Bembridge OD, Bembridge Redwing, Victory, Loch Long, Seaview Mermaid, Squib, Swallow, Flying Fifteen, Howth 17 Footer, Requin, Tempest.*

*Nearly every yacht club in the country had its own one design class at some time, alas not set up for travelling so rarely get together. Most fleets go to great pains to preserve remaining boats.*

and, in the USA, the runabouts that inspired Riva by the likes of Chris Craft, Hacker and more. There was, and still is, a class of motorboat collector who will spend half a lifetime looking for an original fuel filler cap, with a fervour that would shame any sailing yacht conservator, and place him more at the level of a classic car owner hoping to win Pebble Beach.

Motor yachts had their big boat scene later, with an extraordinary flush of restoration of true giants from around 2010. *Nahlin, Malahne, Marala, Blue Bird* and many more from the building boom in the Depression era of the 1930s have been restored to splendour since the new recession in 2008, for inconceivable sums, and with an ever-increasing demand for quality and comfort at any expense.

What will the future bring, one wonders? More wonder materials will boost durability and strength, much as epoxy and carbon fibre have already done; and on-board systems that will use AI to predict everything from passage planning to galley management. Interiors, which have come a long way from even a decade ago, when so many of these yachts looked like Hilton foyers below decks, could continue to evolve in tasteful (if dull) modern style; or there might be a movement back to originality here too, as witnessed in the new love of Formica in sailing yacht interiors. In terms of vessel type, it seems as though we have finally reached a maturity seen in the car world, where a restored Golf GTI can rub shoulders with a 1960s Ferrari. And that can only be a good thing.

## British Classic Week

*Where the ocean racers of the past unite*



# The Price of Nothing & the Value of Everything

by Dr William Collier

*If we fail to create a culture that values yachts as much as art or prized rare cars their future is uncertain*

In a world that sees all yachts as playthings of the rich, how do you make the point that yachts are valuable cultural assets as important and as worthy of appreciation as historic homes, cars and works of art? How do you value the ecosystem of expertise and skills that creates or restores them and in so doing adds value to our society? How do you give this closed world value and consideration in the contexts of economic, technological and social history?

If you look on Amazon you can find 20 or more books instantly available on Ferrari and any of the other great car makers. A similar situation exists for great architects and artists but you can only find one out-of-print book on Camper & Nicholsons and one on [William] Fife. There are simply not enough sources of quality information to prop up classic yachting. But while the present picture is not good enough, we are making progress and we now have great biographies of Starling Burgess, GL Watson, Tore Holm and Alfred Mylne. These books sell so I assume they are read. By providing this information, we not only publicise this world and give it credibility, but we also remove the excuse of not knowing better. However, knowledge and the ability to acquire it is not enough. There needs to be a desire for it, an understanding by yacht owners that they should not feel free

to alter an important historic design. More importantly, designers who work on restoration projects need to put their egos to the service of those who created the yachts and not to their own aggrandisement.

The next part is value. Classic sailing yachts will not survive as things stand today. There is a real chance that all our successes are pyrrhic. The reason is obvious: you simply cannot have a sustainable business model where a yacht owner has to write off 50 per cent or more of his or her investment. I give you the example of *Mariquita*, among the most famous of the big cutters racing today. Twenty years ago her restoration cost between £3 million and £4 million, her annual running costs are say £600,000 and when it came to selling her it was simply unimaginable that the restoration costs could be recouped. It was however quite conceivable that it would take two or three years to sell her. So another £1.8M in running costs only to recover less than that. Her owner was smart, so gave her to a syndicate that would care for her and race her. Then, when they came to sell her, they took her to auction. She sold for £550,000. We are talking about the largest pre-World War One gaff cutter, with a largely original interior, restored to the highest standards. It's an extreme example but few are the restored yachts that sell for anything like what they cost to restore. I have



a recurring nightmare that my life will be circular, that in my old age I will go and see the yachts I spent years saving and restoring and they will again be houseboats, floating restaurants or abandoned. I can't allow this. Until we establish real values we will not have done enough.

The occasional but wonderful regattas that we hold are well covered by the press. The headline that gave me hope was in *Monsieur* magazine, France's equivalent of the *FT's* How to Spend It.

It read: "Be Modern, Sail a Classic' with the standfirst below reading "Timeless elegance that never ages, better still with every year, classics gain new fans who are younger, greener and more chic. Classic yachting has never been so with it." This matters, because classic sailing yachts need to be appreciated on the level of high-value collectors' items. There is no intrinsic reason why a Ferrari GTO is worth north of £50 million. And if that is the case, why are not the world's best classic yachts similarly valued? I hear the arguments about the ease of parking a car in a garage or the difficulties of large crews; I don't accept any of these. Maintenance costs are not in themselves high, they are just high as a proportion of the current



perceived values. As to crew, a good crew is a source of the greatest joy yacht owners can have, and they treasure that.

The question is: how do we change that? We need to make yachts attractive to a whole new tier of owners who are not cost sensitive but who have an emotional response, who see and follow the example of their peers. To make them see that a classic sailing yacht is not something owned in a private world by slightly eccentric people like us, but a mainstream object of desire. So what if they are not sailors? Most of the people who originally commissioned the large classics were not.

If we look at where classic yachts have come close to thriving today, the best examples are probably the 8mR and 12mR classes where one can potentially anticipate that sustained support may translate into greater appreciation. However, for more diverse yachts we are lacking the activity-based focus that these classes have. This is a key motivation for me in creating the Richard Mille Cup: to create an outstanding event with real races that connect with the great traditions of yacht racing.

The 2026 event will be held on Scotland's west coast, home to Fife, Mylne and Watson among others. There will, as always, be a metre-high trophy commissioned from Garrard who made the America's Cup. It will be sociable, it will be a real regatta. It will not be held to fill hotel rooms at the end of the summer season, but by yachtsmen, for yachtsmen. The idea is to make a major contribution to creating an environment that is capable of sustaining the yachts we set out to save.

And if we achieve that then for me it will be enough.

# Hunter's Yard: a Broads time capsule

by Stephen Elliott-Hunter, Historian of the yard

Nearly a century old and nearly completely unchanged, the history of a Broads hire yard in a time warp

In 1931, Percy Hunter's visionary purchase of a piece of land close to Womack Dyke, Ludham, Norfolk, for £200, laid the foundation for what would become the Broads' only surviving traditional boatyard still in its original location, with its fleet wholly intact and using the same methods. This acquisition, now within the Broads National Park, Britain's largest protected wetland, and run by a charity, the Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust, marked the beginning of a remarkable legacy. Little could Percy have foreseen that his investment would result in the preservation of a unique piece of maritime history.



From left to right:  
Percy, Cyril and Stanley

Percy, with his sons Cyril and Stanley, were already experienced in boatbuilding, and following the land purchase, they built the first of their huge wooden boatsheds. Through simple manual labour, they excavated a 25ft (7.62m) by 30ft (9.1m) dyke connecting the shed to the main waterway. A second shed followed alongside in 1935.

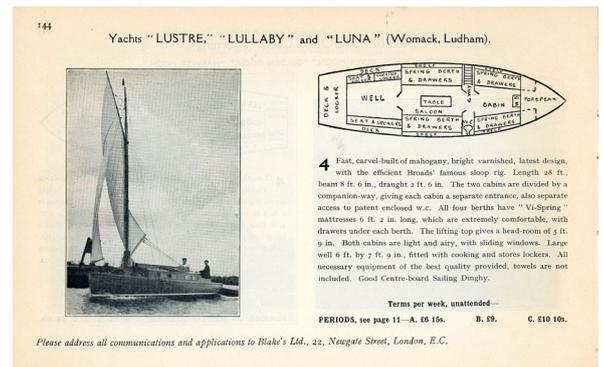


Pat Thrower and Cyril Hunter (right)  
widen the dyke



The yard's first boats, launched in 1932 and designed by Percy, were *Lullaby*, a four-berth, gaff-rigged cabin cruiser later immortalised as *Teasel* in BBC adaptations of Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* books; and *Lustre*, another four-berth yacht. These were followed by *Woodruff*, a three-berth yacht built off-site in Wroxham.

By the outbreak of World War Two, there were 11 cabin yachts available to hire through Blakes: three in the four-berth *Lullaby* Class, three in the three-berth *Wood* class, and five



in the two-berth *Hustler* class. Percy had also built two half-decked boats, *Woodcut 1* and *Woodcut 2*, with the former reportedly his personal favourite.

## The shadow of war

As war loomed, and demonstrating remarkable foresight, the Hunters prepared the fleet for long storage and moved the boats into the sheds before the declaration of hostilities. Government officials, after inspecting

Hunter's Yard, permitted the fleet to remain in the sheds, provided a motor launch was sunk at the dyke entrance to prevent their rapid re-use in the event of an invasion. All yards were forced to close and Hunters' boatsheds were camouflaged with painted roofs.

Due to this quick thinking, the fleet survived intact, remarkable given that wartime restrictions prohibited Broads boating, which meant that many hire craft and private yachts were commandeered and moored across the waterways to deter German seaplanes. This resulted in significant losses and irreparable damage to many vessels on the Broads.

Hunter's Yard resumed hire operations in late 1944, though wartime necessities dictated changes. White canvas cabin tops were replaced with green, and cabin windows were blacked out to comply with air raid precautions. With petrol rationing in effect, sailing craft were in high demand.



WWII - painting the roof in camouflage

The Broads' unique waterways have promoted the evolution of distinctive boat designs, unlike any found elsewhere in the UK, perfectly adapted to their local environment.

Percy Hunter's death in 1964 at age 80 dealt a significant blow to the yard's operation. After three seasons without their father's guidance, and facing an uncertain future, the brothers offered the business for sale in 1966. In 1968, Norfolk County Council acquired the Yard and its fleet for £35,000. Stanley retired, while Cyril remained as a consultant and part-time boatbuilder. Stanley died in 1978 at 65, followed by Cyril in 1982 at 74.

The yard's subsequent phase as the County Sailing Base provided a valuable centre for youth development, fostering confidence, decision-making, and teamwork skills through sailing programmes.

Beginner, intermediate, and advanced sailing courses were offered at Martham and Filby, encompassing dinghy sailing and racing, with larger-crew experiences available at Hunter's Yard.

Les Gee served as the initial fleet warden, succeeded by Jim Searle in 1970, and the Hunter fleet became integral to the Education Department's outdoor activity programme, introducing thousands of school-children to sailing and the Broads. For many, this experience has created a lifelong love of sailing and the Broads.

## Swallows and Amazons forever

A notable event occurred in 1984 when the BBC hired *Lullaby* for three months to film scenes for their adaptations of Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* books *Coot Club* and *The Big Six*. While the boats had remained largely original, the sails (being made from terylene), required a 1930s aesthetic. The unavailability of the original material from that period, Egyptian cotton, necessitated the use of Duradon, a cotton substitute, for the duration of the filming. Though made in the traditional style with rope edging, its weight proved problematic, affecting the appearance and bending of the gaffs.

Yard staff performed their daytime work and then helped the film crew in moving boats between locations like Hickling Broad and Barton Broad using outboard motors.

The original dinghies from the films, *Swallow*, *Amazon*, and *Titmouse*, are cared for at the yard, with *Swallow* currently undergoing restoration. Hunter's Yard also looks after *Dreadnought*, the punt belonging to character Tom Dudgeon in the films.

Government budget cuts ended Norfolk County Council's involvement in 1995, prompting the yard's sale. A significant public outcry, led by yard staff and local newspapers, resulted in the formation of the

### *The Hustler Class*



Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust, a charity dedicated to preserving the fleet, the yard, and traditional boat-building skills. A substantial fundraising effort, with donations from around the world and a significant grant from the National Heritage Lottery Fund, secured the yard's future.

The Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust took over the yard and fleet on 1 April, 1996. The Association of Friends of the Hunter Fleet was established that same year to support the Trust's endeavours. The friends provide vital financial and practical assistance, exceeding their subscription income through fundraising activities. They also serve as a user group for yacht hirers and contribute to the trust's broader development work. The entire fleet, comprising the original 13 cruisers, *Lucent* (a later Lullaby Class boat built in 2007), various half-decked boats, dinghies, and the original *Swallow*, *Amazon*, and *Titmouse*, is available for holiday hire, skippered sails, day sailing, and RYA sailing courses from Easter to early October. This schedule balances the need for boat maintenance and prevents prolonged periods ashore.

Every year by the end of October, following Percy's original practice, the fleet is taken out of the water and into the sheds for storage and winter maintenance. All removable parts such as spars, drawers and hatches are taken off the boats and, as every boat is very slightly different, all items are marked with the boat name to make sure they will fit again later. Gas stoves are serviced, electric motors checked, and all components prepared for reinstallation.

Hauling the boats out is a collaborative effort, employing a traditional method refined over decades. The only modern addition is an electric

winch, replacing the previous hand-powered mast winch which came off a wherry. Greased wooden slips guide the boats up the slipway, with careful handling to prevent tipping. Once in place, the boats are supported using levers and trestles.

There is a specific layout in the sheds for each boat because of the very confined space they share. Despite the cramped conditions, significant maintenance is undertaken, including repairs, repainting, the tailoring and installation of new cabin canvas sides and varnishing, using the 'Hunter's method' to achieve a mirror finish.

Traditional wooden boatbuilding demands exceptional skill, requiring the manipulation of two-dimensional wood into complex three-dimensional curves. This intricate process, involving sawing, planing, chiselling, and steaming, shapes the wood into elegant lines and smooth surfaces, particularly at the bow. The remarkable condition of the yachts, after 90 years and countless voyages, stands as a testament to the original and continuing boatbuilders' skill.

A significant milestone occurred on 11 May 2021, when Princess Anne paid an official visit to the yard, where she heard about a new electric motor and watched a traditional launch.

The Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust is committed to safeguarding Hunter's Yard and its fleet as a unique representation of a bygone era. As a charity, it relies on donations, legacies, and grants to maintain the fleet and provide access to the Broads for hundreds of children and young people annually. In a rapidly changing world, the trust ensures that future generations can indeed 'Step aboard and sail into history'.

[www.huntersyard.co.uk](http://www.huntersyard.co.uk)



# Genesis? The Norfolk 14ft Restricted Class

by Jamie Campbell

*The International 14 is arguably the most important dinghy class in the history of racing; its origins, perhaps even the origins of sailing for pleasure, are to be found on the Broads*

There were water frolics on the Broads from at least 1800. They became a village day out, with all the usual attractions from rowing races to military bands. Racing was included for the larger yachts but it became an elitist affair. Professional crews put the yachts through their paces and owners were rarely seen on board. They were busy entertaining guests on a larger yacht or wherry. Prize money for a four-boat race could equal a year's agricultural wages – small wonder the crews became unmanageable.

The earliest record found to date of a 14ft dinghy race on the Broads is July 1834 at the Burgh Castle Water Frolic. The 'water frolic' always had a civic aspect, with the Mayor of Great Yarmouth presiding in state. Races started with competitors moored in a line, with sails down. By the mid-1800s, the Venetian word 'regatta' began to be heard, which broadly translated as 'mooring place'. 'Flying' starts had to wait for another 30 years.

A decade later, the railways brought greater change than anyone could have imagined. Even before refrigeration, they were suddenly able to deliver fish from the East Coast ports to the newly industrialised cities on the same day it had been landed. Cod was the cheapest protein available and may be said to have fed the Industrial Revolution.

The Broads became a popular holiday destination from the 1870s, a move initially led by Norwich solicitor George Christopher



*They certainly weren't afraid to experiment. This photo was taken by 'Tod' Corbett in 1902. He and his brother Frank had a large sailing boat called White Seal, a .7 rater and of course a couple of 14' dinghies. The Corbett brothers commissioned Linton Hope to design the Broads One Design class and in the same year are believed to have paid for the first five examples. The dinghies were solidly built, which probably accounts for why so many have survived. Racing what were effectively yacht tenders might not appeal to today's sailors.*

Davies, a keen sailor, fisherman and shot. He was the first Broads photographer and a popular and prolific writer. His lead was enthusiastically supported by the railways, who were ever mindful of return loads. They brought in tourists by the carriage load; one of the more pleasing aspects of late Victorian



*The dinghy Castanet, named after her mothership and sailed by Russell Colman, scion of the mustard dynasty. This is another of F.H. Chambers' 'machine dinghies' and built by H.A. Little of Brundall.*

Photo: Broadland Sports. 1902

Britain was the ability of factory workers to take a holiday. George Stephenson's railway to Great Yarmouth also opened out the riverside villages along the River Yare. The Yare became the focal point of Broads yacht racing and the Yare Sailing Club was founded in 1876.

The Broads regatta season ran from July to September. Many families owned wherries or larger yachts and some even let their homes for the summer and decamped, staff and all, onto the boat. Charles Carrodus, local author and Broads correspondent to *Yachting Monthly* and the *Eastern Daily Press* wrote one July: "There is not a day without a regatta before September." The whole season was done in some style and many large yachts kept good cellars. Gerald Sambrooke Sturgess later recalled: "An invitation to dinner ensured a good evening".

The massive prize monies then involved in Broads yacht racing enabled successful boats to recoup their build costs in just months, and this produced some fast, innovative designs. George Mollett of Brundall was acknowledged as the master of the dinghy classes. He was already well known for the first 'skimming dish' *Castanet*, launched in 1892 for Russell Colman. Shortly afterwards, he built a tunnel-hulled rater called *Gossip*.

Clubs had their own measurers and slightly different rules, some racing under their own rules. It took

Horning Town SC until the 1920s to decide to adopt the YRA racing rules regarding luffing where overlaps were concerned. Sail area settled at 140 sq.ft. which had to be in one sail. The distinctive lug rig wasn't the fastest but it was at least easily managed. Hulls were always clinker.

In 1895, E Hicks and H Mower, both of Norwich, called a meeting at the Bell Hotel and the Broads Dinghy Club was formed. The objective of the new club was to encourage the building and sailing of small and inexpensive boats and to bring the class before the various yacht and sailing clubs.

Early Broads sailing clubs weren't at all territorial. They all used the Yare Sailing Club houseboat for running regattas, and clubs just rolled up on the bank and sailed where they felt like. Only the (later Royal) Norfolk & Suffolk Yacht Club had a land base (two clubhouses!). With common membership rife, it must have been difficult to work out which club was running a Broads regatta without looking for the burgee flying on the Yare SC houseboat.

After the First World War yacht racing began to migrate from the River Yare to the northern Broads rivers. Some held that the new sugar beet factory at Cantley had ruined the south river but it's more likely that the advent of personal transport just permitted greater freedom.

The local fleet was dominated by local builders but



*Bonnie 23 wearing her prize flags. She was designed by Frank Harding Chambers and built by H. Press of Wroxham in 1898 for G.M. Chamberlin. Chambers was 2nd Mathematics master at Charterhouse and later Headmaster of Lincoln Grammar School. He eventually formed a partnership with H.A. Little of Brundall (who had bought Mollett's old yard). They traded as The Norfolk Broads Yachting Company and expanded quickly. They opened a yard at Cantley, where Ernest Woods served his apprenticeship. His elder brother Walter was dispatched to Potter Heigham to open a new yard upstream of the mediaeval bridge. It was left to his son Herbert to re-establish the business downstream of the bridge. They also acquired Press Bros business at Wroxham. NBYCo failed in 1917 and most yards were acquired by their manager. Brundall went to Charles Jack Broom.*

*Photo: Broadland Sport. 1902*



*Class race at Acle. In those days helms steered and any balancing required was left to the crew. The style of sitting out later found favour in the Star class.*

a small number of boats 'for the gentry' were from Morgan Giles & May. Morgan Giles had an office just off London's Strand and built racing dinghies at Hammersmith. The partnership always had a West Country bias and indirectly splintered into Berthon Boats and Frank Morgan Giles at Teignmouth. Their Hammersmith premises were later occupied by Chandler and Holt, prior to improvement by the Luftwaffe. Percy Chandler was a 14ft sailor, band leader and sometime secretary of the 505

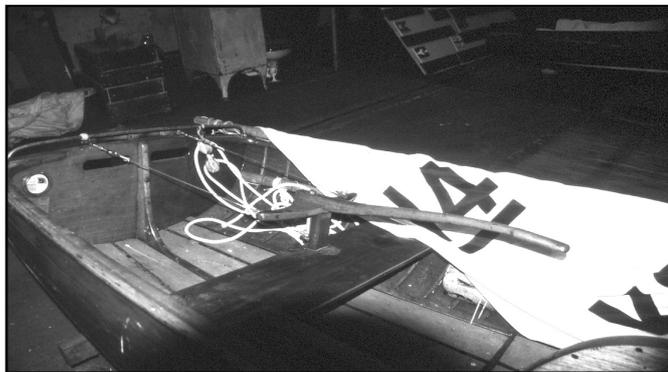
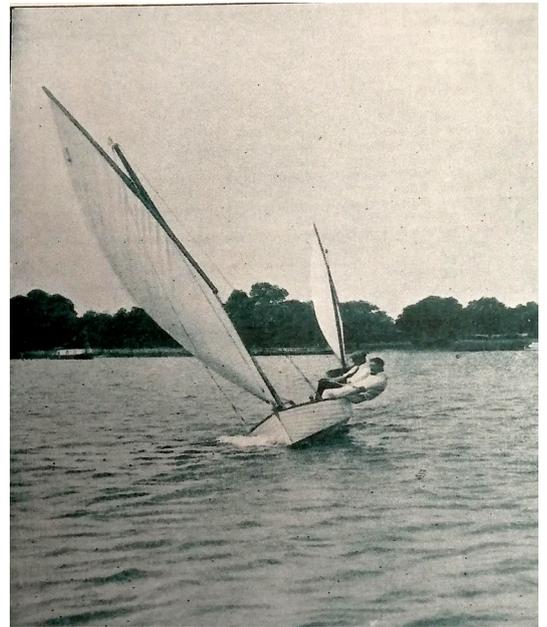
class. Beecher Moore entered the scene as it became necessary to move Jack Holt to Putney.

After some years buying and owning boats on the Broads, including a wherry, Harold Morris, a hop-dealer, based in Southwark in London became the founding commodore of the Norfolk Punt Club in 1926. The following year, he commissioned a Yare & Bure OD (20ft/6.1m half-decker) from Ernest Woods. *Bath White* turned out to be the last 'White Boat' Woods built at Cantley.



*Potter Heigham Regatta 1908*

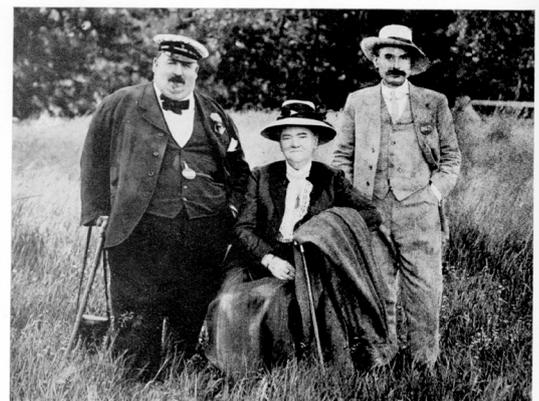
*Colin Newman and Phil Back holding Kismet level on Oulton Broad. In this photo, 'Collie' is steering with his foot*



*14 K85 Zanzara (later Ben Her) illustrates the yoke system with the tiller mounted on the rear thwart, which firmly anchored the helm to the centreline. This is an unusual 14 altogether. Class records show a build date of 1929 and the builder's plate states Ernest Woods, Horning. Woods didn't move to Horning until 1927. She sets a lugsail but the dinghy can never have been built to the Norfolk Class rules, as the hull is carvel. Zanzara was built for T. J. Duncanson of Tunbridge Wells to accompany his Great Yarmouth One Design Tina, (later renamed White Damsel) which had been built by Walter Woods (elder brother of Ernest) around 1914.*

*Stalwarts of Horning Town Sailing Club. Edward Gillard served as Secretary and owned Irene, the boat selected to defend local honour in the challenge. There is no evidence he raced himself. Irene was named after his daughter. Some with grey hair will recall she married Vic Lant and used to keep a small shop on Horning Green. Vic was Ernest Woods' engineer and sometime chairman of Horning Parish Council.*

*Photo: Charles Carrodus.*



STALWARTS OF THE HORNING TOWN SAILING CLUB.  
MR. J. YOUNGS (24 STONES), MRS. YOUNGS, AND MR. EDWARD GILLARD (SECY.).



*Postcard of the fleet at Wroxham regatta in about 1910*



*Whit Monday 1910, racing off Swonnell's maltings at Oulton Broad. Midge 32 was owned by Lt Cdr Gartside Tipping of the RNLI. His daughter, Phyllis became well-known in the 14 class as Mrs. H.S.C. Richardson.*

The Morris family boatman was Cubitt Nudd, whose claim to fame was in teaching the young Stewart Morris to sail. Stewart would go on to win an Olympic gold medal for Britain in the Swallow Class and dominate the International 14 for the best part of three decades. The family fleet of Broads boats was dispersed after Harold Morris' death in 1935. Cubitt Nudd spent the rest of his life working as a rigger for Herbert Woods at Potter Heigham.

The local 14 sailors had decided that *Kismet* was a dog, except that J Colin (Collie) Newman was a very aggressive and successful sailor. His family also had a wherry on the Broads (*Gladys*) and boats from a range of local classes to race. He was part of the British 6mR team that took the British–America Challenge at Seawanhaka in 1924. He was first boat home in the 1935 Fastnet, sailing another *Kismet*, and he frequently helmed 12mR yachts before the war.



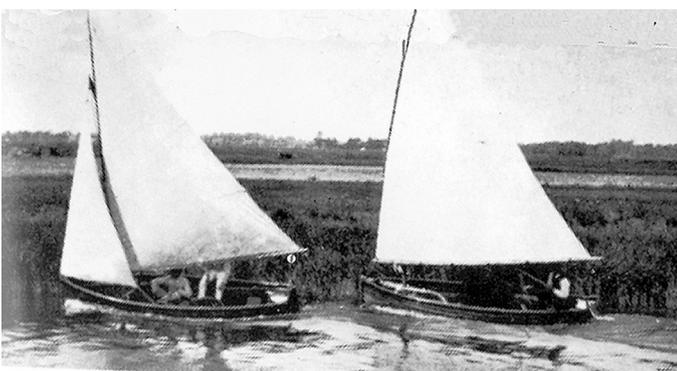
*Kismet moored and showing her narrow profile.*

He was so aggressive, the Americans at one point refused to race against him. But together with his crew Captain Phil Back he made *Kismet* work. They drove the narrow hull by fitting a tiller extension

which they called the 'joystick'. After their first race, *Kismet* was put away and covered up. Skull-duggery followed, and under the cover of darkness, *Kismet* was measured by her competitors. She passed her stiffness test (weight on the gunwhale) but the rest of the fleet passed an amendment that outclassed *Kismet* the following year. She ended her days racing as a Thames gig. Collie had Ernest Woods build him K48 *Safety First* in 1923 and carried on winning.

Leslie Lewis was a solicitor from Radcliffe on Trent, the founder of Trent Sailing Club and a long-standing member of the Royal Norfolk & Suffolk Yacht Club.

He was a keen competitor in both fourteen foot



*The challenge, showing Firefly (sailed by Harry May) ahead of the Norfolk dinghy Irene (helmed by Charlie Press). Firefly missed the first race scheduled for Potter Heigham due to her sojourn in a railway siding. Racing was by no means one sided but despite protests, Firefly won the challenge, a result that was probably about right.*

*Photo: courtesy of Norfolk OD class archives*

dinghies and with his half-rater *Gipsy*. After the war, he raced a Dragon at Lowestoft. In November 1922 Lewis stood up at a north London meeting and advocated amalgamation of all regional 14ft dinghy classes into one national class. He argued that a good boat inland was a good boat anywhere and that open boats encouraged a measure of seamanship to keep the boat dry. He was supported by another keen participant in the Norfolk class, Sir John Field Beale,

who chaired the YRA Dinghy Committee and became a long-standing commodore of the Royal Norfolk & Suffolk YC. Lewis' suggestion was carried and after considerable groundwork, the local classes amalgamated. The Norfolk class was allocated sail numbers 38 – 60 to re-register in the national class.

By 1923, the oldest and largest of the regional classes of fourteen foot dinghies had become history.



*Harold Morris sailing his next 14' dinghy, another Morgan Giles product he called Take-a-Step, built in 1912. The dinghy was later re-rigged with a Bermudan mainsail and re-registered in the national class as K 53.*



*This photograph shows Kismet racing on the Thames. She'd been outclassed but still displays the sail number 14. The photo was found in the Upper Thames SC history, 'Bright Images' published in 1984*

*1923 fleet racing at Horning. Chris Boardman is in the lead with K9 Cayenne and the shot shows the rig improvements over the rest of the fleet. The other two boats registered in the national fleet is 14 K8, Black Gnat, Leslie Lewis and 14 K20 Quicksilver, J. Packer Wagner. Both were regular visitors. The Wagner family were involved with timber importers Meyer and assisted Jack Holt in providing timber to build Kate, the prototype Merlin during WWII.*

*Photo: Boardman*



*14 K9 Cayenne. This dinghy was one of the very last developments of the single sail rig. She was completed just as the classes amalgamated and registered into the national class. Morgan Giles built her for Chris Boardman who is seen sailing beside Boardman's mill, near the family home at How Hill on the River Ant. Chris went on to join the amateur crew on Endeavour and took a Gold medal at the 1936 Olympics in the Six Metre class. Cayenne was eventually sold to a promising newcomer called John Winter*



# A Tour of the Scottish Yachting Archives

with Dr William Collier by Steffan Meyric Hughes

There are archives and there are archives. Some are a polite form of disposal: categorise, list and preserve the labour of the dead, then get on with the business of living, while the business of the past slowly settles under the silt of time, to be disturbed once in a generation by an obscure postgraduate student or AYH member. Others are kept haphazardly as a result of enthusiasm or sentimentality, and are only really accessible to the keeper. Both are considerably better than a hired skip and should be applauded, but they are a sign of the troubles facing archives these days. Museums, their natural home, are low on funds and can barely keep what they've got, let alone take on more. And in the world of sailing much of the past still exists in plans and other artefacts in fragments dispersed across nations to the point where finding an old drawing takes the nose of a Howard Carter.

The Whisky Bond, hard by the Forth and Clyde Canal in north Glasgow, is one of the frank, handsome brick buildings that lined the waterways of the 20th century. Built in 1957 as a bonded warehouse for whisky from the distilleries of the highlands it's now home to the growing Scottish Yachting Archive.

## G.L. Watson

The things kept in the Fife archive, the first such collection of what is now the Scottish Yachting Archive, are of such importance they sometimes seem better suited to the British Museum: the original drawing of *Britannia*, the most famous racing yacht in British history and, even better, a notebook of thoughts on her design, all in Watson's own handwriting; telegrams and hand-written letters from Kaiser Wilhelm and King Edward VII thanking Watson for the design of their yachts in those days of gentlemanly competition before the First World War; a large, solid-bronze bust sent by the Kaiser himself to GL Watson as an elaborate, and rather egotistical thank you for the design of *Meteor II*.

Then there are the smaller, more intimate things, like Watson's blazer buttons; a box of keepsakes his wife kept to remember him by after he died; his last pencils, worn to a nub; a lock of his hair; a photo; various sets of curves, the very ones that no doubt drew the great Big Class yachts of the 19th century; original letters from King Edward VII; the lines of *Vrill*, the earliest surviving Watson design (No 5); all the drawings of the 1901 America's Cup Challenger *Shamrock II*; an 'ashtray' sent from the palace, made from a piece of Britannia as a thank you, before she was scuttled. It's all ordered in a series of archive-quality grey steel plan chests and smaller black boxes.



G.L. Watson's curves

In the 1970s, the Watson artefacts were left in their near totality in Glasgow's Mitchell

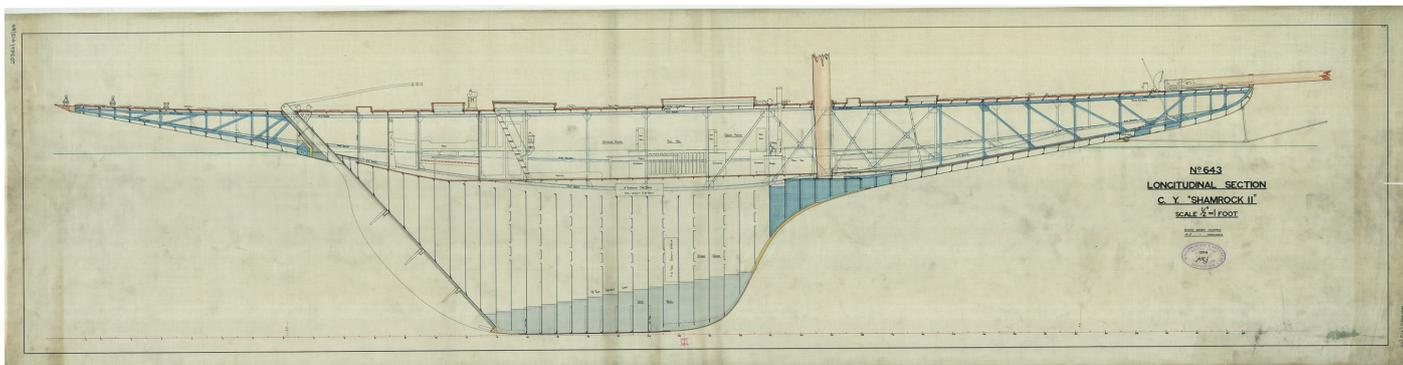
Library, where his genius rested in peace beside fellow Scottish yacht designer Alfred Mylne. In 2001, William bought the archive, initially housing it in offices in Liverpool's historic waterfront. Now of course, it's neatly filed away in its new home, but the journey to that point was a long one. As William explains: "We employed an archivist and worked with paper conservators. There were a few thousand drawings. Everything was rolled up by design number. There was a catalogue but this only covered half the plans. One box had fishery reports; the same box that contained Watson's design notes on *Britannia*! Clearly it was packed in a hurry."

## William Fife II and III

There have been other important yacht designers and designers with greater output and versatility (Watson and Herreshoff spring easily to mind); but since the Swiss collector Albert Obrist restored the Fife schooner *Altair* in 1987, the Fife has held the high-end classic yacht set in thrall, at least in Europe. While Fife's yachts rose to a new magnificence for a new century, the record of his genius - his archive - limped on in a leaky garden shed owned by Fife legatee Archie McMillan. William acquired the Fife



View of the Archive



*Shamrock II - 1901*

archive after a few changes of ownership in 2020 having just moved to Glasgow. It was an easier proposition than the Watson archive, not least because William and David Ryder-Turner had already catalogued the collection in 1997. The drawings of the first yacht designing Fife, Fife II (1821-1902) are largely lost, unknown or unsung. It's easy to lose Fife II in the shadow that his son would later cast over his legacy, but he was a very notable designer in his own right, with yachts going back at least as far as 1832. Rather shockingly, given his eminence, he does not even merit an entry in Wikipedia. Here in the SYA, he fares better on paper than online, for instance in the drawings of *Condor*, a gaff yacht from 1878 of around 80ft LOD, and his half model of the yacht *Gleam*, the earliest work held in the archive. Another early Fife II half-model of an 1860s schooner, was found in a skip 20 years ago.

The earliest Fife III yacht in the collection is *Bedouin*. The design numbering is unclear, but the year is known: 1884. At this point, it's probably worth explaining the design process: both Fifes were modellers, meaning they would carve a half-model then, using a pantograph, transfer the lines from that to pen and paper to end up with a plan. Put like that it sounds easy but, particularly if modelling to a rule, it must have taken what William describes as “an extraordinary sculptural/mathematical connection in the mind.”

As for the plans that came after the models, “Fife II always used to design for the shop floor, so his lines plans are to inside of planking. The final lines plans of Fife III's creations are recorded in the offsets books

that record what was drawn out full size on the loft floor,” says William, to explain what we're looking at.

## A new theory: Fife III's design process

The brief explanation of ‘modelling’ yachts rather than drawing them straight onto paper (in the manner of, for example Watson), will surprise no one who knows of these things, or who knows of Fife. If you are in that category, however, you will be amazed to learn that there might have been another stage to Fife III's process, one that came before the large half-model. The next exhibit is a box of tiny half-models laid out in rows, and William wonders if



*A sketch from the Bloodhound log featuring Fife II*

these were preliminary studies for the full-sized half-models. After all, it's quite a thing to take a 5kg block of pine and slowly sculpt it into the shape of a yacht that will take men years to build, a vessel that will ultimately carry in her bones the survival and happiness of all who sail her.

It seems riveting and impossible that only now are we discovering some-

thing so basic as the design process of one of the most

famous yacht designers in history, but as William explains, “Fife did nothing to memorialise himself, and neither did anyone else. [Nathanael] Herreshoff was well documented and [Charles] Nicholson was written about a lot in his lifetime.” It's also an example of what sort of archive this is. There are, as discussed earlier, sleepers and scatterguns, but this is an archive that is always growing, always moving from dispersion and chaos towards unification and order. And that's



Photo: William Durrant

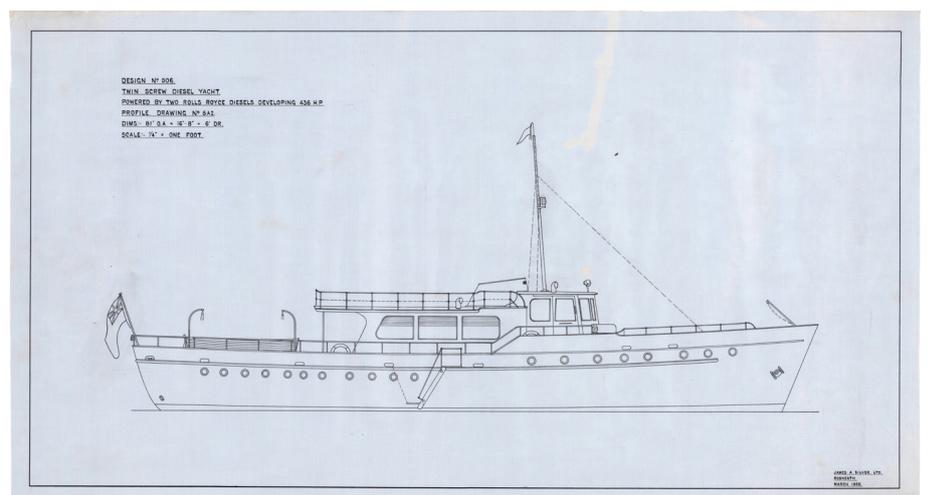
because new artefacts, like the little models, are trickling in now that people holding onto Fife material know there is finally a safe haven for them.

The SYA is filled with delightful bits of ancillary history: the logbook of Fife II's most famous yacht, *Bloodhound* (1886) is a work of art, filled with watercolours and cartoons including a sketch by Fife II of *Bloodhound* herself. There are endless other fascinations, like the 1884 sketch by Robert Cree Crawford of the launch of *Carrisima*. She left the yard on her side down greased 'ways', then as the tide rose in Fairlie's shallow bay, she was floated, heeled over with buoyancy barrels tied to her keel and men up the mast until she was in deep enough water to float free and upright. A collection of photos by William Durrant show the evolution of yachting photography. Durrant predates the the Bekens and Stanley Rosenfeld, and the glass-plate technology of his era meant such long exposures that yachts could only be captured statically, tied to buoys. Later photos show them with their sails raised, but still motionless.

## John Bain

While he doesn't share the same giddy pedestal as Fife and Watson, John Bain's handsome and plentiful motor yachts that streamed forth from the Silvers Yard in nearby Rosneath are these days greatly sought after for restoration. The Silvers acquisition by the SYA in 2024 broadens the collection beyond sail to the new era of the internal combustion engine.

[www.yachtarchive.scot](http://www.yachtarchive.scot)



# A Fine Graduation

by Dick Johnson

During my friend Tony Weber's 70th birthday party, the idea was hatched that we should try to assemble as many of our old comrades as possible for lunch, drinks and the telling of tall Graduate tales. From the late 1950s to the early 1970s the Essex Yacht Club at Leigh-on-sea was home to a flourishing fleet of Graduates. A handful of then-younger members wanted a more modern and lively boat to sail than our local 1929 Essex One Design, a substantial, clinker-built boat from the pen of Frank Morgan Giles. Our sister clubs along the shores of the Thames Estuary, like Southend-on-Sea, already had National Twelves and GP14s, so when Dick Wyche came up with the Graduate, it looked just right as something in the same vein, but different.

The first fleet was a collection of craft that ranged from numbers in the 200s to the 400s, sailed by people who I looked up to, partly as people who



were taller than me, and partly as fine sailors, riotous partiers, practised drinkers and altogether fine role models. But these boats stayed at home sailing club races, with the occasional foray along the coast to the Leigh Sailing Club, the Thames Estuary Yacht Club or the Alexandria Yacht Club.

As the first proponents of the class grew too old, too large or too involved with families, a new, younger set came into the class. In the early 60s, there was a sudden expansion of the class with secondhand boats being bought, brand new boats being bought and built, and a lot of teenagers cutting loose in the fleet.

Meet the post-Graduateers, those of a certain age who once sailed the Graduate dinghy at the Essex Yacht Club

That's when the nucleus of the EYC Graduate fleet I remember was formed. People like David Gorrod, Richard Perryman, Brian (Charlie) Baker, The Peggs twins (Chris and Johnnie) Nigel Souster, Daphne Perrot, Peter Mirren (brother of actress Helen), Tony Weber, Peter Acton and many more who came later and extended the fleet on into the 70s.

Our first major foray away from home came in 1963, when various homemade trailers were double loaded with boats, and ageing Austins, Hillmans and Morrisies set off for Plymouth and the National Championships! We had no idea what to expect and after virtually 24 hours driving, we arrived at the dinghy park where well over 100 boats greeted us! We were immediately accepted by the rest of the class, with people like the Burgoinnes, Hawklers, Atkinsons, Oddies and of course George Miles, helping us to get ourselves established. We ranged from about 16 to 18 or 19 in age, and all released from the bonds of parental control. Good times ahead!

The first time I walked into the hosting club (was it the Mayflower? Or was that just where the dinghy park was?), there was one of those red,



crackle-painted, one-armed bandits with a highly polished alloy Indian's head on the front. I had a sixpence and used it wisely. My single pull of the handle won the jackpot – £6 or thereabouts – and doubled my spending money for the week!

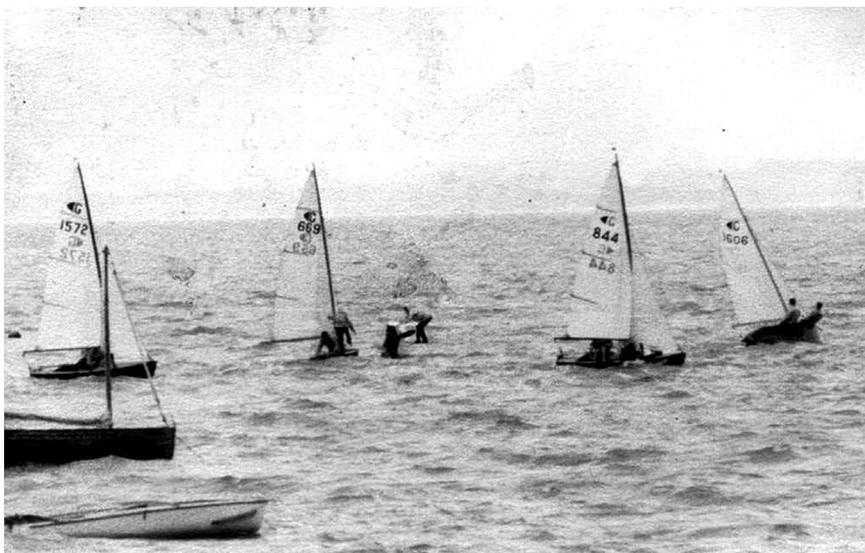
I crewed for Richard Perryman in *Zulu* and we were mid fleet to upper half as I remember, but I do remember the EYC made an excellent showing in the Team Racing with a second. Our celebration in the Royal Western YC, then at the base of Plymouth Hoe, used up a fair bit of my winnings. A later assault on the Hoe landed us in the arms of a substantial Devonian policeman who



suitably chastised us for the noise we were making. He lined us up and, starting with me, asked our ages and if we had been drinking. As the answer to the latter was a definite “yes”, my answer to the former of “16” didn't go down too well. Strangely, the others all answered “18”.

Our first championship was a resounding success. We made our mark on and off the water and our enthusiasm for the Graduate Class vastly increased.

After our first foray into foreign parts, there was no stopping us. Southern Area Championships, Junior Championships, innumerable open meetings: you name it and the EYC was there. The Peggs twins were our most successful team, but Richard Perryman, David Gorrod, Peter Acton, Tony Weber, Robin Jones and others also took prizes – even me. The Essex Yacht Club won three National Championships: 1965 in North Berwick when the Peggs twins were successful; 1966 (Peter Acton at Saundersfoot, a great venue); and Robin Jones at North Berwick once more in 1970. We also went close in Llandudno in 1980 and had good scores in other championships and opens.



All these and many more memories were discussed at our reunion, including at least one alleged streaking incident and also an incident involving the commodore of the Eastbourne Yacht Club – a certain Mr Edward Heath MP – a pair of scissors and his tie. Our haul of Graduate silverware was impressive and I suspect our names are on the trophies they race for to this day. After the 60s, a new generation took over, with names such as Fisk, Tomkys, Seago and more taking over with similar success, though with no more national championships.

Essex Yacht Club loved and still loves its days in the Graduate family and our reunion brought that affection up to date. More than 30 sailors and their wives enjoyed a wonderful day at the EYC's headquarters ship *Wilton* and have plans for another reunion involving more post graduateers.

*Dick Johnson is past-Editor, Yachting World and Cowes Week commentator*

---

### GOING TO PLYMOUTH G3



# Yachts at Risk

## Crowdfunding: Rescue of Clarion of Wight - Phase II

*Clarion of Wight* which was destined for the chain saw had been secured thanks to the intervention of a benefactor. However, after two aborted prospective negotiations we have lost time and find that we still don't have a way forward. Meanwhile, the boat continues to deteriorate.

### URGENT

We are grateful to those who have supported this so far, but we are still short of funds to get it to a safe place. And we do need to cover the yard costs until we can move the boat which of course we'd like to do as soon as possible – and stop the yard breaking it up.

So do please access this link: <https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/clarion-of-wight> and if you are a UK taxpayer, do please Gift Aid your contribution. We need to reach our Phase II target fairly quickly. And please tell your friends.

### Appeal for Consortium Members

Thinking ahead, should a prospective owner not be identified we are planning to put together a consortium to undertake the restoration. Should you or someone you know be interested in participating in any way – funding a share, donating equipment or your time, offer discounts on purchases – please contact us.



### Why Save Clarion of Wight

*Clarion of Wight* is an important boat in the history of our sport – the top scorer in the 1963 Admiral's Cup (Derek Boyer) along with Max Aitken's *Outlaw* and Ron Amey's *Noryema III* – the winning team – both boats restored and actively sailing. *Clarion* also won the Fastnet Challenge Cup in that Admirals Cup series. The Cup was a big deal in 1963 because the UK had won the first two (in 1957 & 1959) but then lost to the USA in 1961 so it was imperative to win it back. As a consequence fourteen boats took part in the UK trials. It was later owned by Sir Maurice Laing and again competed in the Admirals Cup in the 1970 Irish team.

It is significant as the first Admirals Cup boat in the UK team not drawn by a British designer. It is a Sparkman & Stephens boat, built by Lallows in mahogany and teak, and probably the first successful S&S boat designed to the RORC rule. Ted Heath sailed on *Clarion* which led him to order *Morning Cloud* from the same designer and builder. This boat will be an invaluable addition to the competitive classic fleet. *Clarion of Wight* is 43ft 6in LOA.

This project is being coordinated by the British National Yachting Archive

[www.bnya.org.uk](http://www.bnya.org.uk)

## Update on Lulworth

*Lulworth* was sold at auction in November for €1,864,000 – that's €1,000 over the reserve via an online bid and far short of the €10.8 million being asked 10 years ago. Subject to a major restoration in Viareggio in 2001–2006 *Lulworth* was neglected and eventually re-possessed by the Italian tax authorities.

The same previous owner also owned the 10mR *Tonino*, 8mR *Peggy* and 6mR *Zenith* – all Fife boats and all similarly neglected, but now in Naples with plans to restore.

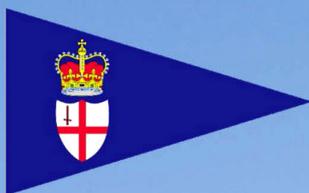
We wish the new custodian of this remarkable yacht well and look forward to seeing the results of her next restoration.

*Lulworth left to rot*



# The Metre & Classic Keelboat Regatta

22-25 July 2008  
Cowes



The Royal London  
Yacht Club



[www.themetreregatta.org](http://www.themetreregatta.org)  
[www.classickeelboats.org](http://www.classickeelboats.org)

© Peter Mumford – Beken of Cowes