

PICKETT'S LOCK: AN EXHIBITOR'S VIEW

Alan Smith

By now the formal reviews of the London Dinghy Exhibition will have appeared in the yachting press. These will undoubtedly have concentrated on the boats on display and I will not presume to impinge on the professionals' points of view. However, as many of you will know, we as a Club have been attending the exhibition as exhibitors for some years now and with no little success.

Primarily we attend with a view to recruiting new members but our stand also serves as a focal point for Club members who are visiting the exhibition and as an informal way of keeping in touch with other clubs and the class associations as we wrestle with the common problems of how to erect and man our stands.

The well organised and efficient set-up that many of you see belies the atmosphere of absolute panic on the Friday night before the place opens. Questions like: "Where the *** has that boat got to?", "What b*** f*** forgot the drawing pins?" or "Why doesn't our stand look as good as the one next to it?" fill the air. Cries of anguish abound as those precious new boats scrape through the entrances. Looks of sheer desperation appear on the organisers' faces as they try to find out where Mudhoppers Y.C. representatives have got to.

In any event, come Saturday and all is a calm bustle of activity and we present our acceptable face having spent a fortune on Grecian 2000 to hide the more apparent side effects. Then it's down to coping with "Can I sit down for a moment?", "Oh yes, I used to sail on the Medway; it's in Suffolk isn't it?", "I'd like to join your club. Have you got a mooring for a motor cruiser?" or "We're having an open for Norfolk Punters. Would any of your members be interested?".

Somehow or other we all manage to keep our sanity and I think it is indicative of the courtesy and helpfulness of the volunteers who man the stand that, despite the temptations to spit in the punter's eye or string them up from the gantries, we always manage to persuade a sufficient number of people that we are what we are, a friendly dinghy sailing club, to make it worthwhile going back each year.

It is also indicative of something that people rarely volunteer twice!

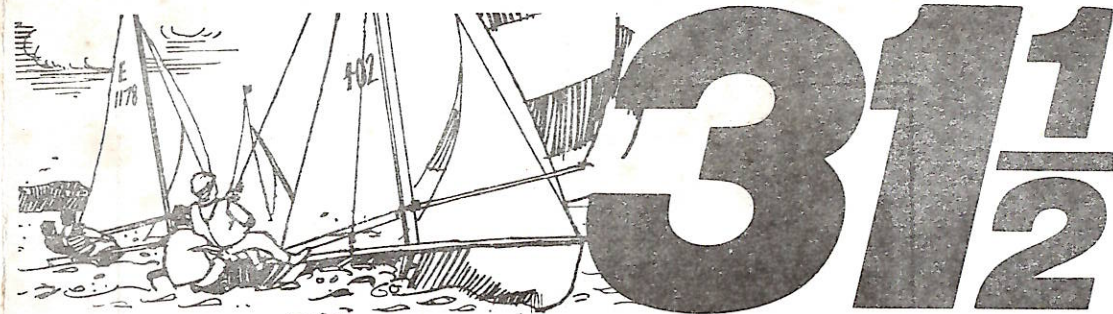
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THE WILSONIAN SAILING CLUB MAGAZINE

Number 20

April 1982

WILSONIAN
SAILING CLUB
Hoo, Kent

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The magazine of the
Wilsonian Sailing Club is
called '31½' because the
clubhouse, the barge
'WILSONIAN' is moored
approximately halfway
between navigation buoys
31 and 32

Acting Editor:
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Opinions expressed in
this magazine are not
necessarily those of the
Editor or of the Officers
or of the Committee.

31½ GOES TABLOID!

The Daily Mail did it; the Evening News did it; and now 31½ does it. Yes the Club Newsletter has become a tabloid. But whereas the others did it to change their image and attempt to increase their share of the market, the change of size in 31½ is for more mundane reasons. Reducing the size of the page permits the same amount of editorial material to be contained on half the amount of paper. It also permits the use of smaller envelopes in which to send it. The result: we hope the same quality at reduced cost to the Club. The editor would like your observations on the new format - and of course your contributions in the way of articles, photographs, drawings, letters and advertisements.

A NEW EDITOR?

Now that Hedda and Roger Johnson's growing family has caused them to give up dinghy sailing, the Club magazine is without an editor. As you will see from the adjacent column, the vacancy has been filled on a purely temporary basis by a previous editor who would like to hear from any member who is interested in editing 31½, or from anyone who would like to help to edit the magazine with, perhaps, a view to taking over in a few months. The numerous advantages of the job will be revealed to you for the cost of a telephone call.

...

Copy for the June edition, please, to the Acting Editor by the end of May 1982.

HARRY CLARKE

Those of you who were not at the Club's Annual General Meeting will not have heard of the sad death of Harry Clarke after an illness. He had not been a member of the Club for as long as some of us but he had become deeply involved with training. At the beginning of the 1981 season he was the Club's Training Secretary but as a Senior Instructor he was one of the few members qualified to step into the shoes of Robin Musters when Robin's employment forced him into becoming a country member. In consequence, Harry became recognised by the Royal Yachting Association as Principal Training Officer of the Club for the rest of the season, a job which he carried out in spite of his illness. The Club was represented at his funeral and the condolences of officers and members have been expressed to his widow and family.

APPOINTMENTS

All members of the Club should have received in the middle of March a copy of the Handbook Supplement for the 1982 season containing the sailing programme for 1982 and the duty lists. You will have seen that there are a number of gaps in the list of officers and assistant officers on page two of the supplement and that one or two of the names are not quite the same as had been agreed at the Annual General Meeting. The explanations are as follows and you are requested to make one or two additions to page two. Les Lyons, who was elected House Secretary at the AGM has agreed to take on the vacant post of Secretary. His address is as shown on the front page of this edition of 31½. His appointment was confirmed at the first meeting of the new General Committee. His place as House Secretary has been taken by John Cassell, whose address is 46 Pine Avenue (not 41). The post of Training Secretary has been filled this year (as for most of last year) by Mrs Sylvia Reed, whose address and telephone number are: 31 The Knoll, Hayes, Bromley, Kent. 01 462 3232. Acting editor for '31½' is as indicated on the front page of this issue. Finally, the General Committee has made a new appointment of Duty List Secretary, an Assistant Officer post, which is being filled by Dick Jordan whose address and telephone number are as recorded for his wife June, the Assistant Treasurer. Dick will deal with all duty list queries - please note the book accordingly.

DUTY LISTS

The duty lists themselves have been completed so far as possible to meet members' requests on the basis of the information available at the beginning of March. Some changes to the lists will be necessary for later in the season but they will not be made immediately. Please remember that if you cannot perform your duty on the scheduled day, you should arrange a swap with another member on the list. Most of the men in the Club will find that they are scheduled for two duties during the season; most of the ladies have only one. Those ladies that insist on equality of opportunity can always telephone Dick Jordan and offer themselves for a second.

TRAINING

Here is some information about the Club's training programme for 1982.

Elementary Sailing Course

An elementary sailing course is to be held on the two weekends 15/16 and 22/23 May 1982. Students are expected to gather on the Friday evening and will stay on the barge for two nights on each weekend. The course is conducted to the RYA syllabus and should lead to the issue of a certificate. The cost, inclusive of accommodation and food, is £25 per person. If you are interested, please contact the Training Secretary by telephone in the first instance since the number of available places is limited by the accommodation that can be provided on the barge. The Training Secretary is Mrs Sylvia Reed, her telephone number is 01 462 3232 and her address is 31 The Knoll, Hayes, Bromley, Kent.

Autumn Sailing course

Provision is being made in the programme for a sailing course to be held on the two weekends 5 and 12 September. At present the Training Committee does not know whether the greater need is for an elementary or an intermediate course. To enable it to plan ahead, if you might be interested in taking part in either an elementary or an intermediate course, will you please complete the tear off slip at the bottom of this page and send it (or hand it) to Sylvia. For those of you who do not know her, she is the lady with the Wayfarer.

Safety boat handling courses

If you have volunteered for rescue boat duty and have no previous experience or training of rescue boat handling, then you will be expecting to take one of the one day courses in safety boat techniques and handling that the Club has offered for the last few years. The course takes a full day (10am sharp to 5 pm) and is usually held on a Saturday. The first course this year will be held on Saturday 8th May. Prospective students should telephone Sylvia Reed. A second course will be held on Saturday 5th June and a third course will be arranged if the demand is there. There is no charge for these courses, and students will need to provide their own midday refreshment.

Principal Training Officer

Brian Blakely has been nominated as Principal of the Training Establishment to fill the vacancy filled by the death of Harry Clarke. Confirmation of his appointment is at present awaited from the Royal Yachting Association.

To: Mrs Sylvia Reed (WSC Training Secretary)
31 The Knoll, Hayes, Bromley, Kent

I would be interested in taking an elementary / intermediate* sailing course on the two weekends 4/5 and 11/12 September 1982.

Name: _____ Address: _____

Telephone number _____ *delete as appropriate

SMALL ADS

FOR SALE OR EXCHANGE FOR GP 14: (with cash adjustment) MIRACLE Number 2097 with trolley and cover. Bell built. All in very good condition. £450. Apply: Colin Crawford, 3 Fernholt, Tonbridge, Kent. Tel: Tonbridge 352387

FIREBALL Number 10021 "PIPEDREAM" For sale or exchange for good condition Miracle dinghy. New cover, spare spinnaker. £550. Apply: Bob Jones; Telephone Medway 79193.

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Small ads are free to Club Members

On the subject of weekend duties at the Club, the Club handbook contains a description of what is entailed, but it is out of date on kitchen duties and it is probably not a bad thing to remind you about attendance times for the other duties.

Ladies (and gentlemen) on kitchen duty are expected to be at the Club at about 11.30 in order to prepare and serve a limited range of refreshments during the lunch period. They should be able to take a break between 2pm and 3 pm before serving the usual range of snacks and teas during the afternoon. Despite what it says in the handbook, it is not necessary for kitchen folk to take any provisions with them to the Club. All will be provided.

Rescue boat crews and race box teams should be at the Club at least one hour before the start of the scheduled racing. Rescue boats should be made ready to operate before the racing starts and they should also be available to lay and racemarks that may be required.

Rescue boat crews are responsible for removing equipment from their boat at the end of the day, for cleaning the boat (if necessary) and for putting it on its mooring. Rescue boats should be secured by the hand buoy chain which should be brought over the bow fairlead and secured to a cleat or towing post. The painter should not be used to secure the boat to the main mooring buoy, but it can be used to secure the handbuoy chain to the cleat if you feel that the chain looks insecure on its own.

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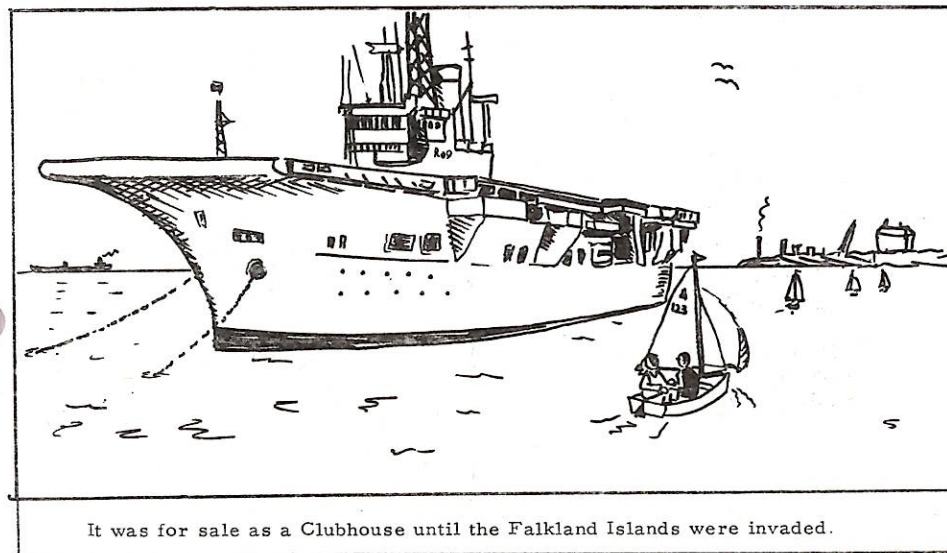
THAT CLUBHOUSE ~ ~ ~

From time to time members of the Club have been promised a report and a Special General Meeting to discuss the future development of the Club, in particular the possibility of building a new Clubhouse on the shore. For a number of reasons, the point where the General Committee can prepare and present such a report so as to permit practical discussion of this very important subject has not yet been reached. In the meantime, since there has been a considerable amount of activity behind the stage, it might be useful to bring you up to date through the pages of the Club magazine.

Outline planning permission was obtained, you will doubtless recall, about three years ago and the special sub committee appointed to deal with the project prepared plans on which detailed planning permission might be obtained. To the surprise of some people, that was obtained too without too much difficulty. The plans for the proposed clubhouse were prepared on the assumption that since skilled labour was an expensive commodity, any building should make maximum use of prepared or prefabricated units and materials. Without going into detail on costs, the proposal would have been that the money would have been raised from various sources including a Sports Council grant or loans, a local authority grant and loans and a sizeable input from Club resources, including the value of the professional services being provided by Club members. A major step in the right direction came when an application was made to see whether, in the event of members approving this project, assistance with some of the labour might be provided under the Youth Opportunity Project. To the surprise of the Sub Committee, they were told that YOP was not appropriate, but that the project was of sufficient value to the community to attract assistance under the Community Enterprise Project scheme. This scheme provides skilled labour from the ranks of unemployed. The prospect of free skilled labour caused the professionals to return to their drawing boards and plans to see to what extent the nature of the proposed building could be changed to make maximum use of on-site labour. In the meantime an official of the Sports Council visited the site and made encouraging noises about the possibility of a grant. Assuming that that grant would be available, the viability of the project rested heavily on the generosity of the local authority. In the event, for reasons not entirely to do with the Club, the local authority decided to agree to neither grant nor loan and although that source of possible financial assistance is not closed for ever, their decision has in effect put paid to this particular proposal, at least for the present.

While the Sub Committee considers the possibility of an amended project, it is heartening to note that after this year's overhaul of the barge, which included the replating of one or two weak spots, the Club was told that it was good to last another twenty years. It may well need to.

There are still mixed feelings among members about the nature of future development. Why not express your views in the pages of 31½?



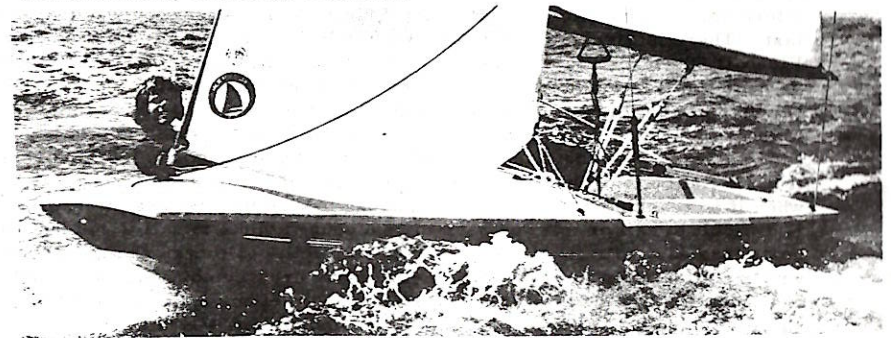
It was for sale as a Clubhouse until the Falkland Islands were invaded.

FLEET NEWS

With the season barely under way, the news from the fleets is a little thin. We have two new class captains: Reg Kuhn will be running the joint MIRROR and TOPPER fleet; Alan Wilkinson will be FIREBALL fleet captain. On the subject of FIREBALLS, Max Carnegie Jones and Peter Stock have great hopes for their new boat but managed to crack the centreboard on the first week of class racing. Last year's Fireball captain and his wife, Roger and Hedda Johnston, became the proud parents of a second daughter, Rebecca Jane on March 30th at 11.19 pm. Not to be outdone, Barry Cann, the HANDICAP fleet captain became the very proud father of his future crew, Oliver Cann, on 1st April. Mrs Cann is understood to have assisted. David Vettergreen, the ENTERPRISE captain reports that a class film show on 13 March was enjoyed by all those who attended it. Enterprise racing should be competitive this year with two owners changing boats and the promise of some new boats to come. Ray and Mollie Fryatt made a flying start by winning the first two races in the Spring Points series with their new boat 'Hunter's Moon'. Enterprises also took the first three places in the warm up handicap race on the first day of the season. On the same day, Peter Belcher won the first open meeting of the season at Maidstone. Martin Jessop is once again captain of the MIRACLE fleet. He wishes to remind all Miracle sailors that their open meeting is quite early this year, on May 16th. Alan Smith expects that if last season's enthusiasm is maintained and if his pressure on potential converts to the GP14 fleet is fruitful, 1982 could well be the best season for GP sailors for some years. There is no truth in the rumour that Ray Blyth is so disappointed by his performance that he intends to bury his boat. Excavations at Blyth Manor are simply to provide car parking space.

What then are the disadvantages? Well, there are a few. The boat is primarily a racing boat. It is not an ideal boat in which to take your mother in law for a picnic (though for the same reasons some people might argue that ~~is~~ ideal for that purpose). There is some skill needed in trapezing and it is simply not possible to take someone from the beach who has never trapezed before and expect them to help you win a race. Jim Saltonstall, the RYA National Racing Coach, has a favourite phrase about throwing the monkey a banana and pushing him out on the wire, but if the monkey does not know what he is doing, it's a pound to a penny that within a few minutes he will have lost his footing and will be swinging helplessly in front of the weather shroud. Regular Fireball sailors therefore require regular Fireball crews and this is one of the principal reasons why some Fireball helms move on to single-handed dinghies.

But the rewards if you can find and keep a regular crew are very satisfying. See for example the very consistent improvement in performance being achieved by Max Carnegie-Jones and Peter Stock, the well oiled partnership of Tony Mason and Alan Wilkinson and the excellent results previously put in by Roger and Hedda Johnston and by David and Pat Scott.

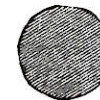


Facts and figures? The Fireball is 16'2" long and has a beam of 4'6" (4.93 and 1.37 metres). Sail area (jib and main) is 123 square feet. Weight is a very light 175 lbs (lighter than an Enterprise). Hulls are made from wood, glass reinforced plastic or a combination of both. A new boat will cost about £2000, but the second hand market has a wide choice at almost any price. If buying second hand, steer clear of some older boats of composite construction in which the glass hull is without reinforcement in the front buoyancy compartment. They are inherently weak and rough treatment can cause them to split.

If you are in the slightest bit interested in getting a Fireball, scrounge a ride from one of the present boat-owners, preferably on a day when there is a force 3/4 wind. Persuade him to let you helm it. You will find it an exciting experience. You will also find that the boat is a lot easier to sail than you imagined. Perhaps you will then buy one and if you are very lucky you may one day find that incredible combination of weather conditions repeating itself that occurred for the South Kent Race some three years or so ago. A fresh south-westerly wind and a kind tide enabled the Fireballs to make a continuous plane on one tack all the way from Gillingham to the South Kent buoy in about 40 minutes. It was almost worth owning a Fireball for that one race alone, even if for the last ten yards as we went past the buoy, the boat was, not for the first time, bottom side up.

OTHER PEOPLE'S BOATS : FIREBALL

Number 1 of an occasional series



We all know a little about the boat that we sail. We may know a little more about a boat that we owned previously. The point of this series is to tell you something about other peoples boats so that if you are thinking about buying or changing boats your knowledge will be a little broader. And the idea is to base each article in the series on the opinions and views of the people who sail the boats at the moment.

The first two Fireballs which led to the current fleet were introduced to the Club some five or six years ago by Roland Spurgeon and Terry Sullivan. Roland appeared to graduate to the Fireball from a Lazy E out of sheer high spirits and until he mastered the art of beating would swoop back and forth through the handicap fleet travelling twice as fast but also twice as far as the others to cover, in the end, just the same distance. Terry's elderly Fireball, "Puddle-jumper" was the boat that people tried out and then one or two others became interested. The principal attraction of the Fireball is, of course, that it is fast. There is a certain vanity about being in front of most people, even if by Fireball standards you are not doing very well. And then there is the trapeze; an instant attraction to those young men and women who realise that they are becoming too old to be satisfied with sitting passively in the front of father's boat when they could be demonstrating their youthful agility on the end of a piece of wire poised inches above the rushing waves. The Fireball is long and narrow; it has a flat bottom which makes it plane easily and it is at its most exhilarating when it is reaching. But it would be wrong to give the impression that the boat is difficult to sail or that you have to be a young athlete to sail it. Like many boats it is easy to sail, but less easy to sail well. Although championship winners often seem to have a light helm/heavy crew combination, club sailors of Fireballs come in all shapes and sizes. Two of our most consistently successful teams have been husband/wife combinations where the wife has been the crew and been of very modest proportions. As for helming, it helps to be quick rather than super-fit. In light to moderate conditions, the boat is docile. It is particularly stable down-wind and its relatively fast speed makes gybing easier than in a slower boat. Beating, too, in a steady wind is far from difficult. The crew takes up a comfortable position on the trapeze and the boat bounces, rather than cleaves, through the waves at a pace which is more than enough to keep the self-balers working.

Balance is very important in a Fireball. The boat must be sailed upright and this is achieved not only by the agility of the crew, but also by playing the main-sheet. Nevertheless, as the writer knows to his cost, Fireball sailing can be very much like the fable of the tortoise and the hare. In club racing, prudence and the ability to stay upright count for more than the knack of alternating between superfast planes and spectacular capsizes even if with its narrow beam the boat is particularly easy to right. Walton on Thames Sailing Club were proud of having the oldest regular Fireball helmsman, Alec Glass, who died last winter at the age of 75 only a few days after having achieved a place in the Club's winter series. I have sailed with Alec in Sakcombe Fireball week. He was never the fastest sailor, but I never saw him capsize and his results were never bad.