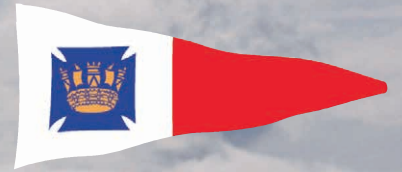


# ROYAL CRUISING CLUB

MARCH 2013



## SAI SEE

### 40ft Finisterre centreboard yawl designed by Olin Stephens, built in Hong Kong of teak for Group Captain Alec Ingle (RCC) and launched in 1960.

Easter 1981, Valentine and I with two small children, sailing back to Portsmouth from Lymington after an Easter Egg hunt with a crowd of small Gleadells and Lloyds. Our old smack *Kathleen* was beating through a nasty chop off Cowes. Valentine, pumping, shouted up to me, "Come and see if you can keep this bilge under control - I can't". Reluctantly we decided that the old boat (James of Brightlingsea 1894) was no longer fit for voyaging with two small children – nine years as a syndicate boat (or courting salon) with several marriages to her credit including ours; followed by ten years in our sole possession; numerous knocks, strandings and inundations; all had finally done their evil work so we sold her and that is a tragic story told elsewhere....

My share in *Kathleen* seventeen years earlier had cost me £110; the prospect of buying a real yacht was daunting. In 1980 for the first time I had made a bit more money than we spent. I said it should be kept for education "No" said Valentine, "We must buy a boat." So we searched and searched and by the skin of our teeth bought *Sai See* in Strangford Lough in the Spring of 1982. She cost £26,000 and we have owned her for thirty-one years. When I see hundreds of thousands of pounds-worth of new yacht sailing by I wonder if she will ever give as much pleasure as we and so many others have had from *Sai See*.

We took her over in Strangford Lough and set off down the Irish Sea and up the Bristol Channel. Bedtime on the first night; Katharine (7) and Mary (3½) in dressing gowns and slippers both tucked on the coachroof underneath the sprayhood, eating their supper. It was a wonderful new world; *Kathleen* had no sprayhood, no cockpit, almost no freeboard aft and the deck was no place for children dressed for bed.

A few weeks later we sailed to Scotland. It rained. Next year we went to France and decided the rain was preferable; most of the next thirty years have been spent on the northern and western fringes of the British Isles and Europe. Our real pleasures are coastal cruising, islands, sailing into small holes and walking ashore. I never had longer than three weeks holiday, so long sea voyages have not been our lot but, by judicious lending of *Sai See* to others we extended our range and, I think, gave a lot of



*Kathleen* with Giles Gleadell at the helm

*Kathleen* RCC Centenary Sail-past. Solent 1980

pleasure. First it was to families, all with small children. The Clothier family, grandmother and all, sailed her in Scotland, Shetland, Orkney, Norway and Iceland; the Lewin-Harrises used her as their family yacht for several years until Michael bought *Musketeer*. We often lent her to the Greenhills with three small boys, to old *Kathleen* partners and other friends who brought her back from Norway and sailed in Scotland and the Northern Isles.

*Sai See* is a centreboard yawl. After *Kathleen*, with her peak and throat halyards, tops'l rigging, jib tackles, peak ensign halyard and pin rails, we welcomed the mizzen at first because it gave us something to do! Gradually we learnt the tricks. The mizzen doesn't generally contribute a lot to sailing except excess weather helm and heel; above F4 we usually sail with it furled. For manoeuvring it comes into its own. With jib and mizzen you can heave-to quietly, turn 180° in not much more than two boat lengths, stop head to wind and lay out the anchor chain gently. The mizzen will keep her head to wind at anchor, prevent her shearing around and relieve a lot of the strain on the anchor. We have a tiny trys'l that goes up whenever we anchor for the night to save the sail from flogging itself to bits. The mizzen enables you to turn round without steerage way and sail quietly off the anchor in a confined space. With skill and luck you can even back a short way out of a crowded anchorage. It is a wonderful sail for children who can be put in charge of it long before they can handle the other sails. And of





course you can hang a colourful mizzen stays'l from the masthead. In *Sai See* the centreboard is only for use on the wind, when it doubles the draft to eight feet and halves the leeway. Lowering and raising it have their problems - a bit of a black art!

From 1987 we kept her for five winters in Shetland, right at the centre of the web of Viking sea routes, in range of a three week cruise to an awful lot of islands; and that range was greatly extended by others using her. In those days our sailing year was: Summer half term week in Shetland with Katharine and Mary, a week in the second half of the term for just me and Valentine and then three weeks in late July and August, leaving Shetland to explore Norway or the north Atlantic islands with the children and usually one other. This was roughly the pattern until they both graduated from University. One year, in trepidation I wrote to the headmistress to ask if Katharine could extend half term for another week. Instead of the expected blast I got a homily about the importance of father/daughter bonding! Valentine went back to teaching and Mary to school while Katharine and I had a lovely time in Shetland, in which she learnt to hoist me up the mast and celebrated my fiftieth birthday.

After four years in the north I thought the family might have had enough of oilskins and heavy sweaters for every holiday so I suggested it was time to head south - Spain or somewhere. "But we haven't been to Iceland yet" says 16 year-old Katharine. So in 1991 we went. We did eventually get to Spain and Portugal as well.

Children grow up. If they spend the first seventeen years of their life immersed in sailing they have learnt an awful lot but it cannot blossom until they find themselves in sole charge of a yacht at sea, without Daddy in board. University leaves months of summer for sailing and judicious lending of your yacht gives the young the experience they need; and some useful delivery trips are a by-product. The first was Richard Wakeford, my godson, who had sailed with us since he was a boy. He became an RYA Yachtmaster early, encouraged by an enlightened schoolmaster at Oundle. In 1989 he sailed with us from Shetland to Lofoten where he took over command and sailed her to the North Cape with a gang of undergraduate friends.

Sixteen-year-old Peter Ingram invited himself to sail with us in Iceland and he was an excellent hand; he said that he was going to take his Yachtmaster exam at Christmas and I said, "If you pass you may skipper *Sai See* next year with Katharine and your own crew". He passed (aged 18)

and in 1992 I handed her over to them in Kinsale. They arrived in Falmouth in style. This was the beginning of ten years of cruising together in Spain, Scotland, Ireland, Faroes (and in the Med. in the Ingrams' *Troubadour*) which culminated in the RCC wedding of 2002 – at least half the male guests were sporting the summer tie and both yachts were on the wedding cake.

Then it was Mary's turn. My rule that a young person must be a Yachtmaster before I would lend *Sai See* was overturned by an RYA instructor who insisted that I must let Mary take her with a Coastal Skipper ticket. "A Yachtmaster must have real experience at sea in command; not a spurious twenty four hours with Daddy on board" he insisted. He won. Mary sailed her with many undergraduate friends, duly won her Yachtmaster and did some spectacular cruises in Scotland and Ireland mostly with beginners for crew; she converted one of them, Daniel, to a fine yachting hand, Mate and husband. So *Sai See* continues *Kathleen's* marriage broking magic!

The many young crews have looked after *Sai See* immaculately, much more carefully than I have, and very little damage was done on their watches. The worst thing that ever happened to her was losing our beautiful S & S designed spruce mainmast in the Azores. The story is told elsewhere (RCC Journal 1998). It was pieced together by a brilliant shipwright in Horta and the return to UK was skippered by Peter Lewin-Harris, then an RCC Cadet. I didn't doubt Mary and Peter but I was relieved when they turned up in Milford Haven with the old mast still standing. Now we have a new one but it hasn't got the style.

At least ten RCC cadets sailed on *Sai See* without a "grown-up", five of them as skipper, and she was the vehicle for five Sea Laughter Trophies, a record, I think.



# SAI SEE



*Sai See* off North Rona leaving a remote meet with *Morning Sky* - photo by Oliver Roome

*Sai See's story begins on page 18*

As I write she is in Lerwick, her seventh winter there in the charge of Tommy Duncan. Tommy was detailed off by the Malakoff Shipyard in 1987 to look after *Sai See* for the winter. His enthusiasm for her was such that by the next summer I was identified in Lerwick as 'the man who owns Tommy Duncan's boat'. Since then he has sailed with us all over Shetland (he has a cousin in every anchorage!), to the Faroes, to Spain and the Azores; and he has been adopted by a succession of RCC members, many of whom he has sailed with, as their guide and mentor in Shetland. I think, on reflection, the golden rules for small children are; never let them see or sense any nervousness or fear in their parents; never let them get the idea that a boat is a particularly dangerous place to be (a dedicated sailing mother is a great boon for this); have strong rules about tying on, in and out of the cockpit, and wearing life jackets in dinghies. Supervise unobtrusively but do not overburden them with exhortations or with cumbersome buoyancy aids. Modern life jackets are much more acceptable than the things our children had and small oilskins have improved immeasurably. Katharine's first oilskin, at eight months, was

a supermarket bag with her legs through the handles and a hole for her head. Frequently dedicate a day to the beach. When ours were small we aimed always to have someone on board whose sole job in a crisis was to look after the children. As they grow up let them run free round the deck whenever you judge it safe – they will soon be less likely to fall off than you are. Let them steer as soon as they are strong enough, get them interested in chart-work and pilotage and encourage them to stand watch.

One problem we have never solved; you are beating up to an imminent anchorage and the shipping forecast has just begun; a child wails "I want to do a poo and I can't wait"; extraordinary how often these three things coincide!

Christopher Thornhill