

One Man and His Boats

A tribute to Jack Walmsley by his son Jonathan

I expect that most members have already heard of the recent death of Jack Walmsley. He was a familiar figure on the Roach since he first sailed there from Leigh in his late teens. My father owned five boats spanning the last 64 years:

Cirrus

Cirrus was the first, bought while my father was a teenager. She was a sixteen foot dinghy which he sailed mainly in the Thames estuary, always in thigh boots and with an eight foot stem dinghy in tow! One long weekend he sailed with his friend to Paglesham, spending the night in the Plough and Sail. This was his first visit to the Roach by sea, although he had learnt to swim as a child at Stambridge where a neighbour kept a houseboat. He kept all the bills for the work he did on Cirrus, and by applying 'a bit of art' sold her at an overall profit.

The Kaye

She was a grey straight stemmed gaff cutter of around twenty seven feet, excluding the eight foot bowsprit, which he kept on an anchor just below Paglesham. He must have been a memorable sight in the lane during the 1930s on his bicycle with oars strung along the crossbar. Despite being full of cement and having 'sieve like' decks, he enjoyed sailing her up and down the East Coast with his friends until joining the Royal Navy in 1940 to cruise on bigger boats.

Arabel

He had many adventures during the war including escorting the first Russian convoy and being sunk in the Java Sea. By applying for every training opportunity available, (the theory being that you were less likely to get into trouble if you were on a course), he rose to the rank of Lieutenant.

On his return he bought Arabel, which he kept anchored in the same spot below Paglesham. She was another straight stemmed gaff cutter, 25 feet long with blue topsides. He spent many seasons sailing with my mother on Arabel, including their honeymoon. Family commitments led to his selling Arabel in the late 60s.

Jo-Ann

Arabel was replaced by a twelve foot Walker Tideway gunter rigged sailing dinghy in which I learnt to sail. She was kept on a running mooring at Chalkwell. With the family growing up, and retirement looming, it was time for another keelboat.

Helius

This was a great departure from the yachts my father had owned previously, being bermudan rigged and having an engine. With a short counter and varnished mahogany cabin and cockpit she was a very pretty boat. Helius was Twenty one foot overall and built as a 'one off' in the late fifties of iroko on oak frames. She was kept on a drying mooring at Wakering.

Stravaig

Nearing his eighties the seasonal varnishing and painting was becoming too much, even with the boy helping. Helius was sold in the Spring and replaced with a 'plastic' Hurley 22 6 weeks later. After a season on a mooring at North Fambridge, my father returned to the Roach. The speed and sea worthiness of Stravaig allowed cruising as far as Woodbridge and Aldeburgh. Although initially reluctant, my father took part in his first ever yacht race two years ago. He very soon entered into the spirit of the events, which culminated in winning the Whitaker Cup, in his last season.

Stravaig will be back racing on the Roach next year, although I fear she will not be quite as competitive as before. The boy will, however, give it his best shot.