

Kingsley Varcoe 1913-2004

Ivor Jones

Kingsley, who died in March aged 91, was one of the original group of yachtsmen who met together in 1972 to found the Roach Sailing Association, and his connections with sailing at Paglesham extended back over seventy years.

He learnt his sailing on the Roach, in the early days sailing various small open boats which had belonged to local smacks or bawleys. Eventually, sometime in the late 1950's, Frank Shuttlewood informed him that it was about time he built him a boat of his own. This was the sturdy eighteen-footer "Islander", which was often seen on the river with big crews made up of family and friends. Later he owned the 1880 Shuttlewood-built barge-yacht "Doreen".

In 1958, King took over the job of organizing both the yacht racing and the annual laying-up supper at Paglesham, and continued tirelessly for some twenty years.

At this time the Paglesham Pot, although it continued to be raced for keenly, had been missing for several years, and it was King who tracked it down to the mantelpiece of a previous winner in Basildon! His unique handicapping system relied on meticulous record-keeping of the performance of boats on different courses and weather conditions, and was calculated to encourage owners of boats of all levels of ability.

The newly-arrived owner of one fast little boat, accustomed to racing of a more formal kind (probably at Burnham), finished ahead of the rest of the fleet by large distances through a whole season at Paglesham, but failed to win any trophies. When he politely inquired why not, he was told, " Well, you see, this is only the first year you've been here". Some older members probably have fond memories of King starting and timing-in races, standing on the end of the hard at Paglesham with his official clock and an ancient shotgun, later declared dangerous and replaced with an air-horn.

Under King's enthusiastic organization the Laying-up Supper became so popular that it out-grew the "Plough & Sail". The success of these occasions in bringing together all sailing people on the river meant that when the R.S.A. was founded it had a healthy and ready-made membership.

By the 1980's, King found that his other favourite pastime, his caravanning holidays in France, took him away from the river for too long, and he handed over his Race-Officer duties and retired from sailing. However, he always retained a passionate interest in everything that happened on the river, and was delighted to be made an Honorary member of the R.S.A.

King will be remembered for his unfailing cheerfulness and friendship to all at Paglesham. There must be many yachtsmen and women who came to enjoy sailing because of his encouragement, and who first held a tiller during one of those races around Potton Island or to the Buxey buoy.