

TROZE

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Narrative  
with Particular  
Reference to Cornwall**

*By Michael Bender*

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## **TROZE**

Troze is the journal of the National Maritime Museum Cornwall whose mission is to promote an understanding of small boats and their place in people's lives, and of the maritime history of Cornwall.

'Troze: the sound made by water about the bows of a boat in motion'  
From R. Morton Nance, *A Glossary of Cornish Sea Words*

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### **Michael Bender**

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# The English Yachting Narrative with Particular Reference to Cornwall

*Michael Bender*

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## Introduction

There has been relatively little research into the yachting narrative. Janet Cusack made an important contribution to the field, but, sadly, died before she had time to turn her thesis into a book.<sup>1</sup> In this paper the focus is on the representations of the development of yachting in Cornwall, in both fictional and non-fictional accounts including images, such as painting by the Falmouth School and, later, photographs.

For the purposes of this paper 'yachting' is considered to be sailing as a leisure pursuit, using sails and wind propulsion. Vessel size is not relevant to the discussion, thus although there are few references to dinghy sailing it is included in the definition. Since fishing or trading vessels can be used for leisure there can be no clear date when yachting started. According to W. M. Nixon, the Roman poet Catullus was the proud owner of a 30 foot seagoing yacht, planked in pitch-pine on oak frames.<sup>2</sup> In this country, convenient dates are the building at Cowes of the yacht *The Rat of Wight* in 1588 for Elizabeth I and the *Disdain*, 'a miniature pleasure ship', copied on the lines of the *Ark Royal*, '28 feet by the keel and in breadth 12 feet', built by Phineas Pett for James I's son Henry in 1604.<sup>3</sup> More generally, the founder of British yachting is considered to be Charles II.<sup>4</sup>

The term 'narrative' is used to provide a structure to the representations of a collection of objects and events that pertain to a given field. A narrative may be communicated through any medium. There will, of course, be many different narratives told by different people and different groups across time, so this narrative is a meta-narrative, which aims to synthesize previous narratives into a set of interlinking themes. This paper aims to make sense of these representations by elucidating their social, political and historical contexts. Clearly, the choice of concepts with which to make sense of the narrative is an individual one. Any narrative will be shaped by viewpoint of the teller. They foreground some aspects and play down, or obscure, other aspects.

## Conditions Necessary for the Growth of Yachting

For yachting to become widely undertaken, it is required that a sufficiently large group within a society has surplus wealth and surplus time. These conditions are separate, since the creators of wealth may spend all their time working, and often it is only the second generation who considers it has surplus time. Also the potential owners of yachts must believe that their prosperity will continue in the future. A further condition is that there is a sufficient concentration of potential yachtsmen in a given locality or who can get to that locality easily, to form an impetus towards the development of a significant level of group activity needed for a successful yacht club and/or yachting centre. This lack of population, uncorrected by ease of transport, is one of several factors that negate North Cornwall from developing yachting. There are also pragmatic considerations. There must be good shelter for a large number of yachts and safe waters within which to sail. This limits the suitability of Penzance being a yachting (as opposed to a dinghy) centre, as the prevailing wind made Mount's Bay a lee shore and effectively limited the development of yachting to Fowey and Falmouth.

## Early Days and Aristocratic Origins - Yachting before 1870

Cornishmen living near Land's End would have been witness to a very early yachting endeavour. In the reign of Elizabeth I, Richard Ferris decided it would be a patriotic act to show that no Englishman need be afraid of sailing in home waters after the Armada had been defeated in 1588. In 1590, with two companions, he rowed and sailed in a wherry from London to Bristol. He was not molested by the Spaniards but had to take evasive action near Land's End to avoid a pirate ship. He escaped by a providential becalming of the latter and by ducking inside the 'Raynalde Stones' (the Runnelstone).<sup>5</sup>

Charles II, as mentioned, introduced yachting into this country. In 1646, the Civil War having gone against his father, he had to spend time in the Isles of Scilly and Jersey, where he learnt to sail and to enjoy the experience. His years of exile in Holland introduced him to the lavish yachts the Dutch used to get themselves around and to demonstrate their wealth. His first yacht of many, the *Mary*, was a present from the burgermeister of Amsterdam. As recorded in the diaries of Pepys and Evelyn, although Charles enjoyed racing against his brother, the Duke of York, the yachts had a more serious purpose of transporting naval personnel about the Thames estuary, and also, during the Anglo-Dutch wars of the seventeenth century, they were put at the disposal of the navy, for example, for use as tenders to the fleet. In 1681, Charles appointed Captain Greenville Collins to 'make a survey of the sea coast of the Kingdom', and lent him two royal yachts, *Merlin* and *Monmouth*. He started from Dover in 1681. By 1682 he had surveyed as far as Land's End, and in 1683 surveyed the Scillies.<sup>6</sup>

There is no mention of yachting in Cornwall till much later since all the key events in yachting's early history happened elsewhere: the forming of the first yacht club, the Water Club of Cork, Ireland in 1720 and the first race on the Thames in 1749. The beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, and the wealth it created, led to the creation of a yacht club, the Cumberland Fleet, later the Royal Thames, in 1775, with regular racing on the Thames. A few weeks before the battle of Waterloo, 1815, saw the forming of the Yacht Club, to transmute by 1833 into the Royal Yacht Squadron (the RYS), with two meetings a year, in London and in Cowes.

The development of yachting at Cowes in the late eighteenth century related to the new-found desirability of the open air, as opposed to the gambling clubs of London, so nobility also started finding fox-hunting, fishing and shooting attractive. More specifically, there was a decline in the prestige of the inland spas, such as Harrogate and Bath, and a preference for the health-giving properties of sea air and sea water, at such resorts as Brighton, Exmouth and, central to the development of yachting - Cowes. By basing itself at Cowes, the Yacht Club was the first yacht club to utilize a seawater harbour and open sailing waters. Yachts had increased considerably in size as the wealthy practitioners found speed was related to size. Sailing in confined waters was neither as pleasurable nor as easy as sailing on the sea. RYS members ostentatiously demonstrated the wealth of the landed gentry in buying large yachts, to be raced by professional crews mainly gathered from the fishing villages of Essex and Hampshire. The first racing regatta organized by the RYS was in 1826. There fairly rapidly developed a regatta circuit. However, the majority of its members preferred cruising and voyaged long distances, frequently to the Mediterranean.

The Yacht Club rapidly became an exemplar for other groups to follow. The Port of Plymouth Royal Clarence Regatta Club was formed in 1827, re-named in 1842 the Royal Western of England. However, the growth of yacht clubs was slow till the second half of the nineteenth century. Bonner in *The Yachting Season of 1845* gives details of 12 yacht clubs and 13 regattas; in 1875, there

were 75 clubs and in 1914, 120.<sup>7</sup> Davis gives figures for yacht clubs that could call themselves Royal as 15 in 1849, 34 in 1879 and 46 in 1914.<sup>8</sup> These included the Royal Cornwall formed in Falmouth in 1872, and the Royal Fowey, formed in 1894 from the existing Fowey Club, founded around 1880.<sup>9</sup>

### The Years of Corinthian growth, 1870 -1914

The new found wealth of those involved in industry and transportation through major economic expansion in the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century permitted the rapid expansion of yachting in this period. However, the two of the most visible professions in yachting, often taking up senior positions in clubs, were lawyers and doctors. Examples would be Arthur Underhill and the Royal Cruising Club, whose committee meetings were sometimes held in chambers and the ophthalmic surgeon, Claud Worth, author of standard works of Edwardian cruising, *Yacht Cruising*, 1910<sup>10</sup>. We may also add some sailing vicars.

In this period, many games were newly created or radically changed and given rules, snooker and lawn tennis are examples; golf was imported from Scotland.<sup>11</sup> Thus, yachting was one of a number of new prestige sports that were being offered to the prosperous. Its rise to prominence was quite rapid. Frank Cowper, looking back, could recall seeing none or only one or two yachts in Chichester Harbour, Lymington, Salcombe, Helford or the Fal estuary at the end of the 1870's.<sup>12</sup> Even when he started his circumnavigation in 1892, Burnham-on-Couch had been almost devoid of yachts. Three years later, he returned to the harbour to find three yacht clubs.<sup>13</sup>

The professional classes could not afford the ostentatious displays which characterized Aristocratic yachting. Nor did they, in their Victorian respectability and valuing of thrift, find them desirable. Rather, they developed their own philosophy - the Corinthian. In 1878 Dixon Kemp defines 'Corinthian' as:

... a term in yacht parlance synonymous with amateur... The name was adopted in consequence of the similarity between the fashionable young men of Corinth who emulated the feats of athletes and their modern prototypes. Some clubs in Corinthian matches do not allow any paid hands to be on board.<sup>14</sup>

The origins of this term are somewhat vague. According to Peter Kemp 'the term originated in the U.S.A. in the mid-nineteenth century to mean a rich amateur sportsman, and spread to Britain mainly in its yachting connotation'.<sup>15</sup> The Corinthian spirit is well described in Cowper's introduction to his pioneering five-volume pilot for yachtsmen, published from 1892 onwards, explaining his motivation to undertake this mammoth and difficult task:

We write for that large and ever-increasing brotherhood of 'Corinthian sailors'... A Corinthian sailor, we take it, is one capable of managing a craft either single-handed (if she is small enough) or with the assistance of other amateurs, if she is from 5 to 30 tons.

We look upon all works which directly aim at improving the inborn love of sport and adventure- which is the natural heritage of the descendants of our piratical forefathers... It is thus a genuine pleasure to see the fleets of small yachts manned entirely by amateurs which go out every year in ever-increasing numbers to encounter the simple, hardy life, which is the best tonic for our exhausting civilization. The more this love of cruising increases the better it will be for our young men, and the better for many kindred interests all involving honest, manly work that ought to be encouraged by every Englishman, for everything that has to do with the sea should be naturally attractive to islanders.<sup>16</sup>

This passage incorporates many of the core values of Corinthian yachting – the small boat, manned by amateurs; a hardy activity which refreshes the soul; the soul being gender specific, since only men would be strong enough to undertake it; and also makes links with a glorious seafaring tradition by untamed, ‘natural’ men, with whom the middle-class professional wished to see similarities. Table 1 summarizes the difference between the Aristocratic and Corinthian philosophies.

Table 1 A summary of the Aristocratic and Corinthian philosophies.  
Source: The Author

ARISTOCRATIC	CORINTHIAN
Ostentatious/conspicuous	Modest
Central values: honour and reputation, e.g. by duelling	Central value: Integrity Foregrounded conscience and living by one’s values and moral code
Competing against others	Testing the limits of oneself
Racing	Cruising
Large yachts	Smaller – suitable for small crews
Professionally crewed	Skippered by owner
Comfort and luxury	Discomfort valued
Owner may not be on board	Owner must be on board
No physical discomfort for owner	Considerable effort and risk - pluck
Woman objects of prestige to maintain family name and lineage	Severe shyness and reticence concerning and with women
Favoured form of representation the oil painting	Favoured form the published log with lithograph illustrations
Classical Imagery	Romantic imagery
Favoured cruising grounds South (e.g. Mediterranean)	Favoured cruising grounds North (e.g. Baltic)

The Aristocratic owner rarely wrote about his voyages - this is hardly surprising as he was not the skipper. The relatively few books written about such voyages concerned the sights seen in the exotic lands of the Mediterranean or, further afield, the South Seas and Asia. Lady Brassey’s *A voyage in ‘The Sunbeam’: Our Home in the Ocean for Eleven Months* was a best seller. So, the book was not their medium. Rather, they preferred to memorialize their fine boats by means of oil paintings. This was part of a long tradition. The *Disdain*, James II’s son’s small yacht, is the first yacht we know much about, and it appears in an oil painting *The Embarkation of the Elector Palatine and Princess Elizabeth in the Prince Royal at Margate, 25 April 1613* by Adam Willaerts (1577-1664). Charles II lured the best painters from Holland – Van der Velde, father and son, for the large sum of £100 per annum each, and a studio in the Queen’s House, Greenwich. The more prestigious yacht clubs all had honorary artists. The first appointment was John Christian Schekty to the RYS in 1828. A number of them, like the Van der Veldes, were father and son. A very talented duo was the Plymothians, Nicholas Condry (1799-1857) and especially, his son Nicholas Matthews Condry.<sup>17</sup> The Royal Thames owns some of his best work, which shows their boats racing in the lower Thames. A visit to any senior yacht club will show this tradition in action – the walls will have oil paintings of members’

yachts and, usually, Royal yachts upon them. This helps underline the point that a member of the royal household holds an honorary post, as their predecessors did before them. The pictures also serve to create the desired impression of the ancient longevity and prestige of the yacht club.

In contrast, the Corinthians' preferred medium was the book. Corinthian yachting was buttressed and encouraged by a veritable library of exhortatory texts. How-to manuals abounded after 1880, all highlighting the key points of the approved ethos – amateur, preferably single-handed, able to helm the boat, and to undertake their own repairs. These highlighted the *differences* between the two forms of yachting - the title of their texts would invariably include the identifiers 'amateur' or 'Corinthian'; or emphasize the discomfort with 'open decked' e.g. *The Corinthian Yachtsman*, 1881, and *Amateur Sailing in Open and Half-Decked Boats*, 1886, both by Tyrell Biddle. The amateur status of the new breed of yachtsman is stressed twice in the title of George Davies' 1880 text *Practical Boat Sailing for Amateurs: containing particulars of the most suitable sailing boats and yachts for amateurs for their proper handling*; and E.F. Knight's *Sailing*, 1889 and *Small-Boat Sailing. An Explanation of the Management of Small Yachts, Half-Decked and Open Sailing-Boats of Various Rigs; Sailing on Sea and on River, Cruising, etc.* 1901, among others.

The importance of this self-definition is shown in the names of yacht clubs – the Corinthian, now the Royal Corinthian, founded in London in 1872; more locally, the Royal Plymouth Corinthian Yacht Club in 1877; the Torquay Corinthian Yacht Club, formed 1895, which amalgamated with the Royal Torquay in 1961; and the Teign Corinthian Yacht Club in 1883, the name it still keeps.<sup>18</sup>

Accounts of singlehanded cruises were published from the 1860s onwards.<sup>19</sup> Leading exemplars are McMullen, Knight, Middleton and especially the self-publicizing MacGregor.<sup>20</sup> These authors and their books remain iconic; they were all featured in the *Mariners Library*, published by Rupert Hart-Davis after the Second World War, the selection being made by Arthur Ransome. The prestige of the series was augmented by striking images on many of the covers, created by the marine artist, Winston Megoran. It is, therefore, a matter of some interest to what extent Ransome created the yachting canon. Obviously, he had his own preferences and he would have been constrained by such issues as copyright.

What is interesting in these texts is that they are usually little more than expanded logs and journals, so it must have been the novelty of these passages that made them of such great interest to the contemporary reader, combined with the use of lithographs which invariably show the boat being pitched around in rough seas going round some suitably perpendicular headland. This Romantic imagery obviously appealed to the dreamer in the reader; but there is a self-denying, almost self-flagellating quality, in the self-chosen tussle with the sea in which the sailor engages. A favourite Victorian word, pluck, does not adequately describe it because it conceals the strong ethical component. Thus, we can say that the Corinthian philosophy had elements of a religion about it, and an evangelical tone. These helped provide it with an emotional resonance and charge.

Already in these first accounts, the South Coast of the West Country was seen as a good cruising ground. McMullen's *Down Channel* in the form we know it today was published in 1893 and contains the original 1869 *Down Channel*, plus *Orion: How I came to Sail Alone in a 19-ton Yacht*, 1878 and *An Experimental Cruise Single-Handed in the Procyon*, 1880, as well as an account of his last yacht *Perseus*.<sup>21</sup> McMullen was the one of the early pioneers of Corinthian yachting, and as early as 1857, he, with a small crew, sailed down to Fowey and Falmouth. In 1861, he visited the Isles of Scilly, and again in 1868.

His wife accompanied him on most of these voyages, but she ‘like other visitors, who never added strength to the crew, though they were occasionally on board in very trying times, are not mentioned in this book’.<sup>22</sup> (At least she is acknowledged. Knight, watching the river traffic on the Thames at Greenwich, decided with a friend on a two-year voyage to Brazil. He does not mention his wife at all.)<sup>23</sup>

Middleton, in his circumnavigation of England – he went across Scotland through the Bowling (nowadays called the Forth and Clyde) canal – was unusual in going up the North Coast of Cornwall as far as Boscastle, before heading across the Bristol Channel to Lundy and Milford Haven. Frank Cowper took five years to complete his cathedral of late Victorian yachting – his five-volume pilot for yachtsmen. Until then they had had to use Admiralty pilots which were not so concerned with small harbours. Part II of his *Sailing Tours* covers Falmouth and the Isles of Scilly, Part IV the North Coast of Cornwall, where he advises that ‘The Bristol Channel is not, in my opinion, a suitable place where amateur sailors may practice cruising. The tides are too strong, the coast too exposed and the harbours of the poorest description, and few and far between’.<sup>24</sup> A view still held by many sailors today. (The five volumes are still in print and are useful additions to a boat’s library).

### The Golden Years, 1890 -1914

A remarkable cultural centrality of yachting in terms of its prestige, and artistic and literary creativeness was achieved in the period between 1890 and 1914. The Cowes Regatta, held the first week of every August, was one of the great occasions of the social calendar. Each meeting witnessed the congregating of kings and emperors watching as their great yachts, flying huge sails, competed against each other, all trying to out sail the Queen’s son’s *Britannia*, launched 1893. Cowes was only part of a series of major regattas demonstrating the ostentatious Edwardian splendour which continued up to the outbreak of the First World War. The very rich were racing their very large yachts in the regattas around the coast from the start of the season at Harwich round the coast to the Clyde, back for Cowes Week in August and then down to the West Country, finishing in Dartmouth in the first week of September. Regattas had been organized from the early part of the nineteenth century, but now these races received a much greater prominence due to the arrival of photography.

The professional classes were increasingly seeing yachting as a desirable pastime. Even the lower classes were attracted to the water, with a large numbers rowing and using skiffs on the Upper Thames.<sup>25</sup> Yachting was much more visible, and yachts were included, willy-nilly, in seascapes; but also deliberately, as this would increase their attractiveness to potential buyers. For example, in the pictures of Philip Wilson Steer (1860-1942) in the late 1880s, he painted around Walberswick beach, his paintings often including yachts in the background.<sup>26</sup> The memorialisation of yachts, as we have seen, can be dated from the seventeenth century Dutch/Flemish school, from which King Charles II hired the Van Der Veldes.<sup>27</sup> This memorializing tradition continued with the Aristocratic owners.<sup>28</sup> The depiction of yachting as an activity, rather than of yachts as expensive possessions, is first seen with any frequency in the work of the early Impressionists, namely Eugene Boudin and Claude Monet.<sup>29</sup>

The same movement towards the painting of yachting and regattas can be seen somewhat later in this country. This delay was because it was brought back by art students, like Stanhope Forbes, finishing their studies in Parisian ateliers. At this period, yachting and maritime painting were particularly closely intertwined. The two will usually go hand in hand, since both sailing and the acquisition of oil paintings require a goodly amount of disposable income. As early as 1827, Turner spent time on the Isle of Wight sketching for paintings of the RYS regatta.<sup>30</sup> John Brett (1831-1902) painted seascapes, which included

yachts around Cornwall and Wales, from the 1870's onwards.<sup>31</sup> Southwest Cornwall, after 1880, was a leading area for the development of art, with the Newlyn colony established around Stanhope Forbes and after the turn of the century, St Ives.<sup>32</sup>

The painters of the Newlyn colony had all studied or finished their studies in Paris so were well versed in recent trends. There were three major features. Both the Realist/Naturalist and the early Impressionists stressed the importance of being in touch with the landscape in which they were painting. Instead of painting in a studio, they painted *en plein air* (outside). Less affected by the Impressionists, the British artists were certainly affected by the ideas of the proponents of Realism and Naturalism, who, instead of painting the good and the great, painted the working class, usually poor people. As mentioned, yachting was a novel and visually attractive topic, as well as potentially saleable, so Stanhope Forbes painted *Regatta*, probably in the 1880s and the regatta is most likely at Penzance.<sup>33</sup> Henry Scott Tuke had lived in Newlyn before moving to Falmouth and remained loosely attached to the Newlyn painters. Tuke and Charles Hemy painted the shipping and sailing vessels of that port, including yachts. Both had boats which were floating studios. Their paintings are also exercises in recording the ending of commercial sail, and this would have been part of the attraction.<sup>34</sup>

All the yacht painters - Brett, Hemy, Tuke - were competent sailors, Tuke winning cups for races; and being featured in yachting magazines.<sup>35</sup> To these names we can add Julian Olsson, a seascape painter, and a founder member of the St Ives colony, who 'was a daring yachtsman, making deep-sea voyages'.<sup>36</sup> This gave them two distinct advantages: they had first-hand experience of the medium they were painting and they could paint from seaward, which gave them a far wider scope than an artist restricted to beach or cliff. In this respect, they differ from the Newlyn school; the bulk of whose canvasses were painted on or near the beach or harbour, facing out to sea. The same limitation affects British maritime writing. Compared to American classics, such as Dana's *Two Years before the Mast*, 1840, and Melville's *Moby Dick*, 1851, which are centred on a ship at sea, the British novel, even if with a maritime theme, is invariably shore-based and land-focussed. Characteristic of this is perhaps the most famous Victorian sea scene; the storm at Yarmouth, in which Steerforth and Little Emily are drowned, in David Copperfield.

By the late 1880's, another art form was coming to the fore, photography. Most of the iconic images of yachting are in this form – one thinks particularly of the pictures of the J class racing. The name most associated with this development is Beken of Cowes; but in fact, the Gibsons of Penzance and the Isles of Scilly pre-dated them.<sup>37</sup> John Gibson had a studio in the Promenade at Penzance around 1860. The Gibsons essentially took pictures for newspapers, 'events that will become history', so that if a yacht - its arrival or more likely, its wrecking - was newsworthy, the image was taken.<sup>38</sup> Since this meant their interest in yachting was secondary, their images of yachts have been rather overlooked.

It is worth noting that 'the early practitioner saw photography as a development of an existing art form.'<sup>39</sup> Another link between sailing and art was the expectation that the Edwardian yacht owner would illustrate his account with pencil or ink drawings, or they could be done by one his friends who had been crew. An interesting example is Guy de Maupassant's *Afloat*, 1889, an account of a voyage around the Mediterranean, with drawings by E. Riou.<sup>40</sup> A more local example is H.V. Willyams' *Down West: Extracts from the Log-Book of a Single-hander*, 1903, recounting voyages undertaken in the 1890's, with many pen and ink paintings by the author.<sup>41</sup> Note the Corinthian branding of 'single

hander' in the title, which is inaccurate, because as he bought larger yachts, he shipped a boy. Willyams' early accounts concern sailing from Falmouth and Fowey, with much praise for the beauties of the Helford, a beauty McMullen had already commented on. Willyams was a member of the (Royal) Cruising Club, formed by and around the very distinguished property lawyer, Arthur Underhill, in 1880.<sup>42</sup> One of its major achievements was to draw up charts suitable for yachts, as opposed to naval and merchant vessels; as Willyams ventured further afield, so he used these charts.

The period 1890 to 1914 was one both of great ostentatious wealth, but also of considerable political unrest. Yachting had a centrality as a metaphor for success and social standing that it perhaps only had previously held in London in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. It is, therefore, not surprising that it features not only in the paintings and photographs of the period, but also that it was during this period that the classic texts that we associate with sailing, such as *The Riddle of the Sands* by Erskine Childers, 1903, were written. We may include Ransome's later *Swallows and Amazons* series since Ransome was born in 1884 and only started writing his children's stories after a career in journalism in 1929 at the age of 45, so that his value systems relate to his growing up during this period. Incidentally, the two older Walker children in *Swallows and Amazons* were taught to sail dinghies in Carrick Roads by their father.

As with the yachting artists, all, except Jerome, were fine yachtsmen. Erskine Childers' *The Riddle of the Sands* was based on a voyage he had made to the Frisians himself. Ransome wrote up one log of his time sailing around what are now Latvia and Estonia; there appears to be no extant log of the second year's sailing.<sup>43</sup> Grahame, of course, had very strong links with Fowey, being married in St Finbarrus the parish church of Fowey in July, 1899, and would often go sailing with Quiller Couch (Q). Q was the Commodore of the Royal Fowey from 1911 to 1944, and professor of English Literature at Cambridge University. Fowey likes to imagine that *The Wind in the Willows'* Wild Wood is along the Lerryn - it is actually set along the Thames near Grahame's house at Pangbourne.<sup>44</sup>

### From Confidence to Regret, 1918 – 1945

The expansionist confidence based on the British Empire died in the fields of Flanders, never to return. Instead, we get accounts suffused with regret and uncertainty. Hilaire Belloc, who in *The Cruise of the Nona*, 1925, sailed through Cornish Waters, recommended a return to pre-Reformation Catholicism. The tone of loss is also strongly present in the last third of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, where, after the war and the death of Mrs Ramsay, Mr. Ramsay and two of his children do at last sail to the lighthouse. Woolf's father, Leslie Stephens, had bought the lease of Talland House, St Ives, in 1881 as the holiday home for his family.<sup>45</sup> 'The lighthouse' is clearly Godrevy. Woolf moves it to the Hebrides, perhaps because the Ramsays so closely mirror her own primary family that she wanted more creative space.<sup>46</sup> If Cornwall is the location of many of the outstanding Edwardian yachting pictures, it is also the location for texts concerned with the problematic position of women during the interwar years. *To the Lighthouse* can be seen as an analysis of the female position in society.

There was a long period of resistance before the First World War towards accepting women into yachting and yacht clubs. Sailing by women was feared for giving too much leeway for the dress and freedom of bodily movement required (and hence, being sexually arousing); and as a statement of equality or independence. Daphne du Maurier, once she started coming to Fowey with some regularity, learnt to sail and sail well.<sup>47</sup> *Rebecca* explores two types of subjugation. Firstly, and traditional, is the power of men over women, especially in the days before ease of divorce. Secondly, there is the power of

heterosexuality over same-sex orientation. To emphasize Rebecca's freedom from traditional values, she owns a yacht and, secondly, sails it by herself. It is thus appropriate that, when her husband murders her, her yacht becomes her coffin, to underline the cost that must be paid for her independence.

If *Rebecca* is now routinely taught on courses of feminist literature, it pales in some ways before the true life history of Peter Gerard, not a man, but a woman born Dulcie Kennard. She was called Peter by herself and those around her. Her autobiography up to 1962 is told in *Who Hath Desired the Sea*.<sup>48</sup> She started as a cub yachting reporter at the same time as Maurice Griffiths. They got married but unfortunately he wanted a standard feminine wife and she hated dresses. Even more outrageously, she did not want to be first mate on his yacht; she wanted her own. She wore a beret, her hair cropped, as did du Maurier. Echoes of *Rebecca*:

‘Everyone was angry with her when she cut her hair,’ she [Mrs Danvers] said, ‘but she did not care. “It’s nothing to do with anyone but myself,” she would say. And of course, short hair was much easier for riding and sailing,’  
...<sup>49</sup>

Griffiths tends to be seen as the epitome of the East Coast ditch crawler, but this is simplistic, since he seems quite unable to settle to one yacht, forever changing them. In his *Ten Small Yachts*, he describes owning eleven yachts in a period of thirteen years.<sup>50</sup> Griffiths found temporary solace with another lady. He and Peter divorced, and she met and married the well-respected artist Charles Pears (1873-1958) who worked as a commercial artist, for example creating posters for Southern Railways, but to such a high standard that his work features in exhibitions and art books. He, too, was a keen sailor, writing various descriptive pilot books, such as *South Coast Cruising*, much of which concerns sailing in Devon and Cornwall.<sup>51</sup> This was his cruising ground, and he had a boathouse in St Mawes.

Gerard was absolutely wedded to the sea. She ran what must have been one of the earliest sailing schools, and would meet Pears in his yacht at some anchorage, and then row over. Pears was twenty years older than her and died in 1958. She came ashore and was living in St Mawes:

When *Juanita* fell off her own legs and stove in her bilge Peter never recovered, according to local shipwright Jimmy Green.

“The boat was sold for a few pounds and I personally feel this hastened Mrs Pears’ end,” he said. “She was a very difficult person...”

“But after *Juanita* was sold she got dirty and scruffy. She didn’t care any more. She lived like a tramp over some old boatsheds. She started going down hill and wandered about crying all the time.”<sup>52</sup>

This resentment at unequal masculine power can be seen, a little later, in the figure of George (Georgina) in Enid Blyton’s denigrated *Famous Five*. Again, to illustrate her independence she is an excellent rower and sailor. Many of the twenty-one stories take place on or near Kirrin Island, which sounds rather like Kernow, and a North Cornish location, although it is usually ‘located’ in Dorset, with Corfe Castle moving itself onto the island. However, *Five Go Down to the Sea* is definitely set in Cornwall. We first meet George in *Five on a Treasure Island*.

‘I’m George,’ said the girl. ‘I shall only answer if you call me George. I hate being a girl. I won’t be. I don’t like doing the things that girls do. I like doing the things that boys do. I can climb better than any boy, and swim faster too. I can sail a boat as well as any fisher-boy on this coast. You’re to call me

George. Then I'll speak to you. But I shan't if you don't.

'Oh!' said Anne, thinking that her new cousin was most extraordinary.<sup>53</sup>

In 1925, the first Fastnet race had been sailed, starting at Ryde, Isle of Wight and finishing at Plymouth. The skippers, meeting at the Royal Western after the race, decided to form the Ocean Racing Club - now the Royal Ocean Racing Club.<sup>54</sup> Long-distance racing was initially criticized as too risky but now has a considerable following. The Falmouth-Azores and Back (the AZAB) for one or two-person crews has been run since 1957, and the Helford - L'Aberwrach race since 1959.

A feature of the Interwar years, and presumably relating to the years of economic depression, was One Design sailing, which aimed to limit costs and to prevent money buying success. Each boat in the fleet is supposedly identical, with the intention of making for a level playing field. Cornish One Designs include the St Mawes One-Design, built by Frank Peters from 1923 onwards;<sup>55</sup> the Sunbeams regular raced at Falmouth from the 1920's onwards;<sup>56</sup> the Fowey Troys, created because Sir Charles Hanson in 1928 wanted a suitable boat for his daughter to race, and the National Redwings, designed by Uffa Fox for the Looe Sailing Club just before the Second World War.<sup>57</sup>

### After the Second World War

After the Second World War, there were a number of long distance voyages that bordered between the courageous and the foolhardy and may have reflected survivor guilt. Humphrey Barton set off from Falmouth to New York in a 25 foot boat, *Vertue XXXV*.<sup>58</sup> Patrick Ellam and Colin Mudie set off in 1951 from the same port in a strengthened and slightly enlarged decked-in racing dinghy, *Sopranino*.<sup>59</sup> An outlier that must be mentioned is Peter Rose, who crossed the Atlantic in 1966 in a 23 foot boat. A man of the cloth, he secured a living at Feock on the Fal, 'where he could see his boat on her mooring from the pulpit'.<sup>60</sup> The second motif after the war was 'selling up and sailing off' which was a catch phrase during the Thatcher years. This started in a small way with the Hiscocks and the Smeatons. Eric Hiscock wrote many best-selling accounts and how-to books on long-distance sailing becoming the icon of the ocean sailor, both belonging to England but unable to live in it.<sup>61</sup> The third long-distance couple, with a less ambivalent relationship to their home, were Peter, the local G.P., and Anne Pye sailing out of Fowey in their 29 foot converted *Moonraker* on long distance voyages.<sup>62</sup> A third feature of the post-war years was the growth of dinghy sailing. Huge numbers of amateur-built dinghies, such as the Cadet and the Mirror, were produced, and clubs that specialized in racing these classes flourished.

Mention has been made in this paper on the regret *motif* between the wars. It is seen again in the international interest in the Tall Ships. These regularly use Falmouth. This desire to re-create the past is also seen in the fashion for Gaff-Rigged Sail, and by converting old luggers and fishing boats into yachts. Here, the numerous yards in Cornwall, most obviously around Penryn, which retain shipwright skills, have a clear role. The tradition is also continued by retro designs such as the Cornish Crabber in fibreglass made at Rock. An even older tradition was resurrected by James Wharram, who in the mid 1950s began designing Polynesian double hulled catamarans. His transatlantic crossing is described in *Two Girls, Two Catamarans* and he became a leading catamaran designer and advocate, working from Cornwall for the past decades.<sup>63</sup>

By the late 1960s, we 'had never had it so good' and surplus income started to become available, allowing the 1970s to become the third period of yachting moving towards greater cultural centrality. Edward Heath, leader of the opposition, won the tough Sydney-Hobart race in his second *Morning Cloud* in 1969. The Observer Singlehanded Transatlantic Race started in 1960 from

Millbay, Plymouth and at four yearly intervals thereafter, saw a rapid increase in the number of entrants.<sup>64</sup> Claire Francis was the first British woman sailor to take part – in the 1976 race.<sup>65</sup> The round-the-world navigations of Francis Chichester, 1966, and Alec Rose, 1967-68, generated huge publicity and their accounts, especially Chichester's *Gypsy Moth Circles the World*, were best sellers.<sup>66</sup> Both were knighted. Naomi James, out of Dartmouth, stopping only at Cape Town and the Falklands, achieved her circumnavigation in 1977-1978.<sup>67</sup>

Both Chichester and Rose had stopped twice in the Southern hemisphere. This meant that the last great unachieved goal was a *non-stop* circumnavigation. In 1968, the *Sunday Times* launched the Golden Globe competition - £5000 for the person to achieve this feat, and another £5000 to the fastest circumnavigation, the boats having left by October 31 to be in the Southern Ocean in the Southern Hemisphere summer. Falmouth is the obvious British port to use for such a venture, as it is the farthest West and avoids having to stay awake at the end of a long voyage to make your way up-Channel. Robin Knox-Johnston took this course, giving rise to the famous reply to the Customs officer's question on his return, as to port of departure - "Falmouth!"

These stirring feats aided a considerable expansion of yachting, as proven by the development of marinas - for example, the huge Brighton marina was built out into the sea, starting in 1971. In Cornwall, Padstow developed a marina behind the flood defence scheme, which slightly modified yachtsmen's views of the Bristol Channel, by providing a safe haven between Newlyn and Swansea. Two marinas were created in Falmouth and one at Mylor, thereby strengthening Falmouth's importance as a yachting centre; an image and a reality strengthened by the town's sponsorship of Tall Ship rallies, and the presence of the last commercial sailing fleet – the oyster dredger.

The last two events recorded here indicate the width of the sailing narrative, and the very different emotions it can generate. In May 1995, the *Maria Assumpta*, the world's oldest working sailing ship, built Barcelona 1858, went aground and broke up off Padstow. Three lives were lost, and the skipper, Mark Litchfield was charged with manslaughter, found guilty and jailed for 18 months. Forty years after Knox-Johnston, lighter materials and different attitudes saw Ellen MacArthur sail into Falmouth on February 8 2005 after breaking the non-stop circumnavigation record.

## The Future of the Narrative

This brief historical circumnavigation of Cornwall and the sailing narrative will hopefully have given some feeling both for Cornwall's contribution to yachting and of the use to which narrative analysis can be put, although the yachting narrative has been barely researched. What is noticeable is how little yachting is reported in the media, be it television, newspapers or magazines, excepting the specialist magazines. Yachting shares this neglect with other popular sports such as fishing. It is worth pointing out how popular sailing is. There are yacht clubs in Cornwall at Cargreen, Cawsands, Falmouth, Flushing, Fowey (2), Helford, Looe, Mylor, Padstow, Pentewan, Penzance, Porthpean, Restronguet, St. Germans, St. Ives, St. Mawes, Saltash, the Scillies and Torpoint - the list may not be complete. At least twenty clubs each with, probably in order to survive, a minimum of five hundred members.

There are paradoxes in the cultural position of yachting. The history of yachting is part of our maritime heritage. Despite the assumption that Britain is proud of its maritime heritage, this appears to be mainly lip service or a traditional cliché, whose reality people do not bother to analyse. The national museum dedicated to exhibiting its history was probably the last major national museum to open – the British Museum was created in 1753, National Gallery 1824, Scottish National Gallery 1850, South Kensington (Victoria and Albert) 1857, Natural History 1881, Tate 1897 and the National Maritime Museum

1937. The National Maritime Museum was, of course, not a new build, but used the empty Greenwich Naval Hospital site.<sup>68</sup> A further problem for the National Maritime Museum is that its most important collection is of Dutch seventeenth century maritime painters. Thus, its relationship to British patriotic identity is weakened, with only Turner among the greats. Geoff Quilly writes about the ‘almost devotional attachment to the sea with the distinctly depressive and resigned account of the sea as a subject in British art’.<sup>69</sup>

Focussing down on yachting, the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich might be expected to hold a comprehensive account of yachting, ‘a sport of kings’ since Elizabeth. In fact, it has little material- at least on display. Its small boat collection is now in the National Maritime Museum Cornwall, Falmouth. Besides Falmouth, the only other museum dedicated to yachts and dinghies is the Classic Boat Museum, Newport, Isle of Wight.

The neglect of matters nautical perhaps should not surprise us. With the loss of our merchant navy, and the severe diminution in the size of the Royal Navy, few people under sixty have any direct knowledge of the sea, or association with those who had. The sea is now little more than the medium in which car ferries take them quickly to the continent, or, if on a cruise boat, supports a floating hotel. Our dinghy sailors have, in recent years, done well at the Olympics, but such successes are not reported in any depth. One may look in vain in the papers for America Cup results. Only the never ending supply of interminable series of Napoleonic naval novels – Hornblower, Kent, Ramage, Aubrey, etc.. Thus, yachting is a marginal adjunct to an overtly important, but, in actuality, ignored and marginal part of our history. The yachting narrative cannot die because any group must have a narrative with which to make sense of its activities; but it can be deemed unworthy of serious study.

These, then, are some of the difficulties in developing a strong and well-researched narrative concerning yachting and its representations. Yachting has been a major pastime in this country since the latter part of the eighteenth century. Considering Cornwall, Fowey, and, especially, Falmouth have long been important yachting centres. Cornwall has a strong yacht-building tradition; it has many yacht clubs; it holds a key role in the development of maritime art, and still houses many of the best examples. Its many yacht clubs will each contain much valuable material. The only two book length Cornish yacht club histories known to the author are the out-of-date G.J.H. Mead *The History of the Royal Cornwall Yacht Club 1871 -1949* and Joan Coombs’ *A Fowey Jig-Saw: The History of the Royal Fowey Yacht Club*. There is a short history of the Helford River Sailing Club, *The First Fifty Years*, along with a few short booklets produced by other yacht clubs.

There is also a certain urgency, for the replacement of wood as the main building material by Glass Reinforced Plastic (GRP) in the nineteen-seventies means that many of the original shipwrights who built wooden yachts, and many of the sailors who cruised and raced them, are now getting on in years. A second, more recent watershed concerns those who sailed by compass, log and sextant, before the advent of Global Positioning Systems (GPS), that started coming into civilian use in the late nineteen-eighties. If no-one looks for or after them, the historical records of those pre-GRP, pre-GPS endeavours - the accounts, the letters, the contracts, the tools - will soon be lost; and if no-one is interested in taking down the accounts of the sailors who used them, and getting them published in one of the many forms now available, they will take their experiences to the grave, and we will be the poorer thereby.

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