

Chapter 3

Post War & Plywood

The 1946 club AGM was held at the Lamb Inn, Orford Place, Norwich in February and attended by fifteen members. The meeting was told that the club had lost Peter Beard (*Rosybill*), John Curl (*Decoy*), Dr. Stephen Falla, Ivan Green (*Smee*), Charles Hanbury Williams and John Wilson (*Sardine*), all of whom had died on active service. C.S. Robinson (*Scoulton Cob*) had been killed off Norway. John Curl had been lost flying over the North Sea and at the meeting his brother Henley announced that *Decoy* had been sold to John Abbott for £100 and it had been his brother's wish that the proceeds be donated to the Norfolk Punt Club. Mr.W.H.Scott presented the club with *Boy William*, their family launch in memory of his son Tom. It was to be another three years before *Boy William* hit the highlights of her own petrol ration.



John Abbott racing *Decoy* at Barton regatta in 1946. A rotating mast had been fitted to replace her pre-war 'birdcage' rigging.

photo: John Abbott

The open hull purchased in 1938 and club houseboat had both been taken over by the Admiralty and in common with a number of yachts, left moored on Barton Broad for the duration of the war to prevent an expected landing by German seaplanes. After five years of neglect they were in terrible condition. Barton had been closed for the duration but the authorities had been persuaded to permit sailing on Wroxham Broad. Most punt sailors not on active service lived in Norwich and for several years they had enjoyed more sailing per petrol coupon by racing with the Norfolk Broads Y.C.

There were two major hurdles to be overcome before the Norfolk Punt Club could make any attempt to continue as it had before the war. The club had only forty six members and even a club handbook was considered "out of the question" for the year. It was decided to ask the Norfolk Broads Y.C. to continue to put on races for Norfolk Punts in the first and last third of the season and to join with Horning Sailing Club and the East Anglian Cruising Club for racing at Thurne Mouth during the mid-part of the season. The club ran a full day during Wroxham Week and rented the club houseboat to other clubs at Thurne Mouth. In 1946, Capt. Wilson and Leslie Storey transferred their ownership of Barton Broad to the Norfolk Naturalists Trust and some members felt that by not organising racing at Barton, the club's right to do so might

lapse by default. Peter Cator approached Anthony Buxton of the Naturalists Trust, who agreed to allow the club to continue to sail on the Broad, free of mooring fees but in return hoped for a donation to their own funds.

The second problem facing a club dedicated to Norfolk Punts was the availability of punts. Prices quoted for new boats and the scarcity of seasoned timber after the war had made the old designs prohibitively expensive. The club needed something new to ensure the future of the class. Despite the problems, Eric Chamberlin managed to update his Norfolk Punt Club Song for the club dinner:

"Oh it's nice to sail a punt again after all these years;
We've had our share of misery, and blood and sweat and tears,
We've lost some gallant members, but they would not have us sad,
They paid for everything we love with everything they had.
Then here's to sailing Norfolk Punts with lots of joviality,
And happy days at Barton in the years that are to come,
And may the club continue to increase in popularity;
If we pull together folks we're sure to make things hum.

Chorus: So point her up and haul your wind, get ready for the gun,
But never set your spinnaker until you're on the run.
Though some may fish and some may shoot and others like to hunt,
The finest sport in all the world is sailing in a punt.

We've got some new flag officers, all tested, tried and true,
(That's apt alliteration, if you see it as I do.
And plagiarism is a sin we all commit at times,
But if you've had some sherry, you'll forgive the cockney rhymes.)
Ph! Dr. Tracey's commodore, a very gallant medic,
His lady listens patiently to all he has to say,
He's keen as mustard on the club, though given to punctilio,
His cheery personality will help us on our way.

Chorus.

Then Peter Cator's second flag - or better known as "Vice",
He has some startling attributes, his lady's rather nice,
He was a naval officer, patrolling around the Wash,
He kept his crew on tenterhooks by drinking lemon squash.
And next to him is a man of perspicacity,
Paul Andrews is rear commodore, he's last but never least,
His ideas are original and argued with tenacity,
We all congratulate him on his return from the East.

Chorus.

There's secretary Wedderburn, he's better known as John,
He was a gallant Major and a treat to look upon.
The Japs once thought they'd captured him and gave a winning shout,
But he put his thumb up to his nose and spread his fingers out.
Before I say good night, I must pay a little tribute to
Dear old Gerald Sturgess - He's sitting over there,

He ran the club for seven years with plenty else to do,
A very handsome copper with his nose up in the air."

Chorus.

By 1947, the number of punts racing had dropped to about a dozen. In his apparently relentless pursuit of owning a faster punt than *Swallow II*, Basil Tracey ordered *Martin* from Martham, to be built to Herbert Woods design. His son, Peter Tracey advises that Basil never considered the boat a success. Gerald Sturgess had become the country's leading authority on yacht racing rules and later that year was elected to the RYA Council, becoming chairman of the RYA Protest Committee.

The Norfolk Punt Club was still in a highly marginal state. Gerald Sturgess served as commodore of the Norfolk Punt Club in 1945/6 and again in 1949/50. He was in favour of the club moving permanently to Wroxham Broad but other members were not so happy about the prospect. As if to compound the connection, he also served as commodore of the Norfolk Broads Yacht Club in 1948.



Gerald Sambrooke Sturgess.

photo: Yachting World



far left
Basil Tracey sailing a reefed *Martin* on Wroxham Broad in about 1950.

photo: Peter Tracey

left
Paul Bown racing *Martin* at Wroxham 55 years later. Paul rebuilt her in 2005.

photo: Author



The Broads Regatta season continued as if nothing had happened. This crowded start includes four Great Yarmouth One Designs setting their 'pothunter' rigs. In pole position is the old rater *Vixen*. The dismasted punt in their midst probably reflects the crowded conditions.

photo: courtesy Derek Gibbs

Whilst Stewart Morris' connections with Norfolk Punts had become more distant since his father's death, the club revelled in reflected glory when he became the second club member to win an Olympic Gold medal in the Swallow class at Torbay in 1948. Whilst he had beaten the world in the Swallows, the International 14 remained Stewart Morris' first love. He competed in thirty four Prince of Wales Cup races, winning on twelve occasions and finishing in the first six in twenty four of them. A record unlikely to be beaten by today's sailors.



Stewart Morris sailing the Swallow *Swift* in 1948.

photo: Beken

1948 found Robert Bond, fresh from the Torbay Olympic trials in his Star *Miranda*, once again at the helm of Herbert Woods *Limelight* for Wroxham Week. It was her first outing since the war. Despite a more modern, single spreader rig and modifications to her bow to "improve her grip" she still struggled to beat *Swallow II*. The one design hulls with their reduced beam could have it their own way in light weather but were unable to hold *Swallow II* in a blow.

Limelight sporting her new bow.

photo: Jennifer Woods





Barton Regatta 1948.

This photograph was taken by Philip Roberts who won the Blakes Holidays photographic competition in 1948. Mr. Roberts was employed "in a well known North London camera shop."

photo reproduced by courtesy of Jane de Quincey and Blakes Holiday Boating

Thanks to the enthusiasm of Herbert Woods and through his good offices, use of the Norfolk & Suffolk Yacht Owners Association weed-cutter, Barton Broad received some much needed maintenance in 1949. At that year's Annual General Meeting, held at White's Restaurant in Norwich, there was further debate about how to rejuvenate the club. The Norfolk Punt Club and the Norfolk Punt class had been eponymous but the meeting decided to open the Club to non Punt owners. In future, only one flag officer and four committee members had to be punt owners. This decision recognised the weakness of a single class club and was designed to attract 'ordinary' yachtsmen to Barton. The move had little immediate impact but the foundations for the club's success today had been laid. Confidence was still lacking and the same meeting also debated amalgamation with the newly formed Hickling Broad Sailing Club, returning to Wroxham Broad and a possible amalgamation with the East Anglian Cruising Club at Thurne.

Eric Chamberlin once again did his best to amuse his fellow punt sailors at the club dinner. His songs provide an interesting historical perspective on what was considered significant. By 1950, he had graduated to the tune of 'Much Binding in the Marsh':

"At Much Barton on the Turf,
 The Norfolk Punt Club's quite an institution.
 At Much Barton on the Turf -
 They say we're getting near to destitution.
 They say there is no welcome there for people who are new
 - our critics I won't mention, as there's only just a few -
 they say we have our sails up but we haven't got a clue!
 At Much Barton on the Turf.

At Much Barton on the Turf,

the houseboat is our scene of congregation,
At Much Barton on the Turf
We think it quite good accommodation.
It gets a wee bit crowded when it's time to have a pee -
it's best to take your tea outside or on the upper deck -
Inside there's quite a chance you'll get a cupful down your neck!
At Much Barton on the Turf.

At Much Barton on the Turf
Our commodore is Mr. Peter Standley,
- an upright figure, bold and fine and manly.
At after dinner speeches he is nothing less than great,
He drives his car and *Rushlight* too at a tremendous rate;
He's such a damn fine skipper but he really needs a mate.
At Much Barton on the Turf.

At Much Barton on the Turf,
This year has seen some breaking with tradition,
At Much Barton on the Turf,
Though for this sin there's maybe some remission,
The vice - com* is the man to blame. I'll say it to his face -
He broke his old established custom - oh what a disgrace!
- For *Merry Spinner* actually finished in a race!
At Much Barton on the Turf.

*
John Abbott very kindly supplied this 1950 rendition and with it all manner of explanatory notes. The "vice - com" at the time was C.R.Pollit - who John described as "a most likeable gent."

At Much Barton on the Turf,
Occasionally we have a few capsizes,
At Much Barton on the Turf,
For this we really don't know who the prize is,+
The Colonel, now rear commodore has drilled us really fine,
What we do now, we do together, smartly, all in time -
We don't turn over one by one - we do it all in line!
At Much Barton on the Turf.

+ *Basil Tracey, of course.*

At Much Barton on the Turf,
A famous cup was won by Doctor Basil,
At Much Barton on the Turf,
With *Gently** he got into quite a frazzle,
Out there in front he showed us that *Martin* was no dud,
And when that fellow *Clabburn* nearly put him on the mud,
We heard him calling: "Water!" but he really wanted blood!
At Much Barton on the Turf.

* *Gently was Jimmy Clabburn's Star.*

At Much Barton on the Turf,
We have a man who ought to be in Heaven,
At Much Barton on the Turf,
He's sailed in punts since 1927+;
Regatta day and *Swallow* got behind the blooming lot -
Her skipper, strange to say had got himself into a spot -
But he pulled up his nylon++ - and just walked off with the pot.
At Much Barton on the Turf.

+ *Facts were sacrificed to rhyme. GSS was a founder member in 1926.*

At Much Barton on the Turf,
Though some may say that Punts have had their day, Sir,
At Much Barton on the Turf,
They'll see us out in strength again in May, Sir;

While some may fish and some may shoot and others like to hunt,
And some just sit and contemplate and grow a great big front,
The finest sport in all the world is sailing in a punt!
At Much Barton on the Turf.

*++ Swallow II was the only
punt setting a spinnaker at
the time.*





Aerial photograph of the Norfolk Punt Club pontoons at Barton.

photo: Peter Tracey



Another aerial shot of Barton Broad taken when there was still room to walk a dog on the island.

photo: Peter Tracey



Head Keeper Ted Piggins is 'shoving' a sickly King George VI back to Whiteslea after the 1951 Hickling coot shoot. King George was an elegant shot and a regular visitor to Hickling. Few people notice the King is sitting in a carvel sailing punt.

*photo: Back to the Broads,
David Holmes*

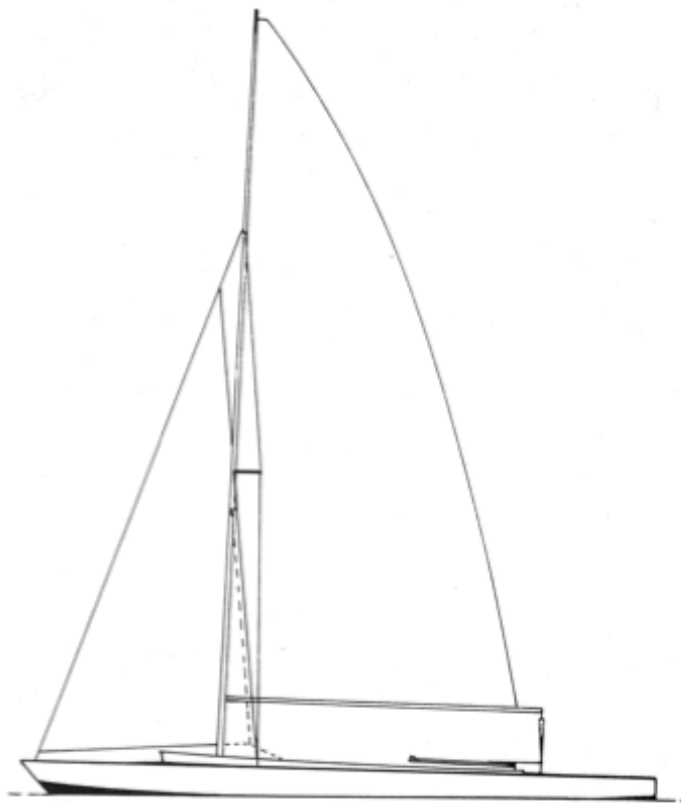
Members generally favoured the adoption of *Swallow II* as a one design hull but Herbert Woods' quotation of £300 for building a similar punt was felt too expensive. 'Percy' Percival offered £256 for building a similar punt to *Decoy*, with a reduction for an order for three boats. The club also agreed to approach Wyche and Coppock of Nottingham to enquire about construction of new punts. During the year, Gerald Sambrooke Sturgess talked with Dick Wyche, who had seen no detailed plans but indicated he could probably build an order for three at £250 each. Wyche & Coppock had developed the Graduate dinghy for 'Light Craft' magazine and Dick mentioned, almost in passing that he thought a plywood, hardchine punt would come out cheaper still. Plywood had been produced throughout the war for use in aircraft construction and was much more readily available than seasoned timber.

Jack Holt had designed a successful plywood International Canoe and was invited to Wroxham Broad in the autumn of 1951 to sail three of the faster punts. Jack arrived trailing a Hornet, with a crew in the passenger seat and clearly intent on making a sales pitch. They rigged the Hornet and planed off in an impressive volume of spray but were surprised when the punts sailed past to windward and leeward, on every point of sail. A copy of the class rules duly returned to Putney and a half model of a plywood, hardchine punt was produced with a quote for £275 for a single boat and £250 per boat, if three were ordered together. The class still thought prices too high and returned to Dick Wyche. Gerald Sturgess prevailed on Herbert Woods to let him have sight of the drawings for *Swallow II*.



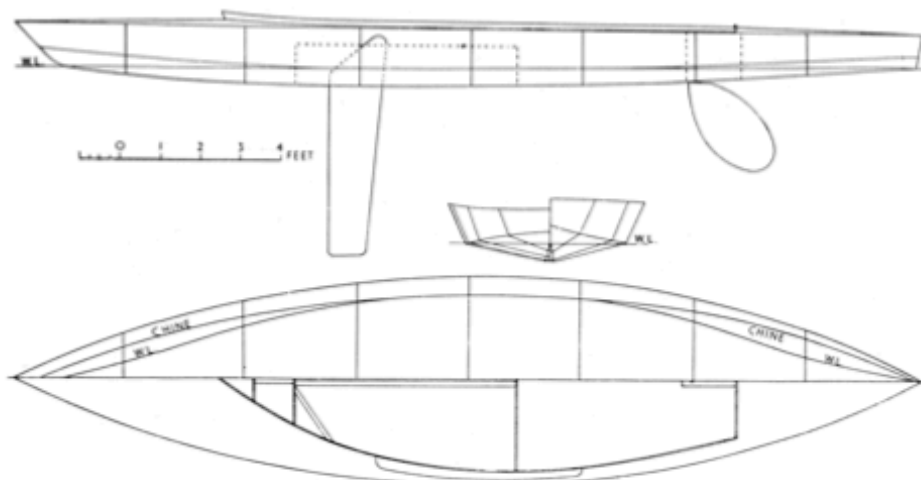
Dick Wyche.

photo: Mary Wyche



Members were invited to subscribe two hundred and forty shares of £1 each and a new, hardchine plywood punt was built, based on *Swallow II* but with a little more rocker and rise of floor, to accommodate flat panels and straight chines. Best of all, the new design had a bow profile just like a proper gun punt. The price was to be £190 plus £35 for sails. The class desperately needed a shot in the arm, only one new Norfolk Punt had been built in fourteen years. *Scoter*, the new punt was to be put up for sale at the end of her first season.

The plywood Norfolk Punt performed well. She was 100lbs lighter than *Swallow II* and faster in light weather. Dick Wyche's friends at Light Craft magazine ran this review of the new boat. *Scoter* used a set of *Martin's* sails for her sailing trials.



A NEW NORFOLK PUNT

**This unique new racing punt
gives high performance at a
low price—may save the class**

REPORT

BY

C. L. NELSON

ONE is apt to think that these are the days of really high-speed sailing boats and the craft sailed by father and grandfather were as whiskery as the owners. Such an opinion could not be leakier and a case in point is the famous racing punt of the Norfolk Broads. This remarkable craft was based on the fenman's gun punt and was developed on the Broads into an out-and-out racing class, the typical boat being a 22-footer of low freeboard, flattish floors, narrow beam, pointed ends and a high narrow sail plan of no less than 176 square feet.

The Norfolk Punt Club with a roving H.Q. consisting of a houseboat, used to stage regular meetings before the war and the craft were famous for their terrific speed. Since the war





This hard chine Norfolk Punt costs little more than half as much as the original design. (Photo: Edward Eves).

however, the cost of building one of these flyers in the traditional manner (clinker above the water, carvel below) has soared to such a height—about £350—that only one of them has been built and the class is threatened with extinction.

Recently the Club was offered a cheaper, modern type of racing craft but the demonstration boat was lapped by one or two of the old-timers and the Club cast around for a builder who would re-design the racing punt and cut down building costs. Dick Wyche of Nottingham was approached and he re-designed the punt using hard chine plywood construction and quoting for a 20 foot, water line boat at £190 less sails. The Club was interested and ordered him to build a prototype—but making one firm stipulation—he was on no account to reduce the sail area.

The other day we had the hair-raising pleasure of attending the new Norfolk Punt's sailing trials. When the prototype was carried down to the rolling waters of the Trent, it resembled nothing so much as a giant

cigar made of wood and split open like a kippered herring to display a central wooden backbone running the whole length of the well. The mast stepping and shroud plates were triangulated by thwarted struts and the tip of the mast appeared to be tickling the clouds.

We climbed aboard, noting the remarkable stability donated by the hard chines, and took a seat on a raised bench overhanging the gunwale while the Bermuda sails were run up and the boat was held carefully head to wind. Dick Wyche took the helm and we got a firm grip on the jib sheet. Then with a cautious push of the bow we left the pontoon and were off.

In the strong puffy breeze the boat dithered a moment and then dived for the lee bank like a hungry crocodile. With a thunder of flapping mainsail we put her about and roared across the river again. As I flattened out over the water with the jib sheet, I could see the sharp bow lifting nicely on its chine and could hear the water slashing past under the lee gunwale.

Two or three of these tremendous tacks and we bore away at ferocious speed to run upstream. This gave us a chance to catch our breath and the boat ran very steadily with the kicking strap controlling the huge sail and damping all tendency to roll. We felt the boat surge forward immediately in the puffs and there was an intriguing ridge or feather of water streaming from the pointed stern.

Once more we put her on the wind and had another five minutes of the wildest excitement it has ever been my lot to experience in a sailing boat and then we stepped ashore for a breather.

Dick Wyche stroked his pointed chin thoughtfully, looked at me and said, "Do you know? I think that boat is capable of 18 knots!" I don't disbelieve him, and one of the reasons for thinking so is that the weight of the new plywood hull is only 200lb.



**Justin Scott standing
beside *Scoter*.**

photo: Celia Scott

In 1953, Justin Scott's offer to buy *Scoter* for £200 was accepted.



The same year members built a new pontoon, fitted a starters box and equipped it with a modern galley. Henley Curl agreed that his brother's legacy could be used for the purpose and the pontoon was duly named *John Curl*. For the 1954 season, the club had a quarters for a race officer and catering facilities but no changing or toilet facilities. A raft was constructed on paint drums with a structure on top (alright; a shed) the £135 cost was nearly covered by member donations and the new raft was named *Kon Tiki*, after Thor Heyerdahl's exploits in the Pacific on a papyrus raft of the same name.

Another new punt was added to the fleet in 1954. *Martin* had failed to beat *Swallow II* and Basil and Kitty Tracey ordered a new plywood punt from Wyche & Coppock. Their third punt was to be called *Melanitta*.

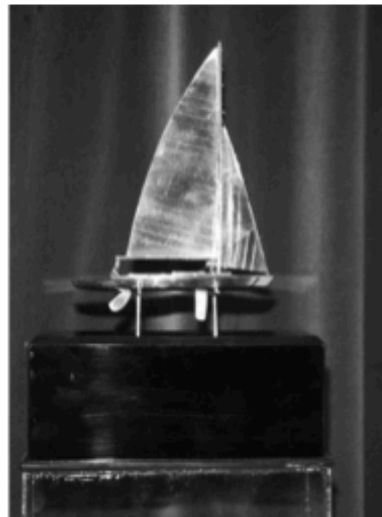
right

Basil Tracey in what was to become typical pose sailing *Melanitta*.

photo: Peter Tracey

Andrew Anderson later commissioned this silver model of *Melanitta* from Peter Tillett.

photographed by courtesy of Andrew and Mrs. Jo. Anderson



In 1956, the club were again represented at the Olympic Games when Tim Whelpton attended as reserve for Star Class in Melbourne. Tim had won the Star class Olympic selection trials but as he'd skippered a yacht in the Mediterranean, there were doubts over his amateur status and Bruce Banks sailed in his place. Tim and his sister Evadne both owned Punts and their father E.P. Whelpton had owned *Pintail* for a couple of years after the war. In 1948 the family purchased *Curlew*, one of the one design punts. At the same time Tim's brother-in-law John Eastwood, part owned *Kipper*, another one design punt with his sister Eileen.



Tim Whelpton at the helm of *Honey Lam* leading *Starkasten*.

photo: Beken

That year, commodore, Peter Standley was able to advise members of a remarkable turn around in the club's finances over the last five years - from a state of near bankruptcy to a position where reserves were being built up to replace the club's pontoons. Sailing clubs are either run for their members or by them and the club's change in fortune was very largely down to Dr Basil Tracey's efforts in maintaining the existing pontoons.



Swallow II

Gerald Sambrooke Sturgess crewed by Mike Stannard.

photo: Judy Macdonald (nee Sturgess) and Peter Sturgess

In 1956, the club purchased the moulds for the plywood punt from Wyche & Coppock for £20.00. Landamores of Wroxham built *Snark* for two farmers *Snow, Arnold* and their kids. The following year, Tom Harmer, then rear commodore, set about the immaculate construction of *Flamer* (later *Greylag*) with Norwich solicitor, Keith Flatman. Wyche and Coppock had only built two Norfolk Punts and Dick Wyche might have been surprised to learn the number of hulls that had been built to his design over fifty years.

It's difficult to imagine today the confusion that existed when individual clubs had their own racing rules - particularly in view of the significant common membership. Up to 1924, Horning Town Sailing Club had insisted that yachts with an overlap could not be luffed. As late as 1947, attempts to coordinate international racing rules foundered on vested interests and impatience when the Americans, not then members of the International Yacht Racing Union, introduced their own new rules. For the next ten years there were two conflicting rule books for international competition. Gerald Sambrooke Sturgess was by then an internationally acclaimed authority on yacht racing rules and pivotal in establishing the new international rules. Peter Scott was elected President of the International Yacht Racing Union in 1956 and said of Gerald: "I had often sailed against him in the old days on the Norfolk Broads. He has made himself the greatest expert on the wording and case law of both sets of rules." In 1957, the International Yacht Racing Union was able to establish the first, single set of International Racing Rules.

On one of his return visits to the Broads in 1958, Stewart Morris was invited to sail *Melanitta* and commented of the plywood punt: "Not only outstandingly fast but most sensitive with the feel of a thoroughbred. Yes indeed!" High praise from the maestro.

In the meantime, the Norfolk Punt Club was beginning to prosper again and members felt sufficiently confident to raise subscriptions to £1. This was a period when racing Norfolk Punts was the sport of husbands and wives and whilst 'Terylene' sails were permitted in 1959, trapezes remained prohibited. Leslie Landamore of Wroxham built a batch of six wooden, replacement punt masts and Dr. Basil Tracey in "The Dinghy Yearbook" claimed the new spars were "based on Star class practice, as used by Lipincott in the US." He went on to elaborate: "Diamonds have been abandoned, breakages having been due to compression and the failure of one spreader. Of the 26ft of mast, 10ft is from the deck stepping to the crosstrees and the lower shrouds, 8ft more to the hounds and the top 8ft is unsupported. The width of the crosstrees is designed so the lower and upper shrouds are parallel, and have a large outward component for their downward compression on the mast. It is found that provided the lower shrouds are sufficiently taught, the mast takes an admirable controlled amount of bend. Throughout the season the masts have proved most reliable. The shrouds are placed two inches behind the mast step and the section of mast is 3 1/2" by 2 1/2"." He went on to remark that 176 square feet of sail was a lot to carry on a simply rigged mast.



In 1960 the Royal Geographic Society published a report written by Lambert, Jennings, Smith, Green and Hutchinson which turned conventional wisdom about the origin of the Broads on its head. Dr. Joyce Lambert had turned over two thousand test bores by hand and come to the conclusion that the Broads were flooded mediaeval peat diggings. The Victorians had believed the Broads were just peaty lagoons left by a retreating sea and scant thought had ever been given that the Broads may have been man made. Place names such as Barton Turf might have provided a clue and there had been a suggestion as early as 1834 from Samuel Woodward that Barton Broad "said to have been called the Deep Fen in the time of Edward III and may have become waters by the continued cutting of turf out of it..." Nevertheless, the conclusions drawn by Joyce Lambert and her team that the Broads were a man made landscape astonished her contemporaries.

There is little natural stone in this corner of East Anglia and wood had to be saved for building. Turf was cut, dried and burnt as a readily available fuel. Barton Broad had been dredged in 1949, when a large amount of reed swamp was removed from the east banks and the surrounding reed beds later became some of the worst affected by coypu. The FRGS team used an old aerial photograph of Barton Broad taken before the 1949 dredging to illustrate how the peat was cut:



*photo: Aerofilms of
Boreham Wood*

To prevent flooding, turf was dug in sections leaving a solid wall of peat separating individual strips. Lines of demarcation, in this case the the Barton-Irstead boundary were left as wider baulks of undug peat which remain today as the island. These shallow 'peninsulas' grew vegetation more quickly and can be seen today on many Broads. This photograph clearly shows these 'peninsulas' and the different alignment of the Barton and Irstead parishes diggings. 'Clever' Catfield villagers had a public staithe and rights to dig turf on what became both Hickling and Barton Broads. Their Barton staithe enabled them to avoid paying tolls at Potter Heigham bridge!

The manor of Bartonbury Hall at Barton Turf had included three valuable fisheries in 1572. One was the river between Stalham and Barton and it seems that Barton Broad ("an area below Barton town") was divided into areas of fishing. Simon Tobyas is recorded as having three acres of fishing and two other areas were known as Buryalwater and Seyveswater and presumably corresponded to areas that were originally peat diggings. Both were rented out at eight shillings a year as early as 1415/1435, so Barton Broad must have been largely in existence by that date. These fifteenth century records also describe what we now know as Limekiln dyke up to Neatishead as a fishery called Burwodeswer. Most peat was excavated some distance away from the rivers to prevent flooding - which is why so many broads are found in side valleys and often connected to the main river by a short dyke. During the years of peat excavation this also applied to Barton Broad. The River Ant was diverted to flow through the flooded peat diggings, possibly to increase their value as a fishery. The original course of the Ant can be found to the east of the Broad and survives in part as a ditch marking the Barton - Catfield parish boundary.

The River Ant has undergone more alterations to its course than any river in the Broads system. Further downstream, there is evidence that a cut was dug across the causeway from St. Benets to St. John's hospital to create Ant Mouth. The lower Ant had previously skirted St. Benets along the Hundred dyke and flowed into the river Thurne. The Thurne then flowed in the opposite direction and emptied into the sea along Sock Drain. Travelling upstream on the Thurne towards West Somerton, Sock Drain is a straight dyke that leaves the main river at Dungeon Corner, beside Martham Broad. Where the Thurne flowed into the sea has become the weakest point in our sea defences. The current possibility of a permanent breach raises the rather alarming possibility that the River Thurne, if left to its own devices, may once again reverse its direction and flow directly into the sea.





**Gerald Sambrooke
Sturgess with *Swallow II*
at Cox's yard at Barton
Turf shortly before he
sold her.**

*photo:
courtesy Mike Evans*



**Billy de Quincey in *Wild
Duck*.**

photo: Jane de Quincey

After *Flamer*, there was a period of five years when no new punts were built until Eastwood Whelpton at Upton produced *Harnser* for John Plaice in 1961. *Wild Duck*, *Wild Goose* and *Tern* followed in swift succession. *Wild Duck* was originally owned by Billy de Quincey and partners, although he became sole owner within a couple of years. *Wild Goose* was another Tracey family punt and Angwin Eddy had *Tern*. His sons Peter and David, having cut their teeth in the Scorpion class, campaigned *Tern* very successfully for a number of years.

Wild Goose under construction at Upton.

photo: Peter Tracey



It would be foolish to try and describe Basil Tracey as anything other than eccentric. He was a kind man with wild, wind blown hair who possessed a fine voice, which he exercised at every opportunity.

Andrew Anderson recalled: "Basil's attitude to his fellow competitors, when it looked likely that a change in *Wild Goose's* direction was immediately necessary was based on Darwin's Theory of the survival of the fittest, or in his case, the Loudest. ie. If you generate enough nautical abuse you are bound to escape the looming carnage." His running commentary could be heard all round the course.

The good doctor had an inimitable sun hat and a massive pair of khaki shorts; whilst Kitty crewed the family punt wearing a tweed skirt. The pair kept a fearless wire haired terrier called Ginger and their motor cruiser *Elizabeth* served as tug and mother hen to most of the Norfolk Punt fleet. She towed the fleet to Hickling and Wroxham every year and most found welcome and a cup of tea on board and possibly a tow out to the Broad. At either end of the season, *Elizabeth* would tow *Melanitta* or *Wild Goose* to and from Clifford Allen's yard at Coltishall.





Tim Whelpton and Basil Tracey debate the finer points of a Proctor gooseneck before the launch of *Wild Goose*.

photo: Peter Tracey



left

***Wild Goose* being launched on a freezing day by Kitty Tracey.**



right

Everyone was invited for a sail in the new punt as soon as she was launched.

photos: Peter Tracey

After the euphoria of a generation of new punts, mother nature had been to work on the club pontoons and the original structures due for replacement. Members working parties were organised under the careful eye of co-ordinator Tom Harmer.



**Building a new pontoon.
Standing at the rear are
Angwin Eddy and Tom
Harmer.**

photo: Peter Tracey



**Mooring the new WC and
changing facility.
Dr. Frank Tubbs is holding
the post upright.
Greshams School Sailing
Club was affiliated with
the Norfolk Punt Club and
contributed half the cost of
the 'shed.'**

photo: Peter Tracey



June 12th 1965. Four NPC
commodores raced
Swealtsje in the Three
Rivers Race.
left to right: Edward C.
Pollit, Reggie Wylie, Roger
Pollit, Justin Scott.

photo: Celia Scott

With a rush of new, lightweight and much more easily trailable punts, the class became significantly more adventurous. Several owners had friends and relations who sailed at Aldeburgh in Suffolk and the sheltered waters of the Alde suited Norfolk Punts well. Aldeburgh became a regular visit.



far left
Kingfisher at Aldeburgh.

left
Tom Carter.

photos: Tom Clarke



David Adler at Aldeburgh.

photo: Tom Clarke

'One of a Kind' boat-for-boat trials were very popular and the Norfolk Punt gained a Portsmouth Yardstick of 98 - establishing the plywood punts as the fastest single hulled class in the UK. This new found status began to attract attention from further afield. Jack Chippendale recalled fitting twin sliding seats to a Norfolk Punt to take part in a cross Channel race. One of Chippendale's directors, Mike Pruett was determined to take part and sailed as a three man crew with John Oakley and Cliff Norbury.

Wroxham Week 1968

There were fewer River Cruisers competing in Wroxham Week during the 1960s and the punts class shared the water for their lunchtime race.

Tom Harmer had very kindly lent *Kingfisher* to the Author for the week. A capsize around a gybe mark in close company with a cruiser ended in one of the more embarrassing moments in an extended yachting career.

photo: Authors collection



Gerald Sambrooke Sturgess and Peter Scott chatting before the International Yacht Racing Union AGM in 1968.

*photo:
Judy Macdonald (nee
Sturgess) and Peter Sturgess*





Mike Evans leads away from the start of a Norfolk Punt race in *Rushlight* during Wroxham Week 1970.

photo: Eastern Daily Press

The mid 1970s saw a modest revival of Norfolk punt building, although the new boats were all amateur built. Even in plywood, the cost of a professionally built boat was rising swiftly. Derek Gibbs comes from a long line of Broadsmen. His grandfather, Charlie Gibbs had been responsible for keeping Surlingham Broad open to the public after a disagreement with a local landowner. The dispute was aided by a punt gun and settled over a bottle of scotch. In 1975, Derek built himself *Shoveller*.



Derek Gibbs in *Shoveller*, crewed by Robin Myhill.

photo: Derek Gibbs



The pair enjoyed some success and won the Cock of the Broads in 1977. This trophy was awarded to the fastest boat at Thurne Mouth Open Regatta. It is now a River Cruiser trophy.

photos: Derek Gibbs

Angwin Eddy crewed by son David in *Tern*, winning the local boats handicap race at Barton regatta in 1970.

photo: Jane de Quincey



David Adler, crewed by David Eddy in *Greylag*.

photo: courtesy Jane de Quincey





left

**Basil Tracey crewed by
Tony Faulkner in *Wild
Goose*.**

below

Hickling Regatta 1976.

*photos: courtesy Jane de
Quincey*



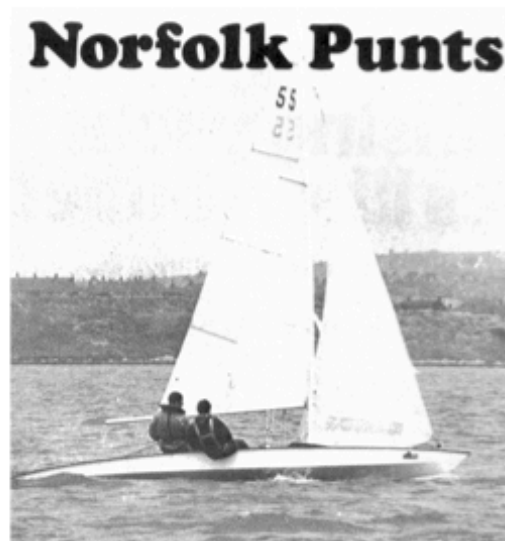
In 1976, The Norfolk Punt Club celebrated its Golden Jubilee and saw the formation of the Fibreglass Norfolk Punts Fund Association. Club commodore, David Adler chaired the association, with co-trustees Tom Harmer and Justin Scott. Their object was to fund development of a new mould to build fibreglass Norfolk Punts. It was estimated that £2,500 would be required to make a mould and a prototype and a formal contract was drawn up between the association and builder, Colin McDougall. Derek Gibbs bravely volunteered *Shoveller* to be used as a plug. She escaped largely undamaged and after some realignment of the deck profile, the plug was ready.

The new association had certainly set itself a challenge and at times the project must have seemed fraught with difficulty. The moulders went into voluntary liquidation and when the first hull was produced and launched on 23rd July 1977, it weighed around a hundred pounds over the maximum weight specified. Her rudder broke twice in quick succession and Colin McDougall agreed to produce a second prototype to be delivered by August 19th, in time for the 1977 Norfolk Punt Championships and named appropriately *Golden Jubilee*.



***Golden Jubilee's* first sail. Derek Gibbs had rigged her and is trapezing whilst David Adler helms.**

A group of keen punt sailors took *Golden Jubilee* to the John Player sponsored World Sailing Speed Record Week at Portland, held during the first week in October 1977. In less than ideal conditions *Golden Jubilee* achieved 13.8 knots. Wind speed at the time was recorded at 30 knots! At the same event, Sir Timothy Colman broke the world sailing speed record in *Crossbow*, with Tim Whelpton as part of his crew. Norfolk Punts received more publicity during this period than ever before or since.



This is the photograph of *Golden Jubilee* at the 1977 World Sailing speed Record Week that was submitted to caption Julia Carter's article in *Yachts and Yachting*. David Adler is at the helm with Colin McDougall.

Julia Carter won the class a two page spread on Norfolk Punts in Yachts and Yachting. *Golden Jubilee* was taken to the London Dinghy Exhibition. Hugh Wylam and David Blackburne sailed her in the Burnham Icicle and she was taken as far away as Rutland, Queen Mary reservoir at Staines, Brancaster, Conniston, Aldeburgh

The class rules required alteration to permit glass fibre construction but on her return from Portland, Jack Chippendale measured *Golden Jubilee* and reported that she had insufficient rocker. Despite considerable publicity, orders for new boats were slow to materialise and an out-of-control sailing cruiser inflicted some serious damage to *Golden Jubilee's* deck at Thurne Mouth. It was decided to repair the deck and sell the boat. Orders started to trickle and Colin McDougall produced *Swallowtail*, *Marsh Harrier* and *Grebe*. The boats weren't without teething problems which, whilst they will have been expensive to the builder, formed an essential part of a learning curve. The flat surfaces and sharp corners that Dick Wyche had drawn nearly a quarter of a century earlier, were just right for plywood but all of the ply classes designed in the fifties and sixties, struggled with transition to glassfibre construction. Their flat surfaces flexed and sharp edges chipped and broke away easily. Maintaining panel stiffness often proved more expensive than moulding a round shape - and the plywood Norfolk Punt had larger flat areas and sharper corners than most. Flexible panels also gave considerable problems maintaining the seal of built-in buoyancy tanks to the hull.



The fleet continued to travel. *Avocet* on Lake Conniston in 1978.

photo: Celia Scott

In 1979 it was *Swallowtail's* turn for an epic voyage. Colin and Duncan McDougall sailed her from Ranworth dam to Brancaster. They managed to get a tow down the Bure on Saturday, on Sunday night pulled her up the beach at Sheringham and arrived at Brancaster on Monday. The trip was made in generally light weather but was not without incident. A main shroud became detached from its spreader off the North Norfolk coast and a member of the public summoned the Police in Great Yarmouth when they saw an unmanned punt beside Haven Bridge and feared the crew might have drowned.



Firefly.

photo: Chris Towell

**The well travelled *Avocet*
on the Thames at
Greenwich.**

photo: Celia Scott



In 1980, a varied team of six Norfolk Punts, ranging from *Rosybill* to *Golden Jubilee* raced on the Thames at Greenwich against a team of 18 foot skiffs. Both these punts were unfortunate to lose their masts in strong winds of the Sunday racing. *Avocet*, *Golden Jubilee*, *Greylag*, *Harnser*, *Kingfisher*, *Puffin* and *Rosybill* failed to beat the skiffs but all agreed it was a worthwhile experience and the first time a fleet of Norfolk Punts had raced beside Tower Bridge.

By 1982, the Fibreglass Norfolk Punts Fund Association had been in existence for five years. By then only four fibreglass and two composite punts had been built from the mould and the Association was wound up. Loans were paid off but twenty five equity members received twenty pence for each pound contributed and the moulds were passed to the Norfolk Punt Club.

**A start at the 1982
Norfolk Punt National
Championships.**

photo: Richard Sadler

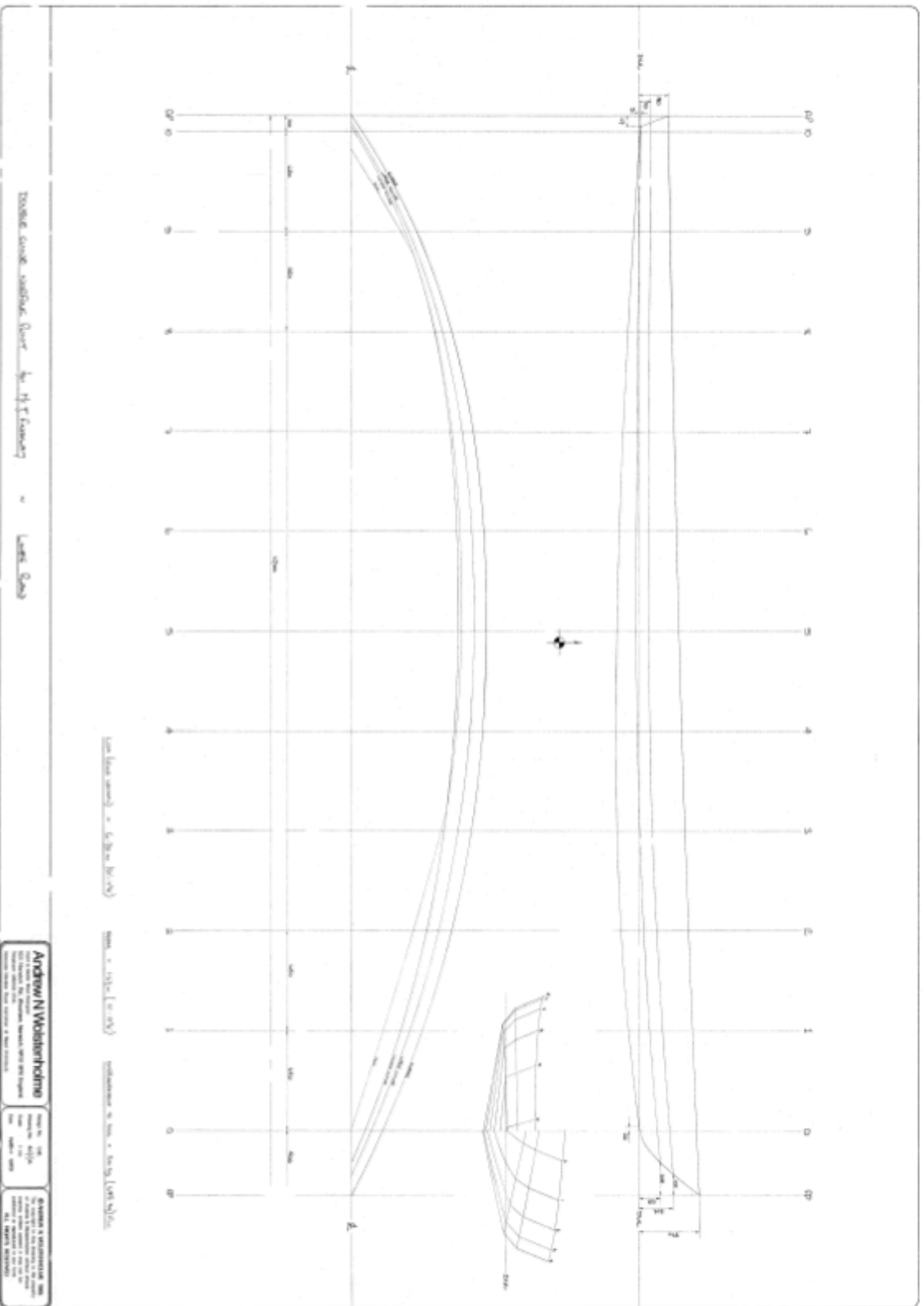




A light weather spinnaker run in 1982. Probably unexciting sailing but the photograph illustrates the extent of punt spinnaker development at the time.

photo: Richard Sadler

John Findlay, mine host of the Fisherman's Return Inn at Winterton and an enthusiast of traditional punts (and one of a growing band that have felt obliged to own several Norfolk Punts simultaneously), approached Andrew Wolstenholme to design him a new, traditional Norfolk Punt. Andrew was advised by the Class Secretary, Richard Sadler, that a traditional Norfolk Punt would no longer be acceptable under the class rules, but a double chine punt would be approved. The class could see advantages in the twin chine construction of *Reedham Nan* and the possibility of producing low cost kits for easy home construction. Andrew had already designed a 'stitch and glue', double-chine rowing skiff *Sprite* and both he and John felt that they could produce a punt which might give the class a boost without necessarily rendering existing punts obsolete. The problem was that the double chine design didn't fit the class rules. Andrew drew what he describes as a conservative hull shape and *Reedham Nan* was built by Fred Saunders. The punt was named after John's late grandmother from Reedham who had left him the money for the new boat! During discussions at various meetings, on how to make room for the new design within class rules, Tom Harmer suggested reversion to the pre-war class rules that permitted a wide variety of hull construction.



Lines of punt 73 Ræedham Nær supplied and reproduced by courtesy of Andrew Wolstenholme



Crystal Palace.

photo: James Hoseason

The class continued to exhibit at London Dinghy Exhibitions and in 1985, *Reedham Nan* was trailed to Crystal Palace. The rest of the fleet went about their business as if nothing could disturb their calm.



Class Secretary Richard Sadler with Sarah Williams on board *Reed Bunting*.

photo: Richard Sadler



Start of a race in the mid 1980s.

photo: Richard Sadler



James Sadler and Tim Jacob push *Decoy* down a windy reach during the 1986 class championships.

photo: Richard Sadler



Punts had used a single trapeze since the early 1960s, largely as a result of their visits to Aldeburgh. Initially they were only used in allcomers racing at Barton. The finer points of work on the wire did not always seem so straightforward!

photo: Richard Sadler



far left

The starters hut at Barton.

photo: James Hoseason



left

Simon Read in *Carllew*.

photo: Richard Sadler





James Hoseason and Warwick Woodall on a three sail reach in *Razorbill* during the 1989 Bloody Mary race at Queen Mary reservoir at Staines in West London.

photo: James Hoseason