

Just a few years ago, one had to go to the coast to see the peaceful picture of colourful sailing boats scudding under a blue sky, dependent only on the whims of the wind as a means of propulsion.

Since 1959 however, sailing has increased enormously and it was in that year that Sutton-in-Ashfield sailing club (then known as the Ashfield Sailing & Canoeing Club) brought the sight within the boundaries of the Sutton-in-Ashfield township.

Today with a flourishing membership and regular racing programme the Club didn't find the going "all Trade Winds." It began when a handful of enthusiasts got together to discuss sailing together where previously they had cruised independently – and somewhat aimlessly, on Kings Mill reservoir. The real pleasure of sailing is racing and a Club was obviously necessary if full benefit of this rapidly increasing sport was to be realised.

Negotiations were made with Sutton Council and Mr. W.E. N. Wilden was elected the first chairman of the Club. Once the Club became reality, the Chairman became "The Commodore" and sailing tradition was followed.

The Council, realising that Kings Mill Reservoir would be put to good use in this respect, gave their approval and a plot of land was leased by the young club. "Land" was hardly the right description however, as it was a very boggy field, the kind of terrain into which a car could drive but, after a couple of hours parking there, was difficult to drive out again, as the wheels had sunk into the ground. By then, a large number of interested boat owners had joined the Club and the first real expense was for hard-core and shale. Work parties were organised and a firm ground surface was laid.

With the ever-present capsizes, changing facilities were required and tents were set up for the purpose. These were suitable in dry weather but it was obvious that something better would have to be found. Then someone came up with the idea of buying an old 'pre-fab'. Permission was sought from the Council to erect a building if one could be found. Permission was granted on a 'temporary basis' and eventually the members found themselves assembling a building that had cost them in the region of £50 but, compared to the tents, an edifice indeed. With Mrs. Celia McCreary, wife of the Club's first Secretary, in charge of paperhanging and the menfolk armed with paint and brushes, spanners, hammers and saws, the pre-fab became warm, comfortable and attractive, with separate changing rooms partitioned off at one end.

Successive Commodores: H. L. McCreary, R. J. Beastall, F. Bloor, R. A. Corney and their Committees improved and developed the Secretaries: Gordon Hemingway, Frank Clarke and Eddie Burnham (the latter being elected in 1964 and still holding that office) improved and consolidated the vast amount of administrative work involved as the club grew, and the Sailing Secretaries, Eric Richardson, John Stafford, Ron Beastall and Trevor Symmons with the ever-increasing organisation of sailing administration got the Club on a sound footing. The 'Menagerie' i.e. nondescript boats were thinned out and Club 'recognized classes' evolved. G.P. 14's, National Enterprise, National Twelve Foots, Graduates, and O.K. dinghies were the established Classes within the Club. This allowed for owners of the same classes of boat to sail and race against each other ... the most popular form of dinghy

racing. Space had been developed within a strong wire surround, to accommodate 100 boats for parking in between racing periods.

The Clubhouse during these early days, had become a target for vandals and thieves and, on an average of 6 times a year break-ins took place. The club never kept anything of value there and the damage caused by the break-ins was the heaviest cost the Club had to bear.

In 1965, Trevor Symmons ex-R.A.F. Officer and Cranwell adjutant, was elected Commodore and, early on an August morning, he and the Secretary, Eddie Burnham, watched dawn break over the smouldering remains of the clubhouse which had been built with so much effort over the years, it had been burned down beyond all reasonable repair following yet another break-in.

This was the biggest setback the Club had ever had to face and it seemed like an insurmountable problem. But the Commodore had other ideas. Calling an Extraordinary General Meeting at a local hotel the case was put squarely before the members and from the floor of the meeting a proposal to levy a 50% increase on subscriptions for the following year was carried. Mr Symmons then set about master-minding the Barbeques which, a few years ago, were one of the most popular Spring and Autumn features of Sutton & district. Some original ideas to entertain the public came out of these Barbecues. Like the 'monster of Kings Mill' a fearsome, floating dragon, made by members, and towed out by rowboat into the middle of the Reservoir before being lit up by searchlight as it 'swam' over the night waters. Magnificent 'guys' were a matter of course for the Bonfire Barbecues and thousands of people came from all over the county to enjoy the music and sideshows presented by the Club.

Finally, after enormous effort enough money was raised to begin re-building and, during the Commodorship of Mr. K. Pollicott, members met at the hotel while the present permanent brick building was taking shape. In March of 1967, the new clubhouse was officially opened by Mr. W.E.N. Wilden and the then Commodore Aubrey Slack. It had a heated clubroom, bar, heated changing rooms, washrooms, toilets and electricity supply – and also an expensive burglar alarm system specially designed to go off before any great damage was done to the building, and which is still the primary concern.

Meantime, sailing continued and Sutton-in-Ashfield Sailing Club became one of the best known Clubs in the Midlands. Other Clubs came to race from Retford Argonauts, Ogston (Derbys), Derwent, Beeston, Nottingham, Staff., Lancashire, Yorkshire and many other counties. The Junior National Championships for Graduates was held at Kings Mill in 1965. The Regatta, a light-hearted day, is held in July each year.

People driving or walking along Mansfield Road can see the colourful dinghies dotting the water of Kings Mill Reservoir on Wednesday evenings, Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

Trevor Symmons is still in action as the Clubs Sailing Secretary, Eddie Burnham still General Secretary and, this year the Clubs youngest Commodore 23 year old David Savory, holds office.

Membership is strong and there are still a few vacancies for keen sailors. Though the club had its social side, it is nevertheless, a SAILING Club and vacancies for membership are primarily for the boat-owners and crews who want to race. One of the favourite expressions of Club members is "Cruising once round Kings Mill, you've seen all there is but racing is a new experience every time

the flag goes down". The fluky winds of Kings Mill present a challenge in every race, no two races offer identical conditions. Though one of the safest sports in existence, insurance is compulsory under the Club and Council rules and, in ten years, there has been no serious bodily injury to any person sailing. Rescue craft are in constant patrol, manned by two members who turn up every Wednesday and weekend without pay, to ensure that no-one is in the water too long. Syd Dernley and Max Clarke are the Clubs "lifeboat service."

Lifejackets too, are compulsory and safety rules are so strong that many members, in light winds, take out their youngest children, often aged 6 or under, as crews. Out in a planing dinghy, one gets the impression of terrific speed and breathtaking danger – but at 15 m.p.h. it's all an illusion... but a great illusion and a great sport.

Sailing may not have the thrill and excitement of 'spectator sports' but many people find pleasant afternoon on the banks of Kings Mill watching the graceful movement of the boats and being amused – as members are – at the sudden wind change that causes a capsize and the ducking of the unlucky helmsman and crew.

The story of Sutton-in-Ashfield Sailing Club is not over by any means, a new Start Box/Control Centre is to be built next month and, with the present co-operation and support of its members the Club will continue to grow and develop in keeping with the sport. No wonder England was known as a race of sailors!

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