

Centenary Celebrations for Emsworth Sailing Club

by Ian McIntyre



HRH Princess Anne unveils the plaque marking her visit to Emsworth Sailing Club on its centenary

Photo: Christopher Ison

Not many sailing clubs can trace their origins back to a muddy trench in France during the First World War. Emsworth Sailing Club (ESC), celebrating its centenary in 2019, certainly can.

The foresight of two young officers wanting to create a better future for their fellow soldiers after the war, resulted in the formation of Emsworth Sailing Club in 1919. There were 32 founder members, and the club was to be based at the old Bath House, on the foreshore at Emsworth.

Today, the club has a full complement of 1,600 members and is still based at the Bath House, which over the years has been much extended and improved to provide all the facilities that 21st century sailors could ask for – including a very active year-round social programme.

Royal Visit

The club organised a year-long programme of centenary celebrations, but a definite highlight was a visit in May by HRH The Princess Royal, as President of the Royal Yachting Association.

After meeting the club's management team and trustees, she boarded the club launch to watch sailing demonstrations by young club members.

Ashore, she met most of the 160 members and special guests there for the event, and was interested to see the signed photograph of her great uncle, Lord Mountbatten, a former ESC commodore and admiral.

She unveiled a plaque to commemorate her visit and before leaving was presented with a bouquet by Ellie-Mai Clift, daughter of the club's popular catering franchisees, Oliver and Eloise Clift.

Many memories of the club and its achievements over the years were assembled in an exhibition which was on display at Emsworth Museum during the summer.

Coaching

While the initial focus of the club was to provide a stimulating leisure pursuit for battle-scarred war veterans, today there is more emphasis on encouraging children to become enthusiastic sailors.

From a very young age – six or seven upwards – children receive sail-training tuition, initially on the calm waters of the Mill Pond next to the clubhouse.

Over the years, many of these youngsters have gone on to achieve great success in national and international racing events,

frequently becoming class champions. A leader board in the club lists 20 young ESC sailors who have recently won top racing events. Since 2009 ESC has been an RYA Volvo champion club, one of only 140 of the 1,500 RYA-affiliated clubs then awarded that status for their commitment to youth sailing and race coaching.

Fundraising

To provide these young sailors with further encouragement and support, the club set up a fund in 2002 to commemorate the great New Zealand ocean sailor and ESC member Sir Peter Blake, who was killed while leading an environmental cruise to the Amazon.

Since the fund was established, thousands of pounds have been raised to help to support young members competing in racing events in venues as far afield as Japan and the USA as well as Europe.

Three of the country's best-known competitive sailors – Sir Ben Ainslie, Sir Robin Knox-Johnston and Sir Chay Blyth – have visited ESC in recent years to support the fund, and all three were pleased to accept honorary membership of ESC. As part of the centenary celebrations, Sarah Ayton OBE, a double Olympic world sailing champion, and winner of the Rolex World Sailor Award in 2016, visited the club to talk about her sailing life and to support the fund.

The club is very aware of the fact that it needs to keep up with the public's changing attitudes to sailing. Young families often do not have enough spare time to spend whole days afloat, or whole weekends away cruising.

As a result, ESC now describes itself as an active water sports centre, and welcomes members who want to try kayaking, or stand up paddle boarding, as well as conventional dinghy racing or cruising.

Before Princess Anne left the club after her centenary visit, she congratulated Commodore Michael Geary and his team on their management of a happy, successful, family-oriented sailing club.

ESC is certainly starting its second century with optimism, and every prospect of more successes to come.

Historic Club Boats

Clubs like ESC, formed a century ago, generally provided their own boats for members to use. They had to, in those days few people owned their own boats and there were no mass produced boats generally available: that came later with the fibreglass revolution.

In her book *Emsworth Sailing Club – a Centenary History* Liz Sagues writes about the development of what was to be called

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HRH Princess Anne, standing left, watched a sail past by younger members of the club

Photo: Christopher Ison

ESC Historic Boats continued

the Emsworth One Design (EOD) – a class of identical racing dinghies, so that in theory anyway each boat had exactly the same performance: whether it won races or not depended solely on the skill of the crew.

There were three generations of club boats, sailed from 1920 to 1962. The first six boats, known as Sharpies, were built by Fowler of Bosham. As there were clearly more members than boats, if you wanted to use them, you had to apply by ballot.

In 1922 George Feltham of Portsmouth built six EODs to a new design, and two more were built by his brother Harry in 1933.

The last EODs were based on the design of Betsy, a successful pre-war boat, and seven were built by J G Parham and Sons of Emsworth between 1950 and 1952. All, of course, had wooden hulls and cotton sails. They were attractive, sturdy and seamanlike boats, quickly becoming classics of their kind.

For many years after 1962, there were no club sailing boats, but recently a varied fleet of sailing dinghies has been bought for members to hire, some tuned up for racing, others designed for enjoyable family sails round the harbour.

The ESC exhibition in the Museum featured the Emsworth One Design Boats on one of the boards



Emsworth One Designs racing in 1939 along with Emerald and other privately-owned boats