

Many of you will know that my brother Dominic, and I own and run Berthon, which has been operating continuously since 1877, nearly 150 years; Berthon's revenue takes us into the top 25 in the UK marine industry.



Harry May, "White Annie" and her mother Joyce Norrington onboard MITTEN

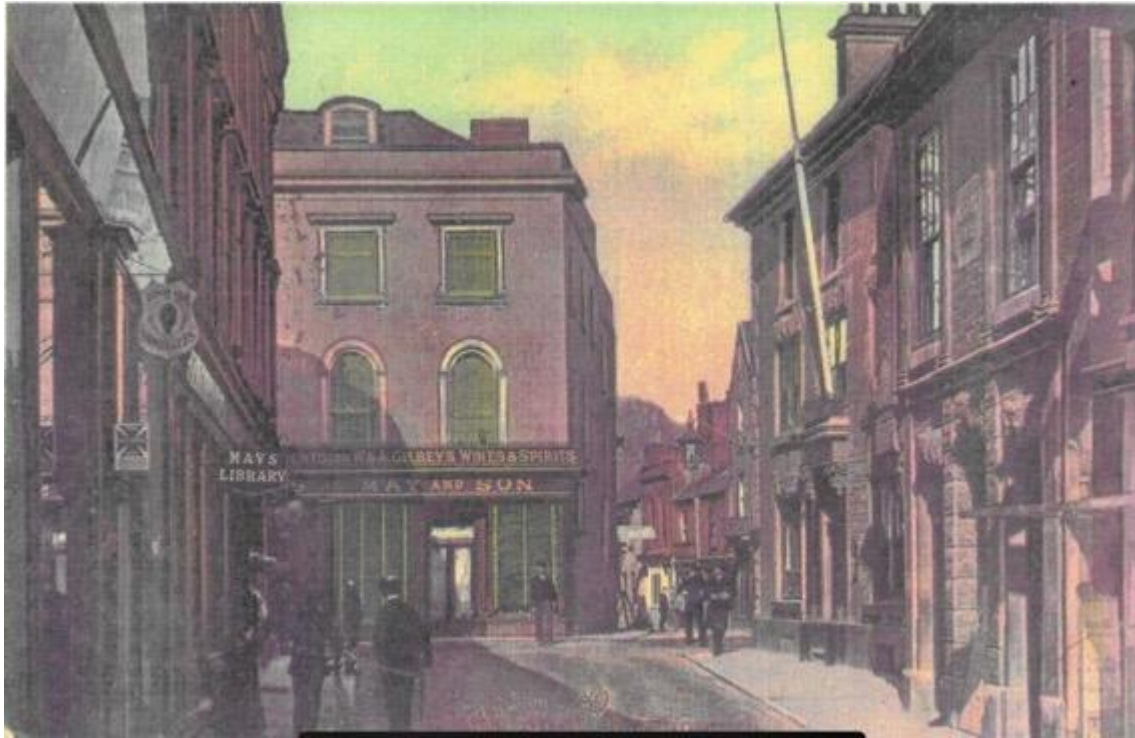
You may well be thinking that I will be providing you with great streams of facts and figures about the famous boats and clients associated with our Company. Those things are important, of course, but what I want to share with you tonight is something different – it is the story of a family enterprise, which has grown and expanded with influence and presence across the world. But today's Berthon owes its philosophy and staying power to the values and sound business sense of not one, but two siblings, Harry Goodland May and his younger brother, George Oliver, born in 1873 and 1876 respectively.



See Harry May on the left and Frank Morgan Giles to the right. Check their attire including the leather shoes!

George emigrated to America in 1897, whereupon he set about changing the world; his fame and influence is still legendary in his profession 127 years later. Meanwhile his elder brother Harry started out as small businessman, selling clothing to Edwardian Exeter folk (Exonians), but soon fell in love with sailing and small craft racing, thereby drastically changed direction, selling up and heading off to London to become a builder of boats.

START OF May FAMILY STORY



The May family came to the small coastal town of Teignmouth, in Devon, in the person of Benjamin Oliver May, Harry's grandfather, and my great great great grandfather, around 1841. He had grown up in Lyme Regis, where his family were devout Methodists and small shop owners, grocers by trade.

At some point there seems to have been a serious falling out, because his son George England May abandoned the Methodists, to take up with the Anglicans at a rival church. The shocking effect of this on such a small community is not hard to imagine. Now he and his father owned different shops – and his grocery business was selling alcohol which, presumably, would have flown in the face of his father's deeply held beliefs. Meanwhile his own children were growing up: one son, my great great uncle George, did extremely well academically, gaining a scholarship to Blundells, by far the best public school in the south west, where he was inspired by a brilliant mathematician.

In due course both brothers gravitated to Exeter, George to study chartered accountancy as an articulated pupil (akin to an apprenticeship), where he gained brilliant results in the national examinations. Harry eventually bought a hosiery business in Exeter High Street, where he learned how to market and advertise, promote products and think on his feet. Meanwhile George went up to London as a practising chartered accountant, from whence he sailed in 1897 for the United States to take up a post in the offices of Price Waterhouse in New York.

Harry seems to have had the sea in his blood. He quickly became one of the leading lights of the Exeter Rowing Club, first as an active racing member and then as Hon Sec, organising everything. Around 1903 his name began to appear in the sailing regatta listings. Soon, he burst upon the scene, in the west of England 14-foot dinghies and 18-foot jollyboats. Pretty soon he was almost unbeatable. At the same time, he had begun a very close collaboration

with Frank Morgan Giles, a budding yacht designer who had grown up at Shaldon just across the river from Teignmouth, and who had also briefly attended Blundells.

In 1903 Frank had headed to London where, according to tradition, he set up a boatyard under Hammersmith bridge.

A Terrah on the water



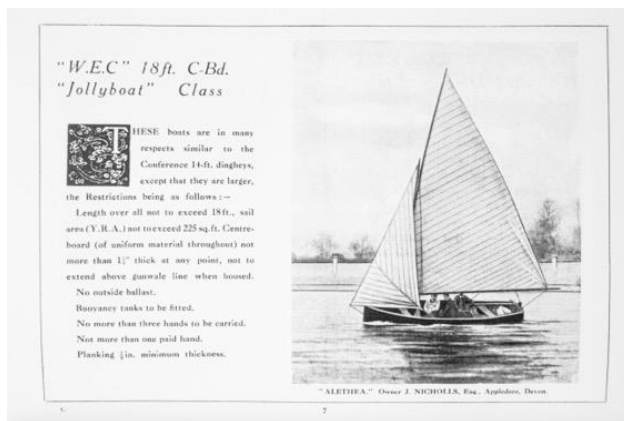
In the Edwardian era there was a freedom from restrictions and a “yes we can” attitude in those with an entrepreneur-type spirit. If you wanted to take up ballooning or motoring or sail around the world you could just do it. While Harry was growing up in Devon, all around the coast rowing & sailing clubs were being founded, with regattas.

These new Clubs and the annual West of England Conferences were where Harry May began to find his feet and then to find his voice. Over a handful of years, his contributions became increasingly frequent and increasingly important. Soon everyone knew him not only as one of the finest small boat sailors in the area, but as a man with analytical and organisational talents.

This is where I would like to share with you the first view of the May family treasures which have come down to us from those far off Edwardian days. Frank Morgan Giles was a prime mover in the setting up, first of the National, and later the International 14 dinghy Class which today has 14 active fleets in the UK, Australia, Canada, the USA, Italy, Switzerland, Japan and France. Today’s carbon fibre machines with their twin trapezes, spinnakers and hydrofoils on rudders that we see today have their origins in the wooden boats crafted in Shaldon by Abraham Pengelly, where Morgan Giles served his apprenticeship. Harry May took care to collect photographs of the small craft racing.

We don't have time to hear the stories of all the owners and their dinghies, but it was because of these boats, and at these events, that the May family began its enduring relationships with building, buying, selling, repairing, servicing sea going craft of all sizes and for all. The important thing about these local dinghies was that people could afford them, at a time when the sport of yacht racing per se had usually been associated with very rich, mostly male owners, and very large and expensive yachts racing from the early 1820's. For Harry May, champion of those of modest means, this was the start of everything.

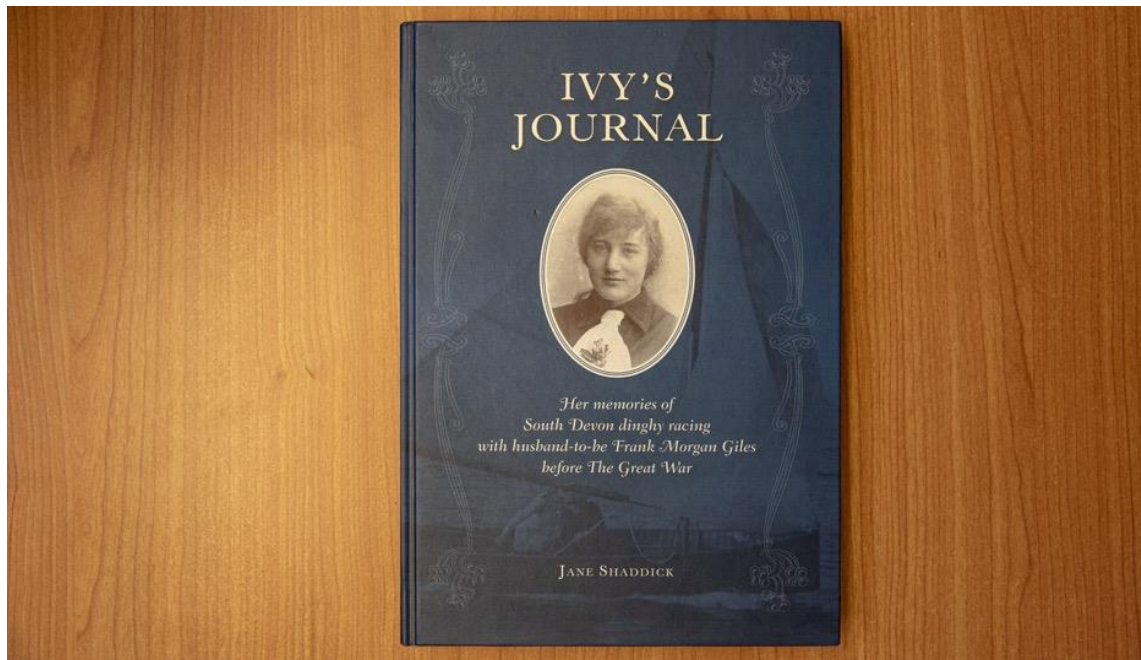
Inevitably, he was yearning for greater challenges. He was almost certainly bored, running his hosiery business in Exeter High Street with its new year sales, its regular promotions of specially patented "bifurcated" shirts (where the tails could tuck down each trouser leg, never rucking up), of every variety of mackintosh, or the complete provision of warm clothing for motorists. Selling underwear, or embroidered handkerchiefs to the middle classes was not exciting!



Harry was now married and had produced two children - perhaps the decision to spend his free time becoming the most feared racer of 18-foot Jollyboats along the coast was driven by a need for personal space which he found out on the water. His nickname at this time was "Terrah" - a man who terrified his opponents. Being wiry and slight compared to many of the other local sailors (including Frank Morgan Giles) gave him an added advantage, but it was his will to win which brought him so many triumphs and trophies in the South West.



The 18' dinghy would have taken the train from London, picked up at the local regatta station and taken to the sea, port or bay by cart and horse. Harry is standing top right.

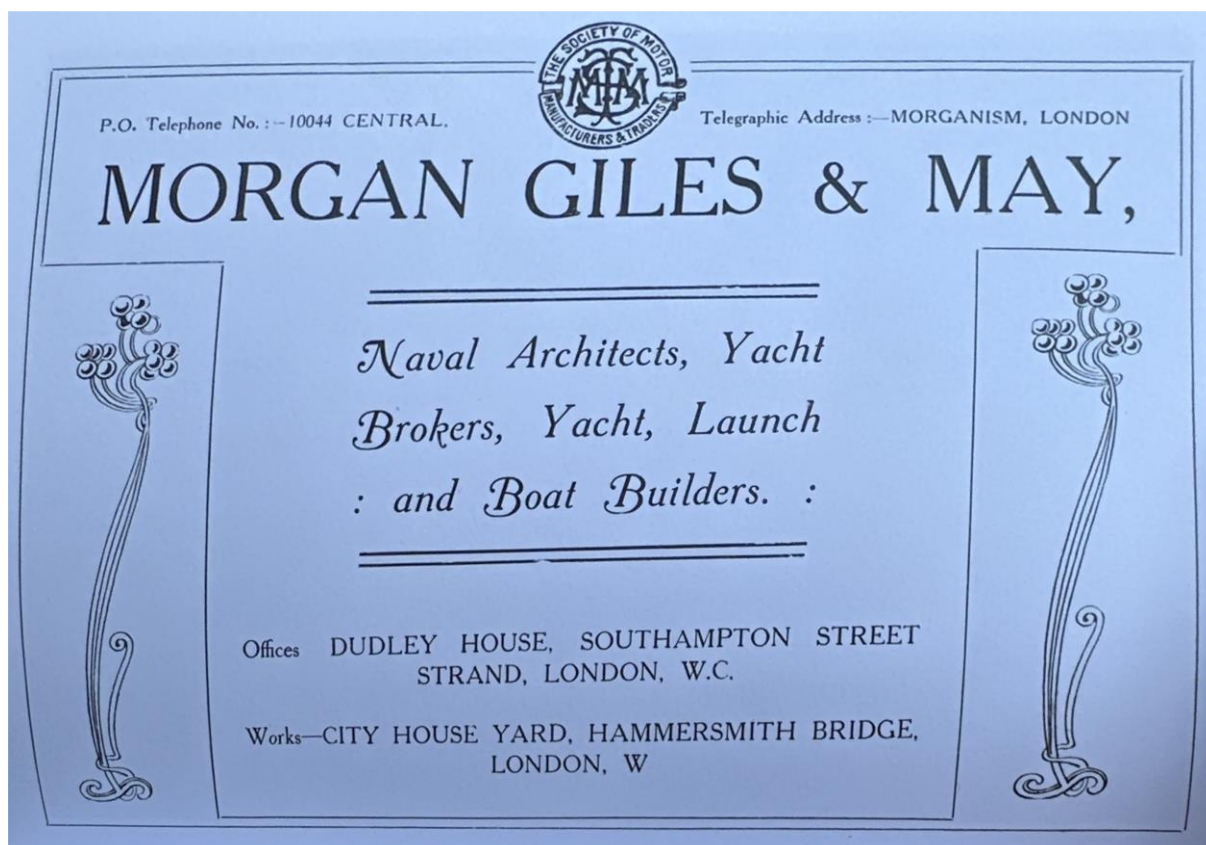


Frank's girlfriend, Ivy, wrote a description of Harry in her Journal which brings that character to life. On one occasion when a Plymouth man had been bragging about not being afraid of the dreadful weather, he took him on: the wind was so appalling that his mouthy rival's dinghy carried away her mast before even reaching the end of the breakwater. Harry then defiantly steered his boat three times round the course with a double reefed lug and spitfire jib. People marvelled that he kept afloat at all. Ivy described what he looked like when he disembarked.

"A more abject, shivering, wringing specimen of humanity when he came ashore I never saw. His hands were raw with the sheets, and he looked simply dead – but he didn't care, he had done it and a fine thing it was to do too. There's some pluck in a man that would do that."

Harry May was not a man to cross swords with, especially if you did not stomach a fierce fight, as Frank Morgan Giles was to find out to his cost. At the end of 1908 Harry sold his shop, lock stock and goodwill, and set off for London to become a builder of boats.

Morgan Giles and May



There was every chance the new enterprise would do brilliantly: in 1906 an International Conference involving representatives from all over Europe created a range of developmental classes - the 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15, 19 and 23-metres, the best known and still alive are the 6m, the 8m and the 12m classes. Designers were required to work within an equation whereby if one measurement, such as girth or sail area, was increased, adjustments had to be made to other elements of the formula. The “metre” designation did not refer to actual length, but to overall dimensions compared to other classes in the series.

It was an inspirational scheme, which ensured that those with money enough to build and transport such boats, could compete bespoke sailing yachts on equal terms not just in home waters but in many other countries. It would be possible to set up large international Regattas and it was also a massive commercial opportunity for yacht builders and designers, with so many new commissions up for grabs, and the possibility of European as well as British clients; Harry and Frank were primed and ready to make the most of this magnificent commercial opportunity.

The new business of Morgan Giles & May, Naval Architects and Yacht Builders of City House Yard, Hammersmith Bridge, opened its doors early in 1909.



Suddenly large, attention-grabbing pages appeared in the yachting press, in particular the *Yachtsman* magazine, showcasing their agency's extensive range of craft for sale. The firm's offices were now listed at the much more prestigious Dudley House on the Strand, and money had been pumped into the exciting business venture, most of the major investment coming from Harry's shop sale and his now wealthy accountant brother, George Oliver May, the first senior partner of Price Waterhouse USA.

Frank was already famous because his winning designs were a regular feature in the pages of *Yachting Monthly*. At the same time, Harry's reported attributes were being watered down – he was simply described as: “well known in the west of England”, with an “**interest in**” Yacht Clubs. This was hardly the whole truth; he had been a driving force in the development of small boat racing in West of England Conference waters. However, as a man born into a family of Teignmouth shopkeepers, he seems to have been regarded as the minor partner in Morgan Giles and May, by the journalists.

In his 1916 application to become a Member of the Institute of Naval Architects, Frank declared that he had been the “Senior Partner” and Managing Director of Morgan Giles and May. This appears to have been ambiguous, which was to fester beneath the surface. With the Mays having provided most of the injection of capital, Harry might not have seen it that way.

Morgan Giles and May,

NAVAL ARCHITECTS AND YACHT BROKERS; YACHT, LAUNCH AND BOAT BUILDERS,

DUDLEY HOUSE, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND, LONDON, W.C.

And CITY HOUSE YARD, HAMMERSMITH.

Telegraphic Address: "Morganism, London."

P.O. Phone No. 10044 Central.

Steam and Sailing Yachts of all sizes For Sale or Charter and Wanted.

150-TONS. Magnificent modern steel STEAM YACHT. (100 A1). Excellent accommodation. Everything perfect. Price moderate.

120-TON (about), ditto. Fine powerful vessel. (100 A1.) Speed 13 knots. Price very moderate for quick sale.

100-TON Aux. Screw STEAM YACHT. Old but sound vessel. Just overhauled and re-fitted. Carries 20 foot motor launch. Price £1,500.

50-TON (about) STEAM YACHT. Excellent sea-boat. Built 1904. Boiler new this year. Sleeps 8 ex-saloon. Excellent order throughout. £1,750.

50-TON (about) Aux. STEAM SCHOONER. Built 1901. Completely fitted for extended cruising. Carries launch. £1,200 or close offer for quick sale.

50-TON Travler Type CUTTER: built of teak and oak. First class order. Good accommodation. Bargain £450.

40-TON Teak-built Triple Expansion STEAM YACHT. Sleeps 7 ex-crew. Price moderate or would charter.

40-TON (about) Modern Cruising YACHT. Spoon bow. Complete inventory. Price very moderate.

30-TON (about) fine Cruising CUTTER. Good accommodation (4 berths ex-saloon), all lead ballast (about 15 tons, Ratsey sails; excellent order throughout; price £450.

20-TON (about) Lock Fyne Type CRUISER (Ketch): splendid accommodation and head-room, full inventory; all lead ballast, Ratsey sails (new), wheel steering gear; classed at Lloyd's. Bargain £400 or offer.

15-TON (about) beautiful Modern Fast CRUISER, designed and built by Fife; all lead ballast, Ratsey sails, 1909; in commission; exceptionally low price to immediate buyer.

15-TON Auxiliary CUTTER, spoon bow, counter, 2 cabins, 5 ft. 10 in. head-room, 8 tons outside lead, Ratsey sails '08 and '09, patent w.c., 7 h.p. Parsons motor, new capstan 1908; handsome, roomy little vessel, fast (prize winner); £450.

15-TON handsome Modern CUTTER, built 1908, of mahogany and oak to Lloyd's requirements for R class for 10 metres; has 2 cabins, 5 ft. 10 in. head-room, 6 tons lead keel, new sails 1910, good inventory;

is a good sea boat, fast and in perfect order; price moderate.

15-TON Quay Punt Type CUTTER, built late 1909 and only had a few weeks' use; grand accommodation and head-room; probably strongest boat of her tonnage afloat; everything practically new; price moderate.

14-TON CUTTER. Fine all-the-year-round cruiser, with excellent accommodation, and good inventory, including trawling gear; all lead ballast, bargain £200.

10-TON Falmouth Quay PUNT (Cutter); handsome little vessel, with modern rounded bow and raking transom stern; 6 ft. 2 in. headroom; sleeps 3; good inventory, including sailing dinghy; 2 suits sails; bargain, £180.

9-TON CUTTER, designed by Fife; handsome and fast little vessel, with excellent accommodation and full headroom, patent w.c. and folding lavatory; good inventory; cheap, £115.

5-TON Single-hander, "Lady Hermione." This well-known single-hander, built and fitted regardless of cost, for sale at very low price.

MISCELLANEOUS

THIS Beautiful 6-ton CUTTER, 38 ft. by 8 ft. by

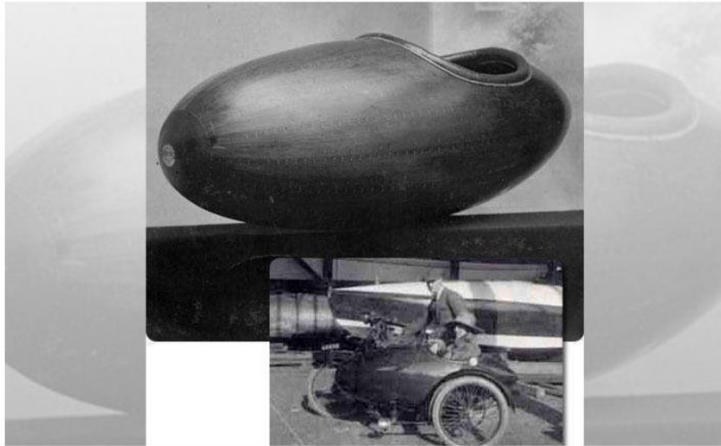
19-TON Norwegian CUTTER, Ran, L.w.l. 30 ft.

As the new racing boats of the International Metre Rule took off, brother George May commissioned two 6-metres in 1910 and 1911 which Harry and Frank raced for him. Other orders followed, from famous names Algernon Maudslay, RT Dixon the top 6-metre international sailors of their day! Alongside design-and-build services, the firm ran an extensive yacht brokerage, as well as all meeting all the maintenance and repair needs of their existing clients. At the end of December 1911 Morgan Giles and May moved their business to Hythe Building yard on Southampton Water. Around this time they were also working on an order for several 22-ft hydroplanes for the Royal Motor Yacht Club, the skill and craftsmanship in their builds was famous, and in the next couple of years their "metre boats" were winning the biggest international prizes.

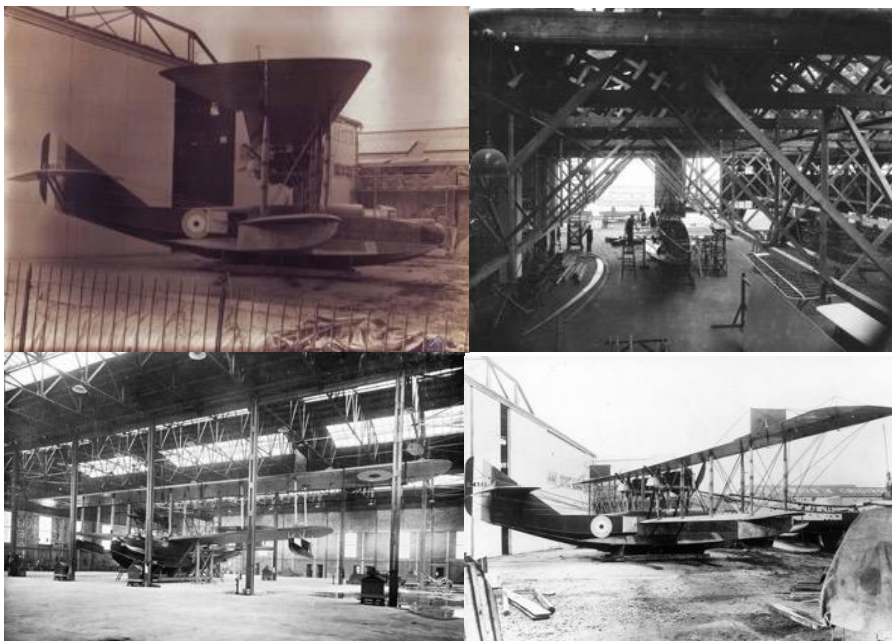


Then something went badly wrong. In early 1914 lawyers were exchanging letters. The relationship between Frank Morgan Giles and Harry May had broken down irretrievably. It

was a terrible row. Frank was no longer welcome to set foot in the shipyard. Money could not be accounted for and must be repaid. Two outstanding designs would be forwarded on to his address. By April Yachting Monthly published a terse notice confirming the split, and that Harry May was to carry on the business at Hythe, under a different name.

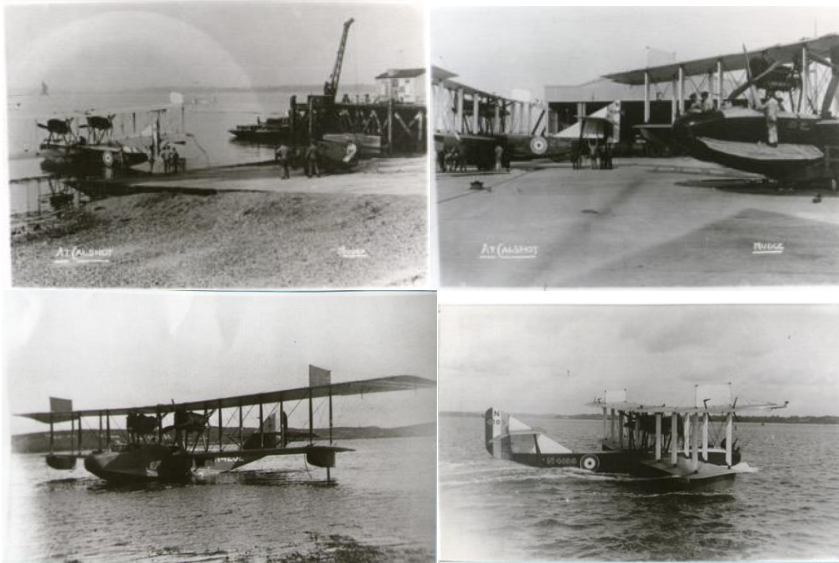


The next few years were very troubled, not just because of the war which had Harry building wooden laminated motor bike egg shell side cars rather usefully used to send messages and orders along the front line – IE the trenches. Harry had bought Frank out, and created a new firm of May, Harden and May. Initially there was expansion of the Hythe premises and equipment but by 1916 there was another takeover in progress. This time it was Harry selling out, although remaining as managing director, but by 1918 there were yet more lawyers writing letters, as a bitter case ended up in court.



May, Harden and May was taken over by Mr Holt Thomas's Aircraft Manufacturing Company, later to become British Aircraft Corporation, with Harry appointed to the board, and in charge at Hythe. An earlier design for a flying boat, described as the "forerunner of all big

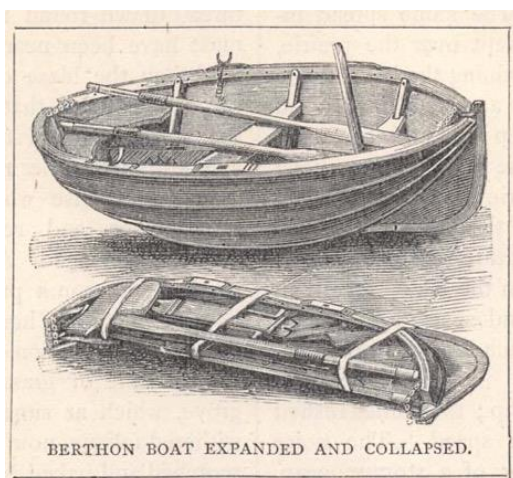
aeroplanes and seaplanes” had necessitated larger premises, hence Harry was also building the Felixstowe Sea Planes.



The prosecuting lawyers argued that Harry had been often absent (certainly not sailing during the war) and a poor manager, and that he had spent substantial company funds restoring the old house in which he lived. Harry didn't back down one jot, retorting that he had devoted more "zeal and attention to organising and supervision" to the business than when he owned it, and had not even taken his holidays. The house in question had been dangerous, with rotting beams – you should have paid someone danger money to live in it. Much of the material used had been offcuts from Admiralty contracts which would otherwise just have been used for firewood etc.

Oh Dear!

Romsey and Lymington



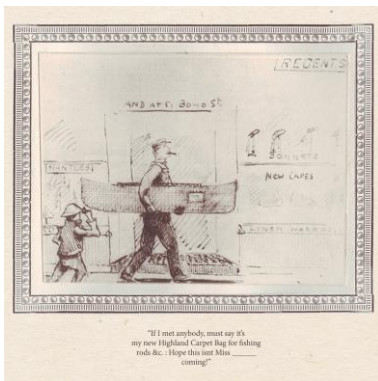
But Harry was very resilient. With the assistance of his younger brother Frank he looked around for a suitable place to buy and establish the family's new business. Frank had been wounded in the trenches and was invalided out minus an arm and with a shattered kneecap,

but it is typical of public-relations-expert Harry's genius that they purchased one of the most famous trademarks in small boat building, that of the Berthon Boat Company Ltd, Edward Pearson Berthon the Reverend's son having just died and which was already an international household name; as ever, Frank was a nominee for his American-resident brother George!

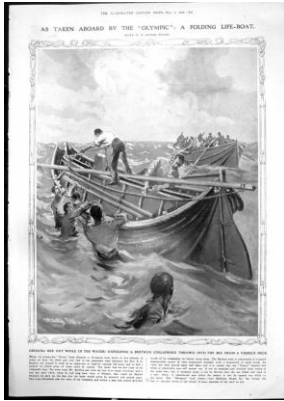


REV. EDWARD LYON BERTHON, M.A.

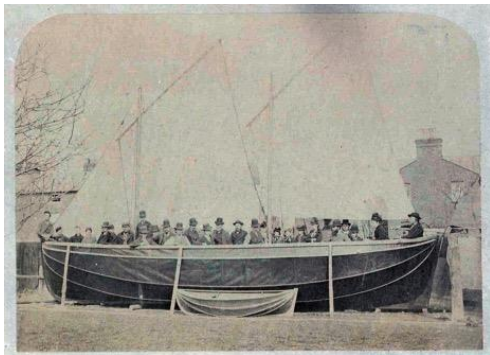
The Reverend Berthon, who had invented the world famous collapsible "Berthon Boat", had also himself been expert at getting his little craft featured the newspapers in Victorian times. On one occasion both journalists and international dignitaries were summoned to watch bridges constructed by joining several Berthon boats together – which proved, before their very eyes, of being able to support many men, a waggon and then cart-horses, even after a large hole had been cut in one of the boats – IE an early form of Bailey Bridges.



The smaller, 7' collapsible, portable craft could be carried under a man's arm, and had been used by naval and military units all over the world, and everybody had heard of them. You'll be able to see a couple at the Lymington Afloat Exhibition next week; the larger 9' one had lingered in the rafters of a wooden hotel in Norway that had been condemned and the other I bought from a museum liquidation auction in Scotland.

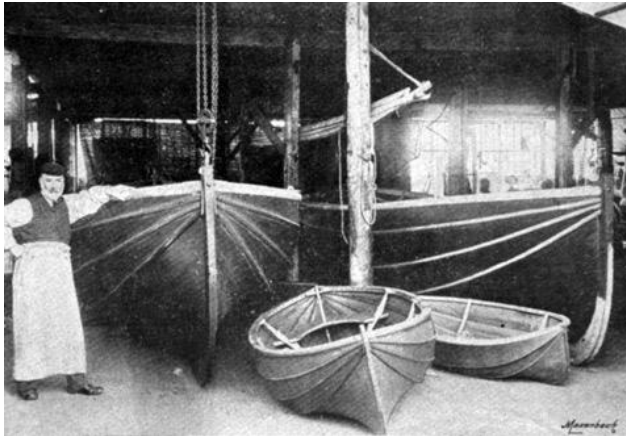


Berthon studied medicine in Liverpool and Dublin, but after his marriage in 1834 he gave up his intention of becoming a doctor and travelled for about six years on the continent. Keenly interested from boyhood in mechanical science, he made experiments in the application of the screw propeller for boats. But his model, with a two-bladed propeller, was ridiculed when it was placed before the British admiralty. Berthon therefore did not complete the patent and the idea was left for Francis Smith to bring out more successfully in 1838.



In 1841 he entered Magdalene College, Cambridge in order to study for the Church. There he produced what is usually known as "Berthon's log", in which the suction produced by the water streaming past the end of a pipe projected below a ship is registered on a mercury column above.

In 1845, he was ordained, and after holding a curacy at Lymington was given a living at Fareham. Yes, what an interesting coincidence! He then designed some instruments to indicate the trim and rolling of boats at sea; but the idea for which he is chiefly remembered was that of the "Berthon Folding Boat" in 1849.



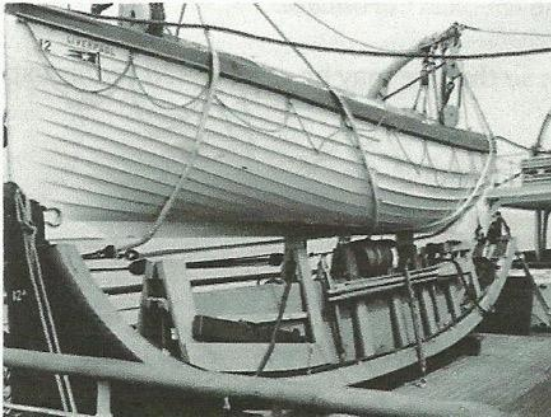
In 1873, encouraged by Samuel Plimsoll, he again applied himself to perfecting his collapsible boat. Success was at last achieved, and in less than a year he had received orders from the admiralty for boats to the amount of £15,000, the equivalent of £2.2m in 2024, that would have finally had his business meaningful. Some were taken by Sir George Nares to the Arctic, others were sent to General Gordon at Khartoum, and others were taken to the Zambezi by Frederick Selous.



In 1910 huge batches were sent to Paris during the floods. These are French postcards, a set that I found in an auction in Germany!

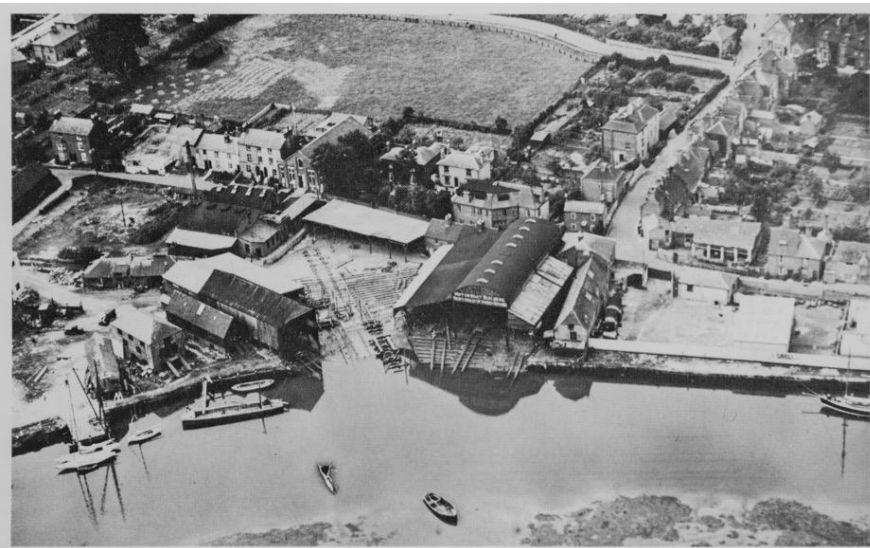


The Reverend also used his shipwrights and apprentices to rebuild the roof of Romsey Abbey; after all, a church roof is built as a ship's hull, albeit upside down! The Church was probably delighted that their asset had been fixed so well, whereas Harry's restorations in the company house in Hythe was used against him!



It was only after the TITANIC disaster that Berthon Boats were put on board passenger vessels, the crew having gone on strike unless enough boats were available to save their lives, note not the passengers!!

Finally, Alain Gerbault used one as his tender in his famous 1923-1929 solo circumnavigation aboard his 39' sailboat Firecrest. His tender was no doubt built in Lymington.



Berthon; The Shipyard, Lymington

In August 1918 the West Sussex Gazette reported that "The Shipyard at Lymington, Hants., has been taken over by the Berthon Boat Company, of Romsey who have also acquired a wharf higher up the river. Tugs, drifters and cargo vessels up to 800 tons are to be built in future at Lymington. Several of these craft are already in frame, while a new system of wood construction is to be adopted."



ARROW sailing past the Needles towards Hurst Castle.

The site Harry purchased had been formerly and famously owned by the great Thomas Inman, ex-boatbuilder from Hastings, whose Alarm and Arrow took part in the iconic RYS 100 Guineas Round the Island Race in 1851 won by the Schooner AMERICA thus become known as The America's Cup.



ALARM off the RYS

I should probably point out that the 37th America's cup is taking place in Barcelona fighting to become the challenger this week challenger at the finals in early October.

I am supposed to be on SHAMROCK V racing against 4 other J-Class the week before final starts.

Yes, it can be a tough life running a boat business, but we also have to find our future customers! I always had a small "black book" forever making notes of who I had met and then would rigorously follow up in due course.



1876 Schooner FORTUNA being built at Lymington shipyard 1876, Shipyard House showing behind her.

The largest boat built was 120T FORTUNA at 130' built for Sir Adrian Hope in the rounded shed that was built specifically in 1876 and she was launched in 1877. The FORTUNA Dock is where the yacht sat in the mudflats to the south of Berthon; hence the name given to the LHC dock there today.

When Thomas Inman's grandson died at the turn of the Century the yard was sold and passed through various hands until 1918 when Harry May took it on. There are still various Inman descendants in the New Forest, one of whom I bumped into at our Music on the Marina two weeks ago.



1907

When his new pride and joy, the Lymington Shipyard, had been previously put up for auction in 1901, the particulars listed "28 acres not inclusive of valuable foreshore and mudlands ...

with “a water frontage of 3650 feet” and “fully equipped with all necessary Building and Repairing shops, slipways and landing stages, for carrying on a large business.” Today we only have 18 acres which includes the Flushard “oozy mud area” where our Marina now sits. Although Harry never used the Oozy mud, his grandson, David May did, thereby proving the particulars 65 years previous.

The 1920s



As early as 1920, the indications were superb. Bear with me while I read some of the list which appeared in the press in 1920, because it gives an impression of how busy the new Berthon site was:



The photo shows A 500-ton wood coaster was launched and work was going well on a 60-ton fishing smack.

An 85-ton twin-screw motor yacht was being fitted out internally by the joiners.

80-ton steam yacht Sheila was similarly in hand.

And many more.

The yard was booming!



In The Roaring '20s, where

Mass Produced Cars. ...

The Discovery of Penicillin. ...

Silent Movies, No More! ...

Manufacturing Boom. ...

allowed Harry to join the inventors and credited with creating alternative classes to the Y.R.A. metre-boats, which had become far too expensive for the average yachtsman's pocket. One journalist wrote, "It has been left to the enterprise of a private firm to make a start in that direction, and the firm in question has met with considerable success in their efforts". I'll start with the Scows:



Those efforts involved producing Lymington Scows: "a smart little sailing boat, - very well built with a good turn of speed, very stiff and light enough to be carried on the deck of a small cruising yacht". Apparently, it was "the adoption of quality production methods" which resulted in a very modest price, so many were sold, "both in the United Kingdom and in other countries." But Harry had taken things a step further: "the firm also supply "knock down" sets of materials, so that any amateur handy with tools can build the boats themselves. By a system of standardisation, every plank and every piece of timber is accurately finished to jigs in the machine shop, and therefore are exactly alike in every respect." By WWII, Berthon had built 200 Scows. Here are some racing at high tide on the river.



Harry's extremely successful innovation from the Berthon stable was in 1923 when the West Solent Class was born to provide similar length sailing yachts as the 6m class bespoke high prices. Again, widening the market.

A report in Country Life in June 1924 waxed lyrical.

"The headquarters of the class are at Lymington where the yachts are built by the Berthon Boat Company, from the design of Mr L. A. Jacobs. The boats, about 6-ton [actually 4.5T] are of a very similar type to the old Solent One Design class" which had such a successful career in the late '90s and early years of the century. Measuring 34-feet over all, 23 feet on the waterline they are slightly smaller but appear to be as fast. They are of One Design only so far as the hull is concerned - the rig is optional as long as the total sail area does not exceed 570 square feet. The first [five] cost £500 complete but owing to an advance in wages it is expected that future yachts will cost a few pounds more.

For the man of moderate means these new one-design boats should be ideal as, having cabin accommodation, it is possible for two persons, or even three at a pinch, to live on board during the season, which would make for economy."

With such widely published praise, who needed advertising?



The West Solents were so successful that the largest and richest Club in the land, the Royal Thames, provided a special trophy for them in the early 1930s. Known as the Cory Cup, it was competed for by three separate fleets of West Solents, one from the East coast, one from the Solent, and the third from Torbay. Small wonder that, at the Lord Mayor's Dinner for the Lymington Council members in October 1927, the Borough Treasurer gave a speech citing the success of the Berthon Boat Company, along with the town's thriving yacht club, as an indicator that the town was forging ahead & Berthon had left the days of Lymington Shipyard bankruptcy far behind.



After all, the first 5 boats were bought by members of the Royal Lymington Yacht Club and Harry also had a second batch contract for 5 more yachts that were sent to the Argentino Yacht Club, one of which has recently been restored and is winning many regattas on the western coast of S America.



Toba downwind in Punta del Este, Uruguay, Classic Week 2023

One of the syndicate owners had visited Berthon to see my WSOD under rebuild which is still languishing in the sheds because we have too many other wooden projects lined up!



Named RIPPLE, suggested by my son, Oliver, who fully understood the reason why I had bought the boat – to teach our apprentices traditional skills in wood as well steel, aluminium, FRP & GRP and of course the modern fibres such as Kevlar, Carbon etc. It is the RIPPLE in the pond that flows down the generations not only the May family but also via the constant apprentices that has kept the Company and jobs for many local families for so long.

These West Solent Restricted Class (WSRC) boats were still being built during the 10 years of depression that manifested itself across the western industrial world from 1929 when only five boats were delivered by Berthon, the first being a yacht ordered in 1928 before the hiatus and then 4 smaller boats. In addition, the new blacksmith shop is given a build # which shows the classic use of craftsmanship during recessions! As a family business, this

continues today, with our dredging equipment having annual maintenance during the summer months when demand is less!



The 1930's brought the Great Depression

However, it was in 1933, when my great grandfather HG (Harry) May asked his naval architect, Rodney Paul, to provide a design based upon a brief for a potential order – “The concept was to be a sea-kindly craft with moderate over-hangs and draught, a fairly heavy displacement, and an easily handled sail plan adept to comfortably carry four to five people. A boat with good auxiliary power, capable of running through foul tides, and suitable for both cruising and offshore racing under recently RORC rating rules”



“GAUNTLET” WINNER OF THE ISLAND SAILING CLUB RACE under RORC RULES, JUNE 1934

To my great grandfather’s immense irritation, his client, a Mr Berge, had second thoughts after inspecting the design, and approached a rival shipyard in the West Country to request an alternative design based on the exact same requirements. Having compared the two designs, Mr Berge, commissioned the other shipyard, Phillips of Dartmouth to build his dream boat.

Berthon legend has it that the origin of the class name 'Gauntlet' was Harry's response to this commercial set back. Frustrated, and totally sure that his design was superior, in his words, he 'threw down the gauntlet' and Berthon built his design.



GAUNTLET BERTHED AT SHIPYARD HOUSE AT NORTH END OF BERTHON BOAT CO LTD, 1934

Once GAUNTLET was afloat, he challenged Mr Berge to a race. His confidence in GAUNTLET (36ft 9ins LOA, 30ft. 6 ins. LWL, 12-tons) with her canoe stern design and sturdy build was fully vindicated, as she proved considerably faster, and she became the first of a production line of a series of variously sized Gauntlets to be built at Berthon (see list adjacent). And so, the Gauntlet Legend was born with a starting price of 1,000 guineas (£1,050) - £95k in 2024. You may be able to buy a 36' sailing boats second hand for that amount today!



The challenge, work, and time had paid off, not just personally but commercially, with 26 Gauntlets built before the war. Sizes ranged from an 8 ton, pertinently named MITTEN by Harry with a touch of humour (before selling her to Hon Clive Pearson after Cowes Week) to the 26 ton flagship of the fleet. Harry had now moved up the scale as dinghy racing became yacht racing with great passion and enthusiasm for the sport; he always endeavoured to take a Gauntlet to Cowes Week to race. He was a very disappointed man if he returned from Cowes still owning her!

BOATS OF THE GAUNTLET CLASS
The list below shows the names of the various Gauntlets built, their year of construction and the first registered owner. It is also listed a number of Gauntlets that were sold either before launching or shortly afterwards. In these cases the second owner and the name of the boat at that time are given.

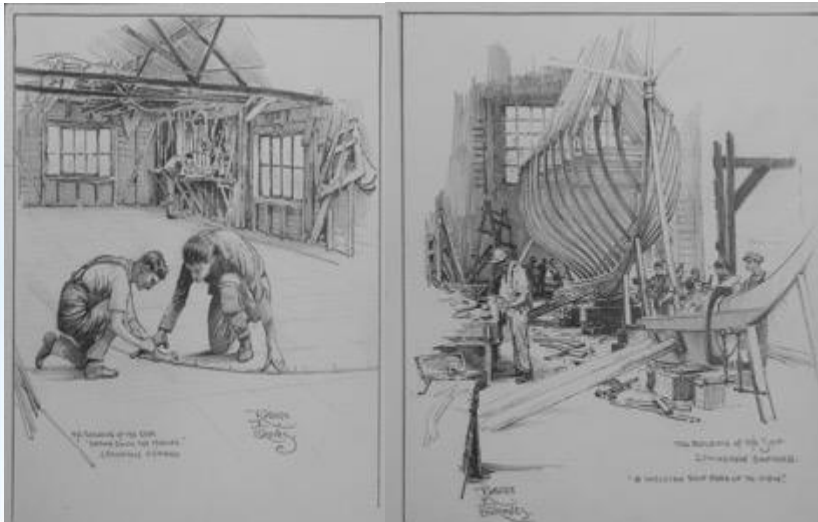
8 TON (PRE WAR)	
1937 MITTEN	Hon Olive Pearson
1939 MALSKAA	Col J J Oosthwaite-Eyre
8 TON (POST WAR)	
1950 AMANDA GP LLYN	O Stanhouse
1951 GAY WIND	W G Tame
1951 BARDU	Ma J Wilkinson
12 TON	
1934 GAUNTLET	Lord Churston
1935 GREENGAGE	F A Prial
1935 HEATHER	H W Goodwin
1935 RED GAUNTLET	K A E Moore
1935 SLEESIE MAO	Ma F Gannell
1936 GARDING LIGHT	Earl of Normanton
1936 MURRESSE	Lt Col F Ford
1936 OSPREY	D Hoak
1936 PHOROMA	F Pugh Sawyer
1936 PERIGRINE	Ma C H C Hingworth
1937 SCORPICO	A M Symington
1937 LENTUNE	G D Russell OBE
1937 SNAILO	T N Clouston
1938 GREY SEAL	D Hoak
1938 MORNING FLIGHT	D N Letts
1938 TYGER C	Capt P G Back
14 TON	
1938 PESADA	Sir Roy Feardon
1948 DESIRA	H D Brown
1948 SALLUK	Ma W Martineau MC
1947 CLOUD IN THE SUN	Hon Olive Pearson
1947 DEMON	J K N Davis
1947 MESALAH	S P Bradston
1948 GAY GAUNTLET	Lt Col E J H Marry
1948 ELA ROSE	S Borne
1950 ST GEORGE	H F Fleming
17 TON	
1938 COCH-YBODKAK	C H Wilson MC RFC
1938 SYRINK	Hon. W H R Little
18 TON	
1937 JENNY SPINNER	K Moore
1937 NEON	F A Keeling
1938 ROYAL CHARLES	M de B Mark
24 TON	
1936 MAIDEN LIGHT	D D Clapper
26 TON	
1936 GAEL-NA-MAPRA	F J G McLoughlin



The planking was originally pitch pine upon grown oak frames...Fastenings were all copper or brass with chain plates and all deck fittings in gunmetal steel – no doubt to reduce corrosion. The addition of an aft galley with a Taylor’s Para- Fin cooker and Electrolux refrigerator provided some comfort when cruising; and a forward “patented” toilet was also popular – particularly amongst sea faring women.

BOATS OF THE GAUNTLET CLASS
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However, one early summer a prospective buyer applied so much pressure to purchase Harry’s boat for the upcoming regatta, that he was ‘forced’ to sell his Cowes Week steed shortly before launch – for a decent premium, of course! This might have been a disaster for the Cowes veteran had it not been for the unsung, exceptional efforts of the Berthon Shipwright team who managed to build another Gauntlet in time for Cowes.

ROATS OF THE GAUNTLET CLASS

The list below shows the names of the various Gauntlets built, their year of construction and the first registered owner. If G. May commissioned a number of Gauntlets that were sold either before launching or shortly afterwards, in these cases the second owner and the name of the boat at that time are given.

8 TON (PRE WAR)	
1937 ARTEN	Hon. Cecil Pearson
1939 MALSKAA	Col. J. Onsthouse-Eyre
8 TON (POST WAR)	
1950 MIRANDA GP LLYN	G. Onsthouse
1951 GAY WIND	W. G. Farne
1951 BARDU	Mag. J. Wilkinson
12 TON	
1934 GAUNTLET	Lord Churston
1935 GREENGAGE	F. A. Prial
1935 HEATHER	H. W. Goodwin
1935 RED GAUNTLET	K. A. E. Moore
1935 SLEESER MAID	Mag. F. Gantet
1936 QUADING LIGHT	Earl of Normanton
1936 MARESSÉ	Lt Col. F. Ford
1936 DESPREY	D. Hoak
1936 PHOROMA	F. Engel Sawyer
1936 PERIGRINE	Mag. C. H. C. Hingworth
1937 SCORISCO	A. M. Symington
1937 LENTUNE	G. D. Russell OBE
1937 SINGLO	T. N. Goussier
1938 GREY SEAL	D. Hoak
1938 MCKENND FLIGHT	G. H. Latta
1939 TYGER C	Capt. P. G. Back
14 TON	
1938 PESADA	Sir Roy Fiddon
1940 DENRA	H. D. Bloomer
1940 SALLUKI	Mag. W. Martineau MC
1941 CLOUD IN THE SUN	Hon. Cecil Pearson
1947 DEMON	J. N. Davis
1947 MESALAH	S. P. Bradburn
1948 GAY GAUNTLET	Lt Col. E. J. H. Marry
1948 ELA ROSE	S. Bourne
1950 ST GEORGE	H. F. Fleming
17 TON	
1938 COCH-Y-BODDVA	C. H. Wilson MC RFC
1938 SYRINK	Hon. W. H. R. Little
18 TON	
1937 JEMMY SPINNER	K. Moore
1937 NEON	F. A. Keeling
1938 ROYAL CHARLES	M. de B. Mack
24 TON	
1938 MAIDEN LIGHT	D. D. Capper
26 TON	
1938 GAEL-NA-MAIRA	F. J. G. McLoughlin



And, I am certain you know what came next: Harry beat his recent “demanding” client with ease! A new large bespoke brand of various sized yachts saw the company through the second half of the depression years before war loomed.

SEPTEMBER YACHTING MONTHLY

ABSOLUTE RELIABILITY

(A GAUNTLET IN A BREEZE)

The Gauntlet yacht demonstrated their seaworthiness in the Channel Race. Of 26 in number, 11 finished, and amongst them four Gauntlets finished in good style and making Five and Three Plus.

The Gauntlets are undoubtedly the most efficient and able cruizers of their vintage afloat. Designed, built and rigged under the supervision of a practical seaman, these boats are fit to go anywhere and have proved their absolute reliability under the most trying conditions.

THE BERTHON BOAT CO. LIMITED
 THE SHIPYARD Managing Director: H. G. MAY LYMINGTON-ON-SOLENT
 Place your order now to ensure early delivery in 1938

(Word for pronunciation is—)

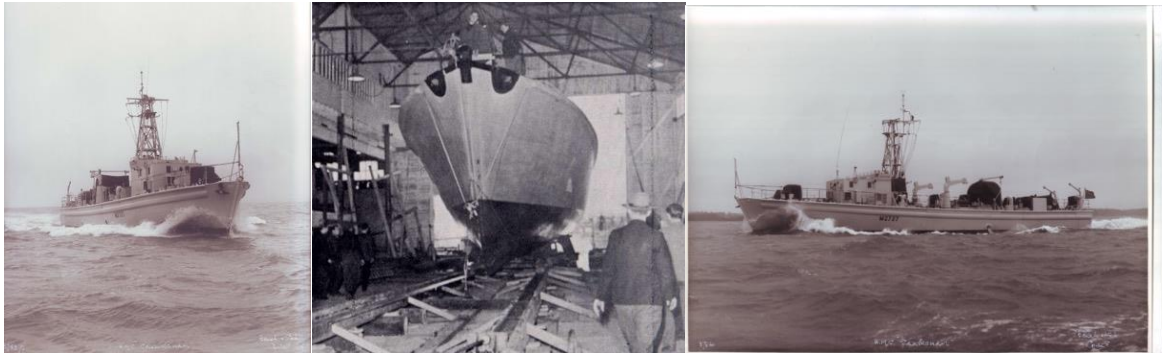
Then the War arrived.





WWII

During the War years, leisure boating was forbidden, with many boats laid up with engines removed for the war effort and the skilled craftsmen at Berthon were put to work building various craft for the war effort (45 x 60'-72' HTMLs & MTBs, 122 smaller vessels such as landing crafts, MBs, & 4 MFVs for undercover work in the Mediterranean & Caribbean).



The company received contracts for 224 vessels of which 49 were cancelled as the war ended, but Harry must have been in his element taking orders from the MOD for batches of builds up to 30 in one contract and an average 35 boats between 25'-72' built annually.



Interestingly, many of the larger Motor Launches were towed away to be finished in small creeks across the south coast where local land lubber carpenters and engineer craftsmen fitting the interiors; not only did this speed up the process but also reduced the risk of fully built vessels being bombed at Berthon.



The German bombers focussed upon large ports such as Southampton or Portsmouth but if they failed to use all their bombs, these were saved to drop on smaller ports as the bombers make their wide turns to face towards home. Seaforth House (still standing at Berthon) was hit and Shipyard House had suffered shrapnel as a bomb landed in the mud adjacent to the railway south of the bridge at low tide.



Left to right: Mr Shaw, Fred Harper, Bert Legg, Bill Dunstan, Bill Matthew, Vic Tiller, Freddie Harper, A Horton, Bill Gregory, Sid Richards (Approx 1941)

During the War, the shipwrights and other Berthon craftsmen doubled up as fire fighters.



Berthon 1947

1945 – 1990 Racing and Dredging

Major W Martineau MC (RCC & Commodore of Royal Lymington Yacht Club, 1954) was the first to order a Gauntlet after the war. SALUKI (14 ton) was launched in 1946, the first of the last 12 new Gauntlets. Harry had cleverly built this 14T to renew the name, since none of the pre-war Gauntlets were 14T. The same year Harry, long considered to be “trade” was invited to join the RLymYC just as his health was failing. This was either because of his contribution to the war effort or maybe that class differences had diminished as a result of the war. Maybe both? Either way, my father was also great friends with the Major, and I remember visiting the latter in Platoff House, near the Chequers Pub. It is likely he who “broke the chain”. Harry probably loved visiting the Royal Lymington Yacht Club without being invited! He certainly deserved his membership.



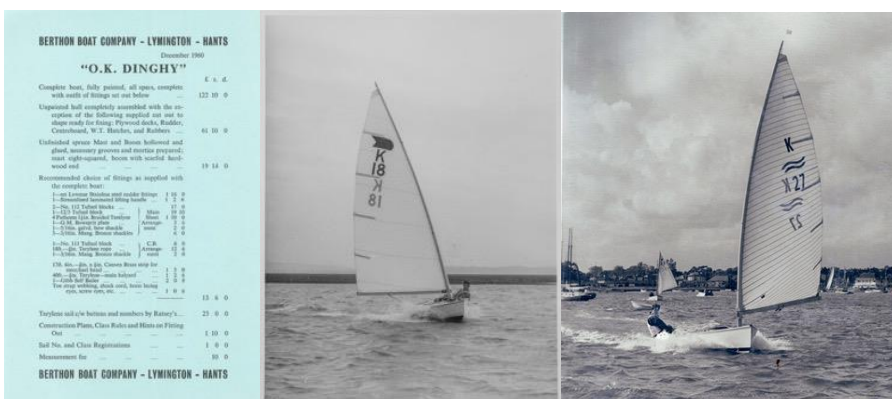
Harry (nicknamed Puffer for his chain smoking habit) died in 1952 at the ripe old age of 79 – despite lighting cigarette from cigarette.

Meanwhile, Gauntlets continue to be cruised, loved, repaired, restored, and above all admired, as the first production class of large leisure sailing yachts on the planet.

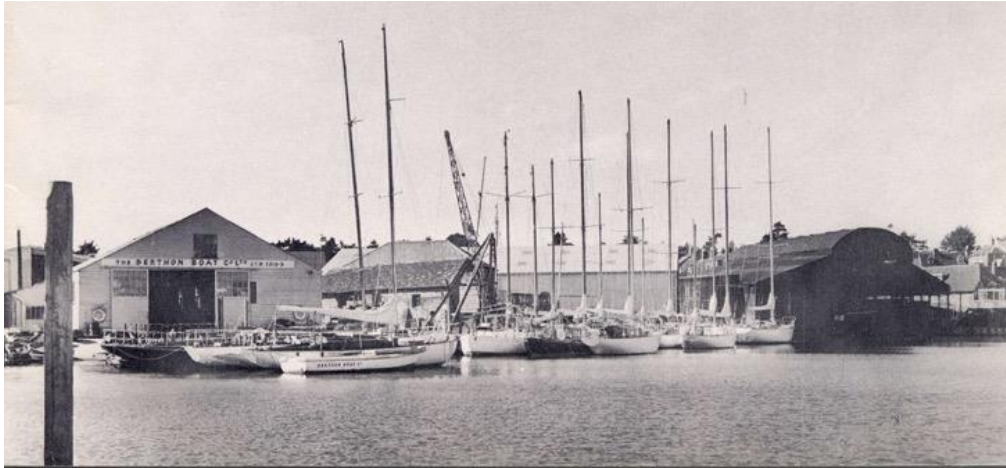


John Oliver May, Harry May’s son preferred banking, becoming a director of merchant bank Guinness Mahon, so the Lymington shipyard business was passed on to Harry’s grandson, my father David, who took over in 1958 but only received the business in 1960 as George May was nearing the end of his life. As an accountant he suggested a wedding gift to alleviate Inheritance Tax! Hence my father married Baroness Catherine van den Branden de Reith who came to England after the War.

After nigh on a decade with a General Manager, Mr Tew, in charge, who focussed more on commercial vessels such as 3 x 40’ Pilot service launches built for British Tankers Company, BP now!, 3 x 100’ Inshore Minesweepers (composite built) for the, 6 Admiralty 42’ Storing tenders for the (fleet craft) and a 30’ towing launch for Sir R McAlpine & Sons.

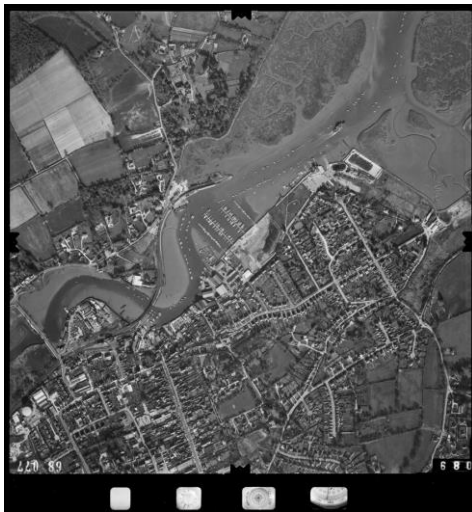


David used his Naval Architect knowledge and in 1958 initiated 14 x Finn Class (Olympic) sailing dinghies, his being named Finnegan’s Wake. OK’s came next, Like Harry, he had started with dinghies building Finns & OKs in batches for locals and himself. The photos show O.K. Dinghy built by the Berthon Boat Co. Ltd. for Olympic Helmsman R.H. Creagh-Osborne And David May in the Finn



1964

During the mid 1960's building batches of wooden dinghies were ceased as GRP hulls on production lines take over world wide.



The most important great step forward, was during a regatta in USA where boats were moored in marinas. He returned to the UK with a mission which ended up as Lymington Marina Ltd opened in 1965 and completed by before 1970.



Lord Mountbatten was officially open it in 1968 and I shall read you parts of his speech:

My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Mr May has admitted that there is an American influence in his development. He almost said it apologetically, but can we be wrong in following the lead of another nation who have more development experience in this field than we have in England. Some of the fringes available here – plug in telephone at individual pontoon berths, an ice making machine, and even Carmen hair curling rollers that can be rented – may be regarded initially as gimmicks but I am sure that they will soon become part of the generally accepted Marina scene.



1972

Mr May has rather light heartedly mentioned the difficulties he experienced in the early stages and the 10 years of preparation and ground work which has resulted in this

development. I would venture to suggest that some older and less progressive Managing Directors would have found the frustrations sufficiently wearing to give up the struggle..... I quote again from his experiences: months and months to obtain the Outline Planning Permission, and then only after Sherlock Holmes measures had been applied; British Railways lost the trolleys; the G.P.O. lost the overalls; British Road Services lost the fittings for the Toilet Block; the Customs at London Airport lost the electrical fittings. What hope has our unfortunate country got of making a financial recovery in the face of such terrifying examples of incompetence and indifference.

But there are encouraging signs of efficiency, competence and enthusiasm for without these Mr May and his Company would never have risen above these appalling setbacks and nevertheless have completed the Marina to schedule.



1978

Mr May has mentioned that my wife's father and grandfather had a real interest in the Berthon Boat Company. This was because the Reverend Berthon, who invented the original collapsible boat, was the Vicar of Romsey Abbey, and their personal friend. I have had personal experience of Berthon Boats, for we carried two of them onboard the Anti Submarine Escort, H.M.S. "P 31" when I was her First Lieutenant and Second in Command in 1918 during World War I. We would never have had room to carry boats of this size if they hadn't been collapsible; and very good they were too.....
If anyone wishes to read the whole speech, you can find under Berthon History



David May at the helm of Winsome II, his most successful racing yacht 1971

By the 70's and beyond the mix of commercial Pilot boats for middle east to RNLI lifeboats alongside Leisure Motor Boats up to 72' with twin engines, sailboats, racing cruisers.

David was an enthusiast and skilled racing yachtsman, participating in Club regattas. Berthon built a series of winning yachts for him, the most successful was one of the two Nicholson 43 hull's, fitted out by Berthon winning almost every silver Cup that Solent yacht Clubs could offer! I recall my mother employing a silver cleaner because in those days the winner literally held the Cups until the prize giving the following year.



Others were from the successful Ron Holland who had arrived from New Zealand in his own small boat, designed one tonner Winsome Blue, hull aluminium built in Florida and fitted out in Lymington; the photo shows David on the stern and 16 year old me on the coach roof!



Later Ed Dubois designed a 2 tonner, WINSOME GOLD in 1979; both hulls aluminium, the former built in Florida and the latter in Holland.

During David's period at the helm for 30 years, apart from building 1 of the first 2 marinas in the UK, he also brought Hood Sails to Berthon, the first American Sail company to venture overseas; many more jobs were available for locals. He was also the first to purchase a straddle hoist for lifting yachts under 16T from the water, again bringing in American ideas. That soon increased to 40T and the slipways were fast being piled to provide more land and frontage for the working on boats close to the workshops. The first spray paint booth in UK for boats was built to paint Winsome Gold the same metallic colour of his Aston Martin!



ENVIRONIST - BERTHON 70FT TSMY 1975

Berthon had moved on from building bespoke hulls in wood during the 1970's, the largest being Environist, a 70' CSD Design TS Research Vessel for JS Seiger Ltd. This boat was then sold by Berthon to the then Australian CEO of Imperial Tobacco as a tender for his race boat. We then sold her to Pete Townsend (of the Who band).



Berthon switched to fitting out hulls built by others, such as manufactured various UK moulders, delivered to Lymington on the back of a lorry for fitting out by our craftsmen. We had a new line of nine Fisher 46's and other smaller motorboats in the late seventies and then the 70' Auxiliary Ketch Camper & Nicholson Hull, built by Halmatic and fitted out by Berthon for Bob Miller in the early 80's. joint owner of Duty Free Shops worldwide.



I cannot list everything thing that Berthon did but the link between generations has to be the aluminium hull and build of Lord Robert Iliffe's 80' motor yacht, DALVINA which started in late 1988.



His father had commissioned the 17T Gauntlet, SYRINX back in 1936!

The head count in 1990 was about 100 finishing off Robert Iliffe's 80' MY DALVINA



And the interior was suspended on an aluminium frame to reduce vibration.



You have heard Berthon eschewed building sticky hulls, but nonetheless training shipwright apprentices to be able to service and repair the new fibre hulls and superstructures continued. Building one-off boats under 20m came to an end as certain brands manifested themselves at the head of their markets manufacturing boats on construction lines and minimal options for interior changes won the day. Thank Goodness the UK are still leaders with Princess & Sunseeker as well as Oyster blue water sailing boats. The marine cluster in southern England means there are a number of suppliers of parts being kept afloat.



2022

The Great Grand Children

In the mid 1980's my brother Dominic and I were both working in the City, he in the life markets and me as a wealth and small company fund manager. We both ended up at Berthon in early 1990's.

I was seeking a new job in the City and happened to be team racing for the RTYC in America sailing with Peter Nicholson (yes, my father's best friend, fellow naval architect, and he taught me how win races in the Solent waters over a five year period), when my father called me from Lymington and asked if I'd like to be Managing Director of Berthon. He had been 80% absent for 7 years and I had noticed that there was no pipeline for the boatyard. Asked for 24 hours to contemplate and when I called back to confirm that I would take charge and agreed a 50% cut in salary, but I forbade my father from sitting on my shoulder!! Finally, I asked my father if I should return immediately or finish the regatta; his answer: you are the MD, YOU DECIDE! I stayed to finish the regatta to keep the rule to never let down a team. I had previously raced dinghies as Captain of sailing at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, where I managed to graduate with two separate degrees, one in Economics and one in History. For the last two years there and onwards I managed to race 100 days a year worldwide for at least 25 years in ever bigger boats.



Dominic joined having decided to leave the life business he started in Paris for a consortium of three existing businesses and soon after and enjoyed the RLYM YC dry sailing racing on Thursday evenings first in the J-24 class and through various others including an X boat (built by Berthon in 1927); As ever, the VAT man turned up and Dominic showed him around explaining how the X-boat was used by him. The X boat was sitting underneath a 100' yacht called PROVIDENCE from the Caribbean on the last slipway the company had. This was too much information for Mr HMRC who tried to charge it as a benefit in kind! We appealed and won because the apprentices who were learning their craft on the X-boat in the previous year were the ones working on board the 100', proven with time sheets!

Dominic also raced in regattas on larger boats up to maxis in the Caribbean and CAMBRIA that belonged to a friend of our father, which had sailed from Australia to race in St Tropez in the Mediterranean. We tried not to be at the same regattas, but sometimes the opportunity was difficult to decline such offers.

It seems quite clear that we both have followed the steps of both David and Harry and it is fair to say we have had a full life on the water in order to comprehend our marine market. I would say that the first few years were a baptism of fire and just to make that real, we did have a minor fire incident! We turned the £1m loss to a meagre profit the following year and we soon managed to get a contract to build a 60' pilot boat for a Middle Eastern Port authority in Abu Dhabi which turned into 2 Pilot vessels. Within a few years we had upped the apprenticeships to 30 on average and they have stayed above 25 during the last thirty.



ARUN CLASS RNLI LIFEBOAT
 SEVERN CLASS RNLI LIFEBOATS
 SHANNON CLASS RNLI LIFEBOATS

Berthon then started to fit out the Carbon/Kevlar 52' Severn Class lifeboats hulls & superstructures built by Green Marine literally on our doorstep for the RNLI; we subsequently built 40 lifeboats for them over 25 years. Refits for blue water cruising sail boats continue as a result of our world-wide sales teams. Just as Harry built a new shed in 1928, and a new Blacksmith shop in 1929, we did the same in 1998, building new sheds based upon time & motion to increase productivity. River walls have been replaced, with more to come and local businesses were bought in 2018/19 to take the company back to smaller entry level sales, via BHG a local business that was quietly for sale. Had we not stepped in, the business might have ended up in the Midlands.

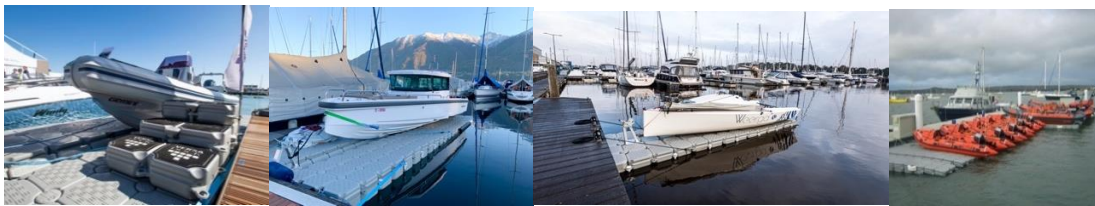


BHG is largest dealer of Yamaha outboard engines and sell Torquedo electric outboards looking forward to sustainability; this subsidiary also stocks a lot of spare parts which sell direct to other marine commercial businesses and DIY purchases. They sell paddleboards and tenders as well as Jeanneau motor yachts made in France, but we install engines, electronics and decks etc.. this all sounds akin to Harry's focus to look after entry customers as well as the rich and famous.



Gemini 780 RIB, built for ABP Ports Southampton
 Gemini 880 RIB, built for the Jersey Lifeboat Association

At the same time Dominic also brought in GEMINI hulls from S Africa and just five years on we fitted out and sold 20 GEMINI RIBs this year having already sold others to ABPorts and Jersey Search & Rescue. The commercial aspect continues with a multi-year contract with ABPorts Southampton & Portsmouth's fleet of pilot & survey or management vessels.



We also purchased another small company based here selling patented floating docks under the brand of Versadock, that used to be manufactured in USA and now here in UK. The sustainable benefit is there is no need for antifouling and anodes last for years and years. Furthermore, simple servicing can be carried out without a lift ashore.



The defence sector brings in a number of the MOD's P2000 Archer class training vessels annually.



And the leisure sector includes Yacht Maintenance and Repair along with wooden boat refit or rebuilds on vessels dating back to the 1930's, 40's and 50's.



Berthon Yacht Sales is now a global business with Berthon USA in Newport Rhode Island, Berthon Scandinavia in Sweden and Berthon Spain in Mallorca offering sales and servicing; these count for around 30 extra people working under the Berthon Group. Our marvellous and very well esteemed Sales Director is Sue Grant who took over Berthon International Yacht Sales not long after Dominic and I arrived on the scene. Her thumbprint descriptions of boats for sale have amused readers of the yachting magazines and now on-line websites.

Between us we became dealers of Norwegian WINDY sports boats in UK and France until a couple of years ago when management there had changed. We continue to work closely to sell British branded PEARL Motor Yachts and also agents for Italian built SOLARIS sailing yachts and motor boats in UK, Berthon Scandinavia and Berthon USA. Our latest brand we represent is PEGASUS, another Italian brand of fast and comfortable blue water cruising. Finally represent IGUANA amphibious RIBs Berthon always likes niche markets!



In summary, we have nearly doubled the headcount from 1990 to around 200 world wide. Berthon continues to diversify, evolving with the times, constantly looking forward to what lies next for the marine industry. Investments continue with a new 45T boat mover due next year, PVs on M Shed, and we recently obtained planning permission to re-pile the marina's river wall starting next autumn 2025, and other sections in due course. Sadly, that brings no extra revenue, and the marina will need to be reconfigured to accommodate the longer, but more importantly wider modern built boats; the latter will reduce berths overall and so we will soon deposit another application with the NFDC planning department for a drystack to meet demand for entry level small motor boats under 10m, where the Lymington Harbour Commissioners have a 25-40 year wait list! There is no waterfrontage in the western Solent that is needed. Yes, despite nearing retirement, we feel the need to future proof the business. Luckily, we have no debt and have been cash positive for over 30 years. We see ourselves as caretakers!

Finally, we use the term Auntie Berthon because we look after our staff. Two retirements earlier this year celebrated 50 years each at Berthon. Another, ex-apprentice, skilled

engineer, promoted to engineering foreman, and long been a senior Project Manager has just applied to reduce his hours to a four day a week!