

**COMBS SAILING CLUB**  
**Notes on the years 2000 to 2010**

## INTRODUCTION

Part of the celebrations for the fiftieth anniversary of the Club, was publication of a booklet "The History of The Combs Sailing Club 1950 - 2000". The final sentence of the booklet is...

"With a core of active members willing to help run the Club, its future looks secure."

Certainly the years 2000 to 2010 have been ones of considerable success and achievement. The improvements to the facilities are the most obvious: the starter's hut in a better location, a new patrol boat house, an improved Clubhouse, refurbished toilets, a new jetty. All evidence of the hard work put in by the core of active members.

On the water, the Club now has several sailors able to compete successfully at National and even World level. The Club has a successful training scheme providing a steady flow of young sailors. Many were involved in Derbyshire Youth Sailing and in school competitions.

But other less obvious achievements need to be recorded. A twenty five year lease was agreed with British Waterways. Without this, it would have been difficult to justify investment in new facilities. Agreements with external bodies bring in a regular income. Becoming a Community Amateur Sports Club reduced the rates. This work, often unnoticed, underpins the whole club.

Nor must the routine work that does not rate a mention in any history, be forgotten. For example, Bob Pyett's work on the stone hut. Then at times a lot of effort is put into a venture that never comes to fruition, for example, the proposal to build a new clubhouse and re-layout of the boat park. But committee members spent hours on design and searching for grants. These activities need to be mentioned as well; not only to record the work but also to provide guidance in the future.

## COMMODORES AND COMMITTEES

During the ten years 2000 to 2010, the Club had three Commodores: Harry Mayo (1998 - 2003 and 2008 - 2010), Tony Berry (2003 - 2006) and Harold Fletcher (2006 - 2008). The progress over the past ten years shows how successful the Commodores have been in directing the willingness of members to work for the good of the Club. However, this enthusiasm does not extend to committee work. The resulting shortage of members willing to serve on committees meant that in the year 2000, the General Purposes (G.P.) and the Sailing Committee were combined. Because of the workload, this is not ideal. A separate Sailing Committee was re-instated in 2001. Also, the maximum term for a Commodore was extended from three to five years. Partly this was because of shortage of candidates but mainly because Harry was not only coping well as Commodore but also making significant progress in many areas.

For many years the G.P. committee had wanted to introduce family membership and at the same time simplify the membership structure. The aim of family membership was to boost membership but also to recognise the role of families in supporting the Club. At the 2002 AGM, it was agreed to:

- introduce family membership category.
- eliminate the retired member class replacing it with a discount.

within a year 22 families had joined adding 64 members; a boost to membership and the Club finances.

Even so this leaves eight categories: Full, Sailing, Family, Junior, Outport, Honorary, Temporary and Group. The distinction between Full and Sailing members is important, as only Full members may vote on Constitutional changes. Full membership is restricted to those who, in the opinion of the G.P. committee, take an active interest in the club.

The growth in the red tape surrounding our sport is a nightmare. However failure to comply with regulations would lead to closure. Typical is the problem of abandoned boats. They take up space in the boat park and give a neglected air to the Club. However to give the Club the right to dispose of (or even move) a boat required an alteration to the Constitution.

Safety is an even bigger problem. During the 2004 season, Malcolm Andrews created the procedures and check lists which form the basis of the Club's Health and Safety system. Some of the changes are trivial, for example, changing the wording in the Sailing Instructions from "Rescue boat" to "patrol boat". The former implies a duty of rescue; the second



Harry Mayo

does not. But others are far more important; for example, improvements to safety equipment and the annual safety inspections. Similarly Child Protection policies, mainly based on the RYA rules, had to be introduced.

Malcolm also created the club website in 2002. This has become the main method of communication with members as well as of attracting newcomers. When Malcolm resigned the site was run by Russell Talbot, with Gerald Williams contributing the on-line results. Even the Newsletter is circulated by email now getting rid of the chore and expense of sending it out by mail.

In December 2003, Tony Berry, who had been Treasurer for many years, decided that the only way to escape this role was to become Commodore. He was immediately faced with a row over what boats should be allowed to sail at Combs.



Tony Berry

In 2000, the Club had three fleets:

- the GP 14 fleet,
- the menagerie fleet, which, basically, was limited to dinghies with a PY from a Mirror (1386) to a Fireball (982).
- the sailboard fleet (although this has never attracted enough interest to support regular racing).

However, the design and technology of dinghies improves continually, so newer, faster boats became available. During the 2003 season Gordon Thompson Jnr. started sailing an ISO. He wanted to race but it was well outside the range permitted at the time. At the 2003 AGM a proposal to have a fast fleet and a slow fleet was discussed. Any change in fleets arouses strong emotions, particularly one that eliminates the GP14 fleet. The minutes of the 2003 A.G.M. record...

“The discussion raised issues on:

- the effect on the quality and organisation of racing,
- safety issues.
- the impact on the development of the Club (i.e. would the changes attract new members to the Club or discourage beginners).

The discussion rapidly became very heated. Since there was had little prospect of it being settling amicably, Tony Berry curtailed the discussion and agreed to consult with members before the start of the next season. Altering the fleets is a change to the Constitution, so this has to be done at an Extra-ordinary General Meeting (E.G.M.).

The consultation was a three stage process.

- a) A letter from the Commodore encouraging participation was sent out with the renewal forms in late December 2003.
- b) A newsletter was issued giving notice of the E. G. M. with several well researched articles from members expressing their views and a questionnaire.
- c) An E.G.M.

Several members complained that the newsletter was biased. For example Richard Silson wrote on the 13<sup>th</sup> Feb 2004...

“I am very concerned at the content of the news letter and the implications for a fair decision at the E.G.M. The issue has been taken up with such vehemence that the club as a whole is threatened by the extreme positions being taken.”

ref G.P.Min Feb 2004

In fact, Andie Downie published all the letters he received; the problem was that most of the letters were against the change. To attempt to rectify the position a series of posters was put up on the day of the E.G.M. allowing members to make written contributions to the debate.

At the E.G.M. Tony Berry worked hard to keep the tone of the debate civil and to a large degree he succeeded. The proposal to create a fast and slow fleet was withdrawn by Gordon Thompson, because, as he explained, his main aim was to be able to race faster boats. This could be achieved by a relatively minor change, altering the yardstick of the fastest boats allowed to sail in the menagerie fleet to 900 from 982. After a long discussion this was agreed but for the 2004 season only. The G.P.14s was to be kept as a separate fleet because the questionnaire had shown this had overwhelming support. After a season sailing with these rules, there was little opposition to making the change permanent. Sadly, the ill-feeling from this episode did result in some members leaving the Club but Tony handled the situation with considerable managerial and social skill.

It was during Tony's spell as Commodore that the major improvements of the Club house were carried out (see later). The Club's finances were steadily improving. The Treasurer, Nigel Carson, managed to secure grants for safety equipment and training. He got the Club registered as a Community Sports Organisation, entitling the Club to rate rebates.

Tony's ploy to escape the role of Treasurer was but a temporary respite. A year after he had retired as Commodore, he was re-instated as Treasurer. The next Commodore was Harold Fletcher. Harold brought considerable practical skills and, as importantly, his heavy equipment to the role, allowing the Club to make significant progress on many groundwork projects. Unfortunately this limited his time on the water and during his two years as Commodore he must have spent less time sailing than any Commodore in the history of the Club.



Russell Talbot (Commodore 2011 to date)

Harold Fletcher

When Harold retired as Commodore, Harry Mayo took over again. During this period, several improvements to the facilities were completed. Toilets have always been a problem at Combs. In fact they were non-existent until 1957 when an Elsan chemical toilet was introduced. Later the toilet block was built and a cesspit installed. However the whole block has been refurbished and the Ladies loo altered to accommodate the disabled as well. This is part of the effort to make the Club more accessible to the whole population. Other, unglamorous but necessary work, was reinforcement of the bank in front of the boat park.

The latest improvement has been the purchase of a plastic jetty in 2010. Prior to this the heavy wooden jetty had to be removed from the water each year, painted with preservative and then manhandled back at the start of the season. The purchase of the plastic jetty, although expensive (c. £8000) saves many man-hours of labour. When he resigned as Commodore in December 2010, Harry was awarded a richly deserved Honorary membership.

## THE CLUB FACILITIES

At the turn of the century our existing lease expired. The re-negotiation of the lease during 2000 by Richard McLean and Norman Higgins is the sort of work that goes unnoticed by members but is fundamental to the running of the Club. The new lease is for 25 years with five yearly reviews. There are break clauses in the reviews, i.e. the Club can close without having to pay the rent for the remainder of the lease. Also there is provision for a rebate if the water level falls too far. This provision has already saved the Club several hundred pounds. The new lease provides security and justified the G.P committee undertaking development of the Club's facilities. At the same time the new lease was signed, new Trustees were appointed. Trustees hold the property and assets of the Club on behalf of its members. The management of the Club's affairs is entrusted to the G.P. Committee. The Club was lucky to have members like Richard and Norman, with both the professional skills and the time to put in the effort required. In recognition of their work, both were awarded Honorary membership.



Once the new lease was settled, attention shifted to the Clubhouse. This is a Terrapin building; ten years old when it was erected in 1982. The basic structure was reasonably sound, but at the time (2000 - 2004) the fabric was in a poor condition and required constant maintenance.

The main question facing the G.P. Committee was whether to build a new clubhouse or improve the existing building. In January 2002 a working party consisting of Harry Mayo, Peter Gardner, Harold Fletcher and Lynda Baxter, was set up to examine proposals to replace the Club house. It soon became evident that this was going to be an expensive undertaking (approximately £200,000) and could not be financed by the club members alone.

So for the next couple of years, Peter Gardner worked on the design and cost estimates. Meanwhile Harry Mayo searched for major grants. Sports England (funded from the Lottery) appeared the only body that could fund projects of this size. In June 2003 the G.P. committee discussed the project. As the minutes note...

“However from discussions... Peter understands Sports England are not considering any applications until June 2004. Sports England is suffering a reduction in income and the recently agreed Olympic bid is likely to be a major demand on its funds.

Since, without major grants a new clubhouse is beyond the Club’s means, several alternatives were discussed:

- cheaper options for a new clubhouse (prefab or Terrapin type building),
- the topsy alternative (building in stages as the Club can afford it).”

GP comm min June 2003

Over the next eighteen months, the various options were investigated. For example a new Terrapin building would cost £131, 500; again too expensive. By the end of 2004, it had been decided that the only practical solution was to refurbish the existing building. This was the same conclusion that the G.P. committee had reached in the mid 1990’s but this time the investigation, in particular the search for grants, had been much more thorough.

Once the decision had been made at the end of 2004 to refurbish rather than replace the Clubhouse, Harry Mayo and Gordon Thompson Snr. set to work with a will. At the beginning of 2005, plastic, double glazed windows were purchased from a local firm. These had the advantage of reducing maintenance. The design was better as well because the old windows had a glazing bar that blocked the view of the lake of anyone seated in the clubhouse. Each window was fitted into wooden frames with weather boarding below. As each panel was replaced, the foundation timbers were exposed. Several were rotten and had to be replaced. To meet the deadline of having the clubhouse ready for use by the start of the season, Harry and Gordon worked several days a week; a huge amount of effort. Again the Club was fortunate to have two members with the practical skill, time and enthusiasm to complete a project of this magnitude. At the same time the veranda decking was replaced with treated timber and the metal railings powder painted. Gordon was made an Honorary member for this and other contributions to the Club.

Later, in summer 2010 the remaining wall panels were covered with weather boarding. Finally the Clubhouse was weather tight and attractive, but equally important would require much less maintenance in future.

Internally, there were several changes as well. The changing rooms had been re-laid out and electric immersion heating of the water installed in 1999 but very little to the other areas. A galley inspection in July 2004 by Elizabeth Fountaine had

highlighted significant shortcomings, namely failure to meet the minimum legal requirements. So the kitchen had to be refitted. Paul Thompson and Chris Fletcher organised and carried out this work.

While the G.P. committee had been ruminating on the clubhouse, other projects had been in hand. The first change was to move the starting hut from in line with the pontoon to its current position near the stone hut. Members of the Sailing committee suggested this in September 2002 in order to:

- improve the starting transit lines,
- reduce interruptions from sailors coming off the water
- OOD has better view of lake.

An additional benefit was that freed up space in the boat park. This is an important consideration. Since most members store their boats at the Club, the size of the boat park limits the number of members. Boat racks are an option for a few boats such as Toppers or canoes but are not convenient for most. The possibility of purchasing more land has been explored on a few occasions but the price has always been prohibitive. The Sailing Committee organised the move, which was complete by the start of the 2003 season.

To those who act as Officers of the Day, the automated starting system designed and built during the 2008 season by Russell Talbot has been a boon. It automatically sounds a hooter at the required intervals, making starting, even of multiple fleets, a simple process.

Another change was replacing the patrol boat hut. The original boathouse was situated where there is now a turning circle and had been built with sections of prefab concrete garages. Not only was it inconveniently sited but also the earth floor was undermined by rabbits so that the wheels of the launching trolley frequently got stuck.

Work began late in the 2003 season. By April 2004 the concrete foundations were in place but the rest of work was not completed till the end of the season. The hut was large enough for two patrol boats, the latest of which has an electric starter. Later the patrol boat hut was extended with a grant from the University of Derby. The University uses the reservoir and wished to have storage facilities on site.

Over the ten years up to 2010, Harold Fletcher has done an amazing amount of groundwork improvements. The most obvious is the introduction of the turning circle (early 2005). This reduces the congestion in the car park at Open meetings as the OOD can insist on boats being dropped off and cars returned to the car park. Unfortunately this rule is unenforceable the rest of the time. Other improvements on the road were the provision of a passing place and better drainage, necessary as the road had been damaged by water from the golf course. Harold also installed the ditch on the North boundary (on Golf Club land as part of an agreement about drainage), as well as replacing and improving the land drains in the boat park.

The facilities of the Club are in better condition than they have been for many years. Equally important, the improvements have produced facilities which require less maintenance and the work required can be carried out by less skilled members. This is a huge achievement and one that involved many man hours work.

## **ON THE WATER**

On the water, the scene has changed considerably over this decade; in particular, the standard of racing is higher. The achievements in the High Peak Regatta illustrate this. Two trophies are at stake:

- the High Peak Trophy sailed between: Combs, Errwood, Glossop, and Toddbrook. All Clubs in the High Peak area.
- the SK Trophy, which is open to all clubs sailing the event, in practice the above clubs and Etherow.

The format is three pursuit races with the scores from the first three boats of each club counting. In the years 2000 to 2009, Combs won eight times, Glossop twice (2000 and 2003). There was no race in 2010.

These team events show the strength in depth of the Club but it also has several outstanding sailors some of whom have won honours in National and even World events. Ric Whitehouse and Louis Saunders are the most obvious examples but this list includes Paul Thompson and Peter Gardner. Ric has been sailing at Combs since about 1970. He has won the Byte Inlands on six occasions and the Byte World Masters in 2008. Louis has won the Lightning Nationals on three occasions (2005, 2006 and 2010), as well as the Lightning Travellers (2005) and the CII Byte Nationals (2010).



Louis Saunders at the Byte Inlands 2010

Louis took his RYA level 1 in 1994, and was introduced to competitive sailing by crewing with Norman Whiteley. He continued to develop his sailing skills with Derbyshire Youth Sailing, (DYS) winning the Youth Series in 2004.



Norman Whiteley with crew Will Lomas

For many years, Norman Whiteley had encouraged newcomers by letting them crew his G.P.14. In December 2001, he became Chairman of the Sailing Committee and introduced the first systematic training the following year. This consisted of five training days run by Chris Bowler. These were aimed at improving boat handling and boat set up skills, through practical sessions. Dave Watson and Peter Whiteley ran some wind surfing sessions as well.

In 2003 Norman Whiteley, Dave Watson, and Phillip Barcion developed a sailing course with 5 levels. On completion of each level the students would receive a Combs Certificate. At level 1 a student is competent to sail in light winds; by level 5, they are competent to sail in moderate to strong winds and even to teach. Level 1 and level 2 are very similar to the RYA course but designed more to get new and existing members into racing. Higher levels improve boat handling and knowledge of racing the rules, but also include how to be OOD and patrol officer. It is a well thought out and comprehensive scheme

The G.P. Committee has supported this work by providing the Sailing Committee with a separate budget. This was supplemented on occasions by grants. For example in 2005, the Treasurer, Nigel Carson obtained a grant of £5,000 for safety equipment and the training of new instructors. The training scheme encourages youngsters to take up sailing, so inevitably their parents spend a lot of time at Combs. Some are tempted into sailing, others help around the Club. To encourage this, family membership, discussed earlier, was introduced and to some extent complements the training scheme.

Naturally the courses proved popular, especially since up to 2005 they were free. Charges were introduced in 2006 mainly to ensure commitment from youngsters on the course, although the income is most welcome. Until 2005 training was mainly at level 1 but by 2006 level 2 training was available and a total of 27 people attended. By 2007 it had become evident that for level 2 and above, each trainer could only teach at most four students. The consequence of this was that numbers on the courses had to be limited. Of all the developments at Combs, the introduction of training is the most significant in ensuring the future of the Club.

The transition from novice to competent sailor is helped by the provision of a manned patrol boat for Saturday afternoon sailing. However everyone ends up racing as Combs is too small to provide interesting cruising. To encourage racing the Sailing Committee sub-divided the fleets into "Gold" and "Silver", the latter category giving less competitive sailors an opportunity to win trophies.

The change in rules for the 2004 season (allowing faster boats to race) has been stimulating. Several new classes of dinghies have become popular, e.g. Super Nova's, RS300s and Phantoms. Exotica such as Contenders, Cherub, International 14 and National 12s have been tried but these boats cannot be sailed to their handicap on Combs. Inevitably competitive sailors change to boats more suitable to our water. But these boats add interest, especially in high winds.

The introduction of faster boats has had few of the problems anticipated (safety, discouraging beginners). The most serious is probably that widely different handicaps in a fleet make organising the racing difficult. A boat (sailed to handicap) with a yardstick of 900 will finish a race in about three quarters of the time a Lightning takes. So the crew of the faster boats have to sit around waiting till the slower boats finish, or perhaps longer if these sailors want a break too. Also, it gives faster boats an advantage in conditions when the wind is dropping. This is quite common on Wednesday evenings. Giving faster boats an extra lap makes the Officer of the Day's job harder, but is possible with a good assistant or when the number of boats racing is small.

The Club has welcomed other organisations as group members. The income (c. £3,000) is of huge financial benefit. Having formal agreements with these organisations, allows the Club to police their use of the water. However the promotion of sailing and canoeing is as important. Edale YHA and Whitehall Outdoor Pursuits Centre use the water very regularly for teaching young people canoeing. Buxton Community School and Chapel High School teach sailing.. Derby University teach students who intend to make sports instruction or leadership a career.

Anglers are another group who infest Combs. Harry Mayo instigated discussions with British Waterways, arguing that anglers were interfering with our rights to use the water. English Nature, who are responsible for preserving Combs as a site of Special Scientific Interest became involved. The situation is unresolved at the present but the aim is to ensure that fishermen do not interfere with sailing and remove their litter.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Everyone joins Combs to sail; rarely do we stand back and consider how successful the Club has been over this past decade. Of course success in sailing depends on the skill of the individuals, but this is grounded on hard work behind the scenes. Everyone should be grateful to the Commodores, Harry Mayo, Tony Berry and Harold Fletcher, the members of the GP and Sailing Committees and especially Norman Whiteley for his work with others on the training scheme.

Recently, there has been a fall in the numbers, especially of family memberships. Perhaps, this is not surprising, since families are badly affected by the current economic situation. Sailing is an expensive sport, especially at the beginning with membership, clothing and perhaps a boat to buy. Also sailing takes up a lot of time and for many families this is a problem as well. But when you join a Club it is the friendliness of the members that is crucial. This too is one of our strengths. Let us build on this during the next decade.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many members have helped with this booklet:

- Andy Butler for photos and the preparation of this booklet for publication on the web,
- Tony Berry , Harry Mayo and Norman Whiteley for proof reading and in Tony's case for photos as well,
- for information and comments, Ric Whitehouse, Louis Saunders, Paul Thompson, Nigel Carson, Norman Higgins, Judy Gibbons.
- Burton Sailing Club for the Byte Inlands photo

Without their help producing these notes would have been impossible.

Sandy Broadbent

## APPENDIX 1

	Commodore	Vice-Commodore	Rear Commodore	Secretary	Treasurer
2000	H. Mayo	S. Broadbent	P. Gardner	D. Fox-Davies	A.J. Berry
2001	H. Mayo	S. Broadbent	P. Gardner	D. Fox-Davies	A.J. Berry
2002	H. Mayo	S. Broadbent	P. Gardner	S. Broadbent	A.J. Berry
2003	H. Mayo	S. Broadbent	P. Gardner	S. Broadbent	A.J. Berry
2004	A.J. Berry	H. Fletcher	H. Mayo	S. Broadbent	N. Carson
2005	A.J. Berry	H. Fletcher	H. Mayo	S. Broadbent	N. Carson
2006	A.J. Berry	H. Fletcher	H. Mayo	G. Thomson	N. Carson
2007	H. Fletcher	H. Mayo	A. J. Berry	G. Thompson	N. Carson
2008	H. Fletcher	H. Mayo	A. J. Berry	G. Thompson	A. J. Berry
2009	H. Mayo	R. Talbot	H. Fletcher	A.J. Berry (acting)	A. J. Berry
2010	H. Mayo	R. Talbot	vacant	J.M. Gibbons	A.J. Berry

Note: Flag officers are elected at the AGM, which is usually in the December of preceding year.