



In May 1961 the *Hampshire* county magazine published an article on the joys of sailing and detailed the life story of the founder of the Emsworth Sailing School, Crab Searl. The author, Ted Stokes, reminisced:

“Racing requires skill, yes, and first class seamanship. But so does exploring by water, adventure by water – just cruising or even messing about. There are so many things you can do in a boat. Why do only one?”

Aged just 42, Crab (Group Captain F H L Searl) left a stressful business life and came to Emsworth in 1954 on the advice of his doctor. He had always loved sailing. Ted asked Crab what he did with his leisure. ‘Oh, if I have a day off,’ he said with a wicked twinkle in his eye, ‘I go for a sail’.

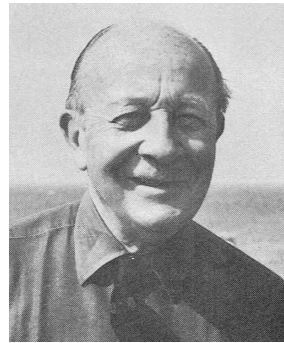
He started the Sailing School in 1958 with just one boat but by 1961 had four Wayfarers, two Scows, and an Enterprise. No less than 800 pupils, including Lieutenant General Sir Brian Horrocks, had been taught by him. Crab had also married one of his pupils, Joan, and the couple lived in the spritsail barge, *Waveney*, which was moored just off Emsworth.

The burgee (above left), emblem of the Sailing School based at the bottom of Bath Road, was gifted to Emsworth Museum by Denis Evans who was Crab’s co-director and managing director of the school from 1961-71. The burgee is a red crab on a white and blue background. Crab’s nickname came from his time in the RAF when he flew sideways one day.

In 1964 Crab passed his knowledge and love of sailing onto many others when he wrote *The Pan Book of Sailing*. It is still in print.

Emsworth Sailing School

by
Chris Clode and Ted Stokes



Crab Searl

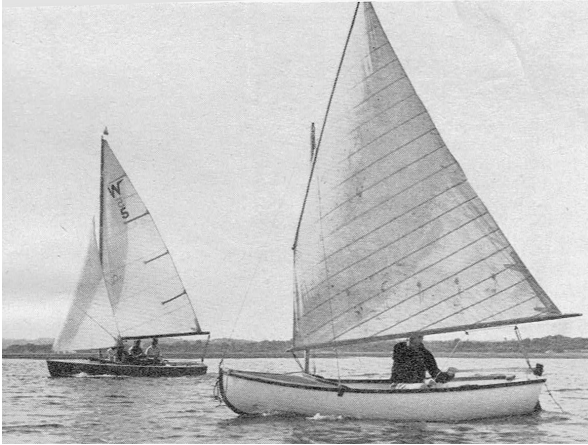
Photo: From an article by Strahan Soames, former chairman of The Emsworth Maritime & Historical Trust, in Yachts and Yachting, October 24th, 1969

Chris Clode, former Commodore of the Emsworth Sailing Club, takes up the tale: “I’m not sure of the exact date but Jim Gordon, the then principal of Rockley Point Sailing School in Poole Harbour, took over ownership of Emsworth Sailing School from Crab Searl either in the late 1970s or early 80s. Jim Gordon’s eldest son Chris was seconded from Rockley to Emsworth Sailing School as the manager and ran it until 1982 when the then Island Sailing (later to become Sunsail), based at Northney Marina, merged with Emsworth Sailing School.

A new manager was appointed in the form of an ex-army RSM, one Tom Gregory, who expanded the school into cruiser sailing and introduced RYA cruiser courses in a small fleet of Beneteau First 32s to augment the Wayfarers, Toppers and Lasers that formed the bulk of the dinghy fleet.

During the 1980s the school became very popular and residential courses were sold out from early April until late September every year. Students were billeted in various houses around Emsworth and the ‘landladies’ became synonymous with the success of the school. Many are still alive and remember those days well.

Several local families sent their children to the school to learn to sail and many of those then went on to become RYA instructors at



Wayfarer and Scow. Photo: Colin N Urry

the school. Even now, some 40 years later, many are involved in senior positions in the yachting industry worldwide.

With the expansion of the school new larger premises were needed and Yacht Villa was acquired, a large house immediately to the west of Emsworth Sailing Club. Planning permission was submitted to move the school from 59 Bath Road to Yacht Villa, but after many objections from local residents, this was refused. Yacht Villa was then used as accommodation for some of the students, but the school itself remained at 59 Bath Road.

In 1988 Sunsail, the parent company of Emsworth Sailing School, moved to the new Port Solent development at the north end of Portsmouth Harbour. Emsworth Sailing School disbanded and became known as the Portsmouth Harbour Yacht Club, based in the Port House at Port Solent.

This left Yacht Villa and 59 Bath Road vacant. No. 59 was sold to Roger Swainston, then one of the Sunsail Directors. He demolished the building and built two semi-detached town houses which still remain in Bath Road. Yacht Villa was demolished and sold to developers who subsequently went bust. In 1992 part of the remaining land was acquired by Emsworth Sailing Club as an extension to their dinghy park, and the rest added to the garden of Angus Duncan's house, 52 Bath Road. Angus had helped facilitate the acquisition of the plot, hence his benefitting from a larger garden.

Many current Emsworth residents either learned to sail at Emsworth Sailing School or taught there as instructors. It was one of the most successful sailing schools in the country and evokes happy memories amongst thousands of students who spent part of their summer holidays learning to sail and enjoying the natural beauty of Chichester Harbour."

Sources:

'Ready About! Heave Ho!' *The Yachtsman*, March 1960. Article by Strahan Soames

'Doing nothing skilfully can be so exciting', *Hampshire* county magazine, May 1961. Article by Ted Stokes