

## **Emsworth Sailing Club**

Although the sport of sailing did not originate in Chichester Harbour, people in growing numbers have enjoyed 'messaging about in boats' here for well over a century. Bosham Sailing Club celebrated its centenary a couple of years ago, and in 2009 it was the turn of Emsworth Sailing Club to mark its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The club has an unusual history. It was founded in 1919 by a group of officers who had fought together in the French trenches towards the end of the First World War. You can imagine them, huddled in their bunkers, making plans by candlelight to create a better way of life when the war ended.

Two of those officers were Major Cecil Whitaker, and Viscount Bury (later the Earl of Albemarle). Emsworth Sailing Club published a history of the club in 1979, and from early club records reproduced some of the correspondence between the friends. Viscount Bury's letter said: "I happened to say to him (Major Whitaker) how much I enjoyed sailing, and then, peering covetously into the dim future of where we might find ourselves after the peace is signed, I said to him: Surely there'll be many young officers of the Brigade who will want to start learning to become helmsmen of small boats, but may lack the opportunity to do this? Could one not start a club in Hampshire or Sussex?"

Very soon after the Great War ended, he received a letter from Major Whitaker: "our dream has come off, for I have secured a house as a club station, and a small fleet of light boats to start with, on Emsworth Harbour".

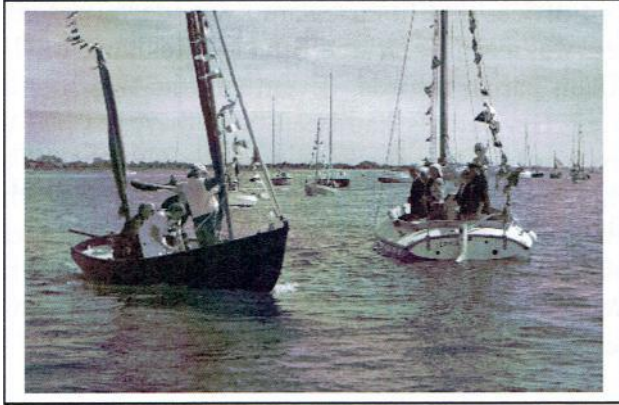
That house, at 55 Bath Road, is still the ESC Clubhouse today. It was in fact the old bathing house, with saltwater pools which filled every tide. Major Whitaker and the co-founders of what was to become Emsworth Sailing Club paid a Miss Duffield £400 for the bathing house, its land, a coastguard station, several outbuildings and three ponds.

The ESC history records that the first committee meeting of the new club was held at Aldsworth Farm House, the home of Commander Charles Denison, on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1919. They were able to offer membership to people who mainly lived in London because of the excellent rail service. Emsworth was on the main line to London, the first-class fare was 2s.6d., and the south coast resorts were flourishing as more Londoners realised how easily they could access the coast.

We don't know how many local people joined, certainly some did, but it was not until after the Second World War that membership became predominantly local. Today, most of the 1,700 members live within 20 miles or so of Emsworth, and enjoy a much wider range of sailing than was possible in 1919. Members sail cruisers, racing dinghies, dayboats, wind surfers, and most recently kayaks – in fact almost any type of craft to get out on the waters of the harbour, the Solent and beyond – including motor boats.

Originally, ESC owned its own small fleet of boats for members' use – this was a common practice in those days. They were called Sharpies – 19ft. overall, 5'6" beam, with an iron centre plate. They came with what was known as a "leg of mutton" mainsail, and a roller jib. For reasons that are unclear to us today, they were sold within a couple of years, and a boat builder, George Feltham, produced a specification for a new "Emsworth One-Design Class". They were to be slightly smaller at 16ft., and were to cost £50 each. The club history records

that they served the club well for some 30 years. In fact, there are still some Emsworth One Designs in private ownership today, and there is talk of plans to build new ones for those who like their boats to have a recognised pedigree. The club boats were sold in the 1960s, to the dismay of some members, but many other sailing clubs were doing the same. New types of sailing boat were being built, the public interest in sailing was soaring, the development of fibreglass meant that new designs could more easily be constructed.



And so today, and the club's 90th anniversary. It has been marked by several spectacular events, starting with a "sail past" in June. This has been staged on several anniversaries in the past: club cruisers and dinghies line up to sail past the Commodore, who this year was anchored in Terror, the restored oyster boat, in the Emsworth channel, with ex-Commodores and their wives on board. On a perfect June day, more than 100 ESC

members' boats took part in the sail past, including children in their Optimist dinghies. There was a grand summer ball, also in June, attended by over 200 members and guests, and in August at a special anniversary terrace party, a Harvard trainer aircraft from the Goodwood Flying School gave a fine display of aerobatics.



In common with other clubs in the harbour, ESC has evolved over the years to meet the demands of members who want to enjoy a very different kind of sailing experience today. We are very much a family-orientated club, and are proud of the fact that over 20 of our best young sailors competed this year in national and international racing events, at home and abroad.

How will the club look in another 100 years? How will the harbour look, with an increase of up to one metre in the height of the sea? No-one can say with any certainty, but having weathered another world war and several deep recessions, the club is well placed to survive and thrive and provide excellent sailing for people living in the area in 2109.

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