

THE DIAMOND SUPPLEMENT

Bill McLaren, Commodore 2009-2012

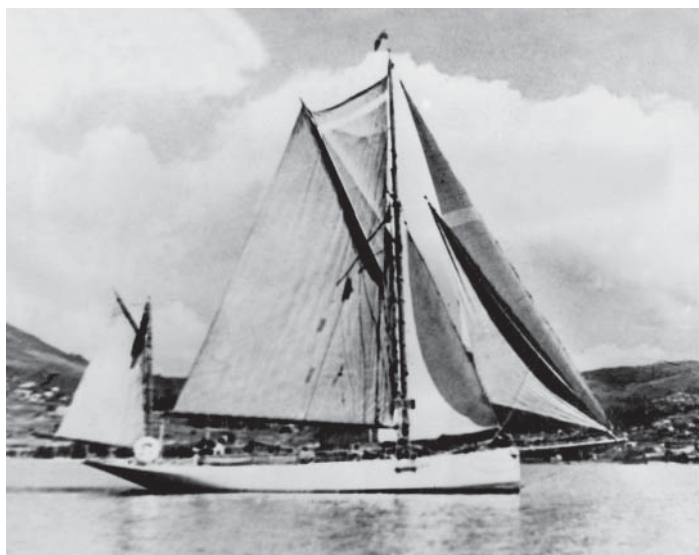
A history is both a narrative and a record of the past. But a good history goes further; it tells you why and how the story developed; it speaks of the dreams of the players and of their triumphs and disasters. And an honest history washes the odd bit of dirty laundry as well. Tony Vasey's *The First Fifty Years*, written and published in 2004, did all that brilliantly. He told of the small beginning of Hum's Chums, of extraordinary adventures, of the near disaster of the Great Schism of the 1980s, of steady development, of more extraordinary adventures, and finally of a mature club seeking to adjust to the huge changes which have taken place in the cruising world.

This *Diamond Supplement* takes the story on a further ten years. There have been more adventures, some big changes in the Club, and no shortage of problems to work our way through. And all this has been against a backdrop of changes in the cruising world of which our founders could not even have dreamed. Founder member Ben Pester put it well in *Flying Fish* 2004/1, when he told of his 1953 passage from Plymouth to Auckland in *Tern II*, which in her 54th year had never known 'the electric':

Since those days the development of ocean cruising has been staggering, fuelled by the explosion in technology, but one has to wonder whether, in the process, some of the plot has not been lost, in view of what sailing is all about. The modern boat is stuffed full of the latest electronic gear, but it has to be queried how much of it is really necessary. Without it, one is freed from its dominance and can experience once again the simple satisfaction and self-fulfilment that went with ocean voyaging, the way it was.

I wonder what he would say if he were writing now.

*Ben Pester, shortly
before his death in 2010*



Tern II, in which Ben sailed out to New Zealand in 1953





*Alan Taylor (left) with his successor,
Martin Thomas*

There are, perhaps, two histories to recount – parallel universes, if you like. Firstly there is the history of the development of the Club, of AGMs, Committees, money and so on. Secondly there is the much more interesting history of the real world of ocean cruising and the adventures of our members around the globe. Both universes have been busy over the last decade.

In 2004 Alan Taylor was Commodore and Erik Vischer Vice Commodore. Erik had become Vice Commodore in 1999 and, due to the 'clock' re-starting with

*Erik Vischer
with Admiral
Mary Barton
in 2007*



the incorporation of the Club, was to remain in post until 2009 through the reigns of four Commodores. This shows stamina, and Erik must often have gritted his teeth as he trained up the new man.

Alan presided over the Golden Jubilee celebrations. The first major event was the Golden Jubilee Dinner in March at which our Admiral Mary Barton was the principal guest. Several Founder Members were present, and the comment was made that our founder, Hum Barton, would have been proud of his club after 50 years.

Alan and Jenny travelled widely – mainly, as he puts it, in their second yacht, *By Air* – attending rallies in Australia, New Zealand and North America, as well as the major and successful Jubilee Azores Rally. It was a good year and it is invidious to single out any special event, but perhaps the prize goes to the British Columbia rally, under the brilliant organisation of Andy and Liza Copeland, which mustered 39 boats and 139 participants at its peak point.

The final party at the British Columbia Rally in 2004, and a big thank you to Andy and Liza Copeland



Two other events dominated Alan's period as Commodore. Firstly, the Club was incorporated as a company under UK law. This formalised the Club's structure and forced a more rigorous approach to its way of doing business. The object of the exercise was to limit liability of the Club and its officers, which is clearly necessary in this modern, litigious age. Although the Club was now formally governed by a Board of Directors whose duties were defined by UK Company law, it made little difference to the day-to-day activities of the Committee. It was, however, a defining moment and was, perhaps, the beginning of the trend towards the more business- and service-orientated style that we see today.

The second problem he faced was a total restructuring of the Club's administration. For more than a decade the roles of Club Secretary and Membership Secretary had been separate, and at that time were filled by Anthea Cornell and Colin Jarman respectively. Anthea also edited the *Newsletter*. This arrangement had served the Club well, but came to an end when Anthea's forthcoming marriage meant she needed to leave at short notice. This led to something of a hiatus, which was resolved by the employment of Richard Anderton as Club Secretary, combining the two jobs, while Colin took over as editor of the *Newsletter*, which he has taken from strength to strength over the years.

This situation remained unchanged until late October 2014, when Richard suddenly and tragically died. He had served the Club well for some ten years and had built



Richard Anderton waiting for the April 2013 AGM to begin

an administration system capable of running a small country. He will be much missed and his successor, Rachelle Turk, who took over in mid-November, has faced a steep learning curve.

Meanwhile folk were going sailing, and as always our members were out there exploring faraway places. In a brief history such as this one can only cherry-pick, and where better to look than the winners of our most prestigious award, the Barton Cup.

Irishmen Jarlath Cunnane and Paddy Barry won the Barton Cup in 2005 for the first-ever polar circumnavigation by a yacht. The voyage began in 2001

when they traversed the Northwest Passage in the purpose-built *Northabout*. After two seasons exploring the Pacific Northwest, in 2004 they embarked on the challenge of the yet more demanding Northeast Passage. They didn't make it through that year, wintering *Northabout* in Siberia after being halted by ice, and completed the Passage in 2005. In *Flying Fish* 2005/2 Jarlath tells of the support they gave to fellow adventurer Henk de Velde in *Campina*, who was attempting the passage singlehanded. His boat was damaged, and *Northabout* towed her to a rendezvous with a ship which lifted her onboard.

It was quite some tow, enlivened by one of *Northabout's* famous Irish music jam sessions while moored to an ice floe. As an aside, Jane and I enjoyed a similar evening, without the ice flow, when alongside *Northabout* in Kodiak, Alaska, but that was a much more civilised affair as the pub was just around the corner.



Campina under tow in the Northeast Passage

I asked Jarlath to tell us of a special moment and he chose to go back to the beginning:

THE LEARNING CURVE

My obsession with boats began early in life making toy boats based on the tarred canvas currachs of the west coast. Living inland on the west of Ireland I had never seen a real sailing boat close up. My only knowledge came from sketches in magazines. Sailing had virtually died out with the arrival of outboard motors.

Youthful enthusiasm and dogged determination overcame the lack of boatbuilding skills, and in my early teens I built my own boat. The woodwork instructor in my local technical school helped by producing a design for a 14ft marine plywood rowing dinghy, and with his guidance it was built and launched on a local lake. To my novice eyes it was a masterpiece of craftsmanship and sophisticated design. However, I soon became bored with rowing – I was obsessed with the mystery of how a boat could sail up-wind and dreamed of owning a sailing boat of my own.

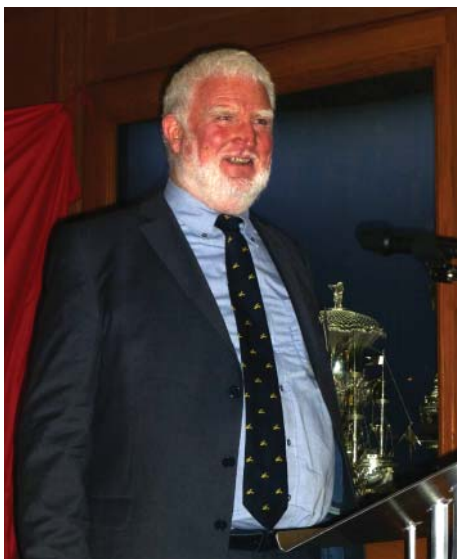
Converting the dinghy to sail seemed straightforward. A straight, slender twenty-foot larch pole served as a mast, and a shorter pole became the boom. It was rigged with galvanised wire and spliced eyes, and the prototype sail was made from builders' polythene sheet. (Sails are now made using reinforced Mylar sheet - I was ahead of my time!) A basic rudder was hung on the transom.

The first sail was a thrilling and frightening experience as the dinghy heeled to the wind. Downwind it performed well, but there was no way it would sail to windward. Something was wrong; it drifted sideways rather than making progress upwind. Gradually it dawned on me why sailing boats had centreboards. After some research, the dinghy was brought back to the workshop where a centreboard case and centreboard were fitted. This transformed its performance. At last I had a true sailing boat and, as I learned about tacking, I soon could sail where I pleased, albeit at a rather leisurely pace. I eventually progressed to a second-hand Terylene sail – its performance gave me the freedom to venture to the farthest shore of the lake.

One day as I approached the north shore, Malachi, a local old farmer with a reputation for crankiness, was waving furiously and indicating that he wanted to talk. Expecting to be reprimanded for frightening his animals, I landed with some trepidation. But no,



Jarlath carrying the framework of an Aran Island currach – one of the many boats he has built over the years



Jarlath Cunnane at the Annual Dinner in 2014

his manner was pleasant as he examined my boat. "Tell me, is that a sailing boat?" he asked. "Yes, it is," I replied. "Do you know that my grandmother went to America in one of them. She always talked of the terrible voyage she endured, I can now see how she would have suffered, the poor woman!" I imagine Granny's sailing boat was somewhat bigger and better fitted out than my humble craft!

My first sail on a small lake in County Mayo has led to a life of boat-building and maritime adventures, culminating in a polar circumnavigation! I like to think Malachi would have been pleased.

2005 saw the first mention of the Cruising Information Website, and George Curtis joined the Committee with responsibility for its development. It was a natural development of the old paper-based system that had existed for many years, and George was to devote an enormous amount of time and effort to the project. The Committee of the day agreed that it should be generously funded for several years, which was to lead eventually to some difficult discussions over our future website policy.



Martin Thomas with Sir Robin Knox-Johnston, who was elected an Honorary Member in 2008

In 2006 Martin Thomas took over as Commodore and George Curtis became Rear Commodore. Martin tackled the job with his usual ebullient style, and set about an exercise to chart the future course of the Club. The results of this survey were published in December 2007 and identified seven main ambitions:

- To enlarge the membership
- To improve the Port Officer network
- To be more recognisably international
- To improve the website
- To reduce the average age of membership
- To encourage young people to sail oceans.

But in the real world none of this mattered. Tom and Vicky Jackson were sailing their beautiful, varnished *Sunstone* enormous distances in pursuit of their combined cruising and racing adventure, and in 2007 won the Barton Cup for their ten-year circumnavigation via the southern Great Capes. They sailed some 80,000 miles

to achieve it, including sailing clockwise round the Pacific with visits to Japan and Alaska. But they also enjoy shorter sails in the far south of New Zealand, and chose to tell us of a special day:

SATISFACTION

Sometimes 'a cruiser's got to do, what a cruiser's got to do'. In this case, it meant a short sleep and rising at midnight, to up anchor and grope our way in pitch dark out of the narrow entrance of Lake Cove at the north end of Chalky Sound in New Zealand's Fiordland. Though we knew it was coming, it was still a shock to feel the wind climb from a gentle zephyr to 30-40 knots in a matter of minutes – fortunately from astern.

With some help from the radar we found our way down the Sound, scudding along with just our No.4. Outside it was blowing hard as we headed more southerly to round Puysegur Point, the South Island's southwesterly tip.

With dawn the wind eased and we set a reefed main. The rising sun lit a dramatically clouded sky and silhouetted the jagged Solander Islands to port. In the afternoon, as we approached the western reefs of Stewart Island, the wind eased further and came more easterly until we were motor-sailing toward the rocks of Southwest Cape, one of the five Great Capes of the Southern Ocean.

As the wind died the seabirds gathered, until we were surrounded by huge flocks of soaring petrels, shearwaters and terns. Tiny storm petrels danced on the waves, while beneath and through those waves seals and dolphins cavorted. However, the best was to come as we rounded the Cape and headed along the south coast of Stewart Island towards the shelter of Port Pegasus. More and more albatross began swooping around Sunstone, singly and almost in formation. The huge, elegant Royals soared along the troughs and tipped over the top of the swells, while the smaller Bullers mimicked their flights at higher speed. Vicky's camera ran hot as she darted from one side of the boat



Sunstone rounding Cape Horn.

Photo Kevin Ruscoe

to the other, determined to catch every moment and every movement.

As we approached the southern entrance to Port Pegasus the wind died almost completely and we motored through flotillas of gently paddling albatross looking hopefully at Vicky's bowl as she ate dinner in the cockpit. With just enough light remaining, we backed our way into a familiar spot in the appropriately named Evening Cove, dropped anchor, and rigged our stern-line to the fishermen's fixed mooring rope. We had earned our tot.

As a short passage it had everything – some challenging weather and pilotage, dramatic scenery, wonderful wildlife, rarely visited anchorages, a famous cape rounded and a passage plan that worked. You could hardly ask for more.



**Peace and quiet in Evening Cove,
Port Pegasus, New Zealand**

In 2007 Martin took his classic *Charm of Rhu* to Antigua for an OCC rally and the Antigua Classics, and surprised himself

by winning his first race in the Classics regatta (left). Meanwhile the Committee was getting on with implementing the seven ambitions, and Mark Holbrook was working on expanding the Port Officer network. This has always been a key element of the Club and Mark was to do sterling work in its development.

At the AGM that year, Treasurer David Caukill – who had a reputation for somewhat lugubrious financial reports – was unusually upbeat, admitting that the Club was in good financial health and that money could be spent. A major update on the websites was authorised, and



the Youth Bursary scheme was inaugurated. This was intended to help young people with the costs associated with ocean passagemaking, but was to encounter problems over the years to come due to difficulties in finding members who could provide berths for applicants.



Bob Shepton in Baffin Island in 2014. Photo Oli Favresse

Meanwhile, back out in the real world, another great adventurer, the Reverend Bob Shepton, was busy throughout the decade. He had won the Barton Cup back in 1995 and in the new decade he seemed to treat Greenland like most of us do the Channel Islands. He has spent many summers sailing and mountaineering in those waters, collecting in the process several prestigious sailing and mountaineering prizes. More recently he has taken to the Northwest Passage, firstly as ice pilot in a superyacht and then with a double traverse in his own 33ft *Dodo's Delight*, for which he was voted UK Yachtsman of the Year in 2014 and received the Barton Cup (again!) for the same year. He tells his story in his 'must read' book *Addicted to Adventure* (reviewed in *Flying Fish* 2014/1).

In answer to my request for a cameo he tells us about the Arctic, a place he knows well:

THE ARCTIC IS A HARD PLACE

So what should it be? The time we were picked up by a freak wave and knocked down in a huge storm off Cape Farewell? No, that is described in 'Addicted to Adventure'. It's got to be something in the Northwest Passage.

We had traversed the Passage east-to-west in 2012 and had left 'Dodo's Delight' in Nome, Alaska for the winter. In 2013 with a different crew we returned west-to-east. It was a more difficult passage, with more ice and more strong contrary winds than the previous year, but at last we reached the Bellot Strait and had nearly completed the Passage.

It is important to get the tides right through the Bellot Strait, as it narrows at the far (eastern) end and the tide rushes through and past and over the infamous Maapie Rock. In spite of much calculation I got them wrong, again. But fortunately they were in our favour, and we sailed (motored) sedately through on a fine calm day with the tide pushing us along. Maapie Rock was clearly visible to starboard, but water was not pounding over it this time, nor ice-floes collecting round it. The previous year when going the other way we had been doing 6 knots through the water and standing stock still over the ground.

We rounded the corner to reach Fort Ross, an old Hudson Bay Company post, and there at anchor were 'Polar Bound', David Scott Cowper's mean machine specially designed and built for polar regions, and Anna, a steel Colin Archer sailed by Peter and Pele, Swedish



Cold conditions in the Northwest Passage – the morning after escaping from the gale in Fort Ross

friends we had not seen since Nome. But trouble was in store.

Basically we were hemmed in by a long tongue of ice stretching for miles down Prince Regent Inlet and strong, relentless north winds, and it was getting late in the year. David and Jane entertained us royally one evening aboard 'Polar Bound', but David, an Arctic guru, had been

here before years back in an old converted lifeboat. The lifeboat had been holed and he had to leave it iced-in for the winter. "So what did you do, David?" "Oh, I phoned Resolute on the sat phone and called for a helicopter". "Help, don't say we're going to have to call for a helicopter ~ how can we possibly afford that?"

And then one night we had a gale, and anchors dragged. Peter and Pete chose to re-anchor near where they had been, while we sped off southwards to a cove marked on the chart at the southern extremity of Somerset Island. It proved a difficult place. The whole of the northern part of this inviting-looking cove turned out to be cordoned off by a sudden sand bank, and then kelp or weed is a terrible thing. I don't know how many times we laid the anchor. It seemed to settle, then gradually we would be dragging again. It did not help that one of the top flanges of our Delta anchor had somehow, somewhere, got bent. Luckily the electric anchor winch was working (it could be temperamental in the cold) and the crew were tremendous. At last we stayed put and, keeping an anchor watch, got some sleep.

By next morning the decks, cockpit and even the dinghy alongside were covered in snow, but the wind had moderated. We made our way back.

The Arctic is a marvellous, hard place. Make sure you take a lot of anchors.

Dodo's Delight serving as 'base camp' for climbers scaling Seagull's Garden on Red Wall, Greenland



In late 2008 I received a call from Martin Thomas suggesting that I should become Commodore. This was out of the blue, and reflected the fact that none of the existing Flag Officers or Committee members were willing or able to take on the job. Nevertheless I swallowed the bait, and took over in April 2009. Clearly it is far better if a new Commodore comes from a background of involvement in Club affairs, but I was greatly helped by the huge experience of key players Erik Vischer, David Caukill and long-serving Committee member Howard Gosling. Both Erik and David were to leave after my first year, following many years of great support to the Club, with George Curtis taking over as Vice Commodore and Sally Currin becoming Treasurer.

Committee meetings were still face to face over the table, but towards the end of Martin's time as Commodore Richard Anderton had introduced telephone conference facilities and we were just beginning to experiment with the new technology. Regional Rear Commodores had always, automatically, been Committee members and this allowed their voices to be properly heard for the first time. The technology progressively improved, initially using Skype and then a commercial internet-based conferencing system, and by the end of my time as Commodore remote attendance had become routine and has now been enshrined in the rules.

It was a valuable change and opened up the Committee to fresh thinking. The Regional Rear Commodores from the USA took a prominent role and started a debate that was to consume much time and energy during my time in office. The websites were the issue and the question was asked whether the development programme was heading in the right direction and whether we were getting value for money. It was a fair question which needed answering, and we spent some two years at it. George would be the first to agree that he defended his position vigorously and the challenge was equally determined. Things were said that would have been better left unsaid, but the energy of the debate demonstrated loud and clear that people cared about their Club. I reported at the 2011 AGM that the debate had been fractious and had led to the break-up of the Website Sub-Committee. I said that the only way forward was to go back to basics and have a formal review of website policy – as if we were starting from scratch. Rear Commodore Mark Holbrook drew the short straw, took immense pains to gather opinion, and wrote a report which was fully accepted by the Committee. It was a good job and I was able to announce at the 2012 AGM that we had an agreed policy which has formed the basis of the websites we see today.



Bill McLaren, Commodore from 2009 until 2012 and author of this account

Not everybody in the OCC does high latitude adventuring or wins the Barton Cup, and like most members Avril and Graham Johnson have generally stuck to less demanding waters – though their passage through the Chilean Canals was a major exception to this rule, for which they won a well-deserved Vasey Vase. I asked them to tell us a tale of peace and tranquillity:

THE CRUISING DREAM

The Cruising Dream of picture postcard-perfect South Pacific islands populated by welcoming, friendly people – myth or reality?

The idyllic island of Kia lies inside the Great Sea Reef, 10 miles off Vanua Levu in northern Fiji. It is a small island, supporting three villages. We anchored off the smallest, lying in an indentation on the west coast, sheltered from the prevailing trade winds. Ashore, a group of folk looking suspiciously like a welcoming committee were gathering on benches under a woven palm frond canopy. We dressed up, Av wearing her *sulu* (ankle length skirt and long tunic top), G in his *sulu vakataga* (formal wrap around), gathered up our gift of kava root, and rowed in. We were greeted by an attractive Fijian girl who escorted us to a simple *sev* *sev* ceremony which welcomed us into the small community.

Mela took us to meet her mother, Maqi, and family at their nearby home. They were our hosts in the village, immediately making us feel extraordinarily welcome. Very few yachts travel this area and we were the first cruisers to arrive correctly dressed for the *sev* *sev* – they were obviously impressed.



Sunday lunch on the island of Kia, off Vanua Levu, Fiji

Life fell into a relaxed pattern. Each morning we went ashore to enjoy a breakfast of tea with doughnuts or fritters. We supplied pots of jam, which had about two days life expectancy. Plans were discussed. If we were exploring we often had company; sometimes we just went to the nearby bay with



The kids loved to be invited onboard

its tiny off-lying islets which promised brilliant snorkelling; other times we stayed aboard, entertaining the adults and distributing largesse in return for their generous hospitality. Mid-afternoon found us ferrying the kids out after school to dive and cavort around the boat. In the evening peace reigned. Sitting in the cockpit, enjoying sundowners, we watched the great golden orb sinking into the sea in a spectacular display of radiant colours.

The time came to move on. We spoke of this to Maqi, and that evening were invited to eat with the family. We were amazed to find the floor of the large family room in their simple wooden home covered with a long cloth, woven palm mats all around the edge, with the entire extended family and many other friends all sitting around. Maqi made a short welcoming speech, then invited her elder daughter Anna to deliver a wonderfully prepared speech, so full of warmth and affection that both she and several of the assembled guests were in tears by the end. We responded emotionally, telling them how they had touched our hearts, forming a unique bond with their kindness, generosity and love.

Plates of beautifully prepared food were laid out on the cloth and over the course of the feast more villagers drifted in to wish us well. As the meal ended Maqi signalled and everyone stood up and gathered in front of us. They burst into the traditional Fijian farewell song for those about to depart their shores. The soaring harmonies, rhythmic swaying and symbolic arm movements were magical and totally spellbinding. It was an unforgettable experience to have such a great tide of love and affection wash over us, one of the pinnacles of our cruising life.

Yes, the Dream CAN become reality!

Some things never change and one of them is the key role that our publications play in our Club. The two membership surveys carried out in the last decade both showed clearly that *Flying Fish* and the *Newsletter* were of first importance – indeed for many retired cruisers they are the primary reason for retaining membership. I have already



Colin Jarman (left) receiving the Endurance Award for 2013, seen with Erik Hellstrom and Rebecca Shaw

mentioned Colin Jarman's *Newsletter*, which he has edited with great flair and style since 2006, including over the past few years while battling serious illness. This Herculean effort was recognised by the presentation of the Endurance Award for 2013.

The flagship publication, *Flying Fish*, has also gone from strength to strength. Browsing back numbers shows a panorama of cruising adventure which truly reflects the extraordinary membership of the OCC. As well as the fascinating content, *Flying Fish* has been upgraded with new printing and binding technology making it a great resident in the bookshelf. And this is all the work of long-term editor Anne Hammick (right) to whom the Club owes a huge debt, and who received the Ocean Cruising Club Award for 2013. Woe betide any Commodore or Committee which messes with *Flying Fish* or the *Newsletter*!

By 2012 the Club had come a long way from its early days. The OCC was always an international club, but now it was run internationally with enthusiastic input from Committee members around the world. We had begun to think in



modern management terms, and to talk of services to our members and of marketing strategies and public relations. Not everyone was comfortable with this and there were rumblings that the Club was drifting away from its core values. There was talk of modernisers versus traditionalists, and this was clearly a balance which had to be addressed. I commented that the modernising trend was right and inevitable, but that we had to remain in the comfort zone of the majority of the membership – we must not move too fast.

One of our members, South African Ralf Dominick, moves very fast, however. He only joined the OCC in 2010, so winning the Barton Cup for 2011 may be something of a record. He took his steel-built *Imvubu* through the Northwest Passage in the very short time of 24 days. It was a classic example of good planning and, as so often in life, that brought the good luck needed for a fast passage. Ralf wrote to me from the other end of the world, and tells of his struggle to reach the Antarctic circle:

DISAPPOINTMENT AND KINDNESS IN THE ANTARCTIC

Early on 8 January 2014 we departed the anchorage at the Ukrainian Vernadsky base in the Argentine Islands on our quest to get to the Antarctic Circle, knowing full well that our chances were slim. Even though it was already halfway through the Austral summer it had been reported that there was still a significant amount of sea ice south of the Penola Strait.

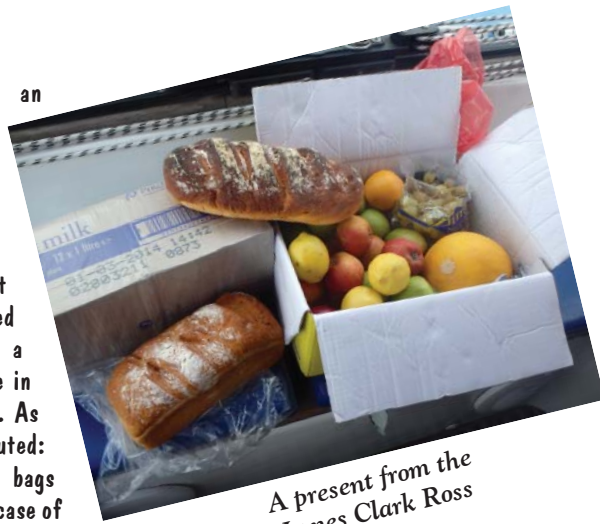
By midday we were heading north again while threading our way through large ice floes in the Grandidier Channel, after having aborted this attempt to get to the Antarctic Circle. Fortunately the dull headache caused by excessive consumption of homemade vodka while celebrating the Orthodox Christmas with the Ukrainians the previous two evenings had abated by this time.

At the entrance to the Meek channel, which leads to the Ukrainian base, we spotted the 'James Clark Ross', a British icebreaker registered in the Falklands. The vessel was hove-to while a shore party was visiting the base. I immediately thought that this might be our ticket to get to the Circle but alas, they had just returned from the south where they had re-supplied the British Rothera base. In response to my request for updated weather and ice information - our primary satcom had failed as we passed Cape Horn - they invited us to come alongside to collect the requested printouts.

*The British
icebreaker
James Clark Ross*



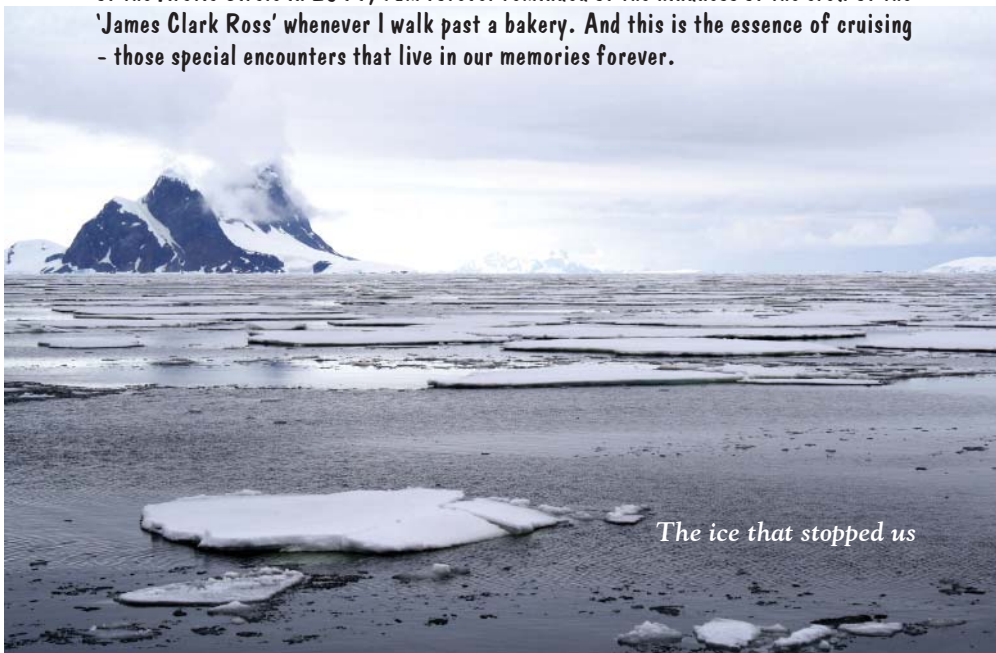
Placing a yacht alongside an icebreaker in even a slight swell is somewhat daunting. I approached at 90° and held position with our bowsprit a metre or so from this sheer steel cliff. Fortunately our bowsprit is a heavily-constructed U-shaped affair that can, and did, absorb a knock or two. As soon as we were in position the first bag was lowered. As I was about to back away they shouted: "Wait there's more". Three more bags followed, containing fresh fruit, a case of fresh milk and a couple of loaves of freshly baked bread. This unexpected and generous gift makes one proud to be part of the seafaring community.



*A present from the
James Clark Ross*

Heeding the advice of the icebreaker's watchkeeping officer we headed west through French Pass, anchored in the Betbeder Islands for the night, and then continued southeast through the South Wind Passage. This time we made it as far as 65°48'S, a mere 55 miles from our target, before being thwarted yet again. The following day we tried going around the outside, west of Renaud Island. The ice pack forced us in a northwesterly direction, however, and by the time we reached 67°W it was time to throw in the towel. At this rate it appeared that we would be circumnavigating the Antarctic continent while being exposed to the full force of the next, imminent, frontal system.

Although I am disappointed that I could not add the Antarctic Circle to my conquest of the Arctic Circle in 2011, I am forever reminded of the kindness of the crew of the 'James Clark Ross' whenever I walk past a bakery. And this is the essence of cruising - those special encounters that live in our memories forever.



The ice that stopped us

As my time as Commodore came to an end the Committee was again faced with the problem of finding a successor. Once again he came from outside the Committee, and John Franklin took over at the AGM in 2012.

His time in office has been marked by successful ongoing development of the Club and its management, but also by ongoing controversy. I had believed that the website debate



John Franklin, Commodore since 2012

– which colloquially had become known as the Great Website Spat – had been consigned to history, but that was not the case. The debate continued, and was centred on the future of the Cruising Information site to which George Curtis had devoted so much time and effort. He had worked hard to persuade other cruising clubs to co-operate in sharing data, and he was a passionate advocate that the information should be generally available to the public in recognition of the founding aim of the OCC of 'fostering and encouraging ocean cruising in small craft'. However the plan of co-operating with other clubs fell through, leaving the OCC shouldering all the costs and potential liability should publicly available data prove incorrect or outdated. The Cruising Information service was, in fact, used by a relatively small number of members and it was arguable whether the costs and risks could be justified. There was much debate, once again with strong opinions being strongly expressed, and sadly the fall out was the resignation of George

Curtis as Vice Commodore, who thought the Committee was losing sight of the founding objective quoted previously. By the end of 2014 the Cruising Information service had been moved back within the members only section of the main website, and various options were being explored as to how it could best be provided in the future.

Another strand to the development programme has been the Port Officer network. Always an important element of the Club, it has grown significantly in recent years and the worldwide coverage is now extensive. We now have some 178 posts in 66 countries, a marked increase since 2006 when there were 92 fewer posts. Much of this

recent activity is thanks to Jenny Crickmore-Thompson who took over the role of Port Officer co-ordination in early 2013.

John set up a Strategy Team which produced an excellent paper, *A Vision for the Future*, which describes exactly what the OCC is all about. It is on the website and well worth reading. The last two years have seen many other management initiatives, from a major overhaul of the Articles of Association, largely by John Whyte and Terry O'Brien, and the parallel development of Policy Documents and membership rules. The changes to the Articles, which are the legal document underpinning OCC Ltd under UK Company law, were largely technical but also recognised that the Committee had become unwieldy with up to 25 members entitled to attend via video link from all over the world. The changes removed the automatic committee membership of Regional Rear Commodores, thus reducing the numbers, and were seen by some as introducing a democratic deficit. However the changes were duly approved at the 2014 AGM despite some strongly felt objections, which included concerns that the process was being unnecessarily rushed and members had not had sufficient time to fully assess the changes.

Finally we have one more Barton Cup winner, that awarded in our Diamond Jubilee year. Jeanne Socrates shows great tenacity, and it was not until her third attempt – and her third circumnavigation – that she achieved her ambition of making the entire circuit non-stop, singlehanded and unaided. She tells us of rounding Cape Horn, with the memory of her previous attempt fresh in her mind:

RETURN TO CAPE HORN

'Nereida' and I were on our third attempt at circumnavigating the globe solo, nonstop and unassisted, and were approaching Cape Horn for the second time in two years - but the previous rounding had been traumatic, to say the least. With a nasty knockdown on 5 January 2011 causing too



much damage to 'Nereida' to be able to continue, we'd limped in to Ushuaia for repairs and had been forced to stay there for over two months in order to get basic repairs completed before being able to head off again...

Nereida's broken boom, January 2011

Things are looking up!

Would we get around safely this time? The Vendée Globe racers were not far from 'Nereida' as we neared the Horn - Alex Thompson was south, within 100 miles, and



Mike Golding was well off to the west. Friends sent me daily updates on the racers' positions and Mike Golding's team put me in touch with the Race Management in Paris, who sent me the same daily Ice Reports being sent to the racers. Several large icebergs were in the area, with lots of less easily seen 'bergie bits' for quite a distance downstream of them ... all to be avoided, if possible...

Cape Horn was finally rounded well off, close to the date of my previous knockdown - there was to be no celebrating until I was safely well beyond. Amazingly, I was positioned between two nasty weather systems at that time, with little wind but plenty of fog. Keeping an overnight lookout for one particular iceberg, reputedly right in my



Our route into Ushuaia in 2011

path, was tiring and rather difficult. In the event I saw nothing of concern, but needed to keep a careful watch on weather, ice and routing through the eastern portion of Drake Passage, where nasty seas occur when the weather is bad.

My route had to keep us well off the extensive shoal area of Burwood Bank, east-northeast of Cape Horn and south of the Falklands - a friend had recently got into bad trouble there when

the wind got up as he crossed the Bank and the seas started breaking - but at the same time I had to try to avoid the sea-mounts of the Scotia Ridge, slightly further to the east. My resulting path was a winding one, trying to keep safe in case of bad weather, but we finally made it safely into the South Atlantic and on towards South Africa, with just the occasional heaving-to needed in stronger conditions as we headed to pass south of the Cape of Good Hope...

Finally, no history of the Ocean Cruising Club can be complete without a mention of Mary Barton, our Admiral. A member since 1970, shortly after she married our founder Hum Barton, no-one better embodies the soul of the Club. She led the Club as Commodore during the difficult times in the 1980s, and has been Admiral since 1994. An extraordinary ambassador, she travelled widely to Club events until recent

years but is now very frail and no longer plays an active part in our affairs. I think her last major expedition was a Scottish cruise aboard *Vagrant* in 2010, when she joined Jane and me to take part in an OCC rally and to attend the Clyde Cruising Club's centenary celebrations. All the leading cruising clubs were there – everybody knew Mary and Mary knew everyone. *Vagrant* had a constant stream of visitors and almost sank under the weight of the well-wishers.



Admiral Mary Barton aboard *Vagrant* in 2010

So has all the hard work and debate over the last ten years born fruit? If a club's success is measured by the number of people wanting to join then the answer is a firm yes. In 2004 there were 1685 members and at the

end of 2014 there are 2046. Much of the increase has been over the last three years, which is directly attributable to the efforts of John Franklin and his team.

So at sixty the OCC is fit and well, but like all sixty year olds we have our issues. None of them really matter, however. The Club is different from other cruising clubs. It does embody the ethos of our founders and does attract the ocean adventurers who seek out the more distant parts of our world. It's a good place to be, the OCC, and so it will continue to be as long as the Flying Fish is to found at yardarms and mastheads in anchorages and harbours wherever you may sail.

