

The Missing Matriarch

Anthea Cowell

We were embarrassed that in the last Squadron Quarterly we wrote that Anthea Cowell did not speak at the Matriarch's Night in June, when in fact she did. We asked her for a few notes about her sailing life to atone for our mistake. But first some background: Anthea's husband, Jamie, sailed from childhood, some of it at RSAYS. After their marriage, the Cowells settled on Kangaroo Island to start farming a new property. Anthea had barely sailed before then but as you can see from the story below, she became an intrepid yachtswoman. Jamie died four years ago and Anthea is still living on the Island, although she makes frequent visits to the Squadron.

In a nutshell this is Anthea's story of her sailing life:



My sailing started in 1959 in *Fife*, a revamped 21ft restricted Class (25ft OA), which we had for six years. Jamie's grandfather had owned her, then she was bought by Bill von Doussa, a family friend, and she stayed in American River for holidays. The Cowell family also had use of her at this time. I went out on her several times but she was always so dirty, and barely making headway against the tide. After we were married and living on the Island, we found her neglected, her wooden keel filled with Toredoworm. We notified Bill that she was within months of sinking, so he gave her to us with his love. We didn't have a brass razor to do her up. We gouged out the rot, filled the holes with concrete and sailed to Adelaide, after mortgaging Jamie's life insurance to cover most of the cost, and then took another year to find the remainder!!

"Our three children became very competent sailors"

Fife had a gaff rig with rotten sails, very little freeboard, lead ingots under the floorboards (which were not fastened down!), and a wooden keel. To begin with I barely sailed her beyond Emu Bay as I was too busy with three small children. We did, however, sail to several Squadron Opening Days, especially after we re-rigged her as a sloop. We also sailed two Kingscote Cup races (Outer Harbor to Kingscote). These were quite an adventure and very wet as the planking leaked when the boat was sailed even moderately hard. It all entailed a great deal of hand pumping. Jamie sailed further afield in her with some interesting tales during this time. We had no engine of course.

We progressed to a 25ft moulded plywood Top Hat, *Woodwind*, which we fitted out from the shell, and in which, as a family, we had lots of fun for nine years. We managed some racing and cruising in Kingscote when other keelboats were available, which wasn't very often in those days. I think we did all the Pt Lincoln races although I missed the reverse race in the Squadron Centenary year (1969) that *Woodwind* won. Our three children became very competent sailors, starting with Holdfast Trainers. We cruised each summer to the Spencer Gulf and Pt Lincoln areas. From there we invariably had to rush home for shearing in mid-January, which was often a 30 hour bash into SE winds.

We had five competent helmsmen and the children voted to stay an extra day to play with their cruising buddies - the Lasts, Judells, Ullets & other children of sailing families. It was lots of fun. For the last three years of the nine that we owned *Woodwind*, she had an engine. What luxury! proper lighting and nav lights!

It sounds as if we mostly played, but we actually worked hard, especially initially to clear the scrub on our farm but, as woolgrowers, we could sometimes organise quieter periods.

"we sailed almost whatever the weather"

We bought *Morning Hustler*, an S&S34 from Dick Fidock (now a CYC member) in 1975. With children at boarding school in Adelaide we were able to sail to Adelaide more often in this BIG boat. In fact she was very useful as transport to visit the children, and we sailed almost whatever the weather. We usually left about 5pm on Friday evening arriving at RSAYS about 4-5am, had a short sleep and then went to see the children, occasionally watching them play sport and taking them on outings. We were frequently out with friends on Saturday evening.

On Sunday evening Jamie's mother would drive us back to the Squadron. We have

Anthea Cowell with husband Jamie on *Morning Hustler*. This was an exceptional sailing trio.



been known to toss a coin to see who took the first watch for the 11-12 hr trip home again! We were not always highly productive on Monday! Of course we were young and fit then. In the twenty-eight years we had *Morning Hustler* we did 167 return trips to Adelaide, some of which were quite memorable. I was there for most.

We occasionally sailed up for Squadron offshore races.

***Morning Hustler* came second in her Division and tenth overall**

Cruising was our real love. We continued sailing SA waters but after our first trip to Tasmania we decided we needed to go again, and entered for the 1979 Sydney-Hobart race. *Morning Hustler* had already sailed the Sydney-Hobart twice with Dick Fidock. In all we did three Sydney-Hobart races (*the best result was in 1979 when Morning Hustler came second in her Division and tenth overall – edit*) and a Melbourne-Hobart, which we won, along with the Sovereign Series. We had a wonderful tussle over the three races with

Eastern Morning, another S&S34, which later came to SA and is now owned by Ric Ottoway at RSAYS.

Altogether we sailed to Tasmania nine times. The races were fun, even if only in retrospect. We were never disgraced and the cruising was superb; nearly as good as SA waters, but just a bit different. We also cruised to New Zealand, through Marlborough Sounds and around North Island. As usual time was always a problem, so three months was our limit. NZ is closer than the east coast tropical region.

With so much fun and time spent 'messaging about in boats', Jamie wrote his SA Cruising Anchorages, (having used every anchorage except one) which was printed in 1992, and has recently been up-dated by David Harris, our son-in-law.

Jamie was an observant, particular and able seaman (*and is a household name in SA sailing circles, edit*).

Our son Sam now has *Morning Hustler* in Melbourne, so I still have an occasional sail on her.



Fife slipped:



Fife in smooth water with small jib

Fife

Fife was one of the Twenty One Foot Restricted Class of yacht which were popular, open (to start with) racing boats from about 1913 till about 1955.

She was built from plans requested by Tom Hardy from William Fife in Scotland. She had a predecessor, *Lady Alice*, which was backyard built in 1923.

Fife was the first of the Searles' Dynasty, as the original RT Searles set up as a boat builder in about 1923 in order to build her as a commission from Lance Bennett. She is still around somewhere.

When is a Tommy Rough not a Tommy Rough?

When it's an Australian Herring!

It's enough to give a fish an identity crisis!

One minute it has a name that everyone knows and has used for years. The next it is forced to take on a whole new persona, because some bureaucrat in Canberra has decided it needs a new identifying tag!

However, according to Andrew Dalgetty of the State Department of Primary Industries and Resources, the recently ratified national decision to re-name some of Australia's fish is a good one. 'It will help lessen the confusion which has previously arisen with the same species of fish being called something different in each state,' he says. 'Now people will know what fish they are buying, regardless of whether they are in Broome or Ballarat'.

The decision actually only affects three fish commonly found swimming in South Australian waters. The Callop is now to be known as Golden Perch, the Tommy Rough is now the Australian Herring, and Goolwa Cockles are now Pippins. However, it is recognised that most people will still prefer to use the old names when they reel in their line or point their finger at a particular fish at the fish shop, so, in its wisdom, the Department has decided to use both names side by side to avoid confusion.

That's all very well for us, but has anyone considered what effect this is having on the fish in question? They're most probably starting each day with a huge existential dilemma brought about by no fault of their own. 'Who exactly am I?' they are questioning as they swim around our seas!



Tommy Rough or Australian Herring?