

## Lymington - Early days:

My father had a life-long love of small boats/ but as a regular army officer he was not able to sail as often as he would have wished; also/ and possibly more to the points my stepmother definitely did *not* share his enthusiasm. He had survived life in the trenches during the first World War and in 1939 when faced with the prospect of another German war he bought a pretty little 3½/ ton Harrison Butler Sloop - "*Ibis*" for £200, which passed the second World War snugly tucked up in a mud-berth in Poole.

At the end of WWII my father was in command of the Home Guard from Lyme Regis to Poole, and his oldest friend and brother officer. Jack Griffin commanded from Poole to Chichester. With help from their naval opposite numbers they got permission to bring *Ibis* round from Poole to Lymington the year before leisure sailing was once again allowed. I think that this was in 1945. I was not there but I remember being told that not liking the look of the weather in the bay they decided to put in to Christchurch for the night got their approach wrong and spent the night on their beam ends in the entrance. The following day they successfully floated her off and arrived in Lymington without further trouble.

*Ibis* lived on a mooring just opposite the root of the old ferry slip, on the East side of the channel, and they kept her dinghy tied up to a ladder there. Jack Griffin, whose wife was my Godmother/ then lived in East Boldre at 'Harepath' - the house now owned by Isobet and Andy Tyrrell and in those days of petrol rationing going round to the Club involved extra mileage as well as paying a sixpenny toll at the bridge. This arrangement thus suited them well and *Ibis* remained there every summer, under shared ownership/ until the early 1970's, after my father's death, when Jack finally sold her.

From 1946 to '49 I used to come to Lymington for a fortnight every summer and we spent the time day sailing in the Solent and Christchurch Bay doing much fishing. We regularly used to see a dolphin in the Solent, we called him "Pelorus Jack" after the famous dolphin which used to escort ships through the Cook Strait in New Zealand around 1900. Newtown and The Beaulieu River were favourite destinations; at that time one could enter the Beaulieu River through a channel inside Needs Oar Point. The submarine Boom Defence vessels with their built up bows were always in evidence, and very many Naval and commercial vessels regularly used the West Solent on their way to and from Southampton and Portsmouth.

The entrance to the river was then marked by the Lymington Spit buoy, a familiar red and white chequered can. My brother-in law, David Strang who ran the 'Lymington School of Seamanship and Navigation' used to test his pupils in the 80's by giving them an old chart and asking them to sail round it - by now of course a non-existent buoy. He could judge their success exactly as he remembered that it had been positioned just at the intersection of the line of the Hurst lights and the Lymington River transit. Dan Bran's shed was burnt down in 1950, so it was still there but I don't remember him; but in 1965 my first boat was a Dan Bran Lymington Pram which I shared with Mike Corfield ~- she was good fun but griped horribly on a run!

In 1946/7 the Club still had the old lifeboat slip to land at/ at low water, it was extremely slippery. The boatman then was/ I think, Fred Frampton who used to live in a cottage at the foot of East Hill. He or someone else had the good idea of nailing battens to the ramp, which made it much easier to walk up. At high water one could use a rather rickety dinghy jetty to the south side of the slip. The Bar was then on the ground floor and the dining room, presided over by 'Brookie/ upstairs in the Library.

Lymington had not then been provided with cattle grids and ponies were met regularly in the High Street, Beaulieu Airfield was still in use by the American Air-force, and I remember going with my Father and Jack Griffin to lunch in the Officers' Mess there. Pylewell House was still occupied by the Army, anffffie Park was full of stacks of military stores,

*Ibis* used to spend the winter in a mud berth behind the ferry slip and was hauled out each spring by Bill Smith for painting, varnishing and antifouling (with Kobe Green) in his yard across the road at the top of the slip at the Town Quay. All the standing rigging was of pre-war galvanised wire. Bill Smith told me he had fitted this new when *Ibis* first came to Lymington and it was still rust free in the early 70's. The reason it had lasted so well, he said, was that that wire had a hemp core and every winter we laid it up in Jack's garage coiled in a bath of petrol and thick oil which soaked into the core and kept it sweet throughout the season. Modern wire has a synthetic core, which does not act as a wick so well.

The owners were not too concerned about dress except in the matter of their caps, and after the war when the Navy resumed wearing white cap covers in the summer they went to enormous trouble to obtain theirs, and explained that being made of a corded material it mattered a great deal

which way the cords ran; in their case being 'proper' sailors the cords should run fore and aft. I also remember seeing a very smart new boat passing us one day, and their indignant condemnations of her pulpit and lifelines, which they thought completely spoiled the lines of the boat. *Ibis* was a very sweet, sea-kindly, fast-sailing little boat and in Club races we regularly used to beat the larger SCODS, which pitched more in a Solent chop. She was perfectly balanced on all points and in all wind strengths. But she had her little ways, and as foredeck man I well remember her dreadful jib sheet arrangement. These were double purchases by means of lignum vitae blocks with no sheaves, attached with short pendants to the clew of the jib; when the sail flogged these two appendages flogged as well and if they had hit you could have fractured your skull. Anchoring in anything of a wind was a fraught pastime as a result. Her boom overhung the transom so she had running backstays and also possessed no winches of any kind.

Mike Thoyts Lymington, March 2008