

Hurley Owners.

Hello.

How I got here is still a bit of a mystery to me. Who would have thought - 35 years ago - when I - along with the Receiver and Fred Hawkins - shut down - sold everything - turned the lights off and locked the doors of Hurley Marine Limited, Valley Road - I would be here talking to you.

The Hurley Owners Association did not exist when the company was in operation – altho' I have a vague memory of Chris Richardson trying to start something similar as a selling tool. The Silhouette Owners Club had been going for many years – they regularly had a table on the stands at Earls Court – we would get dozens of Silhouette owners blocking the gangways – and get complaints from the organisers. I had had regularly contact with many of the members while working, and, for a short while after.

My career with Hurley Marine began in July 1968, after a rather hopeful letter sent - by me - begging for a job - I had a perfectly good job - but - I had seen yachts being made not far from where I lived. To my great delight - I was offered the post as 'Draughtsman' - a position that until my appearance on the scene had not existed within the company. I had to arrange to buy a drawing board and the equipment I needed – if drawings needed to be printed I took them into town.

Up until I joined - boats were built from the designer's drawings and any modifications were either done on the spot - to an individual boat - or devised on the back of the proverbial envelope. These sketches – and some drawings - done by Ken Bowers or Tom Normington and - of course - by George Hurley - comprised 'THE DRAWINGS'.

Tom was the sailing man - Ken was the practical man - I'm afraid, George had left by the time I joined the company - but his legacy was still strong. When I joined the company George had retired and the company had been reshuffled - passing into the hands of Mr Woodrow as Chairman - with a new Managing Director - the man who took me on. Ken Bowers was Works Manager - a very practical person with wide experience - who had grown with the company as it developed GRP boat building. Ken knew the production methods of the boats backwards - he also knew the workforce almost as a family as he had trained many of them personally. Ken was responsible for most of the great things that happened in Hurley Marine and many of the good things that came out of that factory were of his doing.

When I joined I found this family atmosphere a joy to work in - and - to be involved in the building of boats - in the yacht industry - was heaven - with the bonus of being able to sail them from time to time. The job I left to join Hurley Marine was with Tecalimat; as a designer of grease guns and the greasing systems for lorry's I had even trying to get into production a hydraulically driven town car - a forerunner of

the many small cars of today - that was in the 60's and the world was not ready for such things as town cars. Altho' - the Mini was King at the time. The grease gun with my input on it - in its design stage anyway - was called the 'Tecagun' - a small - hand held device - that sold in the thousands - a far cry from the yacht industry but the production in numbers were an great introduction to mass production for me and not too dissimilar to the system developed by Ken and others - which developed further after my input.

Before Tecalimat I had worked for The Marconi Company - in Chelmsford - involved in the design of the mechanical side of things on Early Warning Radar equipment. Before that - I had spent twelve years in the Royal Air Force Air Sea Rescue service as a marine engineer aboard ASR launches. My training as a draughtsman - and in design - had come from my apprentice days in the aircraft industry; the modifications carried out on the Harvard training aircraft - Spitfires for photographic reconnaissance - the air conditioning systems for the Britannia airliner and the design of a car - called the Swallow Duretti. The yachts of Hurley Marine were much more interesting than the grease guns or the mechanical bits of Early Warning radar. I do still have a liking for aircraft – a bit sad that they did not find lots of Spitfires in Burma. As an apprentice I had helped to break two Spitfires up for scrap – worth a few bob then – worth thousands now. Then - Hurley Marine was a great place to work.

I had messed about in boats since the age of seven, built a canoe and a coracle by the age of ten, taking to the water on the local canal or the duck pond just down the road – then - at the age of eleven - had learned to sail properly with the 3rd Walsall Sea Scouts - initially on Sutton Pool – near Sutton Coalfield in the Midlands - at Bala Lake in North Wales plus the several other places like the Norfolk Broads. My first real sea going experience was with the scouts on a 49ft gaff ketch built in 1920. 'Morna' a lovely boat, still afloat and last heard of as being on the market for £133,000, too much for me! During those two memorable cruises across the Channel visiting the French coast and the Channel Isles - back in 1953 and 1954, I got my sea legs and an everlasting wish to be at sea. Fantasies of round the world on a square rigger etc.

Then after joining the RAF – for National Service - I got more sea time than I had bargained for as I then spent the next 12 years as a member of the crews on Air Sea Rescue launches. I gained a lot of sea time in all weathers plus the RAF gave me the chance to race dinghies – Fireflies and Albacores mainly - but including many other types of boats – that included native craft in the Maldives and along the North African coast. I sailed in the Indian Ocean - the Med - in lots of different places around the British coast both for competition and for leisure. Then to join Hurley's - to be employed to mess about with boats - to be involved with yachts on a daily basis - was the great dream come true.

You can probably see where I was coming from. But there is a difference between being employed in the making of yachts - and the experience of owning one. You all sail and maintain your own Hurley with loving care. Your boat means a lot to you and probably to your family. We - who were involved in making the boats - had a different take on it. Yes - we enjoyed being with the boats and sailing them when the opportunity arose - but we did not own them - in fact - most of us could not afford to own one - a fact - I think - many potential buyers and owners did not realise - in fact - many of the workforce of Hurley Marine - the people who made the yachts - did not sail or have anything to do with the sea - at all! Most of the work force had been trained as boat builders in Plymouth Dockyard - I think Ken's background was in the yard - but few sailed. The rigger, Collin - a keen sailing man - and I - tried to get a programme of experience going - for the shop floor workers - to give them a feel for the boats that they were making - the few we did manage to take out did not appreciate the experience and the idea was dropped.

The yachts were a product - made mostly to order - for an individual - finished in the colour the buyer wanted and hopefully delivered on time. The future owner meant more to us than the yacht. Linking a yacht to a potential owner was the key to the daily business. During the build period - if we knew who was to own the yacht then the boat became personal - we could tailor it to the customer's wishes. If on the other hand it had been sold through an agent it was just another production - put on the back of a lorry and gone - most of the time never to be heard of again.

I had a lot to do with the customers - I would occasionally have to draw up the spec for their boat - and got to know some of them well. One of the perks of my job after I had been with the company for a time I would take customers out sailing - I tried to organise such trips on Friday afternoons - as a good way to finish the week's work! Perks did - on occasions - go wrong. With a brand new Hurley 22 I took a couple out into Plymouth Sound - the fog came down and we were lost. Brand new boat - no compass - hardly any wind - no mobile phones in those days - and the same buoy kept coming in sight - visibility about 60 yards. What was to be an hour's trip turned into three hours and it was not until we nearly ran into Drake's Island that I finally worked out where we were - we eventually made it back to the Barbican. The customer's did buy a 22 and - far as I know - lived happily ever after.

During my time with the company we developed the Hurleyquin, the 9.5 - the 27, the 24 and, finally, the Tailwind. My job during the development of these boats was to make it possible in fibre glass - to adapt the designer's designs into products that could be made on a production line. There were also modifications to most of the boats and, of course, the Silhouette. The Silhouette was always there - loved by its owners and always in demand. There seemed to always be a demand for the little Silhouette: three berths - two berths and even a four berth. Many developments of the Silhouette were documented in one of my dissertations for my degree in Art and Design - the life that worked out for me after leaving Hurleys.

The Hurleyquin was the brain child of Chris Richardson but not too many of them were sold. The 9.5 was also instigated by Chris and sold quite well. The 27 was one of my favourites - a good sea boat – that big keel. The 24 was a great boat - chosen for the round Britain race by a very distinguished sailor and only let down by his crew. A good sea boat - a fast boat and another Ian Anderson designs. Then we come to Tailwind - a lovely boat but not a Hurley boat. We were not known for racing yachts and we struggled to sell them. This boat - in my opinion - was a major mistake and had it not happened the company may have survived but it was not the only factor.

As time went on I got more and more involved with everything that was going on in the factory – on the design side I designed new cleats - new fixing for rigging - modifications to hatches, always problems with forward hatches - leaflets on rigging for new owners - trailers modifications - all sorts of things including the show stands for the four Earls Court Boat Shows. I did six shows at Earls Court. Shows were fun - but very exhausting - ten in the morning to ten at night six days a week for two weeks then there was the erecting of the stands - tried out in the factory before the show - and then packing the whole lot away. I also did a couple of Dublin Boat shows - where you drank lots of Guinness but sold few boats - and a couple of Southampton shows. The aim of the shows was to sell as many boats as you could - then you did not have to take them back to Plymouth. We sailed boats up to Southampton and lived on them for the duration of the show. We were there the year that the Force 10 hit the show and spent a very hairy night retrieving gear and securing the boats that were alongside the pontoons - some of which were damaged during the storm certainly - a show to remember - but for all the wrong reasons.

Then things got ugly. In the early 1970's the VAT on leisure goods went up to 25%. Overnight the price of the boats shot up and demand fell. At that exact time we were trying to develop the Tailwind the costs had gone sky high and things started to go wrong. What to do? The 1973 and the 1974 Boat shows had not brought the response we had hoped for – during this time - and I think I am right - Fred Hawkins had a friend that worked for English China Clay. The friend had shown an interest in the use of glass fibre as a building material. This was a new lead and I was sent off – down to Cornwall - to investigate and so - the seed of the development of the industrial use of glass fibre was born at Hurley Marine. As this developed we became quite involved. For the China Clay industry we began to make holding tanks – launders – funnels - and many other strangely shaped containers for the industry. Glass fibre could stand the chemicals they used and could be shaped into a form that allowed the flow of liquids. This development led to the sewage industry - one of my proud moments was when the lid on a sewage holding tank settled neatly into its place - I had first come up with the design by folding paper that gave strength to the cover that fitted together like the segments of an orange. The glass fibre covers were not affected by methane that sewage gave off in large quantities and rotted nearly everything else. 'Where there is muck there is money'. I got quite interested in

sewage! – It may follow in the family as my brother did his MA in Civil Engineering in Liverpool sewage!

The industrial side of the business became my baby. We made things for all sorts of applications culminating in Charlestown Church Spire. The spire was made in conjunction with Blight and White Ltd., then our parent company - they did the steel frame and Hurleys did the outer skin. The skin being coloured to be like weathered copper and designed to look like the spire that had originally been designed originally for the church but had never been put on during the building as they had run out of money at the time. Bit like Hurleys! Last time I was in Charlestown, which is a long time ago - it was still standing and looking good.

John Kiffe, who during the final years of the company was Production Manager - and I - did talk seriously about trying to raise money to do a sort of management takeover - based mainly on the industrial business - we had hoped to keep the 22 and the Silhouette - but before we could get things going the moulds for both boats had been sold and it all became too late to save.

The end came not very long after that and I have done very little sailing since. I took my skills into the teaching of Design and Technology - built a Polynesian sailing canoe as a practical part of my teacher training, a set of navigation instruments, along with a sextant, and wrote a dissertation on the Silhouette - then vanished from the Hurley scene until my son-in-law bought me the book written by Tim and Nick for Christmas 2010. I read the book - realised that there was several photographs of me sailing Hurley boats - and a 'few mistakes'. I got in touch with the authors. And that – as they say - is why I am here. I have enjoyed your company and the many discussions I have had with so many of you.

It has been a pleasure to meet you all and to hear some of your tales and I am pleased that I may have contributed something toward your enjoyment – on the water - over the years - sailing Hurley boats – long may it continue.

Thank you.

David Reeves