

AYH Visit to Northern Germany, 5th – 7th October 2018

Report compiled by Hal Sisk and Kim Lyal

This was at one level a most convivial weekend outing for a group of like-minded AYH members, but it was also much more. It opened our minds to the world of German classic yachting, its history and its admirable and unique Freundeskreis Klassische Yachten (FKY) association. We also experienced that splendid one man's vision turned into reality, Oliver Berking's Yachting Heritage Centre, and finally in Flensburg we saw a prime example of a heritage harbour, displaying classic yachts and historic working craft in a perfect location, for the benefit of the public.

You may recall that we had a two-venue plan: Kiel and Flensburg, accessing the region via Hamburg. Members were briefed with a programme scouted and scheduled by our Chairman Hal Sisk, who has sailed and raced his *Peggy Bawn* in south Baltic waters and even lectured to group gatherings of the FKY

Partly delayed by fog and missed connections, 15 of us managed to assemble at our convenient hotel in Kiel. This city really pushes the boat out with its slogan of 'City of Sails', and even the railway station is bedecked with yacht sails.

Kiel, Freundeskreis Klassische Yachten and plans for a Classic Yachting base

Visit www.fky.org

On Friday our FKY hosts **Wilfried Thorns and Steffen Thiedman** took us first to the Municipal Museum (Stadtmuseum des Seglsports) in Kiel's old town, the entire first floor of which houses a historic yachting exhibition. The first race took place in 1882, followed by stimulation of yachting by Kaiser Wilhelm, and Kiel was twice the venue for the Olympic Games. The exhibition included some spectacular paintings, including those of the G L Watson designed *Meteor I* and *Meteor II*.

Next by bus by a high-level bridge over the Kiel Canal (actually 'North Sea Canal') to the charming suburb of Holtenau, to visit the now closed former British Kiel Yacht Club, previously a seaplane base. Here in warm sunlight Nico von Brosse outlined the plans of the FKY to acquire this facility with its small marina as a Zentrum Klassischer Yachtsport. Negotiations continue with the local authorities but, if successful, this will be a unique centre. - in no other country is there any national centre for classic yachts. The grounds also contain the original timber-framed hanger and slipway for the seaplanes, a future base for restoration, Know-How Centre for craftsmanship and best practice, and workshops for learning and training. Only an aerial photo does this complex justice.

Onwards by bus to the current home of the FKY, in a redbrick former police station where, after most welcome coffee and apple cake, we were offered a series of presentations by FKY members of German yachting history. Thus Jurgen Ottman described the square metre classes, with special reference to the pioneer of scientific yachting, Manfred Curry. So many

modern innovations were first tried out by Curry in the 1920s and '30s in these classes, and then immediately banned. We also got a talk on the yacht building yards of the Bremen estuary, not just the world famous Abeking & Rasmussen but also Lurssen, Burmeister and de Dood. Most entertaining was Artur Vlasaty's talk on the German and Austrian square metre centreboard classes, from 5 sqm to 15 sqm, many of these from the 1930s now restored. Artur came all the way from Vienna to our meeting.

In between these talks, by way of reciprocating, Hal gave us two amusing, short power-point presentations on the 'German Ocean', a surprisingly common descriptor for the North Sea in use in France and Britain until 1900, yet unknown in German! He also teased out the descriptor "Sterling" for pounds originating in the (ea) sterlings of the German Hanseatic League. Steffen then outlined the activities of the FKY, with special emphasis on its digital online presence, www.yachting-history.org. Despite many widely separated centres of classic sailing, the FKY is a remarkable national organisation with 2000 members, at an annual subscription of €60, a quarterly glossy journal, and an annual two-day symposium in Hamburg in early February, the Wintertreffen. They are ahead of us in scanning and putting online historic records, such as the magazine *Die Yacht* from 1904 to 1981 as well as specific yachting history books. An example to the world.

On to a jolly dinner at a local restaurant Havenwirtschaft with our new FKY friends and a local bus ride back to our hotel in Kiel, for which the bus driver kindly excused our entire group from paying.

Flensburg and the Yachting Heritage Centre

Saturday was another most pleasant autumn day. We travelled about an hour by train to Flensburg, first achieving a very large fare discount as a 13 person group (unfortunately, because we left a little early from the hotel Henrietta got left behind but, miraculously, was rescued by our German AYH member Volker Christmann who gave her a lift in his very smart Porsche to meet us all in Flensburg!).

Flensburg is a large town on the border with Denmark, and the Flensburger fjord is situated at 'the head of a loch', a long inlet on the Baltic that almost reaches the west coast. It contains a major shipyard but also the delightful Danish harbour of Sonderborg.

After checking in to our hotel, with its tiny rooms, we walked down the harbour past local marinas to the Yachting Heritage Centre which featured in our 2017 AYH Journal. Here head of boatbuilding Jakob Franze showed us round, firstly the splendid temporary exhibition of the great boat building (and now superyacht) yard of Abeking & Rasmussen, and then, behind the scenes, the building and restoration sheds. The exhibition takes up the entire ground floor and is superbly displayed with drawings, models and even the desk and drawing tools of this Bremen yard.

The library on the first floor of the Centre houses the huge collection of yachting books assembled over many years by Volker Christmann. Here we could have lingered, but we also

greatly enjoyed the adjoining boatbuilding yard which employs 26, including apprentices. Oliver Berking's primary interest is in the big International Rule metre classes. Jakob first showed us the near complete hull of *Janetta*, an Alfred Mylne 12m from 1939. The deck is also nearly ready but the hull weighs only 5 tons. Outside the door is her 17½ ton lead keel. Jakob described the convention that if over 50% of the rebuilt vessel **by weight** is original, it's still the same boat, a rule to which many restorers subscribe! So many beautiful yachts and superb craftsmanship.

Also in the yard is the famous 30sqm *Tre-sang* which Blondie Hasler raced offshore. She is in for repairs to her bow, after a collision with a GRP boat, but from the depth of her scratches it was clear that her needle like bow came off best!

Outside were other boats, in storage or awaiting repair or restoration, including *Genesta* (1930), *Vajo* 22sq m (1919), and *Cantrel* 12m. Jakob told us that while several hundred apprentices are trained every year in boat building in Germany, most find employment in other industries.

We then walked to the nearby marina which contains the greatest collection of restored 12 metres anywhere, which are very much actively raced.

Finally, back at the Centre, Bo Carlssen from Sweden gave us his presentation of his restoration of the remarkable *Ester*, an extreme 'skimming dish' from 1901, which he rescued from 80m deep in the Baltic in astonishing original condition. Visit www.ester1901.se to follow progress.

At the end of a long day, we took over the former small steam ferry *Libelle* moored in the harbour, for a very convivial private dinner just for our group, featuring fish soup and barbequed venison. Indeed, it was a jolly occasion, which ended with a burst of spontaneous singing!

Heritage Harbour and Heritage Shipyard

On Sunday morning we strolled down to the nearby west side of the harbour. For many of us this was an introduction to the concept of a heritage harbour at its best. This is well established on the continent of Europe and Holland has 26 such attractions: beautiful and historically interesting craft are given prominent and free berths close to where the strolling public can view them. Display boards at the water's edge describe the vessels and it is recognised that such vessels enhance the environment. In the British Isles we have much to learn from this example but we are making progress.

Flensburg, however, has another complementary feature: on the old quayside, a historic boatyard. This contains a ¾ scale West Indiaman, built to prompt the building of a full-scale vessel. Such West Indiamen engaged in a trade in rum: 'Rumtopf'. The yard's workshops were open for anyone to wander through on a Sunday. One large work table had laid out the wooden blocks, with tools (!), that a school group would use to build simple block sailing models. (An example of how health & safety preciousness is less inhibiting in many non-common law countries.) Further on along the quayside in the heritage harbour there were

floating examples of many of the traditional typically double-ended fishing craft. Finally, there was an opportunity to visit the nearby Municipal Museum which contained, among many other fascinating artefacts, a large, panoramic model of early Flensburg.

One disappointment of our trip was a misunderstanding about a boat ride down the fjord in the steamboat *Alexandra*. We were mistakenly told our booking was not recorded. Later our Brian Corbett managed to sort this out but too late. He told us the trip was unmissable, and was very impressed with the young volunteers, boys and girls, manning the ship.

Brian also spotted an excellent local restaurant and we finished the day with smoked eels, pickled herring, ice cream and Rumtopf.

On the return trip to the airport we managed to 'lose' one member of our group at the busy Hamburg station, but happily he was recovered at the airport.

By extending the visit, some of our group managed to spend time in Hamburg itself (recommended for a City Break), and they later enthused about the huge International Maritime Museum, the boat trip around the busy harbour and Wunderland, the world's largest model railway.

An abiding memory is of a vibrant yachting scene, relatively less known to the English speaking world, with a keen appreciation of classic yachts and, most of all, an example to other countries of an excellent national organisation for supporting classic yachts and yachting heritage.

Photo captions:

1. Our FKY hosts, Wilfried Thorns and Steffen Thiedman
2. Convivial dinner at the Havenwirtschaft restaurant, Kiel
3. Janetta, an Alfred Mylne 12m from 1939, under restoration at the Yachting Heritage Centre, Flensburg
4. *Ditto*
5. Jakob Franze at the Yachting Heritage Centre, Flensburg, reveals the damage to the 30 sqm *Tre-sang* after her collision with a GRP boat
6. Heritage Harbour, Flensburg, display boards
7. Historical craft in the Heritage Harbour, Flensburg
8. Workbench in the historic boatyard, Flensburg, set up with block sailing models for school groups