



JOHN EDWARD BASLEY

(26/03/1934 - 16/12/2019)

John Edward Basley, my dear friend and fellow member of the Medway Yacht Club and the Association of Yachting Historians, died peacefully on Monday, 16th December 2019, after a short illness.

John had been a valued member of the AYH since 2005 and had, over many years, researched many aspects of yachting and maritime heritage and, of course, prepared articles about the Marine Artist WL Wyllie, for the AYH newsletters.

John was born in 1934 in Plumstead, South East London. His Mum's deep-seated 'can do' philosophy had rubbed off on John. As a young boy he insisted on returning from evacuation, just in time for the Blitz, to help run the family grocery business. His many interests, as a boy, included sailing model yachts, returning home on the bus with the mast wedged firmly up the stairwell, to the inconvenience of fellow passengers. He then took up serious cycling, achieving a proficiency which would have qualified him to compete at national level.

After gaining an economics degree at University College London, when he played rugby at a senior level, he completed National Service with the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, ultimately leaving the Reserves as a Lieutenant. John travelled widely and worked in South Africa, Ireland and even Yorkshire!

John met his future wife, Freda, at a yacht club dinner. He asked her to dance, and they never really stopped. John shared Freda's love of jazz. They married in 1961, after Freda had returned from her service as one of the first lady Merchant Navy officers on P&O cruise ships, and they were together for 58 years. He was an incredibly loyal and committed husband, father and grandfather.

His building of a Merlin Rocket racing dinghy saw him varnishing the centreboard on his wedding morning - his mother was not happy! He raced the dinghy, which was named *Merry Widow* as he had taken Freda on an early surprise date to see a performance of the *Merry Widow* operetta in the West End. He also competed as crew of many one-design and ocean racing yachts, including in the Fastnet.

John's thirst for knowledge was insatiable. His specialist research gave him expertise in many areas, including the history and design of racing yachts, boat yards on the Thames and Medway, the British Inland Waterways, Thames sailing barges, paddle steamers, and the age of steam trains etc. etc.

He wrote the book *Australian Challenges 1898 to 1998* about the matches between the Medway Yacht Club and the Sydney Flying Squadron. The 1898 match was won by the Medway YC boat, helmed by Mrs WL Wyllie, the artist's wife. John was particularly

interested in the fact that Mrs Wyllie had also beaten Winifred Sutton in a clash of the half-raters. My own Herreshoff half-rater *Winifred*, named after Ms Sutton, is a replica of her 1892 *Wee Winn*. When John came out for a sail in *Winifred*, I invited him to helm. But, no, he wanted to trim the sails and examine the Herreshoff rigging and fittings, all bronze, made in the original foundry. It was this attention to detail that made him such a fountain of knowledge.

I feel his family's loss. We would chat for hours comparing notes on classic yachts and one-design fleets. I remember us having a conversation in the club boat yard, after Saturday racing. We suddenly realised it had become dark. We must have been chatting for about four hours!

I have the pleasure now of continuing John's work as the Medway YC's historian.

We've lost a real gentleman, and a great way to remember John is to watch this short film of him taking Penelope Keith out on the River Medway, as part of her 'Hidden Villages' series about Upnor.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BfqaS71bfHo>

Brian Corbett