

# From Dinghy to Cruiser and back again!!

*Roger Frith*

Walter 'Norman' Frith kept boats at Paglesham from the late 1920's until the 1980s. The first boat owned by the Frith family was the HOOKER a converted lifeboat purchased for £10 (so Hilda thinks) in the late 1920s.

In 1931 Norman purchased their first cabin sailing boat RED WINGS and also often sailed in SECRET owned by Les Hughes in 1932.

The JEANNIE was purchased in 1933 and in 1934 a new boat was constructed by the Shuttlewood yard which was launched by Norman's sister Hilda in the March with the name GRACILDA - All the family gathered at the boatyard for the launch, but Norman and Eric were down in the Plough and Sail when Hilda was told that the launch must take place now or never so as to catch the tide. So the co-owners missed the launch of their new boat! GRACILDA was kept up to the war, when she was sold and whilst sailing up the Thames was bombed.

After the war, Norman purchased the barge yacht DOREEN. She was constructed at Paglesham in 1895 and was the first ever barge yacht built. There is still a model of her in the Science Museum and she is currently being lovingly restored to her former glory in Suffolk. She was sold in 1953 as with 3 children and a 'wish my wife Mary' for an engine, a new boat was sought.

Norman also owned a caravan at the Woolcotts for many years and the family spent many holidays and weekends sleeping in the caravan in the early 50's and walking down the lane to don thigh boots and wellies to push the tender down the hard to the water. The next craft to belong to the Norman Frith clan was MAROBEL a clinker built 3 berth cabin cruiser built by John Mackay at Stromness, Orkney Islands. She was sailed over by the boat-yard to Wick and put on a train to Southend. She was lost by the railway for three months and found eventually in a siding in Crewe!! The family at this time owned a number of tenders. Duckling dinghies, Walker 12s and pram dinghies.

In 1960, Norman was up the Deben in Suffolk when he spotted dinghies with 'DB' on the sail and thought them ideal to take the place, or sail along-side, the T.E.O.D.s and E.O.D.s at Southend. After some enquiries where they were made, he discovered that the 'D.B.' stood for the Y.W. 14 foot Dayboat class and obtained the plans. This caused problems as the craft he had seen were in fact the Deben One designs and they had to change the sail insignia after the Y.W. Dayboat Association complained.

Anyway, Norman asked Lew Walker of Leigh to build him a dayboat and so in 1961 the first Y.W. 14ft Day-boat class dinghy was seen sailing at the Alexandra Yacht Club at Southend, and in races up the Pool and round Potton Island. She cost £240 ex works and was named 'DEBONAIR' after the River Deben where Norman first thought he saw them. Subsequently Len Walker was to build more day-boats than any other boatyard.

Dai Williams, in the 1960s down at the 'Alex' was heard to say 'you can't put a little dinghy like that out on a mooring, it will be forever blowing over'. One day the wind was blowing a fair rate of knots and changed as the tide had gone out. Over went DEBONAIR to cries from Dai and other T.E.O.D. owners of 'I told you so'. By the time everyone had bottomed their pints and descended the cliffs to the slipway, every T.E.O.D. and E.O.D had blown over too!!

I sailed his cadet dinghy in races at Paglesham and his 'enterprise' daughters Joan and Beryl have also competed in races at Paglesham over the years in Tideways, Mirror Dinghies and other day-boats.

In 1966, 'ORTHELLES' was purchased, she was a 6 ton Johnson and Jago Bawley class Bermuda rigged auxiliary racing yacht and she also spent her time at Paglesham, at West Mersea and finally at Brixham in Devon. She was sold in 1976.

Dad loved Paglesham, the people, the Plough and Sail and his boats. It was part of his life and I'm sure he would have wished me to thank all the members of the R.S.A and everyone who knew him for their

friendship and comradeship over the years.

Shortly before his death, Norman spent a brief time in hospital. His son kindly put his treasured photographs in an album and took it to his bedside so that he could look back over his boating memories. Roger brought the Album for me to see and it certainly contains a wealth of Paglesham history, including the building and launch of the Gracilda. Roger will try and attend the AGM where other members can perhaps see this unique history for themselves.