

Dunkirk Little Ships



Aberdonia

Aberdonia is one of the many Thornycroft cruisers built at Hampton-on-Thames in 1935 which went to Dunkirk where she is thought to have made four trips to the beaches even before they had time to repaint her in battleship grey. She was then requisitioned to work as a patrol boat in the Royal Navy. She is now at moored in Chelsea Harbour, the flagship of Classic Charters.



Anne

Built in Cornwall in 1925 as a motor yacht. her precise war-time service has not been recorded, but her name appears in all the official records.



Aureol

A 30ft motor yacht built in 1936, Aureol is one of the smallest surviving Dunkirk Little Ships and has cruised the Thames for most of her life. She is also an example of a early classic Rampart, one of the last yards in the UK to build wooden boats.



Bluebird of Chelsea

She was commissioned and built for Sir Malcolm Campbell (a British hero and record breaker) she made four trips to Dunkirk to rescue soldiers on the beaches. She was used as a supply vessel in the Scottish Isles and then as a radar decoy vessel between Portsmouth and Weybridge. She has been beautifully restored and maintained.

Brown Owl

Is a 42ft motor sailer built on the Clyde in Scotland in 1928. She is currently moored in Limehouse in London.



Caronia

Built in 1927 in Newlyn, Cornwall as a fishing vessel and then, in the 1930s converted into a motor yacht. The net and fishrooms were converted into a saloon with a toilet and bunks fitted in the forepeak. By the mid-1960s she had returned to her original use as a fishing vessel engaged in trawling from Brightlingsea. She then underwent her second conversion to a pleasure yacht in the 1970s at Pin Mill.



Devon Belle

After her service at Dunkirk, the Admiralty kept the 60ft Dartmouth Passenger Boat in the Folkestone area for towing the portable Mulberry Harbours. This was the cover name for pre-fabricated floating harbours towed across the English Channel and placed off the Normandy beaches when allied troops returned to the continent of Europe in 1944. These would have saved many lives if they had been invented four years earlier. In 1945 she came back to the River Dart as a passenger pleasure craft, and later took holiday-makers up and down the Tamar for a Plymouth operator.



Elvin

It was late in the evening on 2nd June 1940 when Elvin left Ramsgate and they arrived at Dunkirk at first light. They had no charts, but simply followed the traffic and steered for the glare of the fires and the shell-bursts. As soon as they could see, they went alongside the eastern pier, where a column of soldiers was drawn up. A French officer called out "combien des soldats?", but since the skipper could not remember the French for '25', he shouted "trente", which was more than they could comfortably hold! But another was admitted when one of the French pleaded: "mon ami!" They followed an open boat, grossly over-loaded, with a whaler in tow, making for a Destroyer. The Elvin was a bit top-heavy and they were worried about capsizing. By the time they had negotiated the wreckage which littered the approaches, the Destroyer had gone, so they chased some French minesweepers, but they were too fast for them. So, in the end they headed for Ramsgate. They did not know the swept channel but, with their shallow draft, they were less concerned with mines than with flotsam. They landed 25 French and 8 British troops on the North-East wall at Ramsgate.



Fedalma 11

Built in 1936 at the Suffolk yard of C.H. Fox & Son. Fedalma II is a roomy 47ft motor yacht. She is a handsome boat, with a great expanse of varnished teak both above and below decks. Her 4ft 9ins draft made her unsuitable for lifting troops direct from the beaches - but she is specifically named as a participant in David Divine's book, *The Nine Days of Dunkirk*.



Ferry Nymph

At 11 o'clock on 29th May 1940, Ferry Nymph and her sister ship Southern Queen were ferrying passengers across the entrance of Poole Harbour for J. Harvey & Sons, her owners who had built both vessels, when a telephone message was

received from the Admiralty ordering both ships to Dover. There Ferry Nymph was taken over by Lt-Comdr Gerrard RN, refuelled and despatched to Dunkirk. Her shallow draft made her ideal for the task of embarking troops from the beaches. Eventually she was towed back to Poole in July with many scars in her hull, as well as empty cartridge cases and Dunkirk sand in her bilges.



Gay Ventures

Built in 1938 for the racing driver Douglas Briault. He had taken up the more leisurely sport of yachting and wanted a boat that he could use as a floating home. Just after war broke out, she was requisitioned to become His Majesty's Yacht Gay Venture - a Royal Navy Patrol Ship in the Thames Estuary, flying the White Ensign. Moored at Bosham, near Chichester, she had a coal-fired stove and central heating system.



Gentle Ladye

She is a founder member of The Association Of Dunkirk Little Ships and took part in the very first commemorative return to Dunkirk in 1965. She has been to every Dunkirk return over the 45 years they have been going except for one in 1985. For the

Pageant, some of the crew will dress up in 1940's period war costume.



Hilfranor

Hilfranor was built at Walton on Thames in 1935. She is 41ft motor yacht, constructed with oak frames and mahogany with teak decking. The original owner is believed to be F.Ellam of London. The story goes that he named the vessel after his three daughters Hillary, Frances, and Norah. When the call from the Admiralty came in late May 1940 for sea going vessels to help in the evacuation of Allied troops from Dunkirk, Hilfranor was collected by Douglas Tough from the upper Thames. Following complete restoration, she is now moored at Bray Marina on the Thames.



Janthea

On 29th May 1940 she sailed from Ramsgate in company with five other yachts across the English Channel, all manned by willing and eager crews fired by the one common purpose of saving the British Expeditionary Force. After severe machine-gun attacks from the air off Gravelines they arrived at La Panne beach at 15.00 and at once began towing whalers full of troops

to off-lying ships. She then returned to Ramsgate with 21 soldiers aboard. She braved a bombing raid as she left but survived unscathed. On 31st May she went back for more and after ferrying 50 Frenchmen to a larger transport, brought 23 more direct to Ramsgate.



Lady Gay

Built as a motor cruiser in 1934 for Lord Alfred Dunhill, the chairman of the tobacco company. She was acquired by the Navy in 1942 as a Thames and coastal patrol boat.

Lady Isabelle

An open Thames Day Launch like Lady Isabelle was only able to survive two channel trips in 1940 because of the miraculously calm seas during the nine days of the evacuation. The open boats were towed in their dozens across the channel by tug, but many of them did not survive that journey, as they were torn apart or crushed. Once there, their job was to pick up men from the beaches and ferry them to the naval ships of deeper draught for the channel crossing. Records show that there were at least 700 privately owned, requisitioned, small craft that went to Dunkerque but almost 100 were lost or left behind.



Lazy Days

After Dunkirk, while on parachute mine patrol, a mutiny occurred aboard Lazy Days. Her Petty Officer, who was a hard-bitten, yacht skipper, took exception to the green young Lieutenant who came aboard when she was duty boat. The PO had a pint too many at lunchtime and when the young Lieutenant nagged him about the course he was steering, he hit him. He was sentenced at a Chatham Court Martial to 90 days in the glasshouse. But while being escorted from Chatham to Bristol, he gave his escort the slip and disappeared.



L'Orage

Raymond Baxter, fighter pilot, author and famous broadcaster, had a dream in 1963. He wanted to own a gentleman's motor yacht for cruising the River Thames between Lechlade and the estuary - with, perhaps an occasional venture up the Medway. He found L'Orage on the Thames in Staines. In common with other owners of Dunkirk ships, Baxter made every effort to keep L'Orage in perfect order.

Mada

Built in 1936, this 36ft motor yacht is now moored at Marlow on the River Thames.

Maid Marion PZ61

A 39-foot Cornish Lugger built in 1925 for herring fishing.



Mary Jane

42ft motor yacht built in 1926. Her hull built to stringent Admiralty standards, her accommodation was panelled in Canadian birch and she had central heating throughout



MTB 102

MTB's (Motor Torpedo Boats) were developed to be able to mount a quick response to threats from any sea-going vessel, either warship or submarine. MTB 102 was completed and launched in May 1937 and ran trials on The Solent. She saw active service mainly in the English Channel. During 'Operation Dynamo', the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force, she crossed the Channel no less than seven times. In 1944 she carried Winston Churchill and General Eisenhower to review the ships assembled on the South Coast for the D-Day landings and so saw both the end of the desperate evacuation of the

British Forces from Europe and the start of their determined return.

Nyula

In 1940 she was requisitioned by the Admiralty and along with some 350 other "Little Ships" took part in the heroic rescue of over 338,000 troops from the beaches of Dunkirk. On her return she was allocated to river patrol duties on the east coast at Harwich, equipped with an Oerlikon gun on her foredeck.



Papillon

A 33ft motor yacht built in 1930 and kept on the Thames at Weybridge.



Riis 1

Built in 1920 by McGruer & Co. Ltd. of Clynder, Scotland as a 21st birthday present for Isla Johnston, daughter of the owner of a Scottish shipping company. Early in 1940 she was brought

by a Naval crew from Conway in North Wales to the South Coast to take part in Operation Dynamo.

Ryegate II

In May 1940, Bob Hilton volunteered to take any available ship to Dunkirk. "It was just like Piccadilly Circus" Bob recalls: "There were masses of ships going to-and-fro. There was no need to navigate, we just followed the others. We just got on with the job, which was to sail in as close as we could to the shore, pick up all we could carry and ferry them out to the off-lying ships. After some time, the engine seemed to be seizing up and the tide went out, so we tied up behind a ship called The Horst and used their lifeboat to row ashore to pick up soldiers. Several times we turned over when the men, who had waded out into the water up to their armpits, all grabbed our boat by the gunwales to climb aboard. In the end we were ordered home, packed like sardines, in a small steamer." Ryegate II was towed home at the end of a whole line of Little Ships by a tug.



Silver Queen

Silver Queen was built in 1927. She helped rescue many soldiers from Dunkirk in 1940 but was badly damaged after sailing into German occupied Calais by mistake, however she managed to get her troops home but sank after the last one had disembarked. She was refloated and nowadays is available to charter vessel on the Thames.



Southern Queen

Built in 1927, she is a robust open passenger vessel, 51ft long, with a 12ft beam and a displacement of 20 tons. Before the war she worked out of Folkestone. At Dunkirk she was towed across the Channel by one of the tugs and must have been invaluable getting troops off the beach and taking them to the destroyers anchored off. Once hostilities were over, she returned carrying trippers out of Folkestone and gave a great deal of pleasure to holiday-makers at the seaside.



Sundowner

She was built for the Royal Navy in 1912 and began life as a naval pinnace. Later sold off by the Admiralty and purchased by Commander Lightoller, the senior surviving officer of the Titanic. The Commander had her converted into a motor yacht and she took part in the evacuation from Dunkirk in 1940 under his command together with his son and a sea scout. This Little Ship returned safely to Ramsgate carrying 130 men. The vessel then spent the remainder of World War II working as an armed patrol boat on the east coast of England. Sundowner served our nation in both world wars and at 100 years of age is one of the oldest surviving Dunkirk Little Ships remaining afloat



Thamesia

After Dunkirk, she was found in Ramsgate harbour with her wheelhouse badly burnt. She was used as a tug until 1944 and then re-converted to a motor cruiser. She was one of the first yachts to visit Calais after the war. Just ten years after the evacuation, she returned to Dunkirk for the first reunion ceremony in 1950. An extensive cruiser, powerboat racer competitor and trophy winner, Thamesia once helped 'The Beatles' to avoid the crowds at the height of their popularity by taking them to Thames Television studios on the river. She had a moment in politics, when she conveyed an anti-VAT petition to Parliament, and has been used in television programmes.

Tom Tit

The part played by Tom Tit at Dunkirk is not on record because Ron Tomlinson and his brother Alan took her on impulse and without authority on 1st June 1940 from the end of Ramsgate Pier. Their elder brother Fred, standing on the pier, saw what they were doing and warned them that one of the ship's engines had been on fire, but before anyone could stop them, they had got under way. This was when they noticed a petrol leak - the cause of the previous fire. They quickly stopped the engine and repaired the leak and reached Dunkirk safely. They filled up with soldiers and took them out to the big ships, sixteen times. When they arrived in Ramsgate next morning, they expected to be arrested for stealing Tom Tit, but the Senior Naval Officer congratulated them and said he wished he could have had more like them.



White Marlin

The Armenian sugar broker who ordered White Marlin from Thornycrofts never even took delivery of her. As she was completed at Hampton on Thames in 1939, right on the eve of World War II, she was handed over instead to the Ministry of War Transport at Dover. The Royal Navy assigned her as the communications boat for the Officer Commanding convoys in the area. She now belongs to David Murr who has undertaken a complete restoration to her original form with an open centre cockpit.

Wanda

All that is known of Wanda at Dunkirk is that she ferried troops off the beaches during Saturday 1st June 1940. Afterwards, it is believed that she was fitted with a Bofors gun and used on patrol and pilot boat duties in Portland harbour.

Wairakei II

Built in Rosneath on the River Clyde. With accommodation for seven (in three double and one single cabin) and ample deck space, the Ministry of War Transport requisitioned her early in the war. She had a machine-gun mounted on her foredeck and rifle racks all round her decks. She is said to have saved 150 soldiers during Operation Dynamo.



Wayfarer

A 30ft motor cruiser built in 1928 now given extensive restoration by Michael and Vicky Cowles.