

A review of the Gaffling 4.1 Project

1. The process

In preparation for this review, I asked all the Association Committee members and a wider group of people who I regarded as stakeholders of the Gaffling 4.1 project (the designer, kit suppliers, builders, current and past owners, etc.) for their views. I have tried to summarise these views in this paper, with a look back at the history and current status of the Gaffling project and a “SWOT” analysis. I have outlined three options for the way forward.

2. A Potted History of the Gaffling 4.1 Class

2017

- The outline design for the “OGA Dinghy” was presented to the Association Committee (AC).
- It was agreed to pay Andrew Wolstenholme £2,500 in advance royalties to finalise the design.

2018

- The prototype “OGA Dinghy” was built by Tony Kiddle.

The early “OGA Dinghy” kits were cut by Demon Yachts.

2019

- “Clachnacudney” (1963) was launched at the Cardiff Bay OGA55 event.
- “Clachnacudney” was sailed by OGA members at several other OGA55 events.
- First group build (“Tunstall Tide”) was started by Tunstall Community College in NE Area

2020

- The “OGA Dinghy” was displayed at the RYA Dinghy show
- Two EC group builds were started but were badly affected by Covid
- “Dart” was launched
- Second group build in the NE started (?)

2021

- Following a competition amongst OGA members, the “Gaffling 4.1” name was adopted
- “Suffling” and, symbolically, the “Gaffling 4.1” Class were launched at Walton and Frinton YC
- “Tunstall Tide” was launched in NE
- The “Gaffling 4.1” was displayed at the Southampton Boat show

2022

- Fyne Boat Kits were appointed as the builders of kits for the class
- A group build by young Gaffers from Arnside SC was successfully undertaken

- “Essling” was launched on EC

2023

- “Jabberwocky” was launched in NW

2024

- First Gaffling Championships took place (postponed from OGA 60, 2023)

3. Current status of the Gaffling project

- 7 “Gaffling 4.1” builds have been started
- 6 boats have been completed and launched
- None of the four community-owned boats are being heavily used
- There have been no Gaffling home-builds for personal use
- “Dart” has been sold to a new owner (now “Shrimp”) on the EC
- “Clachnacudney” has recently been sold to a new home, also on the EC
- So far, the Gaffling has done little to attract youngsters into gaff-rigged sailing
- There have been no recent enquiries about the class

4. Gaffling 4.1 SWOT Analysis

4.1 Strengths

- The Gaffling 4.1 is a very nice little boat
- It sails, rows, sculls and motors well
- They are well-liked by those who have sailed them
- The Gaffling 4.1 has been featured and well-received by the yachting press
- Fyne Boat kits are able and keen kit suppliers
- The Gaffling 4.1 is a good subject for group builds
- There is an appetite for Gaffling class racing (on EC, at least)
- Good seagoing characteristics
- Can be sailed single handed or with a crew of 2 to 4
- Good Dinghy Cruising Boat
- Has great locker spaces for gear
- Easy to launch, recover and tow behind a car
- Works well as a tender to a bigger boat

4.2 Weaknesses

- Did the Gaffling 4.1 appear “after it’s time”?
- Did the world really need another small plywood gaffer?
- It’s not sexy enough for the “young-uns”?
- It’s not traditional enough for the “old-uns”?
- It is made of wood – few people want to build/own/maintain wooden boats these days

- It requires rather more than basic DIY tools and skills to build (router)
- Drainage is poor after a capsize and in storage – needs bailers, bungs, more limber holes
- Foredeck and aft deck should be strengthened in build (as with “Essling”)
- Fittings (cleats, etc.) need to be positioned carefully
- Comparatively expensive to build (The Arnside boat cost £8300 to build, which is similar in price to a new plastic RS Quest)
- Concept of group-built boat does not fit with the current national school curriculum, after school clubs or youth groups
- The Gaffling does not fit in with RYA Youth Pathway Programme (Youth racing in RYA Approved Junior Youth Classes such as RS Fevas, Lasers, 420s)
- The description of the rigging needs more detail

4.3 Opportunities

- Re-launch the class in the UK
- “Re-position” the boat to include use as a dinghy cruising boat and as a general-purpose tender
- GRP construction?
- Improve drainage
- Changing promotional message to emphasise sailing qualities.
- Promote more on OGA social media including videos/ in-action photos
- Persuade a Sailing Club (perhaps on the East Coast) to be a base for Gafflings with a fleet of 4 or more boats to offer training, regular racing, dinghy cruising and build up a community of local Gaffling sailors
- Promote community boat building projects, like the St Ayles Skiff to groups such as sailing clubs, men’s shed projects etc.
- Widen the geographical spread beyond the UK – Europe, USA?
- Recognition by RYA as a class dinghy if sufficient get built.

4.4 Threats

- Every current and future “best thing on the water” for young people – modern racing dinghies, SUPs, foilers, etc.
- Established traditional small boat classes, e.g. Smack’s Boat, Drascombes, Vivier boats, etc.
- The population of home boat builders is ageing - people who did woodworking at school and who are also interested in sailing (Mirror Dinghy Generation). There is declining number of people with skills to build kit boats - woodworking is only taught as part of Design & Technology at school in England (In Scotland, it is possible to study wood working at school)
- Fewer people with the skill to lead community builds and to teach others how to build kit boats.

4.5 A few selected quotes:

- Light and fast, exhilarating to sail
- Being wooden saddled it right from the start
- The sail performance is powerful and great fun
- Too advanced for a first boat for a home builder
- A kit boat is not a cheap option in terms of time and money
- Use (of “Jabberwocky”) has mainly been by a limited number of adults, though children have been in it as crew.
- The greatest potential for the Gaffling is probably to promote it as a dinghy cruising boat to people aged 55 to 75 interested in building their own boat
- A priced pre-built version should be available for people not wanting to build their own boat
- Promotion of the boat should focus more on its sailing qualities
- The boat design itself is good but it could do with a couple of tweaks which revolve around drainage

5. Options for the Future

The main options for the future of the Gaffling project seem to be:

5.1 Carry on as we are doing.

Take any opportunities that arise to promote the class.

Maintain and improve the website and documentation

If we do this, given the current level of interest in the Gaffling 4.1 class, it is very hard to imagine that it would do anything but slowly “wither on the vine”.

5.2 Proactively, re-launch the class for the next phase of its development.

What exactly would this entail?

“Re-position” the boat in a new way (or ways), e.g. Dinghy Cruising, genuine multi-purpose, incl. as a tender

Seek opportunities for a new series of articles in the Yachting press?

Establish a presence at major Boat Shows?

Create opportunities for trial sails at Sailing Clubs/events?

Increase the opportunities for Gaffling class racing

Find/establish a “home club” for Gafflings

Make more use of OGA social media

Whatever we might decide to do in the future, it will need a “Champion” for the class, someone with genuine enthusiasm for it, to make these things happen.

It will also need some investment in time and money to promote the class in print or video and at boat shows/events.

5.3 Stop the project, now.

Encourage the full use of the existing boats, maintain the current documentation but do not seek, actively, to develop the class any further.

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