

Solent Area Report to the January 2021 ACM

Activities in 2019.

Looking back over what has been a challenging season for us all, it started rather well with winter social visits to Southampton's Sea City Museum and later to the D Day Museum in Southsea. And then it all went horribly wrong! As with many other organisations, Solent Gaffer's events stalled in March, and we had no option but to cancel our programmed gatherings, one by one, including the Yarmouth Gaffers Regatta and our Annual Race and Rally. However, as things eased a little, a good proportion of our members got afloat and/or started using their boats to enjoy the (mostly) good summer weather. So, as Covid restrictions continued to ease, we programmed two informal late season events.

The first was a low key gathering at Bucklers Hard on 13-14 September. Despite everywhere being suddenly busy, we did manage to reserve berths and eleven boats came, with suitably distanced Gaffers gathering in the boatyard for an early evening reception in perfect conditions. The second event was a gathering at Yarmouth 25-27 September, with the opportunity to take part in the Royal Solent Yacht Club's annual "Centenary Chase" pursuit race. Unfortunately, strong winds the day before resulted in cancellations and a small turnout. But new member Robin Powell in Crystal II came a creditable fifth overall amongst a very mixed fleet. Dinner was held in the Yacht Club in the evening.

Our AGM and dinner being cancelled too, we held our first ever virtual AGM, using a combination of email voting and Zoom to conduct the necessary business; the current committee standing again en-bloc. The event concluded with an excellent talk by Tom Cunliffe. Member engagement was disappointingly poor though, at less than 5%.

Membership.

We have again gained around 20 new members during 2020, with a noticeable bias towards smaller/trailable vessels. We have lost a similar number of members as well, with several unfortunately crossing the bar.

2021 Events.

Looking ahead to 2021 with cautious optimism, we have started to plan the season at Zoom Committee meetings. The Yarmouth Gaffers Regatta will take place 3-6 June, alongside the excellent Festival of Sea Songs and Shanties. The Annual Race and Rally will take place on the weekend of 3-5 September and we have dusted off the 2020 plan to race from Cowes to the Hamble. During the winter we have started a virtual book club and are holding a Zoom quiz in the new year.

Jeremy Retford
Solent Area Secretary