

South West Gaffers

Promoting Gaff Rig Sailing in the

South West Branch of the



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The Dog Watch

For the Sea Dogs of the South West

Issue 51

June '23

Welcome

I have been very remiss with my restart as editor in not following up the good works of welcoming our new members to the fold as Nick Fox did so well during his reign as editor. There has been a renewed interest in Classic boats over recent years and I think the OGA has profited by this. Do carefully read the piece by Tim Price in "From the Poop Deck" and then the article on the history of SW Gaffers by Peter and Elspeth, to see how vital it is to have "new blood" or rather new enthusiasts to bring back a little more vigour to keep this fine friendly group of gaffers ticking along in the right direction.

So, we are delighted to welcome Ellie and Andrew Grant, Clive Thompson who has rejoined, Anne and Peter Roe and Anthony Wakeham. I will hopefully print mugshots of these fine new members in next issues alongside their boats so you will recognise them when we meet.

The stopover of the Round Britain Cruise fleet at Plymouth on 10-12th May was rather thwarted by bad, sometimes horrendous weather and the expected 20 boats eventually became 11 whilst our 12 host boats totalled 5. But the crews from the missing SW boats all helped hugely by coming along to the evening events, several from the far reaches of Cornwall. Sutton Harbour, long supporters of maritime history, had very kindly given us free berthing and use of their excellent facilities which were greatly appreciated by the crews. There is a fuller account of the event in this issue.

Amazing things can happen at sea and one skipper who had to turn back to Weymouth because of storm damage to his rigging e-mailed the Marina Manager asking for his money back as he was unable to get to Plymouth! Isn't there an idiot somewhere all too often! He clearly hadn't read the Skippers notes or OGA information about coming to Plymouth and seemingly hadn't realised that we had been given free berthing. Sutton were bewildered with this and not greatly amused.

So, I leave you to read on but please be conscious this is your newsletter and if you have a good story that could interest others, or cautionary sailing tales or anything of interest please send it along.

Ed John G

Next event 16-18th June

Falmouth Classics followed by
SW Gaffers Helford River Rally
19-20th June

A note from the Secretary

Tim Price

I am sure that everyone's focus has been on getting boats out on the water in time for the various events. As ever there have been mishaps, frustrations and the inevitable mechanical issues but then that is boating. The fitting out lunch and talk by Vicki Samuels (Britannia Trust) on the last East Coast Smack at the Fowey Gallants was truly memorable .

The first major sailing event was the reception of the RBC fleet at Sutton Harbour at Plymouth. We should all be very grateful for the superb effort, not just in arranging the reception, but also amending events as the fleet arrived in drips and drabs after the unexpected thunderstorm and 60 Knot winds of 9 May. A number of boats turned back and sought shelter along the way. The organisers; Jonathan Brice, John Gallagher, Mike Forwood and David Bewick, provided a memorable welcome at unfamiliar but significant Plymouth venues and they have our deepest thanks. As we speak the fleet has left Ireland and is on its way to Oban (our treasurer leading the fleet !).

I should also make special note of the work Mark Turner has been doing in publicising RBC 60 on both social media and mainstream media. He has also been instrumental in giving the fleet WhatsApp coverage and facilitated a live tracker enabling anyone to follow the progress of the fleet on <https://www.sailing-by.org.uk/> , the RBC 60 map tab or the Vessel Finder Tab on the OGA web site.

We currently have 12 boats of all sizes (14' to 31') entered for the Helford Rally albeit I am expecting at least 2 more to enter. We are set for a barbecue at Tremayne Quay and Pauline Garman, by popular request, has been inveigled into producing some puddings.

On the back of the success of Sutton Harbour we have decided to postpone the June Plymouth event and tie it in to the Fowey Classics. We have secured discounted moorings at Sutton Harbour and will further subsidise the fees. Arrival will be Sunday 23 July, race 24 July and sail for Fowey on 25 July. There are no details of the Fowey event as yet other than that the reception at Fowey is in the evening of 24 Jul. Details of the Plymouth event will be promulgated once events have been rescheduled. All those who hold prizes from last year are asked to return them before 23 Jul.

Now here is the difficult bit. We still do not have a volunteer to take on the role of President. The OGA are somewhat concerned that the management structure does not have the weight that it should and whilst we can mend and make do, we need to populate the organisation. We are also lacking an editor for Dogwatch albeit John Gallagher has stepped into the breach.

In my mind, the Dogwatch editor is in some respects more important than a President because it is the voice of the membership and is a key mechanism for distributing information. Finally, as I declared at the last AGM, I do not intend to carry on as secretary beyond the next AGM. If we do not have volunteers to take on these roles, we will need to have a very serious discussion at the AGM on our future.



Photo: Paul Jolley

This is Paul's photo "A glimpse through the rigging" But what is the glimpse beyond to our future ?

This is your South West Gaffers please come forward to help otherwise what future can you see ? I have been involved with helping to run the show for very many years now and it is not arduous. It's fun, get involved !

Ed. John G

Recent Events

The Rebuilding of the East Coast Smack, Britannia by Vicky Samuels

John Gallagher

The story of Britannia is a fascinating tale which Vicky Samuels unfolded to us during her talk. Britannia had been built in 1914 by the Norfolk brothers at Kings Lyn, Norfolk as a 58 ft gaff cutter, 13ft beam and draft of 8ft. The brothers were highly regarded shipwrights with royal favour and had been permitted to select the oaks they needed from Sandringham forest. This and her first owner Alfred Rake, having thought to have crewed on Edward VII's yacht Britannia were considered the possible origin of her name.



Vicky and her husband Sam first purchased her in 1973 as a liveaboard in Lowestoft. Their first son was born that year and then Vicky returned to her job whilst Sam worked on the boat to make her seaworthy, making the bulwarks, then raised the mast and made the standing rigging. She had no sails, but Sam was able to rescue blocks and sails from the Lowestoft fishing fleet which was being decommissioned. By spring of 1974 Sam considered she was sufficiently seaworthy to make the trip to Bristol. A good well experienced friend skippered her on the scary passage and after the engine failed they called into Newhaven for repairs, then onward to Bristol where they stayed for two years. Sam did more work on her over the next several years and they took her on several ventures.

By then Britannia was looking sufficiently attractive to become involved in film work for HTV in the Smuggler TV series. She was the fast Excise boat with borrowed cannons from Berkley Castle. Then after two weeks filming off Ilfracombe with Sam as crew and that hard earned money in their pockets they went straight back to Bristol to have her hauled out for two years for

further needed restoration on the hull and then new masts, spars and new rigging.

Then Britannia took them off for family holidays amongst the Scottish Isles. In 1987 the family launched "Skyles' I Charters" taking many youngsters and others around the Hebrides and Western Isles and sometimes further to Portaferry in Ireland. They had several idyllic years sailing in this beautiful area which was filled with fascinating wildlife. Sadly, this all came to an end in 1996 after 23 years when she had to be sold.

Then to their horror, in 2013 Sam and Vici discovered her moored in Brixham harbour in a really neglected state. A deal was done with the owners and leaking badly, more so as they rounded a rough Start Point, she was eventually sailed down to Falmouth and onto Gweek boatyard on the Helford. The Britannia Sailing Trust was then formed with the famed sailor Tracy Edwards being patron.

The aims are to restore and preserve this unique Class 1 East Coast Smack, she is now the sole survivor. The plan is to restore her to full MCA Certification, use her to public benefit through engagement in maritime history, heritage, arts and crafts, offer sail training on traditional seamanship and navigation and use her to campaign for cleaner seas.



Please look at their website and consider sponsoring their worthy causes

*Photos from Britannia Trust website :
britanniasailingtrust.org*

OGA 60th Anniversary—Round Britain Cruise .

Plymouth 10th 12th May

It was with some trepidation that we waited for the RBC boats to arrive at Sutton Harbour on the morning of Wednesday 10th May. With a fleet of 20 boats registered to come as well as 12 of our SW Gaffers' boats we should have had a fine gathering of lovely boats tucked into the pool at Guys Quay. We planned to make it a colourful spectacle with boats dressed overall against a backdrop of the old Customs house and the various converted old warehouses around. The area had cafes, pubs, restaurants and all manner of eateries all around being in the heart of the Barbican, an area that was not bombed unlike the rest of the city. And Sutton had offered this berthing to us for free !

The fleet had been using Whats app since setting off and already at the Cowes end three boats had pulled out. One with terminal engine problems, one due to fairly bad damage to the only crew after a brutal fall during the rough weather and the other pulled out due to the current and forecast bad weather. And the weather took its toll on those who carried on. Several stayed over in Weymouth others made it to Dartmouth and one to Exmouth. Tim Price bringing *Picatee 2* up from Helford on his own had a near knock down by a sudden ferocious gust. Only five boats from the fleet made it in time for the talk followed by the meal at the Box, Plymouth Museum but although only five SW boats made it the crews of four boats drove up boosting our crew numbers to 30 ! In the end a few extra crew came along from a late arrival boat and another which had pulled out, so we were close to 40 in the end.

The tables were in a line underneath the massive figure-heads hanging from the ceiling and the Speaker jumped up onto a settee near the middle and enthusiastically told us all about figureheads on warships and tales of those hanging above our heads in grand style which all seemed very popular. The meal that followed was fish pie for most and was declared magnificent by almost all. Unlike many I have had it was not mashed potato in which you dug deep to find scattered bits of fish. In fact, it was in inverse ratio with a massive array of fish with some mash and it oozed flavour. So, despite odds against it the evening went very well indeed.

Photos by John Gallagher

The next day again we waited. Whats app was busy with boats telling us they were enroute and would arrive that day but we were still hearing tales of woe. A pilot cutter had rigging damage and had to return to Weymouth and another boat had a knock down but still carried on. They gradually started to come on in and the pool started to fill. With all boats dressed overall it made a grand sight. But still numbers of boats did not arrive. Jonathan approached Sutton and they very kindly said we could all stay on another day and do the Parade of Sail on the Saturday. We thought that boats arriving now would hardly want to leave the next morning after all they have been through.



A few boats gathered in front of the Old Customs House

But there were now 48 for meals at the Pier Masters that evening. All was set out nicely for us and the Calstock Rubber Band were ready and waiting. With everyone with drinks sorted and chatting away at the tables the meals were served. The band started up with mellow mood music and when the second course was finishing the music took off. The Rubber Band are not just musicians but entertainers. Large karaoke type song boards were held up for those who didn't know the words and merry old sing songs reverberated the building. The audience really took to it and joined in with vigour. Another good evening !

The evening's weather forecast predicted three days of very light easterly winds which was the weather window the RBC fleet was hoping for. So, by the morning many boats had already gone and during the day the rest of the fleet went. So, with just 8 or so local boats left and the King's Harbour Master advising us that a submarine would be leaving port at the time of our rescheduled Parade of Sail we decided our paltry numbers would make an embarrassing parade and decided to cancel. The media folk had been attentive all through our time in Sutton with Jonathan giving lengthy interviews with BBC Cornwall and Devon. I was interviewed by local ITV to announce the cancellation and explain all about the RBC 60 and the rapid emptying of the harbour. Then on Saturday the remaining boats left.

The Corinthian Club house folk had looked after us well. It had been our office to welcome the boats and give the skippers their goody bags and our refuge as well as café, bar and social centre. The volunteers running it were really helpful and hospitable to us. We had gathered a



fine collection of boats which did seem of considerable interest to the public who stopped and stared at length. Only 11 RBC boats eventually arrived on Thursday so together with the 5 local boats we had gathered 16. Another arrived on Friday when everything had finished. If all the promised 32 boats had arrived it would have been a splendid display but that's sailing. Estimating how many would arrive for the meals and entertainment laid



on was some challenge. Originally there were 73 crew for the Box and 71 for the Pier Masters. But both venues were very tolerant about our changing estimates of numbers.

John Gallagher, Mike Forwood, David Bewick and Jonathan Brice.

Organising Team

From our members

I asked two of our long serving members if they would write a piece on their memories of South West Gaffers for our 50th Anniversary. This was intended for the goody bags given to skippers of the RBC 60 fleet as our birthdays have coincided. But I think all should see it as I found it quite fascinating. Here it is: Ed John G

Reminiscences of the earlier years of South West Gaffers

Peter Crook and Elspeth Macfarlane

The South West Area of the OGA was started in 1973 (10 years after the formation of the Old Gaffers Association as it was then known) by Patrick Smith, Chris Ansell and John Clarke. On June 23rd of that year they organised a race from Salcombe with dinner at the Yacht Club (for £1.00!). Entries included *Alegria*, *Black Lady*, *Certa*, *Dyarchy*, *Kelpie*, *Norvoren*, two boats called *Ripple*, *Roma*, *Sandpiper*, *Stormalong*, *Tern*, *Wavelet* and *Ziska*, although only 10 started and *Kelpie*, *Morvoren* and *Roma* were the only finishers because of lack of wind.

Subsequent annual races were held in Start Bay with the support of the Royal Dart Yacht Club and Dartmouth YC. In 1974 there were 31 entries and 25 starters but again the wind failed and there were only nine finishers. Dinner was at the Royal Dart Yacht Club for 100! Five trophies were awarded which the Area still has. There are full reports of these and later races in the Newsletters available from the OGA website under 'News'. Below is from the Chronicle Newspaper entitled "Majesty under Sail" describing the 1974 race.

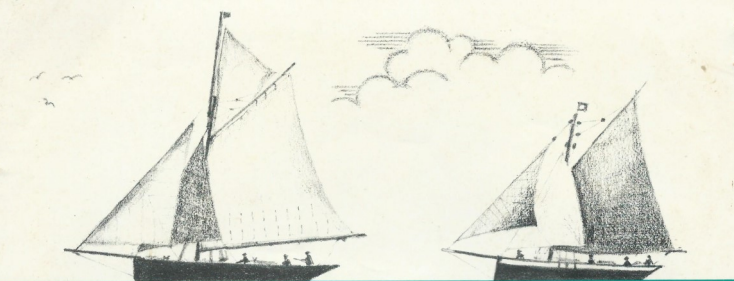
Peter joined South West Gaffers in 1978 and regularly raced his 22ft (but only 16ft LWL) gaff cutter *Chloe* on his own. One of *Chloe's* earliest events was perhaps the South West Area's highest profile, most prestigious and successful event, supported by Plymouth City Council, the Royal Western Yacht Club, Dartmouth Royal Naval College and the Royal Dart Yacht Club: the Drake 400 held in Plymouth in 1980 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Drake's return from his circumnavigation. His departure was celebrated in 1978 by an equally splendid event (see Newsletter 78/2 pp.11- 21).



THE Old Gaffers Association – comprised of enthusiasts dedicated to maintaining and sailing gaff-rigged vessels – held an event last Saturday which attracted the interest of many people from vantage points along the coast at Strete and Slapton. Above the start of the one race held is captured on an eight-mile course south of Mew Stone, with Shearwater in the foreground. Due to take part in the event were two oyster boats from Falmouth where oysters are still fished under sail. This was the second event in the West Country, earlier races having been held in the Solent and on the East Coast. After the day's sail a supper was held at the Royal Dart Yacht Club, Kingswear.

Trophies were presented by the Dartmouth harbourmaster, Capt T Penney. They were:– Whelker trophy: Evelyn; Dartmouth Dead-Eye: Tern; Charlotte Rhodes bell: Dyarchy; Solent Block: Agnes, J M Joly (Dartmouth); Plodder's Pin: Shearwater; Kingswear trophy for best boat: Asia.

Sponsorship for both events was provided by Bell's Whisky (who also provided whisky and trophies) and Plymouth City Council who gave us a major prize, a Mayor's Reception at the start of the event and the Mayor presented the prizes at the end. Both the 1978 and 1980 events were filmed for BBC television. It was a very impressive and well-run event ending with a passage race to Dartmouth and a race in Start Bay. There is an entertaining report by the then OGA President Michael Miller starting on page 5 of the 1980/3 Newsletter.



**BELL'S SCOTCH WHISKY SPONSORS OF
THE DRAKE 400**



**1980 Old Gaffers
International Yacht Rally**
For Gaff Rigged Sailing Vessels

August 17-24

Sunday 17-Thursday 21 Plymouth Sound—Local Racing and Rallies	B-B-Q at Cargreen Lord Mayor's Reception Prizegiving at RWYC
Friday 22—Passage Race to Dartmouth	Sunday 24—Start Bay Race Prizegiving at RDYC

Race Organizers	Lt Cdr A J Poole RN Perry Farm Cottage Doddscombsleigh Exeter Devon Tel: Christow 52541	Michael Shaw Blue Haze Downderry Torpoint Cornwall Tel: Downderry 280	Write to Lt Cdr A J Poole for entry form and details
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In those days many gaffers from the Solent Area would join the annual races. There was also a good turnout for the gaffers' event that was held as part of Dartmouth Regatta. At one such event a club race was held at the same time as ours and the fleets met at one of the turning marks. Of course the club racers were keen to pass the buoy as near as possible but it was interesting to see how they were scared off by large bowsprits looming over them!

Peter was joined by Elspeth in 1989. The most memorable event for her occurred in one of the Start

Bay races when *Chloe* held on to her topsail too long while running towards the finish line. She broached and the cockpit was flooded so Elspeth spent the rest of the race bailing. Luckily this happened in full view of the race officers on Blackstone Point who awarded her the prize for greatest effort as well as the Plodder's Pin.

Peter Lucas who now races *Cynthia* very successfully was a prominent member in these earlier years successfully racing *Ripple* (which he still owns) as well as organising events. In those days the Commodore (the winner of the annual race) held a Commodore's Dinner and Peter remembers going to one organised by Peter Lucas at the Royal Castle Hotel in Dartmouth. Peter L (or Black Pete as he was referred to then) was also one of those responsible for making some of the splendid trophies that we still have.

Peter C's determination to always finish the race whatever the conditions (sometimes so challenging that *Chloe* was the only boat in Class III to stick it out) meant that the Race Rules had to be changed to require that a boat must finish within the time limit in order to be counted (previously the rule was that as long as at least one boat finished within the time limit the race was valid and all finishers, however long they took, were counted). In quiet conditions *Chloe* sometimes took so long to finish that the race officers had little time to get back from the race hut on Blackstone Point for the prize giving at the Club. From the beginning the aim was that the race results always ensured that everyone received a prize and no protests were allowed on pain of disqualification. A proud tradition perfected by Mike Lucas and Peter Crook.

By 1980 a Cornwall Area had been set up and the remainder of the Area became Devon Gaffers. At this time Areas were expected to be self-financing and not allowed to claim for shortfalls on events or even expenses for postage etc. and by 2003 Devon Gaffers was struggling financially. In the 1970s representations from members such as Robert Simper had been made to HQ for Areas to be better supported by a receiving a proportion of the membership fees but no action had been taken. By 2003 Devon Gaffers was in dire straits. Mike Lucas (Life-Vice President) was almost single handedly running the Area and subsidising events himself.



Peter Crook's spoils from his sailing prowess at the Drake 400 celebration races.

Dave Keller, owner of *Petronella*, an Oysterman 16, moved to Kingsbridge about then. He and Marjorie had been living in the Isle of Wight and he was instrumental in starting YOGAFF (Yarmouth Old Gaffers Festival) in 1995 and had set up The Oysterman Association. He joined Devon Gaffers and became Secretary and Treasurer and Mike Lucas President. After much acrimonious correspondence and representation at the OGA AGM Dave, Mike and Charles Holden (who later moved abroad) persuaded OGA HQ to agree that the Areas should benefit from the members' subscriptions (£5 per head) and so they were able to use the funds to organise events in the Dartmouth, Brixham and Salcombe Areas. The intransigence of OGA HQ had provoked some antagonism and Devon adopted a red pitchfork burgee and house flag, only relinquished years later when relations with HQ improved. Port Officers were instigated as local support and promotion of Gaffers in Devon, and Devon Gaffers began to thrive. Sadly in 2007 Dave Keller became ill and was forced to hand over the running of the SW Gaffers to John Scott, owner of *Julitta*, who also sadly became ill and died.

With no-one at the tiller Devon Gaffers was also sickening and to prevent its demise Elspeth Macfarlane, Meloney Webber and Peter Crook became Secretary, Social Secretary and Treasurer respectively. Elspeth and Peter attended the OGA AGM in London at which the enduring enmities were still evident. In 2008 the News Bulletins were replaced by The Dog Watch, instigated by Peter, which he continued to edit until John Gallagher took over in 2014.

The first edition reported on the 2008 Fitting-Out Supper at Salcombe Yacht Club which included a talk by Tom Cunliffe who presented Dave with his Elder Gaffer flag.

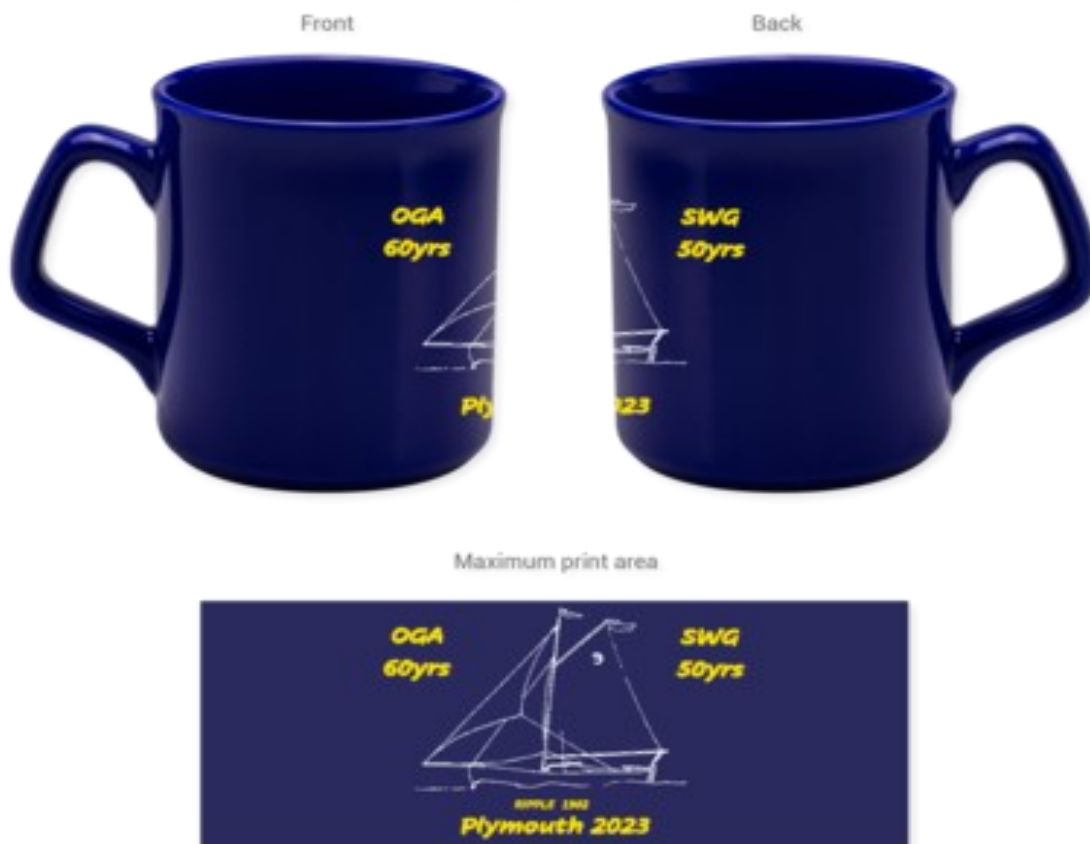
The event was sold out and was a great success and attracted new members. Peter and Elspeth remained on the Committee in various roles until 2018 during which time Peter served as President as well as keeping a Boat Register, measuring for and calculation handicaps and race results and producing programmes for our events, a Trophy Register and Year Books.

Elspeth was asked to take on the Cornwall Area as well as Devon because it had been languishing for some years with no Officers and few active members so we became South West Gaffers again. The Area began to thrive as more members got more involved. Port Officers were not reinstated but an active and enthusiastic Committee has successfully continued in Devon and Cornwall and has made South West Gaffers the thriving Area it is today!

Photos by Elspeth Macfarlane

South West Gaffers is 50yrs old this year !

The 60 Anniversary of the OGA has naturally dominated this year but we must not forget our 50th Anniversary. As mementos we designed a useful gift of a midnight blue mug that doesn't show up those tea stains. This was to celebrate both events and the centrepiece is the outline of one of the original SW Gaffers boats which participated in the first race we held. She is *Ripple* owned by Peter Lucas and still in good condition despite being 121 yrs old. We gave one of these to each skipper who attended the Plymouth stopover but we have quite a few left for our own members. Whilst priceless mementos they are selling at only £6 each.



Periwinkle will arrive at Falmouth Classics with a box of mugs and hopefully those not sold will go onto the Helford Rally. If you would like to reserve any please e-mail me.

Tim Price also has some sew on badges with SW Gaffers 50 insignias which are free.

South West Programme of Events 2023

Feb 14th	SW Gaffers AGM— Lunch at Fowey Gallants SC.	contact: Rob Brown events@southwestgaffers.org.uk
March 18th	Talk at Fowey Gallants SC by Vicky Samuels on the Rebuilding of an EastCoast Smack then Lunch.	contact: Rob Brown events@southwestgaffers.org.uk
April 27-29th	RBC 60 starts from Ramsgate.	contact: Alison Cable alison.margaret.cable@gmail.com
May 10-12th	RBC 60 arrives at Sutton Harbour, Plymouth also SW Gaffers 50th Celebrations.	contact: Tim Price secretary@southwestgaffers.org.uk
May 27-28th	Brixham Heritage Sailing Regatta.*	contact: Penny Jolley brixhamheritageregatta.uk
June 16-18th	Falmouth Classics. *	contact: falmouthclassics.org.uk
June 19-20th	SW Gaffers Helford River Rally with Helford River S.C.	contact: Tim Price secretary@southwestgaffers.org.uk
July 23-24th	SW Gaffers Festival of Sail—SWG 50th Sutton Harbour , Plymouth	contact: Tim Price secretary@southwestgaffers.org.uk
July 25-28th	Fowey Classics - 30th Anniversary *	contact: foweyclassics.com
Aug 11-13th	River Dart Rally and Dittisham Regatta*	contact: Gil Hayward wearesailing@hotmail.com
Aug 15-18th	Falmouth Tall Ships *	
Aug 26-27th	Dartmouth Royal Regatta Gaffer Races*	contact: dartmouthsailingweek.com
Sept 16th	Brixham Heritage Rally *	contact: Penny Jolley brixhamheritageregatta.uk

** events not organised by South West Gaffers but fully supported by us.*