

North East Old Gaffers Association Annual Report 2023

A Year of Celebration, Camaraderie, and Change

2023 was a year of joy and sadness, as well as significant achievement and warm fellowship, for the North East Old Gaffers Association. We had the privilege of hosting a memorable stop on the Gaffers' 60 Round Britain Cruise, celebrating the Association's 60th anniversary in style. In addition, through Martin Haigh our Secretary, who is also boat builder/adviser/consultant to many of us and assisted by Mark and Sue Batey, we continue to develop and promote our Gaffling project.

Blyth: Our "Party Port"

Blyth Harbour became our vibrant hub in July, welcoming weary yet exhilarated crews with open arms. Despite challenging weather, the spirit remained buoyed by fantastic organization, friendly faces, and an infectious "party atmosphere".

Highlights of the Blyth event, centered around LV50 the converted lightship which is the House Yacht of the Royal Northumberland Yacht Club (great supporters of ours) in Blyth South Harbour. We also enjoyed a sizzling BBQ and lively music at Blyth Tall Ships, where rain couldn't dampen the laughter and sea shanties.

- Guided tours of the majestic Williams II and the boat yard at Blyth Tall Ships as well as the historic LV50 Lightship, offering glimpses into maritime history.
- Formal dinners and happy gatherings aboard the LV50, fuelled by camaraderie and the warmth of good company.
- Exploration ashore, including the Blyth Battery and Woodhorn Mining Museum, revealing the region's rich heritage.

While stormy skies forced some to adjust their plans, Blyth's hospitable character shone through, hopefully making it a memorable port of call for our fellow Gaffers.

Remembering Des O'Meara:

The year culminated on a sombre note with the passing of Des O'Meara, a true pillar of our association. His sailing achievements, dedication to community service, and infectious zest for life will be deeply missed. A celebration of his life is planned for mid-January to honour his remarkable contribution to us and his many others friends.. Throughout, he was supported by Anthea Connor, our long serving and diligent Secretary who with our grateful thanks, has now stepped down,

Charting a New Course:

We started the year with a new President, Mark Batey. However, in April circumstances meant Mark had to step down and Des O'Meara resumed as

President until his sad death in October. We owe a big vote of thanks to the National Group, particularly Mike Beckett, who attended our 2023 AGM in order to help us navigate our fresh course and future journey. At that meeting Francis Mogg was elected President, Martin Haigh, Secretary and Frank Cockburn, Membership Secretary. We were delighted that Sue Hall agreed to continue in her role as Treasurer.

Recognizing the strengths and limitations of our smaller NE group, we've adopted a revised strategy for 2024-25, focusing on:

- Sailing adventures: More day trips, extended voyages, and social sailing events are being planned
- Social activities: Strengthening bonds through gatherings, outings, and shared experiences.
- Maritime history: Collaborating with the North East Maritime Trust for enriching discovery days.

By streamlining administrative tasks and prioritizing these core areas, we aim to navigate smoothly towards fresh maritime adventures and continued camaraderie in 2024.

Here's to fair winds, following seas, and many more nautical memories in the year ahead!