

The quieter side of Portsmouth harbour



WicorMarine is a yacht haven rather different from surrounding marinas. This year it celebrates its 50th anniversary, writes **Liz Rushall**

Situated in a tranquil reach halfway up Portsmouth's busy harbour, WicorMarine Yacht Haven is a sheltered spot, and a gentle step back in time for the visiting yachtsman.

Seeking to escape city commuting in 1966, Chris and Ruth Waddington started searching for a marina business. They viewed a site in Emsworth, one that is now Northney Marina, and a dilapidated, deserted site in Portchester then called Feltham's boatyard. Described by Chris as "depressing, smelly, and neglected... it was such a challenge we had to go with

it." They bought it for the sum of £12,000 including light industrial usage, and it was christened WicorMarine after the nearby village.

The couple got married on Thursday 26 May 1966, and moved into their new family home, an old caravan at the yard, on Sunday 29 May to start rebuilding and renovating. Ruth's diaries show that the first job was for Chris to clean out the ladies' toilets before work started on clearing the sheds, and dragging the rickety pontoon ashore to be broken up and burnt. On Monday 1 June, they received their first customer enquiry and were paid the next day. Business was under way and more boats started arriving.

The site was in a designated "blast area" opposite Bedenham Pier, the main storage for armaments for the Royal Navy Ships. There are still the remains of barges and railway trucks on the foreshore today, and Chris used to find

unused ordnance scattered in the mud as they dug in the first new moorings.

Intensive works carried on into 1967 with diggers clearing the site and building the new jetty pilings, whose foundation is two tower cranes acquired through Chris's business mentor, Uncle Harold; they remain in place today. The jetty now provides walk-ashore berthing for larger vessels including Dutch barges, houseboats and motor fishing vessels.

In the early days, a major challenge Chris had to solve was launching and moving boats from a relatively shallow slipway. An Aqualift trailer unit bought at a trade show arrived, but small wheels on soft gravel proved useless. Once again, it was Uncle Harold to the rescue, buying a tractor and dumptruck, chopping the tow bar off the trailer and gluing on a customised gooseneck making manoeuvring much easier.

There were 19 original moorings with big steel Admiralty buoys, which the



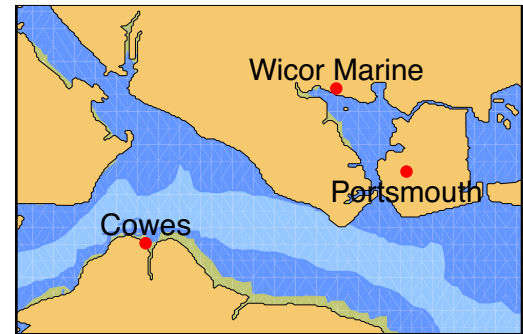
Above, WicorMarine's original jetty. Below, the old tractor and adapted trailer in use



Left, Saari under restoration, with Chris, Ruth and the children. Above, Scott and Chris today



Left, barges on the old pontoon and below, client boats new and old



Harbour Master agreed the yard could have. Another challenge was a suitable vessel for checking and laying new moorings. A winkle barge, which used to carry shellfish up the Thames, was found at Tuffs of Teddington and delivered to Portsmouth. A roller and winch were installed on the foredeck and the barge pushed around by the Wicor launch. Another problem solved.

Bit by bit other facilities were acquired, donated or ingeniously recycled. Ex-Admiralty fenders became the dinghy storage pontoons, the old Gosport ferry pontoon was commandeered in 1984 to increase capacity, and a mooring barge adapted from a Macwester 34 mould.

It was, and still is, a DIY yard, and Chris soon realised he needed a small team of trusted tradesmen for the yard's clients. Between them, David Palmer, shipwright, and Tony Dugdale, engineer clocked up over 60 years service with the yard. The sheds were let to businesses with complementary services. Tenants included WG Lucas sailmakers, Trident Marine, who built the Challenger, Warrior and Voyager Yachts designed by Angus Primrose, and Cladar, builders of steel workboats.

Through *Practical Boat Owner* magazine, Chris was introduced to a young man called Chay Blyth. Having completed his Atlantic row, Blyth was preparing for the Golden Globe and wanted to learn to sail in some privacy. Chris provided him with

a base for his operations and remembers sitting in the local Seagull pub discussing how *British Steel* should be built for Blyth's wrong-way-round circumnavigation.

Subsequently, a number of Blyth's boats came to the yard, and his trimaran *Great Britain III* was built there. As a result, WicorMarine developed a reputation with other long-distance sailors, with up and coming offshore sailors, including Rob and Naomi James, preparing their boats there. Chay became a close family friend, regularly helping out at WicorMarine's annual RNLI carol service and fundraising events at Portchester Castle.

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As the yard steadily got sorted, Chris was able to engage in his own passion, gaff-rigged boats. He started by restoring *Saari*, a 32ft Colin Archer made from oak on pine, eventually selling her to Tom Cunliffe. Chris remembers: "I got really into restoring old boats. I enjoyed investigating how they would have been before they got mucked about with. And I loved meeting the old seafaring folk and hearing their stories."

A succession of other classic restorations followed, including *Moya*, a 43-footer built in 1910 on the lines of a Morecambe Bay Prawner by Crossfields of Arnside.



Chris and Ruth's son Scott Waddington recalls: "Dad raced the beautiful *Moya* and we holidayed on her in Yarmouth each year as a family. I delivered her to her new home in Sardinia via the French canals in the late 1980s."

WicorMarine today

Since Scott Waddington took over in 2003, the facilities have developed without losing any of the original charm. Chris's original ethos, to provide customers with a complete boat service, in a haven of peace, without paying over the odds remains very much in place.

A new Sublift chain hoist and a telehandler offer upgraded launching facilities. Between 2002 and 2012, a number of moorings have been steadily replaced with deep-water pontoons which are a short row from the jetty, suitable for yachts up to 20m LOA. However, there are still swinging moorings which are popular with classic owners. A well-stocked chandlery, tool hire service, and open-fronted covered hard-standings for maintenance have all been added. The most recent addition is the Salt Café, which is proving very popular with clients and passers-by to sit and watch the world sail by.

For more information, see www.wicormarine.co.uk or join the 50th birthday celebrations on [date TBC].



Working with Chay

This photo is from a July 1975 cutting which describes the 80ft trimaran *Great Britain III* leaving the shed at WicorMarine. "Over 300 British companies have supplied fittings, materials and equipment for the boat, making her a truly all-British venture." She competed in the Whitbread/RNSA multihull race, crewed by Chay Blyth, his wife Maureen and a team of paratroopers

If you know of a boating business with a story to tell, let us know and we'll feature it in *Cruising*.

