

Chapter 29

Sailing on Rutland Water – Rutland Sailing Club

Tony Gray and Mike Barsby



Introduction

Where would you look to find a world-class British sailing club, internationally recognised as a prime sailing location and the home of champions at World, Olympic, European and National level? The Isle of Wight? Cowes? The Solent? The Clyde? Devon and Cornwall? As you're reading *The Heritage of Rutland Water*, you will have realised that the answer lies not in a coastal region but in an unexpected location more than 70 miles from the sea! Yes, it's Rutland Sailing Club on Rutland Water, one of only a handful of venues in the country recognised by the Royal Yachting Association (RYA) as a Championship Club and centre of excellence for sailing at all levels from beginner to world champion.

So how did this remarkable and unusual situation come about? This chapter will answer this question and introduce you to the club, its purpose and its history, illustrating the story with pictures and 'famous facts' from the full span of the Club's 40-year history.

How did it all Begin?

The most amazing single fact about Rutland Sailing Club (RSC) is that it existed a full six years before there were any boats or water to sail them on! Three of the founder members met to discuss the news that the Gwash Valley was to be flooded. A conversation followed, and there and then it was

Rutland Sailing Club on a clear summer's day.

The slipways, jetties and sheltered creeks with moorings provide excellent access to the water. The founders chose an excellent location for the clubhouse (Martin Hollingshead)

decided to form a sailing club for the benefit of the people of Rutland and its surrounding area.

The date was summer 1969, and the founders demonstrated great foresight, because at the time it was likely that the preferred approach of the then Welland and Nene River Authority would have been to establish a commercial enterprise, rather than to encourage local people to set up and run an independent organisation, open to all and for the benefit of Rutland.

At the beginning of August – just after the County Council had given up its opposition to the development of a reservoir – a press notice appeared in the local papers advertising a public meeting the following week in a side room at the Victoria Hall in Oakham. The day came and, according to one founding member, the room ‘was overflowing with interested parties and prospective members’. So full in fact, that there was no room for journalists and the meeting itself was not reported. Discussion amongst those who did manage to squeeze into the room led to an agreement to form the club, and all those attending donated one pound to offset the initial costs of room hire, stationery and so forth. The best and most important inland sailing club in the United Kingdom was on its way.

The decision to set up the club was the easy part, setting in motion years of hard work for all those involved. A committee was formed and negotiations with the Welland and Nene River Authority began. The RYA was also contacted, and they were subsequently surprised to find that they had admitted into affiliation a sailing club without water, premises or boats!

The whole process of getting agreements and support took nearly five years. However, by 1st April 1974, all the vital strategic decisions had been made, agreements were in place, and the Club was established as a Limited Company with a proper Constitution and Governing Council representing the membership. The continuing presence of this structure speaks to the sound nature of those early foundations – the Club Council is still manned by volunteers from the membership, managing the Club for the benefit of its members and local people.

Sailors and Snow



The very first sail on Rutland Water, or Empingham Reservoir as it was then called, took place in 1975. Let the Club magazine of the time speak for itself:

‘Saturday May 31st and Sunday June 1st, 1975 have gone down in history. After six long and agonised years of anticipation, Rutland Sailing Club finally got afloat. With remark-

ably little ceremony, and no pomp at all, the first boats to sail on Rutland Water were launched about midday on the Saturday, and by the time the last Mariner had reluctantly left the water on Sunday evening, some eighty boats had sampled the delights in store.

Left: After six long years without water, Rutland Sailing Club finally gets afloat on 31st May 1975 (Richard Adams)

‘Although the reservoir is nowhere near even its low water mark, its size is already impressive. With some 700 acres of the eventual 3,000, even the larger boats were soon little more than white or brightly coloured blobs on a vast expanse of empty water.

‘Even the weather was fairly kind, with reasonable wind and some sunshine – one could hardly ask for more. To highlight our good fortune, the next day, being June 2nd, it snowed.’

So nothing new weather-wise there then!

The pictures of this first foray on to the water are instructive. Any dinghy sailor of today looking at the boats will recognise a Mirror, a Laser and an Enterprise, all still present in the club’s fleet, particularly the single-handed Laser which still has a very active racing membership at RSC. The water does look limited to our eyes, however, as the hedge line halfway up the far slope represents today’s waterline!

And much of the activity is familiar – families enjoying themselves, a range of cars and people. Contrary to popular belief, sailing is not an élite sport. RSC today may have a wider range of boat types, but those early days still chime with today’s membership, which also still comes from a wide spectrum of local people.

However, despite the familiarity of the boats and people, one crucial element enjoyed by today’s membership is missing from these photographs – the Clubhouse and its shore-side facilities.

Sailing for the Landlubber: Boat Spotting 1

Dinghies

These are the small boats you see all over the lake. They are usually less than 5m long and designed for racing and cruising, generally by one or two people but some larger dinghies can take a family of four. They have one or two sails. The key thing about a dinghy is that the crew have to keep it balanced. A dinghy will tip over in strong winds if the crew are not alert. Each type, or class, of boat has distinctive markings or sail colour, or both, and every boat has its own number for easy identification. Dinghies are great fun to sail, and the vast majority of sailors in the UK sail in dinghies. It is possible to pick up a second-hand dinghy for little outlay, take a few lessons, and be on the water in no time.

Near Right: The Laser Pico dinghy is a small sailing boat designed in the mid-1990s and used primarily for training and day sailing (Alisdair Gray)

Far Right: The key thing about a dinghy is that the crew have to keep it balanced (Martin Hollingshead)



Sailing for the Landlubber: Boat Spotting 2

Multi-hull Boats

These boats look like nothing else on the water. Instead of having a single hull where the crew sits, they usually have two, or sometimes three long, slim hulls joined together by cross-pieces. Twin-hull boats are catamarans, three-hulled craft being trimarans. They are the smaller cousins of the world-record breaking boats sailed by Ellen MacArthur and her colleagues. Very fast in a straight line, they are exciting to sail and at Rutland, where the multi-hull fleet is large and enthusiastic, they are exclusively used for racing. RSC has boats of the latest high-tech design, built from materials like carbon-fibre, usually associated with Formula 1 racing cars. They are very demanding to sail and require a skilful and agile crew. RSC also has a fleet of trimarans. These single-handed craft have two sails and are used mainly by our disabled sailors, who are amongst the best in the country.



Multi-hulls, like this Laser Dart 16, usually have two or three slim hulls joined by a cross-piece (Alisdair Gray)

Sailing for the Landlubber: Boat Spotting 3

Keelboats

These look like dinghies but are generally larger, being 6m and more in length, and have two sails. Again, they are designed for racing and family cruising by a crew of up to four people. Unlike a dinghy, a keelboat has a heavy plate or keel hanging down below the boat into the water. This can weigh up to 50 per cent or more of the total weight of the boat and so keeps the craft stable even in quite high winds. A keelboat doesn't have a cabin. RSC has a large keelboat fleet mainly interested in racing, which is exciting, sometimes hard work and often close-run. Rutland keelboats can be any colour and usually have orange-brown sails, but sometimes white. As with some of the dinghies and other boats mentioned here, keelboats can put up a large brightly-



coloured sail at the front of the boat, known as a spinnaker. When set, the spinnaker increases the sail area considerably and allows the boat to sail downwind very quickly.

Keelboats can set a large brightly-coloured sail at the front, known as a spinnaker, which allows the boat to sail more quickly downwind (Martin Hollingshead)

Sailing for the Landlubber: Boat Spotting 4

Cruisers

On Rutland Water, cruising boats vary in size from 5.5 to 8 metres. They are generally white with white sails, have a keel and also a cabin with galley and bunks. There is a very active cruising fleet of sailors who take to the water for picnics or quiet enjoyment of our lovely water. And since the lake is more than 3,000 acres, there are many places for these boats to sail, drop anchor and relax. But not all cruisers like to take things so easy. RSC has a group of hard-core racing sailors who enjoy the thrill of pushing these larger boats to the limit. Stripped of bunks, galleys and other comforts, these boats are crewed by up to five, each member of the crew having a specific job to do. Racing a cruiser offers an opportunity for teamwork and the odd white-knuckle ride.



*Above Right:
Cruising boats
have a keel, and a
cabin with galley
and bunks (Phil
Tomaszewski)*

*Below: The
Optimist has
become the most
popular craft for
introducing
children to sailing.
These young sailors
are aged ten to fif-
teen and some of
them will progress
to become top-class
adult helmsmen
(Martin
Hollingshead)*

Sailing for the Landlubber: Racing

A sailing race can look completely chaotic, and sometimes it even feels that way to those involved! But the concept is just like any other race. You start, you go round the course and you finish after a pre-determined number of laps.

The course is defined by the buoys, known as marks, which can be seen all over the water. The marks have letters or numbers on them, so a course might look like 'Y, R, C3, 17 – 6 Laps'. A board put up by the Race Officer tells the competitors whether a mark has to be passed to their left (port) or to their right (starboard). Courses are aligned according to the direction of the wind. The first leg is into the wind, other legs are usually across or away from the wind, and then the boats sail back into the wind, cross the start line, and start the next lap.

At RSC, the Race Officer is usually stationed on a green and yellow motor boat which displays the course and has lots of flags on one side. These flags give the sailors information about starting and stopping the race. The order in which the boats cross the finish line is recorded, and if all the boats are the same type or class, first past the post wins. If the boats are in different classes the final results are calculated using a handicap system.

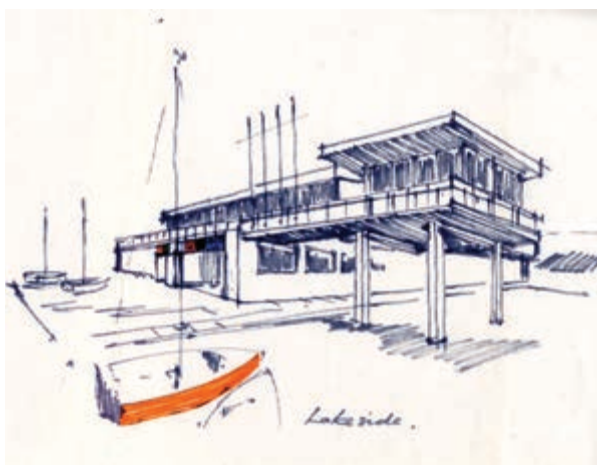
Starting a race well is crucial and difficult. This is because, unlike most other types of race which have a standing start, the boats are continuously in motion right up to the time the race begins. Start late and you are miles behind. Start early and you are penalised and have to start after everyone else! How does this work? Well, just prior to the start of the

race crews try to manoeuvre their boats so that they cross the start line at exactly the right moment, going at top speed, travelling in the right direction, and not breaking the rules. This is not easy to do when there are thirty, or even a hundred other boats, in several different classes, all trying to do the same thing! Just prior to the start the Race Officer drops a class flag, accompanied by a loud hooter, to indicate to each class that their race is about to start. This is repeated, for each class, at the exact start time. A complicated process for the uninitiated!



A Place to Call our Own

How did RSC come by its clubhouse? And why is the building sited in Edith Weston? In fact, three potential sites were considered for the clubhouse: Whitwell Creek, Normanton former Women's Auxiliary Air Force war-time



Above: Richard Eberlin's vision of the proposed clubhouse for RSC. This is the view from the lake side (RSC)

Right: Another of Richard Eberlin's original sketches of the proposed clubhouse for RSC. The finished building is remarkably similar (RSC)



site, and Gibbet Lane, its final location. The ever-busy founding fathers set about selecting their ideal location. They rejected Whitwell Creek because it was too small and cut off from the prevailing winds and Normanton because of its exposure to south-westerly gales. Gibbet Lane, however, seemed ideal. Access was convenient but away from through traffic, there were large creeks to the east and west for moorings, the site faced north and so provided good visibility and an overview of two-thirds of the lake, and there was a long waterfront with excellent space for dinghy and car parking. The gentle gradient of the site also meant that slipways could be built without resort to major earthworks.

weekly wage packet usually contained about £50! Today, we can only admire the spirit of these pioneers who, from a small membership base, with no major sources of revenue and no external support, decided to take on this project.

A Building Committee was formed and the club set about raising the cash required. The first decision was to cap expenditure at £160,000, the equivalent of £1.2 million today, the amount raised by RSC to fund the expansion of the clubhouse in 2004.

From the very beginning, the club was advised by the RYA and the Sports Council to think big, and to plan for a club of a thousand members with five hundred boats. This projected the club's ambitions into a world not necessarily envisaged by the founders, but which gave access to considerable sources of public funding. In the event, £32,000 was offered by the Sports Council, and the membership was faced with finding the rest. A debenture scheme was begun to raise these funds, new members lending the club £100 interest free for ten years on top of their membership and entry fees. Also, grants were made to the club by both Rutland and Leicestershire County Councils, and these, together with gifts from well-wishers and sponsors, enabled the club to finance and finish the entire building programme by the end of 1979. The final bill came to £220,000 thanks to inflation which in the mid-to-late 1970s was running at 17.5 per cent.

Famous Facts 1

In August 1973, the club asked Anglian Water to leave Normanton Church isolated from the shore, half-submerged, so that club sailors could sail round it, and use it as a mark for racing! Sadly this was not agreed!

Famous Facts 2

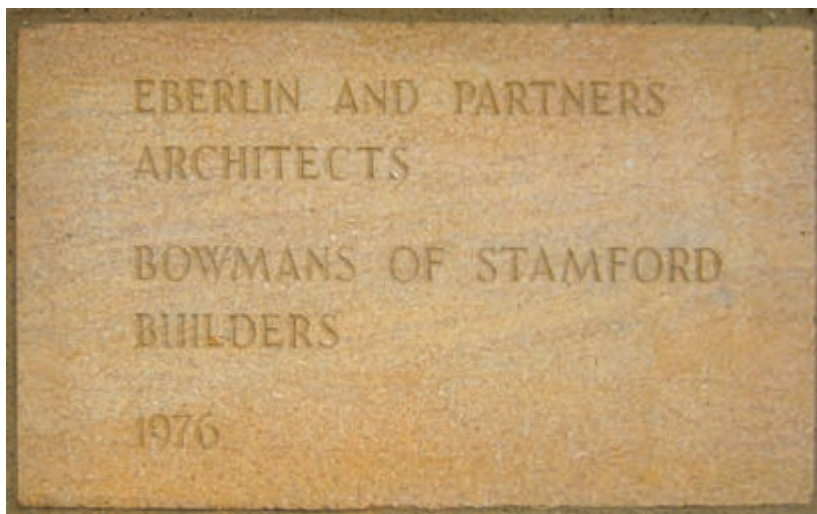
Ever wondered about the mounds which have to be climbed over to get to the car park from RSC's clubhouse and dinghy park? They are bunds built at the insistence of Dame Sylvia Crowe, the landscape designer for the entire reservoir and to whom we owe a debt for the fabulous scenery we now enjoy. She believed that the mounds would hide the parked vehicles from the Hambleton Peninsula.

They don't, but they still look nice!

The process of building the clubhouse and the associated outbuildings was not straight-forward. Money arrived much as the rain did in the 'heat wave followed by drought followed by torrential rain' summers of the mid-to-late 1970s. And this dictated a 'stop-go' building programme. Fortunately for the club, there was a building recession in 1974, and the builder, another member, agreed to do the work for no profit and at a rate dictated by the erratic flow of funding so that he could keep his workforce together, thereby benefiting everyone. Consequently, the work progressed in fits and starts, but always onwards and upwards as the Building Committee and membership strove to raise finance, bring in new members and battle towards their dream of a place to call their own.

Eventually, much of the groundwork, slipways and other roads were completed, again thanks to generous and flexible attitudes by various benefactors in the local councils and water authority. Bricklaying commenced on the clubhouse in July 1975, and a formal stone-laying ceremony was held on 15th September 1975 when the club President, Colonel Haywood, laid the stone which can still be seen on the west wall of the clubhouse. At a meeting shortly after this happy occasion, RSC was astonished to discover that Anglian Water had plans, and clearly expected to take over the club because they were sure that the members could not continue to raise the necessary finance. They were to learn never to under-estimate the determination of a Rutland Sailor!

The clubhouse was completed in two stages following the laying of this foundation stone. The first stage was completed in 1976, the building being completed in 1979 (Michael Barsby)



Membership now stood at around 450, representing £45,000 of debentures, and a drive to recruit a further 150 members before Easter 1976 was undertaken. This influx would generate the £13,000 required to enable the ground floor of the clubhouse to be completed in time for a 'Grand Opening' at Easter. The floor of the top storey would be used as a temporary roof and left incomplete until funds could be found to finish the work.

And it was done! – despite the fact that Post Office Telephones, East Midlands Electricity Board and Severn-Trent Water Authority all required paying in advance because they mistrusted sailing clubs. And despite a decision by Anglian Water to renege on an agreement to connect the sewage disposal system to the mains at their own cost, thereby requiring £5,000 to be found urgently and meaning that the system only went in twelve hours before the opening ceremony, the clubhouse was ready for the Grand Easter Opening.

On the weekend of 16th to 19th April 1976, Rutland Sailing Club officially opened its new home. The weather was fine and the sailing was excellent. The sight of a 1,200 gallon cold-water tank perched precariously on 'stilts' high in the sky, already occupying what would be its final position in the as yet non-existent roof, provided just the right note of incentive and ambition to tempt the membership to even greater fund-raising efforts during the coming year of 1977.

Eventually, of course, all was well. It took time and dedication. But members were recruited with vigour and relieved of their debentures to feed the seemingly inexhaustible requirement for building funds. The clubhouse was finally completed in 1979 and now, 30 years later, remains one of the best sailing facilities in the country.



Famous Facts 3

In April 1975, the Commodore appealed for members to offer services and labour to help with the building programme and establish the facilities necessary to develop the sailing club. This appeal resulted in the gift of thirty doors for the club house, an Avon Inflatable Rubber Dinghy, and forty 30-gallon aluminium beer barrels, regrettably all empty. But they did come in handy as racing marks.

After a ten-year struggle to set up the club and raise the £220,000 needed to build the clubhouse and its associated shore side facilities, RSC was fully operational by 1979 (Brian and Elizabeth Nicholls Photography)

Famous Facts 4

RSC has a Race Control Box standing on stilts next to the western end of the clubhouse. It commands an excellent view of the water and is fully equipped with sirens, lights, radio and all the paraphernalia dear to the heart of a Race Officer.

Not many people know that this excellent structure was presented as a gift to the club by the builders. A kind gesture, particularly given their forbearance over the piecemeal funding of the main building.

Famous Facts 5

Why are the Club colours green and gold?

In 1974, Rutland disappeared as the smallest county in England, being absorbed into Leicestershire, much to the disgust of local people. As one way of perpetuating the heritage of Rutland before its demise, the County Council granted special dispensation to the Sailing Club to use in its livery the county's horseshoe emblem and green and gold colours.

England's smallest County regained its independence in 1997 after a battle lasting more than twenty years. Once again the determination and pride of Rutlanders resulted in an unlikely victory.

The RSC logo incorporates Rutland's horseshoe device and colours (RSC)



In the Meantime

During the period from 1976 to 1999 the club grew steadily, adding to its stature as a sailing venue, creating a professional-quality highly trained on-the-water safety team, purchasing a fleet of working and committee boats to manage the many racing and other events established in the club's calendar, and putting in around a hundred moorings so that cruising and keelboat members could leave their boats on the water safely and comfortably. In addition, new slipways were built, special facilities for disabled sailors were added, and a professional catering operation opened in 1979 to replace the do-it-yourself bar and sandwich service offered by volunteer members.

However, if the story of RSC is to be told in full, there are three aspects of the club's activities during this period which should be looked at in more detail. The first two relate to our involvement and promotion of sailing for the disabled. The third relates to a special individual – the amazing John Merricks, Olympian, Rutlander and inspiration to us all.

From 1991, the venues for the International Federation of Disabled Sailors (IFDS) World Championships were:

- Nyon, Switzerland (1991)
- Barcelona, Spain (1992)
- Marblehead, USA (1993)
- Edith Weston, Rutland (1994)

What was that again?! Edith Weston, Rutland . . . Yes, it's all there on the IFDS web-site so it must be true. But how on earth did the World Championships of disabled sailing come to Rutland of all places, given alternatives such as Sydney (Australia), San Remo (Italy), and Florida?

It all began when the then RSC Commodore and another member who had represented the United Kingdom at the previous IFDS Championships attended a disabled sailing demonstration day at Whitwell Creek in 1993. Sailing back across the lake to the clubhouse, they decided that the next IFDS Worlds would be sailed on Rutland Water. Given the track record of determination showed by RSC, it is no surprise to hear that this is exactly what happened!

The ISDF was persuaded that the club was serious. The club's fleet of National Squibs donated the boats. Sail makers donated free sails. The Sports

In 1994 RSC hosted the IFDS World Championships thanks to the support of the Sports Council, many local businesses and the efforts of many club members. The event was sailed in Squib keelboats loaned from the local fleet (Peter Craven)



Council sponsored the building of a ramp to allow disabled access to the first floor of the clubhouse. Local businesses provided all kinds of goods and services free or at cost, and a new floating jetty suitable for wheel chairs was provided.

Sailors from Armenia, Australia, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States of America and the United Kingdom were present and the event was attended by Princess Christina of Spain, President of the ISDF.

Typical of the club's approach to this event is the story of one member who saw a huge crane laying water pipes in his village, stopped his car, and persuaded the contractor, Balfour Beatty, to go over to RSC and help position the newly-built pontoon jetty for wheelchairs – for free.

Needless to say, the event was a huge success, and the IFDS Championships came again to RSC in August 2006.

The Jubilee Sailing Trust and Sailability

The IFDS Championships were not RSC's first involvement with sailing for the disabled. The IFDS is a national organisation, set up with assistance from the Queen's Jubilee Fund, whose aim is 'to restore dignity and confidence to disabled people and re-integrate them into able-bodied society. Sailing is, in the Jubilee Sailing Trust's view, one of the most effective and desirable ways of achieving this aim'. This goal appealed strongly to a group of RSC members, who set up a local fund-raising group and arranged for the Jubilee Sailing Trust (JST) to be adopted as RSC's 'special charity' in 1983.

Still enthusiastically run by a team of dedicated supporters, RSC's JST group has become frighteningly professional and creative in finding ways to relieve members and the general public of their cash, and hundreds of disabled sailors have benefited from its efforts over the past 20 years.

Building upon this existing interest in sailing for the disabled, and following on from the success of the RSC organised ISDF event in 1994, the RAF sponsored a boat for use by disabled sailors at Rutland Water. This in turn led to a blossoming of interest from local people with physical disabilities who wanted to give sailing a try. As a result, two club members, sailors of the Challenger trimaran, one able-bodied and one with a physical disability, formed a Committee and founded Rutland Sailability with the full support of RSC.

By 1997, Rutland Sailability had begged and borrowed a variety of boats from all round the country. But this situation was not entirely satisfactory. Boats were needed which could be sailed by people with physical disabilities.



Rutland Sailability enables disabled people to regain their independence (Rutland Sailability)

Other boats were required which could be used to take people sailing who were not physically capable of sailing on their own or who had a learning disability which made it impossible for them to sail without supervision.

The 'Access Dinghy' is a relatively low-cost boat made in Australia. It can't capsizes and is specifically designed for disabled people. Initially, RSC's JST group decided to import seven of these boats, and Rutland Sailability now has a fleet of twenty-six. The majority have been provided by very generous sponsors, most notably the local Rotary Clubs.

Rutland Sailability is now a Registered Charity and a Company Limited by Guarantee, and is one of the best and most active Sailability Clubs in the country. Members range in ability from beginners to those among the best in the world. The United Kingdom was represented by a member of RSC and Rutland Sailability at the Paralympics in 2004. It is also likely that the club will again be representing the United Kingdom at the 2008 Paralympics in Beijing.

The following quotation by a member sums up the importance of Rutland Sailability: 'For six days a week I am disabled. But on Saturdays at Rutland Sailability I regain my independence.'

John Merricks

To quote Keith Wheatley of *The Times*, 'John Merricks was a former apprentice electrician, a cheeky chappy who left school at sixteen and was happy to live on his wits'. Taken from us in 1997 at the age of 24, John was one of the finest sailors of his generation, a member of Rutland Sailing Club, and a continuing inspiration.

John began sailing at an early age with his father, starting in a Mirror dinghy on a gravel pit in Syston, Leicestershire. His talent was quickly spotted, and he was advised to seek the challenge of a more significant water. RSC being the natural choice, John joined the club in 1984, aged eleven. Over the next few years, his skills grew, and thanks to the very generous sponsorship of a club member, who also belongs to a long-standing Leicestershire brewing family, John was eventually able to stop work and concentrate on his sailing.

As a result, in 1994 John won the inaugural 'Rutland Challenge for the Tiger Trophy' with Ian Lovering crewing for him in a 420 dinghy, a men's Olympic class. His prize was a terracotta Chinese Tiger. Fifty-six boats attended this first event, the ice flying off the jib every time they tacked reminding them of the temperature. John, who never wore gloves, showed the Race Officer that at one point his hand had actually frozen to the main sheet of his boat!

This steely determination took John to a silver medal in the Atlanta Games, crewed by Ian Walker, and a career in the highest reaches of competitive sailing beckoned. Tragically, John died in a car accident in Italy in 1997 while competing in the European Championships of the Melges 24 keelboat.

His name lives on through the John Merricks Sailing Trust which is now one of the United Kingdom's most important sources of funding for young



Two hundred and fifty of the best young sailors in the world descend on Rutland every February for the John Merricks Tiger Trophy (Sailracer)

talented sailors of limited means. The annual Rutland Challenge for the John Merricks Tiger Trophy is one of the year's most important regattas for young sailors. It is sponsored by RSC and Everards Brewery, and concentrates on the twin attributes close to John's heart: 'Keep it Fast' and 'Keep it Fun'.

John Merricks, a leading Olympic sailor and 1996 Olympic silver medalist, was an example to all through his exceptional skill and down-to-earth good nature.

Rutland Sailing Club Today and Tomorrow



The RSC Committee Boat stranded on ice. Weather-wise, Rutland Water behaves much like an estuary for sailors. They experience gale force winds, extremes of heat and cold, and waves which, although not as large as those at sea, can carry great force. Many coastal sailors have come to Rutland and been caught out by disparagingly thinking of the lake as a mere 'pond' (RSC)



Left: A stormy day on Rutland Water, near Normanton Church Museum (Martin Hollingshead)

The Building Programme – Here we go again!

In the late 1990s the club's facilities and buildings were coming up to 25 years old and the time was ripe for taking stock and deciding how to take the club forward. Equally, new facilities were required, and the club's status had evolved to the extent that many new challenges presented themselves. Sports Clubs all over the country were finding themselves in competition for their members' decreasing amounts of leisure time. The whole nature of dinghy sailing was being changed as large manufacturers came into the sport with new classes and types of boat targeted by skilful marketeers at the owners of the traditional classes of boat, and at new sailors whose needs were different from those of their predecessors.

The Club's Council, aware of these changing needs, began a programme of development, the goal of which was to escalate RSC into a polished professional outfit which could compete and win in the world of the twenty-first century leisure industry. The central plank of this plan was the upgrading of the club's buildings and facilities so that they would meet the requirements of the National Institute of Sport and become an RYA National Centre of Excellence for Sailing. Other aspects of the plan concerned building upon the club's training activities to create a top-class Sailing School with a national reputation. This would link the club more strongly into its Rutland community by developing school and other local links. It was also necessary to ensure that RSC's Safety and Race Management teams could meet the highest national and international standards. A professional approach to the

management and promotion of the club was also required.

All this, of course, could only be achieved by raising a considerable amount of money. Consequently, with a strong sense of *déjà vu*, RSC set about finding the £1.2 million needed for the transformation, a sum which was equivalent in modern terms to the £160,000 raised by the club's founders. A second Everest loomed.

With advice from the ever-helpful RYA, the club's main target was the Sport England Lottery Fund. A Lottery Team was established and approaches were made to the club's long-standing friends in the RAF, Sailability and other generous sponsors. To quote from the Lottery application:

'The primary objectives of this plan are to provide the RYA and disabled sailors with upgraded facilities to support the RYA World-Class Performance programme.'

In addition, of course, this would also give the people of Rutland and its surrounding communities an even better facility for themselves, their children and grandchildren.

After several months of intensive work, RSC received a Christmas present in 1999. An 'in principle' award of £720,000 was made to the club by the Sport England Lottery Fund. Delight all round! All the club had to do now was to find the balance of £450,000.

More work, planning, architect's designs, building, delays, frustrations, negotiations, joy and despair, which went on for four years.



Above: The Clubhouse exterior in 2003. RSC opened its newly refurbished Clubhouse to the great delight of members and relief of the fund-raising team (Michael Barsby)

In the end, all parts of the club were accessible to persons with disabilities. There was a lift to the first floor, improvements to the pontoons and access ways for wheelchairs, and special lifting equipment to enable sailors in and out of boats.

To meet the requirements of the RYA World Class programme the clubhouse was extended and reconfigured to include new training rooms and equipment. Extended accommodation means that the clubhouse can now accommodate sixty sailors in comfortable rooms, some with en suite facilities. There is also an improved and extended restaurant, a refurbished and comfortable lounge, a clubroom, offices and stores. Even the clubhouse heating, ventilation and catering equipment were brought up to 'world class' standard.

There were also improvements to the water-side components of the operation including stabilising the foreshore and beach, piling the pontoon jetties and providing new inflatable boats and engines for safety cover.



Left: RSC Clubhouse from the shore of Rutland Water (Alisdair Gray)



RSC Clubhouse interior
(Michael Barsby)

As for the training and youth sailing side of the club's activities, which are essential to secure the future of the club, RSC has grown a Sailing School second to none. It is staffed by a full-time Manager and Chief Instructor, and during the season employs up to fifteen highly qualified instructors capable of offering a full range of teaching from the six-year-olds getting started, through the teenagers who just want to sail faster, to adults and families who want to get afloat safely and enjoy themselves.

The result is that Rutland now has the finest inland sailing club and venue in the United Kingdom on its doorstep.

The Future – Secured?

RSC now employs eight full-time and numerous temporary and part-time staff, and is recognised all over the sailing world as a centre of excellence for training, racing and family sailing.

For many, the only contact with the Club is the sight of members and visitors out on the water during the week and at weekends. What they don't realise is that today more than 20,000 'sailor days' worth of activity take place at RSC each year, almost 7,500 of these being related to visitors from all over the country and even from abroad. This activity generates around 3,000 bed-nights of benefit to the local economy, as well as financial input to Oakham, Uppingham and surrounding villages by the sailors' partners and children, who take advantage of tourism opportunities while their relatives are out sailing on our excellent Water.

Each year RSC holds championships of national and sometimes international importance on behalf of the RYA. And the club is also involved in Britain's Olympic sailing success story. Britain's sailors are our most successful Olympic athletes, winning more medals than any other sport, and RSC plays its part in this venture by providing a training venue for the squad and helping in the selection process which will identify our future champions. Rutland will be very important in the run-up to both the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics.

The club has also produced its own world class sailors, including, for example, John Merricks whose achievements have already been acknowledged. Amongst its membership there are other Olympic, Paralympic, World, European and National medallists and champions.

This has been achieved because, from the very early days of the club, there has been an emphasis on training, particularly for young people. RSC is one of only five Royal Yachting Association World Class Sailing Centres in the United Kingdom, and the only one inland. There is also a very successful RYA accredited Sailing School and RSC is one of only a small number of 'RYA Championship Clubs'. These are dedicated to helping young people and others get afloat, and to this end, there is a sponsored sailing programme for local schools and children, a thriving Disabled Sailing Group, and close links with important Rutland organisations such as the Army, the



RAF and the county's large private schools.

All this adds up to a major force for health and environmental care in Rutland. The club actively promotes a sport which

burns no fossil fuels, is careful about its environmental responsibility and encourages young people to stretch and challenge themselves in an adventurous and exciting way.

Left: Balcony Panorama.

The view from the clubhouse balcony is considered to be the best on the lake (Alisdair Gray)

So is all Well with the World? – Well, not Quite.

Recent changes in the water authority's plans for extraction and throughput of water potentially threaten both the club and its environment. As a result, water levels may fall lower than they ever have done since the reservoir was filled. With global warming and changes in weather patterns, who knows what the future will bring. Perhaps members will once again find themselves confined to the small area of water they sailed across on that first day of sailing back in 1975. It is hoped not, but the club cannot be complacent.

As a result, the present Club Council, not unlike its predecessors, is having to prepare to meet yet another set of challenges in fighting for the good of the sport it promotes, the membership whom it serves, and the people of Rutland for whom the club's founders began this sailing adventure in the most unlikely place in England.

We can only wish them well. Do not be surprised if somehow RSC and the people of Rutland overcome these and any other difficulties which might cloud the horizon. Remember the county's motto, '*Multum In Parvo*' – 'Much In Little' – and how, from the seed of a conversation between three enthusiasts, a major presence in the world of sailing has emerged over the past 30 years.



Sunset Lake (Alisdair Gray)