

Reprinted from Squibble

## **“DICK BATT . Squib sail maker and much more!”**



With his family based in Winchester, Dick's early sailing was at Hamble River Sailing Club, crewing for his dad in the family Albacore or an old OK Dinghy, or sailing with the better club sailors, often in Merlin Rockets. A summer job at Banks Sails after University led to a permanent post and very

early involvement in computer sail design. “All my sailing was in dinghies but at that time much of my sail-making was for bigger boats,” he says, “I ended up designing sails and running the huge spinnaker department”.

Dick's first taste of Championships success was was winning the GP14 Nationals at Whitstable crewing for college friend Bryan Hayes. After a near-miss or two he eventually won the OK Dinghy Nationals a couple of times by which time he was working in Exmouth with Michael McNamara.

Batt Sails started on April 1st 1980. “ I had emigrated to New Zealand and had four wonderful years living in Auckland. A cottage on Takapuna beach, racing Contenders, Solings, Flying Fifteens, all sorts of yachts. It's a great place, fantastic, but we came back to the UK to set up our own business. That was a tough call ”

Based in the Thames Valley, right next to Maidenhead Bridge, Dick says that this was a smart move, being so close to so many inland sailing clubs and well-placed for getting around to open meetings. It was also very close to a very active Squib fleet at Datchet Water.

At their suggestion, when it was advertised by the RYA, he applied for approval as a Squib sailmaker, winning the license from a shortlist of three. “ I made the promise that I would get fully involved with the Squibs. That was over thirty years ago and it's been nothing but a pleasure since then. It's an incredible class” That was in 1985 and



he visited the nationals in Seaview to introduce himself. By the following year he actually had sailcloth to make some Squib sails, borrowed Squib 576 'Melody' to race in Abersoch, and won.

“I think we had a lucky week” Dick says modestly, “but it put us firmly on the map in sail making terms. Best of all it was the start of many great friendships”.

Since then Dick has owned three other Squibs and raced in nearly every UK Nationals, winning again in Holyhead in 1992. In that time seven Merlin Rockets, four International Fourteens, a B14 and a couple of Flying Fifteens have come and gone. I told you he’s mad about boats. The other boat currently in the stable, in addition to Squib 11, is a classic XOD which he and Pam race from Itchenor when time allows.

I asked about the photos and certificates on the office wall as it’s clear from these that Dick also has a close involvement with the RYA and with World Sailing. For example there’s one of the entire measurement squad at the 2008 Olympic sailing venue in China, where Dick was the Chief Measurer for the event. Another, too from London2012.

He tells me that he chaired the RYA Technical Committee for a number of years and this led to a similar responsibility at World Sailing, where he remains the UK Council member, and he still sits on the RYA Council. “ I particularly enjoy the interaction with all the Classes and it can all get quite political a times. It’s a refreshingly different challenge to running this business day to day.”

Clearly a firm believer in the value of volunteers in running our sport, this is something he majors on in his RYA involvement. Dick is obviously delighted to have been voted onto the NSOA Committee and really looking forward contributing to its work.

The conversation returned to Batt Sails and the Squib Class. After twenty good years in the Thames Valley Dick took the bold decision to relocate Batt Sails to the South Coast, to the modern premises we are sitting in. He says he has never regretted this move and describes it as a real life-changer. “ We love Chichester Harbour. We’re heavily involved here with some fantastic local keelboat fleets and yacht owners but still have much wider horizons in the UK, stretching as far North as the Shetlands, plus a really valuable customer base in Ireland, including Squibbers on both sides of the border”.

What did he think of his closest of near-misses at this year’s UK Nationals in Holyhead, where Squib11 only lost the title on a tie-break? “You have to congratulate the boys in ‘Ric’O’Shea’. They never say never.” We’ve had a lot of fun this year and I’d say Squib11’s end of season mini-tour in Ireland has been the icing on the cake for Pam and myself. The Squib Class is in great shape. I realised a long time ago that it’s people who make a class, as much as the boats so I hope Squibbers both sides of the Irish Sea do as much as they can to race together. It can only make a strong Class stronger.”

