

FAMILY RECOLLECTIONS

***SOME NOTES ABOUT NEDLANDS YACHT CLUB BY
HON SIR CHARLES COURT, AK KCMG OBE,
A PARENT OF FIVE YOUNG SAILING MEMBERS IN EARLY DAYS,
A LIFE MEMBER AND A FORMER LONG TIME PATRON***

I was delighted when I heard the Nedlands Yacht Club was taking positive steps to record a history of our Club.

As a Life Member and one who has been active within the Club ever since its formation, I remind all Members we have much to be proud of through the activities of Nedlands Yacht Club. As a parent and as a citizen of Nedlands, I go back to the very beginning, when, believe it or not, we conducted our Club by tying a flag to the end of the Nedlands Jetty as a sign for all to see that we were racing that day!

Our limited gear and equipment was stored in a shed owned by the original 'Steve' McHenry at his nearby hotel. It was a modest beginning, but it was an enthusiastic and effective one.

My old school mate from Rosalie State School in Onslow Road, then West Subiaco and now known as Shenton Park, Jack Le Maistre, was always a great enthusiast and leader.

If I remember correctly, he was a Carpenter by trade and at one stage was President of the Carpenter's Union.

I assume the club has an accurate list of the original Office Bearers and many members and supporters, including our enthusiastic lady supporters and workers.

Steve McHenry did us a favour when, after a while, he announced he needed his shed for expansion and gave us warning that within a specified time we would need to vacate it and get our own premises. He forced us into a decision about a site and about the construction of premises.

It was not long before Jack Le Maistre was 'on my back' and wanting my assistance with the Nedlands Road Board, later Shire Council and then City of Nedlands, to say nothing of the practical problems of getting the money and materials as well as the skills and physical labour to build our first club facilities.

And what a magnificent site we have! It is quite unique as yachting club sites go and we often used to say it was the only club where you could rig up your boats on a lawn and launch them with comparative ease.

I will not try to go into more detail about the Club's records as I am assuming these are all available to you regarding the office bearers, the introduction of members and different classes of yachts etc.

However, I do want to refer to a couple of incidents along the road.

There came a time when Jack Le Maistre decided we should have a formal occasion for our prize presentation night. Jack, I can assure you, had his standards, which was good to see - very basic, but very solid and desirable standards, especially as initially our facilities were, to say the least, inadequate.

We discussed what would be a suitable venue and agreed the Dalkeith Civic Hall in Waratah Avenue, Dalkeith, which by then had been constructed by the Nedlands Local Authority, would be an ideal place.

His next question was — 'Who would be a desirable dignitary to make the presentations?'

We canvassed a few names, but Jack insisted we should aim high and who better than His Excellency the Governor, Sir Charles Gairdner.

Needless to say, he designated me to make the approach, informally at first, to His Excellency, to see how he would react.

This I did, emphasising we were a young, family Club, desperately trying to establish high standards of conduct, and above all, efficient, safe sailing in a number of junior classes.

Sir Charles Gairdner responded enthusiastically and assured me he and Lady Gairdner would be there on the night.

Jack was determined it was going to be a success and he, together with the Secretary, organised, through me, that a delegation would wait upon His Excellency The Governor to outline what we had in mind and get his approval for the protocol and other matters that were to be observed on the evening, including standard of dress for adults, etc.

You have no idea how detailed were the instructions and the rehearsals to ensure we did justice to the occasion and extended the proper courtesies and protocols to His Excellency the Governor and his lady. Buckingham Palace could not have been more careful or demanding in its preparation than Jack Le Maistre and our then Secretary.

There was a formal presentation of all Office Bearers, Committee men and their wives to His Excellency and his wife at the entrance to the hall, which was nicely and formally done, with all adults appropriately dressed.

The hall was packed and we duly entered with Jack Le Maistre and his wife escorting His Excellency the Governor and his wife, and my wife and I in close attendance.

There was a Guard of Honour of young NYC sailing members all the way down the aisle. All were well turned out but looking extremely nervous and rather over-awed by the grand occasion. That was a good thing!

When we got to the end of the Guard of Honour, His Excellency stopped and turned to the young lad standing there, who was showing great signs of nervousness, and said to him, "You are Rob Vaisey, I presume?"

This took the Commodore and Rob Vaisey by surprise. How would His Excellency know who it was?

His Excellency then said to Vaisey, "You are supposed to start the clapping", which then duly took place amid roars of laughter from all present.

We were amazed as to how His Excellency would know it was Rob Vaisey.

Unfortunately, Rob Vaisey had been petrified at the time and had not initially done what he was briefed to do. The secret came out later.

We found that the delegation which went to Government House under the arrangements I had made so that they could brief His Excellency on the format for the occasion, had mistakenly left behind the detailed procedures which had been very systematically worked out and typed. After the delegation had gone, the Governor's staff found these notes and so His Excellency had a complete written brief of exactly what was going to happen from the time he arrived until the time he left the prize giving. He was greatly impressed but he did not let on at the time!

It finished up a great and memorable night within the life of the Nedlands Yacht Club and one, which in many ways, established the standards that were to be observed for such occasions.

I can assure you, most of it was the brainchild and the inspiration of Jack Le Maistre, strongly supported by his Committee, other office bearers and lady volunteers of the Club.

I conclude by telling you how proud I have been of the Club.

We have always remained essentially a family club.

All of my five sons were active and learnt the fundamentals of safe sailing. Four of them were successful in their classes locally and interstate.

We have always given top priority to training, because properly trained sailors are safe sailors as well as efficient and successful sailors.

We have had our great share of success in the different classes, both State, national and international and we can be proud of what has been achieved at all levels.

Never forget, behind all of this has been a tremendous body of workers, including the women members and supporters of the club. They have set high standards and have done much to establish and maintain the morale of the Club.

Then there are the Race Day officials, without whom we could never have achieved the standard of yachting and racing with safety we must achieve if we want to be a club acknowledged in a wonderful and highly competitive sport.

I look back on the many occasions I have attended and the official openings I have undertaken as well as my years as Patron and Life Member.

I have special pleasure and pride in the way the Nedlands Yacht Club has for so long been the custodians of the Annual Memorial Regatta to remember the gallant heroes of HMAS Perth who, in World War II, lost their lives when HMAS Perth together with USS Houston, were sunk by a much larger Japanese force in the Sunda Straits.

Those who did not perish in the actual sinking of HMAS Perth became prisoners of the Japanese and had horrendous experiences as Japanese Prisoner's of War. They were all true heroes of our country.

We are honoured to be the custodians of this Annual Memorial Regatta and I hope we will never fail in our responsibilities to honour these heroes of World War II with the dignity and the sincerity that the anniversary demands.

I know what we have done in the past is appreciated by the survivors, but we must remember time marches on and there will be a time when there are no living survivors, but the memory and the commemoration of what we honour must go on forever.

It is a fine tradition commenced by this comparatively young and enthusiastic family yachting

Charles Court – 4 February, 2004

Barry Court

I remember the yacht club being at the Nedlands Jetty at the bottom of Steve's hotel and the boats were stored in the shed there and dragged over the wall for the races, which started with the flags on the end of the jetty. I was mainly involved with the starting of the new yacht club, which was located on land allocated by the Nedlands City Council and there was support over the years from the Mayor Charles Smith, which was a great help to the Nedlands Yacht Club. At that stage it was virtually bamboo from the Nedlands Jetty to the hot pool, which in those days was up to where Tawarri or the flying squadron is and we had to dig the bamboos out. I think they grew just as quickly as we could dig them and it wasn't until some time later we found that we could use chemical control to get rid of them. There were a lot of volunteers doing that job and we obtained lawn from all around Nedlands, we asked people to dig up a bit of lawn and we had trucks supplied by Brian LeMaistre to bring the pieces of turf down. The dredge was going down to do the original Narrows Bridge and either on its way down or way back it was delayed at the Nedlands Yacht Club to fill the back of the wall. The lawn or beach has stayed since those days. It has provided the foreshore for what I consider the best small boat club in the world. I have sailed in many countries and with a lawn down to the river with hardly any tide and deep water a few meters from the shore, it is the ideal rigging area compared to many others I have seen, especially those in the tidal areas in Europe where you have to take your boat hundreds of meters out before you can sail, depending on where the tide is. The excellent boating facilities at the Yacht Club were made available by the dredging of the sand to give a deep starting line and a very good beach.

The next project was to build the Yacht Club itself. It was a dirt road from Steve's Hotel through to the Yacht Club and there was a lot of dust, but we got all the equipment down there and started building the yacht club, the old portion of which still remains today.

The original Yacht Club was built well by Ron Steven, who was to become the Commodore, Garnet Rock and of course Jack LeMaistre, who was also a very good tradesman. So we all jumped in and built the clubhouse for the storage of the boats. In those days the boats were all Vee Jays and it wasn't until some time later that we got into a larger 14-foot boat, called the Skate, which I really enjoyed sailing and had a lot of success in. We used to take the boats to the Eastern States and race, mainly on Botany Bay, where we contested the Australian Championships. In some cases we were very successful for Western Australia, with Laurie Chivers finishing in the number one position and Neil Head also winning an Australian title. The Australian Championships were held about every three years in Perth and it was a very big event for the Skates.

Another very exciting time for the Skates was when we went to Geraldton, we formed the regatta at Geraldton and made a colourful scene and a lot of the boats were loaded on a train provided by the Geraldton Yacht Club at the Claremont station and transported by train to Geraldton, where they were unloaded, sailed and we loaded them back on the train to come back to the Yacht Club. I think that in later years with more cars being available, most boats were transported by road. It was very well organised and we went there for many years, providing a very good spectacle at Geraldton. Our State Championships were held there on a few occasions.

In the early days of Geraldton there was unlimited crayfish and fish and it was a very big attraction for all to go up there.

The sailing at the Nedlands Yacht Club also had the advantage of a fairly consistent afternoon sea breeze. I remember a very good sporting commentator, Jim Fitz-Morris always held the impression that sailing was not a sport and was just a leisure activity on the river. Jim's wife Jill sailed Vee Jays out of South Perth and I remember the day I invited Jim, who was the sporting editor of ABC television, to come down and try out this sailing. Fortunately there was a good stiff sea breeze and by the time we got up the river and had the spinnaker up coming down again, which incidentally Jim was left well behind when he fell off, he realised the excitement of sailing. It wasn't long after that the State Championships for the Skates was televised live with a barge out near Dee road, one near the Nedlands Jetty and a big camera at the yacht club. Fortunately there was a good sea breeze that day and we had a jibe mark out by the barge at Dee road. When I asked him afterward how it had gone and he replied that he hadn't actually spoken yet as it was so exciting with boats tipping over everywhere, he said as soon as he went to speak another boat would spectacularly capsize! This also resulted in the live telecast of the Cockburn Sailing Regatta and that continued until there were a few light days and he realised that he had to pre-record the event because a full day of the State Championships with light conditions made it difficult to commentate and not very exciting for the viewers and that was really the end of the television for yachting. However we always had a good relationship with Jim, who I think ended up as the manager of the ABC in Tasmania and I occasionally see him on the international scene where he works for a commercial channel.

A feature of the yacht club was the camaraderie of people and the flag officers. The club was not licensed but that seemed to have a reverse effect as after the race they would invariably have a keg out the back or something like that which the boys would all participate in or they would adjourn to the 'annex', which was the Nedlands Park Hotel. The Club has since been licensed and now has beautiful lawns and barbeque areas. It was pretty rough in the early days but the Yacht Club was where a lot of the fun was had. One of the major races for the year was the Marathon. It started about 9 o'clock in the morning and it finished well into the afternoon, usually on an easterly breeze.

We would move fairly smartly down towards the Narrows Bridge and we would turn and head for Fremantle, we were usually stuck there waiting for the sea breeze to come in but, once it was in, we went all the way to Fremantle and sailed the long way back to the Nedlands Yacht Club. It was a long race and the inspection ports we had on the boats were usually where our lunch was stored, we had to dive in there to get a bit of lunch or a drink, but it was always a feature race of the year.

I remember the heavy sea breezes and the heavier the breeze the more weight you needed and that was often done by just putting more sweaters on, even to the extent of standing in a hot shower to get them wet. Completely foolish and very dangerous, if you went over board you went in with three or four wet jumpers, so now days it is life jackets. In the earlier days lead belts were used to give us extra weight when we were on our swinging plank. So it was a very dangerous practise but we all seemed to survive it alright and I can't recall any major accidents for the Nedlands Yacht Club, there was certainly some 'prangs', but none that involved any major problems.

A few feature races were the opening day, which was always a feature of any yacht club. We all used to go to the different yacht clubs then and by the time we got through to opening day about 4 weeks of the season had gone. I think that has been abandoned now and you sail at your own club. I think it was the 100th anniversary of the Royal Perth Yacht Club and every boat on the river went there for that day, and what a day that was, it was a magnificent race. A feature of the Nedlands Yacht Club now, and one of the more memorable races, is the Hector Waller Memorial. The Hector Waller was sailed out of the Fremantle Sailing Club and when they changed to their current premises the Nedlands Yacht Club held the race on a temporary basis. It was such a success that the Hector Waller, which is the HMAS Perth Memorial Race honouring Captain Hector Waller, is now held annually at the Nedlands Yacht Club and what a great bunch of people. When I was Commodore we certainly had a very good relationship with the survivors of the HMAS Perth. They were a tough mob but we had reciprocal arrangement between the Naval Club and the Yacht Club and a very good relationship was built between the two. Harold Smith, who was the Commodore at the time, must take the credit for getting the Hector Waller at the Nedlands Yacht Club, Fremantle fought for some time to get it back but we managed to retain the race at Nedlands.

I also remember the introduction of catamarans. No other club on the river wanted them, they were sailing too fast, had twin hulls and they were hard to store but really the main problem was jealousy, as they beat every other class on the river. Nedlands took the step to adopt the catamarans and it really gave the yacht club a bit of a boost, so it was a major breakthrough. The Yacht Club was also progressive with the Pelicans, which were a big training class down there, and the Sunday morning training sessions were one of the features of the club, there just wasn't enough boats at times. The treasurer at the time, Jim Carroll, was very generous and purchased some boats, so there were club boats that people could sail in and they were maintained by the club or the people that had them. I think my brother Richard sailed one for some time and we took it home and lightened it off and did it up and it was quite a competitive boat. That boat was also in club regattas with the Pelicans. Rottnest was another Pelican stronghold as that was where the Pelican was developed as a tender for the boats at Rottnest and the kids used to sail them around. Eventually they became a great junior racing boat with just a single main sail and stub nose. I must say I tried to sail them and they were a very hard boat to sail. If you could sail a pelican then sailing a Skate or a Vee Jay, or any other boat really became quite easy.

During my days as Commodore of the Nedlands Yacht Club I received a lot of assistance from previous Commodores and the committees. It was a pretty big happy family at the Club and one committee that became very strong was the ladies committee.

They organised all the lunches, afternoon teas and tea and coffees after the races. They were a very close knit group of mothers and friends and what a great job they did. They raised funds out of their efforts, which helped the yacht club progress. From those funds we managed to put enough aside for the new building, which was fairly heavily mortgaged to the council I might say, but that was our next development as the Club became a lot stronger. A big strength was the volunteers, the starters and the officers of the day. Kevin Bartlett was the main starter for years, he would get down there in his uniform and he would start us off every Saturday, Sunday and Monday if we could. There was racing there everyday we could and we were all very enthusiastic. The Nedlands Yacht Club was known for its heavy weather sailors. Once the wind got under 10 knots the Eastern states sailors would take over but we certainly won fairly comfortably on the heavy days on the Swan River, the Western Australian yachtsmen were pretty well unbeatable.

In my early days when I was first sailing on the river we bolted a couple of 44 gallon drums together and had a barge and we used to go from White beach with one of my father's election signs as a sail, so we reckoned that he should have to pay us for advertising! In those days there were canvas signs around Nedlands when the elections were near and that was our sail. It certainly didn't go to Windward but we had a lot of fun paddling and the Swan River became a major play area for many people in Western Australia. We then graduated to our first Vee Jay, she cost about £10 and was a real wreck. If I remember correctly, we originally stored it in the Mosman Bay Tearooms and then when the racing got going we moved it to the Nedlands Yacht Club.

My brother Vic eventually got a good boat, but the old Vee Jays in those days had stirrup pumps on the front to pump out the water as they all leaked. We had a venturie at one stage, which we would stick in the bung at the back and that would keep it reasonable dry, you have some reports there from Richard Court. Dark Lass was our first boat, he says it had that name because it had some bitumen inside to keep it afloat, but it was named after the two dogs that were at our Grandmother's farm, Darkie and Lassie. So that was the name of our first boat, but we would later build our own boats, which was the tradition in those days, to build boats in the winter and then sail them in the summer.

I used to think that sailing was the most exhilarating feeling there was but also the safest. You can go to the absolute limit of speed and wind on the river and the worst that could happen was that the boat would tip over and you would all get wet. You would be hanging on the end of some really exciting rides and some big waves and there was no real problem with safety, if you fell in you just got the boat back up again. Once again we had extra jumpers on in the heavy days and life jackets were not for us sailors until they were made compulsory.

Yacht Club projects like building the Mercy boat were a voluntary thing. The plywood was supplied by Herne Brothers, the furniture company, I think Dad organised that. In regard to the jetty, once again the pile driver was going past and put some piles in, later on we had to hire one, but we got the jetty in so that we could have bigger boats in the club and it was always needed for the Mercy boat and various other things. So the jetty was built out there and it remains today.

The annual prize night was always a big occasion where we all got together and what a great time we had. We would fill the Dalkeith hall, as the Yacht Club was not big enough at the time. Everyone would bog in and we would have a great night there. Since the extension I believe that it is now held in the yacht club. On one occasion we had the Governor attend and it was always a well-respected club, so we had no trouble attracting important people there to help us out. I think that the local and state governments were always helpful because of the activities of the club and the way it kept people off the streets and involved in a good healthy sport. The people that I knew at the yacht club are still friends today, they were enemies at the time of a yacht race, but the friendships endure today.

Later when Richard had Court Marine, a boating business in Nedlands, I became involved in the business when Richard went onto Parliament. We were the agents for the Windsurfer when it came out and I was involved in organising the World Windsurfing Championships. The Championships were a massive event and there are some beautiful records of it. That event was run from the Nedlands Yacht Club, with temporary tents being put up, a big New Years Eve fireworks display and there was a big international flavour to the event. Preparations for the Americas Cup were underway at the time and we had some international champions and administrators in Australia for that occasion, so we called on them as umpires and protest committee for the Yacht Club. I remember Coca Cola were the major sponsor and they advertised on the windsurfer boards and sails. At that stage sponsorship was not allowed in yachting so we had direction from the International Yachting Federation that all of the advertising had to be taken off. I disappointedly rang Coca Cola and they replied that it was the best news that they had had for years as it was front page news. Their name was taken off the sail but the logo remained, so there was no secret as to who the sponsor was. That really was the start of early sponsorship, which is now everywhere, but it was a big news story at the time and the sponsor received more publicity out of the logo being banned than they would have if it were allowed in the first place.

Because of its situation the Nedlands Yacht Club is an ideal dingy club but it has unprotected waters as far as its moorings and pens are concerned, so it never expanded greatly into big boats and was kept as a small training club. Many of us graduated into, and are sailing today, big boats around the river. My brother Ken has sailed in the Sydney to Hobart, and has Richard and myself. I graduated into a one tonner before I became increasingly busy and had to pretty well give up sailing, but I had 'Nadia', Ken had 'Prime Minister' and then 'Second Term'.

People we knew went into yachting fleets all round the river and we are all still good mates. We had a reunion this year and there were a lot of people who attended and what a great day it was.

The yacht club also had some very big social occasions, it was popular for different functions and promotions as it was on the river and had a beautiful hall. One function that I do remember very well is when Margaret and I were married and held the reception at the Nedlands Yacht Club. The rules of the Club were that the hall could not be let out on Saturdays, as it was for the sailing people to stay on afterwards to have a barbeque. We had to bend the rules a bit on that particular Saturday and we overcame that by inviting pretty well everyone from the Yacht Club to the wedding, which was all my mates anyhow.

Richard Court

Our current Patron was one of the first to be sailing in the Pelican class when they were introduced to the club, then sailed as crew for Barry, Victor and Helen in Skates before he owned his own boat.

My first memories of the Nedlands Yacht Club were as a young boy around six, when it was the Nedlands Subiaco Yacht Club sailing from the Nedlands Baths jetty

My brothers had bought a "VJ" which they called "Dark Lass"

I remember it coming into our backyard. It had a pump in the back deck. The joints were packed full of what they thought was chewing gum that they pulled out, then painted the boat. After it sunk, they realised that it was putty that was filling up the joints that they had pulled out.

They went to the local Council (Road Board) and bought some bitumen which they poured inside to fill up all the holes and that's why the boat was called "Dark Lass".

They were beginners and their boats were very slow.

The officials used to start and finish the races off at the Nedlands Jetty and Steve McHenry had some storage sheds at the Nedlands Hotel where he allowed them to store the boats. I can recall them being rigged and then carried down the stone steps to the north of the jetty which are still in their original form today.

The move to the new site was when I became more actively involved as I was keen to follow my brothers and learn how to sail.

The original clubhouse which still stands today was built by the volunteers at the Club.

Many of the parents keen to have this facility for their children were trades people. In particular I remember Jack LeMaistre who always seemed to be in building mode.

When the Club was completed they then set out to build a suitable rescue boat. It was a modern plywood chine hull boat and it served the Club admirably for many, many years.

To encourage juniors they introduced the “Pelican trainers” and they actually built a fleet of Club Pelicans to enable young people to learn how to sail.

There were also some private people who donated trainers. One was a Mr Bessell-Brown who lived just up the road and who donated a Pelican for the Club and I was able to use that to first learn how to sail.

The first fleets were the “VJ’s”, followed by the 14 foot “Skate”.

My own first yacht was a “Pelican N12” “Ricky 11” [included] which I sailed initially with my young brother Geoff. This boat had cotton sails made by a sailmaker, Huxford in Fremantle who made the cotton sails for the local fishing fleet

The introduction of synthetic sails was revolutionary and it was beginning of the “Rolly Tasker era”.

I can recall the first Tasker Pelican sails being introduced and they were very light weight, had a great shape and it was the sign of things to come compared to the heavy, flat, canvas sails we used. [date]

As we were learning we tipped in often and once the canvas sails got wet they became an even bigger liability.

Geoff and myself had the dubious distinction of being the first people to hole the new rescue boat when our “Pelican” was rescued after capsizing in a heavy sea breeze.

Laurie Chivers was very successful at building very high quality lightweight “VJ’s”, “Skates” and the hollow timber spars used prior to aluminium being introduced.

Laurie built a workshop as an extension of the original clubhouse which is now the WA Yachting Association’s offices and he built up a most successful business both building these lightweight racing shells, spars and many of the fittings — stainless steel and plastic — that were being designed in a very innovative way.

Laurie was also the representative for “Herrick” sails which also had a good reputation at that time.

Laurie’s business was growing at a similar time to that of Rolly Tasker who had been very successful in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics and then went on to become a world champion “Flying Dutchman” sailor.

One of the features of the Nedlands Yacht Club is the extensive lawn areas. Part of the river was reclaimed and the beach was just a very thick shell material and to grow the lawns we brought in huge amounts of suitable soil, much of it from swimming pools that were being dug in the area. Again people like Brian LeMaistre had access to big sand trucks that could help us bring that material down. I remember working on the new fill in front of what is now the new clubhouse

Characters I remember from those early days were the Jack LeMaistre, Garnet Rock, a lovely man whose children were sailing there — Warren, Lance and Graham.

The LeMaistres, particularly Jack and his son Brian. It was Brian who actually gave me my first practical sailing lessons and the fact that he was prepared to come out with me on a Sunday morning and teach me the basics, is something I have never forgotten.

I also remember Peter Bussemaker who came down the Club to encourage his son, Tim to sail and I can still hear his voice yelling at us, "Pull your mainsail in No. 12"

It was these people who gave us the start which was so important.

Some other characters who I ended up doing a lot of sailing with were the Howells, Ian Macfarlane, Ray Wakelin and the list goes on

Nedlands Yacht Club was always open to new ideas and new classes. Its reputation was as a "dinghy" club but it was the first to encourage catamarans. Brian LeMaistre, for example, went from "Skates" and built an "Yvonne" class catamaran.

I remember the introduction of the "Quick Cat", the "Yvonne" and the "Kitty Cat" and then the big success story of them all, the "Hobie Cat" — the "Hobie 14" followed by the "Hobie 16", "Tornado" and then the "Windrush 14's".

Catamarans were very controversial when they first came on the river and some of the "established" clubs didn't make them welcome — that was not the case with Nedlands.

I went straight from "Pelicans" into sailing "Skates" and I was the forward hand for my brothers Barry and Vic winning State Championships with both of them and then for a period I sailed my own "Skate" but not all that successfully

I then sailed for some years with my first wife, Helen, in a boat called "Sir Henry" and we were a very successful combination winning a few State Championships. Roy Dewar was very active at the Club. Roy was Laurie Chivers' uncle and Helen his daughter and she was sailing "Cherubs" and then moving into "Skates".

Roy put in a huge effort at the Club, particularly looking after the finances and was properly honoured in becoming a Life Member

I served on the Management Committee and was in charge of grounds for a couple of years. It was a Club that always had a lot of lawn, requiring a good reticulation system, but the lawn was certainly one of the features.

With "VJ's" and "Skates" we used to have a National Championship every third year as a rule, alternating between Perth, Sydney and Melbourne and one of the features of the championships is that we used to billet the sailors out at our homes. In the early days of the Nedlands Yacht Club it wasn't easy travelling across to the Eastern States on the unsealed roads with our boats either on top or behind

The strength of the Club has been the fact that it is a pure sailing Club with probably the finest dinghy sailing facilities — lawns, beaches, launching areas, etc that you would find anywhere in the world

The Club has been a good custodian of a prime piece of waterfront land. Its membership comes from all over the metropolitan area

At one point all the five boys sailed at the Club and certainly four of us - Victor, Barry, Ken and myself - spent many, many years competing in championships at a very high level and it was certainly a very important part of our lives

The early years was an era when people built their own boats during the winter recess and visiting competitors from the East stayed in our homes and many of the friendships made then continue to this day.

Laurie Chivers' outgrew the Nedlands' site and built a new factory south of the river and moved away from producing yachts into power boats which he did very successfully.

I can recall a "VJ" championship when John Bertrand was sailing in the Junior Division and outsailed the Seniors.

He was using a boat built by Laurie Chivers who had developed a national reputation for building the finest yachts of this type. The brand on his spars was two red stripes.

Whenever there was a big sea breeze I used to walk down to Pelican Point on a Sunday morning and pick up the debris from the previous day's sailing. Wooden spars and leaning planks etc would float to the shore and I would salvage some of the fittings that were on them.

The "VJ's" had duralum [centre boards] and there is a great collection of them still sitting on the bottom of the river. People would forget to tie them in and they tipped upside down, the centre boards slipped straight out.

When we went to compete in Sydney at St. George's or George's River, Yarra Bay Clubs, for example, they were licensed clubs with poker machines. They had great bars, entertainment, food, but their sailing facilities were atrocious and you got the distinct impression that the concept of a sailing club was just a subterfuge to get a gambling and liquor licence.

Our clubs, on the other hand, were only involved in sailing and our facilities for sailing were always significantly better and it was one of the reasons why I was never conned by the gambling lobby in Government that they would put more back into these sorts of activities.

The Fairey Family

The Fairey family joined Nedlands Yacht Club in 1961, one of the reasons was that they would accept catamarans and were prepared to offer Sunday sailing. Eric Fairey along with his wife Iris, son Eric jnr and daughter Sandra, were all made very welcome as the club needed new and willing members to help undertake the task of raising funds to build a new club house, as well as enjoy the sailing offered at NYC. Eric came with a 14' catamaran, Yvonne, Kitty Cats and Quick Cats also made the move from other clubs because now they could have class racing. It wasn't long before Eric sold the 14' cat to upgrade to an Yvonne, named 'Hellcat', which was later replaced by a Loftus built Yvonne called 'Little Joe' after son Eric Jnr. Little Joe was sold about 5 years later. Eric decided he needed to go faster and the latest catamaran was a 'Manta' and it sounded just the thing. So Eric along with son Eric Jnr built a 'Manta' in the garage at home, this was about 1966/67. They named it 'The Joker' Eric and son (now named Ric to stop confusion) sailed 'The Joker' for about 12 yrs. Eric & Ric were a formidable team winning many Club Championships in 1970/71, 1971/72, and in 1973/74. Ric then purchased 'The Joker' from his father. Eric then sailed Tiger with Colin Redman. Tiger was purchased from Brian Lewis. With the decline of the 'Mantas' that had sailed at the club for something like 20 yrs, Eric felt that something more comfortable would be the go, so a Windrush 600 was purchased and named 'Fairey Tales'. Eric and Ric sailed this along with several other crew members for 8-9 yrs. Fairey Tales was sailed most successfully in the cruiser section in the early 1990s. Eric finally gave sailing away in his 80th year. Passed away July 1998. In his years at NYC Eric had contributed a great deal, not only did he help with fund raising, busy bees etc, he worked his way up through the ranks to become Vice Commodore, under Barry Court, and acting Commodore when Barry was overseas. Then Commodore 1967/68. Eric was also a founding member of Swan River Racing. Received Life Membership in 1980.

Iris Fairey soon became involved with the Ladies Auxiliary and was a tireless worker in the early days of the club with fundraising, which included Fashion Parades, Card Nights, Cake Stalls, the ladies also provided the lunches for the busy bees. The Ladies Auxiliary were also responsible for organising what was considered the best Opening Day afternoon tea presented by any club on the river. HMAS Perth was another very big day in the club's social calendar. Iris also very actively supported Eric, in his lead up to and eventual Commodoreship. Iris received Life Membership in 1986.

Ric Fairey sailed with his father from the age of 8 through to 1974. Eric felt that it was time for Ric to go his own way, Ric purchased 'The Joker' from his father, and so became rivals on the water, but remained the very best of friends on the beach, regardless of who won.

Ric won Club Championship in 1975/76. Ric built two fibreglass 'Mantas', one for himself and for Telfer Bowman, that were sailed quiet successfully at the club. 'Manta Glass' won Club Champion in 1981/82. The 'Manta' was in decline, because a new catamaran called a Tornado with Olympic Status on the scene, although there were still a few still sailing. Ric had at this time and with the future in mind become involved in the cruising side of sailing and joined RPYC and with cousin Ken Stokes, sailed an Endeavour 24, on Saturdays and Sundays were at NYC, sailing Manta Glass, so a full on programme. When Eric bought the Windrush 600, Ric decided that meant he could once again sail with his father, as the 'Mantas' had lost out to the 'Tornados'. Still thinking of the future Ric decided to purchase Vic Bannerman's, Swarbrick 20, named 'Rush', which he successfully campaigned in The Rolly Tasker Trailable Yacht Series, over a good number of years, in between sailing with Eric, winning the Trailable Series 1993/94. Ric has campaigned 'Rush' in the cruiser section of NYC for a number of years most successfully. Ric still enjoys sailing 'Rush' and at this point in time, his daughter Rebecca is sailing with him, keeping up the family tradition. Ric sailing the Endeavour 24, along with some of the cruiser members Martin Softly with an MB 24 & Bruce Hartley with a Trimaran and a few of their friends from other clubs, started sailing on Sundays once a month in the winter, this was in the early 1980s The idea caught on and other clubs soon adopted the idea. Now everyone thinks it has always been so and it is thought of as the norm to have Sunday sailing once a month in the winter. Winter maintenance is almost a thing of the past, with fibre glass boats making life so much easier, and so more time to go sailing. Being a mechanic by trade, Ric was soon helping in the maintenance of the rescue boats that was a considerable job, especially in the early days with wooden boats & inboard motors.

He presented himself at busy bees every month for years, and still manages to make one or two a year, the results of which we enjoy today, the tyre groynes to minimise the beach erosion, finger jetty, countless other project around the club over the years. He is presently repairing the training boats held by the club. Ric served on management and was Rear Commodore in charge of the Bar & Rescue. Ric was the first person at NYC to be accredited as TL3 Instructor. He is still, along with John Stickle running TL3 courses. TL3 is rescue boat training. Ric has sailed at NYC continually for 43 yrs. Received Life Membership in 1996.

Keeping up the tradition of the Fairey family, Sue has supported Ric at the club in many ways over the years. Sue took on the canteen and ran it in the days when the club sailed both Saturday & Sundays, 1980/81, 1981/82 then again in 1983/84, which amounted to a very busy lime for the whole family. After she gave the canteen a miss, Sue spent a few years organising Opening Day, and the HMAS Perth regatta afternoon tea etc.

Sue's foray into sailing was in the early days when on picnic day there was lady's skippers race, and under instruction she was most successful, she was also thrown in at the deep end and was required to sail on Fairey Tales as crew for about half a season before a regular and far more experienced one was found. Sue again in 1999/2000 decided to take on the canteen but this time in a tag team with daughter Rebecca. Rebecca also has run the canteen by herself in 2000/01.

Rebecca is now showing support for the Manly Junior Section of the club because her daughter Tegan has just completed her first year sailing forward hand on 'Lots of Knots'. Tegan received the most improved forward hand trophy for 2003/04. Ric is delighted that through his granddaughter, Tegan the family tradition is alive and well. Tegan will be the proud owner of her own Manly Junior, 'UFO' for 2004/05 season.

The family has another potential sailer in her sister Amber. Rebecca also spent a little time on a Manly Junior, in her early years at NYC. She left, but came back as an adult to sail with her father. So she too has had a long association with NYC

Glenn Fairey, has been at the club since birth, so he has already clocked up about 26 yrs. Glenn was lucky enough to have his grandfather Noel Hawkins who sailed a 16' Skiff 'Barbara' at MBSC, build him a 'Mudlark' and that was Glenn's first real adventure into the world of sailing. Glenn sailed a 'Manly Junior' with Emily Lipple named 'Cutty Sark' which was later purchased for Glen and renamed 'Splash', from there into a 420. Then he left to join the Royal Australian Navy, spent time on Destroyer Escort, Navy Survey ship and Submarines. Glenn returned to NYC to sail a Tornado with his cousin Zane Lewis. Glenn & Zane also ran the Sail Training at NYC for a couple of seasons. Glenn met his wife Gwen at one of these Sail Training courses. Gwen also sailed with Ric for one season. Glenn & Gwen sailed one season together. Glenn is currently sailing with a young ex Manly Junior sailer Lucinda Crisp.

The interconnection of people started with the marriage of Sandra Fairey to Brian Lewis, who met at NYC; Ric Fairey to Sue Hawkins, who met a regatta in Geraldton; Glenn Fairey to Gwen Linley who met at NYC. The passion & enthusiasm for sailing started with Eric Fairey & Noel Hawkins and has continued on through, Ric & Glenn Fairey, Rebecca & Tegan Hill and Brian & Zane Lewis. Brian now has a grandson, Alexander, and grand daughter Claire, so who knows what the future may bring.

The Griffiths Family 1960-1986

The Griffiths family joined the Nedlands Yacht Club in 1960 and continued in an active roll until 1986. Jack was instrumental in getting his family involved with the sailing club because of his great love for fishing and sailing.

Jack firstly taught his son Bruce the fundamentals of sailing, then introduced him to the Pelican class into which Bruce took to enthusiastically. He then introduced his wife Gwen to the club to help the other ladies with canteen duties and lastly, introducing his daughter Pam to sail Pelicans with her brother in 1963.

Bruce did not take too kindly to this at first as he was the only boy who had to sail with his sister. He soon changed his view on this when they started winning races. In the season of 1964-65, Bruce and Pam were the first brother and sister team in the Pelican class, to win a "Club Championship" and the "Most Fastest Times" in the same season in a boat called SKIPJACK. Both Bruce and Pam were recipients of the "Alfred Riley Perpetual Cup" for the best junior club person in consecutive years 1963-64 and 1964-65.

Because of the under 15 year age restriction for Pelicans, Bruce and Pam moved up to the Cherub class the next season. It was the season of 1967-68 that they were once again the first brother and sister team in the Cherub class, to win a "Club Championship" and the "Most Fastest Times" in the same season in a boat called CRACK-A-JACK (pictured). Jack was immensely proud of their achievements.

Bruce continued to sail Cherubs very competitively until 1972 in a boat called CHEROKEE.



Gwen, by this time had been embroiled into the Ladies Auxiliary, and had taken over the voluntary running of the canteen on both Saturdays and Sundays and did so for fourteen years until 1986. Hence, Gwen was made a very well deserving Life Member.

Pam can still remember that they were never allowed to go home until the last pie was sold and the fridges restacked. Gwen also helped run some very successful Australian and World Titles held at NYC.

Jack, for many years was involved with helping to train the pelican juniors, crewing on the Mercy Boat and serving on the Management Committee. Also using his own boat as an extra Mercy Boat when required.

Sadly, Jack passed away on April 19, 2004 aged 87, and right up to that day he still had his passion for boats.

Gwen now aged 86 still visits the Club on Opening Day and Hector Waller Day when she is available.

Jack, Gwen, Bruce and Pam all have very fond memories as members of the Nedlands Yacht Club.

McKechnie Family

The following recollections were contributed by Mrs Erica McKechnie, mother of John McKechnie, Windrush Section and grandmother of Fiona, Ranald, Moira and Sheila, all of whom sailed more or less regularly from our Club. Mrs McKechnie had a long association with NYC and came regularly to the Club to watch her family sail and tell Molly Nuttall her latest jokes. Her elder son, Ranald, was a regular sailor at NYC as a youth but tragically died early in life. The Barometer in the Clubhouse, commemorates Ranald's contribution and membership of our Club.

Mrs McKechnie was President of the Ladies Committee for two years in the early 1960s.

Erica's story

My early recollections began in the 1950's when I was shopping in Stirling Highway, next to the Windsor Theatre, and saw a young man carefully arranging Trophies in the front window of the shop. On enquiring he told me with some pride that they were for the Subiaco-Nedlands Yacht Club. I have since wondered how the Subiaco title fared.

Not being a Yachtswoman, I merely wished him luck and it was not until later that my eldest son Ranald became interested and his father encouraged him to join the Nedlands Yacht Club and he spent Sundays sailing his Moth Class Dinghy and winning a few trophies.

The Clubhouse was much smaller then and a Ladies Committee was formed of which became a member and then the President. As far as I can remember the Committee consisted mainly of the mothers of the young sailors, Mesdames Rita Court, Eve Carroll, Dorothy Smith, Win Stephen, Bertha LeMaistre, Iris Fairey, Hilda Ducat, Beat Chivers and Mrs Lothringer and Mrs Lofthouse.

Our Committee worked hard to raise money for the Club by Card Days, Jumble Sales, etc. and started the Canteen. At the time we had no refrigerator or warming oven so we filled bread rolls and made cakes and sold drinks and sweets as our main lines of stock.

The fathers of the young sailors also pulled their weight; Jim Carroll, Ron Stephen, Jack Le Maistre, Harold Smith, Laurie Chivers and my husband Alan McKechnie.

Actually it was my husband and Jack Le Maistre who spent many weekends extending the small jetty into deeper waters. Sir Charles Court recently told me that all his sons learned to sail at Nedlands and on one of his official visits as Patron he remarked about what a family-help sort of a club it was.

The late Sir Charles Gardiner was our Official Visitor one Opening Day and all the young sailors lined up for his inspection. He congratulated them on the appearance of their boats and added that they must not only keep their craft in good condition but also keep their own appearance neat and tidy.

The annual Trophy Presentation night was a Dinner Dance held in the Dalkeith Hall, always well attended. Our own premises were too small at that time.

Some early memories contributed by her son John McKechnie, QC

I remember the 1950s at Nedlands Yacht Club when I was a young boy. The wreck of what had been the first rescue boat, a wooden half-cabin launch, sat on the beach for what seemed like several years.

The premises now occupied by YAWA and the Mirrors were Laurie Chivers workshop where he worked making VJs, Skates and other wooden dinghies.

For some years, garden and other implements were kept behind the old clubhouse in a large pine box which had to be used to crate an AEC truck from the UK.

In the 1950s the bamboo extended to the boundaries of the then clubrooms. The area which is now the rescue boat compound was once bamboo. The bamboos were cut down when the Yvonne catamaran compound was built in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Similarly, bamboo and scrub extended down to an area that is now the Open Cat compound.

The Berry family

The Berry family involvement at Nedlands began in 1971/72 when John started sailing in the open catamaran fleet on a Quickcat named 'Phantom' owned by Bob Hay and that was the last one sailed at NYC. By the end of the season he had moved to the Yvonne cats with the purchase of 'Su-Ton' in partnership with Bob Hay.

Basil soon joined in the fun as handicapper for the section thus beginning his long association with the Yvonne Class and NYC. As the families' involvement in the class grew Basil became involved, not only in the Start Box at Nedlands every Saturday, but also in the Yvonne State and National Title organization as Starter and Handicapper. He was directly involved as a member of the start team for all Yvonne State National Titles held in WA from 1974 to 1985. Only a heart attack in 1983 kept him away, He was awarded life membership of the Yvonne Council of WA in 1983 and life membership of the Nedlands Yacht Club in 1992.

John purchased Puma in 1980 and extensively re-built and refitted the hulls going on to win the Club championship with Doug Turner in 1982/83, 83/84 and 84/85 and the State Championship in 1982/83.