

PETER DUCE (1934-2017)

Peter Duce was the first National Champion of the Squib Class. It may seem unremarkable to remember his passing for this fact only but Peter's part in the creation of the Squib should not go unrecognised by the Class and all its former and current members.

Peter's sailing career started in the same way as many of us in Burnham in those days. Coming from a family already steeped in the life of the river Crouch, he grew up messing about in boats doing a lot of rowing in the service boats of those days – known as “hack boats”! An apprenticeship many could do with today. It seems sad to me that many sailors these days cannot row or scull with a single oar. Our connection with sailing generally started with crewing in one of the many local one designs such as the 14 foot or 16 foot clinker built boats that were the mainstay of the local club, The Burnham Sailing Club. One design was a term that can only be used in its loosest sense compared with today! These boats were meant to be built by shipwrights in the local boatyards who could only belong to the BSC as they were regarded as professionals by the other three more superior clubs in Burnham.

Crewing as a third hand in a BSC 14 or 16 footer was a wonderful apprenticeship and such crews were actively encouraged to take the helm to, maybe, take the boat back to the moorings. Peter's sailing started in much the same way but he soon showed his ability to handle the boat and he was an enthusiastic learner. As the clinker one designs started to show their age, the club decided to adopt the Enterprise dinghy which was then in its infancy. Peter built his own boat and sailed it with some success before moving on to the Finn dinghy. This helped create a significant class in Burnham together with others such as myself and John Boyce, another Squib National Champion.

At this time Oliver Lee, a well known designer and builder decided to create a 3 man keel boat which would be well placed to maybe be adopted by at least one of the clubs to replace their aging fleets. The local potential was enormous. Oliver designed the Ajax 23 footer which created a class locally and which was soon racing on Saturdays.

Peter found himself on the sea wall watching the Ajaxes with Oliver. Oliver asked Peter if he would consider one. Peter replied that although he liked the concept, problems were already beginning to arise in finding a third person for the crew as now sailing dinghies were beginning to proliferate and more youngsters wanted to sail a boat themselves. Peter said that in his opinion there was definitely a market for a 2 person boat, like the Ajax but just that bit smaller. Peter's reasoning was that people such as my father had found themselves with nowhere to go with the demise of the clinker one designs as their only choice was the Enterprise which was rather too lively. Oliver took all these comments on board and immediately came up with the design that became the Squib. Peter had plenty of input and I remember him getting me to come down and look at the drawings of the boat Oliver was starting to create. I know that Peter suggested the boat needed a backstay but Oliver was having none of it so when the mast on the prototype inverted downwind – not helped by those swinging spreaders. Oliver added an inner forestay which was a menace. Eventually it was agreed to have a backstay. The family resemblance to the Ajax is there for all to see but the Squib did fill the slot Peter envisaged for it and whereas the Ajax never really took off, the Squib soared as history can show.

We do have Peter to thank for the rather small spinnaker. Oliver had drawn the sail plan with a larger spinnaker of horizontal cut. Peter was worried about female crews handling the spinnaker and cited the problems in the Merlin Rocket class which had recently gone from 2 sails to 3, followed by a loss of several female crews who felt they couldn't handle it. Peter had hoped to sail with his wife and persuaded Oliver to remove the bottom panel which gives

us what we have to this day. To see the original size spinnaker, you can look at the Sandhopper.

Peter was a helmsman of prodigious ability and was pretty much untouchable in his Squib *Thistle* 28. I believe I am correct in saying that although he won the Championships in 1972, he had gear failure which spoilt his chances of winning at Hayling Island. Many a Burnham Squib Championship winner came home to be beaten by Peter during Burnham Week. Because he was a teacher, he was unable to attend many Championships which were held in term time, a fact he regretted greatly. Otherwise his name may well have been on the trophy more than once.

Can we say that Oliver would not have designed the Squib without Peter? No, we cannot but Peter put the idea into his mind and for that we should remember him and thanks him.

Jonathan Tucker