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Twice the fun at the Barton regattas

“A picnic, and the jolliest one imaginable,” wrote a journalist in 1920 – and the spirit of the water frolics is still alive on the Broads



Left: Pleasure wherry *Hathor*, built 100 years ago this year, leads the trading wherries *Maud* and *Albion*. *Albion*, built in 1898, was unique among the trading wherries in that she had a carvel-built hull designed to reduce the amount of damage caused by the hull catching the brick locks to Bungay



Left: Yare & Bure One-Designs (Y&BOD). Lines for the 20ft gunter-rigged boats were drafted by Norfolk boatbuilder and designer Ernest Woods in 1908. Known locally as the White Boats, they were originally named after butterflies but when the pool of names was exhausted the class agreed to use moth names as well

Right: Sprite (290) leads Bluejacket (39)



Close quarters: Norfolk Punt No 54, Tern, passes within feet of Yare & Bure One-Designs

Left: The River Cruiser Class comprises an interesting selection of Broads yachts ranging from Victorian racing machines through former hire-fleet craft to recently built yachts, and representing a century of Broadland boatbuilding. From left: Breeze (177), Matilda (300), Zingara (30) and the recently restored Moth (189)



During the August Bank Holiday weekend, every year Barton Broad becomes home to an armada of traditional Broads sailing craft that gathers for two of the region's most spectacular regattas. The weekend begins with the two-day Norfolk Punt Club Open Regatta and culminates with the one-day Barton Broad Open Regatta. Although run cooperatively, each event has its own character, as well as organising committee, based on the Norfolk Punt Club's (NPC) pontoons in the centre of Barton Broad.

The regattas cater for a cross section of Broadland traditional sailing craft ranging in size from the Broads yachts of the River Cruiser Class down to the highly varnished 14ft (4.3m) Norfolk One-Design Dinghy Class.

The Barton Broad Open Regatta is one of the last direct links to the water frolics of the 19th century from the regatta circuit of today. Unlike the NPC Open Regatta, which is managed by members of that club, the Barton Broad Open Regatta is organised by a committee of local sailors who are members of various Broadland sailing clubs and come together for this one event.

Records of the Open Regatta Committee's activities date back to 1926 when Sir Edward Preston of Beeston Hall began his second term of office as president. Although the date of the first Barton water frolic remains unclear, there are references to wherry races held on the Broad in 1874 and the last event, before its suspension for the First World War, was held on 4 August 1914 – the day Britain declared war on Germany.

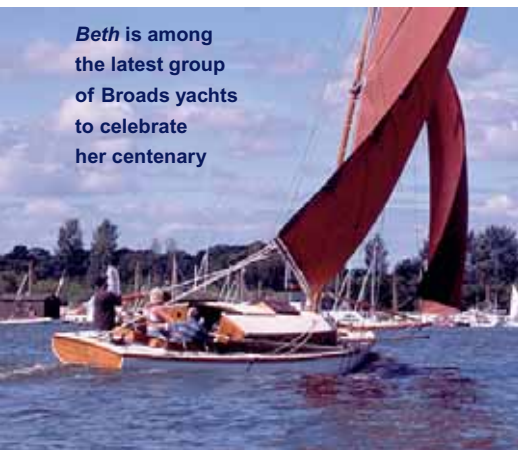
■ BARTON REGATTAS



Matilda (300) and Breeze (177)

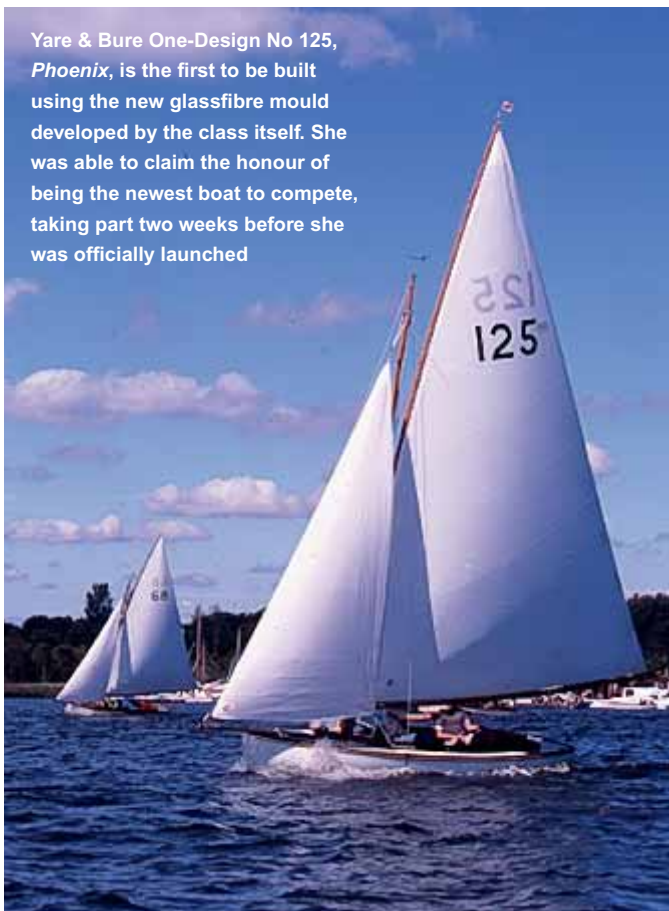


Beth is among the latest group of Broads yachts to celebrate her centenary



Above: Moth (189) has recently emerged from an extensive restoration carried out by the Norfolk boatbuilder Maynard Watson at the Norfolk Broads Yachting Company's yard in Horning for Philip Davies

Yare & Bure One-Design No 125, Phoenix, is the first to be built using the new glassfibre mould developed by the class itself. She was able to claim the honour of being the newest boat to compete, taking part two weeks before she was officially launched



Above: To the left of Albion is the 1895 steamboat *Falcon* – donated to The Museum of The Broads in 1997 and recommissioned in May 2005 following an extensive restoration (See *Yard News*, p61)

Right: The participating wherries concluded their sail past by anchoring off the Norfolk Punt Club's floating pontoons. *Left to right: White Moth, Albion, Hathor, Maud and Olive*



In 1920 the regatta was revived once more. Six years later the *Eastern Daily Press* yachting correspondent describing the background to the event wrote: "Water frolics have been held there for ages and Barton for wherry racing has passed into a truism. Old stagers recall the time when 13 wherries came up to the line... But Barton owes much of its popularity to the fact that the racing is a mere incident and that the day has a strongly marked social side. Barton, in fact, is just a picnic, and the jolliest one imaginable... And well to windward of most of the moored boats a band of musicians from Stalham... entertained us from a lighter among the reeds."

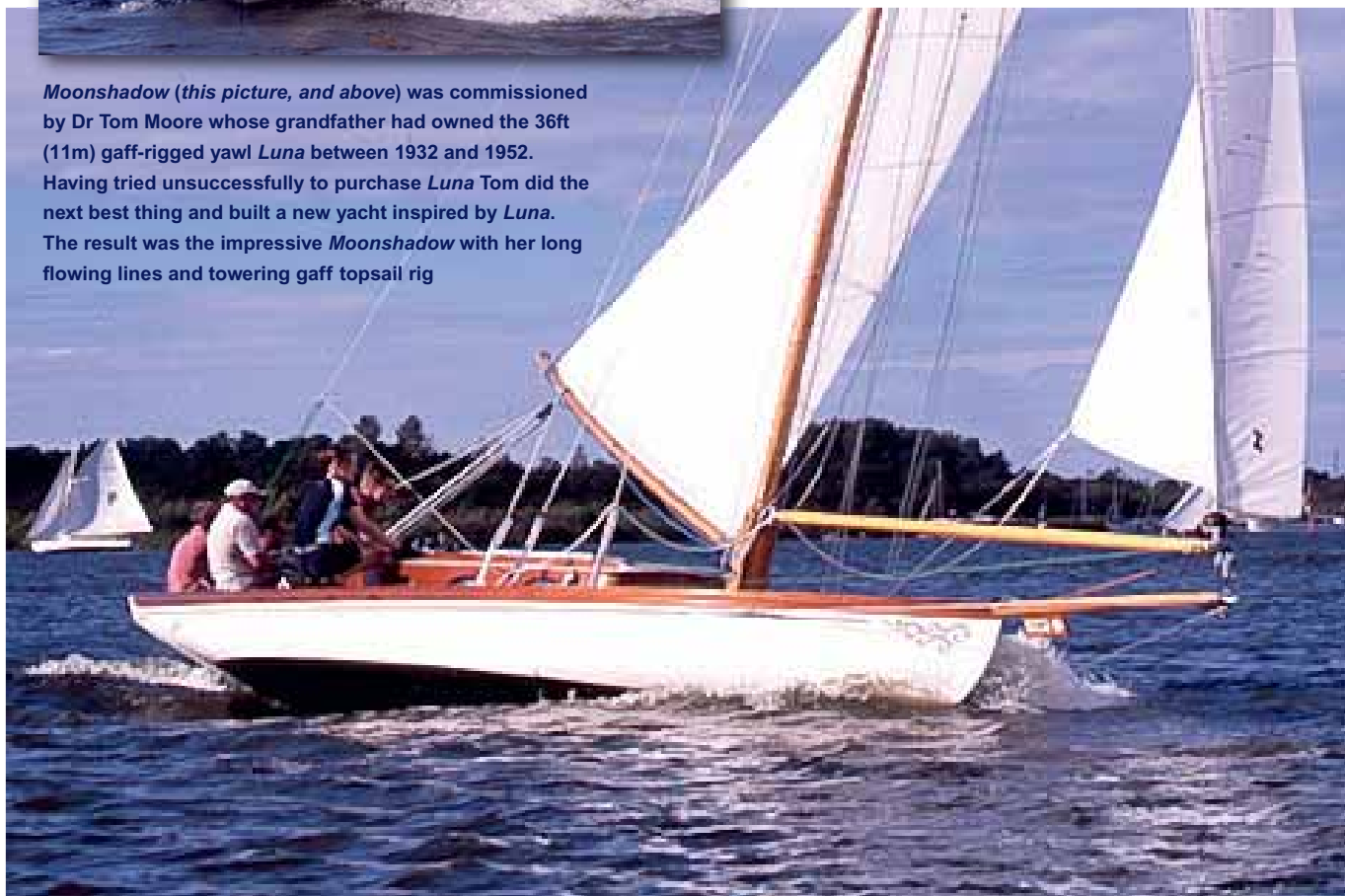
Although the band was dispensed with in 1927, music remains an important element and today a PA system plays band music throughout the day.



Right: The 22ft Rebel One-Design No 3, Rebel Rothay. The class is about to enter the glassfibre era – Horning-based Woods Dyke Boatyard has just completed the mould and is about to start work on the first glassfibre Rebel



***Moonshadow* (this picture, and above) was commissioned by Dr Tom Moore whose grandfather had owned the 36ft (11m) gaff-rigged yawl *Luna* between 1932 and 1952. Having tried unsuccessfully to purchase *Luna* Tom did the next best thing and built a new yacht inspired by *Luna*. The result was the impressive *Moonshadow* with her long flowing lines and towering gaff topsail rig**



Over the years, the Open Regatta Committee has continued to review the racing programme to incorporate new classes while continuing to preserve the event's tradition of holding races for boats with any rig or rating and either a drop or fixed keel. The completion of the Broads Authority's five-year project to dredge Barton Broad in 2001 has resulted in a greater number of Broads yachts competing within the races for the River Cruiser Class. Their numbers are matched by good turnouts of both the Norfolk Punts and the 20ft (6.1m) Yare & Bure One-Design (Y&BOD).

Among the Y&BODs entering this year was *Phoenix*, the first to be built using the new glassfibre mould developed by the class itself. Despite her participation in the racing at Barton, *Phoenix*

was not officially launched until 10 September when a special event was held at the Norfolk Broads Yacht Club on Wroxham Broad, which also celebrated the launch of the second glassfibre Y&BOD, *Iris*.

This year's Barton Broad Open Regatta culminated in a special sail past of five Norfolk wherries, the largest gathering of these impressive vessels since the trading wherry *Maud* was recommissioned in September 1999 on Wroxham Broad.

At the time it looked as though a similar gathering was unlikely to occur until 2009 to mark the centenary of the wherry yacht *Olive*. However, the recent return of the pleasure wherry *Ardea* from Paris may provide the necessary spark for a repeat performance in 2006 when she is due to emerge from her restoration.

Interestingly, *Ardea* was among the entrants for the final wherry race to be staged as part of the Barton Broad Open Regatta in 1950. That day she competed against the pleasure wherries *Claudian*, *Dragon* and the Norfolk Wherry Trust's victorious trading wherry *Albion*.

Sixteen years later another element of the regatta has passed into history: the motor-boat race was dropped from the programme as a result of new speed restrictions introduced by the Bure and Waveney Commissioners.

However, despite this change, the number of boats participating in both regattas continues to rise. And, it seems as though the spectacle can only become more impressive and a greater treat for the true connoisseur of fine classic Broadland sailing craft.