

Motor Launch “Gelyce”; Information and Images From Ken Ricketts



Ken Ricketts has enjoyed a boating pastime which started in 1943, and contributes to the website waitematawoodys.com with some of his vivid memories of the launches which plied the Waitemata Harbour from the 1920s to the '70s. An expertise in equipping launches with various “marinised” engines led to his noticing an account of the restoration in Britain of the 50 feet (12 metres) launch “Gelyce”, using a Rolls-Royce petrol engine. This launch was built in 1930 by Camper and Nicholson at their shipyard in Gosport, Hampshire, for the Glasgow grocer and eponymous tea tycoon Sir Thomas Lipton (1848-1931), and used as a tender for his final, and fifth, America’s Cup challenger “Shamrock V”. This firm is still family owned

after several hundred years, and three daughters had an acronym of their first names making up the name “Gelyce”. As we have watched the racing here for the America’s Cup, many of us will have thought of Sir Thomas and his crew, as they sailed their “ocean greyhounds” of about 40 metres’ length across the Atlantic Ocean in order to compete. Your editor’s mother remembered being rowed by her uncle around “Shamrock IV” when moored at Dunoon on the River Clyde after the 1914 Cup Challenge. After Sir Thomas’s death “Shamrock V” and “Gelyce” were acquired by Sir Tom Sopwith, and “Gelyce” had an active career on that boating playground, The Solent, before being converted to a craft for patrolling and barrage balloon tethering



during the Second World War. Sopwith was already famous as the driving force behind some of the First World War's most successful aeroplanes, and renamed his company after his late friend, the Australian pilot Harry Hawker. From there we have Hawker Siddeley, and eventual ownership by Rolls-Royce Limited of the successor company, Bristol Siddeley, but we digress... After "Gelyce's" ownership by another America's Cup challenger, Hugh Goodson, the launch was used as a riverboat, and was quietly rotting away on the River Thames in Berkshire before being rescued by the wooden boat enthusiast Wint Taylor, and restored by Classic Restoration Services in Windsor to an extremely high standard. This would have been eye-wateringly expensive, with three layers of mahogany hull planking encased in protective epoxy, refurbishment of the original deck planking, superstructure and interior, and with many fittings in the engine compartment and cockpit being gold plated to negate corrosion. The engine, previously a Perkins oil engine, has been replaced by a 4.9 litre Rolls-Royce engine, converted for marine use from its original Silver Cloud form. It is stated to develop 175 bhp, and although the Company did not disclose such intimate details, that sounds about right, given that the 4.25 litre Mark VI is established as producing 130 bhp. Ken Ricketts comments that the exhaust manifolds, resembling those of a racing car rather than the water cooled variety expected in a marine engine, are surely going to produce excessive heat in the engine compartment. In the unfortunate habit of our times, a "value" of £2 million has been attached to this work of art. Many thanks to Ken for his research and reporting.

