

Remembering Michael Joyce, Founder Member and First Commodore, later President of the Hillyard Owners Association



Michael Joyce was born in Strood, Kent in 1922. The family; Father, Sidney, an Engineer, Mother Vera, older sister Doreen, 'Deen' & younger brother Anthony, moved to Bedford in 1927, then Little Aston, Staffordshire in 1929 on to Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire in 1936. Michael gained a scholarship to Bishop Vesey's Grammar School, leaving in 1939, he was Apprenticed to Bellis & Morcom an engineering company in Birmingham. A family move to Huddersfield Yorkshire resulted in Michael finishing his Apprenticeship there with Hopkinsons Ltd. Michael's Dad gave him an Austin 'Chummy' baby car, cost £4.10 shillings to enable him to get to work. This being the start of WW2, Engineering was a reserved occupation giving exemption from call up into the armed services.

In 1943 young Michael Joyce volunteered for the army and joined the newly formed Royal Electrical & Mechanical Engineers, REME. He gained a Commission and began a courtship with Veronica (Nicky) Lansley. No doubt the Austin Chummy came in handy despite petrol being rationed. The couple were wed in 1944. So began a marriage of 66 years. Almost immediately Michael was posted to the Far East, for the next three years, serving in India & Burma, until the Japanese surrender, and finally Hong Kong, ending the war with the rank of Major. For a time he was CO of a TA unit at Folkstone. He also instructed Gravesend Sea Cadets. Half a century later his Indian Army Unit invited Michael to India where he was royally welcomed and entertained by their successors in arms.

Resuming married life together, Michael & Nicky had one child, a daughter Susannah who tragically died at 21 years of age. Nicky was a linguist and later in her life became Secretary of the International Professional Business Women's Association and travelled widely in the course of her work.

They took up residence at Stowcroft, Chislehurst Kent, with Michael teaming up with an Old Boy from his Grammar School, publishing 'Techinview' an Engineering digest moving on to develop a successful Advertising and Public Relations business; Michael Joyce (PR) Ltd in the City of London. One of his juniors was Nick Hewer who later partnered Alan Sugar. Lord Sugar, as he became, was a PR client of Michael's firm.

In his leisure time Michael showed an adventurous trait. Learning to fly, he won an aircraft in a raffle, and the couple flew to France for weekends and holidays where they had bought a Vineyard in the Garonne Lot district. This inspired Michael to form another Company, Southern Air Charter based at Biggin Hill to enable businessmen to attend meetings throughout the UK and near Continent.

Around this time, in the early 1960's Michael took up Offshore Cruising under sail, owning a number of Hillyard yachts, putting his navigational skills to good use. One of these burned to the waterline following a gas explosion off Keyhaven.

In the year 1977 Michael attended a meeting at the Royal Lymington YC called by Hillyard sailors, Robert and Pamela Keen. It was there and then *the Hillyard Owners Association* was formed with Michael as its first Commodore. He served in this role, producing newsletters, enrolling Hillyarders, charming everyone with his humour and sharing his infectious enthusiasm for our sea kindly yachts. He published an annual Members Handbook, keeping the accounts, organising dinners & rallies in London, Cowes and elsewhere for the next 21 years.

These were memorable for being very convivial 'dress up' occasions. The gentlemen members in Blazers & Club ties and the ladies" as fashion and good taste dictate". The venues rather grand. The Royal London YC on The Esplanade in Cowes, all polished brass & Race Trophies, and at London Boat Show time in January, at the Naval Club in Mayfair. The Association presented Michael with an inscribed silver salver as a mark of appreciation for his efforts. In his 11 tonner he attended the Brest Festival in 1992, following which, a very difficult return passage persuaded Michael to quit cruising. He was then 69 years of age. His last Hillyard was a 2½ tonner which he had restored and kept on the Medway.

As a nostalgic reminder of their courtship in the 1930's Nicky bought Michael a 1928 Austin Chummy named "Forgetmenot" in which they would attend rallies of the Baby Austin Owners Club. In retirement the two enjoyed many cruises and were especially attracted to the Blue Funnel Line to African destinations.

In 1998 Michael was looking for help and a successor to progress the HOA. He took me under his wing and I was proud to continue and try to follow his example of leadership for the Association he loved and nurtured.

Nearing retirement, he bought The Mission House at Gravesend, a former bible school founded by General Gordon of Khartoum on the River Thames opposite Tilbury Forts from where he watched the Thames barge races from the start line. Later moving to an apartment at Mayfield House in Sussex where he and Nicky were very content.

This idyll was cut short when the owners sold the property after which the couple moved to Sunrise Living in Sidcup where they were comfortable up to their last days, Michael sadly suffering with Parkinsons. This did not prevent him bravely attending our Dinner at the Naval Club in January 2011 nor enjoying a glass of Champagne and remaining his usual cheery self.

I am grateful to Anthony Joyce for a copy of notes spoken at Michael's Cremation Service which sadly few Hillyarders were able to attend. For five years his carer was Claire Ferguson Webber to whom we are indebted for anecdotes included in this appreciation and obituary of our late much loved President. Michael died at Sunrise Home Sidcup on 2nd July 2010 and Nicky 17 days earlier on the 14th of June, having each experienced 85 years of very full lives.

We of the HOA will always treasure their memory. Michael's invariable parting to myself, and I am sure others was " God Bless."

Michael Walden Vice President

The above tribute appeared in the 2011 December Hillyard Owners Association Newsletter.

Michael Joyce owned 3 Hillyards. He bought the first in 1977 a 1962 9 tonner named *Toccatina*, (ex *Alcestis & Pacanda*) previously owned by Robert & Pamela Keen. Keeping her at Newhaven, tragically on the 11th August of that year Michael Nicky & a friend were on her in the Solent when her BMC Petrol engine caught fire and they were lucky to escape as she burned to the waterline. They were rescued by helicopter but not put off, although after that experience he always kept a grab bag in the cockpit with essentials in as they left the yacht with nothing! In June 1988 Michael bought an 11 tonner built in 1972. Her name was changed by the previous owner from *Chicago* to *Lina Arni*, after his Italian mother in law. In January 1992 he purchased a 2½ tonner *Koala* built in 1936, which was restored in South Wales and bought back to the Medway for Michael to potter about in.

Below; *Lina Arni*

Bottom Right; Michael Joyce & Nicholas Gray inspecting *Koala* in 1992 at Milford Haven

