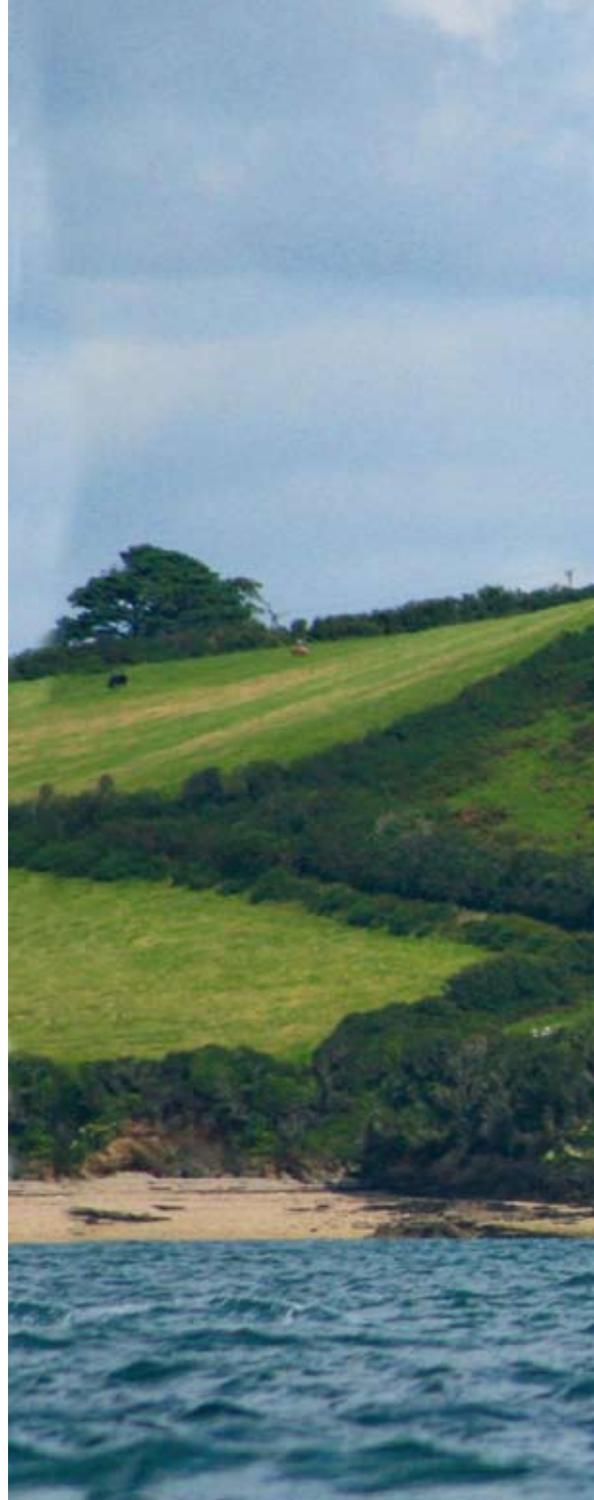




TONY HOPEWELL

Sharing Evelyn 32 ways

Three friends in a pub decided to buy a Falmouth working boat – the result was a well-managed syndicate that provides plenty of racing. *Nigel Sharp* tells their story



TONY HOPEWELL

Above: Evelyn's distinctive black and gold topsail is a familiar sight around Falmouth and St Mawes

Left: Some of Evelyn's 40 syndicate members enjoying a sail



NIGEL SHARP

One evening in November 1993, three friends met for a regular drink in the Roseland Inn, Pilleigh in Cornwall. At that time Andy Tyler, David Mathewson and Glenn Litherland each owned an Ajax 23 keelboat which they sailed out of nearby St Mawes. The conversation turned to the subject of what boat they would like to own in an ideal world, and Andy suggested that they should each get a Falmouth working boat. This was a pretty unrealistic idea in terms of the cost and crew requirements but, as the evening developed, David suggested forming a syndicate to buy one.

By the end of that particular session, they agreed to go away and make a list of anyone they thought might like to be part of such a scheme, and then to discuss the

matter further when they next met for a drink which, quite by chance, just happened to be the following evening.

Each of the lists they came up with included between 25 and 40 names. Everyone who was on all the lists automatically went on to the master list, which was then 'finalised' by discussion between the three regarding all the other names.

Ideal combination

Whereas many ideas formed in such a way come to nothing, this one moved forward at a rapid pace. The three people involved were probably an ideal combination to make this happen: David's practicality and Glenn's negotiation skills kept going by Andy's enormous enthusiasm that counteracted the doubts and saw it through.

Within a couple of days, David wrote a set of draft rules which, with a couple of small amendments, the other two quickly agreed upon. They decided that there should be 32 shares, a reflection of the ship-owning tradition of 64 shares, but that was thought to be too many. However a small number of shares should be offered as half and quarter shares to attract people less able to afford a full share, in particular younger sailors. There would only be one vote per whole share but each member should have the same access to the boat whatever the size of share. The three then began to approach the people on the master list and the reaction soon proved to be very encouraging.

Initially it was thought that they would go for a working boat in GRP but Andy insisted it had to be a traditional wooden

Evelyn's 111-year history

Evelyn was built of pitch-pine planking on oak frames at Yard Point in Restronguet Creek in 1898 by Frank Hitchens (who also built four other working boats) for his sons Thomas and James. She was named after James's daughter.

In 1905 she was sold to the Billings family of Flushing. Her sailing performance had been hindered by the lack of external ballast so they commissioned the Jacket brothers to put an iron keel on her at Burts Yard in Falmouth. While this work was being carried out, she was very nearly lost in an easterly gale, to which the yard was exposed.

The Billings family sold her in 1935 and for the next 30 years she had various owners and was used for both fishing and pleasure purposes. At some point she was fitted with a Ford Model T car engine and a coachroof, and her name was changed to *Curlaw* and then back again to *Evelyn*. In 1958, when she was purchased by a sailmaker called Mathews, she was fitted with bilge keels so that she could take the ground in the drying harbour of Penzance where he kept her.

Restored back to dredging

In 1965 Mathews sold her to Kenny Corke, who brought her back to Falmouth Harbour, removed the bilge keels, engine and coachroof, and re-decked her so that he could start dredging for oysters in the Carrick Roads. A couple of years later he decided to race her as well after people kept telling him what a fast boat she was. He had a mainsail made in a blue material which had come available for a keen price, and won his very first race at Mylor Village Regatta. He then continued to dredge and race her for the next 20 years or so, winning 21 trophies in one season



Left: Falmouth working boats racing during Mylor regatta 1959

alone, as well as the very first West Country Old Gaffers race in Dartmouth in the late 1960s. It was during this time that the distinctive varnished rubbing strake was fitted.

In 1988 Kenny sold her to Bernie Trenoweth Jnr, who sold her to his father, Bernie Snr, a couple of years later. The Trenoweths wanted her solely for racing and they did a lot of work on her – they renewed the whole deck (laid teak over a plywood sub-deck), several frames, planks, spars and a lot of fastenings.

Most crucially, they put a two-ton iron keel on her. Up to that time her windward performance had left a lot to be desired but this improved it immeasurably, although the extra draught would have been no good for dredging.

For the next few years, *Evelyn* had considerable racing success – so much so that handicaps were introduced for the whole fleet for the first time. Bernie had planned to keep *Evelyn* until she reached her centenary but his disillusionment with the handicap system (demonstrated when he had crew shirts made with their seemingly harsh handicap number written in big letters on their backs!) led to the sale to the new Roseland Syndicate.



Left: *Evelyn's* distinctive varnished rubbing strake dates from the 1960s

“Evelyn’s racing success led to handicaps being introduced for the whole fleet”

one. Within a week of the first meeting, the 19th-century-built *Evelyn* was identified as a boat which might be available, and negotiations to buy her began. *Evelyn* is regarded by many as one of the most beautiful Falmouth working boats – that and her long rich history enabled Andy to win the traditional vs GRP argument with some ease, and it is extremely unlikely that any of the current syndicate members would question the wisdom of that early decision.

And so the Roseland Working Boat Syndicate was formed – not actually named after the pub in which the idea was first discussed (although that connection continued as a number of further meetings were held there and two successive landlords became members), but because it was to be based on the Roseland Peninsula.



TONY HOPEWELL

Above: Bowsprit and boom extend length by over 17ft



NIGEL SHARP

Left: Shakedown sail at the beginning of this season – syndicate members take part in maintenance work

There are currently 40 syndicate members – about two thirds live locally and amongst the remaining out-of-port members, one lives in New Zealand and another in Canada. The membership includes five husbands and wives (including Chris and Cath Thomas, the current chairman and treasurer), two sets of siblings and three sets of father/offspring.

Builder's descendants

One of these is Malcolm Hitchens and his son Mark, who have a particularly special reason to be involved – *Evelyn* was built by Malcolm's great-great-grandfather Frank Hitchens. Malcolm was brought up within a couple of miles of Yard Point, where she was built, but at the time the syndicate was formed he was living in St Austell and had

Evelyn

Length of hull: 27ft 9in (8.5m)
Length over spars: 45ft (13.7m)
Beam: 9ft (2.7m)
Draught: 5ft (1.5m)
Sail area: 1,000sqft (92.9m²)
(the maximum allowed under class rules)
Sail number: 15

recently sold a much-loved Enterprise dinghy to buy carpets for his house.

He first heard about the syndicate quite by chance from a colleague in the police force. Initially he didn't know which boat was being purchased but his interest quickened when he found out that it was *Evelyn*. It then became one of the easiest decisions of his life, and both he and his father Ron

immediately joined. When the boat was purchased there was a 'launching' ceremony at the quay in St Mawes and Ron performed the honours. Sadly, he died a couple of years ago, and his ashes were scattered over the sea – from *Evelyn* of course. Mark joined the syndicate about nine years ago; he subsequently met and married Melody, who sails on another Frank Hitchens-built boat, *Victory*.

Regular racing

There are opportunities for *Evelyn* to be raced every weekend, and evenings too, from May to September. The optimum number of crew is six or seven so it might seem that there would often be a number of unhappy members left ashore. However, the Rules, Principles of Operation, and the



NICEL SHARP

way things have evolved seem to ensure that that is not the case. There are a number of members who are less involved than they used to be, but remain in the syndicate perhaps for sentimental reasons, and several also own other boats.

Out-of-port members can be content in the knowledge that their boat is being used in a responsible way and being looked after (which may not be the case with individual boat ownership), and when they are in the area, local members are always happy to stand aside and give them priority.

The syndicate is managed by a committee, one of whose tasks is to officially appoint skippers, of which there are currently eight. Races are allocated to specific skippers partly at an annual skippers' meeting in the spring, and partly by amicable negotiation during the season.

Team-bonding maintenance

Shares cost just a few hundred pounds and members also pay an annual subscription to cover maintenance, repairs and new equipment and sails etc when needed. The syndicate is fortunate to be on a sound enough footing to be able to pay for the annual refit work to be carried out by Freshwater Boatyard in St Mawes, and any repair work is done there by Jonathan Leach, a boatbuilder who also happens to be a member of the syndicate. Some tasks, such as the antifouling and small rigging jobs, are carried out by syndicate members – intended to reduce costs a little, it also has an enjoyable team-bonding effect.

There are three highlights in the local racing calendar. The first, the World Championships, normally takes place over a long weekend in June – *Evelyn* was the winner of the inaugural event in 2005.

There may be those who might argue that this should not be called a World Championship as it is such a local event, but on the other hand no-one could really say that the winner isn't the best racing Falmouth working boat in the world!

Above: Malcolm Hitchens, syndicate member and great-great-grandson of Evelyn's builder, Frank Hitchens, at her helm this spring

“The glorious sight of these spectacular boats racing home and then moored up with mainsails and colourful topsails till set”

The second highlight is Falmouth Week – seven days of racing hosted by a different club each day. Over the years, the start and finishing lines for all classes have been moved further and further away from the host clubs and consolidated in the Carrick Roads, thus removing the individual identity of each regatta – depriving the host



THE FALMOUTH WORKING BOATS

Racing and dredging under sail

Falmouth working boats have been used for oyster dredging in the Carrick Roads since the 19th century. In order to preserve the stocks of oysters, there is still a rule today that dredging cannot be carried out under power, and these working boats are thought to be the last fleet of fishing boats which work under sail alone anywhere in the world. There are also restrictions regarding the months of the year, and the hours in each day, that they are allowed to dredge.

Last winter there were 17 boats registered for dredging with the Truro Oyster Fishery, compared with a high of 50 in 1925 and just seven in 1936. There was a time when the majority of the dredging boats would go racing in the summer months, and the dredgersmen were able to demonstrate their well-honed boat

clubs and villages of the glorious sight of these spectacular boats racing home and then moored up with their mainsails and colourful topsails still set, and the crews of the local hospitality. Happily, after protests from the Working Boat Association this year's Falmouth Week saw their return to finishing on, or very close to, club lines.



Working Boats racing off the Percuil River.
Can you spot Evelyn?

NIGEL SHARP

handling skills competitively. Last season, however, the fleet of more than 30 boats which regularly raced included only three of the registered dredgers.

Of these 30, six were built in the 19th century, one is cold-moulded, one is ferrocement and about a dozen are GRP. The first of those was built when Terry Heard took a mould off a wooden one called *St Meloris* which he had previously built for his own use, and almost all of them have subsequently been built by Terry and his son Martin. In the excellent book *The history of Falmouth working boats* by Alun Davies, published in 1989, much is made of the potential problems that might occur in a racing fleet comprised of timber and GRP boats, sailed by a mixture of dredgemen and 'yachties'. However, there are many people who would argue that, without the introduction of the affordable GRP alternative to replace some of the ageing timber boats, the class would not be the success that it still is today.

The fleet is split into two classes – *Evelyn* has a length on deck of just under 28ft (8.5m) and is one of the smallest boats in the big class. The handicap system is not based on any sort of measurement formula, but depends on previous results. A Handicap Committee meets every month during the season to review each boat's performance, so effectively the crews are handicapped as well as the boats. *Evelyn's* results tend to be inconsistent as one might expect when she is sailed by such a variety of people, so her handicap number is likely to vary more than most!

“Evelyn’s results tend to be inconsistent as one might expect when she is sailed by such a variety of people”

Two days after Falmouth Week finishes, a passage race takes the fleet 20 miles or so up the coast where they then participate in Fowey Week, with another passage race back again at the end of the week – the third highlight of the season. These open water races are the only time that spinnakers are allowed to be used by the big class.

Fowey Week includes the Harbour Race, for working boats only and taking place entirely within the confines of Fowey Harbour. Falmouth working boats are not manoeuvrable so this presents a challenge which some of the *Evelyn* skippers relish more than any other race of the season... and some don't!

For many years the class rules have modified the Racing Rules of Sailing – the zone for claiming an overlap at a mark rounding being three boat lengths (including bowsprit) as opposed to two. The rest of the world has now caught up with this as the 2009-2012 Racing Rules now specify three lengths for everyone.

Falmouth working boats are gaff cutters (although two of them briefly toyed with Bermudan rigs in the 1950s). Each one has unique topsail colours, and this is very much part of the attraction for spectators (as well as photographers and artists). *Evelyn's* topsail was black with a gold V, widely thought to have a link to Flushing Sailing Club, as their burgee is of the same design. However, the idea was actually taken from Flushing Football Club, for whom Bernie Trenoweth's father-in-law used to play. The syndicate chose to keep the black and gold (no harm in flying the Cornish colours) but changed the pattern, initially to an inverted V, and then to stripes.

Apart from *Evelyn*, there are three other boats which sail out of St Mawes. *Florence* is another timber boat, 3 years older than *Evelyn*, and is also owned by a syndicate – formed a couple of years after *Evelyn's* and using exactly the same rules. The other two are GRP boats – *Demelza*, the winner of the 2008 World Championships, owned and sailed by John Andrew, and *Helen Mary*, sailed by another syndicate of sorts, although on a much less formal basis – a group of friends who contribute to the costs – and mostly skippered by Dougie Clode.

Now into its 16th season, the syndicate is in good shape, both financially and in terms of the enthusiastic participation of its members. So there can be every expectation that, as the custodian of *Evelyn*, its involvement in such an important part of local history will continue for many years to come.