

ANDREW WOLSTENHOLME CLARITY OF PURPOSE

Of all the yacht designers working in the spirit of tradition today, Andrew Wolstenholme's 40-year career must surely be the most diverse

STORY STEFFAN MEYRIC HUGHES PORTRAIT KATE WOLSTENHOLME

The work of Andrew Wolstenholme is so prolific and diverse that he is known to many disparate groups, all of whom think of him as their own, and most of whom will never cross paths. So Broads sailors, for instance, will think of him as 'the Broads yacht guy', Hardy and Broom owners will think of him as the designer of well-mannered, modern, semi-displacement cruisers, CB readers, if the name rings a bell at all, might think of him as 'the Norfolk Gypsy guy'; and dredging barge skippers and RNLI crews will think of him as the designer of stout, working craft whose beauty will be measured only by function. Among Britain's yacht designers working today, Andrew is near

Facing page:
Andrew at his
design studio,
which is in his
home in Norfolk

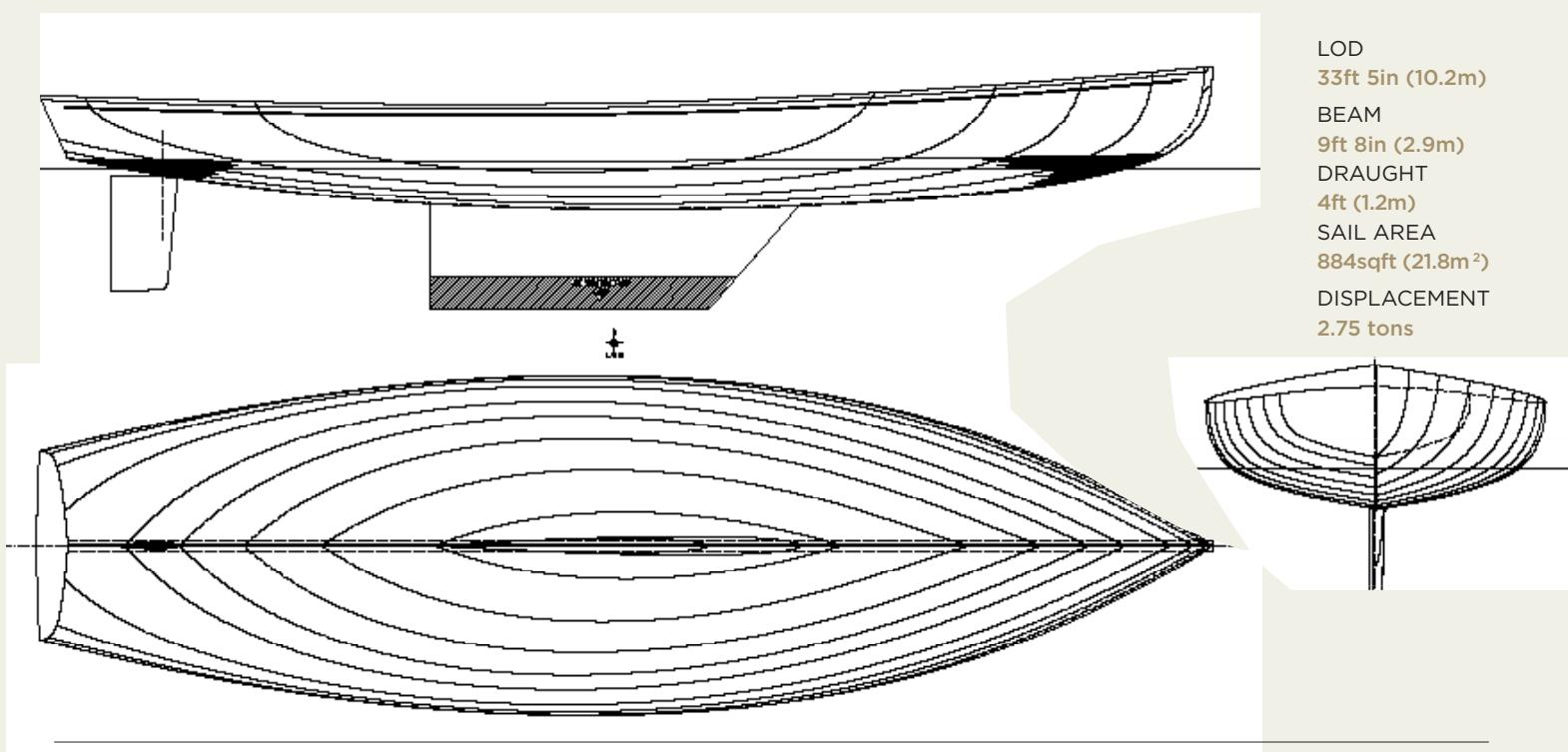
the peak of the pyramid; and his diversity is quite possibly unrivalled. And unlike many, Andrew's upbringing in Morecambe was resolutely unboatmanlike. Soon after seeing a Graduate dinghy in build in the school's woodwork shop, he built a model trimaran, which his father later threw in the bin, under the assumption that, being in three parts, it was broken. His parents came good a few years later, when they blessed Andrew's wish to study the new course in yacht design being offered at Southampton College of Technology. That was 1971 (Chay Blyth the wrong way and T Rex) and his fellow students included Paul Gartside and Ed Dubois. Good jobs followed soon after graduation in 1974, first on

BROADS YACHT CIRRUS, 1981

Cirrus was only the second Broads yacht Andrew designed and she was launched in 1982. The first, two years earlier, was a 25-footer (7.6m) vaguely reminiscent of classic hire boats like those of the Hunter fleet. *Cirrus* was ordered by a friend while that first one was in build. She's longer, at 33ft (10m), and has a racier look. The hull was cold-moulded by Landamores and finished by Paul Bown and owner Richard Mace. So far, about around 50 Broads yachts have been launched to AW designs, and they have changed very little during that period. "They are aesthetically correct, but with foil section rudders and keels," says AW. While the masts of Broads yachts reach ever further for the skies, their keels are limited by the shallow Broads, so the keels are longer than they would be on a high-performance deep-water yacht, to provide the same lateral resistance. "A Broads yacht should be nimble and perform well in a range of weather conditions," says AW. "They need big rigs to reach above trees, a mast that's easy to raise and lower and should be as simple as possible. The shorter gaff mast is the best rig for shooting bridges."



C/O WOLSTENHOLME

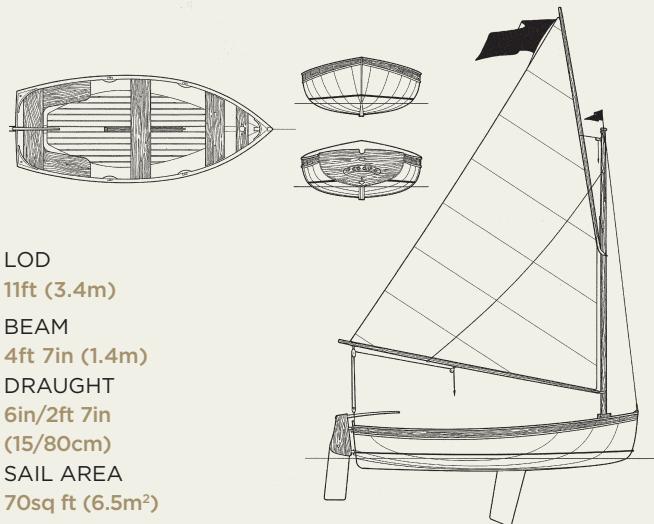




C/O WOLSTENHOLME

DINGHY COOT, 1982

What can you say about a boat like this? Coot is an 11ft high-peaked-gaff, cat-rigged, "Swallows and Amazons" style centreboarder. That make her one of the most ubiquitous, traditional vessels of any sort. It's typical of Andrew's unegotistical style as a designer (boat and client first, designer second) that he has done little to alter the basic concept. He has, however, added a well-thought-through and attractive internal arrangement and transom-top curve. This high finish makes a subtle statement about a boat of this nature, which is that, although dead ordinary, it is worth celebrating. AW likes the Coot so much he has one himself – and here it is, with his older daughter Joanna at the helm.



LOD
11ft (3.4m)
BEAM
4ft 7in (1.4m)
DRAUGHT
6in/2ft 7in
(15/80cm)
SAIL AREA
70sq ft (6.5m²)

Derek Kelsall's design team for Chay Blyth's trimaran *Great Britian 3*, then with Leslie Landamore, the job that brought him to Norfolk. "I learned a lot more after the course than I ever learned on it," was Andrew's take.

The mid-70s, as well as being the end of the wooden boatbuilding swansong which Andrew understood from time spent working at a traditional yard at Glasson Dock ("I learned then that I wasn't cut out to be a boatbuilder") was a time of great enthusiasm for multihulls and early flourishing of the Gougeon brothers' innovation of epoxy glues. Yet amid all this, Andrew found himself increasingly drawn to the classic racing and cruising yachts of the Norfolk Broads. In fact, halfway through our interview, we go to have lunch at

NORFOLK GYPSY, 1989

Andrew likes to work with clients and boatbuilders, rather than in an effort to impose his will over them. Sometimes this has borne fruit, as with his Sprite, where builder Jack Chippendale's suggested second chine to simplify the build and Leslie Landamore's suggested tiny transom, made it perfect. On this occasion it was Charlie Ward, keen to go up against the Cornish Shrimper with this boat, who insisted on round portholes and a plumb cabin trunk front, against AW's first shot at a catboat-style cabin with oval lights. The result is a pleasing combination of grace and stoutness and exemplifies what the boat is all about: substantial weight and quality all around. These are heavy, expensive trailer sailers, but they will last as long as Stonehenge and depreciation is minimal. Charlie Ward and, later, Neil Thompson Boats, have sold an amazing 130 of them.

LOD
19ft 10in (6.1m)
BEAM
7ft 6in (2.3m)
DRAUGHT
1ft 8in/3ft 11in (0.5/1.2m)
SAIL AREA
212sq ft (19.7m²)



"It was difficult for many years to get proper design work"

the Norfolk Broads YC, where some of his designs are on the water racing. The sheltered waters of the Broads, together with the need to find clean wind above the trees, has resulted in yachts with very low freeboard, low cabin trunks (the lids can lift when not sailing), long counters and tall masts. By obviating the need to take on the rough, briny oceans of the world, they have taken elegance into a higher realm, and were mesmerising to watch as they sailed surreally close to the lawned water's edge, where a good-natured crowd, all T-shirts and beer at lunchtime, watched on, enjoying the late-summer sun.

In 1977 Andrew, "in an act of blind faith", struck out on his own. The work might have been bread-and-butter stuff, much of it design work for the local yards who,

LOD

45ft (13.7m)

BEAM

13ft (4m)

DRAUGHT

2ft 6in/8ft 6in

(0.8m/2.5m)

SAIL AREA

1192sq ft (110.7m²)

DISPLACEMENT

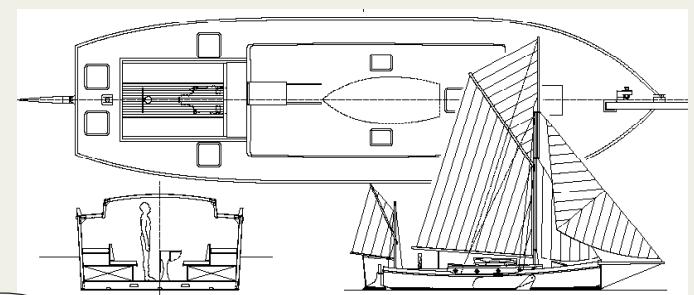
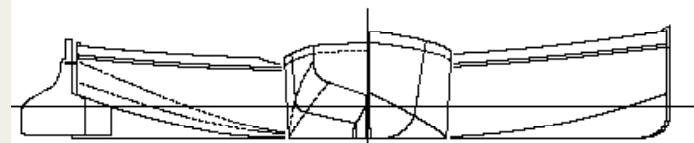
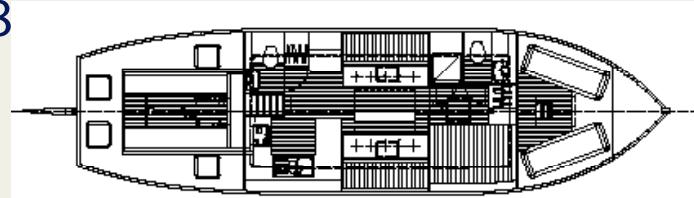
27 tonnes



NEIL FOSTER

BARGE YACHT JUNO, 1998

Of all the workboats dug out from history books and tricked up to make smart yachts, the Thames sailing barge is surely the least exploited. The qualities that made the originals ubiquitous – flat, sturdy bottom and leeboards for hardy and comfortable beaching; easy handling and great accommodation – remain as suitable for shallow waters today, as the Dutch have shown with their eternal commitment to their lemsteraaks and others. AW designed this, a 'mini Thames barge yacht, in 1996 for Charlie Ward, with John Leather as consultant. Steel build and the then-new (to AW) Multisurf CAD program made it one of his biggest design challenges. The shape gives good accommodation and the inch-thick bottom allows grounding even on North Norfolk's uneven bottom, which is where she sails. The 3/4-tonne leeboards are hydrodynamically shaped to give windward performance up to 45° and the great weight and spread of canvas make her stiff. The scalloped sheerline and huge, outboard chainplates are a delight and the plumb bow gives her a yachtier feel than her working predecessors. Those who would want one, could handle one and pay for one are few; *Juno* is, so far, the only one of her type.



during the ongoing shift to GRP production, had lost their dedicated design offices, but still needed things drawing from time to time. "I made 10 per cent more that first year than I did the year before," says Andrew, about the closest his modesty allows him to get to showing off. "It was difficult for many years to get proper design work" he explains. "Yards would want to keep you a secret from their competitors, so they would not put your name as designer on any of their publicity."

Nevertheless, he drew his first boat a year after going solo, in 1978. This was a 16ft (4.9m) catboat inspired by a long coast-to-coast tour of the United States he took a few years earlier in that American symbol of adventure,

the polished aluminium Greyhound bus. Andrew has had "a thing" about catboats ever since seeing them on the East Coast, many of them then, in the 1970s, still working the coast, albeit with conversion to power.

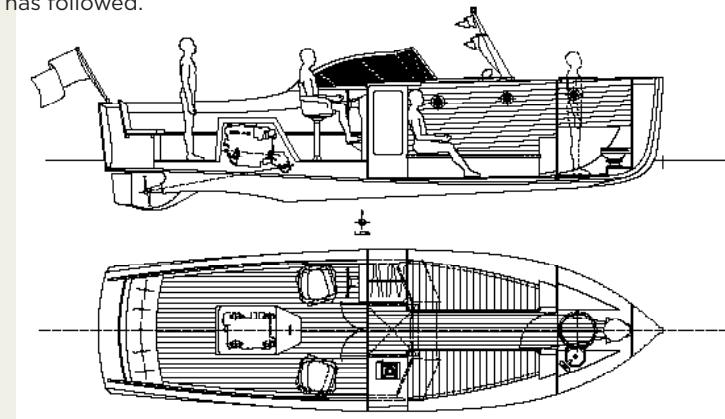
A couple of years later, he would design a much more significant boat: a 25ft (7.6m) Broads yacht, one of the first in GRP. "I knew there would be a GRP boat built at some point," Andrew explained and in fact, the whole Broads yacht restoration movement that continues to this day was already entering its stride by 1980. This was to provide, as well as restoration of old wooden boats, the desire for new, 'maintenance-free' boats that were aesthetically correct and able to join in the racing, given



CB ARCHIVES

BRISTOL 27, 2011

More overtly classic than the Duchy 27 (right) and to an older design language (1920s and 30s) with that glorious stepped sheerline to give a slightly ship-like flavour, the Bristol 27 is one of the most arresting of all AW's creations. She is built, like her smaller sisters the 22 and 16, and bigger sister the 32, by Star Yachts of Bristol (AKA Win Cnoops). We had a test run in 2011 and came to the conclusion that she's that rare combination of excellent river cruiser with minimal wash, and capable sea boat, with dampening rails beneath the hull running the length of the boat. She has a commodious cockpit and a cosy twin-berth cabin and her shape makes her very economical indeed to run – "you can't beat a long, thin hull with a fine entry" as AW puts it. Our reviewer at the time fell hopelessly for this poem of dark, shiny paint and varnish in strip-planked wood – a steady stream of orders has followed.



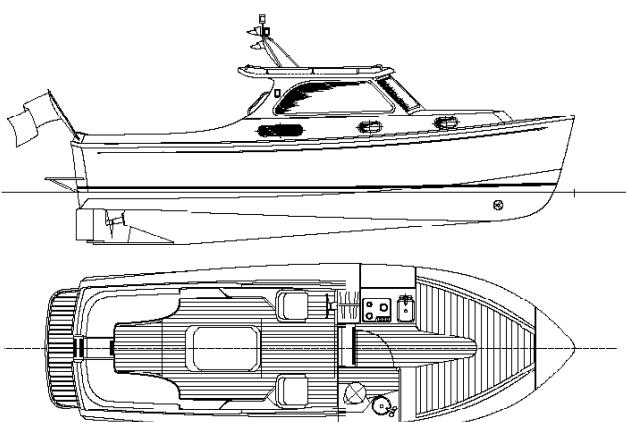
LOD 27ft 4in (8.3m) BEAM 7ft 10in (2.4m) DRAUGHT 2ft 4in (0.7m)

that the empirical handicapping system for Broads yachts takes into account neither age nor material of build; just results on the day. Today, around 50 Broads yachts have been built to Andrew's designs. A planing speedboat, a rowing skiff, a steam launch, motorboats for Broom and Aquafibre and a few other craft later, we get to 1989 (Berlin Wall and the Bangles) and the design that is among his highest selling and most traditional: the Norfolk Gypsy, for boatbuilder Charlie Ward, who saw the popularity of the 19ft Cornish Shrimper and wanted a piece of the action. Andrew would subsequently design three more boats for Charlie Ward and, latterly, Neil Thompson Boats: the 13ft Urchin, 25ft Smuggler and 45ft Barge Yacht. In 2003, his design of the Aquila 27

wolstenholme
design.com

DUCHY 27, 2004

This started life as the Aquila 27 and soon after that caught the eye of boatbuilder Dave Cockwell, who sprinkled some of his magic dust over it (not to mention a much larger engine, in the form of the single 200hp Nanni) and turned it into one of the most subtly attractive gentleman's motor yachts of recent years. The design, vaguely reminiscent of so many post-war inshore workboats, is almost generic, yet works so well. The semi-displacement hull is a sensible marriage of speed, comfort, ride and economy; this is a boat that will go anywhere her range will allow in most conditions at a speed of up to 25 knots, but consuming just four gallons per hour at her cruising speed of 18 knots. A teak bathing platform, high-quality fit-out, cockpit for six and a snug cabin for two complete the picture of a boat that could appeal on many levels to different people. "A real yachtsman's motor launch", as they used to enthuse in the yachting press.



LOD 27ft (8m) BEAM 9ft 2in (2.8m) DRAUGHT 2ft 9in (0.9m)



C/O COCKWELLS

would lead to a collaboration with Cockwells that revamped that boat to the Duchy 27, but more than this, it proved to be the beginning of a new direction.

Using the knowledge of fast semi-displacement hull design gained from decades of designs for Broom, Hardy, Birchwood and others, Andrew has designed a series of spirit-of-tradition motor cruisers for Cockwells, Star Yachts, English Harbour and Creative Marine.

More recently, his 2002 design for the perfect trailer sailer was unveiled, first in plywood, then in series form in GRP (see our test of Kite online). What the future brings for Andrew and his clients is anyone's guess. It could be a working barge, a planing powerboat or a gaff-rigged yacht. We wait with interest!