

# Datchet Water Early Days

by

**Tom Vaughan, ex-Commodore**

To be involved with something entirely new is one of the most rewarding things I have ever known and I can say I first saw Datchet when it was still mostly field, very similar to the fields on the other side of the road as you leave the club today. The road was one of the back doubles from Northwood we used on the way to the south coast, no M25 in those days. Anyhow having heard of a new reservoir and seeing activity, we stopped and walked across one day to see what was going on, only a very muddy edge in those days and we saw a hole being dug in the middle to produce the banks you now see. That was my first sight of what, unbeknown to me at the time, was to become one of my major interests.

I cannot remember exact dates of these times. But some years later the RYA announced an Olympic weekend at the new reservoir which had been completed and near filled with water which I attended and took pictures, the RYA hoped to make into a Centre of Excellence, which came first I cannot recall.



The Thames Water Authority announced in Local Papers a meeting in Slough Town Hall to discuss recreational facilities at the new site. I saw this in my local paper and having been involved with the Rickmansworth Sailing Club thought I would go along and see what it was all about. The meeting was packed several hundred strong, with all sorts of sports being represented, one stood out in my memory a number of horsy types, in pink jackets who seemed to want to ride in the area. Anyhow, having signed up as a representative of sailing I awaited developments.

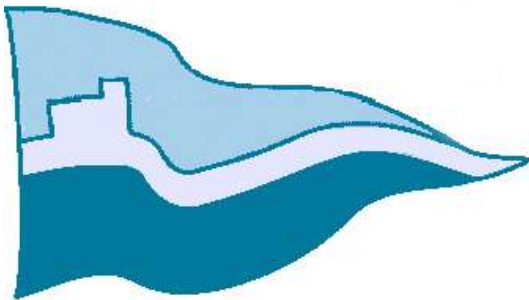
Next we were called to a meeting by Thames Water at the Datchet Mead Hotel on the 28 May 1975, where volunteers were called for, to set up a steering committee to form the new club. The RYA nominated the Chairman - Vincent Blake of Cookham SC - and various other people reluctantly volunteered to represent various other interests, Racing,

Cruising, Pottering *etc.* In a typical British way no one wanted to seem too pushy but a number of us were finally elected.

The next event was the first meeting of the steering committee at Bisham Abbey 23 June 1975, the Sports Council was represented on the Steering Committee, hence the choice of venue, as was the RYA Committee, who had negotiated that the London reservoirs be used for sailing. It was a strange meeting; here we were with no legal agreement to use the water, no name, no burgee, no money, no rules, no members, not even any boats, no one knowing any one else very well, except having met at the Datchet Mead Hotel, having to plan to set up the new club.

I can well recall Vincent's first remark after greeting us all was "*we would have to consider what racing flags we needed*"! That in fact, was the least of our problems but somehow a working plan was agreed and various actions approved and over the next months the various strands pulled together. A key objective was to encourage any class of boat to sail but also to encourage them into fleets. So members could sail the classes they wanted to sail, not the ones officialdom thought they should!

A list of potential members was produced and they were asked to subscribe £5 to help the would be club pay its way which raised £650 .Not without some opposition as it was felt we in fact could offer them nothing and it could be considered fraud. But they did in fact get Datchat which is a year older than the club, set up to keep would be members in touch. We also appointed our first Secretary Felix Hodgson also a member of Cookham and an Honorary Treasurer Peter Hunter at that time as budgets were becoming an increasing concern



The Burgee was designed to represent the water, surrounded by the very white, at that time, concrete wall of the reservoir with the tower of Windsor Castle one of the few buildings to be seen from the Clubhouse and the sky above. The steering committee then moved to Holiday Inn Hotel Langley for its meetings where it remained until the meeting setting up the Club took place on the upper floor of the existing clubhouse on 29 February 1976, when most of the steering committee were elected the first club Council at the meeting. Much of the steering committee's time and that of the new Council was taken up by the legal ramifications of the

agreement with Thames Water, which in fact lasted for many years and has only recently been settled.

The on-site Thames Water staff were not in the main that friendly, it was a severe culture shock having civilians on one of their reservoirs. I remember one of them going for a lady whose child had fallen over on the concrete beach, ordering her to get on the land side of the wall so that the child's blood did not poison the whole of London!!

Another memory was making the main racing marks. Tom Davis had suggested using plastic cores from motor way bridges with a scaffold pole pushed up them to act as a flag pole and keel. All very simple but how to push the pole up the foam core. Simple put the core against the wall and drive the pole with a member's car; for the first few it worked well but by the last one black smoke was pouring from under the car, the member who had volunteered his car must have had clutch problems for ever afterwards!!

An another early and since recurring problem was a shortage of water on which to sail. When the Queen Mother came along to open the reservoir, the Thames Water authorities had everything looking very spick and span and the reservoir full to the brim, but no sooner had she left than the level began to fall. Making it clear that its primary purpose was to quench the thirst of London.

But on the 29 February 1976 which was leap year day which is why the club only has a birthday every fourth year(!!) Datchet Water Sailing Club was at last underway!!! Some eight months after the steering committee started work and about a year after the Slough meeting.

