

The demise of another historic charity?

Over the weekend, an historic sailing vessel used until recently by the Mayflower Sail Training Society, a charity for under-privileged children, sank in Tilbury Docks due to lack of cash (nobody was on board). Several attempts were made to the lottery for funds to help in needed major maintenance, but rejected.

The sailing vessel 'Kenya Jacaranda', built in 1922 as a Brixham sail trawler, had an historic past. Originally built with no engines, she fished out of Brixham for some years and won the coveted Brixham Trawler race in 1926. The well-known song "Red Sails in the Sunset" was penned on her aft and she was the last vessel ever to undertake commercial salvage under sail in 1935. She is arguably the longest serving sail training vessel in the UK. After she retired from fishing she had a few owners, one being Lady Claude Hamilton (a friend of the Queen Mother).

In 1948 she was purchased by two ex-servicemen, Peter Harding, a Spitfire pilot during the war, and Steven Stevens, a Naval Landing Craft Commander, and donated to be used as a sail training vessel for the benefit of young people in London and SE England.

The initial setup running of the charity, all people that helped in the running of her, being maintenance staff or crew, though professionally qualified where required, did so with no payment. What did they get out of it, I hear you say! Well, more than money could offer, I'd say. All monies donated went into her maintenance, safety gear and to keep costs down for the children (mainly charity-funded) who otherwise would not have been able to afford commercial prices. This practice held true until the end. The aim was twofold, keeping a true wooden historic vessel in good working order and in use for posterity and be able to give a varied learning experience to children from the ages of twelve and above from whatever background. Both aims, in my view, were and are of outstanding importance in today's society.

She has been used by children from Centre Point, some with aids, children with mental and physical disabilities, giving child carers a sort of holiday and a rest from their everyday chores, children with leukaemia and other ailments from Chernobyl on charity-organised trips to British Hospitals for medical treatment, various schools and clubs, plus a host of others, too numerous to mention.

This small, well-meaning charitable organisation was left to fend for itself, left in the cold by powers that be, in preference for the newer, glossier, larger charities with paid staff. Over the years the funding was harder to find. Several applications to the Lottery were made but the amount of red tape; jingoistic, bureaucratic gobbledy-gook required, took months of deciphering. Purchasing books produced by the lottery fund on terminologies to be used in their documentation etc, going to seminars organised for the charities that would like to attempt lottery funding on how to do it (has it been made that difficult?) and the siphoning of off funds earmarked for charities for the Olympic Fund, have all played a role in the demise of a long standing charity and the loss of a piece of our heritage.

Today (8th January) an attempt will be made to raise the KJ and a new voluntary team 'Kenya Jacaranda Heritage Sailing' is ready to take over the refit, maintenance and running of this historic ship.

What we need is publicity and financial support.

David (Tink) Isted (Voluntary Skipper)

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