

from Arnside to Alaska, via Whitby:

Alasdair Simpson from the NW Area and organiser of the 2nd Arnside Conference in 2020 brings us a history of 'Ziska', following up our 'top press' in the last issue.

Launch

'Ziska' was launched 28 January 1903. She was made by Crossfield Brothers in Arnside, the same yard in which 'Bonita' (1888) the oldest boat to take part in the 2013 OGA Round Britain Challenge was built. From their yard on Church Hill 'Ziska' would have been rolled down the hill and launched from the beach. In Arnside this would be a case of leaving the boat on the beach waiting for the tide to come in and the boat floating off. In the days before power tools, boats would have been made by hand. Half models were used to design boats.

Other significant events in 1903 included the formation of the Ford Motor Company in June and the first aeroplane flight on 17 December. The horse and cart were the main way of making local journeys. Ladies wore long dresses right down to the ground, though less restrictive clothing for the more active lady was coming in. The Boer War had just finished. The British Empire was at its peak.



Benjamin Robert Geffken, Shmay
Shmalloway and Stanford Siver, June 2019

Crossfields

Crossfields of Arnside were leading builders of Morecambe Bay Prawners and yachts, active from the 1840s to 1940s. Arnside is on the Kent Estuary at the top of Morecambe Bay, Cumbria. It developed as a small resort following the opening of the railway in 1857. The village's first yacht club was set up in 1852. Historically the estuary was the port for Kendal. There are views across the estuary to the Lakeland Hills

John Crossfield (1855 – 1944) was the lead partner in Crossfield Brothers in 1903. His brother William ran the shore boatyard. In 1906 John moved to Conway. One of the boats he built there was 'Pacific Moon' (formerly 'Nama'). 'Pacific Moon' was sailed from England to Tahiti via the Panama Canal in 1931-2 by Sidney Howard featuring in his book 'Thames to Tahiti'. He also built 'Wallaroo', one of the leading yachts in the North West in the 1900s which won the Liverpool Isle of Man Midnight Race four times.

The name 'Ziska'

There were at least two other yachts called 'Ziska' built around 1900. 'Ziska' (1898) was a Dublin Bay 25 footer, later raced at Royal Cork. 'Ziska' (1904) was a Royal Windermere 17 footer. 'Ziska Pilsner' made by the Bowness Bay Brewing Company is named after the Royal Windermere yacht. 'Ziska' is short for the German girl's name Franziska and similar to the Yiddish girl's name Ziske meaning 'Little Sweet One'. One-eyed General Jan Ziska (1360-1424) is a Czech national hero. However it is probable that all three yachts were named after 'Princess Ziska', a novel published in 1897 by Victorian best-selling author Marie Corelli set in Egypt. The final melodramatic scene takes place in the inner chamber of the Great Pyramid.

1903 – 1907: early owners

'Ziska' was built for John Aspden (1855 – 1921), who was born in Blackburn, an inland mill town. In the 1891 Census he lived in Fleetwood working as a fisherman. By the 1901 Census he was a 'sea fisheries bailiff' living in Lytham. In 1904 he was the General Manger of Lytham Baths, a Victorian leisure complex fed by seawater. The adjacent Assembly Rooms housed the yacht club. In the 1911 Census he lived



the story of 'Ziska'

in a now listed house in neighbouring Bath Street. Lytham was developed as an upmarket resort by the Clifton family in contrast to neighbouring Blackpool. It is likely 'Ziska' would have been kept on the beach by Lytham Pier across the Green from the Baths. The estuary at Lytham would have been busy with steamships going up to Preston Docks.

John Aspden did not keep 'Ziska' for very long. In 1904 she was bought by Arthur Earle Hunt (1860 – 1928) of Douglas, Isle of Man. The money to purchase 'Ziska' probably came from his second wife Ellen, the widow of a wealthy Manchester brewer, who was nine years his senior. Born Arthur Hunt in Dublin, in the 1881 Census he is recorded as a bank clerk. His maternal grandfather was Thomas Earle, a Manchester solicitor.

His first wife Evelyn eloped with her employer James Cooper, a Manchester businessman, living in secret with him for seven years. Arthur Hunt received £800 damages against Cooper (about £100,000 in today's money) when his divorce was granted in 1894. James Cooper was tried for murdering his second wife, a barmaid in Douglas, Isle of Man in 1892. He received the lenient sentence of 10 years penal servitude for manslaughter, when the usual punishment for murder would have been hanging. The murder trial and divorce were reported in the national press. Arthur joined the Royal Mersey YC.

'Ziska' was then owned by W.J Ellis, a Dublin solicitor from 1905 - 1907. She was kept at Kingstown (Dun Laoghaire), Ireland's leading yachting centre with three royal clubs in the 1900s. Dublin was very much the city of James Joyce, second city of the British Empire with clanking trams and horse drawn hansom cabs. Joyce's 'Ulysses' is set in the Dublin of 1904, the year he first walked out with Nora Barnacle. The first chapter takes place in a Martello Tower south of Kingstown. There were only 53 cars in Ireland. The fitting out of yachts, including 'Ziska' was reported in the Irish Press.

Arthur Holt & Frederick Smart: 1907 - 1945

'Ziska' returned to England in 1907. Her next owner was Arthur Holt (1876 – 1941), a Liverpool architect, who kept her for more than 25 years. He was a member of Hoylake SC and the Royal Mersey.

At first, aged only 30 living in a terraced house in Hoylake, Holt owned 'Ziska' in partnership with others, then outright from 1925. By time he sold her in 1935 he was Vice Commodore of the North Wales Cruising Club, living in a large detached house in West Kirby, and could afford to replace her with 'Halcyone' a brand new 30 ton yacht.

In 1907 one of the partners was reprimanded by the Royal Mersey for flying a club burgee when they were not aboard. 'Ziska' came last in the 1911 Liverpool to Isle of Man Midnight Race completing the windless 80 miles in 31 hours compared to 2 hours 45 minutes of today's fast ferry. She is also recorded as taking part in races to Llandudno and on the Clyde. 'Ziska' first had an engine at the early date of 1909, a two cylinder petrol engine made by Webbs of Stockport.

In 1939 'Ziska' was acquired by Frederick Smart, who lived in a large house in Crosby overlooking the sea that once belonged to Thomas Ismay of the White Star Line, owners of the 'Titanic'. Frederick fitted a new American engine.

1945 – 1997: Whitby, Plymouth and Cowes

'Ziska' reappears after the Second World War in Whitby owned by Major William McAlpine Jackson, a Bradford architect, who had been in the Royal Artillery. Whitby is associated with James Cook who as well as going to Australia explored Alaska's coastline. There are statues of James Cook overlooking the harbour in both Whitby and Victoria (British Columbia).

In August 1946 'Ziska' hit the national news when she was rescued by the Lowestoft lifeboat after her engine failed in a gale when returning from Ostend to Whitby. As the lifeboat was short handed, a Leicester lady holidaying in the town jumped aboard and helped in the rescue of 'Ziska', along with her crew of seven including a sailing master.

Her next owner was Graham Sherratt, President of the Society of Public Analysts 1959 - 1960. A member of the Whitby and Royal Mersey Yacht Clubs, he lived near Chester. 'Ziska' remained in Whitby till 1970. By this time she was an old boat with her owner living in a semi in Leeds rather than a mansion on the Isle of Man. By 1973 'Ziska' was in Plymouth and broke loose from her moorings in a gale. Uninsured, she was

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damaged resulting in her owner having to sell as he could not afford repairs.

An OGA member moving up from a small gaffer bought her and sailed her back to Cowes in May 1974 in perilous condition with water being pumped out every half hour to stop her from sinking, the mainsail patched with a teatowel and the boom in two pieces held together by metal rods. She was laid up opposite the Folly Inn above Cowes and a start made on her restoration. Inevitably enthusiasm waned and the restoration was never finished.

Ashley Butler

In November 1997 Ashley Butler, a 19 year old apprentice shipwright called at Cowes in his 23' gaffer. He came across 'Ziska' lying on a wharf under torn covers with a For Sale sign held on by a rusty nail. Ashley was looking for a larger classic boat which he could take to the West Indies. Next morning by chance he met the owner, and exchanged his yacht for 'Ziska'.

Taking out a bank loan to transport her back to Essex, Ashley spent the next two years restoring 'Ziska' whilst living aboard, working on her in the evening after finishing his day job as foreman at a wooden boat building yard at Heybridge. Since Ashley's restoration 'Ziska' has not had an engine.

In 1999 Ashley Butler, now aged 21, sailed 'Ziska' across the Atlantic. He found 'Ziska' a competent seaboat, fast and weatherly, despite only having a low freeboard aft. 'Ziska' averaged 140 miles a day crossing the Atlantic. The restoration and Atlantic crossing featured in *Classic Boat Magazine*. Ashley then spent the next four years cruising and racing 'Ziska' in the West Indies and USA.

Charter to Tim Severin: 'In Search of Robinson Crusoe'

During this time 'Ziska' was chartered by the explorer Tim Severin who was researching different inspirations for Robinson Crusoe, including Henry Pitman a surgeon in the Duke of Monmouth's army who was sentenced to ten years slave labour in the West Indies by Judge Jeffries. Escaping from captivity in Barbados Pitman was left marooned by pirates

along with 11 companions on the uninhabited Isla la Tortuga (Island of Turtles) off the Venezuelan coast.

Ziska's voyage is eloquently recorded by Tim Severin in his book 'In Search of Robinson Crusoe'. Tim describes raising the mainsail: "There was the piercing high pitched squeak of the wooden jaws of the gaff sliding ponderously up the mast, followed by the erratic flap and clatter of heavy canvas. . . . When the sheets were hauled in and the mainsail exerted pressure, 'Ziska' groaned with the effort, then groaned again." Joining Tim Severin and Ashley on 'Ziska' was Trondur Patursson, a Faroese artist, who had crossed the Atlantic in 1976 with Tim in a currach, to prove it was possible for St Brendan to have discovered America from Ireland in the 6th century AD.

Antigua Classics: 2003

Aged 100, 'Ziska' took part in the Antigua Classics, winning multiple races. She was sold to an American who wanted to use her for long distance cruising. Unfortunately his job meant he did not have time to sail her. Ashley returned to England and now runs Butler & Co., one of the UK's leading wooden boatbuilders at Penpol Creek, Falmouth

Road crossing of America: 2005

In 2005 'Ziska' was bought by a shipwright who had met Ashley Butler in Annapolis on Chesapeake Bay, the sailing capital of the USA. 'Ziska' was transported across America to Port Townsend on the North West coast by road. The shipwright lived aboard 'Ziska' cruising her locally, before selling her on as he found her too small for a growing family.

Port Townsend grew up as a Victorian port that went into decline as the railway never reached there. It is now a centre for boating and maritime life with a skilled workforce attracting people looking for alternative lifestyles. There is a wooden boatbuilding college and an annual wooden boat festival.

Restoration: Stanford Siver

In 2017 'Ziska' was purchased by Stanford Siver. Stanford's involvement with boats started when he left his job on the East Coast of USA and enrolled in the North West Academy of Wooden Boatbuilding, near Port Townsend. With the help of a team of local

A30 edit the story of 'Ziska'

shipwrights, Stanford spent two years restoring 'Ziska', before entering her in the Race2Alaska, 2019. Work included an upgraded saloon, new mast, rigging and sails.

In many ways the restoration of 'Ziska' could only have happened in a place like Port Townsend with a pool of talented people. Different people worked on different parts of the boat. The new mast, boom and gaff were designed and built by Patrick Mahon, a former lecturer at the Wooden Boatbuilding College. The 46.5' long mast is part hollow and part solid made from 16 lengths of Douglas fir held together by birds mouth type joints. Jo Abeli, a female history and Japanese graduate designed and installed the electronics. Jo learnt electronics whilst working in a boatyard.

Computer drawings were used in the restoration and 'Ziska' was re-launched at the end of March 2019.

Race2Alaska, June 2019

The Race2Alaska is designed to showcase the latest human technology for human and wind powered boats. It attracts a wide range of craft from modern foiling trimarans, finishing in just over four days to one man rowing boats. The race runs for 750 cold miles of water from Port Townsend up the Canadian coast to Ketchikan in Alaska.

The rules are simple: no motor, no support.

Founded in 1885 Ketchikan is Alaska's oldest city, 18 years older than 'Ziska'. It is calling point for cruise liners. It receives 153 inches of precipitation a year, including 39 inches of snow. At 116 years old 'Ziska' is twice the age of the state of Alaska which was created in 1959.

'Ziska' entered the race as 'Team Ziska - Sail like a Luddite'. She was by far the oldest and heaviest boat to have ever entered the Race2Alaska. Her rudder alone is the same weight as the winning boat. Her crew included 16 year old Odin Smith, the youngest person to take part in the race. Ziska's sea trials for the race only began three weeks before the start.

The race set off at 5am on 2 June 2019 with 35 starters. 'Ziska' left harbour the night before to get a good start. She crossed the finishing line in Alaska 16 days later, 12 days behind the winning boat coming 22nd out of 25 finishers. To complete the 750 mile distance, 'Ziska' had to sail 1282 miles tacking against north westerly winds. When the wind dropped the crew had to row her 12 tonnes. The general conclusion was that 'Ziska' performed well in strong winds, but less well in light winds.

What would her builders 116 years ago in Arnside in days before the telephone and electricity had made of her achievements?

Alasdair Simpson, NW Area



'Ziska' at Whilby Harbour c. 1876
David Tennant