

A FEW MEN AND A BOAT



TS 16 No 1 "Viking"

**The Story of the Early Days of the
Hartley TS 16 in Australia**

By Thomas Hearne

INTRODUCTION

In 1963 a small sailing craft was introduced to Australia and the impact it made on the national sailing scene is still being felt today. I was just seven years old when my late father George became the owner of the first Hartley Trailer Sailer or TS 16 in Australia.

Through the efforts of George, the late John Griffin of H & J Griffin Boatbuilders and several other highly committed and motivated people, the Hartley Trailer Sailer Association of Australia was born and a new boating phenomenon was set to sweep the country.

In late 1984 and early 1985, long time member David Boulton set about trying to piece together the early history of the Hartley TS 16 and the beginnings of the Hartley TS 16 Association of Australia. In a huge expenditure of time and effort he interviewed several early members including George and John and this account is compiled from those taped interviews, more questions and of course my own memories. Here is the story:

THE CONCEPT

My earliest recollection of the TS 16 is seeing a stocky little yacht, sixteen feet in length, sitting on the slip at Harold and John Griffin's boatshed at Bayview on Pittwater, NSW, in the winter of 1963. George had just completed building his second boat, a nineteen foot outboard cruiser designed in New Zealand by Richard Hartley and was most impressed with the easy interpretation of Hartley's plans, supplemented by the first edition of his book "Build Your Own Boat".

During the building process of two years and nine months, George occasionally crewed on the popular Heron class, sailing on Sydney's Middle Harbour. Having sailed 12 Foot Skiffs on the Parramatta River before the Second World War, he was subsequently bitten again by the sailing bug and started looking around for a trailable family yacht that could be used as a stepping stone between the Heron and the equally popular Bluebird class keel boat.

The family aspect of sailing was foremost in George's mind as although the Australian Heron Association had a very strong family ethos, he noted that while the Herons were racing, many family members had to stay on the beach and watch. George decided that there was a real need for something a little larger that would cater for family outings as well as being fun to race.

Meanwhile the builder of the first TS 16, John Griffin, of H & J Griffin Boatbuilders was also looking for something new but for an entirely different reason. He was looking for a family yacht that had the potential to be mass produced or built from a kit by amateur

builders and so contacted Sydney boat plans agent Peter Fletcher and told him what he was looking for. About two months later Peter showed him the plans of the New Zealand designed Hartley Trailer Sailer.

In an overnight decision, Griffins took the design on and immediately built two Trailer Sailers. The first boat was the one subsequently bought by George and the second one went on show at the Melbourne Boat Show in late 1963. The fate of the second boat is not known. Griffins subsequently went on to produce a kit of the whole TS 16 and ended up turning out approximately twelve boats, some fully finished and others hull only for the owners to complete but it turned out that most amateur builders wanted to build their boats from scratch. At that time, the cost for the amateur builder to put a TS 16 on the water was approximately 600 pounds.

Some time after the completion of both boats, John held an open weekend at the Bayview boatshed to promote the Trailer Sailer and it was here that George first saw the boat. He took it for a test sail and was immediately impressed with its performance and ease of handling. It fitted in perfectly with his concept of a trailable family yacht and its suitability for amateur building was strongly evident. It subsequently also proved very comfortable for cruising and camping, a quality not lost on John Griffin who used his TS 16 for family weekends and holidays on a regular basis. He and Dorothy and the family could often be found at Halletts Beach in Cowan Creek enjoying the convenience and comfort of the TS 16.

George promptly sold the Hartley cruiser before it had even seen the water and bought the Trailer Sailer in August 1963. By the time George bought the boat, she was a little run down from many demonstration sails and from being out in the weather. He arranged for John to repaint the boat from Navy Blue to White, put windows in the cabin front and cut away the after deck to accommodate a good sized outboard well. The timber spars were replaced with aluminium some time after. The boat was named "Viking".

Unlike today, where a yacht such as the TS 16 would not be kept on a mooring, Viking was moored at Griffins Boatshed at Bayview until George obtained a mooring site to the east of the Bayview Yacht Racing Association (BYRA), and this remained Viking's home. This was subsequently the case with two other boats that I know of. If I recall correctly, Ron Dunphy (Boat No 3) had his TS on a mooring at Palm Beach and Bob Martin (Boat No 5) had his on a mooring in Careel Bay.



Viking on mooring at H & J Griffins Boatshed Bayview NSW

THE ASSOCIATION

George and John discussed the potential of the boat on many occasions and came up with the idea of setting up an association to promote the family cruising/racing concept. George always stressed the immense contribution John made in putting his interests as a professional boat builder aside and helping promote the boat as an amateur building project. He gave countless hours of his time giving advice and assistance to amateur builders all over Sydney and beyond.

Between August and December 1963 George and John did some detective work and located three other people in Sydney who had begun building Trailer Sailers. They were Ron Dunphy, Les Irwin who went on to build thirteen of them and Arthur Curby who subsequently built four. All three had seen the TS 16 at Griffins Boatshed in the preceding months and had subsequently bought plans. They all indicated their interest in establishing an association. The idea was gaining momentum.

The first meeting of Trailer Sailer owners and builders took place at our Normanhurst home on 12 December 1963 and was attended by the following eight people. George Hearne, John Griffin, Ron Dunphy, Walter Dunphy, Les Irwin, Arthur Curby, Lionel Hewish (Heron Assoc) and Neville Corvisy (Heron Assoc). The meeting decided to form the Hartley Trailer Sailer Association of Australia with the purpose of promoting the Hartley sixteen foot Trailer Sailer, to be known as the TS 16, as a one design class and to encourage competition between registered yachts throughout Australasia. George was quoted as saying “No one can say we didn’t start off thinking big!”. The NSW Branch of the Association was also formed at that meeting. It was considered necessary to promote the Association’s activities throughout Australasia as there were already a small number of TS 16s sailing in New Zealand but with no formal activities or organization as such. The Australian Association and the NSW Branch ran side by side for several years before separating into their individual entities. Recollections are vague as to when this actually happened but popular opinion indicates it was sometime in 1967.

The first elected office bearers were: George Hearne - President, Les Irwin - Vice

President, John Griffin - Treasurer and Ron Dunphy - Secretary/Publicity Officer. It was left to George and John to draw up rules and measurement forms for presentation to a general meeting to be called in early 1964. The initial rules were based largely on those of the Heron Association and considerable help was given by Lionel Hewish and Neville Corvisy of that association. Ron Dunphy was a great help as a professional photographer and had good contacts in the magazine and promotional arena.

George recalled spending countless hours of typing and cutting stencils for draft rules, designing application and registration forms and preparing the most important measurement forms and all the while pleading with all and sundry to print them for nothing! He always maintained that without the unstinting support of John Griffin and Ron Dunphy and also the boys from the Heron Association, nothing would have been achieved. As far as the measurement forms were concerned, the relevant figures and tolerances were developed by John while George designed the actual form. The measurement regime was based largely on that of the Heron Association due to its reasonable tolerances for amateur builders and was accepted by Richard Hartley as the world wide standard for the TS 16. The original sail insignia was designed by George and John but was redesigned by Richard Hartley in mid 1964.

Initial Boat Registrations were:

George Hearne	No 1	Viking	12 December 1963
Les Irwin	No 2	Mary Anne	12 December 1963
Ron Dunphy	No 3	Saoirse	12 December 1963
John Griffin	No 4	Wai-Weka	28 December 1963
Bob Martin	No 5	Barren Joey	16 January 1964
Arthur Kirby	No 6	Doreen	22 January 1964



No 1 “Viking” and No 3 “Saoirse” on Pittwater in late 1963 showing original sail insignia. “Viking” still has her original wooden spars in these photos.



Having overcome the initial establishment challenges of the Association, promotion of the TS 16 presented a formidable task. The total commitment and enthusiasm however of all those who built their own boats achieved miracles and gave the Association its well recognized family concept. Many family cruising days were held, normally meeting at The Basin in Pittwater and both George and John always stressed that subsequent success of the Association owes much to those early members and their families.



An early family picnic day at The Basin on Pittwater. It is believed the boats are, from left: No 2 "Mary Anne" Les Irwin, No 3 "Saoirse" Ron Dunphy, No 1 "Viking" George Hearne and No 4 "Wai-Weka" John Griffin.

THE B.Y.R.A. STORY

A major hurdle facing the Association at this time was that in order to conduct organised racing activities, the TS 16 Class needed the sponsorship and facilities of an existing sailing club. As the boat had originated on Pittwater, George and John approached the Bayview Yacht Racing Association, commonly known as BYRA, in an attempt to have the class accepted into their activities.

At that time BYRA only raced the more junior classes and saw the TS 16 as somewhat of a threat to their established practices. On 14 August 1964, George and Lionel Hewish attended the BYRA annual general meeting and presented a case in which the family aspect of the class was emphasized along with the potential benefits, both monetary and otherwise in BYRA taking the TS 16 on. Lionel Hewish attended the meeting with George as, at the time, he was the National Treasurer of the Heron Association and the Herons were an active class at BYRA.

A further presentation was made to a BYRA committee meeting on 31 August 1964 and with additional lobbying from John Griffin, the TS 16 was accepted into BYRA on a trial basis on 12 October 1964. Records reveal that George and Betty Hearne became members of BYRA at that time, with John and Dorothy Griffin joining on 16 November 1964 and Les and Nancy Irwin on 18 January 1965. Following completion of the trial period, formal racing began. Again, recollections vary but it seems that five boats contested the first BYRA race in January 1965. The TS 16 had found a home.



No 1 and No 3 in early racing with BYRA. Note the new sail insignia.

On 26 March 1965, as a measure of goodwill and to demonstrate their commitment to BYRA, the TS 16 Association provided four pounds to the Club to enable the fitting of

screens to the kitchen windows of the clubhouse. There were many Sunday afternoons where my mother Betty, Nancy Irwin, Doreen Curby and Dorothy Martin to name just a few, helped out in the BYRA kitchen serving hot pies and drinks to many a cold and bedraggled young sailor. By October 1965, race records indicate that up to 16 Trailer Sailers were racing on Pittwater. The first annual championship was held during the 1965/66 sailing season and the event was termed a National Championship to project the image of an Australia wide class. The championship was won by John Griffin in boat No 4 "Wai-Weka".

In a footnote to the BYRA story, in September 1984, George presented the Club with an oil painting of TS 16 No 1 Viking, painted by his sister Lorna Sainsbury twenty years earlier. As of mid 2010 the painting still hung in pride of place in the BYRA clubhouse.

RICHARD HARTLEY AND MORE PUBLICITY

At the invitation of the Association, Richard Hartley traveled to Australia in mid June 1965. George and Betty entertained him to dinner at Normanhurst and the next day took him for a day out on Pittwater on board Viking. They were joined by several other TS 16s for a picnic lunch at The Basin. During his visit, Richard remarked at how amazed he was that the boat he had designed as a knockabout sailing/fishing craft based on the New Zealand Mullet boats had evolved into such a competitive, high performance craft. Shortly after his visit to Australia the New Zealand TS 16 Association was formed.

In 1966, the designer donated a trophy to be called the "Hartley TS 16 International Cup" to the New Zealand association in order to encourage international competition. Under the rules of the donation, the host nation was responsible for the provision of all the boats needed for a contest and if necessary, the crew for the challengers as well. The first challenge was won by Australia's Bill Gamble in a competition held by the Richmond Yacht Club in Auckland New Zealand in 1967. It is understood that there were other trans Tasman challenges but details and dates are sketchy.

Publicity wise, the Association scored an unexpected hit when in mid 1965 the ABC televised a series called "Build Your Own Boat". Happily, the TS 16 was chosen as the subject craft and the excellent camera work of member Peter Dabbs who built boat No 46 "Christmarlin" and his constructional ability ensured a top class programme which generated immense interest in both the boat and the Association. George recalled that "the mailbag ran hot" during the time the series was being screened with around two thousand enquiries being received.

TIDES OF CHANGE

At around the same time, George found it necessary to resign the Presidency of the Association when a back problem which prevented him sailing for several years reared its ugly head. He sold TS No1 to member No 58, John Whitefield on 1 October 1965. The boat was sold again to member No 158, G Sayer on 1 November 1966. Nothing further is

known as to the fate of Viking. George subsequently recovered and went on to build and own larger yachts and always enjoyed hearing what was happening with the TS 16. John Griffin took over from George and was President for three years, racing very successfully before moving on to other business and family pursuits. John's son David went on to build another two or three boats and raced for some time.

By early 1966, the TS 16 fleet had grown to a point where BYRA was having difficulty handling the numbers regularly racing and consequently, on 4 April 1966, voted to limit the TS 16 fleet to twenty boats, with preference given to members from the northern suburbs or the local area.

Several members at that point were traveling quite long distances to race, particularly from the Ryde/Parramatta area and the fleet subsequently split into two groups. The first group of mainly original members remained at BYRA while the second group commenced sailing off the beach at Chiswick on the Parramatta River and then moved on to Greenwich Sailing Club which was the first club on the Parramatta River to sponsor the TS 16 as a class. It is difficult to tie down exact years or seasons as once again, recollections vary but by the season of 1969/70, a fleet had been established at Drummoyne Sailing Club through the efforts of Norm Brown who had made the transition to the TS 16 from 18 foot skiffs. To this day, Drummoyne remains the stronghold of the TS 16 in NSW.

It was when the fleet was established at Drummoyne that the family aspect of the class began to wane as the TS 16 was developed into more of a high tech, go fast yacht and the racing became more competitive. It was inevitable that this should happen as racing always encourages class development but some members lamented the loss of the fun and family atmosphere enjoyed so much at BYRA. One early member of the Association is quoted as saying that the early BYRA years were the happiest years of his sailing life.

By 1968, racing was being conducted regularly by BYRA, Drummoyne, Port Hacking, Lake Macquarie and Burrendong Sailing Clubs. All the while the Class was gaining popularity in other states, particularly Victoria who started their own branch of the Association in late 1966 and ended up boasting a larger fleet than NSW.

TOWARDS THE FUTURE

From those early days onwards and due to the enthusiasm and commitment of so many members, including, from my young memories Bill Gamble and Sid Wood who also built several boats, one named "Sweet Sixteen", the Association flourished and in the early 1980s, two thousand sail numbers were allocated to America through the Hartley TS 16 American Association. With TS 16s then sailing in many other parts of the world including South Africa, Denmark and New Guinea, its appeal proved to be truly world wide.

It is now 2010 and the Australian TS 16 fleet is still the strongest trailer sailer class in the country and new boats are still being built. George once said that at that first meeting on

12 December 1963, “we took the proverbial tiger by the tail – and got away with it!” As a seven year old (now 54!!) who learnt about boats and sailing on the TS 16 and saw all this history take place through the eyes of a young boy, I think they got away with it too!

Much research has taken place and many phone calls and emails exchanged over several years to come to this point. Based on the information and recollections available to me, this story is as accurate as I can make it however, if any person feels that they have been left out or misquoted in any way – my sincere apologies. The Association owes a huge debt of thanks to David Boulton without whose efforts this thing would never have gotten off the ground. My thanks also to Barrie Heath, John Gordon and Brian Crawley for their patience and answers to my questions. Other people I’m sure will continue to record more recent details of a great and continuing chapter of Australian sailing.

Finally, thanks to my friend Tony Griffin, who like me grew up with the TS 16 phenomenon and also put up with endless phone calls and questions but believed as I did that this was a story too good not to be told.

Let the sailing continue!

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No 3 “Saoirse” with George Hearne at the helm accompanied by owner/builder Ron Dunphy and Bob Martin who built No 5 “Barren Joey”.



George racing No 1 "Viking" in the early days. Note the author sitting there in his lifejacket!