

NEWS STORY FOR THE ROYAL MOTOR YACHT CLUB

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THE YACHT THAT NEVER WAS

This is the story of the steam yacht *Idaho*, its owner, Theodore Bernard André and has its origins in the first decade of the 20th. Century. The Motor Yacht Club came into being in 1905, initiated by a group of members of the Automobile Club, who represented as an eclectic a group of talents and sporting interests as one might imagine, drawn from the emerging worlds of automobile and marine engineers, aviators, inventors, financiers and yacht designers. The one thing that united them was the quest for speed on land, in the air and latterly, on the water and central to this surge in innovation was the development of the internal combustion engine.

Harmsworth Sets the Bar.

Two years before the Club's formation, newspaper owner and member of the Automobile Club, Sir Alfred Harmsworth, had deployed his considerable wealth to commission and - via his newspaper empire to promote - a new trophy to be contested by the latest and most advanced breed of motorboats. It was a competition for nations not individuals, each boat designed and built in the challenging country. Latterly re-titled the British International Harmsworth Trophy, it was the first annually awarded international prize for motorboat racing. Forever in the custody of the by now renamed *Royal Motor Yacht Club* and won over the years by Argentina, Australia, Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Monaco, Norway, the UK and USA, it became the holy grail for sportsmen and women from across the world and provided a tangible link with at least one of the Club's founding fathers; the gentleman sportsman, cycling enthusiast, motor dealer, racing driver and record breaker, Selwyn Edge.

A chance meeting some years earlier had brought Edge together with Scottish engineer, Montague Napier, who aside from designing and building motorboats and the engines to power them, devoted his talents to improving Edge's Clemént-Panhard car, before building his own Napier car which Edge drove with distinction in international competition. With his interest turning to the water, the first contest for the Harmsworth Trophy took place on 12 July 1903 in Cork Harbour and Edge had entered his 40 foot, steel hulled Napier launch with its 75hp Napier motor, which was crewed to victory by the fearsomely talented Dorothy Levitt and Campbell Muir, at a sprightly 16.97 knots. Publicised by his competitive success on land and sea, Edge established a thriving business importing and selling De Dion-Bouton, Gladiator and Panhard cars.

The Man.

Enter the entrepreneur, car buff and unsung hero of this story, Theodore Bernard André. By 1902 the importer of Marlborough cars built in France by Malicet & Blin, he entered into partnership with J.G.Parry-Thomas, the renowned engineer and land speed record holder. Together they developed the Marlborough-Thomas light car and finally, André launched his own V6 two-seater sports car, which he raced at Brooklands and elsewhere. Thus John Douglas-Scott-Montagu, Edge, Montague Napier, Lionel de Rothschild, other founders of the RM, together with Harmsworth and

André found themselves in the emerging world of car and boat racing, at the time of its most potent development.

Despite fluctuating economic and political fortunes across Europe, in the first three decades of the century, the Royal Motor had continued to offer motorboat racing within the confines of Poole Harbour and until 1939, for larger motor yachts the Club offered a series of long-distance races designated London-Cowes but including more extended cross Channel courses. For reasons still shrouded in mystery, André, whose business empire was by the 1920s, successfully servicing his peers in the motoring fraternity founded on the development and application of the internal combustion engine, acquired the 80 foot yacht *Idaho* powered perversely by a triple expansion steam turbine engine. This he entered and drove to victory in the 1936 edition of what was designated the London-Poole race, but which actually started at Rochester and ended in Cowes. André, whose only previous vessel had been the 40 metre two-masted auxiliary schooner *Heartsease*, piloted *Idaho* over the 200 nautical mile course at a modest average of 10.9 knots.

Having sold the vessel in 1938, André and this exploit would have remained uncelebrated and unsung, but in 2020, an entry on the Ebay auction site described 'a gold medal awarded to the winner of the 1936 London-Poole motorboat race'. This piqued the interest of RM member, John Walker, who successfully bid for the hallmarked medal in its blue leather case. In retrospect, that was the easy bit, and it prompted a frustrating two-year research project to uncover the provenance of the vessel and its owner, and this is where the story began to take on a surreal twist.

From New York to Lerwick.

Idaho was commissioned in 1908 by Caleb Gaskell Evans, a man of independent means and a member of the New York Yacht Club. Built by Camper & Nicholsons in Gosport of teak on rock elm and oak with Yard Number 189, she launched on 14 May 1910 and at around 80 feet LOA and 12 feet in the beam, came in at a GRT of 43 tons and 58 tons TM. How much enjoyment Evans had from her is unknown, but soon after the outbreak of the First World War, on 12 April 1915 she was requisitioned as a 'Hired Yacht' by MOD Navy and under Pendant No. 068, retrofitted with a single 1-pounder armament. She served throughout the war, first as a special service vessel and later as a tug, operating as a depot ship for trawlers and drifters out of Milford Haven. Released by the Navy in February 1919, *Idaho* apparently never reverted to her original private ownership, having been almost immediately deployed into service with Mersey Docks & Harbour Board between 1919-1935, but as what and why remains a mystery.

Thereafter and once again in private hands, her owners were an equally eclectic collection. Richard Verney Wrightson, in the aviation sales and service business, was only 24 years of age when he acquired her in 1935, had her re-registered in Cowes and sold her the following year to André who owned her for less than two years. Next came London bullion dealer Owen Elkin Mocatta who had the steam turbine replaced with a more serviceable 6-cylinder Gardner diesel, but he had hardly used her before the outbreak of World War II. Once again the Navy requisitioned her and she saw service between Newhaven and Cliff Fort in the Thames Estuary and when she was

discharged in 1947, came into the possession of one of Scotland's most notable and public-spirited eccentrics and socialist free-thinkers, Capt. John 'Jock' Hay.

Hay had the bright idea of using her to run charter cruises between Scotland and Scandinavia and having had her refitted at the Toughs yard on the Thames at Teddington, set out with some chums to take her north. In retrospect this sounds like the passage from hell, requiring rescue on two occasions on her passage up the east coast. Arriving in Shetland where the family had a land holding, Hay renamed her *Hjaltlander*, the old Norse name for Shetlanders, and changed her port of registry from Cowes to Lerwick. By 1952 any thoughts of commercial charter had been consigned to history and he brought her south to Aberdeen, to be closer to his family home of Dalgatie Castle. In the following year, Hay sold the much travelled but possibly unloved vessel to Myles Stoney of County Cavan in Ireland. Here the trail goes cold, until in its 1956 edition, Lloyd's Register of Yachts records *Hjaltlander* nee *Idaho* as 'abandoned', but not why or where.

Almost 86 years to the day after his famous victory, a framed history of the yacht and Theodore Bernard André, together with his winner's medal, was presented to the Royal Motor Yacht Club (see below) but one piece of the jigsaw remains missing.

One might imagine that with this well-found provenance, it would have been a simple matter to have sourced an image of the vessel, but despite an assiduous search there is neither photograph, painting nor drawing to be found in any public record or archive. Frustratingly, we know who and what won the Royal Motor Yacht Club's 1936 London-Cowes motorboat race, but without her image. *Idaho* is truly the yacht that never was.



John Walker (left) presents the certificate to Commodore, Graham Turner