



An aerial photograph of three historic sailing ships, likely clipper ships, on a dark blue body of water. The ships are viewed from above, showing their complex rigging, masts, and wooden decks. The water's surface is textured with small whitecaps. The ships are arranged diagonally across the frame, with the closest one in the foreground and two others further back.

# *A family* **affair**

When the captain and owner of *Mariette* decided to find another restoration project, they found *Kelpie*. She was in a decrepit state, but they persevered and launched her in time for this year's Pendennis Cup. What a story...

STORY **NIGEL SHARP** PHOTOGRAPHS **EMILY HARRIS**



ABOVE AND MAIN: NIGEL SHARP



*Above, top to bottom: bronze anchor windlass; traditional ship's wheel; rigging gear attached to the crane iron at the end of the bowsprit. Right: with all seven sails up, she sports a colossal rig. Previous page: Kelpie (top) anchored next to Mariette*



In February 2012 Charlie Wroe flew into San Francisco to look at a boat that was for sale, a Q-Class called *Robyn*. Charlie has been the captain of the Herreshoff schooner *Mariette of 1915* since early 2005 and the Californian visit came about following a conversation between captain and owner, in which they agreed to “embark on an exciting new project” and look for a smaller yacht that could be “restored to pristine condition”.

*Robyn* turned out to be unsuitable – she was in very poor condition and she was caught up in some legal wranglings – but while he was in San Francisco, Charlie decided to see what else was available. He had a look at nine more boats, the first of which was a schooner called *Kelpie*. “I guess you could call it love at first sight,” said Charlie, and the other eight boats he looked at only seemed to confirm that *Kelpie* was the one. A survey showed that the hull was sound, and the deal was done.

*Kelpie* was designed by Francis Sweisguth who was best known for the 1910 International Star, the Olympic-class keelboat. She was built at Harvey Gamage’s shipyard in Maine for New York stockbroker Archibald



McLaren in 1928 (not to be confused with the 1903 Mylne gaff cutter also called *Kelpie*), and christened *Hopeful*. She was renamed *Kelpie* in 1934, by which time her original gaff-schooner rig had been altered: she now had a bermudan mainsail, and subsequent modifications to make her easier to sail with a smaller crew would include the addition of a bumkin in the 1960s to provide a permanent backstay for the mainmast, and conversion to a staysail schooner sometime in the 1980s.

During the war she served as a submarine patrol vessel with the US Coast Guard's Coastal Picket Patrol off the coast of Maine and it is said that she never missed a day's service. She was in poor condition when she was de-requisitioned and over the next few years she wasn't very well looked after. To make matters worse, her stern was seriously damaged when a hurricane destroyed the shed in which she was stored. She was almost cut up for scrap, but was saved after the stern was repaired.

Up until 1950 *Kelpie* had around eight different owners, but she was then purchased by George Minney whose family kept her for almost 30 years. From her base at Newport Beach the Minneys sailed her around the

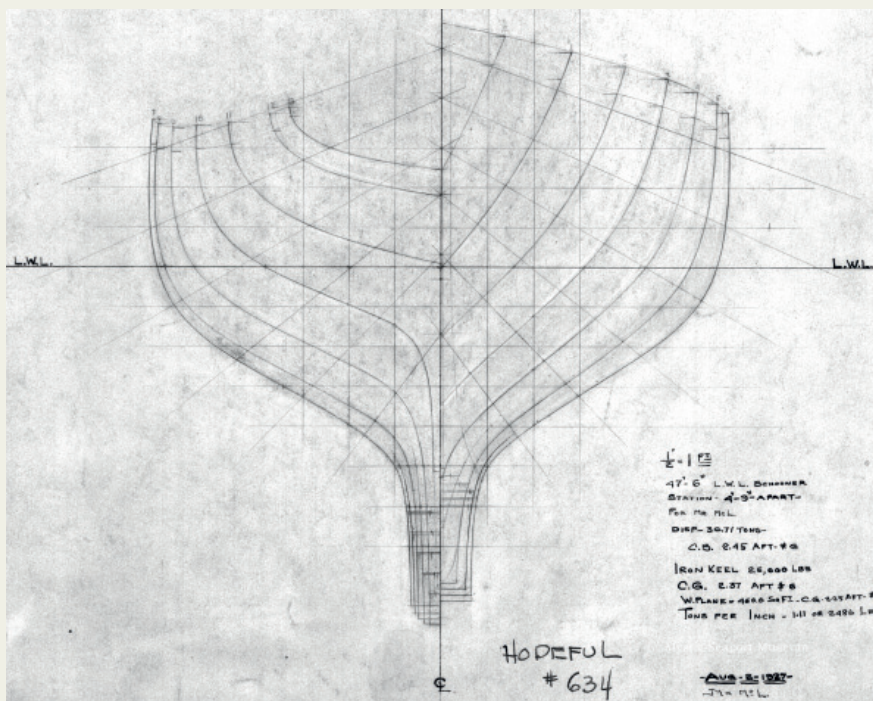
Pacific, as far as Tahiti on at least one occasion. She also did some charter work at this time and Paul Newman and Liz Taylor were among her celebrity guests.

From the mid 80s, after changing hands a couple more times, she was keenly raced for many years. This new racing career was interrupted for a year or so when, in 1989, her USCG annual inspection revealed that she needed much work. After her hull was virtually rebuilt, her racing career resumed and, indeed, flourished – particularly offshore. She regularly competed against other schooners such as the John Alden-designed *Dauntless* and William Fife III's *Astor*, but it was *Kelpie* that earned the nickname “the fastest schooner in the west”. The Newport to Ensenada Yacht Race was her favourite – she competed in it 23 times, won several trophies and, in 2000, broke a 54-year-old record under the command of Mike O'Connor, her skipper for 15 years.

Four years later, a man with a similar but considerably more famous name – Dennis Conner – chartered her for the same race, but he didn't do particularly well. However, he was obviously developing an affection for

**Above: with her twin-mast schooner rig and varnished teak skylights with bronze bars, *Kelpie* of Falmouth strikes a distinctive shape on the water.**





## KELPIE

DESIGNER  
**Francis Sweiguth**

YEAR  
**1928**

LWL  
**75ft (22.9m)**

BEAM  
**16ft 6in (5.1m)**

DRAUGHT  
**9ft 6in (2.9m)**

DISPLACEMENT  
**74,000lb  
(37 tons)**



*Clockwise from top:* her original line drawings – at the time she was christened *Hopeful*; draped in bunting for her launch day; displaying her earlier rig, complete with just one gaff sail

classic wooden boats as the restoration of his Q-Class *Cotton Blossom II* (CB201) was nearing completion at that time. *Kelpie*'s last American owner was John Durra, who bought her in 2007.

Falmouth is effectively *Mariette*'s home port – as much as a boat like that ever has one – and Charlie has a home there, and it made sense for *Kelpie* to be restored there.

In July 2012, after the replacement of two hull planks and a “thorough going over”, delivery skipper Trevor Murphy and a crew of six set off from San Francisco on the 8,500-mile voyage. For various reasons – not because it was the Caribbean hurricane season – it took longer than expected, but eventually *Kelpie* arrived in Falmouth on 11 November, having experienced a number of minor problems, but no major ones, along the way.

It wasn't until then that the owner first saw her. “I must confess,” he said later, “that when Charlie came to me and explained he had seen a 1928 sailing yacht in San Francisco Bay in a derelict state, and said his plan was to sail her halfway around the world to restore her, I was a bit sceptical. But I have full confidence in Charlie as far as sailing yachts are concerned.”

Soon after she arrived in Falmouth, *Kelpie* was taken to Gweek where her restoration began – the full story of which will be detailed in a later issue.

Initially, *Kelpie*'s future role “wasn't set in stone”, as Charlie put it. “We had considered keeping her as a cruising boat, but early last year we decided to fit her out for racing as well.”

*Mariette* had committed to the 2014 Pendennis Cup regatta – she had competed in the previous three and won the last one in 2012 – and so it seemed to make sense that *Kelpie* should make her European racing debut in the same event. After that decision was made last autumn, the pressure was on to launch her on the equinoctial Spring tides at the end of March. She made it, however, and was renamed *Kelpie of Falmouth*.

She was then moved to Falmouth's Port Pendennis Marina, but there was still much to do, and it was just nine days before the Pendennis Cup that the rig was stepped – replicating the original, but all new apart from the rigging screws. However, *Kelpie*'s new captain, Milos Brnjervarac, somehow managed to get her out for sailing trials, and on the day of the first race she was ready.



NIGEL SHARP

NIGEL SHARP

It had already been decided that the owner would helm *Mariette* and that all of the team's efforts would go into the bigger boat, partly because she was defending her title, but also because *Kelpie* was, it could be said, still undergoing sea trials. *Kelpie* would be steered by Phil Badger – “a great sailor who has been sailing for years on *Mariette*,” said Charlie – and her crew would include half a dozen or so people who had made significant contributions to her restoration.

For the first time the Pendennis Cup was governed by the International Super Yacht Rule, which allows for each boat to be allocated a different handicap number before each race, according to the day's conditions and the course configuration. For safety reasons, the six boats in the Pendennis Division had staggered starts, at three-minute intervals, with the corrected time results taking that into account, and *Kelpie* was first off each day.

#### SEVEN SAILS FOR SEVEN SEAS

I sailed aboard *Kelpie* in the third race when a short postponement allowed a light sea breeze to develop. Our starting rig consisted of seven sails: the main,

topsail, foresail (which I would have called the foremain until I was corrected by Charlie), the MTS (or main topsail staysail, with a halyard on each mast), the staysail, jib and jib top. At the end of the first two legs – essentially one long beat on which all the other boats passed us apart from the considerably larger three-masted schooner *Adix* – we bore away and the real action began. We hoisted the ballooner, an asymmetric kite set on the foremast, dropped the jib top and down came the MTS, which was replaced by the larger four-sided fisherman, sheeted to the aft end of the main boom. Initially, *Adix* threatened to sail through our lee, but soon after her asymmetric kite was hoisted and two of her upwind headsails were dropped, the kite's tack strop let go and it had to come down. As we approached the next mark we reverted to our original upwind rig ready for the next leg, a close fetch on which *Adix* caught us. At the end of that we bore away again, onto a broader reach than the previous one so it was the massive gollywobbler that replaced the MTS. We then dropped and stowed the foresail as it is completely ineffective with the gollywobbler up, and we had just

*Clockwise from top: elegant swept deck with varnished centreline hatches – her new timber was sourced from Stones, Salcombe; crewman up the rig adjusting the MTS sheet lead; Adix coming past Kelpie; changing sails*





FAR LEFT AND LEFT: NIGEL SHARP

**Above, left to right:** Chesterfield-style seating in the saloon; owner's cabin from the starboard aft corner looking forward and to port, and into the owner's heads.

**Below:** up on the crosstrees for a perfect view of the Red Arrows at this year's Pendennis Cup

heard that the race would be shortened at the end of that leg. *Kelpie's* result was identical to those of the first two races: last to finish, but fifth on corrected time, sandwiched between the two other schooners – *Mariette* and *Adix*.

On the final day it looked as if there might not be a race at all. Throughout the morning there was hardly a breath of wind and a scheduled Red Arrows display presented an immovable time restraint in the afternoon. But just 10 minutes before the race officer's self-imposed deadline for making a final decision, a line of breeze appeared across the bay, and the starting procedure began. In the meantime, *Kelpie's* owner had been taken by RIB from his bigger schooner to his newer one and he decided to race her for the very first time. It wasn't a very long race – barely an hour for most of the competing boats – and this allowed *Kelpie* to hold off both the other schooners and cross the finishing line in fourth place. More relevant, however, is that she was elevated to second on corrected time, beaten only by the Hoek ketch *Velacarina*, which secured the overall Pendennis Cup. This final result helped *Kelpie* to fourth place in the series, a single point ahead of her big sister.

**“She sails very well and is particularly pleasant to helm”**

As soon as the racing finished, all the competing boats motored towards Falmouth Beach, and after *Mariette* dropped her anchor *Kelpie* went alongside her. Charlie reported later that the mood on board the two boats was particularly high-spirited.

Two days later, work continued on *Kelpie*. There was still much to do, particularly with regard to the interior fit-out, and she would stay in Falmouth for another couple of weeks. The subsequent plan was to take her to the Mediterranean where the racing emphasis would be shifted on to her for the late summer regattas. The two boats will be together, however, with *Mariette* operating as a “mothership” providing accommodation for the owner and his guests – although Charlie expects that the owner might spend the occasional night on *Kelpie* – and hospitality for the crew. The owner is clearly excited by this prospect. “*Kelpie* is a beautiful yacht with a lovely classic sail plan,” he said. “She sails extremely well and is particularly pleasant to helm. I am very much looking forward to racing her in the Mediterranean this summer.”

In 2015 the emphasis will change back to *Mariette* as it will be her centenary year, and there are great plans to celebrate it. After a winter in the Caribbean and a short foray into the Pacific – she hasn't been there since 1961 – she will compete in the Transatlantic Race from Newport to the Lizard, and then call into Falmouth for a big birthday party at Pendennis Castle, which her owner has hired for the occasion. *Kelpie* will, of course, be waiting in Falmouth. “*Mariette* is such a fine old lady and she needs companionship,” Charlie said.

The owner has hinted at taking on another project at some point in the future, but Charlie wouldn't be drawn on that. “For the moment we just want to concentrate on getting *Kelpie* going as fast as possible and having as much fun out of her as possible, and then we'll see what happens,” he said.



**Don't miss the October issue (on sale 12 September) in which we will begin a series looking in detail at the stages of restoration work on *Kelpie of Falmouth***



PENDENNIS