

OBITUARIES & APPRECIATIONS

Mary Falk, Rear Commodore 1989–1993

Mary, an OCC member since 1983, died on 19th September from cancer of the oesophagus, aged 74. Her remarkable life included many achievements both on and off the water. Over 28 years she competed in all the UK's major short-handed, long-distance races, including three OSTARs, three AZABs, one Fastnet, six Round Britain and Ireland Races and numerous Petit Bateau (now renamed the Solo Offshore Racing Club) events.

Mary enjoyed a happy childhood in Rugby, where her father taught at the famous boys' school. At 13 she went to St Mary's Calne, a girls' boarding school where she did well, eventually becoming head girl. Many years later she served as a governor at the school. After leaving school, and before going up to Newnham College, Cambridge to read classics, she spent six months in Italy learning Italian. At Cambridge she kept up her swimming and lacrosse, winning half blues at both.

Mary then embarked on a career in law, becoming a trainee with Farrer & Co in Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, where she later became an assistant solicitor and then a partner, eventually retiring in 2003. Farrer's was well known for its work for the Royal Family and other distinguished clients, and was a very traditional firm, somewhat male-dominated – she was one of the first women to be made a partner. To celebrate passing her law exams Mary booked an extended holiday in the Alps to learn to ski. Alas she broke her leg within days. She was told that she would never be able to ski again, but how wrong they were!

It was at Farrer's that she was first introduced to sailing, when a colleague took her out in a clinker dinghy on the Blackwater Estuary. By the time she bought her first dinghy in 1977 she had the zeal of a convert – a passion which never left her. She began racing with Philippe Hamon, crewing for him in the 1981 Fastnet aboard his Sigma 33, *Charlotte Pico*, her first taste of long-distance racing. Fortunately Farrer & Co was always supportive of her sailing ventures.

The following year Mary co-skipped her first Round Britain and Ireland race, sailing with OCC member Fiona Wylie aboard *Wild Rival*. It wasn't long before she bought her own boat, *Quixote*, a UFO 34, which she kept in Lymington, her home port for most of her life. She followed this up by competing in the 1983 Azores and Back Race two-handed with Penny Benvoison, the first leg of which became her OCC qualifying passage. Three years later she sailed in the Two-handed Transatlantic Race (aka Two-Star) with Kitty Hampton, now Van Hagen, in the 40ft *Ntombifuti*, achieving second in class.

In 1987 Mary entered her first singlehanded race, the 1987 AZAB (a race which has both single and double-handed classes), followed by the 1988 Observer Singlehanded Transatlantic Race (OSTAR) in which she came 7th in class. A very focused and competitive person, while sailing in the 1989 Round Britain and Ireland race with Jenny Bennett (née Pocock) Mary decided that she wanted to win her class in the next OSTAR.

For this she needed a new boat so went to Jenny's father, designer Mike Pocock (later to become OCC Commodore), with a simple brief – she wanted a yacht to beat all



Mary at QII's chart table in her rally car seat

comes in the 35ft class. The yacht was to have water ballast, together with a fractional rig and roller headsail. The interior was designed around Mary's slight, 5ft 4in frame, with a full-sized chart table sited centrally just aft of the mast. This was complemented by a swivelling and reclining rally car-style seat with, according to *The First Fifty*

Years, 'a full seat harness with which Mary tethers the boat to her person. She then drives it like the rally car for which the seat and harness were designed.'

Construction started in March 1990 and by August the distinctive red and white QII was afloat. By way of tuning-up, Mary sailed her in the 1991 AZAB. The 1992 OSTAR followed, in which Mary came second in her class and gained the nickname 'the fastest woman across the Atlantic'. She received the OCC Award for that year in recognition of her many short-handed racing successes, though many may also have seen it as being partly for her stance as a trail-blazer, keen to show that a woman could sail competitively as well as having a demanding career.

The 1993 Round Britain and Ireland Race, again sailed with Jenny Bennett, saw them placed first in class, and in 1995 QII continued her winning streak with Mary and Jenny claiming the AZAB record for the fastest outward leg for a water-ballasted monohull, covering the 1180 miles from Falmouth to Ponta Delgada in 6 days, 16 hours and 35 minutes. But it was in the 1996 OSTAR that QII showed her real pedigree, winning her class by crossing

QII pictured against the Old Head of Kinsale during the 2007 Petit Bateau Race. Photo Paul Beggs





Mary at home on her 70th birthday

the Atlantic in 19 days, 22 hours and 57 minutes – a record for a 35ft yacht which remains unbroken to this day. The Royal Cruising Club recognised the feat by awarding her their coveted Medal for Seamanship. A further Round Britain and Ireland Race followed in 1997.

As well as being an outstanding sailor herself, Mary was a strong supporter of others. She was one of the founder trustees of the Pioneer Sailing Trust which operates from Brightlingsea in Essex and encourages young people, especially those with disadvantages, to sail. During the OCC's 'troubles' in 1988 – see Chapter XII of *The First Fifty Years* – she provided invaluable support to Commodore Mary Barton, both morally and legally, and in 1998 was elected Rear Commodore despite an already busy schedule.

In 2006, soon after completing seven months of treatment for breast cancer, she took part in the Petit Bateau solo race, a series of testing passage races taking in both sides of the English Channel. Her mission was to raise money for The Institute for Cancer Research and to highlight that

there is life after cancer. She finished second in her class and raised over £40,000 for the ICR, adding another £20,000 the following year. She was forced to retire from the 2008 Petit Bateau following gear failure, while a leg broken in a skiing accident thwarted entry to the 2009 event. 2010 saw her continue the fundraising challenge, however, competing with OCC member Jerry Freeman aboard *QII* in her sixth Round Britain and Ireland Race – during which they had to row through a windless stretch on the final leg to avoid being set onto the rocks by the tide. This was her last competitive race, by which time she had raised over £100,000 for The Institute for Cancer Research.

When the passage of years eventually made serious ocean racing difficult Mary returned to skiing, with similar enthusiasm. She skied in France, preferably for the whole season from early December to April. Famous for going out in all weather and making only minimal stops for food and drink, she became a very good skier on and off piste. She broke her leg three more times, making four breaks in all.

In retirement she enjoyed living in her house in the centre of Lymington, a property which included, of course, a small gym in the garden. For many years she was to be seen

in and around Lymington bicycling energetically, and to get fit for a trek in Nepal at age 70 she bicycled with others from Land's End to John O'Groats.

Mary was liked and admired by all who knew her and, though no longer active in our Club's daily life, will be remembered with affection and possibly a little awe by many older members. Her passing is a great loss to the sailing world as a whole.

Andrew Falk and others



William Blunt White

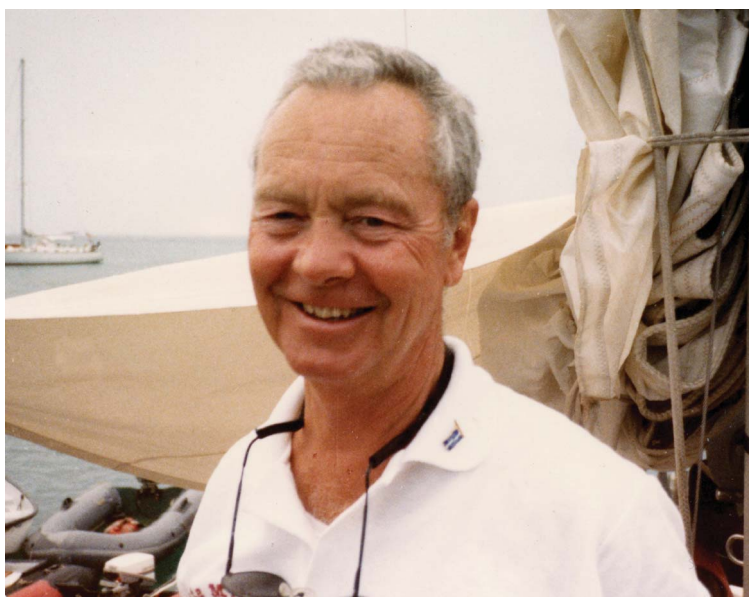
On 16th September 2020 William Blunt White (Bill) sailed over the horizon aged 93. He cast off peacefully from his home in Stonington, Connecticut with his son and daughter by his side. Bill was one of the OCC's most senior members. He joined in 1962, having qualified for membership in 1957 during a transatlantic race from Newport, Rhode Island to Santander, Spain aboard *White Mist*, his father's 46ft Nevins-built S&S yawl.

Bill's significant sailing achievements included seven Newport to Bermuda Races between 1962 and 1984, winning Class C in 1978 with *Snow White*, a Tartan 41. In 1985, while Commodore of the Cruising Club of America, he made his second Atlantic crossing, sailing *White Mist II* from Stonington to Spain in a joint Cruising Club of America / OCC Azores rally that drew boats from both sides of the Atlantic. His voyage home from Spain was via Gran Canaria and the Bahamas, and then north to Stonington. In 1987 he sailed *White Mist II* from Stonington to Newfoundland and explored its coves and bays.

Bill enjoyed the teamwork of organised sailing and volunteered his time and energy, serving as Commodore of the Off Soundings Club (a Long Island Sound sailing club established in 1933) in 1975/76 and eventually as Commodore of the Cruising Club of America in 1985/86. He was also a senior member of the Royal Ocean Racing Club, which he joined in 1965, and of The New York Yacht Club, in which he was member number 50.

Bill learned to sail from his father, G W Blunt White, a noted sailor in the early era

***Bill White, then
Commodore of the
Cruising Club
of America, in
the Azores during
the CCA / OCC
rally in 1985***





Bill, aged 89, attending his granddaughter's wedding in 2015

of ocean racing. Over his lifetime Bill owned five sailboats and one motorboat. His first was *White Mist*, his father's 46ft yawl, which he inherited at the age of 36 following Blunt's untimely passing in 1962, aged 66. A day out from Nassau at the conclusion of a transatlantic crossing aboard *Cyane*, a 46ft S&S sloop, Blunt had suffered a heart attack, dying in a Nassau hospital. Bill owned *White Mist* only briefly, but sailed her in the 1962 Newport Bermuda Race.

Bill's next boat, in 1968, was as one of eight partners in *The Hawk*, a 37ft William Tripp design and one of the early One Tonners. Bill was aboard *The Hawk* when she competed in the International One Ton Cup series of

races held in 1968 and 1969 off Heligoland in the North Sea. His third boat, bought in 1973, was *Snow White*, a Tartan 41 aboard which he won Class C in the 1978 Newport Bermuda Race. His fourth boat, his favourite, was *White Mist II*, a S&S-designed Swan 47 in which he had his greatest adventures, sailing transatlantic twice and cruising Newfoundland. His next boat – *Green Pastures*, a Wilbur 34 – was powered by twin diesels, her design based on a Maine lobster boat. Aboard *Green Pastures*, Bill and his wife Shelley enjoyed coastal cruises. By then in his eighties, Bill's last boat was *Summer White*, an Alerion 28. He appreciated her club-footed jib and easy manners, and day-sailed her easily.

Bill was born in 1926, the son of G W Blunt and Marion (Gildersleeve) White of Mystic, Connecticut. He grew up in Mystic, Connecticut, graduated from Yale University in the class of 1949 and served in the US Navy aboard the diesel submarine USS *Becuna* in 1951. In 1952 he married Shelley Bindloss of Stonington, the next town over. They were happily married for 64 years and had many adventures together, until Shelley predeceased him in 2016. They raised their family in Stonington and built a successful business there, retired to Boca Grande, Florida, and then in their later years returned to Stonington where they enjoyed their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Bill also contributed his skills as a Board Member at the Washington Trust Bank and as a Trustee of Connecticut's Mystic Seaport Museum. His interest in philanthropy led him to be one of the early contributors to, and a Trustee of, the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut.

Up until the last five months of life Bill's health was good and his mind sharp, but congestive heart failure finally caught up with him. His last months were lived in the comfort of his home with a wonderful view of Stonington harbour and the ocean beyond.

Blunt White

Glenn Wakefield

On 6th September 2020, one month after his 70th birthday, Glenn left his home port of Victoria, British Columbia to sail solo down to Cape Horn in his beloved Sparkman and Stephens-designed Comanche 42, *West Wind II*. Nine days later, 500 miles west-northwest of San Francisco, Glenn suffered a stroke. Before losing consciousness he was able to get one message to his wife MaryLou, saying that he needed help. The US Coast Guard took charge and asked a nearby eastbound container ship, *Colombo Express*, to take Glenn aboard. In rough seas, a skilled small boat crew got the unconscious Glenn off *West Wind II* and aboard the *Colombo Express*, which then continued towards the coast. A helicopter met the ship and took Glenn to a medical facility, an operation which required mid-air refuelling from three-fixed wing aircraft to extend the helicopter's range. Two weeks later Glenn was medevacked home to Victoria, where he passed away peacefully on 5th October.

Glenn's lifelong dream started when he was a young boy sitting on the beach, looking out to sea and imagining himself one day sailing a tiny boat on a big ocean. He grew up reading of the adventures of Captain Cook, Sir Francis Chichester and Sir Alec Rose. Throughout his life he read and reread hundreds of books about sailing, particularly those of the singlehanders with whom he most closely identified – John Guzzwell, Robin Knox-Johnston and Dee Caffari.

A born adventurer, at the age of 19 Glenn travelled around the world, making friends everywhere he went. He kept in touch with many of them throughout his life, recently celebrating a 50 year reunion. He worked as a logger, a fisherman, a surveyor and a carpenter, and built a reputation in Victoria for his skill in commercial and residential construction and heritage restoration.

Glenn aboard Sannu II in 1997



***Glenn aboard West Wind II
in September 2013***

Glenn's love for his family was well known. He met MaryLou in 1979 and theirs was a storybook love affair. Their two beautiful daughters, Claire and Nicola, were his pride and joy.

In 1997 Glenn sailed his 26ft *Haida Sannu II* singlehanded from Victoria, BC to the Marquesas Islands, covering 5000 miles in 42 days, the passage he cited as his qualifying voyage when joining the OCC in 2008. MaryLou and their two daughters, aged

9 and 11, joined him in the Marquesas to sail across the South Pacific through French Polynesia, the Cook Islands, Niue and Tonga. Glenn then singlehanded the 18-day leg from Tonga to New Zealand, dealing with a cyclone along the way, after which the family travelled around Australia and South Africa.

In September 2007 Glenn set off on his first attempt at a solo, non-stop westabout circumnavigation from Victoria on his 40ft Cheoy Lee *Kim Chow*. Few people have made such a voyage. Glenn sailed south of New Zealand and Australia but on 24th April 2008, after 220 days at sea and about a thousand miles off the coast of Argentina in the Southern Ocean, he was forced to abandon his disabled vessel after a series of relentless storms rolled his boat, causing serious damage and injuring him. Glenn was rescued by the Argentinean Navy, but *Kim Chow* was lost.

In late 2010 Glenn bought a 50-year-old S&S designed Comanche 42, which he trucked across the US to Victoria. After an extensive two-year refit/rebuild, most of which he did himself, *West Wind II* was ready to go. On 2nd September 2013 Glenn set off again to make a non-stop westabout solo circumnavigation south of the Great Capes. After again sailing south of New Zealand and Australia, Glenn was well out into the Indian Ocean when a routine inspection found that rigging wire was unravelling on two shrouds. With great reluctance he realised that he could not expect to sail

safely against the west winds to round Cape Horn and would have to sail back to Fremantle, Western Australia to make repairs. By then it was too late in the season to attempt the passage around Cape Horn, so



***Glenn aboard Kim Chow
in September 2007 before
departing on his first solo
circumnavigation***

*Departure Day,
West Wind II,
6th September 2020*

he sailed back to Victoria eastabout with stops in New Zealand, the Cook Islands and Hawaii. In 2014 Glenn was awarded the OCC Endurance Award in recognition of his perseverance over the previous eight years.

Over his lifetime Glenn logged close to 55,000 ocean miles and made three attempts to complete a singlehanded non-stop circumnavigation his way – westabout. While many couldn't understand what could drive him to undertake something they viewed as nigh on impossible, those closest to him understood that it was enough that it mattered to him and they supported his dream every step of the way.

His last voyage would have taken him eastabout around Cape Horn to 48°10'S 51°57'W – near the Falkland Islands and the precise location where he had lost *Kim Chow* and been rescued in 2008. After that, he planned to stop in Argentina to meet members of the Argentinean Navy who had rescued him, and then head back around

Cape Horn and home to Victoria. Tragically, fate had other plans for Glenn who was taken from us before he could fulfil his dream. However MaryLou intends to publish Glenn's story, to ensure that he has a place among the finest singlehanded sailors of our time.

Fair winds and smooth seas,
Glenn.

MaryLou Wakefield
and Tony Gooch

