

ADMIRAL MARY: A LIFE TO CELEBRATE

(As members will be aware, Admiral and Past Commodore Mary Barton passed away on 1 December 2015, days before her 96th birthday. Three years earlier she had recounted the story of her life to circumnavigator and past member Mrs Pam Moore, to whom we are all indebted for transcribing these recollections and making them available within the Club. Many others also wished to contribute their memories of Mary, and I would like both to thank Erik Vischer for his help in collating these, and to apologise to anyone whose words have been edited or omitted due to pressure of space.)

Mary Barton (née Danby) was born on 8 December 1920 in Rochester, Kent – her father was commander of the Royal Naval barracks at nearby Chatham at the time. Her first sea passage was at the age of two, when her mother, Phyllis, took Mary and her two older brothers to Melbourne on the SS *Diogenes* to join their father (now a captain) who had been posted to Australia. Mary's mother came from an Australian family, so they had relations waiting for them in Sydney. Three years later the family returned to Chatham.

In 1929 Captain Danby was promoted and posted to Malta for two years, and Mary and her mother joined him there, the boys remaining at school in England. This was a happy time for Mary, now aged 8, attending school in Sliema in the mornings, and Brownies, dancing classes or taking walks with her father in the afternoons. The family lived in a house which had been built in the 16th century for the Knights of St John, following their eviction from Rhodes. More than 80 years later Mary still remembered the knights' shields which decorated the dining room walls, and an 11th century chapel in the garden. The house was built on the highest level of Fort St Angelo, overlooking Grand Harbour, with wonderful views from the flat roof. When the Mediterranean Fleet went out, her parents always gave a party so that others could also enjoy the spectacle.

Founder Member **Ian Nicolson** recalls Mary telling him about her school days in Malta: 'She went to a school on the other side of Grand Harbour, and to get there she walked with her nanny down a set of harbour steps to where a Royal Navy picket boat would be waiting for her – her and her nanny and no-one else. This elegant, narrow, teak-planked vessel was a steam-driven picket boat under the command of a midshipman or possibly a junior sub-lieutenant. After school the return journey would be made in the same vessel – again with just the Captain's daughter and her nanny as the only passengers. This was typical of the times. (I remember doing Cowes Week in 1932, and when it was calm these single-screw steam picket boats off the guardship – a battleship, naturally – towed engineless racing boats to the start, often against the tide, and collected them and took them back to the moorings at the end of racing if the breeze was uncertain.)'

The summer holidays of 1929, spent in the company of her brothers, were a happy

time for Mary, but soon after they left Malta to return to school Phyllis Danby went into hospital for a minor operation on her nose. Tragically she died from internal bleeding which went unnoticed during the night, a terrible shock to all the family but a particularly cruel blow to Mary to be left motherless at such a young age.

Penelope Curtis tells of an amazing co-incidence dating back to those days: 'My husband George has been a member of the OCC since the 1950s, but didn't become really involved until long after retirement. Even so, one May we were in our boat in the Beaulieu River with my parents, Admiral Sir John and Lady Martin, so we went to the Gin's Farm meeting. We went to introduce ourselves to Mary, who took one look at my father and said "Hullo John, we last met as children on the beach in Malta!" and when we got home Pa indeed found a photo of them together on the beach. (My grandfather was a Surgeon Admiral in charge of the hospital in Malta.) Years later, during the 2004 British Columbia Rally, Mary told me that her mother had died when she was very young and that my grandmother had taken her under her wing, so I always felt a special bond with her.'

Mary and her father stayed on in Malta until the end of his two-year posting, then returned to the house in Rochester which had been rented out. Mary went back to her old school in Chatham, and lived for the holidays when her brothers returned from boarding school. From the age of 12 she boarded at an Anglican convent school in East Grinstead, completing her formal education with a domestic science course, as so many girls did at that time.

In 1937 Mary went to work as secretary to the matron at Luton Children's Hospital, determined that she should earn her keep despite her father's wish for her to remain at Chatham. She was still there two years later when the Second World War broke out. She then decided to become a nurse, and in 1940 began training at Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital, but had to give it up when poor diet combined with appalling living conditions in her digs led to failing health.

After time spent recuperating with family friends in Somerset, Mary returned to Chatham and joined the WRNS as a typist, working in the Commodore's office. Despite the War she enjoyed being back in Chatham where she had many friends, and enthusiastically joined in any number of sporting activities including tennis, squash and swimming – but as yet no sailing. Being in the naval dockyard, her father's house suffered its fair share of damage, including a bomb landing in the back garden which shattered all the downstairs windows and uprooted a rather fine oak tree.

So life continued until the Commodore's secretary, for whom Mary was working, insisted she apply for a commission in the WRNS. Mary was reluctant at first, but finally agreed to apply. She was accepted on the same course at Greenwich Naval College as her great friend Betty Blunt, and both qualified five weeks later. During this time her father was relieved at Chatham Dockyard and remarried. He and his new bride went to live in Kent, and Mary's life at Chatham came to an end.

Following postings at the submarine base in Gosport and then at nearby Fort Southwick, Mary started to look for a more exciting life and applied for an overseas

Mary in her WRNS uniform, November 1942

posting. In December 1942 she sailed for the Indian Ocean port of Mombasa, Kenya. During her time there she met Peter Edwards, some thirty years her senior, who was to become instrumental in her meeting her future husband, Humphrey Barton, many years later. After six months in Mombasa as a cipher officer, Mary was posted to Trincomalee in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). This second posting proved a happy one for her, working in a team with three other WRNS officers, among whom Mary swiftly gained the reputation of never giving up on a signal which proved difficult to decipher. When not on duty the WRNS had access to sailing dinghies on



Sailing in Trincomalee harbour, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka)

her father remarried, Mary went to work as practice secretary for her brother Anthony, a GP in Lyndhurst, Hampshire. But within a few years she felt in need of a change of scene and returned to Australia, working as a practice secretary in Sydney. She was able to meet up with her mother's family again, and her mother's sister helped her greatly during the three years she was there.

Back home again in 1951 Mary resumed her job with her brother in Lyndhurst, but she needed more fun than Lyndhurst could provide and decided to move to London, where she got a job as secretary to the senior partner of a firm of stockbrokers in the City. But Mary's life wasn't just about work – she had met up with Peter Edwards again, his son having married one of her cousins. Peter kept his small Harrison Butler-designed *Selamat* in Malta, and he and Margaret, his crew, invited Mary to sail with them. This she did, and enjoyed it so much that she spent many other holidays with

Trincomalee harbour. She was also able to meet up from time to time with her two brothers, who were on active service in Malaya and India, and attended her brother Brian's wedding in Bangalore together with their other brother, Anthony.

Mary returned to England in 1945. With the war now over and

them in the Mediterranean. When Margaret was no longer able to sail, Mary stepped in as chief crew.

During the winter of 1968/9 Mary was on board *Selamat* in Malta when Peter introduced her to Humphrey Barton, founder of the OCC. Hum had a reputation for being a tough, forthright skipper and Mary stood in considerable awe of him. On getting to know him better, however, she found him extremely pleasant and amusing company. Later on that year she gave up her job in London and signed on as crew on a yacht sailing from the UK to Grenada.

Martin Holden takes up the story: 'In May 1969 I had just completed my final exams and was keen to do some more ocean sailing. I answered an advertisement in *Yachting World* – 'Yacht Owner seeks crew for voyage from Gibraltar to West Indies and back to UK via Bermuda & Azores' – met owner Tom Southern at Southampton Boat Show, and soon received a ticket to fly to Gibraltar. The yacht was a 51ft Hillyard ketch named *Aguila*, and the other crew were Jenny, who was just going as far as Grenada, and Mary, who was signed up for the whole trip.

We left Gibraltar in early November, and sailed to Madeira to provision before the Atlantic passage. *Aguila* had a versatile rig and was well-equipped for downwind sailing. She trundled along at a sedate 5 knots and we settled into a relaxing and undemanding routine of two hours on watch and six off. Cooking and routine chores were shared between the three crew, whilst Tom looked after the navigation. The crew had afternoon tea in

the cockpit, followed by 'Pooh Time' when we enjoyed reading stories from *Winnie the Pooh*. This was followed by our one alcoholic drink of the day before dinner.



Aguila, the 51ft Hillyard in which Mary made the first of her seven Atlantic crossings

In mid-Atlantic the trades disappeared, the engine gear box seized up, and for ten days we just drifted. It became very hot on deck and stifling below. We reached Grenada around 17 December after more than 30 days at sea, and set about enjoying the Caribbean for Christmas. There were plenty of parties, and we socialised with the crews of other yachts including the legendary solo sailor Hum Barton. Hum was practically blind with cataracts, and it amazed us that he had just crossed the Atlantic on his own. Mary took Hum under her wing and made sure he ate properly, and generally looked after him while we were out of the water over Christmas to scrub and anti-foul. Then we sailed down to Tobago for a week, where we joined the locals in a wild New Year's Eve party at Man O' War Bay.

Returning to Grenada in early January we only intended to stop for a couple of days, but as we were about to leave for our cruise up the islands Mary dropped a bombshell – she was jumping ship to stay in Grenada and marry Hum Barton. The rest, as they say, is history!



Mary (right) aboard Aguila



Hum and Mary were married in Grenada on 15 January 1970. His right eye was operated on four days later, and he always maintained that he was not disappointed when he was able to see his new bride properly for the first time! She recalled how, when describing his many Atlantic crossings, Hum used to say that 'he was sailing around the north Atlantic looking for Mary'. At last he had found her, and together they made another six Atlantic crossings in *Rose Rambler*, a 35ft Laurent Giles-designed Bermudan sloop, before returning to the

Rose Rambler, Hum and Mary's home throughout the 1970s

Mediterranean for some gentler cruising. This brought Mary's tally of Atlantic crossings to seven and Hum's to an amazing 25.

Jilly Baty adds: 'I qualified by sailing with Hum and Robert Wingate on *Rose Rambler's* maiden voyage from Barcelona to Grenada in 1963. A decade or so later I met Hum and Mary again in Antigua – at that stage they were planning to sail back to the Mediterranean and enjoy semi-retirement. Mary was a grand sailing partner to Hum, and later came into her own creating peace and leadership at a time of friction in the centre of the OCC. Her example made the club what it is today.'

Lin and Larry Pardey also met Hum and Mary early on: 'We met Mary during a short visit to Malta in the summer of 1975 as we were headed north from Tunisia toward Italy aboard *Seraffyn*. We were thinking of wintering in Malta, so stopped to check it out. Mary immediately invited us on board and insisted we join the OCC. She and Hum wouldn't let us leave Malta until we did. When we were preparing to leave for Italy, Mary asked us to do her a favour. Among her favourite people in Malta were a couple who ran a local café. The husband was Maltese, but his wife was from Italy and hated the local pasta. Mary gave us the equivalent of £20 and asked that, when we returned, we bring as much Italian pasta as possible. Four months later we returned with two 15 kilo boxes of assorted

Mary and Hum with the Kennett family (Jonathan, Janet and Sue) aboard *Rose Rambler*, Boxing Day 1975. Photo Doug Kennett



*Hum and Mary
aboard Rose
Rambler in Malta
in 1975. Photo
Lin Pardey*



pasta (we'd added a bit to Mary's sum as we liked the food at that café). Result – one of the most raucous, sea-story filled café dinners I can remember, plus immediate Maltese friends to help us settle in for the winter. Yes, Mary had a way of making friends and keeping them.'

Past Commodore **Tony & Jill Vasey** recall: 'We first met Mary and Hum in Malta in 1976. A sailing friend asked if we would like to meet them, and as Tony had been a member of the OCC since 1974 we knew much about them and were delighted that they were wintering in Malta. Tony was the RAF Station Commander at Luqa and we lived there for two years. On one visit to *Rose Rambler* there were four pilots on board, three of them from the First World War – Hum, Batchy Carr, Charlie Nicholson and, of course, Tony.'

Rozanne Barton, married to Mary's step-son **Peter**, describes sailing with Mary: 'Peter and I admired her more than we can say, and have such happy memories of her on the many voyages she made with us – as well as of our first with her and Hum in *Rose Rambler* in the Cyclades in 1978. Mary was never, ever a passenger – she always played a full role on board, and she taught me so much about long voyages and attitudes to them. Before she sailed with us to the Canaries from Plymouth, when we were caught in the 1987 October hurricane, I had only sailed cross-channel as a child with my parents and then with Peter. Nothing seemed to faze Mary, and I will never forget the eye of the hurricane when we rolled around in huge seas but no wind before it came screaming in again from the other direction. Peter is a calm chap, but it was Mary's example and fearlessness that amazed me, and after that I knew I could face anything.'

She had such a wonderful twinkle and sense of humour, and would frequently have us in stitches of laughter – she was such a fun person to be with. She was elegant, poised and yet so down to earth – and so wise. When we sailed with her and Hum in the Greek Islands she would send us off every morning after breakfast to explore, complete with a little potted history of whichever island we were about to visit. Later

she joined us in Antigua, New Zealand, Australia and Thailand, and was a constant inspiration and such a good friend. We walked her up mountains, on occasion fearing we might be expecting too much of her, but she always insisted on pushing herself to the limit. On one occasion we did find her Achilles heel, however, when she froze on a narrow ledge and we had to help and coax her on! She was human after all.'

Sadly Hum and Mary's time together was a relatively short one, as Hum died in 1980. Mary moved ashore to settle in Sway, Hampshire, near the family of her step-daughter Pat Pocock, and soon became deeply involved with numerous village activities, many of which she kept up for decades – including delivering Meals on Wheels until she was well into her 80s. She continued to sail whenever she had the opportunity, however, and became active in the OCC. In 1981 she flew out to Horta – where she and Hum had become great friends with the late 'Peter' Azevedo of the Café Sport, as well as local member João Carlos Fraga – to welcome yachts finishing the OCC Azores Pursuit Race. With her she brought the Barton Cup, recently presented by Peter Barton and Pat Pocock in memory of their father, which all agreed should go to Wendy Moore for her passage from Northern Ireland in a 27-footer. The Cup duly handed over, Mary sailed home with Rachel Hayward aboard *Loiwing*.

A few years later Mary was persuaded to join the Committee, where her good judgement and common sense soon won respect, and when the Club hit difficult times during the winter of 1987/8, culminating in the resignation of Commodore John Foot, fellow Committee members considered Mary to be the only person with a realistic chance of re-uniting it (see Chapter 12 of *The First Fifty Years* for the full story). Despite a counter-challenge she was elected Commodore, a post she filled with distinction for the next six years. Mary always stressed, however, that it was only due to the dedication, hard work and business acumen of the new Secretary, Lt Col Jeremy Knox (ably assisted by his wife, Caroline), and the support of her flag officers and committee, that she was able to put the club back onto an even keel during her time as Commodore. She travelled widely

Mary with João Carlos Fraga, a friend to all OCC members passing through Horta for nearly four decades



at her own expense, visiting Australia as well as making several trips to America, to reassure the Club's overseas members that all was now well. She became particularly good friends with Marji and Den Bancroft, and a regular at their annual parties at Smith's Cove, forerunner of today's Maine Rally.

Michael Taylor-Jones recalls: 'I got to know Mary when I was Treasurer of the Club and she was Commodore. Her low key but effective diplomacy and charm saved the club. Jeremy Knox as Club Secretary re-instated proper membership records and got the subscriptions in, Mary Falk as a solicitor and I as a professional accountant provided some expertise, but it was Mary's unswerving common sense and determination to find solutions, without alienating some of the more disruptive elements in the Club, that enabled us to win through. I treasure her memory.'

Graham and Avril Johnson smile when they remember Mary: 'It was 1991 and we hadn't long taken up our role as Membership Secretaries, but as college lecturers we got nearly two precious months' holiday every summer and we wanted to go sailing. Mary, as Commodore, was unhappy about the office being unmanned for that length of time, and volunteered to drive the 60 mile round-trip every few days to collect the incoming mail and send a postcard explaining the situation to each sender. On one occasion she was met at the front door by a large, frenzied, barking dog which a relative had dumped in our house whilst going shopping. How did Mary react? Well, of course, she found a lead and took Tammy for a walk! Tammy had never accepted the concept of walking to heel and used to pull relentlessly at the lead. Afterwards Mary left us a cryptic message saying someone ought to teach the animal the col regs: 'The towing vessel should never exceed the maximum speed of the vessel under tow'.'

Graham and Avril were not the only ones to take holidays, however. As **Tony and Jill Vasey** recount: 'After Hum died Mary became our regular crew aboard *Shiant*, our Rival 41. In early 1989 she was sailing with us in the Caribbean when we called in at St George's, Grenada – Mary pointed out the church on the hill where she and Hum had been married, and told us that it was their anniversary! Tom and Donna Lemm in *Papillon* were already at anchor so we decided to have a celebratory supper. Just then another boat sailed in, but up-sun so we could not see who it was. When they rounded up it turned out to be Mike and Pat Pocock with *Blackjack*, so they too joined us in our celebrations. An amazing coincidence.'

In addition to being Commodore, Mary was also involved in the day-to-day running of the club, including co-organising the first Annual Dinners to be held outside London. The first, held at the Royal Lymington Yacht Club, was something of an experiment, but was so successful that for a number of years alternating between London and Lymington – later Southampton – became the norm. It was for the first of these that the 'table burgees' were made. Mary had remained friends with Eleanor Hammick (mother

of current Commodore Anne and her sister Liz) from their days as WRNS officers in Trincomalee, and joined them for some hilarious sessions cutting and sewing the flags (the hilarity stemmed from the tall tales told!). The 'giant burgee' which traditionally forms a backdrop for awards presentations was also very familiar to Mary – when the Annual Dinner was held in Lymington she always hosted a drinks party the following morning, during which it proudly flew from a tree outside her home in Sway.

On completing her second term as Commodore in 1994, and following the death of Sir Alec Rose, Mary was elected Admiral – the third in the OCC's history, following Hum and Sir Alec. Tony Vasey, who succeeded her as Commodore, was heard to remark that he'd never before had the chance to kiss an Admiral! Mary was presented with a glass rose bowl engraved with a picture of *Rose Rambler*, and in return presented the Club with a silver christening mug to be awarded for the most ambitious or arduous qualifying

voyage made the previous year.

Over the following years Mary continued to sail whenever and wherever the opportunity offered, including large parts of the Commodore's Millennium Cruise in early 2000, exploring the Baltic with Eve and Michael Bonham Cozens aboard *Gemervescence* later that year, joining Erik Vischer aboard *Cheeky Monkey* in the Azores, and cruising with Mike and Pat Pocock aboard *Blackjack* on many occasions. She also travelled extensively by air, visiting Australia for her brother Brian's 90th birthday. And wherever she went, she made sure to visit local OCC members.

Admiral Mary with Anthea Cornell, Club Secretary from 1998 to 2004 at the Maine Millennium Rally



John Maddox takes up the story: 'Mary's brother Brian lived in Portsea, Melbourne, and when she came to Australia to visit him in the late 1990s she always wrote to me to find out if there was a dinner or other event that she could attend. In May 1998 Mary came to Sydney for an OCC barbecue at the

home of the late Patricia Wall. We had a very windy sail from Mosman to Clontarf where Pat lived, and the rough weather meant we could not land Mary on the shore near Pat's house. Instead Mary and I had to climb up rocks a considerable distance away, and ended up trespassing through someone's private garden before walking along the road to Pat's



*Sailing in the Baltic in June 2000
with Eve and Michael Bonham
Cozens in Gemervescence of London*

house. Meanwhile Tony and Charles Davis moored the yacht in a safe place. Mary took it all in her stride and enjoyed the barbecue, writing to me afterwards that arriving by sea was far superior to arriving by land!

A few years later and another hemisphere, and **Flor Long** wrote that: 'I always think fondly of our time on the Azores Rally back in 2003, when Mary represented the OCC at every dinner, looking outstanding on every occasion. She was always wonderfully pleasant to my wife

Brenda, and said exactly the right things to my daughter Caroline after the catamaran she was crewing on capsized in its way back to the UK (Club Secretary Anthea Cornell was also among the crew, losing a number of completed application forms in the accident, though fortunately no crewmember was hurt.) A year or two later, when we were walking back to the hotel with Mary after a dinner in Dublin, Brenda commented that the Irish are always last to leave a party, to which Mary replied, "some of the best evenings of my life have been with the Irish".'

Further north yet, **Vladimir Ivankiv**, OCC Port Officer Representative for St Petersburg, recalls meeting Mary and a friend of hers in August 2002 at the Tortuga Restaurant in St Petersburg's Central River Yacht Club. Vladimir says that: 'It was Mary Barton whose reference helped me get the title of the OCC Port Officer Representative, which I am very proud of.'

*Admiral Mary with
Vladimir Ivankiv, POR
for St Petersburg on
a visit to the city in
August 2002*





*Past Vice
Commodore
Erik Vischer
– wearing the
Club's 50th
Anniversary
T-shirt – with
Admiral Mary
in 2004*

**A l a n
Taylor,**
who took

over as Commodore in 2002, confirms Mary's involvement: 'My lasting memory of Mary is how supportive and interested in the well-being of the Club she was whilst I was Commodore. She also loved to be afloat. On the 2004 British Columbia Rally, Jenny and I sailed with Mary from Vancouver Island back to Vancouver. We were on a fast reach, keeping a look-out for floating dead-head logs – ie telegraph pole-sized logs floating vertically with their heads just bobbing above the water – and Mary was at the helm. We noticed that once her hands were clasped to the wheel it was not easy to prise her off it, she was enjoying it so much. She was 84 at the time. It was a pleasure and a privilege to be associated with Mary on our various OCC events.'

Mary's seeming imperviousness to the passing years impressed everyone, including **Doug and Dale Bruce**. Writing to Erik Vischer they recalled that:

'It was in August 2008 that we first met both you and Mary. You had very generously agreed to bring Mary to Maine for the first Maine Rally we had organised, and we considered it, and still do, an enormous honour to have had you both in our midst.

At that point Mary was 88 and we could only guess how frail she might be. We installed a hand-rail on the stairs up to her room. I laugh out loud about that now – Mary turned out to be incredibly fit and agile, and as sharp as a tack. You and Mary arrived in Maine on Friday afternoon, driving up from Boston with John and Jenny and getting to Rockport Boat Club at 7pm (midnight your time) looking as fresh and rested as could be. You both greeted every possible soul who wanted a word with you, and shared in a picnic atmosphere. We brought you back home at 9pm – 2am your time – both still going strong!

Next day contained a tour of our local art museum, lunch at a local restaurant, a brief sail aboard Phil Brooks's boat and a tour of nearby

Mary (at left, in red jacket and white trousers) at the Maine Rally in 2008

Rockport Marine. Then Mary had a very short rest before returning to Rockport Boat Club for the Rally. Everyone considered having our Admiral with us to be an enormous and special treat, and everyone wanted some time with her. But Mary was up to the task – she continued to charm all, speaking fondly and kindly of her good friends the Bancrofts who had run the Rally for many years in Smith's Cove. She had been there on several occasions, and remembered the events well. It was another long day.

On Sunday Mary was the guest of honour at a lunch given by good friends of ours, and she continued to charm everyone she met. One of the guests, Anne Montgomery, presented her with a Camden Yacht Club flag which Mary took back to Lymington – several weeks later, Anne received a Royal Lymington Yacht Club flag which is now hanging at CYC. Bill and Alice Caldwell, old friends of Mary's from the Chesapeake, came calling later that day. They loved having the opportunity to reconnect. You left the following morning, but not before I had taken Mary on a bit of a tour of the area – up Mount Battie for the view of the harbour, before hiking up one of our favourite hills to another stunning vista. And I had put up a hand rail for this woman ... how ridiculous is that! I think of her every time I use it, and smile.

Mary was one of those rare people who made everyone she met feel like they are special, and a good friend. We feel blessed to have known her.'

Bill and Jane McLaren met Mary the following year. Bill writes: 'We didn't really know Mary until I became Commodore, so before the 2009 AGM Jane and I went to call on her for tea at her home in Sway before going into Southampton. It felt a bit like a junior officer calling at Admiralty House in some far flung naval base. 'Is he one of us?' was the question which hung in the air as we enjoyed a game of verbal tennis. Mary served with stories of her war time WRNS service and talked of her father the Vice Admiral. I returned service with tales of my Grandfather, the deputy Governor General of the Sudan. And so it went on, but I never had the courage to ask Mary what she meant by her comment that she 'particularly enjoyed submariners in Trincomalee'.





Admiral Mary aboard Vagrant of Clyde in 2010, a few months before her 90th birthday

I think Mary's last major expedition was a Scottish cruise aboard *Vagrant* in 2010, when she joined Jane and me to take part in an OCC rally and to attend the Clyde Cruising Club's centenary celebrations. All the leading cruising clubs were there – everybody knew Mary and Mary knew everyone. *Vagrant* had a constant stream of visitors and almost sank under the weight of the well-wishers. She had chosen to travel up on the night sleeper to Glasgow and then on to Oban, arriving onboard about lunchtime – enough to finish someone half her age. But she held court until late, and then helped with the cooking and washing up before going to bed about midnight. And so it went on, going for walks in the rain and climbing over rocky foreshores –

our fears about keeping an old lady safe onboard vanished quickly.

She outlasted Jane and me at the partying and was just great fun. When she left she announced that she hadn't managed to book a sleeper back to London and would be sitting up all night. I said she couldn't do that at her age, and she replied that she had had such fun that arriving home exhausted didn't matter at all. I suggested that she should do the little old lady act and throw herself on the goodwill of the train guard, who would be bound to have an empty berth somewhere. Mary thought that was a good idea and claimed that she was really good at the little old lady act, even forcing out a tear in extremis. She did and it worked!

December 2010 and Mary receives her 'birthday pennant' from then Commodore Bill McLaren





*Admiral Mary with the five Commodores who succeeded her.
Left to right: Mike Pocock, Bill McLaren, Alan Taylor,
Martin Thomas and Tony Vasey. Photo Peter Haden*

Later that year the Club held a 90th birthday lunch for Mary at the Royal Yacht Squadron, attended by five current and past Commodores and some 35 other members. A high point was the presentation of a 'birthday pennant', now in the possession of Mary's family. Her last Annual Dinner was in March 2011, when it was held at the Royal Southampton Yacht Club, not too far from her home. By the following year she no longer felt up to attending evening events, but joined members for lunch at the Royal Yacht Squadron earlier in the day of the Dinner and, as always, charmed everyone.

A year or so later Mary took the sensible decision to move into residential care, where she soon became much loved and respected by the staff. She continued to take a keen interest in the club, and spent her last few years surrounded by pictures, photos, trophies, books and papers, all pointing to a life full of interest, dedication and, above all, a great sense of fun and love of life itself.

