

BROOM centenary 1898-1998

1

Basil Broom at the helm of a 10ft motor tender, powered by a 4hp Stuart Turner engine. Photo dates from the 1930s.

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The interior of a pre-war wooden Broom...

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...and something typical from a modern GRP example.

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An Admiral class hire cruiser – one of the main elements in Broom's post-war output.

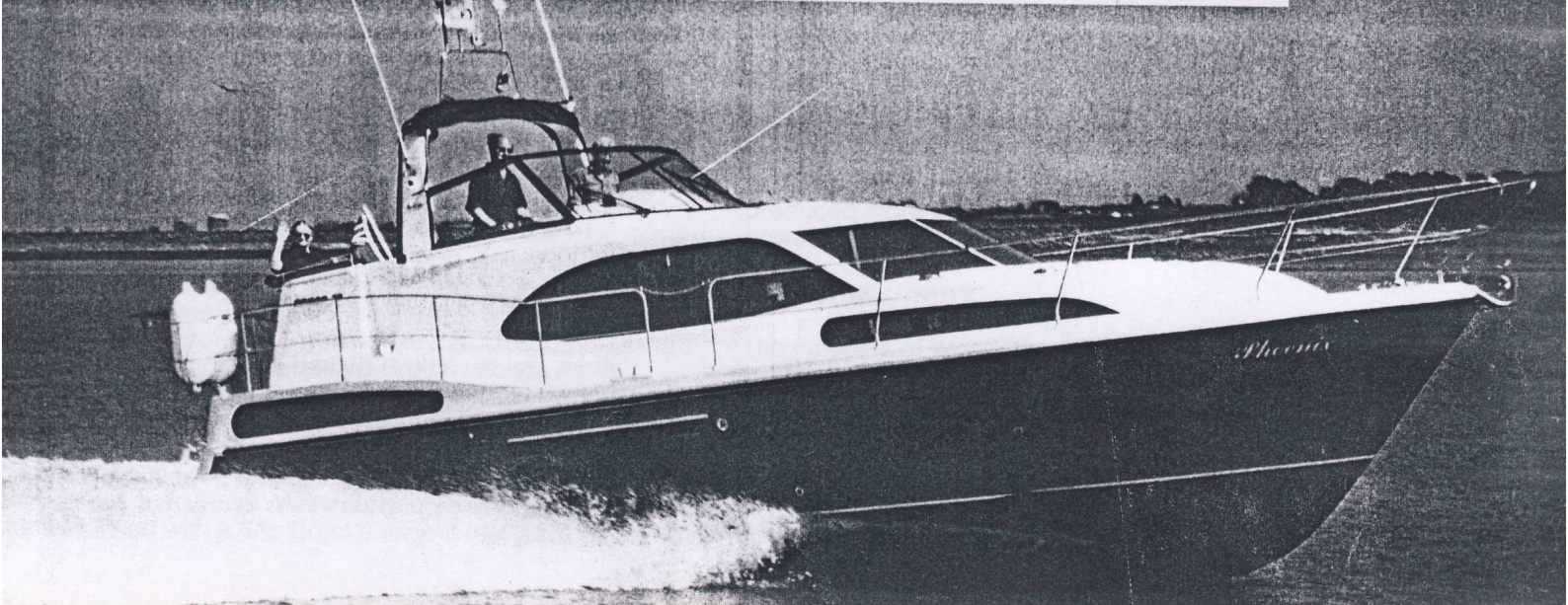
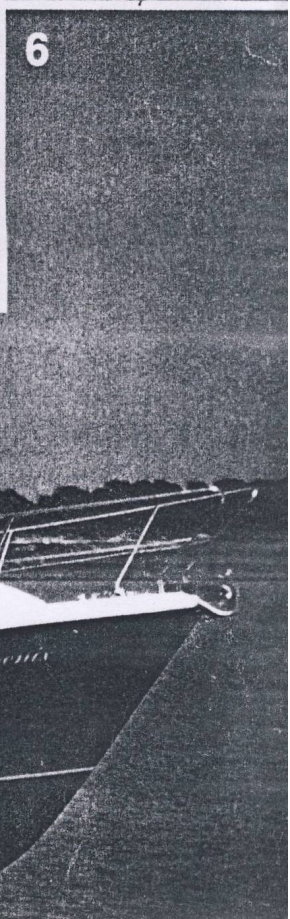
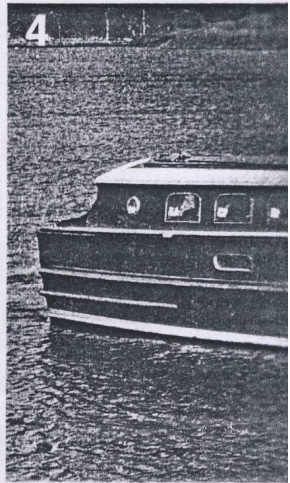
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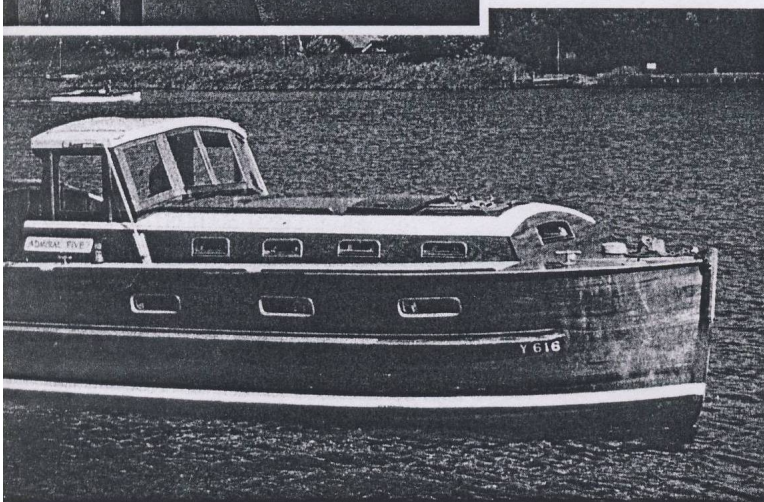
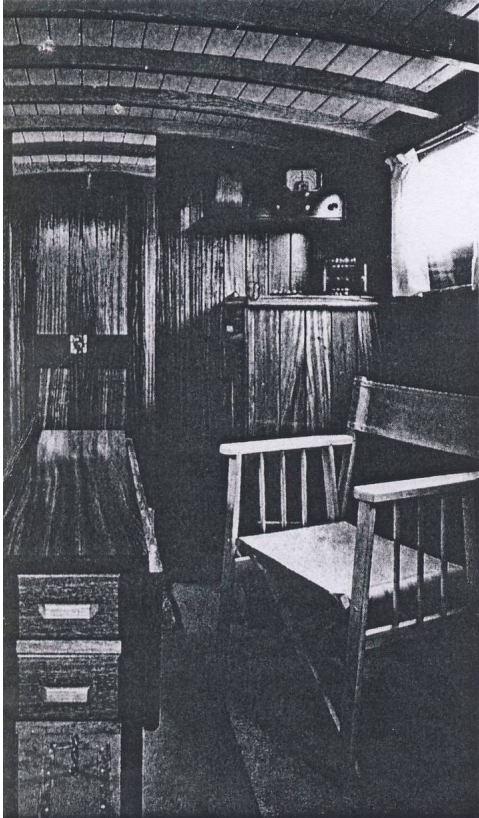
The first Broom 30 from 1967 – a GRP hull and wooden superstructure.

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One of the first Broom Ocean 38s to be built, and the only one made to fit with a racing hull.

Photographs: CJ Broom & Sons





The generation game

Broom, one of the most famous names in British motorboating, is 100 years old. Richard Johnstone-Bryden charts the rise of this family-run East Coast yard whose range once epitomised the notion of a gentle cruise on the Broads, but now embraces a 50ft sea-going cruiser

If there is a secret to Broom's success it is their ability to adapt to changing tastes. Over the years Broom have built a wide variety of craft, from 13ft (4m) motor tenders and Broads yachts, to their biggest boat to date, the Broom 50, due to be launched at the 1998 London Boat Show. It is this development that has enabled Broom to enjoy continual success while many of their contemporaries have faded into Britain's maritime netherworld.

The Broom story begins in the closing years of Queen Victoria's reign when the original Norfolk Broads Yachting Company (NBYC) were selling off their yards. Charles J. Broom, the manager of NBYC's Brundall site, acquired the business in 1898 and began trading under his own name. Broom started predominantly as a maintenance yard, building only a few sailing craft for private owners on the Broads.

The turn of the century saw the dawn of the hire fleet on the Broads thanks to pioneers such as John Loynes and Harry Blake. When Blake produced his first catalogue, for the 1908 season, it featured only boats from the yard of Ernest Collins. However, following a successful season Blake incorporated other yards, including Broom.

The size of Broom's early hire fleet can be seen in Blake's 1916 catalogue. It featured three Broom yachts: *Merry Widow*, *Bessie Bell* and *Mezereon*. The two 26ft (7.9m) sister yachts, *Merry Widow* (built in 1909) and *Bessie Bell* (1911), are still in full sailing order on the Broads and are probably the earliest surviving examples of the company's work. The entry for the third yacht *Mezereon* hinted at Broom's future: she was listed with a 5hp Brooke engine that gave her a top

speed of 6mph, and was perhaps one of the first motor-powered boats built by Broom.

Broom made the transition from yachts to motor boats in the early 1920s with craft such as the 36ft (10.7m) *Beatrice*, but they did not get involved in continuous boatbuilding until about 1930 when they started developing their hire fleet. Instead of building more sailing yachts for hire, Broom concentrated on motor boats, although a few estuary motor sailers were completed for private customers.

During the 1930s, the firm developed the twin-engined Broom 35 as their first estuary motor boat range, which they built through to the 1950s. When it was launched, it featured a novel raised aft deck that was later incorporated into many motor boat designs. Before World War II, Broom used the aircraft designer W. W. Downing to create most of their craft, although when war broke out he returned to aircraft work. As well as building motor cruisers at this time, Broom also produced more than twelve 13ft (3.96m) motor tenders powered by a 4hp Stuart Turner engine.

The war years

The outbreak of World War II caused major disruption to yards on the Broads: many had their hire fleets towed onto open Broads and moored to prevent enemy flying boats from landing with invading troops. As the war progressed many of these craft deteriorated, with some left to sink, while others needed extensive refurbishment.

Broom were lucky in this respect because their hire fleet remained in use – providing accommodation for the army at ▶



The Broom family connection

Broom were founded by Charles J. Broom who was the grandfather of current chairman Martin Broom. Charles had six children – three sons and three daughters. All the sons – Charles Jnr, Basil, and Bernard, who was known as Barney – worked at the yard. Following the death of their father, Charles Jnr was the controlling force until his death in 1936 before he reached 40. His widow, Daisy Broom, was bought out by Charles' surviving brothers Basil and Barney Snr who ran the firm as a partnership.

Barney's son, Barney Jnr, joined Broom in 1946 but in 1963 opted to become a vicar. Basil's son, Martin Broom, entered the family business in 1958 after an apprenticeship with Herbert Woods and two years' national service with the RAF Marine Branch at Plymouth. He won full control of Broom in 1963 following the retirement of his father, Basil Broom, and the departure of his cousin Barney Jnr.

Major dates in Broom's history

1898

Charles J. Broom acquires the Norfolk Broads Yachting Co's Brundall yard.

1920s

Broom are one of the first yards on the Broads to fit an engine to a boat.

1936

The launch of *Manya* – one of Broom's first twin-

Keeping it in the family: Barney Snr, Basil and Barney Jnr are to the right of the children. Martin Broom is far left. They are shown at the launch of a Captain hire cruiser in the 1950s. Photo: Eastern Daily Press.

engined estuary cruisers – takes the company beyond the Broads and into the coastal market.

1939-45

During World War II, Broom is kept open to build destroyer tenders, harbour launches and pinnaces, and is therefore fully operational at the end of hostilities and in a good position to resume business quickly, while some of their competitors had to start again from scratch.

1963

Current chairman Martin Broom gains full control of Broom and is able to move the company forward according to his plans.

1965

The formation of Aquafibre takes Broom into the GRP era.

1969

The launch of the *Ocean 37* at the London Boat Show.

1973

Broom is approached by Guinness to supply four 30s to help establish a hire fleet, called Emerald Star Line, in Ireland. Not only has this relationship led to the delivery of more than 200 boats since 1973, it also provided Aquafibre with the opportunity to develop the largest range of charter boats, from 20ft to 45ft (6-13.7m) designed for inland waterways.

1998

The company is set to launch the Broom 50 at January's London show.

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the yard – and this proved vital in quickly re-establishing the hire fleet when the war ended.

The Royal Navy was also based at Broom's, where the wetshed was used to house commandeered river launches armed with Oerlikon guns. These launches were a way of harassing German bombers that were using the River Yare to locate Norwich. During the war years, Broom entered the high-speed era when it built 16ft (4.9m) destroyer tenders capable of 18 knots. They also made 35ft (10.7m) pinnaces, 35ft harbour launches, and whalers for the Royal Navy.

The post-war years

During the early post-war period Broom's output was dominated by the building of three main classes of motor boats: the 34ft (10.4m) Captain, the 37ft (11.3m) Commander, and the 42ft (12.8m) Admiral. These are perhaps the quintessential Broadland wooden motor boat designs of the post-war era.

By the time Broom ceased producing these designs, they had each been lengthened by a foot. Despite the company's initial intentions, all three classes were built for private and hire fleet customers. These types were later followed by the Navigator, which had a lower hull and bigger windows, and remained in production until the changeover to GRP boats in 1965.

Perhaps the most elegant wooden motor cruisers built by Broom were four 45ft (13.7m) examples: *Cadilly*, *The Albert of Blofield*, *Jabet* and *Sujiroto*, launched between 1964 and 1966, and designed for the Broads and some coastal cruising. *The Albert of Blofield* and *Sujiroto* are still maintained by Broom, while *Cadilly* has recently undergone restoration work at Newsons yard where she is based. Unfortunately, Broom have lost track of *Jabet*, which was taken to the Mediterranean in 1967.

The Albert's moment of glory

came in 1976 when she carried the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh from Hor to Ranworth Broad for the opening of the information centre there.

The final wooden boat to built by Broom was the 38ft (11.6m) *Commander Perrap* launched in 1966 for a hire fl. It still survives in private ownership on the Broads.

The GRP era

Broom entered the GRP era through their involvement in Aquafibre, a company formed in 1965 by John Lindford who owned a boatyard at Neatishead. Lindford realised the future need for GRP hulls the Broads hire fleets, and set up a consortium of Broom, B Boats, Richardsons, and the designer R. M. Martins. Aquafibre's success proved Lindford right as the new company soon had to move to larger premises at its present location in Rackheath.

The first Aquafibre project was the *Ocean 30* hull, designed by Martins. The design was launched as the Broom 30 at the 1967 London Boat Show, and was to prove one of the boatbuilder's most popular models, remaining a part of the range until 1980.

Early Broom 30s were completed with a wooden superstructure because customers still preferred the more traditional appearance of wood, and it was to be a few more years before they were made with GRP superstructures.

Before he died in a plane crash, Lindford helped design the hull of what was to become the *Ocean 37* and *Broom 37*. This design was very significant for the future direction of Broom because it took them into the twin-engined sea-going, semi-displacement era with a boat that could cruise at a top speed beyond any of their previous displacement designs. The Broom 37 was the first to involve the designer John Bennet and it is a link that has continued through his work on all of Broom's subsequent motor boats in their fast offshore range. As with the Broom 30, early Broom 37s were completed with wooden superstructures for the first few years.

Following a disagreement among the other partners, Broom bought a controlling

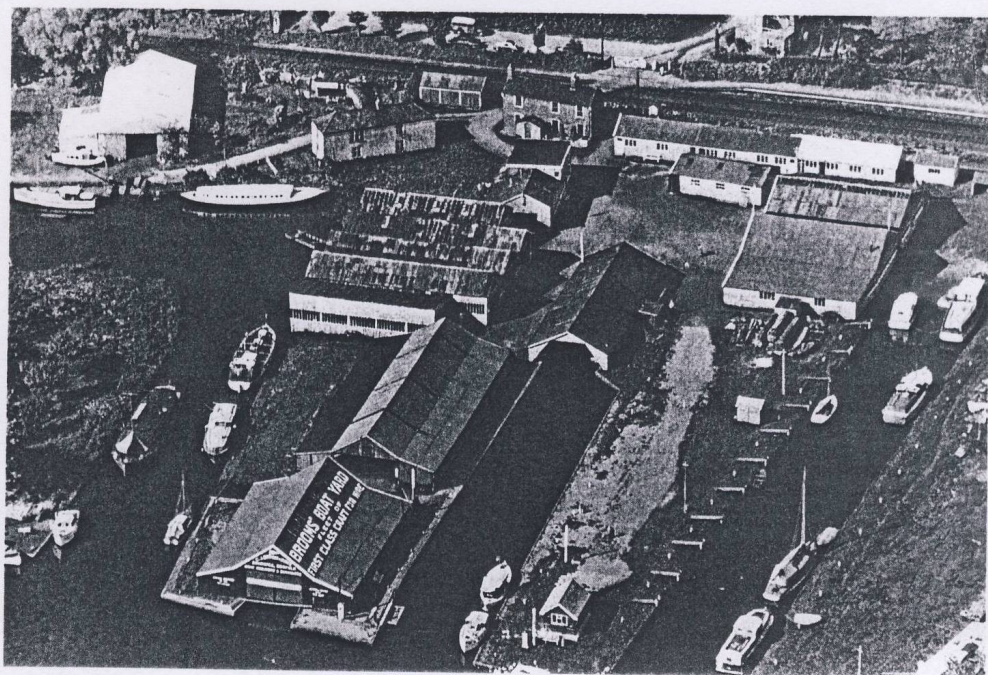
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interest in Aquafibre in 1971. Today, under the directorship of Martin Broom and Ben Mackintosh, Aquafibre specialise in developing new models and making GRP hulls, superstructures and components. In addition to their work for Broom, Aquafibre also have their own range of inland charter boats, ranging from 20ft (6.1m) to 45ft (13.7m). These were designed by Andrew Wolstenholme, partly as a result of Aquafibre's continuing work with the Emerald Star Line in Ireland, who have used their craft since 1973.

Historically, Broom's estuary craft were dual-purpose boats because they could be used at sea and on the river. However, since the 1970s, motor cruisers have continued to get progressively faster, with more powerful engines. The increase in speed led to a number of changes in the new designs, such as smaller keels, which made them less suitable for use on the rivers. The power of the engines also created more problems for river work. When inland waterways, such as the Broads, introduced speed limits, offshore craft with big engines immediately broke the restrictions as soon as their engines were engaged.

To counter this problem Broom developed the coastal range of craft designed by Andrew Wolstenholme in 1993. They were suitable on the river, yet still seaworthy and thus filled the gap left by modern offshore production boats. The price of better inland

This year's model: the Broom 50, which is launched at the London Boat Show, is the firm's biggest boat to date. The first order has already been placed – by a satisfied customer trading up from a 44.



handling was a reduction in top-end speed from the 30 knots reached by typical fast offshore cruisers, to 24 knots.

New models and the future

This year's London Boat Show will mark a new chapter in Broom's history when they launch their largest motor cruiser, the Broom 50. Their new design is, to a large extent, driven by the views of its customers. Much of the company's business comes from Broom owners who progressively move up the range. Their views help determine the size and function of a new design. This was clearly demonstrated by the decision to go ahead with the Broom 50 after existing Broom owners expressed their wish to buy larger boats.

In part, the styling is determined by the designs of the day and will reflect current tastes in powerboat fashion. Over the years features that have made a dramatic impact on the design of Broom boats have included the progressive increase in engine power within a given weight and size, and the introduction of curved glass that allowed the designers to produce softer lines.

Broom's Brundall yard in the early 1950s. Few of these original buildings survive, except the white shed top left and the building shed top right. They are now, respectively, an engineering service centre and a furniture store.

Another recent trend that Broom have incorporated into their new 50 (15.2m) motor cruiser is the move away from mounting tenders on davits. Rather than follow the lead of other builders and put the tender inside a small garage, Broom have made provision for a crane to lift the tender out of the water and place it onto chocks on the bathing platform, so not losing any accommodation.

Broom's formula is to concentrate their business on four core areas: new boat construction, Broads hire fleet, brokerage, and Aquafibre's development work. It is a formula which has worked for them and, as Broom commemorate their first centenary, it will be interesting to see how they respond to new challenges as they navigate their way through the next 100 years. It will be equally interesting to see if the business is still controlled by the Broom family when the company celebrates their bicentenary. □

