





CRUISING DESTINATIONS

Maid a pioneer

One of the most celebrated launches from Camper & Nicholsons shipyard tells the story of 20th century sailing.

***Merrymaid* fielded petrol engines and Bermuda rigs long before the competition. Then won regattas for the most famous names in yachting.**

Fresh from an all-encompassing circumnavigation, she seeks another adventurous owner.

IMAGE The classic gaff cutter *Merrymaid* is at home in any sea, from Patagonia to Portofino.

In 1904 a glorious gaff cutter emerged from the Camper & Nicholsons shipyard near Southampton on England's south coast. "The yacht will be one of the very finest cutters afloat," claimed boating journal *The Yachtsman*, "as no expense has been spared." More importantly, the yacht in question went on to pioneer yachting inventions from powered engines to Bermuda racing rigs. Before embarking on an epic circumnavigation that called at Cuba, Patagonia, Papua New Guinea, Tokyo, the Andaman Islands and Madagascar.

In short, few yachts tell the tale of yachting over the last 120 years better than 34m *Merrymaid*. She is a masterpiece of maritime history.





The yacht was an elegant pioneer because she came from the drawing board of Charles E Nicholson. "Every attention has been given by her designer to the construction of the vessel," confirmed *The Yachtsman*. The maverick naval architect designed *Endeavour*, *Creole*, *Istria* and many of the greatest yachts of the 20th century. All were lightning fast. In her first Royal Yacht Squadron race, for a £100 prize, *Merrymaid* scooped second place in a field that included the Emperor of Germany's *Meteor*, a schooner four times her size.

The original owner of *Merrymaid* was textile heir Thomas Hardcastle. He swiftly cashed in on her racing success, selling her to polo playing stockbroker Robert Young in 1905. Yet Hardcastle missed *Merrymaid* so much that he repurchased her in 1908 for use as a cruising yacht.

In fact, *Merrymaid* was ideal for comfortable long distance cruising. Her accommodation, it was noted, "was very exceptional for her size, and consists of a large saloon, large owner's cabin, three spare cabins, usual ladies' cabin aft... fitted entirely throughout in wainscot oak and mahogany." Hardcastle added a shocking novelty: the first petrol engine to be installed on a classic yacht. "I think there is the idea that a motor installed in a large sailing yacht takes away the charm of sailing," Hardcastle argued in a letter to *Yachting Monthly*. "This has certainly not been my experience." Packed with power, comfort and a hull that turned heads in every port, *Merrymaid* was ready for any itinerary.

FROM LEFT Launched in 1904, the prestigious owners of this classic yachts tell the tale of 20th century yachting. From her home port in Southampton, *Merrymaid* embarked on a six-year circumnavigation with destinations as diverse as Japan and Papua New Guinea.



In 1912 Hardcastle used 900 litres of petrol during his Baltic voyage. *Yachting Monthly* chronicled his 50-port itinerary. Setting sail from Southampton, *Merrymaid* took in Kiel, Copenhagen, St Petersburg and northern Finland for the midnight sun. “The Finnish pilots charge high but they are worth it,” suggested the story. Tragically, just two summers later, German Emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II turned Europe’s cruising grounds into a warzone. *Merrymaid*, like so many classic Camper & Nicholsons yachts, took refuge from World War One in the Norwegian fjords.

A breed of owner rose from the ashes of World War One. Elizabeth Workman was yacht racer, art collector and mother of four who lived on Seymour Place in Mayfair, a short walk from Camper & Nicholsons current bureau in Berkeley Square. Mrs Workman had a predilection for Monet, Matisse and downwind speed. She purchased *Merrymaid* because Charles E Nicholson had added yet


another invention: the first ever Bermuda rig installed on a competitive yacht. Nicholson’s new sailing configuration saved a shocking amount of weight. It also meant that her topsail could be changed or dowsed in record time during a race. By 1930 all Big Class racers had copied *Merrymaid*’s pioneering rig.

By that year ownership had passed to Sir Thomas Royden, the Chair of Cunard, a gentleman who knew a thing or two about boats. During the 1930s, Cunard operated two superliners, *Queen Elizabeth* and *Queen Mary*, from Southampton to New York. Again the clouds of war culled Sir Thomas’s tenure of *Merrymaid*, as her lead keel was melted down to make helmets and bombs. In 1945 she was laid up alongside America’s Cup challengers *Endeavour* and *Valsheda* in the mud of Southampton’s River Hamble. An ignominious chapter for Camper & Nicholsons most acclaimed yachts.

FROM LEFT *Merrymaid* is a bona fide regatta racer. This classic Camper & Nicholsons build was made to cruise — fast — through any climatic conditions including around Cape Horn.







“She was so beautiful,” he recalls. Her Charles E Nicholson hull was a lesson in hydrodynamic elegance; a white lighting swoosh that could slice through spray while carrying a sea of sail.

Ironically the Southampton mud preserved *Merrymaid*’s teak and oak planks. As did her long ownership by Roy Squire — a humble train driver as opposed to a company chair — who safeguarded her as his family’s houseboat during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Yet again, tragedy struck. During the 2000s *Merrymaid* was unbraided by bankruptcy, neglect and a refit performed by well-meaning French carpenters who had never worked on a boat — let alone a yacht of this calibre. In 2006 the semi-rebuilt *Merrymaid* was auctioned in Toulon. After 102 years at sea, this was her nadir.

Hope was at hand. Because during the same decade a passionate owner of a 22m Sparkman & Stephens sloop was searching for a classic yacht large enough for a circumnavigation. The gentleman had an unusual way of searching. “I looked at about 60 boats over five years, mostly from Antibes to St Tropez and along the English coast,” he explains. “I didn’t have a checklist. When I see the right boat, I fall in love.”

When this current owner saw *Merrymaid*, it was love at first sight. “She was so beautiful,” he recalls. Her Charles E Nicholson hull was a lesson in hydrodynamic elegance; a white lighting swoosh that could slice through spray while carrying a sea of sail. “She was

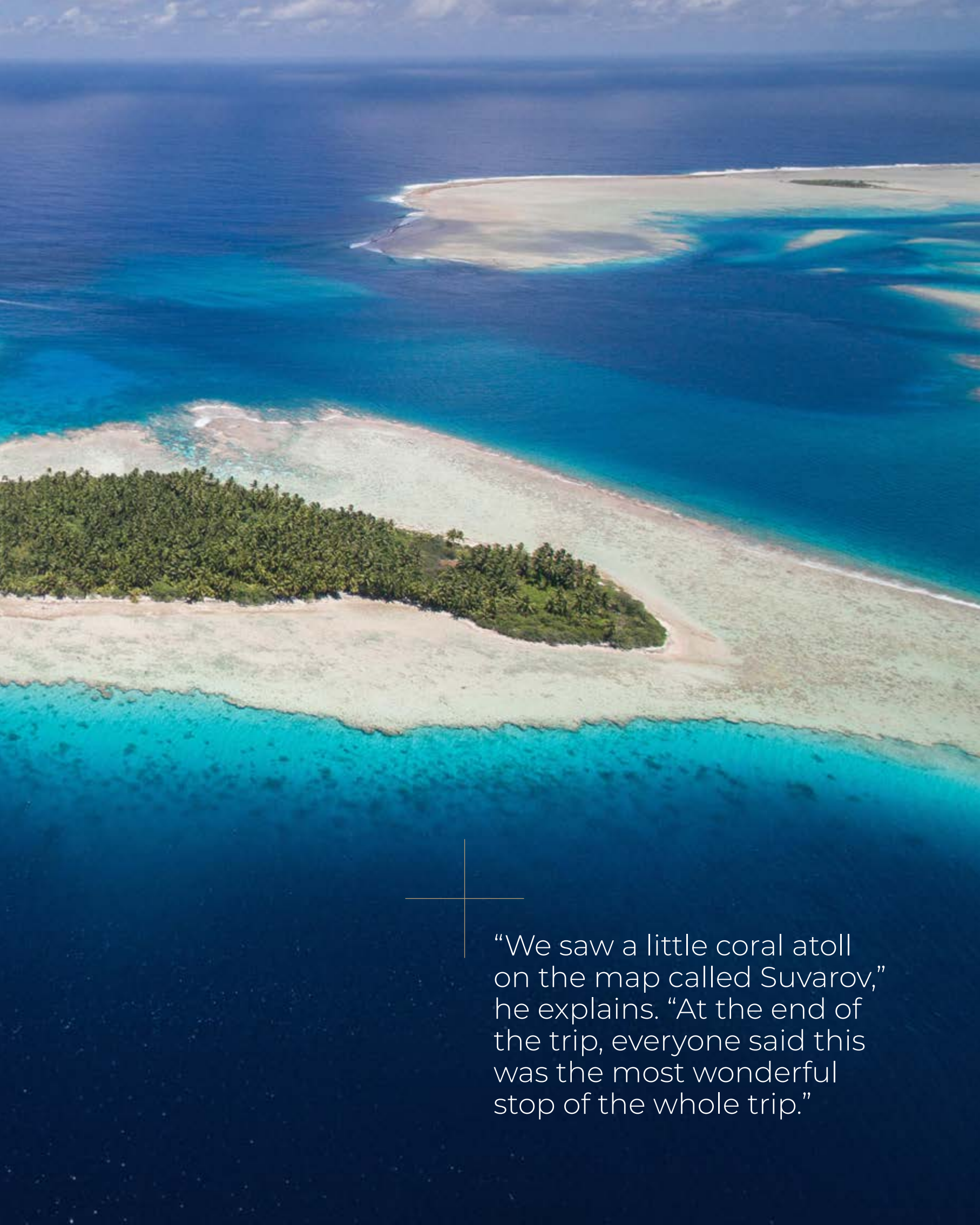
long with a huge saloon,” continues her owner. “Which is good for me because I measure 1.91m!”

Merrymaid was transported to Southampton Yacht Services (SYS) near her original yard. “All the planking the French carpenters had done had to be replaced,” explains her owner. “A really big exercise.” During the two-year rebuild he had one overriding worry. “That with the new wood keel she was going to end up bent like a banana with reduced sailing capabilities.” Not what an owner wants when navigating the Falkland Islands or Maldives. “Fortunately SYS replaced everything and she sailed wonderfully like a fast and safe boat.”

“It might have been an error to immediately start a round the world voyage,” concedes her owner. But after a 70-year hiatus, *Merrymaid* was eager to set sail from Southampton once again. “Happily arrived in Ilha de Fernando de Noronha, Brazil, after having sailed 1,426 nautical miles in perfect weather”, stated one of her first logs in 2008. “Safely arrived in Panama’s terrific San Blas Islands after having sailed 1,095 nautical miles from Cayman Islands,” said an update from 2010. Minor refit issues occurred enroute, “but SYS were always extremely helpful as little problems popped up.”

IMAGE *Merrymaid* remains a delight to sail almost 120 years after her Southampton launch, thanks to a painstaking refit near her original yard.





“We saw a little coral atoll on the map called Suvarov,” he explains. “At the end of the trip, everyone said this was the most wonderful stop of the whole trip.”

Merrymaid made more stops than the round-the-world sailor Joshua Slocum. “I read all the circumnavigation books,” says her owner. “Charles Darwin, Captain Cook, Robin Knox-Johnston, Francis Chichester,” the last of whom became the world’s fastest circumnavigator and the first to sail single-handed by the clipper route — also in a Camper & Nicholsons yacht. “So places like Cape Horn and Patagonia were something I had to see,” he continues. “I came to shore at Puerto Williams,” the southernmost settlement in the world, “and some locals said I was crazy to bring *Merrymaid* there. I said ‘listen guys, you have an aluminium hull. If you hit something you’re in trouble but we can carry out repairs ourselves.’ People underestimate how sturdy these classic boats are.”

China and Vietnam were voyage highlights. Was it strange to dock a capitalist yacht in a communist port? “No, because everyone loves these classics,” says her owner. “On occasions we radioed a harbour and asked to do a few repairs. And when we arrived they said: ‘Oh wow, give us a half an hour and we’ll give you pride of place.’” In South Africa, the descendants of former owner Roy Squire came on board. “They had all the pictures of their old life on the boat and it was a wonderful gathering.” The most legendary memories are always shared.

“I was on *Merrymaid* for 75,000 nautical miles,” during a six year circumnavigation, says her owner. “They were the happiest years of my life.” He explains that many round-the-world owners choose to fly out for two weeks to different destinations. “But for us





the best experiences happened unexpectedly in passage.” Like when the owner and his captain looked for an island to pause at between Tahiti and Fiji. “We saw a little coral atoll on the map called Suvarov,” he explains. On this angelic island, crew members lowered Merrybaby, a classic gaff-rigged sailing tender built by Butler & Co. “At the end of the trip, everyone said this was the most wonderful stop of the whole trip.”

Alas, even the greatest circumnavigators tire of paradise islands. At dusk near the end of *Merrymaid's* voyage through the Indian Ocean, “somebody knocked on my cabin and shouted ‘there’s a beautiful island up ahead,’” recalls the owner. “And I replied, OK, that’s island number 817 and sunset number 3,802!” After the voyage of a lifetime the sublime becomes commonplace.

All of which means it’s time for a new owner to follow in the wake of Thomas Hardcastle, Elizabeth Workman and Sir Thomas Royden by writing a new chapter of *Merrymaid's* 120-year history. “The circumnavigation proves she has everything needed to make another round-the-world trip,” or race in regattas. Her manifest includes twin water tanks, twin Seafresh watermakers and additional fuel bladders that add to her 1,920 nautical mile range under power. “There are spares of everything,” confirms her owner. This born pioneer, sold in immaculate condition, is ready for her next adventure.

PREVIOUS PAGE An owner’s prerogative is to call at mythical specks on the map like Suvarov, which lay undiscovered until 1814. **FROM LEFT** Cape Town was one of *Merrymaid's* premier ports of call. *Merrymaid* at anchor off the lonely Pacific atoll.



Merrymaid:
available for sale