

David 'Tatty' Muirhead, MBE. 1950 – 2021

With great sadness we report the loss of our friend and one of our founder-members, David 'Tatty' Muirhead, MBE who died last week after a long illness. Most members will remember him as the leader of the Cadgwith Singers who regularly came over to support our Boats in the Bay events and, as a consequence successfully reintroduced pub/shanty singing to St.Ives.

Tributes to this son of Cornwall have been pouring in from colleagues far better qualified than I to expand on his considerable achievements. They reveal a well-respected man who spread his energy and charm throughout the Duchy excelling in a wide variety of fields: as a distinguished rugby player (one time captain of Falmouth RFC and having played for Cornwall); through his tireless legal work on behalf of Cornish inshore fishermen, which earned him his MBE and bardship of the Cornish Gorsedh; as a fisherman in his own right; as chairman of the Cornwall Sea Fisheries committee and Cornish Pilot Gig Association; as a leader of singing at any occasion and as a keen sailor aboard the Falmouth Working Boat 'Victory.'



It was in pursuit of this last activity that I first met David during the 70's when the Victory was helmed by the legendary Arthur 'Toby' West. To fully appreciate David, you really ought first to meet Mr. West – the man that, in many ways, shaped him. Here was one of Falmouth's truly great characters. Toby was still the coxswain of the Falmouth lifeboat at this time, a shrewd and masterful helmsman, a natural, social leader and budget bon-viveur.



Left. David's photo of Toby in his twilight years down at the 'Hacienda'. 'It is here that Mr. West holds court with the jokes and memories aplenty and the liquid refreshment flowing freely to lubricate brave Cornish voices in a rising crescendo of song, for singing has always been one of his great passions'. (Mark Fishwick, foreword to Toby's 1991 autobiography, A-Sailing West).

We all had enormous respect for Toby but for David perhaps there was something more. Phil Slater tells me that young David ran away from home to avoid being sent away to boarding school, taking refuge for a day or two down on the foreshore with Toby West. Toby was clearly massively influential and David was devoted to him.

Our mutual respect for Toby cemented our friendship particularly during the 90's when both Toby and the Victory were showing signs of old age. In order that both of them continued to sail as long as possible, David instigated and financed a major refit of the Victory which

I undertook in 1996. Without David's input, it's doubtful the Victory would be still be with us. She certainly wouldn't have been sailed like this again!

Right: Now in his mid 80's, Toby is back at the helm, reefed down and sailing hard, enjoying Victory's first race following her refit. Photo: David Muirhead.



As one might imagine, David lived life to the full – he had to, to cram everything in. So was out in the bay first thing to check his pots before heading into Helston for a days soliciting. Despite his countless commitments, he followed the development of the Jumbo Association with great interest and somehow found time to get to most of our events. He'd been there for the launch of the first punt which is when it all began. He was there again when we raced Victory up to Fowey with Bean Goodden who subsequently decided to finance the building of the first Jumbo 'Celeste'. And here he is once more red-leading the bottom of Celeste as she neared completion (left).



David never married but instead devoted himself to his life's interests and, in particular, to those he wished to help. His gentlemanly, self-effacing manner, sense of service and genuine interest in others seemed to belong to a previous generation and won him the affection and admiration of so many. He took the best qualities he saw in the likes of Toby West - and ran with them! The man whose opinion mattered more to David than anyone, would have been mighty proud of him.

It is often said of the recently departed, that they are irreplaceable. We all said it of Toby yet, in many respects, David has come pretty close. But it's certainly true in David's case; it's hard to imagine who could possibly take on all that David did and fill the gaping hole he has left. There's no doubt, when the new normal returns, the planned wake for David will be massive.

Jonny Nance
secretary

The St.Ives Jumbo Association
Reg Charity No. 1142930
stivesjumbo.com