

Dittisham Clubhouse

History of the Build

Background

The original boathouse was built in the early 1990's with a lottery grant and funding from Sport England. The cost of the build was £30,000. The original planning application was for a two storey clubhouse building, but this was rejected. However, the completed boathouse provided a very valuable facility for the club, but with no toilets or showers and only the "barest" of changing facilities.

In 2003/4 Peter Symons was elected Commodore and it was his initiative to reapply for planning permission for the second storey. In order to avoid piecemeal development the committee produced a 10 year plan for the club. A planning application was submitted in 2005/06. At first a large "A frame" design was submitted but this was initially rejected as having "too much mass". The present design of the new clubhouse was passed by South Hams following a very valuable meeting with Dittisham Parish Council.

A quantity surveyor's report advised the cost to build at £143,000. Various applications to secure funding by way of grants were unsuccessful so the idea of self build was proposed by Jonathan Weeks and Frank Seear. The idea was to try to build the shell from existing club funds (£48,000 at the time) and then try to raise money for the fit out in stages and as we could afford it. Our original estimate for the shell was £35,000. And so began the self build of the new club house by the members. Working parties have taken place most Sundays during the non-sailing season since October 2007, supported by mini parties of semi-retired members working as many as 3 days a week to carry out particular specialist tasks to move the project forward to a point where the big Sunday working parties could be used most effectively.

Build Process

The build envisaged recycling as much of the original fabric as possible. The roof would be lifted off intact and the exterior cladding removed, stored and reused. The walls of the first floor would be prefabricated wood panels and installed once the roof had been removed. The two side wings were built in blockwork. The effluent from the showers and toilets would be processed using a treatment plant, a septic tank or a cesspit depending on the requirements of the Environment Agency.

The club was fortunate to have Jonathan Weeks as Vice Commodore who masterminded the build process. Always to be seen with an A4 clipboard with an endless list of jobs to be undertaken, he undertook sourcing of materials, organisation of labour, site management and endless other duties familiar to those who watch the TV programme "Grand Designs". Perhaps most important of all he sustained the motivation and good humour of club members over the 18 months. That the clubhouse was finished to a high standard is thanks to Bob Thomas who brought to the build his past experience as a building inspector from an era when things had to be done properly.

The Original Clubhouse



Highs and lows of the build

Flash bang wallop!

One of the first tasks was to re-route the electricity and water supplies. Inevitably we put the digger bucket through the unmarked cable. However tragedy turned to triumph when the electricity board repaired the cable and added enough spare to re-route it to the new location months later inch perfect, free of charge.

That sinking feeling --- ready mix.

The new foundations under the two wings were 6 foot deep (or deeper than Bob Thomas standing in the bottom emptying out the sea water with a bucket!) and required 21 tons of concrete. One concrete lorry drove too far into the dinghy park and stuck. If it takes one man ten minutes to pour three tons of wet concrete from a pre-mix wagon how long does it take four men with a barrow and a shovel.....?? Eventually the empty lorry was dragged clear by the local farm tractor.

The first storey walls

The first storey is timber framed. The sections were prefabricated one noisy Sunday morning when the sound of 20 hammers, not all hitting the spot, competed successfully with Dittisham Church bells. Once completed the section were stored onsite in a container which was also used as the site hut for tools and making tea.

The crane that almost raised the roof.



Easily the most stressful day of the entire project, this incident reached the local press, brought a visit from the harbourmaster and nearly triggered an environmental crisis.

The crane was hired to lift off the roof, set it to one side and return 2 weeks later to lift it into its new position once the first floor walls had been installed. The crane sank into the foreshore some 150yds short of the clubhouse and leaned precariously to one side. Various attempts to move it using a range of local tractors of increasing size and members attempts to dig out the crane were all to no avail. Indeed the effect was to make the crane lean at an ever increasing acute angle. As the incoming tide approached, with the risk of diesel and hydraulic fluid spillage, first one and then a second wrecker lorry arrived and the crane finally dragged it to safety. Fortunately JW's negotiating skills (involving pleading ignorance, poverty and sobbing down the phone) ensured the sizeable recovery bill was settled by the very generous crane hire company.

Raising the roof

In the aftermath of the crane debacle, enter new member Brian Fereday who devised an ingenious method to raise the roof using 4 Chinese trolley jacks and 150 fencing posts. Over three dramatic days in February 2008 the roof was jacked up, the walls installed and the roof lowered and rolled back 2metres to it's final position on sawn-off scaffold rollers.



Recladding the exterior

A separate working party was assembled to reclad the building using the original material and new cladding. Thus was born the "Glad to clad" group; sporting their unique hats, they would be seen in the evening twilight wielding saws and hammers.

The forming of the "Glad to clad" group led to a rather more elegantly named "Thrilled to build" representing the Thursday working group. These two groups have maintained a healthy competition, each reminding the other that any problem or delay is the responsibility of the other group.

Replacing the Chestnut shingles

The original roof needed extending by 3m and the two side wings roofed. New chestnut shingles were installed during a series of working parties during autumn 2008, culminating in a topping out ceremony conducted by Jonathan Weeks precariously balanced with the final shingle whilst everyone else ate cake.

At this point the project had cost £33,000 against our original guesstimate of £35k so we looked at the bank balance and discovered that we still had £23k left (no, it doesn't add up but there you are, some kind fairy had been adding cash over the past two years). Promptly declaring the fit-out budget to be exactly £23k we set off on the great fitting-out and sewage disposal adventure.

Fitting-out Winter and Spring 2008/9

Work was suspended during the Summer of 2008 and began again last October with a series of Tuesday/Thursday work parties taking over from the Sunday series when sailing began again in the Spring. Once again the bulk of the work was carried out by a team of regular loyal attendees of a certain age, surprising aptitude and great good humour, sustained by copious quantities of coffee and Cake. The progress was steady with no major drama but some notable land marks....

- The day the South West Water Inspector looked into the pit at the sewerage connection and just said "That's fine" and walked off....
- The day the sewage pump was commissioned, and worked!
- The day the Commodore christened both the Ladies and Gents!
- The day Les Moores took a hot shower
- The day we arranged the new furniture in the first floor Club Room.

The whole process of digging the trench.....

In the end the EA did not want our effluent so SWWater agreed to allow us to pump it into their septic tank in the field behind the club. This required a trench to be dug along the back of the dinghy park with and, with Gil Hayward's very kind permission, through his garden to connect to the main sewage pipe. This was a major Sunday morning task for the heavy digging brigade (aided by Rufus the dog) and involved digging 140m of trench, a rise of some 18m and a pair of pits, one 5 feet deep and hand dug for the connection and one 2m deep with a mechanical digger for the pumping station.

Again, a working party armed with spades, mattocks and wheelbarrows supported by lots of tea and cakes completed what had initially seemed a major obstacle.

Cakes and treats

A particular thank you must be extended to all those who have contributed behind the scenes providing the huge variety of home made cakes and biscuits that have been submitted for the Sunday morning taste test. An army marches on its stomach they say, our work parties exist on (some say for) cakes and treats.

Conclusions

This has been an epic project for the club. It is a remarkable achievement for the members who are almost exclusively amateurs. The project has generated a great sense of camaraderie in the club, with new friendships both on and off the water. We have all learnt new skills and acquired new injuries. The new club house now offers the members the chance to meet together after racing to discuss tactics and the finer points of sailing over cake and tea. The possibility of lectures and social events during the winter will help to sustain the membership during the long dark months.

The founding aim of the club was to offer facilities for sailing and to introduce and encourage people, particularly young people into the delights of sailing. The new lecture room, changing and toilet facilities should now offer local schools and sport partnerships the opportunity to use the club to encourage sailing amongst young people in the area.

And finally a huge thank you to the dozens of members who helped build the new Clubhouse. Whether you only managed to put in a few hours or, as some have done, many, many days, it's been a wonderful experience and a great achievement.

It was built for a total of £55,000 with our money, no debt and our time and effort. It is a Clubhouse to be proud of and it truly belongs to us all.

On a final note, a warning to local clubs, if the name Jonathan Weeks suddenly appears in your membership list, be afraid, **be very afraid**.

DSC July 2009

The New Clubhouse finally in use

