

Mollie Yensie Howes, née Easton (26 Apr 1930 – 10 Mar 2021)

Mollie Easton was born at Low Common in Bunwell in 1930 to Frank and Yensie Easton, who were beginning their married life in a house full of chickens. Her father prospered, becoming a major landowner and a haulage contractor in Norfolk and Lincolnshire. She had an exciting childhood living in a large farmhouse during wartime with many fascinating American servicemen nearby! She went to junior school at Notre Dame in Norwich and then switched to Norwich High School for Girls, taking the bus into the city every day. She was still in touch with some of her school chums right to the end.

She met her husband, Derrick, in the Young Conservatives and they married in 1951 with two children, Paul and Sally arriving before she was 25. A caring and intelligent parent, Paul well remembers that she had taught him to read and tell the time before he went to school at 4 ½, to the surprise of Mrs Coleman, his first teacher.

Fast forward a few years. They bought their first boat sometime around 1965, a wooden launch initially moored at Stubb Mill between Hickling and Horsey. It had a smelly old British Anzani outboard on the transom and it was noisy in the cabin, but it gave the family a taste of life afloat on our beloved Broads. Paul had joined the Sea Scouts and learned to sail on Woodbastwick Decoy. After much badgering from the children (and saving on their part) Mollie and Derrick bought an Enterprise dinghy and joined both Horning SC and Snowflakes SC in 1969. While the children were regularly capsizing, the parents busied themselves with rescue boats, crewing and helping with club maintenance. Derrick and friends removed the floor from the dance hall behind what is now the fish and chip shop in Potter Heigham and re-laid most of it in the Horning SC clubhouse where it is still walked on 50 years later!

They soon decided to commission the building of a Reedling Keelboat, Onyx, #10, built at Catfield Dyke, then the mooring of the family launch, and were regulars on the river thereafter, winter and summer, until Derrick's death in 1993. Both Mollie and Derrick were interested in the social and organizational aspects of sailing. Derrick became Commodore of Snowflakes SC, a post which Mollie would go on to hold herself some years later. She enjoyed timekeeping for both winter and summer clubs. Derrick ran the Three Rivers Race for about 25 years and Mollie was always in the clubhouse overnight helping with radios and safety.

Mollie and Derrick's interest in Thurne Mouth Open Regatta again started with the children. They first visited in 1970 when Paul and Sally won their first minor trophy. Eventually, they took over as the regular OOD and timekeeper for the racing on Bank Holiday Monday. An ex-colleague of Paul (one Richard Baguley, known to some) was visiting the Broads and happened upon Thurne Regatta in the mid-1980s. Knowing that Paul had sailed there in past regattas, he asked a member whether there were any Howes people about and was directed to the OOD tent, which in those days was on the West bank just by the confluence. "Go you over there and you will see a large cloud of smoke. Immediately upwind of it you will find Mollie," he was told. He did. The strategy worked. There she was!

Even after Derrick died, she loved coming to TMOR and at some point was made a trustee of the club. Most years, Ian Stewart would pick her up at the end of Thurne Dyke in the rescue boat and deliver her to the tent. After she became more and more infirm, Sally and her husband, Chris, would bring her down in her wheelchair for a day out in the open air and a massive opportunity for chinwags with one and all.

By way of a side-track, it should be mentioned that Mollie and Derrick were very involved in many other areas of life beyond the rhond. Probably thanks to her father, who twice stood for Parliament, she was deeply interested in politics. She was the chairman for the Conservatives in Nelson Ward, the area now known as the “golden triangle” in Norwich, though she never stood for office herself. Derrick was mindful of his position as a manager in what originally was a family-owned shoe business with employees living all over the City. So, he was reluctant for her to get involved in front line politics, which may well have been frustrating to her.

Her values, judgement and connections led to her nomination as a Justice of the Peace in Norwich, a position she served in for 37 years. She was one of the Governors of Earlham School and served as Chairman for five years. Also, Derrick was the head of a local charitable organization; he and Mollie led the planning and execution of a number of large fêtes in the area, featuring such 1960s luminaries as Rolf Harris, Dick Emery, Dickie Henderson and Mr Pastry, with the aim of raising enough money to build a swimming pool for handicapped children at what was then Little Plumstead Hospital. Of course, they succeeded.

Mollie was one of the most sociable and affable people whom you would ever want to meet. She could remember phenomenal details about everyone she interacted with and showed empathy and concern for all. That sometimes had its downsides for the children. Paul remembers that going shopping in the City with her was, for him, a nightmare. Every 50 yards or so, she would recognize someone she knew and a five minute conversation would ensue! Very frustrating for a teenager, but later very valuable for Paul’s wife, Val, who had lost her own mother before she married and for whom Mollie became “Mum” for over 40 years.

So sociable was she that she would regularly attend public meetings in Sea Palling where she owned a bungalow. It would be remiss not to mention that she was also such a regular attendee of Broads Authority meetings that she acquired the nickname of “Mrs Public”! She did it to keep the Norfolk & Suffolk Boating Association (NSBA) aware of what was afoot, or as much of it as the Authority would allow in the public domain. An implacable foe of efforts by said Authority to become a National Park, she was one of two people to oppose the Broads Bill in both Houses of Parliament, her son being the other! They didn’t succeed in their effort to quash the Bill though they did cause some minor, mollifying amendments.

After all her efforts for at least three sailing clubs in the area, serving over twenty years on the Committee of the NSBA, and running the Ramuz Trophy races for 25 years, the good folks at Norfolk Broads Yacht Club elected her an honorary member about twenty years ago. In recent years she gained much pleasure from sitting on “her” customary bench by the Secretary’s

office, the perfect position for both watching the yachts race and being able to interact with the many other members who passed by. She had a cheery word for everyone, though increasingly as her memory faded, she would lean over to one of us and ask, "Who was that?"! She had such a good line in patter that she was able to hide her condition from most.

She was also recognized by the Royal Yachting Association in 2012 for her services to yachting and presented with an award by the Princess Royal in Buckingham Palace. And she never gave up her love for actually being in a boat; she last crewed for grandson, James, and his partner, Kath, in the Gold Cup race only two years ago!

It was probably the cigarettes that did for her in the end, but the fact that she smoked for 74 years and then survived almost a year after a diagnosis of lung cancer makes her, in the words of molecular biologist grandson Tim, "A medical marvel!" We must hope for all their sakes that her descendants inherit that longevity gene. The other piece of her DNA that they will hope to have received is her brightness of spirit. Though she could be stubborn occasionally toward the end, she rarely lost her cool and certainly never wallowed in self-pity.

Mollie Howes, loved mother, grandmother of 4 and proud great-grandmother of 2, R.I.P.

*Donations in Mollie's memory may be made to either
the Museum of the Broads or
the East Anglian Air Ambulance
at the following web address: <https://www.memorygiving.com/mollieyensiehowes>*