

BUILDING CLOUDS

Lallows on the Isle of Wight has turned its hand to many things over its 158 years, but is best known for its S&S racers, including Ted Heath's *Morning Cloud II*

PHOTOGRAPHY by BEN WOOD
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Cowes has long been a crucible of yachting and few yards have shaped it as well as Clare Lallows. Today, the yard remains traditional, down to its letterhead which, until 1996, was still made using the original thermographic printing method. Lallows' commitment to techniques of old has saved classic yachts, while forward-thinking diversification has kept the company alive and kicking. Given the historic successes of boats like *Roundabout*, *Morning Cloud II* (*Opposition*) and even the first transatlantic rowing boat, Lallows has convincingly earned its place in boatbuilding lore.

STARTING OUT WITH 10FT CLINKER DINGHIES

The company started in Cowes in 1867, building 10ft (3m) clinker dinghies. The family name was already known locally, with Clare's father making sails. For most of its 158 years, Lallows remained in the family, as sons Sydney, Harold, and Arthur worked alongside their father. Later, Sydney's son, also Clare, joined, successfully compounding the international reputation that his uncles set in motion. Back then, the main yard was further up the Medina River and the current site on Medina Road was used as a storage facility.

In a 2020 interview, Ian Lallow explained that he could not help but have a passion for boats and had "always wanted to do it". His father Clare had been reluctant to let him into the family business as he knew all too well the long hours and challenges of running a boatyard. Ian's falling out with his headmaster after only a short time at sixth form tipped the balance for Clare. In January 1961, Ian started an apprenticeship at Lallows and took on the business after his father. With no heir, he was the last family owner, and yard worker Lawrence Boarer bought the company in 1996.

MODERN LEADERSHIP AND DIVERSIFICATION

Lawrence ('Laurie'), began life at Lallows as an apprentice and stayed on for seven years before leaving. However, in 1996 he was called back upon hearing that the yard was up for sale. Before buying Clare Lallows, Laurie Boarer had created a bespoke household joinery business. **To this day, that steady,** adaptable income lets the yard invest in joinery apprenticeships, source responsible timber and keep classic skills alive for future seasons.



THE WAR YEARS

During World War One, Lallows built pinnaces for the Royal Navy, work that exempted many of the yard's workers from call-up; but some volunteered anyway. These 50ft (15m) boats were used for inshore work, such as harbour patrol. Due to limited resources in both world wars, these boats were designed for easy repair with standard machinery across classes. With a narrow hull, powerful steam engine and impressive ordnance, the pinnacle was a capable fighting vessel in shallower waters, moving at up to 12 knots. Carried on larger warships, they offered the navy greater access and manoeuvrability.

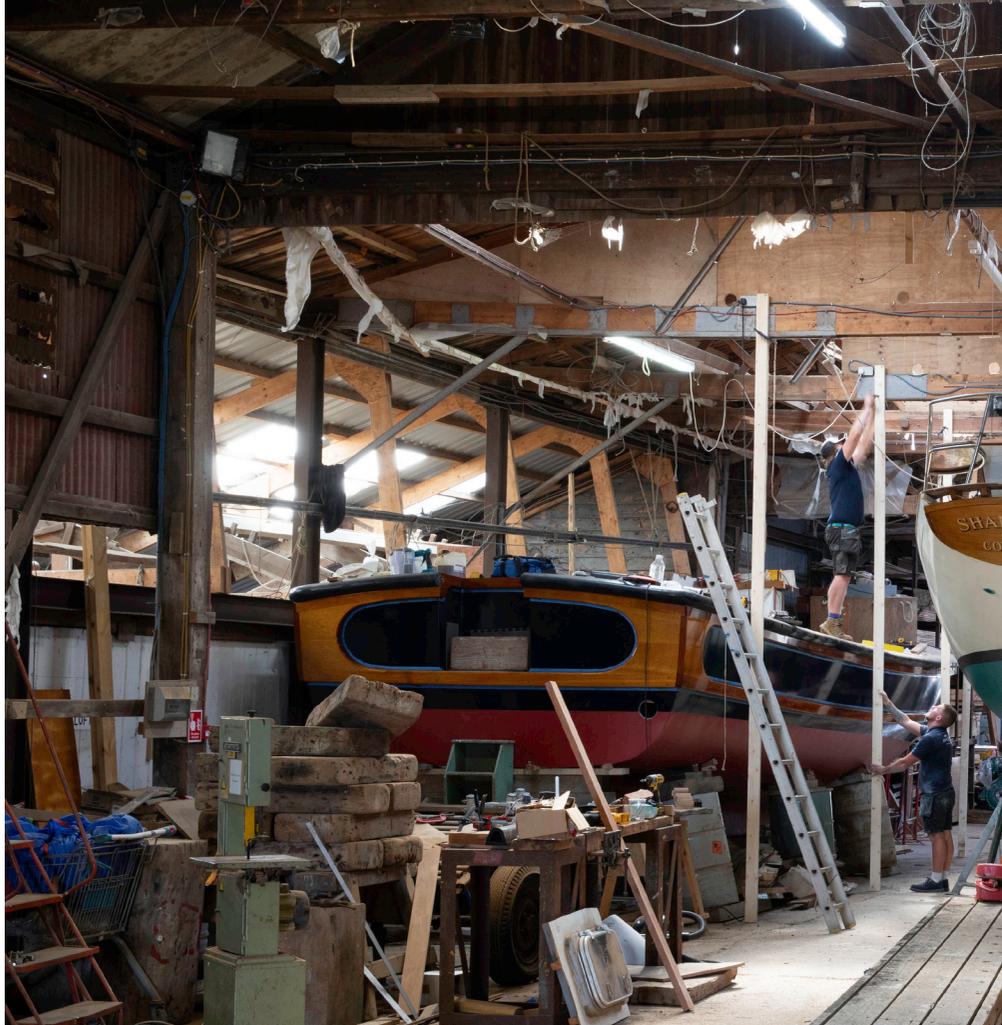
After the Second World War, Clare moved operations to the current Medina Road site. New slipways were installed using secondhand railway tracks sourced on the island, then a new pier. Under Clare's direction, these were built using yard labour and are still used today. Growth continued with new sheds being built on adjoining land, and the yard buying the Gridiron Yard in East Cowes from Sir Max Aitken. **Gridiron Yard was, of course, famous as the yard that built very early flying boats. Ironically, the largest, known as the Princess, was too large to fit in the Gridiron Yard.**

More recently, Lallows bought the slipway next door from Cowes Council. It was this slipway that was built to haul out and service early steel chain ferries in which Lallow's played its part, building the 'penny ferry' *Norris Castle* in 1938 for Red Funnel.

UFFA FOX AND BRITANNIA

By the 1960s the yard had really hit its stride building iconic individual racing yachts. Meanwhile, they were heavily involved in day boats, including developing the burgeoning Daring class in Cowes.

In 1967, the yard demonstrated a flare for versatile craft with the build of *Britannia*, a transatlantic rowing boat designed by Uffa Fox for John Fairfax. Fox's brief called for her to be self-righting and self-bailing and Lallows built it to the exacting simplicity that matched its purpose.



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Two years later, Fairfax went on to row the Atlantic alone in 180 days, becoming the first person to row solo across an ocean, a feat he detailed in his book *Britannia: Rowing alone across the Atlantic: the record of an Adventure*.

SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE USA

Edward Heath's series of yachts, all named *Morning Cloud*, are among Lallows' most famous work. Perhaps the most notable is *Morning Cloud II* – now *Opposition* – commissioned in 1971. She was one of many Sparkman & Stephens designs built by Lallows in the 1960s and 70s. Heath identified a remarkable intuition between the two companies which obviated the need for a mass of detailed drawings. This special relationship began in 1963 with the building of *Clarion of Wight* for Dennis Miller and Derek Boyer, which won the Fastnet Race that year.

Clearly impressed, Miller and Boyer ordered two more yachts: *Firebrand* and *Clarionet*. Sir Max Aitken commissioned *Roundabout*, and *Sasha* was built for Sir Maurice Laing.





The next Morning Cloud needs to be over 40ft in length. That's essential to deal with the southwesterlies coming across the Atlantic. And take my advice: get her built in wood by Clare Lallow next door." Uffa Fox to Edward Heath 1970

According to Ian Lallow, "We were certainly busy with S&S yachts at the time. Olin's brother Rod was very involved in the building process and would visit Cowes regularly. But they would give us a fair amount of responsibility. Occasionally, we would call New York with a query and they would say: 'Oh gee, you guys know what you are doing. Just have a look and do what you see fit.' So we did!"

The two firms worked to build some of the best yachts of the century, high-profile builds that cemented Lallows' reputation in the Solent and internationally. Ian Lallow was also one of the finest yachtsman of his era, regularly helming for yard clients, including Heath.

MORNING CLOUDS

Amid the PM's political battles of the 1970s, sailing proved an invaluable respite. As advised by Richard Nixon, it pays to have a second skill in this line of work.

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For *Morning Cloud II*, Olin Stephens and Drake Sparkman specified a shallow hull and a blister deck with a shorter-than-typical navigator's cabin. It was this unusual design that Ian Lallow claims to be the real point of difference. These details demanded experience and willingness to adapt old methods to new shapes. Owen Parker's cross-winch system was fitted for superior sail tensioning, another instance of Lallows' appetite for combining traditional joinery with practical innovation.

Morning Cloud II was built traditionally in mahogany on American oak, Sydney Lallow travelling up to London to choose every log to be used. The wood would then be taken to Morey's in Newport to be cut, with the blade being replaced every time. The cut was so perfect that there was no need to plane it.

Launch day in 1971 was characterful, as the crew promptly discovered water rushing in, followed by the starboard sheer plank splitting! Olin Stephens flew in from New York that night with his top designer and took the boat apart, discovering that the chainplates weren't tied into the mast step – a design error. As Ian Lallow recalls: "In short, the mast was pushing through the bottom of the boat and pulling the topsides up. A mast step was built and tied into the chainplates and the rest is history."

Morning Cloud II promptly won the Round the Island race and despite only scraping into Class I at the Admiral's Cup, due to size, she punched well above her weight. The year 1971 was packed with elite competitors – the likes of *Carina* and *Windrose* – making her triumphs all the more impressive. She also helped Britain to win the Southern Cross Series along with peer boats *Prospect of Whitby* and





Cervantes IV. Her wins were as much testament to her design and build, as her crew, which included Owen Parker, Anthony Churchill and a young Ian Lallow.

REFIT AND REUNION

In 2007, after Angela and Jamie Matheson rescued her from Largs Marina in Scotland, *Opposition* returned to Lallows for an exacting refit, much to the “elation and excitement” of the yard. Years in the heat of the Med had caused structural damage to the planks, subdeck and ribs, all of which needed replacing, a restoration absorbing 10,500 man hours. Laurie Boarer and his team handled it with the same attention the yacht was first given for Heath. Boarer knew from the start it was destined to be a special friendship with the Mathesons. He recalls the audible gasp of Angela and Jamie when they saw the finished varnish job, eliciting just the word “Wow”. At *Opposition's* relaunch party in May 2008, Owen Parker declared: “I know a gentleman who’ll be looking down very proudly. I can’t believe she’s been reborn. I would say the rebuild is better than the original. Ted Heath would be delighted.”

RECENT PROJECTS

Lallows continues to produce head-turning builds with real effect on the racing scene. The 6-M *Sioma* was launched in 1999 won the European Championship. Her new owners in 2009 won another cup in her with



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no prior sailing experience. Clearly the yard’s skill runs deeper than the family name. In the last few seasons the team has worked on *Kalea*, Tim Blackman’s 70ft (21m) ketch built in 1964, dismantling the topsides and frames, repairing the transom, replanking the topsides, supplying Burma teak and fitting the cap rails. In 2023, Lallows helped Martyn Mackrill in his restoration of the Fife-built yacht *Peregrine* by supplying a new boom.

Another, very different, craft under Lallows’ care is a Thames river launch. Its wooden cabin, designed and built by Lallows, sits atop an old Daring hull. The hull has been modified with the keel cut off and replaced with a large piece of lead. The look is classic, but with a GRP hull and a spritely electric Torqeedo engine.

A 1970s Nelson pilot boat is undergoing major works including full osmosis treatment, boat-out overhaul of the two Ford Sabre engines and extending the wheelhouse to increase the living area.

From hand-built clinker dinghies in the late 19th century to royal commissions, wartime pinnaces and modern restorations, the yard has repeatedly translated traditional skills into world-renowned boats. Generations of boatbuilders, an openness to practical innovation, and pragmatic diversification under Laurie Boarer has kept those skills alive and commercially viable. On yachting matters Uffa Fox was rarely wrong and his advice to Ted Heath all those years ago was very sound.





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