

COMET ASSOCIATION CHAMPIONSHIP Gunfleet Sailing Club 12/13th May 2018

Twenty boats gathered at Gunfleet Sailing Club on the north-east Essex coast for the Class Association Championships over the weekend of 12th/13th May. The entries comprised 16 visitors and 4 home club boats with members travelling from as far afield as Cornwall and Devon in the South and Northamptonshire and Leicestershire in the Midlands. Some members travelled on the Friday and berthed their boats in the Club compound overnight and also took advantage of the cooked breakfast on offer before sailing commenced.



Race 1

The Saturday dawned with clear sunny skies and a light but steady westerly wind giving a flat sea.

Unfortunately, by the start of the first race, clouds had gathered, the wind dropped light and began to shift around making the course difficult for the Race Officer. With a clean start, Paul Hinde, Bob Dodds and Henry Jagers were first to show but, as the fleet bunched against the tide, it was Michael Ettershank and Chris Hatton rounding the first mark, St Michael's, in the lead with the first home boat being Peter Downer in 6th place.

A fetch out to the Seaward mark saw the fleet spread out and facing a further shift towards a beat that caused some helms to be caught out down-tide of the mark and having a difficult beat back. A run towards the Club saw Chris and Michael being joined by Paul and Eddie Pope before a repeat of the fetch back to St Michael's. A broad reach back past the Club saw John Coppenhall join the leading bunch and, as the Race Officer shortened course, a gybe round the Kings Cliff mark left a short leg to the finish with Chris first, Michael second and John remaining in third place.

Race 2

After a welcome lunch, the second race at 1415 saw the wind shift further south easterly and fall very light. A General re-call followed and, with the wind now at around 0 knots, the race was abandoned without a valid start. Most of the fleet came ashore from the nearby start area and sat out the next hour until it became possible to sail over the tide again.



Race 3

The third race started at 1545 with a shorter, newly laid, course as the wind continue to play tricks upon the Race Officer but was mostly light and southerly. A few boats were over the line, and responded to the Individual recall, whilst, after a short clearing leg, the fleet turned onto the beat out to sea with Ben Palmer, Peter Mountford, Nigel Austin and Bob Dodds contesting the lead. Sadly, a further wind shift turned the leg into a fetch with all the boats making the mark in one and Eddie joining Ben and Nigel in the lead. The next leg to Kings Cliff was, again a fetch, before the gybe and return through the start with Eddie now contesting Ben for first place with Chris Hatton quietly coming through to third place. On the now inevitable fetch out to sea, Chris Robinson gained places to reach 6th and Chris Hatton held higher to windward and closed the gap on the leading two boats. Returning towards Kings Cliff, the wind finally paid the fleet a favour by shifting the leg to a beat and caused a wide variation in thought as to how close to sail inshore as the fleet closed up again. Peter, Bob, Ben, Chris R and Michael were now closing the leading three boats with Peter Downer also using his local knowledge to good effect.

When the dust settled after the gybe and a short leg to the finish, it left Chris Hatton first, Eddie second and Bob in third place with a relieved Race Officer rather glad to have got through the day almost unscathed.

After an excellent evening meal and much social chatter in the bar, the fleet gathered again on Sunday to find a slight improvement with a light westerly wind of around 7 knots and the seas remaining flat.

Race 4

The fourth race started at 1000 with the Race Officer hoping for the wind to remain steady in direction as he set a long beat from out to sea back towards St Michael's buoy. The race started with a general recall as the fleet failed to recognise the strength of the remaining flood tide and, on the restart, the fleet split into two camps with some seeking stronger wind further out with others taking a shorter route close inshore.

At the turning mark, it was Peter M, Bob and Michael with a large group of boats just behind and, after an uneventful broad reach out to sea, it was Peter M, Chris H, Bob and Eddie who rounded close together onto the beat. Peter M took a clear lead from Chris H by standing on towards the Pier whilst Henry made a clear gain by tacking fairly early across the lee bow tide and, at St Michael's he had moved up to third place followed by Michael and Eddie. A long run back along the shore, against the last of the flood, posed the question of whether to stay inshore or go out looking for wind and, at the end of the first lap through the Club line, Peter M was still holding a short lead over Chris H with Bob, Jeff Smith, Michael and Ben leading the chasing pack and Henry dropping back.

On the second reach out to sea, the two leaders were suddenly well away, followed by Eddie with a gap to the bunch. Commencing the long beat, these three remained clear but, as the tide turned to ebb, the question of whether to come inshore or remain out in stronger wind caused the fleet to fragment. At the mark, the leading three were still place but closely followed by Paul, Bob, Jeff and Chris R, with Harry Swinbourne from the home club showing strongly.

On the run back past the Club, Chris H sought clear wind and stronger ebb further out whilst most stayed inshore and, finishing the race, it was Chris H well clear from Peter M with Michael overtaking Eddie on the short leg from Kings Cliff.

Race 5

Race five was sailed back-to-back and started at 1145 with the Race Officer pleased to announce a clean start with no one over the line. Peter M, Chris R, and Eddie were cleanly away followed by Michael, Henry and Chris H. At the turning mark, with Eddie narrowly in the lead, he attempted to pinch round the mark and the ebb tide pushed him onto the mark where, in trying to get clear, he managed to capsize.

On the run out to sea, it was Henry, both Chris H and Chris R together with Jeff and Michael who led round the mark and back onto the beat with most opting to head inshore. With Eddie making a remarkable recovery into third place, it was Henry who quickly built up a commanding lead as Chris H covered his closest rival carefully and both boats slowed each other. Nearing the windward mark, St Michael's, the covering became intense and Eddie took turns but the leading three still had a good gap to Chris R and the fleet.

Running past the Club, Henry still had a clear lead but Chris H was catching him by being further out in better ebb and wind with Eddie and Peter M now side by side and a gap to Chris R and the others. At the last mark, Kings Cliff, Henry stayed inshore out of the tide and in search of a lift off the shore while Chris H went out looking for better wind strength and, suddenly, the gap was not so great and the unlikely seemed possible.

Henry needed to use all his experience as, nearing the line, he fell into a hole in the wind whilst Chris H tacked clear of trouble. However, the wind filled back in for Henry who obtained a popular and well-deserved win with Chris H finishing close behind.

Behind this personal duel, things were also tight as Peter M and Eddie both stalled in now variable conditions near the line with Eddie finally third and Peter fourth with Jeff and Ben not far behind.

Over another excellent lunch, the wind fell further and, with the ebb running fast and the overall leader clear, it was decided, after consideration, not to re-sail the abandoned race and the sailors packed their boats in preparation for some long journeys home.

At the prize giving, after short speeches, Helen Swinbourne, Rear Commodore of Gunfleet SC presented the trophies as follows:-

1 st Overall and Association Champion	Chris Hatton
2 nd Overall	Eddie Pope
3 rd Overall	Michael Ettershank
4 th Overall	Peter Mountford
5 th Overall	Ben Palmer
6 th Overall	Bob Dodds
Junior Prize	Harry Swinbourne
Ladies Prize	Diana Thompson
Veteran Prize	Chris Robinson
Ancient Mariner	John Coppenhall

All the other competitors received a memento prize and Richard Walker, Commodore of GSC, received a memento on behalf of the Club from the Association.

Chris Hatton, on behalf of the competitors and gently heckled by his friends, thanked the Club for hosting the event and particularly the Race Officer for his patience, the support boat crew and beach party for their help and, most importantly, the Ladies for the lovely food.

Ironically, as I left the Club some time later, the Club burgee was flying strongly as the wind filled in and, today Monday, the sun has been shining out of a clear blue sky and a fresh to strong wind has given conditions for a totally different kind of event!

Keith Lamdin,
Comet 55.

PS. For clarity, the St Michael's buoy is named after a local convent and care home nearby and has no connection to the obvious commercial entity!