

Adrian Morgan



The problem of bearded blokes

Looking around the classic boat gatherings, *Adrian* notices a hairy trend

If the cause of little wooden boats is to be furthered; if the sailing of small traditional craft is to prosper; and if youngsters and women are to be encouraged to take an interest in classic dinghies, a major issue has to be addressed: bearded blokes.

You cannot fail to notice at classic boat gatherings and jumble sales the length of the land that the vast majority of those running their fingers over varnished gunwales or squinting at sheer lines or discussing the merits of standing over balanced lug rigs are men, usually over 50, and invariably bearded. Of women and the young there is usually no sign. And those who are present look impressed (in the sense that they look like they've been rounded up by the press gang and shovelled into the family MPV).

There are exceptions: the other day I delivered a 15ft (4.6m) faering (see p66 – yes, the one I've been wittering on about for months was finally delivered) to a family in the Lake District. To a man, woman, boy and girl who were mad about little boats – the children wore red woolly hats like the kids in *Swallows and Amazons*. No sign of boredom there, and not a Game Boy in sight. Heart warming.

Then along came the bearded ones. Now, I have to be careful here as they are all good friends, who I respect and like a lot. And one of them was, to be honest, beardless. Nevertheless, beardless or not, they all looked as if they should be bearded.

As a beardless one myself – I have tried but the results have been pathetic – I am not a little envious of those old-fashioned, luxuriant chin bushes and side whiskers you still occasionally see. The ones that look as if they might shelter a cock robin or two or, if shaken, would disgorge the crumbs from half a loaf of wholemeal bread. These are seldom the beards one sees at British traditional boat gatherings, however. There they are usually less flamboyant... more an excuse not to shave, or perhaps a disguise; maybe even worn as a deterrent – for women, by and large, do not like straggly beards.



CHARLOTTE WAITERS

Little old boat gatherings are clearly among the last havens for the hunted and harassed, soon-to-be-made-redundant old British male – places where this endangered species can hang out safely without dressing to attract a mate. He can poke about a boat jumble with impunity, rummage through skeins of cheap rope; stroke varnish in peace, away from the critical gaze of spouse or partner, and converse endlessly about grommets, the genius of Albert Strange, centreboards and buttock lines without that tug on the sleeve that signifies “I’m bored, I want to go home/get a burger/recharge my Game Boy/go to a garden centre/sit in the car and watch telly”.

In America little old wooden boats are also largely owned, admired, stroked, varnished, built, designed and sailed by bearded men over the age of 50. However, there the clothes are smarter, beards much neater – often modelled after Ernest Hemingway’s. You will find throngs of Old Men of the Sea – lacking only a battered straw hat and a pair of ragged canvas trousers – and more women (anthropologists discuss).

Over here we need more young families in red woolly hats involved in little boats. And more women. Bottom line is a bunch of bearded old geezers in scruffy jeans is not only unsightly but deeply unsexy. So smarten up lads.

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