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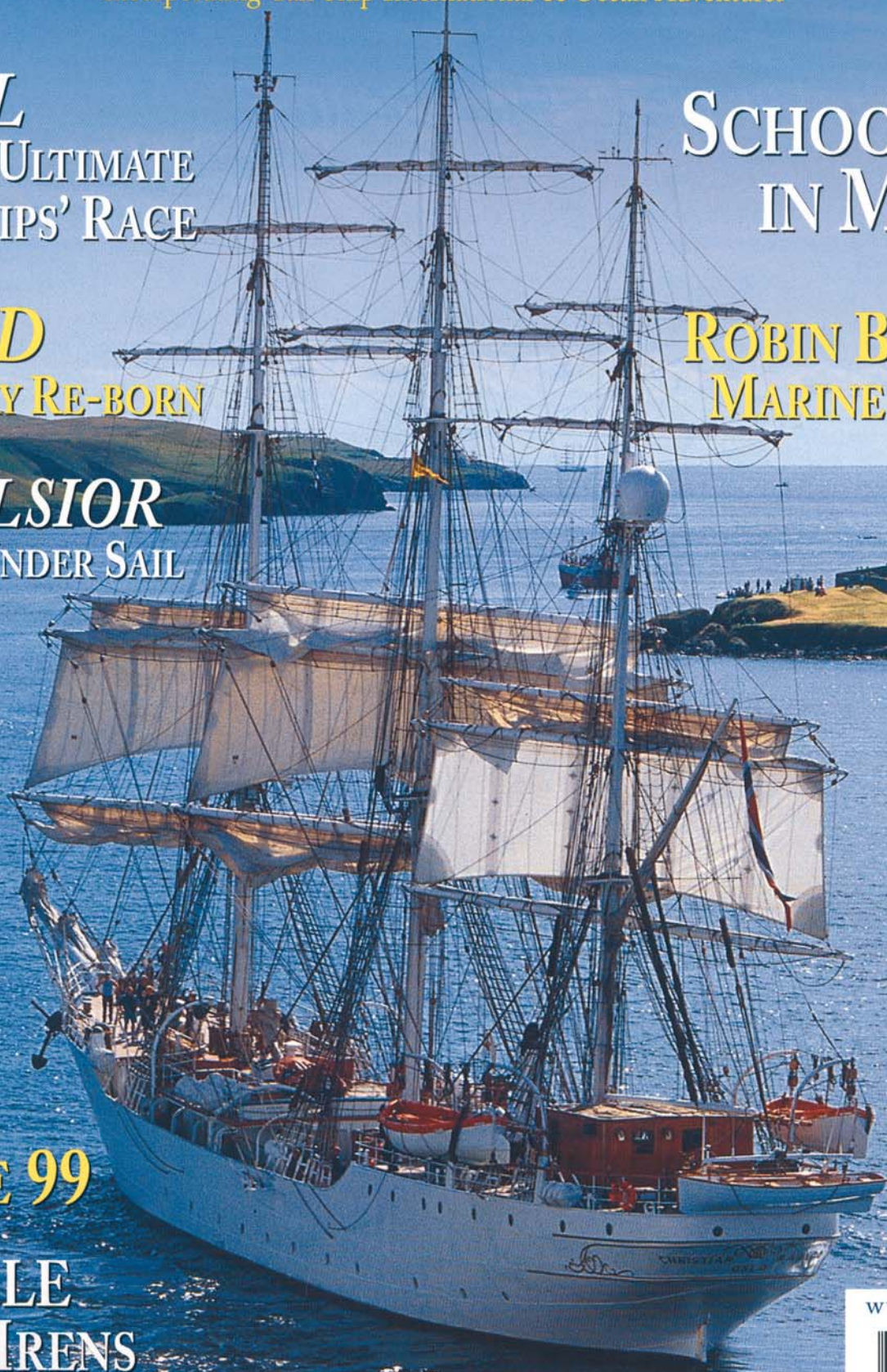
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Kathy's Come Home...

In a working career that lasted some 60 years, the three-masted schooner *Kathleen & May* led a charmed life. However, when it came to preserving this fine vessel, luck seemed to turn against her. Now, at last, as *Tony James* reports, things are looking up

Boss of a Devon plant-hire firm, Steve Clarke regarded himself as a man with his feet not only on the ground, but in concrete, asphalt and aggregate, too. His interest in ships and the sea was minimal and confined to an occasional trip on the family's 50-knot speedboat. He had never had the slightest wish to go aboard a sailing ship.

That was until a fateful afternoon in July 1998 when he fell instantly and irrevocably in love with the *Kathleen & May*. From that moment, 48-year-old Steve's life would never be the same again. The encounter still has a dreamlike quality for Steve Clarke. 'I'm not even sure what I was doing in Gloucester that day,' he says. Walking through the dock, he passed a sheeted 100 foot hulk without masts or rigging. A flapping tarpaulin at the stern revealed the name: *Kathleen & May*. Bideford - Steve Clarke's home town.

He had no idea of the magic of the name - the three-masted 200-ton topsail schooner had worked out of Appledore and Bideford for 30

Right: Kathleen & May picks up her skirts in the late 50s - a speed of as much as 12 knots could be made under sail alone in a blow
Below right: in the cabin, with Captain Jewell second from left

years, and was then acquired from her last commercial owner and restored by the Maritime Trust in 1970. Nearly £2 million was spent over the next decade turning her into a floating museum before funds ran out, and a succession of private owners drove her onto the rocks of bankruptcy.

In 1996 the *Kathleen & May* was towed to Gloucester, tied up in a weedy corner of the

Below left: Kathleen & May drying sails at Appledore in May 1961; despite the cut down rig she still makes a fine sight

Below right: at Pembroke in 1958 - note how the anchor is catted. Pembroke was typical of the tiny ports to which the schooners traded



R J Scott



R J Scott



Peter Loughlin



R J Scott



Tony James

Above: Steve Clarke admits to knowing little about sailing ships but if anybody can steer this project to a successful conclusion he can

Right: Kathy's come home to the port of Bideford – it took two 1,000 ton cranes to lift her onto Clarence Wharf

Below: work in progress on the semi-elliptical stern and deck beams

docks and forgotten. It seemed that men had succeeded in doing what the sea could never do: breaking her heart. Steve Clarke knew nothing of all this. 'I saw she was from Bideford and felt she should go back there as a centrepiece of the regeneration of the town. I decided then and there to make an offer and to get funding to restore her and take her back home. If I had thought about it, I wouldn't have done it. From that moment the *Kathleen & May* took over my life.'

Next, Steve persuaded Appledore boatbuilder Alan Hinks, creator of replicas of the *Golden Hinde* and the *Nonsuch*, to survey the boat. 'I told him that so long as he promised not to take her to sea but restore her as a static exhibit, I'd come on board as consultant,' Alan says. 'But it wasn't long before Steve cunningly moved the goalposts. Now he wants to restore her to seagoing condition. It will probably double the cost, but knowing Steve, he'll do it!'

On the strength of promised grants of £350,000, the *Kathleen & May* Preservation Trust took possession of the schooner last February, sheathed the hull in one-inch ply, and towed her down the Bristol Channel. The trip, in a rollicking northerly, included some heart-stopping moments when the old girl broke her tow off Porlock and set off back to Gloucester.

There were more heart-stopping moments in store for the man who had not long since recovered from a triple bypass... 'As soon as we got her back to Bideford we found that all the funding had fallen through. So here we were with a boat and no money,' Steve Clarke says. 'I had no alternative but to put £100,000 from my business into the venture to keep things going



Clare Kendal



Tony James



Far left: Kathleen & May looks out over Bideford's 'Ancient Bridge' and the waters of the Torridge
Top left: sawing a new frame - when finished it will be 5" by 7" and will be used doubled at close spacing

Below left: a spirited oil painting by Michael Lees showing Kathleen & May off Baggy Point in her heyday as a fully-rigged topsail schooner



'Realistically there won't be much change out of half a million,' Steve says. 'But we'll have a ship which will last at least another 100 years. I am determined to celebrate her centenary by having her fully restored and on public display on the river.'

His enthusiasm is infectious: local people have come forward to help financially and to give a hand with hacking out the rot, and the wharf has been rented for a nominal £1. Several of the shipwrights have given up their own businesses to work on the project. One skilled chippie, a habitual speeder given 200 hours of community service after his last conviction, was allowed to serve it on the *Kathleen & May*!

Meanwhile, Steve Clarke has prepared for his future life as a schoonerman by taking a five-day intensive sailing course on a 45 foot yacht. 'It was a bit slow for me,' he says. 'I'm really more interested in speedboats. But I think I can get used to it!'

Captain Tommy Jewell died in 1985 but his daughter Hester Ryan, who still lives in neighbouring Appledore, is delighted by the *Kathleen & May*'s return to Bideford. She often sailed with her father as a schoolgirl. 'It's wonderful to see her back again,' she says. 'I know my dad would have been so pleased.'

while we looked for more finance.' A possible £250,000 could come from the Irish port of Youghal, where the schooner was a regular visitor for 20 years, and Steve is currently in negotiation with local councils.

'Bideford people want the boat based permanently in the town - thousands have signed a petition supporting what I'm doing and wishing the project well,' he says. Indeed, the town turned out to see the 99-year-old schooner hoisted out of the river Torridge by two 1,000-ton cranes onto Clarence Wharf, an operation which took six hours and cost £27,000.

The *Kathleen & May* was back home - 37 years after she sailed away with a cargo of coal and her owner/skipper Captain Tommy Jewell at the helm. A few months later he sold her for £4,000 after owning her for 30 years. Trading was over for the elegant schooner built by Ferguson and Baird on the Dee in north Wales in 1900. She was named *Lizzie May* after the daughter of her first owner but changed to *Kathleen & May* eight years later.

She was bought by the Jewell family of Appledore for £700 and stayed in their ownership for the rest of her working life, mainly in the coal and china clay trade between West Country ports and Ireland. After the installation of an 80hp Beardmore auxiliary her topsails were removed and topmasts shortened, but she still maintained a working speed under sail of around eight knots and could achieve 12 knots in a blow.

After Tommy Jewell, the schooner changed hands almost yearly until 1970 when the Maritime Trust came on the scene. They bought her for £8,500, and moved her to Plymouth for a refit scheduled to cost £25,000 and take six months. By the time the *Kathleen & May* was sold by the Trust some £2 million had been spent, but she was still not in seaworthy condition.

Now working to a self-imposed deadline of next August, Alan Hinks and five full-time shipwrights plan to remedy that. A restoration to full seaworthy condition will effectively double original estimates for both work and cost, says Alan Hinks. *Kathleen & May*'s 5 inch x 7 inch closely-spaced double oak frames had rotted out badly in the topsides and at least one in every four will be replaced before the entire 800 cubic feet of topsides are replanked with 3 inch Douglas fir. A total of 2,000 18 inch oak trenails will secure the frames.

The elegant semi-elliptical stern and stem-post have been entirely replaced in oak at a cost of £50,000. So far 35 tons of prime oak have been used in the restoration. Steve reckons that's only a start. Still on his shopping list: 3,000 feet of decking, two 250 diesels, 4,000 square feet of sails and massive refurbishment of masts, spars and standing and running rigging.

Anyone wishing to become involved in the *Kathleen & May* restoration project should ring Steve Clarke on **01237 476375**.

A number of limited edition prints by Michael Lees of the oil painting pictured above are available from Steve at £50 each, all monies going to the Preservation Trust.

Sail and spar plan by
Captain R M Willoughby

