

As Robert E Groves studied art as a young man under celebrated artist, teacher and yacht designer, Albert Strange, it was perhaps only natural that he turn to his mentor for the design of his first yacht, *Sheila*.

Design no 70, she is a canoe-sterned gaff-rigged yawl (but designated by Strange as a 'canoe-yacht'), so designated as the mizzen mast is aft of the rudder pivot, and normally carries only a small steadying sail that enables such craft to virtually steer themselves. Yet in *Sheila's* case, this mizzen sail is remarkable for its large size, and was clearly part of the reason for her exceptional performance. At 19' 6" on the waterline, 25' on deck, her 3' bowsprit makes her 28' overall.

*Sheila* was Strange's first deep-keel yacht, drawn in 1903, but built by Robert Caine, Port St Mary, Isle of Man in 1904, and launched in 1905.

Her history is well known, and under her [then] custodian, Mike Burn, she underwent a full keel up restoration and was featured in *Classic Boat* magazine on her centenary in 2005.

She had previously featured in *Wooden Boat* around 1981, early in Mike's custodianship.

Groves' second yacht, Strange's Design no 117 of 1910, was also a gaff-rigged canoe-yawl type, 31' 7" overall and 24' 8" LWL, with a total sail area of 545sq ft, launched as *Sheila II*.

Apparently purchased by Paddy O'Keefe in 1935 and sailed by him till 1946, she was purchased in 1949 by New Zealander, Adrian Hayter, [possibly from JY Wilson, who had a set of drawings of her made in 1948] and setting off from Berthon's Yard in Lymington on August 12th 1950, over the subsequent six years to 25th May 1956, he sailed her home to New Zealand via Suez and Australia. The story of this amazing singlehanded journey he reported in his 1959 book, *Sheila In The Wind*, in which he documents the challenges - physical, mental and emotional – that he faced and overcame during the voyage. It has become a true 'saga' of the sea, and many readers have been inspired by the courage and determination he demonstrates.

Adrian sold *Sheila II*, and many years later, in 1984, she dragged her anchor in a storm and went ashore onto rocks, severely damaging one side of the hull.

Current owner, Russell Rimmington, farmer and former mayor of Hamilton, capital of the Waikato district of New Zealand's North Island, has her onshore in a purpose-built shed, awaiting eventual restoration.

Much information can be gleaned on both of RE Groves '*Sheilas*' from the website of the [Albert Strange Assoc](#) and from the pages of the Humber Yawl Journal, in which the log of *Sheila* was published in an annual report in the early 1900's.