

Ian Proctor remembered at the Maritime Museum Cornwall



Ian Proctor. His achievement in designing popular small sailing boats was recognised by the design establishment

The **National Maritime Museum** in Cornwall is staging an exhibition celebrating the work of outstanding 20th Century small sailing boat designer **Ian Proctor**. I'm delighted, as there can't be many small boat sailors in the UK who haven't sailed at least one of his boats – my own family sail a *Minisail* and a *Prelude*, and love them both even if their little hearts are plastic.

Here's the NMM's press release outlining some of Proctor's outstanding achievements:

'The life of Ian Proctor and his outstanding designs will be celebrated this autumn at the Maritime Museum in Falmouth.

'From September 17, find out more about this accomplished yachtsman and prolific designer in the Museum's Study Boat Area. Check out a state of the art brand new Topper dinghy on show, loaned to the Museum by Topper International, and the first fibre glass International Tempest, Tempestuous.

'Ian Proctor's innovative designs and ideas modernised the whole concept of small boat sailing, making a vital contribution to the popularisation of the sport. He designed over 100 different boats and was a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and a Royal Designer for Industry.

‘Andy Wyke, Boat Collection Manager at the Museum, explained: “I chose Proctor because it’s fair to say he’s probably done more to influence small boat design and small boat sailing than any other designer, from the Topper which is a class in its own right and a recognised one-design racing boat, to the Tempest, which was an Olympic contender. Proctor’s Topper design has been responsible for ensuring the sport of sailing appeals to a much wider group of people”.

‘During trials in the 1960s, Tempest beat off all the competition. It was adopted by the IYRU (International Yacht Racing Union) as a new class of two man keel boat and Proctor hoped it would replace the Star class for all keel boat sailing in the Olympics. However, for reasons which remain unclear, the Tempest only made a showing at the 1972 and 1976 Olympics, and was ultimately eclipsed by the Star Class. This was a considerable disappointment to Proctor, who went on to design a number of highly successful dinghies and cruising boats, as well becoming a household name for aluminium spars.

‘The Tempest is now actively sailed and raced in over 21 countries, and Tempestuous, the first glass fibre Tempest, will be on show at the Museum until December. The success of the Tempest was nearly responsible for its downfall, as the design became so popular that 60 builders applied for licences within a few months of its launch. High demand for the boat resulted in builders producing hulls of inferior quality.

‘Undaunted, Ian Proctor overcame this temporary setback and soon the quality of his design showed through. So much so that in 1967 he received an award for the design of the Tempest from the Council of Industrial Design.

‘Proctor used his racing dinghy knowledge to design, build and ultimately fine tune the Tempest. The result was a boat that is still held by many to be the fastest of its kind ever built.

‘Despite a permanent paralysis of his right arm from polio, contracted during wartime service, Proctor became one of the Country’s leading small boat helmsmen. He won many victories, most notably in the National 12 and Merlin Rocket classes. He went on to design some of the most popular small boats ever, became a Royal Designer for Industry, and was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.’

by Gavin Atkin
November 21, 2007