

Don France remembered

Woodford Bay holds 251 private moorings – more than any other bay on Sydney harbour and its rivers.

Of greater importance, or so Don France believed, were the 251 boats tied to the moorings. With Don's passing, the boats in the bay have lost their shepherd.

An observer standing on the elevated hills of Longueville and Northwood, overlooking the bay, could liken a quarter of a thousand white boats to a flock of sheep.

When strong gusts land on the water and veer down the bay from a new direction, the boats turn like sheep and follow the one ahead until they all take up the new course, laying back on their lines. With each new gust, halyards bleat against

aluminium and the call passes from boat to boat.

Don France cared more about boats than their owners, or so it seemed. He checked loose sail covers, jib furlers and frayed mooring lines, either before or after a gale.

He fixed the problem and called the owner when the boat was secure. More usually he simply did not even tell the owner, often preferring to deal with the boat than the errant owner who seemed to him too far away to know, or care, or even be aware of a problem. Perhaps it was Don's abrupt manner and disdain for people who "did not know boats" that caused him to avoid unwanted discussion and possible disagreement. It did not matter –

just keep the boat safe and secure.

If a hull were low in the water after prolonged rain, Don called Water Police or Maritime and met them in the bay to guide them and have the boat pumped out.

Don knew the condition of most mooring tackles and which ones were in need of service and likely to cause a problem. He often assisted Hugh Treharne and his crew on the deck during periodic mooring service days in the bay.

For Don France, the Woodford Bay slipway was simply another way to look after smaller boats in the bay.

We will miss the cheeky grin and the curt comment, but not as much as the boats will miss their shepherd.

By Michael Chapman



Eulogy for Don France

Hi,

Thanks and welcome.

I've drawn the short straw. I've only known Don for 25 years, I know there are those here who have known him most of his life.

It's a sad and happy day as we bid Don farewell but in the words of Paul Waites, he was ready to go and it was quick for him.

Donald grew up in Longueville and when he came back from the sea, he became re-acquainted with Woodford Bay when he bought his Compass yacht.

The Bay was his life, he had an interest in Kingsford Smith's old boatshed and in the slipway there. We all know he was a cranky old bugger but so many of us saw the good person under all that bluster. He was forever doing good turns on the Bay, salvaging a drifting boat or tying down a loose cover. It was nothing to see Don paddling across the Bay towing a thirty footer with his dinghy. He was not popular with those he brought into line to behave more socially. At least when he was cranky he got over it.



Some office Johnny in the MSB got up Donald's nose when they wanted to put fore and aft moorings into Woodford Bay. It affronted Donald's seamanship and he joined a growing band called the Boat Owners Association. It became his great interest as he advocated for Boat Owners, encouraging people to join. It became his great purpose and social outlet combining the slipway and boatshed.

To ensure the continuance of the slipway, Donald gave his share to the Boatowners which in turn keeps them afloat with a revenue source

Then came the Compass Yacht Group where our old friend Don Lees would ring him from Brisbane to see

if he was still alive and needed a crew for the annual regatta. Between the two Dons and their Compass 'Hellangone', they had almost 200 years between them. Consistently just missing first prize, last year Donald won the most original boat with the most original owner prize.

I am sure many of us will miss the evening tipple of whisky, cheese and wine in the boatshed. At least we won't have any more pensioners reversing through the park into Woodford Bay to be rescued by the Water Police.

Goodbye old friend, happy sailing!

Geoff Raebel October 2011