

Old meets new
in cut and thrust
off St Mawes

Barry pilot
returns to the
Bristol Channel

Tallulah from
Gweek; *Pegasus*
from Bristol

'Company car'
of an elite
professional

The legendary
explorer's own
methods

A different,
and short-lived,
breed of boats

A new twin for Peggy

A labour of love for builder Dave Cockwell has produced a luxurious charter boat – and there's even hanging room for a ball-gown, reports *Martin Smith*. Photographs by *Ray Little*

The new: Dave Cockwell's *Polly Agatha*
Left: The original – *Peggy*, the 1904
Rowles-built pilot cutter from which
Polly Agatha's lines were taken



Dave Cockwell has traditional values; you can just tell when you start talking to him. Immediately our conversation began, words evoking good historic working practices, such as apprenticeships, engineering, seasoned timber, bespoke service and hard work, began to crop up. And it certainly helped the image that we were sat aboard *Polly Agatha*, the new pilot cutter that Dave's Falmouth-based firm of boatbuilders had recently handed over to her new owner.

Polly Agatha is about to embark on a career as a sea-school and charter boat on the south coast of England in the hands of

her owner, Kim Hartley but, really, she is Dave's project. Her hull is an exact copy of *Peggy*, the 1904, Rowles of Pill-built pilot cutter that is today owned and sailed by Diccon and Jan Pridie, based out of Bristol.

Over the years *Peggy* (CB39) has been something of a muse for Bristol-born Dave Cockwell. "I set up a workshop at the Underfalls yard in Bristol in 1996 and at the time I had done some sailing on *Peggy* with Diccon and Jan. By 1999 I'd decided that I wanted to build a replica of her for myself, so I took her lines in 2000." But the large amount of work he had on at Underfalls began to get in the way and in

2002 Dave decided that to free up enough time to pursue his project he would up-sticks and move the family to Falmouth, where they had kept various boats – including a Quay Punt – to take on small projects and begin building the pilot cutter.

What he hadn't accounted for was that once again business would become so brisk that the project would again repeatedly be postponed. Before long he realised that time-wise he was no better off than when he was in Bristol. "I was that busy with ferries and motor yachts that I thought, if I don't crack on and build this pilot cutter, I'm going to end up as a motorboat builder.



The extensive cockpit electronics can be hidden behind panels



Brightwork is finished with flexible Coelan



At around a third larger than *Peggy* would have worked with, *Polly Agatha's* rig gives an abundance of power



Plenty of jobs to keep a sea-school crew occupied



So I turned down some work and made a start.” Even so, by 2005 the plan had changed again. Now with four young children, Dave realised that owning a large sailing boat was not a viable option; though she was still only in frame, *Polly Agatha* would have to be sold.

That year the Southampton Boat Show invited Dave to put together a classic boat feature. *Classic Boat* magazine became the media sponsor and Dave took the bold step of exhibiting the still in-frame *Polly Agatha* in a bid to find a buyer. Miraculously, this did the trick. A potential customer with the money to take the boat forward emerged.

However, her fate was still not settled as, with a further twist, this buyer later pulled out following a change in business circumstances. *Polly Agatha*, by now planked and with deck beams fitted, was once again looking for an owner.

Enter current owner Kim Hartley. At the time Kim was taking a step back from his career in the property business, and busying himself sailing and renovating *Cygnets of London*, his 1906, Borgoigne’s of Kingston-upon-Thames-built 39ft 10in (12.1m) yacht – and a vessel with which he had thought he was very happy. However, after repeatedly reading about the excellent

sailing characteristics of pilot cutters in the pages of *Classic Boat*, he thought he’d find out what all of the fuss was about. As a result his path crossed with that of Dave Cockwell, and Dave was keen to show him the part-finished *Polly Agatha*. Kim was smitten, and by January 2007 the plan to run a sea-school and charter business was formulated around getting *Polly Agatha* finished and on the water.

It looks like a savvy move on Kim’s part, too. Not only did he end up getting something of a bargain – Dave accounted for the remaining work taking 12,000 man-hours, when, in fact, by the time she was finished

in January 2008 it had taken 15,000 – but he now owns an exact replica of a classic wooden craft into which a highly skilled boatbuilder has put his heart and soul for many years. And she’s a superb training and entertaining vessel.

Now, ‘exact’ and ‘pilot cutter’ are words that generally should not be written too close together in this age of the design’s ‘modernisation’ but, right down to the empty wine bottles in her ends and the lead pigs cemented beneath her floors, *Polly’s* hull is as original as practically possible. There’s no strip planking, no minimising of wetted area and no external lead keel.

She’s built of 1½in (41mm) larch on 18in (460mm) centred, 6 x 3in (150 x 75mm) oak frames with an opepe centreline. She goes like a train, thanks largely to her rig being, at 1,232sqft (114.5m²), around a third larger than would have been her normal working rig. Other than the bronze fastenings used throughout, and the deck (teak-covered plywood/epoxy composite) she was built the same way as *Peggy*, more than 100 years ago.

As Dave, Kim and I with some eight or so friends and ex-trainees gathered on the jetty to prepare for our review sail, I couldn’t help letting my eyes wander ever-

further aloft – up her substantial Douglas-fir mast – and out along the hefty boom that extends just beyond her elegant counter, imagining the array of canvas we were about to spread. Winds were forecast to be 16mph southwesterlies and as I checked the wind-indicators and burgees in the marina around us, I estimated it to be all of that and some. So, as we were aiming to carry full sail for photography purposes, it promised to be a sporty sail.

With Kim preparing what is still, for him, a fairly unfamiliar boat, I confess to having a quiet scoff to myself when raising the topsail was mentioned – maybe the

wind would ease a little, I thought. Everyone, however, eagerly accepted the plans, explained at our pre-casting-off briefing. Kim's method for controlling the crew is with a light touch: he's professional and clear, yet not over-authoritative, and it's a friendly mix that should stand up well in the charter and training game.

The plan for Bowsprit Sailing, as the business is called, is that Kim, a commercially endorsed Yacht Master, will host and skipper the corporate and family charter packages that will take *Polly Agatha* from her home port on the River Hamble around or across the Channel, west to Falmouth plus, of course, local charters in the Solent.

Kim's a member of the British Classic Yacht Club and plans to take in as much of the south-coast and West-Country classic circuit aboard *Polly* as the business allows, with plans to enter the Round the Island Race, BCYC regattas, the Pilot Cutter Review and, perhaps, the Pennis Cup later in the year. Alex Day, a friend and qualified instructor, will take the sea-school and RYA trips once Bowsprit Sailing has been accredited.

Whatever your view regarding the relevance or otherwise of pilot cutter folklore today, surely there can be no better type of vessel on which to learn the philosophy of sailing in addition to its pure mechanics.

Those new to sailing can only be impressed by the amount of space – accommodation is as comfortable as any you will find on a medium-sized yacht – and echoes of the history of sailing are never far away.

When it comes to the technical side of sailing, there are pluses too. As Dave Cockwell puts it, "These boats give you back what you put in." To illustrate his point better, he took me through the right way to sail a boat of this type. "The most important thing is that you sail by the stay-sail, that's the key to it all. On the wind,

you get that set to its optimum and then set the main and jib to match it. When you get it right, the boat suddenly starts to perform. You can feel it start to pick up."

And, of course, he's right. During one spell when I was alone at the tiller I was putting up with a small amount of lee-helm. Lazily, I didn't feel the need to re-set sail as we were soon to turn about and head back towards the Hamble, but you could tell the boat was not happy. Everyone was contentedly chatting forward, but Dave came aft and took it as a chance to point out how small are the adjustments needed on a boat like this.

Hauling in on the main-sheet, moving the huge boom perhaps less than a foot, the helm balanced to just a modicum of weather helm and the boat immediately felt more lively, picking up speed and settling into a groove. With just a few handfuls of mainsheet the whole boat had taken on a feeling that is hard to describe.

I began to speculate to myself about sail power and the best use of it, likening it to two engines that may have the same theoretical peak horsepower yet one gives a broader spread, making it much more pleasant in use. Whatever the reason, a well set gaff rig in a decent breeze, despite all of the weight aloft is a joy to helm, and anyone new to sailing could surely not help but be captivated by it; while the intricacies of getting the most out of such a rig seem to keep even the oldest hand interested.

Our day's sail had begun as we entered Southampton Water and raised canvas. Relaxation spread among the crew as the hugely under-stressed 75hp Caterpillar diesel was turned off and we headed up wind. As usual, raising the gaff was a communal affair requiring four crew, with peak and throat each needing one to haul and another to tail – I wondered how the

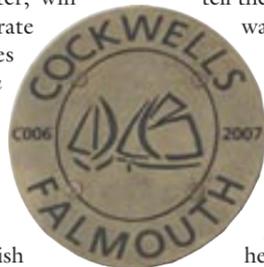
'man and boy' that fable has it always sailed pilot cutters had coped, but it's another aspect that lends itself well to the sea-school scenario. We set about heading roughly towards Cowes in order to give the crew time to become familiar with the feel of the vessel, and Kim gave crewman Gary Wakefield the job of reading the manuals in order to perform the initial set up on the electronics – "He's a pilot, so he likes reading instructions," was the explanation for the delegation.

Soon, though, Dave and Kim were staring aloft, and they weren't inspecting the altostratus, conversation was turning to the yawning space above the gaff and thoughts were congealing around the best way to deploy the topsail. I'd already gleaned from the size of the rig that Kim is a skipper who likes to fly a lot of canvas, and as we were on a photo-shoot, he had the perfect excuse to indulge himself. We'd already shaken out – in fact, unrolled – a reef, and before long the triangular topsail was heading cloudwards too; with no complaints from the photographer, we took on decidedly more heel.

With plenty of keenness still apparent among the crew and an abundance of volunteers for each task, I shirked the deck duties and headed down the central companionway to familiarise myself with the layout below. The companion steps emerge into an area just aft of what is a spacious, comfortable and bright saloon. Directly to port is an L-shaped galley, which, with vast Frigoboat fridge, stacked with beer cans, and an additional capacious drop-in cooler, gives away something about the style of the entertainment that's envisaged. There is also, though, a large diesel-fuelled oven and twin hotplate for hot meals.

Kim has put a lot of thought into all aspects of how the boat is going to work in practice, and has tried to rationalise many areas, not least in attempting to minimise

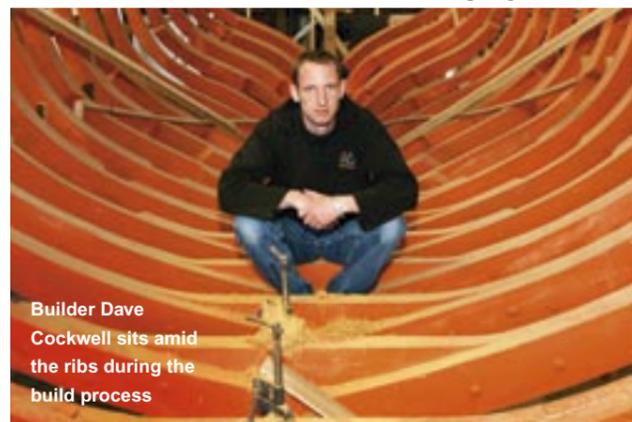
"These boats give you back what you put in"



Above left: galley with hob and oven
Above right: aft cabin and bed
Main pic: Saloon viewed from the nav station. All fit out is in satin finished light oak and pale colours



She has been built exactly as Peggy was 104 years ago



Builder Dave Cockwell sits amid the ribs during the build process

the number of different fuel types – diesel, gas, meths, lamp oil, etc – that are often needed to power heaters, cookers, lamps, engines and so on on bigger boats. Hence the choice of diesel oven, hotplate and heater – the boat requires no gas.

With another piece of forward thinking, the bane of many charter boat guests and those who moor near them – the diesel generator – has been discarded. Instead auxiliary battery charging is carried out silently by an onboard fuel cell running on ethanol. It's an additional and slightly exotic fuel, but the boon of peace and quiet looks like paying back many times

over. Opposite the galley is a comfortable and spacious nav station with its extensive electrical control panel. From the nav seat it's easy to access repeaters from the cockpit-mounted Raymarine electronics and E120 chart plotter. There's also the option of overlaying the display from the Echopilot forward-searching sonar keeping the navigator well up to date with position and condition data.

The saloon itself consists of chintz covered sofa benches down each side of a hefty oak double-leaf table. The sofas double as single berths, and further outboard, at the height of the sofa backs, are additional cots

each side. Storage within the table again gives a clue to Kim's idea of entertaining; carefully nestled in purpose-made drawers is a comprehensive crystal inventory consisting of a full set of wine glasses, a full set of champagne flutes, a set of large tumblers as well as shots glasses – easily enough glass for a riotous party.

Moving about below is a straightforward affair even when underway, firstly due to the boat's exceptionally easy motion and inherent stiffness and secondly because of the inclusion of well-placed and substantial handholds. Also, the space is well broken up so it's always possible to find a

Polly Agatha

LOA 45ft (13.7m)
LWL 40ft (12.2m)
Beam 13ft 6in (4.1m)
Draught 7ft 6in (2.3m)
Displ 22 tonnes



Polly Agatha's make up

The construction of *Polly Agatha's* hull is the same as the 1904 pilot cutter *Peggy*, from which her lines were taken, though with larch planking on oak with opepe centreline, whereas *Peggy* was oak on oak, with probably elm garboards and keel, and silicon-bronze screws and bolts throughout, rather than *Peggy's* bronze nails and iron clamps and rivets. A teak covered plywood/epoxy composite sub-deck has been incorporated for additional strength and stiffness.

Beyond her construction though, modernisation has been extensive in the way of equipment and fit out. Her 75hp Caterpillar engine operates through a 2:1 gearbox and a Dutch-built, hydraulic bow-thruster assists with manoeuvring. She has a total of 390Ah of domestic and engine 12 volt battery supply, which is charged by either a Max Power fuel cell or the engine. Lighting throughout the boat is by low amperage LED. Her navigation system is a Raymarine sailing package augmented with EchoPilot forward-facing sonar and McMurdo Navtex. All woodwork above decks has been treated with Coelan flexible polyurethane coating, while her hull is painted with International yacht enamel.

All spars are from Noble Masts and her rigging, by Traditional Rigging of Bristol, is of galvanised fittings and wire, with ash blocks. Sails, which include a spinnaker, are from SKB of Penryn, Cornwall.

spot in which to wedge your hips, whatever the sea-state or tack. Throughout the interior the refreshing fit-out is in pale 'pippy' oak treated with a satin varnish finish, offset with white satin-painted wooden surfaces, while overhead are large opening iroko skylight hatches.

The airy, stylish feel is all finished off with chromed fittings and a careful use of mirrors. Apparently, Kim's wife, Trudi, stated "I don't want something resembling an old men's club down there," and the concept works very well. Traditional pipe and slippers it may not be, but welcoming, cheerful and comforting it certainly is.

Going forward past the hefty keel-stepped mast there is a forward cabin with a heads and shower cubicle directly in the bow, which also has some hanging space for foulies. This cabin is again bright, having a large hatch offset to port overhead, and potentially contains a further four berths, though the two upper berths are of the canvas sling type and can be slid back if not used.

When found, the last two of the ten berths come as something of a surprise – they are located in the aft cabin beneath the self-draining cockpit. Here, without doubt, lies the owner's cabin. Centrally located in the hull-width room is a full-sized, pocket-sprung double bed. There is good provision of floor space to either side so movement around is easy, though overhead space is limited and the engine, housed behind layers of sound insulation is located at the forward end. It is a sumptuous area, having oodles of stowage and

even hanging space for a ball gown – another of Trudi's stipulations. Again, finished in light oak, it's at least as airy as the rest of the boat, despite the huge bed and limited headroom. The main heads and shower room can be accessed from this cabin or the main saloon.

Without giving away any signs as to his view on the interior, Dave is keen to point out that Cockwells is happy to build future craft to whatever specification is required, and all aspects can be made to suit customers' requirements. Cockwells has just laid the keels for two more pilot cutters: a 27-ton version for charter operator Classic Sailing Ltd, which is similar to *Polly Agatha* but 3ft (0.9m) longer, and a second, at 55ft (16.7m) and 40 tons, an exact replica of the Rowles-built *Pet*. With a price tag of £450,000 ex-VAT and upwards, and a build time of over eighteen months, Dave is keen to get potential customers to sign up early, particularly as he buys all of the materials – wood, lead, bronze etc – at the time of contract, thus isolating customers from potential price changes through the build and ensuring the wood is correctly seasoned at Cockwells' own timber yard.

Going back on deck, I found the crew coming to terms with tacking *Polly Agatha*: she has running backstays as well as three sets of sheets, and no winches, so there's plenty for everyone to do. As I looked again at the amount of sail aloft, I couldn't help thinking that setting the four-part backstays was the most important job to

get right. And with all these lines, tacking is an involved affair, requiring a slow turn from the helm, followed by an increasingly sharp turn as she gets close to the wind, otherwise she will not get through stays.

With both staysail and jib sheets on long tackle arrangements lying along the side-decks, the released sheets need to be run up the deck by hand immediately they're let go so that the sails come across cleanly. And the knack is to catch the two foresails tight on the weather side before they fill – easing the sheets is a lot easier than hauling them back in.

With an increasing amount of experience under our belts, tacks were becoming tighter and there was far less fuss to the manoeuvres. It became easy to imagine the feeling of achievement that would proliferate after a couple of days on board when a crew starts working properly together and begin to feel like they are really sailing this powerful, beautiful and historic craft – she really does give back what you put in.

But, on this day, I felt that the one who was getting the most back from *Polly Agatha* was builder Dave Cockwell. After all the difficulties, his *Peggy* replica was finally setting off for a life afloat, affecting the lives of an unimaginable number of people, perhaps for the next 100 years.

Polly Agatha will be on show at the Southampton Boat Show, berth No383

