

Pick's Arethusa — Is she still sailing?



To me the most magnanimous book written about the sea is that classic, "The Saga of Cimba". Written from the heart by a young American, Richard Maury, it is full of youthful enthusiasm, drama and pathos, as he relates the ill-fated voyage of the little blue-nose schooner Cimba from the cold waters of the North Atlantic to the warm waters of the Pacific.

Here, in the coral reefs off Suva, the graveyard of so many fine yachts, the latest being Greg Elliott's Party Pro, Cimba goes aground eventually to be salvaged and rebuilt. But the dream of a disillusioned Richard Maury is over — he returns to the United States and anonymity.

However, in his book there is one line, just one, that gives the saga a New Zealand flavour (years later Cimba was sailed to Auckland where she became very much a part of the local yachting scene) and that line is: "A.H. Pickmere of the smart Arethusa". The year is 1934, the man is New Zealander Arthur Hereward Pickmere and the Arethusa is a straight stemmed gaff rigged cutter 33ft long, 31ft on the waterline, with a beam of 11ft 6in, and a draft of 4ft 6in.

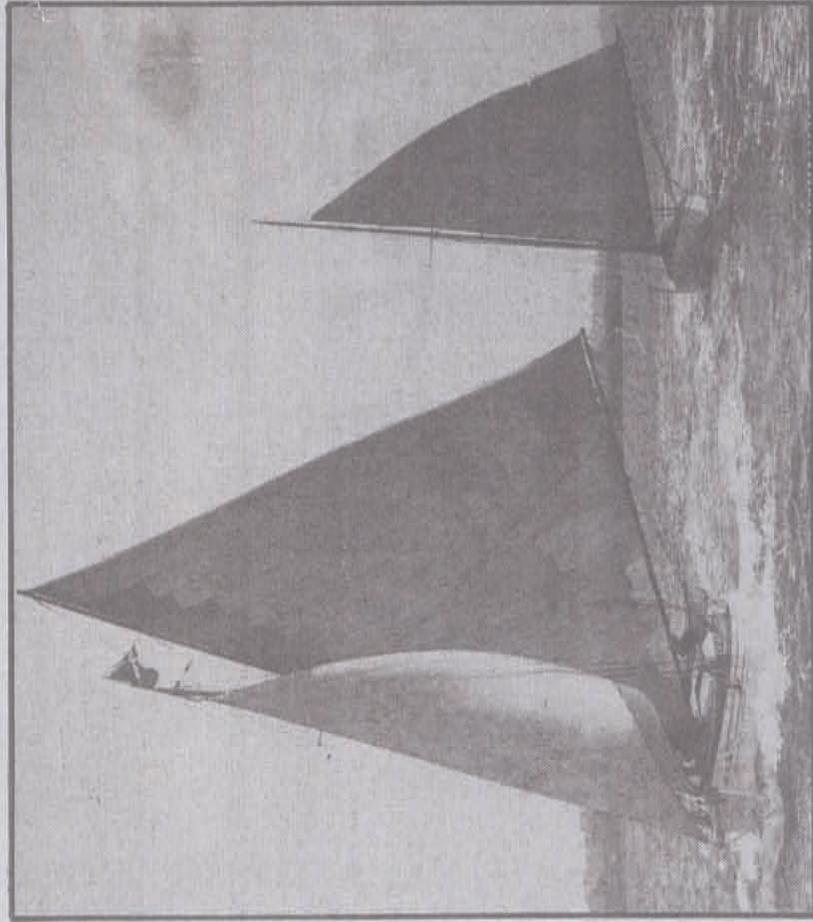
Way back, 53 years ago, it was very daring to sail a small cutter across the oceans of the world. So what was Arethusa and Hereward Pickmere, known universally as just "Pick", doing in Suva? The answer is that "Pick"

Pickmere was by profession a surveyor, having qualified in October 1927. He was born in Whangarei in 1905, the son of a dentist who was a founding member of the Whangarei Cruising Club in 1921, and has the distinction of being its first commodore.

Survey cadet

The Pickmere family home was on the banks of the Hatea River which winds its way through Whangarei. Young Hereward grew up in a yachting environment. He received his education at Whangarei primary and later high school. On November 1920, at the age of 15, he was given by his father an unsinkable 7ft yacht designed and built by Harry Hightet, which was called Haicyon. This little yacht was the prototype of the P-class, still New Zealand's preferred junior sail-trainer, in which many of the famous yachting people have learnt to sail.

Leaving high school in 1923 Hereward Pickmere started work as a survey cadet



Arethusa, accompanied by the C Class keeler Ariel, sails out of Auckland Harbour en route to Suva, Fiji on 17 September 1931.

with a Mr R.S. Finch who had a practice in the northern city. In 1925 young Pickmere was part of a survey team which went to the Poor Knights Islands to conduct the first survey of that most interesting part of New Zealand. This surveying of remote islands must have appealed to the young surveyor for in March 1928, as a fully qualified surveyor he resigned from the employ of Mr Finch and joined the staff of the Fijian Government survey office where he was to remain for the next eight years. During those years, Hereward Pickmere surveyed many of the beautiful outlying islands of the Fiji group including the Yasawa Islands, where many New Zealanders now either cruise in their own yachts or on the vessels owned by the well known Blue Lagoon Cruise Company.

These islands are, however, remote, and before the advent of aircraft, they were only accessible by sea. Hereward Pickmere, in the course of his work, needed a seaworthy shallow draft auxiliary yacht he could live on. In 1931 he returned to New Zealand and purchased Arethusa.

Arethusa proved ideal for what Hereward Pickmere wanted. She was designed and built in the Northcote (a borough on Auckland's North Shore) yard of Mr R.B. Brown and launched in

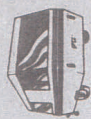
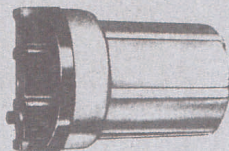
September 1917. Bob Brown was a very accomplished designer and builder of the day. Perhaps he is best remembered for his famous Z class, 12ft 6in long, designed for the Takapuna Boating Club in 1923, for the two-man crew to sail in the tidal waters of Shoal Bay. The well known silversmith company, Walker and Hall, presented a trophy, which was called the Cornwall Cup, in memory of John Travers Cornwall VC who was killed on HMS Chester at the Battle of Jutland on June 1 1916, at the age of 16. The first winner of the Cornwall Cup in 1924 was the Auckland crew of D. MacKay and A.C. Robb. Arthur Robb was later in life to become a famous yacht designer, domiciled in England. Bob Brown was to die tragically in 1934 when he was drowned in a tidal rip at Orewa Beach.

Arethusa was single skinned, with one inch kauri planks fastened to sawn pohutukawa frames. She had a plumb stern and slightly raked elliptical. American-type tuck stern. Her rig was gaff cutter with a 9ft bowsprit, the working sails totalling just over 1000 sq ft. A 15hp Kelvin sleeve petrol engine was installed, which gave Arethusa a speed of 6 knots in calm water. The name Arethusa is of interest. She was named after a British destroyer, HMS Arethusa, which was a flotilla leader

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sunk by German warships at Heligoland in the North Sea in 1916. One of the many crew who were killed was the older brother of Bob Brown. Across the stern of the yacht Arethusa was carved: "Built to commemorate the HMS Arethusa, sunk at Heligoland, 1916".

On 17 September 1931 Arethusa, skippered by Hereward Pickmere with a crew of two, departed from Queens Wharf, Auckland, and 10 days 21 hours later, sailed into Suva Harbour, covering 1352 nautical miles at an average speed of 5.2 knots. For the next four years, Arethusa and "Pick" Pickmere sailed and chartered the islands of Fiji until, in October 1935, his contract with the Government was completed and, on Sunday, 3 November 1935, Arethusa, accompanied by yachts from the Suva Yacht Club, cleared Suva Harbour to return to Auckland. On November 17, she sailed up Auckland Harbour, returning to her home port, after sailing 1411 sea miles at an average of 4.5 knots.

Northern charting

Hereward Pickmere returned to north Auckland and settled at Kerikeri where he practised as a private surveyor, mooring Arethusa in the beautiful Kerikeri inlet. During the dark days of



Hereward "Pick" Pickmere, as many remember him, pictured aboard Winsome.

the Second World War, Hereward Pickmere was man-powered into the Lands and Survey Department, to survey the long indented North Auckland coastline for military mapping purposes. The bulk of this surveying was done from the deck of the trusty Arethusa and from local residents, many of them Maori. "Pick" Pickmere gained the local names and information which was first published in 1974 as the now-famous "Pickmere's Atlas of Northland's East Coast", which is still available and is now essential navigational equipment on

board all the many boats that cruise those delightful waters in the summer months.

In 1943 Hereward Pickmere sold Arethusa and took over Winsome, a 34 ft flush-decked launch built by the grand old, but now defunct, boat building company, Bailey and Lowe in 1918. The Winsome had been owned by Hereward Pickmere's father since 1923 and to this day is still owned by the family — Hereward's son David, who lives in Whangarei. During 1947 the Pickmere family, Mr and Mrs and four children, John, Janet, David and Julie, left Kerikeri to live in the family home up the Hatea River at Whangarei. To the day he died in 1973 at the age of 68, Hereward Pickmere continued to cruise and chart his beloved waters of North Auckland's east coast, Winsome poking her straight stem into virtually every bay and inlet of that long coastline.

But what happened to the rugged seaworthy Arethusa after Hereward Pickmere sold her in May 1943? She passed through various owners until she was purchased by Mr W.D. Winstanley in the early 1950s. Mr Winstanley came from Taranaki and she was sailed out of New Plymouth until December 1955, when her owner decided to Christmas cruise the waters of the Marlborough

Sounds. On December 27 1955, en route to Nelson from New Plymouth, Arethusa during a gale of huge seas, was driven ashore onto Farewell Spit. Although she was pounded heavily, her stout Northcote-built hull did not break up and, after inspection by the insurance company concerned, the hull was sold to Mr I.B. McNabb of Collingwood. He hauled Arethusa by bulldozer across the spit and towed her to Collingwood to be rebuilt. Once this was done, Arethusa was used by Mr McNabb as his home, earning her keep as a fishing boat.

In 1960 she is said to have been used as a pleasure yacht, her old Kelvin petrol engine being replaced by a Ford diesel, and moored at Nelson. Eleven years later, in 1971, Arethusa was reported to be rigged as a motor sailer, moored at the mouth of the Takaka River. She is said to have been renamed Val Marie.

That is all that is known of the fate of the Arethusa. Does the proud 70-year-old yacht still sail the waters of the Northern South Island — or has she moved to other waters? Surely some reader knows her ultimate fate. I, together with many other people, not the least members of the Pickmere family, would love to complete the story of the Arethusa.



Dragging the Arethusa off the river mouth at the Takaka River.



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