



THE LADY WITH THE CARVED DRAGON

Two decades after a radical restoration, and a period of inactivity, Wm Fife's *Lady Edith* has awoken from slumber

WORDS **BRUNO CIANCI**



In the 1990s, during a walk along the jetties of a marina in Kusadasi, Turkey, a man called Rahmi M Koç stopped to observe an old wooden cutter that bore the name *Breiz Atao* on the stern. The expression means “Brittany forever” in Breton, and in the state she was in, there was no worse way to honour the grandeur of this region of north-western France. The boat was scarred by neglect, mutilated of bowsprit and denaturalised in rig, which at that time was bermudan. Nonetheless, the Turkish gentleman, a tycoon at the helm of the country’s pre-eminent industrial and services group, clearly felt he was standing before a boat of rare pedigree.

The condition of the yacht was simply pitiful. From a brief inspection, it was clear that the hull had not undergone any kind of cleaning or maintenance for years. Bewitched by the boat’s potential, the mogul collected information on the mysterious *Breiz Atao* and eventually managed to track down her owner. During the early research, as usual entrusted to a number of collaborators, his initial feelings turned out to be correct: the boat, which for decades had been called *Kailua*, was nothing less than a project by the great William Fife III. The yacht had been built to the second 12-Metre International Rule as a gaff cutter and launched in 1925 in Fairlie, Scotland, under the name of *Lady Edith*.

Rahmi M Koç, who had irreversibly fallen in love with the boat, made a first attempt to buy her, imagining her already restored with her carved and gold-painted dragons on the bows, a distinctive mark of all of Fife’s boats built after the successful *Dragon* in 1888. The first approach, however, proved to be in vain. Some time passed and Mr Koç came to know that the owner of the cutter, a Frenchman, had difficulty paying for another



Above: Rahmi M Koç; the windlass

Below: As *Kailua* in the Solent

Previous page: On the Bosphorus. In the cockpit, among others, are Rahmi M Koç, Ed Dubois and Richard Matthews

boat, 66ft (20m) steel yacht he had commissioned some time earlier. As if that weren’t enough, he was also in arrears with the dock payments in Kusadasi. At that point – it was 1998 – it was relatively easy for Koç to present himself to the owner of *Breiz Atao* as the solution to his problems. “The amount that the owner owed the marina,” says Rahmi M Koç, who has recently turned 90, “exceeded the value of the boat, given its derelict state. In Turkey, the law does not allow the marinas to recover their debts by selling boats, without the due process of going to court. Knowing that this would take a long time, I was able to buy the craft from the owner for a symbolic amount of money, provided that I would pay all his debts to the marina.” Thus began *Lady Edith*’s new life.

A BIT OF HISTORY

Lady Edith, build number 703, was commissioned by Alfred Melson, but was soon sold to a John Good who, moved her from Greenock to Dublin. In June 1932 one of the two owners’ sailing brothers, Peter Good, fell victim to an accident that cost him his life, at a regatta organised by the Royal Irish Yacht Club. A newspaper of the time describes the sea conditions as difficult, so much so that at the end of a complicated manoeuvre Peter Good was thrown overboard. By the time he was taken from the sea, it was too late. He was mourned by his family and the citizens of Dublin, being a well-known benefactor involved in charitable works, particularly in support of the activities of an orphanage.

After the accident, the boat was sold to Sir Robert Burton Chadwick, who looked after her for three years. In 1939, when she was owned by Sparke Davies, *Lady Edith* became *Kailua*, a name she would keep for many decades to come. In 1953, when the owner became Major CB Thorne, the boat was fitted with an Enfield diesel engine that replaced the Bergius petrol twin-cylinder apparatus of the early years. The following year the boat again changed owners to John Lubbock, third Baron of Avebury, who took her to Gibraltar in the same period Queen Elizabeth II for the first time visited the British overseas territory.



BEKEN OF COWES

A KONVALI AND T HUTLU

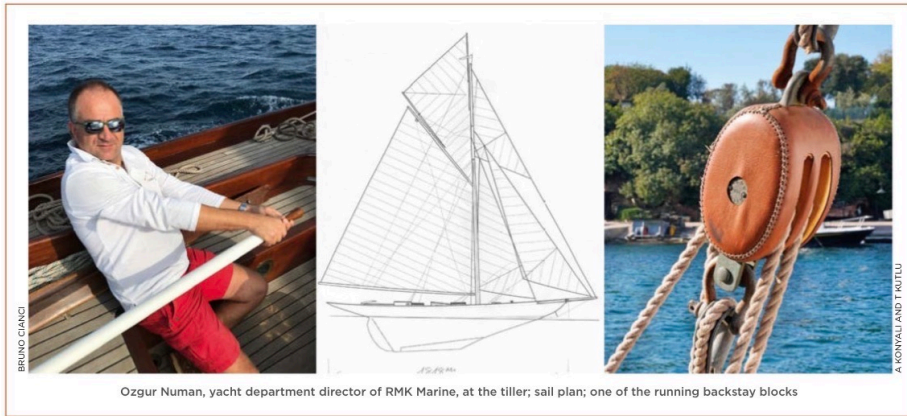


A KONVALI AND T HUTLU

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Below: In a fresh breeze in the Sea of Marmara Above: Rectangular cockpit of the yacht; Sailing downwind before sunset off Tuzla





Ozgur Numan, yacht department director of RMK Marine, at the tiller; sail plan; one of the running backstay blocks

In 1956, the yacht was equipped with a new 52hp four-cylinder Parsons engine. After further changes in ownership, *Kailua* disappeared from the Lloyd's Register records in 1970, which is why the history of the yacht between then and the *Breiz Atao* era is quite unclear.

The story beyond the 1990s is well known. Many aspects of the restoration are still fresh in the memory of the staff of RMK Marine, the Tuzla shipyard owned by Mr Koç, which carried out the work. Ozgur Numan, Istanbul-born in 1976, and today yacht department director, was intimately involved in the restoration that took place from 2001-3. Numan is a naval architect and graduate of the Polytechnic of the Turkish Metropolis who was lucky enough to carry out his first paid job right at the time of *Lady Edith's* restoration. In 2001, he was hired to supervise the restoration of the cutter and that of the trawler *Kont Ostrorog* (now exhibited at the Rahmi M Koç Museum in Istanbul).

"I saw *Lady Edith* for the first time in November 2001," recalls Numan. "I had just had a job interview and was hired as a project engineer. The boat was beautiful, but the undertaking promised to be difficult, since what was at stake was the restoration of the appearance, the configuration and the power. As if that weren't enough, I was a beginner; however, I was lucky enough to work with capable people, including the then Yacht Division Director of RMK Marine, Erdal Kiliç, who was particularly familiar with wooden boats. Erdal directed me during the early stages of the restoration, but eventually I took hold of the tiller myself; later on, I began discussions directly with Mr Koç and Bülent Bulgurlu, who also supervised the whole process. I should mention the skilled and disciplined team of Saban Çakar, a master carpenter who did an amazing job."

AT WORK

Naturally enough the process began by researching and studying the history of the boat. The original plans were bought through Duncan Walker at Fairlie Restorations. The physical work began by removing the eight tonnes of lead from the keel, the interior furnishings and all

deck equipment. Then the team moved on to a complete strip back to bare wood.

"When I first saw the boat she looked poorly, but the hull was in good condition," Numan remembers, "whereas the deck was completely rotten. We therefore decided to start by replacing the beams one by one, leaving in place only the one bearing the registration number. For the wood of the original beams, with European larch (*larix decidua*) being very difficult to find, we replaced it with oak, which resulted in a slight weight gain. Twenty per cent of the oak structural elements and almost all of the steam-bent parts have been either replaced or, if possible, reinforced. Overall, the wood used for the restoration is of exceptional quality: every log was chosen individually by experienced carpenters."

The hull planking, originally made up of three different types of wood (teak in the topsides, mahogany in the interior and Oregon pine in the lower parts) was generally in good condition, except for the one replaced during a summary restoration conducted during the 1950s, of poor quality and rotten at the time. In excellent condition, however, were the original 12-metre-long Oregon pine bilge stringers. Specially made copper screws and rivets and bronze bolts were used to replace structural parts and planking.

And then came the rigging and the spars. For the latter it was decided to use excellent quality Turkish pine, but given the great shortage of long and straight logs, the mast, the bowsprit and the gaff were made hollow. "At this stage" – said Numan – "I was having almost daily talks with Harry Spencer of Spencer Thetis Wharf Ltd of Cowes, who made and supplied most of the bronze fittings for the rig, for the deck and the rigging that, given the time the boat had been conceived, relies on a block-and-tackle system only, using no winches at all. After that we began working on the furnishings, electrical and plumbing systems. Also on this occasion we tried as much as possible to preserve each original piece. With a few changes, including a sink in the forward cabin, we completed the restoration of the interior."

LADY EDITH

TYPE
**12-Metre
gaff cutter**

BUILDER
**William
Fife & Son,
Fairlie**

LAUNCHED
1925

LOA
60ft (18.3m)

BEAM
**12ft 8in
(3.9m)**

DRAUGHT
**8ft 10in
(2.7m)**

DISP
19 tonnes

SAIL AREA
**2,174 sqft
(202m²)**



A KONYALI AND T KUTLU



A KONYALI AND T KUTLU

A KONYALI AND T KUTLU

Top: The saloon is fitted with canapé settees and a folding dining table Above: Cabin with twin beds; the saloon, looking aft



Above: Bonnet fairlead; Tiller stock with builder's plate; deck vent

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The deck was another story. To avoid water ingress it was decided to resort to a composite system, using pine boards above the beams, marine plywood in the middle and teak above: in doing so the boat has maintained the very same aspect of the original from the interior, and is completely waterproofed. The skylights and hatches, all original, contribute to the final result.

One of the interesting aspects of the Fife boats is the dragon figure carved on the hull at the bows, and that stretches towards the stern. There was, however, a problem with *Lady Edith's* dragon: since some courses of the planking had been replaced in the past, there was essentially no trace of much of the figure, which – as is known – varies from boat to boat. The design was unknown to Fairlie Restorations too. Fortunately, however, in the early years of her life *Lady Edith* had raced in the Solent; the restoration team was therefore able to rely on the photos by Beken of Cowes that also proved crucial for the reconstruction of some lost details of the deck, such as the mainsheet traveller, fairleads and other deck gear.

Once the rig was prepared (an operation that required the use of over a kilometre of cordage and a few hundred meters of steel cables, with hand-spliced ends) and the sails delivered, the team finally toasted with a bottle of good quality champagne.

BACK IN THE SEA

"The hour of truth" Numan recalls "started when, shortly after, we had to try the boat on the open sea for the first time. That day the tension could be literally cut with a knife because the wind rose to 25-30 knots, not exactly the ideal conditions for trying out a boat that had just been restored, with no winches, or indeed an experienced crew on board. Fortunately, everything went well. Not only had the boat sailed with ease, but she had also proven to be well balanced under sail. The rudder, in fact, was light and responsive."

Rahmi M Koç also remembers well the excitement that accompanied the whole restoration period and, even more so, the days when *Lady Edith* was given back her original name (a detail that best reflects his desire to bring her back to the original state) and the physical possibility of a return to her natural element. "During the restoration process," he said, "we discovered the original name and decided to present the boat with it."



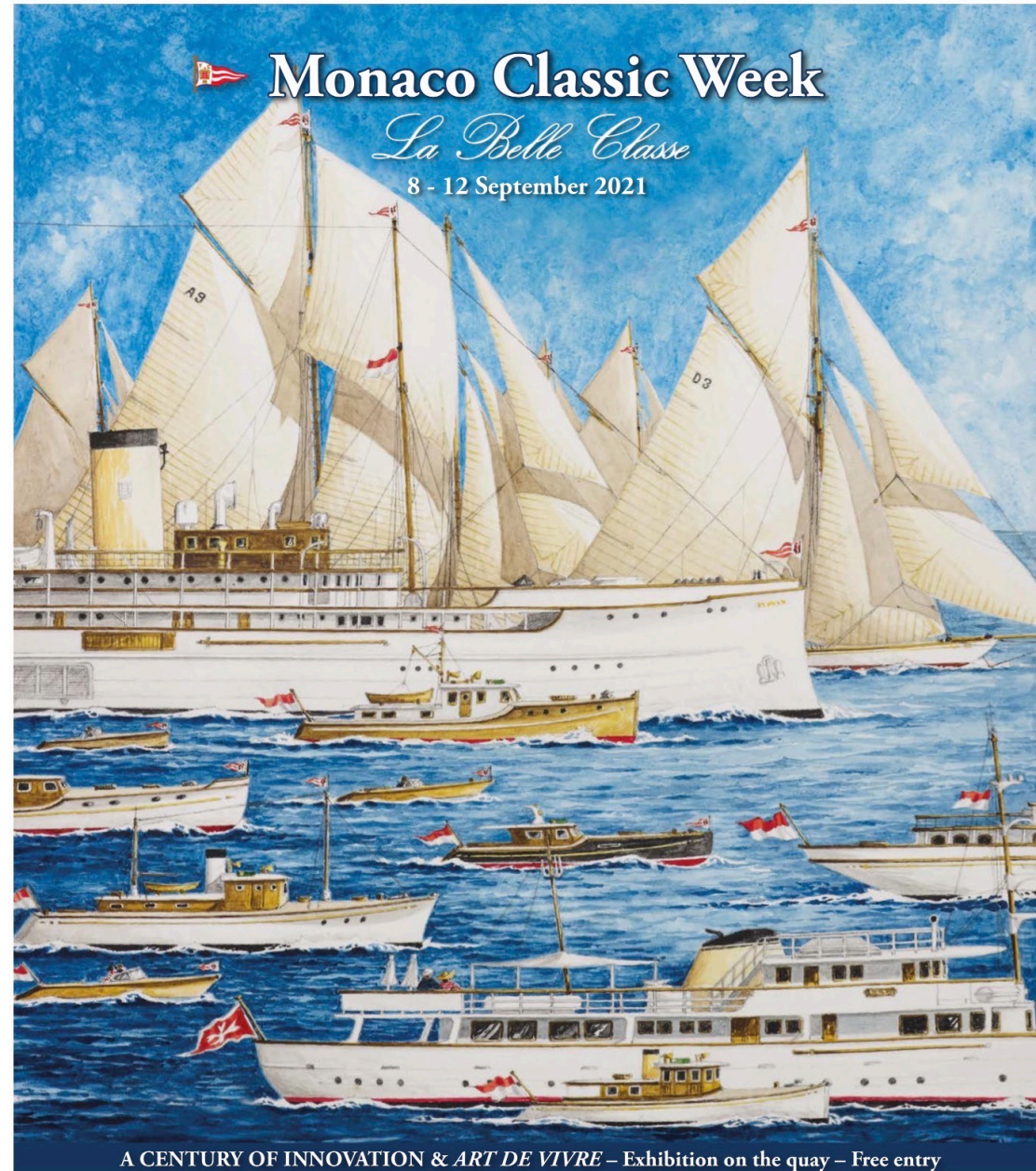
The restoration took longer than expected, but the work was superb, and all the classic boat lovers commended us on the exceptional work done. *Lady Edith* was a great experience for RMK Marine. She's a fine yacht, but like all sailing boats of her type she needs many deckhands in order to be sailed efficiently. I sailed her quite a number of times – even at local regattas held in the Sea of Marmara – the last being when I took out the founder of Oyster Yachts, Richard Matthews."

Aware of Rahmi Koç's keen interest in William Fife, Sir Richard donated the wreck of *Falka*, a very rare Fife-designed wooden motorboat commissioned by the Royal Naval Air Service in 1919. The boat is currently under restoration at RMK Marine (see Yacht News in this issue), destined to eventually join the craft collection of the Rahmi M Koç Museum of Istanbul.

Even Yosi Catalan, a long-time friend and captain at Rahmi Koç's service (he's currently the skipper of the 170ft (52m) Sparkman & Stephens-designed ketch *Nazemin 5*, has had several opportunities to hold the white tiller of this classic gaff cutter. "Steering a William Fife boat equals driving a luxury car," said the tall Israeli. "*Lady Edith* is elegant in every way, and her sheer line being so low on the water makes you really feel you are at sea." As for manoeuvring and handling the crew, the captain stated that "she's easy to steer when all her canvas is balanced, and having no winches on deck is testimony to the fact that blocks and pulleys enable you to do anything, provided that you have muscle aboard. And the result is rewarding."

THE SEASON AT THE GATES

Lady Edith has spent this last winter back in the shed. With the exception of the bow, where the staff of RMK Marine have intervened rather invasively – so much so that new dragons had to be carved – the main purpose of the works was to get the boat prepared for the upcoming sailing season. A few meters away, in a nearby hangar, another restoration proceeds in parallel: that of the above mentioned *Falka*, William Fife's other craft owned by Rahmi M Koç. The latter will likely be launched within a couple of years. With the usual patience, Mr Koç is looking forward to the moment *Lady Edith* will be sailing, escorted by a tender with which she shares the very same noble Scottish pedigree.



A CENTURY OF INNOVATION & ART DE VIVRE – Exhibition on the quay – Free entry



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