



The Riddle

by Maldwyn Drummond

Illustrated by Martyn Mackrill

(Honorary Painter to the Royal Yacht Squadron and the Royal Thames Yacht Club)

Revisited by Keith Muscott

Publ. by Uniform, an imprint of the Unicorn Publishing Group, January 31st 2017
ISBN 978-1-910500-39-2

First published by Nautical Books, an imprint of Conway Maritime Press, in 1985

296 pages. Dimensions: 23.5 x 2.2 x 17.3 cms
Price now **£21.25**, Amazon. Seemingly no longer available for £15 at Messum's Gallery online

[The painting featured on the front cover of the book (above) is Mackrill's representation of Dollman on *Medusa* hailing Arthur Davies, 'Follow me!', as he attempts to lure *Dulcibella* into the shoals of the Hohenhörn Sands – which are the subject of the drawing on page 72 of this issue.]

THE PRICE ON THE COVER is £25, so arguably the Amazon price represents a good saving, but in January this year, having spotted the announcement of the book's re-issue in a magazine advertising the Martyn Mackrill exhibition at Messum's Gallery, I bought it from Messum's for £15, together with the catalogue of Mackrill's *Riddle* drawings plus the catalogue of his other nautical work for another £15. The three publications are beautifully produced on fine paper, and the book is printed and bound in

Great Britain. It is worth its price, being top quality in all respects. I can't find any fresh content in the book, despite it being presented as 'new and updated', but that is not critical as the original is more than good enough.

It was certainly time for a new edition, thirty years on. Drummond's vastly detailed enquiry into the story behind *The Riddle of the Sands* is the most impressive book available on the subject. When I was covering a little of this history recently in *Dinghy Cruising*, the first edition of *The Riddle* was never far from my elbow so I could confirm details and look for new information about Erskine Childers's education as a cruising man and the background to his Baltic and North Sea adventures. Like Childers, Drummond was a member of the (Royal) Cruising Club, and in addition the erstwhile editor of its Journal, *Roving Commissions*.

Shortly after the war, in 1951, Drummond found himself in his 5-tonner *Runa VII* tied up to a salvage crane in Boulogne Harbour and reading *The Riddle of the Sands* for the first time. When he finished the novel he suggested to his crew that they might sail along the coast too and investigate – cautiously – the islands and harbours of the German Friesian estuaries. He didn't have to ask twice. So began years of obsessive research into Victorian Corinthian yachting, pre-WWI politics and all things 'Riddle'. The result is this book.

You can see Martyn Mackrill's drawing of Davies meeting Clara on page 3, as well as *On The Sands* below, plus the sketch heading our Rallies Programme. The exhibition catalogue displays all his *Riddle* sketches plus some oil paintings, with originals and limited edition prints for sale. ('Limited' meaning 50 copies only.)

As well as the artwork there is a lot of text in the programme by Dick Durham, a journalist with an impeccable history in the world of traditional boats. He manages to weave together an account of their recent visit to the Friesian Islands with parts of the Childers story, his cruises, and the plot of *The Riddle of the Sands*. Both men sail their own traditional boats, Mackrill the 31ft gaff cutter *Nightfall* and Durham the Maurice Griffiths 26ft gaff cutter *Wendy May*, so it was something of an anticlimax to find that their recent Friesian trip was undertaken by car and ferry, especially as Durham has visited under sail twice before. But their aims were to identify *Riddle* landmarks like the lonely farmhouse Meirei Farm on Langeoog, and to provide Martyn Mackrill with an opportunity to paint and sketch *en plein air*. In these objectives they were most successful. KM



On the Sands