

The floating work environment



Chloe Collet of YPI Crew looks at how the once humble yacht became a privileged symbol of affluence offering its owners privacy, fun and the ability to reach the four corners of the globe

Have you ever stopped to consider how many times since March 2020 you have been asked where you work or where you are working from?

For most of us land-based employees our place of work was always clearly defined: an office, a factory, an administrative building with a fixed 'googleable' address. The onset and impact of the Covid 19 pandemic has brought a whole new set of definitions of place of work: a home office that may be located in a living room, a bedroom, a kitchen counter, a study (for the fortunate) or even a couch. It may also be a really remote office located in an un-commutable daily location, another city, another country or in some cases a different hemisphere and so far, far away from the office headquarters' postal address.

Our private spaces have been transformed into multi-functional work stations; the physical letter-box location has been modified to any space where an internet connection is available, a virtual hot spot to communicate with the planet!

What about those working on a yacht? In a Seaman's Employment Agreement, Place Of Work will refer to the name of the yacht, not a physical location in view of the inherent travelling nature of yachts. But what is a yacht? There are many definitions available that incorporate size, destination or usage. The Collins Dictionary for example defines a yacht as 'a large boat with sails or a motor, used for racing or pleasure'. How does a yacht differ from another vessel on the water? To answer those questions, let's firstly take a look at the origin of the word and subsequently how the meaning of the word has transformed itself over the years.

The word yacht originates from the early 16th century (1550 – 1560) from the Dutch word jaght, a short form for jaghtschip or

hunting ship. These were fast, narrow and light sailing vessels used by the Dutch Navy, wealthy ship owners and merchants to chase pirate ships, smugglers and buccaneers. With a large sail area but a shallow draft, a leeboard instead of a deep keel, the jaghts could easily navigate the shallow waters surrounding the Netherlands and intercept the pirate vessels and criminals operating from them.

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How did a hunting ship then become a luxury item for the rich and famous? Maritime history takes us back in time to the 17th century and specifically to the year 1660. It is at this moment when King Charles II of England, after having spent 10 years in exile in the Netherlands, returned to the throne and was offered a luxurious 'hunter' – a yacht – by the City of Amsterdam that the term changed meaning. The yacht was part of the Dutch gifts for the newly restored King and was christened Mary. This 60ft hunter was constructed by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and was also gifted with a crew of 20.

Once settled back in England, King Charles II used the yacht for recreational voyages up and down the Thames River. His enthusiasm for this rapid form of transportation soon matured into the study of navigation and naval architecture and also included the construction of several other yachts. King Charles was swiftly joined in his passion by his brother James, the Duke of York. The Duke also had a yacht constructed and races were organised. In no time at all the English nobility all wanted a yacht of their own! Consequently, yachts became the symbol of vessels used to transport the wealthy and the important people for both sport and pleasure and their identification as a luxury item was born.

No matter how they are described whether a superyacht, mega yacht or giga yacht, let's aspire to keep them fun, privileged, safe and professional places to work on for many years to come.