

1920s yacht is saved for role in Olympics

Japan

Richard Lloyd Parry Misaki

For half a century, from her launch in the Roaring Twenties until her abrupt disappearance, the yacht *Cynara* was a jewel of the boating world. A graceful, 96ft wooden sailing boat, she was owned by a series of rich and powerful men who used her to race, relax and entertain their glamorous guests.

Racing drivers partied on her decks. Tony Curtis and Zsa Zsa Gabor made a film on her. Legend has it that Winston Churchill nearly set her on fire. Then in 1973 *Cynara* vanished.

The story was that an Asian millionaire had taken her to the Far East. Now, however, *Cynara* is back. For 47 years, it turns out, the yacht has been at anchor in eastern Japan, taken to sea only occasionally and used now and then for parties and wedding receptions.



British boatbuilders travelled to Japan to help with *Cynara*'s restoration

For the past three years a British-led team of craftsmen has been hard at work restoring her to her original glory and this summer *Cynara* will mark her 94th year by playing a key part in the sailing events at the Tokyo Olympics.

The boat's owner, a family company called Riviera Holdings, has brought together 50 people from nine countries, including an Irish rigger, an Italian carpenter and a Japanese cabinetmaker. Between them they have dismantled the boat into her tens of thousands of parts, down to the tiniest screws, and put her back together, preserving 70 per cent of the original and finding replacements from across the world for the rest, from Burmese teak to French wire.

The fact that *Cynara* was forgotten and neglected for all those decades saved her from the urge to modernise. "It was amazing. I'd never seen anything like it," Paul Harvey, the British chief carpenter, who has spent 30 years working on yachts, said. "Normally owners make changes, they cut bits out, add things in. Sometimes there's bad taste. That didn't happen to this boat. It was like a time capsule from 1927."

The team found a burn mark on a mahogany surface that, legend has it, was caused by one of Churchill's cigars.

Cynara was launched in Southampton in 1927 as the *Gwendolyn*, and passed through several sets of plutocratic hands on both sides of the Atlantic, including those of the Marquess of Northampton.

In 1964, by now called *Cynara*, she was bought by the party-loving racing driver Duncan Hamilton, who kept her in Monaco. In 1966 scenes from the comedy film *Drop Dead Darling*, starring Curtis and Gabor, were shot on her deck. Then in 1973 the department store tycoon Seiji Tsutsumi bought her and she made the 195-day crossing to Misaki, 40 miles south of Tokyo, where she has remained ever since, even after being bought by Noboru Watanabe of Riviera Holdings in 2002.

Classic yachts have never attracted a big following in Japan, and *Cynara* is the only one in the country of her age and class. When the company decided on the restoration, it did not know where to begin. "There are only about 30 vintage yachts like this in the world," Mr Watanabe's daughter, Hanako, said. "We were amateurs who had no idea how much it would cost."

The company declines to say what the bill is, but it must be enormous. Mr Harvey and his British colleague, Ben Hobbs, have lived in Japan for the past three years working on the restoration.

The Olympics begin on July 24. World Sailing wants to use *Cynara* as a viewing platform for VIPs at Enoshima island, near Misaki. The plan is that she will be floated next month.

"That's when we'll know if she's a good sea boat," Mr Harvey said. "It'll be an amazing moment."