

# Yachting World

September 2005 £3.70

www.yachtingworld.com

## SUMMER SAILING

### CRUISING

#### Scotland

- Round Mull to Rum

#### Norway

- Superyacht in the Lofotens
- Midsummer's night in Oslo

### RACING

- We sail **VOR70** Movistar
- America's Cup Acts, Valencia and Malmö

### YACHTS

The Dufour story,  
Arpege to the  
latest range

### SEAMANSHIP

The New York Pilot Cutter

**26** new boats at  
Southampton Show

**WIN**  
**£17,000**  
worth of B&G  
instruments  
and pilot  
see p26

Norway







# Classic midsu

**Norwegians celebrate the summer solstice like true seafarers – afloat. Alan Harper hitches a ride aboard classic yawl *Guri* for a night of parties and prawns among the islands of Oslofjord**



is basically two months," said yachtsman Knut Spaeren, one of my fellow guests aboard the venerable 57ft yawl *Guri*. "Some say it only lasts until the middle of August. Most people take their summer holiday in July."

It was the evening of 23 June, Sankthansaften (St John's Eve), which is observed as the midsummer festival in Norway. It was *Guri's* evening too. Based in Holmenfjord, south of Oslo, she mingled with the crowds with the slightly aloof air of a swan on a municipal boating pond. Even before the drinking starts, reliable estimates put the number of boats that take to the water on midsummer's evening in the Oslo area alone at around 10,000.

Of course, there is a lot of water to take to, but that's still a lot of boats, of every type and vintage, darting in all directions – launches, sailing cruisers, classic Norwegian double-enders, elegant 6-metres, dinghies, fishing boats, runabouts and motor yachts, all parting before *Guri's* imperturbable bow like shoals of curious fish. Many were decorated with symbolic clumps of birch twigs and young women wore garlands of flowers. Families, couples and corporate crews mingled in benign good humour, hailing each other, hailing *Guri* and hailing the arrival of their sacred summer.

Nor is this a quirk of Oslo. One in seven of the 4.6 million Norwegians owns a boat of some sort. And it's hardly surprising – the heavily indented and island-scattered coastline measures nearly 14,000 nautical miles, stretching from 58°N in the far south (roughly the latitude of Juneau or Stornoway), all the way up to 71°N at the fabled North Cape.

As we set off from the marina, heading north-eastwards into the islands, we passed a cluster of »

**T**he Norwegians know a thing or two about summer. It is as rare and highly prized as a Ming vase, slipping in in late-June and departing woefully early in September. But when it arrives, after the long grey northern winter, it is greeted like a prodigal son and the entire population comes out in welcome. Within minutes, it seems, the girls have turned a delicious honey-brown, perfectly designed to complement their remarkably uniform blonde-and-blue-eyedness. I'm told the men are also unusually handsome, but I was too distracted to notice. A robust lady at the airport declared: "They're terribly good-looking, but hopeless. They go skiing in winter, drink five pints, turn over and go to sleep. It's why they've got such a small population."

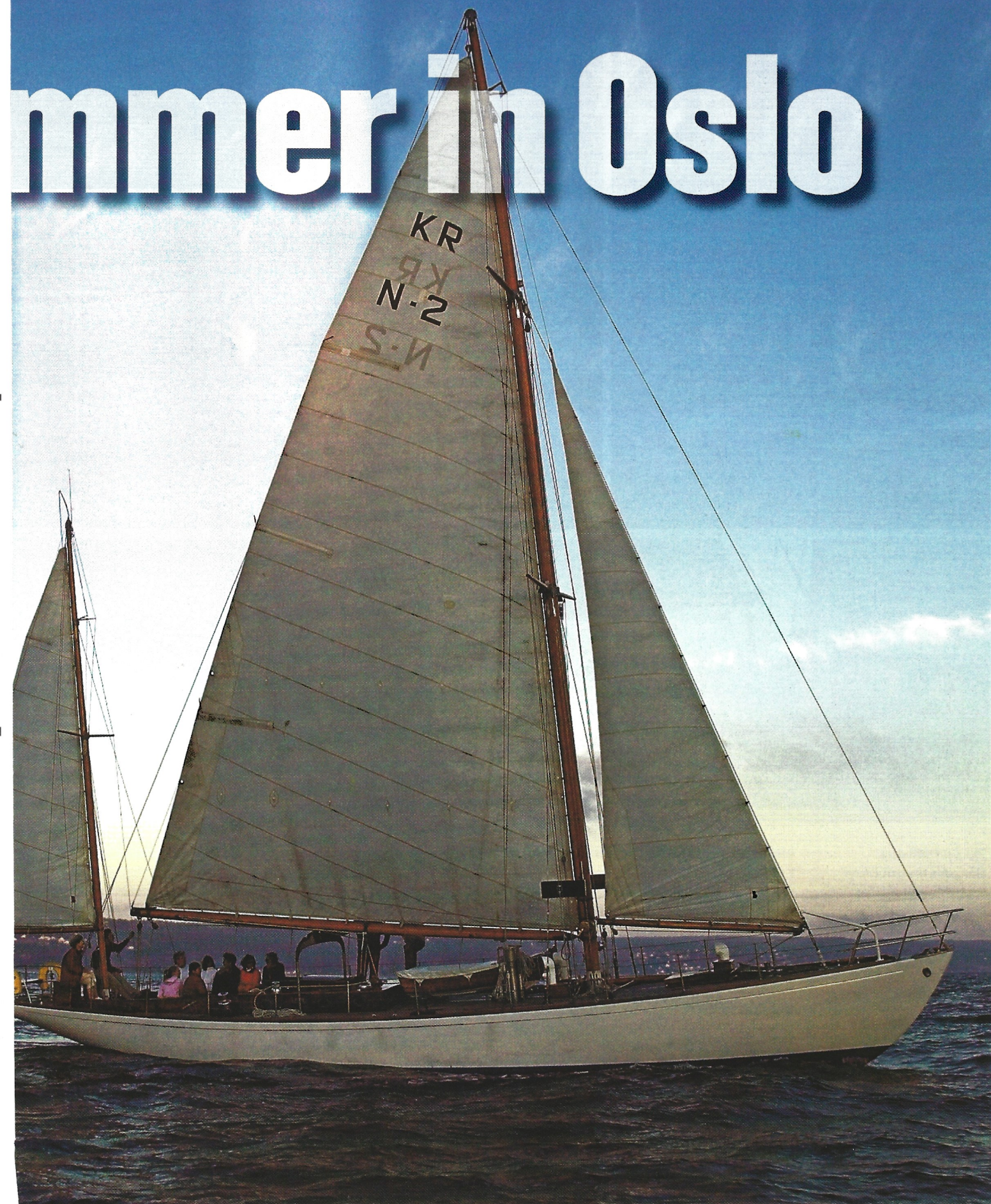
I was unable to obtain independent confirmation on this point, but on the subject of the short summer there seemed to be a consensus. "The boating season

All photos: Chris Davies





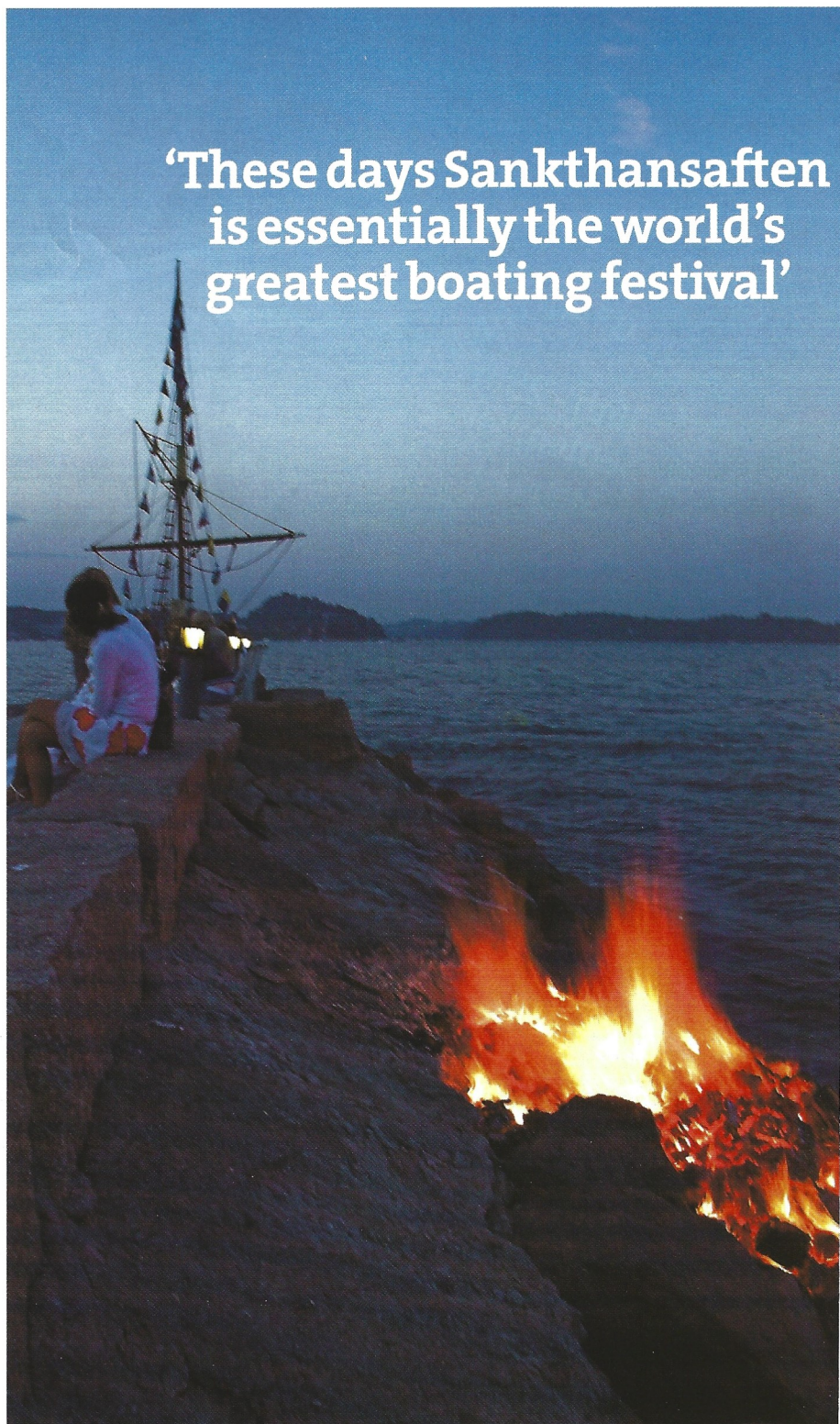
# Summer in Oslo







Above: 10,000 boats take to the water in the Oslo area alone on midsummer's night. Right: a motor yacht traditionally dressed with birch twigs in the rigging. Far right: as the light finally begins to fade, bonfires are lit on shore



'These days Sankthansaften is essentially the world's greatest boating festival'

says Oslo publisher Trygve Hegnar. "She's the real thing. Boats like her tell a story." Since he starts work at 0500 and writes the leader in his financial newspaper, the *Finansavisen*, every day, he presumably looks at *Guri* fairly regularly. He bought her in 1990 and gave her a complete refit six years ago, replacing her old engine with a Yanmar diesel. Apart from that and an electric WC, she is in remarkably original condition, down to the cast iron stove in the saloon and the eight cot berths forward.

Inevitably, Hegnar cannot find the time to sail her very often. Tonight was no exception – he was aboard *Eileen II*, a 92-footer built in 1934 by Alexander

Stephen & Sons, owned by his friend Erling Storm.

Hegnar and Storm are partners in another vessel, the 120ft JS White motor yacht *Grace*, which along with Storm's classic Clyde-built gaff ketch, is a familiar sight on Oslo's redeveloped Aker Brygge waterfront. *Guri*'s base, however, is ten miles further down Oslofjord at the Holmen Fjordhotel, another of Hegnar's business interests. It is just a short sail from the popular anchorage of Middagsbukten, aka 'Lunch Bay', a broad, sheltered haven between the islands of Ostoya and Bronnøya. "It's always calm and always crowded," said Knut Heiberg-Andersen, another of *Guri*'s guests.







Guests aboard *Guri* tuck into boxes full of prawns, a typical Norwegian meal of rustic simplicity

And never more than on midsummer's night. From half a mile out it looked like a densely packed marina on a weekday: an impenetrable jungle of masts, with boats anchored deck-to-deck across the entire expanse of the lagoon. At the helm, Frithjof Foss nosed *Guri* in past a 130ft Benetti, which was rafted up to another motoryacht almost as large and sought out the tallest mast in the anchorage. *Eileen* was already there, lying in deep water surrounded by a curious swarm of small craft, with Hegnar standing on deck, observing us proprietarily as we came alongside.

We were well provided with food and drink aboard *Guri*, but it was clear from the waitress's uniform aboard *Eileen*, embroidered with the name of Oslo's best French restaurant (two Michelin stars) that their catering was of a different order. And there was me wondering why Hegnar had elected to spend the

prawns out of a plastic bag. While a British or an American boatbuilder might have tried to impress a foreign journalist with their vinylester resins, top speed or seakeeping, I reflected, these Norwegians seemed to value honest simplicity above all.

So, our experience aboard *Guri* was far more typically Norse than the champagne and canapés enjoyed by our better-heeled friends aboard the big yacht. Rustic simplicity fuels the Norwegians' self-image, which is one of self-reliance and a kind of glaciated hardness.

Oslo's Viking Ship Museum holds the remarkably complete hulls of two magnificent longships and the substantial remains of a third, excavated from ninth-century burial mounds. Charts detail astonishing voyages as far as Newfoundland and the Caspian Sea made by the Vikings, whose intrepid blood all Norwegians like to believe runs through their veins.

## **'An alfresco Norwegian supper on board might not be pretty, but it is healthy'**

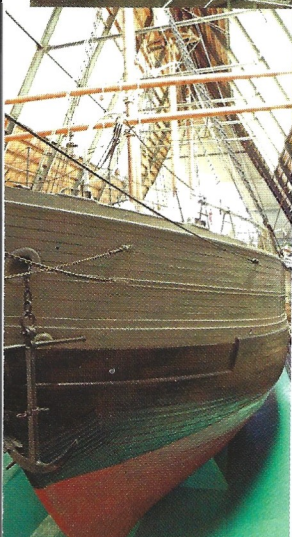
evening aboard his friend's yacht rather than his own. *Guri*'s fare was traditional: beer, white wine and bread and several plastic boxes the size of milk crates filled to the brim with prawns.

An alfresco Norwegian supper on board might not be pretty, but it is healthy. Take as long as I did to peel enough prawns to cover a piece of bread and it's slimming too. At approximately 15 minutes per sandwich, up to my elbows in prawn juice, eggs and bits of shell, I was almost certainly expending more calories than I was gaining. I remembered the first time I tested a boat in Norway for a magazine, 20 years ago, when at lunchtime we simply hoicked a grapnel over the stern, tied the bow to a rock and ate

Even to an Anglo-Saxon, the ships – clinker-built, open, nearly 80ft long – are awe-inspiring. They are displayed like sacred relics. The building constructed to house them is cruciform in plan, with the vaulted ceilings of a cathedral. This, you feel, is not a coincidence.

Just down the road lies an equally astonishing ship – the 128ft polar exploration vessel *Fram*. Designed by Colin Archer for Fridtjof Nansen, she was built to withstand pack ice, with diagonal bracing between decks, V-shaped sections to force her upwards under pressure and a wooden hull over 30in (80cm) thick. Her three-year drift in the ice across the Arctic Circle between 1893 and 1896 is one of the great tales of human endurance. Incredibly, when Nansen





The 128ft polar exploration vessel *Fram*, built for explorer Fridtjof Nansen, now housed in a museum in Oslo

## "It's true. That's us! ... Endurance, sweat, struggling for days; that's what we like!"

realised they weren't going as close to the pole as he'd hoped, he set off on foot. A voyage to Greenland followed, with Otto Sverdrup in command, and then in 1911 Amundsen chose *Fram* for his successful South Pole expedition. She has crossed more parallels of latitude than any other conventional vessel, from 85° 57' N in 1895 to 78° 41' S in 1911.

The tall tent-like building that houses her echoes the structures that entomb the Viking chiefs in their buried ships – it is *Fram*'s tomb. Inside, she looks as good as new. Next door is the Kon-Tiki Museum.

There seems no end to this fund of intrepid Norwegians and tales of their extraordinary voyages, from the Sagas to Heyerdahl. Legends of ice, storms and endurance provide Norwegians with their sense of self – even on midsummer's night.

"It's true," says Heiberg-Andersen. "That's us! Look at our skiing heroes – they're not the elegant sprinters or the ones jumping like gazelles in the woods, but those who do the long, long distances. Endurance,

sweat, struggling for days: that's what we like."

There was little evidence of this on our balmy midsummer's night in Oslofjord, but these basic Norse virtues are never far below the surface. Inviting me down to *Guri*'s engine room to inspect her massive oak frames, Frithjof Foss assures me: "She's built like *Fram*."

In the open water of Oslofjord, we ghosted along on a gentle easterly back towards the hotel. The sun made its curtain call, dipping below a bank of cloud on the western horizon. It was nearly 2300, but still bright as day, and back among the islands the party continued. We hadn't quite finished the prawns.

Foss has sailed these waters since he was a child, and remembers the curfew during the Second World War. Being Norway, it was a sailing curfew. "The Germans would fly over in their Fieseler Storch, very slowly, with a rifle pointing out of the door," he said. "We had to be off the water by five. They never used

the rifle; they were just waving us in." As a young man Foss became one of Norway's most successful racing yachtsmen, campaigning internationally in 5.5s, 6-metres and Dragons before turning to ocean racing. He also sailed with King Olaf and Prince (now King) Harald – "a good yachtsman".

Now with eight grandchildren, all of them into boats, Foss has the use of all the hotel's fleet, which as well as *Guri* includes exotic pre-war motor launches and a 1974 Riva runabout. But he mostly potters about in his own 17ft double-ended snekke, with its single-cylinder 4hp Albin motor.

Bonfires were starting to appear on shore, as – finally – night began to fall. The fires hark back to the midsummer festival's pagan past, when evil spirits roamed abroad as the sun turned south. In later centuries it was also a popular night for burning witches. These days, though, Sankthansaften is essentially the world's greatest boating festival – with an awful lot of prawns thrown in.

## Midsummer celebrations

Norway is not alone in linking the solstice with a saint's day. Just as the old pagan midwinter festival was co-opted by the Christians for Christmas Day, the summer solstice celebrations were adopted as the feast of John the Baptist. As well as boats, bonfires and buckets of prawns, in parts of Norway midsummer is still celebrated with 'marriages' of children and adults, to symbolise new life.

The pragmatic Swedes celebrate midsummer on the third weekend of June by dancing around decorated phallic poles and eating potatoes and pickled herring. So do the Finns, who also maintain

the bonfire tradition, which once stretched across northern Europe from Ireland to Russia.

In England, midsummer is traditionally observed at Stonehenge with battles between riot police and New Age travellers. But the solstice was once celebrated with fertility and purification rites, children leaping over bonfires, well-dressing, gathering garlands of St Johns Wort at dawn to protect against fairies and ghosts and decking the front door with birch and fennel.

Perhaps unsurprisingly for a festival traditionally concerned with the ancient

symbolism of growth, crops and fertility, it's only in boat-mad Norway that getting onto the water has become such a pivotal part of the solstice celebrations. However, China's Dragon Boat Festival, held on the fifth day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar, is also a midsummer celebration. Its origins go back more than 2,000 years. A popular legend links the boat races with the patriotic civil service official Qu Yuan, who lived in the third century BC and drowned himself in the river. When his followers heard the news, they thrashed the water with paddles, like dragon boat racers today, to keep the fish away from his body. His suicide was in protest at corruption in high places – there is nothing new under the sun.