

How to get your boat organised

Are you always misplacing tools and spares?
Roger Hughes has the answer

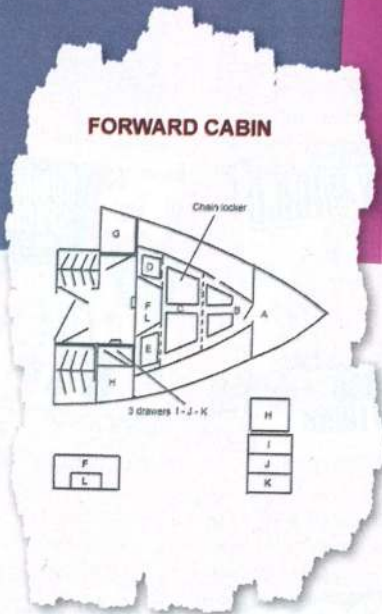
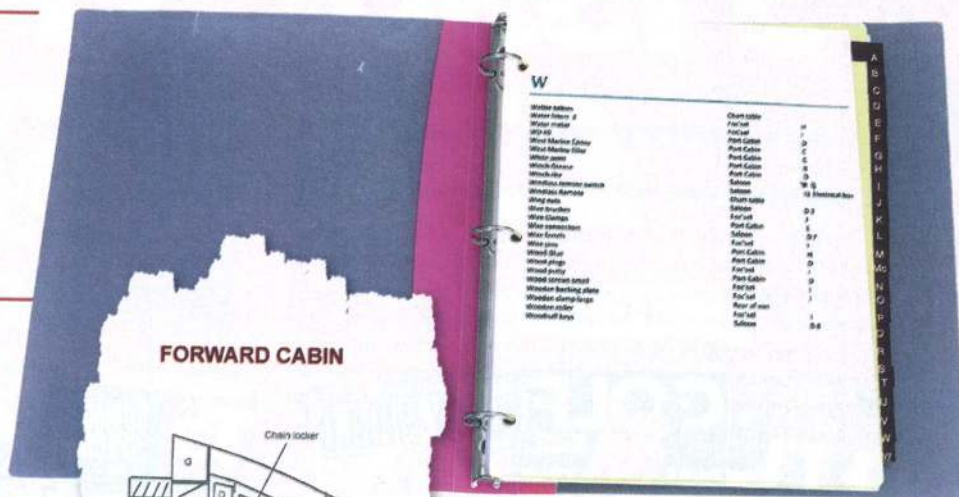
It is very, very frustrating to empty a locker, only to discover the item you're looking for is in another one. That doesn't happen any more on *Britannia*.

I'm sure every yachtsman who ever worked on his boat has spent more time looking for tools and spares than it took to do the actual job. Searching for stuff drove me to distraction on my first boat, and it drove me crazy (until now) on my latest one, a 45ft schooner, *Britannia*.

You'd think there would be enough room in a hull this length, with a 14ft beam, for all the tools and spares under the sun – and there pretty-much is – but the abundance of locker space creates its own problems.

The boat can accommodate a workshop full of tools and spare parts, but that doesn't mean I can always find them. Often, I'd give up completely and have to sleep on it, knowing there was a chance it might come to me in the morning.

This would often cause arguments between my wife, Kati, and I, so we decided to do something about it.



It's all about cataloguing
The answer is not where you stow things, but to accurately catalogue where they are – whether it's a special shackle or a spare alternator – so you have a method of finding it.
I'm not talking about a spread-sheet in Excel, or any other computer program, (we tried that first), because you can bet

ABOVE The basis of the system is *The Book*, a ringbinder where all the items stowed on your boat are catalogued in excruciating detail and location. This is a picture of page W in *The Book*, showing where all items starting with W are kept

LEFT A sketch is necessary of every cabin where items are kept, numbering every cupboard, drawer, locker in the cabin that is used for stowage

your life the laptop battery will be flat when you want to open it, and if someone else is searching for something, they might not be able to open the correct page anyway.

The solution is to keep a simple hard-copy binder, somewhere you'll always find it – maybe the chart table... but then, if you can't find even the book, you really are in trouble.

Start with a ringbinder

First you need to buy a loose-leaf ringbinder complete with an alphabetical index and plenty of blank pages, along with a pencil with a rubber on the end.

Next, make a detailed drawing of every cabin on your boat where stuff is stowed. We started with the fo'c'sle, where we have two spacious compartments under the V-berths, a hanging locker to starboard along with a block of four drawers and a cupboard above. There is a locker to port with four shelves and a second hanging locker.

The bank of drawers and the locker with shelves needs a frontal sketch on the page, labelling them on the sketch A, B,

The only way to spend less time rummaging for things stowed on the boat is to catalogue where they're kept, reckons Roger Hughes





ABOVE It is just as important to include outside stowage, like lazarettes, cockpit lockers, and deck boxes

C, or 1, 2, 3, etc. if you like.

When we started the tedious and time-consuming operation of cataloguing every single item on our boat, we never dreamed it would take three weekends, and run into many hundreds of items. It's really a two-person job; one calling out the item and location, the other writing.

Every single part must be catalogued in the appropriate alphabetical page of the book. For example, my six bags of various sizes of wood plugs go under page W for wood plugs, but also under P for plugs/wood.

Thus, you can find the plugs under 'wood' or plugs, in the fo'c'sle, cupboard C. It is then a matter of looking at the sketch of your fo'c'sle and seeing where cupboard C is. Bingo!

A major advantage of the book is that everyone else in the crew can also find things quickly. Many items have more than one name anyway, so it pays to call a nautical item by a simple generic term as well, so landlubbers can find it. For example, 'Stainless steel set-screws' are also 'bolts,' and 'nuts and bolts'.

Every cabin or compartment where things are stored needs to be illustrated in this way in the front of the book, including exterior lockers, deck boxes and lazarettes.

During this long process, you may even find things you never knew you had, or in a different place to where they should be. Whatever you do, just catalogue it in your book, under as many separate headings as it takes to make them easier to identify.

You'll eventually finish up with your book full of items on each alphabetical page. Some pages will be full of items, others not, like X, which in my book has only one item, Xylene, which is also under S for 'solvents Xylene', along with a long list of other solvents. Port cabin locker A.

Now computerise

Having finished the actual cataloguing, now is the point where you open your

'It goes without saying that it's very important to put things back where they came from, otherwise the system breaks down'

computer and re-type each item on a page in alphabetical order. Thus, on page W we have 26 items, the first being 'walkie talkies', and the last 'woodruff keys'. If you have a programme such as Microsoft Excel, you can re-order these with the click of a button.

Having compiled a neat alphabetical page, print it to replace the pencilled original. Now trace over your drawing with a ballpoint pen, or do a new drawing in Photoshop, as I did. If you leave your original drawings in pencil, they will slowly fade and you won't know which compartment is which. Incidentally, all this effort will someday impress a potential buyer immensely.

It almost goes without saying that it's very important to put things back where they came from when you are tidying up, otherwise the system breaks down. This might sound common sense, but it is easy to slip a bunch of tools back in the wrong place after use.

A lifesaver in emergencies

Being able to find things quickly can also be an actual lifesaver in emergencies. Once, a friend who was stronger than he looked, snapped the end of a seacock while trying to close it with a big pipe wrench. He plugged the inrush of water with this hand while my wife looked in the book and found 'wooden seacock bungs' in the saloon starboard side seating C, and in a jiffy the seacock was plugged. By the way, the remainder of the bungs are now attached to their respective seacocks,

where they should have been in the first place, and that particular item erased from the book!

Recently I searched high and low for a specially spliced length of line that acted as the fore-staysail topping lift. Eventually I gave up and made a new one, using 30ft of line. Later, when I was rummaging through one of our aft deck boxes, I found the line in the bottom of the box. It had been thrown in and not entered in the book. Me, methodical? well not always!

What about the tools you take home?

So what do you do with those more common tools which you use both on your boat and also at home or work?

One reason I bought a Kia passenger van was that it has a very large carpeted storage space under the rear floor. I therefore keep multiple-use tools – such as my circular saw, belt sander and electric planer – in this space, listed under 'Kia' in the book.

If your vehicle doesn't have a space like this you need to store these common tools in a box in the vehicle – or buy duplicates. Otherwise, when you need something on the boat, for sure it will be in your garage, and vice-versa!

Finally, never forget to add anything you have recently bought, or delete any consumable you have used up and not yet replaced. In other words, keep the book current, because someone else might need to reference it in a hurry, when you are not around.

The total number of items we have catalogued to date is 360. No wonder it was impossible to remember what we have on *Britannia*, and where things are stowed. Now I don't have to, and my mind has more room for important things like; where did I put the Guinness? **PBO**



ABOVE The rear floor of my Kia van conveniently has a large space underneath it

RIGHT These are the things which I might use on the boat, and at home – all catalogued, under 'Kia'

