Ronald Maurice Martins – nicknamed Rip because he “got on with things quickly” – brought many changes to the boating scene.

In design, he introduced handsome, light and particularly radical looks to a conservative Broadland fleet of motor cruisers largely dominated by the traditional porthole. Windboats, the recipients of his new styling, flourished as a builder and hire fleet as British holidaymakers swept to the Broads in the early 1950s seeking a new experience aboard boats which were no longer dark, pokey and confined.

In production, he developed thinking from the magnificent but costly timber creations of the 1940s and 1950s towards new materials – even including aluminium and a form of concrete – before concentrating on the growth of glass fibre towards its dominance today.

Martins made magnanimous contributions to others, including former colleagues, too. He gave willingly and freely of his advice and talent – including to the notable current designer Andrew Wolstenholme and also one-time assistant John Bennett.

Born in Norwich, he won a scholarship to the City of Norwich School, and then trained as a draughtsman at Brooke Marine at Lowestoft.

He was rejected by the Royal Navy for active service because of poor eyesight so instead spent the days of the Second World War working with Windboats of Wroxham founder Graham Bunn.

When the holiday hire fleet came alive again in 1946, Martins realised comparative landlubbers would welcome airy, spacious, and light cabins, with women in particular wanting something more than dark restricted galleys.

By now an Associate of the Institute of Naval Architects, he styled craft with large windows, clean hull and deck lines and wide, uncluttered decks.

A sceptical and traditional boatbuilding and hire industry saw the resulting Fairwind I and II glide out from Wroxham in 1947 to enjoy instant success with long seasons at prices earning rapid returns for the adventurous investments.

Over the next decade, Windboats’ success inspired Broadland growth and the admiration of others for Rip Martins’ work further afield. George Formby, the ukelele-playing singer who had a home in Broadland and a was superstar by today’s standards, asked him to design a new twin-engined diesel seagoing boat, the Lady Beryl II, which Windboats launched in 1958.

International recognition came in 1957 when Martins’ design for a 42ft fast cruiser was included in the authoritative American publication Boats Today – a book of reference to the best in marine design worldwide.

His breadth of thinking also created designs inspired for the Broads by boats plying the Mississippi River to the Flat-afloat, a box-like boat with more cavernous spaces for lounging than ever before. The latter did not catch on but demonstrated his adventurous and challenging nature.

But Martins was not only about big boat designs – he created the 15ft Pearly Misses, a 35mph aluminium sports boat which was cynically received by the trade, but sold well in 16 countries.

A 19ft cabin launch with a slide-back hard top, named the Pearly Monarch, then wowed the American market.

In 1958, Martins realised the potential of fibreglass and Windboats gave birth to the Dusky Queen, an open boat to carry six people at 35mph.

Windboats also generated boats in a form of concrete but early in the 1960s, Rip Martins decided to leave the company and started his own yard at Griffin Lane, Thorpe, to design a new range of 35ft grp-hulled cruisers for inland waterways.

He also designed for other firms, including respected Wroxham hire yards Moores and Jack Powles.

But he then laid aside his drawing board and decided his future lay in the supply of grp materials and in surveying. He handed over his client list to his sometime assistant John Bennett, who capitalised on his success.

Martins co-authored the first Broads Authority report on boat wash; was appointed the first boat safety officer by Blakes and Hoseasons and also carried out accident surveys for insurance companies.

He also helped his protegé Wolstenholme set up on his own.

His wife Sybil died in 1993, but Rip is survived by four children and 10 grandchildren.

Rip Martins, a humble and generous man who probably did more than anyone to create the future style and production of motor boat design, has died at the age of 81. Paul Thomas looks back at a remarkable career.

Farewell to a pioneer