

ROYAL LYMINGTON YACHT CLUB 1922 – 1972

Archivist's Comments:

1. Generally:
 - a. The text was found in a cupboard in the Office at the R Lym in January 2008.
 - b. The writer of this informative History was the Commodore 1971-1973 - Admiral Sir Derek Steele-Perkins. He has provided a little of the missing chapters in the History of the Club for the 1920's & 1930's, as little of this period survived the Great Flood of 1989.
 - c. It consisted of pages of type written text – A4 size – probably a 3rd or 4th carbon copy. Unfortunately too light a grey colour to be photocopied, scanned and OCR'd. So it had to be typed out.
 - d. The original was typed out at the time of the R Lym 50th Anniversary Magazine Issue in 1972. However there must have been too much copy and was never incorporated in the Anniversary magazine.
2. Where absolutely necessary spelling & grammar corrections are made in **Maroon** type.
3. **Indexing** –see at rear of this text.

ROYAL LYMINGTON YACHT CLUB 1922 – 1972

From small beginnings the Royal Lyminster Yacht Club has grown in fifty years into one of the foremost clubs in the Solent. During that time it has built up an enviable reputation for sportsmanship and seamanship.

Looking to the future, one can only visualise the continued expansion of sailing in the Solent, with the waters becoming yet more crowded. As this happens, the demands upon the skill of yachtsmen will rapidly increase if everyone is to enjoy, in freedom, what is undoubtedly the finest sailing area in Britain.

Yacht Clubs such as the R.L.Y.C. can do much to maintain the high standards and traditions, which will be required. I know that the officers of your Club have this very much in mind, and I would like to wish you all every success in the future.

THE LYMINGTON RIVER

The Early Years:

Geographically, 'a drowned river valley', the Lyminster estuary was originally a tributary of the River Solent, which flowed between Poole and Chichester. Since the days of the Iron Age, Buckland Rings and Ampress (550-100BC) stand proof of the early importance of the river to which the Romans gave the name "Full River".

Some nineteen hundred years ago, the Emperor Claudius despatched his General, Vespasian, to conquer Britain. After pacifying Kent, Vespasian moved his legions to the Isle of Wight. Arriving at the western end of the Island, he almost certainly crossed to the mainland from the most convenient embarkation point which was later to become Yarmouth.

He disembarked at the Alaunian Wood (Alauna Sylva) or 'at the mouth of the river Alainus' (Full River): almost certainly the river or creek of Limenton (Celtic: limi = stream; ton = town). Here he attacked and reduced the British earthwork fortress, now known as The Rings. From that desolate battleground the view southward to the sea would have been different to that of today; and on the slope of the hill near the river estuary, Vespasian would have noted a settlement of British huts, clustered by the waterside: there too sailing craft may have been moored to the nearby banks.

Man had not yet interfered with the course of the river, which was then wider, deeper and certainly navigable to above Ampress and probably beyond Boldre, the tidal stream reaching as far as Brockenhurst. Lyminster was a port by the time that William the Conqueror handed the kingdom over to his son.

Emerging from the Dark Ages, Lymington was granted its first charter in about 1200, by the Second Earl of Devon, Baldwin de Redvers. Lymington was one of the few English towns to have received its charter from its feudal lord alone. At one time during the Hundred Years War (1337-1453), the Port of Lymington provided nine ships and 159 seamen to man them; the town rivalled Southampton in importance and certainly outshone Portsmouth.

French marauders frequently paced our streets; in 1370, Frenchmen, after destroying Portsmouth and burnt Newtown, Yarmouth and Lymington. In 1545, Claude d'Annebaut, failing to provoke Portsmouth with his fleet, sailed down the Western Solent, burning villages and farms as he progressed. Since then Lymington has had no cause physically to repel invaders. The modern pirate is more subtle: noise, numbers and pollution require no less energy and subtlety to resist.

The Fishermen:

The fishing industry was one of mainstays: whiting off Newtown, flounders in the creeks of Pennington; oysters, prawns and shrimps trawled for or netted in the sides of the lakes and creeks; off Yarmouth and Freshwater, the lobster trade; and, on the face of the mud and as the tide retreated, the whelks, periwinkles, cockles and mussels – all this abundance was harvested by fishermen needing sturdy craft. Boat builders became part of the Lymington scene.

The Port and its Natural Surroundings:

The River thrived: by 1660 as much coal was being handled in Lymington and in London. The coal and general trading brought ships of 1300 tons displacement up to the Town Quay, vessels being able to work the double tides in the deep river. Trading with the farthest corners of the world, Lymington was a commercial port, albeit with its natural fauna and flora unspoilt. *Spartina townsendii* covered the marches from Hurst to Chichester; coot flocked along the coast in the dead months, plover abounded. Man, his industry and the world of nature – all depended upon the double tides and their fierce scouring of the river bed.

High-handed Vandalism: a fortunate paradox:

Incredibly, in 1731 a merchant captain of Boldre, named William Cross, built a dam across the river. It was 500 feet in length, 30 feet wide and 20 feet deep.

By the time that the citizens of Lymington invoked the force of Law against him, the Captain had died. His widow and a tailor named William Lyne then exacted a toll upon all who crossed the 'dam'. At Winchester Assizes in 1739, Lymington Corporation lost the action against Widow Cross to demolish the causeway.

The ships that carried the bricks from the Walhampton brickyard to the West Country; the stone from Swanage for lime-making; the Salterns and the salt exports to America, Newfoundland, Holland and the Channel Islands; the sailing colliers and the timber ships: the oyster fisheries – all these industries depended on the scouring of the tides. The ire expended upon Widow Cross was nothing to the rage felt at the final indignity – a tailor levying the toll.

The Port that Died:

The river inevitably silted up, soundings less than seven years later revealing an accretion of three to four feet of mud. Ships of the deep draught could no longer use the quays so died the commerce port of Lymington.

The First Yacht Builders:

Thomas Inman, boat builder, came from Hastings in 1821, when men's thoughts had turned from war to the delights of peace. Inman began to build boats-for-pleasure and so completed the change in the character of Lymington River. Inman's yard was later to become the Berthon Boat Building Company.

The Incursion of the Railway:

The course of the river was to be affected still further by the encroachment of science. Watt's steam engine and Stephenson's exploitation of it brought the railway to Lymington. Significantly, Lymington in 1844 refused permission for the railway company to build its ferry quay next to the Town Station. The Pier Station, and the fixed iron bridge to serve it, completed the silting up process in 1884. Now only small boats without masts could pass further upriver than the Town Quay. The course of the river has changed little ever since; the maintenance of even its present depth is a costly business.

From "The History of Lymington" by David Garrow, 1825: "It (the river boundary) was formerly distinguished by a boom, a little higher up and which is still standing, and known by the name of Jack-in-the-Basket. Jack owes its origin to some fishermen's wives who were the habit of occasionally hanging thereon their husbands' baskets containing their dinners while they were out at sea engaged in trawling, to which beacon they repaired when the calls of hunger prompted them.

The Salt Industry:

For centuries, the Salterns had brought wealth to Lymington. Along the foreshore from Milford to Oxy the industry thrived, each cistern served by its evaporating pans and a boiling house: and by its windmill for pumping up the brine into the cistern: and by a creek up which a boat brought the coal to fire the boiling pans, before shipping away the resultant salt.

For years the marshes had seen a host of spinning windmill sails. The sea salt industry vied with the rock salt industry of Derbyshire, but Governments then taxed both salt and coal to render the cost of the sea salt sixty times its true value. The sea salt industry then began to decline even before the course of the river changed. Captain Cross's action merely sealed the fate of the Salterns.

Control of the River:

Before 1951, the river was administered by the Borough Council through the River Committee whose members were appointed by the Council. The growth of yachting in the river and the necessity to finance dredging and other maintenance works, so they did not fall on the rate fund, led to an application for a Parliamentary Order to set up a Statutory Body under the Ports and Harbour Act.

The Pier and Harbour Order (Lymington) Confirmation Act 1951 stipulates that the Harbour shall be administered by thirteen Commissioners, two being Yacht Owners who are also mooring holders.

Day-by-day control is exercised by the Harbour Master, and his staff administrative control, by the Clerk and the Treasurer.

The Smuggling Industry:

The stretch of coast between Owers and Brixham – and particularly between St. Catherine's and St. Albans – is considered by seaman to be one of the most deceptive and dangerous coastlines in the world. Perhaps, for this reason, those who fished for their livelihood acquired that sixth sense, an extra cunning in the ways of the sea.

It was seaman of this calibre who, during the struggles between France and England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, turned smuggler. To Poole, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Mundeford, and up to Keyhaven, Lymington, Beaulieu and Hamble; from all these inlets and creeks "The Gentlemen" plied their trade during the hours of darkness.

To seize the contraband and arrest the smugglers, brigs of the Royal Navy patrolled lengths of the coast. Captain Marryatt (1792 – 1848), author of *Masterman ready* and *Midshipman Easy*, commanded such a ship. Ashore the Preventative Service cast its net to ensnare the Free Traders; Coast Waiters and Riding Officers, operated from their regional headquarters in Southampton. Chichester and Lymington were responsible to the Master Port, each 'creek' operating its own revenue cutter. Waiters were distributed throughout the coastal villages, their duties being to check and control shipping.

"The Gentlemen" made the Queens Head at Burley their headquarters, the local hostelrys in the Forest being the disposal points for the contraband: the Cat and the Fiddle at Hinton was probably the most notorious.

Tome Johnston of Lymington was one such smuggler, schooled as a lad amongst the creeks of Pennington, Keyhaven, Oxey and Lymington. With the fishermen, he learned the tricks of the trade: burying the brandy kegs in the mud when the alarm was raised; sinking them on a line over

the ship's side; and whisking the barrels inland, concealed in false bottomed carts. And if a man lacked adventure, the Press Gang was always lurking in Lymington.

LYMINGTON HARBOUR:

(From a book published by R. A. Grove Lymington 1832)

Lymington is well adapted for trade, being the only port on the coast between Poole and Portsmouth; and is most convenient for shipping entering by the Needles passage. It formerly had a foreign trade, the decline of which may be chiefly attributed to the loss of the privilege attached to what is termed a free port. It is, however, in contemplation to make an application to the legislature to confer this right, which would encourage commercial enterprise. The opening of a trading intercourse with Guernsey and Jersey, to which islands this is the nearest and most convenient port on the coast, would be very desirable.

Here are three quays, with commodious stores, where vessels of 300 tons can discharge their cargoes; and an extensive shipwrights' yard belonging to Mr Inman (Mr Inman is about to erect a patent slip to facilitate hauling up vessels for repair), who has, during the last fourteen years, built the undermentioned yachts, besides revenue cutters and trading vessels. Most of the yachts have proved their superior sailing qualities by the many prizes won by them at the different regattas, under the sanction of the Royal Yacht Club

Name:	Tons	Owner	Built
Hind	20	N Pollhill	1820
Mary	53	J S Penleaze	1821
Gipsy	21	H Hopkins	1823
Corsair	43	W Gaven	1824
Elizabeth	15	J Deane	----
Medora	47	H Hopkins	1825
Rob Roy	52	W Gaven	----
Thetis	37	D George	----
Ann	42	Earl Listowel	1826
Owen Glendower	112	F R West	----
Lullworth	127	J Weld	----
Julia	21	C Clementson	1829
Turk	44	J Kean	----
Vampire	44	D George	----
Alarm	123	J Weld	1830

EARLY YACHTING:

Yachting: "the racing of light sailing boats" (O.E.D.) in its contemporary meaning, was probably first practised by the Essex fishermen who, to be first on the quay with their catch, raced homewards from the fishing grounds. No silver up was their reward: to be first home was their livelihood.

King Charles II raced the Royal Yacht, in addition to his other accomplishments: but it was not until 1720 that the first yacht club was founded in Ireland – The Cork Harbour Water Club, not the Royal Cork Yacht Club.

After the Yacht Club of Cowes (The Royal Yacht Squadron) had been founded three years before the Battle of Waterloo, clubs proliferated around the British Isles: by 1833, there were some thirty clubs between which were distributed over twelve hundred yachts. There is no record of Lymington being amongst these original clubs, though, by the end of Queen Victoria's reign, yachts were being based in the estuary. By 1914 yachts were moored in the river and Lymington Prams (later re-named Scows) were being raced. The Prams cost £20 and were built by Dan Bran and the Berthon Boat Company.

The Lymington River Sailing Club was founded in the early days of 1914. There were eighteen members, the Captain of the Club being Captain H H Nicholson. The purpose of the Club was to race the Prams in weekly races between May 15th and August 15th. Before the Club's first Annual General Meeting was held, the world went mad. On August 4th the Great War erupted.

THE GREAT WAR: 1914 – 1918

The Shut-down

The Lymington River Sailing Club closed down. Boom defences appeared in the Western Solent and Examination Vessels anchored off Yarmouth. Gun barrels sprouted from Fort Victoria and Hurst Castle.

By the end of the year, Emden had closed the trade routes in the Indian Ocean and halted the troop convoys from Australia and New Zealand; von Spee had annihilated Craddock's squadron. Hopes of a swift victory faded.

1915 would not see the beginning again of sailing.

BERTHON BOAT COMPANY

The Berthon Boat Company was founded in Romsey in 1877 by the Rev. E. L. Berthon, a Peer of the Realm, a Member of Parliament, and an officer in St George's Volunteers; and by three solicitors, to build boats and "other floating machines".

As well as punts, skiffs and other craft for the use of 19th Century sporting gentlemen, the yard also built the famous Berthon Collapsible Boats. These folding boats, built with a double skin and divided into six sections with an air space between the skins, were unsinkable and were widely used by the Navy as well as by private yachtsmen throughout the world.

In 1917, H G May bought the Berthon Boat Company and, the following year, the Lymington Shipyard, thus continuing in Lymington a long tradition of building wooden yachts.

AFTER THE ARMISTICE

“Peace is come and wars are over,
Welcome you and welcome all”
Alfred Edward Housman.

There could be no greater healer for those who returned than the call of the Lymington estuary. Craft of all descriptions soon began to appear in the river.

There was no organisation to channel the energies of the new boat owners, but Captain Harper was a zealous and busy Harbour Master. Paddling about the river in his duck punt, he could collect his 5/- annual harbour dues from the Prams and a little more for the larger craft.

FOUNDATION OF THE LYMINGTON SAILING CLUB

The Prime Movers:

By the autumn of 1921, sailors on the Lymington River had ceased to eye each other with curiosity. They hailed each other in passing, until, names and addresses were exchanged.

There was on the water, a Royal Yacht Squadron member, a Major Cyril Potter, O.B.E., who owned several boats. He lived in a house called ‘Blakes’, which had been re-named ‘Ferry Point’ and he invited to his house anyone who was interested in forming a club. The proposal was unanimously endorsed by the four ladies and six men present.

By the spring of 1922, the Lymington River Sailing Club was re-created – some eight years after it had lapsed.

The aim of the club was to provide regular racing between June and September for a Handicap class, the Solent Sea Birds and the Prams. The subscription was a guinea a year or ten shillings for those living outside a ten-mile radius from Lymington Church. The first gun of the first race was fired on Saturday June 3rd 1922.

EARLY DAYS OF RACING:

Though the Prams had raced together in 1914, no keep boats had as yet appeared for organised racing. The summer of 1922 saw, in addition to the Prams, the regular racing of a Handicap class. The start line was from Major Potter’s motor cruiser, Wendy, whose skipper, another Captain Harper, fired a shotgun into the air. The year 1922 also brought into the river a new 18ft sloop class boat, the Solent Sea Bird. Built at Cowes for £80, complete, they were stiff, good sea boats, and delightful to handle.

On August 16th, the highlight of the year was the Lymington Town Regatta in which not only the L.R.S.C. boats, but many visitors competed. Present also was the Lymington Rowing Club, which had always been an enthusiastic supporter of the Regatta. The year ended with high hopes; membership stood at eighty-five and the search for a clubhouse had begun.

THE COASTGUARD BOATHOUSE

The Coastguard had for a long time maintained a boathouse and slipway at the end of Bath Road, on the right bank of the river. The site was owned by the Lymington Council but in 1923 the lease was transferred to the newly formed L.R.S.C. In April 1923, the Club took over the boathouse. To mark the circumstance, the L.R.S.C. held its first regatta on August 25th.

The members turned to with a will to transform the premises. Metamorphosis took place and the sparse shed soon became an attractive clubhouse.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CLUB BETWEEN THE WARS

A Fresh Start:

Consolidation was the next step. It was proposed to try and buy the Coastguard Boathouse, its slipway and site: the cost, £600. To raise the money the L.R.S.C. formed a limited company – the L.R.S.C. Building Company Ltd – with a capital of £1,500. In January 1924, the Club bought the property and immediately began to transform the boathouse: £1,253 was spent on improvements. Members subscribed to a stake in their Club and many in due course presented their shares to the L.R.S.C.

The Clubhouse in 1924:

The original structure consisted of one large section, purpose-built for the Coastguard's boat; a small store-cum-workshop was divided off at the landward end. Large double doors opened on to the slipway which sloped into the river so that the boat could be launched at all states of the tide. The slipway was replaced, after Hitler's war, by our present pier.

Though the Clubhouse was shut for the winter, many fund-raising enterprises were undertaken to pay off the building costs: from amateur dramatics to hiring the premises for private parties. By March 1929, the Clubhouse was finally paid for and the Building Company liquidated.

In 1928, the membership had grown to 384; finances were adequate but the capacity of the Clubhouse was not. The premises had to be enlarged.

The old building had a roof which, pitched at 30 degrees, was slated. It was removed by the builder, G.G. Harvey of Lymington, who then raised the walls to form the large clubroom, which later was to become the reading room. The original timbers were re-used as far as possible, the pitch being increased to 45 degrees and plain tiles being laid. The heavy tie-beams and the unexpected queen-trusses now visible in the reading room were the result. Considerable improvements and additions were made to the ground floor. The balcony on the first floor was open, as was the verandah underneath.

The walls of that old building erected during the last century still form part of the south wing of today's modern structure.

The Club has been fortunate to include architects amongst its membership. In 1935-36 a north-south wing was added on the Landward side; in March 1938 the wing was further extended to the northward to provide a boat store on the ground floor, with the Ladies' Room above. A flagstaff and signal cannons were provided during this period.

PERSONALITIES AND CLUB AMENITIES IN THE TWENTIES AND THIRTIES:

Captain H.H. Nicholson:

Captain Nicholson, who lived in Creek Cottage, was a fine seaman, much respected and loved by the young for whom he did so much.

During an early Town Regatta he was late in starting for the Pram race: he had taken his boat to the Town Quay, gone shopping and, his Pram now full of parcels, was sailing back to join the race in which over 20 Prams had already started.

A gale was blowing and the fleet was soon in difficulties. At Cocked Hat a girl in a Pram capsized. The Reverend V.K.G. Logan in his Pram was assisting when Captain Nicholson sailed alongside. "Go on" said the Captain. "I'll pick her up". Captain Nicholson then overhauled the flier; he came in first with a cargo of soggy parcels and one wet girl.

Dan Bran:

Dan Bran's name is legendary. He was a 'natural', a boat-builder who followed his craft by instinct. There was none, it was said, who could build a better Lymington Scow. He retained his reputation by results, for apparently he never worked to any drafted design, but built by eye.

Dan Bran was the 'character' of the River. He helped everywhere, taught everyone. A born seaman, he suffered the seafarer's contempt for the pompous; but those who treated his courteously formed a life-long relationship.

He was often to be seen in his latter years, whiskers sprouting in every direction, paddling about the river in a species of coracle.

Mr & Mrs Francis:

In January 1924, Mr Francis, a former Royal Marine, was appointed Steward, his duties including those of Gunner and Boatman. An ex-member recalls: "curiously enough, probably because the majority of members in those days lived within a short distance of the Club, the most that could be obtained in the way of food and drink was afternoon tea (a 'great feature' of the Club). Alcoholic drinks could be obtained, by only with difficulty, from the Club Steward – a splendid man, a veteran of Zeebrugge, who took his duties seriously, if slowly. A thirsty member would first have to locate the Steward (it was not 'de rigueur' to ring for him) then, having placed his order, there would be time for the member to nip across to the Mayflower for a preliminary snifter and, on returning to the Club House, find his order being ponderously pedalled up the stairs to the upper room.

Dear old Francis: never was there a more good-tempered man, in spite of some irritations he suffered at the hands of the more crotchety members. One thing, however, got his goat. One of his duties was to sweep down the slipway and he regarded the action of the tide as a personal insult. 'Why don't it come up and stop up?' he would mutter as he broomed the slippery surface of the footway twice daily. The Club owes much to the attentions of Mrs Francis and her husband.

His renown reached the pinnacle when he spied an unidentified visitor trying to land on the slipway from a dinghy. Being an excellent Steward, Francis rushed to the water's edge to repel boarders:

'You can't land here, sir, if you're not a member.'

'If I do not land here, then this Club will not become Royal' the Duke of Gloucester replied. Rapid back-peddalling by the Steward **must** have ensued, because the Club was eventually granted the Royal Warrant.

Royal Patronage: The Lymington Yacht Club, 1926.

In December 1925, the Admiralty Warrant was granted and in April 1926, the L.R.S.C. became the Lymington Yacht Club. The Duke of Gloucester became Patron in December 1931; application was made in 1926 for the Royal Warrant but this was not granted until 3rd November 1938, King George VI signing his approval. During this period, gentlemanly warfare was waged with the Southern Railway whose *paddler* "Freshwater", was notoriously unlucky: Jumsey their 'Carrier', the tug which towed two or three barges loaded with cars, was even more unpredictable. Annual letters of courtesy were exchanged with the Skippers of the ferries to testify enduring admiration and friendship.

Eligibility for Membership:

An ex-member remembers:

"The black-ball technique was ruthlessly employed to preserve the high social standing of the club which had but recently been granted the use of the prefix, 'Royal'. Anyone connected with the word 'Trade' was bound to be excluded from membership.

The Committee of those days also established themselves as arbiters of candidates' private morals. A friend of mine whose marriage had been dissolved was himself held to be the 'guilty party', though otherwise a completely blameless and talented citizen, was positively bombarded with volleys of black balls.

By 1932 the Club at the weekends was somewhat sombre because most members were racing away from their homeport. It was refreshing to welcome the cheery youngsters who during the year had arrived with their thriving Montagu Sharpies, though their exuberance somewhat frayed the nerves of a small minority of older members."

The Burgee, Badges and Uniform:

The original design was a red burgee, with a white St George's Cross, on which was a blue St George's Cross and, in gold, the Lymington Ship in the fly. The similarity of the burgee to the Norwegian flag led to considerable controversy; later, a Neptune crown was added in the hoist.

A mess uniform was designed and a coloured drawing of it exhibited; a clup cap badge was also adopted and club buttons, except for the lettering, have remained unchanged to this day.

Between the Wars: Club Classes and Racing:

The Restricted West Solent Class:

32ft6in x 7ft6in x 5ft1½ in, introduced in 1924 by the Commodore, Major Cyril Potter. The popularity of the class was largely instrumental in the success of the Club. Six-ton sloops, they were designed by H.G. May and built by his yard, the Berthon Boat Company.

"...Each boat was manned by a paid skipper who had a considerable say in all matters concerning the conduct of every race, though (at least in theory) his hand never touched the tiller".

"A novel feature of all those West Solent's was the fact that they were the first class-racing boats to be equipped with the new-fangled sanitary apparatus known as 'the Admiral' (Blake of course). This essentially sensible fixture (made more necessary by the fact that at least two of the yachts were owned by ladies) was regarded by the racing fraternity as the greatest joke since the invention of the internal combustion engine. It was no uncommon sight, when the Class visited Cowes and other locations away from Lymington, for the numerous paid hands (and there were plenty among the twelve, eight and six metres) to gather on their respective decks to greet these 'sissy' newcomers with significant gestures of the art of chain-pulling."

The X.O.D. Lymington Division:

The third oldest division of its class, it was born in 1927 with eight boats, its first captain being Admiral Sir Sackville Garden of the Gallipoli tragedy. Three of the originals, X18, X20 and X23 are now back in Lymington, X20 still bearing her original name. The Division was disbanded in 1931 and did not reform until the Second World War.

The X Class was, and still are popular racing boats if you don't mind a thorough wetting in a Solent loup.

An ex-member recalls:

"Of the X Class, I remember discussing with the Captain of the Itchenor contingent their proclivity for drenching their crews. It was at a cocktail party. 'Wet?' he exclaimed; 'they're

as dry as a bone.’ He then fell backwards down a companionway, no doubt struck down from On High (or by the strength of the Martinis). Fortunately he was unhurt.

The Thirties and the ‘L’ Class

“... As the membership of the Club increased, a demand for the less plutocratic type of racing yacht and one more suitable for picnicking, as well as for racing, was met by the design of the Lymington ‘L’ Class by J Laurent Giles. These were compact four-tonners fitted with small motors and they effectively supplanted the dying West Solent Class. Few, if any, carried a paid Skipper though the competition in the races seemed to become even hotter than previously, and resulted in at least one cause celebre which was only prevented from becoming a public scandal by the intervention of Herr Hitler.”

The Coronation Class

“... It was partly owing to the unpopularity of some of the methods employed by the ‘L’ Class owners that an attempt was made to form in 1937 yet another and less expensive class of cabin boat, called in honour of the new Sovereign ‘The Coronation Class’. They were built at Dunoon on the Clyde and coast, complete with the barest essentials, no more than £75, plus a fiver delivery charge.

The introduction of these cheap little vessels was far from popular. Members of the established classes combined to attack the qualities of the Coronations in a manner resembling that chickens resenting the intrusions of a newcomer. The ‘pecks’ were pretty savage. These boats were (it was said openly) either crank or stiff, and appeared to have been hastily constructed from old biscuit boxes. Fortunately, the general opinion summed up, ‘the boats would soon fall to pieces.’ Some twenty years later these ugly ducklings were to be seen in Cherbourg and Biscay, though as a class they did not survive. Their place was filled by the evergreen ‘X’ class.

The Gauntlets

“... No history of the Club could be complete without reference to the creation by the Berthon Boat Company of the ‘Gauntlet’ series of cruising-cum-ocean-racing of twelve, fourteen, or even larger tonnage. All these fine weatherly vessels were built in Lymington, though curiously enough they gained little favour with the general run of deep-water sailors in the Club. In fact, until after the conclusion of the Second World War, these same deep-water members regarded themselves as a class apart from those who were content to make use of the comparatively sheltered waters of the Solent and, almost without exception, made no active contribution to local sailing activities, ostentatiously taking their ships elsewhere during Regatta Weeks and other Club functions”

The Montagu Sharpie 16’ x 6’ beam, carvel built:

Depicted in the painting in the corner of the bar, the Montagu Sharpie was adopted by the Club in 1938. It was thus named after the late Lord Montagu because a small number had been built by

Elkins of Christchurch for the Beaulieu River Sailing Club. In 1949, like the Pram, the class gave way to the Firefly.

On Whit Monday, 17th May 1948, the School of Infantry's Sharpie, Micawber, was run down by Farringford. One of the Sharpie's crew, Major G Richman, was caught in the ferry's revolving paddle wheel. Miss P Clarke, the other crew, could not swim. Both survived.

The Big Cutters and the J's:

Britannia, Astra, Shamrock V, Westward, White Heather, Valsheda, Yankee, Endeavour I and II – and Candida owned by H Andrae of the L.Y.C.. What memories these names evoke!

Though no J sailed up the Lymington River (they drew 14 feet), they would use the L.Y.C. start line between two naval cutters. The J's raced in the Lymington Regatta on Wednesday; and in the Yarmouth Regatta on the Thursday and Friday, in spite of arguments with Black Rock.

The Potter Ship Endowment

On his retirement after thirteen years as the Founder Commodore, Major Cyril Potter in 1937 presented the Club with a beautiful silver wine-coaster, fashioned as a model of a royal sailing galley.

This trophy was donated as first prize for the winner of a mixed-up' race: the start line of the annual "Potter Ship" would gladden the heart of our first Commodore were he alive today. Major Potter also donated an endowment to provide prizes for three other classes.

Hitler's War 1939 – 1945/6

The dreary blanket of wartime descended swiftly upon the river and the Western Solent. A controlled minefield stretched across the Western Solent from Sowley Sluice to Hampstead Ledge. The barrage was protected by a boom defence vessel and ships theoretically could not pass through without clearance from the Extended Defence Officer (West) whose lair was in the George Hotel, Yarmouth. The mainland extremity of the boom still remains, its Qk.F1.R warning still evoking nostalgic memories from the less-young.

A continuous nightly Channel patrol operated from Yarmouth. Whilst waiting for the German invasion, these little craft steamed thirty miles south every night, winter and summer, their duty being to sit on the wireless transmitter key at the first enemy sighting.

In early morning of December 17th 1940, 'HMS Acheron was mined close south of the Island whilst running trials. Of the 215 in the destroyer's company only nineteen survived in the bitter cold, the proximity of the island cliffs being a cruel mockery.

The MTBs, shadows in the dusk, their engines growling as the boats slipped through Hurst; the yellow-snouted Messerschmitt 109s sweeping over Tennyson Down, machine-gunning as they dipped; the Pompey-Dartmouth convoys trundling through The Needles on the ebb; the tragedy of Dieppe and the miracle of D-Day; though history now, these events were very real to Lymington.

And in the Town, the Berthon Boat Company constructed MLs, MBs, minesweepers and water ambulances on Admiralty contract. Some of these 110ft craft were fitted with auxiliary sail for their intended passages across the Atlantic.

Then, in 1946, a mushroom cloud erupted over Hiroshima.

Resurgence: Development of the Present Club 1946 – 1972

“... The attitudes of the Thirties were swept away when the warriors returned home in the 'Forties' to re-open the Club officially on July 21st 1945. It was surprising to many 'old timers' how many of these heroes who had flogged the ocean during the whole war turned at once to sailing what has been called the “Cruel Sea”.

With the end of World War II, when the Club House was relinquished by the AFS who had commandeered it, the influx of thirsty warriors demanded more and better service, and the more progressive Committee members put up a scheme for the construction of a bar with an attendant servitor to supply instant drinking facilities. The opposition to this innovation on the part of the 'old timers' was intense. 'Turning the place into a common pot-house', was one of the least offensive objections raised in committee. They reckoned, however, without the skill and persistence of their own members who, once the motion to create a bar was carried by the narrowest majority, immediately set about demolishing part of the Club structure to such an extent that the work had to be completed, and this was entirely by volunteer labour and finance. At this stage in the history of the Club, which witnessed a renaissance hitherto unequalled or since surpassed, it was indeed most fortunate that the vacant post of Secretary was filled by Captain Mostyn-Williams, MC. This gentleman was a victim of what is now called Poliomyelitis and was completely without the use of his legs. Yet a more active and indomitable member of society never existed. Without his active co-operation the New Brooms would have had little success in implementing the very necessary reforms in a post-war world.

It was as well that the spirit of reform existed after the last War because a rival Sailing Club was in the process of being established for those who were not prepared to offer themselves as victims of the blackball ordeal.

The 'Scow' and the 'Pram':

Smaller classes consisted first of the delightfully diminutive but utterly seaworthy 11ft 6in "Lymington Scow" (also a Berthon Boat product), but since these little craft were essentially single-handed jobs the demand for something larger was met by Dan Bran, the local boat-builder, whose shed was situated close to the Yacht Club. Dan's prices were very reasonable, though his design, which was simply a blown-up version of the Scow and was called 'the Lymington Pram' was sadly lacking in performance in high winds which caused the boats to heel to such an extent that the rudders were lifted so far out of the water as to make their accurate steering a doubtful proposition. Nevertheless the 14ft Pram Class filled a long-felt want and in the fullness of time became an even 'hotter' collection of pothunters than the larger boats.

Classes of Boats: 1946 – 1972 Diary:

There is an embarrass des richesses of members' names qualifying for inclusion in the diary which follows. Space precludes a balanced and comprehensive list, but the author craves the indulgence of members for his omissions of the detailed achievements of those whose names are included in this incomplete list:

Helen Torbin, Sir Christopher Lawrence-Jones, Mike Law, John Biddle, Sir Arthur McDonald, Bob Young, Fred Frampton, Admiral Rymer, Commander Merrett, Val Powell and, of course, Frier Jardine.

1946. Though racing began again less than six months after the Japanese surrender, the 'Ls', 'Cs' and Handicap-classes lacked support because of the difficulty in replacing damaged gear. The dinghies came into their own, the Prams and the Sharpies once more leading the way.

1947 Considerable thought was given to the introduction of new dinghy classes and the decision was made to introduce the 12ft National and the Firefly. This adoption proved a resounding success.

1948 Passage racing was developing rapidly, enthusiasm being particularly engendered by those who had returned recently from 'floggin the oggin' the world o'er. Between six and seven 'X' class boats raced regularly the number of Lymington Prams had increased to 52.

1949 The 'X' class continued to grow and now numbered twelve boats. The 'Tar Barrel Trophy' was instituted for the fastest passage by a centreboard boat round the ancient mark. The R.O.R.C was receiving enthusiastic support from the keelboats.

1950 "The Record" "...Never before in the history of the Club have so many members achieved so much in such a variety of boats and never before has the weather been so consistently unkind at weekends. Fast, wet passages and stormy anchorages have been the order of the day."

Humphrey Barton (Rear Commodore) sailed the Atlantic and back in Vertue XXXV, his crew being the veteran 64-year old Kevin O'Riordan.

The 'X' had become the premier class, racing thrice weekly. Though the Prams still remained the hard core, the Nationals and Fireflies were beginning to develop. The starting platform, built in the spring of 1939, was repaired and saved from collapse.

1951 The Rig of the 'X's was modernised. Nationals and Fireflies forced ahead, Club members winning the Burton Trophy and the Firefly Championship.

1952 Five of the 'L' class 4-tonners were again racing. The Nationals and Fireflies again won glory with Club members on the tillers. The Jardine twins won the Flying Fifteen Championship in Javelin.

The West Wight Scow was adopted to encourage the dinghy tyros.

1953 Richard Creagh-Osborne and Derek Pitt-Pitts were in the British Team which won the International 505 championships in France.

1957 The Finns were introduced under the leadership of Richard Creagh-Osborne who had represented Great Britain in the Olympics.

The redoubtable Prams were fast declining and were now reduced to six: fibreglass and hot moulded, laminated-ply had defeated them.

1958 The Finns held pride of place.

1959 The GP14 was introduced to replace the Lymington Pram. The 'X's continued unabated.

1960 Four Club Members represented the Country for the Olympics at Naples; Graham Mann, Richard Creagh-Osborne and the Jardine twins.

1961 The O.K. dinghy appeared, a smaller version of the Finn. The Cadet and the Moth classes made their debut.

1962 The Fireflies and the O.K.s were still making progress, but the Finns were declining with the changeover to fibreglass.

1963 The Seagull Sloop class appeared, six being owned by members. The winter of 1962/63 was the big Freeze-Up; it spoilt the Christmas Dinghy Meet, but members could walk to skate to their mornings.

1964 Record entry (50) for the Potter Ship Race. The 'X's won the team race at Cowes for the first time since 1931.

At the Tokyo Olympics, Graham Mann was the Dragon Team Manager; Adrian Jardine crewed in the British 5.5 metre boat; Richard Creagh-Osborne and Stuart Jardine were 'reserves'.

1965 R.L.Y.C. second in the RORC Points Championship. 'X's numbered 24 boats, winning the Cowes Team Challenge shield.

Richard Creagh-Osborne beat the Olympic Finn representative; Stuart Jardine gained the title for the Flying Dutchman at the Poole Bay Olympic Association.

1966 150 Boats at the Easter meeting, Fireflies and O.K.s being pre-eminent.

1967 A noticeable decline in dinghy racing, due largely to the river congestion.

1968 Club re-building caused cancellation of Easter meeting but 125 dinghies competed in the August Regatta, over half being Cadets, Scows and Moths.

1969 Agreement with the Lymington Town Sailing Club and the Salterns Sailing Club to adopt the 420 Class of dinghy.

1970 Mike McMullen won the Round Britain Race in "Binkie", a Contessa 32 built by Jeremy Rogers.

The International Soling first appeared:

Malcolm Tew and Fred Skey won a Bronze medal in the 420 World Championship held in Israel. Stuart Jardine won the 5-0-5 South east Asian Championship in Hong Kong. John Biddle was again National Champion in the 10sq Canoe Class.

Passage Racing and the R.O.R.C.

The immediate appeal of passage racing was a strange phenomenon of the immediate post-war period. In 1947 began the first of these races, to Poole and Round the Island, which were to add such lustre to R.L.Y.C membership: names such as Adlard Coles, Humphrey Barton and Jack Giles; Vernon Sainsbury, Mostyn-Williams, H.G. May and Max Solly; Bill Martineau, Erroll Bruce and Brian Macnamara; Jack Bryans, Gerald Potter, Claude Knight and Maurice Hope; Christopher Biddle, Sir Peter Bristow; Roger Pinckney, Bill Fryer and Ted Barraclough; the McMullen family – the Club is privileged to include such names, but it is invidious to attempt a comprehensive record when space is so restrictive. Suffice to state the the R.O.R.C., whose Commodores include the names of R.L.Y.C. members, A V Sainsbury and W.M. Vernon, flourishes with the years, as witnessed by the world-wide fame of the Fastnet and present-day ocean racing. Outstanding cruises were made, some round the world, that of Ann and Tom Worth in 1953 being particularly memorable.

Lymington develops into a major Yachting Centre:

The explosion of 'boating' during the 50s and 60s was a phenomenon peculiar to our Island Race. Whether the compulsive urge to sail, drive or paddle any craft that can float is a condition for the psychologist; or, more probably, an escape from the pressures of over-crowded Britain and the Bureaucrat, the fact remains that, statistically, for every foreigner, 200 more Britons take to the water.

History declared that Lymington should develop along recreational lines and geography has conveniently decreed our estuary to be the gateway to France. Accessible with Yarmouth as one of the twin havens at the end of the Needles Channel, it was inevitable that Lymington should attract the keelboat. Marinas, boat yards and the ancillary industries have sprung up in response to the demand which by 1990 will have reached astronomical proportions. There can be only one over-riding question: when to cry, "Enough is enough?"

The New Club House:

In 1946 the Club's interests widened, the premises remaining open throughout the winter for lectures. For the first time, too, a Club Bulletin, which is very much alive today, was prepared by Gilbert Hackforth-Jones, the author.

Considerable improvements were made to the bar in 1947 by a volunteer gang of Club Members, the ganger-in-charge being the Vice-Commodore. It is interesting that in 1946 Samuel Cook prepared drawings illustrating that additional accommodation could be constructed above the north-south wing by the erection of a Mansard roof-structure. Roger Pinckney also submitted a similar scheme. These plans were of particular interest for future consideration and Samuel Cook apparently made provision for this additional loading when designing the north-south wing.

The pressure of membership demanded expansion of the premises and, during 1957, a generous response was made by members towards a fund to enable improvements to be made to the Club Rooms, the Reading Room being the first to receive attention. Two additional windows were introduced; the fire-place surround was remodelled with its flanking bookcase, new curtains and a complete redecoration.

In 1958/59 a new wine store was built on the site of the old lavatory which permitted the extension of the bar counter and the introduction of a corner at the west end of the bar, where there was a fireplace. It was for this enclosure that Jean Cobb designed and executed the beautiful etched panel which we still have with us. Roy Coombs also painted a fair-scene of yachts on Lymington River which provided a delightful feature for the bar.

Improvements to the Changing Rooms were carried out in 1960 when the Race Officer's Box was erected above the old enclosure. The original concrete slipway of the last century was in such good condition that it became one of the principal supports for the new columns existing today.

'Feeding the Brute' had always been a conundrum and, with the ever increasing membership, the difficulty was accentuated. Mercifully, the advent of the admirable Mr Brooks and his catering staff resolved the problem but there were still no facilities.

In March 1963, Frank Webster was asked to prepare drawing illustrating improvements to the club building, plans, which included providing a kitchen on the first floor. True improvements were completed by March 1964 without interfering with the use of the Club.

In 1966, anticipating a maximum membership of 2,400, the Club decided finally to modernise the premises and to take full advantage of the magnificent view of the river and its estuary. A new pontoon was provided to replace the old waterfront and now 100 feet of deep water is available alongside. The reconstruction was completed in 1968. Our present Club is the happy result.

The Seventies:

The scene is restless, the pace quickens: the dinghies, the keel-boats and now the motor cruisers (who held their first rally in 1969 at Ginn's Farm), all who love the sea and uphold its courtesy, are welcome at the R.L.Y.C.

In 1971, Brian Macnamara organised a visit to Le Havre Yacht Club, a well supported event which resulted in reciprocal arrangements with our French friends who are returning the call at Whitsun this year (1972).

The 70s brought new names to emulate those who went before, but success now depends too much upon the size of the cheque-book as upon the skill and enthusiasm of the owner: a reflection, perhaps upon our society as well as upon our sport.

Ren Clarke in his Quivers, Arthur Slater in his Prospect of Witbys; Chris Dunning in his Marionettes and Red Rooster; Peter Webster's Liz of Lymington, John Paterson in Mutineer and Gallivanter; David Wilkinson's Quickstep II of Wessex, David May's Winsome, Harry Pollock's Olivia Anne, the Rogers brothers' Red Herring and Derek Pitt-Pitts Tern; and many more there are and will be.

Not all the lustre belongs to the 'big 'uns'. In 1970 the Cadiz Cup was won by Bill Tapley in his 20ft sloop, Jane of Jordans in a voyage of 500n miles round the Scillies and back via Alderney – with a 14 year old nephew as crew.

For enterprise, the voyage by the Club's Boatman, the intrepid and imperturbable 'Doug' Baverstock, cannot be omitted. In 1956, in Lymington Pram No. 33, Kestrel, he, three friends and a tent, having sailed from Keyhaven to Southampton, en-shipped to Le Havre; they navigated the Seine and returned via the same route after seven weeks.

In conclusion, the progress of the Club will continue to expand only in partnership with our friends who share the delights of the Lymington River:

The Lymington Rowing Club which must have been a competitor in the Town Regatta of August 22nd 1923.

The Lymington Town Sailing Club, a very live club with headquarters at the Bath house and hold its own races; it was founded in 1946.

The Salterns Sailing Club was founded after World War II for youngsters. Although not on the river, yet the Club is within the Borough

The Keyhaven Yacht Club which has continued to thrive since before World War II.

The Hurst Castle Sailing Club.

The IXth Lymington Sea Scout Group.

The Future:

There is always an optimum size to which a yacht club can grow, but beyond this point communication becomes more difficult, personalities tend to be submerged, and lack of cohesion and purpose result. We are limited in development by the size of our Club.

Membership will always be under pressure from the marinas and their yachtsmen, many of whom will want to join this Club. By the time the second marina is developed, the berths in the Lymington River should be at the maximum that is compatible with the interests of other river users.

There is room for at least two yacht clubs and I look forward very much to the Town Sailing Club going from strength to strength and continuing to be our friendly rivals in every way.

Dinghy racing which founded the sailing tradition in this Club will, if it is to continue – and it should – have to be outside in the Solent and this will apply equally to keel boats. I believe that keel boat racing will increase in the West Solent but in handicapping I consider we should reconcile the racing of unrated boats to the IOR rated sisters and not try to encourage a local handicap system. If we do this, it will encourage more and better boats to race in these events.

The number of members the Club can comfortably accommodate can really only be determined by experience, and we are, I think, nearing the maximum.

There is still room for expansion, in the forecourt and one or two other places. Develop this ultimately by all means, to improve facilities, but not, I suggest, to increase the number of members.

To lessen the work load on the secretariat and to help cope with the increasing demands made by racing and sailing generally, I believe we will have to have a Sailing Secretary – initially part-time – and space for an office has been made available in the plans for the SW corner.

In the 50 years since the inception of this Club, was has caused many gaps in the narration of this book which has been written to place on permanent record something of the story of the Club. The gaps, however, have not prevented a cruising and racing record equal to any other club and better than most.

I hope it will remind our older members to take a pride in their past achievements and that they will encourage our younger members to do at least as well.

The book has been compiled and edited by a small team of our Members and friends of the Club and has been paid for entirely by generous donations. A splendid example of self-help – perhaps our greatest potential asset in this Club.

I offer our most sincere thanks to all who have made the production of this book possible.

“...Finally, I suggest to Members that it is essential to elect a high proportion of new members who are boat-minded and encourage the younger generation in every way possible to the use the Club, for its future lies with them”.

THE COMMODORE 1972

Adm. Sir Derek Steele-Perkins

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