

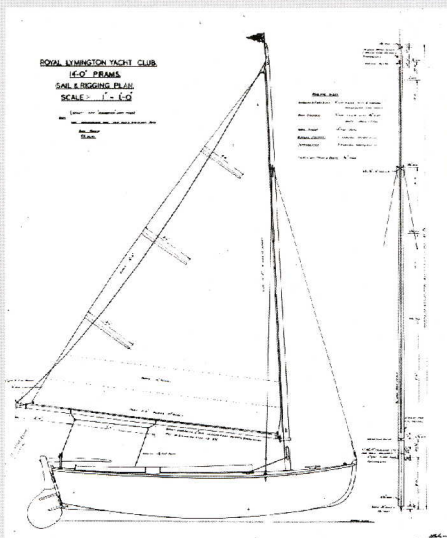
The term Pram was used at the turn of the Century to describe a yacht tender that could be rowed or sailed. Scow was later used to distinguish the earlier 11 ft Pram from the 14 ft Lymington Pram.

Its origin is thought to be the Plymouth Sound Pram which Captain H H Nicholson) sailed on the Lymington River and Solent in 1905. Could this have been a type sailed by the legendary Lymington Sailing Club, which the local boat builder Dan Bran claimed sported a white burgee with a red rose? Rumour has it that the then elderly Captain James Dyer of Wheatfield House, Lymington formed this club in 1900.

The Plymouth Sound Pram did not fare well in the West Solent chop and was prone to stopping. Necessity required a more seakindly design with a stem, and the ubiquitous 11 ft Pram, now called Scow was born. Captain Nicholson commissioned Dan Bran (whose business started in 1910) to build the first 11 ft Pram in 1912, for £20 complete. These clinker-built, 65 sq ft boats were built by other Lymington yards such as George Courtney and Company before the war. When hostilities ceased the Berthon Boat Company marketed a standard boat for £35 in 1920.

The Lymington River Sailing Club was re-created in 1921/22 by Major Cyril Potter, the first Commodore, with Captain Nicholson on the Sailing Committee. The 11 foot Pram Class was joined by the 18 foot, gaff-rigged Solent Sea Bird Class, already popular with Yarmouth locals as early as 1902. This Class was clinker-built, half-decked with a bowsprit, carrying a centreboard and pig-iron ballast. The foresail was capable of being used as a spinnaker. Being virtually uncapsizable, even if the mainsheets remained fast, they were popular with the young. They were built at Cowes for £80 complete. For the LRSC Regatta on August 19 th, 1924, twelve Solent Sea Birds raced from the line. The letter 'Z' pre-fixed the sail number (a letter that, in 1934, was adopted by the Portsmouth based, clinker built Victory keelboat class designed by Alfred Westmacott). Owners often camped aboard and cruised the Solent. These boats were

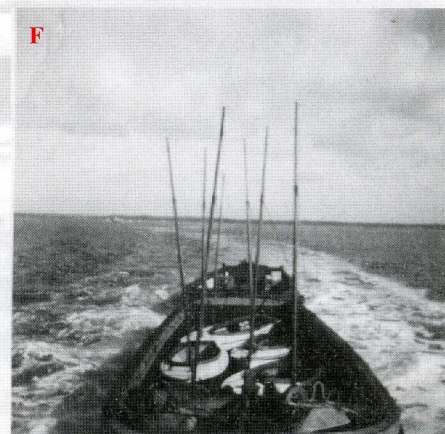
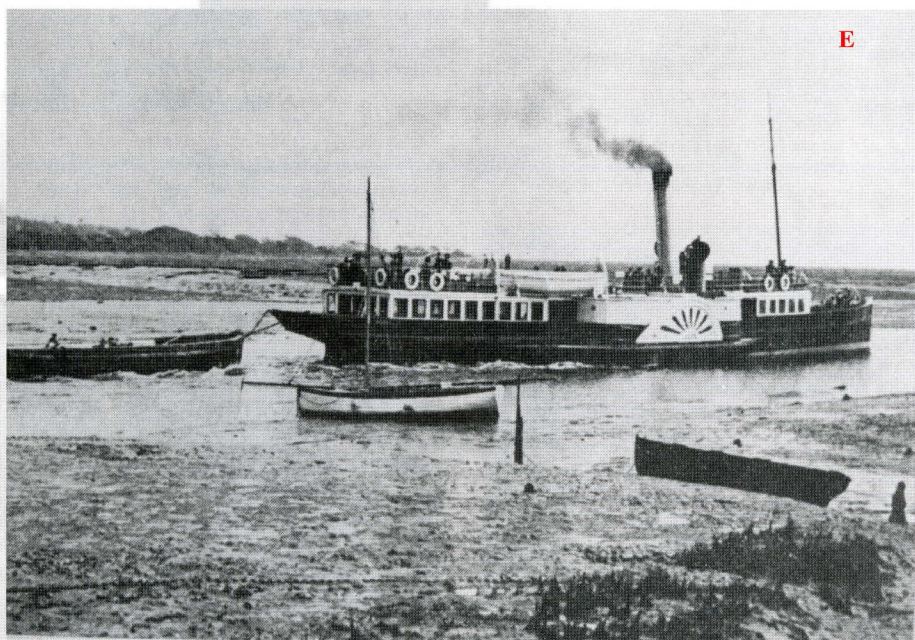
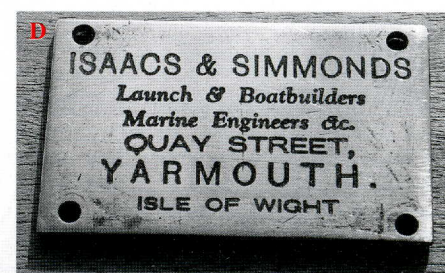
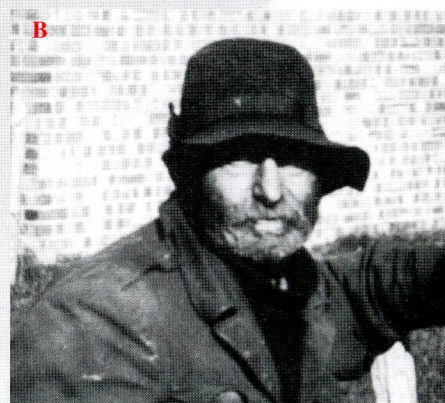
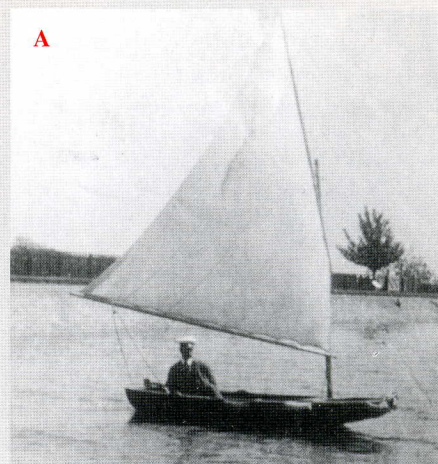
THE 14 FT LYMINGTON PRAM IS IT A PRAM OR IS IT A SCOW ?



raced by Club Members into the early 1930s, after which many upgraded to the West Solent Restricted class yachts or X boats, leaving the few remaining Sea Birds to race in the handicap class.

In 1925, Captain Nicholson, then living in Creek Cottage at the top of the local Oxy Creek, commissioned Dan Bran to build a prototype 14 ft Pram in his riverside wooden shed, close to the sea water baths. This Pram was a development of the pre-war 11 ft Pram and originally also sported a lug rig, but sometimes carried a gunter rig and jib. Nicholson named his Pram *Oxy Bird*, as he did many of his subsequent boats - a name, but not design, later adopted by the Lymington Town Sailing Club for its own 14 foot Oxy Bird One Design Class of 1947.

This seaworthy, clinker-built half-decked design gained almost overnight popularity. In 1926, the second Pram was built by Dan Bran for Bill Nelson who preferred the simple lug rig for day sailing



Hukweem - a name from Longfellow's *Hiawatha*. She is still sailing in Norfolk, having been taken there in 1927.

At Christmas, 1927, Nicholson was presented with a silver salver (on display in the Library and shown right) by the Lymington Yacht Club, on which were engraved the signatures of nearly one hundred members in honour of his 'unfailing help and kindness to them'. The Captain had recently formed the Oxy Lake Sailing Club (1927 - 1934) for the trade families of the area. It is interesting to note that from the ashes of this club rose the Hurst Castle Sailing Club in 1938 and the Lymington Town Sailing Club in 1946. Of the latter, Major Bill Martineau, then Vice Commodore of the RLymYC, became its first captain.

Dan Bran had a wonderful eye for the shape of a boat and his 11 and 14 ft Prams were built from lines in his head, directly on to the floor of his shed. No drawings existed. The 14 ft Pram was such a fine sea boat that a racing class became established at the Lymington Yacht Club by the late 1920s. These were simply rigged, with a single Bermudan mainsail. The first of these Lymington Pram Class boats was built by Dan for Gerald Beesly, who was impressed by Nicholson's boat, often to be seen on shopping trips up the Lymington River. On one Regatta day Nicholson, late for the start of the race and despite sailing his Pram full of parcels, on top of which sat a very wet girl he had rescued from a capsized boat, managed to win ahead of a twenty-strong fleet. These boats introduced many young people to sailing, and by the outbreak of war the fleet approached forty boats.

In the Lymington Regatta of August 21st, 1935, the first three Prams home, their helms and prizes awarded by Captain Goodhart, were, first, *Spray* (Miss Brownlow - prize £1), second, *Sprite* (Miss Kino - prize 15 shillings) and third, *Bird of Dawning* (Mr P Kindersley - prize 10 shillings).

Lionel Knight, now in his nineties, can remember collecting the Pram *Greenfly*, with his late brother, Monty (mentee of Nicholson) in 1931 from the Isaacs and

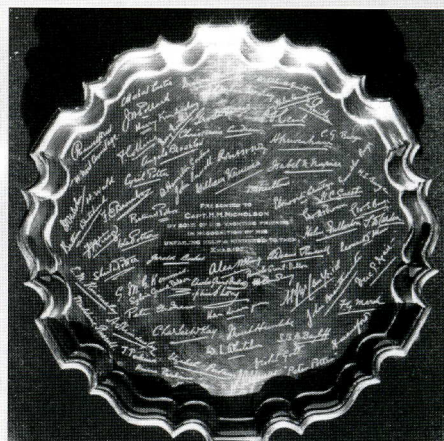
Simmonds yard at Yarmouth and the excitement of sailing her back to Lymington. Monty sailed her until his death in 1988. *Greenfly's* owner today, Kevin Smith, the Club's senior boatman, is restoring her in the workshop for the 75th Anniversary celebrations.

There is a reference to a 14 ft Lymington Pram specification by Laurent Giles and Partners, for the Club prior to 1938, which stated that 'the Prams were to be of light construction and to follow as closely as possible and to the satisfaction of the Lymington Yacht Club the examples built by Mr Dan Bran of Lymington'. Keel to be American elm, stem of oak, transom of elm, garboard and sheer strake of elm and remainder of planking and beams of pine, ribs of English or American elm, deck of pine, canvas covered, coamings of elm, centreplate case of pine. The rudder of elm and a galvanised centreplate. The inventory to be one sail and cover, a pair of oars, a pair of galvanised rowlocks, bailer, tiller, canvas covered fender fitted around boat and a painter. It was stipulated that the 94 sq ft mainsail was to be supplied by Cranfield and Carter, and hulls to receive one coat of primer, two undercoats and one coat of enamel, or three coats of varnish.

The Lymington Pram Class, being so well supported before the War, continued its popularity, increasing the fleet numbers. In 1946 drawings were produced for the first time and measurements taken off *Kingfish*.

They were cherished boats, and this is illustrated by Molly Fortescue who paid £90 and collected her beloved Pram *Bobby*, from Isaacs and Simmonds in 1947 and enjoyed racing and day sailing as far as Cowes, until reluctantly calling it a day in 1992. Many owners explored the Solent in their Prams when not racing, taking advantage of bright, sunny days for beach picnics and swimming.

A popular race was to the Royal Solent Yacht Club at Yarmouth where helms signed the visitors' book to finish.



Racing was becoming very keen and a set number of courses were sailed on the River (five), Solent (five) and Lakes, which are local estuaries and creeks (three). Prams raced well into the Autumn and, weather permitting, Boxing Day, sometimes with ice on their foredecks. In an attempt to improve the balance jibs were allowed in 1949, although only a small sail could be set as the mast was stepped well forward.

Dan Bran (82) died on 23rd December, 1950, followed a week later by his wife, Florence (83), who had fallen at their Rope Walk cottage. They had been married fifty-seven years. Dan, after a dram or few, thought that the River and Solent were his own and could be found anywhere along the shores, day or night, in one of his boats - sometimes brandishing a shotgun, which he once fired at the ferry for creating too much wash. He will always be fondly remembered as the creator of the Prams.

By 1958, the Club boats had begun to deteriorate and in 1959 the Class was replaced by the GP14. This was a lighter dinghy that could be trailer-sailed and which demanded less maintenance.

Although the Prams retired from thirty years of fleet racing, they still raced in handicap events and as family day boats into the Nineties. Those few that have survived are undergoing caring restorations and will be sailing into the Millennium.

Paul Rawlinson

Captions A Captain H H Nicholson in a Plymouth Sound Pram in 1905 It was prone to stopping in the West Solent chop. Photo: Monty Knight B The legendary Dan Bran in 1950. He built 11 ft and 14 ft Prams from lines in his head, direct to the floor of his shed. Photo: Monty Knight C Captain Nicholson in the first (1925) 14 ft Lymington Pram, photographed in 1926 on a shopping trip to Lymington, Bath Road can be seen in the background. Photo: Monty Knight D Nameplate from 1931 of the builder of *Greenfly*, shown bottom right E The paddle steamer *Solent* towing a car ferry barge. It sometimes carried Prams to Yarmouth (see picture F) Photo: Jean Lewis F Prams being towed to Yarmouth (see picture E) Photo: Jean Lewis G Tony Wales-Smith at the helm of *Mickey Mouse*, a Montagu Sharpie, off the clubhouse with brother Pat as crew. Some of the Sharpies are seen on their trot and in the distance is one of the two paddle steamers, *Freshwater* or *Solent*. Photo: Pat Wales-Smith H 14 ft Prams in a Lymington Town regatta in the 1930s. Photo: Monty Knight I *Greenfly*, number 19, seen in 1996 at the beginning of her restoration by Kevin Smith, the Club's senior boatman.

