

THE STORY FROM THE PAST WE ALL MISSED.

Prams, Capt. Nicholson & Dan Bran. 1900 – 1925

Archivists Comments: Since the start of being involved with the Archives there were a number of things that have always fascinated me.

- **Prams:** Because I have never seen one in the water. I remember seeing the one Kevin Smith [our recent head boatman] restored. But I was a bit challenged to know why he was taking so much care with the boat. There had to be a story behind it.
- **Capt. Nicholson:** Up till now I had not found the link between him and how one Yacht Club and 2 Sailing Clubs came into being. There had to be a connection between his efforts in 1914 and what happened after 1922.
- **Dan Bran:** Somebody I would have loved to have known. This man was a true sailor and boat builder – only a few left these days.
- **A hint of a mystery:** The burgee of a lost Sailing Club from 1900.
- **An earlier Centenary Celebration:** Think I am old enough to be a little challenged to wait until 2022.

Source of some of the Information:

A lot of the archival material was already to hand in the 75th Anniversary Book so brilliantly put together by Marilyn Holmes, a bit more from the earlier 50th Anniversary Book. But I thought it would be good idea to collect all the available material together regarding our Clubs earliest history.

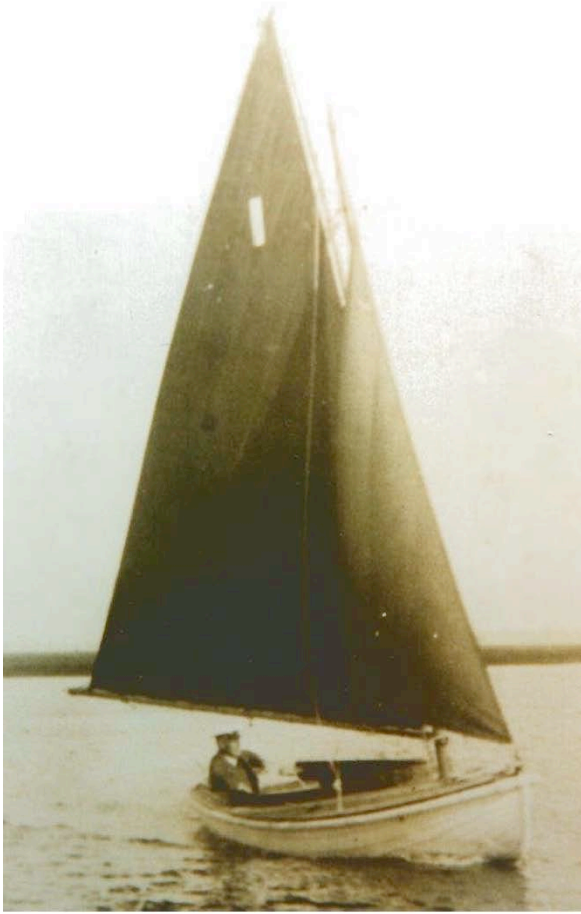
Introducing Capt. H H Nicholson:

If Maj. Cyril Potter was the man who fired the starting gun that set in motion the Royal Lymington YC we all enjoy now – then Captain H H Nicholson was the man who fired the 5 minute Prep Gun. But it was 8 years before.

I believe the achievement of Maj. Potter was brilliant. His drive and enthusiasm was immense. All the basics he achieved in less than 2 years. He had formed a Sailing Club, constructed the New Club's administration, found Club premises and organised how the Club should be purchased it and how it should pay for the needed improvement – all in space of less than 2 years. That is incredible.

Regarding Capt. Nicholson – his history is tightly bound to the Club, Prams, racing, his friendship with Dan Bran and the river that he must have loved. I attempt in the following to share with the reader what I have rediscovered – because it was always there but it seems to have been forgotten.

Note: Archivist Comments and notes in the following are in this colour text.



Capt. H H Nicholson sailing the very first 14ft Pram built for him by Dan Bran in 1925 – this was later in the 1920's – by then a very small jib had been added.

[See Web > Archives > Club Officers:-](#)
Captain H H Nicholson gathered together sailing people of like minds to race Prams in the River back in the spring of 1914. He organised a weekly series of races from **15th May** to **15th August**. There were 18 members of this embryo Lymington River Sailing Club.

The Club Captain was Captain H. H. Nicholson, Hon Secretary & Treasurer was Major A. O. L. Kindersley, Lady member was Mrs R L Bayliss and Rev F. S. Trevor-Garrick.

Before the Club's first Annual General Meeting was held, the world went mad. On August 4th, the Great War erupted..”

Most of these people are mentioned later in the early history of the Club after 1922. 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 earliest 11ft Pram from the 14ft 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 be the 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 a club in 1900.

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

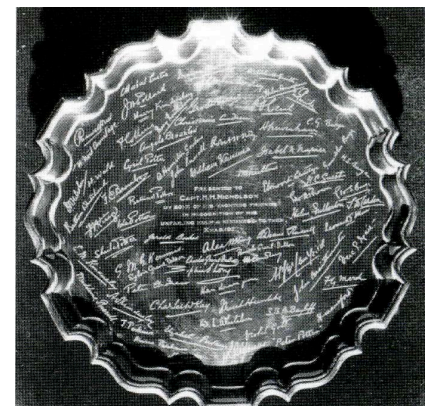
The Lymington River Sailing Club was re-created in 1922 by Major Cyril Potter, the first Commodore, with Captain Nicholson on the Sailing Committee. The 11' foot Pram Class was joined by the 18 foot gaff-rigged Solent Sea Bird Class, already popular with Yarmouth locals as early as 1902. This Class was 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 19th, 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, Victory keelboat class designed by Alfred Westmacott). Owners often camped aboard and cruised the Solent. Club Members raced these boats 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 Oxey 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 *Oxey 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 Oxey Bird One Design Class of 1947.

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



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

At Christmas, 1927. Capt. 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 Oxey 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 the start of the race and despite sailing his on top of which sat a very wet girl he had rescued from a capsized, 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 Knight sailed her until his death in 1988. *Greenfly's* owner today, Kevin Smith, the Club's senior boatman, is restoring [did restore] 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*.



B – The legendary Dan Bran in 1950. He built 11ft and 14ft Prams from Lines in his head, direct to the floor of his shed. Photo by Monty Knight. Ex 75th Anniversary Booklet

for Pram full of parcels,



C - Capt. Nicholson in the first 14ft Lymington Pram built in 1925. Photographed in 1926 on a shopping trip to Lymington. Bath Road can be seen in the background.
Photo by Monty Knight.
Ex 75th Anniversary Booklet

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.

Archivist Note:

My thanks for the photographs of some of the Prams and Capt Nicholson go to Paul Rawlinson who gave them to the R Lym YC Archives in July 2000.

Captain H H Nicholson: *This man was a star.*

Archivist's Comments:

Irrespective of whatever celebrations will be arranged in the future to mark the anniversary of Maj Cyril Potter's efforts in 1922 – **I believe that the centenary of the First Race organised by Capt. H H Nicholson should be celebrated in style.**

If one reads the forgoing it is quite remarkable what men of character we had nearly a century ago.

The nearest Saturday 100 Years on from Saturday 15th May 1914 when the Lymington River Sailing Club first raced would be:

Saturday 17th May 2014

Lets hope the Club, the Flag Officers and General Committee do not forget this man. Every time you go in to the Library

- **Look at that lovely Silver Salver in the Trophy cabinet towards the left end – that seems to outshine all the other Silverware.**
- **Perhaps for a reason.**
- **Look at all the engraved signatures on it that shows what the members thought of this extraordinary man.**
- **Worthy of our remembering him on this day in 2014.**

- **Capt. Nicholson – Archivist's Hero.**
- *I have a notion it is already in the Club Diary for 2014.*

NB. Pram 14ft – The Pram that Kevin Smith refitted – he sold to somebody in Keyhaven according to Boatman Barry Smith – his brother.