

## Development of the Clubhouse and surroundings

The earliest meetings of the reconstituted Lymington River Sailing Club, took place in the home of Major Cyril Potter, in 1922, and mark the birth of what is now the RLymYC. Potter lived in 'Blakes', a large house opposite the entrance to the old car-ferry slipway at the Lymington terminal. Such was his energy and drive that, in addition to holding inaugural Club meetings there, he allowed his conservatory to be used by Members on race days. However, the need for its own, permanent base was a top priority and fortunately this was satisfied by the acquisition of what was the Admiralty Boathouse, the core structure of the current Clubhouse. A large amount of Coast Guard property in Lymington was being auctioned off, comprising rows of cottages, opposite what is now Nick Cox's chandlery; a lookout building in Captain's Row (a few doors up from the King's Head); and the boat house.



The single-storey  
Coast Guard boathouse,  
and the paddle steamer  
*Solent* (IV).

In 1924, the boathouse was initially leased to the embryonic Club but was later purchased, together with some surrounding land and foreshore, from the Lymington Borough Council. Projecting from the boathouse structure was a substantial slipway. Soon, the single-storey brick structure became too small for the growing Club and Potter's energy again came to the fore, resulting in the creation of an upper floor, surrounded by a verandah (later enclosed) on the sides facing up, down and across the river. Access to the first floor was gained by external stairs. Members had formed a building company to pay for development to the Clubhouse, which was fully paid off by 1928.

Energy and growth went hand-in-hand, once more, as the Club outgrew its boat-house footprint and a two-storey brick wing was built to the north, creating the line of the front of the building we know today. This was completed in 1936, when the Club was still relatively young.



With the coming of the Second War (the First having resulted in the stifling of birth of the original Lymington River Sailing Club), Club activity ceased for the duration, other than the occasional gathering of older Members, who met for lunch in the Mayflower Hotel, nearby. The Club house was requisitioned for the war effort and became the base of the Auxiliary Fire Service. During that time, temporary buildings were erected on the adjacent Council-owned land, and lasted some years after the war.

With peace, and the return to normal life, there was a strong resurgence of recreational pursuits, amongst which sailing was a natural and key feature, locally. The Club enjoyed another growth spurt, with modestly-priced dinghies enabling many more people to enjoy the sport. The Clubhouse again rose to the occasion and early in the 1950s, the Club's foreshore was extended to the north and river-wards, enabling increased accommodation for dinghies, that could be launched directly, at high water, or down the fixed jetty, to a deep-water ramp, inside its pierhead berth.



The accompanying aerial photo of the Club, from the 1950s, reveals some interesting and long-forgotten features: the wartime buildings on the Council land to the south; the rudimentary carpark; the large dinghy storage shed to the rear; the old Thames barge, 'Minnedosa', amongst the Fortuna mud berths. Legend had it that the Club was offered the car parking land to purchase but the then Members were mostly brought to the Club by chauffeur and thus did not need to park cars .... apocryphal? The sentry box, just beyond the dinghy shed, was for the car park attendant: neither a particularly taxing nor profitable role, one imagines. The jetty in the foreground, to the south of the Club, was under the control of the harbour Master.

Once again, the indoor accommodation was increased by the further extension of the North Wing, to its current, maximum extent; completed in 1961. All the while, that essential of yachtsmen's life, the Bar, existed at the seaward end of the ground-floor, enabling the thirsty crew to tumble off their boats and straight into their first pint. It was a simple affair, compared with today's sophisticated setting but it was adorned in 1947, by the presentation by Douglas Wales, of his magnificent painted panorama of the river, populated by so many identifiable boats and characters of their day. That panorama, with its framed legend, is still to be seen in the Island Room.

Later twentieth-century development progressed, in line with growing Membership, with the addition of the modern first-floor bar in 1968. As well as providing a welcome new bar, it also created new, and liberated old, ground-floor space for much-needed working accommodation. With this change, the old external stairs were replaced by the current internal ones but still the remnant of the iconic verandah persisted on the North Wing. That, in its turn, was overtaken, when the River Room was built, in 1980 followed by a side extension to the North Wing and infilling the space between, providing integrated catering and service operations, for the whole of the first floor.

The early 2000s saw the balcony being extended; a spiral staircase to the second floor; and ground-floor alterations made. The latter included the move of Doug Baverstock's boatman's workshop, from which he had kept a close eye on the waterborne activity of the Club. That enabled him, at legendary speed, to reach the end of the pontoon, before any boat could berth that had the misfortune not to be flying a Club burgee.

The waterborne facilities had also changed substantially, over the past fifty years. From the north end of the site, a somewhat rickety pontoon provided homes for many tenders for holders of river moorings (there were no marinas then). The fixed jetty in line with the old slipway, was later shortened and the first of the current siting of pontoons was installed. These were gradually extended and transformed, until the latest iteration arrived in 2015, providing what earlier sailors would have regarded as unheard-of facilities and capacity. Rather less obvious, but none-the-less relentless, was the extension and strengthening of the seawall and its growing need to defend the site from rising water levels. One related issue, in 1989, involving the acquisition of a stock of piling material, gave rise to a difficult period in the Club's history but that is a story for another day.

Over the almost-one-hundred years of the Club's existence, the current site and its facilities have been the foundation of Club life, ashore and afloat. As Membership numbers have increased, so has the scale and style of the Clubhouse and its surrounding grown, to meet its needs. There is every reason to expect the next Century will see it flourish likewise.

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It is fascinating to see the many, different photos of the Club, over the years. The eagle-eyed will observe the changing details, such as the copper vent on the old roof ridge; the gradual enclosing of the verandah; the brief tenure of the high-level starting box; the various means of access to the water etc. Amongst these iconic

developments are included the flagstaff, in its different locations –including one arrangement where its gaff is correctly facing ‘aft’, into the Club, as if the Club were a ship, looking ahead. From the periods of existence of such details and from the state of progress of the nearby moorings, regress of the marshes and the different passing steamers, one can date the photos that appear, though sometimes adrift from their era. For example, a number of pre-war photos were used in postcards sold post-war.

If anyone would like to challenge the Historian to date family photos of the Club, he is keen for them to do so; better still, if you know the date of a photo, then he is only too willing to be educated, and accept a copy.

Graham Clarke, Club Historian

**Centenary appeal to all Members** – please dig out any items, photos or memories of early Club life, that may be lurking in the recesses of cupboards, lofts or minds. All will be gratefully received, carefully looked after and promptly returned, once copies taken for the archive. Please email the Club Historian from here: <https://rlymyc-history.org.uk/contact-page/> or phone 01590 671177. Thank you.

The History pages on the Club website are found here: <https://rlymyc-history.org.uk/>