

How the Club became Royal

It is appropriate in the lead-in to our Centenary year, to reflect on how the reborn Lymington River Sailing Club of 1922, blossomed into the RLymYC that we are today. We know of two powerful and important founder members of the Club: Major Cyril Potter and the Hon. Mrs Cecil Brownlow - Angela – both of whose memorable sketches grace the western end of the Island/ Needles Room. Between them, they are responsible for the birth and the development of the Club and, in Mrs Brownlow's case, its care during the war.

From its energetic early days, at Blakes, Potter's house near the entrance to the car-ferry pier, huge strides were made to establish the Club, as both a shore-based entity and its growing position as a source of waterborne activity. Potter was a man of vision, energy and ambition: from the outset, he wanted the Club to develop and be recognised as an eminent home of yachting in the western Solent. It was no surprise, therefore, that he should want that recognition to include the accolade of becoming a Royal yacht club.

As a Squadron member, Potter had many connections, including Royalty, that would give him the entrée to fulfil his ambition but it took time, persuasion and the ultimate engagement of our first lady Commodore – in the form of Mrs Brownlow – to bring the plan to fruition. One has only to visualise the two protagonists, to imagine their different styles employed in achieving the honour. Major Potter, the tough visionary, and his successor, Angela Brownlow, the charming mediator:



Major Cyril Potter, MBE
Founder; Commodore 1922-37



The Hon. Mrs Cecil Brownlow
Commodore 1937-46

So let us look at what Potter, with his military background, would undoubtedly have regarded as a campaign, to obtain Royal status for the Club. The process of doing so – and the Club was the last one to become a Royal yacht club – is opaque, to say the least. It mostly involves Departments of State within Government but with reference to the Palace, along the way. As we can imagine, Potter had friends in high places and he used those connections to further the campaign. This started as far back as 1925, with the Club only three years old but already having 300 Members – and still known as the Lymington River Sailing Club. The opening salvo from Potter

was to the Home Secretary, setting out his stall, seeking the Royal title and a defaced red ensign (then, as now, an unusual combination). By the end of 1925, the Admiralty Warrant had been approved for the Club to wear the defaced ensign from 1926, when its name became the Lymington Yacht Club. That consisted of the red ensign adorned solely with the ship of Lymington, on the fly (the naval crown appeared later, when Royal status was granted).

Many exchanges took place in the Royal application process, looking, amongst other things at the standing and nature of the Club – its newness was commented upon – and consideration of other Clubs that had received Royal recognition and how Lymington's case sat with those. Amongst the measures used to assess if a Club should deserve Royal status, was the cumulative tonnage of its Members' yachts. These messages, to and fro, contained a lot of personal thoughts and comments and reveal a picture of some pressure from the Lymington end and some resistance from the London end, initially including the then Yacht Racing Association (YRA). Nothing in such matters moves swiftly and a degree of lobbying behind the scenes might have been thought necessary but, equally, could be regarded as unhelpful. Indications were received that the King (George V – very much the yachtsman) would be favourable, if the right recommendations were provided from the Government sources.

As the troops were being marshalled in the campaign, the personage of Maj. Gen. The Rt. Hon. J B Seely MP appears in correspondence: he was, during all this time, the Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire and, at the early stages, Vice-Commodore of the Club. Other heavy-weights weighed in; senior officers of other yacht clubs wrote in support of Lymington (there was a lot of cross-membership of local clubs). The years rolled by; correspondence continued fitfully but still no conclusion was reached. Such was Potter's drive and connections that one momentous position was reached in 1931, when HRH Prince Henry, the Duke of Gloucester, accepted the invitation to become the Club's first Patron.



HRH Prince Henry,
Duke of Gloucester.
In 1931, our first Patron.

But still the years went by and the campaign moved slowly through the 1930s: almost annual skirmishes broke out, with the request for the Royal title being renewed and declined, from time to time. One has to admire Cyril Potter's tenacity and thick skin – many a lesser mortal would have given up, but not he. Home Secretaries came and went but still Potter managed to find personal connections, to keep his dream alive. By now, the YRA was in support, as was the Admiralty, so the signs were beginning to look a little more positive but entrenched positions are difficult to reverse and need something new and different, for the matter to be reconsidered.

There were changes on the regal stage during 1936, with arrival and departure King Edward VIII, followed by the accession of King George VI. The new age was the opportunity for a new approach; this time, step forward Angela Brownlow, who, having become Commodore in 1937, and no doubt with connections of her own, made a new application. Once again, LYC Membership (now 500) and the tonnage of their yachts were tallied. During the summer of 1938, when one or two other things were going on in world affairs, the final push was made for the Royal title, with support from no less than the Commodore of the RYS and his Vice-Commodore (also VC of our Club), together our local MP.

On 3rd November, 1938, approval of the Royal title was granted and the news communicated to the Commodore: so became the Royal Lymington Yacht Club. A few days prior, a private communication was made from the Home Secretary to Major Potter (at an address in Ipswich) advising him that his 13 years of effort had at last been successful (even if it had taken someone else to get the ball across the line). The Club owes a great debt – not just for such matters as its title – to those two titans of the formative years: Major Cyril Potter and the Hon. Mrs Cecil Brownlow.

The evolution of the Club may be seen through the development of its burgee, to be found, framed, in the Island Room:



From LRSC to RLymYC
(RLYC being superseded in the 1980s)

The Club became aware of the details of the long process of this great achievement, by the kind efforts of Mr David Prothero, whose close interest in matters concerning flags, led him to research the Club, in the National Archives at Kew. The report of his findings came to the Club, out of the blue in 2008, for which the Club is enduringly grateful to him.

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/>