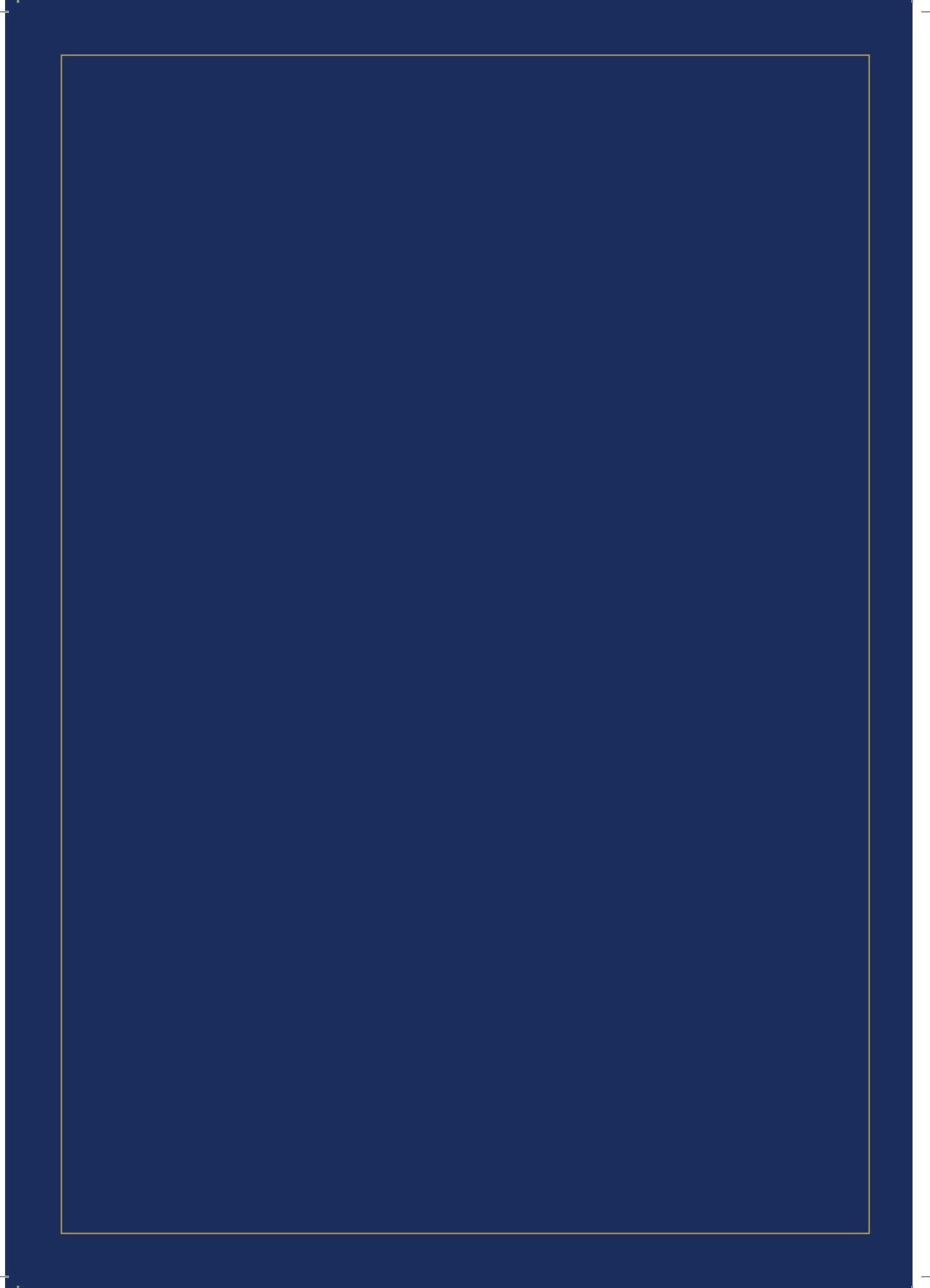




THE
FIRST
150
YEARS



LOCH LOMOND SAILING CLUB: THE FIRST 150 YEARS

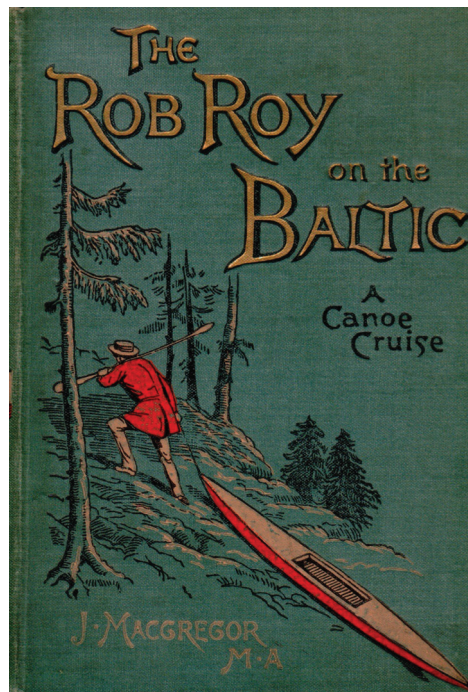
Loch Lomond Sailing Club: The first 150 years

Anniversaries are times to reflect, to celebrate and to look forward.

Loch Lomond Sailing Club (LLSC) has a remarkable history with much to celebrate. For those who wish an in-depth account of the Club's early history this is available elsewhere¹. Here the focus will be the last half century, but first a little distant history.

LLSC was founded as the Clyde Canoe Club (CCC) in 1873. As the name indicates it was based on the River Clyde; the first clubhouse being built at Rosneath with the focus being on sailing canoes. A group of 14 young men from Glasgow met in April 1873 and each bought one share in order to establish the Club. Each share cost £13 6s 8d (£13.33); to put this into perspective, the average annual wage in the 1870s was around £40.





The mid-Victorian period had seen a rise in interest in sailing canoes. A leading light was John ‘Rob Roy’ MacGregor (1825-1892)—an ex-expatriate Scot—who popularised canoe sailing through his accounts of intrepid voyages in Europe and the Holy Land. His accounts served to stimulate canoe sailing across the UK with the coastal waters of Scotland—their lochs and islands—being seen as ideal territory for this activity.²

CCC was formed to encourage the art of designing, building, sailing and racing canoes. Cruising rather than racing was the primary focus of activities in the early days. Accounts of these voyages were frequently published in the newspapers of the day. The Scotsman of the 24 June 1874 described a regular cruise — “The Loch Lomond Round”. A group of members sailed their canoes from Rosneath up Loch Long to Arrochar, there they hired a horse and cart to portage their canoes over to Tarbert on the west bank of Loch Lomond. The portage was not without incident with the canoes tending to slide off the cart when they went up hills and slide over the horses when they went down hill.

¹ <http://www.valeofleven.org.uk/contributions/clydec canoe Club.html> Clyde Canoe Club (1973) Centenary Book

² The Rob Roy on the Baltic: A canoe cruise. J MacGregor (1972) Sampson Low, Marston & Company: London.

³ Over the Sea to Skye: Early Travels by Canoe to the Scottish Islands and West Coast 1814-1976. Jan Poskitt (Ed.) (2002): Solway Dory.



CANOES BEING TRANSPORTED FROM ARROCHAR TO TARBERT ON LOCH LOMOND

The intrepid canoeists then launched at Tarbert, lit their pipes and paddled to Rowardennan in time for dinner. On the Sunday morning they awoke to heavy rain pelting on their tent, when they looked out the prospect was uninviting - "nothing but mist and rain, without a breath of wind". Some things don't change! They put on waterproofs and walked to Rowardennan church but found that the service was held there only once a month. Next day they ran past Inchmurrin and entered the River Leven at Balloch. Masts, rudders and sails were secured for the run down the river, eventually they emerged under Dumbarton Rock and Castle before running back to the Club at Rosneath. A group of members replicated the "Round" to celebrate the millennium; portage was achieved by BMW rather than horse and cart.

But these early intrepid canoeists went further afield. Summer cruises included trips around Mull to Oban, down the Clyde to Arran, across to Ardlamont Point, through the Kyles of Bute and back to Rosneath and from Ardrishaig to Portree on Skye. Truly epic voyages in 15' canoes³.

The Club went into a decline at the end of the 19th century and a decision was made to move to Loch Lomond on the River Leven at Balloch—Balloch being easily accessible by train from Glasgow. Loch Lomond had long been recognised as an excellent venue for canoe sailing. After some temporary locations by the railway lines the Club found the ideal setting at Drumkinnon Bay. In 1907 Sir Thomas Coats—a philanthropist—donated a new clubhouse.

This was described in the official Club history as: “...arguably the finest Edwardian boathouse in the whole of Scotland, outstanding not just in its design and build but also in its location and outlook.” (p. 33). On the ground floor was the boathouse with racks for the storage of canoes, sails, paddles etc. A launching ramp ran down to the Loch. Also downstairs was a kitchen and dining area. Upstairs was a lounge, toilets and bedrooms, each bedroom accommodated two spartan bunks. In the nineteen-twenties the land on which the Club-house was built was sold at public auction. The Club was given notice to quit Drumkinnon Bay and the Club had to find a new home. In mid-1932 the search for a new site for the clubhouse commenced. This proved difficult. The current site at Blair was found and leased for £10 a year. The old clubhouse was dismantled and the timbers reused to build the core of the current clubhouse. This work was carried out almost entirely by the members.



CLYDE CANOE CLUB, DRUMKINNON BAY
1908 - 1932



THE MEMBERS PREPARED THE SITE BY HAND. ABOVE IS A PICTURE OF CLUB ROAD BEING BUILT IN 1933.

Around this time 5.2 ton gaff rigged centreboard Canoe Yawls were brought to the Club. These vessels were essentially small cruising boats (25' overall, 20' waterline, 7' beam and 400sq ft of sail). Alethea being the first being built in Bremen with three copies being built by local shipwrights in Scotland.



MINNA BUILT IN PARTICK IN 1934 FOR D.O. ARCHER BATES THE ERSTWHILE COMMODORE OF THE CLUB

The Second World War (1939-1945) stopped most sailing activities at Blair, the clubhouse and grounds became an ammunition storage depot. The Club's boats remained in storage and a group of 3 or 4 members met regularly to maintain the clubhouse; without their efforts the clubhouse may not have survived the war period. Much of the ordinance was stored under corrugated iron some of which was purchased after the war for boat storage.

By 1945 the Club's lease on the grounds at Blair was coming to the end of its 14 year term. Remarkably the Club was able to purchase the grounds from the Collins family for £250 (approximately £8000 at current [2023] prices). Whilst this purchase exhausted the Club's finances at the time it has long been recognised as the wisest piece of business ever transacted by the Club. The Club was at a low ebb, both financially and in terms of members, at this time. The sailing canoes were still raced actively, however, the transition to dinghy sailing began. In 1950 the Club agreed to standardise on one design, the Yachting World 14ft day-boat; eventually a fleet of 12 sailed at Club until the 1960s. Six clinker boats were built professionally in Kippen; some members built their own boats.

EVOLUTION OF SAILING AT THE CLUB

Other dinghies at this period included Fireflies, 18ft Jollyboats and Ospreys. By 1965 there were ten Ospreys and four Jollyboats; these dinghies were well matched and provided excellent racing and were to serve as the mainstay of racing during the sixties. The first 505 high performance dinghy was introduced in 1962 and soon won converts many of whom demonstrated great skill in the class. Ian Irvine and Alan Carrick represented the Club at the 505 World Championships in Hong Kong in 1973.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pV2kmhy85Z4>)



Jolly Boat

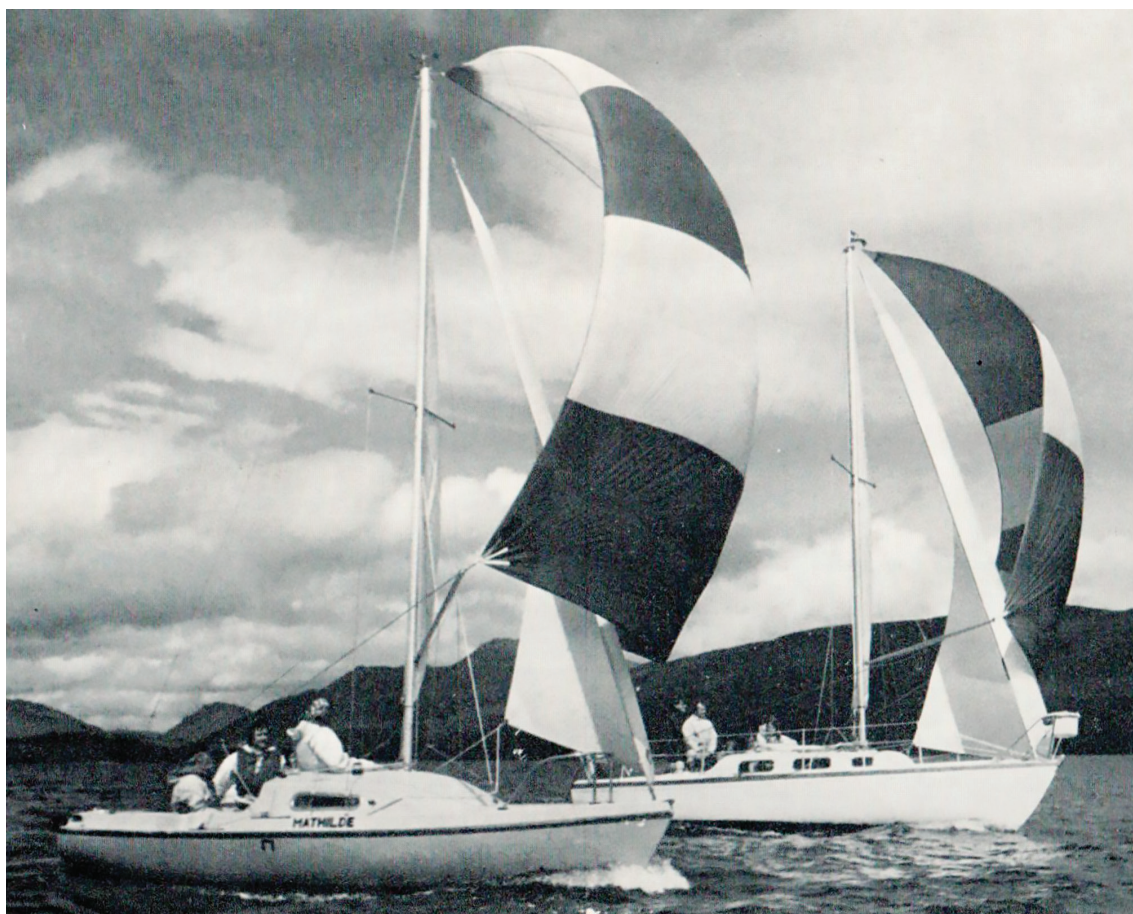


Mirror Dinghy

In the late sixties the Club policy was to encourage class racing by limiting the classes of dinghies that could be brought to the Club. The Mirror Dinghy was selected as a means of encouraging and retaining the younger members of the Club. Many members built their own boats—often in their dining rooms—they were a very popular introductory boat for children and adults alike. At times up to fifteen could be seen on the start line.

In parallel, the keelboat fleet saw the growth of the Achilles 24 and Hunter fleets. This combination of yachts had the advantage that they sailed off the same handicap thus providing good fleet racing.

In 1973 the first Uffa Fox Flying Fifteens arrived at the Club. Initially, they were moored with the other keelboats but since the early nineteen-eighties they have been dry-sailed. At its height the Flying Fifteen fleet could boast over a dozen boats on the start line and at least one Scottish Champion.





A FLEET OF FLYING FIFTEENS

The late 1970s saw the growth in the range and style of dinghies available. The Club was quick to experiment and adopt different types of dinghies. These included a range of single-handed dinghies e.g., International Canoes, Laser 13, RS Aero, Topper, Optimist, Laser EPS, Vortex, Moth (foiling and non-foiling) and K1. Two person boats were numerous and varied some were hiking boats e.g., Wayfarer, Wanderer, Feva, Picos, RS200, RS400, and some were high performance boats with one or two trapezes e.g., Laser 4000, Laser 5000, 49er, International 14, 18ft Skiff and Norfolk Punt. One particularly successful fleet was the Marauder dinghy fleet, with Club boats winning the UK championship in four consecutive years—1978-1981. In 2010 two members won the European Laser 5000 Championship on Lake Mohnessee. Catamarans started making their appearance before the millennium and have become an important element in Club racing. Classes have included Shadow Cat, Hurricane 5.9, Dart 16 and Dart 18.



DINGHIES SAILING BELOW THE BEN

The diversity of boats has advantages and disadvantages. Diversity provides boats to suit all tastes and ability levels. In the 1980s and 1990s large fleets of similar boats could be found racing but since the millennium the diversity of boats has put an emphasis on handicap racing rather than class racing.

RACING AT THE CLUB

Racing has been at the heart of Club activities for many decades; it has evolved to suit the needs and preferences of the members. Traditionally, races would be started and finished from the starter's box at the front of the Club house, with 'flags' being displayed in the windows. This approach limited the flexibility of course selection. In the nineteen-eighties Ceardach, the Club safety boat, was equipped to allow races to be started and finished on the water. The next significant innovation was the introduction of short courses for dinghy racing. Dumpy marks were laid for each race in order to provide an accurate beat, reach and run. This approach was used in the points series with the dinghies having three races during both weekend afternoons. This approach fostered good racing and was in place from circa 2005 until 2019. The approach was discontinued as it was deemed to be too arduous for the duty teams; this may reflect the ageing of the membership and the falling racing numbers. In 2020 the racing programme returned to the two types of racing—Island racing and Points racing around fixed marks. Members tend to display a preference for one type of racing against another. This ability to choose is a great advantage of the Club's water.

Junior racing has been a feature of the Club with training being provided when sufficient numbers of youngsters wished it. The heyday of junior racing was probably in the late 1980s when there were 24 Topper dinghies in the Club. Many young sailors went on to win championships as teenagers and as adults; many remain stalwart members of the Club. Today, junior training is often provided during the annual Family Week that occurs during the school summer holidays.

The Club's expertise and reputation as a racing Club has meant it has been sought out as a venue for national and international sailing competitions. These events have include various national and international events for the International Canoe class and Scottish championships for classes including Flying Fifteen, Wayfarer, RS200, Mirror Dinghy and Topper. The annual Dinghy Weekend at its peak attracted up to 140 boats. Members have travelled far and wide to race, not merely on the Clyde and off the West Coast of Scotland but across the UK—including participating in the Fastnet race—and abroad to Ireland, France, Germany, Portugal, Italy, Hong Kong and Australia.

In the 1970s safety cover for races was provided by two vessels, Lonaig an Edwardian vintage ex-Royal Navy pinnace, initially fitted with a paraffin/ petrol engine and latterly by a Volvo diesel, and by a white dory christened Cruin. Gradually, throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the Club acquired four rigid inflatable boats to improve safety cover.

Over the years the Club has acquire many trophies through the generosity of its members; at the last count there were thirty-seven trophies that can be awarded annually for racing, cruising and contributions to the Club activities. Many are venerable. For example, the Ruthen Plate was won at the Clyde Canoe Club Regatta Clynder in August 1870 and is now presented as the Traveller's award; The Clyde Canoe Club No Rowlocks Challenge Cup was presented in 1901 and the Argentine Cup was presented by Alex C Prentice Esq., of the Argentine Republic in 1909.

CONTINUING THE CRUISING TRADITION

Club members have not ignored the cruising traditions of the Club. Members have made frequently summer voyages to the Western Isles in both keelboats and Wayfarer dinghies. Members have been awarded the Viking Cup by Frank Dyer (the doyen of small boat cruising) for their voyages around Mull in Wayfarer dinghies. Many members have cruised abroad including to the Faroe Islands, Norway, Denmark, Greece, Turkey, Croatia and Australia.

EXCELLENT FACILITIES

The Club is blessed by the investment of time, energy and money of our predecessors. The buildings, grounds and other facilities belonging to the Club are quite remarkable and easy to take for granted. Over the years they have been maintained and upgraded to provide members with wonderful resources. In the nineteen-sixties mains water and mains electricity were brought into the Club. Prior to that water was pumped directly from Loch Lomond to a remote water tank. This tank was only demolished 2019. Electricity was produced by a generator in a shed. The means of introducing mains water and electricity exemplified the do-it-yourself ethos of Club members at that time. The mains water and electricity supplies required the digging of long trenches from the main gate to the Club house. When it was suggested to the powers-at-be that a JCB should be hired to facilitate the work, the withering reply was 'why would we do that when we have fifty men with shovels'.

A major development took place in 1972/1973 with the initiation of plans for a new toilet block. In 1972 all full members were required to make a subvention of £200 (approximately £3400 in today's [2023] prices) to fund the new extension. The extension was opened in 1973. Prior to this the toilet and showering facilities were very limited. In the early eighties members stripped the roof of the Club-house and replaced the corrugated iron roof, the main launching slip was restored in 2002, the Flying Fifteen slip was renewed and widened in 2007.

In 2005 the scaffold-tube jetty, which had served the Club for many years, was replaced with a floating pontoon and bridge. These improvements were funded by a very generous legacy from long-term member Bob 'Mory' Wilson. The legacy also provided funds for the purchase of a Merry Fisher 605, a safety boat with a cabin; the new vessel was named in Mory's honour as a mark of appreciation.



COMMISSIONING OF MORY BY THE FIRST LADY COMMODORE ELIZABETH MOWAT

By the turn of the millennium a shift took place in the approach to Club maintenance. While members continued to carry out many maintenance task there was a greater willingness to seek outside paid assistance.

Up until this point members were expected to lay their own moorings.

This entailed the laying of large lengths of chain, connected to heavy anchors, on the Club raft and dropping these in the allocated spot off the clubhouse. This was a dangerous practice; snaking chains could easily have dragged a member into the depths of the loch. In the late 1990s this practice was stopped and professional help was brought in to standardise the Club moorings. Another dangerous practice was the annual turning of the raft to remove the flotation drums so that they could be painted. Fortunately this ritual no longer takes place! A JCB is now hired to clear the annual build up of debris and gravel following winter storms rather than squads with shovels. Some older member regret the passing of these communal labours.



THE PERILOUS ANNUAL RITUAL
OF TURNING THE RAFT

STAYING AT THE CLUB

Up until the mid-sixties male members slept in lockers situated in the upper story of the Club house. At that time these lockers were reached by a spiral staircase from outside the starter's box. These lockers had an individual bunk bed; what is now the Club store was the 'guest room' with six bunks.

Gradually caravans were brought on-site and by the early sixties there were six families with caravans. Some male members continued to sleep in the lockers despite having caravans. The practice of sleeping in the clubhouse was terminated in the early seventies because of concerns about safety, particular fire risk from smokers. In the early days those wishing to bring caravans on-site had to clear their allocated spot of the brambles and other vegetation that dominated much of the area. The site was still unkempt, there were still Nissan huts present from the Second World War. One of these was used for the winter storage of Minna, a canoe yawl sailed actively by the long-term commodore of the Club - D.Q.A. (Baldy) Bates.

Gradually, over the seventies, more of the site was cleared and the number of caravan spaces available for members increased. The caravan licence now allows up to 40 caravans on the site. Recently, four sites have been made available for motor-homes; this reflects the increasing popularity of these vehicles. Originally caravans were lit with gas lamps but in the late 1990s electricity hook-up points were installed to allow caravans to connect to mains electricity.

CHANGES IN THE CLUB

To survive any Club must adapt and evolve in response to the changing lives of their members. The Club is no exception. Perhaps the greatest change was the change of the Club's name. This was a hotly debated issue, however, in 1999 the Club decided that the name Clyde Canoe Clyde neither represented our activities nor our location. Loch Lomond Sailing Club was born in 1999 in anticipation of the founding of the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park and the need to underline to the new Park Authority that we were the premier sailing Club on the loch. After 126 years the burgee of the Clyde Canoe Club was finally lowered to be replaced by the burgee of Loch Lomond Sailing Club.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN AT THE CLUB

Changes in the Club reflected changes in society more broadly. This is no more evident than in the changing status of women in the Club. CCC was founded by 14 men in 1873 and remained a male orientated Club for many years. Women were allowed to attend at the annual Ladies' Day and there appear to have been ladies' races during the annual regattas. The picture below is of the opening of the Club House on Drumkinnon Bay in 1908 which was a Ladies' Day. This pattern was not unusual in recreational Clubs of that period.



LADIES DAY 1908

During the immediate post-war period the Club was in financial difficulties and in 1947 Duncan Ferguson raised the contentious issue of admitting lady members. Club minutes include comments to the effect that: 'Ladies would be a decided handicap to the home life of the Club' and 'women could either be an aggravation of a decided (sic) asset.' Lady members were eventually admitted in 1951 a good quarter of a century before other Clubs on the loch admitted female members. In the 1960 and 1970s the role of the 'lady associates' was frequently that of helpmate for their husbands; looking after the family with relatively few taking part in the racing. As the seventies and eighties progressed more women and girls participated in racing. Some went on to win national championships at Scottish and UK level. At this time women could become members in their own right but generally they were associate members of the Club without voting rights. Female members now participate fully in the running of the Club and have held important roles on the Club management committee, for example, serving as Club Captain. In 1999 Elizabeth Mowat, a very active sailor, was elected the first—and as yet only—Lady Commodore; she was triply blessed being the last commodore of the Clyde Canoe Club and the first commodore of the Loch Lomond Sailing Club.

THE COVID YEARS

The Covid-19 pandemic started in the city of Wuhan, China, in late 2019 and by early 2020 had reached the UK. As the pandemic spread the Scottish Government imposed strict restrictions on the movement of Scottish citizens. By March 2020 lockdown was imposed and people were only allowed out once a day for an hour to exercise, buy food or go to work. The Club was effectively closed with only visits for essential maintenance being allowed. The committee worked hard to ensure that Club was safe for members to visit when restrictions were eased. A sub-committee met remotely on a weekly basis to review the ever changing restriction. They ensured the safety of Club properties and put in place measures to mitigate the impact of the virus. The Club members were kept informed and the Club Spring General Meeting and Annual General Meetings were held remotely using the Zoom platform.

Even during the height of the lockdown the racing enthusiasts of the Club were not discouraged; an e-racing series was initiated and members competed in lockdown from all over Scotland. Government restrictions were eased gradually throughout 2020 enabling some access to the Club grounds around July, however, no racing was allowed to be scheduled due to social distancing rules. Members were not daunted. They took to the loch: sailing, kayaking, paddle boarding, swimming, exploring the islands and enjoying over-night stays at anchor. Formal racing only returned in the Spring of 2021 with the Dinghy and Keelboat weekends being postponed until 2022. This represented the longest break in racing activities since the Second World War. The Covid Pandemic was a very challenging period for all the UK population, however, the Club membership rallied, supported each other, and more than ever, appreciated how special Loch Lomond Sailing Club really is.

THE CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINING THE CLUB

There is no doubt that sustaining an active sailing Club has become more challenging over the years as external constraints constrict activities and impose significant additional burdens on those members who choose to devote themselves to the Club for the benefit of all members. The Club management committee have to work within the framework of increasing legislation and regulation, ranging from Health and Safety, Food Hygiene, Equality legislation through Child Protection, Data Protection and Bat Protection to regulations imposed by various authorities including Stirling Council, the Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park and the Scottish Environment and Protection Agency. One mark of the demands on the committee is the size of funds that they have to manage. At the time of the 100th anniversary the annual income of the Club was less than £3000 while in 2022 it was nearly £83000. The Club management committee, and many others, contribute in so many ways—often unseen and unacknowledged—to the smooth running of the Club and for the pleasure of the many members.

While there has always been a concern that number of members will diminish this has not been the case. It is interesting to contrast the dress of members in these two celebration photographs.



**CLUB MEMBERS CELEBRATING
THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE FOUNDING OF THE CLUB
APRIL 1973**

CELEBRATING THE 150TH YEAR ANNIVERSARY

The landmark season of 2023 was marked by celebrations throughout the year. In early April, with the Loch at its cloudy best, the members met to witness a new Club burgee being unveiled, to hear a hearty toast to the Club being delivered and partake of cheese, cake and wine in fellowship with other members.

June saw the Anniversary Regatta weekend; this was blessed by moderate breezes and sunny weather. The loch was at its best. A great turnout of boats was achieved with the greatest number of Club boats afloat for many a year competing for the special trophies. Ashore, the Club—its history and its members past and present—were honoured in a toast before feasting began with a hog roast followed by ceilidh that lasted late into the night.

It was not all cakes and ale; much sailing was done. In July the Club, embracing its history, hosted the International Canoe British Championships with entrants from England, Ireland, the Isle of Man and Germany—as well as Scotland. A great series of races, an exceptional feast and social on the Friday evening and a special Islands race on the Saturday morning left the visitors with great memories of the Club.

The Dinghy weekend in September was favoured by the weather gods and the Club welcomed the largest fleet of visitors for many years. Great racing and a BBQ social again showed the Club off to its best. Unfortunately, our weather luck ran out for the Keelboat weekend. Sailing action was limited to those already at the Club on Friday, as all of those trying to travel on Saturday were thwarted by a ring of floodwater blocking access to the Club. This misery was compounded by a flat calm on Sunday.



**CLUB MEMBERS CELEBRATING
THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE FOUNDING OF THE CLUB
APRIL 2023**

The year of celebrations closed at the Buchannan Arms hotel in Drymen. Following the annual prize giving and toasts to the winners and the Club, members enjoyed a substantial meal and a memorable night with dancing and socialising in true Club fashion.

At its 150th Anniversary the Club remains in good heart and good health. We look forward to it continuing to evolve, thrive and provide pleasure and camaraderie for all those privileged to call themselves members of Loch Lomond Sailing Club.

David J Cooke, December 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This brief history is built on the firm foundations of the detailed work carried out by Peter Turner and Roger Hancock. I would like to thank those many senior members of the Club who contributed their thoughts during the drafting of this brief history. Please contact me if you have other thoughts that should be recorded for posterity (djcooke@rgardens.vianw.co.uk).

Clubhouse Address:

Loch Lomond Sailing Club,
Milarrochy Bay,
Balmaha,
Near Drymen,
Glasgow. G63 0AL

T. 01360 870219 Clubhouse
E. secretary@lochlomondsc.co.uk