



THE CLUBHOUSE IN 1902

THE HISTORY OF RNIYC

by Robert Hume

The Club has attractive seafront premises in Cultra. The buildings have been extended and adapted over the years to provide the facilities required for all the Club's activities. In the first half of the 20th Century, the Club encouraged Lawn Tennis, Croquet and other social activities, and even ran timed automobile trials for the more adventurous spirits. However, sailing has obviously always been the main activity of the Club. The good holding ground for the swinging moorings in front of the Clubhouse is complemented by the Club's boatyards and slipways.

The Royal North of Ireland Yacht Club was formed from an amalgamation of its two direct descendent clubs:

1. THE ULSTER CANOE CLUB

The 'Ulster Canoe Club' was formed on 20th June 1892 by a young enthusiast Robert E. Workman who, after a short sojourn in London where he had been a member of the Royal Canoe Club, brought his new found enthusiasm back to Ireland with him, and with missionary zeal soon involved his friends in canoe racing.

With a total membership of 28, they established their headquarters on the Old Cultra Quay, which we now euphemistically call the 'Far Yard'.

2. THE CULTRA SAILING CLUB

The 'Cultra Sailing Club', formed in 1893, had been created as an additional attraction in an area on his property being commercially developed for residential purposes by Landlord Sir Robert Kennedy. It would be perhaps churlish, certainly ungracious, to attribute Kennedy's motives in establishing

a yacht club and clubhouse entirely for monetary gain, as he was himself a keen yachtsman of some considerable fame.

By 1897, both clubs had grown considerably, making Cultra a true mecca for sailing on Belfast Lough. Due both to the increasing number of new members and those existing members progressing from canoes to larger sailing boats, as witnessed by the increasing number of large yachts mooring off the clubhouse, encouraged the Ulster Canoe Club to change its name to the 'Ulster

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Sailing Club'. It was also the first intimation in the minutes of that year, of a tentative dialogue being entered into by the two clubs of a possible amalgamation and further expansion.

However it took a further two years of intense discussion between the two clubs until the matter was finally resolved, and on 22nd February 1899, the clubs amalgamated under the new name 'North of Ireland Yacht Club'. It retained this title until 2nd September 1902 when His Majesty The King Edward VII "was graciously pleased to command that the Club be henceforth known as the Royal North of Ireland Yacht Club".

An early profile in 'Yachting Monthly' records that between 1893 and 1902 the Club had instituted no fewer than seven One-Design Classes, five of which were built by the legendary yacht builder John Hilditch of Carrickfergus - Bird, Star, Shakespear, and Jewel, all of which have long disappeared. The most famous of all and synonymous with RNIYC is the legendary 'Fairy Class'; of the original 15 built in 1902, eleven boats are still racing regularly today and one other being rebuilt, as the class looks forward to their Quasiquicentennial Anniversary.

Club members have always been ready to accept new designs and in the 1930s the then new Dragon Class was adopted. In 1947, Eric Strain, Jack Wallace and George Brown in 'Ceres II' won the International Gold Cup and went on to win the selection trials to represent Britain at the 1948 Olympic Games at Torbay, just losing out on a medal by finishing a very creditable fourth. Simon Brien with brother Mark and David Gomes won the prestigious Edinburgh Cup in both 2000 and 2012.

The Club celebrated the centenary of its Royal Warrant in 2002 - one of the highlights of the celebration was a visit from Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal.

Through the years, Club members have enjoyed numerous successes



JOLITE - 1898 - JEWEL CLASS

with many of its other classes, namely: Lakes, Swallows, Enterprises, 505s, Flying Fifteens, Marks, Lasers and Mirrors, all producing multiple national champions. This is highlighted by our younger members winning no less than three Mirror World Championships - Chris Clayton and Craig Martin in Tasmania, Australia 2003; Ross Kearney and Adam McCullough in Ostersund, Sweden 2005; and again Ross Kearney and Max Odell in Albany, Australia in 2011.

Today Club Racing is held three days a week for RS Elites, Fairies, Squibs, SB20s, RS 400s, RS Visions, RS Teras, Lasers, Picos, Optimists and Mirrors.

Our large cruising fleet, apart from half dozen or so boats on the Club moorings, are now mainly based in local marinas and are seen flying the Club's Burgee and Ensign in many local, UK and foreign waters, several even making global circumnavigations.

The Club has been renowned for its Cadet training since it first instigated constructed courses in the 1930s. Today that tradition is being well catered for by our present Vice Commodore and Hon Cadet Officer and their dedicated teams of instructors and safety crews. They provide programmes to build confidence and experience in the large number of Pirates participating in their Tuesday night social and fun sailing, and for the more competent cadets joining in Club racing on Thursdays, all running concurrently with the full range of RYA training courses held throughout the summer months, which undoubtedly augers well for our future.

