

# The Kyles of Bute Sailing Club

## The First Fifty Years (Abridged)



Sailing in and around The Kyles has been enjoyed over many decades but until boats were factory produced in large numbers, especially after the last war, it was a sport usually only available to the wealthy. It was when yachts became affordable and there arose a demand for organised competitive sailing that many sailing clubs were formed, initially in the more populous areas on the East side of the Clyde and later here in Tighnabruaich.

It was on 18 May 1953 that a dozen local residents got together and decided to form a Sailing Club, soon to be named The Kyles of Bute Sailing Club. It was initially intended to be an informal arrangement, with no written Constitution and its purpose was to arrange regular races for dinghies, with Trophies and prizes for winners based on a handicap system. The annual subscription at that time was 2 shillings and 6 pence (12<sup>1/2</sup>p). It seems that the races were, at that time, started from Tighnabruaich pier.

In addition to the sailing, social events in the form of whist drives and dinner dances took place.

In 1955 the Club obtained its Starting Box which was erected on the foreshore. This very same starting box is still in use today (2003), having survived storms and floods which might have seen it washed away and become a floating wreck! However, the ravages of time are taking their toll and some major renovation work will soon be needed.

The minute books of the early Club history highlight some items of curiosity, even though the reading is tedious and some points of discussion recur many times over. Some things do not change over the years. The Club had not reached its second year before there were complaints that the handicapping system being used was unfairly disadvantageous to the faster boats. I haven't counted the many later entries but it was not very long ago that the opposite statement was last made.

In 1958 the Membership annual subscription was raised to 5 shillings (25p) and in 1966 it reached £1.

In these early years, because there was still a shortage of materials for new construction and special licences had to be obtained for non-essential work, a menagerie of dinghies were being raced. During the first 20 years we saw names like Albacore, Express, Fireball, Flying Fifteen, GP14, Gull, Heron, Hornet, Kestrel, Kyles of Bute dinghy (locally built), Lark, Mirander, Mirror, Miracle, National 12, OK, Osprey, Otter, Phantom, Soling, Streaker, Topper, Wildfire, Zenith, 470, 505. Later came the Loch Long, Enterprise, Wayfarer, Laser, and of course some Cruisers. In the 70's, we saw something like 70 or more different boats racing, which reduced over the 80's down to around 40 boats. It was in the 90's that the numbers of cruisers racing overtook the dinghies so that at the turn of the century we had 20 cruisers and perhaps only 10 dinghies which took part in our races.

In 1966, the Minute book records an incident described as a collision between a Mirror dinghy and the Waverley! I have recently talked to one of the Mirror sailors involved and he recollects seeing the Waverley steaming towards them at speed, with a member of the crew standing at the bow, waving his arms at them. My informant decided that he would be safer in the water and so departed overboard, as did the helmsman presumably. From this watery observation post the Mirror was seen being capsized by the Waverley's bow wave and then heading for the paddle box. The engines must by then have then been stopped because the Mirror survived being passed through the paddles and the two crew climbed back on board their dinghy, shaken and wet.

In the early years of the Club, visitors to Tighnabruaich were much more numerous than they are now. This was mainly due to the austerity of the period; travelling abroad for holidays had not yet become commonplace. Children came with their parents and there was much interest in junior sail training. The late Dr. George Thomson encouraged local Members to take visitors out sailing and Robin Stephens was also encouraging sailing tuition in the village, both in the Club and in his commercial enterprise, Tighnabruaich Sailing School. Later, David Sutherland and Jimmy Donald (and almost certainly others) were involved in the Junior training. For the first year this would have been 'dry' sailing in a dinghy on shore. By the mid 80's Dr. Eddie Torbet became involved with training and very soon the Club had acquired a small fleet of Toppers and by 1988 the Tarka Trophy races were revitalised.

There has been a constant realisation that the introduction of the young people of our village to the pleasures of sailing dinghies should receive a high priority within the Club. There are obvious problems in turning this aim into reality, though. First, although the local primary school is well supported in the village and surrounding area, children who reach the age of 11 transfer their schooling to Dunoon, with many of them staying in Dunoon for weekdays and only coming home at the weekends. Even older and they move further afield for further education or jobs, there being little scope for employment in the immediate vicinity. A second difficulty arises in finding suitable Members to train the youngsters at appropriate times. For a year or two, when children of Members are at a suitable age, they and others may receive training by the parent Member using the Club facilities and this has been a successful method in the past. In 2001, we sought to overcome the difficulty by adopting a suggestion made by Eva Shrewsbury, to offer a scholarship to a number of local children whereby successful candidates could attend the Tighnabruaich Sailing School for a week's course at the expense of the Club. We asked the local school to co-operate in getting interested children to write a short essay explaining why they would like to go on such a course. The quality and number of applications were well beyond our expectations and, in the event, we gave two scholarships for a one - week course plus a further eight children attending a weekend's course. This coverage had been made possible with the help of a generous donation by one of our Members and all the youngsters involved appeared to enjoy the experience.

The responsibilities incurred in having young people sailing by themselves meant that a reliable rescue boat had to be available. Initially, in 1973, an Avon rubber dinghy together with a 9.5 HP engine had been purchased with the aid of a grant and donations. The minutes record numerous problems in keeping the engine working reliably and there was a further problem when both dinghy and engine were stolen in August 1975. The following year a replacement boat and engine was obtained with insurance money and further grant aid. The replacement presumably was more reliable since no further mention of them was made in the minutes until 1982 when the engine received what turned out to be terminal damage whilst on loan to another Club for an open sailing regatta. We struggled on with an unreliable engine until 1997 in which year the RNLI built a new lifeboat station in Tighnabruaich and enquiries revealed that the old lifeboat would be made available to the Club for a very reasonable sum. This piece of good luck was seized upon and we now have a very reliable launch which can cope with safety coverage even on long races from Rothesay.

There had initially been some prolonged discussion over the design of a suitable Club burgee but details of all of the proposals are not available. However the decision was eventually made to use the design we fly today - a 'K' (for 'Kyles') in Orange (for 'of') on a Blue background (for 'Bute') and when I recently discovered this reasoning I changed the colour of the burgee on the heading of The BOWLINE from the yellow I had previously mistakenly used, to the correct orange!

The BOWLINE has been run as the Club newsletter since early 1994. At its inception we ran a competition amongst Members to suggest a suitable name for our new publication. There were several suggestions, some it seemed to us being rather unkind (Tidal Bore), however we so liked

the idea put forward by Mr. E. Williams that it was immediately adopted. The 40th edition was published this year and by far the majority of them have been written by the Editors! The BOWLINE was started because over half of our Members live outwith the immediate area and it was felt that some sort of newsletter was important to keep ALL Members informed about current Committee discussions and other matters of immediate concern.

The Club does not own any moorings. To do so would involve a level of responsibility, cost and personal involvement which are well outside the capability or desire of our Members. However, when in 1983, the Crown Commissioners decided that they would levy a charge on anyone laying a mooring on their seabed, and that they would offer a reduced fee for Group schemes, the Club became involved in collecting licence fees from its mooring-owning Full Members. We have refused, however, to police the moorings in the Club's designated area, leaving such actions to the Crown Commissioners themselves.

It was mentioned earlier that the present Starter's box was erected on the foreshore in 1955. The minutes frequently refer to it as a Clubhouse and indeed, several Club meetings are recorded as having taken place there. I can only think that it must have been very crowded in there and perhaps it was a good way to keep meetings short! Committee meetings appear to have been held in numerous other venues, eg. the home of a Committee member or the doctor's surgery. An opportunity did arise in 1974 to improve matters, when the property above the pier (which I believe was a shop and tea-room) came on to the market. Several meetings discussing the possible purchase by the Club were minuted and the obvious attraction of having a permanent Clubroom and starting line at the pier did not go unnoticed. However, the financial burden to the Club, both the initial purchase and its inevitable ongoing expense, could not be sensibly undertaken and the Committee and Members of the day decided that, regretfully, the Club had to decline the opportunity. It has to be said that grant aid was not then so freely available as it may be now.

Another, more modest, venture, started in 1972. As already described, the main boating population of the Club at that time consisted of dinghy sailors and there was seen to be a need for a dinghy park on the foreshore, convenient for the start of races. It was decided, after the usual period of deliberation, to construct one on the beach at Rhubaan. Loads of materials, including old railway sleepers, were brought to the site and a dinghy standing area and slip were constructed. It turned out to be a short-lived project, since a severe storm during the winter caused its destruction and it was never revived. The use of the landing slip beyond Kames was also considered but had to be rejected.

At the start-up of the Club, it was expected that it could be run without any formal Constitution and it appeared to operate so for around 12 years. However, there are several reasons now why a Constitution is necessary, affiliation with the RYA and application for Grant aid being but two. The first Constitution was drawn up and accepted by the Membership in 1966. There was seen to be a need for revision in 1971 and again, especially to take into account legislation and the requirements of grant-giving bodies, in 1995. Opportunity was taken at that time to also introduce the concept of Family and Young categories of Membership.

We have had nine Commodores, starting with the late Mr. Wotherspoon who presented the Club with a Trophy which we still compete for today. It is the work of these early Officers that has shaped the Club into the success story that we can see today. Further Trophies have been purchased by or donated to the Club over the years. The most recently acquired Trophy to be competed for is the magnificent Barr Salver. The Barr family were Members in the first year of the Club, though they were not living in Tighnabruaich. More recently, Ken Barr has been a Member of the Royal Western Yacht Club (RWYC) and the Salver (which commemorated the silver wedding of the senior Barrs), had been donated to that Club for use as a Trophy in the restricted-sail race from Gourock to Tighnabruaich, which was held during the Glasgow Fair weekend. The race was run in parallel with the Tighnabruaich weekend fixtures, thus linking the names of our Club, RWYC

and the Isle of Bute Sailing Club. The Isle of Bute S.C. eventually withdrew its support (in 1997) and the RWYC did not receive the number of entries to justify running their race but our Club continued to achieve an excellent entry support for its race from Rothesay to Tighnabruaich. Because Ken wanted the Trophy to be one which is regularly used, ownership was transferred (in 2002) to the Kyles of Bute Sailing Club and it will be presented for the first time this year to the overall winner of all races sailed in the season. The winner this year will be Jim Cook in his 29 foot Trintella, TUCHE and he will be presented with it at our AGM by Ken Barr.

Since about 1913 an annual Town Regatta had been held at the time of Glasgow Fair Week. I have no knowledge of what happened in these early years, but when my wife and I were here in 1975, our children took part in events such as rowing contests and sailing in Loch Longs, so although the Regatta organising Committee was separate from the Sailing Club, there was clearly a significant degree of co-operation. By 1989 the Town Regatta had declined as an event and the Regatta Committee decided to hand over the relevant Trophies and residual funds to the Sailing Club, which has continued to run sailing races on the same weekend under the Town Regatta name. The Trophies are presented on the day, and the Funds are kept separate from the normal Club accounts.

It is within the Constitution of the Club to permit election of a number of Honorary Commodores to recognise particularly outstanding service to the Club. The first two Honorary Commodores were Dr. George Thomson and Mrs. M Stewart, who both died in 1979. Mrs. Kay Currie had been Treasurer and diligent Race Officer until about 1974 and was Honorary Commodore until her death in 2000. Performing a similar role and elected Honorary Commodore in 1995, Nan Cook was Treasurer from 1977 until 1994. She was Race Officer for all of that time and continues in that role to the present day. We think that the Starter's Box must be her second home!

Some 30 Members of the Club had a very enjoyable celebration of its 50 years on 14 June 2003, when we sailed in gentle weather round to Rothesay and met together in the evening for a special dinner in the Bistro restaurant.

The above narrative should not be seen as a complete history of the Club, rather it is a glimpse into its past by an interested Member of only 15 years standing, who browsed through the record books looking for snippets of Club life. Of course, much depends on the Secretary of the day who wrote down this history each in their own style - be it verbose or terse, and I am grateful to them all. There is a huge amount of detail which would be tedious to reproduce here so I have generated a number of tables which will tell their own story to those who may have been directly involved.

Additional information and photographs have been gleaned from past and present Members.

Collated and written by David Shrewsbury  
Tighnabruaich October 2003

## **Addendum**

Since 2003, the Club has continued along broadly similar lines. It still administers the rental of moorings on behalf of the Crown Estate, organises a programme of races through the season, especially the Regatta Weekend at Glasgow Fair and holds a small number of social gatherings, including its AGM.

There have been a further three Commodores since 2003. What has changed is that the popularity of racing has diminished. Dinghy racing has all but disappeared from this part of the Kyles, with one exception and most racing involves longer passage races to Ardmeleish, Skipness or round Bute or Inchmarnock. The Regatta Weekend remains a highlight. The Rothesay Race continues to

be our best supported event and, after many years where such activities had fallen away, the Town Regatta on Fair Monday has been revived to a modest extent, offering opportunities to newcomers and youngsters to get on the water and running a few rowing races etc. The days of the greasy pole are behind us, alas. That weekend also sees the main flowering of dinghy racing. The Club has developed a strong relationship with Monklands Sailing Club, who normally race on a loch east of Airdrie. Each year, a number of members will drive to Tighnabruaich with their Flying Fifteens in tow to participate in the Rothesay Race and other races organised for them. They compete for their own set of trophies alongside any other dinghy sailors who wish to join in. At other times only 3-4 boats might turn out for a race and sometimes even fewer.

The starter's hut finally succumbed to old age and was replaced by a slightly larger structure on the same site. Apart from the roof blowing off the first winter, it has stood up pretty well.

BOWLINE ceased to be published some time ago. Nowadays, communication with the membership is via email, the Club website or a WhatsApp group.

Another area which had died out for a time was encouraging youngsters to take up sailing. The Sailing School is still going strong, run by Derek and Fiona at Carry Farm and, with their help, for the last 3 years, the Club has been offering local children the chance to sail from the jetty at the Lifeboat Station on Friday evenings in May and June, using the Club's Toppers. The numbers participating had been growing each year, but no sailing has been possible at all this year, unfortunately.







