

HISTORY

Officially founded in May 1905, The Motor Yacht Club was created by a group of enthusiastic gentlemen who were members of the new Automobile Club, later to become the Royal Automobile Club in Pall Mall, London. They included Bernard Redwood, Lionel de Rothschild, Basil Joy, John Scott-Montagu, S F Edge, Tom Thornycroft, Major Lindsay Lloyd, Captain Dixon, Linton Hope, E A Whitehead, F P Armstrong and eleven others. From this list it is easy to see that these were influential men in the marine world. From yacht designer to banker, from torpedo inventor to marine engineer.



Sir Boverton Redwood



Bernard Redwood

Over 80 people turned up to the first meeting of the Club.

The club soon offered the following.

- Use of a clubhouse on the waterside with moorings.
- The use of an office in London and a room for meetings.
- The right to enter races run by the club for reduced fees.
- Customs facilities for the Continent.
- Assistance in technical matters in the purchase or sale of boats.
- Assistance in planning tours.
- Representation on the Marine Motor Association.
- A club magazine, The Automobile Club Journal.
- Advice on points of law concerning boats.

Within two years these “objects” were to be substantially changed. The new ideas sound more like a modern yacht club.

It has not always been reported that women have been involved in the sport of motorboating from its earliest days.



Dorothy Levitt with Napier 1903

Dorothy Levitt was a pioneer

motorist both on the road and the sea.

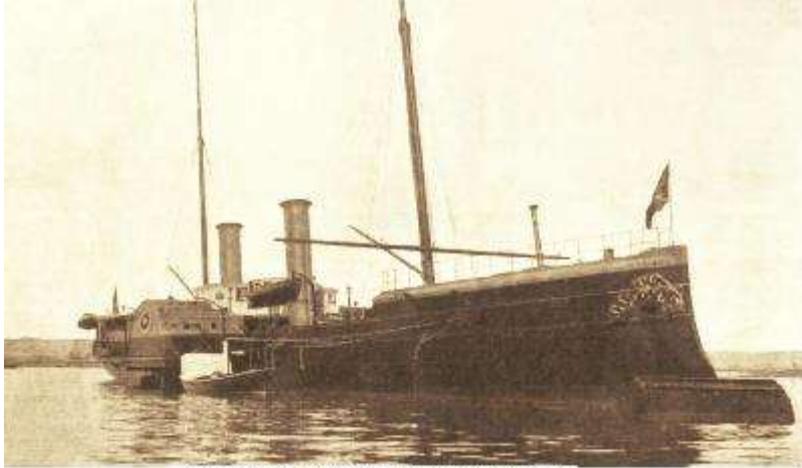
In 1903, in the inaugural Harmsworth Trophy, she piloted the winning launch, much to the surprise of other competitors.

In 1905 she drove a De Dion-Bouton motor car single handed from London to Liverpool and back in two days, averaging 20 miles per hour over two hundred and ten miles. She carried out her own road-side work and repairs.

She also raced a Napier car for S F Edge. In 1909 she published a book entitled “The woman and the car”. In it, she gave the following advice to fellow motorists,

“carry a loaded Colt revolver in a drawer under the seat in case of trouble, I find it very easy to handle as there is practically no recoil”

The first Rear Commodore, Mansfield Cumming, purchased the 1,000 ton ex. Admiralty Yacht Enchantress in 1905.

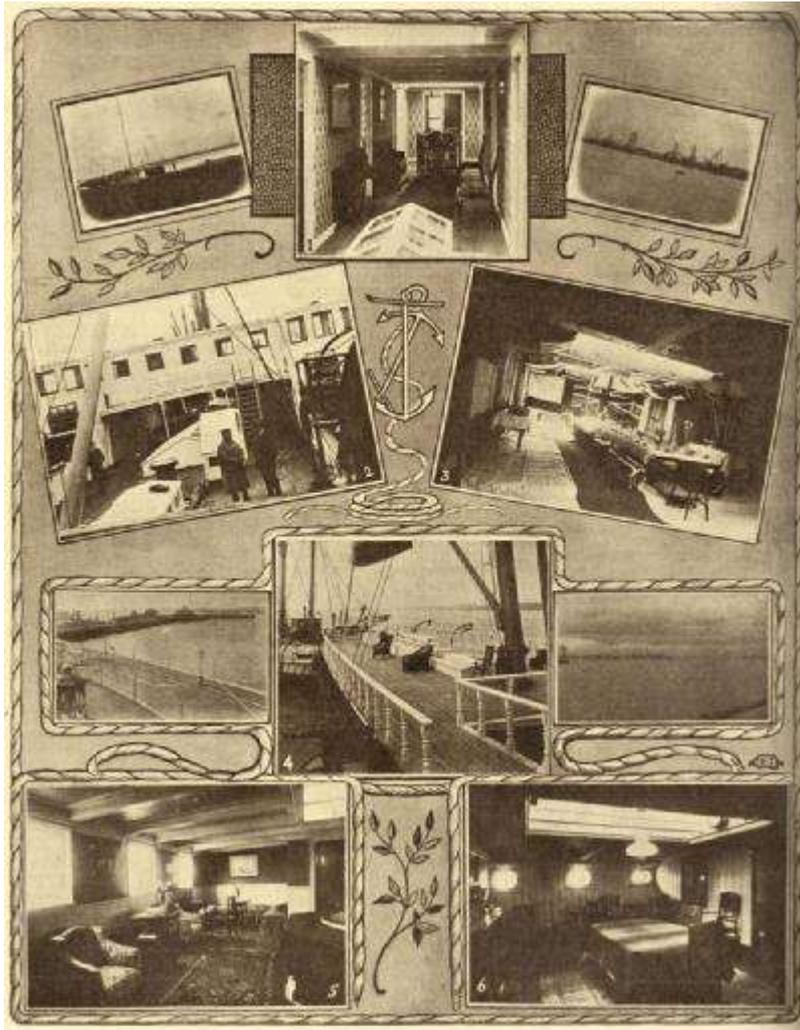


Enchantress before conversion

Removing the paddles, steam engines and boilers, she was converted into a smart and large floating club house and moored off Netley, in Southampton Water.

Onboard accommodation included 25 sleeping cabins, a smoking room, drawing room, promenade deck, dining room and ladies drawing-room. (Ladies however, were to leave for the shore by 10 PM each evening.)

The conversion was completed in record time. The press were invited to come and look over the new venture. (see pictures)



Images of Enchantress in 1906 after conversion

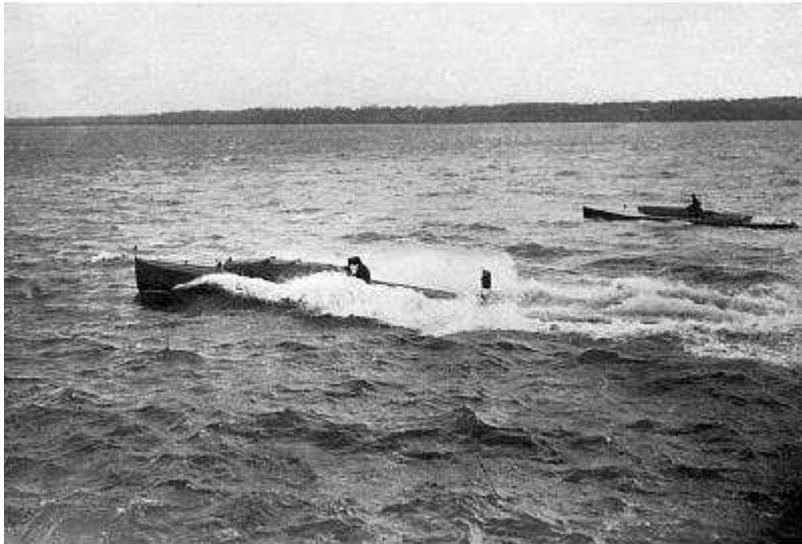
In January 1906, the club was granted the privilege by King George V, through the Admiralty, for its member's vessels to wear the undefaced Blue Ensign of His Majesty's Fleet. Club members could wear the Blue ensign on two conditions.

Every vessel belonging to the club must be registered as a British vessel.

The second was that the Ensign "shall not, without our authority in writing, be worn on board any vessel belonging to the motor yacht Club, while such vessel is lent, on hire, or otherwise, to any person not being a member of the club; or who, being a member of the club, is not a natural born or naturalised British subject."

In 1908, London hosted the Olympic Games. The Motor Yacht Club was asked to organise "Olympic races for motorboats". These were held in Southampton Water, on August the 28th and 29th of that year.

The weather was poor, with a gale blowing from the south-west and large seas rolling up towards Southampton.



The Duke of Westminster's Wolseley-Siddeley

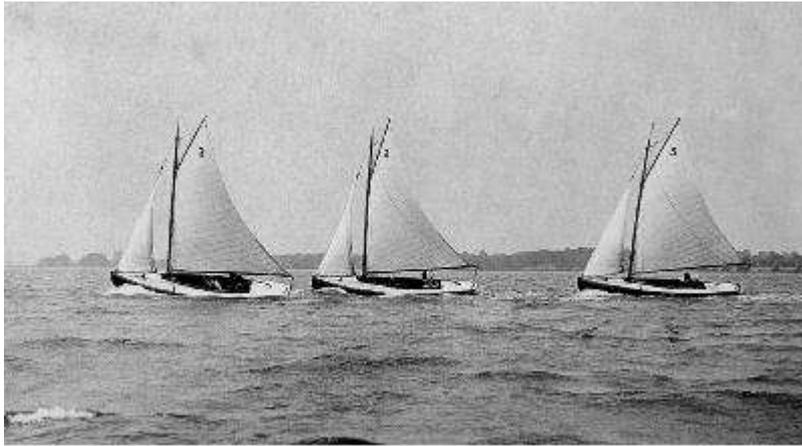
In spite of the awful conditions, two members managed to stay the course and won an Olympic gold medal.

This was the first and last time that motor boat racing was viewed as an Olympic sport.



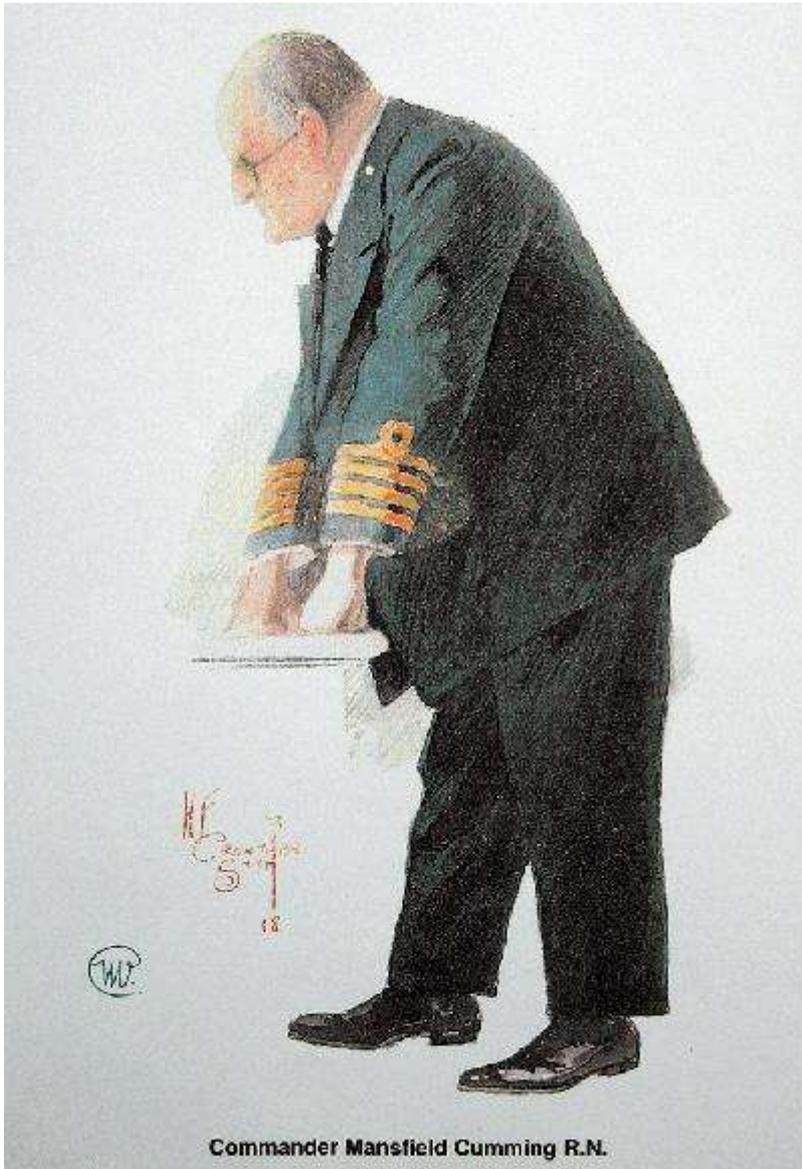
The Diploma of Merit awarded to Bernard Redwood

In 1909 the club asked Alfred Wesmacott to create a new one design yacht for club racing. The well known yacht designer, who was also the owner of the boat-builders Woodnutts, on the Isle of Wight, drew a pretty day boat 20 foot 8 inches long, which would become known as the X Boat One Design, a boat which is still hugely popular in Poole but there are also fleets in Cowes, Lymington and Chichester.



X Boat one design yachts with their original gaff rig

In 1910, King George V approved the Home Secretary's recommendation that the Prefix "Royal" be conferred upon the club and that henceforth it would be known as the Royal Motor Yacht Club.



Commander Mansfield Cumming R.N.

Rear Commodore Mansfield Cumming, who started MI6 and became “C”, (made famous in the James Bond books as “M”), now proposed to the Admiralty that they create a “motorboat reserve” of motorboat owners and their boats.

This soon became the RN Motor Boat Reserve.

In 1915 this was merged with the much larger Yacht Patrol and became the Auxiliary Patrol.

Enchantress became the base for these boats but was hit by a bomb and burnt to the water line, destroying much member’s equipment including X Boat masts and sails and the original deed of gift of the Harmsworth Trophy.

It should be mentioned that Mansfield Cumming trained some members and their wives to spy whilst they were cruising in German waters before the first war started.

Following the end of the Great War and the loss of a number of members, it was suggested that the Royal Motor Yacht club might merge with another Marine Club the British Motor Boat Club, known as the BMBC. This club had been running for almost the same amount of time but in spite of being able to wear the Blue Ensign it had never been given the “Royal” accolade. It ran races and offered similar activities to the RMYC. Throughout the 1920s, the BMBC continually asked that they might be given the “Royal” prefix but after seven requests were turned down firmly, they stopped asking.

With the loss of “Enchantress”, RMYC now moved to Hythe Pier on the opposite side of Southampton Water.

In 1921 they commissioned a set of plans for a new club-house, which was built at the end of the Pier. The club continued to offer motor boat racing, X boat and other class racing and successfully ran club events of many sorts throughout the 1920s, including motorboat races to Poole with a fleet of 10 boats taking part.

Club member Hubert Scott-Payne the well known sportsman, entrepreneur and motor boat racer, waved the flag for Britain and the Club. He was 23 when he founded Supermarine Aviation. He designed and made flying boats, was the owner of the British Power Boat Company, designing and building cutting edge fast boats of many kinds. He designed “Miss England”, which won the world Championship and built “Miss Britain” a challenger for the Harmsworth Trophy.



Miss Britain III

He was to go on to design and build fast motor gun-boats and torpedo boats for the Royal Navy and designs for the US navy PT boats. Scott-Payne was a larger than life figure who not only created a large and efficient business empire but had time to persuade the club to take on a club racing boat that members could afford.

This was the Puma class hydroplane, powered by a 240 hp inboard, costing £1,200 in 1927. Scott-Paine managed to bring both the Royal Motor Yacht Club and the BMBC together in a shared interest in the class and finally in an amalgamation, but that was to come later.

Note:

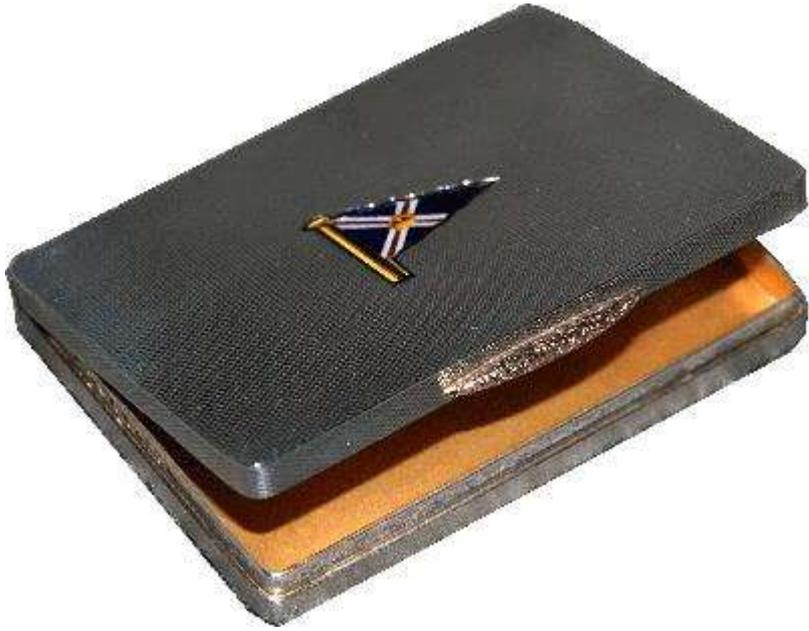
Over the course of the next few months the brief history of the club will cover the 1930s and 1940s. Motor-boat and sailing boat-racing. The Move to Poole, the purchase of our current Club House and the lead up to the second World War.

Club Memorabilia.

As the Club Hon. Historian, and a collector, I am always looking for Club related pieces to bring back bits of our history.

A few years ago, in Bath, I bought this beautifully made card case in solid silver with silver gilt interior, hidden hinges with an enamel club burgee on the lid.

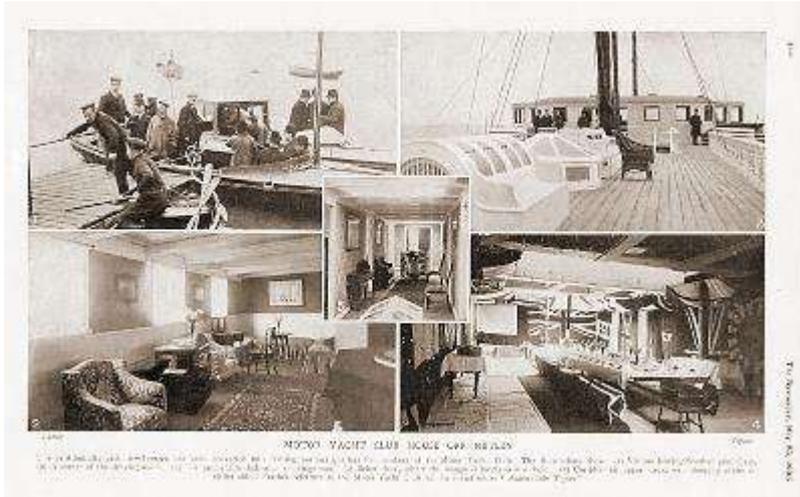
Made by Benzies of Cowes. It measures 80mm x 57mm x 10mm



I bought this late '30s car badge, with a nicely painted Club burgee and engraved club name at Beaulieu Autojumble, 3 years ago.



I recently purchased this page from a copy of the "Bystander" magazine of May 23rd 1906, showing some new pictures of the "Enchantress".



These will return to the club one

day with other pieces.

Have you got something tucked away that we could photograph for the website?

If you have, telephone me, through the club office, and let me know.

We left the Royal Motor Yacht Club in the 1920s with a clubhouse on Hythe pier in Southampton water. The early years of the 1920s when a depression set in, were difficult but in spite of this and the social changes that were happening because of the loss of so many men in the war, the Club managed to offer a few races for motor boats. These mostly consisted of long distance runs or economy runs and were not received too enthusiastically by the general membership because boating people were starting to look after themselves and not have so many crew.



RMYC newly built Clubhouse 1937



Sandbanks Before RMYC building. pre 1936

The British Motor Boat Club was engaged in similar activities but offered more friendly get-togethers around the coast. Their boats tended to be smaller and more handy for a self-drive owner. The BMBC was desperate for the "Royal" accolade but after seven requests lost heart but continued to offer good racing for the ordinary man.

Hubert Scott-Paine, famous motorboat racing driver, founder of Supermarine Aviation [think Spitfire] when he was only 25, builder of flying boats in the Great War, founder of the British

Power Boat Company, director of Imperial Airways and a member of the RMYC and the BMBC, was one of the pivotal people in finally bringing the two Clubs together.

The RMYC with its royal connections and people of “high tone” had been given the “Royal” accolade in 1912. The BMBC with its more worldly and commercial connections had tried to achieve the same accolade, as mentioned above but to no avail. Both clubs had similar interests and with the introduction by the RMYC of the affordable Puma racing motor boat in 1926, there was an opportunity for talks to restart on a possible amalgamation. The RMYC’s annual report to its parent body, the Royal Automobile Club, stated that the year 1926 had been a great success, five new racing boats built and more to follow, which would give RAC members the opportunity to go motoring on the water where there wasn’t the over-congestion to be found on the roads!

The new Hythe Pier Club House was proving very popular and members were beginning to take houses near- by and enjoy the modern sports of motor boat racing and sailing. The Club’s X boats were coming into their own, with racing every weekend throughout the season. The next excitement was the introduction of the so-called “Puppy-Dog” Class of racing stepped-hydroplanes with the first one named “Bow Wow”.

In 1927 the RM purchased a new floating Club House called “Gadfly “. The name was quickly changed to “Enchantress” which was moored on Hythe Pier in Southampton Water. At the same time the BMBC, through its member Lt. Col. Walter Bursey, were offered the “Florinda”, a well known 100 foot racing yacht built in 1873. Bursey had her converted at the cost of £6,000 into the “finest three-decker house yacht in existence” and leased her to the Club for a pepper-corn rent. With a promenade deck 12 feet above the water line, two double and five single cabins each with hot and cold running water and two bathrooms, a lounge/saloon, a card saloon and a dining room, all with centrally heated radiators, Florinda provided excellent amenities for members all year round. She was moored on Poole Quay adjacent to the lifting Bridge, near the modern lifeboat house.



RMYC Florinda. Poole Quay after 1933



RMYC Florinda on Poole Quay 1934

With the RMYC in the Solent and the BMBC Club boat on the Town Quay, Poole Harbour became the focus for motor boat racing on the South Coast. Within a year or two the 100 mile endurance race for the Yachting World Trophy was being run in the Harbour. The course ran from a buoy off Salterns Pier in Lilliput, up into Poole Quay, under the lifting bridge, around a mark in Holes Bay and back into the Harbour. It is difficult to imagine a more dangerous course with boats travelling at up to 35 MPH in opposite directions under Poole Bridge and between the Quays. Local people, including the Mayor, Alderman Herbert Carter, were very much in two minds about whether this motor boat racing was good for Poole. By now the RMYC and the BMBC were jointly hosting race weeks and had become friendly rivals. Finally, after several meetings of the two Clubs it was decided to amalgamate and the BMBC was absorbed into the RMYC by the simple system of electing all the members of the BMBC as members of the Royal Motor Yacht Club. The two clubs' burgees were also merged with the crossed colours of the BMBC on which the Crown of the Royal Motor Yacht Club was emblazoned. Walter Burse was the new Commodore of the Royal Motor Yacht Club, taking over from The Duke of York, [shortly to be George the VI.] who became the first Admiral of the Club.

The members of both Clubs, now amalgamated, had the use of Florinda at Poole Quay. Within a few months the floating Club house at Hythe was redundant and the Commodore also made arrangements to dispose of "Enchantress" but to no avail. After some difficult negotiations with Hubert Scott-Paine, a deal was finally agreed and the sale was completed.



RMYC motor boat racing Poole Quay in front of Florinda 1934

In 1935, Phyllis Lee-Duncan, owner of the Royal Bath Hotel and a member of the Club, was building two flats in Old Coastguard Road in Sandbanks. Bersey approached her and persuaded her to sell the building to the Club. The Cost of the two flats and the conversion to a club house cost rather more than the £13,000 estimate.



RM motor boat racing in Poole Quay near Florida



1938 RMYC clubhouse and Boat shed and Yard

The Club offered debentures of £50 each to members and £14,000 was soon raised which, with a mortgage, enabled the new clubhouse purchase to be completed in February 1936 and the conversion carried out.

“Brass fittings and oak panelling and nautical accoutrements for residents to make the interior resemble a ship, a deck-like terrace overlooking Brownsea Roads, 17 cabins with comfortable bunk beds and a superb view. With a restaurant and picnic hampers available, a well stocked wine cellar, a billiard table and specially laid dance floor; the Club house was one of the best in the country. Add the Club pier, a launch to take members out to their moorings off the Club and the membership couldn’t ask for more”.

The Club and new Club House proved popular and the following year the Club accepted 200 new members.

The Old Coast guard Cottage opposite the Front door was purchased the following year for £900 for use as staff quarters.



RMYC End of Boat shed facing Road. Old Shop front. Note sanddune



RM yard before purchase. Note end of CG cottages on right

“It was considered that for the well being of the Club, that no member or visitor gave gratuities to any member of the staff. Anyone wishing to show their appreciation could subscribe to the Staff Fund.” [From a Club handbook of 1937.]

The Club now boasted 1,000 members including 10 Peers, 7 Baronets, several knights, a foreign Prince, a Count and Countess, 2 MPs and a judge.

More motorboat races were organised for the season of 1937 but sadly they made a financial loss. In spite of this, it was felt that the senior motor boat club in the world, should continue to support motorboat racing, which it did, including the London –Cowes race and three regattas and a long distance race starting in Poole going to Le Havre Light Buoy via Cherbourg and finishing at Poole, a distance of over 260 miles, which for the slower boats took them over 30 hours.

The Club members in their boats were able to go out into the Harbour and watch Hubert Scott-Paine take the salt water speed record to 110 MPH but another member become the fastest man on water in the world.

Sir Malcolm Campbell, who had long been riding fast motor bikes and driving fast cars, including the Land Speed Record car Bluebird, had taken to the water and through the 1930s had pushed to World Speed Record from 129 MPH to 141.74 MPH in 1939.

For more local Club boating; members were involved in raft-ups for tea in the Harbour, predicted log events and treasure hunts, which kept them busy and entertained. It all sounds very familiar to our modern-day Club.

In spite of the problems with the outstanding money owed on the Club house the season of 1939 continued happily with many planned events. However all this was to change in September.

As the Second World War started, members' boats were laid up but festivities at Christmas were continued in the lately altered dining room with its new dance floor, and 75 members and their guests enjoyed Christmas Eve at the Club.

A considerable number of members' boats were requisitioned for war work, including Sir Tommy Sopwith's huge motor yacht "Philante". Many boats from the Harbour, including 13 from the Club, were used in the evacuation of troops from Dunkirk. Many were lost but there were still a handful in the 1950s in the Harbour that proudly carried a brass plaque stating they were "Dunkirk Little Ships".

The Royal Navy showed interest in creating a seaplane base at the Club, but nothing was settled for many months. In 1940 the Commodore offered the Club House as accommodation for eight naval officers who would pay an agreed sum per week for food and attendance. After sorting out

early difficulties, the Navy took over the Boat yard and Lord Lyle's boat shed next door to the Club House as a sea plane training school.



RMYC Hauling a plane onto the slipway. 1941

Ultimately, the Military controlled the whole of Sandbanks and the Navy requisitioned the Club House and the Staff Cottage, on the promise that after the war the Club members would be able to take the Club house back quickly. The premises became RNAS Sandbanks and was known as HMS Daedalus II but was known to locals as HMS Tadpole

Throughout the rest of the war, 765 Squadron were stationed at Sandbanks, flying a number of different planes. The Mitchell designed Walrus with a "pusher" engine mounted under the high wing, hanging over the cockpit, which made a particularly high pitched unpleasant noise, Fairey Swordfish, [known as "Stringbags"], Fairey Sea Fox, American built Vought-Sikorsky Kingfishers, and in 1943 the new Supermarine Sea Otter along with the French Marcel Besson MB-411.



RMYC Fairey Seafox



RMYC Kingfisher

Sandbanks had a busy war with enemy planes machine gunning the area and bombers dropping bombs on Brownsea Island, which had been set up with strings of lights as a decoy area to divert planes from Poole and the munitions factories at Holton Heath, indeed on the night of 21-22 May 1942 German bombers dropped all but 9 tons of bombs on Brownsea.

The war brought its own financial problems for the Officers of the Club who struggled to keep the Club alive. Unpaid bills from suppliers at the beginning of the war required swift action and by the

end of hostilities when the building and land were suddenly handed back on the 14th of August 1944 the Commodore could report to the members that the club was back in credit and ready to welcome members again when it reopened on the 1st of September.

As a member said after the war, "The only way to see our Club during those years was to take a bus from Westbourne to Poole, with a soldier, complete with rifle and fixed bayonet standing on the boarding platform".

The large shed next to the Clubhouse which we now call the Boatshed belonged to Lord Lyle. He decided to put it on the market after it was returned to him following the end of the war. The Club was outbid at the auction but managed to buy it from the purchaser, giving him a small profit. A year later, the Club purchased the Sandbanks Stores, from the same man. This is the shop at the exit from the Club car park, which was then leased to a local yacht chandler for the benefit of the members. These two purchases gave the Club a wonderful asset comprising the Shop, Shed, slipway and work pier along with a few moorings nearby all of which could be used by Club members.



1935 Boat shed and yard. Lord Lyle sold to RMYC 1947

The membership which had not surprisingly decreased during the war now began to pick up. 120 joined in late 1945 and by March 1947 the numbers were getting back towards the pre-war total with 804 members. After fighting the Club's corner all through the 1930s and 40s, in 1948 the Commodore, Walter Burse, was finally asked to resign which he was disinclined to do. However, he was invited to take the position of becoming the Club's first Rear-Admiral. He didn't seek re election as Commodore and accepted the Rear-Admiral's post and the Snooker Room was named the "Burse Room" in his honour.

The Club was now entering the halcyon time of the 1950s when wealthy boat owners flocked down from London and the home counties to go motor yachting at the weekends. Large sailing yachts and motor yachts were to be seen at their moorings lying off the Club in Brownsea Roads. Sir Bernard and Lady Docker's 64m yacht "Shemara", the 38 metre "Braemar", the band leader Billy Cotton's "Wakey Wakey" and Lord Illife's yacht "Radiant". A few years later Phyllis Lee-

Duncan's "Moonspray" was moored off her house just to the west of the Club, future Commodore Major Abraham's "Rosabelle", E. V. "Waggy" Wagner's large modern looking, blue and white motor boat "Thunder", the opera singer, Dame Joan Hammond's "Pankina", Royce Turner's "Rosina" [which caught fire and sank at her moorings], and the replacement a year later "Sherina", [built in the Club's boat shed by the in-house boat builders; Randall and McGregor], along with many 40 and 50 foot Club boats. No other area of the Harbour had such a collection of large and often glamorous boats moored together and with the advent of marinas, we shall not see lines of moorings with large yachts swinging to the tide again.

Of course yacht skippers were not allowed into the Club House and often had no communication with their owners and waited, dressed in their white overalls and white topped caps, at the corner of the boat shed ready for when an owner might put in an appearance and want to go boating. As late as the mid 1970s there were still one or two full time skippers around the yard and shed looking after a boat or taking out the owner's family for the day.

Bill Stephenson, Commodore from 1949 until 1958 steered the Club through the rather gentle waters of those years with firm skill and a steady hand. After the tumult of the pre-war and wartime years it was a peaceful time in which the Club members enjoyed a relatively tranquil Harbour and boating that was not crowded or under pressure.

By 1952 the membership had reached over 1,000, many of whom lived away from Sandbanks but who wanted to keep in contact with the Harbour and Poole. Even at this time, the Sandbanks area was known for its kind climate and water front houses and a four bedroom house on the water could be purchased for £8,000. When George the VI died in 1952 his place, as Admiral of the Club, was taken by HRH the Duke of Edinburgh.



RMYC Poole Quay The Yachting World Trophy '31



RMYC Olympic Finns near the boat shed

Late in the 1950s the Committee decided that flag officers would, in future, serve three years. Finding suitable members who were prepared to serve indefinitely had always been a problem

and besides, if they were not suitable you couldn't get rid of them without embarrassment. Admirals were given the job for life or until they wished to stand down.

The Children's Regatta which had been running for a number of years and was now well established was going from strength to strength. As well as the basic swimming and diving competitions there was also the much enjoyed outboard race in which children as young as eight were allowed to race dinghies in the Harbour with Seagull outboards [open topped flywheels] round a course near to the Club, weaving in and out of the moorings off the Main Pier. [What health and safety would think of that now would be interesting]. The Club hosted the 1957 International 5.5 metre Coppa d'Italia meeting and from that year continued to host a series of sailing and motor boat races which took place in Poole Bay or in South Deep.

Peter Burt.

RMYC Historian.