

**The Story  
of the Clyde Canoe Club**

**at Rosneath, Balloch & Cashel  
1873-2013**

**A Collaboration between  
The Clyde Canoe Club  
(now Loch Lomond Sailing Club)**

**Balloch Heritage Group**

**[valeofleven.org.uk](http://valeofleven.org.uk)**



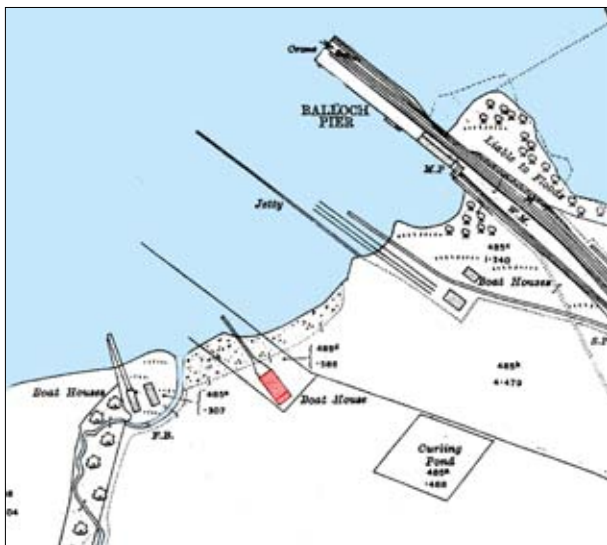
## Background

The Clyde Canoe Club has a long and distinguished history. Its intrepid group of founders started off at a clubhouse at Rosneath from where they embarked on a series of innovative exploratory trips off the west coast of Scotland as well as organising canoe sailing racing on the Gareloch and Clyde. After going into abeyance for a few years they re-formed, firstly on the River Leven at Balloch and then at Drumkinnon Bay also at Balloch but on the very southern shore of Loch Lomond. When forced to move from Drumkinnon Bay the Club moved further up Loch Lomond to their present home just north of Millarochy Bay in one of the most beautiful settings on the Loch.

Their activities over the years are well documented in newspaper cuttings, minute books, log-books, plans of canoes and sail boats, personal reminiscences and an outstanding photographic record. Each generation of members left behind a mine of information and this was been collected by the Club Archivist, Roger Hancock. Of particular value was a history of the Club which had been prepared by a long-time member of the Club, Peter Turner, in 1982, and the photographic archive of the Yuile Family which was given to Roger by Peter Yuile.

Balloch Heritage Group and the web-site of the Vale of Leven and its surroundings, [valeofleven.org.uk](http://valeofleven.org.uk), are delighted to have worked with Roger to have brought this fascinating story to a wide audience on the Internet.

January 2013



*Location (shown in red)  
where the Clyde Canoe Club's Balloch  
Clubhouse was at Drumkinnon Bay  
from 1908 to 1932*

1914 OS Map, Drumkinnon Bay  
1960's aerial of Drumkinnon Bay  
2003 aerial of Drumkinnon Bay



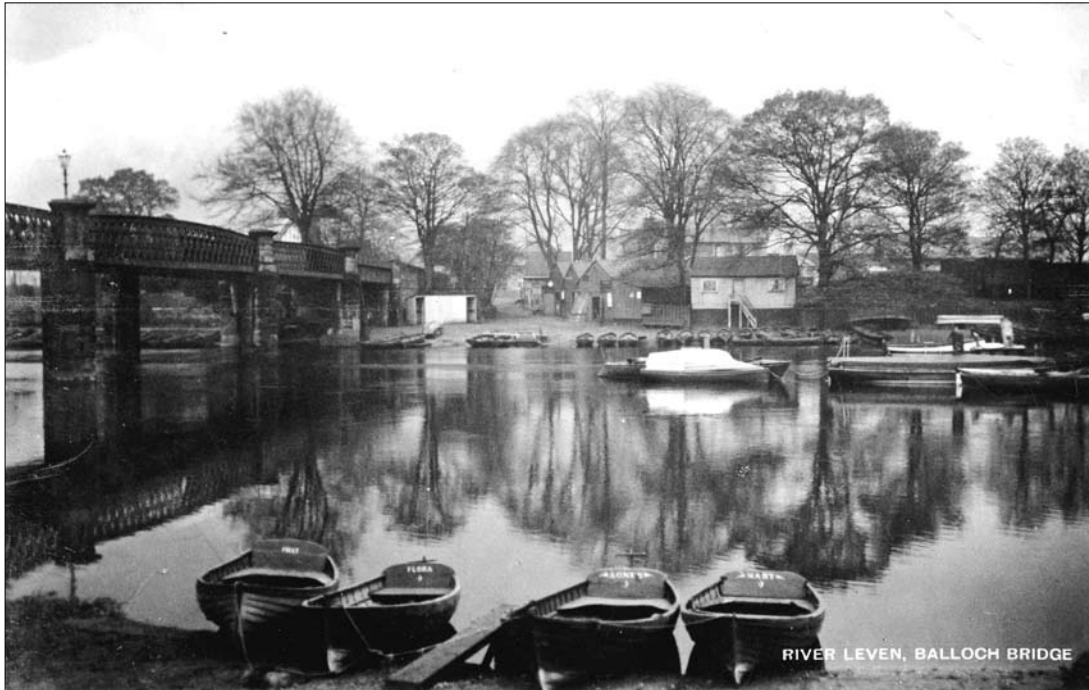
Cover: Opening ceremony  
of the CCC at Drumkinnon Bay, 1908



**CLYDE CANOE CLUB, ROSNEATH  
1873 - 1893**



**CLYDE CANOE CLUB, RIVER LEVEN  
HIRE OF LYNN'S SHED c.1897 - 1904**



The club gap years from 1894 to 1897 were years when the 'club members' did not have a permanent location, but were still sailing on the Clyde and Loch Lomond. Circa 1897 they hired a shed in Balloch near to the river to store their canoes for sailing on Loch Lomond. (Sheds seen here in this 1920's postcard, high centre of picture.)



**CLYDE CANOE CLUB, RIVER LEVEN  
1904 - 1908**



**CLYDE CANOE CLUB, DRUMKINNON BAY  
1908 - 1932**



**CLYDE CANOE CLUB - LOCH LOMOND SAILING CLUB  
CASHEL  
1933 - 1999                      1999 - PRESENT**

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## Part 1

# The Clyde Canoe Club

### 1. Introduction

For over 30 years the River Leven at Balloch and then Drumkinnon Bay at the southern end of Loch Lomond were home to the Clyde Canoe Club, before the Club was forced to find a new site near Cashel on the eastern shores of the Loch, where it has had its Clubhouse since 1933. The “CCC” as it was known was renamed the Loch Lomond Sailing Club (“LLSC”) in 1999, and is the third oldest recreational organisation on the Loch after the Loch Lomond Rowing Club and the Loch Lomond Angling Improvement Association. Although neither the founders of the original CCC nor those who revived the Club in 1898 were Vale men, the Club quickly blended into the local scene and within a short time was an established part of the Leven and Loch community.

Started originally in 1873 at Rosneath just outside, i.e. to the south of, the narrows which lead from the Clyde into the Gareloch (hence the name “Clyde” Canoe Club), the Canoe Club moved to Balloch in 1899 where it operated from a shed rented from Lynn’s boatyard on the west bank of the Leven until it could get land on which to erect its own smallish pavilion-type clubhouse on the east bank in 1904. This was on land owned by the Colquhouns, immediately to the south side of the White Dyke, i.e. now the boundary with Balloch Castle Country Park. This was the club’s headquarters for only about 3 years because in about 1908 it built a classic Edwardian boat house on the banks of the Loch at Drumkinnon Bay and moved its operations to that building. It also kept its first boathouse on the Leven until it was destroyed by fire in 1914.

That Drumkinnon Bay Clubhouse was by far the most attractive boathouse on the Loch, in fact probably one of the most attractive boathouses anywhere in Scotland, and would be a great asset to the area if it had survived until now. Unfortunately, the Club was driven out by the development of the British Silk Dyeing Company’s factory in 1932. It was not, of course, anywhere near the actual factory buildings, but its boathouse was the site chosen for the intake pipes and pump-house to extract the Silk Factory’s water supply from the Loch. Although the Club owned the boathouse it did not own the land – the Smollett estate did – and it was acquired by the BSD from under their feet, so to speak. There were other options for the location of the water extraction and you would like to think that to-day another solution would have prevailed, but after many happy years in Drumkinnon Bay the Club had to move.

Having dismantled the Clubhouse, the Club found another site about 12 miles to the north-east on the east shore of the Loch close to Cashel. There a new club-house was erected using parts of the old one and the club settled down in its new surroundings. The Club is still there and still prospering. In 1999 after almost 70 years at Cashel and almost 100 years on the Loch, it decided to change its name to more accurately reflect its home for the previous 100 years and is now known as the Loch Lomond Sailing Club (“LLSC”).

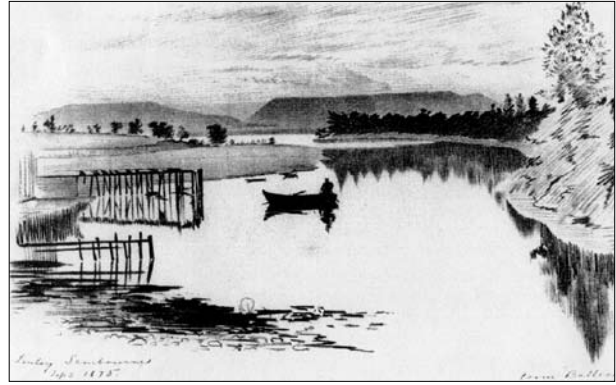


Clubhouse at Drumkinnon Bay, 1909. Balloch pier far left, Winch house for slipping steamers, centre. (colour added)

The story of the Clyde Canoe Club is one of the hidden gems of the recent history of the Loch. It is multi-faceted, covering as it does

- the early days of a new sport in Europe, Britain and Scotland
- pioneering characters with a strong streak of courage, innovation and a love of challenges in the best tradition of Victorian story-book heroes
- the design and building of some beautiful craft
- the first water-based recreation which covered the whole of the Loch as well as the adjoining Lochs
- the local history of Balloch and the Loch in the early days of the 20th century
- an outstanding Lochside boat-house
- a pre-WW1 German canoe which was wrongly believed to have been involved in landing a German spy during WW1.
- some leading figures from the hey-day of British yacht-design and racing including the America's Cup
- resilience in the face of set-backs and challenges

There is one other aspect to the Club which is easy to miss and that is that the members of the Club were pioneers in using the shores of the Loch as well as its waters for recreational purposes. The Club soon settled into the new Balloch location and although races did take place, and as we shall see annual regattas were held at Drumkinnon Bay, it was essentially a canoe cruising club which made full use of the many camping locations which the islands and shores had to offer. In this the members were breaking new ground. By 1898 tourists had been coming to Loch Lomond for over a century, e.g. Dr Johnson and Boswell, Robert Burns, William and Dorothy Wordsworth. Passenger steamers had been catering to these tourists on the Loch since 1818 when David Napier brought his steamer "Marion" onto the Loch to carry tourists up to Ardlui and back on a day-trip. Later in the century some rich individuals such as the Duke of



Drawing showing west bank of river Leven and Monkey Island from Balloch bridge, c.1875.

Montrose owned private steam yachts. Organised rowing had started in the 1820's and from the 1840's the foremen at some of the local bleaching and dyeing works had purchased rowing pleasure boats in which they and their families took trips onto the Loch, particularly to Inchmurrin. By the 1880's John Sweeney and Henry Lynn had started their boat-hiring and boat-building businesses on the west bank of the Leven at Balloch. But until the arrival of the CCC no one had used boats to explore the banks of the Loch and the beaches of the islands for pleasure, although the Rowing Club did follow soon after the CCC when it acquired pleasure boats in the early 20th century.

As pictures from about 1900 show, even then there were very few private pleasure craft on the river at Balloch – very few people could afford them. From the accounts which we have of private trips on the Loch from this time the passengers either did not land at all, or headed to one of the Lochside hotels such as Rowardennan, Tarbet or Inverbeg. Until the arrival of the CCC the only people who stepped ashore on the islands and banks were lairds, ghillies, gamekeepers or residents, and very few of them could be said to be doing it for recreation or pleasure. The CCC members were the start of a great influx which within 20 years had changed the shores of the Leven and Loch for ever.



Postcard view as above drawing some years later showing railway sidings with up-ended sleepers as bank protection. The first signs of a few pleasure boats moored on the river and beached on Monkey Island. Lynn and Sweeney started their businesses on this west bank of the river near Balloch bridge.



And this story is accompanied by one of the best photographic archives which any recreational club has of the closing years of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th century. This photo archive is both the trigger and the basis for this history and a copy of it was very generously provided to Roger Hancock, Official Archivist of the LLSC, by Peter Yuile. Peter is now in his 86th year and was born and lived all his life in England, although he was a regular visitor to the CCC when he was growing up. He firmly belongs to the “aristocracy” of the CCC. His father Ralph and Ralph’s three brothers were all members of the CCC. Two of his uncles joined at the meeting in 1898 when the Club was revived, while his father was Secretary and Treasurer of the CCC from about 1906 until the outbreak of World War One. Another uncle, Herbert Yuile, was a member from about 1905 until his death in 1969 having been Honorary Commodore for the last 12 years of his life. All of the brothers had taken photographs and these had all passed into Herbert’s hands. On the death of Herbert’s son they were given to Peter who set about converting them to a digital format to save the photographs for posterity. Far from wanting to capitalise personally on this substantial archive Peter’s first thought was to make sure that a copy of it returned to the Club in which most of the photos had been taken.

He approached Roger who was delighted to accept a copy on behalf of LLSC. Roger in turn approached Jim Biddulph of Balloch Heritage Group; and Jim used the archive to produce the first pictorial history of the CCC. Jim brought it to the attention of valeofleven.org.uk and we are delighted to help bring it to the world-wide web with profuse thanks to Peter who has also provided a brief account of his family’s involvement with the CCC which appears in Appendix 1, and thanks also to Roger and Jim.

Many other sources are used as the basis of this article, the main one relating specifically to the Club being “The Clyde Canoe Club 1873 – 1982” by Peter Turner (private circulation c 1982). Peter was one of the Club stalwarts in the post-war years



Inchmurrin Jetty, c.1905.  
Early archive photograph from glass negative. Unfortunately the glass had cracked in this photo. Fortunately image can be retouched digitally.

and an interesting person in his own right – he played a leading role in the development of body-scanning equipment now a fundamental aspect of many hospital treatments. Other sources used include “Our Brothers and Cousins: A Summer Tour in Canada and the States” by John MacGregor (1859), “A Thousand Miles in the Rob Roy Canoe on Rivers and Lakes of Europe by John MacGregor (1866) – both of these books are available for free in on-line versions. “Over the Sea to Skye – Early Travels by Canoe to the Scottish Islands and West Coast 1874 – 76” edited by Jan Poskitt (Solway Dory, 2002) is the source of most of the material for the early trips by CCC members to the Hebrides and is well worth a read (it is available by email from eileen.hancock@talk21.com £7 incl postage). “Loch Lomond and the Trossachs in History and Legend” by P. J. Ransom (2004), various Lennox Heralds, and Council Records held at Dumbarton Library as well as Glasgow and Paisley Heralds have proved useful sources. Iain Coats, owner of Argyle Body Repairs at Jamestown Industrial estate, has been very helpful with information about his great-great uncle James and other members of the Coats family.

Finally, we were particularly fortunate in enlisting the help of Duncan Winning OBE. As well as spending thirty-six years in marine engineering and now being closely involved with the sorting and listing of Clydeside’s engineering, transport and ship-building archives, Duncan is the Honorary President of the Scottish Canoe Association and the Historic Canoe & Kayak Association; he is also a Vice President of the British Canoe Union. So there is no one better qualified to advise us on canoeing generally and the history of canoeing in particular. Duncan was good enough to correct our many errors and misunderstandings about the early days of canoeing and provided much of the information about the German canoe which has been at the Club since the early 1920’s and the true story about the German “spies” who brought it to Scotland in July 1914.

The layout and photographic editor was Jim Biddulph, the text editor was Harry Summers and both worked under the guidance of Roger Hancock.

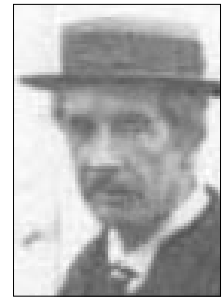
## 2. The Beginning of Recreational Canoeing in Great Britain

Canoes were the first water borne mode of transport found in Great Britain, dating back thousands of years. Indeed some of these pre-historic canoes survived virtually intact for thousands of years in peat bogs in Scotland and were uncovered purely by accident as people dug the peats as a source of fuel. A number were even found during the excavations for the building of the Glasgow docks. A couple of such canoes can be seen on display in Glasgow's Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum and they are in remarkably good condition. Dugout canoes were very practical and robust and it is no surprise that they were in common use until the Middle Ages when they started to be replaced by modern small craft and in any event these early canoes were very much working vessels since the concept of recreational use only arrived in the 19th century.

The person credited with popularising modern canoeing in Great Britain is a Scot or at least an expatriate Scot – John MacGregor. Although he had a small auxiliary sail fitted to his canoe the development of the sailing canoe was pioneered later by another Scot, the Hon. James Gordon, brother of the Sixth Earl of Aberdeen, of whom more later. John MacGregor, who lived from 1825–1892 was the son of General Sir Duncan MacGregor and he practiced very successfully as a barrister at the Inner Temple in London. His specialisation was Patent Law and he wrote the text book on Patent Law, although his boss was accredited as author, a not uncommon practice in those days.

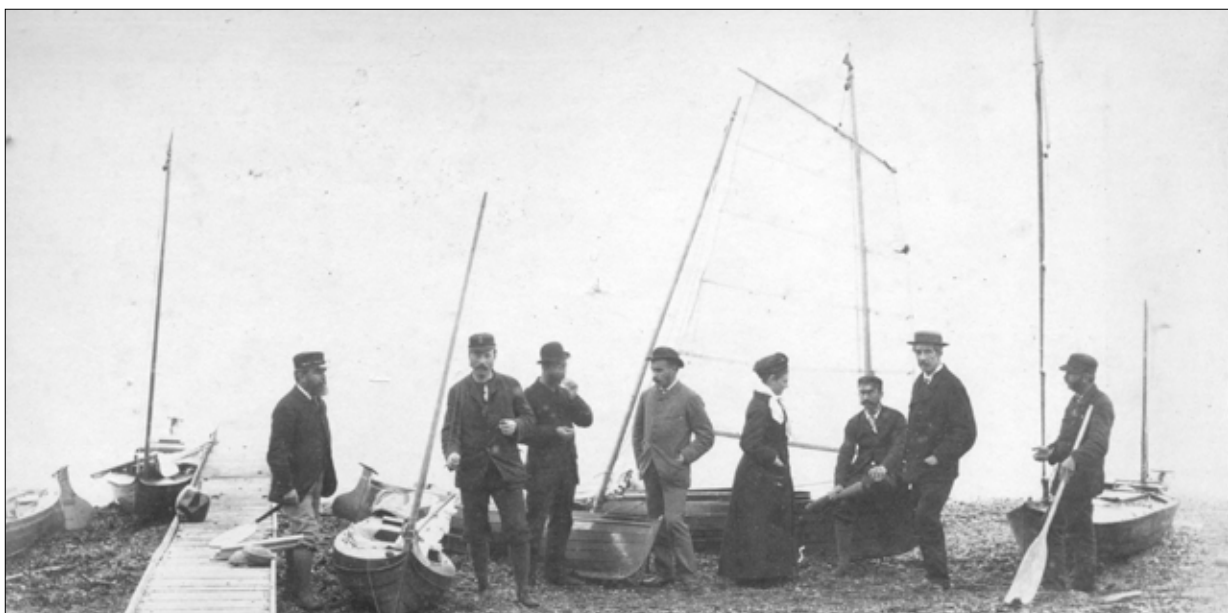
The family laid claim to connections to Rob Roy McGregor and John could therefore be said to

be something of a Lochside man, but that would be a considerable exaggeration because he was born at Gravesend in Kent while his parents were waiting to join the East Indiaman “Kent” bound for India, spent his early years in various locations and his adult life in London. However, he regarded himself as a Scot and visited the Clyde Canoe Club in 1881 when it was still based at Rosneath and he can be seen in the accompanying photographs. It's not known if he canoed on the Loch, but its potential for the sport which he very effectively popularised was well recognised not just by the CCC but also by its adherents across the UK.



John MacGregor

MacGregor had plenty of money and leisure time – in the 19th century, English High Courts sat for very short sessions, which left barristers free to indulge their other interests, of which John MacGregor had many. He was an explorer, travel writer, a gifted artist who illustrated his many books, a champion marksman and philanthropist – such a variety of interests were by no means unique in the Victorian upper classes. However a railway accident left him unable to hold a rifle steady and so he sought other sporting outlets. On a 3 month trip to North America in 1858, a journey into the New Brunswick forests in Canada pointed him in the right direction, because although the Native Americans also used dugouts, it was there that MacGregor saw for the first time double-ended Native American canoes. Not only that, but he was able to personally



Rosneath 1881 (left to right) H. K. Bromhead, R. Ure, ?, Mrs King, Mr G. Y. King, John MacGregor, ?

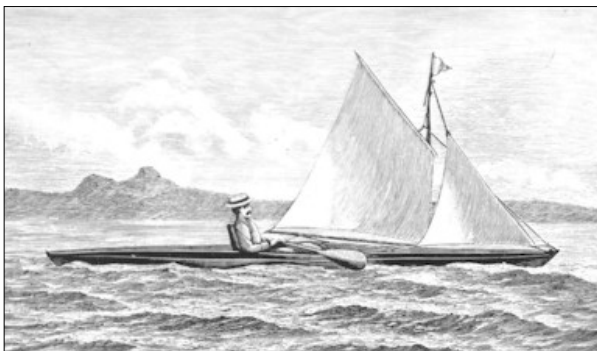
compare the light, manoeuvrable American canoe with the much heavier 4 man dug-outs made from a single log which were typical of those used by the settlers. Experience showed that the dug-outs quickly sank in cross-winds, while the much lighter Indian canoes, made from birch-bark, with spruce or cedar framing, were altogether more weather proof and much easier to handle.

When he came home in the autumn of 1858 he set about personally designing the canoe which was to launch the sport, firstly on the Thames then in very quick succession across Britain and Europe, and soon back into North America. The design borrowed much from the Indian canoe, but it also showed considerable foresight of the use that MacGregor intended to make of it. It was double ended, 15 feet long, just short enough to fit into German railway wagons, 28 inches wide with a depth inside of 9 inches, the keel being 1 inch deep. The craft drew only 3 inches of water and weighed in at 80 pounds. The 54 inch long cockpit was 20 inches wide, with rounded ends and could be sealed with a McIntosh cover, fastened round the coaming and held up in front of the paddler by being buttoned to the breast of his waistcoat. Luggage was stowed in a black leather-cloth bag 1 foot square and 5 inches deep. This provided him with all necessities for a 3 month trip and contrasts pretty starkly with the typical 20 kilo baggage allowance of todays airlines for 2 weeks in the sun. Helpfully, MacGregor lists what luggage he took on his first 3 month trip to Europe:

“A suit of grey flannel for in the boat, another suit of light but ordinary dress for shore work and Sundays. A new Norfolk jacket with 6 pockets and something in each pocket a Cambridge straw hat, canvas wading shoes, blue spectacles, a waterproof overcoat and a spare jib for a sun shawl.” Throw in his razor, toothbrush etc. and that was the lot, so it could be done.

MacGregor lists the advantages of his design and some of the most important of them were:

- It was decked, not open, and therefore not so susceptible to being swamped



Rob Roy canoe

- Since you looked forward you were much more aware of upcoming problems than in a rowing boat, and it was easy to jump out to prevent crashes
- Being of shallow draught the boat was very manoeuvrable and could navigate shallow water, reeds, rushes, rocky river beds etc
- The sail could be lowered and hoisted without changing seat, and the sail meant that you could drift along on the wind without having to paddle
- The sail could be used as cover from the sun or the rain allowing you to sleep in the canoe if necessary
- Being light it could be carried by hand – MacGregor says “up ladders and stairs” or over “dykes and rocks” – but perhaps more commonly to be put on a cart or railway wagon

All of these advantages were to feature later in the Clyde Canoe Club boats which made them ideal craft for the individual sailor on Loch Lomond and waters of the west coast and islands of Scotland.

The building materials used by MacGregor were oak planking for the hull, while the decking was made from cedar. Propulsion was provided by a double-bladed paddle and by a mast and sail operated from the cockpit. Although MacGregor designed the craft, he didn't build it – he handed that task to Messrs Searle & Sons of Lambeth, boat-builders on the Thames, right in the middle of London, who built it speedily enough. He called all of his canoes “Rob Roy” and the first one was launched in 1865 – there were to be at least another 6, number 7 being launched in 1871 or 1872. These days we would call his creation a new class of boat, since there was nothing like it on this side of the Atlantic, and the paddling canoe pioneered by MacGregor took on the generic name of Rob Roy. His first Rob Roy is now in the River and Rowing Museum at Henley-on-Thames, just upstream from the Henley Regatta Course. MacGregor had that combination of vision and perhaps luck to get the design and build right first time in every respect, so it was only natural that others would follow this perfect design, although that was not MacGregor's motivation or objective.



and the Ship-Wrecked Mariners Society – in any case he didn't do any of this for the money. The public response also made it clear that there were like-minded people out there and on 25th July 1866 he called a meeting at the Star and Garter Hotel in Richmond at which the world's first Canoe Club was formed. Members were exclusively middle or upper middle class – doctors, lawyers, businessmen etc – which was hardly surprising given the costs involved in acquiring even a Rob Roy canoe. To begin with all the members used Rob Roy canoes and were asked to give their canoes names beginning with the letter "R" presumably in a sort of homage to the Rob Roy canoe. The Canoe Club based itself just further up the Thames at Teddington, which is still its base. Within a year, in 1867, Edward Prince of Wales (later to become King Edward VII) became Commodore of the Club and in 1873 Queen Victoria gave it the title Royal, and so John MacGregor's new sport of canoe paddling was given the ultimate seal of approval as his Club became the Royal Canoe Club.

MacGregor continued his forays into foreign parts

with his various Rob Roys, going to the Baltic in 1867 then an extended trip to the Jordan, the Red Sea and the Nile in 1868 and 69. He wrote best selling accounts of these exploits in "Rob Roy on the Baltic" and "Rob Roy on the Jordan". In 1871 and 1872 he took "Rob Roys" to the Netherlands then the Shetland Isles. It is a great pity that he did not write a book about these trips, especially the Shetlands with their exposed coastlines. In 1873 he had planned a canoe trip in the Azores, which he called off at the last moment for family reasons.

Other prominent people got into the act as well. In 1876 the author Robert Louis Stevenson and his friend Sir Walter Simpson set out on a voyage to the rivers and canals of France and Belgium in their own Rob Roy canoes called "Cigarette" and "Arathusa" which Stevenson recounted in his book "An Inland Voyage" published in 1878. This was the first book which Stevenson had published and it went on to appear in even more editions than MacGregor's work.

#### 4. The Clyde Canoe Club is Founded 1873

The coastal waters of western Scotland with their many sea lochs, islands and rivers made it ideal territory for canoe sailing and the many fresh water Lochs were an additional bonus. So it was no surprise that the wave of enthusiasm for MacGregor's canoeing produced a group of young men from Glasgow and around eager to give it a go. The Clyde Canoe Club was formed with 14 founding members in April 1873. The aim of the Club was to encourage the art of designing, building, sailing and racing canoes, and this is stated in the Constitution of the Club, although in practice at the time racing was always considered secondary to cruising. Canoe cruising meant camping and as we shall see that was to figure prominently in the Club's future activities. It also led to the development of such helpful equipment as "Clyde" tents and stoves.



Photo dated 1876, shows 19 canoes outside their clubhouse at Rosneath and names the following 10 canoes and owners:

Mopoon—Alan;  
Locheil—Robertson;  
Ranger—J. Wyper'  
Dolphin—W. Smith (capt.);  
Lark—Ferguson;  
Wren—C.G.Y. King  
Bothnia—C. King;  
North Briton—R. Rule;  
Little Rambler—Whitelaw;  
Neptune—Bromhead

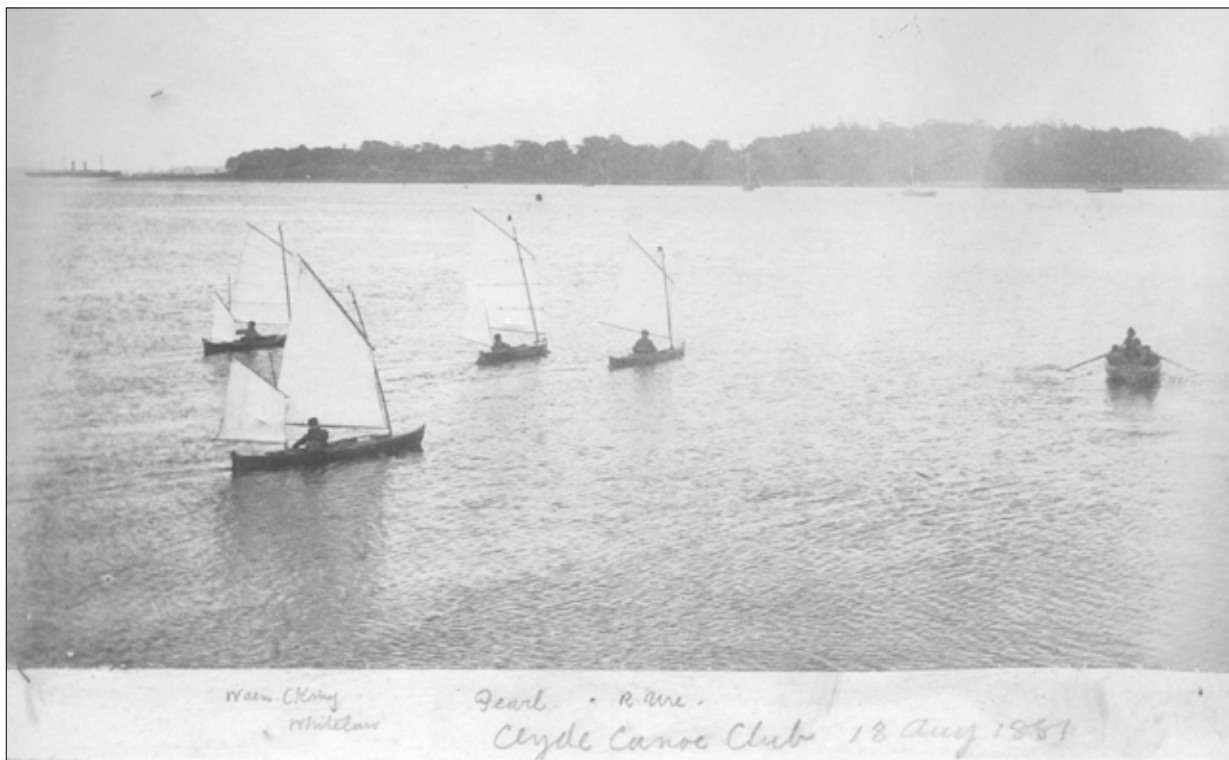
The founding members who are identified by their date of membership 10th April, 1873 were:

	Name	Canoe
1.	George Usher Graham	Lythe
2.	George Corshan	Rover
3.	Robert Rule	North Briton
4.	Horatio K Bromhead	Neptune
5.	Robert Dalglish Jnr	
6.	Ernest Smith	
7.	Matthew Gemmell	Elizabeth
8.	James Coats	Duck
9.	P. E. Dove	Iorsa
10.	John Allan	Mopoon
11.	James Ellis	
12.	Tom Whitelaw	Rambler
13.	Wilfrid Smith	Dolphin
14.	James Wyper	Ranger

It is probable that one of the canoes in the Scottish Maritime Museum at Irvine is in fact the Dolphin, so it still exists 140 years on.

In June 1873 John Ferguson joined the Club and his canoe called the Lark probably dates from 1874. It is believed that his canoe, which is still in the Sailing Club's boathouse, is that original Lark, and the original drawings for it certainly still exist.

P. M. Smith joined in October 1873 and his canoe was called the Hermit, while in April 1874 Charles G.Y. King, who had a Liverpool address, joined with a canoe called the Wren. King was a true canoeing enthusiast; he was a member of the Mersey Canoe Club, which is the second oldest canoe club in the UK. He edited the magazine "American Canoeist" for a time and by 1885 lived at West Loch Tarbert, in Kintyre.



Dated 18 August 1881, top left the Wren (King), below Whitelaw and further right the Pearl and R. Ure mentioned in the caption.

With one exception, all of the 14 founder members had addresses in the more affluent parts of Glasgow, some in the city centre which were probably business addresses, others in the west end, a few on the south side.

The exception was James Coats Jnr; his address was Ferguslie House in Paisley, then a grand mansion overlooking Ferguslie Mill - headquarters of the family business of which James Coats Jnr eventually became head: J&P Coats. The firm manufactured very high quality threads which were in great demand throughout the world and the whole Coats family became very rich indeed. They were also amongst the leading Scottish philanthropists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as was perhaps only to be expected because the founder, James Coats, was firmly in the tradition of the radical Renfrewshire weavers of the early 19th century many of whom were jailed for their political views in which fairness and egalitarianism featured strongly.

Even amongst such a family, James Coats stands out and deserves an article on his own account since he was one of the most practical, innovative and generous Scottish philanthropists of the Victorian era, and a benefactor to the CCC at key times. He was the grandson of the James Coats who founded the firm, and he lived from 1841 to 1912 becoming in the last 10 years or so of his life something of a recluse at Ferguslie House. However even before that he had a strong aversion to being photographed, so he is one of the few founder members of the CCC of whom we don't have a photograph. Coats' generosity extended from sports to civic projects by way of education and culture. One of his most effective projects was the provision of libraries to small out-of-the-way communities north of the central belt and particularly in the north-west Highlands and Islands. As part of this he not only printed many Gaelic books, he also commissioned the writing of new books in Gaelic for these libraries. Another of his projects was to provide a school-bag for every school-child in the west of Scotland – as is mentioned elsewhere on the web-site. During his life time a newspaper reckoned that he had donated more than £150,000 to education and libraries in the Highlands and that this was more than all of the Highland lairds had put together in the whole of the 19th century.

His first love was, however, sailing and as well as owning at least 16 yachts over the years, he had a "yachting-lodge" which he called "Dunselma" built at Strone where the Holy Loch and Loch Long meet the Clyde, although he never seems to have lived in it. It still stands as a private residence, having been in its time a Youth Hostel. Coats also paid

for the building of the Royal Gourock Yacht Club which also still stands just beyond the Promenade in Gourock. The pride of his yacht fleet was the 500 ton Gleniffer which was the largest yacht in the world when it was built by D&W Henderson in 1899, whose yard stood on the opposite bank of the River Kelvin to the new Riverside Museum in Glasgow to a G. L. Watson design.

It was said that because he did not want to make the 40 man crew of the Gleniffer unemployed, he retained ownership of her for many years after he had stopped sailing her. One of his steam yachts, the Triton, designed again by G. L. Watson and built at the Ailsa Yard at Troon in 1902 still sails to-day although much refitted and also renamed. It is the oldest Clyde-built vessel to appear on the Lloyds Register of Yachts. Although all of his yachting activities were on the grand scale, rivalling Sir Thomas Lipton who is perhaps better remembered to-day, Coats' greatest affinity was for messing about in small boats and of course the sailing canoe was ideal in that respect.

For further information about Coats see <http://www.madiz.com/history.htm>

These founder members were therefore reasonably well-off professional men – membership was strictly men-only until 1951. While the cost of a new sailing canoe in the 1870's and 80's seems modest at between £15 and £25 (about  $\frac{2}{3}$  of that for a good second hand one) plus another £3 or so for the canoe's sail and a tent, that was way beyond the discretionary spend of the working man of the time. Further evidence of the business background of the founder members can be found in the way in which they organised the Club's finances from the outset. The initial finance was raised by a first share issue in 1873. Each share cost £13 6s 8d, and no interest nor dividend was paid on the shares. Between July and August 1873 fifteen of these shares were issued, which raised £200.

The members provided their own canoes, so by far the largest initial cost lay in building a new clubhouse. It is not recorded why Rosneath was chosen as the first base for the Club, but it's a fair assumption that even a glance at a map makes it seem an ideal location for canoe-sailing. It provides easy access to the Clyde estuary and all its sea lochs and islands, but it is within a sheltered east-facing bay with protection from the prevailing south-west and westerly winds. Also, at that time the Gareloch was served by regular steamer sailings from Craigendoran and even further up the Clyde, so the journey from Glasgow was not as long by steamer as it now is by road.

## 5. The Clubhouse at Rosneath

The original clubhouse was built in 1873 at a total cost of £207 6s 9d, just a few pounds more than what had been raised by the first share issue. A breakdown of these costs has survived:

Thomas Kay, builder	£114
J. McLean, joiner	£ 11 5s 6d
Smith & Weelstood, stove	£ 3 18s
G. Galloway, pailing	£ 7 11s
Aaron Spy, painter	£ 9 3s 9d
Wallace & Allan, roof	£ 53
Gavin Park, measurer	£ 3 3s

In 1875 Mr McLean the joiner was called upon again, this time to add an extension to the Clubhouse. While not quite as stylish as the later boathouse at Drumkinnon, the Rosneath boathouse was a very attractive building, which looked well suited to the dual role of boathouse and clubhouse. It also stood the test of time, because in 1893 the CCC sold it to Clynder Bowling club, where it remained until the 1980's. A photograph of 1921 shows it with a tennis court in front of it, so it served as a Clubhouse for a tennis club as well as a bowling club.

## 6. Early Club Canoeing Trips

The Club did hold canoe races but right from the beginning the members were more attracted by canoe sailing trips in the MacGregor style. Their preference for trips over races showed that they were imbued with the adventurous spirit set out 8 years earlier by MacGregor. Races attracted maybe 4–5 canoes while 10 members or more regularly made these trips – expeditions wouldn't be out of place as a description for some of them. The trips caught the public's imagination – this was after all the age of the Victorian adventurer – and newspaper editors were happy to give them good coverage. Quite apart from anything else they made good stories – part travelogue, part action hero. So we have a good deal of information from the newspapers about some of the Club trips up the west coast and out to the Inner and Outer Hebrides, as well as into more inland waters.

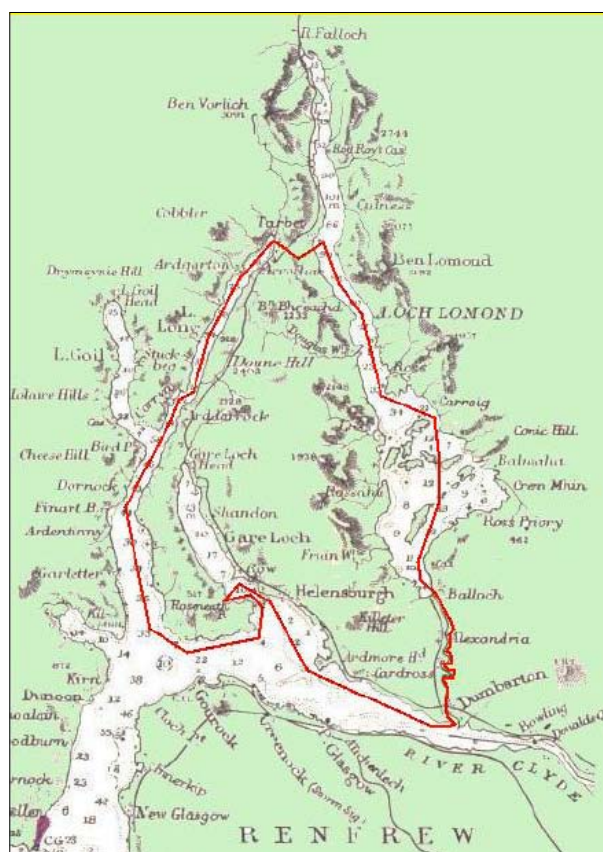


Clyde sailing 1881



## 7. “The Round” – a Three Loch cruise, June 1874

Virtually from the founding of the Club, a trip called “The Round” became a great favourite with the members: we would more likely call it a Three Lochs Tour. There is a report on one such Round trip in *The Scotsman* in June 1874 written by John Ferguson who made the trip in his canoe the Lark. His report makes clear this was by no means the first such trip; members had “often done it before”. This one started from both Rosneath and the Holy Loch on the Friday night, and both groups joined up to camp overnight at Ardentinny. After a 6 am start they made for Arrochar and a portage by horse and cart to Tarbet from where they paddled down to Rowardennan in time for dinner and then another night under canvas at the mercy of both rain and the midgets. On the Sunday they set out to go to Church at Rowardennan, but services were held there only once a month so they went instead for a walk in the hills. On this as on other trips it seems that the members did not sail on a Sunday. On the Monday they sailed down amongst the islands to Balloch, where masts and sails were stowed under the deck, the rudders taken off and everything made secure for a dash down the Leven to Dumbarton in the fast river current. From Dumbarton there is a simple 10–12 mile sail back down the Clyde to Rosneath.



## 8. The Club’s Summer Cruise July 1874

About a month after the above Round trip, 10 canoes from the Club set out on what was described as the Club’s Summer Cruise, on appropriately enough Glasgow Fair Friday, 17th July 1874. Even more appropriately, the direction of the cruise was very much “Doon the Watter”. Since this was an official Club outing the Captain, Mr George Whitelaw, was in charge and he plotted itineraries and rest points. On the Friday the intended stopping points were Kilcreggan, Cloch, Inverkip and then overnight camp at Toward. Weather and equipment failure as always determined the actual course and stops, but night-fall found all the canoes back together at Innellan where five members made for the hotel and another five camped at Toward.

Tighnabruaich was the destination for Saturday night via the east Kyle of Bute, which makes for one of the most beautiful sails in the world on a good day, and it proved to be as good a Glasgow Fair Saturday as you could wish – not words you’ve heard these last few years. The report of this part of the sail tells us of the woods at South Hall, a long-demolished mansion about 4-5 miles south of Colintraive, which were planted out to represent the British and French armies at Waterloo. A swim was taken at Eilean Dearg at the mouth of Loch Riddon where the Kyle makes a sharp turn south-wards towards Tighnabruaich. Once that village was reached the “softies” made for the hotel, while the happy campers paddled across the west Kyle to Bute, almost certainly to the area of Kilmichael. Again no sailing took place on the Sabbath, and one person went to church in Tighnabruaich while the others walked or rested. The club cruise officially ended on the Monday morning at this point. However, with the exception of the Rob Roy, all of the others went off on three separate cruises of their own – one group heading for Iona, another for Arran while a third was heading for a trip round the island of Bute.

## 9. To Oban and Iona

The most ambitious group consisted of three canoes – Rambler, Mopoon and Lark. The bold canoeists plotted a course to Tarbert Loch Fyne, portage to West Loch Tarbert, then Loch Sween, another portage at Tayvallich back onto the Sound of Jura and the long haul northwards via the Sound of Shuna, Sound of Seil under Clachan Bridge and the Sound of Kerrera to Oban. On this part of the voyage overnight camps were pitched at the mouth of West Loch Tarbert on the Monday night, on the shores of Loch Crinnan on the



Oban bay, c.1907.

Tuesday and they made it to Duart Bay on Mull for the Wednesday evening having stopped at Oban to provision and eat. They sailed from Crinan to Oban in only 5 hours, which still seems respectably fast. In the course of these three days they had probably covered more sea miles in their sailing canoes than anyone else in Scotland and quite possibly in Great Britain had done up until then. During the sail they had to cross abeam the Corryvechan whirlpool which created very rough water at certain states of the tide, even at 3 miles distance, and had the first canoeist's encounter with the full force of the Atlantic swell – great rollers up to 100 ft long, in the troughs of which only the tip of their neighbour's mast could be seen.

Some hard work lay ahead when they set out at what they thought was 5 am on the Thursday, because they were now heading up the Sound of Mull into the wind. In fact their watch had stopped and they had slept for 13 hours which was hardly surprising considering the previous 3 days sailing. They had reached Tobermory which is where that they discovered that it was 6 pm and not 11.30 am. They took a chance and decided to sail on in a calm moonlit night and catch up as much time as they could, and in spite of some alarms they did make up time, although they lost the moon sometime before they found a landing place in the dark in Loch Cuin to spend the Thursday night. Friday morning was very hard going in conditions made rough by a strong flood tide running against a stiff breeze "the most perplexing and fatiguing sea it had ever been our lot to face" was how John Ferguson described it. However, things improved for a time in the afternoon and the canoes managed to sail into Fingal's Cave at Staffa, before heading for Iona driven along in a rising sea. With the wind behind them they made the 7 mile crossing from Staffa to Iona in 50 minutes. Having arrived on Iona on the Friday evening – a week after leaving Rosneath – they made it their headquarters for the next 3-4 days of cruising about the Ross of Mull and up Loch Scridain before sailing back to Greenock on board the "Dunvegan Castle" with the canoes stowed in the ships life-boats. They finished their 400 mile journey with a flourish – a sail round the Channel Fleet anchored at the Tail of the Bank before heading back to the clubhouse Rosneath.

## 10. To Arran

A second group of canoes, Bowieknives, Bothnia and Shirrtails, were heading to the island of Arran from Tighnabruaich on the Monday morning. They stopped first at Ardlamont Point where the West Kyle meets Loch Fyne, for a swim and lunch. Leaving Ardlamont about 2 pm they lowered the sail and paddled into the wind at a speedy rate of 4 miles an hour reaching Loch Ranza about 4 pm in the afternoon. On their arrival on Arran they were greeted by a group of young ladies, and struck up a conversation with them. The girls seemed quite impressed by the canoes and the canoeists, so another positive aspect to canoe sailing had been identified – it attracted the ladies.

Tuesday was spent walking in the rain on Arran but two of them had to be back in Helensburgh on Wednesday evening. On Wednesday they sailed from Lochranza round to Corrie for lunch, after which two headed back up the Clyde past the Isle of Bute, and one sailed southwards on the short trip to Brodick. The homeward-bound sailors reached Helensburgh about 10.30 pm, which again seems a very respectable time for an Arran – Helensburgh sail.

## 11. The Public Reaction to the Canoes and Canoeists

These early trips attracted great public attention wherever they visited, because no one had seen small craft like these before. Crowds on passing steamers either waved to them or just stood in dumb amazement. Even the Duke and Duchess of Argyll in their steam yacht "Columba" passing the Iona-bound canoes off Lismore waved handkerchiefs and raised their hats. Fishermen always asked if there was any room for anyone in steerage. However, it was on dry land that the deepest impressions were made. At Tarbert Loch Fyne people, particularly young people, crowded round to see the canoes and lend a hand in beaching and portaging them. The same was true at Tayvallich. At Tobermory things were taken even further. Ferguson says "The whole population seemed to have turned out to see us start and all the juveniles in the place escorted us out of the bay as far as the road went, where they gave three ringing cheers by way of farewell".

However, the people of Iona seem to have best expressed everyone's reaction on first seeing these small one man canoes haul up on their beaches. Although they were well used to visitors arriving at their little island in all sorts of yachts and steam launches they were astonished to see the small one-man canoes which landed at the east of the island having paddled from Glasgow. One of the Ionans reported: "On the news of their arrival spreading, young and old hastened to the beach to these aquatic curiosities. Gulliver's boat was an object of no greater interest to the Lilliputians

than these strange craft to the Ionans". He noted the seaworthiness of not only the craft but the canoeists themselves. He concludes "It was a rare sight to see them set out from Iona on the return voyage via Oban, with a strong breeze of southerly wind rising and with much coolness and courage as if they were on board the "Pioneer" (a David Hutcheson & Company steamer in 1874; the Company became David McBrayne in 1879). The small fleet, as seen paddling through the Sound called to mind the South Sea Savages paying friendly visits to the adjacent islands. One and all wished them Godspeed and a safe return to the arms of their friends."

From being chatted up by girls on Arran to being compared to Gulliver and South Sea Savages on the historic island of Iona, what more could the CCC members ask for. In their first year of cruising they had certainly made a considerable visual impact with the public at large. Amongst a more discerning section of the public, those such as sailors with a knowledge of boats and the sea, their daring, courage, ability to handle difficult sea conditions and all round seamanship was not only noted but admired. That the canoes could handle these conditions also surprised most that saw them for the first time, but boded well for the future of canoe sailing. So it was no surprise when in the summer of the following year, 1875, some of the members set out on even more adventurous trips.

## 12. Adrishaig to Portree July 1875

This 11 day trip started on Tuesday 6th July 1875 when three members of the Club stowed their canoes on the David Hutcheson paddle steamer "Iona" at Greenock and set sail for Ardrishaig, which they reached



A later trip by the club through the Crinnan Canal, 1905.

about 1 pm. They were James Wyper (in the Ranger), Tom or George Whitelaw (Rambler) and John Allan (Mopoon). They were heading for Portree on Skye but had decided to save themselves the long trip round the Mull of Kintyre or the portage at Tarbert, Loch Fyne by taking the short cut through the Crinan Canal, although it was a pretty monotonous 9 mile paddle in a canoe. Having camped at Crinan on the Tuesday night they set off at 7 am on the haul up to Oban and beyond. They followed a slightly different course which two of them, Whitelaw and Allan had taken the previous year en route to Iona. Although they reached Oban about 7 pm they only paused to stock up before heading to Dunstaffnage to camp overnight.

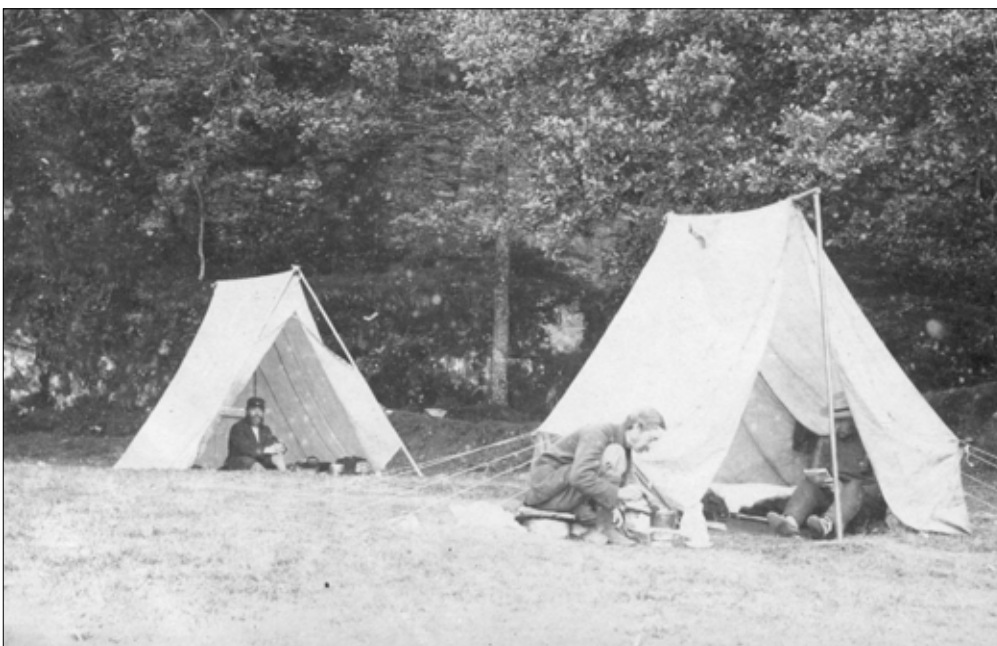
Thursday was another long haul, this time into new



Club members: W. Smith and G. Y. King, c.1880. Canoes beached where they could land and tents pitched for a night under canvas.

territory sailing up the Firth of Lorn and Loch Linnhe to Fort William, which they reached about 9 pm but crossed to the other shore to camp, probably at the mouth of Loch Eil. They were now heading up Loch Eil to portage into the fresh water Loch Sheil then south west down that loch to leave it again via the river Sheil back to the sea at Loch Moidart. This was definitely the scenic route taking in Bonnie Prince Charlie's monument at Glenfinnan (although not the railway viaduct because that wasn't built until 1897-1901), classic Highland scenery of glens and mountains and eventually the historic Castle Tioram.

Although storm-bound for a couple of days they made it to Arisaig by the Tuesday. They stayed at Arisaig overnight and then on Wednesday they crossed to Skye but had to land at Armadale for a while since they could make no headway against a strong wind in the Sound of Sleat. Eventually keeping very close to the shore they crept up to Isle Ornsay where they spent the night. Thursday was their last and longest day in the canoes as they paddled and sailed to Portree via Kyle of Lochalsh, Kyleakin where they landed, and the Isle of Rasaay where they also landed. Having to catch the steamer in Portree at 6 am on the Friday they decided to paddle through the night arriving in Portree just as the sun was rising. The sail back to Greenock from Portree took from 6 am on the Friday until noon on the Saturday, and after docking at Greenock they put the canoes in the water and paddled back to the Rosneath clubhouse, arriving there at 1 pm on Saturday 17th July 1875, after the 200 mile paddle and sail into more new waters.



(photo c.1880) Horatio Bromhead, far tent, with W. Smith and G.Y. King have set up camp on one of their trips.

### 13. Outer Hebrides Cruise July 1875

All of the trips which the Club had taken out into the open sea had included elements of exploration, adventure, risk-taking and danger. They were going where no one had gone before in craft of similarly flimsy construction – or if they had, they certainly hadn't left any record of it. The best written information available to them came from tide tables and nautical charts which were designed for large and studier ships. These charts were reasonably accurate, but not perfect – small discrepancies continued to be found even on the Admiralty Chart of Loch Lomond which resulted from a survey conducted in 1861 after the steamers *Pilot* and *Prince of Wales* had “discovered” the rocks which bear their names in July and September 1860 respectively. Therefore on all their cruises Club members sought and were readily given, where it was available in English, local knowledge from fishermen and crofters. Everywhere they relied on that local information but perhaps nowhere more so than on their trip to the Outer Hebrides and some of the more northern Inner Hebrides in July 1875. This was of necessity because much of the journey involved portage on Lewis and the Uists over land, and paddling in Lochs, streams and burns where written information was lacking.

This was their most ambitious journey so far, going well beyond waters in which they had already sailed, and also planning routes which looked feasible on maps and charts but which often turned out to be either impossible or too dangerous to tackle. The four canoeists who started this cruise were certainly pushing to the limit MacGregor's aim of sailing to places for which no guide book had been written, although even he probably didn't face the challenges that the three CCC members faced in July 1875. This is just a brief synopsis of the trip which is covered in some detail in “Over the Sea to Skye”, but hopefully it conveys a feel for the dangers which were never far away and the skill with which these dangers were overcome. Reading John Ferguson's account of their journey, one is struck by just how laid back he is in telling of his and his companions' experiences, managing to give the impression that while they were occasionally frustrated they were never frightened. Maybe they weren't, but anyone reading Ferguson's story even at the remove of over 130 years is very glad that it wasn't themselves in the canoes off the Uists or Skye. It's a Scottish adventure yarn which still commands our wonder and respect.

Four canoes set out on Thursday 15th July 1875 on the SS *Clansman* from Greenock to Stornoway, so there was a couple of days overlap with the other group who set out for Portree on July 6th.

The canoes heading for Stornoway were Locheil (with Mr Robinson on board), Bothnia (Charles King who penned a short account of the cruise), Dolphin (Wilfrid Smith) and Lark (John Ferguson, who wrote the most detailed account of the trip, as he had the previous year on the journey to Iona). It was a 2 day sail on the *Clansman* from the Clyde to Stornoway, and when they arrived they caused the sort of stir which they had already experienced everywhere else in the past year. The Lewis people were naturally curious about the canoes and crowded round as they prepared to go afloat, but what caught Ferguson's attention perhaps more than that was the exclusive use of the Gaelic language. This was as much a trip into an unknown land as it was into unknown seas and the cultural clash which Ferguson records is striking evidence of how little the rest of Scotland knew about the islanders way of life at that time.

The first cultural surprise wasn't long in coming, quickly followed by a few navigational ones. Sailing out of Stornoway harbour on the Saturday afternoon they turned sharp right down the east coast of Lewis heading for Loch Erisort from where their plan called for a portage over to Loch Seaforth, cutting out a long sail under unremitting cliffs with no landing place. After a few miles sailing westwards in Loch Erisort they pitched camp on an island for the night, and the next day being Sunday they did not sail, which seems to have been a Club custom anyway, but would have been de rigeur in Lewis. Instead, they paddled over to a village on the shores of the Loch where they found that only one person seemed to speak English. They were made very welcome and invited into a house, a typical Hebridean black house which now survive only as museum pieces, but of which there were still a few on the west coast of Lewis as recently as the 1970's. They were stunned by the interior conditions; the house was half byre and half living accommodation for the crofter and his family, thatched roof, earth floor with doors but no windows and the fire in the middle of the room which made the interiors sooty - hence the name “black house”. Entering the house via the byre, they were immediately taken aback not so much by the soot and gloom as by the manure underfoot and the overpowering stench from manure and the animals. They got out of the house as quickly as they could and never entered another one.

The next day they pressed on westward towards the head of Loch Erisort and at its head made the 4 mile portage into Loch Seaforth. On the map Loch Seaforth looked to be a straightforward large sea-loch, but the reality turned out to be a wee bit



Thatched black house, this one photographed near Fort William, c1905.

different. The water between their launch point and the open Loch consisted of dangerous tidal rapids in a neck of the Loch and great care was required to travel the short distance into the wider Seaforth. This comparatively short passage was more dangerous and harder work than they anticipated and although they didn't know it, it was something of a harbinger for some of the challenges which awaited them on the islands. The first one which they encountered when they stopped for lunch on the shores of Seaforth was the ferocity of the local midges and clegs and their unceasing attacks. Much relieved to get out onto the broad expanse of Loch Seaforth they headed south for Tarbert on Harris, noting as they sailed that the shores of the Loch had been totally cleared of people to make way for large sheep stations and deer forests. Although most people in Scotland had heard of the Highland Clearances by this time, almost no one outside the Highlands and Islands had actually seen their impact for themselves, and Ferguson was particularly struck by the landlord-made emptiness.

The Tarbert Hotel was their lodgings for two nights and while there they did some hill walking which gave them the chance to see St Kilda 40 miles to the west for the first, but not the last time. Wednesday saw them afloat again, sailing down the east coast of Harris and then across the Sound of Harris to North Uist. The highlight of this 9 hour paddle in waters which can be treacherous but which were favourable that day was an encounter with a shoal of about 30 Bottlenose whales. The whales were heading due north in what seemed to the canoeists to be a straight line, while they were heading south. Never having met a shoal of whales before they didn't know what to expect; even a harmless flick of the tail by one of them would have smashed the canoes to smithereens. So they stopped while the whales came straight at the canoes in an undeviating line and soon the canoes were surrounded. Some headed at the canoes, but as they approached,

they dived under the craft, coming up again a couple of yards beyond. Mightily impressed at this show from nature and even more mightily relieved that they had suffered no mishap they completed the paddle into Loch Maddy in North Uist where they camped.

At this point Mr Robinson in Locheil had to leave to return to Glasgow and he caught the steamer from Lochmaddy town to Skye from where he connected with a Clyde-bound steamer. The other 3 were about to embark on the most challenging part of the cruise, one which had looked quite feasible on paper but which turned out to be much more arduous than anticipated. They proposed to avoid an exposed stretch of the Minch by taking to the fresh water, which lies to the west of Eaval the highest mountain in North Uist, in order reach the North Ford and so to the Atlantic side of Benbecula. Leaving Lochmaddy the trio ventured down the Minch coast and through the narrow entrance to Loch Eport, from where at high tide they pulled their craft up the burn exiting from the fresh water Loch Obisary, down which they sailed before a stiff breeze past Eaval to make camp at its southern end. They were now in a remote part where no carts were available, so in the morning the canoes had to be portaged by dragging them one at a time over the heather and bog to the salt water again at the head of Loch Eaval, not much more than half a mile away. An idea of the difficulties encountered in this process can be gained from the fact that it took six hours to complete the portage!

It was 4 pm on Friday before they reached the Sound of Benbecula between the south-east of North Uist and north-east Benbecula. At that point they turned west wards to paddle through the North Ford, which is to-day crossed by a causeway, and into the Atlantic. The water they found there was certainly not to their liking: nothing but rocks, islands, shallows and sandbars. They had to sail another 2 hours out in the open Atlantic before they found a scrap of beach on which to camp.

Most of the inhabitants of Benbecula seem to have turned out to see them, but no one spoke English. The people were very keen to see the canoes and equipment and were still milling about outside the tent, tripping over guy ropes long after the canoeists and retired for the night. They were storm bound on Benbecula for most of the next day, but in the late afternoon the weather improved just enough to let them make a quick dash for the South Ford between Benbecula and South Uist past bad shoals and rocks which made it a very dangerous place to be in the rough seas. In deteriorating weather and a dropping tide they just made it to a sheltered bay on the shores of Loch Carnan which lies immediately to the eastern end of the South

Ford on the north-east coast of South Uist. They camped there overnight and next day they paddled about 5 miles further south on South Uist's east coast, to a beach just to the south of Ushnish Point. It had been a very tough and dangerous couple of days and perhaps they had tasted some fear and doubt because Ferguson vowed never to go back onto the Atlantic side of these islands ever again, a vow which he had no difficulty in keeping, brave man though he showed himself to be.

Things didn't get much better at Ushnish – they were storm bound there, but at least there was the Ushnish Point lighthouse nearby and they managed to get some biscuits there to top up their food stocks. This was a Stevenson lighthouse which had only been operating since 1857 so was relatively new when they visited it. More important than the biscuits was the barometric information which the lighthouse keeper could give them. He told them that the barometric pressure had been rising for 3 successive days; this information plus the small white clouds on the horizon suggested improving weather and the chance to get afloat again.

So on the Monday they were raring to go, but the question was where should they sail to? It had been intended to finish the cruise at Lochboisdale on South Uist, only 12 miles south of Ushnish, but no steamer would call there for a week. So they decided to head directly across the Minch to Skye rather than spend a week sailing around South Uist. An indication of just how keen they were to get away from the Outer Hebrides was that they set sail at 6 o'clock on the Monday evening to paddle across the Minch.

They were aiming for a landfall at "McLeod's Maidens" on the north west coast of Skye – 24 miles away – and then into Loch Bracadale to camp. It got dark about 10.30 and they had to light their lamps because there were steamers passing up and down the Minch. After midnight they paddled into



Seil Bridge, 1905.

Loch Bracadale, but it offered no landing place, just sheer cliffs, so they had to push on another 6 miles into Loch Roag to find a beach on which they could land and camp. They went ashore just before dawn, having sailed through the night from South Uist.

On the Tuesday after a short sleep they walked over the hill to Dunvegan to buy provisions and then decided to rest for the day to recover from the previous day and night's efforts. However, the weather closed in again and they found themselves unable to leave Loch Bracadale for a couple of days. Perhaps out of frustration and against their own better judgement they decided to make a break for it at 4 am on the Friday. This proved to be a foolhardy and almost disastrous move. The seas were very rough and came close to swamping them – perhaps the most worrying moment was when Dolphin's boom snapped. They had to stop to bail the boat, but by 11 in the morning, after 7 hours and 22 miles of very hard work they made it to the island of Soay at the southern end of Skye, where they pitched camp, dried out and decided what to do next.



Typical west coast terrain, Bagh Ban, Loch Craignish.

Ever since leaving South Uist on the Monday they had been "off plan" and making things up as they went along; Saturday on Soay was another day for devising a new "best plan" in the prevailing circumstances. Charles King, who had plenty of time to spare, decided that he would stay around southern Skye to do some further exploring and walking. Ferguson and Smith needed to get home and they decided to head for the nearest port with a steamer connection to Greenock. This proved to be Tobermory on the island of Mull, to the south. So they set off on the Saturday to island-hop to Mull. They made Rhum in less than 3 hours from Soay but then had to take shelter from the wind before paddling to Eigg which they reached at 7pm. Ardnamurchan Point was the next target and although it was reached at 9.30 in the evening, they decided to stay afloat and seek the calmer waters of the Sound of Mull. So another night sail



Dunollie Castle, nr Oban, 1905.

beckoned and they slowly paddled the 16 miles to Tobermory which they reached about 3 am on the Sunday morning. All in all they had paddled 47 miles in their day and night sail from Soay to Tobermory. Having secured their canoes on the harbour quay to await the steamer they headed to the Mishnish Hotel for breakfast. They seem to have had to wait a few days for a steamer to Greenock via Oban because although King spent another 3-4 days around Skye he was only 1 day behind them in returning to the Clubhouse at Rosneath.

Ferguson sums it all up “Here at last was the termination of our cruise after 250 miles of paddling and sailing and a fortnight under canvas, our only regrets that we had not time to continue it for another week or two. Almost unknown parts of Scotland had been seen as few people ever see them; the lochs, channels, fords and inland lakes, which before were but names on the chart to us had been thoroughly explored, while the canoes had faced heavy seas and all kinds of hard weather in a way which few people would believe possible.”

In these two years 1874 and 1875 the CCC members had proved their own strength of character and adventure, skill and courage and the also the sturdiness and adaptability of the canoes.

## 14. Racing Competitions

Although these cruises attracted most of the newspaper coverage, the other activity of the Club – canoe sailing races – continued in a racing season which ran from late April / early May until September (cruising continued through the winter). The club stalwarts all took part in the racing, and the same canoes which went on the cruises can usually be found amongst the leaders of the races, but racing doesn't seem to have been as popular as cruising. Perhaps to attract greater numbers, a race, which was held on a Saturday, was usually rounded off by a club sailing cruise in the evening. Nevertheless competition amongst the participants was pretty fierce, with each owner proud of the capabilities of his own canoe. Another feature of the races with which any of to-day's sailing competitors will feel right at home was protests about race results being made to the race committee.

The races were held on different courses, chosen on the day depending on tide and wind, and indeed they could be changed during a race by the Commodore moving the position of his boat, most probably because of a change in the wind.



On the Clyde.

The courses were sometimes in the Gareloch and sometimes in the Clyde. Gareloch courses were typically in the area Clynder / Shandon / Blairvaddich. Those on the Clyde were a bit more varied but usually started at the Green Isle Buoy and took in marks at Ashton Shore at Gourock and Cove, or used HMS *Aurora*, a wooden steam powered frigate moored just off Greenock between 1874 and 1877 when she served as the Coastguard depot ship. The length of the courses varied between 5 miles (the races



around HMS *Aurora*) and about 10 miles (Green Isle buoy / Ashton / Cove / Green Isle). The duration depended not only on the distance to be sailed but also wind and tide and race times therefore varied from about 3 hours to over 5.

The first Canoe Club trophy of which we have knowledge is The Ardencaple Cup which was presented to the winner of the Rob Roy Canoe Race at the Gareloch Regatta in 1868. In 1875 Mr R. Rule put up a trophy – The Challenge Cup – for a race. It was a water jug made from gilt and silver and was first awarded for a race in the Gareloch in August 1875, which was won by John Ferguson in the Lark. This was quite a triumph for Ferguson because not only was he and the Lark just back from the arduous Outer Hebrides tour, but his design of the Lark had come in for a good deal of scepticism about its speed and he was delighted to prove his point.

For the 1876 racing season a classification system depending on canoe size was introduced with separate races for small and big boats. A handicap system was also introduced which was determined by how much canvas each canoe was using. The intention was obviously to make the races fairer but another reason may well have been to try to attract more competitors into the races. At the start of season 1875 club membership had shot up to 42



Ardencaple Cup, 1868.

members who owned 44 canoes; however, the typical numbers entering the Club races ranged from 5 to 9 showing beyond doubt that at this time it was canoe cruising which was attracting members and not racing.

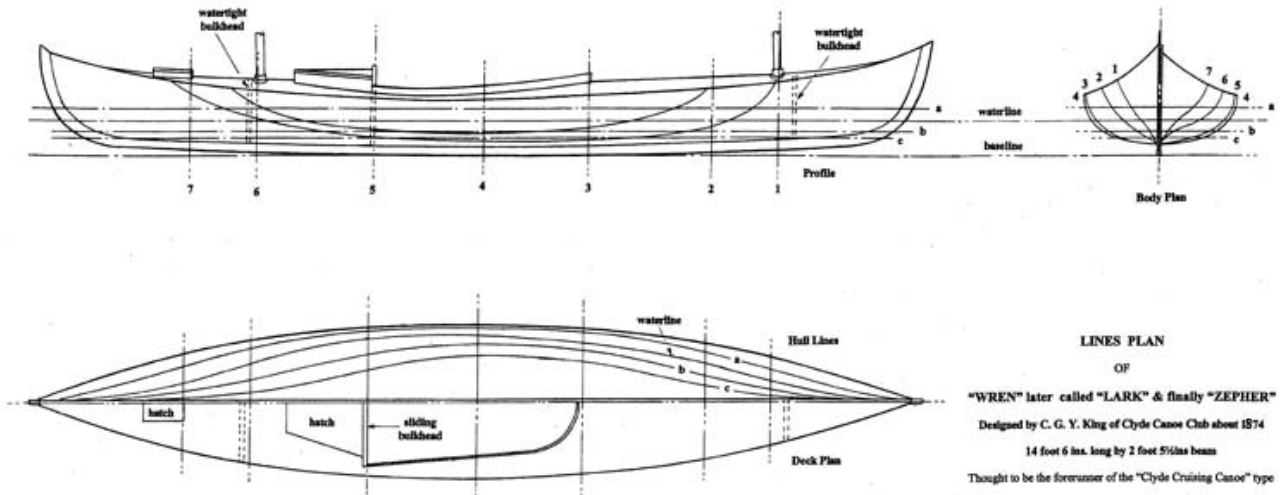
## 15. The Canoes 1873–1893

The first list of the names of the founder members' canoes dates from 1877–78 so we do not know who, if anyone, actually owned a canoe when the Club was founded in 1873. However, thanks to Dixon Kemp's "A Manual of Yacht and Boat Sailing" (1886) we get a pretty good idea of what canoes were available and how some of the founder members went about acquiring new canoes for themselves. He says "Prior to the establishment of the Clyde Canoe Club in 1874 there was no settled class of canoe on northern waters, and Rob Roys were the only craft in which any cruising was done". The early Club canoes proved to be eminently suitable for Scottish waters. Not only were they comparatively water-proof and robust, but they could attain speeds of up to 6–7 miles an hour with the wind dead astern and sail hoisted. Also, a considerable amount of gear could be carried in them for longer trips. True, they did have limitations: they were really just paddling canoes in which a very small sail could be raised when going down wind and their owners motto was "sail when you can and paddle when you must".

We're not quite sure who designed and built all of the first Club canoes, but we do know that John Ferguson of Larkfield, Partick, designed a very fast one which he called appropriately enough the Lark. The Club still owns the canoe which is believed to be the Lark. Of the others Kemp says that in 1874 Rambler was built from a design in Baden Powell's book "Canoe Travelling" and Mapoon (his spelling), Bothnia and Wren followed on from there. Although Kemp says that the design for the Wren can't be taken as a typical Clyde canoe, but is just one of many, he says elsewhere that the Wren was indeed the basis for the design of what became known as the "Clyde Canoe". Its design is usually credited to its owner who was also the Club's furthest-flung member, the above-mentioned Charles G. Y. King, whose address in 1877–78 is given as Liverpool. We also know that McAlisters, boatbuilders at Dumbarton, built canoes for some members.

The Wren featured in almost all the notable early journey's and was regarded as a fast boat in the Club's races, so its prominent position in the early years of the Club make it worth taking a look at its salient design features which are:

Length 14ft 6 inches, beam 2ft 5½ inches, depth 10 inches. Like all the early canoes she was clinker built, with ¼ inch planks and the mahogany decking is also ¼ inches thick. Watertight bulkheads fore and aft, mainmast is stepped 2ft 6 inches from the perpendicular of the bow, and mizzen 3ft 6 inches from the perpendicular of the stern.



Boat Tent on Nellie.

## 16. Decline

The period after this first flush of enthusiasm was one of gradual decline. By 1885, 89 people had joined the Club since 1873, but in 1885 only 6 ordinary members had paid their subscription – the membership of the 83 others had lapsed. Peter Turner in his record of the early years speculates on this decline: “We can only guess at this lack of support. Canoeing with no protective clothing must have been a cold and wet sport, and only the few dedicated members kept the Club alive“. Three new members joined the Club in 1885, but it was obvious that something would have to be done or the end was near. The committee acted pretty decisively both in terms of the types of sailing the Club would offer henceforth and also in terms of spending money.

In 1886 they changed the name of the Club to “The Clyde Canoe and Lugsail Club” and that same year the Club commissioned G. L. Watson of Glasgow to design and build for them three sturdy sailing boats in which new members could learn to sail without spending most of their time in the water. These boats made a piece of history because they are thought to be the first “one design” class of yachts ever built. In 1886 George Lennox Watson had been in business for 13 years, but was still only 35 years of age. He was already recognised as just about the leading yacht designer in the world and the following year in 1887 he designed the first of his 4 America’s Cup challengers, The Thistle, which was owned by a Scottish consortium which included James Coats. In 1893 he designed HMY Britannia for the Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII. As well as the Coats family other Scottish clients of G.L. Watson included Sir Thomas Lipton (America’s Cup challenger Shamrock II was a Watson yacht) and Charles Lindsay Orr-Ewing, later an MP, and a member of a Vale of Leven family who made considerable money from their textile dyeing and printing company: Charles was at this time still living at Lennoxbank House, Dalvait Road, Balloch - just 600 yards downstream on the River Leven from where the CCC set up their second clubhouse on the Leven’s banks in 1904. Watson’s international clients included the Vanderbilt’s and Wilhelm II, the German Emperor. So the CCC was keeping good company, but in case it appears that Watson just took this order to keep James Coats happy, he did many small boat designs for customers – for instance from 1887 onwards he was the consulting naval architect for the RNLI.

These boats were 19ft overall length, 6ft 5 inches beam and 4ft draft. The total cost for the 3 was £101, plus £12 12s for sails and £15 for gear



The Enid, similar design to a red, white and blue beached for painting.

and moorings. When it came to naming them, a certain lack of imagination crept in and they were called Red, White and Blue. Since there wasn’t space for them in the Clubhouse they were stored at McAlister’s yard at Dumbarton over the winter months, which was quite appropriate since that was where they were built. A half model of what is believed to be these craft still exists. It is now in the possession of G. L. Watson but was previously hung in the Royal Thames Yacht Club in London in the company of models of many famous yachts. (See photograph of the half model.)

This investment must have seemed to have paid off for a time because over the next 3 years 32 new members joined the Club and by 1891 the fully paid up membership had increased to 21, a number which was maintained until 1893. Watson himself joined the Club in 1889, membership number 120, perhaps as an honorary member.



Half model of a red, white and blue.

## 17. Disbanded 1893

However, running expenses had increased and although income stood at £58 for the year 1893, the Club Treasurer estimated that the Club would be £5 in debt at the year end. For this apparently paltry sum (in today's money) it was decided to disband the Club. All the assets were sold – boats, club canoes, the Rosneath Clubhouse, everything. The boats were bought by Royal West of Scotland Amateur Boat Club across the water in Greenock, who also offered full membership facilities to all paid up members of the Clyde Canoe and Lugsail Club. And that was that as far as the Clyde Canoe Club was concerned, in 1893 after 20 years of sailing it ceased to exist at Rosneath.



The Petrel just off Helenburgh 1899

The Yachtsman magazine of June 1893, however, reported that the headquarters of the Clyde Canoe Club had moved to Helenburgh which was where many of its members lived according to the magazine. Nothing more is heard of this move and perhaps it was an informal arrangement by members who lived in Helenburgh before moving on to Loch Lomond. The Helenburgh Regatta in the summer of 1898, by which time the CCC had been revived, included rowing races, which were described as the main draw for the crowds, as well as yacht races, but there is no mention of canoes or canoe sailing at the Regatta.

## 18. Canoe Visitors to Loch Lomond

The CCC may have disbanded in 1893, but elsewhere in Great Britain canoeing and canoe sailing had retained its popularity. Loch Lomond, a favoured destination for the founders of the CCC from 1874 onwards, had been discovered by many others from further afield. P. J. G. Ransom in his book "Loch Lomond and the Trossachs in History and Legend" (2004) quotes at length from the touring canoeist's Bible of the day, Prothero & Clark's "A New Oarsman's Guide to the Rivers of Great Britain and Ireland" published in 1896. They describe the Loch as a "paddler's paradise" which offers the paddler and camper "an ideal cruising ground, which for size, beauty, safety and accessibility is unequalled by any other British fresh-water lake."

They advise canoeists to take the train to Balloch rather than Balloch Pier since it is easier to launch the canoes into the River Leven by enlisting the help of the local boat builder, Mr Lynn, who "will attend, if communicated with". Inchmurrin should be their first stop where the keeper can supply milk and any other "little necessities", and where they may get permission to camp. From Inchmurrin to Ross Point is ideal sailing with low islands and plenty of wind; north of there is the "gloomy grandeur of a Highland Loch". The book describes portage arrangements at Tarbet – 3/6d for a horse and cart to take them to Arrochar and Loch Long, although they make it clear that if a Three Loch Tour is wanted, it is much better to do it in the opposite direction and start out at Balloch by sailing down the river to the Clyde. In fact the Leven gets a section of the book to itself. So by the time that the CCC was being revived in 1898 the Loch was well to the fore in canoeists' minds.



Typical horse and cart for hire, c.1900.

## 19. Revival 1898

Although the CCC had disbanded in 1893, interest in canoeing had survived on the Clyde, particularly in Glasgow. There, David McLure Yuile was building his first sailing canoe, *Ludith*, in 1895–6, and he launched it at Millport in 1895 and onto the Clyde at Glasgow Green in 1896. The Green was a popular boating venue for Glaswegians for over 100 years. It is still home to a number of Glasgow rowing clubs, while as recently as the 1950's Ben Parsonage of Glasgow Humane Society rented out rowing boats on the Green, just as Lynn and Sweeney did on the Leven. Fifty or so years earlier it was even busier and when David Yuile took to the water he was soon seen by T. Spence who had also built his own canoe called the *Petrel* and by J. A. MacNeill who had built the first of the canoes which he called *Colonsay*. Naturally enough they got together and they decided to take their canoes away from the Green (Yuile had stored his at Geddes' boatyard) and head for the cleaner and more challenging waters of Loch Lomond. They came down to Balloch, probably in 1897, and stored their canoes in a shed at Lynn's boatyard on the west bank of the River Leven, which backed onto the Balloch Central railway station's goods yard, perhaps taking a leaf out of Prothero & Clark's book.

None of these three had previously been members of the CCC, but they were very much involved in its revival and its management in the coming years. The revival was triggered by a notice which appeared in the *Glasgow Herald* on 24th and 26th January 1898, headed simply "Clyde Canoe Club" (the "Lugsail" had been dropped from the title and never re-appeared). It said that a meeting of the members of the Club would be held within the chambers of Boyes and Ferguson, Writers, 104

West George Street Glasgow on Friday January 28th, 1898 at 6 pm.

That evening the Clyde Canoe Club was reborn and has been going strong ever since, albeit with a change of name in 1999. The meeting appointed a founder member of the Club, Horatio K. Bromhead, as Commodore and a Committee was formed. Although born in Bristol, in 1838, Bromhead had moved to Glasgow in 1859 and shortly thereafter he set up his own architect's practice in which he remained active until his retirement about 1925. He was a lifelong bachelor and was very well connected in the Glasgow social scene being a member of the New Club, the Imperial Union Club, the Royal Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts on whose council he served from its inception as well as various architects' bodies. Not only had he been a founder member of the CCC he was also a life member of the Royal Western Yacht Club and a member of the Royal Canoe Club at Teddington. So the revived Club had a pretty well connected person at its head. The minute of that first meeting (see the accompanying image of the hand-written minute of the meeting of 28th January 1898) records that in his introductory remarks Horatio Bromhead said "the present meeting had been called on account of a strong desire having manifested itself on the part of some of the younger members of the community to take an active part in canoeing". The quaintness of the language only reminds us of how long ago it was. The Committee drew up a new constitution and a set of rules as well as a new financial structure for the Club. A dark blue Club burgee was adopted showing a paddle and the letters "CCC" – it was based on the original Club burgee with a couple of additions – and the Club decided that from now on its base would be Loch Lomond.



Colonsay and skipper, J. A. MacNeill, Inchcailloch Bay, 1900.



River Leven 1900, taken from Balloch Pier.

At Glasgow and within the  
Chambers of Messrs Boyes & Ferguson  
Writers, 104 West George Street, Glasgow  
upon Friday the 28<sup>th</sup> day of January  
1898 met the following members of  
the Clyde Canoe Club in General  
meeting, called by special advertisement  
inserted in the Glasgow Herald  
on 24<sup>th</sup> 26<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> inst.

Present: Horatio K. Bromhead.  
J. J. G. Boyes  
A. L. Miller  
J. A. Lillie.

The meeting unanimously called Mr. Bromhead to  
the chair, who explained fully the position of the Club  
and that the present meeting had been called on account  
of a strong desire having manifested itself, on the part  
of some of the younger members of the community to take  
an active part in canoeing.

It was unanimously agreed that the entry money  
to the club should in the meantime be five shillings and  
the annual subscription five shillings.

The following new members were admitted to the Club viz.  
Frederick V. Burke, Architect, 219 Hope Street, Glasgow.  
Thomas Spence 39 Cambridge Street, Glasgow.  
David Yuille 158 Hill Street, Glasgow.  
Harry W. Yuille 158 Hill Street, Glasgow.  
James Stewart, Builder, 212 West Regent Street, Glasgow.  
Adam R. Waite, 5 Waterloo Street, Glasgow.  
James A. McCall, Barrowfield House, Glasgow  
David McCallum, 2 White Horse Street, Glasgow

Part of the first minute of reconstituted club, 1898.