The Sailing History of Lough Erne

by Michael Clarke

The Sailing Maguires

The Erne's sailing story begins with the Maguires. Five and six centuries ago, they ruled Fermanagh from Enniskillen Castle with a fleet that dominated their waterways. 'A forest of boat masts is on the Erne' declared one fifteenth century poet. Another, in the sixteenth, Tadhg O'Higgins described the 'strand beside the castle crowded with such a grove of tapering ship masts that they concealed the beach and its waves'. He extolled not only their sailing boats but also their cultural and sporting lifestyle. Overstretched, probably too far, this might tempt the thought that the Maguires and Enniskillen Castle were Ireland's first yachtsmen and yacht club.

A Maguire coat of arms, visible today on a Devenish gravestone, depicts a sailing boat with sloped masts that suggest the sprit sail rig that was used at that time across Northern Europe. Sprit sails were traditional on small working boats on the Erne until outboard motors came into widespread use.

The belief that the Maguires built planked boats, and made oars, spars and sails is supported by another reference by O'Higgins to 'a company of artificers binding vessels'. The Maguires were not alone in this. For example, late in that era, Grace O'Malley roamed the west with her fleet of galleys, also under oar and sail, but larger than the Maguires' lake boats. Other Gaelic clans built similar fleets along Ireland's and Scotland's

Atlantic coasts. They traded as far as Spain, all part of a strong Gaelic maritime tradition. Notably, as their era closed, it was The Maguire who organised the Flight of the Earls in a Breton ship from Lough Swilly down Ireland's west coast in 1607.

Maguire's plans were thwarted by a weakness in sailing and navigation technologies at that time. Contrary winds diverted the ship to the Seine estuary. They needed to go to Spain, to the south. But the wind changed, and blew from the south. Their ship could go back north before the wind. With the south wind abeam, she could go west, or go east, which she did, to the Seine along a coast familiar to her Breton captain in those days before charts. But she could not go southward, against that wind and across the Bay of Biscay to Spain, where her passengers needed the King's help.

In that century's final decade, wind, an east wind, again affected Ireland's history. William's fleet was welcomed in the rebel south-west of England. It had an easy voyage, west from Holland with an east wind pressing behind. And a safe voyage, because the King's navy, up the Thames, could not get out westward against that east wind to attack. Outflanked, James fled to loyal Ireland. William's fleet followed to land at Carrickfergus. James lost at the Boyne. His loyal Irish fought on. They lost and sailed away from Limerick. That east wind's effect on history is with us to this day.

Peace and Pleasure Boats

The William and James war over, peace brought prosperity and population growth to Fermanagh. William Henry's account of Lough Erne, a voyage in words everywhere along both lakes and their rivers in the early 1700s, mentioned the recent war and Big Houses, built now for elegance not defence, and many with pleasure boats. Belleisle had a 'quay where used to ride all kinds of pleasant boats' and Belturbet a long canal where 'small pleasuring yachts ride at anchor'. Knockninny quay had a well of clear spring water nearby. Company 'pleasuring on the Lough' retired to this fountain for their entertainments, sitting around on benches made of sod and shaded by aquatic trees.

Clearance of undergrowth and soil near Castle Caldwell recently revealed what looks like stone foundations for similar lake-side seating. There, back in 1776, Arthur Young praised 'the most glorious scenes I ever beheld'. He voyaged to Enniskillen in Sir James Caldwell's six-oared barge with colours flying and band playing. Today, forlorn and moss-eaten, the Fiddle Stone, Sir James's memorial to his favourite fiddler in that band, lies by an old railway bridge on the roadside, far from its original stand on Rossergole, overlooking

the lake where he fell in from that barge. In 1999, Horace Fleming wrote, 'fifty years ago every word of the inscription was clearly legible – because I photographed it. Now perhaps half is legible. Surely this stone is worth preserving'. The Fiddle Stone should be in the Museum.

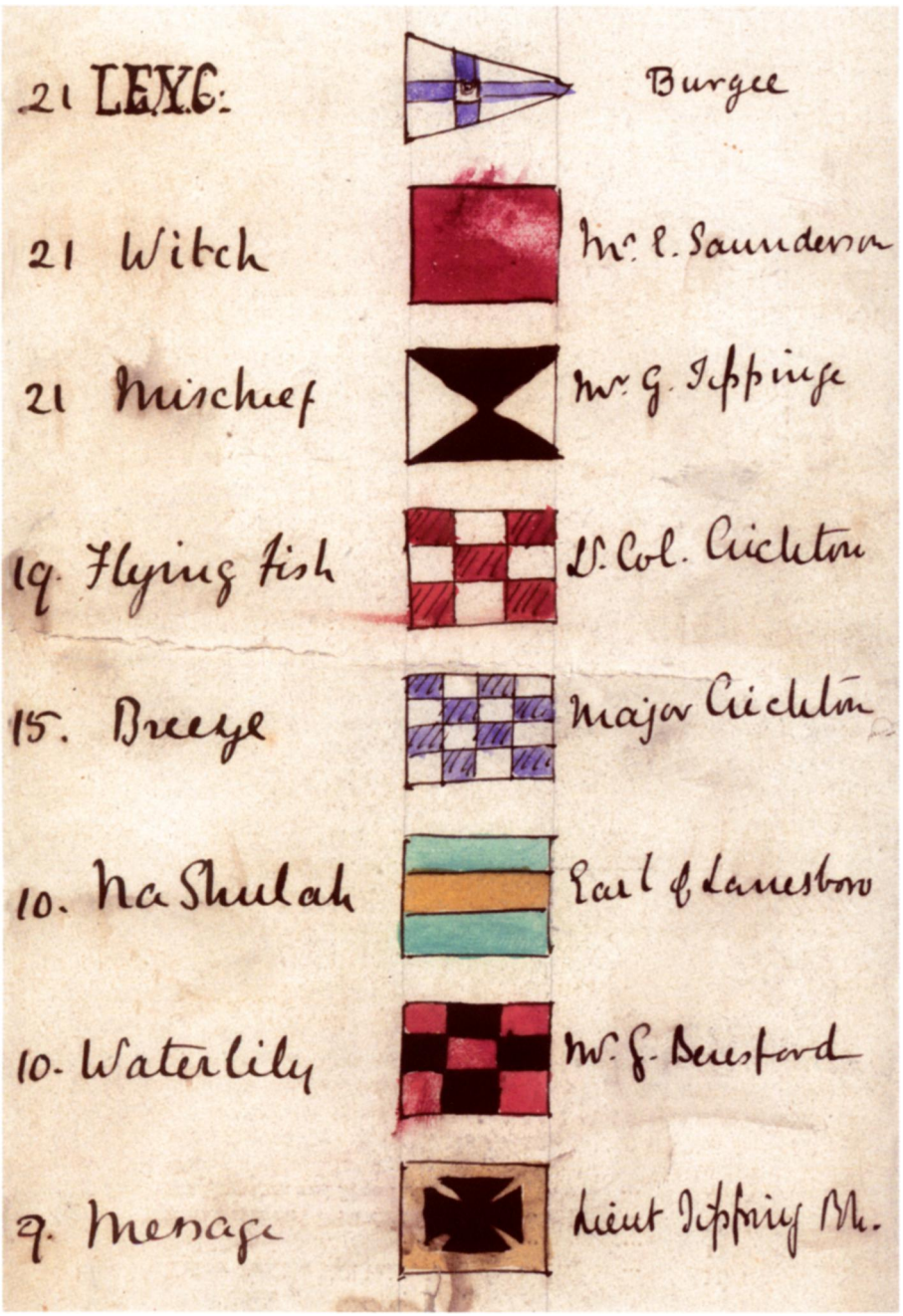
So, with peace, and a bit like Amsterdam two centuries earlier, pleasure boating in the 1700s became a pastime and means of social travel along Fermanagh's waterways, in rowing and sailing craft. Some were statements of status. A painting of Belleisle's house had a sailing yacht moored offshore of the fine gardens. A view of Enniskillen Castle about 1760 had Lady Mountflorence's oared barge on the river. There are a lot of references to pleasure boating on other Irish lakes, in grand barges or in sailing boats, including several gathered for a regatta on Lough Ree in 1770.

Belmore's Osprey

After the Napoleonic wars, many officers and men came home with high level skills in everything to do with sailing and navigation, and were eager to use these skills. An interesting Fermanagh example of these war-won naval skills being transferred to peace time and pleasure use, in navigation and in sailing ship handling, was Lord Belmore's pioneering cruise to the Mediterranean, and along its length eastward to Egypt, Turkey and Greece, between 1817 and 1819 in his own yacht Osprey.

Osprey's captain and navigator was Belmore himself. He took her south across the Bay of Biscay, which had defeated Maguire's much less capable ship with the Earls two centuries before, into the Mediterranean and eastward to explore Egypt, Turkey and Greece. He sold Osprey to the King of Naples, and came home with many fine items for Castle Coole. Belmore papers in PRONI contain much of interest to the nautical historian, including his deck book, setting out instructions to crew, his notes on handling his brig rigged vessel, and even his daily navigation calculations. Her passengers included Belmore's family, wife, two sons, daughter, tutor and a physician, R. Richardson, whose book was reviewed by the *Enniskillen Chronicle* in July 1822. Evidence of local interest included a report on the Earl's travels in September 1818 and Joseph Murphy's 'Panegyric on the late tour' published by the *Chronicle* in 1821.

Osprey was first built as one of a fleet of six fast schooners for the new US coastguard. She bore an important name, James Madison, after the President. During the 1812-14 war, she sailed from Savannah as a privateer, bound south to raid British shipping in the Caribbean. When 250 miles out, in August 1812, the James Madison was captured after a sea chase by a British frigate. Brought across the Atlantic to Portsmouth, she was auctioned



Owner's flags, LEYC race programme, undated, courtesy of LEYC historian

as a war prize and bought by Lord Belmore, who converted her from a schooner to a brig, a rig he preferred. He renamed her Osprey, based her in Killybegs, and took her to sea again as a privateer, but now to raid American merchant ships.

Osprey's wartime success may not have amounted to much as that war soon ended. Some Osprey souvenirs remain in Fermanagh. Nancy, Countess of Enniskillen, writing in 1972 about her Florencecourt home, described a pair of cannon on the steps. They came from Belmore's yacht Osprey and were won by Lord Enniskillen in a gambling wager. They left Florencecourt among the family's furniture, then, in 1997, were gifted to the National Trust and put back on the steps. Another souvenir is a painting of the Osprey. It remains at Castle Coole, in the Garden House.

Navy Style Yacht Clubs

In 1815, Belmore was a founder member of the Royal Yacht Squadron, most prestigious of all clubs. Osprey was among the 40 yachts owned by members and listed in their signals book. This book was one of many ways in which this and similar clubs emulated naval practice. The Royal Navy then was said to rule the seas with a thousand ships that were fast and disciplined in battle fleet manoeuvres controlled by codes and flags set out in the signals book.

Yachting claimed status alongside navy. It even set an example for the navy. Lord Belfast, rich after re-arranging his rent collections, had Waterwitch built with new ideas, raced and beat similar frigates, and the navy bought her. Yachting's many small ships with trained crew were vital in time of war. So they were exempted from customs duties and the like.

In 1865, William Allingham (the poet) who had been customs officer at Ballyshannon, wrote a very different view in his diary:

> The privileges granted to Pleasure Yachts appear to me utterly absurd. They pay no lighthouse dues, no port or harbour dues; they are allowed to have their stores of dutiable goods, wine, tobacco etc, free of duty. Yachting is no nursery for the navy, instead it's easy work is a comfortable refuge and shelter from the rigours of naval service.

Some yachting remains prestigious and for the rich. Well-dressed yachtsmen wear reefer jackets with brass buttons and peaked caps with white tops. Clubs have an admiral, commodore, vice and rear commodore. The admiralty issued warrants so privileged 'Royal' clubs and yachtsmen could fly the blue ensign. According to Lloyd's Register, Lough Erne Yacht Club had one until the first world war. Its warrant was lost, perhaps in a fire at Castle Saunderson.

When naval signals flags were hoisted, a gun was fired to draw attention. This custom survives today for starting sailing races, where as some flags go up, a gun is fired. There are other code flags used to signal race abandoned or shortened, for example, most with a sound to draw attention. Yachts in the 1880s flew an owner's flag. LEYC albums and race programmes set out their various colours and patterns, Edward Saunderson's for example, was a plain red square, his son's likewise, but with a green shamrock on top. Boats today fly a small flag at the top of the mast, called a burgee, to identify their club. A commodore has a square burgee. The logo on a shirt or tie is this burgee. The LEYC burgee's design was set in the 1880s. It is white with a blue cross and red castle. Clubs often exchange burgees as a greeting. LEYC's clubhouse has burgees on display from many other clubs in Ireland, and worldwide.

The Necarne Era

While Belmore voyaged, other Fermanagh gentlemen took to the lake for sport. Lough Erne was ideal for sailing but Fermanagh's wet and hilly lands did not suit horse racing, the popular racing sport elsewhere, for which Kildare's flat dry lands were ideal. Instead, Fermanagh's boatwrights built fast sailing boats that were well able to go to windward using the war-proven gaff cutter rig. These were not yachts for naval emulation and display of status. Simply called Sailing Boats, they were built for sport, only 20 to 30 feet long. To be winner of the race was the status sought.

In August 1822, at the earliest Erne sailing races for which a full record survives, a dozen sailing boats took part over three days at the Lough Erne boat races. Big Houses, on upper and lower lakes, sent boats. Three came from Castle Saunderson, and others from Crom, Dromard, Ely, Magheramena, Necarne, Riversdale and Rossfad. A crew from Crom bested Enniskillen to win ten pounds in the cot rowing race after the sailing races, and on the Friday, upwards of 100 took supper, with 'every delicacy of the season', then danced 'till an advanced hour of the morning'.

The *Chronicle* also reported 'At an early hour countless small craft were plying from all direction to Inisdoney Island, where the gentlemen of the Committee had assembled to make the necessary arrangements'. Their chairman was William D'Arcy Irvine, of Castle Irvine, also known as Necarne, in today's Irvinestown (then Lowtherstown). The Irvine estates included Inishdoney and he had small lodge there, which is shown in a scenic drawing made for an Admiralty chart in 1836. Today, Joey and Caroline Kelly, keen LEYC members, live in this house.

Colleens at Crom, 1905, watercolour by H. Crichton (Crom photographs at WELB)

For over 40 years, the 'subscribers to the boat races on Lough Erne, for the encouragement of fast sailing boats, and for the improvement of the navigation of the lake' ran the Lough Erne Boat Races. Advertisements and reports in the *Erne Packet and Enniskillen Chronicle*, and later the *Impartial Reporter* had sailing boats for sale, notices of meetings, committees, rules, list of boats and results – all the features of an organised sports club. The subscribers had no navy-style commodores and the like. Edward Duffy, as well as editing the *Chronicle*, produced other publications likely to be of local interest, but his yachtsman's signals book advertised in 1825 may have had few takers. The subscribers elected chairman and committee at meetings that were advertised and reported in the *Chronicle*.

Spectators, ashore and afloat, games, music and entertainment on the Boat Race Green at Rossclare's mainland shore, balls in Enniskillen, house parties at Castle Archdall and Rossfad, the scenic setting and visitors from near and far were all enthusiastically reported. Similarly, the boats, the racing and rules were described in technical terms that clearly were familiar to readers. Boats came from Sligo, Killybegs and even Derry and Dublin, and there were sailing races elsewhere, including Ringsend, in Dublin and Belfast Lough. However, only the direct descendant of the subscribers, Lough Erne Yacht Club, survives today from the groups who organised those first sailing races in Ireland.

Reports in early years referred to the Boat Races as a manly and innocent amusement and cited scientific and sporting principles. In 1842, the *Impartial Reporter* supported the 'annual exercise of skill in sailing' saying that, apart from the friendly and convivial occasions thus afforded our gentry and their families for social intercourse, sailing is an amusement divested of the cruel and immoral practices of the horse race – an impartial view, of course! A report, in 1847, lauded Lough Erne's picturesque scenery – 'not less lovely than Killarney, more noble than Windermere' – the number of splendid yachts, and the spirit in which all pertaining to the regatta is carried out by 'our resident gentry'. Townsman's letter in 1851 added a political twist: 'happy to find our excellent member enjoying our annual regatta, and wish I could say as much for our county members. One came home a day too late and the other, no doubt, was patronising some English race. The men who spend their money at home, and patronise whatever is useful in their native county, are the men to take best care of its interests elsewhere.'

The Lough Erne Regatta attracted a large number of visitors, many from England. Necarne's gentlemen, William and his son Henry D'Arcy Irvine, were listed year after year in key organising roles, variously chairman, clerk of the course, steward (a borrowed horse racing term) judge and secretary.

TO BE SOLD,

A HANDSOME

PLEASURE-BOAT,

IN PERFECT REPAIR,

WITH SAILS, &c. &c, COMPLETE.

APPLY AT LAKEVIEW, ENNISKILLEN.

May 3, 1824.

6

TO BE SOLD,

A SPLENDID FAST SAILING PLEASURE YACHT, 26 Tons, built of the best materials, with fittings complete, and only two years in use.

Application to be made to Mr. ROBERT WILLIAMSON, Head-street, Enniskillen.

May 29, 1851.

TO GENTLEMEN.

TO BE SOLD by private agreement, a very fine SAILING BOAT, at present lying on Loch Erne.—Apply to Mr. DOE, Steward, Ely Lodge.

Enniskillen, June 6th, 1851.

TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,

WITHOUT RESERVE,

On TUESDAY, the 13th day of JULY, inst.,

AT the hour of Five o'Clock, p m., at the yard of the Ulster Canal Company, West-bridge, Enniskillen, that

SPLENDID SAILING YACHT

THE QUEEN,

26 tons register, the property of Mr. James Chittick; only three seasons in use, Rigging and Fittings complete, of the best material, with patent Sheaves and multiplying Rollers.

—Terms Cash.—Purchaser to pay Auction Fees.

EDWARD NOLAN,
Auctioneer.

Enniskillen, July 8th, 1852.

They were highly regarded. In 1847, the *Reporter* (on the same page as first news of more potato rot) said that William D'Arcy, the Judge, had conducted the start and other preliminaries of the races to universal satisfaction. Hunt's *Yachting Magazine*, reporting the 1852 regatta, said yachting can never go ahead without efficient officers and Lough Erne Yacht Club is extremely fortunate. To Henry D'Arcy 'of Lowther's Town, County Fermanagh' its honorary secretary, it is particularly indebted for the position it has already attained, numbering fifty members and twenty five yachts, with more being built for 1853. William Dargan, who built and later managed the new Ulster Canal, acted most generously bringing yachts to or from the lake, for example from Dublin by sea to Newry and thence by canal.

However, at the 1854 Regatta, Hunt noted 'some mis-understanding between two or three leading members of the club, which seems to have extended its baneful influence over the whole body' with many of the yacht owners of the upper and lower lakes, sulking instead of sailing in the 'honourable rivalry and generous spirit of sportsmen'. Some may have been taking sides in an acrimonious dispute that had followed a letter in the press by his hot-headed neighbour, Mervyn Archdall about Henry D'Arcy Irvine, who had stood against him in the 1852 election.

There may have been less racing on the Lower Lough for a few years. Then in 1865, a widely circulated notice revived its organisation. The senior officer became a Commodore. John Crichton, now Earl of Erne, was elected (as was his successor in 1885). A resolution asked Henry D'Arcy Irvine to join and to help re-establish the regatta with his knowledge of rules and racing. The long title of the early subscribers had become simply Lough Erne Yacht Club, as it is today. The 1886 sailing regulations booklet listed members from both lakes, including Vice Commodore, Marquis of Ely (lower) and Rear-Commodore, Earl of Lanesborough (upper). The 1868 Regatta was a particular success. 'Tiny craft, close-reefed in the strong wind, were dashing wildly about.' The Rossclare Hotel and grounds were filled with excursionists and sightseers. Likewise were the steamers Rossclare and Devenish, down from Enniskillen. Fifteen yachts raced over the two days, the first stormy the second calmer, on a 25 mile long course from Rossclare and twice round islands and buoys away down the lake. The Breeze won the first cup, and had won it the previous year. Another Crom boat Wizard was third, interestingly entered by William D'Arcy Irvine. Mr Pomeroy's Foam from St Angelo and Charles McCabe's Wasp were there, but no boat from Castle Archdall.

Edward Saunderson, self-portrait

L-R: Edith Dennistoun, George Massy Beresford and Mabel Crichton, all sailors, pictured at the 1894 Regatta

The Boat House at Crom c. 1900, LEYC scrapbook

Breeze in front of Crom boathouse, LEYC scrapbook

Hunt in 1852, surprised that LEYC had no clubhouse, wrote that Sir A. B. Brooke had put up 100 guineas for one near Rossclare. But it was Henry D'Arcy Irvine who opened the Rossclare Hotel in 1866 – perhaps adapting his earlier house there. He assembled sections of a London-built steamer in Enniskillen. Also named Rossclare, she serviced the hotel. Both had scant commercial success. Rossclare sailed as the Lady of the Lake until 1910. The hotel, rarely busy, often closed, was used occasionally at regattas until about 1950. Rossclare's Boat Racing Green is a woodland today.

The Crom Era

Lough Erne Yacht Club's first built headquarters was the boat house at Crom, built in 1842 by John Crichton, third Earl of Erne, whose close involvement in Erne sailing boat racing from its very beginning was to last almost 70 years. This elegant working building, design well suited to purpose, may be Ireland's first yacht club building. The Royal St George Yacht Club, the first in Dunlaoghaire, was built in 1843, and there were few, if any specific yacht club buildings before these dates. Crom boathouse, its structure much as it was in the 1840s, and set today among lakeside trees, is an interesting artefact in Ireland's architectural and yachting history, and a valuable asset to Lough Erne's heritage.

A photograph in an LEYC scrapbook, taken about 1900, shows a signal mast, with LEYC burgee flying, and a yard-arm cocked at traditional angle. On the top balcony, like a poop deck, the fourth Earl, with yachting cap, stands to take in the view. Behind him was a club room, with furniture for afternoon tea, regatta style. Half-models of fast hulls, pictures and trophies adorned the walls. In the 1960s, they were photographed by the late John Switzer for his research into LEYC history. Later moved into the Castle, some half-models are displayed today along the west wing corridor. At ground level is an unusual but practical, long, thin side room, with racks for oars and masts, and a fireplace for Autumn regattas. The main space, with a wide door to the slip way, held a lot of boats and their gear.

Just after the National Trust took over Crom Estate, BBC Bristol came to film at the boathouse for a programme about LEYC's history in the Under Sail series. Consequently, some film and sound records survive of how the boathouse looked in 1987. Little had changed from 1913, Crom's last sailing season before the Great War. Canadian canoes from then were still on racks and other boats and their gear lay as accumulated over the years. Soon after the BBC visit, National Trust volunteers cleared the boathouse. Some items survive in the Trust's exhibition, including a wherry, used to row the Crichtons to church in Derryvore. It had been in the boathouse then, and featured in the BBC programme.

A glimpse, from a century before the BBC film, is in a few lines from a Crom album cutting. In the harbour gig boats and wherries are kept in a row. A grand burnished steamboat is gilded with bunting. And yachts with their canvas as white as the snow. The old steady Zephyr, the queen of the water, The Breeze and the Firefly are plain to be seen. A later line mentions a 'grand spreading water' known by the title of famed Trial Bay. Trial Bay, Formill Bay on the 1838 chart, is across from Crom, deep and clear of dangers, about two miles by a half mile. West winds blow steadily along its length. It was the nearest and best place for trying out sailing boats built at Crom most winters. The steamer was Lord Erne's paddle steamer Eglinton, flag ship of the LEYC fleet. Firefly was his smaller steam launch. Zephyr and Breeze were big racing yachts. Gigs were fast, and wherries were large rowing boats. An old photograph shows moored yachts filling Crom bay, with Gad Tower in the background, in the 1870s.

That big fleet moored off Crom included yachts from Lanesborough Lodge, upstream where the lake was narrower and Castle Saunderson, whence had sailed that squadron of sailing boats reported in 1819 exploring the lower lake, and led by Alexander Saunderson, first secretary of the original subscribers. Edward Saunderson inherited in 1862, and continued the family sailing tradition with great success until his death in 1906. Other Big House families with yachts in the Crom fleet included the Massey-Beresfords at St Hubert's and the Tippings at Rossferry. Two big boat building sheds at Castle Saunderson, were demolished in the mid-1980s, leaving only the stone steps used to embark onto boats a century before. In 1984, the house at St Hubert's was gone, but for floor tiles in a field, and wrought iron gates in bushes near Geaglum. The red brick boathouse walls were intact and ivy-hung, with the roof half fallen in.

Two large pictures at Crom depict regattas hosted by Lord Erne in 1850 and 1853, a panorama of flag flying sailing yachts and oared cots competing afloat, watched by high-ranking guests and a fashionable crowd in the gardens, overlooked by the castle. By then, the grand Crom era for Lough Erne Yacht Club was well underway. It would last for three quarters of a century, until the Great War's social watershed brought all that, and more, to an end.

In Erne sailing history, this era was divided by a big drainage scheme that took up the whole of the 1880s. There were upper and lower lake regattas in 1880, both run from Crom HQ, and attended largely by upper lake boats, but only an upper lake event in 1881, then none again on the lower lake until 1893. Before the drainage, many racing yachts were large for a lake, up to 20 tons (a yacht handicap measure, not the same as weight). After it, the Upper Lough being much shallower, large yachts were abandoned and replaced by smaller boats, often with the same name, but now of a new class

Jack Tipping, boat designer

called Two-Raters, as determined by the Yacht Racing Association's new rating rule introduced in 1887.

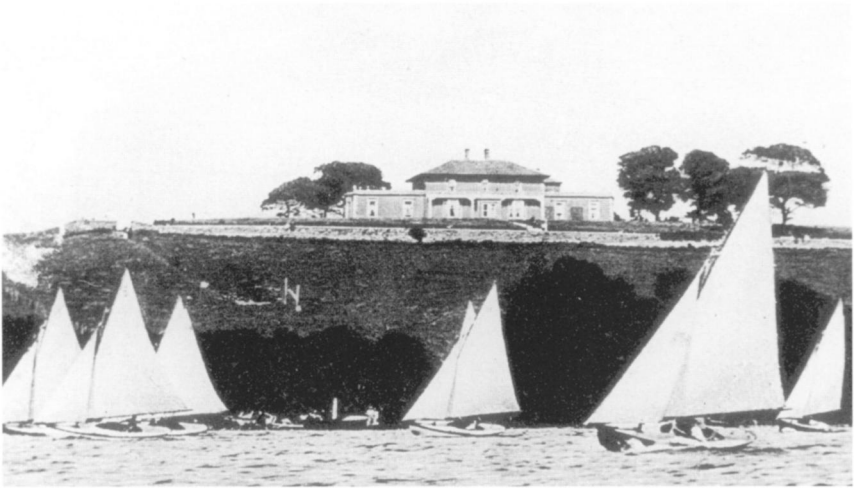
Upper Lough Erne was a peculiar place for sailing races. Along any course, the wind was ever changing in force and direction as it flowed round, or was blocked by an island or wood. Channels twisted, wide then narrow, with rocks, mud and sand shoals. A boat taking a short cut at a bend went aground – the deep water was along the outside bank. An LEYC album of press cuttings, 1890 to 1913, has many accounts of races where boats on very long courses ran a gauntlet of calm, squall, wind-shift and shoal, as well as sailing normally on waters like Trial Bay. Many sailors were very skilled. The Witch was 83 feet overall from the end of her bowsprit to the end of her boom, and Edward Saunderson, sometimes alone, would take her along the twisting channels between Castle Saunderson and Crom for the racing.

This difficult and frustrating sailing was very popular among those who lived there and visitors. In the 1890s and early 1900s, as summer sailing ended elsewhere, LEYC members gathered for four weeks of autumn sailing, one week for the lower lake regatta then three for the upper. After the Tippings had left, Rossferry was rented by Cyril Ward. His brother Lord Dudley joined him each season. Dudley's huge family fortune came from coal, and he was Viceroy of Ireland. Another example of these very rich, visiting LEYC members, was John Gretton, whose fortune came from Bass beer.

Early in those suffragette times, LEYC membership was opened to women in September 1895. The first three were Evelyn Crichton, Alice Massey-Beresford and Miss Dennistoun of Roslea Row, Newtownbutler. In 1918, the first woman elected to Westminster, Countess Markiewicz had canoed at Crom visiting from her girlhood home, Lissadell in Sligo. Her father was an accomplished ocean yachtsman. LEYC's 1898 booklet set out rules for a new one-design class called Colleens, built by Paddy Doyle in today's Dunlaoghaire and designed by his daughter. Eight of these lively 24 foot boats raced, often with women crew, until 1905, when Maeve, with Mabel Crichton and Lord Dudley, capsized in an Erne squall at the 1905 regatta. The press blamed the boat rather than her prestigious crew. Colleens went out of fashion. Most of the eight Erne boats were sold away soon after to Lough Neagh, and sailed there until the 1960s.

LEYC members also sailed elsewhere. Edward Saunderson joined John Gretton on his big schooner Betty to race against the Kaiser in his Meteor and others at Kiel Regatta. This gave rise to an curious enquiry in an Enniskillen paper from the Kaiser about his friends' results at the 1905 LEYC Regatta. John Gretton in 1900 and Charles Crichton in 1908 won medals for Olympic sailing. Viscount Crichton was first Commodore of the Dublin Bay Sailing Club, nowadays the biggest sailing club with the largest programme in Ireland, and perhaps in these islands. Joshua Slocum, first to sail around the world alone, met LEYC's two most active yacht designers, Edward Saunderson and Jack Tipping in Durban in 1898. They were intrigued by his ocean-boat Spray. Over a merry dinner, Slocum resolved to spend retirement in Cavan sailing with them on Lough Erne – but he was lost at sea some years later. There are few contemporary pictures of Slocum. The one on the cover of the Slocum Society's journal for his voyage's centenary was Edward's Saunderson's sketch at that Durban dinner-table, found about 80 years later in his papers at PRONI.

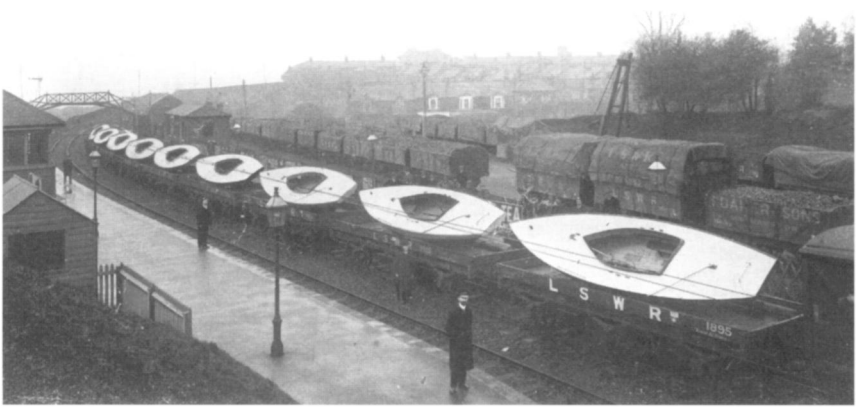
Regattas with Two-Raters continued until 1907. Colleens only to 1908, then 1909 to 1913, a half dozen new Lough Erne One-Designs raced at Crom. But the 1905 Regatta, reported at length in the new *Yachting World* magazine and *The Field*, both published in London, and in the local papers, was the last of the magnificent four-week-long regattas in LEYC's long Crom era. The last of the Two-Raters, and the most expensive, were delivered: Breeze for Viscount Crichton, and Vanessa for Lord Dudley, both from Scotland, and Foam for Cyril Ward from Southampton. After a week's racing on the lower lake followed by three on the upper, Vanessa bested Breeze overall by one point, with Edward Saunderson's home-built Sprite another point behind, then Foam fourth. Alice Massey-Beresford's



Fairy race, Rossclare, c. 1907

Sprite, at Crom, LEYC scrapbook

Colleen from Crom, aground, c. 1900



Nine Lough Erne Yacht Club One-Design Boats, built by Messrs, Alexander Macdonald & Co., Ferry Yard, Southampton, leaving Woolston Station en-route for Lough Erne. Photo by Max-Mills, Southampton.

Wonderland won among eight Colleens. A century later, in 2005, Caroline Wiltshire visiting LEYC recognised Vanessa's picture. Her great-grandfather, William Staunton had bought her cheaply from Crom after the first world war to sail on Belfast Lough, where she was wrecked in Ballyholme Bay, about 1920 in a north east gale. He next bought Squall from Crom and raced in her for years from Bangor. An era ended, boats scattered.

But, in 1905, as one era began moving towards its close, though no one knew it at that September's big regatta, another had already begun dawning in May, at a meeting in Enniskillen Town Hall that founded a new yacht club.

The Enniskillen Era

On 19 May 1905, in contrast to the exclusive gentry membership of the Lough Erne Yacht Club, with its HQ at Crom on the Upper Lake, members of Enniskillen's professional and merchant classes founded the Enniskillen Yacht Club at a 'general public meeting of those interested in promoting aquatic events on Lower Lough Erne'. The 52 founder members – a who's-who of the town and district – eagerly agreed a regatta in August 'to suit Lough Erne Yacht Club sailing' with races for Colleens, for cruiser and small classes on handicap, rowing double sculls, pairs oars, single sculls, four oars for seniors and junior crews, swimming, water polo and greasy pole competitions.

BCU declared Enniskillen their best ever venue, and the *Impartial Reporter* praised the 'dextrous manner in which the light craft were handled by the canoeists, and the rapid manner in which they turn about'. Some Fermanagh people purchased and presented the Lough Erne Challenge Cup, which is still a major canoe sailing trophy to this day. The cup's first winner was J. W. Lemon of the Ulster Canoe Club. His medal is in Fermanagh Museum with a few other sailing canoe souvenirs. The UCC branch at Cultra grew rapidly into the Royal North of Ireland Yacht Club. The RNIYC asked the best small boat designer of that time, Linton Hope, to design a fleet of sturdy racing keelboats suited to Belfast Lough. Those first Fairy class boats were built in 1902 by John Hilditch of Carrickfergus. The Fairies were the very latest in small racing keelboats, and provided excellent sport in 'one-design' racing, where success depends only on crew skills, not the boat, since all the boats are the 'one design' in hull shape, rig and sail area.

Enniskillen already had strong aquatic interests. New boats had been built there for LEYC's lower lake regattas, revived in 1893 after the drainage scheme. Crowds again gathered on the Boat Racing Green at Rossclare to see swimming, rowing and sailing races, as well as land sports alongside these regattas. Rowing and sailing were popular summer pastimes, from

Enniskillen down to scenic Devenish and beyond. In 1893, the town hosted a remarkable rally of sailing canoes, small craft with experimental hulls and rigs devised by owners eager to test new methods and inventions. The British Canoe Union brought canoes and tents, by ferry and by train, to camp at Derrygore for three weeks. Earlier venues, from BCU's foundation in 1885, had included Falmouth, Windermere and the Norfolk Broads.

The new Enniskillen Yacht Club sought a boat best suited to the Erne's Broad Lough, of similar size and often as rough as Belfast Lough. They went for the Fairy. Hilditch's first batch was built, delivered by rail, man-handled to Lemon's yard, and launched in 1906. The first race, for a five shilling sweepstake, was on Wednesday 6 June 1906, Enniskillen's half-day, starting at 3.30 pm, and twice round the Colleen course in Derrygore Bay. Thereafter, sailing was on Saturdays and Wednesdays alternated between Derrygore and Rossclare. A second batch, in the next winter, made a total of 11 boats, identified by sail numbers 1 to 12, with 3 left out to avoid confusion with 8. Today, of the 11, Psyche was sold to Belfast Lough in 1913, and is still racing at RNIYC, and the other 10 are owned at Lough Erne YC.

An early EYC stalwart and local auctioneer, Bob Wilson did much good work in EYC's first score years of growth. He died in 1928, and had been secretary, treasurer and race officer, with time clock, signal flags and tent on the shore starting and finishing sailing races. EYC's sailing committee included Edward Saunderson, one of many members of both EYC and LEYC. Friends, each donated a fine cup to the other, the EYC Cup to LEYC and the LEYC Cup to EYC.

EYC's new fleet prompted LEYC also to establish another new fleet, the Lough Erne One-Designs. Built in Southampton, they left there by train, each on its own flat wagon (see page 518). They had wider flat hulls to suit the shallows of the Upper Lake and raced in the autumn at Crom from 1909 to 1913. August 1914 brought war, and no more autumn sailing at Crom.

EYC became the social club in the town and the sailing club on the lower lake. Minutes detail the purchase of town-centre premises, with everything that a gentlemen's club could need – bar, food, billiard room and rooms for smoking, cards and reading, daily newspapers and periodicals, and so forth. The travel (and song) writer, Richard Hayward declared Enniskillen Yacht Club 'as vigorous as ever', remembering sailing with his father, and 'certainly not lacking on its social side', recalling a night in 'that hospitable Club'. EYC was a success, both social and sailing. In 1925, a detailed table in the *Fermanagh Times*, signed White Wings, set out the race results of eleven Fairies (including Petrel) over the years since their first races in June 1906. Storm, owned by Geoffrey and the Misses Irvine, had started 349

White Wings, photo courtesy of the LEYC historian

The Race Officers' tent, pre-1914,
Bob Wilson, founder/secretary of the EYC is pictured on the right

races and won 104 of them. Major and Mrs Irvine's Pastime won 93 of 354 races, and Iris, Henry Richardson, Rossfad, ranked third overall in EYC's first score of sailing seasons, with 67 wins in 315 races.

Ten years of the Great War and Irish Troubles depleted LEYC membership. The new Lady Craigavon and Lady Brooke Bridges blocked its sailing area to masted boats. LEYC's remaining Two-Raters were sold away. White Wings in 1925 also reported that the Lough Erne Yacht Club was reformed on the Lower Lake. It would run races for the Fairies and a regatta to include LEYC's One-Designs from the Upper Lake and make a 'fleet of fifteen sail again off Rossclare shore'. These arrangements, with old LEYC Cups raced for by EYC Fairies, and the sailors members of both clubs, were set out by Henry Richardson, of Rossfad, in LEYC's annual programme booklets on through to the next war. The usual LEYC start line was at Rossclare, with numbered courses chosen from a card by the number shown on a board ashore. Races were longer than today, hours around islands and buoys away down the lake, and back, sailed reefed down in heavy weather, which they were designed for, with hefty keels, high topsides and small cockpit opening.

Meantime, the LEYC One-Designs were bought as one lot by an enterprising young auctioneer called Ross, and sold to the new Strangford Lough YC. They raced together for about 30 years and had dispersed by 1960. A survivor, hull restored, neatly painted and varnished, and with Sonia LEYC on her stern, is an exhibit in the marine building at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. Some day, might Sonia come home to Fermanagh Museum – the boat section?

Phyllis Richardson of Rossfad, continuing the sailing traditions of her father Jack, and grandfather Squire Tipping, became a famous dinghy sailor in International Fourteens, a class with one main rule, 14 long with any hull shape or sail rig, and the most competitive sailing sport at that time. She was often in the UK top six during the 1930s racing against young men in their twenties, half her age, who called her Auntie Phyllis. Most of her racing was in Britain and North America. On the Erne she raced in the Fairy Iris. Her record has not yet been matched by any other LEYC sailor. Irwin Catherwood was her crew in 1947. They capsized. He, the 19-year-old floundered, while his tall, tough, grey haired helmswoman, a granny in her sixties, quickly righted the boat, baled it out with a bucket, and they were back in the race.

Also in the 1930s, some LEYC members had Snipe racing dinghies built in Belfast, at £50 each, and based them at Crom Boat House. Sailing was

back on the Upper Lough and the Snipes were raced there again after the war in the early 1950s. Today's National Trust display at Crom Estate includes the hull of one of these 15 foot Snipe dinghies.

When Horace Fleming, a Corkman and sailor from Clonakilty, came to Fermanagh in 1937 to be county surgeon, he purchased a Fairy and renamed her Maeve. Her first owner had been Edward Archdale and her name Spook. She ranked ninth in that 1925 table, 10 wins in 142 races. When he reluctantly gave up sailing and sold Maeve, Horace had owned and raced the same boat for 52 years – some kind of record. In his first full season, he sailed in every race, spent two pounds and eleven shillings on entry fees, won five shillings for second in the Commodore's Cup races, and won 5 of the 6 races for the Points and the R. A. Herbert Cups. War was declared that September of 1939, and sailing gave way to a fleet of flying boats from Killadeas and Castle Archdale engaged in the Battle of the Atlantic.

Sailing Sport and Trophies

At his desk in Necarne, about 1820, writing rules for the new sport of sailing boat races, William D'Arcy Irvine borrowed from horse racing and from nautical traditions about which ship gave way to the other when they met. He kept the course simple, from a start line to a buoy and back again. The boats were moored along a start line, to stop them drifting, and the Steward in the Post Boat, horse racing words, used a flag and gun, nautical practice, to signal the start. First back past the Post Boat won. This simple system is still used today, on West Cork and East Antrim coasts, for the ancient sport of gig racing – sea-going rowing boats, long and fast, with crews of four or six men, or women.

The Erne's 1822 rules are probably the earliest published rules for racing in a fleet of sailing boats. Each rule then still exists within today's more complex rules, set by the International Sailing Federation for world-wide use. Words differ: Larboard and Starboard then are Port and Starboard now. Year by year, the 1822 rules got longer. Dumping ballast when the wind fell light was banned. Boats had to fly the owner's identifying flag, and crew had to include 'gentlemen' as well as paid crew to maintain the amateur spirit then called 'Corinthian'. A judge settled protests. Longer courses were set with more sailing to windward, this being the real test of both boat design and crew skills.

By the 1880s, clubs had agreed on common racing rules set by a new Yacht Racing Association. Perhaps the most significant change was the

'flying start'. An Erne start in 1822 was a line of moored boats. Lots were drawn for best places in 1846 rules, a bit like motor racing's grid starts today. In the flying start at the 1880 regattas, a flag, with gun, signalled warning, next was prepare, and a third signalled start. Signals were set times apart and boats timed their manoeuvres to cross the line at full speed on the start signal. With little changed, races still start this way 130 years later.

Down the years, old words disappear. Few sailors today know what 'skeeting' was, and why allowed only to windward, when sail shape matters most. Flax sails, before cotton, lost shape easily (like a linen jacket). Skeeting was throwing water on sails to shrink them into shape, with a long handled scoop, also handy as a paddle. Using a skeet was allowed in LEYC's 1867 rules but not to paddle with. Oars were likewise allowed, but only to push off when aground.

Which crew is really best is obscured when boats differ widely. The Erne's 1822 rules had a Second Cup for boats not more than 24 feet long. Boats equal, success depended most on crew, best hull design within 24 feet and sail rig. Competition for the Second Cup lasted among designers and sailors for 30 years. In 1887, when all clubs adopted common rules, the Erne's old length rule became a rating rule that used both length and sail area, the two main factors in boat speed. Length and sail area were multiplied and divided by 6,000 to give a Rate. LEYC adopted Two-Raters, about 20 feet long with 600 square feet of sail. The Two-Raters raced for almost 30 years until 1907, and, as with the earlier 24 foot class, the first to finish was first, and won, just as happens in the majority of racing sports.

Meantime, LEYC and the new Dublin Bay Sailing Club, of which Viscount Crichton was Commodore, developed their first one-design keelboat, the Colleen class in 1898. They were built by trusted builders with jigs ensuring identical length, hull shape, sail area and rig. With boats exactly the same, success would surely be a matter only of crew skills. Colleens were smaller but similar to the Fairy and Lough Erne One-Design classes that followed in 1906 and 1909. John Hilditch's production-line approach in Carrickfergus got him the job of building the Fairy class, instead of Paddy McKeown, in Portrush, who improved every boat he built. The Fairies celebrate their hundredth season in 2006.

Always there were individuals who liked their boat to be individual too, not the same as another's. The First Cup was for these, all shapes and sizes. But the biggest boats usually finished first and won, not by sporting skill but by size. Hence handicap systems. From mediaeval times a ship's size was stated in tons. The original ton was a standard wine barrel or tun, and this size figure estimated how many she could carry. Ship tons estimate capacity. Provided proportions of hull shapes and sails remained similar, tons also

estimated speed. The First Cup at the 1847 regatta was for a 'Time for Tonnage' race. To win, a 10 ton boat had to finish within a set time before a 5 ton boat. Enterprising designers soon build boats with dimensions that calculated out to a low tons figure. Racing in groups by tonnage was tried, at the 1867 regatta for example. By 1880, tonnage handicaps were abandoned, and yachting history runs on to this day in cycles of new handicap systems, each more complex, soon exploited, and then abandoned.

First and Second Cups from 1822 onward were kept if won thrice in succession, and the subscribers bought another the next year. LEYC's oldest surviving cup, dated 1833, was won out by John Crichton in the 24 foot class and is in Crom Castle, along with the Newtownbutler Cup for ladies in the Colleen class around 1900. The oldest surviving yacht racing trophy in the world is in Sligo Museum, the Ladies Cup presented by the ladies of that town in 1822 for the Lough Gill boat races. Compare these with Yachting's most famous trophy, the America's Cup, dated 1851.

The claret jug won by Arthur Pomeroy of St Angelo in Sybil at the 1867 regatta is in a Canadian bank vault. When Two-Raters had ended in 1908, these cups were stored at Crom. In the 1920s, Henry Richardson gathered up old LEYC cups and many survive today. They include the Burdett Coutts Cup, 1874, presented in 1896 by an LEYC regatta supporter, Angela Burdett Coutts, the rich philanthropist, who funded Baltimore fishing school and helped set up the NSPCC.

Charts, Stakes, Buoys and Bridges

From their sport's beginning, Erne sailors took a keen interest in the navigation of their lakes. Navigation has two needs. First – charts to set out land and water features, shoals, rocks and other dangers. Second – buoys, stakes and beacons to mark way points and dangers. In addition, sailing races need other buoys to mark out courses.

In response to the first need, in the winter of 1817-18, Edward Duffy, the enterprising editor of the *Chronicle and Erne Packet*, advertised for subscribers to a map of Lough Erne, exhibiting the river, upper and lower lakes, from Belturbet to Ballyshannon and its bay to Bundoran and to Donegal, all the lake islands, inlets and bays, depths in feet with all shoals and rocks, and the great road which surrounds the lakes. From a survey by Mr G. Montgomery, accurately and elegantly delineated, the map would be on imperial paper about six feet long by two and a half feet broad. Subscribers were urged to forward their names. The price to subscribers would be only two guineas.

Duffy's own sailing interest may explain his advertisement, from April to June 1819, for a 'Pleasure Boat for sailing – apply to the Printer.' That September, the *Packet* reported a 'squadron of boats returning after a week's cruize' of the two lakes. It had 'more than once noticed the progress of these boating parties because we know that the improvement of the navigation of the lakes is always an object with the gentlemen who undertake them'. It continued 'Messrs Saunderson, Mr Storey, & the other gentlemen of the party, acknowledged themselves much indebted to the New Map of the Lake, from the information they had obtained from a rough sketch of it. We understand that Captains Meara and Saunderson of the Royal Navy assisted the gentlemen in taking landmarks of the shoals and rocks.'

Soon, the *Chronicle* and its successors were regularly reporting sailing and navigation, the twin interests of 'The Subscribers to the Boat Races on Lough Erne, for the encouragement of fast sailing boats and for the improvement of the navigation of the lake'. Alexander Saunderson, leader of the 1819 squadron, was the subscribers' first secretary.

Duffy's map was published by 1821 and distributed. Some copies survive today. Perhaps the most accessible is on the wall of the bar in the Manor House Hotel, once Rockfield, one of the Big Houses whose owner was likely a subscriber. This copy is cut into two sheets and each is framed separately. Another, intact, is in Enniskillen planning office, and could be Duffy's own copy, as it may have been donated by William Trimble, whose *Impartial Reporter* incorporated both *Chronicle and Packet*. A third is in Fermanagh Museum. Others may survive among Big House papers.

In 1836, not long after Duffy's map, both Erne lakes (and Loughs Derg and Ree on the Shannon) were surveyed, and depths sounded by two naval officers, James Wolff and Richard Beechey. Admiralty charts of Upper and Lower Lough Erne were published in 1838. The old plates were found, and the charts printed again in 1965, at the instigation of the late Michael Crichton, a retired naval officer and keen Yacht Club member. They were in print into the 1980s.

These charts, clearer than Duffy's pioneering map, were published to the same high standards as set for thousands of charts made for waters all around the world at that time. Their detail is a delight, and largely applicable today, except for the upper lake – its value for navigation has long since been damaged by bridges and drainage. Particularly interesting on the Lower Lough chart are the views from off Horse Island, and from Rough Island towards the river, as it leaves the Lough. Along the horizon, these present a panorama of hills and islands, all easily identified, even today.

Views were used on old admiralty charts to help establish location from

the landmarks that they pictured. On the Upper Lough chart, one view from Derryvore point shows the old castle of Crom, with a big flag, Corlatt point and a house on Inish Fendra. The new castle, a bridge to Inisherk, and the old yew tree are all on the chart. The other view, looking west from Inisleague shows Knockninny, Rabbit I, Doocharn I, Inis Fausy, Creagnarourke I, Cuileagh (sic) Mountain, Deal and Bilberry islands. Rabbit island can be Coney island from Irish but is Inislirr on today's 1983 map.

Eagle Island at the end of Rossmore on Lower Lough Erne is oddly named. Low with long shallow reefs into the lake, it lacks cliffs or any suggestion of eagles. Wolff and Bechey's boat Eagle was driven onto those reefs by a gale in 1836, perhaps explaining that island's name today. On the other hand, earlier notices for Boat Races in the 1820s specify the race area as between Devenish and Eagle Island, so the name may have earlier provenance. The admiralty chart shows Sandy Rock, the Saunderson nickname. His boat in that 1919 squadron may have hit this rock.

In 1984, just as supplies of reprinted admiralty charts ran out, they were replaced and up-dated by the Ordnance Survey's Fermanagh lakeland outdoor pursuits map and navigation guide, one sheet for each lake. There was local consultation with sailing interests and others, with good results. Using a new and ingenious combination of admiralty and ordnance survey practice, these maps display much useful information about land and water, which being alongside in the map, make the whole all the more useful, land map and water chart each complementing the other.

Sailing's second need for navigation and racing marks was neatly acknowledged. The OS devised a new symbol, a small red ring, to show the traditional positions of buoys that mark sailing race courses. There are examples of the admiralty's traditional 'Compass Rose' useful to take off a course across open water, although the rose for the open Broad Lough is put aside and hidden on land, to avoid obscuring depth figures in this the deepest part of Lough Erne. This point was marked as 226 feet deep on the 1838 chart and as 61.9 metres in the 1984 map. Much the same.

Among other history in the 1984 map is Bingham's Rock near Boa island. Henry's account from the early 1700s tells the story. 'Off from its north west point lie some hidden rocks, which several years ago proved fatal to Archdeacon Hume, Mr Bingham and several other principal gentlemen of Connaught, who, sailing the lakes apleasuring, were by a sudden storm from the shore driven on these rocks and perished to the number of 14 souls, none escaping but one boatman, who was drove ashore on the mast.' The map shows Bingham's Rock on the shore near mark 62B, but an underwater rock out from the shore, at 61B on the 1983 map, seems more likely to be the real

Bingham's Rock. On the chart, Beechey's name is on a rock that he found near Owl Island, but, as Horace Fleming sadly noted in 1983, the map lost the old name and showed just the new marks, 55G and 55H.

Back in the 1800s it was often the Yacht Club that took responsibility for marks. A subscribers meeting about arrangements for the 1846 regatta was asked, from the many accidents, to order buoys to be placed on the shoals and rocks 'which are so numerous on our lake'. In September 1847, the *Impartial* reported help for sailors – the Revd Lord Adam Loftus had placed white buoys, at his own expense, on the shoals of the lower lake, a considerable service to sailors. The Regatta Club also erected a beacon of massive stones on the lower Catherine Shoal. 'These beacons will be useful as landmarks and will give vast employment to masons, who have suffered much for want of employment this season.' The surviving LEYC minute book, from 1890 onward, has frequent mentions of setting stakes, to mark dangers, and buoys to mark race courses. In 1896 the appointment of 'staking and buoying the Upper Lake was given to Phillip Goodwin, Sailor at St Hubert's, in succession to Francis Kearns, Rossferry, resigned'.

For buoying and staking the Lower Lake that year, the club paid William Maxwell three pounds and ten shillings. For 1897 the club accepted an offer from Charles McCabe to paint, put down and take up the club buoys and stakes on Lower Lough Erne for two pounds ten shillings per annum. Over half a century later, after navigation marks became a Ministry responsibility, LEYC still employed the Johnston family, John MacManus and others to lift, paint and lay its racing marks, and its sailors in the 1950s had a handy map of the Lower Lake printed with waterproof ink on cloth, showing those racing marks in mostly the same places as they were later shown on the 1984 map, and still are today.

Designers and Boatwrights

In 1826, when Fairy, the 'superior little boat built by Mr Saunderson at Castle-Saunderson' had thrice won the cup for 24 foot boats, the *Chronicle* praised him for 'bringing this science to its present improved state upon this lake'. An earlier Saunderson boat was called Blue Stocking, after his mother and aunt, Anne and Lydia White, who were blue-stockings, women who dared to be intellectual in the late 1700s. Alexander Saunderson was elected a life member of the Royal Dublin Society in 1809, the highly regarded and influential body behind many of Ireland's new scientific institutions in the 1800s, and today's annual Young Scientist competition. On his advice, in 1825, Enniskillen's new west bridge had special mooring rings fitted at strategic places for hauling boats through, when the stream was strong.

Saunderson had a good grasp of the arguments about best hull shapes for speed through water. About 1840, before illness weakened him, he built Emerald 'on his own model' from the study of Mr Scott Russell's wave-line principle, helped by William Marshall, who built experimental boats in Ringsend, and later built Robert Johnston's Banshee, winner in the 25 foot class at the 1846 regatta, with the older Emerald second. Wave-line principles made for hulls with long sharp bows leading in easy curves aft to a neat stern, in contrast to traditional hulls, with bluff bows and bulky shapes to carry loads. In 1851, when the New York schooner America beat Britain's best, with their traditional bluff bows and baggy flax sails, to take home yacht racing's most famous trophy, the *Impartial Reporter* scoffed at 'complacent neighbours of our sister isle' and explained in technical detail why the America was so much the faster yacht. Hunt's *Yachting Magazine* noted that the fastest vessels of the Lough Erne club had all been built 'on the plan of the America long before she made her appearance'. They have sharp bows on the wave-line principle and sails 'as flat as boards'.

There was even a boat called Experiment. Owned by J. C. Bloomfield of Castlecaldwell, she came second in an 1844 regatta race. Built by a 'Boa Island boatwright called McGoldrick' with Lurg (i.e. local) timber, she was only launched on the Monday before the race. This same builder, perhaps forename John from a Caldragh headstone, again did well in the 1846 regatta, where Foam built 'on Bow Island by a Mr McGoldrick' beat Lord Erne's boat built in England. McGoldrick may have built Bloomfield's earlier Queen, for sale in 1846, and Maid of the Mist for James Johnston, Bloomfield's neighbour at Magheramena. Boa is the Erne's largest island. Its people for centuries were boatmen.

Most Erne regatta fleets included boats built elsewhere. John Crichton's Lady Erne was built in Gravesend. Mid-century builders included Marshall in Ringsend and Wanhill in Poole. Late 1880s builders were in the Solent and Scotland. In the 1820s, some on the Erne and at Ringsend were Gdansk boats, build in Poland as a kit of planks and frames and assembled here, much as were returned empty barrels. In the late 1700s, similar Drontheim boats came to the Foyle from Norway and were the model for generations of fishing boats, displayed today in the Inishowen Maritime Museum.

There was pride in local builders. In 1825, the Belleisle, owner James Ross, did well – 'a Lough Erne built boat, finished altogether by the celebrated boatwrights, the Maguires, of Belleisle'. Many were Estate craftsmen, Tinneny at Castle Saunderson, Connor at St Hubert's and Robert Craig's squad at Crom. He supervised the building of many boats for the Crichtons and others in nearby Big Houses. Crom account books detailed

boat building costs in pounds, shillings and pence. In 1854, the Gossamer cost £83.19.3 to build, plus sails £12.3.4, blocks and cordage £2.2.11.

Among Lough Erne's gentlemen and craftsmen boat designers, two fathers and their sons stand out: Alexander Saunderson, whose work has already been mentioned and his son Edward Saunderson who inherited in 1862, and the 'Squire' and his son 'Jack' Gartside Tipping, who lived at Rossferry. In a few years around 1860 they developed the first of a distinctive Lough Erne type of yacht, the last and most famous of which was Edward Saunderson's Witch.

The first Witch was built at Castle Saunderson in 1868, as were all Saunderson boats. She failed, and was re-built. Her unusual hull and innovative fittings were described with drawings in Hunt's *Yachting Magazine* in 1874. Editions of Dixon Kemp's *Manual of Yacht and Boat Sailing* ran from 1878 to 1913 and even included a German version. The manual was yachting's bible, full of information on sailing boat building, handling and equipment. The Witch featured, and, by the seventh edition, the manual's diagrams included modifications made to her in 1878, 1880 and 1882.

Kemp wrote 'the shallowness of the upper waters of Lough Erne, and the turbulence of the lower, have necessitated a kind of compromise between the shallow American and the deeper-bodied English yacht. Up to forty of these yachts are on the Lough and most were designed and built by their owners.' Her mast was easily lowered to pass under a bridge and a dipper, or centre-board, made of boiler plate moved up and down a slot in her bottom as a keel. She was big, hull 40 by 13 feet, lead ballast 5 tons, and over 2,000 square feet of sail. The manual's detailed drawings and tables of dimensions are sufficient to build an exact or a scaled down replica of this remarkable Lough Erne boat.

Notes on Lough Erne Boats left by Jack Tipping tell how his father visited the USA in 1835 and saw centre board craft there. Visiting the Erne, he had much discussion with Alexander Saunderson, and when he came to live at Rossferry, he built the Erne's first centre-board boat, Spray, at Crom helped by Robert Craig, in 1854. Her success was followed by other boats trying similar ideas with varying success. A whole fleet of this unique type developed on Lough Erne.

The rules for racing on the sea at that time did not allow centre-boards. So, Tipping fitted a fixed lead fin instead of his Mischief's board to enter the Royal Irish Yacht Club's Regatta on Dublin Bay in 1887. Bryce Allen, from Scotland in Doris, designed by George Watson, had won sixty prizes in three seasons, and was expected to win again. However, Mischief won the first race, by seven minutes after fourteen miles in a strong wind with Edward

Pat Goodwin is shown on the right hand side of this photograph, possibly with other members of the Goodwin family.

Saunderson steering. Tipping took her helm next day in a light wind, and again they defeated Doris. The fin-keel type of racing yacht was born, and it had been conceived on Lough Erne. Amid widespread comment, Lord Adare, Ireland's most prominent yachtsman, declared it 'one of the most important events in the annals of modern yacht racing'.

Adare's opinion mattered. He made two challenges for the America's Cup (and Watson designed the Scottish Challenger). A couple of years earlier, John Beavor Webb, who had been educated at Portora, designed Genesta and Galatea, the challengers in 1885 and 1886. He helmed in 1886, making him first and only Irishman ever to do so. Thomas Lipton's parents came from near Clones. Adding his five challenges, in yachts all called Shamrock, makes a total of nine with an Irish connection in the sixteen up to the second world war – there have been sixteen since.

Back to the fin keel. Other designers, including Herrschoff in the USA, went on to produce a new breed of racing boat based on Tipping and Saunderson's three main ideas, built light but strong, width across the beam of one third the length, and a fin keel. A century later the world's most numerous and widespread one-design fin-keel class were the J/24s, designed by an American called Rod Johnstone whose ancestors went out there in the 1790s from Fermanagh or Tyrone and 24 feet long. For twenty years past, Lough Erne's J/24 fin-keel fleet has raced for the Squire's Cup, first presented in 1890 by Jack Tipping, the fin-keel's inventor, in memory of his father, Squire Tipping

Mischief never returned to Lough Erne. In the 1950s, the Witch, now on the Lower Lake, was partly re-rigged and sailed by Mark Hughes. Driven far ashore by a gale and flood, she was left, and her remains are under a playing field at Enniskillen High School. Michael Whaley has one souvenir, Saunderson's ingenious cranse iron from her bow.

There was steam as well as sail on the Erne. Edward Archdale inherited in 1899 after a working life as an engineer that has included laying submarine cables across the Atlantic on the famous Great Eastern. His work at Castle Archdale until his death in 1916, included the jetty and boat house, still there, for his steam launch Alanna.

Newspaper advertisements showed a market in sailing boats, most locally built. Boat names were sometimes changed by new owners. Old names were used again for new boats. However, counting boat names in advertisements and regatta lists suggests that about 100 sailing boats were used for pleasure or racing on Lough Erne from 1818 up to the 1880s drainage. Thereafter, using an LEYC album of regatta reports from 1890 to the Great War, and counting the Fairy boats of 1906/7 for example, adds about 50 to make an

approximate 150 sailing boats in LEYC's first 100 years.

As well as yachts, a host of working boats were built, often to designs handed down within a family – a few names are Cathcart, upper lake; Ternan, lower lake; Cassidy, Enniskillen; and White and Maguire, Boa Island. The clinker wooden rowing boats, some with sprit sails, that evolved on the Erne were light, elegant, shapely and efficient craft. This heritage has been lost in today's heavy fishing boats that need fat and buoyant sterns to supports an outboard-motor. A heritage also lost is the skill of building the very ancient, but simple and efficient Lough Erne cot.

Charles McCabe – Begob the Boat Builder

Charles McCabe is the most interesting of the Erne's yacht building craftsmen, perhaps because more records and personal memories exist about him. Well known in Enniskillen, his prolific output was also recorded in the yachting press, in LEYC records, and in Lloyds annual Register of Yachts, first issued 1878, listing yachts and details. McCabe was listed as the builder, in Enniskillen in 1873, of Tipping's famous Mischief. Her many subsequent alterations, new owners and home ports, were all detailed each year until missing from the 1933 edition – over 60 years, so well built.

As well as in Enniskillen, he built yachts elsewhere, charging for his time, with the owner providing board and materials, according to the recollections of Mrs Kathleen Vaughan (1984). He built Lough Derg's pilgrim ferries, cold winter work, helped by a nip from a whiskey bottle hidden on a fishing line. Bonito, Lord Bangor's first yacht designed by Edward Saunderson, he launched into Strangford Lough from Castle Ward shore in 1884. She lasted many years, was in Lloyds to 1954 and sank about 1960 at anchor off Douglas, Isle of Man, swamped by the wake of a steamer.

McCabe, ever ready for a nip, kept a small telescopic cup in his jacket pocket. Brass buttons suggest a 'reefer' jacket, still fashionable today among older yachtsmen. He wore a matching peaked cap. Nicknamed Begob, for frequent use of the word in conversation, he was well educated, played a concertina, followed the London press and had good penmanship. He always asked and always got top rate, 1 shilling and 3 pence per hour, plus full board and lodging when away. A self-taught boat builder, he was much sought after for racing yachts around 25 to 35 feet long.

Yachts this size included the Two Raters raced at LEYC for fifteen years from about 1890. McCabe built several, including Bambino for George Massey Beresford at St Hubert's on the upper lake. Earlier he both designed and built White Wings in 1892 and Mirage in 1904 for Major G. Irvine, a keen supporter of the Lower Lake Regatta revived in 1893. Charles

McCabe's friendship with Major Irvine, who gave him that nickname of Begob, and Mrs Vaughan's recollection that he had lived on Inishdoney, perhaps working as a boatwright at the Irvine's sailing lodge there, suggest that he was the Charles McCabe, whose Wasp came third among smaller boats in the 1867 Regatta there. Aged about 77, when he died about 1917, he was in his late twenties in 1867. A curiosity also is that his surname is the same as Denis McCabe's, whose drowning a century earlier inspired Caldwell's Fiddle Stone verses.

In all, McCabe built about 20 racing yachts and worked on many other craft. He built few small boats but taught others to do so. Unusual work included the steam launch Sirocco for St Hubert's and double ended wherries for lake shooting parties. They were big rowing boats with pointed stern shaped like the bow so they could be rowed easily either forward and backward avoiding the noisy splashing of turning disturbing the quarry.

Reared by an uncle, a Derrygonnelly schoolmaster called Dane, after Inishdoney he lived in Strand Street at his lakeshore work place between the Barracks and today's Johnston Bridge. A Lawrence photograph taken from Cole's Memorial shows boats there about 1900. Three daughters, all competent in boat work, married away. Esther, as Mrs Newbold, returned to Enniskillen. She made Fairy sails, wrote poetry in a newspaper, and rowed and sailed the lake.

That area of Enniskillen had many other boatwrights living and working there, before and after McCabe. Enniskillen Yacht Club's land with a railway and winch to haul out the Fairy yachts is on Cornagrade shore opposite. Ned Vaughan's home and boat building shed, for example, were knocked down in the slum clearance scheme that replaced that area with commodious car-parks and a wide thoroughfare, with the lake behind a fence and trees. In 1979, from a top window of the new library, one last Fairy yacht could be seen moored at the Johnston Bridge. Enniskillen, and the people between its bridges, may have lost more than they gained from that clearance scheme.

Sailor and Small Farmer

Researching his ancestors in the 1990s, Michael Goodwin came across a curious Census entry. One of them, a Patrick Goodwin, had written as his employment 'sailor and small farmer'. Goodwins traditionally worked on and with yachts. Crom accounts show a Goodwin paid five pounds and five shillings for painting the Wizard in 1867, perhaps before that September's big LEYC regatta down at Rossclare. The Goodwins and their neighbours were also skilled racing crew, sometimes dressed in a practical sailing

uniform of heavy woollen sweaters embroidered with the boat's name, and knitted hats to suit the weather at Crom's autumn regattas. For some years around 1900, this Patrick Goodwin's job was the Sailor at Crom. One photograph of him at work is displayed in today's National Trust exhibition at Crom Estate. Another, in a private collection, shows him assisting the Earl sailing with grandchildren in a Lough Erne One-Design, a new type of sailing boat introduced in 1909.

Lakeside and island small farmers often had a cot or clinker built boat with a sprit sail – just as others inland had a slipe or cart. Sailors as well as small farmers, they could handle their simple boats well. In 1875, William Fiffe of Shanaughey (today's Share Centre) rowed out in his cot, and in half an hour had rescued Lord Crichton and his seven guests left clinging to the mast and top rigging of his yacht when it capsized and sank in a gale. He took them off, in turn, and rowed them to a second Crom yacht, nearby yet unable to get alongside the first in the heavy squalls.

Patrick Goodwin's brother Philip was the Sailor with the Massey-Beresfords at St Hubert's. An LEYC minute in 1896 denotes him Sailor. His work was remembered in 1972 by Tristam Massey-Beresford in the *Impartial Reporter*. Phil Goodwin had charge of all the boats, including the coal-burning steamer which took the family to church (at Derryvore across the lake from Crom) and was tug for the cots bringing coal from Belturbet railway station. With two daughters, who worked at the house, he came three miles a day to and from his home opposite Crom, a hard cold row in winter.

Pat and Phil Goodwin were typical of many sailors whose aquatic skills found employment back down the years to the Maguire era. Regattas in the 1800s had races for turf boats and cots. They came after the yacht races because both crews were often the same men, employed on a racing yacht, and then racing again in one's own or a friend's craft.

Employment in sailing continued into the 1900s. In 1966, eight surviving worker-sailors were elected honorary members of LEYC to mark their service over the years. 'Old' Davy Johnston had begun as apprentice carpenter on the Irvine estate. He worked with Storm, then a new Fairy yacht. Before a race, he had her rigged and ready at the jetty in Gublusk Bay as Major Irvine came down his steps from the house to go racing – still the 'Captain's Jetty' today. The Captain's steps are still there in thick moss and bushes near today's LEYC gate. Davy was an excellent helmsman, often winning the annual crew race. He worked on the new navigation marks in the 1950s. In the mid-1980s, he was elected LEYC admiral, as the Fairies celebrated their 80th anniversary and he featured in the BBC film. When he died, in his hundredth year, his admiral's flag was on his coffin, Other Johnstons made honorary were 'young' Davy, Joseph and Henry.

Three of LEYC's keenest young sailors today, Mark, David and Stephen Taylor, are the fifth generation of another sailing family. Their father, John is an amateur sailor. His father, Joe crewed in the Fairies Snipe and Doreen. The father of Joe's mother, Olive, was John McManus, another of those honorary members in 1966. For every photograph thereafter, he wore his Yacht Club tie. John McManus was sailor for Angel MacManus and her Fairy Paxi and worked sand yachts with his father Andy, who was a racing Sailor at Crom in the late 1800s. Today, Andy's great-great-grandsons, Mark and David are one of Ireland's best J/24 deck crews and Stephen is a lively junior sailor. Work for junior sailors, maintaining their Cadet dinghies in the 1950s and 1960s, made Paddy Adams another of the eight.

The final two were Thomas Balfour, boatman at Gublusk, and Douglas Ternan of Owl Island. His island farm with neat fields and whitewashed cottage, and his boat building with his two sons are described in Hugh Malet's *Wake of The Gods*, an account of a voyage, and folk he met, along the ancient route to Lough Derg in the 1960s. Ternan boats used simple spars to rig an ancient sprit sail and rest the oarsman on long trips. The next generation of Ternans, George and Fred, are skilled sailors and boatwrights. They still have the Ternan 'models' or moulds used to set the hull's shape along its length when building a Ternan boat. Shapely craft with fine lines aft, they were easy to row yet carried a useful load. Edwina Ternan, in today's new generation, is another young LEYC sailor in Laser dinghies and J/24 keelboats. But, none are farmers. So Douglas Ternan was among the last to be a sailor and small farmer.

The Price of Turf and Sand Yachts

> Ten years ago and less I paid twenty-five shillings for a boat load of turf: and sometimes, when winds were contrary, turf brought any money. Now, thanks to the Lough Erne Yacht Club, the turf boats can even compete against the wind with the yachts, and I can now buy my turf for thirteen shillings a boat load at the highest, sometimes as low as seven shillings.

'I cannot overlook that saving of 50 per cent in my household economy', wrote Townsman in the *Reporter*, September 1851. By mid century, the Erne's turf boat traders had mastered the technologies of sailing to windward.

A decade ahead of Townsman's letter, regattas included races for turf boats run after the main yacht races. In 1844, for example, the *Impartial Reporter* wrote, 'At termination of the race of the Lough Erne Club yachts, six turf-boats started and the race was well contested'. There was still a turf boat match in 1868. Mr Emery's boat won. As many as eight boats raced in turf boat races – a number that, a century later, would have been seen as a

good turn out of Fairy yachts, and is seldom achieved by today's J/24 keelboat fleet. Moreover, the turf boats seem to have be built for that trade, even perhaps by the same experienced and confident boatwrights who built gentlemen's yachts.

(Ireland's last sailing turf boats were Galway Hookers, delivering from Connemara to the Aran Islands in the days before bottled gas. The author sailed with some of their crew in 1961. They were superb sailors.)

22 years before Townsman's letter, reporting that first squadron of sailing boats from Castle Saunderson in 1819, the *Chronicle* remarked, 'our boatmen speak with great admiration of the manner in which these boats were navigated through the narrow passes of the upper lake, and in the rough water of the Lower, against violent and contrary winds, while from the imperfect construction of our barges they were detained in port, delaying cargoes and losing wages'.

The *Chronicle* went on, 'we foresee a more active interest will spring up for the improvement of the navigation and of the boats in which our native town is so deeply concerned'. Water transport was vital to Enniskillen in those days before the railway. By water was the best and often the only way to bring heavy goods to Enniskillen, not only turf but stone from Carrickreagh quarries, or the huge variety of goods that came by sea via Ballyshannon's Atlantic harbour.

An 1824 report urged 'accommodation to commercial purposes' of the 'annual exhibition of nautical science' and in 1842, the 'virtues of sailing' were that it encourages the art of building vessels most suitable for our waters and gives employment to sailors, while it instructs the peasantry how to navigate. Until the boat races started some years ago, the peasantry never attempted to sail against the wind: but now it is quite common to see boats laden with turf, stones and timber sail 'with the wind right ahead'. Sportsmen and now working-men had become sailors.

From the mid-1800s, there was a busy period of yacht building, driven by the handicap schemes then used to regulate competition among boats of differing dimensions which therefore took different times to run a course. The handicap depended on the boat's dimensions. A new boat was built. She won. Then another was built with dimensions adjusted for better handicap. So she won, but only until yet another was built with a still better handicap. This cycle produced lots of obsolete boats – large boats when the 1880s drainage lowered upper lake levels and boats with poor handicaps for racing. On the Erne, they were abandoned and became, and were called Sand Yachts.

Andy McManus worked in boats at Crom. When the new Two-Rater, Breeze arrived for the 1905 regatta, he got the old Breeze. Built by Craig,

the estate carpenter in 1865, she won at both 1867 and 1868 regattas and had other successes until the 1880s Drainage. A big deep boat, Irish oak built, she could take the strain of a large load of sand.

Andy's son was John, and today's family remember his boyhood tales of week-long voyages, father and son, to Rossharbour Bay, near Castle Caldwell, where Andy knew where to find good sand. A couple of day's digging loaded Breeze. Waiting overnight for water to drain from the wet sand into her bilge, they pumped it out next morning, raised sail and voyaged back to Enniskillen. The sand was used for building work.

On one trip, when sampled spirits of a trade suited to remote wooded islands kept her skipper to his bunk, that boy on Breeze pumped her out, raised sail and took her across the Broad Lough and on through the islands to Enniskillen. Aged 11, the law said he should have been at school. His was another education, passed on by his father and community tradition. Even as a boy, John was familiar with the Erne's ancient technologies of boat navigation under oar and sail.

Kathleen Vaughan's memories from a 1920s childhood were of working the pump most of the way home in Eddie Vaughan's sand yacht, Snark. Smaller than Breeze, she had been built as a Two-Rater by Charles McCabe in 1884. There were many other sand yachts in this trade, including four in Charles McCabe's fleet, and it remained mostly a sailing trade from the 1880s to the 1920s

By the 1930s, the boy once on Breeze, John McManus, had broken her up for firewood, and was now skipper of Lemon's steamboat, Wide-awake. She had a steam driven grab to dig and load sand from places that John's father Andy had taught him.

The Gublusk Era

In the winter of 1941, war brought two squadrons of Catalina flying boats from Scotland to set up RAF Killadeas at Gublusk Bay. When their Battle of the Atlantic ended in 1945, left around Gublusk were buildings for 2,800 RAF personnel, with surplus aircraft, boats, tools and equipment, and all the facilities of a wartime flying boat base.

Gublusk's wartime relics are still used over 60 years later. Boats are stored in the Hangar, a big tall shed built in 1941 for boats that serviced aircraft. They launch down the wartime slipway to lie on flying boat moorings. Spaces for servicing Catalinas that winter of 1941, now hold the RNLI Station, and racks for children's dinghies. Rings that held down Catalinas in a gale now hold catamarans, and the refuelling jetty is a snug berth for a cruising barge.

Another Gublusk memorial is a stone marked OTU 131 and unveiled in 2000 by returning members of the Canadian squadron 422 – nicknamed the Flying Yachtsmen. Their crews and many others had received operational training at RAF Killadeas. Nearby is a big buoy that had marked race courses on the Broad Lough in the 1930s. Painted with the burgees of EYC and LEYC crossed together, it was erected in 1985 to remember the friendship between these clubs.

Hangar storage helped preserve the Fairies through their second half century, still racing twice a week. Their 75th and 80th anniversary celebrations were in 1981 and 1986. Their centenary celebrations will be very special and are to include a big hundredth birthday gathering of classic boats from all over Ireland in September 2006. These original Edwardian racing yachts were built in the same times as the first motor cars, of which most that survive are in museums. The Erne Fairy class are remarkable boats, with the same mast and sail rig as a century ago, save for terylene instead of cotton sails today. They are a unique and very valuable part of sailing's world-wide heritage, of the heritage of Ireland's oldest yacht racing club, and of Fermanagh, where sailing dates to the medieval Maguires.

On some June evening, might that Gaelic poet's ghost return to stroll the Gublusk shore, composing lines about a forest of boat masts, a scene so like the strand beside Maguire's castle, that he wrote about over four centuries ago.

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Picnic on Inishdoney between Fairy races, 1947: Cooper family