

# YACHTING IN IRELAND

## *A Brief History*

Ireland can claim a rich history in the arena of aquatic sports, particularly in the sailing and racing of yachts. As a leisure sport in Ireland, yachting dates to the early eighteenth century when British naval officers, based at Haulbowline Island in Cork Harbour, developed a system of intricate manoeuvring in yachts which included the hoisting of flags, blowing of trumpets and beating of drums. The officers styled themselves as 'The Waterboys' and their aquatic pursuits are regarded as the forerunner of sailing as a competitive sport.



Original headquarters of the Water Club of Cork, the first sailing club in the world, on Haulbowline Island, Cork. Established by Lord Inchiquin in 1720, it survives today as the Royal Cork Yacht Club (Courtesy NIAH)

While the sailing of vessels dates to prehistoric times, the formal racing of yachts is believed to have originated in seventeenth century Holland, where the owners of large working vessels occasionally came together in their leisure time to participate in mock sea battles or engage in synchronised sailing. Yachting first came to the British Isles with the Stuart Restoration in 1660, but the new sport was slow to take off and remained a mainly royal pursuit, with the majority viewing the sea and rivers as areas for work rather than play.



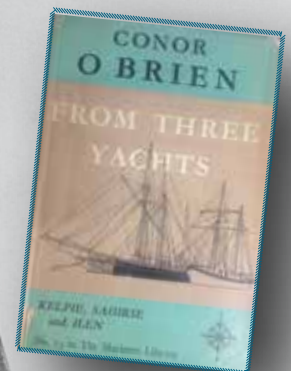
Dutch Yachts Racing by Andries van Eertvelt (Courtesy NMM)

It was from the early years of the nineteenth century that yachting as we know it today became an established leisure pursuit, albeit for wealthy owners of sailing vessels. While competitive yacht racing was very much an elite sport, it is likely that local racing between small working boats took place regularly, with many of these racers later finding work as professional hands on the yachting fleet during regatta season. As the popularity of the sport grew, the design of yachts became increasingly sophisticated, with features including large sail areas, a narrow beam and deep-draft keels. Racing became the primary purpose of yachts at this time and the high point of yachting in Ireland occurred during the second half of the nineteenth century.

From the beginning, Irish sailors have made major contributions and 'firsts' in the world of yachting. The Royal Cork Yacht Club, established in 1720 and originally known as the Water Club of Cork, is believed to be the first and oldest yacht club in the world. The Royal Alfred Yacht Club, founded in Dublin in 1857, is the world's oldest specifically amateur yacht club and was also the world's first offshore racing club. 2023 marks the centenary of Conor O'Brien's journey around the world in his yacht Saoirse. On his return to Dún Laoghaire in 1925, O'Brien became the first amateur Irish sailor to circumnavigate the world.



Constance and Richard Fry, c. 1890. Richard Fry was a founding member and first Commodore of Dublin Bay Sailing Club in 1884. Richard's wife, Constance, a noted helmswoman, was featured in an article in Yachting World magazine in 1894. Women have played a role in Irish yachting from its early days - as far back as 1805, the rules of the Water Club of Cork stipulated that 'the wives and daughters of members of the club, be also considered members of the club, and entitled to wear their uniforms' (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)



Further Reading: From Three Yachts by Conor O'Brien (1928)

Conor O'Brien's Saoirse before her departure from Dún Laoghaire to circumnavigate the world in 1923. Saoirse, a 42 ft ketch, was one of the first vessels to sail under the tricolour of the new Irish Free State (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)

THE RUSH OF THE  
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# YACHTING IN *Kingstown*

Though it was not built with yachting in mind, the completion of the asylum harbour at Kingstown on the south coast of Dublin Bay during the early nineteenth century provided instant and easy access to the open water, paving the way for the establishment of several yacht clubs. Before the construction of the harbour, Ringsend had been the hub for yachting in Dublin, with small scale competitive sailing and rowing races taking place regularly. Members of the Pembroke Rowing Club would later complain that the waters of the Liffey and Dodder rivers were 'every year becoming fouler and less agreeable for aquatic pursuits', and an alternative venue was required.



Picture from Hunt's Yachting Magazine showing the first Regatta at Kingstown in 1828. The yacht at left is Lord Anglesey's Pearl. The Lord Lieutenant stated that he would sail Pearl by himself from the harbour, round the Kish Lightship and back to Kingstown without any help from his crew. The yacht at right, Lord Erroll's Liberty came first, winning the 50 Guinea Cup (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)



Further Reading: History of Dun Laoghaire Harbour by John de Courcy Ireland (2001)



Yacht racing during Dalkey Regatta, c. 1900 (Courtesy Peter Pearson)

The seminal moment in the development of regattas in Kingstown occurred with the appointment of Henry Paget, Lord Anglesey, as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1828. Anglesey was a popular viceroy and supported Catholic Emancipation. A keen sailor, he brought his yacht *Pearl* to Ireland. This spurred some like-minded yachtsmen to organise a regatta in his honour at Kingstown in July 1828. With support from Harbour Master William Hutchinson, who sat on the organising committee, the first major yachting event held in the harbour was a huge success with fine weather and large crowds present to watch the racing. Refreshment stands and booths were set up by the waterfront, and numerous prizes including a Kingstown Challenge Cup were awarded. The organising committee arranged two further regattas in 1829 and 1831, before the developing yacht clubs took more responsibility for racing events.



Racing dinghies exiting Kingstown Harbour, c. 1890 (Courtesy Peter Pearson)

The regattas at Kingstown, which were most often called 'Dublin Bay Regattas', were held yearly with little or no interruptions from this point. The open water of Dublin Bay lent itself well for racing with the permanent navigation marks at Kish lightship and the Rosbeg and Burford buoys, as well as regatta flagboats, acting as racing marks. The complexity of organising regattas required collaboration and, from 1848, the Royal St. George and Royal Irish yacht clubs established a routine whereby one club ran the regatta on revolving years.

The Dublin Bay Regattas quickly became a part of the wider yachting calendar, attracting keen yachtsmen from Britain, as well as the USA and further afield. The prestige of winning a regatta trophy brought many competitors; English yachts took the Royal St. George's Cup, Lord Lieutenant's prize and the Queen's Cup in 1852. Many of the same competitors appear repeatedly on race lists down through the years.



A group of gentlemen inspect the Niagara, a yacht from New York, at Trader's Wharf by the west pier in Kingstown Harbour, c. 1910 (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)

From the middle of the nineteenth century until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Dublin Bay regattas remained the highlight of the seaside social calendar. Throughout this time, other regattas were also organised on the south coast near Kingstown, in places like Dalkey, Shankill and Bray. While conflicts like the Crimean War (1853-1856) and Boer War (1899-1902) caused disruption in the run of regattas at Kingstown, the enthusiasm for cruising and racing yachts quickly resumed once normal order returned.

# WHAT IS A Regatta?

They are eagerly anticipated events that mark the pinnacle of yachting excellence and serve as the high point of the sailing season, but what is a regatta and what does the event entail? In simple terms, a regatta is a series of races held on water, typically featuring sailing, rowing and swimming competitions. Within the regatta programme, races are organised for different classes of boats, including yachts, rowing boats, and even powerboats, depending on the specific regatta. Each race follows a predefined course, which can vary in length and complexity depending on the nature of the event and the skill level of the participants. The best regattas bring together skilled sailors, boat enthusiasts and spectators for thrilling competitions and displays of skill and craftsmanship, as well as festive entertainments.



First Class yachts start at the mouth of Kingstown Harbour, 1881. Regatta races would generally start from between the two piers, the end of Carlisle Pier, or a designated flagship (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)

The regattas at Kingstown were never solely concerned with the racing of yachts and a strong emphasis on other aquatic sports, particularly rowing events, has always been present. The 'Gentlemen's



Naval transport boats racing as part of a rowing match during regatta at Kingstown, c. 1906 (Courtesy Peter Pearson)

'Rowing Match' was a popular event in regatta programmes from the beginning, reflecting the rowing origins of many of the yacht clubs and attracting large numbers of entries from various rowing clubs in Dublin and the rest of Ireland. Swimming races have also featured in regattas throughout their history. While many of the early regattas were open only to members of the organising club, the increasing popularity of yachting and subsequent formation of yacht clubs throughout Ireland and England meant that non-members could sail in almost any race from the 1850s onwards.



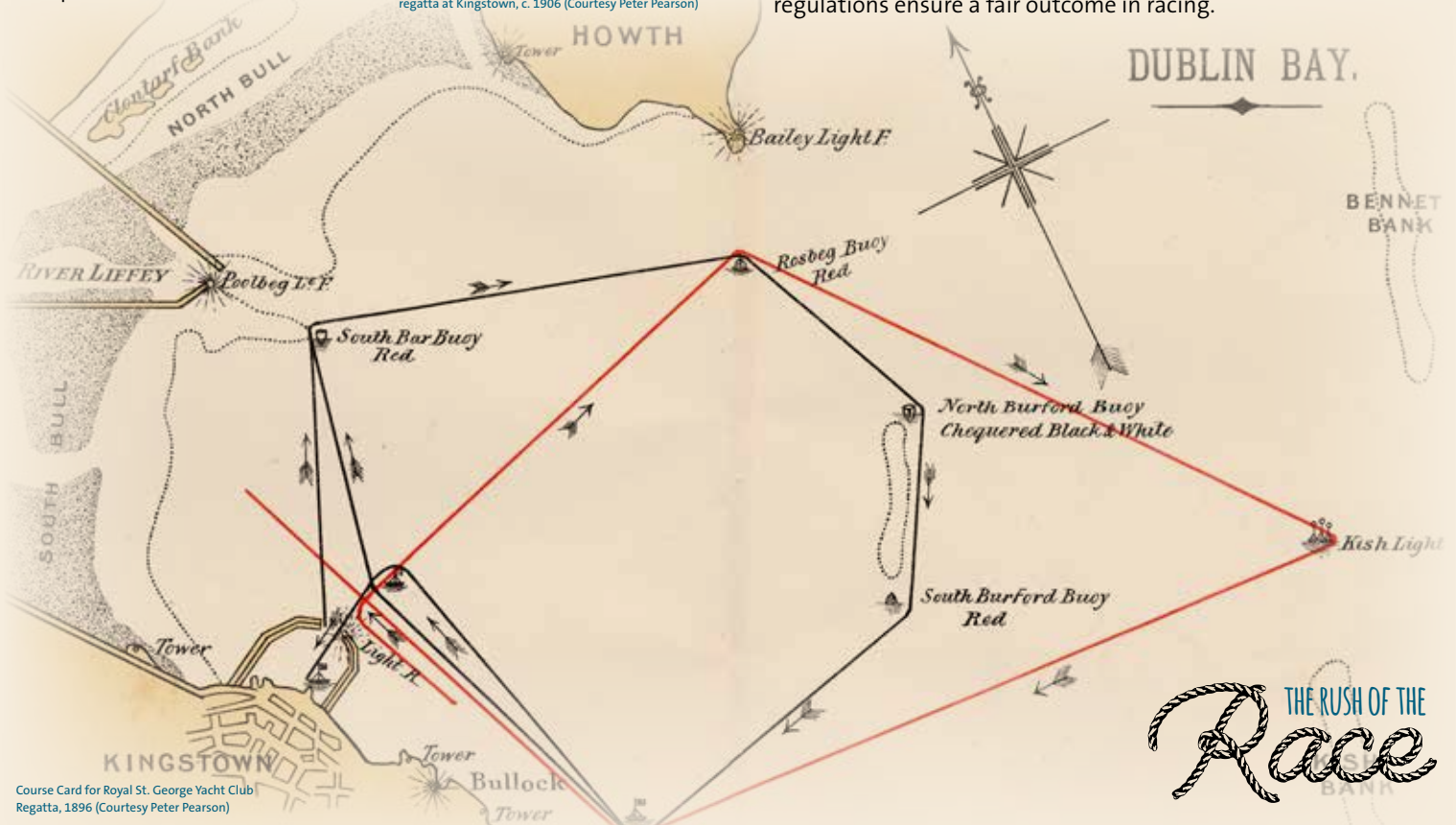
Silver trophy won by Robert Batt in his schooner *Heroine* during the Royal St. George Regatta at Kingstown in 1860. The trophy features Neptune, god of the sea, seated with trident. Sea nymphs and seahorses can be seen below him (Courtesy Peter Pearson)

Although early regattas and the clubs that hosted them were often associated with elitism, it is important to note that the racing included smaller boat categories including fishing trawlers, many of which competed to win legs of mutton or cash prizes. The larger yachts competed for prestigious cups, trophy plaques and silverware. The final results of races could often be contentious and, from the time yachts began racing competitively, the problem arose of how to classify them in order to ensure a fair race.



A list of classes or types of boat competing in the Dún Laoghaire Township Regatta in 1947 (Courtesy Irish Newspaper Archive)

While the simple length measurement was used for smaller boats, the tonnage (weight) rules used in the commercial world of shipping were initially adopted for classifying yachts. As their design developed and improved, yachts became lighter, sleeker and faster, and the need for an agreed handicapping system to allow different types of yacht to race fairly was acknowledged. Uniform racing rules were introduced in Ireland in the 1870s with nationally and internationally agreed rules and handicap systems. In modern times, standardised sailing rules and regulations ensure a fair outcome in racing.



Course Card for Royal St. George Yacht Club Regatta, 1896 (Courtesy Peter Pearson)

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# THE ROYAL IRISH Yacht Club

The Royal Irish Yacht Club, established in 1831, holds the distinction of being the oldest yacht club in Dún Laoghaire Harbour. Its foundation was a direct response to the successful regatta of 1828 which had indicated the need for a dedicated sailing club in Kingstown. Fittingly, it was Lord Anglesey, the man who inspired the 1828 Regatta, who served as first commodore of the club. With a sanction from King William IV, the club was permitted to use 'Royal' in its title from 1831. Despite a brief lapse in activity, the club was back up and running by 1846. The Royal Irish was seen as a more 'democratic' club than the Royal St. George, with a diverse membership open to professional men and merchants of all religions and most political persuasions. Early members included the Liberator Daniel O'Connell and the Duke of Wellington. Another notable member from 1906 was Sir Thomas Lipton, a self-made businessman. He is best remembered as the most persistent challenger in the history of the famous America's Cup yacht race. While women could not take full membership until 1991, they were granted the right to dine in the clubhouse on certain days from 1912.



Dinghies pass the Royal Irish Yacht Club during a regatta, c. 1910 (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)



The burgee of the Royal Irish Yacht Club features a royal crown and the Irish harp

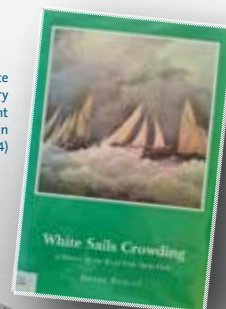
The 'Irish' held its first regatta in June 1832, with the commodore presenting the Anglesey Cup as a race prize. Fishing boat and pilot boat races were also included and they remained a feature of all club regattas. The second regatta, held in July 1833, included a luncheon at Hays Hotel (now the Royal Marine Hotel). The 1835 Regatta included a gold challenge cup, presented by the directors of the newly-completed Dublin and Kingstown Railway. On the death of William IV in June 1837, while the club regatta was taking place, racing was postponed until the following month. The 1838 Regatta was planned to coincide with the coronation of Queen Victoria, the new patroness of the club, with three new yachts built specifically for the occasion.



A yacht in the harbour behind the Royal Irish Yacht Club, c. 1890

The Royal Irish had considerable problems getting permission from the harbour authorities for a clubhouse and remained homeless until 1850. The well-appointed Grecian-style clubhouse, designed by John Skipton Mulvany, has served the club since then, with an extension to the lower terrace added in 1975. In 1981, the club celebrated 150 years of the 'Irish' and a regatta was held the following year to mark the first club regatta in 1832. The Royal Irish retains its distinguished reputation within yachting circles and its regatta remains a highly sought after event in the sailing calendar today.

Further Reading: White Sails Crowding - A History of the Royal Irish Yacht Club by Henry Boylan (1994)



The hustle and bustle of a regatta day at the Royal Irish Yacht Club c. 1895 (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)

# THE NATIONAL

## Yacht Club

The National Yacht Club, first founded as Kingstown Harbour Boat Club in 1869, was originally intended to be a rowing club. The early activities of the club focussed solely on rowing races alongside the east pier as well as travel to compete in 'away' events. The Kingstown Harbour Boat Club was formed in the Anglesey Arms Hotel on 26 November 1869, with John J. Crosthwaite, town councillor and local builder, elected first chairman. Crosthwaite gave a rousing speech, noting that English and American rowers had been invited to compete against the club, and that he was 'satisfied that if they do come, we will not allow them to take the prize out of Kingstown'. The club quickly formed a building committee and, after receiving permission from the relevant authorities in 1870, the foundation stone of the clubhouse was laid by William Pakenham, Earl of Longford, a politician and landowner with extensive property holdings in the Kingstown area.

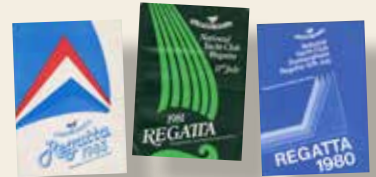


The elegant clubhouse of the National Yacht Club, designed by architect William Sterling and originally built for the Kingstown Harbour Boat Club. Note the wrought iron balcony and viewing platform on the roof (Courtesy Peter Pearson)

The burgee of the National Yacht Club features the red cross of St. George with blue and white sections representing sky, sea and surf.



The Kingstown Harbour Boat Club suffered financial problems from the beginning and went into liquidation in 1881. The next owners of the clubhouse, a syndicate who were determined to run their business at a profit, reopened the building as Kingstown Yacht Club and set about organising racing immediately, with their first regatta organised for the summer of 1882. Unfortunately, turnout for the regatta was low. The lack of interest in the club's sailing programme continued and the Kingstown Yacht Club was wound up by 1887. The next group to occupy the clubhouse was The Absolute Club, started by Charles Barrington, a member of the successful soap manufacturing family. Under Barrington's watch, the clubhouse was opened to women for afternoon tea, and concerts, balls and musical recitals were held frequently. After his death in 1901, the clubhouse was officially transferred to the newly-formed Edward Yacht Club, named after the British king who had just ascended the throne. While the 'Edward' held its first club regatta in 1907, there seems to have been little energy to organise regular racing. However, most members participated in Dublin Bay Sailing Club races on weekends.



National Yacht Club Regatta Programmes from the 1980s (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)



Bernard Forbes, 8th Earl of Granard, commodore of the National Yacht Club from 1931-1942 (Courtesy Library of Congress)

In 1931, the 'Edward' changed its name to The National Yacht Club, at the suggestion of the Earl of Granard who served as first commodore of the newly-named club. It was from this point that the 'National' gained a reputation for sailing and racing, with biennial regattas held in more modern times. With a programme that today includes a wide range of sailing facilities, from junior training to family cruising, and dinghy sailing to offshore racing, the National Yacht Club's evolution, from its origins as a rowing club to modern acclaim as one of the Dún Laoghaire yachting institutions, showcases the growth and development of the club alongside Ireland's own journey as a nation.

Further Reading: The National - Chronicles of a Dún Laoghaire Yacht Club by Donal O'Sullivan (2020)



The National Yacht Club, c. 1895. Located right beside the east pier of Dún Laoghaire Harbour, the clubhouse is a familiar sight for walkers on the pier. Peter Pearson notes the architectural style as a mix of a French chateau, hunting lodge or garden pavilion. The clubhouse suffered disastrous fires in 1975 and 1984, when much of the interior including historic records, was destroyed (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)

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# OTHER

## Yacht Clubs

### DÚN LAOGHAIRE MOTOR YACHT CLUB

The fourth and final waterfront yacht club is the Dún Laoghaire Motor Yacht Club, located at the West Pier facing the Coal Harbour. The Motor Yacht Club was founded in 1965 to cater for local leisure sailors who were not interested in membership of the three other clubs in the harbour. The club remains 'open to all', with the only requirement for membership being an interest in boating, whether it be sailing, powerboating, angling, diving and beyond. With the support of Harbour Master Thompson, a suitable location was quickly identified and a clubhouse was erected, with a slipway added a number of years later. While many members of the Motor Yacht Club are cruising sailors, the club also organises annual keelboat and dinghy racing, with members taking part in races organised by Dublin Bay Sailing Club during the summer months.



The burgee of the Dún Laoghaire Motor Yacht Club

### THE ROYAL ALFRED YACHT CLUB

Established in 1857 as an amateur or Corinthian sailing club, the Royal Alfred Yacht Club was the third 'Royal' yacht club founded in Kingstown. The club, named for Prince Alfred, second son of Queen Victoria, who sailed with it in 1866, is unusual in that it never had a clubhouse, preferring to channel its funds into regular and organised racing. The 'Alfred' was founded with the intention 'to encourage the practise of seamanship and the acquisition



Letterhead for the Royal Alfred Yacht Club, 1978. The letter features the emblem of the club, an anchor in lower hoist surmounted by a royal crown (Courtesy Peter Pearson)

of the necessary skill in managing vessels'. At a time when most yachts were staffed by a paid crew, the club sought to train its members in navigating and racing their vessels independently. The club's commitment to fostering self-sufficiency and a hands-on approach was a defining characteristic throughout its history. The 'Alfred' played a pivotal role in shaping yachting on an international scale and its members are credited with authoring the first national yacht racing rules, which were recommended for general adoption, leading to the establishment of the Yacht Racing Association in 1875.



National Maritime Museum of Ireland

Learn more about sailing and racing at Kingstown/Dún Laoghaire at the National Maritime Museum, located next door to dlr Lexicon in the former Mariners' Church

### DUBLIN BAY SAILING CLUB

Dublin Bay Sailing Club was founded in 1884 with the aim to offer affordable small boat racing opportunities for young sailors in Dublin. Today, it is the largest yacht racing organisation in Ireland with over one thousand members, most of whom come from the local yacht clubs in Dún Laoghaire. The club operates in affiliation with the yacht clubs and utilises their moorings and facilities in the harbour. Dún Laoghaire Marina has also provided accommodation for members' racing yachts since 2001. Like the Royal Alfred Yacht Club, which was incorporated by the club in 2016, Dublin Bay Sailing Club has no premises, using only a starting hut on the West Pier. The well-organised club remains at the forefront of yachting and racing in Dún Laoghaire, holding weekly racing, with hundreds of yachts of different classes starting on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays throughout the season



The burgee of Dublin Bay Sailing Club



The starting gun is fired, Dublin Bay Sailing Club racing, 1980 (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)



Starting Hut for Dublin Bay Sailing Club, West Pier, Dún Laoghaire, 1958. The race judges are Jack Kennedy, Charlie Oswald, and Jack Callagher (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)

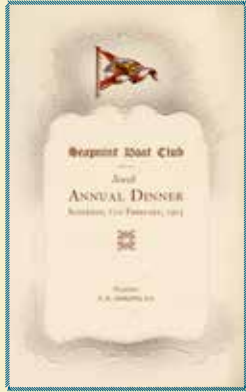
The seafront at Sandycove Battery during the Queen's Jubilee Regatta, 1897. All Dublin Bay Sailing Club races started from Sandycove from 1884 until 1898, when they transferred to the harbour mouth at Dún Laoghaire (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)

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# SEAPOINT BOAT CLUB

## *A Forgotten Club*

Seapoint Boat Club was founded on 27 May 1916 to provide a sailing club for the residents of nearby Blackrock and Monkstown. The club was established following a meeting in Seapoint Martello tower where it was decided that membership would be limited to twenty-five people, indicating the local outlook of the new club. Indeed, all founding members lived nearby and included one woman, Miss M. Murphy, with an address at Trafalgar Terrace. The club was intended to be less formal than its prestigious counterparts down the coast in Kingstown and aspired to be a 'progressive family-based club, where boys could learn the skills of seamanship and girls could develop rowing skills'.



Menu for Seapoint Boat Club sixth annual dinner, 1925 (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)

Seapoint Boat Club grew quickly in popularity, necessitating a change to the membership rules. By 1923, the ranks had swelled to one hundred and thirty-four people. The club leased Seapoint Martello tower from the local authority and used the public slipway next to it to access the water. A boatman was hired to look after the fleet and to row members out to their boats which were moored at a distance off the



The burgee of Seapoint Boat Club (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)



Programme of swimming events at Seapoint Boat Club Regatta, 1921 (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)

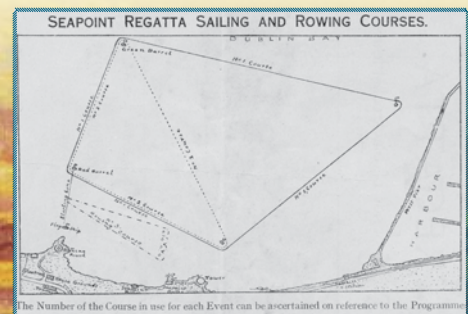


Programme for Seapoint Boat Club Regatta, 1922. The club developed a good working relationship with Thomas McCormick, the owner of Blackrock House, and he often allowed spectators onto the grounds of his house to watch the regatta from the shoreline (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)

Martello tower. The tower was used to store sailing equipment and also doubled as a changing room with lockers for members. Blackrock Urban District Council provided seating around the external walls so that spectators could watch the racing in comfort.

Seapoint Boat Club held sailing and rowing races every week from May to September, with an entrance fee of one shilling per boat per race. Races were generally started from the roof of the Martello tower with the course defined by buoys located off the west pier of Kingstown Harbour. The club regatta took place yearly from 1919, with cash prizes and silver spoons awarded as prizes. While the yachts of members were initially of various sizes, it was proposed that a one-design 12 foot class be established by the club in 1924. Members agreed and six boats were built and purchased from Michael Mahony of Patrick Street in Kingstown. The 12 footers held their first race in 1925 and quickly provided the best competition within the club.

Despite its initial popularity, a rapid decline in the number of boats sailing and an exodus of members to the Dublin Bay Sailing Club led to the winding up of Seapoint Boat Club by 1932. While it only existed for a short time, the boat club met a need within the local community around Seapoint, offering an outlet for sailing enthusiasts and those seeking vibrant social activities. The archives of the Seapoint Boat Club were generously donated to dlr Local Studies in 2022. They offer a tantalising glimpse into this short-lived sailing club.



The Number of the Course in use for each Event can be ascertained on reference to the Programme  
Course card for sailing and rowing races at Seapoint Boat Club Regatta (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)

# THE REVIVAL OF THE *Kingstown* TOWNSHIP REGATTA 1895

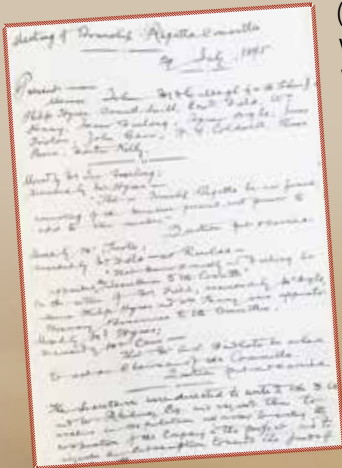
The organisation of the 1895 Township Regatta was a collaborative venture. Adam Findlater, the well-known businessman and Chairman of the Town Commissioners took charge, with five of his fellow Commissioners on the Committee, all ably assisted by John Donnelly, the Town Clerk. The Christian Brothers School secured the services of the Artane School Band, who played on the Victoria Wharf (now St Michael's Wharf). HMS Melampus, the Navy guardship in Kingstown, provided a small boat to serve as the Flag Boat for the racing. The Kingstown Permanent Amusement Committee engaged the band of the Royal Irish Constabulary to accompany a fireworks display which was held in The Royal Marine Gardens, and the Town Hall was illuminated. The gun of the East Pier Battery was used to start races. The event grew to the extent that major employers including the Board of Works, Irish Lights and the Town Commissioners were asked to give their employees a half-day's holiday to attend, and *Erin's King*, a steamship which later featured in Joyce's *Ulysses*, brought spectators out from Dublin town.

The decline of the Kingstown Township Regatta during the latter years of the nineteenth century led to the formation of a new committee, under the auspices of the Town Commissioners, with the aim of reviving it in July 1895. Part of the blame for the fall off was inclement weather conditions, so a decision was taken to hold it later in the year in September with the hope that weather conditions would be more suitable for racing.



Dublin Bay 25 yachts starting, with the west pier in the background (Courtesy National Library of Ireland)

The event was to be self-financing through subscriptions from Committee Members and from business interests including the Dublin, Wicklow and Wexford Railway Company. A national and local press campaign was agreed, and throughout August arrangements began to take shape. A generous prize fund of £142 (close to €28,000 in today's terms) was put in place and the usual water sports were to be included – yachting, rowing, swimming, canoeing and trawler racing.



Minutes from the first meeting of the 1895 Regatta Committee (Courtesy dlr Archive Service)



Unidentified men out for the day, at the top of the East Pier. A Regatta poster is just visible to the right (Courtesy National Library of Ireland)

All accounts are a testament to the huge success of the event and – most importantly – the wind was good on the day. The yachting correspondent of *The Field* described it as 'the most enjoyable aquatic festival of the season of 1895', and buoyed by their success, the Committee members immediately resolved to hold an even more impressive event the following years. A public advertisement was prepared, bringing the 1896 Regatta forward to 31 August of that year.



The East Pier dressed for regatta celebrations – note the Foghorn, and also the inimical weather conditions...no wind for sailing (Courtesy National Library of Ireland)



# THE WATER Wags



Water Wag dressed for a regatta, c.1900  
(Courtesy Peter Pearson)

The Water Wag, the oldest one-design dinghy in the world, is credited with introducing and popularising the concept of one-design racing, first in Ireland, where the class was launched in 1887, and then around the world. One-design racing is a method whereby all participants in a race use

identical models, thus negating the need for a handicap system. This method simplifies racing, allowing for the same start time for all racers with the winner being the first to cross the finish line.

The Water Wag was the brainchild of Thomas Middleton, a solicitor and amateur sailor who sought to develop a timeless boat design which could be replicated and used to ensure that racing would be primarily a test of skill. The first model was designed as a sailing and rowing boat that could be launched from the beaches at Killiney and Shankill. In 1886, Middleton, a member of Shankill Corinthian Sailing Club, placed a notice in the Irish Times stating his aim 'to establish in Kingstown a class of sailing punts, with centreboards all built and rigged the same, so that even a harbour race may be had with a light rowing and generally useful boat'. A committee was formed to oversee the design of the boat and Middleton prepared a sketch which was



*Eva*, the originator of the Water Wag class, launched in 1887. The original *Eva* was lost in a house fire in 1970. In 1986, a century after *Eva* was designed, a replica, *Eva II* was built from Middleton's designs, and she sailed in the Water Wag centenary race (Courtesy Peter Pearson)

sent to Robert McAllister, a boat builder in Dumbarton, Scotland. McAllister adapted the sketches slightly before delivering *Eva*, the 'Mother of the Fleet' in late 1886. The Water Wags embarked on their first cruise on 21 June 1887, a public holiday to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria, sailing from Kingstown to Dalkey Island where they disembarked and picnicked on the island. In 1890, the Water Wags raced in the Royal St. George Regatta with the race sailed under the rules and regulations of the newly established Water Wag Club.



Water Wag off Howth Harbour, c. 1890. Water Wags do not generally emboss symbols on their sails, except their boat number, and they do not paint the names of the boats on their hull (Courtesy Colin Scudds)



Members of Port Dickson Yacht Club in Malaysia pose with their Water Wags during the early years of the twentieth century (Courtesy Peter Pearson)

A modified design was adopted in 1900 with a larger stern and increase in sail area. The Water Wag quickly proved a popular racing boat and could be found in exotic places like Brazil, India and Sri Lanka within a few years of launching. The Water Wag is a simple yet striking boat and remains as popular as ever today. The surviving original boats still sail and the Water Wag Club celebrated 125 years of the class in 2012. The boats are one of the most active dinghy classes in Ireland and race weekly from April to September. The club regularly organises special events and continues the tradition of sailing from Dún Laoghaire to Dalkey Island most years.

Further Reading: *The Water Wags 1887-2012*  
by Alfred and Vincent  
Delany (2012)



# ROYALTY AT

# Regattas

As it developed into a well-known and world renowned marine resort and centre of yachting in Dublin, the 'second city of the British empire', Kingstown drew many prominent figures from home and abroad to its popular regatta season. The early influence of Henry Paget and his endorsement of yachting from 1828 ensured that the great and the good of the yachting world descended on Kingstown for the racing season. The society pages of newspapers regularly listed the names of notable figures, including royalty, headed to Kingstown for sailing and regatta events.



The royal yacht *Britannia*, built for King Edward VII and launched in 1893, was a regular competitor in regattas at Kingstown. William Jameson, member of the Royal St. George Yacht Club and of the famous distilling family, served as sailing master on the yacht, winning 33 out of 43 starts in her first season (Courtesy Library of Congress)

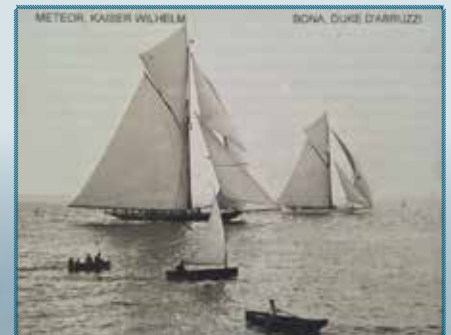
In 1880, Edward, Prince of Wales and later King Edward VII, became patron of the newly founded Yacht Racing Association which helped codify the rules of racing. Edward was one of the most prominent royal visitors to the harbour; he visited Kingstown nearly every year from 1893 in the royal yacht *Britannia* to participate in racing events. The British royals had



King George V at the helm of *Britannia* during Cowes Week Regatta, c. 1925. *Britannia*, a gaff-rigged cutter, passed to the king on the death of his father, Edward VII in 1910. The yacht was scuttled following his death in 1936 (Courtesy German Federal Archives)

maintained an interest in pleasure boats from the time King Charles II was presented with the yacht *Mary* by the Dutch East India Company on the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660. The support and patronage of British royalty added grandeur to receiving clubs and events - the addition of 'Royal' to a yacht club title provided the maximum in glamour and respectability. The Duchess of Kent, mother of Queen Victoria, was an early supporter of sailing, donating a trophy, the Countess of Dublin Cup, as a regatta prize in 1836. The cup was to be made in Dublin in order to encourage native talent. Likewise, Queen Victoria continued the tradition, bestowing the Queen's Cup and 'Her Majesty's Plate' as regatta prizes, and granting royal permission to use the 'Royal' prefix to the Royal St. George Yacht Club.

Other members of European royalty who graced the shores of Kingstown to participate and spectate during regattas included members of the Italian House of Savoy, the German emperor Wilhelm II and King Alfonso XIII of Spain. In 1912, during his visit to the Royal Irish Yacht Club, Alfonso participated in the regatta at Kingstown, racing in a yacht belonging to H.M. Wright, a member of Dublin Bay Yacht Club. Wright subsequently renamed the yacht *Española* in honour of the Spanish monarch. While modern royalty does not have the same presence as that of the past, members of royal families are still sometimes found at the Dún Laoghaire regattas - Frederick, Crown Prince of Denmark, an accomplished yachtsman, sailed to Dún Laoghaire in order to compete in the 1990 International Dragon Gold Cup.



Kaiser Wilhelm II's *Meteor* and Prince Luigi Amadeo, Duke of the Abruzzi's *Bona* competing in the Kingstown Regatta, c. 1900 (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)

# REGATTAS IN THE *Irish Free State*

Following an official change of name, Kingstown became known as Dún Laoghaire from 5 August 1920. As the War of Independence unfolded in Ireland, Dún Laoghaire and its harbour would experience guerilla fighting from late 1920 up until the Truce in 1921. The regattas, which had already been reduced due to the outbreak of World War One in 1914, continued in a diminished manner during the early years of the Irish Free State, lacking the grandeur of previous events.

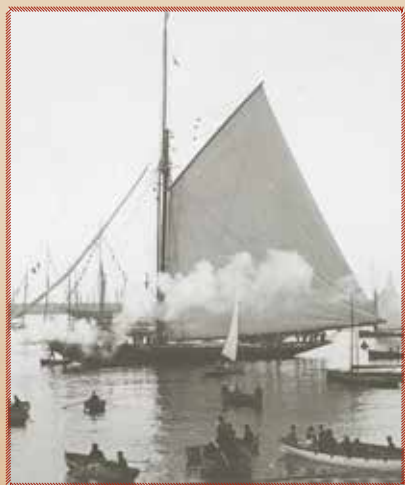
The Royal Irish Yacht Club, c. 1895. Note the ensign with Union Jack at top of flagpole (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)



Though the yacht clubs in Dún Laoghaire had a diverse membership with varying political viewpoints, they were generally regarded as having a Unionist inclination. Many members had enjoyed military careers throughout the British Empire and club dinners typically commenced with a toast to the British monarch's health. When regattas were revived again in the 1920s, they were conspicuously referred to as 'Kingstown Regattas' despite the official name change of the town. The yacht clubs also continued to use the Union Jack in their ensigns (flag). In 1926, an attempt was made to destroy the flagstaves of the three clubs by explosives. The flagpoles remained empty for a number of years before the ensigns were flown again.

In 1931, the Edward Yacht Club removed any royal associations by renaming itself the 'National Yacht Club'. The clubhouse was used regularly by W.T. Cosgrave, first president of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State, to engage in ongoing discussions with representatives of the British government, and this ultimately led the club to change their name. The Examiner lauded the change, noting that the original 'Edward' club was 'the creation of a regime that has passed...the club has been democratised'. Likewise, the new Governor-General of the Irish Free State replaced the former viceroys as guest of honour at regattas, with Tim Healy, first Governor General, present to award prizes during the 1920s. Many Irish political figures were enthusiastic sailors and members of the yacht clubs throughout the twentieth century, including Batt O'Connor, James Walter Beckett and Seán Lemass, who all joined the 'National'.

A salute is fired from the deck of a yacht, possibly *Britannia* or Thomas Lipton's *Shamrock*, at a Kingstown regatta, 1903. Sir Thomas Lipton was born in Glasgow, Scotland in 1848. His parents had been forced to emigrate from Ireland during the Famine (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)



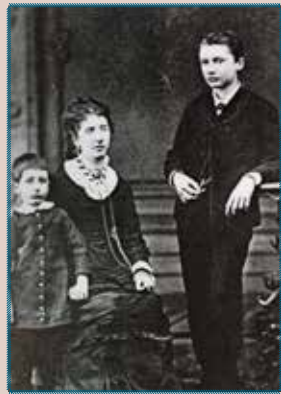
Programme for Dún Laoghaire Regatta Week, 1948 (Courtesy Peter Pearson)



# THE MARCONI Connection

During the summer of 1898, the Kingstown Regatta was the scene of a groundbreaking milestone in history—the world's first commercial and journalistic use of wireless telegraphy. This event marked a pivotal moment in technological advancement, where wireless communication was employed to successfully transmit minute-by-minute reports direct from the sea. The man responsible was Guglielmo Marconi, an Irish-Italian inventor and electrical engineer. Marconi's mother, Annie Jameson, was the granddaughter of John Jameson, founder of the famous Irish whiskey company. Annie Jameson left Ireland for Italy in the 1860s to train as an opera singer. While in Bologna, she met Giuseppe Marconi, an Italian aristocrat and landowner, and married him in 1864. Their second son, Guglielmo, was born in 1874. The young Marconi spent many summers visiting family in Ireland, staying in Daphne Castle near Enniscorthy in Wexford.

Driven by his lifelong fascination with science and electricity,

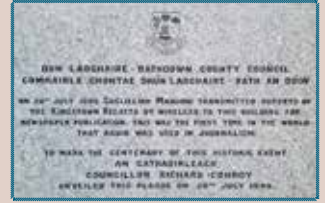


Annie Jameson Marconi with her two sons, Guglielmo and Alfonso, c. 1880

A sketch of Guglielmo Marconi and his radio equipment, from Punch magazine, 1913 (dlr Local Studies)



Marconi began exploring the concept of wireless telegraphy in the early 1890s. In 1897, he established The Wireless Telegraph and Signal Company Ltd., a venture that aimed to revolutionise long-distance communication. While previous inventors had experimented with various wireless telegraph technologies, none had achieved significant technical or commercial success. Marconi's pioneering efforts would ultimately change the course of communication history, and it all took place against the backdrop of the Kingstown Regatta.



Plaque marking the historic achievement of Guglielmo Marconi on the wall of Moran Park House. Originally known as Harbour House, it was built in 1840 with the first occupant being Harbour Master William Hutchison. The house is currently occupied by the Irish Design Gallery

Marconi was commissioned by the Irish Daily Express newspaper to report the results of races at Kingstown in 1898. A yacht, *Flying Huntress*, was chartered and specially equipped with wireless equipment, creating a mobile platform for transmitting wireless signals back to a receiving station at Harbour House (now Irish Design Gallery in Moran Park, next to dlr Lexicon). Marconi, an avid sailor, took to the sea on 20 July 1898 along with his team, following the regatta out into Dublin Bay and sending back the first-ever report by wireless telegraphy. The Irish Daily Express scooped the story, naming the Italian yacht *Bona* as the probable winner of the Queen's Cup race before any of their rival newspapers. Marconi's first sea-test of his invention and the successful transmission of the Kingstown Regatta results made headlines globally, cementing his influence on journalism, radio and communication. Marconi spent the rest of life refining his invention and further pushing the boundaries of wireless communication. On his death in 1937, radio stations in Ireland, America, England and Italy observed several minutes of silence in his honour, acknowledging the profound impact he had on the world.



Further Reading: Marconi - The Man Who Networked the World by Marc Raboy

# SOMETHING FOR

# Everyone

From the time they first occurred in Dublin, regattas held a prominent place in society, captivating individuals from all walks of life. Regattas were not only about the participants but also aimed to provide entertainment and excitement for onshore spectators. The clubhouse facilities by the harbour served as ornate venues for invited guests, with buffets and musical entertainment. An 1858 report from Hunt's Yachting Magazine describes the scene of a regatta party in the Royal St. George Yacht Club, 'the walls and ceilings decorated with pink and white cloth, adorned with mirrors and evergreens. Every delicacy in season was tastefully laid...and the wines were excellent and in abundance'.



Invitation to the Royal St. George Regatta, 1862  
(Courtesy Peter Pearson)

The East Pier would be particularly packed with people, many of whom came out from Dublin for the day on the train or boat. Local businesses cashed in on regatta fever with advertisements for binoculars with 'regatta glass with wonderful magnifying powers'. Yachts were required to fly large masthead flags and these were reproduced in regatta programmes, allowing onshore spectators to identify individual yachts. Spectators would often take to the water on other vessels to watch and follow the competing racers.



Spectators, many of whom have cameras, gather at the Fog Bell at the end of the East Pier to view a regatta, c. 1895  
(Courtesy Peter Pearson)

Within the harbour, other competitive entertainments included rowing and swimming races, tug o' war matches, greasy pole competitions, and a duck

hunt. The duck hunt involved a lone sailor or 'duck' in a punt being chased and eventually caught by competitors. The fishermen and boatmen's races were a staple feature, and though they required a substantial entry fee, the prizes were worth it.



Wintering yachts at the Depot, Kingstown, c. 1895  
(Courtesy dlr Local Studies)



Letterhead for R. Perry & Co., Yacht Sailmakers and Outfitters, Dún Laoghaire, 1924. The prevalence of yachting at the harbour provided many forms of employment for local people, from boat building and maintenance to direct employment in the yacht clubs (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)

A wide range of entertainment was provided for the crowds who descended on the harbour. Marquees were set up along the seafront, offering refreshments such as tea, lemonade, and ices. Military bands provided concerts throughout the day, with ballroom dancing taking place in The Pavilion. In 1890, a grand regatta ball was held in the newly opened Town Hall. The most eagerly anticipated event was the evening fireworks display. With the coming of electricity, the park and much of the harbour was lit with stringed electric lamps, adding 'a touch of the gaiety common in Continental holiday resorts'.



A military band wait their turn to perform at the regatta, c. 1905 (Courtesy Peter Pearson)

The 1927 Dún Laoghaire Regatta featured a slew of entertainment including several bands and Irish dancing competitions. A 'confetti battle' and fireworks display also took place. The No. 1 Army Band performed in the People's Park alongside a fancy dress parade with prizes awarded in various categories. Entertainment during the 1967 Dublin Bay Week included a discotheque, formal dances, a regatta sing-song, and a chicken and beer party. This year, Coastal 2023 marks a return to normal in the post-pandemic world, with outdoor movies, live music, and dlr heritage events taking place as part of the entertainment programme.



A crowd watches from the rear of the Royal Irish Yacht Club as two men, with eyes covered, joust and attempt to knock one another from their boats as part of regatta games, c. 1910. (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)

# UNDER THE *Weather*

The weeks leading up to a regatta were, and continue to be, filled with speculation regarding the ever-changing Irish weather. Though regattas are most often held during the summer months, an inclement racing day can cause the cancellation of races or put the lives of participants at risk. The weather often proved to be the only drawback during regatta season, with regular reports of choppy seas, persistent rain or light winds on Dublin Bay. Alternatively, extreme and gusty gales often left yachts windbound, and the success or failure of a regatta would often depend on the strength and direction of the wind.



Dalkey Regatta, c. 1910. Dalkey Sound, a popular course, is known for its strong tidal currents (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)



*Irish Independent* arrives at the Fastnet Rock on 10 August 1987, on her way to winning the Fastnet Yacht Race (Courtesy dlr local studies)

#### FASTNET YACHT RACE

The Fastnet Yacht Race, first held in 1925, is widely regarded as one of the most exciting and hazardous offshore yacht races in the world. The classic race, a biennial event which serves as the finale of the Admiral's Cup Regatta organised by the Royal Ocean Racing Club in Britain, begins in Cowes on the Isle of Wight and rounds Fastnet Rock, the most southerly part of Ireland, as part of its course. A severe storm during the 1979 Fastnet Race saw the deaths of nineteen people and the sinking of five boats.

The race has been won by Irish vessels twice; *Irish Independent/Full Pelt* came first in 1987, and *Chieftan* followed in her footsteps in 2007. The Fastnet Yacht Race has influenced the growth of offshore racing as well as advances in yacht design, sailing technique and safety equipment.

Newspaper reports made consistent references to bad weather at regattas, often noting the fine weather present the day before racing began! The 1905 Kingstown Regatta was postponed due to incessant rain. In 1928, rain again blighted the Dún Laoghaire Regatta. Despite the rainfall, which remained heavy throughout the afternoon, the Irish Times praised the 'heroic manner in which the crowd braved it out to the end'. The reporter noted that 'an Irish crowd when it is bent upon sport does not care a straw whether it rains or not'. In 1929, the wind was so light and insufficient for racing purposes that the organising committee took the decision to finish the racing at the end of the first round. In later years, many committees ensured that time could be allocated to allow for races if they were cancelled due to adverse weather.



Fireflies, with sailors wearing life jackets, race in Dún Laoghaire Harbour, c. 1975 (Courtesy dlr Local Studies)

Health and safety remains a key concern during regattas. In 1872, the racing rules set forth by the Royal Alfred Yacht Club included comprehensive safety equipment requirements for yacht racing. Throughout the nineteenth century, newspapers reported on the frequent instances of topmasts and bowsprits being broken and detached from yachts. Crash boats were introduced to provide assistance with the inevitable collisions and other incidents that might occur during racing. In 1964, the committee of Dún Laoghaire Regatta Week decided unanimously to require that all helmsmen and crews wear personal buoyancy. The decision was made on the recommendation of class captains and in view of the large number of entries expected for the regatta week. Newspapers noted that these safety measures were to be rigidly enforced with immediate disqualification for competitors who did not comply. In more modern times, race participants must be mindful of debris in the water as well as aquatic sealife.



Further Reading: Dublin Bay - The Cradle of Yacht Racing by Hal Sisk (2014)

# REGATTAS IN

## *Dún Laoghaire* (1920-)

Regattas continued to be held in Dún Laoghaire on a regular basis, with many newspaper reports comparing them to past regattas, noting the similarities with 'the best of the Kingstown regattas of old'. Following a period of stagnation, caused mainly by the Second World War, the Dún Laoghaire Commercial Association, later the Chamber of Commerce, appointed a committee to explore the possibility of a regatta in 1947, with suggestions that the Irish Navy and British Home Fleet be invited to participate. In 1963, over one thousand yachts competed in over ninety races during a very successful Dún Laoghaire Regatta Week, with different days dedicated to specific regattas organised by the local yacht clubs. However, Dún Laoghaire Regatta Week had petered out by the end of the 1960s.



Spectators watch a regatta in Dún Laoghaire Harbour, c. 1950  
(Courtesy dlr Local Studies)

The Dún Laoghaire Summer Festival, begun in the 1970s, aimed to promote and encourage local community life and worked to revive a regatta week. ISORA (the Irish Sea Offshore Racing Association) organised international races during the festival in 1974 and 1980, with boats of all shapes and sizes from all over the world sweeping through the finish line.



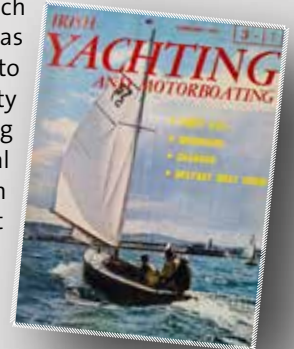
17 footers in Dún Laoghaire Harbour, 1946. The concept of one-design racing introduced by the Water Wags in 1887 inspired other one-design yachts and dinghies, including the Howth 17 footer, Dublin Bay 21 footer, and the Dublin Bay Mermaid (Courtesy Peter Pearson)

The organisation and management of modern regattas requires extensive collaboration and cooperation. In 2004, the four local yacht clubs announced their plans to amalgamate their individual regattas in favour of a combined regatta week. Since 2006, Volvo, a regular supporter of sailing at Olympic and youth level, has been the title sponsor of Dún Laoghaire Regatta, the most extensive of its kind in Ireland. The organising committee, drawn from the four waterfront yacht clubs, works closely with Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, Dublin Bay Sailing Club, Irish Sailing, RNI and a host of others to ensure a successful regatta season. Over 500 boats entered the Volvo Dún Laoghaire Regatta in 2005.



Dublin Bay Mermaids, designed for the Dublin Bay Sailing Club in 1932 by John B. Kearney, c. 1950  
(Courtesy dlr Local Studies)

In 2018, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council assumed responsibility for the harbour, which includes an 820 berth marina as well as the moorings and jetties that belong to the local yacht clubs. The local authority continues to support sailing and racing programmes, and the 2023 Coastal festival, coinciding with the Volvo Dún Laoghaire Regatta, is a reminder of what Dún Laoghaire Harbour, one of the most historic and busiest sailing centres in the world, has to offer.



The East Pier, Dún Laoghaire Harbour featured on the cover of Irish Yachting and Motorboating, 1971  
(Courtesy Peter Pearson)

**Acknowledgements:** David Gunning, curator; Georgina Sweetnam, dlr Archive Services; Catherine Gallagher, dlr County Librarian; Carmel Kelly, Executive Librarian, dlr Lexicon; Patricia Corish, dlr Local Studies Librarian; Éanna O'Keefe, dlr Local Studies; Debbie Moody; Peter Pearson; Colin Scudds; Olivia Hearne, designer, Concept2Print

Crowds line the coast at Loreto Convent, Dalkey, to watch a regatta, c. 1910. Local sailing, rowing and swimming regattas have taken place all along the coast of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown throughout the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries.  
(Courtesy dlr Local Studies)

THE RUSH OF THE  
*Race*

# THE ROYAL ST. GEORGE

## Yacht Club

The Royal St. George Yacht Club, originally known as the Kingstown Boat Club, was founded in 1838 by members of the Pembroke Rowing Club who sought to move away from the increasingly industrial waters around Ringsend. The members were granted a piece of land on the harbour at Kingstown on which to build a clubhouse. While the initial focus of the club was on rowing, the rapidly increasing popularity of yachting and proliferation of members with yachts quickly made this aquatic sport the main focus of the club.

No.	YACHT.	OWNERS.	TONS.	CLASS.
1	Prince of Wales	Marquis Conyngham	300	Cutter
2	Albatross	Mr Robert Owen Smith, Esq.	275	do
3	Yacht	Richard W. Coates, Esq.	250	do
4	Opaline	William Peck, Esq.	250	do
5	Endeavour	Francis Conyngham, Esq., M.P.	250	do
6	Caroline	Richard Graham M. Vandenberg	250	do
7	Argo	Anthony Edward Rees, Esq.	250	do
8	Opaline	Henry Smith, Esq.	250	do
9	Indra	John Young, Esq.	250	do
10	Guinness	Charles Redmond, Esq.	250	do
11	Prince of Wales	Charles Redmond, Esq.	250	do
12	Sea	St. Denis Smith	250	do
13	Britannia	David G. La Touche, Esq.	250	do
14	Sham Eagle	James G. Hamilton, Esq.	250	Yacht
15	Albatross	Francis Smith, Esq.	250	Cutter
16	Albatross	Henry Smith, Esq.	250	do
17	Yacht	John Young, Esq., F.R.S.B.	250	do
18	Opaline	Richard J. Vandenberg, Esq.	250	do
19	Paul Pry	Wm. F. Pringle	250	do
20	Golden Eagle	James Smith, Esq.	250	do
21	Medusa	St. George Smith, Esq.	250	Marine
22	Sea	David G. La Touche, Esq.	250	Cutter
23	Princess	Wm. G. Hamilton, Esq.	250	do
24	Yacht	St. Denis Smith, Esq.	250	do
25	Yacht	St. Denis Smith, Esq.	250	do
26	Yacht	Anthony Smith, Esq.	250	Wherry
27	Sea	Arthur Chapman, Esq.	250	Cutter
28	Sea	St. Denis Smith, Esq.	250	do
29	Sea	St. Denis Smith, Esq.	250	do
30	Sea	St. Denis Smith, Esq.	250	Wherry

List of yachts and their owners, Royal St. George Yacht Club, 1845 (Courtesy Peter Pearson)

The most influential member of 'the George' was Francis, 2nd Marquess Conyngham, an Anglo-Irish politician and prominent attendant at the royal court. Conyngham used his influence with Queen Victoria to have the privileges of a royal charter granted in 1845. The club officially changed its name to 'The Royal St. George Yacht Club' in 1847. The Victorian-era clubhouse, designed by John Skipton Mulvany, was completed in 1843. However, the club quickly outgrew the premises and the building had to be extended in 1845.

The Royal St. George has a long tradition of regattas with many members achieving success in racing competitions at home and abroad. One of the most notable regattas took place in 1848, after the club had received royal recognition and enlarged its premises. The Queen's Cup was introduced in this year and was awarded to the winner by the Lord Lieutenant, Earl Clarendon, who was guest of honour at the event. Clarendon also organised an assembly of British naval vessels to be present in the harbour throughout the regatta, adding prestige and power to the occasion.



Illustration showing race for the Queen's Cup, 1847 (dfr Local Studies)

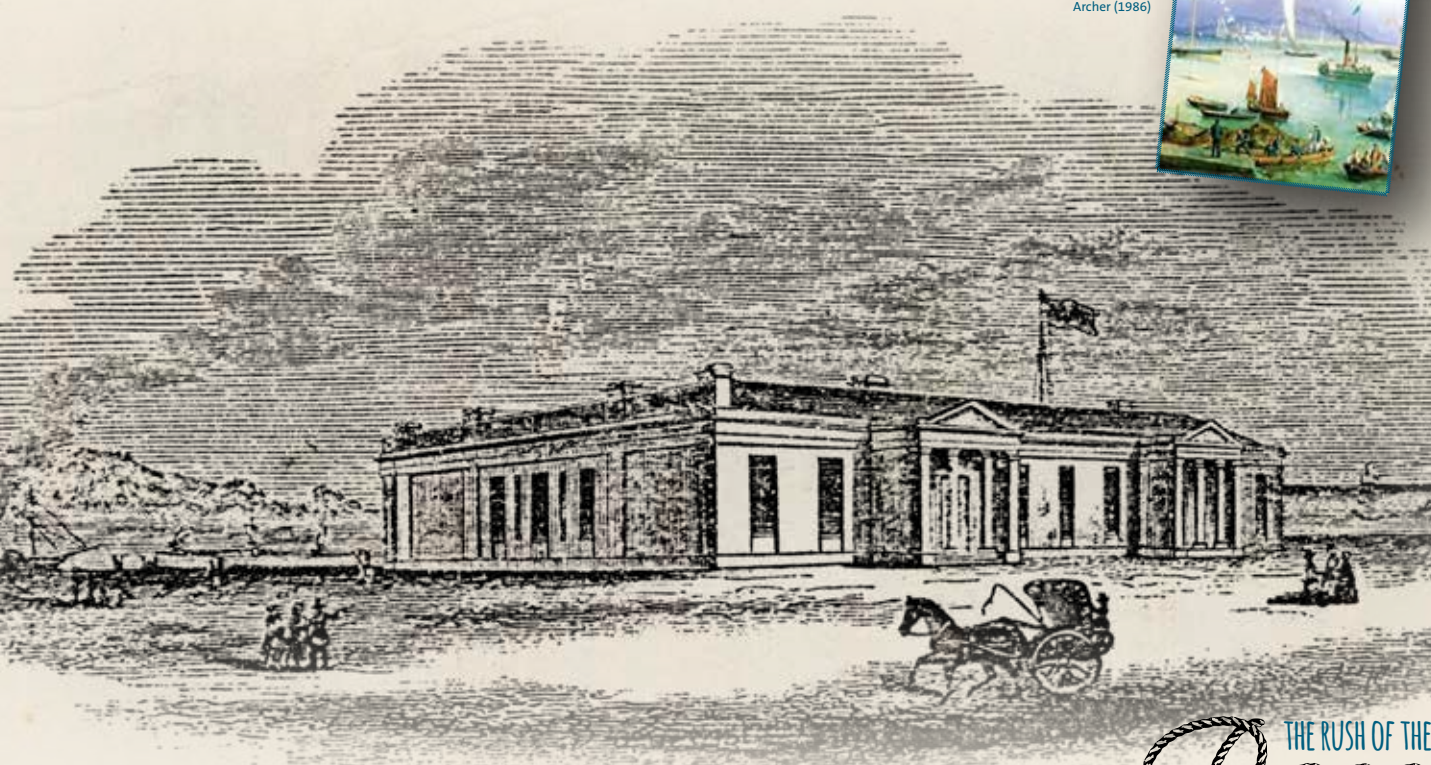
The regatta of 1858 was praised by Hunt's Yachting Magazine and the Royal St. George was praised for 'having carried out the principles of True Yachting, by the giving of exceedingly liberal prizes, real hospitality, as none such as Irishmen give, and impartial administration of the rules regardless of country or kin'.



The burgee of the Royal St. George Yacht Club.

For much of its history, membership of 'the George' was made up primarily of landed gentry and other individuals from the highest levels of society in Ireland, earning it a reputation as exclusive and closed to outsiders. The modern club is very different, with membership open to all, and the clubhouse is regularly made available to other clubs for social events and after-race refreshments.

Further Reading: The Royal St. George Yacht Club by Peter Pearson and Stella Archer (1986)



The newly extended clubhouse of the Royal St. George Yacht Club, designed to look like a miniature villa in the neoclassical style. Permission was granted by the Harbour Commissioners in 1845 for an extension of the original building, which involved duplication of the existing Ionic portico with the erection of a linking colonnade.