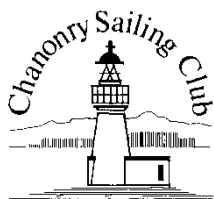


HARBOURING HERITAGE – A HISTORY OF FORTROSE HARBOUR PART 7



THE SEA SCOUTS, THE HARBOUR AND LEISURE SAILING

THE SEA SCOUTS



This picture ¹ was taken in either 1950 or 1955 (opinions vary) on the occasion of the visit of the Chief Scout, Lord Rowallan (he was Chief Scout of the British Commonwealth and Empire from 1945 to 1959). The foredeck in the picture is the war surplus Fairmile D Class that belonged to Raymond Graves (see Part 6 for more photos).

This information from Ian Basham:

The year of Lord Rowallan's visit was in the summer of 1950 - not 1955, the Quincentenary year. Although I was not in the cubs myself, I joined the scouts later that year and I have checked with my classmates that 1950 is the correct year. One tells me that he remembers Lord Rowallan being rowed round from Avoch in the scout boat. It was sold shortly after and

¹ Groam House Museum Collection
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I had only one trip out in it myself. The scouts were the 1st Chanonry troop and at the time of the photo the Scoutmaster was Mr Coutts (to Rowallan's left) and by that time Rev W Craig was Group Scoutmaster. He is second right next to the Troop Leader, Alastair Geddes, at the far right. Both Scouts and Cubs (Guides and Brownies) met in the Scout Hut (now the Cadet Hut) in Cathedral Square, although I think it was properly the Guide Hut!

The Sea Scouts formed nationally in 1909 as scouts whose main interest was in 'scouting afloat'. By 1911 the Admiralty had agreed to sea scouts acting as coast watchers and many of their leaders came from the Coastguard. During the Second World War the Admiralty asked the sea scouts to help their communities by coast watching, delivering messages and learning first aid and seamanship – skills considered important to the war effort.

Over the years sea scout groups have come and gone on the Black Isle with groups at Fortrose, Cromarty and Avoch. The 11th Ross-shire (1st Chanonry Sea Scouts) based at Fortrose would appear to have been first registered on 14 June 1922 with a strength of 1 officer (D B McMonnies of Roseville, Fortrose) and 11 scouts based at the Drill Hall (now the Roman Catholic church). By 1928 the numbers had increased to 27 scouts and the scoutmaster was Lieutenant Commander V C Smith RN assisted by the Reverend W Craig BD. The 1946 registration showed Reverend W Craig as the Scoutmaster with 24 scouts total and now operating from the Scout Hut, Fortrose. The last registration found for this group is dated 1969 when the group consisted mainly of cubs.



Gasóga Mara Abhaich

The 10th Ross-shire (1st Avoch Sea Scouts) registered in 1943 with the Reverend John Lees as Scoutmaster and with 30 sea scouts on strength. Their headquarters was the Village Hall. This group went in to abeyance and was next active in 1961/2 as the 12th Ross-shire but went in to abeyance again before being reformed in 2004 under Mr Derek Martin. The 1st Avoch Sea Scouts are now a very successful group and the only sea scout group in Ross & Sutherland. They have a number of distinctions. First, the Avoch Sea Scouts operate alongside their Explorer Sea Scouts (who would normally be organised at District level); secondly, they are one of only 3 sea scout groups in Scotland to be recognised by the Royal Navy (this is why they fly a defaced red ensign on their boats) and, lastly, they are the only scout group in the World to use drill commands in Gaelic. The group, while based in Avoch, has close ties with Chanonry Sailing Club which is an official sponsor.

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1st Avoch Sea Scouts today (2011) at Chanonry Sailing Club

THE HARBOUR AND LEISURE SAILING

In the latter 19th century an annual regatta was held in Fortrose Bay during the month of August with sailing, swimming and rowing competitions. The Directory of Fortrose and Rosemarkie records in 1885 that the Commodore was R G Mackenzie of Flowerburn at that the Regatta would be held on the 15th August.

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This picture² shows an early regatta – probably in the late Victorian or early Edwardian period. There are swimmers in the rowing boat on the left.

Chanonry Boating Club developed from the regattas but was suspended at the outbreak of World War One. In 1928 its remaining assets were donated to other clubs in Fortrose and Avoch.

CHANONRY SAILING CLUB – THE EARLY YEARS

The present sailing club – Chanonry Sailing Club – was formed on 29 March 1956³ after 20 people agreed, at a public meeting, to revive the Chanonry (or Fortrose Boating) Club. The revived Club was to be known as the Chanonry Sailing Club, and would be based at Fortrose Harbour. The annual subscription was set at £1:1:0 (£1.05) for boat owners and 10/6 (53 pence) for non boat owners and juniors. The first Commodore elected was W A H Rowat. The committee visited Mr Frank Gale's boat yard in Inverness where they inspected his 14 foot GP sailing dinghy. They then visited Mr A J MacKenzie's Mouldcraft Ltd where they were able to view fibre glass boats. The committee recommended that 'the Yachting World 14 ft General Purpose Sailing Dinghy was suitable for a one class design for this club; and that boats can be obtained for approx £140 from various sources.' There follows in the minutes 'The committee while realising that fibre glass would probably be the material for future boats, considered that it had not been sufficiently tried out for them to recommend it.'

² Groam House Museum collection

³ The details of the Club history from 1956 onwards are taken from the Club Archives held in the Clubroom

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This photo from the club scrap book taken in the late 1950s shows Frank Gale crewing a Junior Redwing he built being helmed by the designer, the famous Uffa Fox

By 11 April 1956 the Fortrose Town Council had agreed to rent the Nissen hut at Fortrose Harbour to the Club for £5 per annum (the Town Clerk having already intimated that the Club might have the use of the Fortrose Harbour for mooring their craft). By 26 April 1956, the committee was meeting in the Nissen hut, had plans for its renovation, had written to the Council to ask to have the sandbank at the harbour mouth removed and had been gifted a 40 foot 'stick of sitka spruce' for a flag pole; a racing sub-committee had been elected and a 'first race set for Saturday, 16th June at 4.45 p.m. (*modified to a practice race at a later meeting – the first proper race was held on 30 June- interestingly with a dinghy race, a motor boat race and finally a rowing boat race*) with a midnight regatta on Friday 22 June at 10 p.m.' (!) Membership then stood at 33. The pace of early meetings was rapid and a general meeting was held on 3 May 1956 at which the constitution was approved and the club decided to apply for affiliation to the Royal Yachting Association. The 'Object' of the Club (from the Constitution of 1956) was 'to encourage seamanship, both under sail and power, and to foster the social side of sailing.'

For those on the committee who have wrestled over the years with the issues of Harbour Dues and whether or not to charge for boat space taken ashore, the 13 November 1956 minute may be of interest when a letter from the Town Clerk was discussed. The Trustees had resolved that the present system of charging boats laid up in the basin (*harbour*) must be extended also to boats laid up on the beach (*based on the 1879 Harbour Order defining the limits of the Harbour extending to 200 yards from any part of the walls over the shore below the high water mark*). The charge was set as one shilling (5 pence) per foot length, with a minimum of ten shillings (50 pence).

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The committee meeting of 19 April 1957 was attended by the Harbourmaster (retained by the Town Council) who was none other than George MacFarlane who had been fortunate to avoid being lost when *The Young Fox* sank in December 1928 (see Part 5). Mr MacFarlane attended the meeting to discuss methods to moor as many craft as possible in the harbour (the suggestion was to lay chains in the harbour with rope risers on buoys for mooring and with stern lines taken ashore). On 20 July 1957 alongside the Club's Regatta, the Inverness Swimming Club arranged for 'Open and Local Swimming Races, a Swimming and Diving Demonstration and a Water Polo Match' – all held in the harbour. The scouts took a collection. A special meeting was convened in July 1957 to consider a proposal for a 'DANCE'. This was carried with George Taylor appointed as Dance Convenor and a member (Mr Mackay, owner of the West End Stores) offered a suitable barn – in fact this was the top floor of what is now Quay House.

The provision of a suitable 'guard boat' (safety boat) greatly exercised the committee in its early days. Various members allowed the use of their motor boats but by 1959 the committee was looking to purchase a suitable boat for the Club and in July 'Miss Pat' arrived. She must have been a considerable boat as she could take up to 15 persons. Also in 1959 the committee agreed the use of Terylene (*better known today by the US name 'Dacron'*) sails but NOT in open races.



This picture from the club scrap book and entitled 'Rave-up gear circa 1958' shows left to right: Frank & Evelyn Gale, George & Sandy Taylor, Wylie Martin

The Annual General Meeting of 1960 (held pre-season in those days) saw the retirement of the founding commodore, W A H Rowat, who was presented with a chromium car badge embossed with the commodore's club burgee. Sailing instruction also featured at this

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meeting with the new commodore, R A Taylor, stressing that ‘he would like to see more opportunities being made available for members who did not own boats to get afloat and for sailing instruction to be given to younger members.’ The minutes recorded some concerns that damage has occurred to craft in the harbour through an apparent lack of supervision; the club considered taking a lease for the harbour and appointing its own Harbour Master. There was also a proposal to erect a Starter’s Box at the end of the harbour – one which could be dismantled for the winter. This application was approved by the Town Council and a Minor Warrant was issued by the Burgh Surveyor.

A sensible proposal to resolve the Harbour Master situation was put forward in May 1960 when it was proposed by the Club that if ‘the Town Council appointed Mr George Taylor as their Harbour Master that the Chanonry Sailing Club should appoint Mr G Taylor as their Harbour Master.’ The outcome was that George Taylor worked alongside George MacFarlane for a transition period before agreement was reached in early 1963 for the Club to take over the administration of the harbour and to commute harbour dues by a capital payment of £10 per year. George Taylor was then appointed as the (sole) Harbour Master – an appointment he held for a further 44 years before his retirement in late 2007.



George Taylor on retirement at Harbour Master in 2007

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1961 was a relatively quiet year for the committee but it did see a decision to try to negotiate the purchase of 'the barn' (Quay House today) for the club as the future clubhouse given the state of the Nissen hut.



This is John Mackenzie's TR3 at the harbour in 1963. In the background is the original wooden Starter's Box. In the foreground is the heavy block with a hole through it still in use today to anchor the mast of a boat alongside to prevent it tipping away from the wall when taking the ground.

To be continued in 2012/13