

Fidlers Ferry  
Sailing Club

1904 - 2004



A Souvenir booklet to mark the  
Centenary Celebrations

53° 22.42' N, 2° 39.54' W  
[www.fidlersferrysailing.org.uk](http://www.fidlersferrysailing.org.uk)

The Lock (off Station Road),  
Penketh, Warrington,  
WA5 2UJ.

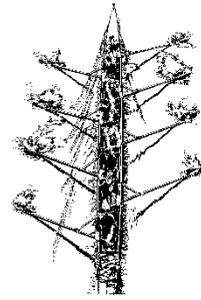
# Before the Club was formed



**Warrington Regatta, 1840s**, looking towards the town centre with the new St James' Church on Wilderspool Causway.

Eye witness to the scene above, Robert Davies recalled:- *"There was always a great gathering of ladies, the schools had a half holiday; and bands welcoming the winner with "See the conquering hero comes" and "Rule Britannia". Many cantered along the Cheshire side of the river (on horse back) following and meeting the boats; every dweller by the riverside and in the town who could muster a flag showed it, and, in fact, there was a general half-holiday. By about 1863 the river became so polluted that it was no longer a pleasure to row upon it".*

What caused the pollution? A glance at the factories and houses lining the river bank reveals the main culprits since drainage and sewerage was virtually non-existent.



## 1842 - Sculling at Bridge Foot

Gilbert and John Greenall (who was then at Oxford University) organised a Sculling Race and brought an Oxford "eight" to challenge the locals. Who won isn't made clear so let's assume it was the local team – to this day there is a strong interest in rowing, now above Warrington Weir.

## 1862 - International Swimming Race at Fidlers Ferry

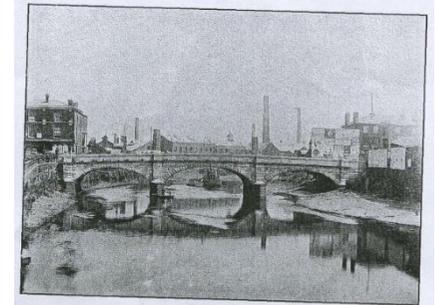
It's hard to believe, but swimming races were held at Fidlers Ferry. They were usually about 200 yards in distance and even featured the new and ultra fast American style Crawl. This was an international affair and a stand was built to seat the 1000 spectators.



*They must have been careful to time the events to avoid the very strong tidal streams in the river (it can run much faster than the fastest swimmer) - it's hard enough to sail these waters on the full ebb tide.*

## 1890s A desolate scene at Bridge Foot

As an indication of the industrial pollution observed by this visitor:- *"There were ... 147 factory chimneys emitting black smoke daily, Sundays only excepted. A perpetual smoke hangs over the city like a pall, through which the sunlight only occasionally penetrates".*



Despite the pollution, the water breeds a competitive spirit. Before formal club racing began, people would have "wagers" and bet on individual "head to head" races – usually for money.

## Club History

### From records and members' memories

#### 1904 – The formation of the Club

Very little is known about the formation of the club other than the entry in Yachting World Magazine in November 1904, which has been condensed in this article but is displayed in full on the clubhouse wall.:-

#### NEW SAILING CLUB ON THE MERSEY

A MEETING of gentlemen interested in sailing and boating upon the River Mersey was held last week with a view to the formation of a club to facilitate those objects upon the river, and was largely attended. It is about six years since there was a sailing club upon the river at Warrington. At that time there was a club called the Warrington and Bank Quay Sailing Club which had its headquarters at the Bowling Green Inn, Bank Quay, and previous to that there was a club which was in existence in 1886 called the Warrington Sailing Club, with its headquarters in the neighbourhood of Warrington Bridge. However, since the Ship Canal has been formed the river has so silted up that it is impossible for boats of any draught to sail up to Warrington Bridge at low tide, and gentlemen owning boats have had to move their anchorage to Fiddlers' Ferry. A resolution that a club be formed with its headquarters at the Fiddlers' Ferry Hotel, and to be called the Fiddlers' Ferry Sailing and Boating Club, was proposed by Mr. Lister and seconded by Mr. Woolstencroft, and carried unanimously.....

Chris Forster, September 18<sup>th</sup> 2004.

With thanks to Philip Bastow, Hon. Secretary, Royal Mersey Y.C .

#### The Name

Where did Fidler with one 'd' come from? No, it wasn't a spelling error. As best we can establish from records held in Preston it goes right back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In those times the surrounding lands were under the rule of a Norman Barron with the name "de Vidler" but the locals pronounced it "de Fidler".

#### The club burgee & colours

The Maltese cross on a dark blue background was inherited from the old Warrington Sailing Club.

#### 1905 – First year of active sailing

Commodore H Frankish, assisted by Mr H Burthem led the club, which boasted 54 members who paid five shillings membership (about 25p in today's money before inflation!).

#### 1908 – it gets official

This is the first reference to a formal AGM. The club raced from April to September – mainly down river.

#### 1909 – The name changes

The club became Warrington & Fiddlers Ferry Sailing Club.

#### 1921 – Revival of yachting

After 1909 all trace of activity disappears but, faced with the First World War, that is hardly surprising. In 1921 the Warrington Year book notes the revival of yachting on the river.

#### 1926 – the 18<sup>th</sup> AGM`

By this time yachting had become popular with local races for small yachts which we now term dinghies, and longer cruises for larger yachts. The local races were up river to Monks Hall whilst the larger yachts sailed downriver to places like Rock Ferry.

#### 1931 – Demise of the Canal

The St Helens Canal was threatened with closure and the club submitted a formal protest. Today we are very lucky that the stretch of canal by the club has been turned into a marina as it means Warrington BC keep the lock in good order. We use the lock to winch in our larger yachts. Seen in isolation a feature (such as a lock entrance) may not be significant but they all play a part in the jigsaw of communities. Today we are opposing the building of height restrictions on the river.

## **1932 – 35 Yachting reached a peak of popularity**

The club name changed to the Warrington & Fidlers Ferry Cruising Club and the first “Commodore’s Cruise” was proposed by Harry Burthem. Sunday racing appeared and a busy race calendar reflected the good fleet of boats that supported the club. Such names as Pastime, Nautilli, Sirdar, Moonflower, Esperanza, Mildred and Fleur del Mar were listed as bigger boats whilst Winsome, Nymph, Greylag, Gannet, Echo, Emerald and Dawn are listed amongst the smaller boats. Dawn was the last “Sharpie” to sail at the club and only left a few years ago.

The first record of motor boats now appears and shows they held a race where Gingalee came 1<sup>st</sup>, Seagull 2<sup>nd</sup> and Mildred 3<sup>rd</sup>. Breakfast at Eastham Ferry proved popular for the sailors although they were clearly let down by their host at some point and the records show they threatened to visit New Ferry instead.

## **1936 – 38 A new club house**

The club was well established by now and even built a new club-house. It was actually a disused railway carriage which had a ramp down to a barge in the river. Sharpies were moored in the river

A Gymkhana was held at Taylor’s Bank and the bigger boats “cruised in company” as far as Rhyl where they camped overnight.

Whilst most of the smaller boat meetings had been held in the local Ferry Inn the larger yachts operated from a club house and in 1935 they applied for a licence; Mr & Mrs Garner were the first licensees.

## **1939 – 46 The Second World War Years**

Very little is recorded of this period due to the restrictions of war and because many members were away on active service.

## **1947 – 50 Post war austerity**

Some limited yachting quickly resumed but it was a struggle. Just getting enough wood to build a boat was a challenge with the.....

country as a whole short of funds and materials. A new clubhouse was built and each member paid a 10 shilling (50p) levy towards it.

To stimulate smaller boat activity money was offered as prizes for races and only one larger boat was then active.

## **1950s Reorganisation and rebuilding**

Since the mid 20’s there had been a distinct demarcation between the smaller and bigger yachting fraternities but all saw the advantages of pulling together. So in 1951 the activities were drawn together and affiliated to the Royal Yachting Association.

Many new rules were compiled within the RYA framework mainly based on making competition affordable and fair but some now look decidedly odd. “The same crew to be carried throughout the race” suggests they may otherwise jettison some hapless soul in mid river. In 1955 it was proposed that they hold an “opening of season hot pot and ladies be invited”.

## **Late 50s to 60s New designs and materials**

A revolution overtook the design of yachts, particularly dinghies, and fleets of GP14s and Enterprises emerged. These were small, lightweight and fast craft needing just one or two crew.

## **1980s - a new fleet**

This period saw the introduction of the “Falcon”. It is a powerful and fast class of sailboat which is still one of our most popular boats.

## **To the present day**

In 2002 a major flood caused by a burst water pipe severely disrupted club activities but strenuous efforts led by the Commodore of the day (Chris Forster) has put the clubhouse in even better shape. The bigger boats are getting even bigger and the dinghy fleet enjoys a large and varied calendar that includes inter-club racing.

The Commodore’s Cruise of 1932 is still enjoyed by all and can include novelty events like cricket on the sand under Widnes Bridge.

## The Club Cups, Shields & Competitions

As well as general races, and thanks to the donations of past & present members, the following prizes are there to be won:

The Cups	
The Smith-Durbin Trophy	The Ditchfield Trophy
The Under 16 ft Trophy	The Caldwell Cup
The Finn-Lomax Cup	The Kelsall Trophy
The Hillfoot Shield	The Remembrance Cup
The Commodore's Shield	The Novice Trophy
The Sailing Secretary's Shield	The Meacock Trophy
The Hallaway Cup	The Thomas Trehearn Cup
The September Cup	The Junior Cup
The Falcon Open Trophy	The Commodore's Plate.
The Farrell Rose Bowl	The Mersey Basin Trophy
The Best Log Award	The "Iffy Crew" Trophy



A busy race day at the club

## A living history

This booklet is a starting point and contains just the information that could be found in time for the Centenary Celebrations. Perhaps you have a photograph or could write a paragraph to add. Please make sure it would be of wide interest to the members and remember the journalist's 'mantra' of "who, what, where & when". The committee welcomes all contributions and will assess their suitability for inclusion.

## Why not join the club?

If you are reading this as a visitor and are interested in sailing then call in on a Sunday afternoon or Friday evening (after 8 pm) and meet the members. Call 01925 723491 to check we are open.

Details are on our website at  
[www.fidlersferrysailing.org.uk](http://www.fidlersferrysailing.org.uk)

## Thank you for the contributions

Writing this history was a bit daunting. Many members recognised that the club had a special place in the community but most found it hard to pin down detail. Thanks go to Chris Forster who came across the article that pinpointed the start of the club and to Warrington Museum for the background to the Grand Day on the River. I am particularly grateful to Ken Duckers who did a huge amount of research to gather the information contained in this leaflet. Also thank you to anyone who offered any details no matter how small.

*Rob McCulloch*

Honorary Secretary 2004