

COWES CASTLE.

THE CLUB HOUSE OF THE ROYAL YACHT SQUADRON.

By LADY FAIRLIE CUNNINGHAM.



N rising ground that slopes gently to the Medina, where that river widening into the Solent affords a safe and pleasant anchorage, sheltered on all sides by wooded heights, stands the town of Cowes. The quaint, old-fashioned place looks very picturesque from the sea, its streets and houses rising one above another like the steps of an amphitheatre, while the crest of the hill on which it is built is crowned by the trees of Northwood. The view from the shore is equally pretty, for the long line of the Hampshire coast, the deep shadows of the New Forest, the woods of Cadlands, and Calshot Castle at the entrance to Southampton Water, form a charming background to the white sails of the endless yachts and trading vessels that pass up and down the Solent.

It might have been imagined that the harbour of Cowes and its navigable river would have made it a place of some importance in early times; but no mention of it occurs in any history of the Isle of Wight till the reign of Henry VIII., nor had the few straggling huts that were built along the shore where the present town now stands received a name. Vessels of light burden sailed up the Medina to the quays of Newport, but the advantages of a good harbour at the mouth of a broad estuary did not seem to have been recognized. About the year 1540 King Henry VIII. built a castle there, and then, and not till then, did the hamlet receive its present name. The castle, which consisted only of a semi-circular battery, does not appear to have been of much importance.

Leland, an historian of the first half of the sixteenth century, mentions two castles, one on each side of the Medina, and boasts in rhyme of

“The two great Cows, that in loud thunder roar,
This on the eastern, that the western shore,
Where Newport enters stately Wight.”

But the battery at East Cowes must soon have fallen into ruins, as in a map published in 1610, where “West Cowe Cast,” is marked, there is no indication of the sister fortress on the east side.

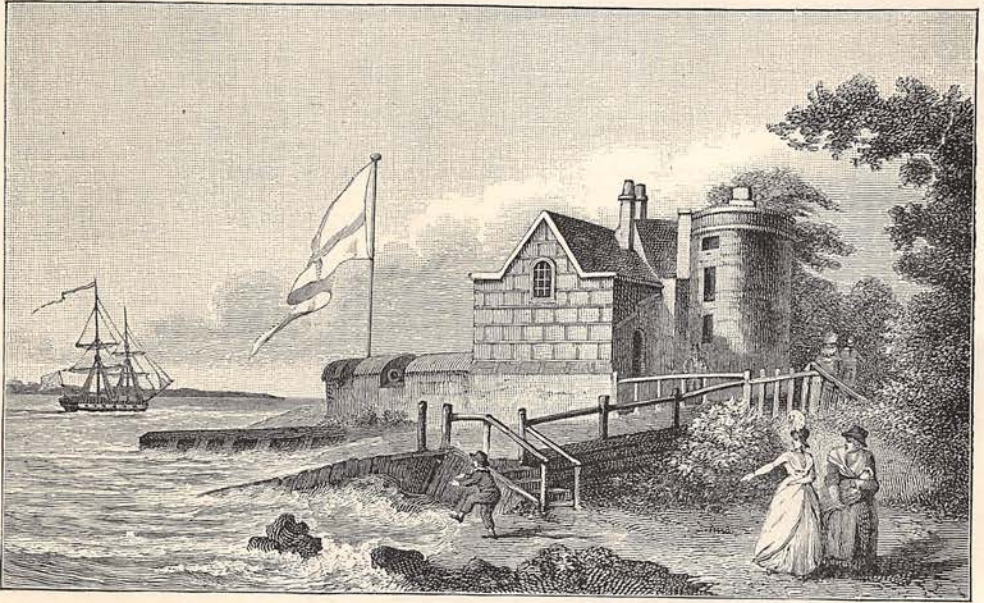
West Cowes Castle does not seem to have been properly kept up either, for when the Commissioners of Edward VI. visited it, “The Barbican had 6 pieces of ordnance, one unservicable, and 148 shot, of different calibre. The West wing had 13 pieces, 210 shot, one double barrel and two firkins of powder, 10 unservicable hag-butts, with 4 Lbs of corn powder, 19 bows, 32 chests of arrows, 22 picks, and 20 bills.”

In the reign of Queen Elizabeth its annual expenses amounted to £39 10s. 10d. It had a porter at 8d. a day, a captain at 1s., and three gunners at 6d. ! A small detachment was maintained here during the French War, and the battery was armed

with eleven guns (nine-pounders). Henry VIII. landed at Cowes when Worsley had the honour of receiving him at Appuldercombe, and later on James I. And Prince Charles always embarked and disembarked there when they paid their frequent visits to the Isle of Wight.

In November, 1647, Charles I. landed at Cowes on his way to his gloomy prison at Carisbrooke; it seems as if the whole island was turned into a prison for the captive King; for he was permitted to hunt in Parkhurst Forest, and to ride wherever he pleased, but the greatest precautions were taken to prevent his escape to the mainland. Vessels were only allowed to disembark passengers, or land cargoes at Cowes Castle, Yarmouth Castle, or Ryde, and those who landed were strictly examined as to the business that brought them to the island.

James II., when Duke of York, always landed at Cowes on his journeys to inspect



COWES CASTLE IN 1801. FROM A CONTEMPORARY ENGRAVING BY J. SPARROW.

Carisbrooke Castle, and in the reigns of the Stuarts the harbour was much frequented by men-of-war. As far back as 1620, Sir John Oglander tells us that "prizes and men of warr" anchored at "the Cowes, which gave great rates for our commodities, and exchanged other good ones with us." Sir John Oglander's MSS. are most valuable as illustrating life in the Isle of Wight nearly 300 years ago, and some of his descriptions are very curious. Among other places he mentions Cowes. "I remember," he says, "when there was not above 3 or 4 houses at Cowes, but I was and am persuaded that if our wars and troubles had not unfortunately happened, it would have grown as famous as Newport, for it was by all the western parts of the world much approved as a place fit for them to victual and make a rendezvous, where I have seen 300 ships at an anchor, and if the country had but as much discretion as to make good use of that harbour—as first to have an honest man to be captain there, to build storehouses, to have by a joint stock a magazine of provisions, and to deal with the Dutch to have their rendezvous and to victual there, they need no other market, or means to make the island happy and fortunate."

It is amusing to see that even in 1629 it was the fashion to rail at the present times, and to sigh for the "good old days" that were past; also that country gentlemen grumbled then as now about "poor rents, and no money stirring, or full markets"; and that Sir John Oglander wished himself back in Queen Elizabeth's days, when "money was as plenty in yeomen's purses as now in the best of the gentry, and all the gentry full of money and out of debt."

It is curious to read that Cowes was not only a trading centre, but that men-of-war were built in her dockyards. That such was the case may be gathered from a book

published in 1796, which tells us that "within the last 60 years Cowes Dockyard contributed to the British navy the following ships of war, namely, the *Vanguard*, 70 guns, the *Repulse* of 64, the *Salisbury* of 50, the *Cerberus* and *Astrea* of 34, and the *Veteran* of 64, besides a number of smaller vessels." Another writer of the end of the last century also speaks of the numerous ships laden with rice from Carolina which landed their cargoes at Cowes. The trade in rice seems to have been an important one, as "from 32 to 35 thousand barrels of this grain were usually skreaned, repacked, and shipped evrey year to Holland and Gemany from Cowes." Cowes boasted a whole fleet of merchant ships, and numerous fights are recorded by local historians between French privateers and these Cowes trading vessels, in the days when England and France were mortal foes. There is a long story about "the *Raven* of Cowes," a trading vessel which was captured by a French privateer in the



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Channel, but it seems that "just as the Frenchmen were in the act of boarding her, the crew put off in boats, and made for the shore, by which means they escaped a prison and safe arrived at Cowes."

On another occasion the packet commanded by Captain Wassell, that carried the mail between Southampton and Cowes, was taken from her moorings close to Southampton quay by a party of Frenchmen. They would have got right away with her had it not been for their ignorance of the coast and the navigation of the Solent. They ran her aground on a shoal near St. Helen's, and being perceived by some Isle of Wight seamen, "one of whom had lost a vessel by the same means a little time back," they put off, re-captured the mail-boat, and to quote the words of the writer, they "took the Frenchmen, left them in the care of Captain Lock, of *sea-fencibles*, and brought the vessel to Cowes, to the great joy of Wassell."

There is no doubt that the "Castelle of West Cow" has never been of much use for defence from the days when its barbican contained "3 pieces of ordnance unfit for service, and the main tower 5 unservicable, with bows, arrows, pikes, and bills," down to the time of our wars with France, when its eleven nine-pounders must have been nearly as useless. A small portion of the original edifice still remains, but most of the picturesque, irregular block of buildings now known as the Royal Yacht Squadron Castle is of modern date. There is nothing imposing about it as seen from the sea, though its position on the point of land that divides the actual town of Cowes from the green and the villas that cluster round it, is a fortunate one, but on shore the

high walls that surround it impede the view on all sides but one, and even on that side it is partially hidden by the few trees that its garden boasts and by the lodge and gateway. It is not any beauty of situation or architectural pretensions that makes it interesting, but rather that for many years it has been the head-quarters of the most important and most exclusive yachting club in the world.

THE YACHT CLUB.¹

The century was very young when the Royal Yacht Squadron was founded, though it did not receive that name till long afterwards. The first meeting of the members of the "Yacht Club" of which there is any record was held at the Thatched House in London, June 1st, 1815, though a yacht club of some kind must have been in existence three years before, there being a seal belonging to it dated 1812. At this meeting it was agreed that the members' yearly subscription should be *two* guineas, which was to include two copies of signal books. The flags were also fixed on—the ensign was to be white, with the union jack at the upper corner, and the burgee was to be plain white. It was required of members to own a yacht of not less than ten tons—a tonnage which three years later was raised to twenty. The election of members was to be by ballot, with a quorum of not less than ten members—two black balls to exclude—and the member when elected was required to send to the secretary the name, tonnage, port, and registration of his yacht. If ten members were not present, the meeting was to be adjourned. In 1822 this quorum of members was reduced to seven, and *one* black ball excluded.

Among the privileges conferred on members in 1815 was the permission given by the admiral commanding at Portsmouth—Sir E. Thornborough—to embark and disembark at the new sally-port, Portsmouth; but the admiral expressed a wish that the boats would immediately put off "on landing the company." This privilege was continued by succeeding admirals, and cards were forwarded to each member of the club, giving this permission. At another meeting in May, 1816—Lord Anglesea in the chair—the following resolution was passed, which is worth quoting as a curiosity:—"Although many of the members of this Club are not personally acquainted, it is hoped that no introduction to each other will be deemed necessary, in any case where assistance or accommodation by boats or otherwise may be required; but that any communication by *signal* may always be received with that cordiality which it was the first object of the Club to establish, though the parties be personally unacquainted." In the same year, at a general meeting held at the hotel at East Cowes, it was unanimously resolved that officers of the navy should be eligible as honorary members of the club, without entrance fee, or annual subscription, so long as they did not possess a yacht exceeding ten tons.

A letter from the Hon. Charles Paget, dated "Sept. 17, 1817, *Royal George* Yacht, Brighton," announces that "the Prince desires to be a member of the Yacht Club, and this is to be considered an official notification of H.R.H.'s desire."

THE ROYAL YACHT CLUB.

In the year 1820 George IV. expressed his desire to continue a member of the Yacht Club, directing that the club should be in future called the Royal Yacht Club, and a few years later the following resolution was passed:—"That our Commodore, Lord Yarborough, be requested to lay before His Majesty the humble petition of the Royal Yacht Club, that he will be graciously pleased to direct that a gold cup, or any other mark of approbation that he may think fit, be given to the Royal Yacht Club, to be sailed for annually at any time or place His Majesty may be graciously pleased to appoint, as an encouragement to the club, established under his Royal Patronage."

Prizes had been given as early as 1819 from the club funds for yacht racing, but £70 was all that was given the first year, and £100 for some years following.

In June, 1821, a red ensign and a red burgee, without swallow-tail, was substituted for the white ensign and burgee; in August of the same year it was resolved that the red burgee should have a swallow-tail; and the year after there was yet another change, as the swallow-tailed burgee was considered too like that of commodores of the Royal Navy, and a plain, small red burgee was again used.

¹ The first two elected members of the Yacht Club were E. Curtis, Esq., and the Hon. G. Vernon. John Ward, Esq., of East Cowes, was the secretary; and their first bankers were Sir R. Carr Glyn, Mills, Halifax & Co., London.

In August, 1824, a red burgee, with crown and fowl anchor, and the letters R.Y.C. was adopted, to be altered finally on June 19th, 1829, to the white ensign and present burgee. A uniform button having been used by many members, was in 1818 formally adopted as the club button; and later on the resolution was passed that no one except honorary members should be permitted to wear the member's button, which was to be obtained only at Busby's, St. Martin's Lane, London.

In 1823, Rear-Admiral Sir Charles Paget brought to Cowes during the regatta week, the squadron under his command, a proceeding which seems to have given the greatest satisfaction to the members of the Royal Yacht Club, for a resolution was at once passed:—

“That the thanks of the Club be given to Hon. Sir Charles Paget for his kindness in bringing to Cowes, during the Regatta, the Royal Squadron under his command—an object of so great admiration—and particularly for his obliging consideration in ordering the Squadron to weigh, which greatly increased the beauty of the sight, and afforded to the members of the Club, as well as the numerous spectators on shore, the highest satisfaction and delight.”

A resolution, passed May 5, 1827, is as curious an indication of the difference between “now and then” as can easily be found. The owners of some of the stately steam yachts that fly the squadron burgee may perhaps not be aware that only sixty-three years ago they would have been obliged to haul down the white ensign, and to cease to be members of the Royal Yacht Squadron. The resolution is as follows:—

“Resolved, that as a material object of this Club is to promote seamanship, and the improvement of sailing vessels, to which the application of Steam Engines is inimical, no vessel, propelled by steam, shall be admitted into the Club, and any member applying a Steam Engine to his yacht shall be disqualified thereby, and cease to be a member.”

To the same year belongs another resolution now equally obsolete, “*that no smoking be permitted in the Clubhouse,*”

A letter in the minute-book of the same year is also worth quoting as being in its way somewhat of a curiosity. It is dated September 1, 1827, the writer being Captain Bullen, R.N., in command of H.M.S. *Maidstone*, at Portsmouth. It runs as follows:—

“The very great attention paid to the Officers of the Royal Navy by Lord Yarborough and the members of the Yacht Club upon all occasions, induces me to take the liberty of sending for their acceptance a very fine turtle, which I brought from Ascension, trusting its coming from an old officer, who sees with pleasure the great good which the Yacht Club does, in bringing forward sailors, will excuse the liberty I take in thus troubling you.”

Another example of the customs of bygone times may be read in the minute-book of a few years earlier (May, 1822), where is to be found a decree, “that yachts are to assemble at Cowes on the first and third Monday of every month, for the purpose of sailing together under the directions of a *Commodore to be appointed for the day.*”

THE ROYAL YACHT SQUADRON.

In the year 1833, the Royal Yacht Squadron received its present name from William IV. as a mark of his “approval of an institution of so much national utility.” The following letter from Lord Belfast announced the King's intentions on this matter:—

“July 4, 1833.

“SIR,

“I have it in command from his Majesty, for the information of the Royal Yacht Club, that as a mark of his gracious approval of an institution of such national utility, it is his gracious will and pleasure that it shall be henceforth known and styled ‘The Royal Yacht Squadron,’ of which his majesty is graciously pleased to consider himself the head.

“Your O. B. S.,

“BELFAST.”

In May, 1834, the committee passed a resolution recommending members to wear the uniform of the club, especially when in foreign parts; the uniform to be a blue coat with cloth collar, and three buttons on cuffs and pockets (the buttons had been approved of by his Majesty the year before); blue or white waistcoat and trousers, and a blue cap with a naval captain's lace band.

The white ensign and the squadron burgee were made the subject of endless

resolutions in the minute-book from the year 1829, when they were, after the many changes already mentioned, finally adopted as the flag and burgee of the Royal Yacht Squadron.

In 1833 it was conceded that vessels under thirty tons, belonging to members, should be allowed to hoist the squadron burgee. In 1834 any vessel belonging to a member of the Royal Yacht Squadron, though under regulated tonnage, might carry the ensign and burgee. In 1840 there was a minute to the effect that the Royal Yacht Squadron could not sanction any member flying the burgee in any vessel not on the Royal Yacht Squadron list.

A curious minute, dated May 13, 1837, was, negatived at the next general meeting! The gist of the minute was that the attention of Government had been drawn to the circumstance that yachts were often taken over to foreign ports for the express purpose of undergoing extensive repairs and of being fitted with foreign stores. It was contended that the principle upon which privileges were granted to the Royal Yacht Squadron was totally at variance with such practices, the object being to encourage the employment of British arts and manufactures, and the advancement of naval science; and the resolution was passed that if any such charge was substantiated the name of the offender should be removed from the list of the Royal Yacht Squadron.

In 1843 it was resolved at the general meeting in May that the Royal Yacht Squadron Regatta should commence always on the 1st August and continue till the 17th. At a meeting the year after the public ball was done away with, and it was decided to *give* a ball annually at the expense of the club. Each member was to be allotted four tickets at 1s. each and his own ticket free, and the honorary members had each one at 10s. In August, 1845, the following resolution was *negatived*.—"That the power of electing members be placed in the hands of a committee to be selected for that purpose." In 1846 new rules were compiled, which are virtually the same as those in present use. Among others, it was resolved that no vessel propelled by steam under 100 horse power should be entitled to the privileges of the squadron.

The head-quarters of the Royal Yacht Squadron have been frequently changed. The Thatched House, where their earlier meetings in London were held, from the first recorded meeting in 1815 down to the year 1861, was pulled down at that time, and the Royal Yacht Squadron then met in Willis's Rooms. The meeting this year was held at Boodle's. At Cowes the earliest meetings were held at an hotel at East Cowes, then at the Vine Inn, then at an hotel at West Cowes, and it was not till 1825 that what is now the Glo'ster Hotel, close to the Squadron Castle, became the club-house of the Royal Yacht Squadron.

In 1855 the Marquis of Conyngham offered to transfer the lease of Cowes Castle (the present Royal Yacht Squadron Castle), which had been offered to him by the Commissioners of the Inland Revenue, to the Club, an offer which was accepted, and the Commodore was requested to negotiate the lease with the Crown. A committee was appointed to examine the Castle, the result being that considerable improvements were found necessary, and a building committee was formed, the necessary funds being guaranteed by the Club. The alterations cost about £6,000, and it was not till July, 1858, that the members of the Royal Yacht Squadron took possession of the Castle.

ROYAL YACHT SQUADRON CASTLE.

There is little that lends itself to description about the Castle, inside or out. Its battlemented ramparts, its ivy-covered walls and high-pitched roof, and its background of greenery, make a pretty picture when seen from the water; but on land it is difficult to have a good view of it at all; walls surround it, the trees of its small garden block it up, and the irregularly-built pile seems sheltered on all sides from the vulgar gaze. The inside of the Castle is equally unpretentious. The numerous public rooms look the essence of comfort, and the sea seems very near as one looks across the Solent to Calshot Castle and Southampton Water. No rooms can be dull and unattractive whose windows overlook such a pleasant sea-scape; but the rooms themselves, with the exception of the library, are neither large nor lofty, and the chief interest they possess lies in the pictures—oil-paintings, water-colours, and rare old engravings—which hang on the walls, and have all been given by members, who in many instances have felt an almost clannish affection for the walls of the Squadron Castle. The

dining-room is of fair size, though somewhat low, and on its dark red walls are numerous oil-paintings. At one end of the room hangs a picture, by Angeli, of the last Commodore, Lord Wilton, in blue coat and epaulettes, and wearing the green ribbon of the Thistle, and facing him is a three-quarter length portrait in Squadron uniform of Lord Yarborough, painted by Huggins in 1839. Over the mantelpiece hangs the picture, also by Huggins, of Lord Yarborough's yacht *Falcon* in full sail—a very celebrated yacht in its day, not only for its size, which was uncommon fifty years ago, but for the naval discipline that its owner, an enthusiastic sailor, loved to enforce on board, and for the long and adventurous voyages he made in her. Two other large, old-fashioned sea-pieces fill the remaining space, for one side of the room is all window, and there is no more wall left.

In the small, low entrance-hall hangs an extremely clever sketch of *Boat and Rowers*, by West. All the sitting-rooms on the ground-floor are equally hung with pictures or prints, all, or almost all, being sea-pieces, and all the gift of members. A large oil-painting by Schetky, late marine painter to the Royal Yacht Squadron, of Cowes Roads, with the Castle and part of the town of Cowes in the distance, is, though somewhat unfinished, noticeable from the mellow beauty of its colouring. This picture was bought after the painter's death by Mr. Montague Guest, and presented by him to the Royal Yacht Squadron. In another room is a good sea-piece by Beechey.

The library, on the first floor, is a delightful, large, handsome room, lined with bookcases full of well-bound volumes arranged according to their subjects, which are indicated on every labelled shelf. It needs but a passing glance to see that the care and arrangement of this library has been a labour of love, and that the librarian, Mr. Montague Guest, must have spent much time, and taken endless trouble, before all these valuable books were put in such perfect order. It must be a real pleasure to read in such a room. It is lighted by six windows; four of them form a kind of bow, and look on the Solent; between the others at the end of the room, hangs a full-length picture in oils of Napoleon III., presented by himself in 1860. It is a striking likeness of the late Emperor, who wears full uniform, with cloak or rather royal robes. A bust of the Princess of Wales, presented by Sir Allan Young, stands in the bow-window, close to the most luxurious of writing-tables.

There are twelve bedrooms in the Castle for the use of members; they are plainly furnished, nice little rooms, but nearly all of them are hung round with delightful old engravings or prints, mostly of naval engagements, or sea-pieces, some of them valuable from their extreme rarity.

