

## Recreation on the Thames

**In the nineteenth century, Erith was famed for its yachting facilities.**

"There are two things scarce matched in the Universe - the sun in heaven and the Thames on the earth", thus said Sir Walter Scott. What a wonderful combination on a Sunday afternoon... or at any time.

If horse racing is the Sport of Kings, then yachting must be the Sport of Princes, bearing in mind Edward, Prince of Wales and his associations with Cowes.

The best matches held on the Thames took place on the course from Erith to the Nore and back. The clubs concerned were chiefly in London but in 1872 the Corinthian Yacht Club took up residence in Erith and in 1892 received its royal title but in 1899 moved to Port Victoria. Thus ended the Club's 27 years connection with Erith and what changes it had seen during that period! The Pier Hotel stood in Erith Gardens but by 1897 the site was being rapidly developed and the gardens made way for a coal wharf. Industrialisation of the area, pollution of the river and overcrowding of the tideway by vessels awaiting docking further up the river, were the reasons for the decision to move. The Club left its mark on Erith however, for the old club house can still be seen on the premises of British Gypsum Limited and the name is recalled in "Corinthian Manorway", which leads from near the old church, to the Club House.

In 1900 a Club was formed locally to continue sailing activities under the title of the "Erith Sailing Club", which was altered to the "Erith Yacht Club" in 1901, and took over the premises formerly used by the Royal Corinthian Yacht Club. In 1929, owing to restricted mooring facilities, the Club decided to move and acquired an old sea-going Thames barge called "Garson" which was converted and used as floating headquarters and moved to a position three quarters of a mile below the town, in Anchor Bay. This was replaced by an old light ship in 1945 which was renamed "Garson II".

When barge races started on the Thames in 1863, they too commenced and finished at Erith. It was due to enthusiasm and interest of a prominent London contractor, Henry Dodd, often

referred to as the "Golden Dustman", as he made his money from refuse collections, that such matches were promoted. Mr Dodd owned a few barges and the main purpose was to stimulate the sporting instinct amongst the crews and to encourage other owners to make the best of their barges and endeavour to improve them. The first race was won by one of Dodd's own barges, the "W.H.D", skippered by an Erith man, Harry Munns. Another local skipper was Sam Beadle who in 1882, won the race in the "Anglo-Norman", for an Erith owner - Mr Robert Stone. Incidentally, the "Anglo-Norman" was the first barge to be fitted with wheel steering, whereas up to that time, it had all been tiller steering.

Although rowing, in all shapes and sizes of boats, must have been used for business (fishing etc.) and pleasure since the early days of Erith's existence, records of organised sport are only available from 1883, when a regatta was held by the local branch of the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes. It seemed to have consisted of a number of races in galleys only and the eventual winners were a crew from Messrs. Easton and Anderson. The Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes sponsored regattas in 1884 and 1885. In 1886 it became a town affair and as far as can be ascertained, became an annual event held on every Whit-Monday until 1914, when the First World War brought it to a close. It was not until 1929 that the regatta was revived and transferred to August Bank Holiday Monday and organised in a bigger way than ever before. Rowing events taking place in sculling boats, galleys and pair-oar boats together with yacht races. The prime movers in this revival were Mr Frank Clarke and Mr Jim Coles, who at the same time did not forget the younger generation.