

100 years of



Alfred Mylne



The Scottish naval architect Alfred Mylne founded his Glasgow design firm 100 years ago. His yachts are regarded as some of the finest ever built, and — despite a lower profile — many consider him the equal of his contemporaries Fife and Nicholson. In Part One of a three-part article on his life and work, Ian Nicolson uncovers the feud which founded a firm

Part One: *'Watsons don't drink with Mylnes'*

AMONG THE GREAT BRITISH yacht designers, Alfred Mylne has received less attention than his contemporaries William Fife and Charles Nicholson — perhaps because he disliked personal publicity, and his firm rarely advertised itself. Yet he produced some of the finest and fastest yachts of his generation. In 1921 the foremost yachting historian of his day, B Heckstall-Smith, opined that although some Nicholson boats were ugly, Mylne boats were almost all beautiful. They were so hard to beat, he wrote, because they excelled on all points of sail.

Mylne grew up on the Clyde during the latter decades of the last century. At the age of 20 he joined the Glasgow firm of GL Watson, then regarded as the world's leading yacht designer (see CBs 52-4). Initially a protégé of Watson, he set up his own design firm four years later. The split was to spark a feud between the two Glasgow offices which lasted into the 1950s.

But the offshoot firm flourished. During his 50-year career, Mylne was responsible for over 360 designs, resulting in some 600 yachts ranging from dinghies to steam yachts. He recognised, and catered to, the need for soundly-built one-designs before many others of his era, and their sturdy construction means that many of his yachts are still sailing today.

Alfred Mylne the First was born on 20 November 1872, the sixth and last child of George Stevenson Mylne, a Clydeside blacksmith who had branched into iron-founding, prospering from the massive expansion of heavy industry on the Clyde

that marked the second half of last century.

The Mylnes seem to have been a typical High Victorian middle class family, unusual only in that George had remarried shortly after his first wife died in childbirth. His second wife was Alfred's mother Jessie, who — we are told by her grandchild — ran a happy household in which music and painting flourished. The children, five boys and a girl, were encouraged to play musical instruments together, and one of Alfred's three older half-brothers, John, went on to become an accomplished painter. He was associated with the school of artists known as "the Glasgow Boys", and was friendly with the innovative architect and artist Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

Dinghy on the Clyde

Alfred was closest to his brother Charles, four years his elder, who later went into partnership with him, establishing and running the Bute Slip Dock where many of Mylne's most successful designs were built. In 1946 Charles's son, also Alfred, took over the family firm. Alfred Mylne the Second went on to become an accomplished yacht designer in his own right.

As youngsters, the Mylne boys sailed when they could, usually in a small lugsail dinghy on the Clyde and on the west coast. It was common for well-off Glasgow families to hire a house down the Clyde for the sunny summer months, and the Mylnes were no exception. Alfred's father rented 'Appin Villa'

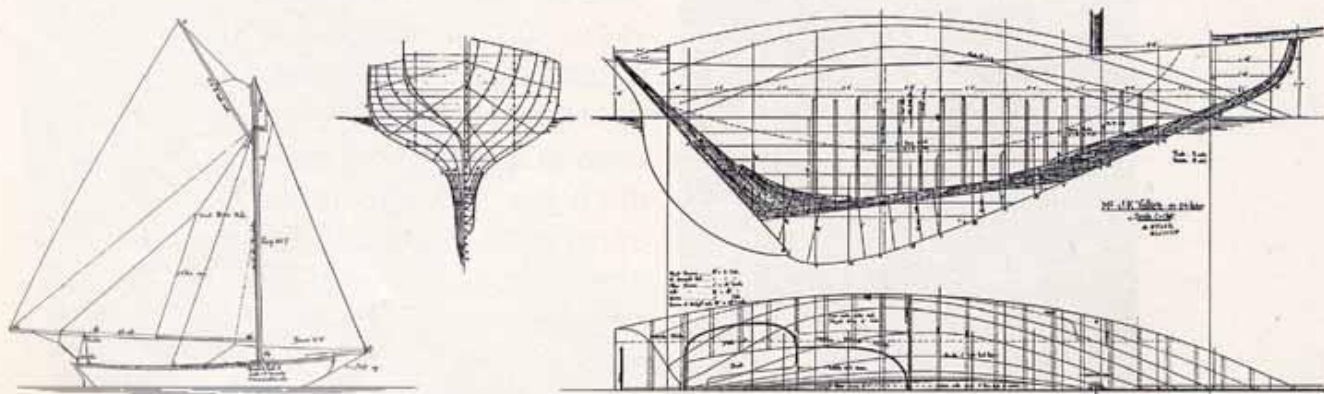
in Port Bannatyne on the Isle of Bute near the mouth of the Clyde estuary — a place that the brothers came to love, and the venue they chose together many years later for the Bute Slip Dock. Alfred's father commuted on the excellent steamer and train services to Glasgow each morning, leaving the boys to venture onto the estuary during the long summer days. The Clyde was flush with beautiful yachts, and it is easy to imagine the young Alfred gazing out at them across the Kyles of Bute, an inspiration, perhaps, for his choice of career.

Alfred was educated at the High School in Glasgow, and later the Technical College. At 16 he became an apprentice draughtsman in the drawing office of shipbuilders Napier, Shanks & Bell. Shipbuilding at the end of the 19th century was the equivalent of today's aerospace industry, leading the way in such fields as propulsion, fabrication, and the science of materials.

The relationship between Watson and Mylne appears to have started off well, and Mylne was soon working shoulder to shoulder with the old man. Some of the drawings for *Britannia*, drafted in 1893, were signed by Mylne, and Mylne's involvement may have been greater still — *Britannia*'s bold, sweeping sheerline, for example, is much more like Mylne's later curves than the flat deck lines typical of Watson up to then.

In 1895 Watson asked Mylne to accompany him on an extended trip to the United States for the America's Cup contest between the British challenger *Valkyrie III* and the American *Defender*. This was a great honour. Did Watson already consider his young draughtsman as a potential successor?

As well as the racing, the visit was to be a sales trip — Watson was keen to secure orders for large steam yachts from the increasing number of Americans making fortunes from the



Previous page: *Moyana*, a 52-foot Linear Rater built in 1906, had the vast sail-area and overhanging boom typical of the class.

This page. Above: The sailplan and construction plans for *Memsahib*, believed to be Mylne's first racing yacht design. Her success put the young designer firmly on the map. Right: The 23-footer *Psyche*, built in 1898. Far right: Built in the same year, *Zitella* was one of Mylne's most successful boats in the 19/24 class.



The builders and designers of the Clyde were world leaders in the industry, and the volume of work was enormous: a new ship was launched somewhere on the Clyde more than once a week. The Yoker-based Napier, Shanks & Bell, founded in 1877, was a typical Clyde firm of the era, turning out a wide variety of craft from freighters to large steam yachts. Alfred began to learn the rudiments of his craft under the firm's chief designer, Robert Napier.

But it wasn't long before Mylne had moved to the large, busy international design office of George Lennox Watson. At the time Watson was at the pinnacle of his career. His work spanned everything from small racing yachts to extremely large steam vessels, and was shortly to include a commission for the King's racing yacht *Britannia*. It was a golden opportunity.

In 1894, when the 21-year-old Alfred was still working at Watson's, he and Charles built an 18-foot half-deck sailing boat. This is generally considered to be Alfred Mylne's first design, and its half-model was the start of what ultimately became an extensive model collection.

The boys put the boat together in Charles' bedroom in their second-floor flat in Glasgow's high-brow district of Kelvinbridge. The windows had to be removed from the room to get the boat out, and — as Alfred proudly wrote to his mother at the time — a gantry had to be rigged to lower it down to a horse-drawn cart below.

country's *fin de siècle* industrial boom. In this he was successful, but on a personal level it seems a rift began to develop between Watson and Mylne. While the older man enjoyed a relaxed time being entertained by his rich clients in the Hamptons and Martha's Vineyard, young Mylne was slaving away in sweltering New York, preparing proposal drawings. Mylne was later to say that the older man seemed to him to be "harsh and mean-spirited", but a good master in the skills of ship design.

If Watson *did* consider Mylne as a successor, his feelings soon changed radically. In 1896 Mylne won a design competition in the *Field* magazine which at that time carried plenty of sailing features. Partly on the strength of this, he decided to set up on his own as a designer. He was only 24.

The start of the feud

Watson was furious and thus began a feud which, astonishingly, lasted as late as the 1950s. I had not been with A Mylne & Co more than 10 years when a bunch of the 'Mylne boys' met a group of the 'Watson gang' at a London Boat Show. We all fell into what seemed to me to be an amicable conversation about the difficulty in getting owners to pay promptly, the near-impossibility of making design work pay, the absurd cost of pensions, and so on. Seeing that everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves, I suggested: "Let's go to the exhibitor's lounge and have a drink." Quick as lightning, one of the Watson crowd

said: "Watsons don't drink with Mylne." I'd heard about the 'feud' several times, but never seen it in action before.

Years later, it surfaced again. The firm of GL Watson fell on hard times and went bankrupt. It occurred to me that if we joined forces, between us we would have the world's longest list of designs, not to mention a valuable accumulation of 'know-how' and experience. I therefore contacted the receivers with a view to buying all or part of the Watson firm. My enquiries were met by stone-walling. The intermediary handling the bankruptcy refused to have any dealings with Mylne. The more I tried, the more real and imaginary problems were introduced. I believe that if I could have spoken directly to the Watson directors, instead of through an intermediary, something valuable might have been achieved.

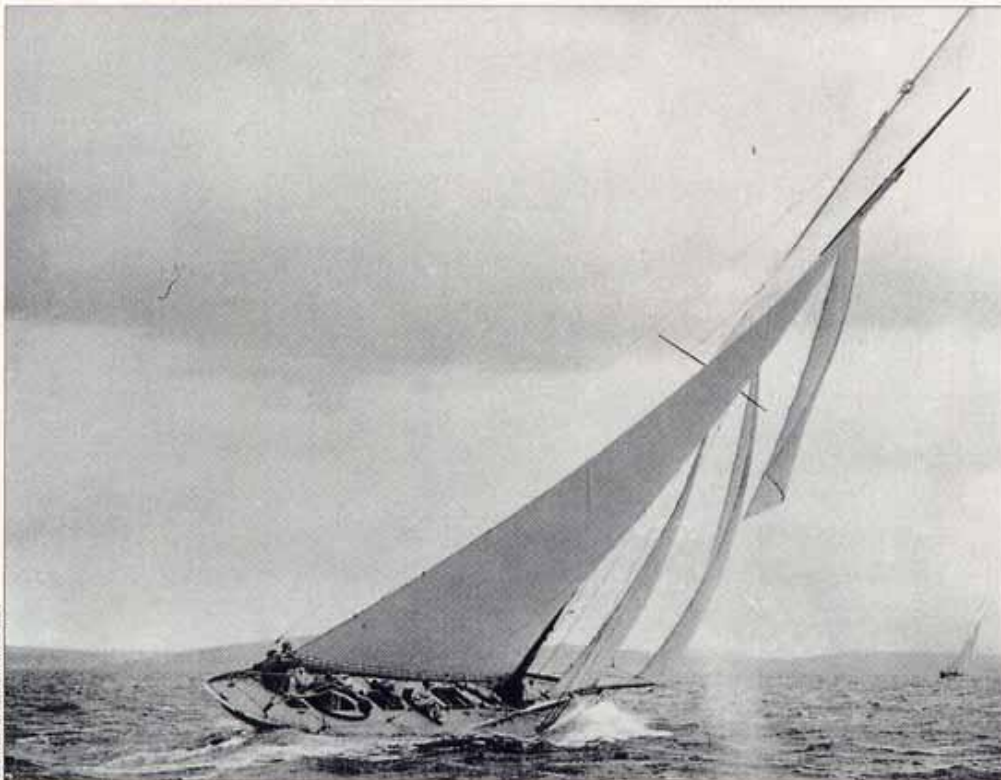
Back in 1896, when Mylne set up his office at 108a Hope

deep lead keel. Mostly gaff sloops, they carried a vast area of sail — around 500sqft (46.5m²) — which made them fast, but cruelly wet in anything but the glassiest of calms.

The first boat Mylne designed for the class, commissioned in the autumn of his first year by a Mr JK Tulliss, was *Memsahib* — believed to be Mylne's first racing yacht design. She was built by Ewing and Gruer McGruer at their recently-established yard in Rutherglen (see CBs 85-7). It marked the beginning of a long and fruitful collaboration between the two young enterprises.

Memsahib did well in that first season: in the inaugural race at Greenock she placed third overall out of the eight new boats which made it to the line, and finished the season with seven firsts, five seconds and three thirds, earning a grand total of £28 in prize money for the gratified Mr Tulliss.

For both McGruers and Mylne, her success marked the begin-



Left: An early photographic plate of *Forsa*, one of Mylne's first 52-foot Linear Raters, powering upwind into a Clyde chop in 1898. This was the first season for this lightly-built beauty — racing in a fleet of six, she amply demonstrated her young designer's talent.

Below: This 18-foot half-deck centreboarder is believed to be Alfred Mylne's first ever design. He carved the half-model himself, and he and his brother Charles built the full-size version in Charles's bedroom in downtown Glasgow.

Street in Glasgow, things seem to have started off sensationally well. Our records for this early period are thin, but we know that in the first five years, Mylne designed for six One-Design classes. This is a record which still stands.

But the one class which probably did most to put the fledgling firm onto its feet was not one-design but restricted: the newly-formed 19/24 class, so named because boats had to be no more than 19ft on the waterline and 24ft overall (5.8 and 7.3m). Mylne's timing was impeccable: 1897 was the first season for the new rule, formulated by William Fife junior and GL Watson after a request from the Clyde Yacht Clubs the previous year. The field was wide open for both established and aspiring designers to compete on even terms in an exciting new forum. The 19/24 class provided Mylne with an opportunity to demonstrate that he was quite capable of matching 'the big boys'.

The Fife/Watson rule produced boats which were transom-sterned, with a low freeboard to minimise the hull weight, and nothing much on deck or below to add to their weight except a

ning of a heady period of designing and building for the class. The next year Mylne designed *Vashti* for the Clark family, the great Glasgow cotton dynasty and among the Clyde's wealthiest yachting patrons. She was the first of three 19/24s that he was to design for them at three-yearly intervals.

Driven under

All the Clark boat names began with 'V' — *Vashti* was followed in 1900 by *Valmai*, and in 1903 by *Valtos*. This boat was of such low freeboard that she was driven under while being raced extremely hard, and one person was drowned. After this tragedy, a limit was put on the minimum freeboard.

Also in 1897 came *Zitella* — Italian for 'young girl' — and *Ceres*. *Zitella* came third overall in her first season's racing, with 10 first places, bettering *Memsahib*'s record. In 1899 Mylne was made class measurer and he found that several boats, including his own most recent three, had become too narrow at the waterline as a result of hard sailing, so they had to be 'jacked out'. This did them little good, but it did literally 'force them back into class'.

The 1900 season saw no fewer than five new 19/24s from the Mylne board on the water: *Shireen*, a new *Memsahib*, *Sapphire* and *Susette* as well as the Clark's *Valmai*. In 1901 came *Gertrude*, *Estrella* in 1902 and both *Susette II* and *Valtos* in 1903. In 17 racing seasons *Estrella* earned a total of £650 for her owner, for an



COURTESY OF KENNETH W. BOWEN

KENNY MANNFIELD

original cost of £150. In those days a typical prize list would read: £3 for a 1st, £2 for a second and £1 for a third, with £15 for special prizes such as long distance races.

Mylne designed the 19/24s *Lorelei* and *Sunbeam* in 1904 — his last boats for the class, which by then was coming to the end of its life. The Metre class boats were about to burst on to the yachting scene. Some of these 19/24s are still sailing and even racing in club events, though this sometimes means going outside sheltered waters. As they are approaching 100 years old the odd weep or creak near the mast-step cannot cause complaints.

In only his second year Mylne was asked to design a 52-foot Linear Rater. She was the *Forsa*, built by J Reid of Whiteinch in Glasgow. She was 55ft between perpendiculars, 46ft 8in on the waterline and with a beam of 12ft 6in (16.7 x 14.2 x 3.8m).

Three small yachts were also designed in 1897 and launched the following year, two of them built by AJ Fryer of Largs.

Mylne's second big break came in 1898 when he was approached by a group of potential owners fed up with the Yacht Racing Association's inept handling of the existing Linear Rating rule. The YRA, precursor of the RYA, managed racing in Britain but its influence was worldwide. Working to the rule, designers produced lightly-built, flimsy boats with short racing lives. Depreciation was so fast that owners, unable to stand the expense of continually building new boats, began to seek alternatives.

Mylne understood that any handicap rule would be an early failure unless it included a full construction specification which aimed to make yachts sound for at least 50 years. It was a philosophy which endured in the firm long after the founder had gone. When I worked for A Mylne & Sons in the 1950s, we used



The boats were lightly built and as a result they had short lives. In 1898, when *Forsa* was launched, there were only six in the class. They had long, low overhangs and very little free-board, but a far-spreading cloud of canvas. Being engineless, they needed masses of sail to get them home as the evening breeze died away — quite apart from the need to get all the sail that could be squeezed from the rating rule. They had no cabin tops, just a plethora of hatches and skylights which the paid hands had to keep varnished all through the summer.

To receive a commission for such a large vessel was an honour for so young a designer, but then to produce a boat which could keep up in competition with boats designed by experienced old hands was a triumph. *Forsa* proved to be evenly matched against the others in her class, and always did particularly well in stronger winds. Along with the 19/24 class boats, she helped to establish Mylne as a reliable mainstream designer.

to take bets on how long a new measurement rule would last — once we had checked whether it laid down how strong the yachts had to be. Each new generation of rule-makers, it seems, is determined to ignore the lessons of the past.

So when, in 1898, Mylne was asked to come up with a one-design which would last, he was more than happy to oblige. The result was the Clyde One Design, or Clyde 20-tonner: 50ft overall, 35ft on the waterline and 9ft 3in on the beam (15.2 x 10.7 x 2.8m). Five yachts were built to the design over the win-



1896
Memsahib

1897
Senta
Maya

1898
Forsa

Kittiwake
Vashti/Viking II
Tresta/Wendy
Olive
Ceres
Zitella

1899
Tigris

Zamora ex Hirta
Jean
Dolphin/Aileen/Aileena
Avalon
Vagrant/Quickstep II
Noyra/Frisa/Vida II
Snarleyow/Ar
Men/Slainte
Talisman

1900
Sentinal
Corona
Astrea
Windhover
Capella/Theti/Thetis/Ha
lcyon
Leda
Nysa/Acorn

Memsahib II/Caribou
Nirvana
Sapphire/Doreen/Wind-
hover II
Shireen
Suzette/Laochan/Viola
Psyche/Zoe/Amy

1901
Meta/Lamella/Sea
Witch/St Vincent
Narwhal
Yvalda/Ragnhild II
Scoter
Gertrude
Clodagh
Sea Mouse

ter, two by Jones of Gourrock, two by McAlisters of Dumbarton, and one by PR McLean of Rosneath (the location of the builders was no accident — Mylne had the advantage of a wonderful steamer service to all parts of the Clyde from near his office in the middle of Glasgow, and in one day he could inspect progress on all five yachts and get home at a reasonable hour). One of these was cheekily named *Noyra* ('No YRA'), a raspberry to the administrators of the old rule. In 1901 a sixth vessel in this class was built by Fifes, called *Yvalda*, later renamed *Ragnhild II*. The majority of this fleet is still going strong. One, *Kelpie*, was considered worth giving a major rebuild recently and is still seen regularly at south coast events. None of their contemporaries from the YRA Linear Rating rule has survived, being too lightly built.

The winter of 1899-1900 saw a great burst of activity at Hope

ed the Dublin Bay 21-footers and the South Coast One-Design — not to be confused with that much later class of the same name produced by Nicholson — which were 57ft 8in overall, 38ft on the waterline, 11ft beam and 7ft draught (17.6 x 11.6 x 3.35 x 2.1m). Most of them are still going strong, even though they were raced hard when they first came out.

Typical of the class is *Eilun*. In the 1948 offshore racing season she was the winner of Class 1 and took line honours in the Brixham-Santander race, in spite of being up against a variety of modern boats, some of which had recently been built to take advantage of the RORC rating rule. This race included a severe gale — not exactly ideal for a low freeboard, long-ended old lady. The same year *Eilun* was also successful in the Kristiansand, Dinard and Brixham RORC races.

Five of these South Coast ODs were launched in 1903, but of



Opposite page: Kelpie, built in 1903, is one of a handful of South Coast One-Designs still sailing — here she is at this year's Salcombe Rally. Nine were built in all, though four were destroyed before the war in a fire while rafted up together.

Below: A half-model of the class, displaying the breathtaking lines that made Mylne famous.

This page: Sir William Burton's Moyana nosing ahead of Britomart in the Solent in 1905. Both Mylne-designed boats, they were the two most successful Linear Raters of that season.

Street. At the smaller end of the size range, Mylne was working hard on a design for the Royal Ulster Yacht Club Star class. This is not to be confused with the smaller fin-keel Star class which came out in America nine years later, drawn by Francis Sweisguth who was then working in the office of William Gardner in New York. In their first year, five Mylne Stars were built by J Hilditch of Carrickfergus. This was the start of another successful association between Mylne and a yacht builder.

During the same winter a centreboard yawl called *Sentinel* was constructed in Annan by W Wilson, to a Mylne design. I used to race against her some 40 or more years ago when she was 'mature' but still going well, and I was asked to survey her in the 1950s. In the 1970s she was going for £1, but I believe no buyer was forthcoming and she was eventually cut up.

By early 1902 Mylne was successful as a designer of cruising and racing yachts, as well as one-designs. These classes includ-

course they were designed in 1902, and construction started that autumn. Mylne must have worked late to get through the commissions. As well as all the other design work, he did the drawings of the 52-foot Linear Rater *Moyana*, launched the following spring. She was the second most successful yacht in her class in 1905, being beaten only by *Britomart*, also by Mylne.

This was the first yacht Mylne designed for WP Burton, later Sir William Burton, founder of the High Street tailoring chain. *Moyana* began a long and highly successful partnership between the two men, extending through a succession of racing yachts and power yachts to the 12-Metre *Jenetta*, built in 1939. 

Ian Nicolson worked with Alfred Mylne the Second for 20 years, until his death in 1979, and now runs Alfred Mylne & Co. In part two, next month, he relates how Mylne plunged headlong into designing for the new International Rule.

1902
Estrella/Noreen/Jildy
Runag

1903
Kelpie
Heroine
Gracie
Jean/Flirt V/Solskin/

Elsa IV/Elsa
Mayflower/
Harmony/Irene
Eilun
Moyana
Kingfisher
Kelpie/Audrey
Carina
Garavoge/Finola

Oola
Estelle
Innisfallen
Maureen
Sufette/Pepe
Seagull
Valdos

1904
Thetis
Irene /Corrie
Armyne
Psyche
Vladimir/Medea
Eileen V/Eileen/
Lady Elise
Petrel

Sunbeam/Amasis
Lorelei

1905
Breeze
Britomart
Naneen
Sinbad
Zoraya

Cobweb/Maia

1906
Medora
Myfanwy Bach



100 years of

In 1907 the yachting world changed forever with the arrival of the Metre classes, built to the second International Rule. As Ian Nicolson reveals in part two of his three-part profile of the great Glasgow designer, Alfred Mylne was in the thick of the fray

IN PART ONE of the Mylne story last month, we learned of the young Alfred Mylne's apprenticeship in the great Glasgow design firm of GL Watson, and of the long-running feud that was sparked when he decided to set up on his own at the age of 24. But by the first decade of this century, boosted by his evident success in the 19/24 class, a string of handsome one-designs and several prestigious commissions for Linear Raters, his reputation amongst the yacht-owners of the Clyde and further afield had been well and truly established.

The man who had achieved so much at such a young age was above average in height and of substantial build. His fair hair was tinged with red, and he often had a wry, amused smile on his face. He had a dry Scottish sense of humour and an amiability and charm, set off by a slightly portentous manner: there were few areas of doubt in the clear-cut world of Alfred Mylne. In many ways he was 'larger than life', and the way he started on his own — so very young and as an immediately successful designer — profoundly affected the man he was to become. He smoked a pipe, wore smart suits except when in yachting gear, and called his friends by their surnames.

His circle of friends was large and included all the well-known yacht designers of the day.

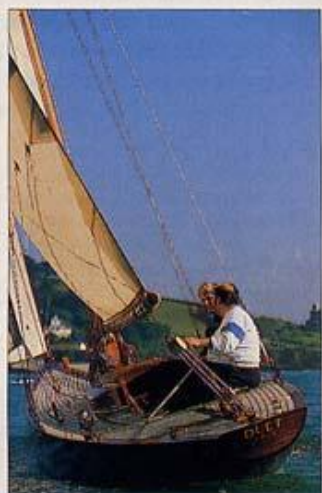
He liked the life of yacht clubs, as well as needing the contacts and professional feedback they provided, and was a member of the Royal Northern, the Royal Clyde, the Royal Gourock and the Royal Western, the Royal North of Ireland, Royal Alfred and Royal St George. He was elected to the Mudhook Yacht Club and became Vice-Admiral, as well as being a founder-member of the Clyde Cruising Club and at one stage its commodore.

108A Hope Street was the Mylne headquarters until about 1904 when a move was made a few blocks down the street to 81 Hope Street, a superb stone building constructed in the traditional Glasgow Victorian manner, immensely solid in structure and appearance. This remained the firm's premises until 1960. On the first floor was the Corn Exchange, and from top to bottom there were broad, gently sloping stairs up which a horse could be ridden quite comfortably.

On the mantelpiece of the main drawing office sat two small pencil sketches by Constable of the *Victory*, Nelson's flagship.

Part Two: Mylne and the Metre boats

Alfred Mylne



Opposite page: The Mylne-designed 8-Metre Dewdrop far from home — here she is racing in the Solent during her first season in 1911. One of the most successful pre-war 8-Metres in competition, she also vindicated the Eight's role as a cruiser. This page: Left: The restored 6-Metre Duet as she is today. She was designed by Sir Thomas Glen-Coats, a wealthy young protégé of Mylne's. Above: Now based on the Hamble River, Duet was recently restored by the International Boatbuilding Training College at Lowestoft.

These sketches were mentioned in Constable's diary — he had apparently hired a wherry at Maidstone and was rowed out so that he could make them from the right distance. Long after, when I was working at Alfred Mylne & Co in the 1950s, these sketches were still in their places. But during one of those waves of burglary which periodically plague Glasgow, it was decided to move them to a safer place. Alfred Mylne the Second — nephew of, and successor to, Alfred the First — later produced some superb colour wash drawings of some of the company's yachts to make up for the deficiency.

Mylne's hospitality to visiting clients was legendary. On one occasion, he was asked to design a new Clyde pilot boat. The chief pilot regularly came upriver from Gourock, by train or paddle steamer, to discuss the new ship. The talk would begin with a gin or two, or more, at a nearby pub, and continue in the office. It was later part of the office lore that the amount of gin consumed by the designer and his client would, if put into a dry dock, have comfortably floated the vessel under discussion. Incidentally, this little ship was shaped a bit like an elegant yacht, with a slim bow and a delightful tucked up counter with tilted-in aft bulwark, so that if she was pitched against a ship in rough weather little damage would ensue.

The nearness to the office of Glasgow Central railway station made things easy for visiting clients, but it had one bad aspect: during a hot summer the windows had to be kept open, and

soot from the nearby station got into everything. To this day, the old drawings of Mylne & Co are dusted with a patina of best Scottish steam coal.

The staff in the office in those early days were a mixture of characters. One was a fellow called McKean, who was the accountant for the company. When I first met him in the 1950s he was of an immense age and worked at a snail-like pace in an adjacent office. By then he had been looking after the books and fending off the Inland Revenue for 40 or 50 years, as far as I could make out. He was bent double with arthritis and was almost unable to walk, talk or see. As is the right and privilege of such venerable elders, he heard only what he wanted to hear, which was not very much. It was lucky the stairs to the office were so gentle, but even so it took him half an hour to get from the pavement to the seat by his desk. Still, if you have a bit of tradition, it is sad to let it go, even if it involves having the annual accounts written in spidery long-hand long after the rest of the world has discovered the typewriter.

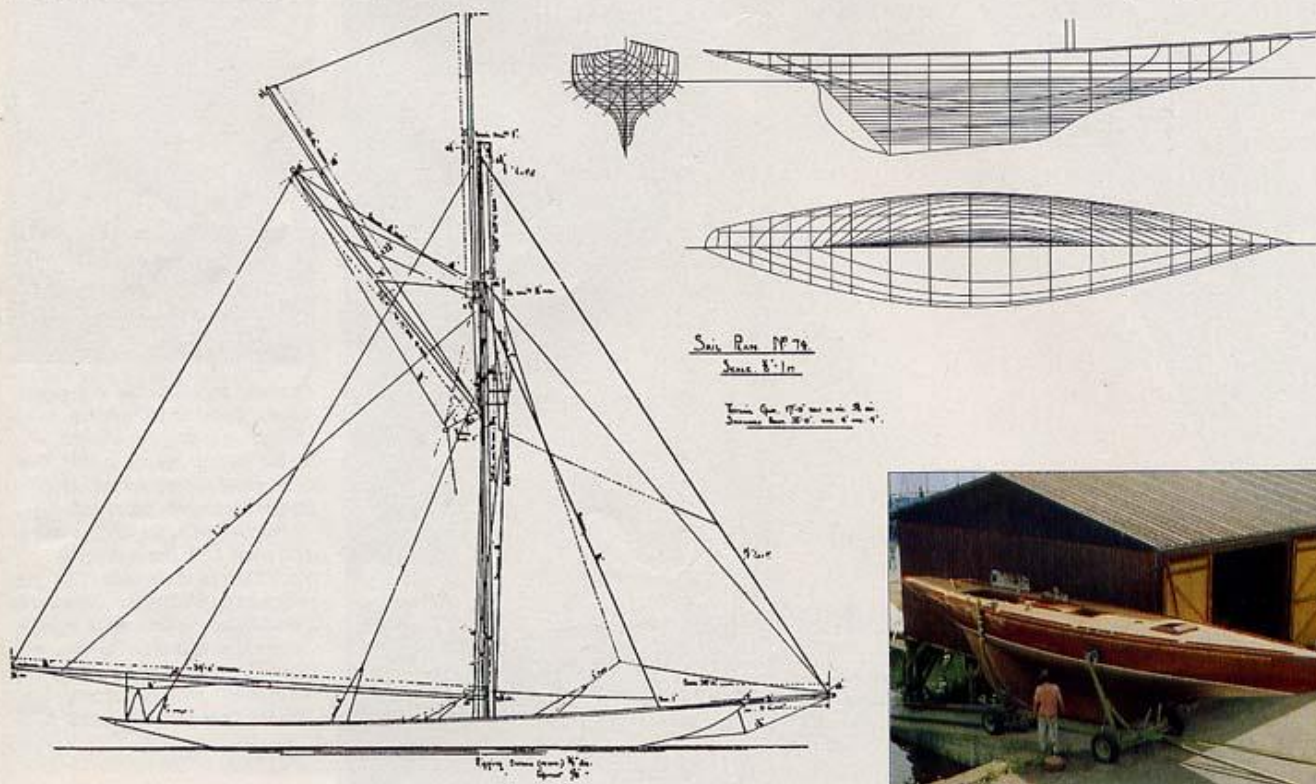
Another important character — though about whom little is known — was John Morton James, who joined the company sometime around 1902. He appears to have combined the position of design partner with office manager. Luckily he had perfect 'copperplate' writing, so that copies of the letters he sent out on behalf of the firm between the beginning of the century and the start of the Second World War are easily read. He seems

to have specialised in the larger yachts but his drawings are so like those done by Alfred Mylne that it is virtually impossible to tell which plan was drawn by whom.

From around 1909 or so there was the curious involvement of Thomas — later Sir Thomas — Glen-Coats in the Mylne design office. Thomas was the eldest son of the Coats family, which had made a huge fortune from cotton and which owned a large fleet of yachts at that time. Thomas's father was friendly with Alfred Mylne and when young Thomas — or 'Tid' as he was known — left university, the father asked if there was room for him in the design office. Tid was so wealthy that he never needed to work, and the father hoped spending time at Mylne's would keep him out of trouble. From then on, Glen-Coats designed himself a series of 8- and 12-Metres, many of which were built at the Bute Slip Dock. His custom was to race them

during the Summer regatta season all round the coast, only returning to the office in the autumn — mainly to get on with designing a new boat for the following year. One of his later designs was the 6-Metre *Duet*, built in 1926 and constructed at the Bute Slip Dock. She was recently extensively rebuilt at the International Boatbuilding Training College in Lowestoft and is now based on the Hamble River. Glen-Coats is credited with designing one of the first two British 6-Metres to be rigged with Bermudan sails, as early as 1909.

There was one other twist to the tale. Following the custom of the time, Thomas's father offered to pay a premium for his son's training. Alfred at first refused to accept any money, but — on being pressed — finally agreed to place a sum of money into a bank account, "for a rainy day". It was a fair exchange, and one not uncommon at the time: a rich young man was able



Mylne and plans

Alfred Mylne seemed to prefer the purity of lines plans to working on cabin layouts. His was an age when the accommodation was seldom considered important in any case. He would put away a roll of about ten drawings for a 65-foot racing yacht, perhaps even as few as six for an 8-Metre. These varied, but typically would include a lines plan, construction plan — which sometimes also showed the cabin layout — a sail plan and perhaps a deck plan which might double as part of the construction plan.

There would be a spar plan and often a full size set of ballast keel sections. But although he was determined to get the details right on paper, Alfred also enjoyed explaining his ideas directly to yard managers and foremen. Unlike modern builders, he did not have to draw out a skylight or a fore-hatch. A rectangle on the deck and a few quiet words with an experienced builder would do the trick.



to indulge his whims in his chosen sport, while Coats money was useful to Mylne & Co in latter years.

A study of the company letter-books at the beginning of the century show that it was active as a charter and insurance agent and yacht manager as well as designing. Other work included acting as agents for sail-makers, engaging skippers and crew, yacht-broking, supplying overseas owners with yachts and gear, and so on. Then, as now, just being a designer was not enough to make a steady living through good times and bad, so that peripheral activities were essential.

A rule to work with

The whole yacht design scene changed dramatically between the middle of the summer in 1906 and January 1907. Alfred Mylne, together with William Fife and Charles Nicholson, were among the representatives from 13 countries who assembled in London, under the auspices of the recently-formed IYRU, to thrash out a new rating rule which would be popular, provide racing without time allowances, and above all limit the galloping depreciation which hitherto characterised the Linear Rating classes.

Owners were fed up with yachts which had too short a life because they lacked strength and the other features which make for a long life, such as a sail plan which does not 'wrack' the hull excessively. Resale values were beginning to matter a lot. The number of professional crew needed for a

typical racing yacht was considered too high. More people wanted to take part in racing, so the general demand was for less expensive boats.

The rule basically allowed designers to trade sail area against length, guaranteeing sound construction by insisting that all the new classes were built to Lloyd's Building and Classification Rules. The ten new classes agreed at the London conference, dubbed the International 'Metre' classes, spanned the whole range of sizes, from the 23-Metre yachts down to 5-Metres. In theory the 'metre' figure indicated the length of the boats on the waterline, but as designers began to find ways of getting "more speed out of the rule", the yachts in each class grew longer. Boats in the 6-Metre class, for example, soon grew to over 7m (23ft) on the waterline.

Alfred Mylne, who had been an early advocate of more

she was one of the four 19-Metres which sailed through the famous 1 July gale in the North Sea en route back from the 1911 Kiel Regatta in Germany.

In that year the 8-Metre class could muster 25 starters in a Solent race, and three of these, *Verbena*, *Dewdrop* and *Adria* were Mylne designs. In his history of the 8-Metre class published recently in this magazine (CB91 & 92), yachting historian John Leather reckoned *Dewdrop* to be one of the most successful of the pre-1914 8-Metres, and she certainly went on to have a long and distinguished racing career. Built in Southampton by Summers & Payne, Mylne's touch was evident in her wide lower section to reduce rating, and small wetted surface area, a mere 263sqft (24.5m²). Her relatively low displacement, 6.38 tons, made her light compared to others in her class. After



Opposite page: The lines of Mylne's successful 15-Metre *Ma'ona*. Relatively shallow-draughted for her length, she was fast, winning 15 first prizes in her first year, 1907.

Inset: The Finnish 8-Metre *Edit* was commissioned from Mylne for the Stockholm Olympics of 1912, but never competed. Here she is over 80 years later, extensively restored and still racing.

This page, left: Sails crisp as white card, *Ma'ona* on a fresh, misty day in the Solent.

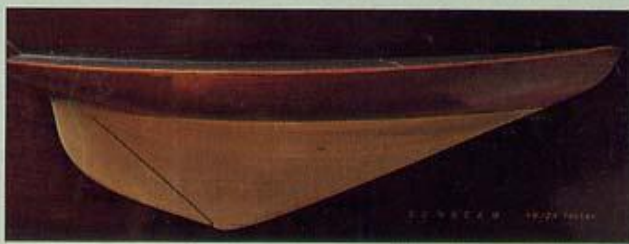
soundly constructed boats, enthusiastically plunged into designing for the new Metre classes, squaring up against the ever-prolific William Fife III and the other leading designers of the time. Like Fife, Mylne specialised in the 12-, 8- and 6-Metre classes because they were the most popular in Britain. He also designed successfully for the other less popular classes, however, drawing 19-, 15-, 10- and 7-Metre boats. He even produced plans for the 5-Metre class, a group which never took off in Britain and was not all that popular abroad.

In 1908, of the eleven designs turned out by Alfred Mylne & Co that year, five were IR class boats: two 12-Metres, a 10-Metre, a 7-Metre and a 6-Metre. Just for good measure, there was also a 30-foot Linear Rater built to the 'old' rule, a 60-foot motor cruiser, and the yawl *Maid of Lorn*, a canoe-sterned beauty which has recently been restored. By 1909 the momentum built up by the International Rule was greater still: there were commissions for two 12-Metres, an 8-Metre and a 6-Metre. At this time a typical design would take about 600 hours of work.

The year 1911 saw eighteen yachts built to Mylne designs, five of which were Island Class yawls, many of which are still sailing. The 19-Metre *Octavia*, was the largest racing yacht from his board so far — 95ft (29m) overall, with a bowsprit which reached 20ft (6m) forward, and a boom which projected aft of the counter by some 12ft (4m). Produced once again for Mr — later Sir — William Burton of the High Street tailoring dynasty,

Mylne and half-models

Many of Mylne's own half-models survive, part of the collection still held by the modern Mylne & Co. His very first model was of his first design and is still in existence — a half-decked centreboarder built by the two brothers in Charles's bedroom in Glasgow in 1894. Other half-models followed, however, and in later years he derived much pleasure from sitting by the fire in the evenings, sand-papering the surface of his models to a perfect smoothness. At one time he employed the father of the 12-Metre designer David Boyd to carve half-models of his boats for him. This way, the final lines plan could be adjusted after studying the shape in three dimensions.



1948, renamed *Mary Falconer* and rigged bermudan, she continued to outpace more modern racers.

"She would not point so high as the later bermudan-rigged Eights, and would not be as fast in strong winds or on rough water," Leather writes, "but downwind in smooth seas she was matchless." Not only that, but she also vindicated the 8-Metre's role as a cruiser — one of the declared aims of the 1906 rule-makers. Below-deck arrangements, with berths for three, remained unchanged almost throughout her existence. "With her speed and longevity in racing, and relative comfort below, *Dewdrop* was a fine example of what the 1906 rule-makers must have had in mind," Leather concludes. She is still afloat today, belonging to a Swiss owner and again renamed *Dewdrop*.

Other Mylne 8-Metres pursued successful racing careers abroad. One such was *Edit*, built for the Stockholm Olympics of

1907 shows that the yacht "complete as per contract" cost £3,000, with £7 13s for signal flags, £5 for a rating certificate, and £6 8s for insurance for a "captain for 12 months". She was composite, with steel frames for extra strength and rigidity.

During her heyday, *Ma'ona* was considered the fastest 15-Metre afloat, with 15 first prizes in her first year, under the ownership of Talbot Clifton. The following year, steered by her new part-owner JR "Fiddler" Payne, a great yachtsman in his day, she won 6 firsts and 17 prizes out of 24 starts. Later, like many of the big Metre yachts, she was converted to a ketch and fitted with an engine.

It was in 1911 that Mylne became involved with Sir Thomas Lipton and his plans to wrest the America's Cup from the US. After preliminary discussions, Mylne sketched some designs for Lipton, but there appears to have been a misunderstanding

Right: Dirty wind leaves Mylne's *Adria* trailing behind *Woge* and *The Truant* during Solent racing in 1911. Along with *Dewdrop* and *Verbena*, she was one of three Mylne designs in a fleet of 25 to come to the line that season.

Opposite page: The long overhangs of *Verbena*, seen here in light airs off the Isle of Wight, were typical of Mylne's artistry.



1912 by Åbo Båtvarf. Owned by a Swedish dentist by the name of Cederberg, she was beaten by William Fife's *Lucky Girl* in Helsinki and so never competed in the Olympics. She went on to become one of Finland's most famous racing yachts, however, and still races today, fully restored, in the modern 8-Metre championships.

One of the first Mylne designs built to the new rule was the successful 15-Metre *Ma'ona*, built in 1907 by McAlisters of Dumbarton. She was 63 feet LBP, 50ft 11in on the waterline. Like all her type, she was narrow at 13ft 3in beam, but not particularly deep at 7ft 3in draught (19.2/15.5 x 4 x 2.2m) — partly so that she could sail into any yachting centre around the coast at all states of the tide. *Ma'ona's* nominal sail area was 3,150sqft (293m²), but this did not include her spinnaker and sail overlaps, so in a breeze she needed skilful handling.

The account which A. Mylne & Co sent out on 26 August

as to how far this should go: Mylne went ahead with the sketches with great excitement, only to find later that Lipton, keen to have builder and designer 'under one roof', had given the commission to William Fife.

Fife was a great professional rival, but a highly respected one, and at the same time a good friend. Mylne was occasionally asked to survey Fife boats, and the following comment, appearing in a report on the 73-foot (22.86m) Fife cruiser *Rendezvous* written in 1913, was typical: "As you may be aware, in connection with yachtwork, Mr Fife's name carries with it the stamp of excellence, and the workmanship of *Rendezvous* is no exception to the rule."

It was common practice at this time to make yacht spars as light as the designer dared. Naturally there was a tendency to think: "If a spar 6in [150mm] in diameter did not break with a given amount of sail on it, and we had some hair-raising squalls

1907

Ma'ona
Tresta
Florry
Elvira
Ethilda/Florenian
Lotos/Sparker/Lotus

1908

Nargie/Malva

Mouette
Geraldine
Maid of Lorn
Frosette
Galma
Ailsa
Mignonette
Sibindi
Sunbeam/Insouciant
Senora

1909

Correnzia/Corrie
Apache/Fera
Novena/Drache III
The Nun/Orsa
Cyra/Lucella/Elsel/Elsa
Javotte/Baccarat
Betty II/Beduin II
Aline
Culwulla/Rawhiti II

Toogooloo
Woo
Trix/Thistle

1910

Ginevra
Mahshuka/Suyyara
Tritonia/Jeano
Amazon
Ocean
Child/Dianthus/Diantha

Certe/RSC/Arin-arin
Paula/Paula II
Thestrian/Nanette
Else V
Ethilda/Ranzo
Merula

1911

Octavia/Wendula
Adria

Dewdrop/Juva
Edith
Iviza
Fiara
Eriska
Tory
Vaila
Ejnar
Kestrel
Lucie II/Butterfly

when racing, then next year I'll reduce an equivalent spar to 5½in [140mm] diameter." The trouble with this attitude was that it assumed all timber was identical, and was all selected with the same care and skill. If the piece of wood chosen for the lighter spar was inferior, the new spar broke in the first squall. In practice, racing skippers of the day used to look at the bend in a spar, and reduce sail when they reckoned the curve was getting excessive. The trouble with this technique was that one only learned by actually breaking spars!

In 1911 there occurred an event which was to profoundly affect the fortunes of the company and play a significant role in the Mylne story: Alfred's elder brother Charles, who had gone off to Africa as a young man to seek his fortune as a banker, returned to Scotland for the sake of his health — he had contracted both malaria and the blackwater fever which was even-

work would soon be forthcoming, it was said, as passing yachts struck the rocks off the point. It was only 'an auld yarn', needless to say, but one repeated wistfully by the Mylnes whenever work was short. Yet by all accounts Charles was a skilled and effective manager of the yard, well liked by his staff.

The First World War began three years after the establishment of the Bute Slip Dock, and war work — mainly small craft for the Royal Navy — quickly displaced yacht-building. Later, like many Clyde builders, the yard turned out F3 and F5 type flying boats, using the finest yacht-building techniques such as lightweight double-diagonal planking with tiny copper clenches. Even during the war, however, there was some yacht design work going on, mainly powerboats for harbour work.

In 1918 Alfred designed the 32-footer *Zanetta* for the famous 6-Metre helmsman and Olympic sailor J Howden Hume, begin-



BENEFIT OF CONES

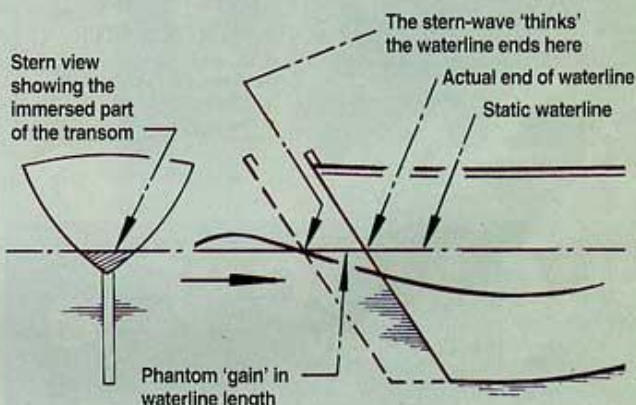
tually to claim his life. The two brothers went into a business partnership together, taking over a boatyard which they renamed the Bute Slip Dock, in Port Bannatyne on the Isle of Bute. For the next 13 years this company, under Charles's steady management, was to turn out many of Alfred's finest designs. And in due course it was Charles's son, also Alfred, who inherited the family business when the elder Alfred died childless.

In theory the brothers had a perfect arrangement, as Charles established and managed the yard while his brother in Glasgow, 50 miles away, found the clients and did the design work. In practice, things were not usually so rosy: the two firms simultaneously suffered from the slumps which bedevil the yacht industry every few years. Whenever work at the Bute Slip Dock was short, so one story went, the yard manager would row out at dead of night to the channel buoy marking Ard-maleish Point and hang his yachting cap over the light. Repair

A Mylne secret: 'phantom' length

One of the secrets of Alfred Mylne's success was his appreciation of the advantages of the immersed transom. He realised that by drawing the bottom of the transom below the static waterline, the stern-wave could be 'fooled' into thinking that the yacht's waterline was longer than it really was.

Unless the boat was moving at a low to moderate speed, when there would be extra drag, the wave ran back clear of the transom, leaving the immersed part dry. This in effect gave the yacht an increase in waterline length and, as everyone knows, the longer a boat, the faster it goes.



ning a long association between Mylne and Howden Hume. *Zanetta* was 32ft LOA, 21ft 6in waterline, 7ft 6in beam and 5ft draught (9.75/6.56 x 2.29 x 1.52m).

After the First World War ended, design work did not immediately flood into 81 Hope Street. Few men in the forces or recently demobilised were able to think seriously about yachting again until well into 1919. By the autumn of 1920, however, things were again beginning to pick up in the drawing office: eleven boats were launched the following spring, two of them 6-Metres built by the Bute Slip Dock. In all, the yard built eight Mylne-designed yachts that year, including two Rivers One-designs. **CB**

Ian Nicolson was a partner of Alfred Mylne the Second for 20 years, until Mylne's death in 1979, and now runs Alfred Mylne & Co. In the third and final part next month, he revisits the final years of the great designer's life.

Kim/Ven
Kitty
Mascot
Rival
Barrabel/Trixie
Ilanga/Tineke II
1912
Etive
Pampero

Fuinary/Galatea
1913
May
Gundred/Saada
GKSS/Waterwitch
Aida/Troll
Trasnagh
1914

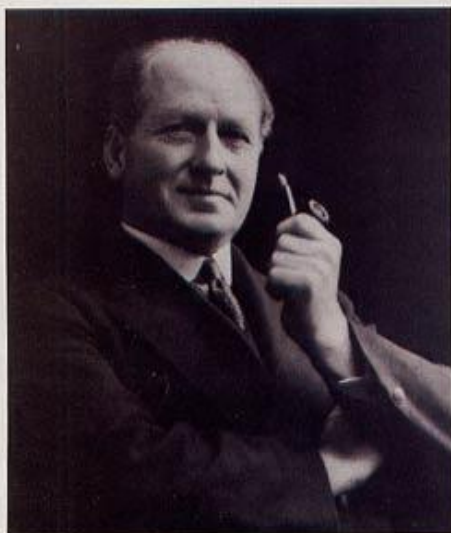
Luzie V/Bobo
Pilgrim
1915
1916
Piet Heyn
1917
Fionn/Ben/Alicia IV/

Thelma
1918
Puffin
Zanetta
1919
Dar-Thula
1920

La Belle Poule
/Gudgeon
Ann/Anne
1921
Gweebara
Lackagh
Laragh
Dorella
Moyola

Oni/Circe
Victoria/Gerris
Quoile
Roe
Shimna-
Strule
1922
Ben

By the 1920s the great Scottish designer was ageing but assured. Giant cruising yachts flowed from his pen alongside affordable racing designs and fishing boats. Ian Nicolson concludes his centenary profile with the twilight years of 'Old Uncle Alfred'. Photographs by Beken of Cowes



Part Three: 'Dreaming down the evening'

LAST MONTH WE learned how Alfred Mylne consolidated his growing reputation with successful racing designs built to the new International Rule, we heard of his rivalry (and friendship) with William Fife and we learned how, in 1911, he established a successful yacht building yard on the Isle of Bute with his brother Charles: the Bute Slip Dock Co.

The year 1922 was not a busy one for Mylne & Co, partly because Alfred, at the ripe old age of 50, unexpectedly married. He did so in the quietest possible way, not even telling his brother — also his business partner — until the wedding was over. He telephoned and casually mentioned, in the midst of a business discussion, that the event had taken place. The bride was 33-year-old Miriam Bay Brown-Constable of Cheltenham, some 17 years his junior. With her father, she often went to the Isle of Bute for summer holidays, which is where she and Alfred had met.

'Aunt Miriam' — as she soon became known by many (unrelated) sailing friends — took a keen interest in Alfred's work and often visited her husband's yachts 'in build' or at their launches. On one occasion a large ketch was launched on a Friday evening from Bute Slip Dock. Miriam went on board from a launch and as she was going up the boarding ladder she barked her shin so that a few drops of blood spilled onto the deck. The crew were superstitious and refused to set sail that night. As it was Good Friday the incident was considered especially 'bad joss', and it was not until the following Tues-

100 year



day that the ketch finally left Port Bannatyne bay.

Miriam was also a keen sailor, and crewed regularly for her husband right up to their last season together in 1949. Once the spring rush in the office was over and all the yachts were afloat, the couple would disappear together into the remoteness of a Scottish loch aboard their own boat, a former Clyde 30 class sloop called *Medea*. Here no telephone could reach Alfred, and his business problems were forgotten.

Alfred was an able helmsman, but not always as considerate of his crew as he might have been. On *Medea*, he favoured setting a jib aft of the mast in heavy weather, where it acted like a high, narrow trysail, giving the yacht plenty of speed in strong winds. It was a devil to handle without help, though, and friends recalled how Miriam would be expected to battle single-handed with this sail while her husband sat at the helm and issued orders.

Medea, formerly *Vladimir*, was built in 1904 as a 30-foot Linear Rater, but when the Metre classes came in, she raced with the 'Eights' for a time. Mylne acquired her in the 1930s — with an old 6-Metre thrown in for good measure, much as today a seller might include a dinghy — and he sailed her for the rest of his life, both for cruising and racing (Mylne took part in many handicap events such as the passage races organised by the Clyde Cruising Club). Her dimensions were 35ft LBP, 26ft 6in on the waterline, 8ft 3in beam, and she drew about 6ft in cruising form (10.7 x 8.1 x 2.5 x 1.8m). Her accommodation was con-

of Alfred Mylne



*Main picture: The Mylne heyday. The gaff ketch *Albyn* was one of a long line of big cruising yachts designed by Alfred at the peak of his career. Below: *Vanda*, the boat Mylne designed for himself but was persuaded to sell before she was even launched. The doghouse is a later addition.*

sidered adequate by the standards of the day, but with low freeboard and narrow beam, most people these days would describe her as a "tight fit".

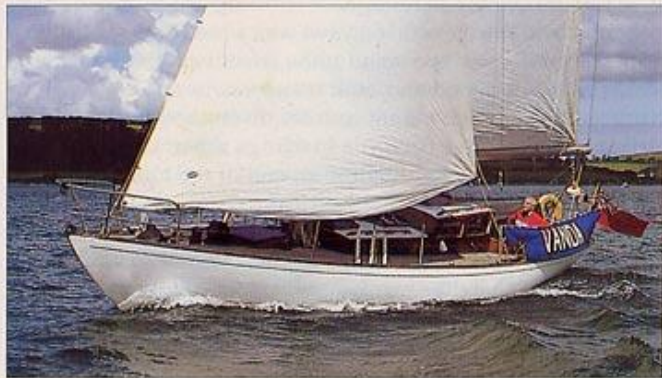
Perhaps the most remarkable thing about *Medea* was her longevity. Built as a Rater by Robertsons of Sandbank, one of the best in the business, she nonetheless displayed the delicate scantlings typical of her class. When Alfred Mylne finally retired and his nephew, Alfred Mylne the Second, took over the firm, the yacht was also passed on. She stayed in the family right through the 1960s, still racing, though there were times when the bilge pump worked hard. She was still going strong 65 years after she was built, and only ended her life in the early 1970s when a mooring failed and she was blown onto rocks near Dublin.

In 1932, realising that *Medea* was not the ideal boat for passage-racing, Alfred Mylne designed a boat for himself with the aim of replacing *Medea*. It is easy to see how he must have been thinking: "I need a little more length for seakindliness and speed, but not so much that the yacht is a handful for two of us. She must be faster than *Medea* so she must be bigger, but she must be wider for more comfort. That means she must be cleverly designed to overcome the disadvantage of the extra beam." The resulting design was a 41ft sloop, 34ft on the waterline, with a beam of 9ft 4in and a draught of 6ft 6in (12.5 x 10.4 x 2.8 x 2m). This meant long bow and stern overhangs and less freeboard than we would consider normal these days, but her sheer — as

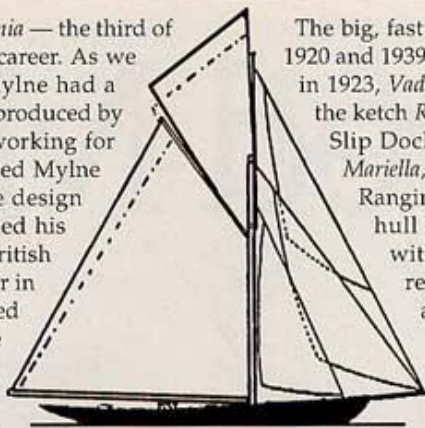
so often with Mylne — was as beautiful as the curve of a lily.

Named *Vanda*, the new yacht was laid down at Bute Slip Dock, but before she was complete a passing yachtsman saw her and was so entranced that he positively insisted on buying her. Reluctantly, Mylne sold. *Vanda* originally sported a large, three-quarter rig with twin spreaders, jumper struts and bumkin, but by 1939 a modification had shunted sail area from mainsail to headsail, resulting in the loss of the bumkin and a shorter boom. She is still going strong following a recent restoration (see CB27).

A real feather in Alfred Mylne's cap was the commission in

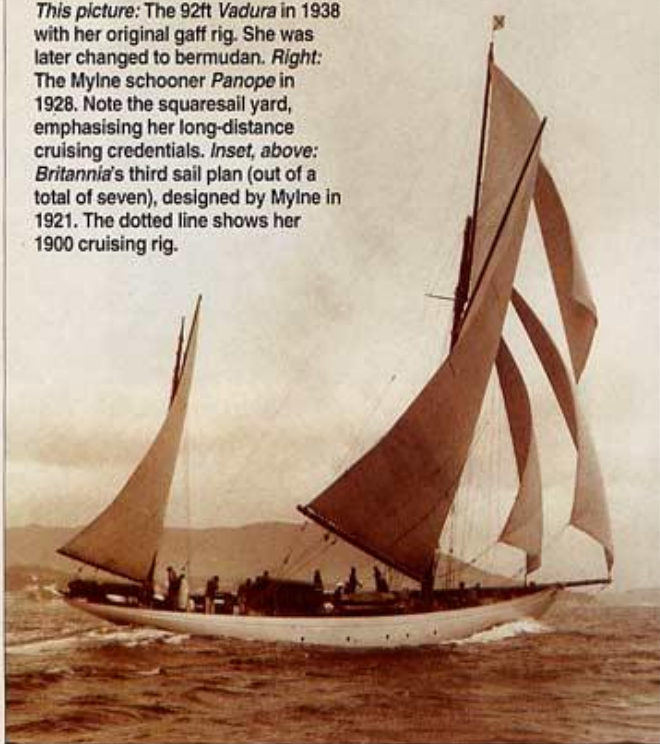


1921 to re-rig the King's racing yacht *Britannia* — the third of seven new rigs during her 42-year sailing career. As we have seen, there is some evidence that Mylne had a hand in the design of *Britannia*, which was produced by GL Watson while the young Mylne was working for the firm. The re-rigging commission entailed Mylne visiting Buckingham Palace to discuss the design with the King, and the invitation confirmed his status as one of the leading lights of the British yachting establishment. A consistent winner in heavy weather, *Britannia* had by then soaked up a lot of water, and was no longer the revolutionary boat she had been in her prime. In practice, there was nothing very radical about Mylne's sail-plan, which



The big, fast cruising yachts designed by Mylne between 1920 and 1939 included such famous names as *Verone*, built in 1923, *Vadura*, *Chicana*, *Fedoa* and *Panope*. Others were the ketch *Roska*, the biggest craft to be launched by Bute Slip Dock, *Mingary*, *Northward*, *Golden Hind*, *Eilidh*, *Mariella*, *Albyn*, *Fiumara*, *Polynome*, *Panda* and *Thendara*. Ranging roughly from 70 to 120ft (21-37m) overall hull length, each of these boats was unique — with its own full set of construction drawings representing hundreds of hours of planning and drawing, discussion and alteration to suit the owner's changes of mind — but all carried the Mylne trademarks of a well-curved bow and sweeping sheer. Most have well-documented histories as well as

This picture: The 92ft *Vadura* in 1938 with her original gaff rig. She was later changed to bermudan. **Right:** The Mylne schooner *Panope* in 1928. Note the squaresail yard, emphasising her long-distance cruising credentials. **Inset, above:** *Britannia*'s third sail plan (out of a total of seven), designed by Mylne in 1921. The dotted line shows her 1900 cruising rig.



continued the trend towards a smaller sail area with higher aspect ratio. It was not until 1931, nearly ten years later, that *Britannia* carried a bermudan rig.

Yet Mylne was always willing to experiment with rigs. He designed at least one yacht with a fully-battened mainsail at the beginning of the century, and another with a roller-furling headsail around the same time (though both ideas had been tried earlier). He was in correspondence with Mr Highfield — he of the eponymous lever for tightening running backstays — informing him loftily, even as the new gadget began to appear on side-decks, that what was needed was a lever which would give *variable* degrees of tension.

Mylne held the view that a yawl was a pretty vessel, but that a mizzen was often too small to be effective. His great friend William Fife designed and built many yawls, and often set the aft mast away aft on a long counter. Even though the mizzen sail was sometimes tiny, the loadings when the wind was strong twisted the slim, shallow aft end of the hull and caused all sorts of problems and assorted leaks.

Alfred Mylne was always conscious of the stresses in a yacht because he had to supervise the construction of so many craft. He also knew that, like many designers, he would find himself being called in by owners if there were leaks or creaks — sometimes years after the boat had been launched. As a consequence, he never skimped on scantlings and fastenings.

bookloads of anecdotes, and many have already featured more fully in the pages of *Classic Boat* (*Mingary* in CB40, *Thendara* in CB75, *Mariella* in CB86).

Most of these yachts are still going strong. Some of them were designed for local cruising around the Clyde, perhaps with an excursion up the West coast of Scotland in the Summer. They were not intended to range around the world, but since 1945 that is precisely what many of them have done.

Perhaps one of the best known today, and typical of her sisters, is the 122-foot *Thendara*, built in 1937 by Alexander Stephen & Sons of Linthouse for the Glasgow MP and carpet magnate Sir Arthur Young. Stephens, though really a ship-builder, had a special connection with Mylne's, since it was yacht work which helped keep the company going during the Depression (the yard also built Mylne's *Vadura* in 1926).

Of composite construction, with steel frames and teak planking, *Thendara* was launched in time for the coronation celebrations of King George VI and — despite being essentially a cruiser — she held her own in racing in the big cruiser class in those early years. During the Second World War, like many of these giant Scottish cruising yachts, she was pressed into service as a barrage balloon vessel, an anchor for vast aerial obstructions intended to make life difficult for Luftwaffe bombers with their crosshairs trained on the shipping of the Clyde basin. Young died aboard *Thendara* in 1950, whence she

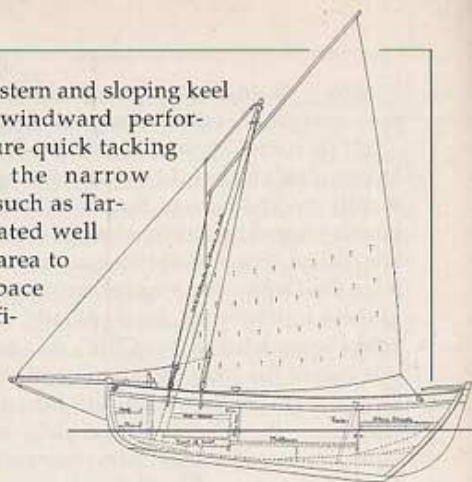
passed through a number of owners, including Greek Royalty, before receiving a fine restoration in the early 1990s at the hands of Southampton Yacht Services.

Northward, a bermudan sloop of 20 tons TM, was one of Mylne's more famous yachts. Built by McGruer & Co in 1930, she was 50ft 4in overall, raking down to a mere 35ft 6in on the waterline, 11ft wide and 7ft 3in deep (15.3 x 10.82 x 3.3 x 2.2m). She was both cruised and raced extensively on the Clyde and West coast, winning the Clyde Cruising Club Blue Water Trophy in 1937 and again in 1939, when she weathered a Force 9 gale. Partially in recognition of these exploits, the poet laureate of the day, Cecil Day Lewis, wrote a famous poem about her.

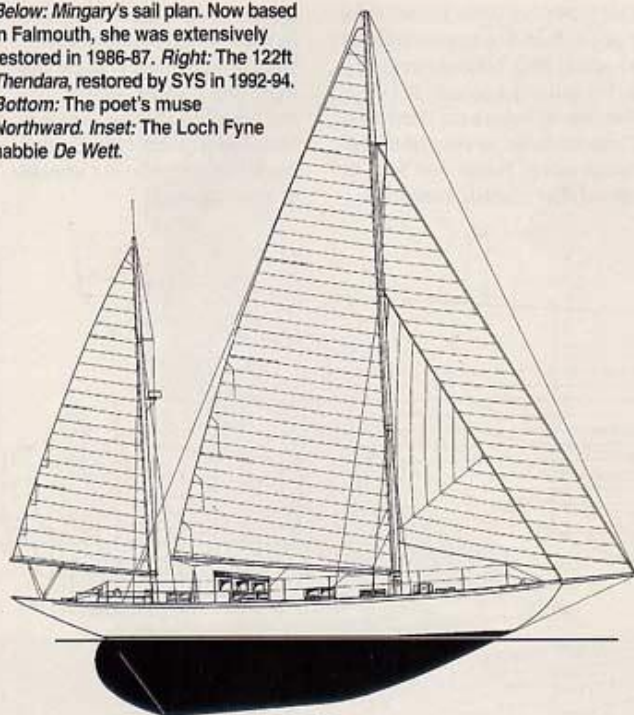
Northward raced on into the 1950s and 60s, receiving a mizzen and a more manageable ketch rig in 1962. The poet's reference to a "flame-spun pall" was prophetic for, sadly, she met her end

ples. The sharply raked stern and sloping keel of this vessel were for windward performance and also to ensure quick tacking when working into the narrow entrances of harbours such as Tarbert. The mast was located well clear of the amidships area to give ample working space as well as for sailing efficiency.

Mylne had also been designing sweetly-lined powered craft from his earliest days. In 1916 he had



Below: *Mingary's* sail plan. Now based in Falmouth, she was extensively restored in 1986-87. Right: The 122ft *Thendara*, restored by SYS in 1992-94. Bottom: The poet's muse *Northward*. Inset: The Loch Fyne nabbie *De Wett*.



*None is so beautiful, weather undaunted,
Flaunt I my colours close to the wild wind's eye,
Or cleaving calm seas, gold on my spinnaker,
Dream down the evening*

*Men say, who sight me naked on the pure sky,
Surely such craft once carried in his flame-spun
Pall a dead Viking past the horizon
Into Valhalla*

Extract from 'Northward' by Cecil Day Lewis

a few miles off Portland Bill in 1969 when a gas leak caused a violent explosion in the early hours of the morning. Her owner, who was sailing single-handed, was half way up the companionway and was thrown clear in the blast. A vivid first-hand account of the disaster appeared in the 1970 Clyde Cruising Club Journal under the evocative title "WOOMF ... the end of *Northward*". The concussed owner managed to climb into the dinghy, having had to duck below the surface to avoid being hit when the blazing mizzen came crashing down, and had to watch as his ship slowly sank, ablaze from stem to stern.

Like other small craft designers, Alfred did not confine himself to yachts, but built fishing boats and small commercial craft. The 34ft 7in (10.5m) Loch Fyne fishing nabbie *De Wett*, for example, showed a thoughtful application of design princi-

designed a 200ft (60m), twin-screw fish carrier for the North Atlantic run, one of the largest vessels he ever conceived. The 69-foot (21m) *Ariadne*, built by Robertsons of Sandbank in 1925, and the 65ft 6in (20m) *Faith*, built by Dickies of Tarbert in 1935, were two successful double-ended power cruisers from his later period. Both displayed Mylne's appreciation of the need to maximise speed through design alone — engines in his day were frequently chronically short of horsepower. This meant fine bows, slim beams and well-rounded bilges, design features which reduced stability, so that freeboard had to be low to keep top-weight down. That in turn meant shallow hulls with a lack of longitudinal strength that were therefore likely to flex. In response to this, one of Mylne's innovations was the use of universal joints aft of the engine, which allowed the propeller shaft to move in a vertical plane independently of the machinery driving it. In his day, these could be vast, whirling masses of steelwork as high as a man.

Mylne's design flair was not restricted to boats alone: he redesigned the burgee for that unique institution, the Mudhook Yacht Club, of which he was a Vice-Admiral. Founded in 1873 to "enhance the skills and raise the performance of our young yachtsmen", the club is limited to only 40 members 'and one forbye', and is one of yachting's oldest and most exclusive institutions. It was just one of the many clubs that Mylne was associated with. His design showed an

anchor well dug into black mud, surrounded by a dark red sea — symbolic, said the wags, of the pollution on the Clyde.

In 1927 Alfred Mylne designed the Scottish Island One-Design class for cheap one-design racing on the Clyde. A fully-decked two- or three-berth auxiliary fractionally-rigged bermudan sloop of carvel construction, he consciously kept costs as low as he could, since the Depression was gathering pace. Twelve of these boats were built eventually, each named after a Scottish island (see CB17). As a one-design, it was one of the most strictly controlled: there were two identical sets of moulds for each of the two builders — Bute Slip Dock and McGruers — and a single measurer was appointed who oversaw the building; no slipping or scrubbing was allowed during the season, and each year the

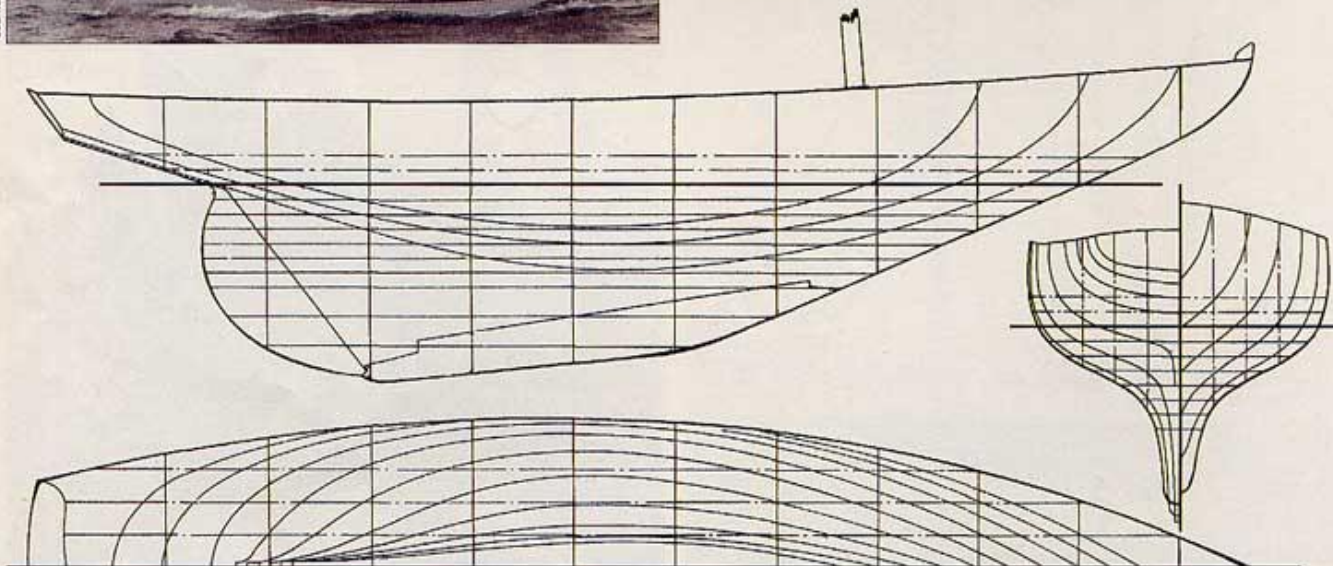


touched ground the lead generally deformed, cushioning the blow. Right up to the Second World War Alfred Mylne designed a succession of successful 6-, 8- and 12-Metres, as well as cruisers. The last year before the war was dominated in the office by the building of the 12-Metre *Jenetta* for Sir William Burton. This was considered a classic "bridesmaid's" boat, as she often won second and third prizes — but then, the class that season was dominated by Harold Vanderbilt's triumphant 12-Metre *Vim*.

One anecdote about *Jenetta's* building reveals the high personal standards which Alfred set himself: the owner wanted lightweight duralumin crosstrees, and was offered the loan of a spare set from a Charles Nicholson 12-Metre. Alfred refused to accept them on the grounds that it

Left: *Northward* under full sail in the Kyles of Bute. She was re-rigged as a ketch in 1962, but was lost to fire by the end of the decade. Below: The lines of Mylne's Scottish Island Class, designed for affordable one-design racing. Twelve were built, all named after Scottish islands.

Opposite page. Left: The gaff ketch *Fiumara* displays the restrained grace of an archetypal Mylne sheer. Right: The 12-Metre *Jenetta*, photographed after her launch in 1939. The outbreak of the Second World War soon after cut short her burgeoning career.



committee — which consisted of all the owners — decided which anti-fouling paint was to be used and which company was to make that year's batch of mainsails. Anyone who did not want an engine — a Watermota 3hp was specified as standard — was obliged to fit the offset stern shaft, tube and folding propeller, together with extra ballast to the same weight.

The Scottish Island class was a great success, and filled a niche well. Johan Anker's similarly-sized Dragon class came to the Clyde a few years later in response to the same demand. Mylne criticised the Dragon for having too little sail area; certainly not something that was ever said about his own designs.

Such was Mylne's emphasis on keeping costs down with the Scottish Island Class that he broke his own rule and specified cheaper cast iron for the ballast keel rather than the lead which he normally preferred. Lead keels, he held, resulted in a better windward performance and had the added advantage that if they

would not be right to be seen to take someone else's bright idea until it was in general use.

By the mid-1930s Alfred Mylne was beginning to feel his age on top of the strain of running both a design office in Glasgow and a boat-yard away down the Firth — after his brother Charles died in 1924, Alfred had also had to take over the running of the Bute Slip Dock. The yard was not easy to manage, as it was isolated and little-known outside the small circle of clients who had their boats built there, and money was always tight.

As war clouds thickened, Alfred sought to shift production at Bute Slip Dock from yachts to aircraft. He lobbied MPs and associates, but was initially told that government work would not be forthcoming for Bute Slip Dock — despite its outstanding record during the First World War — since the demand was now for metalwork rather than woodwork. Mylne promptly wrote back to London pointing out that his shipwrights were skillful in the

1923
Dragonet
Swilly
Verone
Ayesha
Glynn
Gometra
Ilanga/Tineke II

1924
Maharana/Westward
Ho/Moyana II/Estrilda
Gigha
Gullmarr/Gripen
1925
Ariadne
Bint
Gometra

Fiona/Iona
Polynome/Adastra
/Lhasa
1926
Chicane
Vadura
1927
Fedoa

1928
Melmore
1929
Bernera
Cara
Mingary

1930
Aramis IV
The Blue Peter
Caleta
Fidra
Jura
Northward
1931
Bridget

Ellidh
Gigha
Iona
Golden Hind
Ann/Anne
1932
Fiona
Froya
Vanda

broadest sense, and would have no trouble working in aluminium, but his efforts were in vain. By the time war was declared in September 1939 there were still no service contracts in the offing, while orders for pleasure yachts had understandably dried up. The bank had to be approached for a bigger overdraft.

What helped to save both Mylne & Co and the Bute Slip Dock was the Dublin Bay 24 class. These 38-foot yachts, 24ft on the waterline, with a beam of only 8ft and a draught of just over 5ft (11.6 & 7.3 x 2.4 x 1.5m), were in many respects cruising 6-Metres. Greater beam and freeboard allowed more internal space, while a slightly smaller draught made them easy to haul up in a small boatyard, as well as capable of cruising into almost any harbour.

When at last orders for naval launches began to flow to the Bute Slip Dock, the drought turned into a flood. Alfred found himself writing to a government department: "A few weeks

enough. It was time for him to put aside his splines and curves for good. He retired to Cheltenham, his wife's home territory, though the pair continued to make occasional pilgrimages north, when they would disappear with *Medea* into the sheltered anchorages and sea-lochs of his beloved Clyde estuary.

The younger Alfred, who had served in the Royal Artillery during the war and was captured at Tobruk, returned home to take up the mantle of responsibility for the family firm. Things were not in good shape. Although Bute Slip Dock had been busy, the main design office in Glasgow had been too quiet for too long, and finances were shaky. Alfred the Second asked his uncle what he should do about working capital, and was told, affably: "Scratch around, my boy, scratch around." Although the Bute Slip Dock passed out of Mylne ownership in 1975, Alfred the Second continued to run the design and survey side



ago I was begging for work from you. Now you are bombarding me with inquiries and requests that we take on extra work." Asked Mylne in justified frustration: "Did you do no planning when war was imminent?"

Meanwhile, work proceeded on the Dublin Bay 24s. Eight of these boats were completed in all by 1947, of which seven survive to this day in seaworthy condition, six based in Dublin and one, the recently restored *Periwinkle*, in Scotland. It says a great deal for both the Irish owners and the design office that they were able to keep the project moving forward and financed in spite of the war. The owners received their reward when hostilities ended and they were among the first in the scramble to get afloat.

In 1946 Alfred Mylne the First handed over both the design/survey firm of A Mylne & Co and the Bute Slip Dock to his nephew, Alfred Mylne the Second. He was 72 years old. The strains of yet another war had exhausted him, and he'd had

of the business, which thrives to this day.

Meanwhile, Alfred the First, who "had done his bit" on the Home Front in both World Wars, was offered a medal — I once heard it was an MBE. It was typical of him that he turned it down, saying that plenty of people in the two firms had worked as long and as hard as he, and that it would be invidious to be singled out. Mylne died in 1951 at the age of 78, his reputation as one of Scotland's great yacht designers secure.

The words penned by the poet laureate about one of Mylne's finest yachts, *Northward*, make as fine an epitaph as the old man could have wished for:

*Land's End to Lewis I know, but I love best
My western islands where the rain purrs on
Blue profound anchorage, where the moon climbs
Over the Cuillins*

*When you are done with me, let me still be happy,
Wrap my ribs deep in tides Hebridean,
And for a riding light, clear above me,
Set the Aurora*

Ian Nicolson, designer, surveyor and maritime writer, worked with Alfred Mylne the Second for 20 years and now runs Alfred Mylne & Co. With thanks to Gordon Findlay for information on *Northward*. CB

1933
Coquette
Dane Hill

1934
Albyn
Fiumara

1935
Faith

1937
Thendara

1938
Mariella

1939
Jenetta

NB. For the latter years, this list is not complete