

## Daddy's ( or Mummy's) Yacht.

The Royal Yacht “Britannia” was de-commissioned in 1997 after some 43 years of service to The Royal Family and The Nation. During that time the vessel travelled more than one million nautical miles worldwide and today she is berthed at Ocean Terminal in Leith where she attracts more than 300.000 visitors annually. She was designed to act as a Hospital Ship in times of war (although she was never used as such).

In 1997, the then Conservative Government had plans for a replacement vessel but the in-coming Labour Government declared that this would not be the case -and so, today, despite the many arguments supporting the case for another Royal Yacht, no replacement has been found.

She was the 83rd. Royal Yacht and the second to bear the name “Britannia”: The first was a small racing cutter built for the Prince of Wales in 1893 ; the vast majority of Britannia’s predecessors were of a similar size -small sailing craft designed for competition.



*Photo: TEC*

*HM Y Britannia off Browdown during the 50th Anniversary of D-Day celebrations, June 1994*



*National Maritime Museum*

*HM Y Royal George*

Last used in 1842, she became an accommodation hulk in 1902, and was broken up in 1905

The first “Royal” to declare an interest in sailing was Charles II when he was exiled to the Channel Islands in 1651 after his defeat by Cromwell at the Battle of Worcester. Until then, recreational sailing as a sport was unknown in Britain but it was popular in the King’s new, if enforced, residence and when he was reinstated to the throne in 1660 he brought his interest with him -and the sport of sailing slowly became popular throughout the country. His first yachts – small sailing craft – were given to him as gifts by The Dutch East India Company and he raced them between, inter alia, Gravesend and Greenwich – and return. Indeed, on the very afternoon of his coronation he was given a larger craft – and he immediately ordered that another ten tons of ballast be fitted!

The early yachts – irrespective of size – were elaborately decorated with the Royal Coat of Arms carved on the transom. Most were built in Holland but the English shipwrights soon developed their own design (resembling small men-of-war) discarding lee-boards and sprits and introducing the gaff rig.

Yachting as a sport was slow to develop (although there was a Yacht Club) but the Royals recognised the advantages of owning a craft that could “convey Princes, Ambassadors and other great personages from one kingdom to another” and in 1814 the much larger “Royal George” (330 tons) was built in Deptford. The (then) Prince Regent immediately joined the Yacht Club and, on coming to the throne he bestowed the title “Royal” on the Club and later, when William IV came to the throne he changed the name to The Royal Yacht Squadron.

In 1842, with Victoria on the throne, Sir Robert Peel was instrumental in promoting the change from sail to steam and the first “Victoria and Albert” was built in Pembroke. Two hundred feet long with a maximum beam of fifty nine feet and a speed of 11.5 knots she was a paddle steamer of ornate design. Her Majesty never put a foot on her “as she was concerned about the vessel’s stability” and she was replaced (and renamed “Osborne”) by a larger “paddler” of the same name which proved to be more to the Queen’s liking.

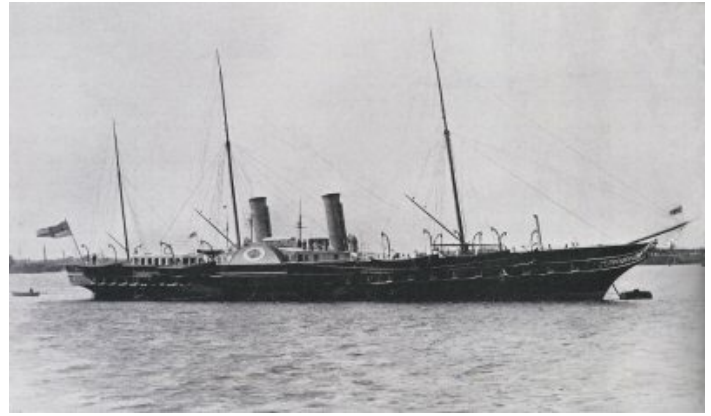
The third “Victoria and Albert” was built in Pembroke in 1890 but (due to a catastrophic error in design) as the building dock was flooded she took a list of some 20



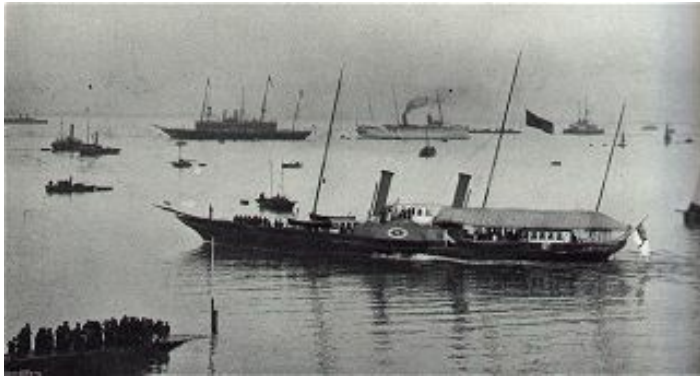
*HM Y Victoria & Albert III*

degrees and nearly capsized. Much later, after the removal of some 260 tons of top-hamper and the addition of 250 tons of ballast, she entered service and proved to be a comfortable ship.

By now, large racing sailing yachts were becoming the vogue and the Royals took a great interest in the sport. In 1851 the Prince of Wales witnessed an American victory in the "Round I.O.W" in the famous "America" and in 1893 he was instrumental in building the first "Britannia". She won her first race and for the next 43 years she was practically undefeated. She was modernised often and ended her life as a "Bermudan" cutter. Her last owner was King George V. and he instructed that, on his death, the vessel should be broken up. Thus it was that, on July 9th. 1936, following the death of the King, she was towed to sea by two destroyers and sent to a watery grave by explosive charges in her bilges.



*HMY Osborne*



*HMY Alberta*, built in 1863 as a tender to the larger *Victoria & Albert II*. Seen here departing Cowes for Gosport with the body of Queen Victoria on board.

With the end of WW2, interest in the sport was revived and, in 1948, the Island Sailing Club presented a Dragon class yacht to Their Royal Highnesses Princess Elizabeth and The Duke of Edinburgh. She was named "Bluebottle" and was a frequent competitor at regattas – but seldom won! Some time later she was replaced by a "Flying Fifteen" craft named "Coveslip" (having been presented by the "People of Cowes") and with the Duke at the helm she enjoyed considerable success. As mentioned earlier the vast majority of the early "Royal Yachts" were small wooden sailing boats capable of competing within their class and the "Victoria and Albert" was the first to be propelled by steam. She served four sovereigns over many years and was finally decommissioned in 1939 but acted as an accommodation vessel in Portsmouth Dockyard until she was broken-up in Faslane in 1954.

The early 50's saw a revival of the interest and, on February 4th. 1952, the Admiralty placed an order with the John Brown Clydebank Yard for a larger vessel suitable for global travel and one that could double as a hospital ship in time of conflict. The keel was laid in June of that year and the all-riveted vessel was ready for launching on April 16th, 1953. Her name had never been revealed until Her Majesty broke a bottle of Empire wine on the hull and announced " I name this ship Britannia – I wish success to her and all who sail in her" – and so it proved to be.