



MOONBEAM OF FIFE – HISTORY

1903

In order to understand how Moonbeam III became an icon we need to go back to England at the end of the 19th century when sail boats evolved from being work tools to become objects of passion and competition. It was when the art of sailing first appeared. The English were the first to join together in clubs to share and practice sailing for pleasure. It was in London, on the Thames, that the oldest sailing club, the Royal Thames Yacht Club (RTYC), was established in 1775. The fall of Napoleon Bonaparte allowed Queen Victoria's kingdom to make itself known commercially on the world stage. In this period of growth and prosperity, the first sailing boats ordered by wealthy enthusiasts started to appear. The era of yachting had begun.

Across the Atlantic, American boatyards were in full swing, with the launch of clippers that transported gold, tea, silk and cotton. They proposed a sporting contest with the English in the form of a regatta. The famous Royal Yacht Squadron (RYS) founded in 1851 in Cowes, rose to the challenge. And so the legendary America's Cup was born. The schooner America crossed the Atlantic in 1851 towards the English Channel, with John Cox Stevens from the New York Yacht Club at the helm. As winner of this first contest, she gave her name to the winner's trophy of what has become the most prestigious challenge in sailing. Today, the Isle of Wight remains the destination of choice for all favorite "gentleman sailors".

The large merchant boats fitted with huge sails, pressured by time constraints, were at the mercy of the elements. And so, the pilot boats, which needed to be competitive and able to set out in all weather to meet commercial vessels and help them manoeuvre in the entrance of the ports, were indirectly involved in the development of the sport of sailing. The designers, wanting to produce vessels that were both solid and fast, created a number of highly elegant sailing boats that inspired the best competitors to take part in the America's Cup. These boats have retained their legendary status today. Following the "deed of gift" which provided the regulations for this famous challenge, the new International Rule was set in 1907 for yachts. This set out a specific handicap system based on waterline length, sail area and several other individual yacht figures.





MOONBEAM

OF FIFE

1903

This new ruling played a part in the evolution of boat design. The construction of yachts boomed and the creativity in their design reached its peak.

MOONBEAM III - DESIGNER AND FIRST OWNER

It was in this buoyant climate that the designer William Fife made his mark in the world of sailing, having an unrivaled talent. On the banks of the river Clyde in Fairlie, a small village on the west coast of Scotland, some 400 sailing boats had already been launched by 1858 by the Fife family boatyard business. Their reputation was unquestioned and the business became the reference for informed enthusiasts.

At the end of the 19th century, the London lawyer Charles Plumtre Johnson, son of the Queen's personal physician, moved to Glasgow to enjoy sailing. An eminent member of the RYS and the RTYC, he acquired Moonbeam, designed and built by Fife senior in 1858. This 25-tonne yacht bore a resemblance to the pilot boats, with a straight bow, a large bowsprit and fairly high bulwark, like Partridge designed by Charles Nicholson in 1885. After sailing the boat extensively for six years, Mr Johnson commissioned Frederick Shepherd to build him a new yacht: Moonbeam II, a cutter 17.78 meter in length at the bridge. By the end of the season, however, the owner was dreaming of a modern and fast sailing boat, in keeping with the new regulations of the Royal Ocean Racing Club. He turned to William Fife, the third of that name, who had been in charge of the family business since 1886.

And thus, in 1903, Moonbeam III was born, combining power and manoeuvrability. A gaff-rigged yawl, it was supremely elegant : with a maximum beam of 4.70 m and a hull length of 30 m, a clear deck, large sail area and an Edwardian interior of flamed mahogany and upholstered leather. It was "one of the finest of Mr Fife's fast-cruisers" according to Dixon Kemp, who published the details of the design in the 1904 edition of the Manual of Yacht and Boat Sailing.

At that time it was called Moonbeam of Fife, so as not to be confused with the designer Shepherd's boat. It was the first in a series of gaff yawls that notably included Valdora, White Heather and Rosamond, which it would race against on many an occasion. Sir Charles Johnson, enthused by the competitiveness and elegance of his new sporty and fast boat, covered nearly 5 000 miles in a short space of time. The success of the first season's racing provided the owner with great satisfaction. At the age of 60, he then returned to the Fife boatyard to order an even larger boat, Moonbeam IV.

MOONBEAM III IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Moonbeam III then had several new owners but was used less, due to the two world wars. The second owner, Fernand Maroni, a Parisian industrialist bought her in 1920, renamed her Eblis and changed the boat's home port to Brest and then Cannes, where she won the





MOONBEAM

— OF FIFE —

1903

Mediterranean Cruise race in 1927 and 1928. She then passed into the hands of Raymond Philippe at the start of the 1930s, then Félix Amiot, an aviation pioneer, in 1947, who took her to Cherbourg.

RENAISSANCE

In France, sailing enjoyed a revival at the start of the 1960s, due in large part to one man, Éric Tabarly. His constant quest for optimisation and innovation ushered in a new era of ocean records. This period saw the appearance of extreme challenges with yachtsmen giving way to skipper-adventurers. Throughout his career, in recognition of the roots of his favourite sport, Éric Tabarly retained a special attachment to Pen Duick, a design by Fife born of her predecessor, a gaff cutter like Moonbeam III, but smaller. And so, the most demanding skipper of his generation was forever associated with his classic yacht.

In 1971, Mrs Anthony bought and restored Eblis (alias Moonbeam III), and took her to Greece to offer cruises. It was not until 1979, following a cargo trip financed by her new owner, Dr John Poncia, that the boat benefitted from a full restoration. At the traditional Camper & Nicholsons shipyard in Southampton and under the leadership of John Sharp Moonbeam was upgraded in 1988 to meet new safety standards. She was rigged as a cutter that conferred a new and pleasing elegance.

One year later, having regained its original name, the boat was sold by Sotheby's to a Norwegian owner, and then to a French ship owner and member of the Yacht Club de France. He based her in Saint-Tropez where she was kept in the best conditions that respected tradition. Moonbeam III enjoyed moments of glory once more, manned by the best and most passionate crews. In 1998, the Yacht Club de Monaco, which enjoys a great maritime tradition, revived the competitive spirit and organised challenges between Tuiga, the Fife design belonging to Prince Albert II of Monaco, and Moonbeam III, then chartered by the Yacht Club de France. This challenge was later run during the regatta between Cannes and Saint-Tropez.

MOONBEAM III TODAY

The elegant gaff cutter began a new life in the Mediterranean and competed in traditional sailing regattas in Saint-Tropez, Monaco, Cannes, Antibes, Porquerolles, Imperia, Marseille and Barcelona. She rediscovered her adversaries from the start of last century and has often had her name engraved on salty trophies.

She took part in the 100 years of Pen Duick in Bénodet in 1998, in the Jubilee of the America's Cup in Cowes in 2001 and in the Fife Regatta in Fairlie in 2008.

In 2003, Moonbeam III celebrated her centenary with a regatta between invited friends only, at Porquerolles. Eleven boats joined the party, which took place in a wonderful spirit of conviviality, in an event that continues today, with the birth of the





MOONBEAM

OF FIFE

1903

Porquerolles Classic, now bringing together more than thirty sailing boats every year in June.

Between seasons, she is meticulously maintained, with the greatest respect given to the tradition of classic yachts. In 2005, the ship was completely restored by the renowned boatyard Fairlie Restoration in The Hamble and the interior was subjected to an extensive refit.

Her results illustrate her racing credentials: in 2015, she won the „Voiles de Saint Tropez“, the “Puig Regatta” in Barcelona, and finished second in the “Régates Royales” in Cannes, as well as in the “Monaco Classic Week” and finished third in the “Vela Classica de Mahon”.

In 2016 Moonbeam III changed owners once again. Since then a businessman from Hamburg and passionate sailor has been her proud owner. Saint Tropez remains her homeport.

Moonbeam III won the “Puig Regatta” in Barcelona again in 2016 and came in second in the “Voiles de Saint-Tropez”, as well as the “Vela Classica de Mahon” and “Vele d'Epoca di Imperia”

With a dragon as a signature, Moonbeam III, Fife design number 491, sail number 88, is a delicate beast. With a wooden hull, gaff mainsail, majestic mast, never-ending boom, three headsails, remarkable bowsprit, clear deck, her freeboard boasting a beautiful shear tapering to a typical Fife counter, inclined boat’s wheel, luxurious mahogany interior.

Ask any lover of classic sailing boats which is their favorite and there is a strong chance that Moonbeam III will appear at the top of the list. Everything is perfect on this iconic and stunning boat, from its hull design, simple and powerful rig, high-quality materials, its history, its racing performances through to its name which sounds like a track on a jazz record. A Celtic jazz record of course.

A living work of art that continues to enthrall both connoisseurs and newcomers, and promises many more unforgettable adventures.

