

SEVERN 1912 – Rivers Class Yacht



Key Statistics

Built 1912 Length Deck Level 23 ft (7.01m) Length Water Line 19 ft 6 in (5.94m)	Beam: 7 feet (2.13m) Draft: 3 feet (1.14m) Weight: 3.4 tonnes	Construction Wooden, carvel pitch pine planks on sawn oak frame and backbone. Rounded Nobby stern . Full keel	Rigg Gaff Rigged: Mainsail, two jibs
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Description

Severn was launched in 1912. She was one of ten Rivers Class Yachts built by William Crossfields and Sons for the River Mersey Yacht Club. Her original name was Elwy, which was changed to Ribble in 1914.

She sunk on an abandoned race on July 23rd 1914, just 12 days before Britain entered the First World War. The boat was rediscovered on the bed of the Mersey in 1927 raised to the surface and sold to Joe Wallace, a 24 year old for £25 and renamed Severn.

By the late 60s, Severn was in North Wales. Between the 1970s and 2018 she was kept on the East Coast in Essex and Kent.

In 2018 Severn was brought by Arnside Sailing Club for £5500 with the help of a Heritage Lottery Grant.

Rivers Class

The boats cost £50 each, with additional £12.7s for sails. (To build the boats today would cost around £20,000). Average yearly wage in 1912 was £67. All the boats were named after rivers. The design of the boats is based on the Fleetwood Jewel Class and is similar to a Morecambe Bay Prawner. The Rivers Class contract would have been a prestige job for William Crossfield as the Royal Mersey Yacht Club was one of the country's premier yacht clubs.

The boats were part of a trend towards racing yachts of a standard design, where everybody competed on equal footing. The boats were allocated to owners by ballot. The Rivers Class were smaller than the typical Royal Mersey Yacht, which on average weighed 55 tonnes. They were designed for short races on the River Mersey with 2 to 3 people crewing. Originally there would not have been a cabin. Crews were amateur rather than paid, as in the case of larger yachts



Photo: Rivers Class Yacht Mersey showing how Severn would have looked when first built

Around nine races were held each season between May and July, largely in the evening. In summer Royal Mersey members took part in races at Beaumaris in Anglesey. The yachts were raced for money. In 1914 prize money was £50.10s (about £5000 at current values). There was annual regatta in July, which also included races for local fisherman sailing Lancashire Nobbies.

Owners include three 1908 Olympic Silver Medallists, partners in Cunard and other members of the Liverpool merchant elite. The Royal Mersey Yacht Club is located in Rock Ferry, Birkenhead close to an area of large Victorian houses overlooking the Mersey. The Club was the leading yacht club in the North West. In 1914 the Royal Mersey arranged a regatta at Holyhead involving the King's yacht "Britannia".

In 1925 the Earl of Derby, who was Secretary of State for War 1917-18, Commodore of the Club, the uncrowned King of Lancashire and a leading horse race owner brought one of the boats. The Earl of Derby owned Witherslack Hall on the other side estuary to Arnside. Up till 1813 Arnside was part of the Derby Estate. If it had not been for the outbreak of World War One, it is probable that more Rivers Class yachts would have been built.

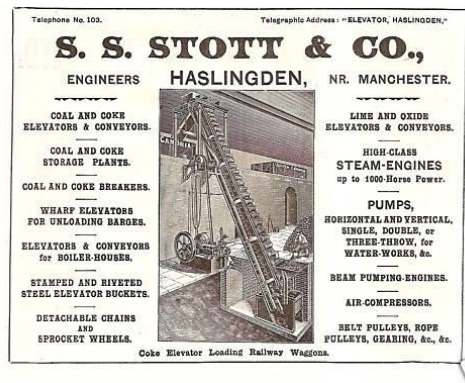
Whilst designed for short races on the Mersey, the Rivers Class have proved themselves capable of making long voyages, with one Deva crossing the North Sea and back five times. With a small draft they are suitable for shallow estuaries such as the River Kent at Arnside.

History by Year

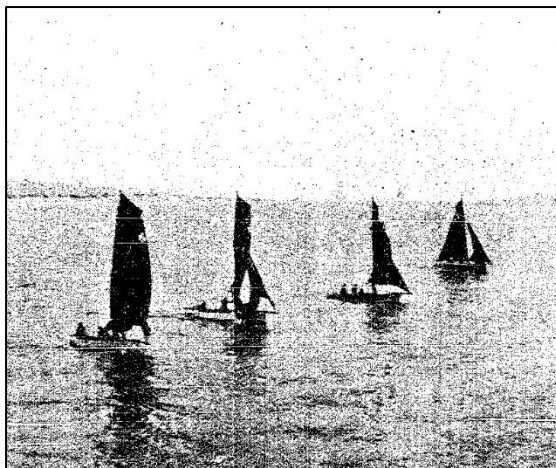
1912 Severn launched. Her original name was Elwy. Her first owner was Lionel Yates Stott. Elwy is a river in Wales. Titanic sunk on April 15th. The first Rivers Class Race was on Monday June 3rd following a triangular up river course.

Lionel Yates Stott 1879 – 1844

Lived in West Kirby with his younger brother and sister in a large Edwardian house. His father Samuel owned an iron foundry at Laneside in Haslingden (now Valmet) and lived at Flaxmoss House, Helmshore. His father died in 1889, when Lionel was 10, leaving £27,266 (£3.5 million at today's prices). Samuel was related to Stott and Smith, the owners of Sykeside Mill, now a Tesco store. His mother was from the Wirral, which was probably the reason for them moving to West Kirby. She died in 1906 leaving Lionel responsible for his brother and sister. Lionel was a qualified master mariner. Along with three other Rivers Class owners he signed up for the Royal Naval Reserve as a Lieutenant on 5 Aug 1914, the day after war broke out.



He later transferred to the RAF. By the end of the war, he was a Captain. He died in Conway. Francis, his aunt, who left ancient Egyptian, Greek and Cypriot artefacts to the Leeds Museums was cited in a divorce case.



The start of the first Rivers Class Race on 3rd June 1912. Severn is thought to have had a white hull and possibly one of the boats on the left.

- 1913** Elwy was joint winner with Styx of the Rivers Class Series, winning the Belcher Cup. The owner of Styx was E. Belcher who as he donated the cup passed over his right to share it with Elwy. Elwy won races on May 23rd, June 23rd and the Regatta Race on June 28th. Her prize money for the year was £10 10s (£1200 in 2020 prices)
- 1914** Elwy brought by Captain Harvey Broadbent, commandant of HMS Conway and renamed Ribble. HMS Conway was a merchant navy training school based in an early nineteenth century ship of the line moored at Rock Ferry near the Royal Mersey.

Captain Harvey Broadbent RNR 1865 – 1942

Captain Broadbent was the Captain Superintendent of HMS Conway from 1903 to 1927, having been First Officer from 1898 to 1903. He was a cadet with HMS Conway in 1880.

His merchant navy career was mainly in the Far East, firstly with Galbraith, Pembroke and Co and then the Bibby Line. Between 1894 and 1895 he served as an acting

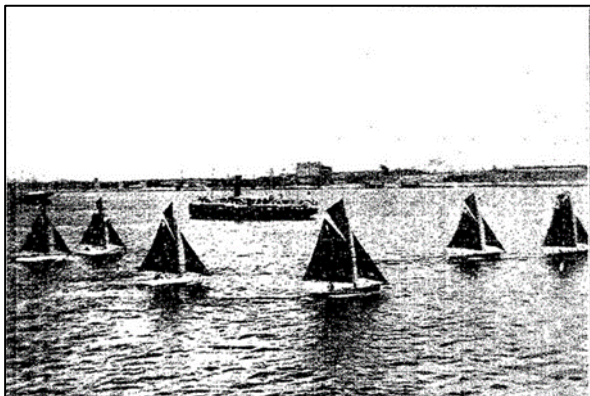
lieutenant R.N.R on the China Station. In 1896 he was appointed second officer of RMS Etruria, a transatlantic liner and Blue Riband holder owned by Cunard. During his time with Etruria, Broadbent received several awards for his part in the rescue of the crew of SS Millfield in 1897 which sank off Ireland in stormy weather.

As commandant of HMS Conway, Captain Broadbent transformed facilities on the ship and updated the syllabus and daily routine. He was described as at first sight a terrifying man whose very look froze you to the deck. Once you got used to his mannerisms, he endeared himself to all, though held in great respect. He was involved in setting up the London Company of Master Mariners and the Seven Seas Club for Merchant and Royal Navy officers



Jun 28 Archduke Ferdinand, heir to Austrian throne shot in Sarajevo. The main issue in Britain was the Irish question.

Jul 18 Royal Mersey Regatta took place in glorious sunshine with 84 yachts taking part offering a fine display of sailing. According to the Birkenhead News the crimson sails of the Rivers Class were much admired by the spectators, including ladies in the watching steamer



Rivers Class racing Royal Mersey Regatta 1914 with watching steamer in background

Jul 23 Ribble capsizes and sinks to the bottom of the Mersey whilst rounding a mark off the Herculaneum Dock, Dingle on the Liverpool side of the estuary in a race in windy conditions. The race is abandoned. The crew made up of Commander Broadbent and two cadets from HMS Conway are rescued. Austria delivers ultimatum to Serbia. Main news story is Buckingham Palace Conference on Irish Home Rule

Jul 28 Austria declares war on Serbia

Aug 2 Germany invades Luxembourg the Belgium

Aug 4 Britain declares war

- 1927** Rediscovered on bed of Mersey at Rock Ferry. The boat was craned to the surface by Mersey Dock's salvage boat "Salvor". The yacht was found in good condition with all equipment intact except for sails.



Salvor

- 1928** Brought from Receiver of Wrecks by Joe Wallace aged 24 of West Cheshire Yacht Club, New Brighton for as £25 (about £1500 in today's prices) and named Severn.



Joe Wallace, friends and relatives restoring Severn

Joe Wallace 1902 – 1990?

Joe (Joseph) was born in New Brighton and was a member of the West Cheshire Sailing Club. His father was a salesman. He may have been taught to sail by Mr W Hepponstall, an artist's colourman. After Severn, Joe went on to buy bigger yachts, including Ikinoo in 1931 and Isabella in 1934, both of which he sailed to North Wales, the Isle of Man and Ireland. He took part in the Isle of Man Midnight Race in 1932 and 1933 in Ikinoo. The Greenwood brothers crewed for him in Severn and Ikinoo. Their voyages in Ikinoo are recorded [here](#). Joe's photo albums were discovered in the attic of the West Cheshire Sailing Club in 2018. Other photos come from albums inherited by Mike Greenwood. Joe went onto be Commodore of the West Cheshire Sailing Club.



Joe Wallace, proud owner of Severn 1928



Severn off Rhyl Whitsun 1928



*Breakfast in Severn off Mostyn Whitsun 1929
Eric Greenwood, Phil, Joe Wallace taken by Jack Greenwood*

- 1928 Joe sails Severn from New Brighton to Rhyl at Whitsun with friends including the Greenwood Brothers. They sleep in Severn overnight. The boat is then opened decked, though a cuddy is used to give some shelter

- 1929 Joe sails Severn with friends to North Wales at Whitsun stopping at Mostyn.

- 1939 Severn came second in a race at Blundellsands Sailing Club, near Formby and first in the handicap race at West Cheshire Sailing Club Regatta at New Brighton. Owners are F.S.Allsop and S.J. Corrigall.

- 1960s By the 1960s Severn was kept at Porthmadog in North Wales owned by Bill Sowerbutts and his wife, who have been in their late 60s. They made surprising long journeys in Severn, perhaps even to France and Spain, but more evidence of this is needed.

- 1967 Sold to Robin and Lesley Kyffin who kept Severn at Porthmadog. Robin worked at Trawsfynydd nuclear power station, which became fully operational in 1968.



Severn in Cardigan Bay late 60s

Late 60s Sold to Alec Taylor, a work colleague from Trawsfyndd. Robin brought Sauntress a bigger boat. Alec and Robin often sailed in convoy with their children onboard at weekends to Abersoch with Taylor children sleeping on board Sauntress as it had more room.

Trawsfyndd Nuclear Power Station

Trawsfyndd was the only inland nuclear power station in the UK with cooling water supplied by Lake Trawsfyndd, a man-made lake. The power station closed down in 1991 with decommissioning expected to take till 2083. However, in 2021 the Welsh Government announced plans to redevelop the plant using small-scale reactors to help meet UK carbon emission targets.



Severn off North Wales circa 1964-66 from collection of Jon Wainwright, owner of Deva

1972 Advertised for sale by Alec Taylor of Plas Mor, Borth y Gest, a village on a sheltered bay south of Portmadoc in Wales for £650. (£8500 in 2020 prices).

Gaffers Log 1972/1 For Sale Notice

SEVERN 23' River class prawner (similar Deva). Gaff sloop, built 1913, pitch pine on oak. V.G. condition. New keel bolts, 4 h.p. Stuart rebuilt. Terylene sails, plus topsail. Unused new 13 oz .cotton trysail. Lying Borth y Gest. £650.

Brought by Mr John Gaynor of Leigh Park Road, Leigh on Sea, near Southend. Leigh Park Road is a road of large Edwardian houses overlooking the bay. Briefly called Rosevern.

1976 Advertised for sale by Mr Gaynor for £1,100. (£7000 in 2020 prices) Boat details include a cooker and toilet. Sold to Ken Tomlinson of Hockley, north of Southend in Essex. Kept at Paglesham on Roach Estuary, south of Burnham on Crouch

Gaffers Log 1976/1 For Sale Notice

SEVERN (509) 23' x 7' x 3'. Rivers Class Morecambe Bay Prawner. Built Crossfield of Arnside 1912, sister to Deva. Stuart P5, 2 sets sails, 2 berths, cooker, loo, rotary bilge pump, seafarer, carvel, pine on oak. Fast boat in good condition. Survey 1974. £1,100

- 1977 Spotted at Paglesham by Peter Booth of West Kirby and Perry's Sailmaker
- 1978 Surveyed at Paglesham on the Roach Estuary on behalf of Ken Tomlinson
- 1980 Severn featured in the "Longshireman" magazine. Ken Tomlinson is the owner. Hull was green.



- 1984 Advertised by Ken Tomlinson for sale for £2000.

Gaffers Log 1984/1 For Sale Article

SEVERN (509) Royal Mersey Rivers Class, one of 30 built on Morecambe Bay Prawner lines by Shuttlewood of Arnside in 1912. 23' x 6'6" x 3' +7' bowsprit, pitch pine on oak. Gaff cutter rig with jib headed topsail. Spartan accommodation for two, Stuart Turner 8 h.p. engine. Much admired & with most interesting history. £2,000

Severn is bought by Lou Perrotta, a young American lady with three children for £750. (£2500 in 2020 prices) She is kept at Heybridge Basin near Maldon on the River Blackwater. Colour of hull is changed to white from green



Severn with Lou Perrotta at helm

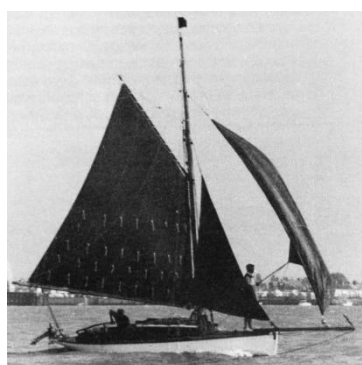
- 1986 Severn was recorded as being owned by Roger Parrimor in Jon Wainwright's book "Only So Many Tides". Roger Parrimor went on to be Chief Fire Officer of Essex. Jon Wainwright owned Deva, one of Severn's sister boats. He recounts taking part in a race in 1986 which also involved Severn. Deva beat Severn
- 1987 In Gaffers Log article about Styx a sister yacht, Severn is recorded as being kept at Heybridge, near Maldon on the Blackwater Estuary.

- 1988 Took part in East Coast Old Gaffers Race, which started from Stone Sailing Club on the south side of the Blackwater Estuary below Maldon,



Severn racing in 1988 East Coast Old Gaffers Race

- 1989 Jon Wainwright mentions Severn being in the hands of a new owner.



Severn in Blackwater Estuary 1989

- 1997 Sailed from Walton-on-Naze to Otterham Creek, near Gillingham in Kent on River Medway.

- 2013 Severn discovered at Otterham Creek Boatyard by David Pearce of Leigh-on-Sea in a poor condition after several years of neglect. Hull is white. David buys the boat for £1000.



Severn at Otterham Creek in 2013

David moves boat to Sutton Wharf Marina at Rochford in Essex on the other side of the Thames. Over the next two years (2013-15) he restores Severn with the help of two retired shipwrights.



2018 Brought by Arnside Sailing Club for £5500. The purchase was funded by a £10,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery made possible by National Lottery players. Re-launched June 18

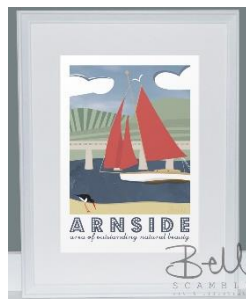


Severn off Arnside 2018



Severn off Croossfields Boatyard where she was built in 1912

A video is made of Severn's arrival in the village. Photo appears in Guardian in an article about tides. Three pictures of Severn made by different artists. Numerous photos.



Severn was taken out of the water before the end of season due to concerns about her condition and structural integrity

2020 Condition survey carried out by Windermere Jetties highlighting the need to do major work on Severn prior to putting her back in the water, including replacing her internal framework

- 2021 Song about Severn written by Mike Greenwood, whose Uncle Eric was a friend of Joe Wallace. A BBC Villages by the Sea programme about Arnside features Luna singing the Severn song in front of Severn. In December moved to David Moss Boatbuilders in Skippool in advanced of restoration.



Being filmed for BBC Villages by the Sea in June 2021 with Luna singing the Severn Song

- 2022 Grants of £58,000 from National Lottery Heritage Fund, £5000 from Headley Trust (Sainsbury Family), £2500 Arnside Silverdale Grant Fund, and £650 Barnes Trust, Arnside. Towards her restoration.

Work starts on her restoration in Autumn 2003 with the deck and cabin stripped off prior to reframing her,