

The Trophy.

The artefact for which the Royal Thames Cumberland Cup international yacht club contest is raced has an iconic significance not just with the Club itself, but in the wider context of the sport we now call yacht racing.

The name Cumberland is central to the whole history and indeed very existence of what today is called the Royal Thames Yacht Club. In 1775 Henry, Duke of Cumberland, who was both the brother of the King – George III – and himself a keen sailor gathered together the gentlemen yachtsmen who had been sailing and occasionally racing on the river Thames since half-way through the previous century and bade them organise a race for which he would give a cup. This was the very first Cumberland Cup, sailed for on July 13th 1775, and in honour of the occasion the gathering of yachts was called the Cumberland Fleet.

At the time of that regatta, there was no organisation in the country – nor indeed so far as we know in the world – engaged in the organisation of regular yacht racing. There had been earlier races and indeed earlier gatherings of yachtsmen – the Water Club of Cork and its 'manoeuvres' being the best known - but by 1775 they had come and gone. After that July 1775 regatta the yachtsmen who had formed the Cumberland Fleet met in a coffee room in London and formed what they called The Cumberland Sailing Society. That society still exists, known today by its more modern – if you call 1830 modern – name of the Royal Thames Yacht Club and each year in June in Cowes at our annual Regatta we hold the Cumberland Sailing Society dinner.

Each year after 1775 the Duke gave another cup – always until 1786 known as the Cumberland Cup – to be raced for by the Cumberland Fleet. After 1786 the Cups had varying names but the Cumberland Sailing Society continued, changing its name very briefly in 1823 to the Coronation Society before becoming, just a few months later, the Thames Yacht Club.

The 1781 Cup – of which the current trophy is a replica, made by Garrards (the makers of the rather later America's Cup) in 1910 – was particularly special. Silver-gilt, and topped by a figure of a sailor holding a scroll bearing the names of the winning yachts of all the previous cups, its inscription reads:

The Seventh Year
His Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland
As a mark of his appreciation
And an earnest of his future Protection
Presents this
More elegant Cup than usual
TO BE SAILED FOR
By those Boats of the Cumberland Sailing Society
Which have won his former Prizes
As well as all other Pleasure Sailing Boats
In the possession of Gentlemen
Whom the Society have publicly challenged to
THE CONTEST
June 1781.

Thus that Contest became, in effect, the sport of yacht racing's first ever Open regatta.

We look forward to seeing you in 2012.

