

The 59-foot LWL *Bloodhound* was another Fife yacht that had a very long life. Also built in 1874, she competed in the Fighting Forties, a 40-ton class, and when she became outdated was converted to a cruising boat. In 1907 she was on her way to being broken up when she was bought back by her original owner, the Marquis of Ailsa, who had William Fife III redesign and heavily modify her over a two-year period. Her underbody was cut away forward to reduce the wetted surface area, and she was given outside ballast and a new rig. She went on to win 143 prizes in 217 races prior to the start of World War I.

The first Fife-designed yacht to be built at another yard came in 1875. Too large to launch at Fairlie at the time, the 165-ton *Latona* was built at the Cowes yard of J. S. White.

Fellow Scotsman George Lennox Watson emerged in 1876 to challenge the dominance of the Fifes with his Five-Tonner, *Vril*, becoming a major but friendly rival of the Fifes.

By the mid-1880's, Fife's personal output had started to decline and his son took on an increasing role in the work of the yard. The year 1889 can be considered one of transition during which William Fife III took over the management of the company from his father. Until the end of his life, Fife II had the satisfaction of seeing his yard continue to expand, and watching his son become one of the most highly regarded yacht designers in the world.

—Daniel B. MacNaughton

WILLIAM FIFE III, OBE

1857—August 11, 1944 · Scotland

Rarely in the history of commerce does a successful family business last multiple generations without losing steam. Looking at the career of William Fife III (also known as William Fife Jr.), we can only wonder what happy chance of genetics or circumstances produced a universally acknowledged artistic and technological genius after a father and grandfather who were likewise yacht designers and builders of the highest caliber.

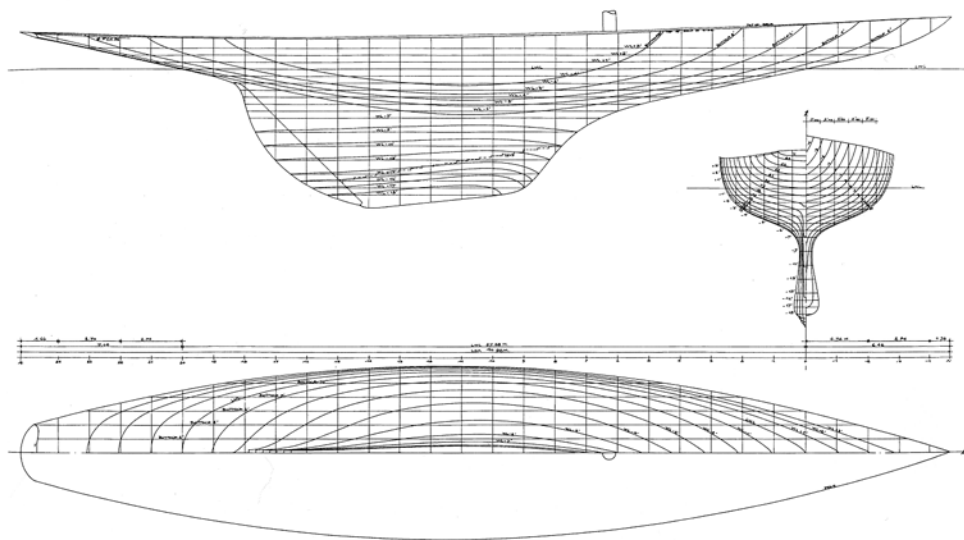
During a sixty-year career, Fife III designed over eight hundred yachts. He experienced spectacular successes and very few failures in designs ranging from small day-racers to the largest cruisers and racers of yachting's Golden Age. He saw yachts of his design built as far away as Australia and New Zealand, and yachts of his construction exported to these and many other countries. His designs show distinctive sheerlines, long ends, spoon bows, and counter sterns with dainty transoms, and the boats were built of the finest materials.

Interiors were particularly elegant. The name "Fife of Fairlie" was respected everywhere.

Fife is often compared to Nathanael Herreshoff of the United States. Their careers overlapped, they were sometimes competitors, and they occupied similar niches in the yachting circles of their respective countries. But while Herreshoff was primarily a brilliant technological innovator (whose boats often beat Fife's on the race course), Fife was an artist of form and proportion probably unrivaled in the history of yachting. Herreshoff would depart from any convention to make a

boat fast, her beauty being a secondary (though still important) goal. If Fife ever designed a boat that was not a work of art, there is no record of it. Both designers headed what may have been the best boatbuilding yards of their respective countries.

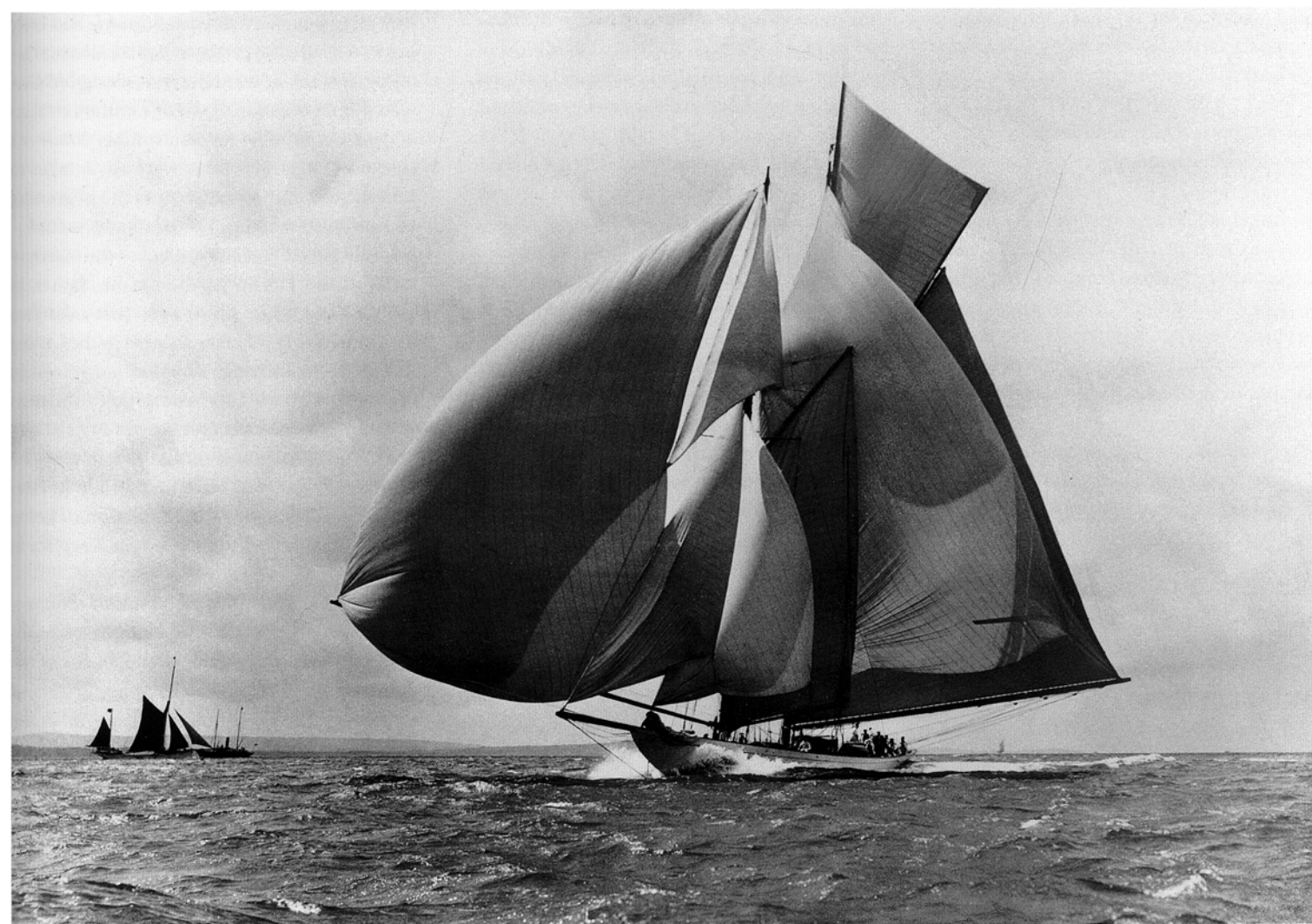
Fife was educated at Brisbane Academy and then apprenticed to his father's yard. Unlike his father or grandfather, he placed a much stronger emphasis on developing his design skills than he did on becoming a carpenter. Continuing a family tradition of youthful achievement, he participated in the design and construction



William Fife III (Jr.): *Shamrock III*. Fife designed two America's Cup challengers: *Shamrock* for the 1899 race and *Shamrock III* for the 1903 race. Shown here, *Shamrock III* is typical of the huge cutters that strove for that Holy Grail of yachting—a skimming-dish hull with a deep, heavily ballasted keel. © *Chevalier & Taglang*



William Fife III (Jr.): *Clio*. Designers often raced their own products. Fife designed and built *Clio* in 1921 to race in the newly established Clyde 30-Foot class. After a life of mixed fortunes, she has been restored to her original beauty. © *Benjamin Mendlowitz*



William Fife III (Jr.): *Susanne*. Reported to be William Fife III's favorite design, *Susanne* was an outstanding example of the great schooners that raced at the turn of the twentieth century. The picture captures better than any words the power and glory of these yachts. © *Beken of Cowes*

of the 28-foot cutter *Clio* in 1875 when he was nineteen. In 1876, he did the same with a yacht named *Camellia*. Later he designed *Cyprus*, which won virtually every trophy she raced for in her first year.

At the end of his apprenticeship in 1878, and seeking to broaden his knowledge and experience into the use of metal in boatbuilding, Fife signed on at the Fullerton and Company Shipbuilders at Paisley, Scotland, where he worked in the drafting office. This prepared him for the steel-and-wood composite construction that was then coming to the fore in yacht building.

In 1881, Fife became the manager of Culzean Ship Building and Engineering, a new yard in Maidens belonging to his client, the Marquis of Ailsa. Insufficient depth of water at the Fairlie yard had prevented the Fifes from building very large vessels, but at Culzean Fife could tackle such large steel-and-wood vessels as the 150-foot barquentine-rigged *Black Pearl* and the 110-foot steam yacht *Cassandra*. Here he also built *Clara*, a plank-on-edge cutter of 63 feet

LOA, 53 feet LWL, 8-foot 6-inch draft, and only 9 feet of beam. While not a practical type of boat, owing to her proportions, she became a great success in America, lending credence to the American "cutter cranks" by beating the beamy and shoal-draft American-style sloops. Fife's international reputation had begun.

Built nearly in the shadow of *Clara*, and at the same time, was the tiny plank-on-edge cutter *Vagrant*, a 22-footer that still sails today and is apparently the oldest surviving Fife-designed yacht. There was cooperation between the two boatyards at Fairlie and Culzean, especially in years when the Fairlie yard needed a bit more work. *Black Pearl*, for instance, was built at Maidens but was completed at Fairlie. Fife left Culzean in 1886 and turned his full attention back to Fairlie.

George L. Watson included Fife in the entourage accompanying *Thistle*, which failed to reclaim the America's Cup in 1887 against the Edward Burgess-designed *Volunteer*. During this effort Fife met people who would become future friends and clients.

In 1888 Fife received a commission from Charles Tweed of New York to build a 40-footer (LWL) that became the cutter *Minerva*. Tweed had no intention of racing her. With his eye for form, Fife chafed under the restrictions of the handicapping rules of his day, which put designers under pressure to distort the proportions of their hulls, so he was undoubtedly pleased by the nature of the design commission. *Minerva* was to be a fast cruiser, qualified for the 40-Footer (LWL) class but essentially designed without regard to rating rules. As a result, Fife was able to give her more beam, lighter displacement, and a clipper bow.

In *Minerva's* first year, she was sailed across the Atlantic and then laid up. The next year she was borrowed by a 40-Footer class racing syndicate when their chosen boat lost her mast. Once *Minerva* began to race, she chalked up an unprecedented winning streak that brought fame to her designer/builder and to her Scottish racing skipper Charles Barr, who went on to become the most successful professional yacht captain of his day. *Minerva* beat every