

to be reconsidered particularly with the changing demographic of the Club. Committee people are very important and we need more of them.

Women Members did not have equal rights at the beginning of my tenure. Luckily a 'do it or else' ultimatum was put on the table by one of our more forthcoming professional ladies and changes were quickly put in place. Fortuitously this saved the Club the embarrassment of a legal challenge which was sure to follow. Another example of not listening to the broader community. Notwithstanding this landmark, the nurturing process of looking after those without a boat to sail on or a group to identify with is still left, in the main, with our lady Members who have abilities beyond those of the mortal male in recognising specific needs of individuals. Yes ladies those two X chromosomes make a difference!

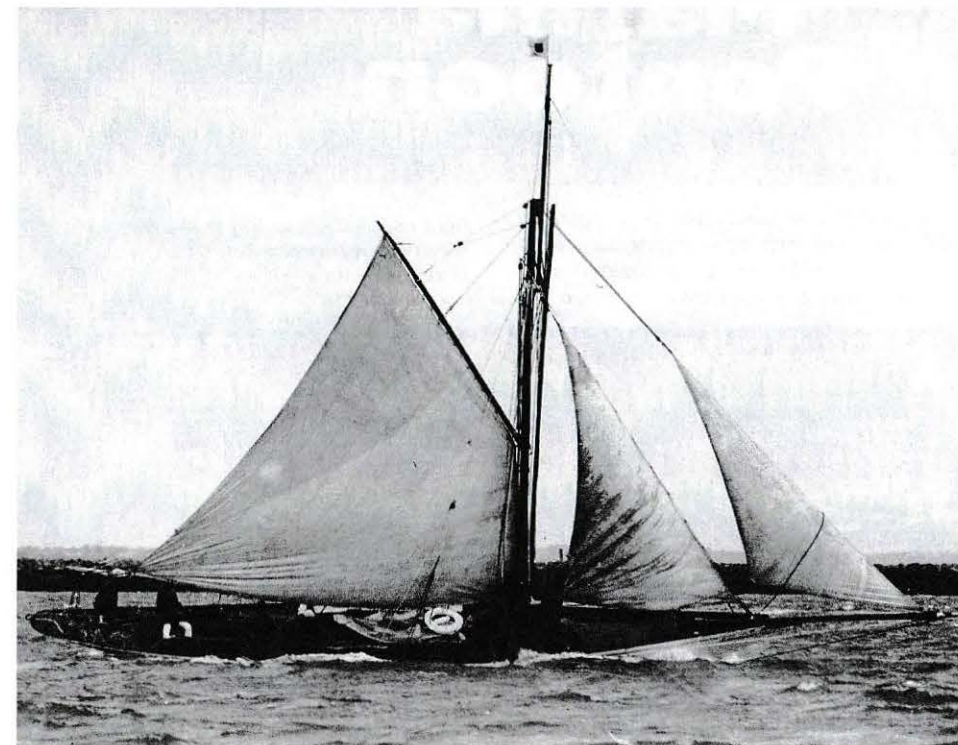
Whether it is correct or not my belief is that the core business of the Squadron is people. Certainly yachting and boats are the basis for the Club but people make this Club. My own

objectives to make this great barn of a dining room more intimate and comfortable have fallen on fallow ground. Likewise my initiatives to attract the local community. As has been endemic since my term began, there have been no funds to pursue these objectives. But the reality is you can have boats till they come out your ears but if you don't do something up here or downstairs for people, forget bar profit and forget a decent catering service. The Club has to get a grip on reality and make the Squadron so appealing that people *don't want* to go somewhere else to wine and dine.

And finally— Tradition and yachting excellence are synonymous with the Squadron. It is the leadership and teamwork initiated by the Managers, Commodores, Members and employees which has resulted in the Squadron maintaining its position in the community. The destiny of the Club lies with you as individuals. Don't rely on everyone else — get in there and do something no matter how small. It all counts. Good luck and good health to you all! SO

Alexa

Peter Last



Alexa in the inaugural Island Cup race of 1931.

On 24 December 1889, Mr Alexander P Wyly applied to enter on the register of the South Australian Yacht Club a new cutter, *Alexa*. There is no doubt about that date, but from *Lloyd's Register of Yachts*, 1908–9, she was built by Alexander McFarlane of Birkenhead in 1898. This must be an error, because Mr AP Wyly's *Alexa* won both the Plympton and Kintore Cups of 1893. According to Commodore FV Sanderson, she cost over £1,000, a very large sum in those days, so perhaps Mr Wyly took time to raise the funds between his application and launching. She was to a design by William Fife Junior, and was said to be named for the builder, although it could as well have been the first owner.

William Fife (1818–1902), son of the founder of the yacht-building firm of Fairlie, Scotland, was

succeeded by William Fife Junior, a sort of Bruce Farr of his day. He designed *Alexa*, *Reverie*, and at least two of the Forster Cup restricted 21-footers (*Lady Alice* and *Fife*, which was once owned by James and Anthea Cowell.) He was the favourite designer of Sir Thomas Lipton, including several of the *Shamrocks*, unsuccessful contenders for the *America's Cup*.

Fife designs epitomised the 'plank on edge' concept, with elegant lines, narrow beam and usually with substantial draft, although some versions (*Reverie*, for example) had centreboards. In *Lloyd's Register of Yachts* *Alexa's* vital statistics were LOA 40.5 ft, LWL 31 ft (William Russell measured the LWL as 31.5 ft), Beam 8.75 ft, Depth 6.4 ft, with 1,407 sq ft sail area and displacing 13 tons. It is likely that the



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sails were made by William Russell, but when Vice Commodore Edward F Belt owned her in 1909 sails were from the notable loft of Ratsey and Lapthorn, now of Gosport and Cowes.

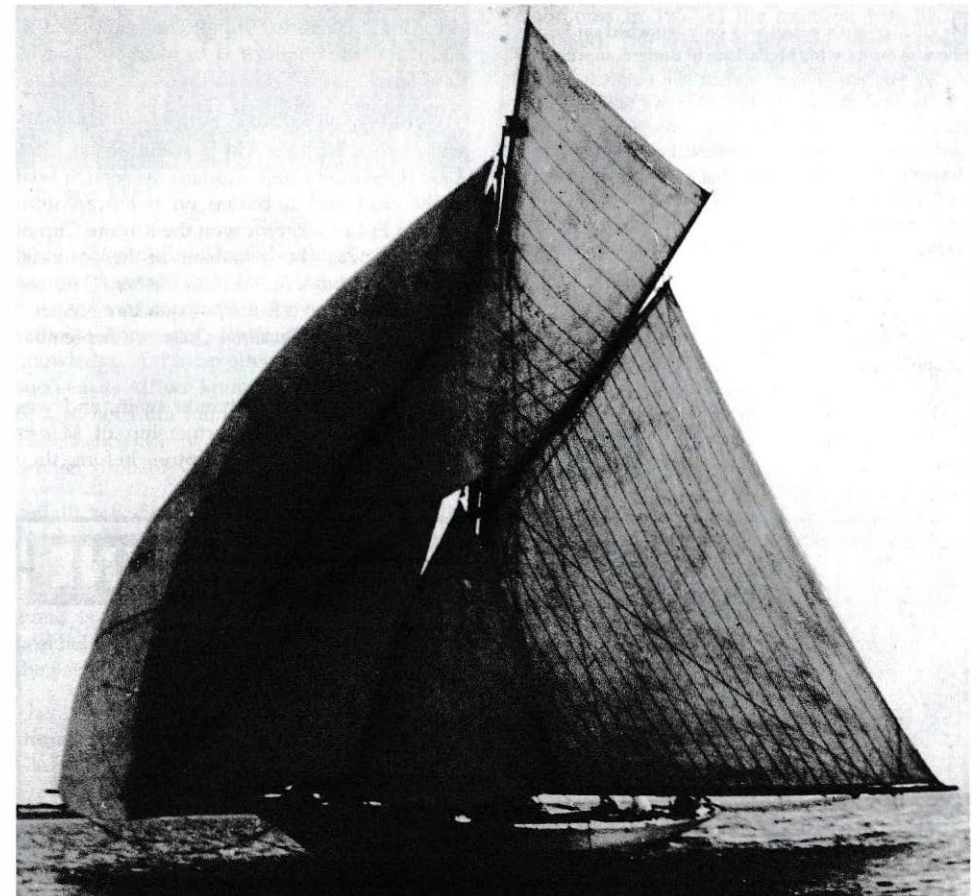
From the beginning *Alexa* was prominent in local yacht racing. The Kintore Cup, in my opinion our most important trophy, was first contested in 1891 and *Alexa* won five of the first ten events, having gained fastest time in most of them. A newspaper report of 1900, when *Alexa* was owned by Vice Commodore EF Belt, is interesting.

The win of *Alexa* [in a heat of the Tennyson Cup], although undoubtedly well earned, was to a certain extent wondered at, for she represents what may be called the 'old school' of racing craft, and Saturday was

essentially a day for the modern type, as seen in *Valeria*, *Geisha* and *Tern*.

With a big display of canvas the *Alexa* drew away early in the race, and reaping full benefit from what little breeze there was, she crept ahead and finished with an excellent lead. It was not expected that *Reverie* would prove a formidable opponent in such weather, but on the whole it was thought that the other craft "would have shown to better advantage.

Valeria, *Geisha* and *Tern* were 'skimming dishes', the hull forms which competed with the 'planks on edge'. The half-model of *Matangi* in the Clubhouse shows what they were like. They were certainly superior in light airs, but could not match the enormous sail area carried by



Alexa with a lot of sail up, but without the watersail or ringtail.

Alexa. On 19 January 1893 Mr Russell recorded three sets of measurements of *Alexa*, all with a LWL of 31.5 ft. Measured with 1,411.55 sq ft of unspecified sails, she rated 7.4 tons. A total of 1,196.98 sq ft had a note, 'This includes jibheaded topsail & masthead spinnaker, but not jibtopsail, yard or jackyard topsail.' This produced a rating of 6.28 tons. With 'lower sails only, including masthead spinnaker' she rated 5.17 tons.

Alexa was sailed to Melbourne for an Intercolonial Regatta, where she beat all-comers. That led to Mr GF Garrard of Melbourne commissioning Alexander McFarlane to build a larger vessel in order to beat *Alexa*. *The Register* of 1 October 1897 reported —

Mr GF Garrard's vessel was only launched on Friday. She was built by Mr McFarlane to designs supplied by Mr W Fife jun. When finished she ought to look a handsome craft and she should prove herself a first-class racing and sea boat. Her dimensions are 60 ft overall, 38 ft 2 in on the waterline, beam 10 ft 7 in and draught 7 ft 6 in. She is provided with a straight keel, to which is fastened 7 tons 15 cwt of lead. Her foundation timbers are of jarrah and blue gum, the ribs being of the latter timber. She is planked with white kauri. Her deck is of the same wood, whilst the deck fittings etc are of teak wood. She is not unlike the *Alexa* to look at, albeit she has a prettier stem and is a much larger craft, being nearly double her size. The spars have yet to be fitted. They will be of Oregon, and the spar fittings will be of galvanised steel. She will be yawl rigged. Her cabin will be splendidly fitted out, and sleeping apartments will be provided for six persons. The cabin panels will be of polished kauri and cedar.

This was *Sayonara*, which won the Intercolonial Regatta of 1898. [See the 'cover' to the Annual report of 2000-1 included in *Squadron Quarterly* June 2002: 26] She was one of the most notable yachts of her time and for her is named the *Sayonara* Cup, which was actively competed into the 1920s. An enquiry addressed to the Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron about *Sayonara* and the fate of the trophy has not elicited a reply.

Between 1889 and 1903 the only Squadron yacht with greater measured sail area than *Alexa* was Commodore Richard Honey's *Ethel*, 35.67 ft LWL, 1,677.75 sq ft with her jib-headed topsail and rating 9.97 tons. It is frustrating that so few measurements were recorded and hardly any photographs have survived of these grand old vessels. Fortunately that cannot be said of *Alexa*, and the dilemma is to restrict ourselves to so few.

By 1919 Len Walter (who built *Norallie* in 1906) achieved a long-standing ambition to own *Alexa*, which he raced regularly as scratch boat in the fleet and unbeaten on handicap until Richard Fisher's *Reverie* won the Kintore Cup of 1920. He was the grandson of her original owner, Commodore William Fisher. [For the expulsion of *Reverie* from the Squadron pool and her sad end, see *Squadron Quarterly* September 1996: 36-7.]

In 1922 *Alexa* changed hands again, and was briefly owned by the partnership of Messrs Angove, Martin & Crompton before they



Mrs Janet Flint

bought *Stormy Petrel* from Napier Birks. In 1927 *Alexa* was owned by Major JM Irwin, and at that time she was much used for racing and social sailing. Thereafter there is a gap in our knowledge, and so far attempts to fill it have not succeeded. All we know is that Mr WF Crook bought her from John Gordon before Easter in 1943, which was as late in April that year as it can get, probably 25 April.

Sad to say, *Alexa* ran aground and on to the beach at North Glenelg in January 1944. In the week that followed, valiant attempts were made to pull her off the beach at high water; but to no avail, as apparently, the six tons of lead in the keel held the hull firmly in the sand. In this way, the yacht *Alexa* became a total loss.

There is a report in *Seacraft* 1946; 1: 51 of a '36-hour storm', in which, 'Of the 26 boats moored off the Glenelg jetty, only three were not wrecked.'

The beach north of Glenelg was strewn with wreckage; one or two hulls were washed up, but in most cases boats were broken up completely. Everything of value was quickly picked up by the public, and the boat owners lost everything, including their craft.

Periodically, these storms occur along the Gulf Coast, and though this last gale was more severe than usual, it is rarely that a year goes by without some toll being taken of the small ships in the gulf. One victim of these storms in recent years was the *Alexa*, an old identity well known on the coast, and noted for her fine lines.

One of the three survivors, a fishing ketch, rode out the storm at her moorings which dragged slightly, however, endangering a second ketch owned by Mr H Tickle who decided to run his craft to Outer Harbor under staysail in order to save her.

The restored watercolour of *Alexa* has recently been hung in the foyer at the turn of the stairs. It was painted by a Member, the noted artist Laurie Howie (1876-1963), who donated it to the Squadron, probably in the 1920s. In one of the moves (probably from the T&G Basement clubrooms in 1967-8) the painting was badly damaged. The artist's daughters, Mary Howie and Janet Flint, together with Keith Flint, paid to have it restored and rehung in the Clubhouse after a long absence. Laurie Howie's story was given in the issue of June 2001: 42.

Alexa was one of the noblest vessels we ever had, and it could be said of her, as Horatio did of Hamlet, 'I shall not look upon her like again.'

SO



Mrs Mary Howie

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