

By RSAYS Historian Dr Peter Last



The brig *Rapid* riding out a gale beneath Rapid Head, 7 October 1836. William Light

From the earliest days of British settlement, it was clear that the eastern littoral of Gulf Saint Vincent was a dangerous lee shore when the weather cycle brought strong winds from the NW, swinging through W into SW and S, by which time there was a prospect of shelter, albeit potentially uncomfortable. This sequence can occur at any time of the year, as shown by the dates of these incidents. Time and again, vessels were driven ashore, but others ignored the risk and paid the consequences. I have selected a few examples of what has happened in the past and could occur again.

Fiona

From RSAYS Newsletter May 1966



Fiona was an H-28 built by Colin White, the father of Past Commodore Peter White, who was living in Canada at the time. This is an edited version of Colin's account.

FIONA was stationed at Seacliff for the duration of the World 505 Championships during a period of assured mild weather. On Sunday 20 March, stiff westerlies were the order of the day. Tim Paterson and myself went aboard to stand by in fairly sloppy conditions. We were quite comfortable with a 65-pound anchor well dug in and riding to an almost new four-strand grass warp. The weather forecast was for west/south-west winds, gusty at times and moderating, so we felt justified in staying put in anticipation.

About 7 pm the wind screamed in from the north-west with gusts of up to 50 knots. It was quite alarming to watch the seas with breaking tops where we were anchored. The dinghy was astern on a long line and threw both paddles overboard before very long. We had no option at this stage but hope that the warp would hold.

During the evening the strain reduced the warp to almost half its thickness, and at something after 11 pm we found that two strands had parted, which left us with no option but to go. The dinghy was tied to the warp, which was slipped, and full

power was given to the 8 hp donk. With the helm hard down, it was impossible to come hard up into the wind. Therefore, in spite of every effort we could not get much sail on apart from a little main and headsail which could not draw sufficiently to drive the ship, and the wind and sea were continually driving us sideways to shore. We tried both tacks, which meant gybing under power, taking us closer inshore each time. We favoured the port tack, as sand is not as hard as the rocks at Marino.

The issue was never in doubt, and our last desperate measure was to throw out the 55-pound anchor as we approached the white water. The first sea snapped a three-inch sisal line like a carrot.

Fiona grounded about 1 am and banged in the surf on the rising tide until about 5 am. She came to rest up to the waterline in sand. [Subsequently she was lifted by crane on to a low-loader and returned to the Squadron by road.]

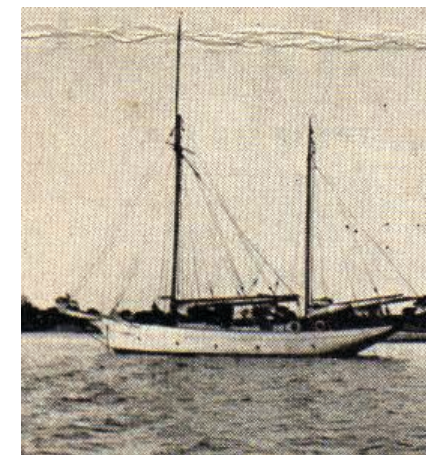
Commodores' vessels

From a newspaper: 23 January 1902

To the north of Largs Bay jetty the yacht *Reverie*, belonging to Mr W Fisher, Commodore of the Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron, lies high and dry on the beach. She was driven ashore on Tuesday night, but she has not sustained great damage, and will be floated shortly. [Confirmed on 1 February 1902]



Commodore Fisher is seated at the helm of *Reverie*, probably after formalities were over on an Opening Demonstration (= Opening Day).



I don't know where this poor picture of *Alfreda II* came from. She was described as similar to her predecessor.

THE story of *Reverie* going ashore in Rapid Bay following her formal expulsion from the Squadron is told in Squadron Quarterly, September 1996. She was refloated after that, but eventually she was accidentally burnt and destroyed while on the slip.

Another Commodore wasn't so lucky. From the same newspaper issue:

The magnificent yacht *Alfreda*, belonging to Mr HJD Munton, Commodore of the Holdfast Bay Yacht Club, had gone ashore in Tuesday night's storm and become a total wreck.

The yacht was at her moorings off Brighton when the wind began to blow with hurricane force from the north-west, shortly after 2 o'clock on Tuesday afternoon. Bert Miller, a man in Mr Munton's employ, being the only person on board at the time ...

Water began to flow into the yacht freely, and he had to work the pump continuously to keep the *Alfreda* afloat. About 5 o'clock the water began to gain on him rather rapidly and he decided to leave the yacht. Unfortunately the dingey [sic] belonging to the vessel was ashore, so Miller threw a lifebuoy into the sea, and jumped after it, with the idea of getting ashore with its aid.

In the rough sea running, however, he missed the buoy, and had to swim for the jetty. Residents of Brighton had been watching his movements and they threw a lifesaving apparatus towards him as he neared the jetty. Miller clutched hold of this and wound the rope around his wrists. He was then hauled on to the jetty in a semi-conscious condition and some time elapsed before he recovered. He had a narrow escape from drowning.

About 8.30 pm the *Alfreda* was seen drifting towards the jetty and she struck hard against the end of the structure three times.

From there she was driven on to the beach 200 yards north of the jetty.

It was thought that when she struck against the jetty she practically broke her back, and on Wednesday morning nothing was left of the yacht but her keel. The woodwork of the vessel was smashed to splinters, which were strewn with her fittings, and clothing which had been left aboard, for several miles along the beach.

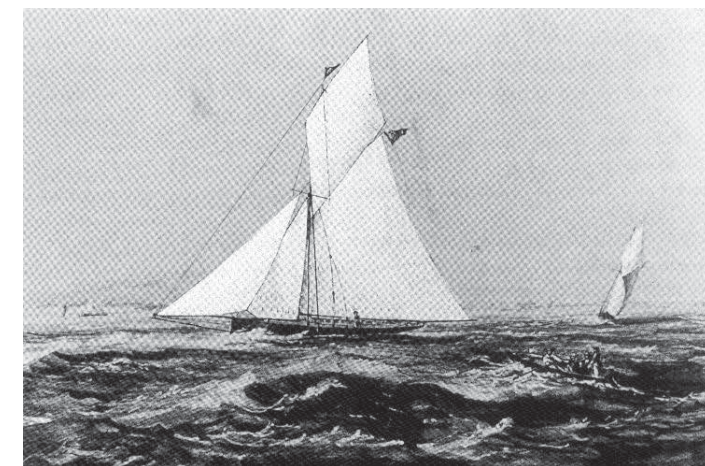
The *Alfreda* was a 20-ton yacht and was built about 15 years ago by Mr Chant of Port Adelaide, to the order of Mr Munton. Her length was between 40 and 50 ft, and her beam was a little over 11 ft. She was considered to be the most handsomely fitted up yacht in Australasia.

Her main saloon was 14 ft 6 in long, with a beam of 11 ft, and there was

accommodation for four men to sleep there. The ladies' saloon had a length of 10 ft, and sleeping accommodation was provided there for two persons. The forecabin was very convenient, and two men slept there when cruises were made. Altogether the fittings of the yacht were of a most elaborate description. Mr Munton valued the yacht at £1,200 ...

Before he had the *Alfreda* built he owned the 10-ton yacht *Xanthe*, and a misfortune occurred with her. She was driven ashore in a storm about 18 years ago in almost exactly the same spot where the *Alfreda* broke up, and it cost Mr Munton £200 to have her repaired.

[Mr Munton had been Commodore of the Holdfast Bay Yacht Club for 12-13 years and was a long-standing member of RSAYS. I have not found a photograph of the first *Alfreda*. In 1889 she won three races for the Brassey Cup.]



Xanthe