

Early Days

Jack Wood

In the March 1994 issue of *Squadron Quarterly* John Smith asked about early days at the Outer Harbor. I became a Junior member of the Squadron in 1936, when I was sixteen years of age. After the Second World War I skippered MY *Grelka* for Professor Sir Mark Mitchell, but I resigned in 1956 when I left the Biochemistry Department of Adelaide University to go to Roseworthy College.

[*Grelka* had an interesting history. She was built in UK in 1910, 55 feet (16.8 m) long but with a beam of only 10'6" (3.2 m) and a draft of 4'6" (1.4 m). Although ketch rigged, her sails were only of use to steady the unpleasant roll which she developed in a beam sea. Her Parsons



Grelka on the main slip in the 1940s. This shows the post-war crew, except for the third from the left, who was only a helper for the day. The others are Dr Brian Meldrum (now a psychiatrist), the late John McNally MSc, L Ween (on ladder), the late Sam Porter PhD and Jack Wood. Another crew member, Mark Shaw, took the photograph.

marine engine was started with petrol before running on kerosene. Her first owner was Baron von Bissing of the German Embassy, and she twice won the annual motor boat race from Dover to Cowes. In both wars she served as a naval auxiliary vessel, first at Scapa Flow in Scotland and then in Western Australia. Mark Mitchell bought her in 1927, and renamed her for a Cambridge undergraduate club of which he was a member. (The word means "fireside" in Russian, which is an odd association for a ship.) She was brought out from England, and in 1930 cast her propeller in Port Lincoln Harbour, fortunately in very calm conditions. Her luck ran out, however, in 1955. Near the Pages she caught fire, burned to the waterline and sank. The crew escaped unharmed in the dinghy, after a scary experience with a large shark. — Ed.]

The winches shown on the cover of the issue of *Squadron Quarterly* for September 1993 were wound by hand. They were low-g geared, so it was not hard work for two men to pull up a boat as big as *Celeste*. (This was the Tumblaren, nowhere near as large as Alan Jordan's last *Celeste*.)

Alex Burnside's cover photograph of September 1993 showed the two slips which were situated on the eastern end of the basin. One had a shed on it to house Mark Mitchell's twenty-one foot class Forster Cup racing yacht *Nerana*. The other belonged to *Carina*, owned and raced by Dr Geoff Verco. A member of his crew was the great chest surgeon D'Arcy Sutherland. Both slips and sheds were built by contractors and paid for by their respective owners.

The dinghy shed was built for Mark Mitchell to house his large collection of twelve-foot cadets and sharpies. Mark Mitchell (who did not become Professor until after the war, and was knighted a good time after that) was a son of Sir William Mitchell, who was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Adelaide for many years, and who lived to a hundred. Mark's mother was a daughter of Robert and Joanna Barr Smith. His grandfather, together with Sir Thomas Elder

(who had no children) founded Elder Smith & Co. [Some of the lavish furnishings of Robert and Joanna Barr Smith are on display in the Art Gallery. They bought and extended Torrens Park, including the theatre for the benefit of their children. This was the site of 15 Australian General Hospital during the Great War, and then became Scotch College — Ed.]

Mark Mitchell was a member of the Squadron for many years, and was Commodore from 1938 to 1945. He did more to promote junior yachting in South Australia than anybody else before or since. Before the Second World War the effects of the Depression lingered on. They were very lean years. The average young lad had no hope of sailing in a small boat. Mark bought several twelve-foot cadet dinghies, sharpies and a Forster Cup twenty-one foot class yacht. He offered crew places to promising youths, who raced the boats and looked after them. Mark Mitchell paid all the expenses. He built a dinghy shed at the Squadron to house them. [There were two dinghy sheds. One was on the eastern bank, and the other was a lean-to east of the main shed, in the area which became the entrance foyer and Office — Ed.] The *Nerana* sat on her slip at the eastern end of the basin. Eventually the cadets moved to the Largs Bay Sailing Club, which also owes much to Mark Mitchell. There is no doubt that he was the best Patron of junior yachting this state has ever known.

The winch on the main slip was motor driven. This was situated on the eastern side of the caretaker's cottage. He was Jack Carlstrom, an ex windjammer sailor. [The weatherboard cottage was demolished and replaced by the sail-drying gallows — Ed.] To work on the boats we used ladders, hoses, scrapers, sandpaper, and lots and lots of elbow grease. There were no electric sanders then.

On the southern side of the basin was the



N36 MY *Ultrama* (Professor ML Mitchell). Small craft of the Naval Auxiliary Patrol RANR patrolled St Vincent's Gulf at night with crews who held ordinary jobs during the day. From *The Repat: A Biography of Repatriation General Hospital (Daw Park) and a History of Repatriation Services in South Australia* by Peter Last, p 83.

Clubhouse, which was very like it has been ever since. In those days it was just a big shed with a balcony. It stored the dinghies, with lockers round the walls. There was a track for the wheeled carriage which was used to take dinghies down to the [solitary] pontoon and then to be put in the water. Beside the pontoon was the Hydroplane Wharf, with a crane. This was originally used (before my time) to lift out the racing hydroplanes, such as Rymill's *Tortoise*. We used it for stepping masts etc.

There were no breakwaters round the basin. On a high tide with a strong NW wind, things were a bit uncomfortable for vessels in the NW corner of the basin. [Reclaiming to create the land for the container wharf is quite new. Until then at high tide we looked across to the mangroves of Torrens Island and St Kilda with only water between. Extension of the northern breakwater is even more recent. Before that there was a long fetch in NW gales, so that a vicious sea built up in the basin. — Ed.]

There is one thing that I thought the Club should have done to commemorate the memory of two brave men who gave their lives in late 1955. They were Ern Stuckey and Harrison, who entered a blazing motor boat belonging to

Harrison, which had exploded while refuelling at the Hydroplane Wharf. They rescued two children trapped below and threw them into the water to stop them burning any more. Ern and Harrison both died in hospital. They deserved a plaque to their memory. SQ

Life Member and Past-Commodore Alan Smith has commented on Jack Wood's memories.

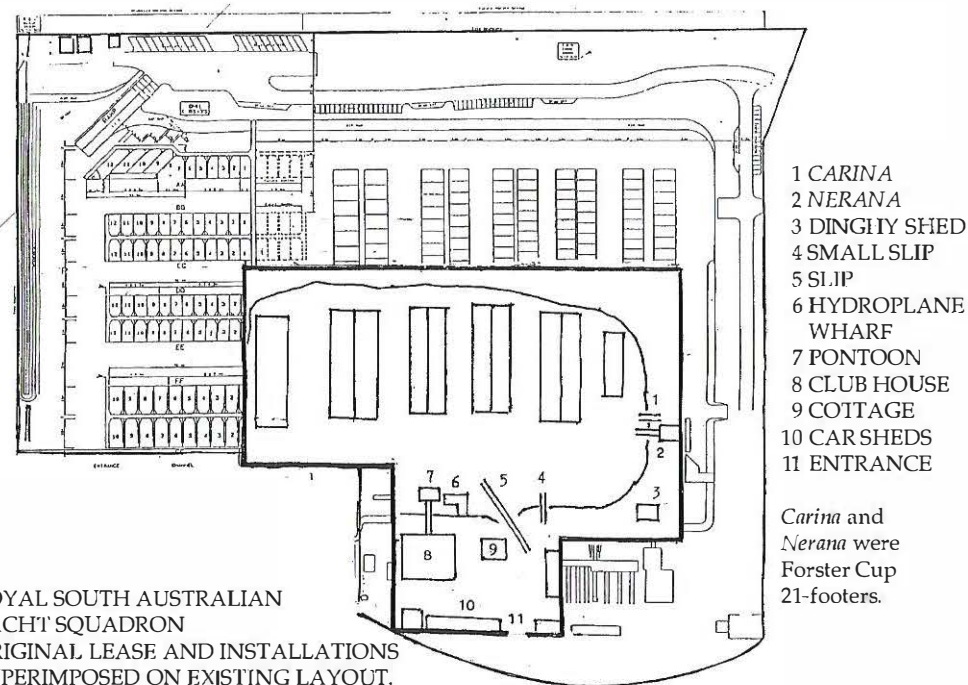
To give newer members some idea of what our Outer Harbor premises have grown from, I have prepared a sketch to show the extent of the original lease taken up in 1924, and the developments to 1939. To make sure that I had this right, I sought the opinion of the following —

Geoff Verco
Keith Flint
Ken McLaren
Peter Osborne
Bruce Tunbridge
John Rischbieth

Laurie Deacon
Alec Burnside
Nick Minchin

All these gentlemen sailed at the Squadron before the Second World War, and they have generally confirmed the layout.

By the late fifties the waterfront piling was breaking down. The slip was inadequate, and the Clubhouse was just a big tin shed. There was a growing acceptance of the need for upgrading, but it was not until 1960 and the Outer Harbor Improvement Scheme that any real action took place. [This was funded by a loan levied on members, many of whom later forgave the debts in favour of the Squadron — Ed.] From that time, work has never stopped. The Club lease has grown from approximately 3.5 hectares to the present approximately 12.5 hectares, [with uncounted working bees to move fences — Ed.]. The site work is visible for all to see. SQ



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Osmosis: A Simplistic View

JH Cowell

Osmosis to most yachtsman means blisters on the bottom of a fibreglass boat. Like footrot to the sheep farmer, it does not kill the host, but the treatment which must eventually be undertaken is hard work, time consuming and expensive.

In my student days I was taught that osmosis is the process whereby a fluid (let's say water) passes through a semipermeable membrane from a solution of lower concentration to one of higher concentration. A semipermeable membrane allows the passage of water, but not the solutes, that is, the salts dissolved in the water.

Osmosis continues until the concentration of solutes in the two solutions becomes equal. This is the process which in all living organisms transfers water to the inside of living cells. For example, put a limp carrot in a bowl of water. Water passes into the cells of the carrot by osmosis, and the carrot becomes firm and crisp.

If the gel coat on the bottom of a boat is slightly porous it may act as a semipermeable membrane. For osmosis to occur there would need to be small quantities of solution under the gel coat containing higher concentrations of salts than are present in the surrounding seawater. Water may then pass from the sea through the gel coat, build

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