

Squadron History

Peter Last

Work on this project proceeds, on two simultaneous fronts. I continue to copy the minute books in the Mortlock Library, currently that covering 11 February 1897 to 11 September 1912. That includes recording all Members who attended plenary meetings, as well as all new Members and those resignations and deaths which were minuted. Difficulties with handwritten records have introduced errors in identification which are hard to correct. Further tedious copying is unfortunately inescapable from newspapers on microfilm, which are not included in the Large Red News Cuttings Book

As relief from this, I have started to draft some early chapters of what should grow into quite a substantial volume. They are produced in the same style as my other recent publications, *Newspaper Cuttings 1889-1949*, *The Rymill Gifts* and the first version of *The Story of the Nyrocas*. All are lodged with the Squadron.

The history has the provisional title *Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron: A History of Seamanship and Fellowship*. It is closely referenced and illustrated, from my library and material entrusted to me as Honorary Historian. The first three chapters and an initial and incomplete list of Members of the South Australian Yacht Club (1869-1890) have been lodged with the General Manager, in both hard copy and as E-mails, the latter without illustrations. (The server refused to transmit them, however small I tried to make individual components.)

I will appreciate any comments Members may wish to make, whether on detail as well as substance. In this context, I express my appreciation to Bob Catley for his helpful advice and meticulous proof-reading. Those who read the drafts are urged to bear constantly in mind that these are preliminary versions. Later editing will eliminate duplications and provide cross-references, which are premature at this stage. SQ

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Mea Culpa: Alone in Investigator Strait

Peter Last

Place and time: Knob Point, February about 1969.

Participants: *Samantha* and *Kareelah*. The cove was otherwise deserted.

It was one of those nights when a gusty SE wind sculpted anew the sandhill by the little stream. David Judell had a net (and a licence for it, which yachtsmen could then get). We joined to a good meal with our respective crews, some cheap flagon red to help it down, and ran the net. Judy Judell showed great patience cleaning what we got, mostly Tommy Ruffs. She wanted more, so we ran the net again, helped now with a flagon of port, because the breeze was chilly.

The wives and crews went to bed, and David and I brought the net in. We sat in the cockpit of *Samantha* until all the fish were cleaned, a thirsty task. As David went to bed, I cast off the dinghy to row home in the Binksdink. A short journey, perhaps twenty metres.

By the time I fitted the rowlocks into place, the light little Binksdink had blown out to the entrance of the cove. All I had to do was to row it back to *Kareelah*, fifty metres at most. After a few minutes I looked over my shoulder. My boat was further away than before. I put my back into rowing harder.

Why were the seas suddenly so sloppy, spilling over the bow? Why did Althorpe light seem much closer? Simple answer: I had blown further away than ever, beyond Knob Point. I shouted as loudly as I could, but nobody to windward heard anything. No wonder, since they were all deeply asleep, and I was the only one left awake.

Very awake. Suddenly sober. Very aware of my situation. No bailer, not even a hat. (I had hair then.). No buoyancy aid. Steadily drifting out into the Strait, however hard I rowed. Nobody

knew I was there. No way of getting help. No rescue helicopters in those days, and neither boat had a radio.

The wind grew stronger now there was that much less protection from the land. I was never much of an athlete, but that night (or, rather early morning) I excelled myself. Pulling hard with all my might, I slowly made my way to windward. At last I was able to grasp *Kareelah's* stern. Gingerly I hauled myself aboard, made the dinghy fast, and went to bed — exhausted, chastened and very much wiser than when I set out.

As soon as we were home, I bought a dinghy anchor on a long warp. It became an inflexible rule that this and a bailer were put into the dinghy as soon as we launched it.

Several years later, we rescued a man in the same predicament in Moreton Bay on Reevesby Island in a strong southerly. He had an outboard motor fresh out of fuel, no oars, no bailer, no buoyancy aid and was drifting out to sea on a heading to miss Winceby Island. For 'anchor' he had a couple of metres of line tied to a rock. The log of AG Rymill's *Nyroca* records something like this happening to three friends spending a quiet weekend in the Port River about a century ago. If I had been in an inflatable dinghy with the little oars most of them have, I would have been lucky to survive.

Moral: In strong winds, well short of gale force, dinghies can drift faster than a man can row. Never launch one without a dinghy anchor on a long line, a bailer and a buoyancy aid for everyone aboard. Put not your trust in outboard motors and a painter only long enough for use on a beach. The motor may fail, and you could be adrift in deepening water. SQ