

Peter McBride

Peter McBride was born in 1925, and somewhere about 1927–29 his father (subsequently Sir Philip McBride) bought and renamed *Koorngana*, which had been built for the Syme family of Melbourne. She was very long and narrow (53 ft by 9 ft) with a straight stem and an old-fashioned “destroyer” stern; round-bottomed forward and flat-bottomed aft. She was powered by a 35 hp American four-cylinder Sterling petrol engine, which had to be started by hand with a crank. She was moored in the front row of the Squadron pool, and Peter without effort recalled all the other boats there. First at the northern end came a houseboat called *Torrens*, built by a man to his own design, which finished at 46 ft, with two Model T Ford engines, plus a Studebaker, which propelled her in quite a brisk fashion. Next came *Koorngana*, followed by *Beth*. She was built by Searles of Largs Bay and was owned by a family named Webb, who were involved in flour milling. During the Great Depression they moved to New Zealand, and *Beth* was shipped there. After a couple of years or so they returned to Adelaide, this time bringing the vessel home themselves. Thus *Beth* became one of the first Squadron boats of modern times to make an ocean passage. She was powered by a 36 hp four-cylinder Ailsa Craig petrol engine, and originally drew only 3 ft 6 in. When Basten had her, he put on a fin keel and installed a Perkins diesel engine which came from one of his buses. Henry Rymill enlarged the deck house, and occasionally hoisted sail. (She was ketch-rigged.)

[*Nyroca* was designed by WD Bailey when he was 86 years old. She was built by Ross, a cabinet maker of Woodville, and Peter thinks that she was his only venture into keel craft. Ross is known to have built some cadet dinghies, one of which was called *George Ross*. *Nyroca* is 44 ft by 12 ft and was powered by a 36 hp Newberry diesel engine. She and *Nerida* were the only pre-war RSAYS boats which Peter could call to mind with diesel engines.]

After *Beth* came *Chum*, a motor cruiser which was advertised for sale quite recently, so presumably she is still extant. She may have found her way to the River Murray. She had a high freeboard and was in the same style as *Para*, but was not so elegant. Then came *Stormy Petrel*, of which Peter remembered little. *Alexa* was designed by Fife, built plank-on-edge, with a lovely clipper bow, an elegant stern and a big gaff rig. Her draft was a few inches more than her beam. She had an off-centre 7½ hp Kelvin petrol engine. *Cultama* was one of two virtually identical ketch-rigged boats built by Searles, which had a canoe-cruiser stern. She was a modest vessel, with a trunk cabin and an open cockpit.

Isis was at the pilot boat end of the row. She was a large steam yacht with a clipper bow and counter stern, schooner-rigged, and at over 100 ft she was a big ship! Built in 1913 for Anthony Horden she was similar to *Ena*, which was restored in the mid eighties and circumnavigated Australia. A book was published about this journey. By the time Sam Perry bought *Isis* she had a 100 hp four-cylinder Thorneycroft petrol engine, but her single screw was inadequate and she was slow under power. Spark plugs had to be changed almost every time the engine was started. The crew came from Perry's and were Ivo Thompson (skipper) Jack Silcock (engineer) and Arthur Claridge (cook). As with *Grelka* there was a telegraph from bridge to engine room. On one occasion Jack Silcock must have thought this to be a bit pretentious, for he frightened Ivo Thompson on the bridge by not responding until the last moment in putting her astern, having popped his head up to see for himself just when he could do so. *Isis* was sold to a man named Buckland, who was a motor car agent in Melbourne.

Before the war petrol cost something like 2½ times as much as today, and *Koorngana* was expensive to run, but the family enjoyed her very much. Although she had only four proper berths, on one occasion fourteen slept aboard. The forepeak was a huge toilet area, and across the stern end of the cabin there was a chest of drawers which went the full breadth of the ship. She had a large quarter circle hatch and an anchor winch with a horizontal drum to raise the anchor from its hawsepipe. The deckhouse sat above the engine room, which was divided by bulkheads. Peter's father sent all the rest of the family to Sydney on the *Manunda* in January 1933. After they returned on the *Westrailia* they found that *Koorngana* had been sold for £300, almost a derisory sum. She went to Port Adelaide Sailing Club; was renamed *Vespa*; and stayed there for many years. She may have gone to the Murray before a publican from Robe bought her, and she sank to the bottom of the pool there. One of the Hannons bought her and took her to Adelaide by truck to restore her. He kept her in the Patawalonga, but her subsequent fate is not known. He and his wife now live aboard *Sir Wallace Bruce* in the North Arm.

Peter's father bought for his elder brothers a cadet dinghy named *Helen*, and he recalled sailing her from the Squadron to Largs for a race. In the early thirties there was little social life at the Outer Harbor, and not much in the way of amenities. Upstairs there were a couple of chairs and a sofa, with a bookcase. Number One slip was operated by hand, and Peter recalled his brothers as husky adolescents being called upon to help to winch *Grelka* up, which was heavy work. From his earliest memories Jack Carlstrom was always at the Outer Harbor, and his sons Peter and John may have been born when the family were living in the small caretaker's cottage. John is now a coxswain and thus an *ex officio* Member.

The next McBride vessel was *Marie*, which was bought in 1938. She was built of oregon in 1927 by MacFarlanes of Port Adelaide: a raised-deck motor boat with a gaff mainsail. She was 26 ft long and with a beam of eight ft, but drew less than two feet in spite of half a ton of lead in pigs. She was powered by the last model built of the Kelvin sleeve-valved petrol engine. Peter had to learn for himself how to handle her, which he did by painstakingly practising during his school holidays. They used her for fishing, and went to Port Vincent a couple of times. [PML first met Peter on one of these occasions, probably in the May school holidays of 1941, when the McLeays accompanied the Judells and the Lasts for a holiday at the Ventnor Hotel. The children played in the stacks of barley in bags on the wharf and there was a mouse plague, but not such a dramatic one as that of 1993.] On one of the trips to Port Vincent the small coaster *Kooraka* came in, with only Captain Spells and a deckhand to be seen. Captain Spells would then have been well over eighty, and he moved very slowly. During the war *Marie* was shifted with the other Squadron boats to Number 3 dock, using almost the last petrol they had. She was sold during the war, and is still about the Port River.

Rex Parsons, Principal of the School of Mines, had only one child, Ralph, who went to a small private primary school and Prince Alfred College with Peter. Rex built a cadet dinghy called *Spindrift*, and they took *Marie* to Mutton Cove to find mangrove branches which were suitable to make the knees. *Spindrift* was kept at Brighton & Seacliff Yacht Club.

Following the sale of *Marie*, Peter met Frank Ide, owner of *Radiant*. She was built in about 1927 to a design of John Dallimore (not as well known as his brother Norman), which was modified by adding extra beam — a good move. She was 30 ft overall, 22 ft on the waterline, with a beam of 8 ft 4 in and a draft of 4 ft. Originally she had a bowsprit and a boom extending over the counter. Frank had only one eye, which