

H Denis Winterbottom

Denis Winterbottom was born in 1910. He was the son of Harold E Winterbottom, Secretary of the Chamber of Manufactures, and Rear Commodore of Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron in the thirties. Denis grew up at Glenelg, where at an early age he had a sailing canoe built for him by his father. He was a great friend of Jimmy Melrose, with whom he also went sailing in Jimmy's twelve foot cadet dinghy. Jimmy once told him that he had never known fear, which may have been the cause of giving Denis a bad scare on one occasion. He wonders if this cavalier disregard of risks later led to Jimmy's death in an air crash. [Jimmy's story is briefly told in *Squadron Quarterly* of December 1991. A biography by Eric Gunton, *The Jimmy Melrose Story: Australia's Youngest Air Ace*, was published in 1990.]

Harold Winterbottom regularly lunched with a group of cronies, of whom Tom Hardy was one. There was interest in trying to attract to Adelaide a series of the Forster Cup interstate sailing races for restricted 21-footers. Tom Hardy had already obtained from the celebrated nautical architect William Fife of Fairlie, Scotland, the plans for such a boat, but had decided not to go ahead with building it. He urged Harold Winterbottom to become involved, and about Easter 1924 offered him the plans. The outcome was that Harold began building a racing yacht in his backyard. Denis, then an adolescent schoolboy at St Peter's College, earned small sums by helping. Although most of his photographs and mementos were later destroyed in a flood, fortunately a few have survived. They include one sheet from the original plans from which his father worked. This is numbered 715 from Fife's office, dated 30 April 1923. There are also pictures of the boat under construction, of her launching and under sail. She was named *Lady Alice* for Denis's mother, who unfortunately had no interest in sailing.

In a surviving photograph album there is a copy of an article by "Ringtail" in the issue of *The Australian Motor Boat and Yachting Monthly* of September 1, 1926 (Page 12) —

The actual measurements are — length O.A., 25ft; water line, 21ft; beam, 7ft 8in; draft with centreboard up, 3ft 8in; board down, about 7ft; and the sail area 446 square feet.

The hull is planked with kauri pine, the keel is wrought from a piece of 12 inch x 9 inch jarrah, and the stem is from a piece of natural brown red gum. One of the most exacting jobs in the whole boat was the shaping of the keel, which runs from a depth of 12 inches at the bow to 4½ inches at the stern, and the width varies from 2 inches to 9 inches.

The hull is wonderfully strong throughout. The planking is ¾ inch off the planes, and many of the ribs are doubled up to the bilges. In addition, Mr Winterbottom has

adopted an idea of his own of casting reinforced concrete beams *in situ* from bilge to bilge for strengthening. These beams are kept in place by wires fastened to screws turned into the ribs. [Denis remarked that he had no memory of this.]

An idea of the value of the material in a boat of this size might be gauged from the fact that the timber put in her cost about £70, brass keel bolts £4, brass screws and copper fastenings £8, rigging, sails and fittings about £60, and 1¾ tons of lead ballast £56, or a total cost of about £200.

[In 1921 the South Australian State Living Wage was £3.19.6 for a man and £1.15.0 for a woman. In 1926 these figures were £4.5.6 and £1.19.6 respectively. With the deflation of the Great Depression they fell in 1931 to £3.3.0 and £1.11.6, and did not return to the 1926 levels until 1940.]

There is a wonderful photograph of a great team of men manhandling the boat into the water at Broadway. Several wore felt hats over the swimming costumes of the time (shorts half way to the knee with singlets). Denis remembered them going back and forth to load aboard the moulded lead ingots used for internal ballast. This was described in *The Advertiser* of 17 December 1926 —

Some difficulty was at first experienced in getting the big craft across the wide beach, but with the assistance of a number of helpers this was overcome, and the boat was successfully pushed into the water. Commodore EP Boucaut's *El Dorado*, of the Glenelg Sailing Club, and Mr Malcolm Milne's power yacht *Erica* stood by, and rendered valuable assistance at the launching. The boat, which is a good job for an amateur built craft, is built from the plans of Mr LT Bennett's *Fife*, but her sheer and other points are slightly different from the Brighton 21-footer. She is constructed of blackwood and karri timbers, and fine Queensland hoop pine planking. After the ballast and the mast had been placed in position, she was sailed to the Outer Harbor, where she will be tuned up for the Forster Cup races. The trip to the Outer Harbor, a distance of 12 miles, occupied two hours 20 minutes, a good performance for the first wetting.

[The different spellings of "kauri" and "karri" are as in the respective originals. Denis remembered the arrival of *Lady Alice* at the Squadron, "to the cheers of Tom Hardy and his crew".]

Only a few weeks after she was launched *Lady Alice* participated in the inaugural Adelaide series of the Forster Cup sailed off Largs Bay in February 1927. The winner was *Tassie*, designed and sailed by WP Batt of Hobart. Thereafter *Lady Alice* was raced and cruised regularly until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. Denis retained a copy of a light-hearted "log" of an Orontes Cup in *Norallie*, written by Harold Holthouse. The winner was *Lady Alice*.

The Squadron moved from Birkenhead to Outer Harbor in 1924. Denis recalled the original Squadron shed at Outer Harbor as a rather gloomy building, which

was pretty rough in its construction and had only the basic amenities. He and his father joined the working bee which constructed the first track to the premises. Other than the annual ball, Opening Day and Ladies Day there was virtually no social life, and not many women participated. Denis especially enjoyed trips across the Gulf to Port Vincent and Black Point at Easter time. He vividly remembered the crews gathering on the beach at Black Point on the evenings round great bonfires, the good company, the yarning and the singing.

One year the boats were caught in a dreadful storm when racing in a regatta at Port Vincent, and were "blown to buggery". *Lady Alice* was one of four or five towed back to Port Vincent by Frank Verco's *Nautilus*. This was the day of the terrible *Sunny South* disaster at Glenelg. Four or five young men lost their lives, including the twin nephews of Bill Fisk the Mayor. Occasionally they anchored overnight at Glenelg, but otherwise sailed there only on day trips, and then not often. They won virtually every trophy available to them, but did not enter the Island Cup.

In 1928, when Denis was doing military service at O'Halloran Hill, *Solace* dismasted *Lady Alice*. That proved a blessing, as the original mast was of heavy oregon, and Harold built a lighter and better one from spruce. He had considerable skills in working timber, and made a dinghy which exactly fitted over the cockpit to act as a sort of cabin. During the years of the Great Depression Roy Stevens lost his job. [He was not the radiographer of the same name] Harold engaged him to remove the centreboard from *Lady Alice*, construct a cabin roof and melt the lead ingots to form a keel. Roy never had a boat of his own and he loved sailing. He frequently sailed on *Lady Alice* and with many other skippers. "Dumps" Somerville, the celebrated and long-lived lady solicitor, took the helm on Ladies Day. ["Dumps" never married and lived almost all her life in the same house at Brighton. She was a frequent participant on Tom Hardy's *Norallie* and *Nerida*. Naturally, Eileen Hardy skippered for her husband on Ladies Day.]

Others who crewed with Denis over the years were Perc Howie — a keen sailor who taught him a lot — Jim Taylor (before he had a boat of his own), Keith Cock, Mac McLean, Bill Morish, Seymour Toms and Dick Lamprell. Dick was a reporter on *The Advertiser* and published a lyrical account of sailing in an Orontes Cup race.

Wartime was difficult. Petrol was rationed and the yachts were inconveniently relocated from the pool to the North Arm. [This was an emergency measure, to ensure that they were not available to an invading Japanese force. The threat was taken very seriously in 1942, but declined over the next couple of years as the island hopping campaign drove the enemy progressively further from Australia.] Denis was overseas, and his father found maintenance of the yacht a strain. They agreed that *Lady Alice* should be sold and she fetched £200. The

next owner was Lance Le Cornu, who installed an engine. At one stage she was kept at Port Lincoln.

In relation to *Fife*, Denis is uncertain how the owner (Bennett) obtained the plans. Her hull was identical to *Lady Alice*, so probably Tom Hardy had a hand in it. [Jamie Cowell met Bennett when he became the mailman on Kangaroo Island, and through him learned a lot about *Fife*. According to Bennett, it was in order to build her that the original Searles set up as a boatbuilder.]

Later there was a fire in *Fife* and Bennett lodged an insurance claim. By a strange coincidence, Denis was required to accompany the insurance adjuster, Mr Henderson, on his inspection of the boat. It was badly damaged and there was clear evidence that the fire had been deliberately lit. One suggestion put forward by Bennett was that the arsonist had mistaken *Fife* for *Lady Alice*. Harold, as Secretary of the Chamber of Manufactures had been publicly critical of certain union activities at that time. The culprit was never discovered, the insurance money was paid, and *Fife* was restored.

Denis had fond memories of some of their yachts and their owners at the Squadron in the pre-war years, some of whom were great personalities. Some he mentioned were —

Stormy Petrel was owned by a syndicate of Angove, Harvey, Birks and Crompton.

Norallie and later *Nerida* were owned by Tom Hardy, whose regular crew were Len Wigan, "Curly" Dempster and George Eimer.

Nautilus was owned by Frank Verco, whose sons Doug and Brian sailed with him.

Soliloquy was owned by Dr Bill Ray, and Denis had several delightful trips aboard her to Kangaroo Island.

Seahawk, owned by Henry Rymill, was crewed by the Hopton brothers and Barney Rowe. Henry later owned *Beth*, followed by Dr Tostevin's *Nyroca*. He usually had some sea scouts aboard.

Denis enjoyed a number of trips on *Nyroca* in Dr Tostevin's time, including one to Kangaroo Island. She was a very comfortable boat.

The owner of *Anyndah* was Norman Ford. It was always a joy to watch him carry out his work of art in manoeuvring her single-handed, with no engine. He sailed his boat into the basin and brought her neatly to her mooring with enviable nonchalance.

Geoff Verco began with a twelve-footer and an eighteen -footer (*Cubriella*) before *Carina*, which he sailed in several Forster Cup races. [Later he had the Squadron's solitary St George, an English design intended to outperform the Dragon, which was selected for the German Olympics of 1936.]

Colin Haselgrove owned *Four Winds*, which was a very ugly boat. [Later he had *Vamp*, *Nerida*, in which he won the Sydney–Hobart Race, *Cooroyba* and a Top Hat.]

Alexa was first owned by Jack Irwin and then John Gordon. She was a real racing machine, quite old at this time but still winning races. She came to a sad end one day when John Gordon was sailing her. The lead keel dropped off and she sank at Glenelg.

Reverie, owned by a Mr Fisher (a former Commodore) was one of the oldest boats in the pool.

Maid Marion was owned by R Quinn, who usually sailed her single-handed. [Malcolm Kinnaird had her for a few years before he became deeply involved in the then new Cruising Yacht Club of South Australia.]

Ardale was bought by Bill Birnie after she competed in the 1927 Forster Cup series. His crew included the three Burnleys and Bo Hosken, to whom he later sold it. [She later passed to Dr Neil Wigg and subsequently was owned by Dr Alan Cotton.]

Solace was owned by Dr Stanley Verco and *Seasalter*, a pretty little yawl, was owned by Rev Guy Pentreath, Headmaster of St Peter's College. Denis could not recall the name of the boat owned by eighty-year-old Peter King, whose crew usually comprised his daughters and a niece.

Pavana was owned by Ron Angas, who had Bob Sanders in his crew. [She went to Port Lincoln under George Mayne, still with no winches, and later was seen in Port Moresby. She was a very large and heavy schooner. At the start of the 1954 race to Port Lincoln she was on the port tack in the river and Colin Haselgrove in *Cooroyba* called her about. George was unable (or unwilling) to respond and *Cooroyba* was dismasted in the collision. Colin had *Cooroyba*'s mast shortened and bound with three metal bands which were still there 35 years later.]

RL Jack owned *Quei* and Hugh Lapthorne had *Boonawarra*, a tiny shallow draft ketch. [She was later owned by Dr John Muirhead. In her John explored with his young family all the small ports of St Vincent's Gulf.]

Power boats of the day included *Avocet* which passed from AC Rymill to his son, and *Isis*, a grand large vessel owned by Samuel Perry. Denis recalled being on her with his father for Opening Day in about 1925. In the photograph in his album Mr Perry is in the left foreground of the large group on deck.

E Johnstone owned *Chum* and Mark Mitchell had *Grelka*. [Her story and loss by fire are well documentd in *Squadron Quarterly* June 1991.]

Mr Webb brought *Beth* from New Zealand, took her home, and returned permanently to Adelaide. After the war Henry Rymill had her before he bought *Nyroca*. [Webb was Paddy Malone's skipper on *Martindale* when she was taken to Sydney for service with the Royal Australian Navy in 1943. Paddy decribed him as a hard and unpopular skipper, but he was an able seaman, which was more than could be said for most of the rest of those aboard. The story of JT Mortlock and the two *Martindales* is told in *Squadron Quarterly* for September 1994, with a postscript in the December issue.]

Clare was owned by K Raphael, and there was an old ship's lifeboat in charge of "Micka" Forbes, who ran the sea scouts at St Peter's College. [John Rischbieth said that in his time there were two such lifeboats called *Pioneer* and *White Star*.]

Denis remembered the dispute within the Squadron when the controversial decision was taken to close the premises at Largs Bay. At a fiery meeting a Member named Baudinet failed to persuade members to retain Largs Bay. The Secretary was Charles Inkster, who was a gentle and quiet man, but he seemed to be a somewhat ineffectual man, apparently very much under the control of the Commodore of the day. He came to Outer Harbor for every race day and seemed to be quite efficient.

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Denis died in 2000, with an obituary in *The Advertiser*.