

Eileen Clara Hardy OBE (1893-1980)

Peter Last

I knew her from not quite sixty years ago until she was an old lady, but hardly different over all that time. Our paths didn't often cross, but she was always the same. Her face would light up with pleasure, and at once she would ask about my family and that of my wife. She had an incredible ability to recall names and associations, and to listen with keen interest to news of others. In the large home at Seacliff overlooking the sea, there were some memorable parties. For those who know Saint Luke's Gospel, she was Mary with the guests rather than Martha in the kitchen who made it possible. There was a time when living was tight, but Eileen carried on regardless. She loved people and the fun they could create. David recalled with a chuckle being sent to the shops down the hill with empty soft drink bottles to be traded for chips and icecream.

Eileen was the daughter of Will Ponder, sometime bank manager at Nuriootpa before moving to work with the AMP. Later he managed the Ventnor Hotel at Port Vincent, which was owned by Nan Ponder's sister Amy Ford. Will Ponder's brother Walter was an MP, remembered at the time for bicycle tracks across the parklands. Old Mrs Ponder had the same energy and vivacity as her daughter. At her eightieth birthday party in about 1951 she danced on the table, and not long afterwards was killed catching a tram on Norwood Parade. By chance I happened to be present at the autopsy, which disclosed serious valvular heart disease. That didn't dampen her energy.

Eileen's interest in sailing dated from being aboard *Alexa* at Port Vincent during the winter of 1910. Those were the days when yachting was very much a man's sport. Frank



Haselgrove's wife Nita was unusual in that she accompanied her husband, and Eileen sometimes went too. Frank's yacht *Miranda* was burnt to the waterline, and Tom Hardy invited Frank and his crew to join him on *Norallie* for Squadron Opening Day in 1920. That was a happy encounter. Tom Mayfield Hardy and Eileen Clara Ponder were married in 1922, to live beside the Haselgroves at Seacliff. Their children were Tom (1924), David (1926), Pamela (1930) and James (1932). Tom Hardy (Senior) began in fourteen-foot dinghies, and his first keel boat was *Norallie*, which had won the Kintore Cup in 1908. She was lengthened after his time, and remained in the pool for many years. In 1933 Eileen blessed and launched *Nerida*. Tom cruised and raced intensively in her. There is a newspaper clipping of the first cruise to Kangaroo Island, the crew being Len Wigan and George Eimer. The other person aboard beside Tom and Eileen Hardy was Dumps Somerville. At the time of her death recently she was Adelaide's oldest lady solicitor.

Tragedy struck the Hardys in 1938. Tom was Managing Director of the family company. He and other wine men flew in company

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with Mr Hawker MP to Melbourne in an aircraft called *Kyeema*. This crashed, killing all aboard, and Eileen was left to bring up her children alone. Her card of acknowledgement to those who sent condolences had a sketch of *Nerida* with a verse –

A noble life has ended,
A gallant soul has sped,
A leader midst his fellow-men –
As he trod, so let us tread.

His Ship of Life has onward sailed
Into the glowing west;
Its Captain stayed the course, and now
Takes his eternal rest.

At Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron Tom Hardy was commemorated by our library in his name. *Nerida* was sold to neighbour Colin Haselgrove, who won the Sydney-Hobart race with her in 1950, rigged as a yawl. Years later she was bought by



Nerida in the thirties

Hardy's Wines, returned to her original rig as a cutter, and became a celebrated sight on Sydney Harbor. It gave Eileen huge gratification to repeat the blessing ceremony with Jim at Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron in January, 1971.

Tom (of the new generation) built *Linleeta* in the back yard of the family home, brought her to the Squadron, and cruised extensively. Like his father he was destined to be Vice-Commodore but not to become Commodore. At the Easter regattas several times he won the Correll and Germein trophies. In a remarkable sequence, Tom, Eileen and Jim were all awarded the OBE, and Jim, of course was knighted. Eileen was justifiably a proud matriarch, but never an arrogant or complacent one.

Jim scored some of his notable successes sailing in the waters below his home, including capturing the world 505 championship in 1966. He represented Australia in the Olympic Games, and his mother followed him to Newport for the *America's Cup* challenges in 1970, 1974 and 1977. Events like that kept Eileen actively involved in yachting until she was an old lady. She presented prizes with grace and dignity. As a student of Wilderness School she had studied elocution. That, together with her unashamed capacity to weep when an occasion called for it, made her a notable public speaker. Her last official engagement was to present the prizes at her old school. She accepted the inevitability of her terminal illness, and maintained her gregarious and cheerful manner, including the pleasure of a glass of Hardy's champagne with those who visited her. There have been hundreds of people involved in yachting who were touched by Eileen Hardy. Her name and the memories of her will long endure.

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