

# HISTORY: ARTHUR G RYMILL AND THE FIRST NYROCA PART 1

By Peter Last

Squadron historian Dr Peter Last has provided an account of cruising South Australian waters from the sailing vessel *Nyroca*'s log kept by Arthur Rymill. Given that it was written more than one hundred years ago, about waters that Members cruise frequently, Arthur's notes are a thrill to read. This is the first of 2 instalments.

Josiah Bonnin (1836–1918) was educated at St Peter's College, became manager of Nalpa Station on the shore of Lake Alexandrina for Sir Lancelot and Sir Edward Stirling, and was the ancestor of a medical dynasty. He commissioned Fred Potts of Langhorne Creek to build the small cutter *Nyroca* from red gum wood. In her first race Mr Bonnin narrowly won the Milang Regatta of 1889 from Mr A McFarlane's *Pasquin*, which was slightly larger at 25 ft LWL. An exciting and detailed newspaper account records the margin as 2 hr 58 min 38 sec to 2 hr 59 min 0 sec.

A young cousin of Fred Potts the boat builder was Arthur Graham Rymill (1868–1934), RSAYS Commodore 1923–31, and one of the most notable and versatile yachtsmen in sail and power we have ever had. He bought the yacht from Mr Bonnin in 1891 and undertook some remarkable cruises in her.

*Nyroca* was 23 ft on the waterline, with a beam of 7 ft, draft 4 ft and freeboard 15 in. Her bowsprit was 13 ft 'outboard', and the boom was 22 ft. Total ballast was 2 tons 11 cwt, combining that on the keel with inside pigs of lead. She carried 600 sq ft total sail area and rated 3.6 tons SAYC measurement. The cabin height of 4 ft 7 in gave only sitting headroom, and from allusions in the log it seems that there was no galley.



*Nyroca* in the Port River (H Loveder)

Arthur wrote a log of *Nyroca*, recording most, but not all of his cruises, illustrated with his sketches and small photographs, which is one of the historical treasures of the Squadron. My annotated verbatim copy *The Story of the Nyrocas* is in the Tom Hardy Library, from which the first entry is:

1891 December 23

Spent the day in Bonnin's Harbour, taking over the boat & getting sails and gear aboard, ready to make a start next day. Crew: AG Rymill, G Acraman and C Horn.

On Christmas Eve they took four hours to travel the 25 miles to Milang, but spent Christmas night aground off Sturt Point and struck twice again before reaching Goolwa, taking two hours to get off.



1891 December 27th

Up at 6 o'clock & made a start for Murray Mouth, which we reached too late to go out, on account of the tide being low. Spent the day shooting & fishing &c &c.

The Rymills were great shooters and Arthur became trapshooting pigeon champion of Victoria.

On 17 October 1903 a newspaper reported,

*Messrs AG and E Rymill will today leave Port Adelaide for Well's Creek in the Valeria (Converted from the elegant sailing yacht depicted in The Gallery at the Squadron to an oil launch with a hideous boxy cabin.) They hope there to have a few days shag shooting, and anticipate getting a bag of 3,000 (sic). Shags, as the fishermen can certify, do an immense amount of damage by devouring young fish. The Messrs Rymill are armed with Winchester repeating shotguns.]*

1891 December 28th.

Up early this morning, expecting to find a North wind, but it was 'blowing a dead calm', so we decided to drift through the Mouth with the current, and keep her head to the breakers with oars & poles. After a ¼ of an hour of jumping about in the breakers managed to get through safely & made Port Victor by 11 o'clock. Saluted by cheers of admiring spectators as we ran in. Hung on a buoy. Snugged the ship down. 11:30 Climbed into our dress suits and went ashore to be feted. Cricket match [?] afternoon under patronage of officers and crew. Ladies and men.

*Nyroca* at the Murray Mouth, 27 December 1891.



1891 December 29th

Out in the bay at Port Victor. In the afternoon had a party of ladies aboard & gave them tea and bread & butter, etc. Judging from the time they spent on board, think they must have enjoyed it. Party numbered 12 in all. In the evening went ashore and stocked up with provisions for the trip [to] Kangaroo I.

1891 December 30th.

Left Port Victor 8:30 am for Antechamber B, reached there at 6 o'clock pm. Voyage across the Passage was uneventful. Found Antech B a good place to put in for the night, with plenty of firewood to be had on shore. In the evening put over a line and caught 2 sharks abt 5 feet long. A third one carried away line & left us the winder.

From Antechamber Bay Nyroca proceeded to American River, Kingscote, Emu Bay, Dashwood Bay and Edithburgh.

1892 January 6th.

Left the cook ashore this morning, as he wanted to catch the steamer back to town. First mate & self started off for Stansbury. Here we fell in with some oyster boats. The skipper of one lent us a dredge & we got ready to do a little oystering in the morning. Went ashore & had a walk round the city.

1892 January 7th.

Started out for the oyster beds & after dragging for abt 2 hours managed to get a bag. Went back to Stansbury, returned dredge & made sail for Port Vincent. Here we fell in with some very good sort of fellows on a ketch, who invited us to take tea with them, after which we yarned till pretty late. [Perhaps the 'oysters' were scallops.]



A typical Gulf ketch of 1913. (Birnie album)

1892 January 8th.

Made a start for home across the Gulf 30 miles, which distance we covered in 5¼ hours, which was not bad time considering we were on the wind all the way. Reached the Yacht Club moorings [at Birkenhead], snugged the ship & made for home after having a ripping cruise of 2 weeks & 3 days.

And so ends the first salt water cruise of the Nyroca & I hope by no means the last.

In April 1892 they cruised to Kangaroo Island and that summer (1892-93) to Port Lincoln.

Friday 15th [April 1892] At six this morning we were sailing off Yankalilla Bay, with the wind freshening from the N. after 4 hours sailing we sighted the Jervis Light. Soon afterwards the Island was visible, lying off Rapid Head. Here the wind freshened to a small gale, & rounding the Head we entered the Passage & were within 5 miles of the cove when the sun set. We stood on into the bay in the dark, & not being able to see the buoys, we ran aground just as we were bringing up. As the tide was ebbing, shears were rigged & we decided to wait till daylight before doing anything further.

Saturday 16th [April 1892]

The ship was still hard aground this morning. We waited for the tide to rise to its highest & then every expedient was tried, but of no use. As a last resource the inside ballast was taken ashore. By this time the tide

was again running out & we decided to wait for the evening. Meantime we all went ashore, shooting & exploring a bit. However, after staying here for some time, the boat was seen to be moving, so we rowed back just in time to find her afloat. She was then sailed up the River without further mishap & got anchored snugly about 1 o'clock. Some fish were purchased from a fishing cutter for tea & we turned in for the night.

In April-May 1893 they set out for American River, but,

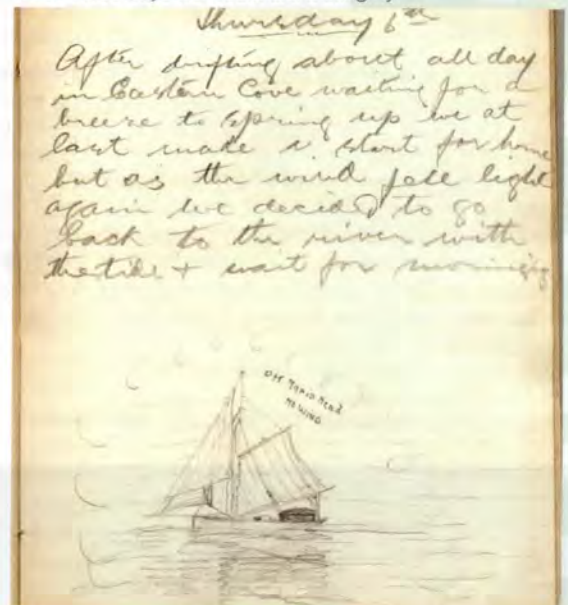
When passing off Second Valley the mainsail cracked & then split right across. A trysail was then rigged up, & not long afterwards the jib went into ribbons. We then made for Rapid Bay; with a very big sea running. We were just able to lay this place under a staysail, so the upper sail was taken in. Reached Rapid Bay at about 12 midday, and brought up off the jetty.

Saturday 1st [May 1893]

When we got up this morning, the wind was still blowing hard at the W, & the seas were rolling well into the Bay. The whole day was spent in patching and repairing the sail, during the time it was not raining. The mainsail was cut right across at the 3rd set of reef points & a patch put in along the bottom, while the gaff was lashed in with the reefs. In the afternoon the wind veered to the S & we got it a bit smoother in the bay.

There is no reference to seasickness stitching sails all day while anchored in a joggly little boat. By contrast, they had a frustrating drift home under their greatly reduced mainsail and made slow progress up the Port River to their mooring, 'after having a real (sic) good cruise.'

A weekend cruise to Black Point has Arthur's sketch of Frederick Rymill catching a skate, which these days we would call a stingray.



Fred Rymill and his skate, caught at Black Point and showing some details of Nyroca's rigging.

