

MRS SUZANNE MACMICHAEL

Suzanne Hawker (Mrs Macmichael) went with her parents for a summer holiday to American River in about 1932. They stayed with the Jensen family, and her parents were somewhat uneasy at the prospect that she might become inappropriately involved with some of the young men in Professor Mark Mitchell's house across the way on Strawbridge Point. Accordingly, her father encouraged her and her cousin Philippa MacFarlane (daughter of Gordon McFarlane from Brinkley Station, subsequently Philippa Henderson) to learn to sail under the tuition of Horrie Ratcliffe, the celebrated one-armed fisherman. Philippa bought a canoe, in which they sailed on the lower reaches of the Murray. This was only in one direction, and when they reached a property down-wind they returned on the back of a lorry. They had a lot of fun, and Suzanne grew to love sailing.

She said that her father decided that she should build her own boat. First she must learn how to do so, and enrolled at the School of Mines. She passed the examinations to be qualified in cabinet making, and was permitted to build a VJ on the premises. She had help from her sister Marjorie and from Philippa MacFarlane with such tedious tasks as riveting. The boat was displayed in the Royal Adelaide Show, and she was awarded a certificate.

An ancestor was Admiral Edward Hawker, who flew his flag in HMS *Furious* sometime in the eighteenth century. Accordingly Suzanne's boat was called *Furious*. Her father became a Member of Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron in order that she could sail there, as at that time only Members could own boats, and a Member must be a British gentleman. This was in about 1934–35. Her stalwart was Tony Triton, and her father insisted that she was not to sail without him in case she came to harm. [For some information on Tony Triton see *Squadron Quarterly*, June 1995: 46.] Diffidently she remarked, almost certainly erroneously, "My sailing was a bit vague." Suzanne didn't race, but took pleasure in regular sailing. This including crewing on one of Mark Mitchell's sharpies, skippered by Bruce Tunbridge. [Life Member of the Squadron, 1995] Bruce subsequently bought *Furious*.

One disastrous day she capsized *Furious*, well out in the river towards the entrance. The boat rolled right over, so she lost centre plate, jib, rudder and tiller. The third person aboard was a PAC boy called Johnny, whose surname she couldn't recall, and who couldn't swim. He clung on desperately. [Her mother disapproved of him somewhat, as her strong preference was for the products of St Peter's College.] One of the first things was to take off the voluminous sweaters which they wore. There were no buoyancy vests in those days. They got ashore and made their way to the Squadron, where a considerate man gave her a tot of whisky. This was the first alcohol she had taken and it sent her to sleep. When she woke up, the old public telephone had been switched through to the caretaker's cottage. It was late in the evening before she contacted her parents, who were apprehensive and angry. As a consequence, she was 'grounded' for a time.

She advertised for the tiller and rudder, and retrieved them from a woman who lived in an old tram in the sandhills behind the Squadron. She paid ten shillings reward, and thereafter secured the centreboard with a strap. The original sails were made in Sydney, in a loft near the Bridge which was notable as the birth place of Victor Trumper the cricketer. They were of fine Japara cotton, and the replacement jib built in Adelaide was not nearly so good. ["Mum took me to Sydney to learn to be a bit more ladylike."]

The next venture was the purchase of *Allawoona*, 24 feet long and broad in the beam (“like a Shetland pony”). Doug Motteram came as crew from the previous owner. Subsequent crew members were Alan Pilgrim, Bill Barton Foster (later a judge in the Northern Territory) and ‘Tich’ Mitchell. They made day sails in the gulf, as far as Seacliff and back, as well as up the Port River and into the North Arm. Once they set out for Port Vincent over Easter, but it was pretty rough and they turned back.

Suzanne became engaged to a man in Melbourne who was not interested in boats, and who was killed in Syria. He was a product of Geelong Grammar School. At the onset of the Second World War *Allawoona* was sold. Suzanne did not resume the pastime of yachting, but remembers it as “a lovely time of my life”.

In her day there wasn’t much social life at the Outer Harbor. Lum and Margaret Rymill were often there, and she remembered Henry Rymill also. She didn’t recall much contact with Eileen Hardy. Generally she was treated well, with a lot of laughter and teasing. “When I did things wrong I thought they were all watching me.” On one occasion she was attaching a leather sleeve to her mast with copper nails. A passing man remarked that her brother was pretty hard on her to make her do a man’s work. That annoyed her, and she told him firmly that it was her own boat.

Her father was Lord Mayor, and was awarded the Military Cross in the Great War. They lived at 51 Pennington Terrace, near Saint Mark’s College. There were balls, dances and tennis parties, quite different from today’s entertainments. “That era has disappeared.”

She married John Blair, who died at the age of 42. Their son Jock is a successful television and film writer/producer. At the time of interview, after his successes in such popular series as *The Sullivans*, he was involved in *The Man from Snowy River*. He has published a novel, *Butterfly Blue* (Random House). After the death of her husband, Suzanne was obliged to support herself by working as a stock records clerk in Australian Motor Industries and fitting corsets at Foys. She married Bill Macmichael, who worked at General Motors Holdens and was a wonderful handyman. He died at the age of 72. She is included in a publication *The Galleries and Artists of Australia*, which helps sales of her collage art.

Interviewed 13 September 1995

Revised on the basis of a letter dated 14 September 1995

A pale picture of *Furious* is in her album, together with an unidentified schooner. There is also an unflattering and unidentifiable photograph of her taken from behind, kneeling on the Hydroplane Wharf.