

Preamble

The existence of the bar across the entrance prevented vessels drawing more than 10 feet from entering Corio Bay and cargo was discharged into lighters outside Point Henry for conveyance to Geelong.

However, in March 1841, the 152 ton barque, Socrates, did negotiate the bar and also, with a full load of wool, successfully made her departure. In 1852 the natural channel through the bar was deepened to 13 feet but this could not be increased because rock was encountered.

Next, after much delay, a new channel, known as the south channel was finally dredged to a depth of 18 feet by 1862. But no sooner was it completed than it was found that the navigable depth was being reduced by sand carried in from the long spit which crosses the bay near Point Henry.

This caused much agitation for a new channel but it was not until 1893 that this work was completed when the new channel was officially opened on December 20 by the Governor of Victoria, Lord Hopetoun, after whom it was named.

In the meantime local sporting enthusiasts, particularly those associated with sailing and other water sports, had not been slow to recognise the bay's potential for this type of activity and some impromptu type of regattas are believed to have been held in the 1840's.

The first official Regatta Committee was not established until a meeting was held at the Victoria Hotel on January 21, 1859. And so, this was the beginning of what was to become one of the best known Yacht Clubs in Australia with strong international recognition.

This volume is the history of that Club.

PROLOGUE

From January 24 to January 27, 1986 the Royal Geelong Yacht Club conducted its 122nd Australia Day Weekend Regatta.

The first heat of the prestigious Geelong Advertiser's Trophy event for teams of four I.O.R. yachts started from Williamstown at 8 pm on Friday January 24 when 52 yachts from 13 clubs faced the starter. Next followed a further 31 yachts from eight clubs competing in another teams event for the Striproll Industries Trophy. These 83 boats were to sail a 90 mile course and scheduled to finish in Geelong on Saturday morning. Then came the J.O.G.'s (Junior Offshore Grade) fleet. Here 23 yachts from six clubs set off in a 60 mile course to contest the teams event for the "Martini Perpetual Trophy."

On Saturday morning a further 209 yachts set off to race from Williamstown to Geelong in a further 10 divisions and classes. At the same time a further three yachts set off to race to Geelong from Blairgowrie in addition to 13 racing from Mornington. This meant that, in all, some 331 yachts raced to Geelong that day.

And while all this was going on, International Cadet Dinghies, Trailable yachts and Columbia classes were racing over courses set within Corio Bay. There were some 30 boats involved in these events, bringing the grand total to 361.

Class and division racing continued on Sunday morning and on Sunday afternoon the second heats of the Geelong Advertiser and Martini Trophies were contested over an Olympic course, as well as Championship races for Dragons, Thunderbirds and Etchells. Plus the third heat of the International Cadet Championship. The final event was an open race from Geelong to Melbourne starting on Monday morning.

Geelong boats fared well. The club team, consisting of Prime Suspect, Ray Abikhair; Ruzulu, Graham Aldersea; Zululu, Guyon Wilson and Nuzulu, Tony Bull won the "Geelong Advertiser Trophy." Ruzulu gained outright first place in Heat one and Nuzulu was first in Heat two.

The R.G.Y.C. team of Quasimodo, Garry Graham, Cutloose, Bill Dodds, Wide Load, Ken Durran and La Farrceur, Barry Bourke won the Striproll Trophy and Quasimodo won the event outright on corrected time.

Alkirie, Sir Frederick Somerset, skippered by Bernard Brayton won the Division C race from Williamstown from a fleet of 33, Baradine, J. Tennant I. Hunter and P. & G. DeVries won the Thunderbird event, Mulberry, Mike Thoms, won Division B and Friction, Geoff Davis won Division A.

While on the cadet course, Anaconda, Y. Bucek, won all three heats of the Championship and the Geelong team won the teams' event.

On shore there was much activity and gaiety in the precincts of the Royal Geelong Yacht Club and a large spectator fleet watched the racing on Sunday afternoon. The weather was fine throughout with winds mainly blowing at moderate strength from the southerly quarter.

There was much favourable comment on the efficient manner in which the Race Committee, led by Club Captain, Ern Armstrong had handled the multi-event program. Visiting yachtsmen were also high in their praise for the excellent spacious facilities of the Club and for the splendid hospitality proffered.

PREFACE

Shortly after Guyon Wilson was elected Commodore of the Royal Geelong Yacht Club in 1983 he approached me and expressed some concern that the History of the Club, despite several abortive attempts, had still not been written.

In his inimitable persuasive fashion Guyon eventually got me to agree to at least take a good hard look at this formidable task and formally got me to agree to proceed with the project.

Because of other commitments I had to defer commencement of my research until March 1984. When I did start to look at it, I began to ponder why I had been so foolish as to agree to Guyon's proposal. I was appalled at the apparent almost complete absence of relevant information, particularly in the early years from 1859 to 1900 and also into the 20th century.

But one very significant piece of documentation was available. This was the original Minute Book of the Geelong Yacht Club from 1859 to 1869. So, with this as a starting point, I set to work.

And just after this I made an important discovery. I found that the library at Deakin University had on microfilm every copy of the Geelong Advertiser from its inception in 1840 to the present day. I also found the people at Deakin to be most cooperative and helpful. Providing that I had a date to work on I could go to the library, select the relevant roll of film, thread it on to a machine with a large screen and then run it through until I came to the appropriate date. It was then a comparatively simple matter to locate the yachting report. All that was then required was to drop a 10cent piece into a slot and out came a photo copy of the report. Many hours were spent at Deakin and much of the resultant material is reproduced in this History.

I therefore desire to express my appreciation, firstly to the Geelong Advertiser for the excellent material I was able to obtain and secondly to the staff in the library at Deakin University for their friendly assistance.

Then from an unexpected source came more help and valuable information. This was from Bert Ferris, an ex-member of Royal Geelong now living in Melbourne who is currently the historian for the Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron, previously Royal St. Kilda. Bert sent me large packages of old newspaper cuttings, letters, photographs, regatta programs and some of his own notes all with some relevance to the Geelong Yacht Club and later Royal Geelong. Bert Ferris's valuable contribution is therefore gratefully acknowledged.

I also acknowledge the assistance given by the Royal Brighton Yacht Club who permitted me to use material relevant to Geelong contained in their excellent Club History written by Chris de Fraga.

I am grateful to Mrs Bronwyn Wilson who assisted in the research of the early years, spending considerable time at the Geelong Public Library making notes and recording appropriate dates for me to pursue at Deakin University. And who later researched the minute books of the R.G.Y.C. Associates.

Ern Armstrong did a painstaking job in putting together the information which enabled me to compile an Appendix on the Dragon Class. Ern's contribution is, therefore, gratefully acknowledged.

Mrs Deirdre Backwell researched the Cadet Squadron for me and produced an excellent compressive set of notes and many photos. Without this much appreciated assistance I would not have been able to write the important appendix on the Cadets.

When I moved into more recent years I was able to tap into the memories of some of our more senior members. Tape recorded interviews and verbal discussions with these people were of invaluable assistance. Among these were life members, David English, Frank Stubbs and Harold Leach as well as Ray Bews, Jim Sim, Peter Mackinlay, Robin Robins and John Taylor Snr. And Past Commodores, Howard Glover, Geoff Wood, Ray Walter, John Collins, Murray McAllister, Ray Abikhair, Ron Moody, Daryl Clarke, Bob Lucas and Guyon Wilson. I cannot forget our present Commodore, Peter Jackson. The willing help which was so readily forthcoming from all of these people is hereby gratefully acknowledged.

Bill Libby helped out with old photographs including the historic reading of the Royal Warrant. Bill's contribution is, therefore, also acknowledged.

I am grateful to Mr. Albert Batty who provided an office at his West Geelong premises in which to store and sort material and records and, if required, to work. This facility was very much appreciated. Also acknowledged is Geelong author, Jack Loney, for his help and advice, and the Blunt Family of East Geelong who made their family history available. I cannot speak too highly of my good friend, Mrs Val Mills, who so painstakingly and accurately typed the manuscript. Much of this work was done from my almost illegible scribble and some from tape recordings. Val's contribution was of inestimable value.

Finally I must acknowledge the assistance given by my wife, Pat, who patiently suffered my constant muddle in our study over the four year period of research and writing, and then, painstakingly and meticulously assisted with the proof reading.

If there is anyone whom I have overlooked I apologise for not mentioning them individually. But during the period of writing I received a lot of assistance from a great number of people, and for this I am truly grateful.

Also, there are doubtless some facets of the Club history which have, without intention, not been covered. If this offends then it is regretted. But I would point out that, from time to time, through the medium of the Club Journal, Seachest I have appealed for historical information and photographic material. Response to these appeals was significant but, without doubt, by no means comprehensive.

Jack Champ. May 1988.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the many Yachtsmen, both past and present, who played the foundations for the magnificent club we enjoy today