



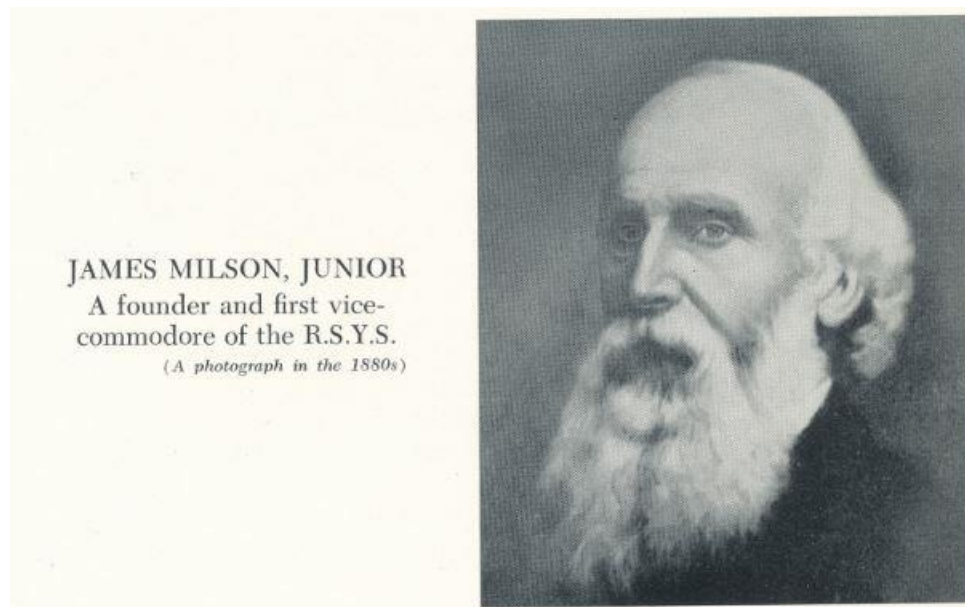
## ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

**"Read all about it!"**

**The origins and early history of the Squadron – as reported in the Press of the day**

### **Part 7: An interview James Milson Jnr., our first Vice Commodore.**

He served as Commodore for six months when William Walker, our first Commodore, left the colony for England in April 1867. The Annual General Meeting was not until August so James Milson filled in until then. Have a look at the Board in the entrance to the club and you will see his name with only 1867 against it.



### **Saturday, 30th January, 1897 – The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser Among the Ancient Mariners.**

There is always something particularly interesting about an ancient mariner, "with long, grey beard and glittering eye," associated with the type ever since Coleridge wrote of a specimen. The ruddy skin, white hair, and clear eye suggest the breezes and the surges of the sea, and the "glittering eye" lights up with recollections of many a buffeting from many a gale, bringing keen relish with it and leaving legacy of good health behind it. The old yachtsman shares many of the characteristics of the ancient mariner. He is marked out from among his fellows by that look of freshness which seems always associated with the sea. He has a brain clear of the dross which clouds that of so many other men, whose pursuits have been less wholesome, when they have passed the three score years and ten of the allotted span, and a memory full of incident of thrilling race and gallant cruise. It is when one finds a veteran like Mr. James Milson, well up in his eighties, going from the North Shore to Bondi daily for his swim — often before breakfast — and meets the other hearty veterans of Sydney yachting that the wholesomeness of it is brought home to us with added force. When one talks of the foundation of the yachting of Australia amongst Sydney yachtsmen certain names immediately crop up. "Oh, So-and-so can tell you of that," and "you must really see So-and-so." So when this number was contemplated a representative of the Mail hied him forth amongst the ancient mariners and many



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of the hearty old men who have been so intimately associated with the yachting of the past, and saw "So-and-so."

### **Mr. Milson's Many Cruises.**

Mr. James Milson is the doyen of Australian yachtsmen. At 82 he is hale and hearty. Yet in 1837 he won at the first Anniversary Day regatta in the *Sophia*, and exactly 50 years later his son — Mr. Alfred Milson — won the first intercolonial race in the *Waitangi*. Already two generations have been Sydney yachtsmen, and a third shows every promise of following in the footsteps of the sires.

### **The First Yachts.**

Mr. Milson remembers regattas as far back as '34. They were then got up among the ships' boats, which used to be given temporary keels to increase their stability, and the races were both rowing and sailing races of crew against crew. The first yacht on Port Jackson was a pleasure boat owned by Mr. Robert Campbell, senior, of Campbell's Wharf, in 1827. She was an open boat of about three tons, with three "sliding gunter" sails, a type of sail then general, but which has practically disappeared from the harbour now. With a large sail laced to the gunter yard, these boats could get very close to the wind, and they carried also a jib. The next yacht, the *Eclipse*, was owned by another of the clan, Robert Campbell, Tertius of Bligh-street. It was about twice the size of the other, and a very superior type of boat, and was kept exclusively for pleasure sailing, as there were no boats fit to race her. The third pleasure boat was the *Petrel*, built for Messrs. Thomas Lord and Evans, of the Bank of N. S. Wales. She was a schooner, built by Brown, in Neutral Bay, with a nice cabin — the first sea going yacht in Sydney, and in which the owner used to go down to Botany.

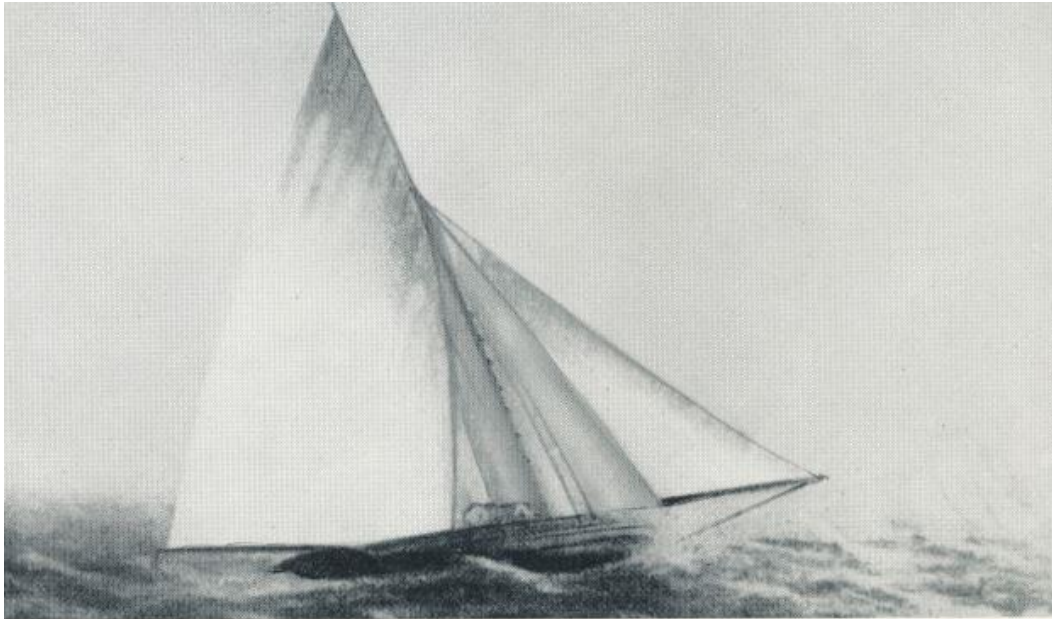
In 1836 there were several small yachts afloat, and an informal association of yachtsmen, who flew a flag much like that of the Royal Sydney. It was the first approach to a club in Australasia. The boats were all open boats, what were known as "first-class sailing boats" in the regattas of the day. The association consisted of Messrs. Burton Bradley, with the *Swallow*; John Ritchie, *Ariel*; James Milson, *Sophia*; Elyard, *Wave*; and George Macpherson with a fifth boat. Mr. Bradley was commodore. These were wont to meet before a holiday and go down the Middle Harbour. Mr. Milson says that Good Friday and Christmas Day were the only recognised public holidays then

### **The First Anniversary Regatta.**

In 1837 Mr. Milson entered the *Sophia* for the first Anniversary regatta, got up to celebrate the 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the colony. There were nine boats in the first-class boat race, including the *North Star*, which, built in 1835, for Mr. Harry Sawyer, was the crack of her day — a sliding-gunter open-boat. She carried off the prizes in two or three occasions, including the regatta of 1838, but at this anniversary regatta, the *Sophia* won. The other races were the second-class open-boats, in which three raced; whaleboats, six; four-oared gigs, four; and one for watermen's boats. Locke was the builder of the *North Star* and the *Sophia*.



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### JAMES MILSON'S *FRIENDSHIP*

Winner of the Anniversary Day Regatta Cup for six years in succession,  
1842-47

*(From a painting by an unidentified artist)*

### **New Boats and New Ways.**

Mr. Milson gave up yachting for a time. The regatta of 1840 was notable as the first appearance of the famous *Friendship* — the ill-fated *Haidee* of Mr. Thornton had also meantime been built. The *Friendship*, a 12-ton decked boat, was built by Mr. Green, up the river. He intended her to carry ballast and cruise; but her great pace led to Mr. Milson's father purchasing her in 1841, and Mr. James Milson resumed racing with her. She carried all before her, and finally was fitted with a cabin and used for cruising on the coast and in the harbour. In her fastest days she was sliding-gunter rigged; but Mr. Milson's alterations included cutter rig, and were not improvements in the matter of speed, and Mr. Thornton's *Champion* beat her on her first appearance as a cutter. It was now that the days of the schooner arrived. The *Petrel*, owned by Messrs. Hill and Wyer, and already mentioned, was the first. The next yacht of consequence was the 40-ton schooner *Pearl*, of Messrs. Randolph Want and J. H. Challis (the University benefactor). She had fine cabin accommodation and extended the cruises to Wollongong and to the Hawkesbury, where the yachtsmen went kangarooing. The *Pearl* didn't race, as there was nothing to pit against her.

### **The First Imported Yachts.**

In '55 Mr. Milson returned from England with the *Mischief*, a 12-ton cutter. She was the first English yacht in Port Jackson, and marked a completely new departure in style and rig, so far as the colonies were concerned, and her sharp bow was a source of wonderment to the local yachtsmen, always used to round bows before. She had won many races in England and continued her victorious career here for many years. After the *Mischief*, Mr. Burt brought the *Surprise* from England, and another notable boat was the *Presto* of 2 1/2 tons, which beat the *Mischief*. The *Presto* was the first centreboard yacht in the harbour. She was an American built boat, a broad shallow craft of the skimming dish order. The informal association already referred to, Mr. Milson says, drifted apart, and in '56-7 there was a



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formal club formed, with Mr. Hutchison Brown, police magistrate, as commodore. Then came the Sydney Yacht Club, and after it the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron, with Mr. Howell, an old English yachtsman, as secretary. Mr. Milson, as is well-known, had a leading part in the formation of the squadron, which boldly applied for the honour of the white ensign, but got instead the blue.

### **The Advent of an Era.**

The next notable step was the advent of the first Era, a name since then the most familiar amongst Sydney yachtsman. She was a 25-ton cutter and was brought from England in frames and built here. The gunter rig was entirely abandoned at this time. The gunter rig, with its enormous boom, which always dipped as the boat rolled at sea, and on such occasions nearly jerked the mast out as the boat recovered, was found awkward for this reason. In her first race the Era met the Annie Ogle, a cutter built by Captain Rountree specially to beat her. It was a nearly dead calm, and the Era, rigged for sea going, was beaten; but in the Balmain regattas, which began about this time, the boats met again in a stiff nor-easter, and the Ogle was badly beaten.

### Points to Note:

- The Perseverance Trophy in the cabinet at the club is a model of the first vessel built and launched by Robert Cambell. Campbell's Wharf was on the western side of Circular Quay and the name is still commemorated today. Robert Campbell, Tertius, means the Third Robert Campbell.
- The reference to the ill-fated "Haidee" will be revealed in a later instalment of these essays