



What's in a Picture?

By Rose Docker (Archivist) and John Maclurcan

Rose: In 2021 Robert Baker approached the RSYs offering to donate some copies of 19th century sailing photographs. He'd come into possession of some 300 photographs from his late mother and was told that they had all been taken by his great grandfather, Victor Cohen, in the late 1880s. The original collection of photographs were in three albums and had been gifted to the NSW State Library.

Accompanying the photos was a spreadsheet which listed any caption information. One particular image was captioned: VC W S 017 - *Iolanthe* rounding Bradley's Head.



John: Investigation in *Sydney Sails*, the RSYs Centenary Book, shows the photo, albeit without the same clarity, with the caption "Sirocco and Iolanthe". There are actually 4 yachts visible in the photo if you look carefully, *Sirocco* lying second and *Iolanthe* in the foreground, trailing the fleet. Using the angle of the wind and the yacht names, I was able to search through the document stored in Archives containing newspaper articles from the 1880s and the following was located:

Saturday, 25th February, 1888 – The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser

Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron, Handicap race for Lord Brassey's Cup, with the entrance fees for second boat, was resailed, as it was not finished on the previous Saturday. Prince Alfred Yacht Club handicap race for Commodore's prize of £15, and a sweep of a guinea a boat for the second prize. The same boats entered for both these races, and the course was the same, so they are taken together. The course was from line between starter's boat and H.M.S. Nelson's buoy, down to and round a boat off Long Reef, back round Fort Denison, thence round lightship and Sow and Pigs and Shark Island, and back to flagboat off Fort Macquarie. The steamer Port Jackson, for the R. S. Y. S., followed the race, in charge of Mr. A. Fairfax, and the Charlotte Fenwick, in charge of Mr. Fred.



Bennett, for the P. A. Y. C., both having a number of members and their friends aboard. The entries and handicaps were as follows: —

Yacht.	Owner.	Rating.	Handicaps.	
			RSYS	PAYC
Era	A. G. Milson	40-0	Scratch	Scratch
Sirocco	E. W. Knox	14-0	30 minutes	35 minutes
Iolanthe	W. M. Maclardy	7.9	30 minutes	34 minutes
Assegai	W. P. Smairl	8.2	50 minutes	56 minutes
Sao	F. Milford, M.D.	8.3	50 minutes	56 minutes

Iolanthe and Assegai carried club topsails, the others squareheaders. At 1 o'clock, with wind E.S.E. and ebb tide, Assegai was first over the line on the starboard tack, followed by Era and Sao. Sirocco was 45 seconds behind, with Iolanthe after her. **Era was favoured by the wind, and was able to clear Bradley's, but all the others had to make a short tack and coming on the starboard stretch the head was passed by Era at 1h. 11m. 25s.; Sirocco, 1h. 14m. 40s.; Sao, 1h. 15m.; Assegai, 1h. 16m.; and Iolanthe, 1h. 17m. 30s.** Sheets were eased, and Era and Iolanthe set jib topsails. Off Watson's Bay the clew of Era's big jib topsail went, and it was stowed, and a smaller one sent aloft. South Reef was cleared by Era at 1h. 25m.; Sirocco, 1h. 32m.; Sao, 1h. 33m. 35s.; Assegai, 1h. 37m.; and Iolanthe 1h. 38m.

Soon afterwards the eye of Assegai's weather rigging went, the mast snapped, about 4ft. from the deck, and everything went to leeward. She was towed into Camp Cove by the Charlotte Fenwick. On getting outside, Sirocco and Sao sent up jib topsails, and off Tumbledown Iolanthe set balloon jib. Off Manly, Era tried to set a bowsprit spinnaker, but it set foul of the jib and was taken in. Jib topsails were taken in, and the boat at Long Reef was rounded by Era at 2h. 8m. 42s.; Sirocco 2h. 23m. 45s.; Sao, 2h. 28m. 15s.; and Iolanthe, 2h. 37m. 15s.

On coming round, the Iolanthe's topmast went at the masthead, depriving her of any chance she might still have. At North Head jib topsails were set, and at Bradley's Era set spinnaker square and Sao squaresail. The Fort was rounded by Era at 3h. 37m. 30s.; Sirocco, 4h. 7m. 25s.; Sao, 4h. 15m. 32s.

So Sirocco was just inside her Royal handicap, and Sao had still about 12 minutes to spare. All cleared Bradley's and set jib topsails. Coming round the lightship, Sirocco and Sao took in theirs, but reset them; but off Long Point Sirocco's burst and had to be taken in. Shark Island was rounded by Era at 4h. 16m., Sirocco at 4h. 52m. 36s., outside her time for both races; and Sao at 5h. 2m., with 4 minutes in hand. All set spinnakers, but the wind, being very light, prevented Sao from saving her time for Lord Brassey's cup. The finish was as follows: — Era, 4h. 35m. 15s.; Sirocco, 5h. 16m.; Sao, 5h. 27m. Era thus takes Lord Brassey's cup with 1 minute 45 seconds to spare from Sao, and 10 minutes 45 seconds from Sirocco, Sao second. Sao wins the P. A. Y. C. Commodore's prize, saving her time by 4 minutes 15 seconds from Era, Era taking second prize.

John: It all matched. Therefore, we have dated the photo to either the 18th or 25th of February, 1888, and we believe the photo was taken from the Charlotte Fenwick. If you look carefully at Bradley's Head, you will note there is a building visible among the trees. Note also the dinghy with 3 passengers paddling along the shore.

Rose: The collection also included a photo of the launching of the yacht 'Era' in 1887 - built for A J Milson by Walter Reeks. There is a strikingly similar image which appears to be taken on the same day, held by the Australian National Maritime Museum as part of the Tim McCormick collection.