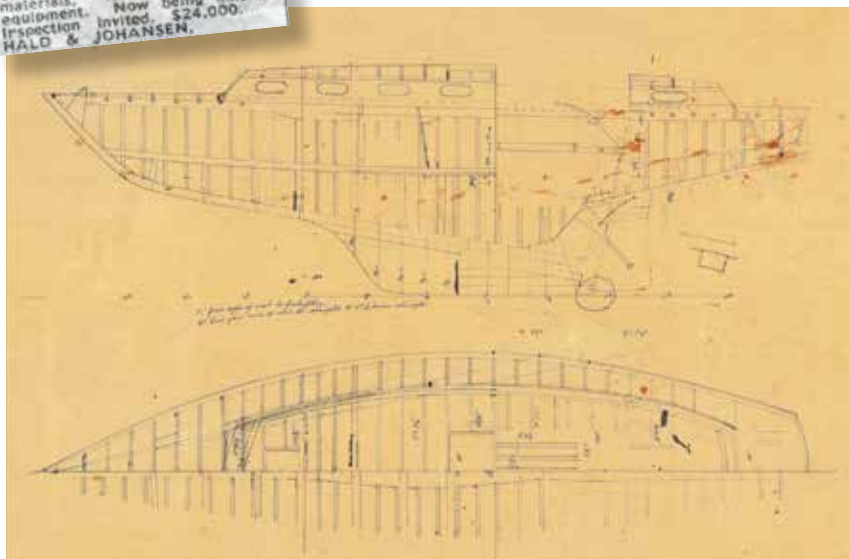


## MORAG BHEAG AND MARATEA

BY JOHN MACLURCAN  
AND ALEX BURT

Two Life Members each own two special yachts. John Maclurcan races *Morag Bheag*, launched in 1969 by his father Donald Maclurcan, and Alex Burt cruises *Maratea*, launched by his father Sandy Burt in 1970. Both boats were built from the same set of plans but with subtle modifications. Here is their story.

**John:** At the beginning of 1969, my father was looking for a slightly larger boat than his *Mhairi Dhu*, a 31 foot Blythe Spirit. Armed with an inheritance from his spinster aunt, Marian Kenna, he discovered a small ad in the *Manly Daily*.



*Maratea.*

The yacht was undercover at the workshop of Hald and Johansen, Danish boat builders who were building her for themselves but had decided to close their business and return to Denmark. Dad viewed the boat, then rang Bob Miller to advise him. They went to Brookvale and Bob said, "Donald, buy it; she has a beautiful shape."

The yacht was a 1963 centre-cockpit Illingworth and Primrose design, light displacement for the time and about 70% complete. Dad did the deal, designed many of the fittings and finishing details, and she was launched on 2 May 1969.

*Morag Bheag* is a stripped planked hull of Honduras Mahogany; the planking is convex/concave fitted, nailed and glued. Her coach-house is teak, and the deck is plywood and sheathed. Her dead weight is about six tons. The name was chosen by my mother. It is from the Lewis Bridal Song (Isle of Lewis, Scotland) and refers to 'Little Morag', the bride who came sailing.

Within months of the boat's launch, Dad was

approached by two keen yachtsmen to buy her – the late Tony Pearson and the late Sandy Burt.

**Alex:** My family moved to Sirius Cove in the mid-1950s. We had our own boatshed and slipway. The only yachts in the Cove at the time were *Ranger*, owned by Cliff Gale; Gordon Ingate's *Caprice of Huon*; Lloyd Thornton's *April*; and the Saalfelds' *Nina*. Shortly afterwards, I started sailing on *Ranger* which in turn led me to Roger Gale and ultimately to my many years of involvement with the RSYS Youth Sailing programme.

Dad's first yacht was *Didgeridoo*, a 33ft canoe-sterned Albatross, which was purchased shortly after moving to Sirius Cove. We successfully sailed her with both the RSYS and CYCA, but he decided he wanted a yacht more suitable for cruising and saw *Morag Bheag*. He was so impressed with the design that he was able to convince Donald to give him a copy of the plans in exchange for a case of red wine.

Dad took the plans to the Quilkey Brothers at Taren Point along with his hand-written amended specifications. She was constructed of three layers of cold moulded Oregon and the interior fitted out in mahogany; she weighed in under five tons. *Maratea* was launched in September 1970. Mum and Dad were both New Zealanders and the name is Maori for 'red snapper.'

**John:** *Morag Bheag* was quickly put to work, racing every season from 1969 to 1991, participating in more than 20 consecutive Squadron Annual Cruises and short ocean racing from 1979. Every Easter and Christmas holidays, she was cruised at Pittwater for many weeks. My mother appreciated the light airy cabin and convenient layout. The yacht was large enough to be comfortable but small enough to be manageable.

**Alex:** *Maratea* was raced against *Morag Bheag* in the RSYS No 2 division from 1971 to 1976 and separately in the CYCA Winter Series. During this period, my wife Carolyn and I would take our four boys aboard each Christmas and school holidays to Broken Bay, rafting with other yachting friends. These holidays have remained an indelible memory for our family.

Following Mum's stroke in 1975, Dad was forced to sell the family house because she was unable to manage the numerous steps. This led to the sale of *Maratea* in 1976, the buyer taking her to Hobart. This was a short break because she was put back on the market soon after, resulting in my sister Susan and her husband David Jenkins buying her back in March 1978.

After her return to the family, she was berthed at Church Point for 26 years and the last 17 years at Cottage Point. During this period, she returned to Hobart on two occasions and since 2005 has cruised in Tasmania for almost three years.

As a result of the extensive cruising, the rigging has been replaced three times, the mast twice

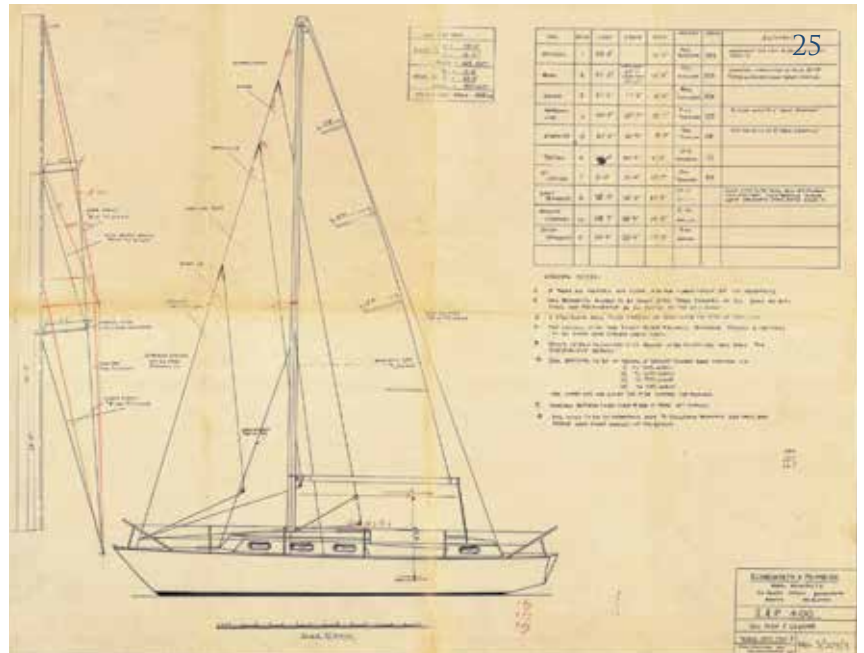
and numerous sails replaced; then more recently a Ken Beashel roller reefing headsail and change from the furling prop to a larger fixed three-bladed prop to improve the boat speed through fast running waters. A new Kubota inboard motor was installed, this being her third engine. Also added for long-distance cruising were extra water tanks, refrigeration, a bespoke folding table for the cockpit, a sailing dinghy tender designed by Colin Beashel and built to fit on the foredeck, plus all the goodies from my sister's accoutrement shop.

**John:** In 1991, my father let it be known that the boat would be going on the market as his own health was deteriorating (age 73). I urged him to give me a chance to take her on, and so the transfer of stewardship began. It was not easy. In spite of my own ocean racing experience, I had never been permitted to take the boat out so I was put through a trial by fire. In 1999, six months before my father died, he insisted I purchase *Morag Bheag* outright. The boat was valued, and ownership eventually transferred.

In the meantime, I had started, as my budget would allow, an extensive and painstaking renovation. While she was well maintained, she was showing signs of age. Progressively, broken ribs were repaired, the keelson was beefed up, a more efficient rudder was installed and an extra floor placed in the aft cabin to strap the boat together. This was all done under the care and supervision of the late Kevin Allen of Hudson Boat Builders.

The culmination of all this work was the installation in 2015 of a new mast, two feet taller in the main-sail but lighter. Not only were the proportions of the boat improved but the light air reaching performance, always a weak spot, was enhanced considerably.

In 2021, the yacht continues to battle around the race-course, have its share of successes and

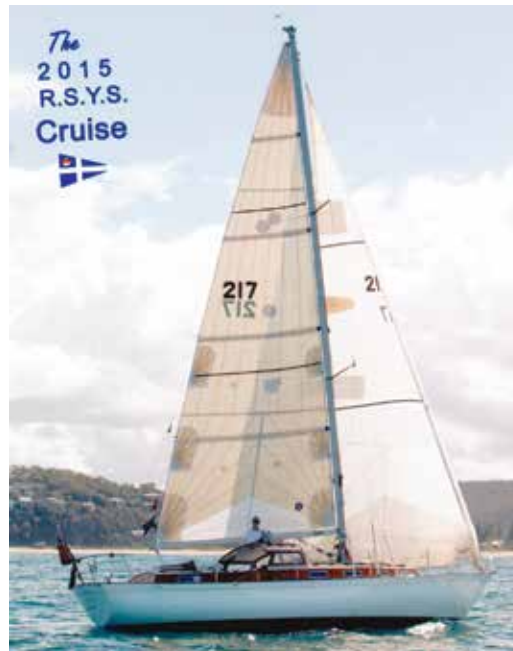


give tremendous pleasure to another generation of the Maclurcan clan.

**Alex:** In February 2021, David Jenkins advised me that he wished to sell *Maratea* because he intended to spend more time in Tasmania. Under our mutual understanding should he ever decide to sell, I was given first option to buy in order for it to stay in the family. The timing was bad. I had just purchased a 40ft V-bottom Halvorsen in conjunction with one of my sons, David, which we have lovingly restored. But what the hell – may as well have two classic wooden boats!

However, I received the full support of my family and it is my intention to move *Maratea* to Lavender Bay where I can keep an eye on her from my bedroom balcony and hopefully race her in the Squadron Twilight Series against her sister ship.

John and I both share a common aim to keep our yachts in our families for as long as possible. ⚓



*Morag Bheag.*

Far left: *Maratea*  
Left: *Morag Bheag.*