



ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

Art Treasures of the Squadron

'Morna' by Peter Yeomans 1993

Watercolour on paper

43.5 x 70 cm

Hangs in the hallway of the Carabella Dining Room



This is the story of *Morna*, an outstanding yacht, built in 1913 for Sir Alexander MacCormick, a brilliant Scottish surgeon and a past Commodore of the Squadron. She was later owned by a radio manufacturer named Sir Claude Plowman who loved competitive sailing and entered her in three consecutive Sydney to Hobart Races from 1946 to 1948. *Morna* took line honours (crossing the finishing line first) in all three of those races to become one of only two boats to do so in three consecutive races in the 78 year history of the race. Apart from the painting, her legacy at the Squadron is represented by two sterling silver cups – one originally presented to the Squadron by Sir Alexander MacCormick in 1913, and the other won by *Morna* in 1947 which was presented to the Squadron in 1978.

Morna was a gaff cutter rig designed by William Fife III and was built by Morrison and Sinclair of Long Nose Point in Balmain, Sydney. She was 65ft in length, 85ft high mast and 13ft beam. She was never rated as a 12 Metre but her design probably came from the First International Rule developed for racing yachts. She was named after one of Sir Alexander MacCormick's daughters and used primarily as a day sailor.



ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

Sir Alexander MacCormick was born on 31 July 1856 at North Knapdale, Argyleshire, Scotland, son of Archibald MacCormick, a farmer and coastal trader, and his wife Mary, née Campbell. He was educated at Lochgilphead School and studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh (M.B., Ch.M., 1880) with (Sir) Thomas Anderson Stuart and (Sir) Arthur Conan Doyle. He was one of the first surgeons to adopt Lister's methods of antiseptics in surgery. When Thomas Anderson Stuart came to Sydney to found a medical school at the University of Sydney in 1883, McCormick joined him in July as demonstrator in anatomy and physiology. In 1885 he was appointed honorary assistant surgeon at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. In 1890 he was appointed senior surgeon and lecturer at Sydney University. His skills as a surgeon and outstanding diagnostician, as well as introduction of Listerian antiseptic methods for operations - now regarded as essential - led to his professional success and widespread recognition.



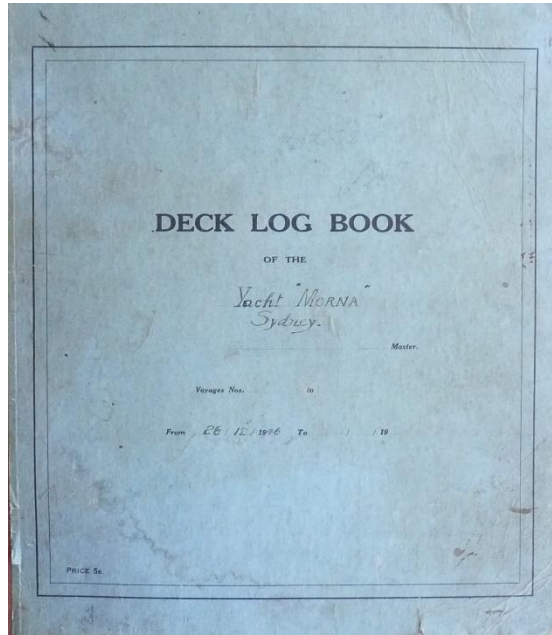
Sir Alexander MacCormick

In about 1941, Claude (later Sir) Plowman bought *Morna* from (Sir) Frank Packer. As a senior member of the Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania, Plowman was prominent in the 1945 discussions that led to the establishment of the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race and entered her in the 1946, 1947 and 1948 events. In the 1948 race, *Morna* carried a crew of 16 (including a shipwright and specialised cook) in 'luxurious comfort', as well as tools and materials for repairs and sufficient provisions for a month at sea. His attention to detail was legendary - every crew member was issued a typed copy of his duties to be carried out before and during the race. Just a few hours after he crossed the finish line on New Year's Eve 1948 his knighthood (recommended by the Tasmanian Government) was announced.



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An account by an unidentified crew member of the second race to Hobart in 1947 describes the glorious start on Sydney Harbour thus: 'Everything out that could float and every vantage point crowded'. During the passage near Montague Island, they received an amorous message from a charming young lady passenger on the cruiser *SS Ormiston* but their signaler was too cold 'to carry on the pretty exchange of messages from our end.'



Morna's logbook, dated 26 12 1946

The logbook consists of two pages, 19 and 20, with the following data:

Page 19: DECK LOG. Yacht MORNA From Sydney to Montague Island & Return Sunday 5.10.1947

Time	Wind	Direction	Force	Sea	Remarks
0800	N x E	W x S W	27-31	17-2	Harder head abeam
0830	N x E S W	Variable	27-30	17-2	200 YL ahead stopped almost to color
0900	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
0930	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
1000	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
1030	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
1100	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
1130	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
1200	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
1230	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
1300	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
1330	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
1400	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
1430	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
1500	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
1530	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
1600	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
1630	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
1700	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
1730	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
1800	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
1830	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
1900	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
1930	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
2000	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
2030	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
2100	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
2130	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
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3030	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
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3130	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
3200	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
3230	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
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10000	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	

Page 20: DECK LOG. Yacht MORNA From Sydney To Hobart Friday 26.12.1947

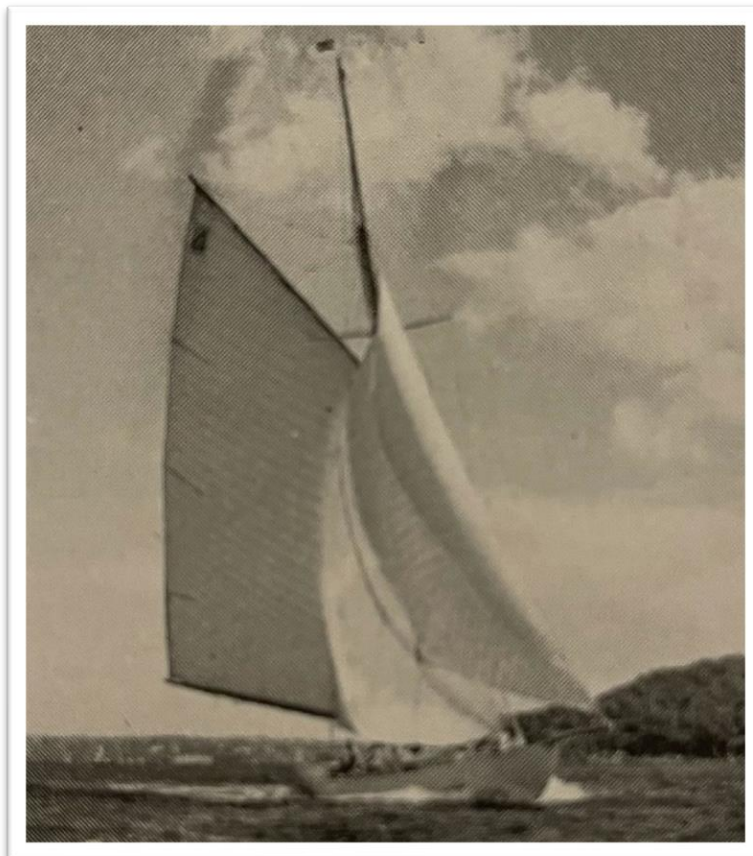
Time	Wind	Direction	Force	Sea	Remarks
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2600	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
2630	N x E	Variable	27-30	17-2	
2700	N x E	Variable	27-30		



ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

Another account by David Hebden in the December 1953 edition of the RSYS Logbook gave a vivid description of sailing *Morna*:

'In 1953 a navy pinnacle clocked *Morna* on the harbour at 14 knots on a reach with the big ballooner up. Sir Claude was not a large man and he frequently needed two men sitting behind him heaving on the iron tiller to keep her own course. At 13 knots the underwater cavitation was such, that the bow would dig a hole and fall into it as the displaced water slid under the stern and lifted it up. This alarming trait stuck the bowsprit well under the water. At sea I've been buried up to my chest standing out on the point, hanging on with my teeth to the upper forestay whilst fighting down jib topsail, a sail set to get her rail down to it on the wind, and thus lengthen the waterline. Life rails weren't invented then and the only winch on the boat was on the fore deck for the jib topsail sheet, everything else, halliards and sheets were heaved in by hand with 'handy billies' (block and tackle).'



Morna under sail

In 1954 *Morna* was bought by the Livingston family and renamed *Kurrewa IV*. She remained in Sydney and between 1954 and 1960 she entered six more Sydney to Hobart races and achieved the fastest times in four of those races. Her resulting record of seven line honours victories would stand for more than 50 years until *Wild Oats XI* won line honours for the eighth time in 2014. Following her



ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

last Sydney to Hobart Race in 1960, *Morna / Kurrewa IV* was laid up and bought by a new owner in 1977. Last reports suggested that she was waiting for a restoration.

Morna is painted from the point of view low down at the stern in profile. She is partially obscured, which concentrates the interest in the lower part of the mast, boom, deck and stern. She is sailing downwind in Sydney Harbour on a starboard tack towards Fort Denison in the distance. She is depicted on the harbour of the 1920s before the familiar icons of the Opera House and the Harbour Bridge were built. There is another yacht in the distance which could mean she is racing or cruising in the harbour with a crew of eight. She is creating her own stern wave in fairly light winds and flat seas. The painting is a delicate watercolour, creating an atmosphere of quiet contemplation on the water. The dark tones of the water and mast help to emphasise the beautiful, sleek lines of the white hull and white sails. The blues and greens of the ocean are subtly reflected in the lower hull and mainsail using greens, blues and pale purples. The crew are captured in various seated poses on the railing or in the cockpit, with one crewman standing and flying the spinnaker. They are all keeping watch and there is a common sense of purpose.

Peter Yeomans wrote to the Club on 4 May 1993 as follows:

‘Dear Mr Heming,

I was a member of the Squadron during the 1980s; living next to the club in Holdsworth Avenue, mooring out in front, my youngest son sailing Lasers on Sundays; my daughter married in the Clubhouse garden....pleasant times.

As a way of marking the association with the Squadron, I would like to give this watercolour of mine, painted of the yacht *Morna*. She was owned by six members of the Squadron that I can think of and may still be on the register. This watercolour represents her original ownership by Sir Alexander MacCormick in the 1920s.

Some members of the Club and Committee are aware that I have now become a reasonably well known marine artist and may remember having seen the large drawing of the *James Craig* which was on display in the dining room for the last Sydney Maritime James Craig Dinner.’

Peter Yeomans was a Fellow of the Australian Society of Marine Artists. He exhibited in the inaugural exhibition in 1997 and worked hard to establish the Society with renowned model maker Dean Claflin cv V OAM.

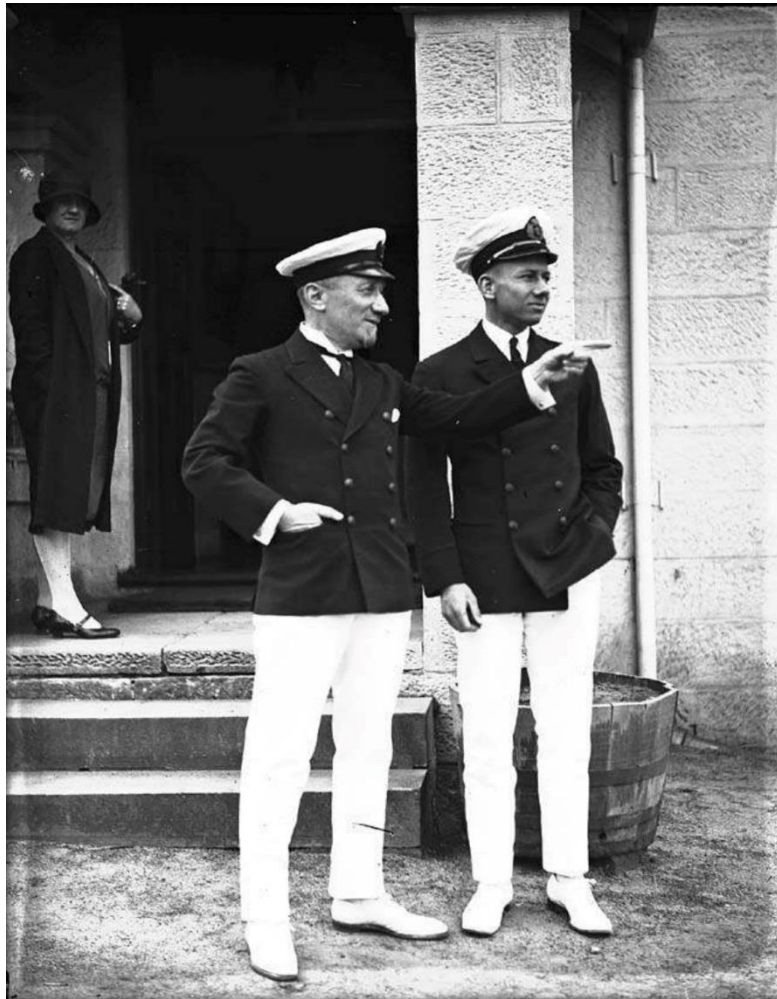
The Morna Cup was originally presented to the Squadron in 1913. It is nowadays awarded to the winner of one of three short ocean races that the Squadron conducts each season - the others being the Gascoigne Cup and the Milson Cup. The event attracts strong fleets as they are part of the Cruising Yacht Club and Royal Sydney Yacht Club Squadron’s short ocean pointscore series.

Since 1913 Squadron yachts raced for the Morna Cup each summer season except during the Great War, until the 1927-29 season when *Rawhiti*, owned by Michel Francois Albert, won it outright.



ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

In 1971 Albert's son Alexis (later Sir Alexis) François Albert, Commodore of the Squadron from 1971-75, donated the Morna Cup back to the Squadron. He felt its rightful place was in the clubhouse, something his late father would have wished.



Alexis Albert (on right) and his father Frank Albert in front of the RSYS main entrance in full Club dress in the 1920's. Photo courtesy of Samuel J. Hood Studio ANMM Collection

Subsequently in 1978, a second trophy that has also become known as the 'Morna Cup' was donated by Claude Plowman's family to the Club. This second trophy was originally won by *Morna* with Claude Plowman at the helm for her line honours win in the 1947 Sydney to Hobart Race. It has been used as a trophy in Division 4 inshore racing.



ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON



The 1913 Morna Cup



The 1947 Morna Cup

Morna was an outstanding racing boat in her era, winning a total of seven Sydney to Hobart races on line honours - including three in succession - at a time when crew sailed without life lines and in a boat that had a very deep displacement into large waves. Peter Yeomans has captured her sleek lines and the atmosphere of quiet concentration on Sydney Harbour in the 1920s. The Morna Cup is a fitting perpetual tribute to such an inspirational yacht.

Robyn Coleman
Exhibiting Member Royal Art Society

Acknowledgements and thanks

The RSYs Archives

Sydney Sails

Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron 1862-2000

RSYS Logbook Sesquicentenary Edition

RSYS Logbook Dec 1953

Australian Dictionary of Biography

Australian Society of Marine Artists Newsletters June 2020 and April 2021

Trophy Register-Margaret Carney

Photographs

“Morna” image by Robyn Coleman



ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

Sir Alexander MacCormick courtesy of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons Museum and Archives

'Morna' log book by Isabel Wartho

'Morna' under sail Sydney Sails

Alexis Albert (on right) with his father Frank in front the RSY main entrance in full Club dress in the 1920s. Photographer Samuel J Hood studios courtesy ANMM collection

Morna Cup 1913 and Morna Cup 1947 images by Isabel Wartho