



ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

**Art Treasures of the Squadron**

***Shamrock V* in the Solent – 1930**

**Oil on Canvas 75 x 60cm**

**By Peter Anderson 1986**

**Kurraba reading room**



*Shamrock V* in the Solent - 1930

This painting depicts the first of the magnificent J Class yachts ever built and was painted for the Squadron in 1986 by Peter Anderson. It hangs above the fireplace in the Kurraba reading room.



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The story of *Shamrock V* and her painting involves two great adventurer artists and friends, two highly competitive races to develop new technologies for both the best racing yachts in the America's Cup and the fastest light aircraft in the world at the time and the attraction down the years of *Shamrock V* and her near sister-ship *Endeavour* to Elizabeth Meyer, a very enterprising and well connected woman who was instrumental in the restoration of both these famous J-boats.

Peter Anderson was generous enough to speak to me about the process of his painting and life on 24 July 2021.

Peter was attracted to the sleek lines and sailing ability of *Shamrock V*, the first British yacht to be built to the new J Class rule adopted in 1929 for the 15<sup>th</sup> America's Cup and the fifth and last British challenger for the Cup commissioned by Sir Thomas Lipton. Built at vast expense in the middle of the Great Depression, the J Class yachts were considered the peak racers of their era and were built under the specifications of Nathanael Herreshoff's Universal Rule which had rated the performance of racing yachts since 1903. Even by today's standards, they are very large and powerful yachts with the capacity to inspire awe in all who see them sailing.

The artist has placed the yacht at the level of the low horizon with the focus on the huge heeling mainsail. The line of sight in the painting highlights her sleek lines and her superb rig. *Shamrock V* measured 120 feet in length. These huge boats were built from wood, with mahogany planking over steel frames to support their immense displacement of 146 tonnes. She was the first British challenger for the America's Cup to carry the Bermuda rig (a fore-and-aft rig with a triangular mainsail). The original J Class yachts carried 165 ft (50 m) masts, but they suffered from frequent dismastings. As a consequence, the J Class rule was amended in 1937 to force rigs to weigh a minimum of 6,400 lb. so as to prevent rigging failures. Innovations drawn from the aeronautical industry such as wind instruments, rod rigging, multiple sets of spreaders and riveted aluminum masts were also adopted to overcome this problem.

Upon closer inspection, a small S6 seaplane can be seen diagonally opposite the yacht in the right upper hand corner. This is a reference to a sea-plane race called the Schneider Cup that was originally announced in 1912 by Jacques Schneider, a French financier, balloonist and aircraft enthusiast, who offered a prize of approximately £1,000. The race was held 12 times between 1913 and 1931 and became a contest for pure speed between Europe and America, encouraging technical advances in aerodynamics and engine design. The contests were very popular and some attracted crowds of over 200,000 spectators. The race was flown over the Solent in the UK and won in both 1929 and 1931 by the British built S6 seaplane and its derivative the S6A. These Super Marine South Hampton flying boats were built nearby on the Solent during the interwar era. The streamlined shape and the low drag, liquid-cooled engine pioneered by these Schneider Trophy designs ultimately led to the famous British WWII Supermarine Spitfire fighter aircraft.

In contrast, the challenge of *Shamrock V* in the 1930 America's Cup was doomed to failure, despite doing well on the British Regatta circuit. The Americans mounted a remarkable response with four defenders, despite the huge cost in depression-hit America. *Shamrock V* was plagued by bad luck with gear failure and haunted by one of the most ruthless skippers in America's Cup history, Harold



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Vanderbilt. By placing the yacht and seaplane diagonally opposite in the painting, the observer can almost feel the tension between the sailing and aviation contest outcomes!

Interestingly, the British aviation industrialist Sir Thomas Sopwith acquired *Shamrock V* in 1931. Already a keen yachtsman, Sopwith bought her as a trial horse to gain J Class racing experience. He would also add his own aeronautical expertise and materials knowledge to build and perfect his challenger for the 16th America's Cup, *Endeavour*.

*Shamrock V* is depicted carving through the famous Solent, the cradle of sailing and a body of water notorious for testing sailors with its unpredictable winds, double tides and shallow draught. The light is fairly bright, emphasising the dark mainsail against the white clouds. The S6 seaplane is also partially in white cloud to pinpoint it. There is a fairly brisk breeze on the Solent creating white water and beautiful green/blue water painted in thick oil strokes with excellent movement from upper right to lower left of the waves consistent with the set of *Shamrock's* sails close hauled on port tack. One or two boats are in the distance suggesting a training day sail rather than a race. There are also a limited number of crew, normally 25-30 crew would be required for a race. The painting shows excellent draftsmanship with accuracy and attention to the rigging, sails and deck equipment. The subject was taken from Beken photography, then compositionally adjusted to suit the artist's spacing and sizing.

Born on the waterfront north of Brisbane in an 'Old Queenslander' house in 1956, Peter grew up sailing dinghies, skim boards, Oyster yachts and more. Peter Anderson was drawn to art by his family traditions and his love of drawing images from life. The family library was packed with wonderful sailing, voyaging and expedition/explorer books. Peter said:

"I was brainwashed early on (boat wise.) My father had all the early Beken on Cowes photographic books and the three volume set of the Jack Spurlings 'Sail' (wonderful square riggers in the era of sail) but it was the black and white Beken of Cowes photo studies of the big (1930s) J Class yachts that really caught my attention, and it was these that inspired the *Shamrock V* and *Velsheda* paintings.

"Aviation was covered by books, starting with Biggles of course. Aviation is an ultimate version of sailing - gliding that is. Another mentor in my art and life (apart from very supportive parents) was a favourite uncle who survived WW2 as a fighter pilot in the UK and was later a Squadron leader in Burma.

We had half a Spitfire starboard wing as a weather awning over the front door of our dear old Queenslander house. It was a 'tip of our hat' to dear Uncle Arch (who's favourite mount was the Mark 9 Spit). Hence the interest in the Supermarine aircraft."

Peter completed a Diploma of Fine Art in Painting at the College of Art, Brisbane (1974-76) and at RMIT in Melbourne in 1977. He had planned to do further study in England in the early 1980s, but on the way to the UK he stopped over in the Mediterranean. While there, he was invited to join an expedition as second mate on the sailing ship *Eye of the Wind* for Operation Drake Circumnavigation. This caught his imagination and so he put his studies on hold. Later, in 1982-83 he became an expedition artist for the *Tami* canoe project in Papua New Guinea. In 1984 and 1985 he was co-pilot for the *Endeavour* Balloon Project - Trans Australia Flight. Upon his return to Australia from these



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adventures, his good friend and respected artistic mentor, Jack Earl, suggested he paint a marine painting for the Squadron and so the painting *Shamrock V* was born.

Later, in 1994-96 he undertook a second two-and-a-half year circumnavigation of the world in a steel 36 ft ketch named *Skerryvore*. In late January 1995, during this voyage, Peter visited St. Helena Island in the South Atlantic (where Napoleon was once exiled) and saw the visitor book entries of Jack Earl and his crew including a flourish of a sketch by Jack Earl himself. Jack had spent three weeks on the Island as a guest at the Governor's residence during his own famous 1947-48 *Kathleen Gillett* voyage around the world and completed a commissioned painting for the Governor's wife, Lady Joy, during his stay on the island.

Peter's understanding of the anatomy and soul of the sea was gained through several years on board sailing ships. Peter describes himself as an 'expedition artist'. His process is to sketch his subjects and take photographs, and then complete the painting in the studio in oils on canvas using layering, glazing and over painting. He sees himself as a draftsman using engraving and hatching. More recently, he has felt compelled to portray the ever-changing effects of climate change from his sailing voyages to the poles.

"Only with repeated visits to the same locations, do you grasp the speed of that change - it hits you like a hammer," he told me.

Peter is pictured below at Deception Island which is an active volcano in the South Shetland Islands on the peninsula of Antarctica. He has worked as an expedition leader / driver / guide and currently as the expedition artist for various Expedition cruise companies. He now sails an Adams 40 steel cutter to continue his expeditions.



Peter Anderson on Deception Island, Antarctic Peninsula, January 2019



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Peter has been a finalist numerous times in major prizes such as the Wynne prize at the Art Gallery NSW and the Tatterstall's Landscape art prize in Brisbane. His work hangs in a number of institutional collections including Parliament House art collection in Canberra, Rockhampton Art Gallery in Queensland and the University of Otago in New Zealand. Phillip Bacon galleries in Brisbane will be exhibiting a large collection of his works in November 2021.

In the 1980s only three J Class yachts were still in existence: *Shamrock V*, *Endeavour* and *Velsheda* - all designed by Charles Ernest Nicholson and originally built in Britain. All the USA built J Class yachts were scrapped for their lead during WWII. Sadly, only *Shamrock V* never fell into disrepair. *Velsheda* lay derelict in the mud of Hamble River, South Hampshire for many years before being restored and refitted between 1994 and 1997. *Velsheda* never competed in an America's Cup, but Peter painted her in 1986 at the same time he painted *Shamrock V* and still has that painting in his possession.



*Velsheda*

Oil on Canvas 75 x 60 cm

Peter Anderson 1986/7



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A revival of the J class was triggered by Elizabeth Meyer who oversaw the refits of *Endeavour* and, subsequently, *Shamrock V* during the 1980s. Elizabeth was from a wealthy Baltimore family who had made their money in investment banking, property and publishing. She started a yacht restoration company in 1977 which has since restored or built more than 80 classic yachts. In 1993 Elizabeth also founded an International Yacht Restoration School which taught 400 students the skills needed for yacht building and restoration.



Elizabeth Meyer helming *Shamrock V* at Portofino, Italy in 2011



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In August 2001, as part of the celebration of the 150th Jubilee of the America's Cup, the three existing J class racers were bought to the Isle of Wight for a round-the-island race to re-enact the original America's Cup race of 1851.

This ultimately led to a complete revival of these magnificent J class yachts with six more new boats subsequently built to traditional designs and a J Class racing circuit which includes regular regattas in Newport, Falmouth, Cowes and the Superyacht Challenge in Antigua, reviving the age of the 'peak racers of the 1930s era'.

Peter Anderson's magnificent painting helps us all re-live the story of these superb J boats and the S6 seaplanes.

By Robyn Coleman, Exhibiting Member of the Royal Art Society NSW

I would like to acknowledge the contributions to this article of Peter Anderson who generously provided me with an interview by phone and answered follow up questions by email. He also gave permission to reproduce images of *Shamrock V in the Solent - 1930* and *Velsheda* and his portrait photograph at Deception Island from his website.

I would also like to thank Bruce Stannard for the generous use of his book 'Jack Earl: the life and art of a sailor'.

I would also like to acknowledge that the photo of Elizabeth Meyer on *Shamrock V* was published with the permission of Classic Boat magazine.