



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 18: RSYs recommences racing following The Great War and Spanish Influenza.

From “Sydney Sails”



This rare archive photo (above), shows the spectator crowd assembled on Clark Island in 1919 as the skiff fleet gathered in the distance for the start of a race. The photo is looking west towards Garden Island. Look carefully and you can see that almost every person is wearing a face-mask.

The end of hostilities in November 1918 was followed by the lengthy process of demobilization, and in 1919 by the world-wide epidemic of “Spanish influenza”. Most of the yachts on the Squadron’s pre-war register had been laid up and had more or less deteriorated or become obsolete. It was necessary to make a new beginning, and this marked the beginning of the “modern era” in yachting, as in many other aspects of life.

The actual revival of yacht racing had begun at the Anniversary Day Regatta in January 1919, known as the Victory Regatta, for which as many yachts, sailing boats, rowing boats and



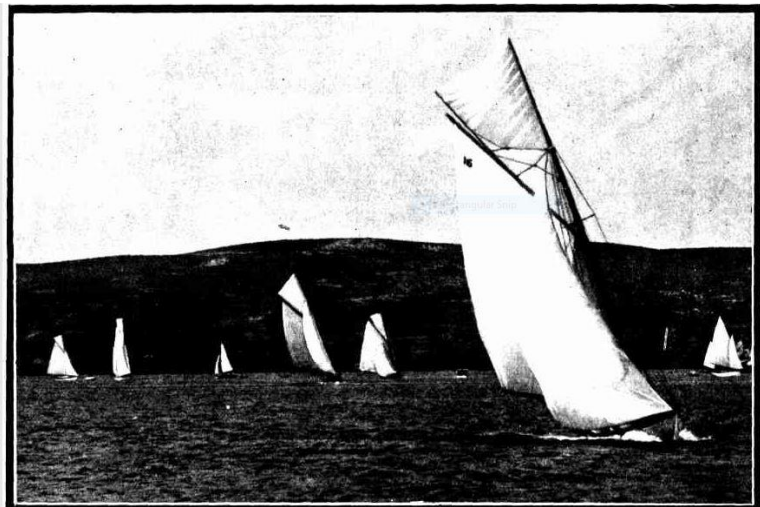
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other assorted craft as could possibly be mustered were hastily refitted and recommissioned, after having been laid up for the duration of the war. Their crews too were hastily mustered, and included newly-demobilized ex-servicemen who were eager to resume the routines and recreations of peace, which for yachtsmen meant the joys of sailing once again, free of serious cares.

With old vessels partly refurbished, and crews who had little if any time for training, the Victory Regatta had its hilarious aspects, and was conducted in a spirit of festive celebration that was long remembered. The winner of the first-class yacht race was Magic (built 1901), which on this occasion was sailed by Roy Stevens, who had just returned home after four years' military service abroad. In her crew also were his brothers Stanley and Arthur, who had been prominent in yacht racing before the war. These three and another brother, "Sep", were all sons of Harry Stevens, who had been owner and skipper of the famous little Australian in the 1880s. So yachting traditions continued from father to son, in this family as in many others.



Magic, Winner of the Victory Yacht Race.



Rounding the Gas Buoy at South Reef.

Saturday, 8th February, 1919 - The Daily Telegraph YACHTING.

VICTORY YACHT RACE.

The Victory yacht race, to be sailed this afternoon, under the auspice of the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron and Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club, is open to all yachts, irrespective as to their being on the register of either of the two organisations. The race is being held as the further celebration of peace by the yachtsmen of the port and has attracted twelve entries for the prizes of the value of three and one guineas respectively. The course, measuring 14 nautical miles, will be from Orient buoy,



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round South Reef gas buoy, Shark Island, Fort Denison, South Reef gas buoy, Shark Island, and finish on south side of Fort Denison.

For the convenience of club members and their friends the R.S.Y.S. steamer will leave the Squadron jetty at 2.30 p.m., at which time the R.P.A.Y.C. steamer will depart from Fort Macquarie. **The committees insist on influenza masks being worn.**

Handicaps for the race are:— Eun-a-Mara (A. Wilson) Scr., Stormy Petrel (S. M. Dempster), Hermione (H. Walters), and Sayonara (Paul Ross) 10min., Yeulba (E S. Heathy) and Magic (W. L. Dendy) 16min., Fleetwing (J. R. Hindmarsh) 20min., Athene (D. Carment), Culwulla IV., Thistle (G. E. S. Sandeman), and Fairlie (S. H. Fairland) 27min., Oithona (H. C. Manning) 35 min. Handicaps will be given at the start, the first yacht being despatched at 2.15 p.m.

Notes:

- The Victory Yacht Race was part of the Victory Regatta which replaced the Anniversary Regatta in 1919. This is called the Australia Day Regatta in 2020.
- The Victory Regatta was not confined to yachting – a display of Naval vessels, rowing and many other aquatic pursuits all participated.
- The reference to wearing influenza masks is the only one I have been able to locate amongst yachting activities.
- To race with the RSYS, you had to be a member of the club. The same applied for the RPAYC. In the Victory Race, the clubs combined and ignored this requirement. In fact, it was not many years later that the rule was dispensed with entirely at the RSYS.