



ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

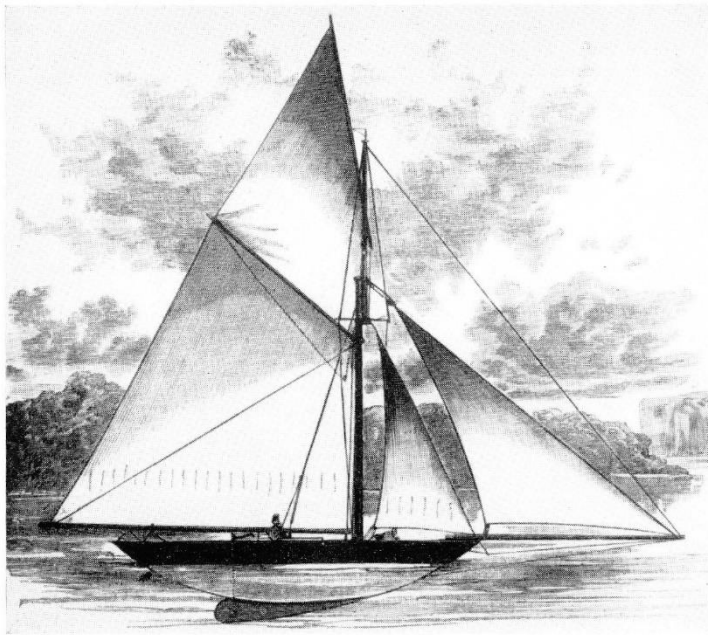
“Read all about it!”

The origins and early history of the Squadron – as reported in the Press of the day

Part 10: Mr. Dangar on Old-time Cracks.

Henry Cary Dangar served as Commodore from 1767 to 1875.

Saturday, 30th January, 1897 – The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser



THE FAMOUS LITTLE AUSTRALIAN

Built at Woolloomooloo, 1858

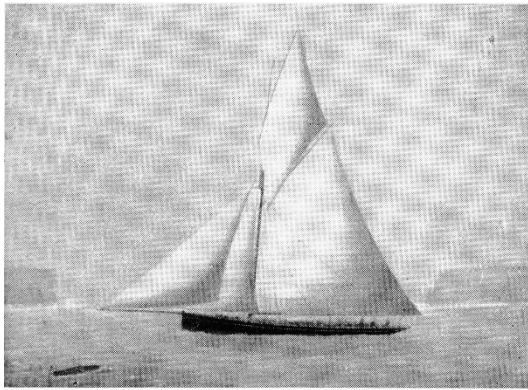
Diagram showing her “mackerel” hull design

A man of note in connection with the older yachting is the Hon. H. C. Dangar, although it is now some time since he gave up active interest in the sport. Though pretty young then, Mr. Dangar remembers the days when the *Friendship* and the *Petrel* were cracks, but fine boats as they were, he says they could not hold a candle to the boats of the present in the matter of speed. In the 40's the leading yachtsmen were Messrs. Richard Hill, George Thornton, and James Milson. Mr. Dangar raced the *Peri* for many years, and, having sold her to Mr. John Cooper, went to England and got the lines of the *Mistral* from Harvey, and then had her built here. Fast as that noted boat was, Mr. Dangar would not class her with the cracks of to-day. The most remarkable boat built in Sydney Mr. Dangar considers to have been the *Australian*, known as the soda water bottle, which gave the idea for the modern yacht. Mr. Alex. Macleay, brother of Sir William and an enthusiastic yachtsman, was so struck with the lines of the *Australian* and their development in Mr. Charles Parbury's celebrated boat, the *Xarifa*, that he went to England and built there the *Jullmar*, of about 60 tons. She was all but champion of her day in England, and so successful did she prove that English designers began to adopt and develop the new type, and so Mr. Harnett's ideas in the *Australian* revolutionised the yacht-designing of the world.



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Mr. Dangar has much to say of the old Xarifa, and he was one of the crew in that famous race between her and the English schooner yacht Chance, to Newcastle and back, which was the yachting sensation of the time. The Chance was owned by the first Commodore of the R.S.Y.S, Mr. William Walker, and the match was arranged at the dinner table of Mr. Edward Wyld, before the Xarifa's keel was laid. It was the new Australian idea against the English model. The original wager was £100 to £75 on the bigger boat, but it increased to £140 to £100. The Chance was 75 tons, the Xarifa about 31, and there was no time allowance. The race was sailed in a gale. The Xarifa carried away her top mast just after passing the Heads, but, as things turned out, it was no loss. The schooner was out of sight when the cutter reached Newcastle, a little after dark. They were to keep on till the Nobbies light bore west by compass. The Chance, however, rounded with too much sail, and got on her beam ends, and the Xarifa, beautifully handled by Mr. Thomas Curtis, on the beat back passed her rival at 10 p.m., and got to Sydney at 11 a.m., the Chance turning up at 3 p.m. A good deal of money changed hands over the race, in which enormous interest was taken.



MISTRAL, 1874

In fact, Mr. Dangar says the interest taken in sailing in those days was not only much greater than now, but there was a better spirit prevailing. Mr. Dangar's Mistral was, he says, really a faster boat than the Xarifa, but her gear was too heavy when she started racing, and she met with a series of mishaps, and when these were overcome had nothing to race against for some years, and then came later and faster types.

Notes:

- Reference is made to the Xarifa carrying away her top mast. The masts of traditional sailing ships were not single spars, but were constructed of separate sections or masts, each with its own rigging. The topmast was one of these.
- Certainly prior to 1900 and for some time after, gear breakage, especially top masts and bowsprits were a common occurrence. If the breeze strengthened during a race, just finishing was often a sufficient achievement.
- With the heavy winds in the race described, with no top mast, shortened sail on the Xarifa was the right rig.
- From "Sydney Sails", the Centenary History of the Club published in 1963, comes the following extract:

"With this victory, and the good sportsmanship that had marked the contest at all stages, from the first friendly challenge to the final cheers, Xarifa was established as Sydney's champion



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yacht. Commodore Walker generously admitted, not only that he had been outsailed, but that Chance had been outclassed. His resplendent schooner which, less than two years before, had arrived with pomp and circumstance from the royal reaches of Cowes, had been compelled to dip her colours to a colonial cutter with the shape and ways of a mackerel! Whether it was for these or other reasons, Walker, almost immediately after the race with Xarifa, put Chance up for sale. She was bought by an island trader."