



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 5: Continuing last week’s race report.

Saturday, 30th January, 1864 – Sydney Mail

First Class Yacht Race.

First Match, for First-class Yachts — Prize: A piece of plate of the value of 10 guineas; to start at 11 o'clock. Course —To start from their own moorings in Farm Cove, round the Sow and Pigs, back to and round Fort Denison. Thence round a boat moored off Long Reef, and back to, and passing a boat moored in a line with the Red Buoy off Fort Macquarie. Time for tonnage — half minute per ton, and schooners to rate at two-thirds their tonnage. Yachts to carry any and what sail they please.

<u>Yacht</u>	<u>Tonnage</u>	<u>Owner</u>	<u>Identifying colours (Pennant)</u>
Xarifa	31 tons	C. Parbury	Light blue
Era	24 tons	Vice-Commodore	Red, white, and blue
Peri	18 tons	H. C. Dangar	Blue and white, and white star
Chance	81 tons	Commodore	Light green.
Annie Ogle	20 tons	Captain Rountree	Red, and tricolour in the corner.

Some considerable difficulty was experienced by Captain Pockley in getting the yachts into position, consequent on the strong ebb running, and some little dissatisfaction was expressed; but as there was every indication of a strong breeze setting in from the north-east, little advantage was obtained. At 11.35 a m., the signal being given, the smart manner in which they all got underway was admirable. Peri was the first to draw ahead, followed by the Era, Xarifa, Annie Ogle, and Chance. The wind was moderate from about E N E, the yachts leading off on the starboard tack — Era having the weather gauge. In this order they proceeded down the harbour, making tack for tack. After passing Fort Denison, Era was leading; Peri, second; Xarifa, third; Anne Ogle, fourth; and Chance well astern. Passing Bradley's Head, the wind gradually fell light, and here Xarifa drew up and passed to windward of Peri and Era, and took up a strong lead, rounding the lightship and reef in beautiful style. In running up for Fort Denison there was little change in the position of either yacht, with this exception, that Peri, when near Bradley's Head, passed to leeward of Era, and stood across that yacht's bows, apparently to get more into the strength of the wind. This manoeuvre, however, gave Era a great advantage, as she at once gybed, and was quickly in her former position of second yacht. No change of importance took place after rounding Fort Denison and reaching down the harbour again, until Xarifa, when more than a mile ahead, in hugging the Inner South Reef too close, ran on a sunken rock, where she must have remained until flood tide made again, but that her critical position was observed by a steamer going to Manly Beach, which at once hastened to render assistance, and fortunately got her towed off; this of course, by all yachting rules, threw her out of the match, and Era became the leading boat. The whole of the yachts were clear of the reef, and well across the Heads before Xarifa was again afloat, happily without having sustained any perceptible damage. By this time the wind had hauled round to S.E., but so light that the sails were banging to the masts. Era was the only yacht that did not carry squaresail and balloon topsail, but still kept the lead and passed round the boat off Long Beef at 2.58 p.m. followed by Peri at 2.59.50, Xarifa 3.6.30, and Chance 3.10, Annie Ogle being nowhere, and was ultimately towed home by the s.s. Morpeth.



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The wind had been gradually falling lighter and lighter and was nearly a dead calm when Era was half way between Long Reef and North Head, by which time, however, Era must have increased her lead a mile on Peri. Xarifa throughout had been gradually gaining on the leading yachts, and, strange to say, passed both Peri and Era. When about a mile from the Heads the breeze suddenly freshened up from the southward, compelling both Xarifa and Era to hand all their lighter sails in double quick time, a smart piece of work and well performed, the others following suit as the wind struck them. After rounding North Head, Era set her square topsail and appeared to gain considerably on Xarifa in running up the harbour; but as she was virtually leading there was no necessity to set square sail or balloon. The yachts finally passed the flagship in the following order: Xarifa, 5.31.10; Era, 5.34.57; Peri, 5.41.57; Chance not being placed. Allowing the time for tonnage, Xarifa beat Era by seventeen seconds, Peri being seven minutes astern of Era; and thus terminated the first race of the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron. It was most unfortunate that the wind would not allow of the relative quality of the yachts being fairly tested in a breeze, and doubly so that the accident occurred to Xarifa by which her chance was lost. We believe the Era and the Annie Ogle were the only yachts manned by amateurs.

Notes:

- Prizes usually were for cash. Ten guineas was a lot of money in 1864.
- Note that the vessels were actually moored in Farm Cove. The RSY got special permission to do this and it was part of the prestige attached to the Club and its vessels which were considered the finest on the harbour.
- The time for tonnage is a reference to the handicapping method used at the time based on a measurement called Thames tonnage
- Yachts were identified by their pennant colours. Numbers did not come in on sails for many years to come.
- Even in 1864, professionals were distinguished from amateurs. The size of the vessels meant they often had paid hands.
- When next possible, have a look at the half models in the clubhouse adorning the portrait of William Walker in the lounge to see the shape of speed in the 1860s.