



ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

Art Treasures of the Squadron

Barque *Veritas*

Oil on Board

By John Allcot

Hangs in the hallway outside the Carabella Room



'Barque *Veritas*' was painted by well-known marine artist John Allcot (sometimes spelled Allcott.) The painting was bequeathed to the Squadron by Carl Halvorsen's only daughter, Verity Halvorsen, in 2019. It represents the story of a famous maritime family, with five generations of seafarers and boat builders from Norway to South Africa and Australia, who built beautiful, strong and fast wooden yachts and power boats for both commercial and recreational use. It is also a story of amazing human resilience and endurance.

Veritas was a beautiful 583 tons net three masted square rigger ship. She is expertly painted here by Allcot, in her element on the ocean, sailing trade routes during the age of sail.

The Halvorsen family connection is explained by Squadron Member Kari Svensen, the granddaughter of Lars Halvorsen:

'I delved through family records and came up with the interesting fact that my great-great grandfather Hans Arentz Andersen was Captain of the *Veritas* during at least 1864 – 65,



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(I have the original ledger listing crew wages) which could be the reason why Uncle Carl commissioned this painting by John Allcot. I knew it was bequeathed to the Squadron upon his and Verity's deaths.'

1864		Kont. Beg. for		Handl. med Skibet Veritas	
Sjemand A. Andersen		Debet	Credit	1864	
	Understiftelsespen 174	1 00		Hammermand Ole Thorsen, Apr. 12	Debet Credit
Sai	Lu. Vagaards i Arendal	5 -		Understiftelsespen 174	1 00
Sai Skuen	Harjens, Kongegarden Bot. 19	1 30		Sai Lu. Vagaards i Arendal	5 -
Debet	London L. 1-11	2 47		Sai Skuen Harjens, Kongegarden Bot. 19	2 -
Debet	Wiborg Bot. 5-87	3 100		Debet London L. 1-11	2 47
Debet	Kjebunden Bot 4-14	2 - 9		Debet Wiborg Bot. 5-87	3 100
Debet	Marsville januar 184	33 - 9		Debet Kjebunden Bot 4-14	2 - 9
Debet	Tuekstedt i Havn	78 -		Debet Marsville januar 184	33 - 9
Debet	Balansi tilføje	22 - 41		Debet Tuekstedt i Havn	78 -
			150 48	Debet Balansi tilføje	22 41
			150 48		
for 5 Sai til og med 16 Februar 9 4. 12 Dage a 1/16				for 5 Sai til og med 16 Februar 9 m. 12 Dage a 1/16	
				for 112 7/16 112 7/16	
1864		Kont. Beg. for		1864	
Sjemand B. Rasmussen		Debet	Credit	Sjemand Ole Corneliusen	
1864		Apr. 4	Apr. 4	1864	
	Understiftelsespen 174	1 - 2		Understiftelsespen 174	1 00
Sai	Lu. Vagaards i Arendal	5 -		Sai Lu. Vagaards i Arendal	5 -
Sai Skuen	Harjens, Kongegarden Bot. 19	4 - 30		Sai Skuen Harjens, Kongegarden Bot. 19	2 -
Debet	Wiborg Bot. 1-88	1 - 115		Debet London L. 1-11	1 -
Debet	London L. 3-15/23	16 - 87		Debet Wiborg Bot. 1-70	1 - 70
Debet	Wiborg Bot. 2-30	2 - 44			
Debet	Kjebunden Bot 4-30	2 - 15			
Debet	Marsville januar 185	18 - 5			
Debet	Tuekstedt i Havn	31 - 10			
Debet	Balansi tilføje	18 - 27			
			98 84		
			98 84		
for 5 Sai til og med 16 Februar 9 m. 12 Dage a 1/16				for 5 Sai til og med 16 Februar 9 m. 12 Dage a 1/16	
				for 98 84 98 84	

Allcot has painted the ship from the point of view looking up on quarter profile. She is sailing on a broad port reach in a fairly strong wind of 25-30 knots coming from behind the ship. She is reefed down on the mizzen mast (aft most mast) with only the fore and main masts square rigged. The light coming in from the right highlights the square rigged sails, the wake of the boat and white caps of the ocean. It is an adventurous atmosphere concentrating on Veritas herself, with a lone seagull following along behind, no land in sight, in large seas. There is a sense of an impending storm on the left with the dark clouds. Allcot captures the beautiful blue/green colours and movement of the open ocean in thick oil brush strokes and the rich dark browns of the timber boat.

Barque refers to the type of ship which has at least three masts, the fore and aft masts being square rigged. They were the workhorses of the golden age of sail in the mid-nineteenth century. They were more efficient than schooners, required less crew, were cheaper and easier to handle.



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The seafarers of Norway lived in better conditions than their English counterparts. As Carl Halvorsen wrote for the Squadron Archives on presenting the *Veritas* painting to the Squadron:

'Food was plain but well cooked. Besides the salt beef and pork, there was plenty of fish such as salted cod and herring. Seamen of Norway were high in prestige and quality. The geographical aspects and the traditions of the land caused a large number of young men to regard the sea as a satisfying way of life. Hardy, skillful and cheerful, the Norwegian sailor was a worthy descendent of the Vikings.'

Veritas is recorded as carrying 1,011 tons of coal to Honolulu on 21 February 1892 when she experienced a moderate gale with heavy seas and started to leak badly. The leak increased the next day, and the sailors refused to continue, so the captain decided to return to Newcastle, NSW, and the cargo was immediately discharged.

Veritas was involved in another incident on 27 January 1879 when she went aground on rocks at Queenscliff in Port Phillip Bay. There was an inquiry into the pilot which showed that he had been suffering from the after effects of having a tooth removed. He had been administered chloroform the day before the accident. A witness observed him to be very sleepy and he had to be woken up to go on board. A doctor who examined him the next day found he was paralysed in the left arm and leg and in severe shock.

As a former medical examiner of seafarers, I found this story particularly interesting. It sounds like the pilot was not fit for service before he boarded the vessel and certainly not fit during the voyage, displaying symptoms of what appears to be a stroke!

Veritas was eventually dismantled and broken up at Great Barrier Island outside Auckland in 1933.

The Halvorsen family history is intricately linked to the story of boat building and design in Australia. As Kari Svensen explains about the family patriarch and matriarch, Lars and Bergithe:

'Interestingly, Bergithe's father, Karl Klemmetson, was also a captain, being appointed at the tender age of 16 – for being "literate"! So Bergithe came from seafaring stock, whereas Lars' father was a subsistence farmer who decided to supplement his income by building boats during the long winter months in Norway, as did many others. Lars then decided he would rather build boats than become a farmer - and the rest is history.'

The family migrated via South Africa to Australia in the 1920s and established themselves as highly skilled boat builders. The Halvorsen name became a byword for quality and style. During WWII they provided tremendous support to the nation by converting from building leisure craft to defence craft. They built more than 250 boats for the American, Australian and Netherlands' Armed Forces.

Harold, the eldest son of Lars and Bergithe, took over as managing director of the company in 1936 on the death of his father and was awarded the Order of Australia Medal in 2000 for his war efforts. He was joined in the business by all of his brothers: Carl, Bjarne, Magnus and Trygve.



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After the war, the company acquired a lease at Bobbin Head located in Sydney in the Kuring-gai Chase National Park, Sydney. They built a fleet of hire boats, the largest fleet of privately owned boats in the southern hemisphere.



The Halvorsen shipyard and staff at Ryde. Image: ANMM Collection

They were active sailors as well. In 1962 they built the 12 Metre yacht *GreteI*, the first Australian challenger for the America's Cup, for (later Sir) Frank Packer. This challenge to the New York Yacht Club was made by the Squadron. Magnus and Trygve Halvorsen crewed in the challenge and Trygve became the team's manager.

In 1963, 1964 and 1965, Trygve and Magnus, sailing as joint skippers, won three consecutive Sydney to Hobart races on handicap sailing *Freya* – a yacht designed by Trygve and built by Lars Halvorsen & Sons. *Freya* remains the only boat to have won three consecutive Sydney to Hobarts in the history of the race!



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Magnus and Trygve Halvorsen with the Sydney to Hobart race trophy

The company expanded overseas to Hong Kong and sold off their Australian shipyard in 2000. They still designed their boats and used various yards in southern China to build them and became predominantly a boat importing business in Australia with a focus on restoring vintage Halvorsen boats.



A collection of Halvorsen vessels at the 2012 Classic and Wooden Boat Festival. Image: ANMM.



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John Allcot is regarded as the father of marine art in Australia. There are no fewer than four beautiful John Allcot paintings on display in the Squadron collection. One at the main entrance on the left-hand side as you enter called '*Gypsy Moth IV*- in the vicinity of Cape Horn' and three in the hallway approaching the Carabella Room from the Neutral Bay Verandah: '*Grete! Wins Race 2 America's Cup 1962*', '*HMS Victory*' and '*Barque Veritas*'.

John was born in Liverpool, England in 1888, where he trained as an artist. He was dark and diminutive - less than five feet tall. He worked as a mariner before moving to Sydney in 1909. After toiling as a deck boy on tugboats and sailing ships, he became a full-time artist in 1912. He painted theatre scenery, worked as an illustrator and took commissions to paint ships. From 1920 he exhibited regularly with the Royal Art Society of NSW, of which he was a Fellow.

A prolific artist, he painted landscapes and still life, as well as detailed marine paintings which were his passion. His marine paintings include Wool and Tea Clippers. His romantic style was widely appreciated, especially his works on the founding of the Colony painted in the 1920s. He had a successful career, exhibiting through the 1960s and 1970s, including the bicentenary of James Cook's voyage to Australia at Proud's Art Gallery in Sydney.



Self-portrait by John Allcot, 1962



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Allcot's studio became a meeting place for those interested in ships, paintings and models. Regular visitors included other famous marine artists, such as Ian Hansen, who watched him work and listened to his colourful stories of seafaring. In 1970 Allcot was awarded an Order of the British Empire. He died on July 13 1973 in Sydney.

In conclusion, as recorded by Carl Halvorsen in the Squadron Archives on the occasion of his presenting the painting of the 'Barque *Veritas*' to the Squadron:

'This portrayal by John Allcot does full justice to a seafaring tradition handed down by Captain H. A. Andersen, Master of *Veritas*, to his descendants, the Halvorsen Family.'

Robyn Coleman
Exhibiting Member Royal Art Society

Acknowledgements and thanks

Thanks to RSYS Member Kari Svensen for her wonderful insight into the fascinating Halvorsen family history. She is also a valuable member of the Race Management Committee, having served for the last 24yrs!

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Photographs:

'Barque *Veritas*' image by Isabel Wartho

Ledger of Listing of Crew Wages image courtesy of Kari Svensen

The Halvorsen Shipyard and Staff at Ryde courtesy of the Australian National Maritime Museum Collection

Magnus and Trygve Halvorsen with one of their Sydney to Hobart Trophies courtesy CYCA Archives

A collection of Halvorsen vessels at the Classic and Wooden Boat Festival 2012 courtesy of Australian National Maritime Museum

'Self Portrait by John Allcot 1962' courtesy of Mitchell Library State Library of NSW.