



ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

Art Treasures of the Squadron

'The Royal Sydney Yacht Club' by John Allcot

Oil on board

48 x 58cm

Hangs at the top of the stairway leading up from the Careening Cove area



John Allcot's beautiful painting 'The Royal Sydney Yacht Club' depicts our clubhouse in the late 1950s; it looks very different from how we know it today. It is painted from a point of view in the vicinity of Kurraba point. The painting is a significant acquisition for the Squadron to add to its collection of paintings by Allcot, a marine artist known as the 'father of marine art' in Australia. It marked the occasion of the retirement of Field Marshall Sir William Slim, Commodore of the RSYS and Governor General of Australia, and was presented as a gift by the Members of the Squadron to him on 27 October 1959.

In the 1950s the Squadron's membership had increased to 930, of whom 218 were Associates. The Club was a popular destination for city Members and their guests for lunch and dinner, with its beautiful north-east aspect and spectacular harbour views. Dinner and social bridge evenings became an integral part of the Squadron social life.



ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

Improvements to the clubhouse since the 1950s included the renovation of the upstairs lounge; glassing in and re-decking of the verandah; enlargement of the dining room and modernisation of kitchen and laundry equipment to meet the extra demands of service. This era saw the introduction of the distinctive Squadron china.

The most significant development of this period was the decision to buy a two-story house, 'Tiverton' and more than an acre of land adjoining the Squadron's south-eastern boundary. This purchase added 100 feet of water frontage to the clubhouse grounds and also forestalled any possible encroachment of high-density buildings close to the clubhouse. 'Tiverton' was eventually demolished to make way for the current underground car park for Squadron Members.

This project was the brainchild of the then Commodore R. A. 'Dicko' Dickson, who during his term, supervised the upgrading of the boatshed, the further extension of the dining room and the expansion of the Club's real estate holdings.

The John Allcot painting shows the Squadron and its grounds on a light and airy day with a gentle 10 knot nor'easter breeze on calm inshore waters. *Kirribilli*, the first 5.5 Metre yacht built in Sydney, is in the foreground. She was built near to the Squadron by Bill Barnett. She is in focus on a close reach with her main and jib hoisted, sailing with a three-man crew. The light is focused on her sails and the reflections in the water below her. She was narrowly defeated in the 1956 Olympic trials by *Burradoo* sailed by Jock Sturrock from Victoria, who went on to win a Bronze Medal for Australia in those Games.

To the left hand side of the painting is the Duke of Edinburgh's Dragon *Bluebottle*, partially obscured, which was a wedding present from the Island Sailing Club in Cowes to Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh, and was also known as *The Royal Dragon* from time to time. She won a Bronze Medal for Britain at the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games, skippered by Lt. Cdr. Graham Mann.

Also in the foreground is the Squadron tender *African Queen*, probably servicing the Kurraba Point yachts.

The Squadron gardens were quite different in the 1950s; a pathway lined by palm trees led down to the whalebone and jetty. In the 1960s the whole concept changed, and the palm trees removed to enable a better view of the harbour and water frontage. Old eucalypts planted in 1903 were allowed to stand, and new eucalypts and Australian shrubs and trees were planted to allow overseas visitors a view of Australian flora.

More recent developments of the clubhouse saw the timber curved verandah facing the harbour replaced by a deeper, curved concrete structure to become the new Carabella Dining Room. New sandstone terraces were built. The more modern extension of the Careening Cove Anchorage with its a la Carte Brasserie has provided more casual dining for luncheon and apres-twilight sailing dinners.

The slipways on the right side of Allcot's painting were used every Saturday by the 8 Metre class following the Division 1 Saturday races on the harbour. There was no anti-fouling in those days, so after every race, they were slipped with their enamelled bottoms and cleaned on a complicated set



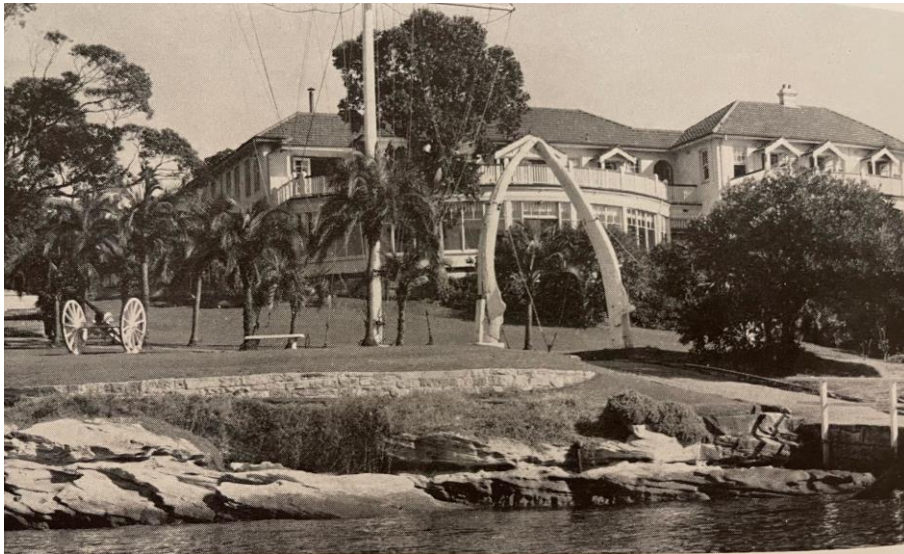
ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

of rail cradles. 'This required plenty of grunts and groans' according to Bruce Dixon, owner of *Norske*, in his oral history saved in the Squadron Archives.

The slipways were replaced by a modern marina and hardstand in the 1970s after considerable negotiation with the local community and North Sydney Council.

Allcot's use of colour is exquisite. The rich red rooves of the buildings and wooden boat hull contrast beautifully with the white brickwork and adjacent boats. The vibrant greens of the gardens compliment the wonderful variety of blues and pinks in the water with yellows highlighting the reflections from the shoreline and *Kirribilli*. He uses white for the wash of *African Queen* and *Kirribilli* to convey the sense of movement in the water. He uses the dark tones of the water to bring out the white hulls of the boats.

The accurate attention to detail by Allcot in the painting can be seen in the garden with the addition of the field-gun, palms, mast and whale's jawbone arch which can also be seen in a photo of the Squadron's Clubhouse in the 1950s.



John Charles Allcot (1888-1973) was born on 14 November 1888 in Liverpool, Lancashire, England, to George Allcot, mariner, and his wife Mary Elizabeth, née Phillips. His mother was a schoolteacher and came from a famous family of publishers. He was orphaned at aged eight when his father contracted a tropical disease on a momentous journey up the Amazon River and died on his return to England. His mother had already died, so he and his sister were brought up by an aunt. Allcot was educated at Arnot Street Board School and at the age of 14, apprenticed to Tillotson & Sons Ltd, Lithographers. He also attended classes at the Liverpool Institute and School of Art.

In 1906 he worked on the Mersey tugboats and next year sailed as a deck-boy in the barque *Invermark*. He loved painting and would scrounge ship's paint, sail cloth and handkerchiefs with which to depict the sea, ships and life on board.



ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

Allcot arrived in Sydney in 1909 working coastal island and intercolonial vessels out of Sydney, before giving up the sea in 1912. He married Elsie Alma Johnson on 13 September 1915 but they became estranged. Supporting himself by painting theatre sets, he obtained commissions for ships paintings from Sydney photographers and toured the countryside completing landscapes which he exhibited regularly at the Royal Art Society of New South Wales from 1920. At about this time, he formed an enduring friendship with Phyllis Zanker, who became his partner.

In the 1920s Allcot gained widespread recognition with a series of oil paintings on the founding of Australian colonies which were later acquired by the Australasian Pioneers' Club. He worked as an illustrator and wrote articles about the sea for the Sydney Mail. In the 1940s he painted the seas for ship-models built by the sculptor Robert Klippel. Allcot's painting of the *Cutty Sark* was presented to the Duke of Edinburgh in 1954.

Allcot exhibited landscapes and still lives at Beard, Watson and Co. Ltd (1962); his paintings of ships were shown at Underwood Galleries (1965) and those of 12 windjammers at the San Francisco Maritime Museum, USA (1969). In Sydney he held a successful exhibition (1970) at Proud's Art Gallery to celebrate the bicentenary of James Cook's landing in Australia. Allcot's last showing took place at the Copperfield Gallery (1973).

Allcot's attention to detail was legendary. He and his long term friend Cyril Hume, a model maker, would spend hours in the Mitchell Library researching facts and figures, drawings and plans, and old photographs from which to faithfully render an accurate account of a particular ship.

Allcot's studio became a meeting place for those interested in ships, paintings and models. Regular visitors included artists Oswald Brett and Ian Hansen who watched him work and listened to his colourful stories of seafaring.

Here is a description of Ian Hansen's experience:

'I only met John Allcot in the last couple of years of his life. Keith James, Director of Proud's Art Gallery organised the initial meeting. I was starting to sell my work at the gallery and very much the beginner, John was the world renowned Grand Old Master.

On the appointed day, I arrived at his home with a few paintings as instructed, John met me at the door in a three-piece suit and ushered me upstairs to his studio. I was like a child in a chocolate shop; magnificent marine paintings everywhere, models, sketches, books, brushes, paint tubes, easels and comfortable chairs and the wonderful aroma of a working studio. We got on remarkably well. I had been in the Navy for eight years at this point, so understood all of his nautical terminology. He looked at my paintings and asked a few questions on why I had done this or that, then he asked, "What do you want?" I knew he had taken Oswald Brett under his wing but apart from that never gave lessons. I asked anyway, "Do you give lessons?" "You want lessons? ... Go home and PAINT! You can draw, your compositions are good, and you understand the sea. All you need, my boy, is time." My one and only art lesson lasted 20 seconds.



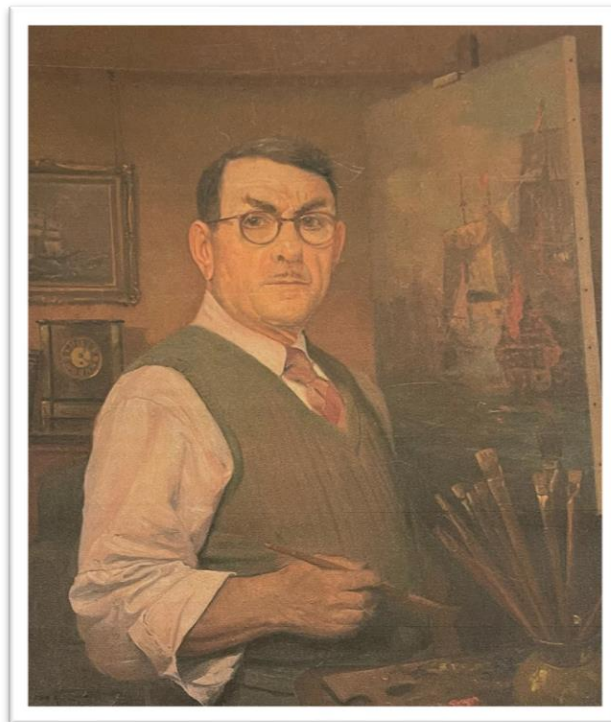
ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

'I probably visited him half a dozen times in the ensuing two years. I gave Phyl (his partner) a small 7"x5" painting as she always had tea and cakes for me on these visits. Apparently, John took the painting and had it propped up in his studio. An old client came to see him, saw the painting and remarked "That's a lovely picture you have done John." John snapped back, "Not mine, it's young Ian's work."

'My last visit was to the Mater Hospital just before he died. John took my hands in his, looked me straight in the eye and told me "Make sure you keep painting, you will be fine." He had a prodigious memory for poetry and could recite all the great classic poems. He would back any horse with a nautical name, and it was amazing how often he collected on these bets.

'Just a few happy memories,
Ian.

'PS. I nearly forgot, John's paint stand and easel were given to Russ Nugent (long-time friend and Tug Master.) Oswald Brett would stay with Russ on his many visits back to Australia and would use the stand and easel when painting here. The easel and stand now live happily in my studio.'



Self portrait by John Allcot 1962



ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

Allcot painted in a romantic style with impeccable attention to detail, using watercolour, gouache and oils. This was at a time of great change in the shipping industry, and he specialised in nostalgic views of ships and steamers, finding an appreciative market of shipowners, captains, crews and their families. In 1956 he was made a Fellow of the Royal Art Society. He was also a member of the League of Ancient Mariners and the Shiplovers' Society. He was elected an honorary life member in 1962 of the Australasian Pioneers' Club and received an O.B.E. in 1970. He was survived by his wife, son Rodney and daughter Joy when he died on 13 July 1973 at North Sydney. His work is represented in private and public collections in Australia and abroad including Maritime Museums, acknowledging him as one of the greatest marine artists.

'The Royal Sydney Yacht Club' is a wonderful addition to the Squadron's collection of Allcot art. It demonstrates the qualities he was famous for: attention to detail, focus on the classic lines of the yachts and a romantic light-filled atmosphere, and shows the Squadron at its best in the era of the 1950s.

It was a generous gift from the Members to the departing Commodore to remember the Club. We are very fortunate that a current Member spotted it for auction in the UK, enabling the Squadron to 'bring it home' and enjoy it here.

Robyn Coleman
Exhibiting Member Royal Art Society

Acknowledgements and thanks.

Ian Hansen for his generous contribution regarding John Allcot

Squadron Archives

'Sydney Sails'

'Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron 1862-2000'

'Australian Dictionary of Biography' John Charles Allcot (1888-1973)

John Allcot, Marine Artist (Syd, 1978)

Photographs

'The Royal Sydney Yacht Club' by John Allcot – image by Robyn Coleman

The Squadron's Clubhouse in the 1950s - photo N.H. McEnally from Sydney Sails

'Self-portrait by John Allcot 1962' courtesy of the Mitchell Library State Library of NSW.