



ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

Art Treasures of the Squadron

***Rovers Bride*, 1987**

80 x 120 cm

by Jack Earl

Kurraba Reading Room



This is the tale of three great friends and sailors: Gordon Ingate (aka 'Wingnut' to his friends), Lyell McLean ('Mick') Morris and Jack Earl; a 19th century boat named *Rovers Bride* built from salvaged wood and machinery from the wrecked steamer *Ceres*, and a beautifully illustrated journal about Kathleen's voyage: a love story.

Extract of a handwritten letter by Jack Earl:

'For a long time, I had been collecting reference on the cutter *Rovers Bride* for a painting Mick Morris wanted of her. Her builder Korff is related to Mick's family on his mother's side. It has been some years since Mick first told me he would like a painting of her, so I assumed he had lost interest in the idea. *Rovers Bride* was on the easel and well advanced when on 7 December 1987, Mick and Phyl came in with a bottle of (brandy) Bundy I should say and half a dozen cans of Coke to celebrate the anniversary of our homecoming aboard *Kathleen Gillett* following our world cruise on 7 December 1948. I phoned Don Angus (the navigator) and we wished him luck. The *Rovers Bride* painting of course became Mick's. Mick Morris left a deposit on the painting for \$1000...'

Many years later Mick Morris sold the painting to Gordon Ingate who then donated the painting to the Squadron on 20 September 2019. It hangs in the Kurraba Reading Room facing the entrance.



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Gordon Ingate generously agreed to speak to me about what had attracted him to the painting. He already owned a 1962 Jack Earl painting of his award-winning boat the *Caprice of Huon*, so he was familiar with Jack's skill in capturing the mood of the ocean and his meticulous attention to detail pertaining to a vessel's line and rig.

Lord Howe Island is depicted in the painting and was very familiar to Jack, for he visited frequently in his yacht *Kathleen Gillett*. To this day, there is a restaurant and accommodation on the island called Earl's Anchorage which is dedicated to his memory.

Jack Earl completed the painting between 1985 and 1987 in oil on canvas. It is painted in profile to show off her sleek lines and full length of the 48.5 foot boat with a cutter rig (two foresails) and square stern. She is under full sail in fairly heavy seas, vividly depicted by the white water and green/blue waves, heading towards the twin peaks of Lord Howe Island. She was the first ship to bring trade to the island. A square-rigged Barque (three masts) is seen approaching the island in the distance, probably also bringing trade. The low horizon highlights her rig against the white clouds, in particular the red flag. There is a sense of an impending storm with the darker clouds rolling in from the left, in conditions that could easily change in the Pacific - as Earl well knew from his circumnavigation of the world in *Kathleen Gillett*, a wooden gaff ketch (two masts). He also captures the movement of the boat surfing down the wave in contrast to the Barque behind her which is surfing up the wave.

Jack Beaumont Earl, AO, was born in 1907 in Durban, South Africa and arrived in Australia with his family in 1911. He is said to have developed his love of boats as a boy sailing in pearling luggers when living in the Torres Straits, where his father was an administrator. Initially homeschooled and trained in art by his father Frank, Jack later studied at the Julian Ashton School of Art in Sydney. He became an artist by profession, painting yachts and historical maritime events on commission. His paintings hang in numerous yacht clubs and in private collections around the world. He came from a distinguished family of Victorian and Edwardian artists especially renowned for their beautiful studies of horses and dogs. His grandfather, George Seton-Earl, was a highly paid professional artist. In 1990 two of his very large works *Going North* and *Going South* each sold for A\$1.3 million.

In 1947/48 Jack Earl and Mick Morris completed a global navigation aboard Jack's yacht *Kathleen Gillett*, thereby achieving the second global circumnavigation in Australian Maritime history. Jack and *Kathleen Gillett* were an amazing duo, having previously competed in the inaugural Sydney to Hobart race in 1945 - making it third across the finishing line. He was awarded the coveted CYCA's Blue Water Medal for the circumnavigation.

Adventurer and larrikin Mick Morris also went on to become a successful yachting helmsman in ocean racing, the Dragon and 5.5 Metre classes with Gordon Ingate. Mick and Gordon won the prestigious Scandinavian Gold Cup for Australia and came fourth in the World 5.5 Metre Championship. Gordon had sailed with Jack Earl on *Kathleen Gillett* as a youth sailor. Gordon belonged to the Sea Scouts shed at the Mosman Rowing Club and *Kathleen Gillett* was moored in Mosman Bay. Jack would ask the Sea Scouts to help him sail the boat and eventually, he taught Gordon how to ocean race.



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Jack Earl completed a detailed and beautifully illustrated account of his 18 month circumnavigation. He created the log for his friends and family at home but it became an extended love letter for his wife, Kathleen.



Log 11 dated 1948

Mrs Earl was from a seafaring family and had learnt to sail small boats in the harbour. Her great grandfather was an English ship builder who sailed to Australia in one of the ships he built. *Kathleen Gillett* was named after Mrs Earl and her great-grandfather and was designed along the lines of a North Sea pilot ketch. It took Jack and Kathleen six years and every penny they had between 1933 and 1939 to construct the seaworthy boat. By that time, they had two children: Maris aged 11 and Michael, 14. Kathleen and the family came with him as far as Thursday Island in the Torres Straits and then they separated for the 18 month voyage. Jack produced 12 logbook charts during the journey which took him north to Cape York, then west to Cape Town via the Indian Ocean, across the Atlantic to the coast of Brazil, through the Panama Canal and back across the Pacific. Each page of the log reveals stunning paintings recording the events and emotions the artist experienced, combined with witty character sketches, photographs and printed souvenirs including local stamps and currency which were dispatched when the yacht docked at each leg of the trip. Regular feature stories ran in *Seacraft* magazine, and the 'Voyage of *Kathleen*' captured the Australian imagination as a symbol of escape in the postwar era. The logbooks continue to be treasured by the Earl family,



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especially since Jack's passing in 1994. They have been fully digitised by the State Library of NSW and a selection is available for viewing in the Squadron's Neutral Bay Verandah lounge cabinets.

Like its artist, the cutter *Rovers Bride* has an interesting history. In 1836 the new paddle steamer *Ceres* was lost after striking a rock off Bungaree Norah Point, south of Newcastle. The wreck was purchased and its timbers and machinery salvaged by a merchant called Edge Manning and English trained ship builder John Korff (after whom the New South Wales town of Coffs Harbour was named.) Mick Morris was a descendent of John Korff's family. After 17 months work on Tuggerah Beach, the 49 ton cutter *Rovers Bride* was mostly built and then put in the water at nearby Cabbage Tree Bay. With machinery from the *Ceres* loaded on board and the boilers towing behind, they headed for Sydney. But bad weather caused the towing lines to part and the valuable boilers went adrift and are believed to have been salvaged by another vessel.

Nevertheless, on 1 May 1838, *Rovers Bride* arrived in Sydney and went on to serve in far-flung parts for many years, voyaging to Lord Howe Island, Western Australia, Tasmania, Queensland, Tahiti and South America. She was cast ashore while trading for sandalwood near an island off Vanuatu. She was salvaged a second time and then headed off to the New Hebrides, before finally fading from the historical record.

The *Rovers Bride* tells the story of three great sailors and friends. It brought together Jack Earl and Mick Morris commemorating circumnavigating the world as an Australian crew in their beloved ketch *Kathleen Gillett*. It illustrates the trading days of 19th century Australia when Clippers, Barques and Ketches were the lifeblood of trade. Gordon Ingate has beautifully preserved the memory of this lovely story by donating the magnificent painting to the Squadron to be preserved in perpetuity. It is a very generous gift.



Gordon Ingate and *Rovers Bride*, September 2019



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By Robyn Coleman, Exhibiting Member of the Royal Art Society NSW

I would like to acknowledge the generous contributions to this article of Gordon Ingate, Leilani Tomaszewski (Jack Earl Family) and Bruce Stannard. Bruce Stannard's book "Jack Earl: the life and art of a sailor" was donated to the Squadron library.

The images of Rovers Bride and Kathleen Earl are reproduced with copyright permission from The Jack Earl Family.

Image of Gordon Ingate by Isabel Wartho.