



## Royal Papua Yacht Club

### A HISTORY to 1981

In 1873 Captain John Moresby aboard the *HMS Bosilisk* became the first European to sail into the Harbour on the south Papua Coast which now bears his name. Less than 50 years later, the embryonic Royal Papua Yacht Club began when a young Australian, Arthur P. Travers, formed the *Port Moresby Aquatic Club* on 2 June 1921.

There is an even earlier reference to a Sailing Club in Moresby before the first World War but no records have survived.

Travers, who was an enthusiastic sailer from Sydney and Cairns, realised that getting Western style craft to Moresby would involve considerable expense so, to satisfy his craving for yacht racing, he bought a local outrigger canoe for £3 and a bag of flour and thus competitive sailing began in Papua New Guinea waters.



[Right] R. Travers –  
The First Commodore (1921)

Within weeks 6 or 7 canoes, hired by expatriate residents, were participating in the new sport. These races were attended by the occasional bookmaker and large sums of money changed hands.

Canoe racing with native crews and one or two expats aboard for the ride was the major sailing sport of the day until Japan invaded Oceania in 1941.

Today the *Royal Papua Yacht Club* remains the focal point of competitive sailing in PNG with an imposing clubhouse on the beachfront of Port Moresby Harbour.

The club facilities include a restaurant, bars, chandlers and a Top Deck for meetings, small social gatherings and which also accommodates the Club's Race Centre with radios and finisher's box.

The Club's foreshore area includes hard-standing for 100 dinghies, 3 ramps and a pontoon with fuel and water.

Offshore, there is accommodation for 100 boats in marinas and moorings together with a careening area.

The RPYC is a popular rendezvous for cruising yachts and many a cruiser, from Hiscock to Alan Lucas, has enjoyed the hot showers and hospitality provided at the club.

The history of the RPYC mirrors to a large degree the history of Port Moresby as it developed from a colonial outpost to administrative centre of the mandated Territory of Papua and New Guinea and now the capital city of independent PNG.



The first Clubhouse was built on stilts over the water which only recently became part of the new container terminal and wharf. The original clubhouse was destroyed during an air-raid in 1942 and when the club reformed after the war years, a private house on the present site was offered to the club.

The war in Port Moresby also claimed the Burns Philp passenger vessel, *MV Mochdui*, which was being used as a troop carrier. Successive waves of Japanese fighters eventually destroyed her with a bomb down her funnel.

The *Mochdui*, still lies exposed on a reef within the Harbour but her mast was recovered in 1967 and now stands outside the clubhouse.

The first western-style dinghies arrived in Moresby just before the war in the form of modified Vacluse Juniors which became known as the Moresby Class and continued to be sailed until 1960.

The 1950's saw a considerable expansion of club activities when power boat racing began in 1951, water skiing in 1954 and the club's



# Sailing & Yachts



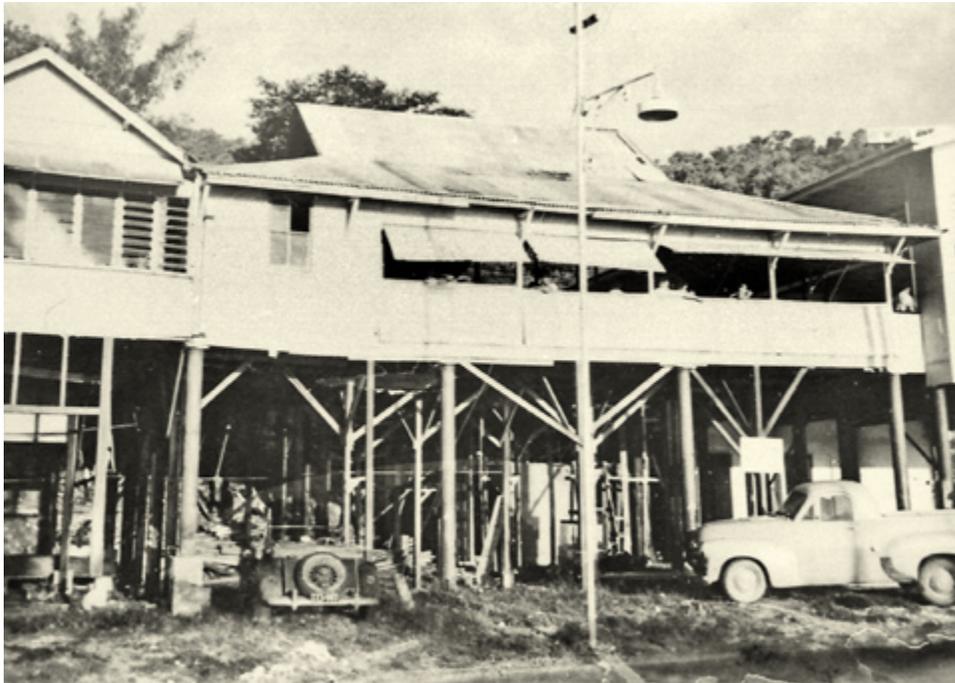
first yacht, Des Ashton's *Laharo*, competed in a Sydney-Hobart, finishing second in a fleet of 14 starters.

During the past 20 years, the RPYC has participated far and wide in international competition. The first international on home waters was a 3-race series with the *Hollandia Yacht Club* of what was then Dutch New Guinea (now Irian Jaya).

Lightweight Sharpie crews from Moresby competed regularly in Australian National Titles, hosted the event in 1968 and promoted a World Series in 1978.

[Right] Moresby Class with Jack Kennedy & Paul Jones.

[Below] The old PYC Clubhouse which was demolished in 1961 (Ron Burgess' MG TD under the club).



The ubiquitous Heron which is still alive and well in Moresby today took RPYC Sailors to Nationals in South Australia in 1964 where they took 3rd place from a fleet of 89.

For many years the International Fireball was a popular class and crews competed in the Oceania Titles and World Titles in 1973 and hosted the 3rd South Pacific Games Yachting events in PNG. Appropriately, club member Geoff Dabb took the gold Medal.

The advent of the plastic boat saw PNG sailing Corairs in the Australian Titles in 1973 while an explosive interest in the Laser took teams to New Zealand for the 1976 South Pacific Championships with the RPYC hosting the event the following year.

The latest in plastic sees the Hobie 16 all but take over sailing action in the country with more than 50 in PNG and 33 registered with the RPYC.

The Hobie 16 was chosen for the South Pacific Games held in Suva in 1979 and the Club will be hosting the South Pacific Hobie Championships in late June when a fleet of over 40 is expected, including world champion Brett Dryland and the originator himself, Hobie Alter.

Since *Lahara* did the Hobart race in 1951, many RPYC yachts have sailed the Sydney-Hobart event including the first ferro-cement competitor, *Shi Bui*, designed, built and skippered by club member Alan Wallis who is now co-owner of the 10- square metre (60 foot LOA) *Even* which won line honours in the Hobart of 1955.



Other Sydney-Hobart competitors include Bill McNeill's Moresby built 60-foot *Red Boomer II*, Bill Brown's Schooner *Pavana*, Bruce Tardrew's Formosan 46 *Obsession* and Brian Jagger's Cole-31, *Vanessa*.

*Red Boomer II* was the first Club boat to circumnavigate the world and is now with the other RPYC, Royal Perth Y.C.

In 1975, Club members chartered *Apollo II*, *Bacardi* and *Aquila* to form a PNG national team in the Southern Cross Cup and two years later fielded their own yachts in the series. The club's first foray into world competition took place in 1977 when 4 yachts flew PNG colours



# Sailing & Yachts

GPO Box 2566 Canberra ACT 2601 · Phone +61 2 6282 5325  
Web: [www.xcsconsulting.com.au](http://www.xcsconsulting.com.au) · Email: [sprad@netspeed.com.au](mailto:sprad@netspeed.com.au)



in the World 1/2 ton championship off Sydney – the most successful yacht was *Mekim Save*, a Farr 920 skippered by ex-Commodore John Wild which won the production boat trophy.

A year later Bruce Tardrew took his Davidson 1/4 tonner, *Velocity*, to Japan for the World Championships, missing out on a 13th place following a disqualification in the last offshore race sailed in typhoon conditions.

Although competitive sailing is the dominant sporting activity of the club, the RPYC caters for divers aquatic interests and is the focal point for the Moresby Game Fishing Club and the PNG Water Ski Association which use the Clubs facilities for social and sporting activities of local and national importance.

The club still maintains its interest in canoe racing and has helped administer major canoe regattas such as the Hiri Festival which celebrates the long trading voyages of a bygone era and the South Pacific Festival of Arts which was held in PNG last year.

With upwards of 100 canoes racing in the Harbour and off Ela Beach on Saturday afternoons, Port Moresby frequently becomes as congested, colourful and challenging as a weekend on Sydney's Harbour.

[Top left] Opening Day Regatta – 1965.

[Top right] Champion Parade from the present clubhouse site – 1929.



Historically the club has had a long association with Royal and Vice Regal visitors. The Duke of Edinburgh paid a call on the club in 1956, the club's hospitality causing HRH to arrive rather late at a reception given in his honour later in the day.

During the 1974 visit by the Queen to pre-independence PNG, HRH Princess Anne and Captain Mark Phillips were hosted by the club. A regatta to mark the occasion was made all the more spectacular by a French cruising yacht oblivious of all those International Yacht Racing Union rules. One of the casualties, a Thunderbird, has only recently returned to the water!

As early as 1924, Australia's Governor General, Lord Forster, visited the club and pre-

sented a canoe racing trophy which is still in the club's possession. Other G.G.'s from Australia included Lord Gowrie in 1937 and Lord Stonehaven in 1929, the latter crewing aboard a canoe during one of the weekend races.

Today, the club's Commodore-in-Chief is Sir Tore Lokoloko, Governor General of PNG. Sir Tore, a canoe-racing enthusiast from the Gulf Province took a special delight in sailing aboard Jack Rooklyn's *Apollo* after the Sydney yacht took double honours in the Inaugural Air Niugini Cairns-Moresby race in 1979.

Membership of the Port Moresby Aquatic Club in 1921 was 30 – some 70 percent of the expatriate population with 16 registered racing canoes. By 1961 membership had grown to 300 with 600 in 1966, 1000 in 1973





# Sailing & Yachts



[Above] Preparing racing canoes off clubhouse beach – 1929.



[Above] Morseby Class downwind.

[Top right] The pre-war Clubhouse.

[Right] The Clubhouse and moored boats in 1981.

and 2000 in 1975. Today there are nearly 300 power and sailing craft on the Club's register. Although membership today is around 1200, there is a growing PNG membership which augers well for the club's future in Independent Papua New Guinea.

The Royal Papua Yacht Club celebrates its first 60 years with the second Air Niugini Cairns-Moresby Yacht Race early May and the South Pacific Hobies in early June. By the end of the Diamond Jubilee Year, the yacht club may well have begun to relocate its clubhouse and aquatic activities to a new site outside the Harbour.

Plans for the development of Port Moresby Harbour include two additional wharfs and completion of the container wharf will swallow up the present offshore area occupied by the club.

While many will regret the changes about to take place in this picturesque Port and the yacht club's displacement, the new site should provide ample space for the club's activities and allow for a modern marina which will cater for boating enthusiasts until the end of the century.

By Philip Spradbery from "Royal Papua Yacht Club Yearbook (1981) Diamond Jubilee Year". The author gratefully acknowledges the historical research carried out by Club Archivist, Valerie Thornton. ■

