SYDNEY FLYING SQUADRON LTD

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THE RINGTALE

BALMAIN REGATTA
SUNDAY 26 OCTOBER 2025

A DIFFERENT SORT OF WEEKEND



Photo with thanks to Rolf Cohen

Saturdays are usually sacrosanct for us sailors. We clear the diary and look forward to a full day of joining up with our crew mates, rigging our skiffs and then racing around the buoys in our beautiful Sydney Harbour. Then, there is unrigging, putting the boats away and enjoying a drink or two as the sun goes down. Pretty bloody good, we reckon!

Last weekend was a little different. No racing meant that the rigging park was left to the large crowds involved in the Bondi to Manly Ultra, or in the annual jacaranda pilgrimage that closes of McDougall Street to the purple-thronged crowds. The Club was certainly busy, but the sailors were absent.

Sunday, however, was to ensure that we could field a near-record number of skiffs in the historic Balman Regatta, one of the world's oldest sailing regattas that held its first event in 1849. Courtesy of a special invitation from the Balmain Sailing Club who were keen to see the H18s as the star entries in the Regatta, it was great to see four skiffs and most of our volunteers keen to participate, The Balmain Sailing Club had even reserved places on their small marina in front of the Club for us to come alongside to showcase the boats.

There was to be a race, of course. To avoid the long sail up to Balmain, the H18s were given special dispensation to start off Kirribilli and join the rest of the Regatta fleet as they came under the Bridge before rounding and heading back up the river to round Cockatoo, Spectacle and Snapper Islands before finishing in front of the Balmain Sailing Club. Alas, this grand spectacle was not to be …



Photos here with thanks to Barley Stewart

















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An early start on Sydney Harbour always carries with it the risk at this time of the year that the afternoon breeze does not have enough time to build. The forecast was for light nor'westerly winds increasing to around 15 knots. But anything with west in it means that you are in for a fickle time and Sunday proved that again. The Regatta Committee, as we heard on the VHF radios now carried by our skiffs, had postponed the start up at Balmain and, at Kirribilli, we needed to follow suit. But by 12.45, there was enough breeze to start and the skiffs set off towards Clark Island – or at least, three of them did with Yendys hanging back in the hope of seeing the first of the Balmain fleet under the Harbour Bridge. Yendys, in the knowledge that this was a fun race, finally decided to set off, having given Scot, The Mistake and Tangalooma a start of nearly 1km.

That start soon evaporated when the three leading skiffs were becalmed off the north shore of Clark Island. After rounding the Island (leaving it to starboard for a change), Yendys had caught The Mistake and Tangalooma that had ventured a little too close to the lee of the Island. Scot had escaped the lee and had a good lead.

It looked like a two-sail reach to the Garden Island cardinal mark in the failing breeze until The Mistake proved everyone wrong and carried her peak head kite very shy to pass Tangalooma and Yendys, closing the gap on Scot. Soon all boats hoisted peak head spinnakers only to see them flopping helplessly in the breeze. Yendys, in her attempt to get around the Garden Island buoy had actually begun to drift backwards in the ebb tide when the decision to abandon the race was made and for a tow to be arranged. Sailors are pretty good at tactical decisions, and this one was based on the comparative advantage of beer and BBQ over being becalmed and uncomfortable in the light rain that had begun to spit on the Harbour.

The decision to tow the boats to Balmain coincided with the VHF radios crackling with call after call from the Balmain yacht fleet where competitors were making the same tactical decisions and heading back for the party.



Photos here with thanks to Tim Magee









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The Balmain Sailing Club Welcome

After the long tow (thanks to our volunteers on the RIBs) under the Bridge and up past Goat Island and Birchgrove to Balmain, the breeze was so light, if any at all, that all four skiffs were able to come alongside the marina at the Balmain Sailing Club with all sails still aloft. It must have been quite a sight for the crowds partying on the deck in front of the Club and in the adjacent park – a small blessing to the Regatta Committee who were undoubtedly disappointed with the loss of a Regatta race.

With the sails down and crews free to join the party, it has to be said that the H18 crews made for a great sight with their team jerseys standing out in the party crowd as they headed to the bar for the free drinks and BBQ arranged for them by the Squaddie. Many of us met up with old friends from the other sailing and yacht clubs who joined in the Regatta. The party atmosphere was encouraged with the loud music provided by the resident band, appropriately called “Yendys”. Photographs were soon arranged with the band members perched on Yendys (the skiff) to record a coincidence that will be long remembered.

Let it be said that this Regatta is a lot of fun and something that we shall certainly do next year with all of our fleet participating in a SFS pointscore race within a race for the Commonwealth Cup. The Cup is named for our late Fergy, who raced the ten-footer, Commonwealth at Balmain. The generosity of the Balmain Sailing Club in their welcome to the SFS is a reminder of the camaraderie that sailors have everywhere and that we shall be keen to reciprocate with our own Regatta being planned by the Sailing Committee for early 2026.

Before leaving for the tow back home, Commodore of the Balmain Sailing Club, Campbell Reid, made a special presentation of the Commonwealth Cup (originally made for the Club by Ian Smith, the builder and long-time owner/skipper of the Britannia H18) to the SFS crews that was loudly supported by the crowd. A rousing three cheers for the Balmain Sailing Club from the H18s was a signal that, with beers and BBQ on board, and despite the failed race, it had been a most enjoyable day for the sailors and volunteers in the SFS contingent.



Photos here with thanks to Barley Stewart



As always, thanks to the volunteers, who were very much part of the fun on the day. We certainly could not have done it without you.





Photos here thanks to Rolf Cohen







Photos here thanks to Phil Franklin





















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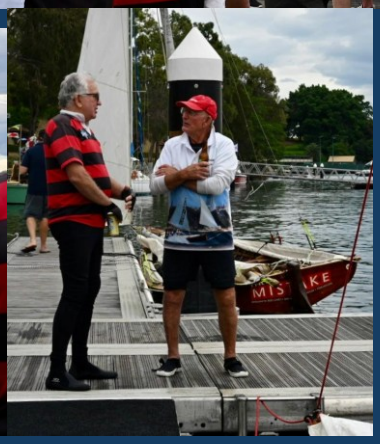











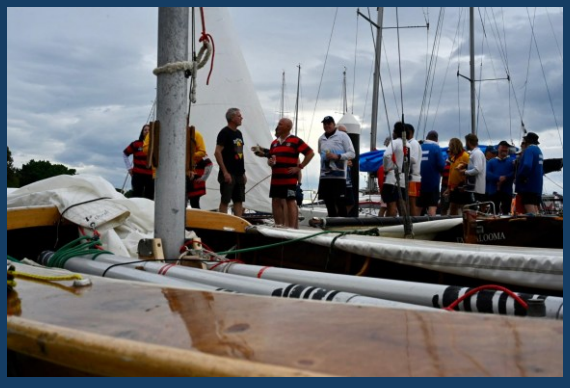

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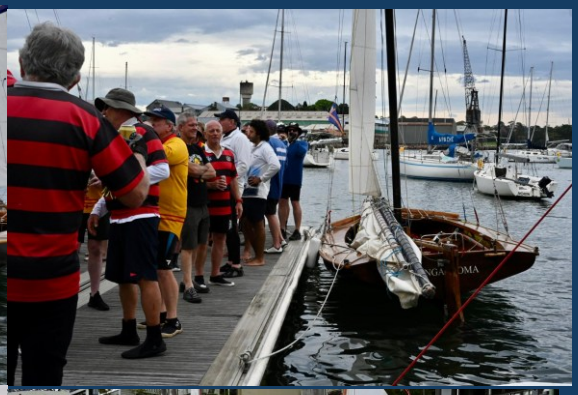











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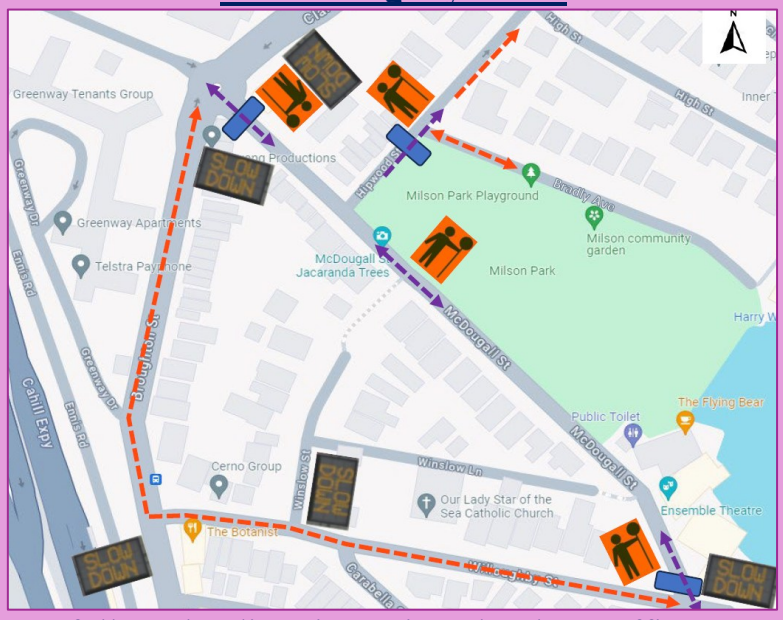
Jacaranda Season is here...

ROAD CLOSURES SATURDAYS AND SUNDAYS FROM 7AM TO 7PM

Cars with trailers/boats must only enter and exit

via Willoughby Street



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Sydney Flying Squadron Ltd

Australia's oldest open boat sailing club

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