

Great love story of the seas revealed at NSW State Library

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Sydney to Hobart race founder and marine artist Jack Earl had two great loves – Kathleen Gillett – his wife and his yacht!

Their unique love story, involving the historic 18-month circumnavigation of the world by the *Kathleen Gillett* in 1947-1948, is told through 12 elaborately illustrated logbooks and a selection has just gone on public display for the first time at the State Library of NSW.

According to State Library Curator Margot Riley: “the Earl’s extraordinary love story and the feat of the *Kathleen Gillett* was legendary at the time but has unfortunately slipped from living memory.”

“It is one of Sydney’s great adventure stories that we’re now fortunate to be able to retell,” said Ms Riley.

With dreams of sailing around the world together, Jack and Kathleen spent six years designing and building their double-ended ketch, the *Kathleen Gillett*, a classic blue-water cruising yacht. However, their big adventure was thwarted by the outbreak of WWII.

At the end of the war, Jack and a group of friends held a celebratory race from Sydney to Hobart. The *Kathleen Gillett* finished fourth (third on handicap) and this race became the inaugural Sydney to Hobart yacht race.

In 1947, the long-planned voyage finally took place, however, Kathleen Earl had to make the difficult decision to stay home with the couple's two children, Mick and Maris. Instead, Jack was joined by four friends on the journey which became only the second circumnavigation of the world by an Australian yacht.

“The logbooks are simply extraordinary,” said Ms Riley. “They’re filled with fun character sketches, photographs and bits of ephemera picked up along the way (stamps, postcards, currency, etc) as well as secret love notes for Kathleen’s eyes only.”

The State Library acquired the logbooks from the Earl family in 2018 – they have been digitised in full for people to access on the Library’s website.

Media Release



During the 25,700-mile voyage, Jack would send the logs back home when the ship was in port. These functioned both as love letters to his wife and as a record of the journey – the logs were shared with friends and family.

The voyage and the Earl's love story captured people's imagination at the time with thousands farewelling the *Kathleen Gillet* from Sydney Harbour in June 1947 and welcoming her back home in December 1948.

Several years after the voyage, the *Kathleen Gillett* was sold and had a few more exciting adventures, including being shipwrecked in Guam, before finding a home at the Australian National Maritime Museum in 1988.

A selection of pages from the Jack Earl logbooks are on display in the Library's Amaze Gallery until 13 June 2021.

Margot Riley is available for interviews.

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