



Editorial

There is an obviously different approach in the presentation of this newsletter. Earlier in the year Capt. Dick approached me, (Peter English) and Jeff Malley, to produce a more 'professional' looking newsletter. I, for one, accepted the challenge enthusiastically for several reasons. Having been invited by Jeff to use the Wattle as a camera platform for the arrival of The Tall Ships in December 1987, I immediately developed affection for the vessel. Jeff was a crewman at the time which made my visit that much more enjoyable. Having been involved in photo journalism and illustrative photography for fifty odd years and having produced several existing newsletters I have taken on the task willingly and, together with Jeff Malley and his broad knowledge in so many relevant topics we hope to maintain your interest.

It is important for all to realise that the success of this publication depends largely on the support from those associated with the Wattle through contributions that may be lodged with either Jeff (jeffmalley@bigblue.net.au) or myself (peterandvern@gmail.com).

'Above and Below Decks'

My first visit to The Wattle, (on dry land), was quite a shock. Not having seen the ship out of the water and closely examining it I realised quite some time had past since the enjoyable days 'on the bay'. The evidence of age and a degree of neglect became very apparent and I have to say I felt a little sad. However, since my first visit and several subsequent visits I have witnessed the incredible effort all have made in the ship's restoration.



The image on the left was the initial hull I saw in May this year. This month, (November) 2010, defective parts, removals and replacement parts have been the order of the day and much has been done. As will always be the case in these situations, costs, volunteers and available parts and materials dictate progress. Also, the odd differences of opinion as to 'how' the process of restoration is undertaken come to the fore.

There's humour associated with the restoration. Jeff was on the spot to capture one of the engineers making an attempt to 'slide' into the boiler for inspection purposes. "One can't put a round peg in a round hole"!



From the Board

It is now some months since we last issued a "Steamlines". You will notice that we have a different format now. This is due to the fact that we have new editors – Jeff Malley and Peter English, both more professional than the Chairman.

To defray postage costs, this edition will be emailed to those who have given an email address. If you don't wish to receive Steamlines electronically, please let us know and we'll revert to the ordinary mail. If you have an email address we don't know about and you wish to get the newsletter by email, please let us know that too.

October 22 saw the first anniversary of Wattle's coming out of the water and as we look around, we should be well satisfied with what we have achieved in twelve months. At first glance it doesn't look as if much has happened. But bear in mind that in that twelve months, we have established a working, fully operational repair yard with single and three phase electrics, compressed air and water where we need them. We have established all our equipment such as the lathe, press, drill, welders etc. As well we have purchased equipment such as a plasma cutter, a magnetic drill and a plate roller.

On board ship, the task of getting out the forward ballast required an enormous effort. Dense aged concrete reinforced with scrap steel billets didn't let go easily but finally gave in to the jackhammer efforts of Tony Bertucci, Tony Adams and others.

Hull plates have been removed and replacement of badly corroded frames has begun. The rudder has been removed and sand-blasted and awaits repairs to some welded seams. The propeller has been removed and temporarily replaced pending Marine Safety inspection. Overhaul of engine room equipment has started in the loving care of John Rogers and John Kovac. Austin Spiteri has contributed his expertise to help John Rogers fix up the ship's electrics. No catalogue of work would be complete without reference to our master scaffolder Ron Stannus and his senior apprentice Jeff Braun. Thanks to them, we can safely access all parts of the ship.

As well as all that, refurbishing of woodwork has started. Victor Langlands has worked his magic with sander, brush and polyester on the bar and the galley roof light and has now commenced on the wheelhouse. This will require stripping the boarding, sanding, finishing and re-installing internally and externally. All electric cabling will be concealed behind the internal panelling. Still to come will be the bulwark top rails and the doors and windows of the aft passenger compartment. Victor receives help from others when they are crowded out of the forward compartment or the engine room. Among those who help Victor from time to time is Peta Knott who has also prepared a conservation plan for the lifeboat. Work will start soon on this.

Away from the work site, we are making efforts in other directions. We have made a submission, prepared by Peta Knott (busy lady, isn't she?) to the Australian National Maritime Museum – we have applied for a grant to enable us to catalogue and preserve all our photographs, pamphlets, brochures and drawings. All of these currently occupy several shoe boxes in Tony Lewis's study and deserve a better fate. If we are successful with our grant application, older members with memories of earlier days may find themselves called on to help identify times, dates, faces and places which show up in the photographs. And if you have anything which can add to our collection, please let us know. Use Dick Francis as the point of contact and Chairman Dick will organise things.

Parallel with this, we have commenced research into early history of Wattle. This work is being carried out by Jeff Malley and Dr. Carolyn Theodore. Carolyn is an archivist who has volunteered her time and we are very appreciative of her efforts. Carolyn and Jeff are digging back into the pre-1932 past to find out just what decisions and bureaucratic mechanisms went into starting the construction of Steam Tug No. 111 (now Wattle). We are certain this will be a fascinating story and look forward to it.

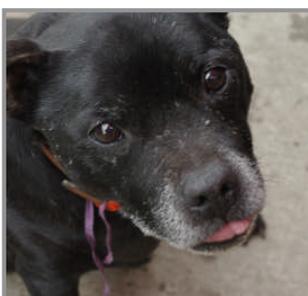
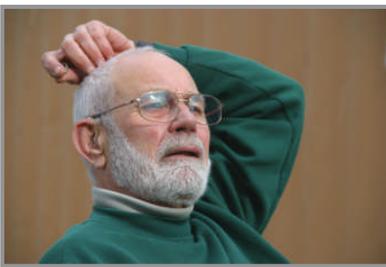
Jeff has also started to compile an oral history of Wattle with a focus on the time after she left the Navy and before she came to Melbourne. People associated with that time who have been contacted to date and have promised to help include Alan Edenborough, Warwick Turner and Andy Munns. Leigh Doeg has also offered his memories of the change-over period in 1979 and later. If any reader has recollections of Wattle which can be added to our history and is willing to bend Jeff's ear, please contact him (phone (03)9876 2213 or e-mail (jeffmalley@bigblue.net.au)).

Dick and Tony attended a recent meeting with Sorrento Steam and used the opportunity to update members of our progress. They expressed themselves as very happy with progress.

Christmas Get Together

A Christmas get together is planned for Tuesday 30th November at 18.30hrs on site (19 South Wharf). All members are welcome as are partners and family. This will be preceded by the AGM at 17.00.

Some of The Wattle Crew



Mystery History

The circumstances leading to the construction of the Wattle seem to reflect much about the history and fortunes of the Cockatoo Island Dockyard where it was built.

From the early 1920's a declining throughput of work and the consequent decline in workforce numbers at Cockatoo Island appear to be influenced by three main factors. One was the withdrawal of the Navy and its maintenance facilities to Garden Island in 1921, another was the High Court decision of 1927 to limit the activities of Cockatoo in open competitive tendering in heavy engineering projects and the third was the effect of the depression on business activity. By 1929 the Dockyard was finding it difficult to obtain sufficient work and by 1931 was struggling to recover costs. The workforce fell from 1,290 in 1928 to 560 in 1932.

In this context of decline the Commonwealth Government through the Commonwealth Shipping Board (established in 1923 to, amongst other things, administer Cockatoo) put the dockyard out to tender in 1929 but found no takers at that time. It was not until 3 February 1933, that the Australian Commonwealth Shipping Board signed an agreement, with Cockatoo Docks & Engineering Co. Ltd (Codeco), effective from 1 March 1933, to transfer dockyard operations to the company (the Cockatoo Island Dockyard Agreement Act 1933).

The change to a private leaseholder is significant in that it occurred after the Commonwealth Shipping Board had approved and commenced construction of a small steam tug ship number 111 (Wattle) - the last ship approved by the CSB. The general arrangement drawings for ship 111 were completed in April 1932, construction commenced sometime later during 1932, and drawings for rigging, navigation lights etc on mast and funnel were completed during 1933. The tug was launched as Codeco by the floating crane Titan on the 27th June 1933. The tug was completed and handed over to the Royal Australian Navy on the 15th February 1934 and named the Wattle where she operated as a non commissioned vessel until 1969.

Secondary sources suggest that the building of the Wattle was a speculative venture undertaken to a) employ the apprentices at Cockatoo and to b) maintain a skills base at the dockyard at a time when employment levels were very low. Thus far an issue in putting together a history of the ship is that few primary sources have been cited with regard to the decision and reasons to build the Wattle. Accordingly it might be necessary to access minutes of the Commonwealth Shipping Board to shed light on this. If it can be shown that a primary reason for building the Wattle was to save and engage apprentices then this might be used today to seek Commonwealth funding support to restore the ship, particularly given the high profile that trade training has in current education and economic growth policies.

Another little mystery about the construction of the Wattle is the sourcing of the steel used to build her. While many of the beams are clearly embossed with a BHP stamp, one beam in the engine room, just in front of the boilers, is embossed with the stamp "Frodingham Iron". A preliminary investigation suggests that the UK based Frodingham Iron Company ceased manufacturing steel under that name in 1912, after it had taken over the Appleby Iron Company and changed name to the Appleby Frodingham Steel Company. So is this engine room beam of the Wattle a left over cut off that had been lying around in the Cockatoo yard or was it recycled from a scrapped ship? Or is there another explanation?

Sources.

Chambers, M. (2000). Cockatoo Island Dockyard : a guide to the records. Canberra, National Archives of Australia. http://www.naa.gov.au/naaresources/Publications/research_guides/guides/dockyard/introduction.htm

Godden Mackay Logan (2007). Cockatoo Island Dockyard Conservation and Management Plan Volume 1. Sydney, A report prepared for the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust. <http://www.harbourtrust.gov.au/docs/cmp-cockatooisland-dockyard1.pdf>

Hogben, G. C. (1991). "Steam Tug Wattle." The Dog Watch - Restoration of Ships in Australia(48): 11-15.

Jeremy, J. C. (2005). Cockatoo Island. Sydney's Historic Dockyard. Sydney, University of New South Wales Press Ltd

Bay Steamers Maritime Museum Ltd. may be contacted at P.O. Box 98, Albert Park, Victoria, 3206 or through the Chairman Captn Dick Francis on 03 9873 2009 (mob 0413 797791; email wendick116@bigpond.com) or Secretary Tony Lewis on 03 9846 1819 (mob 0410 471819; email ailston@primus.com.au).