



WAVE LET

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“theship comes first”

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The Newsletter of the Barque *Polly Woodside* Volunteers Association Inc.



How things have changed! - Polly moored in the river with Shed 4, the Conference Centre, the new footbridge and the Hilton Hotel in the background.
Image dated 26th November 2009

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News on Ship and Site

Progress is being made around the *Polly* site. Sieved building site rubble is being poured into the dry-dock to support the cradle in which the *Polly* will rest. The two top layers of ballast weighting up to 100 tonnes from *Polly* will be added to this when a suitable crane becomes available. At 77 concrete cores to a tonne, this will involve the removal of several thousand cores which will be shifted using paid labour. Probably the same crane will be used to lift the mizzen topmast into position.

The steel sheet pilings (try saying that after a few drinks!) have been driven in at the dock entrance and grouted. A large pump rated at 180 ltr/sec is currently lowering the water level in the dock.

A new dock wall, gate(s) and base slab with keel supports will be built before moving *Polly* back into the dock. The design for the new dock gate(s) has not yet been finalised but if the *Polly* is to be moved in and out of the dock from time to time will presumably have to be integrated with a walkway across the dock entrance.

The State Government is providing \$8.86 million for the refurbishment of the dock and the Plenary Group are providing \$4 million for work on the site and the *Polly*.

Shed 4 remains standing and there are no plans to dismantle it to our knowledge although the flooring will probably have to be strengthened. The site for Shed 2 has been laid out but there is no word as to when construction will commence.

The footbridge across the river is nearly complete and there is a plan to open the new bridge and the Convention Centre forecourt before the end of the year.

The new dry-dock plans were tabled at the last Ship Committee and PWVA Committee meetings.

Glazing of the pump-house is still in progress.

Ralph McDonell

Unfortunately, after his accident 3 months ago Ralph is still hospitalised but his condition continues to improve and he is able to stand with the aid of a frame. He was moved to the Peter James Centre on Burwood Highway in Burwood East on the 27th November and I am sure is always happy to see visitors. He will have access to better rehab facilities at the Centre.

Alma Doepel progress report

The 3 masted topsail schooner *Alma Doepel* is still undergoing work at Birdon's Shipyard at Port Macquarie but is due back home in Melbourne in late January where she will be refitted at Shed 2 at Victoria Harbour. During her refit, the site will be open to visitors who will be able to watch progress. The ship is owned by Sail and Adventure Ltd a not-for-profit company committed to *Alma's* preservation as a youth-orientated sail training vessel.

Library

The last three Lloyd's Registers are now re-bound and back in the collection. A total of 18 Lloyd's Registers were repaired and re-bound, all paid for by PWVA Members. They are housed in a specially-built bookcase in the library at the National Trust HQ at Tasma Terrace. Unfortunately, being away from a maritime site, the number of ship research queries has almost dried up – some publicity is required. Or maybe a move back to the site in due course!

Pump House Ponderings - Derek Moore

Many events have occurred in the Pump House or in the precinct. I will list some of them as they occurred, for the interest and information of all "Polly" volunteers.

On 30th September, all stored items in the white shipping container were shifted to Shed 4, as the container had to be relinquished by the National Trust. After this task was completed by a team of four, I visited the Pump House and discovered discharge water from the two sumps flowing down the brick lined walls, into the bottom of the Pump Room. Investigations revealed that the common discharge pipe at the top of the South wall had been disconnected by persons unknown. The two sump pumps were switched off, to reduce water inflow. Graeme Cooper and I were advised by Multiplex that the situation would be rectified within 48 hours.

The following Tuesday, 7th October, I found the Pump House floor covered in water. Again, the contractor undertook to install a new discharge system ASAP, which was finally done by Thursday 9th October. On Tuesday, 14th October, I discovered that the sump pumps were not working because their power leads had been disconnected from the temporary switchboard inside the Pump Room. They were reconnected and resumed operations,

fortunately before the floor had begun to flood. Silt was swept up from the lower floor and also removed by hand from the bottom of the sumps, especially the West sump.

On 21st October, Tanya Williams visited the Pump House and photographed various items in the Pump Room.

On 28th October, the top of the Engineer's Office was recovered with black plastic, to try and reduce water ingress, when rain occurred. During October and November, the installation of glass and metal cladding on the frame of the enclosure was occurring.

Most of the glass sheets on the walls of the enclosure had been installed on the enclosure by 25th November. The roof of part glass and part zinc sheeting appeared close to finishing, too. Time will tell whether the newly-enclosed Pump House becomes a hot house in the Summer!

H.M.S. Hood's last survivor dies

The last survivor of the *H.M.S. Hood* tragedy died a few weeks ago on October 4th. Ted Briggs was 85 years old. The Hood was sunk by a long-distance salvo from the *Bismarck's* 15" guns in the North Atlantic in 1941. The shells penetrated the thin deck armour of the *Hood* and she sank within minutes with a loss of 1,415 crew. Only three men survived. Ted Briggs was high on the compass platform when the *Hood* blew up beneath him. He was dragged down by the ship but was saved by an air pocket which propelled him back to the surface "like a champagne cork". He broke surface to see the Hood's bow vertical in the sea. The sight recurred in his dreams ever after. He was rescued after 3 hours in the water by *H.M.S. Electra*. He served as a signalman on other ships, retiring from the Navy in 1973 with the rank of lieutenant. An inquiry found that a German shell had pierced the deck armour and exploded in a magazine. However, Ted Briggs blamed the unstable rocket launchers, a whim of Churchill's which the crew hated. He also blamed Admiral Holland for putting "our lovely old girl" in the van of the attack (the *Hood* was built in 1916 and had never been refitted). Both the *Hood* and the *Bismarck* were located by underwater surveys in recent years. In 2001 at the age of 79, Ted visited the wreck site to release a plaque to his lost comrades. Far beneath, the *Hood* lay broken in half. Her rudder was locked in obedience to the last signal that Ted Briggs had seen hoisted, two blue-flag 2, a 20-degree port turn into the *Bismarck's* guns.

Extract from The Economist Oct 25th 2008

It's all happening at Station Pier!

During the late spring and summer a total of 57 cruise ships with 140,000 passengers will arrive at Station Pier (actually only 13 different ships but some of them come back several times). Wednesday the 3rd December will be interesting when 3 ships arrive on the same day plus the *Spirit of Tasmania* (where are they going to put them

all?). Among the visiting cruise ships are the improbably named “*Celebrity Millennium*” and “*Silver Whisper*” (who on earth dreams up these names?). The only downside is for the long-suffering commuters on the 109 tram from Station Pier into the city who have to compete for space with hundreds of shoppers and sightseers off the ships. Anyway it is bringing income to the city and that must be good thing!

The “mystery” of the *Mary Celeste*

BBC Television produced one of its excellent documentaries shown on the ABC during October on the myths surrounding the *Mary Celeste*. The *Mary Celeste* was a 282 ton brigantine which was carrying a cargo of methyl alcohol in 1,700 barrels from New York to Gibraltar in 1872 with a crew of 8 plus the captain’s wife and daughter. She was discovered abandoned with sails set, hatch covers off and a rope trailing astern. The ship’s boat, log book and items essential to survival were missing. The *Mary Celeste* was found and boarded by the crew of a British vessel, the *Dei Gratia*, who towed her into Gibraltar and claimed salvage. Their case was sabotaged by a lawyer who for reasons of his own tried to persuade the authorities that there was skulduggery involved and that the salvage crew were not entitled to compensation. After months of legal wrangling the salvage crew eventually received compensation although it was only a fraction of the value of the vessel and its cargo.

When the cargo was unloaded it was discovered that 9 of the barrels of alcohol were empty and it was obvious that they had leaked into the hold. Experiments on the TV programme demonstrated that a spark could have ignited the alcohol fumes which would have blown off the hatch covers with an impressive show of flame but would have left no scorch marks. It was concluded that the captain had ordered the crew to abandon ship and take to the ship’s boat on the assumption that the *Mary Celeste* was about to blow up. The boat was still attached to the ship by a trailing halyard but strong winds may have broken the rope and eventually capsized the boat with the loss of all on board.

Thus there was no real mystery until Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote a story entitled “J. Habakuk Jephson’s Statement” in 1884. The *Mary Celeste* became the *Marie Celeste* in Conan Doyle’s story and a tale of mystery was woven around the original incident. The so-called mystery of the *Mary/Marie Celeste* also inspired a number of other stories and films (including an episode of the Goon Show) thus perpetuating the myth when the real story was far more prosaic.

PWVA Annual General Meeting

It is planned to hold the AGM at the Mission to Seafarers on **Saturday 14th February 2009**. Notices will be sent out in January.

‘Crossed the Bar’

Vic Hatfield - we have just received the sad news that Vic died suddenly on Friday the 28th November. Our thoughts are with Jenny and family.

Dacre Smyth - passed away on 3rd December. A true friend to *Polly Woodside*, whose support and interest will be greatly missed.

The year in review

It has been, to say the least, a difficult year for the PWVA. We have lost some fine people, Bob Herd, Tor Linqvist, John Steuart, Vic Hatfield whose presence and skills will be sorely missed, to which must be added Ralph’s injury and hospitalisation.

The decision not to build the promised new maritime museum without prior consultation with the PWVA has left us wondering where we fit into the grand scheme . A number of us also wonder whether an extended Shed 2 is going to be as attractive as a fully-fledged maritime museum.

It remains to be seen what 2009 has in store for the PWVA but we do urge as many members as possible to attend the AGM next February and to renew their memberships for 2009 (all membership subs are due at the beginning of each year). **Please forward subscriptions (\$20 for all non-Honorary members) and any donations to John Wroe, 38 Addison Street, Elwood, Vic 3184, phone 9531 5626.**

Next year is going to be interesting and challenging with the much-reduced maritime facility at the *Polly* site due to re-open. At this stage we have no idea how many volunteers will be required at the new site, nor what their roles will be. We are hoping by the time of the AGM in February that the situation will be a little clearer.

The PWVA Committee takes this opportunity to wish all our Members a happy and safe Festive Season.

John Wroe - editor

On a lighter note - spotted last week on Beaconsfield Parade on the back of a “Grey Nomads” caravan “Adventure Before Dementia”