



# WAVE



Number 191

"the ship comes first"

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



Roger Wilson receiving his P.W.V.A. Honorary Life Membership Certificate

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## **Report on Roger Wilson's 'Celebration of Life'.**

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of December, the Mission to Seafarers was filled with over an estimated 200+ people there to pay their respects to Roger Wilson.

Fran, family, friends, seafarers, members and officers of the Maritime Union of Australia, Polly Woodside volunteers and a member of the National Trust packed the hall to near capacity.

At 11 am the Celebrant opened the Celebration with a detailed history of Roger's life, which was an inspiration, and made one realise just how many people Roger had aided, helped and inspired throughout his life.

As there were eleven speakers Fran emphasised each speaker was to keep their speech to two minutes, but this could not be done by most speakers when relating their experiences with Roger.

His son Michael was the first speaker to give, a glimpse of Roger's influence and mentorship and was easily in excess of the time.

Following on with seamen Roger helped especially while Secretary of the Union, Union officials, friends who shared his sailing adventures, and then it was my turn to tell of his help on the restoration of Polly Woodside, and the behind the scenes work he did for us, which was mainly forgotten except by the few old-timers remaining. See my contribution below.

On completion of the Celebration nearly everyone stayed, moving around and swapping memories of the past, whilst sampling the refreshments.

PWVA members were represented by Anne Gibbons, Don Knowles, Derek Moore, Mike Ridley, Richard Barber, Anne and Neil Thomas.

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### **My contribution to the Celebration for the P.W.V.A.**

The skills of Roger's generation were learnt from the sailing ship seamen.

His association with Polly Woodside goes back to when we first started restoring the ship, **but** he was working in the background.

Many seamen came to him complaining of feeling deskilled and frustrated by the new technologies.

Roger asked them, "Well, why don't you go down and help Tor Lindqvist restore the Polly Woodside".

**He managed to get these skilled seamen to come in on their leave and created rosters so they would be on hand when required for Polly.**

Roger came down to Polly when he stopped paid work in the 1980s, and being a real seaman, he became our Bosun. We'd ask him how, and **he would show us how it should be done.**

Two incidents with Roger I will always remember: -

1. The lumber company in Canada who had 12 baulks of Oregon timber for the mast and yards were delivered to Vancouver for shipping to Melbourne, **but we had to cover the shipping.** At 9am roger heard the staff talking about this expense to cover the shipping, -left, went around all the ships in the Port of Melbourne, collected money, went to a bank, got a bank cheque then went back to Polly at 4pm and placed the cheque on the desk.
2. When we were hauling the boats up on the davits, roger supervising with his two dogs Max and Robby, would call "two, three, **Heave!**" On **Heave** the two dogs barked.

Roger in his 95<sup>th</sup> year was still coming to Polly and teaching how to make his memorable Ditty bags.

Roger's approach to Polly Woodside – **is** we have to be **constantly** asking ourselves, - **and this included the National Trust**, - "what will the ship look like in 50 years' time?"

Roger's answer was, "Ok, in 50 years' time, if we pass on all the skills, **this ship will look as it should look**". **SHIPSHAPE.**

## Roger Wilson, His Story.



*The other day I was doing something that reminded me that it is 70 years now since I joined my first merchant ship. I was 16, but I can remember some of the things about that time like it was yesterday. I can remember some of the people that were in the crew; in my mind's eye I can see their faces, and one of the good things in my experience was that in 1946, early after the Second World War, there were still literally thousands of really old seamen – 60, 70 and even 80 years of age – so I learnt how to do all this sewing with canvas, doing fancy knots. The skills that my generation of seafarers used were those learnt from sailing ship seaman.*

*My association with the Polly Woodside goes back to when they first started restoring the ship. In those early years I worked as an elected official of the then Seamen's Union, which is now part of the Maritime Union, and at the same time we were getting the introduction of roll-on/roll-off ships and ways of handling cargo which were – in the skill set needed – less skillful jobs. Lots of seamen came in to complain to me about how they felt they were becoming deskilled, and describing the alienation they were beginning to feel with this decline in the necessary skills required. So, I said, "Well why don't you go down and help Tor [Lindqvist] restore the Polly Woodside?" So, I managed to get these guys to come in on their leave, and the rebuilding of the ship was going on seven days a week and there was a core of about two- or three-hundred people.*

*I've been here since I stopped paid work in the late 1980s. We've now got in charge a highly qualified shipwright, Ferdi [Ferdinand Darley]. He's an experienced shipwright, and he's not just a shore shipwright- he was at sea for ten or twelve years. So, like me, at the risk of appearing immodest, he's a real seafarer. If you have a chance, go into the ship and look into the after accommodation, because you'll see the absolutely superb work done under the leadership of this shipwright. It's just wonderful. He asks me, and I show him, how to do some of the old things.*

*My approach to Polly Woodside is that we have to be constantly asking ourselves, and this includes the leadership of the Trust, what will this ship look like in 50 years' time? The gang of volunteers that come here now, they bring a wide community work experience to the job. We've got people who were fitters and turners; people who ran international NGOs; we've got people that worked in the SEC [State Electricity Commission]. We've got a really good crowd of people, and now we've got about four or five younger*

people. So that for me says, ok, in 50 years' time, if we can pass on all the skills of the older people here, this ship will look as it should look-shipshape. And for me-I'm in my 87<sup>th</sup> year-I'll keep coming here as long as I can.

## **The stories of Two of our Volunteers:-**

### **Polly and Me - From Wave June 1991 - by John Yunken**

Polly Woodside was always a lucky ship. She was lucky in the first place to survive 37 hard trading years at sea without serious mishap. She was lucky to survive even longer as a coal hulk, outlasting the destruction of all her sisters to become, by 1960, the last sailing ship afloat in Australia.

In her life since then she has been incredibly lucky in terms of people. Whatever the need, there was always the right man or woman at exactly the right time.

The key man was Dr. E Graeme Robertson, eminent neurosurgeon and expert in cast iron decoration. Behind the mild, almost diffident manner was a cast iron doggedness. It was he who achieved the first and greatest triumph: persuading Rodney Davidson and Trust Council to undertake the immense task of restoring and preserving the ship. Knowing little about ships himself, he had an even more valuable talent: the ability to find the right people for the task.

Captain Gerard H. Heyen, M.B.E., master mariner. The last man to command an Australian-registered sailing ship before the breed disappeared forever in 1929. A man with an innate power of command, a deep love for and knowledge of ocean-going sail. Between his retirement from A.N.L. (Australia National Line) in 1965 and his death in December in 1980 in his 81<sup>st</sup> year, he prepared a record unique in the world: the details of a 19<sup>th</sup> century 600/100-ton barque, drawn and described in terms comprehensible to a generation which had never seen one.

George Frew, businessman and entrepreneur, a man of energy, force and enthusiasm. Enlisted to raise \$100,000 from the public, he designed and single-handedly ran an appeal which brought in over \$150,000 in one year (1971 values, remember!).

Tor Lindqvist, Finnish-born seaman on the coast: seaman, sail-maker and gentleman. Seven years in Gustaf Erikson's fleet of big deepwater square-riggers before WW2. Silent, reserved, consummate rigger and tradesman: the ideal man to transform Gerry Heyen's documents into reality. In G.H.H's words: "the best marlin spike seaman I have ever known".

Jack Davey and his dedicated band of professional seamen. Vin Darroch, Bob Botterill, Joyce Lambert, Peter Frost, Heather Yarnton, John Steele, Fen Hall, Phil Hollis, Stefen Czordas and hundreds of others. The volunteers came from everywhere, from every walk of life, men and women, young and old, bound together only by a consuming passion for the ship. Skilled and unskilled, seamen and landsman. Toorak and Broadmeadows, welded into one under the Volunteers Association motto "The Ship Comes First".

And me. I too was the right man in the right place at the right time. Just as the project would have foundered without Graeme or Gerry or George or Tor or Jack and Vin and their dedicated groups, it would have been without me. Each of us had a vital central role to play that we did so without friction of any sort, in a single-minded selfless drive to a common goal, is an experience unique in my life.

My role from about 1978 was Executive Officer, responsible for making the project happen. I was also, it transpired, Pooh-Bah: Lord High Everything Else.

Everything funneled through me. If the Trust had a PW problem, be it marine insurance or a submission to Government or a VP to show around or an overseas request for information or an offer of help or a query on the accounts, the Trust referred it to me. If Gerry Heyen finished another set of drawings and specifications he sent it to me for typing, reproduction, distribution, financing, and arrangements to implement. If the Project Manager had a problem, if the volunteers had a suggestion or a need or a complaint, it came to me. If the Harbour Trust or the Press or Greenwich Maritime Museum or “Disgusted, North Balwyn” or Lloyds of London or the Department of Planning or Bert Smith of Murrumbidgee wanted to speak to Someone, Someone was always me. I nearly went round the bend, but I enjoyed every minute.

I was the glue that held the Project together, filling the gaps between its components while at the same time keeping them apart, acting as a shield and filter for everyone – the Trust, the volunteers, Captain Heyen – so that each segment could get on with what it did best. The years were filled with a deluge of tasks from all sources, inside and outside the project: each had to deal with if we were to move on. Leafing through some of the 20 shelf feet of files I am astonished that I ever managed to do it.

On Dr. Robertson’s death in 1975 I became Chairman. My role as glue remained, intensified by the Chairman’s tasks. Without meaning to I had become the only one with a truly comprehensive picture of the whole enterprise, relied on absolutely for every initiative, every decision, every action, every piece of advice.

When Captain Heyen died in 1980 he left a huge void: his knowledge, his skill and his authority were irreplaceable. I took over as best as I could what was left of his research and documentation role. There didn’t seem to be anyone else who could.

Oddly enough, in all my years of involvement the one part I had never played was the obvious one: I had never actually worked on the ship as a volunteer. There had always been too much else to do. In 1981 for the first time, I joined the volunteer carpenters working on the fit out, and for the next five years spent every Saturday working on the tools. I’ve never been happier.

I am deeply grateful to Polly, of course I am desperately proud to have been instrumental in giving her continuing life: but in pure joy and the consciousness of a worthwhile job well done. She has given me more than I have ever given her.

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### **This is how Michael Porter, your Committee Secretary, became a Polly Woodside Volunteer**

#### **Gypsy Story**

The two books required for the exams in my last year at High school were ‘Twelfth Night’ (Shakespeare) and ‘A Gypsy of the Horn’ by Rex Clements.

I read and reread the latter, and as a 15-year-old I was enthralled by the account of sailing on a famous Windjammer around the world and making it safely around the notorious Cape Horn. Growing up far from the sea in the Blue Mountains, reading this story was as near as I would ever be to the sea and shipping. Strangely, I cannot remember if there was a question about the book in the end of year exams.

When the war came and it was time for me to enrol in the Defence Forces, I thought about joining the Navy. But on lining up to enlist in the Navy, we were told they were not taking on new men,

wanting only Stokers and we did not look likely at all. We became a bunch of Footsloggers instead. What a letdown for me and my sailing ambitions.

After the war ended, I followed my Dad into the butchering business. My three brothers and I all became shop butchers. I got married, but finding housing was a problem in Sydney at that time and there were all sorts of other shortages - blackouts, gas and petrol were hard to find and food rationing was common. One day our gloom was lifted when the offer came from a couple of ex army friends of a house and butchers' job in Point Lonsdale. So our little family quit Sydney to become Victorians. No question the best thing that ever happened to us.

Two places quickly became our favourite spots. The back beach was the kids' favourite place and the other was sitting on the cliff below the Point Lonsdale Lighthouse. We spent many happy hours here watching all the comings and goings of so many of the famous passenger liners. They passed through the Rip with many passengers on their way home to England or perhaps immigrants on their way into Port Melbourne. This was a ship-watchers paradise!

I changed jobs and commuted by bus to work in Geelong. What a busy place that was. The butcher had three shops, and I spent time in all of them. There was another aspect to the work that I had not been aware of. They were shipping provedores, supplying visiting ships with both meat and vegetables for their crews. Several times, it was my job to take the van, pick up the supplies and take them to the dockside.

This was, at last, the closest I had ever been to a ship of any kind. These were of course cargo steamers from many different ports. Most of their crews were Pacific Islanders and all the ships had one common smell of turnip stew or soup. I felt sure that this was their basic diet and was left wondering what they did with all the meat and veggies etc. I was delivering.

After about eleven years in the trade, I made a change. I was having too many bouts of flu or bronchitis brought on by going in and out the various shop freezers, especially in the winter months. So I opted for various jobs, mostly outdoors in the fresh air and sunshine. But nothing to do with shipping alas.

My last years before retirement however brought me in close with ships in a big way. These were the ships bringing the imported Toyota cars into Webb Dock. I was employed in getting the clearance papers, inspecting the cars for damage and getting them off the wharf by truck to our holding yards.

Two of these ships I remember so well, were amazing. Toyo Fuji 1 and Toyo Fuji 2 they were called and they did the round trip between here and Japan in approximately 18 days. At times it seemed I had barely cleared the wharf of one ship load when the other ship was back again. I was told that there were miles of roadway inside as you drove from the wharf side to the upper decks. I was once on board to get a key replaced for a locked car and could well believe that it was true.

Just before I retired, Toyo 1 was retired and replaced. If ever a ship deserved a rest, it was her.

So that brings me to the end of my story. The weekend of my retirement, my wife and I decided to visit the Polly Woodside. We had often spoke of doing so but never got around to it. We always seemed to have something else to do at weekends. So, to visit Polly we went. And there she was. At last! My Gypsy of the Horn! Sure, she is no Windjammer. But a brave Barque that has conquered Cape Horn more than once. That is more than many a larger ship could do.

I became a Polly volunteer that same day ... but that's another story.

**From: - THE THREE-HEADED DOG –**

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**Christmas at Sea: A ‘Nautical’ poem by Robert Louis Stevenson.**

Robert Louis Stevenson, born in Edinburgh in 1850, was the son of a lighthouse engineer. He was a sickly child and a life-long invalid, but an inveterate traveler, living his final years in Samoa, where he was known as ‘Tusitala’ – the teller of tales. While Queen Victoria’s reign saw the steady rise of steam-powered ships, sailing vessels only slowly becoming obsolete, and ships often used a combination of steam and sail. Stevenson had very likely experienced first-hand, if only as a passenger, the drama of ‘Christmas at Sea’.

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**Christmas at Sea**

**The** sheets are frozen hard, and they cut the naked hand;  
The decks were like a slide, where a seaman could scarcely stand;  
The wind was a nor’wester, blowing squally off the sea;  
And cliffs and spouting breakers were the only things a-lee.  
**They** heard the surf a-roaring before the break of day.  
But twas only with the peep of light that we saw how ill we lay.  
We tumbled every hand on deck instant, with a shout,  
And we gave her the maintops’l and stood by to go about.  
**All** day we tacked and tacked between the South Head and the North;  
All day we hauled the frozen sheets, and got no further forth;  
All day as cold as charity, in bitter pain and dread,  
For very life and nature we tacked from head to head.  
**We** gave the South a wider berth, for there the tide race roared;  
But every tack we made we brought the North Head close aboard:  
So’s we saw the cliffs and houses, and the breakers running high,  
And the coastguard in his garden, with his glass against his eye.  
**The** frost was on the village roofs as white as ocean foam;  
The good red fires were burning bright in every ‘longshore home.  
The windows sparkled clear, and the chimneys volleyed out;  
And I vow we sniffed the victuals as the vessel went about.  
**The** bells upon the church were rung with a mighty jovial cheer;  
For it’s just that I should tell you how (of all the days in the year)  
This day of our adversity was blessed Christmas morn,  
And the house above the coastguard’s was the house where I was born.  
**O well** I saw the pleasant room, the pleasant faces there,  
My mother’s silver spectacles, my father’s silver hair;  
And well I saw the firelight, like a flight of homely elves,  
Go dancing round the china plates that stand upon the shelves.  
**And** well I knew the talk they had, the talk that was of me,  
Of the shadow on the household and the son that went to sea;  
And O the wicked fool I seemed, in every kind of way,  
To be there hauling frozen ropes on Blessed Christmas Day.  
**They** lit the high sea light, and the dark began to fall.  
“All to loose top gallant sails”, I heard the Captain call.  
“By the Lord, she’ll never stand it”, our First Mate, Jackson. Cried.  
---“It’s the one way or the other, Mr. Jackson” he replied.

**She** staggered to her bearings, but the sails were new and good,  
And the ship smelt up to windward just as though she understood.  
As the winter's day was ending, in the entry of the night,  
We cleared the weary headland and passed below the light.  
**And** they heaved a mighty breath, every soul on board but me,  
As they saw her nose again pointing handsome out to sea.  
But all that I could think of, in the darkness and the cold,  
Was just that I was leaving home and my folks were growing old.

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### **Volunteers: -**

Our Tuesday gang of volunteers consists of Colin, Drew, and new recruit Michael though not PWVA members yet, and Campbell can come down after a 2-hour trip from Bendigo and Wayne whenever he is back in Melbourne. Jeff gets back on Boxing Day instead of 16<sup>th</sup> December, but we will see him on January 6. We also have two other new recruits Sandy and Shruti who have made the garden their domain.  
We really miss Roger and Mark still.

**The ship:** -With the blocks nearly finished (we hope) we turned our attention to the capstan bars, brought them to the workshop cleaned, repaired, and oiled them and Drew commenced putting fancy knots (Turks-head) around the bars. Every now and then he has a rest and scrapes out bitumen from the poop deck to be replaced with Sikalick (is that right?) in the future, as this stays flexible and will seal the deck to hopefully stop the water leaks.

Colin and I dismantled the starboard side boat chocks and are now repairing and restoring them ready for the double-ender boat return.

Michael is moving the mooring lines and painting the hawse-pipes.

Craig (National Trust carpenter) is working on the renewal of the gangway aft stairway base.

As we now have the new falls rope, we hope to lower the suspended boat onto the buffers for support to take it around to the Plenary side wharf for maintenance. When this is completed, we can return it onto the ship and repeat this with the port side boat.

There will be a great deal of restoration required to bring her back to her original condition (as per 2000), involving many requirements such as: -

Dry-docking of the ship and the repair of the air-water line – last dry-docking 2009 – 16 years ago.

Painting the ship's hull both interior and exterior, also masts and standing rigging.

Paint the deckhouse, cover the roof with canvas, and paint it. Renovate the skylight fittings.

Pinrails to be repaired and oiled, and their bases restored

Poop interior painted, and furniture interior and exterior fittings cleaned and oiled.

Ship's ballast sorted, replaced with heavier material e.g. lead in suspended baskets, hold planked providing more space for exhibition space.

Fore and main t'gallant masts to be manufactured and hoisted aloft.

Fore and main t'gallant yards to be made and with royal yards hoisted aloft.

On completion of top hamper standing and running rigging to be set up and re-tuned.

Deck equipment e.g. anchor winch and ship's pumps to be manufactured and fitted.

Signal mast to be re-sited at the south-east corner of the site for security, to enable flags to be flown when volunteers and/or the public are on site.

A platform pontoon required (as in the past) for air waterline, ship and cleaning of dock.

Polly Woodside to be open to the public as in the past

According to some people, the above is a pipe dream, but as Roger Wilson stated:-

**What will the ship look like in 50 years time?**