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“the ship comes first”

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

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Chairman’s Annual Report for 2013

Yet another year has galloped by for the PWVA and our beautiful ship. It has been a year of accomplishments, unfortunately some conflicts and disappointments, but look on the bright side, the volunteers are still a dedicated group doing wonderfully valuable work.

As you may be aware changes have been made with Polly’s management arrangements. The National Trust has appointed BMT to provide onsite management of the volunteers, as well as helping to arrange a more comprehensive volunteer and community engagement program, and to also develop their asset management program.

Sam Tait is creating the community engagement program, which includes the ‘Tuesday volunteers’ currently to be set up as a ‘Men’s Shed’ which under the Federal Government initiative, will gain us funding for tools and hopefully encourage like-minded individuals to join us.

The Signal Mast has now returned as the feature object for your approach to the site, and it will be great seeing flags flying again from the halyards. Our Maintenance Co-Ordinator Trevor Dove brought four members of his staff to assist with the heavy lifting, and it went up with only a few minor hitches. The crane was a great help. Many thanks to Trevor and his four volunteers from BMT for helping with the heavy stuff, and especially our volunteers John, Peter, Don, Roger and Richard for their efforts in showing how easy it was to achieve.

You may recall that the Signal Mast was the brainchild of Arthur Woodley, who worked as a shipwright at Duke and Orr Dock. Arthur built the Signal Mast from spars acquired from boats around Westernport, and many of the mast fittings as well as transport from Crib Point to Melbourne were donated. The rigging was made up by Tor Lindqvist, our late Foreman Rigger. Hence we acquired a Signal Mast worth many thousands of dollars, at a cost to the project of only a few hundred.

Melbourne Maritime Museum's 'Maritime Library' and 'Ships Photo Collection' are now on permanent loan to Seaworks Foundation at Williamstown, being housed in their new library, which was officially opened in September. Unfortunately many of the books were water-damaged while in storage. I still feel the 'Ships photo collection' should have been named after Glen Stuart, who sorted and catalogued the thousands of photos in the collection.

Ann Gibson retired from the National Trust in August after 20+ years of service. A Farewell Party was held for her at Polly Woodside with approximately 60 people attending, including 22 Polly volunteers. With great ceremony a piper escorted Ann and guests from Spencer Street to Polly. Food and drink was generously catered, and consumed. Speeches, toasts and presentations followed. Included with our presentation Ann was awarded an 'Honorary Life Membership' of the PWVA.

We have a **new Manager**, Steven Richardson, replacing Sean DeCourcy. Similarly to Sean he is responsible for Polly, Old Melbourne Gaol, and LaTrobe Cottages. We look forward to working with him.

Our '**Memorial Plaques**' are in the process of being mounted onto a framework which will resemble the ship's boats floorboards, with the 'Dedication Plaque' mounted in the centre, surrounded by the twelve plaques of people who were instrumental in the recognition of Polly and leaders in her restoration. The remainder will be arranged above and below the centre plaques. A mock-up of this was displayed at the Christmas Party, being viewed and approved by the members present.

On completion, the plaques will be displayed on the 'Ship Restoration' display in the Interpretive Centre.

Many thanks to Don Knowles for taking on this project.

We have two **new volunteers** Pat Appleton who lives in Lakes Entrance, and Murray (Nipper) Wenban (at present living in Sydney, but we are working on that!). Both were employed by the National Trust as assistant riggers to Tor Lindqvist.

Pat became Tor's assistant in 1981, and when he had to resign, Murray commenced work with Tor, which unfortunately was terminated by the National Trust after a period of time.

Pat has already been aloft commencing to check out Polly's spars, yards and rigging, after being one of us who attended our 'Working Safely at Heights' course at Polly.

Since the departure of Sarah and Seumas, no work has been done aloft, so now that we have a volunteer rigger, we have the ability to, at least gradually, render all gear aloft safe for us and for visitors.

The Pump House, and all its heritage equipment is now are under the auspices of the Department of Business and Innovation, but its access is still controlled by the MCEC.

On 2 occasions over the last 3 months, Derek with 2 members of Engineering Heritage Victoria, have had access to the Pump House to clean and lubricate the engines, pipework and associated fittings.

The interior view of the Pump House has also been enhanced with the moving of the heritage pipework, and other loose artefacts from the upper floor area, to the top of the boilers.

Most of the dried sediment (from the last flooding) has been cleaned from the metalwork of the machinery, and associated pipework. We hope that such remedial works will continue.

Thanks Derek – all improvements in the Pump House are thanks to you.

2014 promises to be a year of change for the better because:-

1. With having a volunteer rigger, gear can now be sent down from aloft, which we can then overhaul in the workshop.
2. Joint meetings with PWVA committee, National Trust and BMT to continue, thus keeping the lines of communication open.
3. Polly Woodside Men's Shed to commence, with new volunteers an option.

The committee: Finally, I would like to give special thanks to these dedicated people, without whom we couldn't have progressed as far as we have:-.

Ralph McDonnell, Vice Chairman, can't be with us in body, but certainly in spirit and Emails.

John Wroe, Treasurer, I fall back on him more and more, and he never hesitates to give his support.

Jenny Hunter, Secretary, Quiet (?), efficient, and doesn't hesitate to pull us back in line when we meandered off course, and I feel also keeps us motivated.

Roger Wilson, always there with practical advice and negotiation skills. His seaman's knowledge and expertise are invaluable,

Don Knowles – whose expertise in woodworking and ability to organise jobs, is a great asset to the maintenance and restoration of the ship.

Neville Keown, Always willing to help, but a little hampered at the moment.

Also, you the members of the PWVA for your continuing support.

Unfortunately I have to finish on a sad note. In 2013, we lost three members Rene Wilson, Barrie Wood and Dorothy Lyons, but they will all be personally remembered for their contributions to Polly.

Thank you.

The ship comes first.

Extract from George Frew's autobiography 'Someday I'll Have Money'.

George Frew, an 'Honorary Life Member' of the Polly Woodside Volunteers Association was, you will be aware, the instigator of the funds (71 Seamen) that commenced the restoration of Polly.

Without his drive there is a good chance we would not have Polly.

As you read his excerpt from Chapter 4 'The Halycon Years', it becomes evident that the dedication, drive and foresight of our founders was dominant, showing how our motto 'The Ship Comes First' was their all consuming passion.

CHAPTER 4

THE HALYCON YEARS

THERE IS an old expression: if you want something done, ask a busy man'.

My phone rang; it was Lorraine. 'There is a Doctor Robertson on the line. He would like to talk to you'.

'What about?' I said, thinking to myself: 'Surely not another abortionist.' Lorraine came back on the line: 'He says it's about Polly Woodside.'

'Never heard of her,' I said, with considerable impatience. Probably some girl leaving school he wants me to employ or something.

'He says Polly Woodside is a *sailing ship*.' This was getting too difficult.

'O.K. Put him through. Hello Doctor. How can I help you?'

'Mr. Frew, I'm a surgeon, and also involved with the National Trust. I'm hoping to enlist your assistance with the restoration of the 'Polly Woodside'. I've watched your career, and you seem to get things done. We really need someone like you to help us.'

By now I was completely bemused. 'What is so special about this Polly Woodside?' I asked naively.

'Well, it's the only remaining sailing ship in Australian waters,' he answered. The statement hit me like a ton of bricks, I had no idea how many old sailing ships there were around the world, but I guessed there were plenty of them. For there to be only one left in Australia was a pretty surprising revelation.

'Well, Doctor, 'I began. 'I'm awfully busy with a number of new projects my Company has undertaken and I really don't think I could give you the time that such an undertaking would require. What exactly did you

have in mind that I could do, and where is the ship now?' I also presumed this 'last remaining sailing ship in Australian waters' was lying at anchor somewhere out in the bay, rocking gently with the tide.

'I would like you to become a member of the Polly Woodside Restoration Finance Committee,' Dr. Robertson replied. 'She is presently nothing more than an old coal hulk lying on its side in the Maribyrnong River'. I asked how much he was expecting the restoration would cost, and was flabbergasted to hear it would be in the order of \$300,000 – maybe \$4 million in today's terms (14 years ago). For that sort of money, I was used to building a damned fine hotel freehold. 'Well that's a lot of money to raise, Doctor, for a National trust project,' I said.

'Oh, but the Government has promised a contribution of \$2 for every \$1 we raise, Mr Frew.' Well that might make it a bit easier, I thought, but still the time constraints were weighing heavily on me. I figured I knew how to get out of it.

'Doctor, I could never be a member of a committee. I'm used to having my own way, I would drive everyone else mad. All the other committee members would have to resign.' I could tell by the pause that he could see this would be a problem.

'Well, if they do all resign, would you take it on and help us?' I was in a trap now, but there would be no way they would all resign, so I was fairly safe. 'Oh, well, I guess so,' I answered, thinking that would be the end of that.

But that wasn't the end of that, Lorraine called through two days later: 'It's Doctor Robertson on the line again.' After the usual polite exchanges, he floored me with:

'Mr Frew, all the other members are willing to resign. Will you take it on?' After somewhat reluctantly agreeing, he then said: 'The only difficulty is that you can't legally be a Committee of just one person. There has to be one other by law.' I seized on this one last chance to escape:

'Ah, well, I must have the right to appoint that other person. Is that OK?' This will stop him, I thought.

'Yes, of course,' he answered. 'Who will it be?' Well, in for a penny, in for a pound. 'Norm Gallagher', I announced. Norm was the firebrand Secretary of the Builders Workers Union, and a much disliked individual, although from my experience he had always been a good and fair bloke, and we got along well. In any event, I knew he would never be accepted by the staid and crusty old National Trust.

There was a considerable pause before the Doctor said: 'You're joking, Mr Frew?' I had rather expected that reaction, because friend Norm was the most feared of all Victoria's militant unionists, and hardly the type to fit in with the elite National Trust set. 'No Doctor, I'm not,' I said. Dr Robertson didn't like the idea much, but he must have thought I was his only hope of raising the money to restore the ship, so it was a case of the means justifying the end. 'Well, OK then, if that's what you really think is necessary,' he said with reluctance.

And so it was that Norm Gallagher, my anti-hero, and sworn enemy of the moneyed classes, became the second member of the Polly Woodside Finance Committee, and generously allowed me to inform his colleagues in the building industry how pleased he would be should they find it possible to contribute to this good cause.

The project was destined to take much more of my time than I could ever have imagined. A good few thousand dollars were coughed up by Norm and my 'friends' (bless their public-spirited hearts) but in the end it was a marketing device I conjured up that succeeded in raising the balance of the money. I conceived of giving a handsome little model of Polly to any good soul who would donate \$100 to the National Trust of Australia (tax-deductable) for Polly's restoration Fund.

The final result was a splendid little model, precise in almost every detail, made from plastic extrusions and moulded gun-metal masts and other bits and pieces. Total cost, about \$1.50 each, but when painstakingly glued together and mounted on a stained wooden mounting block, it looked the goods, and, with the addition of a tiny brass plaque to identify each donor, it wasn't a half-bad mantelpiece decoration.

Presented to

JOHN W.SMITH

A member of 'the 71 Seamem"

Who gave "Polly Woodside" to Melbourne

The idea was a terrific success. The '71' bit related to the year we got the fund-raising finally together, and it had the advantage of perhaps making it look like there were only seventy other generous individuals who 'gave the Polly Woodside to Melbourne'. The production of the models – 1170, to be exact – was an absolute nightmare, and took nearly two years to complete. Every single day, this high-achieving hotel builder, with projects going left right and centre, would take a "lunch hour" to assemble, box, wrap, and mail a dozen or so of the rotten little ships and at night, masts and hulls, and wooden blocks and brass plaques would dance across my eyelids in technicolour imagery. There was no need for me to count sheep, I counted ship's models, until, at last, the job was done, and the money was in the bank. Pixie helped; young Stephen helped; my secretary helped. Everyone pitched in to get the job done.

The restoration project was completed with the aid of a host of dedicated and selfless volunteers, and the final cost greatly exceeded the \$300,000 goal of that original 'committee', but at least Polly Woodside is now a fine community asset, and a great tourist attraction. One may not find any acknowledgement of my contribution around the ship's environs, but at least there are 1170 brass plaques on little ship models on mantelpieces and bookshelves all over Australia to remind their owners of how we pulled the ship out of its muddy grave in the Maribyrnong River.

Lesson: In business, and in life generally, opposing sides can often work together.

Norm Gallagher was the sworn enemy of the wealthy and cultured fraternity that constituted the National Trust; yet he brought to our 'Committee' a practical advantage that benefited posterity with the preservation of Polly Woodside.

Our Day at the 'Cutty Sark'.

This day commenced nervously as we weren't sure of our reaction to seeing the 'Cutty Sark' in her multi million pound controversial resurrection.

Approaching the 'Cutty Sark' from the river is very impressive, giving the appearance of the ship floating on a glass sea.

Once inside, tickets bought, we walk alongside the hull with the Munz sheathing just above head height and with illustrated information boards on the dock wall side. The entrance cut into the side of the hull, gives entry to the 'Lower Hold'. Here the deck gives the impression you are walking on tea chests, with stacks of them illustrating the story of the tea trade, and the race to be first back to England to get the best prices for their cargo. Amidships there is a theatrette (very neat), the ship's interior frames, and the bilges are exposed with snippets of information projected onto them.

A narrow stair way leads to the next level of the ship. The T'ween Deck, where the interior size is demonstrated here by its openness and content limited to large displays - filled wool bales telling the story of the wool trade including 'Cutty Sark's' visits to Sydney, hands on displays, a 'steer your own wool clipper from Australia to London' (harder than it initially appears), as well as rocking benches providing the feeling of being at sea. On this deck the support frames holding the ship up three metres above the dock floor are clearly visible, but do not encroach (see article in December's 'Wave' on the 'Cutty Sark').

Up to the 'Main Deck', very ship-shape, and we looked closely at the ship's bilge pumps and pump action windlass (these are still to be restored on Polly). Passengers, crew and aft accommodations beautifully restored with realistic sound effects – snoring from crew's quarters, and clucking of hens from the chicken coop.

Walk over the gangway to the glass tower, where lift or stairs take you to the bottom of the dry dock. There is also a lift on the ship, giving access to all its three levels.

When you walk through the door onto the floor of the dry dock, you look across to the café. Then you look up – wow! Suspended three metres above you 963 tons of magnificent sailing clipper ship – her beautiful lines exposed for the world to see, with the Munz sheathing gleaming in the sunlight.

As you look down the length of the ship, the 24 struts and the framework supporting her are visible, but not intrusive, while down the far end of the dry dock is the magnificent collection of 101 ship's figureheads. These were originally displayed on board the 'Cutty Sark', but fortunately were removed before the devastating fire. These include 'Cutty Sark's original restored figurehead 'Nannie', who lost her head and an arm in dangerous seas – remind you of Polly in San Francisco?

The presentation and restoration of the 'Cutty Sark', must be equal to, or better than any sites we visited (well, except the 'Mary Rose'), however a sobering thought is that they say the current refit of the 'Cutty Sark' only prolongs her life for just 50 years; then the decision to refit her will have to start all over again.

Anne and Neil Thomas

