

# MARITIME HERITAGE ASSOCIATION JOURNAL

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*Joseph Conrad*

By Oswald Brett

See article page 15



The Maritime Heritage Association Journal is the official newsletter of the Maritime Heritage Association of Western Australia, Incorporated.

All of the Association's incoming journals, newsletters, etc. are now archived with Ross Shardlow who may be contacted on 9361 0170, and are available to members on loan. Please note that to access the videos, journals, library books, etc. it is necessary to phone ahead.

(If you have an unwanted collection of magazines of a maritime nature, then perhaps its time to let others enjoy reading it. Contact the Association; we may be interested in archiving the collection.)

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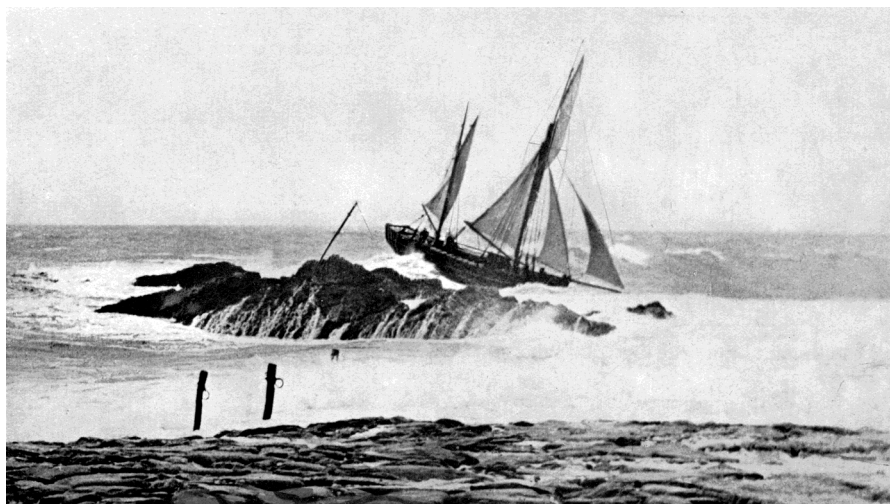
# **MHA Social Get-together & Morning Tea**

**All Welcome!**

**Sunday 1 July 2012 at 10.00 am**

**Hicks' Maritime Museum**

**49 Lacy Street, East Cannington**



**A cup of tea  
is always  
welcome  
after a hard  
day's work**

# President's Annual Report: 2011 12

## to the Annual General Meeting

### of the Maritime Heritage Association.

Please allow me to presage this report to the AGM with an apology. I cannot be with you. Once again I am in Indonesia engaged in a replica ship building project. If memory serves me correctly I had to leave last year's AGM rather early to catch a flight to Indonesia.

This has been an eventful year for the Association. In the previous year our application to Lotteries West for a grant of nearly \$15,000 was successful. This, added to the grant of \$7,500 from the Finding Sydney Foundation, gave us sufficient funds to build a trailer and a viewing platform for the display of our 32' naval cutter ALBATROSS, and also to produce several interpretative graphics panels for the display.

ALBATROSS was first displayed on her new trailer at the Hicks' Museum in December (at our end of year get-together) most appropriately since it was Barry who restored the derelict cutter some years ago.

Subsequently ALBATROSS has been displayed at the Maritime Museum in Fremantle, close to HMAS OVENS. Bob Johnson has undertaken the work required to organise the contracts for the fabrication of the trailer, viewing platform and display panels, and also organised the towing of ALBATROSS and trailer to and from her display venues. Julie Taylor undertook the design of the graphics panels. All of you who have seen those panels will surely agree that they are more than well-designed. The layout is clear, bright and attractive without flashiness – classically good design.

Unfortunately the condition of ALBATROSS has deteriorated in the years since the trailer and display was first proposed. Before the unveiling at the Hicks' Museum much cleaning and painting was undertaken by a small team of volunteers including Bob Johnson, the redoubtable Ms Taylor, Leigh Smith, Bill Brown, Mike Igglesden and Ross Shardlow. There is genuine concern that the fabric of ALBATROSS, the timber and the

fastenings, will not withstand frequent and prolonged towing. The original ambition of displaying in places such as Geraldton and Albany is now unrealistic, so we are engaged in looking for a more long-term home for the historic vessel. There is discussion of ALBATROSS returning to the Naval Stores where she spent her first years in WA. The stores buildings have been ceded with the land at Cantonment Hill by Defense to Fremantle.

*The MHA Journal* continues to be a publication with standards and content far in excess of what might be expected from a volunteer organisation of our size. Many thanks to Par Excellence who continue printing and binding the *Journal*, and to our editor Peter Worsley. Peter is much more than a volunteer editor. With Jill Worsley he is the author of several respected books about Western Australia's maritime history and archaeology. The MHA was very happy and honoured to be able to support a successful MAWA grant application to fund the publication of Jill and Peter's latest book *The Da Vinci Coast*.

Our thanks to Barry and Doris Hicks for hosting the end of year gathering at their splendid museum, and to Brian and Irene Lemon who, as always, assisted the Hicks with the arrangements.

MHA committee meetings are still without a permanent venue. Bob Johnson has hosted meetings, and Bill Brown has hosted several of the meetings which combine Book Club with committee deliberations. Thanks to Jill and Peter for hosting this AGM.

This has been a year of activity and progress for the MHA, for which I would like to take much of the credit, but since I have been overseas for much of the year I must thank the rest of the committee and others for what has been achieved.

Nick Burningham  
Banyuwangi, Java, 27th March, 2012.



# The Ditty Bag

An occasional collection of nautical trivia to inform, astound, amuse and inspire.

(The inspiration could take the form of contributions to this page!)



*Inconsequence of the high rate of wages given to seamen at the settlements of Swan River and Port Adelaide, about thirty-five of the seamen belonging to the Pelorus ran away from that vessel. She is therefore short handed and in want of seamen (The Sydney Monitor, 25 June 1838: 2a).*

Note: HMS *Pelorus* was a 385-ton brig sloop, length 100.5 ft and beam 30.5 ft. She was launched in 1808 and carried 16 guns. Her commander in 1838 was Captain Harding.

In 1842 there was obviously no sympathy among the local West Australians for even seriously ill or injured sailors off American whaling ships:

*Albany, 30th day of September in the year of our Lord, 1842.*

*We jointly and severally agree that if Hazen B. Neath of the American whaling ship Kutusoff is left onshore, he shall not become a burden to the Colony and in case of his death we agree to bury him during the next six months.*

*Signed—Solomon Cook, James Dunn and John Robertson.*

Note: Cook, Dunn and Robertson were deserters from American whaling vessels who had evaded capture and were living in WA.

DUKW – An amphibious military vehicle developed during World War II. Its official description was Amphibian Vehicle All-Wheel Drive Dual Rear Axle—so where do the initials DUKW come from?

Some famous tea clippers were built during 1869, the *Cutty Sark* being the most famous. She was composite built, i.e. wooden planks over an iron frame. However, some were composite built in a different way. The *City of Hankow* had iron topsides over a brass bottom! I wonder how long she lasted!

**23 October 1791** – The *Discovery* (330 tons, George Vancouver) hit a whale off the south coast of Western Australia. The ship's clerk, Edward

Bell, wrote, 'I was awakened by a violent shock as if the Vessel had struck upon a Rock and on enquiry found it was a large Whale we had struck.'

The *Cutty Sark* first loaded wool in Australia at Newcastle, NSW, in December 1883. Her largest cargo of 5,010 bales was loaded at Melbourne in 1893. She also carried a cargo of around 200 tons of chrome ore as 'stiffening'. The total cargo weight amounted to about 893 tons.

The tale is told of a small coastal trading vessel owned by a skipper so knowledgeable of his coast that he could tell exactly where he was by looking at, then smelling, and finally tasting the bottom sample brought up by the sounding lead. On one trip, carrying some chickens from Mr Brown's farm, and slipping along in a thick fog, the skipper called for the lead. The mate, as a joke, armed the lead with tallow and also with some chicken manure from the coops. The lead was heaved, the depth called out, and then the skipper looked at the tallow, smelled it, and finally tasted it – and then looked up, shouting, "My God lads, quick, luff up! Luff up! Something terrible has happened, we're over old Brown's farmyard!"

The *Splendid* (358 tons), a well-known whaling and inter-colonial trading barque, went aground on a reef off Port Albert, Kaipara Harbour in New Zealand, on the night of 7 February 1890. She was floated off the following morning, and it was believed that the vessel had not sustained much damage. The *Splendid* then began loading a cargo of timber for Dunedin when it was discovered that she was leaking badly. The master ran the vessel up on the hard to check and repair the damage. However, so rotten was the hull that she could not support her own weight, and the whole of the starboard side gave way and caved in.

**6 May 1843:** HMS *Beagle* departed from the Swan River Colony for the last time.



# Ships of the State Shipping Service

By Jeff Thompson.

**No 28: Wambiri Official Number: 303894**

In 1962 an inquiry into the affairs of the State Shipping Service was set up. Amongst the recommendations forthcoming was the formation of The Western Australian Coastal Shipping Commission that was constituted on November 15<sup>th</sup> 1965. This new body then set about planning for the re-equipping of the Service. The existing vessels were proving to be inadequate to meet the shipping needs of a developing North West.

The concept of the L.A.S.H. system of a barge-carrying vessel, instigated in the USA, was investigated with two of these vessels replacing the eight existing ships. However, the total overall costs of implementing this system with port facilities was too great, and the proposal was abandoned.

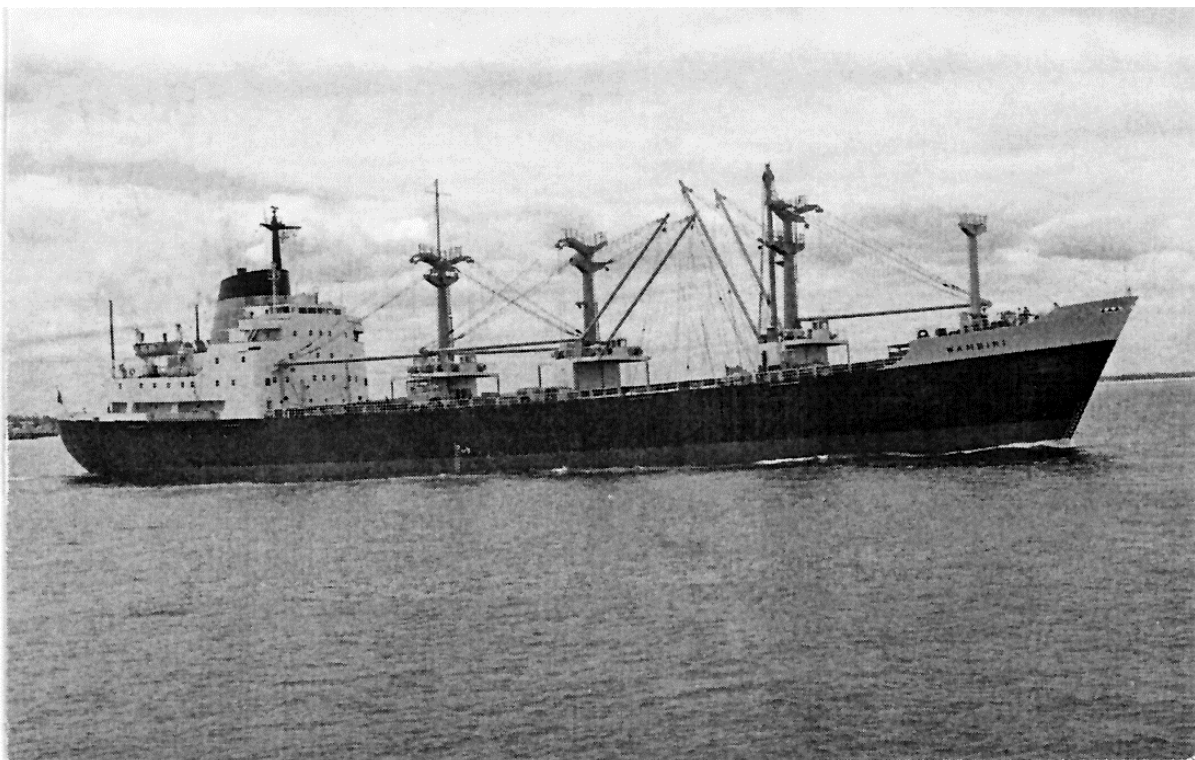
Instead it was decided to purchase second-hand ships of the unit-load type and dispose of the eight outmoded vessels. After an extensive search the first of four generally similar such vessels was obtained. On May 20<sup>th</sup> 1971 *Parthia* was bought by the Commission and initially named *Staship I*, but later was renamed *Wambiri*. Later that year the ship was taken in hand at Taikoo Dockyard,

Hong Kong, and extensively modified to suit the operational requirements of the Service.

The *Wambiri* was built as the *Parthia* for Cunard Line by Caledon Yard, Dundee, for cargo services in the North Atlantic. As built the vessel was 133 metres overall length with a beam of 18.3 metres, a draught of 7.3 metres and was of 5,586 gross registered tons, with a deadweight tonnage of 7,300 tons. A [?] cylinder Hawthorn-Sulzer 7RD68 diesel motor gave a service speed of 17 knots. She was one of four similar ships for the Cunard Line built by two different shipyards, John Readhead and Sons, South Shields, and the Caledon Yard, Dundee.

On July 9<sup>th</sup> 1979 *Wambiri* was sold to Sport Maritime Inc., Monrovia, and later resold and renamed *Rice Trader*, under the Greek flag.

On January 27<sup>th</sup> 1984 off Socotra on a voyage Dar-es-Salem to Karachi the ship suffered a complete engine failure. She arrived off Djibouti under tow on February 13<sup>th</sup> 1984. On April 4<sup>th</sup> 1984, she left Djibouti under tow for Gadani Beach, Karachi, for breaking up, arriving there on August 4<sup>th</sup> after unloading cargo at Karachi.





## Books by Rod Dickson

**For the information of our readers the following is a list of books by MHA Life Member Rod Dickson, both published and those pending publication.**

MARINE ACCIDENTS AND INCIDENTS IN W.A. WATERS.

Extracted from the Marine & Harbours Register. Maritime Museum Report No. 56.

STEAM WHISTLES ON THE SWAN.

The advent of steam transport on the Swan River and the story of Western Australia's First Coastal steamer - *LES TROIS AMIS*. Maritime Museum Report No. 70.

SHIPS REGISTERED IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA; 1856 - 1969.

Including added information on unregistered vessels and Pearlers. Maritime Museum Report No. 80.

THEY KEPT THIS STATE AFLOAT.

Shipbuilders, Boatbuilders and Shipwrights of W.A. Hesperian Press, Perth, W.A. 1998.

THE PRICE OF A PEARL.

22 Short Stories of the Pearling Industry. Hesperian Press, Perth, 2002.

A VOYAGE OF NO IMPORTANCE

Disaster and Heroism on the Kimberly Coast. Hesperian Press, Perth, 2003.

TO KING GEORGE THE THIRD SOUND FOR WHALES.

The log book of the English Whaler, *KINGSTON*. Hesperian Press, Perth, 2006

THE HISTORY OF WHALING ON THE SOUTH COAST OF NEW HOLLAND.

Details of more than 700 American, French and Colonial whaling voyages.

630 A4 pages. Hesperian Press, Perth, W.A. 2007.

In Preparation for reprinting - 2011 or 2012.

UNDER THE WINGS OF AN ALBATROSS.

A Maritime History of the French Sub-Antarctic Islands. Self Published, for the French Department of T.A.A.F., 2007.

Reprinted by Hesperian Press - 2011.

MUM'S GREY HAIR; or; The Life of a Merchant Seaman.

Autobiography. Self Published, 2008.

In preparation for Reprinting by Hesperian Press - 2011-2012.

MARITIME RESEARCH RESOURCES in WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

Where and How to find. Self Published, 2008.

The W.A. Coastal History Series. In Preparation.

To be published by Hesperian Press in conjunction with the Maritime Heritage Association of W.A. as a set - during 2012.

This series encompasses the Maritime History of the coastal regions of W.A. from 1800 to 1900. It includes all known incidents and accidents along the coast and all the ships and boats that entered and left the various ports. The cargo carried by these vessels east and west and also north and south and the passengers carried in and out.



MARITIME MATTERS of the SOUTH COAST of W.A.  
Every known maritime incident from the Leeuwin to Eucla.

MARITIME MATTERS of the SOUTHWEST COAST of W.A  
From Port Augusta to Bunbury. As above.

MARITIME MATTERS about FREMANTLE and GAGE ROADS.  
Fremantle to Rockingham.

MARITIME MATTERS about THE MID-WEST COAST. 1800 to 1900.  
Champion Bay, Abrolhos Islands, Port Irwin & Port Gregory.

MARITIME MATTERS of CARNARVON & the GASCOYNE DISTRICT.  
Just the Northern portion of Sharks Bay.

MARITIME MATTERS about SHARKS BAY - Vol. 1 and Vol. 2.  
The southern areas of Sharks Bay and the Pearling Industry

MARITIME MATTERS about COSSACK and the NORTHWEST PEARLING AREAS.  
From Exmouth Gulf to Roebuck Bay

HEZEKIAH PINKHAM - His Jurnal. 1793 - 1801.  
Transcription and explanations of 5 old ships' log books written by a young Nantucket seaman, Hezekiah Pinkham and bound together. Whaling and Merchant voyages.  
In preparation. To be published by Hesperian Press; 2011 - 2012.

The *ASIA & ALLIANCE* STORY. The Captains Coffin. 1791 - 1794.  
The story of two small Nantucket whalers that came to Sharks Bay in 1792 in search of whales. Went to the Kerguelen Islands and "fished" for Elephant seals.  
In preparation. To be published by Hesperian Press - 2011 - 2012.

H.M.S. *GUARDIAN* & The Island of Ice  
Lieut Edward Riou  
Unparalleled Heroism and Survival in the Southern Ocean.  
In preparation. To be published by Hesperian Press - 2012.

The COLLECTED NAUTICAL TALES of Rod Dickson  
Mostly the stories that appeared in the Maritime Heritage Association Journal  
In preparation. To be published by Hesperian Press - 2011 or 2012.

FROM TRAGEDY HE TRIUMPHED - John Thomas of Fremantle.  
Includes the log of the RORY O'MORE.  
In preparation. To be published by Hesperian Press - 2011 or 2012.





## *Jhelum*

**A short account of the *Jhelum*, a famous land mark in Port Stanley, capital of the Falkland Islands, by Peter Worsley.**

The ship *Jhelum* was built in 1849 in Liverpool by Joseph Steel & Son for their own account. She was one of the last wooden ships built on the Mersey. Her dimensions were:

Length 123.1 ft  
Breadth 27.1 ft  
Depth 18.1 ft  
Tonnage 428 (466 old measurement)

The *Jhelum* (named after a river in Punjab Province, Pakistan) was built of a mixture of English, African and American timbers, copper and treenail fastened, but also with iron spikes. The keel (13 inches by 13 inches) was of rock elm while the keelson (14 inches by 18 inches), frames and beams were of oak. Her knees are a mixture, some being of iron (as are the pillars) and some of wood. The frames are close together, and there was timber sheathing over the planks below the waterline together with felting and then sheathing in yellow metal. She was converted to a barque in 1856. The *Jhelum* made 13 voyages from England to Peru, Ecuador and Chile for Joseph Steel & Son, the return cargoes being mostly guano.

On 18 August 1870 the *Jhelum*, under the command of Captain Beaglehole, arrived at Port Stanley after a rough voyage from Callao round Cape Horn bound for Dunkirk with a cargo of guano on board. She had suffered storm damage and was making water at the rate of 14 inches per hour. The cargo had become wet and been damaged by the water. The crew refused to sail in the leaking vessel, and Captain Beaglehole received no money from the owners to repair her. After a survey the *Jhelum* was condemned as being unseaworthy. The vessel was sold to local interests for use as a hulk, and for years was moored off the Packe brothers jetty at the western end of the town. The hulk was later abandoned and sank at its mooring. It has since been gradually (but recently, much more rapidly) disintegrating. In particular, the bow has collapsed and most of it washed away. Much of the planking has also gone.

The photographs give an idea of the deterioration of the *Jhelum*, and also of the size of some of the timbers which made up her construction. It is no wonder she lasted so long.







*The photograph opposite shows the Jhelum in 1976. The other two photographs show what it looked like in November 2011.*

*Two 2011 photographs by Peter Worsley*





## Then & Now

The old photograph below, taken by Frank Hurley on 24 April 1916, shows Sir Ernest Shackleton, Frank Worsley, Tom Crean, Timothy McCarthy, Harry McNeish and John Vincent leaving Point Wild on Elephant Island in the *James Caird* (22 ft 6 inches long, beam 6 ft) at the start of their arduous boat journey of over 800 miles through freezing seas to South Georgia.

The bottom photo was taken from the same beach on 24 November 2011, looking out towards the bluff promontory with its fringe of black rocks. In this photo the land behind is partly shrouded in mist.

Bottom photograph by Peter Worsley



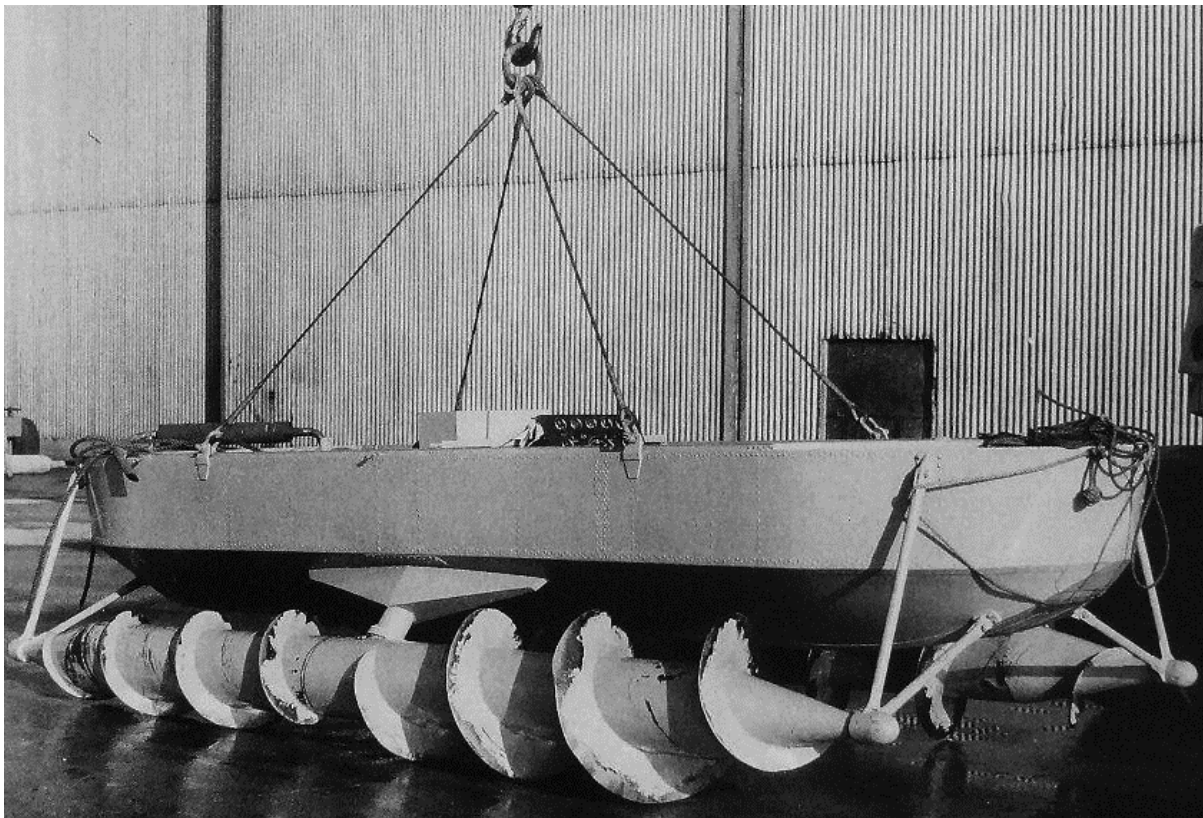


## Can You Help?

I recently came across these two photos under the title of 'Walrus Amphibious Vehicle'. There was no other information and there doesn't appear to be any on the internet. Plenty of information regarding Walrus amphibious aircraft and a current American military am-

phibious vehicle also called Walrus, but nothing about this small boat/car. Imagine what it would do to a road! Does anyone know anything about it?

Peter Worsley





## SOME EXAMPLES OF WORKING SAIL PERSISTING IN INDONESIA

Nick Burningham

I have spent much of the last year in Indonesia, supervising the construction of four replica sailing vessels which I designed. Two were built near Anyer on the Sunda Strait coast of Java, in clear view of Krakatoa when the weather is good. In that area the only traditional boats still in use are small, and rather scruffy outrigger canoes.

The other two replica vessels were built on a small island, out in the middle of the sea. Back in 2002-3 we built the Borobudur ship replica there. She was successfully sailed across the Indian Ocean and around Africa. She was very well built, and the construction was efficient and trouble-free from my point of view. I was very happy to return to the island of Pagerungan Kecil. It's an idyllic island. You can walk around it in an hour or across it in fifteen minutes, which is just as well because there are no cars, and no real roads. The people are so smiling and welcoming. The fresh fish is fantastic. Lunch will often include three fish dishes, one of them a grilled snapper, barbecued over coconut husks and flayed with freshly made coconut oil.



*Traditional houses are shaded by the coconut palms*

Around Pagerungan and the neighbouring islands there are still plenty of traditional boats. Few of them lack an engine, but many still have sails, and one type, the *perahu pakur*, still carries a spectacular press of sail.

The *perahu pakur* is widely accepted as the fastest type of outrigger canoe in Indonesia. They are up to about 10m in length, the outriggers can be as



much as 15m, and they carry a really big boomed lateen or crab-claw sail. A type of sail which wind tunnel tests prove to be the most efficient ever devised.

The *pakur* are used for fishing in various ways both reef fishing on distant reefs and trolling for tuna. They carry ice boxes to keep fish fresh and some also have wet wells to keep fish alive. Quite a few are based at the island of Sapeken which is the administrative and commercial centre of the whole island chain east of Kangean. From Sapeken fish are sent to Bali, both on ice and alive in tanks. Some of those fish are swimming around watching diners in Hong Kong restaurants within twenty-four hours of being caught.

Although the *pakur* are based at Sapeken, most of them are actually from Sekala, an extremely remote island a day or two's sail further east. They are owned and sailed mostly by Bugis people there, although the *perahu pakur* is a *perahu* of the Mandar people, not the Bugis. Ethnicity is confusing out on those islands. Many people will tell you they are Mandar, but they can't speak Mandar and their forebears were actually pirates from the southern Philippines and Arabs from the Hadramawt.

It's always a pleasure to see a *pakur* sailing. They have perfectly cut sails and they always get along at an impressive speed. On one of my visits to Pagerungan, in July last year, when I was travelling on an irregular ferry rather than a local cargo *perahu*, the scruffy old ferry was buffeting its way east from Sapeken into strong southeast trade



winds taking quite a bit of spray over the bow. I was at the other end of the ship keeping dry. I was amazed to see we that we were slowly overhauling a *perahu pakur* which was on the same course. She was hard on the wind, pitching into it in an alarming way at times. It was blowing at force 5-6, perhaps more force six than five, and there was a fairly big sea running. I had always thought that in such conditions a *perahu pakur* would either shelter until things moderated or at least ease sheets and luff her way to windward. But that *pakur* was being driven hard, and there were a couple more further away apparently in similar courses, beating up to Pagerungan Besar.

Thanks to modern digital cameras I have proof of what I saw. I've got a *Lumix*, with a Leica lens and X18 zoom. It's light and amazingly you don't have to steady it on a tripod to use the X18 zoom. From that pitching ship I was able to take photographs, and later in the day, when I downloaded them to

my laptop, I was able to see that *perahu pakur* much more clearly than I had at the time. A month of two previous, I'd been on a small trading *perahu* taking a passage back to the mainland of Java, to the port of Jangkar, which is slightly famous because only horse drawn carts and motorbikes are allowed to carry the passengers who disembark from the daily ferry from Madura. Its a journey of about 5Km to the main road where one can get a bus or a taxi. Anyway, at dawn we were passing Baluran, the volcano on the northeast tip of Java, running under sail and power at a good speed, set fair to reach Jangkar by about midday. One can nearly always see some kind of sailing vessel when approaching Jangkar.



*The local type of outrigger canoe still carries a large sail.*

But as we sailed round the headland before Jangkar we were crossing the courses of larger fishing boats which do not have outriggers, a type called *perahu pakesan* (though not in the politest circles because "pakesan" could be translated as a word that looks rather like cutter and rhymes with hunter). They're very shapely vessels, *pakesan*, with their tall, sharp stemheads (called *linggi* which is from the sanskrit dirty word *lingam*). It was blowing fairly strong that day, force four to five anyway. I was pleased to see that *pakesan* which crossed closest to our course was carrying a rig almost as big as they used to in the days before auxiliary long-shaft motors. And what's more, they sailed her all the way in through the anchorage to the beach without starting the auxiliary motor.





built in southeastern Madura and the ports on the mainland side of Madura Strait, and also at Muncar on the Bali Strait coast of Java. The Muncar *pakesan* have lost their sails but kept the masts.

They often have a roofed platform for fish spotters to sit in at the top of the mast, and they have a riot of Christmas decorations hanging from the mast all year round. Some of the most elaborately decorated operate out of Peruncak in West Bali.

*Pakesan* can be regarded as a form of *perahu lete*. Each area of Madura has a different version of the *perahu lete* the *perahu gole'an* of northwest Madura and the *perahu antokan* of the central north coast are examples.

Out to the east, in the island group to which Pagerungan belongs, *perahu lete* are the most common type of boat. These days they're not built more than about 15m long and most are open boats less than ten metres long. They're not as extravagantly decorated as the *pakesan*. By comparison their

In other areas the *pakesan* have completely lost their sails. Some have two or three, even four long shaft motors clattering away. Some of them are pretty big too. They are always good-looking vessels, brightly painted and decorated. They are

white and blue livery is very sober, but they are elegant vessels and it's always a pleasure to see one which still carries a fairly large sail.





# OSWALD BRETT

## Marine Artist

The following article by Bruce Stannard includes photographs of three of Oswald Brett's magnificent paintings.

*Oswald Brett, the Grand Old Man of marine art, has just celebrated his 91<sup>st</sup> birthday. Still hale and hearty, he continues his life-long passion for portraying ships and the sea, a genre in which he has long been recognised as one of the great masters. Bruce Stannard spoke with him at his home in New York.*

Oswald Longfield Brett is that rarity in the marine art world, a painter with a profound personal understanding of ships and the sea. Having spent much of his long life voyaging across the oceans of the world he has an intimate first-hand knowledge of the power of wind and water and their subtle and sometimes savage influence upon the ways of a ship at sea. It is this deep knowledge, borne of long experience that stamps his paintings with an unmistakable aura of authenticity, so much so that his ships invariably seem poised to sail right off the canvas. Looking closely at his finely detailed portrait of the barque *James Craig* with her crew aloft on the fore t'gallant yard, muzzling sail in the teeth of a southerly blow, I have no difficulty at all in imagining the shrieking of the wind, in sensing the scend of the sea and in feeling the sharp sting of salt spray on my face. It is one thing to portray a square-rigger standing ship-shape and Bristol fashion at a quiet berth, but quite another to capture the power and the glory of the vessel pitching headlong through a rising Tasman Sea. Oswald Brett's paintings capture the moment and give us a vivid glimpse of a way

of life that has now vanished from the oceans of the world.

Oswald Longfield Brett spent an adventurous childhood on Sydney's vast Harbour, paddling about Watson's Bay in tiny cedar canoes, moseying around the towering hulk of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century emigrant clipper *Sobroan* in Berry's Bay and always keenly observing and sketching the magnificent ocean liners and cargo ships that in the pre-war years made Sydney one of the busiest port cities in the world.

When Captain Alan Villiers sailed into Sydney in his lovely little full-rigged ship *Joseph Conrad* in December 1935, the lanky 14-year-old Brett immediately was among the first to climb aboard. He was so smitten by the ship's beauty that he resolved on the spot to run away to sea in her. Villiers, who was to become a life-long friend, would have gladly taken the boy with him on his circum-



*James Craig*  
By Oswald Brett



navigation had Brett's anxious parents not balked at the idea of their only son embarking on a perilous Cape Horn passage.

Notwithstanding his parents' reservations, the sea already had a firm grip on young Brett's mind. As a child with a prodigious natural gift for draw-

ing the South American and Australian trades. Undeterred by Allcot's tales of the "dog's life" that he had endured at sea, young Brett was savvy enough to understand that if he was to become an accomplished marine artist he had to have sea time. He had only just turned 18 when he signed articles aboard the Burns Philp freighter *Malaita*,

bound for Papua New Guinea, the Solomons and the fabled islands of the South Pacific.



*Sirius Supply*  
By Oswald Brett

ing, he discovered early on that he could easily earn good money by painting the ships he saw every day on the Harbour. When he flunked out of high school in his early teens, his father, who was a serving army officer, World War One veteran and a strict disciplinarian, insisted that he enrol in the art course at East Sydney Tech. Young Brett never looked back. Studying art during the Great Depression he completed the five-year course in three and then went straight to work. He has been hard at it ever since.

Os Brett was still a boy when he met John Allcot, the great marine painter who was to have a profound personal and professional influence on his life. Allcot was the first to recognise and encourage his emerging artistic talent. He also shared with him the hair-raising stories of his own life as a foremast jack "cold, wet and hungry" in the big British limejuicers that sailed out of Liverpool in

It was the beginning of a lifetime of voyaging. In October 1944 he joined the crew of the 83,000 ton RMS *Queen Elizabeth*, the mighty Cunard liner in which he would serve throughout the Second World War. He was aboard the drab-grey ocean monarch as an ordinary seaman, ferrying Anzac diggers to North Africa and later in her role as the so-called Atlantic Ferry, in which she transported hundreds of thousands of American soldiers to England and the eventual liberation of Nazi-occupied Europe. Promoted to Lookout, he spent untold hours in the crow's nest scanning the sea. From that lofty vantage point he saw the North Atlantic in all its moods: the furious seas of winter with massive waves as white as milk and the balmy days of summer when American GIs lounged on deck, shooting craps and blowing on the bones (dice) for luck.

In England, Brett was not backward in coming forward, especially where his sea heroes were concerned. He wrote to the Poet Laureate, John Masefield, who promptly wrote back inviting him to visit his country home in Oxfordshire. Brett, who spent a memorable day with the great man, still recites reams of Masefield's immortal sea poetry. The illustrious British war artist and marine painter Charles Pears was another who invit-





ed him home, this time to Falmouth, the historic Cornish seaport where in the 19<sup>th</sup> century so many of the great windships anchored for orders.

During the war years Brett often fetched up in New York, but instead of roistering with his shipmates in waterfront bars, he took himself off to Manhattan's antiquarian booksellers where he started collecting books on maritime history. His highly specialised personal library must now rank as one of the finest collections of its kind in the world.

It was in New York that Os Brett met and married the American fashion designer Gertrude Steacey. They settled on Long Island and raised a family, but although he has now lived in the United States for 66 years, he still speaks with a quiet, laconic and almost undiluted Australian accent. In the delightful clutter of his studio, a cramped upstairs room in his home at Levittown, Brett is surrounded by the kind of nautical treasures one expects to find in a great maritime museum. Paintings by some of the most revered figures in marine art – Charles Robert Patterson, Anton Otto Fischer and John Allcot – jostle for space in a library that contains thousands of books, all of them dealing with ships and the sea.

Over the years Oswald Brett has always remained busy as a specialist marine painter and many highly significant commissions have come his way. His work now hangs in some of the world's major collections including the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, the White House in Washington and the Australian National War Memorial in Canberra. He has always been extremely generous in donating his paintings to help raise funds for historic ship

restorations including the Wavertree in New York, Balclutha in San Francisco, Polly Woodside in Melbourne and James Craig and the Endeavour replica in Sydney.

In 1971 Columbus Lines came to him with the kind of commission that any red-blooded marine artist might kill for. He could travel the world whenever and wherever he liked as a guest in the Owner's Cabin on Columbus ships, in return for a painting of each of the vessels in which he voyaged. Os Brett made 20 such voyages over 31 years in which he logged well over 240,000 nautical miles.

His ocean voyaging came to an end in 2002, but at 91, he thinks nothing of travelling by air to Sydney where he still has a legion of friends and admirers. Oswald Brett's life shines like a beacon for all those with a dream of the sea. "Don't wait for your ship to come in," he says sagely, "swim out after it."

*Oswald Brett's beautifully illustrated autobiography* **OSWALD BRETT Marine Artist** is published by *Maritime Heritage Press*. The price: \$60 includes postage, packaging and the GST. Copies may be obtained on line at [www.maritimeheritagepress.com](http://www.maritimeheritagepress.com)

Oswald Brett on board the *Endeavour* replica





## A Mystery Solved

In the MHA Journal of December 2003 Rod Dickson posed a question regarding where three early photographs had been taken. In the following edition Tony Duvollet was able to provide an answer for two of the photos. However, the strange device shown in the photo on page 2 remained a mystery. I think that this has now been solved. Those avid watchers of the TV program *Coast* on SBS on Friday 16 March would have seen a short film of the machine actually in action. It was in fact an electric railway that ran in the sea at Brighton in England and was called the 'Brighton and Rottingdean Seashore Electric Railway'.

Magnus Volk, engineer and inventor, had built an electric railway, but the unfavourable geography prevented its extension. He therefore decided to build a three-mile long electric railway through the sea past the obstruction. Construction took from 1894 to 1896. The rails (set on concrete sleepers mortised into the bedrock) consisted of two parallel sets of 2ft 8½in gauge rails. The dis-



tance between the outer rails was 18ft, and so this was the gauge of his railway, the widest in the world. Onto this he placed the 'train', the machine in Rod's photo. It was named *Pioneer*, but commonly called *Daddy Longlegs* because of its look. The train measured 45ft by 22ft, and stood on four legs 23ft high fitted with wheels that ran on the rails. It weighed 45 tons. A line of posts alongside the track carried the electricity, which was earthed through the rails via the legs. When the tide was in, the earthing was via the sea.

Continued on page 19





Officially opened on 28 November 1896, it was severely damaged by a storm on 4 December. Volk rebuilt the railway and the *Pioneer* (which had been knocked on its side). The service reopened in July 1897. In 1901 a beach protection

barrier was built by the local council, but this necessitated the diversion of the line around the barrier. Volk did not have the funds to carry out this work, and so the line closed.

Peter Worsley

## Things They Would Rather Have Not Said

Germany has no need of submarines.

Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, 1901

The success of German U-boats in World War I changed his mind and he became a staunch advocate of unrestricted submarine warfare.

## Casting the Deep-sea Lead

Related in 1938 by Harry Hine, then aged 93 years, about a voyage as crew on the ship *Fulwood* in 1864, Plymouth to Aden.

The old man backed the main topsail, and when the ship lost way we took a cast of the deep-sea lead, weighing twenty-eight pounds. As this method of sounding is a thing of the past it is worth describing.

One hand took the lead out onto the jib-boom, while others stood in the chains, each holding a few flakes of the line, the last in order being the mate, standing well aft on the quarter. When the ship had lost way enough, the Captain shouted: 'Heave!'

The hand on the jib-boom swung the lead as far out ahead as he could, and called: 'Watch there! Watch!' As the line came aft, each hand dropped his portion and repeated the warning cry. Finally, the Captain and mate noted when the line was vertical, and the mark on it, at the water's edge. The line was then hauled in and the arming of grease in the cavity at the bottom of the lead examined to see if it had picked up anything from the sea-bed. In this case, however, there was nothing, as we got no bottom at a hundred fathoms.

## Important Notice

Please note that membership fees become due on 1 July

### Maritime Heritage Association Inc. Membership Fees

	1 Year	3 Years	5 Years
INSTITUTIONAL	\$100	\$275	\$440
FAMILY	\$40	\$110	\$175
ORDINARY	\$30	\$83	\$130
ASSOCIATE	\$10	\$28	\$40



# QUIZ

## Answers to March

1. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert had a total of 6 Royal Yachts. These were the *Royal George* (1817, 103 ft, ship-rigged), *Victoria and Albert* (1843, 200 ft, paddle steamer), *Fairy* (1845, 160 ft, screw steamer), *Elfin* (1849, 112.25 ft, paddle steamer), *Victoria and Albert* (1855, 336.33 ft, paddle steamer (the old *Victoria and Albert* was renamed *Osborne*)), and *Alberta* (1863, 179 ft, paddle steamer). All except the *Royal George* and *Fairy* were still Royal Yachts in 1896.
2. Dumont D'Urville's ship was the *Astrolabe*.
3. The deviation of a compass is the error caused by the ship's own magnetism.

## Quiz

1. On what date did the VOC ship *Vergulde Draeck* or *Gilt Dragon* run aground off the coast of WA?
2. What is Muntz metal, and what is it used for?
3. Who named Michaelmas Island in King George Sound, Albany? and why?

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