

MMHN July 2020 Update

Despite the ominous signs of a second wave of COVID-19, activity within the Melbourne Maritime Heritage Network (MMHN) continues apace as we bring together our diverse maritime stakeholders - heritage, industry, educators, and 'sailors' of all types. MMHN is gaining recognition as a unifying force among maritime stakeholders.

Obviously hampered by the constraints of lockdown and unable to convene planned events, MMHN members in Melbourne and around regional Victoria continue to protect and preserve maritime artefacts, memorabilia and, of course, our wonderful shipwrecks. Other MMHN members are looking to the future of the maritime industry sector, advocating for maritime education, skills, careers and maritime innovation, for example, in relation to ship propulsion. The need to re-build our collective maritime expertise is clear. MMHN is determined that this will happen. Advocacy continues during the pandemic at both State and Federal levels.

Advocacy

In addition to MMHN's now well-established column in the *Docklands*

News, (<https://www.docklandsnews.com.au>) five recent examples of MMHN advocacy have Maritime Heritage widely recognised in Melbourne, particularly in the Docklands area.

1. Melbourne Water (MW)

Multiple members of the MMHN Board made submissions earlier this year to Melbourne Water's Yarra Strategic Plan process emphasising the importance of recognition of Melbourne's maritime heritage and of effective river governance. We were therefore very concerned that when a Draft Strategy document was published recently, references to maritime heritage issues were scant. We reached out to the Melbourne Water consultation team seeking an urgent Zoom meeting. Pleasingly, it now appears that the final Melbourne Water Strategy document, due soon, is likely to contain an appropriate level of acknowledgement of the maritime heritage of the Yarra River.

2. City of Melbourne

Seafarers Rest Park – get involved

Prepare to be astounded and dismayed – once again! Regrettably, **Seafarers Rest** Park, this new and quite large public park in an obvious key maritime heritage location in the CBD, abutting the iconic North Wharf and adjacent to the Mission to **Seafarers**, fails to acknowledge or pay tribute to the many thousands of **seafarers** who sailed to and from the berths on both the north and south side of the river (and of course Victoria Dock). Most port cities around the world have some form of recognition of the contribution of seafarers to all forms of national development. It is strange indeed that this aspect of our maritime heritage has been overlooked.

The proposed Park design features wharf timbers, an anchor and a propeller, close by is the iconic heritage-listed and restored 1948 Electric Crane and beside it, the No 5 Goods Shed. All of this is very pleasing in a maritime heritage precinct - but it clearly misses the key point. i.e. **seafarers**! This is an ideal site to 'tell the tale' about the crucial role seafaring and shore-based maritime endeavour (stevedoring) has played in the development of our city.

The Seafarers Rest Park project is informed by a Cultural Heritage Management Plan commissioned by the City of Melbourne. In May 2019, the heritage consultants BIOSIS completed this fascinating document. See https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/hdp.au.prod.app.com-participate.files/8315/6048/7352/Cultural_Heritage_Management_Plan_-_May_2019.pdf

Referring to the site of the proposed Park, an extract from the Biosis report states that it is *located close to the original northern bank of the Yarra River, and that the river has not changed substantially in this location. The Activity Area was originally an area of low river bank near the foot of Batman's Hill, and adjacent to the West Melbourne swamps. As the site did not have fresh water (which was available about a km upstream at the former rock falls on the Yarra or near Elizabeth Street (Williams Creek), it is unlikely to have been a regular camping place for Aboriginal people, but may have been used sporadically as a fishing*

or foraging place. Historical land uses have resulted in up to two metres of fill having been placed over the original ground level. This was undertaken from the 1850s as the Melbourne Wharves were expanded and the ground level raised to provide berthage for ships.



The Biosis report continues, *Documentary evidence in the form of historical maps, illustrations and photographs show that the Activity Area has a long history related to use for shipping and storage, from as early as 1855. This has resulted in excavation for foundations of buildings, construction of the river bank and wharves, roads and paving, land fill, demolition and landscaping, all of which are likely to have caused disturbance to the ground surface, however this is not proven to be by mechanical methods, as these works pre-date the use of mechanical methods for development and construction, and in addition utilises a number of periods of dredging and filling.*

But there is hope – a second Community Consultation on the design of the Park is now in progress and presents an opportunity for you to have input. The mechanism for stakeholder engagement is via submission to the Participate Melbourne website before 15 July. MMHN and OSSA have already made a submission to Council raising the key omission in the current design. MMHN encourages stakeholders to join MMHN and OSSA in advocating the inclusion of some form of tribute to **seafarers** into the design of the Seafarers Rest Park.

An interesting aside –this Park has been inspiring stakeholders for some time. MMHN Board member Jeff Malley recently found in his personal files a plan for the Seafarers Rest Park dating from 2014. Significantly this plan, devised by Captain Euan Crawford a volunteer restoring the steam tug *Wattle* at the time, featured a memorial to seafarers in the form of a tall spire topped by an albatross! Other volunteers restoring the *Wattle* enthusiastically embraced this imaginative plan.



Images from Jeff Malley, 2014

But the momentum for the Park apparently waned - until it bobbed to the surface again in 2020. Estimated completion time will be in two years. Many stakeholder groups have indicated their support (here is an acronym test for you!) including BSMM, COMM, MUA, AIPI, VNA, ANL POM. Do make a submission.



Image from Ross Brewer



Image from Peter Barrow

3. BROADSIDE - Navy Victoria Network Newsletter

MMHN was invited recently by MMHN Member Terry Makings to write for the June edition of *Broadside*, the Navy Victoria Network Newsletter. See <https://navyvic.net/news/broadside/june2020broadside.pdf>. Just in case, by way of clarification, *A broadside is the side of a ship, the battery of cannon on one side of a warship; or their coordinated fire in naval warfare. From the 16th century until the early decades of the steamship, vessels had rows of guns set in each side of the hull. Firing all guns on one side of the ship became known as a 'broadside' [Wikipedia].*

An extract from our article: *Many of us are simply unaware of our maritime heritage, while others care a great deal about it and are determined that such ignorance be dispelled. Although many maritime enthusiasts work tirelessly to protect and preserve our maritime heritage across the state and in this city,*

bureaucratic ‘amnesia’ and a plethora of competing authorities stymie their efforts. As the public and governmental awareness plummeted and the city turned its back on maritime matters, the situation became acute: maritime artefacts and memorabilia were often lost or dispersed. The maritime skills-base eroded, careers on the water (apart from the Navy) have sadly diminished. Yet we are an island nation and we remain utterly dependent on sea trade. While the Navy has been exemplary in sustaining maritime expertise as well as preserving and presenting the maritime history of the service in Australia, other groups have been less well-resourced and consequently less successful.

Note: Broadside offers a useful service to those interested in maritime matters. A list of recent videos, podcasts and news headlines relating to Navy and Defence appears in Broadside. Their website and full articles can be found on: <https://navyvic.net/news/news.html>

Danger on, near, under or above, the water

When reflecting of the inherent dangers in water-related occupations such as seafaring and stevedoring in times gone by, the dangers related to bridge building and maintenance and to ‘municipal’ diving are rarely mentioned. Yet these occupations too are part of maritime heritage.

- **Diving in the Yarra**

Was it ever a good idea? Few people are aware of the fascinating history of early diving work on the Yarra. Ashley Smith, a researcher at the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, recently wrote an article in *Docklands News* titled **Twenty-thousand leagues under the Yarra**.

An extract from Ashley’s research: The Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) was formed in 1891 ‘in response to the massive pollution of the Yarra and other water sources as the city expanded. The main cause was from industrial waste dumped by noxious industries such as abattoirs, tanning factories, and soap and candle manufacturers along the river. Other pollution was human waste thrown away in chamber pots or by careless night men who collected the ‘night soil’ from water closets on a weekly basis. It was such negligence that gave the city the unfortunate moniker ‘Marvellous Smellbourne’. A report by the Harbour Trust in the Footscray Independent on 15 February 1890, complained about the mess, and was especially critical of the swinging basin near the West Melbourne gasworks where several crewmen on passing boats were hospitalised due to the fumes. Building the sewage system involved divers. Divers were especially busy when construction crossed the Yarra. Most notably, a key section of the Melbourne main was inserted west of the Spencer Street Bridge in 1897. It involved lowering a large cast-iron tube into the river and sinking it into a prepared trench. The divers assisted in the trimming of banks of bluestone metal for the bed of the tube. When the tube broke during installation, the divers examined the tube, and assisted in bolting it together, all of which happened underwater. Their jobs could also take a morbid turn. Sometimes, tunnelling under the Yarra would prove fatal. On 12 April 1895, while working on the Hobsons Bay main, the tunnel collapsed and six men drowned.

https://www.docklandsnews.com.au/columns/detail/history-june-2020_16434/

- **Westgate Bridge Construction**

The Westgate Bridge is a familiar sight to all Victorians, but perhaps less so is the memorial plaque below it. Almost fifty years ago *Just before lunch on 15 October 1970, the West Gate Bridge suddenly groaned. An eerie pinging noise filled the air. A storm of rust flakes peeled off weathered steel. The girders started to turn blue. The bridge fell away beneath their feet. Minutes later, 35 workers were dead.* See westgatebridge.org. Eight years later, the bridge workers who survived the disaster paid for and installed the plaque to honour their colleagues.

Such inherently dangerous occupations - seafarers are lost at sea, stevedores maimed or killed on the job, those working on bridges or diving in sewers and piers are seldom recognised by authorities. The appropriateness or legitimacy of statues, monuments and memorials, is of course, controversial of late.

Restorations Reports

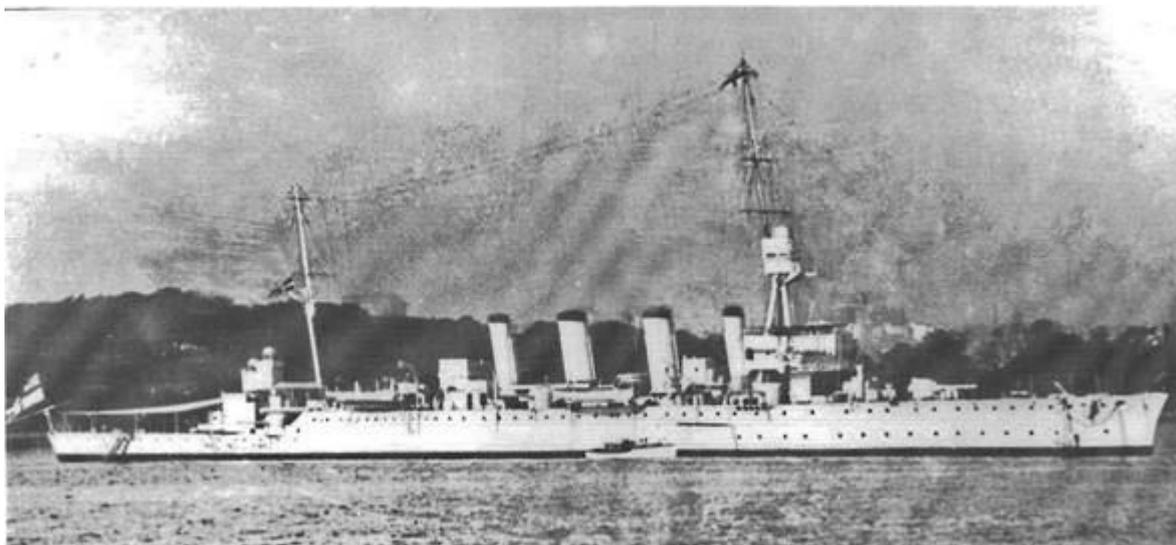
- **OSSA Restoration Project**

OSSA members are taking it on! This is the original tank test model for the *Aurora Australis* made when the ship was being designed in Finland by Wartsila and stored in Hobart since its arrival in 1990. See the new image below indicating that it requires a lot of loving care and expert attention to bring it back to a presentable state. P&O are transporting it to Melbourne - a generous corporate contribution to our Maritime Heritage and a very worthwhile project over the next couple of years for OSSA enthusiasts.



- **Bay Steamers Maritime Museum Group,**

While this group is currently restoring the steam tug *Wattle*, they are also preparing a new project - the restoration of a former Navy vessel *The Janet*. This Admiral's pinnacle originally from the HMAS *Melbourne* (pictured below) was built in 1922 at Garden Island and will soon be restored in Melbourne.



Museums & Heritage Special Advisory Group Report

MMHN has been fortunate to have the assistance of an intern from Victoria University to work with our Museums & Heritage SAG. Following a call to MMHN for their views on a virtual museum, her task is to summarise these views and undertake further research into virtual museums globally. We will keep you advised of the results.

In the meantime, look at the approaches taken by other maritime museums. Here are several in Australia:

- Australian National Maritime Museum (Sydney) <https://www.sea.museum>
- South Australian Maritime Museum <https://maritime.history.sa.gov.au>
- Western Australia Maritime Museum <http://museum.wa.gov.au/museums/maritime>

And, of course, there are many others, including museums based in ships, for example:

- several Fremantle Class patrol vessels have been gifted to 'named' cities, but the HMAS *Gladstone* is the only one that is an actual museum managed by former Navy personnel. MMHN Board Member, Commodore Greg Yorke once commanded this ship. <http://gladstonemaritimemuseum.org.au/visit-216/>

And in Victoria

- a Bathurst-class corvette, the HMAS *Castlemaine* Museum Ship berthed at Gem Pier in Williamson, was constructed during World War II. It was one of 36 initially manned and commissioned solely by the Royal Australian Navy. See <https://hmascastlemaine.org.au>



The Western Australia Maritime Museum, Fremantle

Concluding thought

A reminder to all maritime stakeholders as we optimistically emerge once more from lock-down, please remember that all maritime related events or publications or webinars etc. may be promoted free of charge on the MMHN website. Email details to info@mmhn.org.au

COVID-19 has effectively ‘torpedoed’ or ‘scuttled’ planned MMHN events for the time being so it is our intention that the MMHN Updates will keep us all connected and progress the MMHN multifaceted agenda bringing together the diverse stakeholders - heritage, industry, educators, ‘sailors’ and maritime enthusiasts of all types, to collectively redirect attention towards the continuing significance of maritime history and the importance of the Maritime Industry Sector to this nation.

MMHN enthusiastically invites your participation and hopefully, membership. info@mmhn.org.au

Do keep well

Dr Jackie Watts OAM

Chair,

Melbourne Maritime Heritage Network

0400 305 323 or email info@mmhn.org.au

[WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN NOW](#)

Melbourne Maritime Heritage Network

The membership form is available on www.mmhn.org.au