



## ***“May Queen” – A rare survivor***

Many people drive or walk past *May Queen* every day. It is part of Hobart’s character and waterfront heritage, but not many realise just how rare it is.

*May Queen* was launched on the Huon River at Franklin in 1867. The *May Queen* is an excellent example of the Tasmanian sail trading ketch - shallow draft vessels that generally had a retractable centreboard allowing them to enter river mouths to load or unload cargo, often without the need for expensive wharves or jetties and prior to the development of an effective road system.

The *May Queen* is the last surviving vessel of her type in the southern hemisphere and the third oldest in the world. So it has international significance. Locally, the importance of vessels like *May Queen* in the early European history of Tasmania is immense. They provided the means by which settlers were able to obtain supplies and to transport the products of their labours from agriculture, timber-getting and sawmilling.

During her 106 year working life as a sail trading vessel from 1867 to 1973, the *May Queen* was largely used by Henry Chesterman and his successors in the business Chesterman and Co. It would often be seen carrying sawn timber from Chesterman's Raminea sawmill at the mouth of the Esperance River near Dover to Victoria Dock in Sullivan's Cove, Hobart, a journey that it could complete in 8 hours in favourable weather.

Over the years, *May Queen* carried many items that helped to ensure the industrial and rural development of southern Tasmania. Timber for construction of the ‘Zinc Works’, road bridges, causeways, railway sleepers, roof shingles, as well as coal and sandstone, sheep, feed for livestock, steel railway lines, boilers and occasionally taking injured farmers and their wives to hospital. It also carried the produce of the Huon Valley to market – apples, pears, stone fruits and vegetables.

Trading ketch races were a feature of many local regattas. The ketch race at the Royal Hobart Regatta was known as the ‘Cock of the Derwent’ Race and there was intense rivalry between the ketches when they raced for the honour of flying the Golden Cock. *May Queen* raced with great success, winning her first Royal Hobart Regatta in 1868 and competing in the last trading ketch race in 1954, coming second to *Lenna*. During the first division races between 1882 and 1954, *May Queen* achieved a record haul of placings, with nine firsts, eight seconds and two thirds. So, today you will still see the Golden Cock perched proudly on the top of its main mast.

The survival of the *May Queen* for over a century and a half is a remarkable achievement and is due to the continued value of the craft, initially as an economically viable goods carrying craft and then as an historical icon.

It is even more remarkable that it is still afloat today, as it sank on two occasions during its working life. Once, in 1888, it heeled over during a squall and sank off Huon Island. Luckily a Royal Navy ship in port at the time was able to send down a diver who found *May Queen* upright with sails all set. Then in 1940, it sank at the Dover wharf after being overloaded. As you can see, it was successfully refloated on both occasions.

At the end of her working life, *May Queen* was gifted to the Tasmanian Government by owners H Jones and Co and passed into the care of the Marine Board of Hobart. The relatively modern motor and propeller were removed. The masts and bowsprit were repaired and the rigging replaced, returning it to pre-1954 condition. A steel beam was placed under the keel to give the hull stability and prevent the bow or stern dropping. *May Queen* is now cared for by a Trust, which has a group of committed volunteers and supporters that work tirelessly to keep this rare heritage icon afloat.