

# Maritime Times

## Tasmania

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## ‘George’ gets a helping hand

WOODEN BOAT CENTRE: KEEPING TRADITIONS ALIVE

SEMAPHORE COTTAGE: A LEGACY OF PRESERVATION

## Maritime Museum Tasmania

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Maritime Times Tasmania welcomes original historical or newsworthy articles for publication that reflect the Museum's mission to promote research into, and the interpretation of, Tasmania's maritime heritage. Contact [editor@maritimetas.org](mailto:editor@maritimetas.org) for further details on contribution requirements, guidelines and editorial standards.



# from the president's log

In April, the Maritime Museum opened the Semaphore Cottage in Prince's Park as an interpretive centre, telling the stories of the semaphore telegraph system and coastal gun batteries. Built in 1818 as part of the first battery, the cottage is now the oldest surviving building in Battery Point. As has been said, although it is only a small building, it has a big history.

Threatened with demolition in the 1930s, the cottage was saved by the vigorous actions of the Shiplovers' Society of Tasmania. It is most fitting that the Maritime Museum — itself created by members of that Society — has now begun a new chapter in the cottage's history, one that meets the intent of the Society when the cottage was restored in 1940: that it serve as a memorial to the telegraph system and those who worked on it.

The opening of Semaphore Cottage received considerable media attention. *The Mercury* editorial the following day observed: "Its restoration and reopening represent more than civic housekeeping; they reflect a community willing to preserve its story, not just recite it. This cottage is a reminder that heritage is not a static notion. The stories these buildings tell grow richer with each generation, layered with memory and meaning. But they require care. Not just from governments, but from all of us."

In this edition of *Maritime Times*, we explore the many ways in which Museum staff and volunteers are working to ensure our maritime heritage "grows richer with each generation". Their efforts also highlight how operating a museum today — even a community museum such as ours — has become a complex undertaking.

Many of you will have noticed that *Westward* has recently been absent from Constitution Dock. As Cody Horgan explains in his article, *Westward* has been at the Wooden Boat Centre in Franklin, where deck maintenance is being carried out to ensure the yacht remains in fine seagoing condition.

In March, with support from the Copland Foundation, the Museum hosted conservators from the University of Melbourne's Grimwade Conservation Centre. This project saw the broken hand and forearm of an enigmatic Tasmanian colonial sculpture reattached, providing new insight into the artist's original intent. The conservators carried out the work in the Carnegie Gallery, allowing visitors to watch the sculpture "come together" once more.

Through the support of the Australian National Maritime Museum's MMAPSS grant program, Museum volunteers have successfully rehoused more than a thousand large photographs in high-quality conservation storage albums. This project has also improved the cataloguing of these photographs, some of which date back to the 1860s. A number have already been digitised and are now accessible on the Museum's website. Others will form part of the ongoing photographic collection digitisation project, which sees volunteers scanning thousands of photographs each year to expand the Museum's online collection database.

A number of recent donations to the Museum are highlighted by Camille Reynes, Museum Curator, and Colin Denny, Chair of the Museum's Acquisition Committee. As with many aspects of the Museum's operation, the management, documentation, and cataloguing of these new donations is handled by a team of dedicated volunteers.

While the Museum's operations are largely dependent on revenue from admissions and the Museum shop, staff and volunteers are always seeking additional funding opportunities. One such opportunity is the Tasmanian Recycle Rewards scheme introduced by the state government. This program offers a 10-cent refund per eligible bottle or can deposited at recycling collection points. Donations can be directed to registered charities or community organisations — and the Maritime Museum is now registered to receive them. It's a simple way to support the Museum while also encouraging responsible recycling.

Within the next month, the Museum will begin its annual membership renewal program. As well as renewing your own membership, I encourage you to think of others who may enjoy being part of the Maritime Museum community — both as members and perhaps as volunteers. As *The Mercury* editorial wisely noted, our heritage requires care "not just from governments, but from all of us."

**CHRIS TASSELL,  
MMT PRESIDENT**

# Semaphore Cottage opens

## Maritime Museum continues the legacy of the Shiplovers' Society

BY EMILY QUINTIN

On Wednesday 30 April, Maritime Museum Tasmania welcomed members, guests and volunteers to celebrate a significant occasion — the reopening of Semaphore Cottage as a new interpretive centre, honouring the historic role it played in Tasmania's early communication systems.

Built in 1818, Semaphore Cottage first served as the guardhouse for the Mulgrave Battery, Hobart's earliest defensive fortification. Positioned strategically at Battery Point, the battery was armed with naval cannons and shielded by extensive earthworks. In the years after its construction, the guardhouse took on a new role as part of Tasmania's emerging communication network, with a semaphore signalling station established outside to relay messages across the colony.

This system, using moveable arms rather than shutters, allowed messages to travel rapidly from Hobart to Port Arthur and beyond — a remarkable feat at the time, with messages capable of covering the distance in just 15 minutes. By the late 1830s, Tasmania's semaphore system had expanded to become the largest of its kind in Australia, reflecting a world-leading commitment to long-distance communication technology.

Yet, by the 1930s, the once-vital Semaphore Cottage had fallen into dereliction. In 1936, facing the threat of demolition, the building's survival came to rest in the hands of the newly-formed Shiplovers' Society of Tasmania. The Society, recognising the historical importance of the site, led a campaign to save the cottage. Their advocacy ultimately persuaded the Hobart City Council to restore the building, and in 1940 it was formally declared a memorial to the semaphore signallers who had served Tasmania's early settlements.



Camille Reynes is museum curator for Maritime Museum Tasmania at the Semaphore Cottage, which is being reopened. Picture: Nikki Davis-Jones

## Signs of hope for a vital piece of Hobart's history

Rob Inglis

A key landmark in Hobart's early colonial history has been reopened to the public as an interpretive site, giving people the opportunity to learn about the 200-year-old building's role in relaying messages across the burgeoning colony.

Maritime Museum Tasmania officially reopened the Semaphore Cottage in Princes Park at Battery Point on Wednesday, marking the first time the historic building has opened its doors to the public in decades.

The cottage was built in 1818 and was Hobart's first communications hub.



The Semaphore Cottage in Battery Point and is the oldest surviving building in the area built in 1818.

Maritime Museum Tasmania president Chris Tassell said the property was "a small building with a big story". "Reopening the cottage to the public allows us to reconnect with a time when ingenuity and urgency shaped the way people communicated across great distances," he said. "We're proud to share this important part of Tasmania's history with new audiences."

The Semaphore Cottage relayed long-distance communications via a semaphore

telegraph system and connected Hobart to Port Arthur.

The cottage could relay messages across a 54-kilometre chain of semaphore stations within mere minutes.

It originally served as a guardhouse for the Mulgrave Battery, which was the city's first defensive fortification.

The building was saved from demolition in the 1930s by the Shiplovers' Society of Tasmania, in recognition of its heritage value.

The new interpretive centre, which will be open for regularly scheduled tours, will effectively restore the cottage to its former glory as the headquarters of the colony's

semaphore telegraph system, which was highly advanced for its time.

Modern interpretive elements and historic artefacts will be on display, offering visitors a rare glimpse into the challenges associated with communication in Hobart's early days.

The Semaphore Cottage was most recently leased by the Collection of Medical Artefacts (COMA). However, the Hobart City Council transferred the lease for the building to the Maritime Museum last year, with the support of COMA.

The lease will expire in May 2027.

The Mercury, 1 May 2025 (page 5)



The new interpretive displays within Semaphore Cottage tell the story of the Mulgrave Battery, the birth and expansion of the semaphore system, and the people who operated Tasmania's first long-distance communications network.

Visitors are now able to step inside this important landmark — which has been closed to the

public for decades — and experience the evolution of communication, defence, and maritime life in early Tasmania.

Maritime Museum Tasmania is proud to carry forward the vision first championed by the Shiplovers' Society: to preserve, honour, and share Tasmania's rich maritime heritage with future generations.







# WOODEN BOAT CENTRE: *keeping traditions alive*

BY CODY HORGAN

In the early 1990s, social entrepreneurs Ruth and John Young opened the Shipwrights Point School of Wooden Boat Building in Port Huon, Tasmania. With a passion for heritage and craftsmanship, the Youngs created the school to preserve and teach the traditional art of wooden boat building—skills that were rapidly disappearing. Classes were small, with just a handful of students learning hands-on skills such as canvassing a deck, replacing carvel planks, or building a Huon Pine dinghy.

The school's early success soon required a larger facility, and it moved to the nearby town of Franklin, where it remains to this day. Alongside the move came the launch of a two-year Diploma in Wooden Boat Building. The program was comprehensive and hands-on. Students typically built two dinghies—one composite and one solid clinker-style using Huon Pine—as well as a major group project such as a carvel yacht, usually crafted from Celery Top and Huon Pine.

Each of these significant builds was supported by a sponsor, who not only funded the vessel's construction but also provided scholarships for two students. Over 16 years, the program produced at least eight major vessels, including three 32-foot *Lyle Hess* pilot cutters. These projects not only honed the students' skills but also launched careers in a variety of maritime sectors, from traditional boatyards and shipwrighting businesses to maritime museums and heritage projects.

However, by the late 2000s, a combination of rising timber costs, changing management, and a shift in public interest brought an end to the diploma program.

The school entered a quieter phase of its life, no longer offering full-time training. Despite these challenges, the passion for traditional boat building never completely faded.

In 2014, recognising the cultural and economic value of the school, the Franklin community came together to purchase and preserve it. The centre was renamed the Wooden Boat Centre Tasmania, and a bold new mission was adopted: "To ensure the traditional craft of wooden boatbuilding endures and remains a relevant part of contemporary maritime culture."

This renewed sense of purpose was backed by a dedicated team of volunteers and strong support from both the local community and tourists. Visitors were drawn not only to the beauty of wooden boats but also to the stories, the smells of timber and oil, and the opportunity to witness traditional craftsmanship up close.

The Centre began offering short courses again, including dinghy building and restoration workshops, and in 2021, launched a one-year unaccredited training program focused on essential boatbuilding skills. However, times had changed. The cost of local timbers such as Celery Top and Huon Pine had nearly tripled, making the construction of larger yachts prohibitively expensive. In response, the Centre experimented with the *Franklin 29*, a boat built on spec using Western Red Cedar, as a central training project. While successful in reviving interest in new builds, the course proved challenging to maintain and was discontinued in 2022.





In 2023, a new direction emerged, driven by the growing interest in restoring Tasmania's wooden boat fleet—particularly the iconic Derwent Class yachts. These locally built vessels, often neglected or abandoned, offered an ideal platform for training. Many required only \$8,000 or less in timber to restore, compared to the \$40,000 or more needed just to source the timber for a new 24-foot Huon Pine boat.

Through these restorations, students gained hands-on experience using many of the same techniques required for new builds—planking, caulking, fastening, and finishing—but with lower material costs and greater historical relevance. The one-year course evolved to include three core projects: a composite ply dinghy, a traditional Huon or King Billy Pine clinker dinghy, and the restoration of a carvel yacht. In addition, the Centre launched an apprenticeship program, taking on three apprentices to extend its training capacity and provide paid, real-world experience.

This apprenticeship program has allowed the Centre to begin taking on restoration jobs outside of the one-year course structure. These projects increase the Centre's income, enhance its tourism appeal, and—most importantly—offer apprentices and students the chance to work in a realistic, busy boatyard environment. With growing demand, the Centre plans to employ another full-time shipwright in the near future to manage incoming work.

One recent highlight is the restoration of the renowned Tasmanian yacht *Westward*, a celebrated vessel built by master shipwright Jock Muir. *Westward* is a two-time Sydney to Hobart winner and a proud symbol of Tasmania's maritime legacy.

Unlike many modern yachts with plywood and fibreglass decks, *Westward* features a traditionally laid deck: 50mm solid Celery Top planking over 100mm hardwood beams, fastened and sealed in the old-fashioned way with oakum and pitch.

When *Westward* arrived at the Wooden Boat Centre, her deck was in poor condition. The polyurethane caulking had failed, and the pressure between the planks had caused the deck to buckle into a concertina-like shape. Apprentices worked painstakingly to remove the damaged caulking, fit graving pieces to rotted or cracked plank edges, and in some cases, replace entire planks. Around 80% of the deck was re-fastened using new 100mm bronze fastenings. Finally, the deck was recaulked with oakum and filled with Jeffery's black marine glue No. 2—a notoriously sticky, tar-like pitch.

It was a physically demanding job, but an invaluable learning experience. During the repairs, the team discovered nylon rope had been used as an improvised caulking material beneath the sealant—possibly contributing to the deck's instability. This discovery added a note of levity to an otherwise serious restoration.

For the apprentices, the project offered rare insight into the construction and maintenance of a traditionally planked solid timber deck—something now uncommon outside of tall ships and commercial fishing vessels. And for the Centre, it marked another milestone in its mission to keep wooden boatbuilding alive.

Today, the Wooden Boat Centre in Franklin continues to be a unique, hands-on hub where tradition, community, and craftsmanship intersect. Through education, tourism, and meaningful restoration projects, the Centre ensures Tasmania's wooden boat heritage is not only preserved but passed on to a new generation of makers.





# New acquisitions: A rare view of Hobart's port by Captain Sweet

BY CAMILLE REYNES

When Maritime Museum volunteer and local history enthusiast Jonothan Davies spotted an intriguing early photograph of Hobart's waterfront for sale on eBay, we knew it had the potential to be something special.

Estimated to date from the 1870s, the image (seen here across a two-page spread, colourised) offered an unusual perspective—taken from an elevated position on Hunter Street, likely from the upper floor of one of the waterfront warehouses that now house the Henry Jones Art Hotel. From this vantage point, the photograph captures a rarely seen view of the working port, with watermen's boats drydocked in the foreground and kunanyi/Mount Wellington forming a dramatic backdrop.

Before the print even arrived in Tasmania, we had already identified it as a likely work by Captain Samuel Sweet. The inscription 'Sweet Adelaide' and the number 973 matched the format Sweet consistently used to mark his negatives.

## **Captain Sweet: Sailor, Surveyor, Photographer**

Born in Portsea, Hampshire in 1825, Samuel White Sweet began his career in the Royal Navy before captaining merchant vessels for the Liverpool firm N. J. Myers Son & Co. He spent two years in Queensland from 1863, hoping to establish a cotton farm—an effort that ultimately failed. By the late 1860s, he had settled in Adelaide, where he began to combine maritime work with a growing interest in photography.





Sweet captained the *Gulnare* during the Northern Territory survey expeditions from 1869 to 1872, during which time he took some of the earliest photographic views of northern Australia.

His maritime career ended in 1875, when the ship he commanded, the *Wallaroo*, ran aground in a gale. A formal inquiry found Sweet at fault for an error of judgment and issued a censure.

He did not return to sea. Instead, he established a photographic studio in Adelaide and travelled widely with a horse-drawn darkroom, documenting South Australia's developing towns, rural properties, and natural landscapes.

#### **A visit to Tasmania: May 1878**

While Sweet was based in South Australia, he made at least one confirmed photographic visit to Tasmania.

An advertisement placed in *The Mercury* in May 1878 offers "21 views of Tasmania" for sale, clearly tied to a visit he had recently made. The Hobart waterfront photo now in the Museum's collection is almost certainly among them.

The number '973' inscribed on the photograph fits neatly into Sweet's known sequence of negatives. The National Gallery of Australia holds image number 972, a view of the Cascade Brewery in South Hobart—suggesting this Hobart waterfront scene was taken very shortly afterward. The snow visible on kunanyi in the background prompted some initial hesitation, as May snowfalls in Hobart are uncommon. However, historical weather records confirm there were early snow events in May 1878—just as there have been in Hobart this year!—supporting the photograph's likely date.







image (left): Samuel Sweet, State Library of South Australia [B 5959]. image (right): Adelaide Arcade shop, State Library of South Australia [B 12564].

Of the 21 Tasmanian photographs mentioned in *The Mercury*, nine have been located by researcher K. Magee in her doctoral thesis on Captain Sweet<sup>[1]</sup>, with prints located in the State Library of South Australia and in several other public collections. Until now, this particular Hobart view doesn't seem to have been catalogued in any institutional archive, making it a previously undocumented work.

### From France to Tasmania (and back again)

The journey of this photograph reflects the far-reaching networks of material culture in the 19th century. It was printed on BFK Rives paper—a high-quality French paper favoured by professional photographers for its smooth surface and strength.

BFK began producing photographic paper in the mid-19th century, and it became especially popular for albumen printing, the dominant photographic process of the period. Albumen prints used egg white to bind light-sensitive chemicals to the paper, resulting in the rich, detailed tones that distinguish Sweet's photographs.

This particular sheet of paper would have been imported to Australia, where Sweet prepared it for use in his studio. After printing, the photograph somehow made its way back to France—perhaps with a collector or traveller—and was rediscovered there nearly 150 years later. Thanks to the sharp eye of a Tasmanian volunteer, it has now come full circle, returning to Hobart from where it was originally taken.

This striking view of 19th-century Hobart is more than a visual curiosity—it is a newly identified work by one of Australia's most significant colonial photographers, offering both aesthetic and documentary insight into a formative period in the city's history. Its unusual vantage point, tangible ties to Sweet's Tasmanian visit, and international journey all add layers of meaning to the image.

For the Maritime Museum, it is a welcome rediscovery, and a reminder that valuable pieces of our visual history can still resurface in unexpected places, ready to be reconnected with the communities they depict.

<sup>[1]</sup> Magee, K., 2014. *Captain Sweet's Colonial Imagination: The Ideals of Modernity in South Australian Views Photography 1866-1886* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Adelaide)



# New acquisitions: *Pantologia: A New Cabinet Cyclopaedia*

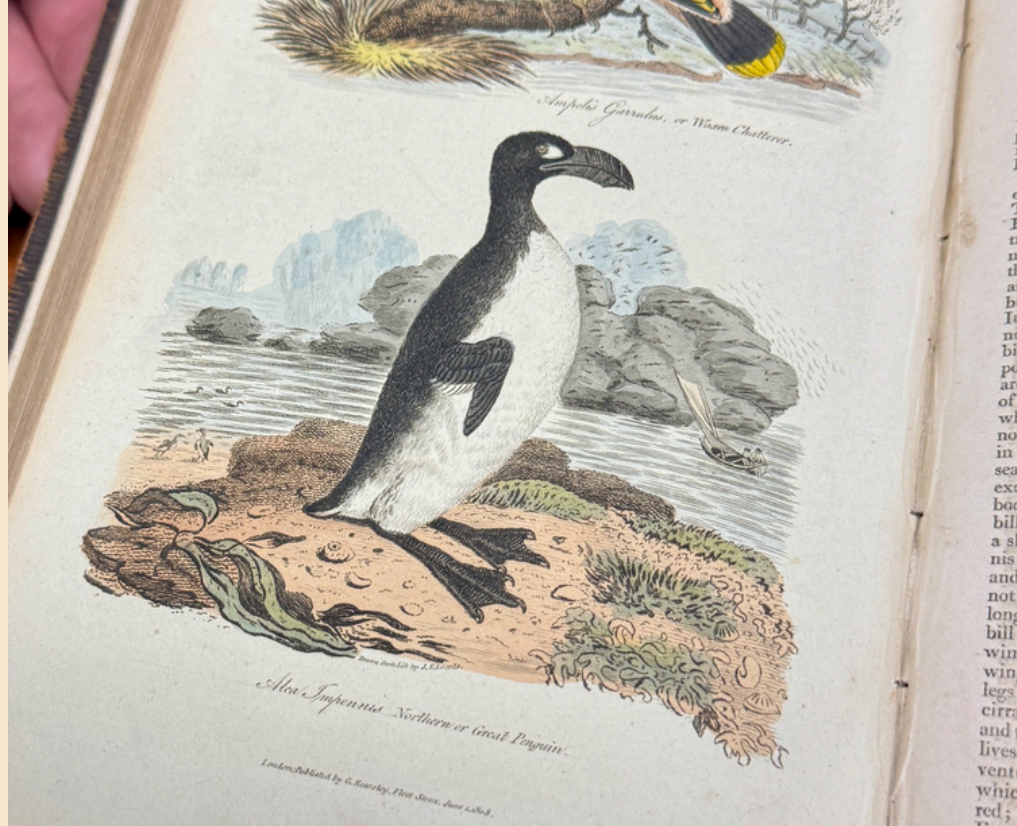
BY COLIN DENNY

In 1823, John Bayles arrived in Van Diemen's Land and settled near Campbell Town at Rokeby, on the banks of the Macquarie River. He brought with him *Pantologia: A New Cabinet Cyclopaedia* (1819), described as 'presenting a distinct survey of human genius and industry illustrated with elegant engravings...those on natural history beautifully coloured after nature.'

Bayles lived by the Macquarie River until his death in April 1849, at which time the cyclopaedia may have been left to the local church he attended. The books became part of the Wesley Museum collection, but the cyclopaedia vanished for a number of years. It was eventually returned and later generously donated to the Maritime Museum by the Uniting Church.

One engraving, titled *Alca Impennis: Northern or Great Penguin*, depicts the now-extinct Great Auk and is a fine example of the cyclopaedia's hand-coloured natural history illustrations. The Great Auk was the original "penguin," though it is not closely related to the penguins of the Southern Hemisphere — which were named for their resemblance to this species. The Great Auk became extinct in 1844 when the last two specimens were killed off the coast of Iceland.

The cyclopaedia also includes many detailed engineering engravings that explain industrial processes, including those related to ships and rigging. Unlike the natural history plates, most of these engravings were not coloured.





# New acquisitions: Australasian Sketcher print

BY COLIN DENNY

Artefacts added to the collection reveal remarkable stories of Tasmania's maritime heritage. Recently, curator Camille Reynes acquired the 22 September 1884 front page from the *Australasian Sketcher* depicting the SS *Southern Cross* recovering a damaged telegraph cable from mid-Bass Strait. The 140 year-old page is mounted and in fine condition.

The *Australasian Sketcher* uncovers the story of Tasmania's early adoption of submarine telegraph cables at a time when the technology was new and, as the following story illustrates, maintenance was difficult.

On 29 July 1884 the Bass Strait cable manager at Low Head, Mr W Warren, reported, "cable broken on other side of the Straits. I leave by first steamer and will use every endeavour restore communication as soon as possible".

When the cable failed the position of the fault was determined using a Mirror Galvanometer to measure the amount of electric charge flowing through the conductor. It detects the position of a current leak to the sea that cable electricians referred to as a "dead earth". Tests showed the break to be about 73 nautical miles from Low Head.

In 1859 Tasmania's first intercolonial telegraph cable ran from Cape Otway to King Island, then by land across King Island and undersea to Circular Head. The unreliable cable chafed on rocks and incurred damage from ships' anchors. The later cable that the SS *Southern Cross* was to repair had been laid down in 1869 by the CS *Investigator* from Cape Schanck to Low Head.

The owners of the cable, the Eastern Extension, Australia & China Company, chartered SS *Southern Cross* to undertake the repairs. The ship sailed for Flinders near Cape Schanck to pick up technicians and equipment and on 6 August steamed south into the Strait along the line of the cable to an estimated position 73 miles from Low Head. Without modern aids to navigation, cloudy weather had made position fixing difficult.

On reaching the possible location of the break they began trawling a grappling hook east to west. After many runs the cable was hooked in 44 fathoms (80 metres) of water about two miles west of the position recorded by the CS *Investigator* when laid. The break, on the Tasmanian side, was buoyed and the search continued to find the Victorian end.

The *Southern Cross* went to George Town to collect spare cable and supplies but bad weather kept the vessel sheltering for many days. On returning to the Bass Strait search area, they trawled in various locations without success. Eventually, on 20 September, six weeks after the search began the cable was hooked "greatly out of the position laid down on the chart" by *Investigator*.

On 21 September *Southern Cross* planned to lay out seven miles of replacement cable consisting of a core of seven copper conductor wires covered by a three layer insulator called gutta percha and then oakum covered by stranded galvanised steel wire. But the task was delayed for a week owing to continuing gales.

The technicians completed the complicated cable splicing on Sunday 28 September 1884 and communications between Tasmania, Victoria and the world were restored after two months work in trying conditions.

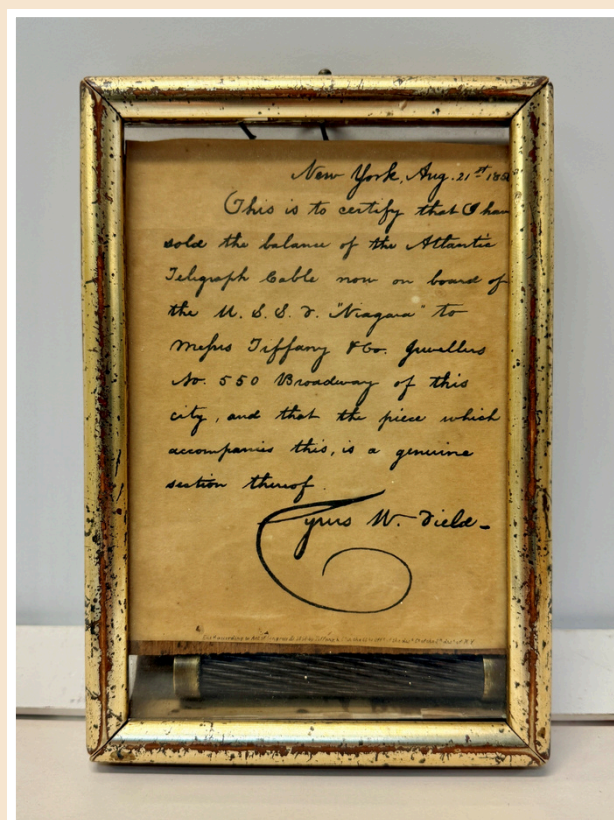


image (above): Sections of the 1858 trans-Atlantic cable identical to the Bass Strait cable were sold as souvenirs by Tiffany of New York (MMT collection)

image (opposite): Australasian Sketcher 22 September 1884 front page depicting Pen and Pencil Illustration from the September 1884 Australasian Sketcher. Illustration is named "Grappling for a Telegraph Cable".



Maritime Museum Tasmania accepts gifts of objects, documents and artefacts relating to Tasmanian maritime history and that meet the Museum's Acquisition and Collection Policy. These donations are tax deductible under the provisions of the Income Tax Assessment Act, subject to certain conditions. The Museum is happy to explain the procedures and benefits of donating to the collection to potential donors, simply [contact us](#) for more information.



# THE AUSTRALASIAN SKETCHER

WITH PEN AND PENCIL

Nº. 184.—VOL. XII.

MELBOURNE, MONDAY, SEPT. 22, 1884.

PRICE 6d.



GRAPPLING FOR A TELEGRAPH CABLE.



# Hands-On History: Conserving 'George'

BY EMILY QUINTIN

Visitors to the Maritime Museum over two days in March were treated to a rare sight: a full-scale conservation treatment carried out live in the gallery. The subject was the Museum's enigmatic sandstone sculpture, affectionately known by staff and volunteers as 'George'.

The project was led by conservators Dr Evan Tindal and Marica Mucic from The University of Melbourne's Grimwade Conservation Services — a leader in museum-grade conservation and training in the Asia Pacific region.

When the Museum acquired George, he had been missing his right hand and forearm — components which had been stored separately since their detachment. The pieces were donated along with the statue.

Dr Evan Tindal and Marica Mucic arrived from Melbourne and completed a thorough condition assessment on the statue to ascertain its preservation. They found George to be in sound structural condition and began the painstaking restoration process.

The first step in treatment involved the careful removal of non-original silicone adhesive that had been previously applied in a failed repair. This was done using scalpels and soft brushes to protect the original stone. Next, precision drilling allowed for the insertion of stainless steel pins: one 6 mm pin to reattach the hand to the forearm, and one 8 mm pin to reattach the forearm to the upper arm.

A structural epoxy was used to secure the joins. The reattached hand was supported in a bucket of uncooked rice — a traditional conservation method! — while the adhesive cured. The following day, the forearm was joined to the upper arm and held in place using a modified timber easel support for 24 hours to ensure accurate alignment.

Once reattached, minor losses at the join lines were infilled with a filler mixture strengthened with sandstone dust to match the surrounding texture. Conservators then undertook inpainting using dry pigments and artist-quality acrylics to sympathetically blend the repairs.

In parallel, areas of fragile paint — particularly on the trousers and feet — were stabilised with a fine application of a conservation-grade acrylic consolidant. A light dusting completed the surface cleaning, carefully avoiding any friable areas.



image: Maritime Museum curator Camille Reynes observes the work of Dr Evan Tindal of Grimwade Conservation Services.

Each stage of the conservation treatment was designed not only to stabilise the statue's condition, but also to ensure the work's structural integrity and preserve its unique surface patina and original polychrome paint.

Throughout the process, members of the public were invited to observe and engage with the work and speak with the conservators. The live treatment provided a rare window into the specialised field of object conservation and highlighted the Museum's commitment to transparency and preservation.

The conservation was made possible by a generous grant from The Copland Foundation. Alexander Ewart Copland was an avid collector with a special interest in historic houses and their contents. The Copland Foundation was founded with his legacy to support fields that were important to him, including the study, management, conservation, acquisition, and interpretation of historic collections.

While the story behind George continues to provoke debate, the restoration has reestablished the statue's physical form and invites a renewed appreciation of its materiality and construction.

George remains on display in the Carnegie Gallery — fully restored, fully intact, and as thought-provoking as ever.





...the sculpture, as he is depicted as  
inating, apparently showing his contempt  
r the people of Van Diemen's Land. The  
atue was plumed to be the centrepiece of a  
untain.

his remarkable work has still to be fully  
searched, but if the subject is confirmed to  
e Lieutenant Governor Arthur, then there  
circumstantial evidence that it may have  
een commissioned by one of the colony's  
ading merchants and landowners, William  
ermode. He had been in conflict with Arthur  
ver many issues from almost the time of  
Arthur's arrival in 1824.

It is probable that this free-standing  
sculpture, apparently Australia's first, was  
created by convict Daniel Herbert toward  
the end of 1835 or early 1836. Herbert is  
generally considered as the maker of  
the carvings on the extraordinary sea  
bridge at Ross and was one of Aust's  
earliest sculptors.





# Do you remember the old *Koranui*?

BY REX COX

Probably not—more than 70 years have passed since this little ship left our shores after being a familiar sight in Tasmanian ports for over three decades.

After World War I, the Union Steam Ship Company of New Zealand Ltd acquired six former (and newly-built) German cargo vessels. Among them, *Koranui* (1,266/1915) became the best known in Tasmania due to its long involvement in the coastal trade. Other vessels occasionally called, such as *Waiotapu* (5,886/1913), formerly *Stolberg*, and *Wairuna* (5,832/1914), formerly *Schneefels*.

*Koranui* was built by Schiffswerft von Henry Koch in Lübeck as *Cleopatra* for Adolf Kirsten of Hamburg. In 1919, the British government took possession of the ship, and in 1920, it was sold to the Union Steam Ship Company. Renamed *Koranui*, it was initially registered in Wellington before being transferred to Melbourne.

The vessel's first arrival in Hobart was on Boxing Day 1921, bringing Newcastle coal. It then returned via the North West Coast ports to Sydney and Newcastle. For the next 16 years, *Koranui* mainly operated between Sydney, Launceston, Devonport, and Burnie. On 31 December 1936, it ran aground in the Mersey River.

In April 1937, *Koranui* joined the Melbourne-Hobart general cargo trade, running alongside Holyman's *Lanena* (1,126/1925)—another German-built vessel, though acquired peacefully. Despite its age, *Koranui* continued operating throughout the war years. After a hiatus from October 1946 to February 1948, it returned to Hobart service until it was eventually replaced by the newly built Australian freighter *Kootara* (2,427/1952). The ship departed for the final time from Queen's Pier on 1 December 1952.

image: a Union Co. trio - *Koranui* (L), *Ngakuta*, and Hobart's last coal hulk *Jessie Craig*, 13-15 November, 1951 (*The Mercury* photo)







By this stage, *Koranui* had taken on a distinctly antique appearance, with its tall, narrow funnel and canvas dodgers around the largely open wheelhouse. Bob Broughton, who worked briefly on the ship in late 1949, recalled, "*It was the coldest wheel turn I have ever had, as the icy wind seemed to strike from all angles*" — despite a window in front of the helmsman.

Many of *Koranui*'s post-war turnarounds in Hobart were lengthy affairs. In 1948, the vessel stayed an average of 14 days per visit, while in its final year of operation, this blew out to 21 days. The record was likely 37 days spent at various berths between 16 April and 23 May 1952, followed by another 24 days in port during its next voyage in June and July. Each trip typically carried around 2,500 tons of cargo. In contrast, today's ships are often in and out of port within 24 hours, handling much larger volumes.

In January 1953, *Koranui* was sold to S.P. Bell of Sydney, then resold in April to J. Hagen of Noumea, where it was renamed *Neo-Hebridais II* for the Sydney-Noumea route. Finally, at the ripe old age of 41, the former German cargo vessel arrived in Hong Kong on 5 September 1956 to be scrapped. That same year, the Union Steam Ship Company commissioned a new *Koranui* (3,722/1956) for trans-Tasman service.

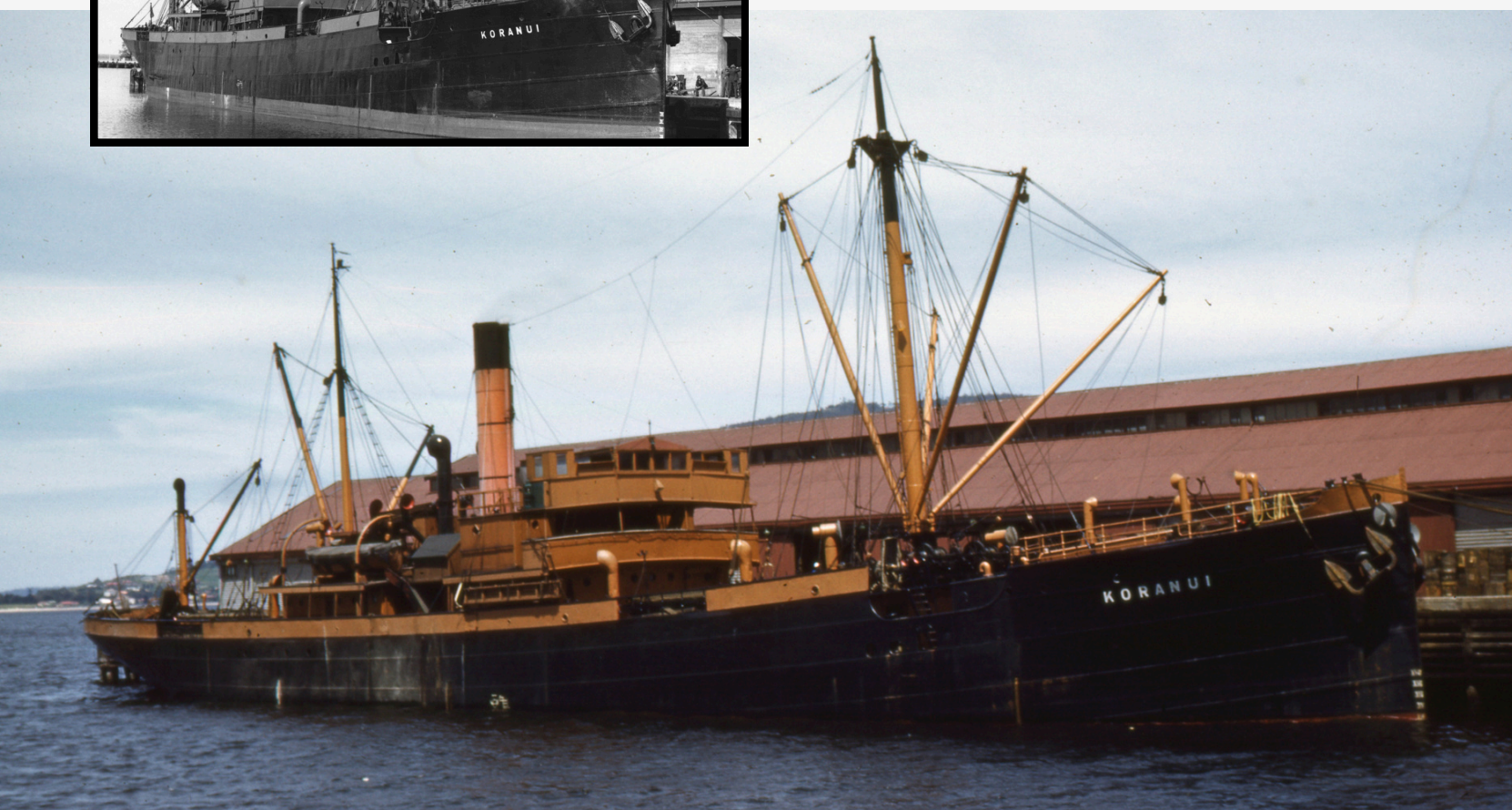
#### References:

- B. R. Broughton, *Berth of a Man*, unpublished memoirs, 1992 (in the Maritime Museum Tasmania collection).
- *The Mercury*, various dates.

image: (top left) *Koranui* unloading a Melbourne cargo at Hobart, 27 May 1948 (The Mercury photo)

image: (bottom left) An excellent study of *Koranui* in Hobart, 10 October 1948 (note the washing!) (The Mercury photo)

image: (main) *Koranui* at Hobart for the last time, 29 November 1952 (David Kirby photo)





# Welcome

to the Museum's newest members...

Pat Klemmy  
Rhonda Burns  
Donald Kable  
Jed Dorrington

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# Ship spotter

BY REX COX

Elsewhere I mention the slow turnarounds that plagued shipping in Hobart (and, indeed, all Australian ports) for a long period following World War II. They reflected the inability of port infrastructure to handle huge volumes of cargo being generated by the postwar economic boom, exacerbated by a volatile industrial scene where strikes and go slows were common.

All shipping was affected, and one British cargo liner particularly so. *Port Adelaide* (8,105/1951) arrived in Hobart on 16 March 1952 to discharge a large general cargo from the UK, then loaded zinc and 155,000 cases of apples before finally departing on 11 May – some 56 days later!

This somewhat dubious record was commented on by *Mercurius* in *The Mercury*, 17 May 1952: *"Something of a gloom was cast over Hobart this week when the Port Adelaide left to continue her journey to England. It was like saying goodbye to an old friend. The ship had been in port about eight weeks. One of the seamen joined a Hobart soccer team, and possibly next trip the whole crew will find themselves eligible to vote at elections."*

Shortly after that lengthy stay *Port Adelaide* had its mast removed, due to excessive vibration, and replaced by a goalpost, topped by a signal mast, so the ship presented a slightly different profile on return visits.



image: a busy port - *Tasmania Star*, *Port Adelaide* and *Parrakoola* at Hobart, May 1952 (David Kirby photo)



image: *Port Adelaide* (with goalpost) at Hobart, August 1960 (John Craike photo)

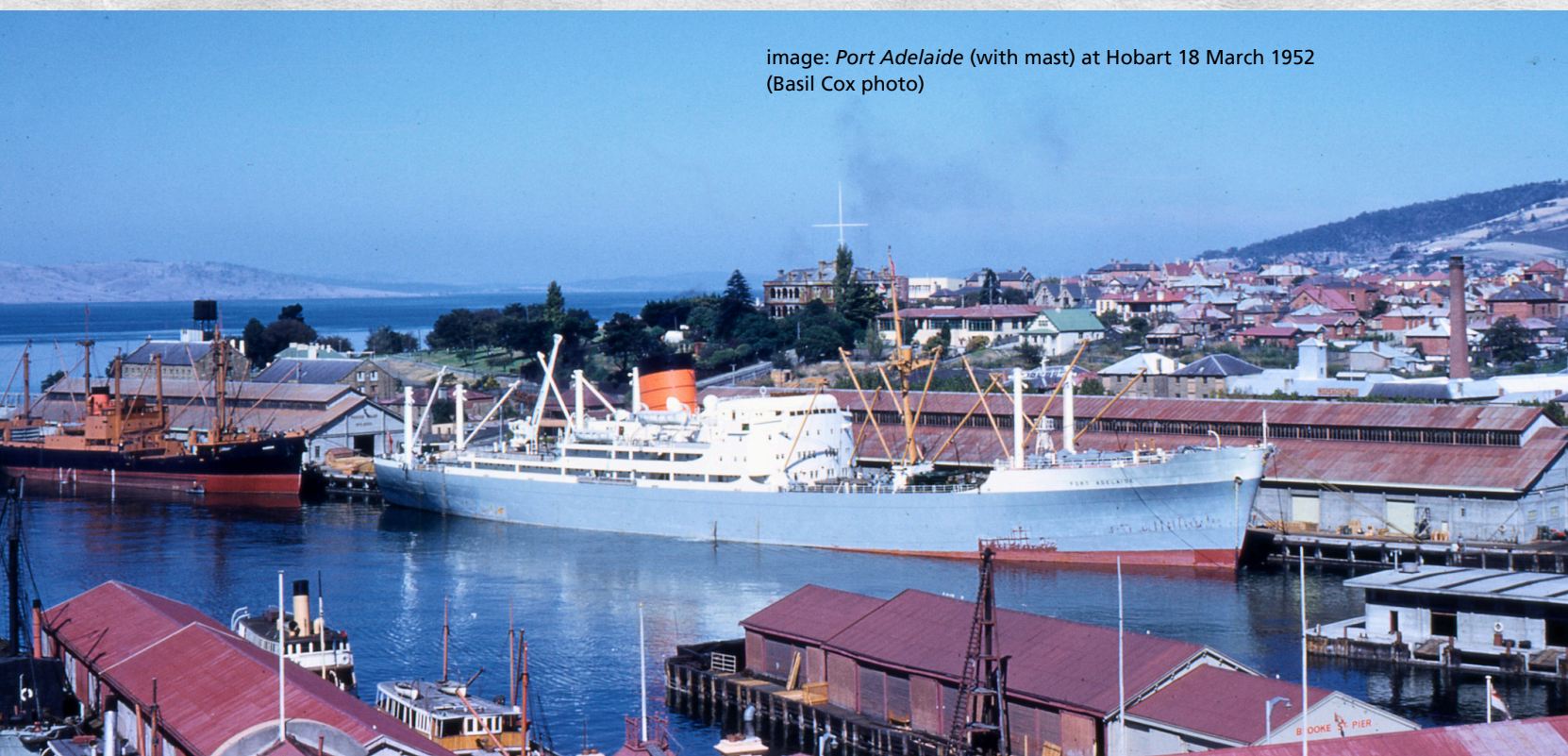


image: *Port Adelaide* (with mast) at Hobart 18 March 1952 (Basil Cox photo)



# The Risdon Punt

## A River Derwent narrative

BY COLIN DENNY

In November 2023 the government released a draft masterplan for the expansion of Hobart's passenger ferry network. The projected reintroduction is a reminder that the River Derwent and nearby waterways were the principal transport arteries serving Hobart and outlying settlements until roads improved and bridges were built.

Perhaps the longest serving route was the Risdon Ferry running from near the present zinc smelter across the river to East Risdon. The Risdon Ferry service by punt commenced in 1836 and continued for 142 years until January 1978.

The Maritime Museum's current display 'Fine Lines: the Art and Purpose of Ship Models' includes a rare model of the nineteenth century punt *Fairy Queen* that once crossed the fast-flowing narrow reaches of the Derwent. The punt ran between two ropes fastened at both shores and was kept moving by a winze wheel worked by the crew, sometimes with assistance from passengers.

In 2014 a damaged model of *Fairy Queen* was rescued by a thoughtful donor who found it dumped. Museum volunteer Bob Parkes restored the model with its two short masts carrying a spritsail and spanker. The sails supplemented manpower in reaching conditions on the crossing.

The origins of the Risdon Ferry can be traced back to the opening of the Richmond Bridge in 1825 that offered an overland route from Bellerive across the Coal River to Sorell.

However, Roderick O'Connor, Lieutenant Governor George Arthur's Inspector of Roads and Bridges said that the Bellerive to Richmond Road was often impassable in bad weather and recommended a "new line" from the River Derwent crossing at Risdon over Grass Tree Hill to Richmond.

Lieutenant Governor Arthur agreed and drafted "some of the worst convicts from the Wharf and from Bridgewater Gangs" to the "safe seclusion" of Grass Tree Hill to build the new road. No doubt Arthur's decision was influenced by his need to access his farm, Carrington, near Richmond. Locals understood George Arthur's ploy, cynically calling the Grass Tree Hill Road "Carrington Cut".

Rowing boats had served the crossing at Risdon but by 1836 the new road created more demand so a winch operated ferry commenced on the 430-metre passage to East Risdon. A punt was guided across by a thick rope worked by nine convicts. From time-to-time strong currents and wind made the crossing difficult particularly when flooding fresh water combined with an ebb tide.



image: an early powered punt, probably the *Queen* (MMT)

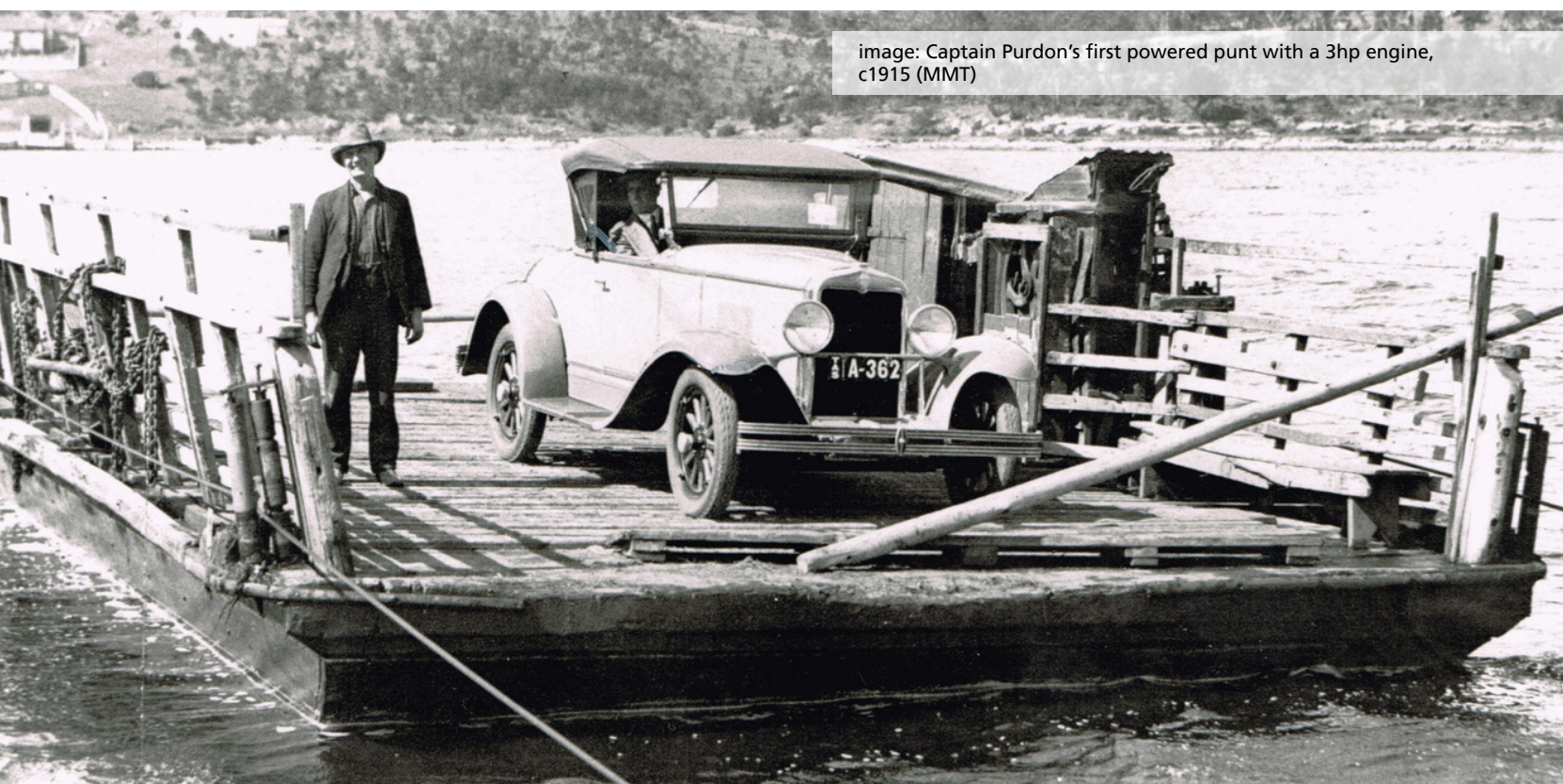


image: Captain Purdon's first powered punt with a 3hp engine, c1915 (MMT)



In the 1850s Richard Cleburne took over the ferry from the Government. He built the Derwent Inn at Risdon and a three-storey hotel at East Risdon and introduced the new punt *Fairy Queen* on which the Museum's model is based.

Thomas Dewhurst Jennings took over the operation of the Risdon Ferry in 1861 and managed the Derwent Inn. The Yorkshire immigrant was reputed to be the largest man in Australia weighing 32 stone (203kg). When the Sorell causeway opened in 1872, Jennings reported a significant reduction in passengers owing to Sorell travellers bypassing Richmond. Jennings retired in the late 1870s, passing the business to Gordon Petrie.

The Risdon Ferry was subsidised and continued with several ferrymen until Captain Thomas Purdon took over in 1908 and motorised the punt with a three horsepower "oil engine". However, in 1914 Purdon's punt was condemned and the Government took over the service with a new *Queen* run by the Public Works Department (later the Department of Main Roads).

Trade improved in 1916 when the Risdon zinc smelter workers used the crossing to and from work. The PWD and the Department of Main Roads built several wooden punts over the period until the last wooden punt *Princess* was replaced by the larger steel punt *Bowen* in 1975.

Soon after *SS Lake Illawarra* collided with the Tasman Bridge *Bowen* was built and played an important river crossing role for nearly three years while the bridge was repaired. Soon after the bridge reopened *Bowen* had served its purpose and was retired. Later it was modified into a powered barge and MV *Bowen* still operates today as a standby ferry on the Bruny Island run.

Punt operators were interesting characters. Notable amongst them was champion Tasmanian sculler Ian "Cookie" Cook who worked the ferry from 1947 to 1977. For many years Cookie was assisted by Josef "Jo" Martak who captained the *Bowen* on its last crossing in January 1978. The Risdon Ferry had ended after 142 years of operation.



image: The ferry *Bowen* after motorising with a Voith-Schneider propulsion system

The model of the nineteenth century punt *Risdon Queen* can be seen in the Maritime Museum's exhibition 'Fine Lines: the Art and Purpose of Ship Models' until later this year.



image (top): Thomas Jennings (1824-1890), reputed to be the biggest man in Australia at 32 stone (203 kg) (MMT)

image (bottom): Punt operator Jo Martak with an unknown model, a photo that accompanied a *Mercury* news story on the closure of the ferry. (image supplied by Jo's wife, Barbara Martak)





# In the bookshop: local legends



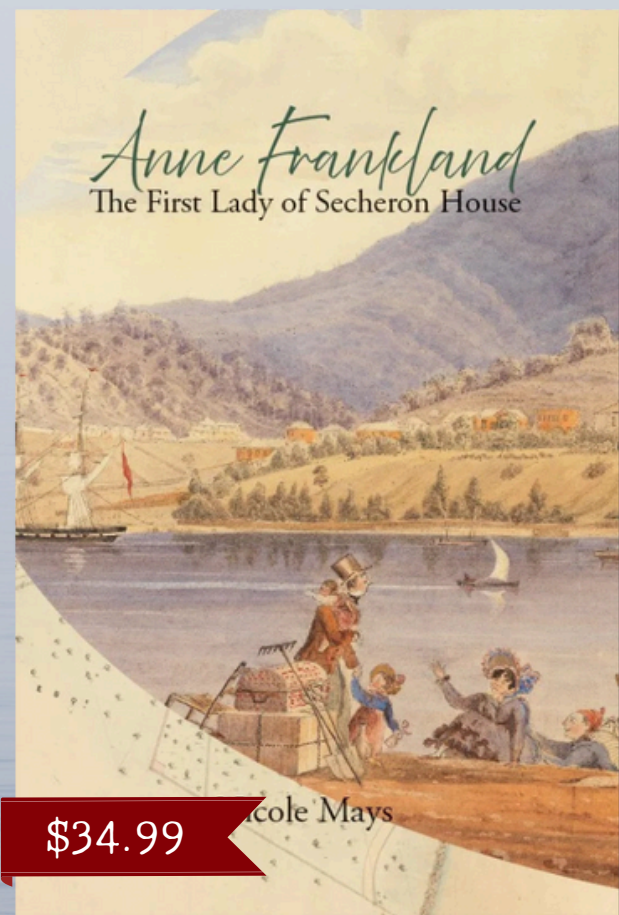
## ***Diemens, Guy Salvidge***

*Diemens* is a tale of Tasmania's origins like no other, a story of how two worlds collide, transforming colonial Van Diemen's Land.

George Baggs, a young Englishman exiled from his homeland, is crewed aboard a Bass Strait sealing ship. Fleeing the cruelty of his masters, Baggs and friend Jimmy Brown are saved by the kindness of northeast Aboriginal Tasmanian clansmen.

*Diemens* follows the colony's first decades told through the lens of a family destined to shape Tasmanian history.

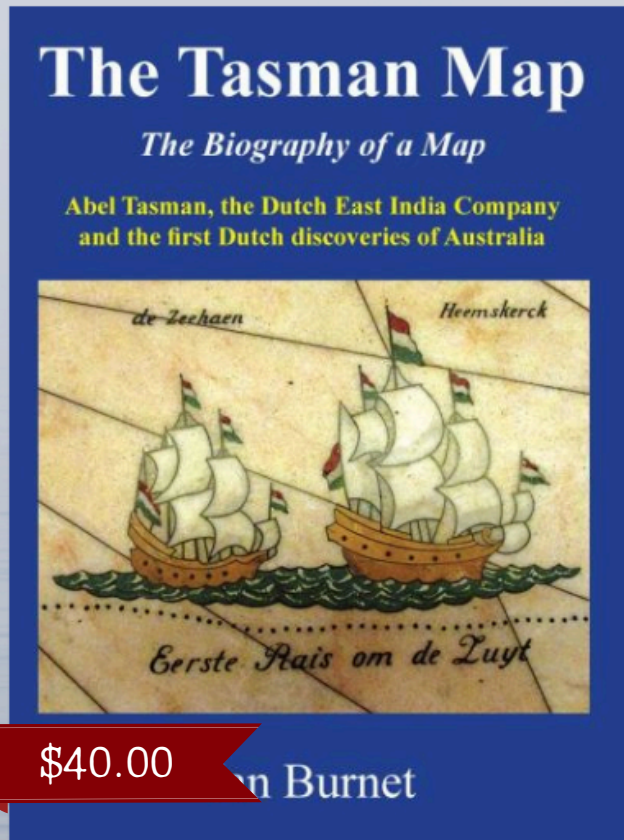
*'A cracking tale that closely follows the historical context'* - Aunty Patsy Cameron



## ***Anne Frankland, The First Lady of Secheron House, Nicole Mays***

Ocean waves carried Anne Frankland around the world. The product of an upper-class family with a proud history of well-regarded professional and charitable men, Anne could never have imagined what would become of the nearly destitute 26-year-old spinster employed as a governess about to leave London for India in March 1820. Her life evolved in a series of events, circumstances and opportunities. From a daughter, granddaughter and sister, she became a teacher, a friend, a wife, a mother, the mistress of a large estate and a member of the upper echelon of society, all within the bounds of an antipodean English colony that was on the other side of the world.



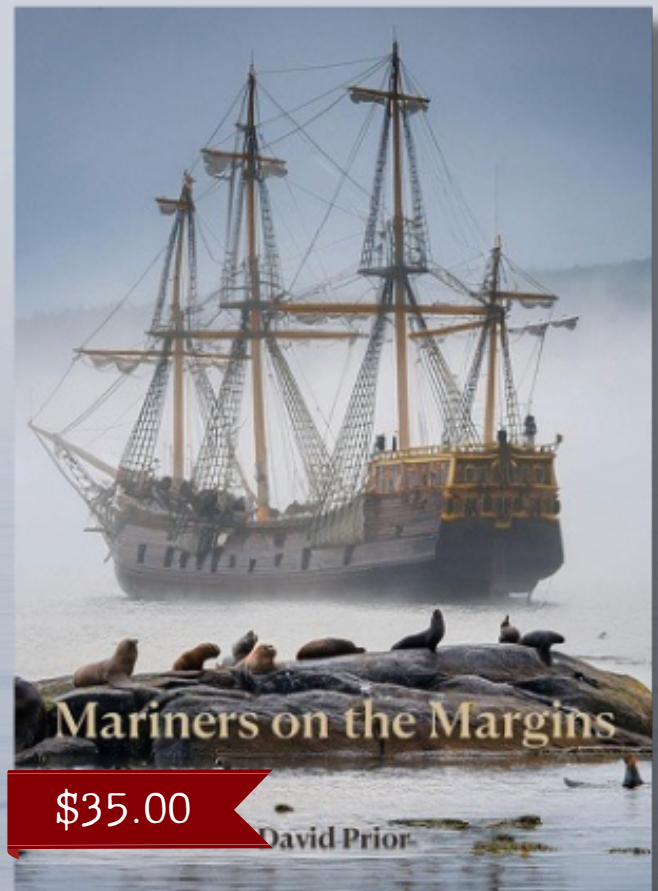


### ***The Tasman Map, Ian Burnet***

Every visitor who passes through the vestibule of the Mitchell Library stops to admire the magnificent marble mosaic of the Tasman Map which fills the entire vestibule floor.

This story of the first Dutch voyages to discover Australia is set against the background of the struggle of the newly formed Dutch Republic to gain its independence from the Kingdom of Spain and the struggle of the Dutch East India Company for trade supremacy in the East Indies against its Portuguese, Spanish and English rivals.

Over a period of only forty years from 1606 to 1644 and based on sixteen separate discoveries the first map of Australia took shape.



### ***Mariners on the Margins, David Prior***

Did you know that Australia's first industry was not founded on the sheep's back but rather in the deep southern waters off Tasmania? This fascinating account traces the daring do of Colonial mariners who hunted seals across the Fishery to the point of extinction. From 1788, when an excited Charles Bishop arrived at the Sydney wharves with a boat heaving with seal skins, gangs from various nations voyaged to the remote and dangerous islands, pursuing skins and oil. Masters employed by Sydney traders captained sealers who were fuelled by hope of making a living from the sea. Some crews thumbed their noses at mainstream operators and set up independently. Most only survived with the help of the First Nations people, who had hunted seals for generations.



# Community-powered conservation project brings Tasmania's wild coast to life



With the support of [TasPorts' Community Grant Program](#), one of Tasmania's most historically significant maritime sites, Maatsuyker Island Light Station, is being preserved and celebrated for future generations.

Built in 1891 by the Marine Board of Hobart (TasPorts' predecessor), the lighthouse stands as the last intact first-order light station in Australia. Now, TasPorts has helped power a community-led project that brought new life to this iconic site through public engagement and essential conservation.

Led by the [Friends of Maatsuyker Island \(FOMI\)](#), Wildcare, the project combined history and habitat protection, highlighting the enduring legacy of Tasmania's lighthouse network, while safeguarding the island's unique coastal environment.

TasPorts Chief Executive Officer, Anthony Donald, said the project was a powerful example of how preserving maritime heritage and protecting the natural environment go hand in hand.

"Maatsuyker Island reminds us of our past and challenges us to care for the future. We're proud to support the people who make that possible," he said.

The two-part initiative began with a public exhibit at the 2025 Australian Wooden Boat Festival (AWBF) in Hobart. FOMI's interactive stall became a standout attraction, featuring a hand-crafted model of the island's original horse-drawn haulage 'whim', built by Ailsa Ferguson, great-granddaughter of the light station's architect.

Alongside it, a restored Maatsuyker haulage trolley and TasPorts-funded interpretive banners drew thousands of visitors, with more than 8000 actively engaging with the display.

FOMI and [Friends of Tasman Island](#) then co-hosted a storytelling event in Hobart, further strengthening connections with the public and reinforcing the importance of preserving Tasmania's offshore lighthouse heritage. The model and banners are now part of a travelling display that will continue to share Maatsuyker's story at events across the state.

In March, the focus shifted from storytelling to stewardship, with volunteers returning to the island for FOMI's annual working bee. Helicopter access, partially funded by the TasPorts grant, remains the only way to reach Maatsuyker, due to the seal population at the old landing site.



image: Volunteer conservation and heritage restoration team on Maatsuyker Island, March 2025 (via M. Campbell, courtesy of Friends of Maatsuyker Island)





image: Model of the horse-pulled 'whim' mechanism and environs displayed at AWBF 2025 (supplied by Friends of Maatsuyker Island)

Once on site, the team contributed over 1800 hours of conservation and restoration work. Their efforts included repainting the interiors of the historic Lightkeeper Quarters and the exterior of the Whim Shed, delivering invasive weed control to protect native vegetation, and continuing seabird monitoring through the long-running Shearwater Program.

FOMI's conservation work, supported in partnership with the Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service, has been active for two decades. The weed control program targets species like blackberry, Californian thistle and Montbretia, plants that threaten seabird nesting grounds and native coastal flora. The Shearwater Monitoring Program, running since 2013, uses remote cameras to track burrow occupancy and chick survival, providing vital data on seabird populations.

"The effort and care that FOMI volunteers put into this work is extraordinary," Mr Donald said.

"It speaks volumes about the strength of Tasmania's community spirit and the pride we all feel in our maritime past."

FOMI relies entirely on community support and grant partnerships like the one provided by TasPorts. The in-kind value of this year's working bee alone was more than \$83,000.

Maatsuyker Island remains a living link to Tasmania's maritime identity with its lighthouse still standing, its history still told and its wild landscape still cared for by volunteers who understand its significance.

"This project captures the essence of what TasPorts' Community Grant program is all about," Mr Donald said.

"Backing local organisations that bring people together, tell our stories and take meaningful action for our future."





# Powering the future: Tasmania launches the world's largest battery-electric ship

A defining chapter in Tasmania's shipbuilding history was written on the banks of the River Derwent on 2 May 2025, as hundreds gathered to witness the launch of Incat Hull 096 — the world's largest battery-electric ship.

Built at Incat's Hobart shipyard for South American ferry operator Buquebus, the 130-metre catamaran is a milestone in sustainable maritime innovation and represents the most significant vessel in Incat's 40-year history.

"This is a historic day – not just for Incat, but for the future of maritime transport," said Incat Chairman Robert Clifford at the launch. "We've been building world-leading vessels here in Tasmania for more than four decades, and Hull 096 is the most ambitious, most complex, and most important project we've ever delivered. This ship changes the game."

When completed, Hull 096 will carry up to 2,100 passengers and 225 vehicles across the River Plate, operating entirely on battery-electric power. It is the ninth vessel Incat has constructed for Buquebus, continuing a long-standing and fruitful partnership between the two companies.

"For me, it's a true source of pride to see Buquebus' vision come to life," said Buquebus President Juan Carlos López Mena. "When we were evaluating this new vessel, Robert Clifford told me, 'The next ship I deliver to you will be 100% electric.' I replied, 'Then the next one must be the one we're commissioning today.' And with great courage, he said, 'Together, we're going to make history.' That's how we began reconfiguring the China Zorrilla – originally planned to run on LNG – into a fully electric vessel."

López Mena described the launch as "a true milestone achieved between private companies, driven by our commitment to sustainability and our ongoing pursuit of service excellence."

Tasmanian Premier Jeremy Rockliff also praised the achievement and its implications for the state's global reputation in maritime innovation.

"Through hard work, determination, and ingenuity, Incat has built a globally significant battery-electric ship from their yard in Tasmania," Premier Rockliff said. "Incat epitomises what it means to be Tasmanian as they quietly pursue the extraordinary, strengthen Tasmania's brand on the global stage, and continue to support Tasmanian jobs and our economy."

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The vessel's advanced Energy Storage System, supplied by Finnish technology partner Wärtsilä, includes more than 250 tonnes of batteries with over 40 megawatt-hours of installed capacity – four times greater than any previous maritime battery system. The power system is connected to eight electric-driven waterjets, offering a fully emissions-free crossing once in service.

"We are proud to have collaborated with Incat and Buquebus in launching the world's largest battery-electric ship," said Roger Holm, President of Wärtsilä Marine and Executive Vice President at Wärtsilä Corporation. "Ferries play a vital role in meeting the growing demand for environmentally sustainable transport options, with ship electrification a key solution for enabling the sector to transition towards net-zero emissions."

"This is a proud day for Tasmania and for Australian manufacturing," said Incat CEO Stephen Casey. "Hull 096 proves that large-scale, low-emission transport solutions are not only possible, they are ready now. We're not just building a ship – we're building the future."

In addition to its revolutionary propulsion system, the vessel will feature a 2,300-square-metre duty-free retail deck — the largest shopping area on any ferry in the world. Final fit-out, battery installation, and energy system integration will continue in the coming months, with sea trials scheduled to take place on the River Derwent later this year.

"This ship puts Tasmania and Australia firmly on the world stage," Clifford said. "We're incredibly proud of what our team has achieved – and this is only the beginning."







*Maritime Times Tasmania*

AUD\$10.00

