

Basic Detail Report



May Queen

Vessel number

HV000012

Date

1867

Primary Maker

Alexander Lawson

Description

MAY QUEEN is the oldest sail trading vessel afloat in Australia and the fourth oldest fore and aft sailing vessel of her type still afloat in the world. The historical and cultural importance to the country, and in particular to

Tasmania, are of a high order of significance. The World Ship Trust recognised this by placing the vessel at No. 22 on their Maritime Heritage Award listing which is granted to “those ships considered of transcendent importance in the context of maritime history and heritage”. Colonial settlement of the Huon River south of Hobart Town began in the 1820s, with settlers first cutting eucalypt timber, then growing potatoes, and later still fruit in large quantities. As there were no reliable roads between the Huon and Hobart, most transport was by boat using the D’Entrecasteaux Channel. When Lady Franklin opened her Huon River model settlement in the late 1830s, she had a leeboard ketch named the Huon Pine built at Port Davey to service it. Between 1843 and 1850, 66 of the 116 river-trading vessels identified as working out of Hobart Town are known to have made voyages to the Huon. By the late 1840s the standard Huon trader had become a strongly-built centreboard ketch, locally known as a “barge,” heavily framed and flat-bottomed to allow loading alongside or even aground riverside timber yards and farms. Regular steamship services between the Huon and Hobart by the former English Channel ferry CULLODEN furthered development of the Huon and Channel districts during the 1850s until the depression of the early 1860s, after which regular steamer services were not seen again until the 1880s. A regular two-way coach service began in 1869, coping with passenger traffic although bulk goods were more cheaply shipped by water. During this period ketch construction became a major industry – both for local use and export interstate and overseas. Many of these vessels were built on and around the Huon itself, where of course there was plenty of timber close to suitable boatbuilding sites. One such builder was William Thorp, Jnr., innkeeper of Franklin. Although he is listed as a shipbuilder, he employed a number of shipwrights to build vessels and may not have had any “hands-on” involvement. William Thorp, Jnr.. first appears in 1861 as part owner of the ketch SKIPJACK built that year by co-owner James Jefferson. Next was the ELIZABETH built on the Huon in 1866, although the builder is not stated she was first registered at Hobart on 20th January 1866 in the name of William Thorp before passing to James Stephenson on the following day. MAY QUEEN’s official builder, Alexander Lawson, does not appear as such on the registers of any other vessels although he no

doubt did build barges for other shipyard operators, such as Huon innkeeper William Cuthbert, whose ALABAMA he had built in 1864. In this case Cuthbert was named as builder on the register. Thorp apparently had another vessel built at his yard before the MAY QUEEN, which has not been identified. The Mercury of 6 June 1867 reports that: "A fine new barge built by Mr. G. W. Thorpe, of the Franklin, has just been launched for the river coasting trade. The barge has been constructed at the Franklin, is of 60 tons burden, with a keel of 60 feet, and is, we are informed, a very fine vessel. The craft has been named the May Queen, and is the fourth boat of the same description built by Mr. Thorpe, who also owns the vessel, within the last few years." Thorp went on to build at least another five vessels before retiring from shipbuilding in the mid- 1870s. He had evidently built the MAY QUEEN as a speculation, for two days after she was registered in his name she was sold to John White, tobacconist of Hobart. In the Regattas of 8 January 1868 and 9 December 1869 William Nicholls was her master, and Thomas Oldham was her master at the Regatta of 1 December 1868. On 25 April 1870 William Bell became owner. He is probably the William Bell, farmer of Franklin Island, who had become owner of the ketch RIVER CHIEF on 13 September 1867. MAY QUEEN was to be the only other vessel he is known to have owned. Then described as a craftsman, he appears to have been her master during all regattas she competed in under his ownership. On 7 September 1873 May Queen was officially purchased by Henry Chesterman, although he was evidently effective owner some time earlier, as The Mercury of 18 August 1873 reports: The new barge Hero, and the barge May Queen were amongst the arrivals of the crafts yesterday afternoon. Both these vessels belong to the firm of Chesterman and Hay, and are laden with railway material, from their sawmills at Southport. These vessels left the bar at Southport at about eleven o'clock yesterday morning, and were in the Dock by five o'clock; thus making the trip up in six hours. This timber is for the cutting at Risdon. Henry Chesterman, who had arrived at Melbourne by the ship Chalmers in 1852 and moved to Tasmania two years later, had a financial interest in the establishment of a sawmill at Hastings by John Hay during 1867-1868. After being in operation for one year the mill was burnt down and Henry dropped out of the project, not being financially involved in the rebuilding. However, he clearly remained a major client, using Hay's timber in his contracting work. Another sawmill Chesterman did business with was that established at Raminea by W. H. Andrewartha (a familiar Maritime Museum name) in 1870. Henry Chesterman bought the Raminea sawmill from him in 1882. Strangely enough, the ketch ONE AND ALL built by John Wilson at Port Cygnet in 1878 was only first registered by W. H. Andrewartha in 1882 and was sold soon afterwards to Henry Chesterman, who had also purchased the Raminea Mill. Henry kept the ONE AND ALL up to 1892 when she was sold to Adelaide. Henry Chesterman and Chesterman and Co. owned, leased or otherwise controlled a number of sailing vessels over the 100 odd years that the timber trading company operated). Many of these were ketches engaged in the timber trade between Hobart and the Huon and southern Channel districts, while others were larger vessels carrying timber to intercolonial destinations. Most of the latter, in particular, were owned by their masters while under mortgage with Chestermans. Chestermans were also one of a number of timber firms associated with Henry Jones & Co., whose partner Albani Rupert Palfreyman was often co-mortgagee with Chestermans in several timber vessels. Another associate was former north-west-coast shipmaster and shipowner Edward Taylor, who managed the interstate traders ZEPHYR, SOUTHERN CROSS, EDWARD and IRIS for Jones and Chesterman during the early 1900s. Similar arrangement occurred with river traders including the Boxall family, who would own MAY QUEEN between 1924 and 1940. Due to her extended working life the May Queen attended (and obtained a place) in more

of the trading vessel races at the various regattas than any other vessel. A listing of these for the Royal Hobart Regatta is set out in the attached table. Henry served as a Warden on the Hobart Marine Board (1883 - 1900) and on the Royal Hobart Regatta Association Committee from 1888-1901. The MAY QUEEN traded to Raminea for the life of the three mills that existed on the site. There were sawmill fires in 1898 and 1914 (as well as 1974). She also traded to and from the Lune River, Tasman Peninsular and East Coast (Rheban). Not only sawn timber but also hardwood sawn beams, piles, mill machinery, boilers, steam engines, iron rails, millstones, fruit, and other commodities were carried on board. On the return voyage in the early days the vessel would carry chaff and feed for the horse and bullock teams that worked dragging logs to the sawmill. During A. C. Boxall's ownership (1924 to 1940) coal was carted to Hobart from Catamaran for Jones & Co. and other work for that firm was undertaken on a contract basis. With a relatively small population the skippers of the local trading vessels would know by name most of the property owners along their route. Medical emergencies were not uncommon and the trading ketches were often called upon to convey injured or sick individuals to the nearest doctor or hospital. Apart from injured mill workers, the May Queen carried at least two pregnant wives to the nearest doctor - the last incident being in 1946 under skipper Clyde McKay. Life on board the early trading vessels was quite tough with the skippers and crew paid by the quantity of the load they were able to transport. There was therefore a strong incentive to bend the rules in terms of load limits and to attempt as many trips as possible over the course of a month. Deck hands often started work as young as twelve or thirteen years of age - generally in the company of a father or relative. The handling of up to 60 tonnes of green rough sawn timber with bare hands and packing it into the hold was hard labour. Once the hold was crammed full, wedges would be driven in between the top of the load and the deck beams. Then additional timber would be loaded on deck until the vessel was loaded down to the Plimsoll line (or sometimes above). The crew slept in rough bunks up forward and the skipper back aft in the captain's cabin. Cooking was done on an open firepot placed on a couple of lengths of railway iron - generally in the aft port corner of the vessel. The first engine was installed in the MAY QUEEN by Boxall in 1924, a 63 Model International petrol powered discarded lorry engine. In 1940 Chestermans installed a low horsepower Lister diesel engine. A few years latter a 40 HP Gardner diesel engine was installed until she went out of service in 1973. In calm conditions carrying 25,000 super feet of green hardwood (60 tons) the trip of 45 miles from Raminea would take about 8 hours. With wind help considerably less. It was necessary to come out of the Esperance River on a high tide. There was a mark on one of the mill jetty piles and the ketch would not move until the tide reached that mark. (Although there are tales of more impatient skippers trying to 'bounce' the keel over a rocky ledge that obstructed the passage). In February 1948 the MAY QUEEN had an extensive overhaul at Purdon and Featherstone's slip. New frames were set up alongside the old ones and much of the planking replaced, the stringers and keelson were renewed together with the interior lining (ceiling). The false keel was also replaced. All the timber was cut at the Raminea Mill. Incidents in a long career The average survival life for sawmills and wooden trading vessel is probably of the order of less than twenty years. The MAY QUEEN has experienced a number of accidents of varying severity as would be expected for such a long career, but fortunately, as far as is known, with only one loss of life. The first recorded incident was reported in The Mercury of 28 July 1873: Between 9 and 10 o'clock yesterday morning the wind, which had been light from the west, suddenly shifted to S.W., and came up in a heavy squall, and catching several of the river craft bound down, they had to turn tail and run for shelter. One of them, the barge May Queen,

got caught before she could round to, and her mizzen was blown out of the bolt ropes, her mizzen-top carried away, and the crosstrees came rattling down on deck, striking one of the crew on the head, and for the time rendering him insensible; but he soon rallied, and with the exception of a cut and a bruise was none the worse. The May Queen, and other craft got safely into port.... Although it resulted in only minor damage, MAY QUEEN's closest scrape with total disaster occurred on 4 June 1883 when she collided with the Tasmanian Steam Navigation Company's steamship Esk off Tasman Peninsula. At the time the May Queen was carrying stone from buildings at Port Arthur that Henry Chesterman had purchased for demolition, using the stone to build houses at Sandy Bay Road. When it was found that the ketch was not in danger the ESK, which was on a voyage from Hobart to Sydney, continued on her way. An Inquiry under the Wrecks Inquiries Act therefore could not be held until her return, and took place at the Police Court, Hobart on 16 June and the findings were published in the Government's Hobart Gazette of 3 July 1883: The Court therefore consider that from the very conflicting evidence as regards the wind at the time given by the crews of both vessels; that as the ketch did not keep on her course as required by the rules of the road; and that the steamer did not reduce her speed or go astern; that the master of the ketch pay the costs of repairs to his own vessel, and that the Captain of the Esk pay the costs of this enquiry. O. A. KEMP, Acting Police Magistrate. J. SHORTT, Nautical assessor. None of the principals in this incident would be out of trouble for long. On the night of 15 July MAY QUEEN arrived at Hobart in a partially dismasted state. She had left Port Arthur with timber but while off Adventure Bay encountered a strong westerly gale and the mizzen mast broke off at the deck, going over the side with all its sails, rigging and fittings and being lost. She put into Wedge Bay for the night before coming up to town rigged as a cutter. More serious trouble awaited Captain Evans of the Esk. Shortly afterwards he was promoted to master of the T.S.N. Co.'s flagship TASMAN, but on the morning of 30 September 1883 the steamer discovered a rock off the Hippolytes Rocks off Tasman Peninsula, only about twenty miles from where the collision with MAY QUEEN occurred. The TASMAN sank within fifteen minutes, although no lives were lost. Evans was back in charge of the Esk when she was wrecked at Tamar Heads on 22 April 1886, marking the end of his seagoing career. An additional link existed at this stage with the Chesterman name, with Edwin Chesterman, eldest son of Henry, aboard as second engineer on the ESK. Evans went on to become a notable Tasmania politician, state premier and finally Lieutenant Governor. On 26 January 1885 MAY QUEEN ran into the yacht FOAM anchored off Lucas' slip. Although the ketch was undamaged the yacht suffered considerable damage including the loss of her mast. So far as is known, MAY QUEEN only sank on two occasions during her long career, in which she was generally fortunate. The shallow-drafted, broad-beamed ketches were quite prone to capsize if caught by a sudden squall of wind and it was under these circumstances that MAY QUEEN sank off Police Point at the entrance to the Huon River on 16 February 1888. MAY QUEEN had left the Dock at Hobart early that morning to proceed down river where she was to load a cargo of piles for Bridgewater. Under the command of Captain Edward McAvoy, she was carrying about 15 tons of ballast. At about 2 p.m. she was about a mile offshore between Police Point and Huon Island when she was struck by a squall, heeled over and sank rapidly in 17 fathoms of water. The crew of three escaped unharmed although the master was a heavy loser as 50 sovereigns and a gold chronometer went down with the wreck. Henry Chesterman left for the scene as soon as he received news of the disaster to organise salvage operations. The wreck was buoyed and he entered into negotiations with the commanding officer of the visiting warship H.M.S. EGERIA to borrow her divers to assist. Unfortunately EGERIA's pumps could

only support diving up to nine fathoms which was only half what was required and arrangements had to be made to bring one in from Victoria. On the 3 April the ketches ALABAMA and ONE AND ALL had left Hobart to assist with the salvage operations. By the 16th she had been dragged into 8 fathoms of water and from there was raised without much difficulty, arriving at Hobart on the 22nd under tow from the steam ketch AMY LOUISE. It was found that relatively little damage had been caused, and she was back in service within a few weeks. On 19 December 1925 MAY QUEEN was run into by the ferry Kangaroo in Sullivans Cove, and in March was the subject of an enquiry: When the Kangaroo left her berth at Hobart at 12.30 p. m. on 19th December last, the master saw the May Queen standing across from off Ocean Pier towards Prince's Wharf. The May Queen was under reefed mainsail and staysail, with a few yards of mizzen peak showing. Instead of following her usual route alongside Princes Wharf, the Kangaroo was headed across the pier heads towards King's Pier with a view to avoiding the ketch. There was nothing to show where the latter was making for, but she came round under the same sail about 60 yards from the Port Victor, a steamer lying at Princes Wharf and the courses of the two vessels then converged. The distance apart at that stage is variously estimated, but appears to have been somewhere about 100 yards, or even less. A stormy north-westerly wind was blowing. The Kangaroo is 110 feet long, so that she was less than three lengths from the ketch when the latter came round, and the Kangaroo kept steadily coming round to port. The master of the Kangaroo blew three blasts and reversed his engines; the May Queen altered her course and the main sheet was slacked, but owing probably to the effect of the mizzen peak she paid away very slowly- The Kangaroo was almost stopped when the boats collided. The May Queen was struck amidships on the port side, and the rail and several stanchions were carried away. The Court considers that the master of each vessel was too late in taking measures to avoid the other, and cannot exonerate either of them from responsibility for the collision. Under the circumstances, the Court considers that each master committed an error of judgement, but the certificate of each should be returned to him without the imposition of a penalty or any order as to costs. Dated at Hobart this sixth day of March, one thousand nine hundred and twenty six. E.W. Turner, P.M., President. J. Davis, William H. T. Brown, Nautical Assessors Costs of the enquiry, £10 10/- In December 1940, more than half a century after her first sinking, MAY QUEEN repeated the performance under rather less dramatic circumstances. While carrying a cargo of 17,000 feet of cut timber from the Raminea sawmill and some steel wagon wheels for the Lune River sawmill, she hit the Dover wharf, rebounded, rolled over and sank on one side, with the other only partly submerged. The exact date of the mishap was not reported in the press but on the 2nd it was reported that only her masts were visible at high tide. Nothing more was reported in the press, but she was soon refloated with little structural damage. Trevor Tuttle was heading out from Hobart in the MAY QUEEN to Raminea in 1966 when just off Taroona the vessel lurched and the stern was lifted several feet up from her normal position in the water. Trevor knew that there were no rocks at this location and wondered what he had struck. A few seconds later the stern dropped back and a whale surfaced just off the port side. The whale was roughly the same length as the MAY QUEEN (66ft), it stayed on the surface for a few seconds and then submerged and headed in the direction of South Arm. There was no damage, or sign of leakage below decks so Trevor continued on his voyage. The Christmas spirit(s) arrived a little early in December 1972 when Wayne Evans, a crewman 'borrowed' the MAY QUEEN after having a few drinks at the local hotel. He was found the following day at Kettering and charged with 'Technical Piracy' for taking the vessel without the appropriate Masters Certificate. Following the completion of her working life the MAY QUEEN

was passed from Chesterman & Co. to H. Jones and Co. (for 6 months) and then on to the Marine Board via the State Government in 1975. The Marine Board undertook comprehensive refurbishment, restoring and remaking, where required, many of the rigging components, after which she was placed in Waterman's Dock for permanent display. Despite a regular slipping and painting program was undertaken, inadequate ongoing maintenance of the hull and deck timbers allowed serious deterioration till, by 1999, there were grave fears for the vessel's ongoing survival. A new organisation registered as May Queen Pty. Ltd. was formed to oversee the vessel's restoration, which was completed in 2004. The ketch MAY QUEEN is currently owned by May Queen Pty Ltd, a not for profit organization with the objective of the conservation, preservation, and interpretation of the vessel. It is currently leased by May Queen Pty Ltd to the Maritime Museum of Tasmania for a nominal sum so that the functions of maintenance and general upkeep can be separated from the display functions. Compiled by Graeme Broxam and Bob Chesterman.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 20.06 m x 5.39 m x 1.52 m (65.82 ft x 17.68 ft x 4.99 ft) Registered Dimensions: 2.29 m, 29.44 tons x 36.3 tons (7.5 ft)