

Basic Detail Report



Imogen

Vessel number

HV000571

Date

1902

Primary Maker

Donnyland Shipbuilding Co.

Description

IMOGEN's owner John Wood was so confident of the success of the patent that he made a considerable investment by having the vessel built in the UK in teak to the design of the naval architects Cox and King. His motor was being hailed in the local press at the time, and the Maitland Daily Mercury 15/01/1902 carried this report: "A MAITLANDER'S INVENTION, A NEW ROTARY MOTORThe motor could be used for anything on land and sea, where steam power was needed and they expected to get as great speed, with less cost and more safety, than was attained with Parson's Turbine. Eighteen knots had been attained in a small boat; and in a large boat they hoped to get more than had yet been secured by a turbine motor, 38 knots." The Newcastle Maitland Herald of 19 May 1902 recorded the vessel's arrival. " There is now being fitted out at Herbert's boatshed in Newcastle a new steam yacht built in England for Mr J. R. Wood, and recently landed from the steamer Port Victoria, by which it was bought to this city. The new yacht, which will be called the Imogen, is really a beautiful vessel, possessing the finest lines, and at a glance reveals the fact that strength, grace, and speed have been combined. Few craft sit so perfectly upon the water as does the Imogen, or present a finer appearance. Her clipper bow and overhanging counter gives the vessel a rakish look, at the same time indicating possibilities of a high speed, while her fine freeboard is a guarantee of seagoing qualities. The hull, which was built by the Donnyland Shipbuilding Co. Rowehead, Essex, has an overall length of 60ft, the length on the waterline being 45ft 6in, moulded breadth 8ft 6in, and moulded depth 3ft 9in. At present the machinery is not all in the vessel, but when fully ready for sea it is estimated the extreme draught of the yacht will not exceed 2ft 6in. Special care has been taken with the hull, which is constructed of the best Indian teak. The planking is double, the outside being longitudinal, and the inner planking diagonal. The decks and deck fittings, cabins. etc, are also fitted in teak, and present a very substantial appearance. The hull is divided by four galvanised steel bulkheads, the same material being used in the construction of two large tanks in either end of the vessel, which will be used for the storage of water to supply the boilers and for general use on board the yacht. So far the engines are not on board, but are now being constructed in the district and on this point Mr. Wood prefers for the present to say nothing. It is understood, however, they will be of the turbine type, and will be driven by means of liquid oil fuel, two large tanks having been provided in the fore and after ends of the yacht in which it will be stored. Provision has also been made for driving the engines with steam, a large boiler, of the Yarrow type, and necessary gear having been built and fitted by Messrs. Sisson and Co. of

Gloucester. The Imogen has four phosphor bronze propellers, each twelve and a half inches in diameter, two being fitted to each shaft. This portion of the yacht's equipment was constructed by Messrs. Thornycroft and Sons, who have a world-wide reputation for producing high rates of speed in steam vessels. When finished, with awnings spread, and in perfect yacht order, it is doubtful if a finer vessel will be found in Australia, and the yacht that shows the Imogen the way will have to possess a marvellously clean pair of heels. The yacht will be fitted with electric light throughout, and when completely fitted out will be capable not only of harbour work, but of making long trips at sea." Considerable detail was also provided about the luxurious accommodation. Unfortunately for Wood he had based his calculations on the result of engine trials in the workshop without any allowances for the vessel's resistance, and IMOGEN failed to perform very well. Wood then designed and made several propellers at his own expense trying to improve performance but nothing was gained. He then removed the turbines and installed two Simpson Strickland quadruple expansion steam engines in their place. In 1912 IMOGEN was sold by Wood to the Commonwealth Government who had chosen the vessel for use as a customs' launch in the Northern Territory. This was widely reported at the time with some unease that proved correct. The Northern Territory Times & Gazette 1 March 1912 carried the following report. "NEW CUSTOMS LAUNCH In the Commonwealth Gazette of January 20th appears a notice of the purchase of the steam launch Imogen for the use of the Customs and External Affairs Departments in the Northern Territory. The Commonwealth paid the sum of 1100 pounds for this launch, which was the property of John Robert Wood, Esq., at present residing in England. The only Imogen in our register is a twin-screw vessel of about 15 tons, length 60ft., width 8ft. 6in., and draws about 2ft. 6in. of water, and has the reputation of being a remarkably fast boat, so as far as speed goes she should be all that is desirable for overhauling sampans and other boats engaged in the nefarious traffic of opium-smuggling. Her beam in proportion to her length is, however, too narrow to be a good sea-going boat, as the rough seas encountered in these waters demand a greater width of beam than the comparatively tranquil seas of the eastern coast. It seems a pity that the Collector of Customs at Darwin was not asked for specifications for a boat suitable to local conditions, as with his knowledge of boats and their requirement for these seas, his opinion would have been of material value in helping the Commonwealth Government to a suitable choice." The Northern Territory Times & Gazette Thur 19 Sept 1912 continued: "A late number of the Brisbane Sun contains a very unflattering article descriptive of the new government steamer Imogen, under scare headlines. The vessel is described as being "absolutely useless for any purposes in the Territory- if she ever gets there- except for cruising up and down the rivers." The writer by the way is most emphatic respecting the improbability of the vessel ever reaching here. But the statements in newspapers which make sensationalism a leading feature cannot always be accepted literally. We extract from the article the following presumably true details, which are of interest: The vessel was built in 1902 to the order of J.R.Wood, the coal king of N.S.W. She is a beautiful yacht of 17 tons, 52 feet long, 8ft. 6in. Beam, 3ft. 6in. in depth. Her speed [in smooth water] is about 12 knots. She has a couple of small masts and "might sail dead before the wind." Her engine room is a delightful little doll's house about 6 feet in length. She is fitted with electric lights, and "nothing that would make a pleasure yacht a joy for ever has been overlooked!" She can carry sufficient coal to steam 300 miles, and her boilers have to be fed with fresh water. Respecting her stability the writer remarks that "the crew will need to keep their hair parted in the middle if they do not court disaster. "The Imogen was twelve days steaming from Sydney to Brisbane northward, and the Sun writer considers that, with luck,

“she may possibly reach Thursday Island in from three to six months’ time.” As to crossing the Gulf of Carpentaria, the writer apparently considers that a feat beyond the bounds of possibility under the conditions.” Subsequent events during the vessels failed passage to Darwin showed this to be a correct, largely due to mechanical problems, but its narrow beam and light displacement had already alarmed people. It encountered rough weather off the NSW coast and had to seek shelter, then struck an object damaging the propellers and requiring it to be slipped in Brisbane. It left Brisbane, then returned and departed a second time. Near MacKay a steam pipe burst and the badly burnt engineer managed to secure the vessel at a nearby port and walk some distance to get help. Towed to MacKay then Townsville the vessel was pronounced unrepairable. After some months it was sold and towed back to Brisbane by the SS GAYUNDAH. The subsequent history is quite varied, and still only partially recorded. During World War I IMOGEN was used by the Royal Australian Navy on Sydney Harbour, designated T.S.L. IMOGEN No.E924. In 1922 tenders were sought for purchase of the vessel lying at Garden Island, Sydney, and it was reported sold by Silverman’s second-hand yard for £250..Soon after it is understood to have been hulked at Conway's slipway in Morts Bay Sydney. In 1934 IMOGEN was sold and the steam machinery was replaced with a petrol engine. It was then converted to a house boat on the Hawkesbury River by an owner who ran a gravel barge and the steam tug DAUNTLESS. In 1941 IMOGEN was lying to a mooring at Bobbin Head. Ted Chopping bought it in 1959 and owned the vessel for about six years and then sold it to Pat Ludford who moored it at Cammeray. When Ludford died in a helicopter accident in 1966, David Haddon bought IMOGEN from the estate and sold it to a French writer, who then sold it to a kitchen hand. It was bought by the present owner from ‘Bunny’ Rabberts Marine in April 1980 for \$500. He has overhauled the hull and superstructure and the vessel remains in use as a private motor launch. Prepared with assistance from the Register of Australian and New Zealand Ships and Boats compiled by Mori Flapan; www.boatregister.net

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 18.29 m x 13.87 m x 2.59 m x 0.61 m (60 ft x 45.5 ft x 8.5 ft x 2 ft)