

# Basic Detail Report

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## Zitania

### Vessel number

HV000775

### Date

c1890

### Description

The electric motor launch ZITANIA was built at Eel Pie Island by Kerbey Bowen in England in 1890 and originally

ran on the River Thames. It was built for an entrepreneur with a fleet of boats, but subsequently bought by the Tolley family, some of whom emigrated to South Australia, and later brought ZITANIA across on a steamer. Kerbey Bowen was an entrepreneur who built a fleet of electric launches for use at Maidenhead on the Thames. He was a competent and expert electrical engineer. Bowen took over the premises of Sergeant's Steam & Electric Launch works (erected by Sergeant in 1891) on Eel Pie Island and it is understood his launches were built there. His company was in business as early as 1889 and was in full swing by 1893. He owned and ran the second largest electric launch ever built "Ray Mead", which Edward, Prince of Wales used to use to visit the Astor's at Clivedon. Bowen was a man whose success largely came from those wealthy patrons that escaped London by train every weekend to spend time messing about on the river. Mr. Bowen commissioned the build of many fine electric launches which were rented by the day, or week, or even the whole season. Charging stations were set up along the Thames so that the boats could be recharged whilst the gentry were on land picnicking. This is most likely the environment where the Tolley's came across Kerbey Bowen and purchased the ZITANIA. The Tolleys' owned a property at Chertsey on Thames and moored ZITANIA there for recreational purposes. Part of the family then emigrated to South Australia early in the 1900's. Albion Everard Tolley brought the boat from England to the Port River South Australia in 1908 on the deck of a mail steamer. This was the same ship that apparently brought the boxer Jack Johnson to Australia to fight a world heavy weight championship. This is the first reference to the boats name as it was henceforth referred to as "The Tub". Albion quickly reconfigured the boat by moving the aft cabin forward in one piece and moved the steering position from the open well in the bow back to the stern. Photographs of it in 1908 show this configuration. It remains unchanged today. The electric motor and batteries did not come to Australia and instead it was fitted with a twin cylinder Gardner kerosene fuelled engine at Port Adelaide. The motor had to be started with a blow lamp. It was apparently also fitted with a unique variable pitch propeller which was controlled by a wheel. ZITANIA's inflatable seating cushions were considered unique at the time, but they were later filled with cork crumbs. Albion joined the Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron in 1908. During ZITANIA's time there it won two silver cups for "motor launch award" in 1909 and 1913. A direct descendant, Sam Tolley, still holds those two trophies. The RSAYS minutes record numerous events involving "The Tub". Albion became Rear Commodore of the Yacht Squadron in 1914. There are photographs depicting "The Tub"

flying this Burgee. "The Tub" was well used at this time often venturing out to Outer Harbour and once it is said to Kangaroo Island. The minutes recall "The Tub" and other launches giving returned soldiers an outing down the river on the 12th October 1916. Albion died in 1922 and his son Eric took over ownership. Eric had been elected to membership of RSAYS on 10 Sept 1919. In 1923-24 ZITANIA was freighted to Murray Bridge as a publicity exercise for the Tolley's wineries. It remained there for approximately one year before being returned the Port River and it then remained at Port Adelaide until the Tolley's sold her in 1928. "The Tub" was sold in 1928 to Harold Hitman who owned it for approximately 7 years. Its name was changed to ZITANIA (apparently after his wife Zitty) during this time. Cliff Wigglesworth and Sam Percival purchased ZITANIA in 1935 and transported it to Murray Bridge on a flat car cushioned by hay bales. It remained at Murray Bridge for 2-3 years before being moved to Mannum where it was maintained by a Tom Underwood. On one trip during this time the engine ran out of oil and seized bending a conrod. The variable pitch propeller and engine were removed and a Gray 4-cylinder side valve engine replaced it. It was well equipped with batteries, lights, self-starter, toilet and refrigerator. At the end of the war she was sold in 1946 to Lance Felstead who purchased ZITANIA for £600 and renamed it BETANI. Bill Testero purchased it in 1952 for approx £500 and it was based at Swanport with moorings at Toora. The Testero's painted the previously clear finished topsides. They also modified the curved front to the cabin which was predominately solid panels and installed the front windows that are in existence today. In 1956 Betani was moved into a billabong at Toora property of the Jaench's to avoid the worst of the 1956 floods. It was inadvertently tied up over a snag and a sudden change in river level holed the vessel and it sank. It was left lying on her side for three months until finally bought by John Carlson. He patched the hole with canvas and timber battens and towed it to Murray Bridge where she it was slipped and repaired. He then moved the boat to Goolwa where it was slipped again. The original repair was poorly executed and was done again on Moritz's slipway. During this time the head was removed from being located up at the bow. The self-starter was removed and replaced with a hand crank. The aft steering was removed and stored and a new helm installed in the cabin amidships. By 1966 the river was low it was left sitting in the mud. When the river returned it sank at its moorings and water entered the engine. By 1968 the launch was for sale sitting in the reeds on Hindmarsh Island approximately 200 yards upriver from the ferry opposite the Captain Sturt. In October 1968 the current owners purchased the vessel at Goolwa. They began a long, long road toward restoration. ZITANIA now has its fourth engine after a petrol fire in 1986. No damage was done, but the days of the petrol engine were over and it is now fitted with a 30 h.p Yanmar diesel, which has no trouble getting her up to hull speed (15 km/hr, on the rare occasions that it is needed. ZITANIA is effectively in the same configuration a sit was at the turn of the twentieth century, with the original hull and superstructure. Interest in this fine old boat grows with her years. 2018 celebrates the 50th year of ZITANIA remaining in the current family ownership, having been adopted by subsequent generations. ZITANIA now is approximately 128 years old.

## Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 10.97 m × 9.75 m × 2.44 m × 0.81 m, 6.1 tonnes (36 ft × 32 ft × 8 ft × 2.66 ft, 6 tons)