

Basic Detail Report



Nelcebee

Vessel number

HV000419

Date

1883

Primary Maker

Thomas Seath

Description

NELCEBEE was initially built in Scotland by Thomas Seath at Rutherglen. It had been commissioned at a cost of 7,000 pounds by Captain Wilson, an old Scottish shipmaster who had long experience in the Calcutta, Chinese and American trades. NELCEBEE was built as an iron steamship, but was launched and trialed without an engine in Scotland. The vessel was then disassembled and loaded onto the steam ship CITY OF YORK and sent to South Australia. It was re-assembled and locally built steam engines were installed at Port Adelaide by builder Thomas Cruickshank. At the launching Mrs Wilson, wife of the owner broke a bottle of champagne against the side and named the steamer NELCEBEE after the Aboriginal name for a spring at Port Pirie, which was spelt as NELSHABY, but this word was both mispronounced and then wrongly spelt in newspaper reports, leading to the actual spelling as NELCEBEE. Cheers were given by a crowd of 100 spectators and a dozen guests accepted Captain Wilson's invitation to refreshments. The builder and the owner were toasted for their enterprise and the Chronicle recorded that it was the largest steamer ever put together in the colony. The 'Port Adelaide News' remarked that the launch was executed with 'as much precision as a discharge of musketry by a volunteer corps'. Day-trippers joined the ship for its first run out of the Port and they were landed before NELCEBEE went onto Tasmania to collect its first cargo, a load of potatoes. In 1884, the year after NELCEBEE arrived in Port Pirie, the 'Register' commented "The towing business has so increased in South Australian waters during the past seven years, that once upon a time it was thought something unusual to have a ship towed to Port Pirie to load, but this has now become commonplace. What is distinctly unusual is to find two ships towed to that place by one tug, which is what happened this week." Before NELCEBEE arrived towage for sailing ships was haphazard, it could be provided by a coastal steamer if one was there delivering cargo, otherwise by a local launch. NELCEBEE was described as 'one of the neatest specimens of the shipbuilder's craft it has ever been our lot to see.' It had been specifically designed for lightering and towing between Port Pirie and Port Augusta. It could tow vessels, or could carry cargo to load onto larger ships in deeper waters. A Port Augusta newspaper went into considerable detail about the construction of the ship. It commented on the unusual iron decks, and suggested sailors might burn their feet in hot weather. NELCEBEE was also fitted out for passenger work; this allowed it to supplement its towing duties and short cargo journeys with excursions. An advertisement for the 'Fast and Favourite' steamer NELCEBEE noted that at the anniversary of the Colony in December 1893 it would be taking passengers from Port Pirie to Port Augusta, and then taking passengers the other

way and leaving them overnight to celebrate at each port. NELCEBEE was constantly employed in Port Pirie after 1890; however by the turn of the century new tugs were being developed as more specialized vessels. By 1904 NELCEBEE was described as being 'very low powered and considered by a former Master to have had her towing bar poorly placed and was in fact a self propelled lighter that could do a bit of towing rather than a tug.' Twenty years after it was launched, NELCEBEE was no longer seen as a proper tug. However it continued to work in the trade for another 20 years until 1927 when it was sold for one shilling. It was then refitted for a new role. NELCEBEE's steam engine and boiler were removed in 1927. The sail capacity was expanded from a single mast at the forward end to become a two-masted schooner. It was fitted with an auxiliary diesel engine. The changes increased its capacity to carry larger cargoes and reduced the cost of running the ship. From 1928 to 1965 NELCEBEE carried cargoes of grain (wheat and barley) and minerals throughout the two gulfs. In 1965 NELCEBEE was purchased by R Fricker and Company, along with FAILIE, another sailing vessel. By then NELCEBEE had been fitted with tanks to carry petrol and oil to Kangaroo Island. It also took general cargo which meant anything from the odd car, farm machinery, bags of superphosphate, household goods and even one small aeroplane. It returned with minerals from the CSR Mine. It continued this regular service from Kangaroo Island to Port Adelaide until 1982 when it was laid up. During this time it continued to use its sail to supplement the power and provide some additional stability to reduce its tendency to roll. In 2010 NELCEBEE was part of the South Australian Maritime Museum's collection of vessels and was stored on land at Port Adelaide where volunteers were working on various aspects of the hull and fitout. Prepared from research provided by South Australian Maritime Museum Prepared with assistance from the Register of Australian and New Zealand Ships and Boats compiled by Mori Flapan; www.boatregister.net

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 32.61 m x 5.69 m x 2.79 m (107 ft x 18.66 ft x 9.15 ft)