

Basic Detail Report



Hebe

Vessel number

HV000195

Date

1888

Primary Maker

James Pashley

Description

HEBE was built in 1888 for use on the Clarence River in Northern NSW. It was commissioned by Colonial Sugar Refining (CSR) and built by James Pashley of Sydney NSW. The vessel began life as a screw steamer, with a 21.33 m (70 ft) long hull, straight stem, elegant curved sheer and a long counter stern, characteristics that are very typical of the period. These features remain evident, even though HEBE was converted into a paddle-wheel vessel in 2001. The hull retains the original structural configuration and profile despite its restoration with extensive use of new materials. HEBE towed barges loaded with sugar cane along the Clarence River, working for CSR until 1974, probably including Cane Barge No 6 (HV000275). CSR is a long standing Australian business with origins in the 1840s and 50s. By the 1880s it had become a major firm in the sugar industry, with plantations and mills in Northern NSW and Queensland. Sugar processing was on a central mill system where the cane was brought from plantations to one large mill in each region. In Northern NSW the river system was the best means of transport. In January 1911 HEBE went to the rescue of the Harwood vehicular ferry, in difficulty in unusual circumstances, as reported in the Clarence and Richmond Examiner 17 January 1911. Tons of water hyacinths had been washed down the Clarence River after heavy rainfall, and to relieve the weight of the vegetation against the punt, one of the wires was cut and the punt floated free into midstream. Its anchor was dropped but only succeeded in catching on and then pulling up and breaking the telegraph cable. It drifted in midstream "surrounded as she was with about an acre of luxuriant bloom" then hung there once the remaining cable was made fast to the Harwood side. The HEBE was called down to tow it back to shore, and this was done with great difficulty as much of the hyacinth remained attached to the punt and wires. Kevin Shortt was one of HEBE's masters over its long life on the Clarence, and in his book "Echoes of the Clarence" he recounts some details of his experiences onboard HEBE. According to Kevin, HEBE was well known by "her coiling clouds of smoke", and had a huge wheel with "seemingly endless turns to manipulate it to effect". Its shallow draft allowed the vessel to navigate even the narrow Murrayville tributary where it grounded once and had to wait for the rise of the tide to lift it off again. Kevin notes that HEBE was the largest vessel in the CSR fleet, and had "the distinction of steaming through every bridge on the waterway with more barges in tow than any other vessel of the fleet." For most of its long working life HEBE was a steamer, but the steam engine was replaced in 1954 with a Gardner diesel. CSR retired HEBE in 1974. In 1975 paddle steamer enthusiast Dick Broomhead bought HEBE and on the 4th of June he left

the Clarence bound for Mannum on Lake Alexandrina in SA. He intended to convert it to a side-wheel paddle steamer to join other Murray River paddle steamers in the area, but although he navigated HEBE there successfully, he never made the changes. Instead HEBE was bought and sold by others with similar dreams, and on a couple of occasions sank at its moorings. The current owner bought HEBE when sunk at Purnong in SA. Salvage experts raised the hull with fifty 44 gallon drums over a 12 hour period. It was towed and taken to the owner's backyard in Ramco SA, for restoration. Shipwrights extensively replanked the hull in kauri and reframed it with spotted gum, retaining the original structural layout. The hull was refastened with copper nails and roves, and caulked in the traditional manner. There remains a strong attraction to paddle-wheel craft on the Murray River and the new owners decided to continue the tradition of this type operating on the river. They converted HEBE to a side-wheel paddle vessel, powered by a six cylinder Gardner diesel. A 2-to-1 reduction gearbox connected to a right-angle drive box brought the drive shaft through 90 degrees, in line with the transverse paddle wheel shaft. The two shafts were then connected by sprocket and chain. A new superstructure was added, using items from another paddle-wheeler, AKUNA AMPHIBIOUS. HEBE is a working craft again and the owners and their family live on board. It is used for towing or pushing barges and punts along the Murray River and as a dredger with a tractor-shovel sitting on a barge. It is looking forward to another long period as a working vessel.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 21.33 m x 18.29 m x 7.92 m x 0.9 m (70 ft x 60 ft x 26 ft x 2.95 ft) Registered Dimensions: 45 tons