



## Preparing for a 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary at Cape Leeuwin

It is well worth the trip out from Augusta, WA to visit the Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse precinct if ever you can visit WA! Next year (2022) will be the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the VOC (Dutch East India Company) ship *Leeuwin*'s visit to the south west corner of



Figure 1 Photo: Peter Ridgway

Australia in March 1622.

The Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse was opened in 1895 and is constructed of local stone. Until June 1982 the lens was rotated by a counter weight driving clockwork mechanism, and the beacon was a pressure kerosene mantle type. A radio navigation beacon was commissioned in 1955 and operated until 1992. The lighthouse was automated in 1982. The lighthouse, also serves as an automatic weather station.

The lighthouse is still in use and is open to visitors

to climb to the top although the Australian Maritime Safety Authority is about to temporarily close the lighthouse itself for maintenance work to the light.

The Lighthouse precinct will stay open and includes an Interpretive Centre housed in one of the original lighthouse keepers' cottages. The Centre uses artefacts and stories, interactive technology and a large-scale animated film to provide insights into the lives of the men, women and children who once lived at the tallest lighthouse on mainland Australia. Visitors can also enjoy a light lunch in the souvenir shop and walk around the precinct to look at the other buildings and appreciate the rugged sea shore. The N Class Destroyers Association also have a memorial in the precinct (see next story).

## N Class Destroyers Recognised



Figure 2 Photo: Peter Ridgway

served in the Indian Ocean and together with *Nizam*, *Nepal* and *Napier* protected shipping off the Cape of Good Hope. The four ships were in Tokyo Bay for the surrender in 1945.

The N Class Destroyer Association has constructed a wall of remembrance and a memorial in the Lighthouse precinct overlooking Cape Leeuwin. The wall of remembrance recognises the contribution of the N Class destroyers HMAS *Napier*, *Nizam*, *Nestor*, *Norman* and *Nepal* in World War 2. The ships were loaded to Australia by the British Admiralty. *Napier* and *Nizam* served in the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean. *Nestor* also operated in the Atlantic and was eventually sunk in the Mediterranean. *Norman*

The memorial plaque recognises the loss of 10 seamen washed overboard by a wave 11 miles south of Cape Leeuwin on 11 February 1945.

## Shipwrecks and Castaways

“It’s not because a man wears the mark of wreckage that he is wrecked inside his heart.” J.M Coetzee

Stories of shipwrecks are often dealt with in sea culture, especially in movies and literature. Whether fictional or based on true events, these stories are manifold and sometimes very old. In “The Tales of the Arabian Nights, the story of Sinbad the Sailor” tells of adventures based on the one hand on true historical events, and on the other and on fictional legends, such as Homer’s “Odyssey”. Indeed, shipwrecks have been not only subject to countless tales, but also to a legal applicable framework. Among most well-known stories, we can quote “Robinson Crusoe”, a novel published in 1719 by British writer Daniel Defoe. The novel reads as a first-person-written diary and relates the story of Robinson, a castaway who spends 28 years on a remote tropical desert island near the coasts of Venezuela, where he meets a local native whom he calls ‘Friday’ (after the first day of their meeting). Daniel Defoe’s novel is greatly inspired by the real life of a Scottish sailor named Alexander Selkirk, who spent in fact four years and four days alone on a desert island. Selkirk was the victim of a shipwreck and landed on a remote island in hazardous conditions. Alone and without equipment, unable to rebuild any ship, he was forced to stay on the island in order to survive. His only hope was to get spotted and rescued by any ship who would approach the island. By necessity, he had to adapt to the island’s environment and survive with anything that he found on the spot. Thus he built huts with some remaining elements of the wrecked ship and used his own sword to hunt game and cook it. In order to maintain his language skills and his cultural knowledge, he used to read a Bible found among the remains of the ship. After spending four lonely years, he was eventually rescued in February 1709 and brought home, where he became a local celebrity thanks to his own story. Yet he never fully mentally recovered from his lonely years on the desert island. He even built his own hut on his father’s domain. Funny fact: he went sailing again and died in

the ocean off the shores of Africa. In tribute to his memory, a Chilean island named Mas-a-Tierra was renamed Selkirk Island.

Similar stories happened to other sailors, such as Spanish sailor Pedro Luis Serrano, who got stuck for seven years on a small desert Caribbean island after being the victim of a shipwreck off the shores of Nicaragua in 1520. This island where he was rescued was named Serrana Island as a tribute. France being a maritime nation (1), French historiography is full of real life stories of shipwrecks. Let's quote the story of Narcisse Pelletier. This French sailor (who was born in Vendée in 1844 and who died in Saint-Nazaire in 1894) was known for wrecking in Australia and then integrating an Aboriginal tribe. Here is his story: in 1858, at the age of fourteen, he engaged as a cabin boy on the Saint Paul ship, which accidentally wrecked on Australian coasts after being deserted by its staff. Pelletier survived the shipwreck and integrated an Aboriginal tribe, who renamed him as Amglo. He was then found again seventeen years later by Westerners (2), who brought him back to his family in France, where he ended his life as a lighthouse keeper. His story still remains a precious documentation about Aboriginal customs, daily life, language and culture.

“He was no Frenchman no more – he was Australian” Constant Merland

From the age of 14 to 31, Narcisse “Amglo” Pelletier lived off fishing and hunting



Figure 3 Portrait of Narcisse Pelletier published in L'Univers illustré, 14 August 1875

with his adoptive family. He adopted the customs, culture and language of Aborigines. He even forgot his French mother-tongue and wore tribal scars on his body. His story was written after his return to France by Dr Constant Merland, a French doctor from Nantes who interviewed Pelletier before publishing in 1876 “Narcisse Pelletier: seventeen years among savages”. This biographical book contains much precious details about the social

organization of the Aboriginal tribe who had adopted Pelletier as “Amglo”. Yet, once back in France, Pelletier struggled to get back to a normal Western way of life. First, he was proposed a role in a nomad circus, but he refused to be a circus freak. He then became a lighthouse keeper until the end of his life. He died at the age of 50 and was buried in La Briandais cemetery, Saint-Nazaire.

Also very well-known is the shipwreck of *La Méduse*, which inspired famous French painter Géricault for his painting *The Raft of the Medusa*. In 1816, *La Méduse* frigate left Aix Island (near La Rochelle) and headed towards Senegal under the command of Chaumareys – who had been chosen not for his sailing skills, but for his military exploits against revolutionaries, and who had not been sailing for 25 years! Due to multiple sailing mistakes by Chaumareys, the frigate grounded on a sand bank off the shores of Mauritania. A dock (12 meters long, 6 meters wide, called “the machine”) was hastily built in order to free the ship from the sand, but without success. It was decided to evacuate the ship. All 147 sailors had to bunch into the machine, trailed by corporals, but the raft was too heavy... and Chaumareys ordered to cut the moorings! Thus the raft was left to the currents’ mercy and drifted for thirteen days. Without food and water, sailors had nothing to eat and were forced to drink their own urine. They started to kill each other in the first nights. The situation quickly derived into mutinies, drownings, and also madness attacks and cannibalism (3). On 17th July, *L’Argus* brig (4) rescued remaining survivors – that is only fifteen men. Two of them – Alexandre Correard and Jean-Baptiste Savigny – would publish their own story of the wreckage after their return. The wrecked raft of the *Medusa* was eventually found in 1980 (5).

Here is another striking story which happened at Tromelin Island. This 1,5 kilometers long and 700 meters wide French island is located in the Indian Ocean and devoid of drinkable water and unfit to any kind of cultivation. A tragic episode occurred there when *L’Utile* – a frigate belonging to the French East India Company commanded by Captain Jean de La Fargue – wrecked on the island’s coral reefs. *L’Utile* had left Bayonne with 142 crewmembers on board and then taken 160 Malagasy men, women and children during a stop. A sailing mistake by night pushed the frigate to wreck on Tromelin Island’s coral reefs. Crewmembers and about sixty Malagasy slaves managed to reach the island. Survivors found some equipment and food among of remains of the ship and fed on fish, turtles and birds. Lieutenant

Barthélémy Castellan du Vernet took command of the remaining crew and had them build two camps: one for the crew and one for Malagasy slaves. Then he ordered the building of a watercraft with tools from the wrecked frigate. Two months later, 122 crewmen hardly took place on the watercraft and left Malagasy slaves on the island after promising to come back and rescue them. The crewmen reached Madagascar in four days and were transferred to Bourbon Island (today known as Réunion) then to France Island (today known as Mauritius). Castellan asked several times for permission to go and rescue the Malagasy slaves left on Tromelin Island, but French Governor Antoine-Marie Desforges-Boucher strictly refused, because he considered that slave transport could create feuds with British rivals. Castellan eventually abandoned his rescue project and went back to continental France in late August 1762. Nevertheless, another ship which passed by Tromelin Island spotted the Malagasy slaves in 1773 and signaled them again. A rescue boat was sent but failed to approach the island because of the coral reefs. No less than fifteen years later did Bernard Boudin de Tromelin, commander of La Dauphine, reach the island and rescue the eight last survivors: seven women and one 8-month-old baby. He discovered the survivors dressed with feather-locked clothes. They had managed to keep a fire lit with wood remaining from the wrecked ship. The island was definitely named after Tromelin in the 19th century.

From a legal point of view, wrecked ships were originally ruled during the Old Regime by what was called “droit de bris” (also known as “droit d’épave” or “droit de lagan”). According to this law, who owns the land where a ship wrecks can also own the wrecked ship and its cargo. Any object with no identifiable owner – which implies incidental or unconscious physical dispossession – can be considered as a shipwreck. On the other hand, unlike any left object, the notion of will is absent; thus, the owner might manifest one day, as long as he doesn’t renounce his lost property. It happened very often in the past that local populations – who lived in poverty – did not respect this law (considered as a feudal privilege) and plundered shipwrecks for profit. Though it is hard to keep record, “droit de bris” probably already existed during the Antiquity. In France, Louis XI was the first king to define “droit de bris” as a royal law. Under the reign of Louis XIV, Colbert restricted this law in 1681 to any property remaining unclaimed after a legal deadline (6). The law remained valid until the XIXth century. Nowadays in France, collecting remains of a shipwreck is forbidden

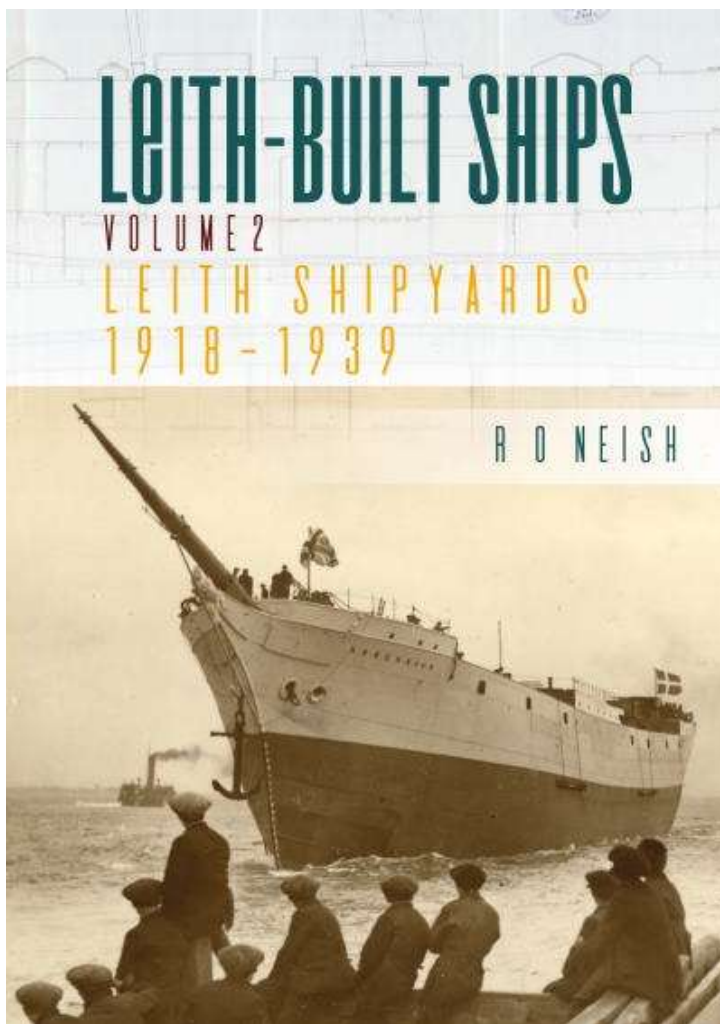


but often performed. As a conclusion, shipwrecks leave a mark in History and often inspire artists, far beyond the domain of sea culture.

### **Simon Coyac - French Lifeguard**

(1) Thanks to the uniqueness of its territory, including wide coastlines, France developed a strong sea culture and engaged in many expeditions, raids and trade trips across the seas and oceans of the whole planet. (2) “Narcisse Pelletier, the true story of the White Savage”, written by Constant Merland and published by Thomas Duranteau (3) “Les Naufragés de La Méduse”, Belin, 2016, by Jacques-Olivier Boudon (4) A brig is a sailing vessel with two square-rigged masts, mainly used for cabotage (5) Article by Yvonne Rebeyrol in newspaper “Le Monde” from 4th March 1981 (6) In August 1681, a decree by the French Navy forbids to plunder the shipwrecks and their cargo.

## **Leith Built Ships**



Leith Shipyards 1918–1939  
Volume 2: Leith Shipyards 1918-1939 by R O Neish (Published by Whittles Publishing Ltd, Dunbeath, Caithness, KW6 6EG, Scotland, UK. Softback, 144 pages, ISBN 978 184995 481 5. Price £16.99.)

This volume continues the chronology begun in Volume I and provides a fascinating illustrated story that reveals the remarkable and ongoing tales of shipbuilding for which Scotland and the Great Britain were renowned. The book is well illustrated with photographs and ships' plans. This volume introduces some well-known ships and tells of their careers and trading. For example, SS *South Steyne*, launched by Robb's in 1938, an icon of Sydney as a double-ended Manly ferry was preserved as a

restaurant vessel in Darling Harbour.

## Share your research through The Great Circle

Do you have some research you would like to share with others? Professor Erika Techera invites you to nominate your research for publishing in The Great Circle. Contact Erika at [info@aamh.asn.au](mailto:info@aamh.asn.au).

## AAMH Conference Opportunity

*Indian Ocean Studies Conference – 12-13 November 2021 Continuity and Change in an Age of Uncertainty*



Figure 4 Photo: Peter Ridgway

Sheridan Institute of Higher Education, in partnership with the AAMH and the WA Maritime Museum, will host a biennial Indian Ocean Studies Conference from 12-13 November 2021. The theme of this year's conference is Continuity and Change in an Age of Uncertainty, and will be held in Perth, Western Australia at the WA Maritime Museum (on Friday the 12th) and Sheridan Institute (on Saturday the 13th).

The biennial Indian Ocean Studies Conference provides an important venue for researchers, scholars, policy-makers, students and the general public to meet and share their thoughts and ideas on this significant region.

The conference will facilitate presentations and discussions focusing on Maritime History and Trade, the Indian Ocean as a Disease Zone, Environmental Studies, Defence and Strategic Studies. A variety of interactive conference opportunities will be provided so delegates can mix, network and learn from each other in a stimulating and dynamic setting. Register now via:

<https://sheridan.edu.au/index.php/extensions/2021-indian-ocean-conference>



## Do you have news/queries?

News stories, short research items and queries about maritime history are always welcome for our Facebook, Website and Newsletter. All three publications have a world wide audience. Contact Peter Ridgway at [info@aamh.asn.au](mailto:info@aamh.asn.au).

## The Great Circle 2021

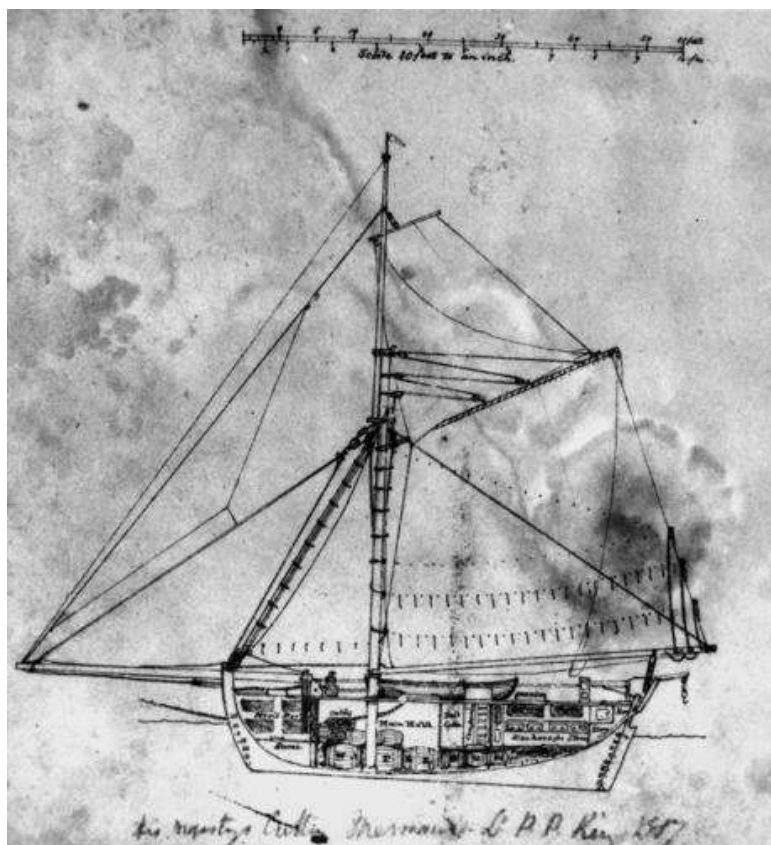


Figure 5 Photo: State Library of Queensland

disagreements about the inscription of 'HMC Mermaid' on a boab tree in northern Australia. The inscription was ordered by navigator Lt Philip Parker King RN in his 1820. The HM Cutter Mermaid was built of teak in Calcutta and captained by King to explore and map Australia's shores. Peter Gunn also explores how time and ill-informed speculation about Aboriginal, British and Indonesian languages played a role in misinterpreting the origins of the place name Marigui.

Journal editor Professor Erika Techera welcomes interest from prospective contributors for The Great Circle: [erika.techera@uwa.edu.au](mailto:erika.techera@uwa.edu.au)

## Historic Issues Online

The latest issue of the AAMH's journal The Great Circle has just been sent to members and explores local maritime history with an international context.

Michael Lee Wing investigates some previously unexplored letters by the American John Minor Maury on his time on the French Polynesian island of Nuku Hiva. Jeroen Overweel reviews the English – Dutch rivalry in eastern Indonesia and Australia and the founding of Merkus-Ord and Heather Campbell writes on the career and loss of the steam tug Escort.

The final paper is by Dr Peter A Gunn who uses family papers to explain

More back issues of the Newsletter (which also carries short unrefereed papers) have been uploaded to our website with more to come. The issues uploaded today are 4 for 1999 and one for 2000.

<https://aamh.asn.au/newsletter-archives/>

## **Vale John Bach – Pioneer Maritime Historian**

Dr John Bach passed away recently on the eve of his 98th birthday. Dr Bach was a founder of the AAMH and a pioneer of Australian maritime History. His 1976 book “Australian Maritime History” was the first of its kind and established the discipline in Australia.

He was born in 1923 in Sydney as the son of a British sailor. In 1954 he moved to Newcastle and became the first history instructor at a preschool in the city. In 1966, the Australian Shipping Council asked John Bach to write a history of Australian maritime transport and industry.

John Bach also wrote a book about the Royal Navy in the Pacific Ocean in the 19th century and also contributed to the ongoing study of William Bligh.

## **Anniversary of sinking of the Burns Philp Ship MV Macdhui**

In December 1941 with Japanese threatening islands to the north the Australian government began evacuating women and children from Papua - New Guinea and Darwin. The Burns Philp ship MV Macdhui along with Katoomba, Neptuna, and Zealandia took the evacuees to ports in Australia. After the Japanese landing on Rabaul some of the troops evacuated to Port Moresby were transported to Townsville aboard Macdhui in late April 1942.

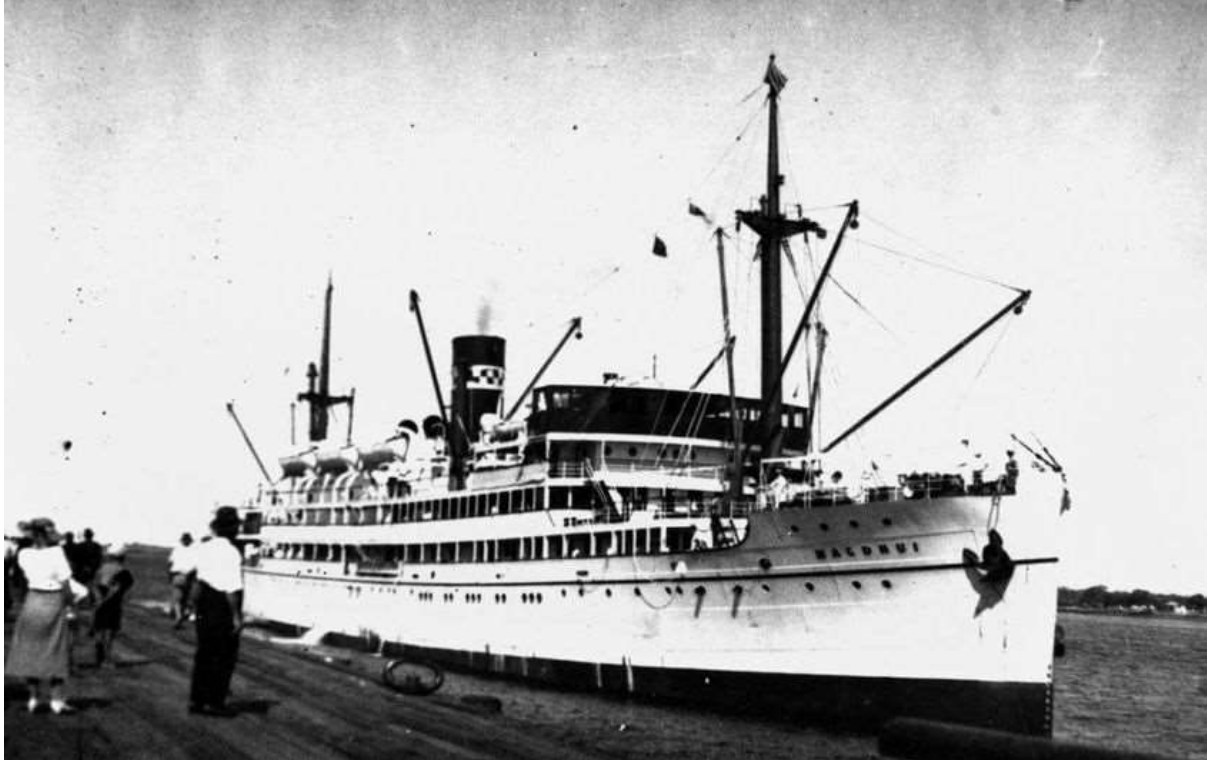
After the initial bombing on 19 February 1942, Japanese air raids continued on Darwin during June, with a sixteenth raid on 13 June. Raids continued each night through to the 17 June, when Port Moresby had its 61st raid. Macdhui was hit amidships with three crew and one military working party member killed. The next day she was again hit and became a total loss.

MV Macdhui was a steel-hulled passenger and cargo motor ship built by Barclay Curle & Company at the Clydeholm Yard, Whiteinch, Scotland for Burns, Philp & Company, Limited, Sydney NSW, Australia. She was launched on 23 December 1930 and completed during March 1931.

Burns Philp (properly Burns, Philp & Co, Limited) was once a major Australian shipping line and merchant that operated in the South Pacific. It was set up in 1883 and delisted from the Australian Stock Exchange in December 2006 following the sale of its businesses.

Up to 1903, Burns Philp operated as merchants and shipping agents in the Pacific Islands, as well as providing a mail service and carrying tourists to Papua New Guinea, New Hebrides and the Solomon Islands. It operated a substantial fleet of

ships. In 1904, Burns Philp began to acquire plantations and land to develop into plantations in the British Solomon Islands. In the second half of the 20th Century, Burns Philp became involved in the production and distribution of food ingredients and consumer branded food, beverage and related products. See Wikipedia for more.



*Figure 6 Photo: Trove - John Oxley Library*

## **Jeremy Green Honoured**

Congratulations to Dr Jeremy Green - Jeremy was invested as an Officer of the Order of the Orange-Nassau for his work in maritime archaeology. The honour was presented by Ambassador Marion Derckx on behalf of King Willem-Alexander at the @wamaritimemuseum. The Order of Orange-Nassau is awarded to persons who have rendered outstanding services to the Netherlands through achievements made possible through exceptional talents.



Figure 7 Photo: WAM

## Photos Wanted

The AAMH is revamping its website and is looking to our readership to provide photos to illustrate and promote maritime history. We are looking for bright photos representing



Figure 8 Photo: Peter Ridgway

- shipping and ports,



- exploration
- maritime archaeology
- coastal communities
- industries
- tourism

We are looking for contemporary (ie current) scenes as well as historic images.

We would also like to have pictures of:

- people enjoying themselves at the Tasmanian Wooden Boat Festival, Maritime Day in Fremantle, Paynesville Classic Boat Rally and similar events.
- images (drawings/paintings) which would serve to highlight a key event and also our link to museum - for example, Dirk Hartog's Plate.

State and regional museums and historical societies are invited to provide images that represent their activities.

We will acknowledge your contribution if we use it. Please indicate that you have the right to grant us permission to use the images and that you do so grant us the right.

Please contact me at [info@aamh.asn.au](mailto:info@aamh.asn.au)

## **Aust Post HMVS *Cerberus***



Australia Post issued a \$1.10 stamp on 22 March 2021 featuring a painting of HMVS *Cerberus*. The painting is by Sydney-based artist Ian Hansen and shows HMVS *Cerberus* during the late 1880s steaming on the waters of Port Phillip Bay. The painting shows her in her fourth colour scheme, which was introduced in 1888.

HMVS *Cerberus* (Her Majesty's Victorian Ship) is described as a breastwork monitor. It served in the Victoria Naval Forces, the Commonwealth Naval Forces (CNF), and the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) between 1871 and 1924. In 1924, the monitor was sold for scrap, and was sunk as a breakwater off Half Moon Bay. The wreck became a popular site for scuba diving and picnics over the years, but there was a structural collapse in 1993.

For more information see *Friends of the Cerberus*: <https://cerberus.com.au/>



## New Antarctic Ship

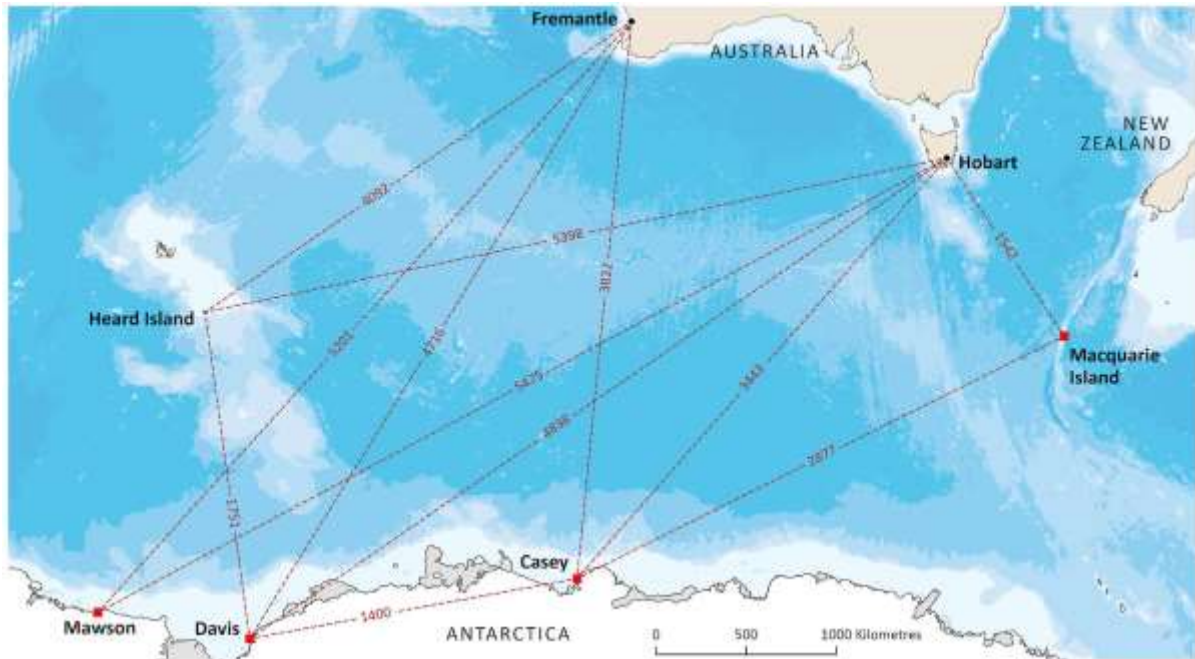


The RSV *Nuyina* is on its way to Australia. Following the signing of contracts on 28 April 2016 with DMS Maritime for delivery, operation and maintenance, the ship's design and construction was contracted to Damen Group. Design was contracted to naval architects Knud E Hansen of Denmark. The keel laying was in August 2017 at Damen's Galați shipyard in Romania. Coins from Denmark, Netherlands, Romania, and Australia, were welded to the keel as part of the keel laying. The ship displaces 25,500 tonnes and is 160m in length.

RSV *Nuyina* (meaning 'southern lights' in palawa kani, the language of Tasmanian Aborigines, pronounced noy-yee-nah) has the capacity to carry 117 expeditioners, 1200 tonnes of cargo and 1.9 million litres of fuel.



This new state of the art supply and research ship is the latest in a long line of Government Antarctic vessels going back to 1954. In that year, the *Kista Dan* helped establish Australia's first modern Antarctic research station at Mawson, followed by our second Antarctic station at Davis in 1957, and research stations on Heard and Macquarie islands.



Map showing distances between Australia and its research stations. While Hobart is the principal home port for the Antarctic Program, Fremantle plays an important role being closer to Heard Island, Davis and Mawson. Russia has a base (Drúzhnaya) close to Davis and one (Mirny) mid-way between Davis and Casey.

Photos in this item: Australian Antarctic Program

## Wreck Seeker

The Australian National Maritime Museum recently launched Wreck Seeker, a new online game developed for classrooms across the country. Players will research, hunt for and explore the final resting places of six semi-fictionalised wrecks from Australian and international waters.

Wreck Seeker, developed over three years, is a gamified learning platform with a direct focus on helping teachers to explain, develop and refine student historical skills explored in the Australian curriculum. Using the backdrop of wrecks from the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, players will speak to historians, eyewitnesses, local fishers and other subject experts before deciding which sources offer the most reliable information. They will then overlay this research onto a map before diving, in 3D, on six beautifully re-created underwater environments.

## Across the Tasman

The New Zealand Maritime Museum was proposed 40 years ago and was opened as the Auckland Maritime Museum Hobson Wharf in August 1993. Since the 1980s the Museum has been acquiring a collection that shares the maritime stories and history of Aotearoa New Zealand. The Museum holds a collection of over 130 watercraft ranging in size and complexity from a surfboard to an 18-metre ketch-rigged scow *TED ASHBY*. This includes watercraft artifacts from the earliest days of Pacific voyaging, to the arrival of Europeans and through to present day such as canoes, yachts, waka, vessels parts and steam engines.

Sailings take place on some of its collection including: *Ted Ashby* (picture NZMM), *Nautilus*, *SS Puke*, *Aotearoa One* and the *Breeze*. While Covid has shut the museum (as it has done the ANMM), the website offers much for those interested: [www.maritimemuseum.co.nz](http://www.maritimemuseum.co.nz)



## **The AAMH Team**

President: Dr Ross Anderson

Secretary: Ms Sally May (retiring) – expressions of interest invited

Vice President: Mr Graeme Henderson AM

Treasurer: Vacant – expressions of interest invited

Great Circle Editor: Professor Erika Techera

Newsletter Editor: Mr Peter Ridgway

## **State & Territory Representatives**

ACT: Michael Pearson

New South Wales: Chris Maxworthy

Northern Territory: Paul Clark

Queensland: TBC

South Australia: Wendy Van Duivenvoorde

Tasmania: Mark Hosking

Victoria: Mark Howard & Liz Rushen

Western Australia: Malcolm Tull

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**Next Newsletter: March**

Send your local news story and short research items to the Newsletter Editor, Peter Ridgway before 1 March and 1 September each year via email to: [info@aamh.asn.au](mailto:info@aamh.asn.au)