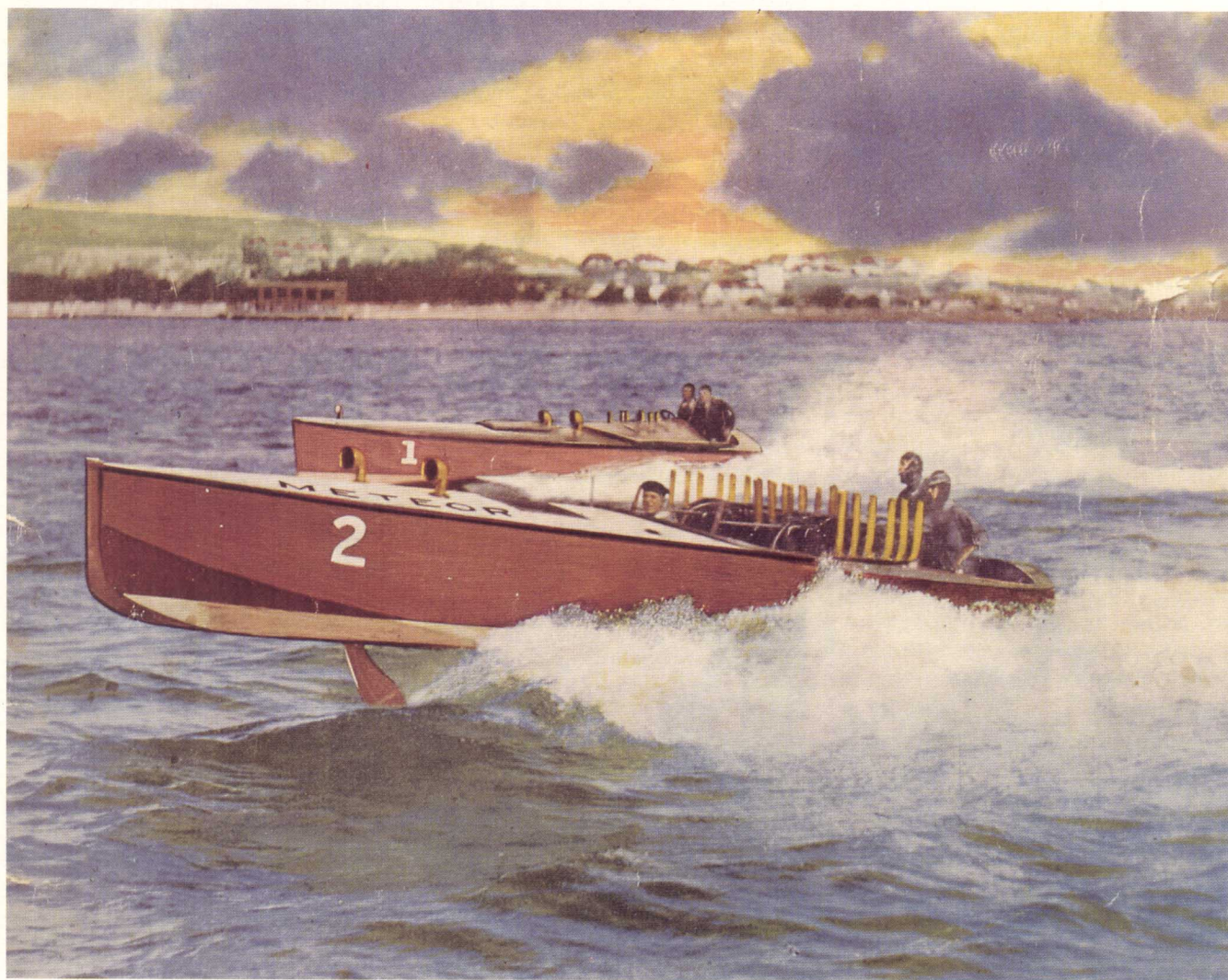


# SIGNALS

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM

MARCH 1990

NUMBER 11



## Winners on water...

Australians flock to their waterways for sport, relaxation and fun. This love of the water has entered Australian culture, becoming part of a national identity.

Cover detail from the first edition of *Australian Motor Boat and Yachting* in 1925. It dramatises the pursuit of speed on water, a challenge that has seen many notable Australian successes, from club racing to the pursuit of world records. The magazine is part of an archive presented to the Museum by Cumberland Newspapers.



## SIGNALS

is the quarterly newsletter of the  
Australian National Maritime Museum.  
ISSN 1033-4688.

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**Graphic Designer:** Peter Tonkin

Printed by W&B Mastercraft Pty Ltd  
39-45 Collins St Alexandria NSW 2015

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## From the Director

In reviewing the material contained in this issue of *Signals* I was struck by the great variety of vessels that will appear in our Leisure exhibition, promising to make it perhaps the most spectacular of all our exhibition themes. Some of these craft - the veteran yachts *Kathleen Gillett* and *Akarana* - will be docked at the Museum wharves. Others, including *Australia II* (on loan from the National Museum of Australia), *Spirit of Australia*, and *Britannia* - will be spectacularly displayed in the building alongside a wide range of other artefacts.

Our Leisure craft are the largest single grouping within the Museum's collection of over 40 vessels, 10 of which will be floating at the Museum's wharves. The range of craft in the water is wonderfully diverse, from the ex-RAN destroyer *Vampire* to the exotic Indonesian perahu, *Sekar Aman*.

It is worth noting that not all maritime museums include floating exhibits. The best-known maritime museum in the world, the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich,



**The 1888 racing cutter *Akarana* is the oldest vessel in the Museum fleet, built to race in the centennial regattas in Sydney and Melbourne. It was restored by the New Zealand Government as its Bicentennial gift to Australia.**

J Mellefont photograph.

England, has no floating exhibits. The Mariners Museum in Newport News, Virginia, one of America's - and the world's - finest, is away from the water and has no floating craft at all.

Then there are ship-based museums like USS *Constitution* in Boston and Nelson's *Victory* in Plymouth, in which the artefact, the ship, is to all intents and purposes the museum (although some of these are large enough to house exhibitions within).

From the perspective of the world maritime museum scene the combination of our major historical fleet with a vast modern exhibition facility is, I suspect, unique. Together they give the visitor the chance to experience an incredibly diverse range of maritime history.

Being the trustee of a fleet of such proportions brings with it a very high duty of care. In each case we must carefully research the life history of the vessel to establish how best to display it. In some cases this could be in the pristine condition in which it was launched. Alternatively, we may choose for historical reasons to present it as it appeared at a significant moment of its life, as we are doing with the World War II commando raider *Krait*, placed in our care by the Australian War Memorial.

In other instances there is an overwhelming case to conserve the vessel in the condition in which it was acquired, as we have done with our pearling lugger *John Louis*, a sturdy if somewhat weather-beaten work boat.

The important thing in all cases is that each vessel be considered on an individual basis rather than seeking to establish an overall approach for all vessels.

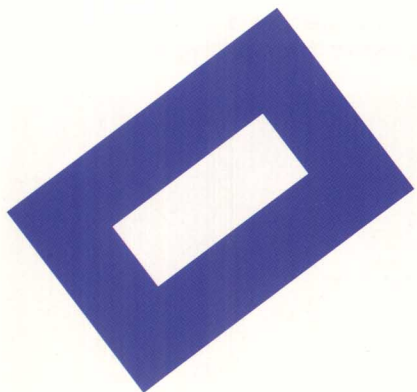
For the visitor walking across Pymont Bridge the fleet will be our greatest lure. But it is the relationship between this spectacular fleet moored in Darling Harbour and the backdrop of our building that will be the distinguishing feature of this Museum.

Dr Kevin Fewster





**Leisure - sun, surf, sails** is one of six major exhibition themes that will open at the Australian National Maritime Museum at Darling Harbour in 1990. The other themes are **Discovery - finding Australia** (Newsletter 8); **Passengers - the long sea voyage** (Newsletter 9); **Commerce - the working sea** (Newsletter 10); **Navy - protecting Australia**; and **Australia - USA - linked by the sea** (Newsletter 7).



# A quest for a suntan or a question of identity?

The Australian National Maritime Museum has devoted a spectacular major exhibition to the theme of recreation on or by the water, prepared by Curator Daina Fletcher and Assistant Curator Kevin Jones.

Many of the public have assumed that America's Cup winner *Australia II* would be part of this museum - and it will be displayed, on loan from the National Museum of Australia. However, some people find it surprising that space will also be devoted to ordinary pursuits like going to the beach. *Australia II* is, after all, one of the most widely known boats in Australia - a great national icon, some would say - while beach-going is something that everybody does.

That is exactly what gives it a place in a national museum, along with the Leisure exhibition's displays of world-beating sail and power boats, the famous Australian 18-footers and other, more relaxed activities.

This Museum's perspective of maritime affairs extends far wider than the view from the bridge of a ship. The exhibitions look at how ordinary Australians, as well as professional mariners, have experienced the sea. This wide-ranging maritime heritage includes more than technology, economics and dramatic episodes of history. It embraces the arts and the cultures created by the maritime experience.

There is a uniquely Australian culture of leisure on water. Lifesavers and skiff sailors featured in the galleries of bold, original poster art that once adorned the outside walls of city pubs. The beach has a sometimes whimsical, sometimes dramatic place in literature - poet Kenneth Slessor's *Backless Betty of Bondi*, novelist Robert Drewe's *The Bodysurfers*. Beach fashions have captured headlines time and again, as fashions and social standards changed.

Many Australian values are contained in the legend of the immigrant entrepreneur who, depending on one's point of view, 'only won a yacht race' or achieved the greatest sporting victory in history - the 1983 America's Cup - and brought a celebrating nation to a standstill.

This love-affair with the water is one that is shared by most modern-day Australians, whether their waterway is an ocean, a river, lake or dam. It has entered their culture, and is a point of reference for their national identity.



**The beach at Cottesloe, WA, about 1900. The dressing sheds and the clothing present a very different picture to the beach today.**  
Postcard, ANMM collection.

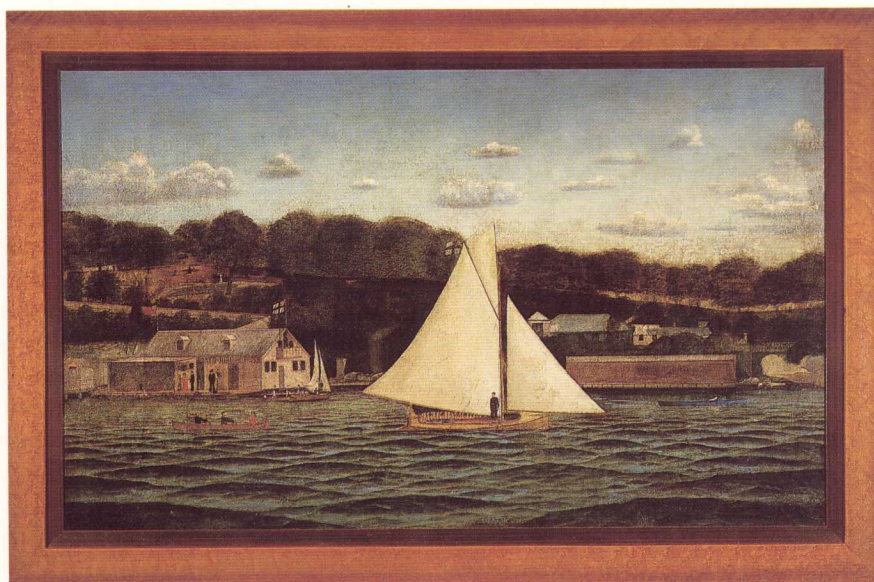


# Origins of the eighteens

Today's high-tech 18-foot skiffs are the world's fastest single-hulled racing dinghies - described by Ben Lexcen as 'the Formula Ones of Sail Racing'. Eighteens have always been extravagant since they first appeared on Sydney Harbour late last century. In the days of wood and canvas technology they demanded huge but nonetheless nimble crews to handle and to balance the extreme amounts of sail they carried.

Eighteen-footers developed from the rabble of work boats and ship's skiffs crewed by workers from around the waterfront.

In the 1880 Balmain Regatta the larger workboats of about six to seven metres (the 20, 22 and 24-footers) raced in the 'open boats under canvas' class. The big race of the day, the Mayor's Cup, was raced in boats called 18-footers - the 'skiffs under canvas' class. These boats, including *Naiad*, *Alert* and *Bacchante*, had a beam of 1.52 m (5 ft) and a depth of 50.8 cm (20"), a gaff rig, a centreboard or fin and no deck. It took a crew of 14-16 professional sailors or waterfront workers to sail them. By about 1910 the class dimensions of 18 feet (5.5 m) length and eight feet (2.44 m) beam had evolved from the two different types of craft, open boats and skiffs.



All open boat sailing other than regattas was carried out under the auspices of the Sydney Amateur Sailing Club. In the early 1880s the club tried 'to remove the expensive practice of professional racing' in the hope that races 'would be amateur contested, and sailed only for the love, honour and the glory of the sport'. (By the 1980s the wheel had gone full circle and professionals once again dominated the sport, yet under different circumstances).

In 1882 the fleet was divided into four classes by boat length - 16', 18-19', 20-23', 24' and over. Boats of 20 feet (6.1m) and upwards were to be sailed by amateurs.

Competition grew. In 1891 the Sydney Flying Squadron was founded and in 1894 held its first 18-footer championship. With entrepreneurial direction by founder Mark Foy, a wealthy Sydney retailer, the club gradually became

**An open boat flying the flag of boatbuilder H C Press sails past his boatshed in the Domain, Sydney. Oil painting from the Museum's collection, dated 1902, by an unknown artist. The artist has shown the dozen pairs of knees of the crew perched as ballast on the weather rail, but the composition is curiously still given the fresh breeze that has been depicted.**

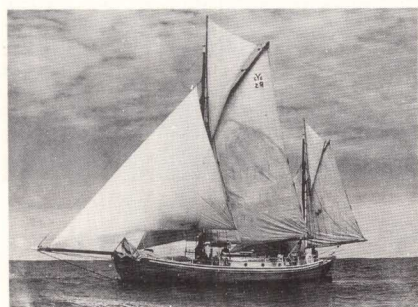
the centre of open boat racing and the home of the eighteens.

Foy did much to promote 18-footer sailing as a spectator event. He introduced a triangular course to ensure a fair trial for all boats on all points of sailing, with a handicapped start. He also introduced coloured sail emblems for identification and he chartered spectator ferries.

Open boat clubs were formed in Queensland in 1896 and Western Australia in 1906. Clubs organised national championships and the sport boomed.

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**Kathleen Gillett was built in Sydney for artist Jack Earl in the 1930s. He sailed it in the first Sydney-Hobart yacht race in 1945, and circumnavigated the globe in 1947-48, when the crew took these photographs.**





## Winged keel or national legend?

In September 1983 *Australia II* became the first challenging yacht to win the 132-year-old America's Cup contest. Designer Ben Lexcen's revolutionary winged keel - perfected on one-third scale test tank models - assumed a central place in the 1983 Cup campaign. More than providing winning technology, it was the focus of all the intrigue and mystique of the celebrated race. It became a symbol of the victory and even, for some people, of national ability.

The keel carried the yacht's ballast lower than normal to increase its stability, and its famous

wings increased hydrodynamic efficiency. *Australia II* could sail faster and closer to the wind, and it could turn more quickly than a conventional 12-metre yacht. With a world class crew led by John Bertrand, it was a winning combination.

The syndicate kept the radical keel shrouded in secrecy from the time it was designed. An *Australia II* hull plan in the Museum's collection shows a conventional keel - a check against a possible information leak. Throughout the Cup series the keel was hidden behind a canvas cover and protected by armed guards. The mystery was heightened by reports of divers around the yacht, of photographs of the keel appearing around Newport,

and of plans being offered for sale at £50,000.

As with every Australian challenge the 1983 America's Cup was embroiled in bitter legal controversy. The US *Liberty-Freedom* syndicate protested that the keel was illegal, arguing that the wings on the keel increased *Australia II*'s draft when it heeled. This meant they should have been taken into account when the yacht was measured, and that it did not conform to the 12-metre formula.

The dispute was fought with all the bitterness of a corporate takeover. There were allegations that the Netherlands Ship Model Basin, where Lexcen had tank-tested his model, had been asked to copy the design, and to claim that Dutch engineers, not Lexcen, had designed the keel. (The Cup rules stipulate that a challenging nation designs its own yacht.)

Winning the legal dispute, and protecting the mystery of their secret weapon, gave the Australians a tremendous psychological advantage for the race series.

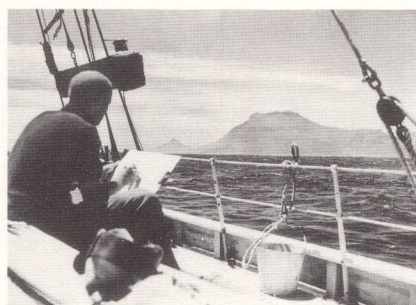
When *Australia II* won the series 4-3, the keel became a national symbol. One newspaper headline boasted 'We keeled them'. Cartoons and advertisements featured variants of the winged keel, and it appeared on cruising yachts and on a surfboard. There were even reports of winged keel fishing lures!

**Curator Daina Fletcher and Assistant Curator Kevin Jones with test tank model donated by the winning syndicate.**

Jenni Carter/ANMM photograph.



The yacht, built to a Norwegian design and now being restored in Sydney, is the Norwegian Bicentennial gift to Australia. It will be part of the Leisure display at the Museum wharves. Photographs courtesy of L and P Morris.







## Speedsters

Enid Nunn was the first Australian to break a world water speed record... but she was never awarded the certificate.

At dawn on 24 January 1950 a crowd of 4000 gathered on Kogarah Bay, NSW, to witness a record attempt for 91 cubic inch (1.456 litres) class hydroplanes. Enid Nunn drove the hydroplane *Do* to a world record of 106.07 km/h. Forty minutes later Enid's rival Keith Barry reached 115.66 km/h in his hydroplane, *Firefly II*. The record was awarded to the faster boat.

The Nunn family and Keith Barry were old rivals, and Enid Nunn had already duelled with him for 91 cubic inch class honours. In

May 1949 Enid set the Australian mile record at 84.985 km/h in *Do*, owned by her uncle Ern Nunn and his son Bill. They then decided to go for the world record, held by American Jack Cooper. One reason that Enid took the wheel for these attempts was that she weighed less than Ern or Bill. (The lighter a boat and its load, the faster it goes.)

Hearing of the Nunn's attempt, Keith Barry and his friends worked around the clock to build *Firefly II* in 12 days - a remarkable effort that won him the world record.

Enid was a typical speed boat driver (except for her gender!). She was a mechanic who worked for the army during the war and later for the NRMA. Her father Bill Nunn drove boats in the 1920s and then moved to car racing, while her

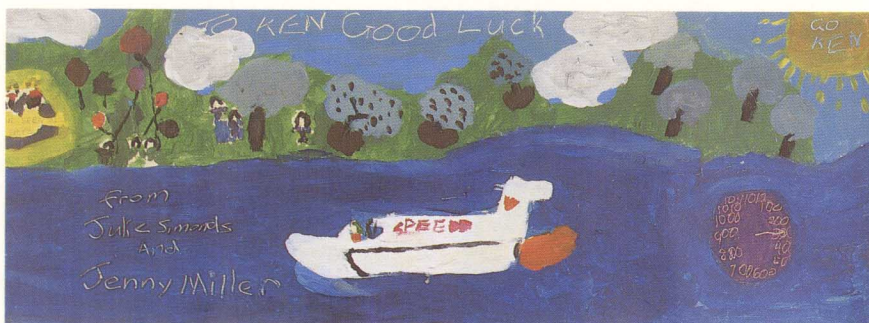
**Enid Nunn prepares to race the hydroplane *Do*, re-fitted with an air-cooled motorcycle engine after her world record attempt in 1950.**

Photograph taken for *Pix* magazine, late 1950.

uncle Ern drove the 255 cubic inch (4.179 litres) champion *Wasp* for 30 years.

Enid loved the excitement of attempts at speedboat record breaking, which she compared to being on a bullet fired out of a gun. Enid also left boats for car racing, taking part in the 1954 and 1955 Redex trials around Australia.

The pursuit of speed on water is one of the Leisure exhibition's highlights. On display will be racing memorabilia from Enid Nunn and Keith Barry, and the restored hydroplane *Firefly II*.



**The outright world water speed record is held by Ken Warby at 511.17 km/h. This is one of many paintings on a scroll presented to Warby by pupils of Tumut Primary School to wish him luck for this record attempt at Blowering Dam in 1978. The record still stands, and his jet-powered *Spirit of Australia* is now in the Museum's collection, along with these paintings of the event.**



# Banana Boats

Boats crashing through breaking waves, colliding as they race around the buoy. Crews straining on the oars, determined to crack the winning wave back to the beach, wary that one mistake will see them picked up and dumped in the sand. These are some of the things that have made surfboat races the most spectacular event at surf carnivals since 1908.



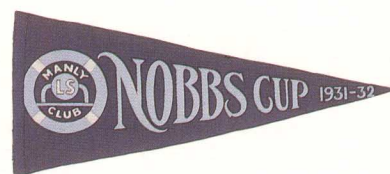
The first surfboat race was held at Manly in 1908, with seven crews racing in boats borrowed from ships in the Harbour. The event was won in a whale boat rowed by Little Coogee (now Clovelly) Life Saving Club.

An early move towards a boat designed specifically for Australian surf beaches was made by lifesaving club member Fred Notting at Manly in 1911. He looked at ocean-going rowboats around the world and chose a Norwegian design from which he developed a plan for a gondola-like, clinker hulled double ender. It was planked with kauri, 6.1 metres (20 feet) long with an exaggerated spring in the keel, and a sheer that curved up sharply fore and aft. Launched in 1913, it was dubbed the banana boat.

Designs were further developed by individual clubs. This was encouraged when the Warringah Shire Council bought boats for the area's clubs in 1914, after councillors witnessed a spectacular rescue at Dee Why Beach, and in the early 1920s by a NSW competition where the winner won the use of a surfboat for the year. Boats were gradually refined through such competitions, with local boat builders experimenting with improvements and clubs interested in winning designs.

In 1927 a big step in the development of surfboats was taken when the first carvel-built surfboat, *Blue Bottle*, was launched by the North Steyne SLSC. *Blue Bottle* was also a double ender but had less spring in its keel than the earliest banana boat design. It was made of the lighter and more buoyant cedar. The basic carvel-planked, double-ended design was to dominate surfboats until the early 1950s when it was modified to a tuck stern, with plywood construction.

Tuck-stern surfboats were in turn superseded for rescue work by inflatable rescue boats in the 1970s but they continue to be a major spectacle of surf carnivals, the classic event of surf lifesaving.



One of the Museum's surfboats, *Boofa*, is a cedar planked double ender donated by the Far South Coast Branch of the Surf Life Saving Association of Australia. It is an example of the first standard rescue boat design developed for Australian surf beaches.

## Dee Why Surf Life Saving Club junior boat crew, who were the SLSA's junior champions of 1931.

Photograph by Leon Gayley; presented to ANMM by James Dempster.

## National passion

Last century going to the beach meant going to the seaside. Baths, piers, promenades, gardens, amusements, theatres and hotels sprung up in bayside suburbs. They offered a range of activities like those of a mountain resort - the sand and surf were less of an attraction than they are today.

Yet people did go in the water, for exercise, hygiene (to bathe themselves) and for fun. On public beaches there were separate areas and times for men and women to bathe, in line with public morality. Many went to seaside baths, which were also segregated, while others preferred secluded beaches where regulations did not apply.

As swimming and body-surfing grew in popularity late in the century, beachgoers pressed for dressing sheds, lifesaving devices and unrestricted bathing. From the 1900s lifesaving clubs were set up and councils gradually allowed unrestricted surf bathing. However, they kept close control over standards of dress.

By the 1920s surfing beaches were promoted as beaches for all Australians. Travel posters called on people to follow the sun to Australia with images of the sand, the surf, surfers and lifesavers. The beach came to be seen as a special attraction of Australian life.



## Museum building hand-over delayed

Development of the Australian National Maritime Museum's opening exhibitions has now reached an advanced stage, and has remained on schedule for the Museum's planned opening date of 1 December 1990. However, a dispute between the NSW and Commonwealth Governments has delayed this date.

Construction work undertaken by the Darling Harbour Authority is reportedly complete. The building, with scaffolding and cranes now removed, has attracted favourable comments from architectural critics and the public, while its designer, Philip Cox, AO, called it his favourite project in a recent interview.

The Museum, however, is unable to take possession of the building for fitting out and exhibition installation until a lease for the site has been signed.

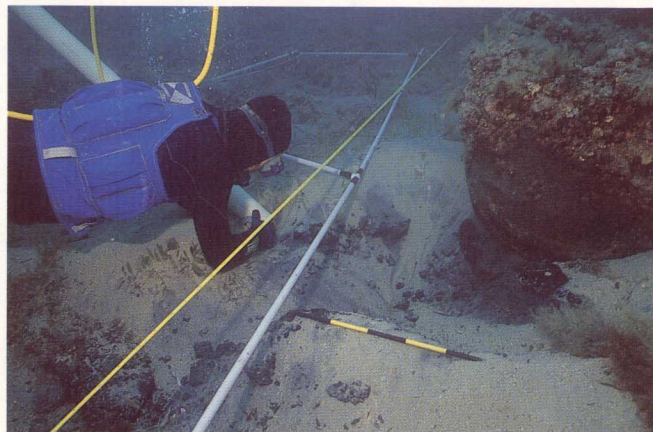
Museum staff are finalising work on exhibition and collection development. Staff are also developing a variety of outreach programs to bridge any possible gap between planned and eventual opening dates. In one such program, school groups will tour the Museum's fleet maintenance facility at Berrys Bay.

## Shipping companies support Museum

Both the Australian National Line and the P&O group of companies have become Founding Patrons of the Museum. The Patrons and Founding Patrons programs offer a number of benefits for Museum supporters in return for contributions of \$10,000 (for Patrons) or \$20,000 (for Founding Patrons). The program has been promoted at a series of lunches held over the last year.

The Australian National Line is Australia's largest container terminal operator, providing bulk and general cargo services in Australia and worldwide.

P&O, now a diversified group, was once a household name as the Pacific and Orient Steamship Company, in the days before air travel. The company has donated a variety of material to the Museum for the major exhibition theme **Passengers - the long sea voyage**, which highlights the experiences of millions of people



who sailed halfway around the world to Australia.

The two shipping companies join property developer Merlin International and energy company BP Australia as the first Founding Patrons of the Museum.

## ANMM Director to chair Maritime Museums Council

The Maritime Museums Council of Australia, inaugurated last year at a conference of maritime museum executives hosted by the Australian National Maritime Museum, convened again during the 1989 conference of the Museums Association of Australia in Melbourne. The Council provides a forum for maritime museums to share information and to improve the profile of maritime museums in Australia.

The Maritime Museum Council, which will become a sub-group of the MAA, elected as its Chairman Dr Kevin Fewster, Director of the Australian National Maritime Museum. Assisting on the executive committee will be Charles Treleaven and Richard Morgan, respective Directors of Melbourne and Sydney Maritime Museums. It is hoped that the new group will find members among small regional museums as well as the larger maritime museums across Australia.

The meeting, attended by 40 delegates, took place on board the Melbourne Maritime Museum's barque *Polly Woodside*. A keynote address was delivered by Ann Shirley who spoke about her work at the Polar Gallery at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

## Maritime archaeology

ANMM curator and maritime archaeologist Mark Staniforth has returned from a series of dives on historical shipwreck sites in Tasmanian waters, organised by the Tasmanian Department of Parks, Wildlife and Heritage. The work undertaken included photography and assessment of site conditions and the need for protection. The potential for excavation to recover artefacts and hull structures was evaluated.

Among the wrecks inspected were *Litherland* (1853), the only known Australian wreck site of a 19th century Hobart Town whaler, and the earliest merchant vessel wreck located in Australia, *Sydney Cove* (1797). Both lie among the Furneaux group in Bass Strait. Also visited were the *Loch Finlas* wreck site at Cape Portland, north east Tasmania, and *Cambridgeshire* (1875) near Night Island.

The dives were supported by Maxwell Optical Industries through financial assistance to the Museum for the purchase of Nikonos underwater photographic equipment.

Pictured above is NSW Department of Planning maritime archaeologist David Nutley with part of the *Litherland* site grid. One of three whaling try pots located on the site can be seen at the right of frame. (Mark Staniforth photograph).

## Travelling Exhibition

The Australian National Maritime Museum has developed a compact travelling exhibition to explain its work to the Australian public. The exhibition, a striking series of panels illustrating the

Museum building and site, and the scope of its collection and exhibitions, has embarked on a tour of maritime and other museums in all Australian states and territories. The panels have been designed for easy assembly and disassembly, and come in three compact cases for courier transport between venues. Organisations that would like to borrow a copy of the exhibition to display to their members or public are welcome to contact this Museum.



## Children set sail

The Museum is giving small groups of handicapped or disadvantaged children access to operational vessels from the Fleet. The program is coordinated with the Fleet conservation schedule, which requires the operational vessels to be run at regular intervals for maintenance purposes. Thirty sight-impaired children, drawn from Sydney primary schools which cater for various disabilities, sailed on Sydney Harbour on board the Museum's Attack Class patrol boat, *Advance*, last December.

In February the committee members of Canteen, the Australian Teenage Cancer Patients Society, spent a morning on *Krait*. They were joined by Arts Minister Senator Graham Richardson who took the opportunity to inspect and ride on the popular World War II commando raider.

