



MORE THAN JUST A WOODEN BOAT BUILDING REUNION

BY BADEN PASCOE



An exhibit that created much interest. Half models by Jack Morgan and Joe Fell. Paintings by Alec Pascoe and a photo board on Joe Fell. The tool box and tools belonged to Joe Fell

The Tree to the Sea reunion, celebrating New Zealand's wooden boat building era, took place in February at the New Zealand National Maritime Museum. The event was opened by founders, Paul Courtenay, Rod Jenden, two ex employees of the legendary P Vos yard and yours truly. My father worked at Vos's in the 1940s.

The show was centred on a twenty minute slide show featuring rare photographs of wooden boat building. It started with the felling of a giant Kauri and followed the building process used in New Zealand wooden boat construction right through to launching. Examples of New Zealand built boats were on display and these included, *Thelma*, *Waiangi*, *Gloriana*, *Francis*, *Te Hauraki* and the super classic launch, the ex Auckland Harbour Board pilot boat *Akarana*. Other boats also berthed included, *Wirihana*, a 1933 Colin Wild launch, *Valda M*, a 1950s restored fishing boat and *Typee* a very graceful little South Island type, flush decked, fishing boat built by Alec Baxter. Also berthed was the 50ft Spirit of Tradition ketch *Sina*.

But let's not forget what this event was essentially about. It was about celebrating the past and living trades people who created these floating, usable works of art and the industry we have today. Many living legends from all around the country called in to say hello to their old friends. For the next generation interested in this culture, there was a real opportunity to rub shoulders with these very knowledgeable people and form ongoing friendships. This enables knowledge to be passed on and wooden boats kept alive or reproduced.

In an endorsement of this statement, one of New Zealand's most versatile boat builders of the more modern times said to me, "I think it would be fair to say that there would be nowhere on

earth where there is so much knowledge on wooden boat building in one room at one time." A statement like this from someone of the standing of this gentleman has to be acknowledged.

Another thing that was very obvious on the day was the camaraderie and respect between the well-known names in the room and to add to this, their openness to talk to people like myself who are not from the trade. They were so enthusiastic about answering questions in great detail and in a manner that gave you the impression, if you are interested in the subject, then you are in our camp.

One of the other things I picked up on was the relationship between the more senior tradesmen who shared their knowledge and taught the many former apprentices in the room. I saw father to son like hugs exchanged between men on greeting. In what other trade or following do you see this type of friendship and respect? I think this is a vital element missing in the sterile system of teaching young people today. These men not only passed their skill on, they mentored these people from boys to men and made great citizens and individuals of them. When you think about it, a well built wooden boat is a complete work of art. It not only requires a high level of skill but also a high level of passion, ethics and deep down honesty. The finished article speaks for itself and it is further tested by time. It must be so great to see a boat built 50 or 60 years ago, having done uncountable tasks, kept it's crew and passengers safe from the elements and have that inner feeling, "I helped create it" with the attributes we just spoke about. I know that is why the names, Bailey, Lane, Brown, Logan and Vos are so well respected. These names are just not about boats! That explains the environment that has forged this culture.



Band of brothers with head masters Ken McCormick and Peter Peal (sitting far left) Employees span from 1937 to today with Ross Watkins's custodianship over the Vos yard

There was heaps to see and hear. Harold Kidd one of New Zealand's most respected authorities on classic yachts and launches gave two short talks, one each on the family and business structure of both the Logan and Bailey families. And there was more. Lines, drawings from masters like Percy Vos, Charles Bailey Jnr and Roger Carey and half models by Jack Morgan, accompanied by his son David, who made the trip north from the Marlborough Sounds. If you like old boat photos, we had heaps of these as well, along with models and more builder's half models. There were specialists on various builders who answered questions in detail.

To finish the day off, Tony Blake, chairman of the Classic Yacht Association of New Zealand and John Street, founder of the Classic Yacht Charitable Trust, gave a short talk titled "Where to now with wooden boats."

From a tradespersons point of view, listening to Tony's talk certainly gave you the impression that the wooden boat era is far from over and done. And this is the very reason why Paul, Rod and myself grew this event into more than just a reunion. We wanted to be part of something that is alive and well and put more than just a smile of the faces of the attendees at the conclusion of the day.

The day ended on an extremely high note with a room full of people who gave the impression that they had taken some sort of energising drug while at this event. We certainly achieved our opening goal and have had dozens of phone calls confirming this.

This is my final article in *Professional Skipper* for now. It has been great to be part of a magazine that speaks for the profession. I hope, over the years I have opened a few windows to the past and given some understanding to the evolution of the workboats we have around our coastline and the environment that has shaped the culture of the industry we now have. I will be concentrating on a couple of books I am writing and hope to



Jack Taylor centre, one of our more senior attendees and work boat surgeons on the Auckland waterfront with some of his boys. Not hard to see friendship, respect and happiness here! Colin Silby now carries the baton in this part of the industry in Auckland

be back on board soon. Thank you for reading my articles and a special thanks to readers who have challenged me and forwarded information to me on various subjects.

Editor's Note: Baden, the research work you have done for every article only demonstrates the professional nature you have brought to your writing and this magazine. We look forward to reading your books once released and welcoming your return in the fullness of time.