

STEPHEN GODFREY (JACK) GUARD

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AT AGE 97, ONE OF BOAT BUILDING'S GREATEST KAURI HAS FALLEN

BY KEITH INGRAM

With a reputation for having one of his vessels working in every port, Jack Guard is a name that needs no introduction in the New Zealand maritime workboat industry.

Jack was of the old school. He came from an era when boat builders sourced and milled their own kauri from the bush where it was left to season prior to further milling and the heavy baulks stacked to season under cover in the boat yard.

He survived the depression and never forgot the lessons learnt from it and, as grandson Darren Guard commented in his eulogy, the boat yard was a family business where everyone was given a job. Darren, as a youngster, well remembers hiding from Grandad Guard because he was sick of stacking timber, sweeping the workshop floors and above all, the finger bashing job of straightening out bent copper or bronze nails.

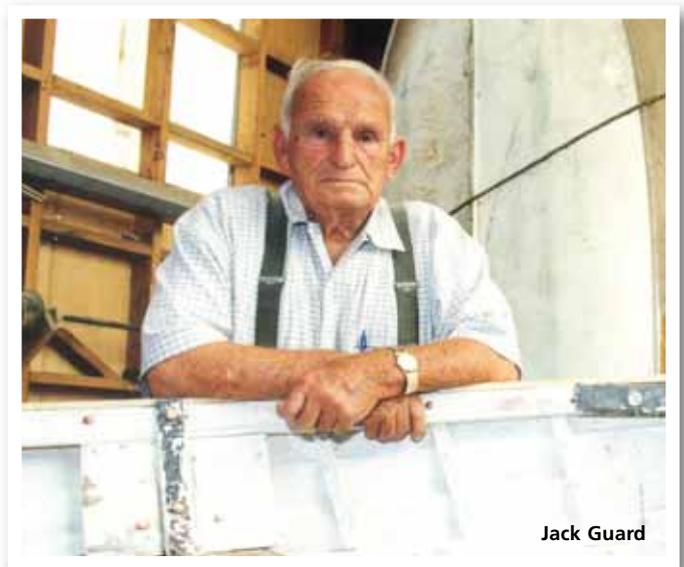
Being one of 14 children he spent many of his childhood years in the Sounds, especially Waitata Bay, with the King-Turners. Back then the kids were shared around, a bit like chainsaws, which is what has bonded Sounds folk into the close-knit community it remains to this day.

One of the best kept secrets was Jack's birth name, Stephen, and how he came to be known as Jack. Apparently, as a child in Waitata Bay, he was being baby sat by relatives and, as an enthusiastic child, was always running away to explore this or that. So, to corral the lad, the family put him in a large box for safekeeping. His uncle Silve arrived home to find the youngster trying to jump out and said he looked like a jack-in-a-box and the name stuck.

Jack built his first boat, the *Dough Boy* at age 11. It promptly sank and was not a good start to a lifetime of boatbuilding. But, with Grandfather and big brother Ted's assistance, it was painted with tar and ash and made ready to go. Family members commented on how the stern looked, the early marks of a Guard designed and built boat. Eventually fearing for his safety,



Polaris II – Jack's last build



Jack Guard

Granddad told Jack to get rid of it. But he refused, so brothers Allan and Bill filled her with stones and sank it.

In 1932 Jack cut his hand on a circular saw while building the Pukatea boat shed. The hospital wanted to finish the job and cut it off but Jack refused and while it gave him trouble for many years it eventually came right and never held him back. Boatbuilding was a tough game and for many years, Jack was seen wearing a leather and steel corset as the hard work took its toll.

Jack married Kathleen Gwen Bradley in 1938 and the couple had five children, and many more grand and great grand children, all with a legacy of boatbuilding in their veins.

While the records are inconclusive, it is estimated that Jack went on to build over 100 fishing and work boats, most of which survive today, a legacy to his craftsmanship. He was to do thousands of refits, repairs and rebuilds on all manner of craft and built a countless number of dinghies.

But it was his last boat, the 70ft *Polaris II*, that was to remain his favourite build. After 14 years in the making this was the largest of all Guard built wooden boats and, with no timber spared, is one that has been built to last a lifetime or more at sea. After a bit of a chequered start in the fishing industry she is now proudly owned and operated by Otago University for maritime studies and training where she is expected to continue to serve for years to come.

Late last year, Jack was honoured with the QSM in recognition of his life long contribution to the maritime industry.

He was sharp as a tack 'til days end. In the rest home just before his time Jack ventured to ask young Darren, what vessel was he on? On being told Wood (the name of the rest home) he mused; "She has strange lines you know. I wonder who built her?"

