



Seahaven History

Training Ship's

"Pioneer" (S.P.S.C.) 1927-1934

"White Star" (S.P.S.C.) 1930-1943

"Wongala" 1945-46-47

"Warrawee" 1948

Shore Establishments

"Seahaven" 1 Prior to 1945

"Seahaven" 11 1945 - 1961

"Seahaven" 111 1961 & Current.

"The demands of the sea are simple,
But there is no evading them."
John Masefield

The sight of Scouts at the Outer Harbor, and in particular on the Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron property, can be traced back to when the St. Peter's College troop shifted their boat Pioneer and its moorings from Port Adelaide to the Squadron basin on 11 November, 1928. Pioneer was a two-masted naval type gig, which was presented to the School by the Navy League. The craft was built in Pt Adelaide about 1900, to be the 'Captain's Galley' of HMCS Protector, and was 'out of service' when passed to the School.

Whilst this craft was suitable for the training of boys, the publication, The Scout Leader of December, 1943, reported that the School Scout Master, Major MHO Forbes (commonly known as Micka, but strictly out of his hearing), had in 1929 written to many shipping Companies based in the United Kingdom to enquire whether they had a ship's lifeboat for sale at a cheap price. A reply was eventually received from the White Star Line with the information that, if and when a suitable boat became available, it would be offered to the College Troop. Further advice was received that Lord Kysant, Chairman of the Cunard Line would make the boat a gift to the School, the White Star Line being a subsidiary of the former Company.

On 30 September, 1930, the boat duly arrived at Outer Harbor aboard the Ceramic (Captain Lloyd in command), freight free and fully equipped. Following the presentation ceremony, which concluded with the christening of the boat by Mrs. Forbes, a crew took the craft for a trial run, after which she was moored in the Squadron basin.

In honour of the White Star Line's generous gesture, the boat was named White Star. She was a typical ship's lifeboat of her era, clinker built, 27 ft 10 in long, with a beam of 7 ft 6 in. She came from the Runic, which had recently been sold out of the White Star fleet. Her condition was sound, as an inspection revealed that she was almost new.

Both boats were used by the Troop for some years, but too much time was required for maintenance, particularly on Pioneer, which was now past her prime. So, in June, 1934 she was returned to the Navy League.

Training continued, using White Star on most Saturdays. During School holidays, particularly during the summer months, cruises were undertaken to the western side of the Gulf.

Various ports, including Troubridge Island, were visited, much of course, being dependent on the weather. The crew camped ashore each night, with the 'Skipper' sleeping on board, where he kept a watchful eye on the weather, the boat's compass and his barometer, which was wrapped in a handkerchief and stowed in his haversack!

Over a number of years, minor alterations were made, and finally she was established as a gaff-rigged cutter, with a centre-plate and bowsprit fitted with a 'traveller'. In addition, a small quantity of inside ballast was installed, no doubt to improve her sailing qualities. Other equipment included a dinghy, a small canoe, plus the usual oars and life jackets. The fore-part was decked in aft to the mast, and some decking and a main sheet horse were fitted aft. Sails were of canvas, and all spars were timber, the only 'extra' being a 'square-sail'.

In order to set this sail, the jib was lowered, thus making its halyard available. The sail was rectangular and fitted with a yard on the upper edge. A long heavy boom, with jaws to fit on to the mast, was set up on the windward side, with a guy rope leading aft. Once hoisted, adjustments were made to the guy, and if necessary to keep the boom near the horizontal, a suitably sized Sea Scout was 'ordered' to sit on it. There were no spinnaker 'kickers' for Micka Forbes! Under this canvas, White Star had a good turn of speed, and in a strong breeze passed some of the slower boats in the Port River, much to the astonishment of those left behind.

All this was accomplished with the Skipper and crew singing sea shanties, which Micka had learnt when serving in sailing vessels whilst accumulating sea-time for his Second Mate's Certificate of Competency, which he duly obtained. Traditionally, the session commenced with 'A Capital Ship' and lasted until he or his repertoire was exhausted.

For many happy years the above routine was a permanent feature of the School's sea scout training, and many old scholars who served in the Royal Navies during the Second World War, served their time as 'Greenhorns' aboard White Star.

This well-loved craft continued to be based at the RSAYS until all those vessels not involved in naval duties were, by naval orders, moved to No 3 Dock, Port Adelaide, more commonly known as the 'Mud Hole'. The established routine continued from this base until early 1943, when the vessel was moved back to the Outer Harbor, but this time the moorings were laid in the public area to the west of the Squadron moorings.

During the war, the Squadron's Outer Harbor premises were rarely frequented by its Members. On a number of occasions Sea Scout Regattas and/or Training Camps were held on the premises over a weekend. Yes, the main shed floor was hard even when slept upon in those years!

A number of Army Huts for use by Naval Personnel were erected around the base of the then Signal Station. As these were vacant, they were used to billet sea scouts during regatta weekends. On one occasion, the decommissioned HMAS Wyatt Earp was used to sleep sea scouts over a regatta weekend. Little did we know that she would be our Training Ship in

the near future. If additional accommodation was required, tents were erected on the edge of the oval, which is now the North Haven Golf Course.

All this maritime activity afloat was religiously recorded by 'Skipper' Forbes, and included the names of all boys in attendance (and their Patrols) on each and every outing. These logbooks, which hold a special place in the history of the School's Sea Scouting activities, are now preserved in the archives there.

MHO Forbes left sea faring to join the British Army, and attained the rank of Major. After discharge, he took up school teaching, and was on the staff of St. Peter's College from 1920 to 1946.

For his long involvement in scouting at both State Headquarters and the School, Major Forbes was awarded the Medal of Merit, 'For his especially good service at the Scout Movement'. On a State basis he was on the staff of the 1936 Corroboree held at National Park, Belair, and served a time as secretary to the Sea Scout Council. Upon his retirement, Major Forbes spent a short time as an announcer on ABC radio, before he returned to his native Scotland, where he died in November, 1973. Norman Howard often called upon him during his meanderings around the United Kingdom.

As usual, the Troop was in recess during the May, 1943 school holidays. Upon the commencement of the second term, the Sea Scout Master called a lunch time meeting of the Troop in his class-room and announced that during the vacation, the White Star had been requisitioned by the Royal Australian Navy. A merchant vessel, the Baron Elphinstone, had required a lifeboat immediately. This news was a great shock to all hands, and, of course, war restrictions precluded any replacement being obtained in the foreseeable future.

During the latter half of the White Star era, the school's Headmaster, the Reverend AGGC (Guy) Pentreath, was a member of the Squadron, and owned the ketch Sea Salter, which Clausens built for him in the mid 1930s. After he sold her in 1944, she participated in the Sydney-Hobart Race of 1949 under DH Jarvis. She was subsequently sold to Victoria, and was last heard of in Geelong.

So White Star ended a 13-year association with the School and the Squadron, during which many hundreds of boys enjoyed the spirit of adventure afloat under the firm, but just and guiding hand of a much-loved School/Scout Master. Current and past Squadron Members included Geoff Bungey, Ian McBryde, Jim Bullock and Peter Dermott, and the late Norm Howard, Kevin Phillips and Deane Coleman. No doubt there are others with similar happy memories.

The loss of the White Star was keenly felt, particularly by the Scoutmaster. In an endeavour to soften the blow, a number of boat owners, no doubt influenced by the Headmaster and Major Forbes, offered to take parties of sea scouts sailing. The outings were most enjoyable and very much appreciated, as it introduced to sea scouting a more sophisticated type of sailing. The boats used included Seevogel (Wesley Harris), Taabinga (Dr. Donnie Donaldson)

and Argo (Peter King). The other side of the coin was, of course, that it provided crews for owners whose regular crew members had joined the armed services.

Norm Howard, when on leave from the Navy, always secured a crew from the School Troop so he could go sailing in his beloved Nereid, which he launched in 1942.

Other Sea Scout Troops in South Australia had the use of a small timber and fibro building, erected in the NE corner of the Mission to Seamen's grounds, situated west of the Outer Harbor railway station. It was later destroyed by fire and in 1998 only the ruins remain. This training centre was called Sea-Haven. During the Second World War, the structure suffered neglect, and together with the ravages of the weather over many years, it was necessary to demolish the building after the war years.

MV Wyatt Earp/HMAS Wongala was a vessel used by the American explorer Lincoln Ellsworth for Antarctic exploration, during which she made several voyages south and travelled over 50,000 nautical miles. Upon completion of this work, Ellsworth presented the vessel to the Tasmanian State Government, who in turn handed her over to the Commonwealth Government.

During the Second World War, the Royal Australian Navy requisitioned the vessel and renamed her HMAS Wongala, this being an aboriginal word for boomerang. As such, she served in a number of locations in Australian waters, finally as Examination Vessel outside Outer Harbor. As the threat of enemy action in the area in 1944 had diminished, the vessel was withdrawn and decommissioned; following which she lay idle at Port Adelaide.

The then Chief Commissioner and Acting Headquarters Commissioner for Sea Scouts, the late Henry Rymill, CBE, approached the Federal Minister of the Navy, Mr NJO Makin MHR, a South Australian. After some delay, it was agreed that the vessel would be loaned to the South Australian Branch of the Scout Association, for use as a Sea Scout Training Ship.

During early March, 1945, a ceremony was held on board, with the vessel berthed alongside at the Outer Harbor, when Commander S.R. Symonds, RAN (Naval Officer-in-Charge, South Australia) formally handed her over to the Scout Association. Commander Symonds concluded his address with these words - 'Take this ship, train your boys, make them good men'.

Many dignitaries from public life and Scouting, including the Lord Mayor of Adelaide, Mr R Walker and Mrs. Walker, and the Mayor and Mayoress of Port Adelaide, were present, plus many members of the Sea Scout Section and their leaders. The Chief Commissioner read a telegram from the Minister of the Navy, 'Extend my best wishes for a successful ceremony. Feel sure the loan of this vessel by the Commonwealth will be amply repaid by the future efforts and achievements of the boys of your Association'.

The Wongala, built in Sweden in 1919 as the Fanefjord, was of wooden construction, 137 ft long and of 403 gross tons. When acquired by Lincoln Ellsworth she was sheathed and

strengthened, thus enabling her to penetrate the southern pack ice. As handed over for Scouting, she was fully equipped, including two lifeboats. Lighting was supplied by a two-cylinder Southern Cross Diesel engine and associated equipment. Her main engine was a 'hot-bowl' six-cylinder diesel, and on the after end was a clutch, which enabled the engine to be run without turning the propeller. This machinery was not used during the loan period.

Prior to the ceremony, arrangements were made with the port authority, South Australian Harbors Board, for the vessel to be moored fore and aft to two large buoys north of No 4 Berth Outer Harbor, and also north of the channel into the Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron.

A ship-keeper was employed and the Ex Naval Men's Association was instrumental in the Scouting Association employing Mr Harry Moles, a former RN & RAN Chief Petty Officer. Following his retirement from the RAN, and prior to the war, Harry had been the 'permanent hand' aboard Mr JT Mortlock's 66 ft yacht Martindale. [For Martindale see Squadron Quarterly September 1994: 24-29]. He was a man 'getting on' in years, but he was still active. His knowledge of the sea, shipboard routine, and in particular seamanship endeared him to all aboard Wongala. While not a man to talk of his experiences, he nonetheless had had a long and illustrious naval career; this being evident by his large and impressive row of campaign medals, which he wore on ceremonial occasions with pride and dignity. The first medal awarded was for service in the Boxer Rebellion of 1900.

In addition to the Ship-Keeper, a Sea Scout Rover Crew was formed, which consisted of some twenty members, mainly Leaders, from various Sea Scout Groups. The Crew assisted with general maintenance and shipboard routine, and supported less experienced Leaders with all facets of ship routine, rope-work and seamanship. Upon Mr. Mole's retirement, and on the employment of an older person, one 'Salt' Kessell, the crew became responsible for all routine training and maintenance under the watchful eye of Henry Rymill and FF (Frank) Medcalf, who was appointed Assistant HQ Commissioner for Sea-Scouts and Officer-in-Charge SSTS Wongala.

Sea Scout Troops of up to 25 or 30 boys, together with their Leaders, were accommodated aboard in bunks. The Troops, including those from the country and occasionally from Victoria, used the vessel on a roster system, which continued throughout the loan period irrespective of the weather. Some Troops also took advantage of the longer periods, such as public holiday weekends, school holidays and Christmas and Easter, to come aboard on Friday evening instead of meeting in their Troop Room.

The ship was also used for Scout conferences, District Weekends, Charge Leader Certificate training, and the annual Sea Scout Regatta. The rowing course was in 'The Gut', with kind permission of the SA Harbors Board and Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron.

In June, 1945 the Navy League presented to the Sea Scouts a 14 foot dinghy fully equipped, thus enabling additional sailing and rowing to be carried out in a smaller craft. During a suitable ceremony the Lady Mayoress of Adelaide, Mrs R Walker, christened this boat Sea Scout. The new acquisition was built by Mr AJ (Jack) McFarlane, whose son was a member

of the Semaphore Scout Troop. In addition, a complete set of International Code Flags with a Code Book was presented to the ship, which enabled flag etiquette to be taught and observed. Code signals were exchanged between other vessels, including yachts from the Squadron. Lieutenant-Commander Blacker represented the Navy, and Chief Commissioner Rymill's Sea Hawk, with a lifeboat lashed alongside, ferried some 150 people out to SSTS Wongala, the shore pick-up point being the RSAYS pontoon (the one and only!). [For Sea Hawk see Squadron Quarterly March 1996: 24-27.]

Amidst all this frantic activity, the 1945 annual general meeting of the RSAYS elected Henry Rymill Rear Commodore. In recognition of the Squadron's friendly attitude towards Sea Scouting over many years, the Association opened Wongala to official guests and Members of the Squadron to witness the sail past of yachts on opening days in November 1945 and 1946. More than a hundred people were ferried out on each occasion and entertained on board for the afternoon, with afternoon tea being provided from the ship's galley. Wongala was dressed over-all for these and other special and festive occasions.

On 2 March, 1946, the first anniversary of the handing over ceremony, a second dinghy, twelve feet in length, was christened Sea Cub. The Navy League again provided this pleasing gift. In addition, a framed, signed photograph of Lincoln Ellsworth and a copy of the book Wyatt Earp were presented to the ship.

In later years and with the permission of the Navy League, Sea Cub was sold and the funds so gained were used to have built a 'twin' version of Sea Scout. Jack McFarlane was again engaged to build the craft. The balance of the cost was covered by funds from Scout HQ.

This arrangement gave the section two identical boats for use in rowing and later sailing regattas. Prior to this using identical boats meant borrowing two boats from the SA Harbors Board, and Groups arranged training by hiring Jolly's Boats and practicing on the Torrens Lake - not a pretty sight sometimes! Today's 16 ft standard fibreglass patrol evolved from the original timber Sea Scout.

All this publicity, training, and sheer pleasure, together with some hard work, had its just reward. During 1945 Sea Scout numbers increased by 15 per cent!

On 15 March, 1946, during a very high afternoon tide, accompanied by SW gale-force winds, SSTS Wongala pulled the forward screw mooring out of the river bed and the vessel swung round to starboard, finally coming to rest on the northern mud bank. The after mooring somehow remained intact. Fortunately, this happened on a Friday evening, and was witnessed from the Outer Harbor wharf by the visiting Troop (1st St Peter's College), and some crew members.

At low water, the ship was well aground aft and afloat forward, with a list to port. The weather had eased considerably by Sunday, and although efforts were made by those on board to refloat the ship at high tides, these were not successful. Eventually, the wake of an outward-bound steamer during the following week broke the suction of the mud, and with the aid of a Harbors Board tug, the vessel was berthed at No 4 Outer Harbor until the

mooring was strengthened and relayed. Mercifully Wongala suffered no damage from the grounding.

The ship was finally reberthed at her moorings some four weeks later. As a safeguard against a repetition, the port anchor chain was made fast to the corner pile of the wharf and slackened to the bottom of the river so as not to impede navigation in that area of the river. This arrangement also allowed the ship's anchor windlass to pull her over to the corner of the wharf for replenishment of fresh water and firewood for the galley stove - all good fun with 'young sailors' and heavy gear. The 'return voyage' was undertaken with the help of the afternoon flood tide.

Regretfully, all good things must come to an end. Early 1947, advice was received from the Department of Navy that the Wongala may be required for further Antarctic voyages, as a recent survey had found that the vessel was still structurally sound for this work.

Eventually this early advice was confirmed, and at a suitable flag lowering ceremony in mid-February, 1947, the ship ceased to be a Sea Scout Training Ship. It was a sad occasion for those Leaders and Rover crew members who had spent a very happy and enjoyable two years aboard the vessel, carried out in the true spirit of Scouting, and at times coupled with the heavy demands of the sea and weather.

Prior to leaving the vessel for the last time, a brass plaque was erected on the after deck-house inscribed - 'During the years 1945-1946-1947, this ship was used as a Training Ship for Sea Scouts in the Port Adelaide River, South Australia.'

In order to perpetuate the name, Henry Rymill presented to the Sea Scout Section the Wongala Shield for competing crews, consisting of four oarsmen and a coxswain, all being under fifteen years. The first winners were Victor Harbor in 1948. This trophy, and others, are still competed for at the annual Sea Scout Regatta.

All Sea Scout property was removed and arrangements were made with RSAYS for Sea Scout and Sea Cub to be moored in the pool. Sailing and rowing gear were stored in a spare locker, and so the happy and friendly relations with the Squadron were called into play again.

Despite a further approach to the Department of Navy, they were unable to offer the Association another suitable decommissioned vessel. Fortunately, however, the SS Warrawee, an intrastate coastal passenger/cargo steamship, which had been requisitioned into the Navy during hostilities, had been decommissioned and returned to her owners, Coast Steamships Ltd of Port Adelaide. As no suitable employment could currently be found for the vessel, the Owners agreed that the Scout Association could use her.

The Owners arranged berthage at the Walter and Morris wharf in Port Adelaide, situated on the eastern side of the river between the old Jervois Bridge and the railway bridge near the Portland Canal. These arrangements were concluded in December 1947, and Sea Scout Training Ship Warrawee was commissioned in January 1948.

The new training ship was built in Glasgow in 1909; she was 155 ft long and of 423 gross tons. She had more accommodation than Wongala and was connected to the shore power and water mains. They were both essential for on board living and safety, particularly as the engine-room, being steam, was 'dead'. All gear and boats stored at Outer Harbor were transferred to SSTS Warrawee, together with most of the Rover Crew, who had still been active as a Rover Crew attached to Scout Headquarters.

In this new location the Sea Scouts continued their training activities, and at the same time played host at frequent intervals to other Sections, Districts, and Leaders, as well as on a number of occasions, the Girl Guide Association Sea Ranger section.

One memorable weekend was the 14-15-16 March, 1948, when a violent SW gale of hurricane force struck Adelaide. Unknown to those on board, Warrawee had considerable water in the bilges, which ran to the lee side as the wind listed the vessel inwards towards the wharf. All was well at high tide, but during low water the stanchions holding the awning deck were hitting the wharf. Thereafter some bent stanchions reminded us all of a very wild, wet and woolly weekend. Sea Scout and Sea Cub were moored on boat booms alongside on the weather side, and to add to our woes both sank. The hulls and all the floorboards were later retrieved with no damage.

On the way home it was evident that the weather had been exceptionally heavy, as trees and power lines were down in large numbers. The weekend is long remembered in Adelaide, as this was when HMAS Barcoo was blown ashore at north of Glenelg, where the jetty was destroyed. Warrawee was later pumped dry, and training continued unabated.

Regretfully, the outlook, and surroundings, were a far cry from Wongala's position at Outer Harbor, but nonetheless the Training Ship concept continued to be very popular with all members of the Scout Association and the Girl Guides.

Unfortunately, this happy situation came to an abrupt end in October, 1948, when the vessel was required again for commercial purposes. This time it was to take over from SS Karatta (owned by the same Company) whilst that vessel underwent an extensive refit. Once again our kind friends at the Yacht Squadron came to the rescue and accommodated our boats and gear.

It had been proven beyond doubt over the years that the concept of a training ship had been a wonderful success. Not only did it increase Sea Scout numbers in the State, but also the Section showed a marked improvement in discipline and seamanship, in both Leaders and boys. History also shows that Sea Scout Groups who owned their own boat were very few and far between, and the Training Ship vessels, of course, filled that void.

A search for a further suitable ship was unsuccessful, so after much deliberation, and bearing in mind the large cost associated with the ship concept, it was decided to establish a permanent training facility ashore. It was therefore agreed by the Sea Scout Council (with the concurrence of the Branch Executive), to approach the SA Harbors Board for land on the western side of the Yacht Squadron on which to erect a suitable building. The Board agreed to the request, and in due course Sea Haven Number Two was erected, and commissioned.

In closing this era of sea scouting, it is worth recording the demise of our two vessels.

Despite a complete refit at Port Adelaide (carried out by Gibb and Miller Ltd.) and including all new machinery, the return to Antarctic voyaging of Wongala (renamed in some accounts as Wyatt Earp) was not successful. She was 'too old, too small and too slow,' said her Naval Commander. After decommissioning, and a period of idleness in Melbourne, she was acquired in 1948 by Argo Shipping Company of St Helen's, Tasmania, who subsequently disposed of her in 1956 to Ulverstone Shipping Company of Tasmania. This Company purchased her for the Queensland coastal trade.

In January, 1959, now renamed Natone, she cleared Cairns, southbound for Brisbane, with a crew of six Europeans and twelve Papuans. The weather rapidly deteriorated and the ship received a severe battering in near cyclone conditions. She sprang a leak and after the engine-room became flooded, sails were set and she finally made shelter at Rainbow Bay. During the night she grounded near Mudlow Rocks, some 110 miles north of Brisbane, where her remains can still be seen. An inspection revealed that damage caused by the grounding and heavy weather, together with her age, made her beyond repair, and she was abandoned as a 'total constructive loss'.

Upon the re-commissioning of SS Karatta, Warawee was again laid-up. Road transport had made heavy inroads into the traditional cargoes available for all ports on the eastern side of Yorke Peninsula, and passenger numbers were also declining rapidly. As no employment or buyer could be found, the vessel was finally broken up at Port Adelaide in 1953.