



CASTLEMAINE CHRONICLE

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An Occasional Newsletter

Issue #10 - Dec 2024

Hello faithful readers and welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter. Since the last edition there has been steady progress with all our maintenance work, it's a bit like painting the Sydney Harbour Bridge once you get to the end you have to start again. So here is a rundown, with illustrations, of the various jobs over the past few months.

Geoff has been very busy on different projects in the engine room. On the fwd. bulkhead – the main feed water tank was all nice and clean but something was missing, thought lost forever (left photo). Then Dennis found 'it' in the shipwright's workshop, Mick polished it up and there it is in the right photo. You just never know what you will find if you look long enough. There is a school of thought that says we need a spotlight to focus on it? It is amazing that it was still on board considering it is brass.



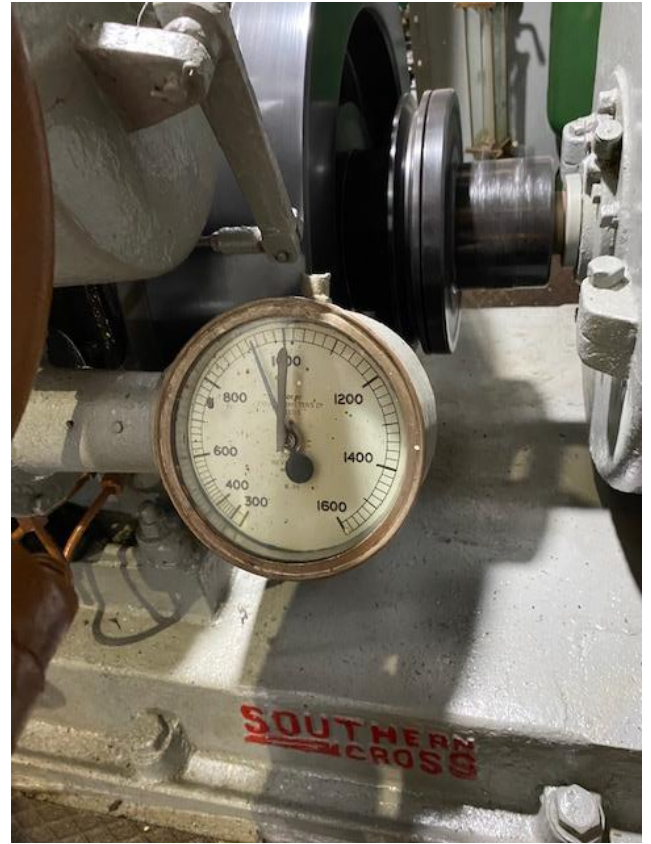
Two other projects that Geoff has been handling are painting all the pipes in their correct colours and trying to get the Southern Cross diesel to run again. There were problems with the injectors and heads.



Geoff on the paint brush

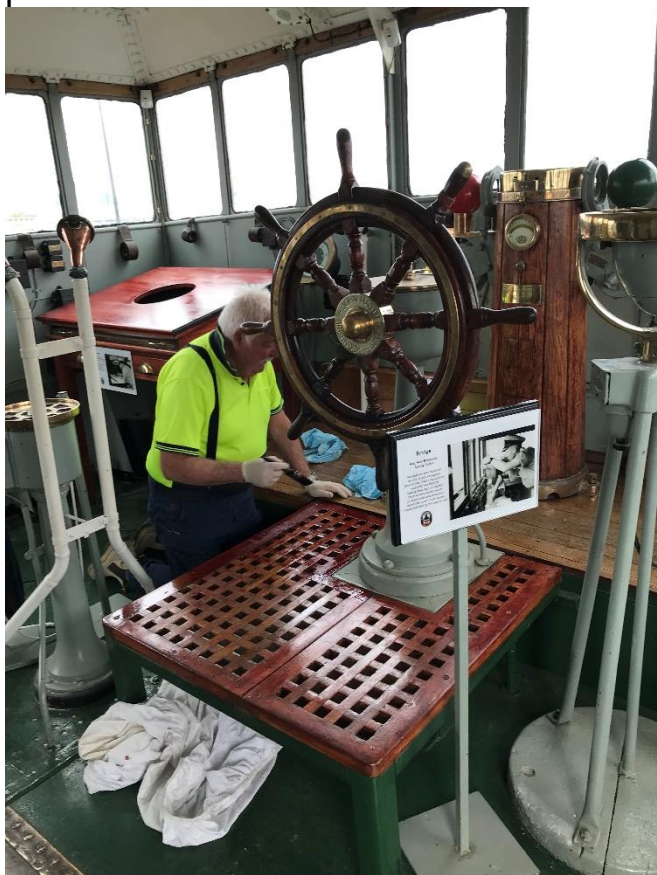


Geoff and the Southern Cross



It may not purr like the Gardner but it was a beautiful sound after all the head scratching and hair pulling over the last year or so.

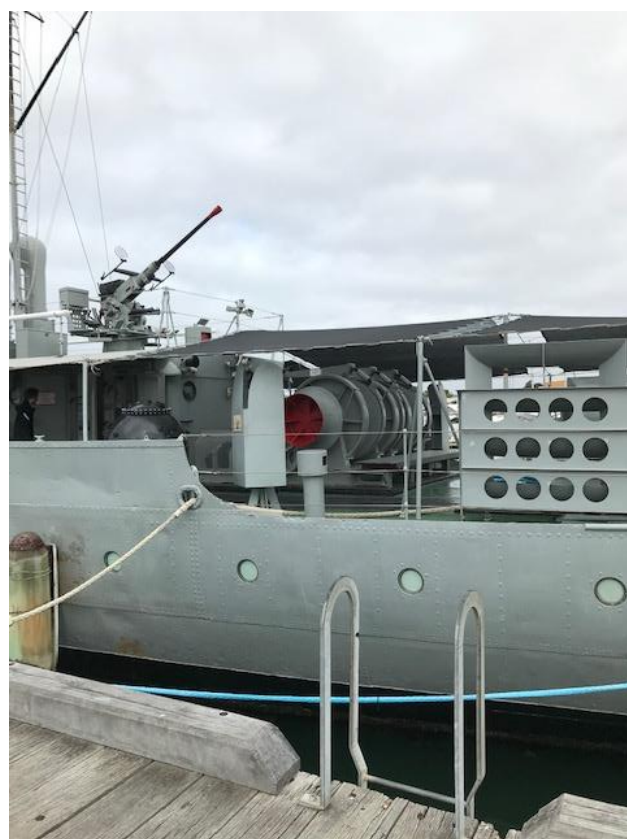
Elsewhere on the ship the bridge came in for a bit of attention with Mike wielding the paint brush and Dean on the never ending polishing of brass work.



Once you let the rattle gun crew loose the inevitable happens on an 80+ year old ship as seen below left. However modern technology, and Martin, came to the rescue to patch the problem.



As we move towards the warmer weather that means two things, renew the festoon lighting bulbs on the quarter deck and put up the awnings. So, on the left below are two of the stalwarts of our electrical department Noel and Jimmy handling the bulbs. I won't bore you with multiple photos of our bi-annual fight with the awnings, just one photo. And the reason I hear you ask, well there is no longer a fight because we now have a system which works.



Recently Andrew and Andy just happened to go on holidays at the same time to North America, not together they assure me. During their trips they each visited a museum ship. Andrew visited USS *Slater* in Albany NY and Andy visited HMCS *Sackville* in Halifax NS (Do you think all that's a bit spooky or what?). Anyway this is Andrew's account of his visit to the USS *Slater*.

On a recent trip to North America I made a visit to the ex-USS *Slater* museum ship in Albany at upstate New York.

I was made welcome by the *Slater* volunteers and they appreciated our gifts of two books about Corvettes and the *Castlemaine*.

Although the *Slater* is a larger ship than the *Castlemaine*, it has similarities to the *Castlemaine* in that we are both not large capital ships but have a proud history.

The *Slater* had a small band of volunteers of varying backgrounds. It is supported by an ex-service organisation the 'Destroyer Escort Association' and the ship is open to the public for inspection during the warmer months of the year. The major fittings of the ship such as weapons came with the ship when it was acquired.

The *Slater* system of showing visitors the ship was through a fully guided tour of half a dozen visitors at a time. They have a small shore facility which enabled a short talk about the ship with a slide show giving a background of the ship. With a short walk across the gangway the volunteer showed the major parts of the ship both internally and on the upper deck. The ship was in really good condition and maintained at a level that looked like a functioning ship and is a credit to the volunteers.

Following are a few photos around the ship.



Oerlikon gun and ready use locker with magazines



Bridge and Wardroom (I think – Andrew is away again and only he knows!)



'Hedgehog' and what looks to me like a twin Bofors

According to Andrew: If anyone is visiting the region, a ship visit to the *Slater* is well worth a look.

And lastly USS *Slater* herself



Below is a photo of HMCS *Sackville* taken by our other intrepid traveller Andy.



Following is Andy's account of his visit to Nova Scotia:

On the 23th September 2024, whilst on a cruise from Quebec to New York, I had the privilege to visit the museum ship *HMCS Sackville*, moored alongside at Halifax, Nova Scotia. The ship is the last surviving Flower-class Corvette and a symbolic representation of Canada's naval contribution to the Second World War. After touring the vessel, I was extremely impressed. I was particularly struck by the open bridge and thought of those men standing a watch on a filthy, dark winter's night in the Atlantic. 'Greenies,' breaking over the f'cstle causing the vessel to shudder, roll and pitch. Such men were of robust character and we remain indebted to them, for their courage, steadfastness and service.

Sackville's keel was laid down as *Patrol Vessel 2* at Saint John Shipbuilding and Drydock Company, New Brunswick in early 1940 and was commissioned into the Royal Canadian Navy on 30 December 1941 by Captain J. E. W. Oland. Her first commanding officer, Lieutenant W. R. Kirkland, RCNR was appointed on 30 December.

The ship was assigned to Escort Group C-3 of the Mid Ocean Escort Force (MOEF) along *HMCS Galt* and *HMCS Wetaskiwin* on 15 May 1942.

Sackville continued in her escort role until undergoing an extensive refit during January 1943. She returned to service in April and was assigned to Escort Group C-1, she then served with two other Escort Groups on Atlantic escort work until undergoing refit at Galveston, Texas, during February 1944.

The vessel then worked up in Bermuda and returned to Halifax in May 1944 where she was assigned to Escort Group C-2 which left for Londonderry, Northern Ireland, to escort convoy HX-297 on 29 June 1944.

Whilst undergoing a boiler clean at Londonderry, a serious leak was discovered in a boiler. Subsequent repairs were unsuccessful, and the ship was no longer considered suitable for convoy escort work. She was thence reassigned for training at *HMCS King* on 29 August 1944. Immediately afterwards she was converted to a loop layer (anti-submarine indicator loops) across harbour entrances, her damaged boiler was removed to provide storage for the cable and the 4-inch gun replaced with a pair of cranes. She remained in this role until paid off in April 1946 and laid up in reserve. During 1952 she was reactivated and converted into a research vessel for Department of Marine and Fisheries. The armament was removed, the hull repainted black and the new pennant number 532 painted on the hull (changed to 113 in the late 1950s). A laboratory was built on the aft superstructure in 1964, and the bridge enclosed in 1968. She remained in service until December 1982.

The ship was transferred to the Canadian Naval Corvette Trust (now the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust) on 28 October 1983 and restored to her 1944 appearance (apart from minor details in her camouflage and the presence of the "barber pole," the red and white pattern around her funnel which had been removed before 1944). It had originally been planned to restore the ship to her 1942 appearance, but costs proved to be prohibitive.

She currently serves the summer months as a museum ship moored beside the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic Halifax, Nova Scotia. During the winter she relocates to the naval dockyard at Canadian Fleet Base Halifax under the care of Maritime Forces Atlantic, the Atlantic fleet of Royal Canadian Navy. *Sackville's* presence in Halifax is considered appropriate, as the port was an important North American convoy assembly port during the war.

Sackville makes her first appearance each spring when she is towed by a naval tugboat from His Majesty's Canadian Dockyard to a location off Point Pleasant Park on the first Sunday in May to participate in the *Commemoration of the Battle of the Atlantic* ceremonies held at a memorial in the park overlooking the entrance to Halifax Harbour. *Sackville* typically hosts several dozen Royal Canadian Navy veterans on this day and has also participated in several burials at sea for dispersing the ashes of Royal Canadian Navy veterans of the Battle of the Atlantic at this location. In 2018, the ship underwent CAN\$3.5 million in repairs at CFB Halifax.

The *Sackville* remains a poignant reminder to all of the struggles and sacrifices of those Canadians whom served in the Royal Canadian Navy during WWII in the battle for the convoys.

Every now and then an event occurs on the ship that makes you pleased that we do what we do. On 27 November such an event did occur and Dick and Mike were on hand to help. The following is Dick's account of the day.

On Wednesday 27 November we hosted a visit to the ship of Arthur Johnson and some of his family (from Sydney). Arthur turned 100 years old in February of this year.

Arthur and family were on a cruise ship that berthed at Station Pier and the visit to *Castlemaine* was a very special part of their cruise itinerary.

Arthur served on the corvette HMAS *Burnie* during WW2 and was an ASDIC (sonar) operator. He was also one of the special ASDIC operators as he was also trained in maintenance of the equipment (conducted by AWA technicians and naval personnel at HMAS Rushcutter).

His memory of service on *Burnie* was amazing. Unfortunately, he could not get up to the bridge to check out the ASDIC operators hutch, he did though tell of the long watches that he did where he would alternate being on the ASDIC and being a bridge look out.

He sighted our electronic valve display and said he changed out a few of those in the ASDIC Instrument Space. Also mentioned it was not a very nice place to work, could be very hot, not much ventilation, very low headroom and in heavy weather something else again. I did not have time to ask about details of how repairs were done (no oscilloscopes, digital-multimeters etc. in those days). One thing he did mention was that the ASDIC never went down while he was on watch, it always waited perversely till he was off watch. However it was a worry when the ASDIC went down, there were enemy submarines out there.

His family said that visiting the ship enabled them to understand and put together a "picture" of what Arthur had told them. They were also amazed at how Arthur and the crew lived, operated and tackled a war in such a small ship. While we were in the mess deck he explained when he first got onboard (over-crowding was happening) that he got to "sling" his hammock on the deck under the tables on the port side and sleep on his hammock mattress. Later on, when he became a "senior" person he migrated to a hammock position.

It was a little warm on the ship so I ran the mess deck fan and Arthur mentioned there was always the constant noise of the fans and other machinery one just learned to live with (apart from the heat in the tropics, heavy weather, shortage of water and besides there was a war to be fought).

They were all incredibly impressed and said so about the presentation of *Castlemaine* and in particular the restoration effort.

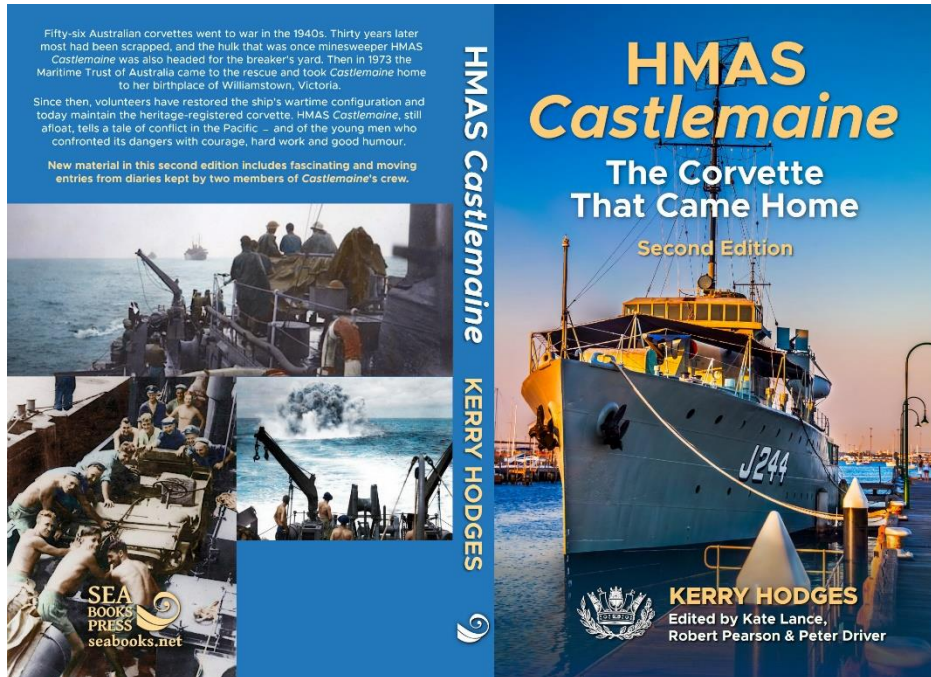
The family did make a sizeable donation to us. On completion of the visit they went to the cruise ship to continue their tour of Australia.

I think the pictures say a lot about how Arthur and family appreciated and enjoyed the visit.

And as Mike and I said to each other when they left "well that was a great day, makes one feel good and yes one of the reasons we all do what we do to preserve and show off the ship".



The bestselling book about our ship 'HMAS *Castlemaine* – The Corvette That Came Home' has been massaged into a 2nd Edition. The work was undertaken by Kate and includes excerpts from the Dyker Diaries and McGarvey Memoir. Now that we have those documents, written by the people who were there, it seemed appropriate to add the human side to various events as described in the book (just a reminder that the complete unabridged versions are available to read on our website). The book will also get a new cover for the 2nd Edition.



On Wednesday 11th December the annual Christmas drinks and nibbles event was held on board. I've attached two photos to remind you who were there that you were.





Above is Dennis your President giving his annual address. For people who weren't there, there is a highly abridged version below.

I would like to thank all of you for your input throughout the year. The ship looks really good overall and is a credit to you all.

I would like to thank Dick for his exceptional efforts as usual this year, and I hope that more support comes to assist you in 2025. Thanks also to Bob for his ongoing effort with the Roster and I'd like to ask if anyone can just spare one day a month, particularly on Sundays to ease the shortage and spread the load.

I now would like to make a special mention of the effort Geoffrey has put into the now colourful Engine Room and of course Mick Newington for polishing all the gauges and copper pipes.

Now I'd just like to mention that the 2nd edition of the Castlemaine book is in print at the moment and the insertion of extracts from the diaries in it really adds realism to the text.

Now, I've left the big news until last. After an extensive search we are almost certain to achieve our long term goal of obtaining an Oerlikon gun for the Stbd side of the bridge wing, and I am hopeful that that eventuates early in 2025.

Finally I'd just like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and healthy 2025.

STOP PRESS – STOP PRESS

EVERYBODY KNOWS BY NOW BUT THE SHIP HAS BEEN SEARCHING FOR A 20MM OERLIKON GUN TO PUT ON THE STRB BRIDGE WING, TO MATCH THE PORT WING. THIS WOULD THEN COMPLETE THE SHIP'S ARMAMENT SUITE. WELL WE MAY BE ON THE CUSP OF GETTING ONE. WATCH OUT FOR THE DETAILS IN THE NEXT EDITION OF THIS NEWSLETTER.

Sadly I have to report that Doug Lapham, a long time volunteer, crossed the bar on 12th October 2024.

Doug served in the RAN on various ships and retired as a CPO Stoker. Note the active service medal with Malaysia and Vietnam clasps below.

He also served as a Sergeant in the WA Police Force before retiring and becoming a stalwart of our Saturday crew.



RIP Doug

Do you feel that you could write an article for a newsletter? Piece of cake right? Sure it is, so put pen to (sorry fingers to keys) and let the creative juices flow and send your masterpiece to me for inclusion in the next newsletter. Just to stipulate though that it should have some relevance to *Castlemaine* or ships in general.

Please send your articles or any comments about the newsletter to me Bob Pearson at newsletter@hmascastlemaine.org.au

TTFN
Bob