



Much Ado About Nothing Much

The third of the profiles of members of MHA is that of the Editor/Treasurer.

I was born in King Edward Memorial Hospital in Subiaco, which just proves that KEMH has had problems from way back! The greater part of my early life was spent living not far from the Swan River, first at Como then at Nedlands. I spent most of my free time in or near the river and my first boating foray was via a home-made canoe. Those people of around my age may well remember the canoes built from corrugated iron, carefully hammered more or less flat then bent together at each end. The ends were wired together and, on a suitably hot day, a quantity of tar was removed from the edge of the road and used to waterproof the ends, and the numerous nail holes. With a square piece of plywood held in each hand as a paddle I sallied forth on Freshwater Bay. The longest voyage was from White's Beach, not far from Point Resolution, across to Mosman, via the Point Walter Spit. This way-point was essential as it enabled the Captain/Navigator to get out and empty the water from the bilge on both the outward and homeward voyages.

SCUBA was only known through reading the just published *Silent World* by Jacques Cousteau, but about this time I also took up diving. My mask was a wartime gas mask, the sort with a can shaped filter in the front. To this I fastened a short length of hose using the ever present tar from the road. The problem with the mask was that it was fastened to the head with at least six buckles and straps. If water flooded in, which frequently happened, it was a race against time to undo the buckles before drowning. No fins, in fact I don't think they, or any other free diving gear, was obtainable in Perth in 1953. All very primitive but it started an interest that I have never lost.

In my mid to late teens I sailed a little on other people's yachts, particularly Dragons. These included *Philante* owned by Athol Hobbs, and *Maranel*, at that time owned and skippered by Mick Ahearn. However this did not last long. At the ripe old age of 19 I left home and went to New Guinea. In early 1961 the Territory of Papua and New Guinea was still very remote and very exciting. As a Patrol Officer my job was varied, full of interest and fraught with a little danger at times, enough to keep you

alert. The only maritime associations during this period were travelling by government trawler to a group of islands on one patrol, rafting down a river on a bamboo raft and sailing in dugout canoes on a few other patrols.

However after four years I considered that Papua and New Guinea would get independence within ten years (I was spot on) and that, while I was jack of all trades I was really master of none, and would find it hard getting a job back in Australia if I didn't do something soon. So I joined the Army and became a would-be officer at the Army's Officer Training School at Portsea in Victoria. What a change – from hot, steamy tropical jungle to swimming in Port Phillip Bay in full battle-order in mid-July!! A serious injury to my ankle put paid to any Army career and on returning to Western Australia, after a short stint as the pay clerk at the GPO in Forrest place, I headed north to Marble Bar. As a District Officer for the Native Welfare Department at Marble Bar I was responsible for the area from Goldsworthy to Mount Newman, including Jigalong and Nullagine. Also employed at Marble Bar was Jill McGrath. We married in May 1967.

For many years I had been interested in yacht cruising, influenced greatly by two books by Eric Hiscock. In late 1974 while living in South Hedland Jill and I decided to build a yacht. Plans were purchased from Bruce Roberts, then the doyen of home built yacht design, and work commenced. The 34-foot yacht was built of C-flex, a then new form of fibreglass planking. This was strictly spare time building when finances permitted, and it was seven years before *Tevake* hit the water. During the building we had shifted to Geraldton and so had to truck the half finished yacht down. *Tevake* provided a lot of fun and we made trips to the Abrolhos Islands, ran aground and got off, and all the other things that go with a new yacht and a not very competent skipper and crew. I did improve, however, and obtained a Yachtmaster's Certificate as well as a lot of practical, on the job, learn from your errors, training.

I also obtained a qualification as a SCUBA diver and both Jill and I became members of the Maritime Archaeological Association of Western Australia in



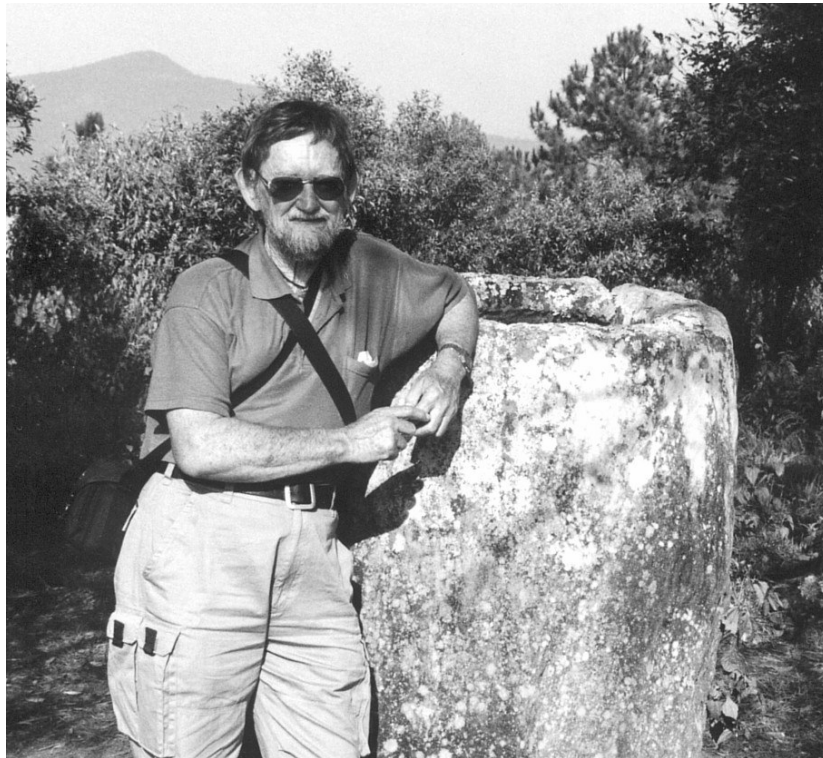
the late 1970s. In mid 1981 Jill started the post-graduate Diploma course in Maritime Archaeology and graduated in mid 1982. From 1979, when I got my diving certificate, I started volunteer work for the Western Australian Maritime Museum. Some of this involved diving on wrecks, inspecting and measuring them, while at other times I took part in Museum wreck excavations and research. The wrecks I dived on include the *Rapid*, *Xantho*, *Mayhill* and others, and culminated in seven weeks spent with the Museum team in Sri Lanka in 1993.

I had become a Life Member of the Sail Training Association and did a few voyages on the *Leeuwin* as Watch Officer during her early years. I maintain contact by spending periods helping during refits, although I haven't been able to do this for a year or two now.

Meanwhile we had sold *Tevake* and after a short period of being boatless we bought the hull of a Westsail 33. This yacht was a fibreglass replica of the *Eric* yacht designed by William Atkins in 1924, and which he based on the Colin Archer pilot boats of the last half of the 19th century. I designed and built the accommodation and then designed and built the gaff cutter rig. She was fitted with a topmast and topsail and readers are referred to the September and December 1993 MHA journals for the story on how I went about the task. The drawing on the cover of the September 1993 journal shows what she looked like. We sailed *Panthalassa* for a few years, again mainly over to the Abrolhos Islands. However boats displacing over 8 tons are expensive to keep so she was eventually sold. The money from that sale bought our block of land in Mandurah!

The sale of our yacht did not end my association with yachting and I have sailed on other people's

yachts to a number of fascinating places. I have sailed along the coast from Geraldton north to Broome on a few occasions, and also on two overseas trips. The first was from Phuket in Thailand to Darwin via Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and East Timor in 1994-95 and the other from Australia to the Philippines via some fairly remote eastern Indonesian islands in 1999. Each voyage was of about two months duration and visited the smaller and more out of the way places.



The editor looking very travel-weary

Jill and I had been members of MHA since soon after its inception and in mid 1998 I took over from Chris Buhagiar as editor of the MHA Journal, and this is the 25th journal I have produced. Being editor is both rewarding and, at times, very frustrating. When there is plenty of material there is no problem (only frustrations regarding computers – lack of skill on my part and lack of co-operation on the computer's). When

there is little in the way of articles sent in, things become a bit more desperate. However the journal has come out more or less on time and full of words, even if many of them aren't specifically relevant to Western Australian maritime heritage.

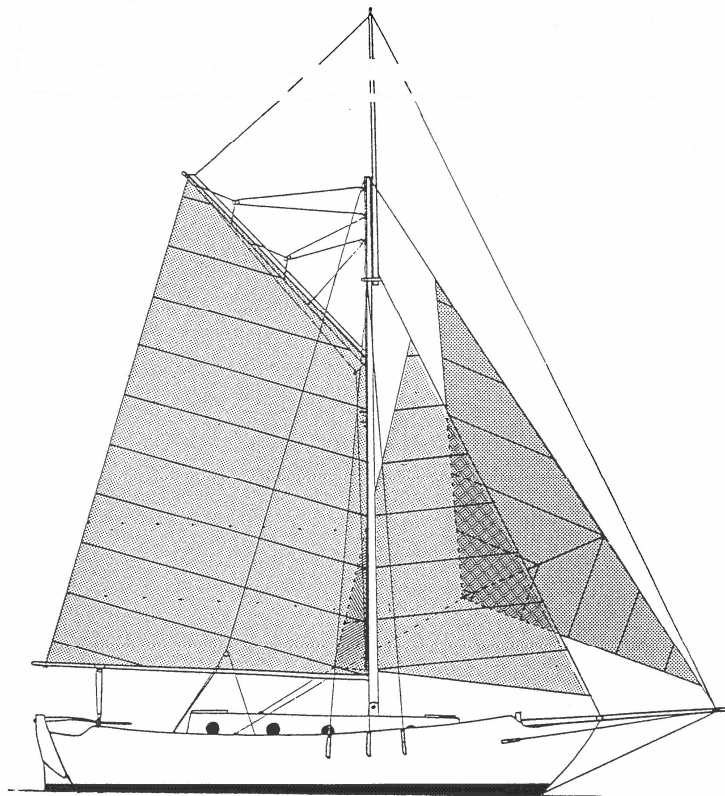
In 2000 I applied for and was accepted to become a student at the Great Southern Regional College of TAFE in Albany. The course was Certificate IV of Wooden Boatbuilding, and I hired an on-site caravan and spent an academic year at Albany learning how to build 2 dinghies and a 29' whaleboat, plus all the oars, masts and spars. I was lucky enough to win the prize for being top student on the course and my bandsaw is a constant reminder of that luck. As our house in Geraldton was for sale, Jill was obliged to stay there to maintain it and travelled many miles to join me at Albany whenever possible.



Our house in Geraldton eventually sold and we built our new house in Mandurah. After shifting down we contacted the Western Australian Maritime Museum to let them know that our previously spasmodic volunteer work could now be put on a more regular schedule, as we were closer to Fremantle. We were asked to update and expand some research done in 1979 by a friend of ours, David Totty. He had collected information on the wrecks on the mainland between Jurien Bay and Port Gregory. We were to expand that to between the Moore and Murchison Rivers, and add anything else we might find or think relevant. This progresses and is reaching the final stages with the search for suitable illustrations being now required. Whether the final result is publishable or whether it will remain a Museum Report is very much up in the air. The Museum is not going to publish, as it does not meet their requirements. The research has been interesting and informative and has taken a considerable portion of our time and a lot of travel.

I have, over recent years, travelled outside Australia a little. Firstly to Sri Lanka with the Museum and then to many of the countries of south east Asia, and China. During these backpacking journeys I spend most time away from the bigger cities, staying mainly in small hotels or guest houses and eating the local food. It can be cheap to visit

such countries if you live this way, as the only major expense is getting there from Australia. Both Jill and I are very interested in the hill-tribes of the mountainous areas of south east Asia and southern China. During these travels we have obtained a good collection of the beautifully woven and embroidered textiles and some of the silver jewellery made by these people. They form a rather colourful contrast to the maritime side of our lives. Jill and I retain our interest in matters nautical and will continue to follow that interest in the years to come. Who knows where it might lead!



Panthalassa, that Jill and I bought as a bare hull and fitted out ourselves. This illustration appeared on the cover of MHA Journal for September 1993.