

QMM Guide Notes - GN 08 v2



The Lugger *Penguin*

The pearling lugger *Penguin* was donated to QMM by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Dauan Island Council.

History

This pearling lugger was built as *Mercia* in 1907 for Hodels Ltd, a Thursday Island pearling company. It is a Thursday Island style of pearling lugger, built there by Japanese boat builder Tsugitaro Furuta, one of the more prolific lugger builders of that time. Furuta is believed to have come from the Wakayama Prefecture, near Osaka, the birthplace of most of the Japanese who came to Thursday Island in the early 20th century to work in the local pearling industry.

The British Register of Ships shows that Furuta built at least 41 luggers between 1899 and 1930, one of the earliest being *Mina* which is now *Tribal Warrior* and the oldest extant lugger. The proprietor of Hodels Ltd was Frederick Charles Hodels. In his evidence to the 1908 Royal Commission into the Pearl Shelling Industry he stated that he owned two pump boats and two bêche-de-mer boats, indicating he was one of the many small operators in the Thursday Island pearling community. In February 1911 Hodels sold his business, including *Mercia*, to the Wyben Pearling Company Pty Ltd which in turn was owned by Burns, Philp & Co. Ltd.

The Wyben Company operated *Mercia* for 30 years until it was requisitioned by the Commonwealth Government for military service. Correspondence held by the National Archives shows that the Australian Army had control of *Mercia* well before February 1943 when the shipping register entry was finally updated. In August 1942 Wyben [was given notice to surrender all its luggers and *Mercia* was handed over soon afterwards.

Initially the company tried to keep some of its luggers out of military control but they had all been handed over by 12th December 1942. In a list of that date *Mercia* appears as the fourth of 60 luggers impressed by the military in northern Australia, noting its value as £1250 minus £219 for repairs, leaving a net value of £1031. All the luggers pressed into military service underwent a conversion costing about £23/10/- each.

Mercia's conversion involved removing machinery and equipment associated with diving; stripping internal fittings, bunks, water tanks, etc.; removing ballast; lowering the cabin sole and increasing cargo space from 5–7 tons to 12–15 tons; making hatches and covers; surveying the hull; and undertaking general work on the rigging and windlass.

Following its conversion, it departed for Daru in the Torres Strait in December 1942, travelling via Badu to pick up a cargo of palm leaves. It continued to work in the Torres Strait and north to New Guinea.

On 30th August 1945, straight after the war, *Mercia* was sold to Mr W.R. Albert for £100. The shortage of boats in the post-war years and the high price of shell resulted in a concerted effort to round up all remaining boats and get them back into work. Many were still in New Guinea, having been sold 'as is where is' by the military.

By 1946 *Mercia* was back at Thursday Island. In 1948 it was licensed to the Bowden Pearling Co. with the registration number A31. In 1957 a new engine was installed and the boat was re-registered and re-measured.

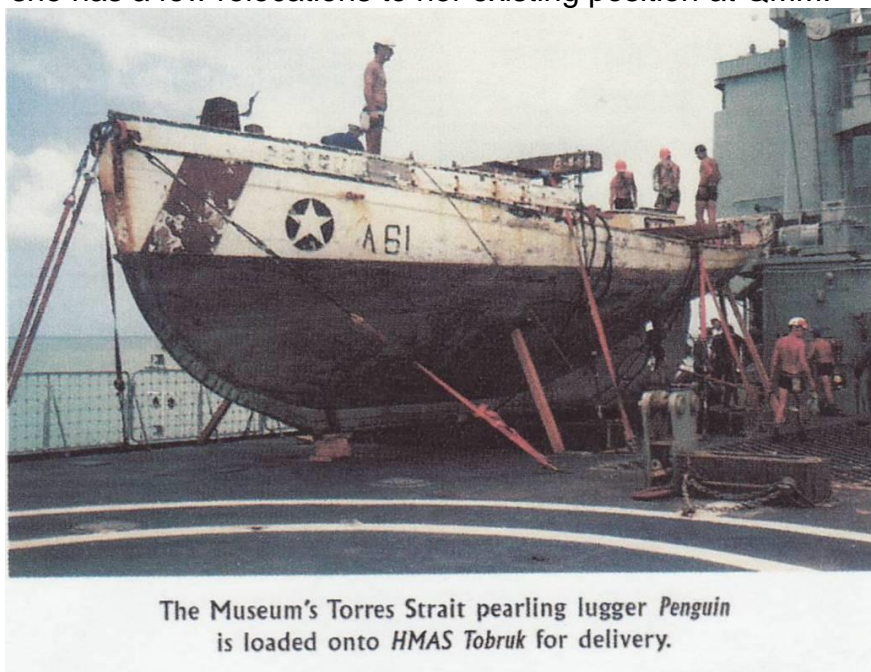
It continued working for Bowdens until the company became bankrupt in 1961. Its pearling licence was suspended until the 1966–67 season when it returned under a new name, *Penguin*, given the new registration number A61 and licensed to the Aucher Pearling Shelling Company Pty Ltd.

In the 1970s *Penguin* was again acquired by the Commonwealth Government and returned to a standard pearling vessel rig. It was placed with the Dauan Island community in Torres Strait for use as a service and supply vessel. In 1981, when it was replaced with a more modern vessel, the community agreed to hand it over to QMM on condition that it retain its Dauan Island colours and number.

Coming to QMM

The assistance of the Australian Navy and local businesses on Thursday Island who helped to build the carry cradle, ensured the safe delivery of the Pearling Lugger *Penguin* around June 1982 on board *HMAS Tobruk*.

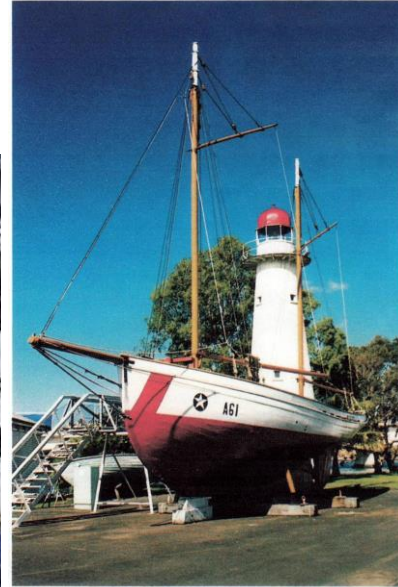
Since then, she has a few relocations to her existing position at QMM.



The Museum's Torres Strait pearling lugger *Penguin* is loaded onto *HMAS Tobruk* for delivery.



Penguin, built at Thursday Island in 1908, restored and on display in front of the old Bolwer Island lead light. Her star and number mark her as a Dauan Island Vessel.



The changing positions of the *Penguin* at QMM. QMM Photos



Penguin's new place from 2009 and being experienced by the young during QMM's Pirate Weeks 2011-17 kbb photo



The new below decks display on diving and the pearl industry
QMM Photo

Information Sources

QMM File records

QMMA Newsletter-1980'S QMMA Museum Guide- Exhibit sources.