

# CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION OF HERITAGE TIMBER VESSELS



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The Pratt Foundation/ISS Institute Overseas Fellowship

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# Executive Summary

This Fellowship was undertaken in order to attain further understanding of restoration and conservation of heritage timber vessels, as well as addressing the related skills deficiencies within the industry in Australia. The necessity for best practice and understanding of timber heritage vessel conservation and restoration is necessary for maintaining and preserving Australia's maritime heritage. Neglecting to address skills gaps in this area will result in a significant loss of our cultural heritage.

Modern materials are fast overtaking traditional methods of construction and maintenance in the boat building industry. This is due to materials such as steel, aluminium and fibreglass being a more efficient and cost effective option. As a result many skills in relation to traditional practices are being lost and training in these methods are close to becoming non-existent.

With these trends in mind the following skills gaps have been identified:

- Restoration, conservation and replacement of timber in vessels
- Caulking of timber vessels
- General design aspects of fitting out of traditional vessels
- Maintenance scheduling
- Documentation of museum vessels
- Restoration procedures for heritage vessels
- Bronze casting for shipwrights

By investigating the policy and practice of maritime conservation in the US context, it was the Fellow's aim to enhance his own skills base and bring valuable insight and knowledge to his work practices here in Australia and, in turn, pass on these capabilities to others in the industry.

This was achieved by:

- Working with shipwrights and staff at the Mystic Sea Port: Museum of America and the Sea.
- Visiting and talking with staff about teaching and restoration practices at the International Yachting Restoration School in Rhode Island.
- Attending a bronze-casting course for shipwrights at the Wooden Boat School, Maine.
- Visiting maritime museums and meeting staff at the Herreshoff Marine Museum.
- Talking with timber boat restoration industry staff around New England.
- Attending the 17th annual Wooden Boat Show, where Dunn met with industry people and attended various related seminars.

Prior knowledge and personal experience was drawn on for comparative purposes when compiling this report. Knowledge and skills were gained with the purpose of transference to a wider base of specialist artisans and tradespeople. This will be achieved through workshops, seminars, public talks and education programs both within the Australian National Maritime Museum and elsewhere among the traditional and wooden boat community.