



Friends of Mandurah Museum Newsletter

August 2021

The Leviathan, also known as *Black Bess*, was one of the largest wooden cargo boats ever built in Mandurah. She ended her short life of less than two years only two kilometres from where she was built on the shore of Soldier's Cove.

Mandurah before World War One was not the developed city that we know today. 'The Fremantle Road', as the route to Perth was known, consisted of a sand track studded with treacherous limestone boulders that could take days to travel. While a railway line from Perth to Pinjarra had been built by 1894, goods had to then be loaded onto wagons to be taken to Mandurah along Pinjarra Road, which could also be a hard road to travel.

The other option was to transport goods by boat. Many families in Mandurah had bought small boats with a shallow draft to clear the treacherous sand bar at the mouth of the Peel Inlet, while also being seaworthy enough to withstand the open ocean voyage to Fremantle. This could be a dangerous occupation, with several boats and men meeting tragic ends in storms or on the jagged reefs between the Peel Inlet and Garden Island. The need for larger and more seaworthy boats that could still clear the Mandurah bar was realised. That challenge was taken up by Charles Olaf Wilson.

"Old Mr Wilson was an unforgettable character as I remember him. He was a small man, very sprightly for his age, bare-headed and sported a huge yellow beard." – Stirling Tuckey

Charles Wilson was born in Scotland but spent most of his early years in Sweden. Tragedy then struck when both his parents were lost at sea. The young man, with no family ties and some carpentry skills, eventually joined the merchant marine. At 21 he made his way to New Zealand. However, he didn't stay long, remarking later in life: "It was raining when I arrived, and raining when I left!" Following a stint in Victoria, he travelled to a place much less used to rain, Menzies in the WA Goldfields. Tragically his wife, thirty years Charles' junior, passed away at Mount Morgan on the 28th of May 1905. By 1911 Charles, along with his two sons and two daughters, had settled in Mandurah.

(Cont. page 2.)

From the Editor As we draw to the end of one of the wettest and coldest winters we have experienced in recent years, we hope we bring you an edition of this newsletter packed with interesting news and information. It also includes an invitation to attend an opening of an exhibition at MPAC. The museum is mounting an exhibition there on the Leviathan. Many of you have commented on our splendid mural of Charles Wilson and his boat *Leviathan*, which has drawn many visitors to the museum.

Also included is one of our volunteer's articles relating to her visits to museums in South Australia during a recent road trip. This included a visit to a Fishing Boat Museum at Port Pirie.

Katrina has been busy and there is information relating to her school visits. Don't forget to check out the school holiday activities for the children.

Nicholas' article on the Leviathan is largely information prepared for the exhibition. He has also been busy ensuring that the museum and its artifacts are protected while we are closed. We have broken with our normal tradition and you will find the Museum Development report on the last page of this edition.

Lastly we include in this issue the request for yearly membership fees which become due on September 1st, and the nomination form for our next A.G.M. where we will be electing a new Vice- Chairman and Treasurer.

I hope you all stay safe, I am off to experience the wild-flowers which everyone says will be spectacular this year.

Jan Baker.

Special features.

**The Leviathan
Define Leviathan
Road Trip**

**Nicholas Reynolds.
Jan Baker.
Christine Steer.**

Regular Features.

Education Matters
Exhibitions
Museum D.O. Info
Friends & Volunteer Activities.

Kat Gauci.
Kat Gauci.
Nicholas Reynolds.

Leviathan (cont) Like many former miners the Wilsons found themselves looking for a life after the initial Kalgoorlie goldrush began to fade. In a fishing community like Mandurah, they had the ability to use Mr Wilson Snr's carpentry skills to get the family started as commercial fishermen. Between 1911 and 1916 they quickly constructed two 16 -18-foot boats named the *Ellen* and the *Doris* which provided the two sons with a living.

The need for a large vessel such as the *Leviathan* in Mandurah was realised after the Fremantle business, Bolton's, bought the old timber mill in Soldier's Cove. They purchased and refitted the mill in order to make wagon wheel spokes and wooden parts for vehicles out of local Tuart timber. Tuart is one of the hardest Australian woods and will not corrode metal fixtures used with it. One of the growing demands for Tuart was for use in the wooden spoked wheels of the increasing number of cars on WA roads. The Soldier's Cove location was ideal as Tuart trees in the local area could be felled and milled, before the finished parts were loaded directly on to boats for shipment to Fremantle.

And so, in 1915, Charles Wilson's son Joe was able to use the Agricultural Hall in Pinjarra Road to design *Leviathan* and carry out the 'lofting' of the patterns for the boat during the summer school holidays. Mr. Dalrymple, the principal of the Mandurah School gave Joe one week to complete the planning before the hall was needed for the new school year. The work was able to be completed in such a tight timeframe by calling on the Wilsons' previous experience building their two fishing boats.

Shortly after, Charles laid *Leviathan's* keel on the banks of Soldier's Cove north of the mill which would eventually provide the cargo for the new boat. Remarkably, Charles was 80 at the time. His age may go some way in explaining why, while working mainly alone as his sons were now commercial fishermen, the ship wasn't ready to be launched until 1920. Even when *Leviathan* did finally slide slowly down into the water of the Peel Inlet, it is said that she was completed without hatch covers other than light tarpaulins. Also, the boat's ribs were left exposed inside the hull. Nevertheless, with her long building time, and the Wilsons' need to generate some income, it was vital to get *Leviathan* to work as soon as possible.

Unfortunately, *Leviathan*, known locally as *Black Bess* due to her new dark paintwork, only made eight voyages to Fremantle before disaster struck. While her design was to be of as shallow a draft as possible, with most of her keel made inside the ship's hull, the heavy loads of timber that she carried left her sitting low in the water. The boat had grounded temporarily on the shallow sand bar at the mouth of the estuary several times but had managed to be got free. However, her eighth voyage was to be her last.

Heavily loaded, and despite now having an engine fitted to help her manoeuvre over the treacherous bar, the vessel with Billy Roberts as skipper became stuck once more. This time, nothing could be done to free her, although strenuous efforts lasted for a week. When, finally, rough weather set in, waves crashed over her stern and destroyed the light tarpaulins that covered the ship's hatches. She was soon filled with water and sand, her fate now sealed. As the vessel broke up, she became a macabre tourist attraction, with locals and visitors alike flocking to Town Beach to see four years of Charles Wilson's hard work destroyed. Some say the wreck of his beloved boat hastened his death, only three years after the wreck.

Nicholas Reynolds



The Tragedy of Black Bess

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the sinking of *Leviathan*, also known as *Black Bess*, the Mandurah Performing Arts Centre will be hosting an exhibition presented by the Mandurah Museum and produced in association with RT Kids and James Walker.

This is the story of sail boat *Leviathan* and boat builder Charles Olaf Wilson. This exhibition explores the significance *Leviathan* and Mr Wilson played in the maritime history of Mandurah.

The Tragedy of *Black Bess* opens Wednesday 25 August at ManPAC and is on display until Tuesday 21 September.

Dates: Wednesday 25 August - Tuesday 21 September

Days: Monday - Friday 10am - 5pm

Cost: Free



Where:
Mandurah Performing Arts Centre - The Mezzanine on Level one
9 Ormsby Terrace, Mandurah WA 6210
Phone 9550 3650
mandurah.wa.gov.au

Friends of Mandurah Museum will have received an earlier mailout of the invitation on page 5. We are hoping to see you there on the opening day. However, if you are unable to attend, we hope you will visit the exhibition while it is open, see above.



Renewal of membership now due, 01/09/2021

Friends of Mandurah Museum Membership

Please complete out the details below:

I/We.....hereby
renew membership of Friends of Mandurah Museum.

Address.....
Town/suburb.....Postcode.....
Telephone (Home).....(Mob).....
Email.....
Current Date.....

Membership fees

Family or Single \$10.00 per annum

Pay by EFTPOS, cash, or please make cheques payable to:

Friends of Mandurah Museum

PO Box 210, Mandurah 6210

Street address, 3 Pinjarra Rd, Mandurah

Bank Transfer: Bendigo Bank Halls Head Branch

BSB 633-000, Acc No: 179671508

Museum Education Officer

Katrina Gauci

The Museum has been closed since May. I have been working from the City of Mandurah Libraries. The staff have made me feel very welcome.

Excursions

I was very pleased with the number of schools that had an excursion, given the uncertainty of the changing Covid-19 regulations and the Museum being closed for renovations. 317 students participated in curriculum linked history activities through the months of May and June.

Incursions

During May and June, I conducted incursions to fifteen classes of students. This is where I visit schools to deliver lessons to engage students with history. This increase was due to the challenge teachers faced when arranging excursions to ensure Covid-19 regulations were followed and due to the Museum closure for renovations.

Educational Loan Boxes

The Museum Educational Loan Boxes have been more popular this year compared to others. These resources are available for teachers to borrow and use in their classes. I am extremely busy planning with teachers, the picking up and returning of Museum resource boxes from one of the libraries. Each of the boxes are checked for missing or damaged items and the items are disinfected before going to the next school.

School Holiday Programs

During the July Holidays, I assisted at Lakelands Library with the activities they had programmed. Due to Covid-19 regulations, these were the first face to face activities held and all the activities were fully booked.

School Holidays: Sept-Oct

Make a Wooden Train

This activity is perfect to train enthusiasts. Build and decorate a wooden train to take home.

Come and have a look at the model trains on display.

Where: Falcon Library

When: Wed 29 September & Wed 6 October

Time: 10.30am-11.30am

Suitable for 5–11 years.

Cost: Free

Bookings required; places are limited. To book, contact 08 9550 3650 or manlib@mandurah.wa.gov.au

Please wait for confirmation of your booking before attending the workshop.



Curious Community Collectibles

This is a display case dedicated to the community of Mandurah. It invites people of all ages to display their collection for a month. This has been available for the general community to use since 2018.

The display case is at Falcon Library.

To celebrate NAIDOC Week during July, Aboriginal Artefacts and Riverside Primary School's Aboriginal inspired artwork were on display.

To celebrate National Science Week in August, ceramic food artwork from Lakelands Primary was on display.



The artwork included 3D cakes with a slice missing and ceramic boxes in the shape of a slice of cake.



As an adjunct to our holiday activity to make a wooden train, there is an exhibition of heritage and current model trains.

Do you have a collection you would like to display? Please contact me if you do.



What is in a name? As mentioned in Stirling Tuckey's memories, Mandurah locals mainly knew the *Leviathan* as *Black Bess*. However, she was launched as the *Leviathan* and sailed under that name. I was curious to know why she was given the name, so firstly looked up the definition of *Leviathan*.

Definition of *leviathan*

sea monster defeated by Yahweh in various scriptural accounts (from the Old Testament)

a large sea animal this *leviathan* of animals is the great Blue Whale---

a sea monster, variously thought of as a reptile or a whale.

the political state, a totalitarian state having a vast bureaucracy

Something unusually large of its kind, especially a ship.

Anything huge or very powerful.

A quick trawl through the internet threw up quite a few definitions, some of which I have included above. It is clear that *Leviathan* means huge. Megamouth, behemoth are just a few similar ways of describing an extremely large being. Having sought the definition, I wondered what would have interested old Olaf Wilson to call her by that name. She was by no means a huge ocean-going ship, although she did put to sea in coastal waters. Multiple ocean-going ships have been named *Leviathan*, including the USS *Leviathan* whose history is worth taking note of.

She was the German ship *Vaterland* 'Pride of the German passenger fleet,' at anchor in American waters when the United States declared war on Germany during the Second World War. Seized and renamed the *Leviathan* and converted into an army transport, she transported thousands of American troops to and from the war. In 2018, prior to another departure for Europe, many of the men and some of the nurses aboard were overcome with the Spanish Flu. At this time there were believed to be around 12,000 crew and army men and 200 nurses on board. After the war, she was again repurposed as a luxury passenger liner. Considered to be the safest ship in the world she was also believed to be the fastest during her trial trip after reconversion in 1923.

Leviathan continued in service until 1934 when due to high operating costs she was laid up in New York Harbour until 1938, when she sailed for Scotland and was scrapped.

Having done the research, I wondered what would have interested old Olaf Wilson to call his boat by that name. She was by no means a huge ocean-going ship, although she did put to sea in coastal waters.

However, we also know that Olaf Wilson came to Mandurah via the Goldfields, and it was there in the Yilgarn District that the Great *Leviathan* Mine was being built. Indeed, there were several *Leviathan* mines both in Western Australia, and also in the Northern Territory. Both the ship and the mine would be specific to the early post World War One timeline. **Jan Baker.**



Painting of the SS *Leviathan* from ship's menu

Museums on a road trip.

In mid April we set off for a 3 month road trip across the Nullarbor and up the Stuart Highway. We then turned west at Katherine and travelled through the Kimberley's and then home via the inland road. We travelled 14,005 kms and gained a wonderful insight into the size and uniqueness of our country.

During the trip we visited as many local museums that we could find. Some were themed such as the Ghan and Road Transport Museum in Alice Springs. We went underground to learn about the history of opal mining in Coober Pedy and learned about the rocket development and test facilities at the Woomera Museum. We even visited the Penfolds Museum in Adelaide.

At Yulara we visited the Cultural Centre where displays explored the foundations of culture and important creation stories of Uluru.

During our stay at Port Pirie we visited the Railway Museum which is housed in the Colonial Railway Station precinct. The building has been restored and is full of memorabilia and displays. On the foreshore near the fishing boats and jetty's stands the Molfetsi Fishing Boat Museum. The centrepiece of this purposed built museum is a beautifully restored 19 foot timber plank fishing boat



"Elizabeth". The museum also includes artefacts, photographs, maps and drawings relating the history of the industry. It was a unique way of highlighting and celebrating the contribution that fishing had made to the history of Port Pirie.

We returned to Mandurah and winter. Time to catch up with family and friends.

Christine Steer.



The Tragedy of Black Bess



You are invited to join us for the launch
of the Mandurah Performing Arts
Centre's new exhibition

The Tragedy of Black Bess

To be opened by Museum Development Officer
Nicholas Reynolds and Artist James Walker

Wednesday 25 August at 3.30pm

ManPAC

The Mezzanine on Level one

9 Ormsby Terrace, Mandurah WA 6210

RSVP Mandurah Museum

17 August 2021

T (08) 9550 3650

E museum@mandurah.wa.gov.au



Above - Attempts to refloat the *Leviathan*.

Below - The skeletal remains of the *Leviathan*.

Far Below - on the 'Bar'.



Wednesday 4th August saw Friends of
Mandurah Museum come together for a
Coffee and Chat.

Sixteen of us gathered together to talk
about what we had been doing during
the museum's closure and to hope for its
re-opening shortly.



The Friends were looked after well by the staff of
Sunbreakers Restaurant which was a lovely venue to
meet in during our rather cold and wet winter.

It is hoped that we might be able to repeat this event
shortly. If not then we hope to see you all for the
A.G.M. which is to be held on the 11th of November.
Notices will be sent out prior to this meeting.



Christmas in July for Volunteers.

On what became a normal July day for this year, volunteers of the Mandurah Museum met to enjoy a Christmas event, almost like they might have in a normal Christmas in the Northern Hemisphere.

It had been quite a few weeks since many had come together and with the museum closed this was an opportunity to bond and tell all the news. It was universally agreed that we were missing the museum and hoped it would be able to re-open soon.

Several volunteers had found other activities to do but it hadn't stopped them joining us. We hope that all will return to our lovely space as soon as it opens.



Above - Nick Reynolds & Ceylene Copley.

Ceylene is on the road to recovery.

Left - Dave Austin, Col Warne, Chris Mailey & Debra Armstrong.

Top Left -

Christmas in July with Volunteers of Mandurah Museum.

Right - Backs turned, Ursula Brimble, Michael McGhie.

Visible is Kaye Toussaint & Dave Austin.

Sadly our normal photographer, Kat Gauci was unwell and didn't attend. Your editor apologises for the poor photography and asks if anyone has some better photos could they please send them to me.



Museum Development Officer. On the 10th of July the latest meeting of the Peel Chapter of the Australian Museums and Galleries Association was hosted by the Murray Districts Historical Society at Edenvale in Pinjarra. Beyond the usual information sharing amongst the various Museums and Historical Societies of the Peel a presentation was given by Vince Taylor on the ongoing conservation works to the buildings at the Old Blythewood heritage site. This was extremely interesting in terms of both the original 1840s material and construction methods revealed and some of the pitfalls often experienced when undertaking work on heritage buildings.

I wonder if anyone has seen the montages of historical images that have been placed on the walls of the Tod's cafes both in town and over on the Hall's Head side? Some of these images were purchased from the Museum's collection while others were sourced from various locals and the State Library collection. They make for a good mix, with some of the colour photos from the 1960s making a refreshing change from the older black and whites. Check them out next time you're out and about for a coffee.

One of the tasks which I've taken the opportunity to carry out while the Museum is closed is oiling and freshening up the floor in the schoolroom. I



was keen to get Joe the Sander back in to do this as he originally re-finished the floor when the schoolroom was re-developed. He's a consummate professional who has a great understanding of older wood floors. As you can see from the photo, all marks have been removed just through a light polish and oiling. In the end there wasn't much required to get the wood back to a great condition which bodes well for the ongoing life of the original boards.



On the 4th of August I gave a presentation on the Museum and general Mandurah history to the Mandurah Ladies' Proboscis Club. Their meetings are held at the main bowling club. The audience of around 60 were very appreciative of what they learned. It's great to be out and about still getting the history message out to the community during this time. I was ably hosted by Derise Caddy's cousin for the presentation, who interestingly enough, is also named Derise!

While travelling between libraries a few days ago, something which both Katrina and I have been doing quite a bit of lately, I thought I'd make a stop in Hall's Head. I'd been wondering how all the rain we've been having this winter had affected the old soak that George Winjan (Yaburgurt) used to camp around on Sutton's Farm. While the canals have done much to keep the old soak dry, I was sure that this winter there must at least be a little water there. As you can see in the photo that I took, there's a reasonable amount which made me smile. Enough, apparently, for a pair of ducks! Even in today's busy Hall's Head you can still find a moment of peace and tranquillity which can give you a glimpse of what it would have been like in times long past.

Nicholas Reynolds.



**Mandurah Museum,
3 Pinjarra Rd,
MANDURAH WA 6210.**

Telephone: 9550 3680.

Email: museum@mandurah.wa.gov.au

Internet: www.mandurah.wa.gov.au/Facilities/Museum/Friends

**Due to refurbishment, the museum is
closed until further notice.**

**Friends of Mandurah Museum,
3 Pinjarra Rd,
MANDURAH WA 6210.**

Meetings 4 times per year as notified.

The mission of the Friends is to provide assistance and support to the Museum in all its endeavours. The 'Friends' also seek to promote the heritage and history of Mandurah, and to assist other like minded bodies.

Membership of the Friends is by a yearly membership fee of \$10 due each August.



**NOMINATION FOR ELECTION
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
November 2020.**

Nominations are invited for the election of Vice - Chairperson and Treasurer at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting on Thursday **11th November, 2021**. This nomination form must be in the hands of the Secretary by **Friday 22nd October**.

Positions for election or re-election, Chairperson, Secretary & committee.

NOMINATION DETAILS

The Chairperson
Friends of Mandurah Community Museum.
2 Pinjarra Rd,
MANDURAH. WA. 6210

Dear Madam

Iam a **full and financial**
member of the Friends, and wish to nominate for election to the office of

.....
At the forthcoming Annual General Meeting

Nominees signature..... Date /...../2021

My nomination is proposed by

.....

Proposer's signature.....Date...../...../2021

And seconded by

Seconder's signature.....Date...../...../2021