

Race for survival

maritime heritage

MIKE GERBER reports on a fight to save a ship ranked as highly as the Cutty Sark...

SOME claim the City of Adelaide — a once illustrious 19th century British clipper — is of even greater historical significance than the Cutty Sark. Yet the vessel is rotting away on a slipway leased by the Scottish Maritime Museum, and the museum has given up on any possibility of raising the funds to preserve and eventually restore her.

Two cities a world apart — Sunderland and Adelaide — have historic and emotional stakes in this ship, and both have ardent lobby groups that are seeking to raise the readies to take City of Adelaide off the museum's hands and save her.

Built at the William Pile and Hay shipyard, Sunderland in 1864 for London merchants Devitt and Moore, City of Adelaide is nearly six years older than Cutty Sark — the only other surviving composite clipper — and is similarly ranked among our top 10 National Historic Ships.

Her significance in the early development of Australia cannot be overstated. City of Adelaide completed some 23 trips in as many years carrying British and German immigrants to Adelaide in the new colony of South Australia, and returning to London loaded with wool, wheat and copper.

At the time, she was the fastest passenger clipper, capable of making the trip to Australia in only 64 days. Some quarter million Australians are reckoned to be descendants of those immigrants.

'It is difficult to imagine a more vital icon of the making of modern Australia, and of the relationship between Britain and the Australian colonies,' says the website of the Save the Clipper Ship City of Adelaide Action Group.

The group has been campaigning for some 10 years in South Australia, the state of which Adelaide is the capital. Its website at <http://cityofadelaideclipper.org> is packed with fascinating historical information, including the 1864 to 1865 crew list.

According to Traditional Boats & Tall Ships magazine, the Australians 'realised some time ago that a full Au\$40m restoration of the clipper would not be possible, and their focus has since shifted



from restoration to preservation. They are working hard with the state government to secure the Au\$3.5m needed to move her overseas.'

Not if the Sunderland City of Adelaide Recover Foundation (Scarf) gets its way — and, unlike the Australians, its plans include an eventual full restoration. The Telegraph learned about Scarf's campaign through Nautilus member Aidan Osmialowski, whose father, John, is on Scarf's committee.

John, a salesman who began working

life as an apprentice marine engineer, says: 'We do need to save some of our maritime heritage.'

But what if the Australian group got the Adelaide? He's philosophical. 'It's like that biblical story, about the baby (King Solomon) — it's got to be saved, whoever gets it.'

Scarf's chairman, Sunderland councillor Peter Maddison, is adamant that his city is the natural home for the vessel. 'After 600 years of building ships, we can claim to have an even greater emotional and physical relationship with that ship. We built her, and our need as a city and people is greater than the Australians.'

So committed is Cllr Maddison, he named his daughter Adelaide after the ship, and saving it is the reason he entered politics as an independent. 'I got involved with local politics because I saw the great need for regeneration to happen in the city. The Adelaide is the blue touch paper which will reignite that regeneration. Every city needs its iconic symbol to tell the rest of world who we are and what were about and Sunderland was once the greatest shipbuilding city in the world.'

Cllr Maddison was in the Royal Marine Volunteer Reserve when City of Adelaide, renamed HMS Carrick, was used as RNVR's HQ club on the Clyde in



LEFT TO RIGHT: Bow view, Irvine Slipway
Adelaide as she was
On the slipway, from the stern
In the hold, 2004 PICTURES: SCOTTISH MARITIME MUSEUM

Glasgow. His seagoing career began when he joined his first ship in Rotterdam as junior engineer. 'I was in the British and Norwegian merchant navies. I ended up as skipper and owner of a 20m Norwegian old wood sailing ship built in 1913. I sailed as electrician, as AB, as old wooden boat restorer, rigger and crew. So I know about restoration projects, what can be done and how to do it.'

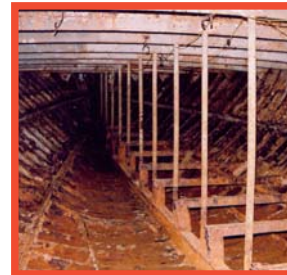
In fact, Scarf can call on a broad range of specialist ability — including architects, designers, and former shipwrights, shipyard workers and engineer officers.

Scarf is calling for donations to help raise £2m, but estimates that far less is needed initially to transport the ship to Sunderland. 'A recovery company in Rotterdam has calculated that we could do the job for less than £400,000,' Cllr Maddison explains. 'More importantly than the money, we've had to demonstrate to National Historic Ships, and the Scottish Maritime Museum that not only are we capable of recovering the ship but we are capable of sustaining a 25-year full restoration project,' he adds. 'That is going to take millions. What's important is that they feel confident that Scarf and the people of Sunderland are going to look after that ship.'

Scarf has already raised half that initial £400,000, and Cllr Maddison reveals that he has just returned from a highly promising meeting with a Sunderland businessman: 'He's joined Scarf, he's a Sunderland patriot and determined that that ship will be brought back to Sunderland and willing to commit his money, time and contacts to that cause. We're working towards a recovery date in September.'

Will that be too late though? The Telegraph has been in touch with Scottish Maritime Museum acting director Jim Tildesley. The reason the vessel is in Scotland, he points out, is because that is where she spent the greater part of her life. In 1887 she was sold to the bulk cargo trade, used as a Newcastle to Dover collier, then as a transatlantic timber carrier. Southampton Corporation bought her in 1893 for service as a cholera collier, then as a transatlantic timber carrier. Southampton Corporation bought her in 1893 for service as a cholera collier, then as a transatlantic timber carrier.

Scotland enters the frame in 1923 when, bought by the Admiralty and renamed HMS Carrick, she functioned as a RNVR drill training ship in Greenock, as a WW2 merchant ship



gunner and detention centre for deserters, and post-war as an RNVR club.

After she sank a second time, the museum acquired her for a token £1 in 1992 and moved her to a slipway in Irvine owned by Ayrshire Metal Products. There she has lain ever since.

Mr Tildesley said the museum acquired the City of Adelaide prior to the reorganisation of local government in Scotland and initially had no problem in raising the first £1m to save the vessel, and to start restoration. However, after re-organisation bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund and other trusts and government agencies would not support the museum's projects, as there was no guarantee of adequate revenue on a long-term basis.

'With no funding, no support from HLF and a requirement to move the vessel, the trustees had no choice but to dispose of the ship,' he added.

Disposal would allow for the retention of the bow, stern and a midships frame by the museum, subject to funding. If funding is not available then a small number of sample materials will be retained.

There can be no further delays without jeopardising the future of Scotland's entire national maritime collection, Mr Tildesley warns. 'The only way to prevent deconstruction now is for an organisation to guarantee they can remove the vessel from the slipway in a matter of months. To do that, our experts believe that they must have around £1m ready to spend and be able to commence work by early summer.'

Unless Scarf or the Australians can raise the funds quickly, they both risk missing the boat.

For further information about the Sunderland City of Adelaide Recover Foundation, or to pledge a donation, go to www.cityofadelaide1864.co.uk. Or contact Cllr Peter Maddison at 19 Azalea Ave, Sunderland, SR2 7EY, or phone him on 07908 520 842.



The 20th anniversary of closure of the last shipyard in Sunderland, outside the yard gates. Peter Maddison's daughter Adelaide is the girl sitting on the red ensign PICTURE: COURTESY OF EASTWISE PUBLICATIONS