

Parappa



NEWSLETTER

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Parappa is an historic Tasmanian fishing boat that was built in 1915 by E.A. Jack, at Trevallyn, in Launceston. Built of huon pine planks on hardwood frames, *Parappa* is typical of the lightly constructed fishing boats turned out by the Jack boatyard in the early 1900s. She was probably not built to last almost 100 years, but with the almost indestructible huon pine hull and careful handling by her several owners, she has survived into the 21st century.

Parappa has been used throughout her entire career as a fishing boat in southern Tasmania, and has been maintained, repaired, adapted and modernised to keep her as a competitive working boat in the Tasmanian fishing industry. But with the death of her owner of over 50 years, Scotty Jager, she was retired from service in 2004. An upgrade to modern fishing boat standard was attempted before her retirement, but it became apparent that the basic wooden hull was not competitive with modern boats. With steel, aluminium and fiberglass hulls being more robust than wooden vessels, and with the move to more powerful diesel engines that allow greater speed, and the extensive use of hydraulics and electronics, *Parappa* admitted she was outclassed and went into graceful retirement.

Over the 96 years of her life, extensive and frequent changes were made, and *Parappa* now incorporates a

record of technological and social change that is well worth preserving. When built in 1915, *Parappa* was designed and fitted out to a good standard for the time, but as our standard of living and real incomes increased, it became possible to enhance and improve the boat. In fact, for her owners, skippers and crew to continue to make an adequate living in competition with more modern boats, upgrading and enhancement was essential. Over the years, the deck has been raised to provide more freeboard in rough conditions, and a wheelhouse has been added. The engine has been replaced about 10 times, and sails have been replaced regularly as they wore out. The rig was simplified as engines became more powerful and steering has been changed from tiller to wheel, driven by a modern hydraulic system.



Parappa in 1921



Parappa on the slip at Dover in April 2004. The external appearance remains the same today.

Finishing the pre-2004 major upgrade

Before *Parappa* was retired and purchased by the current owner in 2004, a major upgrade had been started to make her into a modern fishing boat for working offshore around southern Tasmania. Much had been completed, but many items remained unfinished. Since 2004 most of the unfinished items have been tackled and many completed.

A new aluminium wheelhouse had been fitted, replacing a smaller wooden one. Inside the wheelhouse a console at the front holds controls and instruments for the engine, genset, lights and ancillary equipment such as pumps. The wheelhouse had been fitted out but most of the work was fairly rough, except for some nice Tasmanian myrtle paneling. In 2010 the old fitout was removed and replaced by better quality work, incorporating more myrtle timber. A bunk for the skipper was incorporated, as well as a chart table, and overhead lockers. The navigational instruments and radios were repositioned to a beam above the helmsman's head, and cable ducts were built to accommodate the mass of cables going from the engine room and the wheelhouse roof to the console.

Before the 2004 change of ownership there had been a major upgrade to the electrical system, with the installation of a generator producing 24V, 240V and 415V. The intention had been to install refrigerated tanks in the well. The boat had been professionally rewired with 240V and 24V lights and power points in the wheelhouse, engine room and fo'c'sle. The high capacity bilge pump had been converted to run from a 240V electric motor driven from the generator. Beneath the wheelhouse console a complex of controls and wiring catered for this equipment.

As part of the upgrade the existing Bedford diesel engine was refurbished by fitting new rings, bearings some pistons and injection pump, and a new drive shaft with a packless shaft seal was fitted. New aluminium fuel and water tanks were fitted between the well outer wall and the hull (but no fuel gauges!). But some mechanical items were left unfinished, such as

the coolant header tank not secured, several engine mount bolts missing, the electrical engine stop inoperative, and the oil pressure gauge connected by plastic tube, which melted on first use!

A major component of the pre-2004 upgrade was the installation of a hydraulic system. The steering had been converted to hydraulic, with two enormous rams operating the rudder shaft. At the same time a hydraulic pot hauler and anchor winch had been installed.

Fitout of the fo'c'sle had been commenced before 2004 but was incomplete and unsuccessful. The hull had been lined with myrtle vertical-jointed wall paneling with bunks and a galley built. A fridge and 240V electric range had been installed and a galley sink was provided, but water piping and pumps were not installed. After the change of ownership the entire fo'c'sle fitout was removed, partly to provide access to the bilge. The sole was lifted, to reveal an amazing compost of boulders, old cement rubble, and rusted iron ballast. After clearing out, the cement lining against the hull was repaired and lead ballast installed under a new sole. The fo'c'sle was left unlined, with hull and ribs left exposed to allow for air circulation. Workshop facilities were built in the fo'c'sle in 2008, but these will soon be moved to the well and the fo'c'sle redeveloped as galley and accommodation.

As part of the pre-2004 refit, an attempt was made to close up the well by blocking the 96 water circulation holes in the hull. As described later, much more work was needed to make the well watertight.

The major item that was omitted from the refit was strengthening of the hull. It was evident that the hull had never been re-nailed - ie, the copper nails that fix the external huon pine planks to the internal hardwood ribs had never been replaced. Some were corroded away, while most were loose, allowing too much movement in the hull. Some of the hardwood ribs were in poor condition, being partly rotted away, or broken. So a major three year project was undertaken to strengthen the hull by gluing splines between the hull planks, and reattaching planks to ribs with thousands of stainless steel screws.

The deck had had no attention for a long time and was leaking badly, so it was sealed with Sikaflex seams between boards and waterproofed with a vinyl membrane.

The next major task will be to re-install the original wooden mast and boom, mainly for the purpose of preserving the mast. New standing rigging will be required as none of the old standing or running rigging or sails have been preserved. Later, perhaps, a new set of sails will provide some security against engine failure.



Moving the mast, January 2011. Re-installing the mast is the next major project.

Parappa today - Modernising the well

The history of *Parappa*, since she was built in 1915, has been of continuous modification to make her workable for earning a living. One of the changes, commenced but not concluded in the major upgrade pre-2004, was to close up the well and install refrigerated tanks for fish storage.

Typical of fishing boats of her era, *Parappa* was built with a wet well for storage of fish between catching and landing at market. With fishing trips commonly lasting a fortnight, there was a need to keep tons of fish or crayfish alive and in good condition.

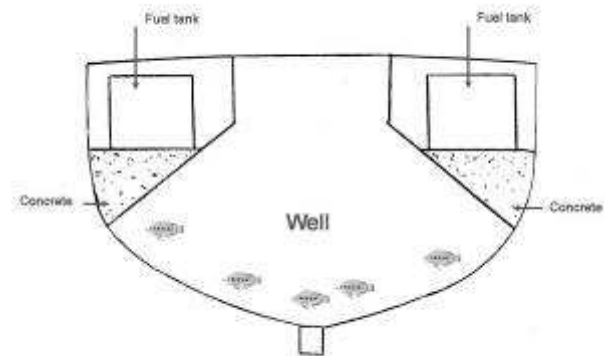
The well would comfortably hold about 80 score of crayfish - at 24 to a Tasmanian fisherman's score, that is about 2000 crayfish. Max Smith told me in 2008 that the most he had seen in the well was 90 score, which filled it to overflowing. If there were a lot of crays a rack would be put in halfway down, so the bottom ones did not get crushed. He remembered getting 90 score in three days at Maatsuyker Island, and having some stacked in bags on top of



Des Beechey and Irene Briant inspecting the well in August 2004

the well.

A wet well is essentially a watertight tank within the boat; seawater comes into the well through holes in the hull, but does not enter the rest of the boat. In *Parappa*, the well is unusually large, occupying almost one third of the length of the boat, forward of the engine room and aft of the fo'c'sle. The well is as deep as the boat, occupying the space from the keel up to deck level, in *Parappa* this being about 2.5 m. The four sides of the well slope inwards towards the top, the well being the full width of the boat for its lower half, but narrowing to a little over a metre at deck level. The upper well walls are of huon pine, in planks 2 inches thick and 12 inches wide (50 mm x 300 mm), which would be difficult (as well as expensive) to source today. The well was covered by removable timber boards, as shown in the picture



Cross section of the hull amidships, showing the location of the well.

above. Between the well and the outer hull is concrete ballast, with fuel and water tanks on top.

When the modernisation of *Parappa* was undertaken by Paul Delaney from about 2000, it was planned to close up the well and install refrigerated tanks. A wet well is a simple and usually effective arrangement, but it has its drawbacks. Fish in the well



A new keel top, more ribs and new floors were installed in the well.

must have a good supply of pure salt water, so when the well is full the boat must be kept moving to keep sea water circulating. And sheltering in areas such as river mouths where there would be too much fresh water would not be possible with a well-loaded well. So the more modern approach is to use refrigerated tanks or freezers, but these require substantial electrical power to operate them.

Modernising the well (Cont.)

The 96 holes providing sea water circulation were closed with wooden plugs, but it was discovered that they were not the only, perhaps not even the major, source of sea water for the well. Over the years the junction between the bottom hull plank on each side of the keel had opened up, partly because of deterioration of the planks and partly because of crayfish



Five tonnes of lead ballast was needed in the well to compensate for increased buoyancy

scrapping away at the timber. The bottom of the well had been lined with a few inches of concrete, possibly for ballast, but most likely to provide protection to the timber from crayfish.

Extensive work on the keel and hull timbers was needed to make the well properly watertight. The top three inches (75 mm) of deteriorated keel timber was removed and a new keel top glued into place. Sections of the lower hull planks that were supposed to meet the keel were replaced to give good, tight joins. And new floor timbers were installed ("floors" are timbers that support the floor we stand on).

With closure of the well, the buoyancy of the vessel increased substantially. When the sea was able to circulate through the well, the volume of the well did not contribute at all to making the boat float. But when the sea was excluded there was an additional air space inside the hull providing buoyancy, and the boat floated about 12 inches (300 mm) higher in the water. To counteract this, 5 tonnes of lead ballast was placed in the well, supported by the new strengthened floors. As the weight of the new wheelhouse put the trim down at the stern, most of this ballast was placed at the front of the well.

With the well watertight and new ballast in place, the space provided in the well could now be utilised. As *Parappa* has been retired from fishing, the plan to install refrigerated tanks was not appropriate, so it was decided to convert the space to workshop and gear storage. This provided a challenge, as utilising a space that is three metres wide at the bottom but

only one metre wide at head height required a creative approach. Shelving was constructed along both sides of the well along half its length for storage of tools and materials and for boat gear such as ropes, fenders and lifejackets.

Conversion of the well has been completed in January 2011 with the building of a deckhouse over the well, to create a dry working space. The deckhouse is raised only about 18 inches (450 mm) above the deck, giving adequate headroom inside, but not impacting on the general appearance of the boat. It was built with a frame of 50 x 100 mm hardwood, with a roof of 120 x 35 mm hardwood planks. These were jointed with Sikaflex seams, giving an appearance the same as the existing deck. The sides were panelled with 13 mm thick vertical jointed hardwood, to match the existing vertical face at the rear of the fo'c'sle. All was painted in the same colours as the existing deck and wheelhouse.

When modernising fishing boats, it is usual for the well to be removed, as it is an awkward space to use, being wide at the bottom and narrow at the top. But the philosophy being taken with *Parappa* is to retain what is old, and build new structures to make the boat more functional, without interfering with the old. So the well structure has been left intact, complete with the partly decayed beams around the well at deck level, and the deckhouse put on top. If anyone ever feels so inclined, the deckhouse can be removed and the well exposed in its original state.



The new deckhouse over the well. Windows are yet to be put into the sides.

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