

***Polly Woodside* Tallship, Melbourne – National Trust of Australia (Victoria) Maintaining a sense of place in a changing landscape**

Section 1

This paper looks at how a partnership managed the successful transition of the *Polly Woodside* tallship into a successful tourism venture and heritage site as the urban landscape dramatically changed from 2005 to 2010.

The *Polly Woodside*, a deep water merchant sailing vessel that traded cargo around the globe from the late 19th Century and winner of the 1988 World Ship Trust Medal, is one of only a handful of tallships remaining in the world that reveal the shipping story of a maritime culture that has disappeared.

Since 1978 the *Polly Woodside* tallship had been the main attraction of a community maritime museum run by the National Trust and permanently moored afloat in Duke's and Orr's timber lined dry dock. The dock itself is a significant heritage site as a functioning remnant of the original Port of Melbourne located on the Yarra river within the commercial centre of the city of Melbourne in Australia from 1878 to 1975. The privately owned graving docks were an integral part of the heavy engineering and shipping industries spread all along this section of Melbourne's Yarra river.

In 2005 the State Government of Victoria decided on a partnership with private developers the Plenary / Multiplex consortium to invest a mix of private, public and state funding over \$367million to transform the original Port of Melbourne South Wharf on the southern side of the Yarra river. The state government vision was to transform an industrial district of rundown factories and cargo sheds disconnected from the city into an extension of the city's business centre on the northern side of the river and a natural continuation of Melbourne's central entertainment district, Southbank, on the eastern side.

The consortium plans included the creation of the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, Australia's largest 5000 seat international convention space, Direct Factory Outlets multi level shopping centres, a new 20 storey Hilton hotel and extensive riverside restaurant strips and clusters. Connecting traffic spines included 3000 car parks, walkways, bicycle paths, and \$25 million pedestrian footbridge spanning the river to reconnect the sides of the river to a new commercial heart of skysrise developments.

The challenge for the National Trust was how to successfully retain the *Polly Woodside* and Duke's dock as a last vestige of the original visual landscape and surviving link to Melbourne's maritime heritage in the midst of this transformed landscape. These challenges included resolving how to run the site as a commercially profitable enterprise as a cultural tourism destination without sacrificing the integrity of the site and ship.

Section 2

The National Trust had one principal objective – to secure the future of the *Polly Woodside*. This outcome required two different concurrent strategies.

In order to ensure the physical preservation of the ship the National Trust had to secure the preservation of the original site as a functioning dry dock in order to keep the ship afloat. This was a means of safely supporting the hull and regular dry docking provided for essential maintenance.

Equally establishing the long term financial sustainability of the *Polly Woodside* was an essential requirement to the physical preservation of the heritage site. The National Trust

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had this single opportunity with the funding released through the public private partnership to create an ongoing commercially successful enterprise to ensure its sustainability. The new site would need to engage with visitors and generate sufficient income from tourism. Only through success as an independent business operation could the *Polly Woodside* maintain her presence as an integrated part of the commercial development of South Wharf and not a redundant relic.

Section 3

Since 1978 the National Trust had leased extended grounds surrounding the Duke and Orr's docks from the State government at a peppercorn rent. The National Trust had operated the Melbourne Maritime Museum as the home of the *Polly Woodside* using a variety of surrounding cargo sheds and structures for over 27 years.

Negotiations with the Victorian Government's Major Projects division, construction firm Multiplex and the developer Plenary Group and the National Trust began in 2005. These negotiations continued in detail over the course of the project until 2010. In exchange for closure of the site for five years and a reduced footprint the Trust secured long term tenancy and a \$12.5 million investment in the site.

This guaranteed the *Polly Woodside* would remain as an integrated component in the masterplan for the complete South Wharf development. The agreement included using Multiplex to deliver all engineering and construction through their construction firm Contexx. Major Projects Victoria supervised the process and construction of the development and coordinated the relationship as well as additional funding. The Plenary group remain as the whole of site manager for MCEC and South Wharf. The National Trust independently manages its business operation the *Polly Woodside* under a long term lease to the Plenary group.

The total funding package with some additional funding included:

- \$8.5 million on the upgrade of the timber lined Duke dock into a functioning drop bridge dry dock
- \$2.5 million to restore the riverside Cargo Shed 4 into a commercial restaurant providing the *Polly Woodside* with a long term lease and income from tenant operator Riverland Pty Ltd.
- \$2.25 million to develop the site into a heritage tourist attraction

Additional project works for the *Polly Woodside* attraction included in the package:

- Storage of the collection
- Dry docking and ship maintenance on the *Polly Woodside*
- Reconstruction of Cargo Shed 2 shell with additional utilities as a visitor centre
- Fitout of a new Gallery / Museum about the *Polly Woodside*
- Fencing and landscaping around the redefined perimeter

Section 4

The original Melbourne Maritime Museum was a sprawling site of 1000 artefacts and ship models in assorted installations and buildings with visitors lead by volunteer guides. Visitation had steadily decreased from 120,000 visitors over 20 years to 30,000. The National Trust used the PPP capital injection to successfully change the fundamental nature of the site as a business operation and appealing tourist attraction. The commercial development of South Wharf and the partnership with Plenary meant the National Trust had

to meet the expectations of a commercial sector and compete in a retail environment for visitation.

The Trust project managed the reinterpretation of the site using Tandem architects and Round Design to create an imaginative layered space of 7 zones. Recently the interior of the new Polly Woodside gallery was featured in design magazine Artichoke. New ideas about ways to appeal to visitors and provide them with an experience included a rotating room to experience the motion of the sea, a realistic super-widescreen film, a robotic sailing ship controlled by a touchscreen, crawl spaces and costumes for small children, wall size graphics and just 76 artefacts on display in themed areas.

Visitors who board the ship are assigned crew roles and are lead by professional costumed character guides. The education program encourages students to operate the capstan, haul sails, man the helm and scrub the decks. School holiday pantomimes, Pirate Sundays, Cocktail and corporate functions and Pirate birthdays are programmed as additional sources of revenue and expand the use of the ship. Despite being a much smaller site visitors to the new Polly Woodside rated the new attraction as 9 or 10 out of ten as an experience in a Loyalty Zone market survey.

Section 5

The Trust faced many challenges negotiating this new environment. There was internal criticism from some core volunteers about the change of focus and diminution of the site. Negotiating with large corporations and developers lead to issues concerning heritage values of parts of South Wharf. Construction delays occurred because an external company on another project failed to make payments with the construction group. Some elements which seemed straight forward such as the fencing became the most difficult to negotiate and deliver while other complex elements such as the internal fitout of the gallery went relatively smoothly.

Currently the site is running successfully as a tourist drawcard and cementing its relationship in the heritage maritime community of Victoria building relationships with the growing fraternity of maritime heritage groups based at nearby Docklands. While building its relationship with the business community the Polly Woodside is an example of a heritage site that has transformed itself to fit into a new contemporary landscape.

Section 6

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Section 7

Root Projects Feasibility Study for the Melbourne Maritime Museum 2005
National Trust Agreement with Multiplex / Plenary Consortium
Melbourne Business School Project Evaluation 2011
National Trust Rationale and Concept for the Melbourne Maritime Museum 2005

Author profile

Martin Green managed the reinterpretation and redesign of the *Polly Woodside* from 2009 to 2011. He has worked in the Melbourne museums sector for eleven years including work as a

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Producer at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, developer of audio visuals at the Science and Life Gallery of the Melbourne Museum and previously worked for ABC television as a producer.