

# ALL ABOARD:

## Friends of Oscar W call for new volunteers...



By Sara Gilligan

Endless maintenance, wood collecting, and volunteer hours are what it takes to keep Goolwa's *PS Oscar W*'s steam-driven history alive.

The Friends of Oscar W meet at the town's wharf every Wednesday from 9am for a working bee and to run the Goolwa Riverboat Centre.

However, following last year's closure due to COVID-19, the centre's volunteer numbers are dwindling – made harder by new regulations which require a COVID marshal.

"We are always looking for volunteers, because we have a degree of transience, and it is good if we can get a cross section of skills," Wayne Burford told *The Southern Argus*.

"Some of us have got engineering backgrounds, some teacher backgrounds, sometimes combined, and those that have got some skills with timber versus those with steel – all are a great help.

"Generally, the maintenance of the boat tends to revolve around rust prevention, cutting it out and putting new pieces of steel where it has got really bad, along with wood rot."

The *PS Oscar W* is a steam-driven wood-fired authentic paddle steamer that was built in Echuca, Victoria in 1908.

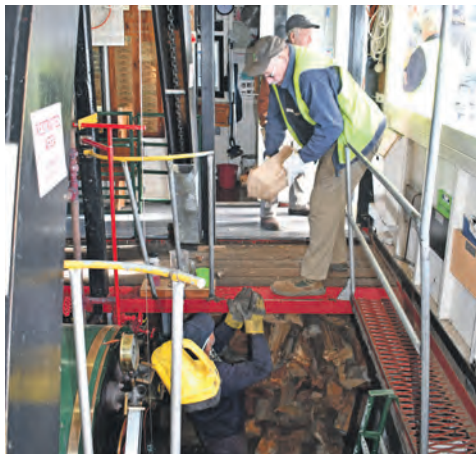
It can burn from a quarter to one third of a wood tonne per hour depending on the quality of the wood and the speed at which the paddle steamer is travelling.

Long-time 'friend' of the *PS Oscar W*, Roly Bartlett, said volunteering at the boat offered vast opportunities for people to be trained in all sorts of skills.

"People without maintenance skills would be ideally placed in the Riverboat Centre," he said.

"This involves talking to tourists, and is great for people with good social skills that can operate a cash register.

"We also have school groups and community groups come through and we



*Friends of Oscar W volunteers load wood used for fuel onto the boat.*

give them a talk and a tour of the boat.

"It's important to engage the local youth, because where else are the future volunteers going to come from?"

Wayne said after the boat's temporary closure, volunteer numbers dropped at the Riverboat Centre.

"People found other things to do during the COVID shutdown and unfortunately never came back," he said.

"We would love to keep the centre open every day of the week, but our current numbers don't allow it, so it's currently only open on Wednesdays and the weekend.

"We are also fearful of losing more volunteers once council's works on the wharf precinct begin.

"We're not sure where we fit into those plans yet, but I'd say we may have to relocate the boat temporarily and shut down the Riverboat Centre, but we aren't sure yet."

To Roly's knowledge, the *PS Oscar W* is the only paddle steamer in South Australia with the ability to tow.

In 2017, it tugged the Murray River Queen upstream on an epic 200-kilometre journey from Waikerie to Renmark.

"Personally, I would love the opportunity to rebuild the Dart barge, which requires significant repair and is



*A conveyor belt and human cue are used to load wood onto the *PS Oscar W* to provide fuel for the paddle steamer.*

sitting under the bridge, so the *Oscar* can tow it for tourism," Roly said.

"It would be a major drawcard of the Goolwa Wooden Boat Festival to have such a display.

"The boat festival brings in millions to the area."

Wayne encouraged anyone who may be able to donate wood to fuel the paddle steamer to get in contact with the group.

"We have conveyers to get the wood from land, across the wharf and onto the boat," he said.

"Where necessary we form a human cue to then pass the wood below deck

and that may be one load for the day or three loads for the day.

"People that are doing that have got to cut the wood into the right lengths and split it if it is a proper log, with a wood splitter."

Alexandrina Council currently owns the *PS Oscar W* and revenue raised by monthly cruises is returned to council to fund its maintenance.

Departing from the Goolwa wharf about twice a month, passengers can choose between a lunchtime cruise or one-hour cruises.

"People love to smell the steam oil and share in history," Roly said.

"It's a unique experience and a recording provides commentary on Goolwa's river history as the paddle wheels turn."

For more information on the *PS Oscar W* call the Riverboat Centre on 8555 7246, Roly Bartlett on 0408 159 998 or visit ([www.oscar-w.info](http://www.oscar-w.info)).



*More volunteers are needed to man the Goolwa Riverboat Centre.*



*Volunteers Roly Bartlett and Wayne Burford spend every Wednesday maintaining the *PS Oscar W* and sharing her history.*



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Friends of Oscar W volunteers Roly Bartlett and Wayne Burford encourage locals to join them in sharing Goolwa's riverboat history. They are pictured in the PS Oscar W's wheelhouse. INSET: The Oscar W bell hangs in the boiler room.  
Photos: Sara Gilligan

## PS Oscar W timeline

**1908:** Franz Oscar Wallin (Charlie) a Swedish seaman decided to build a new boat at Echuca. He named the vessel after his son Oscar William Wallin.

**1918:** After the death of his son, Charlie decided to quit the *Oscar W* and sold her to Permewan Wright Company, which amalgamated with other shipping agencies to form Murray Shipping Limited. Murray Shipping operated for 39 years rationalising to find all manner of work for their vessels. What saved the day for the *Oscar W* was carting goods to build the locks and weirs along the river system.

**1939:** By 1939, *Oscar W* was laid up at Morgan and up for sale. Emphasis by now was on tourism.

**1940:** In 1940 Jack Ritchie of Goolwa was operating the tired old steamer *Despatch* and purchased *Oscar* for 350 pounds. But, alas, he died in 1942, leaving brother Dave to sell the vessel.

**1950s:** A consortium purchased the *Oscar* but materials were hard to obtain and they had to relinquish their tourism plans. The highways department and local government operated the *Oscar* until 1959, when they updated to a screw driven diesel *The Nalta Yuki*. The *Oscar W* was then purchased by river identity and well-known skipper Paddy Hogg.

**1964:** Paddy sold the boat to Allan Moritz of Murray Bridge. Here she took part in the Weerama festival where she raced against the Coonawarra. After this she was placed on Moritz slip for much-needed repairs. Moritz made approaches to governments, councils and individuals and did much hard work himself in restoration, but it was all to no avail, and in 1980 he died.

**1981:** The vessel was sold to the South



Australian Government as an external exhibit for the new Signal Point River Murray River Interpretive Centre.

**1986:** A man named Jock Veenstra saw the problems with the vessel and wrote to Premier John Bannon offering to repair and get the vessel steamed to Goolwa at the newly built Signal Point Wharf. This was accepted and *Oscar* became the S.A. Flagship.

**1988:** She was steamed to the wharf to have superstructure completed there. The Signal Point Board appointed a trust to oversee and soon after being formed, this group called a public meeting and the Friends of Oscar W was formed to operate and maintain the vessel.

**1996:** An inspection deemed the boiler could not reach survey standard. The Friends removed it from the boat and set about repairs, only to find that none of the old boiler could be used. Forbes, Adelaide manufactured a new one which was fitted just in time for the 1997 Wooden Boat Festival.

The hull, however, was not up to survey standard either, so the vessel could not operate to maintain itself, thus The Friends of Oscar W set up phases of work and sought funds with council to get the boat to survey standard.

**2016:** After much hard work the *Oscar* was ready for survey, just in time for her 108th birthday.

**2020:** The *Oscar* is closed due to COVID-19 from March to about October.

**2021:** Operations, maintenance and endless wood cutting still continues by local volunteers.

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