

**Maritime Rescue Institute - Coastal Notes**  
**23 May 2007**

Some of the reports on the recent fire damage to the 'Cutty Sark' at Greenwich in London give the impression that she is the last clipper left in the world. This is true of tea clippers, but clippers were also used for the wool and passenger trade to Australia and here in Scotland we have not only an older clipper, but also one that still holds speed records between London and Adelaide, Australia.

The 'City of Adelaide', later 'HMS Carrick', and now 'SV Carrick', is the oldest clipper ship in the world. Built by William Pile, Hay & Co of Sunderland in 1864, she has the same composite hull as the 'Cutty Sark' and in fact is the world's oldest composite ship. A composite hull consists of a cast iron frame with a wooden hull. Cast iron was the wonder material of the Victorian era, being widely used by the likes of Thomas Telford for bridges, as well as for machinery and even entire woollen mills.

She is listed by the National Historic Ships Committee as part of the 'Core Collection' of UK ships. Within this UK category of historic ships she has been placed in the top ten vessels - she therefore shares her status with vessels like HMS Victory, SS Great Britain and the Cutty Sark. Another indication of her importance is the fact that she is the only ship in Scotland designated as 'A' listed by Historic Scotland. This makes her the most important historic vessel in Scotland.

Sadly, in spite of all this credibility, she is now a decrepit hulk lying at the Scottish Maritime Museum dock in Irvine. She sank at her moorings on the Clyde in 1990; some funding allowed her to be salvaged and moved to Irvine. There was a hope that she could return to her roots in Sunderland for restoration and permanent exhibition, but the hull was in much worse condition than expected. Running out of funds and fearing that the cost of just maintaining the status quo would bankrupt them, in May 2000 the Scottish Maritime Museum applied to the council for listed building consent to demolish the vessel. The storm of objections to the application was unprecedented and took local planning officials completely by surprise. Never before had the Council received objections from outside of the UK but they arrived from individuals, universities and heritage bodies in Europe, America and Australia, culminating in an objection from the Federal Government of Australia through its Minister for Foreign Affairs.

This planning application was refused but, in spite of the world wide publicity, not enough funding has come forward. In January of this year, North Ayrshire Council planning committee granted consent to allow the A-listed vessel to be dismantled. She is too far gone now to be financially viable as a restoration project, even supposing funds were forthcoming. The vessel isn't just going to be smashed up; there will be a careful and systematic deconstruction and they stand to learn a great deal about building methods of the time. The Trustees hope to see segments of the ship going into museums, preserving as much of her heritage as possible.

The 176ft vessel survived 28 voyages carrying emigrants from Falmouth to Australia over two decades. Australian researchers estimate more than 60% of the population of the nation's southern states can trace their families' arrival in Australia to the ship. It's sad that she isn't going to survive into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Those who enjoyed the concert by Dermot O' Brien two years ago at the St Leonards Hotel will be saddened hear of his death this Tuesday. Dermot was a major player on the world's music stage for many years and will be missed by all who were touched by his talent.

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