

My involvement with the First Fleet Re-Enactment Voyage, 1987-88



The *Ana Christina*, photographed from the *Svanen*, a few days west of Perth, December 1987.

In 1987 I was working as an electrician at Mount Piper Power Station where two new generators were being built. It was steady employment, but absolutely freezing in winter. I lived in Katoomba, a good hour's drive away each way. One day, as I was gulping down my tea in the ten minute break we had each morning, I read in the Sydney Daily Telegraph about something called the "Voyage of a Lifetime Contest". You had to save a coupon every day from the newspaper, then send them in along with an essay answer to a question about the history of the First Fleet. The question was a bit tricky, asking what expedition ensured the fledgling NSW colony's survival. My flatmate at that time was Dave Tunks, himself a descendant of First Fleet Officer Lt. Tunks. Dave had a collection of history books which pointed me in the right direction, but I knew that I needed more than just the right answer, so, on the spur of the moment, I wrote it old English, (after a fashion) like Shakespeare. I couldn't believe it when a woman called saying I had won a ticket to Mauritius and a berth on an old sailing ship, a prize with a total value worth \$13,000. I was allocated to the *Anna Kristina*, known as the "jinx ship" because a few weeks previously her first mate had fallen overboard in the middle of the night, and lost. Prior to that its main mast had broken in two.

The *Anna Kristina* was the oldest vessel taking part, being (in 1987) 99 years old. After 1 week we left Port Louis in Mauritius with collective stomach cramps and diarrhea, thanks to someones bright idea to have a farewell dinner at a bargain curry restaurant. The diarrhea was soon replaced by chronic sea-sickness. We sailed down to Amsterdam Island in the South Indian Ocean, one of the remotest islands in the world, but were not allowed to go ashore by the French. We hitched on to the roaring forties and did not change tack for days at a time.

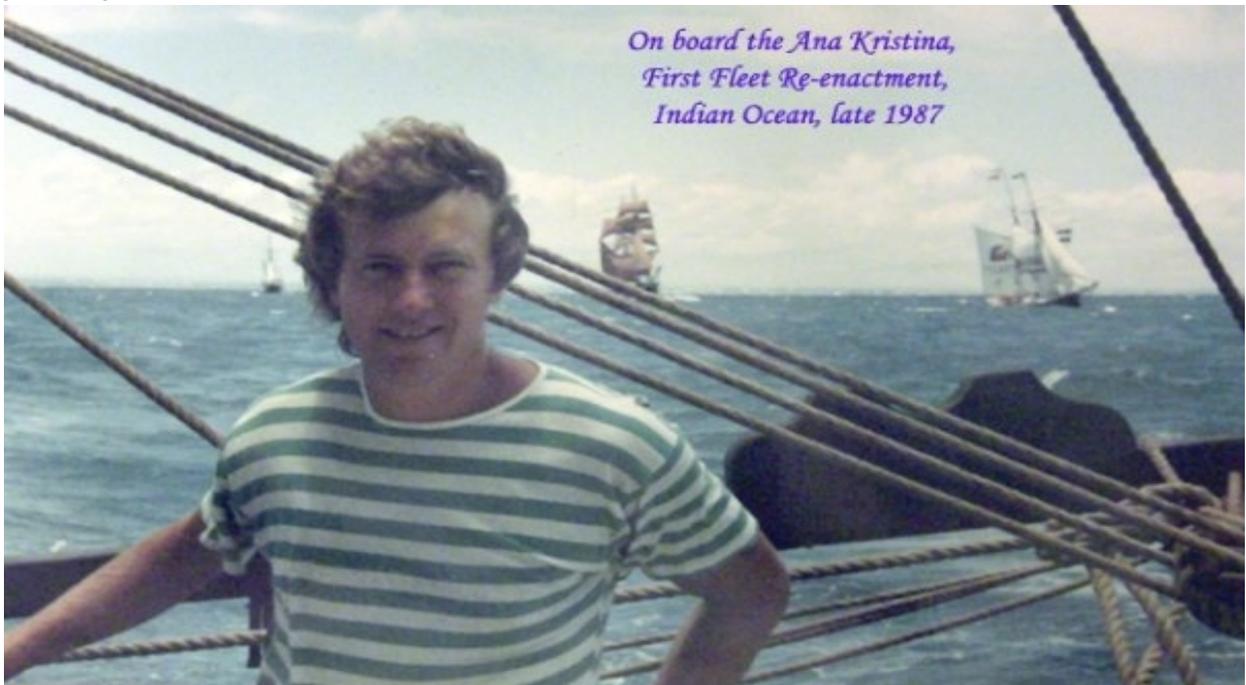
When we arrived in Perth our boat was used to make a music video for the group 'Bahloo', their song 'Keep Sailing On' being the official anthem of the fleet. Fremantle looked very nice, having recently been renovated for the America's Cup defense (which the Aussies lost). Also in Perth we hired a mini bus and explored the desolate west coast of Western Australia, visiting the dolphins at Monkey Mia, the Spanish missions in the desert, Koori rock paintings, Hutt River Province, and The Pinnacles. After spending Christmas in Perth we set sail for Sydney on New

Years Eve. The century-old tilling mechanism broke just as dinner was being served, but somehow we managed to rig up a temporary fix, and continued sailing via the Great Australian Bight and Bass Strait. We stopped in Victoria and Jervis Bay before anchoring in Botany Bay in mid-January. It was here, almost at the end of the voyage, one crew member had a brainsnap and physically attacked a female crew member - after being subdued by other crew members he was removed from the boat by the water police and banned from returning. An eyewitness account of this and various other episodes can be read in Marcus Mainwaring's account of the voyage, "Nor Any Drop to Drink".

Two million cheering spectators turned out in Sydney Harbour on 26 January 1988 to welcome us to the final stretch to Farm Cove. Among the spectators were Prince Charles and Lady Di, Bob Hawke and many Aboriginal protesters who jeered us. There was a well publicized drama when one of our Scandinavian crew tried to raise a hand made Aboriginal flag. Not even my own family recognised me since I had lost so much weight, and become so suntanned and windblown. Despite being heroes of the day, that evening a small group of us could not get admitted to any restaurants or bars, so unkempt was our appearances after months at sea. After about a week being moored in Farm Cove, the police removed the cordon, and some Koori protesters came over in canoes and heckled us. We managed to avoid serious conflict because some of us had taken out an advertisement in the Sydney Morning Herald stating our solidarity with their cause. Originally there was to be a re-enactment of the raising of the Union jack, but that idea was negated by the State Government.

It is now more than 20 years since I sailed that unforgettable voyage, which captured the imagination of the nation with its daily news reports, documentary film and various financial crises that almost bankrupted the whole project; the Federal Government sponsored the rival Tall Ships project, though Barry Unsworth's NSW government did provide a substantial amount of financial aid at the last minute to keep the fleet afloat. At the end of the voyage I thought I would never venture on a boat again, but I have. And also I have developed a keen interest in maritime history. Reading the convict ship passenger lists, I found there were none with my surname, though there was one Royal Marine called Short. I have no idea if I am related to him however.

The 1988 re-enactment boats have slowly dispersed around the world, I'm not sure where the Ana Christina is these days, but it was in the Canaries after a while doing charters in the Whitsundays. The crews? Well, there is a Facebook group dedicated to former re-enactment crew members, but only a handful of people have joined it. Sadly, though not entirely unexpectedly, though this group I learned a few former First Fleet Re-enactors have passed on.



Glen's bound for Botany Bay with 'First Fleet'

Imagine the thrill of being part of the First Fleet Re-enactment . . . imagine standing on the bow of a square rigger riding the mountainous waves as they plunge your ship on a roller coaster ride . . . imagine the exhilaration of feeling the wind against your face as you stand watch over the vast Indian Ocean churning before you as far as the eye can see.

That's the scene 25 year-old Glen Short is finding hard to picture as he prepares to join the First Fleet Re-enactment voyage as a trainee crewman.

In a week's time, land loving Glen, a Katoomba electrician, will be on one of the nine tall ships retracing Captain Arthur Phillip's voyage to Botany Bay.

An excited Glen was presented with his sailing orders last week by Blue Mountains Bicentennial Community Co-ordinator Marlene Jones.

The sailing orders signed by fleet commodore Captain Mike Kitchenside entitles Glen to fly to Mauritius and join the fleet.

He is one of 30 New South Wales winners in the NSW Bicentennial Council and Telegraph 'Voyage of a Lifetime' contest.

For Glen it was the first contest he had ever entered, so he was estatic to find that he had won one of the \$13,500 berths.

Contestants had to collect six answers from diary excerpts published in the Telegraph and research the answer to one more difficult question to be included in a draw.

The question Glen had to research was — What expedition found farming land to the west of Sydney to ensure the survival of the colony?

And as luck would have it, Glen's flat-mate, a first fleet descendant, just happened to have received a book on Australian history for his 21st birthday which Glen had been reading . . . and which contained the answer.

While it was Glen's first ever contest, he isn't unfamiliar with travelling, having already travelled to the USA, Europe, Mexico, the Middle East, Indonesia and South Africa on holidays.

As a trainee crew member, Glen will be flown to Mauritius on October 31 where he will join the sailing ships on their voyage. The ships will sail from Mauritius to Fremantle and then Botany Bay before making their final entry into Sydney Harbour on January 26, 1988.

And what a way to celebrate your birthday! Glen turns 26 on January 27.

The voyage

Born and bred in Katoomba, Glen completed his apprenticeship at the Grose Valley Colliery before being retrenched. When



First Fleet crewman Glen Short is presented with his sailing orders by Bicentennial Co-ordinator Marlene Jones.

the mine closed he went to work as an electrician at the Mount Piper Power Station.

Although he has travelled extensively, Glen says he has never been on a sailing ship before, but is looking forward to learning how to sail.

During the three month passage across the Indian Ocean, Glen will have to get used to cold salt water showers, sleeping in a hammock, working four hour shifts, keeping watch and generally learning how to sail.

After the voyage, trainee crew members are eligible to sit for a maritime exam which will enable them to qualify as able seamen.

While all this may seem well and good, crew members do have to provide their own personal sailing and wet weather gear. Items like oilskins, seabags, etc aren't that easy to buy in Katoomba . . . so it looks like Glen might just have to make one trip into Sydney to buy his sea gear before the Bicentennial.

Bon voyage, Glen and good sailing!

DR. KAREN DOWNEY
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One shower a week on jinx ship

A letter from Blue Mountains resident, Glen Short, travelling with the Bicentennial "First Fleet" to Botany Bay.

"Dear Gazette, Upon arrival in Mauritius I was allocated to the Norwegian ketch "Anna Kristina." It is 99 years old, completely wooden hulled, leaks and squeaks, and is only 37 metres long. It is also known among the first fleeters as the "jinx" ship, because she lost her first mate, Heinrich Nielsen, overboard in a mid-Atlantic squall.

Her present crew consists of Danes, Norwegians, English, Americans, New Zealanders and Australians, the captain is only 25, John Sorenson.

When we left Mauritius, our ship's speed soon left the slower ships behind, we have been sailing in tandem with "One and All" an Australian yacht.

It took me about two weeks to rid myself of seasickness and adjust to the ship's food.

One reason why it is hard to adjust to the food is the smell of bleach, which is due to our washing all the fresh fruit in it to kill weevils.

We are fortunate in that we have hot showers, but we are only allowed one per week.

The only disappointment we have had is when we sailed down to Amsterdam Island, a French scientific station about half way from Mauritius to Perth. The commander of the island wouldn't let us land because there were "sensitive" experiments in place.

Luckily, however, we were able to see some seals which swam around our boat. We also have seen whales and many albatross, porpoises, and schools of tuna fish.

Down in the Roaring 40s it was only 9 degrees C and windy as hell, while in Mauritius it was 30 degrees C and humid.

On night shift we listen for news on the short-wave, but the only English we could get was Radio Holland. Mid-voyage I swapped ships for a few days on board the Canadian ship, "Svanen".

One thing that has surprised me is the way you quickly attune to nature and the elements. Storms can brew up in a matter of minutes at sea and we are in constant watch for storm clouds. Also on clear nights you can almost read maps just from the starlight, and a rising

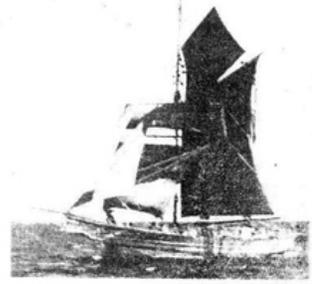
moon or Southern Cross is an easier indicator to follow than constantly checking the compass.

Please excuse my handwriting because I'm writing this by kerosene lamp and there is a slight swell.

On arrival at Rottneest Island we received a marvellous welcome from a flotilla of small craft. Millionaires, such as Michael Edgley, nudged alongside our ancient boat and threw crates of champagne to us from luxury cruisers.

There was an estimated 180,000 spectators. We are now busy provisioning the fleet's ships and preparing them for the final leg to Botany Bay and, a week later, to Sydney Harbour.

I also think that I can get the captain's permission to fly a "Katoomba" flag as we approach Sydney, but I will have to make it myself on the ship, of course."



Ex-student tells of First Fleet Re-Enactment

Four crew members of the Anna Christina, a vessel from the Re-Enactment First Fleet, visited Katoomba High School recently.

Among them was Glen Short, an ex-student of Katoomba High School, who won his passage aboard the Anna Christina by writing an essay about the Bicentennial.

Along with another prize winner, Jane Vitting of Sydney and two Norwegian crew

members, Johan Brox and Mons Branstad, Glen delighted Year 9 History students with tales of the voyage.

They told of shipboard life, the wildlife of the sea and the warm welcomes at ports of call. Glen and Jane the warmest welcome came on 26th January, 1988, but it also marked the end of a most memorable experience.

Year 9 History students were also fortunate in being able to visit the ships of the First Fleet Re-Enactment and Glen told them to look out for a small "Katoomba" flag on the Anna Christina which he raised as his contribution to the voyage.

First fletcher Glen back home

For 26-year-old Katoomba man Glen Short, it's great to be home firmly placed on terra firma and a long way from the rolling seas.

Glen won the chance of a lifetime and sailed on a square rigger in the First Fleet Re-enactment.

While the trip was 'unbelievable' too many of the experiences were unlike those of the first fleeters and therefore,

Glen says: 'It's like climbing Mount Everest...great to do it once but never again.'

Glen won a Bicentennial competition and was given a \$13 000 ticket on the top sail ketch, Anna Kristina.

But this Norwegian boat was soon to become known as the 'jinx ship' and Glen was to experience life as he had never known it.

'Someone died, an-

other went mad, the ship broke its claffe and the motor broke down twice,' he says, 'while I could cope with that the ship leaked, my sleeping bag was always wet and the food went off.'

'I lost my sea legs everytime I came back onboard and used to go three weeks without a shower.'

'I lost a stone in weight and was sick for 48 hours at a time.'

Thank you from Lesotho

— written by Glen David Short, 31 July 2010, expanded from a deleted geocities page from around 2000.

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