

## **29 January 2015 - MILESTONE 150TH ANNIVERSARY FOR SYDNEY SAILORS' HOME**

The Australian Mariners' Welfare Society, a company originally known as the Sydney Sailors' Home, is preparing to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the Home in the Rocks area of Sydney.

The Home opened its doors at 106 George Street North on 1 February 1865 and for the next 114 years accommodated thousands of seamen of all nationalities coming to the port of Sydney in merchant ships, providing them with cheap accommodation and meals.

Naval personnel of the Royal Navy's Australian Squadron then based in Sydney also lodged at the Home up until 1890 when Royal Naval House was opened in nearby Grosvenor Street to cater for them.

The Home itself was closed in April 1979 following compulsorily resumption of the property by the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority. Alternative accommodation was found for those who still remained as lodgers in the Home when it ceased operations.

However, the original building survives today as a heritage-listed property maintained by the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority and currently houses the Billich Art Gallery and the Sailors Thai Restaurant.

A special commemorative ceremony is planned to be held there on 2 February to mark the anniversary.

With the closure of the Home its management, recognising generational changes then occurring in the shipping industry along with a declining demand for accommodation of the kind offered by the Sailors' Home, sought alternative avenues by which it could continue to serve seafarers but in ways quite different to those envisaged when the Home was established in the mid-19th century.

This ushered in a new era for the organisation, which discarded the Sailors' Home name and reinvented itself as the Australian Mariners' Welfare Society.

Nowadays it makes annual grants of thousands of dollars to organisations such as the Mission to Seafarers and Stella Maris

Clubs operating in 30 ports throughout Australia for various purposes including maintenance and upkeep of their buildings and for the supply and ongoing funding of Internet facilities for visiting seafarers to enable them to contact families at home.

Also, scholarships for study at the Australian Maritime College at Launceston (Tasmania) and at selected TAFE colleges are offered to promising young Australians planning a seagoing career as well as to those already at sea who wish to upgrade their qualifications. From time to time serving and retired seafarers and their dependants are also provided with appropriate assistance in times of hardship.

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