

Ngatira

SAILS AGAIN!



Stephen Horsley

I didn't hear any start signal from the Jane Gifford; some said we were over the line. All was a blur. It was literally the first time we had hoisted the new gaff mainsail. And, most likely, the last time *Ngatira* was sailing with a gaff would have been as far back as 1952. To hell with bloody start guns, *Ngatira* was back in the water and sailing!





PHOTO: IVOR WILKINS

Ngatira featured in the 2004 MCC Yearbook and I described briefly the decision Jo and I had made to sail her north to Opuia to the New Zealand Maritime Restoration School for a total restoration. It was our wish, and Jay Lawry's philosophy, to have a faithful restoration done by the school and to rebuild from the hull up in the traditional manner, as was done in the days when she was first built.

Unfortunately, the school did not get the required number of students to really make the project work for its full length and I found myself spending many

weekends up north helping out - and eventually becoming a student of sorts myself, working on *Ngatira*. In the beginning the school was moving forward well with a good number of students and *Ngatira* was totally stripped back to the bare essentials, to her only remaining original woodwork - the hull. She was rebuilt from this state once before in 1964 with a larger cabin and dog house and converted to marconi rig. She raced with the K class fleet, one of three pseudo-Ks.

Jay and I recorded the original deck beam positions and from these we could determine where the horse, the mainsheet blocks, the cockpit and cabin and mast partners were positioned. Students removed the sheer clamp and started replacing the worst of the inner diagonal planking. They scarfed in new kauri, bedded in a slurry of red lead and putty, and copper fastened. All paint was removed, inside and out, and the entire hull had all copper rivets removed and replaced. The timber had several coats of raw linseed oil and turpentine, starting with a 70/30 mix and finishing with just linseed oil, then a coat of red lead. A new sheer clamp and sheer plank were fitted.

In the meantime, I was scouring Auckland for pohutukawa to replace the floors. This became quite an adventure. I found two large trees at Little Shoal Bay that had slipped down the cliffs during a storm. Over several days, between tides, I marked the various crooks with patterns and cut them out with a chain saw. Another weekend and we returned with a mate's fizz boat to tie the logs alongside and to haul them out at the Birkenhead boat ramp. I seriously misjudged the tides and ended up having to dive for the logs and lasso them in murky water. In the choppy conditions we lost one and only managed to regain one other, plus add some broken cartilage to my ribs. So, not a great success. I returned the following week, waded into the tide and managed to float out the remaining two logs with two 20-litre jerry cans. I then towed them up the beach and used a tree to

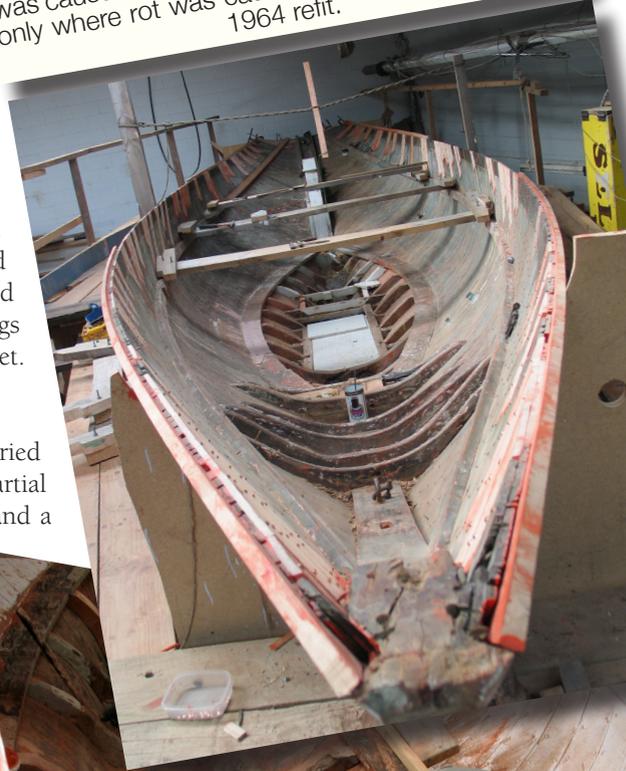


block-and-tackle them on to the trailer.

Jay didn't have much luck either. He retrieved two logs from the Waikare inlet at Opuia but they swamped the dinghy and he lost both of them, as well as a pair of work boots and a chainsaw. These were becoming expensive crooks. Eventually we found some more from trees that had been killed by nesting shags further up the Waikare inlet. Whew!

The remainder of the work carried out by Jay and the school was partial replacement of the sternpost and a new rudder box, removal of those original keelbolts that remained and replacement of all 7/8" sister keel bolts into the new pohutukawa floors. A graduate student fitted new deck beams and commenced laying the diagonal first layer of decking. Jay completed the decking and fitted the bulkhead, then started on the interior settee and fitted new stern timber. With a student we bent 3-metre lengths of 12mm x 300mm kauri for the cabin coamings. Two layers were bent over each other and when cool were fitted to the carlings and round blocking. It was truly amazing to see such wide boards bend around a jig. I was waiting for a resounding crack and to see the timber break, but it bent readily. Cockpit sole, companion way and cupboards were fitted by Jay. Terry Cottier caulked the hull and deck with expert proficiency and incessant hammering. The cabin top was completed

Waka Ngatira. The Pohutukawa floors were in surprisingly good condition, failing only where rot was caused by iron bolts from the 1964 refit. failing only where rot was caused by iron bolts from the 1964 refit.



Jo starting on the undercoat, and that's after puttying all the seams and red leading.

and canvassed. Jay and I fitted the bulwarks and the front hatch, which was another home project after a dovetail joint lesson.

I commenced work on the spars and, after a lesson from Jay, marked out the oregon. I decided to start on something small like the bowsprit to give me encouragement to move on to the larger spars like the 9.5-metre boom and 11.6-metre mast. The mast was tricky as it started out with an octagonal base, then changed into a round main mast with square sections for the spreaders, then became rounded again with square sides, tapering in three sections to finish up with a rounded top section. All this was done with the workbenches in the way, plus a large pile of oregon underfoot. It made for difficult working conditions. So did having to hoist the mast up out of the way until I returned to do more work on another weekend.

The gaff, topsail and jack yard were out of one piece of timber and I did these at home after transporting it on top of the car. The topsail yard, at 7.5 metres, was pushing the limits of transportation regulations and had to be done under cover of darkness from Haruru Falls, Paihia to Torbay. After a return journey, Bud Nalder, the sail maker, proposed we lay out all the spars in the car park across the road from the workshop. This gave the most accurate measurements for the sails and enabled them all to be made before the mast was stepped. They are spot on, and delivered the day before the regatta!

With the shortage of students, hired help was required, which added to the burden of escalating expenses. It became apparent we could no longer have

Ngatira at the school, sitting idle in the





Starting to look whole again.

PHOTO JAY LAWRY



Stripping back timber to eight sides with the draw knife. Note steps to top section for the mast bands, yet to have final rounding



shed so far north. I wanted to keep making quick visits, so she was trucked down to the Sandspit Yacht Club's hardstand and I took over the completion of the work. This was made easier by the generous offer that I might use the Lees workshop - and by help from my cousin Greg Lees and the staff at the Lees boat yard.

I was quite emotional seeing *Ngatira* coming out of the shed. Although not completely finished she was whole again! The scariest moment was seeing her swinging round in the air when she was lifted off the truck and on to a cradle. This was the first time we could really stand back and take a good look at her. All that remained to be done was the basic interior fit out, the final puttying of the topsides, painting and varnishing the exterior surfaces, finishing off the spars, complete the wire splicing, and do some casting! I am really grateful to Jacques de Kervor (*Alia*) for help with stepping the mast.

You can only learn so much from books. The other kind of learning, the hands-on skills, is really priceless, especially when passed down by someone who really knows what they're doing.



In keeping with tradition, galvanized rigging was to be used on *Ngatira*. Larry Pardey (*Taleisin*) gave me a valuable lesson on splicing or, should I say, a lesson in how to wrestle with an angry wire octopus. Larry pointed out, "If you're fighting with it, you're doing it wrong". Unfortunately, I didn't practice like a good student should and several months later, after I had started on doing 24 eye-splices, my forearms looked like they had just had 40 lashes from the cat-o-nine-tails. In this case it was a 7x7 wire-strand angry octopus. I had produced only three suspect-looking eye splices. Out came the book by Brian Toss, *The Riggers Apprentice*. Another attempt, another failure and then, 'ding!' it was like turning on a light. Success! At least I thought so. In the last paragraph in the chapter on eye splicing Brian says, "Now that you've completed your first eye splice, throw it away. Now, you're ready to splice" Anyway, *Ngatira's* mast hasn't fallen yet and Larry wisely tells me, "That rigging is the last thing you have to worry about"

Fabricating patterns for bronze castings is another fascinating art. Again, with sage help from Colin Brown, I made many patterns. Allowing for 3% shrinkage, I set to and made three mast bands of differing sizes, the spreader and mast bracket, the crane for the gaff, the pin rail mast band in two halves, the chainplates, a cranze iron, the bowsprit saddle, the bob stay fitting and base plate, the tiller, cleats and more.

The rig and sail plan is based on research I did into three similar - sized boats, *Prize*, *Waione* (both Charles Bailey Jnr designs) and *Rawene* (a Logan). Chad Thompson had a 1950s sail plan for *Prize* from the English sailmakers Ratsey and Lapthorn. Although *Prize* is a bigger and more powerful boat it was interesting to compare her with *Ngatira*. On the other hand, *Waione* has a modernized gaff rig and *Rawene* still carries a near-to-original rig, albeit with some minor changes. Neither boat is more than two feet longer than *Ngatira* and a good foundation on which to design a similar rig and sail plan. Also, using Henry Winkelmann's

good photos as references, I could get accurate measurements. Rather than shortening the boom as advised by several people I stayed with the original full length of 7.5 metres. You certainly make sure your head is out of the way when the boom sweeps across the deck!

Ngatira's dimensions. LOA 15m (49') LOD 12,4m (40' 8") LWL 8.7m (28' 6") Beam 2.6m (8' 6") Draft 1.8m (5' 10") Sail area. Main 60.25m² (648'2) Head sail 15m² (161') Stay Sail 11.7m² (125' 2) Top sail 12.5m² (135' 2) Total 99.5m² (1069' 2)

Ngatira is a careful restoration of fine Edwardian craftsmanship and design. I am proud of having achieved it with the help of the school and Jay, and of many, many other people. The endless phone calls and discussions, sometimes over seemingly pointless details! But they were all means to a glorious end. It is amazing the comments I have received about how well she looks under sail. This is something I have only seen from photos so far, but hey - my hand is firmly on the helm and I am loving every moment. It has been a wonderful journey of discovery and learning.

I have had amazing help and support from Jo, too, over the six years of the restoration. It's a wonder she's still with me. She has been asked to do puttying, sanding, painting and then more puttying - and after all this we have recently moved into a 1915 two-bay villa also in need of restoration. Another journey starts.

So in January 2010 it was a huge day for us, to bend on the sails, hoist the gaff and be sailing for the first time in seven years in the Mahurangi Regatta. And she sailed admirably. The day finished much as it had started - a blur, partly because Bud presented us with a case of champagne after the race.



PHOTO: JOHN BERTENSHAW