

The Paddle Steamer *E.R.O.*



The *E.R.O.* some time after 1915

Source: Godson Collection State Library of South Australia PRG 1258-1-1033

On the 5 April 1913 the RIT Board resolved ‘that the *Julia* and barge *Sprite* be purchased from Mr A Thompson for the sum of £300 on terms extending to 31-12-13 without interest’. This was still a time of financial difficulty for the Trust and the Board members were undoubtedly grateful when two weeks later, on the 21 April, the chairman, Mr E R Olorenshaw offered the Trust a no interest loan of £1000 on security of the freehold of the Trust offices.



Mayho and barge *Sprite* at Renmark c1912 and *Julia* at Renmark (1912-1915)

Source: State Library of South Australia photograph B28441, PRG 1258/1/1535

Before its purchase by the RIT the *Mayho* (later *Julia*) was a familiar sight around Renmark. In 1910 Harold Quick, leaseholder, and William Pendle, master, of the *Mayho* then owned by Hardys wine merchants of Adelaide appeared in the Renmark Court charged with disregarding the warnings of the Renmark harbourmaster, Corporal Panton (a RIT appointee). In September 1909 the harbourmaster had warned the leaseholder that the boat needed a certificate to carry passengers but had been ignored. On December 26 1909 Harold Quick loaned the boat to the Renmark Band for an excursion and told that harbourmaster that he would sign them on as deckhands rather than call

them passengers. The Marine Board pressed for an example to be made and both Quick and Pendle were fined by the court.¹

The *Mayho* (AKA *Julia* – both names were used in 1911) had a history of service for the settlers of Renmark. On the 16 March 1911 during the picker's strikes the *Julia* was commissioned by the Fruitgrowers' Defence Association (FDA) to transport fruit from Woodham's Packing shed to Morgan². The FDA was an association of settlers who banded together to pick and transport fruit. The *Julia* with an allegedly uncertified Captain Randell broke the blockade of Renmark and left for Morgan with 980 cases of dried pears produced by Messrs Basey and Howie. It had 'gone downstream wheezing and grunting like a broken winded horse'³ according to the unionists who had tried to prevent it. Four crew members on board were an engineer, J Black (a RIT employee) and Messrs Howie, Quarterman and Stone, the last two, the journalist felt necessary to mention, weighed 30 stone between them.⁴ H D Howie was involved two years previously in a night time altercation with strikers on his property in which a striker was shot in the legs. A Howie story passed down the generations was that he captained the boat to Morgan but descendants had serious doubts about the story as he was a notoriously bad driver.

More than a year after its purchase by the RIT, the Board received a report from their Chief Engineer, Captain Randell (who took over the position in 1912 from Alf Thompson), on the condition of the *Julia* and Barge *Sprite*⁵ with a view to purchase. It was proposed that the machinery of the *Julia* be removed and placed on the *Sprite*. The Engineer was instructed to make that arrangement and to inspect barges for sale at Morgan and report on their prices. He was given permission to purchase two provided that the cost of each did not exceed £100 repaired but was unable to find anything suitable. At the same time a letter written to the Board by Captain Randell regarding remuneration for his services as Chief Engineer, Watermaster and Master of the Paddle Steamer was tabled. It was agreed to pay him a salary of £350 per year plus an allowance for a car or other means of locomotion.

Following the purchase in 1913 the boat was taken downstream and from August to November 1914 the *Sprite* was converted into a Paddle Steamer at Mannum. A cost blowout saw the Chairman and Engineer proceed hastily to Mannum to enquire about the charges by two businesses involved in the conversion, one owned by Mortimer and the other by Arnold. They were able to negotiate some reductions. Mr Mortimer wrote to the Trust that he hoped the Trust would be gentlemen and reimburse his business. They eventually reached a settlement as the costs of conversion significantly exceeded the Trust budget.

The *Sprite* returned to Renmark in late 1914 and Captain A W Randell, in a job reorganisation, was given three month's notice in March 1915. On the 21 June 1915 he was appointed as Engineer and Master of the *Sprite* at a salary of £250 without a car. A watermaster was also to be appointed as early as possible at £250 per year to be in charge of water distribution, channel construction and maintenance.

¹ Renmark Pioneer, 21 Jan 1910, 'Down to the Sea in Ships', p8

² Little, R *The Little Family Diaries*, p246

³ Renmark Pioneer, 18 Mar 1911, Thursday's Meeting, p2

⁴ Renmark Pioneer, 24 Mar 1911, The Cruise of the Mayho, p6

⁵ Board Minutes 6 July 1914

On the 12 July 1915 it was proposed at a board meeting 'that for the purpose of new registration required by the Marine Board the ss *Sprite* be renamed the *E.R.O.*' At some time, according to the Board Minutes, after the 18 October 1915 the *Sprite* was officially renamed the *E.R.O.*

During 1916 the Trust hired the barge *Pearl* at a rate of 12/6 per day for wood hauling. The Board authorized Captain Randell to offer the Gem Company £300 for the *Pearl* subject to survey. The Gem Company wanted £450 and the Trust refused to pay that much. In early 1917 the barge *Alice* came up for sale at Mannum for £75 as she is. Captain Randell was authorized to spend up to £220 and on 14 May 1917 the secretary arranged with Landseer to purchase the *Alice* at £170 repaired and floated. In June 1917 the *E.R.O.* was taken to the slip at Goolwa and later returned to Renmark with the barge *Alice*, 200 bags of cement and other cargo.

In June 1917 Corporal Jorgan Christian Jensen, a naturalized Australian from Denmark, was awarded the Victoria Cross. The local newspaper reported that he left Renmark about 18 months ago (around the beginning of 1916 however he enlisted at Keswick on 23 March 1915.⁶). Prior to that he was employed by the Trust on the ss *E.R.O.*⁷ This is the only evidence uncovered to this point that he was an employee of the Trust.

In July 1917 the *E.R.O.* was offered to the transport business Eve and Cuttle for £3 per week to operate a service between Renmark and Paringa which had been cut off because the floodwater made the Paringa Ferry inoperable.

Eve & Cuttle,
Will provide a
Regular Steamship Service
Between
RENMARK and PARINGA.

The s.s. *E.R.O.* during the flood will ply between the above-named ports carrying H.M. MAILS, PASSENGERS, CARGO, and TRAFFIC OF ALL DESCRIPTIONS. The crossing of GREAT and SMALL STOCK will be under the direct supervision of Mr. Walter Ogilvy.

The well-known River Murray Skipper Captain Randell will command the s.s. *E.R.O.* Booking Office: ---

EVE & CUTTLES' LIVERY and CARRYING STABLES, Renmark Avenue. Phone 76. MOTORS and other VEHICLES carefully conveyed. STOCK AND ALL GOODS CONSIGNIED. Teams and Drag will meet the steamer upon her arrival at Renmark.

MONDAY—Leave Renmark Wharf for Paringa 8 a.m., return about noon. Leave Renmark Wharf at 7.45 p.m., returning about arrival of Paringa train. Other trips arranged if necessary during the day. TUESDAY—Leave Renmark Wharf 8 a.m., returning about 12.30 p.m. Other trips arranged if necessary during the day. WEDNESDAY—Leave Renmark Wharf at 8 a.m., returning about 12.30 p.m. THURSDAY—Leave Renmark Wharf 8 a.m., and return about 12.30 p.m. FRIDAY—Leave Renmark Wharf 8 a.m., returning about 12.30 p.m. Leave Wharf at 7.45 p.m., and return about arrival of Paringa train. Other trips arranged if necessary during the day. SATURDAY—Leave Renmark Wharf 8 a.m., return to Paringa 9.30 a.m. To late, leave Paringa for Renmark, return about 12.30 p.m. Other trips arranged if necessary during the day. SUNDAY—Leave Renmark Wharf 8 a.m., return to Paringa 9.30 a.m. To late, leave Paringa for Renmark, return about 12.30 p.m. Other trips arranged if necessary during the day.

Advertisement for Eve and Cuttle Steamship Service⁸

On 14 October 1917 the *E.R.O.*, under the guidance of captains Nutchey and Randell, proceeded to Paringa. There they lashed the Paringa ferry to the side of the paddle steamer and proceeded

⁶ National Archives of Australia, Attestation Paper Service Number 2389

⁷ *Murray Pioneer and Australian River Record*, 21 Sept 1917, A Renmark VC Hero, p7

⁸ *Murray Pioneer and Australian River Record*, 17 August 1917 p3

upstream to Ral Ral Creek. During the flood the Paringa ferry sank and there was a need for some way of crossing Bookmark Creek at 21st Street. The aim was to transport the punt as close as possible to 21st Street using the paddlesteamer. At the entrance to Ral Ral Creek they were able to sail overland towards the Renmark Hospital. They successfully sailed over a fence and, ‘not wishing to startle people by the strange sight of a steamship travelling over sheep country, the whistle was blown’. At the Ral Ral crossing the punt was unleashed from the *E.R.O.* and manoeuvred to 21st Street.⁹

On 14 November 1917 the services of Captain Randell as Chief Engineer and Master of the Paddle Steamer were dispensed with forthwith. He was paid the amount due to him and three months’ salary in lieu of notice. At the same time the barge *Alice* was hired to the Grower’s Distillery to cart stone from Murtho.

In February 1918 the Board considered engaging Captain Nutchey permanently as master of the *E.R.O.*. The matter was left to the chairman and the new Chief Engineer, David Kidd, to negotiate. The Trust also reached an agreement with Cuttle and Ogilvy for them to hire the *E.R.O.* when a high river made it necessary provided they took the barge up river and returned with a load of firewood.

In January 1920 it was proposed to offer the barge *Alice* to Captain Collins for £75 and in February they agreed a sale at £70.

On 6 March 1923 the Board agreed to advertise the *E.R.O.* for sale by tender. They did not accept Captain Collins’ offer of £200 cash **or** 500 tons of firewood on the 4 April but a month later accepted his offer of £200 cash **and** 300 tons of firewood. This ended the ten year ownership of a paddle steamer by the RIT although there was later a strong association between the Trust and paddle steamers and barges during World War 2.

Researched and written by Geoff Bull on behalf of the RIT 2020.

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⁹ *Murray Pioneer and Australian River Record*, 19 Oct 1917, Overland by Steamer, p. 4