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HIKITIA – Wellington's Floating Crane - A BRIEF HISTORY

In Her 88th Year of Service to Wellington

[Based on a History written by Geoff Bennett in 1990s, last Update of this bulletin 19 April 2013]

Monday 21 December 2013 was the 87th anniversary of the arrival in Wellington of the historic floating crane *Hikitia*.

Hikitia was built by Fleming and Ferguson of Paisley, Scotland, in **1926**. She measures 160.1' (48.58m) in overall length with a beam of 52.35' (15.88m) and a moulded depth of 11.35' (3.44m).

Twin screws are driven by compound surface condensing direct drive engines which were supplied with steam by a coal fired Scotch boiler with two furnaces. A similar but oil-fired boiler replaced the original boiler in 1963. In 1980 this was also removed and the present two small modern package boilers were installed.

The crane was built by Sir William Arrol and Co. of Glasgow. It was designed to lift 80 tons at 50' radius but bettered this on test by 25%. The crane can lift 60 tons at 65' and 15 tons at 75'. The speed of the lift is 80 tons at 4' per minute, 40 tons at 8' per minute, 25 tons at 12' per minute and 15 tons at 24' per minute. The crane weighs 310 tons and at a radius of 65' the maximum height of the hook above the water is 95'.

Following trials, ***Hikitia*** left Glasgow on 29 September 1926 under Captain J Fullerton for Ponta Delgado in the Azores, a distance of 1445 miles. She arrived on 9 October. After bunkering, she left for Colon and the Panama Canal, passing through on 2 November. Out in the Pacific, ***Hikitia*** encountered strong head winds and rough seas, which caused the vessel to pitch heavily. The next 48 hours were anxious and stressful for the crew with the superstructure straining and some deck plates beginning to crack but then conditions improved and repairs were made. The ship reached Papeete harbour on 1 December and took on stores and coal, sailing next morning for New Zealand. The final part of the voyage was not without incident, as on 13 December ***Hikitia*** ran into a submerged object and several days were spent battling rough seas and strong winds. At 7.5 knots (approx 15kph) the ship was hardly a flier!

The log of the ***Hikitia***'s delivery voyage has been preserved in the archives of the Museum of Wellington, City & Sea on Queen's Wharf.

Hikitia arrived in Wellington harbour on 21 December 1926 after a voyage of 83 days. It has been generally accepted that ***Hikitia***'s delivery voyage represents a record distance sailed by a vessel of this type with its jib up.

She began work almost immediately and for 87 years has been a familiar sight on the harbour, taken for granted and unheralded. She has worked on all types of construction projects including wharf

construction. Her main role was in lifting heavy cargo onto, and off, ships. She spent some time helping to demolish the wreck of the *Wahine*.

Hikitia's last job for the Wellington Port Company was the removal of piles near the position of the old Floating Dock.

In 1989 the old vessel was put up for tender and ship lovers imagined *Hikitia* would be for the knacker's yard and that she would be lost forever. But this did not happen. Two enthusiastic couples Bob and Mary Box and John and Joy Ackrill bought her on 12 April 1990, for preservation. On 30 July 1992, after much hard work by volunteers, *Hikitia* carried out an 88 ton test lift. This was the final legal requirement for survey and she was then available for commercial lifts up to 80 tons.

Since then she has continued her role in private ownership as Wellington's floating crane and has carried out over 300 lifts, plus other jobs. These include:

- Removing cranes from Glasgow Wharf and Aotea Quay; the last of the Aotea Quay cranes has now been re-erected on Queen's Wharf;
- Lifting and turning pontoons for the *Lynx* linkspan for painting, and subsequently placing in the water;
- Lifting various ferry gangways at Rail Ferry Terminal;
- Putting *Suilven's* linkspan in place, and helping with modifications for the *Kent*;
- Acting as launching platform and control centre for several fireworks displays;
- Putting *Top Cat's* linkspan in place;
- Lifting Global Challenge yachts onto wharf for servicing in 1997, and again in 2001 [and 2005];
- Salvaging fishing boat *Vanguard* after she sank at her berth;
- Lifting WestpacTrust ferry onto wharf for survey;
- Shifting Fishermen's Co-operative icehouse from Waterloo Quay to Glasgow Wharf;
- Lifting *Breum* (an old Danish wooden fishing trawler now serving as a yacht) onto King's Wharf for renovation, and later putting her back in the water;
- Acting as breakwater for start-line of Dragon-Boat races;
- Lifting machinery from Maui platform;
- Moving railway engines, bound for Australia, into position in a ship's hold;
- Unloading three large transformers brought in from Australia;
- Replacing Barrett Reef marker buoy;
- Removing a large anchor, and chain, from the harbour bed near the ferry terminal and replacing it in the water at Taranaki Street Wharf pending preservation;
- Lifting stern of tug *Levanter* for propeller replacement;
- Salvaging *Maria Luisa* after she was run down by *Sydney Express*.
- In September 2004 a test lift of 100tonnes was successfully carried out
- 25 Nov 2006 saw a 75tonne lift of a barge on to Aotea Quay

- Two lifts of a 25tonne crane were done at Kaiwharawhara in early 2007
- Two 34tonne lifts were done at the North Queens Wharf development in May 2007
- A 22tonne ice tower was relocated between wharves at Lyttelton on 20 Oct 2009
- Removal of a 29m high tower crane ex Clyde Quay Wharf for LT McGuinness Ltd April 2013

Hikitia is one of the key reasons the Global Challenge fleet has been three times to Wellington.

She is part of Wellington's maritime heritage and has earned respect for her years of service to the port and the uniqueness of her construction and machinery. She continues to provide a unique waterborne lifting facility, she uplifts the ambience and interest of the waterfront and is an ark of knowledge for ship working skills.

On 16 March 2006 ownership was transferred to the Maritime Heritage Trust of Wellington. Current Trustees include Nigel Gould [chairman], Alfie des Tombe, Peter McKnight, Peter Clarke and Malcolm McGregor. The goal of the Trust is to refurbish and maintain the ship as a working vessel to demonstrate the purpose for which it was built and to help earn its keep at the same time. The Ackrills remain involved and they, and with usually 10 to 16 other dedicated helpers, are on board most Saturdays carrying out ongoing maintenance and are working toward the goal of getting the ship to be truly self sufficient. New volunteers are always made most welcome!

After assessing the ship for repairs needed, over \$660,000 in funding and waivers of fees was secured, not including costs avoided by our volunteer's efforts. The ship was towed to Lyttelton in June 2009 and a successful drydocking of 35days was completed allowing full hull and mechanical repairs. This was the first time in 28 years the ship had been out of the water. Extra money was found to waterblast and paint the crane structure and deck and to repair the deck belting and to make up an initial shortfall of funding. Total cost had exceeded \$780,000 by November 2009. Funders for the refurbishment and operating expenses included Lotteries Grants Board, Community Trust of Wellington, Lion Foundation, Wellington City Council, Pelorus Trust, Pub Charity, Wellington Waterfront Ltd, CentrePort Limited and significant private donations. Photos below show the "**Southern Adventure**".

Since return of the ship on 5 November 2009 the reinstatement of the steam bilge pump and fire fighting system, the refurbishment of the Gear Room at the base of the crane, the reinstatement of rudder boxes and steering mechanisms have all been completed along with retubing of the starboard boiler and structural support for all counterweights. Refurbishment of many other areas including, all electrics and the fuel systems are continuing. In 2014 we are well advanced to testing the ship's self propelling capability and are working toward a survey approval of the original 80tonne limit. All this advances the capability of the ship to be self sufficient to ensure its long term survival while retaining its mechanical function to demonstrate the purpose for which it was built.

In 2008 Hikitia won the Heritage & Environment category of the Wellington Airport Community Awards, in 2010 Hikitia was Runner Up in the heritage section of the inaugural Encore Awards and in December 2011 IPENZ recognised the importance of Hikitia's part in New Zealand's engineering heritage by unveiling a bronze plaque on Hikitia.

The ship is now in its 88th year of service to Wellington having arrived on 21 Dec 1926.

Hikitia IS available for hire to carry out lifts or as an events venue

For more information contact: Malcolm McGregor 5660278, 021 618402
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Hikitia under tow off Kaikouras on 4 June 2009



**Hikitia in Lyttelton dock June 2009
with the 1907 tug SS Lyttelton**



**Hikitia Returning to Wellington
under tow on 5 November 2009
Photo Vic Young**



Hikitia Lifting Off Tower Crane April 2013