

Frank Holsten was born in 1917, and as a child lived next door to the Webb family. Harry Webb was a grain merchant with an office in Waymouth Street. His sons were Reg, Sidney and Phil, who was Frank's age and best friend.

Harry Webb commissioned *Beth* in about 19 [check date with Lloyd's Register]. She was built by Searles and had an Ailsa Craig six-cylinder petrol engine. Frank began as a lad of ten or so by going down for an occasional day on board in company with Phil Webb. Seasickness didn't trouble him, and over time he was taken further afield — to Black Point for Christmas cruising and to Port Vincent for Easter. In *Beth* the adolescent Frank cruised the Gulf and Kangaroo Island, from Bay of Shoals to American River.

When Frank was 14, the family had a camping holiday on [?near] the beach at Normanville by the 'new jetty', which was north of the town. His father was a keen fisherman, and used the jetty for the purpose. They were 'blown out' by a strong wind, which permeated everything with sand, but by the time they set out to drive home on the then new road alongside the coast, they faced sparkling seas and a beautiful scene. Frank's father remarked that if they had a boat they would escape sand (true) and flies (not true!).

Frank went at once to talk over the prospect with the Webbs, and discovered that *Pioneer* was for sale. She was owned by Taylor the 'butter man' of Gawler, who brought *Stradbroke II* into the Squadron pool.¹ *Pioneer* was a motor cruiser of forty feet with a 40 hp four-cylinder Kelvin engine.² Bill Holsten bought her for £400 in 1930. Frank was designated skipper, and they spent much of the first six months sticking themselves on sundry sandbanks. His father encouraged him to persevere, to the extent that he wouldn't go out in the boat without Frank in charge. Frank was always mechanically and electrically inclined, and continues to be actively involved with amateur radio. For this reason, *Pioneer* was one of the few vessels of the day to be fitted with radio. They repeated the pattern learnt in *Beth*, and extended along the North Coast of Kangaroo Island as far as Smith Bay, where in those days there was good snapper fishing. They did not venture as far as Snug Cove. That came later.

With the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, *Pioneer* was compulsorily acquired by the Royal Australian Navy, and was returned afterwards in good order. At about this time Frank and his father went to an auction where there was offered a 100 hp six-cylinder Perkins diesel engine endorsed 'damaged'. This was because a nut had fallen into the gear box, but an unused completely new one replaced it. Even so, they bought it at a very low price, complete with the damaged gear. Examination under magnification revealed that it was barely used before its trauma.

At this time (about 1947) they became interested in *Para*. She was built by in about 1932 for a man named Delmont. While negotiating the sale, the owner died, and his son was not so accommodating, to the extent that he fell out with Bill Holsten. Eventually the sale was accomplished and at a reasonable price. Searles took out the old kerosene motor and replaced it with the Perkins.

In *Para* they cruised extensively, with a major commitment to fishing. A favourite location was Wedge Island, where they often spent three weeks, with one crew succeeding another by swapping cars at Pondolowie.

¹. For *Stradbroke II*, see *Some Notable Old Yacht Logs*.

². According to Peter McBride (30 March 1999), this was a four cylinder 36 hp engine, as Kelvin of Glasgow did not make a 40 hp engine.

They became friendly with Frank ('Pluto') Miller, the celebrated cray fisherman on *White Pointer*, which he maintained immaculately.³ They passed to Pluto bread, meat and cigarettes (for the crew, as Pluto didn't smoke), which allowed him to remain at sea for an extra few days. He paid in kind with excellent crayfish. On the last encounter with *White Pointer*, Frank Holsten was travelling west to Smith's Bay and they spoke to each other by radio off Cape Marsden. He left his radio on, and heard a call from Pluto to say that while bagging crays for the Kingscote freezer, the boat was run up on the wrong side of the beacon on the SE tip of Beatrice Island. They returned to try to help, but the tide had ebbed and she was stuck fast. Fortunately they were able to take the bags of crays to Kingscote, to be suitably rewarded in due course.

By this time Frank Holsten had bought *Martindale* from Robert Barr Smith, who named her *Watgannia*, after his farm in Victoria and Frank brought her round and restored the original name.⁴ After the end of the war in 1945, the Navy went to great trouble and expense to refurbish her. Two men worked for six weeks French-polishing the saloon and master cabin. The motor alone reputedly cost £6,000, which included the cost of flying parts from England. This was silly, as at that time a new motor could be bought for about £3,000, and a government price with no tax would have been less than that.

For tropical service, the Navy had her copper sheathed, but by the time the Holstens acquired her this was worn and thin. The sheathing consisted of plates, 9in x 2ft, with copper nails ½ in apart. These were removed, leaving hundreds of holes to be plugged with wooden nails — a very tedious task! Originally *Martindale* had a big square sail, but it was only used once, because they couldn't get it down. The Holstens rerigged her. She never had a jib. The staysail was the same size as the mizzen staysail, and the mainsail was interchangeable with the mizzen, both being the same size.

Martindale had a Gardiner diesel (6 cylinder, series L3), developed 114 hp originally governed at 800 revs. During war upgraded to 900 revs to produce 114 hp. When first commissioned had a hand winch and holstens had electrified. First Squadron vessel with a deep freeze, made by jim polson, put tv on it in 1960, b7w (colour not yet introduced) ran off batteries, charged from mains power supply. Radio exceptionally powerful, Allowed 5 watts in the aerial, he had 150! Relayed for *Karatta* and the ketches. Gearbox and reduction drive were Glenefer or Glenifer. Gardner didn't make gearboxes. Originally had steamer controls same as *Grelka*, but Frank immediately had engine controls placed in the wheelhouse.

In *Martindale* the same pattern continued, to which was added some protocol activities on behalf of the Squadron. There are a couple of photographs taken in May, 1961 when the Governor (Sir Edric Bastyan) went aboard to view the King's Cup races in the Port River. Frank remembered his annoyance that his strong request that the ladies should not wear high heels was broken by the Commodore's wife, who flamboyantly did so.

Murray Gowling acted as sailing master and general support on *Pioneer*, *Para* and *Martindale*.

Frank recalled several items of great interest.

Stradbroke II was very lightly built, essentially for lake sailing. She hobby-horsed badly in the short steep seas of the Gulf, and after a heavy day was often hastily slipped to be recaulked. That was done as soon as she arrived after her delivery cruise. The deck also leaked if she was strained. She had a kerosene engine which had to be preheated with a blow lamp.⁵

³ Cruising the North Coast with the Ulletts in *Fine Romance* in March, 1997 we were briefly in company with *White Pointer*. Frank's son Lyall keeps the vessel as beautifully as his father ever did.

⁴ The story of JT Mortlock and *Martindale* is told in some detail in *Squadron Quarterly*, September 1994:24–29.

⁵ The information in the paper on yacht logs was taken from *Lloyd's Register* and is clearly not correct so far as the engine is concerned.

In 1938 Bill Holsten was drinking whisky aboard *Pioneer* with Tom Hardy, who suggested that he join a party going to Melbourne for the Cup. It was 'as close as the weight of a postage stamp' that he would do so, but he declined. This was just as well, because poor Tom lost his life in the crash of the *Kyeema* into the Dandenong Mountains on 26 October, 1938.

It is a nice succession that Frank sold both *Para* and *Martindale* to Percy Puckridge of Port Lincoln. Frank got £20,000 for his sale of *Martindale*, but Doug Abbott (the paint man) had a bargain for only £2,000.

Ern Stuckey lost his life from the fire aboard *Pedare*. Jim Polson drove at 100 mph up the Port Road to Royal Adelaide Hospital to no avail. (The Queen Elizabeth Hospital was not yet opened.)⁶

Interviewed 10 December, 1997

⁶. My memory for the stories about fires on yachts in the Squadron pool may not be reliable. I met the niece of a man who lost his life in one. There were children playing in the forepeak while the vessel took on petrol at the hydroplane wharf. He dashed below to throw them to safety, at the cost of fatal burns to himself. I think, but I'm not certain, that this was Ern Stuckey. In this or another fire Dr J Stanley Verco was summoned. He spent virtually his entire career in radiology, and was said to have been overwhelmed by his lack of expertise in handling a disaster way outside his usual practice. There was also a story about some men sleeping down overnight in a tent which caught fire through smoking in bed. These stories are quite possibly muddled together.