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The Sydney Sailors' Home 1859 – 2009: 150 years of caring for seafarers

by Jan Bowen

*The Australian Mariners' Welfare Society: Sydney; 2009; 86 pp.; ISBN 978-0-64651-361-4;
RRP \$45.00 (hardback); Ursula Davidson Library cal no. 721 BOWE 2009*

This is a beautifully written, illustrated and presented book by Sydney journalist Jan Bowen. It traces the history of the Sydney Sailors' Home which, for 114 years (1865-1979), provided cheap, affordable accommodation in a 'wholesome' atmosphere for merchant seafarers from around the world when their ships were visiting Sydney.

When it was constructed, Sydney was a bustling mercantile port hosting some 1000 ship visits and 20,000 seamen annually. The government donated the land at 106 George Street North beside Cadman's Cottage and adjacent to Circular Quay (just behind the current Overseas Passenger Terminal). It was constructed and operated entirely from funds donated by Sydney philanthropists and charitable contributions from the wider community. In addition to accommodation 'cells', the home boasted a magnificent library and room where board games were played.

The building, which still stands, was closed as a

sailors' home in 1979 by which time its services had become unnecessary. It is one of the few Victorian Romanesque Revival style buildings remaining in Sydney and is heritage-protected. It currently houses a commercial art gallery and restaurant.

The book also serves to tell the story of what is today the Australian Mariners' Welfare Society which continues to serve the interests of international mariners who visit the port of Sydney. Rather than accommodation, the charity now provides funds to other bodies, such as the Mission to Seafarers and the Stella Maris clubs, which provide social support to visiting seafarers. It also provides scholarships to enable budding Australian merchant mariners to study at the Australian Maritime College in Tasmania.

I recommend *The Sydney Sailors' Home* to anyone interested in the maritime and/or architectural history of Sydney.

David Leece