

SS MASTER

Working for BC Tugboat Heritage

BY DAVID BRADFORD

The steam tug SS MASTER is clearly a workboat. Strong, heavy and purposeful, designed and built to do a very challenging and important job – towing log booms and barges of building stone, coal, gravel, sand and limestone to the growing city of Vancouver. Originally built for Capt. Herman Thorsen in 1922 by Arthur Moscrop in his False Creek shipyard, the MASTER operated under the Master Towing Co, worked for Fraser Mills and was later chartered to Lamb Logging Company. In 1940 she was purchased by Marpole Towing Co. and she still has the distinctive Marpole colours – black diamonds (for coal) on a white band on an orange stack.

In 1947 Evans, Coleman and Evans assumed ownership and worked her as part of the Gilley Bros. fleet until she was laid up in 1959. Rescued and restored by the World Ship Society in 1962, she again raised steam in 1963 and since then has been constantly in the public eye at various events and festivals around BC. Since 1984 she has been owned by the SS MASTER

Society. This history adds up to 37 years of working life and over 50 years working to represent the heritage of BC tugboats, the history of Canada's west coast maritime and seaport development, and the proud history of BC shipbuilding.

However the MASTER's status as the iconic west coast heritage vessel today did not come easily. It represents a lifetime of work – the work of the companies and crew who ran the tug for years on the coast and the work of shipyards and shipwrights who built her, maintained and restored her. Not least, the work of hundreds of volunteers who, through the years, have given their time and effort to keep the tug operational and tell the story of the MASTER to the thousands who come aboard her every year and marvel at her still-operating steam engine, see how the crew lived and worked for weeks at a time, and climb the ladder to the wheelhouse to grasp the big wooden ship's wheel.

Over the past winter and spring the MASTER has been a feature at Britannia Heritage Shipyard in Richmond BC and will



85' wooden hulled steam-tug MASTER, built in 1922.

If you like classic tugs and have always wanted to try your hand at a working steam engine then the SS Master Society is for you.

We're looking for new members of all abilities.

Interested? There's no obligation.

Contact steamtugmaster@gmail.com

or visit www.ssmaster.org Phone 604 352 4174

BECOME PART OF OUR BC MARITIME HERITAGE



MASTER
Vancouver, BC.

ROBERT ALLAN LTD.
NAVAL ARCHITECTS AND MARINE ENGINEERS

Proud supporter of the
SS Master*
Centenary Project

* Designed and built by Arthur Moscrop in 1922
Photo by Bart Wotherspoon



On 27 June 2014 on board the MASTER at Granville Island in Vancouver, a presentation was made to Robert Allan Ltd (RAL) by board members of the SS MASTER Society. Left to right: Jim Conwell, David Bradford, Drew McVittie, Rob Allan (RAL), Grant Brandlmayr (RAL), Tom Lidstone, Bob Murray.

spend most of the summer at Granville Island with trips to festivals such as Steamship Days on Bowen Island and the Richmond Maritime Festival. The MASTER is a feature of the Vancouver Wooden Boat Festival in August and this year the SS MASTER Society is starting a new festival called The Vancouver Tugboat Festival on Granville Island slated for September 19-21. This festival will feature tugboats, both heritage and modern and participant inquiries are welcome.

The preservation of an aging heritage vessel is a huge challenge and fortunately the process is well under way with the SS MASTER Centenary Project which got started in 2012 with endorsement by the Council of Marine Carriers. This project's goal is to raise enough money to complete major repairs in time to celebrate the MASTER's centenary in 2022. There are ongoing discussions with various BC towboat companies and related maritime companies, and enthusiasm is growing to support this fundraising effort.

Of particular note is a major commitment of support from Robert Allan Ltd, one of Canada's preeminent naval architectural firms with a reputation worldwide for cutting edge tugboat design. Rob Allan himself, well known in the BC towboat industry, is very involved as a committee member of the Centenary Project and is providing a focused way forward for the campaign with his personal commitment. The SS MASTER Society recently recognized Robert Allan Ltd.'s support with a presentation on the MASTER (photo above).

As well, the Society is grateful for the offer from Seaspan to provide a docking for the MASTER this summer for new bottom paint and to assess work needed below the waterline.

It is always an event when the MASTER gets up steam and is under way to a new destination as skippers, engineers, and deckhands all go about their tasks as they always have done. It's the continuation of the story of the MASTER, the story of the skill and dedication of the crew working on a tug whose very essence is the purposeful work that helped accomplish the building of this province. The MASTER celebrates the heritage of that work from which we have all benefitted. Now it is our job to honour what the MASTER represents with her heavy timbers and distinctive character and make sure she continues to be a part of our living history so future generations will understand the cumulative effort and contribution of so many. ◀

David Bradford, president of the SS MASTER Society, can be contacted at: steamtugmaster@gmail.com



The SS MASTER departing Britannia Heritage Shipyard in June 2014.