

Heritage restoration underway at North Wharf

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By Giulia Raneri

Restoration of the heritage-listed Goods Shed 5 in Docklands began last month as part of developer Riverlee's \$500 million Seafarers project.

The redevelopment of the maritime asset, which has sat dormant for more than 45 years, comes as welcome news to the revival of maritime heritage in Docklands with the building situated in what will be a new maritime precinct for Melbourne.

The news comes after the City of Melbourne and state government announced a feasibility study and business case into a new maritime heritage centre at the neighbouring Mission to Seafarers building in August.

To support that vision, Riverlee, in partnership with the council and the state government will also deliver the new 3500 sqm Seafarers Rest Park in the precinct, linking its development to the Mission to Seafarers.

Having already restored the heritage crane attached to Goods Shed 5, the developer is now undertaking work to restore key elements of the building, such as the roof trusses, doors and windows.

Riverlee told Docklands News that all elements would be taken offsite for remediation works and carefully restored in the building during the project's construction phase, which will deliver a mixed-use development at the site.

Melbourne Maritime Heritage Network (MMHN) chair and City of Melbourne Cr Jackie Watts said Riverlee had been tremendously engaged in the actual locality and the specific nature of its importance to Melbourne.

“This part of Melbourne’s historic waterfront is such a critical element in our Maritime trade history that to have a developer as

sympathetic to have that understanding, is very important to us,” she said.

Former Secretary of the Waterside Workers Federation Victoria Archie Arceri said the restoration of the maritime precinct was welcomed.

“The North Wharf was a hive of activity from the 1940s onwards until containerisation saw the end of the area as a commercial hub for the City. Break bulk, steel, wool and freezer ships were aplenty along the wharf area and played a huge part in Melbourne’s development throughout that time,” he said.

Built in 1941, the shed catered to the sudden influx of cargo, incorporating 4.25-metre high sliding doors to allow ample headroom for the movement of cargo. It was the first to have a road-transport loading bay and was also the first fireproof shed in the Port of Melbourne.

It wasn’t until 1975 that the Goods Shed 5 fell into disuse when the newly completed Charles Grimes Bridge left insufficient clearance for cargo ships to pass underneath for passage upstream.

Still to this day, the shed represents the important history and technology of Melbourne’s pre-containerisation cargo handling methods and has remained essentially unchanged.

Cr Watts said the city needed to continue preserving its maritime history in order to understand “and acknowledge the role of trade by sea in driving Melbourne’s economic prosperity in the past and present day.”

With respect to the long history of Aboriginal maritime activity, the City of Melbourne along with Riverlee and landscape architects Oculus are currently in conversation with Traditional Custodian Groups, developing the design details for Seafarers Rest Park, which could see the use of native planting and indigenous maritime references, embedded throughout the site.

Upon completion in 2023, the river-front precinct will comprise of several luxury residences, including events venues, meeting spaces, a state-of-the-art health centre and food and beverage