



MINUTE OF THE MAYOR

Dated: 20 April 2018

RE: Bill Barnett OAM (1915-2018)

William Henry 'Bill' Barnett had few peers in the world of Sydney Harbour's open boat racing and building. His list of achievements was as long as his extraordinary life. Bill was born in 1915 and grew up at 12 West Crescent Street McMahons Point, above the Harbour that he would come to love and know intimately. His family moved to No.8 when he was still a toddler. Bill grew up there and after he married in 1944, built a solid modest house next door at No.6. Bill and Gloria lived there on Berrys Bay for nearly 75 years.

Bill was part of a harbour dynasty. His grandfather worked at Ford's boatyard there, as did his father, the wonderfully named Prince Alfred Barnett. Bill learned the craft from 'Dad' and built his first boat as a school boy. It was powered by oars and a hessian sail. His uncle Sid Barnett was a shipwright and lived close by.

Bill became an apprentice at Neptune Engineering on Lavender Bay, and moved on to the Port Jackson and Manly Steamship Company where he emerged as a shipwright. He worked for a period with Shell at Gore Cove before starting out on his own building boats for the ever-popular, well-sponsored harbour racing scene and surf boats for Sydney's burgeoning lifesaving clubs. Never far from home, Bill was now working at home in West Crescent Street – more particularly in a boatshed at the end of the garden, on the edge of the harbour.

Like his father Bill was both maker of boats and competitive sailor. He built and raced the legendary 18-foot cedar skiff *Myra Too*, winning harbour, state, national and international titles in the 1950-1951 season. Remarkably Bill built two America's Cup challengers in the boat shed at the end of his garden, *Dame Pattie* in 1966 and *Gretel II* for the 1970 race. The boatshed was burnt down the following year with the loss of its contents of tools and drawings. Council and the local community assisted in rebuilding a new shed which has marked that important spot on Berrys Bay ever since.

Dame Pattie found her way to the French Riviera but *Gretel II* was refurbished and remains a regular sight on Sydney Harbour. The vessel was docked at Sydney Amateurs Sailing Club in Cremorne for the 2013 fund raising celebration of the rebuilding of *Myra Too* by the Australian National Maritime Museum for inclusion in its collection of Sydney Harbour 18 footers. Bill and Gloria were both present as the guests of honour.

Bill Barnett was as self-effacing as he was remarkable. After interviewing him for Stanton Library's oral history program in 1994, Nan Manefield noted: 'Bill is a very modest man and was reticent about his successes. The tape could be supplemented by newspaper reports'.

Bill Barnett died on 18 March 2018, aged 103. As his colleagues and friends at the Sydney Flying Squadron noted after his passing: ‘Bill Barnett seemed immortal’. He was an extraordinarily important part of the history of North Sydney, Sydney Harbour and Australian competitive sailing.

I am therefore recommending:

1.THAT Council receives and endorses the obituary.

**JILLY GIBSON
MAYOR**