

A lucky Find!

On our return trip from Queensland recently, my wife and I stopped over in Port Macquarie to break the journey. The booking, of course, was made sight unseen so I was delighted to find we were booked right opposite the Mid-North Coast Maritime Museum, right on the shores of the Hastings River. This was a totally unexpected bonus but, as it was getting late, I only had time to take a few photos before the light was gone.

The next morning, I made a point of getting up a bit earlier than usual to see the Museum at sunrise and was not disappointed as the complex of old boats and buildings was revealed in all its antique splendour. I was also lucky enough to find that the manager of the museum and boat yard, Ron Window, had arrived early to open for the day. After introducing myself, Ron was only too happy to give me a personal introduction and conducted tour of this very interesting piece of NSW maritime history.

First off, it should be said, that the whole the area is still recovering from very recent, serious floods and the museum itself sustained substantial damage and loss of machinery and other equipment. Although everything looks shipshape Ron assured me much work was still to be done. Several of the boats from the collection were washed away but, fortunately, have been found and returned.

The museum started life in 1882 as a slipway to service timber getting, milling and supply along the North Coast of NSW which relied very much on shipping. It depended on ketches and schooner to transfer sawn wood but also log punts or droghers to bring the timber downstream to the mills.

Although most mills relied on such shipping John Hibbard's Hibbard and Haines' mill operation soon built and established its own fleet and the means to service it. That, in turn, soon turned became Hibbard's highly respected shipyard, building a steam punt, a 62-ton schooner and a 35-ton ketch in its early days.

Boatyard operations continued on the site for many years until in 1964 the winch broke, and the yard lay dormant until repairs were finally completed in 1969 and the yard came back to life once again. It is still a working shipyard performing commercial repairs but most of its time is taken up by its volunteers with the maintenance and repair of its memorable and fascinating collection historic boats. Sadly, it is the last old shipyard on the NSW coast.

It is well worth a visit when you're in the area.

My thanks to manager Ron Window for his time and enthusiasm.

There is plenty more information on-line and their website:

<https://portmacquariemaritime.org.au/>

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