



# 100 YEARS OF BOATING HISTORY ON THE TORRENS

THE CENTENARY OF LOUNDER'S BOATSHED, TORRENS LAKE

MARCH 2013

**As soon as the first dam was completed on the perennial creek running through Adelaide, creating the Torrens Lake, people began using the waterway for boating.**

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the busy Torrens Lake supported a full range of Edwardian recreational pursuits, including pleasure launches, rowboats for hire and organized racing between the rowing clubs which had sprung up on the river banks.

Among the rowing clubs were a few buildings like Jolley's Boathouse where boats were built, repaired and hired.

In March 1913, James Greenland, of a famous Melbourne family of racing boat builders, built for his new business what is now known as Lounder's Boatshed – the modest green building used today as the base for the Popeye launches.

Greenland built boats in the shed until 1936, when his employee Harry Lounder bought the business and continued there until 1976, building boats for numerous schools and rowing clubs in Adelaide and on the Murray.

Of the thousands of men and women who learnt to row in South Australia until about the 1980s, there would not be one who did not learn their craft in a Harry Lounder 'four'.

Lounder's Boatshed, still in substantially its original condition, is a survival of the early days of recreational use of the Torrens Lake by the people of Adelaide. It is among the oldest buildings on the Torrens, and is the only one remaining specifically built for the construction and repair of lightweight timber rowing boats.

The boatshed is a deceptively simple building. It is just long enough to accommodate an eight-oared rowing shell, and wide enough to allow boats to be worked on side by side. The sand floor of the shed makes it easy to level the trestles under a long rowing shell, while the sealed windows regularly spaced along the sides of the shed, and the narrow gaps between the carefully selected and placed Oregon weatherboards allow continuous ventilation for the drying of glues and varnishes. Supporting the whole, including the roof of first grade corrugated galvanised iron from the Phoenix Iron Works in Glasgow, is a hardwood frame of jarrah.

The building is a piece of Edwardian technology - a carefully designed and constructed specifically for the building of boats.

Since 1937, the shed has also been the base for the lake's 'Popeye' launches. The first of the eight 'Popeye' launches which have plied the lake since 1937 - in one of which most South Australians and many visitors have travelled - was designed and built in the boatshed and all eight Popeyes have been maintained and managed from there.

The shed's touch with international fame came with the little-known but glorious attempt by South Australia's first Olympians to lift the cup for the world eight-oared rowing championship at the 1924 Paris Olympic Games. The ageing crew of local railwaymen from Murray Bridge, led by a formidable 41 year old riverboat captain and calling themselves the Murray Cods, came close to achieving the dream. The Cods, whose boat was maintained by James Greenland in the Torrens boatshed, lost to an American crew to whom they gave decades in age and not a little in modern technique.

The attractive low, green weatherboard building continues to be a local landmark.



James Greenland and Harry Lounder at work on a clinker-built four in Lounder's Boatshed, c. 1935

## ADELAIDE'S POPEYE BOATS FROM 1937 TO THE PRESENT

List of Popeye launches and proprietors 1934 – 2012

Proprietors: 1937 – 1962: Gordon Watts, 1962 – 2011: Keith Altmann, 2011 - Tony Shuman

Vessel name	Date	Type	Builder	Proprietor	Present location
Popeye 1*	1937	18ft timber	H Lounder	Gordon Watts	Broken up
Popeye 2**	1939	24ft timber	ex 'Princess', Glenelg	Gordon Watts	Mildura
Popeye 3	1951	38ft timber	R T Searles	Gordon Watts/ Keith Altmann	Goolwa
Popeye 4	1953	38ft timber	R T Searles	Gordon Watts/ Keith Altmann	Waikerie
Popeye 5	1955	38ft timber	R T Searles	Gordon Watts/ Keith Altmann	Murray Bridge
Popeye 6 ('1')	1982	45ft f/glass	Clayton Marine	Keith Altmann/ Tony Shuman	Torrens Lake
Popeye 7 ('2')	1982	45ft f/glass	Clayton Marine	Keith Altmann/ Tony Shuman	Torrens Lake
Popeye 8 ('3')	1983	45ft f/glass	Clayton Marine	Keith Altmann/ Tony Shuman	Torrens Lake

\* Popeye 1 was something of an experiment to test whether there was sufficient custom to support a business. It was a lightweight craft akin to a powered punt.

\*\* Popeye 2 was formerly the 'Princess', a seagoing vessel operated from the Glenelg Jetty by Mr Charlesworth who advertised trips 'Around the Bay for a bob'. In 1938 a violent storm demolished the jetty, depriving Mr Charles worth of his place of business. The boat was sold to Gordon Watts who took it to the Torrens Lake. The City Council objected to the effect of the deep-hulled craft's wash on the then unsupported river banks, and the boat was eventually replaced by the first of three 38ft craft from R T Searles. The Searles boats and their replacements, the fibreglass-hulled boats, have had virtually flat bottoms which cause minimum disturbance to the river banks.