

Capt David McFall
February 4, 1942 – May 4, 2018



David McFall, who was well known in maritime circles, passed over the bar on May 4, 2018 after a gallant fight against cancer. He had been working in his beloved model museum at Mona Vale NSW just a few weeks beforehand and died just short of his 76th birthday. While David was known by many there was a mystique about him, and as a man of many parts, revealing his story has involved more than a little research. Perhaps the secret of his success was having many tales but always holding something in reserve.

David was born to George and Jean McFall in the village of Church Cresley in Derbyshire on 4 February 1942. Shortly before David's birth his father, who served in the RAAF as a tail gunner in Lancaster bombers, was shot down in the desert campaign and is buried at El Alamein. Jean moved to be with family in London but with the blitz it was not long before David and his sister were evacuated to live with an aunt and uncle in Cornwall where they thoroughly enjoyed the new environment and fitted in well with many cousins.

After the war Jean married Richard Price and the children returned to London where David received his secondary education at Eltham College near Lewisham in Kent. A military career beckoned and he entered the Mons Officer Cadet Training School at Aldershot. As the family originally hail from the Scottish Highlands he received a short-service commission in the Gordon Highlanders.

David enjoyed Army life with his duties including a posting to the British Army on the Rhine (BOAR) where he undertook German language training and served at the beleaguered Berlin Garrison, near Checkpoint Charlie. A game of rugby unfortunately cut short a promising career and he was medically discharged, but thankfully fully recovered.

Grandad, an engineer, had worked for the eminent shipbuilders Harland & Wolf at Belfast and was involved in the engines designed for Titanic. David's uncle had also served in the Royal Navy. So there was some maritime background and David ventured to a new career in the merchant service. He served with the Dublin based Bell Line involved in coastal trade across the North Seas and then deep sea with the Danish Maersk Lines. His certificates of competency up to ship master were taken at the South Shields Marine School. He also joined the Royal Naval Reserve and undertook annual training, for many years mostly serving as a Lieutenant in minesweepers and was awarded the RNR Long Service medal.

Working for a shipping company was not exactly ideal for someone with David's artistic temperament and free spirit so he skippered motor yachts for clients around the Mediterranean. This was financially rewarding and allowed a certain amount of freedom in which he enjoyed building scale ship models. His interest was such that he would visit museums for inspiration which led to the offer of a position with the Greenwich National Maritime Museum. He branched out on his own with a business called Marine Design Associates in Putney, working for naval architects and some film sets. There was even a small part as a maritime expert in the TV series "The Antiques Road Show".

By this time David was married to Jocelyn and after setting up home two fine children Angus and Pippa came along. But the family was restless and in 1989 David was offered a contracted position curating ship models for the Australian National Maritime Museum. The family settled at Mona Vale which gave David access to take up sailing with a passion and he also became a member of the Naval Historical Society and the Naval Officers Club.

In another career change David joined the Maritime Services Board and for a short while skippered a Sydney ferry. However, David's model making was all consuming and after a while he set up business forming a relationship with the famous retailing firm of "Gowings" who gave him space in their Wynyard store on George Street to display models and sell maritime artefacts. When this store closed he moved to Gowings at Hornsby. After the Hornsby store too closed David established his own Maritime Model Museum (MMM) at Mona Vale. There were also other changes as with the pressure of business the long-term marriage failed. David later found a new partner, Jenny, and they were happily married.

David's continuing relationship with the sea with his love of wooden yachts saw him first become a member of the Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club and then the Royal Motor Yacht Club. His first boat was the sloop Jamboree, followed by a 36-foot ketch Blue Peter and lastly, his favourite, was the 28-foot sloop Daydream. He was still sailing to near the very end of his life.

The MMM was a great success with a wonderful display of beautifully crafted marine models and working model steam engines. The collection grew with some important donations and some rare and valuable models were acquired. In addition, there were marine works of art, maritime books and a wide variety of memorabilia such as chronometers and sextants. In totality it was a fascinating display that could keep ship lovers entranced for several hours.

Taking pride of place on the bulkhead of the museum were two photos of ships in which he had served and meant much to him, one of RN minesweepers in Gibraltar and the other of the Greek-owned yacht SY Antibes. Kevin Antis who worked with David for many years now has the heart-breaking job of disposing this valuable collection.

David McFall was a colourful character blessed with a handsome countenance and a bright smile, and being quick witted and jovial, made many friendships. He enjoyed music and was fond of nothing better than a glass or two in good company singing to Gilbert & Sullivan. In another age he would have been a loveable pirate king. Both David and his collection are a sad loss and will be greatly missed by his many friends and the larger maritime community.

Compiled with input from Angus McFall, Kevin Antis and Richard Francis. First published in Navy News