

# *Xantho* Gallery: 2004 Reevaluation



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## CONTENTS

### Introduction page 1

• Introduction to Maritime Museum	1
• Steamships & Suffragettes	1
• The history of the SS <i>Xantho</i>	2
• Curator's Vision	2
• Brief	2
• Ideal world	2
• Real world & constraints	2
• Constraints	3
• Previous transformations	3
• Eliza Broadhurst	3

### Evaluation page 3

• Indigenous display	4
• Restoration video	4
• Eliza's scrapbook	4
• Broadhurst family	4
• Working model	5
• Model of excavated <i>Xantho</i> wreck	5
• Engine	6
• Personal evaluation	7
• Evaluating display	7
• Staff impression of the gallery	7

### Visitor Evaluation page 8

• Visitor evaluation - method	8
• Children	8
• Visitor movements	8
• Figure 1	9
• Analysis 1	10
• Questionnaire 1	10
• Female visitor response	10
• Male visitor response	10
• Analysis 2	10
• Questionnaire 2	10
• Female visitor response	11
• Male visitor response	11
• Conclusion	11
• Strengths	11
• Weaknesses	12

### Implementation page 12

• Macro review of gallery layout	12
• Considerations for display movements	12
• Model engine	12
• Ship's engine	12
• Broadhurst family and the suffragette movement	12
• Video	13
• Figure 2 proposed gallery layout	13

• Micro review of possible changes	13
• Engine display	13
• Video	13
• Indigenous art	14
• Eliza’s scrapbook	14
• Broadhurst family	14
• Small display case	14

### **Changes, Installation Stage 1 page 14**

• Engine	14
• Eliza’s scrapbook	14
• Display case (small)	15
• Video viewing area	15
• Lighting	15
• Indigenous rock art display	15
• Information panels	16

### **Installation Stage 2 page 16**

• Shelving	16
• Engine	17
• Model of the engine	17
• Computer screen	17
• Eliza’s scrapbook	17
• Small display case (suffragettes display)	17
• Indigenous rock art	17
• Model of excavated Xantho wreck	17

### **Re-evaluation page 17**

• Staff evaluation of Xantho gallery	17
• Video	17
• Small display case (suffragette display)	17
• Eliza’s scrapbook	18
• Indigenous rock art	18
• Visitor response	18
• Female visitor response	18
• Male visitor response	18
• Analysis	18
• Visitor re-visits	18
• Conclusion	19

### **Overview page 19**

• Overview of experiences	19
• Conclusion	19

### **References page20**

#### **Appendices**

1. “The Broadhurst: who were they?” museum information sheet
2. “SS Xantho: Western Australia’s First Coastal Steamer” museum information sheet
3. Xantho gallery Questionnaire 1
4. Xantho gallery Questionnaire 2
5. Xantho gallery Questionnaire 3



# Introduction

My interest in the Maritime Museum developed from my involvement as a Cultural Heritage Student at Curtin University. Although art is my major I didn't want to be restricted by it. My first work placement, as part of my Heritage Studies course, was undertaken at the Art Gallery of Western Australia. I enjoyed the experience immensely and was introduced to the many facets of the art world. These included conducting provenance research, documenting new acquisitions, witnessing the processes involved in constructing exhibitions as well as developing the Darbyshire ceramics exhibition. The experience led me into thinking, what to do next? It was from here, and my previous introduction to both the new and old Maritime Museums through a museum studies class, that I decided to broaden my horizons. The Old Maritime Museum seemed like the logical choice. Unlike the new Maritime Museum, a contemporary building consisting mainly of glass, the old Maritime Museum contained an aura that immediately drew my attention. It's situated in a limestone building over a hundred years old and was constructed by convict labour. The old Maritime Museum has a history all of its own. Its displays capture the imagination of visitors without the need for high tech gadgets or fancy gimmicks. This inspired me to find out how this was done so I applied for an internship through Curtin University and was accepted.

## Introduction to the Maritime Museum

I was introduced to the *Xantho* project by Dr. Michael McCarthy on October 5<sup>th</sup> 2004. McCarthy, a curator at the museum, has been working on the recovery, conservation and restoration of the *Xantho* engine for over twenty years. His extensive knowledge on the *Xantho* was amazing but, as he explained, the construction of the exhibition was a process that was on-going. This was due to the continual conservation work being undertaken on the *Xantho* engine itself. The engine had been disassembled piece by piece to ensure that each element received the attention needed to make it stable. The exhibition, therefore, had undertaken several transformations over the years as research was conducted and new objects became available for display. My internship coincided with two *Xantho* cylinders from the engine becoming available for display. The gallery space therefore needed to be structured to incorporate these two new objects. McCarthy saw this restructure as an opportunity to re-visit the 'gallery experience'. He explained that the *Xantho* contained an extraordinary history that could only be fully appreciated through the studying of its owner Charles Broadhurst and his family. It was from here that I was introduced to the concept of *Steamships and Suffragettes*.

## Steamships and Suffragettes

The *Steamships and Suffragettes* concept developed out of the necessity to understand Charles Broadhurst and why the *Xantho* ended up shipwrecked off the coast of Western Australia. Through the study of the Broadhurst family a complete picture was developed about the sinking of the SS *Xantho* and the family structure supporting Charles Broadhurst. Charles and Eliza Broadhurst's youngest daughter, Catherine Elime Broadhurst, became a suffragette and through her and women like her, Western Australia became one of the first places in the world to grant women the right to vote. It is through the Broadhurst family that two seemingly different subjects are linked. See Appendix 1 for "The Broadhurst: who were they?" information sheet.

## History brief of SS *Xantho*

"The *Xantho* was...the first iron-hulled vessel excavated under the museum's colonial wreck program (McCarthy, 2000, p.68). Originally Built as a paddle steamer in 1848 it received a new lease on life when, in 1871, it was purchased by a 'Metal Merchant' in Glasgow. It was here that a "60 nhp trunk, "ex RN Gunboat engine" was fitted. The boat was later sold to C.E Broadhurst who sailed the ship to a colonial Western Australia. Unfortunately the ship suffered due to its poor condition and mismanagement sinking off Port Gregory a few months after its arrival. Although the *Xantho* was in operation for only a short period, its presence had a lasting effect on Western Australia's social history. 'Malay' people, transported by Charles Broadhurst as pearl divers, settled in Australia<sup>1</sup>. Whilst its brief stint (as a transport vessel) transporting Indigenous Australian

elders has left its mark with Indigenous rock art depicting the vessel. This has added to the complexity of the *Xantho* story. See Appendix 2 for the museum information sheet “SS *Xantho*: Western Australia’s First coastal Steamer”.

### **Curator’s vision**

McCarthy’s vision for the *Xantho* exhibition is to provide visitors with the unique opportunity of seeing behind the scenes of a working museum. By developing a ‘work in progress’ theme the vision is to engage visitors in the evolutionary process of the exhibition. The reconstruction of the *Xantho* engine is conducted in plain view and close to the visitors, creating a workshop feel to the gallery space. This concept contradicts the way museums usually go about creating exhibitions in that exhibitions tend to be presented in their finished state. The *Xantho* gallery is under a process of continual change as research is conducted and displays developed. Along with this behind the scenes look at the museum McCarthy aspires to communicate the interesting history of the *Xantho* and its owner Charles Broadhurst, his family and their link to Western Australia’s suffragette movement.

### **Brief**

The Brief I was given in revisiting the *Xantho* exhibition is as follows;

1. Re-visit the Steamships and Suffragettes exhibit in order to evaluate how the concept is being received.
2. Evaluate the displays.
3. Research possible improvements.
4. Evaluate what effects these improvements would have if implemented.
5. Assess personal, staff and visitor opinions of *Xantho* gallery before and after changes to exhibition have been implemented.
6. Implement changes using existing objects in the gallery and supplies available through the museum.
7. Report to McCarthy on project.
8. Consult and inform museum departments of the progress undertaken in *Xantho* gallery.
9. Develop a working relationship with the museum staff members for the purposes of my internship.
10. Analysis and assess the success of the project.

The reasons behind McCarthy presenting this brief to me are as follows;

1. I was coming into the exhibition ‘cold’ with no prior knowledge of the *Xantho* and its history. I would therefore not harbour any preconceived notions or presumptions.
2. I have the ability to provide a new perspective when viewing the exhibition because I belong to a different generation from those who previously worked on the exhibition.
3. I have background knowledge in heritage issues due to my studies as a Cultural Heritage Student at Curtin University.

### **The ideal world**

The ideal process of re evaluating and designing an exhibition would be carried out with all the necessary funding and equipment available. In this case no funding is available. The re-design of gallery displays would normally be undertaken by a professional designer who would be given a brief and expected to produce a display accordingly. Text panels, labels and creating mounts for displays would be undertaken by professionals, such as a graphic designer, to create a professional finish. Safety would not be an issue as safety barriers would be available where needed. With this in mind two steps have been undertaken when evaluating the exhibition. One is to view the displays with the ‘ideal’ objective in mind. It is acknowledged that some ideas may not be achievable at this present time but future changes may see these potential ideas come into fruition.

### **Real world Design & Constraints**

In reality the work that is being undertaken in the *Xantho* gallery is restricted to the equipment and objects available in the current gallery space. Ideally when presented with such a program a budget would be included as part of the package. Surveys of visitor numbers would be undertaken and questionnaires would be produced

to determine the visitor demographic. This would allow the museum to understand their visitors and design an exhibition accordingly. Briefs would be distributed and designers employed. Unfortunately the reality is much different. The redesign of the *Xantho* exhibition needs to be done with the constraints on available funding and materials in mind. A 'shoe string budget' is all that is available. This means there is a limited amount of money, if any, accessible. Because of this, new concepts need to be developed using existing objects contained within the gallery space. Issues such as safety need to be taken into consideration when rearranging displays as do visitor movement and the gallery's layout. In an ideal world issues such as lighting would not be a problem. Unfortunately the available lighting contained within the gallery space is poor but is something that has to be worked with.

### **Constraints**

- A shoe string budget has been allocated for the re-design of the *Xantho* gallery. This means that;
- Existing objects contained within the gallery are all that is available with the exception of small items that may be purchased for the exhibition after pre approval by McCarthy. For example the purchasing of paper to be used for signs.
- No new display cases or furniture have been allocated to the gallery meaning any changes must be built around existing recycled display furniture already in use.
- The gallery space in its self has a bearing on the arrangement of displays due to the location of two entries into the gallery space. This restricts the display placements and determines how visitor move through the gallery.

### **Previous transformations**

This will be the sixth transformation the *Xantho* gallery would have received in recent years. A variety of people, from different disciplines have contributed to the *Xantho* exhibition. McCarthy explained that the involvement of these people provided the gallery with alternate ways of viewing the gallery space. This enabled the gallery to incorporate fresh ideas developed through new research into the *Xantho*'s history and displays. The main objective of the *Xantho* gallery was to present visitors with an insight into the *Xantho* engine's reconstruction and its fascinating history. "Work in progress" is the theme behind the engines display. The reconstruction work that would usually be undertaken behind closed doors is revealed to the public inside the gallery. This provides the visitors with the unique opportunity to watch the gallery transform in front of their eyes. Previous transformations on the gallery, undertaken by other students, have focused on specific areas of the *Xantho*'s history. For example, research undertaken by Amanda-Jane Arnold focused on Eliza Broadhurst (Arnold, 2003). The most recent was the construction of Eliza Broadhurst's scrap book.

### **Eliza Broadhurst**

Eliza Broadhurst was the wife of Charles Broadhurst and a leading figure in Perth. Many of her husband's failed enterprises, of which the *Xantho* was one, were assisted financially by the day and boarding school in which she had opened. By providing the scrap book to accompany the *Xantho* exhibition visitors are privileged with gaining access to the inner workings of an extraordinary woman. Not only is her history important in understanding Charles Broadhurst and the *Xantho* but independently she remains an important but hitherto little known female figure in Perth's history. The histories of the children of Charles and Eliza have also been researched. Their youngest daughter, Katherine Elime Broadhurst, became a suffragette enduring imprisonment and hunger strikes for the women's movement inspired in her by her mother's interest. As a result of her and women like her, Western Australia became one of the first states in the world to secure the women's vote.

## **Evaluation**

### **Evaluation**

The *Xantho* gallery contains a multi layered exhibition with several different themes. These include;

- The history of the engine from European gunboat to paddle steamer.
- The engines purchased by Charles Broadhurst.
- The *Xantho*'s use as a steam engine and reason for sinking.
- The Broadhurst family.

- Eliza's scrap book.
- The suffragettes.
- The discovery of rock art depicting the Xantho by Australian indigenous people.
- The process undertaken in the engines recovery and restoration 'a work in progress'.

It is therefore important when evaluating the exhibition to examine how each display relates to different themes and how they can be combined to produce the over all theme of steamships and suffragettes. The first step in evaluating the Gallery is to examine each display to determine what they offer and how they work together. These displays are;

- Eliza's scrap book
- The Broadhurst family
- The Indigenous rock art display
- The engine
- The working model
- The video
- The model of the boat with underwater images

### **Indigenous Display**

Following on from the working model display there is a table containing information about rock art depicting the Xantho produced by Australian Indigenous people.

### **Restoration Video**

Situated on the left as one enters the gallery from the main entrance, the video display area is an enclosed area surrounded by shelving. These shelves are covered by black drop sheets creating separate space in which to view the video. Lighting is low and chairs have been positioned in rows.

### **Eliza's Scrap book**

Eliza's scrap book is the first display situated on the left as one enters the Xantho gallery from the main entrance. The display consists of a table and chair along with a lamp and a copy of Eliza's scrap book. A report about how Eliza's scrap book was put together is also situated along side. The Eliza scrap book display provides visitors with an insight into Eliza Broadhurst, the wife of Charles Broadhurst. It gives visitors the opportunity to sit down and study the literature that interested this woman or to glance at some of the more catchy stories that have been enlarged and placed on the desk top. (See over)



Eliza's scrapbook display

### **Broadhurst Family**

The display featuring information about the Broadhurst family is located on the right as one enters the gallery from the main entrance. The main feature of the display is an enlarged image of the Broadhurst family featuring five of Charles and Eliza's seven children. One died just before the photo was taken and the other was yet to be born. Occupying this display is the text panel entitled *Steamships and Suffragettes*. This text gives a breakdown of the family's history and the history of the Xantho and how they intersect. Presented in an x



shaped time line, this information provides a clear picture about how these two subjects are related. Located under the family photo is a desk where information sheets provide subsequent information of the Broadhurst family and an image of the grandchild of one of the children is depicted in a newspaper article. (See below)



Broadhurst family display

### **Working Model**

Moving along the right side of the room the next display is a small working model of the *Xantho* engine accompanied by a computer simulation of the moving components. This display gives visitors the opportunity to see what the engine would look like in action. It also provides those who are more technologically minded a chance to study the intricacies of the engine. (See below)



Working model of *Xantho* engine

### **Model of excavated *Xantho* wreck**

Positioned in the corner of the room on the right-hand side as one enters the gallery from the main entrance is a model of the *Xantho* wreck. It depicts what the *Xantho* may have looked like a few years after it sunk off the coast of Port Gregory. Featured alongside this model are underwater images taken when the site was excavated and information pertaining to the way the *Xantho* degraded under water over time. (See below)



Model of excavated *Xantho* wreck

### **The Engine**

The engine of the *Xantho* is located on the right-hand side of the gallery as one enters from the woodblock floor gallery. It is here that the large components of the engine available for display are located with the crankshaft on the left. Arranged to look like a workshop, also these objects are positioned with safety in mind. (See over)



*Xantho* engine

The two images below feature the layout of the *Xantho* gallery before any transformations were conducted. The first image is of the gallery as one enters from the Dutch (woodblock floor) gallery, the second shows the view from the main entrance. The problem presented to curators by visitors accessing the gallery from two directions is that the displays have to be arranged in a logical order from both directions.



Above: photo from Dutch gallery entrance. Below: photo from *Xantho* gallery main entrance.



### **Personal Evaluation**

My first impression of the gallery came as a visitor in 2003. I had entered the gallery along with my husband Neil and nephew. I remember seeing the objects on display but not paying any attention to the information provided. Our visit was brief and I was left wondering why the engine parts were so exposed to visitors and curious hands. My second introduction to the *Xantho* was from McCarthy on October 5<sup>th</sup>. Prior to entering the gallery McCarthy provided me with a brief history on the *Xantho* project. I spent some time exploring the gallery and viewing the displays with a new found interest. I notice myself reading some text panels but not others and, although I was going to be working in the *Xantho* exhibition, there were pieces of information that I was missing. Only after talking to McCarthy again did I notice gaps in my knowledge. It was then that I began to wonder if these segments of information had been provided. On second inspection of the gallery I found that they had and began to wonder if this information could be more clearly presented.

### **Evaluating display**

- In evaluating the exhibition I noticed that some displays worked better than others. Although the engine display had the feel of a workshop environment I felt it needed to communicate the work in progress theme better to visitors.
- The model of the wrecked ship on the other hand seemed to draw the attention of visitors who subsequently took the time to read the accompanying text.
- The working engine model received a lot of attention but the Indigenous rock art received little.
- The Broadhurst display did draw attention but seemed to remain a little disconnected from the other displays as did the Eliza scrap book display.
- The information that the video provides is well presented as it gives visitors an overview of the *Xantho* project and the people involved in the engine's recovery and restoration. It provides visitors with information about where the project is headed. In my opinion this video is an important aspect of the *Xantho* exhibition.

### **Staff impression of the gallery**

I asked some of the staff about their impressions of the *Xantho* gallery in the view of improving the space. I was provided with some interesting feedback and ideas about possible changes and inclusions. Below are listed some of the opinions and suggestions provided by the museum staff.

- The gallery space was seen as a bit 'cluttered'.
- The display layout was described as a little 'higgledy piggledy'.
- The Indigenous rock art depicting the *Xantho* was too easily overlooked by staff and visitors.
- One impression of the gallery space was that the video area seemed 'closed off'.
- The space was seen to be more masculine and therefore lost the attention of many female visitors.
- Highlighting the social history of the Broadhurst family was seen as a way of engaging female visitors.

- There was the suggestion that some of the text was too small and needed to be enlarged and placed at eye level.
- Placing information sheets in the gallery was recommended as was making the displays aesthetically pleasing.
- In order to get the theme of ‘a work in progress’ across to visitors a staff member, from the Education Department, had the idea of including signage featuring the silhouette of work men with the text ‘Work in Progress’.
- The desk containing the scrap book was perceived as uninviting.
- The display containing the model of the boat was viewed as successful in attracting visitor attention.

By talking to staff members of the Museum I was confronted with a variety of different opinions about what could be done to the museum space. There were a lot of questions concerning the shelving containing the Batavia timbers and comments on how their removal would enhance the galleries possibilities.

## Visitor Evaluation

### Visitor evaluation

Two processes were undertaken to assess visitor reactions towards the *Xantho* gallery. The first was through observation and the second was by developing a simple questionnaire. By observing the visitors that entered the *Xantho* gallery I was able to develop a picture of what displays attracted the most visitor attention and which displays did not. It was also helpful in developing an understanding of the different types of visitors to the gallery.

### Children

The first couple of weeks of observation coincided with school holidays. As such there were more children visiting the museum during week days than would normally occur. Some of these children were taken around in groups as part of vocational care and others were taken through by their parents. Museum educational programs were also being undertaken during this period. The attention span of young children isn’t very long so it was interesting to see which displays caught their attention, even if it was only for a short period. I found those children who belonged to a vocational group spent less time looking at the displays than those accompanied by their parents. The one display that did however receive the most attention from the younger visitors was the working model of the engine. Why this was may be because of their ability to interact with the display. The children accompanied by their parents tended to view a wider range of displays. These were usually the displays their parents were also interested in. These children tended to ask more questions and therefore got their parents talking about the displays in the gallery. A father explaining that Majorie Darling (a descendent of one of the children in the Broadhurst family picture depicted in an article aged 94) was the daughter of Percy Broadhurst ( a young child featured in the Broadhurst family photo) is an example of the types of interactions that occurred. Due to the use of the worksheets handed out through the education program, children were required to find the crankshaft in the *Xantho* gallery. This, therefore, encouraged children to look at the engine and, with the help of their parent, fill out the worksheet.

### Visitor movements

I also sat down in the gallery and mapped the movements of 12 visitors through the *Xantho* gallery.

Visitor 1, an elderly male entered the gallery from the main entrance. He takes a short glance at the scrap book exhibition before sitting down to view the video. He watches the video until the end then gets up to view some images of the engine. He views the large display case then goes back to the video when it restarts to see what he had missed. After he has finished he returns to the large display case. He then views the engine before moving over to the “recycled gun boat text” then returns to view the other side of the engine. He then leaves the gallery. He spent approximately 40 minutes in the *Xantho* gallery.

Visitor 2, male in his early 30’s moves directly to view the model of the boat, glances over the text before leaving the gallery. Approximately 5 minutes.

Visitors 3 and 4, two females walk though the gallery without paying much attention to any of the displays. Approximately 2 minutes.

Visitor 5, male enters from the main entrance. He first views the working model of the engine before moving on to the model of the boat. He then spends time viewing the engine before reading the “Recycled gun boat” text. Approximately 20 minutes.

Visitor 6, male starts by viewing the engine before moving on to the large display case. He then views the small model of the engine. Approximately 10 minutes.

Visitor 7, male enters the room from the Dutch gallery. He first views the “Xantho Recycled gun boat” text before moving on to the engine the model engine and the Broadhurst family. He then goes back to read the “Gun boat” information which coincides with the model of the boat. He takes time to read the whole text before viewing the technical images of the engine. He takes a quick glance at the Indigenous display before going back to the video then the large display case. Approximately 1 hour.

Visitor 8, female visitor has a quick view of the video before moving on to the wreck model. She then returns to the video before leaving. Approximately 6 minutes.

Visitors 9 and 10, male and female enter the gallery together. They both have a look at the engine and crankshaft before standing to view the video for a short period of time then leave the gallery. Approximately 5 minutes.

Visitor 11 and 12, male and female quickly view each display as they walk though the gallery. Discuss the engine then leave. Approximately 2 minutes.

Figure 1 below gives a breakdown of the displays that were viewed.

**Figure 1 break down of visitor movements**

	Video	Engine	Large display case	Engine model	Rock art	Text	Wreck model	Broadhurst
Visitor 1 M	Video	Engine & photos	Large display case	Engine		‘Recycled text’ & ‘gun boat text’		
Visitor 2 M							Wreck Model	
Visitor 3 F	Quick walk							
Visitor 4 F								
Visitor 5 M		Engine		Engine Model		Recycled text	Wreck Model	
Visitor 6 M		Engine						
Visitor 7 M	Video		Large display case	Engine Model	Rock art	‘Recycled Text’ & ‘Gun boat text’		Broadhurst
Visitor 8 F	Video						Wreck Model	
Visitor 9 F	Video	Engine						
Visitor 10 M	Video	Engine						
Visitor 11 M	Quick walk							
Visitor 12 F								

## **Analysis**

By looking at this sample we can conclude that;

- More men spend time viewing *Xantho* exhibition than women.
- Men seem more interested in the *Xantho* exhibition than women.
- The engine and the video received the most attention.

## **Questionnaire 1**

Out of the 14 questionnaire sheets filled in and returned only 3 were completed by females. This therefore cannot be considered as representative of the wider female visiting public but can, when combined with visitor movements through the gallery, give us a rough overview of how women may respond to the exhibition. See Appendix 3 for an example of Questionnaire 1 as filled out by a *Xantho* gallery visitor.

### **Female visitor response**

- Two out of the three women found the *Xantho* break up information to be the most interesting display.
- The third found the Broadhurst family and restoration video of interest.
- Out of the three women two found that they liked the engine display the least. The third did not complete this section of the questionnaire.
- All three were aware that the exhibition was about the *Xantho* but the theme surrounding the *Xantho* differed. One described the exhibition as being about “everything about the beginning of S.S *Xantho* to the end of her life” whilst the other found restoration to be the predominant theme.
- Out of the three women only one provided information about how the exhibition in their opinion could be improved. This involved displaying less text and “more machines of how the different machinery worked”.
- Although this was the first time two of the women had visited the gallery they would consider a return visit in the near future. The third would not.

### **Male visitor response**

- The response by male visitors where quite varied when considering which aspect of the displays they were most interested in. The engine its self, its parts and the artefacts from the ship received interest as did the video, model ship, the *Xantho* “break up and Walga rock painting”. The Walga rock painting is one of the Indigenous works thought to be depicting the *Xantho*.
- The dislikes from this group also varied from the trunk engine, shelving with engine parts and shipwreck equipment (the shipwreck equipment was from another gallery).
- Improvement suggestions where provided by a few of the visitors and included providing more written information, placing more emphasis of this being the “first” engine in context with other (later) ships engines and the providing of more computer images and graphics about engines.
- Eight of the eleven where first time visitors with six of the group surveyed suggesting they would visit again in the near future.
- Most of the male visitors surveyed were first time visitors.

## **Analysis**

Although this questionnaire did provide some useful information its lay out proved to be confusing to visitors. This resulted in many of the questions being left blank or visitors taking the questionnaire to other parts of the museum. As a consequence some of the information provided was not relevant. The number of questionnaires handed out would need to be increased in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the visitor demographic. An interesting point when considering this questionnaire would be my location when handing it out. Because I was situated at the main entrance to the *Xantho* gallery near the scrap book display I may have, inadvertently, discouraged visitors from viewing the scrap book display. My position therefore will need to be taken into consideration when conducting my second questionnaire

## **Questionnaire 2**

Questionnaire 2 was conducted on Tuesday the 16<sup>th</sup> of October. The questions were multiple choice resulting in most of the questionnaire being filled out correctly. Out of the 20 handed out only a small percentage of

these were completed by women. See appendix 4 for a sample sheets of Questionnaire 2 as completed by visitors.

### **Female visitor response, Questionnaire 2**

- 3 of the 4 women who completed the questionnaire were between 50 and 69. The fourth was a mother and her daughter.
- These women rarely visited the museum with two stating this was their first time.
- Half would consider revisiting the exhibition in the near future.
- It is difficult to gauge a pattern of interest due to the small amount of questionnaires completed by women. One woman's comment was "I hate to admit it but I'm not frightfully interested in engines, however I approve of what you're doing". This comment could be considered the general opinion of the female visitor.

### **Male visitor response, Questionnaire 2**

- The majority of males who visited the gallery were aged between 30 and 49.
- Most were first time visitors with the remainder visiting the museum once a year or less.
- Most of these visitors liked the Indigenous rock art display and Eliza's scrap book the least.
- A common suggestion for inclusion in the gallery was more written information along with more photos and better lighting.
- One of the male visitors who completed the questionnaire did express his desire to have more information on the Broadhurst family. At the time of his visiting the gallery there were no information leaflets on the Broadhurst family located in the *Xantho* gallery. These are usually kept in the gallery.
- Half did not see themselves visiting the gallery again in the near future although a few of these were overseas visitors.

### **Conclusion**

In light of these questionnaires it becomes apparent that the *Xantho* engine is seen as the overriding theme of the exhibition. McCarthy's vision of providing the *Xantho* gallery with a workshop aura has been successful. This, however, has dominated the gallery at the expense of the *Xantho*'s social history. Sub-themes like the Broadhurst family, Eliza's scrap book, Suffragettes and the rock art are overwhelming overlooked. It is therefore evident that these themes need to be highlighted as part of *Xantho*'s combined history. Many of the visitors to this gallery are first time visitors or tourists. It would therefore be beneficial to entice these visitors to make a return visit by emphasising the process of change the *Xantho* gallery will be undertaking. In view of the high percentage of male to female visitor ratio the question was raised of whether this represented the museums over all attendance ratios. Because no surveys had been conducted by the museum addressing visitor gender it has been difficult to receive a conclusive answer. The VSO's (visitor service officers) were asked their opinion in light of this question. The belief was that the museum received an even ratio of men to women. It can therefore be concluded that although the attendance to the museum was the same, women were less likely to visit the *Xantho* exhibition. Another issue raised through completion of the questionnaires was the fact that more men were willing to fill out the questionnaire than women. The gender of the person handing out the questionnaire (being female) may have had a bearing on this.

### **Strengths**

The strengths of the *Xantho* gallery as it stands without alterations are as follows;

- **The Engine.** The engine components themselves are an important and interesting part of the *Xantho* exhibition. It was through the *Xantho*'s discovery and restoration process that the exhibition was born and is therefore an important part of the display.
- **The Engine Model.** The Engine model is a popular and engaging display which provides visitors with the opportunity to see how the original engine would have worked.
- **Wreck Model.** This model depicts the *Xantho* a few years after the vessel sunk. The boat model receives a lot of attention from visitors. It not only attracts attention but holds it long enough for

visitors to read the text panels that accompany it.

- **Text Panels.** The text panels provide relevant information pertaining to the history of the *Xantho* and subsequent themes (the Broadhurst family).
- **The Video.** The video provides a lot of information about the history of the *Xantho* and its restoration in an easy to understand fashion.

### **Weaknesses**

- Poor lighting within the *Xantho* gallery has had an uninviting effect on some of the visitors.
- Sub-themes are overwhelmingly overlooked.
- The gallery presents its self as a masculine space and therefore loses the interest of many Female visitors.
- The indigenous rock art display featuring the *Xantho* is not very well presented containing two small images of the rock art and two A4 pages of information.
- The Scrapbook display is not aesthetically presented.
- Video area is too closed off.

## **Implementation**

### **Macro review of galley layout**

A review of the gallery's layout was undertaken when considering how to develop an enhanced view of many of the *Xantho* gallery's sub-themes. This included the consideration of changing the positions of the displays. The objective was to design a layout that would present in a logical order and therefore clarify the links between the different displays and themes. Currently when walking into the *Xantho* Gallery alternative objects/displays of interest are overwhelmed by the Engine. By opening up the gallery space to allow other items to become displays of interest, the gallery would encourage a diverse range of visitor. This would allow those not interested in the mechanics of the *Xantho* engine to still find interest in the galleries sub-themes and displays, even if these alternative displays are still related to the *Xantho*.

### **Consideration for display movements**

#### **Model**

Moving the model of the engine to a position where it could be viewed in conjunction with the 'real thing' would provide children and adults alike the ability to compare and relate the two displays. This would enable visitors to examine the working model closely whilst putting the engine into perspective. To achieve this, the model needs to be positioned in such a way as to allow examination and comparison without restricting the view of the real engine.

#### **Engine**

The movement of the Engine's components and the crankshaft needs to be considered. It is currently positioned near the Dutch (woodblock floor) Gallery entrance which can create viewing problems. This is due to the obstruction of the visitor flow path. Although safety must be considered the movement of the engine away from the doorway is ideal. One suggestion was placing the engine in the centre of the room but this would cause safety concerns which outweigh the convenience of visitors being able to have a 360° view of the engine.

### **Broadhurst family and Suffragettes**

By moving the Broadhurst display into a position where it can be both part of the overall exhibit and with the ability to be read and understood separately is important. Its link to the suffragettes must also be strengthened in order for the 'Steamships and Suffragettes' link to work. This display should therefore include a reference to the scrap book of Eliza Broadhurst and Suffragette information. This may be done by including an explanation of what suffragettes are and by including a 'Mary Poppins' reference<sup>2</sup>. By positioning these displays in close proximity to each other and in a space visible from either gallery entrance they should increase visitor interest. At the moment the Broadhurst display location by the south entrance weakens the displays exposure



to visitors. Visitors wishing to view the Broadhurst display inadvertently obstruct others from entering the gallery and viewing the display.

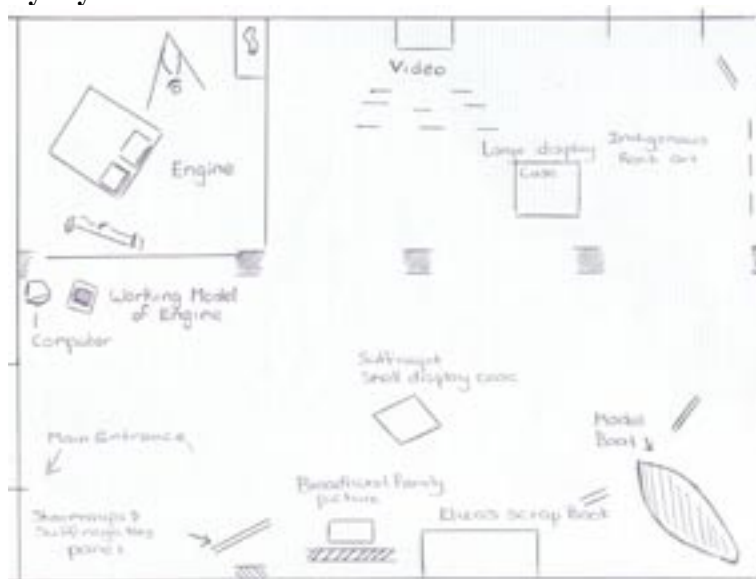
Creating and positioning a small display case containing material about suffragettes alongside both the Broadhurst family display and Eliza's scrapbook display would help create a link between these two subjects.

### Video

Currently the restoration video about the Xantho is in an enclosed area. This does little to encourage visitors to sit and view the video. By opening up this space visitors could potentially view the video from a variety of locations within the gallery. Those more interested in watching would also have the opportunity to sit and view the video in full.

Figure 2 is a map depicting the proposed changes to the Xantho gallery.

**Figure 2 proposed gallery layout**



### Micro review of possible changes to displays

A macro review of the displays provided an opportunity to view each display individually and assess what improvements could be implemented. These are ideal solutions and though some have the ability to be implemented others do not.

#### Engine display

- Removal of Batavia timbers and shelving to create more space in the area.
- Placing a large backdrop behind the engines components.
- Developing signage depicting the theme working progress.
- Labelling the different components of the engine.
- Future option of restoring the engine to working condition.
- Use plastic safety barrier tape around display.

#### Video

- Opening up the video viewing area.
- Replacing plastic seats with lounges/ comfortable seating.
- Upgrading T.V and video unit.
- Developing a DVD instead of the video.
- Upgrading the video footage.
- Adding subtitles for the hearing impaired.

### **Indigenous rock art**

- Enlarging three images. Two of the rock art and one of a Malay diver depicting techniques used by divers in the pearl industry before hard hat diving.
- Enlarging text panels of information describing the rock art and diving techniques.

### **Eliza's scrapbook**

- Use period furniture, i.e. desk, chair and lamp to set the scene of Eliza's display.
- Chose new articles from Eliza's scrapbook.
- Enlarge articles taken from the scrap book to be placed on the desk for visitors to view.
- Re-print a 'good' copy of Eliza's scrapbook including images of Eliza.

### **Broadhurst Family**

- Make available information sheets about the Broadhurst family.

### **Display cases (small)**

- Dedicate the small display case to the Suffragettes.
- Display both a suffragettes badge and coin featuring centenary of suffrage in W.A.
- Provide information explaining the Steamship and Suffragette link.
- Provide information about suffrage.
- Possible inclusion of an image from 'Mary Poppins'.

## **Changes Installation stage 1**

Stage one of the Xantho gallery's transformation consisted of display improvements as outlined above. After each display had been assessed and ideas for improvements gathered decisions were made on what changes should be implemented. These changes were designed to improve the displays presentation and involved minimal object movement.

### **Engine**

- Work in Progress sign has been erected.
- 'A' frame and cylinders have been included in display.
- Small table has been placed in display allowing the exhibit of smaller engine components.

### **Eliza's Scrapbook**

- New photocopy of the scrapbook was printed and placed in a book with plastic sheet protectors for display.
- Four articles from Eliza's scrapbook were chosen for enlargement and display.
- Enlarged articles placed in plastic sign holders for display.
- Arnold's report on developing the scrapbook for display was removed.
- Copies of articles previously fastened to desk were removed.
- Old copy of scrapbook was removed.
- Search has been undertaken in finding a period style lamp to place on the desk.
- Tablecloth (black drop sheet) was placed on desk. (See below)



Eliza's scrapbook

### Small Display Case

- The small display case was converted into a suffragettes display and positioned to become the main focus when entering the gallery from the main entrance.
- Enlarged photocopies of Western Australian centenary of suffrage \$1 coin were position on the bottom of the cabinet.



- Two centenary coins of suffrage have been included in display.
- Image of Eliza and daughter Catherine are included in display.
- Cutting of an article taken from Eliza's scrapbook has been enlarged and included in display.
- Information about suffrage.
- A suffragette's badge.
- Image of from 'Mary Poppins' depicting a suffragette.
- The small display case has been installed in the gallery in close proximity to the Broadhurst display and Eliza's scrapbook display (directly in front of visitors as they enter the gallery from the main entrance). (see right)

### Video viewing area

- The video viewing area has been opened up allowing the video to be visible from the main entrance as one enters the Xantho gallery.

### Lighting

- The lighting in the gallery has been re-directed to emphasise the displays.

### Indigenous rock art display

- The three images featuring the indigenous rock art and a sketch of the Xantho have been enlarged, A3

size, and placed on the table.

- The text that accompanied the images has also been enlarged to improve readability.
- Panels and images depicting the Xantho engine have been removed from this table. (See below)



Indigenous rock art display



**Information panels**

- Information panels have been relocated to create a logical order in the Xantho displays chronology.
- A display panel has been introduced and placed on the main entrance door of the Xantho gallery to provide visitors with an overview of what the Xantho gallery is about. (See right)

## Installation Stage 2

Stage two of the installation stage will involve the movement of the displays within the gallery space. This will occur post placement. This process requires a team of museum staff members to help with the disassembling of shelving and the movement of larger engine components. The important factor of this stage is insuring that the display would be presented in a logical chronology. Factors such as how the displays work together must be taken into consideration before any movements are made. Factors affecting placements, such as the need for a power supply and safety issues needed to be taken into consideration.

### Shelving

- The removal of two shelving units, containing Batavia timbers, creates more space in which to position the displays.
- Batavia timbers, from the remaining shelving units have been removed to allow for the placement of smaller engine objects.

## **Engine**

- The Engine bed will be reinforced with wood to allow for engine components to be placed on it. This is an important step in the evolution of the *Xantho* gallery as it allows the engine to be reconstructed on the original engine bay in the gallery.
- The crankshaft will be positioned alongside the engine bed in anticipation of the engine's components being reassembled.

## **Model of Engine**

- The model of the engine will be relocated next to the engine to allow comparative viewing.
- It is to be positioned facing in the same direction as the engine.

## **Computer screen**

- The computer screen will be relocated next to the engine to allow for comparative viewing.

## **Eliza's scrapbook**

- The scrapbook display will be relocated next to the Broadhurst family display. This is on the right hand side as one enters the *Xantho* gallery from the main entrance.

## **Small display case (Suffragettes display)**

- The small display case, which is now the suffragettes display, will be located between the Broadhurst display and Eliza's scrapbook.
- Its location has been determined by the need to break-up the formality of the space and to secure the link between the Broadhurst family, Eliza's scrapbook and the suffragette movement in Western Australia.

## **Indigenous Rock art display**

- The indigenous rock art display remains located on the right as one enters the *Xantho* gallery from the main entrance.

## **Model of excavated *Xantho* wreck**

- The model of the *Xantho* wreck will remain in its original position.

# **Re-evaluation**

The steps undertaken to re-evaluate the *Xantho* gallery were to firstly receive the museum staff's opinion about the changes and undertake a final visitor questionnaire.

## **Staff evaluation of *Xantho* gallery**

As the *Xantho* gallery evolved staff from the Museum would often discuss the changes and what effect they were having. This communication with staff members has proved to be vital in providing information concerning the re-evaluation.

## **Video**

One of the first major changes that occurred in the gallery was the opening up of the video viewing area. This change proved to be very popular during my placement with the VSO staff who saw it as "much more inviting" to visitors than its original position. Questions were raised about the levels of lighting affecting the viewing experience but thus far have not proved to be a problem. Although the original plan was to position the video on the other side of the room this was seen to be unnecessary due to its success in its current location. It has already received a positive response by visitors of the *Xantho* gallery who now tend to stop and spend a few moments viewing the video.

## **Suffragettes display case**

The inclusion of the suffragettes display case has highlighted the social history of the Broadhurst family that

was missing before. It has received a positive response from both the VSO staff and the viewing public.

### **Eliza's scrapbook**

The removal of the old scrapbook and the tidying up of the desk has created a display that is more aesthetically pleasing. By repositioning it next to the Broadhurst display and associating it with the Suffragettes movement it has highlighted the social aspect of the *Xantho* display. The overall display is more inviting.

### **Indigenous Rock art**

The enlargement of two images depicting Indigenous rock art has been placed in the Indigenous rock art display. These have been accompanied with information explaining the link between the Australian Indigenous people and the *SS Xantho*. Although this has improved the aesthetic appeal of the display the images (which are replicas) are vulnerable to damage. This problem will be solved in the near future with the hanging of three drops depicting the Indigenous rock art and a 'Malay' diver.

### **Visitor Response**

A final Questionnaire was conducted in order to assess if there was any change in visitor responses to the *Xantho* gallery. Female visitors were targeted for the questionnaire. There were two reasons for this.

1. Previous questionnaires lacked a strong female opinion.
2. Changes to the gallery were partly aimed at evoking interest in the female visitor.

### **Female visitor response**

- The majority of female visitors liked the Eliza's scrapbook display the most.
- The majority of these visitors were most interested in learning more about Eliza's scrapbook and the suffragettes.
- The display they found least appealing varied from the engine display, wreck model, video, Broadhurst family to the Indigenous rock art.
- Although most of these women either hardly ever visited the museum or were first time visitors they would consider a re-visit in the near future.
- Many of these visitors would like to see the inclusion of more information about the suffragettes and the Broadhurst family.

### **Male visitor response**

The general response from male visitors remained the same as the previous questionnaire indicated. For example;

- The *Xantho* engine, working model of the engine, display cases and model boat were viewed as the most appealing displays.
- The *Xantho* engine, its history and how it worked were components of the display male visitors would be more interested in learning more about.
- Displays relating to the Broadhurst family, Eliza's scrapbook and the Indigenous rock art remained the least appealing.

### **Analysis**

When analysing the results from the three questionnaires we can see there has been a shift in the way female visitors relate to the *Xantho* exhibition. This shift has been positive with female visitors spending more time viewing and reading Eliza's scrapbook and the suffragette display case. One female visitor even asked where she could get a copy of some of the articles contained within the scrapbook. During my observation I notice a marked increase in the number of female visitors in the *Xantho* gallery. This may be an indication of a changing *Xantho* visitor demographic.

### **Visitor re-visits**

In order to evaluate how the *Xantho* exhibition's changes were interpreted by visitors I asked a friend to re-visit the gallery and give her opinion. She had visited the gallery before any changes had been undertaken. On entering the *Xantho* gallery the first item she noticed was the suffragettes display case. Its introduction

provided a new perspective in which to view the gallery. She commented that the scrapbook's presentation was more appealing and found the introduction of a small display table in the engine display gave visitors a better view of some of the engines smaller components. Her overall impression of the gallery was that the space appeared tidier and the literature was easier to read. I asked the question, what would motivate her to re-visit the exhibition? She replied that she would be interested in seeing the engine rebuilt.

## **Conclusion**

The Xantho gallery has received a lot of positive feedback in light of the changes that have been undertaken. The improvements made to the scrapbook display and the introduction of the suffragettes display case has been successful in evoking the interest of female visitors. There is, however, still the need to improve the Indigenous rock art display. In spite of the fact that the Indigenous rock art received a better response than it had during the first transformation some problems have been highlighted. For example children picking up the images of the Xantho rock art. It therefore will be necessary to secure these images to avoid them becoming dilapidated.

# **Overview**

## **Brief overview of my experience**

The experience of working at the Old Maritime Museum has allowed me to put into practice the knowledge I have gained from years of study in cultural heritage. It has also taught me that there are no 'hard and fast' rules with museum displays. The Xantho gallery goes against the norms of museum exhibiting by allowing visitors to witness the 'mess' and 'clutter' that lay behind the clean façade of the museum exhibition. Objects are exposed to human interaction and not hidden behind glass cases to help create the aura of a working space. This concept was foreign to me during my first visit to the Xantho gallery in 2003. Although this concept is not appropriate for all displays, the large metal components of the Xantho engine lend its self to this type of exposure. Not only has McCarthy introduced me to a new type of exhibit but he has also taught me that even with limited supplies it is possible to re-create an existing exhibition, a lesson that I will no doubt use again. I was given the opportunity to design and install the suffragettes display case for the Xantho exhibition as well as comment on and make recommendations for the Xantho gallery. This was the first time I had been given the responsibility and opportunity to express my creativity through such a project and I am thankful for the experience. The working relationships which I have developed with the museum staff has been an important aspect of my internship. It has provided me with a better understanding of how a museum operates and shown me the many different departments involved in a working museum.

The practical experience gained through this internship extends to areas such as creating questionnaires and analysing displays. It has also exposed me to the variety of issues facing curators and the exhibits. Issues such as safety, catering for a variety of visitors such as the visually and hearing impaired. It has also reinforced the importance of teamwork.

## **Conclusion**

In concluding my internship at the Maritime Museum the Xantho gallery has once again been transformed. This transformation however is not complete and although we have been successful in highlighting the links between the Xantho, the Broadhurst family and the suffragette movement, there is always room for improvement. Changes that will be undertaken in the near future include transferring the film from video to DVD and including sub-titles. The Xantho engine has also undergone the first steps to its reconstruction. This involved the reinforcing of the engine bed in readiness for the rebuilding of the Xantho engine. The rebuilding of the Engine will again change the Xantho gallery. Although the gallery may be continually transforming McCarthy's vision remains the same, this is to provide visitors with the unique opportunity to witness the evolutionary process and a view behind the scenes of a working museum.

## References

McCarthy, M, P.2000, *Iron and Steamship Archaeology: Success and Failure on the SS Xantho*, Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, New York.

Arnold, A-J, 2003, "A study of Eliza Broadhurst's 19<sup>th</sup> century 'Literary Cutting from all sources' scrapbook", Report- Department of Maritime Archaeology, Western Australian Maritime Museum, No. 171

### (Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup> During the nineteenth century the term 'Malay' was used to refer to people from the islands north of Australia.

<sup>2</sup> The image used from 'Mary Poppins' was that of Mrs. Banks. In the 'Mary Poppins' movie Mrs. Banks is seen actively supporting the women's suffrage movement and is depicted, in the image obtained by the Museum, wearing a 'votes for women' sash.