Looking back - an image from yesteryear

Berri Mayor Mrs Margaret Evans (centre) at the opening of the ps Roy at Wilabalangaloo 1986.

Little boat turns 100 years old

By HEATHER EVERINGHAM

The ps Roy, built in 1908 by B. Brown, of Mildura, was one of the smallest crafts to operate on the river.

Its size and shallow draught made these smaller steamers ideal for entering the small creeks and backwaters to collect firewood for the large steamers. They were also ideal as base camps for fishermen who kept their catches in submerged boxes until they had enough to take to market.

The ps Roy had its maiden voyage in early 1909 and has had many owners.

In 1936 it was a wreck near Lock 15 at Euston, where it was purchased by the Collins brothers. They rebuilt the vessel using parts from other boats.

Its last private owner was Frank Beveridge, who used it as a fishing boat at Gurra. After the 1956 Flood the vessel was stranded on the riverbank and became the home of Mr Beveridge until his death in 1973, after which it was purchased by the Berri War Memorial Community Centre.

The boat was then dismantled and stored for safe-keeping until 1977, when enthusiastic members of the Berri community decided to reconstruct 'the Roy' with the view of having an operating steamer as a tourist attraction for the district.

The first working bee took place in May 1977 and attracted 28 people who started repairing the hull and decking of the vessel on the property of G. Barton-Ancliffe, at Gurra.

In September of 1977 the ps Roy , though not fully restored, was refloated after much volunteer work done by Riverland Aid for Orphans and in particular the enthusiastic help of John Craker, Berri tourist officer Sam Najar and members of the Berri community.

By 1983 her maintenance was in the hands of steam buffs Denis Wasley and Robbie Osborne, who took her out on the river for regular runs.

Her fate was in the balance when Channel Seven's State Affair program featured the vessel steaming, with Denis Wasley at the helm. The boat had already made trips to Loxton, Renmark and had gone downriver to Mannum for their river festival.

An estimated $11,000 had been spent on the boat to that date and in 1984 the community centre decided to sell the vessel.

No suitable tenders were received and the craft was offered to the National Trust on permanent loan at Wilabalangaloo.

In September she was hoisted from the river by Dyer's crane, taken by road and placed on land close to the museum. In October of 1986 the renovated ps Roy, now a static display, was officially opened by Berri Mayor Margaret Evans.

Countless schoolchildren and visitors enjoyed exploring the little boat until May of 2003, when she once more took to the highway.

Dyers Transport once again volunteered their services, this time bringing the Roy to the Cobdogla Irrigation Museum, where the Cobdogla Steam Friends have plans to restore her in the near future.