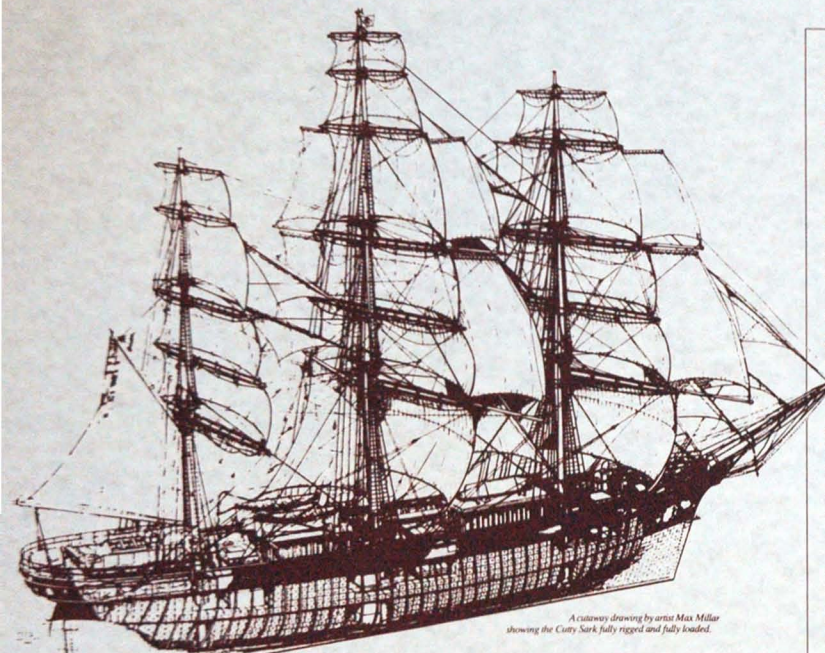


# AUSTRALIA NORTHBOUND SHIPPING CONFERENCE



A cutaway drawing by artist Max Miller showing the Cutty Sark fully rigged and fully loaded.

## The world's fastest wool ship - the Cutty Sark!

The fastest tall ship ever built was the famous Australian wool clipper Cutty Sark. She broke ocean records from London to China, from Shanghai to Beachy Head, and to Port Jackson and back again. Yet compared to some of the Bicentennial sailing giants Australia saw last year, the Cutty Sark was a small ship – a mere 963 tons and 212ft long. Scottish built and designed, she was launched on the Clyde on Monday, November 22, 1869, and sailed fast beyond belief. But her greatest days were to wait a great captain. Just such a man appeared almost 17 years later when Captain Richard Woodget took command of her at 2pm on April 1, 1886, at London's East India Dock. She dropped her pilot on April 3 and by June 19 was safely at anchor in Sydney Harbor. A 77-day run that was the beginning of two of the most famous partnerships of the sea – Dick Woodget and his Cutty Sark; and also that which still thrives today – between fine ships and the Australian wool trade!

Just how fast was the Cutty Sark? Timed at between 17 and 17.5 knots she once logged 363 nautical miles in 24 hours. Off Galba Island one dawn in 1885, a crack seamstress, the Britannia, was ploughing up the east Australian coast when a dot appeared astern. Despite the Britannia hitting 15 knots the dot grew closer and closer until it stormed past the steamer's gaping passengers. With every inch of her 32,000 sq ft of sail set, it was the Cutty Sark – Captain Dick Woodget in command – racing for Sydney to load that year's cargo of fine wool. By the time Britannia reached Port Jackson, the world's most famous clipper ship already had the first bales on board for her long dash to market. Then, of course, it was a once-a-year schedule for the wool ships instead of the many sailings which our conference now publishes on this page, every day.

In the Cutty Sark's years in the wool trade there were no containers as we know them, of course, and casks and barrels of wool did not load economically. So the Cutty Sark and the whole fleet of rival clipper ships were themselves little more than giant floating containers. Wool bales were stuffed in as tight as they would go. To increase her load the captain shared the profits from any cargo jammed into his private quarters. Just as we talk of "stuffing" containers today, these old-time wool shippers called it "screwing the cargo" because of the way the wool was screwed into every available nook and cranny. The only rules were that the wool had to be safe and it had to get to market fast. Anson's ships are governed by more complex regulation today. But the old-fashioned objectives remain unchanged – Get the wool to market, fast and safe!

The Cutty Sark's name means Short Petticoat in Scottish dialect. Her name comes from Robert Burns' famous poem Tam O' Shanter. In the poem Tam – who is drunk and on horseback – is chased by witches. The leading and most beautiful witch is called Nannie who runs fastest because all she wears is "her cutty sark o' Paisley harn". Tam eventually escapes by racing his horse to the nearby River Doon and jumping across to safety just as Nannie grabs a handful of hair from his horse's tail. So all the years when the Cutty Sark raced the oceans of the world it was with Nannie at her figurehead, left arm outstretched and grabbing at the wind. But it was from 1885 to 1895 that the little clipper made her great passages in the wool trade – 67 days in 1885, 84 days in 1895. They were the years of Captain Richard Woodget in command, a decade when she was never beaten in her race around the world. Anson members provide the same strong leadership among those who sail in the wool trade today.

It's a name that dedicated Cutty Sark lovers now prefer to whisper if they absolutely must mention it at all... It is the Thermopylae – Cutty Sark's greatest rival. Indeed the Cutty Sark was built specifically to beat the Thermopylae in the annual China tea race. In fact the two ships raced only once, in 1872, and then the Cutty Sark was 400 miles ahead when she lost her rudder and a week's valuable time repairing it at sea. The Thermopylae arrived in London exactly that week ahead. But when the tea trade died and the two little clipper switched to the Australian wool run there was never a year when the Cutty Sark didn't win the race to market... Despite the fact that the London to Melbourne record – 60 days on her maiden voyage in 1868 – is still held by the Thermopylae. But then as today it was the voyage with the precious wool on board that really counted! In the old days the Cutty Sark always held the honours there, just as Anson members do today.

The Cutty Sark made many northbound voyages between her breath-taking round-the-world dashes with the season's first wool. To fill time between her arrival back in Australia and the new clip being ready, she would load coal from Newcastle and the China mail from Sydney, both bound for Shanghai. At least one voyage saw her loading jute at Cebu, in the Philippines. Another time she was scheduled for Yokohama with coal but her cargo was transhipped at Singapore and the little clipper scrubbed spotless again for her true role of carrying high value wool at top speed. Today when only the Bicentennial tall ships are ghosts in Australia's harbours, all the clipper ships but one are dead and gone. Only the Cutty Sark survives. She'll never see Melbourne or Port Jackson again but thousands of Australians visit her every year at Greenwich, near London, where she stands forever in drydock. She was fast, she was reliable, she was regular... For those of us who have inherited her tradition these are virtues which Anson members strive to maintain in the wool trade of today.

A N S O N

Members of Anson are: Asia Australia Express Ltd, Australia Japan Container Line Ltd, Australian National Line Ltd, Cho Yang Shipping Co Ltd, Dong Young Shipping Co Ltd, Kawasaki Kisen Kaisha Ltd, Kowloon Line Ltd, Mitsui O.S.K. Lines Ltd, Nippon Liner System Ltd, Nippon Yusen Kaisha, Orient Overseas Container Line, Yangming Marine Transport Corp.