Submerged workshop: Mannum Dock Museum

The Australian National Maritime Museum and the AMMC convened a workshop at Mannum Dock Museum on 23 March as part of the Submerged project. Coordinated by Emily Jateff and Em Blamey, Submerged is aimed squarely at including as many maritime museums in Australia as possible. It is off to a good start with thirty people attending the Mannum Workshop and future workshops planned for all states.

One outcome of the project will be a touring exhibition about Australia’s shipwrecks. The National Maritime Museum has enjoyed enormous success with its touring exhibitions marking the Anzac Centenary and sees the potential of a second exhibition to build on that success.

But the exhibition is only one outcome. They want to see how collaborative they can make the production of the exhibition and develop a model for maximum participation. All South Australian maritime museums and related bodies like National Trust branches and maritime archaeologists were asked to come to the workshop with an account of one shipwreck that they think should be included in a national touring exhibition. At the workshop, we formed groups to work together to produce exhibition-ready text about our chosen wrecks along with examples of illustrations that could be used in an exhibition.

The Mannum workshop produced almost ten accounts of tragedies that all made a claim to be exhibited because of their significance: the value of the archaeological site, the human drama of the wreck or its economic or social ramifications. With workshops to follow in each state, I suspect there will be a wealth of material for the exhibition and it will be difficult to narrow its focus to a small number of shipwrecks.

Some of the other outcomes of the project are more immediate. The workshop brought together maritime museums in South Australia and, while we usually meet to discuss historic vessels, Submerged gave us a new format for discussion. And, in working together we shared ideas and skills in exhibition development.

Mannum Dock Museum hosted the workshop on board PS Marion and generously put us up for the night in their passenger accommodation. It gave us a taste of 19th century cruising and the morning mist and the silence of the river were truly beautiful.