

Basic Detail Report



Wood, metal, ink on paper

Dimensions

Overall: 98 x 270 x 273 mm, 0.86 kg

Name

Box

History

Whaling played an essential part in 19th century life. Industry and households depended on whale products for which there was no substitute. Whale oil was used for lighting and lubrication until 1860 when kerosene and petroleum started to gain popularity. The pure clean oil from sperm whales was a superior source of lighting and the finest candles were made from the whale's wax-like spermaceti. Light and flexible, baleen - the bristle-fringed plates found in the jaws of baleen whales - had many uses in objects which today would be made out of plastic. The Sperm whale is the largest of the toothed whales and is recognised by its large squared-off head. It frequents all the worlds' oceans and can dive to depths of 1000 metres in search of squid and fish. These whales were a valuable source of ambergris (a waxy substance used in perfumes), teeth for scrimshaw and most importantly oil used in candles and fuels. During the 18th and 19th century whalers drastically impacted the number of Sperm whales and despite their subsequent recovery, they are currently listed as endangered. American whaling centred on the north-east coastal town of New Bedford, a booming industry in the 19th century with hundreds of ships regularly heading out to the Pacific Ocean. Australian whaling stations included the settlement at Twofold Bay, NSW which was established by entrepreneur Benjamin Boyd in 1844. In this region and in parts of North America whalers noted that pods of Killer whales regularly helped them in their hunts by herding migrating whales into bays and keeping the animals on the surface, making it easier for the hunters to kill the trapped whales. The Killer whales were often awarded the prize of the killed whales tongue and lips.

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Title

Box containing a spermaceti oil blacking substance

Date

late 19th century

Primary Maker

J M Wyatt and Sons

Medium