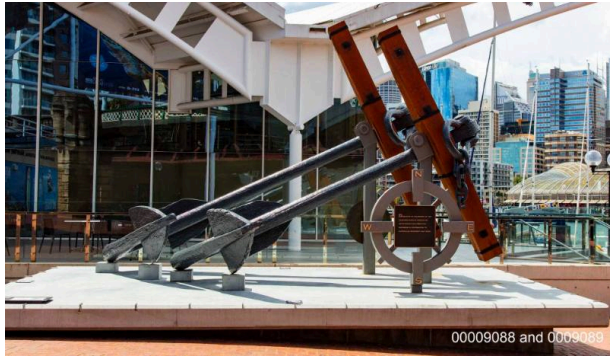


Basic Detail Report



00009088

Title

Seafarers Memorial Anchor

Date

1760-1813

Medium

Iron, Australian hardwood

Dimensions

Overall: 52820 × 3980 mm, 4.2 tons

Name

Anchor

History

In the late 1980s two large anchors reported to have been used to moor NTS VERNON off Cockatoo Island were discovered at a Howard Smith Depot at Birchgrove, Sydney. Subsequently Members of the Seamen's Union of Australia 'guarded' the anchors and kept them from the scrap heap while nurturing the idea of using them as a memorial. With the help of the Maritime Services Board and Australian National Maritime Museum staff, they recovered the anchors from the harbour foreshore, and the museum carried out essential conservation work on them. BHP was then approached to fund the construction of a merchant seafarer's memorial honouring those who sacrificed their lives in the cause of Australian shipping trade. In the early 1990s the anchors were set up between the museum building and Pyrmont Bridge with an inscription, set within a compass rose: 'Dedicated to the memory of the sacrifices made by Australian and International Merchant Seafarers in contributing to Australia's prosperity and peace'. The anchors were donated by the Seamen's Union of Australia and their mounting on the plinth sponsored by BHP. Principle supporters of the memorial project were Mr Alan Oliver of the Seamen's Union, Captain John Evans of the Australian National Maritime Museum Council, and Mr John Prescott, Managing Director of BHP. In 2015 the Museum initiated an investigation into the provenance and history of The VERNON Anchors as a result of a proposal to carry out extensive conservation work on the anchors, including the replacement of the existing stocks. Curators found that firstly, based on their size (84 cwt, with an overall length of 6 metres), these anchors almost certainly did not come out to Australia aboard VERNON, and were in fact most likely manufactured for use aboard a capital warship of the Royal Navy exceeding 100 guns and 2000 tons burthen. There is little doubt that the anchors were government property, based on the presence of multiple 'Broad Arrow' markings stamped or incised on each example. The most likely explanation for the broad arrows is that both anchors were manufactured for, and used by, the Royal Navy. While VERNON was a training ship that prepared wayward boys for service at sea, it was considered a 'Public Industrial School', and not owned or operated by the colony's naval forces. Still, as property of the New South Wales

colonial government, the ship—and everything associated with it—likely would have been marked with Broad Arrows as well, which could explain why each anchor has been stamped with the device in more than one place. A photograph of VERNON circa-1875 shows the vessel bow-on, and the starboard anchor is clearly visible. (see: <http://bishop.slq.qld.gov.au>) The anchor catted to VERNON in this photograph has the distinctive curved arms of a later-period Admiralty Pattern anchor. Using crewmen visible on VERNON's deck for scale, it also appears to be smaller than the examples that form the Merchant Seamen's Memorial. It is possible that the anchors could have formed part of the mooring system used by VERNON when it was stationed at Cockatoo Island; however, it is difficult to determine whether these anchors were specifically placed for the training ship's use, or were already present when VERNON arrived. Beginning in 1857, the graving dock at Cockatoo Island was used extensively for repair and refitting of large naval vessels, and sufficient moorings would have been stationed nearby. In fact, moorings would have been necessary from the earliest period of the island's use as a penal settlement (1839), and the anchors could have been placed there from a relatively early date. Prior to their placement at Goat Island (from where they were moved to the ANMM), the anchors were in the possession of Birchgrove-based Howard Smith Industries, a shipping concern founded in the 1860s that was also involved in towing, salvage and stevedoring activities until it was taken over in 2001. Given the proximity of the company's premises to Cockatoo Island (almost exactly opposite the island's southeast corner), it seems reasonable to posit that the anchors were collected from the waters surrounding the latter, although when and under what circumstances remains an open question. The anchors were ashore at Howard Smith Industries by 1987, when they were transferred to Goat Island. Despite their unconfirmed links to NTS VERNON the two anchors have considerable social, cultural and historical significance in their ongoing role as an active memorial to merchant seafarers. They may also be from a much earlier period than previously thought, and are the largest Admiralty anchors known in Australia. Given that the primary significance of the two anchors has become as a memorial to seafarers in 2016 it was recommended, following consultation with the Maritime Union of Australia and other stakeholders, that the name VERNON Anchors be changed to that of the Seafarers Memorial Anchors.