

Basic Detail Report



00008374

Title

Triple expansion marine surface condensing engine from
HMAS KARA KARA

Date

1926

Primary Maker

Plenty & Son Ltd

Medium

Metal

Dimensions

Overall: 400 x 600 mm, 35000 kg

Name

Engine

History

The late 1920s were the halcyon days of Sydney ferry transport. In 1926 alone, 44 million passengers were

carried by Sydney Ferries Ltd. Under the shadow of the extending arches of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, passenger and vehicular ferries busily shuttled people and cars between Sydney and the North Shore. The last cross-harbour vehicular ferry to be put into service was the KARA KARA. Construction of the bridge had been underway for about 18 months when the KARA KARA was ordered late in 1925 from the British shipbuilders, J Crichton & Co Ltd. The ferry was built at Crichton's Saltney Shipyard near Chester and launched on 30 March 1926. Described as a double-ended screw ferry steamer with a steel hull, the vessel was capable of carrying 50 vehicles and 250 passengers. KARA KARA made the voyage to Sydney under its own steam, battling heavy seas, monsoons and heatwave conditions in the tropics. Arriving in Sydney Harbour on 13 November 1926, the ferry was later put into service on the busy route between Milson's Point and Fort Macquarie (now the site of the Sydney Opera House). After only five and a half years of service, the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge on 19 March 1932 brought an end to KARA KARA's use as a vehicular ferry. The vessel was laid up until 1941 when it was requisitioned for war duty by the Royal Australian Navy. The Navy soon purchased the old ferry outright from Sydney Ferries Ltd and its long flat deck was transformed into an auxiliary boom defence vessel at Mort's Dock, Balmain. Boom defence provided protection from enemy submarines entering a harbour, by suspending a net in the water kept in place by two boom defence vessels. Given a new superstructure, false pointed bow and rounded stern, the former ferry was armed with a 12-pound gun and two machine guns. Officially commissioned into the RAN

on 19 May 1941, HMAS KARA KARA (Z221) set off for Darwin six months later. During the bombing of Darwin by Japanese aircraft on 19 February 1942, KARA KARA was attached to the western gate across Darwin Harbour. Despite being a sitting target firmly attached to the boom, the vessel escaped a direct hit although 14 bombs landed in the waters around and beside the ship. Unfortunately two crew members were fatally wounded during the raid - the ship's cook (Dick Emms) relieving on one of the Vickers machine guns, and a boom rigger (Tony Moore) on the ship's bridge. After the war HMAS KARA KARA remained in the Reserve Fleet at Darwin and eventually sailed back to Sydney in 1950. There, without further sea-going service, the ship was transferred to the Unmaintained Reserve at Waverton. Later, while moored at Athol Bight near Taronga Zoo, KARA KARA provided accommodation for Reserve Fleet skippers. In 1972, the RAN sold HMAS KARA KARA for scrap to the Sydney scrap merchants Marrickville Metal Holdings. All reusable material was removed from the vessel which was then offered back to the Navy for use as target practice. The ship was made seaworthy enough to be towed out of Sydney by the tug BRONZEWING and on 31 January 1973 left to take part in naval exercises. At 5.18 pm that afternoon KARA KARA was sunk off Jervis Bay in 3,000 fathoms of water - but not by gunfire. The ship was still floating after the bombardments and the Navy Diving Clearance Team had to strategically position explosives on board before it finally went to the bottom. However, all remains of the ship were not lost forever. Two months previously the original 35-ton triple expansion marine steam engine had been hoisted out of the vessel's engine room during operations at Garden Island. Even in the 1970s this type of engine was a rare survivor of a once common type. Most steam ferry engines had been redieselled, while overseas other obsolete vessels with similar engines were being scrapped. The engine was acquired by the Goulburn City Council at below its scrap value for preservation at the Goulburn Museum of Historic Engines (referred to locally as the Goulburn Steam Museum). Built in 1926 by Plenty & Son Ltd of Newbury, Berkshire, England the engine remained on display at Goulburn until 1988. In that year it was acquired by the Australian National Maritime Museum and completely restored to operating condition (although not for steaming). It now resides in the Museum's Navy Gallery, operated for display purposes by an electric motor.