

Basic Detail Report



00037715

Title

Half model of the steamship WYRALLAH

Date

c 1885

Primary Maker

Mort's Dock and Engineering Company

Medium

Timber, paint

Dimensions

Overall: 270 x 1,490 x 130 mm, 6.8 kg

Name

Model

History

WYRALLAH was a twin screw steamship built at Mort's Dock in Balmain, Sydney in 1885 and used as a coastal steamer. WYRALLAH was first owned by the North Coast Steam Navigation Company however by 1920 the vessel had passed to Gippsland Steamers Pty Ltd. During a squall in April 1924, WYRALLAH sank outside Port Phillip Heads after colliding with SS DILKERRA in an incident that nearly tore WYRALLAH in half and took six lives. Renowned industrialist Thomas Sutcliffe Mort (1816-1878) established Mort's Dock in conjunction with former steamship captain Thomas Rountree, opening for business in March 1855. Mort's Dock was the first dry dock in Australia, and its establishment came close on the heels of the introduction of steamships into Sydney Harbour. The lack of repair and maintenance facilities available in Australia to cater for these new ships created an opening for Mort & Rountree to capitalise on with their new venture. Mort invested around 80,000 pounds to build the dock, and land was purchased in 1854 at Waterview Bay in Balmain. Operations included a dry dock and floating dock at the Waterview Bay site and a second dry dock at Woolwich. Thomas Sutcliffe Mort had come to Australia in 1838, beginning work as a clerk with Aspinall, Browne & Co. This experience allowed him to gain a good grasp of local and international commerce and he later worked successfully as an auctioneer and wool broker. Inflation coupled with investments in pastoral properties in the 1850s saw Mort's wealth multiply. He was, therefore, in an excellent financial position by the time Mort's Dock was founded. However the dockyards were not initially as profitable as had been hoped. The dock had been built to accommodate the largest vessels expected in Sydney Harbour, however due to the popularity of the Victorian gold rush, Sydney did not become, as expected, the busiest international harbour in Australia at that time. By 1861 much of the land on the site of Mort's Dock was leased to various shipping companies and engineers. In 1872 Mort's Dock &

Engineering Co. was founded, and in 1875 the company was incorporated with limited liability. The dock manager at this time was James Peter Franki, an engineer and shipbuilder who went on to manage the site for 50 years until his retirement in 1922. The dockyards enjoyed a period of productivity and profit during World War II, but a decline in the years after the war led to the closure of Mort's Dock and the winding down of Mort's Dock & Engineering Co. in the late 1950s. Ship builders, such as those at Mort's Dock, produced half block models to demonstrate the shape of a vessel. Builders then used the model as a reference when cutting and fitting timbers for the full scale vessel.