

# Basic Detail Report

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**00018371**

**Title**

Steam picket boat of HMAS AUSTRALIA (I)

**Date**

1994

**Primary Maker**

Leyland Wilkinson

**Medium**

Wood verneer, gilt, brass, rope, paint on fibreglass

**Dimensions**

Overall: 410 x 1290 x 270 mm, 5.9 kg

**Name**

Model

**History**

Steam powered picket boats were primarily used for harbour defence of naval ships and for ceremonial duties such as transporting dignitaries. They were in use in the Royal Navy from the 1870s and always were commanded by a Midshipman. The addition of the outboard torpedoes made them all the more useful for defence purposes. The steam picket boat for HMAS AUSTRALIA was launched at the Thames Ironworks on 7 April 1912. It was 50-foot long with a displacement of about 20 tons. It was the first war vessel to be fitted with a 150-horse power Werry engine, and could reach speeds of around 15 knots. HMAS AUSTRALIA was an Indefatigable class battle cruiser launched in 1911 and later commissioned as the first flagship of the Royal Australian Navy. It was built by John Brown and Co Ltd at Glasgow and sailed for Australia in 1913 after extensive gun, torpedo and machinery trials. It led the Australian Fleet Unit consisting of MELBOURNE, SYDNEY, ENCOUNTER, YARRA, WARREGO and PARRAMATTA into Sydney Harbour on 4 October 1913. It was the embodiment of the Commonwealth of Australia's sea power, and as the flagship of the new Fleet, was the focal point of public interest. AUSTRALIA visited most of Australia's main ports in the first year and several songs and music compositions were dedicated to the vessel. In World War I HMAS AUSTRALIA was active in the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans during which time the ship became the first battle cruiser to launch an aircraft in 1918 (light cruiser HMAS SYDNEY (I) was the first Australian ship to launch an aircraft in 1917). In the Pacific AUSTRALIA took part in seizing German Pacific colonies and destroying their radio networks. In the Atlantic it took part in sweeps, patrols and convoy escort tasks particularly in the North Sea and was present at the surrender of the German Fleet at Firth of Forth, Scotland in November 1918. HMAS AUSTRALIA arrived back in Australia in 1919. After the war, AUSTRALIA resumed normal duties in Australian waters until December 1921 when a lack of funding saw

the vessel paid off into reserve. Most of the vessel's useful equipment and fittings were removed, and eventually it was decided to scrap AUSTRALIA under the terms of the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922 (which aimed at reducing global tonnage of warships after World War I). In January 1924 AUSTRALIA was sold for a mere £3,000, and on 12 April the battle cruiser was scuttled by demolition charges off Sydney Heads. In attendance were HMA Ships BRISBANE and ANZAC, and HM Ships DEHLI, DANAE, DAUNTLESS and DRAGON of the British Light Cruiser Squadron, and steamers crowded with spectators. The vessel disappeared amid almost as much fanfare as when it first arrived in Australia only 11 years previously. In March 2007 the deepest ever remote operated shipwreck survey was undertaken some 50 kilometres off Sydney. The survey was a joint venture between the Royal Australian Navy, Defence Maritime Services and the Heritage Office, NSW Department of Planning. The visiting US Navy submersible CURV descended 380 metres down to the 180-metre long, 19,000 ton shipwreck - the largest in Australian waters. The site is protected under the Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act (1976). Source: 'Famous Australian Shipwrecks', Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, [www.environment.gov.au/heritage/shipwrecks/australian.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/shipwrecks/australian.html) (19/04/2011)