

Basic Detail Report



00006328

Title

Sailmaker's tool

Date

1930s

Medium

Iron, wood

Dimensions

Overall: 155 x 37 x 32 mm

Name

Pricker

History

George Robinson, nicknamed 'Wee Georgie Robinson', was a foreman shipwright at Cockatoo Island. Like his father, Robinson became a boatbuilder and 18-foot skiff skipper. In 1919, he built the 18-foot skiff BRITANNIA. Over the next 26 years BRITANNIA, with a crew of 11 family members and footballers, sailed a total of 17,000 nautical miles in 691 races and won 41 cup races before it was converted to a starter boat. The museum holds a range of items related to Robinson's career as a boatbuilder and skipper, including a selecting of Sydney Flying Squadron programmes, handwritten records of race results and race memorabilia. Half models rarely survive as the names of the ships they represented are usually lost or they are often mistaken for scraps of wood. This half model is an important part of sea racing history in that it is a rare example of early skiff building methods. Robinson and his fine craftsmanship hailed from a time that the Australian Historical Sailing Skiff Association described as the era of 'real skiff sailing'. Bruce Stannard illustrated this sense of nostalgia and loss in his book, 'The Blue-water Bushmen: The Colourful Story of Australia's Best and Boldest Boatmen': 'In the mythology of Australian sport there are few legends more colourful or enduring than those that surround the great sail-carrying open boats. Throughout the 19th century, long before cricket and the turf became obsessions in the infant colony, vast crowds, often hundreds of thousands strong, jammed every vantage point about Sydney Harbour and packed aboard fleets of steamers to gamble and to gape at the incredible antics of the men who dared to race the big boats....In many ways the open boatmen might be described as blue-water bushmen...the rough and ready Sydney Harbour sailors did embody many of the characteristics which were so readily ascribed to their country cousins....' Today, there are no surviving 24-footers, 22-footers, 10-footers, canvas dinghies, 8-footers or 6-footers. Only 'Wee Georgie' Robinson's 18-footer BRITANNIA survives, a mere shadow of its former glory, but a testament to both early boatbuilding techniques and an ethos that dominated maritime culture in Sydney Harbour.