

# Basic Detail Report

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**Title**

The Wharfies Mural

**Date**

1953-1965

**Primary Maker**

Maritime Union of Australia

**Medium**

Paint on plaster, steel

**Name**

Mural

**History**

The mural was produced mainly in the 1950s at the height of the influence of and support for the Waterside Workers Federation (WWF) . The trade union organisation for maritime workers on the docks and at the ports around Australia had conducted many campaigns to achieve better working conditions for their members. Their work was historically dangerous, casual and back-breaking. By the 1940s it was more permanent and well paid - at a time when goods were still carried manually onto ships. The WWF had its largest membership of 12,000 in Sydney. The mural illustrates major themes of Australian history that influenced the trade union as well as events that the union were involved in. The first panels include the first industrial campaigns in the 1850s, and continue through to the end of World War II. The mural reflects the concerns of a generation of waterside workers who had grown up during the 1930s Great Depression and lived through World War II. Originally conceived by Rod Shaw, the mural reflects an active cultural movement in the union. Shaw's concept was that the major themes of waterside history, labour history and Australian history portrayed in the mural would be woven like a tapestry. The mural was executed on the plaster walls of the union's canteen or lunchroom in paint, crayon, pastel and pencil, by a number of trained artists and waterside workers between 1953 and 1963. Various scenes were painted in monochrome sepia, with blank spaces left to be filled by colour cameos of significant people and events. The mural originally covered 11 different adjacent surfaces of varying shapes and sizes as it snaked around door frames and even a chimney piece in the canteen building. The building was situated at the heart of the waterside workers activity at 60 Sussex Street, Sydney, an area also known as the 'Hungry Mile'. A number of trained artists as well as amateurs were involved, including Rod Shaw, Harry McDonald, Evelyn Walters (Healy), Vi Campbell (Collings), Sonny Glynn, Pat Graham, Clem Millward , Harry Reed and Ralph Sawyer. During 1991 and 1992 the mural was removed, conserved and installed at the Australian National Maritime Museum.