

Basic Detail Report



00041451

Title

Metal disk with ornament

Date

Before 1857

Medium

Metal

Dimensions

2.5 x 28 mm, 3.17 g

Name

Decorated disk - part of a buckle

History

Built in 1852, the 1167-ton, wooden, three-masted sailing ship DUNBAR was designed to cater for this new trade. Costing over 30,000 pounds and constructed from British oak and Indian teak and held together by copper fastenings and iron knees, the vessel was designed to carry passengers and cargo quickly between England and Australia. As the vessel was requested by the Royal Navy for use as a troop carrier during the Crimean War, it was not until 1856 that the vessel made its first visit to Australia. The ship remained in Sydney for three months before returning to England in the same year. In late May 1857 the ship departed London for its second voyage to Australia, carrying at least 63 passengers, 59 crew and a substantial cargo, including metal dyes for the colonies first postage stamps, machinery, furniture, trade tokens, cutlery, manufactured and fine goods, food and alcohol. Many of the vessel's first-class passengers were prominent Sydney residents, returning to Australia after visiting their English homeland. After a relatively fast voyage the vessel was only hours out of Sydney when on the night of 20 August 1857, in heavy seas and poor visibility, the vessel struck the cliffs just north of the Signal Station at South Head - midway between the lighthouse and The Gap. Within a few minutes the ship began to break up. All perished in the disaster but one person - a young sailor who was hurled from the deck onto to a rocky ledge. As dawn gradually unveiled the enormity of the event to the community of Sydney, the great loss of life (at least 121 men, women and children, many of whom were known to the local population) deeply affected the population. Thousands were drawn to the scene of the wreck to watch the rescue of the single survivor, the recovery of the bodies and the salvage of some of the cargo. For days afterwards the newspapers were filled with graphic descriptions of the wreck and the public interest in the spectacle. Pamphlets, engravings, poems, paintings and brochures soon began to appear in Sydney as part of the memorabilia industry associated with the tragedy. Many of the victims of DUNBAR were buried at St Stephens Church in Newtown. Some 20,000 people lined George Street for the funeral procession. Banks and offices closed, every ship in the harbour flew their ensigns at half-mast and minute guns were fired as the seven hearses

and 100 carriages went past. The effect of the DUNBAR disaster is hard to imagine in these days of safe and efficient air and sea travel. The repercussions of the event still live on with the descendants of some of the victims attending the annual DUNBAR Commemorative Services at Camperdown Cemetery and St Stephens Church, Newtown.