

# Basic Detail Report

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**Title**

Tristan da Cunha fire in the chimney 1872: Solander RK.  
The chawed boat 1875

**Date**

1993

**Primary Maker**

Gary Tonkin

**Medium**

Sperm whale tooth

**Dimensions**

Overall: 175 x 70 mm, 0.65 kg

**Name**

Scrimshaw

**History**

Scrimshaw was originally a maritime craft that developed from the unique conditions onboard whaling ships in the early 19th century. No one knows for sure where the word

originated, but it comes from the Dutch words 'scrim' meaning to etch and 'shorn' meaning to make. The earliest written reference is in an American ship's log dated 20 May 1826. There is also a reference to 'skrim shunder articles' in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* in 1851. Scrimshaw is produced by engraving, carving, inlaying or assembling bone from marine mammals, such as whale bone, teeth and baleen, walrus tusks and shell. Using jackknives, saws, homemade files and sharp sail needles, sailors etched images of women, whaling scenes or other memories of home. For a period of roughly 100 years whalers produced a wide variety of scrimshaw, but it is the engraved and carved teeth and jaws that have received the most admiration. Teeth are generally considered classic scrimshaw because of their decoration, including whaling scenes, family members, religion, love, women and patriotism. A tooth would be selected and sawn off for stability, then filed and sanded to a smooth surface. The basic design was often copied from books and magazine illustrations and would be scratched into the tooth and the engraved lines filled with ink, lamp black or other pigments. As the work progressed more detail would be added to finish the design. Gary Tonkin began scrimshandering in about 1975, after working in the whaling industry as a young man. He is self-taught and uses traditional scrimshaw techniques, and has become recognised as a leading contemporary practitioner of scrimshaw. On 10 June 1872 ELIZA ADAMS sailed from New Bedford on the East coast of America, bound for the southern Indian and Pacific oceans. The four year whaling voyage,

1872 - 1876, took the vessel around the world and included a successful trip along the West coast of Australia. Both the highlights and mundane aspects of ELIZA ADAMS' journey are illustrated on the teeth: including the vivid and exciting 'Knocked down by a waterspout'; the birth of the Hamblin's son in Albany, Western Australia 'Captain's newborn son' and 'Caulking the hull' which records the ship's visit to Hobart, Tasmania where it docked for repairs in September 1874.