

# Basic Detail Report

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**Title**

New Australian clipper ship the ROYAL FAMILY :  
scrimshawed plaque

**Date**

1860s

**Medium**

Ink on Whalebone

**Dimensions**

Overall: 198 x 220 x 22 mm, 0.58 kg

**Name**

Scrimshaw

**History**

Scrimshaw was originally a maritime craft that developed on board whaling ships in the early 19th century. No one knows for sure where the expression originated, but it comes from the Dutch words 'scrim' meaning to etch and 'shorn' meaning to make. Scrimshaw is produced by engraving, carving, inlaying or assembling bone from marine mammals, such as whale bone, teeth, baleen, walrus tusks and shell. Pan bone was a flat part of a whale's jaw that could be cut into thin canvas like sheets, suitable for panoramic engravings. Using jackknives, saws, homemade files and sharp sail needles, sailors would etch images of women, whaling scenes or other memories from home. The average whaling expedition lasted anywhere from three to five years. This could bring about unbearable boredom and loneliness for the sailors. Whalers would fill their long hours by crafting presents for their loved ones back home, carving designs into whale teeth and bone reflecting scenes of everyday life afloat or their memories of home. The ROYAL FAMILY was built in 1862 at New Brunswick, Canada by William and Richard Wright, who were joint owners of the vessel. The ship utilised more iron in its construction than was typical for a clipper ship. This was due to the difficulty shipbuilders had accessing timber from southern ports in America during the Civil War. The ROYAL FAMILY was active on the Australian trade route between Liverpool and Melbourne. It completed this journey on two occasions in 1863 and 1864. In 1868 it sank after hitting Rufero Reef in the Maldives.