



Object name: Sydney Cove Anchor

Description: Forged iron “Old Admiralty” design anchor from the wreck of the Sydney Cove. The anchor, with ring attached, is in a horizontal position on a specially constructed stand. A rubber gasket is between the anchor and the stand at the resting points.

Dimensions:

Shank Length: 325.00cm

Shank Width: 15.00cm

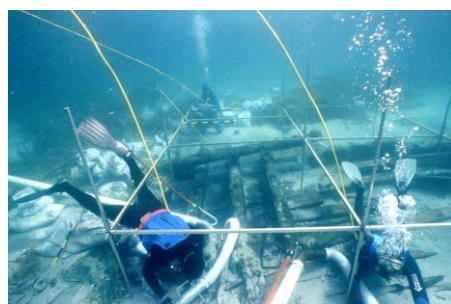
Ring Diameter: 52.00cm

Arm Length: 108.40cm

Weight: >10Kg

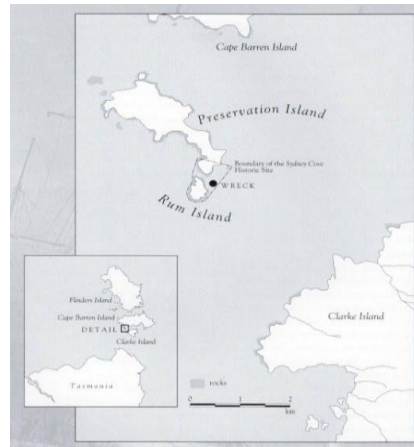
Condition: Fair/good (Conserved by QVMAG 1987-88)

Provenance: The anchor was recovered by archaeological divers in 1980. It was conserved by the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (QVMAG) and was presented to the Furneaux Historical Research Association in 1990.



Divers working on the shipwrecked Sydney Cove site¹³

¹³ Mark McKenna, Sydney Cove shipwreck an epic tale of adventure and survival in 179 , viewed 7 December 2023< <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-05-30/survival-story-sydney-coves-shipwrecked-sailors/8536714> >



*Sydney Cove Historic Site*¹⁴

Context:¹⁵ The Sydney Cove was the earliest known shipwreck in Tasmanian waters and the first to occur after the founding of the colony at Port Jackson (Sydney), New South Wales, in 1788. Sydney Cove's voyage was organised by the merchant house of Campbell and Clark, who operated out of Calcutta under licence from the East India Company. The ship sailed from Calcutta on 10 November 1796 under the command of Captain Gavin (Guy) Hamilton, with cargo including 7,000 gallons of rum, fifty-three crew and two passengers. Encountering heavy gales from the outset of the voyage, during which the second mate was lost overboard, the vessel began to leak. On 13 January 1797 an attempt was made to 'fother' the leak by passing a sail around the bows to keep out the water but met with only partial success.

During a gale on 25–26 January five of the lascars (South-East Asian) crew died from their efforts at the pumps, and the onset of scurvy. The vessel rounded the far south-west coast of Van Diemen's Land on 1 February and passed Maria Island on the 4th. When about 90 miles east of the coast, the ship encountered another gale and sprung an even more severe leak. Captain Hamilton turned the stricken vessel westwards to pass through Banks Strait and on the morning of the 9th, Sydney Cove was run aground in nineteen feet of water between two small low-lying islands at the south-western end of the Furneaux Group.

In this location the wreck was reasonably protected, allowing the crew and essential stores and equipment to be landed on the southernmost point of what was subsequently named Preservation Island. Here they set up camp and their limited store of food was supplemented by catching native wildlife such as mutton-birds. Scurvy still affected the crew and four men died on the island, while a number remained ill for months. Although the wreck was almost completely submerged at high tide, the crew were able to remove over half the cargo before the remains of the hull collapsed at the beginning of May. After some crew members were found broaching the salvaged casks of spirits, that part of the cargo was transferred to the smaller Rum Island. With

¹⁴ Nash, M. 2001, *Cargo for the Colony, The 1797 wreck of the merchant ship Sydney Cove*, Navarine Publishing, Hobart

¹⁵ Australasian Underwater Cultural Heritage Database, viewed 7 December 2023, <<https://environment.gov.au/shipwreck/public/wreck/wreck.do?key=7777>>

the salvage work completed the men were also tasked with building a 'house' near their campsite so they could survive the onset of the winter months.

On 27 February the longboat had been dispatched to Sydney to seek assistance, with a crew of 17 under Chief officer Hugh Thompson and supercargo William Clark. It was wrecked on the Victorian coast, south of Cape Howe, on 2 March, and the crew began an arduous trek northward through completely unexplored country, assisted by friendly Aboriginals on some parts of the journey, and attacked on others. Starvation reduced their numbers until only Clark and two of the crew survived, to be rescued by a fishing boat south of Port Hacking on 15 May. Searchers later discovered the remains of two others left behind a few days earlier. Clark also compiled an account of the journey, which provides the earliest known description of some of the Aboriginal groups living along the coast.

On learning of the wreck, Governor John Hunter sent the 42-ton government schooner Francis to Preservation Island, accompanied by the 10-ton sloop Eliza. Leaving on 30 May, they arrived on 10 June and picked up much of the salvaged cargo and most of the castaways. Six of the Sydney Cove's crew remained with the wreck guarding additional salvage until Francis could return, which did not occur until December. A further salvage trip was made in February 1798, and the cargo brought high prices when auctioned in Sydney in March. The salvaged alcohol was reluctantly purchased by the colonial authorities for the Government Commissariat, so it could be kept out of the hands of the general population at Port Jackson. The 38-year-old Captain Hamilton died in Sydney a few months later, reportedly from the privations he suffered following the wreck.

Off the southern tip of Preservation Island, the destruction of the Sydney Cove took a number of years. In February 1798 Lieutenant Matthew Flinders recorded that the hull had broken up during westerly gales and scattered its timbers and parts of the cargo throughout the islands. Four years later, in March 1802, a French expedition under Captain Nicholas Baudin noted some of the wreck's timberwork lying at nearby Clarke Island. In 1804 it was reported to Governor King that the crew of an American sealing vessel were building a craft from the ship's timbers, but they departed from the Furneaux Group before this could be confirmed.

Sydney Cove is believed to have originally been built in India, possibly at Calcutta as the snow Begum Shaw, and was engaged in the 'country' trade around the Indian and south-east Asian coast under Guy Hamilton's command until 1796. The vessel was then acquired by Calcutta merchants Campbell & Clark and renamed for the Port Jackson voyage. Sydney Cove is believed to have been in the 250 to 300-ton range, and on its final voyage it was rigged as a three-masted ship, with two decks and a copper-sheathed hull.

The exact location of the wreck was not known until it was discovered by divers on 1 January 1977, using information contained in a map drawn up by Lieutenant Matthew Flinders in 1798. Initial survey work and test-excavations were carried out between 1977 and 1980 and established that there was a significant amount of wreck structure lying buried under the sand and seagrass. Between 1991 and 1994 a regular excavation program on the Sydney Cove was undertaken by the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service, with assistance from volunteers and staff from a number of museums and heritage agencies. Associated land sites on Preservation Island were also excavated in 2002 and 2006.

It was proclaimed an historic site and marine reserve on 29 March 1977.

Significance of the Sydney Cove Site ¹⁶

Australian Significance: The attention focused on this previously unexplored part of Australia precipitated the discovery of Bass Strait and brought about the European impact on the area centred around sealing in the 1790's, which emerged as one of Australia's first export industries. The beaching of the Sydney Cove marked the beginning of settlement of the Furneaux group and had long term ramifications for Tasmania and Australia and for the Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

International Significance: The Sydney Cove voyage is representative of a radical shift in emphasis for the trade of the eastern seas. 18th century Indian trade was initially focused on the seas to the West. Due to Maratha warring chieftans in 1776, trade swung to the east and by 1784 pioneering captains were forging further east to Australia.

Scientific Significance: As an archaeological site, the Sydney Cove hull is a unique surviving example of a particular shipbuilding. The relics represent a snapshot in time.

Ethnic Significance: In terms of social significance, all ships carry with them sections of human populations who furnish themselves with various goods and chattels which they can live and work. The make - up of the crews and how they lived and worked can also be seen.

Comparable Objects: Artefacts from the wreck, including the first recovered anchor, and the survivor's camp are now on permanent display at the Queen Victoria Museum in Launceston.



One of the Sydney Cove's anchors showing half the original timber stock on display at the QVMAG (Image courtesy of Maree Crawford)

¹⁶ Shirley Strahan, *The History and Archaeology of the Sydney cove Shipwreck (1797): a resource for future site work*, Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, ANU, Canberra 1986.