

Basic Detail Report



Lady Denman

Vessel number

HV000021

Date

1911

Primary Maker

Walter Reeks

Description

The ferry LADY DENMAN was launched late in 1911 at the builder's yard of Joseph Dent on Currambene Creek at Huskisson, then towed up to Sydney carrying a load of timber (acting as ballast as well as a commercial product) where the fitout and engine installation were completed, possibly by Morrison and Sinclair. The original plan by of the Balmain New Ferry Company was for the LADY DENMAN and its other four close sister ship ferries to remain in service on the Lane Cove and Parramatta river routes until the Sydney Harbour Bridge was opened in the late 1920s or early 1930s. Accordingly they were lightly built, and the structure included a simple corrugated galvanised iron roof. They were relatively small and had a veed shape and shallow draft to navigate the muddy and silted upper reaches of their run. The 38hp Chapman and Co. compound steam engine gave 10 knots of speed, and it featured the unique push or pull single propeller at one end of the double ended hull form, an arrangement favoured by the naval architect Walter Reeks on many of his later designs. Walter Reeks first ferry for the company was THE LADY MARY in 1892, followed by LADY MANNING in 1894. Both ferries had unorthodox features and this became a trademark for the majority of Reeks ferry designs. LADY DENMAN's single propeller on a double-ended hull shape was a feature Reeks introduced around 1906 on the bigger LADY RAWSON and sister ship vessels. An accident on LADY MANNING early in the 1900s led to it being used for a month with only one propeller, and its performance was barely affected. This unintended trial prompted Reeks to specifically design a ferry with only one propeller and one shaft, simplifying the internal arrangements. It was a success and he continued to design a number of ferries with this configuration. He tried to patent the configuration but his application was not successful. LADY DENMAN was licensed to carry 500 passengers. The five closely related ferries, LADY CHELMSFORD, LADY DENMAN, LADY SCOTT, LADY EDELINE and LADY FERGUSON were to remain in service for over 60 years, passing into the hands of Sydney Ferries as they amalgamated with or took over many of the smaller harbour services after WW1. The LADY DENMAN was taken out of the fleet in 1979. The last one to be retired was the LADY EDELINE in 1984. All five were converted to diesel power in the 1930s after a very successful trial conversion was done on LADY CHELMSFORD in 1934. LADY DENMAN was fitted with a 170 kw (228hp) Gardner diesel, which was replaced in 1962 with a 224 kw (300hp) Crossley motor. When retired LADY DENMAN then became the focus for a preservation project with a group of Huskisson enthusiasts who saw its potential as a tourist attraction and the basis for a museum in the area. The first attempt to tow the now leaky vessel to Jervis Bay failed to get far beyond

the Sydney Heads. It then remained under threat in Sydney Harbour until a private mission cloaked in stealth successfully towed the ferry to Jervis Bay and then Huskisson where it nearly sank in Currumbene Creek, opposite to where it had been built. Once they were able to bring the vessel up on to dry land restoration work commenced, along with the construction of a new museum and heritage centre based around the vessel. A dry dock was built and a channel cut to where the vessel was sitting, a short distance away and well out of the water. The dock and channel were then flooded, and with pumps operating a patched up LADY DENMAN was floated a short distance across to its new location, pulled by volunteers on land on the end of the towlines. The water was then drained out, and construction of its new housing began around it. LADY DENMAN is now housed on dry land in a purpose built structure and is the central feature of the Lady Denman Heritage Complex, colourfully repainted in its bright red, green and yellow livery of the 1960s. Restoration and rebuilding work continues to take place ensuring the vessel will remain in good condition for many years to come. In 2009 due to the probable loss of sistership LADY CHELMSFORD in Melbourne, LADY DENMAN has become the second last surviving wooden double-ended ferry remaining extant, the other one is sister ship LADY SCOTT which has operated as a charter vessel on Sydney Harbour, with a different superstructure. However in 2012 LADY SCOTT sank at its moorings and remains under threat of demolition.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 33.53 m x 7.62 m x 2.74 m (110 ft x 25 ft x 9 ft) Registered Dimensions: 33.65 m x 7.62 m x 2.74 m, 96 tons (110.4 ft x 25 ft x 9 ft) Engine dimensions: 223 kilowatts (300 horsepower)