

Basic Detail Report



South Steyne

Vessel number

HV000486

Date

1938

Primary Maker

Henry Robb Limited Engineers and Shipbuilders

Description

SOUTH STEYNE was built in Leith, Scotland by Henry Robb & Co., to a design drawn by the company's chief draughtsman John Ashcroft, however the concept was very much the creation of Walter Dendy. He envisaged a modern vessel, capable of sea-going passages between Sydney and Broken Bay where the company had property and other interests at that time. It also required greater capacity than the existing large vessels DEE WHY and CURL CURL, to improve the service on the harbour. Planning began in late 1936 when Dendy went to Britain to look at recent developments in design, construction and machinery. Initial ideas included the use of diesel electric motors, but they were causing problems on the smaller ferry BELLUBRA, and the PJ&MSSC board decided to remain with the proven steam reciprocating engine. Tenders were let and the quote from Henry Robb & Co. was accepted. The keel was laid on 14 October 1937, and on 1 April 1938 the ship was launched, in fact it slid down the ways of its own accord a little in advance of the christening ceremony. With its elegant raked and flared bows, curved sheer and deck sheer lines, twin funnels and well balanced proportions SOUTH STEYNE was the climax in a design process started in 1896 by Walter Reeks with the wooden MANLY, the first screw propelled, double-ended Manly ferry. He immediately improved this with the steel, ram-bowed KU-RING-GAI in 1901. Both craft stood out for their appearance, but also their capabilities as Reeks recognised the need for them to be sea going craft when they operated in the open waters across Sydney Heads. Subsequent Manly ferries kept improving on this concept, but when it came to SOUTH STEYNE, Dendy took the opportunity to make it the largest and most eye-catching ferry yet seen on Sydney Harbour, and one well and truly capable of offshore work. It had stronger plating and framing, stronger superstructure, more watertight bulkheads, and the flared bows made it a sea kindly hull. All this fitted comfortably with the need to ensure the vessel's tonnage was in excess of 1000 tons to allow for Sales Tax Exemptions, and therefore the ship had to be larger than its predecessors. SOUTH STEYNE steamed to Sydney after its sea trials in late June, leaving Scotland on 7 July 1938 for the voyage via the Suez Canal. Its size and strength made the ship was more capable than any of its predecessors to make this journey, which took SOUTH STEYNE 64 days. During the passage it encountered fog as they left, a grounding in the Suez Canal, a sandstorm in the Red Sea, the monsoon season swells as they crossed the Indian Ocean to Colombo from north east Africa, then heavy gales off the NSW east coast as they approached Sydney. On 9 September 1938 SOUTH STEYNE entered the harbour with flags flying and a big welcome from many other craft that had come out for the event.

Speed trials on Sydney Harbour in October gave an average of 17.1 knots, a very impressive and satisfactory performance, nearly matching the speed of CURL CURL and DEE WHY. The ferry took two special cruises on Sunday 23 October, and then at 8.10 am on a wet and windy Monday, SOUTH STEYNE began its first regular return trip to Manly, accumulating thousands of voyages as it stayed in the service for 36 years. Over this period the great majority of its work was uneventful. However there were a small number of collisions with other craft, at least two occasions when it overshot the wharf at Manly and damaged the wharf structure, and some minor damage from big seas across the heads on just a few occasions. As well as the regular passenger service SOUTH STEYNE was used for occasional charter work, and in the 1950s and 60s took weekend ocean cruise trips to Broken Bay and return. Later it would follow the yachts racing in the Sydney to Hobart fleet on Boxing Day down as far as Port Hacking. Its survey only allowed it a maximum of 26 miles operating limit offshore. SOUTH STEYNE was withdrawn from service in August 1974, at which time it had been the last steam powered ferry operating in Sydney. This was during a time when there was considerable uncertainty about the continuation of the Manly service, which had then been in the hands of Brambles Industries. A fire broke out a week after it had been retired, damaging parts of the engine room and decks above. Although the major machinery was undamaged, it never returned to service, even though the Manly ferries had then been taken over by the State Government to ensure the route was maintained. In October 1975 SOUTH STEYNE was sold and then passed through a series of owners while gradual repairs to the damage were undertaken. In the early 1980s it was towed to Newcastle and later Ballina where it was docked for further work. Under the ownership of Australian Vintage Travel it went under its own power again to Melbourne early in 1988 and carried the Queen on an evening dinner cruise. By the end of the year the business was in receivership and the vessel was put up for sale. The current owner bought the vessel in 1990, and it went to Newcastle NSW and opened as a floating restaurant in 1993. In 1995 it made its return to Sydney and Darling Harbour, set up as the 2000 Sydney Olympics Tourist information venue. After the Olympics it reverted to a floating restaurant in 2001. During this latter period it has been regularly maintained and had a major refit in 2008. Although moored as a static ship, the SOUTH STEYNE is still capable of operation. The SOUTH STEYNE remained as a floating restaurant and prominent attraction in Cockle Bay beside the Pyrmont Bridge until 2016.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 67.05 m x 11.58 m (220 ft x 38 ft)