Cockatoo Island dockyard

There Cockatoo Island, the largest island in Sydney Harbour, was administered by colonial, state and federal governments from European occupation in 1839 until 1933. Initially used as a gaol by the government of New South Wales, from 1856 the island included a dockyard. This function passed to the Commonwealth in 1912 with its purchase of the island. In 1933 the dockyard was leased to Cockatoo Docks and Engineering Co Limited, but the Commonwealth's close involvement continued as owner of the island and the major client.

The period preceding and during World War II was particularly active, with the construction of several vessels for the Royal Australian Navy. However, it was in December 1919 that the largest workforce, 4085 people, was employed. At the end of December 1991 dockyard operations ceased, and one year later the lease lapsed.

Activities of the dockyard

The main activity of the dockyard was ship construction. Most vessels were for the Royal Australian Navy, while some were for other Commonwealth departments, state governments and private clients. Other major activities included:

- refitting, conversion and repair work of vessels from the dockyard's commencement to the refit of the submarine HMAS *Orion* in 1991 (including several United States Navy vessels repaired during World War II);

- engineering work such as the production of boilers and turbines for ships constructed at the dockyard and elsewhere, equipment for mines and factories, and the manufacture of tools used in ship construction;

- design and construction of aircraft and speedboats with aeronautical engines. These were built under the supervision of Wing Commander LJ Wackett through the years 1930 to 1934. Aircraft types included Codock, Warbler, Widgeon I and II, and Warrigal I and II;

- maintenance of the island itself, its buildings and facilities (such as dry docks, machinery and cranes); and

- administration of the dockyard.

Records held

The National Archives Sydney Office holds many records documenting the operation of Cockatoo Island Dockyard over a period of more than 100 years. Records were created by Cockatoo Dockyard Pty Limited (also known as CODOCK), which was previously known as Government Dockyard – Biloela; Commonwealth Naval Dockyard, Cockatoo Island; Cockatoo Docks and Engineering Co Limited; and Vickers Cockatoo Dockyard Limited. The agency has been registered by the National Archives as CA 7228.

Records are held in a variety of formats, including drawings, photographs, volumes and files. A selection is listed in the table below.

Records created by Cockatoo Dockyard Pty Ltd

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Establishment drawings	1870–1988	C3539
Drawings, maps & tables collected by Cockatoo Island Dockyard	1893–1945	C3368
Miscellaneous photographs	1898–1990	C4151
As fitted and working drawings of small vessels	1904–43	C3296
Photograph album depicting activities at Cockatoo Island	1935–36	M3409
Motion picture films & videotape from Cockatoo Island Dockyard	1936–85	M3285

Construction of vessels

Sets of drawings – including working drawings, electrical drawings, guidance drawings, and as fitted drawings – are held for many of the vessels constructed at the dockyard. Photographs covering the stages of construction of many vessels are also held.

The major vessels constructed at Cockatoo Island after it was acquired by the Commonwealth are listed in the table below. Many smaller vessels such as launches, lighters, punts, ferries, lightships, tugs and dredges were also built at the dockyard.

Major vessels constructed at Cockatoo Island since 1912

Name of vessel constructed and type	Years built
HMAS *Huon*, HMAS *Torrens*, HMAS *Swan* – River class torpedo boat destroyers	1912–16
HMAS *Brisbane* – Town class cruiser	1913–16
HMAS *Adelaide* – Town class cruiser	1917–22
Dundula, Eudunda – cargo ships	1918–20
Fordsdale, Ferndale – refrigerated cargo steamers	1922–24
Cape Leeuwin, Cape York – lighthouse steamers	1924–25
HMAS *Albatross* – seaplane carrier	1926–28
Cape Otway – lighthouse steamer	1930–31

HMAS *Yarra*, HMAS *Swan* – escort sloops	1934–36
HMAS *Parramatta*, HMAS *Warrego* – escort sloops	1938–40
HMAS *Kookaburra*, HMAS *Koala*, HMAS *Kangaroo*, HMAS *Karangi* – boom defence vessels	1938–41
HMAS *Arunta*, HMAS *Warramunga*, HMAS *Bataan* – Tribal class destroyers	1938–42
HMAS *Bathurst*, HMAS *Goulburn*, HMAS *Bendigo*, HMAS *Wollongong*, HMAS *Cessnock* , HMAS *Glenelg*, HMIS *Madras*, HMIS *Bengal* – minesweepers	1940–42
River Clarence, River Hunter – cargo steamers	1941–43
HMAS *Barcoo*, HMAS *Barwon* – River class frigates	1942–46
HMAS *Tobruk* – Battle class destroyer	1944–50
HMAS *Voyager*, HMAS *Vampire* – Daring class destroyers	1946–59
Wonga, Yelta – steam tugs	1947–49
HMAS *Parramatta*, HMAS *Stuart* – Type 12 frigates	1951–63
Empress of Australia – passenger/vehicle ship	1962–65
HMAS *Stalwart* – escort maintenance ship (EMS)	1964–68
HMAS *Torrens* – destroyer escort	1964–71
AS Mayne – bucket dredge	1974–77
HMAS *Success* – auxiliary oil replenishment (AOR) vessel	1979–86

For more information

Research guide:

Cockatoo Island Dockyard: A Guide to the Records