

Spectacle Island

1788 – 1889

A survey by CAPT Hunter, LT Bradely & James Kelty on 4th Feb 1788, named a small island south of Cockatoo Island as Dawes Island. The first reference to spectacles occurred in 1843 when Prout referred to 'two small scrubby Islands joined by a sand spit, resembling spectacles'.



Farm Cove, Port Jackson 1788

CAPT Merideth, Royal Marines met natives who throw spear at him on 20 March 1788. Governor Phillip later ordered LT Dawes to shoot the now hostile natives as punishment. He refused and was sent back to England on the next ship.



Royal Marines met by Spear Throwing Natives

When settlers travelling by boat from Parramatta to Sydney ran into adverse tides or weather, they would stop over on Spectacle Island. This was considered safer than the Parramatta River bank due to now hostile natives ashore. Potable water was also available.



Government House Parramatta

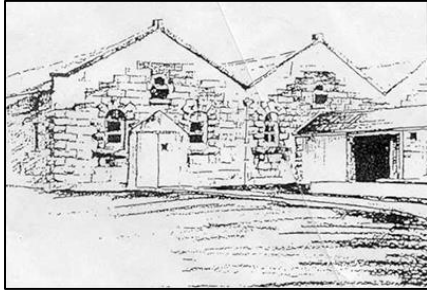
In 1836 Goat Island was formally established by Governor Bourke for regulating the keeping and carriage of gun powder in the Colony. Earlier storage was in hulks in Rose Bay and later at Bantry Bay.



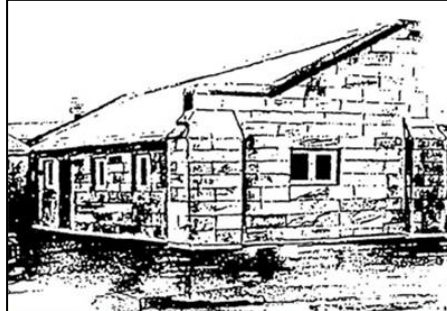
British Coat of Arms used in the Colony

By 1848 Goat Island was nearing capacity and Colonial Secretary Edward Thompson suggested ordinance should be removed to Spectacle Island “. The situation was exacerbated due to large stocks of merchant’s powder” entering the colony as a result of later gold rushes.

Construction of 3 buildings on the Island commenced in 1865 using sandstone acquired during the construction of Fitzroy Dock on nearby Cockatoo Island.



Magazine



Copperage



Barracks

The Barracks Building (Bld 3) was one of three built in 1865 as part of the original magazine complex. Later an addition was added on the western end. However, it became derelict with massive termite damage until repaired in the mid-1990s. The Naval Cadet unit TS Sydney located on the Island now use it as its main office. The Barracks building is now used by the Naval Heritage Collection as its administration office.



Spectacle Island Buildings Circa 1870: L to R Magazine, Copperage Barracks, Residence

The Magazine (Bld 9) stored all the gunpowder that the Colonial Government moved from the its magazine on Goat Island. Its height was later extended to increase capacity when it became a Royal Navy Magazine.

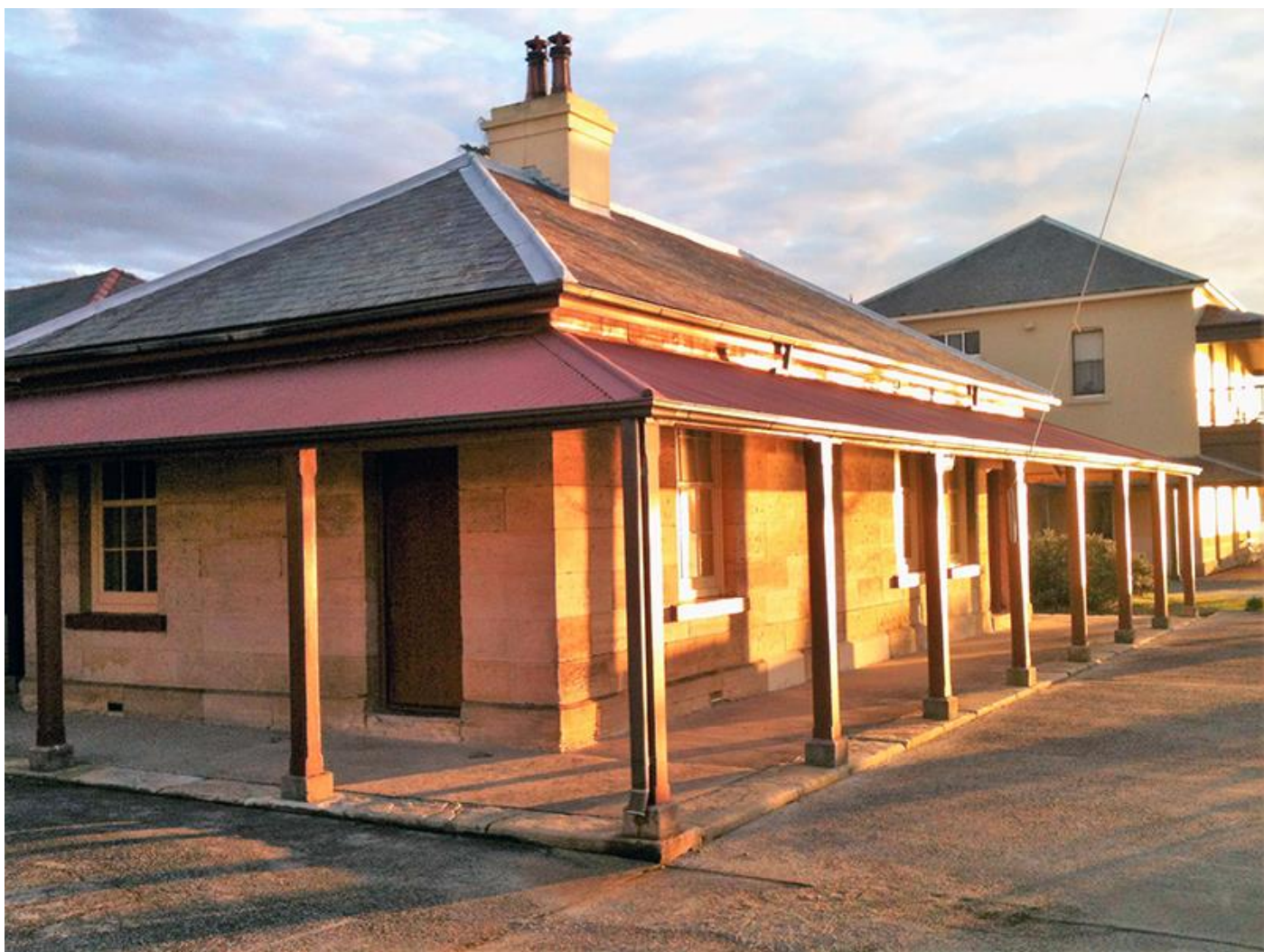


Magazine, Building 9 Spectacle Island

The Cooperage Building was originally used to manufacture and repair wooden barrels to store gunpowder. A Blacksmiths shop and forge was located nearby. However, the wisdom of having a forge located so near to the Magazine became apparent and it was later moved to a new location on the far southern end of the main Island.

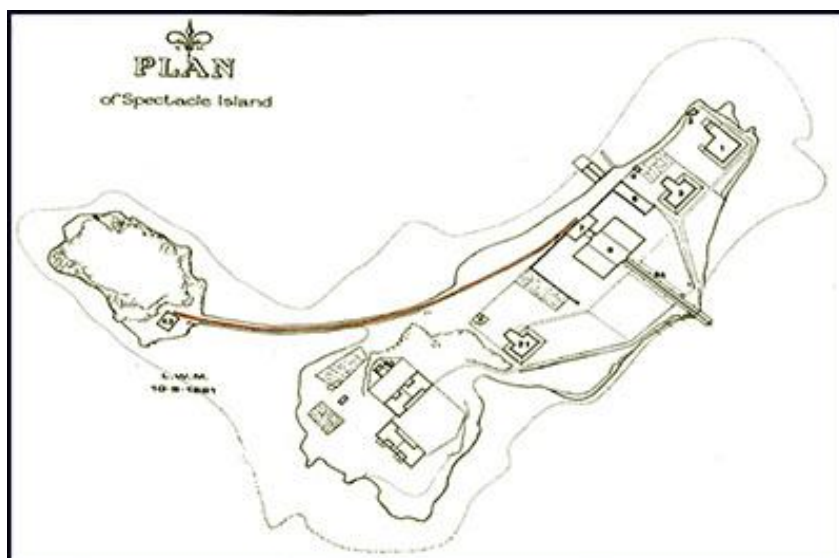


Cooperage Building 8: used from 1942 as an unserviceable cartridge case store; then a laundry and precision instruments store.



Baracks Building 3, 1863-65 built as guard room and barracks; then used for stores; 1898 turned into offices; now Director's office, conference room and general office

This Map of 1881, shows the layout of the original Magazine buildings. Note the two dual resident buildings on the south eastern end of the main island. The only part of these residences still remaining is Building 40, a dual toilet outhouse.



1881 Map of Spectacle Island showing layout of major buildings and first rail track

In 1882 HMS Nelson, flagship of the Australia Station Squadron requested storage for its increase volume of “warlike stores” and Commodore Loring suggests Spectacle Island. In 1884 control of Spectacle Island was handed over to the Royal Navy. Civilian explosives were moved back to Goat Island.



This RN Magazine badge came into use when the Royal Navy's Australia Squadron took control of the Island.



Official badge used after Royal Australian Navy took over and placed Spectacle Island under the control of Newington Armaments Depot (RANAD).

Spectacle Island

1889 – 1913



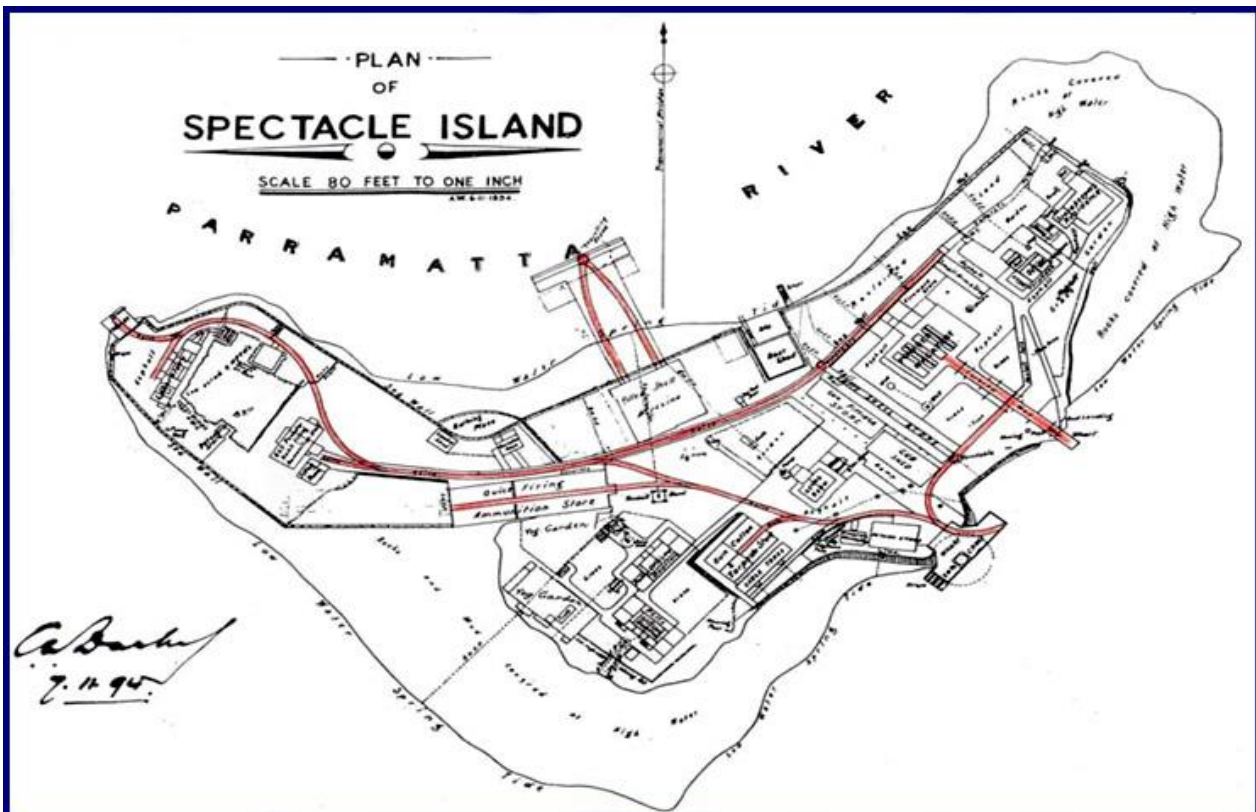
Commodore Loring RN, Commodore Commanding Australia Station



HMS Pelorius, Flagship of the Australia Squadron in Farm Cove 1862

Following takeover by the Royal Navy a number of works were initiated to expand facilities on the Island. These included:

additional quarters, erection of a 5 ton crane on the eastern wharf, new wharf at the south end of Island and 20 ton crane, additional stores for shells, torpedoes, ordnance, and ship's equipment. Additional tramways were installed as well as more water storage tanks. This work was completed during 1884 and 1885.



James Gorman VC was officer in charge of Spectacle Island from the 7th of June 1881 until his death in 1882. His annual salary of 175 pounds (\$350). Gorman was awarded the Victoria Cross in 1857 for his actions, at the Battle of Inkerman, in the Crimean conflict against the Russians.

Gorman arrived in Sydney in 1863 following discharge from the Royal Navy and became the first recipient of the Victoria Cross to live in New South Wales. He was initially employed as a Sailmaker then from 1867 as a foundation staff member on the Colonies first Nautical School Ship. The NSS Vernon a paddle-wheel steamer purchased by the New South Wales government as a training ship for the homeless neglected and destitute boys of the Colony.

James was employed as drill master and gunnery instructor. In 1869 he held the position of Master at Arms and gunnery instructor then in 1872 promoted to Sail Maker and Officer in charge of the lower deck. He was well respected by both the boys and the other officers and commended for his care of the sick onboard during an outbreak of Scarlett Fever.



James Gorman VC Superintendent, Spectacle Island

Royal Navy Staff 1904 consisting of Sailors, Marines, civilian staff and the Gunnery Officer in Charge. Note the boat driver on the right with no shoes, the pet dog in the front and the Spectacle Island life ring at the rear.



Royal Navy Staff, Spectacle Island 1904

Spectacle Island

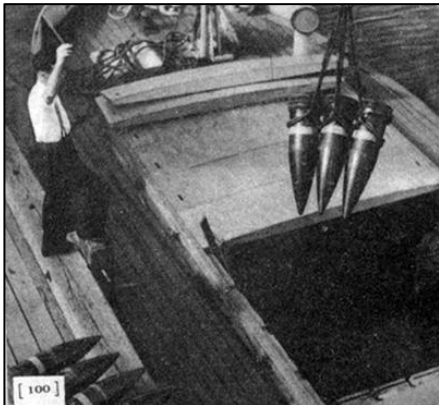
1913 – 1995

Arrival of the first RAN fleet in Sydney on 4th of October 1913, saw Spectacle Island and Garden Island, taken over by the Royal Australian Navy.

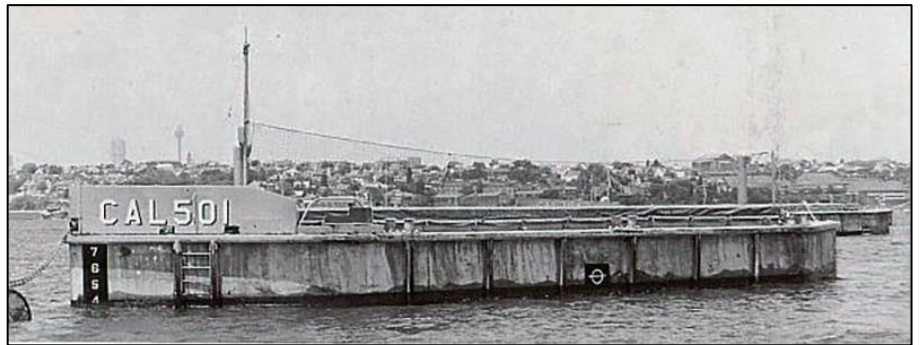


Program Cover, Arrival of the Royal Australian Fleet Unit 1913

RAN ships in Sydney entering or completing refit would load or offload ammunition into lighters stationed at Spectacle Island. These would then transport the load to either Spectacle Island, or further up the Parramatta River to RANAD Newington. This was known as the 'Ammunition Pipeline'.



Ammunition Handling



50 Ton Ammunition Lighter

The outbreak of WW2 in 1939 Start of WW2 led to a rapid increase in activity with a major focus being the storage of smaller calibre ammunition and use of workshops for the overhaul of Bofors and the testing of Depth charge fuses. 177 Ordnance inspectors tested ammunition and gun barrels.



Bofors Gun being repaired, Spectacle Island WW2

A large number of spare gun barrels were stored on gun pounds with additional storage on Shark and Clark Islands. An observation post and spotlight was installed on southern rock outcrop for triangulating any bomb falls.

In 1944 extra Moorings were installed for increased lighter storage and in 1945 reclamation on the south eastern side for Building 39 was carried out to provide space for an empty package store.

Following the end of WW2 Spectacle Island became a repository for surplus gunnery equipment as ships paid off.

The Island stored many spare gun barrels on what was known as a Gun Pound. Barrels were also stored on Garden Island and nearby Clark Island



Gun Pounds; Spectacle Island during WW2

In 1960 control of the island passed to RNAD Newington and use of the Island evolved into a central control centre for the fleet of ammunition lighters. The Island was then ringed by a variety of ammunition lighters which served as temporary storage for warships undergoing refit at Garden Island or Cockatoo Island.



Spectacle Island surrounded by Ammunition Lighters Circa 1970

During the Vietnam conflict as many as 24 Lighters were in use and moored around island. These included; 7x 50 Ton, 8 x 100 ton, 7 x 200 ton, 3 x 300 ton, 1 flat top lighter and 3 40ft workboats and a tug.



Tug Sardius TB9 at Spectacle Island c 1970

In 1983 Defence planning for a replacement ammunition depot commenced as part of a Fleet Base relocation proposal and then in December 1992 the Minister for Defence directed that the Department of Defence commence planning immediately for the closure of Newington Armament Depot and the associated ammunition supply line between Kingswood and the anchorage in Sydney harbour including Spectacle Island.

This was based on a timetable assuming Sydney would be successful in its bid for the 2000 Olympic Games.

Spectacle Island Heritage Collection

1995 – Present

During the 1980s the Naval Repository of Artifacts commenced occupation of Building 41 as armaments operations were consolidated and RANADs Newington and Kingswood. As other stores buildings became vacant they were reallocated to the repository for the Naval Historical Collection.



Naval Heritage Collection
Badge



An early Naval Heritage Collection display in Building 41 consisting of Ships bells, ceremonial life rings and memorabilia.

The main Heritage Collection building (41) is one of two airconditioned stores buildings on the Island. Other stores buildings house more robust heritage items and workshops are used by curators for the preservation and restoration of a range of items from uniforms to precision equipment and ships boats.



Building 41 and dual toilet outhouse, all that remains of the 1881 built dual residences.



Ships Motor Launch, circa 1912 restoration on Spectacle Island

In addition to the full range of traditional heritage artefacts such as bells, name boards, weapons and uniforms spanning Australian naval history from the colonial period to present more unusual items are also stored. For example, a dedicated 'Chapel' store houses naval chaplaincy items from ships and shore establishments.

The chapel stores building has on occasion, doubled as a venue Christenings or Weddings. It is unknown where the original chapel was situated. In the early Royal Navy days, staff went ashore on Sundays to churches in Balmain. This was a problem as they later went to the hotels in Balmain and had to be retrieved.



Chapel, Building 44 Spectacle Island



Christening on Spectacle Island

The complex railway system continues to be used for the movement of large and heavy items around the Island. Manual effort is used to push the trolleys known as a 'drugs'.



Movement of missiles boxes on Spectacle Island using trolleys and rail tracks for transport



Trolleys known as 'Drugs' used on Spectacle Island

In 2010 the collection was renamed 'The Naval Heritage Collection' to coincide with the opening of the RAN Heritage Centre. Heritage Centre on Garden Island is a world class museum open to the public and accessible by ferry from Circular Quay. The exhibition features naval heritage items collected over more than 100 years which were previously stored on Spectacle Island and not available for public viewing.



Submarine Collection Spectacle Island