



ALBATROSS

Significance & History



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INTRODUCTION

The Royal Navy cutter has had a more significant role in Western Australia's establishment and early history than any other type of vessel.

Its clinker or lapstrake construction and sharp lines link Viking seafaring with James Stirling's exploration of the Swan River, Captain Charles Fremantle's proclamation of the Swan River Colony and the loss of HMAS *Sydney* (II) off the Western Australian coast in the Second World War.

After a long and illustrious history, the cutter is now obsolete and has become a part of our maritime heritage.

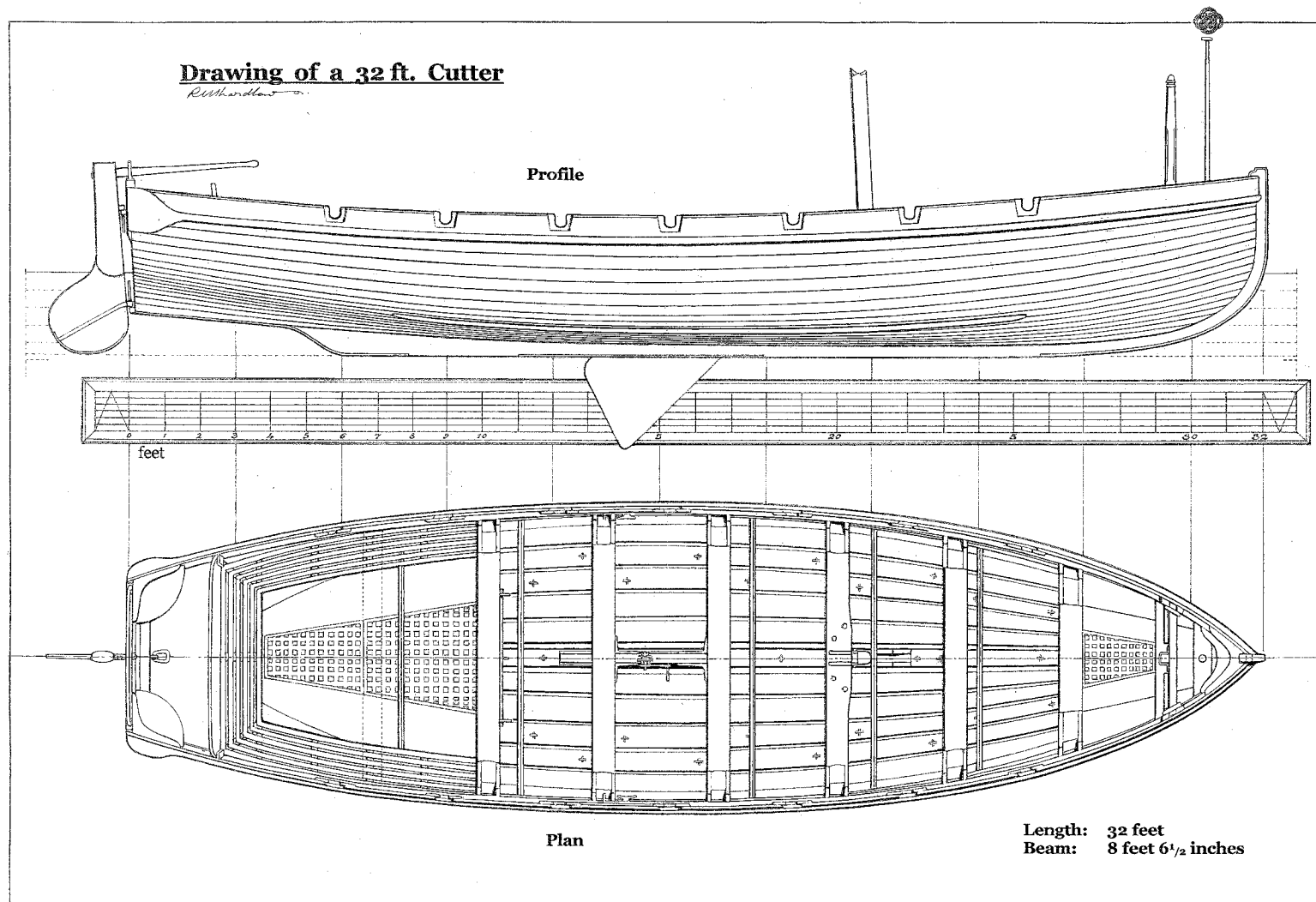
This document is based on display panels produced by the Maritime Heritage Association to accompany the naval cutter *Albatross* while she is on public display. The production of the panels, along with a trailer and viewing platform, was made possible by grants from Lotterywest and the Finding Sydney Foundation.

Albatross is now on permanent display at the One Mile Jetty Interpretive Centre in Carnarvon as a memorial to HMAS *Sydney* (II).



Maritime Heritage Association Inc.





Above: Drawing of a 32ft naval cutter by Ross Shardlow.

1. THE ORIGINS OF THE NAVAL CUTTER

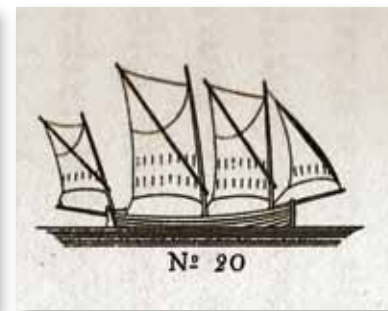
The Royal Navy's Speed Boats

All Royal Navy ships were equipped with ships' boats. Large ships carried several boats. They were used to communicate with the shore, carry provisions and water to the ship, set and retrieve anchors, tow the ship in a calm, and in military operations such as attacking shore installations and cutting out enemy ships from their harbours at night.

Ships' boats built in naval shipyards were strong and heavy. They were not fast and they were difficult to hoist on board. In the first half of the 18th century, some wealthy ships' captains bought sharp, lightly constructed boats called cutters from Deal, a town on the Straits of Dover coast. Deal boats and boatmen were famous for smuggling and providing the pilots who guided ships through the straits.



Above left: Detail from a Dutch engraving dated 1787 shows a ship's boat loaded with barrels for taking water to the ship.

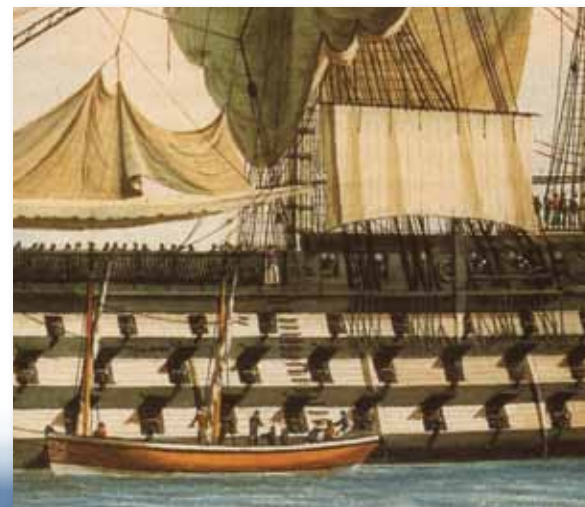


Above right: A small profile drawing of a Deal cutter published in F.H. af Chapman's *Architectura Navalis Mercatoria* (1768). Chapman was the first thoroughly scientific naval architect. His inclusion of the little cutter in his seminal publication demonstrates the importance and reputation of the Deal cutter.



Cutting Out

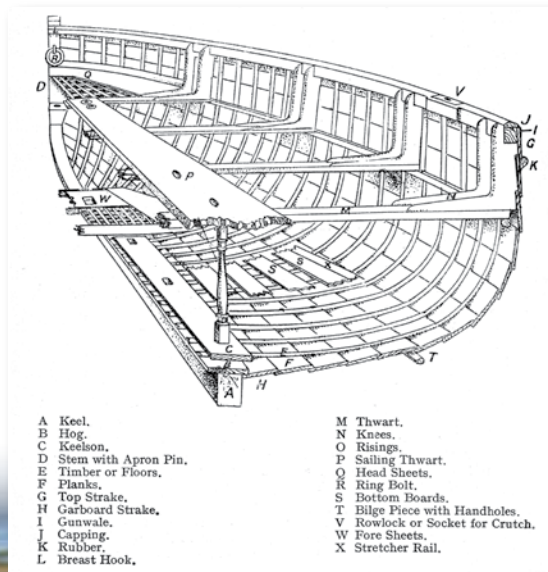
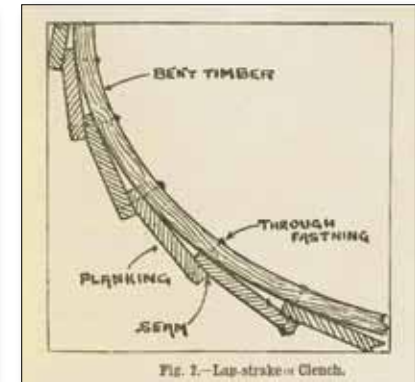
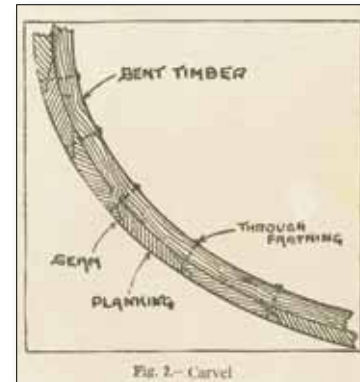
When enemy ships were blockaded in a harbour, the blockading ships might attempt a cutting out operation. On a dark night, ships' boats filled with armed sailors and marines would slip silently into the harbour to board and overpower enemy ships closest to the harbour mouth. If successful, they would cut the anchor lines and set sail to capture the ships, but it was a very risky undertaking.



Navy-built boats were constructed like ships, with thick planks fastened to a strong skeleton of frames. Shipwrights call this carvel construction. Deal cutters were built in a more ancient way, like the Viking longships. Thin, overlapping planks were fastened to each other through the overlaps, creating a plank-shell which was strengthened by light ribs. This is called lapstrake, or clinker planking.

In the 1740s the Royal Navy began ordering cutters from the boatyards of Deal, and in the 1790s they standardised the cutter design. Eventually the navy built its own cutters, retaining the light clinker construction and sharp lines of the Deal boats. The navy required large seaworthy boats, propelled by oar and sail and the traditional design was ideal.

In the 20th century cutters were built to take auxiliary motors, yet the design remained largely unaltered.



Left: Illustration of a clinker built boat from the *Admiralty Manual of Seamanship*, 1926.



Left: A Viking longship showing the overlapping clinker planking.

Right: The naval cutter has a less sculptural shape but retains the clinker planking of the Viking tradition. Photo: Peter Worsley

2. HMAS SYDNEY (II) AND HER CUTTERS

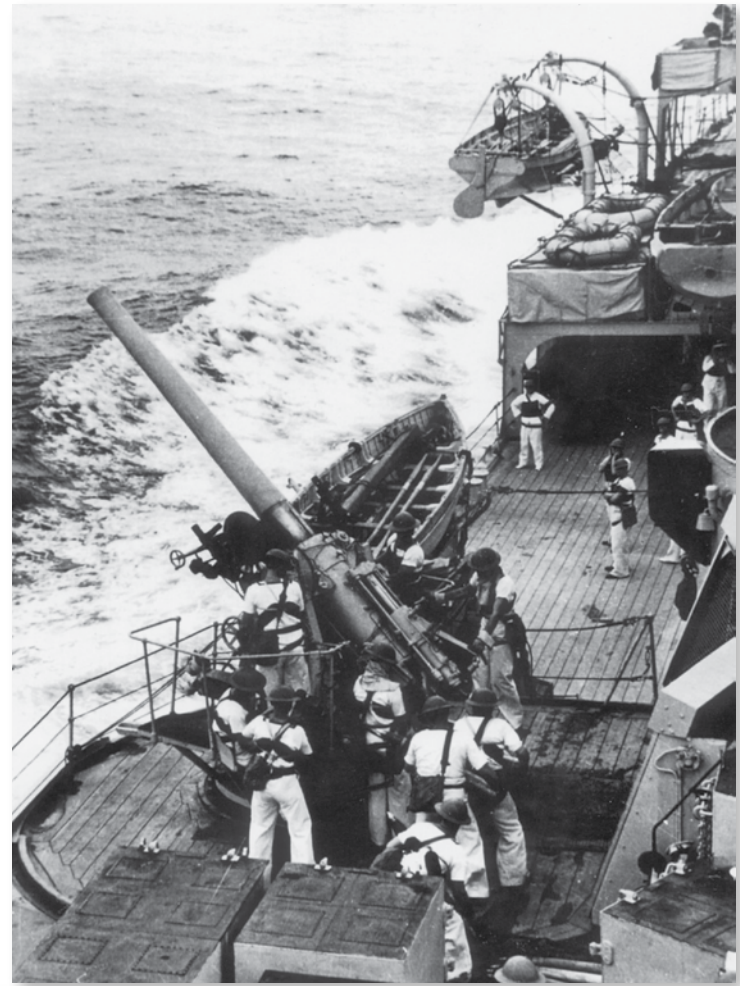
In the 20th century cutters were carried by cruisers. Two were carried by HMAS *Sydney* (II). Indeed our cutter is the same design as HMAS *Sydney*'s and the Finding Sydney Foundation granted the Maritime Heritage Association \$7500 towards this project.

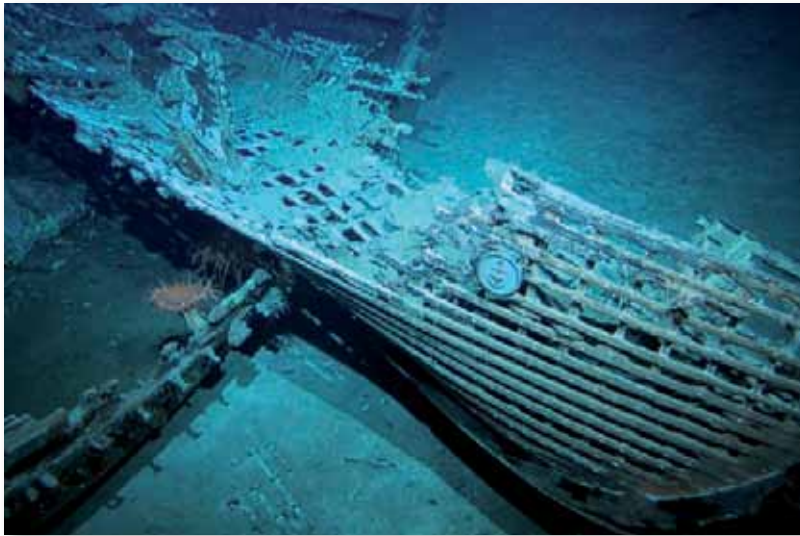
In one of the most dramatic episodes of Western Australia's World War II history, HMAS *Sydney* was sunk by the German raider HSK *Kormoran* with the loss of all 645 hands, on the evening of 19 November 1941.

It is believed that HMAS *Sydney* was in the process of lowering one of her cutters with a boarding party to investigate the *Kormoran*, which was claiming to be the Dutch freighter *Straat Malakka*, when the raider dropped her disguise and opened fire at very close range. Severely damaged, *Sydney* returned fire and inflicted damage that caused *Kormoran* to burn and later sink, with 315 survivors.

The crippled cruiser drifted away into the night burning from stem to stern. The wreck of HMAS *Sydney* was found on 16 March 2008.

Right: HMAS *Sydney*'s port 32-foot cutter hoisted out on radial davits. Witness accounts suggest it was the port cutter that was manned and suspended from its davits when the *Kormoran* opened fire on *Sydney*. Photo courtesy Wes Olson.





An image from the ocean depths showing two of *Sydney's* boats, one lying atop the other. *Sydney's* distinctive badge is clearly visible on the boat's side. Of *Sydney's* nine boats, five were found in the debris field on the ocean floor.

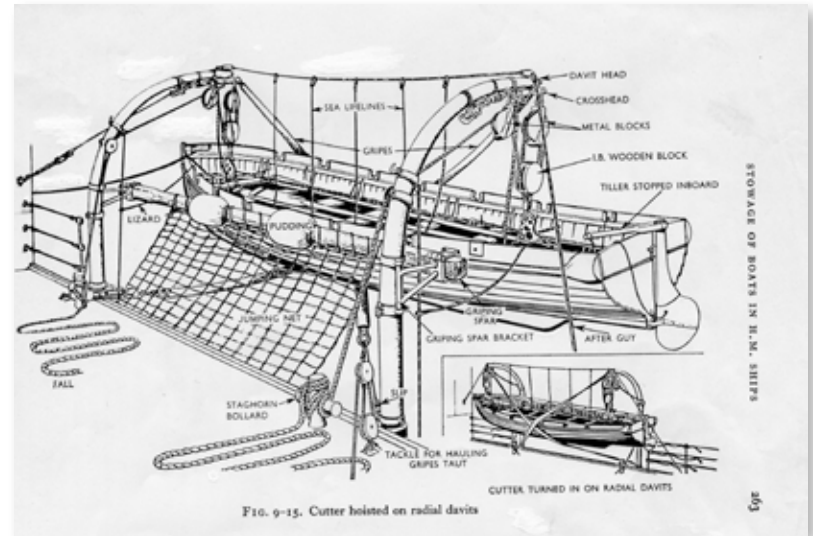


Diagram of a cutter hoisted on radial davits published in the *Admiralty Manual of Seamanship*.

3. CUTTERS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

In March 1827 Captain James Stirling conducted his exploration of the Swan River in the cutter of HMS *Success*. His optimistic reports and crusading enterprise led directly to the founding of the Swan River Colony two years later.

Captain Charles Fremantle of HMS *Challenger* went ashore to proclaim possession of Western Australia on 2 May 1829, then explored the Swan River in the ship's cutter.

The cutter was also used on 1 June 1829 (Foundation Day) to transfer the first settlers from the newly arrived *Parmelia*, and on 12 August 1829 carrying the dignitaries and officers to the ceremony at which the city of Perth was founded.

Visit of HMS *Beagle* to Western Australia

Although HMS *Beagle* was a relatively small ship, she carried a cutter which took up nearly one-third of her length when stowed on deck. Charles Darwin would have gone ashore in the cutter at Albany in 1836.

His shipmate Syms Covington's sketch of Albany from *Beagle* (below) shows a large boat, almost certainly the cutter, approaching the beach.

Below: Part of a drawing by Syms Covington of Albany from HMS *Beagle*. Collection of the State Library of New South Wales.



Following are four views of the cutter from HMS *Success* on the Swan River, March 1827, commanded by James Stirling; unsigned but very likely by Fredrick Garling.



Artist Frederick Garling
Title *View of Swan River, taken at the commencement of the fresh water*
Medium Pen, ink and watercolour over pencil
Measurement 22.5 x 32.8 cm
 State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia
 Purchased 1957

This view is believed to be from Success Hill looking across what is now Fish Market Reserve. There were fewer trees in the landscape of which Nyongar people were the custodians.



Artist Frederick Garling
Title *Red Bank - 30 miles up the Swan*
Medium Pen, ink and watercolour
Measurement 22.2 x 32.9 cm
 State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia
 Purchased 1957

Moored under a low cliff probably between Guildford and Midland. The smaller boat was the type called a gig.



Artist Frederick Garling
Title *Swan River, preparing to encamp for the night, 35 miles up*
Medium Pen, ink and watercolour
Measurement 21.9 x 33.1 cm
 State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia
 Purchased 1957

With the mainsail triced up, preparing to camp for the night, perhaps in the Midland area.



Artist Frederick Garling
Title *Mount Eliza, 15 miles from the entrance of Swan River, Western Australia*
Medium Pen, ink, pencil and watercolour
Measurement 22.2 x 33.2 cm
 State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia
 Purchased with funds from the Geoffrey William Robinson Bequest Fund, 1990

On Perth Water sailing towards Mount Eliza. The tall triangular sail was not the standard rig of a naval cutter. Perhaps Stirling or Lt. Carnac had seen similar rigs during their time in Malaysia.



4. ALBATROSS AND THE 1ST FREMANTLE SEA SCOUTS

The *Albatross* is RAN cutter 272 which was built at Garden Island Dockyard, Sydney in 1946.

She was given the traditional straight-keel design thought to have been superseded in the 1920s. Her naval history is unknown.

In 1957 she was purchased from Fremantle Minesweeper Stores by the 1st Fremantle Sea Scout Troop who gave her the name *Albatross*. As a training vessel she gave 40 years' service and is fondly remembered by many former Sea Scouts, some of whom went on to command ocean-going ships including STS *Leeuwin*.



Above: *Albatross* sailing for the last time in April 1995 as 1st Fremantle Sea Scouts' training vessel.

Left: Max Evans boarding *Albatross* at the Master Mariners Shield Competition greeted by John Barron, Arthur Poore and scouts.



5. BARRY HICKS AND THE RESTORATION OF ALBATROSS

When *Albatross* was too worn-out for the Sea Scouts' use, the Royal Australian Navy considered restoring her as the only surviving example of a sailing and pulling (rowing) naval cutter, but was unable to allocate funds.

In 2005 she was gifted to the Maritime Heritage Association and moved to the Hicks' Private Maritime Museum where Barry Hicks undertook extensive conservation and restoration work.



Barry Hicks inspecting time ravaged timbers during the survey that took place at Wooden Boat Works, Fremantle, prior to the Maritime Heritage Association taking possession of *Albatross* in July 2005.



1:24 scale model of *Albatross* by Brian Lemon reflecting the MHA's restoration aims. As funds become available, the MHA aims to progressively restore the vessel to her original configuration with the addition of her mast, rigging, sails, thwarts, rudder, oars, boat hooks and dicky seats. Also included should be a compass, biscuit tin, two barricoes (water barrels), bailer, a Very's pistol and flares, sail and rigging repair gear, lead and line, lantern, candles, signal book, semaphore flags, life belts, a carpenter's bag containing tools for 'putting on a tingle' (temporary patch) and a spare plug.



After transporting Albatross to the Hicks' Kenwick Yard, the first task was to stabilise and conserve her timbers. Non-original structures, such as the foredeck, fuel tank and propellor shaft were removed, while some missing components, such as thwarts and knees were replaced to maintain her structural integrity. Remarkably, the centreboard winch, bilge pump and under-thwart grapnel reel have all been restored to working order. Dicky seats, backboard and stern benches have been temporarily fitted pending her final restoration.



Stabilised, cleaned and painted, Albatross has been returned to her original appearance. The removal of the false gunwale revealed the intact rows of cut-out rowlocks that distinguish the naval cutter. The search continues for her early provenance, original plans, photographs and missing components. The 1st Fremantle Sea Scouts found her original Admiralty anchor and presented it to the Maritime Heritage Association at Albatross's 60th anniversary mast-raising ceremony. Further research and funding are required before final restoration begins.

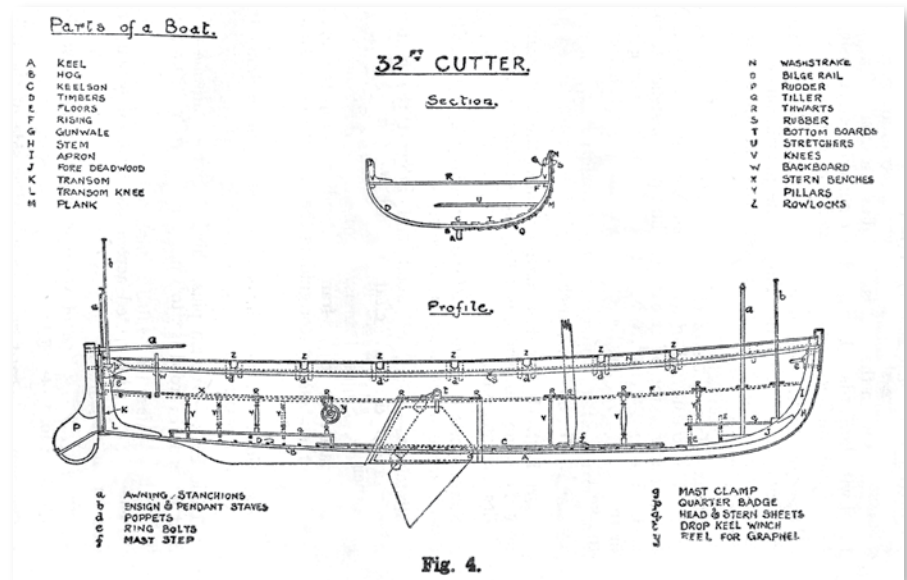
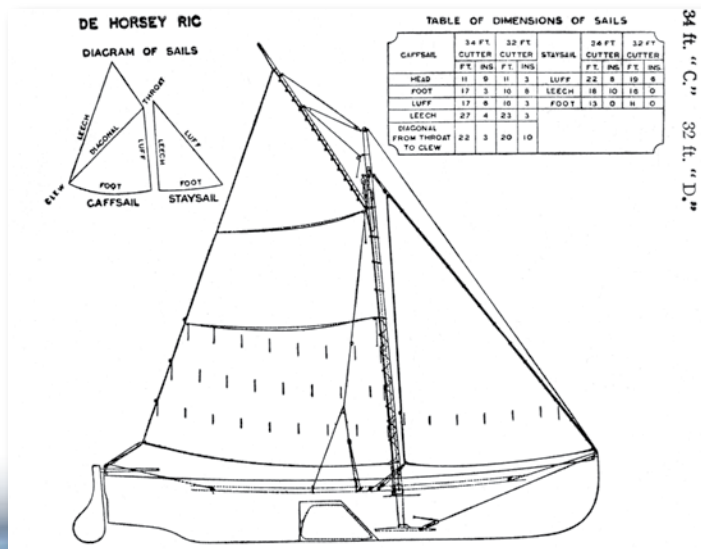
6. CUTTER: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The origin of the term cutter as a type of boat is obscure.

There are similar terms in several European languages, but none is ancient. Perhaps it implies sharp design, cutting through the water.

In the 19th century cutter came to be used for single-masted vessels with bowsprits that could be run in when not in use. A similar vessel with a fixed bowsprit was a sloop.

In the second half of the 20th century single-masted yachts with more than one sail forward of the mast were called cutters while those with only one sail forward of the mast were sloops.



Left: The standard rig for large naval boats including 32ft cutters introduced early in the 20th century. It was known as the “de Horsey rig” because it was designed by Admiral Sir Algernon Frederick Rous de Horsey KCB (1827-1922) during his long and distinguished naval career. Albatross carried a similar, but simpler, rig with a standing lugsail in place of the de Horsey boomless gaff sail, and was referred to as a lug sloop rig cutter. From the *Admiralty Manual of Seamanship*, 1937.

Above: Longitudinal section of a 32ft cutter showing fittings and structural elements. The drawing shows the keel cutaway in the stern, an innovation introduced in the early 1920s for the 'new' de Horsey, sloop rigged, and dipping lug naval cutters. Though built in 1946, Albatross has the older straight keel design with no cutaway. Originally published in the *Admiralty Manual of Seamanship* (1932).

7. MARITIME HERITAGE ASSOCIATION INC

Promoting our Maritime Heritage

The Maritime Heritage Association is a not for profit membership organisation formed in 1989 to unify like-minded people in preserving and promoting the maritime heritage of Western Australia, nationally and internationally.

Our activities include:

- the preservation and restoration of watercraft;
- maritime history and research;
- marine art and ship models;
- preservation of traditional skills, trades and tools.

These interests are promoted through:

- supporting maritime research and publishing local maritime history;
- heritage lobbying;
- compiling heritage registers;
- a maritime book club;
- publication of a quarterly journal;
- organisation of and participation in festivals and special events.

www.maritimeheritage.org.au

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