

Duke's and Orr's Amalgamated Dry Docks Ltd

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Living in modern times, in which advanced aviation technology has made international travel and transport of goods an efficient and relatively effortless process, it is easy to forget that less than a century ago these services were essentially performed by water transport. This mode of transport took a great toll on ships, which often travelled for months at a time in harsh weather conditions. The University of Melbourne Archives holds the collection of Duke's and Orr's Amalgamated Dry Docks Ltd, a fascinating record of the engineering, maintenance and repair side of the maritime industry in Melbourne.

Today the old Duke's and Orr's graving dock at Clarendon Street on the south bank of the Yarra River houses the Melbourne icon, the sailing ship *Polly Woodside*, an iron-hulled barque built in Belfast, Ireland, in 1885 and now open as a museum. The dock, built in 1868, is also part of the rich history of Melbourne's maritime activity, being the place where thousands of ships, including those affected by the battles of wartime, were docked, cleaned, painted and repaired, until its closure in 1975. The dock is also of historic significance in the field of engineering, due to the fact that its wooden walls remained





Opposite: Aerial view of the Yarra River, looking upstream on 29 January 1925. Accession no. 1978.0042, Duke's and Orr's Amalgamated Dry Docks Ltd Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.

Left: Workmen at the dock (detail), date unknown. Accession no. 1978.0042, Duke's and Orr's Amalgamated Dry Docks Ltd Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.

during reconstruction at the turn of the 20th century, making it the last timber-walled dry dock in Australia, and of its size, possibly one of the last in the world. Its longevity is said to be in part due to the choice of Australian eucalyptus timber, which is outstanding for strength and durability. A selection of species including red gum, blue gum, grey box and ironbark were used for the immense and costly reconstruction completed in 1904, replacing the old sheathing around the dock as well as the floor and massive mitre gates.

The collection encompasses records dating from between the years 1878 and 1975, consisting of a variety of material including minutes, accounts, time books, correspondence, share registers and other company-related documents. Time books recording employee wages reflect changing economic conditions and industry wage standards, while correspondence with employees, insurance companies and medical practitioners regarding injury and accident reports provide an interesting historical understanding of work safety practices (or lack of) and protection against workplace injury. Needless to say, there were a lot of slips and spills! In addition, correspondence with Melbourne Harbor Trust, Department of Lands and Survey,

Collector of Customs (Melbourne) and the Federal Taxation Office (now the Australian Tax Office) provides details of Melbourne's port operations. Docking registers, time books and cleaning books all list names of ships docked at Duke's and Orr's graving dock, linking employees to these jobs at certain dates. Together with the library of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria), UMA's Duke's and Orr's Amalgamated Dry Docks Ltd Collection also includes a number of published registers of Australian and New Zealand shipping.

An assortment of photographs provides a visual record of Melbourne's maritime activities, depicting staff at work and posing for group shots, the immense size of the ships, impressive engineering machinery and the mammoth task at hand to repair the damaged ships. Visual records of the Yarra Bank—some featuring horses and carts travelling along the neighbouring roads—richly illustrate the early proximity between Melbourne's central business district and its bustling port facilities. The adoption of new shipping and handling methods and technologies, particularly containerisation of freight, radically changed this relationship through the need for large new facilities and streamlined road and rail access.

The Duke's and Orr's Amalgamated Dry Docks Ltd Collection is now listed online and searchable via the University of Melbourne Archives catalogue at www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/archives/. The digitising and publishing online of some of the more fragile and significant records are proposed for the future. Further, Duke's and Orr's did business with many prominent firms in Melbourne for which the University of Melbourne Archives also holds records, including Huddart Parker, J.B. Were & Son, the Melbourne Stock Exchange, Inglis Smith & Co. and McPhersons Ltd. The ability to consult, compare and make links between related collections such as these is of enormous value to historians in understanding Melbourne's maritime and commercial past.

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Most material in the University of Melbourne Archives is available for use by researchers. Many collections are listed in online finding aids, and requested items can be brought to the Cultural Collections Reading Room on the third floor of the Baillieu Library on the third floor of the Parkville campus. For further information on using the collection see www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/archives.