

Basic Detail Report



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Title

Empty medicine bottle from the medicine chest of the SAMUEL PLIMSOLL

Date

c 1899

Medium

Glass

Dimensions

Overall: 155 x 58 x 58 mm, 267 g

Name

Bottle

History

Named after the inventor of the loadline and Seaman's Friend the British politician, Samuel Plimsoll (1824 - 1898) the iron, three-masted sailing ship SAMUEL PLIMSOLL was built for the Aberdeen White Star Line (George Thompson and Co) by Walter Hood and Company of Aberdeen, Scotland. The ship was launched in September, 1873 and named by Mrs Boaden, wife of its first Captain, in the

presence of Samuel Plimsoll. The 1524 ton (registered) ship was specifically built to carry passengers and assisted immigrants to Australia and wool on the return voyage to England. From its very first voyage out to the colonies in November 1873 the vessel showed fine sailing characteristics. Its passage time of only 74 days out from Plymouth was the fastest voyage for the year beating the very fast wool clipper CUTTY SARK by four days. The vessel made 15 runs to Sydney, New South Wales carrying between 340 and 400 passengers per trip. In March 1888 the ship was transferred to the London - Melbourne run where it made a further ten voyages to the colony. In 1899 the SAMUEL PLIMSOLL caught fire in the Thames and had to be scuttled. It was subsequently salvaged and repaired before being sold to Shaw, Savill and Co of Billiter Street, London who proposed to use the sailing ship on the London - Australia - New Zealand run. In 1902 the vessel was dismasted and damaged on a voyage from London to Port Chalmers, towed into Sydney and then later to Fremantle in Western Australia where it was converted into a coal hulk. Medicine and health at sea The practice of carrying suitably trained and qualified medical personnel on board ships has been in place for some time. By the mid-1600s it was common practice for all Royal Navy vessels or merchant vessels hired by the Royal Navy to carry a surgeon, barber surgeon, or surgeon's mate. But free and assisted immigrants coming to Australia were up until at least 1832 and possibly 1858 still at the

mercy of the shipping companies. Some companies did appoint surgeons and provide medical care from as early as 1804 but many saw no reason to do so until forced by government regulation. High death rates (1 in 5) due to overcrowding and disease on board immigrant ships coming to the Australian colonies were not uncommon. The introduction of the Passengers Act in 1832 and subsequent Acts and amendments to the Acts in 1837 and 1839 saw gradual improvements in sailors' and passengers' accommodation, provisions and medicine. It was only following the 1851 and 1854 British Select Committee into Emigration and the 1858 Inquiry into Emigrants and Passenger vessels that all immigrant vessels coming to Australia regardless of size had to carry a properly qualified surgeon-superintendent and provide space for an adequate hospital or sick berth. Under the merchant Shipping Act of 1894 all emigrant ships in the North Atlantic and the Australian/New Zealand trade had to carry a prescribed list of medicines, medical stores and instruments. These items had to be inspected by the Emigration Officer and the vessel could not clear outwards unless a medical practitioner had inspected the stores and certified that they were sufficient in quality and quantity. By 1894 five main types of drugs were carried in medicine chests on ships. These were for the treatment of diarrhoea, constipation, the relief of pain (opium or morphine), the relief of coughs, colds, bronchitis and tuberculosis and for the treatment of infections such as venereal disease. The medicine chest also contained salves and ointments for burns, cuts and abrasions, and disinfecting agents for washing decks, clothes and beddings.