

Basic Detail Report



00052093

Title

Chisel handle

Date

1890s - 1950s

Medium

Wood, metal

Dimensions

Overall: 175 x 55 x 25 mm, 80 g

Name

Handle

History

Collection of shipwright tools owned by Joan Copp's father William Higham (b.1895) and grandfather Thomas Higham circa late nineteenth century to 1950s. According to Joan Copp's family history, Alfred Charles Thomas Higham and his brother Charles ran a shipyard near Greenwich on the Thames River, London, at a place called Higham - which may be Lower Higham, which has a canal connecting the Thames and the Medway rivers via the Higham Tunnel. A Copp family photograph dated 1902 shows Thomas on the deck of the GIRALDA at Pipers Wharf, Greenwich (still a working boatyard in 2010). Another vessel in the photograph is the QUEEN ALEXANDRIA. James Piper built sailing barges at this wharf he rented from late 1890s. They were heavy haulage carriers, still built with sail at a time when most vessels were steam driven as they were cheap to run and with a crew of only two. With their shallow draught and flat bottom they could go inshore, across shallows and up tidal creeks. Many would also cross the channel and go into European inland waters, or with masts lowered could be used on canals. The GIRALDA was one of Piper's earliest sailing barges and was renowned as a prize winning racing barge. The barge races are still held today, though Pipers Wharf was earmarked for residential development in early 2000s. Joan's father William Higham worked with his father in what she called the Higham shipyard (possibly Pipers) and then migrated to Australia in 1920. William was a naval architect and shipbuilder and entered shipbuilding work in Newcastle. When the Depression hit in 1930 he went back to England and worked in the Higham shipyard during the 1930s. In 1939 William was, according to Joan, seconded to the Australian Navy and came to Sydney and commenced work at Garden Island. He worked as a shipwright at Garden Island until he retired at the age of 65 (circa 1960), when the island workers provided a 'terrific send off' for him according to Joan. The collection comprises a very complete range of shipwright tools, encompassing a wide timespan, possibly dating back to the late or even mid-late nineteenth century, and related to London sailing barge building. Most are engraved with the initials WH and TH. The TH initialed tools were first owned by Thomas Higham who was connected with sailing barge building in the late 1800s, and then by his

son William. The collection includes hand-made wood planes, drills and drill bits, adzes, saws, caulking tools among other items. They are held in 2 purpose built or modified tool boxes.