

A recent W J Sanders commission and a restoration

Backgrounds and processes



The Colin Rodgers Cup, 1921, sterling silver

WJ Sanders has had a long association with the Royal Australian Navy, a relationship commencing in the early 1900s.

Colin Rodgers Cup

In 1921, W J Sanders crafted the solid silver Colin Rodgers Cup for the annual fleet boxing championship. The design is a replica of an imperial gallon copper rum measure, originating from the Royal Navy, circa 1823. Remember that the rum ration is an important centuries-old tradition of the Royal Navy. The Colin Rodgers Cup now resides in the Naval Heritage Museum alongside many other silver treasures, some made and many restored by W J Sanders.

Commission: The Spada Shield

In late 2008, a new award was added to the Australian Naval traditions, being a trophy presented yearly in recognition of the 'Foremost Surface Combatant.' The brief, presented to W J Sanders by Commander Ivan M Ingham reads, 'A trophy that would continue to foster our history and culture for the Navy tomorrow.' The award named to honour the significance of the action by HMAS *Sydney II* off Cape Spada, the northwestern extremity of Crete. Fittingly, the new trophy was named The Spada Shield.

In July 1940, HMAS *Sydney II*, whilst engaged as the support vessel for Royal Navy ships hunting enemy submarines off the coast of Crete, sighted two enemy cruisers. A fierce naval battle took place off the Cape of Spada with the two enemy cruisers, the *Bartolomeo Colleoni* and the *Giovanni Delle Bande Nere*, both were destroyed. During the engagement, HMAS *Sydney II* was hit in the foremost funnel, where luckily only

one minor casualty resulted.

The wooden shield for the new trophy was to be made in Australian timber and the shield was to be adorned with Australian silver 925 quality and marked as such. The requirements were that the shield would be headed The Spada Shield, show the image of the crossed navy ensigns at the top, show an image of HMAS *Sydney II*, and of course depict what the award was for. It was also requested that 20 yearly winner badges be made in sterling silver and stamped as such.

A decision was made that the focus of the shield would be taken from a painting of HMAS *Sydney II*. A large disc of 1.2 mm thick sterling silver was spun up, shaped and polished. Our artisan then commenced the hand chasing (repoussé) of the image onto the silver. This is an extremely time consuming and skilful art that is now very rare. At least 40 hours later, the disc of silver was transformed into a beautiful image of HMAS *Sydney II*.

The top and bottom ribbons were next cut, polished and then engraved. The bottom ribbon was stamped with the traditional W J Sanders mark. The 20 badges were stamped out and all were marked as sterling silver. All

the pieces were then perfectly polished and carefully pinned onto a custom-made Australian kauri pine shield.

It is fitting that this shield honours the significance of the action by HMAS *Sydney II* off Cape Spada, especially as there is considerable public interest after the recent discovery of the ship's final resting place off Western Australia. The inaugural 2008 winner of The Spada Shield was HMAS *Parramatta*.

Restoration: The Victorian Association Cricket Trophy

J M Wendt, who set up business in Adelaide in 1854, was responsible for producing silverware that won awards in Australia and overseas. In the mid to late 1800s, he was commissioned to make numerous spectacular trophies and other ornamental pieces. Like other renowned Australian silversmiths, such as Steiner and William Edwards, Wendt made many Australian pieces incorporating Aboriginal figures, Australian animals, native fauna and emu eggs.

One such spectacular emu egg and silver piece was an 1883 cricket trophy that recently came to W J Sanders for restoration. We were at first shocked to see that the emu egg had been replaced with a plastic 1980s football moneybox! On reflection, we thought it was quite ingenious as after the egg broke, the plastic football was cut to fit the silver insets and decoration, thus keeping them all together and intact, until restoration could take place.

The inscription on the trophy reads:
Presented to / Mr. W H Cooper / by the Victorian Cricketers Association / for / excellent captainship and good fielding / in the / Intercolonial match at Sydney, / Feb y 9. 10.1883 / Won by / Victoria by one innings and 166 runs.

William Henry Cooper was born in Kent, England in 1849 and moved to Australia when he was eight years of age, but he did not start playing cricket until the age of 27. After captaining Victoria, he was chosen for the 1884 test team to England but was a tour failure due to a severe injury to his bowling



Ink stand made by J M Wendt, 1875, silver and emu egg



JW Wendt's 1883 cricket trophy, plastic football in place of emu egg, before restoration



Cutting the oval section from the emu egg with a hand piece



Restoration completed

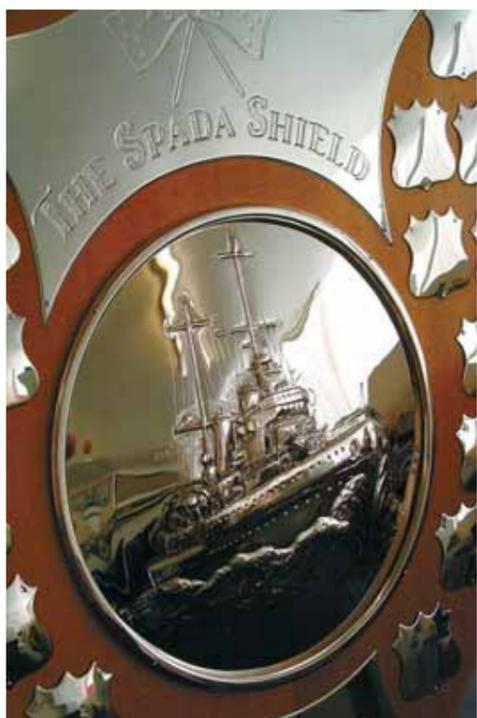
arm whilst on the voyage. However, he did play two tests for Australia during his career.

A handy leg break bowler, he was also noted for his services to Victorian cricket after his playing days, where he served as a state selector and later as vice president of the Victorian Cricket Association. He died in 1939 at the ripe old age of 89. His great-grandson, Paul Sheahan, played test cricket for Australia and serves the sport on the Melbourne Cricket Club committee.

Having restored quite a number of antiques that required the repair or replacement of emu eggs, over time W J Sanders has built up a collection of eggs of various shapes and sizes that could be drawn on.

The area of the shell that had to be removed to house the silver grotto was carefully drawn on a suitable egg. Using a hand piece similar to that of a dental drill the oval was cut into the egg. On the first attempt, the eggshell broke and was discarded. The second attempt was successful. Holes were then drilled at each end of the shell to house the decorative nodes. After this process the shell was thoroughly cleaned using emu oil.

The silver pieces were next taken apart, each piece cleaned and repaired where necessary. A missing fern was cast in silver and re-attached. Two decorative nodes were made in silver, one to go on to each end of the egg. The base was stripped, sanded back and then painted to the original colourway. The trophy was then reassembled, the restoration complete and a piece of Australian history assured for the future ■



Completed image of the HMAS *Sydney II* in silver



Hand chasing (repoussé) of the image of the HMAS *Sydney II* onto the disc of silver



The Spada Shield, commission completed 2008



HMAS *Sydney II*



Presentation of the Inaugural Spada Shield to HMAS *Parramatta*, 2008

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