

# Nautical School Ship *Vernon*

1867 – 1892

**Other Names:**

- *Vernon* Training Ship
- *Vernon*
- NSS *Vernon*

## Details

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The *Vernon* was a tall ship purchased by the New South Wales Government in 1867 and converted to a Nautical School Ship. It was a reformatory and industrial school and housed more than 100 boys, training them in nautical and other trades. The *Vernon* was first anchored between Garden Island and the Government Domain, and from 1871 at Cockatoo Island. The *Vernon* was replaced by another ship, the *Sobraon*, in 1892.

The NSS *Vernon* had been a merchant vessel. In 1867 it was fitted out as an industrial school and reformatory. NSS *Vernon* was the only industrial school for boys at the time.

More than 100 boys lived on board the ship, which was anchored alongside a substantial shore facility that stretched between Garden Island and the Government Domain. The shore facility included a gymnasium, a spacious recreation ground, an entertainment hall and a recreation hall.

At first boys learned nautical and industrial skills and trades, as well as receiving 'moral training'. The intention was to fit them for seafaring. Academic lessons were part of the boys' daily routine, although compulsory schooling for children was not introduced for the rest of New South Wales until 1880.

In 1871 *Vernon* was moved to a new mooring at Cockatoo Island. From 1878, under the guidance of Superintendent Frederick William Neitenstein, boys were given proper schooling, physical drills and a system of grades and privileges. They did, however, fraternise with the girls in Biloela, next door on Cockatoo Island, causing problems until the girls were relocated to Parramatta.

Sarah Luke (2020) writes about a typical morning for boys on the *Vernon*:

*Sleeping in neat rows of hammocks, the boys – in their hundreds – would turn out at five o'clock in the morning. Their bedding would be lashed up, and taken out onto the main deck to air in the sea breeze.*

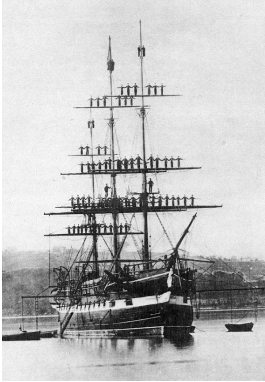
*In small divisions, they would be told off in turn to begin their washing. This was done in iron tubs on the main deck, with several boys to each. To make matters even colder, the ship's washdown parties would then be piped, and the deck would be washed by half of the cohort, while the other worked at clearing the various decks. The pump boys in charge of the seawater were often not too careful to avoid splashing their friends, who were provided with a half coconut husk each to scrub the deck.*

*Breakfast – oats, warm milk and bread with butter – would then be piped and all hands would retire, stiff but grateful, to the mess.*

Vernon was replaced by *Sobraon* in 1892. *Vernon* then was sold and scuttled in Kerosene Bay.

## Gallery

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### Nautical Sailing Ship Vernon

**Description:** This is a digital copy of a postcard in the Mitchell Library's Small Pictures File. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.

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## More info

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### Chronology

- **Nautical School Ship Vernon (1867 – 1892)**
  - *Sobraon* Training Ship (1892 - 1911)

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Colonial Secretary \(1 Jan 1821 - 1 April 1959\)](#)

#### Related Organisations

- [Biloela Industrial School, Cockatoo Island \(1871 - 1887\)](#)

The Nautical School Ship *Vernon*, was moored next to Biloela Industrial School at Cockatoo Island.  
Date: 1871 - 1887
- [Inspector of Public Charities \(1866 - 1888\)](#)

### Resources

- Ramsland, John, *Children of the back lanes: destitute and neglected children in colonial New South Wales*, 1986
- Museums of History NSW, [Child Care and Protection Guide](#), No date
- Rubie, Valerie, *Sent to the Mountain: A History of Mount Penang Juvenile Justice Centre*, 2003
- Sydney Harbour Federation Trust, [Industrial Schools and Reformatory \(1871 to 1911\)](#), Cockatoo Island, No date
- Museums of History NSW, [School Student Records Guide](#), No date
- Department of Justice, [History](#), Children's Court of New South Wales, 2012
- Central Coast Regional Development Corporation, [History of Mt Penang Parklands](#), No date
- State Records Authority of New South Wales, [Nautical School-ship "Vernon" \( 1867-1892\) / Nautical School-ship "Sobraon" \(1892-1911\)](#), No date
- Luke, Sarah, *Like a wicked Noah's Ark: the nautical school ships Vernon and Sobraon*, 2020

## Records

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For more information and to access your records, follow the links below:

## Records

- [Entrance books \[Industrial Schools Branch\] \(1867 - 1897\)](#)
  - [Visitors' Book for Nautical School Ship "Vernon" \(1886-1892\) and "Sobraon" \(1892-1910\) \(28 Feb 1886 - 15 Nov 1910\)](#)
  - [Copies of letters sent concerning the administration of public schools \(1880 - 1896\)](#)
  - [School Files \(1876 - 1979\)](#)
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