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A new life for Derrick

The historic small derrick crane on the wharf at Chowder Bay will be taken away by barge next Wednesday so that it can be properly conserved, before being returned to the wharf.

The crane dates back to the 1890s when it was integral to operation of the Submarine Mining Depot which occupied Chowder Bay until 1922.

Executive Director of the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust, Mr Geoff Bailey said conservation of the crane is important to future interpretation of the history and heritage of the Chowder Bay site.

“The derrick crane would have been used by the Submarine Mining Corps to lift mines on and off the wharf for placing in the harbour’s minefield,” Mr Bailey said.

“These mines (bombs) were a significant part of Sydney’s early defence system. They were laid along a cable that ran across the harbour from Chowder Bay to Steele Point, and were designed to be detonated if an enemy ship came into the harbour.

“The crane has been gradually deteriorating over the years and is affected from exposure to salt water.”

The derrick crane was manufactured by Morris Bros of Sydney around 1890 and is constructed of cast iron with ratchet gear wheels and a timber jib.

Mr Bailey said the Harbour Trust is also carrying out some repair work to the wharf.

“We are repainting the wharf railing to protect the timber and will carry out some minor repairs to the timber deck to make it safe,” he said.

While the Harbour Trust is preparing plans for how the former Defence lands at Middle Head-Georges Heights will be used in the future, a maintenance program is underway to prevent any further deterioration of buildings or structures, particularly those of identified heritage significance.

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