

The Sandstone Trough

The subject of this study is a sandstone trough that has been used by the author's family for at least four generations. The trough has provenance from 1925, and it is likely that a member of the family acquired it earlier. This study will start with a description of the trough itself including the physical attributes and potential age. There will be an appraisal of the construction and ownership of the trough and comparison with similar items. Finally, there will be a discussion of how the trough has been used since the family have possessed it.



Figure 1. Sandstone trough.¹

The *Chambers 20th Century Dictionary* defines a trough (pronounced *trof*) as being a long, narrow vessel for watering or feeding animals.² They can be made from wood, metal or stone of various types, but this trough has been created from a single block of sandstone.

¹ Joanna Hopkins, Sandstone Trough, digital image, 27 November 2021, original held by author.

² *Chambers 20th Century Dictionary*, editor EM Kirkpatrick, W & R Chambers Ltd., Edinburgh, 1983, p. 1386.

Sandstone is a type of sedimentary rock, generally composed of tiny quartz grains from the breakdown of pre-existing rocks.³ Those grains are transported and deposited in layers then stuck together with various types of cementing materials.⁴ Sandstone in the southeast of Tasmania was formed from approximately 240 million years before the present.⁵

Sandstone varies in quality and generally the Tasmanian stone does not last particularly well when used as a building material, but it is easy to quarry and work on.⁶



Figure 2. Close up of sandstone.⁷

The trough is a rough rectangular prism with one face chiselled out to make a hollow. It is irregularly shaped with the greatest width 300 millimetres, the greatest length 590 millimetres and the height 210 millimetres. These measurements in the imperial system would be one foot (twelve inches) by two foot (twenty-four inches) and around eight inches in height.

³ David Leaman, *Step into History in Tasmanian Reserves*, Leaman Geophysics, Hobart, Tasmania, 2001, pp. 402-403.

⁴ Leaman, *Step into History in Tasmanian Reserves*, p. 23; Leaman, *Step into History in Tasmanian Reserves* pp. 402-403.

⁵ Leaman, *Step into History in Tasmanian Reserves*, p. 56.

⁶ Carol Bacon, 'Building stone', in Alison Alexander (ed.), *The Companion to Tasmanian History*, Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Tasmania, 2005, p. 56.

⁷ Joanna Hopkins, Close up of sandstone block carved to create trough, digital image, 27 November 2021, original held by author.

The opening is roughly rectangular and measures 200 millimetres by 510 millimetres at the widest points. The vessel is approximately 100 millimetres deep and the inner base measures 120 by 400 millimetres. The inside and outside are wedge shaped, with the base smaller than the rim. All these measurements are approximate as the stone block is chipped and the carving irregular.

The stone block weighs 41.4 kilograms and holds 8.45 litres of water.

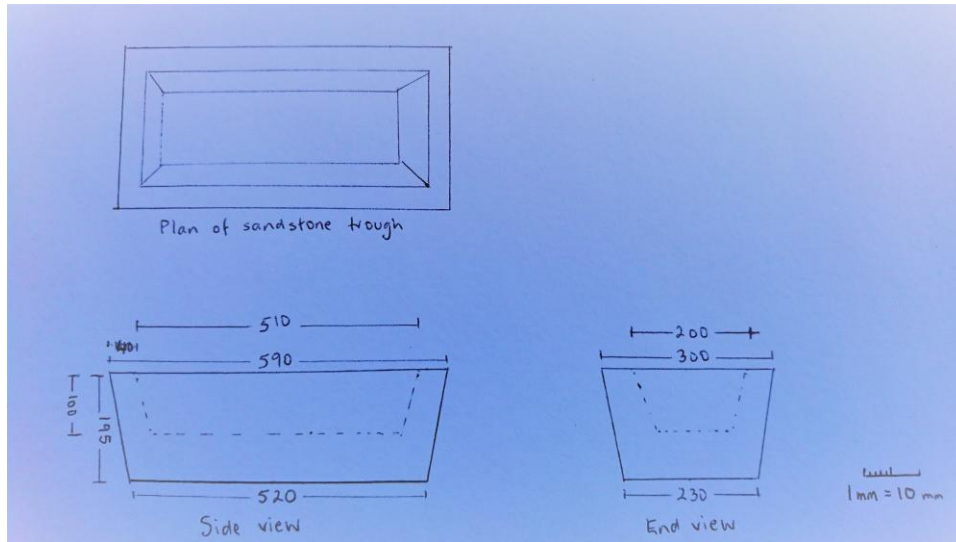


Figure 3. Drawing showing dimensions of trough.⁸

The outside faces of the sandstone block show irregular indentations. These are most likely residual marks from the working of the stone block to form the trough.

⁸ Joanna Hopkins, Drawing indicating dimensions of trough, digital image, 30 November 2021, original held by author.



Figure 4. Chisel marks in sandstone.⁹

When nomadic people began to settle permanently to grow crops and then to domesticate animals around ten thousand years ago, they would have required a permanent source of water for the livestock.¹⁰ One could imagine that seeing water in a depression in a rock motivated someone to replicate this in order to store water.

In Tasmania, the use of sandstone in buildings began soon after colonial settlement in Hobart by the British in 1804.¹¹ Stone is removed from a sandstone deposit using wedges placed along layer lines, sawed into blocks and then worked using metal chisels which are hit with a wooden mallet.¹² Creators of the buildings were often convict labourers with a stonemason overseer.¹³ Ticket-of-leave convicts were free to

⁹ Joanna Hopkins, Chisel marks in sandstone trough, digital image, 27 November 2021, original held by author.

¹⁰ 'Domestication', *National Geographic Society Encyclopedia*, <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/domestication>, accessed 2 December 2021.

¹¹ Eric Ratcliff and Barry McNeill, 'Shelter', in Alison Alexander (ed.), *The Companion to Tasmanian History*, Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Tasmania, 2005, p. 478.

¹² 'Stonemasonry', Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stonemasonry>, accessed 2 December 2021.

¹³ Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, 'Convicts', in Alison Alexander (ed.), *The Companion to Tasmanian History*, Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Tasmania, 2005, pp. 415-416.

work for wages for themselves, and possibly some of the stonemasons chipped away at discarded blocks to make troughs.¹⁴

The regular imperial measurement of the trough (one foot by two foot) suggests that it was originally cut as a building block and refashioned at the time as it had been damaged. Alternatively, it could be a block salvaged from a demolished building and carved into a trough. It cannot be determined which of these is the origin.

The date of manufacture cannot be determined accurately either. Being a cut stone block, it must date from after 1804 and the advent of British manufacture in Tasmania. A photograph exists of the trough circa 1925, so creation is somewhere in that 120-year period.¹⁵

Similar examples are surprisingly hard to find. There is a sandstone trough at Narryna, the Heritage Museum in Battery Point, Tasmania, but the provenance is unknown.¹⁶ There are some documented existing horse troughs along the sides of roads in Hobart, but these are much larger and often decorative.¹⁷

The author's relatives have lived in the rural area of Sorell in Tasmania from soon after colonial settlement in 1804. No records have been found of any ancestors being voluntarily or involuntarily a stone mason, though several of the ancestor convicts were assigned as labourers. A family member possibly made the trough or acquired it from someone who had made it.

¹⁴ Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, 'Convicts', in Alison Alexander (ed.), *The Companion to Tasmanian History*, Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Tasmania, 2005, p. 416.

¹⁵ AA (Albert Archer) Rollings, Photograph of Amy Hunt (nee Jones), circa 1925, Photograph - [undescribed from set 'groups and portraits - people not identified'], original held by Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office, <https://stors.tas.gov.au/NS1553-1-816>, accessed 30 November 2021.

¹⁶ Cripps, Ann, 'Narryna –Landscape Master Plan', Recommendations, Section 8.21 Courtyard, Narryna: The Merchant's House, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 2015, p. 15, https://www.tmag.tas.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/98884/Narryna_Landscape_Master_Plan_with_photos.pdf, accessed 2 December 2021. ¹⁶

¹⁷ 'Horse Troughs of Hobart', *Discover Tasmania*, <https://www.discovertasmania.com.au/about/articles/the-horse-troughs-of-hobart>, accessed 2 December 2021.

Troughs would have been a functional item of the time. They were stable and kept water cool for animal use. The trough volume is small and would not be suitable for animals with high water need such as horses or cattle. It is possible that it has always been in a chicken pen and kept because of continued usefulness for that purpose.

The family have used this trough as a water container for chickens in several locations. Due to the weight of the trough, it would not be readily picked up, so any move would be intentional. Passed down through family, it has been in a chook pen for over 100 years. At present it is primarily a garden ornament although the dog, the chickens and wild birds all drink from it.



Figure 5. Sandstone trough and the author's grandmother, 1925.¹⁸

¹⁸ AA Rollings, Photograph of Amy Hunt (nee Jones), circa 1925.

The sandstone water trough has been in the author's family possession for at least a hundred years, moving several times as properties were sold, or owners died. It was probably created from a discarded building block either when the stone was quarried or when a building was demolished. While the sandstone itself is at least 200 million years old, hand carving of the trough occurred somewhere between 1804 and 1925. The primary use of the trough has been as a vessel for water, probably for chickens, although it does have a decorative purpose.

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Wikipedia, 'Stonemasonry', <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stonemasonry> , accessed 2
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