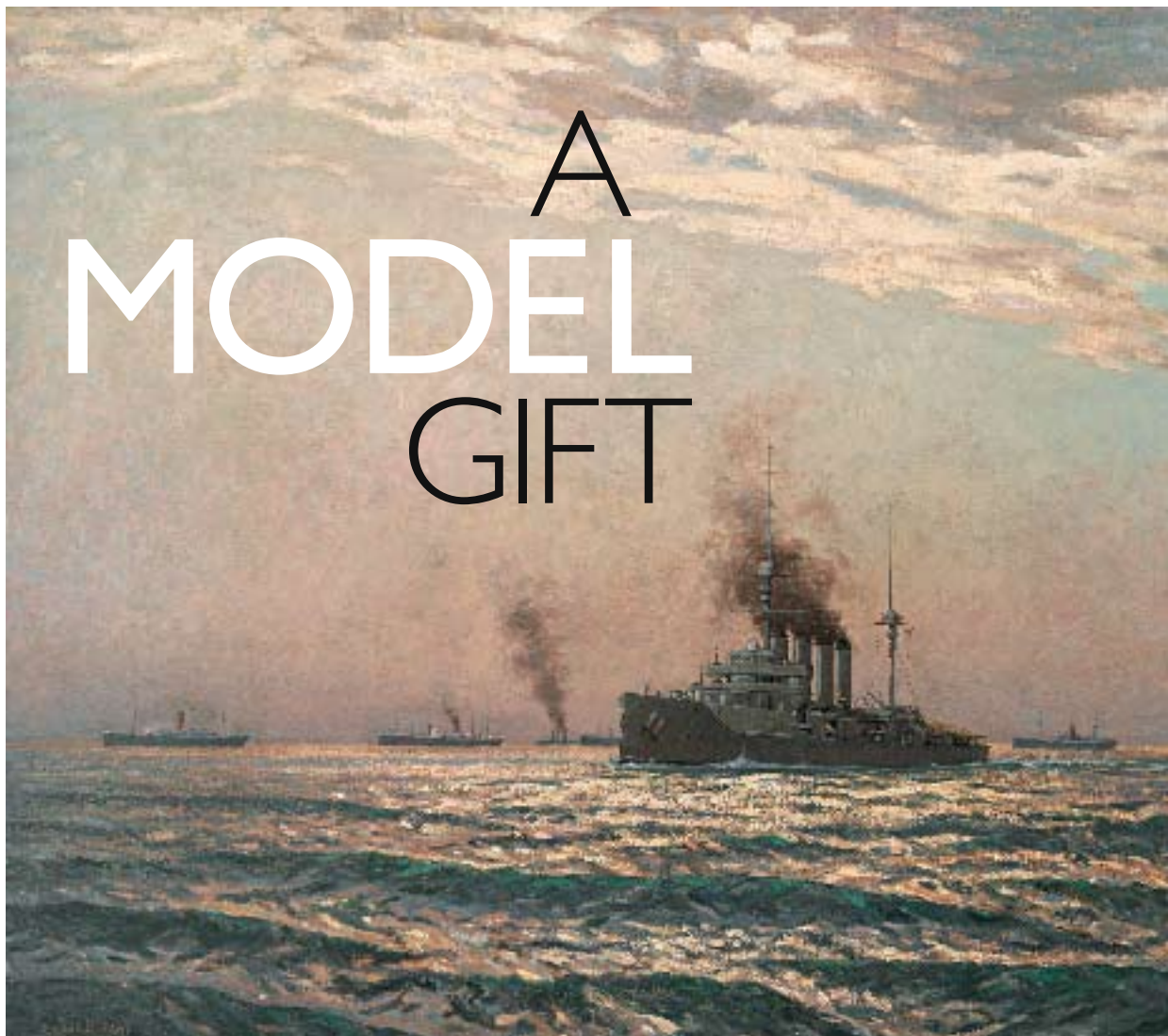


# A MODEL GIFT



**Right:** *Ibuki* is depicted third from left in the background.  
Charles Bryant,  
*First convoy at sea*  
(1920, oil on canvas,  
122.5 × 275.3 cm).  
AWM ART00190

An innocent request had a prolonged sequel. **By Steve Bullard**

**D**uring a parliamentary dinner at Queen's Hall in Melbourne's parliament house in January 1924, the acting prime minister, Earl Page, made an unusual request of Vice Admiral Saitō Shichigoro, commander of a visiting Japanese training squadron. Page asked whether the Japanese government might consider giving to Australia a relic from the Japanese heavy cruiser *Ibuki* as a memento of the assistance the ship gave to Australia during the First World War.

*Ibuki* was earmarked to be broken up under the terms of the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922, which had limited the number of capital ships maintained by the world's navies. Page's request led to the unexpected acquisition of a detailed model of *Ibuki*, which for many years adorned the Ships' Corridor at the Australian War Memorial.

It is unclear what prompted Page to ask for the *Ibuki* relic, but members of the training squadron had visited the Memorial's temporary exhibition in Melbourne during

their visit. One of the Japanese mariners, Sub-Lieutenant Kashiwa, had spoken about his service aboard *Ibuki* during the war with the then-acting director of the Memorial, A.G. Pretty; Pretty later sent Kashiwa a copy of a photograph of *Ibuki* taken while the cruiser was protecting the convoy transporting the first Australian troops to Egypt in late 1914. Perhaps this encounter led to the official request being made at the dinner.

Soon after the official reception, the Memorial wrote to Saitō suggesting that a bell or flag might be a suitable object for donation. Saitō cabled his government on 20 January with the prime minister's suggestion and was advised three days later that an item such as the ship's compass, bell or binnacle would be an appropriate gift to the government of Australia.

When it was learned that the Japanese government had agreed to make a donation, Pretty commissioned a hurriedly prepared, artist-coloured photograph of a Charles

**Author**  
Dr Steve Bullard is a  
historian at the Australian  
War Memorial.



Bryant painting of *Ibuki* to present to Saitō onboard *Asama* before the training squadron left for New Zealand on 29 January. The prime minister's covering letter, however, had gone astray, leading to a series of cables from the Japanese trying to ascertain the reason for the generous gift. The painting itself was an unusual choice: despite being created by an official war artist, *Ibuki* is only identifiable by the plumes of smoke visible in the background.

The Memorial heard nothing concerning the *Ibuki* relics for many months. In the interim, Australia fulfilled its obligations under the Washington Treaty by sending its only capital ship, HMAS *Australia*, to the bottom of the sea off Sydney Heads in April 1924. The scrapping of *Ibuki* in Japan had begun the previous September, so there may have been some anxiety in Australia regarding the promise to deliver a suitable relic from the ship.

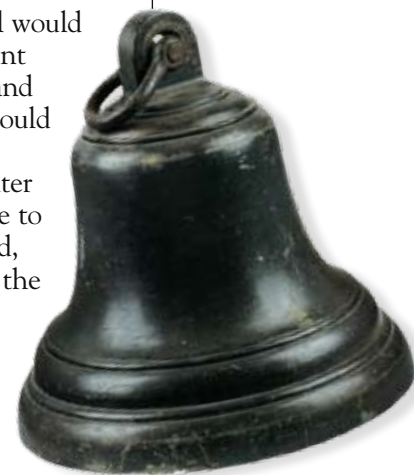
It was not until 14 January 1925 that news came from the British Embassy in Tokyo that

the Japanese had issued instructions for the construction of a “small model of the ‘*Ibuki*’ and a cigar box to be made of wood from the ship”. This was not what the Australians had envisioned; nevertheless, it would not have been an unwelcome addition to the Memorial's collection.

Five months later, the Japanese Consul-General in Australia, S. Yamasaki, advised the Memorial that the *Ibuki* model would arrive aboard the Japanese merchant ship *Mishima Maru* in early June, and that *Ibuki*'s bell and ship's wheel would be given to the captain of HMAS *Brisbane* during its visit to Japan later in the year. There was no reference to the cigar box previously mentioned, but the addition of the relics from the ship would have been a relief to Memorial staff.

The model duly arrived and was presented to Pretty by Yamasaki on 11 June 1925. In presenting the gift, the

**Below:** *Ibuki*'s bell arrived onboard HMAS *Brisbane* in December 1925.  
RELAWM08239



Japanese Consul-General used the occasion as a gesture of good will and to counter anti-Japanese sentiments then prevalent in Australia. The memory of Australian Prime Minister Billy Hughes blocking Japanese efforts to include anti-racial discrimination clauses in the charter of the League of Nations at the end of the war was still fresh and the White Australia Policy was also a continuing issue. And so Yamasaki said:

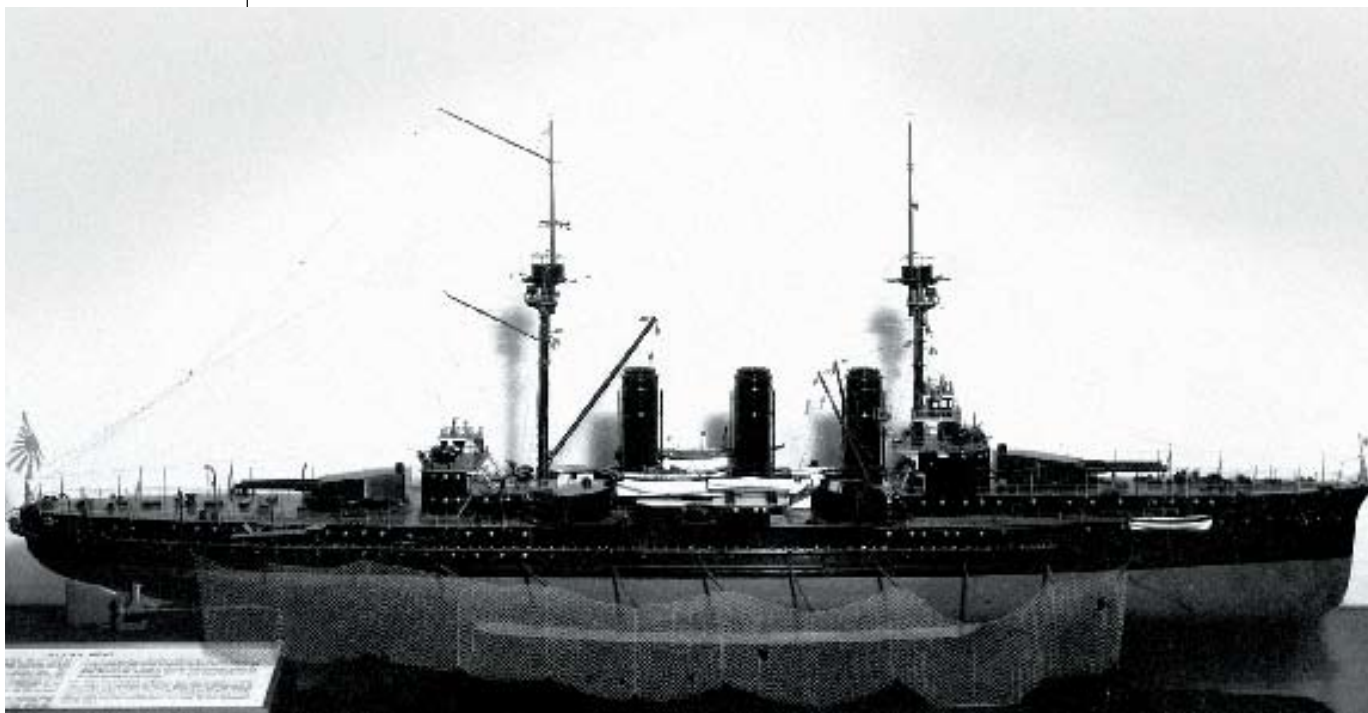
*I am honoured to present this souvenir to the Commonwealth Government at the request of the Japanese Navy Department, and I hope it will be accepted as undeniable evidence that the same friendly and cordial relations still remain unchanged between the Commonwealth and Japan, and are as strong as when the Ibuki*

*convoyed the brave ANZACs to the battle front, there to gain imperishable renown for their patriotism and courage.*

*Actions speak louder than words, and I feel confident that the action of Japan in this instance will counterbalance and set-off some of the unkind words which misinformed people occasionally indulge in regarding the intentions of Japan towards Australia.*

The gift, so eagerly awaited, posed unexpected problems for Pretty and the Memorial. They were especially concerned about the traditional Japanese display case that accompanied the model. Curatorial staff felt the elaborate and exquisitely crafted black-lacquer case “badly matche[d]” the Memorial’s maple display tables in the

**Below:** The model of *Ibuki* was constructed using material from the original ship. Some of the delicate wiring was damaged in transit to Australia.  
AWM 106055



## SHIP MODELS AT THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

Ship models have been part of the Memorial’s collection since its inception after the First World War. The most significant models are often those commissioned by shipping companies to demonstrate the workings of a ship, and to have as presentation items. Many of the Memorial’s models have come from defence sources, but some have been commissioned to fill gaps in the collection or have been received as donations.

The craftsmanship, the materials and the attention to detail are often exceptional. Models received into the permanent collection must be made of long-lasting materials so they will have a long life within the museum. Many models feature equipment such as winches, lifeboat davits and even compasses that actually work. In this splendid company though, the *Ibuki* model is considered an outstanding example.

As display items ship models have always been popular. Although some take up a lot of space, models are the only way that a ship can be brought within a museum gallery. By viewing and walking around the object visitors can project themselves on to it and imaginatively enter the experience of having served there. In the future there may be “virtual-reality” ways of representing ships in galleries, but the Memorial is confident that its ships models will not lose their appeal.

The skills involved in fine model-making are now rare. In this sense a museum like the Memorial becomes a repository not just of objects, but of skills and techniques. Once the people and the tools have gone, the only evidence of how fine craftsmanship is achieved is through the models themselves.

*Anne-Marie Condé*

Exhibition Building at Prince Alfred Park in Sydney. Pretty was doubly concerned about the difficulty in assembling the case, which would require the assistance both of the Consul-General and of a Japanese cabinet maker: "That task alone will occasion me more trouble than the ordering of a new case."

While recognising that it "would be a mistake to scrap the Japanese showcase immediately", Pretty, in consultation with John Treloar, the Memorial's Director, commissioned the construction of a "cheap" table, coloured to match the black-lacquer display case, as a temporary and diplomatic solution.


Why the Memorial wanted to do this can only be speculated upon, but it may have been a reluctance to display such a finely made piece of furniture from a country many Australians considered inferior. Pretty himself was a man of his time. For example, after Yamasaki had presented the model and display case, Pretty had passed to his colleagues a clipping from the 12 June edition of the *Sydney Sun* showing Pretty and Yamasaki with the model: Pretty had snidely written on the clipping, "At the moment this was taken, he was passing some remark about the clever photographers in Australia," and he clearly labelled the clipping with arrows to "me" and "the Jap".

Whatever the reason for the decision to have a new table made, Pretty expected that both the Japanese case and the mock table would later be scrapped, and that the model would be displayed on a standard maple table. Two quotes of £18 and £31 were rejected before Treloar finally approved a lower quote of £10 provided by Chas Ritchie Ltd of Sydney for an "ebonised table" and a mount for a description card. Consequently, the model was not put on display until the end of August. Yamasaki visited one month later and was pleased with the model's position and appearance.

When the bell and wheel of *Ibuki* were finally delivered to the Memorial in Sydney on 8 December 1925, they were carefully mounted to a post near the model. Two years after the acting prime minister had requested the relics from a visiting Japanese admiral, they were on display in the Memorial, where they proved "of great interest to the large number of Australians and overseas visitors who inspect the collections".

The story of the *Ibuki* model and relics raises interesting questions. Why, for example, was there such a fuss made over the display case? Were Memorial staff

embarrassed that the Japanese gift was far more elaborate than they anticipated? Or does the story contain elements of racism inherent in Australian society at that time? Perhaps curators simply wished to enforce a standard display format in the gallery.

In any case, the model of *Ibuki* has been on almost continual view at the Memorial since 1925, though it is currently in storage after renovation of the surrounding galleries. As for the original black-lacquer display case, it has not been seen for some time. 



### THE HEAVY CRUISER *IBUKI*

The lead ship of only two in its class, *Ibuki* was laid down in 1905 at the Kure Naval Arsenal in southern Japan and commissioned in November 1907. After representing Japan at the coronation of the Thai king, Rama VI, in 1911, it was called on to escort the first convoy of ANZAC troops travelling to the Middle East. The 38 transports of the convoy left Albany in Western Australia on 1 November 1914, escorted by HMAS *Sydney* and *Melbourne*, HMS *Minatour* and *Ibuki*. During the morning of 9 November 1914, as the convoy was passing the Cocos Islands in the Indian Ocean, word was received that the German raider *Emden* was in the vicinity. HMAS *Sydney* detached from the convoy to engage *Emden* in the famous battle in which *Emden* was destroyed.

*Ibuki* was eager to join *Sydney* in the battle but was instructed to remain with the convoy, but its efforts were not forgotten. In 1925, Australian Prime Minister Stanley Bruce said of the model:

*[It will] always remind Australians of the valuable services rendered by the Ibuki in connection with the escorting of Australian troopships during the early months of the war and particularly of that dramatic moment on the 9th November, 1914, when this powerful warship with her decks cleared for action, rapidly steamed across the route of the convoy and placed herself between the unarmed troopships and the Cocos Islands where the enemy cruiser had been located.*

Steve Bullard



**Top:** *Ibuki*'s wheel was displayed with the bell before the Memorial moved to its permanent home in Canberra. RELAWM08238

**Above:** The Exhibition Building in Royal Alfred Park in Sydney was home to the Memorial's exhibitions until 1935. AWM P01936.001