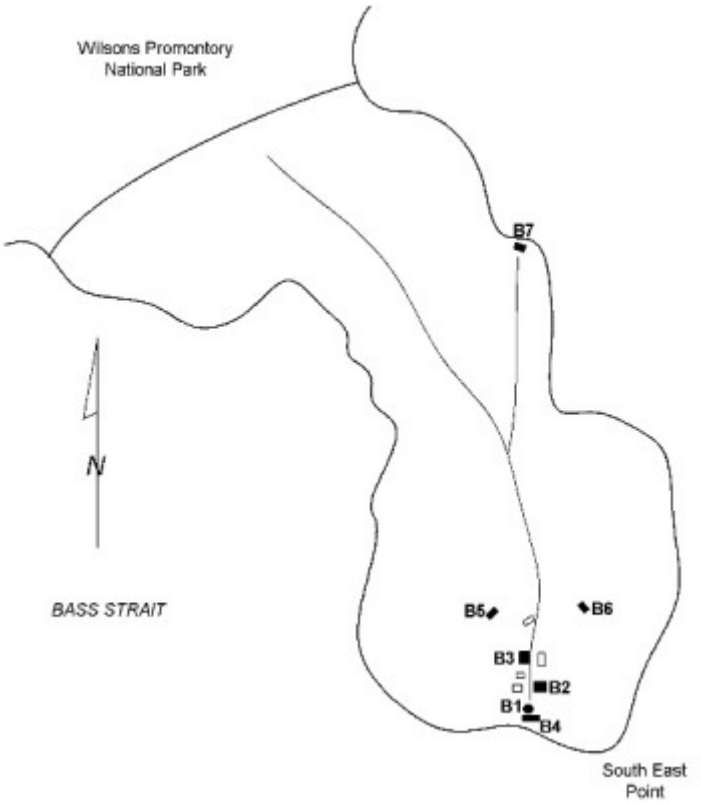
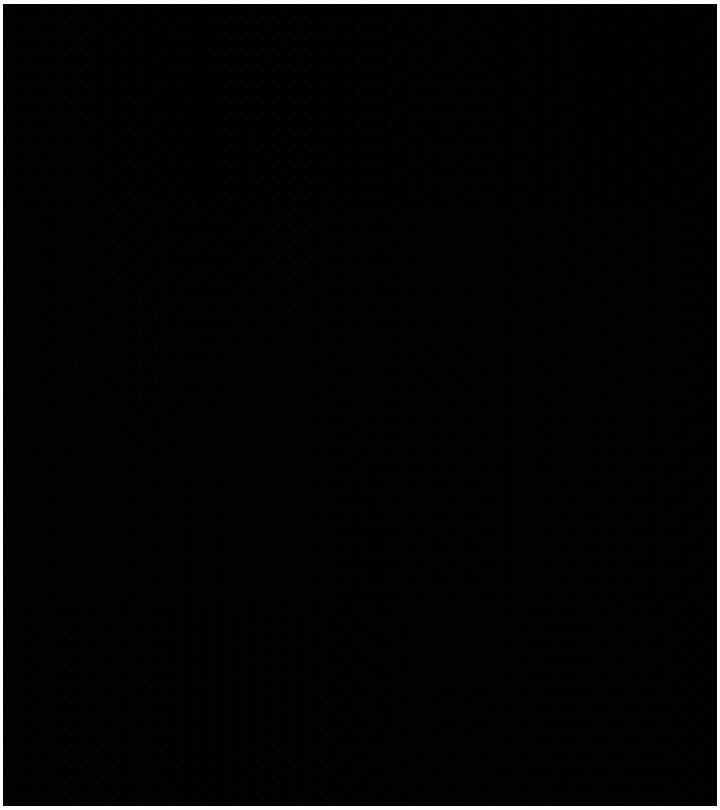
WILSONS PROMONTORY LIGHTSTATION

1 wilsons prom lightstation tower and headkeepers quarters aug 99



H1842 plan



H1842 plan

Location

WILSONS PROMONTORY, SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE

Municipality

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1842

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO19

VHR Registration

November 18, 1999

Heritage Listing

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - September 9, 1999

What is significant?
Wilsons Promontory Lightstation was constructed in 1858-59 from locally quarried honey-coloured granite to the design of Victorian Public Works Department architect Charles Maplestone. It is part of a group that includes Cape Schanck and Gabo Island and which formed the second campaign of lighthouse building in Victorian waters. The buildings remaining from 1859 include the rock faced granite tower, head lightkeeper's quarters and associated stone walls. The original assistant keepers' duplex quarters were lost in the disastrous 1951 fire that swept across the station. Two brick residence were built shortly after the fire and there is also a 1923 brick residence. The lighthouse, which was originally painted white, is now unpainted and has had its original lantern house replaced. The lightstation occupies its own promontory of land on South East Point some distance to the east of the pitch of Wilsons Promontory. During the Second World War there was a radar station of which there are remnants of concrete buildings. Because of its layout with the light tower at the end of a stone walled street, the lightstation has the most village-like feel of all the Victorian lightstations where the normal approach was to lay out the buildings in a line as at Gabo Island, or dispersed at at Cape Schanck.

How is it significant?
Wilsons Promontory Lightstation is of historical, architectural and archaeological significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?
Wilsons Promontory Lightstation is historically important as a key component in a series of navigational aids which served to make safe the passage of Bass Strait. It was built as a direct result of the 1856 inter-colonial conference of maritime officers, and as such it is an important manifestation of a growing co-operation between the colonies in the field of maritime safety.

Wilsons Promontory Lightstation is architecturally important as a fine example of the lighthouse design work of Charles Maplestone, the architect for all Victorian lights between 1856 and 1861. While its integrity has suffered from the loss of the assistants' quarters in 1951 and the tower's original lantern house in 1975, the lightstation retains much of its important early fabric.

Wilsons Promontory Lightstation is archaeologically significant for its potential to reveal artefactual remains principally in the form of building remnants from earlier lightstation and signal station buildings, but also military remnants from the use of the place as a wartime radar station.

Permit Exemptions

General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don’t harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must notify the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions here.

Specific Exemptions:

General Conditions:
1. All alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.
2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of alterations that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such alteration shall cease and the Executive Director shall be notified as soon as possible.
3. If there is a conservation policy and plan approved by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it.
4. Nothing in this declaration prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.
5. Nothing in this declaration exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authority where applicable.

* No permits are required for works which are in accordance with the conservation management plan prepared by Ivar Nelsen, Patrick Miller and Terry Sawyer dated December 1993 with the addendum prepared by RBA Architects and Conservation Consultants dated October 1999

Construction dates	1857,
Architect/Designer	Maplestone, Charles W,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place, Registered archaeological place,
Other Names	WILSONS PROMONTORY LIGHTHOUSE,
Hermes Number	4942
Property Number	

History

from Ivar Nelsen, Patrick Miller and Terry Sawyer Conservation Management Plan December 1993

Discovery
The first European sighting of Wilsons Promontory took place on 2 January 1798 when George Bass spotted the promontory on his exploratory voyage in the south-eastern waters of Australia. Bass had sailed from Port Jackson with six volunteers in December 1797 in a 28 feet whaleboat. Reports from the survivors of the Sydney Cove wreckage had prompted Bass to investigate reports of the area they had traversed in their journey from Preservation Island in the Furneaux Group to a point south of Botany Bay where they were rescued. It was on this voyage that Bass sailed as far as Western Port and became convinced from the set of the sea that a passage lay between Van Diemen's Land and the mainland. On the observation of strong tides and winds which swept around the shore, Bass noted "Whenever it shall be decided that the opening between this and Van Diemen's Land is a strait, this rapidity of tide, and the long south-west swell that seems to be continually rolling in upon the coast to westward, will then be accounted for."

Bass initially named the promontory Furneaux Land in the mistaken belief that it had been seen by Captain Tobias Furneaux in 1773. Following his return from the whaleboat voyage, Bass sailed with Matthew Flinders on the sloop Norfolk with the intention of circumnavigating Van Diemen's Land and thus proving the existence of a strait. This voyage was successfully accomplished and following the return to Port Jackson, Flinders recommended to Governor Hunter that the promontory marking the southernmost point of the mainland be named Wilsons Promontory after Thomas Wilson, a London merchant and ship owner. George Bass considered the promontory to be "well worthy of being a boundary point of a large strait, and a corner stone of this great island New Holland."

Sealing

The reports of Bass and Flinders and of those involved in the salvage of the Sydney Cove concerning the enormous number of seals in Bass Strait led to a rush of speculators to the area. George Bass reported on his voyage of 1798 that seals were plentiful on the promontory and that safe anchorages were available on Sealers Cove and Lady Bay (now Refuge Cove). Sealers Cove became the major base for sealing on the promontory.

The incredible slaughter of seals that followed caused the extinction of two species and the near extinction of a third within a ten year period when seal products became the main export of the colony of New South Wales. In 1804 one ship alone after eighteen months in the area had claimed 28,282 skins and 266 gallons of oil. The sealing industry at Wilsons Promontory was replaced by some whaling activity. Eventually, the only sealers left on the Bass Strait islands were subsisting by hunting wallabies, catching muttonbirds, growing vegetables, and trading the occasional seal skin for luxuries.

Early Australian Lighthouses

Because of its geographical position, Wilsons Promontory is a logical place for a lighthouse. It is the southernmost tip of the Australian mainland and projects into the dangerous Bass Strait waters where the first comprehensive attempt was made to light Australian coastline.

The first lighthouse in Australia was the Macquarie light constructed in 1818 to guide ships to Sydney Harbour, and except for a few harbour lights there were no more lighthouses built until the 1830s; certainly there was no systematic approach to the lighting of the long and dangerous coast of Australia.

In June 1840 the Hobart port officer, Captain William Moriarty, wrote to the governor of Van Diemen's Land, Sir John Franklin, suggesting lighthouses be erected in Banks Strait between the Furneaux Group and Tasmania as well as lights on Cape Otway, Kent's Group and Cape Howe. In February 1841 Franklin wrote to the Governor of New South Wales, Sir George Gipps seeking his co-operation in "this beneficial measure". He then mentioned that he had already begun the work of lighting Banks Strait with two lighthouses - Swan and Goose Islands - and went on to say:

"I consider that the passage through Bass' Strait would be rendered secure, as far as the knowledge of a vessel's exact position would make it, by placing Light Houses on Cape Otway, the south-west part of Sir Roger Curtis' Island, and on Cape Howe ... "

Gipps responded by setting up a committee which broadly agreed with Franklin's concerns but differed in detail. Specifically, it was thought that the northern end of King Island was preferable to Cape Otway and that Deal Island was better than Curtis Island.

Despite the zeal of Sir John Franklin and the deliberations of the NSW Committee, it was several years before the lights were exhibited. The Swan Island light was the first to be shown in November 1845; the Goose Island light followed in February 1846, and the first showing of the Deal Island and Cape Otway lights took place in February and August 1848 respectively. With the egregious absence of a light on Cape Howe, the first stage of the Bass Strait network of highway lights was complete. This system now gave mariners the confidence which they had hitherto generally lacked since the discoveries of Bass and Flinders to use the more direct Bass Strait route from Britain.

Wilsons Promontory Lighthouse

In August of 1856 the first intercolonial meeting of the principal marine officers was held. A commission of enquiry had been suggested by the New South Wales Government and was held in Melbourne as being central to the colonies taking part - New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania. The Lighthouse Commission first considered whether it were possible to set up a board to supervise the planning, construction, maintenance and financing of Australian lighthouses. Because each of the colonies approached the provision of lights in a

different manner and each was wary about handing over any financial powers to a body not directly under its control.

"The Commissioners have considered it hopeless, under the circumstances, to establish a Board that will combine the materials requisite for a vigorous management, and have therefore decided that, in their opinion, the same results may be brought about by ascertaining, in the first instance, where additional Lighthouses ought to be erected, and then by apportioning the expense of their erection and maintenance between the Colonies interested, in such proportions as the amount of tonnage passing these Lights will indicate."

The commission heard some 100 pages of evidence from a large number of master mariners. Based on this evidence the report of the commission recommended the replacement of the temporary light on Gabo Island and the construction of six new coastal lights, all of which were carried out within five years. These were the South Australian lights at Cape Borda (1858), Cape Northumberland (1859), a light in New South Wales at Cape St George (1860), a Tasmanian light at Cape Wickham (1861), and two Victorian lights at Cape Schanck (1859) and Wilsons Promontory (1859).

The commission concluded that the case for the provision of a lighthouse at Wilsons Promontory was clear.

"The position of this headland in the most intricate part of the navigation of Bass's Straits, has impressed the minds of the Commissioners with the absolute necessity of erecting a Lighthouse in the immediate vicinity. As the great highroad to the over-sea and coasting trade from Victoria to the Colonies of New South Wales, Tasmania and New Zealand; and from South Australia to New South Wales, Tasmania (by the eastern route), and New Zealand, its position demanded the most attentive consideration. Surrounded as it is by numerous dangers lying in the direct track, some hidden, and some of less dangerous character, the expediency of erecting this Light has been a subject of lengthy investigation."

Evidence before the commission produced conflicting views as to the most suitable site for a lighthouse in the vicinity of the promontory and the committee felt compelled to examine sites before making a decision. After the completion of a voyage to the promontory on the steam sloop Victoria, the commission stated that

"[the] South-Eastern pitch of the Promontory...(was) found to afford advantages of position superior to what had been contemplated. The extreme point consists of a bold headland of granite formation, level on its surface, and standing at an elevation of about three hundred feet; landing was effected in its immediate vicinity with facility, and no engineering difficulties appear to present themselves which could prevent the construction of a Lighthouse at a moderate cost."

In Victoria the two new lights, Cape Schanck and Wilsons Promontory took precedence over the replacement of the Gabo Island light and planning and construction were put in hand almost immediately. In December 1856 the Commissioner of Customs wrote to the Public Works Department requesting an estimate for construction of a lighthouse at Wilsons Promontory and by mid 1857 plans for the construction of a lightstation at Wilsons Promontory were under way.

Design

In addition to recommending sites for new lighthouses on the southern coasts, the 1856 conference also advocated adoption of the use of catoptric lights for the proposed new towers. While the Commissioners accepted that the new dioptric lights had advantages in both brilliancy and economy of management, they believed that the catoptric type was more suitable for isolated positions where some difficulty existed in appointing adequately trained and efficient lightkeepers to manage the more complicated and delicate dioptric type.

A decision was also made at the 1856 conference to have alternate fixed and revolving lights along the coast. This decision meant that although Wilsons Promontory and Cape Schanck lighthouses were being designed at the same time with identical towers, the Wilsons Promontory light, being a fixed light, was supplied with a Wilkins Brothers lantern multi-lamp catoptric light while the new Cape Schanck lighthouse, having better accessibility than most lighthouses, was provided with a revolving light of the new single lamp dioptric type.

Colonial Architect James Balmain visited Wilsons Promontory in 1856 and found that the site formerly decided on was in fact the most suitable. He also concluded that the granite at the site was good enough for rubble work only, and that the whole of the tower should be faced in another stone, probably Melbourne bluestone. Balmain suggested that a store which could be built to provide initially for the accommodation of the men and the building

materials and later for lighthouse stores be situated at the neck of the point mid-way between the eastern and western bays. He also stated that the lightkeepers quarters be placed near the tower. Timber for the works could be obtained from the nearby sawmills at Sealers Cove. He estimated the total cost at £19,500.

The architect for the Wilsons Promontory lighthouse was Charles Maplestone of the Victorian Public Works Department. Maplestone was a specialist lighthouse architect in the department and was responsible for the design and supervision of all Victorian coastal lights from about 1857 to 1861. In a letter of June 1857 Charles Maplestone reported that he "expected to be engaged shortly in preparing drawings for two new lighthouses ... at Cape Schanck and Wilsons Promontory."

In evidence given to the Civil Service Commission in January 1860, the former Inspector General for Public Works Charles Pasley outlined the duties of officers and noted that "one of his Clerk of Works had designed and had charge of the erection of lighthouses on the coast." This reference certainly refers to Maplestone who officially held a position of Clerk of Works and Draftsman at the time. Maplestone claimed in 1861 to have "designed and built all the lighthouses in the colony but one (Cape Otway)..."

Charles Maplestone was born in Suffolk in 1809 and entered the office of William Cubitt at an early age. He arrived in Melbourne on 26 April 1853 and joined the Public Works Department in June 1853. By 1854 Maplestone was employed on making alterations and additions, and redecorating Toorak House in preparation for its occupation by the Governor of Victoria. In 1857 Maplestone began work on documentation and supervision of both coastal and harbour lights, and this work was to occupy him for much of the remainder of his public works career. He retired from the public service in 1869 and concentrated upon his successful vineyard, Ivanhoe Lodge near Heidelberg. Maplestone was regarded as an authority on viticulture and wine making in Victoria and his wines were awarded medals in international competitions. He died in 1878.

The residences designed by Maplestone were more spacious and comfortable than quarters at earlier lightstations. When Maplestone's responsibilities for lightstation design ceased in 1864, he recalled with some pride his involvement with lightstations in a letter to relatives in England.

"In leaving the regions of the ocean, I believe I bring away the blessing of some 30 families for having ministered permanently to their comfort, in building most substantial and convenient quarters - and I have always contended that when people are shut out from the world, and deprived of all society and intercourse with their fellows, they ought to be provided with every comfort and convenience that a good house would afford, and I have generally had my own way and I do not recollect that with all the lighthouses and quarters which have been built has a single line been suggested or altered by anyone,...(except of a screw pile light and residence design in Port Phillip Bay)"

A visitor to the station in 1935 commented that the station was reminiscent of a Cornish fishing village with the likeness heightened by stone walls enclosing the private yards and protecting them from the wind. Weights and cranking mechanism were in place in the tower at that time and the wooden signal office still stood in the corner of the walled group.

Construction

It was agreed that the costs for the construction of the proposed light be shared New South Wales and Victoria. Tenders were called by the Victorian Public Works Department in December 1857 and a tender for the construction of the lighthouse and quarters at Wilsons Promontory of £12,920 was accepted from contractor P.S. Sinclair on 29 December 1857. Sinclair was later awarded a contract for £800 for extra works. A dispute arose over payment for works and after a court case Sinclair was awarded a further £1605. In 1861 a storm damaged slate roofing to the residences and the slate was relaid on one inch Red Deal boards rather than on battens as originally designed.

Construction progressed satisfactorily and in June 1859 Maplestone recorded that he had just returned from a voyage to Wilsons Promontory, La Trobe Island, Gabo Island and Twofold Bay and that he had just completed the lighthouse and residences Wilsons Promontory.

Operation

The Wilsons Promontory light was first shown from the white painted tower on 15 July 1859. The light was described as a first class catoptric fixed white light.

The Wilsons Promontory light began operation in 1859 with a head keeper and two assistants and their families.

The lives of the keepers followed the pattern of other isolated lightstations. Provisions were supplied by boat at quarterly intervals and at the time of the Brewis report mail deliveries were being made weekly by coastal steamer.

The importance of the Wilsons Promontory lighthouse was augmented by the provision of a signalling station which Brewis regarded of sufficient importance to recommend the appointment of an additional lightkeeper. The signal station has since been removed.

Alterations
The Wilsons Promontory lightstation has been substantially altered over the decades with principal changes occurring as a result of the 1951 bushfires. However, other less dramatic changes have been made during the period of its existence which have altered both existing buildings and also some which have been since been demolished.

In 1873 R. Crompton was awarded a contract for £819 3s 0d to carry out repairs to the Wilsons Promontory lighthouse station and in November 1877 a contract was let to A. Sharp for £784 for works at the signal station but the nature and extent of these works has not been established.

In March 1884 tenders were called for the erection of the signallers' quarters and general repairs at the lightstation and at some time before 1890, the small entry room at the door of the light tower was added but the exact date of this structure has not been established.

In November 1890 a contract was awarded to David Gorrie and Andrew Sharp for repairs, alterations and additions at the lightstations. The work involved the construction of some fencing and either the construction of, or an addition to, an assistant signaller's quarters.

Substantial alterations to the optics of the lighthouse itself followed the tour of inspection and subsequent 1913 report carried out for the Commonwealth by Commander Brewis. Brewis reported that the fixed catoptric 1856 Wilkins and Sons apparatus at Wilsons Promontory, while in good condition, was obsolete and recommended that it be replaced with a more powerful light of a distinctive character. He observed that the dimensions of the tower made it suitable for the requirements of a modern apparatus. Brewis also speculated that the existence of an unused hollow stone central column in the lighthouse suggested that the tower had been constructed with the possibility of a replacement revolving mechanism in mind.

The Brewis recommendation was quickly implemented and the original array was replaced with a Chance Brothers and Co vaporised kerosene incandescent mantle. In April 1913 a temporary light was in operation and a new optical apparatus was being fitted to the tower. This early Commonwealth lighthouse work was supervised by Bernhard Wallach who later became Director of Lighthouses. It appears however that the original Wilkins lantern house was retained. The incandescent apparatus was replaced by auto form mantles in 1922 .

Plans for new quarters for an assistant keeper were prepared by the Commonwealth Lighthouse Service in 1923 and the building constructed in 1924 at the rear of the original paired assistant keepers quarters.

Further minor works were carried out in 1939 when a new tank and tank stand were built at the head keeper's and assistants residences and slight alterations made to the bathroom.

The widespread bushfires of February 1951 extensively damaged the Wilsons Promontory lightstation. Fire destroyed the original 1859 pair of assistant's quarters and the quarters were replaced with two new buildings in 1952 and 1953. Other buildings lost in the fires were not rebuilt.

The red brick powerhouse at the north end of the station complex was constructed in 1968 and the rock-faced concrete block workshop was built in 1973.

Alterations made to the head keeper's quarters in 1969 when the fireplace chimney was removed and the room and external windows enlarged. A new toilet was added into the area where a third bedroom was originally positioned. Part of the verandah was enclosed to create a laundry.

An addition was made to the south side of the engine room to provide ventilation plant in 1975. The light was converted from kerosene to electricity in 1975 and at the same time the lantern, lens and pedestal were all removed and replaced by a NAL1 lantern and lamp array. In 1978 alterations were made to the laundry. A timber

fuel deck at the north end of the lightstation was constructed in 1979.

In 1987 the white paint which was in a deteriorating condition was removed and the tower was not repainted. New windows were also fitted to the tower and the roof to the entry building re-slated.

Wartime Occupation
From about 1938 until the end of the Second World War the national park was closed to the public and a small naval contingent and commando units trained there.

A radar station manned by air force personnel was constructed in the vicinity of the lighthouse station. The men were housed in corrugated iron huts to the north east of the assistants' quarters.

Shipwrecks
Wilsons Promontory is a dangerous feature on a dangerous coast and as such has been the site of many wrecks. The are numerous wrecks in the vicinity of Wilsons Promontory which have not been identified but unlike other lightstation sites such as Cape Wickham and Green Cape, there have been no recorded accidents in the vicinity of the Wilsons Promontory lightstation which have resulted in major loss of lives.

Some of the more serious incidents in the area have resulted from a variety of causes but none are recorded as having been due to the lack of, or deficiency in, a light at Wilsons Promontory.

In August 1876, the steamers Barrabool and Queensland collided off South Point and although the latter sank, only one life was lost. The iron-hulled barque Drumblair ran aground in 1892 as a result of a navigation error but was refloated, and in dense fog the Kanowna struck rocks near Cleft Island in February 1929. There was no loss of life due to the swift action of the Mackarra which took all 250 passengers and some of the crew of the Kanowna aboard. The Dumosa took off the remaining crew members.

The SS Cambridge carrying cargo from Britain to Sydney struck a mine laid by a World War 2 German raider and sank off South-east Point early in November, 1940 but only one of the 58 crew perished.

Automation and Destaffing
From about 1975 there has been a programme of automation and subsequent destaffing of Australian lighthouses. This program was given political sanction with the 1983 report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Expenditure entitled Lighthouses: do we keep the keepers? The savings indicated for Wilsons Promontory over a 20 year period were $1.24 million. The findings which refer specifically to Wilsons Promontory are:

Finding 20: There are significant benefits for weather information required by the Bureau of Meteorology that derive from a human presence at ... 16 lightstations [including Wilsons Promontory].

Finding 26: There are significant benefits for the natural environment that derive from a human presence at ... 21 lightstations [including Wilsons Promontory].

Finding 29: For ... 33 lightstations [including Wilsons Promontory] the Committee is of the opinion that the benefits that derive from the human presence are greater than the cost savings of automation and unmanning.

Finding 32: For personnel safety reasons remote stations should be operated by two persons. Therefore, out of the 33 stations the Committee said should continue to be operated manned ... 7 stations [including Wilsons Promontory] should be operated by two persons.

The report recommended a policy of consultation between Commonwealth and State bodies regarding manned presence and that all reasonable measures be taken to continue manning provided others pay the costs.

Extent of Registration

NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the Heritage Act, I give notice under section 46 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by including the Heritage Register Number 1842 in the category described as a

Heritage and Archaeological place:

Wilson Promontory Lightstation, Wilsons Promontory, South Gippsland Shire Council.

EXTENT:

1. All of the buildings and features marked as follows on Diagram 1842 held by the Executive Director:

B1 Lighthouse and associated stone walls
B2 Head Lightkeeper's Residence and associated stone privy, tank and walls
B3 Assistant Lightkeeper's Residence and associated stone walls
B4 Watchroom and Engine House
B5 & B6 Second World War concrete buildings
B7 Shed and associated landing place

2. All the land reserved for lighthouse purposes at South East Point, Wilsons Promontory as indicated on Diagram 1842 held by the Executive Director being the land described in Certificate of Title Volume 5775 Folio 900 and including all archaeological relics and deposits.

Dated: 4 November 1999.

RAY TONKIN

Executive Director

[*Victoria Government Gazette* G 46 18 November 1999 pp2455-2456]

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/