

# Victorian Heritage Database Report

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## GAMBIER



S281 Gambier PortPhillipBay  
Diver Feb1997

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### Location

Port Phillip Bay, between Queenscliff and Pope s Eye Shoal

### Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S281

### Date lost

28/08/1891

### Official number

68090

### Construction material

Iron

### Propulsion

Steam - Screw

### Engine specification

compound vertical inverted direct action, 155 HP, 2 cy. 32" & 60"-39", 65lb boiler

### Engine builder

Kincaid, donald & Co., Greenock

**Length/Breadth/Depth**

280.00 Feet / 31.90 Feet / 23.90 Feet

**Builder**

J. & R. Swan

**Year of construction**

1874

**Built port**

Dumbarton

**Built country**

Scotland

**Registration Number**

1885

**Registration Port**

Melbourne

**Date lost**

28/08/1891

**Departure**

Newcastle

**Destination**

Melbourne

**Cargo**

304 cases of fruit, 25 tons of fencing wire, 51 bags of maize, 50 bags of rice, 43 half-chests of tea, 10 barrels of corn, 31 cases of manufactured tobacco, 12 cases of plated ware, 3 cases of machinery, 4 packages of typewriters, 80 bales of wool, 500 hides from Sydney, 42 packages of effects, 7 bales of marines, 11 kegs of skins. From Brisbane - 20 cases of meats, 61 cases of tobacco, 105 bags of oysters, 25 cedar logs, 29 cases of pines, and numerous sundries (from Don Love's extract from the Herald)

**Owner**

Howard Smith and Sons Ltd

**Master**

Captain Frank Bell

## **Weather conditions**

Clear fine morning

## **Cause of loss**

Collided with the Easby, hit near funnel, Easby tore more than a third of the way through the ship sunk quickly (UID 9, 99, 125). Signal confusion, and neither ship slackened speed when approaching each other

## **Passenger comments**

Mr Maloney, Mr Johnson, Mr Milne, Mr McMillan, Mr Shaw, Mr & Mrs Thorpe, Mr Kolbe, Mr Struthers, Mr Jefferson, Miss Harrington, Miss Crotty, Miss Woodling, Mrs McWhirter, Mrs Glanfield & child, Mrs Deorwyn, Miss Russell, Mr Hill, Miss Nuttall, Thomas, Phillip & Joseph Rooke, Mr & Mrs Robinson, Mr & Mrs Howe, Mr & Mrs Trevenick, Mr Simms, Miss Orchard, Mr Christison, Mr Bennett, Mr Thomas, Mr Green, Mr & Miss Gainor, Mr Loveday, Mr Dwyer, Mr Williams, Mr Horn, Mr Ryan, Mr Franklin, Lizzie & Kate Kelly, Jon Kelly, Mr & Mrs Turner & 3 children, Mr & Mrs McCarthy & child, Mrs Davidson & child, Mrs Leslie & child, Mr Logan, Mr Martin, Mr Williamson, Mr Paul, Mr Donahue, Mr Bannan, Mr Miller, Mr Quinn, Mr Dennis, Mr Walters (UID 9)

## **Number of crew**

37

## **Crew comments**

John Bell, donkeyman; R Cooper, A. Denyer, D. Spillman, J. Robert, W. Budge, A Macckay, G. Thomas, A. Burghand, J. Dunn, J. Alain, W. Shaw, C. Brown, Allison Brown, T. Carrick, John Laurie, R. Smith, D. Danielson, K. McKinnon, J. Haydon, W. Bowness, N Mcauley, A. Garry, J. Smith, Jas McDonald, J. Hughes, H. Davidson, H. Jacques, T. Bailey, J. Frawley, C. Dryden, Miss Lloyd, J. Webster, J. Connell, F. Queily, W. Willmott (UID 9)

## **Statement of significance**

<p>The Gambier is historically and socially significant for its association with the wrecking incident that involved the loss of many lives and had an enormous impact on Victorian society</p>

## **VHR history**

Originally the Ocean, the vessel was renamed in 1888. Had an expensive re-fit 1885 for work as passenger ship. on 28th August the Gambier had entered the heads and was in the West Channel. When signals were misunderstood, the Gambier was run down by the Easby. Up to 21 lives were lost, particularly as one life boat capsized during launch. There was considerable media interest in the event. Both captains were held responsible - gross misconduct - their certificates suspended by Court of Marine Inquiry: Bell (Gambier), 9 months; Prideaux (Easby), 6 months - both captains should have slackened speed. Writ issued for 35,000 pounds against James Paterson & Co., Easby's owners, by Howard Smith & Co. Ltd. Important unit of inter-colonial fleet, operating Melbourne, Sydney, Newcastle. Customs Dept removed wreck, reimbursed by owners who had failed to comply with warrant removal instructions. Site reveals that wreck not removed from sea-bed, just to extent of not being a hazard to shipping.