Victorian Heritage Database Report
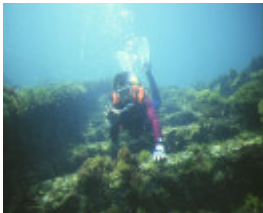
GEORGE ROPER

S286 GeorgeRoper
PortPhillipHeadsLonsdaleReef
HistoricPhotograph

S286 GeorgeRoper
PortPhillipHeadsLonsdaleReef
SideView

S286 GeorgeRoper
PortPhillipHeadsLonsdaleReef
Detail

S286 GeorgeRoper
PortPhillipHeadsLonsdaleReef
DiverOnWreck

Location

Lonsdale Reef, Port Phillip Heads

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S286

Date lost

04/07/1883

Official number

87813

Construction material

Iron

Hull

1 bulk head, cemented 1883; 2 decks (1 part iron) 1;bridge deck amidships (like a steamer); cabin underthis bridge; built especially for carrying large cargo 2;last survey April 1883; anchors & chains proved

Propulsion

Sail

Number of masts

4

Length/Breadth/Depth

301.70 Feet / 39.10 Feet / 23.60 Feet

Builder

W.H. Potter & Sons

Year of construction

1883

Built port

Liverpool

Built country

England

Registration Port

Liverpool

Date lost

04/07/1883

Departure

Liverpool

Destination

Melbourne

Cargo

Equal to 3842 tons (2390 dead weight, 1452 measured goods), 20,000 pounds worth of rails for Victorian Government (UID 1), malt and distilled liquors, chemicals and 30 tons of dynamite (UID 9). Drapery & other goods. Russell Stourbridge bricks as paying ballast. Cargo valued at 50,000 pounds

Owner

W.T. Dickson & Son, Liverpool

Master

John Ward

Weather conditions

Dense fog

Cause of loss

Was under tow by steam tug Williams about 8 miles off Port Phillip Heads, Pilot Gifford in charge. Landmarks were obscured by fog, & the pilot continued to approach heads rather than waiting for fog to lift. Both the tug and the George Roper struck Lonsdale Reef.

Number of crew

31

Crew comments

Lascar hands, white officers

Statement of significance

<p>The George Roper is archaeologically and historically significant as an example of a large fast international trader built especially for the Australian run. The wreck lies in 4-5 metres of water, and is accessible to recreational divers. Though it was severely broken up during its wrecking, parts of the ship remain clearly identifiable, and are a good source for public interpretation. Artefacts recovered by divers during the 1970s and 1980s are in the custody of private individuals, institutions and the Victorian Government. These artefacts are available for research, interpretation and exhibition, enabling further public interpretation for the non-diving public.</p>

VHR history

On its maiden voyage from Liverpool, the four masted barque George Roper was met by headwinds at Bass Strait, about 8 miles off Port Phillip Heads, and was taken under tow by the steam tug Williams with Pilot Gifford (Gafford?) in charge on 4 July 1883. Conditions suddenly worsened, and the Williams had veered too far west in heavy fog. Both the Williams and the George Roper struck Lonsdale Reef, with the tug making water so fast that it had to go up the Bay at once for repairs. As the fog lifted, it was discovered that George Roper was stranded in one of the most dangerous and inaccessible parts of the reef, immediately opposite the green light at Point Lonsdale. Attempts to float George Roper off the reef failed. The barque?s Captain and crew were transferred to Albatross and taken to Queenscliff. After 2 days the underwriters sold the wreck at auction for £3,600 to a Melbourne syndicate. After recovering considerable cargo, the syndicate sold the wreck for £500 to a Geelong syndicate which continued to recover cargo for some months. On 26 August, the George Roper finally broke up and sunk.

 The Pilot Board later found Gifford (Gafford?) guilty of negligence in approaching Port Phillip Heads in fog when all landmarks were obscured and, as conditions worsened, failing to tow the ship into safer water until the fog cleared. Gifford's (Gafford?s?) certificate was suspended for two years.

 The tug Blackboy, one of the vessels commissioned to salvage George Roper, also hit the reef after its trailing cable became entangled in its propeller. The crew of the Blackboy was saved, but the tug sunk.

 The George Roper was built in 1882 for W.T. Dickson and Son in the W.H. Potter and Son shipyard in Liverpool. George Roper was specifically designed for fast sailing and bringing large consignments of cargo to Australia. It was launched on 10 February 1883, and almost immediately was struck by the steamer Bentinc. The damage to the George Roper was a 17 foot gap from the taffrail to near the waterline, and repairs had to be made before its

voyage to Melbourne. It was carrying £50,000 worth of soft goods, draperies, household items, spirits, dynamite, and 1,400 tons of steel rails for the Victorian Government when it was towed into the reef. The Captain was John Ward, supported by 31 crew.