

Victorian Heritage Database Report

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SS GLENELG



SS Glenelg at small jetty
ANMS0047[408]

Location

Bass Strait, near Lakes Entrance

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S291

Date lost

25/03/1900

Official number

70695

Construction material

Iron

Hull

One deck, rigged as fore and aft schooner. Clincher built, round stern, straight stem.

Propulsion

Steam - Screw

Engine specification

2 compound steam engines totaling 85 horsepower fired through a single coal fired boiler.

Engine builder

Rait & Lindsay

Number of masts

2

Length/Breadth/Depth

135.80 Feet / 21.10 Feet / 11.30 Feet

Builder

Aitken and Mansel

Year of construction

1875

Built port

Whiteinch, Glasgow

Built country

Scotland

Registration Number

7 of 1898

Registration Port

Melbourne

Date lost

25/03/1900

Departure

Lakes Entrance

Destination

Melbourne

Cargo

Cargo comprised about 30 tons of bark, hides, tallow, sheep skins, maize, machinery and furniture, together with four piles that were 36 feet long. Most of the cargo was from Bairnsdale but some was picked up in other ports. It

was a relatively light load.

Owner

J.B. Ellerker and Albert John Ellerker.

Master

T. H. English

Weather conditions

Passing through the Entrance, Glenelg encountered a stiff breeze but within half an hour a heavy thunderstorm hit the vessel with gale force winds from the south west that lasted all night. Early on Sunday morning was the height of the storm and the Glenelg, now about 40 miles from Lakes Entrance, was right in the middle of it. It was at this point the vessel was abandoned.

Cause of loss

Foundered suddenly, thought to be caused by loose plate causing damage at stern. Court of Marine Inquiry could not pin point a reason for the sinking.

Passenger comments

Mr. & Mrs Hyatt, of Ballarat
 Mr. Barker & Miss Barker
 Miss Bean
 Mr. Hand
 Mr. G.P. Scott
 Mr. H.B. Holland
 Miss H. M. Anderson
 Mr. R. Weir
 Mrs. (Miss) Moran
 Mr. & Mrs. Cowell
 Mr. John Holoway Griffiths (ass. printer at the Age)
 Mrs. Martha Amy Griffiths
 Albert (8) & Ethel Griffiths (12)
 Mr. R. Scott
 Mr. W.G. Scott
 Mr. R. Palmer
 Mrs. Lynch & child
 Mr. J. Lillicrap
 Mr. Stephens
 Miss Lily Stephens

Number of crew

15

Crew comments

Chief Officer - John Burke
 Chief Engineer - D. Fyffe
 2nd Engineer - Arthur Moulden
 Fireman - T. Hatfield
 Fireman - Con. Williams
 Fireman - M. Williams
 Steward - W. Tomlinson
 Stewardess - Mrs. Boyd
 Boatswain - H. Laphorne
 Able seaman - Peter Benson
 Able seaman - Charles Evans
 Seaman - George Wright
 *Seaman - Alexander Lamb
 *Cook - Valentine Bundy
 *Under-steward - Ernest Thorne
 **Alfred Richardson
 ** James (Albert) Waters

 *survivors
 **possibly onboard but unconfirmed

Statement of significance

<p>SS Glenelg is historically significant as one of the worst maritime disasters in Victorian history, with the deaths of at least 38 people and only three survivors. The wreck has the potential for archaeological significance with some of the hull preserved under the sand. These remains may provide unknown technical detail of iron shipbuilding, details of the refit the vessel underwent in 1898 and information pertaining to life on board a typical cargo/passenger vessel at the turn of the century. SS Glenelg is representative of the fleet of small iron steamers on the small country trading routes around Australia.</p>
 <p>SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA</p>
 <p>Significance assessed against criteria defined in Guidelines for the Management of Australia's Shipwrecks (1994).</p>
 <p>CRITERION 1: HISTORIC</p>
 <p>SS Glenelg has historic significance as one of the worst maritime disasters in Victoria's history.</p>
 <p>CRITERION 2: TECHNICAL</p>
 <p>SS Glenelg may demonstrate technical significance in iron shipbuilding. Iron shipbuilders are known to have deviated off ships plans and, in addition, SS Glenelg was known to have had a refit in 1898 when sold to J.B. Ellerker.</p>

CRITERION 3: SOCIAL
SS Glenelg has social significance as many of the relatives of those that died are still alive. The wrecking of the Glenelg is also one of the worst maritime disasters in Victoria.

CRITERION 4: ARCHAEOLOGICAL
Despite its isolated location, the archaeological remains have the potential to tell the story of shipboard life on a passenger/cargo steamer at the turn of the century. The hull rests on a sandy seafloor and if the hull becomes uncovered, there is the potential to explain the cause of the wreck.

CRITERION 5: SCIENTIFIC
SS Glenelg is not currently the subject of any scientific studies. However, as a part of the iron ship resource in Victoria, the wreck could contribute information to the ongoing national and international corrosion measurement studies.

CRITERION 6: INTERPRETIVE
There is a monument commemorating the wreck and those who died at Lakes Entrance. SS Glenelg is not currently the subject of any shipwreck interpretation. However, there is significant potential to interpret the story of the wreck and subsequent looting to raise community awareness.

CRITERION 7: RARE
SS Glenelg is a rare example in Victoria of a maritime disaster on such a large scale.

CRITERION 8: REPRESENTATIVE
SS Glenelg is representative of the fleet of smaller iron ships that transported cargo and passengers around the coastline of Australia towards the end of the 19th century. The wreck is also representative of the disaster that befell many such ships in treacherous seas and heavy winds.

*There is a 1000m diameter Protected Zone around Glenelg centred on position -38 33' 09" S 147 12' 27" E WGS84. No entry is permitted unless a Permit has been authorised by Heritage Victoria. *

VHR history

SS Glenelg was one of the worst maritime disasters in Victoria where at least 38 people lost their lives and only three survived.

The Scottish-built Glenelg was a small iron steamer that had carried cargo and passengers on various routes around Australia since 1875. The ship had been a Sydney Harbour ferry and had also transported many copper miners between Melbourne and Strachan during the heady days of the Tasmanian copper mining ventures of the 1880s.

Glenelg was sold to JB Ellerker in 1898, the passenger and cargo areas were fitted out, and the ship was put on the Lakes Entrance to Melbourne run.

On the night of 25 March 1900, SS Glenelg had just picked up its final load at Cunninghame (Lakes Entrance) and headed for Melbourne. A heavy south west gale and thunderstorm hit the vessel not long after departure. Despite attempts by the crew to bail out the ship, Captain English was forced to abandon the vessel early the next morning.

Three crew members launched the first lifeboat, but other passengers and crew had difficulty as this lifeboat was on the rough side of the wreck. The second life boat was eventually launched over the other side and the majority of passengers and crew were in it. The captain, his first mate and the chief engineer all went down with the ship.

The crew in the first lifeboat tried to reach and help the second boat but were separated in the heavy seas and the second boat was never seen again. The three crew men drifted for two days before eventually coming ashore at Marlo. Over the next few weeks, bodies were washed up along 90 mile beach some unrecognisable and some were never accounted for. Despite extensive sea searches, the wreck of the Glenelg disappeared for over 100 years.

The drawn out marine inquiry held after the wrecking could not find enough evidence to lay blame on anything in particular for the wreck, despite accusations during the trial of poor maintenance and leaky hull plating.

The final resting place of the SS Glenelg was finally located by Southern Ocean Exploration (SOE) on 29 June 2009. After two years of historical research, the group managed to find the wreck on only the second attempt over the site.

Heritage Victoria provided a permit for a ceramic plate to be raised to assist in positively identifying the wreck. This plate was stamped with the logo of the Tasmanian Steam Navigation Company (TSNC). While the TSNC had never owned the Glenelg, the Union Steam Ship Company had and this company had purchased the TSNC in 1891. Crockery from the TSNC had more than likely been distributed across the entire fleet.

Unfortunately, in February 2011, Southern Ocean Exploration reported more than 150 items, including cutlery, crockery and glass bottles had been illegally removed from the wreck site.

A 500m protected zone was declared around the wreck of the SS Glenelg by the Commonwealth government on 24 February 2011. This protected zone now cannot be entered without a permit. Heritage Victoria actively monitors the site for any further signs of disturbance.