

Victorian Heritage Database Report

Report generated on - 27/09/24

MAFFRA

Location

Two miles west of Point Lonsdale

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S433

Date lost

06/05/1888

Official number

74658

Construction material

Wood

Hull

1 deck, square stern, carvel built, no galleries, billet head

Propulsion

Sail

Number of masts

2

Length/Breadth/Depth

71.00 Feet / 18.30 Feet / 5.50 Feet

Builder

Robert Kennedy

Year of construction

1876

Built port

Yarra Bank, Melbourne

Built country

Australia

Registration Number

No. 33 of 1876

Registration Port

Melbourne

Date lost

06/05/1888

Departure

Lakes Entrance

Destination

Melbourne

Cargo

Hardwood, bark

Owner

2/11/1876: Archibald Brown, ships chandler of Melbourne 32/64 shares
 Louis Lars Jensen, merchant of Sale 32/64 shares
 7/4/1887: Archibald Brown, ships chandler of Melbourne 21/64 shares
 Marion Taylor, spinster of Essendon 16/64 shares<br

Master

P. Holten

Weather conditions

Sudden change, squally conditions, south-west wind, heavy seas

Cause of loss

Blown ashore

Statement of significance

<p>The site of the Maffra has not been positively located and therefore an assessment of its archaeological significance cannot be made. However it would be of technical interest as an example of Victorian/ Australian shipbuilding designed specifically for the Gippsland trade ie; shallow draught.</p>

VHR history

The Maffra was a 46 ton, carvel-built wooden two-masted schooner with one deck and a square stern. Built at Yarra Bank in 1876 by Robert Kennedy, it was registered at the Port of Melbourne for its owners Archibald Brown and others of the Gippsland Steam Navigation Company (ASRO Melbourne Registry, 33 of 1876).

 The Maffra traded between Melbourne and the Gippsland Lakes throughout its career. It had been repaired and overhauled on two occasions - in June 1879 and July 1887 (ASN 28/6/1879, Argus 14/7/1887). In April 1880 it ran aground at Lakes Entrance but was floated off after several days (ASN 10/4/1880).

 On its final voyage the Maffra departed Lakes Entrance with a cargo of hardwood and bark, and had reached Port Phillip Heads which it was unable to enter due to a strong northerly wind. The Maffra's master P. Holten was forced to stand the vessel out to sea, but the wind suddenly changed to the south-west with a squally gust, and the jib stay foresail and boom foresail were torn to ribbons. The Maffra instantly became unmanageable and began drifting towards the shore in high seas. The anchors were dropped but failed to hold, and the Maffra struck reef two miles west of Point Lonsdale (GA 7 May 1888). The crew were swept by seas as they clung onto the wreck for two hours, all the time fearing it would break up. Fortunately however, the vessel was forced over the reef to become beached broadside onto the sand. As the tide dropped the crew found themselves high and dry and all were able to clamber down to safety.
 The Maffra was not insured, and the hull and gear was sold to James Miller for 25 pounds on 17 May 1888 (QS 26/5/1888). As the Master P. Holten did not hold a Certificate of Competency the Steam Navigation Board decided against further action. A number of secondary sources have stated the Maffra was wrecked on Point Nepean, which is incorrect. One report stated that the Maffra lay nearby to a safe channel that had been used by lighters salvaging cargo from the Light of the Age (Age 7/5/1888)

 From an environmental and historical perspective, the wreck of the Maffra is interesting as it led to changes in the foredune structure of Lonsdale Beach, exposing the wreck of another vessel or vessels:

 "During the past few days the sea in the vicinity of Point Lonsdale has encroached upon a part of the beach in an alarming manner. The wrecked schooner Maffra has in some way caused the tide as it rises to flow in a kind of eddy towards the westward, and this has gradually forced itself up the beach until now the water is about 100 yards or so further inland than it was a fortnight ago, and the tents of the men engaged in repairing the damage to the schooner have had to be shifted further back, whilst the sand dune has risen in height from about 7 feet to nearly 40 feet. A most singular circumstances in connection with the encroachment of the sea is that the washing away of what has been hitherto looked upon as the surface sand has left exposed to view portions of the hull, masts, and spars of some vessel evidently wrecked in the locality many years since; wreckage has been carefully examined but so far it has not been identified, although it is evident that the wreck was that of a large-sized vessel. The wooden hull shows all the signs of having been under the sand for very many years and it is in an advanced stage of decay (QS 23/6/1888).

 The site of the Maffra has not yet been located nor reported, though the efforts to refloat it were unsuccessful - three months later the Queenscliff Sentinel reported succinctly "the Maffra has gone the way of all wrecks" (QS 25/8/1888).