

Victorian Heritage Database Report

Report generated on - 26/04/24

MARY CUMMING

Location

Cape Patton

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S457

Date lost

23/11/1872

Official number

28976

Construction material

Wood

Hull

Square stern, carvel built, female bust figurehead

Propulsion

Sail

Number of masts

2

Length/Breadth/Depth

81.30 Feet / 21.10 Feet / 10.30 Feet

Year of construction

1861

Built port

Leith, Edinburgh

Built country

Scotland

Registration Number

30 of 1864

Registration Port

Melbourne

Date lost

23/11/1872

Departure

Melbourne

Destination

Port MacDonnell

Cargo

In ballast

Owner

19/4/1864: Henry Capel Piggott & Louis John Pigott, shipowners of Melbourne

Master

Capt. Wigmore/ Wiginore

Weather conditions

Dense fog

Cause of loss

Went ashore in heavy fog, compass error

Number of crew

6

Statement of significance

<p>The wreck site of the Mary Cumming has not been positively located nor identified, so an assessment of its archaeological significance cannot be made. It has historical significance for its association with its owner Henry

C. Pigott, an inaugural Melbourne Harbour Trust Commissioner and shipowner. The Mary Cumming is representative of a type ie: it was a typical British built, coastal trading vessel, however the predicted state of preservation of the site is poor given its location on a rocky, cliffed coastline in a high energy environment.</p>

VHR history

The story of the crews escape from the Mary Cumming and subsequent row to rescue themselves is one of determination and endurance.

 The Mary Cumming was a 106 ton, two masted wooden schooner built in Leith, Scotland in 1861. It is sometimes incorrectly named the Mary Cummings.
 It traded between Melbourne and the South Australian coastal port of Port MacDonnell for its owners Henry Capel Pigott and Louis John Pigott, shipowners of Melbourne (ASRO Melbourne Registry, No. 30/ 1864). Henry C. Pigott was elected to represent the interests of shipowners as one of the first commissioners of the Melbourne Harbour Trust, a corporation formed in 1877 to maintain Melbourne rivers, channels and port facilities (a role undertaken by the present day Victorian Channels Authority). He served as a commissioner between the years 1887-82 and 1885-1913. Another historical connection submerged nearby is the wreck of the screw steamer H.C. Piggott operated by the Melbourne Harbour Trust in the late 1800s early 1900s, which now lies scuttled in the Ships Graveyard, Torquay area.

 Departing Melbourne on Wednesday 23 November 1872 in ballast for Port MacDonnell with its master Wigmore and six crew, the Mary Cumming ran into heavy fog shortly after leaving Port Phillip Heads. Navigating by compass on his usual course, Wigmore believed his vessel to be ten miles off the coast. However in the early morning of Friday 25 November the captain was shocked to find the Mary Cumming running into breakers and both anchors were immediately dropped. The Mary Cumming was in an impossible position, anchored in the surf with seas breaking over the vessel and given the location and state of the sea it was feared its break up was imminent. The crew hurriedly lowered the small boat and put into it some biscuits and a bottle of gin. Wigmore saved his chronometer and a suit of clothes before escaping from the doomed schooner

 For nearly thirty long hours the men pulled over a heavy sea the waves at times threatening to engulf their frail craft, and many were the narrow escapes they had from being capsized. The salt water spoilt their biscuits so that they had nothing to eat, the gin however, was judiciously served out. After pulling some forty miles they arrived off Barwon Heads so thoroughly exhausted by fatigue, hunger, and thirst, that it was determined if possible to effect a landing. This nearly cost them their lives, as it was only the greatest skill that prevented their boat from being capsized in the heavy surf that was rolling. From Barwon Heads they walked across to Point Lonsdale, where they were most hospitably received and entertained by the telegraph master, Mr Richards, and by him sent across to Queenscliffe, whence they came for Melbourne by the evening train on Saturday, 25 November 1872).

 The tug Mystery was sent to the scene to attempt salvage of the vessel, arriving only to see the Mary Cumming drive ashore when a large wave snapped an anchor cable. A Marine Court of Inquiry found that compass error was to blame for the wreck and no blame was attached to Captain Wigmore (Loney, 1979: 75)

 The site of the Mary Cumming has not been positively located or identified, however the dimensions and reported location of the wreck match closely with the description of wreck material found at the Separation Creek Unidentified site (see entry for Separation Creek Unidentified).