

Victorian Heritage Database Report

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MYSTERY

Location

Swan Island, Port Phillip Bay

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S475

Date lost

1922

Official number

112483

Construction material

Wood

Hull

51 ft length x 13 ft 6 in beam lighter (GA 603/246/307 Secretary Dept of Defence to The Mining Engineer Officer Swan Is. 15/10/1925)

 66 ft x 14 ft approx x 5 ft (Secretary Navy Office to Mining Engineer Officer Swan Is. June 1924)

Propulsion

Steam - Unknown

Length/Breadth/Depth

51.00 Feet / 13.00 Feet / 5.30 Feet

Year of construction

1900

Built port

Sydney

Built country

Australia

Registration Port

Sydney

Date lost

1922

Departure

Swan Island

Destination

Melbourne

Cargo

Approximate value, 10 shillings (GA 603/246/307 Secretary Dept of Defence to The Mining Engineer Officer Swan Is. 15/10/1925)

Owner

Department of Defence/ Swan Island Mining Depot

Weather conditions

Stiff northerly breeze

Cause of loss

Structural defect, cement patches sprung causing leaks

Number of crew

5

Crew comments

On last trip

VHR history

In 1924 the hull of the steam launch Mystery was donated to the Department of Defence Mining Depot at Swan Island by the Ports and Harbours Department in exchange for a small hand pump .
 It was repaired using timber from the hulk S.F. Hersey and converted into a lighter for the purpose carrying benzine and fuel oil from store ships in the Explosives Anchorage, Melbourne to Swan Island.
 On 9 September 1925 the Mystery was being towed from Swan Island to Melbourne by the Depot Motor Boat No. 39 to obtain 500 gallons of benzine from the Commonwealth Oil Refineries.
 When abreast of Corio Bay, the lighter commenced to leak heavily and the coxswain returned to Swan Island. When in the Swan Island Channel, the Mystery listed to port and sank in 18 feet depth of water. The Mystery was later removed from the channel and placed in 5 feet of water about 20 yards to the north-west of the hull of the Submarine J-3. It was later found that cement patches had

lifted from the planking.
 Portions of the hull that were too heavy to lift clear of high water mark were burnt at low tide "to prevent the possibility of further breaking up and drifting to sea".
 The Age newspaper reported that "The ketch Mystery sunk 3 years ago at Swan Island for shelter at the depot has broken up and drifted into the Bay. Bows cast up at Quarantine Station and stern at Portsea, ribs and side near Dromana and Rosebud" (Age 28/9/1925).
 There is still some Mystery about the origins of the Mystery, whether it was an ex-steam launch or ketch (with engine?). It appears it may have been abandoned at Swan Island at least three years previously by Ports and harbours and expediently transferred when the Department of Defence realised it suited their needs.