

Victorian Heritage Database Report

Report generated on - 01/05/24

PRINCESS ROYAL

Location

Lonsdale Reef, Port Phillip Heads

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S542

Date lost

24/02/1849

Construction material

Wood

Propulsion

Sail

Number of masts

3

Length/Breadth/Depth

0.00 Feet / 0.00 Feet / 0.00 Feet

Date lost

24/02/1849

Departure

Hong Kong

Destination

Melbourne - Sydney

Cargo

Tea, sugar, rice ,consigned to Nankeville of Griffiths,

Master

Captain Sinclair

Weather conditions

Clear; ebb tide Heavy gale from SW

Cause of loss

Struck Lonsdale Reef and broke in half

Statement of significance

<p>Princess Royal brought out the first 200 free female immigrants to Tasmania in 1832.</p>

VHR history

The Princess Royal was wrecked as a result of the Shortlands Bluff light
 being moved. Although Captain Sinclair, the master of the vessel, was
 unaware of this at the time, he had decided to wait off the Heads until
 daylight before entering the bay and believed he was some distance out
 to sea. The Princess Royal was a 462-ton, wooden three-masted barque
 built in Bristol in 1841, and registered in Liverpool, UK. It was felt
 and yellow metalled and had had some major repairs carried out in 1845,
 as well as repairs for damage in 1848. Its dimensions are not known. It
 had sailed from Hong Kong on 17 December 1848 for Sydney, calling into
 Melbourne to receive orders from its owners Hall & Co. of London. It
 was carrying a cargo of eight cases of silk, 525 chests, 1011
 half-chests and 127 boxes of tea, 4120 bags sugar, three casks of wine
 and sundries. The Shortlands Bluff light in question had been moved
 from the top of its usual tower on to a platform between two of the
 pilots houses, where it could be obscured by the tower. Captain Sinclair
 was unaware of this when he went below with orders to the chief mate to
 heave to as soon as the light was seen. At 3 a.m. on the morning of 24
 February, in a heavy gale from the south-south-west and with an ebb
 tide, the Princess Royal struck the outer edge of the Lonsdale Reef
 three times, and broke in two on the third occasion. The captain and
 crew were lucky to escape with their lives as they had barely time to
 launch the boats. The vessel broke up immediately and little cargo was
 saved apart from a few tea chests, a small quantity of silk and a box of
 letters that floated on to shore. Captain Sinclair in a letter to the
 Lloyds agent wrote that "... the cause of this disaster is the
 light being placed on the inner island of the outer head, which serves
 as a meteor to lead a stranger into danger, instead of a guide to
 safety." However, the editor of the Geelong Advertiser was scathing
 in his judgement of the captain stating, "it is an undeniable
 fact...that no wreck has ever occurred on the shores of Port Philip
 which was not attributable to the ignorance, incapacity or recklessness
 of the captain or officer in charge...the Princess Royal was cast upon
 the rocks by a captain who saw the light, but, on his own confession,
 did not know where it was!" The vessel had totally disappeared by 1
 March, and was reportedly insured along with the cargo. The remains of
 the hull sold for £20. Identifiable remains of the wreck of the
 Princess Royal have not been located nor reported.