

Victorian Heritage Database Report

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SEA BIRD

Location

Cape Patton

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S615

Date lost

06 Mar 1895

Official number

31660

Construction material

Wood

Hull

Single deck, running bowsprit, square stern, carvel built

Propulsion

Sail

Number of masts

2

Length/Breadth/Depth

39.20 Feet / 11.00 Feet / 4.80 Feet

Builder

J.C. Miller

Year of construction

1851

Built port

Shoalhaven, NSW

Built country

Australia

Registration Number

59 of 1856

Registration Port

Melbourne

Date lost

06 Mar 1895

Departure

Apollo Bay

Destination

Melbourne

Cargo

Split posts for Portarlington, a 'large quantity' of butter and cheese for Melbourne

Owner

J.C. Miller, shipowner, Shoalhaven NSW
3/12/1856 - John Hughes and John Tudor, mariners of Williamstown
2/7/1856 - Henry Lazemby Costin and James Ovens, storekeepers of Melbourne, and Capt. Henry Jeffrey, Master Mariner of Melbourne

Master

Capt. Henry Jeffery

Weather conditions

strong south-west wind and moderate seas

Cause of loss

Went ashore in a strong south-west wind and was wrecked

Number of crew

Crew comments

Only one other crew member mentioned in sources

Statement of significance

The site of the Seabird has not been located and therefore it is not possible to assess its archaeological significance. However it has historical/ technical significance as the wreck of an Australian built vessel, which may contribute to the understanding of research questions relating to Australian-built vessels.

VHR history

The Seabird was owned by Captain Jeffery of Williamstown, Henry Lazemby Costin (described as both a storekeeper of Melbourne and hotelkeeper of Apollo Bay - he built and owned the Ballarat Hotel in Apollo Bay in 1887) and James Ovens, also a storekeeper of Melbourne. Captain Jeffery was described as having traded to Apollo Bay for six years, "and was a careful navigator" (Argus 9/3/1895). However his judgement was to let him down on his last voyage on the Seabird, from Apollo Bay to Melbourne with a cargo of split posts for Portarlinton, and a large quantity of butter and cheese for Melbourne. A strong south-west wind was blowing and a moderate sea running, which did not phase the Captain (Argus 9/3/1895). However he was unable to clear far enough out to sea upon leaving Apollo Bay in the strong south-westerly, and accordingly was blown ashore at Cape Patton, the next headland up the coast. The captain may also have been an unwitting victim of a strong coastal setting current. The crew and salvors were fortunately able to recover the sails, running gear and butter and cheese from the stricken vessel lying broadside onto the rocks, however within a couple of days the Seabird was described as "breaking up on every tide" (Argus 11/3/1895). The vessel was not insured. There is some confusion in the historical record as to whether the Seabird was a ketch or schooner, and of 13 or 17 tons gross. Although it was described as a ketch in newspaper reports its registration details record it as a schooner, indicating it may have been re-rigged at some stage in its Victorian/ Otway trading career. The Geelong Advertiser reported that: "The Seabird was a small wooden ketch of 17 tons, registered at Adelaide. She was built at Garden Island, Tasmania, in 1860, and is owned by Mr G McKay" (GA, 9 March 1895). However these details are incorrect, as this Seabird was a schooner built in Shoalhaven, New South Wales in 1851, and was registered in Melbourne (see Parsons, 1988; A.S.R.O. 1855-1859). This is confirmed by the registry entry for this Seabird, closed on 9 April 1896 with the notation "Wrecked at Cape Patton, Victoria near Lorne on 6 March 1895" (A.S.R.O. Melbourne Registry, 59 of 1856). The remains of the Seabird have not been located not reported, though little is predicted to remain of a 44 year old wooden vessel that has lain in such an exposed location for over 100 years. Any remains that have remained on the shoreline and in the intertidal zone may also have been buried by naturally occurring landslides, and collapsed fill as a result of the construction and ongoing maintenance works to the Great Ocean Road.