

Victorian Heritage Database Report

Report generated on - 30/09/24

SOUTH MILTON



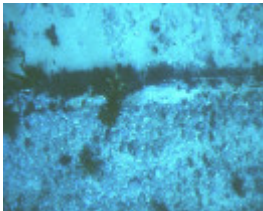
S625 SouthMilton
BarwonHeadsCharlemontReef
DiverOnWreck Jan1984



S625 SouthMilton
BarwonHeadsCharlemontReef
Anchor Jan1984



S625 SouthMilton
BarwonHeadsCharlemontReef
Artefact Jan1984



S625 SouthMilton
BarwonHeadsCharlemontReef
Topview Jan1984

Location

Barwon Heads, Charlemont Reef

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S625

Date lost

10/04/1886

Official number

76345

Construction material

Wood

Hull

Wood; rear quarter deck - length 35 ft; forecastle -length 16 ft; one deck; 2 tiers beams; salted; felt& yellow metalled.

Propulsion

Sail

Number of masts

3

Length/Breadth/Depth

159.00 Feet / 30.70 Feet / 17.90 Feet

Builder

J. Crown

Year of construction

1877

Built port

Sunderland

Built country

England

Registration Port

Salcombe, Devonshire

Date lost

10/04/1886

Departure

Cardiff - Port Louis, Mauritius

Destination

Melbourne

Cargo

840 tons sugar, insured for 22,000 pounds, consigned to Fanning, Nankivell & Co., Melbourne.

Owner

Balkwill & Co., Knightsbridge, Devon (owned fleet of 10 vessels)
 Capt. H. Trinnick (300 pounds interest, uninsured)

Master

1883-1886: Captain Henry Trinnick

Weather conditions

Heavy groundswell, fine night; slightly hazy; no moon; water smooth

Cause of loss

careless navigation

Number of crew

16

Crew comments

Chief Officer, Thomas Blank; Second Mate, Thomas R. Collins/ Collings; Apprentice (and Captain's nephew), John Trinnick; Thomas Field, boy (sick with Mauritius fever), Charles Carlson, seaman (rescued Thomas Field, steering at time vessel struck); three

Statement of significance

<p>The South Milton has historical and archaeological significance as the wreck of an inward bound international merchant ship, although the site does not retain a high level of integrity being easily accessible by boat and having been extensively visited over the years. It represents the remains of a typical 19th century British built wooden sailing vessel ie: representative of a type.</p>

VHR history

Captain Trinnick, commanding the 607 ton barque South Milton, had never visited Port Phillip before. This combination of masters' unfamiliarity and the natural hazards of Port Phillip Heads, when arriving at night, are to blame for many of the Heads wrecks.

 Originally commencing its voyage from Cardiff, Wales, and thirty-five days out from Port Louis, Mauritius, the South Milton arrived at Cape Otway at 12pm on 9 April 1886, and set a north-easterly course for Port Phillip Heads. It had on board a cargo of Mauritius sugar insured for 22,000 pounds. As afternoon and then night fell, weather conditions were hazy with a heavy swell, and a light westerly breeze blowing (Argus 16/4/1886). There was no moon, and the South Milton slowly sailed towards Port Phillip Heads with all sails set except for the royals. At 2.30am a fixed light was seen, and it was thought to be the Cape Schanck light or a pilot boat light. Captain Trinnick hove the vessel to and took a sounding, finding no bottom with 18 fathoms (33 metres) of the lead out. Shortly after this land was sighted to leeward - sounding again he found bottom at 6 fathoms (11 metres), and immediately ordered the yards squared and the helm put up.

 Thomas Collings, the second mate, described the following events:

 " I was on deck at the time the vessel struck....at once the captain altered the course in a southerly direction, and he squared the mainyard, the wind being then full and right aft. Three minutes afterwards she struck a second time, amidships, and so heavily that the bottom boards were smashed in. She remained on the reef about ten minutes, and afterwards she swung right off into deep water. Immediately the vessel struck the captain burned a blue light. The look-out man forward (Captain Trinnick's nephew John Trinnick) did not report anything prior to the vessel's striking. While she was on the reef three heavy seas swept over her, and I was washed off the poop, and landed upon the main deck under some spare spars, spraining my left arm. The sea kept breaking over the vessel, and we had to take to the rigging. When she swung into deep water the pumps were sounded, and as we found the hold was nearly full of water, the captain directed us to lower the boats. Something like half an hour elapsed before we got clear of the vessel. The captain was the last to leave her. She was then sinking forward, and the stern was almost out of the water. The compressed atmosphere burst up the quarter-deck with a loud report,

hurling everything high into the air. The captain's Newfoundland dog perished. We had only got about 30 feet from the ship when she plunged forward, and went down head-first. It was all we could do to prevent being sucked down by the swirl" (Argus 12/4/1886).
During what would have been the confusing and terrifying moments on the reef as the crew gamely struggled for their own lives, one of the seamen, Charles Carlson, acted bravely by saving the life of one of the apprentices who was sick with 'Mauritus fever', bringing him on deck and placing him first in the rigging, and later in a boat.
The South Milton's boats with all the crew safely aboard were picked up by the pilot schooner Rip (the light mistaken for the Cape Schanck lighthouse as it 'revolved', bobbing in the heavy swell) and taken to Queenscliff, where they were inspected by the Health Officer and thence towed across to the Portsea Quarantine Station.
The submerged wreck of the South Milton was described as having just the topsails showing, with the 'exploded' section of poop deck caught in the rigging.
Mr James Miller of the steamer Avon, which was salvaging the wreck of the George Roper (1883) on Lonsdale Reef, reported that "during the afternoon, the South Milton, which had first been submerged to the topsails...disappeared completely and shortly afterwards went to pieces, the deck rising to the surface of the water and the top hamper, masts and other gear being gradually washed shorewards" (GA 12/4/1886). The government steamer Despatch was sent to the scene to search for and retrieve any floating wreckage and a warning was issued to mariners (Argus 12/4/1886).
Captain Trinnick's nephew John, the look-out, later reported that he saw land ahead ten minutes before the vessel struck "but did not report that because he thought all on board knew there was land ahead" (Argus 16/4/1886).
Despite Captain Trinnick arguing that he believed he was 25 miles from Port Phillip Heads as he could see no lights, that he did not check the log as he had perfect confidence in his chief officer (but now doubted that the steering had not been carried out to his orders), and that there must have been a coastal setting current, a Victorian Steam Navigation Board Inquiry sustained a charge of careless navigation, and cancelled his Board of Trade master's certificate for three months (Argus 21/4/1886). Their reasons were that Captain Trinnick had not used reasonable care and precaution when approaching the Heads, had not taken bearings of the Cape Schanck light, verifying those bearing with soundings, and not turning his vessel's course to the southward when he became doubtful of his position (Argus 16/4/1886).
The site is recorded to have been found by abalone diver Bob Bruce, while working a patch of reef when he noticed iron and copper alloy shipwreck material concreted into the reef (Denmead: 72). Today, following visits from divers over the last 20 years, nearly all of the valuable artefacts and copper alloy fastenings and sheathing have disappeared from the site. However the site is still an interesting dive. Lying in 17 metres, and depending on sand movement, a lot of major ironwork including concreted stud link chain, chainplates (iron strapping and stays with wooden deadeyes, mounted to the hull to carry the standing rigging), and cargo hatch coamings are evident.
The most striking features of the site are two iron anchors 8 metres apart, lying apparently as if still stowed. A third anchor lies 40 metres north - all appear to be best bower anchors for a vessel over 250 tons (MHU Wreck Inspection Report). Among artefacts known to have been recovered are a signal gun and swivel mount, a ship's navigation lantern and numerous copper alloy drift bolt fastenings.