

Victorian Heritage Database Report

Report generated on - 09/10/24

SUSSEX

Location

Point Nepean, Port Phillip Heads

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S635

Date lost

26/08/1870

Official number

32123

Construction material

Wood

Hull

2 decks, square stern, carvel built, female figure head

Propulsion

Sail

Number of masts

3

Length/Breadth/Depth

109.00 Feet / 27.10 Feet / 18.40 Feet

Year of construction

1831

Built port

Smithtown, Sussex

Built country

Engalnd

Registration Number

1 of 1865

Registration Port

Geelong

Date lost

26/08/1870

Departure

Newcastle

Destination

Geelong

Cargo

Coal

Owner

P. Huddart, from 14.8.1865

Master

Captain W. Gregory

Weather conditions

Slight sea

Cause of loss

Struck Nepean Reef

Number of crew

10

VHR history

A 332-ton gross, three-masted wooden barque, the Sussex, inward bound from Newcastle with a cargo of coal, was wrecked at Point Nepean just three days after the wreck of the Yarrow, also inward bound with a cargo of coal from Newcastle, on Point Lonsdale,. It was built in Sussex, UK, with two decks, a square stern and

dimensions of 118.6 x 27 x 17.2 feet (36.1 x 8.2 x 5.2 metres). It had been owned by Peter Huddart of Geelong since 14 August 1865 and was registered in Geelong. It was a regular trader on the Newcastle to Geelong run, and had been in Geelong 36 times since its first visit to the port in 1865. Some time previously had struck portion of sunken wreck of Lightning and had not been examined before leaving port. It had weathered many storms over its long career and it was, perhaps, as well that she has at last laid her old bones without causing any loss of life.

After transporting 15 tons of hay from Geelong to Newcastle, the Sussex left Newcastle on 8 August and arrived off the Heads at 4 a.m. on 26 August 1870, Captain William Gregory left his second mate, Charles Seepy, in charge while he went below. In the Rip and steering for the lights in the light south-easterly breeze and slight swell, Seepy later reported that the vessel did not answer the helm, but he did not rouse the captain as he did not think there was any danger of striking the reef. However, at 5 a.m., the vessel struck the extreme end of Nepean Reef. By 7.30 a.m., the Sussex had water up to its decks and the 10 crew safely got away in the ships boats after salvaging some sails and rigging. The pilots and Queenscliff lifeboat attended the scene but their services were not required.

By 11a.m. the tide had come in and increased the swell and the Sussex was washed over on to its broadside. Half an hour later it somersaulted and was turned keel up and the masts and hull were smashed to pieces. It broke up and disappeared during the course of the day and wreckage floated up the South Channel. The government steamer SS Pharos was kept busy towing floating portions of both the Sussex and the Yarrow that were impeding navigation into Swan Bay contemporary reports said that the port quarter and about 50 feet (15.2 metres) of the deck of the Sussex were towed into Swan Bay.

The Marine Board Inquiry found that the second mate Seepy did not know the correct bearings to enter the Heads (though he had been hundreds of times in and out of the Heads.) It also found Captain Gregory held a pilot-exempt certificate (but as he was not a certified ships master could not be suspended) and that he should have been on deck at the time of the Sussex entering the Heads. The Board recommended that the Government should stipulate that it be compulsory for all masters to have certificates of competency in order to leave the port.

The site of the Sussex has not been identified one possible location is an area of coal and rudder gudgeons lying in gutters west of Beacon Rock that could also be the remains of the Pryde.