

# Victorian Heritage Database Report

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## THETIS

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### Location

Lonsdale Reef, Port Phillip Heads

### Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S667

### Date lost

26/05/1848

### Construction material

Wood

### Hull

1 deck; standing bowsprit; square stern; carvel built; no galleries; woman bust head.

### Propulsion

Sail

### Number of masts

2

### Length/Breadth/Depth

66.10 Feet / 18.40 Feet / 9.60 Feet

### Builder

Christopher Brown

### Year of construction

1847

### Built port

Moruya River, NSW

**Built country**

Australia

**Registration Number**

84 of 1847

**Registration Port**

Sydney

**Date lost**

26/05/1848

**Departure**

Sydney

**Destination**

Melbourne

**Cargo**

Iron, lead, wire, beer, timber, foodstuffs

**Owner**

John Rayner, inn keeper, of Sydney

**Master**

Alexander Collins

**Weather conditions**

SW; thick squally weather; low tide.

**Cause of loss**

Struck reef

**Passenger comments**

4 cabin, 10 steerage

**Number of crew**

10

**VHR history**

The Thetis is the first vessel known to be wrecked on Lonsdale Reef. It was a 95-ton, two-masted wooden schooner built at Moruya River on the south coast of New South Wales (NSW) by Christopher Brown. It had dimensions of 66.1 x 18.4 x 9.6 feet (20.1 x 5.6 x 2.9 metres), was carvel-built with one deck, a standing bowsprit, and a square stern. The cabin area was comfortably fitted out with space for eight passengers, and overall is of very tasty build, and a neat specimen of colonial art. Its owner was John Rayner, a Sydney innkeeper, and the master was Alexander Collins. It was a new vessel valued at £2000 but was uninsured, and on this, its fifth and last voyage, was sailing from Sydney to Melbourne with a general cargo of iron, lead, wire, beer, tea, wine, timber and foodstuffs, 10 crew, four cabin and 10 steerage passengers.

The Thetis had a stormy passage after leaving Sydney and was compelled to seek shelter in Twofold Bay, New South Wales for three days. It left Twofold Bay on 14 May 1848 in the company of two other vessels and arrived in thick squally weather and a south-westerly wind on Friday 26 May. Collins had eight look-outs posted as he attempted to enter the Heads at about 9 p.m., bearing in correctly on a course north-by-north-east. Despite this, the Thetis struck the outer edge of Lonsdale Reef with a terrific shock and heeled over on to its beam ends with seas washing over the deck. Fortunately, the tide was out and the masts were overhanging the reef so that passengers could clamber on to the dry rock. Tragically, during this operation, the two children of an emigrant family were washed away in the darkness and drowned.

Two crew members took a dinghy in search of land which they knew from the sound and direction of breakers must be nearby. They did not reach land, but found an intermediate reef which offered more safety than the exposed outer reef and, two hours later, all survivors had been ferried to this location, and from thence to a third reef from where land could be seen. The distraught emigrant parents of the drowned children, travelling to Melbourne in search of work, themselves died of exposure and shock on this intermediate reef. They were not clad to withstand the heavy rain and intense cold and suffered from exhaustion after two hours of exertion. All the other passengers and crew survived, though nothing was saved from the wreck.

The hull was reportedly breaking up fast by 1 June and chests of tea still floating about inside the Heads, but salvage was ruled out because of the heavy conditions. The remains of the wreck were sold at auction to a Mr Raleigh for £30 (possibly Mr Joseph Raleigh, a Melbourne shipowner and merchant, who also bought the hull of the Sophia, stranded on Point Nepean five days later).

The site has not been positively located or identified, though some iron on the east side of Lonsdale Reef may constitute the remains of the Thetis. Substantial iron on the cargo manifest included angle iron and iron pipes, also one cask of pitch and two of tar. A child's pelvic bone has been found on Lonsdale Reef that may be possibly be the remains of one of the unfortunate children who drowned, while iron found on the eastern edge of Lonsdale Reef may constitute remnants of the cargo.