

Victorian Heritage Database Report

Report generated on - 11/10/24

WOLLOMAI



S733 Woolomai ApolloBay
Artefact MJ



S733 Woolomai ApolloBay
WoodenSlatRemnants MJ

Location

Mounts Bay

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S733

Date lost

04/06/1923

Official number

74645

Construction material

Wood

Hull

One deck, square stern, carvel built, billet head

Propulsion

Sail

Number of masts

Length/Breadth/Depth

107.60 Feet / 23.60 Feet / 9.50 Feet

Builder

Robert Kennedy

Year of construction

1876

Built port

Yarra Bank

Built country

Australia

Registration Number

8 of 1882

Registration Port

Adelaide

Date lost

04/06/1923

Departure

Burnie, Tasmania

Destination

Adelaide, South Australia

Cargo

Palings, posts, apples & kerosene

Owner

James Howard O Neill, master mariner, of St Kilda (22/64 shares), A. Le Messurier (28/64 shares), E. Le Messurier (14/64 shares) shipping agents of Port Adelaide.

Master

Captain O Neill

Weather conditions

south-east gale force winds and heavy seas

Cause of loss

weather, blown ashore in SE gale

Passenger comments

Mrs O'Neill (Capt O'Neill's wife)

Number of crew

7

Statement of significance

<p>The Wollomai has archaeological and technical significance as it is likely to be a well preserved example of a late 19th century Victorian/ Australian-built coastal trading ketch, and is therefore representative of this type or class of vessel.</p>

VHR history

The Wollomai had a long career as a regular Bass Strait trader, and was one of hundreds of brigantines, ketches and schooners known as the 'Mosquito Fleet'. It was built at Yarra Bank, Melbourne in 1876 by shipbuilder Robert Kennedy and operated from Melbourne until 1882, when its registry was transferred to Adelaide. One report stated that the 'Woolomai' was previously known as the Little Angelina built in 1912 with an oil-powered engine of 26 horsepower, with dimensions of 59 x 16 x 5 feet (GA 8/6/1912), however this is incorrect as it refers to a different vessel.

 On its last voyage the Wollomai was carrying a full cargo of timber palings, posts, apples and kerosene from Burnie to Adelaide when it was caught in a week of fierce south-easterly gales. A report from Queenscliff was that the gales were the worst in many years, on one occasion during the week the pilot steamer Victoria was compelled to board one pilot on an incoming ship at the Quarantine Ground - after it had already entered Port Phillip: "...in the long history of the Victorian sea pilots this has only been done about six times, which will give some idea of the sea that was running" (GA 6/6/1912). Trees and fences were blown down and heavy rain and flooding was encountered in the Otways. Timber tramlines connecting Otway saw mills to the coast were "badly affected" with no less than twenty bridges washed away, along with miles of fencing and two workmens' huts, "the occupants being rescued with difficulty" (GA 7/6/1912).
 At Apollo Bay a new concrete bridge built by the Country Roads Board at a cost of 3000 pounds was wrecked, and the Apollo Bay jetty was damaged with repairs estimated to cost 5000 pounds (GA 8/12/1912).

 The same winds rendered the Wollomai unmanageable and drove the vessel ashore in Mounts Bay, just south of Apollo Bay, in the evening darkness of 4 June. The Wollomai's distress signals were observed at Apollo Bay and the rocket crew consisting of a superintendent and fifteen men set out with their apparatus at 8pm. Due to the rain and flooding of the Barham River a five mile (and five hour) detour wading through waist deep water was necessary. The rocket crew finally reached Mounts Bay beach and secured a line to the wreck lying 50 yards offshore at 1am, which was being battered by huge seas. In an operation the volunteer rocket crew were officially praised for by the Wollomai's Captain O'Neill, Police Constable J.B. Hayward of Apollo Bay, and the Acting Minister for Public Works Mr Pennington, the crew and a female passenger (Captain O'Neill's wife) were all brought safely ashore. Captain O'Neill was the last person to be brought ashore at 3am (GA 8/6/1912; 13/6/1912).

 A local syndicate purchased the wreck and its cargo, salvaging large quantities of timber palings and sections of the vessel.
 The Wollomai's windlass and some attached deck planking is occasionally visible in the intertidal zone at Mounts Bay. A probe and magnetometer survey undertaken by the Maritime Heritage Unit in December 1987 determined that further remains lie buried and the lower part of the vessel is likely to be well preserved.