

Victorian Heritage Database Report

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Geelong Punt

Location

Barwon River

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S831

Date lost

Jun 1839

Construction material

Other

Hull

wooden flat bottomed ferry/ punt, shipped in frame to Geelong, sheathed and coppered

Length/Breadth/Depth

20.00 Feet / 10.00 Feet / 2.25 Feet

Builder

Mr Thomas Harper, master boat builder

Year of construction

1839

Built port

Sydney

Built country

Australia

Date lost

Jun 1839

Cause of loss

unfit for use, sank

VHR history

"Tender for the erection of a punt at Geelong
The length of the punt on deck to be twenty feet and breadth eight feet, to taper to the flat of the bottom on the side, and round to the bottom on the ends, to be three feet in depth from deck to bottom outside, to have a flap door two feet six inches broad on each end, attached by strong hinges, to be planked outside by inch-and-half pine, and lined inside by one inch stringy bark boards, to have on each side a rail three feet high and done with quarter. The hull of the punt to be lathed and pitched inside and outside and to be furnished with two pair of wooden block wheels two feet diameter and two wooden axles. The whole to be done in a substantial and workmanlike manner for the sum of 129 pounds sterling.
John Grant
James Landles"
NSW Archives
A wooden punt was required to construct a dam across the Barwon River. Tenders were let in Melbourne but the contract went to a Sydney shipbuilder Thomas Harper, and the punt was sent in frame to Geelong by the schooner Devonshire.
Thomas Harper had previously built two similar punts for the Nepean River for the government, and several others for private individuals.
Foster Fyans did not supervise the work and the end result was "quite unfit for the purpose required, being in every respect different to the order given, in shape and dimensions, and in my opinion if the contractor thought fit to please his fancy in building a thing not required and differed so widely from the instructions, that no loss should attach to the Government.
My absence prevented me paying attention to the work, and man employed, that I am not surprised to find the vessel totally unfit for any use. I have only five men, it would occupy their time to keep her floating, which they found it impossible to do, and it now lays in the river, sunk."
Foster Fyans to Col. Sec. 8 August 1839
The punt was intended for construction work, and the ferry punt provided was not up to the task of "conveying stone and other material for the proposed dam on the Barwon River, and also intended to be moved to Corio to throw out a landing pier. The punt which was forwarded is purposely built for conveying cattle and drays, termed a passage punt, with a deck and rails on the side, and considerably broader and shallower."
Foster Fyans to Col. Sec. 17 September 1839
The Colonial Government stated that the punt was not built to tender, and any loss must be occasioned to fall on the contractor "which will certainly be a serious loss to him".
John Nicholson to Col. Sec. 6 November 1839
John Nicholson also stated that part of the blame must reside with Foster Fyans for not supervising the work, and thereby being unable to request alterations during the construction stage as would have been most convenient.