

Basic Detail Report



Portland Lifeboat

Vessel number

HV000273

Date

1858

Primary Maker

Victorian Government Ports and Harbours Division.

Description

Built in 1858 at the Port and Harbour Master's yard in Williamstown Victoria, the Portland Lifeboat was overseen by Harbour Master Charles Ferguson. It is understood to have been constructed from the same moulds used to build the Port Fairy Lifeboat, designed by William White, in 1857. Both boats are similar to the lifeboats designed in England by James Peake and adopted by the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) in the UK. The Portland Lifeboat's 9.14 m (30 ft) long hull is double diagonally planked in New Zealand kauri, and many of the planks run from gunwale to gunwale in one piece under the inner keel section. Eucalyptus and oregon were used elsewhere and the local blacksmith made the iron work. The fastenings are copper. There are two flotation or buoyancy tanks at either end, with prominent whaleback style decking. Under the thwarts is a deck with scuppers so that the craft is both buoyant and self draining whenever large waves are taken aboard in rough conditions. The lifeboat was oar-powered with a sailing rig. The original rig was a lug mainsail, but this was replaced with a lug and headsail rig taken from a fishing boat in 1903. The lifeboat was manned by volunteer crews, mostly local fishermen from Portland. They maintained this service until 1915 when the boat was replaced with a new motorised craft. The lifeboat's most outstanding service was to the steamer ADMELLA in 1859 when the ship grounded on a reef off Cape Banks in South Australia, 150 km to the west of Portland. Survivors clung to the rigging in heavy seas for over a week and 89 people lost their lives in the shipwreck. Taken to the scene by the steamer LADY BIRD, the Portland Lifeboat was unable to assist until eight days after the ADMELLA's grounding when the seas abated enough for the lifeboat to manoeuvre close to the ship and rescue the last 19 survivors. Since its retirement in 1915 the lifeboat has been a memorial to those who manned it and those it rescued. For a long period it was on display in the Portland Gardens, first in the open and then under a canopy. In 2008 it was on display inside the Portland Maritime Discovery Centre, still in original condition complete with the rig from 1915. It is one of the oldest vessels of its type in Australia, and the world.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 9.14 m x 2.29 m x 0.46 m, 3.94 tonnes (30 ft x 7.5 ft x 1.5 ft, 4 tons)