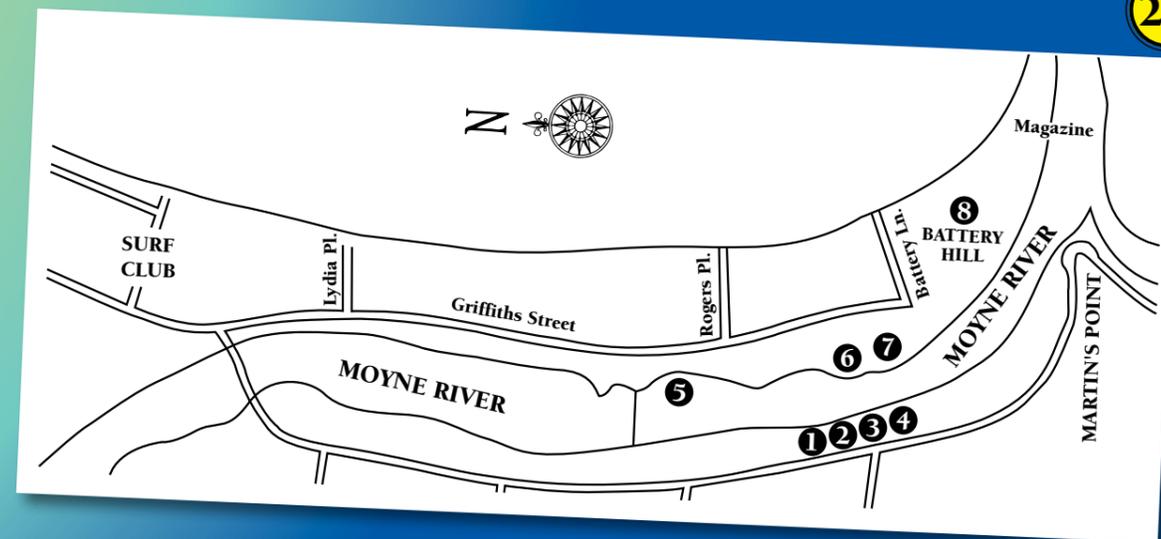


# PORT FAIRY

# Maritime & Shipwreck Heritage Walk



If you had been at King George Square on March 30th, 1888, you would have witnessed the arrival of the Warrnambool detachment of the Volunteer militia to practise with their Belfast rivals at the Battery. You would also have seen the volunteers at the Lifeboat Station practising a breeches buoy rescue and subsequently launching the lifeboat. On the wharves, there was activity in preparation for the arrival of the steamers, Casino and Dawn, the following day, bringing passengers and cargo from Melbourne. This walk will take you past these sites and explain their significance in the community life at that time and why they are important today and on to some of the shipwreck locations in the bay.

## 1. THE PORT

Ships originally anchored in the bay, transferring their passengers and cargo to the port area by boats and lighters (either sailing or towed barges), because the river's entrance was too shallow. The west bank of the Moyne included a number of warehouses and jetties, as well as the public wharf and government facilities at King George Square. The Customs House (opposite the Casino Memorial) in Gipps Street, the adjacent Court House (History Centre) and the Gaol (now demolished) were vital government functions centred around the square.

## 2. PORT SERVICES

The round-topped wooden shed was originally erected in 1863 as a goods shed and terminus for the tramway that crossed the river and ran along Battery Lane onto a jetty in the bay. The jetty was ineffective due to its siting and quickly fell into disrepair. The bridge was demolished in 1873 and the shed located closer to the river. The shed was repositioned a third time when the railway



was extended to the Square and it was then used by the Fisherman's Co-operative. It is the only such general purpose government port building surviving in Victoria. The railway line ran through the back of the Steam Packet Wharf buildings and then crossed Gipps Street at Cox Street. Government vessels (the Customs and the Harbour Master's boats) and the buoy boat were moored near the crane at the south end of the (public) wharf.

## 3. RIVER WAREHOUSE AND MILLS

Before you proceed along the jetty (upstream), note the bluestone two storeyed building on the southern boundary of the Square which was the Moyne Steam Flour Mill, built in 1860. It was originally four storeys high, with extensive storage buildings alongside, but it had a short and unsuccessful life as a flour mill. As you join the elevated jetty, note the bluestone lower storey of the grey house adjacent to the square (on your left) which was part of the Steam Packet Wharf, the berth of the BKSN steamers, while the property next door was originally the teamster's yard. The cut-off piles between the shore and the jetty are the stumps of the original jetty, badly damaged in the flood of 1946. There were further privately owned loading jetties upstream, such as Rutledge's jetty and Challacombe & Bishop's jetty.



## 4. THE CASINO MEMORIAL

The steamer Casino was purchased by the Belfast & Koroit Steam Navigation Company (BKSN) in 1882 for £14,250 to ensure that the trade in agricultural produce flowing via Port Fairy would not be captured by the steamer companies operating from Portland and Warrnambool. The BKSN was particularly successful in this, outlasting its rivals, until voluntarily liquidated before World War 2. The Casino traded between Melbourne, Apollo Bay, Warrnambool, Port Fairy and Portland and, after 50 years of service, sank at Apollo Bay on Sunday morning, July 10th 1932. In gale conditions the Casino attempted to berth at the Apollo Bay jetty; however, despite several attempts the steamer sustained extensive damage and foundered. Ten lives were lost. The vessel's propeller was recovered as the centrepiece of the memorial. The lifeboat bell, which surmounts the cairn, was originally hung on Flagstaff Hill in 1873, to be rung to summon the volunteer crew when required.

## 5. THE SWINGING BASIN

(east side of the river)  
Bringing large vessels into the river provides protection against shipwreck (which was a not uncommon outcome when they anchored in the bay) but a turning circle (swinging basin) was required to allow the vessels to proceed to sea again. This was cut into the eastern bank of the Moyne

and was undertaken at the same time as the plans of Sir John Coode, the English harbour engineer, were adopted to improve the function of the western ports. A hundred years later, the swinging basin was converted into a yacht marina. Climb the steps, cross the bridge and turn right. As you cross the bridge you can see on your left Goble's Mill (flour) which had a jetty for loading flour onto lighters.

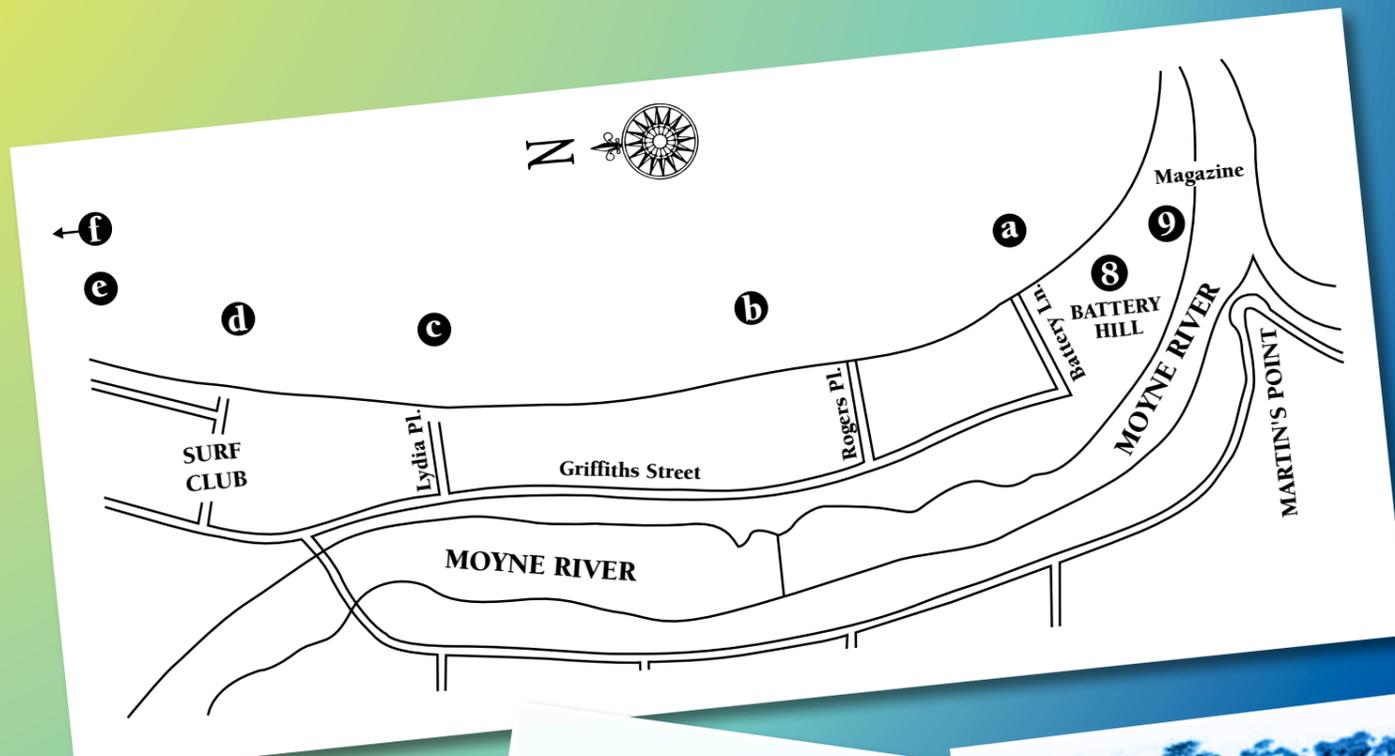
## 6. THE PORT OF PORT FAIRY

The Port of Port Fairy (a local committee of management for port facilities) now controls the original government Ports and Harbours Dept. assets which include two slipways, the lighthouse and navigation facilities. The government funded the blasting and dredging of the Moyne and the construction of the extensive training walls, designed to project the river flow into the bay, and reduce the need for dredging. The large slipway within the Port compound is widely used by fishing boats around the western coast and was first cut about 1890.



## 7. THE HISTORIC LIFEBOAT STATION

The wooden round-topped lifeboat house was originally built on the jetty projecting from East Beach near Battery Lane in 1862, but was dismantled and re-erected in the current location in 1873 and was fitted with a slipway to launch the lifeboat. The lifeboat was built in Williamstown, Victoria, and was delivered here in September 1857, making it the oldest surviving self-righting lifeboat in the world. It was restored in 1997 and is regularly launched by a community crew for exercise and to foster the town's maritime connection. The bluestone rocket house contains a collection of 19th century maritime rescue equipment. The collection of buildings, artefacts and lifeboat is exceptional, preserved as they were in 1888. The Historic Lifeboat Station is open for inspection during holiday periods and by appointment at the Visitor Information Centre.



## THE SHIPWRECKS

The bay and the surrounding waters host 17 shipwrecks, although none is necessarily visible at any time. The bulk of disasters were due to ships being driven ashore on East Beach when strong south-easterly winds caused them to drag their anchors. The moving sands in the bay often cover the wrecks' remains. All wrecks are protected as Historic Shipwrecks and removal of any material is punishable by a large fine and/or imprisonment.

Walking along the beach towards the Surf Life Saving Club, you pass the sites of:-

- a. Essington, a two-masted brig, 123 tons, built in Sydney in 1826. While anchored and with a cargo of coal, she began to take water and was run ashore near Battery Lane in May 1852 and became a total wreck. Small pieces of coal are still washed ashore, particularly after rough weather.
- b. Thistle, a two masted schooner of 58 tons, was built in Bengal, India in 1825 and blown ashore on Christmas Day, 1837. It was loaded with wattlebark (for tanning) for Launceston, Tasmania. This vessel had previously carried Edward Henty and others to Portland in November, 1834 to establish Victoria's first permanent settlement. (Wreck site off Rogers Place).
- c. Lydia, a 3 masted barque of 277 tons, built at Liverpool, England, in 1825 had called at Port Fairy en route from Sydney to London and was run ashore ahead of a south-easterly in February, 1847. Large sections of her hull were removed for the timber. (Wreck site off Lydia Place).
- d. Socrates, a 3 masted barque, 152 tons, built at Scarborough, England,

in 1821 was blown ashore after discharging her livestock cargo in August, 1843 in the vicinity of the present Surf Life Saving Club. Her master returned to Port Fairy 10 years later and established a lightering business and the Steam Packet Wharf.

- e. Eliza, a 2 masted schooner, 94 tons, was built at Port Arthur, Tasmania, in 1834 and was blown ashore (slightly north of the present Surf Life Saving Club) in December, 1866 when in trade carrying potatoes. The hull was sold to a local lighterman.
- f. Sarah Louisa, a brig was lost on 6th July 1849. The full force of a July storm caught the Sarah Louisa as she was about to sail for London fully laden with wheat and tallow. She was driven across the bay, the lifeboat crew were summoned to assist and saved all but two of the crew, the steward and the cook. (Off Connolly Street)

Other wrecks in the bay include Diana (1844), Lady Mary Pelham (1849), Sir John Byng (1852), Inellan (1854), Dundee (1854), and Balmoral (1868). Off Griffiths Island and the south coast lie Dusty Miller (1842), Squatter (1846), Swift (1855) and Waterlily (1870).

## 8. BATTERY HILL

Originally known as Flagstaff Hill, the mound served as the Harbour Master's signal point for shipping. Concerned for the protection of the State from foreign warships (and landing parties), the government encouraged local militia units to establish gun batteries. The militia continued (although the defensive capability of their contribution is doubtful) and the size of the guns increased from 32 to 68, and finally 80 pounders, the latter ultimately located in the concrete fortifications which were completed in 1887. The earlier smooth bore cannons are located in the cannon park and the collection of such weapons is exceptional.

## 9. THE POWDER MAGAZINE

(adjacent to the river wall, opposite Martin's Point)  
The bluestone powder magazine was built in 1860 as a repository for explosives brought to the port for use in civil construction and farming works. The vaulted ceiling was constructed to limit the effect of any accidental explosion. Follow the path through the vegetation to the steps leading to the East Beach.

## 11. GRIFFITHS ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE

From the dune at Lydia Place, you can see the lighthouse, built in 1859 at the tip of Rabbit Island (subsequently linked with Griffiths Island) to allow seamen to locate the bay. The outline of the light station is marked by the Norfolk Island Pine rows, and there were two bluestone keepers' cottages standing by the causeway to the lighthouse until 1956.

## BRIG & BRIGANTINES

Brigs are two-masted sailing vessels with square sails on each mast, also fore and aft sails. Brigantines also have two masts, the foremast being square rigged and the main mast fore and aft rigged.

## SCHOONERS

The topsail schooner with two or more masts fore and aft rigged also carried square sails on the fore topmast. Fore and aft schooners had two or more masts all fore and aft rigged.

## BARQUES & BARQUENTINES

Vessels having three or more masts, square rigged on all but the aftermast, which is fore and aft rigged. Barquentines had three masts but carried square rigging on the foremast only, with staysails between the fore and main masts.

*Maritime & Shipwreck  
Heritage Walk*