

THE WRECK OF THE LOCH ARD & THE LOCH ARD PEACOCK

Loch Ard was bound for Melbourne in 1878 loaded with passengers and cargo when it ran into a rocky reef at the base of Mutton Bird Island, near Port Campbell. Of the 54 crew members and passengers on board, only two survived: an apprentice, Tom Pearce and a young woman passenger, Eva Carmichael, who lost all of her family in the tragedy. The wreck of Loch Ard still lies at the base of Mutton Bird Island and much of the cargo has been salvaged. Some was washed up into what is now known as Loch Ard Gorge following the shipwreck. Cargo and artefacts have also been illegally salvaged over many years before protective legislation was introduced.

Minton Loch Ard Peacock One of the most unlikely pieces of cargo to have survived the shipwreck was a Minton porcelain peacock - one of only nine in the world. The peacock was destined for the Melbourne International Exhibition in 1880. Thankfully, it was well packed which in no doubt gave it adequate protection during the violent storm which battered the stricken Loch Ard.

Today, the Minton peacock can be seen at the Flagstaff Hill Maritime Museum in Warrnambool. From Australia's most dramatic shipwreck it has now become Australia's most valuable shipwreck artefact and is one of very few 'objects' on the Victorian State Heritage Register. Valued at over \$4 million dollars, this priceless piece is a must see during your visit to Warrnambool and journey along the Great Ocean Road.

The Loch Ard's Final Voyage

The Loch Ard left England on March 2, 1878, under the command of Captain Gibbs, a newly married, 29 year old. The ship carried a general cargo which reflected the affluence of Melbourne at the time. On board were straw hats, umbrella, perfumes, clay pipes, pianos, clocks, confectionary, linen and candles, as well as a heavier load of railway irons, cement, lead and copper. Loch Ard also had a crew of 37, and 17 passengers. The voyage to Port Phillip was long but uneventful. At 3am on June 1, 1878, Captain Gibbs was expecting to see land and the passengers were becoming excited as they prepared to view their new homeland in the early morning. But Loch Ard was running into a fog which greatly reduced visibility. Captain Gibbs was becoming anxious as there was no sign of land or the Cape Otway lighthouse.

At 4am the fog lifted. A man aloft announced that he could see breakers. The sheer cliffs of Victoria's west coast came into view, and Captain Gibbs realised that the ship was much closer to them than expected. He ordered as much sail to be set as time would permit and then attempted to steer the boat out to sea.

On coming head on into the wind, the ship lost momentum, the sails fell limp and Loch Ard's bow swung back. Gibbs then ordered the anchors to be released in an attempt to hold its position. The anchors sank some 50 fathoms - but did not hold. By this time Loch Ard was among the breakers, and the tall cliffs of Mutton Bird Island rose behind the ship. Just half a mile from the coast, the ship's bow was suddenly pulled around by the anchor. The captain tried to tack out to sea, but the ship struck a reef running out from Mutton Bird Island. Waves broke over the ship and the top deck was loosened from the hull. The masts and rigging came crashing down knocking passengers and crew overboard. It took time to free the lifeboats and when one was finally launched, it crashed into the side of Loch Ard and capsized.

Tom Pearce, who had launched the boat, managed to cling to its overturned hull and shelter beneath it. He drifted out to sea and then on the flood tide came into what is now known as Loch Ard Gorge. He swam to shore, bruised and dazed and found a cave in which to shelter. Some of the crew stayed below deck to shelter from the falling rigging but drowned when the ship slipped off the reef into deeper water. Eva Carmichael had raced onto deck to find out what was happening only to be confronted by towering cliffs looming above the stricken ship. In all the chaos, Captain Gibbs grabbed Eva and said, "if you are saved Eva, let my dear wife know that I died like a sailor". That was the last Eva Carmichael saw of the captain. She was swept off the ship by a huge wave.

(Tom Pearce & Eva Carmichael)

She saw Tom Pearce on a small rocky beach and yelled to attract his attention. He dived in and swam to the exhausted woman and dragged her to shore. He took her to the cave and broke open a case of brandy which had washed up on the beach. He opened a bottle to revive the unconscious woman.

A few hours later Tom scaled a cliff in search of help. He followed hoof prints and came by chance, upon two men from nearby Glenample Station three and a half miles away. In a state of exhaustion, he told the men of the tragedy. Tom returned to the gorge while the two men rode back to the station to get help. By the time they reached Loch Ard Gorge, it was cold and dark.

The two shipwreck survivors were taken to Glenample Station to recover. Eva stayed at the station for six weeks before returning to Ireland, this time by steamship. In Melbourne, Tom Pearce received a hero's welcome. He was presented with the first gold medal of the Royal Humane Society of Victoria and a £1000 cheque from the Victorian Government. Concerts were performed to honour the young man's bravery and to raise money for those who lost family in the Loch Ard disaster.

The media of the time had created one of Australia's first media celebrities. Everyone followed the story of Tom Pearce and Eva Carmichael with great interest and were disappointed when the two went their separate ways. It was felt by many that Tom should have proposed to Eva - given they had spent an evening together unsupervised in the cave and had drunk brandy to keep warm.

Ten days after the Loch Ard tragedy, salvage rights to the wreck were sold at auction for £2,120. Cargo valued at £3,000 was salvaged and placed on the beach, but most washed back into the sea when another storm developed.

Loch Ard - Ship Construction

Loch Ard belonged to the famous Loch Line which sailed many ships from England to Australia. In 1867 it was not possible to visit the waterfront in the Port of Melbourne without seeing one or more of the Loch Line vessels.

Built in Glasgow by Barclay, Curdle and Co. in 1873, the Loch Ard was a three-masted square rigged iron sailing ship. The ship measured 262ft 7" (79.87m) in length, 38ft (11.58m) in width, 23ft (7m) in depth and had a gross tonnage of 1693 tons. The Loch Ard's main mast measured a massive 150ft (45.7m) in height.

Loch Ard was built at a time when steamships were starting to make the journey from England to the colonies. Shipbuilders were forced to make their vessels as fast and comfortable as possible to attract more passengers. Loch Ard made three trips to Australia and one trip to Calcutta before its final voyage which ended in tragedy near Port Campbell. Diving on the wreck of Loch Ard

The Loch Ard is one of the many historic shipwrecks included in Victoria's Underwater Shipwreck Discovery Trail. Qualified divers can explore the wrecks of old wooden clippers, iron steamships and cargo and passenger vessels located along the coast and in Port Phillip Bay.

Some of these wreck dives are suitable for beginners while other wrecks require the skills and experience of advanced divers.

More Information is obtainable from Heritage Victoria's website.