

The Schooner 'Enterprise'

A Final Word on an Historic Wreck

By M. W. JOHNS*

ONE OF THE most interesting ships in the early history of Melbourne and of Victoria must surely be the *Enterprise*. This schooner was sailed by John Pascoe Fawkner's party from Launceston to the Yarra River in 1835 to establish a permanent settlement at the future site of Melbourne. For almost a century it has been claimed repeatedly, in print, on monument inscriptions and as part of local tradition, that this *Enterprise* was wrecked at Warrnambool in 1850. By contrast, in recent years, it has been suggested that the wreck at Warrnambool was not Fawkner's *Enterprise*, but another schooner of the same name.

Unfortunately, most authors on this subject (and there have been at least a dozen) have simply repeated the confusion and misconceptions of their predecessors while maintaining a cavalier disregard for original records which exist to clarify the issue. These records include the Harbour Master's reports of shipping at Belfast (Port Fairy) and Port Phillip, the Ships Registers at

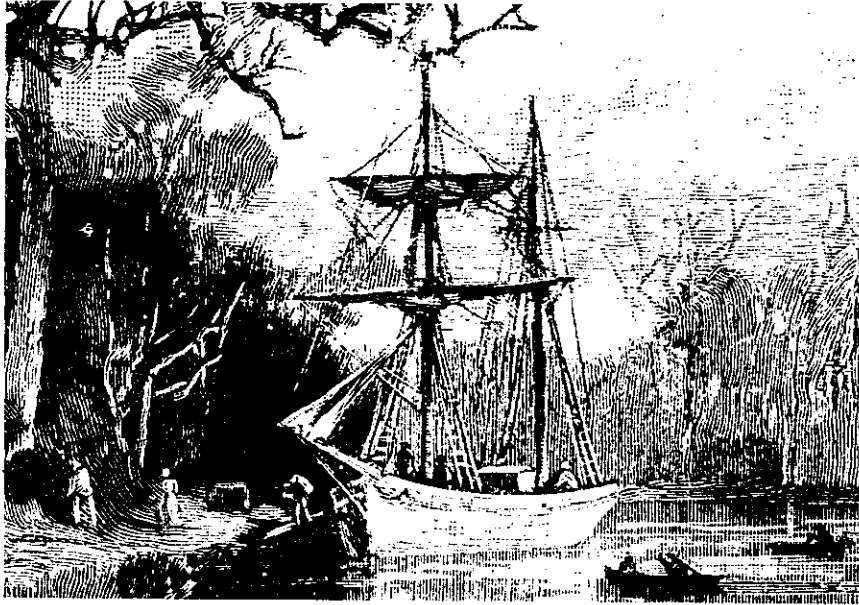
Melbourne and Hobart, and newspaper reports of the day.

Our purpose will be to trace from these primary sources the history of the *Enterprise* wrecked at Warrnambool in 1850, to distinguish this from Fawkner's schooner which had previously met an ignominious fate in New South Wales in 1847, and to show how the confusion between the two arose.

Enterprise (1850)

ON THURSDAY 11 September, 1850, the 58-ton schooner *Enterprise*, Captain James Gardner Caught, arrived at Belfast from Melbourne to load potatoes and wheat from the western ports. Her owner was Mr. W.H.A. Rucker of Melbourne. On Monday 15 September, after the *Enterprise* had moved around to Warrnambool, a strong southerly wind blew up. This turned to the southeast and strengthened further. The *Enterprise* began to drift from her anchorage and beached head-on in Lady Bay on Tuesday 16 September. She lost her rudder and turned broadside

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Fawkner's schooner *Enterprise* unloading stores and equipment on the Yarra Bank in 1835.

— Illustration from *Victoria and its Metropole* Vol. I R.H.S.V. library

on, quickly embedding in the sand near the water's edge. Captain Caught and his crew of five were saved with the help of an aborigine named Buckawall who volunteered to swim out with a line in the mountainous seas.

On 21 October, 1850, the Warrnambool correspondent for the Melbourne *Argus* reported that 'there appear to be many impressions abroad respecting the *Enterprise*, now on shore at Warrnambool. She is not broken up, and the owner has sanguine hope of getting her off, and with proper blocks and falls, I have no doubt will succeed'. He did not succeed and the hull remained. The cargo was damaged and lost and

various parts of the ship were auctioned on the beach for a total of £126. She had been insured for £500.

A Mr. John Young came to live in Warrnambool in 1853. He later recalled that the *Enterprise* was then 'stuck in the sand flush with her deck; part of her deck was gone and the hold quite full of sand'. Young removed more of the deck and stern in 1854. After unusually rough weather and then low tides at Warrnambool in 1887 several wrecks became visible on the beach of Lady Bay. The *Enterprise* timbers were said to have stood three feet out of the sand at low tide and mementos were cut from them. The *Warrnambool Standard* in 1887

reported that the wood was still 'sound and hard, a penknife scarcely making any impression on the seasoned ribs'. The planking was still in place except for the upper strake.

In 1891 the Warrnambool Museum, whose enthusiastic curator was Joseph Archibald, had on display a piece of chain about 6 feet long and some pieces of timber said to be from the *Enterprise*. All these relics seem to have been lost in later years, but in 1932 a walking stick, said to have been carved from a piece of *Enterprise* timber in about 1891 by John Hunter of Prahran, was on display at the Melbourne Museum.

The site of the wreck was gradually covered by sand which encroached on Lady Bay after the breakwater was built in the 1880s. The remains of the wreck were never excavated and now lie in the middle of a caravan park, covered by sand, about 100 metres from the present beach.

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THE RECORDS of the Harbour Master at Belfast in 1850 and annotations in the Ships Register from Melbourne clearly identify the 58-ton schooner, *Enterprise*, Captain J. G. Caught, which was wrecked at Warrnambool as being registered in Melbourne as No 2/1848. These official records leave no room for argument about the identity of the wreck. It is her earlier history and particularly her previous ownership which need clarification.

The *Enterprise* had originally

come from New Zealand via Hobart, arriving in Melbourne on 5 February, 1848, with a cargo of 23,000 feet of New Zealand timber. She was then under the command of Captain David Hay and was registered in Auckland, New Zealand, as No 25/1847. In 1972, Bateson published for the first time details of her New Zealand origin. She was built at Waiheke in 1847 and was a two-masted schooner, 49 feet long, 16 feet 6 inches wide and 9 feet deep.

Within days of her first arriving in Melbourne she was bought by J. Watson and E. Bryan, trading as Watson and Wight. On 23 February, 1848, she was registered in Melbourne by her new owners (No 2/1848) and laid on for the Melbourne-Hobart trade with Captain Samuel Miller. She crossed Bass Strait many times in 1848-9, carrying general merchandise and a few passengers.

On 31 January, 1849, she was bought by Mr. J. S. Spotswood of Williamstown for £550. Captain Henry Ball sailed her on several occasions between Hobart, Melbourne and Sydney. Then between April and July 1850, Captain Alfred Thomas Farley sailed her five times between Melbourne and the western ports of Portland, Belfast and Warrnambool. The *Enterprise* was sold again, in about August 1850, to Mr. W. F. A. Rucker. It was on her next voyage to the western ports with Captain Caught, in September 1850, that she was wrecked.

This schooner, built in New Zealand in 1847 and wrecked at Warrnambool in 1850, was never

owned by J.P. Fawkner and clearly did not have any direct association with his 1835 settlement on the Yarra.

However, it remains for us to examine the history of the other *Enterprise*, which we shall call Fawkner's *Enterprise*, and to see how the confusion between the two schooners of the same name arose.

The Other Ship

FAWKNER'S *ENTERPRISE* did carry his party to Port Phillip and the Yarra River in 1835 and brought Fawkner himself there in October that year. She was built in Hobart in 1830, not in 1831 or 1832 as many other authors have stated. The Ships Register in Hobart shows that she was first registered there on 7 July, 1830 as No. 4/1830. Her original owners were William Mawl, John Anderson Brown and Benjamin Morris of Hobart, although Mawl sold his shares to Brown in 1832. She was re-registered, de novo, at Hobart on 13 March, as No 2/1832.

She was a two-masted wooden schooner of 55 tons, 50 feet 8 inches long, 16 feet 2 inches wide and 8 feet 3 inches deep. Thus, she was a very similar vessel to the *Enterprise* which was later wrecked at Warrnambool. However, a ship built in Hobart would almost certainly have been built of blue gum, which was the favored timber at that time, whereas the Warrnambool *Enterprise* would have been built of New Zealand timbers such as puriri, rata and kauri.

Between 1830 and 1835 the Tasmanian-built *Enterprise* plied between Hobart, Launceston, Sydney and Newcastle. On 18 July, 1835, J. P. Fawkner took possession of her for £430. The original price of £450 was discounted by £20 when Fawkner was kept waiting for delivery.

Fawkner's *Enterprise* crossed Bass Strait many times each year for several years, bringing stock, passengers and general cargo to the new settlement. The last record of this schooner being in Port Phillip was in July 1845, when she arrived from Sydney, Captain Loutit. She had returned to Sydney by 19 September.

On 5 October, 1845, Fawkner's *Enterprise* left Sydney once more in an attempt to sail to Melbourne. She reached Jervis Bay, but was leaking and was almost lost in a storm which forced her back to Sydney where she was unloaded and hove down. On 22 November Fawkner's own newspaper, the *Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser*, announced that the schooner *Enterprise* 'belonging to this port' (i.e. Melbourne) was being advertised for sale in Sydney. Allowing a few days for the news to travel between Sydney and Melbourne, this correlates well with a report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 21 November that the schooner *Enterprise* had just been purchased by Captain Sullivan, who intended to run her in the cedar trade.

Sullivan's *Enterprise*, formerly Fawkner's, was later wrecked at the mouth of the Richmond River, northern New South Wales, on 5

July, 1847. She had plied the northern coastal trade for two years without returning to Melbourne. Her register in Hobart has a line drawn across it in red ink with the word 'lost' but no details or date are given. The fate of Fawkner's historic schooner and the history of the wreck at the Richmond River have not been described previously because the connection between the two was uncertain. The link is now provided by the evidence that Captain Sullivan bought Fawkner's *Enterprise* in 1845.

It is interesting to note that the other, New Zealand-built *Enterprise* was named in November 1847, only four months after the wreck of Fawkner's boat. It was not unusual for a new vessel to be given the same name as an earlier one soon after it had been lost. The spelling of the name *Enterprise* was sometimes given as *Enterprize*, but there was no consistency, even on the same page of writing; for example in Fawkner's diary. Similarly, Fawkner's *Enterprise* was described as having a tonnage which varied in different newspaper reports between 44 and 60 tons, her registered tonnage being 55 tons. All of these factors have added to the confusion about her identity and history.

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OVER THE past century, the confusion in most quarters between the wreck at Warrnambool and Fawkner's *Enterprise* has been a good example of how folk stories become entrenched as 'history', even where there is ample evidence

from primary sources to prove the story wrong. It is true that the two vessels were of similar dimensions, both were two-masted schooners, and must have looked alike. One succeeded the other on the coastal trade in Victoria with only a brief hiatus. It would be understandable for people who did not have close contact with shipping to believe that there was but one *Enterprise*.

In fact, the confusion did not arise until about 1886 when Joseph Archibald and Richard Osburne became actively interested in the local history of Warrnambool. In that year Archibald sought information about the Warrnambool wreck from Captain Farley who had been master of the *Enterprise* on the voyage before she was wrecked in 1850. Farley is reported by several people to have claimed repeatedly that this *Enterprise* had previously been Fawkner's. Farley was thus a major source of misinformation and his story was widely believed when published by Osburne in 1887 and by Archibald in 1891. It is pertinent to note that Captain Farley's 'experience, judgement, intelligence and honesty' had been publicly questioned in the *Geelong Advertiser* in 1849 when he lost two schooners, the *Henry* and the *Elizabeth*, within a few months of each other under suspicious circumstances. Shipowners were advised in the newspaper not to entrust their vessels to his care.

But Farley was not the only source of misinformation. In 1890, William Bally, who had been a crew member on Fawkner's *Enterprise* wrote that indeed it was Fawkner's

boat that was wrecked at Warrnambool. Presumably, he too did not know that this *Enterprise* had been lost in 1847 and that a replacement had appeared which did not belong to Fawkner. It is this misinformation which, coming from what ought to have been reliable sources, was handed down from one author to another with extraordinary confusion over the succeeding hundred years.

Much of the blame for this might fairly be laid at the feet of Archibald who evidently did not consult any of the written historical records about the wreck at Warrnambool. Rather he relied, all too willingly it would seem, on the

faulty or fanciful memory of Captain Farley, 40 years after the event.

It was Bateson who first distinguished the New Zealand-built *Enterprise* from Fawkner's in 1972. Loney had previously claimed that it was Fawkner's boat at Warrnambool but later changed his mind when he referred to the 1848 Ships' Register in Melbourne. Others are still trying to verify the folk story which ought now be laid to rest. Fawkner's *Enterprise* was wrecked, not at Warrnambool in 1850, but at the Richmond River, New South Wales, in 1847. ■

(Extensive source references are available on the original MS in the R.H.S.V. Library)

QUEEN ELIZABETH I.

She (Queen Elizabeth I) badgered, she wheedled, she cajoled, she persuaded. All she lacked to look like a modern American President was a telephone.

— Alexander Campbell Canadian lawyer & politician. (1933)

All government, indeed every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue and every prudent act, is founded on compromise and barter. We balance inconveniences; we give and take; we remit some rights that we may enjoy others.

— Edmund Burke (1727-97)

How strange and awful is the synthesis of life and death in the gust winds and falling leaves of an autumnal day.

— Samuel Coleridge (1833)

I hate television. I hate it as much as peanuts. but I can't stop eating peanuts.

— Orson Welles, (American actor.)

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