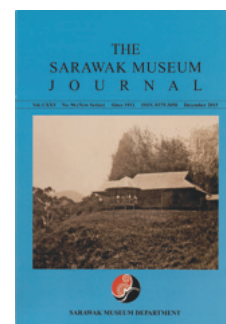




The Sarawak Museum Journal

Vol. LXXV No. 96

December 2015



ISSN: 0375-3050
E-ISSN: 3036-0188

Citation: Hans Berekoven et. all (2015). Short Note on The Ship Wreck of “Viscount Melbourne” In Northern Sarawak. The Sarawak Museum Journal, LXXV (96) : 145-148

SHORT NOTE ON THE SHIP WRECK OF “VISCOUNT MELBOURNE” IN NORTHERN SARAWAK

Hans Berekoven, Roze Berekoven and Mohd. Sherman bin Sauffi

INTRODUCTION

Viscount Melbourne is an 800-ton UK registered cargo ship which was in operation during the time of Rajah James Brooke who ruled Sarawak from 1841. It was named after the first Prime Minister of Queen Victoria’s reign, William Lamb II as Viscount Melbourne.

However, this ship was in fact a 680-ton carrier. It was built in Shields England in 1835 by an unknown builder. The ship is 150ft. long and 47ft. wide. It is a three-masted timber cargo ship. The present maritime archaeology study is still trying to determine the wood type used in the building of the ship and at this stage assume its construction of Oak & Beech. An impression of the ship is shown in Fig. 1.

The fate of the barque rigged British East Indian cargo ship, the Viscount Melbourne could very well have languished in obscurity if not for a set of unique circumstances that eventually led to her discovery, nestled at the bottom of a reef in the middle of the South China Sea about 90 nautical miles north of Miri, Sarawak, Malaysia.

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The ship departed London on the 26th October, 1840, bound for Calcutta arriving there safely in March 1841 where she remained for several months before setting off for China in the later part of the year. When the ship arrived in Singapore, a number of important passengers boarded for the onward trip to Macau. Among them were Lieut. Col. Campbell who was going to command the 30th regiment there and a Mrs. Sarah Dare and her two children, 2-year-old, George and his infant brother, Julius. Mrs. Dare's husband was the Commander of the ship *Medwas*, a trading ship bound for Macau. However, she remained in Singapore waiting for the birth of their son, Julius, and was now travelling on the *Viscount Melbourne* to join him.

The ship departed Singapore on Christmas night with a full load of cotton, rice, wine and saltpetre. By new year they encountered heavy storms that steered them off their intended course. In the calm that followed, a strong current carried them close to a dangerous reef known as the Luconia Shoals. On the 4 a.m. watch,