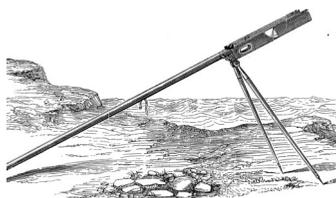


In Portland the lifeboat crew and the rocket crew were generally the same group of volunteers, many being fisherman or whalers. The rocket rescue service supplemented the limited range that lifeboats could provide. Adverse winds, cliffs and rocky shores, underwater reefs and distance from the harbour could make prompt rescue by a lifeboat impossible.



Rocket practice in Portland c. 1910  
Courtesy Vern McCallum Collection

The rescue process and apparatus was identical to that used by the Board of Trade in Great Britain as recommended by Her Majesty's Coastguard. The rocket line of one inch Italian hemp was the first of a series of successively stronger lines sent from the shore to the wreck. As the survivors pulled it in, an attached tally board gave instructions in four languages of the procedure. To their end of the heavier rocket line, the rescue crew attached a heavier endless line called a whip with a tail block attached. Secured to the mast, the whip carried out a hawser to which a breeches buoy was attached. One by one, the rescued were brought to shore in the breeches buoy.

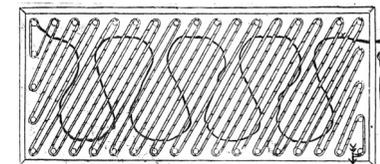


### Rocket and Rocket Launcher

The 'Boxer Rocket' is named after its inventor, Colonel Boxer. It was a two staged gunpowder charged projectile - once the first rocket had expended its force, a second rocket was ignited, thus giving additional projection. The rocket had a range of 500 to 700 yards, and its 10 second fuse was ignited by a portfire.

### Rocket Line Box

The line is faked around pegs in the false-bottomed box from one end of the box to the other. The false bottom with pegs was then withdrawn, and the box canted at 30 degrees to the line of fire. The line could now freely follow the rocket when launched.

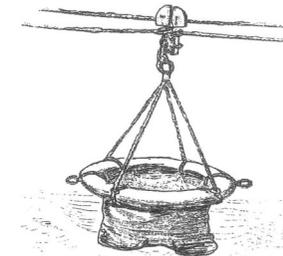


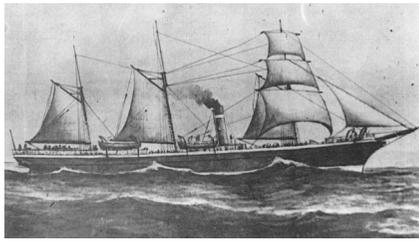
### Tally Boards

The tally boards - one for the whip and one for the hawser - were stored with the whip and hawser, ready for use. The tally boards were attached to the lines with instructions for the rescue procedure. These instructions were printed in four languages: English, French, German and Norwegian.

### Breeches Buoy

Used to transport the rescued person from the ship to shore, the breeches buoy is a cork lifebuoy, fitted with a breeches of tanned canvas through which the person being rescued passes their legs. Suspended from a hawser by a travelling block, the breeches buoy can be pulled from ship to shore and vice versa by an endless whip.





S.S. Admella

**S.S. Admella, 1859 – Carpenter Rocks, SA**

The Portland lifeboat was towed to the scene and hand-held rockets were launched without success by crew member John Johnstone (who received severe burns for his efforts). The remaining 19 survivors were eventually rescued by the Portland lifeboat crew and a shore-based boat during a lull in the stormy weather.

**Tamora, 1860 – Portland Harbour**

Put aground by a strong gale, the *Tamora* was in danger of complete destruction. Rockets fired from the Portland lifeboat enabled the crew to secure a line and they made their way to the lifeboat, and eventually to shore. The barque was wrecked, but all 14 crew were saved.

**Jane, 1863 – Cape Bridgewater**

The *Jane* was driven aground in squally weather. The rocket apparatus was transported from Portland and used three times without success. A cask was later used to float a line to shore from the barque and a line was secured, enabling the crew to make their way to shore. All aboard were saved, but rescuer Waldy Hedditch perished in the wild seas.

**Lady Robilliard, 1867 – Portland Harbour**

The victim of a severe gale, the *Lady Robilliard* was forced ashore in the night. In darkness and tremendous seas, it was several hours before a rescue attempt. Led by Captain James Fawthrop the Portland rocket crew, made contact with the wreck using the rocket equipment. A line was floated ashore and the crew were brought in one by one.

**Portland Rocket Shed  
Cliff Street, Portland**

**OPEN DAILY**

(in conjunction with nearby History House)

**10.00 am - 12.00 noon**

**and**

**1.00 - 4.00 pm**

(closed Good Friday and Christmas Day)

**Admission to the Rocket Shed is FREE**

The Rocket Shed display is an initiative of the Portland Maritime Heritage Committee and has been funded by the Department of Planning and Community Development through the *Victoria Heritage Grants* program, and Glenelg Shire Council

Glenelg Shire Council acknowledges the support of the Moyne Shire Lifeboat Advisory Committee for their assistance in this project



Built in 1886 by local builder George Sedgewick, Portland's bluestone Rocket Shed replaced an earlier weather-board structure. The Rocket Shed was the store house for the rocket rescue equipment used by the volunteer rocket crews who attended ship rescues in the region.

From the late 1820s, Portland Bay was a haven for sealers, whalers, fishermen, trading vessels, immigrant ships and coastal steamers.

Craggy cliffs and offshore reefs, combined with the gale-force winds and squalls that can pound the coast, saw Victoria's south-west as the scene of many shipwrecks in the 19th century.

