



## ***Plimmers Ark*** ***History of the Inconstant***

The *Inconstant* was built in 1847 by George Old and launched on 3 January 1848 at the Bras D'Or shipyards in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia (now Canada). The *Inconstant* was 38 metres long and 8 metres wide and was the largest vessel ever built by Old. The vessel was ship-rigged with three masts. The masts are estimated to have been over 30 metres high, and it would have had about 15 sails.

The *Inconstant* made its maiden voyage to London, where it was surveyed and registered by Lloyds and given an A1 rating.

On 15 February 1849 the *Inconstant*, under the command of Captain Patrick Culliton, sailed from Plymouth bound for Adelaide in South Australia carrying 209 Irish female migrants, leaving Ireland after the potato famines. It reached its destination on 7 June and after repairs the ship left Australia on 11 September 1849 bound for Callao, Peru, via Wellington carrying a light cargo and with large stones in its hull for ballast. It was common for vessels making this long southern voyage to call in at Wellington to replenish their water supplies.

When entering Wellington Harbour the *Inconstant* failed to catch the wind and drifted astern on to the rocks near Pencarrow Head. The Royal Navy survey vessel *HMS Acheron* went to assist the stranded vessel and during the night it hauled the *Inconstant* off the rocks and towed it to Te Aro beach.

Captain Culliton stayed at Barrett's Hotel for some months, firstly trying to get the *Inconstant* repaired, and then selling it, as the ship was no longer deemed seaworthy. The ship was put up for auction on 23 November 1849. Shipwright William McKenzie bought the vessel at auction and later sold it to John Plimmer for 80 pounds.

The *Inconstant* lay at Te Aro for nearly a year until Plimmer moved the vessel across the harbour to its new site at Clay Point (now known as Stewart Dawson's corner) where it was propped up for use as a jetty and warehouse. A pitched roof was added to the midsection of the hull and the upper works of the bow section cut away. The new 'building' measured 20.4m by 9m. The lower part of the ship formed a basement. A small bridge provided access to the Ark from Lambton Quay. It was possible for boats to dock at the stern of Plimmer's Ark to offload.

In January 1855 a severe earthquake struck Wellington, which lifted the shoreline by at least a metre and tipped over the Ark. Though the Ark was righted the water level around the hulk was now too shallow for vessels to dock at. In 1856 the jetty was again extended by 33.6 metres.

A timber retaining wall was constructed on the north side of the Ark and filled with soil from Clay Point (Stewart Dawson's Corner). This linked the Ark to Lambton Quay.

Plimmer built a warehouse on this new land, the warehouse serving as the immigration office. The Provincial and General Government paid Plimmer to have all immigrants step ashore onto this wharf (until 1863 when Queens Wharf was built). Another warehouse was built on the Lambton Quay end of the Ark around 1860. Reclamation of the shoreline around the Ark was complete by the early 1860s. Plimmer still used the jetty, but all goods had to be conveyed across Custom House Quay to the now land locked Ark. A corner of the Ark was cut away to allow people to walk along Customhouse Quay.

In 1883 the Ark was demolished and the ship ribs cut down to ground level to make way for the construction of the National Mutual Life Association head office that is still standing on the corner of Hunter Street and Customhouse Quay. In 1899 the hull was exposed again briefly during the construction of the new Bank of New Zealand head office, which has been recently refurbished and now trades as the Old Bank Arcade and Chambers.

In July 1997, during excavations for the modification of the historic Bank of New Zealand building, the remains of the *Inconstant's* hull were uncovered. This discovery led to an archaeological investigation of the site.

The hull of the *Inconstant* with accompanying interpretation is now on display in Plimmer's Ark Gallery on Queens Wharf where it is being conserved.

