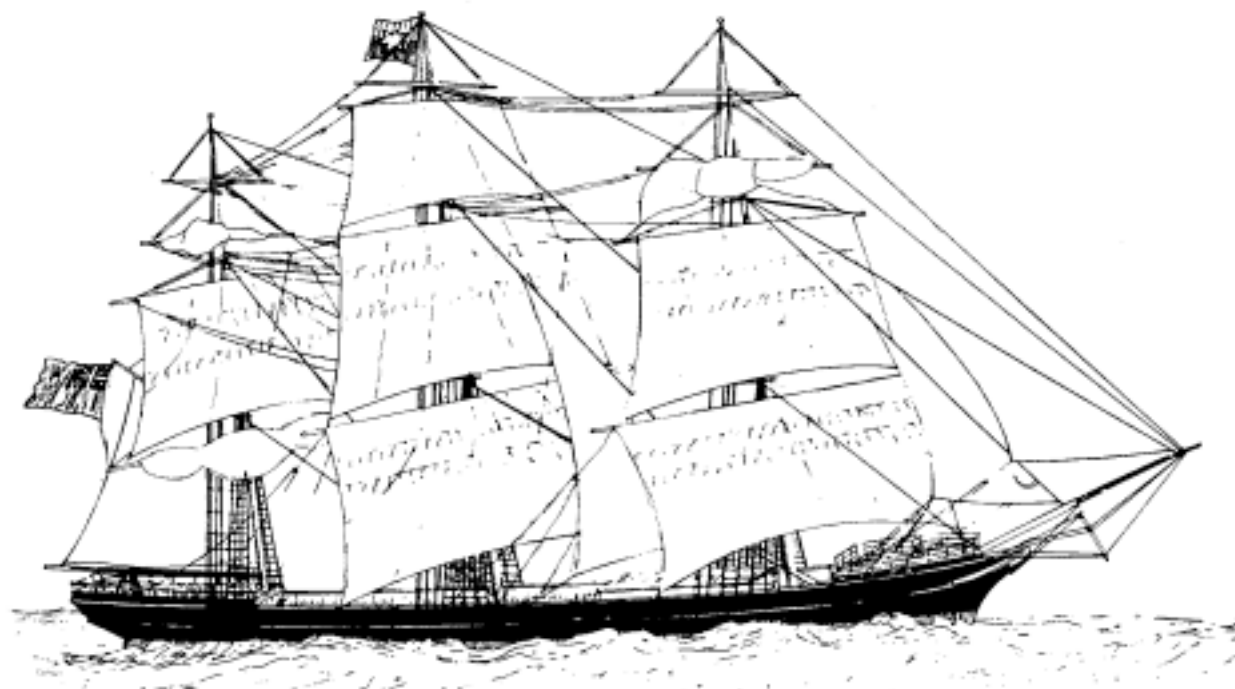


WALTER HOOD

WRECK INSPECTION REPORT



Maritime Archaeology Program

Heritage Branch

Department of Planning

Sydney 1991

Prepared by David Nutley and Tim Smith

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INTRODUCTION

The Department of Planning enlisted Manly Hydraulics Laboratory (MHL) to assist in undertaking a survey of the **Walter Hood** historic shipwreck site (gazetted for provisional declaration 21 November 1989).

MHL was required to assist in the relocation of the wreck site and to provide diving support for the underwater survey of the remains.

The field work was carried out over a two day period (21-22 August 1991), extremely adverse weather conditions precluding the underwater component of an earlier inspection on 22-24 July 1991.

Those present were:

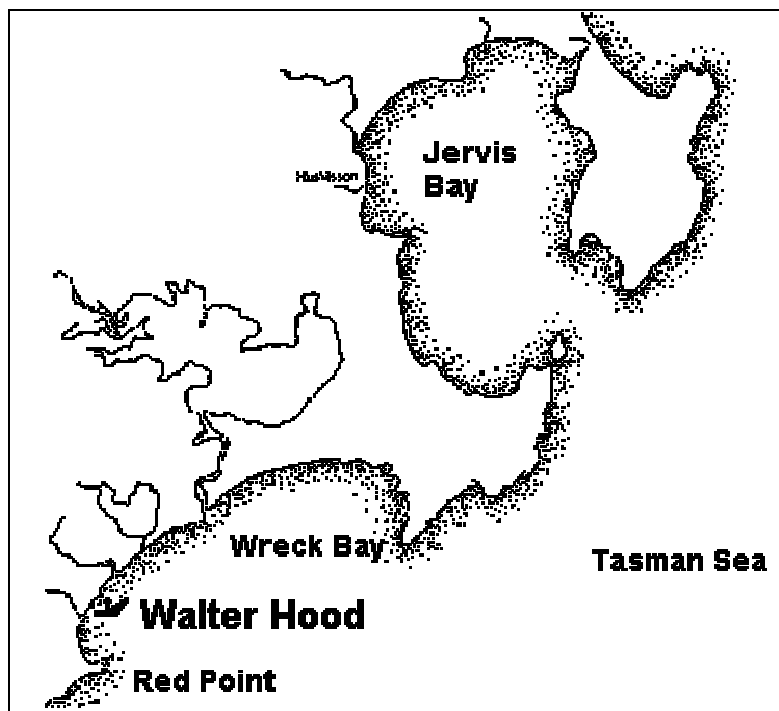
DAY 1

- D. Nutley, Department of Planning, Maritime Archaeologist (Officer in Charge);
- T. Smith, Department of Planning, Maritime Archaeologist;
- C. Browne, MHL (Diver Supervisor);
- P. Clark, MHL (Boat Attendant and Diver Attendant).

DAY 2

- D. Nutley, Department of Planning, Maritime Archaeologist (Officer in Charge);
- T. Smith, Department of Planning, Maritime Archaeologist;
- C. Browne, MHL (Diver Supervisor);
- P. Clark, MHL (Boat Attendant and Diver Attendant).

Figure 1: Location map



OBJECTIVES

General

To accumulate data regarding the wrecksite in relation to its environmental and archaeological characteristics; to develop site interpretation and an assessment of archaeological potential.

Specific

1. To locate the site and record an accurate position of the remains.
2. To assess existing sketches of the site provided by sports divers and to identify any changes.
3. To isolate the major features of the wreck structure, the general distribution and orientation of the remains, and to record environmental conditions impacting on the site.
4. To document artefacts removed from the wrecksite and now in private custody.

METHODOLOGY

A background history of the **Walter Hood** was prepared by consultant archaeologist Adam Wolfe, in a report to the Department of Planning in 1990. The report documented the history of the vessel and the wreck event, suggested the probable position of the site and gave an indication of the likely appearance of the surviving remains based on salvage activity since the loss.

Further information regarding the wrecksite and the effect of local environmental conditions was collected by the Department of Planning through verbal reports from divers.

Researchers based in Australia and overseas provided additional details of the vessels history, construction, fittings and cargo.

The survey was conducted over a two day period and achieved the major aims isolated prior to inspection.

Wreck Site Location

Prominent landmarks, reef patterns, aerial photographs and historical accounts were used to obtain an approximate position of the remains. Divers conducting a surface swim on snorkel located the site almost directly below the work boat, Figure 1.

The site's position was established by conducting a compass and tape survey from the site, to a known reference point on the shore.

The extent of the wreck structure was established by divers and found to cover an area of approximately 32 by 10-20 meters.

Wreck Inspection

DAY 1

An underwater inspection was conducted by David Nutley, Tim Smith and Colin Browne. The preliminary dive aimed to identify the extent of the shipwreck remains and to determine the most effective means of conducting the recording component of the field work. A general survey was begun using a baseline and offset measurements to key features. Three quarters of the main concentration of wreckage was surveyed. Colin Browne recorded the exposed remains on video tape.

DAY 2

The survey work begun on day 1 was continued, resulting in the completion of the overall site plan, Figure 2. Features of special interest (including ships' fastenings) were drawn in detail. The position of the main reef was plotted in relation to the wreck remains. Still photography of major features was completed. The eastern extremities of the site were inspected in an attempt to locate portions of ship structure and an anchor, previously identified by divers. Movement of sand had apparently buried the timber section(s)?, whilst the anchor could not be located (still believed to lie on a reef area approximately 200m to the north east). Divers recorded the depth of the reef below the surface, establishing the slope and orientation of the wreck remains.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Adapted from Wolfe, A., 1990 "The New South Wales Historic Shipwreck Survey", prepared for the N.S.W Department of Planning and from the Department of Planning's Shipwreck Files.

The magnificent wooden clipper ship **Walter Hood** was, at the time of launching, the largest sailing vessel ever built in Aberdeen. The vessel was named in honour of its famous builder, Walter Hood in respect of his skill in ship design and construction. Sister ship of the renowned **Phoenixian**, the **Walter Hood** eclipsed it in both sailing and carrying qualities and was noted for its graceful hull lines.

The **Walter Hood**, a ship of 937 tons, was built in Aberdeen in 1852. The vessel belonged to George Thompson's celebrated White Star Line and was built expressly for the Australian-China trade. The **Walter Hood** had provision for limited first class passenger accommodation and occasionally carried up to fifty passengers in steerage.

The vessel was built in an era which witnessed rapid developments in wooden ship building design and construction. The **Walter Hood** epitomized the level of excellence achieved in the leading Aberdeen ship building yards.

The vessel's maiden voyage to Sydney in 1853 immediately realised everyone's expectations. The record 80 days from London was matched by the fastest return passages from Sydney (1).

General cargoes were typically traded. Manufactured and processed goods, luxuries and necessities were exported from London to Sydney, while wool, cotton and other raw materials were exported in return.

The name of the Aberdeen clipper was familiar to nearly every colonist, the vessel being one of the favourite and most regular traders between London and Sydney during its seventeen year association with the colony. The vessel would commonly sail from England in the northern summer and arrive in Sydney some time just before, or after Christmas. The return voyage to England would be completed by the next northern summer (2).

Wreck Event

The **Walter Hood** left London on 22 January 1870 under the disciplined Captain Latto. The vessel carried a familiar general cargo plus replacement tiles for Sydney's St Mary's Cathedral, burnt down in 1865. Other cargo included, beer, iron bars, railway irons, cork, cement, wine, salt and theatrical costumes (3).

The vessel encountered a heavy storm when turning up the Eastern coast of Australia. Buffeted by the south easterly gale from Sunday 24 April, the **Walter Hood** was stripped of its stunsails and booms. The gale continued the following morning taking away many sails and Wilkie, a seaman, who was to be the first of many casualties. On Tuesday 26, land was sighted amidst mountainous seas. The **Walter Hood**, in a crippled state, did not have enough canvas on board to beat out to sea. Captain Latto attempted to tack the ship in an effort to clear the headland, but to no avail. He then put the vessel on the port tack steering towards the south west but the vessel was embayed (4).

At 7.30 pm, the **Walter Hood** struck a reef some 200m off Wreck Bay. Captain Latto was hit by a large wave which swept him to the side of the ship breaking some of his ribs. The Captain was taken to his cabin with the rest of the crew to weather the first of four sorry nights.

Early next morning, the cabin began to fill with incoming seas and the crew were compelled to leave the Captain below and cling to the raised poop deck. The masts soon went over the side as cargo began flooding out of the shattered hull. Fearing certain death, members of the crew attempted to swim to the shore. Those remaining on the wreck, many of whom could not swim, watched helplessly as their companions suffered terrible deaths in the surf. While some eventually made the arduous passage, others died from exposure on the hull. Captain Latto was washed out of his cabin and drowned amidst the wreckage of his ship. On Friday morning, with the seas abating, others managed to reach the shore in an exhausted state (5).

The thirteen remaining on the exposed stern had now been without food for three days and nights. In desperation they killed a small dog belonging to their dead Captain, ate its flesh raw and drank the blood.

The passing steamer **Illalong** was directed to the scene and arrived alongside on Saturday morning. A longboat was got into by the thirteen souls who were now quite helpless from exposure and could barely move. Of the thirty five hands onboard the **Walter Hood** only twenty three were eventually saved (6).

Following Events

The bodies of those drowned washed ashore and were buried in a suitably marked spot in the bush. Spectators arrived and fought over the most costly articles of flotsam, it is even stated that the bodies of the drowned were robbed. The casks and bottles of alcohol were greedily stowed in and consumed, adding to the mayhem.

The **Walter Hood**, a total wreck, was insured in Sydney with the Pacific Insurance Company for 21 465 pounds. The police of Ulladulla took charge of the cargo on the beach, of which sixty tons was eventually salvaged. The wreck was later sold at auction to an individual for ninety five pounds (7).

WALTER HOOD - CONSTRUCTION DETAILS (8).

Official Number: 9953 Launched: 7 January 1852
Where Built: Aberdeen Builder: Walter Hood
Owners: George Thompson and Sons. Aberdeen White Star Line
Construction: Wooden clipper ship. Clipper bow, two decks, full poop and topgallant Forecastle. Square sterned, imitation galleries. Iron knees.
Dimensions: L 172'2" B 30'2" D 20'9"
Registered tonnage: 937 tons
Figurehead: Male figure
Timbers: British oak, foreign white oak, mahogany, American elm, teak, iron bark, yellow pine.

NOTES

1. *Illustrated Sydney News*, 8 October 1853.
2. *Illustrated Sydney News*, 11 May 1870.
3. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 May 1870.
4. *Sydney Mail*, 7 May 1870.
5. *Town and Country Journal*, 7 May 1870;
Sydney Morning Herald, 2 May 1870.
6. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 May 1870.
7. *Town and Country Journal*, May 1870.
8. Lloyds Building Survey. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

ENVIRONMENTAL DESCRIPTION

Location

The sites co-ordinates are Lat 35^o 13' 28' S; Long 150^o 32' 08' E

Map Name: - Sussex Inlet 9027-1-5 (1:25 000)

The wreckage lies in shallow water at a depth of 3-5 meters and covers an area of approximately 32 by 10-20 meters. The remains lie approximately 120 meters from the shore against the north face of a low reef extending out from shore. The site is subject to extreme wave and surge action especially from the south east aspect.

Archaeological remains

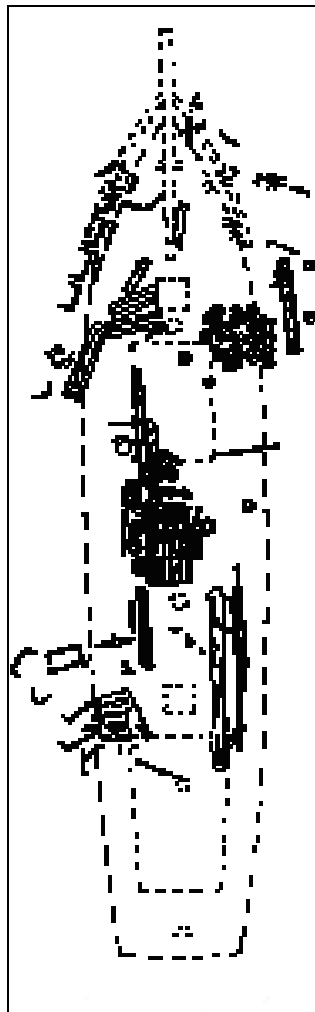
The principle remains comprise heavy cargo which suggests the general outline of the vessel. The majority of the ships' structure has been carried away by wave action and the effects of salvage. The eastern part of the site consists of iron staple knees embedded in the sand. These remain in their original orientation, suggesting that part of the hold deck settled, then deteriorated in this area. A substantial mound of concreted coils of wire or barrel hoops lie adjacent to the knees. Bundles of railway tracks, miscellaneous ironmongery and concreted barrels of cement, remain, as stowed, longitudinally within the vessel. Several pieces of heavy cargo have been associated with a slotting machine. Concreted bottles, ceramics and tiles can be readily observed.

The archaeological potential of the vessels' hull has been reduced by the destructive nature of the local sea conditions. The archaeological potential of the remaining cargo, crew and passengers personal possessions has also been reduced with the advent of SCUBA equipment. Quantities of material have been removed through uncontrolled and undocumented souvenir hunting. Most of this material remains in unrecorded custodianship.

Some custodians have provided the Department of Planning with details of their holdings. (eg, John Riley, Keith Saunders, John Sumner, Lady Denman Maritime Museum, Pro Dive, Jervis Bay). Such material includes assorted bottles and ceramics, decorative floor tiles, ships fastenings, cutlery, brass taps, penknives, lead shot and the ships' bell.

An Admiralty style anchor is reputed to lie some 200 meters north east of the site which is consistent with historical records of the wrecking.

Figure 2: Wreck Site Plan



ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Significance has been assessed in accordance with the nature and degree of significance of the site's primary attributes. These include attributes related to historical, social, archaeological, scientific and interpretive significance. This significance includes a predictive assessment of relics that have reputedly been removed from the site. Such significance cannot be assessed until the full extent of these collections is known.

Historical (concerned with range of context)

The Walter Hood site is significant in being representative of the dangers associated with sea travel in the Nineteenth Century.

The wrecking of the renowned vessel, the resultant deaths, the survivors hardships and the loss of the cargo, had a considerable impact on the colonial population. Flags were flown at half mast in Port Jackson and various fund raising parties organised to raise money for the survivors.

Social (concerned with community regard or esteem)

A vessel significant for its associations with a community in Australia and which demonstrates the trading relationships which existed between Australia and Great Britain.

The **Walter Hood** was familiar to nearly every colonist, being one of the favourite and most regular traders between London and Sydney during its seventeen year association with the colony. The vessel had the honour of forwarding the first edition of the Illustrated Sydney News to London. At the time of the loss, the **Walter Hood** was transporting replacement tiles for the rebuilding of St Mary's Cathedral, burnt down in 1865.

Technical (concerned with technical or creative achievements)

Items related to the vessels hull and fittings survive, although the wreck has sustained a low degree of integrity. This has limited the sites technical significance. Buried portions of surviving hull structure might survive below the current sand level. Such remains are likely to be of moderate significance.

Archaeological (concerned with research potential through investigation of material remains).

The cargo remains have the potential to illustrate the diversity of items imported from England to Australia during this period.

The surviving portions of ships' structure are significant in contributing knowledge of the construction and development of the Aberdeen wooden clipper vessels of the mid Nineteenth Century.

Scientific (concerned with research potential through repeatable measured tests)

There is no current presumption of scientific research potential beyond contributing to the general data available on wreck site conditions and their effect on the survival of cultural remains.

Interpretative (concerned with public education values)

A shipwreck which, by virtue of its fatal loss, dramatic location, noteworthy salvage, historical documentation and relics held in private custody, has considerable potential for public education. This may take the form of displays, plaques in public places, brochures and other publications.

The site, associated graves and monument already form a powerful memorial to those who lost their lives in the disaster and highlight the dangers associated with sea travel in the Nineteenth Century.

Representative (concerned with the typical or characteristic)

Representative of the type of large sailing vessels trading between London and Sydney during the mid Nineteenth Century.

A shipwreck together with its cargo, which amongst other attributes, has the potential to demonstrate aspects of ship design and construction techniques, stowage of goods, the range of commodities imported into Australia and the dangers associated with sea travel.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The **Walter Hood**, through its trading and passenger connections with New South Wales, played an important part in the development of Australia in the mid Nineteenth Century. The archaeological remains, including surviving hull structure and imported cargo, form a significant cultural resource. The remains have the potential for interpretation through public education programs, highlighting the vessels popular acclaim and tragic loss.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the historical research, wreck site inspection and subsequent assessment of significance, it is recommended that;

1. the **Walter Hood** and its associated relics, provisionally declared historic under Section 6 of the Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act, 1976 on 21-11-1989, be declared historic in accordance with Section 5 of the Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act, 1976, and that a submission to this effect be forwarded to the Commonwealth Minister.
2. the gazetted position for the **Walter Hood** be amended to:
LAT. 35° 13' 28"
LONG. 150° 32' 08"
3. interpretive broadsheets be prepared for distribution to dive shops, dive clubs and the Shoalhaven Municipal Council.
4. a Management Plan be prepared for the site and its associated relics.

PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

Figure 3: Wreck Bay - Monument at Cudmirrah Nature Reserve.



Figure 4: Walter Hood wreck site