The NSW coast and waterways are littered with thousands of shipwrecks. Their timbers, iron plating, anchors and cargoes have become fragile records of a heroic maritime history. They are the last remnants of a time when industry, commerce, and families were directly or indirectly reliant on transport by sea.

River boats, trains and road transport linked the inland regions of the State with the ships that plied our coastal and international shipping lanes. Freight and passenger vessels came in various shapes and sizes, their form influenced by their ocean going habits or the shallow river bars of small coastal ports. Technology and cargoes also shaped the construction of the ships while commercial and political decisions determined when and where ships, rail or road were the dominant transport network.

The ships that form our maritime heritage were built locally and at ports around the world - from the small riverside slipways on the NSW coast to the mighty shipyards in England, Scotland, Canada and the USA.

Commercial and public interests did not always result in good record keeping for these vessels, the people who served on them, the passengers who entrusted their welfare to them or the cargoes that they carried. Often they were too mundane, just workhorses that kept the economy together. Many ships passed on with no surviving image to record their appearance. The day to day experiences of the passengers and crew were rarely written down. The remains on the seabed often contain the only surviving clues.

Generally, ships are not totally destroyed when they are wrecked. Parts are preserved, covered in sand, mud and marine growth. A flat expanse of sand can cover a large part of the story of the ship and the people who were associated with it. The only visible clue may be the fluke of an anchor. If this or other visible evidence of the ship is taken away, the site may be lost forever or inadvertently damaged by modern day anchors, dredging or other human activities.

We as a community can help to preserve the information held within shipwreck sites. By becoming aware of their location and place in history we can relive the joys and fears of the people they carried. We can also feel something of the trepidation and anguish of those who waited upon their arrival.

This information sheet lists 15 of the ships that have been lost on or near Lord Howe Island. If you wish to obtain more information or if you wish to share information from other sources, please contact:

Maritime Archaeology Unit
NSW Heritage Office
Locked Bag 5020
Parramatta NSW 2124
Phone: 02-9635 6155  Fax: 02-9891 4688
Email: heritage.office@heritage.nsw.gov.au

See also the Shipwreck Atlas of New South Wales, (ed 3), available from the NSW Heritage Office.

Legislation

All shipwrecks over 75 years of age are automatically protected from disturbance under the State NSW Heritage Act 1977 & Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976.

Relics off the NSW coast likely to be associated with historic ships are also protected under the Commonwealth Act. Relics in NSW lakes, rivers and harbours over 50 years of age are protected under the relics provisions of the Heritage Act.

The Heritage Office should be notified as soon as possible if a shipwreck or other underwater relic is located or prior to any activity likely to disturb shipwrecks and relics. Severe penalties apply for non-compliance with the legislation.
Shipwrecks of Lord Howe Island

**Favorite** - One of the Island’s more recent shipwrecks, the **Favorite** ran aground at the North Passage in 1965. Few details have been located for the vessel, its origin, or ownership.

**George** - the earliest shipwreck at Lord Howe Island, the 186 ton whaler **George** either ran aground or sank off the southern end in December 1830. A 23.77 metre, two-masted whaler operating out of Tasmania, built at Plymouth, UK, in 1810, registered Hobart as 6 of 1830.

**Jacques del Mar** - French-registered 506 ton, 44.28 metre, steel screw steamer wrecked at the Island’s North Passage in 1954. Built as the **Marion Sleigh** at Bremerhaven, Germany in 1906 and one time registered to Sydney as 6 of 1930 with Official Number 139627.

**La Meurthe** - abandoned at sea in gale whilst under the tow of **St. Louis**. The unmanned “ghost ship” drove ashore near the lagoon at Lord Howe Island in 1907 much to the amazement of local residents. A timber sailing ship of 1597 tons gross built at France in 1882.

**Laura** – lost at sea after departing the Peruvian port of Callao on 18 April, for Newcastle to load coal. One of **Laura**’s lifeboats eventually washed up north of Cronulla Beach, Sydney and the wheel box at Lord Howe Island. A barque formerly known as **Claudova**.

**Maelgwyn** – abandoned approximately twenty miles northwest Lord Howe Island in 1907. Departing Pisco, Peru on 17 November 1906, the 1276 ton vessel became disabled in a gale after ballast shifted. All 20 crew reached Lord Howe Island in the boats. A 67.06 metre, iron barque built at, Sunderland, Scotland in 1884 and registered at London. Official Number 89625.

**Mystery Star** – intended as part of a film on Lord Howe Island the 4.88 metre timber motor skiff was lost after departing the island for New South Wales in October 1936. Crewed by actors Brian Abbot and Leslie Simpson, the vessel was never found despite searches by RAN destroyer **Waterhen** and RAAF aircraft including Seagull amphibians and a Gannet monoplane.

**Ovalau** – cargo of copra caught fire about 100 miles from Lord Howe Island in Oct 1903 but contained until reaching that place. Passengers and crew disembarked before the ship exploded, burnt and finally sank off North Passage. A 1229 ton, 70 metre steamer, built in Scotland in 1891, registered at Sydney as 33/1903, Official Number 141471. Cargo of Cockatoos and parrots let loose on the island. Wreckage lies in 19-30m of water.

**Pacific Chieftain** – a 10 metre, wooden fishing vessel, wrecked in November 1968 at Flat Rock near North Rock, Admiralty Islands. All 11 passengers and crew escaped on a lifeboat.

**S.M. Stetson** – the 707 ton collier barque **SM Stetson** left Newcastle with 1150 tons of coal on 10 March 1877 bound for San Francisco. Sprang a leak and beached at entrance to North Passage on 25 March. Three crew manned a small boat and after a gruelling 7 day voyage made Sydney. Built in the USA, in 1874. Registered San Francisco. Official Number 115351.

**Sylph** -The 13 metre, 17 ton ketch **Sylph** foundered at sea after departing Lord Howe Island for Sydney on 20 April 1873. All 8 crew and passengers drowned. Built at Brisbane Water in 1849, NSW. Owned by Lord Howe Island residents Field, Thompson and Wainright, some of whom were lost with the vessel. Registered in Sydney at 1 of 1850 with Official Number 32395.

**Viking** – A wooden, double-ender, island boat lost between Sydney and Lord Howe Island in November 1936 with the loss of 6 lives.

**Whangaroa** - Became unseaworthy and abandoned about 20 June 1911 after departing New Zealand for Sydney with cargo of hardwood. Crew arrived at Lord Howe Island after four days clinging to vessel. Wreckage later sighted ashore. A 36.48 metre topsail schooner of 143 tons, built at Whangaroa in 1893. Registered Sydney as 46 of 1899 with Official Number 94270.

**Wolf** - the 265 ton whaling barque **Wolf** wrecked near Lord Howe Island in 1837. At sea for 18 months with 1700 barrels of sperm whale oil aboard. Exhausted crew went ashore for water and food. **Wolf** blew against near-shore reefs and holed, later sinking within ten miles of shore. Originally built as a gun-brig at the Royal Navy Woolwich Dockyard in 1814.

**Zeno** - abandoned off Lord Howe Island on a voyage from Newcastle to Wellington, New Zealand with coal. Foundered on 6 September 1895 with 10 crew making the safety of the island. A 407 ton, 38.92 metre brigantine, built at John’s River, Nova Scotia, Canada in 1876. Registered Auckland at folio 26 of 1891, Official Number 74343.