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 9 ships that have been lost in or near Shellharbour. 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.
The shipwrecks of Shellharbour

**Alexander Berry** - a wooden screw steamer owned by the Illawarra Steam Navigation Company when wrecked at Bass Point on 1 July 1901. Four of the five crew lost their lives in this tragic event. The vessel was 62 tons, 24.6m in length, built by James Bower & Co at Pyrmont, NSW in 1873. Registered at Sydney as 6 of 1874, Official No. 69740.

**Amphitrite** - a wooden ketch under the command of one of the owners, William Baxter, went ashore at Shellharbour on 15 May 1851. It soon became a total wreck. The remains of the ketch have not been found. The vessel was, 17 tons, 11.8m in length, built at Brisbane Water, NSW, in 1847. Registered at Sydney as 29 of 1850.

**Bertha** - a wooden top sail schooner on a voyage from Sydney to Kiama when driven ashore in a gale on 9 September 1879. The schooner became a total wreck on the north side of Bass Point. The Bertha was under the command of Frederick Mahler and owned by F W Cook. There were about 3 crew and 2 passengers on board. Aboriginal witnesses to the shipwreck saved the lives of the Captain and crew by taking a line from the vessel to the shore. The Bertha, in ballast at the time of loss, was engaged in the transport of road metal from Kiama to Sydney. The remains of the schooner have not been found. The vessel was 64 tons, 22.1m in length, built by Edward Davis at Davistown, Brisbane Water, NSW, in 1864. Registered at Sydney as 64 of 1864, Official No. 49269.

**Cities Service Boston** - a large steel screw steamer, ran aground at Bass Point during a storm on 16 May 1943. Members of the Australian Sixth Machine Gun Battalian soldiers camped nearby assisted in the rescue of the crew. All the crew were saved but, sadly, four of the rescuers drowned. The steamer was 9348 tons, 153.5m in length, built in 1921 in New York as one of the WWII Liberty Ships.

**Comboyne** - a wooden screw steamer, wrecked after striking an object about 1 mile off Bass Point on 27 November 1920. The ship was engaged in the timber trade for Allen Taylor & Co and was under the command of Captain Woods. The remains of the steamer have not been found. The vessel was 281 tons, 42.42m in length, built by Earnest Wright at Tuncurry, NSW, in 1911. Registered at Sydney as 25 of 1911, Official No. 131486.

**Echo** - a wooden schooner, on a voyage from Shoalhaven to Sydney with a cargo of what, maize and potatoes, struck a rock near Long Point, Shellharbour and was wrecked on 21 March 1863. The remains of the schooner have not been found. The vessel was 21 tons, 11.3m in length, built at Sydney in 1843. Registered at Sydney as 76 of 1848, Official No. 32472.

**Franz** - a wooden schooner, on a voyage from Sydney to Kiama, was wrecked in an easterly gale just north of Lake Illawarra on 9 September 1879. The Franz was owned by F W Cook and engaged in carrying road metal but was in ballast at the time of loss. The Master was John Jenkins. He and 6 other crew were all saved. The remains of the schooner have not been found. The vessel was 148 tons, 25.2m in length, built near Hamburg, Germany, in 1862 in 1868. Registered at Sydney as 73 of 1875, Official No. 64388.

**Kiltobranks** - a wooden screw steamer, with a cargo of blue metal and under the command of Capt Gardiner, was wrecked at Shellharbour on 21 February 1924. The remains of the steamer have not been found. The vessel was 272 tons, 40.75m in length, built by Rock Davis at Blackwall, NSW, in 1908. Registered at Sydney as 36 of 1908, Official No. 125170.

**Our Own** - a wooden paddle steamer, wrecked on a beach Bass Point on 21 August 1880 after suffering machinery failure. Two lives were lost. Our Own was carrying general cargo and a steam engine. The vessel was 73 tons, 26.94m in length, built by Reuben Greentree at Nowra in 1878. Registered by the owners, John McArthur & Co, at Sydney as 45 of 1878, Official No. 74982.