Shipwrecks - Shoalhaven

Sailors clinging to their disintegrating ship, battling overwhelming seas, clutching at floating debris, gasping for momentary breaths in foaming surf - these are the images and experiences of shipwreck.

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 11 ships that have been lost in or near the Shoalhaven. If you wish to obtain more information or if you wish to share information from other sources, please contact:

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NSW Heritage Office
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Phone: 02-9635 6155 Fax: 02-9891 4688
Email: heritage.office@heritage.nsw.gov.au
Shipwreck Database: Link to National Shipwreck Database through http://www.heritage.nsw.gov.au, or http://aima.iinet.net.au

See also the Shipwreck Atlas of New South Wales, 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.

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**The Shipwrecks of Shoalhaven**

*Endeavour* - a wooden schooner, built at Sydney in 1801. The vessel, 31 tons, was built by Kable and Co but no Register entry has been found. On 2 March 1813, the *Endeavour* was wrecked half an hour before the *Mercury* (see below), while on a voyage from Sydney to obtain a cargo of cedar. During the overland return of the to Sydney, crew members met various Aboriginal people from whom they obtained fish by ‘menace and entreaty’ and by stealing supplies from an unattended camp site. The remains of the schooner have not been found.

*Helena* - a small wooden screw steamer, 1.58 tons gross, 5.9m in length, whose port and date built were not recorded but which was registered in Sydney as folio 98 of 1883. Owned by Cyril Blackett, the *Helena* was wrecked at Nowra on the Shoalhaven River in 1885 and the hull was subsequently burnt. The low pressure engine was removed to drive a ‘churn’. The remains of the steamer have not been found.

*Henrietta* - a wooden schooner, built by Rock Davis at Brisbane Water in 1871. Registered in Sydney as folio15 of 1871, Official No. 64359. The vessel, in ballast and under the command of Peter Peterson, foundered at Crookhaven Reef off Shoalhaven Heads while on a voyage from Sydney to Shoalhaven on 4 February 1880. The *Henrietta* was owned by Walter John Pashley, a timber merchant. The remains of the schooner have not been found.

*Lady of the Lake* - a wooden schooner, 14 tons, 16.45m in length, built at a time and place unknown, was registered at Sydney as folio 36 of 1863, Official No. 46440. The crew of 3 survived when the vessel, in ballast, was wrecked about 7 nautical miles off Shoalhaven Bight on 31 July 1879. The remains of the schooner have not been found.

*Maggie Scott* - a wooden ketch, 30 tons, 18.1m in length, built by Thomas Davis at Brisbane Water in 1868. Registered at Newcastle as 1 of 1884, Official No. 59503. The vessel, on a voyage from Tomkin Creek to Sydney with a cargo of sawn hardwood, sprang a leak and was wrecked off Black Point at the north end of Shoalhaven Bight on 14 June 1889. The remains of the ketch have not been found.

*Marvel* - a wooden screw steamer, 71 tons gross, 22.98m length, built at Jervis Bay in 1891. Registered at Sydney as folio 14 of 1891, Official No. 93649. The vessel, with a cargo of logs, sprang a leak and was wrecked off Shoalhaven Bight, about 4 nautical miles east of the Pilot Station. The crew of 4 all survived but the remains of the wreck have not been found.

*Mercury* - a wooden schooner of which few details are known except that the owner was Mr Reibey. The *Mercury* was wrecked half an hour before the *Endeavour* (above) and at about the same place. The keel broke after striking a rock. The vessel became unmanageable after the rudder was lost on a sandbank. The remains of the schooner have not been found.

*Result* - a wooden schooner, 56 tons, 25.23m in length, built at Wangaroa, New Zealand in 1882. Registered at Sydney a folio 33 of 1886, Official No. 82715. The vessel was in ballast on a voyage from Sydney to Sir Georges Basin near Jervis Bay when it ‘missed stays’ near Abrahams Bosom, Shoalhaven Bight and was wrecked on 30 September 1893. The remains of the schooner have not been found.

*Sarah Jane* - a ketch, presumably wooden, for which few details are available. The vessel was on a voyage to Moruya when wrecked on the north spit, Crookhaven Heads on 12 June 1864. The remains of the ketch have not been found.

*Susan* - a wooden ketch, 27 tons, 14.29m in length, built at the Hawkesbury River in 1851. Registered in Sydney as folio 68 of 1861. The vessel was on a voyage from Broulee to Shoalhaven with a cargo of wheat when it went ashore about at Crookhaven on 11 July 1853. The remains of the ketch have not been found.

*Unique* - a wooden screw steamer, 84 tons gross, 23.1m in length, built by Rock Davis at Blackwall, Brisbane Water in 1902. Registered at Sydney as folio 23 of 1902, Official No. 112557. The vessel sprang a leak on a voyage from Sydney and was wrecked about 5 nm off Shoalhaven Heads on 4 March 1934. The wreck site has been found.