

Tweed Heads Shipwrecks

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 some of 47 ships that have been lost in or near Tweed Heads. 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

Shipwreck Databases: *Maritime Heritage Online* at <http://maritime.heritage.nsw.gov.au/>, or
Australian National Shipwreck Database at <http://aima.iinet.net.au>.

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

Location



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 Tweed Heads

Unidentified Wreck - Lieutenant John Oxley, Surveyor General of NSW, surveyed the northern NSW coast in 1823. When inspecting Cook Island, his party discovered remains of a shipwreck "on the West end of the island". It included part of the port quarter of a wooden vessel with the stern and quarter-deck partly intact. The timber was identified as oak that "was not totally destroyed" and the vessel thought to have been of at least 300 tons. Wreck not located.

Alberta - the largest vessel lost at Tweed Heads. The new 3168 tons steamer ran aground on the Sutherland Reef south of Fingal lighthouse on 19 October 1890. On a voyage from Japan to Melbourne with coal. The crew of 36 reached Tweed Heads safely in the boats. The 103.60 metres steel single screw steamship owned by the Alberta Steamship Company was built at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK in 1888. Wreck site located.

Dellie - known as the "Apple Wreck", the 410 ton steamer *Dellie* ran ashore on Fingal Beach just north of Fingal Lighthouse on 24 August 1941 after striking offshore reefs. The crew abandoned the vessel that was on a voyage from Tasmania to Brisbane. The beach became strewn with Democrat apples, part of the cargo. These were eagerly collected by locals. A 43.43 metre steel steamer built at Dumbartonshire, UK in 1895, the *Dellie* was owned by Australian Steamships Limited. Registered at Sydney as 18 of 1902 with Official Number 105964. Wreck site located.

Fido - the second largest vessel lost near Tweed Heads on 19 July 1907, when it ran onto a reef at night near Cook Island while the captain was having dinner. When abandoning ship, Captain Larsen shot his Red Setter dog thinking he would have to pay a £50 landing fee. The same dog had earlier saved his wife and child from a cabin fire! A 1433-ton Norwegian steamer under charter to the Pacific Phosphate Company, the *Fido* was carrying 2000 tons of phosphate from Pleasant Island to Sydney. The 70.53 metres steel screw steamer was built in Norway in 1904. Wreck site located.

Orara - the brand new steamer *Orara* was one of the many vessels wrecked while crossing over the dangerous Tweed River bar. Striking the bottom, the 298-ton vessel washed ashore on rocks at the northern side of the entrance on 16 February 1899. The Tweed Pilot attempted to get a line to the wreck from the tug *Terranora* but failed. Later attempts to salvage the vessel also failed and the hull was abandoned. The 40.50 metre wooden single screw steamship was built at Jervis Bay NSW in 1898 and owned by Mr Geroge.W. Nicoll. Registered at Sydney as 48 of 1898 with Official Number 106186. Wreck site not located.

Perseverance - the paddle steamer *Perseverance* was totally wrecked on the north beach after being swamped crossing out on 26 April 1870. Labouring into a heavy sea, the steamer's engine stopped, leaving the 35-ton vessel drifting broadside in the swell. Upon striking the beach, the *Perseverance* was carried high up onto the beach, the passengers and crew rescued by line from the shore. Salvage operations resulted in the engines being recovered. The 21.55 metre timber steamer built at Brisbane Water, NSW in 1867 was originally constructed as a sailing ketch. The vessel then became a Parramatta River steamer before being purchased by Tweed resident, Mr Tankard, for the Tweed River trade. Registered at Sydney as 60 of 1867 with Official Number 38846. Wreck site not located.

Terranora - the local tug *Terranora* was wrecked at the Tweed River bar on 22 February 1933. The accident occurred when the vessel was making soundings of the bar to find a deeper channel. Striking the bar, the 20.60 metre *Terranora* swung around in the swell and washed ashore alongside the northern break wall, a total wreck. The 59-ton timber screw steamship was built at Balmain, NSW in 1896 and owned by Langley Brothers. The vessel was registered at Sydney as 39 of 1896 with Official Number 106125. Wreck site not located.

Tyalgum - the 544-ton steel steamer *Tyalgum* was on a voyage from Sydney to Tweed Heads when it ran ashore on Duranbah Beach under tow on 25 August 1939. With over 2 metres of water rising in the hold, the seventeen crew were taken off with the aid of lines. Several salvage attempts failed, the wreck later being sold at auction and the machinery and boiler recovered. The 48.76 metre steel twin screw steamer was built at Port Glasgow, Scotland, in 1925 and owned by the North Coast Steam Navigation Company Ltd. Registered at Sydney as 22 of 1925 with Official Number 152016. The wreck is occasionally exposed when beach sands are eroded.

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