



Doing shipwreck Research - PART 2: CASE STUDY

Researching the clipper ship, *Queen of Nations* (1861-1881)

This case study will follow the steps used to identify and further research an historic shipwreck located off Corrimal Beach, north of Wollongong, in New South Wales. It shows you the steps involved in gathering background historic information, and of using that information to examine the fragile archaeological remains on the seafloor. The examination of this interesting shipwreck also reveals the importance of the archaeological site for scientific study - it contained a range of materials and goods that were not documented in any of the located historic sources!

The shipwreck was accidentally located in 1993 when staff of the Department of Public Works and Services were conducting some underwater surveys of the beach area. They immediately reported the shipwreck, partially exposed in the sand, to the NSW Heritage Office, a requirement of the Commonwealth *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976*.

Heritage Office Maritime Archaeologists began the process of examining the historic shipwreck remains and attempting to identify the vessel. The first step was to identify all known shipwrecks that occurred in the area since European settlement. This information was already at hand through the Office's Historic Shipwrecks Database. Information on vessel losses had been derived from a number of key primary source documents.

Registers of British Ships

These official registers were developed for each major port by the colonial authorities in the nineteenth century and maintained by the Customs Office. The registers recorded each vessel officially registered in Australian ports, a requirement for owners of vessels. The register recorded the name of the vessel, its type, place and date of build, dimensions, type of propulsion (either by sail or engine power), the succession of owners, including the percentage of shares or partnerships. Individual vessels could have several entries over succeeding years, depending if there were any modifications made (eg lengthening, conversion from sail to steam power), change of name, or port registered (eg Newcastle or Sydney). The register is important because an entry was made if the vessel was destroyed by reason of shipwreck, abandonment or breaking up. This entry provides an important record of the fates of each independent vessel. Copies are available for consulting at the Australian National Maritime Museum Library, Sydney, by request.

Contemporary newspapers

Another important source of information for vessel losses in a particular region, are newspapers. These often recorded the movement of vessels up and down the coast, interstate and overseas, particularly the movements of its important cargoes. The loss of a ship through shipwreck could lead to a long and detailed discussion. While for small vessels, such as coastal traders, this could sometimes comprise only one or two lines, for others the recording of the shipwreck event, rescue of survivors, cargoes and sometimes subsequent salvage attempts, could fill editorial in every paper over a period of weeks.

The shipwreck as a guide

With a list of known losses derived from these sources at hand, the range of possibilities could be narrowed down. When the archaeologists examined the shipwreck they initially measured it and found it to be over 58 metres in length (190 feet). This meant that they were dealing with the remains of a large vessel. Further, evidence on the seafloor confirmed it to be a timber sailing ship, with sections of mast lying alongside and no signs of a marine engine or boiler. The dimensions of hull timbers also confirm that it was a large sailing ship, possibly a three-masted barque or full-rigged ship.

Going back to the historical records, all small sailing ships and all iron sailing vessels, could therefore be discounted, together with steamship losses. Only one large timber sailing ship was

recorded as having been wrecked ashore on Corrimal Beach, and that was the clipper, Queen of Nations in 1881. The dimensions of the shipwreck confirmed the known length of this vessel as reported in the contemporary newspapers. They provided further evidence that this was the wreck of the Queen of Nations - their description and placement of the event exactly matched the location of the shipwreck. Other evidence later confirmed the association, see below.

Lloyds Register of British Shipping

The British Register of Ships could not provide any details for the Queen of Nations however. Being a foreign owned vessel it was therefore not registered in Australia. The newspapers indicated that it was owned by the Aberdeen White Star Line of Scotland, United Kingdom. Another official register was therefore consulted, Lloyds Register of British Shipping, published in London. Like the British Register of Ships, Lloyds Register recorded all vessels registered to ports in the United Kingdom. With copies available at the State Library of New South Wales and the Australian National Maritime Museum Library, a search for a register entry for the Queen of Nations was made.

Lloyds Registration was required annually so a search was first made for the year of the loss, 1881. This would survive as the last official information on the vessel. An entry was found which confirmed the newspaper reference to its size, ownership and tonnage. Further, the register indicated that Walter Hood built it at Aberdeen in 1861. A search through all registers for the years between 1861 and 1881 revealed an entry for each year. This information provided other useful data, three different captains having commanded the vessel and that it had regular repairs to the hull's copper plates between 1863 and 1880. Any major modifications would also be annotated on the register entry if they had been made.

Learning about the wreck event in 1881

The primary goal was to learn more about the wrecking event in 1881. Most of the available information was again found in the contemporary paper's. Being a large vessel wrecked in a relatively urban area at the time, the event attracted a significant level of media interest. Most editions of the major Sydney newspapers, eg Sydney Morning Herald, Illustrated Sydney News, The Bulletin and Sydney Mail, recorded the event, while the locally available paper, the Illawarra Mercury, ran a story in nearly every edition for a month! This written record was invaluable for locating details about the final voyage, the conditions encountered, the reason for the loss, and the attempts made to evacuate the crew. It also provided information on the breakup of the hull over time via eyewitness reports, the salvage of cargo on the beach, and the official investigation of the Captain, Samuel Bache and his Officers. Thankfully in the nineteenth century, newspapers would often repeat, almost verbatim, the investigations into each tragedy as were made available from the official Marine Board of Enquiries into significant losses. Therefore, detailed information as provide by the crew at the time, were reprinted.

The newspapers also provided information on the cargo aboard the vessel at the time of loss, as a "Ship's Manifest". This was in the form of a brief description of the main categories of goods, eg 7000 gallons of cognac, 15 bales of wire, 24 boxes (contents unspecified) for Mr Cunningham, etc. The original ship's manifest, drawn up prior to sailing by the shipping agents used by the shipping companies, rarely survive in other historical collections. The newspapers are therefore another source for this important information.

They also provided some interesting insights into the loss of the *Queen of Nations*, particularly the fact that the captain and First Officer were largely drunk since departing England, and therefore providing a possible reason for the loss of the fine vessel. Such incites are sometimes amusing today, other stories could be of horrific loss, harsh endurance in a boiling sea, and of burying companions washed ashore as a result of a tragic calamity. Drawing out these intriguing stories is important. They can provide a feel for the times and help bring the story of the loss and the people concerned "to life".

Arrival and Departure Records

Information on the prior history of the *Queen of Nations* was obtained from a variety of sources. Apart from the ownership and modification data contained in the Lloyds Register of Shipping, the official Arrivals and Departures records for the Port of Sydney were consulted (copied held

at State Records NSW, Sydney). Maintained by the Customs Office and also republished in modern form, they provide important information on particular voyages, eg arrival dates into and out of Sydney and other major Australian ports. These dates can then be compared to the descriptions in contemporary newspapers to again confirm information and to seek fuller details on cargoes and passengers delivered with each movement.

Lloyds Captains Register

The Lloyds Captain's Register was another official record kept by this insurer, as a means of assessing the relative skills of foreign-trade merchant ship Captains and Mates between 1869-1947. An alphabetical entry, the register lists all vessels commanded by an individual throughout his working life. Copies are held on microfiche at the Library of the Australian National Maritime Museum. The original documents are maintained by the Guildhall Library, Aldermanbury, London, and the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, United Kingdom. Some records prior to 1869 also survive.

Masters and Mates Certificates - Records of Competency

The Masters and Mates Certificates were granted following examinations. The system was established in 1845 by the (UK) Board of Trade for masters and mates of British merchant ships destined for overseas trade. It was made compulsory following the Mercantile Marine Act of 1850 and extended to all home trade vessels from 1854. Copies of the original certification of Captains and Mates are available from the Guildhall Library, London, with some held by the Public Records Office (PRO), London and the National Maritime Museum, London. Copies of the Queen of Nation's captain's examination certificates were located at the Guildhall Library.

Pictorial information

Because the *Queen of Nations* wrecked relatively late in 1881, there was a good chance that graphic representations of the vessel would exist in various forms. The first point of call was again the contemporary newspapers. Several newspapers were established to include pictorial information for the benefit of their readers. The Illustrated Sydney News, Illustrated London News, Australasian Sketcher, The Bulletin and Illustrated Sydney News, all featured a variety of scenes, including those shipping related. Both the Illustrated Sydney News and Sydney Mail featured stories of the loss of the Queen of Nations and an artistic representation of the vessel ashore at time of loss. These provided a unique opportunity to relive the moment of the loss and they provided a range of information which could be compared to the observed archaeological remains, eg orientation of the vessel to the beach, stages of collapse, actions of salvage parties, and sea conditions.

Institutional Collections

Another source of pictorial material are major libraries. The Mitchell/State Library of New South Wales, in Sydney, for instance has an extensive collection of photographs and artworks, some collections dealing specifically with vessels and other maritime themes. Copies can generally be ordered for research use but are subject to copyright clearance and appropriate fees. The library holds one of the most extensive collections of historical records related to Australiana. This includes original correspondence from the earliest days of the colonial period, to vessel logs, personal diaries, shipping charts and early surveys, and occasionally, shipping company records, etc. Other major institutions that should be consulted include the Australian Archives and the National Archives of Australia in Canberra.

Historical Societies

Another source of historic photographs and painting is your local Historical Society. These volunteer organisations have been established by individuals keen to document and appreciate aspects of their local history. Often doubling as small museums, they are often a source of rare records such as donated shipping related materials. Staff are very knowledgeable about the local history and in touch with other residents with similar interests and resources. Details of locally established Historical Societies can be found through the Royal Australian Historical Society (RAHS) in Macquarie Street, Sydney.

Local Studies Libraries

A search of the local studies library at your local council can also be rewarding. The Local

Studies Section of Wollongong City Council's public library was found to hold some significant information on the Queen of Nations.

Local studies libraries can often contain a wealth of locally significant information from donated diaries, paintings, family archives to modern research data, etc. The library held two original silver gelatin photographs of the Queen of Nations taken on the beach in 1881. Original black and white or sepia photographs of shipwreck events are always rare in New South Wales, and it was a fantastic find. The photographs were of immense value - they provided factual information on the construction and form of the vessel, and supporting information on its orientation, and stages of collapse. They served as a window to the past, allowing the researcher to follow the events of 1881 almost as a spectator!

Other Overseas Archives.

Following a media release on the discovery, a descendant of one of the Queen of Nations original captain's, Thomas Mitchell, got in touch. This family, living in Aberdeen, Scotland, had family members resident in Australia who relayed the information. This sort of contact is always rewarding, allowing the researcher to meet first hand, descendants of the original people involved in the vessel and sometimes the loss. The Donald family had possession of an original oil painting depicting the Queen of Nations, thought to have been painted by a Chinese artist during one of its earlier trips in the tea trade, and a photograph of Mitchell. The family also held personal artefacts related to the vessel, including a silver cigar case presented to Captain Mitchell by passengers aboard the Queen of Nations on an earlier voyage.

National Maritime Museum, London

In relation to the Queen of Nations, the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich, London, in the United Kingdom, is an invaluable archive. They maintain one of the most significant collections of information related to British built and owned vessels. The museum held copies of the Lloyds Building Survey Report commissioned in 1861 when the Queen of Nations was being assessed for insurance purposes. These official inspections were conducted by Lloyds and provide exhaustive information on the dimensions of a vessel, down to the size of the bolts used! They survive for some, but certainly not all, vessels built in the United Kingdom. The museum is also a major custodian of ship's plans where they survive. Unfortunately, no plans existed for the Queen of Nations. Copies of records held can be made upon request.

References

The key to any good historical report is to provide the reader with details of all information sourced. This allows the details to be checked and also for people to later extend research. The sources used should be tabled in a Bibliography or References section and include the name of the author, title of article, manuscript or book, etc, its current location, date of publication and publisher or custodian.

Similarly, sources of specific information used throughout the text should be credited. This can be done by "in text" references, eg Smith, 1987, said, or as a succession of footnotes. All assistance provided by individuals and organisations should be listed in an acknowledgments section, and all pictorial material duly credited following approval for use.

How much is enough?

Historical research is never completed. There is always "one more" source of information to track down, or a new line of enquiry to begin. This is part of the fun and detective work of the historian. The level of information obtained is more related to your needs - eg what is the aim of your research, what format will it be used (published) in, your time, access to repositories, etc. It is possible to spend a lifetime researching one particular vessel or shipping company, or a specific region. Each piece of new information adds to the whole.

Useful References

Library Pathfinders

The Library of the Australian National Maritime Museum has published a 12-part reference guide to major documentary sources used for maritime history research. Covering topics such

as Immigrant sailing ships, shipwrecks, convict ships, coastal shipping, seafaring ancestors and lighthouses, the very useful guides are available from the museum by contacting them on ph: (02) 9298 3777.

Guide to Shipping and Passenger Records

State Records NSW (formerly the State Archives Office NSW), has available for purchase the Guide to Shipping and Passenger Records book that provides a summary of the major collections held in their collection. Copies can be purchased from State Records at their public reading room, 1 Globe Street The Rocks, Sydney (ph: 02 9237 0254).

Archives in Brief

State Records have also available a range of information sheets covering material in their collection, Archives in Brief. They cover themes such as, Shipping and Arrival Records, Convict Records, Tracing Your Family History, Sources for Local History Research, Records Relating to Crew.

Sydney Heritage Fleet

The Sydney Heritage Fleet (formerly Sydney Maritime Museum) maintains a research centre and has available a Research and records Service. The SHF can be reached on (02) 9298 3888.

Royal Australian Historical Society

The RAHS has available an information sheet, Maritime Sources for Historians and Genealogists, by Vaughan Evans 1988. They also publish three guides to the pictorial records available in leading illustrative newspapers from the nineteenth century. Also compiled by Vaughan Evans, the guides are: Maritime Illustration Index 1: Illustrated Sydney News 1853-1889; Maritime Illustration Index 2: Illustrated London News 1842-1891; and Maritime Illustration Index 3: Australasian Sketcher 1873-1889. Copies can be obtained by contacting the Society on (02) 9247 8001.

Foster, Leonie, 1986, "Doing Shipwreck History". Paper presented at the Australian Institute for Maritime Archaeology Conference, Queenscliff Victoria in 1986. Copies available from Heritage Victoria, Melbourne.

Australian Association for Maritime History (AAMH)

AAMH publishes a journal entitled, The Great Circle and is available by order or regular subscriptions. Formed in 1978, AAMH can provide limited assistance on historical research. Contact the Secretary,