

COLONIAL WRECKS IN THE ABROLHOS ISLANDS



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Mike McCarthy
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INTRODUCTION

Apart from numerous small rock lobster boats, there are sixteen known wrecks in the Abrolhos Islands area, fourteen of those vessels belong to the Colonial Period and range in date of loss from 1840 to 1961 and in size from almost 2000 tons to little more than 20 tons.

Brief details are as follows:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Size & Type</u>	<u>Area of Wreck</u>
1842	<u>Ocean Queen</u>	268 ton wooden barque	Half Moon Reef
1851	<u>Venus</u>	Small wooden schooner	Position unknown
1855	<u>Preston</u>	20 ton wooden schooner	Pelsaert Island
1861	<u>Cochituate</u>	347 ton wooden barque	Position unknown
1877	<u>Hadda</u>	316 ton barque	Wallabi Group near Beacon Is. 28°28'24" 113°47'30"
1878	<u>Marten</u>	28 ton wooden schooner	East side of Pelsaert Is. near <u>Ben Ledi</u>
1879	<u>Ben Ledi</u>	1107 ton iron sailing ship	East side of Pelsaert Is. 28°56' 113°59'
1891	<u>Evelyn Marie</u>	18 ton wooden cutter	Position unknown
1897	<u>Nautilus</u>	Private yacht	Gun Is.
1897	<u>Orpheus</u>	Wooden schooner	? <i>Wooded Is. Easter</i> North Island <i>Group</i>
1890s	Guano Barge		Near Seal Is. Wallabi Group 28°29'00"S 113°49'10"E
1901	<u>Neptune</u>	22 ton wooden cutter	Geelvink Channel
1908	<u>Windsor</u>	1853 ton iron steamer	Half Moon Reef near Pelsaert Is. 29°0'0" S 113°56'30"E
1914	<u>Ivy</u>	35 ton wooden lugger	Wooded Is. Easter Group

<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Size & Type</u>	<u>Area of Wreck</u>
1921	<u>Ada</u>	Wooden fishing boat	North Is. Wallabi Group
1940s onwards	numerous small craft		
1961	<u>Jon Jim</u>	37 ton wooden freezer boat	South end of Is. Near Jon Jim Is

FIGURE 1. A section of chart B.A. 1056 showing the Abrolhos Islands.

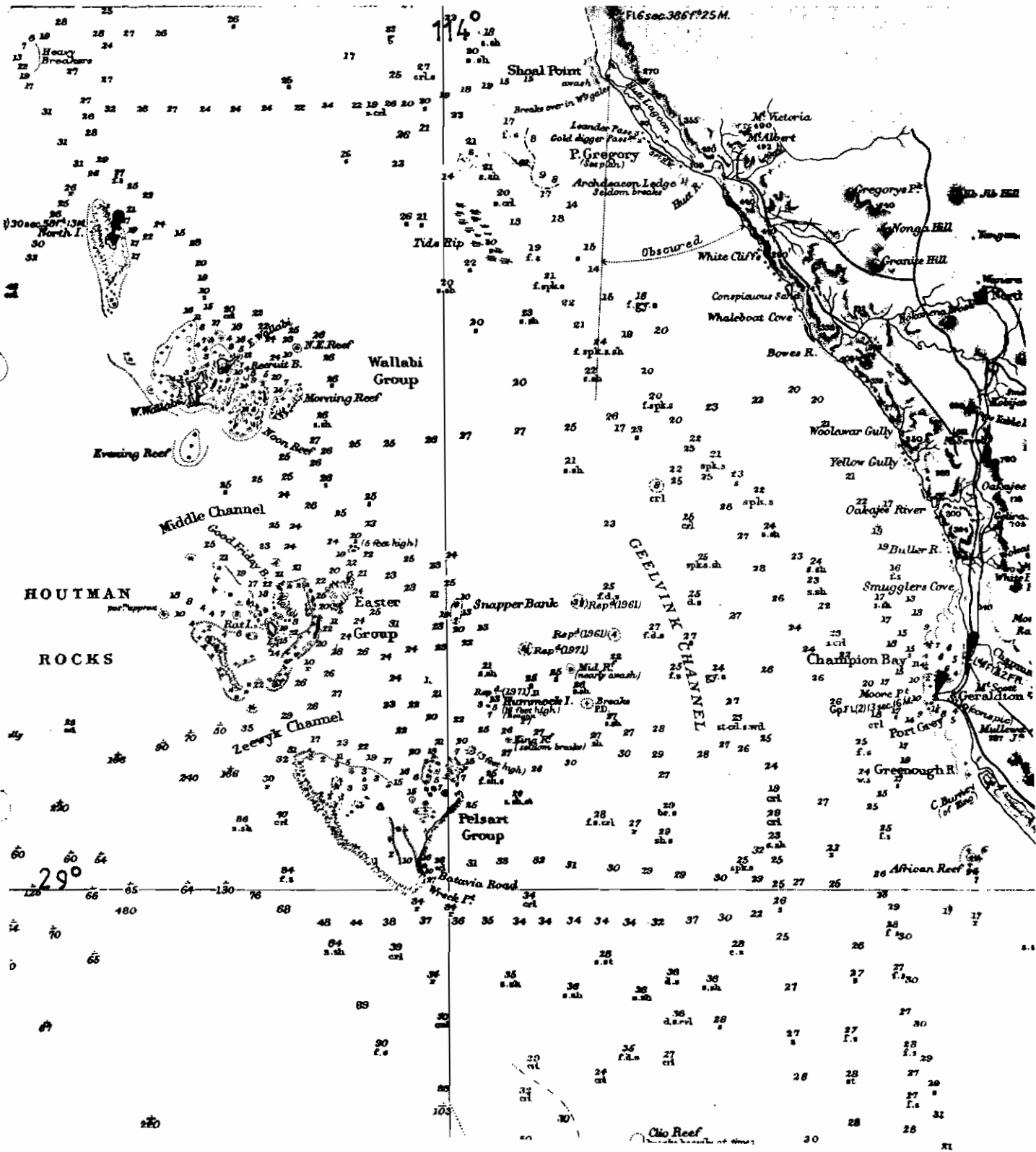
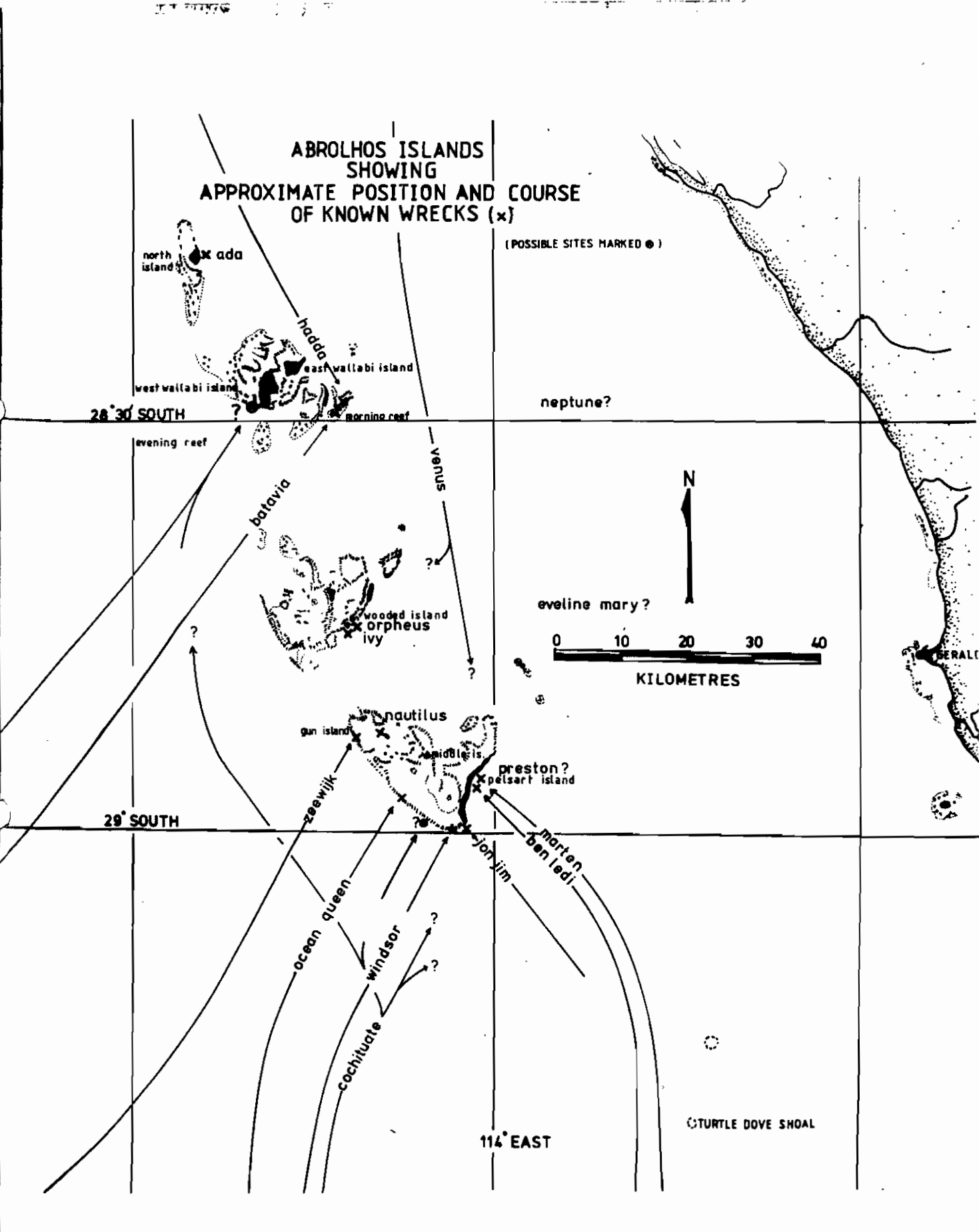


FIGURE 2. A drawing of the Abrolhos Islands and the approximate paths of the wrecks. (M. McCarthy)



1. Wrecks of the Wallabi Group

Apart from the VOC ship Batavia the only known sites are the Hadda, wreckage believed to be a Guano Barge and the Ada.

Hadda:

This 316 ton wooden barque of Newcastle was wrecked on 30 April 1877 on a voyage from the Lacedpede Islands while under charter to a Melbourne firm engaged in the Guano Industry. She is reported (1) as being wrecked in latitude 20°28'26" but her remains are almost certainly those lying further south in reasonably calm water near Beacon Island. Her Captain told the court of inquiry (2) of the difficulties in steering the vessel in the following seas and other factors leading to the loss of the vessel. The crew stayed with the Hadda for a number of days and eventually arrived at Champion Bay in the ship's boats. The captain was exonerated by the court and he subsequently bought the wreck for 150 pounds. The discrepancies in the reported latitude of the vessel and the site of the wreck cast some doubts on the credibility of the skipper, a point elaborated further in Hugh Edward's book Gods and Little Fishes (3). Some photographs of artefacts incorrectly attributed to Hadda, are in Edward's book and others were found during an expedition to the Wallabi Group in conjunction with the Maritime Archaeology Training Course. The stern third of the vessel was excavated in 1981 and a report filed (4). The site was also seen by a Museum team in 1975 but work on the VOC ship Batavia precluded a complete inspection. The site had been heavily salvaged but all indications point to the Hadda.

FIGURE 3. Excavating the Hadda



FIGURE 3. Hadda showing hull timbers



Guano Barge:

A site originally thought to be a Guano Barge (5) also lies in the vicinity of Beacon Island (just off Seal Is.). This site was inspected and is described, however, in the Day Book of the Batavia expedition (April 4th, 1975) as assorted bits of heavy machinery scattered over an area of 5 x 5 metres. The report goes on to say that the evidence did not suggest a shipwreck but rather a "place where ballast had been jettisoned or machinery dumped". Edwards (1962) however, claims that the site is the remains of a Guano Barge which broke away from its two and was wrecked at the location. The site was examined again in December 1980, and the area to shoreward and out to sea examined, but no further traces of a wreck apart from those originally reported were found. The site appears to be the remains of a windlass or similar machine, but there was no evidence of a larger structure. Its appearance in isolation is inexplicable at present and Edwards may be correct in his claim.

Ada:

The Register of Wrecks and Casualties (6) refers to the loss of this 18 ton vessel in an entry dated 19/7/1921. Another reference to the wreck (7) has the following report:

1921: "The Ada was wrecked at the Abrolhos Islands on the North islands, where the crew were stranded and exhausted for two days without food and water, and then had to pull 15 miles in a leaky dinghy with only one paddle and a half one, across the open sea to Wallabi Island (West) before they got the first boat for help".

West Reef Wreck?

Apart from these 3 sites, there has been an unofficial report of a wreck on West Reef in the Wallabi Group, but as yet a search has not been made and this Department awaits an official report of finding.

2. Wrecks of the Easter Group

Orpheus:

A schooner owned by Broadhurst and McNeil, Guano Merchants was wrecked off Woody (sic) Island on 5.2.1897 (8). While getting underway the anchors dragged and the schooner slipped into a 12 fathom hole and drifted onto a nearby reef before she could be checked. Efforts were made to get her off, but on the 9th she filled with water and was abandoned. The cargo and gear were lost in the wreck, though some salvage was undertaken later by Captain MacKenzie of Geraldton.

Ivy:

This unregistered 35 ton fishing lugger is reported (9) has having been wrecked on 29/8/1914 while fishing off the Abrolhos. Two of the crew initially saved themselves by clinging to the rudder of the upturned vessel only to be swept under and drowned when the vessel righted itself. The other crewman boarded the mastless vessel, which drifted in the strong south easterly onto Wooded Island, where she eventually broke up and disappeared.

3. Wrecks of the Geelvinck Channel

Neptune:

This cutter of 22 tons is reported (1) as on 13/6/1901 having been: "caught in a heavy gale in the Geelvinck Channel and became a total loss".

One crew member of the complement of 3 was lost and she was owned by F.C. Broadhurst and is referred to as (11) one of the lighters of Broadhurst, McNeil and Co. Guano Merchants. She was previously owned by George Shenton of Perth, and was used for taking cargo from Gage Roads to Perth Wharf. She was built at Perth in 1870 and registered at Fremantle as Number 4/1870. She had one deck, one mast and a square stern. She was of carvel build with a wood frame. Dimensions 45' x 14' x 3'. The register was closed on the 4/10/1901 (12).

4. Unknown Locations

There are 3 vessels to which no definite lead to the area of their loss has yet been found.

Venus:

This small unregistered schooner was wrecked on 10/4/1851 at the Abrolhos Islands, whilst returning to Fremantle on a voyage from Singapore.

Three of her remaining 5 survivors are reported (13) as having arrived at Champion Bay in a small dinghy after surviving for 7 months on seal meat and rice "obtained from the wreck".

The remaining 2 survivors were rescued by a Mr George Green, who sailed for the Abrolhos at the bidding of the local magistrate and for a remuneration of 20 pounds.

The survivors evidently lived on Middle Island, which was known since the much publicised voyage of the Beagle as one of the few reliable sources of fresh water in the Abrolhos. (14)

The Venus, in her earlier career, was also involved in the occupation of the islands by the Pelsaert Island Fishing Company (15), which was formed in 1847 at the Abrolhos. The company was granted a 7 year lease, with power to charge their successors for any permanent buildings that they might erect (16,17) and renewable annually. The skipper of the Venus would have been aware of this previous arrangement, and would have headed after the wreck to Middle Island in the hope of finding water and shelter.

Twenty-eight years later, John Forrest, then Deputy Surveyor General for the Colony, visited Middle Island and recorded the remains of 2 stone houses 'erected by a fishing party from Fremantle' and a grave with a headstone inscribed:

'Here lieth the body of John Williams Seaman,
died April 1851 in the wreck of the Venus aged
41 years'. (17)

A grave was found in 1978 approximately 300 m north of 2 stone structures on Middle Island and the remains sent to Perth for analysis. The body was not that of a European and the possibility of another grave nearby must be considered. On closer examination only one of the stone structures appeared to be the remains of a hut, while the other appears to be a trig marker probably constructed from the remains of the dwelling. These structures were drawn and appear below:

FIGURE 4. A drawing of the stone structure on Middle Island

STONE STRUCTURE (HUT?)

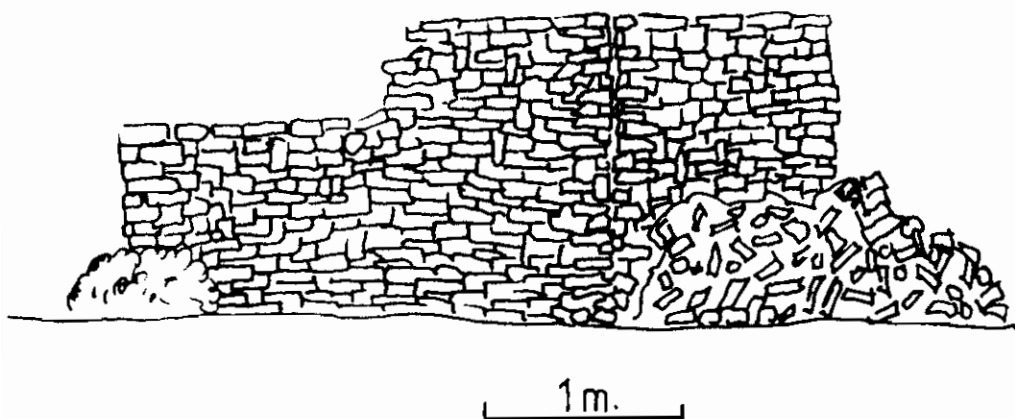
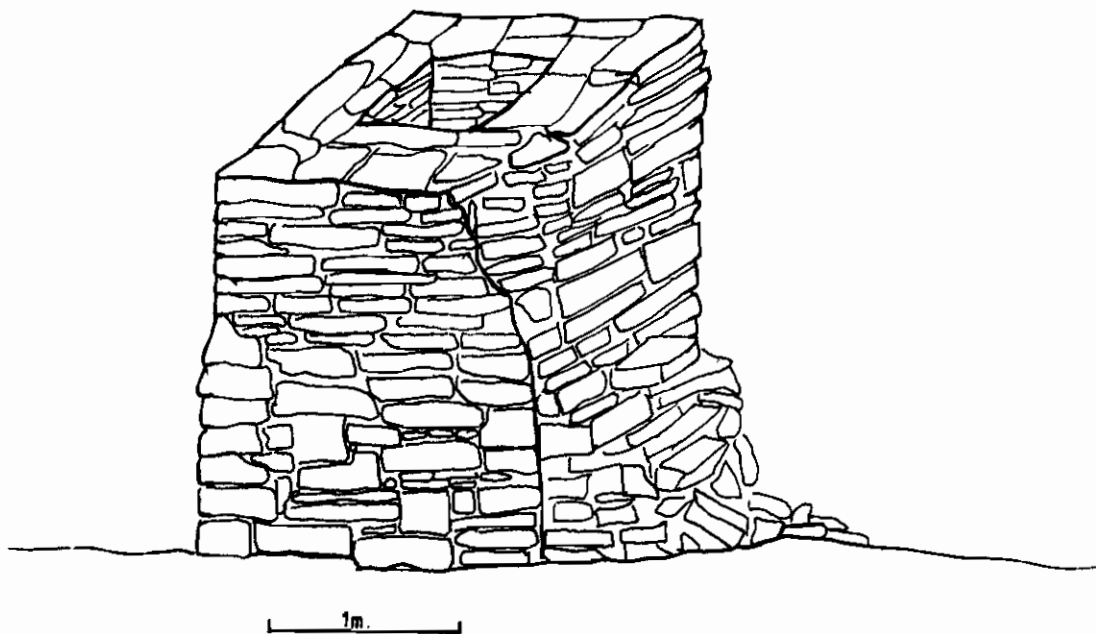


FIGURE 4b. The second stone structure on Middle Island

STONE STRUCTURE (TRIG POINT?)



Cochituate:

This 347 ton barque of Boston USA was wrecked during a voyage from Melbourne to Singapore after she "struck on a rock at 3 p.m. (sic) on the morning of the 14th June - supposed to be the Abrolhos".

Seventeen days later a starving Dutch crewman reached Fremantle to seek aid for those travelling down the coast. After landing near Cockleshell Gully, the captain being unaware that Champion Bay was settled, began the long trek south. On their journey some of the crew stumbled on the yards of a vessel of around 4-500 tons and many candles strewn along the coast. The Cochituate had experienced heavy gales for some days previous to the accident, but at the time it occurred there was only a light wind. It was reported that when the breakers were seen an attempt was made to put the ship about, but she missed stays. There was a number of inaccuracies in this report, and the next edition of the Inquirer (20) contains corrections and the report of her Master Captain George F. Bangs (sic) it appears that she "struck while in stays" and that when the men left the ship she was half full of water, and was breaking up just an hour after she struck, with nothing saved from her.

Goldsmith, (21) claims that the vessel ran onto a shoal of reefs at the north end of Pelsart Island. No other such reference has been found and to check the report, members of the recent (1979) expedition walked both sides of Pelsart Island and conducted a swimming search of the eastern shore to a depth of circa 5 metres. Some wreckage consistent with a large wooden vessel was found on the north eastern shore of Pelsart Island, though no evidence of a wreck was found in the swimline search. The most significant pieces found were lengths of mast or spar timber, a large knee with copper alloy and tree nail fastenings and parts of a fiddle block.

The area is also strewn with timber of a modern variety (e.g. fencing), natural driftwood, plastics, bottles and other rubbish. This site appears to be a locus for flotsam and the remains can not therefore, be considered a definite lead to a wreck in the area. Goldsmith also cannot be considered a perfectly reliable source as he places the wreck of the Ocean Queen (22) and on the east side of Pelsart Island, towards the north end. A more conclusive report showing that the Cochituate was unlikely to have been wrecked in the Southern Abrolhos, is the report (2) to the Colonial Secretary, on the search of the south-west Islands of the Abrolhos by the schooner Clarence Packet in 1872. This vessel was engaged in the search for the missing schooner Flying Foam, and arrived at a point half a mile off the beach at the southern most point of the Island. They found themselves unable to land and two men then went "aloft with the glasses and surveyed the beach minutely as the vessel stood to the north, but failed to see anything which might have been belonging to the missing vessel".

The next day a team was able to land and after dividing to search both sides walked the length of the island, in similar fashion, it appears to the search undertaken by the 1979 expedition. The report is quite conclusive and states that the team travelled

"a distance of 10 miles without seeing anything that might have belonged to the wreck of any vessel"
The report also concludes with the statement that the author was:

"confident that there is no wreck or vestige of any recent wreck on the SW Island of the Abrolhos".

The results of this search only 11 years after the wreck of the Cochituate tend to negate any argument to the effect that there was any wreck in the area prior to 1872. The mast fragments, knee and other fittings appear therefore to be associated with flotsam from a later wreck, e.g. Hadda 1877 or another similar vessel. The site of the Cochituate wreck must therefore be still a matter for conjecture. A wreck was seen on West Reef in the early 1930s by Mr Fred Cato then caretaker for a canning factory on West Wallabi. There is a strong possibility that this site is the Cochituate.

Evelyn Marie:

This 18 ton cutter (O.N. 61113) was wrecked on a voyage from Geraldton to the Abrolhos and broken up during a gale about April 1891 (24). She was built at Fremantle in 1874, had 1 deck, 1 mast, an oval stern and was of wood frame and carvel built. Her length was 42 feet, beam 13 feet and draught 5 feet. She was owned by Richard Burton, a lighter man of Geraldton. (25)

5. Wrecks of the Pelsart Group

The following vessels are known to have been wrecked in the Southern or Pelsart Group of the Abrolhos Islands:

<u>Ocean Queen</u>	1842
<u>Preston</u>	1850
<u>Marten</u>	1878
<u>Ben Ledi</u>	1878
<u>Nautilus</u>	1897
<u>Windsor</u>	1908
<u>Jon Jim</u>	1961

A search was conducted along the Half Moon Reef and both sides of Pelsart Island for the remains of these vessels, but to date the Preston and the Marten have not been found, and a search was not instigated in the Gun Island area, where the Nautilus was wrecked.

There is one other major incident recorded, that of the recovery in 1848 of a 24 cwt anchor, lost by the Cumberland which "went ashore on one of these islands on her voyage hence to China and was got off after 6 hours of labour: the vessel's escape from being a total wreck was a miracle, as had she gone only her own length on either side, nothing could have saved her, the locality is the bottom of a deep bay which has an exceedingly narrow entrance, but within a harbour secure from every wind (26).

Ocean Queen

Apart from the Zeewijk and the Batavia wrecks, the Ocean Queen is perhaps the best known of all the wrecks in the Abrolhos Islands. This 268 ton Barque had a long run of misfortune, having been severely damaged in Launceston on a voyage from London, in July 1840. Damage was so bad, it was feared that the vessel would be a total loss. She underwent substantial repair however, and set sail for Bali in ballast. (27)

The Inquirer of October 12th, 1842 reported that on the night of September 13th, 1842 "The circumstances became known by the arrival on Sunday last at Fremantle of the master of the ship with 13 of the crew being the whole number on board, with the exception of one man, who, being unable to carry on had been left behind 3 days before at a large river supposed to be the Moore River. On the same afternoon a party of natives was despatched from Perth to carry assistance to the man left behind, and Messrs Bibra and Milne left Fremantle with the same object; the man was found by Mr Bibra about 50 miles to the northward, and brought in yesterday to Fremantle. From the statement of the master of the vessel it appears that the Ocean Queen was wrecked on the night of the 13th September, the crew taking to the boats and landing on one of the large islands of the Abrolhos Group. Here they stayed two days, when they again embarked in the boats with the intention of gaining the settlement. The wind, however, being adverse, they were compelled to pull against a heavy current, until, when almost 70 miles to the northward of Fremantle, they abandoned the boats, and performed the rest of the journey overland. The master of the ship is about to charter a small vessel to revisit the wreck and to pick up the specie buried by him on the island on which they first landed. Houtman's Abrolhos appears on every chart of the West Coast, and have been lately accurately surveyed by the Beagle. We have not heard however, how the Ocean Queen came to be in this dangerous position....."

Captain Scott, the Harbourmaster, in his letter (28) dated 3 days previous to the Inquirer's report, informed the Colonial Secretary of the wreck and the state of the survivors. In the letter he also stated his intention of:

"Going tomorrow morning in a boat with the Captain to bring up the money left behind on the beach. The sale of the wreck by Lloyds agent - also Captain Scott was dated in the Perth Gazette 15/10/1842 and a somewhat sour note appears:

"We understand that parties have proceeded to the spot to make the most of this bargain.....
The wreck of the above vessel was sold for 25 pounds."

The same newspaper on 29/10/1842 records the departure of the Venus, "chartered for the Abrolhos by Captain Scott to recover the remaining part of the wreck of the Ocean Queen of which he was purchaser at public auction". On the 19th of the next month is recorded the first news of the return:

Arrived; "On the 13th inst. the cutter Venus, from the Abrolhos. She has bought all the stones and part of the gear of the barque Ocean Queen wrecked there."

The Inquirer (16 November 1842) fills in the events that transpired:

"The Venus arrived at the Abrolhos on the 1st inst. and found the wreck of the Ocean Queen, the ship was thrown down on her beam ends and bilged with her foremast gone and her mainmast still standing. Here also, Mr Scott found his own boat which had been despatched from Fremantle with the mate and crew of the Ocean Queen. This boat, although it had left Fremantle more than a week before the Venus had only arrived at the Abrolhos 2 days before, having been 17 days on the passage owing partly due to the boisterous state of the weather, and partly to the delay caused by stopping on a part of the coast to pick up the boat of the Ocean Queen, and the different effects buried by the crew which they were forced to abandon, and continue their journey overland. In attempting to land, the boat was twice swamped, but ultimately a landing effected and the clothes and other things recovered. A diligent search was made for the specie buried in this place by the master of the Ocean Queen but without success. Captain Harrington of the Ocean Queen was initially reported as having buried the specie on the island on which they first landed and here another anomaly in the report appears. Captain Scott in the meantime continued his official and unofficial business and in a letter (29) to the Colonial Secretary on the 14th November, 1842, states:

"I have returned from the Abrolhos yesterday morning and have brought with me 7 ship mails for Indian which I found in the cabin of the Ocean Queen. I have now placed them in the hands of the Postmaster here."

Scott, as salvor, also recovered some provisions and the anchors and cables from the wreck, and his prompt official actions with respect to the wreck were praised by the Governors Office as having been an "advantage to the public". (30)

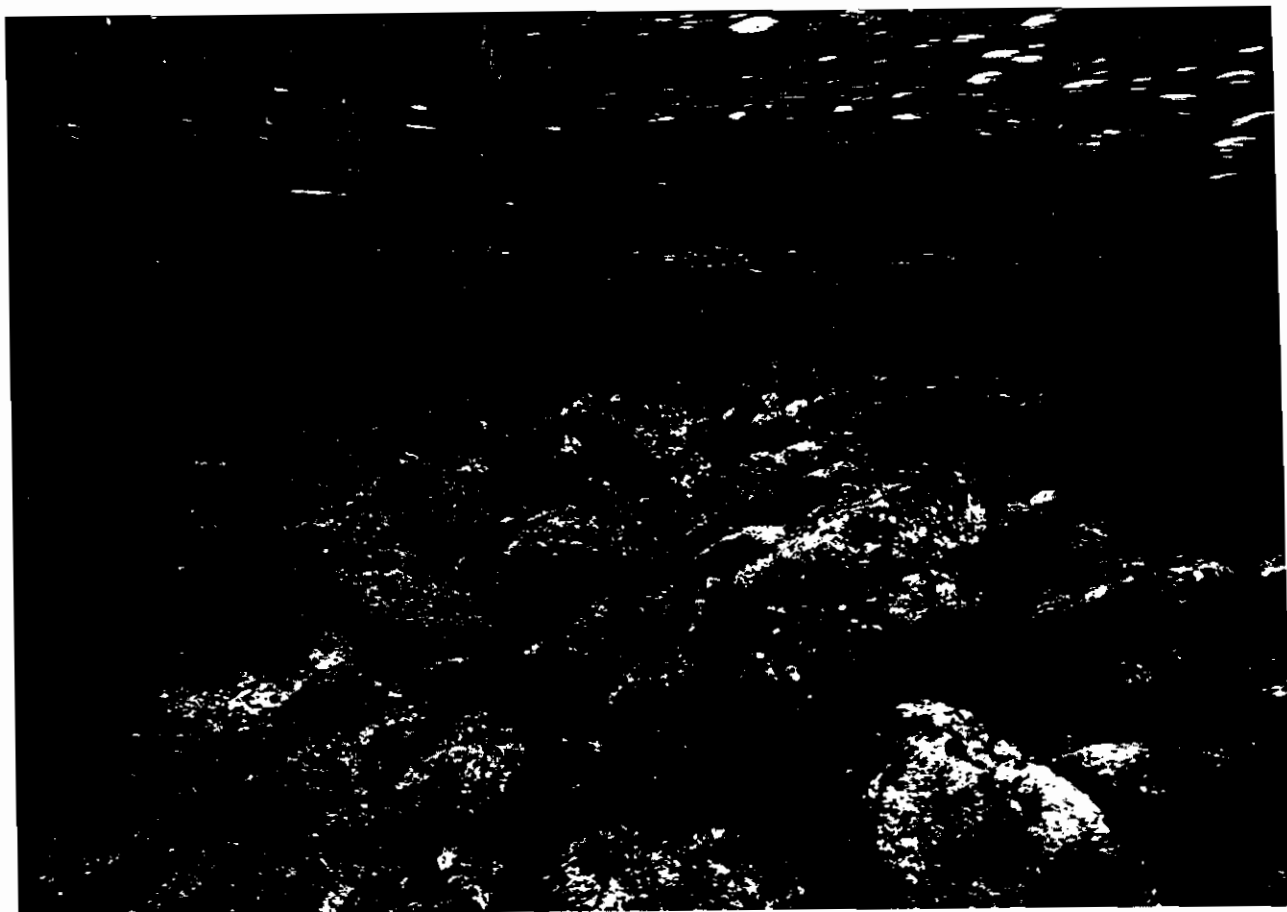
There appears to have been a certain amount of public disquiet over the wreck, and the subsequent loss of the specie one most pointed is this report from the Perth Gazette of 26/11/1842:

"...a general impression has prevailed that this vessel was wrecked as a result of severe south west gales, the opinion we are informed, is erroneous, the vessel was sailing at the time she struck with a fair wind and at a rate of about 6 miles an hour. The accident occurring during the middle watch, and as a proof that she neither encountered any storm, or that the slightest apprehensions were entertained of any approaching gale, the studding sails were prepared to be set..... how it happened that the vessel hugged the coast so closely remains to be explained."

Needless to say, the specie was not officially recovered. The loss of the Ocean Queen and her chest of an unspecified amount of specie was the subject of controversy then and now (31), the roles of her master, salvor and her crew coming under close scrutiny. Despite the furore there is almost certainly as little left of the specie as there is of the wreck itself.

The Ocean Queen is registered at Lloyds of 1842 as a barque of 268 tons (new), 232 tons (old) built at Whitby in 1831 in 10 months. She had damage repaired and was coppered with patent hair in 1841. She was listed as 10A, and is reported in Lloyds 1842 as "lost". A wrecksite between that of the the Zeewijk and the Windsor sites was reported in 1969 by Geraldton diver Max Kramer. The site was reported as red ballast stones across the reef and the stones identified as Dolerite.

FIGURE 5: The Ocean Queen ballast trail on Half Moon Reef.



(Photo: Mike McCarthy)

May 1970, Mr N.H. Jackson of Geraldton reported a similar find in the same area as did Mr Bert Boschetti in September 1970. Until last year, (1979), circumstances prevented the complete assessment of these three reports.

A check on the bearings and directions given by the 3 parties place all reports within 2.5 nautical miles of each other. The exposed reef was searched by the 1979 expedition in the area from Zeewijk to Windsor and only the present site was located. It was concluded, therefore, that the 3 reports refer to the same wreck. The site location was accurately recorded using a geodometer stationed at known points in Pelsart Island. The wreck was also inspected on a number of days, the best being one of the rare days that the reef was totally exposed. A swimline search was also undertaken in the area of the wreckage, but no visible remains were found, despite earlier conflicting reports to the contrary. (32)

The site comprises a trail of ballast stones stretching from about 20 metres inshore of the wave line, across the reef top into the calm waters of the coral lagoon beyond.

On an average day, the reef top is covered with a substantial swell strong enough to prevent an average sized person maintaining a foothold. In periods of high tide, storm or cyclonic conditions the surge of the water over the reef is strong enough to wash over heavy sections of wreckage, such as those on the iron Windsor site. It is not surprising that there were no visible remains on the seaward side of the reef. Apart from the stones only a single 14 lb, 5" diameter cannon ball was found on the reef top, whilst numerous small artefacts were recovered from the crevasses and holes in the reef top. The area on the lagoon side of the reef immediately adjacent to the site was also searched and a trench dug (without positive results) through the largest mound of ballast stones.

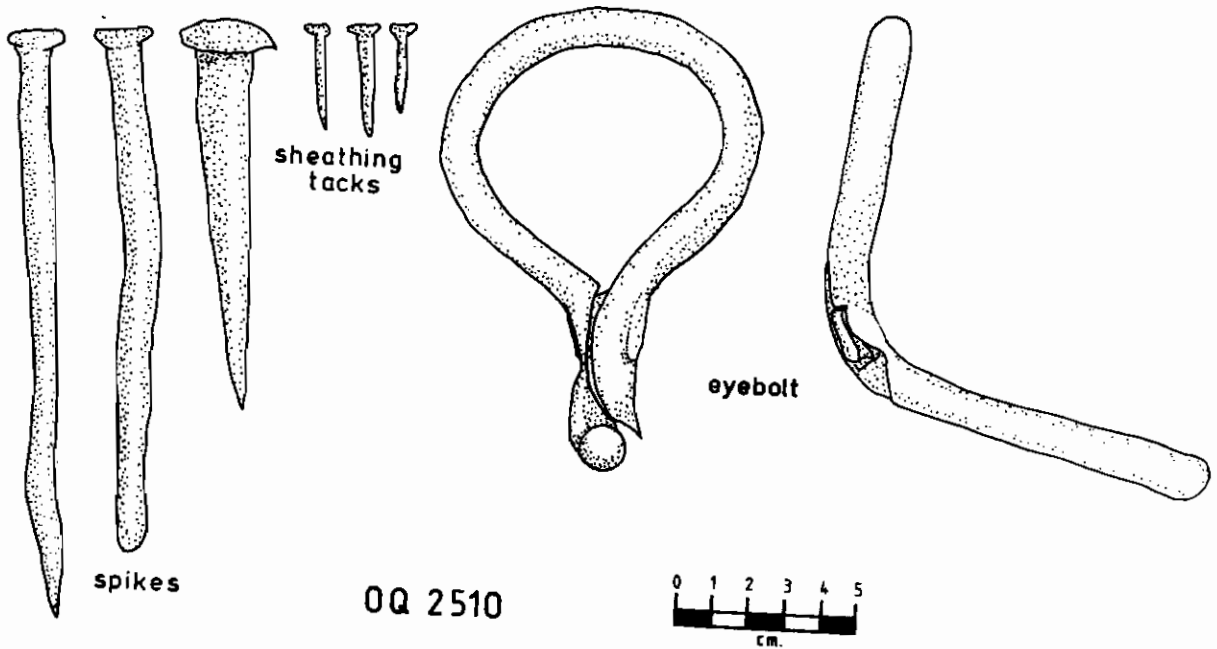
The following items were recovered:

copper sheathing tacks	(OQ 2510)
brace spike	"
plank spikes	"
1 cannon ball 14 lb 5" diam	(OQ 2509)
glass and pottery sherds	
copper ring bolt	(OQ 2510)

The anchors, chain, braces, etc were all missing. Captain Scott is known to have purchased the Ocean Queen and initially recovered most of the ground tackle. He is also likely to have organised the recovery of all copper fittings, cannon and any other valuable and easily accessible items. The Ocean Queen was reported as thrown down on her beam ends and bilged. (33)

Captain Scott himself is known to have entered the cabin of the wreck to recover the mails nearly 2 months after the vessel was initially wrecked. (34)

FIGURE 6 Drawings of the Ocean Queen artefacts



To enable Scott to enter the wreck, the vessel must have been high up on the reef and that upon breaking up, she would have left a wreckage trail beginning not in the surf, as is the case of the Windsor is quite marked as that vessel lasted but a short time, partly on account of the different sea conditions, but also because she was too large to be thrown onto the reef itself.

The ornithologist, Gilbert, who went in Captain Scott's boat to the Ocean Queen some months later in 1843, reported the following:

JANUARY
"On several of the islands of the Pelsarts Group may be seen portions of vessels and on the South Island I found several cannon balls and also some iron bolts, rings etc. attached to timbers". (35)

There is a strong possibility that this wreckage may have emanated from the Ocean Queen, with sections having been eventually forced off the reef top into the lagoon beyond.

The site investigated is beyond reasonable doubt considered that of the Ocean Queen and is the last remains of a very suspicious trail of circumstances that reflected badly on almost all concerned. The Ocean Queen saga did not have a totally negative effect on the colony however, for as Stokes recounts in his Discoveries in Australia:

"It is rather singular that another (island) and the only one not visited by Beagle's boats - water should have been found by a party who came from Swan River to save the wreck of a ship lost in 1843, close to the spot on which the Batavia sank more than 200 years ago (then believed to be Pelsart Island). This Island is called on the chart Middle Island. The well is on the south part and the water of which is very good rises and falls with the tide". (36)

The finding of fresh water and abundant fish life in the months and years following the loss of the Ocean Queen undoubtedly led to the beginnings of the Pelsart Fishing Company, the guano leases and the almost uninterrupted human presence on the Abrolhos Islands since that time.

The Ocean Queen site was gazetted as an historic wreck after a partial inspection in 1974, but an analysis of the three reports mentioned above, was precluded by an injury to one of the inspecting team. The complete inspection was concluded in 1979 and is the basis of the above.

Preston:

This unregistered 20 ton schooner is reported to have run ashore on the south island of the Pelsart Group on the morning of 20/9/1855. Every attempt was made to get the vessel off, but the anchors failed to hold and the vessel drifted further inshore. Three days later the anchors were set further out, but still would not hold. The cargo was discharged six days later on the 29th, and she was finally abandoned on the 2nd October, when the crew departed in the ship's boats for Port Gregory.

The master returned with the skipper and crew of the Nora Crina but their combined efforts were still unsuccessful and after a further six days of effort they finally abandoned the wreck. (37) Despite a swim search and walk along the length of Pelsart Island, no identifiable trace of this vessel was found.

Marten:

This wooden two masted schooner of 27.35 tons was reported (38) as having been lost on the 4th March 1878 on the south island of the Pelsart Group, whilst on a voyage from Adelaide to Browse Island. Her loss was attributed to adverse currents, and at the subsequent enquiry, her master said that the vessel missed stays and went into the breakers. He claimed that she was a vessel that did not stay well, and that this poor handling characteristic, contributed to her loss. Her rudder was broken

and her starboard bilge holed, and it was reported that expensive repairs were needed and that there would be considerable difficulty in refloating her.

She had a crew of 6, was (built) at Yarra Bank in 1871, was carvel built, with one deck, round stern, billet head, wood frame and measured 50.6' x 15.4' x 5.7'. Her owners at the time of her loss were the Browse Island Guano Company of Adelaide. (39)

No positively identifiable trace of this vessel was found, though it appears that the wreck remained visible for some time for Forrest records visiting the Marten on Pelsart Island after viewing the grave of John Williams from the Venus in 1879. (40)

The iron ship Ben Ledi was wrecked in the same area in 1879 and it is likely that her crew availed themselves of driftwood and parts of the Marten wreck for shelter and firewood.

The only artefacts conceivably emanating from the Marten in the area, are assorted pieces of sheathing, a small mast step, and a portion of a small wooden rib or similar curved ship's timber. The two survivor camps are indistinguishable from each other and the wreck itself was not found in the swimline along the Eastern shores of the Island.

When sections of the iron Ben Ledi are to be found in depths of less than one metre it is not unreasonable to assume that the small wooden hulls of the Marten and the Neptune before her would have been driven much further ashore and almost totally destroyed on the hard coral platform.

Ben Ledi

This iron three masted ship rigged vessel of 1107 register tons was lost on the night of December 16th, 1879 whilst on a voyage in ballast from Sydney to Calcutta.

After the ship struck, the master and 23 crew remained aboard till daylight and then got ashore. Captain Boyd and five of the crew then departed in one of the ship's boats for Geraldton and on their arrival a telegram was despatched to Perth and the wreck subsequently reported in the Herald of 20th December 1879. The Inquirer of the 7th January, 1880 reported that:

"the wreck lies in the neighbourhood of where the schooner Marten, some 2 or 3 years ago, and under similar circumstances, was lost".

At the subsequent court of enquiry, (41) Captain Boyd and his crew were exonerated from blame, and the wreck attributed to the adverse and unknown tides taking the vessel to the east of its estimated position. The wreck was subsequently sold to Geraldton speculators for 80 pounds, but it appeared the salvors did not make easy money as the following appears in a contemporary account:

"There is great difficulty in getting to the vessel which still remains intact, but it is likely a very large amount of property will be secured besides the rigging and other moveables. The Ben Ledi, it is reported, was insured for 13,000 pounds". (42)

The Ben Ledi is registered in Lloyds of 1878 as number 249 of that year. Her official number 60339, flags HVPC. She was built under special survey by Barclays of Glasgow in two months during 1868 and was built of iron with heavier plating than that required by Lloyds rules. She had one bulkhead and was 1057 tons net, 1107 tons gross and 995 tons under deck. She was registered in Glasgow, her owners Watson Brothers of London. She was last surveyed in May 1879 at London and her anchors and chains tested and proved.

She was 218 feet long with a beam of 34.5 feet and a draught of 21 feet (moulded depth). Her poop was 43 feet long, her forecastle 35 feet long and she had 2 decks.

The Ben Ledi wreck lies in three parts:

- (a) land
- (b) inshore wreckage
- (c) main wreck

The land and inshore wreckage are also associated with the Marten wreck and survivors camp, and for this reason, the two sites have been treated as a composite wreck and both have been declared historic despite the few remains found associated directly with the smaller vessel. Some evidence of the strength of the sea on this side of the island is the spread and size of the wreckage torn off the Ben Ledi and driven over 50 metres shorewards to lie in depths often less than 50 centimetres.

Both the main site and the inshore wreckage are readily accessible in the right conditions (west and north west winds with low swell) and both were extensively measured and photographed. A photomosaic of the main wreckage was also produced and a plane table survey done of the remains of the survivors camps and the associated artefacts.

Unfortunately, many of the land remains have been removed by Guano digger fishermen, and more recently, by modern souvenir hunters, with one collection of glass and bottle fragments being found wrapped in a newspaper dated 21/10/1978.

Other evidence of the recovery of useful material from sites on this and other islands is the recovery of a stamped Muntz Metal sheathing fragment found in an old dump on the SW side of the Island along with bottles and other material of the late 19th and early 20th century.

The Main Site

The wreck lies in a depression on an axis of 110° magnetic, with bows on to shore in a depth of 2 metres sloping sternwards and a depth of 5 to 6 metres.

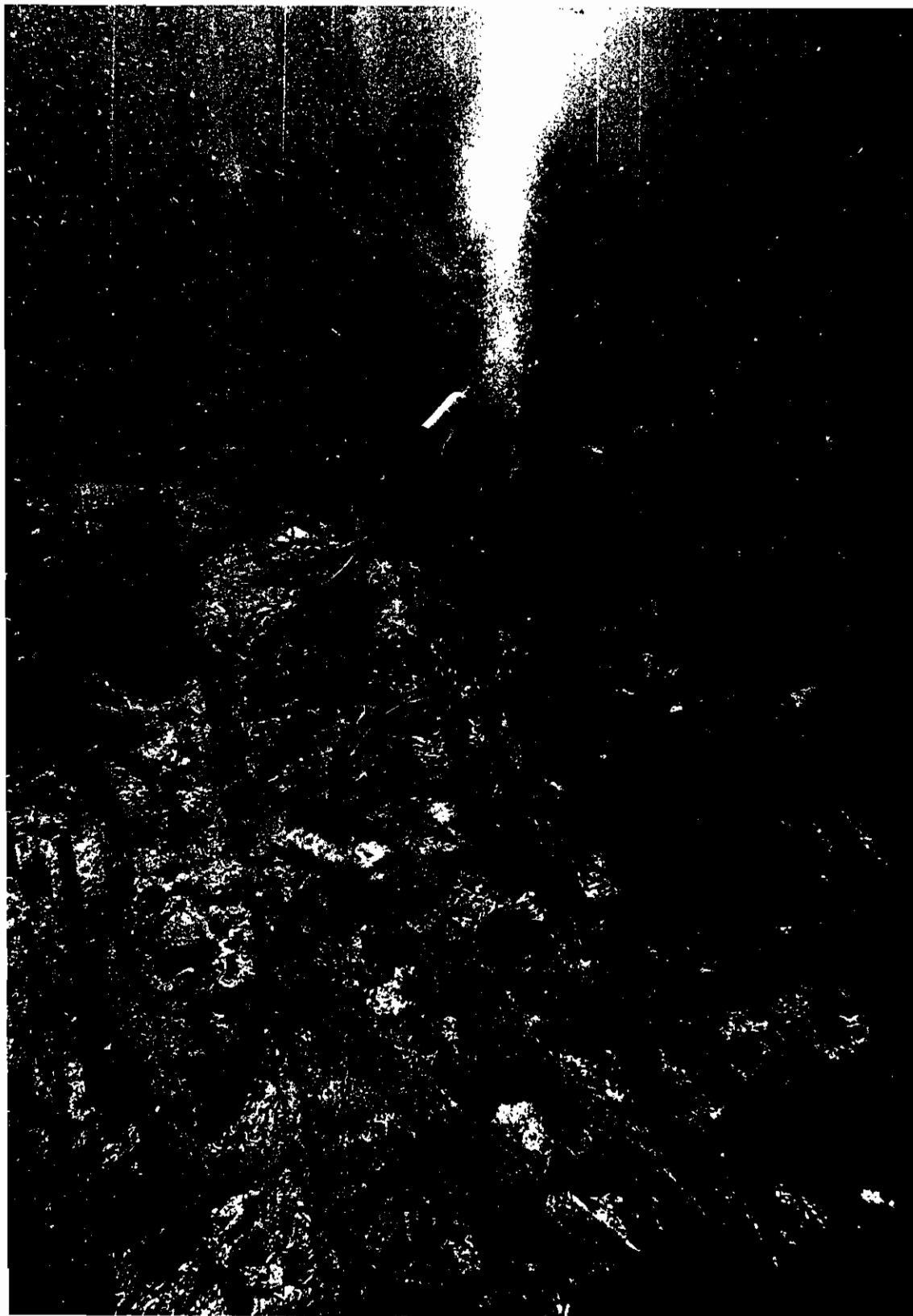
The bows have totally disintegrated in the large swell which normally breaks over this shallow region and only the anchors, chain mound and windlass are immediately obvious.

From there to sternwards, appears a spare anchor and the vessel's floors which are covered with ballast stones, plating, deck and mast fittings. Further astern, the effect is quite striking, with the starboard side of the hull rising to within 2 metres of the surface and curving gracefully down to the keel and then back up to the port bilge stringers.

FIGURE 7. Measuring the capstan on the Ben Ledi (Photo: Pat Baker)



FIGURE 8. The main Ben Ledi site (Photo: Pat Baker)



The stern section and rudder constitute the deepest part of the wreck and these are surrounded by ballast stones, bollards and other ironwork.

A photomosaic, using a centre line and a metre square was produced and from that a plan of the site produced.

The accuracy of the final product is unfortunately not of a high degree due to the adverse weather conditions then prevailing and the large swell which also precluded the fixing of the bow sections into the overall mosaic.

On one day particularly suitable for work on the Ben Ledi, being north westerly squalls and dead calm on the leeward side of the island, the base camp was unfortunately flattened and inundated with rain, preventing departure for work on the wreck site.

The Land Site:

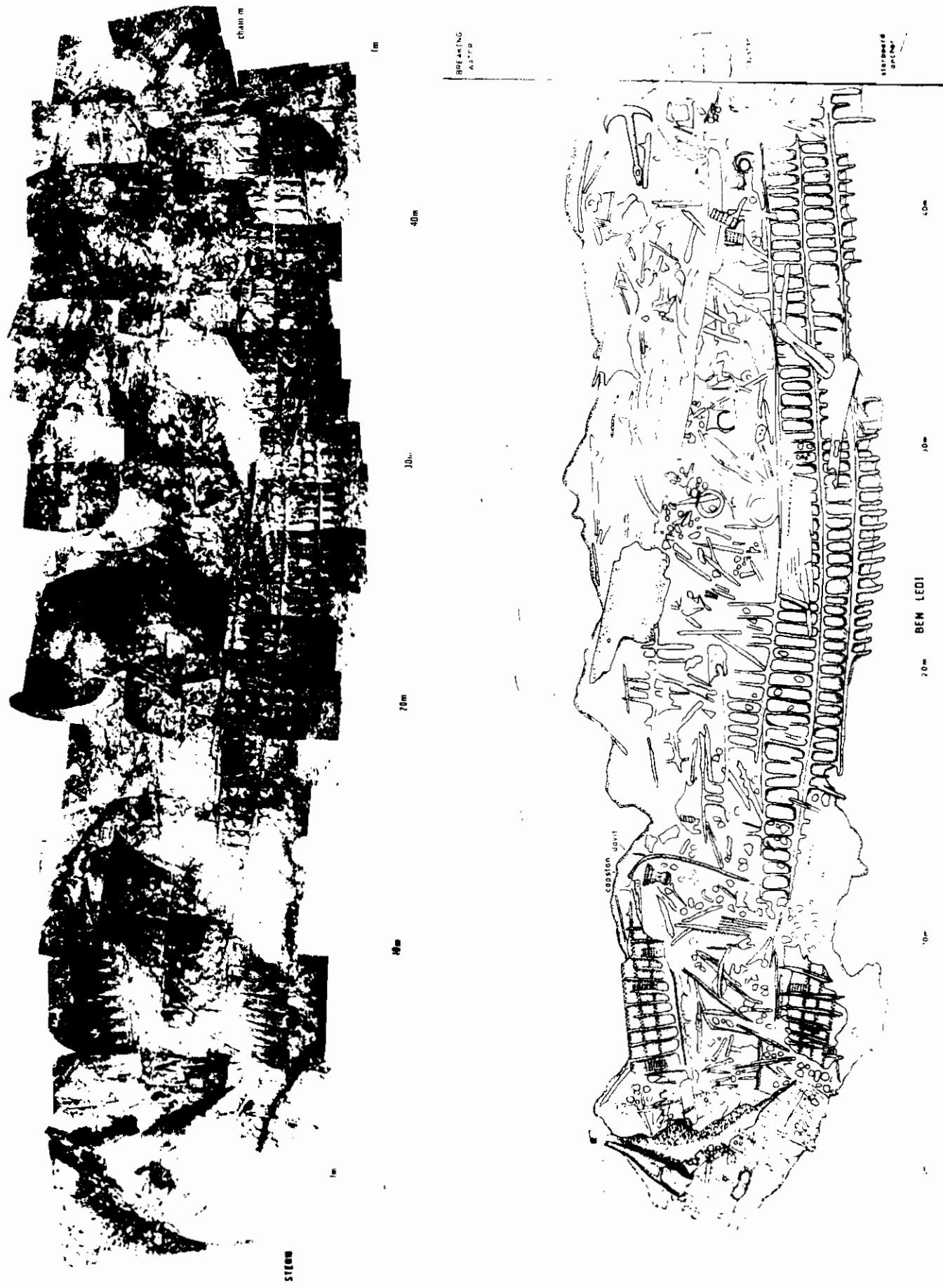
This area is treated as a composite Ben Ledi/Marten site there being little to separate the artefact or camp sites in time or in content. The following plan view of the area surveyed shows the wrecksite and the main artefact spread on the adjacent shore. A walked line search from A to B revealed numerous sheathing fragments incorporated with other flotsam on the Osprey and Sea Eagle nests. Other artefact concentrations were also found and marked and the whole then fixed using two base lines and standard plane table survey techniques.

The Inshore Wreckage:

This large section was a fascinating tumble of scattered wreckage that appeared thus:



FIGURE 9. The Ben Ledi mosaic and site plan (M. McCarthy & P. Baker)



After a period of orientation the wreckage was identified as:

1. a portion of the vessel's floor
2. a section of bullwark
3. a section of deck beams

The wreckage was photographed and drawn, and a section of the vessel's poop with mizzen mast, deadeyes attached was cut free with oxycutting gear placed on a makeshift sledge and hauled with great difficulty to the other side of the island, and then hauled onto the workboard for transport to the mainland for conservation and display.

FIGURE 10. The section of the Ben Ledi raised for conservation

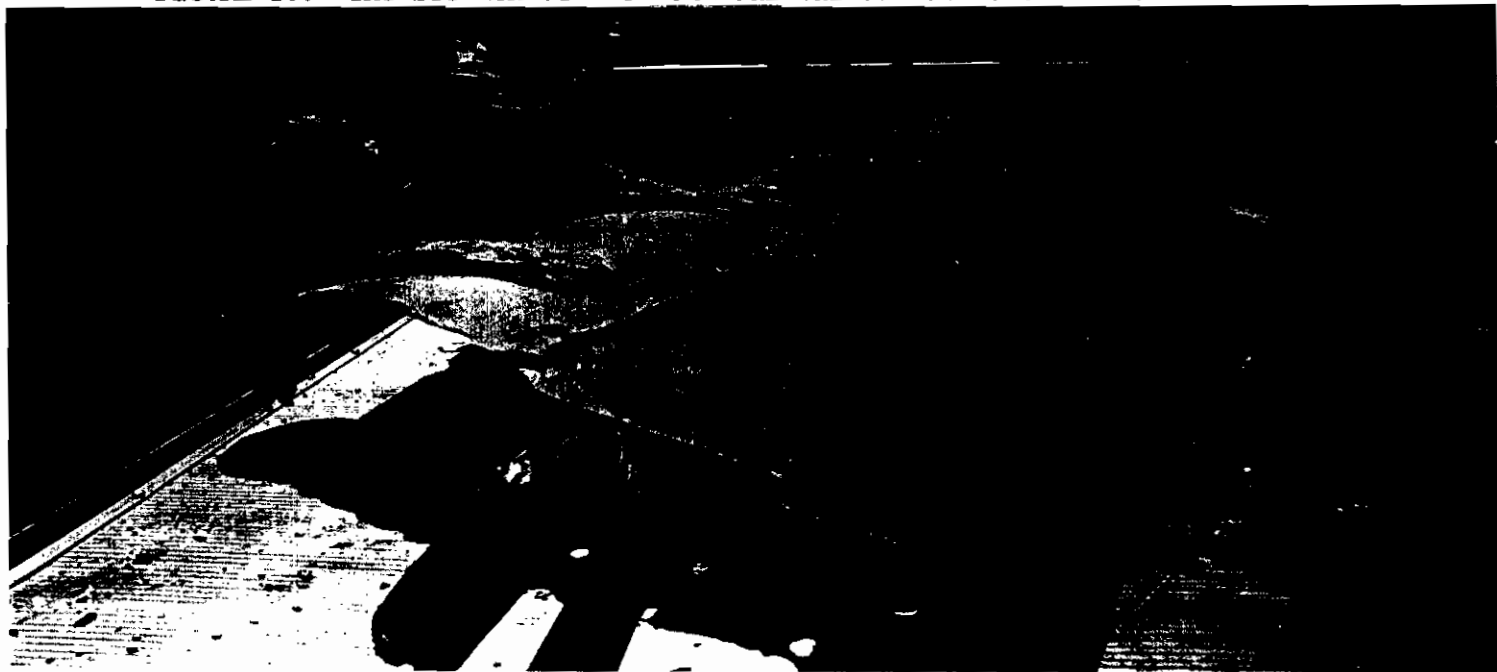


FIGURE 11. The Carbet Castle showing the similar poop section to Ben Ledi



Nautilus:

This yacht belonging to Broadhurst, the guano merchant, was wrecked after parting her moorings in 1897.

Her loss is documented in a letter from surveyor H.J. Wells, dated 17/8/1879 "while staying at Gun Island we had a strong north-easterly gale during which the Nautilus (the firms yacht) parted her moorings and was lost on the reefs". (43)

A search was not instigated for the remains of the vessel.

Windsor:

This iron steamer was wrecked with a crew of 37 on 2/2/1908 on Half Moon Reef near Pelsart Island with the loss of 3 lives. She was on a voyage from Fremantle to Hong Kong with a cargo of 2600 tons of sandalwood. Her owners, Watts, Watts and Co., Master Captain T.H. Watkins and a crew of 37.

The loss of the Windsor was given a very broad coverage in the local press:

"All records were lost on the wreck but according to the contemporary newspaper accounts (44), and the reports of enquiry (45), the vessel was loaded with a full cargo of 2600 tons of sandalwood and was insured, ship and cargo for 25,000 pounds."

She struck just west of Wreck Point on Pelsart Island at 9.50 p.m. on the 2/2/1908 with the master and officer of the watch on the bridge. After a terrifying night aboard, the 3rd mate and three of the crew reached Pelsart Island in a small boat and proceeded to the settlement to raise the alarm.

On the afternoon of the same day, the 2nd mate and three crew also reached the island but during the night the boat broke adrift and was smashed on the reef, thus severing communication with the stricken ship. At 9.00 a.m. the next day, the chief engineer, Mr. W. Jenkins was drowned in an heroic attempt to get a lifeline ashore from the ship. By now, news had reached Geraldton via the SS Venus and a telegram was despatched to Perth which read:

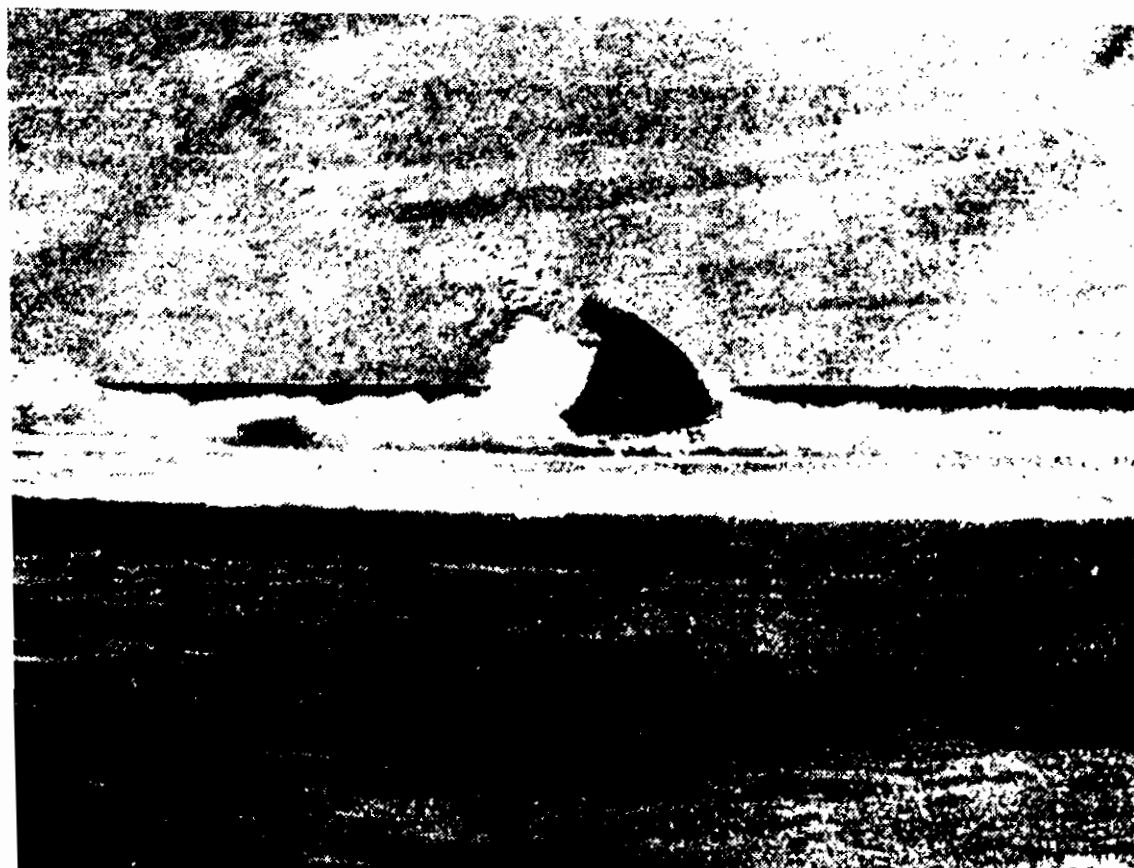
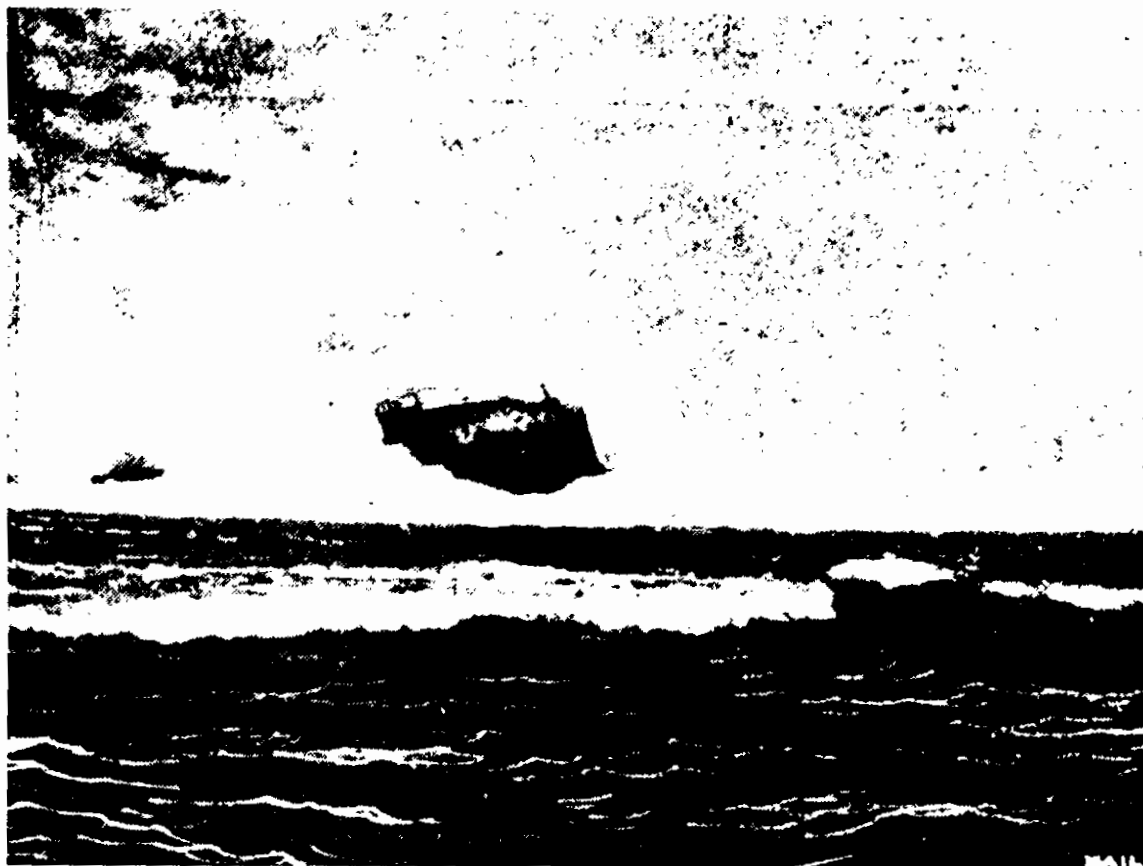
"Vessel's bottom torn out, back broken, mainmast gone, very small chance salvage cargo, no chance ship. Chief Engineer drowned..... hurry rocket apparatus along, Captain, Mate, three apprentices, 12 Chinese still aboard".

The Government steamer Penguin was immediately despatched with the rocket apparatus along with the tug Uraidla which was chartered by the underwriters' agents.

On the morning of the 5th, the vessel was found:

"parted and the aft part from about the 2nd forward bulkhead had up but 7 or 8 of the crew could be seen up on the forecastle".

FIGURES 12 & 13. Contemporary photos of the loss of the Windsor
(Photo: Western Mail)



To add to the misery of those on board the Venus, attempts to re-establish contact with the rocket apparatus were unsuccessful.

The Venus rescue party stayed on the reef on the night of the 6th and at this stage it was calculated that when standing on the reef with water up to their waists, the rescuers had the vessel only 80 yards away. As the wind and sea rose and threatened to engulf what remained of the vessel, the men on the fore-castle rang the bell to indicate that they intended to jump for it and swim to shore. They pursued this course of action and were all saved except for the Master, Captain J.H. Walters and the Chief Officer who had gone aft for shelter 2 days before when:

"that portion of the wreck broke off and was torn to pieces". (44)

Further loss of life was incurred when two men were lost while endeavouring to row a dinghy from the settlement to the reef with a view to ferrying some of the survivors back to the settlement. They disappeared enroute and though the boat was later found, no trace of the men was ever seen again. The finding of the preliminary court of enquiry was:

"I find that the vessel owing to the strong south-west wind and heavy following sea which took her on the port quarter steered very badly and gripped to windward (westward) and that in all probability the helmsman in endeavouring the check same gave her too much weather helm and this was the inshore current took her to the eastward of the course set". (45)

The Windsor is registered in Lloyds of 1907-8 as Number 462 of that year, Official Number 98060, signal flags LQJH of Port of Registry, London. She was a steel screw steamer built in 1890 in 3 months by W. Gray and Company of Hartlepool. Her owners were the Britain SS Co. and Watts, Watts and Co., her managers. She was surveyed at Birkenhead in October 1906, and had 5 cemented bulkheads, web frames, one iron deck with a part awning deck.

She was 2892 registered tons, 2184 nett and 1853 under deck. She was 314.6 feet long, 40.6 feet in breadth, and had a draught of 20.5 feet (23 feet 8 moulded freeboard amidships 8'7"). Her awning deck was 183 feet long, poop 29 feet and a raised quarter deck 102 feet in length. The Windsor was constructed with a 10" bar keel, water ballast tanks in a cellular bottom 268' long with a capacity of 653 tons.

Her engines were issued with a Lloyds Machinery Certificate in July 1906, and were a 3 cylinder tripe expansion type constructed by Blair and Company of Stockton. The engine had a 39" stroke and the cylinders had diametres of 23", 37" and 61½" respectively. She had a nominal horsepower of 235, two single ended boilers each of 160lbs pressure. She had a new donkey boiler fitted in 1906 with a pressure of 100lb. Her main boilers had a shell, longitudinal stays, end plates, furnaces and combustion chambers of steel with the screw stays of iron. The two boilers had a total of 6 corrugated furnaces, a grate surface of 99 square feet and a heating surface of 3250 square feet.

The wreck lies in three main sections:

1. the main site
2. the reef top wreckage
3. scattered remains in the coral lagoon

FIGURE . Inspecting the Windsor on a bad day (Photo: Mike McCarthy)



FIGURE 14. The submerged boiler
(Photo: Mike McCarthy)

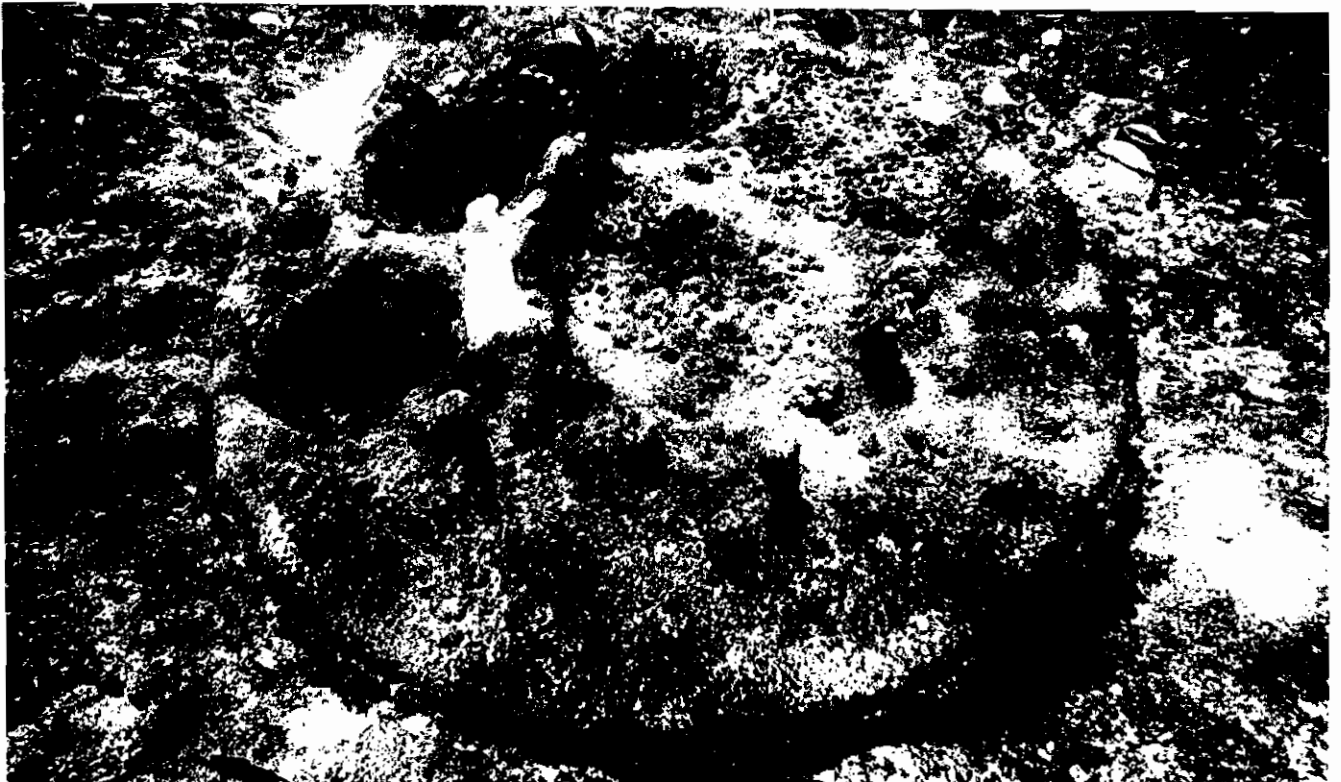


FIGURE 15. The submerged boiler and condenser of the Windsor
(Photo: Mike McCarthy)



REPORT OF WRECK INSPECTION

Site: SS WINDSOR (Known to Museum Staff)

Date of Inspection: 26/10/79

Personnel: M. McCarthy (Officer in Charge)
G. Henderson
P. Baker
G. Green

Approx. Location: Southern end of Half Moon Reef Approx 7 km W of Wreck Point
Pelsaert Island, Houtman Abrolhos.

Lat: 28°58.5'S

Long: 113°54.2'E

Compass bearings: Site to old Guano Jetty, Pelasert Is. 048°
to Lt. House. Pelsaert Is. 085° Haze prevented
taking third transit. Sextant angles unnecessary

Visual Transits: Vessels Iron boiler, reaching a height 4 metres above the reef
is easily recognized from Wreck Point and from several km out to
sea

Transit Photos: Not necessary (site clearly visible)

Site Photos: Colour Windsor Slide File WN(A&B), SAB 6-15, ZW/13/598-601
B&W MA 994-997, 320-26-37, 321-2-11, 323-25-27, 324-1-3

Description of site:

The site was first inspected in 1974 but at that time an inspection of the wreckage outside the reef was not possible, due to the extremely dangerous conditions then prevailing. On this occasion, conditions were ideal but entry and exit from the water still hazardous. The wreckage lying on the reef and in the lagoon beyond consists of a boiler, section of the ships floor, bollards, a winch, deck and side plating and other miscellaneous material. The underwater scene on a good day is very striking and the extent of disintegration of this large vessel is quite remarkable. Swimming from the stern (east) towards the bow (west) the diver sees the remains of the rudder in a crevasse some 7 metres below the surface followed by the portions of stern post with some gudgeons attached (it is interesting to note here, that the screw aperture with the remainder of the gudgeons lie some 400 metres away over the top of the reef in the coral lagoon beyond. Weight possibly 5-10 tonnes). Following that, are the remains of the four bladed propeller and shaft which, though broken at a number of coupling flanges, stretches 30 metres to the remains of the single triple expansion steam engine. The bedplate, crankshaft, main bearings and connecting rods lie to starboard of the line of the shaft while the cylinders lie in a crevasse leading up to the exposed reef itself. The engine frame itself lies some distance to port as does the other boiler which is largely buried in a hole on the bottom. From there, the wreckage consists of unidentifiable iron work and a substantial chain mound. The anchors were not seen and are presumed to lie in an inaccessible area of broken water near the reef face. The site is normally only accessible on the odd good day with no swell.

Material raised:

NIL

Identification Comments:

The identification of the vessel is beyond doubt. The two single ended boilers with 3 furnaces each, the cellular bottom and contemporary photographs also aid in identification.

Recommendations:

It was recommended after the 1974 inspection that should the legislation change the site should be declared historic because:

1. the wreckage provides information regarding the construction and equipment of an early steamer used in W.A. sandalwood trade with China.
2. the conspicuous nature of the wreckage makes it a point of interest to yachtsmen and holiday makers, and
3. it is evidence of a tragic incident in the history of the Abrolhos archipelago.

As these recommendations fall within the guidelines set by the Federal Government for declaring a wreck historic, I support that action.

No rewards are required as the wreck was previously known to Museum staff.

Mike McCarthy, 12/7/80

Joint Committee Action:

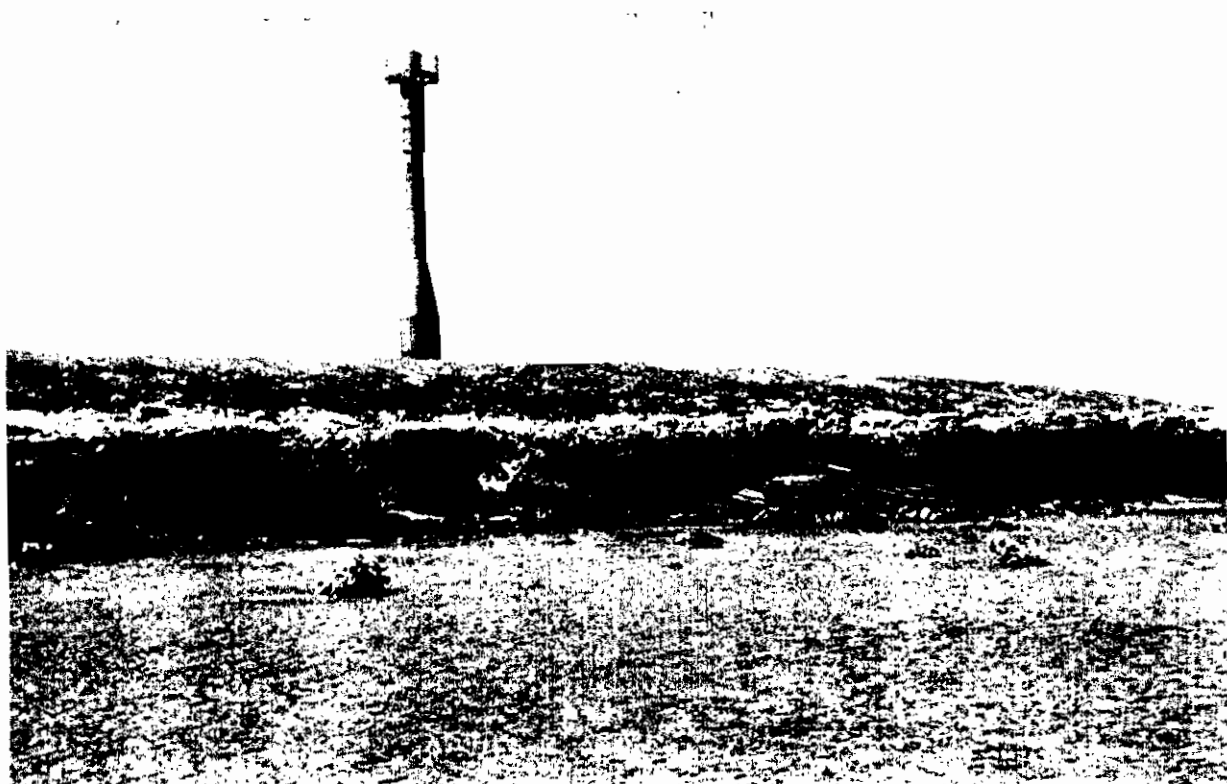
Resolved site be declared a Historic Wreck
Resolution 31/80 1-6/1980

Jon Jim

A lighthouse was finally installed on Wreck Point but not til after the last major loss in the area, the wreck of the Jon Jim on the 17th July 1961 (46). This 36.6 ton freezer boat was lost on the extreme south end of Pelsart Island between a small islet now called Jon Jim Island and the main island itself.

Uncorroborated legend has it that the skipper of the Jon Jim set a course for the Wreck Point and not realising the accuracy of his navigation in the bad conditions then prevailing, was astounded to find himself and his command amidst the breakers on the point. The wreckage lies hard against the cliff on the south end of the island with a substantial section of stern deadwood, keel drive shaft, engine block, freezer gear, fastenings etc. Timber, copper, brass and iron fittings are spread for many hundreds of metres on either side of the island.

FIGURE 19. The wreck of the Jon Jim



NOTES:

- (1) Inquirer, 9/5/1877
- (2) Report of enquiry into the loss of the Hadda, 12/5/79.
Battye Library Acc.No. 11034
- (3) Edwards, 1962 p.199
- (4) Spooner and Vickery, 1980
- (5) Edwards, 1962 p.200
- (6) Register of wrecks and casualties, 1897-1942
- (7) Burns, (no page, undated)
- (8) Geraldton Express, 19/2/1897
- (9) Burns
- (10) Register of Wrecks and Casualties
- (11) Letter from A.J. Wells to the Surveyor General in Perth
17/8/1897 No. 103/160
- (12) H.M.C. Register of British Ships, Fol. 74-1
- (13) Perth Gazette, 7/11/1851
- (14) Stokes, 1846 p.150
- (15) Perth Gazette, 13/4/1848
- (16) Deburgh Diary, p.47 Acc.No.248A
- (17) Perth Gazette, 15/5/1847
- (18) Report on the examination of Houtman Abrolhos for Guano
Deposits. Ex. 223 Co.Sec. 1879
- (19) Inquirer, 3/7/1861
- (20) Inquirer, 10/7/1861
- (21) Goldsmith, 1946 p.64
- (22) Ibid, p.62
- (23) C.S.O. 727 to Piesse 13/4/1872
- (24) Register of Wrecks and Casualties
- (25) H.M.C. Register of British Ships, Fol. 100, Neg.1.
- (26) Perth Gazette, 13/4/1848
- (27) Launceston Advertiser, 22/8/1840

- (28) C.S.R. 110/90, Scott to Col.Sec. 9/10/1842
- (29) Scott to Col.Sec. 14/11/1842
- (30) C.S.O.
- (31) Uren 1940 p.94
Byron 1964 p.53
Goldsmith 1946 p.62
- (32) Pers. Comm. by Maurie Glazier, Jane Gliddon and High Edwards to the effect that there was wreckage in the deep water in the vicinity of the ballast.
- (33) Inquirer, 16/11/1842
- (34) Scott to Col.Sec. 14/11/1842
- (35) Inquirer, 19/4/1843
- (36) Stokes, 1846 p.150
- (37) Inquirer, 24/10/1855
- (38) Inquirer, 15/3/1878
- (39) H.M.C. Register of British Ships
- (40) Forrest
- (41) Inquirer, 21/1/1880
- (42) Inquirer, 21/1/1880
- (43) Letter from A.J. Wells (Surveyor) 17/8/1897
Entitled: An examination of the Abrolhos Islands
No. 103/160
- (44) West Australian, 6th & 7th/2/1908
- (45) Report of preliminary enquiry by Chief Harbour Master
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- (46) Dept of Transport Records, 17/7/1961

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1. To Piesse CSO 727 P55, 13/4/1872
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