

WRECK INSPECTION REPORT

7 Mile Beach (Dongara) wreck—*Margaret Ann* (c.1960)



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Report—Department of Maritime Archaeology, Western Australian Museum

No. 328



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Executive Summary

On 31 January 2018 Aletta Buschenschutt reported a small wooden wreck lying just 30 metres offshore the 7 Mile Beach carpark, north of Dongara. On 9 February 2018 WA Museum staff were accompanied by Aletta on a survey of the wreck. The team took measurements and recovered diagnostic materials including mammal bone and a planking timber sample for further analysis to assist in dating and identifying the site. Historical research was assisted by media publicity about the find, and contact with members of the local cray fishing community, who described a number of wrecks in the 7 Mile Beach area. The site was identified as most likely that of the *Margaret Ann* LFB D16, lost in the early 1960s when it sank at its moorings at 7 Mile Beach.

Site information

Reported by Aletta Bussenschutt 31 January 2018

Date of Inspection: 9 February 2018

Personnel: M. McCarthy, WA Museum Department of Maritime Archaeology (OIC)
Clay Bryce WA Museum, Department of Aquatic Zoology
Aletta Bussenschutt (Finder)

Approximate Location: 7 Mile Beach boat ramp, Dongara

Lat: 29°10', 10.9"

Long: 114° 53', 16.29"⁸

File No: 115/80

File Name: Dongara Area

Access Directions:

Head north from Dongara by road to the 7 Mile Beach Turnoff. Take the sealed road west, stop at the carpark adjacent the unsealed 'boat ramp' (in effect a de facto beach launching facility). A short stay caravan park without facilities has also been established there. When standing on the high ground south of the ramp a submerged reef is visible c. 30m away immediately offshore (west). The site lies inshore around 10 metres from that reef. See site location image following.

To the north lies clear water amongst the reefs, a rock lobster fishing boat mooring area and a relatively clear passage to safe water. To the south and west lie shallow reefs that break in moderate seas and swell. A light current runs south to north in the southerly winds.

The area provides a good haven for fishing boats with shelter from the prevailing southerlies and south westerly winds. Being close to shore the mooring area is also sheltered from easterly winds.

⁸ Derived from Google Earth

SITE LOCATION: Showing the 7 Mile Beach road, the carpark, makeshift ramp, the site and offshore reefs. (from Google Earth)



The site is sheltered from the prevailing winds and protected by an outlying reef structure to the west and south that also serves to form a natural boat haven. Fishing boat moorings (chain and in one case a close stowing anchor) are visible on sand to the north of the wreck. Though the area remains in use by large fishing vessels, those moorings close to the wreck appear to be abandoned and are too large for a vessel of this size. As such they are not part of the wreck, but do form part of the 7 Mile Beach boat haven's rudimentary infrastructure, comprising access road, ramp, moorings and an overnight unserviced caravan or camping area.

Site Photographs:

Dongara Unidentified File
Img_0713; 0328-0330 (Finder's images folder)
DSC_017-0159 (Clay Bryce images folder)
Artefacts Raised (Liam Phillips)

Site Conditions on inspection

Sea and Swell: Strong winds building from 15 knots finishing over the course of the dive at c. 30 knots plus. Low swell.

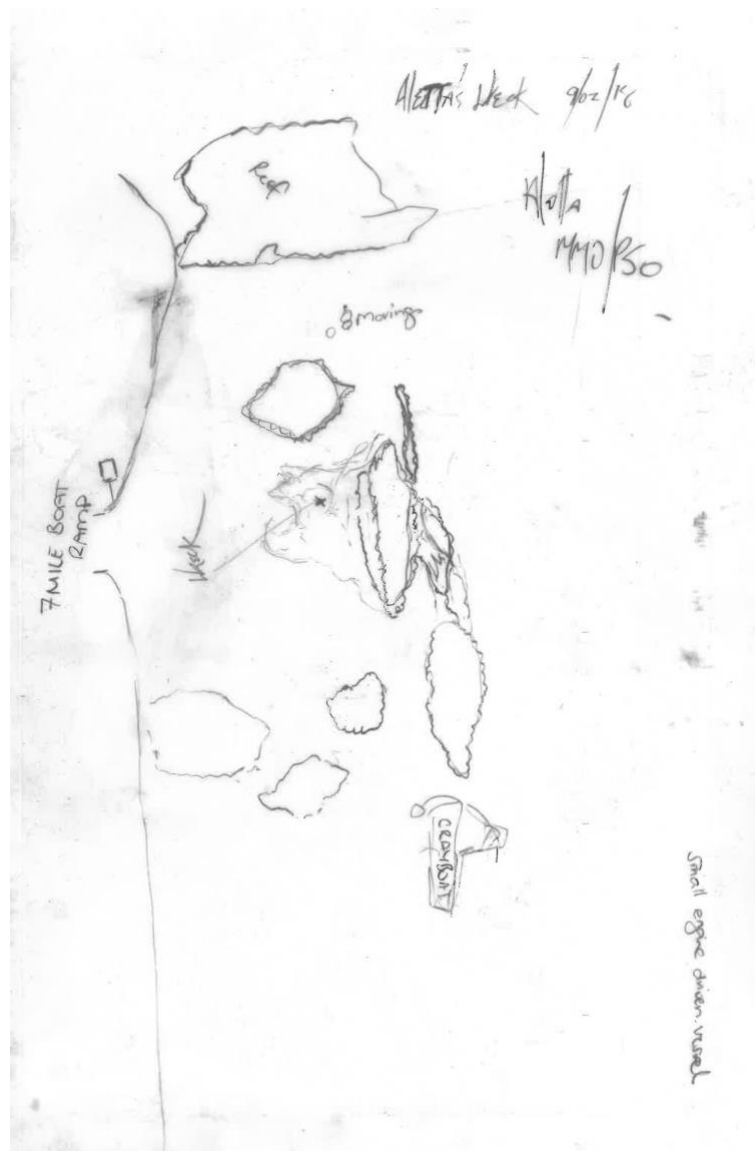
Surge: Nil

Visibility: 4-5 metres

Current: Strong, but swimmable

Sea-bed coverage e.g. weed, sand

Sketch Map showing access to Site (North is down).



Sketch map showing site access with the beach boat launching ramp, reefs, and wreck location

Description of Site

Ms Bussenschutt had reported timbers exposed on the sea bed with copper-alloy fittings, planking and other then unidentified features visible as shown in the image supplied with her report of finding (Front Cover). As advised by the finder, who is an experienced professional marine mammal observer, qualified diver and regular visitor to the area, when found the site has only recently uncovered.

Lying in in relatively shallow 3-4 metres deep in usually calm water, the wreckage seen during the Museum's inspection process measures c. 3 metres long by c. 2 metres wide and lies in a natural basin formed on three sides by weed banks to the east and south and to the west sand and shell sloping up towards a shallow bank.

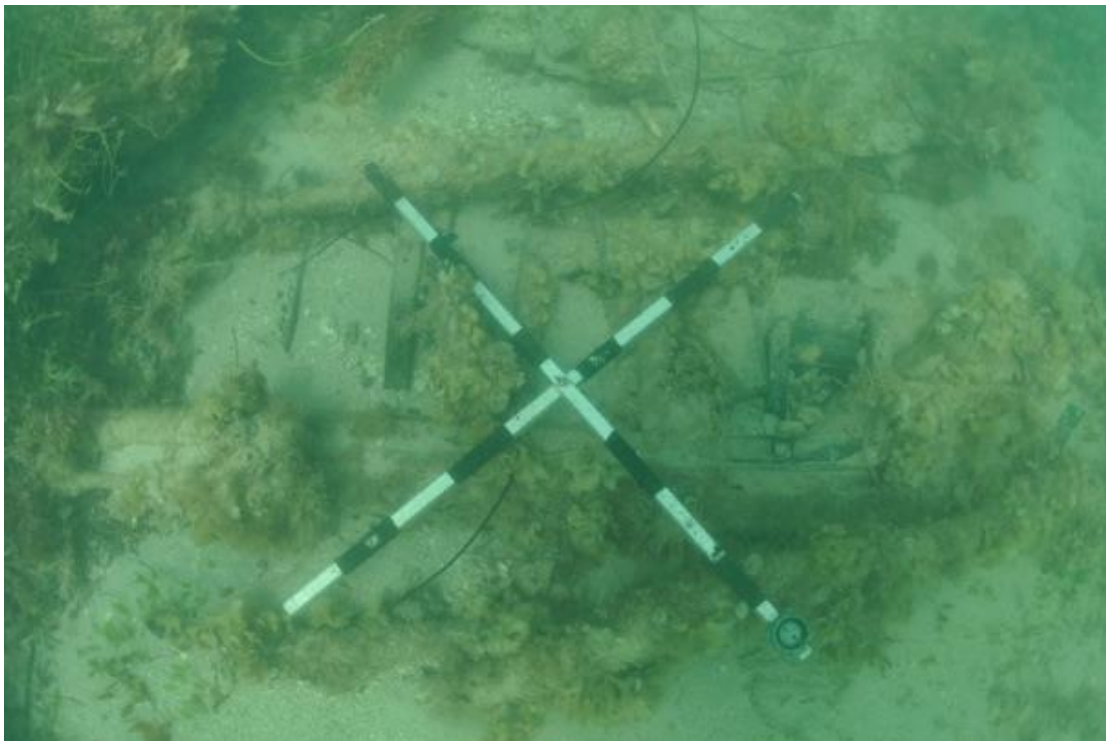


Figure 1: The wreck from above with a one metre scale. The compass on the scale is to the north (Clay Bryce, WA Museum)

As can be seen from Figure 1 above and in Figure 2 following, the wreck lies on a north-west—south-east axis, with wreckage running under the high weed bank forward (LHS of the image above) and into the sloping bank to the south (top of the image). Along the bottom of the image is the keel and keelson and across the top a propeller shaft. In Figure 2 a copper alloy dovetail fastening the sternpost to the keel is visible to the right of the image. Frames (cleared of sediment by hand fanning) are visible between the propeller shaft and keelson and beneath them are the starboard planks. The planking indicated the vessel was carvel-built. A loose timber, later found to be the lower part of the propeller aperture was found in the area hand fanned to the

right of the image. (See Figure 7). This was later identified as Jarrah (*Eucalyptus Marginata*), a local species often used in boat building.⁸ Parts of the keelson and keel project above the sloping sandy bottom at the north edge of the site (lower part of the image). The 15 cm long bone visible in the foreground was found loose on the site. Clearly, it was used for bait.



Figure 2 Showing a copper alloy dovetail fastening the sternpost to the keel to the right of the image. Frames are visible between the propeller shaft (top) and keel and beneath them are the starboard planks. The bait bone is in the foreground. (Clay Bryce, WA Museum)

In Figure 3 a threaded copper (salmon pink in colour) keel bolt is found passing through the keel and keelson and this is fastened with a copper -alloy (golden colour) nut. In Figure 4 the copper-alloy dovetail joining keel and keelson to the sternpost dominates the image while a close examination shows that the outer planking aft is fastened with standard small boat rivets. In the Figure 5 a loose screw fastening, possibly a ‘hangar bolt’ of a type that once secured the engine to its bed is visible. Above it a tarpaulin, nearby lie engine control cables. Frames fastened with copper or copper-alloy boat rivets are also visible.

⁸ By Dr Ian Godfrey, former head of the WA Museum’s conservation section and an experienced timber analyst.



Figure 3: A threaded keel bolt fastened with a nut (Clay Bryce, WA Museum)



Figure 4: The copper alloy dovetail joining the keel and stempost. Inboard is a plank fastened with copper or copper alloy rivets. All are turned green with copper corrosion products. (Clay Bryce, WA Museum)



Figure 5: A threaded through bolt with nut, possibly a 'hangar bolt' used to secure and engine to the floors near a synthetic tarpaulin with grommets (centre). Frames are visible top left and bottom right. (Clay Bryce, WA Museum)



Figure 6: The heavily-colonised engine and below it the propeller shaft. (Clay Bryce, WA Museum)

Material Raised

- 1) Hangar bolt(?) (430mm length, 18mm diameter, with screw thread and 35mm nut).
- 2) Jarrah Stern Aperture (*Eucalyptus Marginata*)
- 3) Animal bone (cut longitudinally)



Figure 7: The material raised: 1) Copper alloy bolt and nut 2) Section of stern post with propeller aperture visible and 3) Cut mammal bone (Liam Phillips/ WA Museum)

Site Identification Comments

While no attempt was made to excavate under the weed beds in order to confirm the vessel's original length, the visible wreckage at just over 3 metres long from aft of the engine to the sternpost, indicates that the remains are those of a c.7 metre long engine driven wooden crayfishing (Western Rock Lobster) boat built from jarrah, a native Western Australian timber.

The tarpaulin, engine controls and bait bone appear to date the wreck from the period when synthetic tarpaulins were readily available to before the prohibition on animal baits around 1990.⁸ As would be expected of any vessel lying close to shore in a well-

⁸ Pers Com., Dr Howard Gray, whose PhD. is on the local rock lobster (crayfishing) industry. Apparently animal hair from the roughly-butchered baits was often found on the forepart of the

known boat haven, the wreck would have been extensively salvaged for easily recovered re-usable materials.

The sinking of such a small vessel in a known boat haven is not expected to have resulted in any press or official record. Thus the cause of its loss is unknown. With its bows to the shore, inside a shallow reef complex, in sheltered water much deeper than the draught of a vessel of its size, perhaps it was anchored in an easterly offshore breeze (possibly overnight) when it sank. It is also possible the vessel sank after striking a reef further out.

(iii) Modern Salvage: Nil

(iv) Casual Diver interference, if any. None seen.

(v) Modern diver use, if any. Visitation appears to have been limited to the finder and the museum team.

Assessment of Site Significance

(i) Archaeological: The site is the wreck of a small, Western Australian built fishing boat type common in the post war era.

(ii) Technological: The wreck is representative of the post war type.

(iv) Educational: The wreck could be visited by school and other groups as part of a learning or recreational experience and help link them to earlier fishers, their families and their habits. The story of its finding by Ms Bussenschutt could also highlight the families and craft in the local rock lobster industry before the advent of aluminium and fibreglass boats.

Management Proposals

- i) It is recommended the wreck is left *in situ*.
- ii) A media release to relate the story of the wreck's finding by Ms Bussenschutt could also highlight the families and craft in the local rock lobster industry before the advent of aluminium and fibreglass boats, and seek public feedback to hopefully identify the vessel.

Further identification comments

Following the above recommendation, the WA Museum put out a media release on 6 June 2018 which received a number of public responses. Respondents identified the vessels *Judith Ann* (1971), *Saint George* (late 1960s-early 1970s), *Margaret Ann* (early 1960s) and *Sea Raider* (1973) as all having been wrecked in the 7 Mile Beach area.

crayfish, proving unacceptable with the advent of the Japanese live rock lobster industry, where contaminants such as animal hide were totally unacceptable.

***Judith Anne* (1971)**

Noel Burton thought it could be the *Judith Anne*, a well-built 25 foot planked jarrah cray boat that had a 4 cylinder Morris diesel engine built by fisherman Rod Brierley. Noel used to own it, then it was subsequently owned by Ray Howarth (a well-known fisherman and ex-skipper of the *Island Leader* Abrolhos carrier boat) who was on board when it sank around 1960 (Noel wasn't sure of the exact date but said "years and years and years ago"). It wasn't moored when it sank.

John Fitzhardinge who fishes out of Dongara and Abrolhos said that sounded about right, that the boat would have been from the 1950s before he was fishing in the area. He said Theo Harris who used to fish Five Mile in the 1950s would have better information.

The WA Museum's Maritime History Vessels Database records *Judith Anne* as a 6.7 tons, 7.6 x 2.7 x 1.4m (25' x 9' x 4'6") Sail and motor (auxiliary) vessel, carvel-planked, single-masted, sloop-rigged, round bilge, square transom, plumb stem, wheelhouse forward, built sometime before 1959 and wrecked 1971, previously registered as LFBF314 and LFBG10 LFGB277 and also named *Judith Anne C*. It was re-engined twice with latest engine being a 4 cyl. Perkins 72HP engine (previously a 4 cylinder Morris Commodore diesel direct-drive engine) (Maritime History Database Vessel ID 15022). This is consistent with Noel's information, apart from the wrecking date (which he was uncertain of).

The *Judith Anne* was one of the first cray fishing vessels operating out of Dongara, so has some local historical value.

***Saint George* (late 1960s-early 1970s)**

Glenn Barndon, ABC Midwest conducted an interview with Colin Duperouzel. Colin said it sounds like the *Saint George* which belonged to Clive Gregory and his brother Bill who worked out of 7 Mile, it was hit by a breaker and sunk in the late 60s or early 70s. It was carvel-built, single mast, 21 foot (7 metres) or a bit longer, Gardner motor, no gearbox, used to start motor and drop moorings, not sure if made locally.

The first year Colin started fishing was 1955. The *Saint George* was hit by a breaker, fishing at the time, all the crew got off OK (Colin not on the boat at the time). The boat was just left there, and was not salvaged. A couple of boats have gone off at 7 Mile. Cray fishing for the whites never went beyond African Reef until 1955, one bloke went south and 'made a killing' in a boat called the *Dawn*, Bob Carberg, a smaller boat owned by Les Moss did very well as well.

Colin subsequently confirmed that the *St George* sank when it was hit by a breaker coming through the 7 Mile passage, which he said is further north of the boat ramp. He wasn't sure if it was Clive or his brother Bill on board at the time,. He wasn't aware of the *Judith Anne* (he said the only *Judith Anne* he knew was brought over from Lorne, Victoria and owned by the Brown brothers [NB: this is a different *Judith*

Ann G81 (Maritime History Database Vessel ID 35184)] but knew of the *Margaret Ann*, and thought that vessel might very well be ‘on the cards’.

The WA Museum’s Maritime History Vessels Database does not have any records relating to a commercial fishing vessel named *Saint George* and it is not recorded in Gray (1999).

***Margaret Ann* (early 1960s)**

Mrs Chris Akerstrom’s late husband Mick Akerstrom owned the *Margaret Ann* (Licence number D16) which was a motorized planked vessel that sank on its mooring at 7 Mile Beach in the early 1960s. He went down to get it one morning and it had sunk in a storm overnight. They didn’t bother to salvage the vessel but went out and bought a new one (plywood vessel with engine and gearbox). She also heard the ABC interview with Colin Duperouzel and said ‘everyone had the same motors’ without a gearbox.

The WA Museum’s Maritime History Vessels Database records the *Margaret Ann* LFB D16 owned by L. Akerstrom of Port Denison as sail and auxiliary motor vessel, round bilge, carvel-built, raked stem, transom stern, single masted, sloop-rigged with an aft wheelhouse. It was 3.915 gross registered tons, length 6.6m, breadth 2.4m, draft 1.1m (21’9” x 8’ x 3’9”) with a four cylinder Morris Vedette petrol engine (2/1 reduction) of 8/22HP and a 14HP Scott outboard motor, built sometime before 1960. It was last surveyed on 22 February 1963 (Department of Primary Industries survey card, Maritime History Vessels Database, Vessel ID 35823).

***Sea Raider* (1973)**

Mrs Chris Akerstrom said that Mick’s brother Laurie Akerstrom also had a vessel that sank at 7 Mile around the same time named the *Sea Raider*.

The WA Museum’s Maritime History Vessels Database records *Sea Raider* LFB D11 as a sail and motor (auxiliary) vessel, round bilge, carvel-built, raked stem, transom stern, single mast, sloop-rigged, aft wheelhouse with dimensions 6.7m x 2.1m. The motor was a 14HP auxiliary motor. It was built before 1959 and was lost or broken up in 1973.

Gray (1999: 232) records *Sea Raider* as having run onto a reef at Port Denison to become a total loss in July 1973.

A search of the National Library’s TROVE historic newspapers for the period 1 January to 31 December 1973 did not reveal any relevant articles for the *Sea Raider* wrecking event.

Summary of identification

As the *Judith Anne*, *Sea Raider* and *Saint George* were not moored when they sank, on the basis of the above information it is most likely that the 7 Mile Beach wreck is the *Margaret Ann*, which sank at its moorings at 7 Mile Beach in the early 1960s.

References

Gray, H., 1999, *The Western Rock Lobster Panulyris Cygnus, Book 2: A history of the fishery*, Westralian Books, Geraldton.

TROVE digitized newspapers, National Library of Australia,
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/>

Vessels database, Department of Maritime History, Western Australian Museum.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Aletta Buschenschutt, Chris Akerstrom, Glenn Barndon, Noel Burton, Colin Duperouzel, John Fitzhardinge, Howard Gray and Theo Harris for their assistance in providing information leading to the identification of the 7 Mile Beach wreck as the *Margaret Ann*.