

boat hitting *Swan*. The salvage attempt was later abandoned. The wreck has not been found.

### *Argo & Dawn*

Two schooners which were driven onto the reef at the Irwin River on the morning of March 10, 1872. They were refloated and both returned to Fremantle. *Argo* was finally wrecked in 1889; *Dawn* in 1902.

### *Arabian & Alexandra*

The cutter *Arabian* and the schooner *Alexandra* were both driven ashore at Geraldton in a storm which began on June 15, 1872 and raged for eight days. SS *Xantho*, which was also in port at the time, had to steam at full speed to avoid the same fate. Both vessels, later got off the beach and returned to service.

### SS *Xantho*

*Xantho* was Western Australia's first coastal steamship. After a short but exciting career in the pearling industry and the coastal trades, *Xantho* was wrecked at Port Gregory on November 19, 1872. The wreck lies in shallow water opposite Gold Digger Passage. The engine was raised by the WA Museum in 1985 and is now on display in the *Xantho* Gallery, WA Museum Shipwreck Galleries, Fremantle.

### *Amy*

This 32-tonne schooner was hit by an unexpected storm on September 10, 1873, off the coast at Dongara. It collided with the jetty after dragging its anchors and lodged itself on shore with its stern several feet under the jetty. It was refloated and continued to sail until at least 1890.

### *Star*

Bound for Geraldton, this 5-tonne cutter left Shark Bay on April 5, 1876. It had not arrived by mid-May and was thought to have capsized. Rumours that the ship was wrecked in the Abrolhos Islands have never been confirmed.

### *Hampton*

This 19-tonne cutter left Fremantle on May 4, 1877 bound for Shark Bay. On the evening of May 11, *Hampton* drifted among breakers and started to break onto a reef. The four crew abandoned the boat and landed 16 km south of Geraldton. Meanwhile, *Hampton* drifted ashore undamaged and was refloated two weeks later to continue on to Shark Bay.

### *Electra*

This 92-tonne vessel was headed for the Abrolhos, but rough weather forced it to seek shelter at Dongara. In the early hours of May 10, 1890, it was blown ashore 275 metres from the jetty near the mouth of the Irwin River. Crewman Edward Duckett was swept to his death by the seas. The ship was later refloated and continued to service the coast until 1904.

### *Mayhill*

One of WA's largest sailing ship wrecks, the 2,121-tonne four-masted iron barque, *Mayhill*, was wrecked at Point Moore Reef on August 10, 1895. Part of its cargo was a load of rails for the Mullewa-Cue railway. The master, Capt. Hume, had been supplied with out-of-date directions, which contributed to the disaster. The iron hull has collapsed, but is a good dive in the right conditions.

### MV *Stanford*

This 4,803-tonne motor vessel *Stanford* ran aground in a storm on African Reef on the night of June 24, 1936. The passengers and crew were taken off by the State ship *Koolinda* before the wreck broke up. It is still on the reef today, but is barely recognisable and is dangerous to dive in all but flat calm conditions. Many of *Stanford's* fittings were bought by Geraldton residents. The bell is displayed in the WA Museum, Geraldton.

For further information on historic shipwrecks contact the WA Museum Shipwreck Galleries or the WA Heritage Council:  
<http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/collections/maritime/march/march.asp>  
<http://tourism.heritage.wa.gov.au>

Text by Lisa Ralph and Naomi Whyte, Geraldton Senior High school. Work experience, WA Museum. Updated by Jessica Berry, Tracey Miller and Jessica Reynolds, WAM 2008.



#### Diving notes

Wrecks are often hazardous. Access to the wrecks requires a boat. Divers must be fit and qualified. A diver's flag must be displayed. Never dive alone or leave a boat unattended. Persons diving on these wrecks do so at their own risk. These wrecks are part of Western Australia's heritage. They are protected under legislation, Please enjoy them but do not disturb them.

# WRECKS IN THE GERALDTON AREA FROM PORT GREGORY TO DONGARA

## Introduction

Once known as Champion Bay, the Port of Geraldton is situated approximately 201 nautical miles north of Fremantle. The port was an outlet for farming produce from the 1850s. Geraldton became a City in 1988 and is a prominent port for the exporting of mineral sands, wheat and rock lobsters. Port Gregory is approximately 40 nautical miles north of Geraldton. Many ships went there to load cargoes such as lead ore and wool, and in the 1850s it was also a whaling port.



*Stanford*

Thirty five nautical miles south of Geraldton is the town of Dongara (Aboriginal word for 'meeting place of seals'). Dongara was once known as Port Irwin and in the 19th century, offered a safe natural harbour. There was so much damage done to ships calling into this area that some companies refused to provide insurance cover. Many ships have been wrecked or damaged along this wind-blown coastline. This pamphlet gives details of these vessels in chronological order.

## Wrecks and strandings from Port Gregory to Dongara

### *Leander*

At 10 pm on November 13, 1853 *Leander*, a 173-tonne brigantine, struck the shore adjacent to a large and prominent sand ridge that ran several kilometres from Port Irwin. *Leander* has never been found and is thought to be buried in the sand very close to the shore. Modern charts mark Leander Point several nautical miles south of the mouth of the Irwin River. The description above, however, places the ship closer to White Point, further south of the Irwin.

### *Mary Queen of Scots*

Bound for Singapore from Fremantle, this 256-ton barque sailed through Hero Passage, Port Gregory, on February 7, 1855. Once inside the reef, two anchors were dropped to stop the vessel dragging. At 10 pm a gale blew up and the vessel began to strike heavily on a reef 180 metres from shore. By 3 am its back was broken and it began taking water in the hold. A few days later the vessel disappeared below the water. The captain was blamed for the incident. The wreck has not yet been found.

### *Iris*

On July 10, 1855 the *Iris*, a 311-tonne New Bedford whaler, became stranded at Port Gregory after springing a leak. A year later it was refloated and renamed *Francis*.

### *Sara*

On returning from Adelaide on its maiden voyage, this 54-tonne schooner was sent to collect a cargo of oil and copper ore. While being towed out of Port Gregory by three whale-boats on July 17, 1856, a heavy swell washed it onto a shoal between Gold Digger Passage and Hero Passage. All hands were saved. The wreck has not been found.

### Unidentified Wreck

Shipwrecked seamen from *Cochituate*, sighted wreckage 12 nautical miles south of the Irwin River in 1861. The position matches that of the wreck *Leander* of 1853. Alternatively it could be the unidentified ship reported in 1851 which is mentioned above.

### *Pilot boat*

This boat, which normally required six crew, was taken by two prisoners who had escaped from the convict depot at

Port Gregory on January 25, 1862. They met a grisly end. It appeared that the boat went up on a reef, and the men stripped in an attempt to swim to shore. One naked and shark-mutilated body was found by police searching for the men.



*Mary Queen of Scots bell*

### *African*

At 10 pm on January 4, 1863, while returning to Champion Bay, the *African*, a 780-tonne ship-rigged vessel, struck the reef which now bears its name. It was refloated but the next morning it ran aground in the harbour, about 140 metres from the jetty. While awaiting repairs, the vessel broke its moorings and floated 5 km to the north, stopping just in time to avoid a reef at the mouth of the Chapman River. The vessel was sold and dismantled to construct *Albatross*, *Lass of Geraldton*, and *Mary Ann*, all of which were later wrecked.

### *Zephyr*

On September 28, 1864, this 409-tonne barque was blown onto a sandbank in only 2.4 metres of water in Port

Gregory. While unloading the cargo, a boat carrying eight men capsized and three men were drowned. The vessel was refloated at high tide.

### *Favourite*

The 46-tonne wooden schooner, *Favourite*, had an eventful trading life. In 1856 it went ashore at Bunbury. In 1858 it was wrecked upon the Abrolhos but refloated later that year. It continued to sail regularly until it was wrecked at Port Gregory on November 24, 1867. The wreck has not been found.



*Xantho engine room*

### *Albatross*

While bound for Champion Bay from the Irwin River in June 1868, this new 18-tonne ship (built from the African wreck) helped to refloat *Sea Bird* and *Twinkling Star*, which had run aground during heavy storms, at Port Irwin. *Sea Bird*, and *Albatross* then sailed to Champion Bay but both were forced to return due to the heavy winds. On June 24, just 1.5 kilometres from the mouth of the Irwin River, *Albatross* was swamped and rolled onto a sandbank. Seven men and a woman drowned. Three men swam to shore and were rescued. The wreck has not been found.

### *Swan*

This 24-tonne schooner, under the command of Charles Preston on a trip bound from Fremantle to Port Irwin and Champion Bay, was wrecked on a reef outside Port Irwin on October 2, 1869. It hit the reef when the helmsman reversed the orders to steer sharply to port. During the attempted recovery the towing cable snapped resulting in the rescue