

The Argus (Melbourne, Vic) Fri 24 Nov 1854 (From the Sydney Morning Herald.).

The Wreck of the Island Queen

We have been favoured by Mr. Crook, Assistant Harbourmaster, with the following interesting communication respecting the loss of the above vessel from Mr. Murphy, Chief Officer. Steamship Ann, August 24.

"After we left Sydney, Captain Porter upon consultation with his officers, determined to take the route through Torres Straits. We had a beautiful run up the coast, falling in on one instance with a reef not marked in the charts of the late surveys.

In lat. 16.40S., long, chronometer, 148.6 E., at noon we unexpectedly found ourselves entering the right of a crescent-shaped reef, trending from the S.W. to the N.E., all studdingsails set, steering N.W. Fortunately it was daylight, we tacked to the eastward and cleared it. Now this might be the Bougainville Reef; if so, it is fearfully misplaced upon the Admiralty charts, and ought to be corrected. This caused us to doubt the chronometer, and we determined to make Bird Island before we steered for the Barrier. Here again we were unfortunate, the weather set in so thick and cloudy that we could not get sights.

During the afternoon of 24th July, in latitude 12.31 south longitude, chronometer 144.12 east, Raine's Island bearing from us N. 5.37 West; variation 5 degrees easterly; distance 58 miles; we found we could not make the passage before dark, so we shortened sail to the jib, fore-top-sail, and mainsail and hauled up to the north; 5 p.m., the breeze freshened from the S. E., with passing squalls; very thick weather, and cloudy; single reefed the fore-top-sail, and double-reefed the main sail; 8 p.m., breakers reported from the main-yard as being right ahead and close to. It was my watch on deck; I put the helm hard down immediately, trimmed sheets, and commenced making sail; there was a fearful sea rolling in upon the reef; she would not stay against it under short canvas, add to this a five knot current setting us right upon it - of course every living soul was upon deck immediately, and working with superhuman strength to make sail, unfortunately, the jib split right up the middle; we let go the best bower, and struck broadside on at the same time with a fearful collision. Had she not seen a very staunch English built schooner she must have gone to pieces; it was the top of high water and spring tides, so we were driven well in upon the reef.

Of course, the moment we struck to cut away the masts to ease the wreck, ?????? beautiful spars would not part from us, even after the weather lanyards were out, although we were at the time lying down on our beam ends.

The mainmast would not start until the foremast went, and all the foremasts stood about five minutes after all the weather rigging was cut. This was a fearful pause. We had just commenced to cut away at the mast itself with the broad axes when crash it went, taking the main along with it, and smashing the gig, which was too leeward into fragments. The surf was now making clean breaches over us, and with the greatest difficulty we were able to hold onto the wreck against the fearful seas, expecting momentarily that the schooner would either go to pieces or else be washed over the reef into deeper water; but we soon found that she had

bilged and was half-full of water, and the masts having fallen upon the reef to leeward, she held on.

Upon consideration, we determined not to launch the long boat that night; had we done so, we should have all perished, as we had no idea of our whereabouts, and the boat would certainly have been wrecked. We passed a fearful night. Oh, how anxiously we looked with straining eyes, to the first streak of dawn - in a situation like this, after all excitement is over, it's an awful solemn contemplation staring death in the face. All our recollection from infancy to childhood, from childhood to man hood, pass before the mind vivified in the imagination to a stern reality - to a trial that once experienced never can be forgotten. Daylight rose, and with it our hearts. To work we went, one and all, launched the long boat over the lee side upon the booms, and commenced fitting her out for a voyage. She was the only boat we had, and we were twenty-seven souls in all. By the time the long boat was ready it was low water, and the reef to leeward of us dry in many places. The boat being ready, we now had time to examine our position. We found by observation, at noon, that we had struck upon the great detached reef which lies some distance outside the Barrier, and to the southward of Raine Island. On examining our track of the night before we found that from noon the current had been setting us to the N W, at the rate of five knots per hour; this accounted in a great measure for our unfortunate position.

There was a large ship upright upon the other side of the reef, with her mainmast standing, main yard across, and her mainmast partly loosed, bearing north from us, distance about eight miles. She must have recently gone on shore, but have been deserted, for she did not answer our signals. We could not start from the wreck this day, it being too late in the day when the tide made. We passed another fearful night, with the greatest difficulty keeping the long boat afloat, although she was too leeward of the schooner. At daylight of the 26th we started from the wreck; our boat so deep that we momentarily expected to be swamped. We had all to get out and tow her over the reef in some places having to lift her bodily.

When I left our little schooner, I felt parting from a dear home; she was such a comfortable little vessel, - one of those few craft that are seldom met with. But we now had to turn our minds and energies to other dangers, infinitely greater than those we left behind us. There were twenty-seven lives in the boat a fortnight's stores and water, kedge anchor, and 70 fathom hawser coir, consequently she was fearfully deep; but fortunately, a double banked boat that pulled with grumets upon a long single wooden trowel about a foot and a half long. We shipped all the trowels and spread a bolt of our canvas all-round the boat outside the gunwale, hauling it taut and tacking it round with pump tacks, this formed a bulwark and kept a good deal of water out, which when we got into the seaway, we found the advantage of. We now steered with a fresh breeze for the Barrier, intending to make Stead's Entrance, but at noon found by observation, that we had to ran to leeward about two miles; it now set in hard squalls from the S.E., seas running high, with the greatest difficulty keeping the boat afloat, so much so, that we determined at all risk to run for the Barrier and close it. We did so, every entry extended with heart-rending anxiety along the fearful reef. This was an awful - a critical moment, for if we had made the reef and found no opening, nothing could have saved us, as the breeze and current were setting in upon the reef, and we never could have kept the boat to windward, but, although we knew it not the merciful hand of God interposed to save us from our impending doom; 2 p.m., sighted what we at first took for a sand-bank, but which upon nearing we found to be a fall rigged ship upon her beam ends,

with her deck presented seaward, lower-mast standing, topmast housed, and a boat hanging over the stern; she was apparently not injured, but lying perpendicular upon her beam ends, keel perfectly horizontal, nearly dry; she was on one end of a very narrow break in the reef through which we stood in N. N. W., being a very narrow passage, but safe. Oh, how gratefully I uttered one deep fervent thank God from the bottom of my heart, when we got into smooth water inside the barrier.

We now steered N. W., for the Hardy Group of islands, intending to bivouac there for the present, during the afternoon, about 4 p. m., it set in very squally and thick, but you may fancy what joy lighted up all our countenances, when we sighted a barque lying snugly at anchor, under the lee of the Ashmore Banks. That joy was not the less, I can assure you, when we got along side, and found it was an old friend, the barque Ellen, Captain Marshall, that had left Hong Kong for Melbourne, a little after us, and was now bound to Calcutta. It is not necessary to tell you how sailors treat each other in misfortune. He was the kindest of the kind and had also the misfortune to have touched upon the Ashmore, losing an anchor and chain cable, and carrying away the pintails and gudgeons of his rudder. Next morning, we stood down to Sunday Island to repair the damages, and there we secured the rudder properly for a voyage, remaining three days.

At Cairn Cross anchorage, we fell in with the **Dutch barque De Kyverheid, Captain J. C. M. Van Stryen**, when he heard our situation, nothing could exceed his kindness. He was bound from Melbourne to Batavia; and when he heard that we wanted to go to China, he offered us a passage to Batavia, and promised to forward us as from there to Singapore; so we agreed to join him at Bovley Island, and the two vessels kept company through the Straits. We had not saved anything from the schooner except what we had upon our backs, and the captain of the Dutchman sent us a quantity of new shirts, trousers, flannels, &c. I shall never forget him for it, I thought it so kind and considerate under the circumstances, especially for a foreigner.

August the 2nd, the steamer Ann, from Sydney to Singapore, came up with us in Endeavor Straits. We thought this a better opportunity than the Dutchman, as we should go straight to Singapore without touching at Batavia. Captain Welsh kindly gave us a passage, and we sent the Lascars on to Calcutta in the Ellen. The captain of the Dutchman really seemed quite grieved that we did not go with him, and that he had not a further opportunity of shewing his kindness. Both he and Captain Marshall sent provisions with us on board the steamer in case we ran short of anything.

We have had a very comfortable passage so far in the Ann, treated, in the kindest manner possible by Captain Welsh and his officers. We, of course wished to proceed to China by the earliest opportunity, to see the owner and arrange matters with him. I believe the vessel was well insured. It has been a serious loss to ourselves, though I had myself about £200 worth of property on board, which to a young fellow struggling through the world is something, but I really do regret the schooner more than anything else; she was such a sweet craft, and we were all so fond of her. Such a pretty sea boat. Captain Welsh reports six wrecks upon the great detached reef, and two upon the Kent reef. I fully expect our owner will have another vessel ready for us to take down; that Porter will be sent home with a cargo of tea; if so, I go chief with Wilson to Sydney. Singapore, August 29th - Porter left yesterday for Hong Kong, in the mail steamer, and we proceed to Hong Kong in the Ann, Captain Welsh kindly giving us a passage up from Singapore. We shall just arrive in China time enough for the fighting.

There are wars and rumours of wars there; all the merchants have had to leave Canton, and take all their moveable property.