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## Shipwrecks: Images and Perceptions of Nineteenth Century Maritime Disasters

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In the nineteenth century the long sea voyage across thousands of miles of open ocean to Australia was a step into the unknown. International migration at this time usually involved travel by sea, as it had in previous centuries. Ships were the primary long distance transportation method and the movement of passengers was one of their most important functions. It has been estimated that more than 1.6 million immigrants travelled to Australia by ship between 1788 and 1900, nearly half of these people were assisted immigrants of one type or another and they came primarily from Great Britain with smaller numbers from Europe (Borrie 1989:121).

In the popular imagination the ocean represented hazard and uncertainty - an alien environment in which the possibility of shipwreck loomed large. Passengers felt themselves to be at the mercy of the elements and being directly exposed to the extremes of the weather in a moving structure was a new and disconcerting experience. This fear of shipwreck can be seen in a letter from P. Harnett to his brother from Cape Town in 1832 who writes that: 'you and the family must have been frequently tormented by anxious hopes and fears of my safety or probably have heard that the vessel was wrecked and as a matter of course that I was lost' (Harnett 1832).

In most respects shipwrecks, like other tragedies involving transportation, are civil or 'man made' disasters yet they also exhibit some of the

characteristics of natural disasters.<sup>1</sup> These include evoking in the victims feelings of powerlessness in the face of overwhelming natural forces and a timeframe which sometimes extends over a period of hours or even days.

These feelings of vulnerability resulted in fear and distress as most passengers were completely ignorant of their vessel's ability to withstand the wind and waves. The general public's fears about the dangers of shipwreck were to some extent the result of, and were certainly magnified by, the newspapers, books, handbills and periodicals of the time.

Water below decks was particularly disconcerting leading passengers to imagine that the dangers were far greater than they were in reality. On some occasions fear became the all-pervading and dominant emotion among the passengers. Much of this fear was unfounded, however, as remarkably few ships were overwhelmed and sunk by the force of weather alone. In fact, shipwreck was not the greatest danger at sea - disease, sickness and accident accounted for many more deaths.

The greatest social effects of the loss of passenger ships were felt in the wider community particularly on those who lost loved ones and friends. Shipwreck also engendered a sense of 'there but for the grace of God go I' among those people who had been or who intended to be passengers. Shipwreck events were of particular interest to those involved in maritime trade because of the significant economic investment in ships and cargoes but they were also important to the wider society in the form of vitally needed cargoes. In more general terms the public has always had a fascination with tales of disaster and survival particularly those which involved incredible hardship.

There was an immense variety of written material produced about shipwrecks in the nineteenth century including manuscript descriptions of shipwreck disasters in the form of letters, journals and diaries written by passengers. These reveal some of the individual approaches employed to cope with the tragedy of shipwreck. The diary of Sarah Davenport, who was on board the *Urania* when it was wrecked soon after leaving Liverpool, illustrates the panic which resulted when shipwreck became a reality:

... the vessel struck about half past ten o'clock she struck on the sand bank i shall never forget it the cries and screams [of] wemon and children and some of the men was terrified they did not know what they was doing ... as soon as Daylight broke the Life boats came and took us off the wrecked vessel (Davenport 1842:239-252).

Despite losing virtually everything in the wreck of the *Urania*, Sarah Davenport showed great determination to get to her destination. Together

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1 For a discussion of the definition and typologies of disaster see B. Raphael, *When Disaster Strikes*, London, Hutchinson, 1986, ch.1.

with her husband and three children she set off again in another ship for Australia; however her woes did not cease there, as she lost her youngest son, Albert, to disease, and had a still born child during this second voyage. The reaction to disaster is not the same for different individuals or groups and not all passengers demonstrated the same resolution as Sarah Davenport. After being shipwrecked when the *Juliana* was driven ashore in 1839, 21 adults and 29 children remained at the Cape of Good Hope, unwilling to risk continuing to Australia in another vessel (British Parliamentary Paper [BPP] XXXIII Appendix M, pp.285-341).

The wrecks of passenger ships in the nineteenth century spawned a whole genre of books, magazine articles, handbills, penny magazines and images of shipwrecks. One of the earliest of these is the *Chronicles of the Sea* which described the loss of the *Amphitrite* in 1833. Newspapers represent an important source of information about these maritime disasters. The popularity of these written accounts is indicative of the public's wider fascination with disaster. This is probably as true today as it was in the mid nineteenth century.

Generally images of shipwreck events varied in their degree of accuracy. The most accurate were usually drawings produced shortly after the event and done from memory by the participants themselves, particularly if the individual had some level of artistic talent. Shipwrecks were also a popular subject for artists who produced oil or watercolour paintings or drawings. During the nineteenth century, despite the introduction and development of photography and by the end of the century of moving footage, there are very few photographs of shipwreck events as they occurred. There are many examples which were taken shortly after the event showing the resulting destruction of the vessel on the beach or rocks.

Images of shipwreck events were sometimes used as the basis for lithographs or engravings for the illustrated newspapers. However, some engravers who worked for the illustrated newspapers produced imaginative 'artist's impressions' of shipwrecks which certainly conveyed a sense of the great dangers associated with shipwreck but which carried the drama to extremes producing visual impressions which exceed the bounds of credibility. As historical documents they cannot be relied upon to provide even a reasonable approximation of historical reality as such images were romantic rather than accurate depictions of shipwreck events. Consequently it is necessary to carefully assess the source and type of image to decide on the accuracy of the depiction.

In recent years disasters have started to attract the attention of historians interested in the social and economic costs of events in which large numbers of 'ordinary people' lost their lives. Shipwrecks have been widely

acknowledged as the worst civil disasters in Australian history in terms of the number of deaths in a single catastrophe (1987:379). In his chapter on disasters in *Australians - A Historic Atlas* Stuart Piggin borrows Donald Horne's now clichéd phrase 'the lucky country' to describe Australia's experience of disasters. Piggin based his claim of a relatively low loss of life in Australian disasters largely on a comparison with New Zealand in the recent history of air and rail disasters. As he quite rightly points out in terms of the number of deaths which occurred, the crash of an Air New Zealand airliner on Mount Erebus and the Tangiwai rail crash were far worse than anything which Australia has experienced this century.

Piggin cites the *Australian Encyclopedia* as the 'most accessible historical information on peacetime disasters' including in his definition of disasters 'wrecks and shipping disasters'. In this paper I intend to demonstrate that the *Australian Encyclopedia*, as well as a number of the other 'standard works' which deal with shipwrecks are frequently unreliable.

In general Piggin's analysis fails to seriously address maritime disasters in Australia apart from a single sentence in which he acknowledges the loss of the emigrant ship *Cataraqui* as the worst civil disaster in Australian history. The *Cataraqui* was wrecked on King Island on 4 August 1845 with the loss of nearly 400 lives including 365 passengers which represents the greatest number of deaths in a civil disaster on the coast of Australia. The loss of the *Cataraqui* has been considered in detail by Marjorie Morgan and Andrew Lemon in their excellent book *Poor Souls, They Perished* (1986).

Unfortunately, some historians have resorted to published secondary sources when discussing shipwreck disasters rather than examining the primary documentation. In his unpublished doctoral thesis Frank Crowley claims that between 1860 and 1914 just six emigrant and six ordinary passenger ships were wrecked on the outward voyage to Australia (Crowley 1951:232). Crowley's claims appear to have been based primarily on information about wrecks and shipping disasters provided in the *Australian Encyclopedia*. As far as I can determine there were at least 15 emigrant and passenger ships lost between 1860 and 1900 (See Appendix). Crowley lists four wrecks in his thesis which for various reasons should not be included.<sup>2</sup> More importantly he fails to mention seven wrecks which did occur, including three which resulted in considerable loss of life among the passengers.<sup>3</sup>

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2 These were the *Megaera* - an RN storeship with no passengers, *Strathmore*, which was destined for New Zealand, *Catterthun* - which was outbound for Hong Kong and *Loch Ard* - which had fewer than 30 passengers on board.

3 These were the *George Marshall*, *Duncan Dunbar*, *Light of the Age*, *Victoria Tower*, *Sussex*, *Royal Adelaide* and *Great Queensland*.

My recent research has revealed that at least two of the shipwreck events listed in the *Australian Encyclopedia* did not, in fact, involve passenger vessels on the Australian run. The first of these was the loss of the *Megaera* which the *Australian Encyclopedia* claimed was a 'government ship, with 400 people aboard for Australia' and which was beached on lonely St. Paul Island (South Indian Ocean) on 19 June 1871 with no lives lost (Vol.10, p.21). In fact, *Megaera* was a Royal Navy storeship destined for the conflict in Abyssinia and only had crew on board (*Argus* 29/12/1871, p.7). The second example was the loss of the *Strathmore*, which was wrecked in the Crozet Islands (South Indian Ocean) on 2 July 1875 with just 38 survivors from among the 51 passengers and 38 crew aboard. Unfortunately, the *Strathmore* was bound for New Zealand (*Argus* 10/4/1876 and 1/5/1876) and did not have the nearly 400 people destined for Australia which the *Australian Encyclopedia* suggests (Vol.10, p.28). Overall, the *Australian Encyclopedia* includes only 22 of the 42 passenger ship wrecks which are listed in Table 1.<sup>4</sup>

Another important and regularly consulted source on wrecks and shipping disasters is Charles Hocking's two volume *Dictionary of Disasters at Sea during the Age of Steam, 1824-1962* which was published by the prestigious Lloyds Register of Shipping in 1969. This could be mistaken for a definitive, if somewhat brief, coverage of shipping disasters. While Hocking lists most of the shipwrecks which resulted in extensive loss of life he nevertheless fails to include four shipwrecks which each resulted in more than 100 passenger deaths.<sup>5</sup> On a more general level this work is even less comprehensive than the *Australian Encyclopedia*; only 13 out of the 42 passenger ship wrecks which are summarised in Table 1 appear in Hocking's work.

Equally, the reliability of some of the information provided is questionable. Hocking describes how the *Great Queensland* vanished at sea during a voyage from London to Melbourne in 1876 with '569 passengers and crew' on board. He goes on to suggest that this was 'probably the worst disaster in the history of Australian emigration' (Hocking 1969:284). This is clearly revealed as incorrect by the *Times* which states in two articles in December 1876 that when the *Great Queensland* vanished there were just 34 passengers and 37 crew on board; a significant loss of life but not the catastrophic disaster which Hocking suggests (*The Times* 15/12/1876 p.6 and 20/12/1876 p.5).

In recent years there have been a number of books written which briefly describe the events surrounding the loss of almost all vessels in the

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4 Among the vessels which are not mentioned and which had extensive loss of life are the *Iowa*, *Lord Raglan* and *Wilhelmsburg*.

5 These were the *George III*, *Ultonia*, *Lord Raglan* and *Wilhelmsburg*.

Australian region. Principal among these are the five volumes of *Australian Shipwrecks* (Bateson 1972 and Loney 1980 and 1982). Bateson's volume considers all vessels which were destined for Australia no matter where in the world they were wrecked and he accurately covers all of the passenger ships wrecked before 1850. Unfortunately Loney's volumes only consider wrecks if they were lost in Australian waters. Thus only if a passenger ship from Europe happens to have reached Australian waters before being wrecked will it be described in *Australian Shipwrecks Vols 2 and 3*. Finally there are the computer databases kept by maritime archaeologists in each state which contain extensive and generally accurate information about shipwrecks on the Australian coast. Unfortunately these have yet to be consolidated into a national register and remain largely inaccessible to the general public.

There are no accurate statistics available on how many passenger ship voyages were made to Australia in the nineteenth century. The reason for this gap in the historical statistics is primarily the result of a definitional problem about what constitutes a passenger ship. The number of passengers on board each ship, the port of origin and even the overwhelming numbers of ship arrivals in the nineteenth century make accurate data series extremely difficult to establish. For the purposes of this paper I have chosen to consider only inward-bound international passenger ships from Europe. These are defined as vessels which had on board more than 30 passengers, immigrants or convicts and which were wrecked after embarking their human cargo in a European port and before disembarking them in the Australian colonies.<sup>6</sup> A rough estimate based on this definition would probably be in the region of 10,000 allowing for an average of 100 arrivals per year over the century.

There were at least 41 passenger ships lost during the voyage to Australia in the nineteenth century which if the estimate of 10,000 voyages is approximately correct represents about 0.4% of the total number of voyages. (see Table 1) Of the more than 1.6 million passengers who embarked for the voyage to Australia at least 3,396 lost their lives in shipwrecks which represents approximately 0.2% of the total.<sup>7</sup>

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6 This definition has several important implications - firstly, that it assumes that the term passengers includes all immigrants and that immigrants includes all convicts. Secondly, that it excludes all of the coastal and intercolonial passenger traffic, all outward-bound passenger ships and all international passenger arrivals from ports of origin outside Europe (most notably China, India, America and New Zealand). Finally, that it does not consider the 'short ships' which carried less than 30 passengers

7 These figures immediately reveal some of the results of the definitional problem - two examples will help to illustrate this. Firstly, the number of passengers must be greater than the number of immigrants - people made the trip back to the mother country and returned by ship to Australia as passengers thus increasing the figure of 1.6 million by an unknown amount. Secondly, that some immigrants arrived on

**Table 1**

*Passengers ships wrecked on the voyage to Australia  
from Europe in the nineteenth century*

Decade	number of shipwrecks	shipwrecks with no deaths	Total number of deaths
1800-09	0	0	0
1810-19	0	0	0
1820-29	0	0	0
1830-39	6	3	459
1840-49	5	2	525
1850-59	13	6	1058
1860-69	9	5	726
1870-79	5	1	378
1880-89	1	0	270
1890-99	1	1	0
Total	41	19	3396

One general point which is immediately obvious from these figures is that only in about half of the cases of shipwreck were there any deaths among the passengers. Thus, if the chances of a passenger actually being shipwrecked in the nineteenth century were actually relatively low then the chances of dying in a shipwreck event were even lower.

The greatest number of shipwrecks and the largest number of deaths occurred in the 1850s. It would be a mistake, however, to immediately conclude that the decade of the 1850s was in any way more dangerous than any other decade as it also corresponds to the peak in immigration caused by the gold rush. More than 670,000 immigrants arrived on board several thousand vessels - far more than any other decade. More extensive research is required before general conclusions about the rises and falls in the relative numbers of shipwreck events in different decades of the nineteenth century can be made.

Comprehensive, comparative figures for the Atlantic crossing from Europe to North America, where extremely large numbers of emigrants made the passage, are also lacking in the historiography. There are

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board 'short ships' thus decreasing the figure of 1.6 million also by an unknown amount.

occasional accounts of shipwreck events and isolated statistics for certain periods such as the years 1847-51, when 44 passenger vessels out of 7,129 from Britain were wrecked with the loss of 1,043 lives (Guillet 1937:126). However, in the absence of systematic quantitative analysis, such figures remain 'occasional streaks of colour that happen, by some accident of documentation, (to) randomly penetrate the haze which obscures our wider understanding of shipwreck disasters' (Bailyn, 1986:xx).

Some of the more important questions which can be asked about shipwrecks is why they occurred and what types of shipwreck events posed the greatest danger to the passengers. There were a number of general types of hazard which resulted in ships being wrecked. These have been grouped into five general types for the purposes of this paper which have been defined as follows:

<i>Fire</i>	including explosion of cargo
<i>Icebergs</i>	including becoming embayed by ice
<i>Collision</i>	including with other vessels or lightships
<i>Foundering</i>	including storms, stress of weather and vanishing at sea
<i>Running ashore</i>	including striking isolated rocks, sandbanks and reefs

These hazards cover the vast majority of shipwreck events in the nineteenth century though they are not entirely comprehensive; rare events such as the cargo shifting or the vessel hitting a whale did happen. Ascribing a single reason for a particular passenger shipwreck event to one of these hazards can occasionally be difficult as the example of the loss of the ship *Wanata* in 1866 indicates. This vessel was damaged in a gale, collided with another vessel (at which point it was abandoned), before catching fire and finally sinking.<sup>8</sup>

Even more difficult to establish were the underlying causes of any particular shipwreck disaster. Questions of negligence (the captain or crew being at fault) had to be balanced against technical failure (a part of the ship breaks) and extreme environmental conditions (storms). The Royal Commission into Shipwrecks reported in 1873 that the losses of all British merchant vessels between 1856 and 1872 were as a result of natural causes (storms) (30.5%), unseaworthy, overloaded vessels (4.5%) and bad navigation (ignorance and drunkenness) (65%) (BPP 1873 XXXVI:315-335). These proportions can only be considered as indicative of the possible causes of passenger ship wrecks. Passenger ships were subject to the

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8 Appendix 33 of the 27th General Report of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners (1986), p.108.



provisions of the *Passenger Acts* and to an increased level of government inspection and regulation compared to the average British merchant vessel.

In addition, and at certain times, recently introduced technology may have contributed to particular disasters. For example, when the immigrant ship *Tayleur* ran ashore on the coast of Ireland in 1854 it was more than 50 miles off course. It was suspected that the ship's compass had been affected by the iron hull which was still a relatively new construction method at that time (*Argus* 26/4/1854 p.2).

Convict transportation provided the earliest movement of people from Great Britain to Australia. Between 1788 and 1868 more than 168,000 convicts were carried by ship to Australia. The first vessel to be lost en route to Australia which resulted in deaths among the passengers did not occur until 1833 when the first of five convict transports was wrecked. In itself, this is quite remarkable as over 420 successful voyages had already been made carrying more than 60,000 convicts to the Australian colonies (See Bateson 1983, Appendices). In 1833 the female convict transport *Amphitrite* was wrecked on the coast of France with the loss of 108 female convicts and twelve of their children.<sup>9</sup> The circumstances surrounding the wreck of the *Amphitrite* were such that there was an opportunity to land the prisoners in safety before the ship was destroyed on the rising tide. This opportunity was not taken as there appears to have been some suggestion that the surgeon and captain were afraid of letting the women go ashore in case they escaped (*Chronicles of the Sea* 24/3/1838). Certainly, in this case, the absence of a guard detachment on board female convict ships would have made it difficult, if not impossible, to prevent some of the female convicts from escaping had they been landed. The fear of escape is a recurrent theme in the wrecks of convict ships; in the case of the loss of the male convict transport *George III* there are reports that shots were fired by the guards to prevent escape even as the ship filled with water (Nash n.d.:19). In the decade between 1833 and 1842 five convict transports were lost with a total death toll of 602 convicts and their children.<sup>10</sup> The overall death rate through shipwreck among the convict transports was about 0.35% or about one convict in 280.

Only two passenger ships were destroyed by fire in the nineteenth century; a remarkably low figure when one considers what would appear to be a high fire risk posed by timber ships with their canvas sails, decks caulked with pitch and sometimes carrying cargoes which could include gunpowder and

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9 BPP Vol XLVII (1834) Papers relating to the loss of the BPP convict ship *Amphitrite*.

10 These were the *Amphitrite* (1833), *George III* (1835), *Neva* (1835), *Hive* (1835) and *Waterloo* (1842).

highly inflammable alcoholic spirits. The barque *India* was destroyed by fire in the South Atlantic Ocean in 1841. The fire resulted when:

The Third Mate and one of the boys were below . . . drawing off spirits, when the candle they used accidentally fell on some spilled Rum which immediately caught fire, and the flames spread with such rapidity that all efforts at extinguishing the tremendous blaze were unavailing; and the ship soon became one mass of flame (*Port Phillip Patriot* 18/10/1843).

There were seventeen deaths among the 186 passengers but not one was as a direct result of the flames. When the first of the *India's* boats was launched, the passengers, in a state of panic, rushed the boat overloading it and causing it to capsize - seventeen passengers drowned.

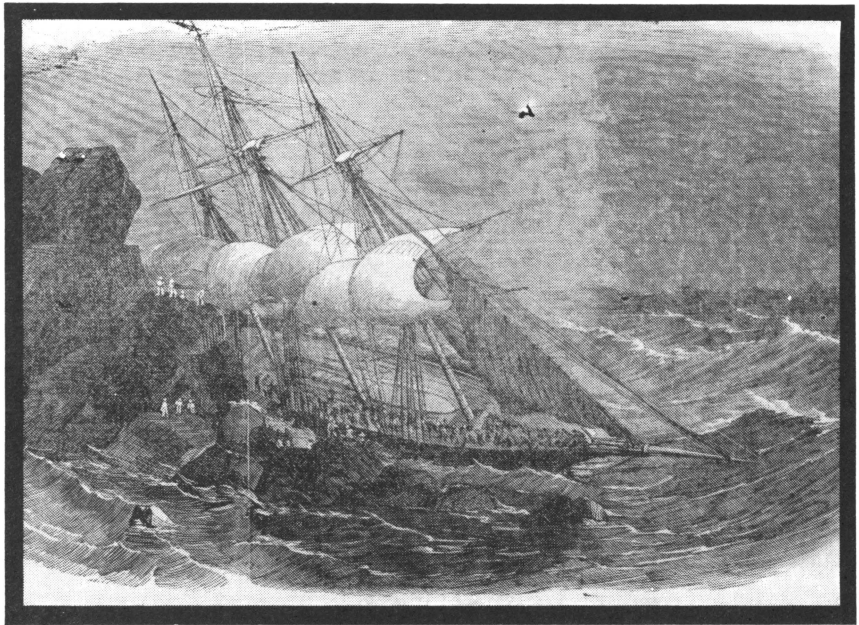
The other vessel lost through fire was the *Katherine Sharer* which was found to be on fire while approaching Hobart in 1855. The passengers and crew wisely abandoned the vessel as four hours later the fire reached the cargo of gunpowder causing a tremendous explosion which resulted in pieces of the mast later being found more than a mile away (Nash n.d.:15).

The iceberg hazard was even more uncommon as only one vessel is believed to have been lost by becoming embayed by ice in the Southern Ocean. This was the loss of the clipper ship *Guiding Star* which vanished while on a voyage to Australia with 481 passengers and 62 crew on board in 1855 (Hocking 1969 Vol.1:289). This was an even greater disaster than the loss of the *Cataraqui* which had occurred a decade before.

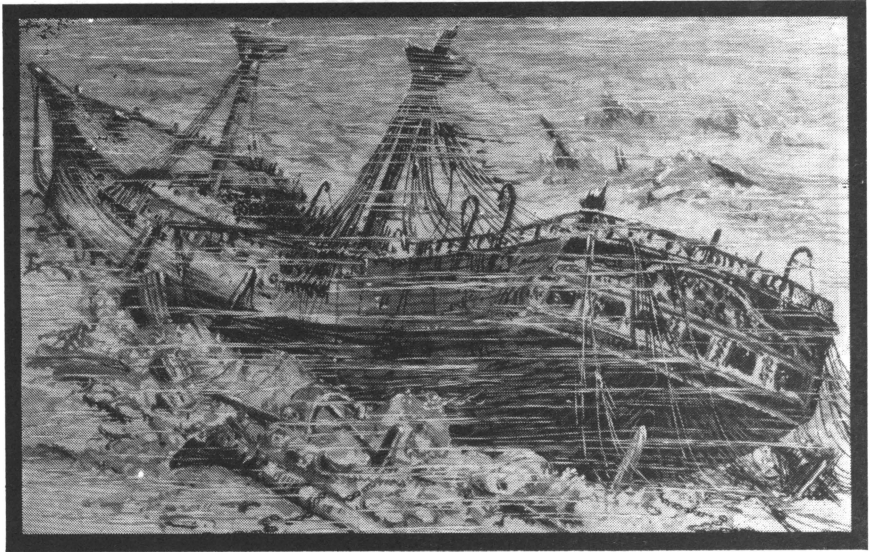
Collision resulted in just two losses - significantly both resulted in heavy loss of life. The *Northfleet* was lying at anchor off Dungeness in the English Channel one night in 1873 when it was struck by the steamship *Murillo*. Most of the 379 passengers were asleep at the time and considerable panic ensued. Unfortunately the Captain did not realize the seriousness of the damage and it was fifteen minutes before distress signals were sent up. A number of small vessels took off 85 passengers and crew but the eventual death toll included approximately 310 passengers (*Argus* 16/3/1873 p.5). The emigrant ship *Kapunda* sank after a collision in the South Atlantic in 1887.



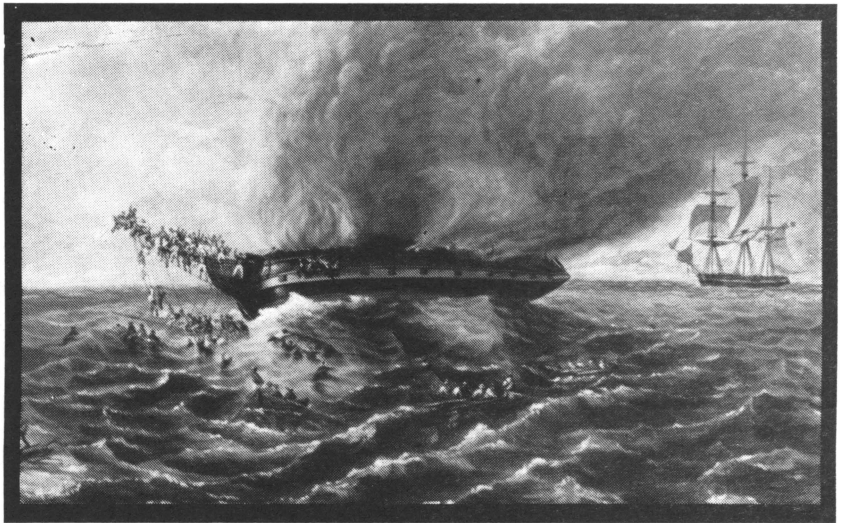
**Figure 1** Loss of the *Amphitrite*, Captain Hunter, August 31st - *Chronicles of the Sea*. 24 March 1838. (ANMM collection 9002)



**Figure 2** Loss of the *Tayleur* Australian packet ship off Lambay Island - *Illustrated London News*. 28 Jan 1854. (ANMM collection 1088)



**Figure 3** The sunken ship *British Admiral* as seen from the deck of the *Cygnets* - Australasian Sketcher. 11 July 1874. (ANMM collection 9097)



**Figure 4** The Burning of the Barque *India* of Greenock - watercolour painting by Samuel Elyard 1841. (ANMM collection 4246)

In the nineteenth century just five vessels vanished on the voyage to Australia with the loss of everyone on board. These were the *Iowa* (1854)<sup>11</sup>, *Ultonia* (1857)<sup>12</sup> and *Lord Raglan* (1863)<sup>13</sup>, *Guiding Star* (1855), and *Great Queensland* (1876).<sup>14</sup> The *Guiding Star* is believed to have become embayed by ice in the Southern Ocean (*The Times* 15/12/1876 p.6 and 20/12/1876 p.5) while the *Great Queensland* is suspected to have been lost through an explosion in her cargo of patent gunpowder. No credible theories have been advanced to explain the disappearance of the other vessels. The death toll in these disasters was sometimes immense; 481 passengers were lost in the *Guiding Star*, 289 passengers on board the *Lord Raglan*, 129 passengers and 50 crew were lost in the disappearance of the *Ultonia*, 85 passengers on board the *Iowa* and 71 lives were lost when *Great Queensland* sank including 34 passengers. In these five shipwreck events more than a thousand passengers lost their lives which represents nearly one third of all the passenger deaths through shipwreck for the entire century.

The vast majority of passenger ships were wrecked through running ashore in one form or another; 29 ships ran ashore whether this was striking an isolated, uncharted rock or being driven onto the beach. As a consequence these events usually happened near land and, except in the most catastrophic cases, there were usually at least some survivors from amongst the passengers. There were ten shipwrecks in each of which more than 100 passengers lost their lives.<sup>15</sup> The total passenger death toll involved in the loss of these vessels was more than 2,200 or nearly two thirds of the total. There were another seven wrecks in which some passengers lost their lives.<sup>16</sup> A total of just 141 passengers lost their lives in these wrecks.

There were a total of 22 ships wrecked in the nineteenth century which resulted in some deaths among the passengers on the voyage to Australia; there were also at least twenty passenger ships which sank without loss of life. These wrecks resulted in 3,396 deaths out of approximately 1,600,000 passengers who made the voyage. Statistically, in terms of the numbers embarked compared to the numbers who lost their lives in shipwreck events,

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11 Appendix 20 of the 33rd General Report of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners (1872).

12 19th Report of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners.(1859) p.13.

13 24th General Report of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners(1864), p.16.

14 Appendix 20 of the 33rd General Report of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners (1872).

15 These were the *Amphitrite* (1833), *George III* (1835), *Neva* (1835), *Waterloo* (1842), *Cataraqui* (1845), *Taylor* (1854), *Wilhelmsberg* (1863), *London* (1866), *Northfleet* (1873) and *Kapunda* (1886).

16 These were the *India* (1841), *Isabella Watson* (1852), *Earl of Charlmont* (1853), *Dunbar* (1857), *Royal Adelaide* (1872) and *British Admiral* (1874).

an individual's chances of becoming a shipwreck victim were fairly low; less than 0.25%. However, no matter what the figures actually were as the *Times* put it: 'no average can make such calamities . . . appear less appalling' (*The Times* 3/9/1878 p.9).

Overall there is a gradation from the 'vanished without a trace' kind of shipwreck event to simply running ashore in terms of the chances of dying. Spatial effects such as remote locations particularly mid-ocean, environmental effects such as extreme cold, timing effects such as night time, psychological effects such as panic and the type of shipwreck event such as collision all increased the mortality rates of particular shipwreck events.

The means of preventing shipwreck can, in part, be traced to British Government regulation which required the inspection of convict and emigrant ships. Emigration agents were appointed in each major port to ensure that the ships were sea worthy and not overloaded. A series of Passengers Acts culminating in the long-lasting *Passenger Act of 1855* provided the legislative basis for State regulation of emigration from Great Britain (*The Passengers Act, 1855* [18 & 19 Vic cap 119]). Government involvement was an important feature in regulating Australian immigration during the nineteenth century. It resulted in better quality vessels being involved in the carriage of people to Australia unlike the situation on the North Atlantic route where leaky, overcrowded ships were a serious problem.

One area in which government regulation had some effect in increasing safety was the provision of standards for the registration of ships and the certification of ship's masters and officers. The *Merchant Shipping Act of 1854* was an attempt to provide regulation across a wide spectrum of maritime activity including the appointment of Marine Boards, the examination and certification of masters and mates, the provision of lifeboats for sea-going ships, the survey of ships, pilotage and lighthouses (*The Merchant Shipping Act, 1854* [17 & 18 Vict. c. 120]). However, the Act was never effectively enforced and serious problems remained within the maritime industries. *The Merchant Shipping Act of 1894* provided more extensive and workable solutions to some of the problems including the provisions for life-saving appliances on board and the marking of a load (Plimsoll) line (*The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894* [57 & 58 Vict. Ch. 60]). Another factor which improved safety at sea was the charting work done by the Royal Navy particularly in the more remote regions of the world including the accurate charting of the Australian coastline much of which was completed by 1850. This was intended to reduce the number of the 'uncharted dangers' which claimed at least one of the earlier shipwrecks -

the male convict transport *George III* which struck an uncharted rock in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel when bound for Hobart in 1835 (Bateson 1983:252).

Ships could be wrecked at any point in the journey but the most dangerous times were while leaving European waters, at ports of call en route and again on arrival in Australian waters. The colonies recognized that the arrival in local waters had considerable dangers associated with it. The solutions were seen primarily in three areas. Two of these were preventative, namely, navigation marks particularly lighthouses, and pilot services, while the last was curative - lifeboats which were intended to save lives if the worst happened.

Lighthouses were established both for coastal navigation as well as for making a first landfall after the long voyage from Europe. Lighthouse services were the responsibility of the colonial administrations during the nineteenth century.

For many nineteenth century immigrants their first sight of the Australian coastline after months at sea was a lighthouse. The provision of lighthouses to aid night navigation began with the Macquarie Lighthouse in 1818, though the South Head of Sydney harbour had been marked at night by a fire since about 1790. Navigational marks were also established - in 1820 an iron post was erected on the Sow and Pigs, a rocky reef which was the only significant hazard in Sydney Harbour, and later in 1834 the lightship *Rose* was placed near the Sow and Pigs. By the 1830s other lighthouses such as the Iron Pot lighthouse (1832) in the approaches to the Derwent River and the Cape Bruny lighthouse (1838) were assisting arriving vessels to make a safe landfall on the coast of Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) (Reid 1988 Chpt 1). Lighthouses did not provide a total answer as bad weather such as fog or low cloud could obscure the beam. This almost certainly happened in the case of the wreck of the *Dunbar* where the ship ran ashore in restricted visibility directly below the Macquarie lighthouse, the oldest in the Australian colonies (*Sydney Morning Herald* 25/8/1857 p.2). The two most important lighthouses for the arriving passenger ships from Europe were the Cape Otway lighthouse (1848) on the Victorian coast and the Cape Wickham light (1861) on King Island. Between these two lights was the entrance to Bass Strait, the main shipping route to both Melbourne and Sydney. A total of five passenger ships were wrecked between 1835 and 1874 in this region including four on King Island.<sup>17</sup>

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17 These were the *Neva*, *Cataraqui*, *Schomberg*, *Netherby* and *British Admiral*.

Another significant danger point was the narrow entrance to Port Phillip Bay where six immigrant ships were lost.<sup>18</sup> Fortunately only 10 passengers lost their lives in these wrecks though many immigrants were left destitute when all of their belongings went down with the ship (Foster 1988:16-17). The loss of the *Sacramento* was witnessed by Harriet King who was on board the *Wacousta* which arrived at Port Phillip Heads shortly after the *Sacramento* went ashore. She wrote that:

. . . we witnessed a sight which ought to have made our hearts overflow with gratitude to the Almighty for our own preservation whilst we lamented the sad fate of the *Sacramento* a ship to all appearance as good as our own wrecked on the very spot our Captain had dreaded - we saw the poor creatures creeping up the shore, thank God, all lives saved, but everything else lost. The next day, beds, pillows, casks etc were floating around us where we had thrown out our anchor to wait for a Pilot (King 1853).

Pilot services had their earliest beginnings in the Australian colonies in Port Jackson (Sydney Harbour) where the first, self-employed sea pilot was officially appointed in 1803. In 1833 it was made compulsory to use a pilot in Sydney Harbour and in March 1838 a pilot was appointed for the port of Adelaide. In the same year a private service was established to pilot ships through the notorious Rip entrance to Port Phillip which later became the Port Phillip Pilot service. Pilots were responsible for navigating the ship the final miles to its port of destination or in the case of the Queensland and Torres Strait pilot service through the dangerous waters of the Great Barrier Reef.

Lifeboats also made their appearance in Australia in the 1830s. Unfortunately, the first lifeboat constructed in Australia proved to be a costly failure. When it was tested by filling it with water to find out how many people it would carry in that condition - it sank.<sup>19</sup> Shipwrecks were closely associated with the development of the lifeboat service. A lifeboat service was established at Queenscliff near the Rip in 1856. In spite of, or in some cases because of, the efforts of the Port Phillip Pilot service the Queenscliff lifeboat attended the wrecks of more than twenty vessels including the immigrant ship *Sussex* in 1871 (Foster 1988:53-54).

Today the loss of vessels like the *Ultonia*, *Iowa* and *Lord Raglan* often go completely unacknowledged in the historiography, even that extensive body

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18 These were the *Isabella Watson*, *Earl of Charlmont*, *Sacramento*, *Sussex*, *Light of the Age* & *Victoria Tower*.

19 For a full description of the construction of the first lifeboat in Australia see the *Sydney Gazette* 17 Feb, 24 May and 7 July 1838.



of material which is devoted to Australian shipwrecks.<sup>20</sup> This is perhaps due to a parochial division between those ships which made it to our shores only to be wrecked and those which were simply heading in this direction. Somehow shipwreck events which occurred on the Australian coastline have engendered wider public knowledge of the events surrounding their occurrence than those lost 'en route'. Events like the loss of the *Dunbar*, where 63 passengers lost their lives, and even the *Loch Ard*, with just 25 passengers lost, loom larger in the modern Australian consciousness than catastrophes like loss of the the *Tayleur*, *Guiding Star*, *London*, *Kapunda* or *Northfleet*.

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20 See for example the first three volumes of *Australian shipwrecks* by J.Loney and C.Bateson, together with the many works by Loney.

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## Appendix

### Passenger shipwrecks 1800-1899

<i>Ship</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Cause</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Passenger Deaths</i>
<i>Amphitrite</i>	30/08/1833	Ran ashore	France	12
<i>George III</i>	12/04/1935	Ran ashore	Tasmania	127
<i>Neva</i>	13/05/1835	Ran ashore	King Island	212
<i>Hive</i>	10/12/1835	Ran ashore	New South Wales	0
<i>Dunlop</i>	24/11/1838	Rana shore	South Africa	0
<i>Juliana</i>	19/01/1839	Ran ashore	South Africa	0
<i>India</i>	20/01/1841	Fire	South Atlantic	17
<i>Urania</i>	09/10/1841	Ran ashore	England	0
<i>Waterloo</i>	26/08/1842	Ran ashore	South Africa	143
<i>Burhampooter</i>	18/08/1843	Ran ashore	England	0
<i>Cataraqui</i>	04/08/1845	Ran ashore	King Island	365
<i>Marion</i>	29/07/1851	Ran ashore	South Australia	0
<i>Isabella Watson</i>	21/03/1852	Ran ashore	Victoria	9
<i>Earl of Charlemont</i>	18/07/1853	Ran ashore	Victoria	1
<i>Meridian</i>	24/08/1853	Ran ashore	Indian Ocean	0
<i>Sacramento</i>	27/04/1853	Ran ashore	Victoria	0
<i>Taylor</i>	20/01/1854	Ran ashore	Ireland	290
<i>Iowa</i>	29/04/1854	Foundered	At sea	85
<i>Katharine Sharer</i>	6/06/1855	Fire	Tasmania	0
<i>Schomberg</i>	27/12/1855	Ran ashore	Victoria	0
<i>Guiding Star</i>	Feb-Mar/1855	Iceberg	Southern Ocean	481
<i>Nashwauk</i>	12/05/1855	Ran ashore	South Australia	0
<i>Dunbar</i>	21/08/1857	Ran ashore	New South Wales	63
<i>Ultonia</i>	31/10/1857	Foundered	At sea	129
<i>George Marshall</i>	15/01/1862	Ran ashore	Flinders Island	0
<i>Lord Raglan</i>	23/02/1863	Foundered	At sea	289
<i>Wilhelmsburg</i>	3/12/1863	Ran ashore	Holland	257
<i>Duncan Dunbar</i>	7/10/1865	Ran ashore	Brazil	0
<i>London</i>	11/01/1866	Foundered	Bay of Biscay	160
<i>Wanata</i>	13/01/1866	Foundered	Bay of Biscay	0
<i>Netherby</i>	14/07/1866	Ran ashore	King Island	0
<i>Light of the Age</i>	16/01/1868	Ran ashore	Victoria	0
<i>Victoria Tower</i>	17/10/1869	Ran ashore	Victoria	0
<i>Sussex</i>	31/12/1871	Ran ashore	Victoria	0
<i>Royal Adelaide</i>	25/11/1872	Ran ashore	English Channel	6
<i>Northfleet</i>	22/01/1873	Collision	English Channel	293
<i>British Admiral</i>	24/05/1874	Ran ashore	King Island	45
<i>Great Queensland</i>	12/08/1876	Foundered	At sea	34
<i>Kapunda</i>	20/01/1887	Collision	South Atlantic	270
<i>Dacca</i>	May 1890	Ran ashore	Red Sea	0
<b>Total</b>				<b>3396</b>

