Shipwrecks of the Far South

Michael Walker
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42 MAIN ROAD ST. JAMES
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Cover: Trawler Rex aground at Kalk Bay. October 1903.
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Introduction

This book is not a chronology of shipwrecks along our Far South coast which extends on the west from Kommetjie Beach and on the east from Muizenberg Beach, to Cape Point. This book is about the human element associated with these wrecks. The drama, the tragedies, the bravery, the sorrow, the seamanship, the discipline, the unsung heroes and the story of mutiny and murder, all of which have occurred along our Far South coast. The time span is from 1650 - 1950, when hundreds upon hundreds of sailing ships and steamships passed this coast, and were very much on their own if wrecked.

The coast around Simon’s Bay has a large number of shipwrecks. Many of these occurred because ships sought refuge here in dire need of repair, only to be condemned as unseaworthy or abandoned because of the high cost of repair. In 1810 the Resident Magistrate of Simon’s Town complained about the number of broken-up ships along Simon’s Bay, discarded because there was nothing worth repairing. After 1838 many slavers were also scuttled when captured, as the Royal Navy took strong action against those ships still involved in the slave trade.

There were, however, some genuine shipwrecks: The Brunswick, an East Indiaman of 1200 tons, ran ashore on Long Beach on 19 September 1805 after parting from her anchors in a south-east gale. The Phoenix, 500 tons, wrecked on the now-named Phoenix Shoal on 18 July 1829. The Waterloo, a wooden brig of 215 tons, stranded on Fish Hoek beach on 25 October 1821. There are many other wrecks, including those which were blown ashore by south-east gales especially on Muizenberg Beach. These among others were the Admiral Cockburn, a whaling barque of 350 tons, on 27 July 1839, HM Schooner Cockburn on 3 April 1823, and the Felix Vindicor, another schooner, on 28 July 1841. Many others were wrecked here including three French ships, the 40-gun frigate La Penélope (16 October 1788), the brig La Camille (18 October 1836) and the whaler Le Protie (10 January 1839), while the Dutch had casualties in the 430 ton Padang (29 June 1828) and the Vrouw Ida Alida (10 November 1818).

Most of the ships which parted from their anchors managed to run ashore on the sandy slopes of Long and Muizenberg beach with no loss of life. This does not mean that there were no acts of bravery or heroism, far from it, but regrettably these have never been recorded and most newspapers of the day merely published the sale notice of the stranded ship and her cargo.

Few shipwrecks have occurred since 1950, and the crews of the Nolloth (April 1965) and the Phyllisia (May 1968) which were wrecked upon the west coast of the Cape Point Nature Reserve, have enjoyed the services of helicopter rescue where the skills of the pilots surpassed those of the hapless crew.
Oh, how those early shipwrecked passengers, officers and crew would have appreciated that helicopter service when wrecked upon treacherous reefs in thunderous seas, and were unable even to cast off a lifeboat. Every shipwreck has its heroes be they officers, crew or rescuers. These brave men are long forgotten. This book recalls their courage.
Great seamanship

One of the earliest recorded examples of outstanding seamanship was that of the injured captain of a small Dutch ship (known as a hooker) which was wrecked east of Cape Hangklip - probably Betty's Bay. The captain and two ill seamen took an open sloop and with a blanket for a sail and in poor weather conditions, negotiated the dangerous rocky coast from east of Cape Hangklip to the beach at Muizenberg. Thereafter they walked to the Fort at Cape Town. This was seamanship at its best, not quite in the same category as Captain Bligh of the *Bounty*, but nevertheless most commendable, especially as the captain had been badly wounded in the leg by a musket-shot in Madagascar before his ship was wrecked.

The details of the wreck are that on 8 October 1672, a Dutch East India Company's hooker *De Grundel*, 90 tons, was sent from Batavia to the Ila de France (Mauritius) with a cargo of ebony and necessaries. She was unable to find the island in the latitude marked down, and after having wandered to and fro, it was decided that the ship should make for the Cape to take on water. The crew landed *en route* in the Bay de Romanza in Madagascar, and not knowing that the place had been occupied by the French who had built a fort, the master was grievously wounded by a musket-shot and four of the crew were killed. France and Holland were at war at this time.

When the east point of Cape Falso was reached, the weather was stormy and dark. It could not be seen that they were so near land and the *De Grundel* ran aground on 20 February 1673. Eight days later a passing ship *Goutvinck* was hailed from the shore, and took on board nine men in a desolate and famished state, who for part of the time had survived on periwinkles and shellfish. They had left the captain and the two seamen with the open sloop in which they had landed.

The *Bruydegom* was to be sent from Table Bay to see whether any of the cargo could be recovered and to bring back the wrecked crew and the captain, if his health would allow it. While the vessel was waiting for a favourable wind to depart, the captain and his two companions appeared limping at the entrance to Van Riebeeck's fort. They were in a very poor condition and Governor Isbrand Goske immediately gave them refuge. They had made a sail for their sloop out of a blanket and, joined by the ship's carpenter, reached behind the Steenberg Mountain (Muizenberg Beach). This was a remarkable feat of seamanship which
had lasted all of three days without nourishment (bar shellfish) or water. Once ashore they had walked overland through the Cape Flats to the fort. The carpenter had to be left among the sand-hills at Muizenberg as he was “too stout from dropsy, and being thus helpless, was unable to bring his body any further.”

Precisely where the wreck took place could not be ascertained. The party of nine picked up by the Goutvinck said that it was slightly to the east of the east point of False Bay (Cape Hangklip), but one of them, the steward, later said that it was impossible to tell where they had lost their vessel as it was misty when they abandoned her. The body of the bosun was found on the extreme point of False Bay. The coast both to the east and west of Cape Hangklip was searched for the wreck and cargo. It was considered that the vessel had been completely destroyed and that should any of the goods be washed up, they would be found on the west side of False Bay. Here the Bruydegom found some portions of the De Grundel and some staves. The mate’s journal records that the spot where she was apparently wrecked was “full of sunken rocks and very steep, so that it may be safely called the Foul Bay (Vuyte Bogt), for within the bay there is no worse place than this.”

It is not known whether any other lives were lost, apart from that of the bosun and possibly the carpenter. There is no record of the latter’s fate.

Cape Archives, V.C.6. Translated into English Précis of the Archives of the Cape of Good Hope Journal 1671-74 and 1676 by H. C. V. Leibbrandt, 1902. (Pages 114-123.)

Another long haul in a lifeboat was that of Captain D. Fergusson of the ship Isaphan who with sea crew of seven, his wife and daughter, rowed from the east side of Cape Hangklip (Holbaai Punt) across the False Bay to Fish Hoek beach in December 1886. Whether the prevailing summer wind, the south-easter, was blowing on that day is not recorded, but it was a considerable feat especially as they set off at about 02h00 in pitch darkness. The first report received from Caledon by the Collector of Customs was that the captain, his wife, his daughter and seven crew had perished. It was only after they ‘appeared’ on Fish Hoek beach that these reports were altered. The Isaphan was a fully rigged British ship of 1436 tons, built in 1876 by Richardson Duck and Co., Stockton. She was owned by the British and Eastern Shipping Co. Ltd of Liverpool and was on a voyage from Calcutta to London with a cargo of wheat, bone dust, linseed and poppy seed. She had a crew of twenty-eight, and was wrecked at 01h20 on 3 December 1896. There was no loss of life and at the Marine Court of Inquiry the captain was blamed “for standing in towards land on a dark night without taking soundings, and had lead been cast at any time during the first watch it would have been discovered at once that the vessel was to the eastward of her supposed position.”
This feat of crossing the False Bay in an open lifeboat after a shipwreck had been previously accomplished on 25 August 1778 when the third officer, John Elliot, and his crew of the stricken British East Indiaman *Colebrooke*, 729 tons, rowed from Kogel Bay on the east coast of False Bay, where the ship had been run aground, to Simon’s Town. They were the last to leave the wreck. She had struck Anvil Rock off Cape Point the previous day and because of the damage as well as the sea and wind conditions Captain Arthur Morris and his officers decided to cross the False Bay and beach the *Colebrook* on the east coast of the bay.

The arduous task of rowing back to Simon’s Town took over ten hours, and was a feat of fine seamanship in treacherous weather. The reason as to why they never landed on the east coast of False Bay was probably because a previous lifeboat from the stricken vessel had capsized when attempting to land and seven men were drowned. The bulk of the passengers and crew had been taken off the previous day by lifeboats from the British warship *Asia* and two East Indiamen ships, *Gatton* and the *Royal Admiral* which had accompanied the damaged *Colebrooke* across the Bay after she had struck Anvil Rock.

Chapter 2

Mutiny and murder most foul

There is only one recorded mutiny and murder on the Far South coast. It was near Platboom Point, south of Brightwaters. It was a gruesome affair not only by the action of the mutineers, but also in the punishment meted out to them.

The crew of the French brig *La Rozette*, under Captain La Bordes, sailed from Bordeaux in mid-May 1786 with a cargo of wine for the Ila de France (Mauritius). It was manned by the captain, a chief officer (Luotaher), a second mate (Lieutenant Boij), a bosun (Maillant), a bosun's mate (Bernardl), a cabin boy (Jerome Bernard), a carpenter (Francois Ros), and seamen Etienne Taljasco (21), his elder brother Antonie (28), Jean Missleux (26), the cook Augustine Schier (17), and William Thoma (28). Besides the two brothers who were from Italy the remaining officers and crew were all French.

*The first phase of this mutiny is detailed from the evidence given by the six accused in court.*

During the voyage, within fourteen days of sailing, the bosun kicked seaman Etienne because he was not working properly, as he did not understand French. He protested at been kicked, upon which the chief officer instructed the carpenter to “put him in irons.” He remained in irons amidships until a few days before the mutiny. On his release he expressed his resentment to his elder brother and said, “If we were men, we could avenge ourselves.” To which his brother answered “Well, why are we not men?” And so the two brothers planned their revenge. They secretly discussed this plan with the carpenter (Ros), the cook (Schier) and seaman Jean Missleux, but not with William Thoma. They decided they would do nothing until land was sighted. On 18 August Platboom Point, south of Brightwaters, was sighted. The cook, as was arranged, asked the captain “to put into land for provisions.” That night Antonie approached the carpenter who gave him, his brother Etienne, and the cook Schier, the tools for the murder. Jean Missleux was at the helm at the time.

The carpenter accompanied by the cook attacked the chief officer in his cabin while he was asleep and with two blows from an axe ended his life. They then went, accompanied by Etienne, to the captain’s cabin where Etienne attacked the captain and the cook gave him a severe blow on the head with a hammer rendering him unconscious. The bosun was alerted by the commotion and on going down below to see what was happening was struck dead from behind by Antonie. The bosun’s mate then appeared and Antonie with the help of the
carpenter struck him down as well.

The small cabin boy, Jerome, an unassuming youth nicknamed Paris, had not wanted to come up on deck but on a promise that no harm would come to him appeared whereupon the second mate, Lieutenant Boij, struck him down with an axe indicating to the mutineers that he, Boij, was on their side and they must not harm him. The cabin boy was not killed by the second mate’s blow, but by the cook who “finished him off.”

William Thoma who had had no part in the murders was then placed at the helm relieving Jean Missleux who with the two Taljasco brothers, Ros the carpenter and Schier the cook gave final blows to those who had been attacked and with the second mate, Lieutenant Boij, tied the five bodies in a sail which they secured to an anchor and then threw overboard.

They then plundered the chests and cupboards and having divided the spoils among themselves placed the goods in five sacks. While plundering the chests Etienne noticed the second mate, Boij, was secretly hiding some papers whereupon Etienne announced that no French officer must remain alive, and Jean Missleux struck Boij with an axe despite his pleas for mercy. Boij then grabbed Missleux by his injured thumb, causing him to drop the axe whereupon Missleux called Etienne and William Thoma for help. Missleux gave Thoma a pistol and told him to shoot Boij, which Thoma flatly refused to do, saying he would rather be shot himself. Boij again pleaded for mercy. He held fast to the foresail, but Etienne cut him down with an axe and with the help of Missleux threw him overboard. He swam for a while but eventually disappeared beneath the surface.

The six mutineers (described as murderers by the court) then decided to sink the vessel and put ashore in a lifeboat. The carpenter Ros was instructed to go down below and chop a hole in the bottom of the vessel large enough to make sure she sank. The six then loaded the goods into a lifeboat and rowed to the shore. They landed at a little cove now called Platboom Point about eight km. south of Brightwaters. They left their boat in the sandy cove, unpacked their goods and rested for the night.

The next morning, 19 August, to their utter dismay they found the brig had moved closer to the shore and instead of sinking was resting on a reef. They panicked and immediately hid the five sacks in the bushes and proceeded to find refuge with what valuables they could carry. They split up into two parties; the one consisted of the two brothers and the carpenter Ros, the other Jean Missleux, the cook Schier and William Thoma.

The later party arrived at a fisherman’s cottage where he gave them some food and advised them of the road to Cape Town. The next day they arrived at the inn of a certain French sergeant who immediately became suspicious especially as he
noticed they carried certain valuable items. He notified the authorities of his suspicions. The other party sought refuge in a house in the mountains away from the sea but left, as they did not trust the people who offered them shelter. They slept in the woods and that night the carpenter, without warning, left the two brothers.

The following day the two brothers came to a house on the dunes and after eating and drinking were shown to an inn where a Spaniard lived. Here they stayed for four days. They sold the Spaniard a gold watch and a gold ring and gave him some earrings and a silver watch in payment for their board and lodging.

Initially the Spaniard asked no questions but on the second day queried their presence. They told him they had survived the wrecking of a French brig on the west coast and had saved these goods from the ship. They bribed him with some valuables to keep quiet.

The next day the carpenter returned from an inn. He told them that he had gone to Cape Town, where he had been on three previous voyages, and had approached the innkeeper of the inn Die Vroystyke Tafel, whom he knew and he, the innkeeper, would get them a ship.

We now turn to the second phase of this mutiny: the discovery of the ship by the authorities ashore.

On the evening of 19 August 1786 a letter was received at the Castle by Governor Cornelis van de Graaff from Christoffel Brand, the Postholder (Resident Magistrate) of Simon’s Town. He stated that he had been to see a wreck reported to him that day between the west corner of Cape Point and Olifantsbos Point. The ship lay over on her starboard side in the sea about one hundred paces from the shore. She was a two-masted vessel, about seventy to seventy-five feet long, with her fore topmast staysail projecting. She sagged in or was broken in the middle, although the upper deck was whole and undamaged. Her lifeboat with four oars lay undamaged on a sandy cove about a quarter of a mile further along the beach. He deduced by the casks of red wine which had been washed up and by a flag which could be seen on the ship, that she was French. There was neither sign of the crew nor of any dead bodies.

Christoffel Brand placed a guard over the wreck to prevent pilfering, as the ship could be reached on foot without difficulty.

Nine days later, Monday 28 August, two letters were received at the Castle from Monsieur Percheron, the local Cape Town agent for Louis XVI, King of France. From papers on the ship M. Percheron had learned that she was the French brig La Rozette and had left Bordeaux about the middle of May with a cargo of wine for Ila de France under Captain La Borde and a crew of twelve.

M. Percheron had come to the conclusion that the officers had been
murdered. This view was strengthened by the discovery on board of a process-verbaal (writ of indictment) by the ship’s council against a member of the crew.

The captain’s version of what had happened appeared in the process-verbaal. The document was prepared by the ship’s council (senior officers), though the mark of the cabin boy, Jerome Bernard, who could neither read nor write, was also evident. The chief officer had prepared the process-verbaal for evidence when the ship reached a place where law could be applied and where Etienne Taljasco could be tried. The captain’s report was somewhat different from Etienne Tajasco’s confession. He stated that Etienne had complained of having been put on rations of two bottles of water a day. The same had applied to the captain, the officers and the rest of the crew. Because of this Etienne had refused to work and had threatened the bosun. The chief officer heard these threats and ordered the bosun to take a rope and give Etienne a few strokes to remind him of his duty. On the first stroke the accused then punched the bosun in the face and arming himself with splicing pin stabbed at the bosun hitting him in the arm. He would have repeated the action had the captain not intervened and the bosun retrieved the pin. The captain then ordered his immediate arrest and that he be put in irons. Signed by the captain, chief officer, the bosun, the bosun’s mate, the carpenter and the cabin boy, all of whom witnessed the incident.

Percheron’s suspicions were further strengthened by the conduct of six persons, who had come to Cape Town in secret without anyone knowing from where they had come. He ordered their arrest. Three of them had previously attempted to find employment on the shortly departing private Dutch ship in the Table Bay, the *Josephus de Tweede*, while the other three had offered to enter the Company’s service. The six were apprehended and on examination were all found to have come from the *La Rozette*. One of them was the seaman against whom the process-verbaal on the ship had been issued. Among their possessions were gold rings, a gold box, chains, watches, watch chains, snuffboxes and earrings. William Thoma then showed the authorities where the five sacks had been hidden on the beach. These consisted mainly of clothing and cutlery. These goods were delivered to M. Percheron.

M. Percheron asked that the six be tried by a Court of Justice in the Cape. The Government felt they could not refuse because of three reasons. The event had happened on the coast here, it was against the navigation laws of all nations, and because of the alliance between the State of the United Netherlands and the King of France.

Among the thirteen documents produced at the trial was a sworn deposition by the commander of the *Josephus de Tweede*, Christiaans Zumack, made before Baron Willem Ferdinand van Rheede van Oudtshoorn and Johannes Smit on 29
August. Therein he said that early in the morning of 21 August, when he had come from his lodgings to the wharf, a person, short in stature, somewhat swarthy, and with a pock-marked face, had come up to him and told him that there were three poor seamen lodging with him who would very much like to return to their homeland. Would he be willing to take them? Commander Zumach had no initial objections provided they were free seamen and not servants of the Dutch East India Company. The inquirer said that he would talk the matter over with the men. He soon came back and accepted.

When the three came on board they were asked the name of the ship from which they came and of her captain. The seamen, two of whom spoke Italian, remained silent. On the questions being repeated by the Commander Zumack, the carpenter said that they had come from a ship wrecked in False Bay and asked that this should not be made known. Commander Zumack became suspicious and reported their presence.

After their arrest all six prisoners were placed in the hands of the Governor’s Pro-Interim Fiscal, Gabriel Exter.

The Court of Justice, which combined the functions of judge and jury, as in all major criminal cases, tried the case. The case began in the first week in October 1786, and the Court consisted of twelve members, of whom the Secunde or Deputy Governor was the President. The sentences had, however, to receive the Governor’s approval.

The crime consisted not only of the frightful murder of six persons, but in that the prisoners had in an all inhuman manner brought about the deaths of those who had lawfully been placed in charge of them. That they had violated and transgressed the flag of a sovereign king and a kingdom under whose protection the vessel fell. That they had committed these deeds with premeditated malice out of sheer resentment and desire to enrich themselves. That they had known the consequences beforehand and not one of them had been able to bring forward a sound reason for leniency.

Exter dealt in turn with the degree of culpability of each of the six prisoners. The two Tajasco brothers, Etienne and Antonio, Ros, the carpenter, and seaman Jean Missieux were sentenced to death with their limbs broken from below upwards, between pauses, after they had been secured to a cross. The cutting off of their right hand and head was to follow. Their heads were to be placed on pens over their bodies which were laid on erected wheels and taken to the beach on the sand dunes at Moelie (probably Mouille Point) “where they were to remain until decomposed by the winds of heaven and consumed by the birds of the air,” as an example to other seamen who considered mutiny and/or murder.

Augustine Schier the cook (aged 17) was sentenced to a more lenient sentence
(sic) as he was a youth and the older crew exercised a certain amount of authority and power over him. His sentence was therefore not as severe and he would simply be hanged with his body left hanging from the gallows.

William Thoma received the most lenient sentence of all, as he had not known of the plot beforehand, and had refused to shoot the second mate when given a pistol. He had, however, helped throw the bodies overboard, and had never divulged or surrendered his booty into justice. His sentence was that he be fastened under the gallows by a rope round the neck bound to a post, be strongly scourged with rods and birches and thereupon be put in chains to be banished to Robben Island for life.

After the verdict it was submitted to the Governor for his approval which he indicated by signing the documents. Their executions and punishment were pronounced from the balcony of Die Kat at the Castle on 14 October 1786 and carried out the same day. The punishment of all the prisoners took place at “the usual place of execution” which was in the vicinity of the old customs house in Buitenkant Street, close to the Castle. It was surrounded by a wall, steps led up to it and access was gained through an iron gate. Here the members of the Court of Justice, headed by the Fiscal, sat on a dais and watched the punishment being administered.

The cost of the case was shared by the Dutch East India Company which paid 225 rix-dollars while the balance was paid up by Monsieur Percheron on behalf of the King of France.

No records are available as to whether there was any punishment meted out to the innkeeper who accepted a bribe or to the innkeeper who acted as a ‘go-between’.

References:
Cape Archives, V.C. 34.
Chapter 3

Le Napoleon - An eventful fortnight

One of the first ships to run aground off the west coast of the future Cape Point Nature Reserve was the French privateer Le Napoleon. This was the only known privateer to be wrecked on the South African coast. The discipline of the two hundred and fifty French marines was exemplary as the Kaapsche Courant of 28 December 1805 noted, “because of the leadership of the officers and calmness and obedience of the marines, not a life was lost in this disaster, which was treated as if it was an everyday manoeuvre.”

The amazing fact was that no sooner had they recovered from their ordeal than they were seconded by the Dutch garrison, and within two weeks were involved in the Battle of Blaauwberg. It was certainly an eventful fortnight!

In order not to fall into the hands of a British Naval frigate the Narcissus which had hunted her for two days, the Le Napoleon was run ashore near Olifantsbos at the end of the second day, 25 December 1805.

The story is told in this letter by the Commander of the British Naval Frigate.

His Majesty’s Ship Narcissus
2 Leagues off the Cape of Good Hope
Christmas Day 1805.

Sir, - Yesterday afternoon while we were anxiously looking out in the ship I command for the Squadron and convoy under your orders, we discovered a ship coming from the land about Table Bay in chase steering down before the wind; she approached within eight or nine miles, and then hailed her wind from us. We instantly pursued, and kept her in view until half past nine at night, when the weather became so thick that we lost sight of her.

Judging, however, from her fast sailing she was a Ship of War, and would most likely push back for the Cape Town to give intelligence of our being on the coast, I plied to windward all night to cut her off, and at daylight had the pleasure of seeing her, though still at a considerable distance to windward. At 9 o clock we neared fast, and fearing she would make in for the shore I used every endeavour to prevent it, but without effect, as she was still to windward of us, and after various manoeuvres to escape close to the surf along shore, and both keeping up a partial fire, we compelled her to run aground.

Soon after we observed her three masts and bowsprit go by the board and her boats went adrift.
The people on board from a Dutch sloop captured by ourselves informed us the vessel we ran on shore was a French ship Le Napoleon of 32 thirty-pounder (short guns) and 250 men, and had sailed from Table Bay. She had on board the Ordnance & Company of L'Atalante a French frigate lately lost there.

The L'Atalante was a French frigate commanded by Captain Gaudin. It was wrecked in Table Bay at the Charlotte Battery during a north-west gale on 5 November 1805.

The French crew and marines from this wreck as well as those from the wreck of the L'Atalante which the Le Napoleon had been carrying, made their way to Simon's Town where they arrived cold and in dire need of food and water. Temporary relief was given in Simon's Town but the marines were soon re-assembled and marched along the road to the Castle. There they were provided with warm clothing and the basic necessities. It was the captain of Le Napoleon who then broke the news to Lieutenant-General Jan Willem Jassens, Governor of the Cape, that a strong British invading force of some sixty-five ships was en route to the Cape. This was Lieutenant-General Janssens' first warning and he immediately started calling up burghers to defend the Cape. He also seconded the French marines into the Dutch defence force as they prepared for an attack from the British. This came within two weeks and these French marines were in action at the Battle of Blaauwberg on 8 January 1806.

There was of total of 250 French marines involved, under the command of General Gaudin Beauchêne. They were mentioned in the Articles of Capitulation signed at Papendorp (Woodstock) whereby the Batavian Republic handed control of the Cape to the British. It was detailed as follows,

"The French subjects who belong to the stranded frigate L'Atalante and the stranded Privateer Le Napoleon were casually here and in terms of the Capitulation shall be handled on the same footing as every other French subject in the colony."

They would, however, be required to embark for Europe with their fellow countrymen as and when transport was available.

It is of interest to note that the Kaapsche Courant later published that, "on Saturday 12 April 1806 at Olifantsbos (back of Simon's Town) Stores of the French privateer Le Napoleon would be sold for the benefit of George Rex Esq.

(Signed) Simon Maying and J. Osmond."

Cape Archives, B.R. 593 (articles).
Kaapsche Courant, 28 December 1805, 11 January 1806.
Chapter 4

The victims of Albatross Rock and the reefs of Olifantsbos Point

Albatross Rock is a hazardous outcrop of rocks which is just under two metres below the water line and less than a kilometre off the point of Olifantsbos on the west coast of the Peninsula. It is about eleven kilometres north of Cape Point. Its victims have been many especially due to the powerful Atlantic waves and the heavy fog that prevails in this area during the winter months. One of the features of Albatross Rock that makes it so dangerous is that it has one fathom (six feet) of water upon it whereas the immediate vicinity has a depth of seven to thirteen fathoms.

The list of shipwrecks on or along this outcrop and on the reefs of Olifantsbos is by far the highest in the Far South. The Holland was the first recorded casualty. She was a Dutch frigate commanded by Captain Willem Silvester and was one of a fleet of Dutch National frigates bound from Holland to Java. She was wrecked near Olifantsbos Point on 11 May 1786. Eight lives were lost. The authorities were soon alerted of the disaster despite the inaccessibility of the sparsely inhabited terrain. Christoffel Brand, Postholder (Resident Magistrate) at Simon’s Town then sent a message to one Johannes Soublée, a Swiss who lived near the wreck, asking him to provide more information. This he did and Brand sent food and drink to the survivors and arranged a rescue mission to the site whereafter the survivors were taken to Simon’s Town. Fifty-two men were taken into company service while the remainder proceeded in two warships the Goes and the Juno to India. The ship’s surgeon travelled on the Juno.

Cape Archives, V.C. 34.

Among the wrecks that hit Albatross Rock besides the Holland were: L’Alouette (June 1817), Albatross (April 1863), R M S Kafir (February 1878), Star of Africa (August 1880), ss Umhali (September 1909) and Bia (September 1917).

L’Alouette — Naval discipline at its best.

L’Alouette’s grounding was exemplified by discipline of the highest order. There was no panic and despite the rough sea due to a north-west winter storm (June 1817) all aboard were saved except a small boy. This happened when the wife of one of the naval officers lost control of him after a large wave hit her
lifeboat as she was preparing to enter.

In a very thick fog on 6 June 1817 at 06h00 French naval ship L’Alouette commanded by Lieutenant Claude Rigodit hit Albatross Rock off Olifantsbos Point during a voyage from Rochefort-sur-Mer, a naval fortress and arsenal, en route to Reunion. She had sailed on 3 April 1817 with fifteen passengers, seventy naval seamen and a cargo of Government supplies. The site lies on a rocky outcrop a fair way offshore, a little north of the Thomas T. Tucker (1942).

The passengers and crew made it safely to the shore and the only casualty was this small child.

The Commander, Lieutenant Rigodit, was summoned to appear with the ship’s carpenter at 10h00 at the Raadsaal soon after the wreck to give evidence of the events. Three days later the Governor Lord Charles Somerset directed that the Resident Magistrate at Simon’s Town should render Lieutenant Rigodit “every assistance in your power in hiring such waggons at a fair price as may be necessary for the conveyance of the stores of the said vessel from the beach of Cape Point to Simon’s Town.”

In a letter dated 4 October 1817 Lord Charles Somerset wrote to a British M.P. Mr P. Courtenay in connection with negotiating a bill upon the French Government for the return to France of the naval crew and passengers of the wrecked ship.

In part of the letter he stated, “His most Christian Majesty’s Transport Ship L’Alouette having been wrecked on this coast on 6 June last the crew has been received by me with every possible attention and succour, until such time as the Commander-Lieutenant Rigodit of the French Navy has it in his power to procure for his people (about 85 in number) a passage to Europe.”

As it was a naval ship and England and France were at peace, Lord Charles Somerset granted a Colonial Government Loan of £1206 for the return passage of the naval officers, crew and passengers, and requested the relevant British Minister to arrange a refund.

The sale notice as advertised in the Cape Town Gazette on 14 and 21 June 1817 gives one an idea of what was on board at the time of the wreck. Why “Trunks belonging to the captain and officers” should have been sold off remains a mystery. It is of note, however, that a considerable amount of gold and silver specie was aboard. The sale was held at the site of the wreck by the captain and commissioner of the ship, assisted by the agents. It is possible that some of the money raised was used to repay part of Lord Charles Somerset’s Government Loan, although how much of this cargo was actually saved and what price it fetched was never recorded in any subsequent issues of the Cape Town Gazette.
By Permission of His Excellency Lord
CHARLES HENRY SOMERSET.

Public Sale,

On Thursday the 26th June 1817, at the Oliphants Bosch, of a quantity of Masts, Yards, Sails, Cordage, &c. being part of the Wreck of the French Ship L' Alouette, stranded at that place; at the same time will be sold, the said Ship as she lays on the Klipbank-The Sale will be held by the Captain and Commissioner of the Ship, assisted by the undersigned.
The Cargo shipped in France, consists of the following, viz. Iron, Copper, Lead, a great variety of new Cordage and Sails for the use of the Ship, and for two Boats for landing Goods at the Government Stores at Bourbon, four new 13 inch Cables,-four ditto of a less size, a variety of new Cordage and Sails, three Anchors, six 6 lbr. Guns, three Boats, bolts of Canvas, a large quantity of Provisions, viz. Flour in cask, salted Pork and Beef, Biscuit, red Wine, Brandy, Oil, &c. laid in for a voyage of eight months, for 85 persons; between 5 and 6000 lbs, in gold and silver Specie, silver Spoons, Forks, and some Jewellery; 50 cases, containing Glass, Porcelain, Goods for the Government of Bourbon, such as Cloths, Clothes for the Troops, Swords, Firelocks, Pistols, various Mathematical Instruments, Secretaries and Trunks belonging to the Captain and Officers of the Ship.

F. De Lettre, }
C. Lind, } Agents.

On 30 August 1817 a further sale notice appeared in the Cape Town Gazette. This was the balance of cargo washed up after the first sale.

OLIPHANT'S BOSCH.

On Thursday the 4th September, of part of the Wreck of the French Ship L' Alouette, consisting of Oak Planks and Beams of various dimensions, fit for Building; also, some Oars, Spars, Sails, old and new Cordage and Junk, a quantity of Iron, two excellent Anchors of 17 and 20 Cwt. 3 Guns, and various other Articles.

Cape Town Gazette, 14 & 21 June, 30 August 1817 (Sale Notice)
The ss Albatross - The wreck that named the infamous rock

The ss *Albatross* was a screw steamer that had arrived in Table Bay c. 1859 as the first steam tug to be employed at the Cape. She towed sailing ships and also served as the Robben Island packet (mail collection and delivery).

After taking on one hundred and twenty bales of cotton, the *Albatross*, 74 tons, commanded by Captain Johnson with seven crew aboard, left Simon’s Town at 17h00 on 10 April 1863 bound for Table Bay. This cargo was from another ship, name unknown, that had either floundered or needed repairs on the patent slipway in Simon’s Town. It was transferred to the *Albatross*, as the final delivery point was Table Bay.

The *Albatross* rounded Cape Point at 18h45 and struck the sunken rock at a speed of nine knots. She had left Simon’s Town with a south-west wind blowing and was moving under sail and canvas in heavy seas. Water immediately flooded the engine-room and Captain Johnson put the helm hard-to-port in an effort to beach her. The crew and captain then abandoned ship and boarded a dinghy. Within minutes the *Albatross* careened over, and it took less than twelve minutes after striking that she disappeared beneath the waves.

Neither the captain nor the crew saved anything, and thankfully the only boat they had was a small dinghy as, had they had a larger lifeboat they would have had
great difficulty in attempting to launch her given the time restraint.

Both sea and wind miraculously died down as they boarded the dinghy. It took them all of five hours to row to the shore and they landed at 01h00 at Hout Bay. It was pitch dark and they managed to make their way to some fisherman’s huts where they woke the occupants who provided them with coffee and shelter until they proceeded on foot to Cape Town. They arrived there that evening at 19h00.

With regard to the wrecked steamer and the cargo, the steamer was valued at £4000 and the cotton, insured with an open policy with the Equitable Insurance Co., was valued at approximately £1000.

On 12 April it was published in the Cape Times that, “the cotton is already washing up from the wreck of the Albatross. The cotton is lying on the beach directly opposite where the steamer floundered. Additional quantities wash up daily.”

On 15 April it was sold on the stoep of the Commercial Exchange by auctioneer Mr Henry H. Jones. “For the benefit of whosoever it may concern the hull and cargo of the steamer Albatross as she then lies wrecked at three miles south of Slangkop Point.”

The damage to the cotton must have been considerable as only £108 was fetched.

The only fact that has lasted in perpetuity is that the rock on which the Albatross floundered has been known as Albatross Rock since April 1863.

Cape Argus, 11 & 20 April 1863.
Shipping Register, Cape Archives C.C. 3/7/2/1.

(Note: This Albatross wreck must not be confused with the wreck of Thesen’s Albatross, a Norwegian schooner of 117 tons which was wrecked on Danger Point at 02h00 on 24 March 1874 while on a voyage from Knysna to Cape Town.)

RMS Kafir – a Union Co. mailship goes aground.

The wrecking of a Royal Mail Steamer was a dramatic event. It was widely reported in all the local newspapers and courage and bravery were very much the order of the day when the RMS Kafir was wrecked south of Olifantsbos Point in February 1878. The total complement of crew and passengers was 142 persons of whom few lost their lives. The stewardess who calmed the women and children and the fishermen who helped rescue fifty passengers are all mentioned in passing, but their names and their bravery are long forgotten with the passage of time. The Cape Times, however, did report that “If it had not been for Captain Ward, whose presence of mind is spoken of in the highest terms by all, and his officers’ coolness of head and skilful seamanship, few souls would have been saved from the Kafir.”
The Royal Mail Steamer *Kafir* was a Union Company iron-steam coaster, built in 1873 by Key, Kinghorn. She was so rigged that she could make sail in favourable weather. She carried passengers and cargo between Cape Town and Zanzibar which helped to open up the East African trade that had been started after Livingstone's journey across Africa. The *Kafir* took many Moslem pilgrims from the Cape to Zanzibar where they transhipped to Mecca. She was regarded as the finest African coaster of her time with long free decks, airy cabins and saloons similar to an ocean liner. On the day of her fateful stranding her complement was seventy-two crew (of whom twenty-seven were Zanzibar Arabs) and seventy passengers. In her holds were many bags of mail for East Africa, two thousand cases of Admiralty stores for two man-o'-wars at Zanzibar, HMS *Fawn* and HMS *Swallow*, and a package of new specie (coins) for the Portuguese Government in Moçambique. The steamer was fully insured and most of the consignment of goods was also insured. Very little was consigned to private parties.

On Thursday 13 February 1878 it was advertised in the *Cape Times* that the coaster steamer RMS *Kafir*, 982 tons, commanded by Captain Ward, would leave at noon that day for Mossel Bay, Port Natal, Delagoa Bay, Inhambane, Quelimane, Moçambique and Zanzibar. Passengers were requested to join not later than
11h00 and no cargo would be received on the morning of the sailing. *Kafir* struck Albatross Rock at 17h20 with a resounding thud that sent many passengers sprawling. She was travelling at about nine knots in fine weather under steam and with her sails spread in a fresh westerly wind. At the time of collision Captain Ward and the Chief Officer Thomas Perrin were on the poop (stern of the ship). No breakers were seen and she appeared to be in deep water. She was not a good distance offshore and according to a passenger at the Inquiry, "She quivered and hesitated, then the sea lifted her clear of the rock and she went on."

It was found, however, that water was pouring in the fore-compartments and into the collision-bulkheads amidships. The position was serious and Captain Ward ordered Perrin to clew up all sails and make for the shore, approximately three kilometres off. At about four hundred metres from the shore she grounded. This was approximately twenty minutes after she had struck Albatross Rock. Her stranding was about five kilometres south of Olifantsbos.

The *Birkenhead Drill* of "women and children first" was strictly applied and several male passengers were forcibly removed from a lifeboat by the captain and officers when they pushed ahead of the women and children. A brave stewardess (name unknown) calmed the women as they entered the lifeboats which were heaving dangerously. The children were lowered by rope. At this point the *Kafir* slewed around and formed a breakwater. This was indeed fortunate and all women and children were then rushed to starboard where boarding the lifeboats became much easier. Officers and crew were allocated to these starboard lifeboats and helped all those aboard to safety ashore. On the port (seaward) side the lifeboats were smashed by heavy seas. Two successful journeys consisting of three lifeboats per journey were made to the shore before it was decided to abandon any further rescue attempts due to the night darkness which would have made any further attempts extremely dangerous as the channel used by the lifeboats between the rocks could not be seen.

Fifty of the crew and some male passengers remained on board to spend a night of terror especially as the ship broke in two amidships at about 22h00. The stern section then drifted closer to the shore. It held only five crew members who refused to go to the aft section where the remainder of the passengers and crew were huddled. One crew member on the stern section then jumped overboard and miraculously managed to make it to the shore. Not so lucky were his four remaining Arab crew mates who drowned when attempting the same feat. Among them was one (name Abdullah) who had crossed Africa with H.M. Stanley and was present at his meeting with Dr Livingstone. Those ashore lit bush fires to keep themselves warm but heavy rain doused the fires and they spent a cold night with no shelter or food other than some wet biscuits from one of the
lifeboats. Nothing had been brought ashore which could be rigged up to protect them from the inclement weather.

At first light a local, searching for Mr McKella’s ostriches, noticed the wreck and delivered an urgent message on horseback to Simon’s Town. However, long before the message reached Simon’s Town some fishermen arrived on the scene and assisted with the lifeboats. They rowed safely through the narrow passage and after four trips had helped to rescue all those still aboard the wreck. As the last lifeboat reached the beach three hearty cheers were given.

HMS Danae under the command of Captain Purvis and on instructions from Commodore Francis Sullivan reached the wreck at about 10h00 to find the vessel abandoned and fast breaking up. Not long after two tented ox-wagons reached the scene and wine, coffee and food were served. One of the ox-wagons was filled with blankets “for the women and children who were found miserably crouching round a fire with a keen westerly wind blowing.” The seamen received tots of brandy. Another two ox-wagons later reached the wreck to transport the passengers and crew back to the British Hotel in Simon’s Town, but not before the four bodies of the Arabs were buried with Moslem rites by their Arabic fellow-crew.

The Cape Times of Saturday 18 February 1878 stated that there were many heroic deeds during the rescue and mentions one sailor in particular who was very skilled at steering the lifeboat through the narrow channel and “had been out to the ship with every boat and was in a very wretched plight when all the work was done.”

The problem with the cargo was serious and the Resident Magistrate of Simon’s Town, Mr Fred J. van der Riet, who was responsible for the collection of customs in the Simon’s Town magisterial district wrote to the Collector of Customs, Cape Town, of the trouble he had had with pillaging of articles washed ashore from the wreck. Who the persons were is not stated but he notes that some items of value had been recovered in the bushes. The culprits could have been local herdsmen, strandlopers, fishermen or farmers. The details of the problem were as per his letter: “I found that a great deal of pillaging had been going on and articles of value removed into the bushes. Some of these I had collected and expelled such persons as had no business or employment at the wreck. I was obliged to appoint some special constables for that purpose and found it necessary to detain the Field Cornet with some special Constables to watch day and night. I wrote to Mr Breda this morning not to keep the Field Cornet employed longer than necessary. I shall proceed thither again on Monday to be at the sale.”

The notice in the Cape Times of the sale of the wreck and cargo on 15 February included “a large quantity of Government stores for the Imperial authorities at Natal.”
The following was also published by the Cape Times, 15 February 1878:

"The Kafir had thirty bags of mails on board, of these only eight have drifted ashore, and they contained chiefly newspapers. Four bags of these were reduced to pulp, and were destroyed by order of the Comptroller, who inspected them on the seashore. Six hundred letters have been recovered in good order, and are being dried. In a few days a list will be published."

These letters were dried at Simon's Town post office and despatched to East Africa for a second time. Locals at the wreck were allowed to pick up drowned sheep and fowls without fear of being charged and strands of silk found among the kelp were spread out on the bushes to dry. The successful bidders at the auction were Messrs Ohlsson and Carlsson who bought the wreck for £580 and the cargo for £300. Their men scoured three miles of beach and loaded nearly three hundred bales and cases on to wagons. Prints, navy serge, blankets, flannels, pillows, towels, boots, hats, saddles and brooms, sea-stained but serviceable, were sold at bargain prices in Cape Town.

Woolven, the carrier, who operated from a pagoda on the Parade, arranged an excursion to the wreck. Sightseers paid fifty shillings return, travelling by train to Kalk Bay and then took Woolven's carts and wagons to the beach. Refreshments were served. At low tide it was possible to reach the Kafir in small boats without difficulty.

Cape Town was shocked by the evidence given at the inquiry, and indeed the Kafir disaster was a disgraceful affair. It was revealed that in spite of the wreck of the Albatross fifteen years previously, Albatross Rock had not yet appeared on the ship's chart. John Knight, lighthouse-keeper at Cape Point, gave evidence that he had seen the rock off Olifantsbos Point, and there was considerable argument about the position of the rock.

Captain Ward declared that he was two miles out when the Kafir struck an uncharted rock. Several passengers, called as witnesses, gave evidence that the captain was drunk. "I would be sorry to sail again in the same ship with Captain Ward," stated a Mr Charles Cairncross. This allegation was emphatically denied by all the officers called to give evidence at the inquiry.

The Resident Magistrate of Cape Town conducted the inquiry and was assisted by Captain Campbell of HMS Flora and Lieutenant Halifax of HMS Danae. Advocate Guthrie appeared for Captain Ward and Advocate Jones on behalf of the Union Company watched the proceedings. The court ruled that the Kafir was much closer inshore than two miles when she hit the rock. No lookout was being kept and there was no officer of the watch on the bridge. No cross bearings had been taken to fix the ship's position. The court blamed Captain
Ward and suspended his master's certificate for nine months.
So the surf still breaks over Albatross Rock and the jagged remains of the Kafir
and one of her boilers did survive the battering of the sea for years and
somewhere in the dunes, covered by bush, are the graves of the four Arab crew.

*Cape Argus*, 14 & 16 (sale notice), 19 & 21 February (inquiry), 1878.
*Cape Standard and Mail*, 14 & 16 (sale notice), 19 & 21 February (inquiry), 1878
*Cape Times* 13 (sailing notice), 15 (sale notice), 20 & 21 February (inquiry), 1878.
*Lloyds Register of Shipping*, 1878-79.
*Shipping Register*, Cape Archives C.C. 3/7/2/3.
Lawrence G. Green, *Almost Forgotten, Never Told*, Howard Timmins publishers,
1981 reprint.

**The Star of Africa – A tragic ending**

In August 1880 the wreck of the *Star of Africa* was the most tragic occurrence
on the Far South coast. Only Henderson, the second mate who clung to a hen-
coop for two hours, and one lascar seaman, survived. There were no doubt acts
of bravery and courage, but none has been recorded as the captain, his wife and
the remaining thirteen crew perished.

The wreck occurred in the early hours of the morning of 29 August 1880 when
the ship hit Albatross Rock. She was under the command of Captain William
Barrow who had supervised her construction in 1876 by Duthie, in Aberdeen. He
had married soon after her launching and the captain's quarters were handsomely
furnished so he could take his wife to sea with him.

Captain Barrow was a part-owner of the vessel with Messrs Anderson and
Murison, leading ship chandlers and ship-owners in Cape Town. Their other
vessels were the Flibberty, the Gondola and the Silver Cloud. The Star of Africa
was a fair sized vessel of “431 tons, 154 feet long, a breadth of 27 feet 3 inches and a
depth of 15 feet 9 inches,” and was built to replace the Gondola which was lost on
the Northumberland coast on a voyage from Cape Town to Glasgow.

Her trade route was from Cape Town to Calcutta and her cargo from Calcutta
was mainly rice but also included wool-packs, cases of coconut oil, castor oil,
casks of tamarinds, rattans, gunny bags, cigars, chutney and other condiments. In
the captain's safe there was a box of gold sovereigns as cargo was paid for in gold
coins in those days. The following report about the ship and her crew was
published in the *Cape Argus*, 31 August 1880:
“The Star of Africa was christened by Mrs James Murison, junr., who sent her out with the reputation of being as smart a little craft as ever sailed into Table Bay. Her lines were of the finest, and she was in every respect well found, being provided with patent steering gear, and all the latest improvements applicable to that class of vessel. Before leaving Calcutta on the voyage destined to be her last, the Star was docked and overhauled, and painted, and rendered as trim and neat as ever could be. Her value, with cargo (consisting chiefly of rice, wool-packs, and grain-bags) is estimated at about £20,000, the whole of which is covered by insurance at Lloyds, with the exception of £600 (Mr. Wm. Berg) in the Commercial Marine, and £1,600, for freight, 8c., in the Equitable. The crew, with the exception of the master and his officers, and perhaps a couple of hands, consisted of lascars. Captain Barrow, who was not far short of fifty years of age, was in the habit of taking his wife with him on his voyages, and she is amongst the lost, the last word Mr Henderson heard, upon taking to the water, being “For God’s sake, save my wife!”

A report of the tragedy was told at the Court of Inquiry by the Second Mate Henderson:

“At midnight on 29 August 1880 the crew of the barque from Calcutta, which carried a cargo of rice, coconut oil, linament, wool-packs and grain bags, was called on deck ready to cast anchor in Table Bay. There was not much wind at the time and the vessel was under royals (topgallant mast and sail, used only in fair weather). At 04h00 on the 30th, after the course had been shaped and while she was running at a rate of 10 knots I reported to Captain Barrow that everything was in readiness to cast anchor. The captain forthwith came on deck and took bearings from the light on Cape Point. Ten minutes had not elapsed when the vessel struck Albatross Rock. The captain who was on deck at least fifteen minutes before she struck, ordered “brace round the yards” to head her for the shore. The vessel came around, but struck again with great force on the stern post.

The captain then ordered “clear away the boats,” but the vessel was sinking too fast. One boat which the men managed to get out, was cut in two by the ship’s yard. The vessel went down within ten minutes after the first shock. I ran up the main rigging but the vessel was sinking almost as fast as I could climb the ratlines, and being afraid of being sucked in by the vortex caused by the ship’s sinking I dived from the main royal into the water. As I was struggling to remain afloat I came across a hen-coop, to which I clung for two hours. Then I saw an upturned dinghy to which five men were clinging. They righted the boat and with the only oar we sculled for land. Three more times the boat
capsized. Four of the men died from exhaustion and only me and a lascar seaman lived to land, quite exhausted, at about 08h00. The spot where the vessel struck is about a mile from the shore, between Olfantsbos Point and Slangkop Point, a most desolate forbidding shore, with one small fishing station. The surf breaks very heavily, and it would seem almost impossible for any boat to land in safety. The barque sank almost at once, only the royals and the foretopgallant mast heads remaining above the water, about a hundred yards from the rock and 1/2 to 3/4 miles from the shore. We were all that were saved, the rest of the crew, the captain and his wife being drowned or dying from exhaustion.”

As they lay exhausted on the shore a fisherman found them and having made them as comfortable as he could, he hurried off to Simon’s Town to report the wreck. Mr Runciman rushed to the scene and confirmed the fisherman’s report. He made further provisions for the two seamen’s wants and reported the wreck to the Resident Magistrate who immediately placed a field-cornet at the spot to prevent the pillaging of any cargo washed ashore.

The steamer Gnu was sent out to look for survivors at the request of Messrs Anderson and Murison. She cruised in the area of the wreck for over three hours without finding any survivors. The searchers, however, did pick up a long ladder six kilometres to the north of the wreck. Two hen-coops which had been torn adrift from their lashings were also found near Slangkop Point. All the fowls had drowned.

It remains a mystery how the Star of Africa ended up on Albatross Rock as Captain Barrow had over twenty years experience along this coast. The vessel remained on even keel in an upright position for near on a fortnight and was sunk in about 12 fathoms of water. Her topgallant mast and yard, with her sails torn loose lay about a kilometre off shore. The vessel’s royals remained above the water about a hundred metres from Albatross Rock.

Cape Argus, 20 & 31 August, 2 September (sale notice), 1880.
Lloyds Register of Shipping, 1880-81.
Shipping Register, Cape Archives C.C. 3/7/2/3.
The ss Umhlali – an eventful lifeboat rescue.

The ss Umhlali was a dramatic wreck at Olifantsbos Point and sadly a young three-year-old boy, James Harrison, was drowned. The launching of the lifeboats was not easy but they managed to put to sea despite the ship being close to the shore and wedged in a reef. Fishermen who were at that time camping near the wreck put out to sea in their boat and despite heavy seas reached one lifeboat which was filled with lascar seamen and some passengers including Mrs Harrison and her remaining son, Swinton. They guided this lifeboat some ten kilometres to Kommetjie Beach. A courageous effort but no record of these fishermen is known. The other five lifeboats were rowed by the crew for some ten hours towards Cape Town. They were picked up by a passing ship and a tug and returned to Cape Town. The crew were praised for their selfless quick action; the ship had sunk within twenty minutes. Their action saved all but one of the passengers’ lives.

The late winter of 1909 must have been treacherous for not only did the Maori go down at Duiker Point north of Kommetjie with great loss of life on 5 August 1909, but the Umhlali was also wrecked within six weeks, on 15 September 1909. She struck Albatross Rock off Olifantsbos Point on a voyage from London to Durban with forty-seven passengers on board. She carried general cargo and railway sleepers.

The ss Umhlali was a steamer of 3,388 tons, built in 1904 by Sir J. Laing &
Sons, Sunderland. It was owned by Bullard, King & Co., and was commanded by Captain J. L. Richards. She struck the rock at 22h30 when most passengers were asleep and within five minutes her engine-room was flooded. She was in a hopeless position and five hundred metres from the shore. Captain Richards, who should have been on the bridge, was in the smoking room playing cards. All lights were out, but candles were lit. Passengers rushed to the deck and poured into the smoking room. The seamen worked feverishly round the davits and the six lifeboats were launched. One lifeboat capsized in the dark and the occupants were pitched into the water only to be saved by the crew of the captain’s lifeboat who managed to right the capsized lifeboat. Sadly Mrs Harrison holding her three-year-old son lost control of him in the incident and despite rescue attempts by the crew, he disappeared below the surface and drowned. He was the only casualty in the ship’s grounding.

The fate of the six lifeboats varied quite dramatically. One lifeboat, as previously stated, was assisted by local fishermen who were in the area at the time of the wreck, and was guided by them for some ten kilometres to Kommetjie Beach.

The remaining five lifeboats rowed all night in the direction of Cape Town and at dawn on 16 September were in sight of Table Mountain. Fortunately the Galeka, (tonnage 6767), a Union Line ship, which in fact was the last liner to be built for the Union Line, left Table Bay Harbour at daybreak the same morning. She was on her way up the East Coast and now in much calmer sea, was able to pick up four of the Umhlali’s lifeboats at about 09h00. The tug Falla collected the remaining lifeboat. Both vessels returned to Table Bay at about midday to land the survivors among whom was the oldest passenger, a Mr Donovan, aged 93. They were met at Pier Head by the agent’s representative, Mr J. Herbert of J. W. Attwell and Co., who immediately provided them with food and refreshments from the Dock Café Ltd. They were then taken by the Table Bay Harbour Board Dock train from East Pier to Monument Station at the foot of Adderley Street. Thereafter they were moved to the Grand Hotel. Most of the passengers and crew were fully recovered with the exception of Mrs Harrison who arrived from Kommetjie by motor-car with Dr Thomas in attendance. Lady Hely Hutchinson visited Mrs Harrison at the Grand Hotel and offered her condolences.

Evidence of the haste in which the poor passengers had to leave their cabins after the ship hit Albatross Rock was very apparent. Their attire which they had to grab, as most of them had been asleep at the time, varied considerably. One lady was in her nightwear, but was wrapped in a red tablecloth with a gold border which a steward had hurriedly grabbed from the smoking room.

After striking, the Umhlali must have turned round for she was seen the next
morning to have her bow pointing seawards and to be cradled on rocks about half a kilometre offshore. Included in her cargo were 75 tons of dynamite which required the services of an explosives expert who was sent to the wreck.

Meanwhile two men-o-war, H.M. ships *Forte* and *Hermes*, raced towards the *Umlali* on the instruction of Vice-Admiral Sir George Egerton, and soon HMS *Pandora* joined the rescue fleet. Next day Captain Davidson of HMS *Pandora* with four men took a small boat to the wreck to find out whether anyone had remained on board. There was nobody but he located some valuable property, including sextants and various articles left behind by passengers in their cabins. Before leaving the ship Captain Davidson heard a horse neighing. It was a racehorse in a box on deck, wild with terror. He opened the box and tried to guide the horse over the side, but failed. He rescued a Persian kitten, and put out food for the horse. Then, as night was falling, he lowered the valuables into his small boat and was rowed back to his ship.

For days the *Umlali* remained on Albatross Rock, broken yet still poised above the waves. The Controller of Customs, Mr A. H. Wilshire, immediately placed two customs officers on the shore for protection of the cargo and passengers' baggage, but fishermen boarded her unobserved at night, found the racehorse dead, and departed quietly with items of loot which proved difficult to trace. Some baggage was saved, but a field-cornet and two constables sent by Mr G. Boyes, Resident Magistrate of Simon's Town, on boarding the wreck reported that desks and packages had been broken open. They estimated that jewellery and other articles worth £1000s had been stolen. Not until a month after the wreck did the *Umlali* break up. The funnel and mast went over the side, and seas broke clear across the hull. Finally the shattered steamer joined the many other sunken ships that litter the seafloor round Albatross Rock.

At an inquiry Captain Richards admitted that he was playing cards when the ship struck. He complained of the absence of a lighthouse and fog-signal at Slangkop. There was evidence that the captain was on bad terms with his officers. Dr Adam Porteous, the ship's surgeon, criticised the navigation. His wife, who was on board, said she was afraid to go to bed on the night of the wreck, and she alleged further that the lifeboats had no water or provisions.

The certificates of Captain Richards and the chief officer were suspended for twelve months, and three other officers were censured.

The excellent service rendered by the Postmaster at Kommetjie in securing and forwarding what proved to be reliable information, was praised by the Resident Magistrate of Simon's Town, Mr George Boyes, whose duties, among others, were Port Captain and Officer Responsible for Wrecks along the dangerous Far South coast.
Flagship HMS *Hermes* rushed to the aid of the wrecked ss *Umhlali*.

HMS *Forte*. She accompanied HMS *Hermes* to the wrecked ss *Umhlali*.
Captain Davidson of HMS *Pandora* was the first to board the wrecked ss *Umhlali*.

The Union Line steamship *Galeka* which picked up four of the ss *Umhlali* lifeboats.
In a memorandum to the Collector of Customs he noted that the Postmaster at Kommetjie, “went far beyond what might fairly be considered to be his duty in this matter, and from first to last kept me posted as to the movements of the Galeka and Falla.”

The wreck site lies near the ss Bia (1917) and the Thomas T. Tucker (1942).

Cape Argus, 17 September 1909.
Lloyds Register of Shipping, 1909-10.
Shipping Register, Cape Archives C.C. 3/7/27.
Lawrence G. Green, Almost Forgotten, Never Told, Howard Timmins, publishers. 1981 reprint.

The ss Bia – a reluctant crew cause tragedy

The Cape Times of Thursday 20 September 1917 published the following report:

“News reached Cape Town yesterday of an accident, off Olifantsbos Point about 15 miles from Simon’s Town, to a Swedish freighter bound from Gottenburg to Basra in the Persian Gulf with general cargo and due to call at Durban for coal. The ship seems to have gone aground or become stranded in a fairly heavy mist on Tuesday night and to have been so firmly wedged on the rocks that the likelihood of re-floating her appears at the moment to be somewhat remote.”

The Swedish freighter Bia, 3,344 tons, was built in 1905 by Hawthorn, Leslie & Co., Newcastle, and had a crew of thirty-two. Her cargo consisted of boxboards, matches and deals. She struck Albatross Rock at 21h30 on 18 September 1917 and was wrecked a few hundred metres south of Olifantsbos Point. When she struck Albatross Rock both the captain and the chief officer were on the bridge, and soundings were immediately taken. It was found that holds one and two and the forepeak hold were full of water. The Bia had not called at Cape Town, but had spent a day in Freetown (Sierra Leone) and was planning to take on coal at Durban. Apparently at the Court of Inquiry it was stated that the light from what is now the old Cape Point lighthouse had been mistaken for that of a steamer and in consequence the Bia headed straight for the rocks where she ran aground.

When news of her grounding reached Simon’s Town and Cape Town no time was lost in rendering assistance in the form of three vessels. The First World War was still in progress and one of the many war vessels (name unknown) and the Royal Navy base ship Afrikander* were sent from Simon’s Town, while the harbour tug Ludwig Wiener was despatched from Cape Town. A heavy swell was
running by the time the two Simon’s Town vessels reached the wreck. The Afrikander, however, was able to approach sufficiently close to the wreck to send a small boat across and bring off the Second Officer with the ship’s papers.

The remainder of the officers and crew refused to leave the stranded vessel. The second officer was transferred to the Ludwig Wiener which returned to Cape Town. In the meantime Messrs Thesen’s small steamer Clara, 139 tons, under the command of Swedish Captain Axel Johansson, was despatched to stand by the Bia.

During the night of 19 September the once calm swell increased dramatically and at first light was seen to be breaking heavily around the Bia. The crew were now in danger of losing their lives. Again urgent messages were wirelessed to Simon’s Town and Cape Town and once again the Afrikander from Simon’s Town and the Ludwig Wiener from Cape Town were despatched. A rocket-line was prepared on the shore opposite the wreck, but the shore was so flat that it was impossible to erect the rocket-apparatus at a sufficient height to enable a line to the vessel to clear the breakers. At this point two of the Bia’s lifeboats containing members of the crew cast off, but before they could reach the rescue vessels one of the boats capsized and three men were drowned. The remainder were saved and with the second lifeboat were taken aboard the Afrikander.

A wireless message from the Ludwig Wiener (she was the first tug to be fitted with a two-way radio) then read:

“Communicated with the Afrikander which has fifteen of crew of Bia on board. One lifeboat capsized and three of the crew drowned. There are still fourteen men on the steamer. Still very high swell running and seas breaking each side of the ship. Captain of Afrikander considers it too rough to send boats at present. Afrikander and Clara standing by. Rocket party on shore.”

The rocket-apparatus was then transferred from the shore to the Clara at Captain Johansson’s request as he wished to run in close to try to save some of his countrymen.

Later that afternoon another wireless message was received advising that the sea had moderated considerably and the rocket-apparatus on the Clara had established communication, and the remaining fourteen crew had been rescued. Captain Johansson was honoured for his valiant effort in taking the rocket-apparatus aboard his ship, and saving the fourteen crew. He worked in dangerous conditions in shallow water for more than four hours. For this courageous effort he received the highest decoration for bravery which was awarded to him by the King of Sweden.

The Bia officers and crew who were aboard the Afrikander arrived at Simon’s Town, and took a train to Cape Town where they were met by the Swedish
*Ludwig Wiener* which was involved in the rescue of the officers and crew of the *ss Bia*.

*ss Bia* - c. October 1917.
Consul. They were accommodated in the Sailor's Home where the superintendent, Mr De Gruchy, made them comfortable for the night.

The remaining fourteen officers and crew rescued by the *Clara* followed the next day. Their rescue was a harrowing experience. The rocket-line from the *Clara* to the wreck could not clear the sea with the result that each man, one by one, had to be hauled through the water and pulled aboard the *Clara*, by which time he was half-drowned. One crew member got stuck in the seaweed and was in a desperate state, and when hauled aboard the *Clara* was in a semi-conscious state.

The question was now raised at the Inquiry as to why the officers and crew refused help the morning after the wreck when the sea was calm. Thereafter they had to be rescued the next day in dangerous conditions which resulted in the drowning of three of their crew.

The master in reply to this question believed that the ship could be saved and that the legal position was that the officers and crew should not abandon the vessel, as it would then be subject to salvage. He also believed that the ship wedged in the rocks would not break up and that by the ship's personnel staying on board they could assist in a salvage operation, if it became necessary.

These answers, both vague and unconvincing, hardly satisfied the bereaved families of the three crew who lost their lives.

It is of note that the ship split in two within a week and was a total loss.

*Cape Argus*, 19, 20 & 21 September 1917
*Lloyd's Register of Shipping*, 1917-18.

*The *Afrikander* was originally the Norwegian owned, German registered, whale-catcher called *Bismarck* which had operated out of Saldanha Bay. At the outbreak of hostilities in 1914 she was declared a 'prize of war' and taken up for war service by the Royal Navy. She was renamed *Afrikander*. She was initially used as an examination vessel, and later served as a base ship at Simon's Town between 1917-1919. This vessel must not be confused with HMS *Afrikander* which was converted from the harbour tug *Ludwig Wiener* to a gun-boat from August 1914 to March 1915, whereafter she reverted back to her original service and was named once again *Ludwig Wiener*. 
Chapter 5

Courage of the highest order

One of the finest acts of courage during any of the shipwrecks along the Far South coast was that of the second mate, James Taylor, who on 3 June 1859, at great risk to his life, swam ashore at night in high seas with a line to save the crew of the *Annie* which earlier had been wrecked at Blouberg Strand on the west coast, about eight kilometres north of Cape Point. The ship’s captain at the subsequent Marine Inquiry mentioned his bravery. The local press organised a reward for James Taylor in recognition of his valiant act. After that his name disappeared into the annals of unsung heroes.

The *Annie* was a schooner of 96 tons commanded by Captain Thomas Armson and had a crew of eight including the mate. She was owned by Mr R. D. Jones of Cape Town and had sailed from Rio de Janeiro to Cape Town on 11 May 1859 with a cargo of 1650 bags of coffee. She was a well-known trader in Cape waters and was built in Glasgow in 1850. She was wrecked in a thick fog on a reef near Blouberg Strand at 21h30 on 3 June 1859.

Captain Armson had been in command of the *Annie* for more than three years during which time he had made several voyages to St Helena, Ascension Island and Rio de Janeiro.

The following account was given by Captain Armson at a Marine Inquiry held at the Commercial Exchange, Cape Town, on 4 June 1859:

*I hereby declare that on the evening of the 3rd June the schooner Annie, of Cape Town, whilst running in for the land to enter Table Bay, was stranded on a reef about four miles to the northward and westward of Cape Point, at a place called Blouberg Strand. The particulars are these. At noon of the above date, Cape Point bore (by compass) SE by E., distance ninety miles. After running from noon to four p.m., I considered the vessel to have made a course of E.S.E., a distance of thirty miles, which, according to my reckoning, made her sixty miles from the shore which would give me the correct position for entering Table Bay. At 16h00 a strong NW breeze occurred. The crew took in foresails, reefed the topsail, and reduced canvas accordingly, no land being in sight. At 21h30 the vessel struck, the weather being very thick at the time. I considered her to have been at least forty miles from the land. I can only account for the accident by an error in the chronometer, as all due attention was paid to the vessel by the officers and crew. At 21h00 I had gone down below and had been down about twenty minutes*
when the chief officer sang out, "come on deck for a moment. I think there is a difference in the colour of the water." I ran up on deck and immediately ordered the helm down but before the ship could come round, she struck; the sea then broke over the taffrail. The crew then clewed up and furled sails and prepared the lifeboat ready to hoist out. The vessel after half an hour slewed round, side on to the sea, which now made a clear break over her, making it difficult to hold on.

During the night the Annie drifted further in until she was about a cable's length from the beach. When the crew left, the vessel was bilged and full of water. We got a guide and proceeded to Simon's Town having left the vessel in charge of the Field Cornet."

This report was published in the Cape Argus on 7 June 1859:

"That no lives were lost was due to the second mate, James Taylor, who at great risk swam to the shore with a line, by means of which the rest of the crew were able to get ashore." The newspaper thereupon made an appeal, "that the public will take occasion to reward James Taylor, for he deserves it. He has lost the whole of his effects, and a few pounds will do him good. Mr Love, Superintendent at the Sailors' Home, will be glad to receive any contributions on his account."

The Court of Inquiry found that, allowing for the probability of an error in the chronometer as stated, they were of the opinion that it was highly imprudent of Captain Armson to continue to run after dark, not having made the land and not sure of his position especially in the thick weather which appears to have prevailed at the time. They concurred that the loss of the vessel was caused by a great error of judgement on the part of the master. His argument that he thought he was a considerable distance from the land was not accepted by the court.

Shortly after the wreck it was announced in the press that, "the owner Mr R. D. Jones will sell at Simon's Town on Wednesday 8 June at 10 o'clock, the hull of the vessel Annie, as she now lies on the beach north-west of Cape Point together with her assessors stores etc etc and also a Cargo originally consisting of 1650 Bags of Coffee."

Although the ship and cargo were insured in Cape Town for £3000, £1500 each, with the Cape of Good Hope Marine Office and the Equitable Marine Office, only £100 was realised at the sale. It appears that little of the cargo was saved for the schooner was completely "under water at every break of the sea."

Cape Argus, 7 June 1859
Cape Weekly Chronicle, 10 June 1859
Shipping Register, Cape Archives C.C. 2/18.
Chapter 6

The tale of two wrecks

The wrecking of two Italian wooden barques each carrying coal from Cardiff to Cape Town within two months of each other on the same stretch of coastline is pretty unique, but it did happen. There must have been some contract with an Italian Company to transport coal from Cardiff to Cape Town, but that they both hit the same coast within such a short space of time is most unusual.

The first wreck was that of the Italian wooden barque Caterina Doge, 856 tons, built in 1875 by Patone, Voltri and commanded by Captain Filippe. She left Cardiff for Table Bay on 4 March 1886. Her cargo was 1,326 tons of Cardiff coal and she carried a crew of sixteen. On 2 June her distance from the Cape was calculated to be about one hundred miles. At 05h45 next morning, 3 June, she was estimated to be still twenty-five to thirty miles from the land, for which a strong lookout had been kept throughout the night. The vessel was under topsails and foresail, and steering east-south-east, when at 06h00 the captain spied land through the darkness and rain and gave orders to ‘about ship’. She would not come round. The lead showed four fathoms of water. The ship was sagging to the leeward. She struck almost immediately and thereupon fell over to seaward to lie on her starboard broadside. To save the ship as far as possible from breaking up, the rigging of the main and mizzen masts was cut and the masts fell overboard. Because of the heavy surf breaking over the ship the rigging of the foremast could not be cut, but the mast fell overboard shortly afterwards. The ship swung round with her bow offshore and then broke amidships, with men on both portions.

With great difficulty the captain and ten of the crew gradually managed to swim to the shore, while five others were drowned, the mate, the second mate, two seamen and the cabin boy. In the desolate scrubland ashore lies an area still known as the Italiaanse Kerkhof, allegedly the site where the drowned men were buried. Considerable research has revealed information on only one of these men. The burial records of St Simon and St Jude’s Catholic Church, Simon’s Town, yield this entry:

4.3.1886 Maurice Cottalengo aged 13 years, 6 months, drowned from the Caterina Doge.

The burial was conducted by the then parish priest but no place of internment was mentioned. Whether he was laid to rest in the nearby Simon’s Town cemetery or with his fellow crewmen near Olifantsbos had not been established. There are no entries for the other four who were drowned nor have any inquests been found. This single church entry and the Italiaanse Kerkhof are the only memorials
to those drowned on the *Caterine Doge*. May they rest in peace.

It was about nine hours after the ship struck that the last man (presumably the captain) left the ship, by which time she had broken into three pieces. Three of the first four men ashore managed to find their way, with little clothing, to the house of Mr Aurret of Theefontein. When fishermen heard of the wreck they went to the scene with lines. To these they tied pieces of wood, which with the backwash of the receding tide were carried out to the men on the ship. They then clutched the wood and were hauled to the shore by the fishermen. Some of the men, dazed and exhausted, had difficulty in releasing their grip.

The wreck occurred near Menskop punt, about three kilometres from Olfantsbos Point north of where the *Star of Africa* was wrecked.

The Sub-Collector of Customs at Simon's Town doubted whether any part of the cargo of 1,326 tons of Cardiff coal would be saved and he appears to have been correct, for the *Caterina Doge* as she lay wrecked, together with cargo, stores, etc., fetched only £20 when sold on the stoep of the Commercial Exchange, Cape Town.

*Lloyds Register of Shipping*, 1886-87.
*Shipping Register*, Cape Archives C.C. 3/7/2/4.
*Olfantsbos* by Margaret Cairns.

Two months later almost to the day another Italian wooden barque was wrecked at about ten kilometres farther south than the *Caterina Doge*. She was the Italian barque *Carlotta B*, 759 tons, bound for Table Bay with a cargo of 1079 tons of coal from Cardiff for the Union Steamship Co. She was built in 1874 by Briasco, Sestri Ponente and commanded by Captain N. L. Rolandi. Observations on 6 August 1886 gave her position to be latitude 29 degrees 9'S. longitude 16 degrees 15'E., a distance of 180 miles from land. Every two hours the log was cast to check the captain's calculations. There was a light wind from the N.N.W., while the course was S.E.E. magnetic. When the wind increased at 08h00 the main royal and foretopgallant sails were stowed. At midnight with the moon going down and it being very dark with thick weather, the main topgallant sail and main sail were stowed to reduce the speed of the ship to about six knots, and it was expected to see the Cape of Good Hope light at about 06h00. According to his calculation the ship was within the radius of the light at 03h00, but it was not visible. The captain became alarmed, called all hands on deck, stowed the upper topsails, and gave orders to wear ship. While the crew were aloft stowing the topsails the ship struck, the time being about 03h30 on 7 August. The captain ordered the helm to be put hard down, but it was too late, for the ship had taken the ground firmly.

At dawn the sea was breaking over the ship and forcing her more inshore. At
07h00, the captain and crew, fourteen in all, managed with great difficulty to land safely in their boat. They had taken provisions with them, but there was no room for papers or other effects. During the day the captain went into the hills in the vicinity to try to find signs of habitation, but was unsuccessful.

The Carlotta B had been wrecked at Platboom Point, a few kilometres north of Cape Point near to where the La Rozette was wrecked in 1786. The steamer Pretoria passing westward saw the Carlotta B and signalled this to the Cape Point lighthouse. The tug Tiger was sent to the scene from Table Bay and the Resident Magistrate of Simon’s Town and others visited the site. The crew was conveyed to Simon’s Town by wagon the following morning. The ship by that time had broken up, although earlier she appeared to be holding together and the captain had hoped to be able to save papers and other effects which were left on the vessel.

The Wynberg Times on 18 August 1886 stated that, “during a severe south-east gale last Wednesday week, 11 August, a considerable portion of the barque Carlotta B was washed on shore at Muizenberg.”

This was apparently regarded by locals as a windfall, and is also shown in a report by the Sub-Collector of Customs at Simon’s Town:

“I had instructed Field Cornet Van Blerk on Thursday last to take charge of the beach, and place guards there to prevent any more of the wrecked goods being carried away as I had been informed on that day people were carrying away things. I lost no time in ordering the return of all goods and stuff picked up by the inhabitants and succeeded in securing a cask containing about 5 gallons of Gin, about 2 gallons of spirits of turpentine, 2 cases of paraffin and some oil – and a large quantity of wood. I then proceeded to the beach and examined the line of coast from Muizenberg to Strandfontein about three miles along which the wreckage was strewn – and I ascertained beyond doubt that the same belonged to the Carlotta B. The name in gilt letters being also found and newspapers in Italian of recent date. In following some wagon tracks into the Down I found in some places wood collected into heaps, ready to be removed afterwards. Mr Ritman who is said to have bought the wreck has laid claim to all the wreckage on the Muizenberg Strand since there can be no dispute about its belonging to the Carlotta B. A brass plate with the ship’s name on it was also found on the beach.”

The hull, masts, spars, tackle and apparel etc, together with her cargo consisting of about 1,079 tons of Cardiff coal, was sold on the stoep of the Commercial Exchange for £60.

Wynberg Times, 18 August 1886.
Lloyds Register of Shipping, 1886-87.
Shipping Register, Cape Archives C.C. 3/7/2/4
Chapter 7

Bellows Rock – a formidable hazard

The Bellows Rock is so named because of the formation of a reef which causes a rush of waves between the rocks, and a great body of water is dashed into the air to a height of sixty feet in anything like rough weather. The roar of the bellows can be heard on some nights for a considerable distance.

It was on this rock that the highest number of survivors in the history of shipwrecks in South Africa were rescued (some 790 persons) when the ship *Lusitania* was wrecked on 19 April 1911. (The *Oceanos* which sank on 4 August 1991 had 561 passengers and crew.)

The Rock, despite the large number of survivors who have been wrecked there, has claimed a number of lives since the 1850s. Sixteen on the first wreck the *Unity*, none on the second wreck, the *Paralos*, and three on the third wreck, the *Lusitania*.

There were no doubt acts of courage and discipline, but the actions of the assistant lighthouse-keeper John Allen when he saved over thirty people after a lifeboat from the *Lusitania* had capsized, was an example of selfless bravery for which he received a most modest reward.

The first wreck on Bellows Rock was the British wooden brig *Unity*, 190 tons, built in 1848 at Whitehaven, and commanded by Captain S. Rich. It was wrecked on 5 September 1859 while on a voyage from Table Bay to East London. Ten crew and six passengers all lost their lives including a Mrs Gilstain and her two children. Pieces from the wreckage and cargo were washed up as far as Saldanha Bay and Dassen Island. They were identified by Mr Gordon, Secretary of the Equitable Marine Assurance Company, part insurers of the cargo.

*Cape Argus*, 22 October 1859.
*Cape of Good Hope Shipping and Mercantile Gazette*, 30 September 1859.
*Cape Weekly Chronicle*, 23 September & 7 October 1859.
*Lloyds Register of Shipping*, 1859-60.
*Shipping Register*, Cape Archives, C.C. 2/18.

The second wreck was the French barque *Paralos*. At 08h00 on 18 January 1880 a signal was sent down from the look-out station on Lion’s Head to the effect that two lifeboats filled with people were in sight off Camps Bay pulling towards Table Bay. A portboat was sent out to assist, and shortly before noon the two lifeboats were brought to the Central Wharf, where a large crowd had gathered. Those in the lifeboats were the exhausted crew of the *Paralos*, 362 tons,
from Nantes, which had struck Bellows Rock off Cape Point. The Paralos was bound for Falmouth with a cargo of guano from the small island of Labuan in the Borneo group, which had lately been discovered as a guano island. The French Consul arranged accommodation for Captain Joseph Pasco and his chief officer at an hotel, while the crew were provided for at the Sailor’s Home.

The night before, the officer-of-the-watch had seen the Cape Point light at about 21h00, but the weather was so hazy and the land so obscured that the captain could not gauge the distance. A heavy inshore current was running which took the ship closer to the coast than the captain had realised and at 0h30 on 18 January at a speed of 6 knots the Paralos struck a small rock belonging to the Bellows reef, after which the captain saw the sea breaking about twenty metres away. He tried to pump the ship, but the pumps were choked with guano and within twenty minutes of striking there were two metres of water in the hold. Attempts to find the leak were unsuccessful and water was now flooding the ship and the order to abandon ship was given an hour and a quarter after she struck. The crew, twelve in all, were able to take with them their personal belongings and sea chests, the ship’s papers, the chronometers and other instruments, and a dog and a fowl. A fair wind assisted the two boats in making for Table Bay, which took about ten hours. Shortly after they had left the wreck, the Paralos was seen to slide off the reef and disappear.

Herein the Cape Times report of 19 January 1880:

“Those who have seen the famous Bellows Rock of Cape Point would be surprised to hear that a ship has been wrecked on the Bellows surf and that those on board that ship escaped with their lives. On this fearful reef which in distance is some three miles from the Cape of Good Hope, a bark (barque) was wrecked on Saturday night, yet the whole crew was safely landed.” It further concluded its account of the wreck by saying, “for a ship to strike on the Bellows Reef and for the crew to be saved is certainly one of the marvellous occurrences in the history of the Cape of Storms.”

Following the wreck of the Paralos the Lighthouse Commission of 1890 cited:

“Taking into consideration the outlying dangers in its neighbourhood - the Anvil and the Bellows Rocks - and the many large and valuable men-of-war and merchantmen and sailing ships which pass round Cape Point we deem that another lighthouse should be erected on the Cape on some site not so liable to be covered by fog.”

This was one of many citations that eventually led to the building of a new lighthouse which was not affected by fog.

Cape Times, 19 January 1880.
Shipping Register, Cape Archives C.C. 3/7/2/3.
The most well-known ship wreck on Bellows Rock occurred at midnight 18 April 1911. She was the Portuguese twin screw steamer *Lusitania*, a fine looking and well found liner of 5,557 tons, built in 1906 by Sir Raylton Dixon and Co. and owned by E.N.N. (Empreza Nacional de Navegacao), Lisbon.

The ss *Lusitania* under Captain Favia was bound from Lourenço Marques via Cape Town and other West African Portuguese ports for Lisbon. She had 793 persons on board, made up of 25 first class passengers, 57 second class passengers, 121 third class passengers and 475 African indentured labourers for the Portuguese West Africa island of São Tomé. The crew numbered 115. On 18 April 1911 the captain sighted the Cape Point light some time before the disaster. He then set a course which would give the Point a wide berth but the light became obscured in the mist which came off the land and, accompanied by light rain, the light was not sighted again until 23h40. The captain then observed that a very strong current was running. This carried the *Lusitania* much closer to land than he had intended. He was now able to see the coast distinctly. He at once put the helm over to stand out from the land, but ten minutes later, at 23h50, the *Lusitania* struck Bellows Rock. There was a short period of panic aboard but this soon calmed. The first lifeboat to be lowered was from the starboard side, and here the rocks were numerous. The craft stoved in and the third officer drowned as his grip slipped from a rope he was holding.

In a report from Captain P. A. Leigh, Port Captain, Table Bay Harbour, to the Dock’s Manager, in which the times of the various rescue operations are given as they occurred, he stated that the Resident Magistrate and Port Officer of Simon’s Town, Mr George Boyes, rang him up at 00h30 on 19 April to report, “that there was a large steamer on the Bellows Rock, that there was only a little sea on, that the steamer had sent up rockets and was burning a big fire on the fore deck and that the Lighthouse keeper was making a fire near Cape Maclear, where there was a boat landing.” At 04h00 he was notified “that the vessel was the *Lusitania*, that the weather was fine and that the ship was quite comfortable in the rocks with her lights all burning as though she was at sea. HMS Forte and the tug Scotsman which had been sent from Simon’s Town at 01h00 were now receiving passengers and crew. The thirty-seven people landed at Cape Point got into a wagon at the foot of the Hill for Simon’s Town. After which they were taken by train to Cape Town.”

Three people drowned out of the entire complement of passengers and crew. Initial press reports indicated that eight had drowned, but this was later amended. Those who drowned were the third officer during the lowering of the first lifeboat, and a woman and one African labourer who perished when a lifeboat capsized near the shore.
Lourenço Marques. S. S. Lusitania leaving the Wharf en route to Lisbon.

This could well have been the start of her fateful journey, April 1911. PC

The ss Lusitania as she lay on Bellows Rock when day broke. BG
The wrecked ship a few moments before she plunged to the bottom.

A boat load of survivors who had spent a miserable night in the cold and fog.
The assistant 'keeper at Cape Point lighthouse John Allen had hurried down to the shore after he noticed the distress rockets. He waved a lamp in the darkness in an effort to warn people against trying to come through the surf but regrettably one lifeboat capsized in an attempted landing and thirty-eight of the forty occupants struggled through the surf, the lives of many being saved by John Allen. The bodies of the two who were drowned were recovered the next day. John Allen received a medal for his bravery and a cheque for £50 from the Portuguese Government.

The Resident Magistrate of Simon's Town, Mr G. Boyes, joined the tug Scotsman and his report of the rescue was as follows:

"A little before 12 o'clock last night I received information that a large steamer, electrically lighted, was on the Bellows Rock off Cape Point. I immediately communicated with Vice-Admiral Bush, who kindly ordered steam to be got up on the tug Scotsman, which was done within one and a half hours. I then communicated with Major Tysack, commanding officer of the Royal Garrison Artillery who sent a party with a rocket-apparatus to the Scotsman, which was in command of Lieutenant Beckett. The Vice-Admiral also kindly sent Lieutenant Bridgeman with a cutter and crew, which was towed by the Scotsman. The Vice-Admiral also sent Commander Nelson to assist me, and he rendered valuable service.

We left Simon's Town at two o'clock, and arrived in sight of the wreck just before four a.m., and could see the lights burning. A heavy fog came on and we lost sight of the ship for one and a half hours. We picked her up again, and Lieutenant Bridegman on the cutter did good work plying between the wreck and the tug.

After transferring a number of passengers from the wreck, to the Scotsman, HMS Forte arrived on the scene in command of Captain Hutton. We then left with the Scotsman towards the land below Cape Point, where we picked up seven lifeboats full of men, women and children. We took the passengers aboard, and with the boats in tow made again for the wrecked steamer. We then left for Simon's Town with the passengers we had taken off the wreck and from the seven lifeboats.

The Forte which took the remainder of the passengers off the wrecked ship and some of the baggage left for Cape Town about 10.30 a.m., leaving the Lusitania fast on Bellows Rock. These passengers were supplied with food, tea and coffee by Captain Evans of the Pandora and the officers of the fleet. Captain Savill, of the flagship HMS Hermes, made all these arrangements. During the greater part of the time while the Scotsman was alongside the
The tug *Scotsman* arriving at Simon's Town with passengers from the wreck.

Waiting to get ashore with a good meal in prospect.
Ox-wagons were provided at Cape Point to convey those who had landed there.

Scenes at Simon's Town after the *Lusitania* rescue.
wreck the light of the Cape Point lighthouse was invisible owing to the fog. For a few minutes after the ship struck there was a panic on board. This lasted for about five minutes after which order and quiet were restored.

The Port Captain thinks that any salvage work necessary must be done at once as there is a heavy sea running around the vessel. There is every possibility that she will become a total wreck very soon", which in fact she did.

The tug Scotsman under the command of Lieutenant Beckett with 228 passengers arrived at 14h00 at the new quay in Simon’s Town Docks, and they were landed under the charge of the Immigration Department. Most of these passengers were Africans. The seven lifeboats from which the passengers were rescued were towed at the rear of the tug as well as Lieutenant Beckett’s cutter. The passengers were provided with a hot meal and refreshments before they embarked on a train to Cape Town.

HMS Forte landed the remaining passengers and crew, including some baggage, at Table Bay Docks. Captain Favia who was the last to leave the Lusitania was aboard HMS Forte and had initially refused to leave the stricken vessel. All means of persuasion had failed until Captain Hutton of the Forte went in a boat to fetch him. He finally persuaded Captain Favia not to sacrifice his life. The unfortunate captain then hoisted the flag at half-mast and joined Captain Hutton’s boat, but in a very distressed condition.

The Forte took all the Lusitania mail and the only animal left aboard was the ship’s cow. Forte’s bluejackets rescued the ship’s cat who remained on board the Forte after the rescue as a ‘prize’.

Ninety members of the wrecked crew were accommodated at the Sailor’s Home in Dock Road much to the annoyance of the superintendent who had them thrust upon him without notice. He complained of their rowdy behaviour and the fact that none of them spoke English and that they did not want English but Portuguese food.

At about 10h00 on 20 April the Lusitania slid quietly off Bellows Rock into deep water and disappeared completely.

The afternoon after the wreck Sir Thomas Smartt, then Member of the Legislative Assembly for Fort Beaufort, asked the Minister of Railways and Harbours in Parliament to make a statement about the wreck. This he did briefly according to available information, which was supplemented by the Member for Newlands, Mr C. F. W. Struben. Struben had telephoned the Simon’s Town Port Captain and had been informed that HMS Forte was bringing 520 passengers and crew to Cape Town, that 228 had been landed at Simon’s Town, and that 37 had been landed ashore near Cape Point in a lifeboat. All were safely off the ship except the three persons who had drowned. The next day, 20 April, Mr Thomas

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HMS Forte arriving at Cape Town with over 500 rescued passengers. BG

The Forte contingent being transferred to quarters at Cape Town Docks. BG
Watt (Dundee) asked whether official notice had been taken of the prompt and courageous conduct of the officers and men of His Majesty's Navy and of the Resident Magistrate of Simon's Town, Mr George Boyes, and others in the rescue of those on the *Lusitania*. The Minister of Railways and Harbours replied that he had instructed that a letter be written expressing the Government's great appreciation.

It took near on a month to repatriate all the passengers and crew out of Cape Town, and so ended the largest rescue of passengers and crew in South Africa.

*Cape Argus*, 19 & 20 April 1911
*Lloyds Register of Shipping*, 1911-12.
Chapter 8

The Sophia – The mystery of a slow boat to Australia.

The Sophia was a British wooden brigantine of 165 tons built in 1848 in Nova Scotia. She was owned by Norden and Company and commanded by Captain J. Poe.

On 8 March 1853 field-cornet Hendrik Petrus Auret wrote to the Resident Magistrate of Simon's Town, Mr F. B. Pinney, the following letter (as illustrated):

“Sir I have to inform the schooner Sophia, Captain Poe, was cast ashore in the course of last night at Schoester's Kraal from Cape Town, 27 February bound to Melbourne the passengers all safe, the following is a list of the passengers: - Nigel Lowler, Joseph Ashpole, Michael Mullins, Thomas Mc Quinn, James Moran, John Madden, James Evans, John Barlett, Mrs Bennett, Mrs Smith.”
(Cape Archives 1/SMT 10/27 Letter 22).

On 12 March The Cape Monitor reported that, “we regret having to announce the wreck of the schooner Sophia, of Glasgow, J. Poe Master, which left Table Bay on the 28 ult. February 1853, for Melbourne with a general Cargo, laden here, and the Passengers as enumerated below. The vessel appears to have remained near the Coast, and on the evening of the 7th inst. March 1853, at quarter past 7 o' clock struck on a rock off the “White Sands,” about 10 miles South of Houts Bay. The Master fearing for the lives of his Passengers and Crew, abandoned the vessel, and all landed in safety. The vessel subsequently came off the rock, and drifted on the beach, where she lies bilged and with cargo all damaged.

We understand that the Agents, Messrs J. F. Long & Co., have had all possible assistance rendered at the wreck. The cargo laden here, valued at about £2,600, is said to have been insured chiefly in England.”

The Equitable Marine of Cape Town had, however, £730 insurance upon her cargo.

The mystery is how did this ship leaving Table Bay on either 27 or 28 February take eight to nine days to reach Schoester's Kraal (today Scarborough), a journey under 60 kilometres? One wonders when she would have reached Melbourne, if at all.

In a later report of the aforementioned newspaper it stated that it was expected that, if the moderate weather should continue, most of the cargo, valued at £2609-15-0, would be saved though in a damaged condition.
The 8 March 1853

Sir, I have to inform the Schooner Sophia Capt. Fox was cast ashore in the course of last night at Schoeters Island from Cape Town by Fife Bound to Melbourne the passengers all safe the following is a list of the passengers

Angel Lowrie
Joseph Boshole
Nech Mattins
Thomas A. Quinn
Lasen Marion
John Madden
James Dean
John Newbrett
Mrs. Bennet
Mrs. Smith

I am Sir Your obedien

Ps. D. P. Penny
Res. Magistrate
The agents J. F Long and Co. advertised the sale with H. Jones and Co. the leading firm in salvage auctions. Mr Henry H. Jones would be “conducting the sale on 15 March on the beach called “White Sands’”.

The sale was conducted in two lots. The first lot was the Hull, Masts, Rigging, Ropes etc., which raised £220, and the second lot was the cargo which included among other items, 12 Cases of Brandy, 2 Cases Van Zan Dyk Cigars, 75 Casks Crushed Sugar, 65 Cases Lucifer Matches, 65 Cases Oilmans Stores, 26 Cases Sago, 6 Casks Martel’s Brandy, 8 Casks Glassware, 135 Casks Rope, 400 Bags Cape Fine Flour, and 298 Bags of Oats. This second lot fetched just over £400.

*The Cape of Good Hope Exchange Gazette and General Advertiser,* 12 March 1853.
*Cape Monitor,* 12 March 1853.
*Lloyds Register of Shipping* 1853-54.
*Shipping Register,* Cape Archives C.C. 2/18.
Chapter 9

The Auret family

Abraham Auret (1819-1902) was a legend in his lifetime. He was, without doubt, one of the best known and much-loved personalities in the Far South during the latter part of the 19th Century. He was a respected fisherman and whaler and a man of exceptional strength and character. He was also deeply religious having part financed and built the Dutch Reformed Church in Kalk Bay. He was a direct descendant of the Huguenot settlers (Aurets of Tarn) and his grandfather had come to the Cape in the service of the Dutch East India Company in 1745.

Abraham was involved in the rescue of the crew of the Johanna Wagner which was wrecked on Muizenberg Beach on 17 July 1862.

His part in the rescue of this ship’s crew was considerable, but an old sea-dog John Allen and two unnamed Filipino youths were the real heroes in saving many lives. These two young men from Kalk Bay for a reward of £10 risked their lives in taking a raft through the dangerous surf and getting a line aboard, thereby saving fifteen lives. The local press reported, “they firmly earned their reward and the honour that such a deed merits.”

They walked away with their reward and never even left their names. John Allen took the first line out and saved three men prior to the line breaking. On the next occasion while alongside, the pilot aboard John Keane, for reasons best known to himself, jumped overboard and tried to reach Auret’s boat. Allen, at great danger to himself, had to swim round the stern of the wreck and save the drowning man.

Details of the wreck state that a Captain Kempl was in command of

Abraham Auret.
the *Johanna Wagner*, a Prussian barque, which was wrecked on Muizenberg beach, east of Sandvlei, on 17 July 1862 while on a voyage from Batavia to Amsterdam with a cargo of sugar, gall-nuts, Indian rubber, tobacco and tin.

The reason for the wreck was that the ship’s rudder had been damaged in a storm and Captain Kempl had decided to run into Simon’s Bay. He had an inadequate chart and mistook in poor light the layout of False Bay and thought anchorage was at Muizenberg Corner. Realising that the ship was lost in her efforts to find anchorage, a Simon’s Town pilot, Mr Keane, with an assistant, went alongside to offer his help. He boarded the ship and requested some payment for his service, but was refused. Thereafter he had no choice but to stay on board as his pilot boat had, in the meantime, capsized in the surf and was broken. His assistant who had remained on board the pilot boat managed to swim ashore. The weather was very overcast and a strong south-easter was raging (no doubt one of those winter black south-easters). The ship was now too near the shore and was stranded in the breakers, east of Sandvlei about four kilometres from Muizenberg Corner.

The crew clung to the mizzen rigging and with every rise of an incoming wave the ship would lurch upward and then crash down with a bump. As soon as the wreck was sighted, word quickly reached Abraham Auret who immediately launched one of his fishing boats and battled through the heavy surf to reach the ship. A *Cape Argus* reporter wrote of Abraham’s efforts, “wonderfully he managed to dodge the crested waves as they came raging in.” The current proved too strong for Abraham to get alongside but he managed to throw a line on board.

Meanwhile a small raft had been made from the bottom of an ox-wagon and some planks. John Allen took the raft alongside making sure the crew did not panic and all try to board the raft at the same time. The pilot nearly drowned as he jumped overboard and tried to make it to Abraham’s boat. Allen saved him. On the raft’s third trip the rope broke and the men who had just boarded the raft had to be dragged back aboard the ship. In the meantime, a more substantial raft was made but the difficulty was to get a rope to those on board. A reward of £10 was offered to anyone who would take the line out. Immediately two young Filipino men from Kalk Bay volunteered and skilfully steered this clumsy raft through the surf and got the line aboard. All 15 members of the crew were brought safely ashore, cold and wet, and having lost everything they possessed. A fire was built on the beach and after drying their clothes the crew were taken to Farmer Peck’s for a meal.

The local press reporter mentioned that, “*the name of the poor man, John Allen, should not be forgotten.*” John Allen, nine months later, received from the Governor, Sir Philip Edmond Wodehouse at Government House, a silver medal
of the Shipwrecked Fishermen and Marine Royal Benevolent Institution, as well as a framed copy of the resolution of the meeting of the Society which awarded the medal.

The ship was a wreck and was auctioned by Mr Henry Jones on 19 July, 1862. The cargo of tobacco, sugar, rubber, as well as sails, rope, timber and rigging, fetched £300.

At the Board of Inquiry into the wreck both the captain and the pilot, who did give some advice, were adjudged to have been incompetent and had even failed to use lead (the fathom-depth finder) which caused them to sail too close to the shore, and “at no time was an anchor let go until the ship struck.”

An appeal for help for the crew appeared shortly after the wreck in the local newspaper which stated that, “the Sympathy and Charitable Aid of the Public are respectfully appealed to on behalf of the shipwrecked crew of the Prussian ship Johanna Wagner, lost in False Bay on the night of the 17th instant. The crew have literally lost everything, except the clothes on their backs. It is trusted that the liberality of the Cape Public, which is cheerfully accorded under circumstances like the present, will not be withheld from these men, cast on shore in a state of perfect destitution in a foreign country.”

Many years afterwards, when the upper structure of the ship had been washed away, fishermen had still to be careful to avoid the stern post lying under the water.

*Cape Chronicle*, 18 & 25 July 1862.
*South African Advertiser and Mail*, 19 July (sale of notice and account of wrecking), 6 August (inquiry), 1862.
*Shipping Register*, Cape Archives C.C. 3/7/2/1.

**Willem Frederick Auret, son of Abraham Auret.**

It is not often that the owner of a vessel which is wrecked and a total loss shakes his head in sorrow and, at the same time, gives a desperate sigh of relief. Such was the case of Willem Frederick Auret, owner of the *Nukteris*.

He had long wanted a handsome schooner, and this he obtained when the *Nukteris* was bought for him in Great Britain. She arrived in Simon’s Bay on 18 November 1895. She was a fast boat with good sailing qualities, and was to be used to provide additional facilities for fishing in Kalk Bay. She was “provided with
davits over the sides to hoist fishing boats on deck. These would be used beyond Cape Point, where boats could be lowered into the sea, and fishing could be carried on in waters previously unexplored by the fishermen." (Cape Times, November 1895.)

But on 4 December 1895 the Nukteris, less than a month after her arrival, was nearly lost. The following report was given to W. F. Aaret as to how this had happened:

“In a north-westerly wind - a wind blowing off the shore - the Nukteris took the ground at Muizenberg beach. How she came to run aground is a mystery. The mate was in charge of her. He is a stranger to the bay but still he had a local crew, and the beach slopes out to sea at Muizenberg. Perhaps it was that the fishermen had no idea of great draught of water of the schooner. Anyhow she went aground, and was very nearly lost. When she had taken the ground efforts were made to take her off. An anchor was taken out seaward, and by hauling on this and arranging the sails her head was slewed round. Her sternpost was now fixed in the sand, and in the turning-round process it had strained her timbers so much that she sprang a leak. The tug Africa was called from Simon’s Town and managed to tow her off, but it was only by constantly working the Africa’s steam pumps that the Nukteris was kept afloat. Efforts were made to stop the leaks but without avail. She was, however, brought safely to Simon’s Town, where she was beached alongside the jetty…”

Her stern was badly smashed and the Nukteris had to spend from 20 December 1895 to 13 January 1896 on the naval slip, at considerable expense to Aaret.

Her success as a parent-ship taking fishing-boats out past Cape Point and then lowering them into the sea to fish may have been a good idea in theory, but it failed in practice. The weight of the fishing-boats when filled with fish meant that the davits were at times not strong enough to hoist the boats. Despite expense in strengthening them they proved unsatisfactory and the fishermen were not happy with their performance, let alone Aaret.

In order to try to reduce his expenses (losses) Aaret used his once-prized schooner for the transport of lime from Buffels Bay to Cape Town for the Cape Point Lime and Cement Co. It was during these operations that she floundered and was lost.

Early in August 1897 she was lying in Buffels Bay taking on her third cargo of lime when the south-east wind suddenly got up and began to steadily increase in strength. Rarely had such a heavy sea been seen at this period of the year. The waves broke over the top of Roman Rock lighthouse and breakers extended over half a mile out to sea on Muizenberg beach. Because of the danger of being in an
exposed position such as Buffels Bay with a south-east wind, the skipper tried to beat out to sea shortly before midnight on 7 August 1897, but by then it was too late. At about 00h30 on Sunday, 8 August, before she could get going, the *Nukteris* drifted and struck the rocky reef flanking Buffels Bay to the north, and went to pieces. One member of the crew was saved by means of a floating box, the other four were drowned.

The *Nukteris* was a financial nightmare as she never fulfilled any of her initial objectives and seemed to have been jinxed from the day she arrived. Auret did, however, greet her demise with a great deal of sadness not only because of the loss of life, but also because the ship was not insured and the man in charge of her did not possess a master’s certificate. Her success as a parent-ship had failed, and her final days of transporting lime were very far from Auret’s original expectations.

*Cape Argus*, 9 August 1897.

*Oral History*. Mr Faans Kloppéer.
Chapter 10

A Clan Line disaster

The ss Clan Monroe was wrecked at Slangkop Point, July 1905, and her sister ship Clan Stuart was run ashore at Mackerel Beach (previously known as Van Breda beach), Glencairn, in November 1914. These two ships could not have been in more divergent circumstances when grounded. The Clan Monroe had one loss of life in the salvage operations and was a high drama rescue operation while the Clan Stuart was a tame affair, with the crew staying aboard the wrecked ship for four months while unsuccessful attempts were made to refloat her.

The wrecking of the Clan Monroe was unique in that it had an unusual distress message and this was later followed by a series of rescue mishaps. Outward bound from Liverpool to Lourenço Marques (Maputo) in Delagoa Bay with a general cargo, which included motor-cars, dynamite and gun-cotton for Natal, this single-screw steamer, 4853 tons, came broadside on and struck rocks at 23h30 on Saturday 1 July 1905 at Slangkop Point, Kommetjie, where she stuck fast some 250 metres offshore. The master Captain Brown had a complement of 82 crew, of which 65 were lascars. The Clan Monroe was built in 1897 by W. Doxford and Sons, Sunderland, and was a turret-ship, so built because of the dues levied by the Suez Canal Company. These dues were calculated on the breadth of the beam.

The seas were running high that night and after the wreck, "All the weather-boats and davits had been washed away, and the weather-bulwarks were stoved in by a boisterous north-wester, while large breakers constantly broke on the deck as the vessel lay helpless on a large rock." (Cape Argus, 2 July 1905).

It was a dark night and people ashore were drawn to the wreck on hearing the rocket-gun firing and seeing the rockets. In a desperate effort to draw attention to their plight the crew had thrown lifebuoys overboard, which had floated ashore. On the one side they bore an inscription: "S.S. Clan Monroe aground, send assistance."

It was a dark night and people ashore were drawn to the wreck on hearing the rocket-gun firing and seeing the rockets. In a desperate effort to draw attention to their plight the crew had thrown lifebuoys overboard, which had floated ashore. On the one side they bore an inscription: "S.S. Clan Monroe aground, send assistance."

And on the other side "Telephone Cape Town send assistance. Inform Simon's Town." These messages received a great deal of attention.

The news became known in Cape Town at about 06h00 the next morning and shortly afterwards the bugles at the Castle sounded The Assembly with the result that in a short space of time, a rocket-apparatus and thirty men of the 84th Coy. Royal Garrison Artillery under the charge of Lieutenant Rashleigh, were on their way by special train to Kalk Bay, setting off at about 09h00. The Table Bay Port Captain telephoned Kalk Bay to ask that all possible assistance be rendered to the
ss *Clan Munroe* off Slangkop lighthouse, grounded 2 July 1905.  

HMS *Crescent* whose bluejackets helped with the rescue of the
*Clan Munroe*’s crew and officers.
party, but horses were unobtainable and the men had to haul the three-ton apparatus from Fish Hoek siding along the wet and muddy Kommetjie gravel road until near Imhoff’s Gift where a pair of mules was obtained. They reached the scene of the wreck at approximately 15h30. She lay 250 metres from the shore, broadside to the waves.

The Port Captain had also sent the tug Sir Charles Elliott with some men and a rocket-apparatus to see if assistance could be rendered from the sea, but she returned to Cape Town at 14h00 with Captain Prince reporting that no assistance from the sea was possible.

Before the men from the Castle had arrived with the rocket-apparatus, the second, third and fourth officers with the chief steward and a midshipman had put off from the wreck in a cutter. They were caught in the cross-seas and capsized, but with the assistance of those on shore, all five reached land safely. They set up a line which was hauled taut and it looked as if this life-saving apparatus could be brought into action but unfortunately the line chafed on the rocks and parted.

When the rocket-apparatus reached the shore alongside the ship it failed to work properly and by 17h00 only two men had been brought ashore. One made it without assistance, but the carpenter who was the first to go nearly drowned when the breeches buoy-ropes snapped halfway between him and the shore. He disappeared under the water with a cry of anguish. Luckily his lifeline was strong enough to enable those ashore to pull the half-drowned man to safety. It was reported that he showed a good sense of humour on revival, but this was more out of relief than trying to amuse.

A message was then relayed by Rear-Admiral Sir John Durnford from Simon’s Town to the Table Bay Port Captain that urgent help was now needed. This resulted in the Cartage Superintendent at Cape Town Harbour being provided with a wagon and four horses, onto which he packed the complete equipment of a second rocket-apparatus which had been removed from the standby rocket-cart. He included a large quantity of rockets and gear. This task was completed by 21h30 and despatched immediately to the site of the wreck.

Rear-Admiral Durnford, at the request of the Resident Magistrate of Simon’s Town, Mr George J. Boyes, despatched by land the soldiers and sailors from HMS Crescent and HMS Forte to render all assistance that was needed. He included with the despatch a quantity of medical supplies.

The weather on the night of 2 July was atrocious. It was cold with driving rain and a stiff north-wester. Those on board collected in the captain’s or second engineer’s cabin or huddled in the lee of the deckhouse, without food, for the galley and pantry had been washed away.
“The lascar crew were, however, in a particular state of excitement and fear. They remained huddled together during the night and time after time they broke forth in piteous appeals to Allah.” (Cape Times, Monday 3 July 1905.)

Ashore the drenched soldiers and sailors from HMSs Crescent and Forte gathered round bonfires to withstand the winter cold, while the local residents supplied them with hot coffee and food.

The second rocket-apparatus arrived at Kommetje at 05h00 and between daybreak and 14h00 the remaining 75 members of the crew were rescued with the help of the sailors and soldiers from Simon’s Town.

The rescue was not, however, without incident. The steel stays that had been dug into the ground kept pulling out as soon as the line was fastened to the ship. It was only on the arrival of a local fisherman Abraham Zachariah Auret, son of Abraham Auret, that the problem was solved. He advised them to dig a deep trench and place poles along the bottom of the trench, and after they had tied the stays to the poles, to fill the trench with rocks and sand. They rejected this idea with a certain amount of contempt, but after he had returned some two hours later he noticed that they had taken his advice and that the line was now secure. Thereafter the rescue was completed without a hitch. The chief officer carried the captain’s terrier in his arms. Prior to leaving he had shot the sheep aboard so they would not suffer after the ship broke up which in fact she never did for several years. It was remarkable how well she stood up, broadside on, to the battering of the waves. Captain Brown was the last to leave after he had hauled down the distress signals.

The rescuers, who included the captains of HMS Crescent and HMS Forte and their officers, sailors and soldiers as well as the general public, received great praise from the Clan Monroe officers and crew especially with regard to the risks taken in getting the rocket-apparatus working. Mr George Boyes was singled out in particular and described as a “good hearted-fellow.” Seventeen days later, in calm weather, the explosives were salved.

It was regretted that later one of the crew lost his life during salvage operations. His grave lies on a small kopje just below a point where the Slangkop lighthouse now stands.

George J. Boyes, Resident Magistrate of Simon’s Town and Officer Responsible for Wrecks along the Far South coast, received special mention from the Admiralty and Government for his actions and attention in organising the rescue of the remaining sixty eight lascar crew and seven officers on board after the initial efforts had failed.

In his annual report for 1905, Boyes wrote the following in connection with what was then the original Cape Point lighthouse:
"I am of the opinion that this lighthouse is placed much too high up; very many nights during the year the light could not be seen at all, the lighthouse being enveloped in mist. This was specially exemplified on the night of the wreck of Clan Monroe. I recommend that the present lighthouse be abolished and two new lighthouses erected, one on Cape Maclear and the other on Slang Kop Point."

This report initiated the move towards the building of the new lighthouse at Cape Point which operates today, as well as the Slangkop lighthouse now operative off Slangkop Point.

The wreck of the Clan Monroe has probably indirectly saved many ships from a similar fate. She sat high and dry on the rock shelf upon which she was wrecked, for many years and at low-tide nearly the whole ship was visible. It was used by locals as a rough tide-table guide.

Cape Times, 3 July 1905.
Lloyds Register of Shipping, 1901-02.
Shipping Register, Cape Archives, C.C. 3/7/2/6.
Oral history, Mr Faans Klopper.
Trawler Rex – a punch-up makes news.

Although there is no recorded outstanding bravery or courage in the wrecking of the trawler Rex, it was a bar fight brawl at the Kings Hotel on Saturday 17 October 1903 between the manager of the company which owned the Rex and the captain of the trawler that brought a touch of excitement to the stranding of this vessel.

The Rex was bought by the False Bay Fish and Cold Storage Company in early 1903 and set sail from England on her maiden voyage in September 1903. She was a 244-ton trawler with a ten-man crew.

She sailed from Simon’s Town at 09h00 on 3 October 1903 and at about 10h30 was anchored off Kalk Bay where she had come to obtain ice from cold storage. A load of ice had been taken out to her and she was awaiting a second load when she began to drag her anchors under the influence of a strong south-east wind. Although the vessel had steam up, between 13h00 and 14h00 she drifted stern foremost on to the rocks close to the railway station. Telegrams were sent immediately to Simon’s Town, and within an hour the Scotsman, the powerful tug of the Admiralty, and the Maori, another steam-trawler belonging to the company, reached Kalk Bay to attempt to tow the Rex off the rocks. However, as the wreck had sprung a leak and was fast filling with water it was deemed better to leave her where she was, the extent of the damage she had sustained not being known. After the stranding the ten-man crew all reached the shore without difficulty. They were the captain (David C. Newbury), the mate, the first and second engineers, three seamen, two fishermen and the cook.

The Court of Inquiry into the wreck was held in Cape Town on 20 October 1903 and a report of the proceedings filled over four columns of the 24 October issue of the Seaside News. The findings of the court were that the Rex had anchored in an unsafe position; a good and proper watch had not been kept; the anchors and associated equipment were defective and inefficiently used; prior to the stranding the ship had been navigated in a careless and unseaman-like manner; and all discipline aboard the ship appeared to have been very bad. Accordingly the master was held entirely to blame and his certificate was suspended for three months.

Messrs H. Jones and Co., conducted a salvage auction on 23 October 1903. The price realised was £51-12-6d which included the trawling nets and the coal.

Trawler Rex remained a pitiful sight on the Kalk Bay rocks until she finally
Trawler Rex, aground at Kalk Bay, 3 October 1903.  

Trawler Rex, c. 18 October 1903.
The centenary of the wreck of the Trawler Rex on the 3rd October 1903.

Commemorative Envelope

7900
Kalk Bay
PO Box 36
Kalk Bay Historical Association
succumbed to the sea. Her large boiler lay on the beachfront for many years after she had disappeared as was evident in many photographs and postcards of early Kalk Bay. The wreck cost the False Bay Fish and Cold Storage Co. dearly and the following year the Company went into liquidation. In the *Seaside News* issue no. 47, of 24 October 1903, it was reported that the manager of the False Bay Fish and Cold Storage Co., who had lost his job as a result of the wreck, had beaten up Captain David Newbury in a bar brawl at the Kings Hotel on Saturday 17 October. He was accordingly fined £2 or, in default, 14 days imprisonment for assault, but it is not difficult to imagine what could have brought this breach of peace.

*Cape Times*, 3 October 1903.
*Cape Argus*, 3 October 1903.
*Seaside News*, 24 October 1903.
Chapter 12

Their bones are still with us

The remains of three wrecks along the Far South coast are still evident today.

*ss Kakapo* - a wrong sighting

The first of these remains are those of the *ss Kakapo*, a British steamer of 1093 tons, built in 1898 by Grangemouth Dockyard Co., Grangemouth, and commanded by Captain P Nicolayson. Her remains lie on the Kommetjie-Noordhoek beach where she ran ashore on Friday 25 May 1900 at approximately 19h00 during a north-west gale and heavy rain. The officer-of-the-watch mistook Chapman’s Peak for Cape Point, (presumably the lighthouse was obliterated by fog and bad weather, as it frequently was) and once past Chapman’s Peak he ordered ‘hard-to-port, full steam ahead.’ This resulted in her ending high and dry as she hit the beach at near full power. Here her plates cut a deep furrow in the soft sand, with steep banks of sand rising on either side of the ship. Two seamen climbed down a rope ladder on to the beach and went ahead with a lantern to look for help in the early hours of the morning. They wandered about until they saw a light in the milking-shed at Brakkloof Farm. There they were able to raise the alarm, and the remainder of the crew was rescued.

The *Kakapo* was on her maiden voyage from the Tyne to New Zealand for the Union Shipping Co. of Wellington. She had left Cape Town harbour after recoaling at 16h30. Her next port of call was Fremantle in West Australia. She had a crew of twenty and no lives were lost. The tug *T. E. Fuller* was despatched on Saturday 26 May to stand-by in case of any rescue. She arrived at 15h00 and commenced towing operations which were unsuccessful.

Winter storms have gradually pushed the vessel further inland and the hull now lies at the high-tide mark. For a few years after the wreck a vagrant made the stranded ship his home and smoke from his fires rose from the ship’s funnel. This gave an eerie silhouette in the evenings as the sun set over the sea and was a source of intrigue to both locals and visitors. Legend has it that this vagrant was in fact the master of the ship, Captain Nicolayson, who had refused to abandon his stranded ship and lived there for near on three years. This has never been substantiated and seems most unlikely.

Besides being a tourist attraction, the wreck with her boiler and rudder clearly visible, was featured in the 1968 award-winning film, *Ryan’s Daughter*, directed by David Lean. It starred Robert Mitchum, Sarah Miles, Trevor Howard and John
ss *Kakapo* wrecked on Kommetjie beach, May 1900.  

ss *Kakapo* amidships c.1920.  

67
ss Kakapo c.1920

ss Kakapo - 2006.
Mills – all highly accomplished actors in their day.

The Kakapo immediately became a victim of looting and two local residents, who helped themselves to the cargo of fabrics and liquor, were prosecuted. The railways legally removed her coal. Later they also removed her steel plates which were used as a barricade on Fish Hoek beach to prevent sand being blown on to the road and railway line.

The name ‘Kakapo’ originates from a rare owl-like flightless bird (sometimes called a night-parrot) which is found exclusively in New Zealand. It is in danger of extinction and may soon disappear similar to the wreck that was named after it.

*Cape Times*, 26 May 1900.
*Lloyds Register of Shipping*, 1899-1900.

**The ss Clan Stuart - a double grounding**

The remains of a second wreck are those of the ss *Clan Stuart* at Mackerel Beach, Glencairn. She was a British steamer of 3,594 tons, built in 1900 by W. Doxford and Sons, Sunderland, and was owned by the Clan Line. She was the sixth Clan Line ship to run ashore along the South African coast. The previous five were: *Clan Gordon* (Natal, 1897) *Clan Lindsay* (Transkei, 1898) *Clan MacGregor* (Southern Cape, 1902) *Clan MacFarlane* (Port Elizabeth, 1903) and *Clan Munroe* (Slangkop, 1905). She was a freight-only ship and was the sister-ship to the ss *Clan Munroe*. She was a turret-ship designed to overcome the restrictions of the Suez Canal. Turret design was such that below the waterline the vessel bulged out with only a narrow portion of the vessel above water. This was because the owners of vessels had to pay taxes on the breadth of the beam when going through the Suez Canal.

The *Clan Stuart* arrived in Simon’s Town from St. Helena and was anchored in the bay when a gale force south-easter at 02h00 on 21 November 1914 caught her unawares. She dragged anchor, running hard aground on the rocks near Glencairn beach, a few kilometres from where the *Brunswick* had a similar fate in 1805. She carried a cargo of coal from Wales for delivery to the coaling-sheds at the Simon’s Town Docks. Her grounding was a tame affair compared to that of the *Clan Munroe*. Her crew were rescued by a lifeline, but later returned to the ship.

Efforts were made to refloat her with the help of the Table Bay harbour tug *Ludwig Wiener*† which did in fact pull the stricken ship off the rocks and was towing her back to Simon’s Town dry dock for repairs, but because of the danger of her floundering in the docks approach-channel, permission was refused for her to enter until further repairs were carried out. This forced the ship’s captain to
Looking south, ss *Clan Stuart* aground - c. December 1914.

STM

ss *Clan Stuart* - c. December 1914.

FHVM
Ludwig Wiener, She pulled the ss Clan Stuart off the rocks.

ss Clan Stuart - June 2006.
run her ashore on Mackerel beach to prevent her sinking. She was then linked to the beach by a cableway and lay about fifty metres from the shore.

It was at first thought that it would be possible to get the vessel off the sand and for this purpose two anchors were used. Her hull was holed near the engine-room and she was making water. The crew pumped in more water in order to keep the ship steady. The water acted as extra ballast and helped to keep the ship in position in spite of the rough weather.

The coal and much of her equipment had already been salvaged, and her deckhouse was later removed when the decision was finally made to abandon her. The deckhouse was taken to the Glencairn Hotel and for many years served as a summerhouse.

Captain Burns of Glasgow Salvage Company inspected the Clan Stuart with divers after she was beached, and reported that the prospect of salvage was good. Repairs then started and lasted until the first week in April when a heavy swell, on 6 April, so seriously damaged the vessel that it was recommended that salvage work be abandoned and the wreck be sold.

The directors of the Clan Line were not impressed with her grounding, and after an inquiry the master was dismissed.

All that now remains off Mackerel beach is her steam engine block with the cylinder tops.

*Cape Times, 22 & 23 November 1914.
*Lloyds Shipping Register, 1914.

*The Ludwig Wiener, 638 tons, was named after the Table Bay Harbour Board Chairman and was, at the time of the stranding of the Clan Stuart, the largest and most powerful tug in the world. She arrived in Table Bay on 18 November 1913 and soon after refloating the Clan Stuart, was commandeered and sent to Simon’s Town as hostilities had broken out in Europe. At Simon’s Town her two lifeboats were replaced by two 12-pounder guns on her boat deck, one on each side of the funnel. She was painted ship-grey and renamed HMS Afrikander (August 1914). She thus became the first warship of the Union of South Africa. This, however, was short-lived as, after seven months, the Royal Navy re-deployed their resources. She was returned to her owners, the Table Bay Harbour Board and renamed Ludwig Wiener after her guns were removed and her lifeboats reinstalled. She gave outstanding service for the next forty-seven years until withdrawn in 1962.

The *ss Thomas T. Tucker* - a compass error?

The third remains of a wreck are those of the *ss Thomas T. Tucker*, which sits high on the rocks about two kilometres south from Olifantsbos Point. She was a wartime wreck, an American Liberty ship of 7,176 tons which ran aground on 27 November 1942. She was one of over 2500 Liberty ships constructed at eighteen shipyards across the United States between March 1941 and November 1945. All these vessels were standardised and served as armed merchant ships. She was *en route* from New Orleans to Suez on her maiden voyage with a cargo of six Sherman tanks, spares, lorries, barbed wire and other war materials for the hardpressed Allies in the North African campaign.

Her construction was completed in September 1942 by the Houston Shipbuilding Corporation, Texas. She was classified as No. 30. She was an all welded ship put together in a matter of weeks due to the urgency of the war.

She was painted grey and had guns fore, aft and amidships. This was scant protection for an all-welded vessel which had a weak bulkhead and longitudinal frames, but it was not enemy craft that wrecked the *Thomas T. Tucker*. A warning had been sent that enemy U-boats had been seen in the area and the captain duly altered course in an effort to find a safe harbour. At 00h15 just after midnight, while proceeding slowly because of thick fog she ran aground about one kilometre offshore and about two kilometres south of Olifantsbos Point. The captain and the crew were rescued in the morning by a naval party.

As the cargo consisted of war material a great effort was made to recover as much as possible. A ferricrete road was bulldozed through the sand-dunes to the wreck and a camp was set up for the recovery of the heavy war cargo. This entire operation lasted four to five months during which time a cable was rigged between shore and ship. With the aid of the Thesen's coaster *Swazi* which unstepped her mast and double-banked the wreck, vital lightweight war material was taken off and ferried to Cape Town.

By the end of March 1943 most of the cargo had been removed and an effort was now made to refloat her. At spring-tide during the last week of March, tugs attempted to pull her stern to sea although by now her double-bottom had been flooded. But the weather suddenly turned vile and the hawser broke and she was swept portside on to the rocks. Within hours she was a total wreck but all her crew were saved. The question now arose: how did the captain miss Cape Town harbour when seeking a safe-haven by so great a distance?

This was never successfully explained. He reported himself aground off Robben Island. This was corrected by the lighthouse keeper at Slangkop, who reported him aground off Cape Point. He was then reliably informed that he had
A Liberty ship rides the waves.


A Liberty ship after conversion to a merchant ship, c. 1950. PC
‘missed’ Cape Town by 23 nautical miles. The captain then requested tugs be sent urgently to pull him off. These were despatched, but were unable to give assistance due to bad weather. It still remains a mystery today, however, as to how the captain came to believe he was off Robben Island. At the official Court of Inquiry the ship’s compass was found to have an error of 37 degrees.

There were very few first-hand accounts of the stranding of the Thomas T. Tucker as secrecy was a priority during the war years. However, one of the few who was soon on the scene was Warrant Officer Les Cowan. His letter to a local newspaper many years later makes interesting reading as well as explaining who Thomas T. Tucker was:

“When the Thomas T. Tucker went ashore near Cape Point in 1942, I was in camp at Klaasjagersberg about 3 km inland. As a Warrant Officer gunnery instructor, I was teaching a group of ‘keymen’, who could not join up but belonged to part-time units, how to fire First World War 13- and 18-pounders. On the Saturday afternoon when we heard the news, everyone rushed down to the beach to see the stranded Liberty Ship on her maiden voyage. We helped off-load the American tanks she was taking to North Africa. It was generally accepted that all this iron affected her compass rounding Cape Point. Thomas T. Tucker, incidentally, was the very first American slave freed.

The crew had been taken off, but not before everything portable was ‘liberated’ – or should we say ‘looted’? Chairs, including the captain’s chair, other furniture, charts, food, kitchen utensils and so on were taken. By the time I got there, the cupboard was bare!

However, opposite the captain’s cabin was a framed picture of President Roosevelt, exhorting ‘every man on this ship to do his duty …’, etc. Having ‘liberated’ it, I had a guilty conscience after the war and presented it to the Simon’s Town Museum for safekeeping.”

As the only item not ‘liberated’ by the crew was a framed picture of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, it makes one think. The crew did their duty, but did not regard a portrait of their President as worth saving!

Today three sections of her remains can be seen on the rocks of Olfantsbos beach. Her rusting plates are testimony to the dangers of the Far South’s western seaboard.

Cape Argus, An article by Owen Coetzer, January 23 1976.
Michael Frazer, Between Two Shores, David Philip publishers, 1994.
Brian Wrexham, Shipwrecks of the Western Cape, Howard Timmins, publishers.
Lloyds Register of Shipping, 1943-44.
Chapter 13

The handling of wreck cargo.

When wrecks occurred the first and foremost priority was naturally to rescue the passengers, if any, the officers and the crew. That goes without saying, but once the rescue had been completed, whether successfully or not, the next immediate step was to save the hull and especially the cargo from pilfering and theft. The Resident Magistrate of Simon’s Town was, among his other responsibilities, the Collector of Customs, the Port Officer, and the Officer Responsible for Wrecks along the Far South coast. When a wreck was reported to him by either the lighthouse-keepers, farmers or any immediate witnesses, the first thing the Resident Magistrate did, after initiating the rescue, was to send out the field-cornet and some constables to secure the wreck and more importantly the cargo. Timber from the ship was a valuable commodity especially in the building of houses. The use of ship’s timber for beams and floorboards was very popular.

The theft of wrecked cargo was a serious offence. The Dutch had, in May 1737, issued an edict which stipulated that if any person or persons were caught stealing from a wrecked ship they would be hanged. This was after a severe storm in Table Bay when seven D.E.I.C. ships were wrecked. Four culprits were caught and hung from the gallows and the bodies allowed to remain exposed as a warning to others.

A ship’s cargo which gave the authorities endless trouble was that of the English East Indiaman Colebrooke, 723 tons. She struck the then uncharted Anvil Rock a short distance S.S.E. of Cape Point at 11h30 on 24 August 1778. She then sailed north-eastwards on the much longer journey to the east of False Bay and grounded at 16h00 on a sandbank some two hundred metres offshore from the sandy beach of Kogel Bay. Looters were soon on the scene. Local farmers and others from as far away as Swellendam, accompanied by their slaves helped themselves to the ship’s cargo. The Landdrost of Stellenbosch did his best to cope with the situation by sending out members of his burghers’ commando as soon as possible to guard the site. Their arrival at the site is confirmed in the ship’s log of 27 August which records that, “We met some Dutchmen and two Soldiers with Slaves carrying provisions who told us they were sent by the order of the Governor.” Later when the ship broke up much of the cargo washed ashore, and was scattered a long way along the coast. It now proved near impossible to stop the pilfering, especially at night. On 8 and 10 September 1778 the Council of Policy considered
two reports from the Landdrost. They decided he had done all he could and instructed him to send them any looters he had managed to catch. These culprits would then face the full force of the law, which included hanging from the gallows.

These looting punishments were not as severe under British rule from 1806 and jail sentences were the norm. Sometimes the culprits appeared to have avoided arrest especially in the Cape Point area where immediate protection of the cargo was difficult. This happened with the wreck of the RMS Kafir (February 1878) when Resident Magistrate Mr Fred van der Riet complained that, "a great deal of pillaging having been going on and articles of value removed into the bushes." He placed a field-cornet and two special constables on duty until the auction of the ship’s cargo could be held.

The cargo of the ss Umhlali was pilfered, as it was difficult to apprehend thieves boarding the ship at night, as she was fast aground close to shore.

The problem of recovering cargo was sometimes not that easy as the cargo did not always remain in the vicinity of the wreck. Similar to that of the Colebrooke, the Star of Africa’s cargo (wrecked August 1880) was also according to Resident Magistrate Van Riet in a report to the Collector of Customs, Cape Town, widespread, and was only found a considerable distance south of the wreck due to a strong north-west gale. This cargo was "quite unlooked for" and he complained that it was impossible for him to patrol the whole coastline. He requested that he and staff set up "station at a farm house so I can control the whole beach." This request was apparently granted.

In the case of the Carlotta B wrecked near Platboom Point (August 1886), the cargo was found washed up on Muizenberg beach due to a severe south-east gale. It was strewn over a five kilometre stretch towards Strandfontein. Quite remarkable if one considers that the wreck was on the lower west coast of the Cape Point Nature Reserve.

It was mainly due to pilfering and the cost of protecting cargo from such pilfering that the hull and more especially the cargo were sold as quickly as possible. This not only limited the damage to the cargo, but it also moved the responsibility of protecting the cargo from the customs authorities to the purchaser. Most sales took place at the site of the wreck though some were held on the stoep of the Commercial Exchange. The amount received in all cases was a fraction of the insured value. This was because of damage which was usually substantial, as was the cost of the recovery of such cargo from the sea and along the beach. To this must also be added the cost of transport from the site. Many sites were inaccessible and the protection of cargo was another added expense.
The less perishable the item, the greater the proceeds from the sale. Auctions were the standard method of sale and H. Jones and Co. Auctioneers were most prominent in this field.

Another item of auction was called “waifs and strays.” This excluded driftwood. These were items that were washed up possibly from the deck of a passing ship. The following notice appeared in the Cape of Good Hope Government Gazette and is an example of these items.

**Waifs and Strays**

*Notice is hereby given that the following pieces of Wood and Tar washed up on the Beach at Olifantsbosch will be sold at the Courthouse Simon’s Town at 10 a.m. Tuesday the 21st September 1897 if not claimed.*

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<tr>
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<td>9 feet long</td>
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<td>3 Deals</td>
<td>15 feet long</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Teak wood blocks</td>
<td>4 feet long</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Hogshead Tar</td>
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*C. A. Horne*
*Sub-Collector.*

Another incident of timber being sold off for the benefit of the Treasury was when on 26 May 1857 field-cornet H. P. Auret wrote to the Resident Magistrate at Simon’s Town to report that a piece of the side of a burnt ship had been washed up at Schoester’s Kraal (later Scarborough) beach, “near the place of Mr van Blerk.” It was about thirty-three feet long and nine feet broad and worth about £5. The Magistrate was requested by the Colonial Secretary, Cape Town, through the Civil Commissioner, to sell the timber by public auction and the proceeds to be paid into the Treasury. There is no record of this unfortunate ship but fire at sea, as it is today, was a dreaded occurrence.

Many years earlier at a meeting of the Council of Policy in the Castle on 5 August 1793 a letter was read of two days previous from the Resident Magistrate of Simon’s Town (Postholder), Christoffel Brand. He reported there had been washed up near Slangkop Point various pieces of wood belonging to a ship, and one cask of well-conditioned seed oil, the cask being marked as such. Other items had also come ashore providing enough evidence for it to be clear that one or other ship had come to an unfortunate end without anyone knowing which vessel had suffered this calamity. Such were the hazards of the sea.
Chapter 14

Lighthouses

The many wrecks on the west coast of the Far South resulted in the building of three lighthouses. Prior to 1860 no such lights existed and with the increase in trade and passenger travel around Cape Point to the East Coast of South Africa, it was only a matter of time before the precaution of having lighthouses became essential.

The original Cape Point lighthouse came into operation on 1 May 1860 on the summit of the Cape Point Peak, 238 metres above sea-level. This was the highest and most conspicuous point and gave a wide sweep over the False Bay and the Atlantic. This seemed the logical choice, but it was an error of judgement because for a large percentage of the time, an average of 900 hours a year, the peak was enveloped in fog. It was also noted that at an elevation of 238 metres the light had too wide an arc and ships rounding Slangkop Point had difficulty sighting a point from Cape Point that would ensure that they missed Albatross Rock. The masters of the Paralos (January 1880) and the Lusitania (April 1911), both wrecked on Bellows Rock, claimed that they had been unable to see the light and had sailed too close to the coast as they could not judge their distance from the lighthouse. The masters of five other ships, the RMS Kafir (February 1878), Star of Africa (August 1880), Catherina Doge (March 1886) Charlotta B (August 1886), and the Umhlali (August 1909), all wrecked on the west coast of Cape Point, claimed they could not see the light because of thick fog. In the case of the Bia (September 1917) the master thought the light seen through the fog was that of a steamer. This sad state of affairs and the recommendations that the light be moved were recorded in the Lighthouse Commissioner’s reports of 1872 and 1880 and in George Boyes’ report of 1905 after the wreck of the Clan Munroe that year. Boyes stated quite clearly that the Far South needed a lighthouse.
at Slangkop Point as well as the repositioning of the Cape Point lighthouse. This resulted in the Governor of the Cape of Good Hope, Sir Walter Hely Hutchinson, appointing a commission in 1906 to report on improvements and additions to the existing lighthouse system around the Far South. The commission endorsed Boyes’ recommendations.

The new Cape Point lighthouse was completed in 1915. Because of security during the First World War, however, it only became operational on 11 March 1919. The site was close to the end of the Peninsula above Dias Rock and 87 metres above sea-level. This was 160 metres lower than the original lighthouse and would eliminate the problems of fog. The light now covers the particularly hazardous sea area including Bellows Rock. Construction of the Slangkop lighthouse was completed in 1914 but again because of security during the First World War the light only became operational on 14 March 1919.

A great number of mariners felt that if a lighthouse had been placed earlier near Olifantsbos Point, even before the first Cape Point lighthouse, the incidence of wrecks would have been far less on this coast. This point that can hardly be contested given the number of wrecks on Albatross Rock and Olifantsbos Point.

George Boyes (1863-1924)

George Boyes was Resident Magistrate of Simon's Town from 1904 to 1916. His duties were manifold for he was the Magistrate, the Receiver of Revenue, the Port Officer, the Official Visitor to Lighthouses, the Collector of Customs and the Officer Responsible for Wrecks from Hout Bay to Cape Agulhas. The latter three duties were involved with shipping and shipwrecks along the Far South Coast.

As Officer Responsible for Wrecks, he received special recommendation from the Admiralty and the Government for his handling of the wreck of the ss Clan Munroe (1905), and was congratulated on his conduct by the Minister of Railways and Harbours for his handling of the Lusitania disaster (1911). He was also involved in the wreck of the ss Umhlali (1909), the British steamer ss Campbell, 3988 tons, which was wrecked west of Cape Agulhas lighthouse on 27 March 1913, and the Norwegian steamship ss Hektor 3856 tons, wrecked on Dyer Island four days earlier on 23 March 1913.

His duties as Official Visitor to Lighthouses were instrumental, after the wrecking of the Clan Munroe and Lusitania, in the building of the Slangkop lighthouse and the repositioning of the Cape Point Lighthouse.

He was also most enthusiastic about the building of an All Round Cape Peninsula Road which would give locals as well as visitors the opportunity to view the beautiful Cape Peninsula. Although Boyes Drive, the high level road originally from Muizenberg (now from Lakeside) to Kalk Bay, was only completed in 1929 after his death. It was named in his honour for his contribution in promoting the Far South.
# Bibliography

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
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<tr>
<td>Brian Wrexham</td>
<td><em>Shipwrecks of the Western Cape.</em></td>
<td>Howard Timms, undated.</td>
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## Other Sources

- Cape Newspaper reports and other references as detailed at the end of each article.

## Cape Archives reference abbreviations

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<td>Verbatim copies.</td>
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<td>C. C.</td>
<td>Chamber of Commerce.</td>
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<td>B. R.</td>
<td>Batavian Republic.</td>
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## Acknowledgements

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<td>RMS</td>
<td>Royal Mail Steamer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ss</td>
<td>Steam ship (single or twin-screw)</td>
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