

## The "Discovery" of the Wreck of the Queen of Nations

It was with some surprise that the people of Illawarra read the *Illawarra Mercury* front page story of 5 April 1991, proclaiming that the wreck of the *Queen of Nations* (which ran aground off Towradgi Point on the morning of Tuesday, 31 May 1881) had been "discovered" by divers some days previous.

For any student of Illawarra history the location of the wreck of the *Queen of Nations* had been precisely known for many years. An article by Edgar Beale in the *IHS Bulletin* of December 1951 had stated that it was located

. . . on Corrimal Beach, about 400 yards north of the Black Rocks at Towradgi. .

In 1937 the Blaker family of Corrimal - who lived near the old Ziems Estate by Towradgi Creek - collected a number of items from the wreck during the period of low tide. These included parts of the rigging known as 'Dead Eyes', planks, nails, etc. Two of the 'Dead Eyes' were subsequently donated to the Society during the fifties by the family. In 1968 pieces of the wreck was removed from the beach by a grader in line with preparations for a major surf carnival; and in 1976 items of wood were used in the construction of a boat at Wollongong Harbour.

To proclaim, therefore, the "discovery" of the wreck in 1991 is slightly presumptuous, to say the least. Due to the circumstances of the stranding - the ship was driven on to the beach with a full cargo, and over the years settled deep within the sand - this meant that ever since that day in 1881 local residents have been aware of the wreck and items have been taken from it continuously over the years. It is therefore one of the most accessible wrecks in all of Australia.

Unfortunately the recent 'feeding frenzy' by local divers has decimated the wreck, and their actions are to be severely criticised. However every cloud has a silver lining, and with the 'rediscovery' the National Maritime Museum and State Government have taken an interest in the site.

Following lobbying by the Society, Steve Dillion, Frank Arkell, and maritime archaeologists in Sydney, the site has been declared an Historic Shipwreck within the provisions of the Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act of 1976 and no items may be removed from it without a permit. A great deal of research, both historical and archaeological, has been carried out by Tim Smith, an archaeologist with the State Planning Department, and hopefully in the future the Society may see the results of this work.

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### References

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