

THE WRECK OF THE QUEEN OF NATIONS

Mrs Betty Shortis of Gerringong has provided us with another contribution to the "Wreck of the Queen of Nations", in verse, and we acknowledge her husband John Shortis as the poet

The poem is as follows:

A story compounded of strange allegations,
Is told of the barque, the 'Queen of Nations',
Which during one night in eighteen eighty-one

When nearing the end of the Australian run,
Did run aground on Corrimal's shore,
Some forty miles south of Sydney's front door,
Misled, it was said, by mountain fires
Of burning coal in massive pyres

From London south to Tristan da Cunha,
That she might have well reached sooner,
But for a weighty manifest,
Which put her timbers to the test,
With the 'roaring forties' in her sails,
Due east for the coast of New South Wales,
Her Plimsoll mark, so the story ran,
Was below water-line, but to defeat the ban

The carpenter, by no means a saint,
Soon fixed that with a brush and some paint,
Tinplate, and whiting, sardines and nails,
Oakum and boiler tubes, candles and rails,
Cockle's Pills and pianos filled all the spaces,
With wine, beer and brandy in thousands of cases,
And in Corrimal surf, amid altercations,

In disarray and dismayed lay the good 'Queen of Nations' -

The skipper enraged, bellowed and roared,
He'd shoot any man who climbed overboard,
Yet despite all his threats to turn the ship to a jailhouse,
Most of the crew reached a Wollongong alehouse,

Four of whom in no spirit of flattery,
Sued the said Captain for assault and battery.
Only he and the first-mate remained on deck,
When the rescue party arrived at the wreck,

And then with the master yelling and raving,
Both went below and refused any saving.
So the rescuers went back to their ship 'Commodore'.

But returned when the roaring started once more.
And yet once again the two went below,
First the Captain, unsteady, with his first-mate in tow;
Cries for help now and then were heard through the night,
Which would not be answered until the morning light.
When under the eyes of Police Sergeant Forde,
And Magistrate Turner, and with order restored,
The rescue boat then tried once again,
And this time indeed secured the two men.
The skipper seemed in need of some strong antidote,
While the mate, in boarding, nearly upset the boat.
But Time and Tide, and the forces of each,
By June twenty-fifth had pushed the 'Queen' upon the beach.

With her balwarks split open, as the surf roared like thunder,
Spreading cargo afar when the wreck fell asunder;
Bales of paper, kegs of rum, wine, beer and brandy,
Armchairs and pianos, admittedly sandy,
Cockle's Pills in their boxes to rest far and wide,
In their thousands marking the extent of high tide.
Temptation a-plenty for the diligent searcher
With a thirst for discovery and eyesight to nurture.

However, in fairness, a newspaper report,
Said that 'only the least experienced were caught',
Many brandy bottles retrieved in delight
Were inexplicably empty when viewed in the light.
But lest it be thought ill of locals, in fact,
All Cockle's Pills remained quite intact.
'For although', said the paper describing the case,
'the odd bottle of brandy may have gone without a trace,
Honesty was not entirely forsaken,
As no evidence existed that a single pill was taken!'

And sometimes under a darkling sky,
When wind and raging seas run high,
And the sands which cover her ribs and keel,
Are swept away, there to reveal,
The 'Queen of Nations' resting place,
And all that remains, which once in grace
The sparkling ocean did explore -
Now bleaching timbers - nothing more.