

# THE WRECK OF THE CHEVIOT

A newspaper article about the wreck of the Cheviot, Saturday 19 October 1887<sup>1</sup>

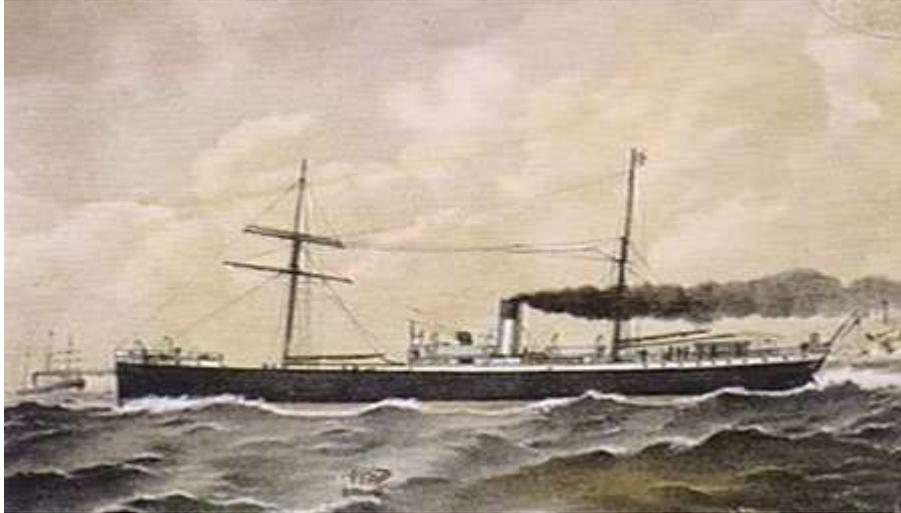


Figure 1 - SS Cheviot in her heyday<sup>2</sup>

The wreck of the Cheviot steamship affords another illustration of the dangers which always attend the navigation of steamers during rough weather, and near the coast. The Cheviot was well-known in the intercolonial trade, and had recently been reclassified. She left Melbourne for Sydney on October 19, at 4 pm, in company with the Wairarapa, and both kept together until reaching the Heads, when the latter hove-to, as she had some valuable livestock on board. Captain Richardson of the Cheviot resolved to face the storm. What followed is best told by Captain Richardson:

“We left the wharf,” he said, “at a quarter past 4 pm on Wednesday and everything went smoothly down the Bay. It would be as near as possible a quarter past 8 o’clock when we passed Queenscliff, and then we met a south-westerly gale with a strong sea. The wind, however, lessened down considerably as we entered the Rip, increasing immediately afterwards as we got more into the open sea. The heavy plunging of the ship met the propeller partly out of the water, and just as we had opened the green light of Point Lonsdale, and were bearing off to the southward in the direction of Cape Schanck, being then abreast as nearly as possible of Point Nepean, something went wrong with the screw. The chief engineer was up on deck a moment afterwards, and came to me on the bridge. He said that he did not know whether the shaft had broken or whether the propeller had fallen off,

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<sup>1</sup> The Pictorial Australian (Adelaide, SA : 1885 - 1895) Sat 1 Oct 1887 Page 2. THE WRECK OF THE CHEVIOT.)

<sup>2</sup> Image from <http://www.discovermorningtonpeninsula.com.au/fascinatingfacts/shipwreck-ss-cheviot.php>

but it was quite impossible to effect any repairs. This being the case, I at once got the fore and aft canvas on her and attempted to reach off the land.

At this time Point Nepean was on our beam, about 1½ miles distant. The ship would not answer her helm, and do all we could, we could not get any way on her, as she started to drift to leeward, and once started I saw nothing could stop her. I gave the order and got both anchors over, though I never thought there was a chance of them holding, and of course they never did. My object in letting them go was to get her head swung to sea, for I saw that it was impossible to launch the boats in such a sea, for they never could have lived.

The second mate was with me on the bridge and I sent him to tell all the passengers to get life belts on and to advise everybody to get aft. She was drifting broadside on, and approaching the rocks very quickly. At a quarter to 9 she struck heavily on the rock, tilted up and came down about amidships, and there held fast, bumping frequently. When she took the reef I left the bridge and went aft, advising every to stick to the ship. About a quarter of an hour later the fore part fell clean away, breaking just abaft the engine room, and carried all those who were in that portion of the ship down in her. There had not been any screaming. We could not have heard it if there had of been because of the awful noise of the wind and the breakers."

Captain Richardson is reticent as to what followed, but all those who were with him tell gratefully how he made a rush into the cabin to get spirits for the ladies, and how by his hopeful calmness, he kept all in heart until they were got ashore.

### **THE LOST AND SAVED**

There were altogether 59 souls on the books of the ill-fated vessel when she left the river, and of this number only 24 were rescued from the wreck, but it cannot be positively stated that the loss does not exceed the 35 persons who are unaccounted for in the published list. It invariably happens on the departure of intercolonial steamers that intending passengers, particularly in the steerage, go on board at the last moment, without having previously taken a berth, and book when the officers check the lists on the voyage, and the departure of the Cheviot has not been an exception to the rule. It is believed by the officers of the ship that there were three or four persons on board the Cheviot who did not book in the ordinary way, but the number cannot be accurately given until the whole of the bodies have been recovered from the sea. So far none of the lists contained the names of any of these passengers, and the official return of the drowned is therefore given at 35. The rescued passengers were greatly knocked about, but not seriously injured, and the captain, officers,

and crew bore marks of a severe treatment they received during the trying night. The following are the official lists of the saved and drowned:

### **The Saved – Officers and Crew**

Captain T B Richardson; Archibald Laing, third engineer; Abraham Chas. Naylor, chief steward; John Sandernick, second steward; Edward Combes, bedroom steward; J H Bailey, messroom steward; Edward Calcraft, lamp trimmer; Mrs Emily Ralph, stewardess; George Anderson, chief cook; Charles Guar, able seaman; Frederick Campbell, fireman; David Turnbull, fireman; John King, fireman.

### **Passengers**

Mr and Mrs Ball, of Toowoomba, Queensland; **Mr and Mrs John Marriott, Campbell's Creek, Castlemaine**; Miss Mary Wilson, Kew; Mrs Joseph O'Brien, Sydney; Mrs Charles Pitchforth, Prahan; Mr and Mrs Apperley, South Melbourne; Mr Thomas B Ryan, Sydney.

### **John Marriott's account of the wreck<sup>3</sup>**

"I am a resident of Campbell's Creek, near Castlemaine, and was going to Newcastle. My wife accompanied me on board the Cheviot, and was lying in the berth with me when the vessel ceased to go along. It was then about 8 o'clock. It was bitterly cold, and we were glad to rest secure from the boisterous wind. After the vessel's screw had ceased to revolve, she commenced to roll heavily, but we did not anticipate any danger. The captain came down to the saloon from the deck, and stated that the vessel had met with some difficulty, but he did not anticipate any immediate danger. He advised us to put lifebelts upon the women and afterwards to place lifebelts upon ourselves. It was seen, however, that the Cheviot was hopelessly drifting upon a lee-shore, and so rapidly that within the space of about an hour from the time she became disabled she struck upon the rocks upon the Back Beach. The shock was not so great as one would have expected, and although she had rolled very heavily, up to that time she had not taken much water on board. On becoming fast upon the rocks, however, she took the water overboard in great quantities. There was a tremendous sea on, and it was also raining. The women acted nobly, and there was not the slightest excitement amongst them. My dear wife quietly stood whilst I adjusted and secured the belt around her. All the women displayed wonderful presence of mind. The most of us remained in the saloon,

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<sup>3</sup> Kerang Times and Swan Hill Gazette (Vic. : 1877 - 1889), Friday 28 October 1887, page 1 (6)

as we were sheltered there, and every now and then the captain would run down the companion-way to see how we are getting along. He was thoroughly self-possessed, and acted with great courage and manliness throughout. The steamer listed to the shore side considerably, so that her broadside was offered to the force of the ocean, and whilst she remained in that position we did not find things so very bad. All of a sudden, however, the captain ran down the companion-way, and said he feared that the steamer would go amid ships. He expressed the hope, however, that if she only held together as she was they would be safe, as she was firmly upon the rocky bottom. Immediately afterwards the vessel gave a sudden jump and reel, and the stern tilted up, so that we felt sure it would bump down again on the rock and break up. It kept in position however and it was only a few seconds that we realised that she had parted amid ships. I believe that every one of those poor creatures who were in the forward part of the vessel was lost, as we saw nothing of them afterwards. Strange to say, we all thought that the stern would have gone first, as the vessel, after grounding with her stern pointing shorewards, swung round stern inwards. As soon as she broke amidships, the water entered the saloon, so that we had to go on deck. We huddled together in a group on the stern end of the quarter deck, near the wheel, and a wretched time we had of it. We were exposed to all the fierce fury of the gale. The seas made clean breaches over us, and the portion of the steamer upon which we stood shook and trembled with the tremendous force of the waves. We were all drenched to the skin, and the cold was intense. Added to that was the feeling of sorrow for those who had been in the fore part of the ship, which by this time had disappeared altogether. Vast masses of floating wreckage were washed hither and thither, crashing and bumping together and against remaining ... showing that she was rapidly giving way to the assaults made upon her. During all this fearfully trying ordeal, the ladies and men all behaved nobly – and I would like you to say so. Mention was made of the boats; but the captain, on being spoken to, said they would never live in such a sea as was raging at the time, and that our only hope was in the remaining portion keeping together. We could see people collecting upon the beach, but they could do nothing for us, and the wind blew with such force that we could not make out anything that was hailed to us. Early in the morning the rocket saving apparatus arrived upon the beach, and the very first rocket was fired so accurately that it carried the line right over the vessel, where it was quickly secured, and the life-saving apparatus placed in working order. The ladies did not display the slightest hesitation in getting into the basket, and remained perfectly cool whilst it was being taken ashore. I should have said that the only thing we had to comfort us during our exposure on the deck of the vessel was some brandy, which the captain secured by breaking open the skylight and seizing the floating bottle in which it was contained. A curious incident occurred during the night. Just before the steamer went ashore a young gentleman passenger named Pitchforth was playing the

piano. After she struck, he continued to do so, and we thought he did not realise the dangerous position we were in. When we rushed on deck after the vessel broke up amidships, we missed him and gave him up for lost. Early in the morning, however, a coo-e-e was heard in the saloon, and on breaking into it from the deck, we found that the young man had been an involuntary prisoner during the weary night, and I can well understand what his feelings must have been, hearing the waves beating over and around the vessel, and each moment threatening her destruction. I cannot tell you with what gratitude I stepped on the shore when taken from the steamer. None of us saved any of our effects but never mind that. I am thankful to Providence for carrying my wife and self through the night's terrors."



## References

You can read more about the Wreck of the Cheviot on the following websites:

Mornington Peninsula website

<http://www.discovermorningtonpeninsula.com.au/fascinatingfacts/shipwreck-ss-cheviot.php>

Wikipedia - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SS\\_Cheviot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SS_Cheviot)

Poi Australia - <https://poi-australia.com.au/points-of-interest/australia/victoria/portsea/approximate-wreck-site-ss-cheviot-bass-strait-off-cheviot-beach-portsea-mornington-peninsula-vic/>

Papers Past - <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZTIM18871121.2.9>