

SHIPWRECKS & SAFE HAVENS

Shannon 1906

“ Captain Johnson has been very unfortunate with his commands of late. ”

LAUNCESTON EXAMINER 17 September 1906



The Shannon in her heyday on the Murray River.
—STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA: ALAN GREEN COLLECTION



All that remains today: the Shannon's iron boiler and drive shaft.
—KING ISLAND TOURIST DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

1906 was not going well for Captain Johnson. His previous vessel had been driven ashore on King Island and wrecked. Now he was commissioned to deliver an ageing paddle steamer across the wild waters of Bass Strait.

The seven crew knew the risks. The Shannon's previous trip across the strait had taken 15 days. The captain hugged the Tasmanian coastline as long as he could, putting in to Stanley for a load of coal before setting course for Melbourne.

As is usually the case in accounts of shipwrecks, the fair weather quickly turned foul, degenerating into gale force winds and driving rain. It was just too much for the 21 horsepower vessel:

“Tossing and twisting as she rode the storm, her redgum planks began to spring

and she began to take in water at an alarming rate.”

With the pumps going and all hands bailing furiously, she made it to shelter under New Year Island. The crew spent a sleepless night pumping and bailing, and in the morning things looked even worse.

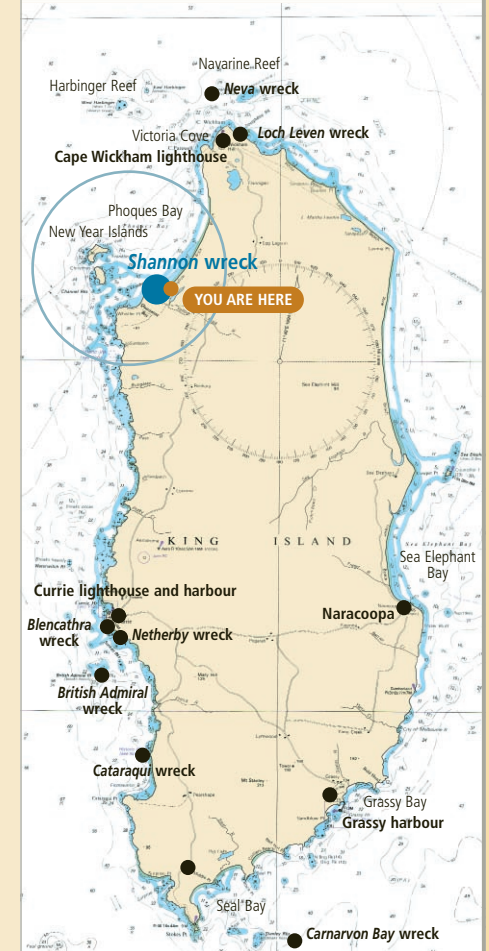
Inspection showed that some of the boiler tubes had burst, leaving the Shannon helpless. Captain Johnson decided he had to beach the vessel to save his crew. What you can see on the beach today are the remains of the boiler, the engine and the drive shafts.

And Captain Johnson? The local newspaper may have made snide remarks, but the inquiry into the loss of the ship cleared him of all blame.

The best looking boat on the river

When Murray River identity Tommy Freeman bought the Shannon, he refitted her with a bigger boiler with three furnaces for better performance. By the time he was finished with her, “Shannon was spruce and fast. She could do fifteen miles an hour downstream. Maintained in top condition, and painted sparkling white, she was the best looking boat on the river.”

But after she was snagged and sunk, Tommy lost interest and sold her, beginning a downward spiral that ended in her sale for conversion to a silt pump barge. What a sad fate for a once proud paddle steamer. Perhaps this beach is not such a bad final resting place after all.



The riverboat that went down to the sea

The Shannon had a colourful career. Here are some of her adventures:

- Built at Goolwa in South Australia in 1877 for trading on the lower reaches of the Murray
- Caught fire in 1885 and sunk to prevent the fire spreading
- Raised and refitted, and converted to a two-decker passenger and cargo vessel

- that could carry 700 bales of wool
- Ran successfully between Swan Hill and Mildura
- Ventured across the Murray bar to get a new boiler fitted in Port Adelaide
- Snagged and sunk near Mildura
- Raised (again) and sold to Captain Henry Mitchell for trading on the Tamar
- Back over the bar and across Bass Strait

- to her new home, almost foundering twice
- With the paddle boxes making it difficult to haul alongside the narrow Tamar jetties, spent a year tied up without work
- Sold for conversion to a silt pump barge in Melbourne, requiring another trip across Bass Strait
- Beached on King Island.

Name of Ship <i>Shannon</i>	
Whether a Sailing or Steamship: <i>Steam Paddle</i>	Where built <i>Goolwa South Australia</i>

Facts and figures

Name	<i>Shannon</i>	Date	9 Sep 1906	Location	Yellow Rock Bch
Rig	Paddle steamer	Construction	Composite	Tonnage	122
Date built	1877	Place built	Goolwa, SA	Place of register	Adelaide, SA
Length	109.4'	Breadth	18.3'	Depth	6.3'
Owner	Walsh, Warnock			Master	Johnson
Departure	Launceston, Tas	Destination	Melbourne, Vic	Cargo	None
Crew	7	Passengers	0	Casualties	0



KING ISLAND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATION