



# Showcasing SA Shipwrecks

## **SULTANA (1849 – 1857)**

Three-masted barque; wooden hull; 588 gross tons

Length 37.2 metres; Breadth 8.1 metres; Depth 6.2 metres

Built: Sunderland, England

Lost: 27 April 1857, Guichen Bay, Robe

Protected under the Commonwealth *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976*

The *Sultana* was one of three vessels wrecked in Guichen Bay during the first six months of 1857 – the other two being the ships [Phaeton](#) (in February) and [Koning Willem II](#) (in June). All three vessels carried Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong, bound for the Victorian goldfields.

The supplementary notes, [A Brief History – Chinese Immigration Through Robe](#), provide further information about Chinese immigration and the Victorian Goldfields.

### **HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE LOSS:**

When the barque *Sultana* left Hong Kong, in either January or February 1857, it carried a general cargo and 400 Chinese passengers en route to Robe. During the voyage, the captain died, and the vessel was left in charge of the mate, Mr Garnett.

On 27 April 1857 the *Sultana* reached the entrance to Guichen Bay, but as it passed Cape Dombey (one reference says Cape Lannes), it struck a reef. Unfortunately the damage was severe and by the time the vessel reached the anchorage it was taking on more water than the pumps could handle. The master decided that the best action was to beach the barque and safely land the passengers and crew.

Mr Garnett claimed that, at the time the ship struck, the weather was so thick that he could not see the Cape Dombey beacon and he made a public complaint about the lack of a pilot in the port. However, there was actually a pilot at Robe – Andrew Rankine, who was already on board another ship. It seems that Mr Garnett saw this other 'China Ship' ahead of him and decided to follow it into the Bay, rather than waiting for better weather or for the pilot to come on board. The consequence, unfortunately, was that the vessel turned too closely ('cut off the corner') and hit the reef.



*Cape Dombey Obelisk, 1980s*

The *Sultana* was a total wreck and, on 15 May 1857, the vessel and its cargo were sold at public auction. The following extract was printed in the *SA Register* 14 May 1857, and shows the interesting mix of ship's fittings and cargo that was salvaged and auctioned.

*The wreck of the barque Sultana, 588 tons, as she now lies beached at Guichen Bay, with her standing and running rigging &c. The cargo consists of :-*

- 80 tons Bally Rice*
- 150 Watercasks, each 200 gallons*
- 100 packets Teaseed Oil, in tins and boxes*
- 43 cases Clothing*
- 15 baskets Ginger*
- 50 do. Potatoes*
- 20 packets Chinese Medicine*
- 2 Iron Water-tanks*

*Cabin Fittings &c.*  
*Spare Anchor 30 cwt.*  
*1 long-boat*  
*1 lifeboat*  
*1 gig*  
*1 jollyboat.*  
*The following goods are Landed: –*  
*1 suit of sails, complete*  
*2 Topgallant, studding sails*  
*1 Topgallant studding sail*  
*2 Loweryards*  
*2 Topsailyards*  
*2 Topgallant yards*  
*2 Royal yards*  
*1 Mizen boom*  
*1 Mizengaff*  
*1 Spare Spar for Mizen boom*  
*2 topgallant and Royal masts*  
*1 Mizen topmast*  
*All the Running Rigging and Blocks*  
*1 Bell*  
*Code of Marryat's Signals and Ensign*  
*1 Chronometer*  
*1 Fire-engine, complete*  
*2 Guns*  
*Studding sails, Booms, and Yards*  
*3 Boats*  
*Fore and Main Topgallant Rigging*  
*Mizen topmast and Mizen Rigging*  
*Mizen topmast Rigging*  
*1 Medicine-chest*  
*Jib Guys*  
*Cabin Bulkheads*  
*Brass Skylight Gratings*  
*Mizen cap*  
*Main topmast*  
*Pump gear*  
*2 Winch Handles*  
*Fore and Topmast Rigging*  
*Jib stay and Martingale*  
*Fore topmast*  
*Main topmast*  
*Main trysail gaff*  
*Jibboom*  
*1 Stream Anchor*  
*1 Kedge Anchor*  
*Wheel Chains, Wheel and blocks*  
*2 kegs of Powder*  
*2 doz. Bluelights*  
*6 Rockets, 1 box Catridges*  
*1 Long-boat, &c.*

**POSSIBLE WRECK SITE LOCATION:**

The *Sultana* wreck site has not been found (as at May 2007). An approximate location has been suggested within Guichen Bay, based on a contemporary newspaper report of 1857 and the *South Australian Parliamentary Papers* of 1875, which indicate that the vessel was beached.