

**Melbourne Herald**  
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# **Mahogany Ship**

**Will It Be Located?**

## **WRECK LEGEND**

Wide interest is being shown in the supposed wreck of an old Spanish ship in the sandhills west of Warrnambool, as reported in The Herald a few days ago. Mr J. Mc Kerr, city solicitor, and former member of the staff of the Public Library, has written, urging the Warrnambool Progress Association to locate and exhume the vessel for use in the Centenary celebrations.

There are numerous points that require investigation, and are dependent for their solution on the exhumation of the wreck itself. The members of the Historical Society of Victoria are well acquainted with the tradition of the mahogany ship.

Mr A. W. Greig, a member of the council, said today that the society recognised, however, that it was impossible to say what the wreck was, and until money was found to examine it, the story must remain a legend.

## **WALKED ITS DECK**

The first difficulty is that its precise position is not known. It is buried somewhere in the shifting sand dunes, six or seven miles west of Warrnambool, and the only clue is a somewhat vague bearing given by Captain J. B. Mills, formerly harbor master at Warrnambool. Captain Mills is said to have actually visited the ship and walked its deck, after its presence had been reported to him in 1836 by two sealers.

The bearing given by him is the "iron church in line with the Tower Hill peak, well in the hummocks". He gave no cross bearing. The iron church referred to apparently no longer exists, but its site must be known, and so there is at least one rough bearing to define the supposed location of the ship.

Tower Hill is the most prominent landmark on that part of the coast. It is 300 feet in height, and is a peak thrown up by volcano agency in the centre of a fresh water lake. It is visible from seaward as a single conical peak.

## **WHAT BECAME OF CREW?**

What ship might it be? Here again, inquirers are left in the greatest doubt. It is nameless, and thus there is no clue upon which to work. It is traditionally known as the "Mahogany ship" or "Spanish wreck", and it has also been reported to be of cedar. Captain Mason, of Port Fairy, described it as resembling a large lighter, but a large lighter is a small ship, and, unfortunately, there are no dimensions available to determine the length, beam, and depth of the vessel, her particular rig and build, or what cargo, if any, was in her hold. Another point which has not been touched upon is the hearsay or legends regarding the fate of her crew.

## **OLD COIN AS CLUE**

One clue to which importance is attached is the alleged existence of a Spanish coin, bearing the date 1717, dug up from a garden in Hamilton, to which it had been carried by aborigines, who are said to have found it near the ship. Further particulars about this coin, while of interest, would not necessarily prove the wreck to have been a Spanish ship. Was it a gold, silver, or bronze coin, a peso, a piece of eight, or a real, and where is it now?

The time at which the ship was stranded appears to be based on aboriginal reports. If it were a Spanish ship, a search in the Spanish ship registers of the period might throw light on its name and its date of sailing, if it sailed from a Spanish port. Its non-return would probably be recorded, since its owners would cause inquiries to be made. If a King's ship, its non-return would be chronicled in the archives of the Spanish Admiralty.

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