

Isis 1892-1932

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[Diving The Wrecksite](#)

[Gallery](#) [Home](#) [Legislation](#) [Links](#) [Members](#) [Project Index](#)

The *Isis* was a timber, auxiliary, two-masted yacht built in 1892 for Mr C. H. Relph by Reeks of Berry's Bay, Sydney, for the sum of 14,000 pounds. Of length 84.5 ft, beam 13.6 ft, draught 9.4 ft and tonnage 71 tons (reg. Lloyds of London). The *Isis*'s 80 HP compound steam engine was replaced in 1921 by an oil engine.

Sold to Sir George Fairfax for 15,000 pounds, and subsequently to her last owner, Mr W. O. Buckland, managing director of William L. Buckland Pty Ltd. of Melbourne purchased from the estate of Mr Samuel Perry.

At the time of her wrecking the *Isis* was valued at 6,000 pounds. On Thursday 10 March 1932 the *Isis* was torn from her mooring at Frankston and swept onto a reef and sunk. According to the accounts of the day, a fierce gale occurred at 12.30 am and Mr W. Buckland, owner, Mr L. Thompson, captain, and Mr C. McClure, engineer, who were sleeping on board, had a narrow escape. The ship was over a quarter of a mile from shore in three fathoms of water when the gale struck, with winds of 60 to 70 miles per hour.



Sir George Fairfax's steam yacht *Isis*.
Illustration courtesy of The Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron

It was impossible to weigh anchor and eventually she was driven ashore. No attempt was made to leave the vessel until 2.15 am when she started to break up, and then the three men took to the dinghy. Rowing to shore in a howling storm was no easy matter with Mr Buckland injuring his leg whilst boarding the dinghy, and Mr McClure losing one oar due to the violent seas, but Mr Thomson managed to row through the heavy surf with one oar to the beach.

The *Isis* herself was blown ashore at a point 300 yards off the beach at Mornington Road, Frankston, where she was later stripped of all her fittings including the oil engine. Today the *Isis* lays approximately one mile west of

Kananook Creek in ten metres of water. Only the boiler and engine remain above the sand. Over the years the local fisherman and divers have taken their toll on the yacht but there appears to be some structure left under the sand that may be of interest to the MAAV in the future.

Frank Derksen

Further dives on the site have been conducted enabling us to assess the impact of commercial scallop dredging on such sites, as well as diver impact. We have put together a site sketch of the remains of the vessel.

Due to the large amount of damage evident on the *Isis* shipwreck site, there is no doubt that this site has been greatly disturbed in the past by commercial scallop dredging and recreational divers. It is quite well known that divers have dredged this site in the past, and this is obvious as the *Isis* holds little relic value. The carelessness of divers is illustrated by the way most fastenings have been removed. The impact of scallop dredging is the major threat to this site. The site lies in an area that in the past has often been worked by scallop fishermen and it is possible that further damage could be done if dredges work this area in the future. This activity has taken its toll on the site as large items such as the deck winch and bollard have been strewn around the site. The boiler has been shifted from its original position and there is no bow section visible forward of the boiler. Although the *Isis* has been greatly damaged in the past, it is still is an important site, as is any shipwreck, and bears a great deal of historical significance. The *Isis* being an Australian-built vessel as well as a fine example of Australian steamship building and is worthy of protection, which it currently does not have, and should therefore be protected under the Heritage Act.

The damage to the Hurricane site caused by scallop dredging makes evident the impact this activity has on our shipwrecks. Other wrecks known to be damaged include the *City of Launceston*, *Uralba* and *Eleutheria*. This leads to the question: how much damage has already been done to other vessels wrecked in the bay that have not yet been located in areas known to have been dredged? If we assume it is likely that these vessels have been damaged, it then leaves us little hope in ever locating such sites. A good example would be the wreck of the *Perseverance*, a small 21 ton timber vessel wrecked off Frankston in 1866, presumably in the vicinity of the *Isis*. If, for example, a scallop dredge had come in contact with the wreck of the *Perseverance*, due to its age and being such a small vessel, it is very unlikely that anything would remain, or what did remain would be scattered over such a large area it would be barely detectable.

Malcom Venturoni

- Do you have any comments or questions regarding the *Isis* project report?
- If you have dived on the *Isis* have you any comments concerning the site?
- Do you have any information / photographs historical or otherwise which you believe may be useful to the MAAV for inclusion in the project report?
- Full credit will be given to any material if published.

[Your comments are appreciated.](#)

References

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Last modified: June, 2011