

NEWSLETTER
SOUTH PACIFIC DIVERS
FEBRUARY 1988

THE DUNBAR-A POPULAR SYDNEY WRECK DIVE

The wind was howling in the riggings. Driving rain was sweeping the decks....and the angry sea was tossing the 1300 tonne Dunbar about like a cork.

James Johnson, able seaman was on his first voyage to Australia. Despite the gut feeling of impending doom he had no way of knowing that come morning he would be the lone survivor of the passengers and crewmen aboard.

And it had really been nobody's fault. Man had simply been pitted against elements his limited technology could not yet master.

Commanded by Captain James Green, the Dunbar had left England on May 31, 1857. After an uneventful voyage she arrived off Botany Bay, some 20 kilometres south of Sydney Heads, on August 20.

For the past few days, however, she had battled against a storm that had overtaken them without warning. As she approached Port Jackson the weather showed no signs of easing. Heavy seas were running, the wind was blowing a gale from the south-east. Visibility was poor.

As the vessel beat her way through the gloom towards the entrance to Port Jackson the weather worsened, obliterating the land. When darkness closed in visibility dropped to almost zero.

All hands were working feverishly on deck preparing the ship for entry to port. By 11.30 p.m. Green probably believed that his ship was still about 10 kilometres from Sydney Heads when, in fact, she was within four...

"Breakers ahead! Breakers ahead! We're heading straight for them!" came the frantic cry from the lookout.

Green instantly realised that he was dangerously close to South Head, about halfway between Macquarie Lighthouse and the Gap.

"Hard to starboard! Hard to starboard!" he yelled, desperately trying to swing the ship away from the ominously beckoning rocks and the white, foaming breakers.

But with the wind lashing at her from the south-east and the heavy sea forcing the vessel to leeward, he realised in

despair that he had run out of room to manoeuvre. Impossible now to change course, the doomed ship struck the rocks with a grinding, sickening crunch.

The force of the sea swung her round and hurled her broadside-on against the base of the cliffs.

She struck with such force that the top of the mast snapped and went crashing into the sea. The first wave that struck spewed over the Dunbar's starboard side like a huge, curling tongue of foam, sweeping away passengers and crew, boats, bulwarks and masts.

No ship could withstand such a battering for long. Within minutes she had split asunder, and the savage cruel and merciless sea pounded her to pieces.

Johnson and three other men tried to reach the shore clinging to a large plank, but the sea was so rough that only he had the strength to hang on. Reaching the shore he spent a cold, fearful night on a ledge with the sea thundering beneath him.

When morning came he tried to make his way along the cliff, knowing that people were above him. But unable to attract their attention, he was exposed to the fury of the weather. More dead than alive, he was trapped on the ledge for nearly 36 hours before being rescued by a 15-year old apprentice jeweller, Antonio Woollier, who had joined the throngs of curious spectators who had come to view the wreck.

They pulled Johnson to safety, wet and blue with the cold and so shocked he could hardly speak.

Bodies were seen floating in the water being dashed against the rocks. The sea was so heavy that every time a wave crashed against the toe of the cliffs it shot spray high into the air and over the men grimly watching on top of the cliffs, searching with sad eyes for signs of life.

For weeks the shores of Middle Harbour and Manly were covered with wreckage. Two boys, Daniel and William Wheatley, found the ship's Bible at Forty Baskets Beach. Cricket bats were found at Watsons Bay, and the shores of Middle Harbour, where most of the debris was washed up, were a tangle of timber, candles, hats, bonnets and drums of pork, figs and ham.

Among the litter was a small piece of crochet work with the needle stuck in it and a cotton reel attached as though it had only been laid aside minutes before the Dunbar ran aground.

Many of the bodies were never recovered and identification of a number of those found was impossible. A common grave was opened at Camperdown Cemetery near St. Stephens Church, Newtown. To this grave were later added bodies lost in the wreck of the Catherine Adamson that foundered after entering the Heads on October 24 of the same year. The remains of one hapless soul from the Dunbar were buried near Manly Beach.

The inquest found that the loss of the Dunbar was due largely to the rapid leeway the vessel had made between Botany Bay and Sydney Heads and "not to any mistake on the master's part in confusing the Gap with the entrance to the harbour."

It also found that "there may have been an error of judgement in the vessel being so close to the shore at night in such bad weather" but it did "not attach any blame to Captain Green or his officers for the loss of the Dunbar."

Earlier, the masters of 35 ships in Port Jackson at the time the vessel was lost jointly stated that Green's action in bearing up for the port was a "sensible" one, and had they been placed in a similar situation they would have done exactly what he had tried to do - "run for the harbour."

Meanwhile, Johnson had been left wondering why he had been singled out by the fates when everyone else aboard the Dunbar had perished.

He satisfied himself by saying that his time was not yet up. What other explanation could there have been for such extraordinary fortune?

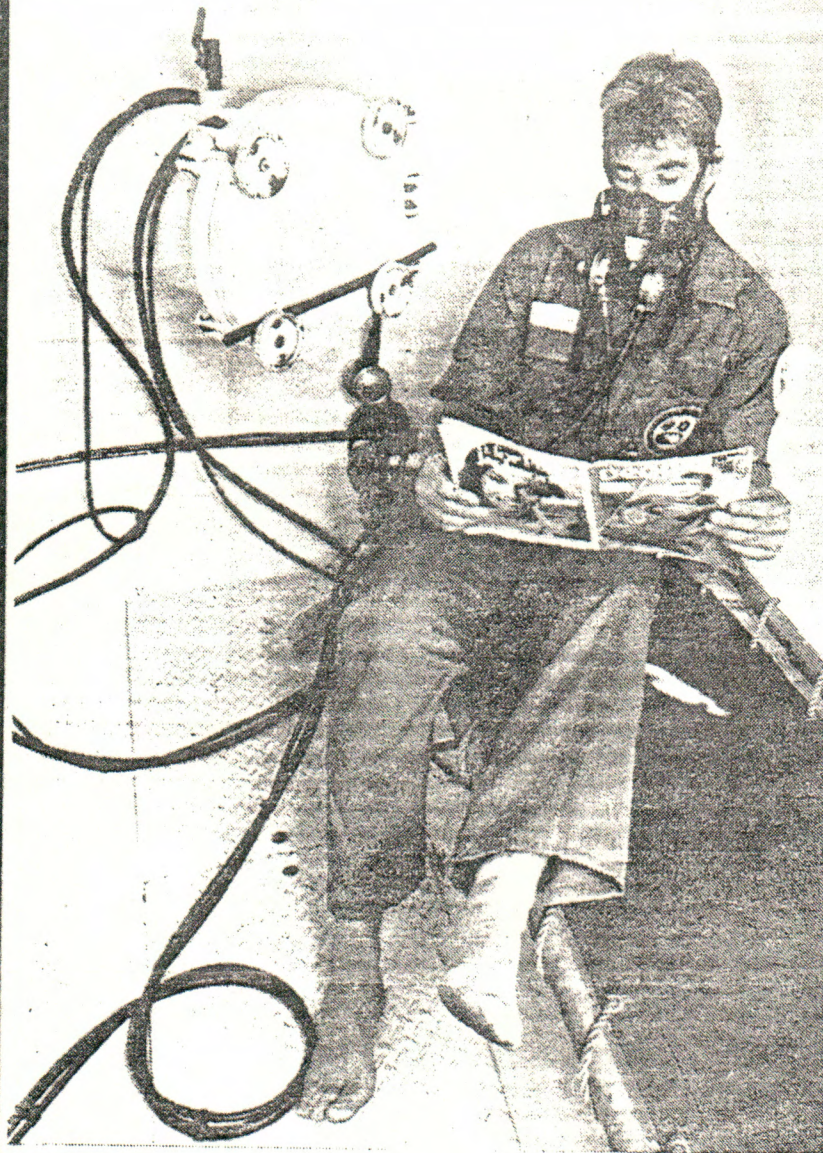
Afterwards he was employed at Nobby's Lighthouse, Newcastle. While there the Cawarra, a steamship, was wrecked on nearby Oyster Bank on July 12, 1866, when trying to enter port during an easterly gale.

Of the 61 people on board there was only one survivor ... his rescuer was James Johnson. At Lewisham in 1915, aged 78, Johnson died.

The Dunbar's anchor was recovered over 50 years after the tragedy and placed on the cliffs at Watsons Bay where, in 1930, a memorial tablet was added. In June, 1955 - 98 years after the ship was wrecked - Sydney skindivers located her remains and recovered numerous relics.

Well that is the story of the Dunbar. If you want to learn more about the Dunbar and wrecks in general come along to the WRECK SEMINAR on the 26th and 27th of February and the 4th and 5th of March. More details available at the next club meeting.

GEARED TO BEAT BENDS



An Illawarra diving firm will set up a permanent recompression chamber at Albion Park after returning from a six-day Queensland contract near Mackay this month.

The \$130,000 unit will be the only permanent chamber between Victoria and Sydney when installed on the Albion Park farm.

Les Griffin, of Southern Commercial Divers, said his crew would be brought up from depths around 60m when laying concrete bags on power lines between resort islands.

"They'll be brought straight up and put into the chamber with oxygen masks — it will take about two hours to return them to sea level pressure," he said.

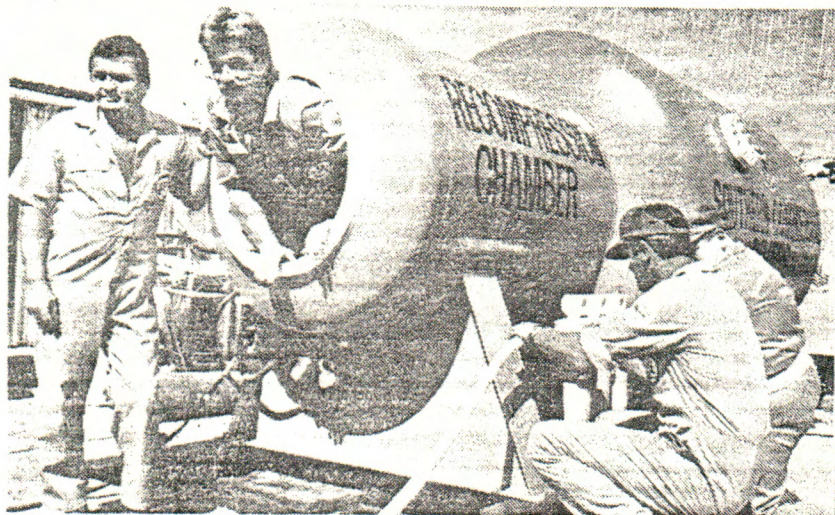
Boon for divers

"However, divers must be placed in the chamber within five minutes of surfacing. Otherwise, they suffer the bends."

The bends, a condition divers suffer when they surface too quickly, is caused by formation of nitrogen bubbles in the blood.

"We can sit six, squash eight or lay three inside the unit," Mr Griffin said.

● **LEFT:** Dapto diver Barry Grugan gets the feel of the \$130,000 recompression unit.



● Les Griffin helps Barry Grugan escape the confines of the chamber while Lyle Poppitt and Jamie Griffin check filters.

MINUTES OF MEETING OF SOUTH PACIFIC
DIVERS HELD 18.1.88 AT BANKSTOWN
SPORTS CLUB

Meeting opened at 8.12 p.m by the President, Jim Smith.

APOLOGIES.

Gary and Miriam Roberts, Larry King, Bob Lewis,
Tony Martin, John Blaszcak.

VISITORS.

N. Marsh, J. Crate, Gerald Browne, S. Wolleswinkel.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING.

Read and accepted (Colwell/Kandelas).

TREASURER'S REPORT.

Cheque account balance	\$ 663.21
Incoming	\$1224.00
Outgoing	\$ 794.47
Petty Cash	\$ 20.00
Balance in fixed term deposit	\$3000.00

CORRESPONDENCE.

INCOMING.

- . Staging Connections:
 - Credit for use of our own carousel trays \$105.00.
- . Taronga Zoo.
 - Details of Christmas/January activities.
- . Australian Underwater Federation.
 - . Diver Emergency Service (DES)
 - . Club Insurance.
 - . Project Stickybeak - diving accidents.
Order reports (1984-5).
 - . Report of Abalone Search Conference -
October - requires Government support
of industry. Also serious penalties
for amateurs breaching fisheries
guidelines.
- . Bank Statement.
- . Fun Dive - 'details' of new Sydney wrecks
(two 190 ft. and 160 ft.)
- . Australian Museum.
 - . Address of Adam Donalson.
 - . Organising photographic competition.

- . Sports Suits Australia.
 - . Two promotional suits of new design (available for raffle).
- . Newsletter.
 - . Brisbane Water Aqualung Club.
- . Newsletter.
 - . Ryde Underwater Club.
- . Down Under Dive.
 - . Whitsundays Diving.
- . C Cat.
 - . Details of closed circuit aquatic television.
- . Sea Safety.
 - . Magazines 'Safety at Sea'.
 - . Calendars.

(From Federal Sea Safety and Surveillance Centre).

OUTGOING.

- . Change of address - Ryde Underwater Club.

SOCIAL ORGANISER.

Thanks to Annie and Rick Latimer for use of their house as a venue for our Christmas Party. The party made a profit of \$237.00.

Also, a weekend dive trip has been arranged for the 12th, 13th and 14th February, at Bristol Point. The cost is \$8.50 and includes camping fees and dinner.

PUBLICITY OFFICER.

After next month's "Wet Rag" is received only financial members will receive the Club's newsletter.

PHOTOGRAPHIC OFFICER.

A "fish photography" competition will be arranged as soon as practical. This will involve each participant photographing as many fish as possible on a given day. Details of this contest are given later on in the newsletter and will also be available at the next club meeting.

FIVE REPORTS.

Penny Smith organised a group of 14 club members early in January to dive the Tuggerah. The dive boat was the Aqua Venture and it took it nearly three hours to find and anchor on the wreck. It resulted in Martin Kandelas "fuming" Vicki Colwell being very sick and a standing ovation from two fishermen once the boat was anchored.

Kathy McDermott and others dived Jervis Bay during the Christmas and January period. The water was very cold and often very dirty. The grey nurse sharks have been seen frequently at the Docks plus the occasional sunfish.

Lyn and Pat Manly and Jim Smith spent six weeks in New Guinea. The first four weeks involved filming (movie) a B52 bomber - Blackjack. The plane was intact and located in 150 ft. Jim was divemaster and "camera-carrier". The filming went successfully but the food became in short supply after a few weeks. However, they managed to endure and spent the last two weeks at Walindi - where Jim was joined by Wendy.

Entries in the third and final round of the George Roberts Memorial Trophy were shown. Slides were also shown by Neil Vincent and Rick James.

THE MEETING FINISHED AT 10.20 P.M.

SOUTH PACIFIC NOTES

* Things are a little quiet on the club scene at the moment with most people still recovering from Xmas and the following celebrations in January. There are some good dives organised especially the Jervis Bay weekend on the 13th and 14th of February. Contact Penny or Miriam if you require further details.

* Halifax Park at Port Stephens has also been booked for the 10th and 11th of June. It may seem a bit far away but write it down in anyway because it is a great dive especially for the photographers.

* The photo 'fishing' comp will be on the 13th of March at Bass point starting at 9.00am and final film should be in by 2.00pm. The price will be \$10.00 and this will include a sausage sizzle in the afternoon. Each entrant will be supplied with one roll of film on the day and the exposed film will be processed on the day. Each species counts once only but you can have as many different fish in each photo as will fit, provided they can be properly identified. Points will be awarded on a sliding scale of hardness to find eg. a blue devil fish will rate higher points than a leatherjacket or similar common fish. All standards of photographers are welcome so get your gear ready.

* Anyone who has ideas on dives they would like to do let's hear from you at the club meetings. Normally there will be some people ready to dive no matter how ridiculous the dive location seems. So don't be afraid to ask.

* This is a good time to let all members know that Aqua Sports have been donating the prizes for our raffle held at all club meetings. These have either been a boat dive or a hydro test. We thank Glen Percy for his generosity and hope club members will remember Aqua Sports (probably the best stocked dive shop in Sydney) when they are in the market for any dive equipment or helpful information on diving in general.

The winners of the last club raffle were Gerald Browne and Tracey Crate both new club members so a good way to start the year.

*****FOR SALE*****

Sea and Sea 18mm lens and viewfinder (including case).
Absolutely perfect condition \$850
Contact John Mcdermott at the next club meeting or phone
726-0982 a.h.

*****WANTED*****

Articles for the newsletter. Someone must have some interesting stories to tell. I will even correct the spelling if needed. See Neil Koos at club meeting.

The next club meeting is on the 15th of August at Bankstown Sports Club 8.00am in the Function Room. Excellent dinner available at the snack bar downstairs at a reasonable price. More and more people turn up for dinner every month.

LAST MINUTE NEWS. - WRECK SEMINAR

The Rick Latimer School of Wreck Diving is underway. Rick + Lyn Manly have organised the seminar for March, so if your interested in learning how to wreck dive safely and confidently be at the next club meeting for details of venues, costs, and dates.

*****FOR SALE*****

ADV Style BC 1 LARGE - BLUE & YELLOW TUSA
1 MED - BLUE & PINK TUSA \$195.00ea
CONTACT Pat Manly phone 728 6808 a.h.