In 1862 John McDouall Stuart made his journey from South Australia pushing his way northwards across the continent. Two years previously A.C. Gregory had probed his way from Port Curtis along the Burdekin and Gilbert Rivers, across the lands bordering the southern waters of the Gulf of Carpentaria and across the base of Arnhem Land. These virgin areas, partly traversed by Stuart and Gregory were then to be had. Logically they did not belong to New South Wales but rather to the neighbouring colonies of South Australia and Queensland. The new colony of Queensland did not seek to acquire them, but South Australia wanted to protect its hinterland and rear flank. In anticipation of a more sensible arrangement of boundaries, Westminster passed the Australian Colonies Act, 1861 which provided the constitutional machinery for more territory to be detached from New South Wales and annexed to South Australia and Queensland. A satisfactory rearrangement of boundaries was agreed upon, and in 1862 Queensland extended her boundary westward from 141° to 138° and in 1863 the Crown formally annexed to South Australia the territory now known as the Northern Territory — a huge 523,620 square miles!

South Australia was no longer confined to southern Australia — it included a northern portion of Australia which protruded into the middle of the Arafura Sea. The name ‘South Australia’ thus became inappropriate and the newly annexed area was given the sub-title of ‘Northern Territory of South Australia’.

To administer the functions of Government, staff were transferred from Adelaide. Transportation of staff grew, and the most expedient

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Mr McInnes, partner in a legal firm at Cairns, and a deeply-read student of Australia’s northern history, has done extensive research into the loss of the Gothenburg.
was by sea — a long haul — a month’s voyage. From the fledgling town of Palmerston (Darwin) the preferred course was across the wide mouth of the Gulf of Carpentaria, through Torres Strait, down the whole length of the eastern coast of Australia and through Bass Strait. In 1875, the Northern Territory of South Australia was presided over by a Resident who received his authority by telegram over the land line from Adelaide nearly 2000 miles to the south. The newly constructed overland telegraph line was of major importance to all the Australia colonies, for it linked not merely Palmerston and Adelaide but the Australian colonies with Europe.

While men were sinking holes for the telegraph posts, gold was found and gold seekers swarmed to places like Yam Creek and Pine Creek. Although the gold boom was brief, the frontier consequences soon required on-the-spot administration of law and justice, and the first sittings of the Supreme Court of South Australia at Palmerston was convened. Mr. Justice Wearing, a Judge of the Supreme Court of South Australia, living in Adelaide, was asked by his Government to preside at this sitting. He was offered a bonus to do so, which he declined but asked that an extra payment be made on his insurance policy. Mr Justice Wearing, his associate Mr. Pelham and the Crown Prosecutor, Mr. Whitby travelled from Adelaide to Palmerston. Early in 1875 the Circuit Court concluded its sittings and its members prepared to return to Adelaide.

The Gothenburg had regularly plied between Adelaide and Port Darwin under charter to the South Australian Government. Its Captain, R.G.A. Pearce had made the journey several times and indeed after a journey in October, 1873, its 47 passengers placed a front-page advertisement in the Northern Territory Times and Government Gazette thanking Pearce for his ‘constant vigilance and well known ability as a seaman’.

Gothenburg was a coal-burning propeller-driven iron steamer and she was also barque rigged with three masts for sails. Originally when launched from Lungley’s building yards in Milwall, London, in 1854 she was named the Celt and was 459 tons. Her first owner was Balgarve of Rotterdam and she was intended to ply between London and Rotterdam. Her length was 176 feet, beam 26 feet and depth 16 feet 6 inches, with four water-tight bulkheads. For 12 years after leaving the stocks the Celt was classed A1. In 1862 Blackwood of Melbourne purchased her for the Australian trade, and in that year she made a protracted voyage from England to Melbourne under sail. In 1865 her ownership was amended to McMechan & Blackwood. Employed in the Australian intercolonial passenger trade, she quickly acquired the reputation of a good — but not fast — sea boat. In 1873 she was lengthened by 20 feet and her registered
dimensions became 196 feet 6 inches x 28 feet 2 inches x 20 feet 5 inches. Her tons gross were 737, her net 501 and her new engines developed 120 hp.

Pearce, as her captain on the Adelaide-Darwin run, built up a solid reputation. He was an experienced man of the sea, a man of sobriety and kindness and was respected by his fellow sea captains. Early in 1875 when the Gothenburg arrived at Port Darwin, the grateful passengers presented him with another address because ‘in seas studded, like those through which we have just passed, with a thousand islands and rocks; with winds the most contrary, with fogs and storms prevailing as on our present trip, we have cause to be, and are, most thankful that owing to your constant watchfulness we have been prevented from ever feeling uneasy’.

When the first Circuit Court concluded the members of the legal party wished to return to Adelaide. Others wishing to leave Palmerston included the French Vice-Consul Monsieur Durand (he was also agent for the Gothenburg), the Hon. T. Reynolds, a former Premier of South Australia and his wife, the Palmerston medical officer Dr. Millner, his wife and their daughters, a Mrs. Prince and her five children, members of an overland telegraph construction party, Commander A. Ross, R.N. (grandson of the Polar navigator) and Mr. R. Wells, editor of the Northern Territory Times.

On Wednesday 17 February 1875 the Gothenburg, laden with coal, sailed from Port Darwin on a routine voyage, with a full complement of passengers. Some had heavy money belts around their waists; some had their whole life savings on them in cash, gold and cheques. M. Durand carried with him a tin box containing sovereigns and coins worth 3000 pounds. Her mixed cargo included large parts of the wreck of the schooner Enchantress on her deck while the spars of the Enchantress were lashed to each side of the Gothenburg. In the safety of the captain’s cabin was a box containing 2500 ounces of newly won smelted gold.

In three days of fine weather she covered the 900 miles to Somerset where she stopped to take on ballast, anchoring in the wild waters of Albany Pass. On 20 February while still taking on ballast the weather started to blow and she parted two chains and lost both her bower anchors and a quantity of chains. One saloon passenger, a Jew named Simon Lizzar, carrying a small fortune in his money belt, became terrified as other passengers told him they were about to be wrecked on shore. Steam had been kept up which enabled Gothenburg to avoid being run ashore.

After this loss of anchors Gothenburg was forced to prematurely steam out seven miles where she brought up for the night. She sailed next morning with insufficient ballast southwards. Cooktown was
passed about 2 o’clock on 23 February. About midday on 24th high
land, Cape Cleveland, was abeam at a distance of between 10 and 12
miles. This was to be their last sighting of land.

February 1875 brought an extremely heavy wet season along the
whole of the eastern coast of Queensland. The Burdekin and
Wickham Rivers broke their banks and a huge volume of fresh
poured down, thrusting its way out to sea. The heavy wet also had as
one of its companions a severe cyclone which struck in the last week
of February. At the same time floods were bringing down telegraph
lines to the north and south of Rockhampton and Brisbane and
Mackay, severing communications.

The Western coming down from Cooktown exchanged signals
with the Gothenburg. The Western, closer to the shore, noted a
strong current setting seawards from the mouths of the Burdekin and
Wickham. On that afternoon the wind was fresh and from the north­
west, and the weather squally and threatening. Blinding sheets of
rain set in and it soon became a heavy gale accompanied by thunder
and lightning.

Gothenburg’s engines were at full speed — she had a full head of
steam on; her foresail, topsail and mainstaysail were all set; she was
making a handsome 10 or 11 knots. The weather continued to blow
hard and became so thick that there was no glimpse of the sun.
Unable to sight either land or sun, Pearce ignored other means of
checking his position and he ignored prevailing sailing directions —
his watchfulness had left him!

From a point just east of Palm Island the prescribed track for the
next 80 miles was SE by E one quarter E (about 121°). Then the
course changed to E by S one half E (about 96°). After 10 miles on
the new course a ship would be nine miles off shore with Mt. Abbott
and Cape Upstart in line. Gothenburg’s course from 10 a.m. to noon
was S.E. half E. (about 129°) but five minutes before his trick
finished, helmsman David Wylie received orders from Pearce to
change course to E.S.E. (about 112°). At noon Pearce threw the
patent log in the sea and altered course a quarter eastward (about
110°).

At four beHs the Gothenburg was continuing with all sails set, with
the wind blowing fresh and full speed with engines. At about 6 p.m.
the top gallant sail was taken off. Stewart Andrew, a passenger,
noticed the second mate on the bridge looking anxiously to windward — the wind was blowing on the port quarter and a squall was
coming up. He left the bridge, came back with the chief mate and
both peered to windward. After speaking together with the chief
mate they went below. The Gothenburg was far too far to the east,
and miles off course. Instead of being nine miles from Cape Upstart
she was more than 25 miles from that cape and was tracking direct to seas studded with thousands of rocks!

The rough seas continued but suddenly the ship began to go steady and sailed in smooth water — an ominous sign which was ignored! For ten minutes the calmness lasted, to the relief of the passengers. At low water at about 6.30 p.m., with a full head of steam on, she suddenly struck with such force as to send her high up on a reef. She drew 16 ft. 6 in. yet her bow finished up in 2 ft. of water.

It was a fearful night — a heavy north-west gale, thunder, lightning and blinding rain — yet the situation was not taken seriously. There were no life rafts and there was a shortage of life boats, but no attempt was made to knock the extensive remnants of the Enchantress into life rafts. Pearce and his officers made light of it and assured all she would get off at high water, due at 11 p.m. Pearce ordered the Gothenburg to be lightened forward. Water casks used as ballast and passengers were brought aft and the engines reversed to full astern — but she did not back off. Further unsuccessful attempts were made between 9 p.m. and 10 p.m. on the rising tide. Up to 11 p.m., Pearce was confident of getting her off and his confidence was accepted by
all! Steadily the sea and wind increased, often blowing in furious squalls — yet still no real anxiety was expressed.

As the gale increased the ship began to thump and grind heavily on the reef. About midnight she commenced to leak, and at 1 a.m. the seas started to break on board, extinguishing the engine room fires. Some preliminary precautions were then taken. Boats were lowered to the gunwhale and provisioned with biscuits, water and tarpaulins for sails. The false atmosphere of tranquility continued to prevail, and all still appeared to believe that they and the ship would get off.

John Marks, one of the crew, in his description of the events that night, reflects the apparent lack of concern. He stated:

“The passengers and all on board were ordered by the Captain to go aft, and the engines were kept going astern all night, one man attending to the wheel another to the lead, the rest mostly turned in. About 3 o'clock next morning one of the mates called all hands on deck and ordered the foretopsail to be set. We went up to loose it but were ordered down again. The ship at this time was on her beam ends.”

David Harris, a passenger, was later to record:

“I tried to get a few hours sleep but the wind increased to a perfect gale, and the steamer was bumping heavily which began to look serious although the passengers were as quiet and cool as though sailing along in fine weather.”

Around 3 a.m. on 25 February the wind changed and slewed the Gothenburg around. She got broadside to the reef and was keeling over to deep water. Even at that stage some passengers remained below and did not come on deck. Among those were the Hon. T. Reynolds and his wife. The two port boats — a gig and a lifeboat — were lowered with four crew members in each. In the gig were lamp trimmer William Burns, coal trimmer Joseph Hudson, fore cabin steward Harry Nelson, and Able Seaman Salvon Hermansoon. It was an unusual choice. Out of all the competent hands on board, only one able seaman was chosen to manoeuvre the gig. The life boat — the biggest boat — broke its painter and was carried away. Its crew tried hard to pull up to the ship's side but could not in the heavy squall.

Pearce ordered the gig to stand by and she struggled to remain there — level with the ship's rail one moment and the next way down in the trough of the sea, in serious danger of being swamped. Pearce ordered them to row around the vessel in readiness to take on passengers, and while attempting to do so they encountered a rapid eddy and were carried away by a heavy sea. Desperately they tried to return to the ship but could not in the heavy seas. Nelson was knocked
overboard and miraculously recovered — but his oar was lost. Hudson's oar broke, leaving only two oars in the gig, making a return to the Gothenburg impossible and she drifted away. This left two small lifeboats and over 120 on board. These two were inadequate and were jammed in their davits, high on the starboard side with the port side of the Gothenburg awash.

It was then about 3.30 a.m. on Thursday 25 February. Gothenburg continued to heel over. The deck became so steep passengers and crew had to climb over the rails to get on her side. The passengers showed signs of fright. Another heavy squall hit, bringing up a heavy sea which rushed down the hatchways and into the cabins. Some boxes, planks and all sorts of litter were floating in the sea together with sheep, dogs and articles of clothing.

At about 4 a.m. she shipped the first real sea, and the two remaining boats were lowered and were rushed by the passengers. As frightened passengers got into one lifeboat a sea crashed over, half filling the boat and washing an infant from its mother's arms. At one brief moment there were 50 people in two lifeboats. A huge sea struck, capsizing both lifeboats and washing the occupants away and at the same time taking many others from the ship's side and plunging them into the water. There was a sea of heads, and in their midst two capsized boats. One survivor reported:

"The men and women met death fearlessly ... when they were struggling in the water they were wishing each other goodbye as if they were leaving for a short time."

The only case of loud lamenting was from a man whose gold belt was strapped around his waist. Some managed to get hold of one boat whose bow was then split open. They tore it adrift, and with six men and one woman on its upturned bottom it was last seen in the flashes of lightning, righted and drifting away, without oars, without food and without water. Its nearly naked occupants were never seen again.

Mr. Justice Wearing was the first to be washed over. M. Durand went below and retrieved his money box, which he clutched under his arm declaring he would climb on to the main mast. As he reached the main rigging the sea carried him away with his money box. Charlie Lebane and Simon Lizzar both had heavy money belts around their waists, and as the sea caught them their weighty fortunes plunged them to the bottom. David Harris had carried with him for some hours a piece of rope, thinking it might be useful. He now used it to lash himself to the rails. John Cleland, a passenger, was washed into the angry sea. As the mass of heads floated away, Cleland swam for his life and reached the upturned lifeboat, still tied to the Gothenburg. There briefly catching his breath, he continued his swim for
life and reached the rigging of the mainmast. In ten brief minutes over 100 had been washed away or trapped in their water-filled cabins.

Crewman Robert Brazil was one of the heroes that night, and so too were passengers John Cleland and J. Fitzgerald. Brazil grabbed a signal halyard and by continuously heaving it out he hauled three men to the doubtful safety of the riggings. Harris, lashed to the rail, found himself in a terrible situation. The seas swept over him and he could not untie himself. Finally he dragged himself through the loop around his body and crawled up to the fore part of the ship, which was a little higher. He sought the foremost to gain a few more moments of living, as he believed it was only a matter of brief time before all masts would be under!

For the 14 on the masts — ten on the foremost and four on the main — and lashed to the rigging, as the ship keeled over, their only hope of salvation was in the upturned lifeboat tied to the Gothenburg. Cleland swam to the lifeboat with a rope which he tied to it. He then tried to cut the painter but could not. Fitzgerald and Brazil joined in the attempt. In the confusion they succeeded in righting and securing the boat, turning her over and exposing her priceless four oars securely lashed inside.

The weather continued, and for more than a day they stayed lashed to the masts and rigging as if in crucifixion, cramped waiting and praying for finer weather. The next evening the rains and winds were as hard and as penetrating as ever. At low tide the Gothenburg grinded and twisted and broke between the fore and main masts. A glimpse of relief came at 3 a.m. on 26th to the cold survivors. The sky cleared and the moon shone brightly; land could be seen and the wind and the waves calmed themselves a little.

By 6 a.m. the lifeboat was retrieved and bailed out. An oar was planted for a mast; a sail fashioned out of the foretop gallant; their bailer was a sou'wester. In the calmer but still rough seas the 14 cramped men cut loose from the Gothenburg. Fitzgerald, Brazil and Cleland continued as leaders and were the driving forces as they sought asylum from the cyclonic waves.

Meanwhile the gig with its crew of four had run before the wind and sea. At 2 p.m. on Thursday 25th they sighted Holbourne Island some 15 miles from Bowen, and for three desperate hours they tried to land there but the sea did not acquiesce. They were swept across the wide mouth of Edgcumbe Bay which houses Bowen, and by 7 p.m. in a clearing sky they saw Cape Gloucester, but after two hours gave up their attempt to land there. Next morning, off Armit Island, they were picked up by the steamer Leichhardt, then en route from Cooktown to Brisbane. Leichhardt had left Cooktown at 7.40 p.m. on
Monday 22 February. After calling at Cardwell and Townsville she arrived at Bowen at 6 p.m. on Thursday 25th. She left Bowen at 4.40 a.m. on 26th and four hours later picked up the gig with its four survivors. This was to be the first report of the shipwreck.

_Leichhardt_ immediately reversed course back towards the wreck, passing but not calling into Bowen and yet signalled to Bowen news of the disaster! She reached the wreck at 3.30 p.m. on Friday 26th. The chief officer and four hands went alongside but not a soul was left. A ladies’ shawl, a muffler and a mattress were tied to the yard-arm as a sign of distress.

_Gothenburg_ was an utter wreck. The funnel was gone and she had sunk to the eyes of the lower rigging. At the time of striking the reef she was steering S.E., E half E but when the _Leichhardt_ got up to her, her head was to the N.E. — slewed around by the wind and sea. From the position of her masts she appeared to have slipped off the reef, probably at low water.

The Bowen bellman cried out and spread the news and a meeting was convened to organise rescue ships. While floods had severed communications to the south, the north was still open and Townsville was advised of the calamity by telegram. Its harbour master James Gordon engaged the steamer _Bunyip_ for rescue work and she soon found other vessels in distress. At Cape Bowling Green she found the pilot steamer _Isabella_ and the schooner _Black Diamond_, both stranded by the cyclone but salvageable.

_Leichhardt_ searched for survivors until the last light, then returned to Bowen, and thereafter resumed her southern voyage. At No.1 Bunker, _Leichhardt_ encountered the _Norseman_, also wrecked by the same cyclone. _Norseman_ of 100 tons was on her way from England to Rockhampton. On this occasion _Leichhardt_ was able to rescue all hands and took them safely to Brisbane. Captain James of the _Norseman_ related that on the night of the cyclone the wind and rain blinded all who attempted to face it and that the fury of the wind and sea were almost inconceivable. In the same terrific weather the steamers _Brisbane_ and _Governor Blackall_ lost all their deck cargo.

The four men in the port lifeboat reached Holbourne Island, where their boat was smashed on the rocks. They commenced building a life raft. Shortly after, the last lifeboat containing the 14 from the rigging also reached the same island. The first group found about 400 sea bird’s eggs and all had a feed of raw eggs. A sail was in the distance but they could not attract it. They succeeded in drying a few matches and soon had the comfort of a fire. On Saturday they found another 100 eggs and caught three or four dozen sea birds which came in to roost on low trees.
The dangerous Nares Rock two miles to the south, placed Holbourne Island off the main shipping track. On Sunday 28 February, 15 of them set off in the boat to an island about 20 miles to the south which seemed to be more in the track of ships. Wylie, Roberts and Fitzgerald were left behind. Rescue was uncertain, and to establish their survival to Holbourne Island they recorded their 18 names on the concave side of a turtle shell while on the converse side they wrote “Life Log — Holbourne Island”. They added the cutting words “long way E of our course”. In fact they had been an incredible 15 miles off course!

Robert Heron, a searcher from Bowen, picked up the group of 15 and took them safely to Bowen. The Bunyip subsequently rescued the three men remaining on Holbourne Island.

Tortoise shell left at Holbourne Island by survivors. Original shell is in S.A. Art Gallery, Adelaide.

Official figures showed a total of officers and crew and passengers on board was 124 — but there was a stowaway, Henry Hazel, making a final complement of 125. Only 22 men survived, the four rescued by Leichhardt, 15 by Robert Heron and three by Bunyip. No woman nor a child was saved.

Brisbane finally learnt of the tragedy on 1 March when Leichhardt arrived there. The telegraph line south of Brisbane was down, so Adelaide did not learn of the disaster until 3 March. Adelaide was stunned! The news first came through to that city by the electric telegraph. On its initial receipt the South Australian postmaster-
general and superintendent of telegraph Charles Todd (later Sir Charles Todd) woke up the editor of the Adelaide *Evening Journal*. Todd was quick to realise the depths of the implications of the shipwreck in both South Australia and Palmerston. The early details were meagre and tantalising. The citizens were starved for any news of their next of kin and friends. News they desperately sought. As a temporary measure, Todd halved telegraphic rates. There was a huge upsurge of work in the telegraph department, particularly during the first day and night. With three operators and a staff supervisor working through the night until 4 a.m., news of the wreck was telegraphed to Port Darwin and to all stations in South Australia.

One of the first telegrams to be despatched was from the South Australian Government beseeching the Queensland Government to spare no expense in sending a steamer to the wreck. When the *Leichhardt* reached Sydney, Todd arranged for the interrogation by morse code telegram of Burns, a survivor on board the *Leichhardt*, and also of the first officer of the *Leichhardt*. Such was the concern of South Australia that with Todd during this interrogation was the Chief Secretary, the Treasurer, the Attorney-General and the Commissioner for Lands. The questions and answers of this interrogation were widely reported verbatim. Burns was asked: 'Would the remaining boats be able to take the passengers and crew' and he gave the awesome reply: 'The remaining boats could not possibly have taken the remaining passengers and crew'. The Adelaide *Evening Journal* tried to gloss over this and allay the fears of its readers by stressing that this answer was only an opinion and not a fact.

Adelaide went into mourning — its churches were draped and congregations wore black. In Palmerston the tragedy occupied nearly an entire issue of the Northern Territory *Times and Government Gazette* complete with a black-bordered editorial which stated: 'A terrible calamity has fallen on the settlement. Every house has become one of affliction and every man a mourner'. All at Port Darwin seemed to have relations or friends on board. In Adelaide a relief fund was started. The city and suburbs were divided into divisions, and each business and house was visited for donations. Many relief fund concerts were held. Darwin contributed to the fund, and a fund was also started in Melbourne. The fund soon exceeded 8000 pounds.

Mr G.F. Sandrock, Shipping Inspector at Bowen, held an enquiry into the circumstances attending the loss of the *Gothenburg*. He submitted the evidence and his report to the Marine Board of Queensland for its consideration. On 5 April, that Board, through its chairman, Commander G.P. Heath (the Port Master of Queensland) handed down its findings:
"The Board are of the opinion that the loss of the Gothenburg may in a great measure be attributed to an unexpected offset seawards, caused by heavy floods in the Burdekin and other rivers discharging themselves into the sea at that portion of the coast; at the same time they do not consider that due caution was observed in the navigation of the vessel, as they are of the opinion that some attempt should have been made to sight Cape Bowling Green Lighthouse, or Cape Upstart, and failing that, that the lead should have been used, which on this part of the coast is a sufficient guide for keeping clear of the Barrier; a vessel carrying a depth not exceeding 15 or 16 fathoms being well clear of that danger, while a less depth would show an approach to the shore of the mainland.

In conclusion, the Board feel that they cannot too strongly impress upon masters of vessels navigating this portion of the coast, the advisability of keeping the mainland on board and at the same time, the useless risk that is run by attempting to borrow upon the Barrier, of the approach to which often no warning is given, and where a casualty must be attended with a maximum amount of danger both to life and property."

These findings, tempered by the agony of the terrible loss of life, were kind to the drowned Pearce. The negligence of Pearce required harsher findings. But the drama of the wreck of the Gothenburg still had much more to unfold. There was the box of gold; there was M. Durand's tin of coins and sovereigns worth 3000 pounds; there were the money belts, and there were the jewels and other valuables of the victims.

Captain William Collin, the owner of the ketch Dawn, was interested in attempting salvage. He knew Gothenburg, her captain and crew well. In the previous year while beaconing the inner route, Collin frequently spoke to Gothenburg and he had relied on her for mail and stores for his ketch and crew. His crew agreed to join his salvage venture on a share basis. Samuel Dunwoodie of Brisbane, a diver by profession, also agreed to join Collin. The Government of Queensland then owned a complete diving apparatus, and Collin advanced Dunwoodie money to pay the rent of such apparatus. Alfred Harwood of Brisbane, the Master of the schooner Countess of Belmore, also joined them. After procuring a wrecker's licence from the Collector of Customs in Brisbane he set sail, arriving at the wreck on 26 March. There at high water her main was 46 feet high from the deck, her cross trees were about 10 feet out of the water, the lee side thereof awash, her foreyard which was 34 feet high above the deck was about four feet out of the water. Her stern was in about 10 fathoms and her head in about five fathoms. Her foremast had gone through her bottom and stuck in the coral.
Collin saw spars attached to the mast which caused him to suspect that an air pump had been placed there and that they had been beaten to the wreck. Dunwoodie was convinced that no diver had been ahead of them. Dunwoodie searched all over the wreck for three days, but could not find any trace of the box of gold. He recovered jewellery, wearing apparel, papers, guns and many other articles. He recovered the luggage of a large number of passengers from the saloon,foresaloon and other parts. On the outside lying at the bottom within 15 feet of her he found stores of ale, porter, gin, flour and the like. As the weather changed to rough, all salvage ceased and the Dawn set sail for Bowen where Collin sought out Mr. Sandrock, who in addition to his duties as Shipping Inspector was also Sub-Collector of Customs. He readily explained why Dunwoodie had failed to find the box of gold. It was in his possession. Collin's suspicions were confirmed — they had been beaten to the wreck. They had been beaten there by James Putwain of Breakfast Creek. Putwain had moved quickly.

When news of the wreck reached Brisbane, Putwain was one of the first to hear of the disaster and the box of gold. He was an experienced diver and owned one of the two serviceable diving suits in Queensland. Putwain showed initiative, ingenuity and drive and deserved to be the first salvor to reach the wreck. At the time he was hard up, for he had lost a lot of money on the wreck of the Rhonda. The lure of the box of gold — 2500 ounces of it — spurred him into immediate action. He had the diving gear, he had the know-how, but he had no money. He could not attempt salvage unless he had financial assistance. He made enquiries in Brisbane as to the insurer of the gold in the hope that he might negotiate an agreement for salvage, with the insurer underwriting his expenses. He was frustrated in this as the telegraph line to Adelaide was out. This also prevented him from ascertaining the name of the owner of the gold. He approached several mercantile firms in Brisbane and proposed a joint venture for salvage but all considered it too hazardous and risky. Among those who declined were Messrs I. & G. Harris of Short Street, Brisbane; Messrs Scott Dawson and Stewart at the corner of Creek and Elizabeth Streets and Messrs Parbury, Lamb & Company of Elizabeth Street.

Finally he sought out Richard Morris Phillips and quickly concluded a joint venture agreement. Phillips was in command of the steamship Florence Irving, then in Brisbane en route to Cooktown from Sydney. Phillips’ main role was that of financier of the venture but in addition he was to convey Putwain, his diving gear and crew to the wreck. After reimbursing Phillips for his out-of-pocket expenses, the remaining profit was to be shared equally between Putwain and Phillips.
On 2 March the *Florence Irving* sailed from Brisbane to Bowen — just the day after Brisbane first heard the news of the wreck. No other ship was due to sail north for over a week. The impecunious Putwain had stolen a march on any likely competitor. On 6 March the *Florence Irving* with Phillips in command and Putwain as a passenger arrived at Bowen. Phillips proved he could move as fast as Putwain. A manoeuvrable steamer was obviously preferable to their needs. They ascertained that the *Bunyip* was the only steamer at Bowen and that she was then absent under charter. Phillips persuaded the charterer to surrender his charter in their favour, on the return of the *Bunyip* to Bowen. He arranged for *Bunyip* to go straight to the wreck immediately on its return. Phillips also chartered a cutter *Henry and Albert* and instructed its Master to proceed to the wreck and render assistance to Putwain. It would be a slow journey under sail.

There was only one boat in Bowen suitable for diving and capable of handling the situation, and this was Heron’s boat which had already rescued 15 survivors. Phillips arranged to charter this boat and its owner. It was a cranky and leaky boat. A crew to support Putwain was needed but no one in Bowen had any experience in the art of diving. Their choice of crew was a master stroke. They approached three of the *Gothenburg*’s crew, James Marks, Robert Brazil and John Reynolds. At first they were reluctant to return to the wreck, and claimed the risks and dangers were too high but they consented when Phillips agreed to pay a high fee for their services.

From James Marks, Putwain learnt of Durand’s box of coins and at the same time Phillips was hearing confirmation of Durand’s hoard from William Thomas, the only surviving saloon passenger. The *Florence Irving* arrived at Bowen on Saturday 6 March and at 5 a.m. on Sunday 7 March she sailed, with Heron, Marks, Brazil, Reynolds, Putwain and his diving gear and Heron’s leaky boat on board. The *Henry and Albert* and the *Bunyip* were to follow. At 3 p.m. that day, Putwain’s efforts were coming to fruition — the *Florence Irving* was abeam of the wreck. Heron’s boat was launched and cast adrift with Putwain, his diving gear and crew on board. The *Florence Irving* left them and sailed on north to Cooktown.

They were on their own — a diver, his gear, an inexperienced crew and a leaky boat. Putwain briefed his crew on the surface operation of the diving gear, and surveyed the scene. *Gothenburg* was lying on the inner edge of the reef, below the surface, her head to the north east with a strong list to port. Her stern was in about 10 fathoms and her head in about five, with her foremost yards lying awash. His first attempt failed — the current was too strong and the sea breaking too strongly. He then erected a stage on the maintop, which was a few
feet out of the water and there he fitted his pump and apparatus. He made a second attempt down the main rigging but this also failed as his hose became entangled in the collapsed funnel. The inexperienced crew in the boat compounded his difficulties but he finally succeeded in clearing all obstacles and returned to the surface. He then gave a second crash course in the art of diving to his crew. On his third attempt he reached the sloping deck. He saw two female bodies, one with her arm around the other with their long tresses of hair waving in the current. He sought a lock for identification but his air hose was not long enough to reach them. Large sharks abounded.

The captain's cabin had all been washed away except the roof, and the uprights. On the coaming board on the lee side he found the box of gold. It weighed 223 lb., but its value was enormous. It was at a point where the bulwarks and washboard had been broken and washed away. Putwain rescued the box and it was hauled to the surface and placed in Heron's boat. Neither the Bunyip nor the Henry and Albert was in sight. They were in absolute isolation, but Putwain was in his hour of glory. On that day of salvage the gold was worth 9030 pounds. The impatient Putwain, intoxicated by his success, elected to sail immediately to the nearest point of land. It was a rash decision. He started for Cape Upstart, leaving Brazil in the crow's nest. Brazil had a lonely vigil with nothing but waste water around and bodies of the dead beneath. Conditions were difficult. Heron's boat was leaky, the seas rough and the weight of the box of gold and diving gear overloaded the boat. With great exertion they just managed to keep the boat afloat and by sheer luck they fell in with the schooner Diamond. Putwain arranged for the Diamond to take them to Bowen and en route they met the Bunyip, which had been to the wreck. Brazil told the Bunyip of the recovery of the gold and the departure of the boat. Putwain, his crew and the box of gold transshipped to the Bunyip and proceeded to Bowen towing Heron's boat. During the tow Heron's leaky boat filled with water and was cut adrift. Had this occurred prior to transshipping to the Diamond, the gold would have been irretrievably lost as the waters between the reef and Cape Upstart were too deep for diving.

Putwain deposited the box of gold with the Sub-Collctor of Customs. Later the English, Scottish and Australian Chartered Bank claimed the gold. Putwain and his crew returned to the wreck next day in the Bunyip but the weather was too rough for further salvage work and the Bunyip sailed onto Townsville. Near the wreck the Bunyip crew found a corpse, naked except for a calico money belt containing 250 pounds in pulped bank notes. The body was too decomposed for identification and the money was later shared between the crew. Near the wreck sharks were caught, the stomachs of
some of which contained human bones and apparel. In the Queensland Museum Miscellaneous Register for 20 March 1875 is the entry ‘Mr. Putwain — human bones out of the stomach of a shark, Gothenburg’. Previously one of the rescue boats on its trip to Holbourne Island passed a dead body also perfectly naked. From its light curly hair and small bald spot on the head, the body was identified as that of a sailor named Williams.

At Bowen, Sandrock told Collin of the Jew Simon Lizzar who was known to have a belt of gold around him. Assured by Sandrock of the truth of the gold laden Jew, Collin and his crew agreed on a joint venture to return to the wreck and search for Simon Lizzar. On reaching the wreck, Dunwoodie dived. His task was more difficult than previously for he was not to search inside the wreck but to search outside the wreck, seeking Lizzar’s body. The air hose ran out quickly and soon all 120 feet had run out. Collin’s heart missed a beat and he made a signal to Dunwoodie. There was no response and Collin feared the worst. Collin resisted the urgings of his crew to pull Dunwoodie up and for the next half hour they sweated it out. Then an exhausted Dunwoodie surfaced declaring that nothing would induce him to go any more to the bottom of the sea.

After leaving Dawn’s side, Dunwoodie had fallen through the coral. On hitting the bottom all he could see above him were branches of coral, as though he was gazing through a dense forest of trees. He realised that to be pulled up would be fatal. He trapped air in his suit, wound the line around him, and the air in his diving suit then lifted him, weaving his way between the branches of coral to the surface. The Dawn stayed at the scene but Dunwoodie confined his diving to the wreck itself. Steam winches and jewellery were recovered, sufficient in value to cover expenses. The weather suddenly changed, and the Dawn herself nearly came to grief. She got clear and returned to Brisbane on 6 April. Thornton, the Brisbane Collector of Customs, took possession of the salvaged articles and held them for a year to enable relatives to claim them. Rather than have his crew wait for a year, Collin offered each of them a lump sum which they accepted. Some of the unclaimed jewellery was kept by Collin, and as late as 1965 was still in the possession of members of the Collin family.

There were three heroes on that dreadful night. In recognition of their bravery, on 26 July, 1875 the Governor of South Australia, Sir Anthony Musgrave, presented Fitzgerald, Cleland and Brazil with gold medals and a gold watch. The Gothenburg Relief Fund Committee presented each of them with a gold chain.
Putwain and Phillips sought salvage from the E.S. and A. Chartered Bank. Where a person effects salvage without an agreement with the owner he is a risk taker. If they cannot agree as to the amount of reward, the Admiralty Court has power to fix the reward. In such a case the degree of danger from which the property has been salvaged is a factor; so too is the value of the property salved. As a general rule the Admiralty Court will not award a salvor more than one half of the value of the salved property. The owners considered the demands for salvage by Putwain and Phillips exorbitant and offered 1000 pounds. Putwain and Phillips rejected this offer and instituted proceedings in the Vice Admiralty Court of Queensland. In addition to a proper reward for their salvage they sought reimbursement of their out-of-pocket expenses which they claimed amounted to 497 pounds — nearly half the sum offered! The E.S. & A. Chartered Bank defended — though no doubt the insurer of the gold, the Mercantile Marine Insurance Co. of South Australia, was the real defendant. Lengthy affidavits were filed by Putwain, Phillips, Collin, Dunwoodie, Harwood and others.

The Bank contended that there was no extraordinary risk — merely the ordinary risk associated with salvage. Putwain and Phillips claimed there were high risks and dangers and that if Putwain had not moved quickly the gold would have been washed into deep water from the derelict Gothenburg. Putwain deposed that when he was below a very strong current was running, and he had been exposed to a great and continuous peril of his life by the presence of a large number of sharks. The Attorney-General, Samuel Griffith, Q.C.
and Blake, Q.C. appeared for Putwain and Phillips while Pring, Q.C. and Harding appeared for the owners of the gold, which had been sold to the Melbourne Mint for 8918 pounds, with Bowen safe custody and transportation cost of £130/2/5. However, the parties agreed that the value of the gold was 9030 pounds.

On 1 December 1875, Cockle C.J. delivered his judgment — a judgment of Solomon. He reduced the claim for out-of-pocket expenses of £497/-/- to £302/12/6. He held that the salvors incurred risks but that the case for the salvors had been modified by, but by no means totally displaced by the evidence of the owners. He then decreed "from £9,030 let £302/12/6 be deducted and paid to the plaintiffs. Let the residue, to wit £8,727/7/6 be divided into three equal parts, of which let one third to wit £2,909/2/6 be paid to the Plaintiffs. From the remaining £5,818/5/- let the plaintiff’s costs up to the time of the complete execution of this decree be deducted and paid to the plaintiffs and let the residue be paid to the defendant". It was a well deserved victory for Putwain and Phillips.

The defendant’s appeal to the Privy Council was heard in London by Sir James Colville, Sir Robert Phillimore, Sir Barnes Peacock and Sir Robert Collier. On 11 January 1877 the judgment of their Lordships was handed down. The Privy Council advised Her Majesty to dismiss the appeal and with costs. It was probably the first appeal from the Colony of Queensland to the Privy Council.

Durand’s tin box has never been recovered. In the court proceedings Putwain deposed that he had searched diligently for it without success and that he believed it had sunk in deep water. The records of the Corporation of Lloyds disclose that in April 1875 the wreck was sold for 95 pounds. For many years her masts and other features protruding above the waters of the Barrier Reef were visible, but as they rusted away Gothenburg slipped from sight and became forgotten.

On 10 June 1967 a canefarmer from Home Hill, Bert Rubiolo and some friends set out from Cape Upstart for a weekend of fishing and skin diving. They headed N.E. to Old Reef, called by some of the locals Boulder Reef. Old Reef, a detached inner reef off the southern mouth of Flinders Passage, is tear-shaped, running N.W./S.E. with the bottom of the tear at the S.E. end. Rubiolo anchored just off the drop on its southern edge — about a mile from its N.W. corner. His position was 19°21′21″ South and 148°2′30″ East. Two of the party who were skin diving sought refuge in their boat when a shark appeared. After it swam away they dived again and came across the remains of a steel hulled ship about 150 ft. long. It was the Gothenburg!
Positive identification was slow and difficult. Her handsome clipper bow assisted in her identification, and so too did the broad arrows on the port holes for the 1873 lengthening and refitting had been carried out at the Government dockyard in Adelaide. She was lying on her port side with her head in five fathoms pointing to the N.E. and with her stern in 10 fathoms. Although badly broken up, her boilers were there and so too were some davits. Her propeller shaft was encrusted in sand and coral, and there was a large quantity of coal also encrusted in coral which could be easily chipped away to reveal firm gleaming coal as fresh as the day it was hewn. A member of the Rubiolo party retrieved the brass hoop of the crow's nest in which Brazil spent his lonely vigil.

In 1981, after submissions from the Maritime Archaeology Department of the Queensland Museum, the Commonwealth Government in pursuance of the provisions of the Historical Shipwrecks Act 1976 declared the remains of the Gothenburg an historical wreck.

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