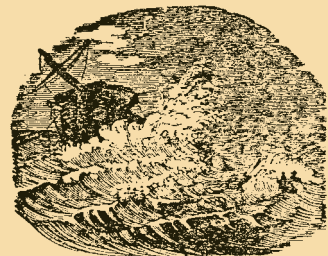


SHIPWRECKS & SAFE HAVENS

Neva 1835

“... the women on board the doomed ship, seeing themselves thus abandoned, set up a great despairing wail.”

CHRIS HALLS *Australia's Worst Shipwrecks*



A full and Horrifying Account of a most dreadful SHIPWRECK Of the Neva, Convict Ship, Which sailed from Cork, for New South Wales, in May last, containing 241 Souls on Board, consisting of 150 female Convicts, 9 free Women, and 55 Children, all of whom perished except 6; and 9 of the Crew; with an Account of the dreadful Sufferings of those who were saved, while staying on a desert Island, being altogether one of the most heart-rending Accounts of Human Suffering which has occurred for a very long Period.

MITCHELL LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

The loss of the convict ship *Neva* was the first major shipping disaster on King Island, resulting in the deaths of 224 passengers and crew.

Disaster struck at five in the morning, when the prisoners were still locked below decks. The ship had run off course during the night, and with the lookout calling “Breakers ahead!”, the crew tried frantically to change course. The *Neva* struck a submerged rock, and with heavy seas pouring over the decks, the ship began to break up. The prison stanchions collapsed, allowing the women and children to rush up onto the deck. As they well knew, there were not enough boats to save even half those on board.

Abandoning ship and passengers, the captain and some of his officers climbed into the first boat, but it foundered. The crew launched another, and then another, but they were swamped by panic-stricken passengers. Each time the master, a strong swimmer, managed to struggle back on board. When the ship finally broke up, he survived by clinging to the wreckage, and drifted ashore eight hours later.

Of the 22 survivors, seven were dead by the next morning—a result of cold and exhaustion, aided by the effects of a puncheon of rum washed up on shore. The remaining 15 survivors set up camp from salvaged materials, and were rescued some six weeks later.

A survivor's account

Rose Ann Hyland was one of the most troublesome convicts aboard the *Neva*. Here is her account of her amazing escape:

When the ship struck, I was in bed in the black hole that night ... The Captain ordered the ladder to be hauled up, and that we, who had been in the black hole, were to be kept down, but myself and other two succeeded in getting on deck. Most of the other Women, who had been in the main prison, had got on deck and into the Cuddy where they were drinking, and some of them were so drunk as to be unable to help themselves. I was on the Poop when the Ship opened, and ... I stuck to this part of the Wreck, and went some part of the way on Shore upon it.

When we came close to another part of the Wreck, upon which were some of the Sailors, I endeavoured to get upon it, when one of the Sailors caught hold of me and pulled me upon it. I fell off and was a second time caught hold of by the same man, and placed again upon the Wreck. When we got near the shore, this Man (Sharp) jumped off the wreck and carried a Boy on Shore; he returned for me, and then for another woman.

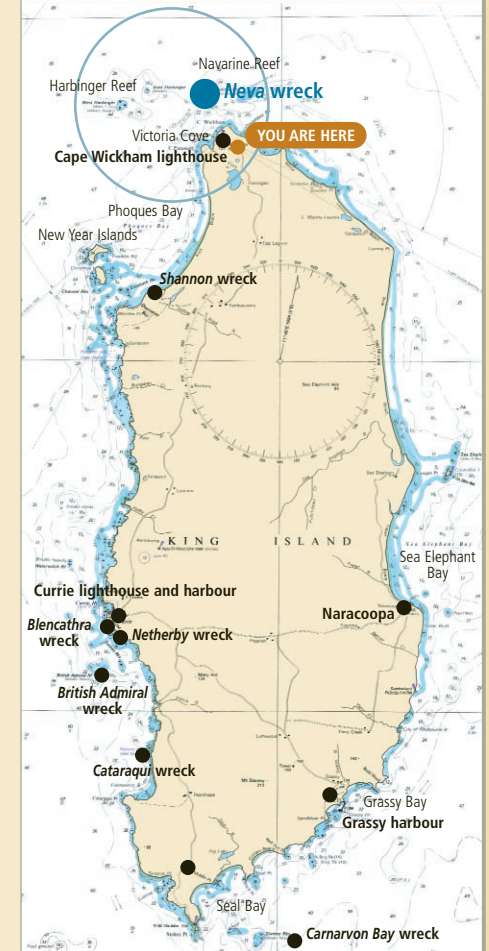
Why did it happen?

No-one knows for certain why the *Neva* struck the reef—or even which reef she struck.

Captain Peck claimed his chart was incorrectly drawn, and the official enquiry blamed “the Extraordinary strength of the tide” as the main cause of the disaster.

While the captain claimed to have been wrecked on Harbinger Reef, it seems more likely from the way the survivors drifted to shore that it was in fact Navarine Reef, further inshore. With diving too dangerous in this exposed location, the wreck has never been located to settle the mystery.

Another mystery is that the captain's behaviour in abandoning his passengers and crew in an effort to save his own life did not receive a single adverse comment from the board of enquiry.



283. Slattery Mary
70. Cullen Ann
118. Drury Margaret
177. Duvon Ann Rose
248. Hyland Ann Rose
159. Galvin Eliza

The six surviving female convicts went on to serve their terms in Van Diemen's Land. The year after being shipwrecked, Margaret Drury married Peter Robinson, one of the surviving crew from the *Neva*.

A human cargo

The *Neva* carried a human cargo of 150 female Irish convicts, 9 free women, and 55 children. Formerly used to transport stores, the ship had been refitted with a second deck to serve as a prison. According to all accounts, the voyage was uneventful: fair weather, little illness, three deaths and one birth. The prisoners were allowed up on deck during the day, and were then locked below at around 8 o'clock in the evening.

Transports carrying Irish prisoners were generally considered less troublesome, the prevailing opinion being that “the rigours of Irish life better prepared the prisoners for the hardships of the voyage ... a common point in their letters home was the novelty of having a blanket and a bed ‘to my own self entirely’, even if they had only eighteen inches of berth space in which to enjoy the luxury.”

Facts and figures

Name	<i>Neva</i>	Date	13 May 1835	Location	Navarine Reef
Rig	Ship	Construction	Timber	Tonnage	327
Date built	1813	Place built	Hull, UK	Place of register	London
Length	104'4"	Breadth	27'1"	Depth	6'5" (between decks)
Owner	S. Masters, J. Lachlan			Master	B. Peck
Departure	Cork, Ireland	Destination	Sydney, NSW	Cargo	Passengers
Crew	26	Passengers	214	Casualties	224



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