

Wrecks on the SOUTH AUSTRALIAN Coast

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Sixteen lives were lost when the Dutch barque *Koenig Willem II* from Hong Kong was lost at Guichen Bay on 30 June after all her Chinese passengers had been safely landed. The ship had been ready to sail for several days but bad weather had prevented her continuing her voyage. On the morning she was lost the strong wind had increased to a gale from the south west.

Although all the upper spars and fittings had been sent down she drifted from her anchorage until about noon when the force of the gale tore the windlass out of the ship, forcing the master to raise sail in an attempt to beach her. She finally grounded to the east of Robe on Long Beach and became a total wreck immediately as terrific seas swept over her endangering the lives of all on board. News of the wreck spread rapidly and all the men in the employ of Messrs Omerod hurried to the scene where they were joined by soldiers and police.

Soon after the barque struck a boat was launched containing the mate and crew, with the exception of the captain who was left stranded on the wreck when the boat's painter broke. The boat had proceeded only a short distance when it broached, filled quickly, leaving the occupants struggling for their lives in the breakers. Of the twenty-five who left the ship, nine, including the mate were dragged ashore more dead than alive. Those on shore now turned their efforts to the rescue of the master, clinging to the vessel's stern. He pointed frantically to the boats lying on the beach but they were damaged and useless. Even had they been seaworthy it would have been impossible to attempt a rescue in the conditions.

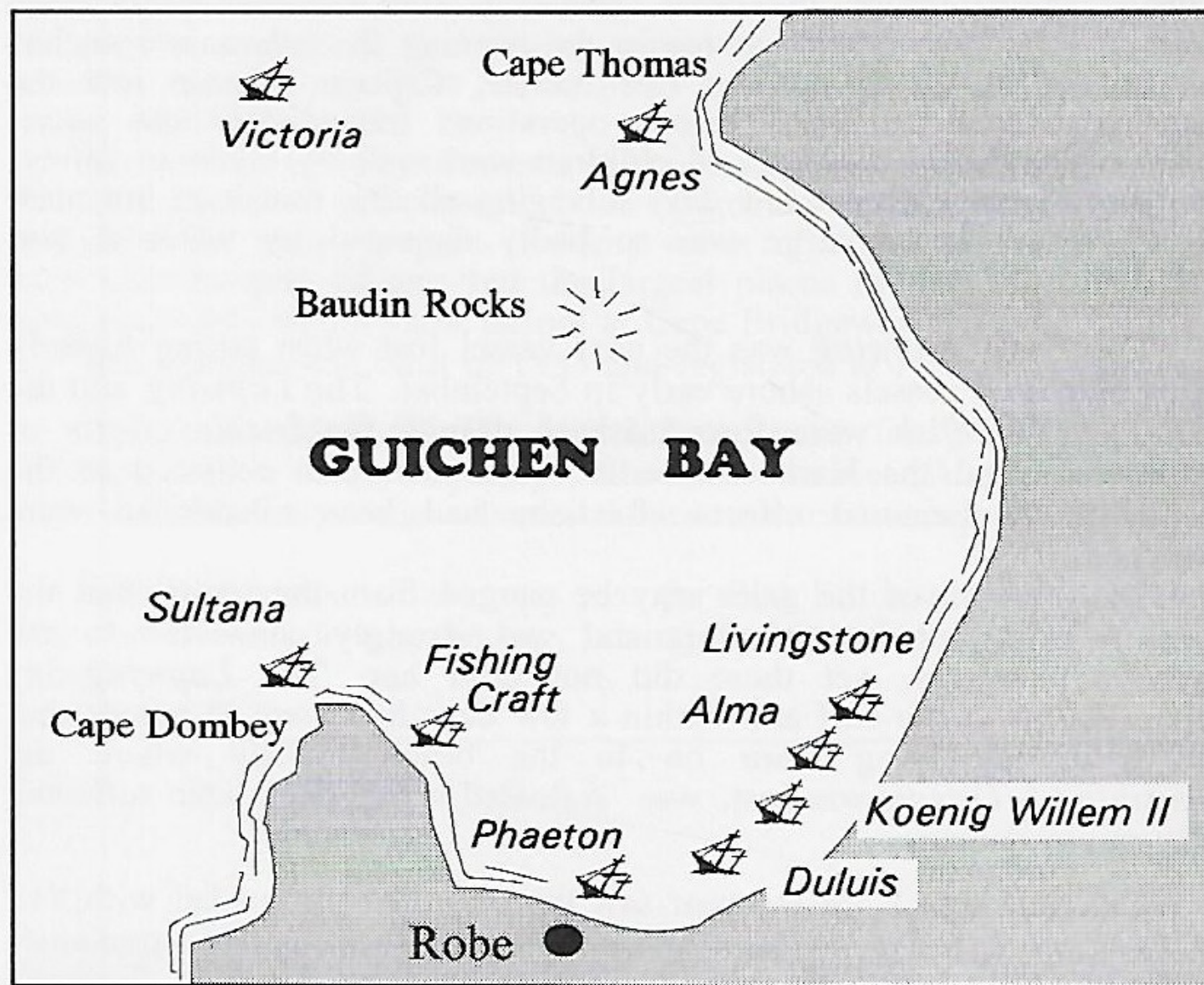
After sunset most of those at the scene returned home, leaving a few on the beach in case the ship broke up during the night. John Omerod promised £50 to any boat's crew if they succeeded in rescuing the captain while an aboriginal from Encounter Bay volunteered to swim out if he was paid a small reward. While these plans were being discussed the wind shifted slightly and this allowed the captain to drift a cask to shore with a rope attached, after which the men on the beach were able to safely draw him through the surf.

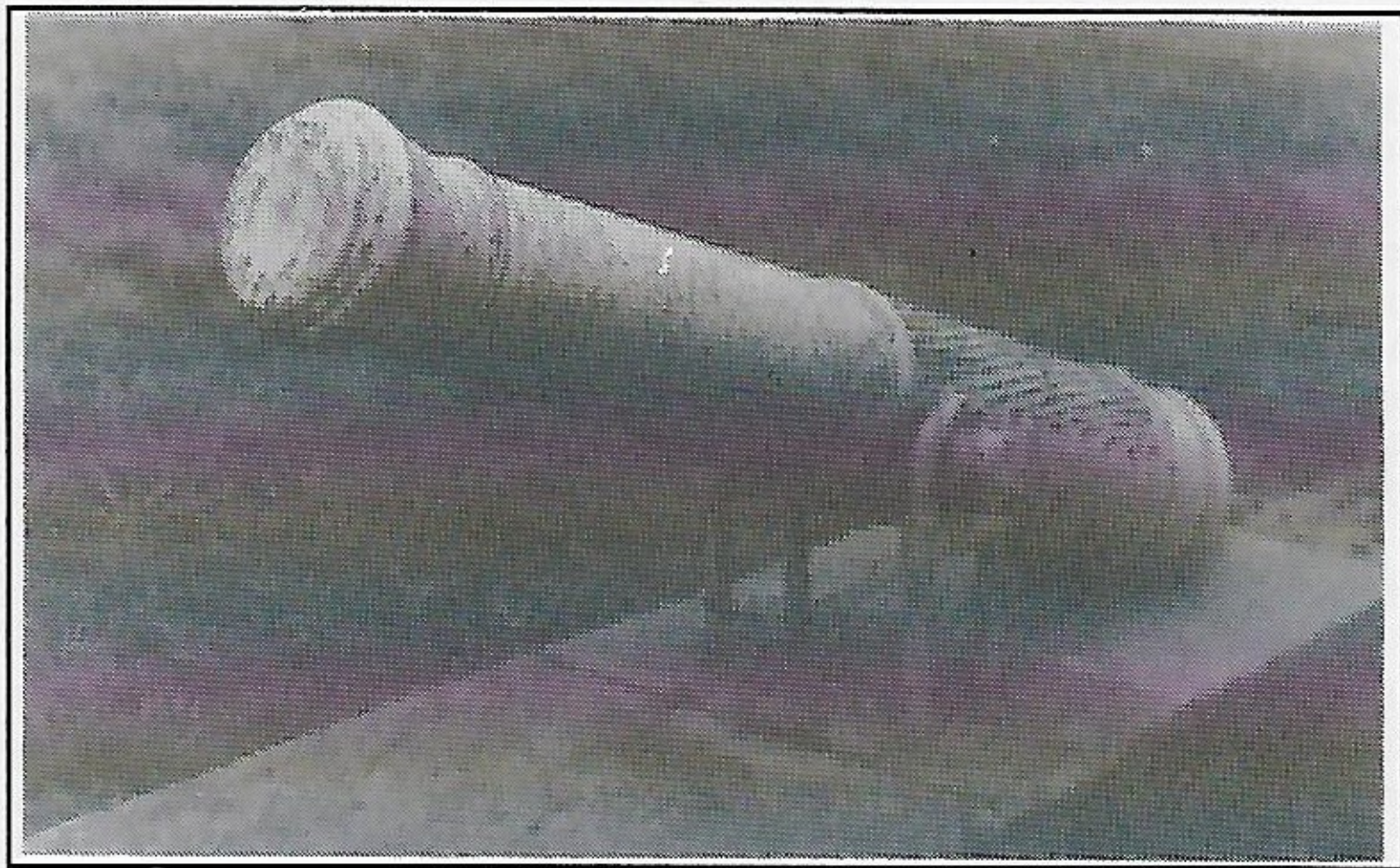
For the next few days wreckage and bodies washed ashore. The human remains were in such a decomposed state that it was thought better to bury them on the spot. Although police maintained a close watch on the beach, plunderers stole cargo, fittings, and also broke open chests belonging to the unfortunate seamen as they washed ashore.

On 11 July the remains of the *Koenig Willem II* were purchased by J. Chambers of Robe for £225. He dismantled most of the wreck but left two cannon from her lying wedged between rocks. They were later salvaged and placed on the Flagstaff Hill in Royal Circus. Vandals destroyed one and the second was removed to a private home where it remained for many years before being returned to Flagstaff Hill.

The *Koenig Willem II* was a vessel of 800 tons under the command of Captain Giezen.

The brig *Ida* with 30 tons of copper ore from Port Wakefield went ashore at Port Willunga on 15 January, after snapping her Government moorings and dragging an anchor in near gale conditions. Next morning she lay a total wreck with her back broken and full of water.





This cannon on the flagstaff mound at Robe is believed to have come from the wreck of the Dutch barque *Koning Willem de Tweede* (*Koenig Willem II*), wrecked in 1857. Some claim it is from the barque *Duilius*, wrecked at Robe in 1853. (Author's Collection).