

# ORBOST & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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## NEWSLETTER

MARCH, 2011

'Snowy River Mail', October 21, 1981:

### CONRAN GRAVE REMAINS A MYSTERY

Very few of the thousands of people who visit Cape Conran realise that the Cape is steeped in history. Quite apart from the influence of aboriginals on the area, white man has also played a part in the history of the Cape.

The aboriginals left their mark through their middens rich in artefacts whilst white man in much more recent times has visited the Cape — at times unwillingly.

On a flat, low sheltered area on the eastern side of Cape Conran there lays a grave known to contain the bodies of three to five men.

Following concern shown by locals that the grave site was suffering abuse by campers who were unaware of its historical importance the Lands Department began investigating the

history behind the burial.

References found to shipwrecks in this area indicate that no loss of life was involved, except in the case of the S.S. *Bogong*.

On September 23rd, 1896 this 25-ton steamer sprang a leak about three miles off Marlo and sank while the captain was trying to beach her, one and a half miles west of the Snowy River entrance.

Five men were lost, and a report in the "*Snowy River Mail*", September 26th, 1896, p.3, read in part:

.....so far the efforts to recover the bodies have been unsuccessful. It is the opinion of some that they will never be found, while others think they may be thrown up somewhere near Cape Conran.

A search through the "*Snowy River Mail*" to the end of 1896 found reference to only one body being washed ashore. The edition for November 21st, p.3, contained an article which dealt with "the discovery of a portion of a human body on the beach near Pearl Point, about 30 miles from Orbost".

The story continues, "the remains were buried in the hummocks, a pole being placed in the

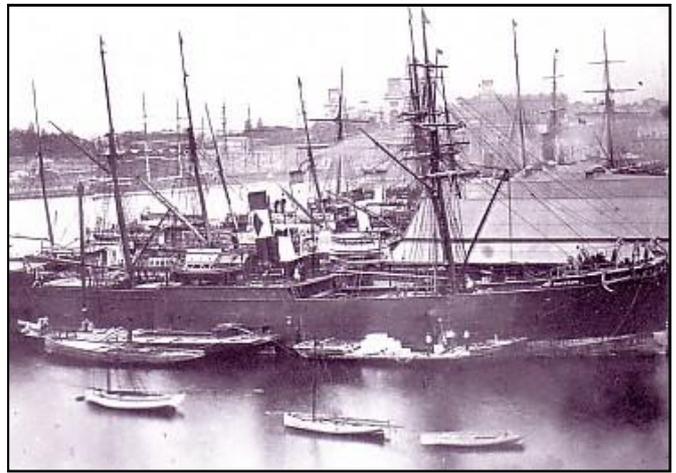


S. S. *Bogong* at Cunninghame Wharf

ground to mark the spot”, and concludes, “the Constable is of the opinion that the body is the remains of one of the unfortunates lost from the S.S. Bogong”.

Whilst it appears likely that the bodies in the grave are those of the unfortunate souls from the S.S. Bogong, more research will have to be carried out before this can be accepted as fact.

In the meantime the grave has had protective works done on it and will be appropriately marked when further information comes to hand.



S. S. Ridge Park

## THE CONRAN GRAVE

**An article in the “S.R. Mail” of October 21st, 1981, entitled “Conran Grave Remains a Mystery”, had brought the following interesting information from Mr. Eric Herbert, of Orbost.**

He writes: In answer to the query in the “Snowy River Mail”, October 21st — Conran Grave Remains A Mystery, I refer to the extract from my father’s diary, quote: “A sailing ship, the Ridge Park, went on Beware Reef during 1884. Three bodies of the crew were washed up in the cove at East Cape Conran and buried in sand, hence the name Sailors’ Graves”, end of quote.

I can recall many years ago these graves were marked with a heap of rocks and a rough cross. Location was about two metres south of the driveway to launch the boats off the beach, east side. Directly in front of Steed’s camp.

Another extract that may be of interest. Quote: “Ridge Park laden with flour, German pianos and French wine lost on Beware Reef,

1884 — three lives lost. The cutlery with Ridge Park engraved on it was used for many years at Stirlings’ Marlo Hotel. I have checked with Elsie Stirling (later Mrs. Dave Conlan) and find these facts to be correct. She gave me a spoon with the Ridge Park engraving on it” — end quote. I still have the spoon; also the letter from that lady, and if anyone is interested I could show them the location of the graves.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mr. Editor, whilst on the subject of graves, once again an extract from the diary — “Grave at Tabbara”. Grave on Ben Webb’s property, near old Tabbara mill site was of “Old Benson”, approximately 1888. He died from natural causes and was buried 6’6” deep. Coronial inquiry was held before James Cameron, J.P. (later The Hon. James Cameron, M.P.) and Constable Clarke.” Mr. Editor, this may help to convey that the entries in this were well researched before pen went to paper. — Thank you Mr. Editor, Eric HERBERT.

The information below refers to the death and burial of Bill Benson at Tabbara and is taken from the Diary of Sam Richardson. The transcription of the diary entries has been undertaken by May Leatch.

APRIL & MAY

4th & 5th Months 1888

Marlo Bkfst & dinner Meat 36 ff

120 29 SUNDAY — 4th after Easter 246  
 Old Bill Benson died suddenly between 9 & 12 a.m. this morning  
 a & shot owen & duck 3 Tomlinson’s here Dinner & Tea.

Sunday 29th April 1888: Old Bill Benson died suddenly between 9 & 12 a.m. this morning.

121 30 MONDAY 245  
 A coronial enquiry on the death of Old Bill Benson at Peterborough by Jas Cameron & policeman Clarke. Verdict — Natural Cause. I to undertake the funeral, dig the grave & make the coffin for £8. Signed the requisite papers to get the money paid at Bairnsdale. Alan put in another new junker Lorry pole today. The Linn Log in Eva, her 3 kids. Mrs. Vale went off to Orbost in the Polly. Sent 7 Frank in the Budge

**Monday 30th April 1888:**

Magisterial enquiry on the death of old Bill Benson at Fischers house by Jas. Cameron & policeman Clarke. Verdict natural cause. I to undertake the funeral, dig the grave, make the coffin for £3. Signed the requisite papers to get the money paid at Bairnsdale.

*Coffee palace Mrs R. Albert each J. Bed & B<sup>n</sup> fast - Eva paid hers 6/- ✓*  
1 TUESDAY - St. Philip and St. James 244  
*Finished the coffin & buried old Bill Benson in a grave 6'6" deep near Fischer's house near the slope of the hill above the road over the flat Tomlinson, Johnstone, Gledhill, Alan Fischer & self present. Alan left for Orbost on his motor to the re signing of the lease of his land to - McKenzie. Weather misty in morn/ cleared towards north. Bridge returned about 8.30 A & Mrs R. at about 4.30 in the p.m.*

**Tuesday 1st May 1888:**

Finished the coffin and buried old Bill Benson in a grave 6'6" deep near Fischer's house near the slope of the hill above the road over the flat. Tomlinson, Johnstone, Gledhill, Alan, Fischer and self present

Full reports from the *Snowy River Mail* of items referred to on Pages 1-2 of this Newsletter

'*Snowy River Mail*', Saturday, September 26, 1896:

**WRECK OF THE S.S. BOGONG  
RUN ASHORE NEAR MARLO  
FIVE LIVES LOST**

On Wednesday evening last news reached Orbost that the s.s. Bogong, carrying a cargo of fish from Mallacoota to Lakes' Entrance, had foundered near Marlo, and that three passengers and two seamen had been drowned. Early on Thursday morning our reporter in company with Mounted Constable Hall proceeded to the scene of the disaster and heard the sad story of the vessel and her crew from the lips of the survivors. The boat was well-known to Gippsland people, having been engaged in the fish-carrying trade about the lakes, to and from Kent's Group and Mallacoota, for the last 15 years. She left the latter place on Wednesday last at about 10 o'clock. On board, Capt Galliene, engineer Price, two seamen, and a fisherman who was working his passage constituted the crew; and in addition there were three brothers, Edward, George, and Ernest Huysman, non-paying passengers. Edward Huysman was some months ago a railway booking clerk, and has been wanted by the police for some time in connection with the theft of a large number of first-class railway tickets. His younger brothers had at last persuaded him to give himself up to Constable Stephens at the Entrance on the arrival of the boat there. Wednesday morning was beautifully fine and all went well on board, light variable winds prevailing until Cape Conran was passed, at about 5 p.m., when the wind suddenly chopped round to the south-west and there was a heavy rain and strong squalls. The Snowy River light was sighted at about seven o'clock, and about half-an-hour later, when about three miles off Marlo, a serious leak was sprung. Pumps and

buckets were at once set to work and Engineer Price endeavoured to locate the leak, but was unsuccessful. The Captain Galliene was at the wheel, the night was very dark and the water gained fast notwithstanding the superhuman efforts of those on board. The entrance to the Snowy was unknown to the skipper and as a last resource he decided to beach the vessel, an attempt which ended most disastrously.

**THE CAPTAIN'S STORY**

"This is first real mishap I have had at sea," said the skipper, on being interviewed. "When the squall was at its worst, Mr Price, the engineer, and young Huysman came out from below and reported that the water was making fast. All hands were at once put to work with pumps and buckets, and deck cargo was thrown over board to lighten her. We were unable to discover where the water was coming in and the boat was filling so fast that I could see nothing for it but to beach her. The night was pitch dark. I told the men to keep cool and get well forward when we were nearing the shore. A little before nine o'clock the boat, which was settling very low, struck the outer bar about 80 yards off the beach and an immense sea swept her from stem to stern. All on board gathered around and clung to the bridge, which was the highest part; one by one they left or were swept away. I was the last to leave. I divested myself of most of my clothing and struck out for the shore. I was a long time in the water before I touched bottom, and the sea was frightfully rough. When I was thrown on the beach I found that only the engineer and Len Stephenson had landed besides myself. We looked about for the others but could find no trace of them. Edward Huysman was very weak and ill, and I am not surprised that he did not reach the shore. We had a boat on board, but it was useless to try and launch her in such a heavy sea. We did our best for all on board. There were plenty a life-belts handy, some of which were used. Unfortunately the men seemed to lose their heads when the vessel struck. She went to pieces very quickly, and the sea had a strong set to the east. We landed about 500 yards east of where she struck, and when we reached the mouth of the Snowy. We found that a good deal of wreckage had come in before us. We hailed a boat from the Falcon

and crossed to the Marlo hotel, where we were kindly treated. A search party was then sent out. You know the rest," concluded the captain.

### THE ENGINEER'S NARRATIVE

"I was engineer on the Bogong for a good many years," said Mr Price, on being questioned, "When I discovered she was taking water below on Wednesday night I immediately reported to the captain and tried to discover the leak. The water gain very fast and I fancy it must have been coming in somewhere from underneath the boiler. Possibly the vessel may have struck a snag, but we felt no shock. We were unable to cope with the water and turned her to the beach. All on board were close together at the bridge when she struck. The sea was running high and the first wave turned her over. I saw Edward Huysman washed off; he floated on his back for a moment and then threw up his arms and sank without a struggle. Wave after wave poured over us and I found myself floating. I was the first to land, not until I was considerably battered by the heavy seas which were coming in. I believe I was fully a quarter of an hour in the water before I landed. It was exceptionally lucky that we were not further out to sea when the leak was sprung, or probably no one would have lived to tell the tale. As soon as I recovered myself I looked around to the others. Captain Galliene and Len Stephenson landed soon after me, but the others could not be seen along the beach. It was a very dark, rainy night and the moon was obscured by thick clouds. Stephenson seemed to have had a bad time and was in a dazed condition when he reached land. I would not care to have again the experiences we had last evening."

### THE SCENE OF THE WRECK

Very little was visible of the ill-fated vessel on the Marlo beach on Thursday morning. A portion of the hull and ironwork was visible about 2 miles west of the Snowy River entrance and forty or fifty yards from the shore. The ship's boat was on the beach, perfectly sound, and here and there were strewn splintered pieces of timber and general wreckage. Captain Galliene in one place picked up the will of Edward Huysman, which was made prior to his leaving Mallacoota. Only a number of lifebuoys and a few other unimportant articles were recovered from the devouring sea by the search parties.

### THE MISSING

The missing men, who had evidently been drowned, are: —

- CHARLES ASTROP, A.B., aged about 50.
- JOHN ANDERSON, A.B., aged about 45.
- EDWARD HUYSMAN, aged about 30.
- GEORGE HUYSMAN, aged about 23.
- ERNEST HUYSMAN, aged about 19.

George Huysman, who was studying for the profession of a marine engineer, has been engaged on the steamer Lady Harriett, which is owned by Messrs Huysman and Rochford, for the last 18 months. He was a quiet unassuming young fellow, and during the time he has been in the district he made many friends and was a favourite with all.

Ernest Huysman had only recently left school, and was employed at his brother's store and farm at Mallacoota.

James Anderson had been formerly employed by Messrs Carpenter and son afterwards as a deck hand on the J.C.D. He had only been for a short time on the Bogong. He was a married man and leaves a wife and two children, who reside at Cunninghame.

Astrop was well-known in Bairnsdale, having been employed for some time on the wharf and in connection with the shipping, being familiarly known by the soubriquet of "Charlie the growler."

The survivors from the wreck, who were in a state of utter exhaustion on their arrival at the Marlo hotel on Wednesday evening, were carefully attended to by Mr. and Mrs. Cameron. On Thursday they were unable to move about a little, and we are pleased to say that they are slowly recovering from the shock caused by the sensational experiences of a few nights ago.

So far, the efforts to recover bodies have been unsuccessful. It is the opinion of some that they will never be found, while others think they may be thrown up somewhere near Cape Conran. Constables Hall and Stephens have been instructed to keep a sharp lookout for wreckage along the beach and report full particulars to their department of the disaster.

'Snowy River Mail', Saturday, November 21, 1896:

## DISCOVERY OF HUMAN REMAINS NEAR PEARL POINT

Intelligence has been received in Orbost of the discovery of portion of a human body on the beach near Pearl Point, about 30 miles from Orbost. Last week Messrs Geo. Morgan, senr., Geo. Morgan, junr., and Mr Richard Morgan were engaged mustering cattle in the vicinity of the Point and on the evening of the 9th inst. at about 6 o'clock, Mr R. Morgan left camp, taking his gun with him, and when walking along the beach on the lookout for game, came across portions of a human body, which had apparently been washed up by the sea. The head, legs from the knee joints, and one arm were missing, while part only of the other arm remained, and only a small portion of flesh was left on the body. Mr Morgan immediately returned to the camp to inform his relatives of the discovery, and next morning at 7 o'clock the remains were buried in the hummocks, a pole being placed in the ground to mark the spot. At the earliest opportunity information was conveyed to Mounted-constable Hall, of Orbost, but as there was apparently no means of identifying the remains he will not proceed to the Point pending instructions from headquarters, but probably an enquiry will be held next week. The Constable is of opinion that the body is the remains of one of the unfortunates lost from the S.S. Bogong when that ill-fated vessel was wrecked off the coast at Marlo some two months ago.