

The Shipwreck Watch

A Journal of Macquarie Island Shipwreck Stories

Volume 2

1812

First Known Wreck - *Campbell Macquarie*

The *Campbell Macquarie* is the first known shipwreck on Macquarie Island. Sailors from the *Campbell Macquarie* were marooned there for four months during 1812 and in this time, four Indian sailors died.

The Campbell Macquarie was a full-rigged ship of 248 tons, built at Calcutta, India.

*Shipwrecked in the
stormy winter dark of the
subantarctic*

Sealing businessman, Joseph Underwood, of Sydney, bought the *Campbell Macquarie* in Calcutta, India, in 1810. He sailed her out to New South Wales with about twenty-five 'Lascars', or Indian sailors on board. Early in 1812, Underwood sent the *Campbell Macquarie* on a sealing voyage to the South Seas under the command of Captain Richard Siddins. After leaving Sydney, Siddins first sailed to Kangaroo Island, where he collected 1650 seal skins and 33 tons of salt.



Sailing ship by H. Underhill. Permission to reproduce granted by Brown, Son & Ferguson publishers, Glasgow.

The night the *Campbell Macquarie* approached Macquarie Island, James Kelly and the ship's gunner were on duty. Kelly was the first mate, although he was only twenty one years old at the time.

There was a heavy sea fog and seas were rough. Neither Kelly nor the gunner saw the island's rocky coast until the *Campbell Macquarie* was dangerously close to the coast. When the gunner gave the alarm, Kelly alerted Captain that the vessel was dangerously close to the surf. Siddins immediately rushed on deck and called all hands to unfurl the sails so he could head the ship out to sea. This attempt failed, and the *Campbell Macquarie* became trapped in the breakers.



The *Campbell Macquarie* struck rocks in Hasselborough Bay in the early hours of 11 June 1812. Siddins tried to anchor the vessel, but the anchors dragged. An hour later, the rudder broke and the *Campbell Macquarie* began to fill with water. All hands tried pumping out the water, but it soon became obvious that the ship was completely wrecked. The crew launched lifeboats in the dark into gale force winds and tumultuous

seas. They were lucky to reach the shore alive.

The next morning the castaways set to work salvaging whatever they could from the wreck. Rowing through high surf in open boats was hard and dangerous work, and the men were worried that the ship might roll while they were unloading her. The unloading continued for the next fortnight. In that time, the crew built a timber-framed hut to store the ship's spare sails. This may have been the first hut ever built on Macquarie Island.

The men took the ashore seal skins and salt barrels they had brought from Kangaroo Island, as well as the ship's rigging and water casks. Siddins saw no value in saving the *Campbell Macquarie*'s wood, a beautiful Burmese teak. He wanted to salvage its ironwork so it could be melted down and sold, to recoup some of the money lost in the wreck.

Unfortunately, the storage hut also burned down on the day of the ship's fire.

Another disaster occurred because the crew did not drag their salvages high enough on the shore. The waves washed precious water casks, seal skins and salt barrels out to sea and they were destroyed on rocks.



Hasselborough Bay, where the *Campbell Macquarie* was wrecked in 1812. Photo Tavis Potts.

By the end of June 1812, the castaways had salvaged everything they could and briefly stopped work for a well-earned rest. They then set to work killing fur seals while awaiting their rescue. By day they foraged for food, killed seals and pegged fur seal skins out to dry. They had enough salted meat and other provisions from the wreck to keep them going for the next few months and were able to add birds, fish and 'Macquarie Island cabbage' to their diet of salted food. They probably built huts out of tussock grass, with windows made from seal bladders. They had few clothes, so they made boots and coats from seal fur. It was a harsh life for the castaways and four Lascars died before the *Campbell Macquarie* crew was rescued.



Macquarie Island cabbage, *Stilbocarpa Polaris*.

Photo Geof Copson.

The *Perseverance* arrived at Macquarie Island to collect a gang of sealers on 20 October 1812. The Captain offered a passage to twelve of the *Campbell Macquarie* castaways. James Kelly was one of them, and it was he who reported the shipwreck to Joesph Underwood and the Sydney Gazette.



James Kelly by an unknown artist, Courtesy Tasmaniana Collection.

Underwood was obliged to rescue the remaining castaways and bought the *Elizabeth and Mary* for this purpose. He sent this vessel to Macquarie Island to rescue the Indian sailors.

He then had to make plans to return these men India immediately. Even in those days, the colonial authorities had strict regulations concerning illegal immigrants.

References

- Broxam, G. & Nash, M., *Tasmanian Shipwrecks*, Vol.1, 1797-1899, Navarine Publishing, Canberra.
- Rose, L. 1984, *Richard Siddins of Port Jackson*, Roebuck Books, Sydney, pp 61-72.
- Bowden, K.M 1964, *The Adventures of Captain James Kelly of Hobart Town*, Melbourne University Press, London, pp13-19.

Further **R**eadings

The story of how James Kelly announced the news of the Campbell Macquarie shipwreck is told in:

[James Kelly, Master Mariner](#)