

# The Shipwreck Watch

*A Journal of Macquarie Island Shipwreck Stories*

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## *Lord Aids Ailing Countess*

Captain Allen was trying to land a gang of men on Macquarie Island to dig for guano when the *Countess of Minto* became caught in surf and wrecked. Luckily the crew were not marooned, because the *Lord Duncan*, had been standing by during the wreck and took the crew back to New Zealand.

*The Countess of Minto was a barque of 265 tons built at Whitby, U.K. in 1839 and registered at Liverpool in the name of Ralph & Co.*

### *A veteran of storms*



A barque. Sketch by H. Underhill, permission to reproduce by Brown, Son and Ferguson, Publishers, Glasgow.

Only three months before her fateful voyage in 1851, the barque, *Countess of Minto* narrowly escaped being shipwrecked in a cyclone at Lady Elliott Island on the Queensland coast. Only two men were aboard at the time, the steward and carpenter, and these men sailed her through the cyclone, and safely into Port Macquarie.

*Having miraculously survived the cyclone, the Countess of Minto's next trip was to be her last.*

Captain Allen set sail from Sydney in the *Countess of Minto* on 4 November 1851 in search of guano. The barque arrived in a gale at the north coast of Macquarie Island on 31 November 1851.

The vessel was lying close in-shore, so that a landing party would not have far to row through the dangerous surf. Suddenly the wind died and the *Countess of Minto* became trapped in the surf. Her steering failed and she started to drift ashore near the Nuggets.



The Nuggets, near where the *Countess of Minto* was wrecked. Photo Geof Copson.

Captain Allen dropped two anchors but the swell was increasing. The vessel soon struck the rocks, rapidly filled with water and rolled. All hands took to the lifeboats and managed to land safely, just as the vessel started to break up.

*Fortunately, the Lord Duncan had been standing by during the wreck.*

After landing a sealing gang on the island, the *Lord Duncan* took the crew of the *Countess of Minto* back to New Zealand.

In the 1870s a sealing party found a ship's bell washed up near the Nuggets. Captain J.S.I. Thomson wrote that the name, '*Countess of Seafield*' was engraved on this bell. Since there are no reports of a *Countess of Seafield* wrecked on Macquarie Island, we think the bell probably belonged to the *Countess of Minto*. The bell was returned to a Captain 'Allan', who was then living in retirement at Newcastle, New South Wales.

### **R**eferences

- Broxam, G. & Nash, M. 1998, *Tasmanian Shipwrecks*, Vol. 1 1797 - 1899, Navarine Publishing, Canberra, p78.
- Cumpston, J. S, 1968, *Macquarie Island*, Antarctic Division, Melbourne, pp 73, 75, 76, 78.

### **F**urther **R**eadings

You can read about Captain Thomson's time on Macquarie Island in:

Horizontal Icicles Cling to Wreck - BenCleugh  
&  
Chief Harpooner, Henry Whalley

### **M**ystery

The origin of the ship's bell found on Macquarie Island in 1874 is one of Macquarie Island's mysteries – but it is probably the easiest mystery to solve.