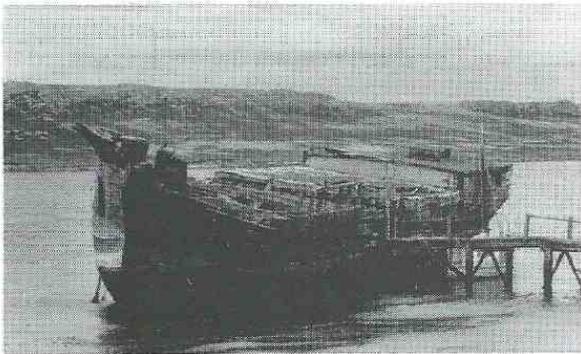
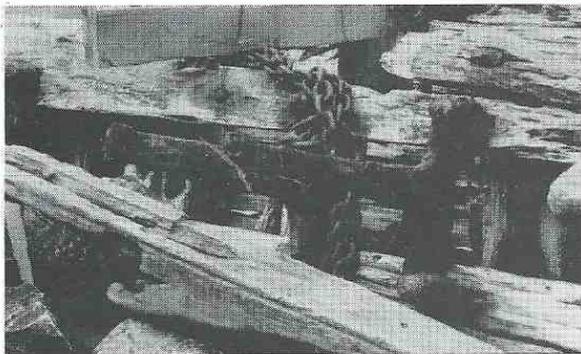


The *Lady Elizabeth* under sail



The *Jhelum*



Composite structure - wooden planking and iron knees on the *Jhelum*

NOT JUST THE GREAT BRITAIN HULKS AND WRECKS OF THE FALKLANDS

Anthony Burton

Before beginning to describe the extraordinary array of old vessels to be found in the Falkland Islands, it is necessary to take a brief look at the islands' history to see how they came to be there in the first place.

When the Falklands were first established as a British settlement, the main trade was, as it was to remain, sheep farming - those with no taste for mutton, roast, boiled, fried, minced, stewed or cooked by any other means ingenuity can supply had best keep away. Then in 1849 came the California gold rush and anything that could float was pressed into service to carry the would-be millionaires to the gold fields. This was followed by a second gold rush in Australia and a more sober but certainly not less profitable trade in guano from Peru. As a result, until the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914, there was a steady procession of sailing ships from many different nations making their way through the hazardous waters around Cape Horn. Stanley had already been established as a port and the principal town in 1843 and now it became established as a major centre for ship repairs. Not all the ships heading for Stanley made it to safety - several were wrecked on their way to the safe anchorage of Stanley Harbour. Still more were so severely damaged as to be beyond repair. That did not, however, mean that their useful days were over. The Falklands are virtually treeless, which makes timber an expensive and valuable commodity. Hulls were pulled up into shallow water, covered in and pressed into service as wool stores. Others were sunk to provide foundations for piers and ships' timbers were used as building material throughout the islands. Shifting ahead in the story slightly, I visited Port Stephens on West Falkland - a not untypical "sheep farm" of roughly a quarter of a million acres, supporting 50,000 sheep. Here I was told that there was nothing at all connected with old ships, but half the buildings stood on piling made of cut-down masts, spars served as gate posts and iron pigs that had come over as ballast were being used as door stops! The main interest in the visit was my exploration of the hulks and wrecks of East Falkland.

The visit began at Stanley, a town that appears to have grown as much by accident as intent, a colourful patchwork of houses, built largely from brightly painted corrugated iron. A prominent feature on the waterfront is a mast set horizontally on a plinth - all that remains of the island's most famous maritime resident, the mizzen of the SS *Great Britain*. Nearby, the ribs and carcasses of sunken and abandoned vessels poke out from the shallow water, among them the *Capricorn*, a 380-ton West Country barque built by Cox and Sons of Bideford in 1859. At the end of 1881 she sailed from Swansea, with a cargo of coal, for the west coast of South America. During a storm off Cape Horn, the coal caught fire. She was sailed to the Island de Los Estados off Tierra del Fuego, where she was scuttled in shallow water to put out the fire, pumped dry and sailed on to Stanley

- but to no avail and there she stayed. By far the most impressive features however are two hulks, the *Jhelum* and the *Charles Cooper*.

The *Charles Cooper* is an American packet ship that made her maiden voyage from South Street, New York in 1856. In 1866 she arrived at Stanley with a load of coal from Philadelphia bound for San Francisco. She was leaking badly and abandoned. To protect her from the weather she was given a cover - now of corrugated iron - so that she looks like a full-size Noah's Ark. Approaching her by dinghy, her size is at once impressive and passing under the bows an unusual feature appears, two wooden "patches" which could be removed and replaced. These are reminders of her days in the timber trade when the wood was loaded directly through these temporary openings. The vessel is of entirely wooden construction and quite beautifully built. Once on board, there are two very distinctive and very different areas. The area immediately below the main deck at the stern housed the saloon and cabins for passengers. Pillars are turned to give a decorative effect and even structural features such as the wooden knees that support the upper decking are handsomely shaped. The scarf joints that connect the planking are superb examples of the carpenter's craft. The *Charles Cooper* is best visited at low tide, when the water drains away through the large hole in her starboard. Then the whole of the cargo space is revealed as one long hold, with a procession of wooden knees and beams reflected in the water that lies at the bottom.

The *Jhelum* is a little older than the *Charles Cooper*, a 428 ton wooden barque built at Joseph Steel's yard near the Dukes Dock in Liverpool. She was launched in 1849, a typical bluff-bowed merchantman stoutly constructed, mostly in mahogany. She set off, very overloaded from Callao in July 1873 hoping to make it to Dunkirk but arrived in such bad condition in Stanley that the crew refused to go on. Where the *Charles Cooper* looks remarkably sound when seen from the shore - the hole is on the seaward side - the *Jhelum* is obviously damaged, her bows in particular are severely twisted. Much of the forward end, which had been left uncovered, has deteriorated badly - though some features remain intact including the windlass used for heaving the anchor. Although, like the *Charles Cooper*, *Jhelum* is a wooden sailing ship, extensive use has been made of iron in construction notably in the supports for deck beams, in the form of Fells patent fastenings, T-shaped plates that fit either side of the beams. Her appearance is altogether less sophisticated than that of the *Charles Cooper*, reflecting that she was never a passenger-carrying vessel.

Completing a trio of remarkable sailing vessels is perhaps the most remarkable of them all, the *Lady Elizabeth*. She is a barque built at Sunderland in 1879. She arrived in the Falklands in 1913 under the Norwegian flag, hit a rock on the way

into harbour and was abandoned. What makes her unique among the Falklands sailing ships is her construction and the extent of her preserved features. This is an all iron ship - hull, masts, bowsprit - even the shrouds of iron wire. Her three masts still stand, rising slightly above the cross trees. Getting on board is not easy, involving an interesting approach from a rubber dinghy to a dangling rope ladder. The effort proved well worth while, for the ship is full of interesting details. The hull is basically just one huge cargo hold, so that once she was holed her fate was sealed. Among the fixtures was a curious tripod arrangement that was once the base of a windmill used to power the bilge pumps.

The trip out across the harbour provided a new opportunity to view some other vessels, among them one of considerable interest, the steam tug *Samson*. At the end of the nineteenth century there had been much public complaint about the lack of such a vessel in the harbour. The complaint reached a crescendo in 1896 when the fully rigged ship, *City of Philadelphia*, hit a rock and foundered in sight of land with the loss of all crew - and all for want of a powerful vessel. *Samson* was the answer; built in Hull in 1888 she arrived in the islands in 1900. It is still possible to peer in and see her rusty triple-expansion engine. Another vessel with British connections was the little Portmadoc brig - a mere 242 tons - built in 1874 and sturdy enough to work on a coal run from Wales as late as 1911 when she finished her last voyage at Stanley.

I also had the opportunity to visit the site of the railway built by the Royal Navy along the northern shore of Stanley harbour, a distance of approximately 6.5 km. It was not entirely removed from my sailing interests. A small truck was fitted with a small gaff sail and was regularly used by naval personnel to get from one end of the line to the other - if not back again. The main power came from the two narrow-gauge 0-4-0 saddle tank locomotives, both of Kerr Smart "Wren" class. Their battered remains had only recently been rescued from a rubbish tip, but there seemed to be enough to create at least one moderately complete locomotive.

From Stanley I flew to Goose Green - and the pilot obligingly circled the *Lady Elizabeth* for photographs and made a diversion so that I could look down on another, otherwise inaccessible hull, the *Garland*. Goose Green has its own hulk, the most venerable of them all, the *Vicar of Bray*, built c.1845 at Whitehaven. She was one of the genuine forty-niners and was lucky to get back from San Francisco as the crew promptly abandoned ship for the gold fields. She worked in the ore trade, taking copper ore to Swansea for smelting until she was honourably retired in the 1880s. A small vessel, her registered tonnage, 281 tons, can still be seen carved in elegant script on a beam. It was shearing time at Goose Green and I had a chance to see an aged piece of industrial archaeology at work. The wool is compressed into bales using a system manufactured by John Shaw and Sons of Salford. Wool is loaded into a box sunk in a pit and when full a stout wooden structure is wheeled in place over the pit and the wool is forced up by a hydraulic ram and packed into a solid bale. Even here the wrecks play a part - the start and end of work is signalled on the bell of the old *Rotomahana*. From Goose Green I was taken by Land Rover

across the "camp", an area of seemingly featureless countryside with only the faintest of tracks visible. It was a 70 km journey that took eight hours and involved a crossing of North Arm creek on the islands' solitary suspension bridge.

The objective was a shepherd's hut at Fanny Cove, where I stayed overnight to see the wrecks that abound at Bull Point. A note in the *Falklands Islands Gazette* of 1896 warned sailors "when a heavy sea is rolling in on the South and South East Coasts of the Falklands Islands, there is stated to be a strong set to the North-westward to which set has been attributed the loss of several vessels in the neighbourhood of Bull Point." There are signs of carnage everywhere - broken spars, a fence of ships' timbers, a dead-eye lying on the pebbles of the beach. Timbers half-buried in the sand make convenient door lintels for jackass penguin burrows. The most spectacular remains are those of the *Craigie Lee*, another iron-hulled sailing ship that ran aground in 1879. The stern section lies on its side, buffeted by breakers. An unusual feature is the small lighthouse with an acetylene lamp. Bull Point is an extraordinarily beautiful spot of white sand and blue sea, uninhabited apart from flocks of penguins and other birds. Given time there is much to discover - the figurehead of the barque *Horatio* is said, for example, to be buried under the sands. However, I had to start back for Goose Green - though there was time to see the remains of a steamship at Danson harbour, a collier which was abandoned here in the 1920s.

There was to be one last visit to a wreck site, to Kelp Lagoon, 40 km from Stanley. The *St Mary* had a tragic history. She was a three-masted ship, built at Phippsburg, Maine in 1890 and set off on her maiden voyage from New York to San Francisco, under the command of Captain Jesse T. Carver. On the return journey she was in a collision off the Horn and lost the rigging on her mizzen mast. This would have made steering more difficult and she finished up on the rocks. The crew rowed ashore leaving the captain on board. When they returned in the morning he had killed himself - the *St Mary* was his third loss. The remains of the *St Mary* give a clear indication of how she was built, as one can see a cross section through the hull, with its double planking, beams and wooden knees. After the *St Mary* only one more wooden ship was to be built in Maine. Equally interesting was the cargo strewn around the beach - sections of railway track, boxes of tin tacks and cast iron toys - model trains and horses.

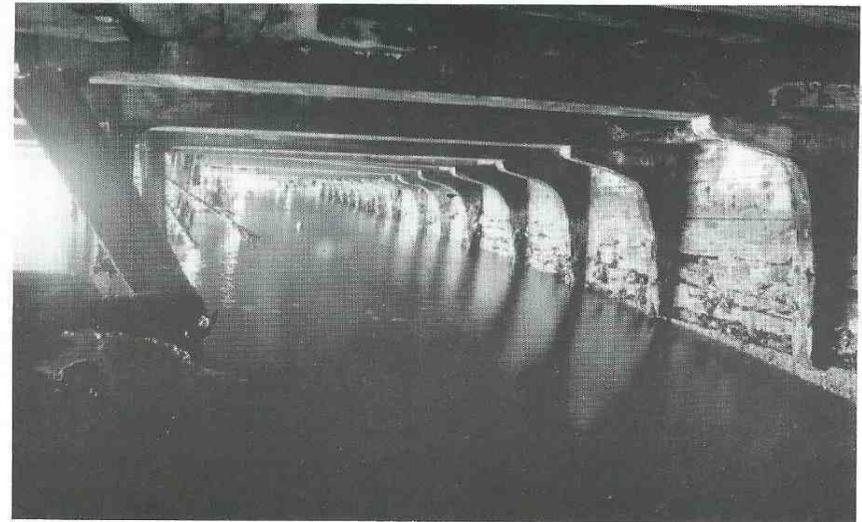
It was to have been the last wreck of the visit - but there proved to be one more of a different nature. A school of whales had been stranded years ago in the next bay and now all that was left were the huge whitened bones, like Henry Moore sculptures.

These few notes have not included all the wrecks and hulks of the Falklands. For anyone with an interest in nineteenth-century ship building these remains are unique - covering the full range from the all wooden to the all iron ship. Their setting, often in remote and wild countryside, helped to make the Falklands visit one rich in memories.

Photographs: Author



The stern section of the *Craigie Lee* at Bull Point
The mizzen mast of the *SS Great Britain* and the *Charles Cooper*



The flooded hold of the *Charles Cooper*
Passenger accommodation in the *Charles Cooper*

