A SHIP FOR THE TAKING:
THE WRECK OF THE BRISBANE AS A CASE STUDY
IN SITE SALVAGE AND MATERIAL CULTURE REUSE

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‘I hereby declare that the work herein, now submitted as a thesis for the degree of Master by Research of the Charles Darwin University, is the result of my own investigations and all references to ideas and work of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged. I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has not already been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any degree’

David Steinberg
‘Sahei told him that *O-fune-sama* referred to the ships wrecked on the reef that stretched out in front of the village. The ships normally carried such things as food, utensils, luxury goods and cloth, which would substantially improve the lives of the villagers. Also, pieces of ship’s timber smashed by the rocks and angry seas and hurled up on the beach would be used to repair houses, or even to make furniture.

The late-autumn village ritual was carried out in the hope that passing ships would founder on the reef.’

*Shipwrecks*

Akira Yoshimura
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ABSTRACT

On the 10th of October 1881 the Brisbane, a large, modern and well equipped steamship carrying passengers and cargo struck Fish Reef, approximately 25 nautical miles from Port Darwin, and became permanently stranded. What followed over the next three months was an organised salvage programme in which the ship was salvaged of cargo, equipment and fittings. These goods were sold to Port Darwin locals through a series of auctions. The wreck provided a wide selection of second-hand goods to a small isolated community. Approximately one hundred years later locals return to this wreck to take objects they considered of value.

This thesis is a case study in material culture salvage and reuse of material from the Brisbane. Local men purchased the wreck in 1881 and presided over an extensive salvage programme in which maritime technical equipment and a range of other equipment, furnishings and fittings were removed, sold and reused. Some items were not salvaged and were left on the wreck site, these being visible today. The decision of salvors to not reuse some machinery and equipment challenges broad assumptions that isolated pioneer settlements, with poor access to goods, without fail practiced full scale salvage and reuse out of necessity. This thesis examines what was taken, why it was selected and how it was used.

Recent cases of salvage in which objects are valued as historic ornaments are analysed in detail to demonstrate that there is no consensus to either the historic value of this wreck or its objects. Analysing the kinds of qualities attributed to historic ornaments, identifying them for example as antiquities or curios, reflect different ways in which people engage with the past. A comparison of salvage in 1881 to that more recent shows change in how salvage and reuse have functioned as social mechanisms. This thesis emphasises that object transformations may not involve physical modification, and that object meaning is relevant to a specific time and place.
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Finally thanks to Anna Davis for her patience, support and editing assistance.
CHAPTER ONE:  
INTRODUCTION

1. Research Question

I first became interested in the Brisbane shipwreck in 1999 when I accepted a contract with the Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory (MAGNT) to write a management plan for the site. Over the course of this contract I found a handful of historical references particularly interesting. One of these was written by William Sowden in 1882, one year after the Brisbane was stranded on Fish Reef outside Darwin Harbour. He was a South Australian parliamentarian who made a trip to the Northern Territory and he described his visit to the homestead of a sugar plantation, located on the west bank of Darwin Harbour, with:

‘The inside is gorgeous with imitation rainbows; and there are most curious devices in furniture and fittings, some of the latter from the wreck of the Brisbane – a wreck which was quite a godsend to the folk thereabout. You meet with ‘Brisbane’ relics everywhere’ (Sowden 1882:91).

What first intrigued me about this statement is that it demonstrates that the history of this shipwreck and the social history of Port Darwin, a name often used in the late 19th century for present-day Darwin, are connected through the salvage and reuse of materials from this wreck. It appears that people furnished their homes with salvaged fittings and furnishings from the ship. I discovered later that salvage was extensive and salvaged objects were reused in a variety of ways and circumstances. Another fascinating aspect of this quotation is that the wreck was described as a ‘godsend’ for the local community of Port Darwin. Far from being a disaster, the wrecking event provided what must have been a greatly needed injection of material goods. It also suggests something about the quality and range of the objects and materials that were salvaged and reused. Port Darwin at that time was a small isolated community that was economically struggling. The Brisbane was a large ocean going steamship, powered by sophisticated technology and built with luxury accommodation. Therefore
this match between a community in need and a shipwreck serving as a source for material goods makes this an important event in local social history, and a remarkable story about the diffusion and reuse of material culture. I began to appreciate that the more interesting historical connection between this shipwreck and the community of Port Darwin lay not in the story of the ship but in the story of the shipwreck.

As part of my contract with the MAGNT I made some enquiries into contemporary visitation to the wreck in order to identify public stakeholders and gauge possible human threats to the site. It was evident that contemporary salvage was occurring. As part of research for this thesis I went further and interviewed a number of collectors, and I analysed their collections. This gave me a number of examples of both salvaged relics and some insight into the processes of salvage and reuse. This work gave me the information to begin to construct an inventory of raised relics, which also includes the MAGNT collection of Brisbane objects. This recent evidence shows that salvage of this wreck site is ongoing and that the history of this wreck’s salvage so far is 120 years long.
While salvage can cause the loss of archaeological integrity, thereby hindering archaeological research, it also forms an opportunity for framing new research questions. Furthermore, the fossicking of a historic site by the public demonstrates an interest in and engagement with the past, even if it limits professional objectives. These heritage issues are discussed further in this thesis.

In my study of the history of salvage in 1881 and my research of more contemporary salvage, I focus my enquiry into determining the criteria for selection by collectors and the meanings and functions for salvaged objects as determined by their users. I question why people have removed some things over others, how objects are used, how they are categorised, and how important provenance is to object significance. The importance of these questions is that my inventory of raised relics is not ordered based on differences in form, or manufacture, or materials, or other similar approaches to object analysis. Rather these objects have individual trajectories, and it is their particular stories, of collection, use and even discard, that form object meaning. In this context the wreck site is identified as a quarry or source for individual objects. What has emerged from a rather mundane story of a ship stranding, a story without heroic tales of rescue or moving accounts of survival and tragedy, is a case study that speaks of a long-term interaction between a community and a wreck site.

I have focused my enquiry by answering a specific research question:

Has there been change in the criteria used by salvors in selecting objects from the Brisbane wreck site and in how Darwin residents have reused these objects over the past 120 years?

This research question can be broken down into two sub-questions:

1. What objects and materials were available to salvors?

This question is about two issues, availability and accessibility. Availability refers to the materials that constituted the ship structure, fittings, furnishings and cargo when the ship struck Fish Reef. Essentially this is a question about what physically
constituted the ship when it struck the reef and became stranded. What must be subtracted from this kind of inventory is the personal belongings removed by officers, crew and passengers, undamaged cargo that may have been salvaged and sent on to their respective ports of destination, and any material deliberately jettisoned or material that floated away (flotsam). Accessibility is about how accessible the things that remained on Fish Reef were to salvors. For example if the shipwreck was difficult to access because it was submerged at a considerable depth, or if only some areas of the wreck were accessible because structure may have collapsed on top of other deposits, then what was ultimately salvaged may be an accurate reflection not of what was considered valuable, but only of what was accessible. These questions are addressed in Chapter 5.

2. What was taken from the shipwreck, how were these items reused and what criteria determined value?

This requires a detailed history of salvage and reuse. It also involves an analysis of the criteria used by salvors. These questions are dealt with in Chapters 2, 4 and 6.

2. Aim and Scope of this thesis

Fundamentally this thesis is about significance, about those objects that were considered valuable and were retrieved, and those which were not and were left at the wreck site. It is about those objects sold at the shipwreck auctions in 1881 and those which were not considered valuable commodities and so were donated. It is about those items contemporary salvors still consider valuable items in their personal collections months or years after they were collected, and about those that have lessened in value over time. This thesis concerns the different categories of significance and what makes something significant. Figure 2 charts those categories or kinds of significance that I have identified in this study. This chart holds two kinds of information. Firstly it identifies ways of classifying objects according to perceived significance. Secondly it shows that objects may change in significance over time, moving from one category to another. Objects can undergo one or more transformation in use and meaning.
At the top of Figure 2 salvage is divided into organised salvage and random fossicking. This is a division with historical importance, distinguishing the organised salvage of 1881 from the far more random and unsystematic collection of more recent fossicking. This division between phases or periods of salvage permits certain historical analogies to be made about consistency and change over time. The different categories shown in Figure 2 are explained in detail in Chapter 2. However a brief summary here will make the chart clear. Objects taken from the wreck in 1881 were diffused into Port Darwin as either donations or commodities. I distinguish objects being reused as instruments or symbols. This distinction is a reference to what evidence is available and consequently to what extent we explore that object’s reuse. Where there is evidence and commentary about reuse beyond a simple mechanical function I explore its broader symbolic function, involving for example an object’s role as a social status symbol.

Most of the categories associated with recent fossicking, such as the historical curio and memento, fall within a broader group of objects deemed significant as historic ornaments. The exception to this is the object as commodity, which refers to the
collection of brass scrap for sale. Leading from this group is the object as donation and the object as antique. The broken lines in Figure 2 indicate that only some collectors have been willing to donate objects to the MAGNT or believe that the wreck is old enough for it and related objects to be considered antique. These are categories in contention.

Ultimately the significance of an object is a social construct. Thomas (1991:4) poignantly states that ‘…objects are not what they were made to be, but what they have become’. This suggests two things. Firstly, that an object’s form does not strictly determine use and meaning, and secondly that the function of an object may change, differing from the prescribed function for which it was manufactured. For example in this case study an anchor which was once used as an anchor is later incorporated into a monument. The anchor has not been physically modified to accommodate this monument, yet its primary function has changed.

3. Thesis Outline

Chapter 2 is a review of the relevant theoretical ideas. It includes a literature review and contextualises this work within the broader discussion of material culture value.

Chapter 3 provides a history of the Brisbane’s working life, and a summary of the stranding event. It gives a brief description of Port Darwin in 1881, and provides examples of local auctions that occurred around the time of the Brisbane shipwreck auctions.

Chapter 4 is a summary and analysis of the salvage of the wreck and the subsequent auction of salvaged goods in 1881. This rapid and intense period of organised salvage only lasted approximately three months. I explore some specific examples of reuse and comment on different kinds of significance.

Chapter 5 provides a description of recent survey of the wreck site listing the materials and objects that remain on the site. As stated earlier these constitute those materials rejected in the salvage process. It describes signs of salvage, for example boilers that have been damaged for copper scrap metal. It also provides a site
formation model. This model cites historical evidence and uses archaeological evidence to demonstrate that the shipwreck has always been accessible to salvors; accessibility having been described as an important consideration earlier in this chapter. This model also explains the role of natural forces in the removal of material and the degradation of ship integrity.

Chapter 6 provides a summary and analysis of more recent salvage, dating from the 1970s to 2003. I explore some specific examples of salvage and reuse and comment on different kinds of significance.

Chapter 7 focuses on three ideas. The first is that salvage is a social process. Secondly, that the meaning of an object is, in part, relative to a particular time and place. Thirdly, that the categories of antiquity and historical curio and monument can signify fundamentally different ways that people view the past.

Chapter 8 is the conclusion to this thesis

In one context by exploring the story of a shipwreck this thesis is about maritime history. It also draws from the methodology of maritime archaeology, with the survey of a partially submerged site. But this thesis has broader relevance, for the story quickly leaves the water, tracing the injection and diffusion of a group of material goods into a community. Some of these objects were sheets, napkins, couches and musical instruments. That fact that these things had been sourced from a shipwreck had no real bearing on their uses. On the one hand this is an historical study, which identifies the salvage of this wreck as an event in local social history. However because this study includes recent uses and meanings of salvaged objects it constitutes, in part, a contemporary study of how people give significance to things. Therefore this thesis does not just inform about Port Darwin in 1881, but is a study also about ourselves (Buchli and Lucas 2001:4, Leone 1981, Rathje 1981).
CHAPTER TWO:
SALVAGE AND MATERIAL CULTURE STUDIES

1. Introduction

The Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea, a definitive dictionary of maritime terms, defines salvage as either a portion of the value of a ship or cargo offered as a reward to those who saved a vessel in distress, or the recovery of a ship and/or its contents (Kemp 1976:747). In this study salvage is taken to refer to the latter meaning.

The aim of this chapter is to contextualise this work within the broader discussion of material culture value. I focus on four areas. These are:

- Briefly exploring the economic, industrial and social dimensions of salvage through a series of examples
- Examining relevant approaches in material culture analysis
- Examining the relevance of a diachronic and synchronic approach to this research
- Explaining the specific kinds of object significance, as introduced in Chapter 1

The vocabulary, ideas and variety of case studies offered in this chapter form a theoretical framework, which is used in this thesis to examine this specific story of shipwreck salvage and reuse.

2. The economic and industrial dimension of salvage

A history of the salvage of objects and materials from a shipwreck or a series of shipwrecks can contribute to our knowledge about economic and industrial history. Richards has analysed the relationship between local practices in ship abandonment and scrap metal salvage with regulatory processes, technological change and market forces (Richards 1997, 2002). He identifies a link between local scrap metal salvage and world prices for scrap metal. One can investigate shipwreck salvage as an ordered and planned social practice and a comparison between stories of shipwreck
salvage can contribute to the building of models of salvage behaviour, looking at phases, purposes and archaeological signatures (Gibbs 2003).

Individual stories of the salvage and reuse of machinery and technological equipment can be interesting stories of technological ingenuity and invention. For example here in the Northern Territory the paddle steamer *Young Australian* was wrecked in the Roper River in 1873 (Ashford no date). In circa 1925 one of the paddlewheels was removed from the wreck, transported to Groote Island and erected in the Emerald River to drive a sawmill and various pumps (Forrest 1990:190, Ashford n.d.). There are also numerous examples of the salvage of propulsion engines from boats and ships around Australia, these being fitted to different vessels (Hardwick 1997). The fitting of salvaged engines demonstrates that the life history of equipment does not necessarily end with the conclusion of a ship’s working life.

A useful comparison can be made between the salvage of the *Brisbane* and that of the *Emden*, a German light-cruiser that was run aground by its Captain in November 1914 on North Cocos Keeling Island, following a sea battle against the HMAS *Sydney* (Gibson-Hill 1948:98-99). Between October 1915 and January 1916 the islanders conducted an organised salvage of the wreck (Gibson-Hill 1948:99). One similarity is that in both cases salvage was organised and not random and opportunistic. Figure 3 shows a wire rope carrier erected between the *Emden* and the shore for salvage purposes. The construction of this pulley, and also the extension of the rail track to transport salvaged goods, shows the investment of time and resources to support an organised salvage programme.
A second similarity between these cases of shipwreck salvage is that both communities were small and geographically isolated. Some archaeologists who have worked extensively in Australian industrial history have suggested interpretative themes and models for technological adaptation and industrial reuse in isolated locations (Birmingham, Jack and Jeans 1983:11-12, Pearson 1984:29, Pearson 1992, Pearson, 1996, Todd 1995). Birmingham, Jack and Jeans refer to dominant themes such as isolation and ingenuity whilst M. Pearson, in his 1992 paper on ship tanks, refers to a general practice of technological adaptation in isolated materials poor locations. W. Pearson (1996) examines windmill technology, and argues for a variety of conditions that predetermine whether technology, both hardware and knowledge, is successfully transferred between places. In Chapter 7 I discuss Brisbane salvage in the context of technological adaptation in Port Darwin.

3. The social dimension of salvage

Some stories of salvage may deal less with economic and industrial issues and focus more on objects taking on social and symbolic meanings. Furthermore, salvage itself can be an act with profound social meaning. For example Royal Divers discovered and recovered a graduation ring of an American officer killed aboard the Peary, when
the Japanese attacked Darwin Harbour in 1942 (Mullins, cited in McCarthy 1992:18). The ring was returned to the family of the deceased officer. The value of the ring was its association with the previous owner. Here salvage facilitated the discovery of personal items which may have grown to be significant memorabilia for loved ones. A similar example is that in the 1960s Japanese salvors, working on World War 2 wrecks in Darwin Harbour, made crucifixes out of scrap salvaged from these wrecks and donated them to a local Anglican Church (NTN 15/03/1960). Here scrap metal was not only turned into religious symbols, but was also used to communicate a message of peace between people. Another example of recovered materials being converted into culturally poignant objects is the phenomenon of trench art, in which spent military shells and other military equipment is incorporated into passionate and personal works of art (Saunders 2000).

A discussion of the social and cultural dimensions of salvage should firmly acknowledge that maritime salvage and reuse are not necessarily acts which involve creating and nurturing social and cultural meaning. Some acts of salvage can be an offence to cultural values. Researchers have noted that in some cultures boats have great symbolic meaning (Adams 2001, Malinowski 1987, Southon 1995, Stacy 1999). For example, Stacy notes that building an Indonesian Bajo perahu is a highly ritualised process, and during a stage of this process the perahu is given a life or soul (Stacy 1999:102). The consequences for Indonesian seafarers caught fishing in Australian waters can include the forfeiture and even burning of their boats by Australian authorities (Stacy 1999:108). As these boats live a life, they also undergo a death (Stacy 1999:105). In cases of forfeiture, in which boats or equipment may be reused by the government or sold to local residents, how does this action fit into the cultural explanation of the life cycle of these boats? Here the reuse of maritime material culture has an impact on highly developed and significant cultural beliefs.

In a similar vein, in Australia and elsewhere the shipwreck as property has been challenged in some instances by the notion of the shipwreck as cultural resource (Green 1995, Jeffery 1999, Nutley 1990). Like the Bajo, Australians have determined that some boats have worth far beyond their value as functional vessels. The protection of a shipwreck, a site, a place, or a portion of the landscape as a cultural asset is in itself a reflection of cultural values, more specifically a reflection of what
places a community considers significant and how that significance is determined (Ross 1996, Smith 1996). Included here is the protection of wrecks as tombs of the dead. A Northern Territory example is the I-124 Japanese submarine. This vessel was sunk outside Darwin Harbour in 1943 and the Japanese government has requested that it remain undisturbed as a sacred war grave (McCarthy 1998).

4. Approaches in material culture analysis

Figure 4 shows the five directions of analysis used in this thesis. These draw together some of the ideas already discussed, such as the industrial and social dimensions of salvage and reuse.

![Figure 4. Directions in Analysis](image)

The ‘cultural history of wreck’ is the consideration of the transformation of the wreck from commodity to historic site and cultural resource. The ‘shipwreck as debris site’ is a different perspective that focuses on the fact that what constitutes the shipwreck today is the refuse of salvage activity. Archaeological signatures include signs of salvage, for example the destruction of a boiler housing to remove brass tubes. The presence of things not salvaged also contributes to the story. ‘Object biographies’ involves studying the individual trajectories and life histories of objects salvaged from the wreck. ‘Variation between objects’ is a comparison of the different object
categories that reflect different forms of significance, for example between the historical curio and the memento. ‘Salvage as reuse process’ is the analysis of salvage and reuse as social processes (Schiffer 1987).

Explaining these approaches in greater detail, outlined in part below, Schiffer offers a useful vocabulary to study salvage and reuse as social processes (Schiffer 1987: 27-30, 36).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systemic context</th>
<th>An object in use exists in a systemic context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archaeological context</td>
<td>A discarded object exists in an archaeological context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuse processes</td>
<td>A process, for example salvage, in which a new user or use assures an object remains in or returns to the systemic context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateral cycling</td>
<td>Associated with a change in who uses an object without the need for physical modification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recycling</td>
<td>Associated with a change in form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary use</td>
<td>Involves a change in function without extensive modification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuse mechanism</td>
<td>A reuse mechanism, for example an auction or donation, is a process that moves objects between people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Schiffer’s salvage and reuse vocabulary

The terms listed in Table 1 are useful in this research because they emphasise that salvage and reuse are activities that occur in the social world and are therefore the subject matter of history and archaeology. Furthermore they make a distinction between an object in use and abandoned, and between the process of collection and the process of exchange.

A major approach of this thesis is an examination of the social and cultural context of the individual object. Schlereth (1982:33) identifies approaches in material culture studies in which the single object is comprehensively analysed. This is associated with what has been called the ‘symbolist perspective’ (Schlereth 1982:43-46). It is an approach that deals with qualitative rather than quantitative data, and explores the social and political dimensions of single objects. This focus on the individual trajectories of things relates to what is often referred to as object biographies (Appadurai 1986, Callahan 1999, Gosden & Marshall 1999, Kopytoff 1986, Peers 1999).
As with the biography of a person, the biography of an object is formed by the events in its life history. It is a story of the interaction between objects, people and society over time. A *cultural biography* appreciates that objects are culturally constructed entities endowed with specific cultural meanings, and are over time classified and reclassified (Kopytoff 1986:68). As categories of meanings are culturally created, and the stages in an object’s life are culturally determined, these meanings and transformations can reveal things about that society (Kopytoff 1986:68). A similar approach, with a specific focus on the geographic region of northern Australia and southeast Asia, appears in a volume edited by Fredericksen and Walters (2000).

This thesis adopts a material culture perspective that is non-empirical and not reliant on the traditional attributes of objects as assigned by archaeologists; these being location, form and age (Crook, Lawrence & Gibbs 2002). These dimensions are considered to be crucial in archaeological analysis (Deetz 1977:64). Lawrence (1998) describes artefact cataloguing, seriation and dating as the empiricist perspective, and notes that other valid approaches to material culture research also exist. In this thesis I focus less on the measurement of visible attributes and more on subjective value as assigned by object users. A comparison of these personal definitions of meaning subscribes to Hodder’s goal to uncover ‘deeper levels of variation’ between objects (Hodder 1986:134). Hodder (1982:24) stresses the importance of looking beyond simple analogies about an object to explore the user’s *attitude* towards an object.

Finally, that a shipwreck is the site investigated in this study has advantages. One such advantage is that the archaeology of a shipwreck deals with the archaeology of a single structure. Unless a wreck site has been contaminated by other deposits such as other shipwrecks, wharf developments or abandoned salvage equipment all of the objects found on the site are components of the same closed system (Muckelroy 1978:56, Staniforth 2003:30). The *Brisbane* shipwreck has not been contaminated by any other deposits so forms a closed system. The relevance of this fact is that it makes a biographical approach more complete and authoritative because the source of objects as found on the reef is known. The closed system analogy is particularly strong in this case as the shipwreck is literally kilometres from other cultural deposits.
Another advantage, related to that of shipwreck as a single structure, is that the archaeology of a shipwreck is the archaeology of an event. Consequently there is tight temporal control over the exact time when objects were deposited (Muckelroy 1978: 56, Gould 2000:12, Staniforth 2003:28). This is particularly important in this study because if there was an ongoing process in which new objects were deposited on the site after the wrecking event, it would be far more difficult to argue that the material which exists today is left by salvors since salvage first began.

5. The Synchronic and Diachronic perspectives

I stated earlier in this chapter that the salvage history of the Brisbane is divided into two historic periods. However in this thesis I also break up this story between two differing perspectives of history. For the purpose of this research, events between 1881 and the 1990s, which measures the full expanse of the history of salvage, are referred to as the diachronic. A focus on a specific time within this broad history is referred to as the synchronic. Figure 5 illustrates the difference between synchronic and diachronic with specific attention to phases of Brisbane salvage.

![Figure 5. The synchronic and diachronic perspectives](image)

A synchronic perspective focuses on how objects become entangled in their immediate surroundings. It shows that the meaning of things is associated with a specific time and place. The two synchronic periods illustrated in Figure 5 reflect dominant phases of salvage. Some commentators use the term synchronic to mean an instance, rather than a phase (Fabian 1983:20). But in this research synchronic can encompass months and decades. What is important is that within these two periods or
phases there was no change in dimensions of significance. In late 1881 people viewed collected objects with the same social frame. The frame of reference for object collecting in the period from the 1970s to the 1990s was also similar. The diachronic perspective relates to the notion of the long durée (Braudel 1980). The long durée provides an opportunity to explore new expanses of history and scales of change. For example Broeze uses long durée in his study of port systems in Asia (Broeze 1996:73). In my thesis the diachronic perspective reviews the entire salvage history from the 1880s to the 1990s as one process. Here I study change over time.

6. Types of significance identified in this study

All meanings ascribed to objects are socially constructed. The different object categories that are associated with perceived significance (shown in Figure 2), for example the commodity and historical curio, have emerged as being particularly dominant in this case of salvage and reuse. As objects have trajectories, moving between people and places, and as social meanings and values change over time, objects do not remain a commodity or historical curio indefinitely. For example in terms of the commodity memento and antique, commodities once valued based on market forces can become personal heirlooms, and personal heirlooms can be sold on the open market as antiques. Therefore there is no fixed definition as to the meaning of an object but rather it is in a constant state of flux and change. Furthermore the explanations of object meanings as offered by salvors and collectors can be complex, in which meaning draws on a variety of classifications, and so an object can be both historical curio and trophy to one person.

6.1. The object as commodity and donation

In this thesis commodity refers to the situation when an object is assigned a market value, allowing it to be compared with other measurable things and so exchanged (Kopytoff 1986:68). It is therefore a strict definition of commodity based on how much money an object is worth. As with all of the categories of meaning discussed in this thesis, an object may be a commodity for only a period of time. It may also become one again at another time. Thus objects become commodities when they
reside within a certain set of circumstances (Appadurai 1986:13). Callahan (1999) analyses the biography of the American Liberty Bell and emphasises its transition from commodity to sacred object. Kopytoff (1986:68) talks about a tension in society between the force to turn all things into commodities, and the force that removes things from the market deeming them priceless and sacred. This notion of a tension in society between defining an object as a commodity and purposefully removing an object from monetary evaluation is discussed further. Figure 2 shows that *Brisbane* objects have been identified as commodities both in 1881 and more recently.

Over the history of *Brisbane* salvage donation has appeared as a *reuse mechanism*, a process, like commodification, that has facilitated the exchange of objects. Objects from this wreck have been exchanged through donation both in 1881 and more recently. Donation can be, but is not necessarily, a process in which the donor expects nothing in return. An example is anonymous donations of second hand goods to opportunity shops which in turn sell these items very cheaply. In contrast, in this thesis I examine a case of donation in which the donor used objects from the *Brisbane* as a means to influence the behaviour of an entire group of recipients. Here seemingly harmless objects were used as a tool in political coercion.

6.2. The instrument and the symbol

The difference between an instrument and a symbol is one of a different focus by the researcher on the context of an object as it is used. The division of object use between utilitarian function and symbolic value is established (Deetz 1977:51, Shanks and Tilley 1987a:88). The object as ‘instrument’ is discussed by Maquet (Maquet 1993:30-34). An analysis of an object as an instrument is a strict focus on its practical and straightforward function as a tool. For example an anchor is used to secure a vessel at sea, or a piano is used as a musical instrument. Both these examples appear in this research. Maquet does not argue that instruments have no other meaning or function within society but only suggests that this line of enquiry can produce insight, and that it requires less abstraction than an analysis of symbolic meaning. The value of studying objects as instruments in this thesis is that it explores a large part of the story of reuse in 1881. Here there was lateral recycling in which anchors, sails, sheets, blankets were salvaged and reused for their utilitarian value.
The object as symbol is a further level of analysis in understanding object use and meaning. In terms of studying symbolic meaning Maquet states that, in contrast to instrumentality, the researcher must turn to the users rather than the manufacturer to understand object meaning (Maquet 1993:35). There are examples of salvaged objects in 1881 being used as status symbols, political tools of coercion or mechanisms that bring family together. These are examples of broader social roles than just tools and so form a symbolic rather than physical value. In this research the symbolic value of an object is something consciously assigned by people. In contrast are other approaches that emphasise that objects can actively reinforce social norms, power relationships and cognitive patterns without the user’s knowledge (Hodder 1992:13, Mackenzie & Wajcman 1985:7, Shanks and Tilley 1987a:98-102).

Included in the discourse about understanding object meaning is the popular argument that objects are not just things used and then discarded, but are active participants in human history, not just reflecting culture but reinforcing it (Buchli and Lucas 2001:5, Lawrence 1998, Mackenzie & Wajcman 1985:7, Shanks and Tilley 1987b:142). Particularly relevant here is Orser’s use of the term ‘mutualism’, referring to a focus on human interaction and relationships, in which the form of the object is less relevant than the message being conveyed through the object (Orser 1996:53). This thesis will demonstrate that the symbolic function of some salvaged Brisbane objects is to actively communicate social, cultural or personal messages from one group or person to another.

6.3. Those meanings associated with ‘the past’

6.3.1. A public that actively engages with the past

The categories of memento, historical curio, antique, and to an extent trophy, all relate to a significance which is based on the object having an association with ‘the past’. Though as a group these are all conceived as historic ornaments, the differences between them point to different ways that the past is used. Lowenthal (1985:35-73) identifies a variety of attractions and uses for the past, for example affirmation of identity, as guidance, or to escape the confines of the contemporary world. Davison (1988) analyses three roles for the past, as identified by Nietzsche, in the context of
Australian history. These are monumental history, which is punctuated by big events and famous characters; antiquarian history, which is nostalgic; and critical history, which relates to a critical and not necessarily favourable interpretation of the past. The relevance of Lowenthal’s and Davison’s arguments here is to demonstrate that it is a commonly held premise that the past can have different uses. Furthermore, this engagement with the past can be achieved through historic objects.

That people use objects as one way to engage with the past has been clearly demonstrated through a 1999-2001 national survey to investigate Australian attitudes towards and usage of history (Hamilton and Ashton 2003). Fifty five percent of respondents stated that they engage with history by visiting museums and historic places. Thirty three percent engaged with the past by having a hobby such as collecting. Seventy percent engaged with the past by saving heirlooms (Hamilton and Ashton 2003:11). These results demonstrate that Australians are not necessarily passive students of history, but prefer to actively engage with it (Hamilton and Ashton 2003:5). These results also show that the ways Australians engage with the past often revolve around sites and objects.

6.3.2. Collection and the ‘past’

The behaviour of collectors, the criteria used to appraise objects, and how collections are made and organised, demonstrates something about interpretations of the past and the role of material culture in this process. Pearce (1991:3) discusses how Collection Studies should deal with ‘the nature of the collections themselves, and the reasons why people collect, both the explicit intellectual or ‘presentable’ reasons, and the more obscure psychological or social reasons’. Playford (1996: 119) cites an incident in the salvage of the Dutch shipwreck the Zuytdorp, located on the West Australian coast. The team constructed a worktable and bench seats out of wood from the wreck so that they could comfortably study those items from the wreck deemed significant. The incident demonstrates the result of a criterion that distinguished the significant salvaged objects from the insignificant wood of the wreck. In this thesis collectors are seen to actively engage with the past, and their collections demonstrate both uses of the past and the role of objects to facilitate those uses.
6.3.3. Collection, research and conservation

Finally, the collection of historic objects is not exclusively a private activity but can have a political dimension. McBryde (1985) argues that in the study of Australian Aboriginal history the question of ownership relates both to perceptions of the past and the actual use, control and interpretation of the physical remains of the past. Mulvaney (1985) refers to the collection of Aboriginal cultural property by explorers, colonists and museums. He concludes by supporting the repatriation of cultural objects to Aboriginal people and argues that the collector is more custodian than owner. The relevance of the political dimension of collection to this case study is that the collection of objects from the Brisbane shipwreck can be perceived as the depletion or destruction of a cultural resource (AIMA 1994, Henderson 1993, Hosty 1987, Jeffrey 1999). As the site is protected under the Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976 it has been illegal since 1993 to be in possession of unregistered items or to collect further objects without a permit.

In this thesis I do not aim to condone the fossicking of the Brisbane wreck site, but wish only to record and understand it. Evidence has shown that the public are not just passive recipients of prepared histories but actively engage with the past and do so partly through the collection of historic objects. In understanding this process I believe there is an important case for what Lowenthal refers to as the difference between Heritage and History (Lowenthal 1996). Public and private uses of the past (heritage) differ from the academic study of the past (history). The difference is one of motivation.

Another perspective that supports the validity of analysing public interpretations of object meaning is the argument that all definitions of object meaning are social constructs, even those constructed by archaeologists. Smith (1996:67) argues that the scientific significance of archaeological sites is not an absolute quality but is born from academic trends in research, in which significance and meaning is created and recreated. Similarly Bowdler notes that the scientific research value of archaeological sites is dependant on timely research questions and contemporary academic debate (Bowdler 1984:1). Ross (1996:9-17) argues that many heritage managers (influenced by an archaeology background) see the cultural landscape as a specific site with
boundaries, perhaps including a focus on material remains. In contrast, Ross argues, is the Australian Aboriginal view in which the unmarked landscape is an entity in its own right.

That object meaning is a constantly changing socially constructed entity, even amongst professionals, is also seen in museum exhibitions. Leone (1981:5) rightly argues that when objects are placed on display they show in part what the past was like, but also contemporary interpretations of the past. For example, Peers (1999) explains how the explanations for a beaded bag originating from North America changed over time. Rather than accurately describing in detail the life-history of this particular object the author shows how it came to symbolise first tribal identity and later contact history, reflecting the wax and wane of popular approaches in presenting the indigenous past. This argument is not meant as an attack on museum curation, but as an example of how all meanings ascribed to objects are socially constructed.

Within this thesis the collection of Brisbane objects by a museum is discussed, as is the protection through legislation of the site and related objects as a cultural resource. I have chosen to consider the museum curation of Brisbane objects and the heritage protection of the site as just further examples of how people interpret and use the past.

6.4. The memento

In this study ‘memento’ is used to mean an object that provides an association with the past. The memento makes the past familiar, attainable, memorable, rather than emphasising remoteness or difference between the past and the present. The memento can connect one with a personal history, for example the family heirloom. Or the memento can signify a shared, collective, very public history, for example the memento as monument (Davison 1988).

The line between the memento and the monument is blurred, particularly where people associate objects with a specific group’s history or are alone in deciding a particular object’s association with certain events. An example of both is the importance Edwards, who accompanied a team of salvors to the Dutch shipwreck the Batavia on the West Australian coast, placed on a piece of lace (Edwards 1975:61-67). She recounts how she had little interest in the dry facts of history but felt a deep
and immediate association with the women connected to the shipwreck’s story on discovering a small piece of decorative lace, identified as a fragment from female clothing. Edwards felt a connection between herself as a woman and the women who were aboard the ship and endured life at the survivor camp. This was an emotional association that she alone felt.

Turning to Darwin monuments that are very much in the public space, many are associated with two local events, the Japanese air raid on Darwin during World War 2 and Cyclone Tracy in 1974. These are recent events that are considered generally as central and defining stories in Northern Territory history. For example recognition of the significance of the bombing of Darwin is reflected in the existence of the many published accounts of this event (Leach 1999, Lockwood 1966, Powell 1988, Rayner 2002, Tucker 2002). One public monument associated with the bombing of Darwin is the monument to the wreck of the Peary, which is dominated by a gun salvaged from the ship (Figure 6).

![Figure 6. Salvaged gun as war monument to the Peary, Darwin Esplanade](photo: D. Steinberg)

One example of a public monument to Cyclone Tracy is an anchor and plaque monument dedicated to those who lost their lives whilst at sea during the cyclone. This is located at a local boat ramp (Figure 7) and is from an unknown wreck. Another kind of Cyclone Tracy monument comprises the cyclone wrecks themselves.
Two recently discovered wrecks are the *Mandorah Queen* and the *Booya*. A draft management plan for the *Booya* stresses the high social significance of the site (Wells 2004).

![Figure 7. Monument to those who died at sea during Cyclone Tracy, Darwin Trailer Boat Club (photo: D.Steinberg)](image)

The *Peary* monument and the Cyclone Tracy monuments are associated with tragedy. They are emotionally charged local stories. In this thesis I compare the affect these stories have had on the public with the significance people give to the story of the *Brisbane*’s stranding.

### 6.5. The historical curio

In this study the term ‘historical curio’ is used to mean an object for which significance is based on a curiosity value that is associated with the past. The terms ‘curio’ and ‘historical’ each contribute something particular to this phrase and so each will be discussed in turn. An object can be attractive because it evokes curiosity. Strangeness and mystery can be alluring and these are defined by the imagination rather than a growing knowledge of the object’s factual history. As Lowenthal
eloquently states ‘Exotic enigmas enrich heritage more than drab details’ (Lowenthal 1996:136).

Thomas (1991) analyses the curio in the context of the appropriation of material culture from societies foreign to the collector. His study includes the appropriation of indigenous material culture by European explorers in the Pacific. Thomas offers a brief but informative analysis of the psychology of the curio collector, naming it an ‘infantile condition’ which is based on ‘impressionistic judgment’, disconnected from any analytical knowledge (Thomas 1991:128). Griffiths (1996) offers an Australian history of the collection of curios, both natural and cultural. The curio can either evoke curiosity through its form, for example an elaborately decorated costume, or can be simple and mundane in appearance but create curiosity because of the mysteries surrounding what it represents.

In the same way that an object from a foreign culture can be a curio, so can an object originating from one’s own past. Lowenthal (1985), says that the past is a ‘foreign place’. He suggests that objects from the past speak of a different society, gone and never to be repeated. Unlike the memento, the historical curio is not based on the user identifying with the past, there is no nostalgia or familiarity. Rather the past is an alien, perhaps even exotic, place which cannot be visited, but can be invoked through its physical remains.

A local example of the historic curio is an anchor displayed on Kitchener Drive in Darwin, forming the foreground to a plaque dedicated to the Goyder survey party of 1869 (Figure 8). The text on the plaque states it was installed in 1969 but makes no mention of the anchor exhibited alongside. The anchor is not historically connected with the Goyder survey party, although it is used to enhance the plaque. There was no mention of an anchor in the newspaper article describing the unveiling of the plaque and so it may have been installed years later (NTN 06/02/1969). No current employee of the Darwin Port Authority knows when the anchor was added or where the anchor was found (pers.com. Bruce Wilson 2004). The anchor is likely from an unknown ship found either in Darwin Harbour or surrounding waters. As shown by the recent discovery of another large anchor that appears to date to the late 19th century,
historically ambiguous anchors are discovered from time to time in Darwin waters (NTN 28/08/2004).

Figure 8. Goyder party plaque with unknown anchor
(photo: D.Steinberg)

Perhaps one role of the anchor is to enhance the visibility of the plaque to those passing by, as the plaque is diminutive in size. But that somebody has chosen an old style anchor for this function speaks volumes about what they interpreted as the anchors meaning. Certainly the anchor is used as a symbol of maritime culture and this is apt as the Goyder survey party arrived by sea. But the anchor is not of contemporary design, rather it is noticeably, in fact obviously, an historic anchor. Here the anchor is used as a symbol of ‘the past’. This is in fact an extreme example of an historical curio, because the origin of the anchor is not known. Here the past is so general and unspecific that an anchor from an unknown ship can evoke an association with a story about land survey because the survey party arrived by sea. Later in this thesis I examine examples of salvaged Brisbane objects valued as historical curios.
6.6. The antique

The antique has similar qualities to the historical curio in that, unlike the memento, the antique provides a sense that the past and the present are both different and disconnected. What comes to the forefront in the meaning of the antique is age, and the distance between the past and the present. The antique comes from the distant past. Lowenthal (1985:52-57) argues that antiquity has four distinct qualities: precedence, remoteness, primitiveness and primordiality. Of these qualities only remoteness has emerged as an explanation for the perceived antiquity of the Brisbane shipwreck by some. As argued by Lowenthal, the more remote past has a status and romantic attraction that the recent past cannot match (Lowenthal 1985:53). I have previously discussed the Brisbane shipwreck and the quality of antiquity (Steinberg 2005). In this thesis I look further into antiquity and remoteness, particularly the accepted acknowledgment that sufficient time has elapsed for an historic site or object to no longer just be old, but to be antique.

6.7. The trophy

In his introduction to Nautical Antiques and Collectables, Baddeley (1994:6) states:

‘Above all, collecting should be a fun pastime, with all the prize pieces in a collection having a story to tell, not only their use and construction, but on their acquisition’

Baddeley exposes two crucial aspects that relate to objects valued as trophies. The first is that part of the motivation to possess the object in the first place derives from the satisfaction that comes with discovering and collecting it. The second is that in these cases, the story about collection is a crucial if not dominant aspect of the object’s significance to the collector. One motivation behind trophy hunting is personal status. For example Thomas explains that one of the reasons why European explorers in the Pacific collected indigenous material culture was because it was proof that the traveller had visited foreign lands and experienced exotic cultures (Thomas 1991:141). The Brisbane case-study includes incidents in which objects have been deemed personal trophies and then given as gifts to family. As a
personalised gift the object is transformed to represent both the shipwreck and the collector. In this thesis there are examples of collectors describing objects as both trophies and historic curios. Rather than being one or the other, multiple kinds of significance can be cited by collectors.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed concepts that will be applied in this thesis. In this study salvage is discussed as a social process whereby objects move through the world, being selected, redefined, exchanged and in some cases discarded. The cultural history of the entire shipwreck is one area of study focusing on a transformation from monetary commodity to cultural resource. Another area of study is the biographies of individual objects from the wreck site, focusing on the different meanings and significance ascribed to objects. This broad discussion about material culture studies and salvage is placed in a specific historical context in the following chapter, which introduces both the Brisbane wreck and the community that salvaged it.
CHAPTER THREE:
A STRANDED SHIP AND AN ISOLATED PORT

1. Introduction

This chapter has three aims. The first is to provide a background to the *Brisbane* in the context of the ship’s working life, including its last journey in October 1881, and also the marine enquiry that followed. The second aim of the chapter is to review the *Brisbane* steamship in terms of its structure, equipment, fittings and furnishings. The purpose of this inventory is to appreciate what materials were made available to local salvors when the ship struck Fish Reef. The final aim of this chapter is to examine the town of Port Darwin in 1881, with specific attention to demographics, shipping and industrial activity. The local setting is important to this story of salvage and reuse because it was local conditions that formed the demand for salvaged goods. This final section also includes a discussion on other local public auctions held around 1881, as cited in the local newspaper. This comparison, between the auction of *Brisbane* goods and the auction of other second-hand goods will illustrate whether such auctions were common, and what range and quality of goods were sold.

2. The operational period of the *Brisbane* steamship

2.1. Introduction

The following history of the *Brisbane* is not structured to provide a detailed chronology of the ship’s working life, which for example might list all ports of call or the handover of command between various Captains over time. Such a chronology would not address the core historical questions of this thesis, which deal primarily with what happened after the stranding event, and we would learn nothing of the meaning ascribed to objects by salvors. Moreover an assessment of this ship’s working life shows that its function and ownership did not change over time. From its first voyage the *Brisbane* functioned as it did on its last, as a mail steamer,
immigration vessel, and trader between Asian and Australian ports. Therefore I present a history that is *analytical* rather than narrative (Atkinson 1978:13-14,21).

### 2.2. Construction, Ownership and Itinerary

The *Brisbane* was built at the Pointhouse yards on the Clyde River, Glasgow Scotland by A&J Inglis in 1874 (Inglis n.d.: 47, NMM: RS: 3906:1874). Inglis identified this ship as vessel 110, although Lloyds lists 110 as the yard number in which the ship was built (GCA: TD 36/3; 110/111, NMM: RS: 3906:1874). Inglis also built the ship’s four main boilers and the propulsion engine and also fitted the ship out with furnishings and equipment (NMM: engineer’s certificate 1874, GCA: TD 36/3). The *Brisbane* had a sister ship called the *Singapore*, also built by Inglis, which was wrecked in 1877 off Keswick island, Queensland (ANSD 2004).

The Eastern and Australian Mail Steam Company (E&A) commissioned the construction of the *Brisbane* (and the *Singapore*). The E&A owned and operated the *Brisbane* throughout its working life. (The company underwent a number of liquidations and restructurings and so in different periods of its history the company existed under slightly altered names. For consistency it will be referred to as E&A). The company was formed in 1873 to service a Queensland government mail contract to connect Queensland ports with New South Wales and Asia. This mail service provided an alternative to that shared amongst Australian colonies with the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O). The P&O, in conjunction with connecting services, provided a mail service that ran from the West Australian coast, south along the continent to the east coast of Australia. The Queensland government considered the delays inherent in this service as unacceptable. The new service was distinguished by a route through the Torres Strait to Asia. Whereas the earlier service had ships depart Singapore for Western Australia this service had E&A ships collect goods and mail from Singapore and reaching Queensland considerably faster via the Torres Strait. This alternative mail service would thus directly link Queensland ports with the lucrative Asia trade. Furthermore, by providing a coastal service between Queensland and News South Wales it challenged shipping company monopolies in the Queenslands coastal trade with NSW and Victoria (Bach 1976:94-95, Lewis 1973:42).
The *Sunfoo* was the E&A company’s first purchase. Unfortunately on the 10th March 1874, only months after it was bought, the ship struck a reef and became a complete loss (Olson 1976:14). Chartered ships included the *Jeddah* and the *Tom Morton* and the first two purpose built ships were the *Somerset* and the *Normandy*. These two were quickly followed by the launching of the *Brisbane*, *Singapore* and *Bowen* (Olson 1976:14). During the operational period of the *Brisbane* approximately seven different ships existed in the E&A fleet.

The *Brisbane* did not stop at each port on every voyage but called in only if the port was on the mail schedule, or if there was financial incentive to do so. In 1875, the ship’s first year of operation, the mail ports and prospective ports were Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Keppel Bay, Bowen, Townsville, Somerset, Port Darwin, the Javanese ports of Sourbaya, Samarang, Batavia (now Jakarta) and Singapore (E&A 1875). Soon after the company began operations in China, and so Chinese ports were added to the itinerary (Olson 1976). Singapore was removed from the itinerary in 1880. A map showing the itinerary of the *Brisbane* and other E&A ships in 1881 can be found in Appendix A.

The E&A fleet has been recognised as having played a significant role in transforming the Torres Strait from a dangerous sea passage to a viable commercial route. It provided the majority of the first pilots knowledgeable in that stretch of water and the
Brisbane itself was the first ocean-going ship to call at Thursday Island (Foley 1982). There was, of course, shipping through the strait before the introduction of this fleet’s activities, However many of these voyages were one off voyages, rather than legs in a long standing itinerary (Nicholson 1996). It should also be noted than in addition to safe navigation, fuel consumption was an obstacle to the early development of a Torres Strait route to Asia (Nicholson 1996). The fuel-efficient compound engine of the Brisbane was a propulsion system well suited for the long voyages between refuelling depots.

In 1880 the E&A lost the Queensland mail contract to the British India Steam Navigation Company, which provided a direct service between Queensland and Europe without having to link with other shipping companies. A year later the E&A was awarded a far smaller contract with the South Australian government to provide a mail service for Port Darwin. Again the mail contract was a secondary role to providing trade opportunities and a passenger service. Prior to this contract the Brisbane and other ships of the fleet called at Port Darwin when there was sufficient incentive to do so. With this new contract the Brisbane stopped as part of contract obligations. To many local Darwin residents the significance of this contract was not that it connected Port Darwin with South Australia but that it connected Port Darwin with Asia (NTTG 12/06/1875).

2.3. Mail and Other Cargo

The establishment of a mail contract was a popular method for a government to sponsor and encourage commercial trade (Henderson 1977:27). The Queensland government mail contract provided both a superior mail service and supported international trade through the Strait (BC 27/05/1873). Similarly, the shipping company used the mail contract as a means to subsidise and also gain a foothold in the lucrative trade between Australia and Asia (Olson 1976). The trade that the Brisbane was engaged in can be divided into intra-state trade between Queensland ports, interstate trade between Queensland, NSW and Victoria, and, if sufficiently lucrative, Port Darwin, and finally international trade, not just with Asia but also with Europe via Asia.
Although we do not have a list of goods specifically transported by the *Brisbane* to the Northern Territory, the Northern Territory customs revenue indicates the kinds of goods that were shipped to the Territory by ocean going steamers at the time. The Northern Territory customs revenue for 1882 lists ‘goods, wares and merchandise for home consumption’ imported into the Northern Territory (SRSA: SAPP, 20A, 1882). These would have been imported for sale by merchants, or ordered by individuals. There is a suggestion government supplies were exempted from this list. Food items included beer, spirits, rice, grains, meats, fish, biscuits, fruit, jams, coffee and potatoes. Another major item was opium. Other goods included stationery, paper, paints, timber, nails, steel, glue, glassware and furniture. Larger equipment included general machinery, boats, wagons and carts.

A letter sent by the Government Resident in October 1880 lists items requested for government use (SRSA: GRS 1/16, 593, 1880). While goods required by the government at different times varied in general this list contributes to an appreciation of the range of goods imported into the Northern Territory. Items included saddles and police uniforms, gardening tools for the experimental gardens, equipment for the government boat, sundries such as paint and brushes, drafting equipment for the survey team and supplies such as bicarbonate of soda, carbolic acid and adhesive plaster for the hospital. The importation of all of these goods would have been shared amongst the E&A ships and a growing number of competing shipping companies. For example in August 1880 the *Graaf Van Blyandt*, owned and operated by the Netherlands India Steam Navigation Company, imported a consignment of cement and pipe for the Northern Territory government (SRSA: GRS 1/16, 420, 1880).

In summary the Port Darwin import trade was extensive because most of the food goods and materials needed to sustain this community were imported. The *Brisbane* did not necessarily deliver exotic ornaments or expensive jewellery to Port Darwin, although it is logical to assume there was some minimal demand for such merchandise. On the whole goods were basic buildings materials and foods.

In 1881 the Northern Territory exported little. Items included gold and the produce of mostly experimental crops such as sugarcane and tobacco (SRSA: SAPP, 17A, 1881). In 1881 Edward Price, the Government Resident, made a remarkable accusation when
he stated that since export duties had been placed on gold Chinese miners were attempting to smuggle it to relatives by hiding it in the coffins of their dead who were sent to China for burial (NTA: GRR, 1881). Powell argues that this accusation and other accusations about the Chinese as smugglers were unfounded (Powell 1982:116).

Turning to international trade a telegram gives us a detailed list of goods imported to Australia on the Brisbane on its maiden voyage in January 1875 (SMH 27/01/1875). I have listed the goods below in table form. The ports and descriptions of cargo are listed when given. I have however excluded the sizes of consignments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Cargo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singapore or</td>
<td>Townsville</td>
<td>Sago, tapioca, nutmeg, pepper, coffee, unspecified merchandise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Brisbane</td>
<td>Dates, pickles, pepper, curry, powder, chow chow (Chinese relish), coffee, cloves, sago, nutmeg, ginger, coca, rice, books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>Brisbane</td>
<td>Iron, sundries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Hemp, castor oil, dates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Tea, castor oil, hats, cigars, silk, rice, ‘curiosities’, unspecified merchandise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>Hemp, coffee, dates, coca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>Tea, camphor (chemical substance), merchandise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Cargo with ports of origin and destination

The term merchandise is a broad classification and may have included furniture and other household items. We know that when the Brisbane stranded it carried merchandise such as silks, tortoise shell ornaments, embroidered shawls and lacquered decorations (NTTG 29/10/1881). At that time Australia was in general importing a considerable amount of furnishings from China and India (Broadbent, Richards & Steven 2003). A final note on goods is that this overview has focused on the ship’s trade in regard to Australian maritime history. Broeze (1987) makes a challenging argument that colonial steamship activity adversely affected Asian indigenous shipping and trade. A more in-depth history of the Brisbane’s operation in Asia should consider this perspective.
2.4. The passenger trade

The *Brisbane* offered First Class, Second Class and steerage passage. Passengers travelling to ports on the E&A itinerary could travel solely on the *Brisbane*, while those travelling to other Asian ports such as Bombay, or further on to Europe, could connect to other services in Singapore (Age 2/02/1875, BC 21/5/1875). When Singapore was removed from the E&A itinerary in 1881 the link to other shipping services may have been affected.

The *Brisbane* transported a diversity of passengers. Some travelled for business reasons, some to be reunited with family and friends, others were headed for ports to find work, wealth and create new lives. In this way the *Brisbane*, like many ships, was a catalyst for great change in the individual lives of many people. The vast majority of passengers who travelled aboard the *Brisbane* were Chinese. For example, in October 1880 the *Brisbane* brought only a handful of European passengers to Australia but transported 242 Chinese passengers from Hong Kong (NTTG 6/11/1880). The *Brisbane* rarely arrived from Asia without bringing Chinese passengers.

The Chinese were very active in gold mining in Australia in the 1880s and this explains this dynamic period of immigration (Jones 1997). The *Brisbane* carried Chinese immigrants to a variety of Australian ports, including Townsville, Sydney and Melbourne (BC 30/1/1875). Although restrictions on Chinese immigration were introduced in various Australian colonies around this time, immigration to the Northern Territory was still officially encouraged, and by the early 1880s the Chinese population of the Northern Territory far exceeded the European population (Jones 1997:112). Many Chinese came for a period of time and then returned to China, while others chose to stay. Naturalization records of NSW, for example, list 105 Chinese men who arrived aboard the *Brisbane* and were given naturalisation status (CHAF). Commonwealth records also list Chinese men who gained naturalisation status in Australia. This includes Jimmie Lum who was offered citizenship in 1939 (NAA: CRS, SP 11/2). I have chosen to include the images of Jimmie Lum (Figure 10) as this is rare evidence and it brings a human and personal quality to this history.
The transport of Chinese immigrants was a lucrative business. One revealing reference is a telegram sent by the Government Resident to the South Australian minister in charge of the Territory, in which he states:

‘the distance from Hong Kong to Port Darwin, two thousand one hundred miles average length of voyage, eleven days. Passage money for Chinese six pounds eight shillings out of that steamer receives probably 5 pounds and balance is commission to the storekeepers who sent them’ (SRSA: GRS 1/16, 492, 1880)

Here we learn that the E&A received approximately £5 for every immigrant transported aboard the *Brisbane*. The commission to storekeepers is also interesting. This may be a reference to either government funding to merchants to send labour, or to wealthier Chinese merchants who invested their own funds in Chinese workers (Jones 1997:11, 21).

Unfortunately there are not the historic records to reconstruct in detail the conditions for Chinese passengers aboard the *Brisbane*. The vast majority of Chinese passengers travelled by steerage, which was located below the main deck. Robert Herbertson was a European passenger aboard the ship in 1879, and his journal briefly described the voyage. He wrote:
‘Besides ourselves as passengers, there was a large number of Chinese, over 500-600, of which was (sic) coolies destined to work on the wharfs of Sydney, the remainder have leave at Port Darwin destined to try their luck on the goldfields of the Northern Territory. They seem a queer lot huddled together between decks, like so many sheep, as far as I can see we seem pretty crammed full with them, there being very little available space’ (Herbertson 1879).

Herbertson’s assessment of passenger numbers may be an overestimation in comparison with newspaper figures for the average number of passengers. However his description of crammed and crowded conditions is likely accurate. Figure 11 shows Chinese immigrants undergoing a medical check on the main deck of the Brisbane whilst the ship was moored in Darwin Harbour. These passengers were being checked for smallpox before being allowed to disembark. The South Australian Quarantine Act 1877 decreed that passengers could not disembark a steamer before a 21 day period following departure from an infected port. It was assumed that signs of infection would be evident in a medical examination following this incubation period (NTTG 21/01/1881).

Figure 11. Chinese passengers undergoing medical check at Port Darwin
2.5. The stranding of the Brisbane

In early October 1881 the Brisbane began its return leg from Hong Kong. Its first scheduled Australian port of call was Port Darwin. The ship carried European and Chinese passengers, mail for the Northern Territory and other ports, and a range of cargo, predominately rice and opium for Port Darwin, and more exotic foods and manufactured items for southern ports.

The best account of the stranding event comes from the marine enquiry testimonies of Captain Craig, the Master of the vessel, and his officers (SRSA: GRG 51/7, 5106, 1881). The marine enquiry was held at Parliament House, Palmerston (Port Darwin) on the 27th of October 1881. An excerpt of their accounts was printed in the Northern Territory News and Gazette (NTTG 29/10/1881). A preliminary inquiry had been held earlier, to ascertain whether a more formal enquiry was necessary (NTA: GRIC, A5027/3, 1881). Captain Craig himself requested an enquiry be held, in order to exonerate himself and his officers (SRSA: GRG 51/7, 5106, 1881)

On the 9th of October the ship was travelling south along the west coast of Bathurst Island northwest of Darwin Harbour. The officers sighted what they thought was Cape Fourcroy, situated on the southwest point of the island. It was later revealed that they had actually sighted a reflection on the water. The course was altered based on that sighting.

They wrongly entered Port Patterson, north of Bynoe Harbour, and at 11pm struck a reef off Quail Island. They first reversed the engines in an attempt to free the ship but soon decided to wait until after sunrise when the tide would be at its highest (an extreme low was tide due at 2:30am that morning). They anchored and waited for sunrise and the higher tide. At the time the Captain believed the ship had struck Bathurst Island.

On the morning of the 10th of October the ship floated on the high tide. The Captain took bearings from Quail Island and Point Charles in an effort to identify the ship’s location. He wrongly identified these visual marks and so again misjudged the ship’s location. The vessel steamed north and at 7:30am struck Fish Reef, where it became
permanently stranded. The Captain argued that it was extremely hazy and difficult to see. He also argued that the land was similar with no distinguishing features. It was not until they struck that they identified Point Charles correctly. At the time of the accident the tide was high and Fish Reef was invisible from the surface. The ship struck the reef at full speed. The bow rose by three feet and about one quarter of the ships stern was floating (the rest resting on the reef). The Captain did not order the jettison of cargo to lighten the ship as he believed the rising tide would eventually float the vessel off the reef.

At 10am the Captain sent Officer Wilson in a ship’s boat to Port Darwin for assistance. I will not recount the attempts to reverse the ship, as these will be discussed in Chapter 5, except to note that they were unsuccessful. On the 22nd of October the crew and the Chinese passengers were sent to Port Darwin aboard the Maggie, while the European passengers were conveyed there aboard the government vessel Flying Cloud. The Captain and officers stayed aboard the Brisbane until the list to one side made it too dangerous to remain aboard. The passengers bound for southern ports were housed at Pickfords Hotel in Port Darwin, and were scheduled to leave for southern ports aboard the next available steamer, which departed approximately one week after their arrival in Port Darwin (NTTG 15/10/1881). The Chinese crew left Port Darwin on the 14th of November aboard the Catterthun, another E&A ship (NTTG 19/11/1881).

Exonerating themselves from blame the Captain and his officers argued that the navigation error occurred through the culmination of problems: haze, the lack of navigation markers and that tide marks on the navigation chart were incorrect, causing the officers to expect a different tidal influence than actually experienced. The Captain’s closing words were that a navigation beacon should be placed on Point Charles.

The enquiry supported the Captain, declaring:

‘After hearing all the evidence the court are of the opinion that the wreck of the steamer Brisbane, was caused by the current, and tide setting the vessel to the southward and westward. Also through the fact that a bank of haze having been
mistaken for the land at Cape Fourcroy. Also to the ebb tide being wrongly marked in the chart as running to the east instead of the west. The weather being very hazy the court do not consider the commander to blame for mistaking it for the land. The court believe that everything possible was one to save vessel and cargo, and that no blame is attached to the Captain and officer’
(SRSA: GRG 51/7, 5106, 1881)

Edward Price, the Government Resident and Henry Marsh, the Harbourmaster, held the enquiry. Their final recommendation was also that a beacon be placed at Point Charles. This directly led to the construction of the Point Charles lighthouse.

Months after the enquiry found the Captain and officers neither negligent nor liable, the conclusion was successfully challenged. The claim about incorrect tidal marks on the nautical chart was investigated and correspondence with the British Admiralty in England confirmed that these were not tidal marks but marked the track of a past survey vessel. In conclusion the British Admiralty reversed the decision of the enquiry and found the Captain and Officer at fault, determining the accident occurred because of poor navigation (SRSA: GRG 51/7, 6035, 1882). This may have resulted in the shipping company having to refund the insurance payout.

3. **A ship as a collection of materials and goods**

The second aim of this chapter is to review the *Brisbane* steamship in terms of its structure, equipment, fittings and furnishings. The purpose of this inventory is to appreciate what materials were made available to local salvors when the ship struck Fish Reef. Our knowledge of the physical makeup of the ship when it struck Fish Reef comes from:

- Detailed specifications reported in a document by the shipbuilder
- Numerous survey reports (condition reports) conducted by Lloyds engineers for the purpose of insurance
- Descriptions of the ship whilst on its maiden voyage, which were provided in newspapers
These sources together provide a solid body of information, covering a number of issues from passenger accommodation to the engine room, and do so in considerable detail. It is because of this historical information that I can reconstruct the ship in terms of its structure and fittings and furnishings.

Of the references cited above the principal evidence is the specifications document provided by Inglis Shipbuilders (GCA: TD 36/3; 110/111). Inglis was responsible for not only manufacturing the ship’s hull and propulsion system but was also given the task of completely outfitting the ship, including the bridge, galley, public spaces and passenger accommodation. The document describes navigation equipment to fire fighting equipment to the kind of stuffing in First Class versus Second Class bed mattresses. I will use this reference widely and unless otherwise cited, this is the source of the information presented here.

Before I begin a description of the ship it is important to reiterate that the purpose of this description is to provide a list. It is not to provide an explanation of ship systems and modes of operation. The skills and techniques of the engineer are irrelevant for this study. The astronomical navigation skills of the officers are irrelevant. How the cook managed his workspace is also irrelevant. What is relevant is the existence of the tools, machinery, objects and goods used in these activities.

This inventory is divided into four sections. These are:

- Integral portions of ship’s structure
- Essential systems and equipment (for example the engine, winches, the bilge system)
- Moveable safety and navigation equipment (for example bells, lights and compasses)
- Sundries (non-nautical equipment such as galley utensils and furniture)
3.1. **Integral portions of ship’s structure**

The *Brisbane* had a registered tonnage of 891 tons (905.26 tonnes), this measurement being the weight of the ship without consideration of cargo. It was 281.5 feet (85.90 meters) in length and 32.2 feet (9.8 metres) in breadth. This was a large to medium sized ocean steamship and one of the largest ships to enter Port Darwin at this time. The vast majority of this 891 tons was the iron and wood that constituted the hull and deck houses. The large deckhouses, which constituted the saloon, bridge, aft house and galley, were built of teak wood. Sections of the spar deck were built of ‘Moulamein Teak’ and ‘Pitch Pine’. The Spar deck and Cabin deck were floored with teak and the main deck was constructed of seasoned yellow pine. Long thick handrails were constructed of moulamein teak. There were also sections of hardwood fixed in key areas such as covering the keelson and over the beams of the bulkheads, the latter to prevent cargo being chaffed. The cargo hatches were also made of seasoned yellow pine and teak.

The hull of this four-decked steamer would have constituted a substantial amount of iron metal. Although it is not possible to give an accurate total of the amount of iron used in the construction of the vessel, it is important to appreciate in general the large amount of iron used and to conceive the hull structure as a network of iron beams, joists, scantling and other useful pieces. Figure 12 shows an iron hull, without the hull plating, in order to illustrate a hull as a collection of interlocking iron pieces.
3.2. Essential systems and equipment

Table 3 lists some of the key equipment and machinery associated with essential ship functions such as propulsion, mooring and the handling of cargo. A number of other essential systems not listed ran through the ship, for example the steam pipes which brought steam from boilers to steam driven machinery, and the bilge system which pumped water from below out of the ship. These iron and brass pipes and fixtures represent further potential scrap metal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rigging</th>
<th>2 masted brig or barque. Masts of iron and pitch pine, booms and gaffs of pine. Standing rig of galvanised wire rope.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sails</td>
<td>1 rigged and 4 sets spare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propulsion engine</td>
<td>direct acting inverted compound, 2 cylinders, 250 hp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boilers</td>
<td>4 scotch type main boilers (superheating included). 2 scotch type auxiliary boilers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windlass</td>
<td>one on deck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winches</td>
<td>three on deck, one by each cargo hold.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donkey engines</td>
<td>two in engine room (for turning engine and discharging water)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchors</td>
<td>3 bower, 2 stream and 2 ketch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chain</td>
<td>300 fathoms (548 metres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propeller</td>
<td>iron, 16 feet (4.88 mtrs) in diameter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Essential equipment
One would assume that these items would be highly valued by the market in second-hand marine technology. We know that this machinery and equipment was in good working order because it was inspected annually by Lloyds Engineers who rated the Brisbane as 100A1 in the Lloyds register of British Owned Ships. This rating was used as an insurance classification and measured the ability of a ship to safely transport 'dry and perishable goods' (Paassch 1977:233). 100A indicates that the hull was of the highest quality. The number 1 that follows indicates that essential equipment was of the highest quality. Survey reports over the operational life of the Brisbane indicate the ship was maintained at this rating (NMM: RS: 3906:1874, NMM: RS: 127:1879, NMM: RS: 188:1880).

I will briefly explain some technical equipment to give the reader a basic knowledge of terms. The propulsion engine, built by Inglis, was a direct acting compound engine with two inverted cylinders (NMM: engineers certificate, 1874). Direct acting means the engine crank and the propeller shaft had the same rate of revolutions, doing away with complicated gearing. Compound refers to there being two stages of steam expansion. Inverted refers to the positions of the cylinders which were situated upright and next to each other.

Other machinery aboard included deck winches and a large windlass. Winches were steam driven pulleys used to haul sails and cargo. Muir and Caldwell manufactured the three winches that were fitted to the ship. Auxiliary or main boilers powered these. The windlass was a larger steam driven pulley used mostly to haul the large bower anchors. Harfield and Company manufactured the windlass aboard the Brisbane. It was similarly powered by steam from the boilers. The windlass and particularly the winches were versatile machines. They could be used in a variety of different sized ships. Theoretically, a cargo winch from the Brisbane could have been used as a multi-purpose pulley on a smaller vessel.

3.3. Movable safety and navigation equipment

Table 4 gives an abbreviated list of safety and navigation equipment on the Brisbane. The table is sufficient to reinforce the idea that there was a considerable amount of material available. Furthermore it was the shipping company not the Master, officers
and crew who owned all the equipment aboard this vessel. Therefore officers or crews could not claim objects when the ship was abandoned. They remained the property of the company, were transferred to the insurance company and later sold locally.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 binnacles</td>
<td>Admiralty charts and equipment eg. Parallel rulers and dividers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 compasses</td>
<td>18 lifebuoys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 patent log manufactured by Maseys, used to measure ship speed</td>
<td>1 large bell with ornamental brass belfry &amp; two smaller bells with ships name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telegraph used for onboard communication</td>
<td>Sounding machine used to measure depth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking trumpet</td>
<td>20 lamps and lanterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 fog horns</td>
<td>1 alarm clock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 telescope</td>
<td>2 spring clocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sets of binoculars</td>
<td>2 one hour glasses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 barometer</td>
<td>2 sets of log glasses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Ship boats: 4 of these large lifeboats 1 was a screw steamer yawl meaning it could be rigged with a sail and had a small boiler, engine and screw propeller.</td>
<td>Fire fighting equipment: 2 ‘Downtowns’ pumps 2 lengths of 300 feet (91 mtrs) leather hosepipe brass valves and couplings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Portable safety and navigation equipment

These items could be used in other than a nautical context. Further, the ship boats were vessels that could be reused independently.

### 3.4. Sundries

The ‘sundries’ category is of particular interest to this thesis because it lists objects that could be reused in a number of contexts other than aboard a ship. The potential for wide scale reuse is high and the story takes an interesting turn when we appreciate the transferability of so much material culture from a strictly maritime context to a wider terrestrial one.
1 large wrought iron cooking range with baker’s oven
2 smaller cooking ranges
Large galvanised tanks lined with cement with a carrying capacity of 7000 gallons of water each.

Copper pots, iron pots, tin dishes, kettles, enamelled stew pots and tools such as whisks, knives, and spoons
Butchers steelyard and lever weighing machine

Fresh water condenser capable of condensing 1000 gallons of water a day from the ship’s boilers.

Table 5. Galley, butchery and drinking water

| Carpenters tools: hammers, chisel, shovels, crowbars | 12 snider rifles with bayonets, 4-6 chambered colt revolvers (NTTG 05/11/1881, GCA: TD 36/3; 110/111). |
| Cleaning equipment: brooms | 12 cutlasses |
| 6 pairs of handcuffs | 2 brass carronades (small cannons) (NTTG 26/11/1881) |

Table 6. Carpentry and Armoury

| ‘Broadfoot’ patent lavatories | Piano (NTTG 26/11/1881) |
| 2 large gilded framed mirrors, 9 smaller mahogany framed mirror | Coloured glass or gilt china plates for saloon decoration |
| 2 copper and enamelled baths and 3 cast iron or lead and enamelled baths | 1 white marble bar and 2 large mahogany bookcases in saloon |
| Solid mahogany beds | Carpets and rugs |
| Velvet and horse hair sofas, leather sofas | Horse hair mattresses and down pillows |
| Pantries and linen lockers (BC 30/1/1875) | Wooden chests |

Table 7. Passenger and officer facilities

It can be presumed other essential materials such as cutlery and serving dishes were also aboard. This breakdown of material culture into categories based on type rather than location is a reminder that when this ship was declared a wreck the original contexts of the objects became redundant. The ship was no longer a closed system but was transformed into a collection of materials and objects. One can imagine the
salvors themselves creating similar lists, ticking off objects as they were loaded aboard lightering boats.

4. Population, industry and shipping: a background to Port Darwin

4.1. Introduction

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a complete and detailed history of Port Darwin as it was in 1881. However a basic picture is pertinent. We need to understand salvage, discard and reuse within the frame of the social and economic conditions of Port Darwin at this time. If, for example, a local steamship building industry existed at this time there would be an immediate market for various items. If there was a large urban population then there were potentially more buyers. Furthermore, if Port Darwin was geographically isolated and without its own manufacturing industry, manufactured goods available to the town’s residents would be expensive and of limited diversity. All of these kinds of considerations point to a relationship between what was selected by salvors, what was valued and the conditions of life and business in this small isolated settlement. The contribution of this thesis to local social history is twofold. There are individual stories about people buying and using material objects. There is also a broader comment about the influence of this town’s economy, industry and isolation on the use of material goods.

4.2. Population and industry

In 1881, when the Brisbane stranded, the non-Aboriginal population of the Northern Territory was only 4,768 (Jones 1997:112). The European population was 660 and Chinese numbered 4,108 (Jones 1997:112). In comparison, the settler population of South Australia was 275,344 (Vamplew 1984). The population is one indicator of local commerce and industry. Port Darwin was clearly a small isolated settlement.

The economy of the Northern Territory at this time was weak (Powell 1982:105-108). Many industries that were tried at this time failed (Hillock 2000). For example, a sugar trial, involving 50,000 hectares of actual plantation and 100,000 hectares more
secured by speculators and targeted for further planting, resulted in a total sugar production of under 10 tons (10.16 tonnes) (Hillock 2000: ix). The one significant export was gold (NTL:SAPP/18A/1880, Powell 1982). However, even gold mining never fulfilled expectations, with a pattern of speculation, funded ventures and company closures. Hillock states that ‘inevitably many companies that had floated in ignorance and fraud were soon liquidated; unfortunately they often pulled some honest venture with them’ (Hillock 2000:13).

The difference between the export duties made by the government from gold and the total value of goods imported into the Northern Territory shows that this region was not economically self-sufficient. An export duty was placed on gold only because it was the single industry producing a profit that could in turn be taxed. In the December quarter of 1881 gold fetched an export duty of £782 8s and 2p (NTL:SAPP/18A/1880). In contrast, for the same quarter the total value of goods imported just for home consumption was valued at £20,635 (NTL:SAPP/18A/1880). A similar ratio existed in the September 1881 quarter in which gold export duty raised £1,106 3s 9p. In contrast the total value of goods imported for home consumption equalled £19,492. This data indicate that the community imported much of its materials and had no substantial export industry.

Many people commented on the poor economic state of the Northern Territory. The report of a South Australian parliamentary visit in 1882 stated that South Australia had lost a lot of money on the Northern Territory (Sowden 1882:126). In 1895 the South Australian government formed a Northern Territory Commission to identify the reasons why the province had failed economically (NTL:SAPP/19/1895). The vast amount of money that the South Australian government had lost by investing in the Northern Territory and the bleak forecast for the future, were reasons why the colony handed control of the Territory to the Commonwealth Government in 1911 (Powell 1982:138-142).

4.3. Shipping

The size of this settlement and the poor economic outlook had a direct relationship with its maritime traffic, activity and industry. In short it was a time of very limited
local activity, punctuated by the occasional and brief visit of an ocean-going steamship. There were also no large-scale Northern Territory marine industries. Fishing was small, predominately to serve local consumption, although there was some small-scale exportation of dried fish (NTA: GRR/2\textsuperscript{nd} 1886). Visiting Macassans collected trepang, but this was not a locally operated marine industry. Pearling had not yet developed in Port Darwin (Powell 1982:117).

Visitation by large steamships could be misconstrued as a measure of maritime activity and subsequently the Territory’s economic health. A quarterly report of the Government Resident in 1882 stated that:

‘The total number of vessels calling at Port Darwin for the past financial year has been fifty one, which forty seven have been steamers. This is very satisfactory, and the passenger and cargo trade has evidently been very profitable to the owners, as one of the Captains of the mail steamers informed me Port Darwin was their most profitable port of call (NTA: GRR/2\textsuperscript{nd} quarter/1882)

A more detailed breakdown of shipping activity gives a clearer picture of the economic significance of shipping traffic. A customs report for the quarter ending in June 1881 states that 12 British ships and two other (foreign) ships arrived in Port Darwin. However, one of these carried only 10 tons (10.16 tonnes) of cargo and had a crew of two (SRSA: SAPP no. 20A, 1881). Similarly the quarter report for September 1881 states that 11 British ships and one other ship arrived in Port Darwin, but one of these only brought 120 tons (121.92) and had a crew of four (SRSA:SAPP no. 17A, 1881). Therefore the number of vessels arriving is not a simple and direct measurement of economic activity. Furthermore, estimates of shipping might have included local traffic in and out of the harbour. Ultimately the steamship trade referred to by the Captain in the above quotation was the transport of Chinese immigrants and the importation of goods, not the export of locally produced Port Darwin goods. Thus his profit was not a reflection of local profits.

Another indicator of local maritime activity was the absence of shipbuilding and ship repair businesses, industries that would follow if the population were larger and maritime traffic greater. There are historic photographs suggesting local Chinese built
small sampans to function as local fishing vessels, but there was no construction of steam vessels or of more conventional and popular sail vessels (NT Library, Nott Collection, Photo: 0002/0076). A different picture comes from the maritime history of the Murray-Darling river system with:

> In the days of the Goolwa Ironworks, conducted for much of its time by Abraham Graham, it was possible to construct a ship from the first rivet to the last detail of its furniture. Hulls were constructed in metal and wood usually by contract shipwrights; boilers made, engines constructed and vessels fitted out’ (Parsons 1987:39).

Maritime traffic in the Murray-Darling river system was sufficiently large to support a local shipbuilding culture. There was no equivalent shipbuilding industry in Port Darwin. This is significant as it helps us to understand the capacity for Port Darwin to absorb and reuse the maritime technologies and material commodities that were aboard the *Brisbane*.

Another important sign of Port Darwin’s lack of maritime industry was the failure of the South Australian government to provide maritime infrastructure, as such an investment would have occurred had the port showed signs of prosperity. Until 1886 there was no wharf at Port Darwin and passengers and cargo were serviced through two slipways and privately run lightering services (NTA: GRR/2nd 1886). Figure 13 shows the *Brisbane* anchored in Darwin Harbour. Small boats would have lightered cargo and passengers.

![Figure 13. The Brisbane anchored in Darwin Harbour](Nott Collection, NT Library)
The lack of a sufficient wharf was considered a major setback for the development of trade and shipping (NTTG 2/1/1874, Sowden 1882:22,23). Another key problem was the lack of navigation markers along the Northern Territory coast, which was commonly highlighted as a limitation to shipping (NTTG 28/11/1873, NTTG 01/03/1884, NTTG 15/09/1888). Lastly the harbourmaster’s small vessel, the infamous *Flying Cloud*, was so unseaworthy that it was reputed to be totally unsuitable as the government vessel (Sowden 1882:123). These failings are important aspects of the maritime history of this place as they contribute to a picture of Port Darwin being a minor port with poor infrastructure at the time the *Brisbane* was stranded.

5. **Local auctions in Port Darwin**

As part of this background chapter it is important to consider how common auctions of second hand goods were in Port Darwin. If local residents were able to source various second hand merchandise from many other auctions, the opportunity provided by the *Brisbane* stranding would be of lesser importance.

Auctions of wrecks did occasionally occur in Port Darwin, but judging from the lack of advertisements in the local newspaper they were few. On Thursday the 4th of May 1882 local auctioneers sold the wreck of the *Ellengowan* (NTTG 22/4/1882). This included the gear, fittings and engines. The *Ellengowan* was a small iron hulled schooner of 27.17 metres length and 58 gross tons (58.93 tonnes) (Jung 1995:6). The wreck was sold for £5 and was refloated and sailed again (Lewis 1992:9, Jung 1995:16). The *Ellengowan* was an entirely different class of vessel to the *Brisbane*. It was a far smaller vessel and was not equipped for large numbers of passengers. The sale advertised only technical gear. There is no reference to furnishings or other non-technical equipment, unlike the list of the *Brisbane’s* inventory presented earlier in this chapter. The *Ellengowan* auction is an example of the kind of shipwreck auctions that normally took place in Port Darwin. The quality of materials was poorer and the range of materials was far smaller than that offered by the *Brisbane* auctions.

Local auctions of non-maritime goods are also worth considering. I will examine three examples. The first was the auction of the Extended Union Mine on the 5th of May
1882 (NTTG 22/4/1882). The items for sale were 3 mining leases, 2 battery machines, miners’ cottages, horses, drays and tools (NTTG 22/4/1882). The sale of mining leases and equipment may have been common because mining in the Northern Territory had a history of overly optimistic speculation and investment and comparatively poor results. However the equipment was highly specialised. The second hand market for tools and machinery would have been very specific. In contrast the Brisbane offered a range of tools and machinery, some that catered for a variety of trades such as butchers, carpenters and cooks.

Another local auction worthy of consideration was the sale of the personal property of Mr F. Becker on the 4th January 1882 (NTTG 31/12/1881). The advertisement for this is shown below in Figure 14.

![Figure 14. Advertisement for the auction of Mr Becker’s property (NTTG 31/12/1881)](image)

As indicated in the advertisement the auction included a range of goods such as chairs, tables, crockery and kitchen utensils. Similar to many of the items at the
Brisbane auctions, these were goods applicable to the home and not a specialised industry or other exclusive context. Mr Becker was a senior constable with the police, a man paid a regular government salary (NTTG 17/12/1881). Therefore his wealth was probably greater than a typical person in Port Darwin, and so his material possessions are not representative of the general population.

The third auction discussed here involved the sale of the business and stores of Gore and Company storekeepers in 1875 (NTTG 24/04/1875). Gore and Company storekeepers supplied a range of goods including drapery and groceries (NTTG 13/02/1875). The goods would have certainly suited a range of uses. However, it is possible that the entire business or the stock was sold to other retail outlets, meaning the general public got no opportunity to purchase. Furthermore, the goods were not second hand but only discounted new items. The reduction in retail price may have been minimal.

Auctions such as these did not match the kinds and range of materials for sale from the Brisbane shipwreck. The sale of industrial equipment, like mining equipment, attracted only those who would have had an investment in the same business. Auctions in which household goods were sold, such as Mr Becker’s estate, did provide further opportunities for local residents, but the range of goods was limited and Mr Becker’s material wealth was not typical.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has given a brief history of the ship and the explanation for its stranding in Northern Territory waters in close proximity to Port Darwin. It also lists a number of examples of items that were aboard when the ship stranded, and consequently what was available for salvage. Lastly this chapter has offered a background to Port Darwin describing the local scene at the time of the Brisbane stranding. From this baseline information we can move on to explore Port Darwin’s response to this shipwreck event.
CHAPTER FOUR:
THE SALVAGE OF THE BRISBANE
FROM OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 1881

1. Introduction

This chapter offers a detailed history of an organised salvage programme that began soon after the ship was stranded. It explores the administrative structure that controlled salvage, who conducted the work, why, and what the specific goals of the salvage programme were. This chapter also explores the diffusion of salvaged goods into Port Darwin. Figure 15 (from Figure 2) illustrates the salvage and diffusion of goods in 1881.

This chapter will show that the wreck was considered as property throughout the 1881 period of salvage, and was managed and protected as such. Objects were salvaged and were either sold as commodities at a series of public auctions or donated to local charities. The owners of the wreck may have kept things for themselves, but except for circumstantial evidence in one case, in general there is no evidence for this. There is, unfortunately, only a small number of accounts describing who bought salvaged objects and how they were reused. The distinction of instrument over symbol, as explained in Chapter 2, is a distinction dependant on what evidence is available to the researcher.

The salvage and reuse of wreck objects in 1881 did not involve things being valued as historic ornaments. The Brisbane was not an ‘ancient’ wreck when salvaged in 1881. It was a recent wreck, in which the value of objects was primarily based on their condition and remaining working life. It is possible that in 1881 some items were
considered curios, particularly damaged imported luxury goods from Asia. These however were not *historic curios*.

2. **The transfer of the shipwreck; the *Brisbane* as property**

Before investigating the salvage and sale of individual objects, I will consider the shipwreck as a whole. An underlying constant throughout 1881 is that the *Brisbane* was continually managed within a legal and administrative framework as property. The wreck and related items were protected by law. The distribution and reuse of material occurred within a commercial framework where people purchased goods with money, with the exception being two cases of donation. A popular secondary account of the *Walter Hood*, wrecked in NSW, tells a very different story of shipwreck salvage. The account states:

> ‘Wreckage and cargo scattered for kilometres along the beach attracted mobs of looters who fought over the cargo, furniture, bedding, clothing and many became drunk on the thousands of bottles of beer and casks of wine washed ashore. Even the bodies of the dead, washing in the surf were robbed’ (Warwick 1993:102).

The *Brisbane* story is very different. The filter that determined what was taken from this wreck and what was subsequently reused was not whether the public wanted it but whether the wreck’s owners believed someone would buy it. Things were removed because the owners of the wreck believed those items would sell, or they themselves planned to keep them. Aside from two cases of donation, the general public gained access by being successful in a financial bid against others at the public auctions.

The *Brisbane* remained under the control of the E&A until its Master, Captain Craig, declared the stranded ship a *wreck* on the 23rd of October 1881. Captain Craig did this only after he was convinced it was impossible to refloat the ship. A local merchant, V.V. Brown, was the local agent for the shipping company and he witnessed both attempts to refloat (NTTG 22/10/1881). As late as Friday 21st of October news reached Port Darwin that the Captain was confident he could refloat, and thus save the ship (NTTG 22/10/1881). However by the following Sunday, the vessel was handed
over to Captain Marsh the harbourmaster, in his role as the Receiver of Wrecks (NTTG 29/10/1881). The appointment of a Receiver of Wrecks was a common practice. The *British Merchant Shipping Act 1854* was widely adopted by British colonies and it clearly stipulates the importance of appointing a local Receiver of Wrecks.

The particular powers and duties of Captain Marsh as the Receiver of Wrecks in the Northern Territory were stipulated in the *Marine Board Act 1860 (South Australia)*. There were a number of amendments to this Act over the years but none challenged the 1860 definition of this role. The *Marine Board Act 1881 (South Australia)* would completely supersede the *Marine Board Act 1860*, however this legislation was enacted after the stranding event. We therefore turn to the *Marine Board Act 1860* for clarification of this position.

The excerpts from the *Marine Board Act 1860* below define the role of the receiver and clarify the notion that a shipwreck is property:

> ‘All cargo and other articles belonging to such ship or boat, as aforesaid, that may be washed on shore or otherwise, be lost or taken from such ship or boat, shall be delivered to the receiver; and any person, whether he is the owner or not, who secretes or keeps possession of any such cargo or article, or refuses to deliver the same to the receiver, or any person authorised by him to demand the same, shall incur a penalty…’(s165)

> Whenever any such accident as aforesaid occurs to any ship or boat, and any person plunders, creates disorder, or obstructs the preservation of such ship, boat, lives, or cargo as aforesaid, it shall be lawful for the receiver to cause such person to be apprehended and to use force for the suppression of any such plundering, disorder or obstruction…’(s165)

> If any receiver suspects or receives information, that any wreck is secreted, or in possession of some person who is not the owner thereof, or otherwise, improperly dealt with, …it shall be lawful for the receiver to enter into any house or other place, wherever situated; and also into any ship or boat, and to search for and seize and detain any such wreck…’(s173). *Marine Board Act 1860 (SA)*.
What the above sections clearly illustrate is that the Receiver of Wrecks was fundamentally a government appointee whose role was to protect the shipwreck as property. If the marine enquiry found the Master negligent then the ship remained the property of the shipping company. If not then the insurance company gained rights over the wreck and any proceeds from its salvage. From the 23rd of October 1881, when the ship was declared a wreck, until the 27th of October 1881 when the marine enquiry found the Master was not negligent, the wreck was administrated by the Receiver of Wrecks. Following this his authority continued and he represented the interests of the new owner, the insurance company. As I shall soon detail in this chapter, the powers invested in the receiver to search for stolen goods in private homes was invoked in this case.

Who the insurance company was is unknown but its directives were simple. From the perspective of the insurance company, the wreck was solely a means to recuperate a portion of the funds lost to paying out the shipping company for its asset loss. Though not mentioned by name in existing documents, the insurance company wielded substantial power over salvage and sale. A letter from Captain Marsh to the South Australian Marine Board, dated the 14th of November 1881, stated that he remained unable to sell the wreck or salvaged goods, as there was to date no instruction from the insurers (SRSA GRG 51/17, 5299, 1881). An advertisement in the local newspaper five days later stated that Marsh employed local auction house V.L. Solomon to sell the wreck and goods (NTTG 19/11/1881). Captain Marsh must have received instructions in those five days.

The wreck was sold on the 23rd of November 1881. It was auctioned alongside ship stores, fittings and furniture (NTTG 19/11/1881). The following day scrap metal and the ship boats were sold (NTTG 19/11/1881). These two auctions will be discussed in detail, but at this juncture it is significant just to note that the wreck itself was sold alongside what had up to that date been salvaged. It is also worthwhile to note that the insurers did not make a business decision to continue ownership and contract further salvage work, although this may in the long term have been more profitable. Rather the insurers aimed to gain whatever was possible as quickly as possible.
The wreck was bought by a partnership of two local men, Captain James Dunscombe and Captain Lamont (first name unknown). They purchased the wreck for £50 and also bought most of the technical items sold at the auction on the 23rd of November (NTTG 26/11/1881). Dunscombe and Lamont were partners in a Port Darwin lightering company. These two salvors used their lightering fleet, made up of five boats, to continue salvage of the wreck (NTTG 29/04/1882). What followed was the sale of salvaged goods for personal financial return. The *Brisbane* became a quarry in which goods were mined and sold for profit.

There was no doubt in the minds of locals that Dunscombe and Lamont would make a profit from their initial investment. A writer for the local newspaper commented at the end of December 1881 that after salvage was over, they would have made a substantial profit. It reads ‘probably they may make £3000 out of her, but when I hear they will make £20,000 I walk away and say bosh’ (NTTG 31/12/1881). Here a self-proclaimed conservative estimate suggests they would make a profit of 60 times their investment.

After this period of organised salvage, there is no further reference to ownership over the wreck. Dunscombe appeared to have been the major stakeholder and owner, as he was the most outspoken regarding the wreck. Dunscombe died of dropsy on the 7th of June 1882 (NTTG 10/07/1882), a disease identified and diagnosed by signs of severe bloating and fluid retention. His sole beneficiary was a sister, Elizabeth, who lived in England. The will makes no mention of the wreck of the *Brisbane* (PRSA: 28/399-402/1882). It is possible that by 1882 the wreck was considered of no value and so disregarded as part of the assessment of property. A public notice requesting claims to Dunscombe’s estate was advertised. However, it is unknown if a claim for the wreck was made (NTTG 27/01/1883). Dunscombe’s estate was auctioned and the advertisement made mention of ‘two valuable chronometers’ [ship clocks] (NTTG 24/02/1883). These may have been salvaged from the *Brisbane*.

Lamont possibly continued an active ownership over the wreck after Dunscombe’s death, but there is not mention in accounts of later salvage by him. Though Lamont is noted as having continued mastering some voyages he suffered from inflammation of the eyes. This greatly affected his health (NTTG 23/07/1881) and may have restricted
his salvaging activities. What is likely to have happened is that as the wreck collapsed further, and material deteriorated, it was simply forgotten. Lamont continued to hold a stake in the wreck, but it could no longer provide financial return. Additionally the wreck was not located in a major shipping lane nor was it an obstruction to development, so Lamont was never held responsible for its removal.

3. **Salvage prior to being declared a ‘wreck’**

Before the stranded ship was handed over to Captain Marsh salvage had already begun. Salvage at this time was conducted for a number of purposes. There was the transport of undamaged cargo such as the mail, the transport of damaged cargo that would later be used to pay salvors, and salvage for the purpose of lightening the ship in the effort to refloat it off the reef. Cargo and other materials were not jettisoned into the sea for this reason. Thus the history of salvage began before the ship was officially declared a wreck.

Soon after Officer Wilson reached Port Darwin to notify the town of the stranding, a contingent of men aboard local lighters headed for Fish Reef. It included Captain Marsh, Mr Cate from Customs and Mr Brown the shipping agent for E&A (NTTG 19/11/1881). They travelled on the *Dawn* and *Activity*, lighters owned by Dunscombe and Lamont. (Prior to purchasing the wreck Dunscombe and Lamont were hired by the government to transport passengers and crew and conduct the initial salvage).

Once the tide had risen sufficiently for lighters to go alongside the wreck the removal of cargo began. The local newspaper gives us a summary of lightering work (NTTG 15/10/1881). Within a few hours the *Activity* had between 80 tons (81.28 tonnes) and 90 tons (91.44 tonnes) of cargo. It also took on board saloon passengers, and then headed back to Port Darwin. Shortly afterward the *Dawn*, loaded with 50 tons (50.8 tonnes), also returned to Port Darwin. Whilst these lighters worked their way eastward, the *Hibernia* and the *Jessie Anderson*, other lighters owned by Dunscombe and Lamont, headed for the stranded ship. The government sheds, located on the banks of Darwin Harbour, were used to temporarily store the cargo.
Salvage would continue for some weeks while the Captain and officers attempted to refloat the ship. On the 18th of October the Maggie (Figure 16), another lighter owned by Dunscombe and Lamont, arrived in Port Darwin with 25 tons (25.4 tonnes) of cargo from the wreck (NTTG 22/10/1881). It also towed some or all of the Brisbane’s boats, which totalled six in number (NTTG 29/10/1881). The Sydney Morning Herald reported that there was a plan to remove 500 tons (508 tonnes) of cargo (SMH 21/10/1881).

Some information exists on the kinds of goods shipped at this time. A correspondent for the Sydney Morning Herald stated that the mail was salvaged and shipped to Port Darwin (SMH 13/10/1881). Also 54 cases of opium, slightly damaged, and approximately 1000 packages of tea were removed (SMH 26/10/1881). Another report from the correspondent states that on a particular voyage the Maggie brought 30 tons (30.48 tonnes) of cargo mostly tea, the tea which was reported to be in ‘good order’ (SMH 28/10/1881).

One lighter the Dawn, a ketch of 51 registered tons (52.65 tonnes), had a load of Brisbane cargo when it sunk in Darwin Harbour (SRSA: GRG, 51/17, 5152, 1881). The Dawn had returned to Port Darwin from the Brisbane on the 13th of October. The crew did not unload that day at Palmerston (main town) but rather moored the vessel
in the mudflats (SRSA: GRG, 51/17, 5152, 1881). At the time the vessel was carrying *Brisbane* cargo that was originally bound for Southport, a small port located at the middle arm of Darwin Harbour which mostly serviced miners. Dunscombe decided that rather than unload any cargo he would proceed to Southport, and return later with the *Brisbane* goods bound for elsewhere. He took aboard an additional 12 tons (12.19 tonnes) of cargo from the storehouse, assumingly also bound for Southport (SRSA: GRG, 51/17, 5152, 1881). Testimony from Mr Brown, the E&A agent, said Captain Dunscombe chose to head for Southport to unload rather than unload at Palmerston because the tide was dropping and he could not raise the centreboard (SRSA: GRG, 51/17, 5152, 1881). Dunscombe towed the *Dawn*, which was laden with cargo, with his steam launch the *Pioneer*. The *Dawn* foundered close to Southport with a total loss of cargo (SRSA: GRG, 51/17, 5152, 1881).

The *Brisbane* cargo aboard the *Dawn* when it sunk included 57 tons (57.91 tonnes) of rice (SRSA: GRG, 51/17, 5152, 1881). A further 14 tons (14.23 tonnes), not from the wreck, is described as general cargo from Palmerston bound for Southport (SRSA: GRG, 51/17, 5152, 1881). This cargo included sugar, vestas, rum, stout, pint ales and butter (NTTG 6/5/1881). The rice was owned by Chinese miners (NTTG 6/5/1881). The *Dawn* was not insured. W.K. Griffiths, a Southport shop owner and Adock Brothers, a local shipping agent, sued Dunscombe and Lamont for loss of their merchandise to the value of £54 11s. The Chinese were reimbursed for their lost cargo (NTA: GRIC, A5235, 1882). The Captain was found at fault for operating a damaged and overloaded vessel (NTTG 6/5/1881).

The *Dawn* saga shows us that 500 tons (508 tonnes) of cargo were removed from the *Brisbane* prior to it formally being declared a wreck. Fifty seven tons (57.91 tonnes) of this was rice. Other goods included tea and opium. The mail was also removed and it was likely transhipped on the next available steamer in an effort to minimise delay. In mid-November the *Catterthun* called at Port Darwin on its way to Sydney and collected 250 tons (254 tonnes) of rice and boxes of opium from the store of salvaged cargo (NTTG 19/11/1881). Aside from detailing the fate of some of the salvaged cargo, the story behind the loss of the *Dawn* also demonstrated that salvaged cargo was carefully tallied. A Mr Kelsey gave evidence at the enquiry. He was described as the ‘tally clerk’ and his role was the careful recording of all *Brisbane* salvaged goods
unloaded from lighters and stored at the government sheds (SRSA: GRG, 51/17, 5152, 1881). Unfortunately there are no records of this tally but again it emphasises the notion of these goods as private property goods that had to be accounted for.

4. Paying for salvage with salvaged goods

Salvaged cargo that was transhipped out of Port Darwin, such as mail bound for the eastern colonies, is not relevant to this story of reuse because it reached its intended destination. What is relevant is the material that was redefined and reused in some capacity in and around Port Darwin. The first example of this revolves around a contract between the government and salvors in which salvors received cargo and a profit of sales in exchange for conducting the salvage. A letter from Captain Marsh to the South Australian Marine Board, dated the 14th of November 1881, lists the details (SRSA: GRG, 51/17, 5299, 1881). The letter firstly confirmed that approximately 550 tons (558.8 tonnes) of cargo was salvaged from the ship prior to it being declared a wreck. Furthermore, another 200 tons (203.2 tonnes) of cargo was salvaged afterwards, some of it damaged in the ship’s stranding. The damage was likely water damage. The letter states that the salvors agreed to take 15% percent of the opium cargo, 30% of the undamaged cargo and £50 of the net proceeds of the eventual sale of cargo. It is unclear if this was a bond until further payment or the payment itself.

Once these conditions were accepted Marsh handed the salvaged cargo over to the shipping agent. Ironically the £50 the salvors received for salvage is the same amount they would later pay for the wreck. The exchange of cargo as a form of bond or payment immediately established these goods as having a definable financial value. The process likely continued with Dunscombe and Lamont selling items such as their share of opium to local merchants or directly to users.

5. Shipwreck salvage and the auction of salvaged goods

5.1. The first auction; exotic but damaged cargo

On Tuesday 25th of October 1881 a small auction of salvaged goods was held in Port Darwin at V.L. Solomon Auction House (NTTG 29/10/1881). The goods consisted of
damaged cargo and included carved ivory and tortoise shell ornaments, silks, embroidered shawls, jewellery and lacquered goods. The newspaper announcement stated that ‘Most of the goods were much damaged by water, and considering their condition, the sale realised fair prices’ (NTTG 29/10/1881). The purpose of the auction was partly to pay the salvors. The auction was likely sanctioned by Brown, the shipping agent, as we know he was by then given authority over the salvaged cargo that had been landed in Port Darwin (SRSA: GRG, 51/17, 5299, 1881). However, even if he had not received sanction for the auction, Marsh could have proceeded regardless, as he had the authority to do so under section 175 of the Marine Board Act 1860 (SA). It is unclear how much cargo was sold at this auction. However we do know that it was only a small portion of the ships cargo as overall the majority of items were not saved from the wreck (NTTG 02/11/1881).

It is worth briefly considering these exotic ornamental goods as salvaged cargo and auction items. Considering that these were exotic ornamental goods and the ship was bound for larger ports on the Australian east coast, they may have been destined for retail outlets in these larger cities. The stranding of the Brisbane and the subsequent damage of the goods made them both available locally and sold at below retail value. These were items of fashion and curiosity. The jewellery, silks and embroidered shawls may have become personal attire of local women. The lacquered goods and ornaments may have become features of people’s homes. The significance of these goods and how they may have been reused is that the reuse of Brisbane goods is not just a story of technical equipment but of personal decorative items.

5.2. The second and third auctions; the wreck, ship stores and equipment

We learn from an article in the Sydney Morning Herald that by the beginning of November the salvors began to include ship fittings and equipment in the salvage process. This means that the ship itself began to be dismantled. Again, the function of this salvage was to reimburse the insurance underwriters. It is at this juncture that the ship itself becomes what I have called in this thesis a quarry. Its identity as a ship became redundant.
The two auctions in which the majority of material was sold, including the wreck itself, were held on the 23rd and 24th of November 1881. The advertisements for each auction are shown in Figures 17 and 18.

![Figure 17. Advertisement for the 23rd November 1881 auction](NTTG 19/11/1881)

![Figure 18. Advertisement for the 24th of November 1881 auction](NTTG 19/11/1881)
The advertisement for the 23rd of November auction is particularly informative because it recounts the auction of the wreck itself and a wide variety of material. Some items sold at this auction were nautical technology, for example bells, sails and compasses. But also included were items that could be sold at a house auction, such as mirrors, sofas, mattresses and bed linen. Here we return to some of the sundry items listed on board, as discussed in Chapter 3. The variety of material shows that the goods extracted from this steamship wreck were varied and eclectic.

Figure 18 advertises the sale of those items stored at the wharf. In addition to the ships six boats there is a reference to a large quantity of copper piping. This marks a shift by salvors to the retrieval of scrap material. There is however no mention of either wood (teak decking, deck houses etc) or iron. Copper would fetch far more than wood or iron and so this was a priority for the salvors.

Most of the copper pipes would have come from the surface condenser of the propulsion engine and/or the drinking water condenser. A condenser is an apparatus that converts exhaust steam from an engine to water. A surface condenser consists of a series of brass tubes. In some cases the steam is pumped through a network of pipes surrounded by a well of cool water. This cools the steam. In other cases the water is pumped through the pipes and the pipes sit in a chamber periodically filled with steam. The drinking water condenser worked on the same principle. Seawater was boiled and the steam converted to freshwater. A large condenser was connected to the propulsion engine of the Brisbane. It provided 15 square feet (4.57 square metres) of surface area, for cooling purposes, per horse power (BC 30/01/1875). The engine produced 250 nominal horsepower. This meant that the total surface area of the condenser equalled 3,750 square feet (1,143 square metres). The drinking water condenser was a Normandy’s patent condenser, which was capable of condensing 1000 gallons (4,546 litres) of water per day (BC 30/01/1875). There are no specific surface area measurements of the drinking water condenser.

As the condenser was an expensive and necessary component of the propulsion engine which was in turn physically rooted in the engine structure, it is most likely that if the propulsion engine was salvaged and sold the condenser would accompany it. There is however no mention in any known records of the salvage and sale of the
main propulsion engine. Furthermore as the propulsion engine condenser constituted the vast majority of brass piping on this ship, it is certainly possible that the piping sold at this auction came from that condenser, making it increasingly unlikely that the engine was sold separately. The question of whether the propulsion engine was salvaged and sold as a complete and functioning machine is an interesting puzzle as there is an extensive history in Australia of the removal and reuse of propulsion engines in steamships. Its salvage would symbolise the ability to find a market for a large and highly specialised piece of equipment. The question of the propulsion engine is continued in Chapter 5, in which the archaeological evidence is assessed.

The auction held on the 23rd of November generated a return of £550 (NTTG 26/11/1881). The wreck itself was sold for only £50. The auction on the following day, that of the ship boats and scrap metal, generated a return of £800. Thus the Brisbane steamship, with all of its equipment, inventory and sundries sold for the total amount of £1,350. In comparison Olson states that the ship cost £61,897 to build (Olson 1976:17).

With the auction of the wreck and the vast majority of salvaged goods completed, government correspondence on the salvage and sale and materials from the Brisbane ends. Further accounts of salvage derive solely from newspapers. The next auction of material was held on the 22nd of December 1881 (Figure 19).
The advertisement suggests that Dunscombe and Lamont, the new owners of the wreck, were still salvaging cargo from the wreck a month after technical equipment was removed and sold. However the wording states that Mr Brown the agent for E&A instructed the auctioneer. This was therefore a sale of goods salvaged prior to the sale of the wreck. The local newspaper commented on the results of the auction stating that it ‘reached fair prices’ for goods that ‘were more or less damaged’ (NTTG 24/12/1881).

5.3. The new owners

Salvage continued. An article in the newspaper stated that Captain Lamont returned from the wreck on the 29th of December and brought with him goods estimated to be worth £300 (NTTG 31/12/1881). They included mouldings and paper-maché architraves; the descriptions of which that suggest they were furnishings and decorations stripped from the deckhouses.
The removal of mouldings and delicate paper maché decorations after the salvage of heavy technical equipment and scrap metal illustrates that, as an organised salvage programme, there was not necessarily a simple progression in salvage whereby delicate decorative features were removed before heavy technical and industrial goods. Mouldings and architraves might had to be detached from walls and door frames requiring additional labour, suggesting why they were not taken until the end of December. However if these were highly valuable the effort would have been made earlier. The order of salvage can be influenced by, amongst other things, what owners and salvors perceive as the financial value and saleability of individual items.

The final reference to salvage dates to April 1882. It involved Dunscombe visiting the wreck in April. This was after the monsoon season. A newspaper account tells that during this season there was at least one gale force storm strong enough to tear the roofs off houses in Port Darwin (NTTG 21/1/1882). Dunscombe noted that some heavy machinery had become more easily accessible having been torn away from the wreck’s deck over the cyclone season (NTTG 29/4/1882). He stated his intention to return to retrieve this machinery which likely included large items such as the forward winch, windlass, donkey boiler and anchors that can be seen on the site today. As these items remain today, it seems that Dunscombe did not return for this intended salvage.

6. Legal proceedings regarding theft, and the repayment of customs duties

I have already discussed legal proceedings relating to the sinking of the Dawn and the subsequent loss of Brisbane cargo. Four other court cases that related to the salvage of the Brisbane also took place. One was a charge against a man for the theft of cargo during salvage, and the others were separate charges against three men relating to the undeclared importation (or smuggling) of cargo. These cases further emphasises that salvage occurred within a legal framework and all objects were property.

The charge of theft was against Jahannes, a ‘Malay’ man who was hired as crew to one of the lighters engaged in salvage (NTTG 19/11/1881). He was charged with stealing ‘sundry articles’, namely silk handkerchiefs, tablecloths and decanters. The
The defendant was reported as saying ‘he found the articles knocking about the deck of the steamer [Brisbane], and thought he was doing no harm in taking them’ (NTTG 19/11/1881). The magistrate offered the option of a fine of £10 or three months imprisonment. The man chose to pay the fine.

The charges of smuggling were against William Marshall, Henry Howard and George Norcock (NTTG 19/11/1881). William Marshall was the skipper of the Jessie Anderson, one of the lighters engaged in salvage. He instructed one of his ‘Malay’ crewmen to take four boxes of cigars from the wreck and put them in the lighter’s cabin. On the lighter’s return to Port Darwin Marshall gave a box to Norcock, who was also a local customs officer, and a box to Howard. Marshall was convicted and ordered to pay a fine of £50 and £1 17s for court costs, or serve six months imprisonment. He paid the fine immediately. Norcock was also convicted and fined £25 or serve six months imprisonment for accepting the goods. He also elected to pay the fine. The charge against Howard was dismissed because of a legal technicality regarding the Customs legislation. It is worthwhile to reflect on the fact that European men who illegally took goods from the Brisbane were charged with smuggling whereas the ‘Malay’ crewman was charged with theft. Though in terms of fines the financial cost seemed to favour the crewman, the social stigma that comes with each charge was almost certainly different.

A small side note to the salvage history is that the Government Resident had to reimburse those who had pre-paid custom duties on cargo which was eventually damaged or lost and therefore not delivered. In Port Darwin this amounted to £200, 5 shillings and 10 pence (NTA: GRIC, A5235, 1882).
7. **Buyer beware**

Before I explore the sale or donation of *Brisbane* objects and their reuse, it is worthwhile to briefly consider the auction of second hand goods as a reuse mechanism. Appadurai (1986:43) and Spooner (1986) consider the consumer’s knowledge about an object for sale. In the case of second-hand auctions and bazaars there can be doubts about object quality, real market value and authenticity. The *Brisbane* auctions were a short-term phenomenon, a race amongst local buyers to take advantage of an unusual opportunity. It was most certainly a ‘buyer beware’ scenario in which it was the consumer, without guarantee, who measured quality, authenticity and market value.

Some of the goods for sale were water damaged, and later in this chapter there is a story of one buyer being berated by his spouse for purchasing goods considered too damaged. Another consumer is complimented in the local newspaper for buying a musical instrument that was worth far more than what he paid. The question of authenticity arises not over whether objects originated from the *Brisbane*, but whether they were indeed authentic examples of their type. For example no guarantee could be offered to buyers as to whether the ship’s butcher weighing machine had all its original parts. As one auctioneer stated ‘no fuss about…take em as you see em’ (NTTG 26/11/1881). With the unique circumstances of the salvage of this wreck, and the subsequent assessment of value by local auctioneers and buyers, the value of these commodities was locally determined.

8. **Case studies in the reuse of material**

The salvage and sale of goods were the mechanisms that directed the next stage in the life histories of these objects. From their sale at the *Brisbane* auctions they undertook vastly differing trajectories, being owned by different people, and used in different geographical, social and industrial contexts.
8.1. The sale and reuse of marine fittings and technology

From the advertisements and newspaper accounts of the auctions it appears that the majority of technical equipment was sold at the auction held on the 23rd of November 1881. The quotation below lists some of the equipment and suggests that Dunscombe and Lamont were the chief buyers.

Captain Lamont and Dunscombe, ...were the purchasers [of the wreck] and were the largest buyers at the sale of the salvage fittings. They no doubt will remember the stranding of the Brisbane for many a year. The compass were true enough; the red and green lights perfect. Blocks and tackling, of no use to anyone else, fell of course, into their hands at a desperate sacrifice. The brass carronades should have been secured for the police department, but they were allowed to pass at £35 for the two. The sails, new and old, brought £20. The smaller items realised good prices, as there's always a lot of folk who like to buy second hand goods for cash (NTTG 26/11/1881).

The article suggests that Dunscombe and Lamont bought the majority of technical equipment. An interesting part of the quotation is the reference to the blocks and tackle being of ‘no use to anyone else’. This brief comment offers a momentary assessment of local watercraft, claiming that only these men who ran a lightering service could use tackle equipment. This speaks volumes about the scale of local shipping. The number of potential buyers for this equipment on the wharves of Melbourne and Sydney would have been considerably greater. There is a sense that there was a limited market for maritime technical equipment in Port Darwin.

The brass carronades (small cannons) were an unusual item. Despite the journalist’s belief that the carronades should have gone to the police, one wonders what practical use they would have been to the police, other than perhaps ceremonial. The lightermen likely purchased the carronades in order to mount them on one or more specific vessels for practical defence against pirates, which was their original function aboard the Brisbane. There is a story of the Bowen being under threat of pirates between Singapore and Hong Kong (Olson 1976:21-22). Lamont continued to sail to Asia to trade after the stranding of the Brisbane, and his ships, as all vessels, would have been vulnerable to attack (NTTG 23/07/1881).
Interestingly, unlike the individual technical equipment such as sails and compasses, which were purchased by only a few specific people, there is evidence that the ship boats may have been a popular item at the auctions. Recalling a description in Chapter 2, the *Brisbane* was equipped with six boats, one of these being a steam launch. We know that a man known locally as ‘Old Feekins’ bought a ship’s boat amongst other items (NTTG 26/11/1881). His wife was reported as calling him a fool for purchasing it.

Other evidence for the purchase of ship boats is somewhat anecdotal but nevertheless raises interesting questions. The auction of Dunscombe’s estate in February 1883 includes the sale of a ‘cargo boat’, a boat that was towed behind another (NTTG 24/2/1883). Could this have been one of the *Brisbane* boats? Dunscombe was certainly one boat short after the loss of the *Dawn* only five weeks before the auction.

Another brief newspaper item may be of relevance to this story. A Mr Fred Dewer left Port Darwin to live further south in April 1882. He was described as having been a blacksmith by trade, but had recently purchased a steam launch and made a great deal of money using it (NTTG 15/04/1882). Could Mr Dewer have been the local resident who purchased the *Brisbane*’s steam launch? Although this is unknown, it shows that others were engaged in lightering or inner harbour transport and may have purchased the steam launch for that purpose.

These historical references indicate that the ship’s boats were regarded as instruments, their function being that of practical watercraft. Some information also suggests that small boats, including perhaps those from the *Brisbane*, were for a time pleasure craft and status symbols:

‘There seems to be a succession of manias (sic) afloat. A few months ago all our young men were investing in boats and cutters. These proving a source of annoyance to their owners were disposed of at a sacrifice, and another craze presented itself in the form of Timor ponies. The youths who could raise the ten or fifteen pounds made an investment much to the annoyance and vexation of quiet respectable citizens, who were annoyed by their constant neighing during the night. The last craze is the “Chinese pup”. No sooner does a steamer arrive from Hong
Kong that a host of youths rushing about the deck enquiring ‘Have you brought my pup?’ …’ (NTTG 1/4/1882).

This article was written in April 1882, a few months after the auction of the Brisbane boats on the 24\textsuperscript{th} of October 1881. The writer’s reference to the boat fad being a few months old means the fad was at its height at the time of the auction. Unfortunately it is not known if these young men purchased ship boats. But aside from this, the article illustrates that there was a market for small boats as pleasure craft and status symbols and offers a social context for the reuse of Brisbane boats.

8.2. The donation of sheets and blankets

Linen and sheeting from the Brisbane were purchased and some, what percentage is unknown, was soon after donated to the Port Darwin hospital. It appears that much of the linen was damaged. In describing the auction the local newspaper recounts that:

‘The sheets and table linen afforded some amusement; there being no smuggling about them – all laid out in honest dozens – “no picking allowed! Take em as they are gentlemen, or leave em alone” ’ (NTTG 26/11/1881).

We know that a ‘dray load of old linen’ from the wreck was donated to the hospital (NTTG 26/11/1881). Furthermore, we discover that Old Feekins, mentioned earlier, was instructed by his wife to donate to the hospital the sheets he had purchased at auction (NTTG 26/11/1881). Her opinion of their quality is clear when she asked her husband ‘What have you brought them things for? It’s just a lot of old rubbish. Call them sheets do you?’ (NTTG 26/11/1881). In appreciation a Mrs Manson, associated with the hospital in some capacity, made a public statement thanking everybody who donated linen (NTTG 26/11/1881).

The linen was damaged ship linen of dubious quality. Its resale value was poor and so it was donated to the hospital. We gain a new perspective of this donation from a newspaper article dated some months later which stated that a great limitation to the Port Darwin hospital was that there were no baths; facilities in which patients could wash themselves (NTTG 14/01/1882). The ability to keep patients clean is a core
priority in health management. This reference is interesting if one recalls that Chapter 3 listed a number of tin and brass baths on the ship’s inventory. The failure to donate a bath to the hospital puts the donation of sheets into perspective, highlighting that in general the distribution of items was controlled by wealth not need, and that the linen was donated because few wanted it.

Another donation was that of ship’s blankets to local Aboriginal people (NTTG 26/11/1881). The reference to the donation of blankets is barely half a sentence, but it weighs into political discourse about government funding to Aboriginal communities. Wells (2003) argues that government donation of blankets to Aboriginal people was a charity programme steeped in cultural meaning. She states

‘…some colonists acknowledged the importance of land to Aboriginal people’s survival and accepted responsibility for destroying their livelihood. Many solutions were proffered as a means of atoning their invasion. These included the declaration of inviolable reserves for Aboriginal people and the distribution of government rations of food and blankets’ (Wells 2003:191).

The allocation or donation of food and blankets to Aboriginal people in the Port Darwin region began as a haphazard phenomenon that eventually grew into ongoing government policy. Eventually there was a formal programme of donating blankets on the Queen’s Birthday (NTTG 27/5/1892). At the time that Brisbane blankets were donated to local Aborigines, the practice was irregular. Figure 20 shows a gathering on a beach in Darwin Harbour for the allocation of blankets by the government.
Official donation of blankets and rations to Aboriginal people was controversial at the time, receiving a great deal of criticism. Some local residents believed that supplying food and rations stopped Aboriginal people from doing their fair share of labour. One resident wrote:

‘I do not say the government should not feed the natives, but what I do say, and what every woman [potential employers of house maids] in Palmerston thinks, is that when there is a chance for them to earn their food honourably they should be compelled to avail themselves of it and not be allowed to sponge upon an unsuspecting government official...’ (NTTG 16/3/1900).

Another local openly blamed colonial society for their conditions for Aboriginal people, but saw the donation of food and rations as ultimately detrimental to them. He wrote:

‘We have stolen their country and taken away their birthright; and we atone for our crime, or lessen their wrong by forcing upon them favors (sic) that only transform them from their native simplicity into cunning thieves and criminals…the cure is worse than the disease... (NTTG 25/05/1900).’
Others still suggested that Blanket Day was a disgrace and an embarrassment for the basic reason that too few were allocated compared to what was needed (NTTG 27/05/1892). Supporters of the policy argued that it promoted good relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. One person suggested that blankets be given out annually, and if an Aboriginal person perpetrated a crime, the allocation to that group could be suspended until they handed over the suspect (S.A. Register 13/02/1888). To some non-Aboriginal people the donation of blankets was a symbolic payment, however inadequate, for the seizure of land. To others it was the sign of a too liberal government. Others again saw it as an opportunity to control Aboriginal people, through the power to suspend allocations at will.

The body of commentary regarding the donation of blankets explores the blankets not just as instruments but as symbols. Reviewing the political, social and ethical dimensions of this debate is beyond the scope of this thesis, however it has been suggested that the blankets were used in an exchange in which specific political messages were conveyed and specific power relationships between people further entrenched. The meaning of the donation of ship blankets to this research is threefold. On one level the donation of blankets, and of sheets, introduces donation as another reuse mechanism alongside auctions. Secondly it shows that Brisbane objects were reused by a cross-section of local people including local Aboriginal people. In a simplistic way one could say that these blankets moved across a cultural boundary. What is perhaps more significant however is the social and political processes that defined and shaped this exchange. The final meaning behind the donation of blankets is that it reinforces that these objects were absorbed into and entangled within a specific world. In another place in Australia these blankets may have been considered to be worth little, but they served a specific purpose in Port Darwin.

8.3. The Brisbane piano

One of the more valuable and unusual items salvaged and sold from the Brisbane was the ship’s piano, described by the local news as a ‘double grand’ (NTTG 5/11/1881). The only direct reference we have for the sale of it is: ‘The ship’s piano realised £15, a really good instrument and of a dove like tone; this was secured by our Russian pianist, who declares the true value to be £50’ (NTTG 26/11/1881).
The identity of the ‘Russian pianist’ is the key to documenting the reuse of this item. An 1881 census, compiled by the Northern Territory Genealogical Society, identifies a Maurice Holtze, and though his own ethnic background is not listed, there are no entries of other Russian immigrants (GSNT 1986). We learn much about Maurice Holtze from a biography written by his descendant W. Ruediger (Ruediger 1988). Holtze was a prominent local figure and the first curator of the Northern Territory Botanical Gardens. Evidence from this family biography suggests Maurice Holtze purchased the piano. The piano became a valuable and even sentimental part of the Holtze family’s possessions. The biography states

‘As soon as the opportunity arose Maurice had bought a piano and one of his many pleasures lay in teaching his only daughter to play upon it. Many happy evenings were spent with friends and neighbours while Maurice, also very musical, conducted spirited singing sessions. Sometimes he and Ludmilla pleased the gathering by playing a duet. Somehow the piano seemed lonely once the little musician was absent’ (Rudeiger 1988:35).

Figure 21 shows the Holtze family, with Maurice Holtze leaning on the chair in which his daughter, Ludmilla (in the centre) is sitting. Figure 22 is a sketch showing the layout of the Holtze home. It depicts a music room in which the precise location of the piano is given, and shows the position of couches where people sat to listen to the pianist.

Figure 21. The Holtze family in Darwin
Spillet Collection, Northern Territory Library, circ. 1880s
Unfortunately the trail of this piano stops here. Maurice Holtze and his wife eventually moved to Adelaide, with only one son remaining in the Northern Territory. It is unknown what eventually happened to the piano. What we can say is this item became, at least for a time, a core part of Holtze family life. It was a focal point for family social activities and perhaps an opportunity for Maurice and Ludmilla Holtze to celebrate and strengthen their own relationship. The piano underwent a considerable transformation in significance, what Kopytoff refers to as a transformation from a commodity, common amongst its type, to having a singular cultural identity (Kopytoff 1986). Over time, as a feature of the Holtze house, the piano was given a singular and unique value, a history that distinguished it from all other pianos.
8.4. Miscellaneous objects

There are a host of brief references to the sale and purchase of other individual items. Unfortunately there are no descriptions of how these things were used and so we are left with a complicated puzzle; one which offers some significant insights but ultimately, will remain unsolved.

From newspaper accounts one learns that the Government Resident purchased the ‘punkahs’ and four of the ‘maple cabin sofatairs’ for the courthouse. It was said that ‘…now our jurymen may look forward to the forthcoming sittings of the Circuit Court with feelings of pleasure’ (NTTG 26/10/1881). This tells us that government was free to make some purchases for the benefit of the community. One also discovers that the Government Resident bought the fine tablecloths. However, it is unclear whether this was for the government or for himself (NTTG 26/11/1881). We also return to Old Feekins and his wife to get an amusing and insightful story regarding the tablecloths and napkins. Old Feekins was sent by his wife to purchase the tablecloths and was berated for missing out. Furthermore he failed to buy the napkins, which had the E&A insignia printed or woven onto the surface. Old Feekins is referenced as saying “Ah well, I did not care about second-hand napkins with the E&A rubber stamp in the centre, so I let them go with the tablecloths” (NTTG 26/11/1881). The article openly belittles Old Feekins, as it was accepted that everybody else considered the napkins of greater value because of the shipping company insignia.

The auctions included the sale of lacquered ware, ivory, tortoise shell, silks and embroidered shawls (NTTG 29/10/1881). It included ‘curiosities’ and matting (NTTG 17/12/1881). Also ‘china-ware’, sheets, napery, knives and forks and silver plates (NTTG 5/11/1881). The same reference mentions snider rifles with bayonet fittings (NTTG 5/11/1881). Included are table and bed linen, glassware, mattresses, sofas, chairs, mirrors, tables and cabin fittings. The advertisement does not list all of the items for sale as they were ‘too numerous to mention’ (NTTG 19/11/1881).

What we can take from this list of items is an appreciation that the opportunity presented to local residents was unique and that these items penetrated people’s private lives, not just their workplace. Many of these items became incorporated into
the home. There was expensive women’s clothing and jewellery, originally bound for exclusive markets in southern ports, now available at a fraction of their original cost. There were mirrors for the bedroom, furniture and fittings for the lounge and cutlery and pots for the kitchen. The quotation cited at the beginning of Chapter 1, which referred to a visit to a local homestead decorated with curious furniture and fittings from the Brisbane, demonstrates that the material entered the private realm of local people (Sowden 1882:91). Another similar reference states that the wreck was ‘providing odds and ends of furniture for half the houses in Darwin’ (NTTG 11/12/1903). Businesses too may have benefited from the auction. This ship was equipped with for example carpenter’s tools and butchers weight machine. Were these purchased by local tradespeople?

9. **Objects as trophies**

The ships boats and the napkins with the company’s insignia are examples of objects being given value as status symbols. Salvaged objects were valued as trophies in later salvage, so it is important to consider whether in 1881 some salvaged objects were valued simply as trophies from the wreck. For example SS Beaver, a steamer well known for its colourful history was wrecked in 1888 near Vancouver, Canada, and then soon salvaged for trophies by the public (Delgado 1993). If Brisbane objects were valued in 1881 because they simply came from this wreck, then the greatest trophy of them all would have been the ship’s bell with the name and year of construction of the Brisbane engraved. Advertised for sale in November 1881 and now a part of the MAGNT collection, this ship’s bell, the largest of the bells on the Brisbane, remains the single object salvaged in 1881 whose location is known today. The contemporary use of this bell is discussed in Chapter 6. To exist in circulation today this bell must have had some value to somebody in 1881. But whether this bell was originally considered valuable as a trophy from the Brisbane or valuable as an instrument is unknown.

There are in fact no references to objects being salvaged in 1881 as trophies. Hill (1951) wrote a popular history of the Northern Territory formed by a collection of local and unconfirmed stories. It includes a reference to VV Brown and his son
recovering the *Brisbane* ‘money box’ by navigating an ‘Aboriginal canoe’ to the wreck (Hill 1951:36). The tone of the story paints the ‘money box’ as a trophy, the story being a tale of bravery and skill. However given that the ship underwent organised salvage it likely that the anecdote is nothing but fiction.

10. Were wood and iron salvaged?

Chapter 3 gave a detailed description of the ship which noted the presence of extensive ironwork and teak decking. Although the vast majority of iron structure and wood is not on the wreck site today, there is no direct historical evidence that either material were salvaged. Arguably one can suggest that the lack of references to the sale of wood and iron in the newspaper or in government correspondence shows that wood and iron was not salvaged and sold. One reference to the wreck states that anything that could float ended up strewn along the coast and became incorporated into people’s furnishings (NTTG 11/12/1903). Perhaps wood from the *Brisbane* reached the coast as flotsam, and was only then collected. Yet a reference tells us that in 1882 nearly all of the wooden structures in Port Darwin were destroyed by white ant infestation, meaning that the port was certainly in need of wood for construction (NTA: GRR/4th quarter/1882).

Another reason why wood may have been salvaged, apart from white ant infestation, is suggested in historical pictures of Port Darwin at this time. These illustrate that many buildings were ram-shackle, built of odd bits and pieces. Some were made of brick but many public and private buildings appear to have been make-shift, built from roughly cut locally sourced wood. The Commercial Hotel (Figure 23) is one example. The *Brisbane* would have been valuable as a source of good quality hardwood.
Little iron was probably removed from the wreck. Perhaps particular beams were salvaged as they suited specific jobs. However in general the hull sheeting would have been of little value, being too thick and heavy for use in many practical applications, such as roofing. The true value of this material would have been as scrap to ironmongers and founders. However, at this time there were none in Port Darwin. By way of contrast is the case of the British Admiral, a sailing ship wrecked in 1874 on King Island in Bass Strait. An advertisement for an auction of salvaged goods appealed specifically to ironmongers and iron founders (Age 04/02/1875). The auction included muntz metal, bars of iron, bundles of steel, sheet iron, wire and ‘scrap iron’ (Age 04/02/1875). Some of this was cargo, rather than ship structure, but the importance of this example is that it highlights that the absence of iron works in Port Darwin would have minimised the local value of scrap iron. This question of local industry influencing what was salvaged is further discussed in Chapter 7.

11. Conclusion

As it was throughout its operational history, the Brisbane was valued and treated as a commodity after its wrecking. The wreck was a quarry mined for valuable contents. It and its contents were protected as private property by the Receiver of Wrecks and the local police, and cases of theft went before the local magistrate. Some of these objects were directly related to maritime culture, for example the ship’s boats and
chronometers. The function of other objects was unconnected, for example the cargo of jewellery or the dinnerware and furniture. Consequently, the diffusion of objects into Port Darwin was widespread. Objects were reused in the homes and likely the businesses of people whose lives were unrelated to maritime activity.

The initial mechanism that facilitated objects being reused was the salvage programme. After this, with the exception of those items kept by Dunscombe and Lamont themselves, items were diffused as auctioned goods and donations. The few individual stories of object reuse that we know of allow us a unique insight into local social history and material culture reuse. Furthermore, the failure to donate any baths to the hospital by Mr Brown the shipping agent or Dunscombe and Lamont shows the limits of their charity. In material culture analysis it is not just the actual trajectories of objects that inform us about people, but also the directions they could have gone but did not because of individual human decision.

These case studies of salvage and reuse give insight into objects as instruments and as symbols. The use of small boats as status symbols among young men, the napkins with the ships insignia, and the donation of blankets to local Aboriginal people are examples of objects having greater function than merely a utilitarian one. In conclusion these stories, of objects as instruments and symbols, show that items recovered from the wreck became immediately entangled in the local social and economic environment.
CHAPTER FIVE:
WHAT'S BEEN LEFT BEHIND:
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE
BRISBANE WRECK SITE

1. Introduction

This chapter describes and interprets the remains of the Brisbane shipwreck. It provides a description focusing on the presence of structural material and machinery which remain on the site as evidence of items that were not salvaged. It therefore builds on Chapter 4 by showing that although historical references give the general impression that the salvage programme in 1881 was organised and extensive, it was not complete. This chapter also identifies and interprets signs of salvage on the wreck site, for example damage caused to machinery to remove the more valuable components. This chapter also considers the role of environmental factors in site formation, particularly in the removal of cultural material. Lastly it examines the history of the wreck’s collapse in the context of the accessibility of components to salvors.

2. Site Description

2.1 A summary of the wreck site

The wreck is located on the southwest edge of Fish Reef. Although formally named a reef and covered in some parts with hard corals and plant life, Fish Reef is predominately a rock formation made up of a plateau bordered by rocky terraces which descend into deeper water. At a spring low tide this plateau, or raised ground, is exposed. At a high tide all of the reef is submerged. As a consequence of this tide cycle Fish Reef can be divided between this plateau, which can be classified as an intertidal zone, and the deeper water below the terraces that border the plateau. The terraces that descend from the plateau to the deeper sea bottom differ from each other in their gradient. In some sections of the reef the descent into deeper water is gradual. Where the wreck is located, in the southwest corner, the descent from the plateau to
Deeper water is sudden and extreme, with a two metre drop off. The wreck is spread over the plateau, a sharp terrace and into deeper water. The bow is located on the raised terrace and the midship and stern section is located beyond the intertidal zone in deep water.

Figure 24 is a photograph shot from a boat anchored off the reef during a spring low tide. It shows in the foreground the stern steering column breaking the surface and in the background wreckage on the reef plateau. Between the stern steering column and the water’s edge are the remains of the stern and midships, invisible to us in this figure as they are submerged.

![Figure 24. Steering mechanism, area of submerged wreckage and wreckage on exposed reef (photo: S.Jung 2002)](image)

Figure 24 clearly demonstrates that this shipwreck has little hull integrity and is best described as a scattered wreck site. Figures 25 and 26 also emphasise the poor hull integrity and more closely show the topography of the intertidal zone. Figure 25 depicts items of machinery on the reef plateau; most noticeable is an anchor and boiler. Other machinery and hull debris on the site is not shown. Figure 26 depicts the descent of the port side of the lower hull off the reef plateau. The exposed rib structure shown here is at the midships of the hull. The submerged portion of the wreck is more intact.
Below the intertidal zone the wreck follows the original line of the ship, being less scattered than the wreckage on the reef plateau. The hull is broken into parts but leads to the stern section. The remaining stern consists of the extreme end of the hull, the ship's large four bladed propeller, the rudder, and a steering column that extends from the interior of the stern to the water surface. Protruding from the stern section is a
portion of the propeller shaft and housing, which once lead to the propulsion engine. Forward of the stern and just starboard of the ship floor (the iron floor above the bilge) are the remains of four boilers, masts and a condenser. The propulsion engine is noticeably absent.

Later in this chapter the wreck is described in greater detail, but at this juncture some general conclusions will assist in forming a preliminary understanding of the site. The wreck is located in both shallow water and the intertidal zone and has very poor integrity. The superstructure and decks have collapsed and there is no visible evidence of them. There are some individual examples of deck structure, however these are few and stand as the exception. The line of the ship can be determined only from the stern to the reef plateau, for beyond this material is more scattered. The wreck site is dotted with large identifiable machinery, both in the submerged region and the higher reef plateau. The plateau surface is bare rock without any sand cover, and is punctuated by deep fissures and cracks. It is clear that winds and seas have dragged some machinery across the surface of the plateau and smaller items such as coins and shards of ceramic have become trapped in its fissures.

2.2. The redistribution of material and the dimensions of the site

Figures 27 and 28 are site plans of different resolution. Figure 27 shows the wreck site in its entirety. Figure 28 is of a smaller scale and greater detail, and excludes the two water tanks depicted in Figure 27. Figure 27 illustrates that these two tanks have been moved in an easterly direction across the plateau over 400 metres from the main body of wrecklage, and their original location. The seasonal monsoonal conditions, particularly high gales and seas, have caused this redistribution in an easterly direction.
Figure 27: Fish Reef and wreck site, emphasising storage tanks

Figure 28

- Modern navigation marker
- Brisbane tank

Legend:
- Fish Reef plateau/intertidal zone
- Beyond low tide mark
- Tide line estimated from nautical chart and observations
Figure 28: visible wreckage excluding two distant water tanks

Area of Figure 30

Area of Figure 29

KEY

1. hull debris
2. water tank/s
3. donkey boiler/s
4. winch/s
5. bow and keel
6. section of foremast
7. mound of chain
8. davits
9. capstan
10. windlass
11. perimeter of hull material not surveyed
12. mainboiler/s
13. bower anchor
14. spring or stream anchor/s
15. exposed ribs of lower hull
16. ship floor and lower hull
17. Mid size boiler parts
18. condensor
19. section of stern mast
20. propeller shaft and housing
21. steering column and rudder

25 metres
The eastward movement of large machinery and features other than the two tanks is also shown by the location of various features from the bow, as shown in Figure 28. The bow is positioned within 5 meters of its original location from the stern. Consequently any machinery further east of the bow are examples of this movement of material culture across the reef. Another clear example of this pattern is the relocation of a large propulsion boiler from the midships of the wreck to the bow (Figure 28).

An additional pattern of movement is the relocation of materials starboard of the wreck, which occurred as the ship hull collapsed. The ship developed a list to starboard in the first few days after the stranding, a position still evident in the wreck. A diver swimming over the port side of the remaining lower hull in the midship and aft section would note how it curves over the ship floor. Similarly the starboard side is visibly flattened against the seabed. The list is also noticeable from the position of the keelson that is visible on the ship floor. The boilers, condenser, water tank and stern mast (Figure 28) are on the starboard side of the wreck. Starboard of the bow are the windlass, capstan and davits. The bow was on its starboard side and as the deck weakened through corrosion the weight of the windlass and capstans tore them away from the bow. The windlass still has sections of deck attached to its base.

In conclusion this wreck is broken up and material is widely scattered. The original ship was 85.80 metres in length but the wreckage is now scattered across an area of over 400 metres. The shipwreck receives the full brunt of the seasonal northwest monsoonal winds and the occasional but devastating force of tropical cyclones. Fish Reef is located in unsheltered waters and because the wreck is located on the reef’s west side, it is not protected by the reef from the northwest monsoonal winds. Tropical cyclones appear between November and April and can be categorised by hurricane strong winds and large seas and swell (Australian Pilot 1992:22,31). Although they do not stay in one location for long, usually less than 12 hours, the degree of destruction possible by a cyclone in that time is immense. The loss of hull integrity of the Brisbane wreck and the pattern of re-distribution of material in an easterly direction show that over the years much material has likely been removed from this wreck by cyclones and other forces. The absence of material from the shipwreck is not necessarily a sign of salvage activity.
3. Machinery and equipment that was not salvaged

The material that still exists on the wreck site consists of items that have not been salvaged. Figure 29 shows visible material present in the vicinity of the bow, with a specific attention to machinery and equipment. Ceramic shards and coins have also been located in this area. The plan depicts a windlass, anchors, auxiliary and large boiler (the latter associated with propulsion), a winch and tanks. Another large bower anchor was removed from this area by the MAGNT in 1976, and so in terms of salvage behaviour of the 1880s this anchor is included as equipment that was not salvaged. The two tanks at the far eastern side of the reef should also be considered in the broad inventory of things not salvaged.
Figure 29. Key machinery and features in bow area
Similar to the area around the bow, the midships and aft of the wreck is also associated with equipment that was not taken. Figure 30 is a plan of the midships and aft areas of the wreck. Various equipment is shown, including two of the four main boilers that were aboard the ship. A third boiler is located near the bow but the fourth was not found in the wreck survey. Other items are a water tank, four parts of an auxiliary boiler, the remains of a condenser, the propeller shaft and housing, and a large four bladed cast iron propeller. The four parts of the auxiliary boiler are two sections of the boiler’s shell, one with brass tubes still attached, and two furnace tubes.

The remains of the condenser consists of a box shaped container 1.55 mtr wide and 70 cm long. Protruding from the open end of the box are thirteen brass tubes. Twelve of these are 2.1 metres long. A thin plate lies across their end. The thirteenth tube extends beyond this plate for another 80 cm. It appears that the thirteen tubes are close to the total number of tubes that fitted into this box as the box neatly holds them in place. It is unclear whether this condenser is the remains of the propulsion engine condenser or the drinking water condenser. However the pipes are considerably wide, suggesting they originate from the larger propulsion engine condenser. This condenser had such an extensive surface area for condensation that this must be only a small section. It may represent a part of one grouping of pipes, as some condensers were designed with separate groups of condenser pipes separated by some space within the larger chamber (Paasch 1977:plate 54A).

The fact that the propeller remains on the site suggests that it was not considered valuable. Later in this thesis I suggest that no local ships could use a propeller of this size, and not being brass its scrap metal value was low. The salvage of a brass propeller from another large steamer wreck in the Northern Territory has been documented (Steinberg 2001).
Figure 30. Key machinery and equipment at midships and stern
4. **Signs of salvage**

There are three clear signs of salvage on the *Brisbane* shipwreck. These are: the condition of a main boiler located farthest south at the midships of the wreck; the condition of the midsize boiler located at the midships, and the absence of brass portholes.

Figure 30 shows a main boiler south of the midship section. The diagram and inset photograph illustrate that part of the shell is gone and the brass tubes are exposed. An inspection of the boiler indicated that approximately 60% of the boiler’s sides are gone altogether, making the boiler appear bowl shaped. The two large boiler furnaces, shaped like iron drums, that were once located inside the boiler, are missing. Inside the boiler are six of the original thirteen brass tubes. Some of these are attached at both ends of the boiler and others have been wrenched away at one end and are attached only at the other (the matching main boiler located close to the bow demonstrates the original number of tubes). The boiler sits upside down, evident by the fact that tubes are located on the bottom of the boiler rather than the top. An upright boiler has the furnaces at the bottom and the boiler tubes above.

The condition of the boiler suggests firstly that explosives were used to gain access to the brass tubes, and secondly that these were removed when the boiler was in its current location. A tear around the boiler shows that material was not cut away but torn apart by an explosion. There is no historical reference to an explosion on the *Brisbane* caused by a build up of steam pressure (boiler explosion) so the use of explosives on the wreck is a likely explanation for this evidence. The boiler has rolled 15 mtr from the hull to its current location, the direction influenced by the ship’s list to starboard. What this also proves is that explosives were not used until well after the ship’s hull had collapsed, as objects once located in the hull were scattered only after the loss of hull integrity.

Oral histories, referred to in Chapter 6, detail claims that a salvor used explosives on the wreck in the 1970s. The objects in his destruction may have included this boiler. The furnaces were likely used as the place to set the explosives, as these were
convenient holes into which explosives could be inserted. This would explain their absence, as they would have received the brunt of the explosion. Remaining debris would have then been removed to gain access to the tubes below. The fact that six brass tubes remain may indicate that these are difficult to remove from the boiler frame. The boiler is also located some distance from the main body of wreckage and so perhaps recreational divers, who would have otherwise salvaged some or all of these pipes, have not discovered it.

Another sign of salvage is the condition of the midsize or auxiliary boiler located at the midships area of the wreck site. It is also pictured in Figure 30. This boiler was likely the boiler once situated between the decks and was used, in conjunction with another auxiliary boiler on the deck, to power auxiliary machinery. This boiler is in four pieces. There are two furnace tubes resting side by side and two sections of the boilers’ outer shell. One section has brass tubes still fixed to its damaged face. The question is whether the damaged state of this boiler was caused by salvage or whether it was caused by the collapse of the ship.

When the shipwreck collapsed the boiler would have fallen and structural debris then fallen onto it. This alone may have been sufficient to cause the damage that is evident today. However if natural forces removed other structural material, some far heavier, such as beams, why were the shells of the boiler, which are relatively light in weight compared to their surface area, left in situ? It is possible that this damage occurred after the ship broke apart. As salvors have removed brass pipes from one boiler this may be another case of salvor damage. If natural forces caused this damage then that process has provided easier access to the brass tubes for later salvors. In this way wreck disintegration has assisted in salvage.

Another noticeable feature of this shipwreck is the presence of sections of hull that once clearly held brass portholes. None of these except one still hold a porthole. Although it is possible that brass portholes were wrenched from the hull plating by natural forces this is unlikely. These features were fixed firmly with large brass screws. It is also unlikely that these portholes would have fallen away under their own weight, as did the windlass. They were probably removed by salvors. At least some were removed in recent times. Chapter 6 confirms at least three in the possession of
one contemporary salvor. Figure 31 illustrates a section of hull with a porthole missing.

![Figure 31. Hull without porthole](image128x462.png)

D. Steinberg 2001

5. **Site formation and the question of salvor access**

5.1. **Introduction**

An understanding of how a wreck site has physically changed from the initial wrecking event to the present is a fundamental goal in site analysis. Questions about the formation of the Brisbane wreck site are of particular importance in this research because they are closely connected to questions about salvage. The collapse and physical transformation of the wreck over time has a direct bearing on whether the wreck was accessible to salvors. Therefore understanding the sequence and time scale of this wreck’s collapse contributes to an understanding of the site conditions experienced by the waves of different visitors.
5.2. The stages of site formation

Figure 32 illustrates three key stages in the formation of this wreck site. They depict major stages in the wreck’s collapse, the direction of the monsoonal winds, and the tidal range. These stages are: late October 1881 following a failed attempt to reverse off the ship, the ship after the 1881/1882 monsoon, and the wreck site in 2001.

Newspaper accounts detail how the ship lay on the reef prior to the 22nd of October 1881, when Captain Craig, the Master of the Brisbane, reversed the ship 50 feet (15.24 metres). Prior to this action the vessel lay mostly on the high reef plateau of Fish Reef and it was described as being on an even keel (the bow and stern being close to level). An observer described that at low tide one could walk from the funnel to the bow without getting wet (NTTG 15/10/1881). Although cargo was removed, there was still hope the vessel could be freed, so little of the ship itself was salvaged.
Figure 32. Site formation
Stage 1 of Figure 32 depicts the ship following an attempt to rescue the ship by reversing the engines on the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of October 1881 (NTTG 22/10/1881). The ship was reversed before running aground again (NTTG 29/10/1881). The ship listed to port and then shifted and settled with a 25 degree list to starboard (NTTG 29/10/1881). The point where the stem of the ship meets the keel (the bottom and most forward part of the bow) was 15 feet (4.57 mtr) above the reef bottom. There was therefore a considerable tilt with the bow raised above the stern (NTTG 29/10/1881). The ship was not moved again but broke up at this location. The organised salvage of this wreck occurred as it lay in this state.

There is only circumstantial information as to the state of the ship in November and December 1881. A picture can be formed from the accounts of salvage. The \textit{Jessie Anderson}, a small lighter used in the salvage was said to have conducted its last visit in the first week of November, as it was becoming unsafe to tie up to the wreck (NTTG 5/11/1881). However in the last week of December a salvage team returned with goods such as papier-maché and decorative mouldings (NTTG 31/12/1881). The goods taken in December were described as being in excellent condition. Such items would be located in the saloon, suggesting the superstructure remained intact. Since papier-maché would have been immediately damaged by submersion in water or considerable water spray it was likely located above the tide line. Therefore I can conclude that at least six weeks after the stranding event there was sufficient hull integrity to retain the deckhouses on the main deck.

Stage 2 of Figure 32 recreates the ship as it may have existed after the first monsoon period, which began at the end of 1881 and lasted until March/April 1882. A local newspaper report tells of gale force winds that season which destroyed in Port Darwin (NTTG 21/01/1882). The transformation to the \textit{Brisbane} wreck was extensive and the ship lost much of its integrity. According to a local newspaper by April 1882, six months after the stranding event, the ship was in a considerably poorer state than before the monsoon. It reported that large portions of plating were strewn across the reef and that its ribs and cross beams were twisted and broken ‘…as though they were a lot of bamboo twigs’ (NTTG 29/04/1882). Machinery was also scattered on the reef plateau free from the ship. Most interestingly the description states that the hull was
only visible above the surface of the water at extreme low tide. The depth of the sea floor at spring low tide is 2-6 metres. This suggests the hull was considerably broken down by April 1882. Lastly, the most crucial part of this description is that it states this dramatic change was caused by the ‘northwest gales’, clearly identifying the role of the seasonal monsoon in site formation. In short the arrival of the monsoon, with its powerful destructive force, ended the intense period of organised salvage. One chief salvor did suggest that the monsoon had freed machinery that was previously too tightly fastened to be removed (NTTG 29/04/1882). But the salvor’s comment that machinery was too securely fastened does not suggest such items were not accessible outright to the salvors. His comment more likely means that the amount of effort required was greater than the financial return to be obtained.

Stage 3 of Figure 32 depicts the shipwreck as it exists today. This is the wreck site experienced by contemporary salvors. Two obvious characteristics are the separation of the stern section and the separation of the bow and forward section from the existing keel of the wreck. I emphasise that although these characteristics are major visible stages in site formation, it is unclear when these occurred. The stern has broken away from the hull of the ship and fallen forward. This occurred as the hull walls in the aft portion of the hull broke down through physical abrasion and corrosion, so that the ship’s structure was unable to hold the stern in place.

The termination of the ship floor at the bottom of the reef terrace is also worth consideration. The aft and midship section of the wreck, which is located beyond the intertidal zone in deeper water, is more intact than the forward section, being partially protected from wave, seas and wind. The forward section of the wreck located on the intertidal zone of the reef’s plateau does not have ship floor or keel that lies true to the original line of the wreck. Here waves crash against the reef’s terrace and the wreck is exposed to cyclonic winds. This current appearance of the wreck is a product of the position of the wreck in late October 1881. A forward section of the wreck rested on the top of the reef plateau and the stern sat on the sea bottom. This created a sag effect in the middle of the wreck, which remained unsupported. This would have hastened the break in the ships keel.
Based on this model of site formation I have concluded that early salvors experienced a wreck site very different to that experienced by later salvors. Between October 1881 and the onslaught of the 1881/1882 monsoon season the Brisbane shipwreck remained relatively intact. Salvors worked on the deck of the ship when removing goods. They used ship ladders to gain access to lower and higher levels. Today salvors experience a wreck that is broken up and scattered. However in both situations it can be concluded that material culture was accessible to salvors. In terms of contemporary salvors, the collapse of the hull and the scattering of material has exposed material once trapped in the hull. Furthermore, contemporary divers may be reluctant for safety reasons to penetrate a hull to locate material, whereas a scattered site is a safer dive site. This raises interesting questions regarding site type and accessibility.

Murphy (1983:82) suggests that archaeologists working on wreck sites of ships that broke up quickly may have more material culture to contend with because the original salvors would have found it more difficult to locate and retrieve material. O'Shea (2002:217) also comments on this question. In his study of scattered wrecks in the Au Sable Shores of Lake Huron, he explores the relationship between re-deposition and storms (O’Shea 2002:217). He argues that if there was an interval between the vessel being stranded and the vessel breaking apart, then the salvage of cargo and portions of the vessel is more likely. This situation of an interval between a stranding or wrecking event and the storm that finally breaks up the vessel is directly applicable to the Brisbane, and its organised salvage prior to the monsoon. However, I suggest that scattered sites can also provide new opportunities for salvage.

The relevance of distinguishing the Brisbane as a scattered site is significant not just in the reconstruction of a particular salvage history but also in the theory and methodology of shipwreck archaeology. In the introduction to this thesis I argued against the analogy of the shipwreck as a time capsule. This is misleading in terms of appreciating the individual trajectories of material objects, and also because many wreck sites are not entombed and preserved but are constantly changing. The archaeology of the Brisbane is the archaeology of the scattered wreck site. This thesis is another case study demonstrating that valid research design can be applied to scattered wreck sites that have poor site integrity.
6. Conclusion

The presence of seemingly valuable machinery and equipment on the wreck today suggests that although salvage in 1881 could be described as organised and extensive it was not total and complete. Later in this thesis I will discuss this discrepancy in relation to Port Darwin’s population and industry. The sequence of major stages in site formation serve to show that the months following the stranding, just prior to the monsoon season were the most advantageous for salvage both in terms of general weather conditions and in terms of ship integrity. One could extrapolate further and suggest that organised salvage only stopped because of the arrival of the monsoon. In the next chapter I examine the reintroduction of salvage in recent times.
CHAPTER SIX:  
CASE STUDIES IN RECENT SALVAGE

1. Introduction

The organised salvage programme of 1881 brought about a systematic salvage of the Brisbane wreck and the widespread sale and distribution of material goods in Port Darwin. The story of wreck site salvage does not end there. This chapter explores more recent salvage, a period spanning the 1970s to the 1990s. Recent salvage was not as organised as that in 1881, nor was it widely recorded by local media. Therefore this history is based mostly on oral sources, supplemented by archaeological material examined in the previous chapter. It is a history formed from a collection of case studies. Figure 33 (from Figure 2) illustrates salvage from the 1970s to the end of the 1990s.

Figure 33. Recent salvage

Figure 33 demonstrates that some objects were reused as commodities. Objects were also seen to be significant in other ways, based on historical ornamental value. The category of antiquity is separated because it can appear after the emergence of the other categories of significance. The arrow that leads to antiquities is broken to emphasise that this is a category in great contention.

2. A quiet interval: between 1881 and recreational diving

After 1881 no newspaper references are found relating to the organised salvage of the Brisbane. As time progressed the wreck collapsed further and material deteriorated. Some passing ships made mention of the wreck as an unusual feature of the local
landscape and in 1897 the government used the wreck as a platform to mount a navigation marker (NTTG 8/11/1895). A sketch showing a proposed design for the marker is reproduced in Appendix C. Aside from these few references the wreck was forgotten.

One reason for this slip from significance to irrelevance is location. The shipwreck was too far from populated areas to become a popular recreational site and too far from areas of urban or industrial development to be either an obstacle or resource. In contrast are the *Meigs* and the *Neptune*, two ships bombed in Darwin Harbour in 1942 (Lewis 1992). The wreck of the *Meigs* was used as a recreational swimming platform and *Neptune* wreck lay dangerously close to the main Darwin wharf for many years (Lewis 1992: 21, 34). The *Brisbane* became forgotten to the extent that when hydrographical work began in the area the wreck was not marked. In 1913 and 1919 Bynoe Harbour was assessed as a potential naval base, but the wreck was not mentioned in descriptions of the area (Hardy 1913, Jellicoe 1919). The *Moresby* conducted detailed soundings around Fish Reef in 1935 to produce Admiralty chart AUS 5129, a chart that does not mark the wreck. These descriptions focused on environmental conditions such as harbour depth and sources of fresh water but the wreck remained unmentioned, having become an irrelevant feature of the landscape.

This period of insignificance and virtual invisibility ended with the introduction of recreational scuba diving to Darwin in the 1950s. Alec Brown, a long time Darwin resident and one of the founders of the Darwin Sub Aqua Club, told me he first dived the wreck in 1953 (pers. com. 2002). The introduction and widespread availability of scuba technology opened up a whole new wilderness to explore. Thus technology opened up access, although accessibility alone does not explain motivation. Rather the motivation to collect is tied to a divers judgement of whether an object is significant.
3. Recent case studies in salvage

3.1. The salvage and exhibition of a bower anchor

In May 1976 staff from the MAGNT visited the *Brisbane* shipwreck for the purpose of removing a bower anchor (Colin Jack-Hinton pers. com. June 2004) Located in the intertidal zone, the anchor was completely exposed at low tide. Over time it had become embedded in the reef floor and so explosives were used to free it. Large drums were tied to the anchor at low tide. As the tide flooded the force of the floating drums lifted the anchor from the reef floor. It was towed back to Darwin, where it underwent months of conservation and desalinisation. Figure 34 shows Dr Colin Jack-Hinton, the then Director of the MAGNT, and the bower anchor. After conservation treatment the anchor was exhibited at the entrance museum. With a change of Director the anchor was moved to another, less prominent, location and was finally placed in storage.

Figure 34. The 1976 salvage of an anchor
Northern Territory News 19/05/1976
This anchor became both memento and antique. It was a memento in that it was a public monument. It was exhibited at the front of the museum and signified something to the visitor. Two questions intrigued me about this exhibit: why was it taken and what was its message as a monument? I asked these questions to Dr Jack-Hinton. He explained that he salvaged the anchor specifically for exhibit outside the museum, although it spent some time before this outside a local sailing club. He explained that it was common practice to exhibit anchors outside of museums and so was ‘appropriate’ in this case. He clarified that it was an instant and clear signifier of maritime history. Maritime history was a personal interest for Jack-Hinton and a key research and collection focus of the museum. However, we also need to consider the ability of this anchor as a monument to communicate specific cultural messages or narratives beyond the specific objectives related by Jack-Hinton.

Anchors are commonly exhibited in public spaces across Australia particularly in coastal towns. For example in Victoria anchors from local shipwrecks include the Eliza Ramsden anchor at Queenscliff foreshore reserve, the Ozone anchor at Indented Head foreshore reserve, the Speculant anchor at Apollo Bay foreshore reserve, Cerberus anchor at Sandringham Yacht Club and a prison hulk anchor at Williamstown foreshore reserve (Ross Anderson, Heritage Victoria, pers.com. 2003). In South Australia at Encounter Bay at least eight anchors have been salvaged of which six of these are on display (Corones 1997: 126). Western Australia has an extensive anchor exhibit at the Fremantle foreshore in the vicinity of the Old Jetty, and there is an anchor exhibited at the front of the Western Australian Maritime Museum in Fleet Street. There are also examples in Darwin. An anchor said to be from the Booya is exhibited at the Darwin Ski Club, and an anchor of unknown origin is exhibited at the Darwin Trailer Boat Club to honour those who lost their lives aboard boats during Cyclone Tracy. In all of these cases of anchor exhibits the anchor acts as an immediate recognisable reference to maritime history.

Davison (1988:58) argues that narratives of our colonial past can be read from an exploration of historic monuments. Recently the NSW Government released a management plan for an area that includes Cook’s landing site at Botany Bay (NSW NPW 2003). The introduction states that it is a site of ‘contested history’ and previously there has been a ‘European’ perspective and now a ‘multidimensional’
examination is more appropriate (NSW NPW 2003:1). Included in this is the question of the fate of the replica of Cook’s anchor as a monument. In this case an anchor could be construed as reflecting one perspective of history over another. With this in mind does the exhibition of the Brisbane anchor also have a similar political dimension? Carment (1996) discusses the material evidence of European settlement in Darwin and two arguments are of particular importance. The first is that a tradition of building on top of Aboriginal sacred sites in Darwin demonstrates a clear emotional need to mark the landscape as European rather than Aboriginal (Carment 1996:106). Furthermore in reference to the protection of cultural heritage there is the question of whose heritage is being protected (Carment 1996:101-106).

The Brisbane anchor does derive from specifically colonial history. It was an immigration ship bringing mostly Asian people to the Northern Territory, and it was a supply and communication ship for the isolated settlement of Port Darwin. Therefore it represents a period in settler history not Aboriginal history as such. Shanks and Tilley (1987b:130), in their exploration of ideology and material culture, suggest that ideology can misrepresent ideas by presenting something that is partial as being universal. There was certainly no conscious attempt to present a specifically European narrative in the display of the Brisbane’s anchor. The museum also famously exhibits south-east Asian and Pacific Ocean watercraft. Furthermore, when directly questioned why an Indonesian anchor was not exhibited Dr Colin Jack-Hinton explained that in his opinion he had no Asian or Pacific anchors that looked as good. Therefore simple aesthetics was also a consideration.

The anchor also had significance as an antique. One demonstration of this is Figure 34, which shows Jack-Hinton with the anchor. The caption does not name which ship the anchor came from. Rather the significance of the anchor is that it comes from a wreck that dates to 1881. Jack-Hinton himself reinforced the significance of age in the case of the Brisbane when he attended the First Southern Hemisphere Conference in Maritime Archaeology in 1977. During an open forum discussion, in response to what was happening in the Northern Territory regarding shipwreck research and management Jack-Hinton stated that:
‘In the Northern Territories nothing is happening mainly because we have no historic [my emphasis] wrecks except for the Brisbane of 1892 (sic). We would expect to find a considerable number of prows from early Macassan trade (OSA 1977:102).

This quotation is particularly revealing because it shows a bias for wrecks past a certain age. At the time that Jack-Hinton made this statement there were other located shipwrecks in the Northern Territory such as the World War 2 wrecks in Darwin Harbour and the Florence D and the Don Isidro outside Darwin Harbour in Commonwealth waters. Reinforcing this idea of a preference for age, when referring to the protection of the I-124 Japanese submarine, a World War 2 wreck, Jack-Hinton stated that the submarine was not at that time historic but would increasingly become so (OSA 1977:35). He also stated that the motivation behind its protection was diplomatic rather than a consequence of perceived historic value (OSA 1977:35). Peter Ryan would make a number of direct challenges to Jack-Hinton’s arguments about significance (OSA 1977:25). In the next chapter I will demonstrate that the prioritising of antiquity, or age, was and remains an extremely common but contentious criterion of significance.

Finally, a panel of photographs showing the Brisbane anchor’s recovery accompanied the anchor displayed outside the museum. This suggests that there was an element of the anchor as trophy, as the collectors had worked themselves and the object’s recovery into the display. This however was not their intention. When questioned Jack-Hinton explained that the reason for this approach was to provide a display giving information on the disciplines of Maritime Archaeology and Conservation as much as on the wreck itself.

3.2. Boxes of things; salvage and collection by a local dive club.

A community dive group, to which I will assign the pseudonym Happy Divers, has been operating in Darwin for decades and over the years members have salvaged relics from the Brisbane and other local wrecks. Some of the items salvaged from the Brisbane are kept in private collections at home, whilst others have been left at the clubhouse. Those items stored at the clubhouse are the focus of this particular
discussion. I attended a club meeting in February 2002 and the first thing that struck me was the display of salvaged relics. One entire wall of the clubhouse is used to display binnacles, gun stands, brass engine plates and various odds and ends collected from wrecks both inside and outside Darwin Harbour. When I asked to see specifically Brisbane relics I was given a box of objects. The members were unsure what had come from the Brisbane and what had not. Although members certainly knew which wrecks the larger more showy items in the clubhouse came from, other items were stored collectively and people had forgotten which diver collected them and from what wreck they originated. Figure 35 shows some items inside this box. Other artefacts from the box are excluded from the photograph after members decided they were definitely not Brisbane relics.

Figure 35. A box of miscellaneous curios
D.Steinberg 2002

A number of observations can be made at this juncture. There is a hierarchy of criteria that divides objects stored at the clubhouse, in which some have higher significance than others. Members explained that to a degree significance is about aesthetics, explaining that large brass objects are more aesthetically appealing than rusted iron objects.

Members of Happy Divers treat Brisbane objects as trophies and historical curiosities. The object as trophy is evident by the kind of emphasis that collectors give when they
discuss the meaning of the object. These members write their own experience of
collection into the story of the artefact. This can be likened to the curator at Sotheby’s,
cited in Chapter 2, who believed that collectors can actively participate and contribute
to history itself through the act of collecting. For the trophy hunter visiting an historic
site is not sufficient engagement with the past. The historic site, or wreck site, is only
the potential source of historic objects. Most poignantly one member, whom I will call
Anna, told me how disappointed she was with herself because she had visited the site
many times but returned with nothing. Later in this chapter I discuss how one
collector who I have called Jarrah, believed that the significance of the object was
heightened by the fact that it was a rare find and that it took considerable work to
remove it.

Objects as trophies is also evident in the way that for some collectors Brisbane objects
have become less significant over time. The reason for this is that the stories of
collection have become increasingly distant. In this way historic ornaments can
become redundant. This is clearly demonstrated with the box of miscellaneous
objects. Collectors once had the impulse to collect these items. However their
relevance diminished, and their provenance is now forgotten.

Within this clubhouse some Brisbane objects are valued as historical curiosities. One
such type of object is small copper alloy Chinese coins. Many members have found
these on the site. One club member, identified as Jarrah, told me that for a time divers
considered these coins as the ultimate find on the Brisbane. He explained he never
understood this because the same kind of coins could be found in abundance at the
remains of Chinese mining sites at Pine Creek inland of Darwin, a more accessible
source for these objects. He clarified this observation by stating that their abundance
did not decrease their value, thereby revealing that the object as trophy is less relevant
for these artefacts. Jarrah’s comment is further revealing as it shows that the place of
recovery of the object is sometimes less important than the object’s original function.

That the object’s value rests little on the context of recovery is seen again in another
example from Happy Divers. Figure 36 shows the display of shipwreck materials at a
local gun show. Happy Divers provided a display board that consisted of mostly
military relics from wrecks, although some other salvaged relics were also displayed.
Here military hardware had value as historic objects, but as historic military hardware rather than objects from specific wreck sites. The associations are general rather than specific.

Finally a club member, who I will refer to as Ian, told me that the *Brisbane* is only visited rarely now because there is nothing left to take. As there is much material remaining at the site Ian’s comment must mean there is nothing left of value to club members. Other club members seem to support the notion that salvage is finally winding down. Stories of trophy hunting on the *Brisbane* are told with an element of nostalgia, in which really valuable things, such as complete ceramics, were taken long ago. Other oral evidence will show that this belief is also held outside the Happy Divers community.

### 3.3. Diver one: portholes and machinery and all things brass

The salvage stories of Jarrah, introduced earlier as a member of Happy Divers, deserve individual consideration. Jarrah has contributed a wealth of information including a diary entry that describes the removal of portholes from the *Brisbane* (see appendix D). Jarrah gives immediate significance to all things brass. He also
demonstrates an interest in things that are either stamped with a manufacture’s mark or have a clear mechanical purpose.

Jarrah has in his collection three brass portholes from the *Brisbane*. Each of these has an engraved/stamped identification number that corresponds with their location along the hull. These are 5, 18 and 58. Porthole 5 was located closer to the bow than 18 or 58. Furthermore, although this cannot be confirmed with ship plans, it was common for odd and even numbers to correspond with starboard and port sides of the ship. Appendix D includes a diary entry describing the removal of porthole 58. Figure 37 shows a section of porthole 5 with the names Terry and Phil engraved. These divers engraved their names on the porthole while it remained attached to a section of hull. Jarrah explained that the divers could not remove the porthole that day, and so marked the porthole to deter other salvors.

![Figure 37. Porthole 5 with salvor engravings](image)

Another object from the *Brisbane* that Jarrah considers to be of high significance and forms part of his private collection is a two-part brass valve system (see Figure 38). The mechanism can be turned manually and this opens and closes a valve. Jarrah speculated that this controlled either the movement of steam or water.
Jarrah explained that his interest in things of brass relate to three factors. Firstly the inert nature of the metal means it survives a sea environment better than iron. Secondly he appreciates the aesthetics of brass. Thirdly brass tends to be associated with ships’ machinery and equipment rather than structure. Historical curiosity is the category of significance that best describes Jarrah’s discussion about the value of the portholes and brass valves. His curiosity is so particular that he has taken visiting divers to the *Brisbane* and shown them where they can find portholes, but only after he had acquired sufficient examples to satisfy his own interest.

Jarrah’s fascination with mechanical items from the past is also demonstrated in his collection of objects from other wrecks, objects that have a clear mechanical function or a manufacturer’s mark. He has brass plates and gauges marked with manufacturers insignia. He also has various industrial pieces and technical equipment, including a restored historic gun. Jarrah clearly associates historical significance with form and manufacturing history.

### 3.4. Decorative Art

Frank, the pseudonym for another recreational diver and salvor, has also collected a number of things from the *Brisbane*. Some he has transformed into artistic ornaments while others are stored half forgotten in boxes. Frank showed me a collection of brass
pipes, a porthole, a piece of glass from a porthole and a brick. He had also salvaged a brass lock that he later donated to the MAGNT. From the diameter of the brass pipes I can determine they come from the condenser located at the midships of the wreck. The only brick structure on the *Brisbane* was the bakehouse, although it is also possible the brick was cargo.

Frank has manufactured two ornaments from *Brisbane* artefacts. One is a porthole in which he placed a clock and gave it to a friend as a wedding gift. Here the object underwent transformation from being representative of a broad history to having a personal significance. Unfortunately the clock was unavailable for examination. The second ornament is a wind chime, which Frank has created from the brass condenser pipes. (Figure 39).

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Figure 39. Brass pipes as ornamental wind chime
D. Steinberg 2000
To Frank the clock and wind chime have significance as historic relics, either as mementos or historical curiosities. The distinction is unclear. These are cases of recycling, a process in which objects are modified to serve a new purpose. In this case the purpose is ornamental. Frank explained that he donated a brass lock from the wreck, which he did not alter, because he had no use for it. As he had no artistic project for the lock it became useless to him.

Another comment by Frank is worth particular attention. He kept repeating that the *Brisbane* was not that popular amongst divers and collectors because the World War 2 wrecks in Darwin Harbour have far more material to collect. This suggests that many salvors and collectors make no distinction in value between objects from wrecks of different ages.

### 3.5. A worthless coin, a gift and a priceless bottle

Two other divers and collectors, who I will refer to as Mike and Joan, have both dived the *Brisbane*. Mike collected a coin and Joan coins and a bottle. Mike explained that he used to wear the coin around his neck as a medallion. He wore this for some months before he went to an antique evaluator and had the coin appraised. The appraisal confirmed that the coin was only worth a few dollars on the antique market. He immediately removed the coin from his neck because it had no value. Mike originally gave the object value because he saw it as an historical curiosity and a trophy. He discarded the object because its low value on the antique market overshadowed its ascribed historical significance. In this example there is a tension between significance based on personal criteria and significance determined by the market. Ultimately it was Mike’s own decision whether the market value of an object, the object as commodity, would define its overall significance. To Kopytoff this tension between two modes of value shows a crossover from the closed sphere of personal definitions to accepting the criteria of outside influences (Kopytoff 1986:80).

Joan, in recounting the recovery of her bottle (Figure 40), described how other divers that day were, in a friendly way, jealous of her discovery. She now keeps the bottle stored in a box in a top cupboard in her home. Joan explained to me that the bottle has particular significance to her because she found it. She also explained how she had
discovered coins (the same kind as found by Mike). She had given these to her brother, also a diver, for his 50th birthday. She explained only another diver could appreciate this kind of gift. Her brother had sent her a picture he took of seals whilst diving in Wales, which she proudly displays in her home, this being his trophy from the marine environment. Here Joan recognised the bottle and the coins as trophies, and as a trophy that she collected the coins became a personalised gift.

Joan also explained that in her opinion the Brisbane is far more significant than the World War 2 wrecks, and other later wrecks. It was special because of its age. Here the wreck is seen as antique, demonstrating that Joan valued things from the Brisbane as both antiques and trophies.

3.6. Museum collections

The MAGNT has a collection of objects from the Brisbane. The items include the anchor, which has been discussed earlier, a ship’s bell, a brass lock and three wooden shoes. Local residents donated all these items other than the anchor. Max Treloar (his real name) donated the bell in 1989 (Figure 41). Mr Treloar is now deceased. However his wife, Phyllis Treloar, told me that Max had purchased the bell at a time between 1957 and 1965 from a man ‘who worked on the wharf’.
The bell has a unique importance in this research because it stands as the only object likely salvaged in 1881 that remains in a collection today. A newspaper advertisement from November 1881 states that the ships bells were for sale (NTTG: 19/11/1881). There were three bells and all were mounted on the deck, affording easy access to salvors. The bell was briefly a commodity but whether it soon afterward functioned again as a bell or was attributed only ornamental value is unknown. What makes the provenance of the bell so easy to determine is that the name of the ship and the date it was launched is stamped on its surface (Figure 41).

Figure 41. The ship’s bell
MAGNT 2000

Turning to the shoes an anonymous person donated these shoes at an unknown time. The wood has deteriorated considerably, appearing to have shrunk and expanded a number of times. Measuring the original size of the shoes is consequently impossible. There are also no obvious signs of wear on the soles to indicate they had been used. They are popularly identified as ‘Chinese shoes’ (Lewis 1992:7). The shoes may have
been owned by either Chinese passengers or Chinese crew or could have been purchased by a European passenger as a memento of a holiday in China. Alternatively they may also have been cargo bound for shops in Australia.

The acquisition of these items by the museum raises questions regarding this institution’s role as a repository of *Brisbane* objects. The museum has several issues to consider. These items were accessioned prior to their protection under legislation, so the question of whether objects that were held illegally had been donated is not relevant. But the origin of objects salvaged by other parties can be in question. Did they indeed come from that specific shipwreck? This introduces the issue of authenticity. Another dilemma deals with the museum’s own curatorial filter that determines what should be accessioned into the museum collection based on an institutional criteria of significance. In the case of the MAGNT the decision to collect may come both from a curatorial decision about historic significance, and from administrative duties. The Director of the MAGNT is the delegate for the *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976*, placing the management of the shipwreck in the hands of this institution. Funding made available because of this responsibility directs research at a specific list of shipwreck sites in Commonwealth waters, including the *Brisbane*.

The question of a museum’s criteria for significance assessment is also relevant in the case of the possible future acquisition of *Brisbane* relics by the Chinese Museum of Darwin. One recommendation from the management plan (Steinberg 2005) was to support dialogue between private collectors and the Chinese Museum in order to facilitate the transfer of *Brisbane* relics to the museum, for inclusion into a permanent exhibition on Chinese immigration ships to the Northern Territory. This creates a framework for assessing significance, in which the value of *Brisbane* objects is based on association with Chinese immigration. They are mementoes of a specific ethnic history. Therefore some objects, such as Chinese coins and the Chinese shoes, would be acquisitioned but portholes and steam valves may not.

### 3.7. Scrap metal salvage

I asked two local divers about the visible damage caused to one of the large submerged boilers, as noted in Chapter 5. They claimed a third man who I will refer
to as John used explosives on the wreck in the 1970s in order to free and salvage brass fittings for sale as scrap metal. In one perspective this demonstrates recycling in which objects are valued solely for their base materials. Secondly, it shows a return to the sale of brass scrap from this wreck 120 years after the second auction in October 1881. What this also indicates is that there is no unanimous consensus that this shipwreck has undergone transformation from scrap parts to cultural resource.

4. Other commentary about the Brisbane

Finally, there are general comments about the Brisbane not necessarily associated with salvage that are relevant to understanding significance. A local recreational diver, who I will name Jack, has dived the Brisbane a number of times and informed me that there are few wrecks of that particular vintage in Darwin and ‘when you dive the wreck you know you are diving something old’. Here Jack defines the wreck as antique.

Another reference is a seven-page article on local shipwrecks with a specific emphasis on the Brisbane filed on the Northern Territory Shipwreck Database at the MAGNT (MAGNT: Brisbane). The author is unknown but the style of the article suggests it was written for publication, perhaps in a local newspaper. It is not dated, though the author does state he first dived the wreck in 1961. It is unlikely to have been written by a museum employee and was more likely written by a member of the public who sent a copy to the museum, the letter subsequently finding its way onto the file because of its subject matter.

There are some glaring historical inaccuracies in this article. These coupled with the fact it remains anonymous raises the question whether it presents an accurate portrayal of the author’s salvage of the wreck. However there are interesting conclusions regarding the historical value of the wreck. The author states he or she salvaged a number of items but only directly admits to taking a porthole and coal. The author does say he or she found a set of brass tools and if so these would likely have been salvaged. The author described how swimming among the boilers one could imagine ‘whiskered old sailors’ clambering over the machines with ‘their oil cans and rag polishing and wiping’. The author also describes the remains of engines as
breaking the waves ‘defiantly and menacingly’; they are described as a ‘tribute to those long gone shipwrights of 120 years ago’ (Inaccuracies in the article means that ‘120 years’ is unreliable to use to calculate date of authorship). In this quotation the wreck itself is a monument (memento) to past engineering achievement. That the wreck itself becomes a monument to past industrial history and that tactile contact with the physical remains conjure up images of the past is important. It is the aesthetics of the site, and the fact that objects can be seen and touched and experienced first hand, which goes towards the role of the shipwreck as accessible history.

Finally another dive group, who I will refer to as Scuba Sports, were unwilling to discuss any collection on the *Brisbane* but did support the comments by some members of Happy Divers that the era of visiting the *Brisbane* as a regular dive site is over. They explained this shift in terms of new interests. However it may also be based, as explained by others, on a lessening of the wreck as an abundant source of artefacts.

5. **The historic shipwreck as property**

The status of the *Brisbane* wreck site as private property is measured by reference to the *Navigations Act 1912*. As explained by Jeffery (1999) this legislation does not protect shipwrecks but deals with property rights and the management of salvage programmes. Jerry Price of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, who acts as the ‘Receiver of Wrecks’, claims in correspondence with myself that no application to salvage the *Brisbane* has ever been received (Jerry Price pers. com. 2002). What this means is that no recent salvor has made a formal and legal application to remove material.

6. **Conclusion**

Oral evidence suggests that the period of random fossicking on the *Brisbane* wreck site began in the 1970s and ended during the 1990s. I do offer an account of
recreational diving on the site as early as 1953, but there is no evidence of salvage. This period marks the second synchronic study in this thesis.

The comments by collectors that World War 2 wrecks are more abundant sources of material culture than the *Brisbane* demonstrate that collectors do not necessarily discriminate between wrecks based on their particular histories. Furthermore some do not give the *Brisbane* any special significance based on its age. In contrast others do consider age alone as a criterion for historical value. Some collectors struggle over a conflict between public and private views of value, as did Mike over his coin. To the Chinese Museum, with its focus on a specific theme of this ship’s history, the significance of an object was determined by its association with Chinese crew or passengers. In conclusion, this chapter has revealed that there is no consensus as to the significance of *Brisbane* objects. How people interpret meaning is personal, subjective and even self-contradictory. These different object case studies show that there is diversity in how people possessing *Brisbane* objects use those objects to engage with the past.
CHAPTER SEVEN:  
CHARTING CHANGE: TRANSFORMATION IN OBJECT MEANING OVER 100 YEARS

1. Answering the thesis question

The question posed in Chapter 1 of this thesis was: has there been change in the criteria used in selecting and reusing objects from the Brisbane wreck.

The histories of early and more recent salvage have demonstrated that a simple brief answer is inadequate. One could generalise and conclude that following a period of one hundred years everyday items ranging from structural materials to kitchenware, had become, in general, historically significant and so have taken on some form of ornamental value. But this answer remains unsatisfying because in general all objects gain historic value with the passage of time. Therefore this answer offers no particular insights.

The history of the early salvage of the Brisbane and the collection of case studies of more recent salvage offer rich information to draw a number of conclusions about industrial salvage and reuse, shipwreck salvage and reuse, and the kinds of meaning given to historic ornaments. To make sense of this information and form a more detailed and insightful answer to my question I have concentrated my efforts on specific directions in material culture analysis, as cited in Chapter 2. An example is the study of salvage and reuse as social processes. Another is the study of the particular ways different users consider salvaged objects significant. In discussing recent case studies in salvage I used categories such as historic curio, memento and trophy and here I consider these categories further. The different directions in analysis form a multi-level analytical approach to studying change in object significance. This model provides explanations conclusions from a variety of different approaches and because it can be applied to other cases of salvage and reuse, makes this study relevant beyond shipwreck archaeology.

Finally this chapter contributes to the development of broad models for shipwreck salvage and industrial reuse.
2. A synchronic study of salvage

The appreciation that object meaning is culturally determined leads to questions about how an object’s location in time and place determine meaning. Staniforth (2003:22) concisely clarifies the relevance of time and place to object meaning with ‘Meaning is a construction which best only holds true at some particular historical time and within a specific cultural or social context’ Others also support this idea (Deetz 1977:40-41&156, Hodder 1992:13, Shanks and Tilley 1987b:151). Salvage of the *Brisbane* occurred in major phases, which are separated by nearly 100 years. The importance here is that Port Darwin of 1881 was very different to Darwin of the 1970s to 1990s, and this has a direct bearing on the shifting significance of the objects obtained from the wreck.

The significance given to objects by salvors and buyers in 1881 was a direct reflection of Port Darwin at that time. Salvaged blankets donated to local Aboriginal people reflect a message on the politics and power relations of the time. Another example is the *Brisbane* boats which anecdotal evidence suggests offered young local men, for a brief time, social status. The fact that seemingly valuable machinery was not salvaged relates to the industrial landscape of Port Darwin. Machinery was left simply because there were no other ships of similar size based at this port that could use such equipment. Iron was not stripped from the structure because there were no local ironmongers.

A narrow detailed perspective of salvage and reuse, that comes with a synchronic perspective, also highlights the fact that individual objects were collected by individual people and the meanings these objects took on relates to individual judgement, and not necessarily to a broader community based one. Maurice Holtze is cited as believing the *Brisbane* piano he purchased was an excellent opportunity as it was worth so much more that the asking price. Others may have believed it worth less, or believed that buying a piano for personal enjoyment a waste of money. Obstructions to salvage, as discussed in the case of Port Darwin industry, can also be studied on the level of the individual. That baths were sold rather than donated to the
hospital reflects a personal ethical choice. As well as salvage and reuse based on social, political and industrial conditions of the time, the decisions of individuals also controlled the trajectories of objects and the significance assigned to those objects.

The phase of more recent salvage began in the 1970s and continued into the 1990s, with decreasing intensity over time. It began with the emergence and immediate popularity of recreational scuba diving and waned because with further deterioration and salvage, the wreck declined as a rich source for small ornamental objects. The phase therefore has a very distinct beginning and end. The resurgence of the wreck site as a source of material culture almost a century after earlier salvors considered the wreck exhausted shows that the definition of what was and was not significant differed between the two phases. The synchronic perspective of salvage identifies two distinct worlds in which Brisbane material objects were introduced. Salvage and reuse were particular to periods in Darwin’s history, periods that shaped object meaning.

3. A diachronic study of salvage

3.1. The Long Durée

I explained in Chapter 2 that I associate a diachronic perspective with the long durée, a perspective of the past that in this case study deals with the entire history of salvage, not a specific period. An emphasis on dividing salvage into two periods is seen with the preceding discussion, and also with the division of early and later salvage into two separate chapters. The following discussion brings these ends together as part of a single story.

This discussion is substantially longer than that for the synchronic approach because the diachronic perspective leads to other directions in analysis discussed in Chapter 2. For example, I discuss change over time in the social mechanisms that facilitated salvage and reuse. I also consider the passage of time itself as a catalyst for change, with the transformation of the shipwreck into a site of historic significance and the emergence of kinds of object significance that are associated with age. The previous
chapter demonstrated that in the latter period of salvage many objects were reassigned ornamental uses, far different from their role as machines or tools. For example the Brisbane anchor ceased to be used as an anchor and became a monument. As machinery or equipment is converted to ornaments it comes to reside in fundamentally different kinds of social spaces.

This observation, that as objects age and become rare they become valuable, is not particularly original. In fact there is almost an expectation, as I alluded to at the beginning of this chapter, that as things age they gain an historic value (Davison 1988:56, Lowenthal 1985:240). However this case study shows that this process is not straightforward. Firstly, to conclude only that objects are given value as historic ornaments fails to recognise the finer distinctions that people make such as between the curio and the antique. Secondly, to suggest that a single transformation has occurred in which an object gains a type of status is to fail to appreciate that there is no consensus as to the true significance of these items as historic objects. Adding further ambiguity, opinion changes over time, whereby value may actually decrease over time as it does when the thrill of discovery attached to the trophy wanes. The meaning and significance of an object from the Brisbane as an historic ornament is not fixed but remains in contention and flux.

The following discussion, using the perspective of the long durée, is in four parts. The first part focuses solely on identifying change by considering salvage and reuse as social mechanisms. The three sections that follow consider specific aspects of the complexity of objects gaining historic value. I discuss popular and professional determinants of antiquity. I also argue that the memento and the historical curio reflect a different use of history to that of the antique, a frame of reference in which shipwreck stories are not judged in relation to linear time (when events occurred) but on other attributes altogether.
3.2. The social world

As explained earlier in this thesis, salvage is a social process and objects continue to move within the social world once they have been salvaged. Although this may seem obvious, it does challenge some preconceptions about shipwreck archaeology. It broadens a narrow perspective of the shipwreck as archaeological site. The primary aim of shipwreck archaeology is not necessarily to reconstruct the ship prior to its wrecking, as is argued by Muckelroy (1978:157). A recognition that salvage is a social process, and that salvaged objects become entangled in the world around them acknowledges that the life histories of objects continue beyond the wrecked ship.

The application of Schiffer’s terminology, which emphasises analysing salvage and reuse as social processes, was touched on in Chapter 4. There I identified the auction as a reuse mechanism and argued that consumers in Port Darwin faced a buyer beware scenario in which the quality and authenticity of the goods could not be guaranteed. By further using this terminology other kinds of change over time can be identified.

Throughout the history of the Brisbane wreck salvage has been the reuse process that facilitated the recycling of material culture. However there were significant changes over time in how this worked. In 1881 salvage was organised and tightly controlled firstly by the harbourmaster (representing the shipping company and insurers) and then by the wreck’s owners. Furthermore, except for the small amount of undamaged cargo that was transhipped to its original destinations, at this time items were salvaged for their resale value. By contrast salvage that began in the 1970s was unsystematic and occasional, carried out by individuals who were driven by personal determinations of value.

There is also a marked change between past and more recent salvage with the disappearance of the auction as a reuse mechanism. In 1881 the auctions first concentrated material in one place and then facilitated their wide distribution across the community. In contrast with more recent salvage the original salvor remained the primary object user. The few examples of the donation of objects in more recent salvage remain the exception. Changes in how objects were distributed are further seen with a consideration of the public and private spheres. The auctions were public.
events in which theoretically any person was able to bid for possession of objects. The reason why I stress that theoretically any person could bid at the auctions in 1881 is that absence of financial resources excluded many. This opportunity was not offered in recent salvage. Contemporary salvage was a private practice.

Using Schiffer’s terms of lateral cycling and recycling also provides insight into change over time. In 1881 most forms of reuse were lateral cycling in which the user changed but object function did not. In many cases the object remained an instrument or simple tool, for example a sail or blanket. Some objects salvaged in 1881 did however gain secondary functions, communicating social codes, as in the case of the blankets distributed to Aboriginal people, or as symbols of status in the case of napkins and the ship’s boats. In contrast secondary use, or a change in function without extensive modification, dominates object reuse in more recent salvage. Here objects have such functions as trophies or curios as mentioned earlier. There is also some recycling in both periods involving scrap brass.

The value of Schiffer’s approach is twofold. It emphasises that salvage and reuse occur within the social world. Secondly it assesses the relevance of physical modification in reuse. Some things take on very different functions from the purpose they were originally manufactured for. Yet in the vast majority of cases there is no physical modification to accommodate this change. This transformation emphasises that objects are social constructs defined by the people who use them rather than by their actual form. Perhaps a valid criticism of Schiffer is that he does not explore the social repercussions of object meaning. As discussed in Chapter 2, objects can be active participants in social history, communicating messages, reinforcing social codes, and supporting various cognitive behaviours. Therefore, to acknowledge that an object has a social or ideological value is a starting point in considering its role in society.

3.3. The Brisbane wreck site and antiquity

Figure 42 (taken from Figure 2) illustrates the emergence of the object as antique. The figure charts the different kinds of object significance relevant to this study. The arrow is broken because there is no general consensus on whether the shipwreck as a
whole or individual objects from the wreck are antiques. To some people sufficient
time has elapsed for the wreck and these historic ornaments to qualify. What
determines this judgement is the topic of this section.

Chapter 6 provided several examples of recent salvors and others who gave value to
the wreck or its objects because of age. Antiquity suggests that sufficient time has
elapsed for the object, site or event to reside in the remote past. What determines
remoteness for a person may or may not be measured in the number of elapsed years.
Chapter 6 cited Jack-Hinton giving the Brisbane unique value as an historic site.
However, when I asked whether antiquity was a suitable adjective he thought it is too
strong a term (pers.com 2004). As Director of the museum he also dealt with
Aboriginal sites that predate European occupation by many thousands of years. In
comparison the Brisbane is not antique. Here a consideration of antiquity is shaped
by a personal perception of the past in which one hundred years is placed in relation
to tens of thousands of years. Others have a sense of historical remoteness that is not
measured by years but by events.

Fabian (1983) called the phenomenon in which time is measured by a series of
culturally meaningful events ‘typological time’. This is different to ‘physical time’,
which relates more to physical cycles outside of human history, such as geological
time or astronomical time. Connah suggests that sufficient events have occurred in
Australian colonial history for us to think of early colonial history as the distant past
(Connah 1988:1). I argue that local social histories, as told by both academic and
popular historians, present a history of Darwin dense with recent meaningful events. These consequently push the era of the *Brisbane* into what is the remote past and the realm of antiquity. For example Bunbury (1994) recalls Cyclone Tracy as an important event in local history; Powell (1988) gives a military history of northern Australia during World War 2; and Barter (1994) provides an historical view of the transformation of a suburban area noting difference from the 1940s to today. The social history of Darwin as told by historians is marked by relatively recent events and changes.

This perspective of the local past is reinforced by the physical evidence. The consideration of far younger heritage sites, such as the 1939 Burnet House is on the National Trust of the Northern Territory’s heritage register, pushes the *Brisbane* further back into antiquity (NTNT 2004). Another factor that may influence people’s judgement about this site’s antiquity is the knowledge that physical evidence from this period of Darwin’s history is rare. Few historic structures that date to the period of the *Brisbane* still exist in Darwin because land has been reclaimed for development, and buildings have been destroyed by cyclones and by the bombing raids of World War 2. Here age is reinforced by rarity.

There is no authoritative definition of antiquity, and therefore it is not a question of whether collectors are ‘correct’ in ascribing this kind of significance to the *Brisbane* and related objects. Antiquity is decided on a personal *sense* of historical remoteness. Furthermore, knowledge about local history and the rarity of sites of this vintage in and around Darwin suggests antiquity is certainly validated within a local context. In this local chronology, in which stories of Cyclone Tracy and World War 2 dominate the telling of local history, the *Brisbane* is an older story, a story from before.

3.4. **Professional interpretations of the historic and the antique.**

That antiquity is a subjective quality is supported by the fact that there is no professional consensus as to what does and does not constitute antiquity. The bias of some archaeologists towards European history and chronology to determine antiquity demonstrates that antiquity is at times determined by specific histories. For example, Forrest refers to a definition based on the time of the Byzantine Empire as a
chronological baseline (Forrest 2002:7). Others have argued that wrecks following the Industrial Revolution are of no archaeological value (Muckleroy 1980:10). Delago (1997:28) defines ‘ancient wreck’ as those remains of vessels that date to no later than pre-medieval times.

The lack of consensus on what constitutes antiquity is also revealed in heritage laws that support an age criterion for significance. UNESCO defines wrecks older than 100 years as automatically of historical value (UNESCO 2001:2). In 1963 the Museum Act (WA) deemed that in state waters remains of all ships wrecked prior to 1900 protected. Other legislation outside Australia has a fixed time limit of the year 1600, clearly related to particular histories and historical periods (Forrest 2002:7).

Similar to these other examples of heritage laws and age criteria is the protection of the Brisbane. The Brisbane shipwreck is protected under the 1993 amendment of the Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976, an amendment that stipulates the automatic protection of shipwrecks older than 75 years. This makes the discussion of the relationship between an age criterion for historic and the subjective quality of antiquity particularly relevant. There are three shared qualities that reveal a relationship between antiquity and having a specific age for determining site significance. Firstly, both antiquity and age are defined by time alone. Secondly, rather than refer to a specific historical event both antiquity and a rolling date of age emphasise a difference between the present and the past. Thirdly, antiquity and an age criterion of 75 years do not deal with living memory but with history (Lowenthal 1985:256). Here the protection of sites because they are 75 years old or older does not protect those sites associated with our own experiences. It affords protection to the sites associated with the stories of those before us. Those older people who recall events beyond 75 years ago are the exception. Although sites younger than 75 years can be protected through individual declaration, these are not automatically protected.

Little has been written on the reasoning behind and the consequences of the specific cut-off point of 75 years for the amendment. Henderson (2001) argues for the validity of blanket protection of historic shipwrecks in Australia. However his argument deals with practical advantages rather than the theoretical outcomes of an age based criteria, or why 75 years marks a sufficient period of time. In this context it should be
recognised that other professionals argue that age alone does not necessarily equal significance and so the age criterion has serious conceptual drawbacks (Callahan 1999, Davison and McConville 1991:67). Cockrell (1998) argues that a consequence of a bias by archaeologists towards older sites represents a failure to successfully advocate the protection of younger sites. Whether intentional or not the selection of this specific period of time makes a statement about history, creating a specific fixed point which divides what is irrefutably historic from the possibly historic.

I suggested earlier in this chapter than notions of antiquity in Darwin may relate to perceptions of local history. If we again accept there is a relationship between an age criterion in heritage law and antiquity, the importance of local history in determining what is historic and antique is further revealed. A recent discussion paper prepared for a review of the *Heritage Conservation Act 1991* (Northern Territory) states wrecks older than 50 years old and located in state waters should be protected automatically (Woolfe 2004:34). Woolfe considers the Commonwealth criterion of 75 years but notes ‘If the World War II ship and plane wrecks are to be protected under this legislation, then it may be advantageous to protect ship and aircraft wrecks [automatically] over 50 years’. Here the threshold of what is deemed to be historically valuable is based on local events.

The declaration of the *Brisbane* wreck site as a heritage site is a *conservatory process*, a process in which the objective is to arrest decay and reduce or end human disturbance (Schiffer 1987:32). This, consequently, calls for an end to the shipwreck as a source for historic objects. Rather the ideal is for the submerged shipwreck to become an underwater exhibit, frozen in time. A conservatory approach to shipwreck management attempts to change, on a very critical level, salvage practices. As an action it places tight administrative control over the site, but what ultimately does this action symbolise in terms of site and object significance?

Forrest discusses the idea that in the protection of archaeological material, the process begins not with attributing a value to specific archaeological remains, and then protecting it because of this, but with a decision to protect a ‘class of material’ (Forrest 2002:4). This is an important insight in determining what a 75 year criterion, which is not a unique attribute of the *Brisbane* but shared with other shipwrecks
across Australia, says about a site or object having a singular and unique historical value. Kopytoff (1986:73), in his discussion of the cultural biographies of material culture, suggests that cultural items are the ‘symbolic inventory of a society’. He makes a clear distinction between the object, or site, as being a commodity, rather than something sacred and ‘singular’ (Kopytoff 1986). A case in point, discussed in Chapter 2, is the Liberty Bell which became consecrated in the public mind with its own unique history (Callahan 1999). The declaration of the Brisbane shipwreck as an historic site, because of an attribute that is shared with potentially hundreds of other shipwrecks, does not promote or reinforce singular value. Different to a singular and unique value, this criterion only declares that the Brisbane shipwreck resides within a class of all shipwrecks older than 75 years. Suggesting that heritage protection under this criterion assures a singular identity in the public eye is a profound overstatement.

3.5. The historical curio, the memento and a flattened time

The identification of material culture as historical curios and mementoes reflects in some cases a specific view of history, in the same way that antiquities reflect an opinion about scale in history and about a sense of historical remoteness. This other perspective views the past as a mass of stories, stories symbolised by different wrecks. Here the wrecks are identified by their story rather than their age. In this way it is the opposite of antiquity, which makes reference to chronology, linear time and historical depth. Lowenthal suggests this flattening of the past makes it indiscriminate, a process where events decades apart sit side by side in a two dimensional world (Lowenthal 1996:137). He ties this with his thesis that there is a difference between the study of History and the practice of Heritage. Schlereth (1982:72-73) also recognises this practice and discusses it in the context of a popular realisation that material culture from the very recent past can also be heritage. What it does reflect in the context of this research is that the Historical Curio, the Memento, and the Antique are ways of classifying object significance that can reflect different perspectives of the past, in particular the importance or unimportance of chronology and age.

Stories that are considered central narratives can arouse public interest over other local stories, and this prioritisation flows into the differing significance ascribed to the material culture associated with these sites. In Chapter 2 I referred to public
monuments commemorating Cyclone Tracy and the bombing of Darwin. Unlike the wrecks associated with these stories, the *Brisbane* is not associated with emotional stories. Rather the *Brisbane* stands as a rather mundane story of a steamship stranding on a reef. In this limited context of interpretation the *Brisbane* is comparatively insignificant.

4. Models for historic salvage and industrial reuse

4.1. Patterns in salvage and the *Brisbane* case study

Gibbs (2003) discusses prospective directions in researching maritime salvage in Australian archaeology and identifies a need for specific studies in wreck salvage processes. He identifies a number of categories of materials that may be salvaged, but stresses that he does not present these in a hierarchical order (Gibbs 2003:139). The case of the *Brisbane* does offer one example of organised salvage, a process in which materials were systematically removed from a stranded ship. What we learn from the organised salvage of this wreck site in the context of salvage processes is that, although a methodical approach was instigated, the ship was not salvaged in a pattern whereby types of objects were removed in turn.

Chapter 4 cites Lamont salvaging fine ornamental pieces long after scrap metal and heavy nautical equipment were removed. It is true that these ornamental pieces were fixtures which may have had to be detached, and so they were not as easily portable (accessible) as were for example free standing objects. However if one categorised these as delicate decorative pieces then their removal weeks after scrap metal shows that an organised programme of salvage may not necessarily start with all the delicate fineries and end with technical equipment and scrap. The salvor is influenced by, amongst other things, the expected financial return from objects and materials that they salvage (Gibbs 2003:140). Perhaps these decorative pieces were not expected to sell for a high price. This shows that in organised salvage potential buyers can influence what is taken from the wreck site and when.
4.2. Industrial salvage and models for reuse and adaptation

Industrial machinery and equipment was not salvaged from the Brisbane and reused on other boats in Port Darwin or adapted locally for terrestrial industries. Such cases where valuable hardware is not selected and reused should be considered if developing a broad inter-site model for industrial salvage and reuse. Whether in a marine or terrestrial context, these instances in which items are not salvaged and reused contribute information to a picture of salvage and reuse. Valuable things are left behind for a reason.

Chapter 5 described the existence today of ship tanks, anchors, winches, a windlass, chain and a number of boilers on the wreck site. The presence of a condenser demonstrates that either the drinking water condenser or the propulsion engine was not salvaged in its entirety. In fact the lack of reference to the salvage of either in local accounts strongly suggests that neither were salvaged from the site.

The market for Brisbane machinery and technology was primarily local. It is highly unlikely that Dunscombe and Lamont would have been able to secure inter-state buyers for second hand machinery. The machinery may have been damaged and would have required repair. No person would purchase this machinery without inspection, meaning the owners would have to ship the material to potential inter-state buyers without a guarantee of sale. Whether buyers would make the long journey to Port Darwin for damaged equipment in questionable. This begs the question, what does the decision not to remove these machines and equipment suggest about Port Darwin. The answer is that there was neither the industry to absorb this machinery nor the specialised knowledge to use, maintain and adapt these machines.

Much of the marine equipment was too oversized for the small local fleet that was based at Port Darwin. There was no vessel based at this port that could have utilised large bower anchors. This is the explanation for why they remain on the site. There was no vessel based at Port Darwin that could utilise 270 fathoms (494 metres) of anchor chain that had a thickness of 1 & 11/16 inches (NMM: RS: 3906:1874) which explains why a large mound of chain remains on the site. The sheer size and class of the Brisbane meant that some equipment was not transferable.
The question regarding machinery such as winches, windlass and tanks is more complex. In terms of marine reuse the operators of small steam launches that plied Darwin Harbour would have had no use for winches or a windlass of this size. The boilers used on small steam launches were designed to power small, usually single cylinder, propulsion engines. There was no wharf at this time, and so the machinery could not be utilised as cargo derricks (cranes) operated from a wharf structure. Furthermore, there was no terrestrial industry in which the winches or windlass could be of use. The only land-based industries that used machinery were the Deliseaville experimental sugar plantation and mining operations. The sugar plantation had one specially built machine (NTTG 01/04/1882). The mining industry was dependant on large machinery, such as batteries, which were imported from the south or acquired second-hand from failed local companies (Jones 1987: 5, 11, 21, 27, 30).

The four tanks that remain on the site are an enigma. Ship tanks were used to store water and perishable goods such as food. These four tanks were clearly rejected in the salvage process, but this does not reflect a general rejection of ship tanks in the overall salvage programme. Although it is unclear how many tanks were aboard the ship, many were likely salvaged and reused. In November 1881 equipment including seven large iron tanks full of bread and flour and 50 empty iron tanks, all from the Carnatic, were sold in Brisbane (BC 04/11/1881). The Brisbane had water tanks lined with cement to store drinking water. What can be concluded regarding the four existing storage tanks is that other tanks may have been removed, but the demand was not sufficient to warrant the search and salvage of all tanks.

The likely failure to salvage the propulsion engine is in contrast to a common practice of removing and reusing steamship engines. Hardwick (1997) outlines a history in Australia of removing engines and boilers from steamships and installing them on other vessels. His explanations for this practice are that the amount of metal in engines and boilers made them more resistant to salt water. The shortage in Australia of machinery for ships, and the fact that later ships were engaged in less profitable trade, would have seen cheaper second-hand equipment installed.
Hardwick recounts that the practice was common in Australia. He refers to the *Belmore* being equipped with the two sets of compound engines salvaged from the *Tilba*; the *Doepel*, with two sets of compound engines came from the *Bellinger*; and the *Glenreagh* which was fitted with two sets of triple expansion engines and two boilers from the *G.F.Holden*. Parsons (1987) discusses engine recycling along the Murray-Darling river system in particular and provides accounts of the *Alert* that had two second hand engines installed; the instalment of the *Bantam* engines into the *Murray* and the instalment of the engine and boiler from the *Queen* in the *Britannia* (Parsons 1987: 43, 47, 50). One of the most intriguing examples is the case of the *Struggler*, a wooden paddler steamer that was re-equipped with a 10 horse power steam tractor engine and the gearing from an old tram (Parsons 1987:116-117).

In Chapter 2 I made reference to Birmingham and colleagues suggesting a number of ‘interpretative themes’ for the archaeological study of industrial history. These themes include ‘isolation’, ‘pioneer frontier’ and ‘transplanted technology’ (Birmingham, Jack & Jeans 1983:11-23). I also cite M. Pearson who criticised another archaeologist for writing a descriptive account of a site’s history without association with broader themes, such as the diffusion of European goods into the Australian outback and technological adaptation (Pearson 1984:29). Although it seems a logical premise to assume that people with limited access to material goods salvaged and reused what was available, the failure to salvage and adapt hardware from the *Brisbane* shows we cannot assume this was always the case.

Highlighting the danger in over generalisation and over simplification is M. Pearson’s study of the adaptation of ship tanks in rural settings. He writes:

‘The prevalence of the ship tank in rural Australia reflects the extensive recycling of manufactured items for alternative purposes, a trait necessary for survival, or at least comfortable living, in a society that is isolated from the source of purpose-built manufactured products’ (Pearson 1992:24).

M. Pearson’s individual examples of modification of water tanks in various places are fascinating examples of individual object reuse. However, whether they reflect a broader culture, in which the opportunity to reuse materials and machinery was
consistently taken, requires a more thorough study of material culture reuse as practiced by individual groups of people. The Brisbane is an example of a collection of objects, a wide selection of goods, being available in one place at one time. When we see reuse played out at this level we do not see a simple scenario, but a complex and partly contradictory one. On the one hand small ornamental goods were in great demand, as were bed sheets, but industrial machinery was not. W. Pearson (1996) provides a model for the transfer and adaptation of industrial machinery from Britain to Australia in the 19th century. He considers, amongst other variables, socio-cultural factors, local knowledge, local supporting industries and technologies and local economic factors. What my thesis demonstrates is that conditions particular to a place and time can influence whether industrial adaptation, lateral cycling and recycling occurred.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to draw on the research data provided in earlier chapters and address the research aim of this thesis. There has certainly been substantial change between the 1880s and the 1970s in the criteria used by salvors in selecting and reusing objects from the Brisbane. From the perspective of understanding salvage as a social process, there have been significant changes in the social mechanisms that directed what was taken and how things were salvaged and distributed. Dominating this perspective is the fact that initially the shipwreck was owned and controlled by people driven by financial gain, whose criteria for selecting materials were primarily a response to local demand. Items were sold locally through public auctions. In contrast the more recent fossicker determined value on personal criteria and, except for the rare cases of donation to a museum or family, the salvor remained the primary object user.

From a synchronic perspective this study has demonstrated that objects become entangled in their immediate surroundings and their function and significance can be a product of a specific time and place. Furthermore, object function and meaning can be determined by individual people or small groups of people, such as the case of the Holtze family and the ship’s piano. A diachronic perspective has demonstrated that after sufficient time the Brisbane wreck and its associated objects were considered
historic. Yet this is neither a straightforward attribution nor a permanent one, as there are finer increments within this broader recognition related to people’s underlying uses of the past. The historical meanings of the wreck and its objects are unstable, continuingly being debated and reconsidered.
CHAPTER EIGHT:  
CONCLUSION

This thesis is a study in site salvage and material culture reuse. Initially I was inspired by historical references such as that written by Sowden (cited in Chapter 1), in which the Brisbane wreck is described as a ‘godsend’. To the residents of the small, isolated community of Port Darwin the stranding of the Brisbane was not a loss, but a rare and valuable opportunity. Decades later new residents revisited this wreck site and removed material, determining through new criteria that things once discarded and forgotten had become significant. The question of what was and was not salvaged and what objects were used for, were primary questions in this thesis. However I also moved beyond this, analysing how users assign different kinds of meaning to salvaged material.

This thesis is not a study of a shipwreck, but the study of a process. In this way it has relevance to students of material culture studies and historical archaeology. Certainly many aspects of this story are shaped by the fact that the Brisbane was a ship wrecked on a reef. But if it was an aeroplane wreck, or an abandoned house, or disused factory questions concerning salvage, reuse and object meaning would remain equally pertinent.

As the wreck has aged it has increased in value. Through the study of more recent salvage it is clear that the public are not passive recipients of history but actively engage in it, and in part do so by collecting items from the wreck. The differences between the historical curio and the memento further illustrate that the past is not conceived as generic and standard, but that people choose to have varying ideas of the past, for example whether chronology and age are important or not.

Whether one is considering an example of reuse from 1881 in which ship’s blankets become political capital, or a story from the 1990s in which engine condenser pipes are fashioned into personal art works, an essential premise is that people fundamentally change objects by constructing new uses and meanings for them. In this way the ship’s piano that became a family heirloom, and the odd bottle and
twisted porthole collected more recently by individuals, are ultimately not stories about salvaged objects but stories about how and why people reuse salvaged objects.
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APPENDIX A

The Brisbane’s itinerary in 1881

Figure A1. The Brisbane’s itinerary in 1881
APPENDIX B

Principal ship specifications in table form

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date built</td>
<td>1874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location built</td>
<td>Glasgow, Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builder</td>
<td>A&amp;J Inglis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port of registry</td>
<td>London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hull type</td>
<td>iron hull, 4 decked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigging</td>
<td>two masted square sail brig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propulsion type</td>
<td>fully powered single screw steam with sail assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross tonnage</td>
<td>1503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered tonnage</td>
<td>891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold cargo storage</td>
<td>ice-house, meat rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length</td>
<td>281.5 feet (85.80 metres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breadth</td>
<td>32.2 feet (9.8 metres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth</td>
<td>17.6 feet (5.40 metres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propulsion engine/s</td>
<td>inverted compound engine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2 cylinders 40” &amp; 72” - 42 ” stroke)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>250 registered horse power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boilers</td>
<td>4 main (superheated) boilers and 2 auxiliary boilers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ship boats</td>
<td>6 wooden boats, one being steam launch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passenger facilities</td>
<td>first, second and steerage class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B1. Principal ship specifications
APPENDIX C

The design proposed for the Fish Reef beacon

Figure C1. The design proposed in 1897 for the Fish Reef beacon
(NTA:GRR,GRIC,8281, 1897)
APPENDIX D

A diary entry discussing the discovery and removal of portholes and images depicting the removal and cleaning of a porthole from the *Brisbane* wreck

Figure D1. Jarrah’s diary entry for finding and discovering some portholes on the *Brisbane*
Figure D2. Two divers using hammer and chisel to remove a *Brisbane* porthole with permission from photographer.

Figure D3. Using an air drill to remove concretion from a *Brisbane* porthole with permission from photographer.
APPENDIX E

Methodology – verification that research is original

The following outlines the major sources of historical data, how the survey of the wreck site was conducted, and how interviews with contemporary salvors were conducted. This provides an ability to assess the information in the context of how it was collected, to bring to light limitations to this research, and to verify that this was original work.

1. Historical research

Information about the design of the Brisbane and the inventory of things that were aboard derived in part from Lloyds Register and Lloyds survey data, both sourced directly from the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, England [NMM]. The detailed information about fittings and furnishings came from a construction report produced by Inglis the shipbuilder and sourced from Glasgow Archives, Scotland [GCA:TD 36/3;110/111]. Further description of the ship came from newspaper accounts [SMH, NTTG]. Information pertaining to Chinese immigration came from the Australian National Archives and a website listing results from a federally funded immigration research project [NAA:CRS, CHAF].

Some of the information about the ships’ working life, stranding and its salvage came from newspapers. These included the Northern Territory Times and Gazette [NTTG]; Brisbane Courier [BC]; Sydney Morning Herald [SMH]; Illustrated Sydney News; and the Age, which are all stored on microfilm at the Northern Territory Library (NTL). Government Records on these subjects were sourced from the State Records of South Australia [SRSA] and the Northern Territory Archives [NTA]. Government records included the Marine Board Office [SRSA:GRG]; the Dept. of Marine and Harbours [SRSA:GRG]; records relating to the Northern Territory [SRSA:GRS]; the South Australian Parliamentary Papers [SRSA:SAPP] and the incoming correspondence of the government resident (NTA:GRIC).
Records relating to the Northern Territory include the incoming correspondence of the Government resident [GRIC] and the Government Resident Reports to South Australia [GRR] both accessible at the Northern Territory Archives [NTA]; and from the South Australian Parliamentary Papers [SAPP] accessible both at the State Records of South Australia [SRSA] and the Northern Territory Library [NTL].

2. Survey of the Brisbane wreck site

The wreck site was surveyed over a period of four years. The aims of the survey were to record visible wreckage, identify signs of salvage, and collect sufficient information to produce a model of site formation. I was the supervising archaeologist throughout this survey and I produced the maps inserted in this thesis.

The survey was two dimensional, capturing a planimetric view of the wreck site. The survey strategy was a chain survey strategy whereby a network of datum stations were formed through a series of interconnected triangles. Iron spikes (re rod) and star pickets marked the stations. This network of triangles was superimposed over the wreck and the location of cultural material was measured by its distance from two or more stations. Distances were measured by tape measures, except distances over 100 metres which were measured using a handheld portable Electronic Distance Measuring Device (EDM) accurate to one metre. Figure E1 shows the datum structure to scale. Stations G-K were underwater at low tide and were surveyed on scuba. This section of the datum structure was smaller because the wreck site was less scattered beyond the inter-tidal zone and because distances measured with tape measures underwater become increasingly inaccurate over longer distances.
The datum structure measured the accurate location of material and the surface detail was recorded by using either planning grids or handheld tape measures. Drawing grids were more suitable for capturing complex detail from relatively flat surfaces. A one metre grid was positioned over material and its location measured. A surveyor sketched the material within that one metre grid using the grid as a border. A handheld tape measure was also used to measure the position of key features from the x and y axes of the planning grid. Other features, such as anchors and mounds of chain, were recorded by measuring a length and width and then sketching the form and detail. Figure E2 shows Paul Clark and Silvano Jung using a planning grid to record hull debris.
A planning frame of 5 square metres was used to record the ship-floor at the midships and aft of the wreck. A frame of these dimensions caused a reduction in accuracy, but was necessary because time available underwater was limited.

**Dry Reef fieldwork**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Approximate hours on site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26th October 2000</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27th October 2000</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28th October 2000</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29th October 2000</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17th October 2001</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18th October 2001</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th October 2001</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st October 2001</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th September 2002</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th October 2002</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table E1. Dry reef survey
Diving fieldwork

The table below shows the total time spent underwater diving the submerged material by the author and his dive partners (dive buddies).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diver</th>
<th>Total time underwater</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan Watson</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo Boyanton</td>
<td>66 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Clark</td>
<td>95 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silvano Jung</td>
<td>709 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Steinberg</td>
<td>915 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table E2. Diving fieldwork

3. Oral histories

Information about recent salvage derived from interviews with local salvors, divers and a past MAGNT Director. The interviews produced four kinds of results. These are examples of salvaged objects, stories pertaining to salvage, an understanding of how objects are stored and exhibited, and explanations of wreck site and object significance from salvors and collectors. The Charles Darwin University Research Ethics Committee approved this interview process.

It was not possible to interview every person who has salvaged material from this wreck since the emergence of recreational scuba diving in the 1950s. Some are unknown. Some are now deceased. Other people were unwilling to participate in this research. Therefore the list of salvaged objects offered in this thesis cannot be considered a complete inventory of raised relics. It is however the most complete inventory produced to date. Some of the interviewees recounted stories of salvage which were many years old. There is therefore a possibility, as there is in all oral history research, that the interviewee made errors. The problem of fading memory and oral histories is clearly demonstrated with the box of miscellaneous objects at Happy Divers. To minimise this I have where possible cross referenced information with other interviewees and archaeological data. I have directly conveyed any doubt I or the interviewee felt towards the accuracy of accounts.