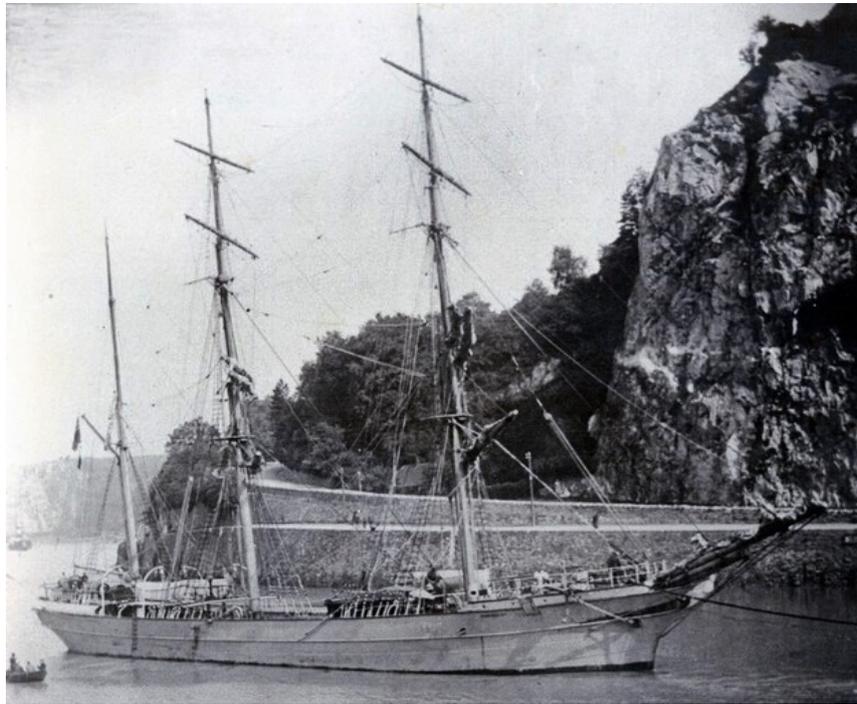


# A captain's last voyage & how Mandalay Beach got its name



The 'Mandalay' on the Avon River, Bristol, England. (WNDHS)

The Norwegian barque *Mandalay* left Delegoa Bay in Africa in 1911 to take on cargo in the Western Australian port of Albany.

Good weather favoured the ship and as she sailed gracefully over the Southern Ocean off the south-west corner of the Western Australian coast Captain Emile Tonnessen and his crew looked forward to reaching their destination.

In all his 46 years at sea as a naval man, the skipper had never experienced a mishap. This was his final voyage before retirement.

As the sky clouded over and the breeze freshened, Captain Tonnessen was filled with sense of foreboding. He recognised these ominous signs of a change in the weather.

Suddenly there was a freak wind change which turned the breeze

into a gale from the south-west.

The Captain issued his orders and the crew sprang into action and for many hours fought to control the vessel against the fury of the wind, which in turn whipped up huge, relentless seas.

The tremendous force of the wind caused the *Mandalay* to be driven shorewards and all efforts to bring the ship away from the coast were fruitless against the merciless wind.

The ship came perilously close to Chatham Island, a sheer rocky peak rising 130 feet out of the water.

By some miracle the captain and his crew managed to keep the vessel clear of Chatham but a greater danger loomed; Long Point.



Wreck of the 'Mandalay', Mandalay Beach. Photo taken by Tom Swarbrick c. 1929. (WNDHS)

Captain Tonnessen realised that the force of the onshore winds would prevent them from rounding Long Point and made the only

decision that could result in survival. He ordered his men to beach the vessel.

The beaching was accomplished but resulted in a further problem; that of moving men and provisions ashore through the turbulent, tossing ocean. The storm had not abated and the wind howled through the flapping canvas of the ship's sails.

One man volunteered to make the first move and a rope was tied securely around him. However, it became tangled around his leg, putting him in imminent danger. A young Englishman went to his aid and together they were successful.

Finally, all the men, urged on by the skipper they loved and respected, fought their way to shore with provisions and set up a makeshift camp where they watched helplessly as the seas relentlessly battered the stricken ship.

When the wind abated, efforts were made to find help.

One crew member was sighted in the dense bush by early settlers on the Deep River — Frank Thompson and his sister Phyllis — who took the man to their home.

After a short rest, he led a rescue party back to the beach where Captain Tonnessen and crew of the *Mandalay* were overjoyed to see their rescuers.



Captain Emile Tonnessen and the crew of the iron barque 'Mandalay' were wrecked on the beach that would bear the ship's name. Photo taken at Bow Bridge in 1911 by Bert Saw. (WNDHS)

The men were led through the sand hills to the Thompson's homestead and enjoyed great hospitality before being taken to Albany and on to Fremantle and then back to Norway.

Thus ended the life of the *Mandalay*; left to be gradually broken down by the sea until little remained of the ship.

A number of people still hold relics of the *Mandalay* and for many years, at various times of the year, parts of the ship are visible on the beach that bears her name.

Perhaps you have been to Mandalay Beach recently. What did you see? Let us know in the comments below.

*This story has been adapted from an article that first appeared in two parts; in the [June 11, 2014](#) & [June 18, 2014](#) editions of the [Walpole Weekly](#). Molly Smith is a regular contributor to the Weekly with her "Looking Back with Molly" column. Pictures sourced from the [Walpole, Nornalup & Districts Historical Society](#).*



Wreck of the 'Mandalay', Mandalay Beach, November 27, 2002. Photographer unknown. (WNDHS)