

the sand. Among other incidental misfortunes a youth was accidentally blinded by a detonator.

Wrecks are bought for a variety of reasons. There may be a hope that the vessel can be refloated. This hope has sometimes been fulfilled, to the great enrichment of the wreck-owner, but in almost every case when the auctioneer announces that a wreck is a "break-up" proposition he saves the purchaser much money. The "Riverina" still lies off Gabo Island (off the coast of Victoria), although several syndicates, one after another, were formed to refloat her, and sand now almost completely covers the "Uralla."

Occasionally, a wreck is sought for her hull, engines, or cargo. It was said that the late Mr. John Brown, of Newcastle, wanted the "Uralla" for her boilers, and had arranged with a naval engineer lieutenant to get them out. Mr. Brown bid £1,500, but the wreck was sold for £1,600, and the costly attempt to refloat her has already been described. Solely to demonstrate special diving gear, Mr. A. Clarey, of Melbourne, paid £300 on April 2, 1928, for the "Merimbula," which had been driven ashore at Beecroft Head, near Jervis Bay.

Because of the financial outlay required, and the risks and difficulties in disposing of wrecks, many ships built at a cost of over £100,000 are finally sold for a few hundreds. Among the highest prices obtained in recent years were £1,600 for the "Uralla" and £1,500 for "Cities Service Boston," now lying on the rocks at Shell Harbour (New South Wales), after cargo and fittings worth £20,000 had been removed.

At the other extreme was the "Northern Firth," driven ashore at Ulladulla (New South Wales) early in 1932. When most of the cargo had been taken out and sold she rolled off the reef and broke up, only a piece of mast showing above the water. An offer of £70 for the right to any material washed up was refused by the underwriters because it would have been impossible to divide such a small sum among the various interests entitled to a share.

Almost invariably, wrecks are sold by auction, and before the sale the auctioneer must personally explore all the possibilities so that he can answer any question—for many take his word as to what can be recovered. To visit the "Uralla" the auctioneer rode six miles on a horse saddled with a hessian bag and a rope bridle! After having climbed a 40 ft. steel ladder on to the "Cities Service Boston," the auctioneer had to be off in a certain period to avoid being marooned on the vessel by the tide. On other occasions investigation has involved wading through partially submerged engine-rooms with a torch.

Sales are well attended because the auctioneer invariably has an interesting story to tell. But most of his audience are there for business. After the sale some may offer the purchaser their services and the use of equipment in the complicated business he has undertaken. Often a retired mariner, with the smell of salt water still in his nostrils, steps from the crowd to volunteer his experience and portion of the capital required for a share in a ship which never again will ride the waves.

But at least the buyer of a wreck captures, for a time, elusive romance, and his ship may really have come in at last—weather permitting.

