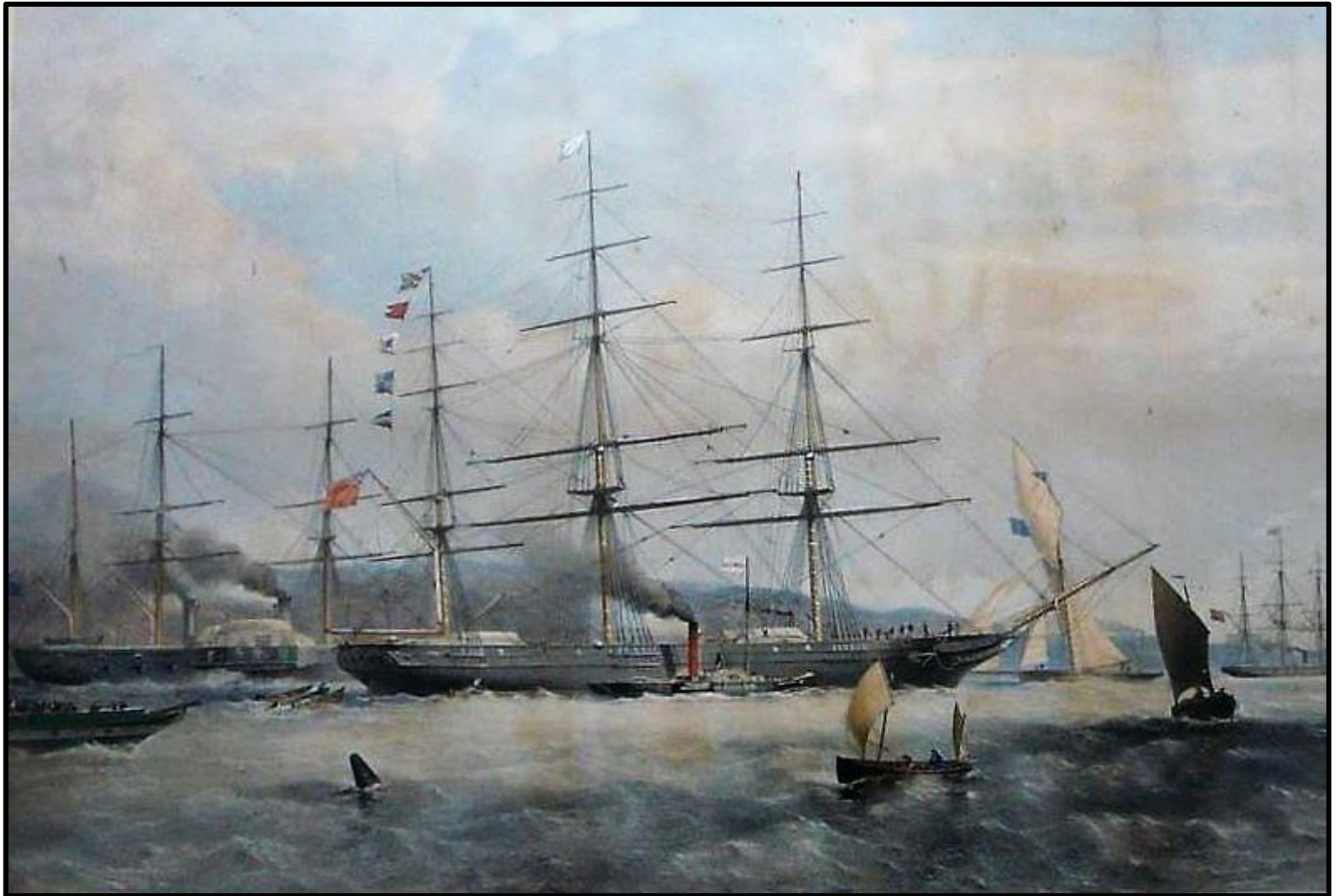


An Account of the Shipwreck of the “Schomberg” 1855

The *SS Schomberg* was a clipper built in Aberdeen by Alexander Hall & Co. for "the Black Ball line" (which was a subsidiary of James Baines & Co., of Liverpool) for carrying large cargoes and steerage passengers. When built, she was regarded as the most luxurious and well-built clipper of the period.



The Schomberg departs Liverpool on her maiden Voyage 1855 ¹

She was named after Captain Charles Frederick Schomberg R N., the Emigration Commissioner for Liverpool, an influential man when it came to securing government contracts for the carriage of emigrants. The Black Ball Line's owners clearly sought his favour. She was launched in Aberdeen, Scotland, on 7 April 1855, and christened by A. H. Layard M.P. ²

The Schomberg, with its Captain “Bully” Forbes, was on its maiden voyage to Australia and departed Liverpool on 6th Oct 1855 carrying 430 passengers. On the night of 27th Dec 1855, she ran a ground, on a reef and sandbar in Newfield (Newfold) Bay, Victoria.



Wreck Site near Peterborough, Victoria ³

Most of the weight of the ship's cargo was railway track for the Geelong Railway and when she ran aground there was little that could be done, at the time, to re-float her and she was in danger of being dash upon nearby rocks. Although salvage attempts were made (with the loss of two lives) the ship eventually did break up, on 6th Jan 1856, and still lies where she ran aground.

The circumstances surrounding why the Schomberg ran aground were many, from the ship's Captain being diverted by the attentions of a 18 year old female passenger, to simply a navigation error. The Captain was cleared, as the sandbank was uncharted and there was "not enough evidence to show he had not used every precaution necessary to save his ship"; but public outrage ensued.

Following a mass meeting of the passengers of the Schomberg, shortly after the sinking, the following resolutions were unanimously carried:

1. That the conduct of the captain, the surgeon and some of the officers of the Schomberg was ungentlemanly, discourteous and grossly immoral.
2. That it was not only the general impression of the passengers of the Schomberg, but to the certain knowledge of many of those here assembled, that the loss of that fine ship can only be attributed to the gross negligence of the captain.
3. That we are of opinion that the contracts entered into between Messrs. James Haines & Co., of Liverpool, and the passengers of the Schomberg have not been fulfilled.
4. That a deputation be appointed to wait upon His Excellency the Office Administering the Government, praying that an investigation be held into the circumstances of the loss of the Schomberg, and the property of the passengers. ⁴

Captain Forbe's career was in ruins and he sank into obscurity.

However, John Millar, with two others, were credited with taking a small boat, in the night, to see if landing passengers on a nearby beach, would be safe to do so. The backwash of the breaking waves on the beach, convinced him that this option was not possible and would result in a serious loss of life.

The Shipwreck Mariner's Society of the United Kingdom was made aware of the heroic deeds of Mr Millar, onboard the Schomberg, and the minutes of a meeting, conducted in London are shown below.

Minutes of Meetings of the Shipwrecks Mariner's Society United Kingdom ⁵

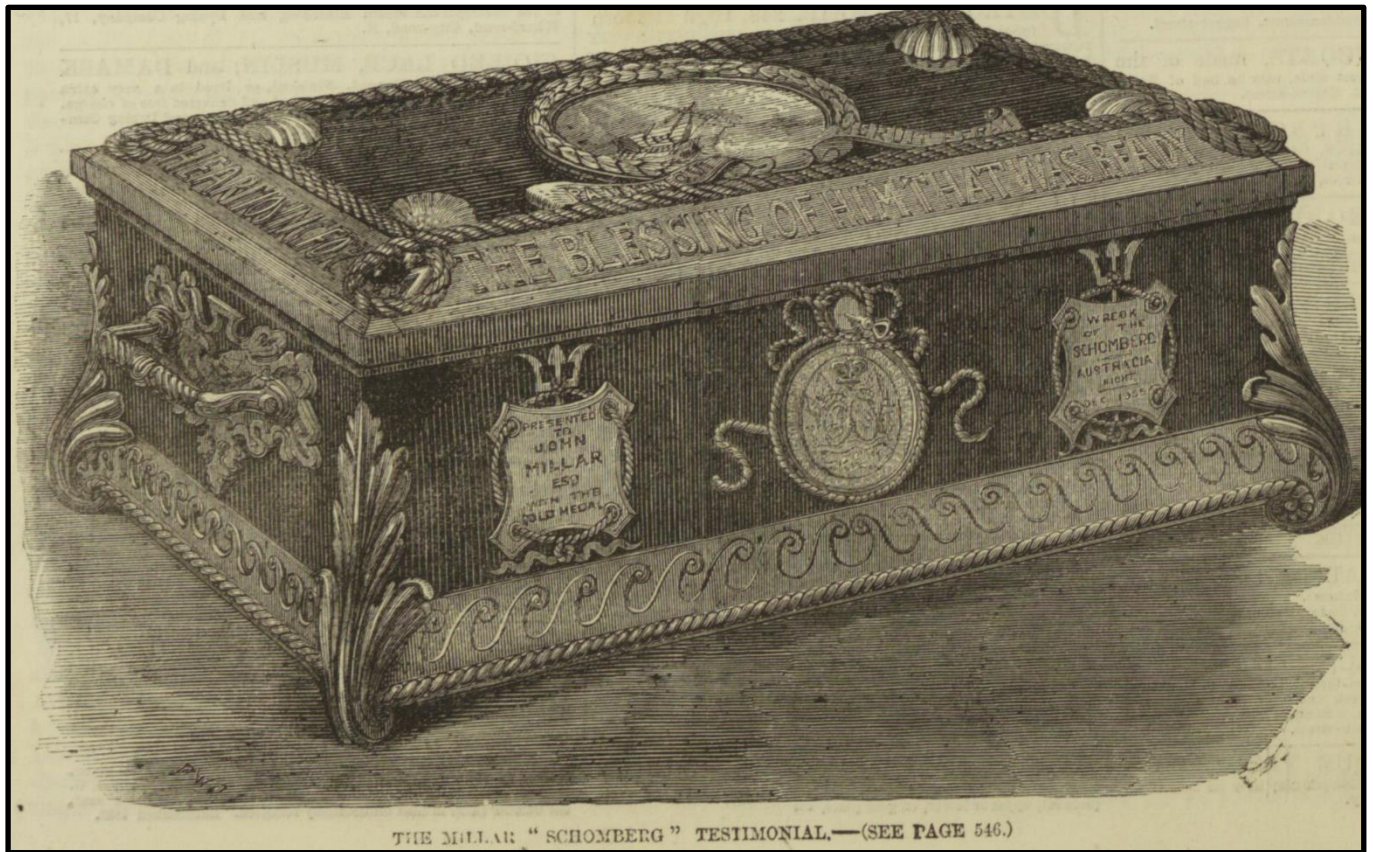
Gold Medal 1856:

A letter was read from James Girvan Esq. of Melbourne, Australia, calling attention to the gallant and praiseworthy conduct of John Millar Esq. Architect and Civil Engineer of Ulsterville, Belfast, on the occasion of the loss of the Emigration ship Schomberg on the Australian coast.

The Committee having fully considered the account of the wreck, given in the Melbourne paper, the Argus of the 29th December 1855, and of the Age of the 7th January 1856. It was proposed by Rear Admiral Bertie Cator, seconded by Capt. the Hon. Francis Maude, RN., and carried unanimously, "that it is the opinion of this Committee that to the devoted courage, presence of mind, and unwearied exertions of John Millar, Esq., is mainly attributed, with the Lord's blessing, the salvation of many lives from the wreck of the late ship Schomberg, and that the conduct of Mr Miller calls forth their warmest admiration, and as an expression of it, that the Gold Medal of the Society be presented to him, accompanied by a copy of this minute, in the frame given by the Society as the reward for merit."

A letter, from Mr Millar, was received by the committee, in response to the award:
February 1857:

A letter was read from J. Millar, returning thanks for his Gold Medal and sending £10, £5 for the Society and £5 for the Belfast Sailor's Home. At the AGM Friday, 21st May 1858 Mr Millar was also presented with a highly-ornamented casket, containing a case of instruments, which had been designed in London, the funds being raised at a public meeting at Geelong, as a testimonial.



Casket containing Gold Medal from Shipwrecked Mariner's Society ⁶

1 Wikipedia

2 Wikipedia

3 Google Earth

4 Wikipedia

5 Minutes of Meeting held by the Shipwreck Mariner's Society United Kingdom

6 Illustrated London News, 29 May 1858,