



In 2008 we looked at the Durban July over the years. The pictures were sent in by the public relations manager of Gold Circle, Gill Simkins, which show the start/finish area of the July in 1947 (above left) and the start of the race in 2003 (above right) and aerial shots of the same event (below). They graphically show how the event has changed over the years, from the massive new grandstands to the hi-tech starting technology.



The postcard which Cyril Crawford (inset) bought in Durban in 1940 showing the entrance to the Amphitheatre on the back of which he jotted his memories.. A picture of the Amphitheatre taken by Marilyn Bernard in 2008.



In 2008 we published pictures and a story about the wreck of the ship the Ovington Court off Durban's beachfront and a British soldier's memories of this and the city which attracted a lot of interest from readers. This picture of the Ovington Court from the Independent Newspapers archives, shows the Ovington Court stuck in the sand off South Beach and was taken in the early to the mid-1940s. This picture of the Ovington Court wreck was taken in 2004 by the chairman of the Durban Paddleski Club, Johnny Vossilaros, during a Spring low tide.

TREVOR BRUCE

Uncovering the secrets of the Ovington Court

THE hobby and curiosity of a local journalist, combined with the power of the internet, has revealed a fascinating relationship between a shipwreck, a postcard and a British soldier who spent a few days in Durban during World War 2 on his way to North Africa.

Jonathan Oberholster, a freelance sub-editor for Independent Newspapers, is a scuba diver who lives in South Beach, Durban. Nearby, offshore opposite Addington Hospital, lies a famous shipwreck, the Ovington Court, which ran aground on November 26, 1940, during heavy seas.

According to Allan Jackson's 'Facts About Durban' webpage on the Ovington Court, the 6 000-ton cargo freighter's anchor dragged at about 6pm and the ship

drifted towards shore, which it struck about four hours later.

The captain made the decision to abandon ship and an attempt was made to rescue the crew using two lifeboats. The first reached the shore safely but the second capsized, pitching 12 crew members into the sea. All 12 were rescued but four of them died later in Addington Hospital. They were cabin boy Gordon Hunter, 15, and crew men Michael Kennedy, Mahommed Abdoos Shaali and Said Ben Said. The following morning the remaining crew were brought to shore by pulley. The last person off the ship was Captain George Linsell - with the ship's monkey in his arms.

The wreck was a tourist attraction for many years.

However, holes were made in the hull to hasten its break-up because authorities viewed it as potentially dangerous - people were swimming out to it and clambering all over the rusting superstructure.

Today, many Durbanites are completely unaware of the wreck because the sea has reduced it to an underwater skeleton. Only with Spring low tides does part of the wreck, thought to be the engine block, still stick out of the water.

Oberholster has dived and snorkelled among the wreck a number of times and has become fascinated by the ship's history and is compiling a dossier on the Ovington Court and its untimely end. On one of his many searches

he came across a family website created by Sue Lawrance, who lives in England, which has a section in it devoted to her grandfather, Cyril Crawford.

Oberholster wondered whether Lawrance knew about the shipwreck and e-mailed her (sue@jamieandsue.co.uk). She e-mailed him pictures of the front and back of a postcard Crawford had written while in South Africa and more information about Crawford.

Crawford, 32, joined the British army and embarked on a ship, the Andes, which set sail from the UK on November 15, 1940. The ship stopped over in Durban just days before the Ovington Court ran aground.

Anyone who can contribute to Oberholster's dossier can e-mail him on jonathan.oberholster@ini.co.za. For an explanation on the demise of the Ovington Court visit www.fad.za/Resources/ovi/ovington/hm