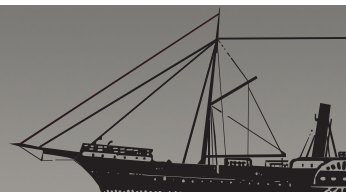




# Ship Fact Sheet



## SOBRAON (1900)

*Base data at 4 April 1900. Last amended November 2008*

*\* indicates entries changed during P&O Group service.*

Type	Passenger/cargo liner and troopship
P&O Group service	1900-1901
P&O Group status	Owned by parent company
Former name(s)	
Registered owners, managers and operators	The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company
Builders	Caird & Co Ltd
Yard	Greenock
Country	UK
Yard number	293
Registry	Greenock, UK
Official number	109253
Signal letters	RKNB
Classification society	Lloyd's Register
Gross tonnage	7,382 grt
Net tonnage	4,411 nrt
Deadweight	
Length	137.11m (450.0ft)
Breadth	16.51m (54.2ft)
Depth	9.63m (31.6ft)
Draught	
Engines	Triple-expansion steam engines
Engine builders	Caird & Co Ltd
Works	Greenock
Country	UK
Power	6,500 ihp
Propulsion	Twin screw
Speed	16 knots
Passenger capacity	114 first class, 57 second class
Cargo capacity	9,030 cubic metres (318,939 cubic feet)
Crew	
Employment	Intermediate passenger services. Intended for trooping if required

## Career

- 17.02.1900: Launched.
- 29.03.1900: Registered.
- 04.04.1900: Delivered as *Sobraon* for The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company at a cost of £160,515. With her sisters *Assaye* and *Plassy* she was designed to take advantage of Government trooping contracts when not employed on the 'intermediate' passenger services for which she was designed.
- 26.04.1900: Maiden voyage London/Bombay/London.
- 24.04.1901: Wrecked on Tung Ying Island, 130km (80 miles) north-east of Foochow, China, in dense fog, whilst on a voyage from Shanghai to London with general cargo. Unsuccessful attempts were made by *Coromandel* to tow her off, and the crew remained on board to stop looting. Passengers were taken to Foochow in native craft, and the mails were forwarded to Europe aboard a Nordeutscher Lloyd's *Prinzess Irene*.
- 05.1901: Abandoned. Subsequent attempts to sell the wreck proved unsuccessful. Captain Wibmer was not employed by the Company again.

## WRECK OF A P&O LINER

*"The Times" 27 April 1901*

We are informed by the Post Office that the Peninsular and Oriental Company's packet *Sobraon*, which left Shanghai with the homeward mails on the 23<sup>rd</sup> inst., went ashore on Tung-Ying Island on the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> in a dense fog. The mails have been safely landed at Fu-chau, and will, with those from Hong Kong and the Straits Settlements which were to have been despatched by the *Sobraon*, be forwarded by a steamer of the North-German Lloyd bound for Naples. Letters will probably reach London about June 1.

A Reuter telegram from Hong Kong says that the *Sobraon* is badly ashore on Tung-Ying Island, off Fu-chau and reports all compartments full of water. The crew are standing by the vessel. The passengers and mails have been sent to Fu-chau in junks.

A Reuter telegram from Shanghai says the *Astrea*, cruiser, Captain C J Baker, is proceeding to render any possible assistance to the *Sobraon*. The P&O Company's steamer *Coromandel* is also leaving with salving plant.

Lloyds agent at Fu-chau, telegraphing at 3.25 yesterday afternoon, says that the *Sobraon* is expected to become a total wreck, and according to a Laffan telegram from Hong Kong the captain of the ship has cabled saying that she is in a dangerous position and assistance is urgently required.

The *Sobraon* is a steel twin-screw steamer of 7,382 registered tonnage, and was built by Messrs. Caird & Co. at Greenock. She was launched in April of last year.

Reuter's Agency states that, according to the China Sea Directory, a reef is reported to exist six miles north-east of Tung-ying Island, and Captain Moore, of His Majesty's surveying vessel *Penguin*, expressed the opinion that until the question had been decided the locality was one to be avoided. The island itself has steep cliff shores, and off its southern extremity there is a ledge of rocks, while another reef projects for half a mile from a small island to the north-west.

## THE LOSS OF THE SOBRAON

*"The Times" 19 July 1901*

At the Middlesex Guildhall, Westminster, yesterday, before Mr Marsham, stipendiary magistrate, who was assisted by Captain A Ronaldson and Captain Kennett Hore, nautical assessors, the Board of Trade inquiry into the loss of the P&O steamer *Sobraon* on the island of Tung-ying, off the China coast, on April 23 last, was opened. Mr. Muir Mackenzie, appeared on behalf of the Board of Trade; and Mr. Scutton, K.C., for the owners of the vessel, the P&O Steam Navigation Company. The Captain and the officers were also represented by counsel. Mr Muir Mackenzie, in opening the case, said the *Sobraon*, which was a vessel of 4,411 tons register and was only a year

old, having cost £160,000, left Shanghai for London on April 23 last with 70 passengers. Her course was set to enable her to pass ten miles east of Tung-ying island, and at midnight she was reckoned to be at a distance of 45 miles from the island. Two hours later 28 fathoms were sounded, and the second officer reported that the ship was about two miles off her course. An hour afterwards she ran into a bank of fog and grounded. Captain Lewis Witmer, the captain of the *Sobraon*, stated that he had been in the service of the P&O Company for 30 years, and had never previously had an accident. Shortly after leaving port on April 23 he discovered an error of 1deg. west in the course indicated by the compasses. When it was reported to him that the vessel was within her course he gave no special orders, as he considered that those he had already issued were sufficient. He went below at 10 p.m., and was aroused at 3a.m. by the grating of the vessel's keel, and on going on deck he found the engines going full speed astern and the vessel hard and fast. The passengers were at once assisted on the hurricane deck. The cause of the vessel's leaving her course was, in his opinion, an abnormal current, which was distinct from the ordinary currents set up by the periodical monsoons. The evidence of the officers was then taken and the inquiry adjourned.

#### WRECK INQUIRY

*"The Times" 19 July 1901*

Judgement was given in this inquiry into the stranding of the Peninsular and Oriental Company's steamship *Sobraon*, of Greenock, on Tung Yung Island, on the coast of China, on April 24, 1901.

Mr Muir Mackenzie appeared for the Solicitor to the Board of Trade (Mr R Ellis Cunliffe); Mr Scruton, K C for the owners; Mr H W Nelson for the master; Mr McNair for the chief officer; and Mr Botterell for the second and third officers.

The *Sobraon* was 450ft long 45.2ft, broad, depth 31.65ft., schooner rigged, and fitted with triple expansion engines of 1,700hp. She carried 11 lifeboats, one steam launch, 387 lifebelts, 14 lifebuoys and three compasses. She left Shanghai for London on April 28 with 70 passengers, a crew of 210 hands, and about 800 tons of general cargo. At 5.30 p.m. she passed Finger Rock, which was distant about six miles to the north-west. The course set was expected to take the *Sobraon* past the Tung Yung island at a distance of ten miles to the east. At 10.30 p.m. she was reckoned to be about 80 miles from Tung Yung. The master went below giving orders to the third officer to take castings at midnight, at 2 o'clock, and at 4 o'clock, and to report to him if necessary. At midnight the second officer went in charge; a cast of the lead was taken and showed 34 fathoms with a mud bottom. She was then reckoned to be about 45 miles distant from Tung Yung. At 2 a.m. on the morning of April 24 another cast of the lead was taken showing 28 fathoms with a mud bottom. The night was dark and clear, and the second officer reported to the master that the vessel was a mile to a mile and a half inside her course. At 18 minutes past 3 she went aground on the north-west corner of Tung Yung Island. The *Sobraon* took a heavy list to starboard. During April 24 assistance was obtained, and all the passengers and the mails were landed. The vessel ultimately became a total loss.

The Court, in answer to the questions set by the Board of Trade, said that the vessel had three compasses, two being on the bridge, the standard and the steering compass, by which the vessel was steered and navigated, and one in the wheel-house aft. They were in good order, and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel, and were last adjusted on April 3, 1900, by Mr. A W Baird before leaving the Clyde, where the vessel was fitted up. The master ascertained the deviation of his compasses from time to time, the errors were correctly ascertained and entered in a deviation book, and the corrections were properly applied to the courses steered. The position of the vessel was assumed at 5.30 p.m. on April 23 last by a bearing taken of Finger Rock which bore N. 59 W., distant six miles, a previous bearing of Hieshau lighthouse having been taken at 3 o'clock which gave N. 79 W., 5 ½ miles distant. At 8pm the position was merely ascertained by dead reckoning from the position given by the two bearings at 3 and 5.30 and from the course since steered. The position of the vessel was then, at 8pm., estimated to be 27° 43' north latitude 121° 38' east longitude. A safe and proper course was set at 5.30 p.m. if the vessel was in the position assumed by the two previous bearings. No allowance was made for tide and currents. Proper measures were taken at midnight and at 2am to ascertain the position of the vessel by a cast of the lead on each occasion. The cast at 2am placed the vessel about 1½ mile inside the position the master intended her to be at that time, which showed that the course set was not made good. This was reported to the master, who had been below since 10.30 pm., but as he had set a course to pass ten miles outside Tung Yung he thought it unnecessary to alter the course or come on deck.

In the circumstances there was no necessity for the master to have been on deck at 2am, but bearing in mind the fact that the cast of the lead had placed the vessel 1½ miles inside the course he had intended to steer, it would have been better for him to come on deck or given orders to haul her further out. The Court thought it was desirable the lead should have been used more frequently after 2am considering the scarcity of soundings on the chart. The Court was not, however, prepared to say that the more frequent use of the lead would have given sufficient information to avert the casualty. From the evidence of the principal witnesses the weather was dark and cloudy, but not foggy and lights could be seen two to five miles off. The fog only became apparent when the vessel struck. It was then too late to reduce the speed, and the court saw no reason why the speed should have been reduced earlier. It was stated that a good and proper lookout was kept. The cause of the casualty was that the course was set by the master when off Hieshau to pass ten miles eastward of Tung Yung was not made good and that Tung Yung, being hidden by a fog and the night dark, that island was not seen when the vessel struck. There was some ground for supposing that there was an abnormal current setting towards the westward, which seemed more probable, in consequence of the change in the monsoons at that time. The Court was not prepared to say that the vessel was not navigated with proper and seamanlike care. The loss was not caused by the wrongful act or default of the master and officers, or of any of them.

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