The *Mermaid* was a cutter, of 84 tons, 55.77 feet long, 18.37 feet wide, with a draft of 8.86 feet. She was built in Calcutta, India in 1816. The *Mermaid* is famous for its role in surveying the Australian coastline, under the charge of Lieutenant Philip Parker King, and its later role as a colonial vessel. The ship was used in 1823 on a voyage to locate a new site for a penal colony, under Captain Charles Penson. Also on board were Lieutenant John Oxley and surveyor John Uniacke.

It was on this voyage, on 31 October 1823, that the *Mermaid* encountered bad weather and sheltered near Cook Island off the coast near Fingal Head. The mouth of a large river was sighted, and the next day Oxley and Uniacke went up the river by whaleboat, investigating both the river itself and the surrounding land. In his diary, John Uniacke wrote “The scenery here exceeded anything I had previously seen in Australia – extending for miles along a deep rich valley, clothed with magnificent trees, the beautiful uniformity of which was only interrupted by turns and windings of the river, which here and there appeared like small lakes...”. John Oxley named the river the Tweed, after a river in his native Scotland.

The *Mermaid* was wrecked on the Great Barrier Reef in 1829. The wreck was only recently discovered, in January 2009, by a team from the Australian National Maritime Museum. The site is now a protected zone, and some relics are being conserved by the National Maritime Museum.

The model of the *Mermaid* was constructed by local enthusiast, Bill Spencer, who made several models for the Lower Tweed River Historical Society (now the Tweed Heads Historical Society). The models are now part of the Tweed Regional Museum Collection.