

SHIPWRECKS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

FITZJAMES - possibly Jervois Basin

The three masted ship *Fitzjames* was built in 1852 by JJ Jardine and Co. of Richibucto, New Brunswick, Canada and sold to Jardine and Co. of Liverpool. The wooden vessel of 1307 gross tons measured 186.0 feet (56.7 m) in length, 32.5 feet (9.9 m) breadth and 22.7 feet (6.9 m) depth.

Shortly after arriving in England, the *Fitzjames* was sold to Pilkington and Partners to become part of the White Star Line. The ship at first traded in the Atlantic, but in 1854 made its first trip to Australia with emigrants, arriving in Melbourne on 15 June. The *Fitzjames* also voyaged to Adelaide and Sydney with emigrants.

On 20 January 1866 the *Fitzjames* sailed from Liverpool for Melbourne, on what became the vessel's last major voyage. With emigrants on board and only a few days out, the ship sprang a leak and put into Lisbon. The vessel was considered unseaworthy and on arrival in Melbourne was condemned and hulked.

In 1876 the South Australian Government bought the vessel for use as a quarantine ship, and in 1880 the *Fitzjames* became a floating reformatory for neglected and delinquent children. The Destitute Board took charge of the vessel where it was anchored at Largs Bay, marking the seaward end of the channel into Port Adelaide.

Less than four months after the transfer, with the first big storm, the Board realised that it had inherited a leaking, rotting vessel, with repairs an ongoing necessity. Pumping was essential to keep the ship afloat and it was so wet below decks that bedding was often ruined. When storms hit, the vessel strained at its moorings and was brought into the Port to have the leaks stopped. In more settled weather it was towed out again and anchored off Largs or Semaphore. Eventually the leaks became too severe and the *Fitzjames* was towed to shallow water off the Port River.

In 1885 the Royal Commission into the administration of the Destitute Board strongly criticised the management of the *Fitzjames*, and responsibility for the reformatory ship was transferred to the newly created State Children's Council, who campaigned to have the Boys' Reformatory moved to a land-based institution. This was not a high Government priority and a suitable site did not become available until 1891, when the boys were moved to Magill. Meanwhile, the state of the ship deteriorated, although conditions for the boys improved.



Fitzjames in the Upper Reaches of Port River, c1900.
Photo: Ron Blum



At some stage following the relocation of the boys' reformatory to Magill, the *Fitzjames* was towed along the Port River and through the Jervois Bridge, where it was beached and moored at the end of the Cable Company Wharf.

No artefactual evidence of the *Fitzjames* has so far been located in Jervois Basin, but it is likely that the vessel's remains have been covered by reclamation.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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