



Showcasing SA Shipwrecks

SIR WILFRED LAWSON (1878-1908)

ketch; wooden hull; 52 gross ton

Length 22.0 metres; Breadth 6.2 metres; Depth 1.8 metres

Built: Southport, Tasmania

Lost: 20 March 1908, Gilbert Reef, Port Moorowie

Protected under the Commonwealth *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976*

EARLY HISTORY:

Little is known about the *Sir Wilfred Lawson* prior to its loss. It was first registered in Port Adelaide, by E.J. Wright, in 1891, having previously worked out of Melbourne. In 1897 it was sold to R. Fricker, with its final owner being C.E. Fricker.

In South Australian waters the wooden ketch was involved in a few minor incidents, including a collision with the steamer *Era* in the Port River in 1900 and grounding in Marion Bay in 1905. On the latter occasion, the *Sir Wilfred Lawson* was carrying a general cargo from Port Adelaide to Port Lincoln but needed to shelter in Marion Bay during a SSW gale. Unfortunately the cables parted and the vessel went ashore. The cargo was lightered onto another ketch and the *Sir Wilfred Lawson* was refloated almost two weeks later.



Sir Wilfred Lawson wrecksite, 1994

THE WRECK OF THE SIR WILFRED LAWSON:

The loss of the *Sir Wilfred Lawson* is a simple story of navigational error. On 20 March 1908 the ketch was in ballast, approaching the Port Moorowie Jetty to take on a load of wheat, when it grounded on the outer Gilbert Reef, with no lives lost. Captain Harper sent a carpenter to inspect the damage to the hull but, before any repairs could be made, the vessel was battered during a storm a week later and became a total wreck. The *Sir Wilfred Lawson* was uninsured.



Finding the bell, 1994

The wrecksite was located in 1994, following a 'tip-off' from a local spear-fisherman, Kym Bray. It consists mainly of iron remains, such as sections of the windlass and a length of chain, some copper fastenings and lead pipe, with no wooden material surviving. Surprisingly, the ship's bell was discovered wedged in the reef, in less than a metre of water. It was remarkably well-preserved, considering that it had been pummelled in the ocean for 86 years, and has undergone conservation treatment prior to being displayed at the Edithburgh Museum.

