



Showcasing SA Shipwrecks

MAGIC (1874-1958)

cutter; wooden hull; 28 gross ton

Length 14.7 metres; Breadth 3.6 metres; Depth 2.7 metres

Built: Berry's Bay, New South Wales

Lost: 3 April 1958, off Cape Cassini, KI

EARLY HISTORY:

The yacht *Magic* was designed and built by W. Longford for Alfred Fairfax, who was a cousin of James Fairfax, son of the founder of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Its maiden voyage was on 26 January 1875 at the Anniversary Day Regatta on Sydney Harbour. It won the race, which had only two other entrants. From 1875 to 1886 the *Magic* entered twenty-one races, winning fifteen and only being unplaced once. During this racing career on Sydney Harbour, the sailing vessel had numerous owners including, in 1880, James Fairfax.

In 1894 the craft was purchased by William Russell of Port Adelaide, and a year later was taken over by a syndicate including local Port Adelaide identities Russell, Wald, Osborne, Cruickshank and Woolnough. In 1921 the *Magic* was sold to Stan Sheridan of Western River, Kangaroo Island, and was converted for fishing. The lavish fittings were removed and a wet well was built into the hull. The cutter was used for general fishing and the occasional sealing expedition to the Neptune Islands. Over the years, the *Magic* was owned by numerous South Australian fishermen including, in 1924, Alf Sheridan, who installed an oil engine.

ACCOUNT OF THE LOSS:

On 3 April 1958, after a successful shark expedition off the western end of Kangaroo Island, the *Magic* left West Bay with five tons of shark on board, as well as the owner-skipper, Nigel Buick, and three crewmen.

That evening, when abreast of Western River, the engine was accelerated and the sails set so that the cutter would make Kingscote by the early morning. It was a calm night with a light southeast wind and fresh gully winds blowing off the shore.

At 11.00 pm, as the crew members slept, the skipper noticed steam coming from the engine room and went down to investigate. All the sails were set; the wind was blowing along the coast and an updraught from the high cliffs at Cape Cassini caused the staysail (tied on the lee side) to back wind and the vessel headed for the shore. While the crew slept and Nigel Buick was attending to the engine the *Magic* hit the rocks.

The crew woke immediately and quickly came on deck, lowering the sails and inspecting the vessel for damage. Surprisingly the hull was not holed or taking on water, and so an attempt was made to get the cutter off the rocks. The dinghy was lowered and two anchors and chain were taken out about 50 yards astern and dropped. The engine was started and put into reverse gear with the anchor chain pulled tightly by the vessel's deck winch. The fishing boat, however, was wedged between two boulders and did not move. Within two hours it was holed on the port side and taking in water.

The crew decided to walk to Stokes Bay, about seven miles away. While scaling the high cliff the skipper slipped and badly staked his right leg, thus hindering their progress. About 4.00 am they arrived at a farmhouse at Stokes Bay and were able to telephone for help. Following this call the fishing vessel *Jeanette S* headed for Cape Cassini, where it found that the *Magic* was breaking up. The five ton of shark was transferred to the *Jeanette S* and taken to Port Adelaide. Unfortunately, by the time it reached the Port, the fish was unsaleable.

Meanwhile the crew had returned to the *Magic* and begun the task of salvaging the sails, anchors, shark lines, mast and anything else they thought valuable. By the afternoon a strong southwest change had come in, accompanied by an increasing swell. By the end of the day the cutter was smashed and wreckage littered the base of the cliffs.

