

# SHIPWRECKS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA



## ***SOUTH AUSTRALIAN***

The *South Australian* is South Australia's oldest shipwreck. The barque left England in 1836, carrying free settlers to found the new colony of South Australia. The vessel enjoyed a varied career as Post Office Packet, Royal Navy ship, emigration ship, and finally as an offshore whale-processing platform before being wrecked in Encounter Bay in December 1837.

*South Australian* was built at Falmouth, England, and launched in 1819. Originally named *Marquess of Salisbury*, the vessel was 87 feet (26.5 m) long and ship-rigged. The vessel was attached to the Post Office Packet Service (a so-called 'Falmouth Packet') carrying mail and goods. In 1823 the Royal Navy took over the Packet Service, and in 1824 *Marquess of Salisbury* was commissioned as HMS *Swallow* and reconfigured as a 10-gun brig-sloop.

In September 1836, the South Australian Company acquired the vessel and re-rigged it as a barque and renamed it *South Australian*. Its hull was adapted to suit carriage of colonists to Australia, although the Company's intention was to use the vessel in whaling duties on arrival in the colony. The vessel departed Plymouth on 22 December 1836 under the command of Captain Alexander Allen, with a contingent of primarily British and German emigrants.

*South Australian* arrived at Nepean Bay (present day Kingscote), Kangaroo Island, on 22 April 1837 and discharged its passengers and cargo. After its arrival, *South Australian* completed three more voyages between Kangaroo Island and Rosetta Harbor, Encounter Bay.



Oil painting of the packet-brig *Sheldrake*, a barque-rigged 'Falmouth packet' of 228 tons launched in 1825 and thought to be similar in design to *South Australian* (Source: Royal Museums Greenwich, UK)

In May 1837, *South Australian* returned to Rosetta Harbor and was refitted as an offshore whale-processing platform or 'cutting-in' vessel.

On 8 December 1837, while *South Australian* was anchored in Rosetta Harbor, a strong south easterly gale caused it to part its cables and strike Black Reef stern-first. The vessel was pushed over the reef by heavy waves and driven into calmer waters inshore of Wright Island, and grounded in shallow water in front of what is now the Yilki Store.

In the two weeks that followed, much of the cargo and ships' fittings were salvaged, before another gale rose on 21 December, wrecking another Company ship, *Solway*, in near-identical circumstances. No further salvage activities on *South Australian* are recorded.

## Rediscovery

The general area where *South Australian* went aground has been known since just after the wreck event, however the specific location was only discovered in April 2018. Early charts and an 1838 painting of the harbour show the wrecks of *South Australian* and *Solway*. Anecdotally, local fishers have known the location for several decades, although it is not known whether the identity of the shipwreck was known.

The final resting place of the remains was formally discovered as part of a collaborative research project between the Department for Environment and Water, Silentworld Foundation, South Australian Maritime Museum, Australian National Maritime Museum, Flinders University and MaP Fund.



The team conducted a survey over a period of five days to locate the shipwreck site, and included reef walks with metal detectors to map the debris field and boat-towed magnetometer surveys.

The shipwreck site was located on 20 April 2018.

## The Shipwreck Site

The site consists of the lower hull from stem to stern. Because the remains have been buried in sediment for decades, many of the lower timbers have been well preserved. It appears that the site goes through cyclical stages of covering and uncovering with the result that many of the upper timbers, such as planking, frames, ceilings and other structural components, have suffered deterioration.

More research work is required to adequately map

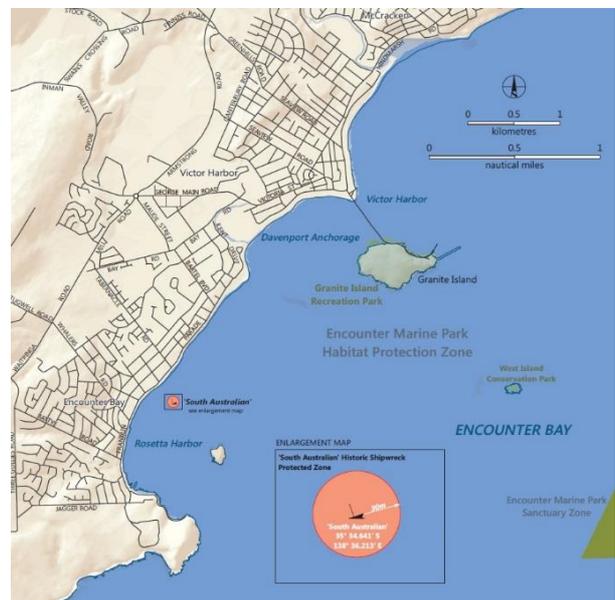
the site, determine the extent of deterioration and assess the environmental factors that affect the preservation of the site. Although located in shallow inshore waters, the site is affected by southerly swells creating a strong surge on the site.

DEW has prepared a comprehensive Conservation Management Plan that will guide the management of the site.

## Protected Zone

Although *South Australian* was already protected as an 'historic shipwreck' under the *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1981*, the high heritage significance of the shipwreck site was considered by the South Australian Government to warrant additional protection measures. Accordingly, on 3 July 2018, a 30-metre radius Protected Zone was declared around the shipwreck site.

Entry into the protected zone with any type of vessel, or conducting underwater activities such as SCUBA diving, is strictly prohibited without a permit issued by DEW.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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