

# SHIPWRECKS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

*Historic Shipwrecks Act 1981*



**Fact Sheet No. 28**

## **Fitzjames**

### **Jervois Basin Ships' Graveyard (possibly)**

The three masted ship *Fitzjames* was built in 1852 by J.J. 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.

Soon after arriving in England, *Fitzjames* was sold to Pilkington and Partners, becoming part of the White Star Line. At first the ship traded in the Atlantic, but from 1854 began making trips to Australia bringing emigrants to Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney.

On 20 January 1866 *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 *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.

*Image courtesy: Ron Blum*



*Fitzjames in the upper reaches of the Port River, c.1900*

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 *Fitzjames* was towed to shallow water off the Port River.

The management of *Fitzjames* was strongly criticised by the 1885 Royal Commission into management of the Board. As a result, responsibility was transferred to the new State Children's Council and, in 1891, the Boys' reformatory was transferred from *Fitzjames* to a site in Magill. In the meantime, the condition of *Fitzjames* had deteriorated and it was towed along the Port River and through the Jervois Bridge, where it was beached at the end of the Cable Company Wharf.

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

### **More information**

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