



# THE TRAGIC SHORE

Geoffrey H. Manning







## THE TRAGIC SHORE

To Geoffrey Manning. With  
congratulations & appreciation of a  
task so ably done. For all the  
enthusiasm & skill you so kindly  
donated to this book, please accept  
the sincere thanks of all members of  
the Willunga Branch of the National  
Trust of S.A.

We could not have done it  
without you.

Luth Buxendale  
Chairman.



# The Tragic Shore

The Wreck of the *Star of Greece*  
and  
A History of the Jetties of Port Willunga

By  
GEOFFREY H. MANNING

4.  
G. H. Manning

Cover:  
*Ruins of Port Willunga jetty with  
Bicentennial Tall Fleet ship in  
background, 1987.*

F. Lush/J. West

End papers:  
*Front: Port Willunga showing  
ruins of jetty on the beach*

B. Foreman

*Back: Early plan of  
Port Willunga*

Mortlock

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# Foreword

Sailing ships during the first half century of South Australia's existence took three or four months to make the voyage from England; and sailing ships, though in decreasing numbers, remained until the First World War. The voyage was perilous as well as long and comfortless. Our forefathers knew this all too well. Nor did they need the reminders in the weekly church service. Again and again arrived at length in the waters near their destination, ships overtaken by the sudden changeableness of our weather ended up on the rocks. The number of wrecks between Cape Jervis and Port Noarlunga is astonishing; the tragic shore indeed.

In the mid winter of 1888, a century ago almost to the day, a sailing ship the *Star of Greece*, of 1227 tons, carrying some 16 000 bags of wheat and a crew of 28, on its way from Port Adelaide to England was overtaken by a sudden storm near Aldinga and crashed to its end at the cost of 17 lives. It was, interestingly, Friday the 13th, the day of dread according to the ancient superstition of sailors.

This aptly named book tells the story of what happened, the faults observed or alleged, and the pretty piece of footwork and buck-passing by the bureaucrats and the politicians involved. That was a century ago. The book shows that while maritime transport has changed dramatically human behaviour, no less dramatically remains about the same.

Mr Manning, an authority on the region, has made a mark for himself by his books. In *The Tragic Shore* he treats us once more to his customary qualities of reliable research and interesting narration. Our interest is heightened by the illustrations and by the supplementary chapters on the jetties at Port Willunga.

Walter Crocker



# Acknowledgements

With the significance of 13 July 1888 in mind the 100th anniversary of the wreck of the *Star Of Greece* at Port Willunga, members of the National Trust of S.A., Willunga Branch, decided to achieve a long-held ambition to publish a book on the tragic event.

Encouragement and support received from the National Trust of S.A., District Council of Willunga, generous interest free loans and donations from members enabled us to proceed.

Sponsorships were received from the Estate of the late Jessie Cashmore, District Council of Willunga.

Thanks go to Mr Roy Tuohy for allowing use of family letters and photographs, Brian Foreman for photographic assistance and Alan Hale for his contribution regarding the present situation and photographs for the Epilogue.

Our branch historian Faye Lush has made an inestimable contribution in so many ways, doing all the typing and verifying material and contacting numerous individuals and departments.

We owe an immense debt of gratitude to author Geoffrey Manning who generously donated his skills and time in so many ways; a further tribute to the area he has grown to know so well.

Ruth Baxendale



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*1 000 copies of this book  
have been printed  
of which 100 have been  
edition bound and  
authenticated with the  
signature of the author*



# Preface

As a young boy, in the depression years of the 1930s, I was taught, with Dickensian rigidity, the three 'R's' at Mount Gambier Primary School. My teacher was invariably armed with a steel-lined ruler of prodigious dimensions, which was used indiscriminately, for both academic and moral persuasion, in his daily pursuit for excellence and perfection among his students.

History was a small facet of the curriculum and, when taught, usually comprised of the revelations of the 'glories' of the British monarchy and ancillary praise for its feats of arms which, over the centuries, conquered much of the world and established the now extinct British Empire.

Thankfully, today, young Australians are being exposed to the history of their own country and over the past few decades a plethora of South Australian history has been researched and published by competent amateur and professional historians; as I move among younger people I find their interest to be both genuine and positive.

My paternal forbears emigrated from Cambridgeshire, England in 1850, but it was not until the mid-1970's that I learned they settled in the McLaren Vale, known as part of District C in the preliminary surveys of the colony. Since that time it has been my pleasure to write two books about the area and when the National Trust, Willunga Branch, asked me to add a further facet to the district's history I was both honoured and pleased to research and write the tragic story of the wreck of the *Star Of Greece*.

The majority of the text of the history of the jetties of Port Willunga was first produced, in an unpublished form, in 1984, as an offshoot of my *Hope Farm Chronicle*; I am, indeed, flattered that it has been considered worthy of reproduction in book form.

G. H. Manning



There is never a wreck in Saint Vincent Gulf but as  
the result of wilful and gross carelessness.<sup>1</sup>

*John Formby, Chairman  
Marine Board, 1888*

God chooses some of us to do certain work here on earth before we go,  
possibly to bring happiness to others, and some he takes away  
at the very threshold of life.<sup>2</sup>

*Carl Clarkson  
Survivor of the wreck*

Alas, for our sailors! Had only a Lord,  
A Duke, or an Earl, or a commoner rich,  
A member of Parliament, knight of the sword,  
Or some one of note (for it matters not which)  
Been fighting for life on the ill-fated wreck,  
Then all that invention and modern research  
Could do to save life would be done, and the deck  
Cleared quickly of all; none left in the lurch.  
But perish the thought! thus to place on a par  
The life of a Lord and a simple Jack Tar!<sup>3</sup>

*(One stanza of a poem by 'Nemo')*



## CHAPTER ONE

# Prelude to Disaster

'In the maritime history of South Australia rarely has such a disaster been recorded as that which occasioned the loss of the ship *Star of Greece*. In seven hours from the time of leaving the Semaphore anchorage this fine iron vessel was ashore on the pitiless Willunga coast, at the mercy of the wind and waves. Of the twenty seven (*sic*) on board seventeen were drowned, including the captain and second mate.'<sup>1</sup>

In the weeks following the disaster accusations of insobriety<sup>2</sup> and incompetence were levelled against the deceased captain, but no evidence, presented to the Select Committee of the House of Assembly in respect of the tragedy, supported these allegations although the Marine Board found that there had been 'a want of skill in the management of the vessel':— 'Somebody had spread the rumour that our captain was intoxicated and this false rumour I denied since I was the last person to take orders from him and my testimony was accepted as final'.<sup>3</sup>

### THE STAR OF GREECE

Built in 1868 at Belfast, Northern Ireland, by Harland and Wolff, on behalf of James P. Corry & Co., she was a three-masted ship, 227 feet long by 35 feet wide by 22 feet 2 inches deep; of 1227 tons with four watertight compartments, which were an important factor in the breaking up of the ship on the Willunga reef.

From October 1868 until October 1880 she traded between London and Calcutta, breaking this sequence by visits to Sydney, in 1881, and 1885 (via New Zealand), and a voyage to Adelaide commencing on 20 December 1880.<sup>4</sup>

Following the Crimean War of the 1850s the government and citizens of the fledgling colony were concerned as to possible attacks by Russian warships and this uneasiness is evidenced by a letter to the Colonial

---

1. *SA Register*, 16 July 1888, p6. The number of crew (27) is incorrect; it should read 28. See Reconciliation Statement, Appendix I.

2. *Ibid*, 20 July 1888, p6 g.

3. Letter from Charles Clason (Carl Claeson), 13 July 1934, held by Mortlock Library. See footnote 9 below and *SA Register*, 14 and 20 July 1888 and in particular 'Letter to Editor' where the first mate defends his captain 'whose reputation has been foully tarnished in high places . . .' The rumours of drunkenness were perpetuated over the years, e.g., Stanley S. Addison (born 1881), in his reminiscences, makes a statement, ' . . . the main cause of the wreck was drunkenness on the part of the crew', which is not substantiated by the facts. (See under Marine Board Enquiry. p44).

4. *SA Ports and Shipping Journal*, March 1981, p8; *Before the Wind*, Rae Sexton.

#### Frontispiece

1. *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Assembly on the Wreck of the 'Star of Greece'*, p 16, no. 522.

2. Letter from Charles Clason (Carl Claeson), see footnote 3 above.

3. *SA Register*, 19 July 1888.





Star of Greece  
from a painting

A.D. Edwards Collection



National Trust

Willunga Life Boat Crew. Members include J. Fridlington, J. Kernick, T. Kernick, Gepp, G. Hill, secretary; L. Jacobs, Captain Lipson, W. Meverley. Circa 1890s. Local rocket crews were formed shortly after the wreck.



Secretary from William Gray, a storekeeper at Port Onkaparinga [now Port Noarlunga], in August 1858:—

Captain Lipson, RN, having reported that the defence of our coast so far as is practicable, would be best attained by the equipment of gunboats etc. to be stationed at Port Adelaide and the creek at Glenelg, I have the honour to respectfully suggest for the consideration of Your Excellency, the following extension of his plan.

That as the harbor of Port Onkaparinga is the first accessible and most unprotected part of the coast, which in all probability would be selected as an eligible landing place for effecting a 'coup de main' on Adelaide, it could be made another gunboat station and provided with the following defences:—

1. A battery on the northern reef similar to that on Pinchgut Island in Sydney Harbour.
2. A Martello tower on Witton Bluff within range of the jetty, and a small enfilading, earth work battery near Onkaparinga Bluff.
3. As a tower on Witton Bluff would command a full view of the gulf from Cape Jervis to the lightship, it would be necessary to extend a telegraph wire to join the Adelaide and Melbourne line on the South Road, a distance of three miles. This would combine the advantages of warning and defence with the earliest transmission of commercial intelligence, as the largest vessels could approach within a mile of Witton Bluff, make their number, or in the case of contrary winds, land their mails and passengers in safety some hours before they could reach Adelaide by the ordinary route.

A lifeboat station here, manned by hardy fishermen, could perform this service with safety in any weather, and be immediately available in case of shipwreck or accident within the gulf.<sup>5</sup>

This isolation from the protective arm of the 'Mother Country' prompted the government to build forts along the coastline and, by 1888, two had been established; Fort Glanville with ten-inch muzzle loading guns and Fort Largs with two nine-inch guns, both supplemented by a warship, HMCS *Protector*.

The *Star of Greece* departed London on 17 March 1888 and amongst its cargo was a twenty-two ton gun, for a proposed fort at Glenelg,<sup>6</sup> in which considerable interest was displayed when the ship arrived at Port Adelaide on 11 June 1888. 'The task of lowering the gun from the *Star of Greece* was accomplished without mishap on Tuesday afternoon and during the night she was towed away.'<sup>7</sup>

By 10 July she had loaded 16,002 bags of wheat for the United Kingdom and the pilot, Alexander F. Boord, took her out to an anchorage in the Semaphore roads. The captain came on board on the morning of Thursday, 12 July:— he 'appeared to be perfectly sober'.<sup>8</sup>

5. Quoted in *Hope Farm Chronicle*, G. H. Manning, pp 147-148.

6. *SA Register*, 12 June 1888, p4 a.

7. *Ibid*, 27 June 1888, p5 c.

8. *Ibid*, 21 July 1888, p5.





*Port Adelaide circa 1870*

*Gillingham*



*Port Adelaide circa 1880*

*Gillingham*





*Stylised fig-motif carving from Star of Greece presented to Corry & Co. by traders in Greece.*

A. Hall

## HOMeward BOUND

When the pilot left the ship the barometer on board read about thirty degrees and when anchor was weighed at six pm there was a moderate wind blowing and if it had held she would have taken until daylight to reach Backstairs Passage. 'There were some aerated waters on board, but so far as [I] knew there was no grog.'<sup>9</sup> During the evening the wind blew freshly from the northward, with occasional showers of rain, keeping the sea moderately smooth. At ten pm the wind shifted suddenly from the north-west to south-west and blew with great force. On Friday 13 July the weather bureau in Adelaide said:—

'Last night the weather in South Australia was very rough and squally owing to the passing of another centre of low pressure to the south, in an easterly direction, during which the barometer at Adelaide fell to 29.68. During Thursday evening the wind backed from north-west to north, veering again to north-west [possibly a misprint for 'south-west'] with heavy squalls and showers, the total rainfall at Adelaide between six pm on the 12th and nine am on the 13th being over three-quarters of an inch. The wind at Adelaide, as shown by the anemograph, had a velocity during the squalls of thirty-six miles an hour from the north-west. The centre of the extended area of low pressure which has been passing to the eastward during the last few days appears to have traversed the 40th to 45th parallels of latitude.'<sup>10</sup>

With the worsening weather the captain, anxious to avoid negotiating Backstairs Passage at night, ordered the ship to be hove to, with the main topsail aback. This manoeuvre caused the ship to drift leeward which, together with a strong current, took her fifteen miles off course towards the shoreline. Why the captain did not 'go about' and stand out to sea is a mystery. 'If he had she could have fetched the vicinity of Ardrossan . . . in some comfort under the lee of Yorke Peninsula.'<sup>11</sup>

9. *SA Register*, 21 July 1888, p5. '[The captain] was a teetotaller and his ship was a teetotaller ship.

The only thing on board was two cases of colonial wine, a present to the captain's mother' (*ibid*).

10. *Ibid*, 14 July 1888, p6.

11. Printed article by Chris Halls, *SA Ports & Shipping Journal*, March 1981, p3.



At midnight, William Waugh, the second officer, took over the watch from the mate, John Hazeland; Carl Claeson (able seaman) takes up the story:—

‘My turn at the wheel came at two o’clock and was to last until four o’clock. Blowing a hurricane by then, the wind made it impossible for us to set any more sails; and we just kept the great ship to the wind. I had been at the wheel about half an hour when I thought I could see land on the lee shore, and I called the attention of the second officer to it, but he said he did not think it was so as we were supposed to be far away from land. Nothing was reported from the lookout; so things seemed alright. As the vessel, being heavily loaded, was shipping much water the whole watch on deck as well as myself had on our slickers – coat, pants, and hat. I felt not uncomfortable when all of a sudden a great mountainous breaker came roaring along and lifted the ship up in the air as if it had been a ball and then set her down on a rocky bottom with a terrible crash that shook her from stem to stern, and the wheel went spinning out of my hands round and round impossible to hold.’<sup>12</sup>

Earlier, the captain had often been on deck and told the second mate to keep a sharp lookout for land, to steer south-west, keep the lead going every quarter of an hour and to call him at any time. Shortly before the ship ran aground the captain came on deck and ordered the port anchor to be dropped, when sixty fathoms were let out. The ship dragged the anchor and about two minutes later ran aground.<sup>13</sup>

On 10 August 1888 the vessel *Cowry* salvaged the anchor and chain, which was found to be only forty fathoms in length and foul of the anchor itself, the chain having a turn round the stock, thereby making it impossible for the anchor to catch the ground. Probably if the anchor had not been fouled the vessel would not have drifted so helplessly as she did.<sup>14</sup>

Claeson continues his story:—

‘Mountains of water rolled over the vessel and over the poop deck where I was. The captain and eleven others of us made for the mizzen-rigging to seek safety. I climbed on to the mizzen-top, and there I shed my slickers and some clothes ready for a slide on the wirestays from the mizzen-mast to the mainmast because it seemed to me that the forward part was higher up on the rocks. My decision was a wise one. As the huge breakers rolled over us spars, yards, and tackle came tumbling down, and I could see the wheat sacks bubbling out of the mizzen-hatch that had been smashed. I called to the eleven others and pointed out to them our dangerous predicament in that place, but only two young Englishmen, who were not sailors but merely working their passage to England, followed me down the wirestay.

‘The situation was very risky, and I hurried all I could. I had great luck to get to the mainmast safely, and in a moment during a lull I landed on

---

12. Charles Clason, *op. cit.* His story is, in part, in contradiction to that of other survivors, James Revell and John Hazeland. See pp12 and 14.

13. *SA Register*, 21 July 1888, p5.

14. *SA Register*, 11 August 1888, p5 b. It was unfortunate that this evidence came to light after the Marine Board Enquiry, which found the captain guilty of exercising ‘a manifest want of skill’ – see p44.





*Bell from the Star of Greece*

A. Hall



*Figurehead from the Star of Greece*

A. D. Edwards Collection

deck followed by the other two. We watched our opportunity, and then we made for the forward part of the ship to the sailors' quarters in the bow. Here we found the rest of the men and officers assembled. It was still dark, but I was able to find my chest and get some clothes. After just a short while I looked out the forecastle door, and to my horror I was able to see that the vessel had broken completely in two, and the afterpart with all the men in the mizzen-rigging had disappeared. The roar and the pounding of the ship on the rocks must have been terrific when we had never even realized the vessel had broken in two. Why the captain and the others did not follow me is hard to say, for as events proved they might have had a chance. The captain and eight men went instead to a watery grave without being able to raise a finger to help themselves when the afterpart broke away and turned over.'

The following is a list of the crew who were left to the fury of the elements and, for some, vain attempts to save their lives, without any officially organised assistance from sea or shore, due to bungling and procrastination in the upper echelons of authority, within South Australia.

HENRY RUSSELL HARROWER (captain) - a native of Dundee, Scotland, unmarried and aged 29. He was a brother of Mrs Bishop of Adelaide, whose husband, James, was employed by the Adelaide Steamship Company. (lost).

JOHN HOWARD DASHWOOD HAZELAND (first mate) - probably hailed from New South Wales, aged 24. (survived).

WILLIAM. R. WAUGH (second mate) - aged about 23, from Belfast, Ireland. (lost).

CHARLES MARTIN CUMMIFORD (third mate) - aged 22. Name sometimes reported as John/Commerford. (survived).



WILLIAM PARKER (boatswain) - (lost).

ROBERT DONALD (carpenter) - from Carrickfergus, Ireland. Name sometimes reported as McDonald or Donnell. (lost).

GUSTAV CARLSON (sailmaker) - a Russian Finn, came out with the ship. (lost).

F. C. BLACKMAN (cook & steward) - hailed from London, where he had a wife and two children. Initials sometimes given as 'G. C.' (lost).

George CARDER (cabin boy) - came from Romford, England. (lost).

JOHN AIRZEE (able seaman) - came to Adelaide from Melbourne and belonged to London, aged 28. According to Charles Clason (Carl Clacson) his surname was AIRLIE. Clason said, in 1934, (see footnote 3) - 'He had a gold watch around his neck; I hope his poor mother, in London, received this last token from her son'. (lost).

D. BLAIR - at the inquest was identified as Andrew Blair by James Revell, who described him as 'a small boy'. See also p13, where Thomas Lovelock refers to 'Andrew' Blair. (lost).

EDWARD BLUHM (able seaman) - aged about 22. (survived).

DAVID BRUCE (able seaman) - aged 24. (survived).

F. C. CARTER - initials sometimes shown as 'F. P.' (lost).

CARL CLAESON (able seaman) - a Swede, aged 21. In a letter dated 13 July 1934 he signs as Charles Clason (see footnote 3). In 1900 he settled in the U.S.A. and Anglicised his name. (survived).

H. JAMES R. CORK(E) (ordinary seaman) - had been an apprentice on the *Greta*. (lost).

PETER DESMET (able seaman) - a Frenchman, came to Adelaide on the *Elizabeth Nicholson* from New York, aged 39. (survived).

JOHN GATIS (able seaman) - (lost).

GEORGE IRVINE (able seaman) - arrived in Adelaide from Newcastle, New South Wales. (lost).

J. JOHNS(T)ON(E) (apprentice) - came from Dumfriesshire, Scotland, where his father was a gamekeeper to Sir Robert Jardine. Name sometimes reported as JOHNSON or JOHNSTON(E). (survived).

FRANCIS J. KEARNEY (apprentice) - a native of Cork, Ireland, he came out with the ship. (survived).

E. J. McBARNET(T) (apprentice) - born in New Zealand; came out with the ship. Aged 17 at the time of the wreck, he lost his life in World War I at the Dardanelles. Of his survival from the wreck it was reported: 'he stripped himself to the nude, smothered himself with oil and took his chance in the terrible sea ...' (survived).

W. J. MILES (able seaman) - (lost).

ROBERT MUIR - aged 20, shipped on at Port Adelaide and was working his passage home. (lost).





*Francis J. Kearney, apprentice*

*R. Tuohy*



*J. H. D. Hazeland, First Mate*

*R. Tuohy*

W. OERMICH (able seaman) – aged 26. (lost).

ALFRED ORGAN (able seaman) – came from London, aged 35. Name sometimes reported as ORSON or HOGAN. (lost).

ALFRED PRIOR (apprentice) – came out with the ship. (survived).

JAMES T. REVELL (able seaman) – aged about 40. (survived).<sup>15</sup>

There were twenty-eight crew in all; seventeen were lost, eleven survived. The bodies of Airzee (Airlie), Gatis and Miles were never recovered/identified.<sup>16</sup>

One man, in retrospect, would have good grounds for thinking that the hand of fate interceded on his behalf; a Mr H. Edwards had been signed on as a crew member but two days before the ship sailed he was charged in the Port Adelaide Police Court for stealing a watch and was sentenced to one month's imprisonment.<sup>17</sup>

15. See *SA Register* and *SA Advertiser*, 14 July 1888 for lists, which show names of the crew. Note alternative spelling of names. See Reconciliation Statement, Appendix I.

16. See *SA Register*, 24 July 1888, p5 f, where 'one terribly mutilated body came ashore on 23 July'.

17. *SA Advertiser*, 14 July 1888, p5.



## CHAPTER TWO

# The Tragedy Unfolds

As was her usual custom Fanny How rose early and about six am on 13 July 1888 she was taking cold ashes from her kitchen stove for depositing in the primitive 'outhouse', which stood in isolation from the house. To her surprise she saw three masts sticking up over the cliffs, and with 'wind and rain swirling around her she suddenly realised the full horror of what she saw. She went inside, took out a red 'kerchief, tied it on her head and went down to her brother-in-law, Thomas Martin',<sup>1</sup> who had been a former harbor-master at Port Willunga before being compelled to resign because of the cheese-paring policy of Sir John Downer's government in 1885.<sup>2</sup>



*Thomas Martin JP  
Harbormaster, Councillor,  
Clerk of Aldinga Council, Wharfinger,  
Contractor and farmer*

Thomas Martin at once proceeded to the scene and, with the aid of a telescope, saw four men and a boy in the mizzen-rigging and one man standing on the break of the poop. The sea at the time was making a clean breach over the stranded vessel, with spray flying over the topsail masts. He then got his horse and galloped to the Aldinga telegraph station controlled by Mrs Jane Machell, arriving at 7.55 am.<sup>3</sup>

1. Newspaper cutting of January 1984, held by National Trust, Willunga. The facts are contradicted by Thomas Martin in his evidence (*Report of Select Committee*, p50, no. 1784), where he said 'I got the information from a boy'. See also the *Advertiser*, 4 August 1953, where it is said 'Carrie Ellbourn (sic), who was the first to see the wreck, ran to her father and raised the general alarm'.

2. *SA Register*, 17 July 1888, p5.

3. *Ibid*, 27 July 1888, p7; *Report of Select Committee*, p42, nos. 1462-1476.





*Post and Telegraph Office, Aldinga. Mrs C. W. Machell was Postmistress at the time of the wreck*



*Harbormaster's Cottage, Port Willunga, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' shown in background. Mrs Mary Skellet, formerly Martin, Mrs Thomas (Mary) Martin and children Stan and Mary*



He hurriedly wrote out a telegram to the Secretary of the Marine Board, Port Adelaide:—

Ship *Star of Greece* ashore here; want rocket apparatus to save crew; sea making clean breach over her; some of the crew in the mizzen-rigging; sea very rough, masts likely to go at any moment; main royal mast carried away and swimming (*sic*) aloft; courses and topsails flying loose,<sup>4</sup>

and galloped back to the seashore to render any assistance that lay in his power. He then found that the mizzen-mast had gone and that one man had come ashore alive. He was James Revell, who told his harrowing story while recuperating at the Sea View Hotel:—

‘It was very dark, and blowing a heavy gale of wind. I groped my way aft from the forecastle, where I was lying with a bad headache owing to the wound I had received. I found the mate and second mate aft and perfectly sober, and the skipper in a state of intoxication. I went and stood in the companion way and saw him repeatedly drinking brandy out of a bottle. The ship was laboring very heavily, and the water was coming aboard in tons. She was buried in the sand, so that she did not heel over much. About half past four in the morning the rush of water on the decks cleared the booby-hatch and the hen-coops as well. At the same time she carried away her fore, main, and royal masts. By this time the cabin was full of water, and the spanker-boom getting adrift it smashed the companion way right in. We then had to clear out of the companion way where we had been standing for shelter, and took to the rigging, and had hard work to hold on, the seas flying as high as the tops. The seas then began to sweep the decks thoroughly, clearing off all the deck-houses, boats, and spars. The men that were forward tried to get out one of the forward boats, but the seas smashed her up. I called the captain’s attention to the breaking up of the decks, and asked him if he did not think it was time to leave. He was alongside in the rigging and answered, “Yes; lend me a hand off with my coat.” I took my coat off and then helped him off with his. I wished him “Good-bye”, and jumped. I had a pretty hard struggle to get ashore, and got a few knocks. It took me about twenty minutes to do the 400 yards, and my strength was gone when I reached the beach, but one of the rescue party named Lovelock caught me by the hand and brought me in.’<sup>5</sup>

As to his rescue and subsequent events, Thomas Lovelock, a labourer of Aldinga, had this to say:—

‘Between seven and eight o’clock on Thursday morning I went on the beach at Port Willunga and saw a ship on the shore 200 yards from the dry land. I saw six persons on the mizzen-mast. One jumped overboard about an hour after I got there. I went in and helped to drag the man ashore. I went along the beach, and the mizzen-mast went over the board.

4. *Report of Select Committee*, p6, no. 152.

5. *SA Advertiser*, 14 July 1888; his statement of the captain’s drunken condition was subsequently disproved.





A. Hale

*Structure built of timber wreckage from the Star of Greece, positioned near the creek at Port Willunga. Jetty in background.*

Soon after I saw a body coming on the crest of a wave. A man named Crisp[e] and myself went into the water and dragged it out. We took it up the cliff, but seeing that life was extinct, let it lie there. There was a large bruise on the head which was bleeding. The body has since been identified as Andrew (*sic*) Blair. I do not think it was possible for a boat to live if it had been put off from the vessel. During the day I assisted in bringing several other bodies ashore, and some of the saved men.<sup>6</sup>

At this time the beach was 'strewn with heavy spars, cabin fittings, galley utensils, lifebelts, broken oars, ropes, rafts and a miscellaneous collection of timber and wearing apparel'. Towards Gull Rock were thousands of bags of wheat, which had been cast into the sea during the night; burst open, their contents were lying in crevices in rocks or lying in huge beds on the sand. The bow of the ship pointed due south with her port side facing the shore; broken amidships her mizzen-mast was gone and all deck houses had been carried away by the cruel, relentless sea.<sup>7</sup>

On board the men were in a dilemma for there appeared to be no hope of the ship holding together and, as no help was forthcoming from either sea or shore, they resolved to land by means of rafts or swimming. The first mate, John Hazeland, said that the suspense of waiting on board during the storm and darkness was too much for the men, so he led the way in endeavouring to get to the shore. He got off from the end of the bowsprit and so escaped the backwash. Many of the others tried to get into the water a little before the cathead, and could not contend against it. Prior, an apprentice, got off with a bunk board under each of his arms and came ashore all right. Three or four men got on a sort of triangular raft but, getting into the backwash, were all lost.<sup>8</sup>

6. *SA Register*, 16 July 1888, p7.

7. *Ibid*; *SA Advertiser*, 14 July 1888.

8. *SA Register*, 14 July 1888.



A reporter from the *SA Advertiser* interviewed Hazeland at the Bowering's house, which stood on a hill near the beach, where he was slowly recuperating from the effects of his lengthy battle with the waves. He went on to tell this story:—

'After the ship foundered we tried to fire our rockets, but found that we could not light them, as they appeared to have got damp. At 5.15 we were washed out of the cabin by a tremendous wave which swept over the vessel, washing away the skylight and the booby-hatches, and the cabin filled with water. At the time the captain and myself were standing in the cabin, but the waves struck with such force that we were both carried off our feet. I picked myself up on the port side of the forecastle. When I got in the forecastle I found it was the driest (*sic*) place in the ship, and I found that all the sailors had assembled there. At nine o'clock this morning the ship broke in halves just abaft, and the mizzen-mast went by the board. Now the first loss of life occurred. Four hands were washed overboard, and they disappeared from sight at once, being drowned.

'At ten o'clock the captain and second mate attempted to swim ashore, and both perished. The sea was running mountains high and the wind blowing terrifically, but they could see the shore, and determined to try for dear life. We saw them jump into the water; another moment and they were drowned. We could afterwards just distinguish their bodies being tossed backwards and forwards. By this time the vessel was a complete wreck, great seas breaking over her, and we were standing up to our waists in water. We began to see that we must make an attempt to get ashore, and at noon we resorted to every dodge to get a line ashore, such as floating a seaman's chest with a line attached to it, hoping that we would thus be able to communicate with the shore. But there was an eddying tide and back-drift, and the chests would return to the ship after going half-way across. After all these efforts had failed we determined to swim ashore.'

Back at the telegraph office, Jane Machell was unable to transmit Thomas Martin's telegram until nine o'clock, 'as the line did not open until that time'<sup>9</sup>; all messages were, of necessity, transmitted via the Willunga station. She attempted to get a special messenger to go to Willunga but all people were too intent on hurrying to the scene of the disaster. 'If there had been a telephone attachment the message would have reached Willunga an hour earlier.'<sup>11</sup>

The Secretary of the Marine Board, Thomas N. Stephens, received the telegram at 9.40 am on 13 July and, as the nearest rocket apparatus was at Normanville, he despatched the following telegram to that town's harbor-master:—

Wreck at Port Willunga. Can you send rocket apparatus quickly. If so, do it; Captain Inglis [Port Adelaide harbor-master] will be there.

9. *SA Advertiser*, 14 July 1888; note that his story differs from Carl Claeson's and James Revell's versions, see pp6-7 and 12.

10. *Report of Select Committee*, p42, no. 1462.

11. *SA Register*, 18 July 1888.





*Post and Telegraph Office. High Street, Willunga*

*National Trust*

'It then appeared advisable, or rather absolutely necessary, to have some experienced person on the spot to take charge of the apparatus, to direct the movements of the relieving parties, to represent the department at the wreck, and to advise as to what, if any, further steps could be taken to accomplish the end in view. Thereupon, the secretary saw the harbor-master, Captain Inglis, gave him verbal instructions as above, requested him to leave the office at once to catch the ten am train to Adelaide and, on arrival, to drive to the wreck as quickly as possible in the conveyance, which would be provided. In the meantime Messrs Hill & Co. had been telephoned to for a buggy and good horses, to meet Captain Inglis at the Adelaide station, on arrival of the ten o'clock train.

'The telegraph station-master at Port Adelaide was asked to facilitate the dispatch of messages, and, readily complying, he handed the secretary a telegram sent at 10.03 am by the harbor-master, Normanville, stating that he would send the rocket apparatus at once. Shortly after ten o'clock Mr Martin was informed what had been done, and was asked if anything further could be suggested. Nothing was suggested.'<sup>12</sup>

Captain Inglis was accompanied to Port Willunga by Captain Osborne and Mr M. G. Anderson, agent for the shipowners, who told his melancholy story:—

12. Report from Chairman and Secretary of the Marine Board presented to Select Committee (unpaginated). *Report of Select Committee*, p21 no. 717, says Gaskell received the telegram at 10.03 am, whereas at p6, no. 152, it is recorded that this was the time it was despatched. His reply was sent at 10.10 am not 10.03 am.



'We arrived at about half-past two when half a dozen men had come ashore from the wreck. Several plucky fellows were engaged on the beach doing all they could to render assistance to the survivors and to restore the apparently drowned. There were no boats on the water; in fact the sea was running so high that none could live. The most unfortunate thing of all was that there was no rocket apparatus at hand. I immediately telegraphed to our town office to see Mr [John] Darling, the charterer of the ship, and the Marine Board, giving them the facts with a view of getting them to forward rocket apparatus as early as possible. The ship was about 250 yards from the beach, and we could see at times four or five individuals on board, but nothing could be done to render the slightest assistance to them. Of course a good lookout was kept for men who got off the ship and endeavoured to swim ashore. We waited for an opportunity to rush in and pull out any as they came within reach. Two men nearly lost their lives in trying to save those who were struggling to get ashore. They went out with a rope, which was held by others on the beach, and one man lost his grip of the rope, and was more than half an hour in the water before he could be dragged out. One man I noticed take off his clothes, tie a rope around his waist, and work most bravely. It was simply heart-rending to stand there and not be able to do anything for the men on the wreck. We were waiting every minute for the arrival of the rocket apparatus, and hoping against hope that it would come in time for us to send the poor fellows a line.'<sup>13</sup>

Mounted Constable Tuohy, of Willunga, was informed of the wreck and arrived on the scene about ten o'clock. He found the vessel parted amidships, one person safe on shore [James Revell] and one dead body [D. Blair]. He telegraphed at once for Dr Robert McGowan who came immediately and stayed the whole day. In a sworn statement, at a later date, the doctor said:—



*Mounted Constable  
Thomas Stephen Tuohy  
of Willunga Police  
Station wearing his  
awards for bravery earned  
during his participation  
in rescue attempts*

13. SA Register, 14 July 1888.





*Dr Robert McGowan and wife in the garden at St Anne's Lodge, St Peters Terrace, Willunga. He died at Mallala in November 1898, aged 68 years*

'I was present at Port Willunga on the 13th July last and was an eyewitness of the attempts made by the crew of the wreck of the ship *Star of Greece* to swim ashore, seventeen of whom were drowned. I saw Thomas Stephen Tuohy, mounted constable of Willunga, divest himself of a portion of his uniform, dash into the heavy breakers which were following each in quick succession, and which were from ten to twenty feet high. Tuohy did not wait to fasten a rope or anything to secure himself to the shore in order that he could return through the back breakers. He was several times beaten back, and under the boiling surf, but with great determination persevered in his efforts to reach Kearney who was completely exhausted and was being tossed about from one breaker to another. After fully a quarter of an hour's exertions Tuohy succeeded in reaching the drowning man and brought him in within reach of others who went out with a rope to their assistance.

'Shortly after coming out and altho' somewhat exhausted, seeing another sailor endeavouring to fight his way (*sic*) through the breakers, Tuohy again dashed in without a rope and, although breaker after breaker went over him, he went steadily out and had almost succeeded in reaching the drowning man when a terrific heavy sea broke over both of them and they disappeared for fully a minute, when Tuohy came up and was so completely exhausted that it was with the greatest difficulty he reached shore. The sailor never came up alive. Not only did Tuohy bravely risk his life several times by being drowned but he was also in great danger while in the breakers of being killed by the wreckage, which no doubt was the



immediate cause of the deaths of several of the unfortunate crew who were attempting to swim ashore.<sup>14</sup>

Tuohy attempted to communicate with the men on the wreck and got half a door, which had been washed ashore, and wrote on it in bold capital letters 'Throw a line' and held it up for the men to see. Shortly afterwards some of the crew attempted to float chests to shore but, unfortunately, they washed around in the current in a half-circle and ended up back alongside the wreck. Later he obtained a blackboard and wrote, in chalk, 'Help is coming', took it to the edge of the water and held it aloft for five minutes. It was presumed that the wrecked sailors saw it because no attempt to abandon ship was made for an hour or more.<sup>15</sup>

As a result of Tuohy's bravery the Government was asked to grant a reward from the police fund and, accordingly, he received £20, which sum he asked to be laid out in something as an heirloom to his family. At Tuohy's request, the police department obtained a handsome medal for him and, at the presentation, on 1 August 1888 the Hon J. C. F. Johnson, representing the Chief Secretary, said he had been 'informed by eyewitnesses that Tuohy for at least seven hours exposed himself to the boiling surf for the rescue of life, and on more than one occasion risked his own life in doing so'. The Minister then presented Lance Corporal Charles P.H. Nalty with a reward of £5, and £2 each to Constables Bernard McCarron, Harold Finch and Wells for their 'gallant efforts in the rescue and preservation of life'.<sup>16</sup>

Nalty was later to tell of the part he played in the tragic events:—

'I arrived at two o'clock, and attempted to resuscitate life in the bodies of the men who came ashore apparently dead, and conveyed the bodies to the hotel. On Saturday I patrolled the beach from daylight till noon, and we recovered three dead bodies and a portion of one. While on the beach a man handed me a piece of wearing apparel containing a man's hand. On the little finger there was the gold ring produced, identified as having belonged to the second mate, Waugh, by the initials 'A.W.' (sic)<sup>17</sup>

During rescue operations throughout the tragic day, M/C Tuohy was given assistance by numerous local residents, who rendered specially valuable aid in attending to the rescue of the shipwrecked mariners, viz., Charley Addison, Mrs Maria Bowering, her husband (William Bowering), sons (Herbert and Frederick Bowering) and daughters (not

14. Copy of statement given to the National Trust, Willunga, by the Tuohy family.

15. *Report of Select Committee*, p47, no. 1654; *Adelaide Observer*, 4 August 1888; see *Report of Select Committee*, p51, no 1794, where Thomas Martin contradicts Tuohy's evidence, and p19, no. 605, where Captain Inglis says 'we wrote on a board . . . those who came on shore acknowledged that they understood'. See the first mate's evidence, p11, no. 344, where he suggests the notices could not be seen from the ship. See also Claeson's evidence, p52, nos. 1862-5, where he states the signs could not be seen. Thomas Culley, an eyewitness, later wrote - 'The statement . . . that Constable Tuohy waded into the sea with a blackboard on his head is absurd. The wind was blowing at from sixty to eighty miles per hour. The board was placed on a trestle with the legs embedded in the sand'. (From papers held by National Trust, Willunga).

16. The Royal Humane Society of Australia awarded a silver medal to M/C Tuohy (*SA Register*, 21 September 1888) and in January 1889 he was given permission by his superiors to accept a silver case from Captain Harrower's mother containing photographs of both herself and her late son. (Copy of letter in possession of National Trust, Willunga.) See Appendix III.

17. *SA Register*, 16 July 1888.



named), Noah Crisp, Frank (Francis?) Culley, Thomas H. Culley, H. Ellbourne, J. (John?) Fidge, Ernest T. How, Thomas Lovelock, John McBurney, Thomas Martin, James Nelson, Hyett Shepherd, and Ben Sparrow.<sup>18</sup>

To attempt to single out individual citizens for commendation in respect of specific acts of heroism on Friday, 13 July 1888 is well nigh impossible because even eyewitnesses are at variance in recalling events of that fateful day. For example, in 1925 Thomas H. Culley (born 1862), the son of Frank (Francis?) Culley, and personally involved in rescue operations, said '...Addison was the only man who did any swimming. With a line attached to his waist he was successful in securing a cask on which the crew were trying to send a line ashore, only to find the line had parted...' In 1938 it was said, 'Ben Sparrow swam out to near the ship in a sea in which no small boat could live and got near the ship with a line, which was eventually got on board and by means of which some of the crew were saved...' To this claim a dissenting eyewitness [Mr J. Nelson, of Goodwood, one of the helpers on shore (see above)] said, 'Mr Sparrow did not swim to the wreck...the only one to try and reach the wreck by line was C. Addison..., but he failed to do so.' In his reminiscences, written in August 1971, Stanley S. Addison said of his father: 'Charles (*sic*) Addison, the champion swimmer of the area, performed prodigious feats in seeking to save lives. His main effort was to swim out from the shore, through waves up to fifty (*sic*) feet in height, for about two hundred yards, where from the wreck, he was given a box with a line attached to it. With this hung (*sic*) to his body he swam to the shore and was on the point of reaching it when the line parted...'<sup>19</sup>

With due respect to the comments made by the foregoing gentlemen, the sworn evidence of Captains Robert W. Osborne and Alexander Inglis, who were at the scene, to the Select Committee of Enquiry, casts strong doubts upon the claims that anyone swam out and reached the wreck:—

Q: Was there any means by which the men on shore could aid those men who were swimming to land?

A: They could do no more than they did. They went in after them into the surf.

Q: How far did they go?

A: Up to their necks, and the sea rolled them back again.<sup>20</sup>

Q: What was done from the shore to save men from the wreck?

A: Men were going with lines as far as they could go into the surf.

Q: How far could the men go in that way?

A: They would run behind a sea as far as possible and then run back again.

Q: Would they be able to go fifty yards?

A: No.<sup>21</sup>

18. *Ibid*; *The Observer*, 21 July 1888; *Report of Select Committee*, p49, no. 1738; *Willunga Town and District: 1951-1975*, M. Dunstan, p36. See Appendix II for biographical notes.

19. Newspaper cuttings and reminiscences held by National Trust, Willunga; copy of Stanley Addison's reminiscences provided by Margaret Jones.

20. *Report of Select Committee*, p40, nos. 1409-1410. See also M.G. Anderson's comment on p16 of this book.



This surfeit of contradictory evidence and conjecture leads to bewilderment as to where the truth lies. It is realised, of course, that the captains did not arrive on the scene until about 2.30 pm on 13 July but, in all published reports emanating from journalists who, no doubt, were on the spot, private citizens (e.g. Lovelock and How(ie)), and M/Cs Tuohy and Nalty, no mention is made of the events later claimed to be fact. Surely, if they were true, Messrs Sparrow and Addison would have been recommended for Royal Humane Society awards, one of which was bestowed on M/C Tuohy who, according to reliable evidence, was only able to venture but a few yards from the shore in his rescue attempts. Dr McGowan joined with two prominent residents, W.J. Blacker and Frederick Maslin, and, in a letter to the police commissioner, they said, *inter alia*, 'in his [Tuohy's] manly endeavours to save life he was repeatedly in the water for about seven hours and in several instances nearly lost his life in his determined efforts...'<sup>22</sup> Further, crew members, in their efforts to reach safety, were subjected to strong eddying tides and the hazards of floating wreckage, which suggests that attempts to swim out to the wreck would have been equally hazardous and unlikely to succeed. Accordingly, claims that swimmers actually reached the wreck must be regarded as unsubstantiated.

At 4.40 pm the rocket apparatus arrived from Normanville under the direction of Frederick Gaskell. Dusk was closing in and time was running out for the ill-fated crew, two of whom still remained on board. It was estimated that it would take about an hour to unload the apparatus and transport it over a sandhill to the beach but, as this operation commenced, events on board the doomed ship demonstrated that 'this action was unnecessary, for time and the merciless sea had decided the crew's fate'.<sup>23</sup>

'A touching description is given by the *Chronicle* reporter of the scene at five o'clock, when the last two men on board made their attempt to swim ashore. The shore – not 200 yards distant – was crowded with able-bodied men, not one of whom could stretch out a hand to save the unfortunates. The waves dashed over the vessel, and sent the spray high into the rigging. The people on shore with the naked eye could see the last two on the wreck. One was an elderly man (the sailmaker), and the other a youth. The youth went to the bows of the vessel, and quickly divested himself of all his wearing apparel. Then, as we watched, we saw him climb the side of the bow of the vessel, and for a moment he stood irresolute, but in a second he pulled himself together and plunged headlong into the sea. He shot from below the water, and struck out boldly for the shore. Bravely he seemed to be swimming, and as he breasted the first huge wave we felt that he would reach the land. But our hopes were speedily dashed to the ground, for a billow engulfed him, and in an instant he was floating at the mercy of the waves. He sank so suddenly that we

21. *Ibid*, pp19-20, nos. 634-636. See also Captain Inglis' comments on p33 of this book.

22. A copy of this letter is held by the National Trust, Willunga.

23. *Report of Select Committee*, p 23, no. 781; *SA Register*, 23 July 1888.





*A. D. Edwards Collection*

*The day after the wreck, Star of Greece, Port Willunga*

concluded that he must have been struck by a floating spar, and his body was not seen again.

'Now we turned to the old sailmaker (his identity is not quite certain), [Gustav Carlson] who was about to engage in a battle for dear life. He did not divest himself of his clothes, but reached the centre of the vessel, and then without hesitation dropped into the sea. Now a fierce war was waged between the elements and one man. The battle was an unequal one, but despite this it seemed as if pluck would carry the unfortunate sailmaker



through. He grasped at and secured a piece of the wreckage, and clinging to this he was carried hither and thither. His case was now hopeless. The vessel formed a breakwater, and as fast as he floated out, the receding waves sucked him back again, and in this way he was carried out, and from one end of the vessel to the other. Had he jumped from the bow or stern of the ship there would have been a chance of his saving his life. Worn out with the exhausting struggle we saw him throw himself on his back, still clinging to the spar, evidently with the hope that the waves would drift him ashore. In this position he hung for some time, and then a tremendous sea struck the vessel, and breaking over her caught the sailmaker in its grasp. For a moment the spray hid him from sight, and when it cleared away the spar and the man were seen to be separated. It had been a gallant fight, and when it was all over tears stood in the eyes of more than one, who had witnessed the display of sad but useless valour. The fierce waves carried the body towards the shore at right angles to the vessel, and in a few moments some men were seen carrying the unfortunate man's body along the beach and depositing it alongside those who had shared his sad end.<sup>24</sup>

On the following day coaches and traps brought large numbers of people, from Adelaide and other localities, who poured on to the beach in search of mementos of the tragedy but this, of course, was discountenanced by the police; today, however, there are many pieces of memorabilia held in private and public collections including the figure-head, bell, a chair, spar, porthole, and ship's buckets. Many of the visitors expressed astonishment at finding the wreck so close to the shore and the 'dilatory action of the government in allowing the men to perish within a couple of ship's lengths of the land was generally commented upon in condemnatory terms'.<sup>25</sup>

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24. Quoted in *Australian Sketcher*, 9 August 1888.

25. *SA Register*, 16 July 1888.



### CHAPTER THREE

# Steamers, Rockets and Procrastination

## INTRODUCTION

During the fateful daylight hours of 13 July inaction and procrastination were the order of the day, coupled with indecision, at the Marine Board and within government. In retrospect, there is no doubt that more lives would have been saved if life-saving gear had been housed at Port Adelaide and if the responsible officer of the Marine Board had had greater experience of life at sea, with accompanying expertise in maritime affairs. The refusal of Henry Thompson's mortar (see Chapter 5) is beyond comprehension in view of the recognised delay of the rocket apparatus from Normanville, while to leave the twin-screwed *Protector* at anchor seems to have been the height of folly when her lifeboat could have been used in rescue attempts had she been ordered to the scene of the wreck. (See Captain Quin's statement on p29.)

## INDICTMENT OF THE MARINE BOARD

Shortly after the secretary of the Marine Board sent the telegram to the harbor-master at Normanville (see p14) the chairman, John Formby, arrived at the board's office and expressed his satisfaction with what he considered to be 'prompt, proper and sufficient measures'. In his view the case appeared to be one that could be properly dealt with only by means of a rocket apparatus – a steamer was not required!

At about 10.45 am the chief secretary spoke on the telephone to the board's secretary and asked if he knew of the wreck and what was being done to save the men on board, and the following transcript of events is, as presented, an indictment of those holding the reins of authority.

Memo by the chief secretary (Hon J.G. Ramsay.)

'On Friday morning, about 10.40, I sent for [Police] Commissioner Peterswald, as I wished to see him on business connected with his department. He came in a few minutes, and brought a telegram which he



had just received from a trooper stationed at Willunga, containing information about the wreck. This was the first I heard of it. I immediately asked what was being done to save the men on board. I at once spoke to the secretary of the Marine Board through the telephone [and] asked if he knew of the wreck and what was being done to save the men. He replied he had ordered the rocket apparatus to be taken from Normanville to the scene of the wreck at once, and had sent the harbor-master by special conveyance to direct matters, and show them how to work the rocket apparatus, to prevent any hitch.

Q.- Was there no rocket apparatus nearer?

A.- No.

Q.- Was there none at Port Adelaide, or anywhere on the coast nearer the wreck?

A.- None.

Q.- Is the Governor Musgrave in steam?

A.- She has gone to Port Augusta.

Q.- Could you get another steamer to go?

A.- Yes; but it would be useless. She could do no good; they could not get her near the wreck.

Q.- Have you got a lifeboat?

A.- No.

Q.- What! No lifeboat at Semaphore or Port?

A.- No. There was one at Semaphore, but it is broken up or useless - or words to that effect.

Q.- Where is the nearest lifeboat?

A.- At Victor Harbor.

Q.- Is she in seagoing order?

A.- Yes.

Q.- Is there a crew available to work her?

A.- I think so; but she is too far away to be of any use. The rockets will be at the wreck long before she could be brought up.

Q.- Are you sure that the rocket apparatus at Normanville is in good order?

A.- Yes.

Q.- I have heard that the rope was stolen or damaged?

A.- A new rope was supplied since then. It is in perfect order. I had a telegram to that effect this morning.

'I then went across to telegraph operating room; spoke direct to Victor Harbor to get lifeboat manned and ready to start at a moment's notice. I asked if there was a steamer at or near Port Victor. Spoke Willunga, but could get no further news, as all the people had gone to the wreck.

'I returned, saw Mr Playford [the Premier] and told him substance of conversation with Stephens, expressing astonishment that there was no lifeboat or rocket apparatus at the Port or Semaphore. I then heard that



Mr [William] Cave had promised the Premier to send steamer *Defiance* at once.<sup>1</sup>

This damning evidence, in respect of the omissions of the Marine Board relative to the paucity and quality of rescue apparatus at Port Adelaide, when presented to the Select Committee, was to be fatal to any mitigating evidence presented by its two executive officers, Messrs Formby and Stephens.

Captain Legoe, a member of the Marine Board, had an altercation with the chairman and expressed the opinion that a steamer should be sent and that the board members should be called together immediately; the chairman formally refused both requests because he believed a steamer could not live near the wreck<sup>2</sup>.

However, after further heated discussion, the secretary was told to telegraph Port Willunga and accordingly, at twelve o'clock, a request was made to Thomas Martin - 'could a steamer render any assistance?', to which an answer was not received until 2.43 pm<sup>3</sup>.



Steam launch *Defiance* at Largs jetty

Morlock Library

## THE *DEFIANCE* TO THE RESCUE!

At about twelve noon William R. Cave, agent for the Semaphore Steamboat Co and proprietor of the steamer *Defiance*, informed the Premier, Thomas Playford, that his ship had steam up at Semaphore and if 'I would hold him harmless from any fines and penalties' he would send her down to the wreck at his expense<sup>4</sup>.

1. *Report of Select Committee*, p 2, no. 35.

2. Captain Legoe's evidence (*Report of Select Committee*, p 23-30); at the meeting of the board on 24 August 1888 the chairman was censured when a motion was passed stating that the board should have been consulted or summoned immediately. (*SA Register*, 24 August 1888; *SA Register*, 17 July 1888).

3. *Report of Select Committee*, p 3, no. 56.

4. Hon Thomas Playford, *Report of Select Committee*, pp 62-64; see p 25, no. 842 for Captain Legoe's opinion of the efficacy of the proposal.



Captain Joseph Amora of the *Defiance* was informed by William Cave that 'some things would be sent down for us, such as lifebuoys and that Mr Randall, who was intimate with the locality, would come with me'<sup>5</sup>.

'The vessel was to have started about 12.30, and was expected to reach the wreck between two and three o'clock. Captain Amora, however, being strongly impressed that it would be useless to attempt to render help by sea, the treasurer was advised by telegram from the Marine Board that the *Defiance* would not be able to get within half a mile of the wreck, and could do no good by going. On that the treasurer withdrew the order for the vessel to go.' However, there is conflicting evidence as to the treasurer's order, for a newspaper report said:—

'The steam launch *Defiance* in charge of Captain Amora, and having on board Mr Little (of HM Customs), Captain Spells (Messrs Cave & Co's floating manager), Mr Randall, and a representative from the *Register* left the Semaphore jetty shortly after two o'clock for [Port] Willunga, in the hope of rendering some assistance from seaward. This, however, was deemed doubtful owing to the heavy sea running, but W.R. Cave, who arranged for the steamer to go, hoped that if no practical help could be rendered the sight of the steamer to the poor fellows on the wreck would be encouraging, and, further, that failing to get the rocket apparatus to work from the shore, the steamer to leeward might get a line on board.

'This, however, could not be done. During the passage down the steamer experienced some very heavy squalls accompanied with rain, but on coming opposite [Port] Willunga the elements seemed to reach a climax, for the wind blew most terrifically and the sea was rolling in mountain high. The darkness came on as the steamer neared the scene of the wreck, and despite the attempts to get near enough to signal the wreck on the shore, nothing of a practical nature could be done. As the darkness came on the wind blew stronger, coming in heavy squalls from the southwest, and it was decided to return to the Semaphore, as no possible good could be done. Considering the very heavy weather the *Defiance* behaved splendidly, and had the weather moderated instead of increasing in violence her services would have been valuable.

'... Cave was greatly concerned for the poor shipwrecked seamen, and showed considerable energy in dispatching the steamer and provisioning her should her services be required. The orders were that failing to get a rope aboard the wreck – and the men could be seen clinging to it – the *Defiance* during the night should proceed to Port Victor, pick up the lifeboat lying there, and return to the wreck by daylight this morning. This, however, was deemed useless, and the steamer returned, reaching the Semaphore at half-past eight. As she was nearing the jetty the steam tug *Yalala* passed on her way to the wreck, but it is considered doubtful whether she can be of much service.'<sup>6</sup>

5. Captain Amora, *Report of Select Committee*, pp 53-55.

6. *SA Register* 14 July 1888. Note that the first paragraph of the quotation is contrary to Captain Amora's evidence to the Select Committee, nor is it confirmed in the Marine Board chairman's report to the Select Committee, dated 17 July 1888, but see p 63, no. 2211, where the Premier gives credence to the newspaper report.



### THE YATALA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE RESCUE!

On the morning of 13 July the *Yatala* was at Semaphore with steam up and fires banked and, if required, could have been under way within an hour. At 2.43 pm the following telegram from Thomas Martin was received at the Marine Board (it had been lodged at Aldinga at 1.10 pm):—

...sea very heavy. Try and send lifeboat before night. If weather continues as now, ship will probably break up tonight. Wish rocket apparatus was here now.



Steam tug *Yatala*

*A. D. Edwards Collection*

At about 3 pm John Formby and Captain Legoe were still debating as to whether a steamer should be sent and the secretary, with a view to bringing the matter to a head, intimated that he intended to telegraph the treasurer, to which Captain Legoe responded 'you had better first communicate with the Tug Company about a tug'. 'We did that and Mr Willimott said we could have the tug for £80.'

In his evidence to the Select Committee, George Willimott, secretary/manager of the Tug Company, which owned the *Yatala*, had the following verbal exchange with the Chairman, David Bews, which indicated considerable ill-feeling between him and the Marine Board:—

'Was there any disagreement between the Tug Company and the secretary of the Marine Board over that? [The wreck of the *Guldax* off Normanville in September 1887] — There was afterwards.

'What was the dispute about? — I was chartered by the secretary to go down for £75. On return I sent in the account, and also one for £2-6-0. This latter consisted of £2 for provisions, and six shillings for a bottle of whisky, used by some men who were sent down. The secretary of the Marine Board sent for me some time about the middle of September and asked me the meaning of that account. I said it was quite fair, the £2-6-0 was apart from the £75 charter; and he replied "If you insist on the money

7. Henry John, *Report of Select Committee*, pp 64-66, and T.N. Stephens' evidence, p 4, no. 59.





Port Adelaide, circa 1880

I will pass it to you". I replied that I did not insist, but I considered that the provisions ought to be paid for. He replied "I will pass the account but I will never employ you again as long as I live if I can help it". The account was passed and paid.<sup>8</sup>

However, Willimott made it quite clear, when giving evidence to the Select Committee, that there was no suggestion that the Marine Board's secretary invoked his previous threat and therefore delayed in making contact with the Tug Company in respect of using the *Yatala* for rescue purposes.

The treasurer's approval was obtained to send the steam tug and Henry John(s), captain of the *Yatala*, takes up the story:—

'We left Port Adelaide about five o'clock on Friday evening, and proceeded to the *Protector*, where we took aboard a lifeboat and crew, and at once proceeded on to [Port] Willunga, arriving off the bay soon after one o'clock. We then hove to, and sent up a couple of rockets with the hope of getting some response from the shore, but failing in this we burnt blue lights at intervals, trusting that if any men were still on board they would be encouraged to stick by the wreck till daylight when we could easily rescue them. We were hoping to get some signals from the shore to show us we were at the right spot, but nothing was visible, and we dodged about all night, sometimes under way and sometimes with engines stopped. Daylight broke and showed us in a good position opposite the wreck, which could be plainly seen. The weather had moderated

8. *Report of Select Committee*, p 37, no. 1297-1298; see also p 66, no. 2298, where Mr T.N. Stephens disputes the final statement.



somewhat during the night, and we had no difficulty in lowering the lifeboat and getting the *Protector's* man aboard.<sup>9</sup>

Captain Hugh Quin was on board *Yatala* as pilot and, upon his return to Port Adelaide, was most cynical in respect of the dilatoriness of both the government and the Marine Board. 'The thirteen (*sic*) men who were drowned could have been saved had the tug been dispatched when the information conveying the intelligence of the disaster was received. Why did not the Marine Board endeavour to send the *Protector*? She had the same advantages as the tugboats, and could steam faster, having twin screws. For £80 the government had sacrificed thirteen lives. I strongly condemn the action of the Marine Board for not sending a steamer at once. In the days of Captain Lipson and Captain Douglas the government would not have been asked to sanction the sending of a steamer, but one would have been sent and they would have been consulted afterwards. They would not have hesitated as the Marine Board did. He hoped the matter would be taken up by members of the House.'<sup>10</sup>

Indignation was generally expressed at Port Adelaide and the authorities were bitterly condemned. 'The question will probably come before the Port labour organisations and it will be brought up at the Trades and Labour Council.' The following comments were typical:—

It's a disgrace and a shame to the country and amounts to little less than murder. They knew of it soon after nine o'clock, and there were two steamers at the Semaphore that could have been sent at once, and others at the port. It makes my blood boil. It's a miserable question of pounds, shillings and pence.

The *Yatala* was at the Semaphore jetty this morning with steam up, and could have been sent away by eleven o'clock at the very latest. Instead of that we have been waiting about all day. The vessel won't get down there till dark, and most likely can't do anything till the morning.

The government and the Marine Board ought to be kicked out for this. They talk enough at North Terrace, but if they acted differently in cases like this it would be better.

It was a cruel thing to leave the men to be washed away and drowned. They sent away to the Dutchmen in the last wreck quickly enough. If the *Yatala* had gone down early she could have got near, dropped her anchors, and gradually warped herself in, with engines ready in case of need. She could have let a lifeboat to the wreck with a line and have saved the poor fellows<sup>11</sup>.

The first mate, John Hazeland, was more than incensed at the lack of initiative on the part of the Marine Board and vented his spleen:—

'...in this colony the authorities seem willing to allow sailors in distress to be drowned like rats in a barrel. My blood boils with indignation when I think of the apathy that has been shown in connection with this fatal disaster. I am convinced that if, say, the steamship *Yatala* had been chartered she could have reached us by noon at the outside, and have rescued every soul on board. She could have hung off a short distance and fired a rocket [or mortar?] on board, by which means communication

9. SA Register, 16 July 1888.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*, 14 July 1888.



between the two vessels would have been established, and we would have all reached the steamer in safety.'<sup>12</sup>

### ROCKET APPARATUS

The somnolence of the village of Normanville was disturbed at 10.03 am on 13 July when Frederick Gaskell, the local harbor-master, received a telegram from the Marine Board to send, post haste, the rocket apparatus to Port Willunga.

For some inexplicable reason the apparatus was housed in a six-foot-square wooden shed to which the only access was by foot and some 200 yards over a sandhill. Accordingly, Gaskell immediately engaged the services of two fishermen, who lived nearby; after about one and three-quarter hour's labour they carried the apparatus, thirty to forty pieces and weighing, in total, about fifteen hundredweight, to a suitable loading point alongside the tramway.



*Firing the Life Saving Rocket at Port Willunga at a later period*

*National Trust*

In the meantime Gaskell sent a man to Yankalilla, some two miles away, to obtain two suitable horses from Joseph (?) Butterworth. While horses were available in Normanville at Hill & Co and from Messrs Michael Baker and Mitchell and, according to John Cornish, a local miller, more than suitable for the purpose, some two hours passed before Butterworth's horses were shod and ready to commence the twenty-four-mile journey to Port Willunga. Thus, at 12.15 pm the van and apparatus

12. *SA Advertiser*, 14 July 1888, p 6; see also 'Letter to Editor' (*SA Register*, 20 July 1888) where the first mate, John H.D. Hazeland, says:—

'The men were becoming exhausted through cold and hunger and ... seeing no prospect of rescue from either land or sea, we considered the forlorn task of reaching the shore... I accordingly took the lead...'

See also *SA Register* 23 July 1888 under the heading 'A Select Committee of Enquiry,' where the Premier, Thomas Playford, makes a highly prejudicial remark - '... the first mate ought not to have left the wreck as he was the officer in charge...' In his evidence to the Select Committee Claeson said 'We were very glad when he reached the shore; it gave us fresh heart' (p 53, no. 1885). See the Select Committee findings in para. 7, p50 of this book.



started off on what was to be a journey of some four and one half hours, under the command of Frederick Gaskell, who was accompanied by two other men and police trooper, Bernard McCarron, riding in advance of the party.

Trooper McCarron was critical of the horses used because 'they were grass fed and therefore not suitable for the work with fast driving', while Cornish was of the opinion that the journey could have been accomplished much more quickly:— 'an express conveyance should have been secured and two or three smart horses could have been picked up, in relays, on the road, thus saving at least one hour in travelling time'.

As the party proceeded towards Sellick's Hill, 'the weather was comparatively calm with us and we said that if they [the crew] could remain on the rigging they would be got off', and accordingly they continued at a leisurely pace, but by the time Sellick's Hill was reached the horses were knocked up and in retrospect Trooper McCarron agreed that they should have secured fresh horses, at intervals, as suggested by Cornish. Three miles from the wreck they were very tired and 'did not travel well at the end of the journey'.<sup>13</sup>

'Then, as you know, assistance was too late, as all the men had left the vessel. We could have fired a rocket on the ship with the greatest of ease...' <sup>14</sup>; cold comfort indeed for the dead mariners lying in a temporary morgue set up in an empty house near the Sea View Hotel and others held in the watery arms of the merciless sea.

Dr McGowan described the appalling carnage:—

'Found eight bodies in the dead house, and one of which is entirely eaten away, except part of the skin, some hair and one hand...I believe they were stunned by the wreckage and then got drowned afterwards'.<sup>15</sup>

In retrospect, H. William How(e), mason of Port Willunga, ventured the following opinion:—

'I have had ten years' experience in the use of rocket apparatus. Had the apparatus been here on Friday I am positive that we could have saved every life on board the ship at the time. The rocket would take a small line on board the ship first, then a larger one, and then an endless rope with a cradle. We had plenty of time to save everyone in the mizzen if we had had the apparatus. There was a rocket apparatus here for fifteen years, but it was taken away about four years ago. I was second in charge of it. The total cost of the apparatus would be about £100 or £150, and the total cost of maintenance would be about £6 per year. It was kept in Mr Butterworth's store, and cost £9-12-0 per year for storage. We could have used the apparatus easily had we had it, and could have reached the vessel [even] if she had been one hundred yards further away'.<sup>16</sup>

13. *Report of Select Committee*, pp 21-23, nos. 715-798; pp 53-59, nos. 1968-2141.

14. F. Gaskell, quoted in *SA Advertiser*, 14 July 1888, p 6.

15. *SA Register*, 16 July 1888.

16. *Ibid.*



# Port Willunga and its Citizens

## Their Role in the Tragedy

The story of the tragedy of the *Star of Greece* cannot be completed without reference to the compassion and heroism shown by the citizens of Port Willunga and environs on 13 July 1888. (See also p19, where the conflict of evidence surrounding attempts to swim out to the wreck is examined). M/C Tuohy's bravery has been discussed in a previous chapter but in his evidence to the Select Committee he describes two rescue operations:—

One of the crew, when near the beach, turned on his back as if exhausted and two or three men went into the water, where it was about three feet in depth, and caught him and fetched him out. We rubbed him down and I took off my shirt and put it on him; had a large fire made and sent for plenty of blankets and clothes and we kept on rubbing him.

On another occasion Mr Martin and five or six men ran in and got one of them; I got another out. The women, Mrs Bowering and others, saw another man drowning and cried out 'Would not some one save him', so I went in, but he was lost; Mr Culley threw a rope and dragged me out<sup>1</sup>.

Ernest T. How(ie) told this harrowing story in respect of his experiences on that fateful day:—

'I reached the sea coast at a quarter past seven o'clock this morning. Directly I, with a number of other residents, reached the shore we saw five men clinging to the rigging. Just at this time we noticed a man in the water, and some of us rushed in and managed to pull him ashore. Looking at the vessel again we saw three men standing in the bows, and immediately they all sprang into the sea. One, however, at once turned back to the vessel, but whether he managed to get on board again we could not see. The other two struck out for the shore, and as they approached we tied a line to ourselves and ran into the surf. We secured both men and brought them safely ashore. Afterwards, we noticed two other men jump into the sea, but the eddy carried them away, and all that we saw afterwards was their bodies drifting to the shore. Poor fellows, both seemed to die without a struggle. I saw no other men saved up to three o'clock.'<sup>2</sup>

'Perhaps the saddest incident was the death of an old seaman who successfully battled with the waves, only to succumb two hours after reaching the shore. Standing on the beach, we saw this man gallantly fight

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1. *Report of Select Committee*, p 47, nos. 1655-1656.

2. *SA Advertiser*, 14 July 1888, p 5-6; see also *Report of Select Committee*, para. 6, as published on p50 of this book.



## ALDINGA.

County Adelaide, Electoral District of Noarlunga, District Council of Aldinga; 27 miles S.

Population, 245; Houses, 53.

Post and Telegraph Offices—Mrs C. W. Machell.

Resident Justices—Duncan Stewart, F. Maslin.

Places of Worship—Church of England (St Ann's), Rev E. K. Miller; Wesleyan, Rev J. D. Langsford; Baptist, Rev John Renney.

Bank of Adelaide—Henry Hughes, manager.

Hotels—Aldinga (Richard George), Temperance (Francis Hart), Sea View (W. Kimber).

Institute—Secretary, Henry Hughes.

Communication with Adelaide—Coach (Hill and Co), once daily.

Addison, Charles, baker  
Air, S., laborer  
Bennetts, J. T. E., farmer  
Bennetts, Mary, farmer  
Bennetts, R. C. H., farmer  
Bird, Alfred, butcher  
Bowering, William, farmer  
Butterworth, Brant, miller  
Butterworth, Mrs J.  
Caeonowith, Edwin, saddler  
Cheeseman, Jas., laborer  
Clift, William, farmer  
Clift, Alfred, laborer  
Clift, James B., laborer  
Cocksedge, Mrs W.  
Cox, Gabriel, farmer

Cox, Henry, farmer  
Cox, M., laborer  
Crisp, Noah J., blacksmith  
Culley, Frank, sen, farmer  
Culley, Henry, farmer  
Dennis, Geo, laborer  
Denton, Joseph, laborer  
Elbourne, Arthur, contractor  
Elliott, William, miller  
Ellis, John Cock, farmer  
Fidge, Lewis, farmer  
Fidge, Lewis, jun, auctioneer  
Foster, Benjamin  
George, Richard, publican  
Goode, H. A. and W., storekeepers  
Goode, Hy Able (Good H. A. & W.)

Greenless, J., jun, teacher  
Hart, Francis, Temperance hotel  
Hart, Shadrach, farmer  
Hounsell, Mrs Sarah  
How, E. T., mason  
How, William, mason  
Hughes Henry, bank manager  
Humphreys, John, laborer  
Humphreys, Joseph, farmer  
Illman, Henry, farmer  
Illman, Misses, farmers  
Jones, George, farmer  
Jones, Thomas, farmer  
Jorrelafstev, A., farmer  
Kimber, Walter, butcher  
Kimber, Wm, butcher & hotelkeeper

Langsford, Rev J. D. (Wesleyan)  
Longdon, John, carpenter  
Lovelock, Henry, farmer  
Lovelock, Jabez, farmer  
Lovelock, Jas B., farmer  
Machell, Mrs C. W., postmistress  
Manning, William, storekeeper  
Martin, Thomas, farmer  
Maslin, Frederick, J. P., farmer  
Maslin, Thomas, farmer  
McBurney, Mrs Jemima, farmer  
McBurney, John, carrier  
McBurney, Thomas, farmer  
McCallam, Archibald, farmer  
McCallam, Hugh, farmer  
McCallum, Alexander, farmer

McKenzie, Malcolm, farmer  
McMurtrie, Miss  
McRae, Colin, farmer  
McRae, F. D., laborer  
McRae, Kenneth, farmer  
Mumford, Chas, laborer  
Mumford, James, carrier  
Pengelly, Henry, farmer  
Pengelly, John, sen  
Pengelly, Thomas, jun, blacksmith  
Pengelly, Thomas, sen  
Perkins, William, laborer  
Pethick, Abraham, farmer  
Pethick, Chris, laborer  
Pethick, John, farmer

Polkinghorne, E. T., farmer  
Pridham, James, farmer  
Reid, Thomas, laborer  
Rogers, Ellen, sewing mistress  
Rogers, John, laborer  
Searson, William, farmer  
Shepherd, Hyett, farmer  
Sibley, Alfred, bootmaker  
Stewart, Duncan, J. P., farmer  
Sullivan, Hugh, laborer  
Valentine, S., laborer  
Valentine, Joseph, farmer  
Wheaton, Henry, farmer  
Willoughby, John, stationman  
Wright, David, laborer

SA Directory, 1888

his way through the waves, and, as he reached the last line of the breakers, willing hands rushed in and pulled him ashore. He was sorely distressed and restoratives were at once applied. Rubbing his chest with brandy was tried, in which work Mrs Bowering kindly assisted and moistened his lips with brandy. This was carried on for two hours, at the end of which time the breathing became much stronger, and hopes were entertained that he would pull through. He opened his eyes, glanced round and endeavoured to speak, but suddenly fell back and life flickered out.<sup>3</sup>

Captain Inglis reported to the Marine Board that 'all the people on the beach (and especially Mrs [Maria] Bowering, a police trooper, and two or three others whose names I do not know) worked splendidly in assisting the men through the surf and in attending to them afterwards, and every effort was made to restore life to those who died after reaching the shore. Mrs Bowering took charge of the mate and two apprentices, and I sent the

3. *Ibid.*



seven others to the [Sea View] hotel at Port Willunga<sup>4</sup>, where they were well cared for. A doctor [Dr McGowan] was also in attendance. As the men were all naked, I found suits of clothes for all of them; the police took charge of the dead bodies.<sup>5</sup>

When taken to the Bowering's house, Hazeland, Kearney, McBarnet(t) and, apparently, Claeson, found that she had a fire, medicine, blankets and other necessities waiting. The survivors' relief at finding themselves safe and secure after their terrifying ordeal is evident in Claeson's statement that, when he awoke, he found himself in a nice little cottage, belonging to William and Maria Bowering, with many young ladies around his bed, one pouring beef tea into his weakened body<sup>6</sup>.

There was no doubt in the minds of those who witnessed these events that the rescuers risked their own lives in their attempts to save the drowning sailors, and that, regardless of subsequent recognition through awards or commendations, they deserved every credit for their heart-breaking labours<sup>7</sup>.

Several citizens were the honoured recipients of a congratulatory letter from the Chief Secretary's office, among whom were Messrs Charley Addison, William Bowering, Thomas Martin, James A. Nelson and Benjamin Sparrow, which read:—

I am directed by the Honorable the Chief Secretary, on behalf of the Government, to convey to you their warmest thanks for the valuable assistance which you rendered in connection with the saving of certain of the crew of the *Star of Greece*, wrecked off Port Willunga on July 13, 1888. It would be difficult to speak in too high terms of your conduct on the occasion in question, and this most grateful acknowledgement will only serve to convey some slight idea of its merit<sup>8</sup>.

Eight of the survivors wrote a letter to the editor of the *SA Register*, which was published on 18 July, in which they said:—

‘We beg to tender our thanks for the treatment we have received from the people at [Port] Willunga. We can never forget the kindness shown by Mrs Bowering and the Sea View Hotel at [Port] Willunga’.

### PORT WILLUNGA – AN OVERVIEW

A roving correspondent made the following observations about the port in 1889:—

‘Port Willunga, which is [Aldinga's] port, lies a mile and a half to the west, and has a rather dilapidated jetty or pier. The place as a whole, indeed, looks decidedly as if it had seen better days, and the only fact which is particularly memorable in its recent history is the wreck of the *Star of Greece*, which occurred last year quite close to the jetty. Port Willunga, indeed, ranks among the “has been” settlements of the colony. In the earlier days of the Victorian goldfields it was one of the most

4. Originally licensed as the Lewis Arms in 1846, it became the Jervis Arms (1859-60), the Lewis Arms Inn (1860-1864) and Sea View (1884-1894). William Bowering, one of the rescuers, was licensee in 1860-63, 1879-80 and 1887. *Hotels and Publicans in South Australia*, J.L. Hoad, (1986).

5. *Report of Select Committee*, p 19, no. 605.

6. Letter from Charles Clason, *op. cit.*, 13 July 1934.

7. *Report of Select Committee*, p 40 nos. 1411-1412.

8. Information supplied by National Trust, Willunga Branch.





Chief Secretary's Office

Adelaide.

1888

Sir,

I am directed by the Honourable the Chief Secretary, on behalf of the Government, to convey to you their warmest thanks for the valuable assistance which you rendered in connection with the saving of certain of the crew of the "Star of Greece," wrecked off Port Willunga on the 15th July, 1888.

It would be difficult to speak in too high terms of your conduct on the occasion in question, and this most grateful acknowledgment will only serve to convey some slight idea of its merit.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

Mr James T. Wilson.  
Adelaide

H. G. Anderson

Under Secretary.

Commendation from Chief Secretary for assistance in the rescue of crew members of the Star of Greece.



considerable of the outports. Thence large quantities of wheat and hay and slate were shipped; a busy trade was done in the large and substantial buildings which were the pride of their owners a quarter of a century ago, and which even in their skeleton form seem to have a certain pretentiousness about them. The bustle is only a recollection now, but the time when it was otherwise is still a vivid memory in the minds of the sturdy old residents. They especially tell you of the time when Samuel White (who recently revisited the colony after many years' absence) had his wheat vessels trading regularly to the Port, and they point out to you a tall cylindrical<sup>9</sup> structure somewhat like a chimney stack, now standing lonely in the middle of a paddock between Aldinga and Willunga, which according to tradition Mr White erected partly to enable him to command a view of the Port so that he might have early notice of the approach of his vessels.<sup>10</sup>

### DESCRIPTION OF THE BAY

On 14 July 1888, both the *SA Advertiser* and the *SA Register* carried almost identical descriptions of the bay in which the wreck lay<sup>11</sup>, using, no doubt, the 'Sailing Directions for Port Willunga' issued by the harbor-master's office at Port Adelaide:—

'Port Willunga is situated in a small bay on the east shore of the Gulf of St. Vincent. It measures one and one half miles from Blanche Point to Schnapper Point, is thirty miles south half west of the lightship off Port Adelaide, and twenty-seven miles north east half east (*sic*) of Cape Jervis. This part of the coast may be recognised by a remarkable range of white cliffs lying within the limits of the bay. A reef [Aldinga Reef], composed of hard rocks, extends in a west northwest direction of the south point of the bay [Schnapper Point], running parallel with the coast to the south for nearly two miles. At the head of the bay is a jetty.'

Vessels approaching from the south were warned to 'stand in for the white cliffs, guarding most carefully against the reef, which extends from Schnapper Point, by keeping the red buoy on the starboard hand, or not hauling into the bay until the jetty bears east by north quarter north (*sic*) in a line with a small house on the high ground inland'. Vessels approaching from the north were reassured that they 'will find no difficulty in approaching the coast after having passed the reefs of Onkaparinga, seven miles north of Port Willunga. There are from three to six fathoms of water in the bay, which is sheltered from southerly winds by the reefs extending from Schnapper Point, which is the only danger near the anchorage. This holding ground is good anywhere outside the four-fathom line off the jetty, but the anchorage being exposed to all winds from the north-west round by west to south-west, at times a heavy sea rolls in, causing vessels at anchor to be uneasy, and, unless well found in ground tackle,

9. A photograph shows this structure to be square, not cylindrical.

10. *Our Inheritance in the Hills*, (1889); reprinted from *SA Register*, *Adelaide Observer* and *Evening Journal*. (Series of articles by a special correspondent).



rendering their position unsafe. It is therefore recommended on the approach of a north-west gale, which is indicated by a falling barometer, and the wind freshening from the northward with a cloudy sky, that shelter should be sought in the eastern cove, Kangaroo Island, where vessels can ride in safety.

'As showing the rough nature of the coast at Port Willunga, it may be mentioned that, some time since, the jetty there was badly damaged by the sea, a number of the piles being driven a considerable distance out of the straight line. It has, however, since been repaired. The jetty is simply a place for landing cargo, being unprovided with rails, and is 621 feet long, having nine feet depth of water at the outer end.'<sup>11</sup>

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11. *SA Advertiser*, 14 July 1888, pp 5-6; *SA Register*, 14 July 1888, pp 6-7. See pp60-75 of this book for an account of the jetties.



## CHAPTER FIVE

# Aftermath

### INQUEST AND FUNERAL

'An inquest was held at the Port Willunga [Sea View] hotel by Mr [Duncan] Stewart, JP, on Saturday [14 July] afternoon, as to the cause of the death of G.C. Blackman and others, who were drowned off the *Star of Greece*. The utmost interest was taken in the proceedings, people flocking to the hotel from all parts of the district. Mr [Francis] Hart was chosen foreman of the Jury, who inspected the bodies, which were lying in an empty house about fifty feet below the place where the inquest was held. They presented a fearful spectacle. They were terribly mangled, nine of them lying in different attitudes huddled closely together. In the corner was the skin of one of the unfortunate sailors, the head being completely scalped, nothing remaining but the shell of the body. One piece of skin was three or four feet across, having one ear and the hair of the head upon it. Portions of the legs and the face remained, and a mass of flesh completed what the sea had left after the death struggle.

'Next to this appalling spectacle was the naked body of a young sailor, which was not so badly marked; and next to this, again, was a row of mangled corpses, some with their heads in one direction and others in a reverse position. Here was a mangled foot, and next to it a battered skull; there a piece of raw flesh, and in juxtaposition to it was a shattered limb. The room was so small that when you once entered the door you dared not move for fear of treading on an injured foot, a bruised head, or a piece of something resembling human flesh. The room was dark, and the floor was strewn with bodies, most of which have up to the present baffled identification. Altogether the scene was horribly appalling and one from which the jurors gladly turned away.

'The jury were half an hour considering their verdict, which was put in as follows:—

"We the undersigned having heard the evidence in respect of the death of [W.] R. Waugh, second officer, and eight (*sic*) other seamen of the *Star of Greece*, are unanimous in the opinion that the men now lying in the deadhouse and viewed by us came to their death by attempting to get ashore from the wreck of the vessel at Port Willunga. We also certainly think that the Marine Board should provide a rocket apparatus for this port, as we feel confident that if one had been here the majority would have been saved."

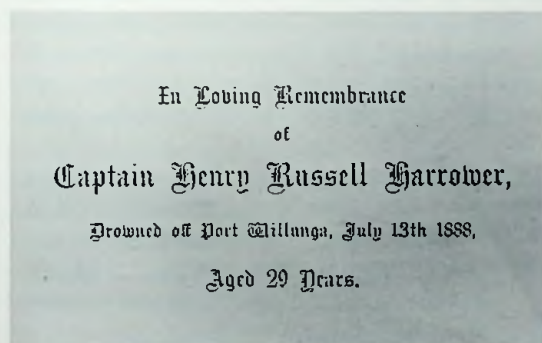




*Seaview Hotel, Port Willunga, where survivors were cared for, and the inquest was held*

'As soon as the jury brought in their verdict a trap arrived from Willunga with eight plain coffins with varnished sides. The eight bodies were placed in different coffins, the skin, scalp, and hand of the second mate being deposited on top of one of the bodies. The funeral took place on Sunday afternoon, the bodies being interred in one large grave in the Wesleyan cemetery [Aldinga]. All the survivors attended, and people from all parts of the district were present, as well as many from the city. The cortege left Port Willunga at four o'clock. The coffins were placed in two waggons, and the survivors walked after the remains of their comrades. After them came twenty-five vehicles and a number of horsemen.'

On Wednesday afternoon, 18 July, the remains of Captain Harrower were buried in the Aldinga Cemetery alongside those of his crew, the service being conducted by Rev E.K. Miller, of the Anglican church,



*Memorial Card  
Captain H. R. Harrower  
Star of Greece*

1. SA Register, 16 July 1888.



Willunga. It was pointed out that M/C Tuohy deserved great credit for his courage, as he encountered many hazards in bringing the body up the cliffs<sup>2</sup>.

On 20 November 1888 the late captain's mother expressed her heartfelt thanks to M/C Tuohy:—

'I hope you will accept a small tribute of respect and admiration for the brave and gallant manner in which you rescued the body of my beloved son and gave to me, his sorrowing mother, the comforting thought, in the midst of so much agony, that it is resting in a lonely, though not intended, grave.' (See Appendix III).



Port Adelaide, circa 1880

Gillingham

### MEETING OF INDIGNATION AT PORT ADELAIDE

A mass meeting of over 1000 citizens gathered in the Town Hall on Saturday evening, 21 July, where indignation was expressed at the apathy shown by the Premier and the Marine Board in not sending at once a steamer to the wreck. The mayor, John Cleave<sup>3</sup>, in the chair, was received with loud cheers, and in introducing the first speaker, Henry W. Thompson, said it should not be a question of money when there were valuable lives clinging to the 'sticks of a wrecked vessel ready to be dashed into a watery grave'.

On rising, Thompson said he intended to move 'that this meeting expresses its indignation at the government neglecting to attempt till too late to rescue by sea the crew of the *Star of Greece*, when means for doing so were at their disposal'. He went on to say that while a steamer might not have been able to rescue them, it could have been the means to encourage them to hang on to the wreck until daylight next morning, instead they

2. *Ibid*, 20 July 1888. The body came ashore clothed in all but a coat and was identified by the name on the shirt. (*ibid*, 18 July 1888).

3. *Ibid*, 23 July 1888.



threw their lives away; and why did they do this? – ‘because they felt that the government allowed them to die like rats in a cask’.

The second speaker, Mr McGillivray, JP, echoed the sentiments expressed by Henry Thompson and suggested that if the Emperor of Germany had been aboard the stricken vessel rescue action would, no doubt, have been initiated much earlier in the day. ‘If the Marine Board had not the power to act in such a case the sooner they were did away with the better’.

Alfred E. Sawtell told the meeting that it was not generally known that ‘on the charts there were places where life-saving apparatus was lying when such was not the case’.

George Willimott, the Secretary/Manager of the Tug Company, was most scathing in his condemnation of the authorities, and ‘in supporting the proposition, said that no one regretted more than he the circumstances connected with the wreck, and as his name as secretary of the Tug Company had been mentioned, he thought it advisable to make a few remarks. The first he heard of the disaster was a few minutes before ten o’clock. He informed the harbor-master that he had a boat ready at any moment. It had been asked why did not the Tug Company send a boat at once. This was not the first, second, or third occasion on which he had sent away a boat on his own responsibility. He was not putting this forward as any excuse for the loss of life and possibly had he known the seriousness of the situation he might have again sent a boat on his own responsibility. About twelve months ago the Marine Board brought him a telegram stating that a vessel was in distress off Troubridge. The Board did not feel inclined to send a boat, but he sent one. The vessel, however, was out of danger before the boat got to Troubridge and the captain said “Who sent you? We don’t want you”. That was an instance of how the Tug Company were (*sic*) sometimes treated, and he could give others.

‘On Thursday, at ten o’clock, he went to the city on business, but he had arranged for a boat to start at any minute. Returning from the city he heard that Messrs Cave and Co’s launch *Defiance* had been chartered in preference to the *Yatala*. Afterwards he was asked by the Marine Board if he had a boat ready. They inquired the price, and in less than ten minutes of receiving notice that a boat was wanted the boat was ready. The Tug Company had, perhaps, more suitable boats than any other company for this purpose, but it would have been useless for him to have sent away a boat unless the government or the Marine Board assisted him with rocket apparatus or a lifeboat, which they did not seem to possess.

‘At a place like Port Adelaide it was a disgrace that rocket apparatus and lifeboats were not kept. What was the use of sending the harbor-master [Captain Inglis] overland to [Port] Willunga without appliances? It was a disgrace to the colony to find that an accident like this happened at two o’clock in the morning and the first intimation Port Adelaide



received was at half-past nine. Any boat capable of doing the work should have been despatched at ten o'clock at the latest. He did not think that they could blame the Tug Company when the company had a boat ready that could have been despatched at half an hour's notice, and with proper appliances a number of the men at any rate could have been saved. There was something very much wrong. Would it not have been better to send a rocket apparatus away from here than to send to Normanville, where they had to take the horses off the plough to get the rocket apparatus down? The same thing that occurred now happened twelve months ago at the time the *Guldax* was wrecked on the same coast. The cheese-paring policy of the government was such that the nearest telegraph operator lived four miles from the station, and they actually had to send two operators from the city to work the telegraph. There were appliances in Port Adelaide, but there should be a proper lifeboat. He remembered the time when a lifeboat was kept at the Semaphore. He hoped that the circumstance connected with the present wreck would be a lesson not only to the public but to the government that this state of things should be remedied.'

Captain Bickers rose and told the meeting - 'Captain de Steiger' offered a fine lifeboat, and with half a dozen good men to man her, lives would have been saved. The tug could have let the boat go astern and get near the wreck and haul the poor clinging fellows aboard. Even if the tug was unable to render assistance the very sight of her would have put heart and energy into those clinging to the wreck.'

William Mattinson, MP, informed the meeting that, in parliament, he intended calling the Premier to account 'for what I call moral manslaughter'. His associate, George F. Hopkins, MP, went a little further and called it 'judicial murder' and added it was shameful that no serviceable lifeboat was stationed along the coast from Port Adelaide to Port Victor.

At the conclusion of the meeting it was suggested that an 'Appeal Fund' be launched and, accordingly, £9-9-0 was donated at the door<sup>5</sup>.

### WHO WAS TO BLAME?

The special reporter of the *SA Register* had a tilt at the Marine Board and the government when, on Monday, 23 July 1888, he said:—

'It was supposed that with the array of nautical talent employed by the Marine Board, the saving, effected by the conversion of the presidency at a large salary into a chairmanship at a small one, would be unattended by any material alteration in the conduct of the business. But this appears to be incorrect in one important particular. In the days of the presidents, the head of the department in cases of shipwreck acted on his own responsibil-

4. Captain de Steiger, of the *Oaklands*, offered his ship's lifeboat, properly fitted out, while in the Marine Board Office at 11 am, when the issue of whether or not a steamer should be sent was being hotly debated, with the idea that the lifeboat would be loaded aboard a steamer and used for rescue work (by the steamer putting out a line and slackening the lifeboat down to the wreck). In the event, the lifeboat and crew from the *Protector* were sent on the *Yatala*, too late to be of any assistance. See *Report of Select Committee*, report from the chairman and secretary of the Marine Board, unpaginated; *ibid*, p24, no. 820; *ibid*, p38, nos. 1318-1358.

5. *SA Register*, 16 July 1888.



ity, but now I am told the power of the chairman is limited to a recommendation. [See comment on p51 for government action on 1 July 1889].

'It came as a surprise to me to learn that the wardens had not been consulted on the matter of the wreck. There was no need for the secretary or the chairman of the board to delay taking what action seemed to be urgently required in the case in order to consult the board, but it did seem passing strange that a messenger was not sent to acquaint the nautical and other wardens on the spot that their presence was immediately required, and that those who responded should have been told of what had been done and asked to say what more it would be advisable to do.

'Had the Marine Board been called together immediately there is scarcely room to doubt that a steamer would have been sent forthwith, and though it might not have been able to take off the *Star of Greece* sailors, it might have fired a rocket apparatus across the vessel to the shore. Certainly it would have given the poor wretches on board heart to have remained till the next day had dawned on a calmer sea and a boat at hand.

'One lesson of the disaster of Friday is the necessity for a rocket apparatus in good repair being placed where it can command, within a comparatively brief time, the longest possible range of coastline. An apparatus should be certainly kept at Port Adelaide, where it could be taken by the many excellent roads branching from the city to a great number of points on the eastern coast of St Vincent's Gulf.

'If a rocket apparatus had been found in Adelaide when the news of the disaster reached here it would have been on the scene by one o'clock and saved several lives, for the wreck was lying in an excellent position for rocket purposes.

'The Marine Board, who have about 2 400 miles of coastline under jurisdiction, contend that it is impossible to entirely command it with lifesaving service. Only at important places can a rocket apparatus or lifeboat be provided. Formerly Port Willunga was a station so provided, but that was in the days when it was frequented by shipping. Since then it has dropped out as an outport of consequence, and for several years, I understand, the rocket apparatus and the lifeboat have not been kept up there. All changes of this kind are notified to the Admiralty for the purpose of corrections in charts, but the Admiralty alone are responsible for the charts. A lifeboat used to be kept at the Semaphore, but it remained there unemployed so long that it lost its value as a lifeboat, was sold and not replaced. The lifeboat in the dockyard is the one brought from the South-East which capsized during a practice some time ago, with the loss of two lives. There is no doubt, however, that the whole question of the light and coast service as connected with the Marine Board is deserving of special enquiry at this time, and that it is needful to do so in order to reassure the public mind'.



### ARRIVAL OF SURVIVORS AT PORT ADELAIDE

The survivors, except the first mate, arrived at Port Adelaide by Hill & Co coaches at 11.30 am on Monday, 16 July and as they passed on their way to the Sailors' Home they were loudly cheered by the assembled crowd.

They were formally welcomed by the Mayor (John Cleave), Inspector Doyle and Emanuel Hounslow (the Seamen's Missionary). To the survivors the Mayor said:—

'I can only say that the public of South Australia, to a man, will try and atone for the very great neglect we have shown on your part... Provision has been made for your bodily comfort and I will see that you are well clothed... I have given instructions to Messrs Hounslow and Hills to go to the drapers' shops and get whatever you require'.<sup>6</sup>

### THE MARINE BOARD ENQUIRY

During the Downer administration, in 1885, a reduction of some £4000 was made in the annual costs of the Marine Board at the expense of the efficiency of the service. Lightkeepers were reduced in number, steamers laid up, and trained boat crews dispensed with. How far the policy led to alleged mismanagement is impossible to say, but there is no doubt that, at the time of the wreck, the rocket apparatus at Port Adelaide was in a state of disrepair and the board's lifeboat was not fit to be launched into a rough sea.

The government's parsimony permitted the Marine Board to be shorn of its head and to this circumstance is attributed no little of the blunders of 13 July 1888. When Captain Ferguson, the President of the Marine Board died, late in 1886, the government did not appoint a successor, but gave the board a chairman, John Formby, and as such he was not the head of the department in the sense of attachment to the Civil Service; the secretary was in effect the 'working head' and this division of authority and absence of fixed responsibility led to inefficiency and dissent among board members. 'I am told the power of the chairman is limited to a recommendation; those who understand the routine of government offices know that in this seemingly trifling alteration may be traced the history of pregnant red-tapeism.'<sup>7</sup>

At an acrimonious meeting of the board, on 19 July, the chairman said that a great deal had been written about the board in connection with the wreck and he thought it would be most injudicious and improper to bring it before the board at the present time. Captain Legoe and Andrew S. Neill were both incensed that the board had not been called together because on former occasions of emergency several members had been consulted. To this the chairman responded that it would be very bad taste to press the question and unfair to officers of the board.

6. *Ibid.*, 17 July 1888.

7. *Ibid.*; see *Report of Select Committee*, p63, no. 2218, where the chief secretary designates the secretary as the 'Executive Officer', and no. 2220 where he contradicts himself and nominates the chairman as the 'responsible man'. See also comment on p51 of this book for government action on 1 July 1889.



Mr Lindsay said that in the time of the late president he, together with the secretary and treasurer, would have decided on a course of action, without calling the board together at all.

Andrew Neill reminded the board that when the *Guldax* was wrecked he had asked the question whether it would be understood that the board could incur expenses on their own responsibility. He was distinctly told that they could. 'The affair had nothing to do with the retrenchment policy of the government.'

After lengthy discussion as to the desirability of instituting either an internal enquiry or referring the matter to a Court of Marine Enquiry, Captain Legoe moved 'That the Board hold a preliminary enquiry at 10.30 am tomorrow morning into the loss of the *Star of Greece*'.<sup>8</sup>

After a long hearing where evidence was taken from the pilot, Alexander F. Boord, and six survivors (Hazeland, Claeson, Johns(t)on(e), Prior, Bruce and Cummisford) the Board announced its verdict:—

'That the board having carefully enquired into the circumstances attending the loss of the ship *Star of Greece* find as follows:—

"A manifest want of skill was shown in the management of the vessel from the time of starting from the anchorage, and the time required to approach Backstairs Passage by daylight was miscalculated. Laying the ship to from nine pm until two am on a lee shore with the main topsail aback and a strong gale blowing was fatal, and caused the loss. The deep-sea lead should have been used, more especially as the ship was drifting. The master having lost his life and no blame being preferred against the mate, the board do not propose to refer the case to a Court of Marine Enquiry. There is nothing whatever to warrant the report that there was any drunkenness on board."

The captain, at this time, was lying in the mass grave at Aldinga cemetery and, of course, unable to defend his actions but in his defence the evidence of the first mate at the hearing bears repetition:— The captain 'told the second mate to keep a sharp lookout for land, to steer south-west, keep the lead going every quarter of an hour, and call him at the first sign of anything'.

## THE RELIEF FUND

The appeal was initially proposed by the *Register* on 14 July 1888<sup>9</sup>, while on 16 July a meeting was held at the Sailors' Home at Port Adelaide under the auspices of the mayor, when it was decided to arrange for the formation of a committee to superintend the disbursement of the fund; those appointed were:— John Cleave (Mayor), Captain Bickers, Messrs Mattinson, Hopkins, McGillivray, Hounslow, Wilks, Legoe, Sawtell, R.K. Thomas, J. Darling jnr, B.H. Laker, C. Hains, Willimott, and all the clergymen at the Port<sup>10</sup>.

8. *SA Register*, 20 July 1888.

9. *Ibid.*, 16 July 1888.

10. *Ibid.*



At the second meeting Captain Bickers said he considered the wreck to be a national calamity and disgrace; at this time the fund stood at 'about £200' and by 20 July it had reached £521-15-0, and finally £812-2-5<sup>11</sup>. Sustenance allowances were made to the survivors while dependants of those lost were paid amounts ranging up to £100<sup>12</sup>.

At a final meeting held on 18 December 1888 a letter was received from Walter J. Kimber, of Aldinga, saying that a committee had been appointed in the town to raise funds for defraying the cost of procuring and erecting a headstone over the grave and asked whether there was a fund set apart at Port Adelaide for that purpose; to this letter the secretary replied in the negative.

Thus, the fund was virtually wound up and this meeting concluded with votes of thanks to the *Register* and the secretary, chairman and treasurer of the committee<sup>13</sup>. A residual sum of some £40-£45 was eventually distributed among the survivors<sup>14</sup>.

### SALE OF THE WRECK

At an auction, on Monday, 16 July 1888, Elder Smith & Co. sold the hull of the ship, including all stores, mast, spars, chains, anchors, boats, etc. and the cargo 'shipped as 16002 bags of wheat. The vessel, with all belongings, was sold to Mr W. Russell of Port Adelaide for £105. He also purchased the stores for £5; the cargo was knocked down to W. J. Tonkin for £21. The commission on the sale will be given to the Relief Fund.'<sup>15</sup>

### THE PARLIAMENTARY ENQUIRY

The circumstances of the wreck were exhaustively discussed in both houses of parliament on 17 July 1888 and the general tenor of the debate was that it would not be fair to judge anybody until a full enquiry had elicited the facts. On 19 July the Attorney-General, Charles C. Kingston, moved for the appointment of a Select Committee to enquire and report on all matters connected with the failure to rescue certain of the shipwrecked crew<sup>16</sup>. The motion was agreed to and the following committee appointed:— Messrs Bews (subsequently elected as chairman), Cockburn, Dashwood, Holder, Mattinson, Horn and Kingston.

Proceedings commenced on 20 July and, after eleven meetings, concluded on 14 August. Much of the pertinent evidence has been introduced in chapters 1 to 4 but two possible methods of rescue, not considered by the Marine Board, but forcibly put to the Select Committee, deserve a mention here:—

#### Use of a Mortar

At about 10.15 am, on 13 July, Henry W. Thompson, ship chandler, Port Adelaide, sent a message to the Marine Board offering the services of a mortar – 'It was a new one that came out of a tug boat, when a few years

11. *Ibid*, 25 July 1888; 19 December 1888.

12. *Ibid*, 4 August 1888, p7 c; 19 December 1888, p6 c.

13. *Ibid*, 19 December 1888, p6 c.

14. *Ibid*, 21 December 1889, p21 c.

15. *Ibid*, 17 July 1888.

16. *Ibid*, 23 July 1888.





Old Legislative Council Building, Adelaide

Gillingham

ago mortars were superseded by the rocket apparatus. ...It could be effective when a line was wanted to be carried to windward... The answer I received was that it was not required.' Both Captains Legoe and Osborne were critical that the chairman of the Marine Board had refused the offer; the latter contended that, from his experience, mortars were equally as effective as rocket apparatus<sup>17</sup>.

### Use of Kites

The commander of HMCS *Protector*, John Walcot, in his evidence introduced the novel and unusual method of getting a line aboard a stranded ship. A kite could be constructed of bamboo or broomsticks and canvas with two lines attached 'and with the second line it can be brought down to earth'. Captain Amora, of the *Defiance*, said that he had had experience with kites - 'it is by no means an uncommon practice to use them. In America they have contests . . . and it requires a great deal of dexterity to get it into the proper position to be effective . . .'<sup>18</sup>

### Report of Select Committee

The findings of the Select Committee would not have been palatable reading for the Marine Board and, in particular, the chairman, John Formby:—

1. 'The evidence proves — That there was not a complete rocket apparatus at Port Adelaide: that the government lifeboat had been lying in the dockyard since August 19 1883, and was unfit for use: that there is nothing to show why the boat was removed from the Semaphore, and the members of the board examined differ in their explanations (it may be mentioned that even at the time of the inquiry the secretary was unable to give complete information as to the condition of the boats at Port

17. *Report of Select Committee*; see nos. 46, 427, 847, 995, 1035 ('[the mortar] could have been got down by two o'clock . . .'), 1098, 1417 ('a steamer could have laid a hawser to the shore [with a mortar]'), 1440, 1444 1477-1516.

18. *Ibid.*, nos. 1558-1564 and 1916.



Adelaide, and he had to supply information subsequently, which appears as an appendix, and is entirely at variance with the particulars given in the last report of the Marine Board under this head): that neither the chairman nor secretary can say why the rocket apparatus was removed from Port Willunga in 1883, the minutes giving the bare fact that it had been resolved to remove it.

'(In answer to question 831, Captain Legoe states that the board were (*sic*) under the impression that the lifeboat and other things were ready for use, although he acknowledges that when the annual inspection of lifeboat stations last took place, no inspection was made of any of the appliances at Port Adelaide. The committee are (*sic*) of the opinion that this circumstance, coupled with the fact that nothing was done in the matter of providing a regular crew, goes to prove that Captain Hay, superintendent of the dockyard (question 1160), was correct when he said that he 'looked upon it (the lifeboat) as being there in stock, and not required.')

2. 'The evidence further shows that the Secretary of the Marine Board received notice of the wreck at 9.40 am on the 13th July: that he telegraphed to Normanville for the rocket apparatus, and, at the same time, dispatched Captain Inglis, the harbor-master, to Port Willunga to superintend its working on arrival, and to advise generally: that this was practically all that was done by the board until between two and three o'clock in the afternoon, when, in answer to a request from Mr Martin for a lifeboat, it was decided to consult the treasurer as to the advisability of sending the steamer *Yatala*: that at 10.40 am the chief secretary telephoned the Secretary of the Marine Board and suggested the despatch of the Governor Musgrave, and, when he was informed that she had gone to Port Augusta, Mr [J.G.] Ramsay asked if no other steamer was available: that Mr Stephens' reply was "Yes; but it would be useless; she could do no good; they could not get near the wreck" (Mr Stephens states that he had in his mind the government steamers): that, on returning to the office, the chairman (Mr Formby) had arrived, and on being informed by the secretary of what had been done, replied "That he (the secretary) had done the proper thing, and that he (the chairman) did not see that anything more could be done": that so satisfied was the chairman on this point that he refused the use of a mortar offered by Mr Thompson at 11.30.<sup>19</sup>

'That early in the day Captain Legoe came upon the scene, and suggested that a steamer should be sent down: that these two wardens at intervals, up to two o'clock in the afternoon, argued this point: but Captain Legoe does not appear to have been so decided in making the proposal as the chairman was in opposing it: that Captain Inglis arrived at the wreck a little before two pm, but did not send any report to the Marine Board before five o'clock, and his presence at the wreck does not appear to have been attended with any beneficial results.

19. The time is in conflict with Henry Thompson's evidence to the Select Committee, p42, no. 1479, where he says 'shortly after ten o'clock'.



3. 'Although there is some difference of opinion on the subject, the preponderance of evidence shows that, had a steamer been there early with a lifeboat, those on board might have been rescued, either by dropping the boat within reach of the forepart of the wreck, or by establishing communication between the wreck and the land by floating a line on shore or to the wreck, and failing success in this respect, the presence of a steamer, or some other proof of practical assistance being provided, would have encouraged a number of those who were drowned in an attempt to reach the shore, to remain on the wreck; and the committee are (*sic*) of the opinion that one of the first duties of the Marine Board was to have sent a steamer. The evidence of Captain John, of the *Yatala*, however, renders it doubtful if his vessel could have arrived with a lifeboat at the scene of the wreck before five o'clock. [Strangely, the committee makes no mention of HMCS *Protector*, which had a lifeboat and twin screws and could steam faster than the *Yatala* - see Captain Quin's comment on p29].

4. 'After considering the foregoing facts, your committee are (*sic*) of the opinion that the secretary of the Marine Board, after telegraphing to Normanville, should have taken steps to consult the chairman or other members of the board; but that on the arrival of the chairman, the secretary's responsibility practically ceased, and devolved upon the chairman. They are further of opinion that the chairman's knowledge of the position of the rocket apparatus at Normanville should have enabled him to anticipate to some extent the delay attending its removal; and that, in depending entirely upon the rocket apparatus at Normanville as a means of providing relief to those on board the *Star of Greece*, he was at fault.

'It is, however, only fair to point out that the chairman evidently thought that the rocket apparatus would have reached the scene of the wreck much earlier than it actually did. The evidence generally proves that the Marine Board have been negligent in the discharge of their duties regarding the maintenance of life-saving appliances, especially at Port Adelaide. The Committee are (*sic*) of the opinion that, had a rocket apparatus been available at Port Adelaide for immediate dispatch to Port Willunga, at least eleven [more?] lives could have been saved. [For an inexplicable reason the committee, at this point, makes no mention of the possible efficacy of Henry Thompson's mortar which, according to other presented evidence, was as equally effective as rockets.]

5. 'After carefully considering the evidence of witnesses as to the promptitude observed in dispatching the rocket apparatus from Normanville, the committee are (*sic*) of the opinion that the harbor-master, Mr [Frederick] Gaskell, did all that, under the circumstances, seemed to him to be necessary; but that he failed to fully realize the extreme urgency of the case.



6. 'Your committee feel (*sic*), and it is their duty to direct attention to, the valuable assistance rendered by Mr [Thomas] Martin and other residents, some at the risk of their own lives.

7. 'Some reflections have been cast upon the crew and the chief officer for not remaining longer on the wreck. Your committee think it only fair to say that nautical witnesses were not satisfied that, in the face of the sea breaking into the vessel, the danger of the remaining masts and yards coming down at any moment, and no sign of help arriving, they would have remained any longer on the vessel than did the members of the crew. And as regards the chief officer, instead of his conduct being unmanly it was the reverse. Up to the time of his going off all attempts to land had failed<sup>20</sup>, and, at question 1881, Claeson states that the mate's conduct cheered them up, and led to his (Claeson's) attempting to save himself.

8. 'Your committee feel that, although the resolution of the House does not embrace recommendations for the future, it would not be out of place to mention the reforms that have occurred to them as being necessary. They are as follows:—

1. The maintaining of a properly-found lifeboat and rocket apparatus at Port Adelaide.
2. The placing of all life-saving appliances throughout the colony under one head, in whom the responsibility of acting in cases of marine disaster shall rest.
3. Facilitating the dispatch of messages from coast telegraphs at any hour of the day or night.

DAVID BEWS, Chairman.'

In retrospect, it is so easy to be wise, but two questions remain unanswered. Why didn't the captain order the ship to go about and stand out to sea when the storm hit on the evening of 12 July? Would either the steamer *Yatala* or HMCS *Protector* have effected rescues had they left port before midday on 13 July 1888 with mortar, lines and lifeboat? They will never be answered; the only statement that can be made with any certainty today is that the waves still roll in at Port Willunga beating over and against the encrusted remnants of the ill-fated *Star of Greece*.

Perhaps it would be appropriate to leave the last word on the tragedy to one of the survivors, Charles Clason, (Carl Claeson):—

'We should have gone about ship and stood on the other tack, long before the catastrophe . . . but I have noticed all my life that none of us are very careful; we just plunge heedless (*sic*) with disaster ahead. People and nations should study and calculate well; it is better to change course, turn about ship and avoid the rocks.'<sup>21</sup>

20. This statement is incorrect. James Revell was safely ashore by nine am. See Thomas Lovelock's statement on p12.

21. Charles Clason's letter, *op. cit.*



## COMMENT

Of interest is the fact that in November 1888 the superintendence and direction of lifeboats and other life-saving apparatus was delegated to the naval commandant.<sup>22</sup> Further, the office of president of the Marine Board was revived as from 1 July 1889 when F. J. Sanderson, SM, was appointed to the position.<sup>23</sup>

## LIFE-SAVING APPARATUS.

The Treasury, Adelaide, November 1st, 1888.

NOTICE is hereby given that the life-saving apparatus in the colony has been placed under the charge of Captain Walcot, R.N., Naval Commandant, who is empowered, in the case of a marine disaster, to order the service of any Government official or vessel that can render assistance, and all persons in the employ of the Government are required to obey such order.

The signal for calling out the lifeboat's crew and rocket apparatus at Port Adelaide will be as follows:—Three guns fired, at a minute's interval between each, by H.M.C.S. *Protector*, or, in her absence, by Fort Glenville.

T. PLAYFORD, Treasurer.

*Extract SA Government Gazette 1 November 1888*

22. *Cyclopedia of South Australia*, Vol. 1, 1907, p400.

23. *Ibid*; see also Vol. 2, p846, col. 2, which says, 'shortly after [the wreck] . . . a rocket crew was formed at Aldinga.'



# Epilogue

Following the disaster, residents of the Aldinga and Willunga districts took 'practical measures to preserve the memory of the brave men who perished in the struggle to reach the shore from the shattered ship.' A committee was formed of Francis Hart (chairman of the District Council of Aldinga) president, Mr Wellaman (manager, Bank of Adelaide, Aldinga) treasurer and Walter Kimber, of Port Willunga, secretary. By means of personal canvass and entertainments nearly £40 were raised and a neat granite obelisk with a substantial base and pedestal was placed over the mass grave.<sup>1</sup>



*National Trust*

*Old Court House, Police Station and Stables, High Street, Willunga. M/C Tuohy was Officer-in-Charge 1882-1898*

## COMMENT

At one time another memorial to the ill-fated ship existed at Port Willunga in the form of a spar and a marble plaque which read: 'The *Star of Greece* was wrecked in 1888 and the captain and ten of the crew were drowned'. The spar and damaged plaque were later removed after a vehicle collided with the memorial. They are now housed in the police station and courthouse, Willunga, from which M/C Tuohy answered the call to help the shipwrecked mariners.

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1. *Observer*, 10 August 1889. The closing sentence of this report reads - 'Port Willunga is still left unprotected with lifesaving appliances . . .'





*Headstone, Aldinga Uniting Church Cemetery. Grave of eleven sailors who died on 13 July 1888*



*A. Hale*



# The Wreck Today

*Contributed by Alan Hale<sup>1</sup>*

One hundred years have now passed since that fateful day – 'Black Friday, 13 July 1888'. No longer is Port Willunga a sleepy hamlet with scattered stone cottages dotted through the creek area and along the cliff face. No longer do the horses and carts rumble along the dusty roads to Aldinga and Willunga. The jetty that once played an important role in the day-to-day lives of the residents has since been washed away, with its remnants scattered over the seabed including the crane that stood majestically at the end of the jetty ever ready to load local slate from Willunga on to the waiting ships. All that now remains are a few stumps and timbers pointing out to sea.

The remains of the once beautifully decorated three-masted *Star of Greece* lie to the north of the jetty in approximately five metres of water. As one descends beneath the waves, the entire length of the ship lies on the ocean floor broken into three sections – the bow, the mid-section and the stern.

At some times of the year it is possible to swim among the tangled web of girders that once held together this proud ship. At other times, sand covers the entire wreck to a depth of one and one half metres and obscures it from view so that all that is visible are the stern post, masts and portion of the bow protruding from the sand toward the surface. The wreck itself appears to be fused to the seabed and will doubtless change very little over the decades to come. At low tide two pieces of the wreck are clearly visible from the shore, these being part of the bow section and a portion of the foremast, both constant reminders of the horrifying tragedy that occurred on that 'Friday the thirteenth'.

Over the years numerous relics have been recovered from the wreck. Unfortunately many of these have gone into private collections without due regard to their preservation or restoration and, consequently, within a very short period of time the article deteriorates to such an extent that it is rendered useless. On the other hand, some relics, including a port hole, belaying pin, decorated stern-post nut cover and others, have been recovered by responsibly-minded divers and have been donated to the National Trust so that they can be seen and appreciated by the majority and, most importantly, can be restored and the relevant preservation techniques applied to ensure that further deterioration does not take place.

Over a period of many years thousands of scuba divers have visited the

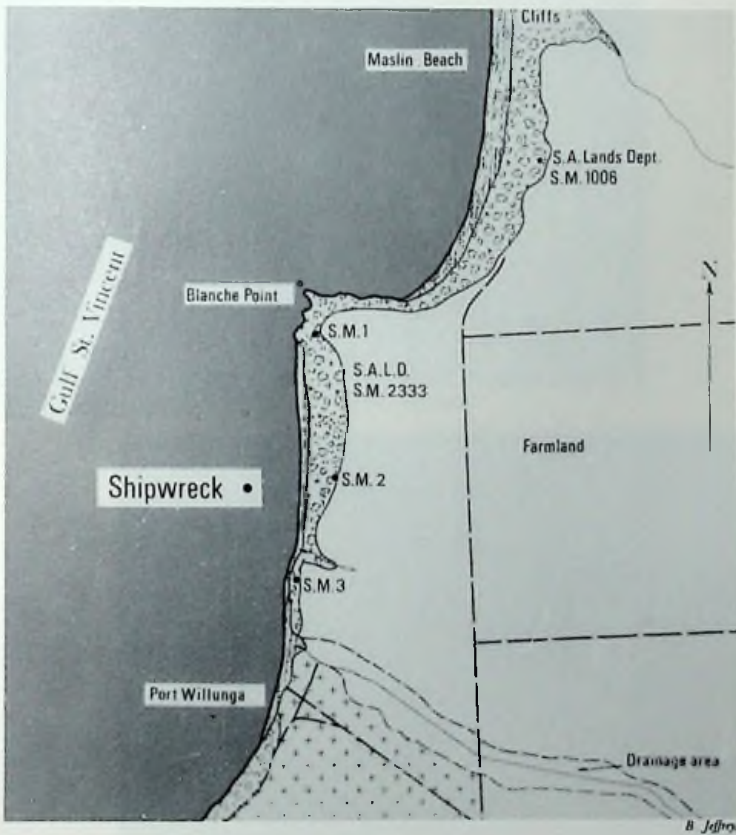
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1. Alan Hale lives at Aldinga Beach. He is chairman of the Scuba Divers' Federation of South Australia and is a founding member of the Nautical Archaeological Association of South Australia (NAASA). He has been diving for twenty years and has participated in two major underwater archaeological surveys – the *Loch Vennachar* expedition to Kangaroo Island in 1977, and the *Buffalo* expedition to New Zealand in 1986.



wreck site but it was not until 1977 that any form of survey was considered. The Society for Underwater Historical Research (SUHR), which is a group of divers and non-divers concerned with the protection and recording of our maritime history, decided in the latter part of 1977 to conduct a survey of the *Star of Greece*, with the following aims:—

- (a) To produce a general photographic view of the wreck.
- (b) To produce a scale drawing of the wreck site by measurement (triangulation) and observation.
- (c) To locate and identify significant parts of the wreck and plot their positions accurately.
- (d) To accurately plot the position of the wreck in relation to known points on land.
- (e) To gain experience and expertise which can be employed on other important historical sites.



*Location of Star of Greece shipwreck*





*Fish swimming near the wreck*

A. Hale



*Dead-eyes on the port side of the wreck*

A. Hale



*Inspecting the mast lying on the ocean bed*

A. Hale





*Uncovering the rigging block*

*A. Hale*



*The mast lying on  
the ocean bed*

*A. Hale*



*The rigging block*

*A. Hale*



The survey commenced in January 1978 and, because of the large area covered by the wreck, was confined to the stern section only. The survey continued for approximately six months, being conducted on weekends, weather permitting. When one bears in mind that, at that time, the science of underwater archaeology in South Australia was in its infancy a great amount of information relating both to techniques and recording was obtained from this survey and used on subsequent projects.

It was not until 1982 that the site of the *Star of Greece* was declared to be of historical significance and protected under the *Historic Shipwrecks Act, 1981*. This, in essence, means that the site cannot be interfered with and no items can be removed from the wreckage; severe penalties can be imposed on any persons contravening this Act.<sup>2</sup>

As mentioned before, most of the houses that stood at Port Willunga at the time of the wreck have long since gone, but there are still constant reminders of that tragic occurrence, namely:—

The large gun that was part of the cargo unloaded at Port Adelaide is now at the entrance to the Warradale Army Barracks where it stands as a silent sentinel;



*Twenty-two ton gun, shipped to Port Adelaide on the Star of Greece, for a proposed fort at Glenelg which was never built; now at the Warradale Army Barracks.*

The *Star of Greece* Road at Port Willunga is named after the wrecked ship;

The Sea View Hotel where the inquest was held is now a delightful private residence;

The Aldinga Post Office, in the main street of the town, was formerly the Telegraph Office from which the all-important message could not be dispatched until nine am;

The empty house where the bodies and portions of bodies were laid out, whilst not positively confirmed, is in all probability the small cottage north of *Star of Greece* Road, just below the house that was once the Sea View Hotel. One cannot help but think that if ever there was a place where the souls of the dead should roam then this should surely be that place.

2. In February 1988 it was announced that the *Star of Greece* wreck was one of four wrecks to be included in an Underwater Maritime Heritage Trail (The *Advertiser*, 29 February 1988).



# A History of the Jetties of Port Willunga



# Introduction

The pioneers of District C, Hundred of Willunga, among whom were Messrs Colton, Hewett, Hill and Atkinson, arrived at Holdfast Bay, late in 1839.

Setting forth from Adelaide, with laden bullock waggons, they followed the cuts and marks on trees, which had been blazed by surveying parties. Dust, stirred up by the revolving wheels, continually rose and enveloped them, while clouds of troublesome flies added to the discomfort of the three day trek.<sup>1</sup>

Upon their arrival rude shanties and tents were erected and the laborious work of land clearing and the growing of crops commenced. The soil proved fertile and, with a steady influx of settlers, by 1843, grain and farm produce were being laboriously hauled to the Adelaide market.



*Wheat carting in colonial days*

*Collingwood*

During the latter part of 1850 farmers, ever watchful to the financial overheads of their trade, deduced that, if a jetty was erected on the adjacent sea coast and sea transport made available, they could save up to seven pence per bushel.<sup>2</sup>

Thus commenced eighteen years of wrangling with the government in connection with the two jetties, which were eventually erected in Aldinga Bay. The story of their erection, accompanied by government procrastination, bungling and deception, follows.

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1. Aldam Family papers - Mortlock Library.

2. *Register*, 21 December 1850.



## CHAPTER ONE

# The Port Willunga Wharf Company

Following the 1849 harvest three vessels were loaded with grain at Port Willunga; bags of wheat were carted, in drays, out to small boats, in shallow water, which then conveyed the grain further out to sea to awaiting ketches. This proved laborious and time consuming, sea spray often being driven into the small boats, penetrating the bags and spoiling the cargo.<sup>1</sup>

By September 1850 the township of Port Willunga had been laid out on a section owned by Thomas Martin, Sr, and Messrs Stan(d)ford and Burley had erected a large grain store.<sup>2</sup>



*Charles Thomas Hewett*

*Gillingham*

During the first few months of 1850 a committee, appointed by the settlers, under the chairmanship of Charles T. Hewett, carefully examined the seaboard adjacent to White's Gully, at Aldinga Bay. They measured the distance from high water outward until they had attained a depth sufficient to accommodate a vessel of large tonnage and to allow convenient loading.

Late in September 1850, at a meeting held at the Bush Inn, Willunga, it was decided to form 'The Port Willunga Wharf Company', and it was proposed that the shareholders:—

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1. Colonial Secretary's Office (C.S.O.) 2151/1850.

2. *Ibid.*



Build as much wharf accommodation as we can obtain funds for this year and subsequently to extend the work both ways – inwards until we arrive at high water mark and outwards until a vessel of large tonnage can load or discharge alongside the wharf.<sup>3</sup>

The prospectus of the company stated, *inter alia*:—

1. That the sum of £1,000 be raised in shares of £2/10/- each, with power to increase to £4,000.
2. That application be made to the governor for a grant of land and for an Act in Council to enable directors to levy tolls, etc.

Negotiations then commenced with the government in respect of financial assistance and the granting of land fronting the sea:—

We beg to be informed if the district road commissioners have the care of the banks and chain road reserve outside the bought lands fronting the sea, as there is a sand bank to be removed, we shall consider it our duty to remove any obstruction to procure an open road to the wharf.<sup>4</sup>

The farmers' representations were formally answered, in October 1850, to the effect that they should prepare a draft bill to be put before the Legislative Council, who would vote 'such sum, if any, in aid of the undertaking, as its public importance shall seem to justify'.<sup>5</sup>

Events of 1851 put paid to the wishes and desires of the company. In January 1851, an official despatch from London enclosed the *Australian Colonies Government Act*. On 21 February 1851 the non-elective Legislative Council was dissolved and on the following day the *Mining Journal* proclaimed:—

The Legislative Council was finally strangled yesterday. The last of its life was in strict accordance with the whole of its miserable existence. Defiant of public opinion, reckless of right and eager for wrong, it never once committed itself by a solitary instance of beneficial legislation, nor did an act which lost sight of the principle – the government against the people.

The new council comprised a mix of nominated and elected members; elections commenced on 1 July 1851, with the opening ceremony being held on 10 August 1851. Having held their hand for many months the settlers once again entered the fray<sup>6</sup>, but, alas, the final body blow was delivered when a general exodus of settlers to the Victorian goldfields commenced in September 1851.

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3. C.S.O. 2267/1850.

4. *Ibid.*

5. C.S.O., letter to T.S.Kell, 29 October 1850.

6. C.S.O. 3113/1851, 3268/1851.



## CHAPTER TWO

# The First Jetty – Stage One

By March of 1852 the economic crisis, which threatened to bankrupt the colony, had passed. Gold from the Victorian diggings found its way back to Adelaide, either by returning diggers or government escorts. With better times at hand, the farmers of District C re-opened negotiations with the government.



*First escort of gold to Adelaide*

*Illustrated London News*

In August 1852 the following comments were made in support of a memorial praying for assistance in the erection of a jetty at Port Willunga<sup>1</sup>:—

As we are now led to believe that a steamer is soon to be placed in the Murray River and that the gold diggings of Victoria being such as to offer a good market . . . , by shipping our produce at Port Willunga and by way of Port Elliot and Goolwa, by steamer to the nearest place of landing to the diggings, our produce can be got there, with less expense, than by way of Melbourne.

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1. C.S.O. 2123/1852.



As we now have four steam mills in the Hundred, and also one at Noarlunga, a jetty would be a great saving in expense on the main line of roads, as but little, if any, grain would be required to be sent to Adelaide.

A township has been laid out at Port Willunga . . . a large stone store has been erected, which will hold many thousands of bushels of grain.

Mr Hewett, of McLaren Vale, informs us that he has experience in the erection of jetties, and that it can be erected, by the American log system, for about £1,000.

Upon receipt of the farmers' submission the government, to its credit, responded almost immediately by ordering Mr Bennett, supervisor of works, to inspect the environs of Port Willunga and furnish a report, which was duly forwarded to the colonial secretary on 17 August 1852.

Mr Bennett said:—

Should a jetty be erected, extending some little distance beyond low watermark, there is no doubt that produce might be shipped with little difficulty. The plan proposed by Mr Hewett is one which, with slight modifications, I am disposed to recommend. It is simple, inexpensive and easily constructed. The work could not be entirely completed for less than £1,400 to £1,500.<sup>2</sup>

In view of the fiasco which was to follow, it is interesting to note that Charles Hewett's proposed jetty was to be 395 feet in length, having at its outer extremity, ten feet of water at high water. He undertook to erect the jetty and facilities for two trams for £1500:— '£500 to be expended as soon as possible and according to valuation, seventy-five per cent to be paid following inspection and approval by the supervisor of works, the remainder, at the Governor's option, within two years.'<sup>3</sup>

On 24 August 1852 the settlers were informed that £500 had been appropriated for the erection of the jetty<sup>4</sup>, but, due to an apparent administrative oversight, no mention was made of the government's intention that any funds necessary, in excess of £500, were to be raised by the settlers. In February 1853, when this proviso was brought to the attention of the settlers, Mr Hewett castigated the government:—

Why should the inhabitants of Willunga erect or partly erect a jetty. Why should we be treated any different (*sic*) from Port Adelaide and Port Elliot . . . we consider that we are justly entitled to a portion of revenue . . .<sup>5</sup>

To this plea the government was unyielding and the colonial architect was directed to draw up plans and specifications for a jetty (the cost of which was not to exceed £500) and to call for tenders.<sup>6</sup> Mr Hewett declined to tender and said:—

. . . I do not consider it would endure one year, if so erected. The substitution of gum trenals for iron bolts is much cheaper, but without iron bolts I do not think it is worth the labour. Carrots might as well be used . . .<sup>7</sup>

2. C.S.O. 2347/1852.

3. C.S.O. 3654/1852.

4. C.S.O., letter to Messrs White and Lovelock, 24 August 1852.

5. C.S.O. 422/1853.

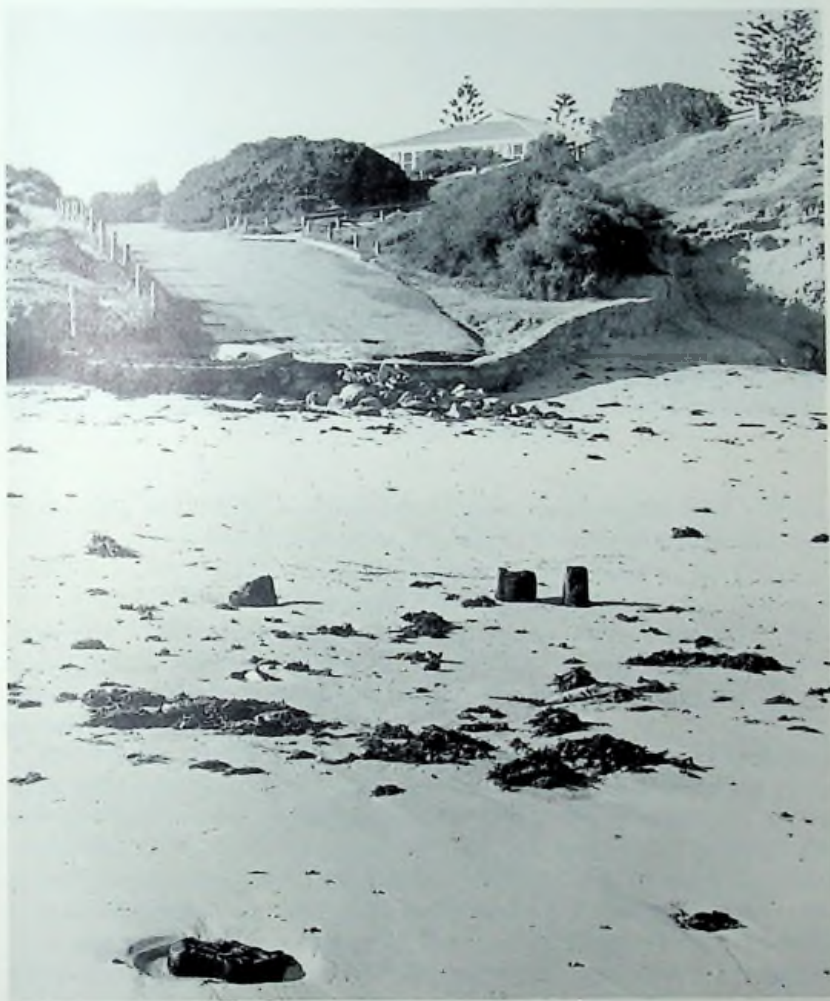
6. Notation on C.S.O. 2347/1852 and C.S.O. 882/1853.

7. C.S.O. 948/1853.



Unmoved by this parthian shot, the work was let to a local contractor, Robert Palmer, at a total cost of £485/16/-, for a jetty, 176 feet in length.<sup>8</sup> The contractor was obviously aware that, although the plans showed that the jetty would run out into five feet of water at low water, the whole structure would be dry at low water. Without this knowledge other tenderers were at an obvious disadvantage.

Construction commenced in April 1853 under the supervision of a 'responsible overseer' from the office of the colonial architect. His



B. Foreman

*Piles of the first jetty at Port Willunga, uncovered after a winter storm in 1982*

8. Notation on C.S.O. 948/1853.



effectiveness can be gauged from the following deviations from the approved plan, with accompanying shoddy workmanship:—

1. No 1¼ inch bolts, where they were specified.
2. Cross brackets undersized, in most cases.
3. Planking was three-inch sawn timber and not five-inch poles as specified.
4. No washers to bolts.
5. Rails butted too close.
6. Many piles split, from two to six feet, in driving, etc., etc.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, after three years of wrangling with the government the settlers had a jetty which, 'is totally inadequate, in as much as at low watermark the structure will not go within forty feet of the edge of the water'.<sup>10</sup>

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9. Parliamentary Paper (P.P.) 154/1856, Appendix H.

10. C.S.O. 2226/1853.



### CHAPTER THREE

## The First Jetty – Stage Two



*Threshing and bagging wheat in the early days*

*Gillingham*

By the close of 1853 the wealth created by the return of gold from Victoria provided an impetus to land sales. District C became closely settled and 9,581 acres were under wheat, the largest of any district in the Colony.<sup>1</sup>

In August 1853 the settlers again approached the government and, in a memorial couched in much stronger terms than previously, they demanded a grant of £1,200 to extend the existing 'white elephant' standing in Aldinga Bay.<sup>2</sup> In its wisdom the Legislative Council appropriated £1,000 for the purpose.<sup>3</sup>

The wheels of government turned ponderously and it was not until April 1854 that the colonial architect, William B. Hays, prepared plans and specifications for an extension of 171 feet to the existing jetty.<sup>4</sup> In his estimation £1,800 were required for the work and to this proposal the government acquiesced.<sup>5</sup> This sum included £300 for, as Hays described it, 'a novel breakwater suitable for the protection of roadsteads, harbours, piers and landing places, designed to break up waves without opposing any positive resistance to them'.<sup>6</sup> He omitted to state that the proposed breakwater was subject to a patent granted in his name!!<sup>7</sup>

1. Blue Book, 1854.

2. C.S.O. 2226/1853.

3. Notation on C.S.O. 2226/1853.

4. P.P. 154/1856, Appendix G.

5. C.S.O. 1462/1854.

6. C.S.O. 1237/1854.

7. P.P. 154/1856, p4; C.S.O. 753/1855.



The specification proposed that the extension of 171 feet would provide for, at its extremity, five feet six inches of water at low tide – alas, once again he was in error, as only two feet were later proved to be available in such circumstances.<sup>8</sup>

Tenders were called for the extension and, in August 1854, a tender of £3,352 was declined by the government.<sup>9</sup> W.B. Hays was instructed to call in past tenderers, with a view to having the work completed within the balance of funds appropriated, which had, at that time, been increased to £2,700.<sup>10</sup> A Mr Rogers subsequently tendered for £2,488/10/8,<sup>11</sup> which was duly accepted.

By January 1855 the work was well under way, when the colonial secretary received a letter from the office of public works, which stated:—

The contractor for the Port Willunga jetty, in forwarding a statement of the work in progress, states that he has paid £76 for the T-head [breakwater]. Upon inquiry, what this charge meant is that, when tenders were called, Mr Hays caused a memo to be attached to the specifications, to the effect that, as he intended to take out a patent for his invention, he should charge so much per lineal foot on construction, which money he was to receive from the person whose contract was accepted. £76 has accordingly been paid by the contractor to Mr Hays and the money is sought to be recovered from the government. I have caused the amount to be deducted from Mr Rogers' bill.<sup>12</sup>

Incensed at the apparent skulduggery of Hays who, at that time, was on leave in London, the colonial secretary demanded an explanation from him<sup>13</sup> while, closer to home, Captain A.H. Freeling, at the office of public works, on 27 February 1855, instructed the contractor to suspend all work pending an investigation, which was to include a possible further extension to the jetty over and above the approved addition of 171 feet.<sup>14</sup>

During the ensuing period of inactivity material, left on the beach by the contractor, was washed away by a gale and he sought compensation of £128 from the government which, with the underhand behaviour of Hays still rankling, replied:—

The colony clearly has no concern in the mode of which he stored his timber. The contractor is to suffer the loss. He suspended the work without remonstrance and in hopes of having huge gains increased by the further extensions of the jetty.<sup>15</sup>

In March 1855 the government decided that the T-head breakwater was not to be constructed and that the jetty was to be completed, as to length, in terms of the schedule of prices furnished by the contractor.<sup>16</sup>

A reluctant Mr Rogers and his workmen once again picked up their tools and by the latter half of 1855 the jetty, 347 feet in length, was

8. P.P. 154/1856, Appendix G.

9. C.S.O. 3028/1854.

10. Notation on C.S.O. 3028/1854.

11. P.P. 154/1856, p4.

12. C.S.O. 407/1855.

13. C.S.O., letter to Mr Hays, 22 January 1855.

14. C.S.O. 753/1855.

15. C.S.O. 2001/1855.

16. C.S.O., letter to Colonial Architect, 15 March 1855.



completed, but 'as it only extended to the breakers its utility was greatly impeded, and unless used by shipping in special wind and weather, was rendered almost useless'.<sup>17</sup>

On 10 September 1855 a reply to the charges levelled against him was received from Hays. The colonial secretary, with an acid pen, commented:—

I must say the conduct of Mr Hays is most inexcusable and highly unbecoming an officer in his position. Throughout the whole transaction, from the pinning of his memo to the specification, up to the receipt of £76 from the contractor, there is something underhand in his conduct. The matter should be considered by executive council. If he was in the army I think he would be cashiered.<sup>18</sup>

In their wisdom the executive council demanded an apology from Hays and ordered a refund of £76.

In March 1856, commissioners appointed by the government made an inspection of the jetty and reported:—

On the occasion of our inspection, a schooner, which was lying in the bay, was unable to load her boats at the jetty, though the weather was remarkably fine, and the flour which was being shipped had to be carried into the boats, at the more sheltered part of the bay. As the advantage, which would otherwise be derived from this jetty, is to a great extent lost through the defect pointed out, we recommend that the structure be extended into five feet six inches of water [at low water].

We are of the opinion that it would have been better to have placed the jetty more to the southward, under the shelter of the reef, which extends from the south-west point of the bay. As the jetty now stands, it is frequently unavailable for loading or discharging boats, even in fine weather, owing to the swell, which sets in at that part of the bay.

In May 1856 the jetty was placed under the charge of the District Council of Willunga<sup>19</sup> and, following an approach from that body, Thomas Turpin, the Deputy Collector of Customs at Port Willunga, undertook the general oversight of the structure.<sup>20</sup>

On 11 June 1856, two schooners, *Grenada* and *Alice Martin*, during a heavy gale, broke from their moorings and grounded at the end of the jetty, breaking an end pile in two.<sup>21</sup> The *Alice Martin*, after completion of repairs to its hull and decking, was again the villain of the piece for, in September 1856, Thomas Turpin reported:—

A portion of the jetty has been carried away by the *Alice Martin* running into it, about forty feet at the south side. The jetty is now in such a position as to render it impossible to persons wishing to load.<sup>22</sup>

The owner of the vessel, Samuel White, undertook to pay for the repairs, which cost £220.<sup>23</sup>

17. C.S.O. 2141/1856.

18. C.S.O. 2902/1855.

19. C.S.O. 1642/1856.

20. C.S.O. 1880/1856.

21. C.S.O., inward letter from Harbor Office, 13 June 1856.

22. C.S.O. 2938/1856.

23. Noration on C.S.O. 2938/1856.



#### CHAPTER FOUR

## The First Jetty – Stage Three

Having read the commissioners' report, which was placed before the Legislative Council in April 1856, the settlers of District C once again approached the government<sup>1</sup> which, with little room to manoeuvre, informed the settlers:—

Provision will be made in the land funds estimates for 1857 to an extent which, with the present unexpended balance [£808-11-0], will render £1,700 available for the work in question.<sup>2</sup>



*Port Willunga, Uncle Tom's cabin (right of centre)  
The first jetty stood at the left background and extended from the front of the cliff.*

By March 1857, Mr Moses, the contractor, had a large gang of men at work pile-driving, which was a long and tedious business, because of the rocky nature of the sea bed.<sup>3</sup> The extension was set back for some time when, in May 1857, a gale washed away seven casks of tar which were stored, in an apparently safe place, at the foot of the jetty. The *Ida*, a large American brig, which had been stranded some months previously, was broken up by the fury of the winds.<sup>4</sup>

The extension was completed in July 1857. The settlers now had a jetty 477 feet in length, erected at a total cost of £3 883-15-8.<sup>5</sup>

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1. C.S.O., 2141/1856.

2. C.S.O., letter to Messrs Colville and Clift, 18 July 1856.

3. *Register*, 5 March 1857.

4. *Ibid*, 12 May 1857.

5. P.P. 154/1856 – £485-16 (Stage 1)

*Ibid*, – £1,697-19-8 (Stage 2)

Refer 2 above – £1,700 (Stage 3)



## CHAPTER FIVE

# The Second Jetty

By 1860, 16,714 acres of land were enclosed in the Hundred of Willunga<sup>1</sup> and Port Willunga was the second busiest port of the colony.<sup>2</sup> In 1861, 4,477 acres were under wheat, which produced 49,805 bushels.<sup>3</sup>

It became obvious to the farmers that, to expedite the export of their produce, a new jetty was needed, because the depth of water, at the existing jetty, was too shallow for moderately sized crafts and, when the wind was in certain quarters, the waves made a clean sweep over the structure.<sup>4</sup>

In August 1863 it was reported that the destruction of the jetty was imminent and 'should another gale arise very little hope can be entertained of its being seen in the morning, a new jetty will soon have to be built and it is hoped in a better situation and on a better principle.'<sup>5</sup>

Finally, in June 1865, the farmers petitioned the government, stating:—

The jetty now standing is of very inferior description and from its position useless in anything but perfectly calm weather. Its approaches, being through a deep sandhill, entails a constant and heavy expense on the District Council of Aldinga. The late gales have considerably weakened and injured the jetty and, should another storm occur, the whole fabric could be washed away.<sup>6</sup>

Parliament answered this request by placing £5,000 in the supplementary estimates for a jetty to be erected one quarter of a mile southwards from the existing jetty, where a reef afforded shelter from prevailing gales. The work was contracted to a Mr Schroeder and construction commenced in March 1867, under the supervision of the resident engineer, George E. Hamilton. The contractor often experienced great difficulty and was much hindered by stormy weather and heavy seas. Some unforeseen expense was incurred in consequence of the shifting nature of the sandy beach at the land approach, the level of which varied, at times, before and after a storm, by as much as two feet six inches to four feet.

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1. Statistical Register, 1861.

2. SA Parliamentary Debate (P.D.), 1862, p87.

3. *Report of the Royal Commissioner Into a Need for a Railway to Willunga* - 1909.

4. *Register*, 2 March 1868.

5. *Ibid.*, 15 August 1863.

6. P.P. 72/1865. In 1857, Aldinga broke away from the District Council of Willunga (which had been created in 1853) and formed its own district council. Aldinga remained a separate council until 1932, when it amalgamated with Willunga.



*Port Willunga Jetty**National Trust*

The jetty was completed in January 1868 and 'a depth of ten to twelve feet is obtained at the end at medium low water and the structure is eight feet above high watermark'. The total cost was £5,300.<sup>7</sup> Cranes from the old jetty were removed and set upon the new jetty.<sup>8</sup>

The official opening took place on 6 February 1868 when Miss Stewart, a young lady born in the district, the daughter of Duncan Stewart, was deputed to break a bottle of wine upon the structure. At four o'clock in the afternoon, fifty gentlemen sat down to a luncheon in Messrs Butterworth's corn store, opposite the Lewis Arms.<sup>9</sup> The chief speaker was the Commissioner of Public Works who said, *inter alia*:—

There are several important interests in the district, which I hope will bring the jetty into use. The roofing slate of Willunga is equal, if not superior, to any obtainable. The large mill will be enabled to help farmers, because the miller will be helped in shipping his flour.<sup>10</sup>

This statement was less than prophetic because the production of wheat in the Hundred was in a state of decline; the soil was 'wheat sick' through over-cropping and, within the next three years, many farmers left the district when the northern agricultural lands were opened up for closer settlement. (In 1861, 4,477 acres were under wheat; in 1871, 4,072 acres and by 1881 the area under production had been reduced to 1,095 acres).<sup>11</sup>

7. *Register*, 2 March 1868.

8. P.P. 28/1868-9.

9. *Register*, 2 March 1868. See also footnote 4 on p34 for details of the Lewis Arms.

10. *Ibid.*

11. See 3 above.





*National Trust*



*New Year's Day  
Celebrations*

*National Trust*





## CHAPTER SIX

# Aftermath

By the early 1870's a rural depression had enveloped the district. The new jetty was mainly used for the export of slate. Demand for this stone was very high and four quarries, collectively, employed fifty five men and eighty tons of roofing slate were exported to Melbourne each month.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to 1871, wheat carts had to trespass upon private property to get to the jetty, but during March of that year the Central Roads Board prepared plans for a road, which would connect with the main line to Aldinga and Willunga.<sup>2</sup>



*Second jetty - the aftermath of a storm in 1914*

*National Trust*

By September 1871 the crane from the old jetty, which had been permanently fixed to the end of the new jetty was, because of tide variations, not suitable and the farmers requested the installation of a travelling crane.

During 1872 chaff cutting machinery was erected at Port Willunga and operations commenced during June with a view to preparing hay for shipping to the mining districts of Yorke Peninsula and other places<sup>3</sup>, but it was apparent that, although the reef afforded some barrier to the rough seas, the shortness of the jetty was a great drawback to exporters, as vessels often had to stand far out.<sup>4</sup> In addition, strong south-west winds caused a heavy roll and, on occasions, ships loading alongside the jetty were obliged to go to sea and run under the shelter of Kangaroo Island.<sup>5</sup>

In 1873 the barque *Egbert*, of 280 tons, could not get within one mile of the jetty and her cargo of wheat had to be taken in large boats out to the roadstead.<sup>6</sup>

In September 1873, a deputation of farmers waited upon the minister of works and asked him to consider an extension of the jetty, by seventy to eighty feet, with a protective T-head.<sup>7</sup> The matter was subsequently debated in parliament when John Carr, the member for Noarlunga, asked for an appropriation of £2,000. One speaker, William H. Bunday, urged

1. *Register*, 24 March 1873.

2. *Observer*, 25 March 1871.

3. *Ibid*, 1 June 1872.

4. *Ibid*, 18 April 1874.

5. *Ibid*, 5 September 1874.

6. *Ibid*, 29 March 1873.

7. *Ibid*, 6 September 1873.





*Remains of second jetty, date unknown*

*National Trust*

Carr to withdraw his motion and come forward in 1874 for £10,000 for the erection of a breakwater 'as there is no part on the east of the gulf, from Port Adelaide to Antechamber Bay, where a vessel could be safe in a south-west breeze'.<sup>8</sup> From the tenor of the debate John Carr felt obliged to acknowledge defeat and withdraw his motion, but not before delivering a broadside against city members 'whose interests all seemed to be with the city and who seemed never to have been from the city'.

The matter was raised again in parliament in 1880, when the Hon John B. Colton said:—

The high cost of transport from Port Willunga is caused by it being immediately opposite Investigator Strait and exposed to the ocean swell, so that vessels can only load in calm weather and to the necessity, often times, for boating from jetty to ship. Recently, more than two months were occupied in shipping eighty tons of slate, through the vessels being obliged to quit the roadstead to seek shelter, and the like is constantly happening.<sup>9</sup>

By 1892 the slate trade to Melbourne had virtually ceased, because galvanised iron could be purchased much more cheaply. By 1900 the local flour mills were closed and/or demolished; the jetty standing as a 'mere tombstone of departed industries'. The rails of the jetty were rusted and the roofs, floors and doors of the local storehouse mere 'emblems of the past'.<sup>10</sup>

By early 1915 the jetty was in a ruinous state. Storms had washed away the middle of the structure and fishermen bridged the gap, fifty feet in length, with a makeshift wire contrivance.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, in May 1915, mountainous seas, often fifty feet high, washed away the outer portion of the jetty, together with a crane and truck.

A petition for a new jetty<sup>12</sup> was summarily dismissed by Sir Richard Butler, the Commissioner of Crown Lands. The remnants of the jetty, which had stood for over seventy years, were finally demolished by the army during World War II.

8. P.D., 1873, pp. 1419-1422.

9. P.D., 1880, pp. 1180-1184.

10. E.H. Hallack, *Our Townships, Farms and Homesteads*, 1892.

11. *Observer* 23 January 1915; *Chronicle*, February 1915.

12. *Chronicle*, February 1915.



# Appendix I

## STAR OF GREECE - CREW: RECONCILIATION STATEMENT

From SA *Register*, 14 July 1888:

Harrower, Hazeland, Waugh, Cummiford, Parker, (Mc)Donald (Donnell), Blackman, Carder, Cork(e), Kearney, McBarnet(t), Prior, John(s)on(e), Carlson (sailmaker), Airzee (Airlie), Gatis, Bluhm, Desmet, Claeson, Organ (Orson, Hogan), Irvine, Oermich, Bruce, Miles, Revell. 25

From headstone at Aldinga Cemetery:

Muir, Carter, Blair. 3

TOTAL CREW 28

## RECONCILIATION

### LOST:

From headstone at Aldinga Cemetery:

Harrower, Waugh, Muir, Blackman, Irvine, Oermich, Cork(e), Carder, Carter, Blair, Orson (Organ, Hogan) 11

From SA *Advertiser*, 14 July 1888: Parker, Donnell (McDonald), Carlson (sailmaker) (Their resting place is unknown) 3

No record by name in reports:

Airzee (Airlie), Gatis, Miles 3

Total Lost 17

### SURVIVORS:

From SA *Advertiser*, 14 July 1888:

Hazeland, Cummiford, Revell, Alfred Hogan\*, Desmet, Claeson, McBarnett, Kearney, Prior, John(s)on(e). 9

\*Incorrect - This refers to Alfred Orson (Organ), who was lost. (See SA *Register*, 14 July 1888 and *Before the Wind*, (Rae Sexton), pp32 & 38.)

Add Bluhm and Bruce 2

(They were signatories to 'Letter to Editor', SA *Register*, 17 July 1888)

Total Survived 11

TOTAL CREW 28



# Appendix II

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

The following notes are included to give a brief understanding of the background and circumstances of some of the local residents mentioned in this book.<sup>1</sup> The details are given as at July 1888 (the time of the wreck).

**CHARLEY ADDISON** - Aged 33 years, a baker at White's Gully, Aldinga; married with one daughter and three sons aged from five to eight (an infant son had died in 1886). He died in 1919. Ironically, his father, Charles, was lost at sea in St Vincent Gulf in 1874 while returning from recovering cargo from a wrecked ship.

**WILLIAM BOWERING** - Aged 61 years, a farmer and ex-hotelkeeper of Port Willunga, he arrived in South Australia from England in 1849 in the *Seabonheath*; married with four daughters and seven sons. He died in 1905.

**MARIA BOWERING** - Aged 51 years; married William Bowering in 1854. The ministrations of 'Mrs Bowering and her lovely daughters' were often commented upon by the rescued sailors. She died in 1912.

**HERBERT SAMUEL BENJAMIN BOWERING** - Aged 21, son of Maria and William Bowering; he had celebrated his 21st birthday just two days before the wreck of the *Star of Greece*; single. He died in 1902.

**FREDERICK CHARLES RICHMOND BOWERING** - Aged 18 years, son of Maria and William Bowering; single.

**JOHN NOAH CRISP** - Aged 29 years, a blacksmith in Aldinga township; he married in October 1887. Two of Thomas Martin's sons later worked for him - Maurice Martin was employed as a blacksmith and, later, in 1909, Allan Martin, aged 16 years, was apprenticed as a carpenter, wheelwright and coachbuilder. After the wreck, Noah Crisp had a daughter and two sons. He died in 1939.

**FRANK (FRANCIS) CULLEY** - Aged 66 years, a farmer with large landholdings, including the property *Woodside Farm*, just south of the Aldinga township; married with five sons and three daughters, he had arrived from England in 1848 in the *Gratitude*. He died in 1908.

**THOMAS H. CULLEY** - Aged 26 years, son of Francis Culley; a farmer; married with several young children.

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1. Compiled by National Trust, Willunga Branch. Sources were the *Biographical Index of South Australians: 1836-1885*; *Willunga Family Histories* (unpublished) by O. M. DeCaux; and District Council of Willunga Assessment Records held by that council. Details have been checked with descendants wherever possible.



H. ELLBOURNE – While no records relating to an ‘H’ Ellbourne have been found, an ARTHUR EDWARD ELLBOURNE lived in Port Willunga at the time of the wreck. He was a contractor, aged 53, whose first wife, Mary, had died in 1874 leaving him with several young children to care for. He remarried in 1877. His daughter CAROLINE (CARRIE) ELLBOURNE, aged twelve, saw the wreck, and ran to tell her father. (See footnote 1, p10).

J. FIDGE – Possibly John Fidge, a farmer, aged 58, and brother to Lewis Fidge, farmer, who owned the land on which the village of Aldinga was laid out, circa 1857.

ERNEST THOMAS HOW – Aged 24 years, a mason living in Aldinga; married with one child. He died in 1942 in Western Australia.

FANNY HOW – Aged 32 years, sister-in-law of Ernest T. How and Thomas Martin; married to HENRY WILLIAM HOW, a mason, of Aldinga; they had six children and lived on a cliff-top block of one acre on the southern edge of the Port Willunga township. She died in 1921.

ELIZA KIMBER – Married to William Kimber, a butcher, of Aldinga/Port Willunga, but widowed just five weeks before the wreck of the *Star of Greece*. The family were licensees of the Sea View Hotel which figured so prominently in providing shelter and support to the shipwrecked sailors.

WALTER JOHN KIMBER – Aged 24 years, son of Eliza Kimber (above), a butcher and hotelkeeper; single. He and his younger brother, HAROLD FRANK KIMBER, aged 17, must have carried much of the responsibility of maintaining the Sea View Hotel and accommodating the unexpected guests, who arrived so soon after their father’s death.

THOMAS LOVELOCK – Aged 36 years, a labourer of Aldinga; the son of George and Anne Lovelock, who arrived in South Australia in the *Prince Regent* in 1839; George Lovelock died in 1883 and is buried at Aldinga.

THOMAS MARTIN – Aged 46 years, a farmer of Port Willunga whose eighty-acre holding abutted the coastline where the *Star of Greece* ran aground. His first marriage to Amelia How(e) ended tragically with her death in 1874, and he remarried in 1882, to Mary Hancock. Their only daughter Mary (Cissy) was drowned at Port Willunga in 1899, aged 14 years. Thomas Martin had six sons. He was Clerk of the District Council of Aldinga at the time of the wreck and until shortly before he died in 1916. His father, Thomas Martin, Sr., arrived in the *Lysander* in 1840 and, after farming for some years, settled on the land on which the township of Port Willunga was laid out in 1850; he became the licensee of the Pier Hotel (Uncle Tom’s Cabin) at Port Willunga from 1853 until his death in 1862.



JOHN McBURNEY - A carrier and farmer at Aldinga; married. Arrived in South Australia in 1882.

JAMES A. NELSON - Aged 27 years, son of James and Susanah Nelson who arrived in the *Flora* from Scotland in 1873. James Nelson, Sr., died in 1873, aged 54.

HYETT SHEPHERD - Aged 42 years, a farmer at Aldinga, and a councillor of the District Council of Aldinga; married with nine surviving children. Born at Aldinga in 1845 he died at Black Forest in 1936.

BEN SPARROW - Aged 23 years, a teamster from Morphett Vale; single. He died in 1946.

THOMAS STEPHEN TUOHY - Aged 35 years, a mounted constable stationed at Willunga Police Station; married with four children at the time of the wreck and three born subsequently. He arrived in South Australia with his parents Dennis Caulfield and Ann Tuohy from Galway, Ireland, in the *Navarino* in 1857. He died in 1935, aged 82, and is buried at Willunga.



## Appendix III

Letter from Mrs Harrower to M/C Tuohy

6 Bickerton Road London N.  
Nov 20<sup>th</sup> 1888.

My dear Sir

I send you by parcel post -  
 this week, to the care of Mr  
 James Bishop my, son-in-law,  
 a Photograph of my, dearly loved  
 son Henry - (the late Capt Harrower)  
 along with one of myself -  
 which I hope you will keep -  
 as a small tribute of respect  
 and admiration, for the  
 brave and gallant manner  
 in which you rescued the  
 body of my beloved son,  
 and gave to me, his sorrowing  
 mother, the comforting thought  
 in the midst of so much  
 agony - that - it is resting in  
 a lonely though not distant



ed grave - I feel deeply the kindness that has been shown to me by you, and many others in the far off land where my dear son lies - and I shall always think of you as of a friend, and will be glad to hear of your welfare and advancement - I have lost a good and dutiful son and my comfort now is that I shall meet him again, when there is no more sea, and our parting is unknown.

• In expressing my heartfelt  
 gratefulness and gratitude  
 to service you have rendered  
 I remain

Very truly  
 Your sincere friend  
 J M. Sillarower



# FURTHER READING

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*Report of Select Committee of the House of Assembly on the Wreck of the 'Star of Greece'*, Parliamentary Papers 58 and 58A. Adelaide, 1888.

Sexton, Rae. *Before the Wind*, 1982

*Star of Greece* Papers, various dates. Compiled and held by National Trust of SA, Willunga Branch.

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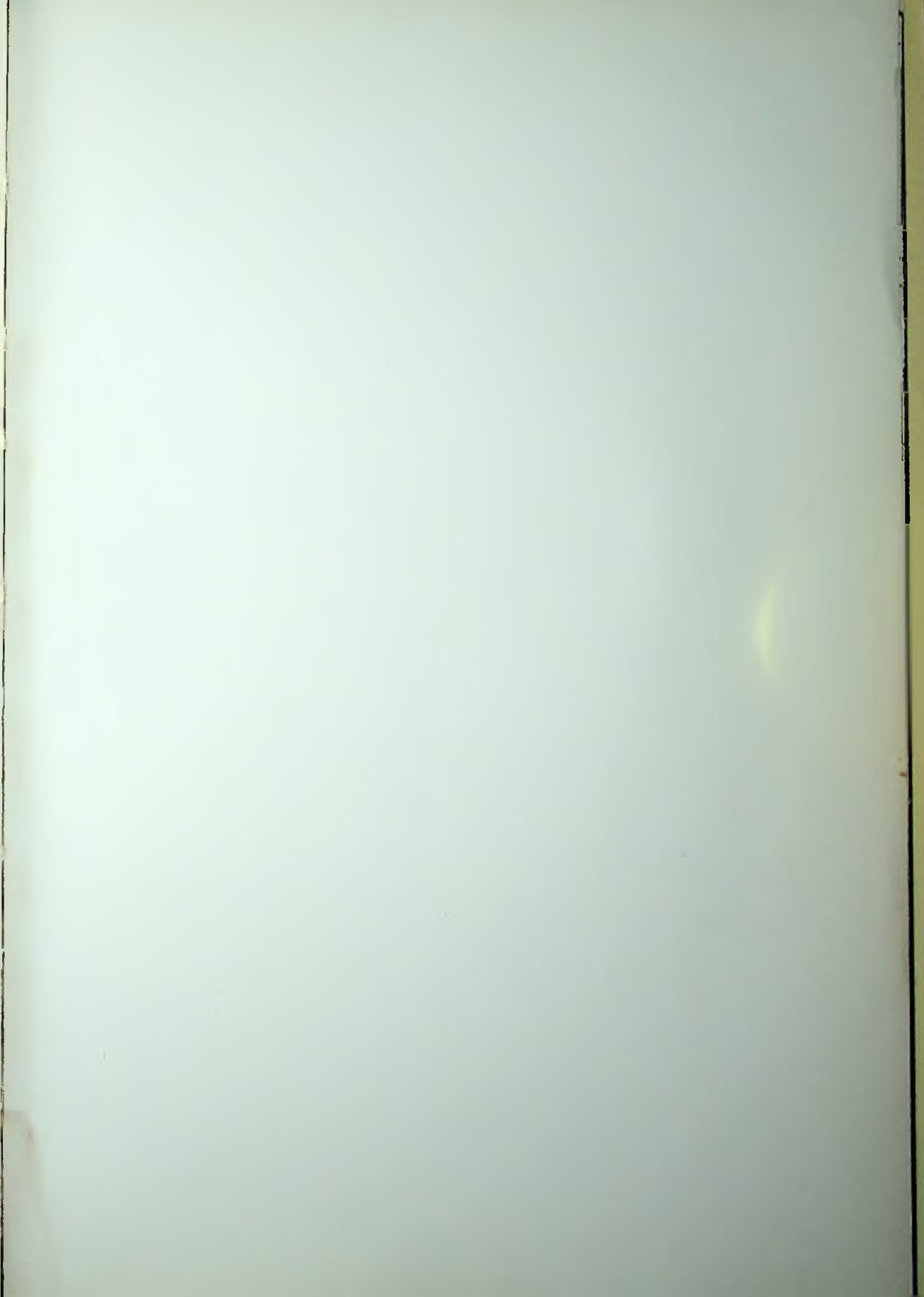
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