

SHIPWRECKS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Historic Shipwrecks Act 1981



Fact Sheet No. 49

Ethel

The remains of the barque *Ethel*, located on Ethel Wreck Beach in Innes National Park, is arguably the most well-known and photographed shipwreck in South Australia. Wrecked in 1904, the wreck's slow decline has been witnessed by generations of South Australians.

Ethel was built in 1876 by Austin and Hunter in Sunderland, England, originally with the name *Carmelo*. It was renamed *Ethel* in 1892. The iron hulled vessel of 711 gross tons measured 177.4 feet (54.1m) in length, 30.7 feet (9.4m) breadth and 18.5 feet (5.6m) depth.

Owned by S.A. Sandle and sailing under the Norwegian flag, *Ethel* entered Investigator Strait on 2 January 1904 under the command of Captain Bogwald. It had sailed from South Africa in ballast, and was bound for Port Adelaide to receive a cargo of grain.

The master intended to pass south of Althorpe Island but due to poor visibility caused by gale force south-westerly squalls he was actually steering a course close to Cape Spencer. *Ethel* struck a reef which damaged the

rudder and left the vessel at the mercy of wind and waves. In the early morning darkness of 4 January, *Ethel* was driven broadside onto a small beach north-west of Reef Head. One of the crew, 19 year old Leonard Sterneson, bravely volunteered to swim ashore with a line but he was drowned in the powerful surf.

At daylight with an ebbing tide the crew were able to easily jump ashore. Help soon arrived after *SS Ferret* heading towards Port Adelaide saw the stranded *Ethel* and reported the wreck to the lighthouse keeper on Althorpe Island.

A salvage attempt was made during May 1904 by A.H. Hassell of Marion Bay who had purchased the *Ethel* wreck for £100 at auction. With lines attached the tug *Euro* successfully dragged *Ethel* into deeper water. The lines parted when a south-westerly blew up and *Ethel* was thrown back onto the beach with a broken keel. The vessel was then abandoned.

The hull slowly deteriorated on the beach for decades, but following a severe storm in the 1980s, it finally collapsed completely.

Today, little of the hull remains, consisting of scattered and twisted wreckage that is normally covered by the beach sand. The wreck periodically uncovers after storms, but quickly re-covers.

Image: DEW Files



The barque Ethel shortly after being pushed ashore, 1904

A pictorial essay of archaeological site formation...

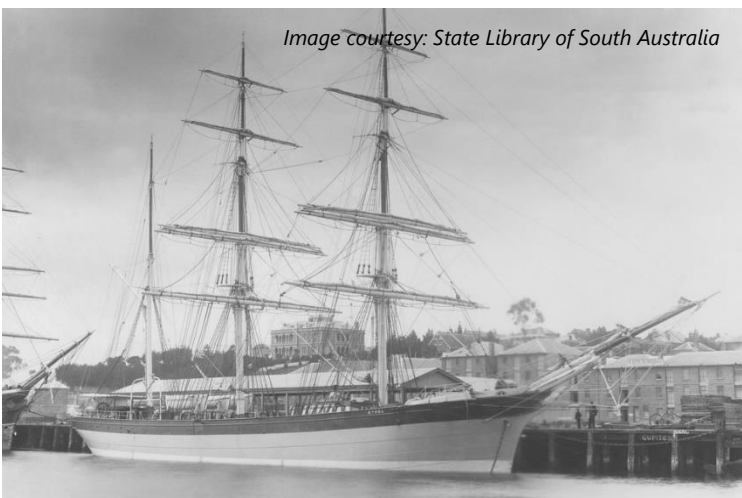


Image courtesy: State Library of South Australia

Ethel in its heyday, at Victoria Dock, Hobart, in 1893



Image: DEW (Innes National Park) Files

Ethel wreck, c.1920s



Image courtesy: M. Stevens

Ethel, c.1940s



Image courtesy: John Webb Collection

Ethel, January 1983



Image courtesy: M. Davison

Ethel uncovered after a particularly heavy storm, August 2018

More information

Heritage South Australia

Department for Environment and Water

GPO Box 1047, Adelaide SA 5001

Ph. (08) 8124 4960

Email: DEWheritage@sa.gov.au

www.environment.sa.gov.au