

SHIPWRECKS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

FIDES - Jervois Basin

The four-masted auxiliary schooner *Fides* was built in 1918 by Linstol & Sons of Risor, Norway. The wooden hulled vessel measured 141 feet (43 m) in length, 31 feet (9.5 m) breadth, 14 feet (4.3 m) depth and 430 gross tons. It had accommodation for up to 20 crew, was built at a cost of £35,000 and was used in a variety of trades between the Baltic Region and England.

In 1927 Captain J. Olsen of Birkenhead, South Australia, purchased the *Fides*, to carry timber between Port Adelaide and New Zealand. The schooner's delivery voyage began from Gothenburgh, Sweden on 1 September 1927, laden with Baltic timber for Port Adelaide. During what became an epic 15 month journey, the vessel suffered storms, a cyclone and calms; damage to masts and rigging; trouble with the engines; and sickness among the crew.

Eventually, in late 1928, the *Fides* reached Port Adelaide and was registered there in March 1929. Unfortunately the Depression had crippled coastal shipping and the timber trade, and the schooner lay idle for the next four years.



Fides at Corporation Wharf, c.1930 (Photo: Ron Blum)

In 1930, Captain Olsen and the Reverend T.P. Willason, of the Port Adelaide Central Methodist Mission, proposed a scheme which, if acted upon, would have been the first of its kind in Australia. They suggested that the *Fides* should be converted to a deep-sea fishing vessel, to employ 30 men in fishing operations off the West Coast and the Great Australian Bight, specifically between Streaky Bay and Denial Bay. This scheme had the double effect of providing a livelihood for many Port Adelaide unemployed (with a wealth of sea and fishing experience), and developing an industry which was seen as sadly neglected in South Australia. Reverend Willason and Captain Olsen hoped to raise finance by public subscription and through government assistance. Prominent South Australians, Sir Langdon Bonython and Tom Elder Barr Smith each pledged £500 towards the project, but it did not proceed.

In 1932 the South Australian Harbours Board seized the *Fides* for non-payment of harbour dues. An attempt to sell the schooner was unsuccessful and so in November the vessel was moved to Commercial Wharf and workmen began to break it

up. Two masts, the engine and fittings were removed and sold.

In January 1933 Reverend Willason purchased the *Fides* on behalf of the Port Adelaide Central Methodist Mission and had it moved to the Portland Canal, where it was broken up by the unemployed for firewood. The breaking-up process was slow, taking more than a year.

During the night of 2 January 1934 the *Fides* began to take on water and, after an unsuccessful attempt to pump it out, was beached two days later at Ethelton during the early hours. Two days later the remains were placed well up onto the beach during an extra high tide and wreckers continued to dismantle the hull.

Today, remains of the *Fides* are exposed in the silt on the western side of Jervois Basin at low water, although they are generally covered by the tide. Only about one third of the length of the vessel can be seen, with the majority covered by reclamation and earthworks.



Remains of *Fides* at Jervois Basin



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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