

THE MOSQUITO FLEET

The “Mosquito fleet” or “Ketch fleet” consisted of ketches and other small sailing vessels, i.e. cutters and schooners, that plied South Australia’s coasts as cargo vessels. They carried wheat, wool, live animals, gypsum, salt, firewood and many other cargoes around Australia’s ports and were used to lighter these cargoes to larger vessels for the overseas trade. The use of these “semi trailers of the sea” slowly declined, beginning in the 1960’s, after competition from air, rail and road freight, proved their once constant trade unsustainable. The last trading ketches in Port Adelaide, including *Nelcebee* and *Falie*, ceased their operations in the 1980’s. Both *Nelcebee* and *Falie* have survived as examples of this state’s working ketches, and can be viewed at their moorings in the Port River.

ACTIVE II

Active II is a reconstruction of the South Australian cargo vessel, known as the ketch. A ketch is a sailing vessel with two masts, and with the main mast being taller than the mizzen (rear) mast. It also has fore and aft sails – i.e. sails running lengthways (bow to stern) of the vessel. The rig has many minor variations to suit the whims of the owner/skipper and the availability of materials. Technically not all of the light craft working the South Australian coast were ketches. Small schooners and cutters were also part of the trade known as the *Ketch* or *Mosquito fleet*. An example of a ketch in Port Adelaide, which can be viewed on the water or chartered, is *Falie*.



The original Active sailing on the Port River

Active II was built on site in eight months during 1985 as one of the major displays for the South Australian Maritime Museum, which was to be opened in 1986. She was designed along the lines of a typical small 1880’s ketch. The work team included two highly experienced shipwrights who took great pains to ensure that the vessel would be truly ship-shape even if it was never destined to catch the wind in her sails. Her derrick and rudder are operational and she is presented in a setting to invoke the feeling of a cargo vessel of the period. *Active II* remains a favourite display for many of the visitors to the museum.

The original *Active* was built in 1873 by J. Lowen in Port Adelaide. In 1889 she was involved with a collision with *S.S. Wilcannia* in which she was crushed out of shape and sunk at Dunn’s wharf, Port Adelaide. The resultant enquiry blamed the pilot, however there was some controversy over the outcome, as some of the wardens of the Marine Board were shareholders of the Tug Company that many believed to have been at fault in the accident. *Active* was raised and placed on Jenkins' slip for repairs, which almost amounted to rebuilding. She worked around South Australia and interstate until 1959, when she was said to be derelict. It was reported that *Active* was demolished near the Jervis Bridge, Port Adelaide.