

## The Star of Greece



The Star Of Greece, wrecked off of Port Willunga, is widely regarded as one of South Australia's worst maritime disasters. A three masted ship of 1227 tons, built in 1868 by Harland & Wolff – Belfast, she left London on 17 March 1888 loaded with a 22-ton gun for the proposed defence fort at Glenelg. She arrived in Port Adelaide on 11 June 1888 and drew quite a crowd of onlookers, as the gun was unloaded. The vessel was then loaded with wheat for the UK and left Port again at 6pm on 13 July.

The vessel didn't get far out to sea when squally weather set in, causing the ship to drift off course. She started to drift close to shore, unnoticed by the crew because of the weather conditions. The anchor was let out to hold the vessel, but was later found to be fouled in its chain, and so failed to grip the seabed. Between 2 and 4am a large wave lifted the vessel and she crashed down upon a reef off Port Willunga. The vessel broke in two, leaving those men upon the mizzen section stranded.

At 7.55 am the alarm was raised at Aldinga Beach as the residents of that town could see the top of the wreck and the men clinging in the rigging with the naked eye. Waves were crashing violently over the vessel, sweeping the deck clear, and at 9 am the rear of the vessel broke away completely and the 8 men including the captain that were in the mizzen rigging were all lost. At 9 am, when the telegraph service was opened, a telegram was sent requesting help and a rocket device to send a line out to the wreck, as no such device was held in the near vicinity.

One man reached the shore safely after jumping from the rigging. The survivors had no option but to swim for shore as all the boats were smashed and the ship was being broken up by the still raging storm. The residents of Aldinga Beach gathered to offer whatever assistance they could, however they witnessed many men being killed by debris as they tried to reach the shore. The local Policeman, among other locals, swam out repeatedly to try to help the men swim in and to recover their bodies. He was later honoured for his bravery.

The nearest rocket device, the best way to reach the stricken vessel, was held at Normanville, and arrived at 4.40pm just as the last sailor perished trying to escape from the vessel which had broken up irretrievably. Of the 28 crew, 17 men were lost and 11 survived. A public outcry ensued against the Government at the chain of errors which caused the loss of so many lives, so close to shore, which could have been avoided with proper planning for such disasters.

The figurehead and other relics from the wreck are held on display at The South Australian Maritime Museum.

### **Sources:**

South Australian Maritime Museum

Manning, G. *The Tragic Shore*