SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S 'FLOATING COFFIN': THE DISEASED, THE DESTITUTE, AND THE DERELICT FITZJAMES (1852 – c.1900)

Imagine, for a moment, the feeling of an eight-year-old boy as he draws up alongside an imposing wooden hulk and realises that this is to be his isolated floating home, possibly until the age of 16. From March 1880 until May 1891, this was the fate of over a hundred young South Australian boys. Some were accused of petty crimes, a few of more serious ones, and many were simply given over to the care of the State by parents who could not afford to feed them. These children probably were unaware, as they went about their daily training programs, of the fascinating life their new home, Fitzjames, had lived before finding its way to Port Adelaide. It was a life that would later inspire plays, articles and artists imaginations. Yet it is the final role that Fitzjames played, just prior to its inevitable voyage to a ship breaker, which has motivated this paper.

Histories of ships that were significant in the establishment and foundation of the Australian colonies are fairly common. They tend, however, to concentrate on the place of particular vessels in the establishment of settlement, their role in the opening of new trade, and upon the events that defined their wartime service. Nevertheless, most vessels spent their lives in the service of assorted owners, as well as in a number of occupations which may have included floating lodgings, churches, and quarantine depots. Fitzjames was no different.

Following its life as an immigrant vessel and warship, Fitzjames served two important functions in South Australia; first, as the colony’s quarantine ship and, second, as a reformatory for boys. In both capacities it would be at the centre of both innovation and controversy as the colonists reacted to perceived social problems and, similarly, sought to improve services to underprivileged sections of the community. In South Australia, Fitzjames was the only vessel ever to perform such tasks. But South Australia was not alone in this experiment; many other Australian states employed land-based as well as ship-based reformatory institutions. In New South Wales, for example, the vessel Vernon, was for a long time moored in the higher reaches of the Parramatta River. Generally, the aim of these institutions was the same – the reform of 'criminal as well as neglected youth'. What made Fitzjames even more significant were the controversies that erupted around it, and the ramifications that the events on board had in changing and shaping the social welfare system of South Australia.
As already mentioned briefly, the story of *Fitzjames* has inspired numerous creative works including plays and paintings. It has also more recently re-emerged to feature in local radio shows and magazines. Here the emphasis has generally been on the vessel's imprisonment of young destitute boys. Nevertheless, it is not widely acknowledged that the colony of South Australia, which was free of a 'convict past', employed vessels for the incarceration of its citizens in this way. When referred to at all, the last decades of *Fitzjames* have been characterised as years of inefficiency, inhumanity and missionary zeal. Others have romantically likened the vessel to the convict hulks hauntingly depicted in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*. Still others maintain that *Fitzjames* was a product of the 'obsession among childsavers of the era to place delinquent boys on training ships'. On all counts, the vessel can be seen to reflect concurrently a departure from ideals enshrined in the South Australian welfare system, and an Australia-wide tendency to use ships as tools of education and reform.

It could also be argued that the barque was linked with the British reformatory system. For instance, from the opening of the 'renovated' hulk in March 1880 to June 1884, government reports cite 122 boys as having been 'processed' and discharged from the ship. Ninety-two of these were said to be 'doing well'. It was argued that the suggested success rate of 75% was very impressive, as it was comparable with those of similar institutions in England and Ireland. *Fitzjames* was at once an attempt to borrow from the experience of the British homeland, and an effort to improve on it. In such light, the vessel may be seen as another experiment in the Benthamite ideals stemming from the inception of the colony of South Australia.

This paper will outline the history of *Fitzjames* with a focus on its later life in South Australia. The processes that occurred between the purchase of the vessel as a stop-gap measure to solve a looming public health problem, and its ultimately becoming a ship of disease in its own right, are of central concern. In essence, this is a story of neglect despite arguably good intentions, the slow operation of bureaucracy, and the disparate values placed upon reputation and justice.

**THE EARLY HISTORY OF FITZJAMES**

The 1,307 gross ton (originally 1,195 ton), wooden (Hackmatack, Birch, Spruce and Pine) three-masted barque *Fitzjames* (official number 26397) was built at Richibucto, in New Brunswick, Canada, in 1852. The vessel was 186 feet x 32.5 feet x 22.7 feet in dimensions, and was sheathed with felt and yellow metal (partially over iron bolts). It is believed to have been built by J.J. Jardine and Company (also its first owner), and rated A1 for its first four years of operation, working out of Liverpool, United Kingdom, and trading predominantly to New York, USA. Less than a year later, it was sold to a
business syndicate comprised of Mr Halstead, Mr Fletcher, Mr Pilkington, Mr Wilson and John Chambers. Under these new owners, and the banner of the White Star Line, the vessel was placed into the Atlantic trade.\(^9\)

In 1854 Fitzjames was re-surveyed and began taking immigrants from Liverpool to Melbourne. Its first voyage as an immigrant ship would see it carry 468 passengers and a cargo of cheese and coal. It was in Melbourne from 13 to 14 September 1854 under Captain M. Hamilton, where the crew was reported to have refused duty.\(^10\) The vessel was surveyed again in 1856, but nevertheless lost its rating.\(^11\) Fitzjames spent another four years bringing immigrants to Australian ports and made frequent visits to Port Adelaide with new arrivals.\(^12\) In 1856 it was hailed as one of the largest ships to ever enter the Port River, having left Southampton, United Kingdom, on 3 October 1855 and taking 98 days to complete the journey. The only incident on board during its passage was the death of an able bodied seaman who had fallen from aloft while working on the main topsail.\(^13\) Some work appears to have been done to the vessel in 1859 when old timbers were replaced with new elements of fir and spruce. Following survey, it was classified AE1 under the second clause of Lloyd's Rules (Section 60) for four years. One unsubstantiated story infers that it continued to function as an immigrant vessel until the early 1860s, when it was transferred into service as a transport in the Crimean War, the last part of which is easily debunked by the fact that the war had ended some years before.\(^14\)

We know that Fitzjames was damaged and returned to England in 1862 for repairs, and was resurveyed and reclassified AE1 for an additional four years. It was subsequently placed in the emigrant trade again and made voyages from Liverpool to Australia from 1862, then to Callao, South America, around 1863 and finally to Quebec, Canada, in 1864. This was also the year that the barque was apparently re-sheathed in felt and yellow metal with more replacement of timbers of fir and spruce following other unspecified damage to the ship. The following year, its Lloyd's entry notes additional voyages from London to South America, before returning to the Liverpool-Australia trade. The vessel was once again surveyed in 1866 and parts of the deck replaced with more fir and spruce. This was the last time Fitzjames was surveyed for commercial insurance purposes.

On its final journey to Australia, bound for Melbourne, the vessel was forced into Lisbon, Portugal, because it was taking on substantial amounts of water. On 20 January 1866, it was condemned as unseaworthy but was repaired sufficiently to continue the voyage. The rest of the journey, however, was not without incident, and 22 people died en route due to an outbreak of 'ship fever'.\(^15\) This would not be the barque's last brush with death and disease. Once in Melbourne, Fitzjames was sold to a local business syndicate who considered having it refitted and overhauled. These plans did not eventuate and the vessel was once again sold, this time to a Melbourne ship chandler and sail
maker by the name of Donaldson. Donaldson's plans were those often applied to condemned vessels; it was to be sunk at the end of a pier near Yarrabank to be used as a wool shed.\textsuperscript{16} It is not clear why this did not occur, but instead \textit{Fitzjames} sat in Hobson's Bay for the next decade, a dismasted, dilapidated and rapidly deteriorating reflection of its past glory.

The salvation of \textit{Fitzjames} would come some years later, and from across the colonial border. In 1876 the South Australian government was facing a problem that would have substantial impact upon the ship. The low lying swamps, poor drainage and bad sanitation at Port Adelaide was becoming a major public health issue, and concerns regarding potential outbreaks of epidemic disease were increasing. Compounding these matters, many of the immigrant ships visiting the port were known to be carrying people with a range of communicable diseases including smallpox, measles, typhus and scarlatina. While this was temporarily remedied with simple quarantine measures, such as the forced mooring of vessels offshore for considerable lengths of time, this was not seen as being viable in the long term. In particular, it had adverse affects on trade turnaround and traffic congestion in the port.

Soon after, a Doctor Duncan, the Port Health Officer, and the man with the responsibility for the health of the entire port, began petitioning the colonial government for a vessel that could be converted into a permanent quarantine hulk. Such a ship could be moored in an appropriate position until a shore-based quarantine station could be established. This was seen as a good method for saving money in one major way; ship owners would not have to lay up their ships for considerable amounts of time, thus losing business. Despite the fact that colonial officials did not think highly of the suggestion, arrangements to purchase a quarantine hulk were made, and eventually it was settled that the South Australian government should purchase the rotting hulk of \textit{Fitzjames} for the considerable sum of £2,800. By Saturday 27 May 1876, \textit{Fitzjames} was once again on the move, this time being towed out of Port Phillip Bay by the steamer \textit{Woonona}, and by sunset was reported to be off Cape Otway. The journey to Adelaide took two days. It arrived amidst a storm of bad press:

The \textit{Fitzjames} is the very best picture of a complete wreck which has been seen near the Bell buoy for 20 years. She is pretty evidently well hogged, as both ends present a drooping appearance. Her weather-worn sides were variegated by the newly caulked seams, and while she rose and fell in the seaway, sheets of sheathing were in some places hanging off like rags.\textsuperscript{17}

ARRIVAL AND REFIT

This relatively short journey would almost spell the end of the vessel. Upon arrival it had to be taken to Fletcher's Slip to be extensively re-fastened and re-caulked. It took four months for \textit{Fitzjames} to be fully converted so that it could
be used as a quarantine ship and lazarette. The masts were taken out, and the
dekhouses and topgallant masts were removed. A hip roof of galvanised iron
was erected from the break of the poop to the bows. Forward, on the main deck
was a cook’s gallery, capable of providing for some two hundred people, and
beyond that were boilers and troughs for washing. Entrance to the vessel was
through a side port located amidships. The poop deck had also been re-caulked,
sheathed and painted. Two skylights were installed on the deck within, and in
various parts of the vessel there were airshafts and another skylight on the main
deck.18

![Figure 1. Detail of drawing of Fitzjames](unknown artist, reproduced with kind permission of the Largs Pier Hotel)

In the cuddy there were doctors and matrons quarters, a storeroom, and eight
sleeping berths intended for a 'superior' class of patient. The total length of the
poop including washing rooms and officers quarters were 65 feet and the
breadth was 30 feet. There was a dining room table running along the centre
with ample seating and in the middle there was new flooring. Abaft the main
mast, twelve sleeping berths were constructed, six on each side and one lavatory
at each end. There was a bed in each room, and one stove to warm all of the
passengers sleeping in this area. These berths were intended for use by women
and were partitioned off by galvanised iron from the identical men’s area
further forward. In the hold were 100 tons of stone ballast and 24 hundred-gallon tanks full of fresh water. In contrast to earlier reports it was noted that:

The vessel is immensely strong, the knees from the keelson to the hold beams are of iron and weigh a ton each. The planking too, is not only bolted horizontally but also vertically. She is quite dry at the bottom and appears to be as sound as possible. It was not thought necessary to examine her bottom because she was completely overhauled in Melbourne, and as she is copper sheathed there is very little probability of her making any water...the work supervised by Dr. Duncan seems to have been admirably done.  

*M Fitzjames* served in the capacity of quarantine hulk for five years, until shore-based quarantine facilities were established on Torrens Island in 1881, and it was deemed redundant.

'TO SAVE THEM FROM THE CRIMINAL CLASSES' – BUYING A HOME FOR DESTITUTE BOYS

Although many considered that the *Fitzjames* of 1881 had reached the end of its life, and was now no better than floating firewood, the government was not yet willing to surrender its still relatively new purchase to the ship-breaker. Bids were made from various government agencies to use the vessel. The best submission came from the Destitute Board, which had been making plans for a floating reformatory from as early as 1868. At this time there were significant numbers of destitute children in South Australia, supposedly brought about in the most part by the desertion of families by fathers, and compounded by the lack of a treaty amongst the Australian colonies for the extradition of wife deserters. By the 1870s there was renewed interest, and a stronger incentive for the provision of a floating reformatory. The Destitute Board, in its 1874 report on the pre-existing Boys Reformatory at Ilfracombe, made a number of suggestions that explicitly called for such a vessel for 'protecting' destitute children:

In view of the expiration of the lease of the Ilfracombe premises in December next, the Board had urged upon the Government very strongly the desirableness of establishing a floating reformatory or hulk as the best and most economical mode of treating these boys, whether as regards safe guardianship or effective training...The Board have therefore suggested the purchase of a hulk from 200 to 300 tons for this purpose, and trust that their recommendation will be adopted by the Government.

Additionally, there were several other factors at play; first, the accommodation for destitute children at Magill and Ilfracombe was overcrowded and, second, the Board believed that a more complete separation of boys from society would
be of greater benefit to the young men themselves. The use of a ship as a reformatory was justified by the Destitute Board by further references to it as a 'training ship' that would provide recruits with experiences that would set them up for a life at sea in the merchant navy. In February of the following year T.S. Reed, the Chairman of the Destitute Board was happy to report that:

It is a matter of satisfaction to the Board to note that their suggestions as to the desirability of a Floating Reformatory for criminal boys, have been acted upon by the Government; and that the Imperial authorities have responded so promptly and liberally to the application made by His Excellency the Governor, in placing at the disposal of the Government of South Australia, the ship of war Rosario, for the purpose contemplated.23

Reed also pointed out that a floating reformatory was preferable to a land-based one because it allowed 'safe custody' by the mooring of the vessel 'some distance from the shore' (thereby avoiding the need for costly expenditure on security) and provided 'more varied and attractive' employment in trades and activities such as 'naval instruction, ship and other carpentry, drilling, and shoemaking'. Additionally, the boys would be taught to cook their own food 'as in the English training ships'.24 How different the reality would be, as the aforementioned vessel Rosario was never purchased. Indeed the vessel in question, a British wooden screw sloop launched at Deptford, England, in 1860 and measuring 160ft x 30ft 4in. x 13ft 6in. (920 tons displacement) had served as a slave ship chaser in the waters off Cuba before arriving in Australia in November 1867, where it was used in attempts to stamp out the kidnapping of Pacific Islanders for employment in Queensland and Fiji. The vessel returned to England in early 1875, a number of months after it had been 'promised' to the South Australian government. It was sold out of service in 1882.25

The less than new but nevertheless available Fitzjames was obviously the government's second choice, and was probably its only viable alternative. It was a curious purchase in the light of the goals of naval instruction, considering that it had no masts or rigging by the time of its transfer into its new service. It was in this greatly diminished capacity that Fitzjames would now operate and, consequently, become profoundly engraved into South Australian history. On 5 March 1880, 35 boys made the journey from their home at Magill to the hulk, which was moored off Largs Bay.26 Although the vessel had been substantially overhauled in its time as quarantine station, it was now 28 years old, and in less than pristine condition. Even so, it remained predominantly off the Largs beach for the best part of its remaining life, only coming to shore for occasional repairs and to restock stores.
LIFE ONBOARD FOR THE 'JUVENILE PAUPERS'

The boys placed on Fitzjames came from diverse backgrounds and circumstances. Their passage into state care, and their internment on the ship, came about for a range of reasons; some had committed heinous crimes (such as one documented case of rape), while most others had carried out petty thefts (such as stealing food). A third class of boy was more victim of circumstance or family desertion. In the early days of the colony, many parents found that they simply could not afford to keep their children. In these situations boys were often given over to the state for 'having bad manners', or were labelled 'neglected' or 'uncontrollable'. In other cases their crimes were manufactured. All eventually would be known as the 'Juvenile Paupers'. From a legal standpoint these boys were divided into three classes of children; those sentenced by the courts, those received by the Destitute Board, and those surrendered by their parents. This apparent 'mixing of the innocent boys with the criminal boys', of the 'bad with the poor', would be one of the major criticisms of the system set up on Fitzjames until its use was discontinued towards the end of the century. Whatever a boy's background, once on board ship all children were admitted to the lowest class (Class 3) of a structured
system which reinforced that in life punishment should be expected, while privilege and advancement had to be earned.  

In keeping with the varied background of the internees, there was also a wide range in the ages of the boys onboard the vessel. The youngest on the hulk were nine years old, and 16 was generally the age when boys had to leave. Some of them could stay for up to seven years. In particular, the upper age limit had been enforced by the courts, on account of the effect of the 'evil proclivities' of older boys on younger wards of the state. By 1884 it was reported that the upper and lower age of the boys had dropped by one year, with boys aged between eight and 15 residing on the vessel. Most could be apprenticed out after one third of their time had been served, but were entitled to retain only a third of their wages. The remaining monies were placed into a personal savings account. Those not apprenticed were allocated to one of a number of 'industrial departments'. In 1881 the three industrial departments on the hulk were listed as tailoring, shoemaking and carpentering. Shoemaking was cancelled at the end of 1887, and later, turnery would be added to this list. From the opening of the reformatory hulk, questions about the appropriateness of the training were raised. It was admitted that despite the original intention that the vessel provide naval training, there were 'no provisions for any nautical training, or for giving the boys knowledge of a seafaring life'. It was resolved that the purchase of a mast would fix this, but no later report shows that this ever occurred, despite comments by Reed that:

Hitherto, I have regarded any teaching in practical seamanship as inexpedient, as the effect of a seafaring life would be to send our young muscle out of the colony. In the event, however, of a warship being permanently stationed in the gulf, which is not improbable, I think these boys would form an admirable nucleus for a future naval brigade, and to this end should be placed under nautical training without delay.

The failure to provide naval training was again later defended by the argument that 'the natural effect of seafaring tastes would be to remove boys from the colony'. Despite this, the stationing of the South Australian Colonial Navy vessel Protector in Gulf St Vincent from 1884 would indeed have consequences for the fate of some of the Fitzjames boys when, in April 1885, five and, in May 1885, two were enrolled for service on the warship despite their obvious lack of real nautical training.

Early reports seem to suggest that the hulk was very much a security concern, with many separate instances of boys' escaping despite being lodged well offshore. While the commencement of twice-weekly visits to the beach and swimming lessons in 1883 should have perhaps increased (and assisted) escape attempts, the opposite actually occurred and numbers decreased. Other than the religious services that were central to the educational life on board the hulk (and themselves caused considerable controversy), in 1885 it was reported the
educational programme included reading, spelling, writing, arithmetic, geography, grammar and object lessons. The schoolmaster also gave additional lectures on a range of adventurous and romantic subjects, and it was reported that the boys were able to enjoy rowing, cricketing, and football. Some 'in the higher classes' were also allowed to go fishing. Despite this almost idyllic picture painted for public consumption, some critics, often citing the 'mix of classes' on the vessel, nevertheless maintained that the 'principal education received by the inmates of the Reformatory is an education in evil'. This reputation also affected how the rest of the community perceived the boys. In one particular case, a serious gale at Port Adelaide impeded boys from the hulk returning from a day excursion. It was decided that the most appropriate expedient was to make them spend the night at the Port Adelaide Police Station.

**CONDITIONS ON THE HULK AND THE WAY COMMISSION**

It seems that even in the 1880s, despite the reported success of the hulk in combating 'the larrikinism of the streets', the placement of boys in a leaking hulk at sea was somewhat controversial. Early visits to the floating reformatory by the press were pre-planned and seemingly well rehearsed. When it was known that the press would be coming on board, the dorms were clean, the boys were happily at work, and the reporters were always greeted with smiles and naval salutes. Consequently, news of the true conditions on board the vessel was slow to reach the wider public. Eventually, reports began to delve deeper into the treatment and punishment of the boys, their domestic arrangements and the unhygienic conditions in which they lived and worked.

By 1883, only two years after *Fitzjames* became a reformatory, a Royal Commission into the working of the Destitute Act in South Australia was convened under Chief Justice Way, and the clash of truth and rhetoric finally came to a head for the Destitute Board. Indeed, the Way Commission sparked a number of controversies that had the reformatory hulk at their centre. This first began around the middle of 1884, with the levelling of accusations of religious tampering and proselytism by the Destitute Commission in regard to the religious education of the boys on board the ship. Of particular concern to some sections of the public were questions about the provision of appropriate religious services to both Protestant and Roman Catholic boys, and issues of access to their pledges for religious instruction.

Also in the mid 1880s, questions about the seaworthiness of the hulk caused major clashes between men of substance and reputation in the colony. While an enquiry into *Fitzjames* was included as a part of a general enquiry into the Destitute Act, it was also timely due to the number of leaks that seemed to periodically occur on the vessel and require fixing. To begin with, the ship was inspected by the shipwright surveyor (Captain Inglis) and the supervisor of
the dockyard (Captain Hay), and later by a representative of the Adelaide Underwriters Association, a Captain J.H. Gibbon. These reports were very different, with both Inglis and Hay soon embroiled in a public slanging match with Gibbon and his supporters in the Destitute Act Commission, Mr H.W. Thompson, and the Mayor of Adelaide, Mr Bundley. The Gibbons faction was supported by the Adelaide newspapers, in particular the South Australian Register, which proclaimed that it had 'no private interests to serve', but would 'much rather see...[Fitzjames] on the top of Mount Lofty than in Largs Bay'.

It was also reported that Captain Gibbon believed that the condition of the hulk was so bad that it was not worth repairing. Indeed, the reports on the vessel's condition were so 'diametrically opposite' that the debate degenerated into a public slanging match between the 'experts'. Fitzjames was reported to have rotten wood that could not hold nails (with particular emphasis on the topsides of the vessel), decaying oakum, and was in danger of opening at any moment, endangering the lives of those housed on board. Soon it was being referred to as a 'floating coffin'. Subsequent visitors noted the rot and decay of the structure, remarking on the 'redolent' smell of chloride of lime, as if to imply that the many attempts to make the vessel appear in good condition were purely cosmetic. This incensed Captains Inglis and Hay who considered 'the danger to life...imaginary' and responded with defensively worded, 'reclarimentary reflections'. In particular, they accused Gibbons of exaggeration. Inglis and Hay maintained that the vessel's planks were on average around nine inches thick, that the vessel was coppered a full three feet above the waterline, and provided testimony that the leak which had been affecting the hulk, and bringing its state of repair into dispute was 'private or particular leak, and not general'. They insisted that the vessel was not a 'floating coffin' and that, despite the fact that it regularly had 21 inches of water in its hold, this did not qualify it as 'leaky'. According to their own statistics, the normal state of Fitzjames when 'pumped out' would be with around 15.5 in. of water in the hold. In the opinion of Hay and Inglis, the function of the vessel was a critical consideration, and the level of water in the hold was acceptable given that it was only a 'floating house'. They further maintained that Fitzjames should not have been surveyed as if it was a commercial vessel, which was the standard Gibbon, as a member of the Underwriters Association, had applied. They also claimed, 'in self defence' that they were 'more competent judges than either Mr Thompson or Captain Gibbons'.

There were accusations that the Hay and Inglis report to the Destitute Commission had not been thorough, and that Gibbon's testimony was more accurate. This was put to a number of meetings, including one of the Marine Board on 20 November 1884. The Marine Board sided with Gibbon and the Destitute Commission's findings both in relation to the status of the hulk as a death-trap, and the poor work of Inglis and Hay, stating in no uncertain terms that 'it appears that the investigation was only very partial, and the stopping of the leak was most imperfectly done'. Following this correspondence, the reports regarding the affair became more focussed on the damage to Hay and
Inglis' reputations, and issues of jurisdiction pertaining to the hulk, and who should inspect or survey it, rather than clearing up once and for all the question of its seaworthiness. Proceedings would drag on, and on.

In the end, Way's commission found that the vessel was in a bad state and was very unsafe in deep water. Taking into consideration that the vessel would now cost £3,500 to repair, the government instead chose to move it to the shallow water of the False Arm of the Port River. Permanent screw moorings were later installed by the Marine Board at a cost to the government of £210. As well as the poor state of the vessel, Justice Way was appalled at the physical and mental condition of the boys on board:

On our first visit to the hulk we were struck at the pallid and dull appearance of the boys. This we attribute to the depressing conditions and wearisome monotony of the life on board, and largely the defects in the dietary and want of open-air exercise. There are no masts and no rigging to serve for means of physical training. As the hulk is roofed in forward, the poop is the only place where the boys can get the light necessary for health. From January, 1882, to the end of 1883, the boysgoing on shore seems to have stopped altogether, except at intervals of six or seven months.

Indeed, the conditions on the vessel were often criticized as dreadful. It was, for instance reported that 'twelve of the worst cases of ophthalmia...ever seen have been admitted to the Hospital school, and in seven of these cases it is possible that the patients will lose their sight'. The spread of ophthalmia was not the only condition attributed to overcrowded conditions on the hulk; many other diseases were also a problem. It is more than likely that these sicknesses were linked to innutritious diet. Food for the young boys was said to be amply, and contained all the staples of bread, dripping, potatoes and meat; however, it lacked variety and was cooked very poorly. In 1884, a review resulted in major improvements to the boys' diet. Hygiene practices, such as washing hands before eating, were not observed, and a ten-gallon keg cut in half served as a toilet. No more than two and a half gallons of water were allowed to each boy per day, and consequently showering was often undertaken in saltwater. Furthermore, the boys' education was under the control of the ship's carpenter Mr Redman, who had no teaching qualifications, and it was rumoured that he had forced a fourteen-year old boy, who had been convicted of forgery, to do the majority of the teaching. In light of these conditions it is no surprise that despite the explicit didactic aims of the reformatory, and the intentions of the Destitute Board, Fitzjames as a training school and reformatory was largely a failure. Indeed, only a small number of boys ever made it to merchant ships after they were released, and most were simply returned to their often-abusive parents or were sent to serve new settlers. Additionally, when boys were eventually seconded, or apprenticed off ship, instances of abuse were often reported in the papers. In particular, there was a stream of reports and
accusations that included floggings, starvation, beatings and burning around the mid-1880s.\textsuperscript{65}

Justice Way’s report and its recommendations spelt the end of incarceration of children on the vessel, and inevitably led to the end of Fitzjames itself. One of the consequences of the Way report was that control of Fitzjames and the boys onboard passed to the State Children’s Council. With Fitzjames now out of the picture, Reed announced the Destitute Board’s desire to make:

...immediate application to the Imperial Government for an old frigate to supply its place, as they feel that a vessel of this character would afford facilities for carrying out a better system, for classification, and for the general purpose of such an institution, which at present do not and cannot exist.\textsuperscript{66}

This announcement was repeated in September 1885, but went unacknowledged.\textsuperscript{67} South Australia’s short-lived experiment with floating reformatories died with Fitzjames.

\textbf{'IS THE FITZJAMES STILL AFLOAT?'}

Amazingly, despite all the controversy, Fitzjames persisted and was continually patched up with each subsequent leak, whether minor or serious.\textsuperscript{68} Further tests of the ‘clean’ and ‘well-managed’ hulk showed that a knife could be pushed all the way through the inner hull, and that water was streaming in as fast as it could be pumped out. Nine boys had to work the pumps.\textsuperscript{69} In 1888, during a meeting that would decide the fate of Fitzjames, the secretary of the Marine Board jokingly asked, ‘Is the Fitzjames still afloat?’\textsuperscript{70} By 23 June 1888, two boys had to work at the pumps two to three hours solid each day to stem the two and a half inches of water it was taking each hour. On this day representatives of the State Children’s council paid a visit. Their observations were recorded in the Adelaide Observer:

On reaching the deck we saw nine little fellows at the pump, three at the handle and six hauling on a line. The rest of the boys were at school and would have to take their turn when lessons were done.\textsuperscript{71}

By the end of that same month, this was up to ten or twelve hours everyday due to winter storms, and probably ever increasing openings in the ship’s hull.\textsuperscript{72} Needless to say, under these circumstances Fitzjames was a mess, and a sham of institutional education. The schoolmaster could not get ashore, the boys could not write during their lessons. From 26 June school was out. With time needed to be spent at the steam engine pump, there was simply no time left for books and arithmetic. Within a day, conditions had worsened and water was truly pouring in as soon as it was pumped out. By 29 June the boys working the
pumps were replaced by men. Still, plans were made to repair the weary barque.

Repair they did and, by someone's iron will or some other miracle, Fitzjames would remain afloat another two and a half years. This surprising longevity after such a damming enquiry into its condition is hard to explain. One possible reason was that just months after the conclusion of the Destitute Commission, the vessel underwent a series of improvements including modifications to toilet and shower facilities and the addition of a library with 300 volumes, supplied by 'a benevolent public'.\(^\text{73}\) The ultimate end of the vessel would come not because of its deplorable state, but because of other changes afoot. Early in 1891, the girls who had been living at the boys' old residence at Magill were moved to new lodgings at Edwardstown, and on 28 May 1891 the boys were taken off 'Hell afloat' and returned to their old address where they were again trained to become farmers and gardeners.\(^\text{74}\) Fitzjames could now finally fade away, and not a moment too soon.

**FITZJAMES' FATE**

Following this reorganisation of Adelaide's young and destitute, Fitzjames was mothballed. After the removal of the boys, references to the ship largely disappear and there is some doubt as to where its remains ended up. It is generally accepted that the vessel was abandoned and broken up somewhere in the Port Adelaide region at some unknown date toward the turn of the century, although the specific location of its discard is still a mystery. The best indication comes from an extract from the memoirs of the 90-year-old Captain Andrew Walter Todd (1883–1973), published in the Journal of the Port Adelaide Historical Society, *Portonian*. Here Todd makes particular reference to the vessel:

> [When] she was finished with she was towed up and went through Jervois Bridge to the end of the Cable Company Wharf and beached and moored. There she died, and the wood topsides went home to many people's homes for the fire, but her backbone, the keel, is in her grave.\(^\text{75}\)

Others, such as Chris Halls, have suggested different locations:

> The Fitzjames was then moved to a mooring in the North Arm of the Port River and apparently broken up. Her figurehead stood, for many years, in the garden of a Mr. Stewart's home in Gladstone Street, Mile End, eventually it was chopped up for firewood.\(^\text{76}\)

This location has also been favoured by others:
...the almost unrecognisable remnant of the once proud old immigrant ship was towed to the North Arm of the Port River where she was eventually broken up. Nothing now remains to remind us of that dark period of our forefather's approach to juvenile punishment.77

Nevertheless, despite the fact that Captain Todd was only about eight years old when *Fitzjames* was discarded, the vicinity of the still-standing Cable Company wharf, in the Jervois Basin at Ethelton, seems to be the best indication of the vessel's location. This is for a number of reasons. It is true that the North Arm of the Port River was a particularly popular place for the discard and salvage of watercraft. Indeed, South Australia's major ships' graveyard, located on a portion of the southern shoreline of Garden Island, is located in this stretch of water. However, there has been a tendency in literature pertaining to the discard of unwanted vessels to presume that all vessels abandoned in 'the ships' graveyard' were beached at Garden Island.

![Figure 3. Fitzjames in the Upper Reaches of the Port River, c1900](Ron Blum Collection)

Furthermore, recent archaeological research into ships' graveyards and watercraft discard has shown that Port Adelaide had a number of areas designated for the dumping of watercraft, one of which was located in the Jervois Basin at Ethelton.78 The site at Garden Island seems to represent what could be called a secondary discard site where larger, predominantly ferrous-hulled watercraft were dumped after being substantially salvaged at another
location. Such vessels were generally broken down to the point that they could still remain afloat before being moved on. The eastern bank of the Jervois Basin, in close proximity with the old Walter and Morris wharves, is most often cited as the location of these initial salvage activities. There also is some photographic evidence that *Fitzjames* was at one stage beached at the Jervois Basin. In the book *Southern Passages* there is depicted a wooden vessel lying on the western bank of the Jervois Basin, towards where the southern end of the Cable Company wharf would have terminated. Other photographs of the derelict hulk at Ethelton, carrying the name *Fitzjames*, exist in private collections. While it is possible that the vessel depicted was undergoing salvage before being taken to Garden Island for dumping, this is unlikely because of the obvious poor condition of its hull. It is also pertinent that this section of the western bank of the Jervois Basin is noted as a location where wooden ships were beached so that they could be dismantled for firewood.

On 5 April 1998, two employees of Heritage South Australia, Terry Arnott (Principal Maritime Heritage Officer) and Nathan Richards (then a Maritime Heritage Officer with Heritage South Australia) visited the ships' graveyard at Jervois Basin, Ethelton, close to the position that Captain Todd indicated the vessel was discarded. Maritime archaeological site inspection in the water of the basin was attempted, but achieved nothing due to extreme pollution and near nil-visibility water. Inspections on the bank of the basin, however, uncovered a portion of a highly degraded wooden hull. Initially it was believed that these remains belonged to *Fitzjames* due to their close proximity to notable landmarks. But timber samples taken at the site proved to be *Pinus sylvestris* (Scots Pine), and subsequent research shows that the remains belonged to the Norwegian barque *Fides*, built in 1918, and abandoned there in 1932. In March 2000, staff from Heritage South Australia, with the assistance of the Western Australian Maritime Museum, employed a side scan sonar in the Jervois Basin to identify possible vessels in the ships' graveyard (including *Fitzjames*)—once again, due to pollution there were no results. While the vessel's remains may still lie in the waters of the Port River's upper reaches, it is equally likely that it now lies under metres of fill somewhere under the reclaimed bank of Ethelton. The search continues.

**CONCLUSION**

The fate of our hypothetical eight-year-old boy encountering *Fitzjames* for the first time and that of the notorious hulk are entwined. While throughout the 1880s it could easily have been assumed that the decay of the vessel's reputation across South Australia would lead to its demise, it was, in fact, the decay of the vessel itself that ended its (and the boys') sentence. Ultimately, public outrage over the practices and conditions of life aboard *Fitzjames* did little to influence its fate.
Many would argue that the story of this vessel is simply 'a revolting picture of callous indifference and mismanagement...and of a system leading to the bestial degradation of the boys entrusted to their care'. Given the evidence presented here, it is hard to disagree with this assessment. The isolating of young boys aboard the floating prison caused them extensive pain and suffering that often continued through into their later lives. While it is true that Fitzjames was significant to South Australia’s maritime history, its story also demonstrates how important ships could be to the formation of attitudes in the wider colonial setting. Its controversial history impinged on, and helped to shape, the development of South Australia’s public health and welfare systems. For this reason, while the resting place of Fitzjames remains a mystery, its varied and troubled career will continue to be discussed and debated for many years to come.

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2 *Melbourne Argus* (AS), 7 June 1884, p.5ab.
5 Ibid.
7 *South Australian Government Gazette (SAGG)*, 8 January 1885, p.46.
9 *Mercantile Navy Register (MNL)*, 1866.
There are actually some questions as to who captained the vessel on Australian voyages during this period. M.A. Syme, in *Shipping Arrivals and Departures, Victorian Ports, Volume 2: 1846-1853*, Roebuck Press, Melbourne, p.271, suggests Captain M. Hamilton, whereas LRS notes I. Hoyt as its master (LRS, 1853-1856), followed by Captain Hamilton (apparently Hamilton) (LRS, 1857-1862), Captain W. Forsythe (LRS, 1863-1864), and finally Captain Wardrop (LRS, 1865-1873). D. Hollett, in *Fast passage to Australia: the history of the Black Ball, Eagle, and White Star lines*, Fairplay, London, 1986, pp.207-208 notes that the journey to Melbourne was undertaken under Captain Alexander Lowe, then under Captain Wardrop in 1866.

11 *LRS*, 1857.

12 It is noted in I. Nicholson, *Log of Logs: a catalogue of logs, journals, shipboard diaries, letters, and all forms of voyage narratives, 1788 to 1988, for Australia and New Zealand, and surrounding oceans*, published by the author and the Australian Association for Maritime History, Yaroomba, pp.188, that the vessel also visited Sydney transporting migrants probably sourced from Ireland.

13 *South Australian Register (REG)* 3 January 1856, p.2a. Previously, around June or July 1854, the vessel *Dorrigo* had entered the Port Adelaide River. *Dorrigo* is cited as being 25 tons less burden than *Fitzjames* (see *Ibid*).

14 This was reported by C. Halls, in *Port's Quarantine Hulk*, *SA Watersport*, April 1972, pp.2. No sources to substantiate this claim were found during research. While it is possible that the vessel was serving as a transport in the Crimean War (1853–1856), the evidence of visits to various British and Australian ports during this time, and the notations in LRS, 1853-1873 that repairs and modification on the vessel were only carried out in the years 1862 (attributed by Halls to damage during the war, but six years after the conflict), 1864 and 1866 seems to suggest that this was not the case.

15 *Adelaide Observer (OBS)*, 23 May 1891, p.37d.

16 Ibid.

17 *REG*, 29 May 1876.

18 *OBS*, 23 May 1891, p.37d.

19 Halls, *Port's Quarantine Hulk*.

20 *REG*, 14 December 1885, p.7cd.

21 See *South Australian Advertiser (ADV)* 26 April 1884, p.4def, although an earlier reference in *REG*, 3 December 1883, p.4def, cites that only 10% of cases of pauperism were attributable to wife desertion.

22 *SAGG*, 13 August 1874, p.1581.

23 *SAGG*, 18 February 1875, p.312.

24 Ibid.


26 *OBS*, 23 May 1891, p.37d.

27 As referred to in *REG*, 14 June 1884, pp.4h, 5a.

28 *ADV*, 26 April 1884, p.4def.

29 *REG*, 14 February 1885, p.7cd; 13 April 1885, p.6gh.

30 *OBS*, 23 May 1891, p.37d.

31 *SAGG*, 17 March 1881, p.827.

32 *OBS*, 24 May 1884, p.37c.

33 *SAGG*, 17 March 1881, p.827; 27 October 1881, p.1203; *OBS*, 5 November 1881, p.35ab; 25 May 1884, p.37c; *REG*, 14 February 1885, p.7cd.
SAGG, 11 October 1883, p.1235.
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SAGG, 8 January 1885, p.46; 17 September 1885, p.845.
ADV, 14 August 1884, p.4fg.
REG, 3 September 1887, p.5a.
SAGG, 2 September 1880, p.871.
OBS, 5 November 1881, p.35ab; REG, 27 June 1883, p.5bc.
ADV, 28 July 1884, p.4ef; 2 August 1884, p.4ef.
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OBS, 24 May 1884, p.37e.
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Ibid.
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Hannan, *Chief Justice Way*.
REG, 14 June 1884, pp.4h, 5a.
Ibid., pp.4h, 5a and 18 June 1884, p.4h.
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SAGG, 8 January 1885, p.46.
SAGG, 17 September 1885, p.845.
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See N.T. Richards, 'The History and Archaeology of the Garden Island Ships' Graveyard, North Arm of the Port Adelaide River, South Australia', unpublished Archaeology Honours dissertation, Flinders University, 1997; Shirley Matthews, 'The North Arm Ships' Graveyard,


80 This area has since been incorporated into a maritime heritage trail due to the proliferation of discarded watercraft in the area. The remnants of only three watercraft have thus far been verified: Alert, Fides, Trafalgar and the 'Old Fish Barge'. See R. Hartell, Port Adelaide Ships' Graveyards: Garden Island, Jervois Basin, Mutton Cove, Angas Inlet, Broad Creek, Heritage South Australia, 2002; N. Hopkins (ed.), 'Maritime trail will highlight historic ships', Pen 2 Paper: City of Port Adelaide Enfield newsletter, vol. 7, no.3, 2002, p.4; T. Arnott, 'Heritage South Australia', Australian Institute for Maritime Archaeology Newsletter, vol. 18, nos 3&4, 1999, pp.15-16.

81 Hannan, Chief Justice Way.