

ACTIVITY: Land/ Sea disaster

CASE: GSAF 1909.06.18

DATE: Friday June 18, 1909

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Tasman Sea at Middleton Reef, 300 nautical miles from Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.



BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: New Moon, June 18, 1909

NARRATIVE: The *Errol* (ex-*Carisbrooke Castle*) was wrecked on Middleton Reef on June 18, 1909. Several of the crew drowned at the time of the accident but the remainder sought shelter on the wreck of the *Annasona* (which had wrecked on the reef on January 18, 1907). Subsequently, the master of the *Errol*, his wife and their four children perished, along with several more of the crew. On July 12, 1909, five crew members were rescued – all that remained of the complement of 22.

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This sailing ship was built in 1868 by Barclay, Currie & Co at Glasgow as a three masted ship with a tonnage of 1415, a length of 230'4", and a beam of 37'8". She was delivered in September 1868 for the London to Calcutta run. Records show she became the fifth Currie ship to be sold to Charles Barrie of Dundee in 1889 and was renamed *Errol*. When she was sold with the Cluny, Castle sail ownership came to an end.

Under the command of Captain Freebody the ship arrived in Auckland on September 8, 1875 after a passage of 92 days. She was from Liverpool and Belfast and brought 363 settlers to New Zealand including 122 "healthy-looking, clear-complexioned" Irish lasses (in the reporter's words) who seem to have captivated the attention of an Auckland Star reporter of the time.

In 1900 she was acquired by A P Ulriksen of Mandal, retaining her name which she kept when she was sold again to Walker, Howard & Co. of London in 1904.

She was sailing under a Norwegian flag, Captain Andreasen, bound from Peru to Newcastle, when she wrecked on Middleton Reef. Caught firmly in the grip of treacherous currents, she crashed on to Middleton Reef some 300 miles East of Brisbane on June 18, 1909.

Within a few hours and with her back already broken, she disintegrated into three pieces throwing her master, the mate and several of the crew to the sharks. Most of her passengers met a slow and horrible death from drowning, thirst, starvation and sharks. A raft with five men on board set out for the *Annasona*, which could be seen about eight miles away. There was no food on the *Annasona*, but they discovered some brackish water trapped in the crevices in her hull.

Those left on the *Errol* were soon suffering from hunger and thirst. One morning the body of the captain's wife and two of her four children were found floating near the wreck. Next day two more children died. When *SS Tofua* passed by the Middleton Reef on July 12, 1909, only five of the 22 passengers and crew were still alive.

Today nothing is visible of the barque above the sea.

SPECIES INVOLVED: Not identified

SOURCE: Australian Zoologist, viii., 1937, page 207



Middleton Reef image from NASA Millennium Coral Reef Mapping Project