

In the early hours of Monday 1st August, they found themselves just out of Antechamber Bay, after narrowly escaping being washed up on the Pages by the treacherous tide that runs through Backstairs Passage. With the motor out of action the *Mary* was washed ashore between the jetty and the mouth of the Chapman River, just below Mr. Tom Lashmar's house. She first grounded about 50 yards from the beach, but the vessel was forced further inshore by the huge waves that were buffeting her side. The crew finally abandoned ship, by wading ashore when the tide went out.

It was hoped the wind and the seas would moderate, in anticipation of getting the ketch afloat, but she had settled on the sand bar, with heavy seas continuing to break over her. A few hours later she had broken her back, and all hope of getting her off was abandoned.



J.R.Trethewey

The ketch *Mary* on Antechamber Bay beach, 1st August 1951

Staying at Mr. Tom Lasmhar's house for three days, the crew spent their time salvaging parts of the stricken vessel. Amidst the heavy seas washing over the wreck the men spent arduous hours trying to salvage the main parts of the ship, but high seas and cold driving rain made the job almost impossible. They returned to Port Adelaide on the *Karatta* on Sunday 4th August.

After 75 years of service the *Mary* was lying helpless and broken, with the seas pounding her useless hulk and the wind sighing in the depleted rigging.

The *Mary* was not insured, and was sold by Mr. Hogg to the Lashmar family at Antechamber Bay. They salvaged the engine, masts, and dismantled most of the hull, using the timber for sheep yards. The masts were cut down and used for framework for farm sheds.

GRELKA

The motor cruiser *Grelka* was built in 1910 by White Brothers at Southampton, England, for Baron von Bissing, who at the time was a high-ranking officer at the German Embassy in London. Her dimensions were 55.0 feet long, 10.0 feet beam, and 4.0 feet depth, and powered by a 55 horsepower White Bros. kerosene engine. When first launched she was named the *Flora Clara*. She was the winner of the first motor boat race from the Thames to the Isle of Wight.

At the outbreak of World War I the motor cruiser was confiscated by the Royal Navy and used as a patrol vessel. After the war in 1919 she was sold by the Royal Navy to an unknown person. Sir Mark Mitchell in England, acquired her in 1927 and changed her name to *Grelka*, and after using her there for a while had her shipped out to South Australia, where she was used for pleasure cruises in South Australian waters.

At the outbreak of World War II, *Grelka* was taken over by the Royal Australian Navy, and again used as a patrol vessel, based at Fremantle, Western Australia.

Every year, in the summer months a crew of amateurs took the motor launch from the Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron, at Outer Harbour, down to American River where Sir Mark Mitchell had a summer residence. The *Grelka* cruised extensively along the north coast of Kangaroo Island.



Sir Mark Mitchell

The motor launch *Grelka* at American River

Antechamber Bay, a haunt of big game anglers such as Jack Davey, Eldred Riggs, and James Cowell. Skippered by Mr. Jack Wood, and the crew, Messrs. Ron Wall, Max Wall, Dean Hamill, Ken Raul, Bronte Woodman, and Malcolm Hudson. The vessel usually carried a small dinghy in her davits, but something prompted Mr. Wood to leave the small dinghy and take a larger, eleven foot six dinghy.

Early in the afternoon of the 25th they arrived at Antechamber Bay and after taking the owner and three guests onboard, they cruised about the bay fishing. The owner and his guests then went ashore, where they had established a shore camp for the night. It was arranged to pick them up early the next morning, and then proceed to the Pages, a small group of islands in Backstairs Passage, to try their hands at catching sharks. Towards evening H.M.A.S. *Barcoo*, a survey frigate, entered Antechamber Bay and also anchored.

Early in the morning they contacted the shore camp and picked up the guests, the owner deciding to stay ashore and fish for bream in the Chapman River, a fresh water stream that enters the bay. They had an uneventful run out to the Pages. The day was very hot and the wind was light, although there was a long swell running. On anchoring near the Pages, bare islands of rocks devoid of any vegetation, they fished. An hour or two later they 'upped' anchor to return to Antechamber Bay at about 10.30 a.m.

It was a contented crew that lounged on *Grelka's* deck as they cruised back. The engine was throbbing reassuringly, the sun was shining brightly, and the helmsman singing lustily at the wheel. Everybody was at peace with the world when suddenly a terrific explosion flashed from the direction of the engine room. Mr. Wood ran forward and looking down the hatch of the engine room saw that it was a raging inferno.

All hands raced to procure fire extinguishers and played them on the fire, but all to no avail. By this time the fire had spread forward through the bilge and flames were shooting from the forecastle hatch. The main fuel tanks, which held 200 gallons of power kerosene, had not yet caught fire and could have blown up at any moment, so the dinghy was lowered. All hands except Mr. Wood and Mr. Max Wall clambered aboard. The dinghy was hung from the stern and Mr. Wood and Mr. Wall endeavoured to pour buckets of water on the flames, but it only encouraged them. All hope for the motor launch had now gone, the flames were spreading everywhere and the main fuel tanks had yet to blow up. H.M.A.S. *Barcoo* was a smudge of smoke on the horizon, and no immediate help from her was expected even if she had seen the smoke. There was nothing left to do but abandon ship.

Mr. Wood and Mr. Wall dived overboard and swam to the dinghy and got those onboard to pull as far away as possible from the *Grelka* before they endeavoured to get aboard the dinghy, as it was by no means certain that the dinghy would hold seven people. Luckily it did and they were afloat once more. It was decided to head for Cape St. Albans, the nearest point of land. The time was then about 11.15 a.m. They could not gamble on the *Barcoo* coming to their rescue, so the outboard engine was started and their boat headed towards Cape St. Albans. At this stage another terrific explosion came from the burning yacht accompanied by huge columns of smoke.

They were approaching land when the *Barcoo* was seen nearing the burning *Grelka*. After circling her, the *Barcoo* commenced a block search. When about a half mile from the shore, the *Barcoo* was seen coming fast in their direction, having sighted the dinghy.

When they were three hundred yards off shore, *Barcoo* was signalling them to come to her, so the dinghy was turned around, but not for long, as there was another kind of trouble, for, on the stern, there was an eighteen foot shark following. By this time the outboard motor had stopped and they had to row. Cape St. Albans was a lot closer than the *Barcoo*, so it was to the Cape they headed with the shark still silently following. It kept nudging the transom with its head then went either side of the dinghy and bumped the oars with its head. It then moved underneath the dinghy, presumably to upset it, and started to bump the underside. At this stage something had to be done to distract it so the outboard engine was dropped over the stern, and luckily it followed it down. The oars were applied with great vigour for the last hundred yards and they headed the dinghy into a crevice in the rocks on Cape St. Albans and scrambled ashore.

H.M.A.S. *Barcoo* then lowered a launch and ran alongside the rocks and picked them up. They were taken onboard *Barcoo* and treated very handsomely by the officers and crew. The captain told Mr. Wood that when he approached the *Grelka* he could see that she was doomed as her starboard side was blown out. The men from the *Grelka* were put in a launch and landed at Penneshaw. The *Barcoo* then steamed back to the burning *Grelka*, arriving as she sank (according to the captain). It is believed that when the *Barcoo* got to the *Grelka* she was still afloat and she was sunk by gunfire from the *Barcoo*, as she was a shipping hazard.