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# AN ENGLISH CASED SCRATCH-BUILT TIMBER MODEL OF "THE GUIDING STAR"

Victorian, built to remember the famous clipper bound out of Liverpool for Melbourne, Lost at Sea in 1855, the three-masted clipper, sails stowed, depicted on a naturalistic swell, the glazed case with stop-chamfered mouldings,

DIMENSIONS: 50cm (19<sup>3/4</sup>" ) High, 70cm (27<sup>1/2</sup>" ) Wide, 36cm (14<sup>1/4</sup>" ) Deep, the case

PRICE: £820

STOCK CODE: 46610



## HISTORY

The Guiding Star was a clipper built for speed and ocean-going prowess, her career was to have been the long trips to the far reaches of the Empire – particularly transporting emigrants to Australia as the reported Gold Rush generated a surge in demand. The ship was sailing for “The Golden Line”.

She set out from Liverpool in January 1855, her Captain James McClelland having been recorded as wanting to break the record for the fastest passage to Melbourne. Aged 34, he was a relatively inexperienced captain and an ambitious one with a known track record of risk taking. He adopted the new “Great Circular” route that took The Guiding Star south through the mid-Atlantic, crossing the equator and sailing close to the eastern coast of Brazil in the direction of South Georgia, where the ship was last sighted. He then went further south than any of his peers dared – deep into the great South Seas before turning East.



The Guiding Star in the Illustrated London News, 1853

It wasn't until October that year that the Lloyds finally conceded that the ship must have been lost at sea and that the most likely cause would have been "Ice". Charles Strutt, the acting Immigration Agent at the destination recorded it as follows:

*"In concluding the subject of Assisted Immigration it is my painful duty to state the loss of the ship Guiding Star, which sailed from Liverpool on the 9th of January, 1855, with 546 souls on board. She was last heard of on the 15th February, in lat 26° south and long. 34° west, since which period no tidings whatever have been received of her. The cause of this deplorable catastrophe can only be conjectured; in all probability it has been owing to collision with the ice. Many vessels reported that they had seen vast quantities of ice in unusually low latitudes, and some of them had suffered more or less injury in passing amongst these floating masses."*

In "**Re-assessing the Disappearance of The Guiding Star**" in "The Great Circle" Journal Vol 38. No 2, 2015, Kenneth N. Mival runs a "Cold Case" investigation into the disappearance of the ship. He details all of the factors that must have lead to her loss in the South Seas and the hubris of Captain McClelland seems to have been an important factor. He concludes with a list of all the pertinent factors:

*In 1851, the Gold Rush generated urgency for passengers to get to Australia;*

*The Golden Line over-reached itself financially as more competition and waning passenger numbers reduced fares to uneconomic levels, and possibly were less careful in crew selection, along with demanding ships be sailed as hard as possible to maximise returns;*

*Captain McClelland had struggled to get larger ships and the recognition he perhaps felt he deserved, but was inexperienced in managing ships of more than 400 tons, as were most of his officers and crew;*

*McClelland set record times to New Zealand in 1853, pushing his ship to the limit to achieve fast times and future fortune as a Captain of modern Clippers;*

*McClelland demonstrated he would take significant risks apparently sailing Admiral Grenfell with only officers after his crew deserted;*

*A race between James Baines, Lightning, Red Jacket and Guiding Star was underway and McClelland would have wanted to make his reputation by proving he was a better sailor than their better-known Captains;*

*From 1850, the new Great Circle Route saved time on the voyage to Australia, but in 1855 captains and crews had limited experience below 40° South;*

*Thomas Towson was expounding on the benefits of Great Circle sailing in Liverpool in the months prior to the sailing of Guiding Star;*

*In 1854, masses of giant icebergs appeared in the Southern Ocean due most probably to break-up of an Antarctic Ice Shelf;*

*The ice at 42° south was well north of latitudes anticipated by Towson, so McClelland would have met it sooner than he expected by several days;*

*In his last recorded conversation with Captain Dimon, McClelland said he would 'stand as far south as possible' guaranteeing he would encounter the ice;*

*From the reports of the George Marshall and Great Britain, a large mass of ice was located directly in the intended path of Guiding Star;*

*A large ice surrounded bay open to the north west, provided an inescapable trap for square rigged sailing ships that could not easily tack to windward. Gale winds from the north east, may have prevented the ship from sailing out of trouble to the north, forcing it to turn south – possibly already inside the 'bay' and unable to turn into the wind to extricate itself.*

The loss of all 546 lives on board was met with shock in Britain and Australia. Being a vessel full of emigrating families that had loosed their ties to their homeland and yet to establish themselves in a community at destination, and given that the ship's manifest and passenger list went down with the ship, the identity of all the passengers has never been established.