



Captain Richard Pierce & the Wreck of the *Halsewell* in 1786

Story by David John Allen

Compiled, Edited & Additional Material by Ed Cumming
MIBEC Maritime 2007

PDF Version 1.0. Revised & Updated 2020 for NAS

- The East India Company & its merchant fleet.
- The *Halsewell*, & its Commander Richard Pierce.
- The wreck of the *Halsewell* at Peveril Point, Isle of Purbeck, 1786, outward bound to Bengal.
- A copy of a Contemporary Narrative.
- Details of the aftermath; was any one to blame?
- The early salvage of the wreck & artefacts recovered after the wreck in 1786.

Archive

- Notes & research material by Ed Cumming, relevant to the *Halsewell* story
Bibliography, References & Glossary.
- Details of contemporary recoveries following the wreck.
- Details of a few significant finds from the wreck site by various groups of divers.

Introduction

by the Editor



'Balemark' or 'Trademark'
Of the United East India Company

Part I

By David John Allen

Contents

- 1 - The Wreck of the *Halsewell*
- 2 - Prologue
- 3 - The East India Company
- 4 - The Birth of an Honourable Ship
- 5 - A Family Affair
- 6 - Prelude to Wreck
- 7 - A Contemporary 'Narrative'
- 8 - Aftermath
- 9 - The Final Question.

Part II - The Archive

- 1 - *Halsewell* Odd Notes 1 to 9.
- 2 - Articles Written on the *Halsewell*
- 3 - Newspaper Reports
- 4 - References to the People Onboard
- 5 - Contemporary Poems
- 6 - British Library Material & Further Records
- 7 - Burials & Memorials
- 8 - Bibliography
- 9 - References
- 10 - Glossary
- 11 - The Eidophusikon
- 12 - Illustrations, Prints, Sketches & Artists
- 13 - The Significant Finds from the Wreck Site

Introduction by the Editor

It was not long after initiating the project to research and excavate the wreck site of the *Earl of Abergavenny* which foundered in Weymouth Bay, Dorset, in 1805 that I started to take an interest in the wreck site of another East India ship further to the East. The tragic wrecking of the *Halsewell* in 1786 at Peveril Point, Dorset was probably better known than that of the wreck *Earl of Abergavenny*.



Print by James Gillray

I certainly had no wish to dive or research the wreck myself, but I was keen to liaise with divers working on the site, primarily to compare finds from both sites. I expected there to be many similarities despite the almost twenty years between the two incidents. Research into the outward-bound cargoes carried by both the first and second ship named *Earl of Abergavenny* had indicated to me that cargoes at this period, in the long history of the English East India Company, were often very similar.

In 1980 I was approached by a member of one Sub Aqua Club who appeared to be interested in recovering items from the *Halsewell* site, but this, like many other approaches over the next few years came to nothing. Many items were regularly being taken from the site but very limited information was being made available. Fortunately, a few finds found their way to the Dorset County Museum during the late 1980's.

In 1999 I was lucky enough to meet up with David John Allen, who was researching and recovering finds from the *Halsewell* wreck site, within minutes of our meeting it was clear that we were kindred spirits. He shared the same enthusiasm and dedication, had been involved with his project for several years and amassed a significant archive. Sadly, David was very ill. Whilst we tentatively agreed to meet up again, we never did.

After David's death I keep in touch with the curator of the Weymouth Museum, Rodney Allcock, who had known David and his wife Valerie very well, like myself he fully appreciated the value of David's work. In 2003, following an approach by David's family, the Weymouth Museum was offered his archive, with the request that it should be placed in the public domain.

In 2000 the *Halsewell* became the first wreck to be part of the Nautical Archaeological Society's 'Adopt a Wreck Scheme'. The project group, however, do not appear to have reported on their activities.

However, artefacts from the work of this group can be seen in Part II, the section detailing some of the finds, courtesy of Ian Curruthers; the project leader at that time. Navigate using the underlined hyperlinks. Searches can be undertaken using the PDF reader's 'Find on this Page'.

First published in 2007 as a CD called 'Three East Indiamen Wrecked off the Dorsetshire Coast'.

Ed Cumming: (Revision and update as a PDF, in August, 2020)



Part I - The Wreck of the East India Ship, '*HALSEWELL*'

I have often been asked why, of all the comparatively safe and more friendly sports there are, I should choose scuba diving. Well it certainly wasn't the thought of entering the cold grey waters that surround the British Isles. In fact, my very first expedition into this enchanting world, was in the distant warm clear waters of the Indian Ocean. It may be said that the main reason for my indulgence was to enhance the deep interest I have in maritime history but that would not be quite true. I suppose if I were pressed to give a reason, I would have to say it was a combination of curiosity and the chance, nay, privilege, to explore one of the two remaining frontiers, virtually unknown to man. However, having the ability to dive has, as you can imagine, proven to be the most significant of all my pursuits in the quest to explore the tragic story of the *Halsewell*.

It was in 1988 when I had my first brush with the *Halsewell*, a name then, that I was totally unfamiliar with. On a rather cold Sunday morning in early April a diving acquaintance of mine, having suggested the night before that I, being interested in ancient ships, should dive the wreck site of an eighteenth-century East Indiaman that had foundered on rocks and was lying in about seven meters of water. Thrilled, I nodded my approval eagerly, at the thought of visiting an ancient shipwreck, but alas, I soon found myself shivering in the murky green waters of the English Channel, gliding over a thick forest of waving kelp which completely obliterated the sea bed and all hope of seeing any wreckage. My initial enthusiasm began to wane and finally foundered amongst the kelp along with the *Halsewell*; if there was such a ship! Numb with cold, I longed for the dive to be over and drooled over the thought of a hot cup of tea. How green I was, and little did I know that at that particular moment in time, in the very near future, I would be spending many cold, wet hours lying on this sea bed, surrounded by the thick kelp, in a painstaking excavation of the site.

It seems that the *Halsewell*, according to my companion, was outward bound for Bengal, India and had encountered severe weather in the Channel. After many unsuccessful manoeuvres carried out by a frantic crew, exhausted by fatigue and benumbed with cold, it had been driven on to a lee shore with a terrible loss of life. I was absolutely enthralled. It was obvious to me that this wreck needed to be thoroughly researched along with the unfortunate people who perished with her. Finally, although I didn't exactly relish the thought, I would perform a detailed excavation of the site.

All shipwrecks, especially if resulting in a substantial loss of life, as it was with the *Halsewell*, tend to promote a morbid fascination. Tales are told, with wide eyed exuberance, of the raging tempest and seamen, whose impending fate must involve feats of heroism that would excel the most vivid imagination together with the terrors of drowning. The *Halsewell* was no exception. Only in this case the stories of courage and terror were in most part true.

Throughout maritime history, the rugged Dorset coastline has always presented a navigation hazard to shipping, and if we associate this with the most prominent and unpredictable factor that the sailing ship had to contend with, namely the weather, then we can perceive a situation which spells tragedy. Evidence of this is sadly portrayed in the many wrecks that litter the seabed along this particular stretch of coast. Even today, pieces of wreckage can still be found among the rocks from ships long since devoured by the sea. The ensuing story tells of the East Indiaman *Halsewell*, which was one of those unfortunate ships.

From her launch in 1778, to her untimely and disastrous end eight years later, her pathetic remains now lay amongst the rocks. She was to become yet another casualty in a long line of maritime disasters. In my view, to say this is a story of just another shipwreck would be wrong, for it is an epic tale of both heroism and tragedy. It relates to compassion, and the suffering endured by passengers and crew and above all it was a disaster of such magnitude, that it stunned the whole nation into mourning. In 1789 King George III, and several members of the Royal family came to Seacombe to view for themselves, the site where this catastrophe took place. At the time, a William Holloway composed a poem, as a commemorative tribute to the Royal visit, which was then published in the Western County Magazine. So engrained was the loss of the *Halsewell* that in later years it became an inspiration for Charles Dickens' 'Lost Voyage'.

In the following pages, an attempt has been made to paint a picture of the *Halsewell*, and of the events leading to her tragic end. Also, to convey to the reader, the horror and utter despair the crew must have felt, on finding themselves in that desperate situation on the night of the 6th January 1786. However, it would leave an incomplete picture at this point, not to blend into the background a little of life on board vessels in the service of the East India Company during the eighteenth century. The *Halsewell*, as indeed many other East Indiamen had before her, carried the priceless cargos of the Company since 1600. Spices and perfumes, pearls, rubies, diamonds and cinnamon, guaranteed immense profits for the Company's shareholders and ship owners alike.

It is however, important and necessary to remember that this wealth was in a major part achieved by the consummate courage, patience, skill and long-suffering of that race of beings, the intrepid seamen, who rarely received their due from the landsmen they made rich and comfortable.

I hope this record will serve as a token to the memory of the *Halsewell* and as a tribute to the bravery of many of those who perished. Perhaps also as a symbol, not just to the ships lost in similar circumstances while in the service of the East India Company, but to the brave mariners, ancient and modern from all vessels that have been wrecked along the Dorset coastline. Although I do not take any credit whatsoever for the re-discovery of this particular wreck; I feel that my team and I are the first to conduct a detailed and documented investigation. Underwater archaeology is not always recognised as a discipline. There will always be those who merely wish to plunder historically important sites and unfortunately, over the years, the *Halsewell*, as well as many other sites around the British Isles, has not escaped their attention. Sadly, due to the predatory actions of some diving groups who have gone before, a great deal of material has been removed and consequently valuable information has been denied us and is now lost forever. Nevertheless, important finds have been made which hopefully, after careful study, will yield important information concerning this unfortunate ship and perhaps tell us something of the cargo and people who sailed with her. Some of the finds you will see illustrated in the archive.

We are fortunate indeed today, for the publication of 'Memoirs' by William Hickey (1749-1830) Attorney at law, who travelled extensively on-board English East Indiamen. Also 'Barlow's Journal', written by Edward Barlow during his life at sea. He, Barlow, was born on, 6th March 1642, and went to sea at the tender age of seventeen in 1659, as an apprentice aboard the *Naseby*, a First-Rate Naval ship of 76 guns. He also served in East & West Indiamen between 1671 to 1703. These very important volumes in particular, portray a very clear window from whence we can look back over the centuries to gain a fascinating glimpse of the true reality faced by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century seamen which otherwise would be shrouded in the mists of time. Those ancient wooden ships were, by today's standards, very small and the seamen who sailed them were tough and resilient. Upwards of a hundred men would be cramped together within the confines of a small vessel for months, sometimes years on end. Their tiny ships tossed and broken, sometimes being completely overwhelmed by the power of the tempest and being forever at the mercy of the winds. Not knowing whether they would ever reach their intended destination. Yet, with this knowledge, they put to sea regardless. We, today, could never begin to imagine the hardship they endured, or of the constant dangers that confronted them.

I hope the reader will share with me the historical insights into the workings of the East India Company, details of the *Halsewell*, events which led to her loss, and the results of our excavation of the wreck site.

DAVID JOHN ALLEN.



Prologue

The misfortunes that took place from the outset of this unhappy voyage, with the nautical manoeuvres of the crew, and the means used to avert the danger, are minutely described, in 'Narrative', by the officers who escaped the shipwreck. It is impossible to read the account of the last tender scene, where the afflicted father is pressing to his bosom his mournful daughters, in the moments before their impending fate, without sharing his grief. Nor can the most obdurate heart bring to mind the situation of this friendly group, that once composed an amicable society, in the cabin of this unfortunate ship, late so happy in their prospects and enjoyment amidst the accumulated distress, aggravated by the darkness of the night, the horrors of the boisterous ocean, and the ravings of a frantic crew, without partaking of the dread which they must have felt; they could have had no other hope but that every moment should put an end to their misery.

Death by shipwreck is the most terrible and awful of deaths. The spectacle of a field of battle is lofty and imposing, its glittering apparel, its martial music, its waving banners and floating standards, its high chivalric air and character elevate the soul and conceal from us the dangers of our situation. Stretched on our death bed, enfeebled by sickness, our sensibility becomes enfeebled also, and, while heavy shocks shake the body and make it to the bystander seem to suffer, nature throws over the soul the kindly shroud of a happy insensibility, while the closed shutter, the tiptoe tread and whispered attendance shut out the world we are so soon to leave. But in a storm at sea, the scene is not more terrible than disgusting, in a miserable cabin, on a filthy wet bed, in a confined and putrid air, where it is as impossible to think as to breathe freely, the fatigue, the motion, the want of rest and food, give a kind of hysteric sensibility to the frame, which makes it alive to the slightest danger. A helpless hand presses the mournful daughters ever closer to the parental bosom. Hidden by the mists of the oppressive gloom, despairing tears silently burn the cheek of a lamenting father aggravated with stifled melancholy. The imminent doom holds no fear but for the knowledge that his eyes shall no longer feast upon life's youthful innocents. How he longs once more to hear the laughter of his children float on the summer air. Wishing them far from this hideous vault. But all is now distant and already drowned by the infernal tempest. The whimpering pleas of these wretched adventurers, are usurped by the shrieking gale. Amidst accumulated distress, the forlorn candle sheds in vain its pallid beam of comfort against the blasts of tendrilled breath, those unforgiving rocks with deaths finger beckoning. If we look around the miserable group that surround us, no eye beams comfort, no tongue speaks consolation, and when we throw our imagination beyond to the death-like darkness, the howling blast, the raging and merciless element, expected every moment to become our horrid habitation. Surely, surely it is the most terrible of deaths!



'The East India Company'



The First East India Company's Achievement of Arms

The motto "DEO DUCENTE, NIL NOCET" [God Guiding/Leading? Nothing Hurts] and above the globe the words "DEUS INDI CAT" [God Values]

[Painting by Bernard Gowing for Ed Cumming]

In 1599 a number of merchants met in London and agreed as a group to petition Queen Elizabeth for permission to send a number of well-equipped ships to trade in the East Indies. They would collectively subscribe an initial sum of about £30,000 provided they were granted a charter giving them exclusive rights to trade to the East. Permission was eventually granted, and in 1600 the English East India Company was founded.

A glance through the pages of any Maritime history book would be enough to reveal the British Navy's violent, if not turbulent past, but as we progressed, we would soon become aware of another navy. A navy, whose fleet of ships was strong, well-built and armed like warships, and, in most cases, built to a higher specification, who also had an equally turbulent past. Perhaps its vessels were not quite as well-known individually, as the more famous British warships, but nevertheless, they are closely woven within the tapestry of the glorious and colourful pageant of British Naval history.

They were of course a navy of merchantmen better known as 'East Indiamen' and they served with honour and distinction, plying the oceans carrying their valuable cargoes in the service of the Honourable English East India Company. These East India ships were also to prove a valuable ally in times of conflict for England and the Royal Navy, they were heavily armed, the crews were hardened to working full rigged ships and accustomed to fighting pirates, privateers and enemy warships. Their Captains were seasoned navigators and skilled in their profession. In a real theatre of war, the Company's ships were a valuable form of assistance, a small service as regards numbers, but they were certainly very gallant and many a fine incident bright with bravery and daring belongs to their history. To the more historically minded, the East India Company and its inception, what it stood for and of the ships that ploughed their way to and from the Far East, will be familiar. However, there will be those readers who will undoubtedly be interested to know initially, how and why this immensely successful Company came into being, how trade with Asia was first inaugurated and what inspired them to carry it out by way of the sea. With this in mind the following pages have been allocated to a potted background history of the English East India Company, the evolvement of its ships and men, and some of the drawbacks that beset them on their long voyages.

This story has been dedicated to one of those East Indiamen, the *Halsewell*, which was built when the Company had been in business for nearly 180 years and had undergone many changes. A major reorganisation had taken place at the start of the eighteenth century because of political pressures and pressure from other merchants upset about being excluded by the various charters giving the Company a monopoly. All this led to a new amalgamated company called the United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East Indies, usually referred to as the United East India Company [UEIC] or sometimes as the Honourable East India Company [HEIC].



The Achievement of Arms of the New Amalgamated Company.

[Painting by Bernard Gowing for Ed Cumming]

This design was granted by letters patent on 7th October 1698 to the ‘New Company’ and was adopted by the UEIC. With the union, the principles of monopoly and Joint Stock were both ratified, the charter on this occasion was granted by the Sovereign following an Act of Parliament. This was a significant change to the original charter given to the old London Company by Elizabeth I in 1600 and can also be seen by the significant change to the United Company’s motto which refers to the double sanction in the words “AUSPICO REGIS ET SENATUS ANGLIAE”. [Under Protection of the King and Senate of England.]

Hopefully, what follows will serve as a foundation so the reader can relate to the events and circumstances surrounding the *Halsewell's* untimely end on the night of 6th January 1786. I also think it appropriate to include a small tribute to those ancient pioneers and merchant adventurers, to whom we owe so much regarding the sea passages of today. Who indeed struggled incessantly, against all odds, to achieve their objective of navigating a seaward passage to the east. Finally, to be crowned with success but sadly, to the cost of many brave sailors lives and fine ships.



1 – Pioneers of Trade.

Although the *Halsewell* succumbed, along with her crew, to a devastating and horrific end on an isolated stretch of rocky coast, she was by no means alone. Ancient vessels sailing those first expeditions of discovery, as well as the merchant ships that succeeded them, suffered considerable losses while finding their way across vast trackless oceans, now laying forgotten at the bottom of some distant sea. A sobering reminder of their courage and perseverance, but it is also worth remembering that for every sailor lost through shipwreck or killed in action, nine would be lost through disease and the lack of hygiene. Scurvy for example could decimate a ship's crew within weeks, barely leaving enough able-bodied men to work the ship, which in itself was a disastrous situation.

In the year 1601, Captain James Lancaster headed an expedition to the East with a squadron of four ships. By the time they arrived at Table Bay, South Africa it was found that the majority of the crews had fallen victim to scurvy. Conditions were such they could barely muster enough men to bring the ships to anchor. Except for the crew who were in the Flagship, Red Dragon commanded by Captain Lancaster. So why were the crews of the other ships' so badly affected while Lancaster's men remained free of the dreaded scurvy. Well, Captain Lancaster had learnt a lesson from his first voyage to the East after losing two thirds of his crew to the disease. The answer was, according to a document written at the time;

"He brought to sea with him (Lancaster) certain bottles of the juice of limons (lime juice) which he gave to each one, as long as it would last, three spoonfuls every morning fasting; not suffering them to eat anything after it till noon. This juice worketh much better, if the party keep a short diet, and wholly refrains salt meat, which salt meat, and long being at sea is the only cause of the breeding of the disease. By this means the General (Lancaster) cured many of his men, and preserved the rest."

Amazing though it may seem, the carrying of lime juice aboard ships as a preventative cure for scurvy never entered those slow reasoning minds until over a century later! Although the following few paragraphs have little significance on the story of the *Halsewell*, they are entered purely for the interest of the reader. Scurvy was one of the greatest hazards of any long sea voyage in the days of sail. Nowadays, seafarers have nothing whatsoever to fear from the disease, and unless they are familiar with marine history, would have little if any knowledge of it.

When asked, some people have casually referred to it as "a disease born through bad diet, " which of course is true, thinking perhaps, it could be no more serious than say, influenza. I would, therefore, like to include a passage from the journal of George, Lord Anson, written during his circumnavigation in 1740-44.

In it he gives us a first-hand account of the disease and its symptoms and the devastating effect it had on the crews of his ships. Right Honourable Commander George, Lord Anson, who returned from a voyage of circumnavigation to attack Spanish trade. Departing in September 1740 with five warships and returning in June 1744 alone in the Centurion.

"Soon after our passing Straits Le Maire, the scurvy began to make its appearance amongst us; and our long continuance at sea, had occasioned its spreading to such a degree, that at the latter end of April there were but few on board, who were not in some degree afflicted, in that month not less than forty three died of it on board the Centurion. We were willing to hope, that as we advanced to the northward its malignity would abate, yet we found, on the contrary, that in the month of May we lost near double that number. And as we did not get to land till the middle of June, the mortality went on increasing, and the disease extended itself so prodigiously, that after the loss of above two hundred men, we could not at last muster more than six fore-mast men in a watch capable of duty. This disease so frequently attending all long voyages, and so particular destructive to us, is surely the most singular and unaccountable of any that affects the human body. For its symptoms are inconstant and innumerable, scarcely any two persons have the same complaints, and where there hath been found some conformity in the symptoms, the order of their appearance has been totally different. There are some symptoms, which are more general than the rest, and therefore, occurring the oftenest, deserve a more particular enumeration. These common appearances are large discoloured spots dispersed over the whole surface of the body, swelled legs, putrid gums, and above all, an extraordinary lassitude of the whole body, especially after any exercise, however inconsiderable; and this lassitude at last degenerates into a proneness to swoon on the least exertion of strength, or even on the least motion. This disease is likewise usually attended with a strange dejection of the spirits, and with shiverings, tremblings, and a disposition to be seized with the most dreadful terrors on the slightest accident. Indeed, it usually killed those who were in the last stages of it, and confined those to their hammocks, who were before capable of some kind of duty, so that it seemed as if alacrity of mind, and sanguine thoughts, were no contemptible preservatives from its fatal malignity.

But it is not easy to complete the long roll of the various concomitants of this disease; for it often produced putrid fevers, pleurisies, the jaundice, and violent rheumatic pains, and sometimes it occasioned an obstinate costiveness, which was generally attended with a difficulty of breathing; and this was esteemed the most deadly of all the scorbutic symptoms. At other times the whole body, but more especially the legs, were subject to ulcers of the worst kind, attended with rotten bones, and such a luxuriancy of fungous flesh, as yielded to no remedy.

But a most extraordinary circumstance, and what would be scarcely credible upon any single evidence, is, that the scars of wounds which had been for many years healed, were forced open again by this virulent distemper. Of this, there was a remarkable instance in one of the invalids on board the Centurion, who had been wounded above fifty years before at the battle of the Boyne; for though he was cured soon after, and had continued well for a great number of years past, yet on his being attacked by the scurvy, his wounds, in the progress of his disease, broke out afresh, and appeared as if they had never been healed. Nay, what is still more astonishing, the callous of a broken bone, which had been completely formed for a long time, was found to be hereby dissolved, and the fracture seemed as if it had never been consolidated. Indeed the effects of this disease were in almost every instance wonderful; for many of our people, though confined to their hammocks, appeared to have no inconsiderable share of health, for they ate and drank heartily, were cheerful, and talked with much seeming vigour, and with a loud strong tone of voice; and yet on their being the least moved, though it was only from one part of the ship to the other, and that in their hammocks, they have immediately expired; and others, who have confided in their seeming strength, and have resolved to get out of their hammocks, have died before they have well reached the deck; and it was no uncommon thing for those who were able to walk the deck, and to do some kind of duty, to drop down dead in an instant, on any endeavours to act with their utmost vigour, many of our people having perished in this manner during the course of this voyage."

It seems as though it was quite sufficient for these commanders, the above being a good example, to log the symptoms and count the dead during the ravages of this disease, instead of trying to root out and expose the causes. Therefore, it was left to men like Captain Cook to solve the problem.

The quality of food served aboard Indiamen, and warships, for that matter, was abysmal to say the least, although the quantities, especially to layman of today, appear enormous. However, we must bear in mind, when these ships finally sailed from England, be it merchant or warship, what supplies there were on board had to sustain the whole ship's company, upwards of a hundred men, for approximately one to two months and it was therefore made to last.

No matter how putrid the food or stinking the water became, the men would be forced to eat it for there was nothing else, apart from any fish that could be caught. Of course, there were ports where Indiamen would put into on these long voyages. Where ships were able to receive fresh supplies of water, fruit, vegetables and also livestock. Cattle, sheep and even goats would be taken for fresh meat. Cows and their calves were taken on board, the calves would be served as veal for the Captain's table, the cows provided fresh milk for most of the voyage, then were slaughtered for fresh meat.

Penurious merchants and ship owners provisioning their vessels only allowed enough food and drink for a certain number of days. Should they be delayed for any reason e.g. becalms, storms, the loss of masts etc, or even an engagement with an enemy, the Captain would be forced to issue half rations. Many a seamen would feel the pinch of hunger in his stomach before they made landfall. Barlow tells us of a time in 1663 while aboard the West Indiaman Queen Cathrane bound for Brazil with a cargo of wine from Madeira. They ran foul of the doldrums and as a result, were becalmed for several weeks.;

"And having many cross winds before we could get out of the rains so that we were forced to go to a quart of water for a man a day, our water growing short and the rain water was not good to keep. And having gained not half our passage to the place where we were bound, this went very hard with us, being just under the sun and the weather exceeding hot. Neither had we better allowance of victuals, having but five pounds of bread for one man for seven days, with a little dry stock-fish and two spoonful's of oil for four days in a week, and the other three a little salt beef and a few peas, or a little old musty rice, faring as hard as though we had been in a Kings ship and many times harder."

There were no facilities on board ship for keeping food fresh, no receptacles in which food could be kept cool, no refrigerators or cooling boxes. Nevertheless, all the known methods of preserving food were practised, such as salting down beef, pork, mutton, tongues and fish, of these about 40 tons would be required. Quantities of dried fish were also taken aboard along with substantial amounts of dried peas, beans, biscuits and suet. As well as 18 tons of bread, 50 bushels of oatmeal, 7 tons of flour, 130 gallons of lime juice, 11 hogsheads of vinegar and 30 cwt. of tobacco. Amongst the perishables would be 2-3 tons cheeses, 30 firkins of butter, 300 gallons of oil, 15 tons of potatoes and turnips, 6 chests of oranges and lemons. Amounts and types of these provisions varied considerably depending on what was available and in season. To all of this would be added the livestock, cattle, sheep, pigs and about five hundred chickens which supplied fresh eggs and birds for the Captain's table, with a few geese thrown in for good measure.

The ships main beverage of course was water, eighty tons of it came aboard and was stored deep in the hold to act as ballast. Also, there was 252 gallons of wine, 1040 gallons of rum and brandy, 28 tons of beers, ales and cider. Neither water nor beer kept well for any length of time at sea so wine and especially Madeira were used on voyages of long distance. Grog, made up of half brandy or rum and half water was served to the crew at around 11 a.m. and again at 9 p.m., it was also served out to them at dinner time, the total allowance per man was about a quart a day. Breakfast was at eight, dinner at midday and supper around six in the evening. On these long voyages, the crew and passengers never had things easy; there was no luxurious pampering for instance, as with today's travel.

Most certainly, there was plenty of food and drink, such as it was, but it wasn't exactly prepared and served in an appetising way. Food was plain and the cooking very English, but it was substantial and for the strong and healthy it was adequate. There were those however, who were naturally terrified of the sea, especially woman and young children who were of a delicate disposition and unable to settle to life on board ship, then the voyage would be far from exhilarating and the food uninspiring.

It was with Captain James Cook on his first voyage to explore and chart the Pacific Ocean in 1768, that for the first-time aboard ship, scurvy had been eliminated. On the arrival of Endeavour in Tahiti, not one man was sick, neither had Cook observed any but the mildest symptoms of scurvy which quickly vanished after treatment. All due to Cook's insistence on hygiene and his provision of unsalted 'portable' soups, sauerkraut, fruit and vegetables juices also the forcible methods of administering them. Which caused much moaning amongst the ship's company.

We ought to here, and no apology to the reader is made for the digression, take leave for a moment to acknowledge the great achievements of Captain Cook, who must be recognised as one of the greatest seamen and navigators of all time. Giving the world a vast geographic knowledge of the oceans, he travelled, the charting of New Zealand and the eastern coast Australia, not to mention the discovery of numerous islands in the Pacific Ocean. He will be remembered for his circumnavigation of the world in iceberg infested Southern Latitudes and for his premature and violent death at the hands of the Hawaiians while effecting repairs at Kealakekua Bay in 1779. There was never a more skilled and benevolent man to have sailed the sea.

The English East India Company was built more or less, on the demands of the English people for exotic foods and spices, Persian silks and other eastern luxuries.

Before the East India Company came into being in 1600, commodities such as these were supplied to Britain and Europe by huge caravans that travelled via Europe and the Middle East to trade with India and China. Taking many years just to accomplish one trip, which incidentally, was fraught with danger at every turn. Over the years these caravans became very expensive indeed to operate. One enormous drain on capital were the gifts demanded by the noblemen over whose territory the caravans travelled. The demand for the ever-increasing amounts of delicately worked gold, silver and precious gems became a tremendous burden upon the merchants. Not only was there a crippling cost involved in procuring these works of art but also where to obtain such treasures in quantity presented a problem in itself. The cost of such extravagance eroded any profit at an alarming rate.

This was apart from accidental losses and those attributed to attack from hordes of bandits. Soon however, the caravans that carried this exotic merchandise were to come to an end, not only because they were becoming extremely unprofitable to operate, but also on the horizon, clouds of unrest were looming over the Near East.

The year 1300 saw the rising of the Ottoman Empire. (1300 to 1920). At its height, during the sixteenth century, its officials, under the rule of Suleiman the Magnificent, were to finally control more than three million square miles of the Near East. Its bounds were Europe, as far as Hungary, parts of southern Russia, Iran, the Palestine coastline, Egypt and North Africa. This significantly blocked the caravan routes to the Orient and subsequently, cut the supply of spices and Persian silks into Europe, also the pain killing drugs that could only be found in the East. Therefore, during the early part of the fifteenth century, the urge arose to find a sea route to the fabulous wealth of the East Indies. By 1448, with the guidance of Prince Henry of Portugal (better known as Henry the Navigator) voyages leaving Lisbon had ventured as far afield as the Azores. Driven by the incentive to gain the monopoly of the spice trade, coupled with an insatiable quest to find the elusive sea passage to the East, Portuguese expeditions over the next forty years, had eventually extended down the western coast of Africa to the mouth of the Congo river. Then, in the year of 1488, Bartholomew Diaz in his ship the *Soa Pantaleao*. rounded the Cape of Good Hope, but the limelight of his success was dimmed four years later by Christopher Columbus' voyage of discovery. Under the patronage of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, he was to find a passage Westward to India but instead, he discovered the Islands of the Bahamas. According to the ships log, an ordinary seaman from Lepe, by the name of Rodrigo De Triana, was the first person to see landfall on Friday 11th October, 1492.

In subsequent voyages, Columbus landed on the shores of South America, travelling north to explore the islands of the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico. Thus, the New World came into existence. He was convinced until the day he died in 1506, that this was the continent of Asia. Doubt is now in the minds of historians of the authenticity that Columbus was the first to navigate a passage to the Americas. It appears that documentation, which has recently come to light, suggests that the Portuguese were charting the Windward Isle of St. Lucia some years before Columbus set sail. Owing to the excitement caused by Columbus, Bartholomew Diaz failed to take advantage of his discovery that a sea route to the East existed. Before he died in 1500 at the age of 50, Diaz lived to receive the news that three ships, under the command of the Portuguese, Vasco da Gama arrived in Calcutta, India in 1498. The cargo of spices they brought back made over 600% profit on the voyage. This encouraged Pedro Alvares Cabral, two years later, to set sail with a fleet of twelve ships.

Not only was he to trade with the East but he was also under patronage of the King to establish sovereignty. Heading south to the Canaries, Cabral picked up the Northeast trade winds that carried him to the coast of Brazil, then tacked back across the Atlantic to round the Cape. Both the East India Company and the Royal Navy because of the constant prevailing winds adopted this route and the most important of these "constants" are the trade winds. Due to the rotation of the Earth, they blow at an angle. North of the Equator, this continual air stream would be found blowing from the Northeast to Southwest whereas, south of the Equator, they blow Southeast to Northwest.

At that period in time, the Spanish, as indeed did most of Europe, regarded Britain as a nation of uncouth proletarian heretics, who at some stage must be brought to heel. We can see at a glance, by the omission of the British Isles from some early Spanish Sea charts, just how insignificant they thought they were. After the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and Sir Francis Drake's triumphant circumnavigation of the globe eight years earlier, England began gaining respect as a Naval sea power. The dismay of the English was much exacerbated with the knowledge that Portugal and Spain were successfully tapping those vast treasure houses of the East like India, and accessing them by sea. At that time there were two routes to the East, one, held by the Spanish heading West by way of South America, the other held by the Portuguese travelling East by way of South Africa and the Cape of Good Hope. Needless to say, these routes were guarded with the utmost secrecy and vigorously protected, both the Spanish and the Portuguese were determined to hold on to their monopoly of eastern trade. The English on the other hand, had not yet acquired the technical ability to navigate ocean going ships or possessed the necessary cosmography to find their way to the East.

The very first Englishman from these shores to set foot on eastern soil was Thomas Stevens. He reached India on the 24th October 1579 aboard a Portuguese vessel, which had left Lisbon, along with four other ships at the beginning of the previous April. During the voyage, Stevens studied the Portuguese navigators closely, and the meticulous way they used their instruments, he could not help but marvel how these ships managed to find their way across these unmarked oceans. He wrote a letter to his father in England about the voyage;

" You know that it is hard to sail from East to West, or contrary, because there is no fixed point in all the sky, whereby they may direct their course, wherefore I shall tell you what helps God provide for these men. There is not a fowl that appereth or sign in the air, or in the sea, which they have not written, which have made the voyages heretofore.

Wherefore, partly by their own experience, and pondering with all what space the ship was able to make with such wind, and such direction, and partly by the experience of others, whose books and navigation they have, they guess whereabouts they be, touching degrees of longitude, for of latitude they be always sure."

To appreciate these unbelievable feats of navigation, we must remember the limited ability of their instruments. As Stevens pointed out in his letter, they had no means of determining longitude, for this an accurate chronometer was essential. (It was not until 1761 when John Harrison (1693 - 1776) made a timepiece that was almost perfect. His son William tested it on a voyage to Jamaica and on his return to Portsmouth in 1762, it was found to have lost just 1 minute 54 ½ seconds.)

Then, a significant stroke of luck came to the aid the English navigators, after Drake sailed for Lisbon in 1587. He arrived in the Bay of Cadiz and found that a large fleet of Spanish and Portuguese ships had been assembled, as it turned out, part of the Armada. Drake's guardian Angel smiled upon him that day, he calmly entered the harbour under the Spanish batteries that protected the harbour mouth, which greeted him with a ferocious bombardment. Paying them little heed, he set fire to upwards of ten thousand tons of Spanish shipping and calmly passed out again without losing a man. This act of daring prevented Philip from invading Britain that year. He said in jest that he had singed the King of Spain's beard. He then set his sails and sailed for the Azores where occasionally galleons or merchantmen were to be met and the enemy could pay for the cost of such exploits. Drake's lucky star was still riding high. As if sent for him alone, a magnificent 'caraque' that was none other than the San Felipe, homeward bound from the East, her holds crammed with valuable merchandise came his way. She was quickly seized and taken in tow to Plymouth harbour, undamaged.

However, although the carrack's cargo was estimated at around half a million pounds, the most valuable find on board were the ships papers and charts, which disclosed the long-kept secrets of the Spanish East India trade and their favoured routes. Up until now eastern trade was exclusive to the Portuguese and Spanish. The ports of Lisbon and Cadiz bristled with English, Dutch and French ships, their squabbling merchants, eager to trade for the diminishing eastern riches. Cadiz, being the most important, was where the richly laden Spanish Plate fleets always arrived when returning from the West Indies. Meanwhile, merchants in general were finding it more and more difficult to acquire the rich and much sort after merchandise the East had to offer, luxuries the afore mentioned countries had been enjoying for over a century. But now, the pendulum of change was poised to swing, firstly in favour of the Dutch soon followed by the English.

In September 1599 the 'Company of Merchants of London trading into the East Indies' was formed by subscription. This Company of course, better known as the English East India Company, quickly grew from strength to strength, chartering at times a phenomenal number of ships and men. Ultimately the English Company would, in one form or another, finally control the whole of India and become rulers over millions of people. They enjoyed a monopoly of trade throughout Asia for generation after generation through almost two and a half centuries. This was until the Company's last charter of commerce came to an end in the year 1834, losing its exclusive trading privilege. When this occurred, to the elation of the now 'British' people, trade with the East was thrown open to free enterprise

The English East India Company employed many good ships to bring home their rich cargoes from around the globe. The *Halsewell* was just another of the many hundreds of merchantmen that sailed those perilous seas, but she was significant in marking the beginning of a much larger class of vessel. With a burthen weight of 786 tons, her sleek hull, improved rigging and the carved artwork that adorned her stern, clearly represented another step had been taken up the evolutionary ladder of merchant shipbuilding. The *Halsewell* was indeed the pride of the English East India Company in these last years of the eighteenth century. The ship builders had made considerable progress since the tiny disproportionate, clumsy vessels of little more than 300 tons, that first hoisted their sails on those exploratory voyages two hundred years before. However, although the *Halsewell's* size had now set the stage for the progressively larger ships which undoubtedly must follow, (like the *Earl of Abergavenny*) we must remember that ship builders back in the seventeenth century had already launched vessels much exceeding 776 tons. So why then was the *Halsewell* being regarded as a benchmark in ship size?

Consideration could be given to the fact that at the beginning of the Eighteenth century the biggest vessels were less than five hundred tons, many much smaller. To try and find a reason we must return to the year 1609. The original charter granted to the Company by Elizabeth I in the year 1600, for the sole right to trade with the East had only six years to run, so the Honourable Company was compelled to petition James I for a renewal. The Portuguese were so incensed at having their monopoly on Eastern trade threatened by these belligerent English interlopers that they decided to take urgent measures to remove them. The English East India Company that had just completed its third voyage to India, having made a profit of 234 per cent, had no intention of giving up such a lucrative and rewarding trade. Conflict between these rival nations was inevitable. The English Company would require more ships that were well armed and had a greater carrying capacity. Consequently, on the 13th December 1609, three ships, which had been built rather hastily, were launched and fitted out. Two ships the *Peppercorn* and the *Trade's Increase* were to set sail on the 1st April the following year.

The *Trade's Increase* at 1100 tons was however, a clumsy, unwieldy ship and difficult to handle in a squall or heavy sea. With her high stern castle and low bows, she was top heavy and would roll to an alarming angle. Which, incidentally, was the case with most of that generation of ships. Her demise came two years later when she needed urgent repairs to her hull. In those days the practice, in the absence of a dry dock, was to careen a ship so this type of repair could effectively be carried out, but due to her overwhelming size and weight she toppled too far and collapsed resulting in a total loss of ship and cargo.

The method of ship building during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries had not really changed since the Middle Ages but now, they were trying desperately to improve their techniques and move away from the old unscientific methods. These so-called new ships which started to emerge were however almost identical in design and nature to those of the Dutch and Portuguese, still incorporating a tall stern and bows which were unnecessarily low. Almost identical in fact to the *Trade's Increase*. They were clumsy and unwieldy with a tendency to wallow. When sailing close to, or in a crosswind, they would make leeway rather than headway and make little if any progress in a head wind. They did well when running with the wind, or when it was on their quarter. Consequently, much time, sometimes weeks, was wasted in the Downs waiting for a favourable wind to take them through the Channel. Most British seafaring folk are aware that the prevailing winds across the British Isles blow from the Southwest, but there are times, usually in the first quarter of the year, when we can expect them more predominantly from the North and East.

As we have seen, a fair wind was desirable for a good passage down the Channel, and in an attempt to reduce the time spent waiting for favourable conditions, East Indiamen were fitted out for sea, to coincide with the beginning of the year. These awkward old ships would also waste valuable time in working their way down the Thames. Weighing anchor when the tide ebbed to take them down river until low water when they would anchor and lay for the next tide and so on. Edward Barlow describes this process in his journal, when in 1668, aboard the merchantman *Reall Ffernshippe*, of 140 tons, bound for Tenerife;

"...And two or three days, after our ship lying down at Limehouse, having a fair wind we set sail and came down that tide no lower than "Dedforde" and the next day being Christmas day, we came down to Blackwall, and the next day Woolwich, and the next day, having cross winds, we were forced to beat (tack in the direction of the wind) down coming as low as "Graise" Reach; and the next day we got down to Gravesend..."

After a spell of bad weather, he goes on;

"Two days afterwards, having better weather, we got up our anchor and came into the downs, there being forty sail of merchant ships outer bound, which lay for a fair wind to carry them away, being bound to Virginia and Barbados and the Straits. So, staying in the downs for two or three days, there came a fair wind, and all the ships that were outer bound weighed their anchors and set sail."

With the wind still with them, they continued down the Channel steering West, South-West. Reaching Lands' End, they met cross winds and had no option but stand to the Westward for fifteen days. Finally, they meet with a favourable wind and they steered away South, reaching Tenerife thirty days after leaving the Downs! There is no doubt these leaky old ships, given the right conditions and an aft wind, performed rather well, or as well as their ill designed hulls would let them. Also, there is no doubt that the new vessels were large, but they had failed to solve the inherent technical faults that plagued their predecessors. Simply, they had built a larger version of those unwieldy ships that had gone before; incorporating most of their faults.

So, we must presume therefore the *Halsewell* was heralded, not for just her size alone, but for her combination of size and design. The answer then must be that the ship designer and builders in a combined effort had, employing this comparatively new and proven architecture, launched a vessel that had outpaced its contemporaries in size and had successfully jumped the evolutionary gap. Gone was the great top burden of stern castle that made those old ships so cumbersome and with it went some of their clumsy, awkward, handling.

Unfortunately, it never occurred to those complacent, inward looking, marine architects that, at this period, French Frigates were skimming about the oceans at an unbelievable twelve knots shooting up our merchantman. Sometime had to pass before they applied construction techniques to our Indiamen that had been adopted by the French i.e. sleek hulls, sweeping lines and a superior rigging, streamlining which did in fact benefit our naval ships.

We must not lose sight of the fact that these were merchant ships that needed immensely strong, kettle shaped hulls, capable of carrying vast quantities of cargo and stores, there had to be a compromise on speed. There is no doubt that East Indiamen, in the latter part of the Eighteenth century, had become a symbol of marine architecture and design and had reached a pinnacle of success. The long road over which they had evolved having stretched back to the fifteenth century. Yet the turn of the eighteenth century would announce their inevitable slide into oblivion, taking less than a hundred years. Remarkably beautiful and noble though they were, and although many improvements had been made over the years, they retained two of the most annoying and frustrating traits one could ever experience. Firstly, they retained their lurching roll, which made everyone who sailed in them thoroughly sick and, because of their massive size, they were extremely difficult to manoeuvre.



2 - An Exploratory Expedition; Example of Pioneering Courage.

The success of Sir Francis Drake navigating around the Cape of Good Hope prompted a delegation of London merchants, who in 1589 begged an audience with Queen Elizabeth I. These merchants handed her a petition praying for a Royal sanction to organise and fit out a fleet of three ships to embark on a long and hazardous voyage, to navigate a passage around the Cape and to seek trade in India. It seems as though the request did not immediately meet with Royal favour. Elizabeth I was a procrastinating uncertain woman, first she would give her permission then it would be withdrawn, and in consequence kept the matter hanging indecisively until the beginning of 1591. On the 10th April in the same year, an expedition consisting of three vessels, the *Marchant Royall* (or *Royal Merchant*) the *Penelope* and the *Edward Bonaventure*, under the commands of Captains, Kendel, Raymond and Lancaster, weighed anchor and sailed out from Plymouth, firing their guns in salute to old England. This expedition, with its three tiny ships none larger than three hundred and fifty tons, setting forth into the unknown was fated from the very beginning.

Four weeks after putting to sea they encountered atrocious weather also, the majority of the crew, on all three ships, had already begun to be afflicted with bad health, losing two men before crossing the Equator. A short time before this they did however, managed to capture a Portuguese caravel bound for Brazil with a cargo of wine, oil, jars of olives and other produce.

On reaching the South African port of Table Bay on the 1st August, the decision was taken that the "*Marchant Royall*" should return to England with the sick. The remainder of her crew to be divided between the *Penelope* and the *Edward Bonaventure*. The remaining two ships then rounded the 'Cape of Storms' and proceeded up the East coast of Africa, but the cruel hand of fate was to strike the expedition another devastating blow. An unusually severe storm arose with tremendous seas which raged for several days, springing masts and shredding canvas. During the storm, the *Edward Bonaventure* lost sight of the *Penelope* and no trace of her was ever seen again. There is little doubt that she foundered with all hands.

In November the same year, the one remaining ship, commanded by Captain Lancaster, the same Lancaster whom we met earlier, came to anchor in the port of Zanzibar. Here they were treated with much caution, due to the spreading of cruel rumours, by the Portuguese, that the English were a terrible cannibalistic race of people and should be avoided at all costs. In consequence of this, no information was gained about the country or its trade. It was obvious that the Portuguese were very jealous, which, as I said earlier was only natural, when another nation was trying to wrestle from them the rich source of trade which they had been the first maritime nation to secure.

On the 15th February Lancaster set sail once more, and laid in a course for India. They encountered unknown currents and failing to pay strict attention to the Southern star, found themselves off Sumatra. Not being able to navigate this area safely, they lay for two or three days hoping for a pilot to lead them in. This they failed to do, so they made for the Islands of Pulo Pinaou, which they reach in June and remained until the end of August. Sadly, during this long and eventful voyage, disease and sickness had taken their toll of the crew. Of the 97 that were on board when the ship left Africa, only 34 now remained alive.

Determined not to return empty handed, Lancaster, in desperation, performed acts of piracy against Arab and Portuguese shipping by attacking and boarding several of their vessels and relieved them of their cargoes of pepper. During the following months, they were lying in wait off the southern tip of Ceylon, hoping to secure further merchandise, when Lancaster himself succumbed to illness. Due to the combination of the long weary months spent at sea and the number of fatalities that had befallen the crew, Lancaster decided to return to England.

By April 1593 the Edward Bonaventure had rounded the Cape and would carry him to the Windward Islands. Yet again, Lancaster miscalculated his position and found himself being tossed around in the Caribbean Sea by a series of violent storms. Finally, he was to lose his ship off Perto Rico with a further loss of five lives. He, and a handful of crew that narrowly missed sharing the fate of the ship, would have perished on a desert Island were it not for the timely rescue by a French merchantman and they returned to England on the 24th May 1594.

These early pioneering voyages, venturing into unknown seas must have been terrifying for those superstitious ancient mariners but they faced them with courage and perseverance. Although a financial disaster to begin with, they were finally crowned with the success of breaking the monopoly of eastern trade, that had been in the grip of the Portuguese since the early part of the sixteenth century. The principal Portuguese settlement in the East was Goa on the west coast of India, they also had fortified trading posts extending from Africa, to the Molucca Islands in the Pacific Ocean and they guarded them jealously.

It wasn't long however, before the gauntlet was thrown for a share in the much-coveted spice markets. Eventually, these pioneering English seafarers established a firm hold in India as well as China and the Spice Islands of Indonesia, the latter proving to be one the riches sources of Eastern trade. Captain James Lancaster being largely responsible for inaugurating maritime trading in the Orient in 1603. From then on, the trafficking of exotic merchandise began to flourish. The introduction of fine Indian cotton into Britain, for instance, was the cause of great excitement, now, for the first time, under garments could be worn next to the skin in relative comfort. Spices, with their pungent aroma had the ability to preserve meat and mask the rancid taste of some meals, they were also used as the bases of many medicines. Imports of tea and coffee were revolutionising the drinking habits of Europe. Within a decade, trading throughout the East Indies increased rapidly; laying the foundations for a commercial company that was to become the largest and most powerful organisation that the world has ever known. The English East India Company.

Equipped with a fine fleet of well found ships they were now poised to reap the riches of the East, nevertheless, with the Portuguese, Dutch and French also claiming a right to share in this new found wealth, fierce rivalry was inevitable. Finally, a state of permanent undeclared war existed between the main European countries which was to continue until the defeat of Napoleon in 1815. Although the Royal Navy gave some protection to East Indiamen by escorting them through European war zones, there still remained the constant threat of an encounter with enemy warships, rival merchantmen, or when in Eastern waters, marauding pirates.

Therefore, it was crucial for vessels to have the ability to defend themselves. East Indiamen were well armed and solidly built and normally excelled in an engagement. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the majority of three decked East Indiamen of 800 tons carried twenty-six guns, usually eighteen pounders, mounted on the main or middle deck. The lower deck was reserved for cargo but painted along the outside of this area, would be a line of imitation gun ports. This, together with the way they were rigged meant that a potential enemy on first sighting an Indiaman, would be forgiven for thinking they were about to engage a war ship.

Records show that it was not uncommon to find a Company ship taking offensive action in an engagement, rather than the expected defensive. On a number of occasions Frenchmen have been known to strike their colours to an East Indiaman thinking themselves under the guns of a British warship. The number of ships employed by the English East India Company varied from season to season.

In the year 1786 forty-three were chartered and placed in service by the ship owners under a term of contract. Involved in this contract, the Company undertook to hire ships, for not less than six voyages, to carry their goods to and from India and China. This did not necessarily mean however, that they were to be in succession. Indiamen were usually laid up between voyages for repairs, especially to the hull, or any damage that had occurred during her time at sea, this operation normally occupied the next six to twelve months and another ship would be taken up for the following season, while she was in dock.

The management of these ships was undertaken by a manager elected by the owners called the 'Ship's Husband'. Although there was no actual clause written into the contract, the owners retained a vested right to be asked by the Company to build ships as successors to those that had become unserviceable; or to use the terminology then applied, be built in the predecessor's "room". A quick scan of the record books, shows, that in some cases new vessels would also inherit the name of its forebear, giving the impression that it was a vessel of long service. This fact is in evidence when we compare it with the Indiaman, *Warren Hastings*. Her first appearance came about in 1782, on her maiden voyage and she remained in service until 1797. The second *Warren Hastings* took to the seas in 1803 and graced them until her capture by the French, in 1805. *Warren Hastings* the third sailed for Bengal on 24th February 1809 and lasted for a further six voyages.

By the year 1773, an East Indiaman completing four voyages was considered worn out, mostly due to the ruinous combination of fatigue and decay.

The introduction, in 1778, of ships hulls being sheathed with thin sheets of copper, prevented the accumulation of barnacles and algae, it also prevented the hull being eaten by the marine worms and, in consequence, lengthened the life of the ship. A good example of coppering can be seen on that famous tea clipper, *Cutty Sark*, berthed in dry dock at Greenwich, London. The Royal Navy Frigate *Alarm* was the first ever ship to be coppered in 1758. In effect, employing this method now enabled ships to make upwards of six voyages. A further two were often permitted after the vessel had been docked, 'un-coppered', and the hull had been thoroughly examined and effectively repaired.

In 1807 when William Hickey retired, he decided to leave India, due to ill health and secured a passage to England on the Indiaman, *Castle Eden* commanded by Captain Colnett. At this time, the *Castle Eden* was in dock at Bengal for repairs and Hickey explains how she had been un-coppered to expose the many leaks sustained on her outward journey.

When a vessel was finally decommissioned it would be dismantled and any sound bottom timbers were then supposedly used as the base for the new construction. So theoretically, the new ship was built on the 'bottom' of the old one.

This process became known as 'Hereditary Bottoms'. The practise of salvaging re-useable timbers from old and decommissioned ships was actively encouraged. Pressure, at this period, was being applied on the East India Company, by the Government, following a series of complaints issued by the Royal Navy, they being very much alarmed by the vast quantities of high-quality oak timber, that was being consumed by the Company for their ships. Should this be allowed to continue, a serious depletion of stocks would follow, depriving the Navy of valuable timber for its warships. It was well known at that time, that the Navy's complaints, although well founded, were tinged with a modicum of jealousy. The reason being, that the quality to which India ships were built, usually surpassed those of the Navy and of course, they bore a strong resemblance to a ship of the line. Hundreds of mature oak trees were required in the construction of an 800 ton merchant ship. At the end of the seventeenth century, England became heavily dependent on the Baltic countries for her ship building timber. The amount of serviceable timber that could be salvaged from decommissioned ships, (usually confined to the massive keel and rib timbers), was very little and gradually the practise fell into decline. The term 'Hereditary Bottoms' continued to be used and the owners still claimed the right to replace their ships in this way until 1796, when this whole hereditary system was abolished.

3 – Of Officers & Husbands.

Commands of Indiamen were invariably sold, the owner or Husband, would offer it to a Captain, who was probably an acquaintance, for a sum in the region of £10,000. The amounts of money required to secure a command of an East Indiaman varied enormously and prospective Captains would expect to pay anything from £6,000 - £12,000. The selection for Captaincy and the appointing of Officers rested entirely with the ships Husband. He would submit a tender of employment for his vessel, along with the name of the new Commander and Officers to the Honourable East India Company for approval. The Captain, once sworn in, held complete supremacy over his new ship and his word was absolute. He alone was responsible for the safety of the vessel, its cargo and also the welfare and discipline of the crew. Such was the power of command that he could only be made accountable to the Company itself. He now held a valuable asset, which could be disposed of if so desired and should he become lost at sea, or in the event of death, the command would then be inherited by the next of kin, where it could be either sold or held for auction. He would also be entitled to succeed to the command of any subsequent replacement vessel until he chose to retire.

The Honourable Company were also duty bound, by their own agreement, to re-hire 'Hereditary' or 'Replacement' ships. In 1796 the practise of 'selling a command' was also abolished. Officers would usually be selected on their merits and experience but this was not always the case. William Hickey tells us about the following incident while on board the *Plassey* bound for Madras in the year 1769. The East Indiaman, *Plassey* belonged to a very wealthy ship owner by the name of John Durand. Captain Waddell had succeeded to the command of the *Plassey*, from having been Chief Mate, on the death of her Commander while in Bencoolen. (a small settlement on the West Coast of Sumatra which was the site of a Company factory, i.e. warehouses for the storage of outgoing cargo) As Captain, Waddell conducted the *Plassey* on her homeward voyage assisted by Samuel Rogers, (who was then second mate), being appointed Chief Officer (Mate) and Peter Douglas who rose from Third to Second Mate.

On arrival in England, Mr. Durand confirmed by letter to Waddell, his approval of him as Captain who then called on Durand to thank him. While he was there, Waddell expressed his wish to retain both Rogers and Douglas as First and Second Mates, to which Mr. Durand agreed and confirmed their positions. This was in turn conveyed to both parties and in consequence they did not pursue further employment. The *Plassey* was then to be taken up for a voyage to Madras and China and by this time Rodgers and Douglas had been acting in their respective positions for several weeks.

Two days before the swearing in examination, Durand wrote to Captain Waddell saying it was necessary for him to install a new Second Mate, by the name of Mr. Chisholme and he would provide otherwise for Douglas. Captain Waddell was furious at the suggestion and proceeded to confront Mr. Durand complaining of this injustice, especially as Douglas had turned down a position of Second Mate, preferring the *Plassey*, on a ship that had since sailed. Durand said he felt for Douglas but he was under so much pressure, he would have to install Mr. Chisholme as Second Mate, even if it meant turning out his own son. Captain Waddell angrily retorted that his apology was no justification for such a serious breach of faith, and Douglas must continue as Second Mate, Durand replied, in a baronial and contemptuous manner, "I say he will not."

Captain Waddell's anger for Durand's lack of morality was such that he approached the Directors of the Honourable Company and made them feel utterly ashamed of the flagrant injustice imposed on Douglas but their support for Durand was unanimous. Without being accepted by the Captain and against his will, Chisholme was finally sworn as Second Mate.

Hickey tells us that this incident was the only one of its kind that ever occurred in the service of the Company. However, it highlights the power husbands held over the Company where their ships were concerned.

Hickey also tells us that Captain Waddell;

"thought it his duty to make Douglas every compensation in his power. He therefore put his officers upon three watches instead of two, as was usual, giving the command of the third watch to Douglas. He also allotted him a much larger space than he was entitled to for his cabin, gave him a seat at his table, and in short shewed him every indulgence in his power."

John Durand eventually became the Husband of several East India ships. One, was the 500-ton *Earl of Ashburnham*, built about 1761. Another, as we already know was the *Plassey*, renown among the India fleet for her unequalled speed and in consequence being christened 'The Flying *Plassey*'. In fact, on a return trip from China, she weighed anchor at Canton on the 17th December 1769 and arrived in the Downs off Dover on the 20th April 1770 completing the journey in four months and four days, the fastest time then made by an Indiaman.

It is quite reasonable to presume that Durand first made his fortune, indulging in the lucrative pursuit of private trade, while serving as the Commander of an East Indiaman employed in trading to and from the various ports of the Orient. The amounts of money accumulated by sea Captains entering into private trade were enormous. Indeed, it was the private trade that made the command of an East Indiaman a much sought-after position.

In the course of a single two-year voyage, the amount of money gleaned could be as much as £12,000, enough to recoup the price of the command. This could also be repeated on two or three occasions during the time taken to discharge Company business whilst calling at 'Coast and Bay'. (The Coromandel Coast and the Bay of Bengal). Captains of East Indiamen were notorious for pursuing their own personal wealth and at times they would put their own gain before that of the Company and crew.

The English East India Company granted certain 'indulgences' to their Commanders, in allowing them to carry on board their own 'private investment' for trade, Officers and ordinary seamen were given licence to tender for any free space and the amount of tonnage allowed, varied according to rank.

Commanders of Indiaman, during the length of their career, had they ventured wisely, could amass a sizeable fortune on which they could retire. One of the conditions imposed, however, was that the merchandise carried by their employees was other than that of the Company.

Any vessels from India must not carry tea, china, or raw silk. Likewise, ships leaving China should not be carrying silk, musk, camphor, arrack, arsenic, so avoiding direct competition. In some cases, decks were stacked to such an extent, that the ship would become precariously top heavy and in imminent danger of capsizing, Commanders and officers found that walking the decks of their ships, particularly in a heavy swell, was not only difficult but fraught with danger.



4 – Passengers: Ordeal by Passage.

The carrying of passengers aboard Indiamen had notably increased towards the end of the eighteenth century, due mainly to the Company's expanding interests throughout the Far East, and the need for the ever-increasing number of military personnel and servants to manage its affairs. The Captain of an East Indiaman would be obliged to prepare births for private and Company passengers alike, and negotiate the price of passage. Initially, he would receive letters of introduction normally from mutual friends and in response, the Captain would invite them to dine on board ship. His guests would sit down to an excellent dinner, accompanied by an ample supply of claret!

"You will be agreeably surprised, that the table set before you, will be as good every day during our voyage".

Food on board Company ships was certainly plentiful at the Captains table, and to begin with it was of good quality, but it rapidly began to deteriorate within the first three weeks, usually the time taken to 'gain one's sea legs'.

When they had discussed and settled the price, the conversation, after touching on various topics of the day, would undoubtedly revert back to the ensuing voyage and the Captain would offer practical advice on what could be expected at sea. Guided by his council, passengers brought with them items of furniture of which they were particularly fond, to make their cabin more familiar and the sudden wrench from England less distressing. Undoubtedly, this made the long and monotonous journey to India a little more bearable.

One cabin on the Indiaman *Plassey* belonging to the Third Mate, was indeed handsome;

"It was painted of a light pea green, with gold beading, the bed and curtains of the richest Madras Chintz, one of the most complete dressing tables I ever saw, having every useful article in it; a beautiful bureau and book case, stored with the best books, and three neat mahogany chairs, formed the furniture."

Although a cabin such as this was the exception rather than the rule. On arrival in India, passengers removed the furniture for either use on shore, or it was sold, perhaps to homeward bound passengers.

Needless to say, it wasn't long before enterprising folk set up warehouses along the quays, specialising in the buying and selling of quality furniture.

The more affluent or those of 'considerable wealth' would in most cases employ a carpenter and commission several pieces to their own design.

Hickey, when leaving India for the last time in 1808 aboard the Indiaman *Castle Eden*, had made the following for his homeward passage: -

"A capital cot for sleeping on, a bureau with writing desk and apparatus attached to it, a table and four large and strong teak-wood chests."

It seems that the drinking of claret in great quantities when on board ship gave great relief from the pangs of lassitude. Hickey also put aboard the *Castle Eden*.

"A chest of claret and another of madeira of a very superior quality,"

The price of passage, being a perquisite of the Captain, was sometimes negotiable and therefore varied enormously. On requiring a passage back to England, for instance, the traveller was largely at the Captain's mercy.

In 1769, Captain Charles Haggis Commander of the Indiaman *Thames*, returning home from Bengal, replied to an enquiry about passage home;

"I believe I might be able to spare a small cabin in steerage for three hundred guineas!"

For the wealthy, a roundhouse cabin offered a berth in comparative luxury, although they could become rather noisy at times owing to the poop deck being immediately above. William Hickey, on his way home in 1808, aboard the *Castle Eden* offers advice on accommodation, and what might be expected as a round house passenger on board an East Indiaman, two hundred years ago;

"I however have tried both, roundhouse and great cabin and from that experience never would recommend any person to put themselves between decks if they can have accommodation above. The objections to the roundhouse are the frequent noises that must occur upon the poop from the seamen performing the necessary manoeuvres with sails and mizzen mast, especially that of working the spanker boom, and the feeding of the poultry kept in coops there, with the consequent pecking twice a day, and both points undoubtedly are extremely unpleasant and great annoyances.

But on the gun deck, if you avoid the noises above specified, they are more than counterbalanced by a variety of inconveniences, the grand one that of being completely debarred of all daylight in tempestuous weather by what is very expressively termed "the dead lights" being then fixed in to all the windows in order to prevent the sea breaking in, which nevertheless it does not effectually do, for I was often set afloat in my cabin by heavy seas breaking against those dead lights, and entering at the seams, especially so at the quarter gallery door and window, where it poured in torrents, beating even over my bed. You have also at times the horrid screeches and crying of children going home (it is called, although born in India,) for education, or what is full as bad, their vociferous mirth when playing their gambols in the steerage, added to which grievances is frequently being half poisoned by a variety of stinks, and that notwithstanding the Company's ships are considered, and certainly with truth, as being remarkable for their cleanliness, being regularly purified twice a week by a complete washing of decks from the forecastle to the after most part, and last but not least of the evils, the perpetual creaking of bulk heads, accompanied by the "music" of the rudder working, all of which unpleasant circumstances are avoided by being in the upper cabin or round house."

In the cheaper class of cabin, passengers would sometimes find themselves sharing their accommodation with one of the guns! And these cabins, being already very small, were made even smaller by a twelve-pound cannon. And yet whole families would sometimes have to squeeze into these tiny spaces, which would become their home for six to eight months. These were however, usually reserved for the ship's Officers.

In spite of all the assurances and charm that exuded from the Captain, nothing could prepare the passengers for the reality that lay ahead in the long tedious months at sea. Confined in close proximity with people one might dislike, together with the constant nauseating smell of the ship, proved an ordeal in itself for many of the passengers. As discussed above the kettle hulled design made them notoriously bad sailors because they possessed a sickening lurching roll. It was this continual rolling, that made all but the most hardened of sea travellers ill. Boredom was the main enemy during passage, cards, music and dancing were the main amusements but suicides were common and quarrels would break out over the most trivial matters, and often duels would be fought at the first available landing place.

Many quarrels were over young ladies. One incident aboard an Indiaman concerned three young male passengers who all fell in love with the same charmer and decided to fight it out on reaching the Cape.

Although flattered, she intervened by declaring she would marry all three in turn and in due course she did with the help of the obliging Indian climate.

Singing was a most favoured pastime and musical instruments were a great favourite, especially the pianoforte. Passengers themselves supplied the music but in the latter end of the eighteenth century, Indiamen carried musicians as part of the crew, solely for the entertainment of the passengers.

On occasions, the number of passengers requiring passage would exceed available cabin space. In which case the great cabin would be partitioned off to provide the extra space needed. For the humbler of passengers, there was steerage. This was far from the comfort and luxury of the roundhouse. The traveller would descend into the dark claustrophobic bowels of the ship; the only light would be from a dismal candle or a lantern if you were lucky. Here, in the cramped confines, he would hang his hammock. He would be in very close proximity with other travellers, sharing a tiny living space that stank from a nauseous combination of crew, stagnant seawater and the livestock.

I have tried putting together in this chapter, a background setting which I hope will give the reader an insight of what it must have been like to travel as a passenger on an ocean-going vessel. Long tedious days that dissolved into even longer months of monotony aboard an overcrowded ship. Little or no privacy for the most basic of bodily functions. Heavy seas, violent storms, a shortage of water for washing, stale food and the incessant movement of the ship. A far cry from the smooth, luxurious liners of today.

When we look back in horror and wonder how those poor souls survived venturing in those ships, we must remember that travelling by sea and the ships they travelled in, had not changed for hundreds of years. It was only in the nineteenth Century that the first primitive steam power was introduced into shipping. And it is worth remembering the people who travelled in those old wooden ships, knew of no other way.



The Birth of an 'Honourable' Ship



Society at Sea by R. Dodd 1786

Few subjects lend themselves so well to excite the imagination as the grace and splendour of a tall ship plunging her bows in a boisterous sea. With a cloud of snowy canvas, billowing and snapping in a freshening wind. Sights such as these could not fail to stir the blood and spark the imagination of men and women born to these Islands, to install pride in their nation's seafaring, if not turbulent, nautical history. When, in times past, the sight of a ship heeling before the wind were commonplace, they still must have influenced our forefathers to answer the call of the sea and seek their fortunes serving before the mast. But if the sight of a tall ship was not quite enough to persuade the would be traveller that life at sea was for him, then the seamen in the taverns along the quays who were brimming over with tales of lands with strange people and animals, beautiful Islands, fruits and exotic birds that had be seen to be believed, probably did the trick. But once at sea they found things were very different, life on board ship was not all that these seamen had led them to believe. All too soon the promise of excitement and the sights of exotic places faded into sad disillusionment and hard work. But whether it was through dreams of adventure, impress, lustiness or a desperate need to provide for their family, they went to sea.

We can look back with pride at those ancient sailors who under the most appalling conditions, sailed both merchant and fighting vessels to the farthest reaches of the globe. Into unknown oceans, darkened with superstition, defying mountainous seas, and violent storms.

The terrible hidden dangers that plagued their daily lives were many. The one thing that seamen feared the most was disease, a serious outbreak could, within a few weeks, devastate a ship's company. As discussed at length in Chapter 1 the first and foremost that struck terror into the very hearts of seamen was scurvy. Other diseases such as typhus and dysentery with its attendant dehydration, lay cloaked in the bad food and stale water, were sinister companions on their long and arduous voyages and claimed the lives of many. According to a seaman's diary, into which he wrote.

" During a period of nine weeks while becalmed in the doldrums, sixty-four of our men died of the scurvy, and so many others were in such a bad state, that when the breeze did blow, we had not enough men to brace the sails."

Today, it is extremely difficult for us to imagine, or even to capture a feeling of life aboard those ancient wind driven ships. For the Captain of a modern vessel can control his ship's speed and heading from the comfort of the bridge. Rough weather and heavy seas rarely affect modern day ships, and the crews are all safe below decks. But in those days, it was a far cry from the modern ships of today, there was no telegraph to signal a change of speed. No hydraulic helm that is no larger than the steering wheel of a motor car, that can be held with the fingers of one hand in the roughest seas. Unlike then when it would take up to four or five men to wrestle with the helm, unprotected from the fury of the weather. To control the ship seamen would have to claw their way aloft in the teeth of a raging gale to take in canvas, with hands benumbed with cold, would cautiously inch their way out onto the yards, supported only by a thin line for their feet. Leaning over the yard, with arms reaching down to heave on the sails reef earrings and in doing so bearing the whole weight of canvas together with the full force of the wind in the sail. In the dead of night, with a profound darkness rendering it impossible to see anything or anyone about them. The shrieking blast ever ready to pluck them from their treacherous position and hurl them into the turbulent abyss. It must have seemed like an eternity, precariously suspended for long periods in the biting cold, trying desperately to maintain their balance on masts that were thrashing violently as the ship tumbled and heaved a hundred and thirty feet below. Or as one seaman put it

"like a great millstone rolling up one hill and down another."

In 1774, during the introduction of the judicial system in Bengal, an Act of Parliament was passed appointing Warren Hastings, who from 1772 to 1774 was Governor of Bengal, to Governor General of India. (1774-1785). General Sir John Clavering, Colonel Monson and Philip Francis were also appointed members of the Supreme Council. These four in effect represented the British Government in India. By the same Act the Supreme Court of Judicature was formed, consisting of Sir Elijah Impey, Chief Justice. Stephen Caesar Lemaitre, Robert Chambers and John Hyde, Puisne Justices. In September of the same year, two time-honoured East India ships were specially chartered and fitted out. The *Anson*, was to carry the Justices and the second ship the *Earl of Ashburnham*, would convey Francis, Clavering and Monson to Bengal. Although Warren Hastings, along with his successors, were eventually to dominate the whole of India, their opportunity to do so must be contributed to the skill of the Captains and seamen who served with the East India Company's ships, that brought them to Asia. Unfortunately, after an exemplary career with the English East India Company, enhanced by the honoured recall to duty in 1774 for the transportation of those distinguished gentlemen to India, the *Earl of Ashburnham* was finally to suffer the humiliation of the breakers yard. But in the year 1776, the East India Company granted Thomas Burston permission to build, within the 'room' of the now dismantled *Earl of Ashburnham*, a new ship. And now the day had dawned when with great pomp and ceremony as it always is on these occasions, the new keel was laid and all the huge rib timbers salvaged from the *Ashburnham* were now in place.

Thomas Burston was an accomplished wealthy man of mature years and held an influential position in society. He had since acquired the keel rights of this new ship, probably by purchasing the *Ashburnham* from John Durand, another wealthy man who owned several East India ships, after her de-commissioning in 1773. Along with this vessel Burston also inherited her Commander, Captain Richard Pierce, who had commanded the *Ashburnham* since 1769, and would also be taking command of this new ship.

The year is now 1778 and a new ship stands poised on the stocks. Its size dominates the skyline, dwarfing the adjacent yards and buildings. To have seen her; one would have been enthralled by her beauty. Monday 24th August 1778, and the warm hazy sun of early morning, filters through the web of scaffolding and glistens along the ships deep yellow hull. The noise and bustle of the dockyard fades to the sound of hammers striking timber as carpenters drive out the stabilising blocks beneath her keel, to let her down gently into the launching cradle.

A dignitary from the Honourable East India Company addresses the gathering and delivers a speech ending with those time-honoured words, "I name this ship *Halsewell*, may God bless her, and all who sail in her". As tradition dictated then as it does today, a container of liquor is dashed against her cutwater. Gracefully, this noble ship, which, without let or hindrance glided quietly into the river, admired by the gathering crowd. Yet another fine 'Blackwall Frigate' is launched into the Company's service. John & William Wells at their yard at Rotherhithe [see Note 1] built the *Halsewell*, to a specification not dissimilar to that of a warship. Using only the finest seasoned oak and elm timber; the best American pine will serve for her masts, so they will bend and give with the gale force winds she is sure to encounter. All the stages of construction would have been subject to scrutiny by inspectors employed by the Company to ensure the craft was capable of carrying their valuable cargos with the utmost safety. She also mounted twenty-six guns, twenty of them nine pound and six four-pound carronades. With this armament she could be speedily converted into an effective fighting machine enabling her not only to defend herself but in times of need to be called into service by the Royal Navy as a warship.

At 786 tons burthen, the *Halsewell* was an exceptionally large vessel. And she being one of the first of a larger class of ship, the atmosphere at her launch was alive with apprehension for the shipbuilders, draughtsman and all concerned with the building of this fine vessel.

This ship in particular was to become the pride of the East India Company. Small groups of dignitaries and officials huddled together in approbation of the new ship but it would be some time yet before the carpenters and riggers had been discharged and the ship made ready for sea and her maiden voyage. The new design incorporated the latest in technology and safety features, the front hawser holes now had canvas flaps on the outside and pockets on the inside so that water could not enter when plunging through heavy seas. All the rigging and cordage, along with her three 120 fathom anchor cables, some fifteen inches in circumference, were of the finest hemp. When fully rigged, the three masts will be able to carry 13,000 square feet of canvas, with her main mast towering approximately 140 feet above the deck.

The hold had been redesigned, it was now set to a depth of fifteen feet and with a beam spanning 36 feet, meant that she could accommodate a thousand tons of cargo with ease. The *Halsewell* was a fine ship and with a good crew of able boded seamen under the command of an accomplished Captain, who possessed a great knowledge of the sea, she would serve the Honourable Company well and carry their trade safely across the vast oceans of the world. She exuded craftsmanship and skill from her every quarter.

The ship builder had excelled in his craft. "See how she stands proud in the water", her graceful lines culminating into the sheer elegance of the stern, itself an exquisite work of art.

The quarter sections and taffrail were rich in detailed carvings, stories from Greek and Roman mythology. Leaves of the acanthus and vines embrace mythical figures of languid Maenads, paying homage to Zeus revealed as an Eagle, lightning bolts of the tempest grasped within its talons. The two radiating suns that shine from above the port and starboard quarter sections give light and happiness to all who sail in her and to lighten the darkness in her hour of need when battling against tremendous seas and violent storms.

The main, or the Captain's cabin, is situated within the roundhouse and being the farthest from the daily activities of the ship, it would also be the quietest place on board. Passengers, who also occupied cabins in the roundhouse would have immediate access to the stern gallery, by way of a pair of glass panelled doors. During clement weather it offered a rather tranquil setting, where fellow travellers could indulge in a little relaxing conversation, while taking the sea air, after dining in the adjacent cuddy. The Gallery, on the seaward side, was partially enclosed by an ornately decorated balustrade.

Finally, beneath the great cabin, carved in gold upon her upper counter, she proudly carried her name *HALSEWELL*. It will take the Captain, seven Officers and upwards of a hundred able-bodied seamen to maintain and work this ship through all the difficulties that may await her.

Since the first sail appeared in the upper reaches of the Nile many thousands of years ago, man has striven to design the ultimate in sailing vessels. To achieve a combination of speed with ease of helm, together with the ability to carry his ever-increasing amounts of goods safely. But we must bear in mind one limiting factor, the simple materials that were at hand for construction. Only then can we appreciate the magnificence of the shipbuilder's craft. Ultimately, the vessels that had evolved possessed extreme beauty and grace.

And although the *Halsewell* portrayed a picture of exquisite eighteenth century ship building, which was then at its highest, she still had one inherent fault, which was common with all Indiamen. And it lay within the design of the hull. Then, as is the case today, shareholders were always looking for large profits on their investments. When ships set forth to the Far East, they could easily be away for three years, so the more cargo they could carry the more reward on their return. Therefore, as one might expect, the design of the hold evolved into an oval shape, or to use a nautical term 'kettle hulled'. These vessels were literally floating warehouses.

Their beauty of line belied the bulbous hull beneath the waterline. An Indiaman fully laden could not hope to make more than six to eight knots at the most, the average was more like five, and they became awkward to handle which made the helm rather sluggish. Graceful though it may seem in fine weather, an Indiaman in full sail majestically cutting her wake, but low and behold, rough weather would see her in a different light, and this undoubtedly contributed to the *Halsewell's* loss.



‘A Family Affair’

Elizabeth Pierce and her sister Mary Ann would have been initially, both excited and apprehensive at the thought of their forthcoming sea voyage to India. The warnings, voiced by their father of the profound boredom, experienced by passengers during the long months at sea, had little effect on their enthusiasm for two reasons. First, they were to be reunited with their elder brother Richard, who sailed in the *Halsewell* on her last voyage in March 1783, just two years before, and had since become a respectable young gentleman in the service of the East India Company, as a writer. Secondly, and I would expect the most important, Elizabeth and Mary Ann would also be united with their intended bridegrooms. The gentlemen, to whom the young ladies were betrothed, came from excellent British stock and were both of considerable fortune. They had started by serving the Company as military cadets and now they were free merchants trading in the Far East. Captain Richard Pierce knew India to be the ideal place to broaden his daughter's horizons and further their education. It was an excellent land of opportunity for two young ladies who were at the beginning of life. So, now Elizabeth and Mary Ann were to embark on the long and hazardous journey to Asia, with their father, aboard the *Halsewell*.

Richard Pierce had planned that this coming voyage was to be his last post as Commander of an East Indiaman. On his return to England he would retire. It seemed rather fitting that his career, as a sea Captain, should end with him escorting his two beloved daughters to their new life in India. He hoped very much to stay for Elizabeth's wedding and to see both his daughters settled before returning in the *Halsewell* for England.

Elizabeth, at the age of seventeen, was a most beautiful and delicate girl. She was indeed gifted, possessing an uncommonly fine voice and had accomplished a great skill at the piano. Mary Ann at the tender age of fifteen had all the charm and grace of her sister with the same accomplishment in music but possessed a face so innocent and pure it could not help to lift the sternest of hearts. The *Halsewell*, since returning from her last voyage in August 1784, had been laid up undergoing vital repairs. The bulk of the work was near completion; all that remained was the fitting out of extra cabins. For this trip a good number of people had paid for a passage to India. Also, on board there would be detachments of soldiers from the 42nd Regiment of Royal Highland Foot, and East India Company, some with their wives, who had been ordered into service at Fort St. George at Madras. Little did they know what terrors awaited them and how their courage and endurance would be taxed to the absolute limit in the few days after leaving port.

The 1785-86 season was approaching and the *Halsewell* had been taken up by the Company's directors for one voyage to the coast of Coromandel and the Bay of Bengal in India. This would be her third consecutive season and Captain Pierce hoped to leave Gravesend by the 1st January 1786 at the latest and warp his ship down the Thames and into the Downs. There he would wait for a North-East wind to carry the *Halsewell* and her precious cargo into the Channel.

Of all the splendid ships in the service of the East India Company there was none finer or of better repute than the *Halsewell*. Richard Pierce was proud of his ship. He admired the beautiful cutwater at her bows with its intricate scrolling woodwork and the magnificent artistry adorning the stern. There were two rows of gun ports, black and intimidating that stood in sharp contrast against her yellow hull. A grim reminder that the sea was indeed a dangerous place. Coming fresh from the yards after the refit the vessel could not have been in better condition for the coming voyage. Since 1778, the year the *Halsewell* was launched, Captain Pierce had taken command, and had sailed with her through her two previous voyages. There was a sudden air of despondency about him - retirement. At a single stroke, he would be without both his daughters and the *Halsewell*. He remembered, long ago, how his father had answered the calling of the sea by placing him as midshipman in an Indiaman at the tender age of nineteen. Although those early years were harsh, he became wedded to the sea. Some of the Sea Captains under whom he served were fierce disciplinarians who regularly meted out their unjust punishment and were disliked by their men. But those were not kid-glove days, and the certainty of a voyage could not be taken for granted. Those Captains had to maintain law and exercise discipline aboard ship, and during the long months at sea scarcely a day passed without them being plunged into some sort of anxiety. At times, everything seemed to be against them, raging tempests, hurricanes, rocks in uncharted seas, Privateers, Pirates and enemy warships. Even ships of the British Navy would on occasions impress their best men. And should they manage to run this gauntlet unscathed, they could very well come home to find the ships managing owners had gone bankrupt preventing him and his crew from receiving their hard-earned reward. But despite their severity those Captains taught him the skills of navigation and the ways of the sea. From midshipman to his present position of Commander, he had always sailed under the flag of the English East India Company. Those years of austerity while serving before the mast as a Midshipman under some tyrannous Captains had taught him to exercise fairness and compassion, when dealing with the crew, he considered himself a reasonable man but was always firm.

Richard Pierce and his two daughters had been requested to dine aboard the *Halsewell* at her moorings at Blackwall. The invitations coming from his ailing father-in-law Thomas Burston. Burston, and another wealthy gentleman by the name of Peter Esdaile, who was a merchant banker, were the two principal-managing owners of the *Halsewell*. Burston the most senior, owned the two thirds, he also worked as the Ships Husband and had done so since the vessel was first commissioned. When the honourable Company's Court of Directors convened to discuss forthcoming voyages to India for the year ahead, one of the husband's main functions was to attend these meetings to learn which ships were to be 'taken up' and of course their destinations. With this in mind he would set about acquiring all the necessary proportions of victuals, livestock, spars, shot, powder and the huge amounts of equipment and stores that would be needed aboard ship for the months at sea, plus the supervising of the accounts. Burston also held the inherently strenuous position as The Collector of Customs for Surrey. Inevitably, this combination of strain and responsibility began to take its toll. He would often complain of pains in his chest and stomach, at times the pain was severe, forcing him to take to his bed for several days. The various medicines administered by his doctors and the frequent letting of blood had little effect. Even the prescribed laudanum failed to dull the pain for very long. Burston's main thought, when he was first aware that his two granddaughters were emigrating, was to travel with them to India. However, his health being in the condition it was, he decided against it. Instead he would board the *Halsewell* at Deptford where the ship would complete her lading, then would accompany Richard Pierce and the ladies as far as the Downs. There, after an emotional and poignant farewell, he would return overland to London. Sadly, this was not to be. The weeks following the dinner aboard the *Halsewell*, Burston's health deteriorated rapidly and, on the 7th, May he was to breathe his last. He was buried at All Saints Church Kingston, on the 14th May 1785.

With a degree of apprehension, the two girls stepped aboard their father's ship. This was the first time they had ever seen an ocean-going vessel; the *Halsewell* was quite the largest thing they had ever seen. With its towering masts soaring some 140 feet surrounded by a dense canopy of ropes, spars and furled sails that formed the rigging, the sight was awe inspiring. Men working high in the shrouds and way out on the yards appeared tiny amongst the entanglement of ropes. If one should fall thought Elizabeth! Disregarding all the advice and careful upbringing Elizabeth ran forward calling for her sister to follow, hoisting up her skirts, in a very unladylike manner, she climbed the steps to the forecastle deck and sat on a cathead to catch her breath. Hank after hank of neatly coiled ropes hung from the pinrail that encircled a mast of almost four feet in diameter.

The overpowering smell of tar, turpentine and freshly worked oak hung thick on the warm afternoon air. The water was calm. Drifting up through the gun ports were the muted sounds of carpenters working on the lower decks. A small ripple, caused by the flow of the tide, lapped softly against the hull creaking the ships bulkheads. Elizabeth leaned against the rail and studied the waters of the Thames flowing on its never-ending journey to the sea. Soon she, accompanied by her sister and father, in this very ship, would be taking that same journey to the open sea and to her new life in India. She suddenly remembered horrific stories of vessels being lost at sea in violent storms. Hurricanes that drove stricken ships on to rocky shores; the survivors eaten by savages. Below decks a sailor sang softly to himself as he worked, the plaintive cries of wheeling gulls sent a slight shiver of apprehension though her young frame. Craft of every description lined the quays and she contemplated the forest of masts; in the near distance lay two ships of war riding peacefully at their moorings, the calmness of the moment belying a violent past, their shadowy reflections shimmering on the flowing tide. The gentle lapping of the water and the cry of a gull all but disturbed the peace of that moment. Occasionally the long boat that brought the two girls to the ship bumped impatiently against the side of the ship as it bobbed on the tide.

Captain Pierce joined his daughters on the forecastle and offered a word of warning. He gestured towards the space in front of the forecastle, known as the beakhead. It could become very dangerous, as it was open to the sea, he also told the girls never to venture here because this was the place used as a lavatory by seamen. The small family group casually made their way aft, Pierce pointing out certain areas of interest, in particular to the empty gun carriages stationed at their ports. It was the policy of the Company that all ordinance; powder and shot could only be received on board after lading. The same applied to all Indiamen returning from a voyage, they would also have their guns, powder and shot removed long before the unloading of cargo commenced, this was purely a safety measure. The *Halsewell's* twenty-six cannons were to be replaced by new improved guns in response to the many requests and complaints made to the Honourable Company's Directors. Sea Captains pointed out the inadequacy of their ships' armament against the increasing numbers of pirates and French privateers that now infested eastern waters, who were better armed probably at the expense of captured British ships. These new guns, although still only nine pounders, had been cast longer, so the powder would burn more efficiently thus producing a greater power of destruction. He also pointed out how the two long boats had been rigged to accommodate the sheep that would provide fresh meat during their voyage. The girls looked at each other and grimaced.

There were also three hen coops on the poop deck, in which five hundred or so fowls would be kept. Above the poop deck, with the gentle breeze in its folds, stood the Company's ensign.

Much to the girl's surprise, on entering the roundhouse, they found it more oblong than round. It was soon explained that it derived its name from the 'Rounds' of the watch because it was quite possible to walk around the outside of the cabin.

Entering the cuddy, they found an excellent dinner had just been set upon the table which was clean and neat. The food looked remarkably well cooked and consisted of soup, ham, tongue, turkey pie, sausages, roast leg of mutton, boiled fowls, pork pies, stewed cabbage and potatoes, with liberal amounts of claret and Madeira. The six people who sat down to dinner were Captain Richard Pierce, Thomas Burston Senior (the ship's husband) Elizabeth and Mary Ann Pierce, Thomas Burston Junior (First Officer) and the Surgeon, Thomas Clothier.

The conversation that followed touched on the usual topics, the chartering of ships and the prices the Company had set for them, the market price of tea, weather, and finally, as always, settled on the coming voyage. Pierce voiced his concern at the reported increase of pirate activity in the Indian Ocean, as the *Halsewell* would again be sailing alone, without the safety of a convoy. However, this would lessen the danger of the crew being impressed by the Royal Navy. There was of course the added reassurance that there would be a large detachment of troops aboard at least for the outward-bound journey. To quench their fevered curiosity of the ship, Captain Pierce suggested the two young ladies should explore the roundhouse and the adjacent cabins, accompanied by their cousin, Thomas Burston Junior.

The tour ended an hour later when their father introduced them to the cabin or 'apartment' they were to occupy during the voyage. At the far end of the cabin, in the corner stood a washstand, with two small drawers set in immediately under the basin, in the recess underneath stood a water pitcher. Next to it, also at the far end of the room under the windows, was a sofa with light green upholstery which had three large drawers to its base. Along one wall sat a large dome-shaped chest with brass fittings. Next to that stood a small writing bureau, opposite were two hanging cots, and to the delight of the girls, a pianoforte, which completed the wall furniture. In the centre stood an oval table and four blue velvet chairs; all the furniture was securely lashed to the floor in case of rough weather, except for the cots; these were designed to move with the motion of the ship. Just above their heads were the massive oak beams that supported the poop deck.

Along the cabin walls were fixed the huge knee supports on which the beams rested, giving the cabin an oppressive and gloomy feel. Elizabeth and Mary Ann stepped into the room and looked in amazement. It was very small. It would be difficult to adjust to, their house in Kingston could not be described as large but the rooms were light and spacious, unlike this, which was cramped and dark in comparison. But still, it was a good deal larger than the other cabins they had just visited.

A slight breeze caught the tops of the masts, and the following motion of the ship required both girls to quickly hold on to the table for support or be flung upon the deck. The ship's Surgeon, Mr. Thomas Clothier, stepped forward to assist the ladies who complained the movement of the ship was making them feel nauseous and a little dizzy. Mr. Clothier produced some smelling salts and began to relate the first time he had ever set foot aboard an Indiaman. *"After stepping aboard and casting my eye about the vessel"* he said. *"I made it my business to seek out the Captain, whom I found upon the quarter deck speaking with his officers. When I had introduced myself, I enquired to where I should find my accommodation, I was then conducted below to the great cabin where a section of it had been partitioned, similar in size to the one in which we are now standing, and properly prepared on the larboard side of the ship. I remember"*, he went on with some disdain, *"The window being shuttered and I had scarcely enough light to see the extent of my quarters. The motion of the vessel, although riding at anchor in calm water, was considerable and I had great difficulty in maintaining my balance unless first laying hold of something fixed"*. What the Surgeon had described was an inherent feature with all Indiamen along with the indescribable and offensive smell that was noticeable all over the ship, the *Halsewell* was no exception. All ships leaked, that is why they carried pumps, but the pumps never removed all of the water and it would stagnate. Keels were usually made of elm and the ribs of oak and after a while the effect of this stagnant seawater on these timbers produces an obnoxious smell. This together with the smell of the livestock and the seamen's quarters permeated throughout the ship.

The large space beneath the poop deck was the roundhouse, this was partitioned into cabins that had a port or window, which provided light and air, and these were the most expensive accommodation on the ship. Another large space called the cuddy was just forward of the roundhouse cabins and was divided into two, one side, was the dining room, where they had just finished that excellent meal and on the other was the Captains stateroom. On the deck below was the great cabin, this was also divided into a number of small spaces usually for civilian gentlemen and army officers. The windows here, in rough weather, would have shutters or dead lights fitted to prevent heavy seas from staving in the windows.

While these were in place all daylight and fresh air was prevented from entering the cabin so the occupant had no other choice but to resort to the use of candles during the day as well as night.

If you had had a brush with the law, or had been threatened with the debtor's prison, even perhaps deserted from one of His Majesty's war ships and would like to escape the long arm of the law, you could run away to sea. There, if luck was with you, you could safely hide for two even three years, that is if you kept your nose clean, remained in favour with the bosun, and of course, managed to dodge the press gangs when in home waters. These vicious gangs would patrol the quays and outlying villages, on the lookout for the unsuspecting traveller on route to the tavern, who, if he didn't have his wits about him would soon find himself in the hold of a ship well out to sea. These gangs would also use their cutter to lay in wait in the channel for homeward bound Indiamen and relieve them of their crew. To lodge a complaint with the Admiralty was the only thing the Honourable Company could do, they did on a regular basis and, in the strongest terms possible, but generally it had little or no effect. The King's ships had to be manned and that was that. The pressing of good seamen from East Indiamen was a real thorn in the side of the Commanders and Company. However, crews removed from vessels that had newly arrived back in the Downs would sometimes be overcome if the Navy replaced the men they had taken (which they sometimes did) with men who had limited experience of the sea but were experienced enough to work the ship to her moorings. What really infuriated the Company was when they impressed seamen from outward bound Indiamen, or from ships already in foreign waters. This happened all too often in times of conflict and the outcome for the luckless Indiaman could be catastrophic. Of course, the number of seamen pressed from these lone ships varied enormously, from a handful of the best seamen, to almost a whole crew in times of war, all according to the needs of the warship's Captain. This need for crew replacements aboard British warships was mainly due to the loss of men through accidents, disease and of course warfare.

This time out a new company of well-seasoned and experienced seamen who knew the sea, had been signed on to work the *Halsewell* on this her third and what was sadly to be her final voyage. Almost a month to the day before the *Halsewell* set sail on her fateful voyage, the Indiaman Anson was also cast away. Two of her chief Officers, Henry Meriton and John Rogers, who fortunately survived the catastrophe, re-entered the service of the East India Company aboard the *Halsewell* as second and third Mates respectively.

There was always a certain amount of apprehension at the beginning of a long voyage, not necessarily at the outset but when she was far from land. Any mishap, however serious, had to be dealt with by the Captain, there was no communicating with the land. He had a completely new crew; his second and third mates however, John Rogers and Henry Meriton were very experienced seamen, although this was their first voyage in the *Halsewell*. They would not be sailing in convoy this voyage to lessen the chance of the crew being impressed. Pierce needed a fully manned ship; he would not jeopardize the lives of his daughters. Of course, the threat of pirates was still very real but the *Halsewell*, with her new guns and the troops in attendance, was a great comfort. This was indeed quite a responsibility with all the ladies on board and especially his daughters and he prayed for fine weather... if anything should happen!



'Prelude to Wreck'

"Should once the bottom strike the cruel shore,

The parting ship that instant is no more!

Nor she alone, but with all her crew

Beyond relief are doomed to perish too."



That valiant ship, *Halsewell*, was cast away just West of Seacombe Bottom in the County of Dorsetshire on the 6th January 1786. It was about 2am on Friday morning when after five days of torment, she was finally flung upon the rocks in mountainous seas in bitterly cold weather. But before we enter into this narrative, I would like to place before the reader an account, written in June 1782 by an Englishman, William Hickey, who booked passage to India aboard the Portuguese West Indiaman, *Raynha De Portugal*. He relates in graphic detail his experience of a particularly violent storm. The confinement of a small dark wet cabin devoid of all daylight by the closed windows, the violent pitching of a ship that had been stripped of masts and rudder, the incessant crashing of mountainous seas over a ship wallowing helplessly at the mercy of the storm. It is all there and one can only shudder at the overwhelming despair made desperate by his hopelessness. In the forefront of his mind was always the fear of his impending death not knowing whether the next few moments would be his last before this once gallant vessel surrendered its miserable cargo of life and trade goods to the remorseless depths. Plagued also by the knowledge that death by drowning is the most feared of all deaths added to his misery.

William Hickey's description appeared as follows;

"There was an immense swell from the westward. Our latitude by reckoning was thirty-five, sixteen south; dismal, dark, threatening sky; hard squalls, rain with an immense sea running, which made the ship labour very much. Immense numbers of albatrosses were flying about the ship. By the Captain's Journal we were now upon the edge of the bank of Cape Lagullas; hove to, and sounded, but got no bottom with a hundred and eighty fathom line. As the water continued much discoloured, we sounded every watch but without finding bottom, we saw a gannet, a bird that seamen suppose never goes off soundings, an idea that was verified with us, for heaving the lead we got ground at sixty fathoms; a yellow sand.

So heavy a sea run we apprehended being pooped every minute. The ship laboured dreadfully, tumbling about so that we split the mainsail from the violent jerks, and soon after both main and fore topsails, after which we ran under the fore sail alone.

The next three days it blew strong, with at times severe squalls, rain and a sea that seemed disposed to overwhelm us. The motion was quite horrid. The severe motion caused one of the main chain plates to break, which endangered the mast; all hands were busily occupied replacing it, a difficult job from the violent motion. Mother Cary's chickens every quarter. (Seagull's) It blew still stronger the next day, with uncommonly black sky, the same high sea running, but more confused, the ship being sometimes struck with great violence. In the evening the gale increased, attended by severe squalls. At 8 p.m. Mrs Hickey, (the author's wife) Mr. Bateman, Mr. Kemp, Mr. Brown, and Mr. Barretto, whom we had invited to supper, and myself, had just seated ourselves, the chairs being made fast to the table, and the latter as we thought so well secured that nothing could move it, when we heard a dreadful crash upon deck. In the same moment to, the vessel took so desperate a lurch as to tear the table at which we were sitting from its lashing's, and the whole party, chairs, dishes, plates and all the etceteras were dashed in one promiscuous heap against the lee side of the cabin. Providentially none of us received any material personal injury. Sad screaming and more noise prevailing upon deck, I went up to enquire the cause of it. The night was so dismally dark that to discover anything by the eye was utterly impossible, but I learnt from one of the midshipmen, a young friend of mine, that in a sudden gust of wind the fore yard had snapped in two in the slings, the consequence of which was that the foretop-sail yard gave away and both sails were blown to ribbons. During my stay upon deck the main topmast with all its rigging went over the side, being immediately followed by the fore topmast, the main tack at the same time breaking. These complicated misfortunes I heard from the people, for seeing it was entirely out of the question. The dreadful crash of falling masts, with the flapping of the split sails and melancholy cries of the people struck a general panic throughout the ship; nothing but confusion and despair prevailed, increased not a little by a piercing cry from below that the pumps were choked and would not work. A more truly terrible scene could not be; in fact, we expected nothing short of going to the bottom. The greater part of the crew, as I understand is always the case with Portuguese sailors in times of imminent danger, abandoned their duty to assemble round their priest, with whom they joined at the altar, screeching out supplicatory prayers to their patron saint Antonio, and all the other saints in the calendar, to have mercy upon them. A few, however, who possessed more firmness of mind, at the head of whom was the boatswain, never ceased to exert themselves with constancy and firmness.

It was by some of them ascertained upon examination that the alarm relative to the pumps was without foundation, arising from the carpenter's fright being so great upon finding the well full of water that he forgot to pull out the stopper or plug, the omission of which prevented them from working.

We nevertheless had still evils enough to render our situation very precarious. In less than one hour the ship, from being in good working order, became an absolute wreck. Not a sail was left to the yards; all three top-masts gone and lower rigging torn to pieces; a dismally dark, blowing night, with a tremendous sea; in a high southern latitude and tempestuous part of the ocean; an increasing leak, and the ship labouring in such a manner as to excite a reasonable apprehension of its becoming still worse, formed such a complication of evils as to make our bearing up against them a very doubtful matter.

Upon mustering the people, it was discovered that two were missing, supposed to have been carried away by some of the heavy seas that broke over the deck. The miserable men lost were one of the mates to the boatswain and a common seaman. The 13th the weather again became very bad; violent gusts of wind, rain, hail, thunder and lightning, all of the severest kind. A short, irregular sea made the motion of the ship very distressing and considerably increased the leak, nor could anything be done in the repairs of rigging or making more sail. This squally, disagreeable weather continued four days.

At daylight on Sunday (a memorable day to me) finding as I lay in bed the motion of the ship particularly uneasy, I got up to look out, and never to the last day of my existence shall I forget the shock I experienced at what I beheld. The horizon all around was of a blackish purple, above which rolled great masses of cloud of a deep copper colour, moving in every direction with uncommon rapidity; vivid lightening in every quarter, thunder awfully roaring at a distance, though evidently approaching us; a short, irregular sea breaking with a tremendous surf, as if blowing furiously hard through then but moderate, the wind, however, whistling shrill as a boatswain's pipe through the blocks and rigging. The scene altogether was such as to appall the bravest men on board. Going upon deck, I found a dead silence prevailing, not a syllable uttered by anyone, all looking in stupid amazement. Not a single precaution was taken, no deadlights to the great cabin or quarter gallery windows, not even a top gallant yard down; on the contrary, every sail set, notwithstanding they reckoned themselves within a few leagues of Ceylon, for which they were standing direct, and all this strange neglect at a time when a British vessel would have struck everything that could be and made all snug as possible in order to be the better able to receive the shock that was so perceptibly coming upon us.

Although all violent tempests are in a great measure alike, partaking of the same circumstances and consequences as those I have already had occasion to attempt a description of, that this was so peculiarly dreadful, and our escape with life so wonderful, that I am led to relate the melancholy particulars.

At eight in the morning, it began to blow hard, torrents of rain pouring down, rendering it almost dark as night. Then was an order first given to take in topgallant sails and reef topsails. The order was too late; the instant the sails were lowered they were blown to atoms, being torn from their respective yards in shreds. The sea suddenly increased to an inconceivable height, the wind roaring to such a degree that the Officers upon deck could not make themselves heard by the crew with the largest speaking trumpets. Between nine and ten it blew an absolute hurricane, far surpassing what I had any idea of. As it veered all round the compass so did the sea increase infinitely beyond imagination, one wave encountering another from every direction, and by their mutual force in thus meeting ran up apparently to a sharp point, there breaking at a height that is actually incredible but to those who unhappily saw it. The entire ocean was in a foam white as soapsuds. At a quarter before eleven, the fore topmast, yard, rigging and all went over the side, the noise of it being imperceptible amidst the roaring of wind and sea. In a few minutes it was followed by the mizzen-mast, which snapped like a walking stick about eight feet above the quarter deck; part of the wreck of it unfortunately got foul of the rudder chains and every moment struck the ship's bottom with excessive violence. At half past eleven the foremast went, being shivered into splinters quite down to the gundeck. The fall of it drew the mainmast forward, whereby the levers upon which the pumps worked (as they do in all ships built in the East Indies) were totally destroyed, putting an end to our pumping.

Before noon, the mainmast and bow-sprit both went at the same instant. Our situation seemed hopeless, not a creature on board but thought every minute would be the last of their lives. When the masts were gone, she immediately began to roll with unparalleled velocity from side to side, each gunwale, with half the quarter deck, being submerged in water each roll, so that we every moment expected she would be bottom uppermost or roll her sides out. Thus buffeted about on the angry ocean I told my poor Charlotte, whom I had secured in the best way I could and was endeavouring to support, that all must soon be over, it being quite impossible that wood and iron could long sustain such extraordinary and terrific motion, and such were my real sentiments.

The dear woman, with a composure and serenity that struck me most forcibly, mildly replied, "Gods will be done, to that I bend with humble resignation, blessing a benevolent providence for permitting me, my dearest William, to expire with you, whose fate I am content to share, but oh! My dearest love, let us in the agonies of death be not separated," and she clasped me in her arms. Whilst thus situated, three out of the five stern windows, frames and all, suddenly burst inward from the mere force of the wind, the noise attending which was such that I conceived the last scene of the tragedy was arrived.

The ship was apparently full of water, and seemed to be so completely overwhelmed that we all thought she was fast settling down. Nevertheless the velocity and depth of her rolling abated nothing, tearing away every article that could be moved; not a bureau, chest or trunk but broke loose and was soon demolished, the contents, from the quickness and constant splashing from one side to the other of the ship, becoming a perfect paste, adhering to the deck between the beams, many inches in thickness, so as near the sides actually to fill up the space to the deck.

During the severity of the hurricane, about twenty noble fellows, such as would not have disgraced the British Navy, at the head of whom stood the boatswain, acted with the same determined spirit they had shown on days earlier, doing all that could be performed by men, while the rest of the crew gave themselves up to despair, and screeching out prayers for pardon and mercy in such dismal and frantic yells as was horrible to hear. By 2pm in the afternoon every bulkhead between decks, except that of my cabin, had fallen from the violent labouring of the ship. The reason of my cabin standing when every other yielded was that being the stateroom it partook of the general strength of the vessel, being erected at the time of her building and as firmly fixed as her decks, but the folding door that opened into the Great Cabin was soon torn off its hinges and broken to pieces, exposing to our view the foaming surges through the Great Cabin's stern windows. My darling girl sat like patience itself, though drenched to the skin and covered with filth from the washings that burst into our cabin.

The Captain, who had for so many days been confined in a delirium and so reduced that he could not without assistance turn in his bed, on being told what had happened, and that the ship was sinking, instantaneously recovered vigour both of body and mind sufficient to allow not only of his jumping from his cot but going upon deck, where he issued his orders with as much, or perhaps more, precision and skill than he had done during any part of the voyage. The first order he gave was by every possible means to lighten the ship. The sea indeed had already done much towards it for us by carrying off the whole of the masts, yards, rigging and everything that was upon the upper deck.

An attempt was therefore made to throw the guns overboard, but only five were so disposed of, and those at the imminent risk of the lives of the men from the excessive motion. After exerting himself in a wonderful manner the Captain, by one of the violent jerks from a tremendous sea breaking on board, was encourage the few sailors that were ready to do all in their power to prevent the ship from foundering. Thus, he remained until two in the afternoon, when he fainted away, whereupon the people cast off the rope with which he was secured and were about to convey him between decks when at the moment an enormous wave came over the stern, sweeping them all away.

Thus hour after hour passed with us in utter despair, but still to our amazement we remained afloat, which seemed to us little short of a miracle for a ship in such a state as ours was, so tossed about at the mercy of such a sea as never was seen, so involved in ruin an desolation on every side, making to, as she did before the hurricane commenced, thirty inches of water every hour, and not a single stroke of a pump after half past eleven in the morning; nor could anybody account for her not going to the bottom but by supposing she actually rolled the water out of her as fast as it came in.

At six in the evening the fury of the storm had somewhat abated, though not sufficiently to afford us hope of ever seeing another day; our surprise only was at surviving from hour to hour without the least expectation of escaping finally from a watery grave. At eight at night the gale had evidently subsided or, to use a seaman's language, it had broken up. At the imminent risk of their lives some of the seamen went over the stern and ultimately succeeded in cutting away considerable quantities of the rigging, sails and yards that got so entangled with the ships rudder and rudder chains as totally to prevent the ships steering, by which our danger of foundering from the overwhelming sea was greatly increased. They also afterwards accomplished the throwing overboard fourteen more of her guns besides much lumber from between decks, by which the ship was importantly benefited, the rolling being less rapid and not so deep. By midnight the sea had gone down a great deal, and the people were enabled to keep their legs enough to rig out one pump and set it to work. Thirteen of the crew lost their lives, the greater part of them, as was conjectured, being washed over board. Three other bodies were found in different places, two of them under the beams upon which the boats had been stowed, the third between the coppers and ships side, a space of only a few inches wide. It was a shocking spectacle, for being so jammed in by the working of the ship the intestines were squeezed out and the head forced completely round, the face being towards the back. These miserable corpses were committed to the deep in the afternoon"

The above is a good example of how those old wooden East India ships behaved in rough seas, and of course, this drama took place in southern latitudes, where storms are known for their ferocity. But a storm is a storm in any part of the globe, severe or otherwise and had to be faced with undaunting courage. A quality possessed by British sailors down through the centuries, so when admiring the exploits of the famous Admirals and Commanders in the great British sea battles, spare a thought for the seamen who obeyed their every command and worked their ill-found ships.

While reading the narrative which follows, try and imagine the experiences of those wretched people aboard that doomed vessel; their melancholy drama.

Share the heart rendering decisions faced by a parent torn with anxiety. The hysteria, the helplessness and bravery of that friendly society on that storm filled night that was clothed with unspeakable horror. It will be impossible to read it without coming to know them so well while partaking of the dread they must have felt, and sympathy for them will run deep. But beware, linger there not, for so moving is the story and the ending so tragic, that when, from the depths of a warm slumber you are awoken to the storms fury and the rain driven before a howling gale lashes the windows. You will remember again this story, the thundering of a raging sea against ragged cliffs and through the darkness the screams and the mournful wailing of those tormented souls will live again to haunt your mind and deprive you of sleep.



The *Halsewell*, as I have mentioned earlier, had been taken up to make her third voyage to Coast and Bay by the East India Board of Directors. On the 16th day of November she slowly warped her way down to Gravesend to complete her lading. The noise, bustle and confusion of the docks while loading a ship are tremendous. The quay would be a hive of activity; throngs of people eager to see all that is going on, for when a ship is about to leave on a long voyage it was a great occasion. Pens of livestock, sheep, cattle, pigs and of course crates of fowls, all had to be stowed on board; loading was a long and tedious task. It was not practical and, indeed almost impossible, to moor these huge ships at a quay. The Indiamen would stay out in the deeper water serviced by smaller craft which would bring the cargo, supplies and people. When loading was completed, the quays were alive with spectators all wanting to see the *Halsewell* leave her moorings and slowly make her way down the river towards the open sea.



A Circumstantial Narrative

A CIRCUMSTANTIAL NARRATIVE

Of the LOSS of the

HALSEWELL
(EAST- INDIAMAN)
Capt. RICHARD PIERCE,

Which was unfortunately wrecked at
SEACOMBE in the **ISLE** of **PURBECK**
On the Coast of **DORSETSHIRE**,
On the Morning of Friday the 6th of January, 1786
COMPILED FROM THE
Communications, and under the Authorities of

Mr. HENRY MERITON and Mr.
John ROGERS,
The two chief Officers
Who happily escaped the dreadful
Catastrophe

The EIGHT EDITION

LONDON

Printed for WILLIAM LANE,
Leadenhall-street

M.DCC.LXXXVI.

(Price One Shilling)

Entered at Stationer's Hall

According to Act of Parliament

THE Circumstances of this
Narrative
were communicated to the EDITOR
by US; and the whole ACCOUNT,
as far as it comes within the reach of
our
Knowledge is strictly TRUE.

HENRY MERITON,
JOHN ROGERS

The misfortunes of individuals affecting only their immediate relatives, occasioned no public concern, and death presented in any of its ordinary forms, though at all time awful, is too familiar to be tremendous, but when numbers are involved in one common fate, and that fate is attended with circumstances of unusual horror, the united bow is felt by the whole community, the republic itself is convulsed by the shock, and grief, pity, and regret, spread themselves among all orders and conditions of men. Thus the decease of a single citizen, however respectable his character, however amenable his conduct, passes unnoticed among the daily records of mortality; and the number who fall in a battle, or perish in a fight, are enumerated and counted without emotion; whilst the fatality of a pestilence, the deviations of an earthquake, and the terrors of a storm, fix on the mind, and awaken the passions to sympathetic sensibility.

Nor is this distinction unwarranted by reason; the common lot of mortals we are prepared to expect, and know to be unavoidable, and the events of war are equally obvious and certain, but the pestilence, the earthquake, and the storm, are calamities of which no apprehensions are formed, and which rush on you with such sudden and inevitable violence, as to bid defiance to fortitude, and battle the efforts of philosophic arguments.

The melancholy catastrophe which is intended to be the subject of the following pages, is of a nature so direful that humanity recoils at the recollection of it; and among the various events of the same deplorable kind, which have blackened the annals of the last forty years, scarce one has been attended with so many circumstances of aggravated woe.

Of the loss of the VICTORY, no certain accounts have ever been received: the prevailing opinion has been, that she sank at once, and that her numerous, and still lamented crew, were overwhelmed in momentary destruction. The fate of the DODDINGTON East Indiaman is too well known to require a recognition, she struck at once on an unknown rock, and the destiny of the sufferers, and those who escaped, was determined in the course of a very few hours. In the ST. GEORGE, which was unfortunately burnt in the Bay of Gibraltar, in the year 1758, but few, in comparison, perished, relief was almost instantaneously afforded. to the survivors, and the accident was one of those, which even the casualties of war might have occasioned, to a ship prepared for battle.

The wreck of the RAMILLIES on the western coast of England, and of the LITCHFIELD, on the African shore, were each of them marked with many circumstances of horror; in the former case no more than 24 lives were saved, out of a crew which consisted of near 800; and in the latter, instant death was avoided, at the expense of a blessing, dearer than even life itself, the survivors being immediately reduced to a state of slavery, from which they were not emancipated till after a tedious and difficult negotiation; but these were both ships of war, destined to dangerous and adventurous services, in which the tenure of existence could only be precariously held, and must be considered to be subject to the verity of contingencies ever annexed to such employments.

The loss of the ROYAL GEORGE was indeed a national misfortune of great magnitude. The brave Admiral Kempenfelt, the experienced officers, and the able and selected seamen who constituted her unfortunate crew, were so many pillars withdrawn from the support of a fabric, of which its naval strength is only a prop; nor will the merit of the individual sufferers, or the injury sustained by the public, be forgotten, whilst the ports of Great Britain can furnish a fleet to maintain an Empire over the main, to which her situation, her interests, and her superiority in nautical skill and bravery, so justly entitle her; but even the gloom of this scene of distress is alleviated by the consideration, that the fate of those who suffered, was unattended with the aggravation of lingering and hopeless apprehension.

When we reflect on the loss of the GROSVENOR on the eastern coast of Africa, we shudder at the miseries of the surviving few, and cease to deplore the less rigid destiny of those, who by immediate death, were happily exempted from the dreadful participation; - of this sad event we shall have occasion to speak hereafter, and hope, from a further consideration of it, to offer consolation to the afflicted relations and friends of those, who were on the present most unhappy occasion, have been untimely victims of misfortune.



The recent shipwreck of the NANCY PACQUET, on the fateful rocks of Scilly, in her homeward bound passage from Bombay, is fresh in the memory of our readers; but though the destruction in that instance was more complete than in this now immediately before us, yet we are inclined to believe, that those who peruse this narrative will be of the opinion, that it was less horrible, and that if such scenes will admit of comparison, the circumstance of the present case were more lamentable.



The HALSEWELL East Indiaman, of 758 tons burthen, commanded by Richard Pierce, esquire; having been taken up by the directors of the East India Company to make her third voyage to coast and bay, on the sixteenth day of November, 1785, fell down to Gravesend, where she completed her lading; and taking the ladies and other passengers on board at the Hope, she sailed through the Downs on Sunday the first of January, 1786, and the next morning being abreast of Dunnose, it fell calm.

At the moment let us take a prospect of an outset, in which all appearance united to promise a happy and prosperous voyage, and not a cloud intervened to obscure the pleasing hopes, which are ever annexed to a life of adventure, and which are the main springs of industry, the foundations of commercial spirit, and the conductors to private wealth and honour, and public advantage and aggrandizement.

The ship one of the finest in the service, and supposed to be in the most perfect condition for her voyage; the Commander of distinguished ability, and exemplary character; his Officers, men of unquestioned knowledge in their profession, and of approved fidelity; the crew, the best seamen that could be collected, and as numerous as the establishment admits; to whom were added a considerable body of soldiers, destined to recruit the forces of the company in Asia.

The very respectable passengers were:

Miss Eliza Pierce & Miss Mary Anne Pierce - Daughters of the Commander

Miss Amy Paul & Miss Mary Paul - Daughters of Mr. Paul of Somersetshire, & Relations to Capt. Pierce

Miss Elizabeth Blackburn, daughter of Capt. Blackburn, of the same service.

Miss Mary Haggard, sister to an officer on the Madras establishment & Miss Anne Mansell, a native of Madras, but of European Parents, returning from receiving her education in England.

John George Schutz, Esq; returning to Asia, where he had long resided, to collect a part of his fortune which he had left there,

The ladies were equally distinguished by their beauty and accomplishments, the gentleman amiable in his manners, and of high respect in his character. Mr. Burston, the Chief Mate, was also related to Captain Pierce's lady; and it is hardly more possible to conceive a more friendly and happy society, nor one more calculated to join in diverting the tediousness of a long passage, by little plans of rational amusement, and by anticipating the pleasing scenes of novelty, the congratulations of expecting friends, and the success and prosperity which awaited the accomplishment of their voyage.

The objects of the voyage highly laudable, to extend the commerce, and to promote the revenue of the state; - to employ that useful and absolutely necessary body of men, whose services are now no longer required for national defence; to furnish the community with articles by use become essential necessities;- to provide others for foreign markets, which produce an influx of profit from the various nations of Europe, and to obtain decent and competent rewards for the skill, assiduity, and diligence, of the Commander and his Officers. Such are the ends pursued in a mercantile voyage, in the attainment of which, not only the state itself, but every member of the Common-Wealth is unquestionably interested.

From such pleasing expectations, such encouraging, such animating prospects, we are compelled to turn our eyes on a scene of distress so fatal and complicated, that humanity sickens at the recollection, and the pen trembles while it records the melancholy tale.

Monday the second January, at 3 in the afternoon, a breeze sprung up from the South, when they ran inshore to land the Pilot, but very thick weather coming on in the evening, and the wind baffling, at 9 in the evening they were obliged to anchor in 18 fathom water, furlled their topsails, but could not furl their courses, the snow falling thick and freezing as it fell.

Tuesday the third, at 4 in the morning, a strong gale came on from the east north east, and the ship driving, they were obliged to cut their cables, and run off to sea. At noon, they spoke with a brig bound to Dublin, and having put their Pilot on board her, bore down the channel immediately. At 8 in the evening, the wind freshening coming to the southward, they reefed such sail as were judged necessary. At 10 at night it blew a violent gale of wind at south, and they were obliged to carry a press of sail to keep the ship offshore, in doing which the hawse plugs, which according to a new improvement were put inside, were washed in, and the hawse bags washed away, in consequence of which they shipped a large quantity of water on the gun deck. On sounding the well, and finding the ship had sprung a leak, and had five feet of water in her hold, they clued the main topsail up, hauled up the mainsail, and immediately to endeavour to furl both, but could not effect it – all the pumps were set to work on discovering the leak.

Wednesday the 4th at 2 in the morning, they endeavoured to wear the ship, but without success, and judging it necessary to cut away the mizzen mast it was immediately done, and a second attempt made to wear the ship, which succeeded no better than the former; and the ship having now 7 feet of water in her hold, and gaining on the pumps, it was thought expedient, for the preservation of the ship, to cut away the main mast, the ship appearing to be in immediate danger of foundering; in the fall of the mast, Jonathan Moreton, Coxswain, and four men, either fell or were drawn by the wreck overboard and drowned, and by 8 in the morning the wreck was cleared, and the ship got before the wind, in which position she was kept about 2 hours, in which time the pumps cleared the ship of 2 feet of water in the hold: at the time the ships head was brought to the eastward with the foresail only.

At 10 in the morning the wind abated considerably, and the ship labouring extremely, rolled the fore topmost? over on the larboard side, in the fall the wreck went through the foresail, and tore it to pieces. At 11 in the forenoon the wind came to the westward, and the weather clearing up, the Berryhead was distinguishable bearing North and by East, distance 4 or 5 leagues; they now immediately bent another foresail, erected a jury main mast, and set a top gallant sail, for a main sail, under which sail they bore up for Portsmouth, and employed the remainder of the day in getting up a jury mizzen mast.

Thursday the 5th at 2 in the morning, the wind came to the southward, blew fresh, and the weather was very thick; at noon Portland was seen bearing North and by East, distance 2 or 3 leagues. At 8 at night it blew a strong gale at South, and at this time the Portland lights were seen bearing North-west, distance 4 or 5 leagues, when they wore the ship, and got her head to the westward, but finding they lost ground on that tack, they wore her again, and kept stretching on the the eastward, in hopes to have weathered Peverel Point, in which case they intended to have anchored in Studland Bay.

At 11 at night it cleared, and they saw St Albans Head a mile and a half to the leeward of them, upon which they took in sail immediately, and let go the small bower anchor, which bought up the ship at a whole cable, and she rode for about an hour, but then drove; they now let go the sheet anchor and wore away a whole cable, and the ship rode for about two hours longer, when she drove again. Whilst they were in this situation, the Captain sent for Mr Henry Meriton, the chief officer who survives, and asked his opinion as to the possibility of saving their lives, to which he replied with equal calmness and candour, that he apprehended there was any little hope, as they were then driving fast on the shore, and might expect every moment to strike; the boats were then mentioned, but it was agreed that at that time they could be of no use, yet in case an opportunity should present itself of making them serviceable, it was proposed that the officers should be confidentially requested to reserve the longboat for the ladies and themselves, and this precaution was immediately taken. About 2 in the morning of Friday the 6th, the ship still driving, and approaching very fast to the shore, the same officer again went into the cuddy, where the Captain then was, and another conversation took place, Captain Pierce expressing extreme anxiety for the preservation of his beloved daughters, and earnestly asking the officer if he could devise any means of saving them, and on his answering with great concern that he feared it would be impossible, but their only chance would be to wait for the morning, the Captain lifted up his hand in silent and distressful ejaculation.

At this dreadful moment the ship struck with such violence as to dash the heads of those who were standing in the cuddy, against the deck above them, and the fatal blow was accompanied by a shriek of horror, which burst at one instant from every quarter of the ship.

The seamen, many who had been remarkably inattentive and remiss in their duty during great part of the storm, and had actually sulked in their hammocks, and left the exertions of the pump, and the other labours attending their situation, to the officers of the ship, and the soldiers; (who had been uncommonly active and arduous during the whole tremendous conflict) roused by the destructive blow to a sense of their danger, now poured upon the deck, to which no endeavours of their officers could keep them whilst their assistance might have been useful, and in frantic exclamations demanded of heaven and their fellow sufferers, that succour, which their timely efforts might possibly have succeeded in procuring; but it was now too late, the ship continued to beat on the rocks, and soon bulged, and fell with her broadside towards the shore; when the ship struck a number of the men climbed up the ensign staff, under an apprehension of her going to pieces immediately.

Mr. Meriton, the officer, whom we have already mentioned, at this crisis of horror, offered to these unhappy beings the best advice that could possibly be given to them; he recommended their coming all to that side of the ship which lay lowest on the rocks, and singly to take the opportunities that might then offer of escaping to the shore. And having thus provided to the utmost of his power, for the safety of the desponding crew, he returned to the Roundhouse, where by this time all the passengers, and most of the officers were assembled, the latter employed in offering consolation to the unfortunate ladies, and which appalled magnanimity, suffering their compassion for the fair and amiable companions of their misfortunes, to get the better of the sense of their own danger, and the dread of almost inevitable annihilation. At this moment, what must be the feelings of a father – of such a father as Captain Pierce!

In this charitable work of offering comfort to the fair sufferers, Mr. Meriton, now joined, by assurances of his opinion, that the ship would hold together until the morning, when they would all be safe, and Captain Pierce observing one of the young gentlemen loud in his expressions of terror, and hearing him frequently exclaim that the ship was going to pieces, he cheerfully bid him hold his peace, observing to him, that though the ship should go to pieces, he would not, but would be safe enough.

It will now be necessary to describe the situation of the place which proved fatal to so many valuable and respectable persons, as without such a description it will be difficult to convey a proper idea of the melancholy, deplorable scene. The ship struck on the rocks at or near Seacombe, on the island of Purbeck, between Peverell Point, and St Albans Head, at part of the shore where the cliff is of vast height, and rises almost perpendicular from its base.

But at this particular spot the cliff is excavated at the foot, and presents a cavern of 10 or 12 yards in depth, and a breadth equal to the length of a large ship, the sides of the cavern so nearly upright as to be extremely difficult of access, the roof formed of the stupendous cliff, and the bottom of it strewn with sharp and uneven rocks, which seem to have been rent from above by some convulsion of nature.

It was at the mouth of this cavern that the unfortunate wreck lay stretched almost from side to side of it, and offering her broadside to the horrid chasm.

But at the time the ship struck it was too dark to discover the extent of their danger, and the extreme horror of their situation: even Mr. Meriton himself conceived a hope that she might keep together till daylight, and endeavoured to cheer his drooping friends, and in particular the unhappy ladies, with this comfortable expectation, as an answer to the Captains enquiries, how they went on, or what he thought of their situation.

In addition to the company already in the Roundhouse, they admitted three black women, and two soldiers wives, who with the husband of one of them had been permitted to come in, though the seamen who had tumultuously demanded entrance, to get the lights, had been opposed, and kept out by Mr. Rogers, the third mate, and Mr. Brimer the fifth, so that the numbers there were now increased to near fifty; Captain Pierce sitting on a chair, cot or some other movable, with a daughter on each side of him, each of whom he alternately pressed to his affectionate bosom; the rest of the melancholy assembly were seated on the deck, which was strewn with musical instruments, and the wreck of furniture, trunks, boxes and packages.

And here also Mr. Meriton, having previously cut several wax candles into pieces, and stuck them up in various parts of the Roundhouse, and lighted up all the glass lanthorns he could find, took his seat, intending to wait the happy dawn, that might present to him the means of effecting his own escape, and afford him an opportunity of giving assistance to the partners of his danger; but observing the poor ladies appeared parched and exhausted, he fetched a basket of oranges from some part of the Roundhouse, and prevailed on some of them to refresh themselves by sucking a little of the juice. At this time, they were all tolerably composed, except Miss Mansel, who was in hysteric fits on the floor deck of the Roundhouse.

But on his return to the company, he perceived a considerable alteration in the appearance of the ship, the sides were visibly giving way, the deck seemed to be lifting, and he discovered other strong symptoms that she could not hold together much longer, he therefore attempted to go forward to look out, but immediately saw that the ship was separated in the middle, and that the fore part had changed its position, and lay rather farther out towards the sea; and in this emergency, when the next moment might be charged with his fate, he determined to seize the present, and to follow the example of the crew, and the soldiers, who were now quitting the ship in numbers, and making their way to a shore of which they knew not yet the horrors.

Among other measures adopted to favour these attempts, the ensigns staff had been unshipped, and attempted to be laid from the ships side to some of the rocks, but without success, for it snapped to pieces before it reached them, however by the light of a lanthorn, which a seaman, of the name of Burmaster, handed through the skylight of the Roundhouse to the deck, Mr. Meriton discovered a spar, which appeared to be laid from the ships side to the rocks, and on this spar he determined to attempt his escape.

He accordingly laid himself down on it, and thrust himself forward, but he soon found that the spar had no communication with the rock, he reached the end of it, and then slipped off, receiving a very violent bruise in his fall, and before he could recover his legs, he was washed off by the surge, in which he supported himself by swimming, till the returning wave dashed him against the back part of the cavern, where he laid hold of a small projecting piece of the rock, but so benumbed, that he was on the point of quitting it, when a seaman who had already gained a footing, extended his hand, and assisted him till he could secure himself on a little shelf of the rock, from which he clambered still higher, till he was out of the reach of the surf.

Mr. Rogers the third mate remained with the Captain, and the unfortunate ladies, and their companions, nearly twenty minutes after Mr. Meriton had quitted the ship: soon after the latter left the Roundhouse, the Captain asked what was become of him, and Mr. Rogers replied that he was gone on the deck, to see what could be done. After this a heavy sea breaking over the ship, the ladies exclaimed, "Oh poor Meriton; he is drowned, had he stayed with us he would have been safe" and they all, and particularly Miss Mary Pierce, expressed great concern at the apprehension of his loss. On this occasion Mr. Rogers offered to go and call in Mr. Meriton, but this was opposed by the ladies from an apprehension that he might share the same fate.

At this time the sea was breaking in at the fore part of the ship, and reached as far as the main mast, and Captain Pierce, gave Mr. Rogers a nod, and they took a lamp, and went together into the stern gallery, and after viewing the rocks for some time, Captain Pierce asked Mr. Rogers, if he thought there was any possibility of saving the girls, to which he replied, he feared there was not, for they could only discover the black face of the perpendicular rock, and not the cavern which afforded shelter to those who had escaped; they then returned to the Roundhouse, and Mr. Rogers hung up the lamp, and Captain Pierce, with his greatcoat on, sat down between his two daughters, and struggled to suppress the parental tear which then burst into his eye.

The sea continuing to break in very fast, Mr. McManus, a midshipman, and Mr. Schutz a passenger, asked Mr. Rogers what they could do to escape, who replied "Follow me" and they then all went into the stern gallery, and from thence from the weather upper quarter gallery upon the poop, and whilst they were there a very heavy sea fell on board, and the Roundhouse gave way, and he heard the ladies shriek at intervals, as if water had reached them, the noise of the sea at some times drowning their voices.

Mr. Brimer had followed Mr. Rogers to the Poop, where they had remained together about five minutes, when on the coming on of the last mentioned sea, they jointly seized a hen coop, and the same wave which he apprehended proved to fatal to some of those who remained below, happily carried him and his companion to the rock, on which they were dashed with such violence as to be miserably bruised and hurt.

On this rock were twenty seven men, but it was low water, and they were convinced that upon the flowing of the tide, they must all be washed off, many of them attempted to get to the back or sides of the Cavern, out of the reach of the returning sea, in this attempt scarce more than six, besides himself, and Mr. Brimer succeeded, of the remainder some shared the fate which they had apprehended and the others perished in their efforts to get to the Cavern.

Mr. Rogers and Mr. Brimer both however reached the cavern, and scrambled up the rock, on narrow shelves of which they fixed themselves, Mr. Rogers got so near to his friend, Mr. Meriton as to exchange congratulations with him, but he was prevented from joining him by at least twenty men who were between them, neither of whom could move without immediate peril of his life. – At the time Mr. Rogers reached his station of possible safety, his strength was so nearly exhausted that had the struggle continued a few minutes longer he must have been inevitably lost.

They now found that a very considerable number of the crew, seamen, soldiers, and some petty officers were in the same situation with themselves, tho' many who had reached the rocks below, had perished, in attempting to ascend; what that situation was they were still to learn; at present they has escaped immediate death, but they were yet to encounter cold, nakedness, wind, rain, and the perpetual beating of the spray of the sea, for a difficult, precarious, and doubtful chance of escape.

They could yet discern some part of the ship, and solaced themselves, in their dreary stations, with the hope of its remaining entire till daybreak, for, in the midst of their own misfortunes, the sufferings of the females affected them with the most acute anguish, and every sea that broke, brought with it terror for the fate of those amiable, and helpless beings.

But, alas! Their apprehensions were too soon realised. In a very few minutes after Mr Rogers had gained the rock, a universal shriek which still vibrates in their ears, and, in which, the voice of female distress was lamentably distinguishable, announced the dreadful catastrophe: in a few moments all was hushed, except the warring winds, and the beating waves: the wreck was buried in the remorseless deep, and not an atom of her was ever after discoverable.

Thus, perished the HALSEWELL, and with her worth, honour, skill, beauty, amiability, and bright accomplishments; never did the angry elements combat with more elegance; never was a watery grave filled with such precious remains. Great God, how inscrutable are thy judgments! yet we know them to be just; nor will we arraign thy mercy, who hast transferred virtue and purity, from imperfect, and mutable happiness, to bliss eternal!

What an aggravation of woe was this dreadful, this tremendous blow, to the yet trembling and scarcely half saved wretches who were hanging about the sides of the horrid cavern?

They were themselves in the most imminent danger, but their dearest friends, the pleasing companions of their voyage, those whose beauty, and accomplishments, would have charmed the tedious hours, and beguiled even contrary winds, and all the impediments of a long passage, of the sting of disappointment: had now bid themselves an everlasting farewell; they felt for themselves, that they wept for wives, parents, fathers, brothers, sisters, - perhaps lovers. All – All cut off from their dearest, their most invaluable hopes.

Nor were they less agonized by the subsequent events of this ill-fated night; many of those who had gained the precarious stations which we have described, worn out with fatigue, weakened by bruises, battered by the tempests, and benumbed with the cold, quitted their holdfasts, and tumbling headlong either on the rocks below, or in the surf, perished beneath the feet of their wretched associates, and by their dying groans and gulping exclamations for pity, awakened terrific apprehensions in the survivors, of their own approaching fate.

At length, after the bitterest three hours which misery ever lengthened into ages, the day broke on them, but instead of bringing with it the relief with which they had flattered themselves, served to discover all the horrors of their situation; they now found that had the country been alarmed by the guns of distress which they had continued to fire for many hours before the ship struck, but which from the violence of the storm were unheard, they could neither be observed by the people from above, as they were completely engulfed in the cavern, and overhung by the cliff, nor did any part of the wreck remain to point out their probable place of refuge; below, no boat could live to search them out, and had it been possible to have acquainted those who would wish to assist them, with their exact situation, no ropes could be conveyed into the cavity, to facilitate their escape.

The only prospect which offered, was to creep along the side of the cavern, to its outward extremity, and on a ledge scarcely as broad as a mans hand, to turn the corner and endeavour to clamber up the almost perpendicular precipice, whose summit was near two hundred feet from the base.

And in this desperate effort did some succeed, whilst others, trembling with terror, and their strength exhausted by mental and bodily fatigue, lost their precarious footing and perished in the attempt.

The first men who gained the summit of the cliff, were the Cook, and James Thompson a quartermaster, by their own exertions they made their way to the land, and the moment they reached it, hastened to the nearest house, and made known the situation of their fellow sufferers. The house at which they first arrived was Eastington, the present habitation of Mr. Garland, steward or agent to the proprietors of the Purbeck Quarries, who immediately got together the workmen under his direction, and with the most zealous and animated humanity exerted every effort for the preservation of the surviving crew of this unfortunate ship; ropes were procured with all possible dispatch, and every precaution taken that assistance should be speedily and effectually given; and we are happy in this opportunity of bearing testimony, under the authority of the principal surviving officers to the kind, benevolent, and spirited behaviour of this gentleman, who conduct on the melancholy occasion, entitles him to universal respect and regard, as well as to the particular gratitude of those who were the immediate objects of his philanthropy.

Mr. Meriton made the attempt and almost reached the edge of the precipice; a soldier who preceded him, had his feet on a small projecting rock or stone, and on the same stone Mr. Meriton had fastened his hands to help his progress: at this critical moment the Quarrymen arrived, and seeing a man so nearly within their reach, they dropped a rope to him, of which he immediately laid hold, and in a vigorous effort to avail himself of this advantage, he loosened the stone on which he stood, which gave way, Mr. Meriton must have been precipitated to the bottom, but that a rope was providentially lowered to him at the instant, which he seized when he was in the act of falling, and was safely drawn to the summit.

The fate of Mr. Brimer was peculiarly severe, this gentleman who had only been married nine days before the ship had sailed, to a beautiful lady, the daughter of Captain Norman, of the Royal Navy; in which service Mr. Brimer was a lieutenant, but was now on a voyage to visit an uncle at Madras, came on shore, as we have already observed, with Mr. Rogers, and like him got up the side of the cavern, where he remained till the morning, when he crawled out, and a rope being thrown to him, he was either so benumbed with the cold as to fasten it about him improperly, or so agitated, as to neglect making it fast at all; but from whichever cause it arose, the effect was fatal to him; at the moment of his supposed preservation he fell from his stand, and was unfortunately dashed to pieces, in the presence of those who could only lament the deplorable fate of an amicable and worthy man, and an able and skilful officer.

As the day advanced, more assistance was obtained; and as the life preserving efforts of the survivors would admit, they crawled into the extremities of the cavern, and presented themselves to their preservers above, who stood prepared with the means which the situation would permit them to exercise, to help them to the summit,

The method of affording this help was singular, and does honour to the humanity and the intrepidity of the quarrymen. The distance from the top of the rock to the cavern, was at least a hundred feet with a projection of the former of about 8 feet, ten of these formed a declivity to the edge, and the remainder of it was perpendicular. On the very brink of the precipice stood two daring fellows, a rope being tied around them, and fastened above to a strong iron bar, fixed in the ground, behind them in like manner, two more, and two more. A strong rope also properly secured, passed between them, by which they might hold and support themselves from falling. They then let down another rope with a noose ready fixed below the cavern; and the wind blowing hard, it was in some instances forced under the projecting rock sufficiently for the sufferers to reach it without crawling to the extremity, in either case, whoever laid hold of it, put the noose around his waist, and after escaping from one element, committed himself full swing to another, in which he dangled till he was drawn up with great care and caution.

It is but justice in this place to say, that the survivors received the friendly and humane assistance of Mr. Jones and Mr. Hawker, gentlemen resident near the spot.

But in this attempt many shared the fate of the unfortunate Mr. Brimer; and unable through cold, weakness, perturbation of mind, or the incommodiousness of the stations they occupied, to avail themselves of the succour which was offered them, were at last precipitated from the stupendous cliff, and were either dashed to pieces on the rocks beneath, or falling into the surge, perished in the waves.

Among these unhappy sufferers, the destiny of a drummer belonging to the military on board the HALSEWELL, was attended with circumstances of peculiar distress; being either washed off the rock by the seas, or falling into the surf from above, he was carried by the counter seas or returning waves, beyond the breakers, within which his utmost efforts could ever again bring him, but he was drawn further out to sea, and as he swam remarkably well, continued to struggle with the waves, in sight of his pitying companions, till his strength was exhausted, and he sunk to rise no more.

It was not till late in the day that the survivors were all conveyed safely, one indeed, William Trenton, a soldier, remained on his perilous stand till the morning of Saturday 7th January, exposed to the united horrors of the extremest personal danger, and a most acute disquietude of mind; nor is it easy to conceive how his strength and spirits could have supported him for such a number of hours, under distress so poignant and complicated. Though the remains of the wreck were no longer discoverable among the rocks, yet the surface of the sea was covered with fragments as far almost as the eye could reach, and even so late at ten o'clock on the Friday morning, a sheep, part of the livestock of the unfortunate officers, was observed buffeting the angry waves.

The surviving officers, seamen, and soldiers, being now assembled at the house of their benevolent friend, Mr. Garland, they were mustered, and found to amount to seventy-four, out of rather more than two hundred and forty, which was about the number of the crew and passengers in the ship when she sailed through the Downs; of the remainder, who unhappily lost their lives, upwards of seventy are supposed to have reached the rocks, but to have been washed off, or to perish in the falling from the cliffs, and fifty or more to have sunk with the Captain and the ladies in the roundhouse when the after part of the ship went to pieces.

All those who reached the summit survived, except two or three, who are supposed to have expired in drawing up, and a black, who died in a few hours after he was brought to the house, though many of them were so miserably bruised that their lives were doubtful, and they are scarcely yet recovered.

As the last returns which were dispatched from the ship have never come to hand, and all the books and papers went down to the bottom with her, it has been impossible to obtain an exact list of the seamen, soldiers, passengers, and servants who were on board her at the time she sailed, nor is the list of officers perfectly complete, some of the more subordinate being usually entered on the ship's books, at the time they actually came on board.

We shall, however, offer to our readers, two lists; the first, of all the principal officers, and such others as can be precisely ascertained, who sailed in her, and the authenticity of which, as far as it goes, may be depended on; the second (in which but a few doubts occur) of the persons who were saved.

On Saturday morning Mr. Meriton and Mr. Rogers, having been liberally assisted by Mr. Garland with the means of making the journey, set off for London, to carry the melancholy tidings to the Directors of the India House; and having humanely taken the precaution to acquaint the magistrates of the towns through which they passed, that a number of shipwrecked men would soon be on the road to the metropolis, (lest the tedious and disagreeable way-fare of these unfortunate beings should be rendered more miserable by unjust suspicions) they arrive at the India House on Sunday the 8th instant at noon.

Here the sad tale was no sooner told, than the Directors, with their usual munificence, ordered handsome gratifications to the Quarry-men and others, who assisted in saving the survivors, and provided some immediate support for those who outlived this lamentable event. To Mr. Garland the Directors have also made such acknowledgement of thanks, as his benevolent conduct merited.

It would be unjust to suppress a circumstance, which reflects great honour on the benevolence of the master of the Crown Inn, at Blandford, Dorsetshire: When the distressed seamen arrived in that town, he sent for them all to his house, and having given them the refreshment of a comfortable dinner, he presented each man with half a crown to help him on his journey. An example of liberality which we trust will have its effect.

Before we pay the tribute due to the memories of those who unfortunately suffered on this deplorable occasion, it may not be improper to remark, that a very particular friendship subsisted between Mr. Meriton and Mr. Rogers, the two principal officers who escaped the dreadful catastrophe; they had made a long and painful voyage together in the PIGOT, and were among the few who survived the mortality with which the crew of that ship was visited: On their return to England, twenty-five days only before they undertook the voyage which has been so unhappily interrupted; they again engaged to embark in the same bottom, and Providence has a second time rescued them from impending death: The sanction which these Gentlemen have given to this narrative, prevents us speaking of them in the language which their universal reputation dictates.

The character of Captain Pierce is beyond eulogium: his professional skill and knowledge will be best testified by the command with which he has been long invested, and which he bore with equal honour to himself, and advantage to his employers. His integrity was an unimpeached as his punctuality was exemplary. He was generous without profusion, and liberal without ostentation. His heart and his hand corresponded in the exercise of every act of humanity; from his door the distressed never departed without relief. He was a sincere and zealous friend, a kind and unassuming benefactor. In his family he was a pattern of excellence, a tender and affectionate husband, a fond and indulgent parent, a mild and beneficent master. In his ship he was the friend of his officers, the protector of youth, the encourager of merit, a father to the crew: Few private men have deserved, few have enjoyed, a character so totally irreproachable, so conspicuously eminent.

His daughters (in the acts of tenderness to whom he nobly and heroically expired) were as remarkable for accomplishment of mind, and sweetness of disposition, as for the elegance of their persons, and the extent of their polite acquirements; they were educated under the immediate care of their parents, and repaid their tenderness by the most dutiful and affectionate attention.

Six children happily survive him, and we trust will serve as comforters to his afflicted and yet disconsolate widow, to whom he had been married upwards of twenty years; one of these, the eldest, a son, and a namesake of his lamented father, is now about eighteen years old, and was left in the East Indies by Captain Pierce on his last voyage; the others are two of each sex of different ages, and an infant yet at its mothers breast. Mrs. Pierce was the daughter of Thomas Burston, Esq; the Collector of Excise for the County of Surrey: and at Kingston in that county, Captain Pierce and his family have resided almost consistently from the time of his marriage. As merit and industry, like his, could hardly fail of success, it is said he had acquired a competent fortune, and intended that this should be his last voyage.

Unhappily for his family, his friends, and the community, the progress of it was stopped by an event which has produced the most universal and unaffected concern.

The two Miss Pauls were relations to Captain Pierce and daughters of a gentleman of the West of England, beautiful, sensible, amiable, and accomplished young women – Happy in the companionship of their beloved cousins, happy in the protection of their worthy and affectionate father, the pain of quitting their still nearer relations, and the terrors of a long voyage were dissipated, and their embarkation seemed only to be an agreeable change of situation – How uncertain are these expectations, how delusive the prospects, how evanescent the hopes, by which mortals are guided in the pursuit of sublunary happiness.

Miss Blackburn was the daughter of Captain Blackburn, a Commander also in the service of the East India Company who now resides at Old Malton in Yorkshire. If the reports we have heard be true, that this gentleman has lately lost two sons by untimely and accidental deaths, what pity and commiseration is due to him on the additional misfortune which has befallen him in the person of a daughter, whose beauty and merit were equally the objects of admiration. Of Miss Haggard and Miss Mansell no further circumstance has come to our knowledge, and those we have already mentioned; but it is universally allowed by those to whom they were known, that they may be very deservedly grouped with their amicable and amiable fellow sufferers.

Mr. Schutz had acquired a very considerable fortune in Asia, from whence he had not been long returned; but some difficulties arising in the collection and remittance of considerable sums which he had left behind him in the East, he found it necessary to make another voyage to Indostan, but unhappily perished, in all probability, as he was attempting to gain the rock, his body having since been found, and received interment. Of this gentleman's family and connections no accounts have come to our hands, but the officers who survived speak of his character with great respect.

Mr. Pilcher, the fourth mate, was about twenty-four years of age, a young gentleman highly esteemed; he was lately a lieutenant on board the SCIPPIO, a guard ship, commanded by Captain Inglefield; his father, Edward Pilcher, Esq., is in the commission of the peace for the County of Kent. – Mr. Falconer, one of the surgeon's mates, was the son of Magnus Falconer, Esq, one of the Master Attendants of Chatham Yard, and he was going to settle at Bencoolen. - Mr. William Rayner the Purser's Assistant, was the son of a gentleman of very respectable abilities in the law, and grandson of John Rayner, Esq. late of Sunbury, in Middlesex.

Among the youths who were cut off by this dreadful blow, were Mr. Charles Templer, brother of James Templer, Esq., His Majesty's Attorney and master of the Crown Office in the Kings Bench. Mr. Charles Webber, son of the late Admiral Webber, and son in law to Wm. Smith, Esq., of His Majestys Office of Ordnance. - Mr. William Cowley, son of Mr.----- Cowley Esq of Kingston, in Surrey, and Mr. ----- Miller, son of Mr. Miller, organist of Doncaster; this young gentleman was a proficient in music, and it was intended, with his assistance, and that of some of the Captains band, to have formed occasional concerts, in which the ladies would also have taken part, to amuse them on the passage.

Among the Midshipmen who suffered was Mr. Thomas Jeane, son of Thomas Jeane Esq.; of Monkton, near Taunton, in Somersetshire, this youth was also under the immediate care of Captain Pierce, and his fate was also attended with many calamitous circumstances.

After he had quitted the ship and gained the rock, he was again swept off by the devouring waves, swimming well, he a second time got footing on the rock, but being now worn out with fatigue and stiff with cold, he could not support himself against the continued assaults of the tempest, but after seven hours endurance of all the discomforts of his situation, he was compelled by debility to abandon his only hope of life, and perished in the sea.

Of other officers who perished, no particular Accounts have been obtained, nor any anecdotes of any other sufferers, except the following, which the Editor subjoins in the very elegant and affecting language in which it was conveyed to him.

Amongst the many unfortunate sufferers, were Mr. James Humphries, and Mr. William Humphries, sons of the Reverend Mr. Francis Humphries, the preset Curate of Hampstead. The youngest had already made one voyage to the East Indies, and by his good conduct recommended himself to Captain Pearce, who received him on board as a Midshipman. The eldest had been educated at Woolwich, and acquired complete military knowledge, such as induced him to hope for promotion. But being without connections or interest, he stood no chance of a commission on return of the peace, and therefore quitted the academy.

A warm friend of his father, who had greatly interested himself, and assisted him in the advancement of a numerous family, exerted himself in favour of this young man, and got him on board the HALSEWELL, with a prospect of the most flattering nature. It opened to him suddenly, he had but a few hours to prepare for a six month voyage; however he set about it with spirit and activity, inspired by hopes that fortune would favour his devout wishes, and enable him to repay a fond father the expenses of an education, not quite convenient to a situation in life, seldom accompanied with affluence. But alas! How soon were his pious dreams closed by a watery grave! All that we have learnt of these unfortunate brothers is, that they were seen by one of the seamen, aiding each other in the devouring waves, we are unhappy not to find their names in the list of survivors. – one may form some estimate of their merit by a circumstance that strongly marks it, and ought not to be concealed, for the honour of a young gentleman, whose name is Lewis. Mr. Humphries, for the purpose of augmenting his little income, and better support his numerous family, has of late years taken a few pupils, and amongst them Mr. Lewis. The amiable disposition of his lost companions had created such an attachment in him, that his distress on hearing the horrid tale was truly fraternal. The injunctions of a mother, and persuasions of his friends, could scarcely restrain him from weeping over the tremendous rock that deprived him of his beloved associates, and exploring the coast for the recovery of their bodies, to perform this last kind office, by their decent interment. – Amiable, sympathising youth! May success reward thy virtuous, generous views! May thy pillow be soft in the hour of death, and may some friendly hand be near, to close thine eyes!

Nor may it be improper to mention the escape of Sir George L. Staunton and his lady from being sharers in this dreadful catastrophe. – The gentleman who had long been in the particular confidence of Lord McCartney, accompanied him to Madras as his secretary, and came to England after the conclusion of peace with Tippoo Saib in the treaty for which he had a very considerable part. He was now able to return to Asia, and had actually engaged for the passages of himself and lady in the HALSEWELL, but the arrival or immediate expectation of Lord McCartney in England, happily induced him to abandon his attentions but a very few days before the ship sailed.

Though we are aware that the task is arduous, and are conscious of our own inability, we cannot conclude this little narrative without offering to the relations and friends of those who have suffered in this unfortunate disaster, such consolation as presents itself on a retrospect of the several circumstances which have been drawn together in the foregoing pages.

Let those to whom the amiable sufferers were most dear, reflect on the fate of such of the same sex as were wrecked in the GROSVENOR, who escaping a sudden violent death, were exposed to hunger, thirst, nakedness, the attack of wild beasts, and of the still greater brutes, the savages of the human race: who, cut off from all hope of ever being restored to any of the comforts of society, must have looked forward to death as a refuge from such transient calamities, and have considered its tardy approach as a delay of happiness: and let them compare the fate of these wretched victims to that of the friends for whom they mourn, who, in all the purity of virtue, were in a moment transferred to everlasting happiness, without a pang, and almost without an apprehension; and they will find an alleviation of their grief which reflection will strengthen, till time has mellowed the poignancy of their anguish into mild and tender regret.

Let the friends and relations of the officers, seamen and other of that sex, derive comfort from the consideration that the lives of those who are engaged in this perilous profession, are in a constant exposure to danger more ostensible, though perhaps not more actual, than those of the tradesmen, the mechanic, or the artificer; and that the separation of such as are employed in this way of life from the rest of the community, renders the accidents which befall them more conspicuous and observable; that they would, in all probability, lose the same number of those with whom they are connection in the ordinary events of mortality and that the pursuits that brought them to this sudden, and, apparently, untimely end, were innocent, useful, and laudable.

And above all, let the afflicted on the present occasion, remember that the friends they lament neither precipitated themselves to destruction by neglect, obstinacy, temerity, or even imprudence; but that the event, however melancholy in its operation, was the dispensation of that Being who “rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm;” and that all his purposes, however unaccountable in the weak perceptions of human wisdom, are unquestionably wise, gracious, and ultimately merciful.

FINIS



‘Aftermath’



WINSPIT QUARRY

Courtesy Weymouth Museum

The narrative gives us quite a bit of information about the events once the cook and James Thompson managed to raise the alarm. The following letter: "Submitted to the Hampshire Chronicle by a Clergyman at Worth Matravers" gives a very personal and descriptive picture of the wreck site in the early morning of the 7th January 1786. This letter could have been written by Morgan Jones, vicar at Worth Matravers or by the Rev.d Mr. George Ryves Hawker, Rector of Wareham, who also wrote to the East India Company Secretary.

"I was sitting at breakfast with Mr. Garland on Friday the 6th of January, when news was brought, that a large ship was on shore. The disposition of the country to plunder is well known; we therefore immediately mounted our horses, to afford what protection we could to the unfortunate. But the fury of the wind, the violence of the rain, thick fog and a deep snow, frustrated our endeavours after three hours riding round the coast. We then met with three poor wretches who had escaped from the general ruin, over the cliffs, they were in a most distressed state at Worth. We removed them to a better house, and left them in good beds and well provided, and then proceeded with a guide to the fatal spot. But such a horrid, tremendous scene never did my eyes behold, and God of His mercy grant that they may never again. The sea ran mountains high, and lashed the rocks with all the appearance of insolence and anger."

The ship, which struck at two in the morning, was so entirely beat to pieces, that nothing but the whole ocean covered with her fragments could have persuaded me that she had ever been drifted together. In one place lay her rigging, &c., wound up like the garbage of an animal and rolling to and fro in sullen submission to the imperious waves.

In the different recesses of the rocks, a confused heap of boards, broken masts, chests, trunks, and dead bodies, were huddled together, and the face of the water as far as the eye could extend was disfigured with floating carcasses, tables, chairs, casks, and part of every other article in the vessel. I do not think that any two boards remained together.

You remember Winspit Quarry; she was lost half a mile to the east of it. I do not mention all the circumstances, as you have probably seen them in the papers. Of the crew about 70 were saved, mostly sailor; the rest, with the Captain and 15 women, of two were his own daughters, and three more young ladies, perished. The second mate, a stout young man, ascended the cliffs without help; but how, it is impossible to tell, nor could he himself, as they are nearly perpendicular; a few others were equally fortunate, by being carried on pieces of the wreck to parts more easily gained. The fourth mate and about 40 of the men followed the second as far as they dared, and then waited in painful suspense, till they were drawn up by a rope let down by the quarriers. Another party of 30, worse situated, or unable to gain a higher part, were seen to be washed from the rock on which they stood by one furious wave, at the return of the morning tide. The arrival of Mr. Garland and myself proved fortunate for about 20 more unhappy wretches, who were discovered under the shelter of a large chasm or cavern in the rock, about 30 feet from the bottom. The quarriers were worn with fatigue, cold, wet and hunger; and were more eager to get their share of two casks of spirits which had been just sent them, than to attend to the cries of the sufferers below; nor was there any one person or sufficient authority to encourage or direct them. Our presence occasioned a proper application of the liquor, prevented all intoxication, and saved many of them from tumbling down the precipice; and our promises of reward cheered them to proceed with vigour, till we had drawn up every one that remained alive.

The method of saving the last was singular, and does honour to the humanity and intrepidity of the quarriers. The distance from the top of the rock to the cranny was about 60 feet, with a projection of the former of about eight feet, ten of these sixty feet formed a declivity to the edge, and the remaining fifty feet were quite perpendicular. On the very brink of the precipice, stood two daring fellows, a rope being tied round their bodies, and fastened above to a strong iron bar, fixed in the ground; behind them, in like manner, two more.

A large cable also, properly secured, passed between them, by which they might hold and support themselves from falling; they then lay down a rope, with a noose ready fixed, below the cavern; and the wind blowing hard, forced it under the projecting rock sufficiently for the men to reach it. Whoever caught it put the noose round his waist; and after escaping from one element; committed himself in full swing, to another, in which he dangled till he was drawn with great care and caution. We brought up 18 in this manner; three died before we could assist them; they were all senseless when we received them, and sadly bruised; but we had brought cherry-brandy and gingerbread [1] with us, and by supplying them with small quantities of ale, we soon recovered them, and sent them to a farm-house, where they were supplied with every possible assistance. The surviving officers, seamen and soldiers, being now assembled at the house of their benevolent friend, Mr. Garland they were mustered and found to amount to 74, [see Purbeck Society Papers Note 3 which estimates eighty two] out of more than 240, which was about the number of the crew and passengers in the ship when she sailed through the Downs, of the remainder, who unhappily lost their lives, upwards of 70 are supposed to have reached the rocks, but to have been washed off, or to perish in falling from the cliff, and 50 or more to have sunk with the captain and the ladies in the round-house, when the after-part of the ship went to pieces. I have not yet recovered from the shock I felt at this horrible affair".

The first the East India Company knew about the tragedy was probably in a letter from Poole Customs: [2]

Honourable Sirs,

We have this moment received from the Officers at Swanage the following melancholy account, that on Tuesday night last, the Halsewell outward bound East Indiaman, was entirely lost between St Albans and Durlestone point, in the Isle of Purbeck within this port, and that no less than One hundred and twenty six persons have lost their lives, amongst whom are the Captain, his Two Daughters and ten other female passengers.

No part of the Cargo is salved except a few Boxes, and some other small Packages, which with what other Articles may come on shore, we shall use our utmost endeavours to secure.

We are: J? Lander & R. H. Weston

Custom ho Poole, 7th Jany. 1786, Noon.

A limited number of artefacts from the wreck were recovered at the time and these are now in museums and private collections. Many of these can be seen in the Archive section. Wrecks like this, prior to a significant revival of interest in subjects like this in the late twentieth century, were eventually forgotten. In this particular case however, not straight away. The publicity following this disaster was enormous. This publicity not only resulted in a large number of narratives, painting and prints, but was also one of the first subjects of 'Eidophusikon or moving pictures. See Archive 11.

As for the owners of the *Halsewell* and the East India Company there were plans to build a new ship, or in the terminology of the Company, 'to build on its bottom';

1 - Committee - examination & proceedings (527, 5th September 1786)

"On reading the request of Mr. Peter Esdaile for leave to build a new ship in the room of the Halsewell, ordered that it be referred to the Committee of Shipping to examine & report"

2 - *Resolved that leave be given for the building of five ships at 1100 & 1200 tons each for the service of the year 1790. That the ships to be so built be in the bottom of the next five ships in turn being;*

The TRUE BRITON to be commanded by Captain Henry Farren Montague

Montague to be commanded by Captain Thomas Britten

HALSEWELL - To be commanded by persons qualified under the present regulations and who shall be approved by the Court.

ALFRED - To be commanded by persons qualified under the present regulations and who shall be approved by the Court.

SOUTHAMPTON to be commanded by Captain John Lennox - Eventually became the WOODFORD

MONTAGUE. - Eventually became the CANTON

Prior to the launch Peter Esdaile, probably due to the death of his co-owner Thomas Burston and the loss of the *Halsewell*, felt it would be better to renamed the next ship. So, the ship, technically built on the bottom of the *Halsewell*, became the 1200-ton *Taunton Castle*. Still the link with Somerset perhaps! Launched in 1790 it made 9 voyages till 1810. Interestingly captain Pierce's son Thomas (Thomas Burston Pierce) turns up as 3rd Mate on the third voyage, 2nd Mate on the fourth and on the remaining voyages he is the captain.

References:

[1] – Gingerbread was thought to have medicinal qualities and there would be have been plenty around at the Christmas/New Year period. Communication Gordon LePard.

[2] - Letter No. 12, BL OIOC - MISC. LETTERS RECEIVED E/1 1785/86.



The Final Question

In January 1786 a periodical, namely "The Gentleman's Magazine" published an article containing letters, from the general public, concerning the *Halsewell* disaster. The general mood of all the letters was similar to one of the questions asked by a correspondent signing himself P.H.J.; [1]

"Whether there is any truth in the report circulated in the public papers, that the ship's crew refused to do their duty? And, if they did, from what cause such refusal proceeded?"

I will give my answer to this question which was I feel referring to the charge of imprudence made against Captain Pierce in the press. Before proceeding I will include here a short reference to the character of Richard Pierce.

Since there already is a section outlining the career of Richard Pierce elsewhere in this story, it is sufficient to mention at this time that he entered service in the East India Company as a Midshipman at the age of nineteen. From the research I have undertaken it would appear that Pierce approached his men in a "fatherly" fashion, using measures of a persuasive nature to gain his ends rather than the more stubborn and brutal approach practiced by some sea Captains. However, it must be remembered that once a vessel was at sea it became very vulnerable, and seamen being of a lusty nature would soon take advantage of a weak Captain, and a loosely run ship breeds insubordination. Help could be many weeks or even months away, so the Captain and his officers had to have some means of imposing their will upon the crew which was through fear of punishment, hence the Captain's word became law aboard ship and his orders were carried out to the letter whether right or wrong. The Captain had at his command certain forms of punishment, which he could have administered, from the docking of pay, (for minor offences) being clapped in irons and flogging. Good examples of Captain Pierce's answer to insubordination and an insight to mutiny can be seen by the selected entries made in the log of the *Halsewell* on her first voyage to India and China in 1778. This is exactly how the entries are written in the log but here they do not necessarily appear in day to day sequence because many of the entries are of everyday mundane tasks.

Wednesday 9th December 1778.

At 6 PM the caulker being riotous and refusing his duty and threatening to strike the Chief Mate put him in irons.

Saturday 12th December 1778.

Winds still from the South West AM swayed up lower yards loosened sails to dry. People employed under Boatswain (bosun). On caulker acknowledging his crime and promising to behave well in the future, released him from confinements.

Friday 12th March 1779.

Departed this life one of the Highland troops who had cut his toes off hoping to obtain his discharge.

Saturday 13th March 1779.

Committed the body of the deceased to the deep with the usual ceremony. AM raised up the bower cables and cleaned under them. Washed with vinegar and burnt charcoal fires in the stoves on the lower deck to purify the air.

Sunday 11th April 1779.

Winds variable and fair.

Employed receiving and stowing our water. PM two of our people attempting to leave the ship. Put them in irons. At 8 PM a ships company came aft and broke the lock and released the prisoners by force. Andrew Stewart and Ian Duncan were the persons that broke the lock.

Monday 12th April 1779.

Winds from the Westward and fair.

Employed in shifting the cross trees of the fore top mast. Swept and got our main bower anchor. AM the Captain came on board and punished Andrew Stewart and Ian Duncan with 2 dozen lashes each for mutiny and at the same time punished Thomas Grundy for going ashore and wanting to leave the ship. Put them in irons again at 10 AM until an opportunity to send them on board the Admiral. [2] James Nuttal seaman departed this life PM. Sent an officer out to sea with the corpse and committed his body to the deep with the usual ceremony.

The question of benevolence regarding Pierce is a delicate one, and must be approached with care for to slight him inadvertently at this stage in time would be irresponsible and would serve no purpose. On one hand we have the fact that punishment was administered on Pierce's orders. Verification of this can be found in the ship's journal, although in some cases perhaps, a little severe for the crime, considering they were still in port. On the other hand, those who gave testimony to Pierce's honourable character, would have come from personal friends and acquaintances who were also undoubtedly members of the aristocracy and their statements could have a tendency to be biased.

Could we have here a tyrant who ruled his ship by draconian standards? Or alternatively, a man of mild nature who, under different circumstances, would normally be as magnanimous and benevolent as one could ever wish to meet, but in the eyes of his crew, had to show strength through admonishment and even chastisement. I personally, have a tendency to support the latter, for brave and compassionate he most certainly was, and a caring and devoted husband.

Unfortunately, but only to be expected, extensive research has revealed precious little of the personality of Richard Pierce. I expect there are those who are already familiar with this man, if there are, I would welcome any enlightenment, but for the present his true character will remain a mystery. The reader may, from the limited amount of written evidence, which now lies before you draw his or her own conclusions, which will be difficult. Although, it must be confessed, during the many hours spent examining records, ships logs, letters and other documents and statements concerning the *Halsewell* and her people, one tends to gradually become aware of a general feeling of warmth toward Richard Pierce, although nothing documented has been found. I believe that Pierce was basically a caring person who handled both his ship and men in a responsible and professional manner. Let us not forget that, not only Captain Pierce, but also all sea Captains have a very difficult job.

One theory put forward regarding the so-called mutiny, was that it happened owing to the crew not receiving any of their wages before leaving England. It was suggested that East India ships, when outward bound, anchored off Dunnose Point in the Isle of Wight, in order for the crew to receive money before putting to sea. (Although this may have been the case, I personally have never found any evidence to support this.) However, the weather being as rough as it was, perhaps the decision was taken to forego Dunnose and make for open water.

Consequently, the crew became mutinous and refused to do any work until they received their dues. According to the narrative, she not only anchored off Dunnose Point, but was also becalmed, offering every opportunity for this task to be carried out. One other important factor remains, which cancels out this theory altogether, and that is the Paymaster performed his duties at Gravesend, not the Isle of Wight. The normal procedure when paying the crew was three months wages paid to them before they sailed and the balance on the ship and its cargo's safe return to England. But this was only paid for after the ship had been cleared and the crew released from their commitment. Should there have been any damage done to cargo, through the ingress of sea water for example, then the cost would be calculated and deducted from the men's wages.

Damage to cargo was deemed the fault of the crew for being negligent and not ensuring that it was stowed securely in the first place. If a ship was cast away the seamen who survived would forfeit their entire pay earned during that voyage to pay for the damage. They had a very raw deal they were also never paid any bonuses when defending their ship against marauding pirates, the enemy's men-o-war or simply fighting for survival against storm and disease to promote the safe arrival of merchandise for their iniquitous employers.

It seems highly unlikely that the cause of this so-called mutinous action taken by the crew was due to their not being paid. First, what exactly does constitute mutiny? Mutiny, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, is "To rise or stir up revolt against lawful authority, especially of soldiers and seamen against their commanders." In fact, if we return to the narrative for a moment as we often have during the course of this story, we find the contrary happened as in the following.

"The seamen, many of whom had been remarkably inattentive and remiss in their duty during great part of the storm, and had actually skulked in their hammocks, and left the exertions of the pump, and the other labours attending their situation, to the officers of the ship, and the soldiers."

Also, when this question was put to the two surviving officers, Meriton and Rogers,

"Whether there is any truth in the report circulated in the public papers, that the ship's crew refused to do their duty?"

Their answer was "No" and was publicly contradicted by them. Yet in the Hampshire Chronicle on Monday 16th January 1786 appeared the following:

"The loss of the above ship is attributed, in great measure, to the want of subordination in the crew, as while there was a probability of saving it the seamen absolutely refused to obey the officers, and on being threatened with chastisement, exultingly answered in the following laconic insolent manner: You be d---d: if you dare d--n my eyes but I'll Loughborough you! Alluding, as is supposed, to a late verdict in the Court of Common Pleas. The soldiers assisted in every way in their power, and actually mounted aloft, but were not sufficiently expert in the necessary business."

Although there is sufficient evidence to suppose these fellows did refuse their duties and the officers were unable to persuade them otherwise, it is a far cry from rising up and taking control of the ship by force as is the constitute of mutiny. It must be said however, that their actions were totally unacceptable in placing such a heavy burden on the inexperienced soldiers and passengers.

British seamen were sons of the sea in all respects, especially those who sailed with the East India Company for the simple reason they were generally there of their own choosing, as opposed to the pressed crews of naval ships. Although, perhaps in some respects, they had certain failing's, but one thing that set English sailors above the rest was that when the going got rough, whether it be to fight like a demon when engaging the enemy, or going aloft in a raging storm, they could always be relied upon to do their duty, under any circumstances or under whoever they were sailing. But one extraordinary factor was well known. Ships that had been caught in severe storms and were thought any moment to be overwhelmed by the sheer power of the sea, despite all their efforts in trying to save the ship and everything humanely possible had been carried out, but alas their imminent doom seemed inevitable. The crew would give up, become disheartened and nothing could be said or done that would revive them from their drooping state. For they were as frightened of death as the next man. Most were highly superstitious and feared the wrath of God through the intimidatory compulsory worship they had to attend as laid down by the Honourable Company's law. The Company even had its own specially written prayer, which, at these services, would be read by the presiding Captain.

It seems the reaction of seamen facing this sort of predicament is well known, as a member of the Cook expedition recalls. In the year 1770 Captain Cook was tentatively exploring the eastern coast of Australia, keeping close with the land, the leadsman continually sounding. On June 11th soundings became irregular, first deep then shallow, they could see steep hills of coral passing beneath the ship. Cook sailed on into the night under a brilliant moon and smooth sea. The last sounding at 11pm. was seventeen fathoms and before another could be taken the Endeavour struck a coral ledge and remained fast with the tide at high water. Cook remained absolutely calm and his cool brain grasping control over the situation. There was no order and counter order that showed a Commander to be rattled which has its effect on the men, instead, they worked quietly and steadfastly without any excitement. Joseph Banks, a botanist of 24 years of age, a hardy and reliable man who became a firm friend of Captain Cooks, looked with astonishment at the crew, for he had heard that it was customary in cases of shipwreck for sailors to refuse all commands and get drunk.

To conclude, we must first accept that this happened over two hundred years ago. There was no moral law for the average person and the beliefs of the people and their outlook on life were far different from those of today. There were no such things as Trade Union, where a slighted person may seek free advice or the welfare for when they were in need.

But to answer the question in hand, brought about by the correspondent, P.H.J., yes, it can be safely acknowledged that if not all, some the *Halsewell's* crew lay skulking in their hammocks but I would rather use the word despairing than skulking. Clearly, there was no mutiny, in the true sense of the word, aboard the *Halsewell* during that dreadful storm. The truth was, British Jack Tars were not well treated. Nothing has ever drawn my attention so much, in all the accounts of British naval history that I have read, than the dogged tenacity with which sailors hope on and strive on to the last. I dare say the natural instinct of self-preservation is implanted strongly within the breasts of every one of us, but it seems to me that the mariner clings faster and longer to life than any other class of men. One wonders how often those London merchants realised how dearly their big percentages had been bought. In war these seamen were pressed into service and in peace, they were oppressed but in their own line, were honest and hard-working men. They received little or no reward for their loyalty to the lace coated merchants who lay comfortable and safe in their beds at night. Who never had to sail in their leaky, ill-found ships through storm and tempest. Fed meagre rations of bad food and stale water rendering them vulnerable to disease. Death by shipwreck and from enemy fire was a constant threat, yet this was accepted as part of their daily lives which, at the end of their voyage, earned them a begrudged pittance. This was granted them by inconsiderate employers who demanded everything and gave nothing for the sufferings of their crews who provided the fortunes and luxuries for those who stayed at home in ease. In times such as these when a seaman becomes despondent, when all hope is gone and his spirit broken. Then takes to his cot with a prayer on his lips and a bottle in his hand to dull the pain of facing his ultimate sacrifice, then in all honesty, who can blame him. QED

Notes:

[1] - See letter in Newspapers.

[2] - The *Admiral* was the ship acting as escort to the squadron



Part II - The Archive

[1](#) - *Halsewell* Odd Notes 1 to 9.

- *Halsewell* - Build Details
- Halsewell House
- Horatio Nelson & The *Halsewell* Incident
- Notes on Barlow's Journal
- The Grosvenor
- Blackman's Style
- British Charts & Surveys
- Extracts from the Log Book of the *Halsewell's* 1st Voyage
- Extracts from the Log Book of the *Halsewell's* 2nd Voyage

[2](#) - Articles Written on the *Halsewell*

[3](#) - Newspaper Reports

[4](#) - The People Onboard

- Ship's Officers
- Troops

[5](#) – Contemporary Poems

[6](#) - British Library Material & Further Records

[7](#) - Burials & Memorials

[8](#) - Bibliography

[9](#) - References

[10](#) – Glossary

[11](#) – Eidophusikon – Moving Pictures

[12](#) – Various Illustrations - Prints, Sketches & Artists

[13](#) – Wreck Site Finds

1 - *Halsewell* Notes

Note 1 - *HALSEWELL* - BUILD DETAILS [1]

General information on the ship;

She was one of five ships, probably sister ships, built by John & William Wells at their yard at Rotherhithe, that were launched between 1777 and 1779 when shipbuilding resumed after the enforced ban on new ships. The other ships were the *Earl of Mansfield* 1777, *Glatton* 1777, *Ganges* 1778 and *Walpole* 1779. Leave to build had been granted by the EIC on the 29th May 1777; when the keel was laid has not been recorded. She was actually launched on 24th August 1778.

She was built to the EIC order of 27th June 1770 which stated that "Ships should be 110ft by the keel and not less than 35ft or more than 36ft broad" - i.e. giving a tonnage of between 716 and 758 tons.

The price was £13.10.0 per ton.

The contract dimensions were length of keel for tonnage 110'-0 and the maximum beam 36'-0 giving a tonnage of 758 tons. The contracts may have been modified as all 5 ships seem to have been built to more like; LK112'-0 B36'-0 = 772 tons and these probably were the design dimensions for the ships.

The 'as built' dimensions were –

Extreme length at the height of the wing transom = 139'-7; Length of keel for tonnage 112'-2¼; Breadth outside to outside of 4" plank = 36'-1; Depth in hold 15'-0½; height of the wing transom 23'-0; The height of the port Cills in amidships 25'-1. She had 3 decks, and the decks were 6'-4¼ apart. The tonnage was 776 90/94ths tons.



Note 2 - *HALSEWELL* HOUSE [2]

Halsewell House is in the parish of Goathurst, four miles south-west of Bridgewater. I can only assume that the ship was named after the Halsewell (or De Halsewell) family who once lived here, but currently there is no positive evidence. The last male Halsewell appears to be Hugh Halsewell whose daughter Jane married into the Tynte family sometime in the early 1600s. The owner at the time the ship was named was Sir Charles Kemeys-Tynte 1736 to 1785, the members of the family were generally known as 'of Halsewell'. 'Tynte of Halsewell' became extinct in 1785. [2]



Note 3 - HORATIO NELSON & THE *HALSEWELL* [3]

In October 1781 Nelson had just taken command of the frigate *Albemarle*, which was seriously undermanned. Arriving at the Nore (in the Thames estuary) he heard that three East Indiamen were arriving in the Thames Estuary bound for the London docks. They were sailing in company under full press of canvas as protection against both the French, and the Royal Navy, which might attempt to press some of their prime seamen as often happened when homeward bound and in sight of port.

This was exactly what Nelson had in mind. He gave chase to the East Indiamen, flying a signal ordering them to heave to. The big ships had no intention of complying for they were well manned and armed and, together, more than a match for a frigate. Nelson ordered a blank charge to be fired as a warning, but this, too, was ignored and the ships swept on led by the *Halsewell*. Probably the masters of the East Indiamen expected a shot across their bows before they shook the frigate off, but they did not know her captain. As the *Albemarle* sailed past the *Halsewell*, the latter's master noticed that the frigate's gun ports were open and her guns ran out; a moment later the flame and smoke of a broadside burst from her and tossed water spouts around the merchantmen. A second broadside followed, also aimed to miss; then a single shot falling alongside. The *Halsewell* hove to, as did her companions, and "finding the *Albemarle* yard-arm to yard-arm with them", as Nelson put it, "they submitted".

After taking as many seamen as he required, he noted in his log that he had fired twenty-six nine-pound shot and one eighteen-pound shot in subduing his own countrymen.

The *Halsewell* Log

The major part of the log entries in ships like the *Halsewell* give details of the weather. There are also many which give clues about life at sea and in some cases about the character of the Ship's commander. David discusses some of these in his last chapter. In 1776 the Admiralty granted protections to the crews of East India Company ships, its pilot boats and hoys. In the late 1770's and early 1800's when we were at war with France the naval crews would often ignore these 'protections'.

There were no protections for men in the 'homeward bound' Company ships and men on these ships frequently mutinied when the pressing sloop's approach. An excellent example appears in the log of the *Halsewell* for Sunday 28th October, 1781 as she approaches the Nore on her return from Bengal:

Sunday 28th Octbr 1781 - Ship HALSEWELL working up the River

"At noon came on board 2 of his Majestys Lieutenants to impress our men which they resisted & arm'd to defend themselves. At 5 AM Weighed & at ½ past 9 PM past the Conquistadore at the Nore, was fired at by several Ships, but could not bring our Ship too, the people refusing to clew the Sails up or let go the Anchor; his Majesties Frigate the Albermarle Cap.n Nelson kept firing Shot at us one of which struck off the Chick of the Main Mast another through the Main topsail & several overhead, when the officer came to let go the Topsail Halyards found them ripp'd aloft, at last with difficulty the Chief and 4th Mate let go the Anchor all landing? the ship being head right on for the shore & having fresh weigh when brought up found ourselves in ½ fathom. The lights of the Nore SEtd. Came on board Cap.ⁿ Nelson with offers to our People which they all refused. "

Monday. 29th. Octbr 1781

"Came on board again Cap.n Nelson who told the People if they refused serving His Majesty, he must bring the Frigate alongside, after much trouble & difficulty they got all our People & left only the Foreigners and Servants promising to bring Men in the Evening, at 8 PM. Came a Lieutenant with 24 Men to work the Ship up to her Moorings. "



Note 4 - BARLOW'S JOURNAL - [4]

... "It was quite contrary with us, for we seldom in a month got our bellyful of victuals, and that of such salt as many beggars would think scorn to eat. And at night when we went to take our rest, we were not to lie still above four hours; and many times when it blew hard were not sure to lie one hour, yea, often we were called up before we had slept half an hour and forced to go up into the maintop or foretop to take in our topsails. Half awake and half asleep, with one shoe on and the other off, not having time to put it on; always sleeping in our clothes for readiness; and in stormy weather, when the ship rolled and tumbled as though some great millstone were rolling up one hill and down another, we had much ado to hold ourselves fast by the small ropes from falling by the board; and being gotten up in the tops, there we must haul and pull to make fast the sail, seeing nothing but air above us and water beneath us, and that so raging as though every wave would make a grave for us; and many times so dark that we could not see one another, and blowing so hard that we could not hear one and other speak, though being close to one another, and thundering and lightening as though heaven and earth would come together, it being usual in those countries, with showers of rain so hard that it will wet a man 'dunge wet' before he can go the length of the ship."



Note 5 - The Grosvenor

The ship the Grosvenor, had been homeward bound from India, carrying East India Company elite. The Grosvenor had onboard about 140 crew and passengers and went aground on the coast of South Africa, 500 miles east of Cape Town. Of the 140 onboard 125 managed to reach the shore alive, including all the gentry i.e. the company's servants and their families. This was drama enough but what was to follow was far worse.

The ship's commander was John Coxon who like many other English captains had done his best to avoid Africa, having little or no knowledge about the coast or the hinterland. After the wreck the local tribesmen descended on the wreck to scavenge, it appears that there were no signs that they were hostile but they had no intention of helping the survivors. Coxon, the gentry and the crewmen however, took fright at the appearance of these half-naked men, daubed with red mud, and decided to attempt to follow the coast to the Cape.

The company which included seven women, one in an advanced stage of pregnancy, five children and several seriously injured men proceeded on a forced march along a very difficult shoreline.

It was not until late in 1782 that thirteen emaciated men stumbled into a sleepy settlement on the Cape frontier, near to death and with a harrowing tale of events in the unknown territory beyond. They were apparently the only survivors of the shipwreck and had survived a march of 400 miles, scavenging for food and evading hostile tribesmen.

Like the *Halsewell* the loss of the *Grosvenor* caused a sensation in England. What really gripped the readers of the time were the accounts of the fate of the female passengers.

The Morning Chronicle stated that Caffre (sic) warriors had carried off Mary Hosea, Sophia James and Linda Logie "*to the most dreadful existence that imagination can form*". The Herald was less circumspect. The women it proclaimed, were to be used "*for the vilest brutish prostitution*".

The surviving sailors were eventually shipped home and brought to the company's offices in Leadenhall Street, where, from their shamed-faced, halting testimony, more of the story of what happened began to emerge.



Note 6 - 'Blackman's' Style [5]

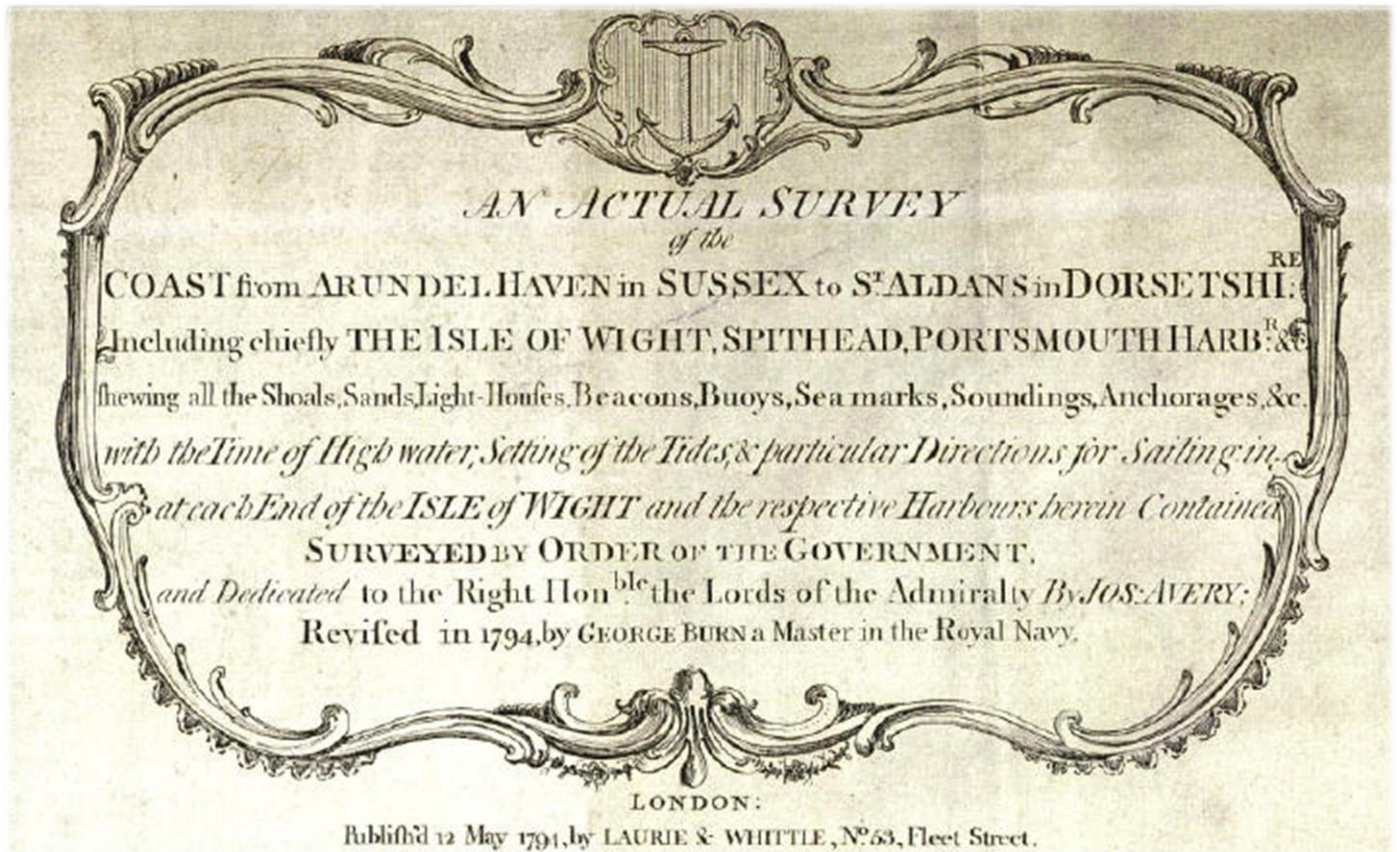
On the top of the cliffs above the wreck site is (or was) a 'style' known as 'Blackman's' or 'Nigger's' Style. The story is that on the day after the wreck a Negro from the *Halsewell* was found at this style but unfortunately died of exposure.

If you bring up the Map at the end of the Illustrations Archive 12 you will see the area in front of the 'Necklace' near Seacombe Bottom.



Note 7 - British Charts & Surveys, c. 1720-1820: [6]

The Rhetoric of Cultural Narrative, Francis Curtis



The following is an extract from the paper by Francis Curtis.

"British charts and surveys c. 1720-1820 are repositories of more than navigational and hydrographical significance. The wooden world of the Georgian marine was an integral part of British society as a whole. The maritime discourses represented on these charts and surveys encompassed social, commercial, political and cultural fields. So much of the marine environment was, and is, deceptive and subject to constant change: the rhetorical textuality of its maps showed inextricable links with an equally protean territorial society. As the nineteenth century progressed, charting the ocean became institutionalised and standardised. In the period c. 1720-1820, with Britain's maritime development undergoing rapid change, the diversity represented by and on these charts and surveys constituted narrative case studies illustrating the culture of an age"

Interestingly one of these case studies concerns the loss of the *Halsewell*:

"The verbal and visual rhetoric of the charts and surveys also engaged the knowing reader with more narratives, with embedded events and histories which rippled outwards into eighteenth century social and political life.

A resonant example of such a narrative is represented on the 1794 Joseph Avery survey. This concerns the loss of the Halsewell, an East Indiaman which foundered off Seacombe Cliff in Dorset. It is noticeable that this event is the only shipwreck inscribed on to the survey.

The language is concise and brief "Seatcombe or Salcomb Cliff where the Halsewell, Indiaman, Capt'n Pierce, was lost, Jan'y 6th 1786"



The information given is sparse but densely allusive for contemporary readers. The nominalizations tell the reader where the vessel foundered, its name and captain, under whose flag it sailed, the day, month and year. The passive syntax and choice of "lost" promotes a teasing ambiguity: was the agent of this shipwreck misfortune or carelessness? This terse, enigmatic inscription is not only a warning, a positional hazard marked on the survey but is also a concealed narrative with several interested readerships, as contemporary accounts make clear.

The East India Company was a major stakeholder in British eighteenth-century political and maritime life. Alexander Dalrymple, the first Admiralty Hydrographer, was formally Hydrographer for the Company. The opportunities for patronage and wealth for Company servants and stockholders were very considerable, on land and sea, in Britain and India.

"The loss of the HALSEWELL in 1786 was widely known and attracted attention not only from a seamanship point of view but also because of the social conduct of the captain and what was revealed about the identity of his passengers.

The maritime community, especially the Admiralty and serving Royal Navy sea officers, had an interest in the handling of East India Company vessels. Royal Navy captains frequently pressed Indiamen crews and there was a healthy rivalry between officers serving under both flags for social and professional status. The identity of Captain Pierce's passengers was revealing: four of the female passengers were his close relatives. He had his two teenage daughters, Mary and Anne Pierce on board, together with his two nieces, the Miss Pauls. Royal Academy artist James Northcoate exhibited his painting of the Halsewell shipwreck in 1786 and Robert Smirke's contemporary engraving depicted Richard Pierce on the poop of the stricken vessel surrounded by the young women. The weather at the beginning of January, 1786 was atrocious: gales bringing strong winds and snow reduced visibility, creating hazardous conditions for the HALSEWELL as she made her passage down Channel past the Isle of White. Twentieth-century commentators differ in opinion as to culpability for the disaster. The weather conditions, the behaviour of the crew, the conduct of the captain, the seaworthiness of the ship after its hawser inlets had been refitted have all been considered. Contemporary mariners, from the Royal Navy and Indiamen captains to Trinity House pilots sought to glean lessons from the sinking. The tactics of cutting the anchor cables and subsequently masts in an attempt to get the ship to answer her helm and come before the wind were 'in extremis' measures but feasible under the circumstances. However, it was not only the loss of this vessel and its cargo, and the questions of seamanship which figured in the public mind, large though these issues were. It was the loss of the female passengers, particularly Captain Pierce's two daughters and two nieces, which exposed a more sinister trade. Mary and Anne Pierce, only seventeen and fifteen years old, were being taken by their father to be married off in Bengal on this his final voyage for the Company. He stood to complete his service with the Company with a considerable fortune from these marriages."

This provoked the following comments printed in The Hampshire Chronicle and Portsmouth and Chichester Journal ten days after the shipwreck:

January 16th.

"It is a dreadful thing to hear of seven young ladies being drowned - Nor is it much less lamentable to think that beautiful women are now reckoned among the articles of our export trade to India.--Not one ship is now sailing without a cargo on board; and they are literally going to market. On their arrival they are shewn as we shew a horse, and are disposed of to the best bidder. This is a coarse description, but does not so indelicate a traffic deserve rebuke!"

Over half of this report on the wrecking of the *Halsewell* is devoted to a discussion of the position of women and the Indian marriage market. Thus, the loss of the *Halsewell*, declaratively and innocuously represented on the survey solely as a maritime event, is an embedded narrative of late eighteenth century social culture.

Hampshire Chronicle and Portsmouth and Chichester Journal Monday
January 16th, 1786 No. 696, Vol. xiii.



Note 8 - Extracts from the Log Book of the *Halsewell's* First Voyage
Contributed by the late 'Chippy' Pierce, Researcher & Diver.

Tuesday 29th September 1778

Light airs variable and foggy weather.

Employed scraping deck and stowing provisions in the fore hold.

Wednesday 30th September 1778

Winds Southerly and mostly fair.

Employed blacking and tarring our yards, scraping masts and paying ditto with turpentine.

Thursday 1st October 1778

Winds from the NW, the first part fair the latter squalls and the rain. AM

Employed scraping our lower deck.

Friday 2nd October 1778

Winds variable with some rain.

Employed Knotting and drawing yarns. Received a recruit on account of the Honourable Company.

Saturday 3rd October 1778

Southerly winds and fair.

Scraped sides and payed ditto with turpentine. Received 11 recruits on account of the Honourable Company.

Sunday 4th October 1778

Light winds at the NW and hazy weather.

Officers on board 2 and 3

Monday 5th October 1778

Fresh breezes NW the first part the latter light winds and fair weather.

People employed knotting and drawing yarns and making platts.

Monday 26th October 1778 - At Gravesend

Winds from the Westward and fair weather.

Employed in the hold and receiving our stock fish etc. At PM missed James

Hopper one of the Honourable Company recruits which by his shoes being found in the head imaged to have gone overboard.

Thursday 19th November 1778

Winds Westerly and cloudy weather.

Employed in hoisting in part of our boom. Received on board a hearth to be fixed amidships, carpenters employed cutting a scuttle for the funnel.

Wednesday 9th December 1778

At 6 PM the caulker being riotous and refusing his duty and threatening to strike the Chief Mate put him in irons.

Saturday 12th December 1778

Winds still from the SW.

AM swayed up the lower yards loosed sails to dry. People employed under

Boatswain. On the caulker acknowledging his crime and promise to behave well in future, released him from confinements.

1779

Friday 12th March 1779

Departed this life one of the Highland troops who had cut his toes off on hope of obtaining his discharge.

Saturday 13th March 1779

Committed the body of the deceased to the deep with the usual ceremony. AM raised up the lower cables and cleaned under them. Washed with vinegar and burnt charcoal fires in the stoves on the lower deck to purify the air.

Sunday 11th April 1779

Winds variable and fair.

Employed receiving and stowing our water. PM two of our people attempting to leave the ship. Put them in irons. At 8PM a ships company came aft and broke the lock and released the prisoners by force. Andrew Stewart and Ian Duncan were the persons who broke the lock.

Monday 12th April 1779

Winds Westward and fair.

Employed in shifting the cross trees of the fore top mast. Swept and got our main bower anchor. AM Captain came on board and punished Andrew Stewart and John Duncan with 2 dozen lashes each for mutiny and at the same time punished Thomas Grundy for going ashore and wanting to leave the ship. Put then in irons again till 10 AM until an opportunity to send them on board the *Admiral*. James Nuttal seaman departed this life PM sent an officer out to sea with the corpse and committed his body to the deep with the usual ceremony.

Friday 14th May 1779

Moderate breezes hazy weather.

At 6 AM departed this life Dennis McMullen one of the Honourable Company's recruits occasioned as supposed by his taking a quantity of opium. Washed the gun deck. At ½ past 11 AM William Stevens one of Honourable Company's recruits fell overboard, lowered down the jolly boat and hove too gave up after an ½ an hour search without seeing anything of him.

Wednesday 19th May 1779

At 3 AM fell overboard John Galts seaman hove too and lowered down the jolly boat immediately and sent her in search of him but imagine he was killed in the fall. The boat returns without being able to find him.

Sunday 28th October 1781 - Ship *HALSEWELL* working up the River
(See also above Note.)

Westerly winds and small rain.

At 5AM weighed and as high as the buoy at the House and at ½ past 11 anchored with the best bower in 11 fathoms of water. The buoy at the House NNW distant at ½ a mile.

At noon came on board 2 of his Majesties Lieutenants to impress our men which they resisted & arm'd to defend themselves. At 5 AM Weighed & at ½ past 9 PM past the Conquistadore at the Nore, was fired at by several Ships, but could not bring our Ship too, the people refusing to clew the Sails up or let go the Anchor; his Majesties Frigate the *Albermarle* Cap.n Nelson kept firing Shot at us one of which struck off the Chick of the Main Mast another through the Main topsail & several overhead, when the officer came to let go the Topsail Halyards found them ripp'd aloft, at last with difficulty the Chief and 4th Mate let go the Anchor all landing? the ship being head right on for the shore & having fresh weigh when brought up found ourselves in ½ fathom. The lights of the Nore SEtd. Came on board Cap.n Nelson with offers to our People which they all refused.

Monday. 29th. October 1781

Variable winds with dry weather.

Came on board again Cap.n Nelson who told the People if they refused serving His Majesty, he must bring the Frigate alongside, after much trouble & difficulty they got all our People & left only the Foreigners and Servants promising to bring Men in the Evening, at 8 PM. Came a Lieutenant with 24 Men to work the Ship up to her Moorings.



Note 9 - Extracts from the Log Book of the *Halsewell's* Second Voyage
Courtesy of the late 'Chippy' Pierce.

Much less edited and gives an interesting insight into the logistics of the voyage.

Capt. P. entered (i.e. in wages ledger) 24th Dec. 1702. Discharged 14th Oct. 1784.
Salary: £10 a month. Duration of service: 21 months 20 days.

Captain's Log;

Tues 8th October, 1782. - Came out of Greenland Dock and warped down to Deptford.

Wed 9th - Levelling the Kintledge.

Sat 12th - Taking on board coals, stowing Butts. Swayed up the Topmasts, Riggers. Employed in rigging them.

Sun 13th - Employed filling water.

Mon 14th - Taking in iron on account of the Hon. Co. and filling water.

Tues 15th - Employed stowing and filling Butts and receiving on board Iron.

Wed 16th - Taking on board copper on account of the Hon Co. and filling water.

Thurs 17th - Received on board Pitch & Tar stores. Employed in the hold stowing copper, & getting on board the Lower & Top sail yards, also received on board the ship's engine.

Fri 18th - Received on board Pitch & Tar Stores. Also 2 cables for the ship's use.

Sat 19th - Received on board the ship's provisions. Also, ship's chandlery, Pitch & Tar on account of the Hon. Co., and bending sails.

Sun 20th - Employed filling water & cleaning & receiving on board? arthorn wood.

Mon 21st - Received on board Ship's provisions and stores, Pitch & Tar on account of Hon. Co. Got in remainder of wood.

Tues 22nd - Received on board lead on account of Hon Co., likewise Brandy & Ship's Stores.

Wed 23rd - Employed receiving on board Empty Butts, stowing and filling them with water. Also 2 sheet cables (etc) and a viol.

Thurs 24 - Employed filling water.

Fri 25th - Employed getting on board the Ship's guns, likewise Gunners' stores, and otherwise in the hold.

Sat 26th October, 1782. - Received on board Copper for Hon Co. Also, our anchors, filling water and stowing ships provisions.

Mon 28th - Clearing ship for Gravesend.

Thurs 31st - Lower part of Gravesend Reach.

Sat 2nd November, 1782 - Employed stowing the hold. (etc)

Sun 3rd - Employed in the Hold and cleaning ship.

Mon 4th - Received on board small arms for the ship's use.

Wed 6th - Received on board Copper on account of Hon Co.

Thurs 7th - Received on board Provisions on Government account.

Sun 10th - Washed decks.

Mon 11th - Received on board Bales of small arms on account of Hon Co.

Tues 12th - Variable winds and mostly fair. At 7am came alongside a Craft with King's victualing stores. At 9am dispatched ditto and at half past 7am came alongside the Charming Sally, with Copper on account of the Hon Co. Employed taking on board Copper and stowing the Hold.

Wed 13th - N.W. winds and fair. Received on board the remainder of the Copper, likewise our Gun Carriages, Carpenters, Boatswains, Gunners, Coopers, and Armourer's Ironmongery stores. Employed hoisting the Guns out of the Main Hold and Mounting them, Blacking the Mast heads, Tops, etc.

Thurs 14th - Received on board, Cordage for the use of His Majesty's ships in India, And Blacking our yards.

Fri 15th - Received on board remainder of the King's Cordage, and some stores Deals.

Sat 16th - Received on board the remainder of the stores Deals.

Sun 17th - Cleared ship fore and aft.

Mon 18th - Received on board Cordage & Tarr on Government account, and likewise salt provisions for Ship's use.

Tues 19th - Received on board Cables on Government account. Employed clearing the Hold to receive the Cables.

Wed 20th - Received on board Stores on Government account & stowing them.

Thurs 21st - Received on board Stores on Government account & stowing them.

Fri 22nd - Received on board Sundry stores on the Victualling Bill. P.M. cleared the Hawse.

Sat 23rd - Received on board sundry stores.

Sun 24th - A.M. Came on board Capt. P., and 5pm he left the ship. Cleared the hawse. Officers on board 2nd and 4th.

Mon 25th - Received on board 11 barrels of Gunpowder on account of the Hon Co. Also 20 Butts of Beer on the victualling Bill and Sundry Private trade on account of Capt. Pierce. Officers on board 2nd and 4th.

Thurs 28th - Washed the gun deck.

Fri 29th - Received on board Stockfish.

Sat 30th - Received on board Private Trade on account of the Capt. and Officer Also 21 Bales on account of the Hon. Co. and 204 bags of bread on account of the ship.

Mon 2nd December, 1782 - Received on board the Company's and Ship's powder, likewise some brass ordnance on account of the Company. Employed scraping the lower masts, and stowing the hold.

Tues 3rd - Received on board Private trade, and wine on the victualling Bill. Paying the lower masts with Turpentine.

Wed 4th - Received on board Beer on the Victualling bill.

Thurs 5th - Received on board Remainder of the Beer.

Friday 6th - Received on board Powder, Private Trade, Bales on account of Hon Co.

Sat 7th - Received on board some Private Trade and Cordage, likewise a Bower Cable for the Ship's use.

Sun 8th Cleared Hawse. Received on board 60 casks of split Pease and 50 barrels of Flower on account of the ship.

Mon 9th - Cleaning ship.

Wed 11th - Received on board 18 recruits on account of the Hon Co.

Thurs 12th - A.M. Came alongside the Ship's sails. Employed getting them on board and stowing them away in the Gunroom.

Sat 14th - Washed the Gun Deck.

Sun 15th - Washed Decks.

Mon 16th - Received on board some private trade on account of the Capt. and Officers, likewise received on board some vinegar, sugar and soap on account of the Recruits. Came on board Messrs Gwynn and Deminicus and paid the soldiers.

Tues 17th - Cleared Hawse. Received on board some private trade.

Thurs 19th - Received on board Rod Iron, and Iron Chains on account of Hon. Co.

Fri 20th - Quartermaster stowing the Lazaretto.

Sat 21st - Employed getting the ship ready for sea. Received on board 24 trusses of hay.

Sun 22nd - Washed the Gun Deck.

Mon 23rd - A.M. Came on board Capt. Pierce, Messrs Welch and Fowler and paid the Ship's Company their River pay and bounty, likewise came on board Mr Card, Pilot, and took charge of the ship. N.B. This is Tuesday's transaction, the 24th.

Tues 24th - Employed stowing the hold. Lazaretto and Gunroom. N.B. This is Monday's transaction, the 23rd.

Wed 25th - Anchored in the lower part of the Hope. Scald our Guns. At 10pm Daniel McNeal one of the Hon Co 's recruits, was seen on board, but being informed his intention was to swim on shore, on the above information mustered them immediately and found him missing. Having had no boat alongside after 10pm. and none prior to their being mustered, he must have committed the rash act of risking (sic) his life for his escape.

Fri 27th - Came too in the Downs. Deal Castle.

Sat 28th - Cleaning ship.

Sun 29th - Washed the upper deck. Came on board the Co's agent and mustered the Ship's Company.

Tues 31st - At 2pm the Convoy having made the Signal for sailing, weigh'd and made sail. Midnight - Beachy Head North.

Wed 1st January, 1783 - Wind from the N.E. & fair. At daylight the Isle of Wight N.W.W. At noon came too with the Best Bower to wait for the tide. At 2 weigh'd & turned up. At 6 came too with the B.B. in 13 Fathoms. St Helens W.S.W. Friday 3rd - 1783 Punished Jacob Archer one of the Hon Co's recruits for Theft, with a dozen lashes. Received on board some water for present expending.

Sat 4th - Employed about the rigging, drawing and knotting yarns etc. Armourer at his Forge, Tradesmen usefully employed.

Sun 5th - Strong westerly winds with hard rain in the night. Washed the upper and gun deck.

Thurs 9th - Received on board some water for present expending.

Sat 11th - Washed the Gun Deck. People employed under the Boatswain.

Sun 12th - A.M. Washed Decks.

Sun 19th - Washed the Gun deck.

Mon 20th - Cleared Hawse. Came on board Messrs ? ? to inspect the state of the ship.

Wed 22nd - Received on board a chest of colours.

Thurs 25th - Received on board 15 casks of Brandy for the Military. At 7pm found 2 of the Hon Co's recruits missing which by report made their escape in a wherry over the bows.

Fri 24th - Came on board Mr Hayes and took out of the ship the Hon Co's recruits, with their baggage, etc. Received on board some hammocks for the Kings Troops.

Sun 26th - Washed the Gun Deck. Received on board 47 privates and 10 office of the 83rd Regiment.

Wed 29th - Received on board 2 officers and 78 privates of the 83rd Regiment.

Thurs 30th - Received on board 12 privates of the 83rd Reg. and the baggage belonging to the troops on board. Cleared Hawse.

Fri 31st - Washed the Gun Deck.

Sat 1st February, 1783 - Received on board an 18inch cable for the Ship's use.

Sun 2nd - Washed Decks.

Thurs 6th - 47 Private men belonging to the 83rd Reg. got into the boat and went on shore again to their Officers approbation and at 5pm 57 men more went on shore against every persuasion.

Sat 8th - Washed the Gun Deck. At 10am went on shore Lieutenants Nivian, Louder, and McKenzie and took with them men and left on board men in charge of their baggage.

Tues 11th - Delivered all the baggage belonging to the 83rd Reg.

Sat 15th - Washed the Gun Deck.

Sat 22nd - Washed the Gun Deck.

Wed 26th - Came on board 2 officers, 4 women and 46 men belonging to the 36th Reg.

Thurs 27th - Strong gale from N.W.

Fri 28th - Came on board 2 officers, 5 women and 69 men of the 36th Regiment.

Sat 1st March, 1783 - Cleared Hawse. Washed the Gun Deck.

Mon 3rd - Came on board 4 men belonging to 36th Reg.

Tues 4th - Came on board 6 men and 2 women belonging to 36th Regt. PM. Sailed the Hon Co's Ships, York, Stormont, Sandwich, Lascales, Houghton and True Briton.

Sat 8th - Received on board 31 men (56th Regt.). Received on board 3 Bon Pacquets and 5 Parcels of letters from the Hon Co.

Sun 9th - Paid the Ship's Company. Cleared the Hawse and made the signal for sailing.

Tues 11th - At daylight unmoored ship, and hove short on the B.B. At noon weighed and came out clear of the shipping, and hove too for the *Fox* and the *Atlas*. At 5pm made sail. the 2 ships joined us, which we supposed to be the above-mentioned ships.

Wed 12th - Sunset - the Needles E.N.E. and Dunnose S.E. by E. The *Atlas* and the *Fox* astern.

Thurs 13th - At Sunset the Lizzard N.N.E. distance 9 leagues. The *Atlas* and *Fox* in company - for whom went under an easy sail all night. At night the *Fox* far astern.

Sat 15th - Signalled to Atlas to make more sail.

Sun 16th - Signalled ships to come into my wake.

Tues 18th - In the morning could see neither of the two ships our Consorts.

Sun 23rd - At 4am in a heavy and sudden squall carried away the Fore topmast.

Sat 29th - Island of Bonavista SSE at 5 leagues.

Sunday 30th - Praya Bay. At daylight sent on shore all our empty casks, employed filling them and conveying them on board. Expected to find our consorts but on enquiry find none of the ships have been here.

Mon 31st - Completed our water.

Tues 1st April, 1783 - Waiting for the *Belmont* and our former consorts.

Wed 2nd - 9pm. Punished 8 seamen for behaving in a mutinous manner and attempting to take the Boatswain out of his cabin to ill use him.

Fri 4th - Joined by the *Walpole*. Kept waiting for her.

Sat 5th - In company with the *Belmont* and *Walpole*.

Mon 14th - Caught a land bird something like a jay but with a green head and breast.

Tues 15th - Put the people to an allowance of water and Quarts to men.

Sun 27th - At 1/2 past 5pm I hove too for John Lowell ? seaman who had fallen overboard. Lowered the (?) and brought him on board but insensible from a blow on his head received in falling. A.M. - he departed this life. At 11pm the *Walpole* fired guns and shewed lights which we answered and hove too immediately. When she came up we found she had in a squall carried away her Fore topmast and mizzen(?) Top gallant mast.

Mon 28th - At 4pm Committed the body of the deceased to the deep.

Fri 23rd May, 1783 - Crossed the Meridian of London.

Fri 6th June, 1783 - At 5am departed this life George Cruthers, one of the 56th Regt.

Mon 9th - At noon punished Wm Gray and John Dean, each with a dozen lashes, the former for cutting canvas out of a main T. M. and steering sail, the latter for taking canvas of the quarter deck.

Tues 17th - Saw the island of Madagascar.

Wed 18th - Near Cape St Vincent?

Mon 23rd - Johanna Island. Found riding here the Barwell and Lord Macartney, Indiamen and Europe man of war. Employed sending on shore empty casks, filling and receiving them on board, likewise some beef for the ship's company.

Fri 25th - Received on board water, livestock, etc. PM came on board the *Governor* and the King's two sons with several attendants. Saluted them with 7 guns on their going away. Heeled ship both ways scraped and pay'd her to the water's edge.

Wed 25th - Completed watering. Arrived the *Fox* Capt. Blackburn.

Thurs 26th - Waiting for the *Belmont*.

Sat 12th July, 1783 - Washed the Gun Deck.

Fri 18th - Death of a soldier of the 36th Regt.

Sat 19th - Washed the gun deck.

Tues 22nd - Kelah.

Sat 26th - Madras. Saluted the Admiral with 11 guns - came on board the *Superb's* boat with an officer who pressed 50 of our people. Found riding here *Admiral* (?) Eden Hughes with his fleet.

Sun 27th - Getting ready to deliver the Company's cargo.

Tues 29th - Came on board the *Seahorse's* boat and took one of our men.

PM -clear hawse.

Sat 30th - Landing troops baggage. Cleared hawse.

Thurs 31st - Delivering cordage on board His Majesty's ships. Cleared hawse.

Fri 1st August, 1783 – Sent on shore the Co's Packet for Bengal. Cleared hawse.
 Tues 19th – Unmoored ship. Came on board the Capt. And passengers.
 Mon 25th – At 1pm saluted the *Admiral* with 15 guns.
 Sat 30th – Washed the gun deck.
 Tues 2nd September, 1783 – Pilot in control of ship.
 Thurs 4th – Kedgereee / Bengal.
 Mon 8th – Delivering private trade. PM The Capt and passengers went to Calcutta.
 Fri 12th – Cadet died.
 Fri 26th – Received on board Redwood on account of the Hon Co. Picking Oakum & Caulking.
 Mon 6th October, 1783 – Checking the re-caulking of the lower deck.
 Wed 8th – Loading Salt Petre for the Hon Co.
 Fri 17th – Heel'd ship both ways, Log-d her bottom.. and payd it with Pitch and Tarr.
 Fri 24th – Seaman died.
 Sat 25th – Seaman died.
 Sun 26th – Washed the gundeck.
 Sun 2nd November, 1783 – Washed the gundeck.
 Sun 9th – Washed the gundeck. Seaman died.
 Tues 11th – Seaman died.
 Sat 15th – November 1785 – Quarter Master died.
 Mon 17th – Sent 25 sick people to the hospital at Calcutta.
 Sat 15th December – A landsman died.
 Thurs 18th – Seaman died.
 Sat 20th – 17 Lascars run in the night.
 Tues 23rd – 2 Lascars left the boat while on shore.
 Wed 24th- Loading Bales on account of the Hon Co. 2 Lascars left the boat.
 Tues 6th January, 1784 – Armourer died.
 Thurs 22nd – Getting ready to sail.
 Sat 24th – A landsman died.
 Mon 26th – Seaman died.
 Tues 27th – Passengers came on board.
 Wed 4th February, 1784 – Boatswain's servant died.
 Thurs 5th – In company with the *Ceres* and *Talbot*.
 Fri 6th – Cooper died. Small Bower anchor half eaten with worm, broke off.
 Mon 1st March, 1784 – Carpenter's mate died.
 Thurs 18th – Seaman died.
 Fri 19th – Seaman died.

Thurs 7th May, 1784 – Third Officer died.

Sat 8th – Cape Point.

Wed 26th – Surgeon died.

Tues 1st June, 1784 – Saluted the Fort at St Helena with 7 guns.

Fri 4th – Fired 21 guns in honour of His Majesty's birthday.

Sat 15th – The *Fox* damaged on a rock. Considerable damage.

Tues 15th – Came on board the Capt. And passengers.

3rd September, 1784 – Blackwall. Greenland Dock.



References:

[1] - Information from Roger Abbott

[2] - Papers are available at the Somerset Archive and Records Service, Obridge Road, Taunton, TA2 7PU. Papers include DD/S/WH 322 to 324.

[3] - Taken from Horatio Nelson 1987 by Tom Pocock & BL OIOC, Log of the *Halsewell*, L/MAR/B/465 B Log (24th Aug 1778 – 1st February 1782)

[4] - Barlow's Journal.

[5] - Source Mr David Sales.

[6] - Curtis. F, *Terrae Incognitae*, Volume 29, 1997 by The Society for the History of Discoveries.



2 – Articles Written on the *Halsewell*

Most of these articles, notes and the Charles Dickens short story contain repetition; they are added for completeness:

A Reference to WILLIAM LARKINS the 5TH Mate.

SOME CHRONICLES OF THE LARKINS FAMILY II. THE WRECK OF THE *HALSEWELL*, 1786.

By E. W. Bovill, F.S.A.

In the eighteenth century sea-faring sometimes brought handsome rewards, but they were gathered at great hazard. Between the years 1761 and 1810 almost one in every four ships employed by the East India Company met what we may call a violent death. About a third of the losses at sea were due to enemy action. The rest were ships wrecked or foundered or, worst of all in days when every Indiaman carried gunpowder, burnt. The toll of life in these losses was usually heavy because it was seldom possible to get a ship's boats safely launched and wooden ships broke up very quickly. Most of the ships recorded as 'foundered' were those which had disappeared and were 'not since heard of'.

The Larkins, the most prominent family in the Company's shipping, had been lucky in this half century. Only three of the twenty or more East Indiamen in which we know them to have had an interest, either as owners or sworn officers, were lost. These were the *Albion*, wrecked in 1765, the second *Warren Hastings*, captured by the French in 1806, and the *Earl Camden*, burnt in Bombay in July 1810. The family, however, had suffered a tragedy in a ship with which they were less influentially concerned.

When the first Warren Hastings returned from China in May 1786, sad news awaited her commander, Captain Thomas Larkins. Five months earlier his eldest son, William, a boy of sixteen, had lost his life in the *Halsewell* East Indiaman. As the ship's papers were lost the only members of the crew whose names are recorded are those of her senior officers so we do not know in what capacity William Larkins was aboard the *Halsewell*. It is highly probable that he was following the family tradition and serving as either a midshipman or fifth mate. [A] On the other hand, he might have been a passenger outward bound to India to take up a writership or some other appointment in the Company's service.

The *Halsewell*, 758 tons burden, was one of the bigger ships in the Company's service when she entered it in 1779. At the time of her loss, her managing owner was Peter Esdaile, who had but recently taken her over, and her commander was Captain Richard Pierce who had commanded her since she first went to sea. She had made two voyages, one to China and another to India. She was therefore a well-trying ship and commanded by an experienced captain.

Nevertheless, according to the usually accepted narrative of the shipwreck, that of Sir J. G. Dalyell, the conduct of Captain Pierce from start to finish was most unseamanlike. Allowance must, however, be made for the chronicler's very inadequate knowledge of the sea which appears to have led him to attribute to the commander actions so foolish and inexplicable that one hesitates to accept them. To do so would be to hold Captain Pierce chiefly responsible for a disaster in which he and most of his ship's company lost their lives.

In November 1785 the *Halsewell* 'fell down' the river to Gravesend where she completed her lading. She then moved down to the Hope where she took her passengers on board. They included seven women; two were daughters of the captain and two more were his relatives. The ship was also carrying 'a considerable body of soldiers, destined to recruit the forces of the East India Company in Asia'.

Whatever young William Larkins' status may have been, he was, if the chronicler of the impending tragedy is to be believed (which he almost certainly is not), setting out under conditions of almost unimaginable felicity.

The *Halsewell*, the chronicler tells us, 'was one of the finest ships in the service, and judged to be in most perfect condition for her voyage. Her commander was of distinguished ability and exemplary character; his officers of approved fidelity and unquestionable knowledge in their profession, and the crew not only as numerous as the East India establishment admits, but the best seamen that could be collected'. Turning to the passengers, it is scarcely necessary to add that (the ladies were equally distinguished by their beauty and accomplishments; the gentlemen of amiable manners, and of a highly respectable character. . . the whole formed a happy society united in friendship. Nothing could be more pleasing or encouraging than the outset of the voyage.'

They sailed through The Downs in calm weather on Sunday, 1st January 1786. On the Monday the wind got up and that evening, after the ship had run inshore in an unsuccessful attempt to land the pilot at the Isle of Wight, very thick weather came on (and the wind baffling, she was obliged to anchor, at nine o'clock, in eighteen fathom water. The topsails were furled, but the people could not furl the courses, the snow falling thick, and freezing as it fell. Next morning a strong gale came on from the east-north-east, and the ship driving, they were obliged to cut the cables and run out to sea.' The wind was one which should have taken the *Halsewell* down Channel on her proper course. It is therefore difficult to understand why Captain Pierce should have cut his cables and thus lost his best anchor; a measure so desperate that it would not have been taken except in an extremity such as had not yet arisen. After this inexplicable action by the commander they hailed a brig bound for Dublin, put the pilot aboard her, and resumed their voyage down the English Channel.

So far, the conditions experienced by the *Halsewell* were no more than were to be expected in the Channel at this season, and whatever the passengers may have felt, her commander had not yet had any cause for anxiety for the safety of his ship. Late on Tuesday night, however, it blew a gale from the south so violent that in order to keep the ship off the shore they were compelled to carry a press of sail. In any other circumstances this would have been considered highly imprudent on account of the immense strain which it put on the ship. But there was no alternative if the *Halsewell* was to be kept off the shore. The strain, however, proved too much for her. Trouble arose where a year or so before it would have been least expected. The two hawse-holes in the bow of the *Halsewell* had been fitted with new and, what: were considered, improved plugs. These hawse-plugs, contrary to custom, were inserted from inside instead of the outside. The violence of the sea now forced these new-fangled plugs out of the hawse-holes with the result that the vessel shipped a large quantity of water on her gun-deck. On sounding the well, it was found that the ship had five feet of water in the hold from which it was evident that she had sprung a leak. The commander had all the pumps set to work. He gave orders to furl the main-topsail and the mainsail but the crew could not do so. At two o'clock on Wednesday morning an attempt was made to wear the ship, that is to say turn her round with her stern to the gale, but this too they could not do. They then cut away the mizen-mast apparently hoping, according to the not very reliable narrative, that this would enable them to wear but, as was only to be expected after depriving the ship of her manoeuvring power, they were again disappointed.

The situation was getting desperate. There were now seven feet of water in the hold and it was gaining fast on the pumps. The crew next cut away the mainmast 'as she appeared to be in immediate danger of foundering'— another desperate measure which could have been achieved at far less cost by, say, jettisoning a few guns. In the fall of the mast the coxswain and four men were lost overboard.

The situation now appeared to be less perilous, for they were able to get the ship before the wind, and they held her there for two hours. During this time the pumps reduced the water in the hold by two feet.

At ten in the morning the wind abated considerably but they suffered another blow. The ship, labouring extremely, rolled her fore-topmast overboard and in its fall, it tore to pieces the foresail on which they depended for the control of the vessel. They were within sight of Berry Head, just south of Torquay, and perilously close to the shore. A new foresail was immediately bent, a jury-mainmast was erected and a top-gallant-sail was set for a mainsail.

Captain Pierce, realizing the impossibility of continuing his voyage without a refit, bore up for Portsmouth.

At noon on Thursday, the 5th, they sighted Portland, bearing north by east, distant two or three leagues. Having regard to their crippled condition they were making fair enough progress to encourage the hope that the worst was over and that they would now be able safely to make Portsmouth. But the elements decided otherwise. The ordeal they had already experienced was but a foretaste of what was impending.

At eight o'clock that night, with the lights of Portland bearing northwest, they were struck by a strong gale from the south. The commander got his ship's head round to the west, but finding she lost ground on that tack he wore her again and kept stretching on to the eastward, hoping to weather Peverel Point and anchor in Studland Bay. At eleven at night it cleared and Captain Pierce saw that his ship was in great peril. Not more than a mile and a half to leeward was the grim outline of St Alban's Head. There was immediate danger of destruction. Sail was instantly taken in and the small bower anchor let go. The ship rode for about an hour, and then drove. They let go the sheet anchor but after two hours the ship drove again. They could now do no more than fire guns of distress, which they had already been doing for some time, but with little hope of their being heard above the noise of the gale or, if they were, of their bringing relief.

The *Halsewell* was a doomed ship and there cannot have been a seaman on deck who did not know it. With the failure of the sheet anchor in that gale no power on earth could save the ship from striking on the rugged lee shore, now less than a mile away. In the days of wooden ships shipwreck, especially at night, was a far more terrifying experience than to-day. Once a wooden ship struck, she might, unlike an iron one, go to pieces at any moment with the probability of very few of her company surviving to tell the tale. To-day a ship may hold together for days, and all that time provide reasonable security for those aboard pending their escape or rescue. A wooden ship striking in the middle of the night during a gale was likely to go to pieces before day-break with little chance of anyone being able to get ashore alive.

Captain Pierce asked his second mate, Henry Meriton, what probability there was of saving the lives of those aboard. He got the only answer he could have expected. There was little hope of saving anyone's life. It would be impossible to use the boats in such a gale, but it was agreed that in case such occasion should arise the 'officers should be confidentially requested to use the long-boat for the ladies and themselves; and this precaution was immediately taken'. The decision does not appear to reflect very favourably on the commander, but we shall regretfully note other indications that in this hour of crisis he lacked the traditional resolution and courage of the service to which he belonged. His predicament, however, was a singularly grievous one for he had with him his two much-loved daughters whose peril seems partly to have paralysed the powers of independent thought and decision which every commander is expected to exercise in the hour of crisis.

At 2 a.m. on Friday the 6th, the ship struck with great violence. The force of the impact was such that it dashed against the deck above the heads of everyone in the cuddy or dining saloon, where we may presume many of the passengers to have sought shelter, and it brought cries of terror from every part of the ship. Although the chronicler described the crew in his introductory paragraphs as the best seamen that could be collected, he admits that their conduct up to this point had been at least disappointing. Many who had been skulking in their hammocks when they should have been manning the pumps or performing other duties which in their absence had fallen to the officers of the ship and the soldiers, now poured on deck and 'roused by a sense of their danger - in frantic exclamations, demanded of heaven and their fellow-sufferers, that succour which their own efforts timely made might possibly have procured'.

The *Halsewell* had struck on some rocks at the base of an almost perpendicular cliff of vast height near Seacombe, on the Isle of Purbeck, between Peverel Point and St Alban's Head. As she beat on these rocks she was quickly holed and filled with water. At this point there is a cave of great length, ten to twelve yards in depth and with almost perpendicular walls, in which the sea was pounding with great violence. The ship lay broadside on to the cave. In the pitch darkness of the storm the ship's company were unable to appreciate the full horror of that forbidding shore on which their ship might go to pieces at any moment. Had they been able to do so they would have seen nothing in the formidable rocks on which their ship lay, in the storm-wracked cave or that perpendicular wall of cliff to encourage hope of greater safety ashore than on board the wreck. Destruction seemed as certain on the one as on the other.

Nevertheless, Meriton advised the crew, who were in terror of the ship immediately breaking up, to gather on the side of the ship lowest to the rocks and seize what opportunities offered for getting ashore. With the passengers in the round-house [1] were—I suggest very improperly—the commander and most of the officers "offering consolation to the unfortunate ladies, and with unparalleled magnanimity, suffering their compassion for the fair and amiable companions of their misfortunes, to prevail over the sense of their own danger ', and leaving Meriton to do all the work. The second mate offered some encouragement to this unhappy band of terror-stricken women and their comforters. He was of opinion—or wisely said he was—that the ship would hold together till morning when all would be safe.

The genteel company in the round-house had admitted three black women and two soldier's wives. The seamen tried to force an entrance and were only kept out by the combined efforts of the third and fifth mates. On a chair in the centre of this not wholly creditable scene sat Captain Pierce 'with a daughter on each side, whom he alternately pressed to his affectionate breast'. The other occupants of the round-house sat on the deck which was strewn with musical instruments and broken furniture. The second mate, who alone seems to have retained his sense of duty, brought the women a basket of oranges which helped to compose all except one who was in hysterics.

Any hope which Meriton may have had that the ship would hold together till morning was now rudely shaken. He saw what every shipwrecked mariner of those days most dreaded. The deck had begun to lift, and with it the sides of the ship were giving way.

At these sure signs of impending disaster, he attempted to go forward to learn more of the ship's condition, only to discover that she had already parted in the middle and that the fore-part now lay farther out to sea. Perceiving that many of the crew had succeeded in quitting the ship, though with what consequence he did not know, and assured that certain death awaited anyone remaining aboard, he resolved to try to get ashore himself.

Sliding down a protruding spar, he fell violently on to the rocks and was quickly carried by the surge into the back of the cave. Here he managed to gain a footing on a shelf where he found another survivor.

Meanwhile, Captain Pierce and the third mate had gone to the stern-gallery to see whether there was any hope of escape for the women from there. Deciding there was none, the commander returned to his daughters and gave himself up to despair. The third and fifth mates, however, climbed from the stern-gallery to the poop and while they were considering what next to do a very heavy sea fell on board and the round-house gave way. They continued to hear at intervals the shrieks of the women above the noise of the sea. As another sea swept the wreck they together seized a hen-coop and were swept off the ship on to a large rock to which they were able to cling and where they found twenty-seven other survivors. Their comparative security was due only to its being low tide and could evidently last only a short time. Some decided to remain awhile where they were but others endeavoured to reach the cave, hoping there to find a measure of security; of the latter, six only succeeded in joining the second mate and a number of other survivors—crew, seamen and soldiers—who had collected on ledges in the cave. The rest were drowned and the same fate overtook all who had remained behind on the rock.

From their situation in the cave those who had reached the shore and still survived could see the wreck which they momentarily expected to disappear with every sea which broke over her. It was not long before their fears were realized. Within a few minutes the sea closed over all that was left of the *Halsewell* and muffled the shrieks of those left on board as they went to their destruction.

The situation of the survivors in the cave was highly precarious. Some, weakened and benumbed by injuries and exposure in the sea and the cold of a January night, lost their foothold and perished. When daylight came, three hours after the ship had disappeared, it revealed to the diminishing band of survivors the dangers which still beset them. The great cliff was overhanging and precluded any hope of their being seen from above. The gale blew as strong as ever and no boat could live in such a sea.

The only hope of rescue lay in the possibility of someone reaching the top of the cliff and giving the alarm. Of those who made the attempt some were too exhausted and, losing their footholds, were dashed to pieces on the rocks below. The cook and a quarter-master succeeded in getting to the top and made their way to Eastington. The steward of the Purbeck quarries, a Mr. Garland, organized a party of rescuers who lowered ropes down the face of the cliff and hauled up the survivors. But the death role continued to mount. Some, unable properly to secure the ropes round their bodies owing to physical exhaustion, slipped and lost their lives as they were being hauled to safety. Two or three died on the way up and a negro expired after reaching the top.

When the survivors, who included the gallant Meriton, were mustered they were found to number seventy-four out of a ship's company of two hundred and forty. About fifty were believed to have been on board when the after-part of the ship went to pieces. All these, of course, lost their lives. Fifty more were believed to have reached the rocks and to have been washed out to sea or killed on the way up the cliff. The remainder must have perished in attempting to reach the shore from the ship. Among the dead was young William Larkins, but when or how he died is not known. [2]

The author is greatly indebted to Captain H. T. A. Bosanquet, C.V.O., R.N., F.S.A., for advice and generous help in preparing this paper.

Purbeck Society Papers 1856

There is an interesting article to be found in the 'Purbeck Society Papers' of 1856, page 142-156 by Oliver W. Farrer. I have recorded information from the article which does not duplicate that in the Narrative.

"__ The loss of the Halsewell is yet remembered by some aged people of the country, who relate how the surviving sailors created astonishment as they marched towards London, unaided by Steam or Ship-wrecked Mariner's Societies. The quarry still tells its tale in its name (Halsewell Quarry), portions of the ship's timbers and copper are from time to time washed up, or discovered wedged in the rocks: many guns were recovered, and many remain at the foot of the cliffs, but covered with debris. One other sad memorial remains; on the little patch of flat ground where the cliffs divide, and the stream, when there is a stream, descends to the sea, may yet be seen the traces of four long graves.

The spot is indeed appropriate. As you stand by the almost obliterated mounds, the eye wanders over little but sea and sky, and the wild solitude of the spot accords with the sadness of the tragedy here played out. Yet the thought will occur that charity, which we know to have cheered the survivors, might well have honoured the sufferers. Many a barrow in Purbeck attests the pious care which the old inhabitants paid to their dead. And one could have wished that in the eighteenth century, the bodies of Christian men and women, might have met with Christian burial in the neighbouring ancient church-yard of Worth Matravers. "
[3]

Notes: by E. W. Bovill.

[1] - The round-house—called the coach in ships of war—was a large cabin built in the after part of the quarter-deck, having the poop for its roof. Adjoining it was the cuddy in which the officers and cabin passengers took their meals.

[2] - James Northcoate, R.A., painted a picture of the loss of the *Halsewell* which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1786. There are also aquatints of the wreck by and after R. Dodd, after T. Rowlandson by J. Mercier, after R. Smirke by F. Jukes and R. Pollard, after T. Sothand by Scott.

Purbeck Society Papers

[3] - The Register of Worth, notes but one burial connected with the *Halsewell*, that of the body of a man thrown up a month subsequent to the catastrophe. A note entered in the register gives a succinct notice of the wreck. It reports the number of those saved as eighty-two.

See also 'The Long Voyage' - Charles Dickens



3 – Newspaper Reports

This is a record of the various newspaper and periodical reports giving contemporary accounts of the wreck of the *Halsewell*. They are reproduction for those interested. Much of the text is of course repetition and some of the stated facts require confirmation.

These newspaper reports like the narrative were printed using a straightened lower-case variant of the letter ‘S’, known as the long S, which looked like an ‘f’ { ‘f’ } which was used in script and in printing during this period (except in the final position); these have been removed to make the text easier to read. Words which may not be understood are hyperlinked to the glossary (Ed)

Hampshire Chronicle and Portsmouth and Chichester Journal
London Magazine
Lady Magazine

From the Hampshire Chronicle Monday, 16th January, 1786:
"LONDON, 10th January 1786 WRECK OF THE *HALSEWELL*
EAST INDIAMAN"

It is with the utmost regret that we inform our readers of the unhappy fate of the HALSEWELL East Indiaman, Richard Pierce Esq., Commander, which was totally lost off Peveral Point on Friday last, on her outward-bound journey to Bengal.

The Pilot had left the ship on Tuesday noon; after which she sailed down the Channel with a fair wind till about four o'clock on Wednesday morning when in a very hard gale, with a heavy fall of snow, came on by which the ship received so much damage as to admit six feet of water into the hold. About eleven o'clock on Wednesday morning, when they thought they were between the Lizard and Start Point, they cut away the main and mizzen sails, then wore ship, and endeavoured to make Portsmouth under jury-masts. They stood for the Channel on Wednesday afternoon and all the day on Thursday. In the afternoon of the last named day a heavy gale blew from the South, which by degrees drove them on a lee shore, in spite of all their endeavours to avoid it. Between one and two o'clock on Friday morning they saw land, and came to anchor, at which they rode about an hour. But having either driven or parted, they then let go the only anchor left them, with which they were unable to bring up the ship, as the hurricane continued to increase.

In the state the vessel drove upon the rocks at the headland of St. Alban's about three leagues to the East of Portland and in less than an hour were dashed to pieces.

Had they been fortunate enough to have driven clear of that Headland, they would have got into Swanage or Strickland Bay, where they might have had safe anchorage under the weather.

Besides the Captain, the First, Fourth, and Fifth Mates, the following passengers were lost, viz:-

John George Schultz, Miss Elizabeth Pierce, Miss Mary Ann Pierce, two Miss Pauls, Miss Mary Haggard, Miss Elizabeth Blackburn, Miss Ann Manfell and about 160 or 170 seamen and soldiers.

OFFICERS SAVED

Mr. Henry Meriton Second Mate

Mr. Rodgers Third Mate

Mr. Daniel Sixth Mate

Mr. Duncan McDonald

Mr. Manus Midshipman with 40 seamen and 25 soldiers.

Mr. Meriton was driven from onboard the Halsewell on a rock by a very heavy sea breaking over the ship. Just before which Captain Pierce asked him if he thought anything could be done for the safety of the ladies. He replied it was impossible upon which the Captain addressing himself to his daughters and enfolding them in his arms said. Then my dear children we will perish together. The ship disappeared in a few minutes.

Mr. Thompson the Quarter Master was the first who climbed up the rock and got on shore. He saw a light about a mile off to which he went. The people very humanly came down with him to the shore with ropes which was the means of saving many lives, though several after being drawn up the rock from fatigue let go their hold, and were dashed to pieces.

The Chief Mate of the unfortunate Halsewell East Indiaman said in the fatal moment when the second mate was quitting the ship that he would die with his uncle the captain and his cousins the Miss Pierces.

For were he to leave such dear relatives behind him he could only expect the worst of fates, "to be discarded forever from the service".

Captain Pierces two daughters who were drowned in the arms of their father were going to India to be married to gentlemen of considerable fortune. The eldest was only seventeen and the youngest but 15 years of age

Captain Pierce has left behind him a wife and seven children.

The loss of the above ship is attributed, in great measure, to the want of subordination in the crew, as while there was a probability of saving it the seamen absolutely refused to obey the officers, and on being threatened with chastisement, exultingly answered in the following laconick insolent manner-"You be d-----d: If you dare d--n my eyes but I'll Loughborough you" alluding, as is supposed, to a late verdict in the Court of Common Pleas. the soldiers assisted in every way in their power, and actually mounted aloft, but were not sufficiently expert in the necessary business. It is a dreadful thing to hear of seven young ladies being drowned - Nor is it much less lamentable to think that beautiful women are now reckoned among the articles of our export trade to India.--Not one ship is now sailing without a cargo on board; and they are literally going to market. On their arrival they are shewn as we shew a horse, and are disposed of to the best bidder. This is a coarse description, but does not so indelicate a traffic deserve rebuke! Is not meretriciousness it is at best so interested and paltry so beneath the elegant purity of a female heart, that it ought to be discouraged by the sex.

When a lady goes abroad to a man of her heart it is a different matter. It is a generous proof of her passion, and does honour to her constancy and spirit. But when a lady carries her beauty, youth, and accomplishments to a foreign market--when she decks herself out to attract Nabobs, and makes a venture of her own person among people that she never saw exposing herself to the scrutiny of suspicious wealth and age (for wealth and age are always suspicious) she lowers herself from the rank which she can only preserve by delicacy; and if she accomplished her purpose in marrying a man of fortune, she finds in him an imperious Lord, or a jealous dotard; a man who conscious of the personal infirmities derived from an Asiatic climate, sensibly reflects that she married him without love, and who in the paroxysms of jealousy, or the peevishness of disease, daily throws this reproach in her teeth."

Rescue Operation

Extract from a letter submitted to the Hampshire Chronicle by a Clergyman at Worth Matravers.

"I was sitting at breakfast with Mr. Garland on Friday the 6th of January, when news was brought, that a large ship was on shore. The disposition of the country to plunder is well known; we therefore immediately mounted our horses, to afford what protection we could to the unfortunate. But the fury of the wind, the violence of the rain, thick fog and a deep snow, frustrated our endeavours after three hours riding round the coast. We then met with three poor wretches who had escaped from the general ruin, over the cliffs, they were in a most distressed state at Worth. We removed them to a better house, and left them in good beds and well provided, and then proceeded with a guide to the fatal spot. But such a horrid, tremendous scene never did my eyes behold, and God of His mercy grant that they may never again. The sea ran mountains high, and lashed the rocks with all the appearance of insolence and anger. The ship, which struck at two in the morning, was so entirely beat to pieces, that nothing but the whole ocean covered with her fragments could have persuaded me that she had ever been drifted together. In one place lay her rigging, &c., wound up like the garbage of an animal and rolling to and fro in sullen submission to the imperious waves. In the different recesses of the rocks, a confused heap of boards, broken masts, chests, trunks, and dead bodies, were huddled together, and the face of the water as far as the eye could extend was disfigured with floating carcasses, tables, chairs, casks, and part of every other article in the vessel. I do not think that any two boards remained together.

You remember Winspit Quarry; she was lost half a mile to the east of it. I do not mention all the circumstances, as you have probably seen them in the papers. Of the crew about 70 were saved, mostly sailor; the rest, with the Captain and 15 women, of two were his own daughters, and three more young ladies, perished. The second mate, a stout young man, ascended the cliffs without help; but how, it is impossible to tell, nor could he himself, as they are nearly perpendicular; a few others were equally fortunate, by being carried on pieces of the wreck to parts more easily gained. The fourth mate and about 40 of the men followed the second as far as they dared, and then waited in painful suspense, till they were drawn up by a rope let down by the quarriers. Another party of 30, worse situated, or unable to gain a higher part, were seen to be washed from the rock on which they stood by one furious wave, at the return of the morning tide.

The arrival of Mr. Garland and myself proved fortunate for about 20 more unhappy wretches, who were discovered under the shelter of a large chasm or cavern in the rock, about 30 feet from the bottom. The quarriers were worn with fatigue, cold, wet and hunger; and were more eager to get their share of two casks of spirits which had been just sent them, than to attend to the cries of the sufferers below; nor was there any one person or sufficient authority to encourage or direct them. Our presence occasioned a proper application of the liquor, prevented all intoxication, and saved many of them from tumbling down the precipice; and our promises of reward cheered them to proceed with vigour, till we had drawn up every one that remained alive.

The method of saving the last was singular, and does honour to the humanity and intrepidity of the quarriers. The distance from the top of the rock to the cranny was about 60 feet, with a projection of the former of about eight feet, ten of these sixty feet formed a declivity to the edge, and the remaining fifty feet were quite perpendicular. On the very brink of the precipice, stood two daring fellows, a rope being tied round their bodies, and fastened above to a strong iron bar, fixed in the ground; behind them, in like manner, two more. A large cable also, properly secured, passed between them, by which they might hold and support themselves from falling; they then lay down a rope, with a noose ready fixed, below the cavern; and the wind blowing hard, forced it under the projecting rock sufficiently for the men to reach it. Whoever caught it put the noose round his waist; and after escaping from one element; committed himself in full swing, to another, in which he dangled till he was drawn with great care and caution. We brought up 18 in this manner; three died before we could assist them; they were all senseless when we received them, and sadly bruised; but we had brought cherry-brandy and gingerbread with us, and by supplying them with small quantities of ale, we soon recovered them, and sent them to a farm-house, where they were supplied with every possible assistance. The surviving officers, seamen and soldiers, being now assembled at the house of their benevolent friend, Mr. Garland they were mustered and found to amount to 74, out of more than 240, which was about the number of the crew and passengers in the ship when she sailed through the Downs, of the remainder, who unhappily lost their lives, upwards of 70 are supposed to have reached the rocks, but to have been washed off, or to perish in falling from the cliff, and 50 or more to have sunk with the captain and the ladies in the round-house, when the after-part of the ship went to pieces. I have not yet recovered from the shock I felt at this horrible affair".

Hampshire Chronicle - After 14th January.

"Upwards of 73 lascars were on board the Halsewell outward bound East Indiaman, Captain Pierce, who were all lost.

The Halsewell was built by Greenland-dock [1] four years since, and had made two voyages, to Coast and Bay, where she was bound, when the disaster happened. She was one of the strongest ships in the Company's service, of 758 tons burthen.

Captain Pierce, a little while before the ship went down, called Mr. Meriton into the cuddy, where his two daughters, two nieces, and three other beautiful young ladies were clinging round him for protection, and on being told, that it was impossible for the ladies to escape, he nobly resolved to share their fate and holding in each hand a beloved child, in a few minutes fell a sacrifice to the devouring waves; the unhappy wretches who gained the rocks, were in a more dreadful situation; they were, by the force of the returning surge, dashed to pieces, except the second mate, who fell into a fissure of the rock, and was sometime up to his chin in water.

A large Swedish ship a few years since, was drove on the same rock where the Halsewell was lost; but the Captain and most of the crew saved themselves upon a raft which carried them into Torbay."

23rd January 1786, written Winchester, Saturday,
January 21st.

The body of Captain Pierce, of the Halsewell East Indiaman, which was unfortunately lost off Portland last week, floated ashore at Christchurch, near 20 miles from Purbeck, at which place some part of the wreck was found.

In addition to the above we have learnt the following particulars from Christchurch, in a letter dated the 12th instant: Every day brings in fresh intelligence of dead bodies being cast ashore on the west beach, from the wreck of the unfortunate Halsewell Indiaman. Two were buried here yesterday, and two more are to be buried this day; and I heard last night four or five dead bodies were lying on the beach. The whole shore from Christchurch Head to Poole is strewed with wrecks. For the honour of humanity, I could wish to conceal the treatment which these dead bodies meet with from the savage shore-walkers; they are generally stripped naked, and left without any discriminating mark, except sex only.

The gentlemen of the neighbourhood have (much to their honour) done all in their power to save these unfortunate sufferers from the rapacity of these wretches, but it is hardly possible to prevent it.

England, perhaps, cannot boast more accomplished young ladies than were Capt. Pierce's daughters; and what rendered them more estimable was, that the good news of their dispositions was equal to their accomplishments.

It is remarkable, that universally beloved as the Captain was, he made less successful voyages than any person in a similar situation.

Miss Marianne, the Captain's youngest daughter was extremely beautiful, and if her eldest sister yielded to her in personal loveliness, though certainly a pretty delicate girl to say the least of her- she made amends by her great share of elegant attainments. To the fine arts, indeed, they had all paid great attention, and the eldest had an astonishing skill in music-she could play any piece of music

The unfortunate Mrs. Pierce has not been able to quit her bed, since the melancholy tale has been unfolded to her; at present there is little hope of her surviving this severe shock of Providence.-She has five infants around her, the oldest not ten years of age, and the youngest but six months. We sincerely wish that the same heroic virtue which induced the father to perish with his daughters, may rouse the unhappy mother to his great charm.

A correspondent expresses his surprise, that when the Halsewell Indiaman first came to anchor she did not cut away her foremast, as in all probability her hull would then have rode out the gale. The loss of such a ship, and of so many lives, is a very melancholy circumstance, and what adds greatly to it is the want of subordination among seamen. A grievous sore, which never appeared with any bad symptoms till the late unfortunate misunderstandings between them and the sea officers. Seamen then saw that there was as much littleness among men in laced coats as among tarred jackets. The truth is, the Jack Tars are not well treated; in war they are pressed; in peace oppressed; and yet in their own lives they are really very honest fellows."

From David Allen's Notes

London, 13th February 1786

"A Correspondent who has lately been at Christchurch corrects a paragraph in our former paper, respecting the body of the unfortunate Captain Pierce, of the Halsewell, being found and buried there: he not having yet been found. About twenty bodies have been found and buried there with the greatest decency and respect---

Those who have not been owned, and whose friends do not appear to bury them, are interred at the expense of the Lord of the Manor, G. I. Tapps, who humanely stood forth on this occasion."

Extracts from "The Gentleman's Magazine" for January 1786, page 44.

Mr Urban, Christ-Church, January 21th.

"The following questions are submitted to the consideration of any reader of your useful Miscellany, who has it in his power to answer them, respecting the dreadful accident which lately befell the unfortunate Halsewell Outward bound East Indiaman, the circumstances attending which, being so peculiarly distressing, have diffused a general gloom amongst all ranks of people, except indeed the rapacious plunderers on the sea coast, who are so devoid of humanity as to strip the bodies of the dead as soon as the waves have thrown them on the shore: which, however, some gentlemen in the vicinity of this place, to their honour let it be spoken, have had decently interred.

Question 1. As the ship, during the violent snow storm of the 4th instant, had her main and mizen masts cut away, and several feet of water in the hold, why did not the captain, after the weather became moderate, make for the first leeward port, and put into Plymouth?

Question 2. When the ship came to anchor off Portland, in a second storm early in the morning of the 6th instant, why was not the foremast immediately cut away, which probably might have prevented the ship from driving on the rocks, where, in ten minutes, she was dashed to pieces?

Question 3. Whether there is any truth in the report circulated in the public papers, that the ship's crew refused to do their duty? and, if they did, from what cause such refusal proceeded?

Question 4. What is the meaning of the ship's name, the Halsewell?

*If either of the surviving officers, or any other of the parties concerned, will take the trouble to answer the above in your next Magazine, it will have a tendency to vindicate the captain's conduct of imprudence: and , on that account will, I hope, be agreeable to your readers in general, and will particularly oblige,
Yours P.H.J."*

Note:

[1] The papers in the BL OIOC say that the ship was built by "Wells, Thames", DJA has referenced the Greenland dock, possibly because of this reference and another in the NARRATIVE & THE LADIES MAGAZINE. Captain Roger Abbott who is carrying out research into EIC shipbuilding is sure it was built by Wells.



4 – References to the People on Board

The Ship's Company:

A complete list of those onboard the *Halsewell* when she was wrecked has never come to light, all the books and papers went down with the ship. It is estimated that there were 160 - 170 seamen & soldiers.

The list that follows comes from " A Circumstantial Narrative of the Loss of the '*Halsewell*' (East Indiaman) Capt Richard Pierce". See NARRATIVE

The key crew members are as follows:

Richard <u>Pierce</u>	Captain (Commander)	Drowned
Thomas <u>Burston</u> Jnr (son of one of the owners)	Chief Mate	Drowned
Henry <u>Meriton</u>	Second Mate	Saved
John <u>Rogers</u>	Third Mate	Saved
Henry <u>Pilcher</u>	Fourth Mate	Drowned
William <u>Larkins</u>	Fifth Mate	Drowned
James <u>Brimer</u>	Supernumerary ditto	Drowned
John Daniel	Sixth Mate	Drowned
Thomas Clothier	Surgeon	Drowned
Richard Fowler	Purser	Drowned
----- McCoy	Surgeon's Mate	Drowned
----- Falconer	Ditto	Drowned
William Rayner	Purser's Assistant	Drowned
Duncan McDougal	Midshipman	Saved
----- <u>McManus</u>	Ditto	Saved
James Humphries	Ditto	Drowned
William Humphries	Ditto	Drowned
Thomas Jeane	Ditto	Drowned
Charles <u>Templer</u>	Youths under the care of the Captain and other officers, but acting as Midshipmen	All Drowned
Charles <u>Webber</u>		
William Cowley		
Thomas <u>Miller</u>		

James Welch	Gunner	Saved
Daniel Frazer	Boatswain	Saved
John Harrison	Sail Maker	Saved
Edward Hart	Gunner's Mate	Saved
Jacob Murray	Gunner's Mate	Saved
Thomas Barnaby	Boatswain Mate	Saved
Benjamin Barclay	Quarter-master	Saved
James Thompson	Quarter-master	Saved
Andrew West	Quarter-master	Saved
Gilbert Ogilvie	Quarter-master	Saved
Joseph Jackson	Quarter-master	Saved
Jonathon Moreton	Quarter-master	Drowned
Thomas Firth	Captain's Steward	Drowned
George Wilson	Ship's Steward	Drowned
James Jackson	Carpenter's Mate	Saved
William Fleet	Caulker's Mate	Saved
James Turner	Cooper	Saved

The Passengers:

Miss Elizabeth Pierce	Daughter of Capt. Pierce
Miss <u>Mary-Ann Pierce</u>	Daughter of Capt. Pierce
Miss Ann <u>Paul</u>	Niece of Capt. Pierce
Miss Mary <u>Paul</u>	Niece of Capt. Pierce
Miss Mary Haggard	Visiting her brother in Madras
Miss Elizabeth <u>Blackburn</u>	Daughter of another East India Captain
Miss Ann Mansell	Returning to Madras
Mr. <u>Schultz</u>	Returning to India to fetch his 'fortune'!

Seamen listed in contemporary documents as saved:

Robert Pierce	Cook [A]
Richard Tupman	Seaman
Thomas Morgan	Seaman
John Lock	Seaman
Timothy Forster	Seaman
George Woodgate	Seaman
Andrew Anderson	Seaman
John Morris	Seaman
George Harris	Seaman
William Viccary	Seaman
John Cowndon	Seaman
Robert Millar	Seaman
David Ansley	Seaman
William Thomson	Seaman
George Sunderland	Seaman
Jonathon Rogers	Seaman
Nathan Mingies	Seaman
John Price	Seaman
John Love	Seaman
Thomas Brooks	Seaman
Solomon Bevans	Seaman
Michael Bevans	Seaman
Isaac Holland	Seaman
Robert Humphries	Seaman
Richard Berry	Seaman
John White	Seaman
Peter Ross	Seaman
Thomas White	Seaman
John Anderson	Seaman
George Russell	Seaman
Robert Roberts	Seaman
William Evans	Seaman
James Flendall	Seaman
George Powdrill	Seaman

Soldiers listed in contemporary documents as saved: [B]

John Fowkes	Soldier
Joshua Hawkins	Soldier
William Gapon	Soldier Note- <u>[C]</u>
James Rowley	Soldier
Richard Strover	Soldier
Thomas Jones	Soldier
Robert Daniel	Soldier
William Spraggs	Soldier
Thomas Eastman	Soldier
William Clarke	Soldier Note- <u>[C]</u>
William Rickies	Soldier Note- <u>[C]</u>
John Morse	Soldier
Celeb Austen	Soldier
Joseph Watson	Soldier
Thomas Shaftoe	Soldier Note- <u>[C]</u>
John Todd	Soldier
William Johnston	Soldier
Richard Reeves	Soldier
Philip Smith	Soldier
Patrick Ganetty	Soldier
Benjamin Morris	Soldier
Thomas Sanders	Soldier
James Shield	Soldier
John White	Soldier
William Trenton	Soldier

The HAMPSHIRE CHRONICLE reported;

"Upwards of 73 lascars were on board the Halsewell outward bound East Indiaman, Captain Pierce, who were all lost."

These lascars, woman travelling with their soldier husbands and the 'Blacks' mentioned in the narrative were unlikely to be included in any of the survivor lists and, if found would have ended up in the mass graves at Seacombe Bottom.

Of Interest:

Précis of the Proceedings at the Old Bailey, Ref: t17861025-33, Oct 25th 1786. [D]

"STEPHEN NEWMAN was indicted for burglariously and feloniously breaking and entering the dwelling house of Joseph Banfield , about the hour of seven in the night, on the 4th day of October, and burglariously stealing therein, one iron japan tea tray, value 8 s. his property

PRISONER'S DEFENCE.

I went down to Blackwall to go out in the King George Indiaman ; I am a gunsmith by trade, and have a wife and three children; I was going to India; I have not been able to work since I was cast away in the Halsewell East Indiaman; I heard the gentlewoman crying stop thief; I said what is the matter; I run after him, and spoke to that good man; she came up and gave charge of me; when she came up, says she, I cannot be positive whether that is the man or no; I spoke to her first, and asked her what was the matter.

Prisoner. My friends are all at Plymouth; I have a wife and three children in the yard.

Found: GUILTY, but not of the burglary.

Whipped, and confined twelve months in the House of Correction.

Tried by the second Middlesex Jury before Mr. Baron EYRE."

Notes:

[A] - The Cook has been added here. He does not appear on the list of those saved in the NARRATIVE, however it is the Cook that apparently made it to the cliff top with James Thompson the Quarter Master?

[B] - See the also the hundred or so TROOPS, mustered on board the *Halsewell*, on the 24th December 1785 at Gravesend.

[C] - Soldiers not mentioned on the list above. TROOPS.

[D] - Steven Newman is not mentioned in the lists here! Question is, was he telling the truth?



Ship's Officers:

CAPTAIN RICHARD PIERCE - Commander of the *HALSEWELL*
captain-pierce2.jpg (206187 bytes) BORN 1726, MARRIED MARY BURSTON,
25th SEPTEMBER 1767 @ ST. DUNSTAN, LONDON.

1762 - 1763, 3rd Mate on the the *HORSENDEN*, 499 tons to China - Owner John Durand, Captain William Marter. Sailed 25th May, 1762 to 14th July 1763.

1764 - 1765, 2nd Mate on the *PACIFIC* 499 tons for 1 voyage to Coast and Bay - Sailed for the ports 14th April 1765.

1767 - 1768, *EARL OF ASHBURNAM*, 499 tons, Coast & China, Richard Pierce Captain, Sailed ports 18th January 1767 to 26th July, 1770.

1772 to 1773, *EARL OF ASHBURNAM*, 499 tons, Owner John Durand, Richard Pierce Captain.
Sailed ports 16th January - Downs 25th January 1773.

1778 - 1779, Commander of the *HALSEWELL*, 758 tons (taken up for the season, for 1 voyage to Coast and China - Husband Thomas Burston

1st Mate John Easterbrook.
2nd Mate Joseph Carnoult.
3rd Mate Thomas Burston Jnr.

Sailed for the ports 7th March, 1779 returned to her moorings at the Downs, 17th October 1781.

1782 - 1783, Commander of the *HALSEWELL*, 758 tons (taken up for 2 voyages to the Coast and Bay (the Coast of Coromandel and the Bay of Bengal.)
Husband: Thomas Burston.

1st Mate Thomas Burston Jnr.
2nd Mate Henry Meriton.
3rd Mate John Rogers.

Set sail 11th March 1783, returning to her moorings on the 28th August 1784.

1785 - 1786. The *HALSEWELL*, 758 tons was taken up for 1 voyage to Coast and Bay. Owner, Peter Esdaile Esq. Note: Thomas Burston the principle owner died and was buried 14th May 1785.

1st officer Thomas Burston Jnr.

2nd Mate Henry Meriton.

3rd Mate John Rogers.

Set sail on the from the Downs 1st January 1786.

Lost at Seacombe 6th January 1786.

Note: Captain Pierce's son Thomas born in 1776, followed his father footsteps. He is recorded as third mate on a voyage to Bombay & China in 1795, (19 years old). In 1798 he sailed as 2nd mate again to Bombay & China. In 1800 he was sworn in as a Commander. [1]

His salary details (Commander) are recorded for the Voyage ending 24/12/1782:

Impress paid: £20.00.00

Greenwich Hospital Duty: £00.12.01

Balance paid himself: £196.01.03

Total: £216.13.04

Poplar Hospital: £2.14.02

Purserage: £00.00.00

Effects: £00.00.00

Total: £193.01.03

A second voyage is recorded as follows:

Commander Richard Pierce – Discharged 14/10/1784. By 21 months 20 days wages @£10 per month - £216.13.06

The Pierce family lived at Walnut-Tree House, Kingston-Upon-Thames.

THOMAS BURSTAN JNR – First Mate.

Known voyages:

1st voyage to India in 1771 in the *EARL of ASHBURNHAM* to Madras and China as Captains Steward.

2nd voyage to India in 1773 in the *TRUE BRITON* to Madras and China as Midshipman.

3rd voyage to India in 1775 in the *ROYAL HENRY* as Midshipman. 1 year 8 months.

4th voyage to India in 1778 in the *HALSEWELL* to Coast and China as 3rd Mate.

5th voyage to India in 1782, 2nd Mate of the *HALSEWELL*, 28 years of age.

6th voyage to India, 1st Mate of the *HALSEWELL*, died 6th Feb. 1786.

His salary details (Commander) are recorded for the Voyage ending 24/12/1782:

Impress paid: £10.00.00

Greenwich Hospital Duty: £00.12.01

Balance paid himself: £97.14.07

Total: £108.06.08

Poplar Hospital: £1.07.01

Purserage: £00.00.00

Effects: £00.00.00

HENRY MERITON – Second Mate

In several ships in the West India trade

Brig '*JOHN & RICHARD*'

Gunner 1 year.

Second Mate, 2 years.

First Mate, 1 year.

Master, 4 years.

PIGOT, 758 tons, owned by Charles Fonlis Esq., season 1782 to 1783 - To Coast & Bay

Captain Robert Morgan.

Third Mate Henry Meriton. (23 or 24 years of age)

(Note: Forth Mate John Rogers)

Sailed for the Ports 11th March 1783 arriving back at the Downs 9th October, 1785. Reports at the time, and according to the newspapers, the *PIGOT* was wrecked in 1785. Henry Meriton & John Rogers survived and enlisted with the *HALSEWELL*.

After the *HALSEWELL* wreck:

April, 1786, *BRIDGEWATER* as 1st Mate. (John Rogers also signed on)
ALBION, East Indiaman, 961 tons, 1790 to 1791, sailed from Torbay 29th Jan 1791, returned 16th May 1792. Captain William Parker, 1st Mate Henry Meriton.
EXETER, East Indiaman, 1200 tons, season 1792 to 1793, sailed 5th April 1793, returned 10th September 1794, 1st Mate Henry Meriton.
EXETER, East Indiaman, 1200 tons, season 1794 to 1795, sailed 24th May, returned 28th July 1797. Captain Lestock Wilson, 1st Mate Henry Meriton.
EXETER, East Indiaman, 1200 tons, season 1797 to 1798, sailed 17th Feb 1798, returned 1st August 1799. Captain Lestock Wilson, 1st Mate Henry Meriton.
Bombay and China.
EXETER, East Indiaman, 1200 tons, season 1799 to 1800, sailed 17th Feb 1798, returned 1st August 1799. Captain Lestock Wilson, 1st Mate Henry Meriton.
Henry was still 1st Mate probably because he lacked the necessary influence and money. In 1799, however, by-laws prohibiting the sale of commands along with the introduction of free and open competition in hiring of ships, were reintroduced and became part of the law of the land.

In 1800, his 5th voyage in the *EXETER*, he finally became Captain. [2]. In September 1803 the *EXETER* arrived in Chinese waters and eventually anchored off Danes Island with several other Company ships. These ships included the '*EARL OF ABERGAVENNY*' which was later wrecked at Weymouth, Dorset, a few miles west of where the '*HALSEWELL*' was wrecked at Peverel Point. The *EXETER* and the '*EARL OF ABERGAVENNY*' took part in the famous battle of Polu Auro, 8th February, 1804.



Medal struck in the honour of the EIC Ships.

1825 - Became Governor General of Bombay.

Henry Meritton's Sword

Auction June 2012



“A CASED LLOYDS PATRIOTIC FUND SWORD OF £50 TYPE PRESENTED TO CAPTAIN HENRY MERITON OF THE HONOURABLE EAST INDIA COMPANY'S SHIP EXETER, 1804, BY RICHARD TEED, SWORD CUTLER, LANCASTER COURT, STRAND - with reblued, curved, fullered blade (cleaned, no decoration visible), gilt-brass hilt comprising quillons formed as fasces, langets applied with Naval trophies, knuckle-guard formed as Hercules' club entwined by a serpent and the back-piece as the pelt of the Nemean Lion; finely chequered ivory grip secured at the base by a laurel wreath, in its original, gilt-brass-mounted fishskin-covered wooden scabbard, the mounts cast and chased with Classical scenes including Hercules and the Nemean Lion and Hercules and the Lernean Hydra, the locket inscribed 'Exeter', with belt and slings, in a Lloyds fitted mahogany case lined with blue velvet, the lid fitted with brass carrying handle and plaque, the latter recently engraved 'From the Patriotic Fund, Lloyds London to H. Meriton Esqr H.E.I.Co's Ship Exeter 1804', the interior with label including the maker's name, 76.8cm; 30 1/8in blade.”

This sword is one of fifteen Patriotic Fund swords of £50 value awarded to the ships' captains of the East India Company's 'China Fleet' involved in the celebrated engagement with the French of 15th February 1804 now known as 'Dance's Action'. All fifteen of these swords have the name of the relevant ship engraved in a scroll on the offside of the upper part of their scabbards. This feature, unique to the Fund's £50 swords for 'Dance's Action', enables this sword to be confidently associated with Captain Henry Meriton, captain of the Indiaman *EXETER* on that famous occasion - a sea battle memorably fictionalised by Patrick O'Brian in chapter nine of his 'Jack Aubrey' novel *H.M.S. Surprise* (London, 1973).

The 'China Fleet' of Dance's Action comprised sixteen homeward-bound Indiamen laden with cargo worth an estimated £8 million and eleven 'country ships' sailing from China to India. It sailed without naval escort, being reliant upon the size of the Indiamen - easily mistaken at a distance for British 64- or even 74-gun warships - and the pugnacious spirit of their captains to fight off a French force known to be lurking in wait for them. The fleet and its predators, a squadron commanded by the French admiral Linois, met off Pulo Aor at the entrance to the Malacca Straits late on 14th February 1804. The fleet's commodore, Captain Nathaniel Dance (1748-1827), was advised by some Royal Naval officer-passengers and, when the French were sighted, adopted tactics that were typical of the Royal Navy in order to delude Linois into thinking that he had met a powerful naval force and not a convoy of armed merchantmen: as night fell, he sent the country ships inshore and formed line of battle. The following morning, three of Dance's ships hoisted blue ensigns and pennants - a tactic intended to reinforce the impression that they were line-of-battle ships of the Royal Navy - and the line stood on for the mouth of the Malacca Straits. At this, Linois signalled his ships to attack the rear of the line. Dance's riposte was to signal his ships to tack in succession, bear down upon the French and engage them - not a manoeuvre that Linois might have expected from a convoy of merchantmen. The first six Indiamen, led by *ROYAL GEORGE* - the largest of them, approached the French squadron resolutely and in the face of French gunfire, so unnerving Linois by their evident enthusiasm for the fight and threat to surround and overwhelm his ships that he broke off the engagement after forty minutes and before the remaining Indiamen could join it. The Indiamen suffered only one casualty in the action and, after collecting a Royal Naval escort at St Helena, returned safely with their cargo and to enormous popular acclaim. Dance was knighted, lavishly rewarded and pensioned and received a sword of £100 value from the Patriotic Fund; each of his fifteen captains were also rewarded and each received a £50 sword, of which this is one.

Henry Meriton (1762-1826) was born in Rotherhithe and served a seven-year apprenticeship in the brigantine *JOHN AND RICHARD* on the West Indies trade, working his way up from gunner to ship's master, before joining the East India Company's maritime service in 1783. For the next decade, he served on four Indiamen, progressing from 3rd mate to 1st mate and being one of the two survivors from the crew of *HALSEWELL* when she was wrecked off the Isle of Purbeck in 1786. He joined *EXETER* as 1st mate on her maiden voyage in 1793 and made three voyages in her, to Bombay and China and back, before being appointed her captain in 1799.

On his first voyage to China as captain of *EXETER*, Meriton distinguished himself in an action off the Brazilian coast on 4th August 1800 when, under cover of darkness, he captured a French frigate, *MÉDÉE*, that he had pursued and whose captain believed he was menaced by a large British man-of-war. Dance's Action, in which *EXETER* was not actively engaged, took place during his penultimate voyage as captain of that ship. In 1809 he was appointed captain of *CEYLON*, aboard which he was severely wounded and captured during an action in the Indian Ocean on 3rd July 1810, in which a French frigate squadron attacked and seized the greater part of a convoy of Indiamen. Taken to Mauritius, then called Île de France, with his ship, Meriton was released when the island was captured by the British in December 1810; he may have captained the Indiaman *SOVEREIGN* on a voyage in 1813-14. By 1816, Meriton had been appointed Superintendent of Marine and President of the Marine Board in Bombay, positions that he held until early 1826 when he returned home. Meriton died in Greenwich on 7th August 1826.

Note & References:

See also Times Article, *Earl of Abergavenny*

Arms, Armour & Militaria Sale on Wednesday 27th June 2012 - Auction 2012 Literature - Frederick Wilkinson, *Edged Weapons*, 1970, p. 150, illustrated.

Meriton detail: See A. Farrington 1999, p. 536; the same author 1999, pp. 116 & 237-238; and J. Wright 1997, pp. 30-32.

JOHN ROGERS – Third Mate

Born 1753:

1st voyage to India in 1769 in the *HOUGHTON* to Madras and Bengal, Midshipman, 4 years 8 months.

2nd voyage in 1771 in the *GREENWICH* to Madeira, Madras, and Bengal as Midshipman, 1 year 8 months. 3rd voyage in 1773 in the *ROCHFORD* to Bencoolen and China as 5th Mate. 1 year 5 months.

ROYAL CHARLOTTE, 758 tons was taken up by the East India Company for 2 voyages for the season 1777 - 1778, Coast and China.

Captain Joseph Cotton & John Rogers 4th Mate.

Sailed for the ports 20th January 1777. Arrived back at the downs 28th October 1778.

ROYAL CHARLOTTE, 758 tons. Season 1779 - 1780 taken up for three voyages to St. Helena and Bombay.

Captain Joseph Cotton.

1st Mate Joshuar Pryce.

2nd Mate John Rogers.

Sailed out of Torbay on the 3rd April, 1780 and returned to the Downs 24th October 1782.

PIGOT, 758 tons, owned by Charles Fonlis Esq., season 1782 to 1783 - Coast & Bay.

Captain Robert Morgan.

Third Mate Henry Meriton. (23 or 24 years of age).

Forth Mate John Rogers.

(There are notes which may refer to 3 voyages to India in the "*DUKE OF YORK*")

Dalmedia Narrative (*Earl of Abergavenny*, 1805). He is mentioned as being Captain of the '*General Stuart*'.

HENRY PILCHER – Forth Mate

Paid off naval officer, 24 years, lately lieutenant on board the *Scipio* guard ship.

JAMES BRIMER – Supernumery Mate

Ex naval officer, he was serving as a supernumerary mate. He was travelling to Madras where he had relatives who he hoped were in a position of furthering his career.

THOMAS MILLER - Midshipman

Thomas was the son of Edward Miller (Doncaster's famous organist, musician and local historian) who was born in Norwich in 1735. In his teens Edward Miller was something of a musical protégée with a German flute. He became a pupil of Charles Burney who in 1751 was the church organist at Kings Lynn.

Through Burney Edward Miller was introduced to Handel. On February 15th in 1763 Miller married Elizabeth Lee, daughter of a local Barber and Wig-maker. In the 10 years before Elizabeth's death she bore three boys and seven girls, but only one, William Edward Miller reached more than the age of 23. With his wife and children Edward Miller moved to St. Georges House, then known as Church Hill with a rear garden sloping gently down to the river Cheswold. The house had belonged to his wife's father. Before the 19th century the area north east of the parish church was known as Fishergate.

In 1785 his son Thomas, the last survivor of his marriage was drowned at sea aged 15 whilst serving as midshipman on the East India Company's '*Halsewell*'. Just previously, Thomas on a visit home, had carved his initials in glass on a bedroom window at Church Hill – they are apparently still there.

References:

[1] Lords of the East, Jean Sutton, Conway Maritime Press, ISBN 0 85177 786 4

[2] BL OIOC, Log of the Exeter, 1803 to 1804, L/MAR/B/138L-N.



Troops:

List of troops for the *HALSEWELL* Captain Richard Pierce for Bengal - [1]

Information discovered by Ed Cumming & James Derriman in the British Library archives:

NAMES	COUNTRY	OCCUPATION	AGE	HEIGHT	REMARKS	FATE
James Hedgcock	Kent	Labourer	19	5'-5"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
Lion Wallis	Rutland	Labourer	18	5'-4"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
John Essea?	Warwick	Labourer	19	5'-4"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
Edmund Barry	Cork	Labourer	22	5'-6"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
James Burnage	Worcester	Saw Maker	21	5'-8"	Received on board 19 Decs 1785 from Sick Quarters? <i>Sullivan</i>	
William White	Hants	Labourer	24	5'-7"	Received on board 29 Nov 1785. S.Q. (Sick Quarters) 16 Decs sent out <i>Walpole</i> 21 Jany 86	
William Pooley	Essex	Labourer	21	5'-6"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
William Japin	Middlesex	Labourer	17	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
Mick Shais ?	Limerick	Labourer	16	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
Alex Buckie	Scotland	Labourer	24	5'-11"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
William Johnston	Wales	Labourer	18	5'-9"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Saved
Simon Tilly	Somerset	Cordwainer	18	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
John Folkes or Fowkes	Middlesex	Lighterman	18	5'-5"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Saved
Richard Reeves	Middlesex	Labourer	18	5'-5"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Saved
William Sprag or Spaggs	Hants	Labourer	16	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Saved

Richard Smith	Warwick	Labourer	18	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
John Leslie	Sunderland?	Labourer	19	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
Robert Rickets	Devon	Labourer	16	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
Thomas May	Devon	Labourer	16	5'-4"	Sent to Sick Quarters 24? sent out to the <i>Hillsborough</i> 8 Feby 1786	
William Snow	Somerset	Labourer	22	5'-8"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
William Tranton or Trenton	Stafford	Labourer	19	5'-6"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Saved
James Spencer	Surry	Labourer	17	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
Edward Connor	Gloucester	Taylor	16	5'-4"	Received on board 29 November 1795. S.Q.(Sick Quarters) 12 Dec 1785 sent to <i>Valentine</i> 8 Jany 86??(S 2 may be 'Sick Quarters'?)	
Joseph Murray	America	Cordwainer	18	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
Thomas Lock	Kent	Labourer	21	5'-7"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
Robert Caineson	Edinburgh	Labourer	26	5'-8"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
John Downes	Ireland	Labourer	19	5'-4"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
? Jacob	Kent	Labourer	31	5'-6"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
Jacob Cooper	Middlesex	Labourer	20	5'-6"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
Janus Wade	Suffork	Labourer	17	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
Micheal Murphy	Ireland	Cardmaker?	19	5'-6"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
John Howse [A]	Norfolk	Labourer	19	5'-4"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	May have been saved
James Durant	Suffolk	Labourer	21	5'-7"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned

Richard Clifton	Lincoln	Labourer	19	5'-6"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
Thomas Jackson	Cambridge	Labourer	19	5'-5"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
Thomas Harman	Dublin	Taylor	24	5'-7"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
William Easton	Middlesex	Labourer	16	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
John Meason	Cornwall	Labourer	19	5'-8"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
William Rigge	Middlesex	Labourer	18	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
Samuel Masnigaib ?	Cambridge	Labourer	16	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
William Carter	Lancashire	Labourer	22	5'-6"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
Henry Townsend	Berks	Labourer	30	5'-8"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
William Baker	Herts	Labourer	25	5'-10"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
John Wyatt [B]	Devon	Presser?	16	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	May have been saved
John Sizemon	Worcester	Baker	18	5'-4"	Private, received onboard 29 Nov 1785	Assumed drowned
John Watts	Sheffield	Labourer	30	5'-7"	Run 29 Dec 1785 (i.e. deserted)	
James Rowley	Lye	Labourer	29	5'-8"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Saved
James Johnson	America	Labourer	26	5'-7"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
John Cox	Hants	Labourer	17	5'-4"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
Thomas Jones	Lincoln	Labourer	23	5'-8"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Saved
John Jones	Herts	Labourer	19	5'-4"	Received on board 1st December 1795. Sent to S.Q (Sick Quarters) 13 Dec? sent on <i>Phoenix</i> 9 Jany? removed? to the <i>Walpole</i> 10 Jany	
Caleb Austin	American	Labourer	21	5'-11"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Saved

John Dawson	Cumberland	Labourer	30	5'-10"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
Edward Ellery?	Hants	Labourer	17	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Saved
John Dunn	Middlesex	Labourer	18	5'-4"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
John Todd	York	Labourer	18	5'-5"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
Joseph King	Hants	Labourer	18	5'-4"	Received on board 1st December 1795. Run 29 Dec 1785 (i.e. deserted)	
James Gorman	Ireland	Labourer	17	5'-5"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
Watkin Morris	Middlesex	Labourer	16	5'-4"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
Henry Shafton	Essex?	Sawyer?	22	5'-6"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
John Witford	Worcester	Labourer	16	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
Thomas Herriman	York	Taylor	19	5'-5"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
James Andrews?	Worcester	Labourer	18	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
George Haynes	Middlesex	Labourer	16	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
James Douglas	Edinburgh	Labourer	17	5'-6"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
Thomas Saunders	London	Weaver	20	5'-7"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Saved
John Sinddall?	Cambridge	Labourer	22	5'-11"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
Mathew Mahoney	Ireland	Labourer	26	5'-7"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
Robert Daniel	Middlesex	Blacksmith	22	5'-7"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Saved
Thomas Ruffeler	Surry	Labourer	18	5'-4"	Received on board 1st December 1795. S.Q (Sick Quarters) 22 Dec sent out <i>Phoenix</i> 9 Jany removed to the <i>Walpole</i> 20 Jany?	
John Sturley?	Norfolk	Butcher	18	5'-5"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned

John Kirby	Herts	Labourer	25	5'-9"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
Thomas Eastman	Wilts	Labourer	20	5'-6"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Saved
Thomas Arnold?	America	Labourer	19	5'-6"	Received on board 1st December 1795. Run 29 Dec 1785 (i.e. deserted)	
Thomas Asley?	Dublin	Pinmaker?	19	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
John Black	Middlesex	Buckle-maker	19	5'-5"	Received on board 1st December 1795. Discharged 1 Dec 1785	
John Williams	Lanarkshire?	Labourer	18	5'-3"	Received on board 1st December 1795. S.Q (Sick Quarters) 22 Dec ^r sent out <i>Hillsborough</i> 3 Feby?	
William Black	Ireland	Weaver	24	5'-6"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
James Shields or Shield	Down?	Labourer	19	5'-4"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Saved
John Angel	Herts	Labourer	16	5'-5"	Received on board 1st December 1795. S.Q? (Sick Quarters) 22 Dec sent out <i>Pheonix</i> 9 Jany removed to the <i>Walpole</i> the 10 Jany	
Iain ? Woodcock	Gloucester	Labourer	30	5'-8"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
Joseph Thomas	Middlesex	Labourer	27	5'-6"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
George Hancock	Hants	Taylor	27	5'-7"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
Thomas White	Ireland	Labourer	30	5'-8"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
Andrew Johnson	Scotland	Labourer	19	5'-5"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
Richard Stovell or Stover	Surry	Labourer	26	5'-6"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Saved
John Streeter?	Middlesex	Bricklayer	24	5'-10"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned

? Mathews	Ireland	Hairdresser?	19	5'-5"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
Joseph Watson	Kent	Labourer	19	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Saved
Pat Giraghty or Ganetty	Ireland	Labourer	20	5'-6"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Saved
William Varnell	Herts	Labourer	28	5'-6"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
James Thompson	Northumberland	Taylor	32	5'-6"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
Joshua Hawkins	Middlesex	Labourer	18	5'-5"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Saved
Moses Langford	Sussex	Labourer	16	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
Benjamin Morris	Herts	Labourer	19	5'-4"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Saved
Joseph Allen	Bucks	Labourer	18	5'-6"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
Pat Ryan	Dublin	Corporal	26	5'-5"	Captain of Infantry, received onboard 3 Dec 1785. Applied 25 Nov. pd £4.10 & 13/8???	Assumed drowned
Thomas Perryman	Somerset	Sergeant	31	5'-5"	Sergeant of Infantry, received onboard 17 Dec 1785. pd £4.10 & 13/8 in lieu Bed???	Assumed drowned
Philip Smith	London	Labourer	18	5'-3"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Saved
Richard Barnes	Dorking, Surry	Hatter?	19	5'-5"	Private, received onboard 1 Dec 1785	Assumed drowned
William Pink	Lincoln	Labourer	17	5'-3"	Received on board 29 Nov. Run 29 Dec. 1785 (i.e. deserted)	
John Wilkinson	Herts	Labourer	18	5'-5"	Private, received onboard 19 Dec 1785 from S.Q. (Sick Quarters) <i>Sullivan?</i>	Assumed drowned
David Laidlor	Twedale	Soldier	27	5'-10"	Matross, received onboard 12 Dec 1785. paid in lieu ?? of Bed £2.5.6	Assumed drowned

Mustered on board the *Halsewell*, the 24th December 1785 at Gravesend in the presence of;

G. Dominicus of the East India House
George Cooper Surgeon at Gravesend
James Goggan of The East India House

Notes:

[A] - There was a John Morse reported saved. May be a spelling error or may be a soldier from King's troops.

[B] - There was a John White reported saved. May be a spelling error or may be a soldier from King's troops.

? - Spelling or word(s) uncertain.

Some other words like 'Surry' are spelt as written in the document

There are numbers in the margin of the document indicating that there are 103 entries less 8 discharged to other ships leaving 95.

Ships mentioned in the muster. Information from ref. [2]

WALPOLE 1778-1797, 758 tons

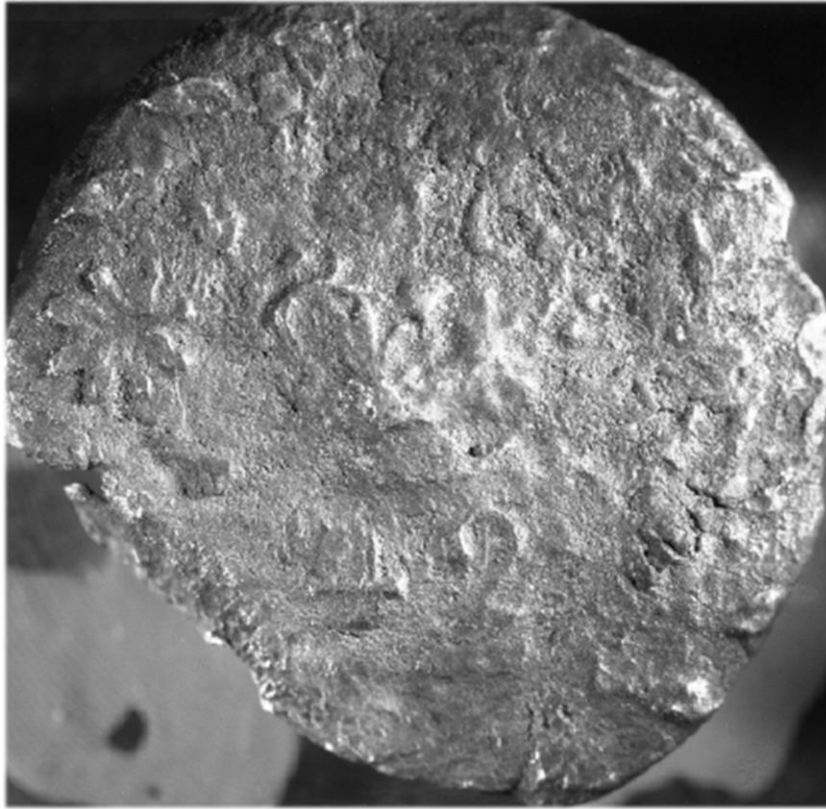
HILLSBOROUGH 1785-1796, 764 tons

SULIVAN 1782-1796, 755 tons

VALENTINE 1780-1793, 790 tons

PHOENIX 1785-1799, 800 tons

King's Troops:



[Photograph David Allen]

The evidence of King's troops comes from a button from the 42nd Royal Highland, Regiment of Foot and an undated letter in the BL-OIOC archives:

"From M. Lewis Esq., of the War Office, a letter requesting Thomas Morton to move the Court of Directors to provide room on one of the Company's ships bound for Bengal for clothing for the 2nd Battalion 42nd Regiment replacing that lost on the *Halsewell*, and for passages for a Captain and four ensigns of the 2nd Battalion."

There are four soldiers reported saved which do not appear on the EIC muster list [See People Aboard]. These are William Gapon, William Clarke, William Rickies & Thomas Shaftoe. These may be the soldiers from King's troops mentioned above.

Look closely at the photograph of the button and you can just make out the '42' a crown above and a star, flower or leaf? to the left.

References:

[1] - BL-OIOC, Ref L/MIL//9/91.

[2] - Sutton, Jean: *Lords of the East; The East India Company and its Ships*. Conway Maritime Press, London, 1981. ISBN 0 85177 1696. Second Edition, 2001.



5 – Contemporary Poems

Poems were very popular at this time, the first was published very close to the event, and the second three years later to commemorate a visit to the wreck site by the Royal Family. In the Hampshire Chronicle of the 1st May 1786 there is a very interesting notice advertising a poem by The Rev. E. Thomas:

(A copy has yet to come to light!)

SHIPWRECK

The Melancholy Fate of the *HALSEWELL*
EAST INDIAMAN, lately lost
(with the Captain, passengers, and most of the crew)
on the Dorsetshire Coast is a
proof of the uncertainty of all transitory enjoyments.

A POEM on that distressful event, is just published, with very large and copious NOTES, giving a particular and authentic account of the Shipwreck, from the sailing of the Vessel, January the 1st, 1786, to its final destruction on the morning of the 6th of the same month; and the dreadful sufferings of those of the crew, who escaped that fatal catastrophe, by getting upon the rocks; together with their miraculous deliverance from that scene of horror.

Printed in quarto, price ONE SHILLING, and may be had of the printer, and all the distributors and carriers of this Paper

Be careful to ask for
The Rev. E. THOMAS'S POEM
ENTITLED,
The Shipwreck of the *Halsewell* EAST INDIAMAN,
Dedicated to the Honourable Directors of the East India Company.



The SHIPWRECK.

Occasioned by the loss of the *Halsewell* Indiaman.

Written by Mr. BIRCH

Quis talia fando, Temperet a lachrymis? ----- Virg.

The sorrow light, and common is the sigh,
When heroes perish, or when Monarchs die,
Tears flow obedient to the Court's command,
And servile fashion fables all the land:
The heart, a stranger to the outward show,
Forgets not with its wonted joy to glow.
Far otherwise - is public sorrow seen,
When woes domestic sadden all the scene!
The spreading grief assumes no gloomy vest,
Its house of mourning is each feeling breast.
With sighs the desolating tale we hear,
And ev'ry cheek is moisten'd with tear;
Tears of high price! That, spite of manhood, start,
And sighs that vibrate all along the heart!
Thy fate! O gallant Pierce! Where'er 'tis known,
Each child of sympathy shall make its own,
Fame's choicest meed the dismal tail attend,
And sprigs of laurel with the cypress blend.
And equal fate, not time itself can show,
Of mighty ruin and extended woe!
Destructive deep! Whose captivating calm
Allures the bark with more than syren's charm;
With plenty stor'd, the cheerful spreads the sail,
And vainly trusts to the deceitful gale.
Then sudden howls thy fury from afar,
And midnight tempests all thy caverns tear:
The climbing billows mock the seaman's toil,
And burst relentless on the sinking spoil.
Dismal the trophies that thy conquest wears,
The sighs of friendship, and the orphan's tears,
The weeds of windows, and to glut thy rage,
The hoary honour pluck'd from childless age!
But these are common to thy awful state,
Alas! New horrors on thy trident wait!
What piercing shrieks rides on thy midnight blast,
And groans that deeply murmur, oh the coast!
Lo! Anxious seraphs hover o'er the deep,
The Tritons tremble, and the Naiads weep!

The hardy veteran, to his fate resign'd,
In vain collects the firmness of his mind:
His blood flows back at the remembrance wild,
Of widow'd comfort, and of orphan'd child.
Yet oh! With less composure can he bear
The fruitless cries of beauty in despair!
Doom'd with the keenest anguish to expire,
The daughters, helpless, grasp their helpless sire!
But thou, Supreme! Whose undivided sway,
Not man alone, but earth and seas obey;
Whose faithful providence, in unseen storm,
Still points the whirlwind, and directs the storm!
If deeply agoniz'd with mental pain,
Forgive the mourner that shall dare complain;
Soothe the wild workings of afflictions breast,
And teach our wishes that thy will is best.



POEM No. 2 - Western County Magazine

The wreck site was viewed from the cliff top above by the Royal Family in 1789.
To commemorate that important and certainly unusual event, a poem was written and published in the Western County Magazine. October 1789.

*On their MAJESTIES and the Princesses
view the spot where the
HALSEWELL was wrecked*

*See how, with sudden sympathy oppress
Melts ev'ry eye, and beats each Royal breast
As yon rude rocks tremendous great the view,
And active fancy paints the scene anew -
That dreadful scene, which hapless Pierce survey'd
Thro' the dun horrors of th' incumbent shade!
Here daughters, such as these, on bended knees,
Invok'd in vain that God who rules the seas;
Whilst the sad sire appall'd - despairing stood,
To hear the howling winds and dashing flood!
Struck with that thought again the salt tears flow,
And Britain's Sovereign joins the gush of woe.*

*Ye glorious fav'r'ites of an happy isle,
Whom heaven regards with an indulgent smile,
Long may you live t'adorn the sacred throne,
And weep for others' sorrows - not your own.*

Weymouth W M. HOLLOWAY

Note:

While still a young man, William Holloway left his grandmother's home and care to settle in Weymouth. He took up an apprenticeship with a local printer, eventually being put in charge of the printing shop attached to Weymouth's Circulating and Musical Library owned by the obese larger-than-life public figure of John Love. It is thought that from an early age William had already begun to write verse, though his first published work, a eulogy on the local *Halsewell* shipwreck disaster, did not appear until 1788, when he would have been about 37. A small book of verse under the title of *The Cottager* appeared the following year, these early works being published by his employer John Love.



POEM No. 3 - Monody on the Death of Captain Pierce [1]

How long with raging winds and seas he fought,
Suggesting all that human prudence ought!
And when at last, of ev'ry human hope bereft,
Th'affrighted crew their sinking vessel left,
"Can ought be done," he kindly ask'd, "to save
"These dear companions from the briny wave?"
Ah, hapless parent! who can pain such woe!
"They're doom'd to sink, deep in the gulph below."
At that dread moment, to his feeling breast,
In one paternal sad embrace, he prest
The lovely objects of his fondest care,
And, scorning life, resolved their fate to share.*

[* *Resolv'd their fate to share*] That generous turn of mind, which so amiably distinguished Capt. Pierce's character, received its fullest illustration in the last great act of his life; when amidst a scene of fate, ever to be deplored, he seemed to have suppress'd the almost resistless impulse of nature, which so powerfully directs to self preservation, and felt only for his friends. He appears to have known no anxiety, but for their safety! Finding there remained no possibility of saving their lives, despised every effort to preserve his own; and generously resolved to perish with them. It was then that, in circumstances too dreadful to be conceived, he gave a loose to the finest feelings of humanity, and fell - a glorious sacrifice to Paternal Tenderness.



POEM No. 4

The section quoted is from a much longer section in a poem called Lewsdon Hill (1788) by the Rev. William Crowe (1745 - 1829) Rector of Alton Barnes in Wiltshire. [2] & Public Orator of Oxford

Text below is from the 1827 edition.

Read by Wordsworth c. Nov-Dec 1795 while living at Racedown, Dorset, near Lewesdon Hill.

See how the Sun, here clouded, afar off
Pours down the golden radiance of his light
Upon the enridged sea; where the black ship
Sails on the phosphor-seeming waves. So fair,
But falsely-flattering, was yon surface calm,
When forth for India sail'd, in evil time,
That Vessel, whose disastrous fate, when told,
Fill'd every breast with horror, and each eye
With piteous tears, so cruel was the loss.
Methinks I see her, as, by the wintry storm
Shatter'd and driven along past yonder Isle,
She strove, her latest hope, by strength or art,
To gain the port within it, or at worst
To shun that harbourless and hollow coast
From Portland eastward to the Promontory,
Where still St. Alban's high built chapel stands.
But art nor strength avail her -- on she drives,
In storm and darkness to the fatal coast:
And there 'mong rocks and high-o'erhanging cliffs
Dash'd piteously, with all her precious freight
Was lost, by Neptune's wild and foamy jaws
Swallow'd up quick! The richliest-laden ship
Of spicy Ternate, or that Annual, sent
To the Philippines o'er the Southern main
From Acapulco, carrying massy gold,
Were poor to this; -- freighted with hopeful Youth,
And Beauty, and high Courage undismayed
By mortal terrors, and paternal Love
Strong, and unconquerable even in death --
Alas, they perish'd all, all in one hour!



POEM No. 5

On The Wreck Of The *Halsewell* by Henry James Pye

Now the loud winds with angry pinions sweep
The laboring bosom of the stormy deep,
The face of day o'erspread by vapors scowls,
And 'mid the shrowds the increasing tempest howls,
O'er the tall mast the giant surges rise,
And a new Chaos mingles earth and skies;
Bold even in danger's face, the naval train
Exert their force, and try their art in vain;
Despair and Death on all their efforts lower,
And the loud tempest mocks their feeble power.
Large and more large the threatening rocks appear,
And every billow brings their fate more near.—
Steep Purbeck's chalky cliffs, whose welcome sight
So oft have fill'd the bosom with delight,
When, as from hostile coasts and distant skies
The wave-worn mariner, returning, spies
Their well-known summits with exulting eyes,
Renews each scene with thoughts domestic dear,
And wets the cheek with joy's o'er raptur'd tear,
Now in the dreadful garb of terror dress'd
Freeze life's warm tide, and chill the shuddering breast;
And the lov'd shore that life, that freedom gave,
Now sinks her sons beneath the whelming wave.

So Jason's infant race, a suppliant train,
Around their frantic mother cling in vain,
Hang on the parent bosom that supplied
Their earliest nurture with it's milky tide;
On all their pangs she smiles with savage joy,
And her own hands her hated race destroy.
Full on the shore the giddy vessel drives,
And the rude shock her solid timbers rives,
The lashing wave her batter'd planks divides,
And o'er her deck the sea resistless rides.—
Say shall no voice in pitying strains relate
The hardy mariner's untimely fate,
Who oft Britannia's streaming flag unfurl'd
To the wild inmates of the Southern world,

Or with bold prow the hostile fleet explor'd
When louder than the surge the battle roar'd?
Yes! yes! to them the sorrowing Muse shall pay
The votive tribute of a mournful lay:
Yet while she pours the unavailing tear
Some transient gleams the night of horror chear.
For scenes that frequent shapes of Death impart
Arm the firm breast, and steel the manly heart;
And he who oft has seen his ghastly form
Glare in the fight, and thunder in the storm,
Will with bold arm his tyrant force engage,
And while he combats mitigates his rage.

Not such the means to check the awful doom
When Youth and Beauty meet the watery tomb:
Where those mild graces partial Nature gave
To sooth the labors of the wise, and brave,
Softened by all that fond assiduous care
Which every bosom gives the young, and fair,
Each kind attention warm affection pays,
The Parent's fondness, and the Lover's praise,
Teach Sensibility's resistless glow
To raise each fear, and double every woe.
Say how shall they, whose eye's averted sight
Shrinks trembling from the phantom of affright,
While Art inventive skreens each lovely form
Or from the sultry ray, or chilling storm;
Say how shall they with gentle bosoms brave
The rushing torrent of the delug'd wave,
Where Death's pale shape in heighten'd terrors dress'd
Strikes icy horror through the firmest breast?

What language can describe, what colors shew,
Each varied form of terror and of woe?—
With pallid features, and dishevell'd hair,
In all the agony of dumb despair,
Here on the deck the wretched victim lies,
And views approaching death with lifted eyes.
Here piercing cries drown'd by the sounding main
Invoke an absent mother's aid in vain.
Here stony fear arrests the laboring breath,
And dread, anticipates the stroke of death.

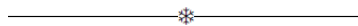
This on the crew her eye attentive throws
To try if hope one distant ray bestows.
And see supreme in sorrow and distress
The wretched sire his trembling daughters press,
Now down his cheeks the streaming torrents roll,
And speak the bitter anguish of his soul;
And now parental care his face beguiles,
And hides his heartfelt pangs in transient smiles,
Throws a faint sunshine o'er the brow of care,
And gilds with hope the horror of despair.—
Heavens!—that soul-piercing shriek!—the conflict's o'er,
Hush'd are their cries, their bosoms beat no more;
Sad, silent, all, save where the wild winds urge
The sullen fury of the heaving surge;
And, floating lifeless, see each beauteous form
Drives a pale course before the ruthless storm.

Even the stern mariner whose doubtful hand
Just grasps the summit of the wish'd for land,
While scarce his thoughts the sense of safety know,
Escap'd from rocks above, and waves below,
Amid the conflict keen of hope and fear
Hears their last cries still vibrate in his ear,
Feels their keen anguish 'midst his dearest strife,
And mourns their sufferings while he pants for life.

Note:

The Wordsworths moved to Racedown in Dorset at the end of September 1795, which is within about three mile's walk from Lewesdon Hill. The poem was also read by Coleridge in 1795.

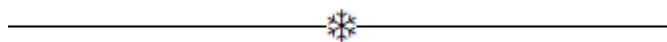
Another interesting link with the Wreck of the *Earl of Abergavenny*.



References:

[1] - British Library, W. Lane, Shelf Mark 11602.e.30(1)

[2] - Text taken from www.arts.ualberta.ca & www.thedorsetpage.com c.2002.



6 – British Library Material

MILITARY ON BOARD THE SHIP *HALSEWELL*, CAPTAIN
RICHARD PIERCE FOR BENGAL - L/MIL/9/91.

CORRESPONDENCE

LETTER 8 (BL OIOC - E/1/78)

Sir.

It is with much concern that I transmit to you for the information of the Court of Directors of the East India Company, the enclosed copy of a Letter received here yesterday morning from the Customs at Poole giving the melancholy account of the loss of the *Halsewell* Indiaman.

I am your most obedient servant ///ules

Customs House, 9th Jan^y 1786.

LETTERS 10 (or 12 received with above?)

Sirs,

We have this moment received from the Officers at Swanage the following melancholy account, that on Tuesday night last, the *Halsewell* outward bound East Indiaman, was entirely lost between St Albans and Durlestone Point, in the Isle of Purbeck within this port, and that no less than One hundred and twenty six persons have lost their lives, amongst whom are the Captain, his Two Daughters and ten other female passengers.

We are:

J. Lander

Custom House Poole, 7th Jan^y 1786, Noon.

LETTER 12

Honourable Sirs,

We have this moment received from the Officers at Swanage the following melancholy account, that on Tuesday night last, the *Halsewell* outward bound East Indiaman, was entirely lost between St Albans and Durlestone Point, in the Isle of Purbeck within this port, and that no less than One hundred and twenty six persons have lost their lives, amongst whom are the Captain, his Two Daughters and ten other female passengers.

No part of the Cargo is salved except a few Boxes, and some other small Packages, which with what other Articles may come on shore, we shall use our utmost endeavours to secure.

We are:

J. Lander

R. H. Weston [1]

Custom ho Poole, 7th Jan^y. 1786, Noon.

[These two letters use basically the same words but letter 10 does not have the R. H. Weston signature and is written in the singular. There is also the extra paragraph in letter 12]

LETTER 13

Extract of letter from the Rev.d Mr. Geo. Ryves Hawker, Rector of Wareham, to Tho. Southcomb Esq. of Gate Street Lincolns Inn Fields, dated 9th Jan^y 1786.

Dr. Sir

"Mr. Jones [Vicar at Worth Matravers] has I know informed you of most of the particulars of the loss of the *Halsewell* Indiaman; the Crew have just left this Town, where all their present wants have been supplied by the Inhabitants with a liberality that does them honour, a few sick are left behind, and they shall be taken care of. The intrepidity and humanity of the Quarriers in saving the lives of these unfortunate Men deserve the highest commendation and ample reward. indeed Mr. Jones & myself promised them every exertion in our power to procure them the latter; had we not been there to have encouraged and directed them, many more had perished.

If you will therefore be so good as to represent this matter to your friends in the India House, and get these brave Fellows some recompense, you will greatly oblige us both, and will also be the means of these People running every risk to preserve any Seaman who may hereafter be subject to the same misfortune. Should you succeed, I would also wish the Money to be sent to Mr. Jones to be distributed by him as I am certain no one can be better acquainted with their respective Merits in this affair. We shall then also be satisfied that the Money is distributed & the Men not defrauded of any part of it.

12th January, 1786 [2]

Letter from J. Lander, Customs House, Poole.
To Thomas Morton, Esq., East India House

I am favoured with yours of the 11th instant and in consequence thereof shall go tomorrow to the Several Places where I am informed large quantities of wrecked goods have been taken up, and use my utmost endeavours to secure the same. In the meantime, I presume it would be of infinite service were you to cause a Manifest of the Cargo the *Halsewell* had on board, with the particular Marks and packages, to be sent me as it will serve better to lead me to identify the goods, which belonged to that unfortunate ship, for it appears that other vessels were lost on this coast about the same time she was.

I have got some few articles in my Possession that were taken up by the Poole vessels, and will send you the particulars of them together with the best account I am collect of all the goods saved and in whose custody they are as soon as possible.

I submit whether it would not be possible for me to be authorised by power of Attorney to act in this Business as I know that some of the goods are in the hands of obstinate people who I suspect will not give them up without such authority.

From William Stiles Esq., Customs House [Possibly London]
To Thomas Morton Esq., East India Company

The Commissioners having read your letter of the 11th instant signifying the request of the Court of Directors of the East India Company that orders might be given to the officers of the Customs to use their utmost endeavours to secure such part of the wreck of the *Halsewell* East Indiaman as may be drove on shore or otherwise saved -

I am directed to acquaint you for the information of the Court that orders have been given to the proper officers accordingly.

LETTER 33

This is from George Ryves Hawker, Wareham, dated January 20th, 1786.
Probably addressed to Thomas Morton Esq. Secretary to the Honourable East India Company at India House, London. Difficult to read!!

LETTER 100

Sir

We rec^d the favour of your letter of the 13th of Jan.y, directed to Mr. Garland, with nine Bank Notes of ten pounds each, & one of fifteen pounds enclosed? We have distributed this sum amongst one hundred & forty persons, who were aiding in preserving the crew of the *Halsewell* to the best of our judgment in proportion to their several merits, except a small matter? wch (which) was expended in contingent expenses. By the Humanity of the Borough of Wareham, & the Bounty of the Neighbouring Gentry, the sick & hurt have been amply provided for & are now all dispersed? We beg leave to transmit them? to your hands, to the Directors of the East India Company our thanks, & those of the Quarriers for the reward of their services, wch they were pleased to order? them. Nor can we avoid acknowledging the very polite manner in wch you announced the same to us. We have the honour to be Sir, your most Honourable Servants

Geo. Ryves Hawker

Morgan Jones

Tho.s Garland

Wareham Feb.y 10.1786

Letter No date

From M. Lewis Esq., of the War Office, a letter requesting Thomas Morton to move the Court of Directors to provide room on one of the Company's ships bound for Bengal for clothing for the 2nd Battalion 42nd Regiment replacing that lost on the *Halsewell*, and for passages for a Captain and four ensigns of the 2nd Battalion.



The Court Book: Minutes of the Meetings Held by the Court of Directors.

11th January, 1786.

The Chairman acquainted the Court that on Sunday last Mr Henry Meriton, 2nd mate of the late ship *Halsewell*, brought the melancholy news of her entire loss between St. Albans Head and Durlestone Point in the Isle of Purbeck. On a motion he ordered that it be referred to the Committee of Shipping to enquire into the circumstances attending the loss of the said ship and to report.

1st February, 1786.

Resolved that it does not appear to this Court that the ship *Halsewell* was lost through any neglect in William Henry Meriton, 2nd Mate or William John Rogers 3rd Mate of that ship.

21st February, 1786.

a) A letter was read from Mr. Hawker, Mr. Jones and Mr. Garland of the 18th acknowledging receipt of the Secretary's letter dated 13th January.

b) Resolved that the loss of the ship *Halsewell* does not appear to be imputable to any misconduct in Captain Pierce or his sworn officers.



Other Documents:

Pay receipt for Commander Richard Pierce.

Pay receipt for Midshipman Richard Pierce junior.

Pay receipt for the First Mate, Thomas Burston junior.

Hampshire Record Office (SO23 8TH) - Q10/3/2 - Payments for subsistence of sailors of the *Halsewell* an EIC ship.

Odd Texts from 'NOTES & QUERIES'

CAPT. RICHARD PIERCE of the "*Halsewell*" East Indiaman. The melancholy fate of this gentleman with his daughters, Miss Elizabeth and Miss Mary Anne, who were wrecked off the Island of Pyrbeck [sic], Dorsetshire, and perished on January 6, 1786, excited the greatest commiseration. He had been a long time a resident with his family at Kingston-upon-Thames, which was their usual place of interment, but his remains were never found. A hatchment was put up in the church for him, and a funeral sermon was preached for him by the Rev. Matthew Raine, on Sunday, February 19, 1786, from James iv. 14, the latter part "For what is your life," &c. (4 to, 1786), and published by desire of the bailiffs and corporation of Kingston. I do not find any particulars of this sorrowful catastrophe in Manning's Surrey nor in Anderson's History of Kingston, 1818. Though both have an account of a monument by Rysbrach to a Richard Pierce, gent. (Qy. an ancestor?), who died June 22, 1714, aged ninety-four, who received a wound through his body at Edgehill fight, in the year 1642, as he was loyally defending his king and country. The widow of the foregoing Richard Pierce died April 9, 1807. Where can I find further particulars of Capt. Pierce, the family, and the unhappy fate of the "*Halsewell*"? *. [Two small works have been printed on the loss of the *Halsewell*]

"*Halsewell*." 1. "A Circumstantial Narrative of the Loss of the *Halsewell*' East-Indiaman, Capt. Richard Pierce. Compiled from the communications, and under the authorities of Mr. Henry Meriton and Mr. John Rogers, the two chief officers who happily escaped the dreadful catastrophe." Lond. 8vo, 1786. An abstract of this Narrative is printed in The Annual Register, xxviii. 224-233. 2. "An Interesting and Authentic Account of the Loss of the *Halsewell*, with all its dreadful circumstances." Lond. 8vo, 1786. From these works we glean a few particulars of Capt. Pierce; that he married the daughter of Thomas Burston, Esq., the collector of excise for the county of Surrey, and that since their marriage they constantly resided at Kingston. Capt. Pierce had acquired a competent fortune, which was due to his merits and industry, and he intended this fatal voyage to be his last. At the time of his death he had been married above twenty years, and his disconsolate widow was left with six children, one an infant at the breast. Capt. Pierce's two daughters, Anne and Mary, who perished in the "*Halsewell*," were going to India to be married to gentlemen of large fortunes. The eldest was only seventeen, and the youngest but fifteen years of age. For two poetical pieces upon this sad catastrophe, see The Universal Magazine, lxxviii. 40, 214.]

THE *HALSEWELL* (Thomas Burston Peirce/Pierce was born in 1776 and died in Sidmouth in 1806. He married Anna Maria Fearon in 1801 in Prince of Wales Island, Penang. They had a daughter Mary Anne Pierce. (3 Pd S. iii. 9, 34, 80.)

As an 8 pendant to the contributions on this subject, I may mention that the son of the Captain Peirce who was drowned, lies buried in the churchyard of Sidmouth, Devon. The grave is at twenty-five yards north of the church, for I have just measured it. The place is marked by a head and footstone. The subjoined is the inscription on the former:

"In memory of Capt. T. B. Peirce, son of Capt. Peirce of the *Halsewell* E. Indiaman, obit October 13 [?], 1806, aged 30 years." The date, " 1806," is almost illegible, but on the foot-stone it is plain, as follows: " T. B. P., 1806." An old man, who recollects the circumstance, told me in the churchyard, that the younger Capt. Peirce, thus commemorated, died in a residence still standing, called CastleHouse, in the Upper High Street, Sidmouth. On the stone the name is twice spelt Peirce, not Pierce; that is to say, the 'e' is before the 'i'.- P. HUTCHINSON."

THE *HALSEWELL*, EAST INDIAMAN (7th S. iv.189, 296, 477).

This sad shipwreck, which occurred on January 6, 1786, has been already ventilated in ' N. & Q.,' 3 rd S. iii. 9, 34, 80, 159, and much additional information concerning it could no doubt be found at the references there given to contemporaneous periodicals. The family of Capt.Pierce, one of the highest respectabilities, seems to have been long resident at Kingston- upon-Thames, and it is said that there was a hatchment put up in the church of that town commemorative of him (see 3rd S. iii. 9). This, in all probability, has long since been either destroyed or removed. At the same reference allusion is also made to a funeral sermon preached upon his death by the Rev. Matthew Raine, on St. James iv. 14. The shipwreck of the *Halsewell* is alluded to by Erasmus Darwin in his 'Botanic Garden,' and, unless my memory is at fault, a very good account of it may also be found in ' Old Stories Retold,' by Walter Thornbury, which appeared originally in the pages of All the Year Bound. The story of it has been told and depicted many times.

Note:

[A] - Second ships named *Montague*, *Halsewell* and *Southampton*.
See Aftermath. Part 1

References:

[1] - There is a Mr Roper Weston who in 1815 appears in the *Alexander* record in the Weymouth Customs

[2] - The India Office Record that are not numbered are taken from "Miscellaneous items connected with the wreck of the *Halsewell*" by B. H. & J. Sutton, Local Studies, Leaflet 151, February 1971, Joint Committee for Education, Dorset Library, L.910.4 HA13.



7 – Burials & Memorials

1786

On the fourth, fifth & sixth of January a remarkable Snow Storm, sometimes a Hurricane, with the Wind at South on the latter Day at two in the morning The Halsewell East India Man seven Hundred & fifty eight Tons burthen Commanded by Capt Richard Pierce bound for Bengal was lost on the Rocks between Seacombe & Winspit Quarries in this Parish - never did happen so complete a Wreck, the Ship long before daybreak was shattered all to pieces & a very small part of the Cargoe sav'd - It proved fatal to a Hundred & sixty eight Souls, among whom were the Captain, two of his Daughters and five other young Ladies. - Eighty Two Men, by the Exertion & Humanity of the Inhabitants & Neighbouring Quarriers at the imminent Hazard of their own Lives, were Sav'd. - The East India Company to reward such merit sent a Hundred Guineas to be distributed among them.

Morgan Jones Vicar

Burial Register at Langton Matravers

"On the fourth, fifth & sixth of January a remarkable Snow Storm, sometimes a Hurricane, with the Wind at South, on the latter Day at two in the morning The Halsewell East India Man seven Hundred & fifty eight Tons burthen Commanded by Capt Richard Pierce bound for Bengal was lost on the Rocks between Seacombe & Winspit Quarries in this Parish - never did happen so complete a Wreck, the Ship long before daybreak was shattered all to pieces & a very small part of the Cargoe sav'd.- It proved fatal to a hundred & sixty eight Souls, among whom were the Captain, two of his Daughters and five other young Ladies.- Eighty Two Men, by the Exertion & Humanity of the Inhabitants & Neighbouring Quarriers at the imminent Hazard of their own Lives, were Sav'd.---The East India Company to reward such merit sent a Hundred Guineas to be distributed among them.

Morgan Jones Vicar."

Thomas Burston Senior

Collector of Excise, appointed Collector for Kingston in 1771 (PRO CUST 47/280). His initials can be seen in PRO record CUST 43/4 dated August 21st, 1784. He was buried at All Saints Church, Kingston, Surry on the 14th May 1785.

Note:

[1] - Two of the ladies who died on the wreck were Miss Ann & Miss Mary Paul daughters of Henry Paul They were described as Captain Richard Pierce's nieces.



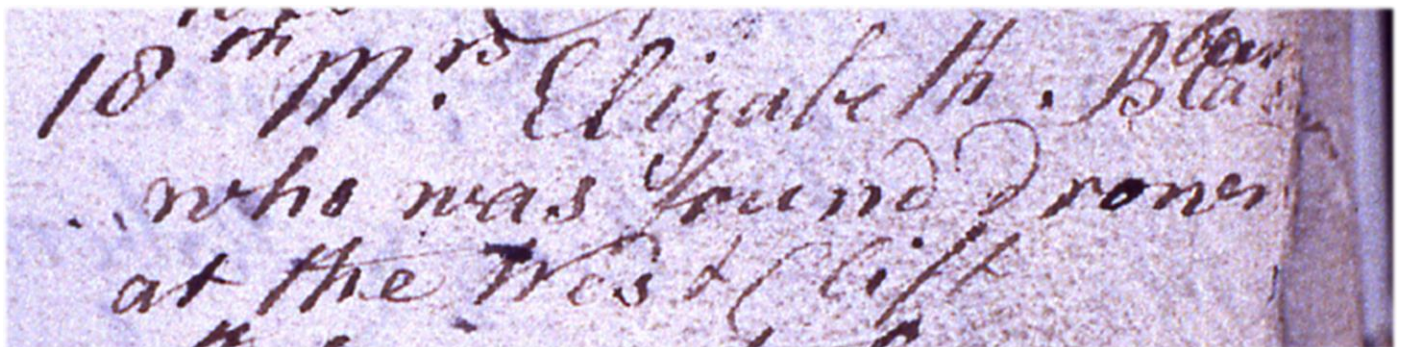
The Tombstones at Christchurch Priory



Many victims were washed up several miles from the wreck site on the shore of West Cliff in Poole and were buried in Christchurch Priory. The Death Register at Christchurch gives the following information:

Miss Elizabeth Blackburn

Miss Blackburn was the daughter of Captain Blackburn, a Commander also in the service of the East India Company who now resides at Old Malton in Yorkshire.



Elizabeth Blackburn



Charles Webber

Charles Webber, John Grace Schultz & 3 Unidentified

12 Charles Webber &
 Mr. John George Schultz
 who were found down
 at the West Cliff out of
 the Halswell Indiaman
 & 3 others their names
 unknown who were
 found drowning at the
 same time

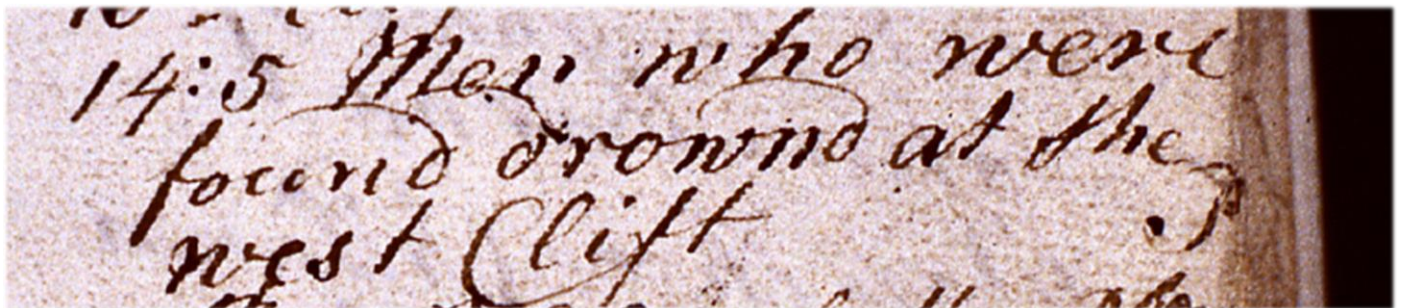
We have found no sign of a Tombstone for Mr John George Schultz but the Tombstone for Mr Charles Webber survives. As you can see from the photograph above taken in 1980 by Bryan & Jean Sutton, this tombstone is now almost illegible.

The narrative gives the following information;

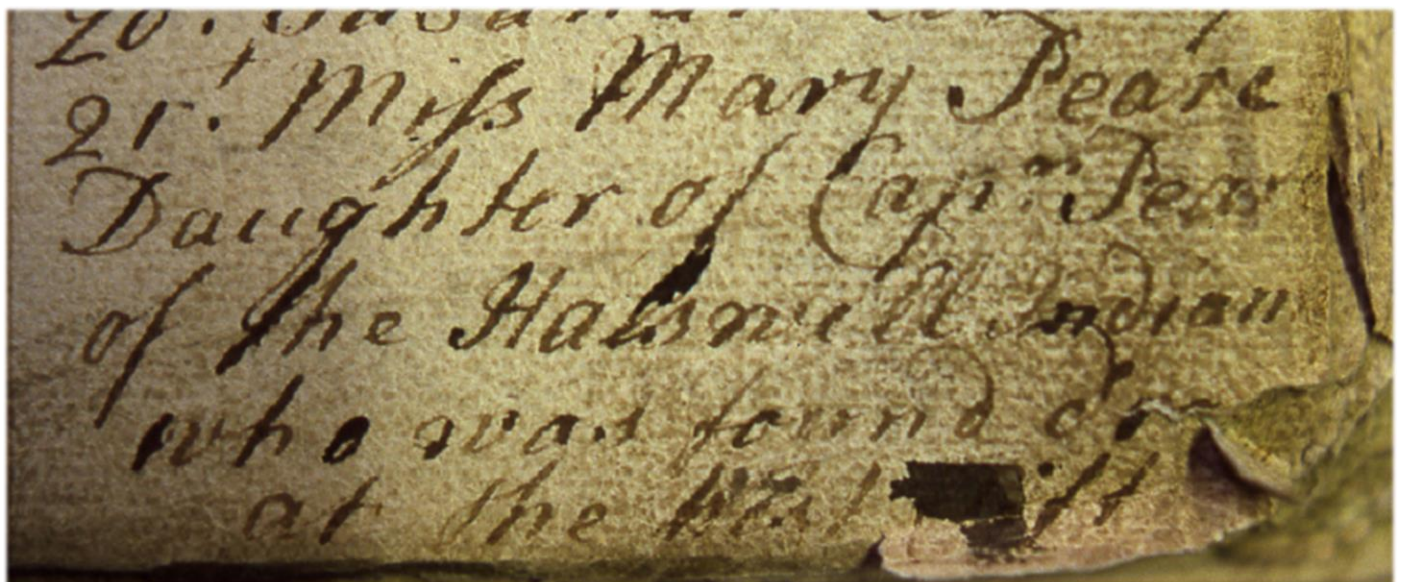
"Mr. Charles Webber, son of the late Admiral Webber, and son in law to Wm. Smith, Esq., of His Majesty's Office of Ordnance." Inscription:

*To the Memory
of Charles Webber
Son of the late Admiral Webber
Aged 13 years
Lost with the Halsewell
East Indiaman January 6th 1786"*

Five Unidentified



Mary Pierce



Templer Memorials

The Templer association with the East India Company started with James Templer who was born in 1722. He was the sixth child of a very poor tradesman, Thomas Templer of Exeter. Thomas died when James was six years old, leaving the family destitute. James was taken to St. John's Hospital, an orphanage known as 'The Blue Boys School'. At the age of fourteen he was apprenticed to John Bickly, an Exeter architect, where he remained for three years. Apprenticeship in those days was a form of servitude, little better than slavery; an apprentice breaking his bond by absconding was liable to suffer severe punishment.

James did decide to abscond and 'ran away to sea' by boarding a vessel, bound for Madras as a shipwright. In Madras he applied his knowledge of building to good account. By the time he was twenty-five he had risen from employee to a partnership with Henry Line and Thomas Parlby. This association led to wealth and a good reputation. James married Mary Parlby, daughter of John Parlby of Gravesend and Thomas's sister in 1745.

James's wealth soon led to a country estate (Stover House at Teigngrace built in 1780)

James and Mary had one daughter and six sons. The sons being James Jnr; John; William (died young); George (became a famous MP); Henry Line (named after his partner) and Charles Beckford.

Both George and Charles joined the East India Company. George after three years at Lincolns Inn, at the age of eighteen entered the Company as a 'writer' in 1773. He was very successful. In March 1781 he married Jane Paul, daughter of Henry Paul [1], another East India Company employee or 'servant'. Charles was enrolled in the East India Company service at the very young age of fourteen, possibly to follow his elder brothers' footsteps. It is possible that he was to be under the care and sponsorship of some friend of George with whom George had made the arrangement after his own return to England and resignation from the East India Company service in 1785.

Charles Beckford Templer



This memorial is in the Parish church of Teigngrace, near Newton Abbot in Devon. Dedicated to Mr. Charles Beckford Templer who died in the *Halsewell* disaster of 6th January 1786. The family house is Stover House which is now a school within Stover Country Park, Teigngrace.



There is another similar Charles Templer memorial at Shute Church, Devon [EX13 7QL]



Detail from the church:

"This memorial was placed in Shute church by Sir John William Pole, in memory of Charles Beckford Templer who perished on the 760 ton 26 cannons East Indiaman "Halsewell", captained by Richard Pierce, on January 6th 1786. This wreck occurred on the Dorset Coast, near Worth Matravers on the Isle of Purbeck.

“In January 1786 the Halsewell was returning from Madras, filled with a rich cargo and bound for London. It was to become one of the coast’s more celebrated victims. Aboard was a full complement of crew as well as a company of soldiers, and a number of passengers including the captain’s daughters. The voyage was to be Captain Pearce’s last before retiring.

“Entering the English Channel, she encountered a violent winter storm. After several days battling a mixture of blizzards and hurricane-force winds the Halsewell, leaking badly, was eventually driven against the cliffs at Seacombe, close to Worth Matravers. As luck would have it, the ship was dashed broadside against a natural cave in the cliff face and many were able to scramble to what they thought was safety. The cliff above them was almost impossible to climb, especially in such atrocious conditions. Only two sailors made it to the cliff top to alert the local villagers, while those left behind gradually succumbed to cold and exhaustion and were washed away into the broiling sea. 82 were rescued and by the morning 160 people had perished in the freezing waters including the captain who chose death rather than abandoning his two young daughters.

“The ship soon turned to matchwood and sank without trace. The bodies that were recovered reputedly lie buried in mass graves on the cliff tops, the only individually recorded soul appearing in the burial register of Worth Matravers having been washed up some weeks later.

“Public sympathy was to run so high that George III himself, holidaying in nearby Weymouth, visited the spot to pay his respects and a reward of £100 was paid out in appreciation of the efforts of the local villagers.”

The site has since become a treasure trove of artefacts from the cargo of the ship. Everything from a pair of cufflinks, depicting one of the earliest flights by balloon, to the ship’s hourglass which miraculously survived, cushioned and entangled in seaweed. This and a number of other artefacts can be now seen in the Dorchester County Museum.”



8 – *Halsewell* Bibliography

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9 – References

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Wreck of the *Halsewell*, East Indiaman, at Seacombe, Isle of Purbeck, 6th January, 1786.

Photograph of an engraving by S.W. Fores, 14 by 20 cm.

Illustration Collection (negative available) - L.910.4 HA.2.

Wreck of the *Halsewell*, East Indiaman, at Seacombe, Isle of Purbeck, 6th January, 1786.

Six photographs of contemporary prints, 15 by 19cms.

Illustration Collection - L.910.4 HA.4 to 9.

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Details from the British Library - Oriental and India Office Collections.

L/MAR/C/529 - Marine Records

HALSEWELL:

Built by Wells, launched 1778, 3 decks, 4in thick bottom, 139ft 7in long, length of keel 112ft 2¼ in, breadth 36ft 1in, depth of hold 15ft ½in height of wing transom 23ft, height of port cell 25ft 1in, 6ft 4¼in between lower and middle deck and 6ft 4¼in between middle and upper, 776 tons, 99crew, 26 guns.

Note: Ships of this size would have had 13,000sq ft of sail.

Principle Managing Owner 1 - 2 Thomas Burston & 3 Peter Esdaile.

See also Note 1 – *Halsewell* Build Details

Voyages

First

1778 to 1779 Coast (Madras) and China

L/MAR/B/465A & B Log or Logs? (24th August 1778 - 1st February 1782)

L/MAR/B/465D(1) - Ledger

L/MAR/B/465D(2) - Pay Book

L/MAR/B/465D(3) - Impress Book

L/MAR/B/465D(4) - Absence Book

<p>Captain - Richard Pierce</p> <p>(Note: Received pay November 1778 to February 1782, 38 months & 3 days)</p> <p>First Mate - John Eastabrook</p> <p>Second Mate - Joseph Garnault</p> <p>Third Mate - Thomas Burston (Jnr)</p> <p>Forth Mate - John Stewart</p> <p>Fifth Mate - Henry Ridley</p> <p>Surgeon - James Gent</p> <p>Purser - William Graham</p>	<p>Log précis</p> <p>6 March, 1779 - Portsmouth</p> <p>5 April - Madeira</p> <p>8 May - Goree (Senegal)</p> <p>30 July - Table Bay (Cape Town)</p> <p>18 January 1780 - Madras</p> <p>19 July - Malacca</p> <p>1 September - Whampa</p> <p>11 December - 2nd Bar</p> <p>22 January 1781 - Ballawang</p> <p>19 May - St Helena</p> <p>20 October - Downs</p> <p>3 November - Blackwall</p>
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Second

1782 to 1783 - Coast (Madras & Bay & Bengal)

L/MAR/B/465C - Captain's Log 8th October 1782 to 16th October 1784

L/MAR/B/465E (1) - Ledger

L/MAR/B/465E (2) - Pay Book

<p>Captain - Richard Pierce</p> <p>Note: Received pay Dec. 1782 to Oct 1784</p> <p>21 months & 20 days</p> <p>First Mate - Thomas Burston (Jnr)</p> <p>Second Mate - Ninian Lowis</p>	<p>Log précis;</p> <p>11 March 1783 - Portsmouth</p> <p>30 March - St Iago (Cape Verde Islands)</p> <p>23 June Johanna (Cornane Islands)</p> <p>26 July - Madras</p> <p>4 September - Kedgerree</p>
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Third Mate - Thomas Smith (died May 6, 1784)
 Forth Mate - Martyn Chamberlayne
 Fifth Mate - Thomas Lucas
 Sixth Mate William Harris
 Surgeon - Charles Bromfield (died May 26, 1784)
 Purser - Richard Fowler

(Calcutta)
 31 January 1784 - Saugor
 7 June - St Helena
 28 August - Downs
 3 September - Blackwall

Third

1785 to 1786 - Coast (Madras) & Bay (Bengal)

Captain - Richard Pierce
 First Mate - Thomas Burston (Jnr)
 Second Mate - Henry Meriton
 Third Mate - John Rogers
 Forth Mate - Henry Pilcher
 Surgeon - Thomas Clothier
 Purser - Richard Fowler

Lost on Peveril Point 6th January, 1786.

Other references mentioned:

G/32/41 f318v, G/32/45 f176 St Helena musters 11th June 1781, 12th June 1784

Court Minutes B/102 ff 469, 522, 557, 677, 739, 805.

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A circumstantial narrative of the Loss of the *Halsewell*. (New ed, London, 1786 P/T 544)

A True and Particular Account of the Loss of the *Halsewell*, Sabine 1786, T.35361

Henry Meriton & John Rogers (see People)

L/MAR/C/652, page 194

L/MAR/C/653, page 151

L/MAR/C/653, page 310

BL Ms 38872 ff77,81

Stockholders: L/AG/14/5/22

Miscellaneous Letters Received E/1 1785/86

Resolved that leave be given for the building of five ships at 1100 & 1200 tons each for the service of the year 1790. That the ships to be so built be in the bottom of the next five ships in turn being;

The True Briton to be commanded by Captain Henry Farren Montague
Montague to be commanded by Captain Thomas Britten

Halsewell - To be commanded by persons qualified under the present regulations and who shall be approved by the Court. [A]

Alfred - To be commanded by persons qualified under the present regulations and who shall be approved by the Court.

Southampton to be commanded by Captain John Lennox

Committee - examination & proceedings (527, 5th September 1786)

On reading the request of Mr. Peter Esdaile for leave to build a new ship in the room of the *Halsewell*, ordered that it be referred to the Committee of Shipping to examine & report.

(1044 - 27th February 1789)

Narrative of the loss of the *Halsewell* East India-man which was wrecked off Seacombe in the Isle of Purbeck on the coast of Dorsetshire, January 6th 1786.

A true and particular account of the loss of the *Halsewell* East Indiaman: 1786.

Interesting narrative of the loss of the *Halsewell* East Indiaman, Captain Richard Pierce, which was unfortunately wrecked at Seacombe, in the Isle of Purbeck, on the coast of Dorsetshire, on Friday morning, January 6th 1786. Meriton, Henry.

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A circumstantial narrative of the loss of the *Halsewell*, East Indiaman wrecked at Seacombe, compiled from communications of H. M. and J. Rogers. 3rd edition. Meriton, Henry, 2nd Mate of the *Halsewell*. 1786. (There are also 11th Edition and 21st Edition; Also, a 'new' Edition 1791. Note: The one reproduced in this publication, is the 8th edition.)

Monody on the death of Captain Pierce and those unfortunate young ladies who perished with him in the *Halsewell*, East Indiaman. W. Lane, 1790. Shelf Mark 11602.e.30(1).

A Sermon [on James iv. 14] preached...upon the death of Captn. R. Pierce, Commander of the *Halsewell* East Indiaman, which was lost off the Island of Purbeck, Jan. 6th 1786. Raine, Matthew, 1786.

The Shipwreck of the *Halsewell* East Indiaman: a poem. With ...notes, etc. Thomas, E., Astronomer, Shrewsbury [1786?]

The Shipwreck, or Loss of the *Halsewell* East-Indiaman. Being a Grand Instrumental Piece Adapted to Piano-Forte with an Accompaniment for a Violin and Violoncello...Operavi. [Parts] Kollmann, August Friedrich Christoph 1796.

Log of the *Halsewell*, 1779. Extracts can now be viewed@ www.bl.uk/learning. All courtesy of British Library.

May 14th 1779. This extract records the death of a crew member "occasioned as supposed by his taking a quantity of opium". Another seaman is said to have fallen overboard.

May 12th 1781. A record of Captain Pierce punishing two of the crew for attempted mutiny, giving them two dozen lashes each.

May 14th 1781. Difficult weather conditions.

24th to 30th May 1781. Examples of work carried out on the deck and on the sails.

28th October & 29th October 1781. Nelson fires at the *Halsewell* and boards to impress seamen. See also Note 4

Public Records Office:

To be searched for information on the 42nd & 73rd Regiments of Foot

Letters from the East India House to the Admiralty 1782-1795 are ADM1/3914.

Dorset Records Office:

Among documents collected by Margaretta Michel (ref. D/TRD/F22) is a copy of parish register entries for Worth Matravers, concerning wreck of the *Halsewell*. Similar extracts, dated 1876, are in the Lester and Garland families archive (Ref. D/LEG/Z5)

Somerset Archive & Record Service:

The Kemeys-Tynte family deeds and estate papers (ref. DD/S/WH).
(Link between *Halsewell* & Tynte family with EIC not found.)

National Register of Archives (Kew):

Kemeys-Tynte catalogue here, NRA31183

Internet:

A sermon preached at Kingston upon Thames on Sunday, February 19th, 1786, upon the death of Captain Richard Pearce. Commander of the *Halsewell*, East India-Man, which was lost off the island of Purbeck on Friday, January 6th, 1786.

By Matthew Raine, Publisher, London. Printed by C. Macrea and published by G. Kearsley, Messrs J&J Merrill and J. Fletcher, 1786.



10 – Glossary

Naval Terms

This is not a comprehensive list; it is mainly applicable to naval and merchant ships circa 1800. Reference should also be made to:

The Oxford Companion to Ships & the Sea, Oxford University Press, London, 1976.

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A Dictionary of Sailing, by F. H. Burgess, Penguin Reference Books, 1961.

A Sea of Words, Third Ed, by Dean King, An Owl Book, Henry Holt and Company, ISBN 0-8050-6615-2.

The Nagle Journal, edited by John C. Dann, Weidenfield & Nicolson, New York, ISBN 1-555-84223-2, 1988.

ABAF - Towards the stern - e.g. abaft the main mast.

ABATE - A wind is said to abate when its force lessens.

ABEAM - At right angles to the fore-and after line, i.e. in line with the beams.

ABREAST - In line abeam on a parallel course with bows all in line. Side by side in a direction at right angles with the keel.

AFT - To the rear, toward, or at the stern of the vessel.

APPALL - Modern 'APPAL', to fill or overcome with horror, consternation, or fear; dismay.

ATHWART - Running across, from side to side.

BACKSTAY (BREST & AFTER BACKSTAYS) - Long ropes extending from the topmast head to the chains on either side of the ship.

BALLAST - Weight added to the hold of a ship e.g. iron pigs, loose sand/gravel. Often added even when there was cargo present to ensure the correct sailing performance from the vessel.

BEAKHEAD - A small platform at the fore part of the upper deck; the part of a ship forward of the forecastle, fastened to the stem and supported by the main knee. The sailor's lavatories were located here.

BEAM ENDS - When the ship is on its beam ends the deck beams are almost vertical i.e. unless righted could capsize.

BEAR UP - BEAR AWAY - Put the tiller up and keep farther away from the wind.

BEAR DOWN - Approach anything from windward.

BEAR OFF - Move away from.

BEFORE THE MAST - Crew taken on as seamen were housed in the forecastle (bow) i.e. in front of the mast. Officers were housed in the stern.

BEFORE THE WIND - Sailing in the same direction as the wind.

BELAYING PINS - Large wooden or metal pins used on ships to secure running rigging.

BEND (BENT) - A knot or hitch used to join two ropes.

BENGAL - A province of Hindustan, India that includes the delta of the Ganges.

BILGE - Lowest point in the hull of a ship. This is where any water will collect.

BOOM - A long spar run out from different places in the ship to extend the foot of a particular sail, such as the jib boom.

BOSUN - The abbreviation for BOATSWAIN, the officer or seaman responsible for the supervision and maintenance of a ship's boats, sails, rigging, cordage etc.

BOW - Front of the ship.

BOWER ANCHOR - the main anchor of the vessel, used with chain cable.

BOWSPRIT - Mast like protrusion (almost horizontal) attached to the bow.

BRIG - A two-masted sailing vessel, having square sails on both masts and a gaff mainsail.

BROADSIDE - Side of the vessel; simultaneous firing of all guns on one side of the vessel.

BULKHEAD - Vertical partition (wall) between decks.

BULWARK - Strake of plating or planking forming an extension of a vessel's side above her weather deck. It serves as a protection against rough seas.

CABLE - Thick heavy rope; also a unit of length.

CAT - Mechanical device, made up of ropes and pulleys, used to hoist an anchor OR short for 'cat o' nine tails'.

CAT HEAD - A piece of heavy timber, securely fastened to the bulwark on the outside of each side of the bow, to which the top of the anchor is slung, attached to the cat. It permitted the anchor to swing free of the hull of the ship when in use.

CAREEN - Turn a ship on its side for repair. Usually at low tide.

CARRONADE - A short fat gun invented in 1770 and manufactured by the Carron Company of Scotland. Favoured by merchant and later used by the Navy.

CHAIN PLATE - The metal fittings secured to the sides of the ship, to which the shrouds are set up.

CHAIN PUMP - The main pump, driven by chain, used to remove water from the bilge.

CLEW or CLUE - A lower corner of a square sail or the aftermost corner of a fore-and aft sail, to which tacks and sheets are made fast for extending the sail and for holding it to the lower yard or boom. To clew up is to draw a sail's lower ends up to the yard or the mast in preparation for furling.

COPPERS - Large copper vessels, built into brick ovens, used to cook the meals.

CORDAGE - The general term embracing all ropes made from vegetable fibres.

CUDDY - In a large sailing ship, a small cabin under the poop deck in which the officers took their meals.

CUT THE MAST - Under severe weather conditions, or when the vessel was on its beam ends it was sometimes necessary to cut the upper masts and let them go over the side. The process did not normally involve cutting the mast itself, but cutting of disengaging the shrouds and stays that held the upper masts in place.

CUTTER - A small decked ship with one mast and a bowsprit, which was light in the water and fast. Used for coastal work and messenger service between ships in a large fleet/convoy.

CUTWATER - The forward curve of the stem (foremost timber in a ship) of a ship which was also known as the knee (bend) of the head or beakhead. Simply; it cuts away the water.

DOLDRUMS - Windless areas/zones. A state of lifelessness or low spirits.

DOWNS (place name) - Off the Kent coast.

DRIVE (**DROVE** being the past tense) - To drive a ship is to carry too much sail. Vessels are said to be 'driving' when running before a strong wind. The wind will 'drive the vessel' during a gale.

FALSE KEEL - An additional keel, secured outside the main one, intended to protect the main keel in case of grounding. Sometimes used to improve the sailing qualities.

FORECASTLE (pronounced 'folksil') - The raised deck at the bow of the vessel and the living quarters below it.

FOREMAST - The forward mast of any ship having two or more masts.

FORETOPMAST - The mast next above the foremast. The one above this is the foretopgallentmast.

FOUNDERING - About to founder, i.e. to go to the bottom. Fill with water and sink.

FORESAIL - The lowest square sail on the foremast of a ship, bark or brig.

FURL - Roll, gather, or make up any sail, awning, canvas etc.

FURLONG - One eighth of a mile.

FUTTOCKS - Separate pieces of timber used to build up structures like the frames of ships.

GAFF - A spar to which the head of a fore and aft main sail is bent. The gaff topsail is a triangular sail with the head extended on a 'gaff' which is set from, or hoisted on a topmast; it is clewed out to the peak of the main gaff.

GALLENT - Name of a sail, e.g. topgallent.

GIG - A light narrow boat built for speed, with oars and short masts for lug or lateen sails.

GREAT COAT - A heavy overcoat.

GROG - A mixture of one-part rum to three parts water, the standard daily drink of the era of the *Halsewell* and *Earl of Abergavenny*.

GRYLLS, THOMAS - The Thomas Grylls Act of July, 1808. Thomas was a local solicitor of Porthleven, he drafted the act which sets out the procedures regarding burial of bodies cast up by the sea. All bodies cast ashore must be recorded and given a Christian burial in consecrated ground. This was regardless of race, creed or colour.

GUN DECK - Deck housing the main guns.

GUNWALE (pronounced 'gunnel') - A planked wall or balustrade along the sides of a vessel on either side of the waist.

HAWSE - In the bow of the vessel where the hawseholes are cut into the bow.

HAWSE PLUGS - HAWSE BAGS - A 'jackass' which is a bag or plug to prevent water entering the hawse pipe.

HAWSEHOLES - Reinforced holes through which the anchor cables pass.

HAWSER - A very heavy (thick) cable used to secure to the anchor or the vessel to a wharf/mooring.

HEAD - Carved figurehead of the vessel. General reference to bow area. 'Heads' toilet area.

HEN COOP - Large ships carried live farm animals on their decks. Hen coops or cages would often float free when the ship sank.

HOG - A ship is said to 'hog' when the bow and stern droop and the keel and bottom arch upward.

HOGSHEAD - A large cask for liquids, especially one of a definite size (capacity) that varied for different liquids and commodities and in different localities. Approx 50 gallons.

HOGLI or HOOGLY RIVER - The most westerly and most important channel of the Ganges River, leading to Calcutta, India founded by the English in c. 1690.

HOY - Small vessel, rigged as a sloop, used for coastal traffic and for ferrying stores from shore to vessels in port.

HOUSE - The House referred to by the log of the *Halsewell* is probably the Mast House at Blackwall, where the East Indiamen docked. Ship's positions are identified by giving her distance and bearing from a prominent landmark, such as a buoy off the Mast House.

IMPRESS - To be forced into service with the British Army or Navy during wartime. At the time of the *Halsewell* it was estimated that half of the men in the Royal Navy were impressed. By 1804 when the *Earl of Abergavenny* was about to start its fifth voyage the number may have been as high as 75%. See Note from the log of the *Halsewell*.

JACKASS - A hawse bag, canvas bag filled with oakum used to plug the hawse-holes to keep out the sea water.

JIB - A triangular headsail that stretches from the outer end of the jib boom to the fore topmast head in large ships.

JURY (as in jury masts) - A temporary mast put up in place of one that has been broken or carried away, e.g. jury foremast, jury mainmast.

KEDGE - Smallest of the anchors. Used in mooring to keep the vessel steady and clear of her bower anchor while in harbours and rivers, particularly at the turn of the tide. Also used to move the vessel in harbours by dropping the anchor from a smaller boat in the desired position and pulling the vessel to the anchor using a rope and windless.

KEEL - The principal piece of timber in a ship (backbone), usually first laid on the blocks in building, to which the stem, sternpost, and ribs are attached.

KINTLEDGE - Ballast, usually blocks of iron laid in the bottom of the ship. The amount used depended on the weight of the cargo.

KNEE - A piece of timber shaped in a right angle, often naturally so, that is used to secure parts of a ship together, especially to connect the beams and the timbers. A hanging knee lies beneath and supports the ends of the deck beams; a lodging knee fastens the forward side of a ship's beam to the ship's side; and a bosom knee the after side of the beam to the ship's side. In the *Halsewell* the knees were wood. In the *Earl of Abergavenny*, the knees were made of iron because by 1797 when she was built there was a great shortage of available wood of the correct shape and quality.

KNOT - A piece of knotted string fastened to the log-line, one of a series fixed at such intervals (every 47 feet 3 inches) that the number of them that run out while a 28-second sand-glass is running indicates the ship's speed in nautical miles per hour, or 'knot's'.

LABOURING - Pitching and rolling in heavy seas.

LADING - A vessel's cargo.

LARBOARD - The name circa 1800 meaning portside.

LASCAR - A sailor from the East. The East India Company would only allow them to crew on inward bound vessels. They were returned to the East as passengers.

LEAD (hand lead) - A weight of seven to ten pounds attached to the lead line of approximately twenty fathoms to measure depth.

LEAGUE - Three nautical miles, which is one twentieth part of a degree of a great circle.

LEEWARD - The direction in which the wind blows. Down wind. 'Lee' shore is down wind of the vessel. 'Leeway' making sure a vessel is not too close to a lee shore.

LINOIS, Charles Alexandre Leon Durand, comte de (1761 to 1848) - French admiral who engaged an East India Convoy at Pulo Auro in February 1804. He retreated. The *Earl of Abergavenny* was in the Convoy along with Henry Meriton who survived the wreck of the *Halsewell*.

LONG BOAT - The largest boat belonging to a sailing ship, carvel-built with high sides, capable of carrying a ship's gun in the bows and fitted with a mast and sails for short journeys. Used primarily for provisioning, for transporting water casks for refilling, and as a lifeboat.

MAINMAST - A vessel's principle mast, in a three masted ship, the centre mast.

MAINSAIL - A vessel's principle sail. On a square-rigged ship, the lowest and largest sail on the mainmast.

MAST - A vertical pole to carry a vessel's sails that descends to the keelson, where its squared heel is stepped. Originally the mast was built from the trunk of a single fir tree. As ships grew in size circa the time of the *Halsewell*, masts had to be extended and broadened to carry more sail.

To add girth and strength, the lower mast was fashioned from more than one timber (known as a made mast), while topmasts and topgallent masts (usually single-trunk or pole masts) were added above.

MIZZEN (MIZEN) - The fore-and-aft sail hoisted on the mizzen-mast in a large sailing vessel; it is also called the 'spanker' or driver', but never referred to as a mizzensail.

NORE - The Nore was an important anchorage in the western part of the Thames Estuary taking its name from a sandbank 3 miles NE of Sheerness and 47 miles East of London Bridge. In 1781, the old 4th rate Conquestador was permanently moored at the Nore as a receiving ship: new recruits or impressed men, such as those from the *Halsewell*, would be accommodated there until they were drafted to seagoing ships.

PILOT - A person licensed to navigate ships through channels and fairways in and out of a port/ mooring area.

PINRAIL - A stout hardwood rail fitted along a ship's bulwark, parallel to and below the caprail [top of the bulwark]. It is rounded on its projecting edge and fitted with necessary holes to receive belaying pins for running rigging.

POOP - A short, raised aftermost deck of a ship, above the quarter-deck, found only in very large sailing ships.

POOPED - A wave breaking over the stern of the ship.

PLATTS, PLAT - From the verb to plait or weave. Weave made of rope to form a mat. The mats were used to protect other ropes like anchor cables from wear and tear while the ship was at anchor.

PRESS GANG (IMPRESS SERVICE) - A group of men, commanded by an officer, who impress men for service in the British Navy or Army.

PRESS OF SAIL - The use of all the sail that can be carried by the vessel.

QUARTERDECK - The portion of the upper deck of a vessel behind the main mast, usually raised above the the level of the main deck but below the level of the poop deck. The quarterdeck was largely the preserve of the captain and the commissioned officers, and was from there that warrant officers received orders and the captain commanded the ship. Sailors/seamen only went on the quarterdeck to fulfill a specific duty, and it was standard procedure at this time for all on board to salute when ascending the ladder to this level of the vessel.

QUARTER - The side of a ship between the amidships and the stern.

QUARTER GALLERY - Small gallery on each quarter of a ship which were linked with the stern gallery. Used to provide walking space for the occupants of a cabin with which the gallery was linked. In East Indiamen these areas were highly decorated with carvings.

REEFED - Having reduced the sail area by folding, rolling, or tying up part of the sails.

RIBS - The timbers of a vessel to which the inner and outer planking is secured.

ROUND HOUSE - The 'round house' of a ship was commonly a square or rectangular cabin built on the quarter deck of East Indiamen or large passenger ships. The term has nothing to do with 'round' in the sense of circular, but relates more closely to 'making the rounds', as it was possible to walk round the outside of the cabin.

SHEET ANCHOR - A spare or a reserve anchor.

SHIPPED (UNSHIPPED) - Having received something on board ship. To put a thing in its place.

SLINGS - A rope or chain passed to anything for hoisting e.g. a large rope strop.

SOUNDING - Measuring the depth of water.

SPANKER - Fore-and-aft sail, set with a gaff and boom on the after side of the mizzenmast.

SPAR - A general term for any mast, yard, gaff pole or boom etc.

STEERAGE - Cheapest accommodation in the ship below deck often at the back. Usually lined with bunks.

STERN GALLERY - Gallery around the after part (back) of the ship.

SUPERNUMERARY - In excess of the normal number. Engaged for extra work.

TACK (To tack) - To go about, change direction. Opposite to wearing.

TAFFRAIL - Curved wooden top of the stern of a sailing ship. On East Indiamen particularly, usually carved or otherwise decorated.

TAKEN UP - Contracted for a voyage by the East India Company.

TONNAGE - This unless specified as displacement tonnage, is a measurement of space, not weight. It derives from the 'tun', a cask which was a standard unit of cargo in medieval times, and provided the basis for calculating a vessel's cargo capacity. The formula used for the calculation in the 1770's and 80's was laid down by Act of Parliament in 1773, and essentially consisted of multiplying the vessel's length (defined as along the rabbet of the keel from the fore side of the stem beneath the bowsprit to the after side of the stern post), minus three fifths of the maximum beam, by the maximum beam, and by half the maximum beam again, and dividing the product by 94. Hence the *Halsewell's* 776 tons burthen represents a theoretical assessment of the quantity (not weight) of cargo that she would carry, for the purposes of taxation or other dues.

WAIST - The midsection of a ship, between the forecastle and the quarterdeck.

WARP - A light hawser (rope) used to move the ship from one place to another using the kedge anchor and the capstan (ship's winch). 'To warp a ship' is the operation of moving a sailing ship in a restricted area like a harbour or river where the power of the wind cannot be used.

WEATHER & WEATHERED - Pass on the windward side of another vessel or object.

WEAR THE SHIP - Change from one tack to another, stern to wind.

WEATHER SIDE - Side on which the wind blows.

YARD - A spar hoisted and retained on a mast, for attaching and extending sails, hoisting flags, lights etc.

Miscellaneous

Most of the information was taken from the Collins & Oxford English Dictionaries.

ABATED - Decreased.

ACANTHUS - Herb like plant with prickly leaves.

ADMONISHMENT - To warn, reprove, urge, advice etc.

ALACRITY - Cheerful readiness, promptness, or willingness.

ANNIHILATION - Total destruction.

APPARELLED - Something that covers or adorns e.g. outer garments or clothing.

ARDUOUS - Hard to endure; harsh, e.g. arduous conditions.

ARTIFICER - A skilled craftsman.

ASSIDUITY - Constant and close application; devoted attention.

AGGRANDIZEMENT - To increase the power, wealth, prestige, scope etc. OR to cause (something) to seem greater, magnify, exaggerate.

AUTHENTICITY - Of undisputed origin or authorship; genuine; accurate in representation.

BAFFLING - To perplex, bewilder or puzzle; to check, restrain or regulate.

BEGUILED - To charm, fascinate, to delude.

BENCOOLEN - A small settlement on the West Coast of Sumatra.

BENEVOLENCE - Inclination or tendency to help or do good to others; charity; act of kindness.

BOTTOM (Same bottom) - Term used by the East India Company who allowed ship owners to rebuild their ships when worn out.

CAFFRARIA - Sometimes KAFFRARIA. Was a British Colony in the Eastern Cape of South Africa.

CALLOUS - Having a callus; indurated, as parts of the skin exposed to friction.

CANDOUR - The quality of being open and honest; frankness; fairness; impartiality.

CHASTISEMENT - To punish by beating.

CONCOMITANTS - One that occurs or exists concurrently with another.

CONTINGENCES - A possible but not very likely event.

CONSPICUOUS - Attracting attention because of a striking quality or feature; clearly visible; obvious.

COMMISERATION - To feel or express sympathy or compassion for something or someone.

COMPETENT FORTUNE - Polite way of saying he was loaded.

COSMOGRAPHY - The science dealing with the whole order of nature.

COSTIVENESS - Stingy; tight-fisted OR slow; sluggish.

COUNTER - In a wrong direction; in a contrary direction or manner.

CROWN - Approximately five shilling (old money) or twenty five pence today. Half a crown being half the amount.

DISPENSATION - A religious system or code of prescriptions for life and conduct regarded as of divine origin.

DISQUIETUDE - A feeling, or state, of anxiety or uneasiness.

DISSIPATED - Wasted; scattered; exhausted.

DISTEMPER - A deranged condition of mind or body; a disorder or disease: a feverish distemper.

DOTARD - A person who is weak-minded, e.g. through senility.

EULOGIUM - To praise (a person or thing) highly in speech or writing.

EMANCIPATED - To free from restriction or restraint; to free from the inhibitions imposed (forced) by conventional morality; to liberate (e.g. a slave) from bondage.

EMBEDDED - Inserted as an integral part of a surrounding whole, i.e. the information added to the chart.

ENUMERATED & ENUMERATION - To list; to mention separately or in order one by one.

ENSIGN - Any flag, standard or banner. A commissioned officer of the lowest rank.

EJACULATION - An abrupt emphatic utterance or exclamation.

EVANESCENT - Passing out of sight; fading away; vanishing. Ephemeral or transitory.

EXACERBATED - Made worse, angered, irritated.

EXULTINGLY - Rejoice greatly.

FATHOM - Equivalent to 6 feet.

GAMBOLS - To jump about playfully.

HEROICALLY EXPIRED - Died heroically.

HICKEY, WILLIAM - Born 1749, died 1830. He was a lawyer who made many trips to India, and is best-known for his vast Memoirs, composed in 1808-10 and published between 1913 and 1925, which in their manuscript form cover seven hundred and forty closely-written pages. Described as one of the most remarkable books of its kind ever published in the English Language. Hickey's Memoirs give an extraordinarily vivid picture of travelling in the East India Company ships and life in late 18th century London, Calcutta and Madras.

'IN THE ROOM OF' - A term used in the East India Company to mean that a new ship could be built because a previous ship in use by the Company had been sold, worn out or wrecked.

INCOMMODIOUSNESS - Insufficiently spacious; cramped.

INDURATE - To make or become hard.

INTIMIDATORY - to force into or deter from some action by inducing fear.

INDOSTAN - Old name for Hindustan, India.

INFIRMITY - Moral flaw or failing; physical weakness or debility; being ill etc.

INIQUITOUS - Wickedness, gross injustice.

INSCRUTABLE - Incomprehensible or mysterious.

INTREPIDLY - Fearless; daring; bold.

IMPEDIMENT - Hindrance or obstruction.

IMPERIOUS - Domineering; arrogant; overbearing.

IMPRUDENCE - Rash, heedless or indiscreet.

IMPUTABLE - Attributable to

JAUNDICE - Yellowing of the skin caused by liver damage.

LACONIC - Using few words OR terse.

LANGUID - Lazy looking, un-inclined to exert oneself.

LANTHORN - An archaic word for 'lantern'.

LASSITUDE - Weariness of body or mind from strain, oppressive climate, etc.; lack of energy; listlessness; languor OR, a condition of indolent indifference.

LAUDABLE - Deserving or worthy of praise; admirable; commendable.

LIBERALITY - Generosity; the quality or condition of being liberal.

LUXURIANCY - The state or quality of being luxuriant; luxuriance.

MAGNANIMITY - Generosity.

MEED - Reward, gift or recompense.

MERETRICIOUS (?) - Showily but falsely attractive.

METROPOLIS - In this situation it refers to London.

MUNIFICENCE - Very generous, bountiful etc.

MUTABLE - Able to or tending to change.

MYTHOLOGY - Figures and symbols from Greek mythology were often used in the ornate carvings on the stern and bows of both merchant and war ships. Maenads were female worshippers of Dionysus, the Greek god of mystery, wine and intoxication. They were usually pictured as crowned with vine leaves, clothed in fawnskins and carrying the thyrsus, and dancing with wild abandon. Satyrs were male creatures who inhabited woodlands and forests in Greek mythology. In addition, the satyrs as a group were passionately fond of females – especially nymphs, those gentle and beautiful nature spirits. Note: The Romans had different names for similar gods and characters.

NABOB - A European who made a fortune in the Orient, e.g. India.

NAIADS - Greek Mythology; One of the nymphs who lived in and presided over brooks, springs, and fountains.

OBDURATE - Not easily moved by feelings; hardhearted.

OSTENSIBLE - Apparent, seeming, pretended.

OSTENTATION - False appearance.

PAROXYSM - An uncontrollable outburst of some kind.

PEEVISHNESS - Fretful or irritable, e.g. a peevish child.

PENURIOUS - extremely stingy; parsimonious; miserly OR extremely poor; destitute; indigent OR poorly or inadequately supplied; lacking in means or resources

PERTURBATION - A cause of disturbance or upset.

PHILANTHROPY - The practice of performing charitable or benevolent actions. Love of mankind in general.

POIGNANCY - Sharply distressing or painful to the feelings.

PLEURA - Membrane surrounding the lung. PLEURISY lung inflammations.

PRECIPITATED - To throw or fall from a height.

PRECLUSIVE - To exclude or debar; to make impossible.

PROCRASTINATING - Delay; to defer or put off an action until later.

PROCURE - Obtain something.

PRODIGIOUSLY - Extraordinary in size, amount, extent, degree, force, etc

PROMISCUOUS - Consisting of a number of dissimilar parts or elements mingled in a confused or indiscriminate manner; casual; heedless; indiscriminate in selection.

PROTEAN - Readily assuming different forms or characters; extremely variable AND exhibiting considerable variety or diversity.

PUISNE - Judge of superior court who is inferior in rank to chief justice.

RAVELING - To become tangled, to become confused or perplexed.

RAPACIOUS - Practising pillage or rapine; greedy, grasping.

REPOSITORY - A safe storage place.

REPUBLIC - A political or national unit possessing a form of government.

RHETORICAL - Used for, belonging to, or concerned with mere style or effect.

SCORBUTIC - Pertaining to scurvy. Lack of fresh fruit. Vitamin C deficiency.

SHIVERINGS - Not really a word. Author has added an 'S' to shivering

SINGULAR - Remarkable, exceptional, extraordinary, unusual, odd, unique.

SANGUINE - Cheerfully optimistic, hopeful, or confident.

SERAPH - A celestial being having three pairs of wings. Can also refer to 'angel like'.

SOLACED - Giving comfort in misery or disappointment.

STUPENDOUS - Astounding, wonderful, huge.

SUBJOIN - To add or attach to the end of something written i.e. at the end of this narrative.

SUBLUNARY - Of or relating to the earth or world.

SUBSISTED - Continued in existence.

SUCCOUR - Help or assistance in time of difficulty.

SUCCINCT - Brief and clear.

SUPPLICATORY - To make a humble request to someone (in this case God); plead; to ask for or seek humbly.

SYREN - One of three sea nymphs, said to frequent an island near the coast of Italy, and to sing with such sweetness that they lured mariners to destruction.

TENDRILED - Furnished with tendrils, or with such or so many, tendrils.

TENURE - Period of time. Time you have to live.

TEMERITY - Rashness or boldness.

TEXTUALITY - the property of written material to form a coherent whole; the nature or identifying quality of a text.

THYRSUS - Greek Antiquity: A staff tipped with a pine cone and sometimes twined with ivy and vine branches, borne by Dionysus and his votaries.

TREMBLINGS - Similar to shivering, author has added an 'S'

TRITON - Classical Mythology; a son of Poseidon and Amphitrite, represented as having the head and trunk of a man and the tail of a fish, and as using a conch-shell trumpet.

TUMULTUOUSLY - Turbulent, greatly agitated, confused, disturbed etc.

UNAFFECTED - Free from affection. Not affected by.

UNIMPEACHED - Unquestionable as to honesty, truth etc.

VERITY - Most important, a true statement.

VOCIFEROUS - Noisy, clamorous, loud and insistent in speech.

ZEALOUS - Filled with or inspired by intense enthusiasm or zeal; ardent; fervent.

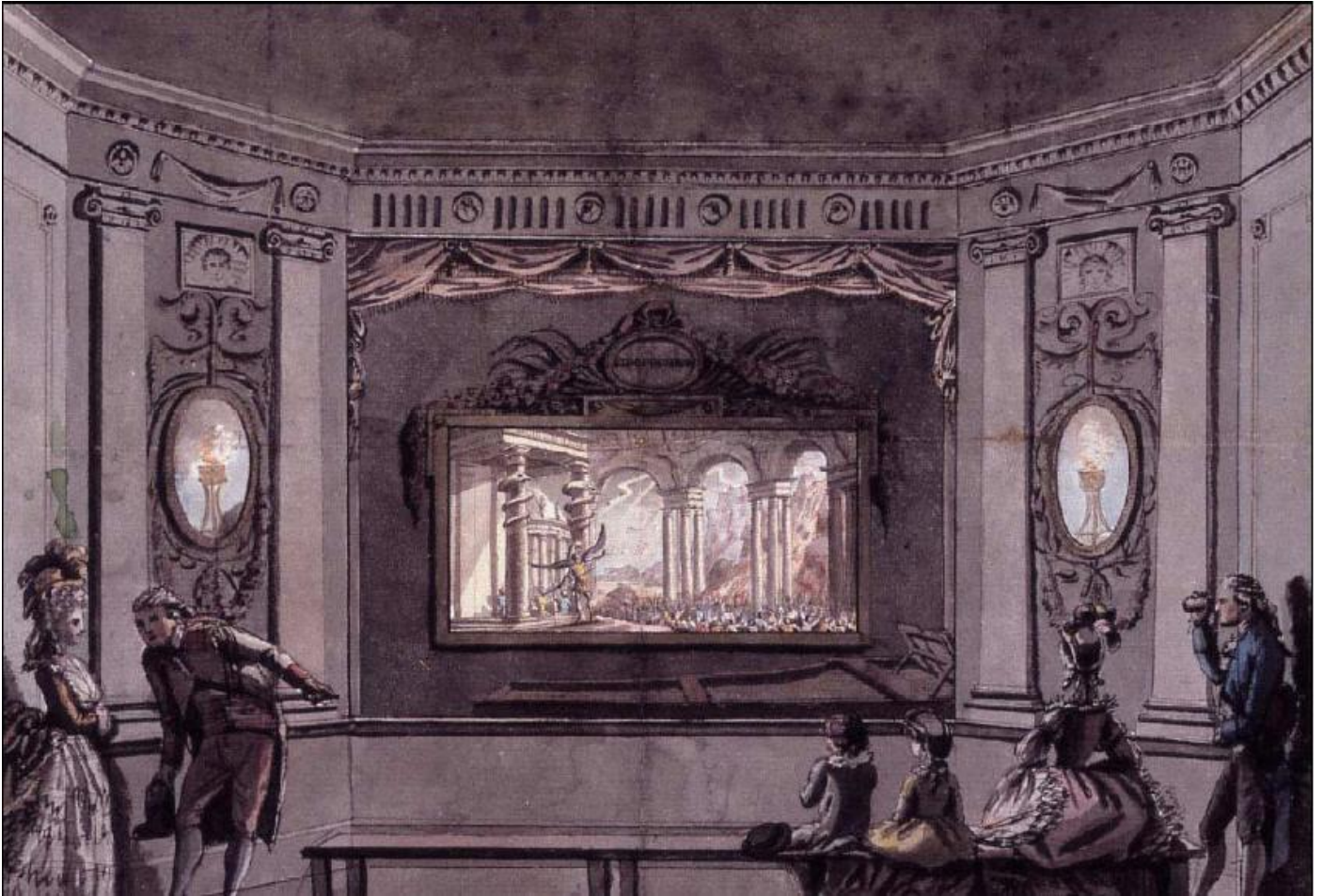
ZEUS - Highest ranking of the Greek Olympian Gods. Ruler of Mount Olympus and god of sky and thunder.

Ships

NANCY PACKET - Wrecked 25th February, 1784: East India Company Packet/Pacquet, master John Haldane, carrying mail, passengers, and cargo, struck first on the outer Gilstone (Isles of Scilly) and then drove ashore on Rosevear. Her passengers included officers returning from India and a Mrs Ann Cargill, a well-known actress who having made a fortune in India was bring it back home mainly in cash. Now the subject of a MIBEC Historical Record.



11 – The Story of the Eidophusikon



Edward Francis Burney, 'The Eidophusikon' Scene from 1782 Milton's *Pandemonium*
[Picture courtesy of the British Museum]

As part of a Federation Fellowship, Iain McCalman of the Australian National University, is writing a book about an amazingly talented, Alsatian-born, scenographical artist by the name of Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg. [2] Amazingly, having spent over ten researching the wreck of the *Halsewell* not a name I had come across until I discovered Iain's work in Australia from the Internet in 2006.

"On the 26th February 1781, in a house adjoining London's Leicester Square, an artist-scenographer, Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg, opened a show described by the Public Advertiser as "various imitations of Natural Phenomena, represented by moving pictures.

The show featured a glamorous specially-built theatre called an Eidophusikon which seated around 130 people paying three to five shillings each. Inside a type of giant peephole or miniature stage about 2 metres wide, 1 metre high and 2.7 metres deep, showed five scenes of Picturesque landscapes in phases of transition.

Each scene ran for around three minutes, using controlled lighting, magic lantern slides, coloured silk filters, clockwork automata, three-dimensional models, painted transparencies and an accompanying sound system.

Within a darkened auditorium, viewers saw dawn creep through the mist over the Thames at Greenwich, a view of Gibraltar at noon shimmering beside the hot port of Tangier, a scarlet sun flushing over the Bay of Naples, a vivid moon rising over the Mediterranean, and a torrential storm wrecking a ship at sea. In between each scene, painted transparencies served as curtain drops, and viewers were entertained with music and song. Within the first ever moving-picture theatre, Philippe had created the first ever moving picture show."

In 1786 according to the research carried out by Iain there is an addition to the show which can be described as simultaneously a disaster movie, a newsreel, a multimedia re-enactment and an experiment with virtual reality; "The Shipwreck of the *Halsewell*.

"The curtain rises. A ship sails along serenely in gentle waves with clouds scudding in the background. But as the wind rises the ship begins to show signs of distress. A torrential storm breaks. Lightning cracks and thunder detonates through the room. The sky is black except for a pallid moon which illuminates careering clouds. Vast broiling waves batter the ship. A distress is fired from the deck but the explosion is swallowed by the storm. At this moment, one of the audience, a young artist called William Pyne, feels he is actually there: he later says he has to stop himself from crying out hoarsely in terror. Pyne knows what is about to happen because he's watching a true story that has already been a newspaper sensation. At the door of the theatre he's also bought a short printed account taken from the words of an actual survivor"

One the accounts similar to those in our own story featured here. According to Iain, Philippe's movie became a London sensation, and it was shown around fifty years before the invention of photography and two hundred years before the popularity of modern multimedia.

Reference:

[1] - Iain McCalman, Private Communication, Australian National University.

[2] - See also Artists



12 - Various Illustrations

Contemporary Prints:

The wreck of the *Halsewell* must have resulted in one of the largest numbers of contemporary shipwreck prints, many depicting Captain Pierce consoling the young ladies just prior to the ship breaking up. Most of these can be found in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK.



Loss of the Halsewell, East Indiaman, Capt. Pierce.



SOCIETY AT SEA.

REUNION of the COMPANY on board the HALSEWELL in 1800. Picture taken on the day after the wreck of the ship, on the 25th of January 1801.

Engraved by R. Dodd from the original drawing by W. E. Lockhart.

R. Dodd - NMM



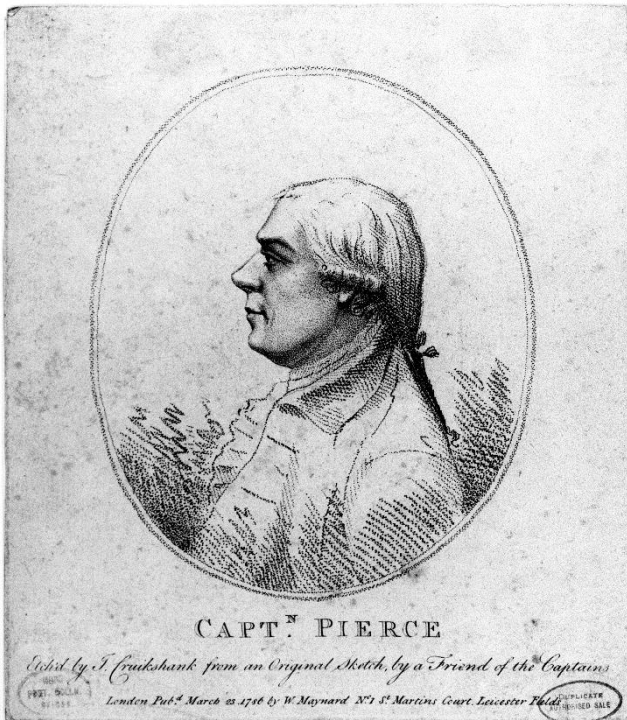
F. Jukes & R. Pollard - NMM



R. Dodd - NMM
Wilkinson - Northcote



P. Mercier - NMM



CAPT. PIERCE

Engr'd by J. Cruikshank from an Original Sketch, by a Friend of the Captain
London Pub'd March 23. 1796 by W. Maynard N° 5 St. Martins Court, Leicester Fields.



The Afflicting situation of CAPT. PIERCE and the LADIES his Daughters, Nieces, &c. in the Round House of the HALSEWELL East India Man, just before the sinking of the Wreck.

Ladies Magazine - DJA

Paintings

Launching of an East Indiaman



A picture from the David Allen archive. This is not the *Halsewell* but a similar vessel at launch.

Artists

Joseph Mallord William Turner, R. A. (1775-1851)

The Loss of an East Indiaman c. 1818



Painted c.1818 and originally exhibited in 1819 as 'Loss of a Man of War'. This was corrected when shown at Leeds in 1839 although it underwent several changes of title later.

Eric Shanes has shown convincingly that this disaster was based on the tragedy of the *Halsewell*, a merchantman, which sank on 6 January 1786. Only 74 of the 240 people on board survived, the ship finally breaking up on the rocks off Seacombe between Peverel Point and St Alban's Head on the Isle of Purbeck. There were many accounts of the disaster which continued to appear until at least 1810 so that Turner would certainly have been aware of them. He actually referred to the sinking in an unpublished poem he wrote 1811-13 to accompany the letterpress to Picturesque Views on the Southern Coast. It is also likely that Turner knew Robert Smirke's painting *The Halsewell*, East Indiaman or the aquatint after it by Robert Pollard published in 1786, as he and Smirke were well acquainted. But Turner has infused his version with such a sense of terror, danger, catastrophic wreckage and imminent loss of life that it bears little relation to Smirke's despite some similarities – the broken mizzenmast for example.

Eric Shanes, curated an exhibition of Turner work, 'Turner's Watercolour Explorations' held at the Tate Gallery in 1997. Extract taken from Watercolours and Drawings, Cecil Higgins Art Gallery by Evelyn Joll.

Philippe Jacques De Louthembourg

The Shipwreck c.1793



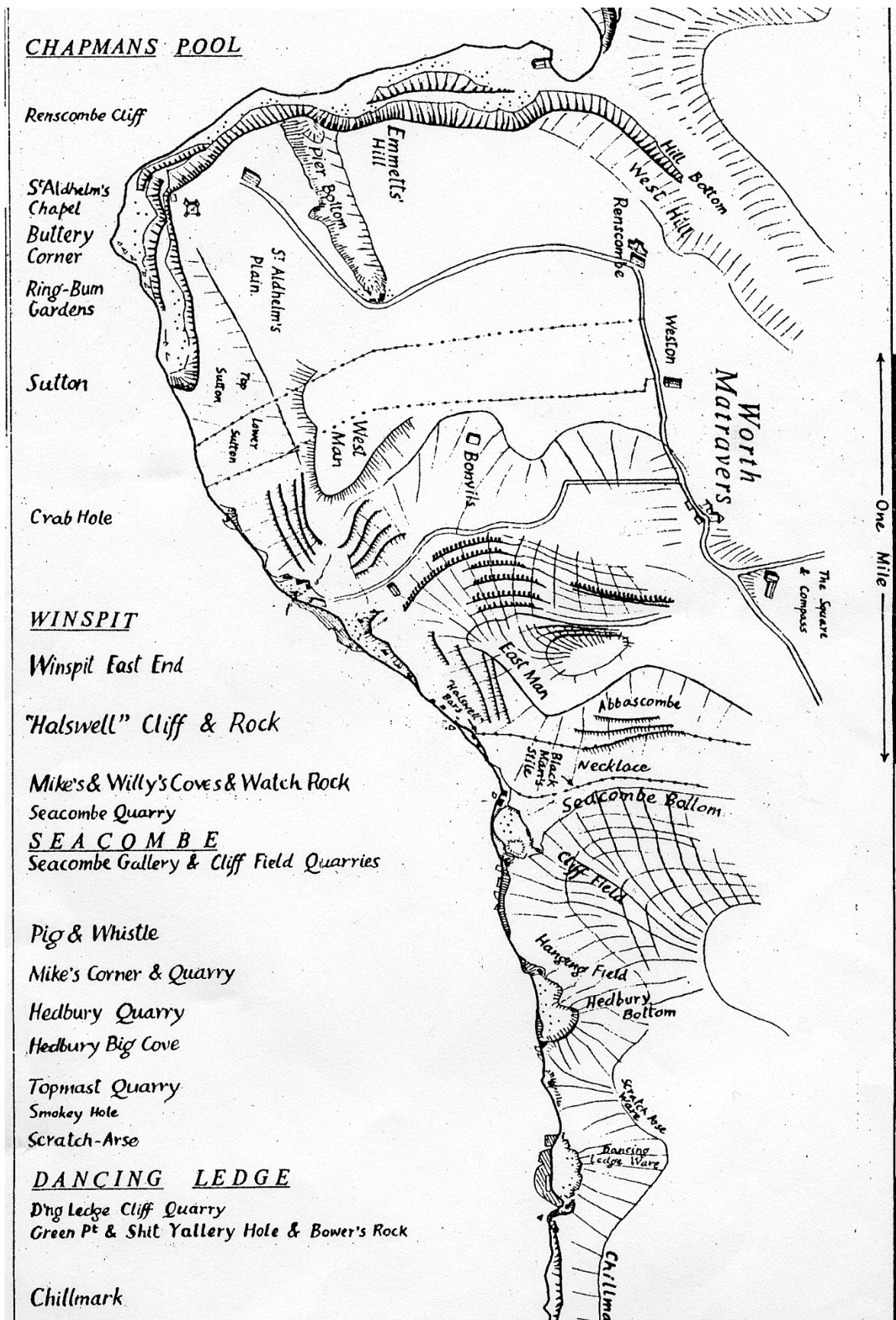
In England Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg was considered one of the leading painters of his day. The Shipwreck in the Southampton collection is dated 1793 and is among the painter's most ambitious works. The scene is likely to be based on a real shipwreck, that of the East Indiaman *Halsewell* which sunk off the coast of Dorset in 1786 and was published in a pamphlet recounting the facts of the event in 1791.

In 1793 de Loutherbourg, who was also an accomplished and innovative stage designer in the European tradition, made a moving peep-show, called an Eidophusikon, illustrating this tragic event and it is likely that his painting of the same year is an early example of contemporary historical narrative painting which was then beginning to come into fashion. The composition of de Loutherbourg's painting is derived from a print of 1782 by Daniel Lespinière after Claude-Joseph Vernet whose style was the greatest single influence on de Loutherbourg's work. In The 'Shipwreck', de Loutherbourg has updated Vernet's picturesque style by rendering his scene with startling realism, particularly in his well observed treatment of the white breakers crashing over the rocky cliffs. However, he also sounds a loud note of romantic drama with the introduction of the group of struggling figures in the right foreground of the picture and the strong contrasting light conditions of the overcast sky - elements that seem more appropriate for a theatre stage than the representation of a tragic event.

Reference: -

Southampton City Art Gallery: Accession number SCAG 1367

Map - Area of Purbeck where the *Halsewell* was wrecked.



13 - Wreck Site Finds

Contemporary Recoveries

Although we have been unable to find the complete manifest pertaining to this particular voyage, Newspaper reports together with information from the British Library's Oriental and India Office Collections, other voyages and advertisements in the Calcutta Gazette, also available in the Indian Office archive, gave us clues as to what might turn up.

It is often extremely difficult however to classify items as above because in most cases the amount of recovered material is very small and many finds could be assigned to more than one category.

Some of the items listed as put onboard:

The Commercial Journal (British Library) gives us some details of what might turn up:

To the General Merchandise	£----s----d
53 Chests of Small Arms	1446--12----6
103 Plates of Copper in 120 Cases (25 tons)	2484---8----0
389 Pieces of Lead	506--16---11

Items of General Merchandise	£----s----d
Pitch	29---9----0
Leather	47---3----3
Ironmongers Ware	234--16---0
Smiths Bellows	13---13---0
Grindstones	1----10---0
Buoy Chains	56---16---0
Turpentine	6----3---0
Cordage	717---18---3
Tar	56---16---0
To the owners of passage of military and dieting	1357--12---0

Those recovered at the time.

Hampshire Chronicle - Letter from Weymouth, dated January 14th, 1786.

"The very severe weather has prevented any experiments being made hitherto upon the wreck of the Halsewell, East Indiaman, but as the place is marked by buoys etc., and the property on board her valuable, the divers will be at work as soon as the Spring approaches."

When the weather allowed the divers from Weymouth had been able to visit the site and, with little or no equipment, managed to recover a substantial amount of material. The probable technique used in their diving operations was to jump from a boat into the water possibly with a heavy weight which could easily be released. Then by holding their breath they would be able to fix ropes onto various objects enabling the men in the boat to raise the same. From our own experience on the site, these recovery operations would have been quite simple to perform in these shallow depths. Without the advantage of the modern wet/dry suit however it is likely that their dive times were limited. It is also questionable how much would have reached the auction.

Hampshire Chronicle - Monday 18th December, 1786

POOLE, Dorset, - To be sold by Auction, at the Old Antelope Inn, by Joseph Rule, at two o'clock in the afternoon, on Thursday 21st December, 1786, the following ARTICLES being part of the CARGO of the *HALSEWELL*, EAST INDIAMAN: -

Copper, 98 loose plates & Copper, 10 cases
Lead, 169 pigs, nine ½ pigs, 3 rolls
Anchors, 3 of 18 cwt., to 25 cwt
Pieces of such like Anchors, three
Iron Hoops, 35 Bundles, and some loose
Grapnels, three of two to three cwt.
Buoy Chains, three of five to seven half cwt.
Cast Iron, 105 Pigs
Carriage Guns, 12 Nine and one Six-Pounder
Spanish Hides, 54
Porter, Four Hogsheads
Iron Oven, one

Also, sundry other Articles, consisting of Stationary, Whiting, empty Casks, Pitch, Tar, Turpentine, Cordage, Nails, empty Trunks, broken Muskets, Bridles, Lead, Copper, Iron &c saved from the wreck of the *Halsewell* East Indiaman, lately lost near St. Albans, within the limits of the port of Poole

The goods may be viewed three days before the sale, by applying at the Customs-House. Catalogues may be had at the New Antelope, at the Custom-House, of the Auctioneer and at the place of sale.

These artefacts were recovered at the time of the wreck, they are in museums & private collections.



Mirror from the cabin of the young ladies aboard the *Halsewell*. This was presented to the Worth Matravers parish church of St. Nicholas by Captain Reed, to whom it had been given by Mrs. Turner. It had been presented to John Turner by Barnabus Lowe, Mrs. Turners uncle. Mr. Lowe was an Excise man of Winspit. The mirror was washed ashore, where it was observed by the Customs men as it reflected the rays of the sun.



Glazed Cupboard Door from a cabin of the *Halsewell* East Indiaman, reputedly from the cabin of Captain Richard Pierce
Presented to Langton Matravers Parish Museum by Mr. J Dean.

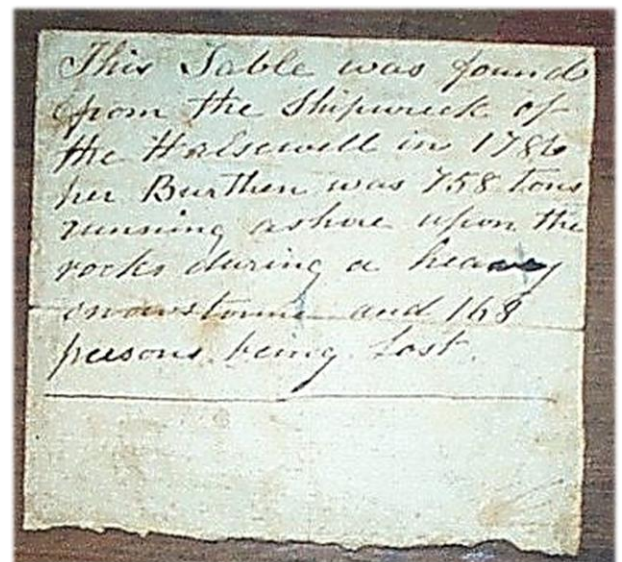


A small cup with handle re-attached, from an Eighteenth-Century Service, with the Arms of the Garland family, complete with Crest, in colour. The last remaining piece from the service presented to Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Garland of Eastington, Worth Matravers, by the East India Company in 1786 in recognition of their part in helping to save and nurture the survivors from the wreck of the Company's vessel the *Halsewell* of Seacombe cliffs in the early hours of January 6th, in 1786. The cup was presented to Langton Matravers Parish Museum by Lt. Col. Garland Jayne of Lisbon in 1974.



Old script inside the drawer states:

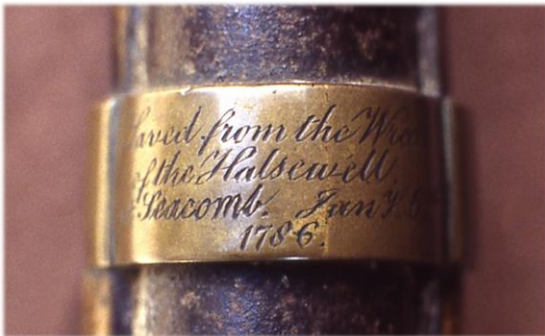
"This table was found from the shipwreck of the Halsewell in 1786 her berthen was 758 tons running ashore upon the rocks during a heavy snowstorm and 168 persons being lost"



Courtesy of Ann & Roger Day



A musket from the *Halsewell* in a private collection.



An ornate chest also in a private collection



Recent finds from the wreck site

Unlike the wreck site of the *Earl of Abergavenny* I have not found any significant archive material detailing salvage activity on the *Halsewell* during the eighteenth century apart from the Hampshire Chronicle. After the WW2 however hundreds of recreational divers were attracted to the site following the discovery of gold and silver coins. Several diving groups have however established project groups and have contributed illustrations to this publication. David Allen's is certainly one of the most competent when it comes to documentation. I had many contributions from Ian Curruthers from the Halsewell Group, this group was one of the first to join the Nautical Archaeology Society Adopt a Wreck Scheme, however as mentioned, there was no report found.

The Seadart Dive Team and the Northampton Dive Team made significant contributions along with Andrew Wagstaff who has presented items to the Portland Museum. Mr. W. Hammond presented items to Dorchester Museum

Find Categories:

Ship: Items from the construction of the ship and items used to equip the ship.

Military/Armament: Likely sources are; Ship's Armament, Troops and Personal.

Cargo: East India Company and Private Trade. Items in this category tend to be found in large numbers.

Food and Drink: Victualling a ship like the *Halsewell* required a huge amount of stores. It is clear however from papers like the Calcutta Gazette that the large quantities of food and drink were also taken out to India for sale as private trade.

Personal Possessions: Crew, Troops and other Passengers.

Coinage: Money allocated to the Captain and Officers as 'petty cash'. Bullion sent out by the East India Company either to pay their employees or purchase items of trade. Money belonging to the Crew, Troops and other Passengers.

Unidentified: Where the category is uncertain or the identification of a particular find is not known.

From the Ship

Sounding Lead - Seadart



Rudder Pintle - Dorchester Museum



Personal Items

Chess Pieces – Halsewell Group, IC.



Recent research ISBN: 978-09557325-1-5 (Dorset Press) has described these as a 'George Washington Style'. The form of the bone chess set is a late 17th century one, typified by:

Simply carved knights with little duck beaks for noses.

Contrasting mortar joints between the masonry of the rooks (red mortar for the white rook, and white for the red. "Spiky" King crown crenulations.

Ball-topped Queens

Urn shapes in the bases, an extremely popular form at the time which may be attributable to the architectural influence of the Scottish Adam brothers, who re-introduced this classical shape.

Note: There are more pieces in the Dorchester County Museum



Cuff Links – Halsewell Group



The *Halsewell* wreck site has yielded a large number of oval (16mm by 12mm) bronze cufflinks. Due to the quantity they are most likely 'Private Trade' goods.

The most intriguing are those showing an air balloon. When the *Halsewell* departed on its voyage it was only about two years since the launch of Montgolfier's hot air balloon and just over a year since the flight of an Italian, Vincenzo Lunardi from Moorfields in the UK. The balloon on the cufflink however appears to be that of a hydrogen balloon rather than the open bottomed hot air variety. The two flags indicate an international crossing. The most likely flight was the one on 7th January 1785 when the Frenchman Jean-Pierre Blanchard and an American Dr John Jeffries became the first to fly over the English Channel.

[Photographs Ed Cumming]

Thomas Burston Button Found by Mr. W. Hammond



Burston Seal – David Allen



Glass & Ceramics

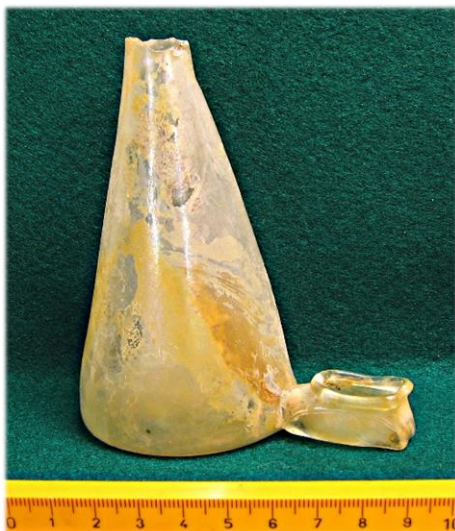
Wax Seal – Chatfield & Son



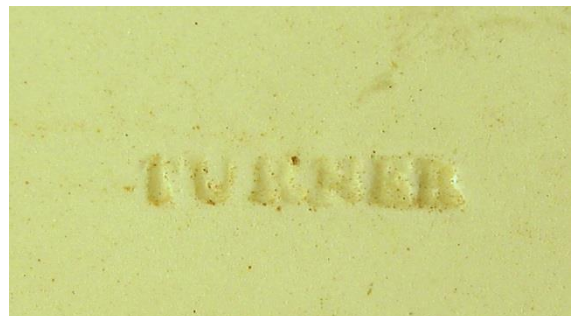
Glass Vial – Halsewell Group



Bird Feeder



Creamware on board was manufacture by Turner. The *Earl of Abergavenny* was also carrying Turner Creamware.



Coins – Seadart Divers

Carolus III – 8 Reales



A Gold Mohur minted at Murshidbad and minted for the East India Company-Bengal Presidency.

Dated 1190ab/1776 AD on Reverse is year 12.

The weight of this coin is 12.4 grams.

All numbers and letters are readable.

The Obverse side of the Gold Mohur coin has a small notch and the coin overall has a slight bow.



8 Reales 1775

Weight 27.0700g.

Obverse: Bust of Charles III [right]

Reverse: Crowned Spanish Shield.

Also, a rarity, as this coin was minted in Seville, Spain.

Therefore, there are no pillars on this coin, as with most of our 8 Reale coins.

Mint Mark: Seville. Assayer C.F.



8 Real - 1770

This Eight Reales coin is one of the better conditioned coins to be recovered from the *Halsewell* wreck site.

The majority of our coins were minted in Mexico or other parts of South/Central America.

Gold Guinea – Several Found



Gold Half Guinea – Several Found



1771 Danish Shilling – Halsewell Team



Obverse of the Shilling



Pewter Items – Halsewell Team

Spoons



Small Pewter Taps



Armament - Halsewell Team & Seadart

Musket Ramrod Thimbles



Trigger Guards



Musketoen Barrel



Cannon 1



This picture of a cannon recovered from the *Halsewell* was probably found by David Allen. The only conservation I believe was, that it was left for a period in a flowing fresh water stream. Possibly 1m 35cm, the only scale are oak the leaves! Luckily, I was able to take a photograph of the flake which broke away from the castable end.



Photographs Ed Cumming

Although the gun is in poor condition, a small flake bearing an engraved crown was recovered and conserved. It was thought by Le Pard (2002) that this was carved into the cannon as a show of patriotism after the restoration of Charles II.

The location of the artefact is currently unknown and only a few photographs and drawings survive. This engraved crown appears to be a commercial Woolwich 'Proof' mark in use from 1749, known as a crowned P.

These marks are usually indicative of a weapon belonging to the HEIC as few companies could afford to have their guns tested at Woolwich. The size and form of the gun is consistent with guns from late 18th century. This would mean that this gun belonged to a non-governmental organisation, that it is likely to be from an English vessel dating between 1749 and 1800, suggesting that this gun was recovered from the *Halsewell*.



These are the marks from a carronade found on the HEIC Henry Addington which sank near the Isle of Wight in 1798.

Courtesy Martin Woodward.

Cannon 2



This is referred to as the Hedbury Quarry Cannon. It was removed from the beach after the 1950's. This picture is courtesy of Dr. Ian West. It is now up on the cliff mounted on a stone plinth.



