



*Went a week after
a French Brig*

*Came on shore under Stag Cliff
and all her crew perished her
Cargo was Turpentine Stains Pitch
&c. just after that the Cliff fell
away just the N side of the end
gate and John Camben was going
by under the said Cliff was
killed and buried and his remains
still lying there*

THE following particulars are to hand concerning the wreck of the barque Lanoma in the English Channel on the 8th inst. : The iron clipper barque Lanoma, 665 tons, belonged to Messrs J. B. Walker and Co.'s line. She left Launceston on December 23, under the command of Captain T. B. Whittingham, with a crew of 18 hands all told, the first officer being Mr W. Cruse and the second officer Mr J. Fox. The cargo consisted of 5 tons 15cwt. ground bark, 245,027 sides of leather, 243lb Angora goat hide, 280 skins, 4 cases of beeswax, 15cwt. 1qr. of horns, 1 ton 5cwt. 3qr. shanks, 8cwt. 9lb. hair, 500 sheepskins, 1,083,650lb. wool. The total value of the cargo was £45,548 18s 6d. The Lanoma was built at Sunderland in 1877 by Messrs Austin and Hunter, and arrived at Launceston in the latter end of the same year, under the command of Captain W. R. Barwood, now harbour-master at Launceston. Whittingham, who was captain of the barque Araunah, of the same line, assumed command of the Lanoma in 1881, and ever since then has been trading from London to Launceston. Captain Whittingham married Miss Reading, of Launceston, and had nine children, all of whom are living. The Lanoma was a swift sailer, and one of the most popular vessels in the colonial merchant service. Both the vessel and cargo were well covered by insurance in various offices.

It was a dark and stormy night

Let's begin there, as so many stories have before. Out in Deadman's Bay, named for good reason, imagine your ship driven by the hard winds and rain toward the unseen shore. Tossed this way and that, the sea in constant sickening motion. Pitch black. The terrible roar of the gale and the toppling of huge waves, a frightful cacophony. The ship pitches and rolls, sails torn apart, hatches smashed, all too soon to be a hopeless mass of shattered wood on jagged rocks or shingle beach, cargo and crew spilled.

By day, in finer weather, you can see the long stretch of the Chesil Beach reaching towards the rugged stone island, a seemingly tenuous connection, the top of Portland rising up with its Victorian fortress, the land falling away southwards to the Bill, where our iconic lighthouse stands.

'Strictly speaking,' Christopher Stocks points out, 'it isn't an island at all, but what the French call a *presqu'île*, an almost-island.' This almost-Isle has been a Royal Manor since before the time of the Conqueror, sticking out into the English Channel like a pointed finger, with its own ways and customs, and unique geology.

The Channel might seem familiar, homely, picturesque, placid – less remarkable, as we cross it daily by car ferry, fly above it, or as we speed beneath it. One of the world's busiest shipping lanes, less impenetrable than it used to be, even swum by a children's author and comedian in 10½ hours as he raises money for charity. Looks are deceptive. We can't see the hidden dangers.

Local historian Stuart Morris sets the scene: 'You've got all these powerful currents going up and down the Channel, meeting at Portland from both directions. Off the Bill there's a ledge, which is fairly deep – it's almost like an underwater promontory. It drops away very steeply, so when the tides flow over the ledges they boil up to the surface and create enormous turbulence, which is the famous – or infamous – Portland Race. That has always been a hazard. In the days of sail the number of ships lost there were legion. We'll never know how many vessels came to grief. I've read accounts of ships caught in the Race then suddenly swallowed up never to be seen again, men and cargoes there at the bottom somewhere.'

Apart from this strong tidal race and shallow reef, a few miles off the Bill there's a shoal called the Shambles Bank – only a few feet below the surface at low tide, over 3 miles long and 1 mile wide, the bottom continually moving and changing. Tom Cunliffe, author of the *Shell Channel Pilot*, describes this

place around the Bill as 'the most dangerous extended area of broken water in the English Channel.'

Portland folk knew well the impact of the elements and the cost of shipping fatalities around their Isle. John Thomas Elliot of Weston kept a diary. Most of his daily entries start with a weather report.

4th January 1873. A very strong wind veering from SSW to SW all day and a very thick rain. I was home in the morning making out the quarterly accounts. Went down to Weston in the afternoon. Portland Roads is nearly full of ships and vessels still going in. Some with their masts gone, some with bulwarks and some with cargo shifted. Nothing of consequence took place.

10th January 1873. Wind about SW a steady brease fine all day. We worked all day and saw a steamer go up dismasted. She was well in the bay but it appeared that her engin was all right and she whent out if the bay. We could see though a glass one of the stumps of the mast and funnel.

26th February 1873. Will and I & Harry got up about 1.30 in the morning and whent out the Beal and halled up the boat. The wind was S at that time. Come home and whent to bed again. Whent down in Will Otters Quarry in the morning and made three Roaches to make up a load and sent them away. Whent up lap yets after dinner and saw a barque sunk about a mile of Powell. Her crew got out in a boat and pulled up of Breston and then the Turk took them up and carried them to Weymouth. We whent over Church Hope to launch but never had enough hands. Her crew consisted of 8 men and a dog. Her name was the Ulverstone of Hull. She was laden with 350 tons of Coals & Coke. She was ran into by an Austrian Barque called the Concordia. She rendered no assistance to the Sinking Crew. She was stopped in Portland Roads by the Government. The Captain had a trial and was brought under £4000 damage. It is said the Ulverstone was only 63 years old.

At the end of his diary, Elliot also keeps a description of wrecks, many of which he has seen in his own lifetime. As he closes the final page, it is only 6 years since Chance Brothers installed the new lights in the Upper and Lower Lighthouses on Portland; at the glassworks in Smethwick they are now constructing lenses bound for Cape D'Aguilar in Hong Kong, for Heligoland, Port Adelaide in Australia, Aitidor in the Crimea, Poeloe Bars Island, Java, and South Stack Rock at Holyhead.

Blow wind, rise sea, ship 'shore 'fore day

In 1925 Hilaire Belloc describes his experience sailing past the Bill. He writes: 'There is no set of the sea in Portland Race; no run and sway; no regular assault. It is a chaos of pyramidal waters leaping up suddenly without calculation, or rule of advance. It is not a charge, but a scrimmage; a wrestling bout; but a wrestling bout of a thousand against one. It purposely raises a clamour to shake its adversary's soul, wherein it most resembles a gigantic pack of fighting dogs, for it snarls, howls, yells, and all of this most terrifically. Its purpose is to kill, and to kill with a savage pride.' He likens it to 'a huge pendant hanging from the tip of a demon's ear.' An infernal cauldron, in which vessels of all kinds have foundered on the rocks. Along this stretch of Dorset coast, over the past centuries so many have come to ruination. Among them:

- A British troop transporter bound for the West Indies.
- A French brig full of coffee and cotton.
- A Swedish schooner laden with salt.
- A Danish brig full of fruit.
- A German steamer carrying oil.
- A Dutch galliot full of oranges, tobacco and wine.
- An English schooner carrying Welsh slate.
- An Exeter brig carrying timber.
- A Spanish brig with sugar and mahogany.
- An Austrian pollacco, out of Trieste, a cargo of timber, cloth and sugar.

So many losses. A French barque taking 890 tons of coal from Dunkirk to Senegal is wrecked on Chesil Beach, as is a Latvian schooner carrying fireclay from Teignmouth to Lisbon; as is an East Indiaman on the last

stretch of its voyage from Bombay to London, with a consignment of cotton, sugar, coffee, pepper and rice, only four Lascars and one woman passenger survive. An ironclad bound for Wellington, New Zealand, collides with a wooden ship bound for New York, with dreadful loss of life despite the best efforts of local fishermen attempting a rescue.

Down to the bottom goes barley from Ipswich intended for Glasgow, logs from St Domingo, cattle from New York, salt from Cadiz bound for Bergen, a cargo of iron pyrites from Huele intended for Rotterdam, coal and coke from South Shields destined for Carthage, floorboards en route from Drammen to Dartmouth, wine and soap for Amsterdam, coal for Genoa. A cargo of deals going from Nardmaling to Nantes is lost, as is a cargo of matches, tar, turpentine and acid being taken from Hamburg to Buenos Aires. Ore from Sagunto never reaches Rotterdam, wool from Brisbane will never be unloaded at Liverpool docks. Roadstone and tin ingots from Newlyn lie scattered on the sea-bed.

It is only in 1852 that the Admiralty begin to collect statistics on shipping casualties, extending this in 1856 to include the causes of shipwrecks, as they recognise the problems of poor navigational aids at both harbours and along the shipping lanes. Three years later a Royal Commission is set up to examine all lighthouses around Britain and Ireland, as well as visiting those in France and Spain.

