

HMS *Pomone*

On 11 October 1811, HMS *Pomone*, a 5th Rate 38-gun 1,076-ton frigate with a crew of 284, was lost near the Needles. She had been built in 1805 and had fought successfully against the French in the Mediterranean under Captain Robert Barrie. Her greatest success was at the Battle of Sagone Bay, where *Pomone* led three frigates into the Corsican harbour, fighting two French frigates, an armed merchantman, and a barrage of fort and shore artillery. By nightfall, the three French ships were burnt wrecks, and the fort had been silenced.

In 1811 Barrie was ordered home to repair the battle-scarred frigate; in addition, he was carrying intelligence from Sardinia which needed to be taken to Westminster as soon as possible. Also, on board *Pomone* were the British Ambassador to Persia, Sir Harford Jones, who was retiring, and some Arab stallions which were a present from the Shah of Persia to King George III.

Trinity House had built three lighthouses around the Island's shores in 1785. One was at the Needles, on the cliff 500 feet above Scratchells Bay; one was at St Catherine's near



the Pepper Pot, and one at Hurst Castle.

Pomone set course through the narrow Needles Passage, with the ship's Master, James Sturrock, at the helm. It was a misty day, and Sturrock mistook the light at the Needles for the light at Hurst Castle. Barrie, at the front of the ship, was able to see Hurst Lighthouse, and realised Sturrock's mistake.

The wheel was spun, but too late. Two minutes later, *Pomone* struck. The crew approached Captain Barrie and asked permission to cover the figurehead in black cloth, and Barrie accepted that his ship was a wreck. Luckily, the sea was calm, and the crew was saved. Over the next three days

the ship's cannon, masts, cargo and valuables were all salvaged, with the Shah's horses manhandled out through the gun ports.

The Court Martial severely reprimanded Sturrock, and Barrie was relieved of all responsibility.

In 1969 the remains of *Pomone* were discovered by Derek Williams, and the ship is now a Protected Wreck Site.

Illustration: HMS *Pomone*, from a colour lithograph by [T. G. Dutton](#), after a painting by G.F. St. John

Sources: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A894224>