

The Wreck of the Convict Ship Cedrene on the 2nd April 1862

The Cedrene was a 308 ton three masted Bermudan barque which was just 16 days old when it was wrecked on the shores of the Back of the Wight.

She had left Bermuda March 16th on her maiden voyage bound for Portsmouth

At 1am on April 2nd the mate mistook the outline of the Island for a great black cloud. He called the captain who ordered the ship to turn but it was too late to save her from grounding and becoming stranded on the Ship Ledge. In a heavy swell and thick fog the Brighstone lifeboat the Rescue was called out to attend the ship.

Coxswain James Buckett was surprised to find that the Cedrene was carrying a human cargo, 192 convicts returning home after their sentences were finished and another 43 overseers and crewmen, a total of 234 souls that needed rescuing. In 8 trips the Rescue safely brought 134 people to the shore, including all of the women and children. The groundswell drove the wreck closer to the beach, this enabled a line to be attached, along which the remaining men could make their way through the surf to the beach. Many of the ex-convicts made their way to the two Brighstone pubs.

Having drunk the pubs dry they continued celebrating their good fortune of being alive by fighting in the road outside the pubs. The inhabitants of Brighstone must have been relieved when troops from the Parkhurst Barracks arrived and marched the offenders to Newport.

The chief coastguard, Joe Cutajar and the Rev. Pellew Gaze were later commended by the R.N.L.I. for their outstanding gallantry during the beach rescue.

The Church of St Peter and St Paul is medieval dating from the 12th century.



The ship was a total write off, left high and dry on the beach where she was broken up. Her cedar timbers provided valuable building material for local buildings, including the roof timbers for the Chancel of the church of St Peter and St Paul at Mottistone.

Reference: Shipwrecks of the Wight. J.C. Medland