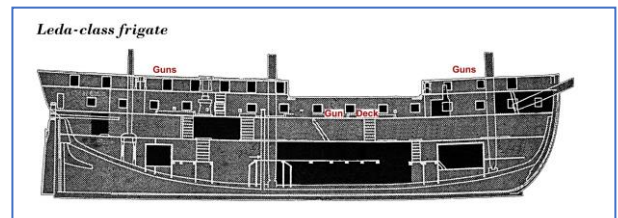


H.M.S Pomone - The ship and her sinking

HMS Pomone was launched 17 January 1805, the year of the Battle of Trafalgar. Based on a French design, she was a Royal Navy, Leda class 38-gun frigate, carrying a crew of 284.

Built at Chatham Dockyard in Kent, *Pomone* was placed under the command of *Captain William Lobb* for service in the English Channel. Under his command she seized smuggling and privateer vessels.

Pomone had considerable firepower, carrying
10 nine-pounder guns,
28 eighteen-pounder guns,
14 thirty-two-pounder guns,
2 thirty-two pounder carronades



Robert Barrie 1774-1841 was appointed captain of *HMS Pomone* on 10 May 1806.

Napoleon's brother

In August 1810 *HMS Pomone* captured an American-bound ship that was carrying *Lucien Buonaparte* (*Napoleon's brother*) and his family.

Barrie described the incident in a letter to his half-sister Fanny: -

"At first Lucien was very angry at being made a prisoner-of-war but by degrees he became reconciled and we are now very great friends..."

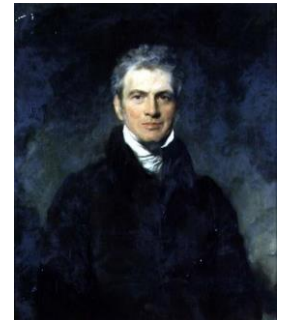


Barrie refused to claim any of Lucien's treasure which he considered to be private property. Lucien remarked: *"We could not have been better treated by the captain of this frigate"*.

On his departure from the ship *Lucien* ordered a cash gift to be distributed amongst *Barrie's* men. The crew honourably refused. The petty officers returned the money saying they did not make war upon private individuals, especially women and children, but if *Lucien* cared to give the men a glass of grog each, they would have no objection to drinking his, and his family's, health.

The return to Britain

In September 1811 *Captain Barrie* received his final commission on *HMS Pomone*, to sail from Malta to Constantinople. He was to collect the Persian ambassador, as well as the King's minister and envoy *Sir Harford Jones* and party.



Sir Harford Jones

The Persian ambassador did not sail, but *Sir Harford* did embark along with other passengers including *Mr Close* a London merchant, and *Major-General Sir Francis Wilder*, a large man of 22 stone who suffered with gout. *Pomone* also carried Arab stallions that were a present to *King George III* from the *Shah of Persia*.



HMS Pomone – voyage September 1811

Having called at Malta to make urgent repairs and Cagliari (capital city of Sardinia), the frigate returned to Britain with great haste. *Pomone* was carrying intelligence about an uprising against Napoleon in Sardinia; news that needed to be taken to Westminster as soon as possible.

The curse, or was it?

HMS Pomone returned to Malta where a curious incident took place. A local trading vessel approached the ship hoping to sell merchandise to the crew.

One of the officers ordered the traders to stand off as the crew were busy. Unfortunately, this did not go down well with the traders and in revenge for the slight they nailed a sheet of copper against the ship's bow.

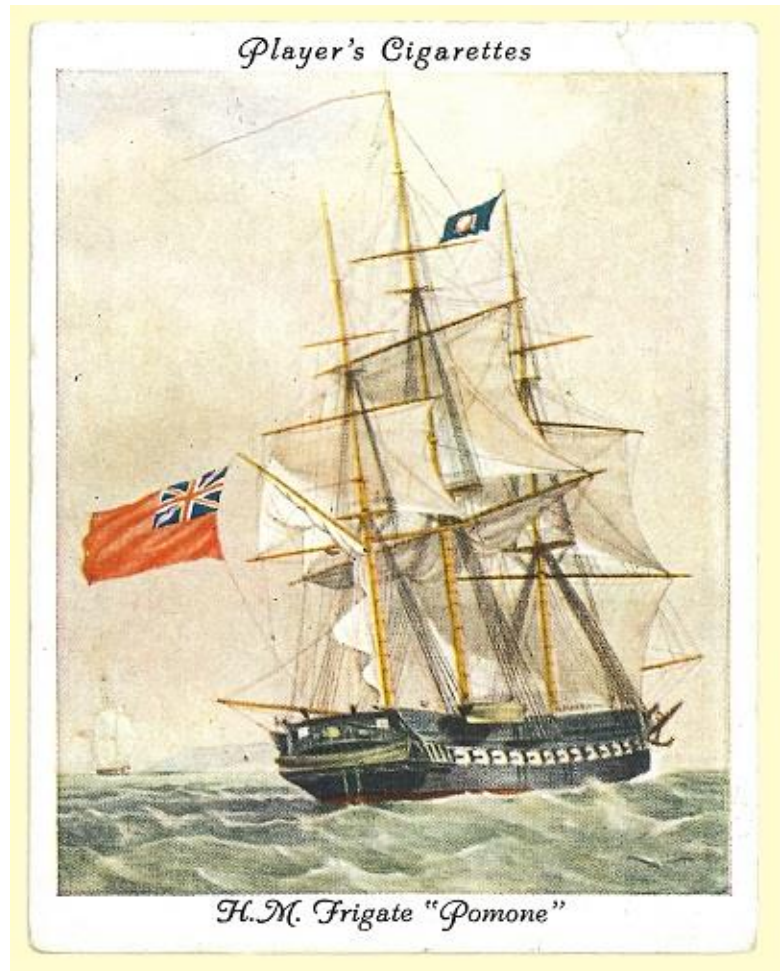
The superstitious crew began to have a feeling that they were cursed and that the *Pomone* would never reach England in safety.

On the rocks

The morning of the 11 October 1811 was foggy. At around 1.00pm *HMS Pomone* rounded Portland Bill whilst the mist had begun to clear.

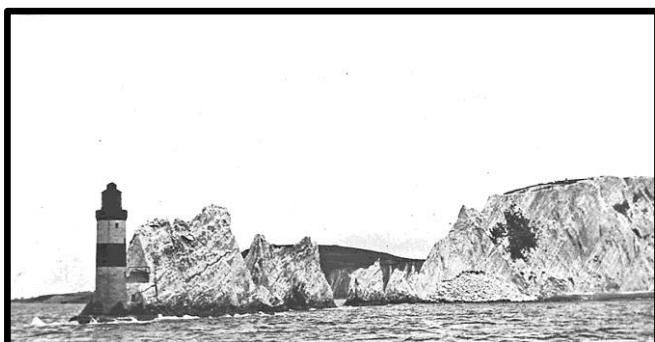
With the need for haste to get messages to the *Duke of Wellington*, *Captain Barrie* decided to take the ship through The Needles passage.

The *Pomone* reached The Needles at twilight. The Master, *James Sturrock* steered the ship and set course through the narrow and treacherous channel.



This 1936 Player's cigarette card shows *HMS Pomone*.

In the mist *Sturrock* mistook the light on the cliffs above the Needles for the one by *Hurst Castle*.



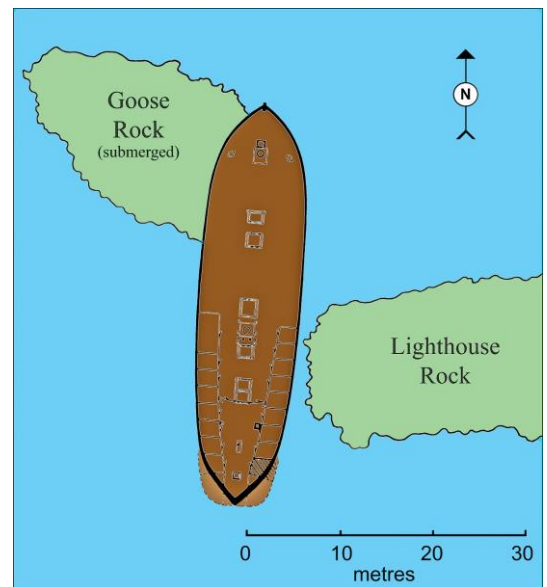
Needles Rocks and Lighthouse.
By *James Dore* 1854-1925.
Circa. 1891-1914

IWCMS.2012.51

Barrie, saw the *Hurst Light* in the distance, realising the ship was off course he cried out the order "*Starboard the helm!!*" The wheel was spun, but it was too late: two minutes later the *Pomone* hit the submerged '*Goose Rock*' with a jolting crash.

She had struck at high tide and was severely damaged. There was little hope of refloating her.

The Maltese traders who had nailed the copper tablet to the ship's bow were now cursed by the sailors and their act was seen as the reason why the ship had been wrecked. A group of seamen came to see Barrie on the quarter deck and asked for his permission to cover the figurehead with black cloth.



HMS Pomone strikes the submerged 'Goose Rock'.

Barrie had to accept that his ship was wrecked and it would not be possible to save Pomone.

Evacuation and man overboard



The Needles.
Samuel Howitt (1756/7-1823)
1791. IWCMS.2002.98

When *Pomone* struck 'Goose Rock' *Captain Barrie* was galvanised into action. He gave orders from the quarter-deck commanding crew to get below and man the chain pumps to try to keep the ship afloat.

Below decks *Private Marine Bernard Lowry* deserted his post. He grabbed a jug of rum to drink himself insensible and blot out the fear of his impending doom.

Fortunately, on deck, Barrie was made of sterner stuff and, alongside *First Lieutenant Gabriel*, he organised the evacuation of the ship.

During the evacuation there was a flurry of noise and activity at the front of the ship. In his impatience to be saved the very large *Major General Wilder* had stripped to his drawers and, according to an eyewitness, "*got out on the bowsprit to jump into the sea, acknowledging at the same time that he could not swim!*" Luckily for him he was hauled back on board by the *Pomone's* crew.

As the men disembarked, an extremely drunk Bernard Lowry appeared on deck. Mistaking Barrie for Lieutenant Gabriel he began a garbled account of how by mistake he was wearing another man's clothes. The clothes belonged to the luckless London Merchant, *Mr Close*. A furious Barrie ordered somebody to shove Lowry into the boat!

The unfortunate sailors made their way into the boats, expressing their sorrow for their Captain, "*Poor Barrie*" and lamenting the fate of their ship; "*Old Mother Pomone*".

The rescue



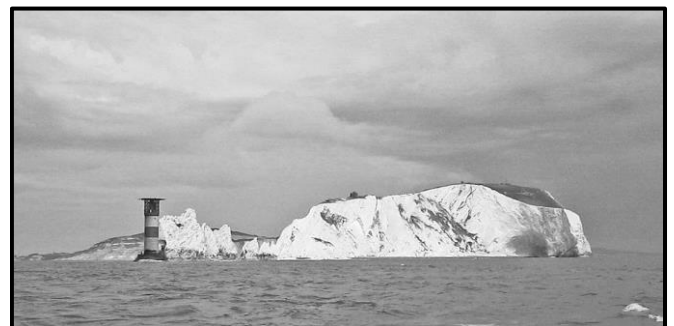
Officer's Badge
From HMS Pomone
wreck site
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Fortunately, there was no wind that night. Boats from the guard ship *Tisiphone* and pilot boats from Yarmouth were able to get alongside *HMS Pomone* within an hour.

All 283 officers, crew, and passengers were saved.

Over the next three days *Pomone's* cannon, masts, cargo and valuables, including 50,000 dollars, were salvaged. The Shah's Arabian horses were brought out through the gun ports. "*We succeeded in getting the horses out of the ports, I fear they are bruised but I hope not ruined as horses. The mules and goats are not hurt and old Tom is safe*" (*Barrie*). Was old Tom the ship's cat?

In a race against time *Capitan Barrie* oversaw the salvage operation, finally leaving *Pomone* on the 15 October, "*The loss of the ship is almost more than I can support*".



The Needles from the sea.

In response to the accident, the Admiralty ordered that its ships should not attempt *The Needles* passage at night.

The court-martial

On 25 October 1811 the court-martial* into the loss of *HMS Pomone* took place on board *HMS Gladiator* in Portsmouth Harbour.

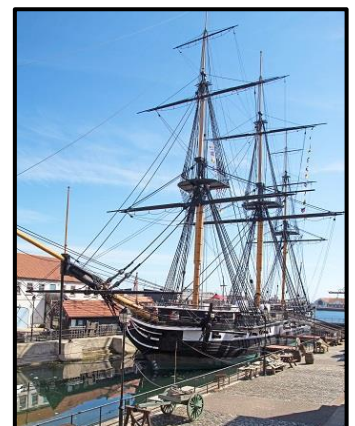
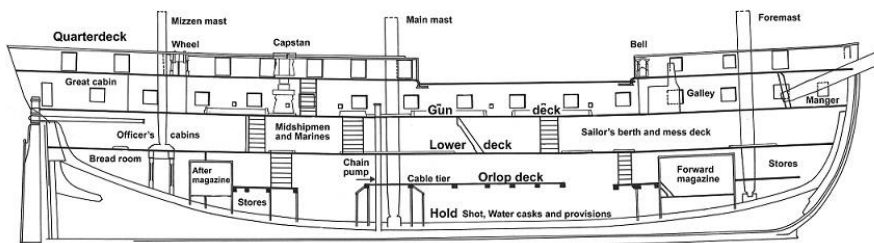
The Court decided that the ship's pilot *James Sturrock* was to be severely reprimanded for his mistake, whilst *Captain Barrie* and his other officers were cleared of all responsibility for the loss.

The drunken *Private Marine Bernard Lowry* was to receive fifty lashes on his back with a cat o' nine tails.

Fortunately for Lowry he escaped this punishment as *Rear-Admiral Hargood* recommended mercy!

Barrie went on to have a glittering career in the Royal Navy. On 25 November 1834 he was knighted by *King William IV* at a ceremony in Brighton. He was promoted to rear-admiral on 10 January 1837 and became a 'Knight of the Bath' in 1840.

* The Royal Navy had a standard court-martial which convenes whenever a ship is lost; this does not presume that the captain was suspected of wrongdoing, but merely that the circumstances surrounding the loss of the ship are made part of the official record.



HMS Trincomalee, one of two surviving Royal Navy, Leda class 38-gun frigates at the National Museum of the Royal Navy Hartlepool.

Phone 01983 823433

Email - museums@iow.gov.uk

Web - www.iwight.com/museums

Isle of Wight Council Heritage Service

