

Basic Detail Report



00015618

Title

Part of the crew of His Majesty's Ship GUARDIAN
endeavouring to escape in the boats

Date

1790

Primary Maker

Robert Dodd

Medium

Printing ink and watercolour on wove paper

Dimensions

Overall: 843 x 717 mm, 0.6 kg

Name

Engraving

History

The story of the GUARDIAN and her trials at sea after leaving the Cape became well known throughout England and her Captain, Lieutenant Edward Riou, became a national hero who was later to serve under Horatio Nelson. On the eve of 23 December 1789 the GUARDIAN was awaiting the return of a number of "jolly boats" that had been sent to obtain ice from floating berg that had been spotted in the distance. Due to the large number of livestock, particularly cattle, that was on board the demand for drinking water had been high throughout the journey. According to newspaper accounts of the time which were based on a letter sent by Riou to the Admiralty, the GUARDIAN had been waiting the return of the boats when foggy, rough weather set in. The ship lost sight of the iceberg and in strong currents and reduced visibility, struck it three times causing severe damage to the hull including the destruction of her rudder. The ship began filling at once with water and by the time pumping was begun, at least six feet had filled the hull. All available hands were set to pumping and by the 24th December only two feet of water remained. However the damage to the sides was proving difficult to contain and any lapse in pumping caused the ship to fill to 10 feet of water again very rapidly. Riou was desperate to lighten the load and proceeded to throw all livestock overboard - sheep, cows and horses that had been intended for Botany Bay. Many of the crew and passengers, by now exhausted, were realising that the pumps were "losing their efficiency and power" and believing all was lost, apparently begged Riou for permission to escape in the GUARDIAN'S small boats. Riou agreed although, heroically, he chose to stay with the GUARDIAN and attempt to save her or at least as much as the cargo as possible. He was accompanied by at least half of those originally on board, including 21 convicts who also had assisted in trying to save the ship. Rudderless, the GUARDIAN was fairly

unmanageable and Riou's priority and focus was trying to patch leaks with sailcloth and straw and keep her afloat. After a number of weeks at the mercy of the current, and a testament to the seamanship of Riou and the remaining crew, the GUARDIAN was approached by a Dutch ship, on her way from Batavia to the Cape of Good Hope, and assisted in making her way back to the Cape towards the end of February. Riou ran the GUARDIAN aground on a beach at False Bay to prevent her sinking and managed to salvage the remaining cargo. However bad weather wrecked eventually destroyed the ship. Although the ship was lost, Riou was completely exonerated on his return to London and indeed, became a figure of great courage and honour. He was instrumental in receiving the pardon of 14 of the convicts who had remained with him aboard the GUARDIAN and he implored the Admiralty not to find fault with those of the crew who had abandoned the GUARDIAN in the boats. Of those who had left, only one boat had been rescued and the others were not seen again. Riou was later appointed by Nelson to command the HMS AMAZON during the Battle of Copenhagen in 1801. He was however shot and killed during that battle. Interestingly, Riou is said to have talked with Lieutenant Bligh whilst at the Cape of Good Hope as Bligh was returning to England after the Bounty mutiny. What tales they both would have told each other.