

### The *Boreas* disaster.

On the night of 28<sup>th</sup> November 1807, the warship *Boreas* found herself on the Hanois reef during a terrible storm and sank at half past five in the morning the next day. There were more than one hundred and ninety-five officers and sailors on board. The ship left the harbour of St. Peter Port during the afternoon of the 28<sup>th</sup> when she received a message that a small boat was in difficulty near the west coast with two men on board. Even though it was very bad weather, the *Boreas* found the boat and began to tow it towards the harbour. It began to get dark and the sailors were ordered to watch out for any danger. The wind came from the north-west and the wooden warship began to roll with each roller. Suddenly a sailor shouted, "There are rocks straight ahead!"

Too late, the captain did not have time to avoid hitting the rocks. He gave orders to hoist more sail and the ship advanced about two hundred yards and for a moment the men on board believed that the warship had got away. But no! A moment later she had struck harder on another rock and this time she was holed and the sea came in fast. The two men in the little boat which the *Boreas* had taken in tow decided that it was time to save themselves and they cut the rope and went off towards the coast. They reached the beach but, it is said, they did not try to alert the authorities of the disaster.

The cannons were fired to try and let the inhabitants along Rocquaine and L'Erée know that a ship was in great danger at Les Hanois, but they thought that it was a French ship and they were not going to help it. When the captain realised that there would be no help. He ordered that each man be given a measure of spirits and the small boats put into the water. One would go and seek help and the other two would take the sick and wounded ashore. They would return to the *Boreas* to fetch other sailors. The seamen who reached land at Pleinmont escaped up the cliffs but, it is said, did not help their comrades.

There is a great deal of information about the wreck in the newspapers of that time, much more than can be included here, but it seems that the captain told his seamen still aboard the *Boreas* to find shelter in the stern of the ship. They stayed there all the rest of the night, but early in the morning they heard a terrible noise and the ship slipped down the rocks and under the sea.

The crew was thrown into the sea, but there were some who climbed up the rocks or on to rafts which they had made from driftwood during the night. The captain managed to climb on to one of these rafts, but he died after a short time and the sea took his body. When it was light, the men on the rocks were saved by fishermen from Rocquaine who, at last, decided to go to sea to see what was happening.

During all this time, the soldiers at the fort at Pezeries did not hear or see what was happening at Les Hanois. They were too busy with the sick and the women who were at the fort that night. In a letter from Vice-Admiral Sir James Saumarez, (who was in charge of the navy in Guernsey), to the Admiralty in London, he said that he had sent two ships, the *Brillant* and the *Jamaica* to Les Hanois to aid the *Boreas* but they could do nothing for the wreck. They saved thirty men from the Hanois reef and other men from the small boats were saved as well. He mentioned, also, the courage and good behaviour of Captain Robert Scott, his officers and crew during this terrible night. With great regret he had to report that the captain and more than one hundred and twenty of the crew had been lost.

At the enquiry in December 1807, at Portsmouth, the captain, the officers and crew were exonerated from all blame except for those who had escaped up the cliffs when they landed.

Forty years later, a diver discovered fifteen cannons and a lot of cannon-balls amongst the rocks and sand which had almost covered the *Boreas*, but everything was left as it was. More than fifty years after the wreck, Les Hanois lighthouse was built and the light was lit in November 1862. Since that time, other cannons and guns have been found and these relics are in Fort Grey Museum at Rocquaine.