

The wreck of the *Courier*.

The weather was beautiful that day. There was no wind and the sea was calm and smooth like glass. It was April 30th 1906. In the morning, when the ship *Courier II* left the harbour of St. Peter Port, there were about eighteen passengers on board and nine crew members with the captain. The passengers were looking forward to seeing their relations and friends in Sark, or to spending a good day there.

At five o'clock the boat was ready to return to Guernsey with twenty-seven passengers on board. The *Courier* left the little harbour at Creux as the tide was rising and the captain took his marks towards the Great Russel just as he had done dozens of times before. It was still fine and the visibility was good, but the sea had become a little rough.

The boat was to the south of Jethou, near some rocks called Les Ferrières when – according to what a passenger said later at the enquiry – she hit a rock. Everyone on board heard a dreadful noise, as if the propeller had been ripped from the ship. The captain ordered the lifeboats to be put into the water and then he steered the boat on to Les Ferrières. He thought that he could save the passengers and perhaps the ship.

The steamer sank very quickly and those who were in the small boats were thrown into the sea. The crew feared that the engine was going to blow up because so much steam was coming out of the ship. There were twelve or thirteen people in a small boat, but there were even more in the water with life-belts. Even though it all happened so quickly, there was no panic. For about half an hour the boats picked up the people in the water and took them to the reef of rocks, even though the sea was rolling a lot now.

The boat *Alert* arrived and put its life-boats in the water, and soon the pilot boat *Vixen* followed her and picked up the people from the rocks. The two boats stayed there until seven in the evening to look for survivors and then they returned to St. Peter Port.

By the time that those who had been saved landed, there was a great crowd of people on the White Rock and all along the jetties. The disaster was seen from the town and there were those who said that there were ten thousand people at the harbour that evening. By this time, the *Courier* had sunk completely. The *Alert* had fourteen survivors on board and many of them were injured. A Mr. Thorburn was picked up from the sea, and even though he still had on his life-belt, a doctor pronounced him dead. The boat *Vixen* arrived with the people who had been on the rocks – one of whom was the captain. He had stayed on board the *Courier* but he had been thrown into the water and had been saved.

When all the passengers were counted, the authorities found out that four men and three women had been drowned and three of the crew also. One of the passengers was the Seigneur of Sark – Mr. W.F. Collings – but the report in the Press did not say whether he was one of the drowned.

The next day, it was discovered that the *Courier* had sunk in sixty feet of water. All the post was lost and nothing was saved from the ship. Later, a diver went out to the wreck to examine it and it was decided to raise the *Courier* from the sea-bed. The captain was partner-owner of the ship but she was not insured. On July 30th some tugs and the *Alert* went to raise her and took her towards the harbour in town. However at ebb tide the wreck touched bottom and it was left there until August 4th when it was raised again on the rising tide and this time it was towed by the *Alert* to the Cambridge Berth. The cable snapped but the wreck was almost dry. When she was examined, the authorities found a split from the stern to the middle of the ship on the

starboard side under the water-line. On the other side, to port, there were holes and it was possible to see right through the ship. A search of the boat found the body of a man but he was unrecognisable. Some jewellery found with him identified him—he was a Mr. Walter Long from Bradford in England. His wife had been saved.

On the same day, August 4th, a body was found on a beach near Cherbourg. It was a man and he was about sixty years old. At the Court of Enquiry which followed the disaster, Captain Whales was found guilty of negligence. He should have taken more care and the ship was too near the rock La Goulinière.

On October 5th 1906, the *Courier* was towed to Southampton where she was built and the company Day & Summers did the repairs on the ship which they had constructed. By the month of December that same year, the *Courier* was in Guernsey once more to continue her service as she had done for years. During the First World War she was painted grey, but during the Second World War, the ship found herself in Scotland, on British Admiralty service on the Clyde. The little steamer came back to the island in July 1947 and there was a great crowd of people at the harbour to shout, "Hurray!" and blowing of fog-horns when she entered the pier-heads. However, unfortunately before the end of the year, the owners sold her because she was too old and cost too much to maintain. She was taken to Holland where she was broken up for scrap. That is how the story of the *Courier II* ended, but for a long time the people of Guernsey remembered her. Some verses about the wreck were even written by a Mr. Amy.

The ship which sank near Jethou was the second *Courier*. The first boat went between Guernsey, Alderney and Cherbourg from 1876 to 1913 with passengers and cargo. The same company which were the proprietors of the *Courier I*, Alderney Steam Packet Co., bought the *Courier II* in 1883. She was a little bigger and did the same work on the same route.