

The Thurlestone Wreckers



Wrecking, the practice of looting ships that had foundered close inshore, was regularly carried out by people living along the South Devon coast. Survivors were seen as a threat to the locals' 'right' to plunder for, until the late 1700s, the law sanctioned the pillage of wrecks provided no man or beast survived. It was a law that invited murder!

The wreckers at Thurlestone, to the west of Salcombe, had a particularly savage reputation. This is clear from the verses opposite (written in 1753) and from the sad fate of a wealthy lady passenger on the barque *Chanteloupe* which, in September 1772, was dashed onto the reef that links Thurlestone Rock to the shore.

The lady survived the wreck but her fine robes and valuable jewellery attracted the attention of the wreckers, who 'seized and stript her of her clothes, even cutting off some of her fingers, and mangling her ears in their impatience to secure the jewels, and left her miserably to perish.'

*Verses occasioned by the late Wrecks
near Thurlestone, Devon,
Jan 23, 1753*

by Col. L_____ of T_____k, Devon

*From Thurlestone's shores, O fly! Never dare to trust,
The cursed rabble of that hated coast.*

*Where sailors oft' their hapless fate deplore,
Who escaped the seas, are wrecked upon the shore.*

*For when the boisterous winds and raging deep,
To this inhuman coast enforce the ship,
Around the beach the rude barbarians stray,
The vessel rend, and on the cargo prey.*

*By other's deaths they keep themselves alive,
Subsist by robbery and by ruin thrive.*

*May justice then, impartial justice, wake,
And on these cannibals, due vengeance take!'*