

# OCTOBER MEETING

————— First Speaker —————

## The Goodwin Sands and Its Wrecks

A talk by Peter Legg

Reported by Alan Lee

Peter opened his presentation by showing the members a map of the Goodwin Sands linked to some topical music about ship wrecks.

Once farmland, the sands are up to 3 miles wide and covers an area of about 21 square miles. Contrary to popular belief the depth of the sand over the majority of the Goodwin's is only 15 to 30 feet. It became known as the great ship swallower.

The first recorded ship wreck was in 1298. In WWII a German Dornier was shot down by the crew of a Bolton. It crashed on the Goodwin's with only two survivors.

In 1851 the Admiral Taylor, a barge, was moored to be used as floating asylum, within days it had sunk.

Originally there were six lifeboats that covered the Goodwin Sands, Ramsgate, Walmer, Kingsdown, Hythe, Dungeness and North Deal. For many years' lifeboats were open to the elements with no extra floatation and the crews did not have the benefit of lifejackets until the mid 1850's. *"The first cork life jacket was patented in 1765 by Dr John Wilkinson."*

In 1367 Brother Nicholas De Legh, a hermit monk, is said to have kept a lantern burning in a cave at St Margaret's to warn mariners of



Peter Legg

the dreaded Goodwin's.

In 1635, a distinguished soldier, Sir John Meldrum, arranged for the construction of two iron braziers which held an open fire, and from that time onwards we have always had two Lighthouses at South Foreland. In 1636 he was granted by letters-patent from Charles I licence to continue and renew the lighthouses. He also profited from a monopoly that entitled him to levy 'light dues' at a penny per ton of cargo carried by ships that passed the lighthouses, payable at the next British port they reached.

At one time there were 7 light vessels now only 2 remain and they are both unmanned. The South Foreland is the highest lighthouse above sea level in the UK.

In November 1703 during the great storm 14 warships, including the Stirling Castle and 40 merchant vessels (some estimates are as many as 90 ships), were wrecked with the loss of some 1190 lives.

### The phantom ghost ship

The Lady Lovibond a three-mast schooner was bound for Oporto, Portugal, with a cargo of flour, meat, wine and gold. The ship was lost on the 13th February 1748. The Captain Simon Peel was celebrating his honeymoon with his new wife, when Rivers the ships mate deliberately ran the ship aground in a jealous rage. All hands were lost to the dark

sea on that fateful night. Every 50 years on the anniversary of the disaster this grim story is said to re-enact itself. On Feb 13th 1898, 1948 and 1998 the 'ghost ship' has been reported trapped on the sands by several other ships in the area, but upon further investigation each time no wreck or sign on the ship has been found.

In October 1939 the Mahratta II ran aground on the Goodwin Sands. After the Mahratta II broke up, the ship was found to be resting on top of the first Mahratta which had sunk on the Goodwins in 1909. On 31 January 2008, the roll on roll off passenger ferry Pride of Canterbury hit the wreckage and suffered extensive damage.

Although not wrecked on the Goodwins Peter mentioned a couple of other local shipping incidents. The Preussen was a German steel-hulled five-masted ship-rigged windjammer five masts carrying six square sails on each mast. Until the 2000 launch of the Royal Clipper it was the world's only ship of this class ever built. In 1910 it was in collision with the small British cross-channel steamer Brighton 8 nautical miles (15 km) south of Newhaven. They tried to tow the Preussen into Dover Harbour but the weather was against them so 10 tugs towed her round to Fan Bay where she broke her tow and beached on the rocks. The cargo included 100 pianos bound for Chile, one piano was broken and found to be full of guns. Many people in St Margaret's ended up with a piano in their house. What a surprise!

HMS Glatton was a flat bottomed ship with heavy guns and in 1918 suffered a small explosion that ignited the cordite and the ship became engulfed in flames. Vice-Admiral Keyes alarmed by the munitions ship, the Gransha, tailing a mere 150 yards away ordered the Glatton to be blown from the water. H.M.S Cossack launched two torpedoes, neither of which were successful

in sinking the Glatton. Keyes subsequently ordered H.M.S Myngs to fire its turrets at the ruptured hull to quell any concerns of triggering the Gransha. Sixty crew men were killed by this manoeuvre, with a further nineteen dying of burns. The wreck remained in Dover Harbour, salvaging the Glatton was repeatedly delayed by expense. On 16th March 1926, it was moved to its current position and now remains buried under the car ferry terminal.

At 03.30 on the 19th November 1991, with her main anchor failed, the MV Ross Revenge, better known as Radio Caroline, found herself grounded on the Goodwin Sands. 04:45 DHB tug Dextrous deployed. 05:35 Ramsgate lifeboat arrived and at 06:58 ran aground but managed to free herself. 06:57 the crew were airlifted by an RAF Sea King helicopter to RAF Manston. Twice the Dextrous failed to move the Ross but on the high tide on 21st November they finally succeeded and towed the Ross back to the Eastern Docks at Dover. While waiting to move Caroline obtained a temporary licence and continued to broadcast from the Granville Dock.

The Channel Navigation System operating from the 1970's to the present day has seen great advances in safety covering the sea area from Dover to Harwich.



26 27th November 1954,  
*Wreck of the South Goodwin Lightship*