

Captain William Eastfield to
William Ramsey, Esq., India House
Deal, 26th January 1809

Sir, It is with extreme regret that I have to confirm the intelligence of the Honourable Company's Agent here, as to the loss of the Admiral Gardner on the Goodwin Sands, yesterday morning; the painful circumstances attending which I here beg leave to state.

We sailed out of the Downs on the 24th, with the Carnatic and the Britannia, the wind from the eastward. On getting a little to the westward of the South Foreland, the wind drew to the south-east, and about dusk fell calm: it being flood tide, let go the anchor in fourteen fathom water. At 7pm, while giving the ship cable, the wind sprung up from the west-north-west. The people were sent up to hand sails immediately, but the wind increasing violently, they could not effect it. The people continued on the yard until 10pm: the pilot then feeling the lead, called out the anchor was coming home; the people were consequently called off the yards to give the ship cable, and when I was below seeing a little more service clapped on, a little before eleven I heard the pilot exclaim "cut away the sheet, the ship's on shore."

On coming upon deck, I inquired of the pilot what water we had, and he said five fathoms: I observed it was odd that he had not struck before, but repeated his orders to cut the sheet away, under the idea that the depth of water was true; and thinking it impossible to save the ship any other way, as I was aware, if it was so, that we were near the edge of the Goodwin.

The weather had come on so thick, with rain, that we had not seen the lights of the South Foreland since the wind came from the westward. The pilot went forward to see the sheet cut away, and in assisting to do it unfortunately had two of his fingers cut off, after which we was obliged to be laid on his bed, and was immediately delirious. I immediately took a cast of the lead myself, and found to my astonishment fourteen fathoms water. The ship brought ups, and we endeavoured again to hand the sails, which was partly accomplished. I intended, as the tide made to windward, to cut and put her head to the northward, but was induced to hold on as long as I could, to get in the remaining sail and clear away the spare anchor (having lost the best bower in the Gulls the preceding night) and we were employed bending the cable and clearing the anchor, when we first brought up; but from the people being called off, and all employed on other duties, we had not completed it.

The people were by this time absolutely worn down with fatigue. The ship still held on, and I was in hopes would continue so. At half past two, on the weather side slackening the sails then not all in, I thought it advisable to give the ship more cable, which we were effecting, when the small bower parted, broke all the stoppers on the sheet, and it run out to the clench. On the tide making, she brought the wind on the starboard bow, and I was afraid to cut, as I could not get her to cast any other way than to the southward, and judging we were near the Goodwin, was afraid, before I could get her wore round, that she would be on it. Under these circumstances, all I could hope for was that she would hold fast, which she did until half past six, when having left the deck to see how the cable was in the hawse, the chief mate sent down to say the anchor was coming home, and that we had only ten fathoms water. The people were previously stationed at the fore stay sail and topmast stay sail halyards, and the carpenters ready to cut away the mizen mast, the shrouds also braced for casting, and I gave immediate orders to cut the cable, when, on putting my head up the ladder, the quartermaster called out seven fathoms, and in one minute afterwards we had but five, and I saw the breakers under our lee.

Seeing it impossible to save the ship, I ordered the main and mizen masts to be cut away. In the act of doing it the ship struck, and the sea made a fair breach over us. At daylight I had the misfortune of witnessing her on the south sand heads. Myself, officers and crew, remained by the vessel until thirty-five minutes past three PM, when to the gallant exertions of the Deal men, at the risk of their lives, we were brought off, with the loss of only one man: the ship then full of water to the upper deck.

As I am not very well, I trust the Honourable Court will excuse any incorrectness in this statement, and remain,

Sir,

Your most obedient servant

W Eastfield

[Source: British Library Oriental & India Collection]