

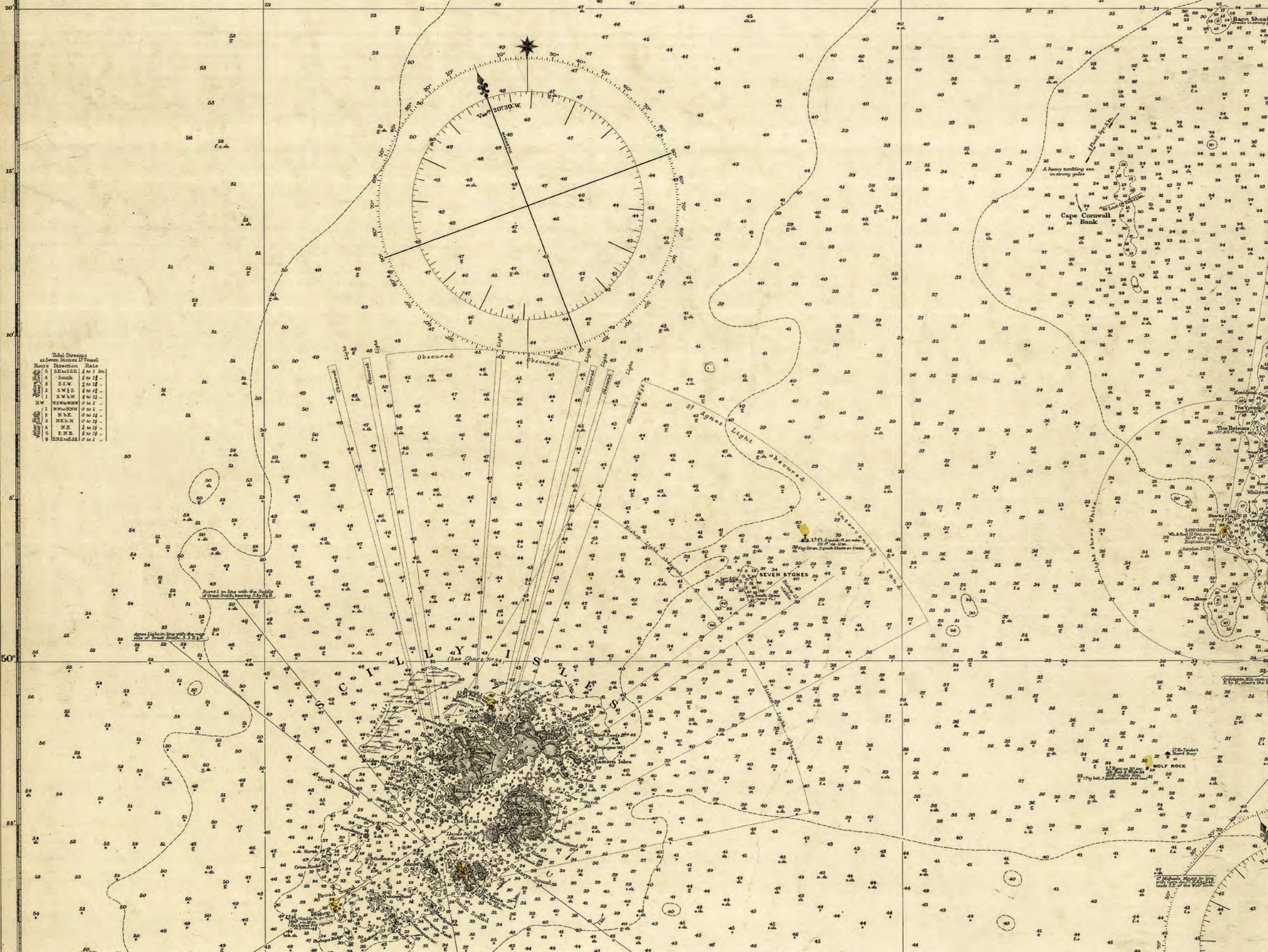
SHIPWRECK

Gibsons of Scilly
Carl Douglas Björn Hagberg

MAX STRÖM

Tidal Streams at Seven Stones Light

Hour	Direction	Rate
High	SE	1/2 to 1/3
1	South	1/2 to 1/3
2	SE	1/2 to 1/3
3	S	1/2 to 1/3
4	SW	1/2 to 1/3
5	SW	1/2 to 1/3
6	SW	1/2 to 1/3
7	SW	1/2 to 1/3
8	SW	1/2 to 1/3
9	SW	1/2 to 1/3
10	SW	1/2 to 1/3
11	SW	1/2 to 1/3
12	SW	1/2 to 1/3
13	SW	1/2 to 1/3
14	SW	1/2 to 1/3
15	SW	1/2 to 1/3
16	SW	1/2 to 1/3
17	SW	1/2 to 1/3
18	SW	1/2 to 1/3
19	SW	1/2 to 1/3
20	SW	1/2 to 1/3
21	SW	1/2 to 1/3
22	SW	1/2 to 1/3
23	SW	1/2 to 1/3
24	SW	1/2 to 1/3
25	SW	1/2 to 1/3
26	SW	1/2 to 1/3
27	SW	1/2 to 1/3
28	SW	1/2 to 1/3
29	SW	1/2 to 1/3
30	SW	1/2 to 1/3







Earl of Arran 1872

The *Earl of Arran* was one of two steam vessels that provided services between Penzance and the Isles of Scilly. She ran aground on 16 July 1872 near St Martin's in the north-eastern part of the archipelago. With 92 passengers, the captain opted to run the vessel ashore at Nurnour, south-west of St Martin's, to enable an easier rescue of those on board.

The cause of the wreck was the captain's reliance on a 'hobbler' or uncertified pilot, who had persuaded him to take a shortcut. The shortcut was a safe route for those experienced in navigating among the many exposed rocks in the area. However, the hobbler, who was travelling as a passenger, did not have the necessary skill.

The first priority was ensuring that everyone on board made it ashore. Then the cargo was landed and some of the ship's fittings were removed. The *Earl of Arran* suffered a large gash in her port bilge, and the saloon filled with water up to its windows. Two days later she broke in two. She sank several metres to the seabed, where she remains to this day. The captain's licence was suspended for four months. One assumes he relied on his own skill and experience to pilot his ships after that.

The National Maritime Museum's description of this photograph captures the overall image and the small details of the scene from 150 years ago:

'A starboard bow view of the paddle packet steamer *Earl of Arran* aground on Nornour Rock, just off Great Ganilly, Eastern Isles, Scilly. The steamer is sunk by the stern up to paddle boxes. A large rowing gig is alongside with a mizzen mast hoisted. The gig has "Lloyds" on the starboard bow in large letters. The crew and passengers on board the gig, are blurred due to their movement. Four men are on rocks on the right of the image – three sitting or reclining and one standing. The conditions are very calm.'

Aksai 1875

On 2 November 1875, the Russian cargo steamer *Aksai* was carrying a cargo of coal from Cardiff to the Black Sea port of Odessa, when she encountered dense fog and ran ashore on the rocks on the northern shore of St Martin's in the Isles of Scilly. Her engine stopped and she started taking on water. The captain ordered the crew to the lifeboats. They set off emergency flares and remained by their ship. Eventually they were rescued by the steamer *Lady of the Isles*.

The cargo could not be offloaded. Within just three days of that fateful day the ship had completely filled with water. It gradually sank below the surface, a total wreck.

Today the wreck of the *Aksai* lies on the seabed at a depth of 25 metres (80 ft). Its hull has collapsed and its steam engine lies exposed. The sea can exert terrible force in shallows like this. Every storm breaks the wreck down further. Eventually, as with so many other shipwrecks, only fragments remain on the seabed.

This photograph of the *Aksai* is the earliest surviving image of a shipwreck taken by Alexander Gibson – the second generation of Gibson photographers. At about the age of 17 he went by boat to the scene of the wreck and took two photographs using the wet plate process. He had to wrap the neg-

atives in a wet cloth to prevent them drying out. The passage back was rough but the negatives survived and were developed five hours later – an amazing achievement. The shipwreck almost appears to emerge from the mist – the lengthy exposure gave the water's surface a dreamlike appearance.

Shipwrecks have occurred ever since the very first mariners ventured out onto the sea. For just as long, shipwrecks have been a source of dread and fascination. In his 1755 poem *The Storm*, the German poet Johann Joachim Ewald presents a perspective that seems fitting for the Isles of Scilly:

Suddenly it grows dark, the wind is howling loud,
And heaven, sky, and land appear a frightful jumble.
Toward the stars flies up the ship, then plunges down again,
Sails on washed by waves, with naught but ruin all around,
Here lightening, there thunder, the whole ether storming,
Swell towering up on swell, and cloud on cloud,
The ship is shattered, and I... nothing happened to me,
Because I only watched the storm from shore.















