



**The Unfortunate
Captain Peirce and the
Wreck of the Halsewell,
East Indiaman, 1786:**
A Life and Death in the
Maritime Service of the
East India Company

by Philip Browne

November 2015 | 365pp
PB £14.95 | 9781906978327
Kindle £9.99 | 9781906978181

IT WAS A TIME of foreign wars, financial crisis, corruption, cronyism and a class system that stifled social mobility. Yet, before that disastrous night in 1786, Captain Richard Peirce enjoyed only good fortune in the maritime service of the East India Company. In a long and successful career, he sailed to the East Indies seven times, encountering military heroes, corrupt 'nabobs', artists, map-makers and scoundrels.

Then, on a tempestuous January night, his ship, the *Halsewell*, struck rocks on the Dorset coast. In one of the most dramatic shipwrecks of the

eighteenth century, the 'unfortunate Captain Peirce' lost his ship, his daughters, his fortune and his own life.

This book traces his career to a tragic conclusion that shocked and upset the nation, triggering an outpouring of emotion through poetry, music, painting and the 'Eidophusikon' - a revolutionary new kind of theatre. Two centuries later, the Halsewell disaster still has the power to move us.

**Winner of the 2018 Hall & Woodhouse
Dorchester Literary Festival Writing Prize**

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