

# “THE GIBSONS OF SCILLY”

FOR OVER A CENTURY, THIS PIONEERING FAMILY OF BRITISH PHOTOGRAPHERS RECORDED SHIPWRECKS ALONG THE HAZARDOUS CORNISH COAST  
BY JOHNATON WHEATON

We are all captivated by photographs of sunken or abandoned ships. Why? Well, that is a bit difficult to define. Perhaps it is the fact that these photos usually represent the last operating days of the vessel being depicted. Perhaps it is part of the morbid human psyche that enjoys seeing devastation wrought upon others. Perhaps it is the fact such photos capture a portion of nautical history that would be forever lost. Some 150 years ago, the coast of Cornwall was a wild place — full of smashing waves, sharp rocks, dangerous reefs, and all the other many hazards that could contribute to the downfall of even the most majestic of sailing vessels.

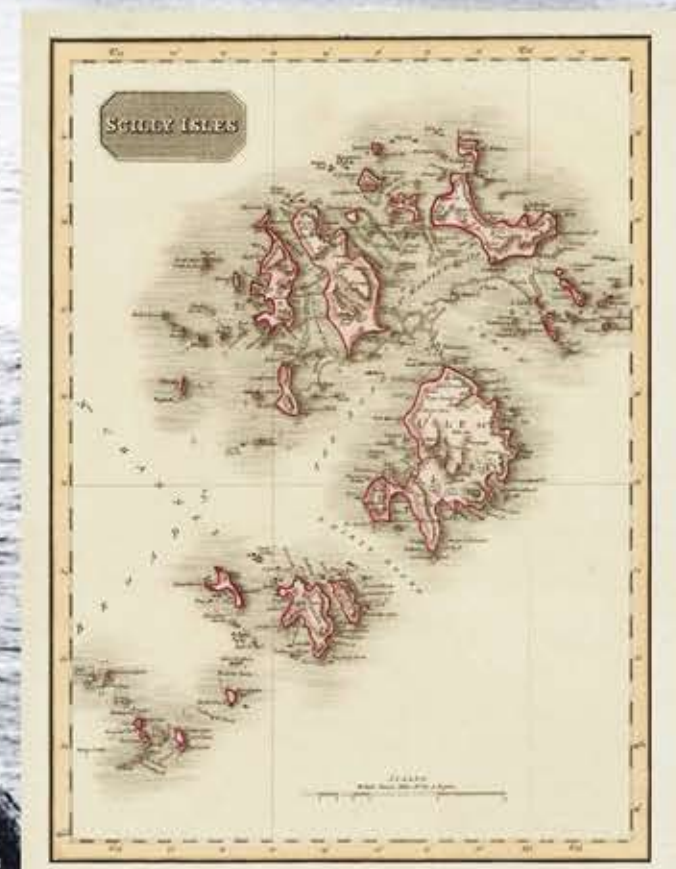
During that time, this stretch of magnificent nature was also



One of the more recent wrecks photographed by the “The Gibsons of Scilly” was the MV *Cita* in March 1997. German-owned, the 300-foot ship sank after its hull was pierced when running aground on the rocks off the south coast of the Isles of Scilly during gale-force winds while *en route* from Southampton to Belfast. The mainly Polish crew was rescued a few hours after the incident. Many of the ship’s containers were washed up on the rocks and beaches of Scilly but some traveled as far as the Celtic Sea.



A group of locals watch the remains of the SV *Granite State* after it ran aground near Porthcumo on 4 November 1895. Built in the USA and completed in 1877, the ship had arrived in Falmouth with a cargo of wheat from the River Plate on 3 November and set sail the next day. Attempting to round Lands End, she struck the Lee Ore Rock of the Runnel Stone. Damaged, she was taken in tow by the tug *Elliot and Jeffrey* and was beached in the shallows of Porthcumo. Then as she settled, the wheat began to swell as water entered the holds and this factor burst the hatches open, allowing more water to pour in. The ship was abandoned and soon broke up in a winter gale.



Vintage map of the Isles of Scilly. As can be seen, the hazards were many and varied.