



This item contains the Dublin core metadata attributes and Curatescape item type metadata fields for a story from the Ports, Past and Present archived collection on the digital repository of Ireland. It has been provided in .odt format for easy copy and pasting.

For more information about the Ports, Past and Present Project, see

<https://portspastpresent.eu/>.

For more information about Omeka Classic, see <https://omeka.org/classic/>.

For more information about Curatescape, its Omeka plugin suite and this item type metadata schema, see <https://curatescape.org/>.

For a .csv containing tabular data for all stories, see the larger collection at

<https://doi.org/10.7486/DRI.ht259b362>.

For an archived snapshot of the story as it appeared between 2020 and 2023 on

<https://portspastpresent.eu/>, see the Relation field below.

## Dublin Core

### Title

The Cursing of the HMS Caesar

### Subject

Pembroke Dock

Shipbuilding

Supernatural

### Creator

David James

### Publisher

Ports, Past and Present Project

### Date

2023

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### Relation

<https://perma.cc/ST3W-FTX9>

### Format

Curatescape story

### Language

English

## Coverage

51.69582055628288, -4.95124975534495

# Curatescape Story Item Type Metadata

## Lede

Through witchcraft or mishap, the newly-built *HMS Caesar* was unable to launch from her slipway in Pembroke Dock for seventeen days.

## Story

A local story in Pembroke Dock concerns the launch of *HMS Caesar*, planned for July 21, 1853. The ship was a wooden two decker, screw propelled ship of ninety-one guns. As was the custom on launch days all the residents of Pembroke Dock would flock into the Dockyard in their hundreds to see the event.

One such visitor was known as Betty Foggy, an old woman who lived in Pembroke and who had a reputation for witchcraft and an unkempt appearance. She arrived at the main gate with her daughter, hoping to get a good view of the ceremony. The crowd, dressed in their Sunday best clothes, felt that she was too shabby and should not be admitted. The unfortunate policeman on the gate was uncertain what to do.

The ensuing commotion attracted the attention of Captain Sir Thomas Sabine Pasley, whose house was beside the main gate. He came down and the policeman explained the situation to him. The crowd repeated their request that she should not enter the Dockyard, Captain Sir Thomas Sabine Pasley gently suggested to Betty Foggy that perhaps she had better return home. Betty's response was "Then Sir, you had better send all these good people home as well, for there will be no launching this day!" Words spoken in jest but proved to be only too true. Sure enough the ship stuck in the ways and refused to slide into her intended element.

This disaster, which disappointed the many who came to watch, was perhaps less to do with witchcraft than the fir timber used for the launching ways instead of oak. The timbers were too soft and caused them to adhere, thus preventing the successful launching of the ship. In addition to this, it was stated, the tallow used to grease the ways was of inferior quality. The *Caesar* remained in this unfortunate position for seventeen days before she was finally got off.

The men of the Dockyard were kept constantly at work in order to try to move the vessel, and were not allowed to leave the premises, save in batches, during the time the ship hung. She was precariously balancing with half her length unsupported so she had to be shored up to protect her from damage. Great Camels (immense air tight tanks) were rapidly constructed each 48 feet long by 20 feet wide and 22 feet deep shaped to fit the ship and secured by immense chains. Under each quarter great vessels 70 feet long were secured in addition to the Camels.

It was on Sunday morning August 7, 1853, during the hours of Divine service, that the worshippers in the various Churches became aware that the *Caesar* was moving. A bugle was sounded to call out the few Dockyard men that were amongst them. This resulted in the very natural, if somewhat unseemly, effect that followed. All the people hastily left the places of worship, and, moved by one impulse ran to the Dockyard to see the ship go off.

In recent years, the children of the Pembroke Dock Community School - known as the Blue School - were fascinated by the story and decided to have a pageant about it. Every child had a role to play. *HMS Caesar* was a small rowing boat in the middle of the school hall, and

David James was the Commissioner of the dockyard and had to apologize to the crowd for the failure of the launching. This caused much hilarity.

**Factoid**

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