



STORIES FROM THE SEA

SHIPWRECK OBJECTS



‘THE WRECK’ [OF THE *BRITANNIA*];

ILLUSTRATION FOR FALCONER’S ‘THE SHIPWRECK’ (1811 ED., F.P. 127)

Date made

1810

Object ref.

PAF5920; [PW5920]

Credit

National Maritime
Museum, Greenwich,
London

Artist/maker

Nicholas Pocock

Description

This is one of a set of watercolours for engraving as illustrations to a famous epic poem called ‘The Shipwreck’, written by a seaman called William Falconer. This poem, in three cantos (sections) of more than 900 lines each, recounts the final voyage of the merchant ship *Britannia* and her crew. Although this is a fictional ship, Falconer based his poem on personal experience: he was one of only three survivors of a shipwreck on a voyage from Alexandria to Venice in around 1750 (and later died in another wreck off Madagascar). As well as describing the horrors of shipwreck, the poem also contains technical details on sailing and navigation and a love story between a young officer and his sweetheart, Anna.

‘Again she plunges! Hark! A second shock
Tears her strong bottom on the marble rock!
Down on the vale of death, with dismal cries,
The fated victims shuddering roll their eyes,
In wild despair; while yet another stroke,
With deep convulsion, rends the solid oak.’

[Canto Three, ll.640–45]

Questions

1. Look closely at the painting. What words would you use to describe the sea, the ship, the sky?
2. What do you think happened before and after the moment captured in this painting?



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