



Cornish Wrecking, 1700-1860: Reality and Popular Myth

Cathryn J. Pearce

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Although the popular myth of Cornish wrecking is well-known within British culture, this book is the first comprehensive, systematic inquiry to separate out the layers of myth from the actual practices. Weaving in legal, social and cultural history, it traces the development of wreck law - the right to salvage goods washed on shore - and explores the responses of a coastal populace who found their customary practices increasingly outside the law, especially as local individual rights were being curtailed and the role of centralized authority asserted. This groundbreaking study also considers the myths surrounding wrecking, showing how these developed over time, and how moral attitudes towards wrecking changed. Overall, the picture of evil wreckers deliberately luring ships onto the rocks is dispelled, to be replaced by a detailed picture of a coastal populace - poor and gentry alike - who were involved in a multi-faceted, sophisticated coastal practice and who had their own complex popular beliefs about the harvest and salvage of goods washing ashore from shipwreck.

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