

Regarding the Lifeboat Catastrophe of New Years Day, 1907

In the Nov 2004 Journal of the IWFHS there was a short paragraph about the Lifeboat disaster in 1907, as reported in the *Liverpool Mercury*. Having researched this event from local records for our website about Ryde cemetery, I thought readers of the IWFHS Journal might be interested to know more about what happened. The reports in newspapers also provided the names of many local people who participated in the inquest or attended the funeral, which I have written in CAPITAL letters.

At the Inquest into the death of the two lifeboat men, Henry HEWARD, 51, and Frank HAYNES, 38, details of the horror of the night were uncovered. It seems that in the early afternoon of Tuesday, 1 January 1907, Augustus JARRETT, master of the barge "*Jane*", complained to the chief officer of the Coastguards, Mr BROOKS, that a boat belonging to the barge had been stolen; he was referred to the police. It was thought that the boat had not been properly tied up, and had drifted away. Later on a man was seen to put off from the Dover Street Slipway, and was observed to be sculling the boat with some difficulty near the Sewer-Buoy. He didn't realise that as it was low tide, he could have waded ashore. Seeing the boat in difficulty, George JEFFERY, one of the lifeboat crew, put off in a small boat to his aid. Being unable to reach him, he put back, and the decision to signal was given just after five o'clock.

There was a little difficulty with the launching, but the lifeboat "*Selina*" eventually got away about 5:30, with the following crew on board: William BARTLETT 49, of 21 Nelson Place, the Coxswain; George JEFFREY, 32, married, of 59 Monkton Street; Ernest COTTON, 33, married, of 30 Nelson Street; Alfred LINNINGTON, senior, 59, married, of 15 Bellvue Road; Alfred LINNINGTON, junior, 21, married, of 30 Nelson Place; Daniel REEVES, 30, single, of Clarges House, Nelson Street; Albert REEVES, 37, married, of 1 Nelson St ; Henry HEWARD, 51, of 139 High Street, single, second coxswain; and Frank HAYNES, 38, commissioned boatman of Coastguards, married.

The *Selina* was a 30 ft long whaleboat with a drop keel; she had been in use since the previous July by this crew. Under sail, the boat behaved well going eastwards in what turned out to be a futile search to Horse Sand Fort, but the crew could see nothing. They then they crossed to the Noman fort, spoke to the Warner lightship, and returned to Ryde getting close to the Bell-buoy, about 200 yards from pier, when the boat overturned around 8 pm, either from a gust of wind, or for some other reason. They had nothing to hold on to and nothing to signal with. In the darkness, the boat drifted in the cold waters of the Solent all night with the crew clinging to its keel, first eastwards towards the forts, and then northwards towards Southsea, where they were finally rescued.

It appears that Haynes probably died around 10 and Heward around midnight; succumbing to exhaustion and exposure in the cold seas, and, although two of their fellow men, Linnington senior and Bartlett, tried to hold them up, they were washed away by a fierce sea only a few yards from the beach at Southsea. A policeman, P.C. VINES, heard the cries of the survivors around 1:15 am, and he telephoned for the Portsmouth Lifeboat. He was joined by P.C. Frederick

WILLIAMS, and Coastguard Lewis RICHARDSON, who with a lifebelt around his waist, waded into the surf, and together, they managed to get the remaining crew ashore. They were taken to the Southsea Police-station, and subsequently removed in cabs to the hospital. The body of Haynes washed ashore around 3:15 am, and that of Heward at about 4 o'clock. The Portsmouth Lifeboat crew took charge of the Selina.

When interviewed on 4 January, the man Jarrett said that the "*Jane*" had arrived at Ryde from Portland carrying stone. He said he landed at St Thomas's Street slipway with a mate around 10:30. He adhered to his story that the boat had been stolen; he later found it at the Dover Street Slip, and said the Coastguards wanted salvage, which he refused. Eventually, he set out to return to the barge, and was soon in difficulty with the bathing pier, breaking two of his thole-pins. He got out of the boat on the sands, but owing to the depth of water, he did not have sufficient power to move the boat. He got back into the boat and tried again, but eventually sculled across the Solent landing at Eastney at about half past seven. (It would appear that at no time was he in any real danger.)

At the inquest, much of the examination was made to determine why the crew did not use a self-righting boat. In his summing up, the Coroner noted that the volunteers had gone out to try to save the life of another person, and, as it turned out, the duty was unnecessary as the man was saved in another way. The disaster was due to a very heavy gust of wind, which struck the boat on her way home. He said that what happened after the men got into the water was terrible to imagine, but these poor fellows had been bustling about in the dark and cold, with very little hope of being rescued. (In fact, the Bembridge lifeboat had been launched at 10:50 in response to a wireless message received from one of the forts, that a boat with a man in it was adrift off Ryde. Mr. W. COULDREY and Mr. L. MARTIN stood by on duty the whole of the night. The boat was manned by Mr John HOLBROOK coxswain, who was at the helm, and Mr R. HOLBROOK second coxswain. The boat cruised up to the Horse Sand Fort, over the Langston sands, thence westward to near Southsea castle. For three and a half hours they cruised up and down the Solent searching for the small boat. They must have been near the ill-fated Ryde boat at times. They were unaware until daybreak on Wednesday of the fate of their heroic comrades from Ryde. About 7 o'clock the tug Empress reported to them that a boat had been washed up on Southsea shore and two men were drowned. Not knowing this was a lifeboat, they conjectured that this was the boat they had been looking for, and the lifeboat returned to Forelands around 9:30.)

The Coroner went on to say that the boat was new, and even now, nothing was found wrong with it. Looking at the whole case from beginning to end, he said there was no blame attachable to anyone, and a great deal of praise was due to the men who went out gallantly to save life. They had it in evidence that the Ryde crew selected the Selina as being the class of boat they required, and the selection made them have every confidence in her. After a very brief deliberation, the Foreman said the verdict of his colleagues was one of "Accidental Death", and they wished to commend the conduct of the Coastguard and police who rendered such valuable aid.

The Funeral Of Haynes and Heward

The funeral procession took place in Ryde, and was attended by huge crowds of people who lined the streets and literally filled the cemetery. The body of Haynes was carried from his home at the Ryde Coastguard-station, and as a Coastguard he was given full naval honours. The procession was lead by a firing party of Coastguards, the Cowes division, who marched with reversed arms, under the command of Commander A. J. HOTHAM. The procession, through Pier Street and Union Street to St James' Church, included the volunteer band, conducted by Mr. FITZGERALD. The drums were covered in black cloth. The horse drawn hearse bearing the coffin of Haynes followed. Other Coastguards, their arms tied with black, walked on each side as bearers, lead by Chief Boatman BURNARD. Lieut. BARON and 25 bluejackets from HMS Prince George attended by order of the Commander in Chief. The lifeboat officials present included Mr. KEPPEL, H. FOOTE (District Inspector of Lifeboats for the Southern District of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, Capt. E.W. BURT, R.N. (hon. Secretary of the Ryde Lifeboat Committee), Mr. E. CARTER, J.P., Mr. F. PINNOCK, Mr. J. STORY. There were also in the long procession Mr. GAWN and other representatives of the Customs, four of the survivors of the crew of the Selina (Messr's G. JEFFERY, E. COTTON, A. REEVES, and D. REEVES), and Messr's BARTLETT and LININGTON.

The other survivors of the crew rode to the church in a horse-drawn cab, being too unwell to walk. The following were also in the procession: Bembridge lifeboat crew and officials, including John HOLBROOK (coxswain) and R. HOLBROOK (Deputy Coxswain); Coastguards – Chief Boatman WESCOMBE, A. HOGG, and H. SMITH (Forelands) W. H. LENTERN, W. MOSES, and A. CARTER (Bembridge) Ernest BAKER (fisherman), Mr. W. L. MARTIN (Chief Officer of Coastguards, Bembridge), Mr. W. COULDREY (hon. secretary), Mr. J. PETTY, R.N., and Mr. Thomas JORDAN (representing the Bembridge Lifeboat Committee), and Mr. Edward ATTRILL late coxswain. Messr's F. STURMEY and W. WOODFORD, of the Atherfield and Chale lifeboat, and Mr. James COTTON, of the Brighstone crew were in the procession. There were also present a number of volunteers, under Colour-Sergeant Instructor COOK, many Ryde Fisherman, employees of the Ryde Pier and the Joint Railway Companies, and representatives of the Ryde Fire Brigade, under Superintendent SAPSWORTH, the Newport Brigade, under Cap't N. H. T. MURSELL and Foreman APPAL, the Cowes Brigade, under Captain J. BILLOWS and Deputy Captain WILLSTEAD, while Captain Oscar REYNER represented the Shanklin brigade. The Yeomanry were likewise represented. The Borough Police were in charge of Chief Constable GREENSTREET. Mr. W. P. BRIGSTOCKE'S motor carriage was also in the procession. The imposing line extended from the Coastguard station to the first cab-rank. At St Thomas' square, the hearse carrying Heward's body joined the procession.

Flags were flying at half-mast at the Town hall, the Pier, the Coastguard-station, the Castle and many private houses, while shutters were up and blinds down very generally along the route. There was a large crowd in St James' Church, the galleries that run around the three sides of the building being packed with people as well as the body of the church. Haynes coffin entered the church first, followed

by a Coastguard carrying a tiny white coffin, containing the body of Haynes's baby daughter, aged 3 months, who had predeceased him on December 30. The three coffins were placed between the choir stalls. After the service, the procession was reformed in Lind Street, which was thronged with people. The church bell was rung as the long line proceeded through High Street and Hill Street to the Cemetery, which was filled with people. The firing party formed up across the road, leaning on their reversed arms. The band stood inside the cemetery as the coffins and mourners passed within. Many touching and sympathetic references were made on the Island to the disaster over the following weeks, and the noble self-sacrifice of the lifeboat men was eulogised. A fund was set up to support the families of the two men.

Reference: The filmed copies of the January 5 and 13 1907 editions of the Isle of Wight County Press, kept in the County Record Office, Newport, IW, were used for preparation of this article.

The full report of the funeral can be found on the Ryde Cemetery Website: (www.rydecemetery.org.uk). The report of the inquest is presently in draft form, but will be uploaded soon.