

THE BLAKENEY DISASTER OF 1861

By John Wright

The twin themes in this issue of the GLAVEN HISTORIAN are ships and gravestones, a chance result of the topics that authors have chosen. This note brings the two themes together. The existence of gravestones in Blakeney churchyard recalling a disastrous rescue attempt that took place in 1861 is well known, but little seems to have been written about it. On the assumption that such an event would have received newspaper coverage, a search was made and two items turned up (though there may be others). Does anyone have more information about this disaster? Who were the eight men who drowned?

Norfolk Chronicle & Norwich Gazette
Letter from the Rector

23rd February 1861

THE LATE GALE AND LOSS OF LIFE AT BLAKENEY

To the Editor of the Norfolk Chronicle,

Sir - I beg to call your attention to the distress occasioned by the loss of life at Blakeney during the late gale. On the morning of Saturday, the 9th of February, a boat with a crew of eight men was proceeding to the assistance of the barque "Favourite", of Banff, from Hartlepool for Spain, which had been wrecked in the course of the night previous, about a mile to the westward of Blakeney harbour. The sea was running much stronger than they at all expected when they left Blakeney for the wreck, a distance of about four miles. In crossing the bar at the entrance to the harbour the boat was capsized by a heavy sea, which, to use the words of one who witnessed the scene from another boat, "caught her on the quarter and hove her completely end over end". Three of the poor fellows were picked up after about twenty minutes, but too late to save life even in a single instance. The remainder it is supposed sank under the boat. The men thus lost were all married and most had families - though not large.

It is on behalf of the widows and families that I desire to ask help through the medium of your columns. All but one of the widows are left penniless, and one of the children has been a helpless cripple for many years. The late severe winter following on an unprecedentedly bad oyster fishing season, having long since exhausted all their hard earned gains. We are doing all we can to give assistance, but our power to help is much diminished by the number of similar cases amongst us. Out of a population of about 1100 there are between 40 and 50 widows, nearly half of whom owe their bereavement to some casualty connected with the sea. We do not desire to shift the whole burden from our own shoulders to those of others, but we ask for help to give relief to those who need more than we can give ourselves - a help which we trust will be given both for the sake of our own poor sufferers and also that the sailors in our various ports may be assured that when they risk their lives to save the lives and property of others, their widows and families will not be left in destitution and uncared for.

Subscriptions will be thankfully received, either sent to myself direct, or paid to the "Blakeney Subscription" at Messrs Gurney's Bank at Norwich and Fakenham.

I am, sir, your most obedient servant,

R.H. Tillard Rector of Blakeney
Blakeney Rectory Holt Feb 19th 1861.

The second extract is from the *Norwich Mercury* 23rd March 1861

FUND for the RELIEF of the WIDOWS
and CHILDREN of the BLAKENEY FISHER-
MEN, who were Drowned 9th February, 1861.

Amount already advertised £496 19 0

ADDITIONAL SUBSCRIPTIONS.

	£.	s.	d.
Countess of Leicester	2	0	0
Countess Waldegrave	1	0	0
Sir Willoughby Jones	3	3	0
Lord Sondes	3	0	0
Bank of Eng. note (72,418) Anonym.	5	0	0
Rev. W. C. Rawlinson	2	2	0
Mr. W. R. Price, Lloyds	1	0	0
Mr. T. Gaskell, ditto	0	10	0
Mr. H. S. Dazley Smith	2	0	0
Stamps	1	0	0
Ditto	0	7	0
Mr. Boyle, Norwich	1	1	0
Mr. W. Cooke, Glandford	1	0	0
Mr. R. Cooke	1	0	0
Mr. W. Sherringham	1	1	0
Mr. Money Griggs, jun.	0	10	0
Mr. Lightly Simpson	1	0	0
Mr. Paul Bell	1	0	0
Rev. J. F. Cobb	1	0	0
Mr. William Browne	1	0	0
Rev. T. R. Anderson	0	10	0
Mr. Bowers	0	5	0
Mr. C. Stehn	1	1	0
Mr. Edward Browne	2	2	0
Collected in small sums in Glandford	0	5	8

Mr. Robert Archer, Snoring	0	10	0
Mr. John Saver	0	2	0
Rev. C. S. Denis Moxon	0	10	0
Rev. J. C. Platten	1	0	0
Mr. Joseph Stanford	1	0	0
Mr. Henry Brown	1	0	0
Rev. J. Gunton	1	0	0
Rev. F. Fitch	1	0	0
Mrs. Fitch	0	10	0
Miss Pointer	1	0	0
Mr. Herring	0	10	0
Mr. Cooper	0	10	0
Miss Massey	0	10	0
A Friend	0	5	0
Mr. Blackee	0	5	0
Mrs Cooch	0	5	0
Mr. Heath	0	5	0
Mr. Rust	0	5	0
Mr. Breese	0	2	6
Mr. Fisher	0	2	6
Mr. Walker	0	2	6
Mr. Burton	0	2	6
Small sums	0	7	6

£45 2 2
£496 19 0

Total £542 1 2

REV. R. H. TILLARD, Blakeney Rectory.
March 20th, 1861.

Peter Catling, in his unpublished typescript The History of Blakeney and its Havens, comments that in 1861 Blakeney had no lifeboat but in the following year one was provided by Miss Brightwell of Norwich. The boat was launched four times in two years and was then replaced by a larger boat. Both were named the Brightwell. There had been a lifeboat some time in the early 1800s but the RNLI were not involved until 1861 and they maintained the station until 1935. It is therefore evident that some good came of the 1861 disaster, in the form of funds for the bereaved families and a new lifeboat, but one cannot help reflect that seven men lost in one incident did not have the national impact then that it would do today.

