

## **Brig 'MANLEY' 28.09.1871 SHIPWRECKED**

### **LOSS OF SIX LIVES**

#### **The Story.....**

On Tuesday night 28<sup>th</sup> of September 1871 the Brig Manley, under the command of Captain John Graham, was making its way from Newport to Dublin laden with coals and a crew of seven. The vessel was a two masted square rigged brigantine registered in Whitehaven and had been active in the Irish Sea Trade for over 50 years trading to Drogheda Port on a regular basis.

A gale of unusual magnitude was blowing south-east that night and took the brig Manley past its destination and towards the Drogheda bar where it was driven ashore on the Mornington\Bettystown beach.

The vessel had all the appearance of having encountered the vehemence of the storm and she was not more than half an hour stranded when she sprung a leak and the crew seven in number including the captain betook themselves to the rigging. The sea outside our bar at the time is described as having been fearful so much so that the Brig wriggled frequently and there were small hopes entertained for the safety of the unfortunate crew.

About an hour after the Brig striking the shore Captain Fackrell R.N. chief officer of the coastguard station at Queensborough who had charge of the life boat (*Old George Irlam of Liverpool*) belonging to Drogheda Port summoned the crew, but from the inwashing of the tide it was found impossible to make headway towards the threatened wreck. The lifeboat station is at Queensborough Baltray on the north side of the river and fully three miles from the stranded vessel on Mornington\Bettystown beach making the task of rescue on this tempestuous night near a physical impossibility with a reduced crew to reach the Brig in the storm to afford any assistance.

The lifeboat was put out however with a deficient crew but could get no further than the bar with the storm hampering any progress beyond the bar. The captain of the lifeboat fearing for their own lives ultimately commanding his crew to turn around. The brig Manley broke up shortly after and melancholy to relate six of the crew met with a watery grave. The seventh an able seaman jumped overboard with a life-buoy and made his way ashore.



## **Postscript.....**

At a meeting of the Drogheda Harbour Board on Tuesday 3rd October 1871 the subject of the late wreck of the Brig Manley and loss of six lives was brought under notice.

Every member of the board pronounced an opinion on the fact that had the superintendent of the life-boat and his crew acted their part not only as parties who were paid for attending to the duty but as human beings having a feeling for their fellow-creatures shivering in the shrouds they would have made an effort to save the six lives sacrificed to their cowardice.

It is resolved that no more support will be given to the Life-boat Institution here until the boat-house is fixed on the south side and a complete change made in the crew.

## **Miss Campbell & Miss Fox.....**

Only one member of the ships crew was saved that night. He had floated for some distance with the aid of a life bouy and he would have inevitably have perished had it not been for the noble conduct of Miss Jane Campbell in rushing at great peril to his rescue, wading into a heavy surf and then using proper means to restore him to consciousness. Miss Campbell was assisted by Miss Fox of Kells and providing her most valuable services in aiding and encouraging Miss Campbell to accomplish her mission of mercy.

Miss Jane Campbell was awarded the Silver Medal of the RNLI Institution and an inscribed vellum in acknowledgement of her brave conduct that night. Miss Fox was presented with an inscribed vellum for her part.

During the rescue Miss Campbell lost some of her jewellery and in subsequent correspondences with the port authority was seeking recompense for her losses. She suggested that a gold watch would be an appropriate acknowledgement. The archives do not record if a gold watch was ever presented to Miss Campbell.

## **The Lifeboat Stations No 1 (Baltray) & No 2 (Mornington).....**

The loss of life from the brig Manley changed the course of the lifeboat service and stations in Drogheda Port.

It was decided to open a No.2 station at Drogheda in 1872, located on the south side of the River Boyne at Mornington County Meath and in 1899 the Baltray lifeboat station was closed. (Between 1879 and 1899, the Baltray lifeboat was launched only eight times, with no lives saved.) It was moved to Clogherhead where it remains today.

The lifeboat involved in the attempted rescue of the crew of the Manley arrived to Baltray in 1862 and it was originally named *Rescue*. It had had served at St Sampson in Guernsey.

In 1867, funds were appropriated from the legacy of Miss Maria Irlam of Dibbinsdale, Bromborough and the lifeboat at Baltray was renamed *Old George Irlam of Liverpool* in honour of her father.

## **The Song (SJ McArdle).....**

The story of the brig Manley lay hidden in the archives of the Drogheda Port Company until local singer songwriter SJ McArdle brought it to life in his song cycle called PORT.

*PORT* is a song cycle born of a year-long research and writing project around the history and stories of Drogheda's ancient Port, conducted during Stephens tenure as Artist in Association at Droichead Arts Centre in 2019 along with its accompanying critically-acclaimed RTÉ Radio 1 Album of the Week *Old Ghosts In The Water*, *PORT* is full of work songs, story songs, love songs to the sea. Songs written in anger and written in sorrow. Songs about injustice and change. Songs about people.

What first struck SJ even more than the tragic fate of the Manley's crew was the dreadful conundrum faced by the lifeboat's captain – whether to battle on hopelessly against the storm and inwashing tide or to try to safeguard the lives of his crew. For this reason the song is written from the perspective of a lifeboat crew member rather than that of a member of the brig's unfortunate crew or of an omniscient narrator.

## **The Painting (Emily McCormack).....**

In 2024 Drogheda Port company reached out to local artist Emily McCormack as part of its annual arts commission. The annual commission is normally non specific but this year was very different.

The Commission was to tell the haunting story of the Brig Manley, her crew and the lifeboat crew. Emily was asked to create a painting of the tragic event using the song created by Stephen as her inspiration.

From Emilys perspective the song focuses on the viewpoint of the lifeboat crew, the storm they encountered on the night in question, and the fact that they were under manned.

There were only 3 crew members in the lifeboat that night and the song captures the human perspective of having to live with the emotional consequences of being unable to save the lives of the 6 sailors and despite, saving his other crew members, how this would forever haunt the Superintendent both at night in his dreams and in his existing day to day life.

The research for the painting took Emily in many directions, researching the brigs of that era right down to the clothing and life jackets of the lifeboat crew, they were originally made of cork.

She also had to work out the overall composition of the scene she was to paint. Really, only the landscape panorama style canvas shape worked. It also took time to work out the overall sizing and placement of both the shipwreck and the lifeboat. To help generate ideas, she researched the artwork of famous maritime artists of that time, including Turner, De Vlieger, De Velde, Aivazovsky, Pillement, Vernet and Moran.

For the facial expressions of the lifeboat crew, Emily spent a Saturday morning from 5am till lunchtime sitting on her kitchen floor, recording herself, as she pretended that she was each one of the crew members, rowing the lifeboat through the storm.

## The Brig Manley

Words and music by SJ McArdle

Let me tell you a story  
With an unhappy ending  
Of the brig Manley and its fate  
A storm was raging  
The likes of which we'd never seen before  
Around our lifeboat station  
And we were called to the fray  
We mustered at station  
We answered the call  
And we rowed into the dark and the howling gale

There were three on our crew that night  
We were three miles from Queensborough  
We were three minutes from our fate  
When the captain called ...

The brig Manley  
Badly beaten by the wind  
Bruised and shaken and run aground on its lee  
The crew, in blind panic,  
Had shinned the rigging to escape  
The grasping hands of the furious sea  
And we heard them calling  
From the ratlines and shrouds  
But we just couldn't fight the vicious tide

There were three on our crew that night  
We were three miles from Queensborough  
We were three minutes from our fate  
When the captain called:  
"Turn around boys – the tide's too strong  
Turn around boys – this feels all wrong  
Turn around boys – we'll perish here  
Turn around boys – there's no shame in fear  
Turn around with everything you've got  
Turn around ..."

The voices faded  
As with heavy hearts we picked our way home  
And the brig surrendered its crew to the sea  
And they cursed us for cowards  
In the streets and in the papers  
And the Harbour Board called for our redundancy  
And I still hear those voices  
Whenever I rest  
And I wake up calling ...

(80 tonnes Newport coal in transit  
7 young sailors stout-hearted and true  
6 in the shrouds in 5 minutes undone  
Forsaken 3 miles to shore and the race is hard won)