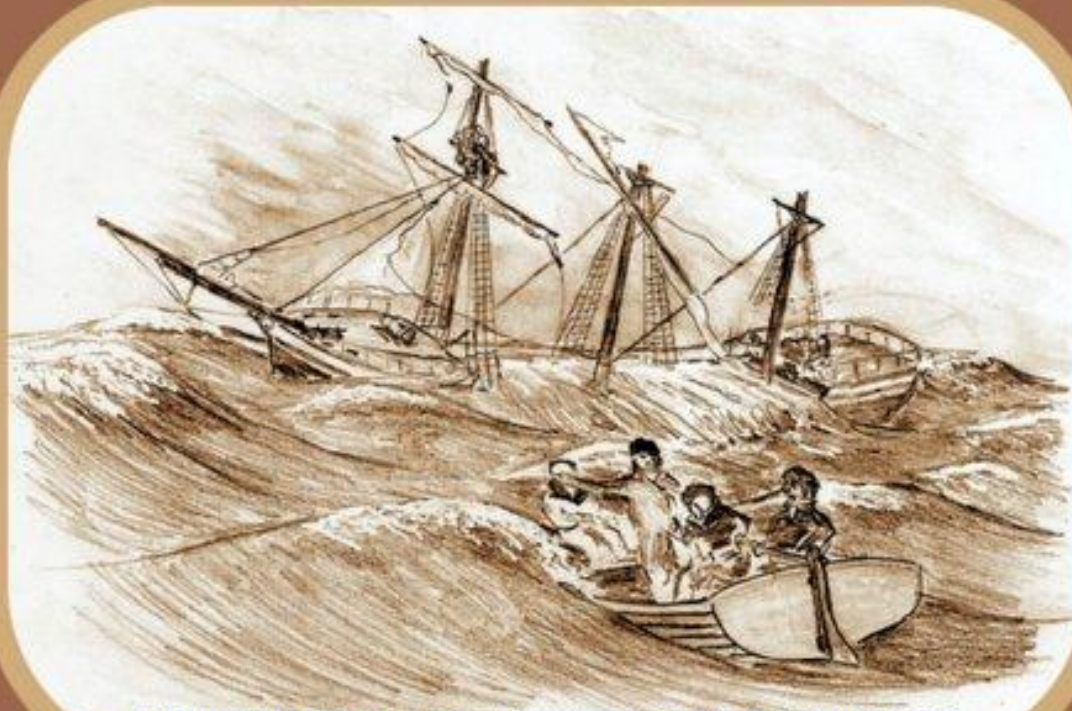


***The Mary Stoddart Disaster
and the death of
James Crosbey of Blackrock
in the rescue attempts
Dundalk Bay, April 1858***



Michael Harris Barker's drawing of Captain Hind's boat

*Noel Sharkey & Charlie McCarthy
Heritage Week lecture 2015
in association with Blackrock Tidy Towns*



The Mary Stoddart disaster and the death of James Crosbey of Blackrock in the rescue attempts - Dundalk Bay, April 1858.

We are here today to honour the memory of one of Blackrock's most famous sons, James Crosbey of Main Street, and to officially unveil this commemorative plaque at the house where he lived for twenty five years before he lost his young life in April 1858 in a characteristic attempt to save the lives of others in what was the worst maritime disaster ever to occur in Dundalk Bay.

It is now almost 160 years ago since these tragic events occurred and we must recreate them for you today, which I now propose to do by drawing on contemporary newspaper records, the testimony of the survivors, the knowledge of several local friends and the definitive account of the Mary Stoddart tragedy which was written and compiled by Charlie McCarthy and published in the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Journal of 2008.

During that fateful week in early April 1858 the greatest storm in living memory raged with unabated ferocity for 5 days. In that week of freezing gale force winds, floods, cold and rain, over 70 men, from all walks of life; businessmen, sailors, fishermen, dockers, coastguards and farmers, displaying extraordinary courage in the face of almost insurmountable odds, risked their lives in 11 repeated rescue attempts over those 5 days to try to bring ashore the hapless crew of the Mary Stoddart, who were marooned in Dundalk Bay.

It is necessary at this point to briefly describe the village here. Blackrock village is first noted in 1752 in *The Book of Dundalk* when the area along the shore is described as '*being well inhabited by labourers and weavers who live very much on the cockles which they get out of the strand*'.

One hundred years later, around 1850, the small thatched fisherman's houses in Blackrock village were augmented by some guest-houses and hotels; the demand for these, and for appropriate stabling, being driven by the local gentry and landed classes who organised and ran horse races on the strand; the high ground at what is now the Marine Court complex forming the grandstand.

The Sandy Lane was a dirt-track and maps of the time show few houses at the north end of Main Street. The North Star hotel, which was situated where Dr. Chris Fingleton now has his practice, would not be built for another 50 years. The village had no catholic school or church.

In those pre-industrial days most of the local people were dependant, either directly or indirectly, on fishing to supply their staple food and wages, many men continually braving the whims and caprices of the deep for their catch. Despite this, the village had no lifeboat service. The catastrophic events which were to unfold in Dundalk Bay in April 1858 were to change that. The weather during that first week of April 1858 was appalling. Good Friday, the 2nd April was described as the coldest of that year so far with heavy falls of snow, sleet and rain all over Ireland.

On Tuesday, April 6th, a barque, a low hulled boat, The Mary Stoddart, out of Scarborough, was caught in a violent storm and slowly crawled her way in to Dundalk Bay under escort, with a terrible sea beating on her beam, in other words at right angles to the vessel's length. This torturous operation took the Mary Stoddart over six hours to complete in the appalling conditions. Captain Bernard Johnston of the *Enterprise*, which had escorted her into the bay, directed Captain Every Hill of the Mary Stoddart to anchor near the middle buoy, which you can see on Charlie McCarthy's marvellously detailed map on page 9.

The Mary Stoddart was too deep to attempt to come up river to Dundalk, her depth being some 19 and a half foot. She was just over 114 foot long and 28 foot wide and weighted some 516 tons according to the appendix in Charlie's exhaustive *County Louth Archaeological Society* article. The Mary Stoddart had a crew of 18.

She remained there from around midday, apparently safely at anchor. Strange to say, witnesses from shore were later to state that Captain Hill did not issue orders to lower any of her yards in order to reduce wind resistance and help to make the ship more stable in such extreme weather conditions. Charlie reports the testimony of Edward Tipping of Tipping's Mount at Bellurgan in this respect, who later testified that had the Mary Stoddart cut her masts, she might not have later been carried away and the terrible events which occurred as a consequence of this, might have been avoided.

By the next day, Wednesday, April 7th the storm still raged with heavy rain and floods reported everywhere. It was decided to send the paddle steamer *Independence* out to assist the Mary Stoddart, as Captain Johnston had promised the previous day; and if possible to tow her to Carlingford Lough which would afford more water depth and where she could be brought further in and safely tied. For various reasons this proved unfeasible due to the extreme weather. That night, disaster occurred and the dramatic events of the following days were now inexorably set in motion.

Thursday 8th April: By early morning it was discovered that the Mary Stoddart had broken loose and dragged her anchor to a point nearly opposite Blackrock and in about 12 feet of water. Her crew were now in a desperate condition, being marooned in about 5 or 6 foot of sea water when the tides came in and having to climb and tie themselves on to the mast poles to stay alive. The waves were reported as even rising as high as the mast tops. The men were coming down to the deck when the tide would ebb away, in order to move around as much as they could and exercise their frozen limbs. With the storm blowing the waves across the ship's decks even this venture was fraught with danger.

The crew spent that night tied to the rigging, frozen and drenched by the storm, which was showing no signs of abating. Some young apprentices, one of whom was only 14 years old, were tied to the mast poles for their own safety by Captain Hill and Jean Baptiste, a black cook, who then secured themselves as well as they could do so, in order to try and survive the awful cold and avoid being washed overboard and drowned.

Unless they could be rescued they were going to die with exposure, hunger and cold, or if they couldn't hold on to the mast when the tides rose and flooded the ship, they would drown. Even more ominous was the fact that some of the mast poles were now down and damaged. If the storm winds pulled down the rest they would drown anyway.

The first Rescue attempt.

On land, witnesses could now see the seamen and deck hands on the mast poles and rigging of the Mary Stoddart, and desperate attempts were now being made to get them of the wrecked ship. Catherine Richardson, who had then just turned ten years of age and who lived at The Square at Blackrock, would recount in her reminiscences at her 100th Birthday in 1946 how she and her neighbours, standing at the high ground at Rockmount, watched the drama unfold over the coming days.

The first rescue attempt took place around 2.00 p.m. when the lifeboat belonging to the *Enterprise* was brought by cart from Dundalk quay and launched off Soldier's Point with a crew of four. However, as was to prove the case again and again, their struggle against the massive seas proved too much and they were forced ashore at Blackrock.

Further rescue attempts

Several more rescue attempts were then made from Blackrock. John Connick, who was the agent of the Shipwrecked Fishermen and Mariner's Society, seeing that the best way to attempt to rescue the crew of *The Mary Stoddart* giving the way the storm was blowing, would be to try from the south at Blackrock. With the help of local men George Elphinstone and James Crosbey in charge of two Blackrock boats with a crew of six men in each, they made another attempt to reach the hapless hands on the *Mary Stoddart*. Neither George Elphinstone, who lived at the present entrance to Rock Court, or James Crosbey who lived here in the village where Blackrock Credit Union is now established, were strangers to the dangers of the sea.

Both men had participated some years earlier in the rescue of the respective crews of the *Grace of Harrington* and the *Elizabeth of Hollyhead*, and indeed were probably selected by John Connick because of their particular experience in such attempts. The boat piloted by George Elphinstone went out half an hour before Crosbey's, with John Connick, who was in Elphinstone's boat, constantly bailing out sea water with a can and bucket as the waves kept breaking over them. They both made their way to within a quarter of a mile of the *Mary Stoddart* but the ebb tide carried them south and on past it. They could see the crew on board waving hysterically in their direction.

They now had no choice but to row backwards as they knew from experience that any attempt to turn the boats in the massive seas which were blowing could be fatal if the boats capsized. They rowed out towards the *Mary Stoddart* again, this time facing to the north-east so that the tide would take them south and carry them to the barque. They rowed to within half a mile of the lighthouse and then turned towards the ship. However, just at this crucial time the tide began to turn and flood against them and with the wind buffeting them, they were forced to undertake the arduous task of rowing back to the shore, which they reached three hours later in a complete state of exhaustion and half frozen with the cold.

Another attempt was made almost simultaneously from Blackrock by Captain James Joseph Kelly, who had acquired a boat and six volunteers from the village, paying them £1 each, which Charlie McCarthy points out in his footnotes may not have been necessary as an enticement to these men but rather as an indication of Captain Kelly's generosity and appreciation for the help. Captain Kelly had been reared in nearby Haynestown and may have known the crew. These men rowed the three miles towards the ship but fared no better than the crews in the first three attempts and had to return to shore three hours later completely worn out.

The weather worsened. Eyewitness Edward Tipping, from his vantage point at his cottage high up at Tipping's Point, Bellurgan, reported that at the onset of darkness the storm increased and he could only catch occasional glimpses of the *Mary Stoddart*, which was now being unmercifully buffeted about by the wind. It was feared that the ship would break up under such conditions. With snow on the Cooley Mountains, continual heavy rain and driving storm-force winds and sea spray, the wind chill factor was possibly minus seven degrees for those poorly clad and starving souls clinging desperately to the mast poles in the darkness. By this time of the evening the appalling weather would have driven even the most ardent onlookers from their vantage points on the shore. It's likely that young Catherine Richardson and her friends at Blackrock square would have now retreated to the shelter of their thatched, candlelit homes offering up their rosaries for the poor souls on the wrecked ship.

These men now needed such prayers.

We now come to the awful events of Friday 9th April.

During that terrible Thursday night or in the early hours of Friday morning an apprentice had been washed overboard, and poor Jean Baptiste, the black sailor, who had taken such care to secure the others to the mast poles at the expense of being able to secure himself properly, had also fallen from the mast and had been washed away and drowned.

The men on the ship were now in a pitiful condition. They must have been completely demoralised by the loss of two of their number. Apart from a few raw horse beans and occasional spoonfuls from two bottles of sauce they had had no food or water for the last three days, as all their provisions and fresh water had been washed overboard in the storm. When these sauce bottles were empty they used them to save and drink their urine. What one man passed into the bottle he then gave to another, as no one wished to drink their own bodily waste.

At 4 am in the morning the gales were raging so fiercely off Soldier's Point and that the respective Captains of the *Independence* and the *Earl of Erne* met with Captain Gaussen, the commander of the Coastguards and decided that there was so much sea on the bar and plans made to have the *Independence* go out to the Mary Stoddart were scrapped. It was then decided that the Dundalk harbour paddle tug the *James Watt* with its shallow draft would be a safer vessel to attempt to tow two boats as far as possible to the Mary Stoddart.

Incredibly, this paddle steamer the *James Watt* had engine trouble and could not be used. Had this tug been fit for use the horrible events which were shortly to unfold might possibly have been averted.

Two hours later at 6am that morning Mr. Peter Russell drove by horse and cart to Blackrock to bring in George Elphinstone and James Crosbey to act as pilots for two lifeboats being launched off Soldier's Point. Both men were again selected for their expert knowledge of the tides and the Fane River channel. James Crosbey now walked from his home on Main Street for the last time in his life. James Crosbey had a crew of eight volunteers in his boat, including Captain James Kelly. Captain Kelly had decided to use the ship's boat from the *Pride of Erin* for the rescue attempt. While it was not a lifeboat and thus more exposed to the waves, it was lighter and more easily rowed. Many were astonished that a seaman of such experience as Captain Kelly would have ventured out in the prevailing conditions in such a flimsy craft, but onward they went.

The other boat, which was being piloted by George Elphinstone had a crew of nine men. These two boats now made their attempt to reach the Mary Stoddart, first making their way to the lighthouse, where one man was put ashore from Crosbey's boat, apparently because of his inexperience. James Crosbey thought it was still too soon to make the attempt to reach the Mary Stoddart, as the tide had now only half-ebbed and it would be safer at low water. This would have been about three hours later. But we know from Edward Tipping's record of events where he was watching the drama unfold from his vantage point high up at Bellurgan that the boats left the lighthouse around 10 a.m., the tide having only ebbed for about two hours.

This was the most dangerous type of tide to attempt to navigate in order to reach the stricken ship. A strong ebb piling against the gale force winds was now creating very high waves coming very close together. As the force of the ebb-tide weakens the waves would tend to peak less and become longer and thus easier to navigate, this being the reason for James Crosbey's wish to wait for the tide to ebb further. He was overruled however, and with waves of possibly three to four metres high the men grimly rowed out from the lighthouse to Captain Kelly's fervent '*in God's name, let us go on!*'

But the waves were so savage that even when half way out, Michael McArdle was thrown out of George Elphinstone's boat and had to be hauled back in by an armpit and by the hair on his head by James Moran and George Elphinstone respectively, an oar being lost in the attempt. Moran was also half washed in to the water head first but was pulled back in by Captain Hinds grabbing the belt of his trousers.

Upon nearing the Mary Stoddart the men could see some of the hands up in the rigging and some of the others on the deck. The enormous waves were drowning all communication but the terrible night's exposure had left all on board too weak to move and the two rescue boats were forced to back off. As they did so an enormous wave overturned James Crosbey's boat and threw all on board into the sea, where they managed to cling on to the keel of this flimsy craft for dear life. Later estimates place them as being in the water for around fifteen minutes. This lengthy exposure in such frozen seas would be the main factor in now killing some of them from shock and hypothermia.

Miraculously, another huge wave righted the boat again and the frozen crew scrambled back in as best as they could. Captain James Kelly however, had been washed away by several yards. Witnesses would later state that the last time they had seen him in Blackrock or Soldier's Point he had been wearing a long overcoat and heavy leather sea-boots which reached above his knees. This weight now dragged the poor man down and his impassioned '*Lord, have mercy on me, look out for yourselves, boys!*' were the last words the deeply-shocked survivors heard, or thought they heard, above the roar of the wind before he sank under the waves.

George Elphinstone's boat, with all on board still baling out water to stay afloat, had now made her way to Crosbey's stricken vessel and managed, with great difficulty to drag some of the crew members, Patrick Callan and Thomas McArdle, John Lamb and a conscious but dying Gerald Hughes into Elphinstone's boat. They then took Crosbey's half-sunken and oarless boat in tow, with George Elphinstone managing, despite the raging seas, to leap in to her and hold poor James Crosbey's head above the water. But for this he would have drowned. As it was James Murphy was now lying dead in this boat.

Again, how they made it to the shore at Blackrock is a miracle. The lifeboat was completely overloaded and lacked one oar, but the boat from the *Enterprise*, which had come out from Blackrock on another failed rescue attempt, now approached and assisted in towing them in on the Fane river channel to 'Jack's Beach' where the Marine Court apartments are now built. Mr. Peter Russell, who had brought George Elphinstone and James Crosbey to Dundalk that morning had been watching the events from shore and now rode to Blackrock's Main Street in order to have horses and traps brought up to the beach.

Frantic efforts were now made to get the stricken men ashore. When they reached the shoal waters and attempted to get James Crosbey out of his boat, they had great difficulty in doing so as his frozen hands had a death grip on the seat of the boat. He was brought ashore by cart to Emily Cockshot's house which is now the Blackrock Fruit & Vegetable Shop. There he was given first aid. The other men were in an almost equally pitiful state; being blue with the cold and delirious, and eight of them were housed in Samuel Hill's house nearby where hot drinks and blankets were provided for them and every effort made to alleviate their half-perished condition. But James Crosbey was beyond human help. Although he was given warm clothes and wrapped in blankets and took some brandy, he was sinking fast from shock and exposure. The news would have travelled like wildfire throughout the village and many of its inhabitants would have witnessed the awful events as they unfolded. So it is likely that James's traumatised family would have been with him before he died. He was given the last rites by parish priest Fr. John Marmion before he expired.

Given the fact that the parish was then the United Parishes of Haggardstown & Kilkerley, with the parochial house being situated at Rath opposite the Dundalk Union Workhouse, this being the centre of gravity between the two parishes, it is extremely likely that Fr. John Marmion had been staying in Blackrock for the previous few days in order to be near the shore to administer such spiritual aid as might be required. It is likely that James Crosbey's body would have been brought back down Main Street to be waked in his family home, and that a complete parish turnout would have visited the little cottage to honour his memory and his heroic sacrifice, and sympathise with his distraught family.

The crew on the Mary Stoddart, who had witnessed the capsizing of James Crosbey's boat and the drowning of Captain James Kelly, must now have given up all hope of being rescued. Four of the crew were now dead from cold and exposure and three more had been washed overboard and drowned.

Another attempt was made from Tipping's Quay at Bellurgan Point in the early afternoon when a crew of six braved the mountainous seas in Edward Tipping's six-oared yawl. To those watching from the look-out point high up on Tipping's Mount, this yawl kept disappearing from sight only to reappear standing nearly upright on the face of the next incoming wave. Although the yawl reached the Mary Stoddart, this attempt was again foiled by the enormous waves throwing the yawl away from the distraught crew on the boat. The crew on the yawl had now no choice but to row to the Bellurgan shore and this they did with great difficulty.

By 4.00 p.m. the storm had now lulled but the seas were still very violent, as another attempt was made by a crew of four led by Robert Shankey, who was the Chief Boatman at Giles' Quay. Expertly led by Shankey, this boat reached the Mary Stoddart just after 5.00 p.m. and incredibly managed to get seven members off the Mary Stoddart by rope, a miracle in itself as the hands and feet of her crew were frost-bitten and their limbs almost frozen. Robert Shankey's crew had to drop away four times from the Mary Stoddart owing to the treacherous seas, but each time they managed to reach her again until they had managed to get Captain Johnson and six others on their own small boat, which was now over loaded with twelve men on board.

It was now going to be extremely difficult to make it back to the Bellurgan shore in such conditions. Seeing this, Captain Hill and his first mate Archibald Hogg, and two remaining crew members heroically decided to remain in the tattered masts of the Mary Stoddart rather than risk overloading the rescue boat.

Robert Shankey's overloaded boat was now some two and a half miles from the nearest land, and not being familiar with the entrance to the Fane river estuary off Blackrock and as it was coming on high water they now faced the treacherous journey back to the Soldier's Point with high seas breaking over the boat. The journey back took them two and three quarter hours, and they reached Soldier's Point at 8.00 p.m. It was now dark and nearly four hours had now elapsed since they had set out, and the survivors of the Mary Stoddart were brought into Dundalk and treated by a Dr. Gartlan and provided with shelter. As the seas were still raging very high, Robert Shankey and his crew left their boat at Soldier's Point, crossed to Bellurgan and walked the six miles to home to Giles Quay in their wet clothes!

Incredibly, Robert Shankey was ready to set out again on the following morning, Saturday 10th April, and together with a crew of five men, was able to bring Captain Hill and the remaining three men off the Mary Stoddart at 4.00 a.m. The storm had now abated somewhat and they reached Soldier's Point an hour and a half later and the men were brought ashore to lodgings and again treated by Dr. Gartlan.

It was a test of his skill to do so. The men were in an appalling condition. They had been marooned on the *Mary Stoddart* for three days and nights. Robert Shankey later described their state: *'They were starving and parched with thirst. One man had no trousers on. None of them had shoes or stockings. Their feet and hands [were swollen] like loaves [of bread] and were as black as tar* (which would seem to indicate severe frost-bite). *Four men who had died from exposure in the rigging had been cast overboard in order to make room for the living'*.

Those who remained alive took the clothes of the dead in a desperate effort to ward off the cold. Richard Wray (who is pictured on Page 11) had Percival Mann's trousers on when he got home to Scarborough! Archibald Hogg, the first mate, had hands and feet in such a terrible state it was feared they would have to be amputated.

The *Mary Stoddart* affair had been a catastrophe; one of the worst and the most documented in Dundalk bay. A freak storm which had lasted the best part of a week; the failure of the engines on the *James Watt* which had rendered her incapable of being used as a tug-boat in the rescue attempts; Captain James Kelly's last fatal rescue attempt in an ordinary boat instead of a lifeboat whose sides would have offered greater protection against the waves; James Crosbey's misgivings on that last fateful morning of his life about the dangers of going out before the tide had ebbed had all contributed to the terrible events of that awful week. Eleven men were dead; seven on the *Mary Stoddart* – two apprentices; Percival Mann and Richard Lancaster; William Morris, the third mate; John Cole, the ship's cook; Thomas Ashworth, a steward; Guiseppe Consauto, a seaman, and Jean Baptiste, the black seaman who had tied the others to the mast and who had washed overboard. His body was later washed ashore and he was laid to rest in Ballymacscanlon churchyard.

Four more had died in the rescue attempts; Captain James Kelly, whose body was washed ashore some two months later; he was still wearing one of his heavy thigh-length leather sea boots which people noticed at Dundalk and Blackrock in those last days of his life., and which dragged him down to drown so quickly after the rescue boat capsized. Captain Kelly, who was thirty-seven years old, left an aged mother to bear his loss as best she could. His funeral to Seatown graveyard is described in *Tempest's Annual* as the largest ever known in Dundalk. The three others were James Murphy of Dundalk; Gerald Hughes, who hailed from Quay Street in the town, and of course poor James Crosbey, who had expired in Emily Cockshot's house soon after being brought ashore on Friday 9th April, was probably buried on the following Sunday or Monday morning.

I have already described the Sandy Lane as being incomplete at this time and consisting mostly of sand dunes once one left the village, so it would have been very likely impossible to bear a coffin by horse-drawn hearse and it is likely his remains would have been brought to St. Fursey's Church on the Saturday or Sunday via what we now know as Wallace's Road or the Green Gates junction. What needs no guesswork is the fact that his funeral from St. Fursey's Church to Haggardstown graveyard on what is now the Old Golf Link's Road would have been witnessed by of the largest turnouts ever witnessed in the district.

Again, the final resting place of James Crosbey must remain conjectural, given the fact that many of the graveyard records were destroyed in the 1960s, and a proper inventory of those buried there was impossible as far back as the 1930s, as there are so many unmarked plots in the graveyard. It is not impossible that he may lay in the Crosby family plot where Paddy and Margaret Crosby are laid to rest with some of their family, and which is listed as number 68 on the graveyard plan of Haggardstown (Old) graveyard.

11 members of the crew on the *Mary Stoddart* were rescued. Committees were formed and funds were raised for the financial relief of those families bereaved in the disaster and for the erection of a suitable memorial. Of the monies collected, the sum of £325 was given to the relatives of the men who were drowned, and £160 was divided between the 63 men who had manned the various boats in the almost suicidal rescue attempts. It was not until twenty years later however, in 1879, that the monument was erected at Roden Place, the cost being some £400.

The inscription reads: *KELLY - In memory of Captain James Joseph Kelly, Gerald Hughes, James Crosbey, and James Murphy, who lost their lives in a noble and humane effort to rescue the crew of the barque, Mary Stoddart, wrecked in Dundalk Bay, on the 9th of April, 1858. Erected by voluntary subscription 1879. In commemoration also of the gallant services of Volunteers of the rescuing party, John Lamb, Patrick Callan and Thomas McArdle, who after a heroic struggle to succour their ill-fated comrades, reached shore in a state of exhaustion.*

Royal National Lifeboat Institution silver medals were later awarded to several of the men who had taken part in the rescue attempts. Among the recipients were Chief Coastguard Robert Shankey of Gyles Quay and George Elphinstone and Nicholas Crosbey of Blackrock, James's 20 year old brother.

The *Dundalk Democrat* concluded its coverage of the affair by stating: *the fact is, the effort to rescue...the crew of the Mary Stoddart in such a sea in small boats was too much to be encountered...while the storm continued to rage with such fury, no one should have permitted to venture out. No one doubted their courage but the effort was, we repeat, too much.* A lifeboat station was erected at Blackrock the following year, and these men had paid for it with their lives. The heroic efforts of the men involved in both the rescue attempts and the bravery and fortitude of the crew on the *Mary Stoddart* were reported in the weeks following in the newspapers of the United States, Britain, Australia and New Zealand, and soon passed into folklore. Fifty years later in 1908, *Tempest's Annual* published an account of the disaster, and a popular poem was composed about the affair. Catherine Richardson, of Blackrock Square, who as a young girl had witnessed the awful events of that week in 1858, celebrated her 100th birthday in March, 1946. At a special celebration which was organised by The Blackrock Development Committee and County Councillor Packie McGuinness in Blackrock Skating Hall, Catherine, without a pause or a falter, recited an eight verse poem '*The Wreck of the Mary Stoddart*' to tumultuous applause from the packed congregation who were present that day.

It was a fitting tribute to Blackrock's most famous sons, one of whom, James Crosbey, had died only a few yards away all those years ago in Emily Cockshot's house. The efforts of James Crosbey, George Elphinstone and their comrades were the bravest actions ever undertaken by any group of people from this parish, as were the similar actions of all the men concerned during that fateful week. It is only fitting that we recognise those actions here today at the former home of a young man who gave his all in order to save the lives of others. James Crosbey had severe reservations about going out on that last day of his life before the tide had fully ebbed yet he still went, and he paid the supreme price for it. Twice on that fatal journey out to the *Mary Stoddart* two of the rescue crew, Michael McArdle and James Moran, were washed out of the boat before being pulled back in, yet still they went on.

When James Crosbey's boat capsized and was turned over again by a freak wave around fifteen or twenty minutes later, George Elphinstone somehow managed to jump from his own boat into James Crosbey's vessel and get him ashore. How he did this in such conditions and with such treacherous waves washing over the two boats is impossible to conjecture.

Despite being in deep shock and traumatised by the deaths of four of the rescue crew, George Elphinstone gave an extraordinary lucid account of the disaster in the following week's *Dundalk Democrat*. He stated that had he known that the steamer *James Watt* was unable to start her engines in order to tug out the rescue boats, he would not have gone to Dundalk to make that last fatal rescue attempt from Soldier's Point but would have rowed out from Blackrock to the Fane River channel to do so as he knew the waters here. Whether this would have averted the disaster that ensued must always remain a mystery.

The Wreck of the Mary Stoddart in Dundalk Bay, 1858

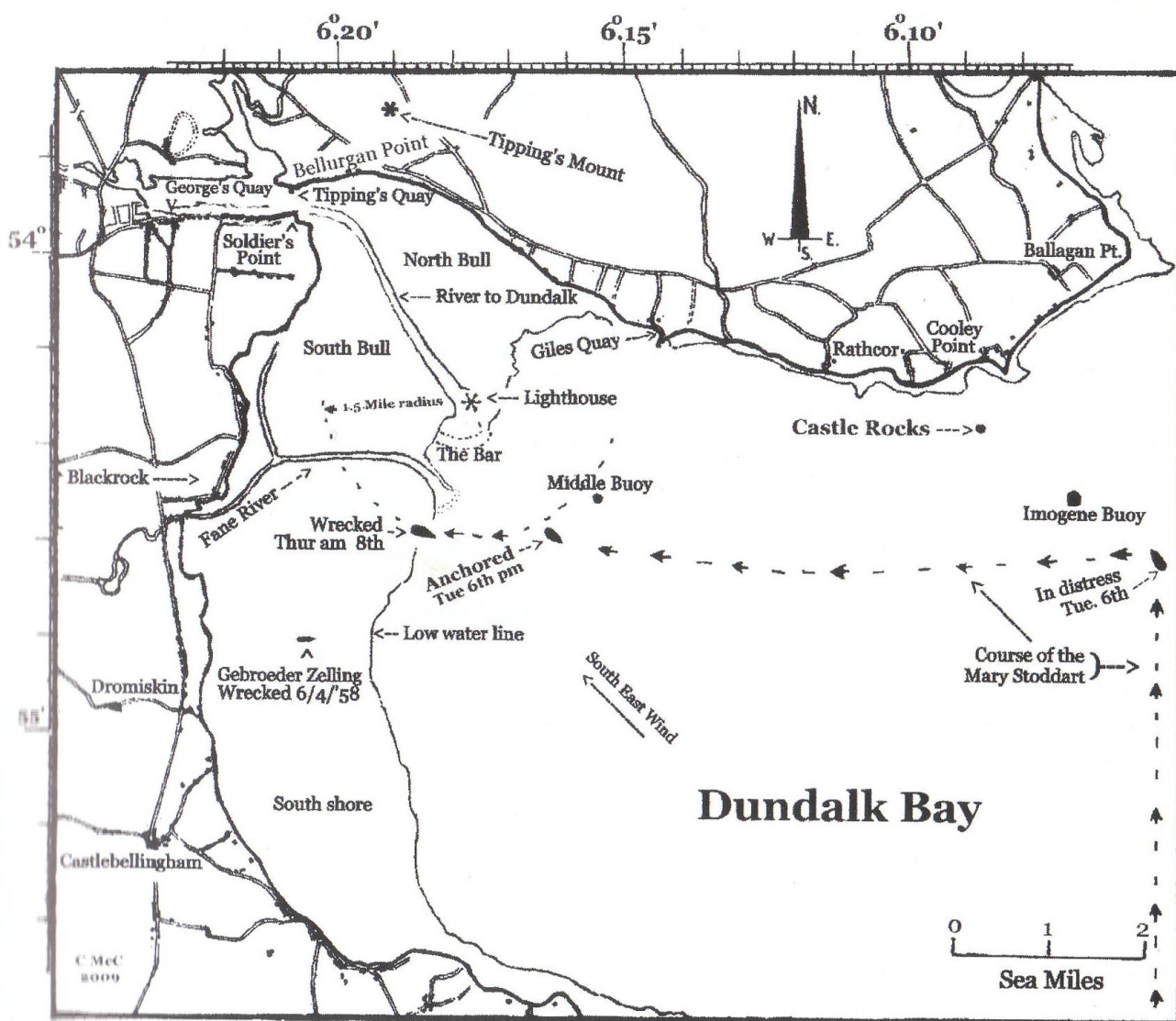


Fig. 1. Map of Dundalk Bay.

Charlie McCarthy's Map detailing the route of the *Mary Stoddart* into Dundalk bay in April 1858 and the point at which she ran aground.

Map: *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society* Vol. XXVI, No. 4, 2008



James Crosbey's family home is situated two doors to the left on the south side of The Gaelic House (now The Stone House). A lady, perhaps a family member and descendant, is pictured standing in the doorway. During James Crosbey's lifetime (1832-1858) the house, like most of the dwellings on Main Street would have been thatched.

In 1832, the year James Crosbey was born; Ireland was blighted with a cholera epidemic which quickly spread to County Louth. By the end of that year the total number of recorded cases in the county was 1,850 with 750 people dying from the disease. Tradition has it that local victims were buried in a communal plot in Haggardstown (Old) Graveyard. With the contagion being linked to the consumption of shellfish, local farmers supplied the villagers of Blackrock with vegetables during the crisis.

James had one sister, Catherine, who was born in 1835; and one brother, Nicholas, who was born three years later in 1838. (Photo: *Lawrence Collection*; courtesy of Sean MacAonghusa.)



Emily and Hargrave Cockshot's home was situated at the north end of Main Street, Blackrock, opposite Sandy Lane, which consisted mostly of impassable sand-dunes at the time of the *Mary Stoddart* disaster. James Crosbey died here on Friday 9th April 1858 from shock and hypothermia having been brought by horse and car from the beach at the present parochial house. Eight of the other survivors, who were delirious with shock and blue with cold, were provided with beds and warmth in the home of Samuel Hill; who is listed on Griffith's Valuation Map (1854) as owning a house, office and small garden on the hill opposite Cockshot's house on Sandy Lane, where The Neptune is now situated.

George Elphinstone, who cradled James Crosbey's head in the waterlogged boat and who helped to keep him alive until the two boats reached shore, is listed in the Griffith's Valuation Map and accompanying lists as owning a field at the Green Gates junction between the Blackrock road and the river Fane, where the Clermont Manor estate is now built.

(Photo: courtesy John McGuinness.)

John Richard Wray of Scarborough pictured in a home for retired sailors in 1908.

As a young apprentice he survived the 'Mary Stoddart' disaster and gave an account of the experience near the end of his life.

(Photo: *Tempest's Annual* 1909.)



(See across)

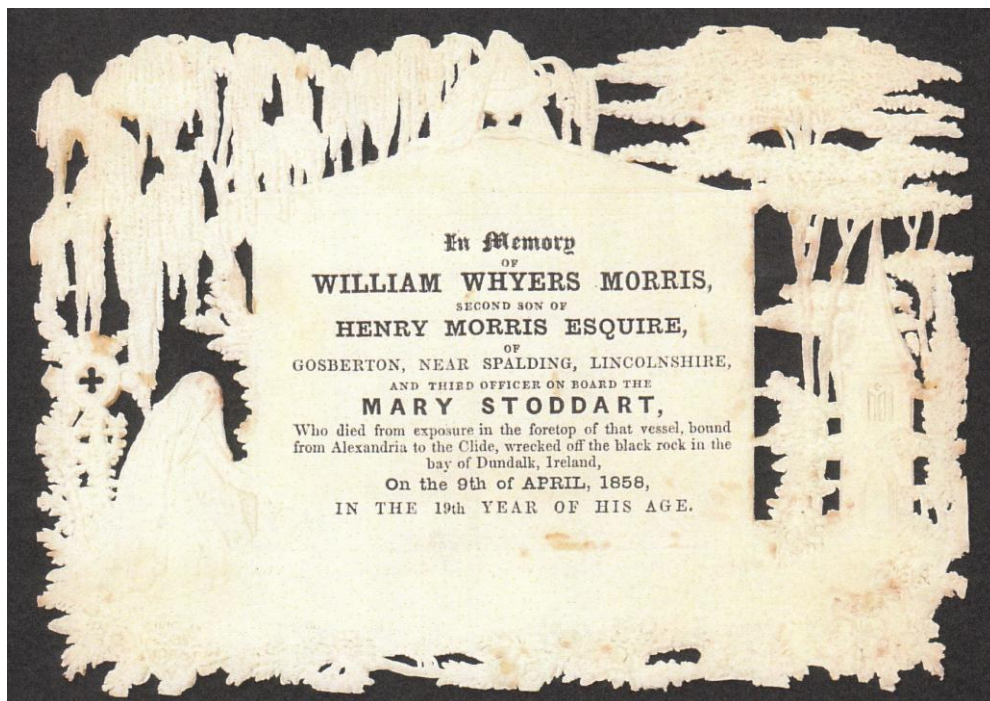
Richard Griffith (1784-1878) was responsible for a national land and housing valuation list and maps carried out in 1854 for the purpose of levying rates. The section reproduced from Blackrock (32) is the promontory of land stretching from the parochial house opposite the entrance to St. Oliver Plunkett Church to the Blackrock Fruit and Vegetable Shop opposite Sandy Lane.

32a was Duffys (now Harrison's Pub). 32 b was Emily and Hargrave Cockshot's house where James Crosbey died after he was brought ashore.

From research carried out by Charlie McCarthy the Cockshots are listed as residing in Blackrock from 31st January 1852 to 10th April 1867. It would seem that Hargrave Cockshot was a grain merchant in the employ of Lord Clermont and may have had a large grain store in the village. He was possibly a native of Lancashire as his death notice is reported in the *Catholic Telegraph* of 18th December 1852 as having occurred on 6th of that month at Kirkland, Lancashire, U.K.

In 1863, Emily Cockshot obtained a lease in the name of her Husband from Thomas Fortescue (Lord Clermont), for sea-water baths and a refreshment saloon at the premises.

30	a	James Byrne, .
31	a	James Shekleton,
32	a	Frances Duffy, .
-	b	Hargrave Cockshot,



An extremely rare commemorative card to the memory of William Morris, third mate on the Mary Stoddart, who died from exposure on the ship.

My special thanks to Mr. Noel Ross, Hon. Editor of the *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society* who placed the original in the County Louth Archive Centre at Ardee Road, Dundalk, from where I obtained a copy courtesy of archivist Loraine McCann.

(Noel Sharkey.)



Catherine Richardson (1846-1948) pictured at her home at The Square, Blackrock in 1946.

As a twelve-year old girl she watched the drama on the *Mary Stoddart* unfold from the banks at Rockmount.

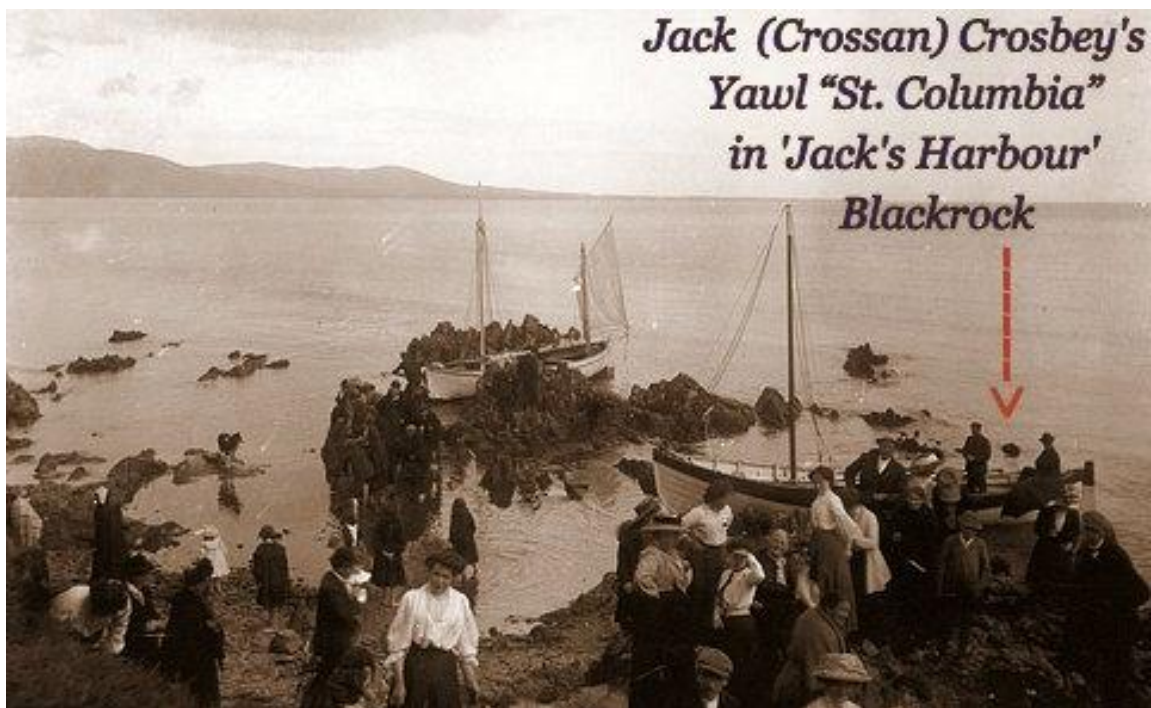
At her 100th birthday party in the skating hall she recited a twelve-verse poem on the disaster to tumultuous applause from the packed congregation who were present.

(Photo: courtesy John McGuinness.)



Captain Kelly's monument in Roden Place, Dundalk. It was erected in memory of those who lost their lives in the rescue attempts to save the crew of the 'Mary Stoddart'.

(Photo: *Memories of Dundalk* – Victor Whitmarsh, p 49)



**Jack (Crossan) Crosbey's
Yawl "St. Columbia"
in 'Jack's Harbour'
Blackrock**

'Jack's Harbour' circa 1900: a period when the area was used by local boatmen in order to bring visitors for trips around Blackrock bay. Situated behind the former swimming pool and the present Marine Court apartments, this is very likely the area where the rescue boats landed following the capsizing of James Crosbey's boat, and from where he was brought in a dying condition to Hargrave and Emily Cockshot's house.

The boat in the centre of the photo belonged to Paddy White and was formerly a U.S ship's lifeboat.

(Photo and information: courtesy Charlie McCarthy.)



Royal National Lifeboat Institution Medal awarded to Captain John Hinds of the schooner 'Venture' following the Mary Stoddart disaster. (Photos: courtesy Charlie McCarthy.)

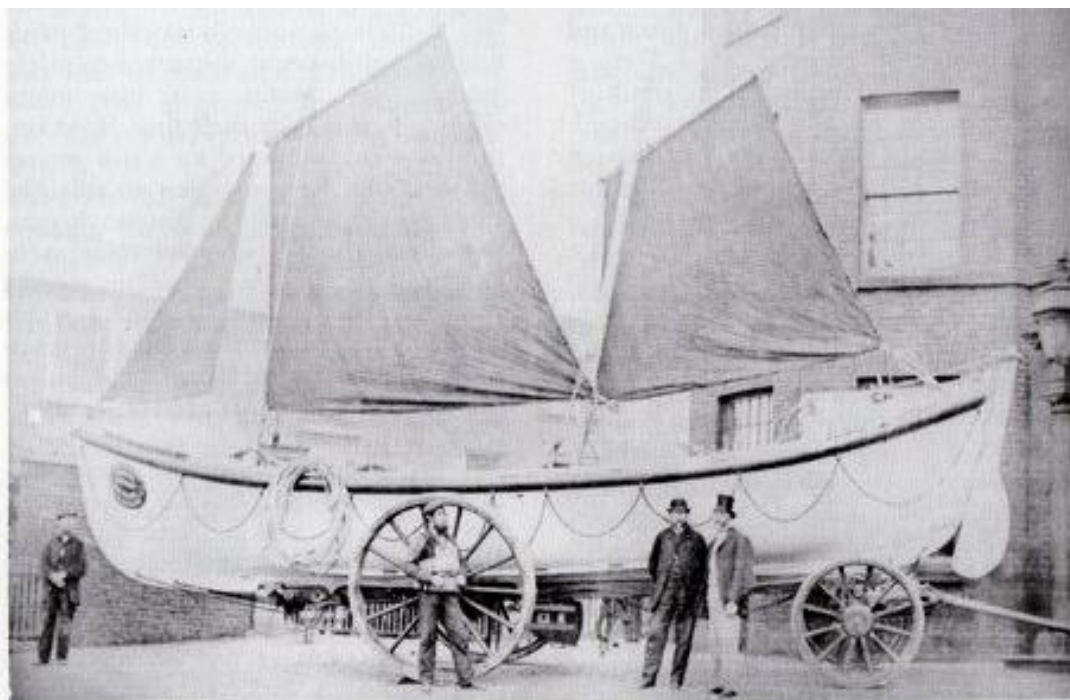
LIFEBOAT PRAYER

Merciful Father, all things in Heaven and Earth are held within Your loving care, look with favour upon the Royal National Lifeboat Institution.

Protect and Bless the crews of all their Lifeboats and all who risk their own safety to bring help to others.

Guide all who work for the Institution that they may be faithful to the vision of it's founders, so that it may always be seen as a beacon of hope and light to those who find themselves in peril on the sea.

Through the same Jesus Christ, to whom with You and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory, now and forever. Amen.



Dundalk lifeboat of 1870, Stockport Sunday School. She saved forty lives between 1867 and 1885
Blackrock Lifeboat ~ 1879

The 'Stockport Sunday School' lifeboat was built at a cost of £246 which was raised by the Stockport Children's Sunday School and she was then allocated to the lifeboat station at Blackrock where she served from 1867 until 1885. During her tenure at Blackrock forty people were safely brought ashore. (Photo and information courtesy Charlie McCarthy.)



The general R. Dudley-Blake Lifeboat and its crew taken in 1913-14. The lifeboat Station in Blackrock was established in 1859 following the loss of the Mary Stoddard in 1858. The Life-boat House was erected by Lord Clermont. From 1859 to 1935 when the station closed, the service had four lifeboats and was called out forty times saving eighty-four lives. Although there was some misgivings about the suitability of Blackrock in the beginning, the men of this station never failed to answer any call and always showed the greatest devotion and dedication to their job.

Front Row – Paddy Carroll (boy), Matt Carroll and Ed. Dullaghan (seated).

Middle Row – Pat Stanley, Para Richardson, James Sharkey, Paddy Smith, John McKeown, John Sharkey, Joe Sharkey, Tom Crosby, M. Hamilton, R. Smith, Phil McGuinness.

Back Row – Joe Smith, James White, James Stanley, Jack Crosby, Nick Smith, Paddy Breen.

(Photo and names courtesy of John Hamill.)

BLACKROCK LIFEBOATS

BLACKROCK LIFEBOAT STATION 1859 – 1933

DATE	CASUALTY	OUTCOME
19. 9.1860	Smack "John James"	Gave Help
22. 9.1861	Barque "Frederick"	Twenty One rescued
16. 1.1862	Schooner "Rook"	Escorted In
24. 3.1866	Barque "Julia"	Nine Rescued
24. 8.1871	Brigantine "Zoe"	Stood By
2. 7.1873	"Prince of Wales" (Princess)	Sixteen Rescued
27. 2.1875	Brigantine "Ida"	Seven Rescued
16. 4.1877	Brigantine "Jane"	Five Rescued
16. 4.1877	"Andromeda"	Seven Rescued
19. 1.1879	Schooner "Fanny Bailey"	Five Rescued
24.12.1895	S.S. "Paragon"	Eleven Rescued
24.12.1895	Barque "Ardendee"	Eleven Rescued
8.12.1904	Dandy "Catherine Latham" (Latour)	Four Rescued
15.12.1909	Steam Dredger "Thames"	Stood By
8. 4.1923	S.S. "Fetlar"	Two passengers taken off

Coxswains

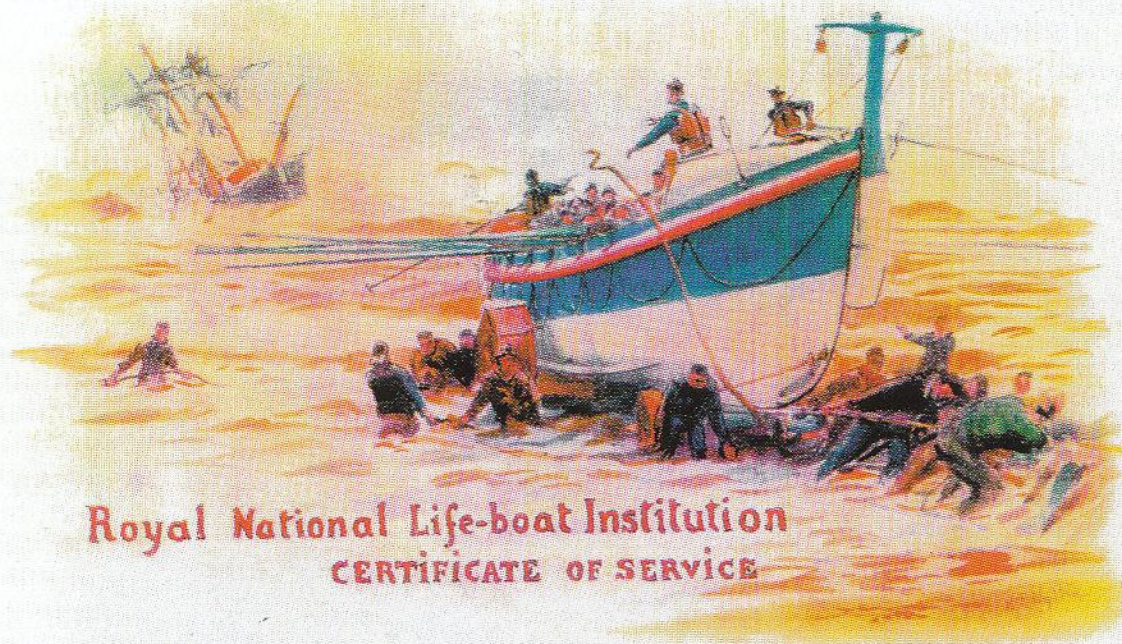
Bernard Hamilton 1859 – 1907

Michael Hamilton 1907 – 1934

Daniel Smith 1934 – 1935

Coxswain Bernard Hamilton was awarded the silver medal for long and gallant service.

(From the Boyne to the Mournes – Patsy McKenna pages 24 and 25)



Patrons

H.M. The King, H.M. The Queen.

President

His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, K.G.

This is to Certify

that Nicholas Smith
was a member of the crew of the Blackrock
Life-Boat for 24 years. The Committee of Management are
glad to place on record this testimony to his personal participation
in the Life-Boat Service.

Secretary.

Chairman.

October, 1935.

Lifeboat service certificate awarded to Nick Smith of
Blackrock in 1935

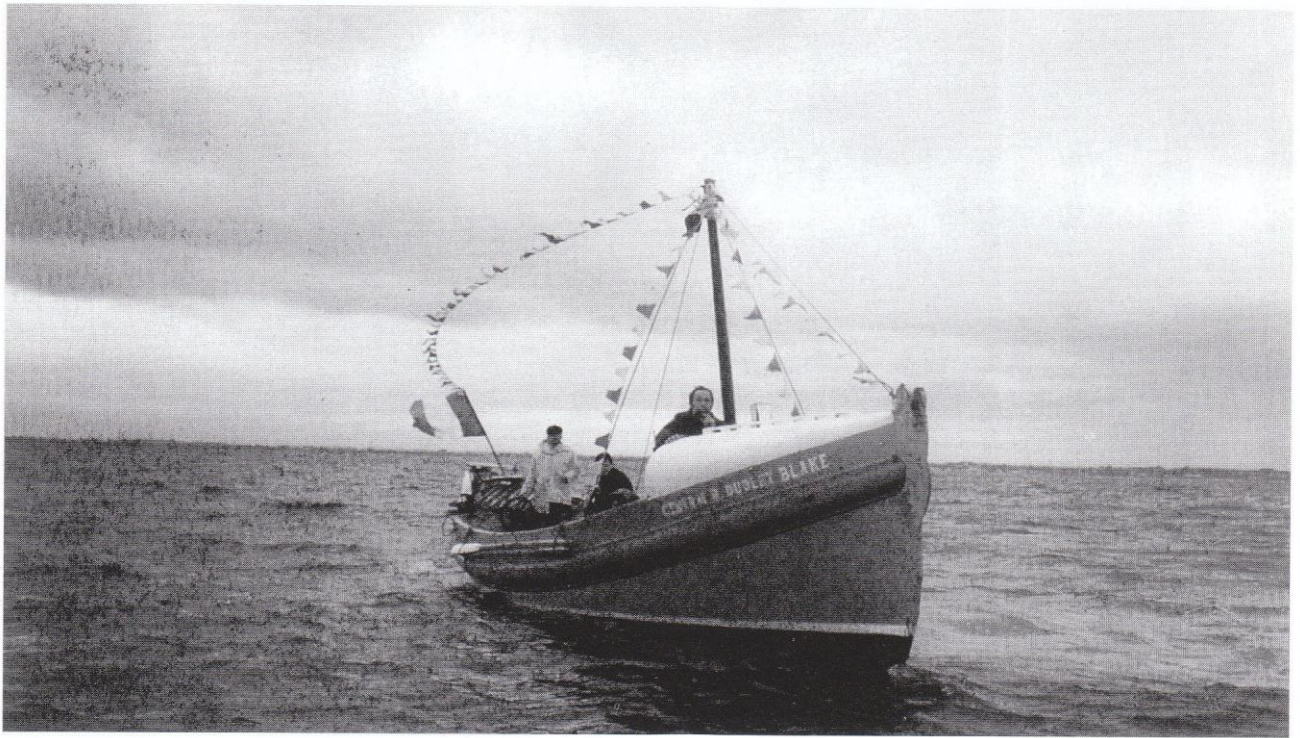
(Photo courtesy John Hamill)

BLACKROCK'S LAST LIFEBOAT SAILS BACK FROM THE PAST

Long after everybody believed that a special item of Blackrock's maritime history was consigned to the scrapyard, their last lifeboat the "General Richard Dudley-Blake" made a nostalgic comeback voyage to the bay on 25th June, 1994.

For years its courageous crew had risked their lives to help those in distress before the lifeboat left Blackrock for the last time in 1935 and the local station closed. It was assumed that the vessel had long gone to its end in some breaker's yard.

Before Christmas, 1993, however, local lifeboat enthusiast John Hamill from the Marlbog Road discovered the vessel's whereabouts and along with Blackrock fisherman Eamon Carroll R.N.L.I. and Dundalk Port Pilot Charley McCarthy, he arranged for the boat's nostalgic trip back home. The boat is based in Howth, and its owners, Ken and Frank Doyle, run pleasure trips. The present owners bought the boat in 1947 in Limerick, and it was only in 1992 that they ascertained that it was the former Blackrock lifeboat.



(Photo: courtesy of John Hamill)

(Text is abridged from Terry Conlon's article in the "Dundalk Argus" of 25-6-1995).

Source Material

The Wreck of the Mary Stoddart in Dundalk Bay, 1858 by Charlie McCarthy, *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society* Vol. XXVI, No.4, 2008.

The Dundalk Democrat.

The Wreck of the Mary Stoddart; Tempest's Annual, 1908; 1909.

The Book of Dundalk by P. Uí Dubhtaigh.

To School through the Rock by Pat Mulligan.

Memories of Dundalk by Victor Whitmarsh.

From the Boyne to the Mourne by Patsy McKenna.

Newry Herald and Down, Armagh, and Louth Journal; 5th August 1858; 10th May 1859 and 3rd December 1859 – articles on the Cockshot family all courtesy of Charlie McCarthy.

Newry Examiner & Louth Advertiser; 31st January 1852 and 22nd Dec., 1857 – information on grain exports by Hargrave Cockshot; courtesy of Charlie McCarthy.

Catholic Telegraph 18th Dec., 1852. *Belfast Morning News*; 10th July 1863; *Belfast Newsletter*; 3rd October 1865; *Newry Examiner* 10th April 1867; articles on Cockshot family, all courtesy of Charlie McCarthy.

County Louth Achieve, Ardee Road, Dundalk. (My special thanks to Archivist Lorraine McCann).

Louth County Library, Dundalk (my special thanks to Alan Hand and Mary Morgan of the research section for their invaluable assistance in copying the Griffith's Valuation Lists and in researching the relevant genealogy of the Crosby family).

National Map Centre, Augnier St., Dublin 2; *Griffith's Valuation*, Sheet no: 7:12.

Cover photo courtesy of Charlie McCarthy; other photos courtesy of John Hamill; Michael Harris Barke; Noel Ross; John McGuinness; Sean MacAonghusa, Owen Byrne; Eamon Carroll and Robert Sharkey.

My grateful appreciation to Larry Magnier for his invaluable assistance in the production of this brochure; Noel Sharkey.

