



# Sker Point: the graveyard of sunken vessels

**PORHCRAWL'S MARITIME** history is stained with disaster. But it is marked with great acts of heroism, too.

Scarweather Roack alone has claimed countless hundreds of lives. But the entire length of the seabed from Nash Point to Sker is a graveyard of sunken vessels and forgotten sailors' names.

One of the earliest shipping disasters in this part of the Bristol Channel turned into a jiving nightmare for Porthcawl when the bodies of over 300 soldiers were washed ashore in 1798.

## Soldiers washed ashore

A troopship bound from Bristol to Dublin heavily laden with soldiers to put down a rebellion in Ireland ran aground on Scarweather Rock and broke up. No one knows exactly how many lives were lost, but the 300 soldiers washed ashore along the Porthcawl coast were given an undignified burial in unconsecrated ground in the west ward of Porthcawl.

Ten years later Porthcawl witnessed ugly scenes of violence when a cargo of Irish whiskey was washed ashore at Sker. The brig "Perseverance" was en route to Bristol with a load of the fiery spirit when she broke up on Sker Point.

Sixty sailors were saved but the disaster took an unexpected turn when the local people ransacked the cargo.

Two looters drank themselves to death before the cavalry from Swansea arrived to protect the cargo.

But ugly scenes quickly broke out when the rest of the pilferers complained that they had been cheated out of their fair share of the whiskey. Order was only restored after the Riot Act was read out in local churches.

Porthcawl launched its first lifeboat, the "Dolphin," in 1830—before the days of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. The RNLI was established in Porthcawl in 1859 with the launching of "Good Deliverance." It was reformed in 1965 as an Inshore Life-Boat Station.

Nash Sands was the scene of many shipwrecks and countless drownings.

The "Marianne" was wrecked there in December 1821, to be followed a decade later by the packet steamer "Frolic." Eighty passengers and all the crew of the "Frolic" were lost.

## Heavy seas broke 'Samtampa' in two

Even the famous Royal Navy didn't escape the clutches of Nash Sands. The Lords of the Admiralty went aground there in 1840, though no lives were lost. Their ship, the "Black Eagle" was later refloated.

One of the most famous heroes of the Porthcawl coast was Daniel Shea who won the silver medal four times. His most daring rescue took place on October 13, 1858, when the schooner "Ajax" was wrecked on the Kenfig Sands.

Daniel Shea and six other coastguards dragged a gig along the foreshore to the scene of the shipwreck and, without waiting for the rest of the lifeboat crew, launched the boat. Battling through the heavy surf they eventually reached the Ajax and took off her six crew members.

## Awarded silver medals

Daniel Shea and James Collopy were awarded silver medals for their bravery and the remaining men were given cash awards. But fate caught up with Shea nine years later. He was drowned when the Padstow lifeboat capsized.

The RNLI life-boat "Good Deliverance" made a name for itself with four rescues in less than a decade. In January, 1861, the life-boat towed the schooner "Mary Jane" into Porthcawl from the Scarweather Rock after it was abandoned by its crew.

A year later "Good Deliverance" rescued ten people from the Liverpool brigantine "Champion," which was also wrecked on Scarweather. In 1869 it rescued eleven crew members and the captain's wife from the Spanish schooner "Loretta" which went aground on Nash Sands. And three crew members from the pilot cutter "Dasher" were rescued a year later at Tusker Rock.

Twenty lives were lost off Nash Point in 1866 when the iron sailing vessel "Malleny" laden with coal for South America, went

out of control in a gale in Swansea Bay. She drifted helpless back along the coast and was driven ashore off Nash Point.

The Italian barque "Caterina" met an equally tragic fate on Nash Point in 1857—its crew of 12 and a pilot were all drowned only hours after leaving Cardiff bound for the colonies.

Midnight of June 19/20, 1926, spelt disaster for the Dublin-bound ketch "Renown" when she was struck by a heavy squall in the Bristol Channel. Severely damaged by the storm, she sank four miles south of the Porthcawl lookout.

## Rescued ten sailors

The Porthcawl Lifesaving Association earned a Board of Trade Wreck Shield in 1938 when they rescued ten sailors and the captain's wife from the Dutch ship "Regina" when it went aground on Kenfig beach. A breeches buoy was used to ferry the victims ashore from the ship.

A tragic accident led to death of a Mountain Ash woman at Coney Beach in 1946 when an ex-Army amphibious vehicle sank with 29 passengers on board. The vehicle was being used for pleasure rides from the beach but the plugs were inadvertently left open one morning. The vessel filled up with water and sank soon after setting out.

The most famous shipwreck on the Porthcawl coast happened in April of 1947 and was captured on film by a Sunday Times photographer. When the American Liberty ship "Samtampa" (pictured above) ran aground at Sker Point, the Mumbles life-boat "Edward Prince of Wales" set out to its rescue. But heavy seas capsized the lifeboat and quickly broke the "Samtampa" in two. All 39 crew members of the "Samtampa" and all eight life-boat men were drowned.

The ship's master was later exhumed from Nottage cemetery and his body taken back to his home in New Zealand.

The most recent disaster on the Porthcawl coast was in October 1968. The sand dredger "Steepholm" went aground on Tusker Rock and was a complete loss.

Its crew of seven were all rescued by the Mumbles Lifeboat whose coxswain, Derek Scott, was awarded the RNLI Bronze Medal.

A year later the Greek ship "Amalia" went aground at Nash Point, but it was later refloated.