

*A wee bit
of maritime
history... 6*

FREE



Dramatic Cloughey Rescue



***Courageous rescue of the South Rock Lightship
Crew by Cloughey Lifeboat men in February 1950***

***38 hour ordeal for the lifeboat crew in raging seas off the
Cloughey coastline***

When you look out across Cloughey Bay to the Irish Sea on a calm day, it is hard to imagine that this was the scene of a dramatic rescue over 70 years ago. Read on to discover more about this amazing rescue.

The South Rock lightship came into service on 1st April 1877 to highlight the dangers facing seafarers in the Irish Sea offshore from Cloughey.



At 3 a.m. on the morning of Tuesday 31st January 1950 the Tara coastguard telephoned the Cloughey lifeboat authorities to alert them that the South Rock lightship was in difficulties and had broken her moorings in gale force wind conditions. The Cloughey lifeboat, the *Herbert John*, was launched. The weather was the worst ever seen by some of the rescue team with dangerous seas and gale force winds. Conditions were so bad that when the lifeboat men reached the ship there was a risk that the emergency anchor would not hold in the turbulent sea conditions and the lifeboat men were ordered to stand by. It was a very anxious time during the long night as the vessels were battered by wind and waves.



The Donaghadee lifeboat was also launched to assist.

Donaghadee lifeboat
Civil Service No.5 (left)



The Herbert John—Courtesy of RNLI/Beken of Cowes

On Wednesday morning 1st February in very stormy weather 43-year old Coxswain George Young brought the *Herbert John* alongside the lightship. A ladder was lowered and the crew from the lightship jumped into the lifeboat. The crew of seven had been without food for four days. It was a challenging rescue experience for Coxswain Young, in command of the Cloughey lifeboat for the first time during a distress call since his appointment to the position just six months previously.

Captain McGrath, skipper of the lightship, fell into the water as he was being rescued and had to be pulled to safety by the lifeboat crew. As a 56-year old ex-Royal Navy man, he was filled with admiration for the way the rescue had been carried out and commented that it was one of the worst nights he had witnessed in thirty six years at sea and that they were lucky that no one was injured.

The rescued seamen were brought to Cloughey to the home of Mrs Bell on Manse road where they were given refreshments after their ordeal at sea. One can imagine that the rescued men never forgot the kindness shown to them by Mrs Bell. Her husband William (Billy) was a member of the lifeboat crew and the boat's mechanic. He was one of the youngest serving members of the entire RNLI. At the time he commented: 'It was not really too bad but we got very cold.' The lifeboat men who served with the Cloughey lifeboat station saved many lives down through the years and in the village there is a standing stone overlooking the beach as a memorial to those brave and selfless men.

Acknowledgements

This article is based on information from the following sources:

A Belfast Telegraph report on the incident, February 1950

Brochure entitled 'The History and Heritage of Cloughey, County Down(2011), Peace III Community History initiative

RNLI Logbook report 1950 Vol 33 Issue 353

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Crew of the Cloughey lifeboat, *Herbert John*, following
the rescue of the crew of the Southrock lightship,
January / February 1950

D Thompson (Hon Secretary); AMcNamara (Signals); H Palmer (Bowman);
G Gibson; W (Billy) Bell (Mechanic); G Young (Coxswain);
G Coffey; S Adair (2nd Coxswain)

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