

PORT GAVERNE CLIFF FATALITY - INQUEST STATEMENT REFUTED - VIGOROUS PROTESTS

We have received, many protests from residents of Port Isaac on the criticisms passed on the Coastguards at the inquest held at Bodmin last week concerning the death of a lad who fell over the cliff at Port Gaverne and received fatal injuries. We give below some of the letters:

“UNFORGIVABLE SLUR”

Mr. Jack Collings, of 1, New Estate road, Port Isaac, writes:—

“It would seem, according to Capt. and Mrs. Hall’s stories at the inquest, that crowds of people from Port Isaac and district simply stood on the cliff and did nothing for three hours. It would greatly help matters if Mrs Hall would tell exactly what time the accident happened.

“The slur on the two coastguards and the local constable is unforgivable, being attacks on people who are unable to reply for themselves.

“As to the statement that the owner of the only boat available could’ not be found, it may surprise Mrs. Hall to know that Mr. Norman Short (the owner) was nearly the first man she spoke to on the Platt. Though he is a sick man, he proceeded in the boat with two others to the scene of the accident, a distance of about two miles.

“It may further surprise Mrs. Hall to know that it was this same boat owner who, at her request, about five years, ago, lowered her boy down the cliff about 100 yards from the same spot to see the gulls’ nests.

“Port Isaac people never let the thought of payment enter their heads in the matter of rescue work, but we in Port Isaac are beginning to wonder after such criticism whether we should always be so ready to risk our lives and so leave our own wives and families to fend for themselves.

“If Port Isaac people did nothing, how can Mrs. Hall explain the shabby clothes of the would-be rescuers? These people left home in their best clothes.”

RISKED THEIR LIVES

“Sir, the scene of the accident was nearly two miles east of Port Gaverne, to which port the casualty was brought and placed in the waiting ambulance. Everyone must sympathise with the parents and friends of Mr. Jack, and will admit that Mrs, Hall especially must be very upset; but surely that is no excuse for blaming others for neglect of duty.

“The coastguard and Customs officers, who happened to be first on the spot, were without any means of communication. Perhaps they should have commandeered Mr. Hall’s car instead of doing as they thought best and allowing Mrs. Hall and son to use it to summon aid.

“The small rowing boat left Port Isaac harbour within five minutes of the local constable being informed of the accident. No larger boat could get near the cliff at the state of tide, with a considerable amount of swell running.

“I can assure you neither owner of rowing boat nor motor boat which followed to tow the rowing boat back to Port Gaverne made the least protest about their property being commandeered. As always, the men of Port Isaac, boat owners, sailors, or the law’s representatives, are ready and willint to endeavour to save life.

“Capt. Hall owes an apology to those who risked their lives. Quite a number of men, some only partly clothed, had to remain at the bottom of Bound’s Cliff for some hours after the ambulance had left Port Gaverne.”

A FISHERMAN’S WIFE. Port Isaac

“RIGHTING A WRONG”

Mr. Tom Honey of Middle Street, Port Isaac, writes:

“The local policeman had his call to render assistance, and immediately came down to the Town Platt, accompanied by the Coastguard and Mrs. Hall. As soon as the situation was explained the owner of a rowing-boat said to myself and Mr. S. Mitchell: ‘Come on boys, let’s go!’ We ran to where the boat lay on the beach, and within two or three minutes had it in the water. Mr. N. Short,, the owner, took his turn at the paddles, and within 20 minutes we were at the scene. We got the injured boy aboard the boat and, on turning our craft we were taken in tow by a motor boat to Port Gaverne, a distance of over, two miles. It took only an hour and ten minutes to go from Port Isaac and back to Port Gaverne. Had we known at 4.30, when the accident happened, Nothing could have been done by any boat, as there were far too many rocks to get a boat in close and there would also have been too much rough sea at low water, which was about 5 o’clock. Nothing could have been done; we were powerless.

“As to the commandeering of boats, Port Isaac fishermen do not hesitate to man their boats in any rescue efforts, and, as in this case, we do not expect or demand any financial gain. I have written this in order to right a wrong done to all.

COASTGUARDS’ QUICK RESPONSE

Writing from Hillside, Port Gaverne, Mr. R. Atkinson says:—

“I was very much surprised on reading in the ‘Guardian’ the report of the fatality at Port Gaverne. I wish to point out that my son, Cadet T. Atkinson, was the very first person to be on the scene of the accident with his boat. After trying to land three times he found it impossible. The lady on the cliff, after seeing he could not land, cabled out to him to go for help.

“ He immediately came to me and within ten minutes of reporting the accident I had the coastguards and their gear in my car and was on the scene. I therefore think that there should have been some praise for the quick response the coastguards made, instead of condemnation.”

MANY DIFFICULTIES

“ Sir,—Reference your report of a boy’s fall to death at Port Gaverne and the inquest criticism of aid efforts, I wish to make it perfectly clear that twenty minutes after the message for help reached me at the Coastguard Station, Port Isaac at 6 p.m., I was with the deceased at the foot of the cliff.

“When I descended the cliff I found Dr. Singlett, Messrs. J. Langdon, J. Glover, D. Marks, F. and D. Cleave. I made a signal to Coastguard McDonold at top of cliff, ‘Send boat immediately.’ The only delay in bringing aid was the state of tide, which was out.

“A rowing boat was nevertheless pulled down to the water, and hastened over the approximate distance of four miles to where the deceased lay, manned by S. Mitchell, N. Short, and T. Honey. As soon as the motor boat could be got afloat she followed the rowing boat.

“A heavy swell was running, and numerous attempts were made before the injured person could be transferred to the rowing boat, and hence towed to Port Gaverne Harbour by the motor boat, where an ambulance was awaiting its arrival.

“Those assisting in the rescue were detained so long by their efforts that they were cut off by the tide, and had to await until a motor boat came to take them back, finally arriving at Port Isaac. at approx. 10 p.m.”

H. ROOKE

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