



# The Rescue of the Hermina

The night the RNLi lifeboat, Charterhouse, faced its greatest and most arduous test

The drama started at 7.15 on a December evening in 1920 when flares from the Dutch schooner "Hermina" were spotted and the lifeboat launched. Coxswain John Howells, almost 66 years of age commanded the motorised lifeboat Charterhouse out into the bay to aid the vessel. After a great struggle in mounting seas seven of the ten men aboard were rescued but by now the lifeboat had been drenched and the engine would not start and so consequently the lifeboatmen had to resort to sail and oars to return to shore. The three sailors left on board the Hermina had refused to leave despite Coxswain Howells pleading with them to abandon ship as he knew he would not be able to return later. After three hours fighting the waves the lifeboat returned to Fishguard but no sooner had they done so than more flares were spotted as the Hermina was breaking up on Needle Rock. The sailors only hope was with the cliff rescue team who were dispatched with the rocket apparatus, pulling it from Goodwick up to Garn Gelly by means of a horse and waggon.



The wreck of the Hermina on Needle Rock



The bravery shown by all was recognised with the only RNLi Gold Medal ever to be awarded to Fishguard Station being given to Coxswain Howells, silver medals to Tom Davies, Tom Holmes and Robert Simpson and bronze medals to lifeboatmen T. Perkins, J. Rourke, P. Whelan, T. Duffin, J. Gardiner, W. Devereaux, H.W. Mason, W. Thomas and R. Veal. William Morgan, the hero of the cliff rescue received the thanks of the Institution on Vellum. As a token of their thanks the Queen of the Netherlands and the Dutch Government presented Coxswain Howells and William Morgan with gold watches and silver watches to the other men.

By the time the cliff rescue team were in place it was apparent they could not help as the ship had already broken up and one sailor had been washed away. The remaining two, one of whom was the Captain were clinging to rocks at the base of the cliff. Despite it being the height of the storm, a local farmer, Mr William Morgan who had been watching the drama unfold, volunteered to be lowered down the 180 ft cliff on a hemp rope to rescue the men. He was lowered down twice and brought to safety both the Captain and the Chief Officer.



Mr. Wm. Morgan.



In April 1921, the lifeboat men and William Morgan together with the Charterhouse lifeboat were conveyed to London via the GWR to receive their awards from the Prince of Wales in Parliament Square. The top photo shows the men outside the RNLi Headquarters and the photo to the left, Coxswain Howells being presented to the Prince.