CHAPTER 2 - SEEKING WORK

In the mid-to-late 19th century (and particularly in the vicinity of Falmouth) the term 'Going seeking' was common parlance to describe the beginning of a boatman's endless cycle of activity. It was his search for work. Accompanying that search was the persistent competition from other Quay Punts, each of whom was constantly attempting to become the first to 'speak' to any ship which appeared to be heading for Falmouth Harbour. By becoming the first to do so provided that boatman with the exclusive right to undertake all the work arising from that ship once it had anchored in the Harbour.

It was often the case that the race began even before the topsails of a ship were sighted above the level of the horizon. Whenever this occurred, the business of seeking became both dynamic and competitive, a potentially dangerous mix of forces with which each boatman had to contend, especially when so far away from home and, more often than not, far from help.

In the years prior to 1870, the highly independent-minded boatmen had but few members of the public paying attention either to the nature of their day-to-day work, or to the conditions they so often had to endure. It also appears that the pre-1870 Harbour Commissioners had only a marginal interest in whatever went on in the harbour, especially with regard to the Quay Punts. However, in September of that year a completely new Commission was appointed and, as one can detect from reading the minutes of that body, the new members took a genuine interest in what the Quay Punts were up to, especially so if the Commissioners detected any Quay Punt charging fees that were so high that a ship might think twice before entering the harbour.

The moment the new Commissioners attempted to establish their authority over the boatmen, they found the boatmen well-prepared to meet them; not surprisingly the boatmen reacted with sharp disdain to any suggestion concerning the imposition of rules and regulations which might impinge upon them. That attitude made the new Commissioners all the more determined to have their way over what they saw as a motley group of boatmen. Much to the boatmen's consternation, it took but little time for the new Commissioners to establish a significant degree of administrative control over four major features of the boatmen's day-to-day activities. These were:

- The issue of permits to trade within the harbour's boundaries.
- Control over the fees the boatmen were permitted to charge for their manifold services,
- The prohibition of working with explosive or corrosive substances, and
- The prohibition of Sunday working

These matters still left the Quay Punt boatmen relatively free to work as and when they chose and to adopt whatever customs and practices they considered appropriate amongst themselves. What everyone knew but did not want to say was that beneath all the talk there was one underlying factor which undermined the power of the boatmen: if the boatmen refused to comply with the desires of the Commissioners, the boatmen's level of income would surely suffer a loss.

If money became extremely scarce, a determined boatman could usually find a casual one-off in-harbour job or, maybe, engage in a spot of commercial fishing. Sometimes (if lucky) the summer months might also provide the opportunity of giving holidaymakers a 'trip around the bay'. However, serving the ships was undoubtedly the central purpose of a Quay Punt's daily life and their boats were designed accordingly. Furthermore, the boatmen had deliberately chosen to secure their work from a ship by competing with one another to become the first to 'speak' to any given ship. This usually caused the boatmen to sail well beyond the harbour's boundary and into the open sea: going seeking.

One might think that a more logical, less risky method of securing work could have been arranged: for instance, the boatmen could have agreed to a means of allocating each ship to a particular Quay Punt as and when the ship entered the harbour, rather in the way of today's taxi rank. Maybe that approach would have required a level of trust far beyond the reach of many of the boatmen.

Having arrived some two or three miles south of Lizard Point (and in clear weather), many of the ships heading eastward would have been spotted quite easily. The first signs were usually a ship's topsails piercing the horizon. Soon after that the alignment of her masts might have provided an early indication as to her intended course but, the all-important question remained: 'was she intending to make for Falmouth, or was she just closing-in to make a landfall or, perhaps, to read any code-flags hoisted upon Fox's Telegraph Station at Lizard Point?' If the latter, then her intentions might be to pass-by, *en route* to some eastward port. Only time would tell. Occasionally, a ship might have been seen approaching from up-channel *i.e.* from the east, but by far the most would have been approaching from the direction of the Atlantic Ocean.

Seeking was competitive. It was always likely that a Quay Punt would find itself racing against one or more of its kind and if a boatman was unable to secure his first target, he would have to await the next, and so on until he met with success.

Seeking was the single, most spectacular aspect of the otherwise fairly humdrum life of a Quay Punt boatman. It was an all-year-round activity conducted in exposed, wet, wind-blown and often cold conditions. As such, both the boatman and his Quay Punt were constantly being tested to the full, especially the Quay Punt's stability, its handiness, its sturdiness, and its (usually) more-than-adequate turn of speed.

2.1 Estimating the Probability of Ship-Arrivals

The main seeking-grounds were the waters south of Lizard Head. To sail some sixteen miles or so to the seeking grounds and then to find oneself having to spend yet more time awaiting the sight of a ship (and, at some

time later, to return to the harbour) would surely have been a frustrating exercise for any boatman.

Whatever it was that caused a boatman to set-off in search of new business would probably have been decided upon long before his departure. Until the advent of radio or telegraph communication, information was somewhat conditional in its nature, so making it extremely difficult to estimate the time of a ship reaching the western approaches and setting a course up-channel, hopefully via Falmouth. There were three main rough and ready ways of forecasting the arrival of ships:

- Keeping abreast of news received by local Ship Agents
- Regularly scanning local newspapers and the weekly editions of *Lloyds Lists* and, from those, estimating arrival-dates from dates of departure from various foreign ports, and
- Keeping an eye open for other Quay Punts leaving the harbour.

In respect of the first method, the ship's owners and the owners of the cargo would always be eager to know when they might expect any ship of theirs to approach the English Channel. For the ship-owners, such information enabled them to direct the ships to the ports which were offering the most advantageous prices for whatever was being carried in the ship's hold. In this respect the weekly edition of *Lloyds List* was of particular value to them. The local newspapers also published similar indicators, although their information was probably drawn from that same source. The boatmen relied much upon their relationship with the Ship Agents for news but, unless an Agent had a particular desire for a ship to be reached via a Quay Punt rather than one of his or her own boats, the needs of the boatmen appear to have been low on the Agent's daily list of priorities.

A large number of variables were at play at any one time, so causing the calculation of statistical probabilities regarding arrival dates to be somewhat hit-and-miss. Whilst the well-established trade-winds held a fair degree of stability in respect of both direction and seasonal force, the constancy of their strength was less predictable: under press of sail and with the wind from the most advantageous direction, some of the larger ships could reach remarkably fast speeds: as much as 18 knots has been mentioned but it is known that such speeds were difficult to maintain for long periods, a matter about which the boatmen were fully aware.

In an interview conducted by Paul Tonkin,[2] boatman Norman 'Ferret' Morrison was asked '*How did you know that there was a ship out there?*' To which Morrison is reported to have replied:

> *'We didn't. The only way a boatman could gauge the likely arrival of a ship was to examine the* Journal of Commerce*. In it would be the date a named ship had (for instance) left Las Palmas. Taking into account the slowness of the ships, seven or eight days would be allowed for the passage, plus an extra 24 hours or so within which she should be around'.*

Morrison's answer matched that of a study undertaken by the Science Museum in London during the 1930s.[3] In that study the average speed in respect of any voyage connected to the Australian wool fleet in 1886/7 was just over 6 knots, a calculation that took account of the occasional 18 knot sprint. That same result also applied to the *Herzogin Cecilie* during the period 1925-1929, indicating that whether a clipper ship or a large, less-shapely cargo carrier, the overall speed of the two types could be much

the same when calculated over a long distance. The study reached the conclusion that the high speeds - about which everyone liked to hear - were '*of more interest as records of the occasional force of the wind than as measures of the effective speed of sailing ships'*.

Another method of estimating the arrival-date of a ship was entirely speculative: what one might regard as being 'out of this world'. This method was reported as coming mostly from the time-served, well experienced boatman who 'felt-in-his-bones' that a ship was approaching. Such a feeling as this might simply have been triggered by a boatman having come to the conclusion that it was 'about time' a ship had turned-up. Whether such comments were just play-acting based upon news secretly acquired might never be known but, on the few occasions when such forecasting came to fruition, the mystique it engendered amongst the boatmen is said to have reached religious proportions.

When telling this story, Jimmy Morrison explained the process by simply saying '*Somehow they got to know'*[4] and, by a wry smile, would imply that both his father and his uncle were similarly gifted. When describing this wholly abstract, almost spiritual form of forecasting, Morrison spoke with a mixture of mild humour and profound reverence, thereby generating a hint of artful mystique which he was unwilling to forego in its entirety, and something no landsman should ever expect to comprehend, least of all to acquire.

Later, Morrison recited yet another example along the same lines:

> '*Me and my father would sometimes anchor off Church Cove (on the Lizard peninsula) and walk to the top of the rise in order to examine the often hazy or rain-shrouded horizon. There we would cast our eyes over the Channel approaches in the hope of seeing early signs of an inward-bound ship. As and when the topmast of any ship broke the horizon, we would return in haste to the cove, hop aboard our tender and, trying to look as relaxed and casual as possible so as not to give our secret away (just as we would have done earlier when leaving the harbour), we would row as fast as we dare towards our Quay Punt and set-off in the hope of stealing a march on everyone else in the area'*.[5]

In circumstances such as these, Morrison and his fellow boatmen might nevertheless discover that some other boatman had already reached the incoming ship. Such were the risks attending to what he referred to as 'the game'.

One of the greatest anxieties entertained by the boatmen concerned the possibility that one amongst them might have received specific news of a ship about to enter the seeking-zone. Knowing, as they did, that a boatman holding such information would do all he could to keep his news hidden from all others, every boatmen was inclined to watch his fellow boatmen every bit as much as he did the horizon.

As has already been implied, it was always possible that any parting boatman had been urged to make for the Lizard by nothing more than 'a feeling in his bones' but the rest of the boatmen, upon witnessing his departure, could never be sure why he was leaving at that particular moment. If it was nothing more than mere hope which drove him, then he, and any other boatman who decided to follow him, might easily have found themselves in the midst of a wild goose chase, and furious with themselves at their own gullibility. Then again, that same departing boatman who caused others to follow might have known something of value: how was anyone to know?

2.2 The Influence of the Ship Agents

Over the period in question there were several Ship Agents operating in the town, each eager to serve any ship which sought instruction as to where they were to be directed next. Most of the Agents were also Consuls to one or to several countries, thereby sometimes pre-determining which ship dealt with which Agent.

The information acquired by the Agents included that which became the ship's 'orders'. By one means or another, this information had to be delivered to the appropriate ship; hence the term 'Falmouth for Orders'. The Ship Agents often delivered these orders themselves but, at other times, a Quay Punt might be detailed to undertake this simple task on the Agent's behalf.

The Agents and the boatmen alike had to secure for themselves the type of information they each required. There were three main means to achieving this goal:

- To receive advance information directly from a shipowner sufficient in its nature to estimate the likely time of a ship's arrival.
- For a Ship Agent or boatman identifying a passing ship and (in the case of the Agent) subsequently making contact with her owners, on a first-come, first served basis. Once the telegraph had been installed the matter could be determined quite quickly but, until that time, the process could have taken several days to complete
- By taking a gig or some such vessel out to accost approaching ships, rather in the way the Channel (or Trinity House) Pilots, or Falmouth's Quay Punts were apt to do.

2.3 The Arrival of the Electric Telegraph, Lizard, 1872

In 1872, Fox and Company took the initiative to build a telegraph Signal Station on the highest, most southerly point of the Lizard peninsula: Bass Point. Not only did the Company purchase sufficient land for their building, true to their name they also had the cunning foresight also to buy much of the surrounding land so as to keep any would-be competitors at bay.[6]

Fox's purpose, like everyone else striving to intercept any incoming ship, was always to be the first on the spot. In clear weather, the Station provided an excellent panoramic view of the Channel and, by being painted white and positioned fairly close to the lighthouse, it provided one more prominent building for the ships to spot, (although rather too close to the other conspicuous buildings to enable a reliable triangular fix to be made).

Fox's Signal Station at the Lizard (Source: Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society)

Sometime before Fox's had sold their station to Lloyds of London in 1883, they had boldly painted on its white, seaward side: the letters 'I C U' - 'I see you'- in large black letters. The idea behind this notice is said to have been that if, in good visibility, a ship could comfortably read the letters through an eye-glass, then it stood to reason that it could also read any hoisted code flags, including the permanent message 'EC', meaning 'What Ship is That?'.[7] By the same token, it seems logical that the Signal Station would then have had an equal chance of being able to read the ship's code flags and thereby identify it for the benefit of her owners. At this same range the ship would also have found itself at a fairly safe distance from the dangers of the headland.[8A]

2.4 Taking Account of the Weather

Despite all the talk about the Quay Punt's ability to cope with all weather conditions, heavy weather could seriously affect their work, even to the point of putting life at risk. Sheltered though the harbour has always been, the Carrick Roads could sometimes become surprisingly rough, especially so in the case of strong easterly or southerly winds. Whenever the harbour was troubled in this way, it would have been unwise to take any boat - let alone a small open boat - beyond Black Rock (a partly submerged reef lying more-or-less across the very centre of the entrance to the Carrick Roads, and marked only by an unlit beacon).

As far back as 16th December 1856 a Licensed boatman (no name provided) wrote to the Editor of the *Falmouth Packet* complaining that, in particularly bad weather, he took a captain ashore from a ship anchored in Carrick Roads and, upon landing him, charged him double fees. The captain (knowing the system operated by the Harbour) refused to pay because *'there was no flag up!'* The captain's comment is explained by the fact that, at the time, Falmouth Borough Council was responsible for hoisting the bad-weather warning flags, leaving the boatmen to hope that

[A] See colour plate

'*it should be left to some competent person to have the power* [*i.e.* the authority] *to hoist it when he judges it right to do so'*. It is easy to understand the writer's proposed solution, but the question remained as to whether the judgement of the appointed 'competent person' would always have been respected by others.

In 1874, that method of signalling a weather-warning had been taken-over by the Harbourmaster. He decided to dispense with the flags in favour of balls. These balls were easier to see from any standpoint, regardless of the wind direction. Henceforth the arrangements became: '*When one ball is hoisted* [the boatmen were authorised] *to charge double fees. When 2 balls are hoisted, the boatmen may make special arrangements'.*[9]

It is clear that the responsibility for deciding whether or not the boatmen should continue to work whilst the warning-balls were up lay not so much with the authorities but with each individual boatman. If a boatman chose to continue working in such conditions, then no-one would stand in his way.

2.5 Setting Off: Attempts at Secrecy

Even if a Quay Punt had won a ship fairly and squarely, feelings could run high amongst those who had lost-out, especially if they had been patrolling the area south of Lizard Point longer than had the winner. Again, Leonard Morrison told of the sometimes grudging acceptance shown by the loser: '*I've seen Willie Tonkin there, if I'd been out and I spoked a ship and had the job, he wouldn't give you the time of day. There was always a bit of nastiness'.*

Much has been made of the volatile nature of so many of the boatmen and, in particular, how fierce their tempers could be; yet, it is true to say that no matter what the circumstances, one boatman would never see another in difficulties without giving the utmost assistance even if, by so doing, the rescuer might have placed himself in danger, or even forfeited the opportunity to bag a ship.

When contemplating the prospect of going seeking, each boatman took great care to behave in a most secretive, even furtive, manner. The various ploys or ruses used by the boatman to conceal their departure ranged from the most imaginative to the completely absurd, and from the amusing to the downright criminal. The Minutes of the Harbour Commissioners reveal that in particularly malicious moments, competitors' boats were sabotaged: that is to say, sails were deliberately torn or cut, spars were snapped, and tenders were cut adrift or deliberately hidden. Some even had their boats taken out and sunk. One might think that these more extreme measures were employed by those most in need of the money but, as can still be seen today, it might just have been that those responsible for such behaviour were those who would always be prone to such extremes of behaviour.

In any attempt to achieve a quick and surreptitious getaway, darkness always helped. Within the existing range of oral history there resides a variety of stories, such as a boatman having constructed a 'body' by mounting a hat and smock upon the end of a mop in order to deceive others into believing that he was simply taking a visitor out for a sail. Casual, nonchalant, unhurried movements were called for lest any hint of urgency was detected by a fellow competitor.[10]

At one of the many interviews given by Leonard Morrison to members of his family, and to the press, he described how he achieved his own secretive getaways:

> *'I went on my hands and knees across the quay, so they wouldn't see me walking'* and, he continued *'I dropped down over the ladder, put the rope quietly in the punt, all quiet of a morning, 4 o'clock: stuck the paddle in the water so the leather would get wet, so it wouldn't screech (in the rowlocks) so up on the boat, put the chain in the boat quietly so as they wouldn't hear me.'*[11]

Unless a boatman was absolutely certain that he was the sole bearer of news concerning an approaching ship, he might have had to stay in the vicinity of Lizard Point for a day or two, in anticipation of which he might have taken a small tender with him (as many were said to have done). This would have enabled him either to reach land if he wished to land with a view to finding a higher vantage point, or to have available to him should an emergency occur. However, in more favourable circumstances he would have benefitted from being free of such encumbrances and, therefore, lighter in weight in order to be travelling as fast as his boat would allow.

Another matter which would have aided the secrecy of a boatman's departure was the fact that the Quay Punts seldom displayed riding lights. This was not due to the boatmen being contemptuous of safety at sea: instead, the Harbourmaster required all small boats to carry some form of light whilst sailing in the harbour at night. To satisfy this requirement the Quay Punts would usually carry a lighted paraffin lamp, safely hidden in a bucket situated near the helmsman, ready to display should any approaching vessel appear to be on a collision course.[12]

Waiting to hoist the sails until well beyond earshot was another common ploy. In this case the manner of the actual departure would have been affected much by the strength and direction of the wind, plus the state of the tide. In calm conditions, oars or a single sweep might have been deployed to manoeuvre the boat towards an inaudible and possibly hard-to-see location. Having left the mooring under shortened-sail, the final preparations might sometimes be completed when well beyond the docks.

On such occasions the boatmen often carried a small stock of foodstuff or drink, plus a fair bit more in the hope of selling it to the crew of any ship they managed to secure.

From Pendennis Point one can see The Manacles reef and Manacle Point but one cannot see Lizard Point because of it being farther to the West. That being so, if a ship was to have been seen from Pendennis, then it would have already been well on its way towards rounding the Manacles buoy with the chance that, by then, some other Quay Punt would have already claimed it.

2.6 TACTICAL PLOYS

A well-planned, tactical approach to reaching a particular destination can compensate for a boat being smaller - and therefore inherently slower - than its rival. For example, awareness of the tidal streams, their direction, their rate, their timing and their heading, plus an understanding of how the winds may be affected by the topography of the land-mass, or by the time of day, when the variance in the temperature between the land and

the sea would set-up local convection winds. Knowledge of all such matters would have been of great advantage to any boatman in his efforts to determine the best course to take.

In a post-World War I interview with R S Burt (on 2nd March 1923), a reporter from the *Cornish Echo* asked what it was that caused the larger boats to be preferred; Burt's reply was simple and straightforward: '*it was the ambition for speed which led to the increase in size'.* (It is generally understood that the longer the waterline, the greater the speed').[B] This being so, how could a boatman with a boat smaller than his immediate competitor ever hope to succeed in his quest? Just three possibilities came to light:

- By tactical means (such as those described above)
- By stationing himself off the Lizard peninsula for long periods of time, ready to pounce before any of the larger Quay Punts could reach the area, or
- By having been the sole receiver of vital information long before anyone else.

By the time a Quay Punt had reached halfway to the Lizard the boatman - visibility permitting - would have scanned both the coastline and the general area around him in search of other contenders. Once abeam of Manacle Point the next point-in-view would be Black Head (to starboard) and, subsequently, Lizard Point. Whilst negotiating this stretch of coastline the boatman would have had to keep an eye seaward, partly because of local hazards, partly to keep a look-out for rival Quay Punts, partly to continuously search the horizon for approaching ships, and partly to review his tactics should it become necessary. By this time the boatman would probably have been some 16 miles or more from Falmouth Harbour. Obviously the weather would affect the boatman's decisions, especially if there was any question of venturing towards increasingly open, unsheltered water beyond Bass Point.

Sometimes a Quay Punt which had previously arrived would have taken momentary sorties out beyond the Lizard in the hope of keeping abreast of the situation; at other times they would have anchored in a sheltered cove with a view to scaling the cliffs to take a look from a greater height. It was entirely up to each boatman to determine his own tactics.

No matter how experienced the boatman, the Manacles Reef[C] has always remained capable of catching-out even the most experienced of them. An example of this was highlighted in *Lake's Falmouth Packet* of 4th October 1890: in a report headed '*Narrow Escape for Quay Punt and its Owner',* Boatman Veale was said to have been fishing in his Quay Punt

[B] The most common formula for *estimating* the maximum hull speed of a displacement hull is: Square Root of Length Waterline multiplied by 1.25. (NB: This assumes constants in hull design which are seldom to be found between one boat and another).

[C] The name 'Manacles' is an Anglicised version of the Cornish '*Maen Eglos*', meaning 'Church Stones', resulting from the fact that the rocks can be seen from St Keverne Church. The highest of this group of rocks, *Carn Du*, is visible at all states of the tide.

Bluebelle,[D] possibly passing the time whilst awaiting a sign of a ship, when he unexpectedly struck a barely-covered rock; fortunately for him, he was rescued by Pilot Cutter No 13, the '*Alert*'.

Despite the very real dangers of the Manacles reef, it had always been a rich fishing ground. Here, anyone fishing would tease the rocks, the tide and the wind by harvesting food from amongst them. If fortunate they might have caught sufficient fish either to take home, or to supplement their income. Eighteen years earlier Veale had simply been unfortunate, but so had many an incoming ship.

As if to compensate Pilot Cutter No 13 for her earlier rescue of boatman Veale, on 17th January 1908 it was reported that another member of the Morrison family, Henry Thomas Morrison known as 'Harry' (born 1867), took his newly built Quay Punt *Melville*[E] on her maiden voyage down past the Lizard:

> *'The winds rose to gale force, the seas piled up and Harry, single handed and now with everything reefed, decided to run for home. Off Black Head,* Melville *closed with an incoming barque (hoping to speak to her).* Pilot Cutter No 8 *was in attendance but, as Harry watched, the pilot's boarding punt was swamped and its crew thrown into the sea. He brought the* Melville *close to one of the struggling men, lashed the tiller, and hauled him – sea-boots and all - up and over the leeward gunwale. The two others who remained in the boarding punt were both lost'.*[13]

For his gallantry, Harry Morrison was presented with a commemorative clock by the Mayor of Falmouth, complete with an illuminated Address, from the Falmouth and District Pilot Boat Association.

Having reached the major area of the seeking grounds, the search for work began in earnest.

[D] This was the same *Bluebelle* that was built in 1920 for boatman Dunstone of St Mawes.

[E] Now named *Veryan*.

CHAPTER 3 - AT THE SEEKING GROUNDS

The geographical area covered during the course of seeking was often much greater than might nowadays be thought. Whilst there are no formal records to support this judgement, various statements (made within the realm of the more soundly-based oral tradition) claim this to have been so; furthermore, such was the pressure to be 'first to the ship' that one might have expected such. Some Quay Punts were said to have gone as far westward as the Isles of Scilly, especially so if a boatman was either desperate for work or confident of news that a ship that was due. Bearing in mind the usual level of ship-arrivals, it is most likely that such tactics would only have been employed when desperate.

Another method of seeking was for a boatman to reach a specially chosen geographical point with a view to using it as a base, either making short outward sorties or to patrol the area in readiness to pounce. This was particularly so whenever visibility was poor. In general, one can say that the frontier of the seeking grounds began the moment any Quay Punt left its mooring and continued right up until the time a boatman had satisfied himself that he had gone far enough westward to give himself a sporting chance of 'bagging' the next ship whose topsail would pierce the horizon.

Towards the tip of the Lizard peninsula stands the Lizard Lighthouse, a most conspicuous twin-towered building. Whenever visibility was sufficient, it proved to be a most important physical landmark.[A] Off Lizard Point and to the area west of it, formidable swells are apt to roll in from the Atlantic, especially whenever the prevailing south-westerly winds blew, or when the wind was from the easterly quadrant. In addition, even without much in the way of wind, the regular tidal pattern has always been capable of whipping-up a race of its own Whenever the two forces come together in opposition, the consequences can be spectacular. Since time immemorial it has been a demanding place for anyone to be in a small sailing boat, especially an open boat; however, even the largest of ships can suffer tragically, for Lizard Head presents a number of additional features besides, including steep underwater contours,

[A] The Lizard Lighthouse, Lizard Point. In 1619 the seaward area to the south of Lizard Point benefitted from the installation of its first lighthouse (grid reference OS SW704 1106, or 49. 57.58N 05.12.07W). It had been provided by Cornishman, John Killigrew. Since then it has been subject to many periods of development; the 'first fires' were lit on 22nd August 1752. Its management was assumed by Trinity House in 1771 and the new building was given twin light-towers to distinguish it from other nearby lights.

obstructions, tidal collisions and ocean swells, all of which combine to disturb the surface.

David Barnicoat, one of Falmouth's most experienced former Senior Pilots and a prominent local maritime historian, describes the area in a more professional manner: amongst the many difficulties presented by the Lizard is

> *'Not only is it exposed to the full brunt of the prevailing south westerlies, it also has a rectilinear tidal pattern which sweeps across it at right angles, and its close proximity to the un-tamed swells of the Atlantic (or 'ground sea' as the locals call it) which can make a dangerous place for any mariner.'*[B]

Barnicoat also emphasised the dangers of The Staggs, the subterranean reef which extends for about one-and-a half miles in a southerly direction from Lizard Head. In relatively good weather and at the peak of its flow, it can be dangerous enough but, when backed by a heavy, unhindered swell from the Atlantic, plus strong winds, the whole area can turn into a maelstrom. In such conditions all vessels are advised to leave the point at least three miles off.

In 1906, the ever-popular Quay Punt yachtsman, Percy Woodcock, made something of these conditions in one of his many articles; there he described how his friendly boatman handled his Quay Punt in rough conditions and at night,

> *'It was difficult distinguishing between which sea must be met by luffing as it comes roaring-up out of the night, and which may be ignored…. so [in order to reef the sails] we heave-to, and thump and pull at the water-soaked canvas.'*[14]

If careful, by sailing up (whichever turned-out to be) the leeward side of the Lizard Peninsula, the Quay Punts could usually find a reasonable amount of short-term shelter, although the wisest boatmen would take care to study the wind and the tide before attempting such a thing. Looking at a chart of that area, one can see a liberal scattering of extremely dangerous reefs, individual rocks, and sunken ships. At first glance, the western side of the peninsula appears to have fewer coves within which shelter might be found.

If choosing to remain overnight in the vicinity of the Lizard, perhaps anchoring in some sheltered bay or, maybe, a small cove such as that at Coverack, the forepeak would have offered the skipper and his mate (if he had one) a fair, if crude, shelter. Once again, Percy Woodcock provided a clear glimpse of this practice:

> *'Now the stove is got going and we get a decent feed … Boiled eggs and sandwiches, while a pint of hot Bovril, made with the water in which the eggs had been boiled – but who cares about that - goes down better than I have ever known it do before.'*[15]

More often than not, the many inlets and coves along both sides of the Lizard peninsula offered some sort of shelter; for instance, there is one tiny

[B] Overfalls appear as standing waves caused by water passing over obstructions, or across gullies on the seabed. The effect upon the water can be to create large and steeply formed standing waves. In the case of the *Fear Not (see Chapter 7)*, extra understanding can be gained by examining a tidal flow chart of the area, particularly for the fifth and sixth hours after High Water Dover.

cove called Housel Bay, close to Lizard Point, in which some boatmen are said to have tried their luck. Beautiful and sheltered though it is, any boatman would surely have needed to keep a sharp weather-eye for any change in wind direction and force. Remaining there with a freshening wind when the tide was ebbing or flooding might have meant becoming trapped for a while; that would have compromised their purpose for being there in the first place. Although an inner channel across Lizard Point was known, its proximity to the race would have required well-found experience to navigate with any confidence: but confidence was, perhaps, what some of the boatmen would claim to have had in abundance.

Kemp had been informed that some Quay Punts often remained seeking in the vicinity of the Lizard for a solid week or more. Williams also stated that in fair weather *'The Quay Punts often did a week afloat off the Lizard and Manacles area, only coming home for weekends'*.[16] Today this sounds a little far-fetched. Unfortunately his source of information is not available for checking. Williams also said that on these protracted occasions '*the boatmen would go ashore to the likes of Church Cove or Cadgwith for daily supplies'* (both of which are on the eastern side of the Lizard). They would cook these victuals on a small coal stove located in the forecastle. Newspaper reports were found showing that some boatmen were not above stealing vegetables grown by the local villagers. As one might expect, a few were caught red-handed and were fined.[17]

One or more of Falmouth's Quay Punts would probably have been in the vicinity most of the time. The frequency and duration of a Quay Punt's sojourn would have enabled the boatmen to develop a keen understanding of the headland: its shape, its tides, its winds, its rocks, its shelters and its dangers. Indeed, the boatmen learned to have total respect for the area. Once one realises that their caution was founded upon knowledge rather than just fear, it becomes less surprising that the Quay Punts suffered so few loses.

Exactly when, and for how long, an individual boatman chose to remain in the seeking-grounds were matters entirely up to him. Furthermore, the number of ships a boatman chose to accost during any one period of seeking was also his own affair.

It is has become clear that where a Quay Punt stationed itself was vitally important: the further westward beyond Lizard Point the better in so far as 'reaching-out' was concerned. Being bold enough to lay hove-to would have provided great advantage (it was in such circumstances that the Quay Punt's long, deep keel and its yawl rig might have proved a valuable asset). Some Quay Punts have been said to have remained in this position for considerable periods of time.

Overnight stays would not have been unusual if and when the weather was favourable but, surely, few would have been so irresponsible as to remain at sea (or even at anchor in a cove) without a waking watch.

In 1892, Thomas Cowper, a yachtsman well known for his books on pilotage, recorded his opinion of the area immediately south from Lizard Point. From the point-of-view of a small cruising boat he wrote: *'For my part, I never linger over a coast like this, and see more risk than fun in anchoring along here'*.[18]

In the 1893 edition of *Down Channel*, R T McMullen recounted a passage from Penzance to Falmouth sometime during the early 1850s when he inadvertently found himself sailing into the Lizard Race.[19] The wind had all but died, leaving him without steerage way; consequently, he

resorted to oars. Even in those conditions the sea became sufficiently rough to invade the deck of his boat. He was afraid that he might be driven towards the rocks. He then saw a local tailor's cutter belonging to Moses and Son (of Falmouth) which was also being rowed. Upon nearing the cutter, its crew offered to accompany him towards the shelter of Perran Vose Cove. Throughout their ordeal, the two boats remained close to one another, yet such was the height of the waves that '*at one moment the two boats found themselves in full view of one another, and the next they were out of sight*'.

Unlike Cowper and McMullen, the Quay Punts, the tailor's cutters and others in the vicinity were on business, not pleasure. Should anyone be inclined to think that the Lizard Race might have tamed itself over the ensuing years, it is worth them reading the 'no nonsense' warning contained in *MacMillan's Nautical Almanac* of 2000: '*There may be a race SE off the Lizard. Keep at least 3 miles to seaward …*'[20]

3.1 Upon Sighting a Ship

Once an approaching ship had been sighted by any one Quay Punt there would have been a real likelihood that the ship's presence had also been noticed by others. Even those which had been sheltering in some shallow bay might have alerted by the sudden flight of offshore activity. In no time at all the relative solitude of the first Quay Punt could be lost and be replaced by a period of hectic activity: a race for a still unseen ship could be on.

Not all of the other Quay Punts would have been positioned *behind* the one which had been first to notice an approaching ship, for there might have been others situated even closer to the ship who had yet to see it. Eventually, those that were so positioned might well have found themselves at great advantage, hence the pressure felt by many a boatman to venture as far out as their courage would permit.

Fair play did not always rule the day. Sometimes any of the more deviously-minded boatmen might try something on in order to gain an advantage. A tale exists that was told by Jack Snell in which he spoke of one boatman who noticed that he was about to be overtaken by another Quay Punt. On board his boat, but hidden away, he deliberately carried an odd plank of wood: possibly a 'strong-back' for supporting the weight of, say, a medium size ship's anchor. This he picked-up as ostentatiously as he could so that his competitors would be sure to see it. Once he was confident that several of his nearby followers had taken notice of his activity, he let the plank slip overboard, feigning an accident. Believing that its eccentric owner had lost something which was dear to him, Snell - either out of kindness or curiosity – made his way to recover the plank in order to return it to its rightful owner at some later time. As a result of his trouble, Snell lost his position in the race and the other boatman bagged the ship. Soon afterwards Snell realised that it had been a ruse. He would not have been amused.[21]

That story, which lives-on within the stock of local tradition, seems to have been looked upon as a bit of a joke, a good story for when back at the pub, rather than the betrayal it really would have been.

By the time that the first of the Quay Punts began to close-in upon the ship there might also have been several other types of small service-vessels jostling for attention, each vying for whatever custom they sought. In such circumstances collisions were liable to occur. It should be remembered that, by the time a Quay Punt drew near to any given ship, there was the likelihood that the ship would have already acquired a local Pilot (for ships of a certain size or type were, by law, compelled to have a Pilot on board when making an approach to most harbours).

The Pilot boats were noticeably larger than the Quay Punts. They were also fully decked with all but a relatively small cockpit. They also carried at least one boarding-gig which was heaved over the side whenever a pilot made to board a nearby ship. Both Falmouth and St Mawes are known to have had their own fleet.

Towards the latter period of the research, the Bartlett Centre received a question (posed by well-known yachtsman, author and broadcaster Tom Cunliffe) as to whether there was evidence of a Quay Punt ever having been used as a Pilot Boat. This question had been asked before by someone else, only to receive an outright negative response. Upon puzzling as to how such a question might have arisen in the first place, a painting was found of - what looked very much like - a Quay Punt making her way towards an approaching ship, and flying from the mast-head what could only be the red and white pilot-flag.

The painting was by Charles Pears, whose wife, Mrs Dulcie Pears, owned the Quay Punt *Juanita.* Two questions arose from this discovery: firstly, had Charles Pears taken *Juanita* (or some other Quay Punt) as the model for his picture? And, secondly, could it have been that some unusual circumstances had arisen to cause a Quay Punt to fly a Pilot's flag? No answer is available in respect of the first question but, in the case of the second, the response gives rise to three supplementary questions:

- Could it have been that Pears had caused someone to think that, by having painted a flag which looks rather like a Pilot's pennant, the Quay Punts sometimes operated as unofficial Pilot Boats?
- Was it that the Quay Punt was simply ferrying a Pilot to re-join his Pilot boat, or
- Was the touch of colour provided by the flag mere artistic fancy?

Rather than dismiss any of these possibilities without further consideration, it should be noted that for several years, Pears lived in St Mawes from where he would have become familiar with both the local Quay Punts and the village-based Pilot boats. Whatever Pears' reason, one can be sure that if profit was to be made, a Quay Punt boatman would probably have taken the pilot's fare without question and, at the behest of the pilot, fly whatever flag the pilot requested.

It was the Pilot's job to take the vessel safely into port and to ensure that she was moored safely. Once in position the Pilot's purpose had been fulfilled whereas, in the case of the Quay Punt it was its signal to begin. Very soon afterwards, one might also have seen a Tailor's Cutter making its way to the ship; even the presence of other boats selling sea-boots was possible, or a butcher's boat might close-in (one of which is believed to have been a Quay Punt, a matter which has yet to be confirmed).

When the Quay Punts were able to take their turn to 'speak' depended upon the relative proximity and importance of the several other vessels. In a head-to-head, no doubt the Pilot boats and the tug boats would have

taken precedence. From the ship's point of view, their entry into Falmouth Harbour could sometimes have turned-out to be one long gauntlet of eager costermongers pedalling their services, each attempting to be the first of their type.

A rather different matter worthy of note is that small rowing gigs (of both four and of six oars) were occasionally employed to carry Pilots or Ship Agents to their respective destinations, especially in calmer conditions when the wind was not sufficient to drive a sailing vessel. Due to the distances involved the gigs carried a mast and sails for use whenever the weather permitted. These gigs are mentioned not only in relation to the Quay Punt boatmen, but also the Ship Agents and Channel Pilots. The idea of such small open boats - whatever their design - having to face open seas in all but the worst weathers, conjures up an image of determination, stoicism and even desperation.

It is difficult to assess the credibility of the methods employed when seeking. Many similar stories abound from a variety of sources, most of which continue to dwell on the lips of oral tradition. Knowing that whilst the core of such material might well be true, such was human nature that bits of embellishment might well have attended the more exaggerated, somewhat outrageous, tales.

The earliest-known written account of a ship's point of view was given in 1853 when Captain Snellman of the *Rosina* gave a clear description of his first encounter with the Quay Punts of his day. This event, made known through the kind permission of the Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society, has been regarded as unique record and therefore merits being presented in full:

> *'No sooner had we entered the Bay when a number of small sailing vessels left the harbour and headed towards us with considerable speed. Our pilot told me these were "Quay Punts" racing towards us; the first to reach us would have the right to handle all traffic from ship to shore during the time we lay on the roads. Already before we had dropped the anchor one of the punts had reached the ship and a man had climbed aboard*[C] *and announced that he was "our punt". I was somewhat taken aback with this, since it had been my intention to handle the traffic ashore with our own gig. I knew the owners of* Rosina *expected a very tight economy and naturally I was trying to avoid any expenses that the owners might regard as unnecessary. It was, however, impossible to turn down that enterprising young man, especially after the pilot had told me this was the accepted custom in Falmouth. So, after we had secured the ship, I boarded the Quay Punt together with the pilot and was taken ashore. I went to see Mr Fox who was the Russian Vice Consul … the Russian Consul also ran a ship's agency, which meant that I would find my orders at his office'.*[22]

From Fox's Agency, Captain Snellman discovered that his orders were to make firstly for Amsterdam, and secondly for Sweden. Whilst remaining in harbour, the *Rosina* was provisioned and one of his sick crewmen was given medical treatment.

[C] This event indicates that the health regulations had been completed with in respect of a boatman boarding a ship immediately after it had arrived.

This episode occurred on Snellman's very first command of a ship and the experience remained etched upon his memory. During the course of Snellman's captaincy of a series of ships he called into Falmouth on four further occasions. His comments, reported above, emphasise the positive impression Falmouth had made upon him, in particular the efficiency and eagerness of its services and the friendliness of its people.

If, in 1853, the practice of the Quay Punts was to begin their approach to a ship only after it had entered the Bay, then it may have been that the custom of hanging around to the west of Lizard Point might not, by then, have become established, for it was only two years after the time the Falmouth Packets had left the harbour, leaving as they did a large commercial hole to be filled by growth in other areas of business.

If a ship was accosted by a Ship Agent's gig or launch, there was always the possibility of a Quay Punt losing the opportunity of in-harbour work due to the fact that the ship's desire 'for orders' had been immediately satisfied by the Agent. Percy Woodcock describes this situation as a *'gone in job'* which, he claimed, was Quay Punt parlance for the fact that that ship could proceed towards its destination without needing to enter the harbour.[23] According to Henry Wills, Fox's Ship Agents would fly a red flag with the letter 'F' in white embossed upon it in order to gain the attention of those ships for which the Agency was Consul.

It was nothing to witness a rowing gig leaving the harbour at 03.00hrs and not to return until sometime around 20.00hrs that same day. In the meantime, it would have been rowed to Lizard Point and back, a minimum of about 30 miles or so: a feat which seems somewhat extreme today.

In *An Artist's Journal* of 1894, Henry Scott Tuke described how he would set forth on a mission to observe Quay Punts at work on the outskirts of Falmouth Bay.[24] As he and the ship in question approached one another somewhere well beyond the harbour's mouth, Tuke said that he had noticed a little vermillion steamer coming out, *'cutting her way through the grey-green water, and the boarding clerks nimbly jump on board with letters and papers'.* He then pointed out that sometimes these papers would include orders for the port of discharge *'in which case the vessel will perhaps square away up Channel and never enter the harbour'*. The vessel Tuke used on this particular occasion was his own Penzance-built 32ft Quay Punt, *Cornish Girl.* In his article, Tuke wrote 'Cornish Girl *was a good specimen of a class well known among boating men …'*

Whenever the opportunity came to speak to a ship, it was always helpful if the boatmen could round-up close alongside so that the two vessels would be moving in the same direction (even if the ship was moving more quickly) in order to enable a conversation - however short - to take place. If approaching the ship in a contrary direction, the meeting-speed of the two vessels would usually have provided too little time for the two characters to converse, short though the calls might have been; nevertheless, if the very next Quay Punt was but a length or so away, rounding-up could take too much time, thereby creating the opportunity of allowing one's bolder competitor to sneak in between and become the first to speak.

What with the noise of the wind, the clatter of the rigging, the ship's wake and maybe the noise of the ship's auxiliary engine, a boatman with even the most stentorian voice would have had difficulty being heard. If the ship was inward bound, the boatman might have addressed the ship by asking *'does the captain want a boat?'* or some such clause. If the reply was positive then, as previously described, that ship would remain the boatman's exclusive customer for as long as she remained within the confines of the harbour. On the other hand, if the captain had reserved the work for some other boatman, then that ship would be left to make its own way towards the harbour whilst the disappointed boatman sought a new quarry. Similarly, if the ship was found to be making for some other port further eastwards, then again she would have been left alone.

Luck would have played a part in transactions. A situation was described by Leonard Morrison: in this case a harbour tug was found off Lizard towing-in two ships at once.[25] A nearby, lone Quay Punt closed alongside the first of the two towed ships, whereupon the boatman succeeded in securing its work. After that the boatman held-back his Quay Punt whilst the tug-boat drew the second ship towards him, at which point he then managed to secure the work arising from that one too. To cap it all, the boatman was offered a tow all the way back to Falmouth Harbour behind the second ship. That would have been one very happy boatman.

Although seeking usually occurred well beyond the sight of most of Falmouth's population and was therefore, seldom brought to the forefront of people's minds, there were those who occasionally took the opportunity to observe the Quay Punts at work, even going so far as to record their observations. Obviously Tuke was one such person; however, the most prolific early 20th century chronicler of this activity must surely have been Percy Woodcock. He was a great supporter of the boatmen and a regular customer of the Quay Punt builder, W E Thomas. Several of Woodcock's articles appear in back-numbers of *Yachting Monthly.* When placed together, these articles provide a reliable, if slightly romanticised, source of information on the *modus operandi* of seeking.

Overall, the impression of seeking is that it was a largely haphazard affair, chiefly characterised by speculation, danger and physical discomfort. It would have remained that way until Marconi's ship-to-shore radio system became sufficiently well-developed to enable remote communication; however, when that level of service did arrive, it had a most unfortunate consequence for the Quay Punts, as will later be explained.

3.2 The Service Agreement

Once a boatman's offer of assistance had been openly accepted and the ship had anchored in, or near to, Falmouth harbour, the work arising from that ship was reserved for the contracted boatman, no matter how long the ship chose to stay; if anyone entertained doubts on the matter then the aggrieved party would certainly challenge the trespasser face-to-face. The following account describes the situation as well as any other:

Boatman Walter Morrison had been informed by a second boatman, that a third boatman - in this case, 'Janner' Snell again - had been seen visiting one of Morrison's ships: presumably without Morrison's consent. Incensed, and without any attempt to check either the accuracy of the

message or the circumstances of the event, Morrison immediately visited Snell at his home. There, Snell attempted to explain the extenuating circumstances behind the matter which were, according to Snell, that a marine surveyor had an urgent need to reach the vessel which was known to be under Morrison's properly-held gift. However, at the time of the request Morrison could not be found, despite a search. The surveyor pleaded with Snell to simply ferry him over to the ship in question. As a one-off favour to the surveyor - and, one might say, to the ship - Snell obliged. Whether he took a fee for the errand is not known; however, Morrison was not in the mood to accept Snell's explanation so he assaulted him. Upon his recovery, Snell reported the matter to the police. As a result, Morrison was arrested and charged with assault.

Morrison was sober at the hearing and finally understood that the circumstances of the event were quite different to those he had allowed himself to believe. The report of the case filled several columns of the *Falmouth Packet* and ended with an interesting cameo of just how personalised local justice can become in a relatively small town: after passing sentence the Chairman of the Bench said *'he* [meaning Morrison] *was known to be a very decent and nice kind of fellow, and that the bench thought it would be better if he left the liquor alone'*.

For all Morrison's self-righteous indignation when considering himself out-done, he was not against plotting his own brand of mischief. In another case, a relative of his, Leonard Morrison, related a story to Brian Peters[26] which had previously been passed to him by Peter's' grandfather. One day, Walter Morrison spoke to an approaching ship only to be informed by the captain that whenever the ship was brought to Falmouth he liked to reserve his work for boatman Janner Snell. Such a reservation was an accepted custom, welcomed and usually honoured between the boatmen. Morrison, in characteristic mode, was not to be outdone. He told the captain that since he had last visited Falmouth, Snell had died. As a result of this news, the captain, believing Morrison's story – and why should he not? - agreed that Morrison should take the work of tending his ship.

Once the ship had anchored, Morrison conveyed the captain ashore for the usual purposes of registration. At the completion of the official business, the captain, accompanied by Morrison, wandered into one of the neighbouring pubs for a much-desired drink. To Morrison's embarrassment, the captain was more than surprised to see the so-called 'late' Janner Snell having boldly returned to life. It took not a moment for the captain to express his relief that Snell had not died. As soon as Snell realised that he had been duped he became very angry. Inevitably, and within seconds of receiving the false news, Snell had exercised (what he considered to be) his rights in the time-honoured, thoroughly pugilistic, blood-letting fashion so prevalent amongst a number of the boatmen, especially when faced with circumstances such as these.

Percy Woodcock described[27] why few boatmen would approach a Norwegian ship: apparently, they had the reputation of always being '*run on the cheap'*, such that *'you don't get a job out of one in twenty…No bumming on a Norwegian; they'll work for nothing, and live on the smell of an oily rag!'* This somewhat rude criticism was much against the experience of the example given above in respect of the *Rosina*.

3.3 The Frequency of Seeking

How frequently boatman would go seeking has been difficult to assess for, once again, no such record would ever have been kept. By examining the frequency of ship arrivals, by estimating a ship's average period of stay, and by listening to local 'chat', it would appear that most Quay Punts might have had to go seeking at least once a week. Bearing in mind that success could not be expected on every sortie, seeking would therefore have absorbed a very noticeable, unpaid portion of a boatman's annual activities.

Whenever a boatman returned to the harbour with no ship to tend, the Harbour Commissioners would express no interest or concern whatsoever except, that is, for the fact that it indicated the harbour itself becoming short of business. What also became obvious was that for as long as the Quay Punts remained outside of the harbour's boundaries - as they were whenever they were seeking - they remained free of any exterior controls as long as they avoided trading in illicit goods (which would then have been a matter for the Customs and Excise to pursue).

Here it must be re-emphasised that seeking work, or simply achieving sales of goods, was not the sole purview of the Quay Punts. All manner of boats sought custom from the ships: the tug-boats, the Pilot Cutters, the Ship Agents' cutters, the tailor's cutters and other sundry vessels might also have been in the vicinity, each exercising their own peculiar tactics to beat their competitors.

Having read these various accounts, one might be excused for wondering why the boatmen bothered with all the pressure and shenanigans they placed upon themselves when, with the benefit of just a little thought, they could have saved so much time and energy by agreeing to wait patiently for ships to arrive one-by-one into the harbour, upon which occasion they could have allocated the work by rota. Clearly, cooperation of this kind was foreign to their way of thinking: at least it was until after the First World war when, upon attempting to reassemble their pre-war pattern of work, several of the boatmen found that the number of vessels entering the harbour had reduced considerably (due mostly to the war-time development of remote communication between ships and the land) and that those which did come to the harbour required few of the services offered by the port and even fewer of the services previously offered by the Quay Punts. In consequence, several of the boatmen (who, post-war, clearly preferred to be known as 'Watermen') formed an Association which monitored the arrival of ships and were known to have been capable of allocating work (to those boatmen who chose to be members) on a systematic basis.

Had this method of allocation been accepted earlier – say, during the latter half of the 19th century - then the history of Falmouth's Quay Punts would have been very different. For instance, their handiness at sea would not have been noticed because only seldom might they have had to venture seaward. Furthermore, their boatmen would have been rather more sanguine about the nature of the contracts they had with their ships; the design of the Quay Punts might have required less thought and less cost. The world of yachting might surely have suffered a considerable loss as well.

Fortunately, the loss of a Quay Punt at sea was a rare event. In the next chapter an account is given of one well-publicised disaster which deeply

affected the whole population of Falmouth and many influential persons beyond.

CHAPTER 4 - THE LOSS OF THE QUAY PUNT '*FEAR NOT*'

THE MORNING OF SUNDAY 11TH FEBRUARY 1900

It was on this day, and at some time towards mid-day, the Quay Punt *Fear Not* became overwhelmed by the turbulent waters of the Lizard race. The event lead to the death of two young men. So unexpected and so tragic was this occurrence that it jolted the local community into acquiring a greater awareness of the conditions under which the Quay Punt boatmen so often operated. The reaction of the town's inhabitants - as reported in the *Falmouth Packet* and later told by Jimmy Morrison - now provides an acute insight into the values held by the people of the town at that time.

4.1 THE CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO HER LOSS

Brian Pascoe[A] and his friend and neighbour William Weatherly, had known one another since childhood. On the occasion now to be told, both had reached their early twenties and had only recently come together to make their way as skipper and crew of a Quay Punt named *Fear Not*. Up until this time Pascoe had spent his time as crewman on other Quay Punts and had always harboured a desire to own one and to work it. Fortunately for him, his father (who, at some earlier time is thought to have been the Town Crier) kindly agreed to acquire one for him.

The *Fear Not* had been advertised for sale in the *Falmouth Packet* on 7th October 1899. She was a well-known vessel lying on her usual mooring on the Flushing side of the inner harbour and had been under the ownership of a Mr W Garland. She had been built in 1865[28] but who it was that built her and where, remains a mystery. She is believed to have had a displacement of 10 tons. If so, then it is likely that she would have had an overall length of about 28ft, or slightly more.

The *Fear Not* was the only Quay Punt found to have been awarded a nickname, 'the Fat Boat'. It had nothing whatsoever to do with either her dimensions or her proportions; instead it came from the fact that she had long been engaged in the collection of used animal fat which most ships' cooks deliberately accumulated during their many months at sea. This was not a particularly pleasant substance to handle: soft, sticky, smelly and heavy, it was a commodity for which there was a constant demand. Her previous owner had found that it could be sold-on for about one penny

[A] Brian Pascoe was the son of John Pascoe who, in 1905 owned the Quay Punt '*JB*', the letters being the initials of his son's two Christian names. Some suspect the 'JB' to have been the Quay Punt used by Percy Woodcock when penning his articles concerning the *'Petrel'*.

per pound, so what the cooks charged Garland for the fat must have been very little indeed.

Used cooking fat had a wide range of applications: for yet more cooking; as a lubricant to ease the friction generated between a sailing ship's mast and its hoops and spars; and to sell to local tallow chandlers such as Richard Osler or to Abbots Chandlery.[29] It was customary for ships' captains to permit their cooks to keep the money received from the sale of this fat: 'slush', they called it. This, it is believed, gave rise to the money taken by the cooks being referred to as their personal 'slush fund'.

The *Fear Not* remained unsold for many weeks before Pascoe (Senior) decided to purchase it. Once acquired, he, his son and his son's friend Weatherly, worked together to smarten it up and to make her seaworthy for the year ahead. Pascoe and Weatherly had been friends since their schooldays and for all that time they had lived close to one another; Weatherly, with his young family in New Street, and Pascoe, with his parents, in Gylling Street (the next road up the hill beyond Weatherly's home), both roads being in close proximity to Custom House Quay. It was, therefore, natural that when Pascoe sought a crew, he should firstly turn to his friend of long-standing.

Before Pascoe acquired the *Fear Not*, he had worked wherever he could, usually in connection with small working boats of one kind or another. Weatherly had previously been employed on the *Dragon,* one of the several local harbour-tugs. As a tug-man he had learned a great deal about the harbour's environs, the handling of steam-powered working vessels and the nature of the seas immediately to the south of the Lizard peninsula; in addition, he had witnessed the Quay Punts at work, both in the harbour and off the Lizard.

As required by, what was then, a fairly-new bye-law, the two young men would have had the Harbourmaster look over their boat regarding its condition and its suitability as a Quay Punt. The duo planned to make their debut early in the morning of 11th February 1900. It being a Sunday, they would have realised that, if they happened to be successful in their quest, another of the bye-laws would have prohibited them from engaging in any work concerning a ship until the following day.[B] They knew of this regulation but did not mind it, eager though they were to get started; 'one thing at a time' was to be their approach to their new quest.

Somewhere around 0500 hrs the two men made their way towards the harbour. It was still dark but, worse than that, it was also very windy and bitterly cold. Later that morning, the Harbourmaster was to write in his log *'A strong breeze with showers of hail and sleet during the day. NW to WNW'*. That would have meant the wind being somewhere between force 4 and 5 on the Beaufort scale, enough to make the sea south of Lizard Point surprisingly rough, especially so on the western side of the

[B] The Quay Punts were not permitted to undertake work in the harbour on a Sunday; however, they were permitted to go seeking on a Sunday in preparation for work the next day.

peninsula. It would therefore have been prudent for them to keep to the home side.

Pascoe and Weatherly made their way out from their quayside mooring and, as they did so, the shapes of a few anchored ships became clear; directly ahead of them was the *Simson*, a tug from Hamburg which, the day before, had been out seeking for her own purposes; a little beyond was the *Dalblair* which had come all the way from Iquique (Chile) with nitrates and had been towed-in the day before by Weatherly's old tug, *Dragon*. As would have been expected, the *Dalblair* had already been spoken-for by another Quay Punt.

Alongside the docks they could see the steamship *Queen Williamena* of *The Neptune Line.* At some time prior to the previous Monday she had suffered a broken propeller shaft, causing further damage to her tunnel bearings and glands. Fortunately she had been taken in tow by the German steamer *Tectonia* which, by February 5th, had reached the Manacles. Subsequently she was towed into the harbour by the tug boat *Dragon*. Neither the *Simson,* nor the *Tectonia* had had any need for a Quay Punt. As for the *Queen Williamena*, she was docked and therefore enjoyed direct contact with the land. [30]

Eventually, Pascoe and Weatherly had the *Fear Not* well under-way. After turning towards the harbour entrance her sails became well-filled to port. Then, on their way past Pendennis Point, a course was set slightly to the east of the Manacles' buoy. With just one reef in their mainsail, they fairly bowled-along. Quite soon after entering Falmouth Bay a squall caught-up with them. The sleet and hail fell upon them as if bullets from a gun. The clatter of the hail and the roaring of the wind became so loud that it made it difficult for them to hear one another speak. They tightened the lacing of their sou'westers and fastened all the buttons on their topcoats in a vain attempt to keep dry and warm. Fortunately for them the squall passed-by every bit as quickly as it had arrived; however, to the two men in the *Fear Not,* it had seemed a much longer affair. On the cockpit sole and along the water-ways lay an inch or more of marble-sized hail. Weatherly took to clearing as much of it as he could. They continued undaunted, intent upon reaching the seeking-grounds as quickly as possible.

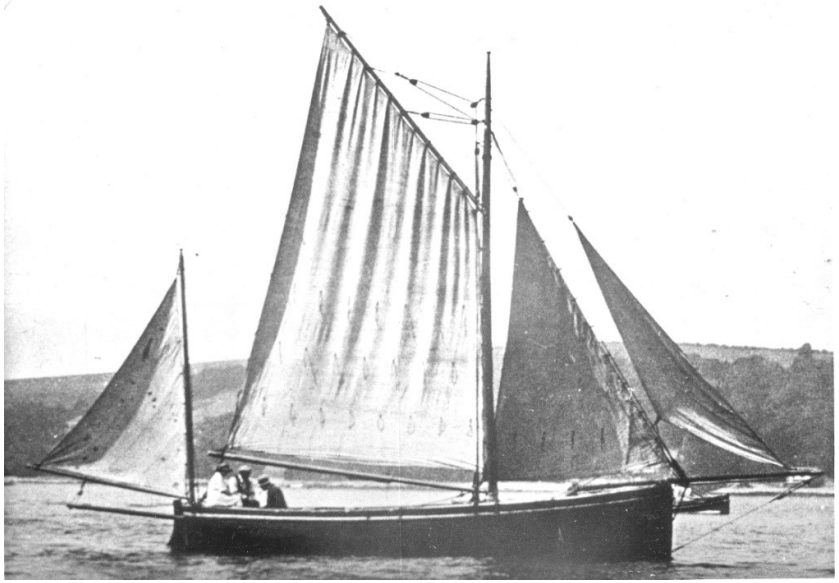
Eventually a glint of light emerged from the horizon. The estuary, now well behind them, was almost completely lost to sight yet, somewhere in the murk, between the estuary and themselves, they saw something that they had hoped not to see: the vague outline of another Quay Punt making her way out from the harbour. Perhaps the *Fear Not's* departure had been spotted after all. Indeed, it was as they feared: another Quay Punt; and, what was more, it was catching them up. Soon, it was near enough for them to recognise her by name. It was the *ICU*, owned by 'young Walter Morrison', as he was then known, a good friend of Pascoe's, yet at the same time a powerful commercial rival who was not above a bit of shenanigans. At once, both Weatherly and Pascoe felt a sense of dismay. Realising that such a situation would become a regular feature of their work, they immediately quelled their concern and replaced it with the excitement arising from the mere idea of being challenged.

In just a few days Pascoe was due to be married. His current competitor, Morrison, had agreed to be his Best Man. From the position of the *Fear Not*, it looked as if Morrison had two other people on board. Inevitably, Pascoe and Weatherly wondered if those on the *ICU* knew

something they did not. Had there been news of a particular ship heading for Falmouth, news which the two of them had missed by having left too early? Perhaps, shortly after they had left, one of the local Ship Agents had received a telegraph from Lizard Head to say that a ship had been sighted. If so, how would Morrison have heard of it? Yet it might have been that he had simply noticed that the *Fear Not's* was unoccupied and so decided to find out what she was up to. No matter, with a boat named *Fear Not* Weatherly and Pascoe were determined to let it live-up to what they believed was behind her name. After all, it was they who were in the lead and the two boats were each about the same size.

By constantly reviewing their course, Pascoe and Weatherly were confident that they would leave the dangerous overfalls well to starboard. The *ICU* continued to gain upon them, albeit on a course slightly to their east. She was now close enough for her crewmen to be recognised. Yes, the crew were those whom Weatherly and Pascoe had first thought: Walter Morrison Junior. at the helm, with Charles Richardson, and William Wright as crewmen.

Eventually the *Fear Not* cleared the Manacles buoy and made her way well beyond Black Head. In what seemed no time at all they felt confident that they were where they had intended to be: that is, somewhere to the south-east of Lizard Point and sufficiently far away from the tidal race to prevent it from causing them any trouble. Weatherly was keeping watch up forward at the forward part of the punt. The dawn was beginning to lighten the sky. Within minutes he suddenly noticed what appeared to be the glint of a ship's bare topmasts penetrating the gloom; if it was a ship, it was situated a little to starboard of them, and would almost certainly be making its way towards Falmouth.



ICU

With visibility as low and as changeable as it was, and with the horizon being made ragged by the sea, first something resembling a topmast could be seen, then it could not. If it was a ship then, due to the nature of the weather and the condition of the sea, it was probably nearer to them than at first it might have seemed.

Together, they totted up the odds: they took account their present course, their speed, the likely speed of the ship and the distance between them. They agreed that it would be about half an hour or so before they would close upon one another. Looking next at the *ICU*, they estimated that within that same period of time she would at least draw alongside the *Fear Not* or, worse still, overhaul her. The two considered what best to do. With the *ICU* having the reputation of being one of the fastest of the harbour's Quay Punts, they were worried that they would be beaten to the ship if they kept to their present course. Weatherly and Pascoe had a quick look around and decided that it looked safe enough to steer just a few degrees nearer to Lizard Point in order to benefit from a more direct course towards the approaching ship.

As they drew nearer they could see that the ship was a four masted barque carrying shortened sail, having only the forward mainsail, three of her lower topsails and one foresail set; furthermore, they could see that her anchors had been made ready at her catheads. Her whole demeanour told them that the ship was making her way towards Falmouth.

As yet the *Fear Not's* crew were still unaware that the ship was the *Mowhan,* another regular carrier of nitrates from Iquique and customarily bound directly for Dunkirk; so, if she was making for Falmouth (as she appeared to be so doing), they realised that something must be amiss. Unbeknown to either Pascoe or Weatherly, *Mowhan*'s steering-gear had developed a fault and she was, therefore, in need of repair.[C]

The crew of the *Fear Not* hoped that this ship had not visited Falmouth before, thereby avoiding any possibility of their offer of service being declined in favour of some other Quay Punt. The thought passed through their minds that it could have been the *ICU* which had served her previously, if so, then they would have lost the race already.

On board the *Mowhan,* the approach of both the *Fear Not* and the *ICU* had been noted: from a few previous visits to Falmouth the captain knew the customary ways of the harbour's Quay Punts but, at this very time, Pascoe and Weatherly remained unaware of the ship's identity.

Watching the Quay Punts force themselves through the turbulent and increasingly-rough water would have been good sport for the *Mowhan's* crew. No doubt some enterprising crewmen would already have been taking bets on which of the two Quay Punts would be the first to speak. Captain Patey of the *Mowhan* knew only too well the hazards which now attended these two diminutive Quay Punts, especially with the direction of the wind being in opposition to the tidal flow. From the relative safety of the Mowhan, he became alarmed by the increasingly difficult predicament into which the *Fear Not* was moving.

Over the last several minutes the *Fear Not* appeared to have held-off the *ICU.* Nevertheless, those on the *ICU* saw no reason to surrender just yet: there was no telling what might happen during the minutes to come. It was an open guess as to which of the two Quay Punts would have her as their customer. With the *ICU* so very close by, Weatherly and Pascoe

[C] These large barques, with their centrally placed wheelhouse had huge, long steering-chains reaching from the central wheelhouse all the way back to the stern-mounted rudder-quadrant. This system was believed to have generated an inherent weakness in its design which often contributed to breakages.

decided that they would have to approach the ship head-on rather than going-about because any extra manoeuvre at this stage would take-up valuable time and maybe cause them to lose their now-slender lead.

Moments later, looking back over his shoulder, Weatherly noticed that the *ICU* was by no mean as loose as he would have expected. Looking more carefully he could see that she had come-up into wind. Had she conceded the race to the *Fear Not*, he wondered? That would have been most unlike the Morrison he knew. What, then, might be the reason? Something serious must have happened.

A second glance at the *ICU* revealed what appeared to be a broken gooseneck. Her storm jib had been gathered-in and, as far as he could make out, her mizzen was keeping her towards the wind whilst her crew fought to lash the boom's gooseneck to the mast. Inevitably, the *ICU* was being left behind, so much so that there would be little hope of her continuing her challenge.

Weatherly and Pascoe looked at one-another and shrugged their shoulders. As long as the *ICU* was not in immediate danger there was no need for them to forego their imminent prize. It was all part of the so-called 'game'; even so, they felt that this was not the way they wanted things to be on their first attempt at seeking: they would have preferred to have won their prize fairly and squarely in the time- honoured fashion.

They turned their attention back to the ship. They were close to having the *Mowhan* in their grasp. Then, no sooner had that thought come to mind than a huge standing, white-crested wave rose before them. The *Fear Not* had no chance of rising to it and therefore plunged straight into its sea-green centre. In no more than a moment her foredeck was awash and gallons upon gallons of foaming sea-water tumbled over her coaming and down into her cockpit. As the sea-water found its limits and sloshed around inside the well, the *Fear Not* became uncontrollable. Pascoe, whilst still gripping the tiller with all his might, managed to free the mainsheet in the vain hope of steadying her whilst Weatherly released the jib sheet, thereby allowing the sail to become free of the water which had been pressing hard against it.

It was clear to both men that the *Fear Not* had taken-on a dangerous quantity of water. Before either of them could gather their wits, the *Fear Not* was pitched upwards and through the crest of a second standing wave. The on-board sea-water then rushed aft. Struggling hard to steady herself, she again tipped forwards, causing the water inside the boat to once again cascade downwards and forwards, drawing the boat inexorably towards yet another vast wave which was poised ready to engulf her once more. Whatever hope there might have been of regaining control had surely gone. Nevertheless, Weatherly suddenly regained his composure and did the only thing that came into his mind: he grabbed the already-full bailing-bucket as it washed past him and began to bail like a madman. On many occasions he had heard it said that '*there was no better bailing machine than a frightened man with a bucket*!'. Now he was that man. Gallant though his efforts were, they were no match for the onslaught. Neither Pascoe nor Weatherly had any chance whatsoever.

As if conscious of her plight, the gallant *Fear Not* struggled to right herself. For a moment, with her decks awash and her sails free of their sheets, the still-tied mizzen began to turn her head to wind. Then, as if to make a final, dignified salute, her low-set iron ballast drew her masts and sails to an almost vertical position above the water. Gracefully, but

tragically, she surrendered herself to the sea: yet another casualty of the Lizard Race.

Unfortunately, Pascoe and Weatherly had been washed out of the boat but both men had managed to float clear; however, the rate of the *Fear Not's* descent had allowed them little opportunity to seek personal buoyancy of any kind. As was often the case in such times, it was possible that neither man had prepared himself with what, even then, would have been regarded as an adequate life jacket.

On board the *Mowhan,* Captain Patey and the Ship's Mate had witnessed it all. She was still proceeding as before. Despite the difficulties caused by the ship's damaged steering lines, Captain Patey nevertheless managed to manoeuvre the *Mowhan* towards where the *Fear Not* had foundered. His hope was to shelter the two men from the worst of the conditions and to then throw them a line. In so doing, he had to take into account the strength and direction of the wind, his distance from the stricken men, and the speed of his ship. At what they considered to be the first feasible moment, they each threw a line in the direction of the two boatmen, but to no avail; both the wind and the waves took the lines, causing them to fall too far to one side for either of the men to reach.

4.2 The Last Sighting

In the vain hope of being able to help themselves the two friends searched frantically for something to keep them afloat but, alas, there was nothing in sight. For a short while the air trapped in their clothing helped to keep them above the turmoil, despite the sea constantly washing over them. Their heavy woollen garments, encased by their stiff, buttoned oilskins soon became waterlogged, thereby losing whatever buoyancy they once had, turning the fabric into weights. The two men had already been chilled by the weather; now the temperature of the sea and the air was such that whatever little body-heat they had had was quickly drawn from them. In what seemed no time at all, the two young men were swept out of sight by the turbulence, believed never to have been seen again.

4.3 Back in Falmouth Harbour

On reaching Falmouth Harbour, Captain Patey is reported as having said '*The moment I see them, and the next they go'.*

In the few moments preceding this event, those on the *ICU* had naturally hoped to have been first to reach the ship. However, they had also come to realise that the wind was stronger than they had appreciated and that they, like the *Fear Not*, had also inadvertently entered the Lizard race. Whilst Morrison did his best to hold the *ICU* head to wind, his two crew members lowered and gathered-in their coarse, thrashing mainsail with a view setting-up a jury rig to see them home. Once they had regained control of their boat, White happened to look back to see what had become of the *Fear Not.* Not being able to see her, he first assumed that she must have moved to the far side of the *Mowhan;* however, within a couple of minutes it became clear that the *Fear Not* was nowhere to be seen. The crew of the *ICU* looked at one another and, without a word passing between them, they came to realise that something dreadful must have happened.

Together, they gradually worked the *ICU* towards where they thought they had last seen the *Fear Not,* in so doing they took account the direction and rate of the tide. Somewhat ironically, they noticed Weatherly's old tug, the *Dragon* standing-to nearby. She had been out seeking on her own account and had been preparing to accost the *Mowhan* with regard to a tow. Even more ironically, Weatherly had lost his life within sight of his birthplace, (for he had been born in Lloyds Telegraph Station in 1872, where his parents both resided and worked) at the end of Lizard Point.

Eventually, when the *ICU* came within hailing distance of the *Dragon,* those on board explained the predicament to her. Both the *Dragon* and the *ICU* immediately set up a yet-wider search: at first, not being sure exactly where the *Fear Not* had gone down or quite where the current might have taken her and her two crewmen, the *Dragon* went beyond the locality, but soon returned to where the *ICU* was circling. Alas, the critical moment had passed. Apart from the tiniest bits of flotsam which could be spotted amongst the maelstrom, neither the *Fear Not* nor her two men could be found: nor ever have been.

4.4 Post Mortem

Later that afternoon three ships arrived in Falmouth Harbour, each of which had approached Falmouth on a course well to the south of Lizard Point. The first of these was what might have been the *Fear Not*'s prize*:* the *Mowhan.* Soon, everyone involved began to regain their composure: the *Mowhan* had, of course, willingly accepted the offer of a tow from the *Dragon.* Whilst all this was going on, the other two ships made their way into the harbour with no awareness of the tragedy which had so recently occurred.

Once the *Mowhan* had been anchored to the captain's satisfaction, Morrison was able to take Captain Patey ashore to register her arrival. Until then, news concerning the loss of the *Fear Not* had not reached the town; when it did, such was the shock that it was met with complete disbelief. It seemed beyond anyone's comprehension that those two lively, friendly and hopeful young men should have died at all, let alone in that manner, and so early in their career too. Surely the weather had not been *that* bad, had it? When, if ever, had such a tragedy occurred before? No one could remember. Could it happen again, they wondered? It was acknowledged that such an occurrence had always been a possibility; some of the more-knowing regarded the incident 'as an accident waiting to happen'.

Despite the tidal race, disasters of this kind were rare amongst Falmouth's fleet of Quay Punts, consequently this event was bound to stand out for that reason alone. Not surprisingly, the news reached an enormously wide spectrum of local society. A report issued by *Lake's Falmouth Packet and Cornwall Advertiser* brought into focus the conditions under which the local boatmen so often had to operate. To the editor's credit, the incident was published with only the slightest hint of melodrama: the tragedy spoke for itself. It displayed the boatmen as courageous individuals, willing to face huge odds simply in order to secure an income for themselves, whilst at the same time operating an essential role in respect of Falmouth's economy by the practical support they gave to both the ships and the local traders.

In the week following the loss of the Fear Not, the *Falmouth Packet* reported the scene as follows … 'the heavy breaking seas, close-ranked and footless...' and told how the *Fear Not* had '*dropped into a trough and the succeeding wave broke aboard before she could rise to it and filled her*'.

Later, in that same edition, the editor wrote with a kind heart

> '... *These brave fellows risked their lives daily only in the end to struggle with their destiny in an angry sea on the Sabbath morning. Their day of rest it proved indeed …'* [and he went on to say] *'this adventurous spirit seems to be inborn in those who do their business on the sea and* ***now that ships bound for Falmouth are few and far between, much more is risked by local seafaring men in their anxiety to reach a vessel first.***' [Author's emphasis].

This statement bore witness to the high level of pressure experienced by the boatmen at a time of economic constraint, but it also had another effect: it highlighted a fundamental error of perception common amongst local people of the time: *i.e.* that those who owned and worked the Quay Punts had some inbuilt sense of adventure which, by its nature, placed them gung-ho into danger of their own making: as if some invisible, natural force had been injected into their makeup which drove them towards danger. From the physical comforts of office life, the editor and others might have found it logical to have regarded the boatmen in such a manner, with little comprehension that many people of that era had little choice about the ways and means by which they might earn a living, especially if they wanted to remain independent.

Being a boatman did, at least, allow a home-based family life; furthermore, it provided for its time the chance of a relatively moderate and stable income. So, did the boatmen consider themselves fortunate? Maybe, maybe not: nowadays there is no reliable means of telling: one can only speculate.

The absence of any enquiry into this tragedy left a teasing little mystery which is unlikely to ever be solved: it was reported in *Lake's Falmouth Packet and Cornish Advertiser* that the *Fear Not* was, in some way, '*different to the other Quay Punts'.* This comment implies that whatever the differences were, they might have contributed to the tragedy. Bearing in mind that the variety of shapes and sizes which populated what one might call the Quay Punt service, that possibility was destined to be of no consequence whatsoever. Apart from Jimmy Morrison's comment that she had the reputation of being '*crank*' and '*leaner than some' i.e.* narrower in the beam than would have been customary for her length, only one other possibility was voiced: Jimmy Morrison had been told by his father that soon after Pascoe had taken ownership of the boat, he had beached her and had removed her loose ballast in preparation for cleaning the underwater sections of the boat.

The question thus posed was whether the ballast had been replaced correctly, both in respect of its quantity, its manner of distribution, or the way in which it was secured. Perhaps the vessel's trim had been altered either deliberately, in the hope of improving the boat's performance - or accidentally. Or maybe it had shifted to the boat's detriment as a result of the rough seas.

Even if there had been an enquiry immediately following the event, it is fair to say that by then the remains of the *Fear Not* would have been inaccessible. It is also known that small, sunken sailing boats are much

subject to the effects of tidal streams, sometimes being moved along the sea-bed by the pressure of the water upon their hull and even their still-set sails, especially if any ballast had been spilt.

The emphasis placed upon the boat having been at fault in some way enabled everyone to avoid focussing their attention upon the possibility of a weakness in the *management* of the boat. On the matter of such possibilities Chapelle (in the USA, 1951) observed that:

> '*Swamping in heavy weather is the most common cause of fatalities in small craft, power or sail. In an open boat this may happen because the crew have been careless for a moment, owing to weariness, ignorance, or overconfidence; or the boat may have been taken into a condition of sea and wind too great for her capabilities.*' [31]

A few days later another element of sad irony later came to light: the *Mohawn,* which both Pascoe and Weatherly strove to bag as their first substantial prize, remained in harbour for only a very short time whilst her steering-gear was repaired. She then immediately made for Dunkirk. The most that the two men would have achieved from having been the first Quay Punt to 'speak' would have been to ferry Captain Patey and his Mate to Customs House Quay where they would have visited the Customs Office and, maybe, attended to some small errand in the town. Hardly enough work to feed two families even for a day, one might think. The likelihood is that they would have had to go seeking again the very next day by which time, as fate would have it, the weather had improved. Perhaps Pascoe's and Weatherly's inexperience did contribute to their deaths but, if anyone thought as much, then no-one wished to voice it.

The Editor of *Lake's Falmouth Packet* very generously set-up a Relief Fund to help provide for the two families, a very practical and honourable act which again, through its list of donors, demonstrated the depth and breadth of sorrow experienced by so many. Such people as the Duke of Cornwall, and Rudyard Kipling (a frequent visitor to Cornwall) contributed. A little over £143 was raised and subsequently allocated to the two families concerned. This might have been regarded as a generous amount for the time but, what about a few months hence, by which time the fund would have become exhausted?

The story of the *Fear Not* will forever remind people of the perpetual dangers facing all those whose work required them to patrol the area immediately to the south of Lizard Point: it was the equivalent to the risks pertaining to Cornwall's offshore fishermen, or to those who toiled in the Cornish tin mines.[D]

[D] In addition to the references given above, the background to this account of the *Fear Not* has been compiled from a series of personal interviews with (the late) 'Jimmy' Morrison. These began on 27th February 2002, plus several contemporaneous reports appearing in *Lake's Falmouth Packet*. The exact circumstances of the sinking are, therefore, uncorroborated. Similarly, the movements and comments of the two men are, whilst plausible, imaginary.