

Fred's Thread

July 2009

Not so much a Thread as a very strong Rope

On the 24th of November 1924 the Trawler *Press Home* was heading for her home port of Portgordon, after having spent the last eight weeks fishing out of Yarmouth. A strong and increasingly south-easterly gale sprang up, causing a heavy swell on the sea. About 6am the *Press Home* crashed on to the rocks at Portlethen. The skipper, Alex Coull sounded the siren to attract attention onshore. Within only ten minutes the trawler had been smashed to pieces, three men had succeeded in scrambling on to a large rock; however the other five crewmen were swept away and drowned.

George Craig a 70 year old local fisherman, along with the other men scrambled their way down the precarious cliffs to the shore. Attempts to throw a rope to the survivors were hindered by an intervening boulder. The heroic veteran decided to clamber out to this rock which was over twenty feet away, thankfully knowing submerged boulders by which he could make his way.

"When my son saw me gaun oot, he nearly went mad" was how Craig described his son's anxiety on seeing his father set out on his attempt to save the remaining men. There was little wonder at his sons misgivings, for any moment the old man might be dashed against the rocks.

"I just scrambled fra buller tae buller, fa in noo an again, bit aye getting up. Sometimes the water wid be up tae ma waist, still I reached the rock. There were only the three on the opposite rock, and nae sign o the ithers. One was in his bare feet, and the ither two shouted to get him first, as they thocht he was near gone. He threw the rope to them, and they fastened it around the waist of their exhausted shipmate. George Craig pulled him to the rock where he himself stood and afterwards pulled the other two over. He shouted to the anxious watchers onshore, and one by one the four were dragged to safety. "Fan they were pu'in me back, I went richt under" he concluded with a quiet smile.

At a subsequent enquiry at Stonehaven on the wreck of the *Press Home* sheriff Laing said, "Mr. Craig's services were extremely notable and revealed as nothing else could, the extraordinary fine qualities with which the fisher men of the North East of Scotland were so fully endowed."

Apart from his age, this was an act of very brave gallantry and the Lifeboat Institution awarded him its Silver Medal and a framed copy of the vote inscribed in Vellum and a monetary award. He was also presented with the Silver Medal for gallantry at sea by King George V at Buckingham Palace.

For more information, please visit **Portlethen Library**
or email Fred at Fred.Stewart@tphs.org.uk