

Wrecks and Rescues: Danger in the Bay

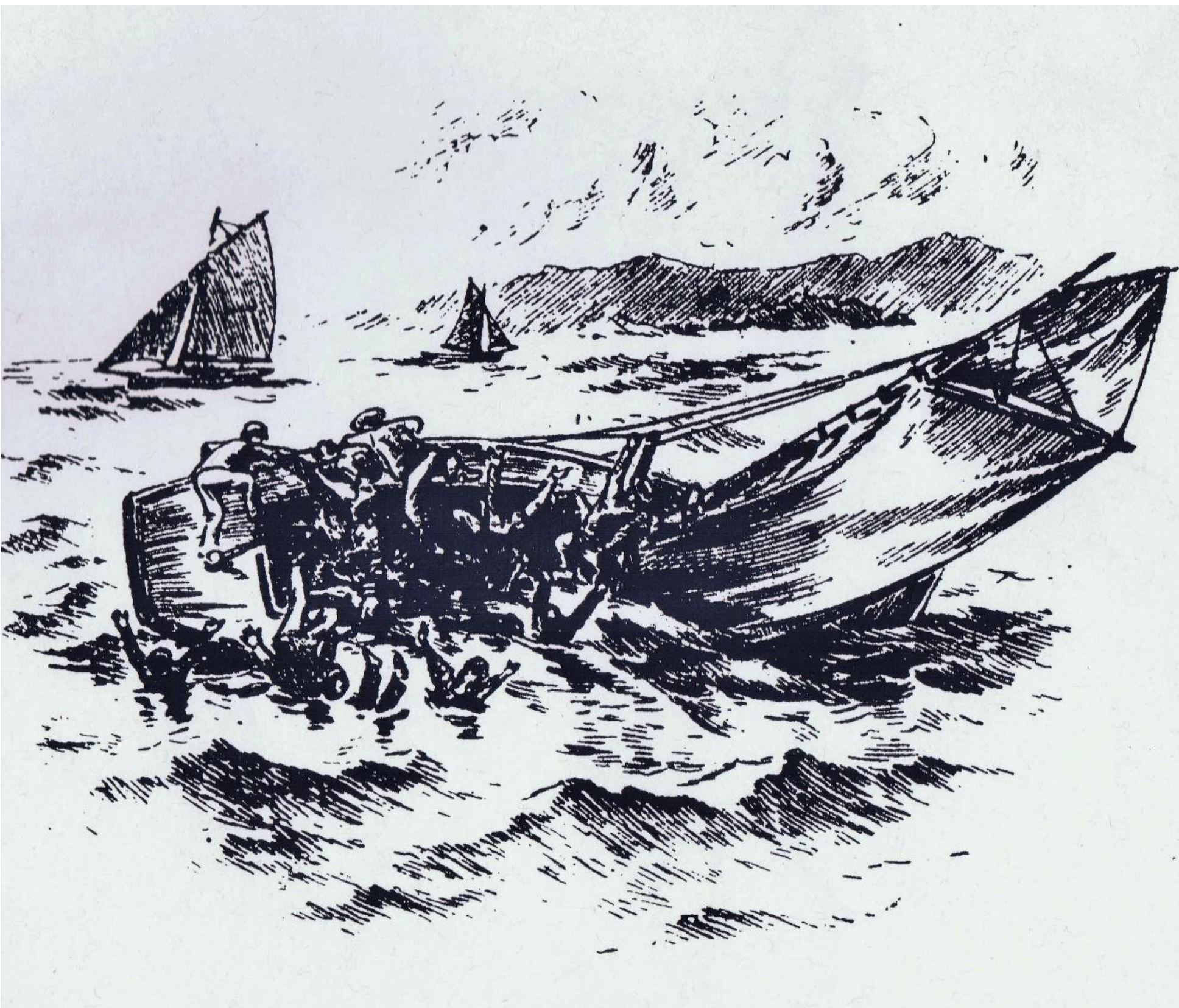
The shining sands of Morecambe Bay can be deceptive. Fishing and sailing in the tidal waters is highly skilled and fishermen and sailor's lives were beset with dangers.

Working people, travellers and visitors have regularly been caught in the sands and over the years a number of famous incidents have been recorded

The cockle pickers disaster occurred on 5 February 2004 when at least 21 Chinese labourers were drowned in treacherous weather conditions off Hest Bank

The *Matchless*, a Nobby Disaster off Silverdale

(material provided by Simon Williams)

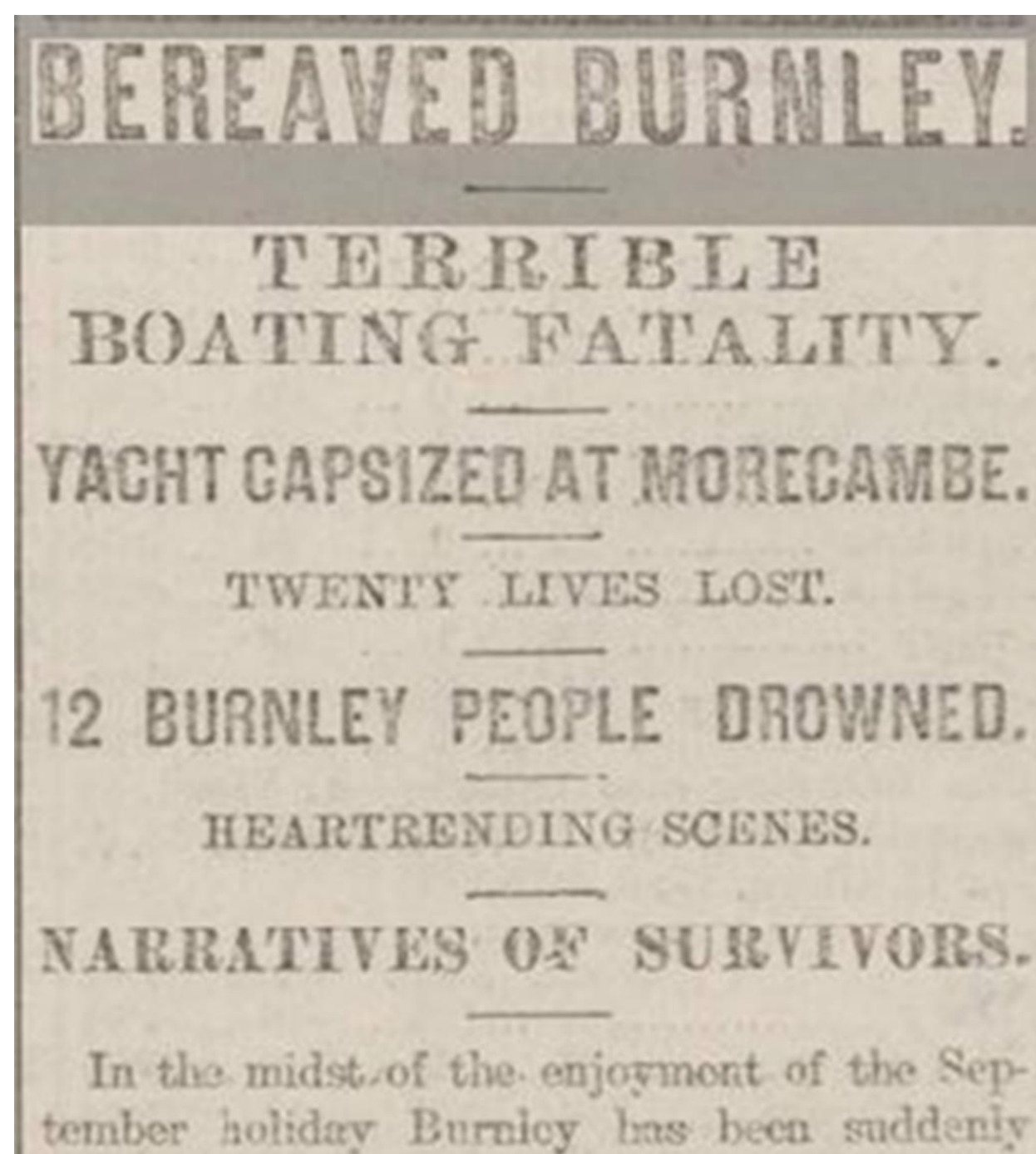


Sketch of the Disaster

This appeared in the Lancaster Standard and County Advertiser, September 7th 1894 – archived at Lancaster Library. Artist is unnamed, but said to be an eye-witness.

Jenny Brown's Point at Silverdale is the site of one of Morecambe Bay's greatest boating tragedies. On 3rd September 1894 the *Matchless* set sail on a pleasure cruise from Morecambe to Grange-over-Sands. She was a "nobby" fishing boat and was licensed to take passengers for boat trips. That day the *Matchless* was a very popular boat, and the skipper Samuel Houghton welcomed 33 men, women and children aboard.

Most of the passengers were the families of millworkers from Burnley. It was a calm sunny day as the *Matchless* made her way along the coast to Jenny Brown's Point, ready to cross to Grange as the tide came in. Suddenly a gust of wind caught the sails, and in a moment the overloaded boat capsized, spilling all into the sea.



Burnley Express 5th September 1894

Image of the Matchless at Grange, looking over to Silverdale provided by Andrew Wolstenholme.

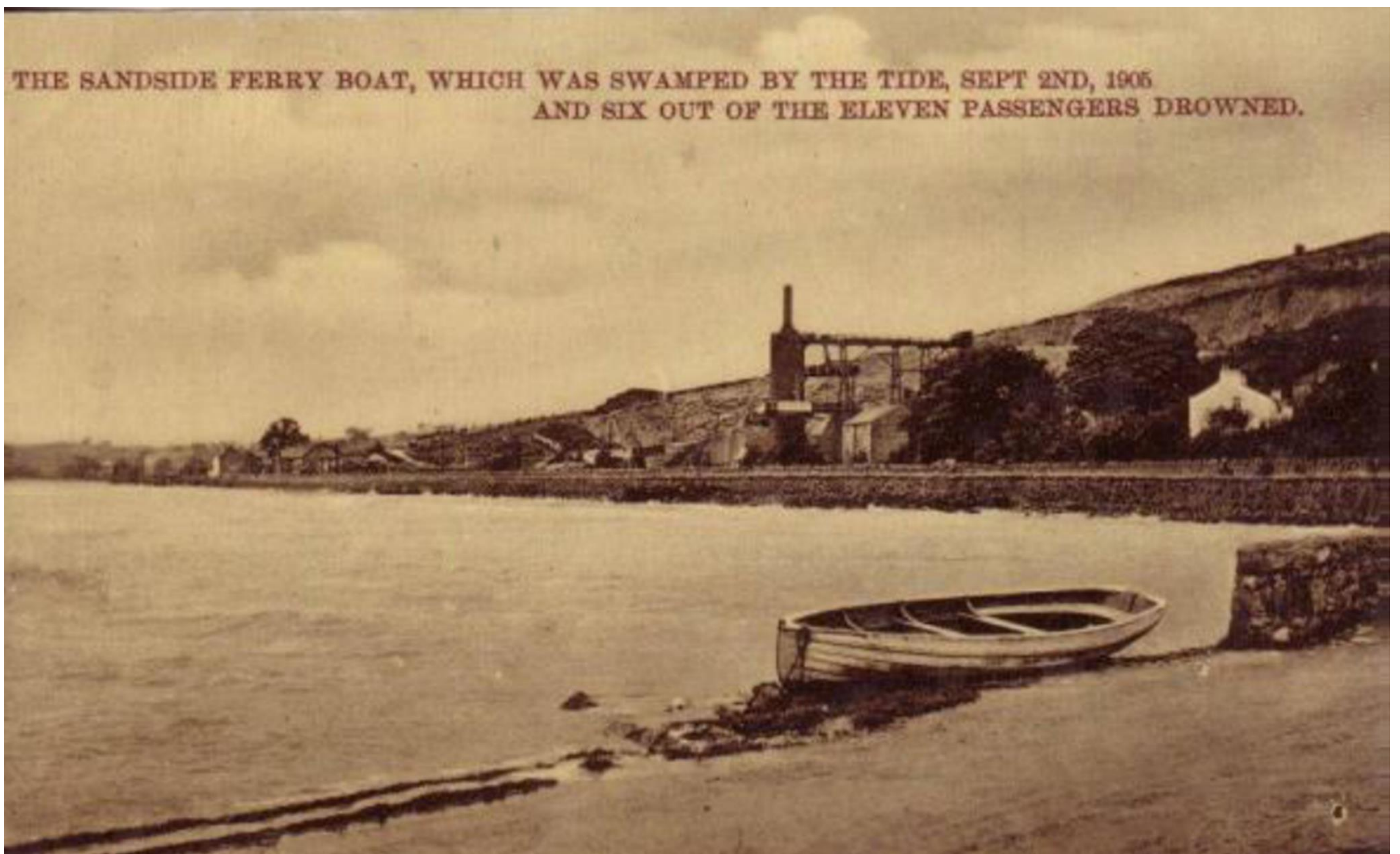


Few could swim, and though the water was shallow, the heavy clothes and clogs of the millworkers dragged them under. Even though other boats quickly came to their aid, only nine survived, including the skipper. 25 lost their lives – “accidentally drowned” according to the verdict of the inquest that followed over the next two mornings. Many felt that the inquest had been unduly rushed, and was more concerned with protecting the reputation of Morecambe as a holiday resort than establishing the reasons for so many deaths.

The horror continued over many weeks as bodies were recovered from locations all around the bay – at Morecambe, Grange, Ulverston and as far as Barrow. Two were discovered mostly covered by the sands under the Arnside viaduct.

By 1895 Morecambe had introduced an improved byelaw to protect passengers. There were now legal limits to the numbers that a boat could carry, and for any journey of more than 6 miles a skipper had to hire a lad to assist with the management of the boat.

Ferry Disaster at Sandside

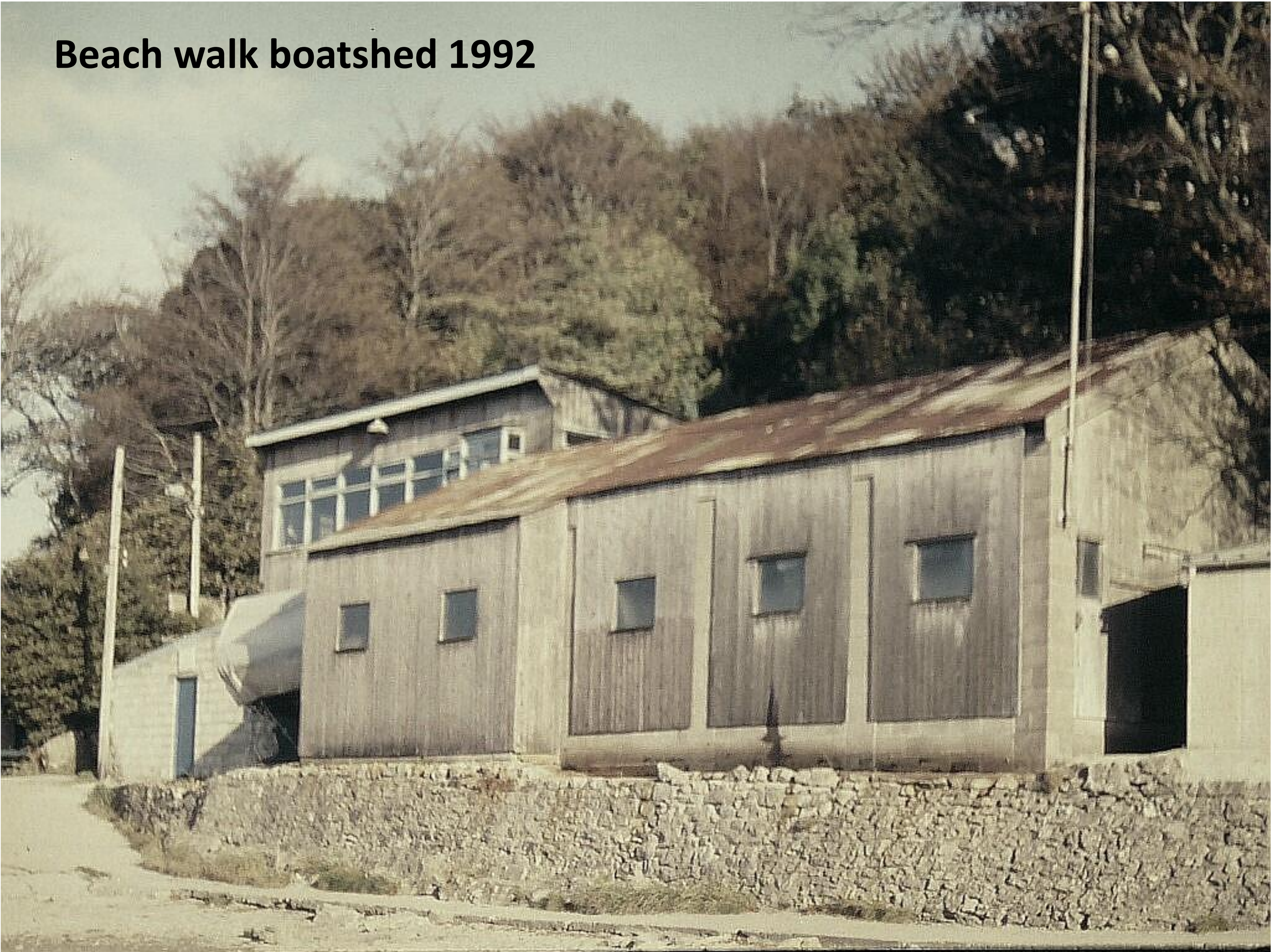


The Times 4 Sep 1905. *'A terrible accident happened .. in the neighbourhood of Sandside ... 16 people from Hollinwood at Oldham had been staying at Lower Foulshaw Farm. At Saturday noon they were returning home via Arnside Station crossing the channel by ferry controlled by John Pearson of the Ship Inn Sandside. Sixteen passengers were to be carried across in an ordinary rowing boat in two batches.*

The tidal bore passed by and boat set off. One survivor said the water was almost over sides. It seems likely that the boat was probably overladen, possibly rolling in the strong swell. Sadly it tipped its ten unfortunate passengers into the fast-running waters. Six of whom drowned.' KH

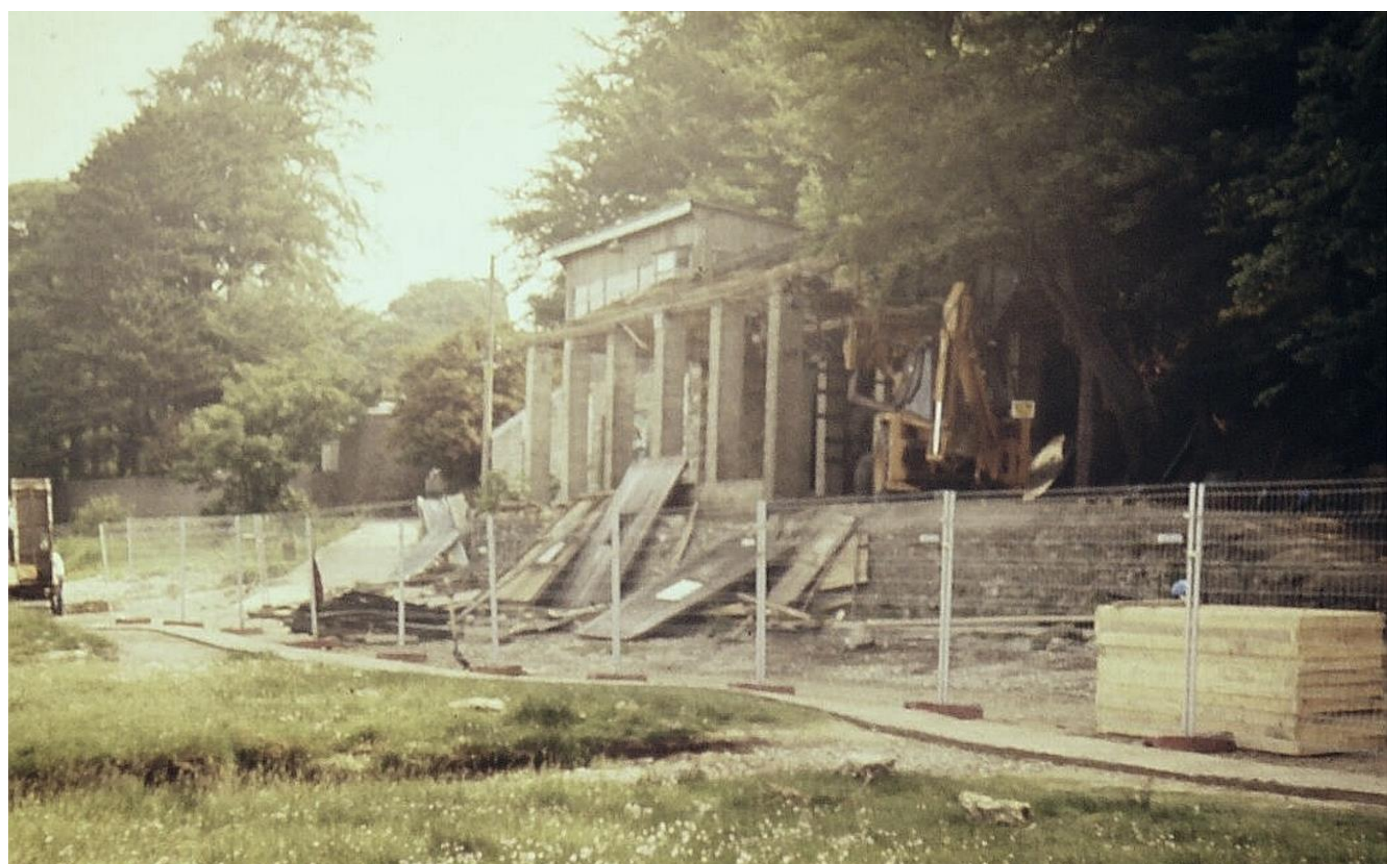
Building the Coastguard station

Beach walk boatshed 1992



Before there were coastguards, those working in the Crossfield boat shed had been on the spot when people or boats got into difficulty on the estuary. Also having the boats and the skills to manoeuvre them, they therefore got involved with rescues.

Work starts on building the coastguard station 1993



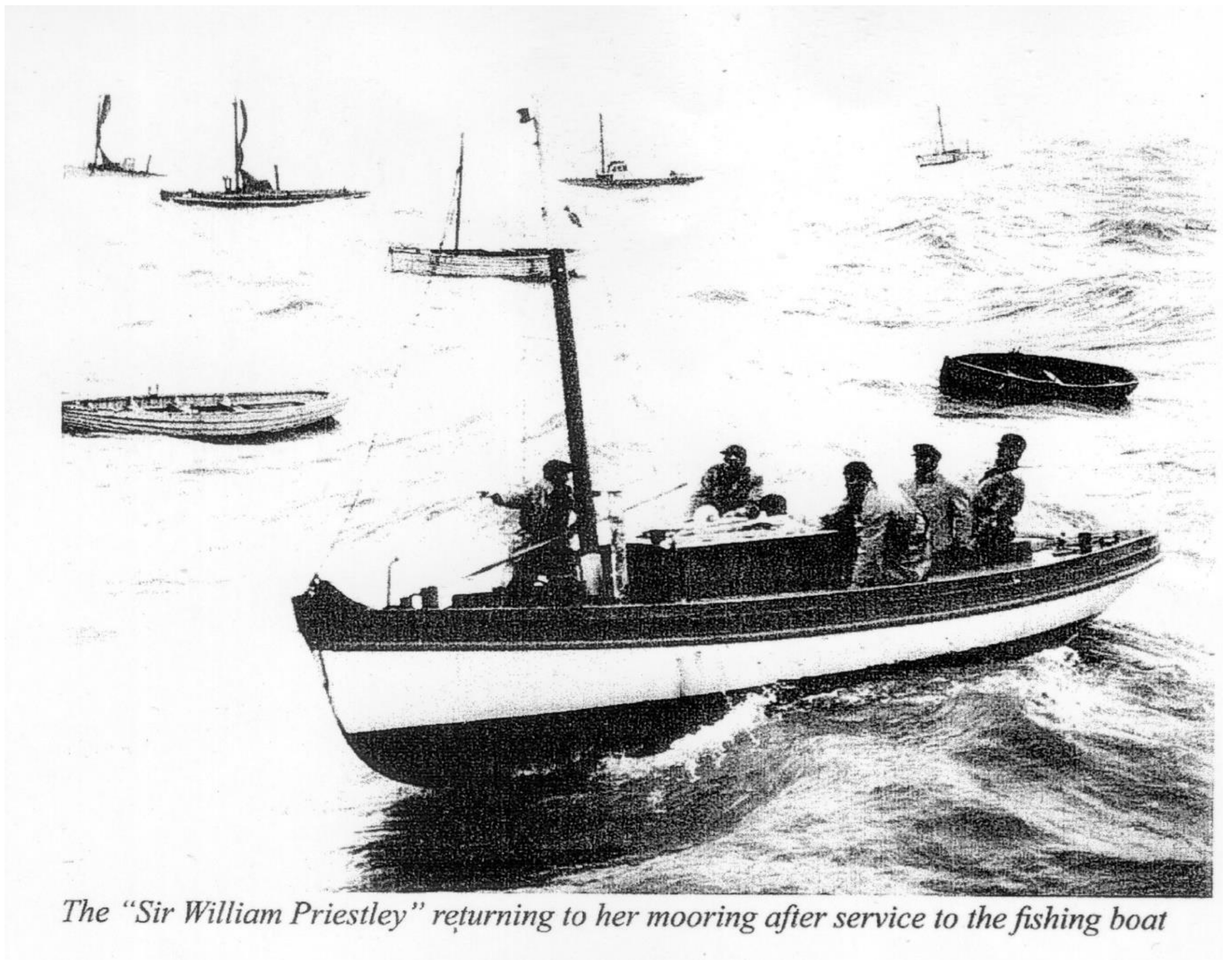
The Coastguard station opens 1995



Andy Pringle, now head Coastguard, writes:

“The Duerdons, last owners of the working yard, as a family were heavily involved in village life with John being a member of the committee of the sailing club for many years. In the 1960’s there were several fatalities on the estuary. John was instrumental in firstly getting the tide siren installed and then setting up Arnside Coastguard in 1970. Both of these are a living legacy to the family that have saved many lives.”

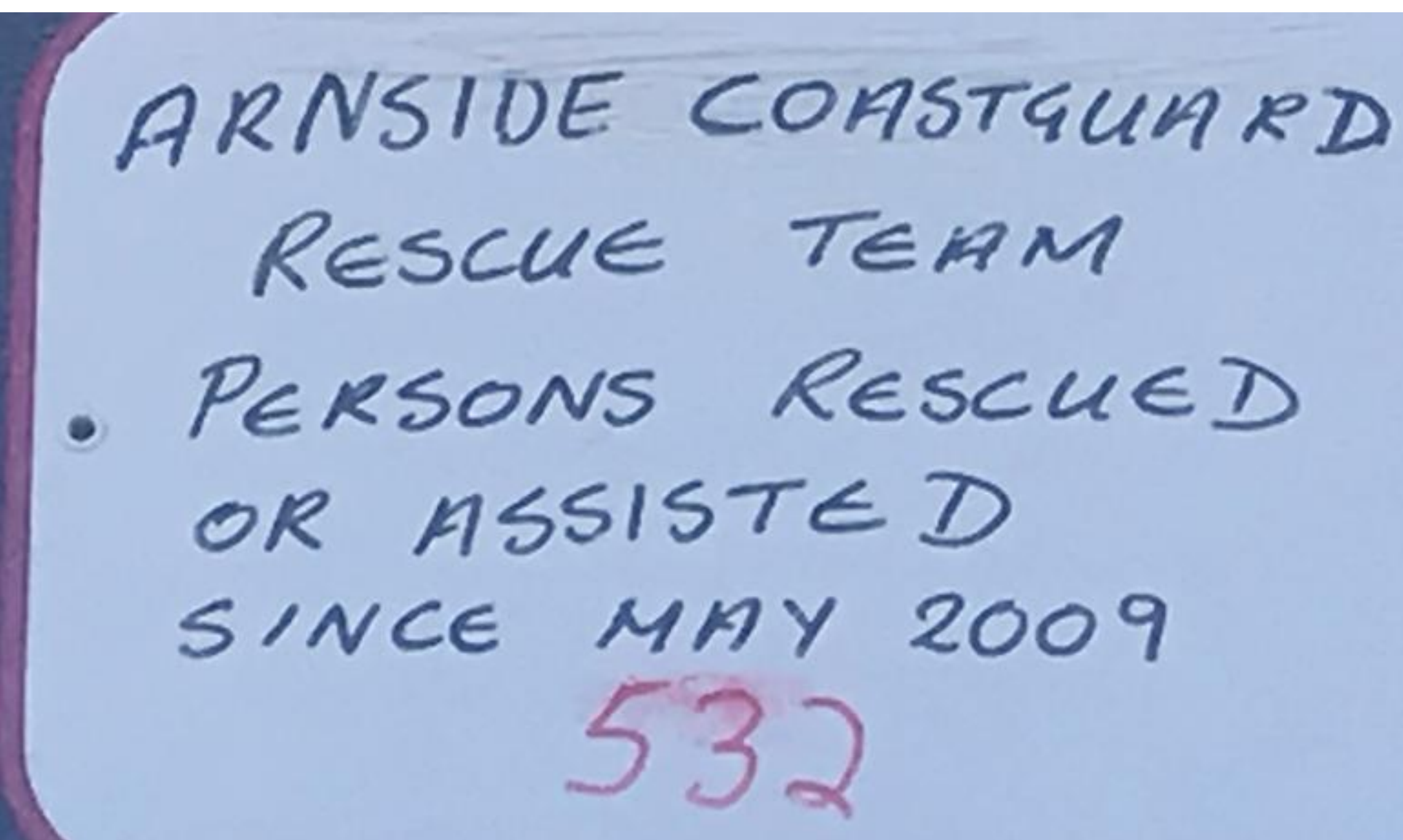
Morecambe Bay lifeboat

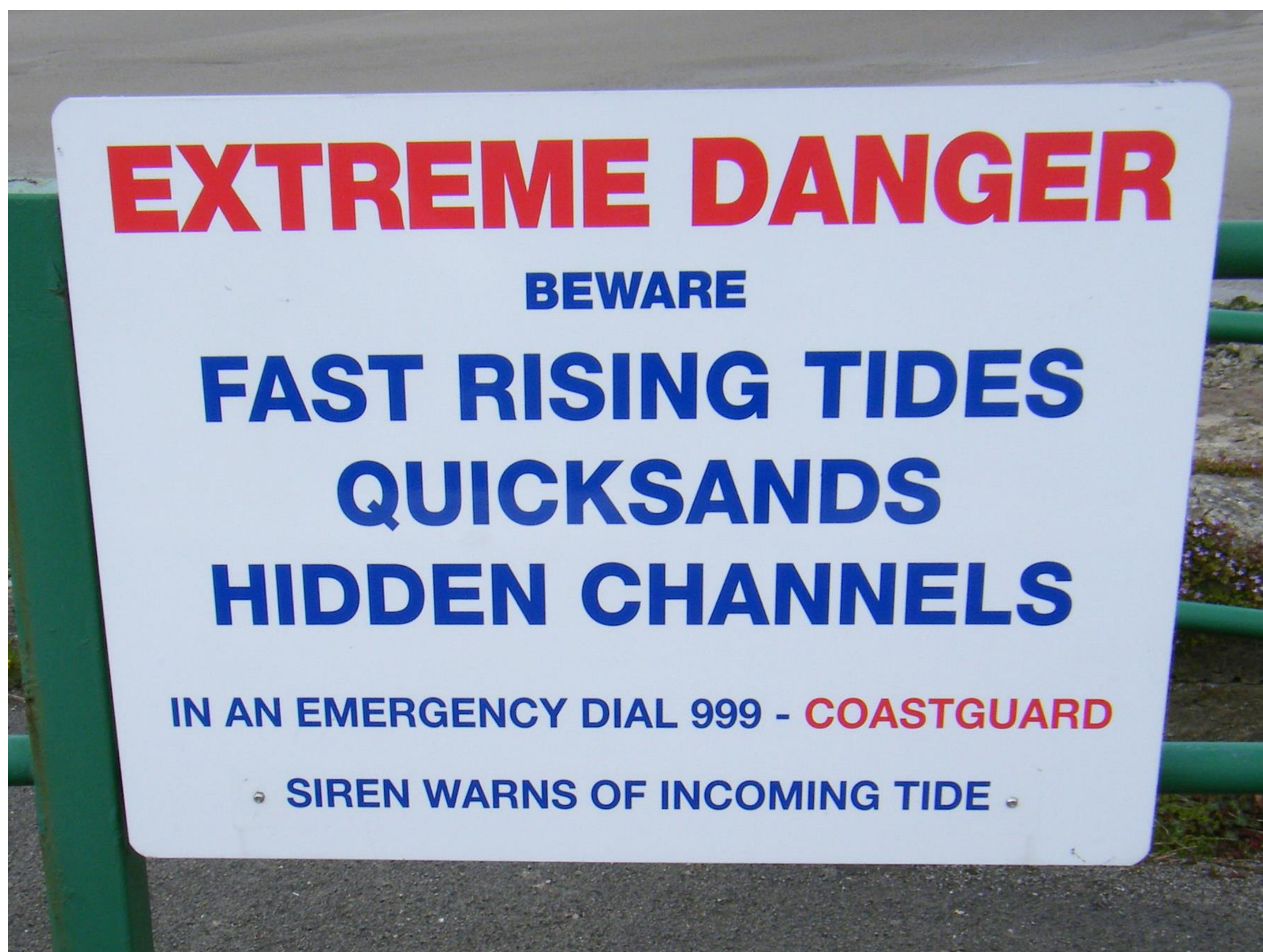


The "Sir William Priestley" returning to her mooring after service to the fishing boat

The lifeboat *Sir William Priestley* was built in Arnside for the Morecambe and Heysham Fishermen's Association. It was built by Fred Crossfield and was launched in 1934. It is now in Lancaster Maritime Museum awaiting renovation.

The bell, the sirens & signs





The coast of Arnside is subjected to a very fast rising tide and a bore. Because of the potential danger warning notices are posted at the pier, and an audible warning is sounded before every high tide (in summer time daylight). Originally the warning was a bell on the roof of the Albion pub. It can still be seen there. The coastguards work in cooperation with Bay Search and Rescue as well as the Morecambe Bay Lifeboat Association and other local services. Each organization contributes different forms of equipment and expertise. The Coastguards have a jetski and an inflatable. The Lifeboat Service has a hovercraft, Bay Search and Rescue have an all terrain vehicle. The Sailing Club also have rescue boat.



The old and the new: the *Severn* built 1912, the RNLI Hovercraft and the CoastGuard jetski



The Arnside Coastguards' jetski. Photo from Fellow

- The slides beyond here are for the booklet associated with this panel

The cockle pickers disaster

(Chinese: 拾貝慘案 *Shi bèi cǎn'àn*, "cockle-picking tragedy") occurred on the evening of 5 February 2004 at Morecambe Bay when at least 21 Chinese labourers were drowned in treacherous weather conditions off Hest Bank by an incoming tide after picking cockles.

The Bay of Words

Plaque in memory of the Chinese cockle pickers, who drowned in February 2004:

The Bay of Words by Laverne

From dawn to dusk and through the night,
They worked and riddled out of sight.
Far away on distant shores,
Men and women do their chores.

Families so very far to see,
Pick cockles for you and me.
A fruitful day as some would say,
We picked cockles on Morecambe Bay.

Such success we trawled for more,
On this lovely majestic shore.
Are we illegal? No we are not!
Travelled migrants we forgot.

Just how savage can life be?
For each and all including me!
In utter panic we lost our way,
And on the bay we had to stay.

The light went dim we should have known,
Morecambe Bay is now our home.
Oh gentle people be so kind,
Always keep us in your minds.

We worked so hard to get our pay,
Oh good lord what a way!
Cold... Wet... And in the dark, we become
the bay.
Remembered as part of the majestic
Morecambe Bay.

To end our day and nights too,
On Morecambe Bay so loved by you!
Sunshine come and light the bay,
We won't see another day.

Look out and you will see,
Passing migrants just like me!
Please remember how we fell,
It was just a living hell.

So see the birds up in the sky,
They take our souls and make them fly.
Across the world from whence they came,
Sharing in the bays great fame.

Remember us with love not fear!
We like you,
Now live here!

Completed by Lancashire Fire & Rescue Service -
Princes Trust
Morecambe Team - 17 July 2007

