



DISCOVER
GROOMSPORT

Services of the Groomsport Life-Boats 1858-1920

Transcribed (with additional information) from the RNLI Service Registers

by Peter Gibson

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The Life-Boat Station at Groomsport

On 7th February 1856, the RNLI decided in principle to purchase a life-boat, as soon as funds permitted, to be placed at Groomsport to serve Belfast Lough and the surrounding seas*. This was in response to the many shipwrecks that had occurred in the area in previous years.

In late 1857 the Groomsport Branch of the RNLI was established with the following officers:

Chairman: Lord Dufferin and Clondeboye

Treasurer: Major Robert Perceval-Maxwell

Hon. Secretary: Rev A H McCausland (Rector of Groomsport)

John Waring Maxwell, the landowner of Groomsport donated land at the harbour for the building of a Boathouse. Sir Charles Lanyon, the famous architect, designed the Boathouse, without charge.

The RNLI branch raised the necessary £200 to build the Boathouse and additional funds for running of the life-boat station. Several local gentry and businesses in Belfast made contributions.

The first life-boat entered service in 1858. This document details the services of the four “pull and sail” life-boats which were stationed at Groomsport.

In 1910, the RNLI opened the Life-Boat station at Donaghadee. The Donaghadee life-boat, which had an engine, was berthed in the harbour and did not need to be launched.

In 1920, the RNLI closed the Groomsport Life-Boat station.



Groomsport Boathouse. The original 1858 building was extended in the 1970s

Photograph: Amanda McWhinney

* “The Life-Boat” Vol. III, No. 23, page 20.

Services of the Life Boat at Groomsport

Date of Wreck	Site of Wreck	Direction and force Of Wind. State of Sea and Weather	Name of Vessel	Nature of Service	Lives Saved	Vessels Saved	Expense of service	£	s	d	Date of reward	Remarks
Dec 19 1862	Groomsport	N W Full Gale	Barque "Carioca" of Liverpool	Put off and rendered assistance			5 men @ 10s 12 helpers Horse Total	4	0	0	27 Dec 1862	Salvage £80 (See below)
30 May 1865	Cockle Island	N Stormy	Smack "Agnes and Mary"		1		Total	4	11	0	8 June 1865	

On 15 January 1863, the Belfast News Letter reported that, regarding the salvage of the Carioca, the crew had been awarded £7 10s each. The second coxswain, John Waterson (1840-1922), was awarded a further £4. He had entered the sea, boarded the stricken ship and then guided it safely into Donaghadee harbour.

Dates	Name	Services	Lives saved	Vessels saved	Expenses (£-s-d)
1858-1866	Unknown	2	0	1	£ 9-14-0



Possible image of Groomsport's first Life Boat

The first life boat was built in 1858 at a cost of £136.
 Its dimensions were:
 Length – 28 feet
 Breadth – 6 feet
 Depth – 3 feet
 Oars – 6
 Weight – 30 cwt.

In 1867, Mrs Florence Dormer, of Bampton, Oxfordshire made a donation of £420 to the RNLI. This was used to purchase a new Life Boat for Groomsport. It was named **Florence**, after the donor, or perhaps her daughter, who was also named Florence. The Florence was 32 feet long, its beam was 7 feet 6 inches and it had 10 oars.

Services of FLORENCE Life Boat at Groomsport

Date of Wreck	Site of Wreck	Direction and force Of Wind. State of Sea and Weather	Name of Vessel	Nature of Service	Lives Saved	Vessels Saved	Expense of service	£	s	d	Date of reward	Remarks
20 Dec 1872	Off Groomsport	SE Heavy sea.	Brig "Hays" of Amble				Total	11	4	0	12 Jan 1873	
14 March 1876	Off Groomsport	SE Heavy sea.	Brig "Linwood" of Maryport	Rendered assistance			12 men @ 10s 13 helpers @ 3s Total	6	0	0	20 April 1876	
3 Dec 1876	Mew Island	Very stormy	Schooner "Lawsons"	Services not required			11 men @ 10s 10 helpers Total	5	10	0	11 Dec 1876	
19 May 1877	Ballyholme Bay	NE Heavy sea.	Smack "Newland" of Kilkeel	Saved vessel	3	1	13 men	3	0	0*		£8 10s paid by owner of vessel. £3 from local funds.
2 March 1881	Briggs Reef	SE Heavy Gale	Schooner "Topaz"	Found vessel abandoned. Life boat went out again but could not save the vessel			13 men @10s 4 helpers @ 2s 2 horses @10s Total	6	10	0	11 March 1881	
14 Oct 1881	Bangor Bay	NNW	Barque "Margaret" of Belfast	Lives saved	15		13 men @15s 15 helpers 2 horses Total	9	15	0		

Services of FLORENCE Life Boat at Groomsport

Date of Wreck	Site of Wreck	Direction and force Of Wind. State of Sea and Weather	Name of Vessel	Nature of Service	Lives Saved	Vessels Saved	Expense of service	£	s	d	Date of reward	Remarks
29 Sept 1883	Bangor	NE Heavy Gale	Schooners "Miss Pritchard" and "William Henry" of Carnarvon	Lives saved	6		12 men @ 10s 11 helpers @ 1/6 12 men @ 10s Messenger	6	16	6	0 2 Oct 6 1883	
				Lives saved	3		Greasing wheels Total	2	0	0		
12 Feb 1884	Bridge's Reef	WSW Moderate	Steamer "Emily" of Sunderland	Lives saved	5		11 men @30s	6	10	0	15 Feb 6 1884	Life Boat went out twice
				Lives saved	4		13 helpers Total	1	4	6		
								17	14	6		

Dates	Name	Services	Lives saved	Vessels saved	Expenses (£-s-d)
1858-1866	Unknown	2	0	1	£ 9-14-00
1866-1885	Florence	13	36	1	£ 80-10-06
	Totals	12	36	2	£ 90-04-06



In 1884 these two plaques were installed above the main door of the Boathouse in Groomsport. They marked the 60th anniversary of the founding of the organisation which later became the Royal National Lifeboat institution (RNLI).

The first plaque has the date "1884" and the Tudor crown which reflects the Royal connection. The second plaque has a life boat, under which (partially hidden) are the letters "RN". In front of these are the letters "LBI". Part of the "B" is broken and the letter looks like an "E". At that time "Life Boat" was two words so the letters are RNLBI. (**R**oyal **N**ational **L**ife **B**oat **I**nstitution)

A new life boat, the **George Pooley** was sent to Groomsport in 1885. She had cost £309 and was paid for through a legacy of James Pooley of Hadley.

Services of GEORGE POOLEY Life Boat at Groomsport

Date of Wreck	Site of Wreck	Direction and force Of Wind. State of Sea and Weather	Name of Vessel	Time of Launching Life Boat	Time of returning ashore	Nature of Service	Lives Saved	Vessels Saved	Expense of service	£	s	d	Date of reward	Remarks
11 Jan 1886	Off Bangor Point	N Heavy Gale	Schooner "Lord Willoughby" of Maryport			Services declined			13 men @ 10s 12 helpers @ 2s Greasing rollers Boathouse keeper Total	6 1 2 2 7	10 4 6 6 19		13 Jan 1886	
														See below*
7 Sept 1886	Mur [?Mew] Island	Sw Half Gale	Barque "Tobago" of London			Services declined			12 men @ 10s 13 helpers @ 2/6 Greasing rollers Watchman Total	6 1 2 2 7	12 6 2 6 17	6 6 6 6	6 10 Sept 1886	
26 Jan 1888	Between Bangor and Grey Point	NNW	A schooner	5.30pm	9.30pm	No service			15 men @ 20s 16 helpers @ 4s 2 horses @ 5s Total	15 3 10 18	4 10 14			
28 Nov 1888	Cockle Island	ESE Strong wind. Heavy sea	SS "Victoria" of Glasgow	10.30pm	12.30am	Remained by vessel			13 men @ 20s 17 helpers @ 5s 2 men watching life boat @ 4s Total	13 4 8 17	5 8 13			

*03 June 1886. Binocular Glass voted to William Orr, Coxswain.

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									Grant to William Orr, late coxs., Certificate.	15			10 Jan 1889	
									Additional grant to above	10			14 Feb 1889	
									Total	25				
									13 men @ 2 30s	19	10	0		
									15 helpers @ 4s messenger	3	0	0	28 Oct and 19 Nov 1889	
19 Oct 1889	Crawfordsburn Bay	E Strong breeze	Barque "Buckley Castle" of Aberdeen	9.15am	7.30pm	Rendered assistance			1 helper		4	0		
									Less amount paid by owners of vessel	10	0	0		
									Total	13	11	0		
20 Sept 1890	Between Ballymacormick Point and Groomsport Watchhouse	SE Strong breeze. Heavy swell.	Ketch "Hobah" of Falmouth	9.15pm	12 MN	Assisted to save	3		Property salvage 1 case.					
7 Nov 1890	Off Seacliffe, Bangor	NNW Whole gale. Very heavy sea.	Yawl "Urania" of Lowestoft			Crew assembled 3am to 7am.			13 men @ 7/6	4	17	0		
									16 helpers @ 5s signalman	4	0	6	15 Nov 1890	
									Total	9	4	0		

Services of GEORGE POOLEY Life Boat at Groomsport

Date of Wreck	Site of Wreck	Direction and force Of Wind. State of Sea and Weather	Name of Vessel	Oars or Sails	Time of Launching	Time of returning ashore	Nature of Service	Lives Saved	Vessels Saved	Expense of service	£	s	d	Date of reward	Remarks
26 Feb 1893	Off Groomsport	ENE Strong wind. Very heavy sea.	Schooner "Maria Fairley" of Fowey		9.30am	2.30pm	(Landed at Belfast)	4		13 men @ 22/6 20 helpers @ 4s messenger Total	14	12	6	26 April 1893	Property salvage case. £18-19-6 returned 30 Dec 1893
22 Nov 1893	Off Groomsport	NE Strong gale. Very heavy sea	A schooner		2am	9am	No service. Taken to Bangor for launching			13 men @ 45s 13 helpers @ 6s signalman watchman Robert Murdoch in consideration of illness Total	29	5	0	27 Nov and 7 Dec 1893	
7 Jan 1897	N end small Copeland island	ESE Strong breeze. Very heavy sea.	Ship "Ulrica" of Greenock	Both	9am	12.30pm	No service			14 men @ 15s 16 helpers @ 4/6 messenger Total	10	10	0	12 and 13 Jan 1897	2 helpers were watchmen at breakwater

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15 Oct 1898	Briggs Reef	ESE Whole gale. Very heavy sea.	SS "Dalriada" of Glasgow	Oars	8.17pm	6.15am		8		15 men @ 30s 17 helpers @ 26s signalman messenger additional for 2 helpers @ 6s 15 men @ 15s Harbour signalman 3 attending horses Additional reward to crew 15 men @ 10s 3 rd signalman*	22	10	0			
16 Oct 1896	Briggs Reef	ESE Strong to whole gale. Very heavy sea.	SS "Dalriada" of Glasgow	Oars	8am	9.15am	To fetch captain. Unsuccessful			15 men @ 10s 3 rd signalman* Total (2 services)	7	10	6	0	Oct, 7, 10 and 15 Nov 1898	* 6s returned 3 Dec 1898
21 Feb 1899	Briggs Reef	Whole gale. Heavy swell.	Schooner "Caledonia"	Both	5.40am	6.45am		5		13 men @ 30s 19 helpers @ 6s* signalman messenger Total	19	10	0	0	24 Feb 1899	8s returned. 4 helpers under 17 (4s each)

Services of GEORGE POOLEY Life Boat at Groomsport

Date of Wreck	Site of Wreck	Direction and force of Wind. State of Sea and Weather	Name of Vessel	Oars or Sails	Time of Launching Life Boat	Time of returning ashore	Nature of Service	Lives Saved	Vessels Saved	Expense of service	£	s	d	Date of reward	Remarks
										13 men @ 30s	19	10	0		
										14 helpers @ 6s	4	4	0		
										7 youths @ 3s	1	1	0		
										3 lampholders @ 2s		6	0		* watching boat left at anchor overnight. 2 men every 2 hours.
										8 men @ 3/6 per hour* messenger signalman	1	4	0	6 Feb 1900	
1 Feb 1900	Briggs Reef	SE Strong breeze.	Schooner "Maud" of Chester	Oars	8.30pm	10pm	No service			Total	26	18	0		
										13 men @ 30s	19	10	0		
										16 helpers @ 6s	4	16	0		
										4 boys @ 3s signalman		12	0		
										Total	25	4	0		
30 Dec 1900	South Briggs Reef	SE to SW Moderate gale. Heavy sea.	SS "Rosabelle" of Bangor	Both	0.50am	3.30am	Stood by vessel								

Dates	Name	Services	Lives saved	Vessels saved	Expenses (£-s-d)
1858-1866	Unknown	2	0	1	£ 9-14-00
1866-1885	Florence	13	36	1	£ 80-10-06
1885-1901	George Pooley	14	32	1	£307-17-06
	Totals	29	68	3	£388-08-00

Chapman, a Liverpool class Life Boat, took up station in Groomsport on 8th May 1901. She was 35 feet long with a 10 foot beam, a height of 5 feet, and weighed 4 ½ tons. She required a crew of 15 – coxswain, second coxswain, bowman and 12 oarsmen.

Services of CHAPMAN Life Boat at Groomsport

Date of Wreck	Site of Wreck	Direction and force Of Wind. State of Sea and Weather	Name of Vessel	Oars or Sails	Time of Launching Life Boat	Time of returning ashore	Nature of Service	Lives Saved	Vessels Saved	Expense of service	£	s	d	Date of reward	Remarks
										15 men @ 45s 22 helpers @ 9s 1 boy signalman 4 horses - not used 4 horsemen @ 5s	33	15	0		
12 and 13 Dec 1904	½ mile NW of Copeland Island	N Whole gale. Very heavy sea.	Barque "Touraine" of Nantes	Both	10.20pm	1.30am 13 th	Stood by vessel. Spoke to vessel returning home on 13 th .			Refreshments Coast Guard getting horses	1	5	0	16, 20 and 28 Dec 1904	
											47	10	0		
2 June 1905	½ mile E of Black Head	W to W by S. Moderate gale. Heavy sea.	A fishing boat	Sails	3.45pm	5.30pm	Attended boat			12 men @ 10s 11 helpers @ 2s watchman Total	6	0	0	5 June 1905	
										Additional grant to William Orr, late 1 st coxswain, on account of old age.	20	0	0		Committee meeting 14 Dec 1905

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Date of Wreck	Site of Wreck	Direction and force Of Wind. State of Sea and Weather	Name of Vessel	Oars or Sails	Time of Launching Life Boat	Time of returning ashore	Nature of Service	Lives Saved	Vessels Saved	Expense of service	£	s	d	Date of reward	Remarks
1 Jan 1911	N end of Big Copeland Island	N Strong breeze. Rough sea.	Schooner "Gipsy Maid" of Padstow	Sails	7.45am	10am	No service			15 men @ 22/6 15 helpers and signalman @ 4/6 Reporter Total	16 3	17 12	6 0	10 and 17 Jan 1911	
24 June 1911	½ mile N of Bangor	N String wind. Rough sea.	Yacht "Ulva" of Bangor	Sails	4.30pm	6.30pm	No service			12 men @10s 14 helpers @ 3/6 Signalman Total	2	9	0	3 and 7 6 July 1911	
5 Nov 1911	Belfast Lough	WNW Strong gale. Rough sea.	Schooner "Mary" of Glasgow	Sails	3.30pm	7pm		5		15 men @ 37/6 26 helpers @ 7/6 Total	28 9	2 15	6 0	9 Nov 1911	
9 Feb 1912	South Briggs Reef	NE Slight. Smooth sea.	SS "Kathleen" of Belfast	Oars	7.30pm	9pm	No service			15 men @ 30s 13 helpers @ 6s Signalman 1 st Informer 7 boys with lamps @ 1s Total	22 3	10 18	0 0	27 Feb 1912	
11 Jan 1913	Mid entrance to Belfast Lough	ESE Strong gale. Rough sea.	Unknown barquentine	Sails	1.10pm	3.15pm	No service			15 men @ 15s 18 helpers @ 3s Signalman 1 st informer Total	11 5	5 8	0 0	23 and 28 Jan 1913	

Services of CHAPMAN Life-Boat at Groomsport

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										Grant to Head launcher and Winchman, John Waterson, on retirement on account of age.	5	0	0	10 Dec 1915	See below*
20 July 1915	Maidens Rock.	SE Slight wind. Smooth. Very Thick	SS Canada	Oars	12am	About 5am	No service			15 men @ 20 s 14 helpers @ 4s Messenger Total	15 2 2 17	0 16 2 18	0 0 6 6		
27 Sept 1915	Cloughlin, Islandmagee	NE Strong breeze to SW. Heavy sea. Very dark.	SS "Cliffmore" of Belfast	Sails	11.40pm	4.30am	No service			15 Men @ 20s 9 helpers @ 3s and 9 helpers @ 6s Lamp carrying 4 @ 2/6 Signalman Telephone man Total	15 4 10 6 6 20	0 1 0 0 0 3	0 0 0 0 0 0	9 Oct 1915	
18 Nov 1916	Dundrum Bay	SW Moderate gale. Heavy sea. Cold.	Schooner "Fulvia" of Denmark				Crew assembled			8 men @ 5s 20 helpers @ 3s 5 lampboys @ 1s messenger Total	2 3 5 2 5	0 0 0 6 7	0 0 6 6 6		

*John Waterson, whose retirement was marked with a grant of £5 in 1915, had been second coxswain on the first service of the Groomsport Life Boat, in 1862. It is possible that he joined the life boat crew in 1858 and that he served for about 53 years. He was about 75 years of age when retired from the life boat crew.

Services of CHAPMAN Life-Boat at Groomsport

Date of Wreck	Site of Wreck	Direction and force Of Wind. State of Sea and Weather	Name of Vessel	Oars or Sails	Time of Launching Life Boat	Time of returning ashore	Nature of Service	Lives Saved	Vessels Saved	Expense of service	£	s	d	Date of reward	Remarks
18 Oct 1917	1 mile WNW Ballymacormick Point	W to NW Heavy gale. Very cold.	Basque "Juntero" of aalborg	Sails	10am	1.15pm	No service			15 men @ 15s 20 helpers @ 3s Signalman Total	11 3 3 14	5 0 0 8	0 0 0 0	09 Nov 1917	
5 Nov 1918		WNW Strong breeze. Rough sea.	HM Tug "Dainty"				Part of crew assembled 12am to 2am			7 men @ 7/6 8 helpers @ 6s Signalman Total	2 2 6 5	12 8 0 6	6 0 0 6	07 Dec 1918	

January 1920 – Groomsport Life Boat Station closed

A summary of the Life Boat service at Groomsport

Dates	Name	Services	Lives saved	Vessels saved	Expenses (£-s-d)
1858-1866	Unknown	2	0	1	£ 9-14-00
1866-1885	Florence	13	36	1	£ 80-10-06
1885-1901	George Pooley	14	33	1	£307-17-06
1901-1920	Chapman	16	18	0	£435- 08-02
	Totals	45	87	3	£823-16-02

Chapman – Groomsport’s last Life-Boat

After **Chapman** left Groomsport in 1920, she became part of the RNLI Reserve Fleet. From 1924 to 1939 she was based on Hilbre Island, off Hoylake in Cheshire. Later, renamed **Harbinger**, she provided day trips for holiday makers in Morecambe. Renamed again, as **Peggy**, she served as a Lancaster pilot boat for 39 years.

Peggy was a land-based attraction in a caravan site when found, and purchased, by John Parr, of Hoylake. She was restored as a lifeboat by trainees of the Cammell Laird shipyard. The restored **Chapman** was in Hoylake Lifeboat Museum from 2011 until the museum closed in 2015. Since then, she has been in the Lifeboat Museum at Lytham in Lancashire.



Chapman in Lytham Lifeboat Museum, Lancashire

Photograph: John Parry.

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