

Source 1: Shipwreck!

An essay written in 1799 by Dr Anthony Fothergill describes three shipwrecks in which 27 lives were lost. Its publication was an effort by the Royal Humane Society to draw public attention to the problem of shipwreck and encourage solutions to it.

Ships were wrecked for a variety of reasons:

- being in poor condition
- being caught in terrible storms at sea
- mistakes made by the Captain or crew
- a combination of the above reasons.

Shipwreck is a chaotic and frightening experience that sends people into a state of shock. At this time many people could not swim and, even if they could, waves could easily overcome them before they could reach land. Drowning, hypothermia, exhaustion and injury could all take the lives of shipwrecked souls.

As Dr Fothergill explains, people often gathered to try to help those suffering as a result of shipwreck but, having no way in which to save them, could only watch them perish at sea.

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PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

FREQUENCY OF SHIPWRECKS,

PARTICULARLY NEAR SHORE.

ILLUSTRATED BY SOME LATE MELANCHOLY EVENTS.

OF all the heavy afflictions incident to a seafaring-life, shipwreck is the most disastrous. For what can afford a more affecting spectacle than those poor way-worn mariners, who, on their joyful return from a long voyage to the bosom of their families, are unhappily cast away at the very mouth of the harbour! To behold them, in this perilous situation, conflicting with the merciless waves; clinging to the broken planks, or with uplifted hands and piercing shrieks imploring aid with all the eloquence of ineffable
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woe! among the crowd of spectators on the beach, see the aged parent, the tender wife, and the helpless children of the distressed sufferers, bathed in tears, and, in the anguish of their souls, pouring forth their unavailing cries and supplications! at length exhausted with ineffectual strugglings, the devoted victims in the agony of despair, are forced to yield to the all-conquering element, and, while casting their last look on the shore, are suddenly overwhelmed in one common undistinguished grave!

Now, this is no feigned picture of imaginary distress, but the genuine recital of a mournful event, which, alas! is too often realized on the British coasts!

An affecting instance of this nature happened not long ago, in open day, and in the face of at least a hundred spectators, to two vessels belonging to Cardigan Bay, which, during a storm, were unfortunately wrecked near the coast. One of them, being in a *decayed* state, sunk within fifty yards of shore, where the crew, being instantly cast on a sand bank, miraculously escaped. But the miserable sufferers in the other vessel, eleven in number, being unable to keep their hold, whilst immense billows broke over them, were washed off one by one, until only one man was left, who tenaciously kept his seat for two hours after his unfortunate companions, when a prodigious

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prodigious wave dashed the wreck to the shore, where it unhappily struck against a rock which forced him back into the foaming surge, and he was seen no more!

Extract from *An Essay on the Preservation of Shipwrecked Mariners, in Answer to the Prize Questions Proposed by the Royal Humane Society*
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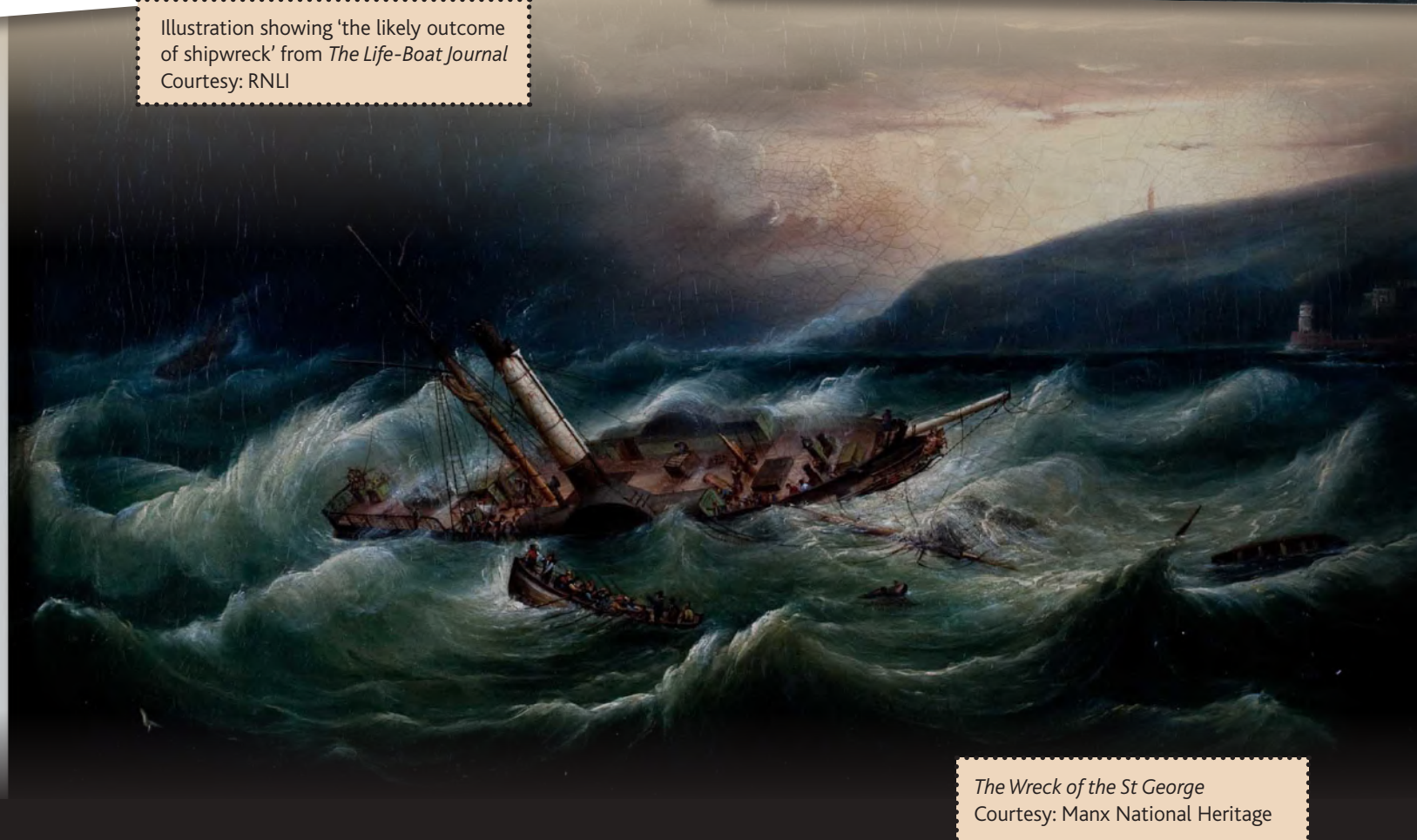
Source 1: Shipwreck! (continued – page 2)



The Lifeboat in the Act of Saving Part of the Crew of a Ship Wrecked Near Tynemouth Castle after W Elmes, 1803
Courtesy: RNLI Heritage Trust



Illustration showing 'the likely outcome of shipwreck' from *The Life-Boat Journal*
Courtesy: RNLI



The Wreck of the St George
Courtesy: Manx National Heritage

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1. Read through the extract from Dr Fothergill's essay and look at the pictures above.

Imagine how the passengers, crew and Captain of a shipwrecked vessel would be feeling. How would you feel if you were watching from the shore and you could not help to save them?

2. What impact would shipwreck have had on people living in the Britain at that time? Try to think of at least one impact:

- socially
- economically
- politically
- environmentally.