

Source 14: Letters from Sir William Hillary to The King and the Admiralty

Douglas, Isle of Man.
10th February 1823

Sir

I have the honor to transmit to you a copy of a small work, which, with the most profound respect, I have presumed to dedicate to the patronage of a gracious Sovereign, as the Father of his people, and the most powerful friend and protector of his gallant Navy - on a subject which so worthy the generous regard of a benevolent and munificent Prince, having for its object the establishment of a National Institution for the rescue and preservation from Shipwreck, of those brave defenders and valuable subjects of the State, who may be exposed to so awful a calamity.

And understanding that the most respectful manner in which I can submit this subject to the King is through your Department, I beg leave to request, that you will do me the honor to offer the accompanying copy with my most humble and dutiful respects, to the gracious acceptance of His Majesty

To the Right Honorable
Robert Peel
His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Home Department &c. &c. &c.

As soon as he had printed his appeal, Hillary sent a letter and copy of his pamphlet to The King via the then Secretary of State for the Home Department, Robert Peel. He meant to gain support from the country's most powerful people and so impressed on them the glaring gap in Britain's provision for those suffering shipwreck.

The cause which I have had the temerity thus to offer to the consideration of my Sovereign and his people, has long impressed itself on my mind, as one deeply affecting the honor, and the dearest interests of a great and powerful maritime Nation - but the first ideas of the Institution I have now proposed, suggested themselves, after having witnessed some disastrous scenes on these dangerous Seas, and rugged coasts, during the tremendous storms of the present Winter - Under these impressions were they first written, and I have felt it to be an imperative duty also, to offer them, with every respect to the consideration of His Majesty's Ministers, and to appeal to the humanity and generosity of a noble minded people for the support of an Institution which extends its views, to the rescue of the mariners and subjects of England, and those of every other state, from the disasters of the sea, on our own, and every foreign Shore.

When all the noble and benevolent Institutions of the British Empire, which have been patronized by the Crown, cherished by the Government, and supported by the spontaneous liberality of the people,

are contemplated, it will scarcely admit of belief, that in the most powerful Maritime Nation of the present, or any former age, there never yet has been established one general national Institution for the preservation of human life from the perils of the Sea, or to ascertain and to write into one well organized system, the most effectual means for so great an object, as the rescue of those who for ages have been the great support of her Splendor, and her Power.

I have also taken the liberty to desire that a copy may be sent for your own perusal, and I shall rejoice to find that the motives by which I have been actuated in offering these suggestions to the consideration of His Majesty's Government, and the honor of the British Nation are distinguished by your approval, being well aware that within the province of that Department of the State over which you preside, many of the efforts and arrangements which I have proposed would take place, and persuaded that to their ultimate success, your liberal aid and influence would materially contribute.

I am anxious that this object of my warmest solicitude, should be honored with your protection and support.

With every respect I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient, and
Very humble servant,

W. A. Hillary

Letter from Sir William Hillary to Robert Peel, Secretary of State, 10 February 1823
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Source 14: Letters from Sir William Hillary to The King and the Admiralty
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Sir,

I have the honour to transmit to you a copy of a small work, which with the most profound respect, I have presumed to dedicate to the patronage of a gracious sovereign, as the Father of his people, and the most powerful friend and protector of his gallant Navy - on a subject which is worthy the generous regard of a benevolent and munificent prince, having for its object the establishment of a National Institution for the rescue and preservation from shipwreck, of those brave defenders and valuable subjects of the state who may be exposed to so awful a calamity.

Understanding that the most respectful manner in which I can submit this subject to the King is through your department, I beg leave to request that you will do me the honour to offer the accompanying copy with my most humble and dutiful respects, to the gracious acceptance of His Majesty.

*To the Right Honourable Robert Peel
His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Home Department*

The cause which I have had the temerity thus to offer to the consideration of my sovereign and his people, has long impressed itself upon my mind, as one deeply affecting the honor, and the dearest interests of a great and powerful maritime nation - but the first ideas of the Institution I have now proposed, suggested themselves, after having witnessed some disastrous scenes on these dangerous seas, and rugged coasts, during the tremendous storms of the present Winter - under these impressions were they first written, and I have felt it to be an imperative duty also, to offer them, with every respect to the consideration of His Majesty's Ministers, and to appeal to the humanity and generosity of a noble-minded people for the support of an Institution which intends its views to the rescue of the mariners and subjects of England, and those of every other state, from the disasters of the sea, on our own, and every foreign shore.

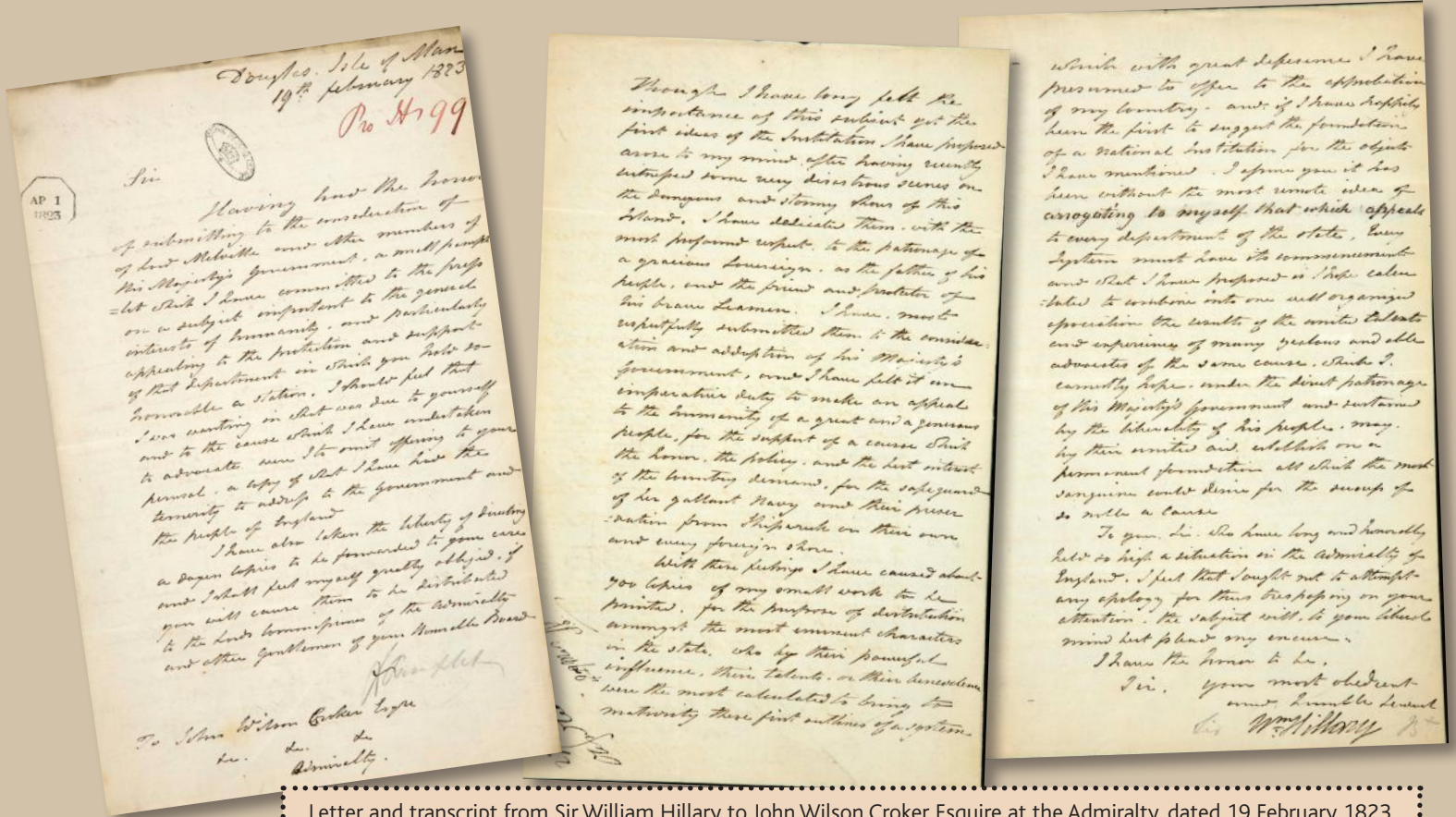
When all the noble and benevolent Institutions of the British Empire which have been patronized by the Crown, cherished by the government, and supported by the spontaneous bounty of the people, are contemplated, it will scarcely admit of belief, that in the most powerful maritime nation of the present, or any former age, there never yet has been established one general National Institution for the preservation of human life from the perils of the sea or to ascertain and to unite into one well organised system, the most effectual means for so great an object as the rescue of those who for ages have the great support of her splendour and her power.

I have also taken the liberty to desire that a copy may be sent for your own perusal, and I shall rejoice to find that the motives by which I have been activated in offering these suggestions to the consideration of His Majesty's government and the benevolence of the British Nation are distinguished by your approval. Being well aware that within the province of that department of the state over which you preside, many of the efforts and arrangements which I have proposed would take place and persuaded that to their ultimate receipts, your liberal mind and influence would materially contribute. I am anxious that this object of my warmest solicitude, should be honored with your protection and support.

*With every respect I have the honor to be Sir
Your most obedient and very humble servant
William Hillary.*

Source 14: Letters from Sir William Hillary to The King and the Admiralty
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Another letter shows how Sir William Hillary sent his appeal pamphlet straight to the top of Britain's most powerful institutions. He offered to speak to their officials in person to answer any questions they might have about his plan. He originally wanted the Government or Admiralty to put his plan into action.



Letter and transcript from Sir William Hillary to John Wilson Croker Esquire at the Admiralty, dated 19 February 1823
Courtesy: The National Archives

Sir
Having had the honor of submitting to the consideration of Lord Melville and other members of His Majesty's Government, a small pamphlet which I have committed to the press on a subject important to the general interests of humanity, and particularly appealing to the protection and support of that department in which you hold so honourable a station. I should feel that I was wanting in what was due to yourself and to the cause which I have undertaken to advocate were I to omit offering to your perusal, a copy of what I have had the temerity to address to the Government and the people of England. I have also taken the liberty of directing a dozen copies to be forwarded to your care and I shall feel myself greatly obliged, if you will cause them to be distributed to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty and other Gentlemen of your Honourable Board. Though I have long felt the Importance of this subject yet the first ideas of the Institution I have proposed arose to my mind after having recently witnessed some very disastrous scenes on the dangerous and stormy shores of this Island. I have dedicated them, with the most profound respect, to the patronage of a gracious sovereign, as the father of his people, and the friend and protector of his brave seamen. I have, most respectfully submitted them to the consideration and adoption of his Majesty's Government, and I have felt it an imperative duty to make an appeal to the humanity of a great and a generous people, for the support of a cause which the honour, the policy, and the best interests of the country demand, for the safeguard of her gallant navy and their preservation from shipwreck on their own and every foreign shore.

With these feelings I have caused about 700 copies of my small work to be Printed for the purpose of distribution Amongst the most eminent characters in the state who by their powerful influence, their talents, or their benevolence were the most calculated to bring to maturity these first outlines of a system which with great deference I have presumed to offer to the approbation of my country - and if I have happily been the first to suggest the foundation of a national institution for the objects I have mentioned. I assure you it has been without the most remote idea of arrogating to myself that which appeals to every department of state. Every system must have its commencement and what I have proposed is I hope calculated to combine into one well organised association the results of the united talents and experience of many zealous and able advocates of the same cause which I earnestly hope under the direct patronage of His Majesty's Government and sustained by the liberality of his people may by their united aid establish on a permanent foundation all which the most sanguine could desire for the success of so noble a cause.

To you, Sir, who have long and honourably held so high a situation in the Admiralty of England. I feel that I ought not to attempt any apology for this trespassing on your attention. The subject will, to your liberal mind but plead my excuse.

I have the honour to be Sir, your most obedient And humble servant.

[Signed] Wm Hillary

Source 14: Letters from Sir William Hillary to The King and the Admiralty
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On advice from his fellow campaigner Thomas Wilson MP, they changed their campaign tactic to make the institution possible through charitable donation. They had to get support from the public and other maritime organisations instead.



Thomas Wilson MP, first Chairman of the RNLI
Courtesy: RNLI

Q

1. Who were some of the key people in politics in the 1820s?

2. Who are the key politicians in your area today?

How might they help you to campaign?

3. While government, monarchy and the military can be very powerful allies for your cause, who else might you try to contact to bring about change for the better?