

Source 18: The wreck of the *St George*

The oil painting *The Wreck of the St George* illustrates Sir William Hillary's most epic rescue at sea.

On the night of 19 November 1830, two rival paddlesteamers arrived in Douglas from Liverpool, the Manx *Mona's Isle* and the *St George*. Both anchored as they were unable to enter the harbour at low tide so they unloaded their passengers and goods via the small harbour boats.

A severe storm was brewing. The Captain of the *Mona's Isle* knew local conditions well so he raised the anchor to go back out to open sea to weather the storm. The *St George* stayed close to land and at 5am its anchor cable broke in the storm. Despite the Captain's efforts to steam out to open sea, just as the *Mona's Isle* had done, the fierce waves swept the ship inshore where she struck St Mary's Rock.

Distress rockets were fired to call for help. Sir William and 13 volunteers went out in the lifeboat to their rescue. As the lifeboat was nearly toppled by waves, Coxswain Sir William commanded the men to row backwards into the narrow gap between the shipwreck and the rocks in an effort to reach the *St George's* crew.

The lifeboat struck the rocks and the ship, smashing the rudder,

and six of its oars were broken. Then the boat swung up vertically throwing Sir William and several lifeboat crew into the raging sea. Luckily Sir William managed to grasp a rope from the *St George* and was hauled up onto the deck by her crew. He had six broken ribs and a shattered chest bone. Thankfully the other crew had made it back into the lifeboat.

The route between the ship and the lifeboat was now blocked by the ship's broken mast and rigging. The crew cut through these to clear the way and then the 22 ship's crew used ropes to lower themselves into the lifeboat.

Baling out the water, and with only two oars for 36 men, the lifeboat set off for land but overturned, throwing the men into the sea. They held onto the upturned boat until it was washed over the other side of the rocks where two more harbour boats had come out in rescue. Thankfully they were able to collect the crews and tow back the lifeboat.

The *St George* smashed to pieces against the rocks. Had it not been for the lifeboat and its brave crew, the crew of the *St George* would have drowned. The lifeboat crew were awarded two Gold and two Silver Medals for Gallantry from the institution.



The Wreck of the St George, 1830, attributed to Samuel Walters
Courtesy: Manx National Heritage

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1. What is the story behind the picture of *The Wreck of the St George*? Why has the story been captured in art?

2. What message does this painting convey about why it's important to have a national institution to save lives at sea?

3. Why are images like this painting such powerful campaigning tools?

4. How might the campaigners have used this image during their campaign?