

Source 9: Appeal to the British Nation

The appeal pamphlet, *An Appeal to the British Nation on the Humanity and Policy of Forming a National Institution for the Preservation of Lives and Property from Shipwreck*, published by Sir William Hillary in 1823, effectively launched Britain's emergency service for saving lives at sea, now known as the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI).

Sir William Hillary was a man with a mission to save lives at sea. He had witnessed terrible scenes of shipwreck, recruited volunteers to battle stormy seas in heroic rescues and successfully championed the plight of families left destitute when their loved ones were drowned. But Hillary recognised that more could be done to preserve lives.

In his appeal pamphlet, Hillary outlines his idea to create a national organisation responsible for saving lives at sea. He had a vision that help would be given automatically to all those in need of rescue all around Britain's coastline.

He outlined that the way to achieve this would be to:

- provide lifeboats to stations around the coast
- man them with trained crews ready to rescue at any time
- provide incentives to encourage brave volunteers, such as payments if they were injured, or payments to their bereaved families if they were killed at sea.

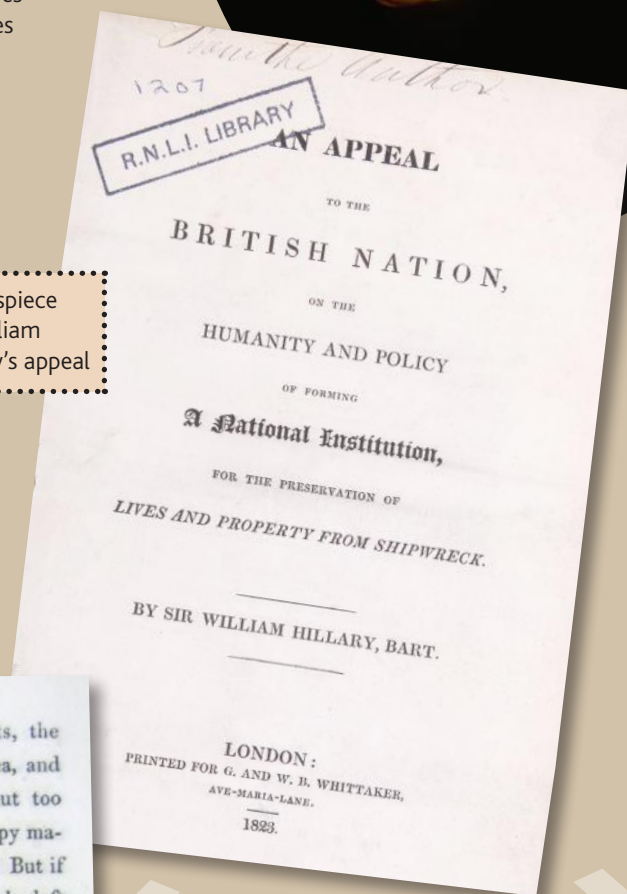
He published and distributed hundreds of copies of the first edition of his appeal and targeted the Admiralty Board as the likely organisation to make his vision a reality.

In order to reach a wider, even international, audience, Sir William Hillary then printed a second edition to which he added an emotive introduction stressing the extreme urgency of forming a National Institution for the Preservation of Life from Shipwreck.

Sir William Hillary,
founder of the RNLI
Courtesy: RNLI
Heritage Trust



Frontispiece
to William
Hillary's appeal



Another winter has scarcely yet commenced, and our coasts are spread over with the shattered fragments of more than two hundred vessels, which, in one fatal tempest, have been stranded on the British shores, attended with an appalling havoc of human life, beyond all present means to ascertain its tremendous extent, besides the loss of property to an enormous amount: and shall this fearful warning also be without avail? Shall we still close our eyes on conviction, until farther catastrophes wring from us those reluctant efforts, which ought to spring spontaneously from a benevolent people? With the most ample means for the rescue of thousands of human beings from a watery grave, shall we still leave them to their fate? Shall we hear unmoved of this widely-spread destruction, and not each contribute to those efforts, to which the common charities of human nature, and the conviction of the direful evils we might avert, and the sufferings we might assuage, ought to incite us to lend our utmost aid?

The conflicting fury of the elements, the darkness of night, the disasters of the sea, and the dangers of the adjacent shores, but too frequently combine to place the unhappy mariner beyond the power of human aid. But if all cannot be rescued, must all therefore be left to perish? If every effort cannot be attended with success, must not any attempt be made to mitigate these awful calamities, which bring home the evil to our very doors, and force conviction on us by their desolating effects, and by the destruction of hundreds of our countrymen, whose wretched remains now strew our shores? Whilst we pause, they continue to perish; whilst we procrastinate, the work of destruction pursues its course; and each delay of another winter, in the adoption of measures more commensurate with the extent of these deplorable events, is attended with the sacrifice—perhaps of a thousand human lives.

In our great insular empire, almost every individual, from the most exalted and powerful in the land to the lowly and obscure, are at some period of their lives induced, by their various avocations and pursuits, to leave their own coasts. The brave seamen, the gallant sol-

diers, and the various subjects of these realms, of all ranks and degrees, are to be found traversing every stormy sea, and exposed to peril on every dangerous shore. This is not then an object for which the great and the affluent are called upon for the relief of the humble and the destitute alone—the cause is individual, national, and universal, perhaps beyond any other which has ever yet been addressed to a country for support. It appeals equally to personal interest and to national policy—to private benevolence and to public justice; and each who thus extends the benefits of his efforts and his bounty to his countrymen and to mankind, may also be contributing to the future safety of his family, his friends, or himself.

Extracts from Sir William Hillary's appeal
Courtesy: RNLI Heritage Trust

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1. How would you describe Sir William Hillary's choice of language in the first extract? Make a list of words to support your decision.

2. How does Hillary draw attention to the problem of shipwreck? List the rhetorical devices he uses to persuade others, giving examples for each one.

3. Which emotions is Hillary trying to evoke?

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AN APPEAL,

&c.

For many years, and in various countries, the melancholy and fatal cases of shipwreck which I have witnessed, have excited a powerful interest in my mind for the situation of those who are exposed to this awful calamity; but the idea of the advantages which would result from the establishment of a national institution, for the preservation of human life from the perils of the sea, has only suggested itself to me since my residence on a part of the coast often exposed to the most distressing scenes of misery, and where the dreadful storms of the last autumn prevailed with unusual violence.

On some occasions, it has been my lot to witness the loss of many valuable lives, where, if there had been establishments previously formed for affording prompt relief, and encouragement given to those who might volunteer on such a cause, in all probability the greater part would

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have been saved. At other times I have seen the noblest instances of self-devotion; men have saved the lives of their fellow-creatures at the peril of their own, without a prospect of reward if successful, and with the certainty that their families would be left destitute if they perished.

From these circumstances, I have been induced to wish, that the results of the experience, talent, and genius, of the most distinguished commanders and men of science should be united in the formation of one great institution, which would in itself embrace every possible means for the preservation of life from the hazards of shipwreck.

Though many distinguished officers have employed their time and attention, and often exposed their personal safety for this object, yet, throughout nearly the whole of the most dangerous parts of the coast, no means have been adopted, no precautions taken for affording assistance in cases of shipwreck. Winter after winter, we have the most distressing details of the deplorable consequences; lives have been lost, which might otherwise have been saved; acts have even sometimes been perpetrated at which humanity shudders, and which have

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caused other nations to cast reproach and opprobrium on the British name.

But individual efforts, however meritorious in themselves, are unequal to produce all the benefits, or remedy all the evils, attendant on one of the most inevitable of perils to which (in the present state of society) human nature is exposed; and which is most likely to fall upon those who are in the very prime of manhood, and in the discharge of the most active and important duties of life. From the calamity of shipwreck no one can say that he may at all times remain free; and whilst he is now providing only for the safety of others, a day may come which will render the cause his own.

These are not arguments founded on the visionary contemplation of remote or improbable dangers. Their urgent necessity must be obvious to every mind. So long as man shall continue to navigate the ocean, and the tempests shall hold their course over its surface, in every age and on every coast, disasters by sea, shipwreck, and peril to human life, must inevitably take place; and with this terrible certainty before our eyes, the duty becomes imperative, that we should use every means to

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4. Why do you think Hillary was motivated to write this appeal?

5. How does Hillary create an impression of his credibility?

6. What solutions to the problem of shipwreck does Hillary suggest?

That a national institution should be formed, equally worthy of Great Britain, important to humanity, and beneficial to the naval and commercial interests of the United Empire; having for its objects,

First, The preservation of human life from shipwreck; which should always be considered as the first great and permanent object of the Institution.

Secondly, Assistance to vessels in distress, which often immediately connects itself with the safety of the crews.

Thirdly, The preservation of vessels and property, when not so immediately connected with the lives of the people, or after the crews and passengers shall already have been rescued.

Fourthly, The prevention of plunder and depredations in case of shipwreck.

Fifthly, The succour and support of those persons who may be rescued; the promptly obtaining medical aid, food, clothing, and shelter, for those whose destitute situation may require such relief, with the means to forward them to their homes, friends, or countries. The people and vessels of every nation, whether in peace or war, to be equally objects of this Institution;

and the efforts to be made, and the recompenses to be given for their rescue, to be in all cases the same as for British subjects and British vessels.

Sixthly, The bestowing of suitable rewards on those who rescue the lives of others from shipwreck, or who assist vessels in distress; and the establishment of a provision for the destitute widows or families of the brave men who unhappily lose their lives in such meritorious attempts.

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7. Sir William Hillary's proposed aims of the institution are shown in order of priority from highest to lowest. What values do the proposed aims of the institution illustrate?

8. What are the values of today's RNLI? Use RNLI.org to find out.