

Shetland Times 5th February 1887

STEAMER AGROUND ON BRESSAY

On Monday about noon, the steamer Merjulio of Leith, Capt. Baillie, put into Lerwick Harbour, to coal. The steamer was on a voyage from Bergen to Burntisland in ballast, and having encountered rough weather was detained on the passage, and had run short of coals. On arriving in the harbour, the anchor was let go, when the vessel was boarded, and on being informed where the coal hulk was, the anchor was raised, and the vessel got under weigh with the intension of going to Messrs J. Leask & Cos. hulk to coal. The wind was blowing strong at the time, and as the vessel was exceedingly light, it was difficult to get way on her. In consequence of this the force of the wind, (which was blowing in a south-westerly direction) drove the steamer towards the Bressay shore, where she stranded on the rocks nearly opposite Maryfield House. The sea was running high at the time, but as it was only a little more than half-tide, the captain was hopeful of getting off his vessel by means of a "kedge" this, however, proved unsuccessful, as the kedge put out, came "home" as soon as they commenced to heave "taut". An arrangement was then made with the Shetland Islands Steam Navigation Company, that the s.s. Earl of Zetland, Capt. Nicolson, should endeavour to tow her off, and this was successfully accomplished by Capt. Nicolson, and the vessel was afloat by 3.45 p.m. She had sustained no damage, and immediately proceeded to the coal hulk to take in coals.

On Tuesday Captain Baillie made a statement before the Collector of Customs for this port, in which he said that his vessel had sustained no damage. On Friday the Merjulio left Lerwick for Leith, where she will be put in the graving dock, and undergo a survey preparatory to loading at Burntisland.

SAD FATAL BOAT ACCIDENT

After the Merjulio had proceeded to the coal hulk, Mr A. B. Jamieson, from Messrs J. Leask & Co., went north from Albert Wharf in a small boat, manned by two men, named James Duncan and Henry Sinclair, both pilots. On reaching the vessel's side, Jamieson went onboard while Duncan and Sinclair remained in the small boat alongside. It seems that at this time, owing to the stormy nature of the weather the master decided to give the vessel her second anchor. Without being aware that the small boat was alongside, the steamer's engines were suddenly put in motion, and the water from the escape pipe poured into the boat, partly filling her, and it is supposed, owing to coming in contact with the steamer's side, she upset, leaving her two occupants in the water. After being a considerable time in the water, they were rescued by a small boat coming out to the steamer, and immediately taken ashore to Freefield, and put into Mr William Halcrow's office. Sinclair was very much exhausted, while Duncan was quite unconscious. Medical aid was summoned by telephone through Messrs Hay & Coy's office, and Drs Skea and Pole, together with their assistants were soon in attendance; but not withstanding all efforts to restore animation, Duncan never recovered. Duncan leaves a widow and six of a family to mourn his loss. He was seventy two years of age, and has been a leading pilot at Lerwick for over 20 years. He was a kind hearted and obliging man, and many of our readers will learn with regret of his tragic death. The following is a narrative of the accident as given by the survivor, Sinclair – "When we got to the steamer, Mr

Jamieson went aboard, and our boat was hanging on alongside with a painter. I was sitting in the forehead keeping the boat off the steamer's side with the helm, and Duncan was sitting aft without any warning, the steamer's engines commenced to work, and a tremendous discharge of water from the escape pipe came down on us, knocking Duncan and I into the bottom of the boat. I rose as quickly as possible, and took hold of the painter, to pull the boat ahead, but had hardly got her half her own length when she sank from under us. I retained my hold of the painter, but Duncan must have had hold of the boat as he had no rope from the ship to hold onto. We had been sometime in the water before our cries attracted the attention of those on board. With the motion of the vessel, and the boat dragging alongside, I was several times nearly jerked out of the water, and almost lost my hold of the rope. When we were observed the ladder was pulled along, and I got hold of it, while one of the falls of the ship's boat was lowered down to Duncan, which he seized hold of. One of the men from the steamer come down the ladder and took hold of me, but was unable to take me out of the water. An attempt was made to lower a boat, but it was found that we were immediately below, and it had therefore to be abandoned. I was getting quite benumbed, and but for the assistance of the man who was holding up my head, I could not have held on for any time. A boat coming off the steamer, manned by James McPherson, Gideon Blance, and Arthur Conely, then came up to us and got Duncan onboard at once, after which I was taken aboard, and the boat was pulled ashore to Freefield as quickly as possible. After putting Duncan ashore, two of the men – Blance and Conely – assisted me out of the boat, and afterwards helped me home." Sinclair, who as may be inferred from this narrative, was very much exhausted, is now recovering.

James Duncan was a native of Cunningsburgh, and on Thursday his remains were conveyed to that parish, where they were interred.

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STEAMER ASHORE IN LERWICK HARBOUR

On Monday the large steamer Merjulio of Leith (981 tons registered) Bailie master, from Bergen to Burntisland in ballast, put into Lerwick harbour for the purpose of coaling. The vessel anchored on her arrival about the middle of the harbour, but shortly afterwards she got underweigh to proceed round to the coal-hulk off Garthspool. The wind was blowing strong from the south-west at the time and when the anchors were lifted, the vessel's head swung round to the south, and she began to drift broadside on to the Bressay shore, the wind having great power on her, as she was very high in the water. She took the ground near the pier of Maryfield, on a rock known as "The Skate". Kedge-anchors were got out, and attempts made to get the vessel off, but without success. The flood-tide was almost at its height when the steamer went ashore, and it was therefore thought necessary to get the assistance of the s.s. Earl of Zetland to tow her off. The Earl accordingly commenced operations, and in less than two hours she succeeded in taking the Merjulio into deep water. The vessel had sustained no damage, and at once proceeded to Garthspool to coal. The agreement for the towing operations was £60 if unsuccessful, and £200 if successful, the latter sum thus being gained. After coaling, the Merjulio yesterday proceeded to Leith, in order to be surveyed.

FATAL BOAT ACCIDENT

A melancholy accident occurred at Lerwick on Monday, whereby James Duncan, a well-known pilot, lost his life by drowning. The accident occurred in the afternoon, shortly after the successful towing off the steamer Merjulio, the stranding of which is reported in another paragraph. Duncan had been engaged at the vessel all day, helping the crew to put out kedges, &c., and when the steamer was taken off, he proceeded to the Docks in his boat, another boatman, Henry Sinclair, being along with him. They had taken a gentleman from the Earl of Zetland to the Merjulio, and were lying alongside the latter vessel when she was steaming ahead to let go her second anchor. At this time Sinclair observed that the boat was lying directly below the exhaust pipe of the condenser, and sprang into the forehead to haul the boat forward. Before he could do so, however, the boat was filled with water, and almost immediately afterwards sank, both men being thrown into the sea. Sinclair got hold of a rope attached to the steamer, and managed to hold on with the assistance of one of the crew, who descended the ladder, until a boat arrived on the scene, when he was rescued in a very exhausted state. During this time Duncan had apparently been holding on by a rope, but had been forced to let go, and when brought to the surface, life was found to be quite extinct. He was speedily taken ashore, and Drs Pole and Skae and assistants, were on the spot as soon as possible, but although the usual means for restoring animation were adopted, and kept up for a considerable time, these efforts proved without success. Duncan was an old man 74 years of age, and for the last 20 or 30 years has been one of the principal pilots at Lerwick. He leaves a widow and 4 of a family, 2 of whom are grown up. Sinclair was for sometime in a precarious state, but has now happily recovered from the effects of the accident.