

The Sinking of the Neptune

1st October 1831

MELANCHOLY SHIPWRECK

On Friday last, a most melancholy and distressing shipwreck happened in the river Lune, about two miles below Sunderland, which, we are extremely sorry to add, was attended with the loss of all the crew. From what we have been able to learn, we believe the following particulars will be found correct:-

A smack, called the Neptune, of Liverpool, laden with eighty-seven tons and a half of wheat, from Dundalk, in Ireland, consigned to **Mr Walmsley** and **Mr Whiteside**, of this town, arrived at the buoys on Friday afternoon, and it appeared that she was in distress when she entered the river. The Jack (a signal for a pilot) was flying, and although the pilots at Sunderland saw it, none went out to her, considering it was too late for the tide. The vessel struck on a sand bank, near the third buoy from the sea, and the wind blowing strong from the S. W. she was, when the tide again made, beat up the river into Sunderland Hole, and upset. It is supposed that all the crew were washed off the deck and drowned, as the boat was hanging ready to be lowered. She is now lying between Sunderland and Glasson, bilged, and on her beam ends. It is conjectured that there were on board at the time of the accident, the Captain, whose name is **John Wilkinson**, his wife, and two daughters, a little boy (probably his son) and three seamen. A silk gown and veil, and apparel for two girls and a boy, were found in the cabin, besides other clothes, which load to the above conjecture. Neither Mr Whiteside nor Mr Walmsley were insured at all, so that the loss is no way covered. From the log-book it appears that **Archibald Gilles** was master of her in May, and the boat had his name on the stern. Who are the owners of this ill-fated vessel, is not yet known, but there is a probability that she belonged to the captain. His body was found on Saturday afternoon, on the sands between Sunderland and Glasson, and that of one of his daughters, on Sunday, at Aldcliffe, and have both been interred at Cockerham. One of the crew, supposed to be the mate, a tall stout man, apparently about twenty years of age, with a very small foot, was picked up on Tuesday, near Sunderland. He was very much bruised, and his thigh nearly twisted off. We have not heard of any other having yet been picked up. The captain, it appears, was a stranger to the channel, and unhappily had not proper assistance. It should seem that some regulations are wanting to insure the prompt and active attendance of pilots, in a channel, by no means an open one, and very intricate to strangers.

By a letter received yesterday from Dundalk, it appears there were eight persons on board the Neptune, all of whom were lost, viz. the Captain and three men, the Captain's wife, two daughters, and a son; the oldest daughter about 18 or 19 years old; the younger about 15 or 16; and the boy about 12 to 14. She sailed from Dundalk on the 18th ult and the crew are supposed to have belonged to Maryport or Workington.

INQUEST ON THE BODIES

On Saturday last, an inquest was held at Glasson before **J. Gardner** Esq. Coroner, on the body of a person, supposed to be the Captain of the above vessel.

On the following day an inquest was held at Stodday

before the same Coroner, on the body of a woman who, it is supposed, was lost in the same vessel. From the evidence of **William Jepson**, it appeared that he passed the vessel about 12 miles outside the port about half-past four on Friday morning; she then sailed badly and deep and signals were flying for a pilot, but none went near her.

Another inquest was held, on Tuesday last, at Sunderland, on a body, supposed to be the mate. He had a watch, much crushed, and on the paper, "Walker, clock and watchmaker, Maryport." Verdict in each case, "Found drowned."

15th October 1831

To the Editor of the Lancaster Gazette:-

Sir,

Will you have the kindness to give the following letter a place in your Gazette. The report given in the Preston Chronicle, which I am contradicting, has spread very extensively, and has been copied into more than one London newspaper.

I am, Sir, yours,

William Mason, Vicarage, Cockerham, Oct. 12, 1831

To the Editor of the Preston Chronicle.

Sir, I doubt not that you will do me the justice to correct, in your next paper, by the insertion of this letter, an incorrect statement relative to the interment of one of the sufferers, in the late distressing shipwreck, near Lancaster. The paragraph to which I allude is as follows, in your Chronicle of October 1st., "It is our painful duty to add the following particulars: The bodies of the Captain and his wife were thrown on shore, in the parish of Cockerham, and were interred in the church-yard of that place. The body of one of the daughters was cast up a few miles from the same spot, but in the parish of Lancaster. It was, however, more convenient to remove it to Cockerham, where the parents were buried; but when this was done, the parson would not permit the interment without being paid double funeral dues. The parish officers would not grant this disgraceful demand, and the body was about to be conveyed to Lancaster, when one of the owners of the cargo, hearing of the circumstance, liberally paid the additional sum required, and this prevented the unnatural separation of the remains of the unfortunate parents and child.

Sir: *It is not true* that the parson would not permit the interment without being paid double funeral dues.

It is not true that any claim for dues was made before the funeral.

It is not true that when after the funeral, the fee due to the worthy Vicar was required, the parish officers made any the slightest objections or demur.

I may also add, to show how incorrect your informant has been, that the body of the wife was *not* brought to Cockerham for interment; but only the bodies of the Captain and one of his daughters.

William Mason, Curate of Cockerham.

Vicarage, Cockerham, Oct. 12, 1831.