

As we all know Fishing is a very dangerous profession, more so in the 19th century. This is just one account taken from the Dartmouth Chronicle in January of 1881.

'The rumour of last week, as to the probable loss of the fishing ketch 'Sly Boots' with her crew, numbering 5 in all, is now but too apparent, and all hopes of any intelligence being received of her or her crew are totally abandoned, both by the relatives and townsfolk generally. The affair cast a gloom throughout the town, as the whole of the crew belong here. The names are Richard Barnes, aged 34 Master and owner; (having only recently purchased her) he leaves a widow and three children. Daniel Ward, Mate, aged 30 leaves a wife and four small children-this unfortunate man came home from Ramsgate only three months ago. An apprentice named Samuel Parnell, a native of Torquay. Harry Howe, a son of the wife of the Master by her first husband. George Cle, an apprentice on trial, a native of Brixham. The Sad occurrence has been painfully felt throughout the town, as many hundreds of families are connected with the fishing trade and liable to the same bereavement. The 'Sly Boots' was insured in the Brixham Fishing Smack Insurance Society for £250.'

A rather spooky follow up to this was also reported;

On the same night as the 'Sly Boots' was lost Mrs Barnes the wife of the owner, dreamed that she was standing on a rock, and saw a steamer run into the boat, and that she screamed to her husband, "Richard save the boy" meaning her son Harry Howe. Another mysterious incident is also mentioned. At 6 o'clock in the morning, a few hours after the dream, Osman Barnes, a boy of 7 years came into his mother's bedroom, and asked for his father, for as he told his mother, he knew he was home, for he distinctly heard him come up the steps with his sea boots on, and kick the door.....and after he came in the clock struck 3. The singular coincidence of this incident with her own dream, which was so startling in its apparent reality, that she could not rid herself of the thought that some accident had befallen her husband and son, so alarmed the poor woman, that immediately after she got up she told the circumstances to a neighbour, who tried to reassure her by treating the matter as mere fancy. As the narration of the incident took place in the morning, no intelligence of the disaster was bought until night, and the boat was not overdue, as she was not expected home, there seems no natural explanation of the mystery.

The week ending the 28th of January 1881 an inquest took place at the Sutton Harbour Inn, North Quay, Plymouth, into the death of Daniel Ward, a fisherman, of Brixham. This is the account that was reported;

Louise May Ann Ward, wife of the deceased, stated that he was a fisherman of the trawler Sly Boots, which left Brixham harbour on 3rd January last, and had not been heard of since. The deceased was 30 years of age, and the body which she had seen at the mortuary was that of her husband. William Moxey, captain of the trawler Sparkling Wave, stated that he had known the deceased for some time, and had sailed with him. On 3rd January the steamship Compton put into Dartmouth to coal, and the captain reported having been in collision with a trawler twenty miles north-east of the Start, which had sunk, and he thought all hands were lost. The captain of the steamer further stated that he could not see anything but heard some screaming, and he afterwards lowered a boat, which was pulled about the spot but nothing could be found. After reporting this at Dartmouth the steamer proceeded on her voyage. Witness was in his ketch on Tuesday morning about 15 miles N.N.E. of the Eddystone, and as they were hauling in the trawl he saw the legs of a human body. He called to some of his crew and they got into the trawl and lifted the body into the boat. He examined the clothing, and on looking at the stockings he found the initial "D.W" marked. He was quite positive it was the body of Daniel Ward, because having sailed with him he knew his build and height. After examining the body he had it wrapped in sail, and came back to Plymouth and handed the body over to Inspector Damarell. The Coroner said there could be no doubt that the body found was that of Daniel Ward, who left Brixham in the Sly Boots but whether she was the trawler which the steamer Compton ran into they had no evidence to show, and he thought their safest plan would be to return an open verdict of found drowned. The Jury after a short consultation returned a verdict as directed.

Sometimes good things can happen due to bad events occurring, or maybe this is just ironic.

Some six weeks after the sinking of the Sly Boots a report was published it goes as follows;

Lights for Fishing Vessels

The Committee appointed by the Admiralty, the Board of Trade, and the Trinity House, to consider the Regulations for preventing Collisions at Sea, upon the recommendations contained in Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Lights for fishing vessels, have

agreed to the following recommendations:-

- 1) That all fishing vessels, when not actually fishing and attached to their nets, trawls or lines should be required to carry and show the same lights as other vessels under similar circumstances.
- 2) That a drift net fishing vessels, when fishing and attached to her nets should carry 2 white lights to show not less than 3 miles, to be visible all round, the horizon, to be 6 feet in vertical height one above the other, but not necessarily one immediately over the other.
- 3) That a trawling vessel when at work should carry 2 lights both to show 2 miles all around the horizon- the red light to be at the mast head forward of and, at least, 6 feet in vertical height above the white light.
- 4) That a trawling vessel with her gear fast shall show the same light as a vessel at anchor.
- 5) That a decked fishing vessel not exceeding 20 tons shall carry the same lights as open fishing and other boats.

It would be nice to think that legislation was brought in because of the loss of the Sly Boots but January of 1881 saw some of the worst conditions of hurricane force storms and the loss of many boats due to collisions.

Martin Smith