

## **CORNISH GUARDIAN ARTICLE – *Harry Oaten's Perilous Adventure***

*Undated, 1950s?*

### **“THOUGHT ALL WAS LOST”**

#### **PORT ISAAC FISHERMAN'S PERILOUS ADVENTURE**

##### **Dramatic Cliff Climb On Leaving Disabled Boat**

To spend a night in a storm at sea, alone, and in a disabled boat, and at dawn to be faced with a cliff climb of something like 200 feet, was recently the alarming experience of a middle-aged Port Isaac fisherman.

Mr. Harry Oaten has had a lifetime's association with the sea-and ships. He served in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in the last war, and did patrol duty under Admiralty control earlier in the present conflict'. He has also had long spells of sea fishing with some perilous adventures. But he confesses that this recent experience eclipses them all. "It is by no means the first time I have had a fortunate escape" he told a "Guardian" representative. "I have I had the lifeboat out to search for me twice previously, but this is the narrowest thing I have had in my life. It was wonderful how I got ashore without being broken up."

Mr. Oaten related unemotionally, as though he had been a detached spectator rather than the sole participant, the story of the adventure in which for many hours his life had been in constant jeopardy. Only when towards the end of his thrilling narrative he was recalling the warm hospitality extended to him when, almost exhausted after his never-to-be-forgotten cliff climb, he arrived at a farmhouse, did he give indication of his feelings. Here is his stirring story just as he told it as we sat together on Tuesday afternoon on a seat overlooking Port Isaac's rugged harbour.

### **“AT MERCY OF THE SEA”**

"On Monday week I went out fishing about 8am in the motor boat Rosalie. During the day I caught about two cwts of fish, including 25-30 conger. I commenced to return, but the motor went wrong. I got underway and was coming towards Port Isaac, but the weather changed and I altered my course to the westward. Then I saw I was blowing to sea, and when darkness came I lowered my sail and rode at anchor. One of the other fishing boats came out to look for me. I could see her, but she could not see me. I only had a little flashlight and my matches were by this time wet, so I had no means of attracting her attention. "After a time I said to myself 'I am here for the night.' Then I found my anchor was gone. I tried to get under weigh again, but, with only one hand, by the time I got back to secure the sail it had been blown to pieces. I was therefore at the mercy of the sea and wind and I drifted all night. It was very dark and impossible to see anything which would have enabled me to get my bearings. I saw the searchlight of what I now know to be the Padstow lifeboat: which put out to look for me, but I thought at the time the light came from something else. Anyone would almost have given up hope in the circumstances.

### **‘DRIFTED ALL NIGHT’**

"I drifted all night, but when daylight broke I saw some land which I thought was Tintagel Head, but I now know it was Carnbeak. I tried to make for Boscastle, but as I got in I saw there was no chance of doing so, and said to myself, 'The only chance I've got now is to go into this little cove.' As I was going in the boat shipped a big sea, and I thought it time to make a move, so I jumped overboard and swam ashore. I took off my guernsey and put it on one of the paddles and waved it to attract attention. I also put a paddle to stick up in the cliff. People would know that in that position it was a signal and had not just been washed up by the sea, but I did not see anyone. Some say there was a lookout man on duty at the top of the cliff, but if there was I am surprised he did not see me, as I could see the hut from the beach.

"I looked at the cliff, but could not see any way to get to the top. Then a little distance away I saw a footpath near the top of the cliff, but I had to wait about an hour and a half before I could reach a spot below it. This cove (Pentargon) is one of the most dangerous on the Cornish coast, and anyone who knows it would say that under such conditions my chances of getting in there had been a thousand to one.

### **USED ELBOWS TO CLIMB CLIFF**

"I commenced to climb the cliff in my stockinged feet, and had to use my elbows as my hands were numbed with cold. The first 20 feet was very difficult, but the remainder was much easier. When I got to the top of the pathway, I saw a farmhouse a field or so away. This I now know to be Tresuck Farm, Boscastle, and the residence of Mr C.H. Tippett and Miss Tippett. By the time I reached it I was pretty groggy and could not have gone much farther. Miss Tippett saw me coming, and I was soon indoors in front of a good fire. Hot food and clothes were brought to me, and I could not have been treated better anywhere. Arrangements were made for a car to take me back to Port Isaac, and by the time it arrived I was feeling much better. Since I arrived home, however, I have discovered I sprained a foot and have had to spend a week indoors, although at the time I was not aware of the injury.

"There were several occasions during those trying hours when I thought all was lost and I think myself very lucky to be alive. It was one chance in a thousand. I don't know how I got out of it. If I was paid £ 1,000 to say how I did it I could not do so. The feet of Mr. Oaten's socks were completely worn away by his exacting climb and his arms were cut. On Tuesday he was only commencing to get the normal use of his hands.

The Rosalie, which was later found smashed to pieces at Pentargon, about a mile above Boscastle, was owned by Messrs. A. and J. Provis, and when Mr. Oaten did not return in the evening, they went in search for him in a larger boat, Messrs. J. Glover, T. Tabb, and R. Oaten courageously volunteering to accompany them. They were out from 7.30 p.m. until 10 o'clock, but at 8.30 drew in under the cliffs at Port Isaac and asked people on shore to get into communication with the Padstow lifeboat authorities