


# The Bencoolen Bell

At the same time as the *Bencoolen* was wrecked, Thomas Hills, a member of the Roscarrock Hill Methodist Society, was in Bude on his coasting smack *Telegraph*. He paid thirty shillings for the Bencoolen bell and brought it down the coast to Port Isaac and to its new home in the Chapel. Apart from during the war years, the bell was rung every Sunday up until the Chapel closed, calling the congregation to worship.



The *Telegraph* that brought the bell back to Port Isaac



## PORT ISAAC

### THE METHODIST CHAPEL

### ROSCARROCK HILL

The wreck of the *Bencoolen* on 21st. October, 1862, was so calamitous that for many years after, other happenings in the district were dated from it.

The disaster will be more fully understood if the following details are given.

The Harbour at Bude is protected by a breakwater which runs due north from under the high southern cliff called Compass Point. Around the north end of this breakwater runs the little river flowing out to the sea, and here too, is the narrow channel by which the harbour is entered at certain states of the tide, wind and weather permitting. A wide stretch of sand lies between this channel at the end of the breakwater, and the cliff which runs out to the north of Bude called Summerleaze.

The *Bencoolen* was first sighted about the middle of the day, and soon the earliest arrivals on the cliff could see her, a long black hull deep in the water.

She sent no signals, no sails were set, her masts were gone. There had been some days of stormy weather, and the sea was high with the incoming tide.

A star barrel was lighted on Summerleaze cliff so as to guide the vessel on to the sands, her only chance, and presently a small sail was seen on the stump of her foremast, and she appeared to be heading straight for the entrance of the harbour.

By this time the cliffs were crowded with people, and they watched with increasing anxiety the doomed vessel as she came drifting in, borne by the wind and the tide.

Just before three o'clock the ship came broadside on, exactly at the entrance of the Haven, where she struck on the sands, and instantly was swept by seas.

Both the rocket apparatus and the lifeboat had been brought near to the end of the breakwater, but the latter was useless, so the rocket apparatus was placed in position.

The first rocket fell short. The second rocket fell on board and was at once swept back into the sea. The third rocket took the line well over the stern of the ship, and a man started to secure it. He was swept overboard by huge seas, which at the same time rushed up the breakwater and over the apparatus rendering it useless, and all those on the shore could then do, was to watch the scene in utter helplessness.

The great seas rolled in, covered the wreckage, and just before four o'clock the ship parted in the middle. From survivors the rest of the story was obtained.

The Captain had been drinking for days previous to the day of the wreck. On that day at noon, he retired to his cabin, and refusing to leave it, was drowned there.

The first mate had a broken leg. He had then been lashed to the raft. Two men jumped into the sea, one was drowned, and the other, beaten and battered, was washed ashore and saved. The rest of the crew, some 25 men, either lashed to the raft or clinging to it, waited until an enormous wave lifted the raft clear of the vessel into the raging sea.

Wave after wave rushed over the raft, every one of which claimed some victims. Of these three were washed ashore and saved. At last, incredibly, the raft came in under the steep Summerleaze cliff.

Rope was lowered, and by this means all who were left on the raft, 6 dead and 2 living, were drawn to the cliff top. Of the crew of 35 men only 6 survived.

The BELL of the *Bencoolen* was bought by Mr. Thomas Hills for 30/- and brought to Port Isaac in the smack *Telegraph*, of which he was in charge at the time, and was later placed on Roscarrock Hill Methodist Chapel.


The BELL, which has recently been refung in an oak frame and the roof lined with copper is rung for all services.

**BUDE** October, 22, 1862—THE SHIP *BENCOLEN* MASTER CHAMBERS, OF AND FROTH OVERWHELMED, FOR BOMBAY, IN ENTERING THE HARBOR, SHEET AND BEING A TOTAL WRECK; ONLY 6 OF THE CREW, OUT OF 27, SAVED.

**STRATTON** October, 22, 1862—AS MUCH OF THE CARGO AS POSSIBLE HAS BEEN SAVED TO-BAY FROM THE *BENCOLEN* WRECKED AT BUDE, BUT THE VESSEL HAVING PARTED FROM TOP TO BOTTOM, THE WHOLE CARGO IS CRUSHED, AND THE HEAVY BOXES ON THE SANDS. THE VESSEL, FROM LIVERPOOL TO BOMBAY, ENCOUNTERED BAD WEATHER FROM THE TIME OF HER SAILING ON THE 15<sup>TH</sup>, AND ON THE 19<sup>TH</sup> LOST HER MASTS OVERBOARD, AND BECAME UNMANNAGEABLE, 6 NOT 3 OF HER CREW WERE SAVED.

**LIVERPOOL** December, 3, 1862—THE BOTTOM OF THE *BENCOLEN* MASTER CHAMBERS, HENCE TO BOMBAY, WHICH WAS WHEELED OFF BUDE ON OCTOBER, 22, HAS BEEN WASHED UP IN THAT HARBOR AND THE REMAINING PORTION OF THE CARGO GOT OUT.

Reference to this wreck is made in the book "The Vicar of Morwenstow" by S. Baring-Gould, M.A., (METHUEN & CO., 1900).



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