

Wrecks

An extract from the late Robin Penna's A Short Guide to Port Isaac, revised version that was never completed and remains unpublished

One of the earliest wrecks recorded happened near Port Quin, during the summer of 1752, when a fleet of ships, becalmed off Trevoise Head, was hit by a sudden storm and fifteen of them were wrecked. In thick mist, one schooner drove into the bay behind Kellan Head only to crash on the rocks at Fox Hole. The only survivor was a man who had been sent to the top of the foremast to look out for land. He was sent flying by the impact and had the extraordinary good fortune to land on the grass at the top of the cliff, which happens not to be particularly high at this point. He was knocked out by the impact and when he came to later the ship he had been on and all of his companions had disappeared. He ran up to Roscarrock Farm to raise the alarm but no other survivors were ever found.

In the past, ships have often tried to run for safety in Port Isaac harbour in storm conditions but the entrance is badly exposed to north westerly gales and many of them have been wrecked, although others managed to beach on the sand. Witness the harbour during a ground sea, at half to full tide, with an on-shore gale, and see an incredible sight. The whole of the water surges and rises in 20 foot waves which come crashing down, washing right over the Platt, along Middle Street, up the bottom of Church Hill, up Roscarrock Hill, and down Fore Street from the Pentus. Water goes over the roof of the fish cellars and pours out of the doors. The Golden Lion is deluged and large waves even carry over the Old School building and up on to the top of Lobber.

Charlie Mitchell of Mount Pleasant, died in 1948, aged 88. He was a member of the crew of the fishing smack *Kindly Light* which sailed on the night of 1st December 1903. The skipper was William Callaway, and the other crew members were John and Walter Mitchell, and Jack Oaten. They were drifting sternway as it is called, shooting the nets over the bows because this is easier than shooting them over the stern when the head of the boat is to the wind. They had tried unsuccessfully a few times when they suddenly found a harvest of fish about half a mile off Varley Head. They began to fill the boat with them, but, before they had time to realise, it became overfilled, water came in over the stern, and it was swamped. In no time at all their boat sank beneath them and the five men found themselves splashing around in the water. They could all swim except Charlie so they lashed him to some oars and a barrel and left him to fend for himself while they struck out for the shore. Some time later another boat, the *Daring*, returning to harbour later, fished Charlie out of the water. The body of Callaway was later found on the rocks but no trace was ever seen of the other three men.

The fishermen are right - there is no point in being able to swim, as there is very little chance of survival and it would only prolong the agony.