

THE STORY OF JANE
WHYTE

Jane Whyte

Jane Whyte lived in a croft on this shore more than 100 years ago. Only a few stones of her house remain. On the site of her home is a memorial to show when she was born and when she died. Jane Whyte's great grandson, Mr Robert Fraser, designed the memorial. What most people remember about Jane Whyte is what she did.

It all happened one stormy night in 1884. That night the William Hope, a steamer from Dundee was in the North Sea. The engine failed near New Aberdour beach and the boat ended up on the rocks. Jane saw the men clinging on to the masts and shouting. Then a man threw a rope and she plunged in to the swirling water. She wound the rope around her body and signalled for the men to come and soon one stood beside her followed by another. Then they came one by one until all 15 stood on the shore.

Jane was given many awards from different organisations for bravery, and the local and national press told the story.

If you cross the bridge at the north end of the car park you will find the memorial a short distance along on the left.



This is
a picture of
Jane Whyte

A tale of heroism

THE following article details the heroics of New Aberdour woman, Jane Whyte, who risked her own life to save the lives of two fishermen. The article is taken from the book "A Tourist Guide to Aberdour Shore", which was written by local woman, Mrs Mary Michie.

GR^{EAT} tales are told of those rescued at sea and one recalls Grace Darling of Bamburgh fame. On a stormy night of September 1838 she rowed in a small boat with her father, who was the Longstone Lighthouse keeper, to rescue nine survivors of the Forfarshire ship which was wrecked on the Farne Islands rocks a mile away. Several journeys had to be made until all the men were brought safely ashore. A brave lass indeed, yet Aberdour can also claim a lass equal to Grace in heroism and bravery.

On Bankhead and Waulkmill land in a small field beside the sea one can see some foundation stones marking the outline of some buildings, all the now remains of a once prosperous woollen mill. But it ceased as a working mill a long time ago and at the time of which we write the dwelling house was used as a cotter house for the farm of Bankhead. The foreman at the farm, a Mr James Whyte, occupied the house with his wife Jane and a family of nine, five boys and four girls.

Our tale of heroism begins as night descended and a storm began to brew.

James and his family were accustomed to the noise of the sea and were not unduly disturbed. The evening passed in quiet harmony as the bairns did a little school homework and played together, Jane was busy with some mending and James slept.

morning the wind was howling and the sea boiled in wild abandon and Jane tossed and turned in an uneasy sleep.

Away in the North Sea, the steamer William Hope from Dundee was homeward bound. A stiff northerly gale was blowing but the skipper, Captain Golden, and his crew were quite happy knowing their boat was sturdy and capable of weathering the storm. In the words of one of the crew they laughed and thought light of the gale for no matter how angry the weather they never had known the vessel to fail. But on the night of 27th October 1884 their luck gave out.

When just off Troup Head their engine failed. They put up the sails but it helped little for still, relentlessly, she was driven onward towards the cruel, jagged rocks that lay waiting in Aberdour Bay. As a last resort the skipper ordered the anchor to be lowered and for a short time their drifting was checked but nothing could withstand the strength of the gigantic waves that struck with such force and with despair, the crew soon heard the cable snap. Nothing could now save the William Hope.

Up at the farm, work began at six o'clock and in a way, Jane was glad to get up and get her husband away. The storm had somehow abated but still the strong wind was blowing. For a while Jane sat with her knitting, but once daylight came in, her unease and restless mood increased. She could still hear the sea and knew it was still in



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door of the house open and let him out. She made her way round the gable end of the house past where their small boat lay. As they were now into the season of high tides, they had last week, for safety reasons, pulled the boat up from the shore. They used it quite a lot for fishing to supplement their food supply.

When she left the shelter of the house the wind almost swept her off her feet, but pushing into the wind she crossed the small field, the dog beside her, and made for a side gate that would gain her access to the shore. Everything was covered with a frothy white scum off the sea water. Jock seemed excited and whimpered now and again but she blamed the storm for his unease and gave him a pat and a word of comfort.

With an effort, she gained the

round it knowing full well she dare not unwind the rope. Jock was in the water too and kept licking her face, but she was able to give a signal for the men to come and soon one of them stood beside her followed by another. Then all three holding on, one by one they came until all 15 stood upon the shore.

They shook her hand, they hugged her and they kissed her; this brave stranger, this lovely woman who had wrought a miracle and saved all their lives.

Wet and wary, they were glad to turn their backs to the cruel sea and followed Jane to her home. Part of the mill was now used by the Whytes as a wash house and with some help Jane soon had a fire going there and also in the kitchen. For some of them she found clothes of her husband's and others wrapped themselves in blankets. Then cups of hot tea with scones and rhubarb jam! Jane had done a baking the day before but her weekly supply was soon devoured. To these men, I'm sure, those scones and jam tasted like nectar from heaven.

Next day, with the help from the neighbours and the Rev. Mr Birnie, the men were able to leave, travelling by foot to Fraserburgh railway station where they got a train for Dundee and home, but that was not the end of the story.

When the seamen returned to Dundee they did not forget the courageous woman who had risked her life for theirs. They sent her back presents, they wrote her poetry and they talked and sang her praises to all who would listen. The owners of the

William Hope also sent her a handsome present. The local and national press all took up the story and soon the Lifeboat Institute, the Ship-wrecked Mariners' Society and the Board of Trade decided to do something to honour the famous lady.

Later that month, Jane and her husband travelled to Fraserburgh and in the town hall met members of the Lifeboat Institution who were gathered along with members of the public to honour her and present her with a silver medal, and address in vellum and £10 in money.

One one side of the medal was a portrait of Queen Victoria and on the reverse three of a lifeboat crew rendering assistance to a ship-wrecked sailor with the words "Let not the deep swallow me up".

Later the Board of Trade made another presentation. This time she travelled by train from Fraserburgh to Aberdeen and there in the harbour, aboard a boat, she was given a bronze medal and another £10 in money by the Duke of Northumberland an officer in the Admiralty.

* On Tuesday, October 28th, 1986, 102 years to the very day of her brave deed, a memorial to Jane Whyte was unveiled and dedicated to her memory in a moving ceremony at Aberdour shore.

The Jane Whyte Memorial was built into a constructed section of the cottar house where she lived in Waulkmill. The memorial was designed by a great-grandson of Mrs Whyte's, Mr Robert Fraser, an architect from Brechin.

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James and his family were accustomed to the noise of the sea and were not unduly disturbed. The evening passed in quiet harmony as the bairns did a little school homework and played together, Jane was busy with some mending and James slept.

The children were put early to bed and as is the way with children, their slumber was deep and they were oblivious to any sound. James, too, was sound asleep but Jane felt on edge and as the night wore on the storm gathered in strength and ere the

morning the wind was howling and the sea boiled in wild abandon and Jane tossed and turned in an uneasy sleep.

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Putting her knitting aside, pulling on her big boots, and taking up a shawl which she wound round her head and shoulders, she went outside. She heard Jock the collie whimpering, and with some effort was able to get the



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door of the house open and let him out. She made her way round the gable end of the house past where their small boat lay. As they were now into the season of high tides, they had last week, for safety reasons, pulled the boat up from the shore. They used it quite a lot for fishing to supplement their food supply.

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With an effort, she gained the beach to be confronted by a huge wave that broke at her feet drenching her through, but as it ebbed her amazement was great when she saw the boat lying only a few yards away and half submerged in a raging sea of boiling and hissing surf.

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Plaque to heroine ready to be unveiled

A MEMORIAL to New Aberdour heroine Jane Whyte is to be unveiled on October 28 — the 102nd anniversary of a dramatic rescue of 15 crewmen from a steamer grounded in Aberdour Bay.

A committee raised more than £700 to commission a memorial plaque designed by a great-grandson of Jane, Mr Robert Fraser, an architect from Brechin.

The plaque is to be mounted on a cairn at the ruins of Waulkmill where the Whyte family stayed.

Plans are in motion to use Manpower Services Commission workers to build a bridge over a ford near the cairn for easy access.

Donations to the memorial fund included one from ITN newscaster Sandy Gall, whose grandparents lived at New Aberdour at the time of the rescue, which involved the crew of the Dundee steamship William Hope.

Additional money will come from the sale of a



booklet, "A Tourist Guide to Aberdour Shore", written by Mrs Mary Michie, Bankhead.

It includes a graphic account of the dramatic rescue by Jane, who was then aged 40, on the stormy morning of October 28, 1884.

"With an effort, she gained the beach, to confront by a huge wave that broke at her feet drenching her through, but as it ebbed her amazement was great when she saw the boat lying only a few yards away and half-submerged in a raging sea of boiling and hissing surf. She saw several men clinging to the mast and their voices shouting.

STUMBLER

"Helplessly, she stood not knowing what to do for she knew that ere she was able to get help the men would be swept to their death. If only they could try to swim! She waved to them, trying to convey this message but they just kept clinging onto the vessel. Then she saw a man throw a rope, thinking she might catch it and this was wishful thinking.

"She hesitated a moment but forgot the danger as she plunged

into the swirling surf. Ignoring the cold and fighting for breath, she somehow found herself close to the boat and when the man again threw the rope she caught it.

"The only way she could hold it was to wind it round her body, but how she did this with the waves battering her she never knew. Turning, she lashed out and stumbled towards the shore. This time it was easier as she was carried with the waves, and when she stumbled on the block where their boat had been tied up, she leaned and half-twisted her body round it, knowing full well she dare not unwind the rope.

"Jock (her dog) was in the water too and kept licking her face, but she was able to give a signal for the men to come and soon one of them stood beside her followed by another. Then all three holding on, one by one they came until all 15 stood upon the shore.

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