



The Lifeboat 'MONA' Disaster

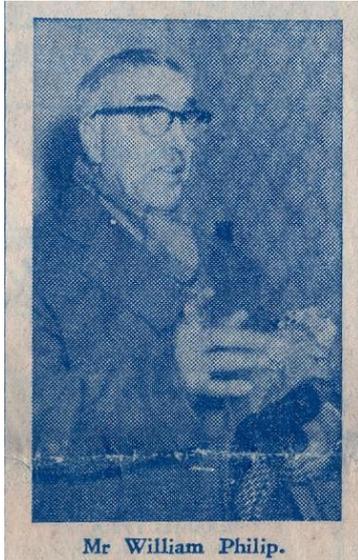
8th December 1959



The Disaster Scene

STORIES FROM THE LOCAL PAPERS OF 1959

First on the Scene



Mr William Philip.

Mr William C. Philip, a barman of the Carnoustie Station Hotel, was the first person to reach the scene of the disaster.

He usually went for a walk first thing every morning and spotted in the distance bobbing in the water. At first he thought it was a ship's small boat that had come in with the storm. When he reached the boat he shouted if there was anyone there, but with no response. He stayed around for a while and when he started to walk back he saw a young man's body floating in the surf. Mr Philip tried to pull him in, but the body was too heavy. Just then Mr John Hamilton came along the beach and together they pulled the body up onto the sands.

Mr Philip belongs to Hillside and was formerly on the staff of the Park Hotel, Montrose.

Coastguards Dash

Mr Hamilton, 17 Lingard Street, Carnoustie, was a Corporation employee, who was also a relief coastguard. When the rocket went off he left his municipal job and hurried to the coastguard station. The others having already left for the Gaa Sands.

By walking and cycling in turn along the wet sand, he arrived before the others who had had to take the road way round in their vehicle.

Thus Mr Hamilton took part in both the beginning and the end of the Mona's disastrous trip.

He had been on coastguard duty from 2 am to 8 am that morning (8th) and he had received the message at 02:45 am from the coastguard at Fifeness that the North Carr Lightship had broken adrift..

Mr Hamilton had called senior Coastguard David Mearns and the message was relayed to Broughty Ferry to call out the Lifeboat.





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Shortly after 9 am, when Mr Hamilton had returned to his job as a Burgh Labourer in Carnoustie he heard the maroon being fired from Westhaven.

A message on the pad at the Coastguard station told him the Mona had been driven ashore at Buddon. The team of coastguard officers led by Senior Coastguard officer David Mearns, of Westhaven, had also spotted the shape of the boat on the beach a mile west of his station. He called out his men and they headed for the spot.

On his way there, Mr Hamilton met Mr Philip who told him that a body was in the water beside the Lifeboat. Together they brought the body ashore. That turned out to be the youngest member of the Mona's crew, John T. Grieve.



When the live-saving apparatus crew with breeches buoy equipment arrived, Mr Hamilton was sent to telephone the police.

The rescuers found the bodies of five of the lifeboat crew in the cockpit of the Mona.

The police walking to the scene found the body of the seventh member of the crew on the beach at South Flat, about half a mile away from where the Mona had gone aground.

The seven bodies were taken to the police mortuary at Carnoustie. The eighth (the body of George Watson) remained missing.

Colin Gibson among the First there

One of the first on the scene was Mr Colin Gibson, the well known naturalist, who writes for 'The Courier'.

Mr Gibson walked from Monifieth to the Gaa Sands by the beach, a trudge of some 3½ miles, against the gale.

"Towards the mouth of the Elliot Water, giant breakers came thundering inshore, sweeping over the level sands in white lacy patterns of foam.

From there I could see the cliffs beyond Arbroath rising above the sea haze, and waves leaping at the harbour mouth where the whole of a lifeboat crew, except one were lost to the fury of a storm – a tragedy still fresh enough in memory to give awe to our thoughts of these winter gales.



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