

# Cornish Courage - The Bravest of the Brave



## The Place - Mousehole



The village of Mousehole is pronounced "Mauzl" locally; or in Cornish *Porthynys*, is situated not far from Land's End, Cornwall.

The harbour is one of the most beautiful in the country. The harbour today (left) and in 1920 (right).



Mousehole, along with Marazion was until the 16th century one of the principal ports of Mount's Bay before its decline as a major commercial centre. Mousehole had a number of fairs and markets, including the charter for a market on Tuesdays, with a fair for three days at the festival of St Barnabas, granted to Henry de Tyes in 1292.



Mousehole, like many small communities around Mount's Bay, fell within the authority of the Manor of Alverton. All early charters, fairs etc. associated with Mousehole are associated with this manorial estate. On 23 July 1595 a Spanish naval force attacked Mount's Bay. Mousehole with Penzance, Newlyn, and Paul Parish Church, was destroyed. The only surviving building in Mousehole was the 'Keigwin



Arms' (above right), a local pub. Outside the Keigwin Arms (now a private residence) is a plaque with the wording "Squire Jenkyn Keigwin was killed here 23rd July 1595 defending this house against the Spaniards". Dolly Pentreath, who is often accorded the status of the last native speaker of the Cornish language, is often listed as coming from Mousehole. In 1938 at Mousehole a boy was born to Mr. & Mrs. Brockman, one



Nigel.

Mousehole kids in 1948 and Nigel aged 10 years on the left



This picture was taken at the Millpool in Mousehole, possibly in 1946, and was sent to us by Mrs Jean Richards, of Brook Street. The picture shows from left to right Nigel Brockman, who died when the Pentlee Lifeboat, Solomon Brown was lost in December 1981. John Richards, Sid [unclear], Lillian Dander and the late David Dennis.

## Christmas 1956

It was a crisp cool afternoon. We pulled on our football strip black shorts and white shirts, laced up our boots ready for the battle ahead. Our studs clattered noisily on the wooden floor of the changing room as we trooped past our diminutive 70 year old manager, Mr. Jukes, donned with his long brown overcoat hanging almost to his shoes and scarf slung around his neck with a flat 'at perched above his horn rimmed specs. In his calm way he said simply with a smile 'You can win. Play football!'

Our opponents were grown men. We were under eighteen year old school boys representing Penzance Minors youth team.

The St. Clare hallowed turf of the cricket cum football pitch was always well kept and the ball ran easily despite the slope to one side. The heavier opponents used their weight advantage and our curly headed centre-forward, Nigel Brockman, 'Brocky' as he was known, hit the turf on several occasions. He simply just got to his feet each time and smiled good natured while the battle raged on. At half time the game was tight. Mr. Jukes encouraged his team. 'Keep playing football and you will win!'



Left footed Vard Richards chipped the ball to rangy centre - half Tony Williams who distributed the ball along to 'Fish' Wheeler and 'Brighteyes' Brightmore followed with sharp passing movements along the clipped grass towards the goal. Brighteyes slipped the ball to inside- forward Terry Dann who with a slide rule pass between the backs to beat the offside trap. Ever alert Brocky sprinted through the gap like a terrier while gathering the ball with his left foot shifting it to the right controlling the ball to about the 'spot' then calmly slid the ball past the big lunging goalkeeper's left leaving him floundering. The ball ran along the back of the net and stopped. The opponents were stunned! Brocky picked up the ball out of the net and handed to the goalkeeper with his usual charming cherubic-like smile. After shaking hands with the opponents and towards the changing room Mr. Jukes said proudly, 'I told you can win, if you play football!'

The young eleven naked figures were hardly visible through the steaming hot showers were singing with gusto and discussing how they are going to spend Christmas. After the match we decided to celebrate Brocky's well taken goal at Jimmy Jewel's Fish and Chip shop at Newlyn Bridge (*left*). After a Harold's hearty packet of chips, batter bits and plaice washed down with a bottle of pop, some of the team walked back happily to Penzance along the green while Brocky took the bus to Mousehole where he lived.



It was probably one of the last times I saw Brocky alive. Her Majesty's forces decided to conscript many of the team to attend two year's compulsory military training unless temporarily deferred.

### Christmas 1981.

It was December nearing Christmas in Hong Kong. The office was slowing down and everyone was looking forward to the festive week ahead. The hotels and corporate large buildings around the waterfront had already switched on the extravagant festive lighting. My wife and I and children were home looking forward to spend and enjoyable but restful few days while the children were looking forward in anticipation what Father Christmas might bring.

The Mousehole community likewise were already enjoying the cheery Christmas lighting strung around the granite walled harbour.



Captain Mike Moreton had proudly taken command of a new mini bulk carrier of 1,400 tons. The Union Star (*sister ship left*) handled well in its new livery of green, pale grey and pink.

Capt. Moreton with a crew of four called into Brightlingsea, Sussex to pick up his ex-wife and her two young daughters as a special Christmas treat aboard the Union Star bound for Ireland. The Union Star made its way along the south coast. The sea was quite rough but Capt. Moreton was an experienced seaman. The ship was making its way along the Cornish coast. The Cornish coast is a dangerous and uncaring one at the best of times. The Land's End peninsula is open to the north Atlantic wind



driven waves and the weather unpredictable. It was probably not on the skipper's mind when a sister ship the 'Union Crystal' sank off the Cornish coast in 1977. The weather was deteriorating and Cornwall was experiencing the worse seas in memory.



**At 18.05 on 19 December 1981** the Union Star reported engine failure and its engines had stopped just off the solitary Wolf Rock lighthouse south east of Land's End. The vessel was being tossed around like a matchbox. It must have been terrifying for the young children in particular. A Sea King helicopter had been readied at Helston.

At **18.21** the Mousehole voluntary crew of the lifeboat Solomon Browne at Penlee Point near Mousehole were summoned. At **18.30** the Dutch salvage tug Noord Holland offered the Union Star a Lloyds salvage 'No cure - No pay' contract. Seven minutes later the Sea King was airborne heading for the stricken tanker now only about four miles from the Cornish jagged coast.

By **19.52** the helicopter was over the Union Star. The wind was gale storm force 9-10 with mountainous waves with long overhanging crests with wind driven foam blowing the ship only two miles off rugged Tater Dhu point a few more miles along the coast to Mousehole. Unfortunately the helicopter was unable to drop a winch man.



**20.12** The Mousehole crew on the lifeboat Solomon Browne was launched from Penlee Point into terrifying seas and dirty night heading towards Lamorna Cove. But not before the wise Coxswain



Trevelyan Richards informed one of the two Brockman family volunteers that only one of the Brockmans could go. Young 17 year old Neil Brockman was left ashore while his 43 year old father assistant mechanic took his position with the



other members of the lifeboat crew.

**21.20** the Solomon Browne was along side the stricken freighter. A few minutes later Coxswain Richards transmitted that “We’ve got four off”. The Dutch tug was standing off a mile away. A report was received that the Solomon Browne were going in for the four remaining stranded members on the hull of the freighter. The wind force was blowing over 100 knots with towering waves of 60 feet in the cold, stygian night.

**21.26** a helicopter pilot reported the life boat was aside the Union Star and being pounded by angry seas against the ship with the wind howling like a banshee. The helicopter was forced to return to base.

**21 .36** it was reported that the Union Star was on the rocks below Tater Dhu lighthouse.

At **22.00** there was no further transmission from the Solomon Browne. Ominous **silence!** The canny Mousehole seamen listening into the transmissions knew it was close on neigh to consider pleading for divine intervention.

Shore parties scrambled along the sopping wet black slippery coast paths struggling down to the coast where the vessel was last reported,

**23.35** the Sennen lifeboat the ‘Diana White’ was launched but found it impossible to round Land’s End due to the rough seas.



**20.12.1981** at **0047** the ‘Duke of Cornwall’ Lizard lifeboat was launched. A shore party reached the Union Star on the rocks to try and attach lines by rocket. They thought the Solomon Browne was returning to Mousehole, although overdue.



**00.56** a lifeboat electrician reported finding wreckage of the Solomon



The relief lifeboat bobbed peacefully at anchor in the harbour below with a new crew already on call. The writer's old school friend John Blewett's body was recovered by the shore at Penzance where we both went to school.



In an attempt to raise spirits the Mousehole Christmas lights were switched on again.

### **25 December 1981 Christmas Day**

The sorrow continued with a double funeral at the quaint old Uny Church at Lelant for Charles Greenhagh and his aged mother who died on hearing the sad news she lost a son.

### **31 December 1981 New Year's Eve**

The funeral of John Blewett lifeboat emergency mechanic was held at Paul Church.



At Penzance the funeral of young Sharon Brown who was a passenger on the fated Union Star was held accompanied by her father Mr. Brown and the relief lifeboat crew. Her sister Deane was never found.



A chain of 90 bonfires were lit by a descendant of Lord Nelson to start Maritime England Year 1982.

The nation and Cornishmen throughout the world were touched by the enormity of the calamity. The writer in the comfort of my Hong Kong home found it difficult to grasp how two of my young school friends manfully gave up their lives this Christmas in an attempt to rescue those who found themselves in peril from the cruel sea.

### **22 January 1982**

A Memorial Service was held at Paul Church to pay their last respects to the eight lifeboat men who unselfishly gave up their lives for others. The Service was attended by the Duke & Duchess of Kent.

Right are the remains of the Dublin registered Union Star a few weeks later as the cauldron surges hungrily claimed another Cornish coast maritime statistic. The ship's only companions now are the spectator seagulls and ravens using the updrafts.



**1982** The Chairman of the Institution, The Duke of Atholl, presented Vellums recording the bravery awards to the families of the men who died.

**1985** Following the 1981 lifeboat disaster Penzance Town Council created a Memorial Garden on land next to the boathouse at Penlee Point in memory of the lifeboat crew 'who gave their lives in service.'

**The Members of the Union Star who were lost on 19 December 1981.**

*Capt. Henry Morton; Mrs. Dawn Morton (Brown); Ms. Sharon & Deane Brown*

*Crew James Whittaker; George Sedgewick; A. A. Verrissimo; M. J. Lopez.*

**The Bravest of the Brave Manning the Solomon Browne on 18 December 1981**

*Cox William Trevelyan Richards*

*(56 years & widowed mother) (RNLI Bronze Medal for Bravery 1975 sea rescue)*

*2nd Cox James Stephen Madron (*

*Married with 2 children) (RNLI Bronze Medal for Bravery 1975 sea rescue);*

*Nigel (Brocky) Brockman*

*(43 years married with 3 children) (RNLI Bronze Medal for Bravery 1975 sea rescue);*

*John Robert Blewett*

*(Married with 2 Children);*

*Charles Thomas Greenhaugh*

*(46 Married with 3 Children));*

*Kevin Smith*

*(23 Bachelor);*

*Barrie Robertson Torrie (*

*(Married with 2 children) ;*

*Gary Lee Wallis*

*(22 Bachelor).*





**Coxswain William Trevelyan Richards was later posthumously awarded the RNLI's Gold Medal. Bronze Medals were awarded posthumously to the remainder of the**



**Lifeboat Crew.**

**A local appeal raised over £3 million.**

### **The Lifeboat Maritime Investigations**



The 21 year old wooden Watson Class Solomon Browne undertook a complete refit in 1980. The RNLI and Department of Trade surveyor authorities came to the conclusion that the Solomon Browne crew unselfishly and courageously as a matter of duty felt compelled to attempt a second rescue to save the four remaining on the Union Star in appalling hurricane sea conditions. The lifeboat's paint was found on

the Union Star's hull and evidence indicated that the lifeboat Solomon Browne was in a sudden and catastrophic collision with the freighter's hull in such tremendous force so that the crew were unable to transmit or send up flares. *(Left)* the remains of the Solomon Browne.

### **Chip Off The Old Block**

**1992**

Brocky's son Neil Brockman became the Cox of the Lifeboat 'Ivan Ellen'. On 7 December 1994 the fishing vessel 'Julian Paul' fouled her propeller to the west of the Longships. Coxswain/Mechanic Neil Brockman with the Sennen Cove lifeboat Coxswain/Mechanic Terence George rescued five persons and for saving the boat were both awarded the RNLI Bronze



Medal.

**2000**

A Framed Letter of Thanks was presented to Coxswain Mechanic Brockman for taking the lifeboat alongside the French Fishing Vessel 'Gwel a Vo' more than 15 times, at night, in rough seas with five metre swells on 21 December 1999 to treat an injured man.

### **Royal National Lifeboats Institution**



Commitment: Saving lives at Sea.

Since the RNLI was founded in 1824, its lifeboats have saved more than 137,000 lives.

In 2005 RNLI lifeboats rescued 8,104 people - an average of 22 people per day. RNLI Lifeguards assisted 9,930 people.

## Sources of Income

Legacies make the largest source of income but are down by £2.7M (3.7%) on the previous year. Other sources of income is necessary to secure the Institution long-term financial stability. The increased fundraising effort raised voluntary income with a £3.5M (10.3%) increase over 2004. Running costs increased by just £0.4M (0.3%) to £120.2M as a result of the need to invest in alternative forms of fundraising to reduce reliance on legacy income. The vast majority of expenditure continues to be on rescue and operational maintenance. Capital expenditure programme is invested in the boats, equipment and shore works required to maintain operational efficiency.



*“O hear us when we cry to thee*

*For those in peril on the sea”*

**The RNLB deserves your support!**

## **Christmas 2006**

Since the Solomon Browne tragedy in December 1981. Twenty five years has passed.

December 2006 is the 25th anniversary of the loss of the lifeboat Solomon Browne and his crew and my two young friends.

Reflecting on my Sunday morning informal racing from Marazion to Mousehole was an exhilarating experience across Mounts Bay on the basis ‘last boat in- pays for the beer’ at the Ship Inn. But anything could happen out there in the Bay miles from shore.

As a Cornishman and yachtsman who encountered unpredictable wind shifts and sea conditions with a few capsizes and scary moments it was reassuring to know that there were a couple of sound lads around like Brocky and John who would hell or high water to pick you up if you lost a mast or capsized and dumped into the cold water some way from shore.





*A Personal Tribute*

*To Nigel 'Brocky' Brockman and John Blewett my school friends and  
the crew of the Solomom Browne*

*You were and still are an inspiration to us all!*

*The Lord Is My Pilot*

The Lord is my pilot; I shall not drift

He lighteth me across the dark waters

He steereth me in deep channels,

He keepeth my log.

He guideth me by the star of holiness for his name's sake.

Yea, thou I sail mid the thunders and tempests of life,

I will dread no danger - for them art with me.

Thy love and thy care they shelter me,

Thou preparest a harbour before me in the homeland of eternity

Thou anointest the waves with oil,

My ship rideth calmly

Surely sunlight and starlight shall favour me on the voyage I take

And I will rest in the port of my **GOD** for ever

Amen



**The Kernow Kid**

Christmas Hong Kong 2006