

200

MAGAZINE

#7

JANUARY  
1823 / 2023

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# Scores die in UK winter shipwrecks

**A**t least 50 people have died in a wave of shipwrecks in December and early January after storms hit the Lancashire, Durham, Welsh and Irish coasts.

The biggest loss of life came with the sinking of the merchant vessel *Weare* on the first day of 1823. The *Weare*, sailing from Bristol to Jamaica, went down off the fishing village of Ballycotton in County Cork, a [notorious danger spot](#) for sea traffic, taking with her 25 of the 38 crew and passengers.

Reports from Co. Cork say that the screams of a woman passenger, intending to retire in south-west Ireland, could be heard from the shore, but the fury of the storm thwarted efforts to save those on board.

Bur rescuers were able to mount a major rescue operation off the Isle of Man (14 Dec) to save the crew of *HMS Racehorse*.

THE DOOMED *HMS RACEHORSE*, PICTURED OFF THE ISLE OF MAN

The Royal Navy brig was en route to Douglas to escort back to England the partly-restored *HMS Vigilant*, which ran aground in October. The ship's pilot mistook a shore light for that of the pier at the island's capital, and the *Racehorse* hit rocks at Langness Point.

Only one rescue boat could be launched but it brought 90 crew to safety before a huge wave overcame the final run, with the loss of six sailors and three men from Castletown.

Nine men died when the steamship *Prince Regent* went down (5 Dec) in the Mersey estuary near Ellesmere Port in hurricane-force winds. Three crew drowned when a pilot vessel from Liverpool sank near Abergele in Denbighshire, among at least 60 vessels wrecked the same day. Thirteen ships are said to have been driven ashore (30 Dec) near Sunderland, Co. Durham.

[Time for a sea rescue service?](#)

## Envoys pull out in new blow to peace

The ambassadors of Austria, Prussia and Russia have left Madrid in what is being seen as a further sign that armed intervention in Spain on the side of embattled King Ferdinand VII is imminent.

Paris's ambassdor is expected to follow suit, and it is France that is set to take military action to restore ultra-conservative Ferdinand's full powers and oust Madrid's liberal government.

The three envoys decided to leave after an uncompromising speech by the progressive Spanish foreign minister, Evaristo de San Miguel. Mediation efforts by Britain have come to nothing.

**From January, 200 appears as a larger magazine in March, June, September and December, and in this shorter format in other months**

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# Thames freezes over, ships stuck

**T**raffic on the River Thames has been badly disrupted by sub-zero temperatures and frost which led to drifting ice on London's river between Christmas and the New Year. Deaths during the big freeze and in hurricane-force winds earlier in December have been reported from Liverpool, Birmingham, Hove, and Dublin.

A large number of vessels were forced free from their anchors, threatening shipping lanes on the Thames, while police boats were confined to the shore because of the risk of being locked in the ice at night. Ships anchored in the centre of the river, including a convict ship off the Tower of London, have had to use rope and pulley systems to enable people to board or disembark.

Drifting ice is said to have been the most severe for a number of years, but the cold weather did make possible winter leisure pastimes.

The ice was thick enough to allow large crowds to [skate on the Serpentine](#) lake in Hyde Park. Thames watermen, unable to operate their river taxis, came to the Serpentine and were joined by pie, gin and gingerbread sellers.

In **Birmingham**, five boys and two girls died when the ice they were sliding on gave way in Handsworth. At **Hove** in Sussex, two brothers died when ice gave way.

In **Leicestershire**, the local Tory MP Lord Robert Manners had to be rescued after falling through ice on a fish-pond.

Hurricane-force winds before Christmas caused substantial damage to buildings and a number of deaths.

In **Liverpool**, five died when chimneys and roofs were brought down by high winds. **York** and **Wakefield**

were among towns and cities where churches and private homes were badly damaged.

Conditions in **Manchester** have been described as the most violent tempest of wind and rain ever experienced in the town, and 20 part-built homes were blown down.

In **Dublin**, two people were killed. Eighty trees were felled in Phoenix Park, and damage estimated at ● £4,000 caused to [Carton House](#), the home of the Duke of Leinster in Co. Kildare.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

**BRIGHTON:** King George received Holy Communion on Christmas Day in his private chapel at the Royal Pavilion. For the first time, members of the public were allowed to take the sacrament in his chapel.

**NORWICH:** Writer and campaigner William Cobbett has described his success in getting a [county meeting in Norfolk](#) (3 Jan) to adopt a [radical programme](#) as "the proudest day of his life". The meeting backed Mr Cobbett's call for the sale of church property and crown lands, abolition of a standing army, scrapping taxes on malt, soap and candles, and moratoriums on seizure of property for unpaid rents, and payment of tithes. Local meetings are being called to distance the county from what are being called revolutionary principles.

### HOLKHAM. NORFOLK

The veteran Whig MP and agricultural reformer, Thomas William Coke, 68, and his 19-year-old wife, Anne, are celebrating the birth (22 Dec) of a son, Thomas. The marriage of 'Coke of Norfolk' to a god-daughter 50 years his junior [shocked London and Norfolk society](#) in February last year.

**EDINBURGH:** A new livestock show, which the Highland Society of Scotland is trialling with a view to it becoming an annual event, has been held (26 Dec) at Queensberry House in Canongate. More than 60 cattle were exhibited. ●



**LONDON'S LAST FROST FAIR IN FEBRUARY 1814:** THE THAMES "WAS ONE SHEET OF ICE AND SNOW", WITH FOOD AND DRINK STALLS, A SHEEP READY FOR ROAST, SKITTLES, SWINGS, AND A BARBER. BUT CONDITIONS THIS WINTER HAVE NOT BEEN SO COLD

## Time for a sea rescue service?

**As many as 1,800 ships are wrecked off the coast of Britain and Ireland every year. It is an accepted risk for seafarers.**

But questions are now being asked about whether the UK needs a co-ordinated, national sea rescue service, rather than ad hoc local responses to emergencies at sea.

The impetus is coming from the Isle of Man, where two Royal Navy vessels have run aground in the last three months. In October, *HMS Vigilant* was wrecked near Douglas. The dramatic events at sea were watched from the shore by local resident Sir William Hillary, who organised and commanded a militia legion during the French war.

Sir William (right) urged bystanders to join him in rowing out to save the ship's crew. It was hailed as a "[laudable and dangerous enterprise](#)". With three local [Manx](#) men dying in the *HMS Racehorse* rescue, he believes it is not fair that their families should not be provided for, and that some sort of trained lifeboat service is needed. ●



PHOTO: RNLI

# Fury as 'bottle riot' targets London's man in Ireland

**A** loyalist protest against the UK government's policy in Ireland has led to chaotic scenes in a theatre, missiles being thrown, and charges being laid of conspiracy to murder the head of the British administration at Dublin Castle.

The disturbances, already labelled the 'bottle riot', happened when the Lord Lieutenant (Viceroy), Marquess Wellesley attended a performance of *She Stoops to Conquer*, by the Anglo-Irish playwright Oliver Goldsmith, at Dublin's recently-rebuilt Theatre Royal.

Handbills bearing the slogan "No Popery" were thrown from the balcony and there were cries of "No Popish lord lieutenant" as the play was disrupted by the [Orange](#) protesters.

Missiles and abuse were aimed at Lord Wellesley's box, including at least one bottle and some wood, believed to have been a rattle. There are claims that opponents of the [Orangemen](#) were assaulted.

Four men were detained and three have since been charged with conspiracy to assassinate Marquess Wellesley. But it may be hard to secure convictions in Dublin, where Protestants make up a quarter of the population, not least as the lord lieutenant does not appear to have faced significant physical danger.

The authorities believe that six members of the Orange Order planned the protest because of Lord Wellesley's role in suppressing Orange celebrations in Dublin this year, and his support for ending restrictions on Catholics sitting as MPs.



MARQUESS WELLESLEY

Meetings have been held across Ireland to voice anger at what is being described as an "atrocious outrage". In Dublin, one was attended by the Duke of Leinster, the Grand Master of the [Orange Lodge of Ireland](#), the pro-emancipation campaigner Daniel O'Connell, and the brewer Arthur Guinness II. He described those behind the attack as mischievous allies of "the Fiend of Discord".

## Tyne coal dispute over after 10 weeks

**The strike which has disrupted coal supplies from the North-East of England has come to an end without any significant concessions by the employers.**

Keelmen, whose wooden boats have transported coal to waiting collier ships near the mouth of the Tyne for centuries because of the river's shallowness, went back in December. But they have failed to get limits on the use of new technology, 'spouts' that enable coal to be loaded directly into collier ships, without the need for the keels.

The strikers have secured an extra man on each keel, but will have to meet the expense themselves.

More than 20 keelmen who were facing criminal charges as a result of the often bitter dispute have been discharged by magistrates, at the request of their employers.

# Fears of body-snatchers lead to extra security for grave of top prize-fighter

**The grave of Tom Hickman, the boxer known as 'the Gasman', who died in a road accident in December, was dug extra-deep to deter body-snatchers. There were fears they might target his corpse, and guards were posted at the London graveyard where he was buried.**

Tom Hickman (37), from Dudley, and his companion, jeweller Thomas Rowe, were killed when the carriage the boxer was driving left the road in fog after attempting to overtake a goods vehicle at Finchley Common, Middlesex.

Their heads are said to have been "smashed to atoms" after being trampled on by the cart's wheels. The landlord of a pub where the bodies were taken is said to have been so shocked that he too died within days.

An inquest returned a verdict of accidental death, and newspapers have raised questions about the standard of Tom Hickman's driving.

His body was placed in a 15ft deep grave at a burial ground in Aldersgate, London, to deter 'resurrectionists' who might dig it up and sell it for medical research.

Tom Hickman became a pub landlord after losing his high-profile bout against Bill Neate almost a year to the day before his fatal accident. It was highlighted in [The Fight](#), by the essayist William Hazlitt. Hickman, famed for his bragging and bravery, had become one of the [biggest draws in prize-fighting](#).

The sport's big names joined large crowds at his funeral, as well as top sportswriter [Pierce Egan](#). But absent was Tom Cribb, the man still hailed in retirement as England's champion.



TOM HICKMAN, ALIAS THE GASMAN

Tom Cribb, who [twice defeated black American fighter Tom Molineaux](#) in 1810 and 1811, was thrown from his horse and initially feared to have died, but has recovered.

# RNLI launches plans to mark 200 years in 2024

**E**xpect to see more and more mentions of the [bicentenary of the RNLI](#), the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, in the next 12 months.

The RNLI was founded at a meeting in London on March 1824, but the idea of a national organisation to rescue seafarers was very much in the mind of the man seen as its founder, [Sir William Hillary](#) in January 1823, as we report in [this month's edition of 200](#).

In February 1823, Sir William will take a decisive step toward the creation of a lifeboat service manned by trained crews for Great Britain and Ireland.

This will be in the news in  
March's edition of 200.

In 2024, the RNLI will be staging bicentenary events throughout the year, commemorating 200 years of saving lives, thanking volunteers and [supporters](#), and hoping to inspire new backers and lifesavers.

A 200 Voices podcast will celebrate everyone associated with the RNLI.

[RNLI Timeline](#)  
[History of the RNLI Factsheet](#)

Read [here](#) about Jack Lowe's project to photograph all 238 RNLI stations in the United Kingdom and Ireland.



The story of [Grace Darling](#) (pictured), who risked her life to rescue survivors from the wrecked *SS Forfarshire* in 1838, is one of the many told in an extraordinary number of [lifeboat museums in Britain](#). The [Grace Darling Museum](#) in Northumberland covers her upbringing and life in Longstone lighthouse, and the events that propelled her into the limelight to become a Victorian national heroine. Find out more at these other lifeboat museums, but check before visiting as not all are open throughout the year:

- [Eastbourne RNLI Museum](#), East Sussex
- [Henry Blogg Museum](#), Cromer, Norfolk
- [RNLI Moelfre Seawatch Centre](#), Anglesey/Ynys Mon
- [Poole Old Lifeboat Museum](#), Dorset
- [The RNLI Historic Lifeboat Collection](#), Chatham, Kent

## NOTES FROM NOW

## Observations about the news from 1822

The novelist L.P. Hartley's much-used adage, "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there", never seems truer than when it comes to body snatching.

The removal of corpses from graves, morgues, and other burial sites, and the sale of the bodies primarily for the purpose of dissection or anatomy lectures in medical schools, was a very real problem from the 17th to 19th centuries in Britain and the [United States](#).

Until the [Anatomy Act of 1832](#), the only legal supply of corpses was from those hanged and ordered to have their bodies dissected. Those who stole bodies to meet demand were called "[resurrection men](#)", often working in teams to dig up bodies before they decomposed.

But they provoked public outrage. In January 1823, four bodies were dug up in Wandsworth and police had to intervene to stop two brothers, believed to be involved, from being lynched by local people.

**VIDEO:** Historian Roger Griffith reports from Scotland on how the authorities and public tried to stop body snatchers.

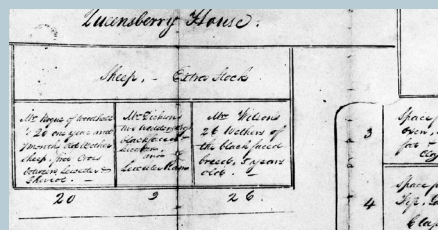


BODY SNATCHERS AT WORK, PAINTED ON THE OUTSIDE OF THE OLD CROWN INN. PENICUIK

**EDINBURGH FAT CATTLE SHOW.**

The exhibition of fat cattle for the premiums given by the Highland Society of Scotland, took place in the usual area at Queensberry House, on Thursday week. The show of this description was new in this metropolis, and excited great interest. It was most numerously and respectably attended, and the display of many fine specimens of different breeds of cattle at this, the first exhibition of the kind, was highly satisfactory. The Committee of Management, and the public, have equally to thank the

The 'Edinburgh Fat Cattle Show' that got this extensive coverage in the first edition in 1823 of the *Inverness Journal and Northern Advertiser* is still with us 200 years later - but it is now known by a much grander name.



The [first patent](#) for a propelling (mechanical) pencil that did not need sharpening was filed by [Sampson Mordan](#) and John Hawkins in London in December 1822. In 2023 they remain [very much in demand](#).

The [Royal Highland Show began as a trial event](#) on 26 December 1822 at Queensberry House in Canongate, where the Scottish Parliament now stands.

The first show had upwards of 60 cattle exhibited. Now over 100 trade exhibitors, 2,000 livestock competitors with over 6,500 animals, and tens of thousands of visitors come to RHS to experience the best of farming, food and rural life. The bicentenary was featured

in [last spring's edition](#) of the magazine of the [Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland](#). Its archives include (pictured left) the plan for the first showyard in 1822.

200 is edited by John Evans. Thanks to Jane Evans, Jude Painter, Larry Breen, British Newspaper Archive, Cambridge University Library, Central Bedfordshire Libraries. Email: [feedback@200livinghistory.info](mailto:feedback@200livinghistory.info). Copyright issues/takedown requests: [john@freelibraryproject.uk](mailto:john@freelibraryproject.uk)

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