

The Beginnings of Lifesaving at the Beaches of Spanish Point and The White Strand, Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare. 1935.

The Indian Summer of 1934, tempted many bathers into the calm waters of Spanish Point, Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare. Saturday, September 15th was a particularly pleasant day. A Sister from the local Convent of Mercy, got into difficulties while swimming. When another Sister and two teenagers went to her assistance, the undercurrent proved menacing and soon, all four lives were in danger. Two strong swimmers from the locality, swam out and brought all four ashore. Tragically, one of the Sisters did not respond to resuscitation and was pronounced dead by a local doctor.

News of yet another drowning tragedy, a frequent occurrence along the beaches on all Irish coasts, shocked not just the local community but the population at large. Shortly afterwards, a group of concerned locals decided to do something about it. A fund raising committee was formed and its aim was to raise funds to purchase Lifesaving apparatus, the type which was already in use on beaches in Great Britain and on the continent. P.J. Hurley, a local newsagent, approached the 'Daily Sketch' Newspaper in England, seeking help in both the sourcing and in the delivery of this apparatus.

By July 5th 1935, the following circular was compiled:-

Appeal For Funds

**To provide life-saving apparatus
For Spanish Point and Silver
Strand Miltown Malbay.**

**Miltown Malbay
July 5th 1935.**

A subscription list has been opened for the purpose of providing Spanish Point and the Silver Strand, Miltown Malbay, with modern Life-Saving Apparatus.

This apparatus is patented by the Life Boat association and is extensively used at English and Continental Seaside Resorts. Subscriptions will be gratefully received by any of the following members of the committee in charge:-

**Rev. Thomas Neylon.C.C. Chairman.
Mr. Ryan, National Bank, Hon. Treas.
Mr. P.J. Hurley, Hon. Sec.**

Rev. Father Murphy, P.P.; Rev. Father McKenna,C.C.; Dr. M.J. Hillery, Dr. D. MacClancy; Mr. O' Brien National Bank; Mrs. Elliott, Spanish Point; Miss Moira White, do.; Mr. Thomas Browning,do.; Mr. E.J. Carroll,M.C.C.; Mr. E McMahan; Mr. J. Fitzpatrick, N.T.; Mr. E. Moroney ; Guard T. McLaughlin; Mr. N.C.Philpott; Mr. John O Neill; Mr. P. Collins ; Mr. M. Clery, National Bank; Mr. P.J. Killeen; Mr. Joseph Mc Mahon; Mr. J. Devitt, N.T.; Mr. P. Morrissey; Mr. John Sullivan, Mr. P. J. Harrison.

HELP A GOOD CAUSE—————DO IT NOW!

The members of the committee outlined in the circular above, formed a broad representation of the population living in the Miltown Malbay area at that time and included many members of The Anglican, Church of Ireland community – many of whom lived in Spanish Point.

Five hundred circulars were printed at a cost of 10/= (ten shillings) and a young boy was given 6d to deliver most of them to homes in the town and its environs. P. J. Hurley drew up a list of approximately two hundred names and included in this were the names of:- Locals who had moved to other parts of Ireland; people who holidayed regularly in the area and included many religious communities and clergy from the Dioceses of Killaloe and Limerick; friends and business contacts. A circular was posted to each.

The response was immediate and generous. Contributions arrived from all quarters and from people from all walks of life and of religious beliefs. The contributions ranged from 1/= to 2 guineas and the average contribution was approximately 5/=

By late October 1935, three Lifelines, each made up of a harness, float and portable reel with rope, were purchased. Concrete beds on which to place them were made. Shelters in which to place them were erected at Spanish Point and at the The Silver Strand (more commonly referred to as the White Strand). The total cost of supplying to and installing the apparatus at the beaches was £39-18-0. This lifesaving equipment was relatively new in the Irish state, and

formal training in the use of this equipment at beaches, was not readily available. The strong swimmers living locally, were happy to be on duty on a voluntary basis during the summer seasons of 1936 and 1937. It was not until 1937, that Lifeguarding at beaches was introduced in a structured way and again, Miltown Malbay led the way.

Jane Hurley. August 2012.

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