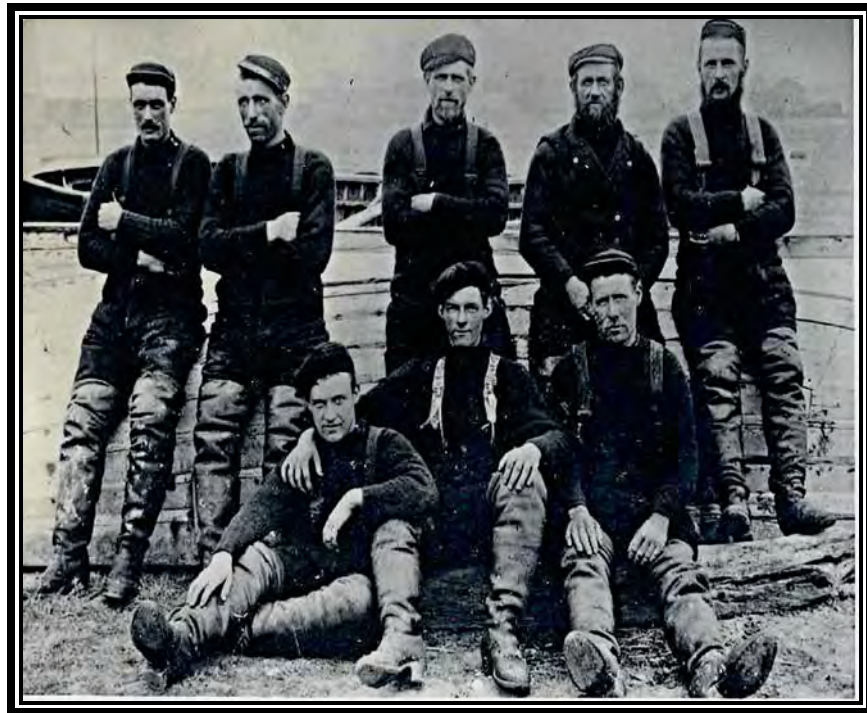


A Portknockie Tragedy

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Evangeline BF 1952



*At sea off Stronsay
Orkney Islands*

16/17th January 1905

The Evangeline

The fishing communities of the Moray coast have suffered many tragedies over the years as the brave men went out to sea in all weathers to make their living from catching the 'silver darlings' and other species of fish from the storm tossed seas around the northern coasts of Scotland and its islands. Such was the case more than a hundred years ago with the loss of the Evangeline which sank in a storm of wind in January 1905 with all eight crew men lost in the terrible night off the coast of the Orkney Islands.

The fishing boat Evangeline was built in 1896 by George Innes & Co of Portknockie. It was constructed from a hull design first thought of in Lossiemouth in 1878 and was the successor to the Fifie of the time. The new design had a straight stem and a raked stern, could carry large sail areas on masts up to seventy feet high, they were quick in the water and could make up to ten knots. The design was named the Zulu fishing boat so called after the Zulu wars raging in far off southern Africa. Many Zulus were subsequently built throughout the fishing fleets of Scotland and they gained a reputation for being an exceptionally fine sea boat.

The Evangeline had been built for one of Portknockie's most skilled fisherman of the time; David Wood 'King' registered the new boat as BF 1952. Her name Evangeline can be found in the bible and has the meaning of 'Good Tidings'. It is likely that given the religious beliefs of the fishermen that this is where the name came from. However it is just possible that it was named after the sad heroine of the poem Evangeline written in 1847 by Henry Longfellow.

A word of explanation about the 'King' suffix to the name of David Wood, for those not familiar with the fishing villages of the Banffshire coastline, they had this method of differentiating between families who bore the same name, there were very few families of different names in each of the villages and Portknockie was no exception. In order to sort out who was who they adopted a by name or tee name which they themselves had selected or it had been selected for them by their peers. To give an example, my wife's father was named William Mair, ask anyone in Portknockie if they knew of him and they would say that they needed his by name to positively identify him. Given the by name of 'Shy' after his maternal grandfather, he was instantly recognised as Willie Shy and not Willie Mair. What confuses the issue for outsiders like me is that his father was Alexander Mair 'Brother' but instead of following his father he was given part of the by name of his mother Helen Jane Mair 'Bobbin Shy'. The uninitiated can immediately see how it serves to confuse those from outside given that this lady apparently had not one but two by names!

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The Evangeline no doubt had many 'good tidings' between its launch and before the fateful stormy afternoon and night of Monday 16th January 1905 off the Orkney coast at Stronsay when it was lost with all hands.

"The fishing boat Evangeline, of Portknockie was wrecked at Stronsay on the 16th inst, and her crew of eight all lost. Part of the wreckage of the Evangeline has come ashore at Tresness, Sanday and part at Elsness. The mast of a fishing boat broken off at the deck, came ashore at Rusness, Sanday; and two fishermen's trunks, a lot of buoys, and some pieces of net, have been picked up at various places on the coast of Sanday".

The fishing boat had sailed with the fishing fleet early Friday morning (13th January) from the harbour at Wick, heading for the fishing grounds off the Orkney Island coast. The day was set fine and the barometer was high, there was no warning of what was to come in before the dawn of Saturday 14th January. The seas got higher and higher whipped up by a southerly gale described as of 'hurricane strength' which swept all before it. Other boats in the vicinity which had sailed from Wick at the same time said that they had held on to their nets until Monday when they had to abandon them and run before the mountainous seas towards Fair Isle. Alas it was not to be, the boat foundered off Stronsay in the Orkneys and was lost with all eight men.

The press reports of the incident gave the crew of the Evangeline as follows:-

1. *David Wood (King), skipper, about 50 years of age, residing in Station Road, Portknockie. Married and leaves a widow and five of a family, three of them being quite young.*
2. *John Wood (King) nephew of David Wood, about 35 years of age, residing in Pulteney Street, Portknockie, married and leaves a widow and four of a family from one to seven years of age*
3. *Alexander Mair (Shavie) brother in law of John Wood (King) about 38 years of age residing in Park Street leaves a widow and six of a family, from one to perhaps ten years of age.*
4. *James Mair (Shanker) about 37 years of age, residing at Braehead Portknockie, married and leaves a widow and three of a family from perhaps one to seven years of age. His widow is very delicate and recently came out of the infirmary.*
5. *William Mair (Shanker) the brother of James Mair, about 33 years of age, residing in Pulteney Street, Portknockie. Married and leaves a widow and three of a family from about one month old to perhaps four years of age.*
6. *Joseph Mair (Bobbin), about 24 years of age, residing in the lower part of Portknockie, his father and mother are alive.*

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7. David Mair (Bobbin)* brother of Joseph Mair about 17 or 18 years of age and also resides with his father. He was unmarried.

8. George Findlay of Cullen (little was said about this young boy in the report he was mentioned briefly but his name was not on the list of crew

*David Mair 'Bobbin' was erroneously named in the press report of the crew-list; it was actually Alexander Mair 'Bobbin' who was onboard; he was the younger brother of Joseph Mair.

The Evangeline would also have abandoned their nets and made an attempt to reach shelter in the islands.

"For two or three days the brave fellows must have been face to face with death, as they were on a lee shore, and the strength of the gale such that no boat could carry canvas. It would be impossible, too, for them to see the low level land of the island, as the southerly blizzard they were battling with would blind them and leave them in darkness. Their faces, particularly that of the skipper, wore a look of courage and determination and yet of patience and resignation".

When the wreckage was found scattered over the area, it was discovered that the mast had broken off at deck level; this factor alone would have drastically altered the handling of the boat.



The first news of the disaster was a brief report in the *Orkney Herald* of Wednesday 18th January 1905 when scant details were available, communications had been blown away in the severe storm and the full news of the disaster had not reached Kirkwall from Stronsay. The report said that a fishing boat had been lost and that wreckage with the name Evangeline had been washed ashore at Stronsay.

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“On Tuesday morning the 17th Inst, three bodies were washed ashore on Griceness, Stronsay and towards evening a boat came across from Papa Stronsay with a fourth body. Several small pieces of wreck, some cooking utensils, and boots were driven ashore. It would appear that the disaster had taken place near or on the rocks. On one piece of the wreckage the name Evangeline could be made out. Between two and three o’clock in the afternoon a boat was seen running down for Sanday Sound. The seas were tremendous, and the greatest excitement prevailed, but no time was lost by the steam liner Kilrenny of Aberdeen, which put off and towed her safely into Stronsay harbour. She proved to be the Sunshine of Portknockie. The crew identified the bodies as being part of the crew of the boat Evangeline, of Portknockie”.

While the newspaper states quite clearly that a piece of wreckage was recovered which had the name Evangeline on it, this is probably a bit of journalistic licence. The true story appears to have been that a broken timber, probably from the stern frame, carrying the last three letters “INE” and “Portknockie”. This information was telegraphed to the minister at Portknockie and raised great concern for the crews of the “Sunshine” and the “Josephine” who were also with the fleet. It was only further investigation of the mizzen boom, engraved “D King” and the tattooed hands of one of the recovered crew members with his initials “WM” which gave conclusive proof that it was indeed the Evangeline.

The initial identification of the recovered bodies carried out by the crew members of the Sunshine was later confirmed by friends and neighbours of the men whose bodies had been recovered from the sea. It appears that the Sunshine had a very lucky escape given the above contemporary press report of the incident.

“The body found on Papa Stronsay that of the skipper. On Wednesday a fifth body was found on Papa Stronsay. Their relatives being communicated with, two steam drifters came from Stornoway to convey the remains home. Two boats come from Kirkwall, one from Westray and one from Portknockie, all their crews being in some way connected with the deceased fishermen. After the arrival of the Orcadia, the Reverend Mr Brownlie held a short and impressive service. Then the sorrowful procession of local and south coast fishermen carrying five coffins started down the pier. After the remains had been taken on board, the drifters steamed for home with the flags at half mast.”

The press report then gives an account of the journey by the Bluebell and the Trident who sailed to the Orkneys to recover the Portknockie dead.

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“During the previous evening (Wednesday) about 60 Portknockie fishermen arrived from Stornoway per train after experiencing a very rough passage of the Minch to pay their last respects to their deceased comrades. A large number of fishermen also accompanied the steam drifter BlueBell from Stornoway to Stronsay, where another Portknockie steam drifter, the Trident, shared with her the honour of bearing home the dead. Both vessels left on Thursday shortly after twelve o’clock and were expected to arrive about eleven at night.”

The sombre little armada sailed south from Stronsay to their home port where the news had spread through the village and beyond. Loss of their men at sea was an all too common occurrences for the fisher wives of the Moray Coast, this would require all their fortitude as such a crushing blow fell upon them again. Whole families would be made destitute overnight as the bread-winners were dead. Families would of course gather round and give as much support as possible to each other. To lose one of the foundation stones of the family is a blow from which many families can never recover.

“On Friday morning a most pathetic and weird spectacle was witnessed at Portknockie, when the five bodies recovered from the ill-fated crew of the lost fishing boat Evangeline arrived there. The steam drifters BlueBell and Trident with the bodies on board of those of the crew recovered from the sea reached Portknockie between 12 and 1 o’clock on Friday morning. The whole population, old and young, men and women, and children, were gathered on the braehead overlooking the harbour as the vessels were moored to the pier. The scene in the cold bright moonlight was an impressive and weird one, as the coffins were landed and carried up the steep winding path by relays of bearers, which relieved one another at measured distances of their mournful burdens while the midnight silence was broken from time to time by the wailing and cries of the women unable to contain their grief.

The village had turned out in full to view the return of their men, not all had been given up by the sea and indeed were never recovered. The families of those still missing would have been praying that the sea would relent and return their men to them. Another press report of the arrival of the two drifters at Portknockie is equally as descriptive of the scene.

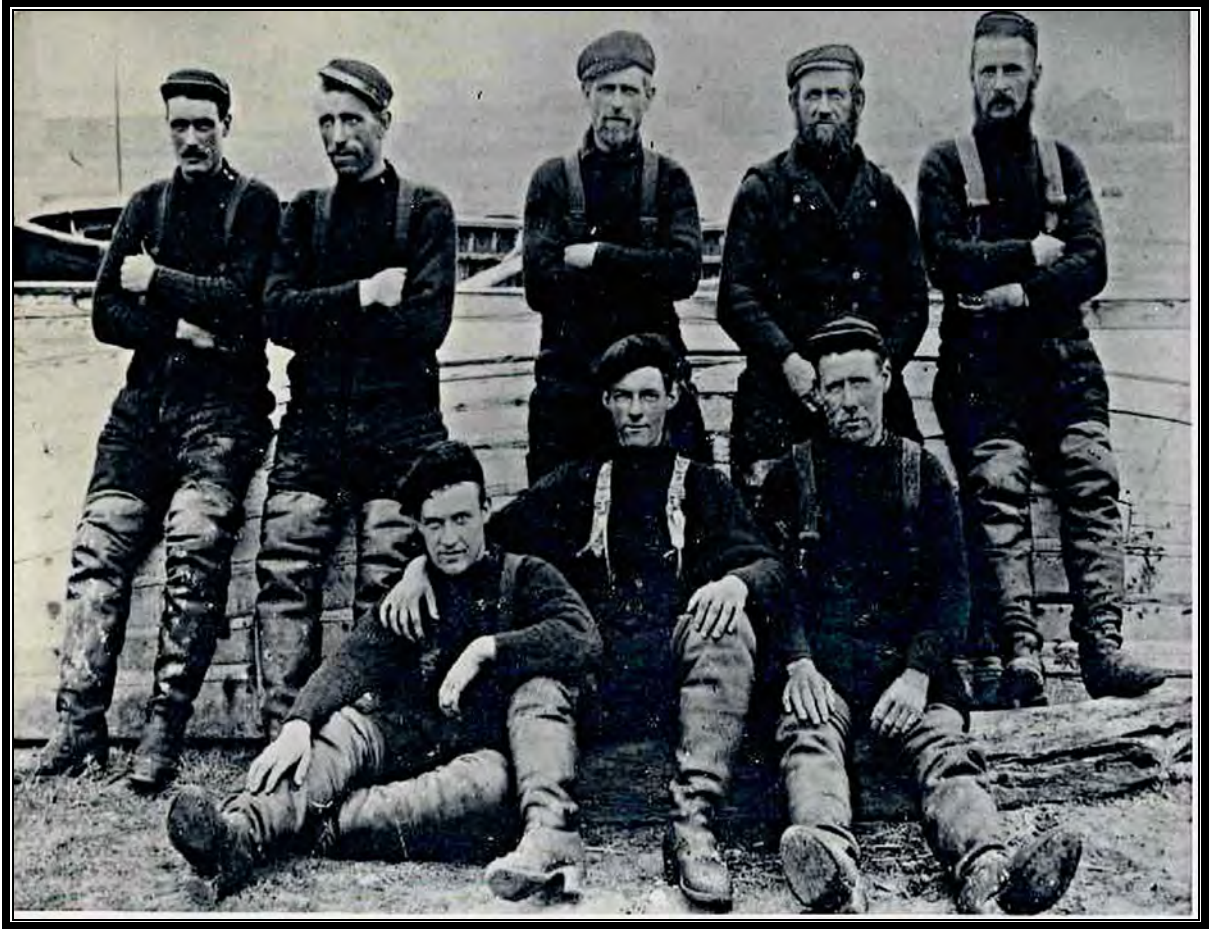
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“It was a brilliant moonlight night, and about half past eleven, hundreds of the population lined the cliff heads as the lights of the two steamers came in sight. The Trident, about a mile ahead, burned flare lights as signals of her coming. Within five minutes of midnight she steamed into the harbour without sounding her siren, and with ensign half mast and foremast lowered. A great crowd received her at Lady Seafield’s jetty in almost dead silence, not one speaking above their breath. By torchlight the bodies of Alexander Mair (Bobbin) and William Mair (Shanker) , enclosed in plain black coffins, were raised out of the forehold and reverently landed. A quarter of an hour later the BlueBell steamed into the harbour and was berthed alongside the other vessel. The three coffins containing the bodies of the skipper, David Wood (King), and his nephew John Wood (King) and George Findlay (Cullen) were also hoisted out to the quay. Each of the coffins was then shouldered by four fishermen. Behind each coffin large companies of mourners formed. The mournful procession wound its way up the tortuous and precipitous accesses to the harbour which lies 200 feet directly below the town. The moonlight rendered everything as clear as day light, and when the top of the hill was reached the procession passed between two lines of people, chiefly women, most of whom were weeping. Each coffin was carried to the respected residence of the deceased, there being a special party from Cullen to carry home the Cullen lad. The scene presented, which lasted half an hour, was unparalleled in the fishing annals of the coast.”

The family of the skipper were no strangers to such disasters as some years earlier off Portknockie the brother of David Wood ‘King’ was lost in another accident some two and a half miles off Portknockie on 22nd November 1887. Alexander Wood ‘King’ was lost along with two brothers by the name of McIntosh. His son John Wood ‘King’ was one of those lost from the Evangeline and his mother Jane Wood ‘King’ living in Pulteney Street had lost her husband Alexander in 1887, lost another son in Shetland and now a second son had been taken from her by the cruel sea.

The men of the village had travelled to identify their dead comrades they had brought them home to their loved ones who could now bury them in Hillhead and Cullen cemeteries. The families could then start to deal with their grief, remember their men, their sons; and what of those who had children, how would the widows cope; the grandparents and great grandparents all had been affected by the tragedy?

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The Evangeline Crew - circa 1904. David Wood 'King' is second from the right at the rear and Alexander Mair 'Saucy' is in the middle of the front row. The remainder are the crew who were believed to have drowned in the terrible storm which overwhelmed the Evangeline on 17th January 1905.

Photograph courtesy of Mary Laing

The photograph shows the crew in 1904, seven of them would perish in the loss of the Evangeline, they look young, fit, strong and very capable men who you feel could deal with almost anything thrown at them. The skills of the skipper David Wood 'King' were known throughout the village and beyond. The experience he had in his crew was considerable but it proved not to be enough.

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David Wood 'King' (51), the skipper, was the son of George Wood 'King' and Margaret Mair. He married Margaret Mair (b26th August 1858) on 26th October 1877 at Portknockie. He was 22 years of age and she was the 20 years old daughter of Alexander Mair/Janet Slater. They were married by James McIntyre the Minister at Seafield, the witnesses were George Mair and Alexander Wood 'King' his brother who was then 40 years old. David's wife Margaret died on 14th May 1891 aged 33 years of an internal haemorrhage.

As can be seen from the census record taken 5th April 1891 we have the family of David and Margaret Wood 'King' in Portknockie just a month before the untimely death of his young wife Margaret Mair.

David Wood 'King'	M	36 yrs	Fisherman
Maggie Mair	F	32 yrs	Fisherman's wife
Maggie Wood	F	12 yrs	Fisherman's daughter Scholar
Jessie A Wood	F	2 yrs	Fisherman's daughter

He remarried on 21st September 1891 to Jane Mair who had been born on 6th October 1857 the daughter of David Mair 'Bobbin' and Helen Donaldson then resident at 225 Portknockie.

Jane Mair was the widow of William Mair 'Saucy' whom she had married on 8th October 1880 at Seafield. Both bride and groom were 23 years old, William Mair was the son of Alexander Mair 'Saucy' and Elizabeth Wood.

William Mair 'Saucy' had been born on 13th May 1857 at 205 Portknockie. They were married by the Reverend James McIntyre before witnesses William George Wood and Joseph Sutherland. Their son Alexander Mair 'Saucy' was born on 23rd August 1881. William Mair 'Saucy' died aged 30 on 19th September 1887 from an abscess in the right lung. His young widow was just 30 years of age. I have not traced the family of William and Jane Mair apart from Alexander Mair 'Saucy' who was just a small boy when his father died and provides a link to people related to him who are scattered far and wide in the UK.

"The seas were tremendous, and the greatest excitement prevailed, but no time was lost by the steam liner Kilrenny of Aberdeen, which put off and towed her safely into Stronsay harbour. She proved to the Sunshine of Portknockie. The crew identified the bodies as being part of the crew of the boat Evangeline, of Portknockie"

David Wood was by all accounts a very experienced skipper, most of his crew had been at sea for years and were well used to the ways of the sea. His body had been found on Papa Stronsay and was returned to Portknockie onboard the Steam Drifter Bluebell and from the harbour at Portknockie he was carried up the brae to his wife Jane at the family home in Station Road, Portknockie. Jane had been widowed for a second time. She was left to bring up her family of five children. David's parents George Wood and Margaret Mair were both deceased by the time

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of his death at sea. He had been identified in the Orkneys by his neighbour Alexander Slater who also registered his death at Portknockie. He was interred at Hillhead Cemetery Portknockie having been carried there from his home in the traditional manner.

Great and widespread interest in and sympathy for the bereaved families has been shown in Portknockie district.

On Wednesday afternoon Dr Campbell, accompanied by Reverend Mr McIntyre, called on them as representing Lady Seafield to assure them of her ladyship's sisterly sympathy and to say that she would have done so in person had she not been confined to her room with bronchitis. Mr Black, M.P. member for the county, wired Mr Addison on Wednesday as follows;-

"Deeply grieved to hear of the sad disaster; please convey my very warm sympathy to relatives, and inform me if any fund is started"

Nothing has yet been done in a formal way to institute such a fund but there can be no doubt the need of it is urgent enough and meanwhile subscriptions sent to Reverends Messrs McIntyre and Brown or to Mr George Donald M.A. Portknockie schoolhouse, or Mr Addison JP will be thankfully received and distributed with due discrimination.



Jane Wood 'King' m.s. Mair 'Bobbin' 1857 - 1945

David Wood 'King'. 1836 - 1905

Photographs courtesy of Mary S Laing.

"The skipper was considered one of the most experienced seamen in Portknockie, and was exceedingly popular in the town, bearing, as he did, a very high character. It was stated in Portknockie on Tuesday night that although all the men bore good characters, it would be difficult to imagine a group of married men who could have left their dependents in a more destitute condition. For example, Alexander Mair Shavie and the two brothers, James and William Mair (Shanker) are particularly sad and necessitous cases, and in these three cases help will have to be given at once."

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Jane Wood 'King' died aged 87 years at 73 Cranford Road, Aberdeen. Her son George Wood registered her death.

Alexander Mair 'Shavie' (38) was born 25th September 1866 at Portknockie, son of Alexander Mair and Georgina Mair. . He married at age 26 years of age on 14th September 1894 at Seafield Church Portknockie to Barbara Ann MASSON aged 20 years (not Allan as on death certificate). She was the daughter of John Masson, Farm Servant who was deceased at the time of her wedding in 1894. Her mother was Georgina ALLAN or Mair 'Bo' a domestic servant. It is possible that Barbara adopted her mother's surname as her father was deceased by the time of her wedding to Alexander Mair. The Minister James McIntyre officiated and the witnesses at the wedding were William Mair and James A Mair.

Alexander Mair was lost in the Evangeline tragedy on 17th January 1905 with his body being recovered from the sea by the trawler Mercury out of Hull. He was identified by William Wood a neighbour of his in Portknockie. Unlike the others he was buried on Stronsay in the Orkneys. He was the brother-in-law of John Wood 'King' as his younger sister Helen had been married to the unfortunate fisherman who had perished with his brother-in-law.

His parents Alexander Mair and Georgina Mair had been married on 14th October 1854 and had a number of children whom they brought up at 134 Portknockie. They had a tragedy of their own to deal with when one of their twin daughters Catherine (aged 6) died from Measles on 7th January 1867.

I have tried without success to find the death record of Georgina Mair who appears in the census record in 1871 but not it seems in the 1881 record, She is 'deceased' at Alexander's wedding in 1894. His father Alexander Mair Shavie died on 25 June 1904 at 261 Portknockie, just six months prior to the Evangeline disaster. His death was registered by his son William who was resident at 219 Portknockie. Alexander Mair 'Shavie' was the son of John Mair 'Shavie, a Boat Carpenter and Elsie Smith.

The 1901 Census record for the family of Alexander and Barbara Mair Shavie is as follows;

Alexander Mair	Head	30 years	Fisherman
Barbara Mair	Wife	28 years	
Georgina Mair	Daur	7 years	Scholar
Barbara Mair	Daur	4 years	
Helen Mair	Daur	1 year	
Alexander Mair		68 years	Retired fisherman.

His widowed father appears to have been living with the family at that time.

Barbara Ann Mason, the wife of Alexander Mair 'Shavie' was the daughter of John Masson a farm servant and Georgina Allan a domestic servant. Georgina Allan later married Alexander Mair 'Bo' and had a number of children from that union. Barbara Ann Masson died aged 71 years on 19th August 1945 at 17 Park Street, Portknockie. Her son Alexander Mair 7 Low Shore, Macduff registered his mother's death.

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“On Friday, as the custom is with fisher folk, little groups of women in shawls, might be seen passing to and from the different houses where the bodies lay in open coffins awaiting burial, for it would have been regarded as showing a want of respect and sympathy had they not visited them. The faces of the dead were very dark red, and their bodies are said by the fishermen who were present at Stronsay when they came ashore, to bear marks of struggle and injuries received other than by drowning.”

John Wood 'King' (33) was the nephew of skipper David Wood 'King'. John Wood 'King' was born on 27th March 1871. His father was Alexander Wood 'King' and mother Jane Gardiner. They were descended from George Wood 'King' and Margaret Mair. He married Hellen Mair on 28th November 1895 at Seafield Church officiating was Minister James McIntyre, witnesses were William Mair and James Mair. The young couple settled in Pulteney Street, Portknockie and the family soon started to grow.

His father Alexander Wood had been born on 19th October 1837 and had married Jane Gardiner on 23rd October 1863 at Seafield Church by George Henderson the minister at Cullen in front of witnesses George Wood and George Wood. It is likely that these were the two brothers of Alexander who had been born on 3rd May 1835 and on 2nd November 1843 respectively. Jane Gardiner was the daughter of John Gardiner and Jane Pirie. Alexander Wood 'king' died on 22nd November 1887 when he was drowned at sea 2 ½ miles off Portknockie Harbour. With him in the boat when it foundered were James McIntosh (32 years) and John McIntosh (25 years). Jane Pirie lived well into her old age and died on 11th February 1934 aged 91 years at her home Laing Cottage Macduff.

Following the sinking of the Evangeline John Wood 'King' was identified by Alexander Slater the same neighbour who had identified his uncle David Wood. He was returned to Portknockie onboard the Bluebell and taken to his home at 249 Portknockie and to his wife Helen Mair. She had a number of small children. Hellen Mair was the daughter of Alexander Mair 'Shavie' and Georgina Mair (married 14th October 1854) the same parents as crew member Alexander Mair 'Shavie' who also perished. She had been born on 17th September 1873 in Portknockie.

Her son George Wood 'King' was born in January of 1897 and was just eight years of age when his father was lost at sea from the Evangeline. He too was the subject of a tragic drowning at Portknockie harbour on 8th September 1905 just months after the loss of his father at sea, he too was gone just short of his ninth birthday. Helen Mair had had enough tragedy and left the country to try and escape the trail of death in her family. Having lost a husband and a brother on the Evangeline the death of her young son George obviously proved too much to bear. She moved to Canada and died there in Toronto on 22nd May 1941. She is remembered along with her husband John Wood and her son George Wood the family plot at Hillhead Cemetery Portknockie.

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William Mair 'Shanker' (32) was born 28th June 1872 at Portknockie, the son of George Mair 'Shanker' and Euphemia Pirie. He married Margaret Jane Wood on 6th December 1901 at Seafield Church. The minister James McIntyre officiated with Joseph Mair and Andrew Wood as witnesses. The couple settled in a house in Pulteney Street, Portknockie.

Margaret Jane Wood was the daughter of George Wood 'Park' and Isabella Gifford. George Wood had been born on 17th June 1840 in Rathven and was the son of Alexander Wood and Ann Sutherland. Isabella Gifford was the daughter of Edmund Gifford and Jane Geddes and was born Portessie. They married on 11th January 1862 at Rathven Church with the Minister James Crichton officiating and William Smith and Peter Smith were witnesses. George Wood 'Park' died aged just 37 years on 2nd August 1880 at his home address 186 Portknockie. He had suffered Phthisis Pulmonalis for some 18 Months. His widow registered his death. Isabella Gifford never remarried and remained a widow until her death at 23 Seatown Buckie on 12th February 1921 at 79 years. Her death was registered by the second husband of her daughter Margaret Jane Wood - James Cowie.

When the Evangeline was lost on 17th January 1905 off the Orkneys, William Mair's body was recovered and later identified by his brother Joseph Mair. He was taken home to Portknockie onboard the Trident, one of two Portknockie Steam drifters sent out from Portknockie to recover their men who had perished. His brother Joseph registered his death at Portknockie. On arrival at Portknockie he was carried up to Pulteney Street and handed over to his grieving wife Margaret Jane and their three children. One of these children was named after her grandmother; Euphemia was born on 7th May 1903 at Portknockie. I have no trace of her siblings. William Mair was later interred in Hillhead cemetery Portknockie his coffin having been shouldered there by his friends and family.

Some eight years later, on 17th December 1913 Margaret Jane Wood who was by this time staying at 153 Portknockie was re-married at 23 Seatown, Buckie according to the United Free Church to James Cowie a 37 years old bachelor fisherman of 23 Seatown Buckie. Officiating Minister was Alexander Shaw with witnesses being George Wood and Peter Corrie. Margaret Jane Wood died on 10th December 1957 aged 79 years at her home 23 Seatown, Buckie. Her death was registered by her son David Cowie.

"The coffins were numbered before being put on board, and wisely so, to guard against the possibility of mistake in conveying them to their respective homes".

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James Mair 'Shanker' (34) was born on 17th June 1870 at 25 Seagate, Peterhead when his parents George Mair 'Shanker' and Euphemia Pirie were there for the summer herring. He was the elder brother of William Mair 'Shanker'. They were the first of two sets of brothers to die on the *Evangeline* when she was lost on 17th January 1905. He married Margaret Wood on the 9th September 1892 in the Free Church of Portknockie, he was 22 years of age and his wife Margaret was a 20 years old domestic servant, she had been born on 20th November 1871 in Rathven, her parents were not married but were identified on the birth certificate as George Wood, a Farm Servant and Louisa McBain a Domestic Servant. The minister of the Free Church, Peter Brown, officiated at the wedding at which Robert Mair and William Mair were the witnesses.

James Mair was part of a large family that had no less than eight children prior to the census of 1881 in Portknockie. The ages in brackets relate to their age at the time of the census. He had brothers/sisters Alexander (14), George (12) then James (10) himself, he was followed by William (8), Margaret (6), David (4), John (2) and finally Euphemia (8 months) A further child had been born after the census - as his brother Joseph identified both of his elder brothers following the tragedy. James remained on Stronsay and was buried in the Stronsay Bay Cemetery there. His wife meanwhile was at home with her two young children; she had recently come out of hospital and was recovering at home in the Braehead Portknockie. One of her children was Euphemia who had been born on 11th October 1899 at the home address 84 ½ Portknockie. I have not yet been able to trace the particulars of the other child.

I have not been able to trace when his wife Margaret Mair died. Similarly I tried to trace a wedding of Euphemia in Scotland but failed to find that too. It is possible that Margaret and her two children moved to a different country.

George Mair the father of William and James Mair married Euphemia Pirie (born 4th April 1844) on 18th January 1866 at Portknockie he was 23 years of age and his parents were Alexander Mair and Margaret Wilson, Euphemia Pirie was the daughter of George Pirie and Margaret Flett. They were married by William Birrell of the United Presbyterian Church with William Wilson and James Findlay as witnesses. George Mair died on 19th May 1906 aged 63 years at 250 Portknockie; his son John Mair registered his death. His wife Euphemia Pirie died some three years later on 19th June 1909 at their home address 250 Portknockie, again her son John Mair registered her death. He was resident at 300 Portknockie at the time.

As a small aside his sister Margaret, who was just six years old when her big brother died; she later married Alexander Jappy and died on 21st January 1947 aged 73 at her home 21 Seatown, Buckie.

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Joseph Mair 'Bobbin' (23) was born 13th November 1881 at 36 Portknockie, the son of David Mair 'Bobbin' and Margaret McDonald.

Alexander Mair 'Bobbin' (17) was born 19th October 1887 at 29 Portknockie, the son of David Mair 'Bobbin' and Margaret McDonald.

Both the young brothers were single men when they were snatched by the sea from the Evangeline. Alexander Mair a neighbour identified the body of Alexander Mair Bobbin but the body of Joseph was never recovered. He was known to have been on the Evangeline and a neighbour William Wood gave testimony on that to the authorities in Orkney. Alexander Mair was returned to his parents in Portknockie on the Trident and he was buried at Hillhead Cemetery Portknockie in plot 1614, no headstone was erected.

As to be expected in a family of fishermen, David Mair Bobbin was actually in the same area fishing from the Parvaim (BF103) the first steam drifter built at the Cliff at Portknockie. With an engine powering the boat they had ran before the sea and out of reach of the land, they sought deeper waters where it was safer. But fate was not done with the Parvaim as she herself sunk following a collision with the Twenty Eight YH711 which hit her starboard side and wheelhouse while manoeuvring in thick fog on 23rd July 1907, the boat sank within minutes but the skipper James Pirie 'Ticks' and his crew just had time to scramble aboard the Twenty Eight before the Parvaim sunk beneath the waves.

I shall deal with the Mair brothers ancestry together as both were unmarried. Their parents David Mair and Margaret McDonald had been married in Seafield Church on 8th October 1880 with the minister James McIntyre officiating and witnessed by William Slater and John Falconer. David was the 24 years old son of Joseph Mair and Catherine Mair while Margaret McDonald was aged 19 and the daughter of John McDonald (deceased at time of wedding) and Agnes Gault. I have been unable to find any records of the wedding or death of either of her parents.

Joseph Mair the father of David Mair had been born on 6th July 1806 to James Mair 'Bobbin' and Margaret Sclater. Catherine Mair had been born 29th March 1811 and was actually christened Katharine and not Catherine as found on later documents. She was the daughter of William Mair and Isobel Findlay (her first name later appeared on official documents as Isabella)

They had been married on 6th December 1830. Catherine Mair died on 26th April 1884 at Portknockie; her death was registered by her brother in law William Goodbrand of 132 Portknockie. Joseph died on 31st August 1890 at 129 Portknockie aged 82 years, his son James Mair 'Bobben' registered his death.

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George Findlay 'Hooker' was born on 24th October 1886 at Sandhaven, Pitsligo. His is quite a poignant tale as he was not a regular crew member of the Evangeline having taken the place of Alexander Mair 'Saucy' for this trip only. He was just 17 years of age when he perished on the Evangeline; he was only on the trip because of the altercation between the skipper David Wood 'King' and his step-son Alexander Mair 'Saucy'. Fate had reached out for George Findlay who was the son of James Findlay and Margaret Brodie. James Findlay was himself a fisherman from the Seatown of Cullen; he had been born there on 14th February 1860 to James Findlay and Isabella Sim. The young James had married Margaret Brodie on 29th October 1880 in the Free Church at Cullen by the Minister John Forgan in front of witnesses Robert Findlay and Hellen Findlay. The young couple settled in the Seatown. James Findlay and his family used the tee name 'Hooker'. James Findlay died some fifteen years after his son George on 1st January 1920 at the family home 236 Seatown. His son, also James registered his father's death. Margaret Brodie was the daughter of William Brodie and Mary Mitchell and was born 6th August 1861 in Cullen; her father was a Ploughman and her mother a domestic servant. Margaret Findlay died at her home 4 Richmond Place Huntly aged 71 years on 3rd November 1932, her son in law James Whyte (married to Isabella Findlay on 11th July 1923 in Greenock) registered her death.

As far as I can trace the family in 1905 consisted of James Findlay and Margaret Findlay with son George the eldest of three children, his young sister Isabella was six years old when her big brother died on the Evangeline and his younger brother James. I have not researched further into the families of his siblings as that might bring me up against living persons who may not want to remember the tragedy.

The body of George Findlay 'Hooker' was returned from the Orkneys to Portknockie on the Bluebell; he had been identified by William Wood a neighbour of the Findlays. His body was then carried in the traditional manner to his home at 236 Seatown, Cullen prior to his burial in Cullen cemetery.

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Alexander Mair 'Saucy' born 23rd August 1881 was a regular crew member of the Evangeline; he was 24 years of age and the step son of David Wood 'King'. His father was William Mair 'Saucy' (born 13th May 1857) whom his mother Jane Mair married on 8th October 1880 in Seafield Church. Unfortunately William Mair died leaving his widow Jane Mair. She then married widower David Wood King in 1891 following the untimely early deaths of their previous spouses. Young Alexander had a melodeon and loved to play it, the crew of the Evangeline liked to sing hymns as they toiled at their fishing, he wanted to accompany them on his melodeon. David Wood and the lad had a disagreement over the melodeon which led to Alexander refusing to go on the boat without his melodeon. His place was taken by another young man, George Findlay from Cullen. Alexander Mair liked his music, as well as his melodeon he played the flute. His grand-daughter, Mary Laing who has assisted in this research is herself an accomplished cellist. He gives the impression of being a headstrong young man, he was however described as being a very placid man, quiet and thoughtful.

According to his son, sadly now deceased, Bill Mair, David Wood had a fondness for the young Alexander Mair. He had even allowed the young family of Alexander to clear a piece of ground opposite his own house in Station Road which he used for lay out the fishing nets. He was to build a house on the plot which still stands to this day in the shape of Rose Villa. The street was later renamed High Street.

The same source, Bill Mair, also told his son (also Alexander Mair) of a couple of 'signs' which would usually have had the usually highly superstitious fishermen heading straight back home. The first one was the Woods had a pet, a tortoiseshell cat, which had followed David Wood no less than three times from his home on the cliff top to the harbour, the cat had to be returned home on each occasion. In addition to that it was said that the boat when it did leave harbour had to be warped out of the harbour only to fail to catch the wind on three occasions and finally sailing off on the fourth attempt.

By all accounts David Wood 'King' was a pragmatic man and whether he had any superstitions is not known. The fact of the matter seems to be that if he had been he would have returned home that day and not sailed to his death on the island of Stronsay.

Since writing the first draft of the research I have been updated on occasions by Mary Laing whose grandfather, Alexander Mair 'Saucy' was scheduled to be a crew member of the ill-fated Evangeline. She was in touch in the spring of 2006 when she related the following which had been written in a letter from Wilma Wood the grand-daughter of David Wood 'King' - I have paraphrased the text somewhat but the basic facts remain unaltered.

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Somewhere in the Orkneys there is still a piece of equipment from the *Evangeline*. A close relative of Wilma Wood was there about 40 years ago (1960s) doing research into a disease called farmer's lung. During his visit he met a man whose mother had a compass (as far as the letter writer remembers) from the *Evangeline*. Apparently his mother had found it after the wreck and offered it to David Wood's widow, Jane Mair Bobbin, apparently she did not want it and the Orcadian lady kept it. The man met the lady in the 1960s and she agreed to let him take it back to show the family of David Wood 'King', the grand-daughter remembers it was in their house for a few weeks and her father was thrilled to have it. However, it had to be returned as the new owner, the Orcadian lady, wanted to keep it.

In the same letter the grand-daughter goes on to tell how she had contacted her brother David to see if he could remember any more details. He could not add much to what she had already related but remembered a rather bizarre tale from the same source (the close relative), he had been told (it is presumed by the Orcadian lady) that some of the bodies recovered from the *Evangeline* had been laid out on the beach while the rescuers went to get something to carry the bodies in, when they got back, one of the bodies had turned over - had the man been alive when recovered and died on the beach?

When I heard this latest from the direct descendants of David Wood 'King' my reaction was that it would be wonderful if the current owner of the compass from the *Evangeline* could be traced. If the current owner is traced then perhaps he/she would consider offering the grandchildren of David Wood 'King' what is probably the last remaining physical memory of the *Evangeline* which had been crushed by the sea and their grandfather and his crew of Portknockie men had perished. An alternative is that the current owner would perhaps consider gifting it to the community of Portknockie in order for them to remember the sons and fathers of the crew of the *Evangeline*.

I have been in contact with a friend who is knowledgeable about the ways of the sea. He comes from a long line of fishermen. Given the descriptive terms in which the gale is described by others it is considered that David Wood 'King', who was acknowledged as one of the best skippers of the day, would have found it difficult to find the sea room to avoid the low lying land of Stronsay. It is doubtful if there was much canvas left giving the battering the boat had received from the gale. The standard rig on a Zulu boat was extremely heavy and did not lend itself for short tacking, without canvas the boat would have been driven by the wind backwards or possibly headlong if the men had been brave enough to turn her. They probably towed a warp or some sort of drogue or an anchor to prevent her broaching and to slow her down. One can only imagine the maelstrom in the darkness in which they had to operate. Screaming

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hurricane force winds would be driving the boat and the mountainous seas plunging the boat this way and that. The low lying land and the treacherous rocks which awaited on the Stronsay shore as she raced towards her final moments in the darkness; the force which tore the zulu apart was considerable, these boats were built to withstand great strains and stresses but this was obviously overwhelming. The mast was torn from its root in the boat, all steerage would have been gone the men helpless as they crashed ashore, their boat wrecking itself before them. The compass torn from its mounting and washed up on the shore, such a heavy object to be thrown ashore like a matchstick emphasises the force of the sea on the night. The crew being found in a small area near to the wreckage of the Evangeline all point to the boat having been driven ashore by the gale rather than being overwhelmed out at sea. It is likely she would have rolled over, her mast striking the bottom and breaking. Up to that point it is likely that some or all of the crew would have been alive and fighting for their lives. It is also possible that Joseph Mair Bobbin was washed ashore earlier in the storm as his body was never recovered.

I find that quite compelling and feasible and made the decision to include it in the narrative in order to provide a conclusion of sorts of just what could have happened and it also serves as a discussion point for those knowledgeable in the ways of the sea as to whether or not they agree.

As for the story of the recovered body turning over on the beach at Stronsay, it is possible that the man had survived the ice cold waters for the time he had been in them, he would undoubtedly be suffering from the effects of hypothermia which would have rendered him unconscious although not necessarily immobile, it is considered possible that he could have rolled over in the time the men were away to get recovery equipment. Again it is open to discussion.

We shall never know for certain what happened on board the Evangeline as those eight men fought the wind and sea for their very lives and lost.

I have taken the liberty of including the testimony of Mr J Campbell who was the skipper of the Glide out of Lossiemouth; it relates his experience of a journey home from Lowestoft through a terrible gale in November 1893. He wrote the account himself and I am sure he would have given his permission to use his very enlightening story to highlight his fellow fishermen's plight some years later. It may give the reader an understanding of what might have been happening onboard the Evangeline as it fought for survival in the Orkney gale.

At noon on Friday 17th November 1893 the sailboat Glide of Lossiemouth left Lowestoft. A number of boats from the area resolved to head for home after months of absence. The Glide from Lossiemouth, the Morning Star and Venor of Hopeman, the Glide of Cullen, the Reids of Buckie all set out together. Mr Campbell was in conversation with the Mr Main the skipper of

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the Venor. They decided to head for Winterton and anchor there until Saturday morning. The wind was in the SSW and not very strong as they set out. However the glass (barometer) was exceedingly low. They arrived at Winterton around 5pm on Friday and despite misgivings about the low state of the glass and against their better judgement they decided to proceed homewards. The wind had turned a little more northerly.

As the evening wore on a strong frost came down and the wind backed to the west or WNW, the sail was increased and the boats were rattling along at good speed by 10pm, each boat carrying the foresail, the mizzen and the jib. At 4 a.m. the light of the Inner Dowsing had been sighted to the west. They passed the Toiler of Lossiemouth which was riding out the breeze. At 7 a.m. the Glide was somewhere between Flamborough and Spurn with the Humber astern. The boats were then becalmed until around 9.a.m. when with a light wind from the NE the foresail was tacked. Mr Campbell went below for breakfast; he was almost finished when hurriedly called to deck. He then takes up the story, in his own words:-

“Reaching the deck I beheld approaching us and coming directly towards us, at the time we were scudding along with a fine two sail breeze. As soon as my eyes fell upon the black, terrifying, awesome mass that seemed to be coming towards us like a huge octopus, I ran towards the fore halyards. Quicker than lightning I let go the fore halyards and as the sails with their yards fell upon the deck, the huge black mass struck us.

Never before or since have I seen anything like it. Sea, wind and blinding snow enveloped us in darkness indescribable. The feeling that came to us, the atmosphere that surrounded us, were of such as one had associated with the day of Judgement. Before I had gone the cabin I had seen the houses of Bridlington, dead ahead, and had concluded that we were about 8 or 10 miles off the land.

After the first shock, and when in a measure we had become somewhat accustomed to the darkness, the snow, the wind and the sea, with great difficulty we gave our vessel two rings of the foresail. Snugging up everything we proceeded towards land. Before raising the sail I recognised that it would require better canvas than we had - and our sail was quite new - to stand the test that I knew lay before us. To give our sail every chance, I resolved to roll up on the yard all the spare peak. This I did to save the sail of the shake that I knew quite well the sail would have to undergo, and which it could never stand. I confess it was an inspiration of the moment, the inevitable, unaccountable prompting that often comes to me in the hour of danger. I had never seen or heard of being done, although I had heard of the cutting off of the first two or three rings. In point of fact, I had my knife in my hand to cut, when instead of cutting I was prompted to roll. I rolled the peak round the yard, then lashed it firmly round with stoppers, using the mizzen 'humper' to save chaffing. How often I look back and thank God for the inspiration that came to me at that moment. I have no doubt it was because our sail was thus raised that we saved our lives. The sail was raised just the least degree possible - the 'eemost' ring. It was secured with two sets of tackle at the aft end and by a rope in the 'Bowlin'

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In the midst of the prevailing darkness, I recognised it was useless to go toward the land. Our only hope of weathering it out, lay in seeking the open sea. When shall I ever forget that noonday hour on Saturday 18th November 1893 when the Glide was laid about and we began to go off-shore. What tongue will ever tell, what pen shall ever describe all those hours of anxiety, suffering and trials until 4 a.m. on Sunday morning, when we put about to retrace our steps, if possible, for another 16 hours.

During the whole of that afternoon and that long, dreary night, when every lurch almost spelt Death, what mountainous waves the Glide had climbed; how often had she risen battered with the fury of the gale, to fall into the wallowing trough of sea perhaps for the last time. What thoughts filled by breast as, lashed to the wheel, I remained there during those terrible trying hours.

The lash of salt water as it smote on the face was very bad but the continual flick, flick, flick of the huge snowflakes upon one's face almost drove one crazy. The ordinary effort to see was insufficient, one had to steel oneself to keep staring. This intensified the affliction of the snowflakes. All these hours, surrounded with the blackness of the darkness of the pit, with the mountainous waves whose roaring as they approached, struck terror to the heart, what a time; how well we all remember when we came to a specially bad patch of sea, as though we had come to shallow water. This was after 4 a.m. on Sunday morning and while we were making landwards. How reassuring was the message of the run of water leading from Flamborough Head. What a blessing it was for us that night that there were no ebb tide and thus there was no 'lee-Faul'.

Just as we were laying about, at 4 o'clock on the morning, I was washed from my position at the wheel. Shortly before this we had seen close to us, what we believe was the Glide of Cullen. I was being swirled about in the water, and somehow or other it came to me that the Glide perished at that time. Certain it was we never saw her again. I was washed from my position on the stern of the Glide by the continual dipping into the waves of the stern. Fortunately, I was able to seize hold of the capstan spindle and recovering from the mass of water that had assailed me, I just sat down as formerly at the wheel. I stood on my feet and looking round, was amazed to think that a frail barque could live amidst such fury. I stood gazing at the infuriated, heaving mass of seas, with the wind whistling around my ears and shrieking through the rigging, all accompanied by the deep roar of the oncoming waves. We were steaming inshore, heading anything from North to N.N.W. The Glide was picking her way wonderfully well. I confess with pardonable pride that I was proud of her. Looking back upon it all, I realise that there were better hands than mine guiding the little Glide.

With the presence of daylight, the darkness and the snow gone, our hopes revived. With the new power that thus came to us, we were enabled to set up a fresh battle for our lives. It was then I realised the wisdom of rolling the peak on the foreyard.

When snugging the boat on Saturday forenoon, our hatches were on. I accordingly ordered all the oars and wands available to be laid in order upon the hatches. On top of the oars and the wands, the big mizzen was spread and on top of all this we ran two heavy chains across the hatches.

About 9 o'clock on Sunday morning I noticed a steamer on our lee bow bearing about NNW from us. She was heading in the same direction as we were. I saw this steamer take a run of seas that turned

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her right round, putting her head where here stern had been. I believe that steamer never reached land.

At 3 o'clock on Sunday afternoon the wind had eased considerably. With two rings of the sail and things ever so much more comfortable for us, we came to Smethwick Bay at the darkening. At Smethwick Bank we gave her two anchors, and although the weather was still bad, it had moderated considerably. As daylight made on Monday morning, the lifeboat came off to us and spoke to us. We lay there until Monday forenoon, ultimately reaching Bridlington at dinner time.

The Glide was only 48 feet of keel, carvel built by Mr Duncan at Speymouth. Apart from her usual fishing kit, she carried as ballast about 3 tons of stones. This doubtless helped to make her more seaworthy. The effects of the voyage never left us. The story is not told with any desire to boast or to appear van-glorious, but simply to set on record the real experiences of one crew in the November gale of 1893, and in acknowledgment of their thankfulness that they escaped the fate that overtook so many that memorable week-end.

So there it is; what a tale he had to tell. Very descriptive, it also tends to show that small decisions made on the moment can sometimes change the catalogue of events. I think the weather conditions faced by Campbell and the crew of the Glide were similar to those faced by the crew of the Evangeline some years afterwards. The storm which ended the Evangeline seemed to last for some time longer than the one sweeping down the north sea in 1893.

No matter really, both faced horrendous situations and there but for the grace of God.

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The two steam drifters Blue Bell BF 1048 and Trident BF1049 who went to Orkney to recover the dead of the disaster were both built in 1902 in the yard of Smith Dock Company Ltd, North Shields Middlesbrough. Both were scrapped in January of 1936.

The local minister Peter Brown had sent a small card dated Portknockie 16th February 1907 to Jane Mair 'Bobbin' the wife of David Wood 'King'.

It reads

Let widowed wife and children three
Rest freely on the promise given;
By His good grace and faithful Word,
Ties broken here are fixed in Heaven.

Our journey may be long or short,
Its course as winding stream;
Yet all is well, if, in it all,
Our souls do trust in Him.

We wait with glad and patient hope
The will of Him, who rules our life;
Ready to serve, content to wait,
As best fulfils the faithful strife.

Peter Brown
Portknockie 16th Feb 1907

The above card was sent to me by Mary S Laing who is the grand-daughter of Alexander Mair 'Saucy' and the great granddaughter of Jane Mair 'Bobbin'.

Mary has also been kind enough to send me photographs of her ancestors and given her permission for them to be used in articles such as this. I thank her very much for her contributions which add so much to mere words.

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The following poem was penned by John Cowie 'Coup' who signed himself as "A Yardie Loon" It was taken from the book "A seafaring Saga" written by James Slater Portsoy in 1979.

**With sorrowing heart, I now would write
Of loved ones that are gone;
They left their homes with prospects bright,
But now their race is run.**

**Eight of a crew, all well and strong,
They sailed off to the sea;
Expecting nothing to go wrong,
But Oh! How blind we are.**

**On January the thirteenth day,
From Wick they did set sail;
The day was fine the glass was high,
No signs of coming gale.**

**They shot their nets among the rest,
We suppose they went below;
I'm sure that they were all surprised,
When the wind began to blow.**

**Before the fourteenth dawn did break,
An awful gale did rise;
Just such a day, you'll oft hear say,
The sea meets with the skies.**

**They rode at nets for three long nights,
But parted were at last;
We suppose that they all did agree,
To run before the blast.**

**Driven by the fury of the gale,
Upon a wild lee shore;
The *Evangeline* met with her last,
And sank to rise no more.**

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**How they met their death that fatal night,
No one on earth will know;
But this – a crew of eight all told,
Was swept to depths below.**

**Our boats are strong and equitable,
And right men do combine;
But let the Tempest breathe its breath,
*Alas' the *Evangeline*.***

**Men may think and men may act,
But He ruleth that's divine;
No secret is held from Him,
*About the *Evangeline*.***

**But this we know that God doth hold,
The waters in His hand;
All power is His, all things do move,
At His supreme command.**

**Yet such is His love that He did give
For us His only son;
That we might look to Him,
All through what He has done.**

**O Lord do comfort those that's left,
Help them to trust in Thee;
Be thou a God to those bereft,
We leave them Lord with Thee.**

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Almost a year to the day after the event the Orkney Herald, from which many of the contemporary reports have been used herein, published the following poem which commemorates the event through the words of the local minister.

The wreck of the Evangeline

From the Orkney Herald – Wednesday 10th January 1906

By the Reverend Walter J Mathews F.R.G.S.

*As taut a craft as ever was seen
Was the Portknockie lugger Evangeline;
Built for the swirl of the wild North Sea.
Of the toughest oak and larch was she.
Her sails and rigging and masts and all
Were fitted to stand what might befall
In the roaring rage of an Orkney gale.*

*Her skipper was built of the self same plan
A rugged and storm trained Banffshire man,
Calm as a sea-bird, strong and brave
He would ride the ridge of the roughest wave,
And his spirit and grit nerved all the crew
What the skipper would dare they would forthwith do,
But even the bravest of men may fail
In the roaring rage of an Orkney gale.*

*Season by season for many a year
She swung to her berth at Stronsay pier,
The silver freight of her latest catch,
Glistening down in a main-deck hatch;
But whether her luck was good or bad,
A right good welcome she always had,
And none dreamed that she would ever fail
In the roaring rage of an Orkney gale.*

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*The Stronsay men and her sturdy crew
Foregathered as fisher-folk all will do
Search the World you will never find
Men of such single heart and mind;
They meet and they part like brothers all,
With a shake and a smile and a cheery call,
Nor think of a day when there still may fail
In the roaring rage of an Orkney gale*

*One year, when the work of the fleet was done,
The skipper set sail on his homeward run,
And the crew of the good Evangeline
Waving their hands on the deck were seen,
Whilst their voices ran back the old refrain –
“Goodbye, good luck, we will come again”,
And who could tell that they ever would
In the roaring rage of an Orkney gale.*

*They all came back – but not as before
With a leap and a laugh to a Stronsay shore.
They all came back – but wait, I will tell
The fate which those gallant hearts befell,
How the crew of the lugger Evangeline
On the Stronsay shore again were seen;
Alas, alas, 'tis a sad, sad tale
Of a wreck in a raging Orkney gale.*

*Christmas was past with its kindly cheer
And Hansel Day of the new-born year,
And after a feast comes need and need,
The fish must be caught and the children must feed;
So out from Portknockie and fishing fleet steered,
Whilst the wind to the deadly south-east veered,
And woe to the craft that with it must sail
In the roaring rage of an Orkney gale.*

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*The night came down like the fall of doom,
Not a star flashed out on the fearful gloom.
Suddenly rushed the wind to the worst,
With a bound from their nets, the fisher fleet burst;
Then by God alone that night were seen
The lights of the poor Evangeline,
As she drove brow down with her shattered sail
In the furious grip of that Orkney gale.*

*Past Burgh Head like a feather she flew
Beyond will and skill of skipper and crew,
They had done their best, they had done their last,
For the breakers roared through the raging blast,
And the billows swept over the groaning deck,
Leaving the lugger a crewless wreck
To drift without mast or sail
Through that seething scud of that Orkney gale.*

*They all came back – but not as before
With a leap and a laugh to Stronsay shore;
They all came back – but silent and still,
Like men who had yielded to God's great will;
And the Stronsay folk remembered with pain,
"Goodbye, good luck, we will come again".
And prayed "Lord may thy mercy never fail
The Fishermen's needs in an Orkney gale".*

Such tragic events were alas, a common place occurrence in fishing villages, no matter where they are located. We owe them a great debt for their courage, steadfastness and skills. Those who have been to sea in any capacity can only begin to understand what they had to endure. I have trawled through many records to obtain the information above and am as satisfied as I can be that it is accurate.

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Musselburgh. 2005.
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