

# FETHERD LIFEBOAT DISASTER

A tale of Bravery and sadness



*left to right: "Billy Duggan, Ron Duffy, Nell O'Rourke, Nick Doyle and Ibar Murphy "At the Burrow monument Rosslare Strand. Celebrating the bravery of all the lifeboat Men involved in the rescue of the crew of the Schooner Mexico"*

*This booklet was put together to celebrate  
the O'Rourke Family gathering  
in the Danby Hotel, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2009.*

*Historical records was the source  
for compiling this booklet.*

*It is dedicated in memory of  
Bill and Ann Duggan,  
Nell and Lar O'Rourke,  
Liam and May O'Rourke,  
Mary O'Rourke, Peter Bent.  
and James Tyrell.*

*The Mayor then presented the medals  
and shook hands with Messers Wickham  
and Duggan. Mr William Duggan rose  
to reply, amid loud applause. In simple,  
modest fashion, he thanked the members  
of the New Ross Urban Council and all  
those connected with the GAA for the  
honour conferred upon him, and he was  
very proud to receive this medal from  
the Mayor of Wexford, it being the first  
medal he ever received in his life.  
(Applause) He also thanked Mr Walter  
Hanrahan for having made the proposal  
to the GAA to present medals to Jim  
Wickham and himself. Apologising  
for being unable to express his gratitude  
in a more eloquent speech to all  
concerned, he resumed his seat amidst  
loud applause.*

## FETHARD LIFEBOAT DISASTER 20<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 1914

On the afternoon of the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, 1914, there being what was described as a somewhat unsteady breeze from S.S.W., with a force of 4 to 5, misty showers of short duration, and a moderate sea, the coastguards on duty at Bar of Lough, between 2.30 and 3 o'clock, sighted a vessel between the Saltees Island and the Keragh Islands, on the port tack. Recognising that the stranger was in a perilous position, the signals J.D. ("You are standing into danger") were hoisted, but apparently without any response being made.

At Bannow, which it was stated is a better place for obtaining a view of the Keragh Island than is Bar of Lough, the wind on this day is said to have been south, force 6 to 7, with thick misty weather. The mist cleared off about 2.45 p.m., but a little before that time, about 2.30 p.m., the sails of a vessel were seen to the eastward. The signals J.D. and C.S were also shown at this station, and the vessel hoisted her ensign.

The coastguard stations at Bar of Lough and Bannow were in constant telephonic communication with one another, and information was telegraphed to the head office of the coastguard at Wexford that the wind was south, that there was a vessel in the bay, heading W.S.W., on the port tack, and going to leeward on the Keragh Islands. As a matter of fact, the vessel appears to have struck on the rocks on the southern side of the outer Keragh Island about 4 p.m., there being a heavy squall about that time. Upon the stranding taking place, the coastguard communicated with the lifeboat stations at Fethard and Kilmore, the latter being situated behind Cross-fornoge, in the north-east corner of the bay. However, earlier in the afternoon, about 3 p.m. Mr. George L. Bassett, Honorary Secretary of the Local Lifeboat Committee, had been informed that there was a vessel well inside the Saltee Islands, and apparently trying to get out. Mounting high ground, he saw that the vessel was in a very dangerous position south of the Keragh Islands and at once caused the usual signals to be made for the assembling of the lifeboat's crews. The men speedily responded, and about 3.30 p.m. the "Helen Blake" was successfully launched, without accident of any kind.

What was to follow will go down as one of the greatest feats of endurance, courage and dedication ever performed in the history of the Lifeboat Service. This story has rolled off many tongues over many years and is famously known as the "Fethard Lifeboat Disaster" or the "Mexico Epic" (Mexico being the name of the vessel that was struck on the rocks of the Keragh Island) and an excellent publication known as the "The Helen Blake".

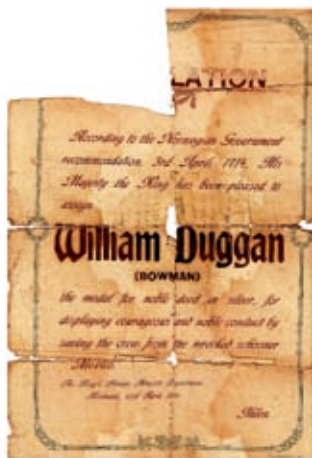
The Helen Blakes proper complement was 13 men, namely, a coxswain, second coxswain, bowman, and 10 other hands, but in this instance one member of

the regular crew did not first arrive, and so a volunteer was taken in his place. However, before the lifeboat left, the missing man appeared, also went in her, thus bringing the crew up to fourteen. Of those manning her, it may be said that all were good men, more or less connected with the sea, and used to boat work. The coxswain, who bore an excellent character, had filled the same position for twelve years and some of the other persons had been members of the crew for a very lengthy period. The crew, with the exception of the man who arrived late (William Banville), had their life-jackets on, but owing to anxiety to get away without delay, partly on account of the tide, the lifeboat left without Banville having been provided with one of the spare life-jackets from the store. Here is an extract from a letter written by Lieutenant-Commander Walter G. Rigg, R.N. (retired), one of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution's district Inspectors, to the Chief Inspector (Commander Holmes), dated the 6<sup>th</sup> of April, 1914, tending as it does to show, taken in conjunction with what has gone before, that on the 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1914, the "Helen Blake" when about to leave Fethard on her last service, was in a thoroughly satisfactory condition.

*RNLI, GAA & Norwegian Awards presented William Duggan & James Wickham for bravery and the saving of lives in the Fethard Lifeboat disaster February 1914*



*GAA gold medal*



*Diploma from King of Norway*



*RNLI silver medal*

The extract is as follows:- “ *I inspected this (Fethard) station periodically between the end of 1910 and 1913, and on every occasion of my visits I found everything appertaining to the station in excellent order. I exercised the boat on most occasions, and always found the coxswain, Christopher Bird, a good and competent seaman, and he always handled the boat in a seaman like manner. I do not think there was a station on the coast where a coxswain paid greater attention to having everything always in the most efficient condition.*”

Shortly after 4.p.m. the Helen Blake left Fethard for the scene of the wreck. There was a strong breeze, variously described as from S.S.W. to W.S.W., with a heavy sea, and the tide was about half ebb. The lifeboat, which was under all sail, and was steered to windward of the wrecked schooner, with a view to manoeuvring into the best position for effecting communication with her, appears to have behaved well and to have made good progress, although during the first part of her journey it seemed to have had the tide against her.

When about two cables from the “Mexico” the coxswain gave an order for the drop-keels to be lifted and this was done, although there is some little doubt as to whether the pin was put in the forward one to keep it in place. The wind had been more or less on the starboard beam, and the lifeboat being now to the southward of the wreck, the coxswain kept her off a little, in order to edge in. Just at this time, however, she was struck by a heavy and unexpected sea which completely filled her. The helm was put up, the mizzen sheet was eased off, and the jib sheet was hauled to windward, but she would not pay off, and began to make a stern-board in towards the island, while a succession of heavy seas kept her full of water and rendered her quite unmanageable. The coxswain now gave the order to let go the anchor, and this order was executed, but a heavy sea struck the bowman and knocked him over, and the cable ran out to the clench, by which time the lifeboat was ashore. She struck in an upright position, and then heeled over on her side until the mainmast came in contact with the rocks.

It was stated by two witnesses from Bannow, one a boatman of the coastguard and the other a shoemaker who were watching events, that after the “Helen Blake” struck the rocks she capsized, but this was denied by survivors of her crew. While giving these shore witnesses every credit for only stating what they thought they saw, yet presumably those who were afloat and actors in the scene were better able to form an opinion as to what actually did occur; therefore, an inquiry accepted as a fact that the lifeboat did not capsize. Upon the Helen Blake striking the rocks which was about 5p.m., her crew were thrown or washed into the sea. Four of them eventually, with great difficulty, succeeded in getting on to the South Keragh Island, one other was hauled on board the “Mexico” and nine unfortunately men lost their lives.



*William Duggan*

Subsequently a line was got from the “Mexico” to the Island and made fast there by two of the lifeboat men, and the crew of that vessel and the one lifeboat man were hauled through the water to a place of comparative safety. Thus, after all, in a sense, the Fethard lifeboat’s crew did succeed in fulfilling their errand of mercy.

**KILMORE lifeboat.** About 4p.m. of the day of disaster, information was sent to Kilmore that there was a vessel ashore on the Keragh Islands, and as soon as possible the lifeboat was launched, and left her station about 5 p.m. However, she was not successful in finding the wreck as the night was dark and the sea heavy, and so she returned to Kilmore, where she arrived about 9 p.m. The crew stood by all night, and at daylight on the following morning another attempt was made. It was then blowing fresh from the S.W., and the lifeboat could not round the Crossfarnoge Point. This being the case, she returned to the quay. At 9.30 a.m. she again left Kilmore, and upon this occasion managed to get about half-a-mile to the southward of the wreck, but could not approach nearer as the weather was too bad. After lying head to the sea, which was getting worse all the time, for about an hour, and there being no prospect of an opportunity to rescue those in distress, the lifeboat returned to her station about 3.30 p.m. During the night the wind shifted to S.E., and the boat was housed for safety. In the next day, 22<sup>nd</sup> of February, the Dunmore lifeboat was at Fethard, and, that being so, the coxswain of the Kilmore stated, there was no necessity for launching the boat again while the wind remained as it was- and, accordingly, she did not again appear on the scene.

**Commander Holmes.** As soon as news of the disaster reached London the Chief Inspector Life-boats, Commander Thomas Holmes, R.N., was instructed to proceed to Fethard. He left London on the Saturday Night, arriving at the scene of the calamity shortly after 3 p.m. on Sunday.

**Dunmore Lifeboat.** About 8 a.m. of the 21<sup>st</sup> of February information was received at Dunmore that the lifeboat was wanted, and at 9.30 a.m. she was launched and proceeded. She arrived off the Keragh Islands about 1p.m., approached close, and backed into shallow water. There was a big wash on the shore, and it was found impossible to communicate with the island. The lifeboat remained at anchor for some three hours and then, as nothing could be done, proceeded to Fethard and remained there. At 4.30 a.m. of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February the weather had moderated, and the Dunmore lifeboat again left Fethard, this time with Commander Holmes on board, and, at his suggestion, connection was effected with the island by means of a rocket and line. An attempt was made to send an unmanned dinghy to the island, but the boat was smashed. Two of the Fethard lifeboat men, Kelly and McNamara, were then hauled through the water by means of a line and a lifebuoy. Dunmore Lifeboat had rescued two of the stranded lifeboat men.

**Wexford (Fort) Lifeboat.** At 7 a.m. of the 21<sup>st</sup> of February, intelligence was received by telephone at the Wexford lifeboat station that the “Mexico “ and the Helen Blake had been wrecked, and that survivors were seen on Keragh Island. Some of the crew lived about four miles from the boathouse, but shortly after 9.a.m. the lifeboat left to render assistance, towed by the steam tug ”Wexford”, which took her to within a mile or a mile and a-half of the Keragh Islands, after which she proceeded under sail. Arriving near the Island, she endeavoured to establish communication with stranded men, but found it impossible, and as the wind and the sea were increasing she made for Waterford Harbour, arriving off Hook Point about 8.30 p.m. by which time there was a heavy gale blowing. All next day nothing could be done owing the state of the weather. However, about 3.30 a.m. of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February, the lifeboat again started, once more towed by the steam tug “Wexford” and arrived off the Keragh Islands about 7 a.m., where she anchored in the best position she could for the purpose of effecting the work of rescue.

She brought with her a strong punt belonging to the tug, which was more suitable for the work. Two of the crew of the Life-boat, named William Duggan and James Wickham, volunteered to work the punt. Stripping off their sea boots and oilskins and with nothing on but their shirts, trousers and lifebelts (note this was in the month of February), they veered the punt down with a rope attached to her bows, from the Wexford(Fort) Lifeboat. Awaiting a “smooth” with an oar apiece they guided the punt through the peaks of out jutting rocks as they came through the surf, they got close enough in to the rocks to get hold of two men and dragged them on board the punt, which was then hauled back to the Life-boat; by this means, in the course of five trips all the survivors, ten in number, were conveyed to the Wexford(Fort) Lifeboat. there being some distance to travel in the punt and a bad sea on for a small boat.

During the second trip the punt was driven on to the rocks and a hole stove in her. Cox Wickham threw a loaf of bread to the punt, and William Duggan stuffed the hole with the loaf and some packing, and, undeterred by the accident, they gallantly continued the work of rescue.

Eventually, as soon as all the men were safely on board the Life-boats the tug took them in tow; the five Fethard men together with the Chief Inspector were landed at Fethard and the Dunmore East life-boat then re-joined the tug, which proceeded to Waterford, dropping the Dunmore East boat off her station and taking the Wexford boat and seven men belonging to the Mexico up to Waterford, thousands lined the quays at Waterford to welcome them where they were well cared for. Both tug and Life-boat remained at Waterford for the night and returned to Wexford next day. On their return as they passed the Connybeg and Barrels Rock

Light vessels the Captains and Crews mounted the bulwarks to cheer them on their way. And when they got to the Wexford Quays and the Fort the crews got the reception fitting the heroes they were. They had been at sea for four days

During the whole of the time that the survivors were on the island all they had to eat was two small tins of preserved meat and a few limpets, as no provisions could be got from the schooner. No water could be found, and the only thing they has to drink was a small quantity of brandy and about half a pint of wine which the captain of the schooner had managed to take with him when leaving the vessel. Their suffering therefore can be imagine, exposed as they were to a biting wind, with no shelter, their condition was rendered, more miserable by the rain and the spray which constantly drove over the island.

*The master of the “Mexico;” I Ole Edwin Erickensen, of Frederikshald, Norway, tells his storey.*

I was master of the ship or vessel ‘Mexico’, which was wrecked at Keragh Island, on the coast of County Wexford, Ireland, on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of February, 1914. The vessel belonged to the port of Frederikshald, in Norway; her registered tonnage was 434 tons; she was owned by Alf.Roed, of Frederikshald, Norway, and was a three mastered schooner, built of steel, at Frederikstadt, in the year 1905. The crew consisted of ten hands all told, including myself, and she had no passengers. Her cargo was 481 tons of mahogany and cedar logs, shipped at Laguna, Carmen Island, Mexico, by Bolnes & Co., and consigned to David Mishley, of Manchester, England

The vessel left Laguna on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November, 1913, for Liverpool, in good condition and well found in all respects, and was wind-bound in the Gulf of Mexico for about one month. She passed Cape Hetteras on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, and subsequently encountered several heavy gales, and on or about the 26<sup>th</sup> December the steering broke, but was temporarily repaired on board and the vessel reached Ponto Delgada, in the Azores, about the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, 1914, where further repairs to the rudder were made and new sails and lifeboat obtained, as the former lifeboat had been broken in the storms. She sailed from Ponto Delgada on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February, 1914, and encountered a hurricane for the North when in about 43° 45’N., and 17° 48’ W. on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February. On Thursday, the 19<sup>th</sup> of February, I took observation at noon and found the ship’s position 50° 49’ N. and 8° 18’ N., and set a course for Coningbeg lightship.

On the morning of Friday, the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, the wind increased to a gale form the S. and S.E., with rain and sleet. The ship was on the starboard tack on a course E. and E. by S., and nothing was seen. At 1pm. with weather cleared, and I then found that the vessel was between Saltee Islands and the mainland,

and I had the vessel brought on the post tack and headed S.W.1/2W., but owing to the heavy seas, the strong current, and the force of the wind, the vessel was driven inshore and failed to clear the Keragh Island, on the south west end of which she struck on rocks at 3 p.m. on the same day. The lifeboat was lowered and the two of the crew got into it. In order to get the boat down quickly when there was a chance, it had to be cut away, and in getting down some fittings were lost. The two men in the boat had oars, but probably no rowlocks. They could do nothing to get back to the ship and were carried ashore near Bannow. Attempts were made to get the mizen boom swung out towards the shore so that men could go along it and try to get to the island.

In the meantime the lifeboats from Fethard, County Wexford, approached, but as the lifeboat neared the wreck she struck on rocks and was broken to fragments within three minutes. Four of the lifeboats-men got on the island and one reached the wreck.

A line was subsequently got from the wreck to the Keragh Island or rock, and was made fast by the lifeboat-men there, and the seven men of my crew and the lifeboat-men and myself were hauled through the water to the Island, where we remained until the morning of Monday, the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February, where we were rescued, the Wexford (Fort) lifeboat taking off ten survivors and the Dunmore lifeboat two. One of the crew of the "Mexico" Antonio Live, a Portuguese subject, had died on the island from exposure to the freezing cold, hail, sleet, and rain, and two had got to shore in the ships boat on the 20<sup>th</sup>, as stated. The five lifeboat-men saved were landed at Fethard, but all the survivors from the "Mexico" were taken on direct to Waterford by the Wexford Harbour tug which had been rendering assistance.

At the time the Mexico, struck she was under fore-staysail, jib, double reefed foresail, double reefed mainsail, and full mizen. It was impossible to anchor owing to the heavy sea, the wind being a whole gale from S.S.E., heavy sea with the wind, and a strong current going to the northward. I attempted to save the logbook and the papers from the cabin, but could not do so, the cabin having filled with water within 10 minutes of the vessel striking the rocks. The 'Mexico' struck at 3 p.m., and the Fethard lifeboat at about 4p.m., and we got out line to the island at somewhere about 5 pm. I estimate the value of the ship at £3,000. I estimate the value of the cargo at £10,000, but I do not know for what it was insured, nor as to the insurance of freight. In my opinion, the sole cause of the stranding and loss of the "Mexico" was the thick weather which came on, and the strong currents from the southward causing the vessel to drift inshore, and in the circumstances, it was unavoidable.

So far as I can judge, the cause of the loss of the Fethard lifeboat was the same; she was carried inshore too close to the rock, the wind failed, and she could not her make way out, and was caught by breakers and was at once stove in

and smashed on the rocks in heavy surf. Nothing could be done to save the brave men who were thus thrown into the heavy sea, and with the exception of the five men mentioned, all others of the lifeboats crew were drowned. Our lifebuoys had been lost, and our other boat carried on the fore-hatch smashed by seas breaking over the 'Mexico' when she struck. Each man had a lifebelt, but after putting it on we took it off again to enable us to work better. The lifeboat was under sail, I did not notice anyone rowing. She passed a very short distance from our bow, and we were trying to get our boom in so that it should not be in her way. Seas were constantly sweeping the forepart of the 'Mexico'. The vessel was about 5 Fathoms distance from the island. The wreck was heading southerly, and the place where the lifeboat struck was on our starboard side, at about 7 or 8 fathoms distance.

Everything possible seems to have been done to render assistance to my vessel, and both when we got on the tug and when we landed, we were treated with the utmost kindness, and everything was done for our comfort. On my own account, and on behalf of the whole crew, I wish to record our most grateful thanks, and our very deep sorrow for the terrible disaster to the lifeboat-men who were trying to come to our rescue.

I now desire to say a few words in appreciation of the services rendered by the crews of the lifeboats which, under difficult circumstances, effected the rescue from the island, and in the connection Edward Wickham, coxswain of the Wexford(Fort) Lifeboat, and Walter Power, coxswain of the Dunmore lifeboat, are worthy of much commendation. Laurence Busher, master of the stern tug "Wexford", also appears to have done all that he could to assist in the good work. In the earlier attempts to approach the wreck the Kilmore lifeboat had some trying experience. I have already mentioned that ten men were taken from the island, in five successive trips in 13-foot punt, manned by two men. Commander Holmes, who was an eye-witness upon that occasion, stated that this service was one of the great personal risk to those who undertook it, as can be readily understood when the size of the boat, the state of the sea, and the rocky nature of the locality were taken into consideration. Accordingly, it affords me very great pleasure to have the opportunity of bringing the names of these two men, William Duggan and James Wickham, respectively bowman and second coxswain of the Wexford(Fort) Lifeboat, to the special notice of the Board of Trade, for its favourable consideration.

### *The Helen Blake*

The Fethard lifeboat Helen Blake was built by the Thames Ironworks and Shipbuilding Company, Limited, of London, in 1905. She was of the self-righting type, and was propelled by means of oars and sails.

The “Helen Blake” was placed at the Fethard lifeboat station in November 1905. Before being sent there and put into active service, she underwent harbour trials for draught under varying conditions of weights, for stability, and for self-righting power. The results were very satisfactory. Soon after her arrival at her station she was subjected to a thorough trial under sail in heavy weather, and according to the report made to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution at the time, her coxswain and crew were delighted with her performance. Since being placed at the Fethard station the “Helen Blake” has been out to sea:” Thirty-four times for practice. Twice (exclusive of the occasion of her loss) on active service). Upon all the weather varying she had proved herself to be a good sea boat.

The occasion of the services of the Helen Blake being required on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February last was that, there being a strong breeze from the southward at the time and a high sea, the Norwegian three-mastered schooner “Mexico” stranded in the vicinity of the South Keragh Island.

As soon as she struck, about 4 p.m., the coastguard station at Bannow informed the lifeboat station at Fethard. However, the Honorary Secretary of the Local lifeboat Committee at Fethard had previously heard that there was a vessel in the neighbourhood that would probably get into difficulties, had seen her, and had summoned the crew and launched the lifeboat. This being so, as soon as the intelligence was received from Bannow she was able to start, and did start, with utmost promptitude.

When the Helen Blake left Fethard at or about 4pm of the 20<sup>th</sup> of February last: She was in good condition, she carried all her proper equipment, she had one man (a volunteer) in excess of her full and usual complement of crew. With the exception of one man, all were supplied with life-jackets. The man not so supplied was a member of the regular crew, who arrived late after his place had been filled up by a volunteer and the later had donned his life-jacket. The coxswain being eager to shove off, the man in question (William Banville) jumped into the boat without being furnished with one of the spare life-jackets from the store, and unfortunately, he was one of those who lost their lives. The coxswain in command of her (Christopher Burd) was an experienced man in lifeboat work, and had been twelve years a coxswain.

The cause of the loss of the “Helen Blake” and nine of her crew on the afternoon of the 20<sup>th</sup> of February last was that when close up to the Keragh Islands in order to try to take of the crew from the “Mexico” which vessel had stranded in their immediate vicinity, she was struck by a succession of seas which kept her full of water and rendered her in manageable. Under these circumstances the anchor was let go, but the bowman being knocked over by

a heavy sea the cable ran out to the clench, and before was quickly smashed to pieces. Four of her crew reached the south Keragh Island, one was saved by the “Mexico” and nine others perished.

**The calamity excited the deepest sympathy**, not only in the United Kingdom, but also in Norway, and Their Majesties King Haakon and Queen Maud contributed 1000 kroner (55*l.*) to the Fund, which was raised for the benefit of the Life-boat men’s relatives. In addition, the Storthing, on this occasion, the unprecedented step of voting the sum of 10000 kroner (550*l.*) towards the relief of the bereaved.

This act, which gave proof of the sympathy which unites the two maritime nations, caused the most profound satisfaction to the Institution and to all those whose attention had been drawn to the sad loss of the life at Fethard.

The RNLi Committee subsequently bestowed the silver Medal of the Institution on Thomas Holmes, R.N., and presented him with a special Vote of Thanks engrossed on Vellum. They also awarded the Second Service Clasp to Edward Wickham, coxswain of the Wexford (Fort) Life-boat, and Silver Medals to Walter Power, coxswain of the Dunmore East life-boat, and to James Wickham and William Duggan, the two men who so gallantly put off in the small boat for the purpose of saving the endangered men. They presented the Thanks of the Institution on Vellum to the Captain of the tug which towed the Wexford Life-boat, and also to the five Fethard Life-boatmen for their prompt and courageous conduct in assisting the crew of the Mexico, conduct the merit and humanity of which was heightened by the fact that they themselves had only just been cast ashore after the total loss of their Life-boat.

**GAA Annual Conference 1914.** - At the GAA Annual Conference of 1914 the following motion was put to the conference by Mr. W. Hanrahan (Wexford): That two All Ireland Medals, suitably inscribed be given to the men who distinguished themselves in the work of rescue in the Fethard Disaster, and whose action had been sworn to in an open court “as the bravest act a man ever seen”. Mr Hanrahan speaking to his motion referred to the incident of launching the small boat, making five trips to the island, and generally described the sad affair. Mr Tadg Barry (Cork) supported Mr. Hanrahan in asking the convention to enter this GAA business, which was not on the agenda; and Mr. P. Larkin (Galway) seconded the motion, when it was formally put and passed. He was referring to the bravery of Bill Duggan and Jem Wickham, who were later awarded specially struck GAA gold medals. This is unique in the history of the GAA for never before or since have the GAA presented gold medals for an achievement other than on the field of sport.



*The O'Rourke family pictured with the GAA & RNLI Medals  
 left to right - M.O'Rourke, J.O'Rourke, H.O'Rourke, Fergus Wickham (retired Cox  
 Rosslare Lifeboat), F. O'Rourke (Pictured with The GAA & RNLI Medals), A.O'Rourke,  
 David Maloney (Chairman Of Rosslare Lifeboat Service who presented the Medals on  
 behalf of the Rosslare Lifeboat) E.O'Rourke, P.O'Rourke, L.O'Rourke, M.O'Rourke.*

*"The thunder roared, the lightning flashed, the seas like mountains ran,  
 But onward 'mid that tempestuous storm the lifeboat proudly came.  
 The signal which she flashed that night was the white o'er the green in view:  
 The signal which a sailor reads: 'I will not abandon you'.*

*As she neared the ill fated Mexico, oh heavens what a shock,  
 Their boat was dashed to pieces on the dreaded Keeragh Rock.  
 Oh God what a sensation, to behold those heroes brave,  
 Contending with the raging seas, their precious lives to save.  
 The crew of the gallant Mexico, though terror stricken too,  
 They rendered all assistance to the drowning lifeboat crew.*

*Five of those gallant heroes were all that could be found.  
 The other nine, by the Keeragh Rock, I'm sorry to say were drowned.  
 May God have mercy upon their souls, who gave their noble lives,  
 And heaven guard the helpless ones those heroes left behind."*

List of members of the crew of the lifeboat  
“Helen Blake” who lost their lives when she was  
wrecked on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, 1914.

*Christopher Bird (Cox), William Bird,  
Thomas Handrick (Bowman), James Morrissey,  
Michael Handrick, Patrick Butler, William Banville,  
Patrick Roche, Patrick Cullen*

*Antonio Live, a Portuguese subject, and a member of  
the crew of the three-mastered schooner  
“Mexico” died on the South Keragh Island from  
exposure to the weather.*

## CREWS:

### Wexford(Fort) Lifeboat

Edward Wickham (Cox), James Wickham (2<sup>nd</sup> Cox), William Duggan (Bowman), Philip Duggan, Christopher and Andrew Doyle ( Father & Son), Mogue Furlong, William Shiel, John and William Walsh (Brothers), John Mitten.

### Wexford Tug

Laurance Busher (Capt), John McDonald (Engineer), John Harpur (Mate), Peter Hamilton, Bartholemew Carty, John Furlong.

### Kilmore Lifeboat

John Kehoe (Cox) Peter Brien, John Walsh, Nicholas Wickham, Mathew Wickham, Richard Wickham, Richard Rochford, Philip Walsh, James O'Flaherty, James Hayes, Nicholas Cousins, William Blake.

### Fethard Lifeboat

Christopher Bird (Cox), John McNamra (2<sup>nd</sup> Cox), Thomas Handrick (Bowman), William Bird, James Morrissey, Michael Handrick, Patrick Butler, William Bandville, Patrick Roche, George Crompton. Richard Bird, Garrett Handrick, John Kelly, Patrick Cullen.



The O'Rourke Family (*grandchildren, great grandchildren, great great grandchildren of William Duggan*) at their family gathering in 2008 for the presentation of replica GAA Gold & RNLI Silver medals. Both were approved by the GAA and the RNLI.