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CALAMITOUS SEQUEL TO SALVAGE TRIUMPH

ISLAND MEN'S EXCITING EXPERIENCE AT SEA

A party of Island men, belonging chiefly to Cowes and Newport, had a thrilling experience and miraculous escape at sea on Tuesday. Numbering 14, they were on board the Dutch cargo steamer Betsy Anna, which by a remarkable feat of salvage had been refloated after stranding in a dense fog and becoming wedged in between two high ledges of rock at Prawle Point, Devonshire. After being removed from her perilous position on Sunday week, with remarkably little damage except for leaking badly, the ship was towed into Salcombe by the tug Trustee of Glasgow, which had assisted in the salvage operations, and eventually beached at Millbay. Temporary repairs were effected, the leakages stopped as far as possible, and on Tuesday morning the tug set out on its journey to tow the ship to Cowes, where it was intended to thoroughly repair the Betsy Anna in the hope of selling her and restoring her to cargo service. It was by no means an easy task, the fulfilment of which largely depended on fine weather. There were 14 men engaged on the tug, mainly to attend the pumps, which had to be kept going as the ship continued to make a good deal of water. All went well during the day, Portland Bill was passed at 7.30pm but towards midnight a fierce gale sprang up and the towing became much more difficult. There was every expectation, however, of weathering the storm and getting to a sheltered spot

when suddenly the towing line broke. It was impossible in such stormy conditions to get another line to the ship, over which very heavy seas broke. The men on board were in considerable peril, but they stuck heroically to their task. Pumping had to be discontinued, and the ship, making a lot of water, began to sink. The water had reached practically to the level of the deck, and there was not the faintest hope of saving the vessel when the men were compelled to abandon her. At great risk the derelict ship's lifeboat was with much difficulty lowered and the men were able to make their escape. Fortunately the lifeboat behaved splendidly in the rough sea and eventually the tug was reached and all the men managed to get on board. Except for a few minor injuries they were unhurt. The greatest praise is due to Captain Brice, who was in charge of the salvage operation, for the highly skilful seamanship he showed in rescuing the party in extraordinary difficulties. Although flares and other distress signals were shown and ships were believed to have been in the vicinity, no assistance was received. The Betsy Anna foundered soon after the men had taken to the lifeboat, in deep water, about five miles off the Needles Lighthouse. The tug, whose delay had caused some anxiety to the Salvage Company's officials, reached Cowes soon after noon on Wednesday, when the disappointing news was

received that the valuable prize had been lost. It was most unfortunate for the Salvage Company, who had bought the stranded ship, successfully salvaged her, and were, naturally, looking forward to some reward for their enterprise. The Company have recently commenced a ship-breaking industry at Cowes on a site of Arctic Road, where one ship has been broken up and another large iron steamship, formerly a collier, is now in course of breaking up, or, rather, cutting up, by the acetylene flame cutting process. A considerable quantity of metal is, we understand, being sent to Italy. It is proposed to extend this branch of the business, in which a good many local men have found employment, by the use of a site further up the Medina, at Kingston. The salvage of the Betsy Anna, a general cargo boat of 880 tons gross, built at Newcastle in 1892, and owned by a Dutch firm, was an exceptional effort. The ship had discharged a cargo at Fleetwood and was bound for Amsterdam when, on August 17, she stranded between two tiers of rock so closely that the crew were able to jump ashore. Salvage being regarded as hopeless, the owners abandoned her, and she was bought for a comparatively trifling sum by the Salvage Company, who under the capable direction of Captain Brice, succeeded in refloating her in about 10 days. The ship was secured to the surrounding rocks by means of wire hawsers. With much difficulty, three powerful pumps, each capable of draining 800 gallons a minute worked by two 40 h.p. motors, were conveyed by barge and put on board, the flooded parts were pumped out, and the leaking places plugged with wood and cement. The damage was not nearly so great as might have been expected but the strain on the plates caused

considerable leakage through the rivet holes. By continuous pumping under great difficulties the water was got under, and at high tide on Sunday week, the ship was gradually pulled off the rocks and refloated.

On Thursday a ship's lifeboat without a name, containing several kitbags of sailors' belongings, came ashore at Brook, and quantities of wreckage, timber and numerous cans of petrol were cast up along the coast from Brook to Freshwater Bay. The finds gave rise to fears that some disaster had occurred in the Channel, but later the lifeboat was identified as belonging to the foundered Betsy Anna, and the fears that there had been loss of life were thus happily alleviated, as it is safe to assume that the other wreckage also came from that vessel. The fact that the seamen had to abandon their belongings in the lifeboat shows what a narrow escape they had.