Source 2: HMS *Racehorse*

On 14 December 1822, the ship HMS *Racehorse* was on its way to Douglas, capital of the Isle of Man. Its mission was to escort back to England the partially repaired HMS *Vigilant*, which had run aground 2 months earlier on the treacherous St Mary's Rock in Douglas Harbour. In the early evening, not too far from its destination, HMS *Racehorse*'s pilot mistook a shore light for that of Douglas Pier so he unknowingly caused the ship to head for the rocks, which she struck violently. Captain Suckling dispatched two boats from the ship to seek help. They reached nearby Castletown at about 1am.

Local men rushed to help but only one boat could launch through the rough surf. The brave rescuers rowed out several times to the shipwreck to collect its crew, almost all of whom were saved. Tragically,

on its last attempt to reach shore carrying the final group of survivors, a large wave overcame the boat. The nine men onboard drowned, including six crewmen from HMS *Racehorse* and three local men — Norris Bridson, Thomas Hall and Robert Quayle — who had selflessly gone to the rescue. They left behind families with young children who had been dependent on them for their income and survival.

Even when people who witnessed shipwreck could help, the story of HMS *Racehorse* shows how they risked everything to do so.

The images show a selection of artefacts found by archaeological divers on the sunken shipwreck of HMS *Racehorse* near Langness Point on the Isle of Man. These objects were used by men serving in the Navy in the early 19th century.

Brass and leather dirk scabbard, lightly inscribed with the initials WS, with a brass scabbard tip and lead musket balls from the wreck of HMS *Racehorse*

Photos: Manx National Heritage

Royal Marines Cross Belt Plate from the wreck of HMS *Racehorse*

Objects from the wreck of HMS *Racehorse*: Clockwise from top left — tiller drum, bronze key, map dividers, brass hammerhead with Navy arrow mark and early belt plate from the Royal Marines

Still remembered

Gravestones of people that died as a result of the shipwreck of HMS *Racehorse* in December 1822 can be seen at Malew Church graveyard on the Isle of Man.

The families of naval crewmen who died in service were provided for with pensions from the British Navy. For example, the orphaned son of Charles Caggett (a crewman onboard HMS *Racehorse* who died in this wreck) was sent to the Greenwich Hospital School.

However, the families of Norris Bridson, Thomas Hall and Robert Quayle, the Manx men who died, were left at risk of poverty after

their providers had been taken from them by the sea.

Manx resident Sir William Hillary thought it was highly unfair that the families of men who risked their lives to rescue others from shipwreck should not be provided for. Just 2 months earlier, when the Navy ship HMS *Vigilant* had first gone aground (see above), Sir William Hillary had himself gathered volunteers and rowed out to help rescue survivors. He knew first-hand the risks taken by those selfless enough to rescue.

So Sir William Hillary wrote to the Admiralty to request financial assistance for the Manx men's families.

In Memory of
Mr Thos Mein Bone of London Aged 24 Years Midn of H.M. late Sloop Racehorse wrecked on the Scarens on the night of the 14th Decr 1822 who unfortunately perished with five of the crew & three Manxmen who fell victims to their humane perservering & undaunted conduct in endeavouring to save the crew of the Ship he was a gallant & promising young officer whose death will ever be felt with deep regret by Officers and crew

Here repose the Remains of Norris Bridson of Castletown who was drowned, in the humane Act of saving the Officers and Crew of H.M. Sloop Racehorse when wreck'd on the Scaranes near the said Town the 14th Decr 1822 he lived 27 Years and having borne an unsullied Character his Fate is much lamented.

Photos courtesy: Centre for Manx Studies, University of Liverpool

Q

1. Who would have been affected by this shipwreck? Write a list of people, starting with those most affected and ending with those least affected.

2. Who do you think would have been held accountable for HMS *Racehorse* being shipwrecked?

3. How can having people to blame for wrongdoing be useful to campaigns?

4. The story of the rescue from HMS *Racehorse* and its aftermath powerfully demonstrates community action. What local examples of communities taking action to make things better can you think of?