

Miss Colenso drowned with the sinking of the “Happy Return”

On the night of the 10th October 1827 the Happy Return, laden with tin, foundered on the Warden Ledge near Colwell Bay and The Needles (pictured below). She had been sailing from Penzance to London but her master, William Woolcock, had put into port at Yarmouth to find a doctor for a passenger who had had a still-born baby. She had gone into premature labour the night before, reportedly brought on by shock (presumably the weather).

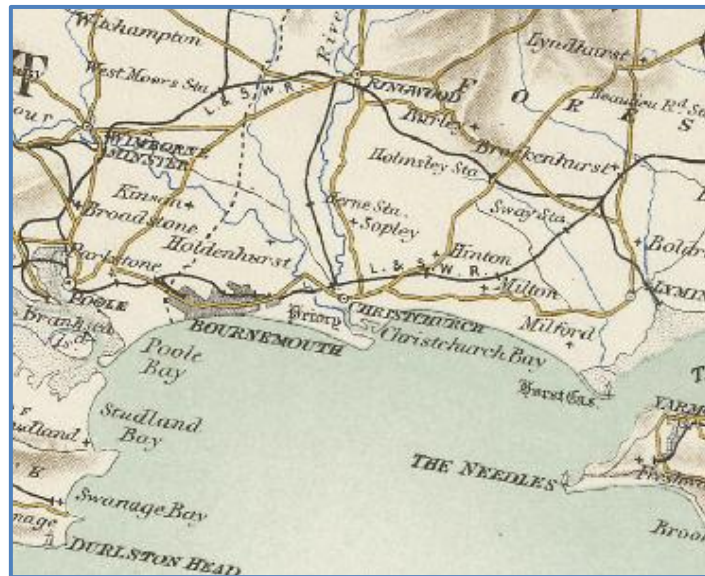
Surgeon John Wavell, from Newport, had been the doctor who boarded. As he was getting ready to leave the boat, a sudden squall washed him overboard and the boat adrift. When the boat foundered passengers who were below were trapped inside the vessel and drowned. Four women and two children were lost along with the surgeon.



From the newspaper accounts and the Yarmouth Burial Records, the following is a list of those lost.

Fanny Acres	A child of around 15 months who had been washed out to sea. On inquest was held on the 12 th and she was buried in Yarmouth on the 14 th .
Mrs Arthur	Taken out of the wreck, inquest held on the 14 th and buried the same day in Yarmouth.
Miss Arthur	Her body was recovered near Christchurch and the inquest was held on the 18 th . She was probably a child of around 15 months. Not shown as buried in Yarmouth.
Miss Colenso	Taken out of the wreck, inquest held on the 14 th . Didn't find a record of her burial in Yarmouth.
Mary Oats	Taken out of the wreck, inquest held on the 14 th and buried the same day. Believed to be aged 36.
John Wavell	Surgeon, whose body was picked up by the Rose Cutter, buried by his family in Newport.
Mrs Acres	She had a still-born baby on the 10 th October. Her body was picked up near Christchurch. Her inquest was held on the 18 th and she was buried the same day.

The following map shows the area mentioned above.



When I first came across the newspaper articles related to this shipwreck, I thought it would be possible to determine who the Miss Colenso was - as there are a number of Colenso/Arthur marriages.

In Chelsea on the 4th May 1826 a Thomas Arthur, originally from Devon, married Elizabeth Colenso from Helston. He married again in 1832 and I cannot find a death in London that correlates with his first wife. However the newspaper records infer that a child of around 15 months was also lost. When they married Elizabeth would have had to be very pregnant, and there is no London christening record that corresponds. So it is unlikely that Elizabeth Colenso Arthur was the woman lost.

In 1816 Catherine Colenso married a Richard Arthur in Madron. He had no brothers, and his own children were too young.

Neither of these connections led to a particular Miss Colenso as a likely candidate.

There are three possible candidates – Jennefer Ann Philippa Colenso (born 1783 in Dartmouth), Frances Callenso (born 1806 in Plymouth) and Maria Stribley Callenso (born 1805 in Devonport). All their families are originally from Penzance and have a mariner or shipbuilding history.

Unlike the other passengers there is no record of her burial at Yarmouth. Did her family bury her elsewhere?

Incidentally, the Happy Return was raised by the 4th November and continued to ply her trade. She had been built in Topsham in 1814 and the owner was Jenkins. There was a dispute heard in the High Court of the Admiralty in July 1828 concerning the costs of salvaging the tin, which was owned by Bolitho and Sons.

NEWPORT, ISLE OF WIGHT, Oct. 13.—It is this week our melancholy duty to announce the premature decease of John Wavell, Esq. surgeon, of this town, who was washed overboard from a vessel in Totland Bay, within the Needles Passage, during a violent storm on Wednesday night last. It appears that Mr. Wavell was solicited to attend on board the vessel, in discharge of his professional duties with a poor woman in labour. The weather had been very boisterous during the day, but between seven and eight in the evening it became sufficiently moderate to induce Mr. Wavell to proceed from Yarmouth, & the boat reached the vessel without much difficulty. About half-past nine o'clock, a dreadful storm of thunder and lightning, accompanied with heavy squalls of wind, came on, during which the vessel was driven from her anchorage, and struck on a reef of rocks called Warden Lodge, by which the vessel was so much injured that she immediately became a complete wreck. Mr. Wavell was in the cabin at the time, and the instant he gained the deck a sea struck the vessel, by which the unfortunate gentleman was swept away, and every exertion to render him assistance, or even to gain sight of him again, proved ineffectual. Three women and two children, taken on board as passengers to Portsmouth, who were in the cabin, were also drowned. So instantaneous was the accident that the pilot and crew, who were on deck, were obliged to take to the rigging. The master was washed overboard, but saved by three men who were in the boat which conveyed Mr. Wavell, although much exhausted. The preventive officers immediately commenced firing and flashing, as signals to the persons left on board the vessel. At midnight, the weather having somewhat abated, two young men, named Callaway, of Freshwater, offered their assistance to attempt to reach the vessel, and, aided by Timothy Bannister and James Andrews, of Yarmouth, happily succeeded in saving the lives of Mr. Griffiths, the pilot, and four of the crew, all of whom had been three hours in the rigging, exposed to a tremendous sea, which threatened them with instant destruction. The vessel was named the Happy Return, Woolcock, master, laden with block tin, from Penzance, for London. It must be a source of consolation to the afflicted relatives of Mr. Wavell, and some alleviation to terrors of sudden death, to reflect that his valuable life was sacrificed when engaged in the humane exercise of his professional duties, for which through life he was so eminently conspicuous. The agonized feelings of the family are somewhat increased by the absence of Mrs. Wavell, who is at Cheltenham on an excursion with her daughter, whose marriage with A. D. Blane, Esq. was announced in our last publication. At a late hour last evening, the remains of Mr. Wavell had not been discovered.—*Hampshire Chronicle.*