

FREE

A wee bit of maritime history... 8



James McCausland

The obituary of James McCausland of Portaferry, reprinted here from the Down Recorder of 24th July 1915, says a lot about this brave and enterprising man.

A man of action, known far beyond the limits of County Down, in the person of Mr. James McCausland, died on Sunday after a lengthened illness at his residence, Westgate, Portaferry, at the age of 65.

Mr. McCausland achieved considerable fame in the salvage of wrecks. In many instances, in different parts of the world, he succeeded in raising sunken vessels where other firms had failed.

It is remembered how when the French barque, Cannabiere, foundered in Dundrum Bay of a tempestuous night one of his steamers ran down and took off the crew. (He received a medal from the French government for this.)

To his enterprise the labouring population of Portaferry were indebted for employment one winter in the scrapping of three condemned war vessels which he purchased from the Admiralty. His probity and large-heartedness won him at once respect and esteem. Certainly he will be much missed.

On Tuesday his remains were laid to rest in Ballyphilip graveyard. He is survived by a widow and two sons.

Portaferry man, James McCausland, was an internationally known salvage contractor. With his wife Susan, family and one servant, Annie O'Connor, he lived in Westgate on The Strand.

Originally based in Ballyhenry Bay, in 1900 the land known as the Saltpans was leased to 'James McCausland, a local shipowner, for the business of salvaging shipwrecks.' He made further additions to the quay by reclaiming the land and re-filling it in with ash, stone and other gravel. He owned two salvage steamers - the *Duke of Edindurgh* and the *Ackland*.

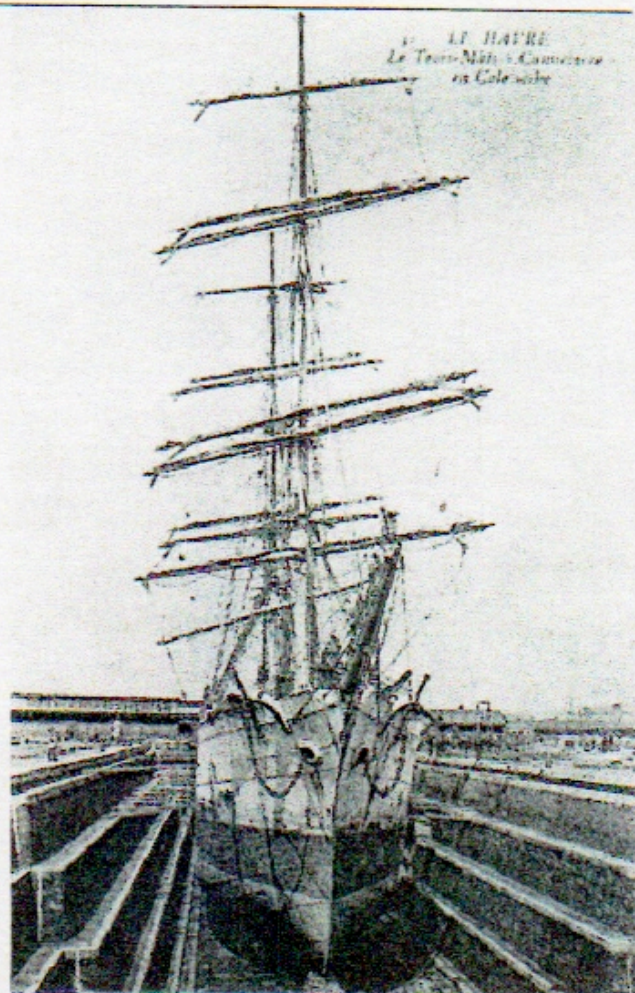
Salvage work often took the McCauslands away for several months at a time and they did a lot of work off the coast of Scotland - whether to salvage the *SS Baron Glamis* in Stranraer or to float the *Whitehead* in the Sound of Mull and bring her back to Belfast for Heyn and company of Belfast.

In 1905 he purchased the *Flying Serpent* - one of the most powerful boats on the Clyde - renamed it the *Jim McCausland* and used it in his rapidly expanding salvage business. His son, John, tells about the men of Portaferry who were always at the ready to work with them:

We always had a crowd of men along the shore (Portaferry) who never refused to come on all calls. They were the Barnes, the Mullans, the McMullans, the Converys, Hugh Dummigan and Charles Dummigan, Dan McAlea, Dick McMullan, George Tomelty, Joe Traynor, W. Parkinson, George McGrath and his two sons Willie and Tom, another Tomelty, Ned Convery, Hugh Ellison, John Blaney. I could go on writing down names but there were few of the men who were all on calls, and these were men, mind you who were fishermen, and many a time I saw them at the hauling of the "Poke Net", as they called it, and them in the middle of the water with the snow and the sleet coming down the Lough, hauling their fish into their boats. Hardy? You could not get them now to do or stand what these men stood. The coming generations would never attempt to do it!

James McCAUSLAND of Portaferry but working in Newcastle; owner paddle driven tug boat 'Flying Irishman' ; helped with rescue of 'Cannebiere' 15 Mar 1905 ; father of John McCausland who skippered the tug during the rescue & received a gold medal & diploma from French Government.

Down Recorder. 1905



James McCausland, was a well-travelled man and the Upper Ards Historical Society's journals contain a narrative written by his son which makes fascinating reading.

Ellis Island records show him arriving in New York, with his wife and grandson, in 1907. The previous year he had taken them to South Africa.

In 1908 he travelled there again, this time with his son who described the journey from Glasgow to Capetown. 'We had a splendid run down to the equator, we had trade winds and you would not have thought you were at sea.'

By this time James' health was not great and he went to a sanatorium outside Capetown for a month which did him a lot of good. So much so that he had meetings at the Cape government buildings and got a free hand to work all the wrecks on the Cape Coast for 7 years.

His son John described the state of Portaferry in 1908. He wrote:

'Portaferry was a throng spot with a big circulation of money coming into it: one of the prosperous little towns in all Ireland and perhaps in the British Isles.'

James McCausland's entrepreneurship did not go unnoticed and almost every week references to him appeared in the Down Recorder.

e.g. 18th November 1905: *'Mr. McCausland's industry in general deserves more than passing notice. At the Saltpans, Portaferry, where so much local labour was provided in the demolition of obsolete warships purchased by him, he is building a sea wall, with a west and north breast, so that a dock will be constantly available for loading or discharging steamers used in salvage or other operations.*

21st November 1908: *The French steel barque, Croisette, bound from New Caledonia to Glasgow, with 3,500 tons of nickel ore, was driven on to the South Rock, Cloughey, during a gale on Saturday morning...Part of the Croisette's cargo has been jettisoned, and Mr. McCausland, the well-known salvage contractor, will make an effort to float the vessel today.*



James' son John continued the salvage business after his father's death and his name is recorded on Rathlin Island where he salvaged the *HMS Drake* which was torpedoed during WW1.

The McCausland family is commemorated on this twenty-foot high grey granite Celtic Cross in St. Patrick's graveyard in Portaferry. (Photograph courtesy R. Murphy)


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