

The New York Times

Published: October 20, 1908

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WRECKED OFF THE BAHAMAS.

Hesleyside Tossed Upon Coral Reef— Crew Saved by a Lifeline.

Driven high upon a coral reef off the Bahamas, the steamer Hesleyside was wrecked in a hurricane on Oct. 1. Twenty-two members of her crew arrived yesterday as passengers on the steamship Seneca. They made a sixty-eight-mile journey in a schooner to Nassau, and from there were sent to New York.

The Hesleyside was in a narrow passage between two of the Bahama Islands, when the hurricane struck her. The skipper tried to make the open sea, but could make no progress against wind and sea. Anchors thrown out did not save her.

Suddenly an immense wave drove in under the vessel's bow and lifted her upon the outer reef. Then another following carried her over the second ridge of rocks and she brought up with a hole in her hull on a third reef. The vessel was in a dangerous predicament, and when the deck house went by the board, Jack Thompson, a fireman, volunteered, and swam ashore with a line, which he made fast inshore, and the crew followed hand over hand.

That night they sought shelter in a cave, and the next day Thompson returned to the vessel, the storm having abated, and returned with a boat and food. The skipper made the trip to Nassau in the lifeboat and came back with a schooner and took off his men.

The skipper remained at the island to look after salvage. It is believed that the engines of the wrecked boat can be saved.



SS Hesleyside

Thursday, May 14, 2009

According to The Marine Engineer (1882), the steamship Hesleyside was launched August 28th, 1882 from **Newcastle upon Tyne, England**. The vessel was able to carry 850 tons of dead-weight cargo while only drawing 12ft 6inches of water. It was given an extra boiler and engine built by R. & W. Hawthorn Leslie and Company for increased power to carry such loads. The ship was named the Hesleyside by Mrs. W. Charlton. It was specially built for the fruit trade – equipped with powerful steam engines, a shallow draft, and large cargo capacity – well suited for the shallow waters of the West Indian and Nova Scotia ports. (1882)

R & W Hawthorn Leslie and Company were a locomotive and shipbuilding company that built locomotives, freight ships, and destroyers for the Royal Navy – including the *HMS Active* and *HMS Boadicea*. They were the result of a merger between shipbuilding company A. Leslie and Company and the locomotive works R & W Hawthorn. (Wikipedia 1)

During a voyage from St. Michaels, England, to Key West, the Hesleyside was caught by a hurricane off the coast of Abaco on October 1st, 1908. Captain Bedlington tried to save the ship by turning to the open sea, but was driven back by fierce wind and waves. Throwing out anchors did not help either. A massive wave caught the steamers bow and lifted it onto the reef, with another monstrous wave pushing it further onto the reef – ultimately tearing a large hole in the hull. (New York Times, 1908) (Wikipedia 2)

As the boat was being torn apart, firefighter Jack Thompson volunteered to swim a line ashore. Successful in his endeavors, he fastened it to the rocks – allowing the twenty-two passengers and the Captain to pull themselves to safety.

They found shelter in a small cave, and rode out the remainder of the storm. The following day after the storm had passed, Thompson returned to the damaged Hesleyside to gather food and a small lifeboat that remained. Captain Bedlington took the lifeboat to Nassau and returned with a schooner to rescue his stranded passengers, who were taken by schooner to Nassau. From Nassau, they were taken by the steamship *Seneca* to New York City. The Captain remained on the island of Abaco to look after the wreck and salvage operation. According to the New York Times, it was believed that the engines could be salvaged. (New York Times, 1908)

Remnants of the SS Hesleyside can be seen on the iron shore at Schooner Bay. Pulleys, sheet metal, and other pieces of debris are scattered along the rocks – while the ships large boilers sit in just 15ft of water at the shore.

The write up featured in the New York Times on October 20, 1908, can be viewed by following the link below:

http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?_r=1&res=990DE6DC1739E333A25753C2A9669D946997D6CF

REFERENCES

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Wikipedia 1 – “Hawthorn Leslie and Company” Wikipedia. Last modified 17 November 2008. Accessed 5 March 2009.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hawthorn_Leslie_and_Company

Wikipedia 2 – “St Michael’s Mount” Wikipedia. Last Modified 26 February 2009. Accessed 5 March 2009.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Michael's_Mount#History

New York Times, 1908 – “Wrecked off the Bahamas” New York Times. 20 October 1908.

