

STORMY STAN'S RESCUE MISSION

❶ 1850's North East England. Strange as it may seem, whenever a ship is stranded on the rocks off Redcar, it's a welcome sight. It means that the local fishermen can agree terms with the captain to help refloat the ship. The money they receive will really help their poor families.

❷ 15 November 1854. There's a buzz of excitement around the streets of Redcar. Young William Dobson learns that an Irish brig, *Jane Erskine*, is aground on the rocks to the east of Redcar. William's father joins the other fishermen as they launch their cobles (fishing boats) and row out to help the ship.

❸ Despite a strong south-east wind, the fishermen are soon alongside the *Jane Erskine*. The captain of the brig fixes a price with the fishermen for refloating the ship. An anchor will be laid in deeper water and the cable taken to the stranded ship. When the tide rises the cable will be pulled in on a windlass (a very large hand operated winch) and the ship will be dragged off the rocks. Twenty six fishermen stay on board the ship to help with the heavy work of turning the windlass.

❹ William's father and a few other fishermen stay in their cobles. The wind is getting stronger and the sea is getting rougher, so they decide to head for the shore and wait. When his father gets home he's cold and wet, so William gives him a hot drink in front of the fire. Then a friend runs in to say that the brig is showing a distress flag.

❺ As they reach the beach they see the brig lying on its side; those on board are in great danger. Clearly the conditions are too bad for the fishermen to go out again in their cobles. Now it's a job for the lifeboat. The crew, mainly made up of fishermen, is called out by a drummer boy beating the rhythm 'Come along brave boys'.

❻ The lifeboat, *Zetland*, is just over 9m long and made of oak and larch. The carriage and helpers launch the lifeboat into the sea. Soon it's ploughing its way towards the brig through the huge troughs of the waves.

❼ The lifeboat nears the brig and prepares to come alongside. The brig is beginning to break up.



❽ The lifeboat manages to stay alongside the wreck as the fishermen and the ship's crew jump into the lifeboat. Never before has the lifeboat had to carry so many people:

- 9 crew from the brig
 - 26 fishermen
 - 17 lifeboat crew
- 52 people in all!

The lifeboat makes a slow but sure passage back to the shore and safety. William Dobson feels so proud of his dad and the Redcar fishermen.

❾ 142 years later a huge piece of wood is washed up on the sands of Redcar. It is identified by local historian, David Phillipson, as probably being part of the rudder from the *Jane Erskine*. The rudder now stands next to the *Zetland* lifeboat that made the rescue all those years ago. You can visit the Zetland Lifeboat Museum at Redcar and find out more about the famous lifeboat and its brave crews. (Zetland Lifeboat Museum - tel: 01642 494311)



Acknowledgement to an original story by David Phillipson