

## 5 James Gall. Survivor of the SS Forfarshire. Origin of the Grace Darling story 1838



**James Gall**

### The Monument

Capt Stokes, local secretary to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, drew attention to the presence in Barrow of someone supposed to be the last survivor of the SS Forfarshire in a letter to the *Barrow News* in Sept 1888. In December James Gall, who had been living with his son, died.

In January 1889 there was an evening of song at the Town Hall, Barrow, to raise funds for the erection of a memorial to Mr Gall, and thereby invoke the memory of Grace Darling (*and raise funds for the Lifeboat Institution?*).

The letters pages of the *News* over the following months indicate a dispute about where the memorial should be sited: on the grave of James Gall or in the ornamental gardens of the cemetery.



The *Barrow News* of Thursday Dec 27<sup>th</sup> 1888 reported that James Gall had died at the age of 84, having lived in Egerton Buildings. It was thought that he was the last survivor of the SS Forfarshire. He had been a 'fireman' on board the ship.

'Gall had the good fortune to be rescued through the heroism of Grace Darling, but he had three ribs broken, and had to stay at the lighthouse for some little time where his injuries were tenderly ministered to by Grace Darling and her father, ..' From information available, it appears that Gall survived on the ship's lifeboat, rather than being taken off by the Darling's efforts.

Death notice *Barrow News* 5 Jan 1889

### The Story of the SS Forfarshire

SS Forfarshire set off from Hull for Dundee on 5 September, with a mixed cargo and 60 people (passengers and crew) on board. In the early hours of 7 September 1838, her engines failed after a boiler leak.

Grace Darling, the keeper's daughter, spotted the wreck from an upstairs window of the Longstone lighthouse on the Farne Islands, with survivors of the *Forfarshire* on Big Harcar, a nearby low rocky island. The *Forfarshire* had foundered on the rocks and broken in half: one of the halves had sunk during the night. The weather was very poor, and Grace's father, the lighthouse keeper, judged it too bad for the launching of the lifeboat at North Sunderland.

In their rowing boat, William Darling and his daughter Grace rescued nine people from Big Harcar rocks. Her heroism in managing the rowing boat while her father landed on the rock earned her national acclaim.

Nine other people, included James Gall, survived the wreck in the ship's lifeboat and were taken ashore.

Grace Darling (b. 24 Nov 1815 – 20 Oct 1842) died of tuberculosis and is buried at Bamburgh, where there is a memorial to her.

Sources: Wikipedia; Grace Darling factsheet - **RNLI Grace Darling Museum**, 1 Radcliffe Road, Bamburgh, Northumberland, NE69 7AE  
Tel: 01668 214910 Fax: 01668 214912 Websites: [rni.org.uk/gracedarling](http://rni.org.uk/gracedarling) <http://www.gracedarling.co.uk>  
<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/library/specialcollections/services/exhibitions/maritime/maritime.pdf>

### Where is the grave?

The lighthouse monument is directly below the crematorium on a path parallel to the main driveway into the cemetery.

Walking up the main driveway, pass the Thorncliffe Road/ North Lodge exit on your right. Take the next pathway on the left and follow it as it bends to the right. Take the next left, then first right. The lighthouse memorial is 100m along, next to the path on the left-hand side.

30m further on, again on the left with its back to the path, is an interesting memorial to Christopher Wilson, a Salvation Army bandsman killed in an accident at work.