

**John Parsons, drowned in Walney Channel 25 June 1873**



IN MEMORY OF  
**THOMAS PARSONS**  
WHO DIED JULY 16 1874  
AGED 56 YEARS  
ALSO OF  
**JOHN, SON OF THE ABOVE**  
WHO WAS ACCIDENTALLY DROWNED  
JUNE 25 1873 AGED 20 YEARS  
AND WAS INTERRED AT DALTON CEMETERY

*This grave covers the time when Barrovians were often buried in Dalton Cemetery (son John Parsons died 1873; and when most were buried in the new Barrow Cemetery (father Thomas Parsons died 1874)).*

The Barrow Herald and Furness Advertiser 28 June 1873 carried a lengthy report of the Inquest:

**THE SAD CASE OF DROWNING IN WALNEY CHANNEL.**

Yesterday an inquest was held in the Ambrose Hotel, Duke-street touching the death of John Parsons, a labourer, twenty years of age, and residing at Hindpool, who was drowned in Walney Channel on the Wednesday previous, on the occasion of the launch of the new steamer Duke of Devonshire. Mr. W. Butler, coroner, presided, and a respectable jury having been sworn,

William Parsons, a brother of the deceased, was examined, and said that on the day of the launch of the new steamer deceased and witness were down at the Old Barrow side of the Channel. Witness and deceased saw two men whom they knew out in a boat. Witness hailed these men to come to the shore. They did so, and both deceased and witness got into the boat. They rowed up to the ferry opposite Strong's boathouse, and when about there the water got very rough, and a wave came and half filled the boat with water. When they saw the boat was half filled with water they called for help, and a boat put out to them. Their boat did not then sink, but drifted about ten yards. Witness said to his brother, "Pull, John! We'll be safe if you'll only pull!" There were two oars rowing, and witness was steering with one. Deceased got frightened, and dropped his oar. The boat at this time was gradually sinking, and kept going down, until witness and the rest of them were up to their middle in water. The boat then capsized, and witness, who was able to swim, got away. Deceased could not swim. Witness got on the top of the boat as it capsized. All the persons in the boat left it at the same time. When the boat capsized, she turned bottom upwards and floated away. Witness then got on the top. ' One of the men, along with deceased, got hold of witness and both pulled him down to the bottom. When below, witness's eyes opened, and he saw them both hanging on by him. He struck the other man, whom he knew by the name of David, from him, and tried to bring his brother up. His brother let go when coming up from the bottom, and as witness was getting weak himself he made for the shore, and when about half way he was taken in by a boat. He was then led home. Witness had been well used to boating, having acted as ferryman; and another man in the boat had been a sailor. The boat was fourteen or fifteen feet long, and about four feet in beam. She had carried more than four people previous to this occurrence. Witness went down to Biggar in the same boat on the Sunday preceding the accident.

A Juror thought it was a very dangerous practice going out in such a small boat with such a number of people in it.

The Coroner enquired if these small boats were licensed.

Witness said he did not know, but he thought all Strong's boats had been licensed.

The Coroner said he had observed Strong had been fined lately for not having his steamboat licensed, but that was a Custom-house affair. He thought it was customary for the harbour authorities to license these boats.

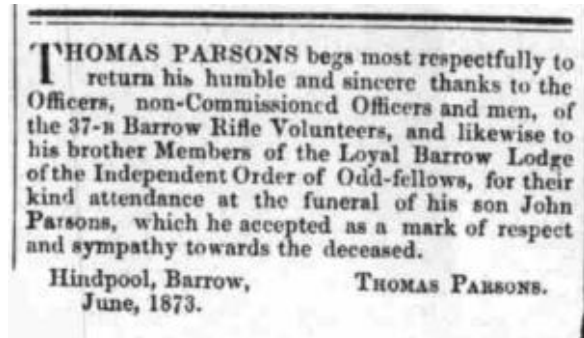
Another juror said there was a dispute as to the licensing of the ferry boats. He had heard that Mr. Fairclough had intended putting on a ferry-boat there, but owing to a dispute existing between the corporation of Barrow and the Duchy of Lancaster as to fees, he was not able to do so.

The Coroner said no reflection could be made on Strong as he had only hired the boat to two persons, and if other people afterwards got into it he could not help that.

Samuel Wiseman, a labourer, residing at 1, Hexham street, said he was standing on the beach on the evening of Wednesday last, at the back of Old Barrow. There were men looking for the body. He saw a boot appear above the water, and he rushed in and caught hold of the leg of a body which proved to be that of deceased.

Henry Cuddy was the next witness. He said he was a labourer, and resided in Hindpool. Witness was a sailor before he came to Barrow for about two years. He was in the boat with deceased at the time of the accident. Witness at the time of the accident gave Parsons a push towards the shore. He then swam ashore himself, took off his clothes and went in again to assist in rescuing the others- He looked about for deceased, but could not find him. The boat was sufficient to carry four in quiet sea, but was not sufficient in a dirty sea for even two persons.

The Coroner said many of these people who took out boats were just tempting Providence. He meant to blame nobody in particular while saying so. No matter what stringent regulations or licensing powers were made they could not be prevented, but when people were out of sight no control could be had over them.



A Juror said if anybody was to blame it was those two men who had hired the boat and taken the others in, and not the boatmen. The Jury then, after some consultation returned a verdict of "Accidental death."

The *Barrow Herald & Furness Advertiser* 5 July 1873 had a 'thank you' advert from John Parsons' father.

Thomas Parsons has adverts selling houses e.g. *Barrow Herald* 27 September; 11 October 1873, from an address of 55 Parry Street.

Thomas Parsons was also in trouble with the police for selling beer without a licence. Articles in the *Barrow Herald and Furness Advertiser* 14 and 21 June 1873 reported the case, for which Parsons was fined £2 with costs for each of two cases. The Magistrates commented that since Parsons had been a licensed beer seller in the past, he should have known better. Note that this case is contemporaneous with the loss of his son.

The **1861 Census** shows the Parsons family living in Chapel Street, Rowley Regis, Staffs. The household is Thomas Parsons (42) Brick Maker, born Plymouth, Devon; Maria Parsons (33) Boot Binder, born County Town, Staffs; William Parsons (12) Scholar, born Halesowen, Worcs (as were all the following children); John Parsons (8), Scholar; Henry Parsons (6) Scholar; Thomas Parsons (4) Scholar; George Parsons (2) Scholar; and Eliza Parsons (10 mo).

In the **1871 Census** there are two families of Parsons (mis-transcribed Parson on *Ancestry*) at 82 Anson Street, Barrow, one headed by John Parsons (50) Labourer, born Plymouth, along with his wife and three children; the other headed by Thomas Parsons (53) Brick Maker, born Plymouth. His wife is Maria Parsons (43) Shoe Binder, born Stafford; William Parsons (21) Labourer, born Oldbury; John Parsons (18) Labourer, born Oldbury; Henry Parsons (16) Labourer, born Oldbury; Thomas Parsons (14) Labourer, born Oldbury; George Parsons (12) Scholar, born Oldbury; Elsie Parsons (10) Scholar, born Oldbury; Wm? John Dodds (27) Lodger, Labourer, born Oldbury; Mary Ann Parsons (2) Daughter, born Barrow, Lancs.