

# Capt. Wm. Hewett, R.N. and the Loss of H.M.S. 'Fairy'

By A. T. REYNOLDS

118813

REAR-ADMIRAL SIR FRANCIS BEAUFORT, K.C.B., D.C.L., F.R.S., was Hydrographer from 1820 to 1855. One of the outstanding surveyors during his period of office was Captain William Hewett. He entered the Royal Navy and went to sea in November, 1805 in H.M.S. *Indefatigable*, and by 1813 he had started his surveying career while serving in the frigate H.M.S. *Inconstant*. He assisted his Captain, Sir Edward Tucker, in surveying various ports and river estuaries along the coast of Brazil. Four years later, as a Lieutenant, he returned to England for his first command, this being the gun-brig surveying vessel H.M.S. *Protector*. One of his first duties as captain was for the Royal Society. In experiments connected with ascertaining the exact shape of the earth he was dispatched to the Orkneys to carry out pendulum experiments. Such was his zeal for work that he used this opportunity to make many small plans of harbours and estuaries in the Orkney Isles. It was during this period of his career that Hewett was promoted to Commander.

Hewett's true vocational work was soon to start; the surveying of the coasts of Norfolk and Lincoln, the Gabbard, Dudgeon, Lemon and Ower Banks.

In 1830, while serving under Hydrographer Beaufort, his great labour in the southern North Sea really began when he commissioned the sister ship to H.M.S. *Beagle*, the 233-ton, 10-gun brig-sloop *Fairy*. This 90-ft. vessel, launched at Chatham Naval Dockyard on April 25, 1826, was to serve Hewett for the next ten years.

The following years passed swiftly for Hewett; vast strides were made in surveying techniques, many new banks, shoals and channels being located and fixed. Lighthouses and buoys were established at his instigation and the sailing directions were completely updated. During 1836, while surveying the approaches to Lowestoft, he identified a new and important channel. The current copy of Admiralty chart number 1536 still shows this channel, the Hewett Channel. In the southern North Sea, Commander Hewett discovered a large bank; and named it the Fairy Bank, after his ship. Off the Norfolk coast, Hewett located and fixed an area of shoal banks and he named them the Hewett Ridges.

In recognition of his work, January, 1837 saw Hewett assume the rank of Captain. As if to encompass and harness more of the North Sea's mysteries, part of the summers of 1837 and 1840 were spent obtaining important data on the theory of tides for this area. The most important task was locating the exact place in this sea at which there is no rise or fall of the tide, only a gradual gyration of the water. Two such points (nodal or amphidromic) were located and fixed for the first time.

CAPT. W. HEWETT, R.N.—LOSS OF H.M.S. FAIRY 221

Even though Captain Hewett was at home in the southern North Sea it must truly be said that the Lowestoft/Yarmouth area was his prime interest. Captain Hewett knew the coast of Suffolk, and in particular, the area of the approaches to Yarmouth and Lowestoft, as only an experienced naval surveyor can know. Of the 31 surveys he completed, at least 10 of them were varying-scaled surveys of the approaches to Lowestoft and Yarmouth. These surveys were carried out without any of today's electronic aids, in fact Hewett produced some 30 major surveys, using mainly sextant, chronometer and leadline. His interest moved him to write an article for the *Nautical Magazine* of 1837 (Volume VI) on the art of navigating the Yarmouth Roads.

Captain Hewett was progressing well with his enormous task of surveying the southern North Sea when fate stepped in.

Often called upon to report on various nautical inventions, it came as no surprise that as the surveying season of 1840 drew to a close, H.M.S. *Fairy*, about to return to Woolwich, should be ordered to Yarmouth to report upon a new dredging invention. This invention, by Captain T. Manby who, amongst other things, invented the rocket mortar, was for removing sand and shingle-bars in harbour and river entrances. Late on November 12, H.M.S. *Fairy* sailed from Harwich, and on Friday, November 13, continued northwards from the vicinity of Orfordness. It was a bright, clear day, but the barometer was slowly falling, and as dusk fell, clouds began to gather, the wind rising rapidly. In a very short time the now infamous gale of November 13 and 14, 1840 was upon her. Throughout the night of this Friday and Saturday the gale raged.

Though at first no particular anxiety was felt for her, a report of November 20 in *The Times* newspaper stated that a fishing-smack, arriving at Yarmouth, had reported that during the gale of the 13th, her men had seen a three-masted vessel founder, and had heard the heart-rending cries of her crew. The gale had prevented any assistance being given. Anxiety, slow to be roused in the Admiralty, was soon well established with the wives of the men of H.M.S. *Fairy*. Mrs. Hewett wrote to Hydrographer Beaufort on November 26, expressing the anxiety she felt for her husband's safety, H.M.S. *Fairy* being now some 12 days overdue. The optimism of the Hydrographer was given in his reply the following day when he stated that it was unlikely the ship had been lost, believing that Hewett had run before the gale and had sought safety in one of the many excellent harbours on the Norwegian coast. But slowly the evidence was to build up against Hydrographer Beaufort's optimism.

Captain Henry, in the wooden paddle-sloop *Salamander*, was dispatched to Norway on November 27 or 28 to search the south-west ports of that country for the missing ship. Lieutenant Frederick A. Cudlip, R.N., was in charge of the *Fairy's* tender, *Violet*. He should have been, but for a stroke of fortune, aboard the *Fairy*. Instead he was finishing off some coastal surveying work for Captain Hewett, and on completion of this work he was to make his own way with the tender to Woolwich. At the beginning of

December, Lieutenant Cudlip was ordered to Harwich, there to take charge of the cutter *Flying Fish*, and proceed to Aldeburgh to see a certain Mr. Fuller, a bricklayer. Mr. Fuller had in his possession articles, that had been washed ashore soon after the gale of November 13 and 14, believed to be flotsom from the *Fairy*. At Aldeburgh, Lieutenant Cudlip examined these articles. Writing to his Hydrographer on December 3, he stated, 'I was soon convinced not any article whatever belonging to the *Fairy* or any vessel had been washed on this shore.' Lieutenant Cudlip, this time from his own vessel, the H.M. tender *Violet*, wrote to Admiral Beaufort on December 6, 1840. The news was particularly galling for the Hydrographer, for the letter confirmed the report of November 20 in *The Times*. Lieutenant Cudlip's report stated that the fishing-smack *Ebenazar*, of Harwich, had picked up, on the morning of Saturday, November 14, in the area of the Brown Banks, an oar with the broad arrow Government mark on it. A grating was also picked up and identified from the paintwork as belonging to the *Fairy*, the grating coming from immediately over the galley. The master and crew of the *Ebenazar* had also seen other pieces of wreckage but, due to a very heavy sea, had been unable to recover them. The harbour-master at Harwich, confirming that the grating was fixed to the ship and, therefore, could not have worked loose except if the ship was breaking up, assumed that, and here I quote, 'These circumstances afford a melancholy presumption of the ship's fate.'

On December 11, the Secretary of Lloyd's, a Mr. W. Dobson, received from his agent at Kristiansund, Norway, news that the search of the *Salamander* had been fruitless. The search had covered the Norwegian ports of Bergen, Stavanger and Flekkefjord, as well as the Shetland Islands.

A small box of papers, a triangular piece of board, a stand of an instrument, and a lid of a chart-box, all positively identified as belonging to the *Fairy*, were picked up on Corton beach, on the coast of Suffolk, on December 20. As the year drew to a close further information on the fate of the *Fairy* was obtained. On December 29 a piece of decking and fragments of a chart-box were found washed ashore. Again these items were positively identified as coming from the *Fairy*. The harbour-master at Harwich was given information on the following day, the 30th, from a master of a Yarmouth vessel. This master gave news that he saw a ship similar to the *Fairy* sink on the morning of November 14 near the Barnard Sand.

On the last day of the year, the Hydrographer was so moved by these reports that he offered 'small' rewards to anyone who found wreckage, no matter what size, washed up on the shore, that could positively be identified as coming from the *Fairy*.

Throughout the following January, fishermen, obviously induced by these small rewards, reporting in at Lowestoft, confirmed seeing wreckage on the morning following the infamous gale, wreckage that could have come from the *Fairy*. A fisherman named Benjamin Butcher, stated that '... at 11 a.m. on the morning of 13th, being in my boat, about 5 miles from Kessingland church, this bearing

about W.N.W., I passed close to a great number of papers, also a lug-sail belonging to a gig, which appeared to have been at a short time in the water, but was unable to pick it up from the state of the sea.'

These, and other reports, prompted the Lords of the Admiralty, in January, 1841, to issue an advertisement: 'Sir John Barrow, Secretary of the Admiralty, append this advertisement offering a £50 reward for information leading to the location of the wreck of H.M.S. *Fairy* within the next six months.'

On February 3, an eye-witness of the sinking was found.

John Dale, a crew member of the north country collier brig *Alpha*, gave evidence to Lloyd's Standard Association. His evidence read, '... that on the 13th day of November, 1840 he and the rest of his crew saw a warlike vessel at 10 a.m. between Eastness and Southwold, standing to the southwest. They saw her go over on her broad side, she soon afterwards righted again but then went down immediately in about 17 fathoms. Due to the very bad weather no assistance could be given...'

A suggestion was made that a vessel be sent to locate and buoy the wreck, with a view to sending down a diving bell to recover her surveys, chronometer and charts; charts which were supposed to be in a watertight container. This ambitious suggestion never materialised.

The wooden paddle-steamship H.M.S. *Lightning* was sent to locate and fix the wreck, it met with no success.

Throughout these months, Hydrographer Beaufort had maintained the optimistic view, refuting the evidence as it slowly built up, not willing to believe what surely his experience would tell him. So it was not until February 16, 1841 that Admiral Beaufort was forced to admit publicly, beyond any doubt, the terrible loss to his service. In a letter written on that date, the Hydrographer stated publicly that he believed the wreck of the *Fairy* lies a short distance off Kessingland, a little to the southward of that place. He proposed that as soon as the weather moderated two 'proper-sized steamers' would be sent along the coast to sweep for, locate and fix the wreck.

No claimants for the £50 reward were received, so in the June of 1841 the task of sweeping for the wreck was put in hand. Two naval paddle-steamers, together with the stores ship *Comet*, were put under the command of Captain Frederick Bullock, R.N. Captain Bullock, himself a naval surveyor of some note, and later to carry on Hewett's surveying tasks in the southern North Sea tried, in the perfect June weather of 1841, to locate the wreck. Many square miles of sea were swept; but the result proved fruitless. On July 13, the Hydrographer, in consultation with their Lordships, agreed to discontinue the search; Captain Bullock returning a disappointed man to the River Thames area to continue his own surveying work.

Contributions for the widows' and orphans' of the men of the *Fairy* poured in. In recognition of Captain Hewett's work on sailing directions for the coasts of Norfolk and Suffolk; directions by which innumerable buoys were laid and, more important, many

lighthouses erected, Trinity House made a special award of £200, this amount to be given specifically to Hewett's widow. Mrs. Hewett was also awarded a pension of £100 per annum from the Compassionate Fund of the Royal Navy; this for the upkeep of herself and her eight children. The money was but small recompense for the tragic loss felt by Mrs. Hewett. Her eldest son, who was a midshipman on the *Fairy*, and her brother, the master of the *Fairy*, perished along with her husband. Three lives had been taken tragically from the Hewett family at a single stroke.

Captain Hewett was a brilliant surveyor, navigator and naval officer. A man who had spent many years at his chosen profession, who had studied with great exactitude the many moods of the southern North Sea. It is doubtful if any man alive at that time had a greater knowledge of the coastal waters of Yarmouth and Lowestoft. But for all a person's experience and expertise, and the knowledge of the many ways of the sea, it must be remembered 'that the sea always has the last say'.

Before this account is drawn to a close one point may be worth considering. Though reports of locating the wreck were coming in as late as 1842, these were never substantiated. The position of the wreck of H.M.S. *Fairy* remains to date a mystery. The Lords of the Admiralty offered the sum of £50 to anybody who could locate the wreck within six months, but I wonder if somebody were to locate the wreck at a future date if their Lordships would ever pay the £50 reward.

I would like to extend my gratitude to many members of the Hydrographic Department of the Admiralty for their diligent assistance and constructive criticism in helping me with the compilation of the above article.

✠   ✠   ✠   ✠

**LONE WHALER UNDER FIRE**—An Australian conservationist group has called for a complete ban on whaling and the revocation of the licence of Australia's only whaling company, Cheynes Beach Whaling Co. The conservationists are the Australian branch of Friends of the Earth which is associated with Project Jonah, an international effort to save whales. Friends of the Earth has called on the Federal Government to ban completely the importation of all whale products and to close all Australian ports to the whaling-vessels and fleets of all nations, except for medical purposes. This would put Cheynes Beach out of business. Already it is the last of a long line of whaling companies which have been in and out of business in Australia, although last season it had its record catch of 21 years of 'fishing' in the Great Australian Bight. The company uses three 150-ft.-long chasers which are based at Frenchman's Bay, at Albany, Western Australia, and it also uses a Cessna spotter aircraft. Last season (March to December) the chasers caught almost 1000 sperms, right on the quota allowed by the International Whaling Commission. Cheynes executives do not argue that catching should be controlled, but they say there is no shortage of sperms in the Bight. The spotter plane frequently sights packs of 500 or more, and even smaller packs now seem to be more in evidence than some years ago.

## The Seahorse—Queerest of Fish

By DAVID GUNSTON

**N**ATURE certainly outdid herself when she created the seahorse, perhaps the oddest of all the world's 20,000 different species of fish. 'Leafy seadragon', 'horse caterpillar', 'fish that stands on its tail', 'knight of the sea'—the various names given to this tiny 2-4-inch creature reflect both its strangeness and its fascination.

Seahorses are in fact unique in several ways. They are the only fish in the world to swim more or less upright: they are the only fish with a prehensile tail they can curl delicately yet firmly round fronds of seaweed; they are alone among fish in being prone to punctures. Added to which, the father seahorse bears the young alive himself!

Naturalist Deena Clark gives as good a description of the seahorse as any: 'This bizarre creature has the arching neck and head of a stallion, the swelling bosom of a pouter pigeon, the grasping tail of a monkey, and the colour-changing power of a chameleon. It has eyes that pivot independently, so that while one orb scans the surface the other can be directed underwater. To top this fantastic make-up, the male is equipped with a kangaroo-style pouch from which the little ones are born.'

As it darts jerkily among the underwater weeds, this freakish fish suggests a miniature horse-cum-dragon in general appearance, while its size, snout and general head-shape do indeed resemble nothing so much as the knight pieces in a set of chessmen. Small wonder, either, that the Ancient Greeks were enthralled by these fish, naming them *Hippocampus*, or horse-caterpillar.

There are about 40 different species of seahorse and they live in most of the warmer waters around the globe. Each one has a semi-transparent body encased in numerous rings of spiny bone, rather like a short length of flexible metal gas-piping. Their bulging bellies give a well-fed appearance that is made quaintly absurd looking by the long, thin tapering tails, corkscrewing round stalks of seaweed.

Seahorses are rather feeble swimmers as fish go, always remaining vertical, with a constant forward nodding of the head, ever at the mercy of strong-flowing currents, and progressing when they can gracefully and gently by the movements of the thin fin on the lower back, that appears to fan rapidly like a miniature propeller.

Dark grey, bronzy-black, pale greenish or pinkish, seahorses everywhere can adapt their coloration to their surroundings, changing instantly, chameleon-fashion, to brown or dingy greenish-black to merge with rocks or weed if danger threatens.

As the tiny bodies are held erect in the water by a gas-filled buoyancy bladder, a puncture sustained on a jagged rock or from the sharp teeth of a would-be attacker...

METEOROLOGICAL REGISTER.

Kept at Croom's Hill, Greenwich, by Mr. W. Rogerson, of the Royal Observatory.  
From the 21st of November to the 20th of December, 1840.

Month	Day	BAROMETER.		FAHR. THER.				WIND.				WEATHER.		
		In the Shade.		In the Shade.				Quarter.		Stren.		A. M.	P. M.	
		9 A. M.	3 P. M.	9 AM	3 PM	Min.	Max	AM.	PM.	AM	PM	A. M.	P. M.	
		In Dec.	In Dec.	o	o	o	o							
21	S.	29.51	29.23	41	43	35	44	SW	W	7	5	gor (2)	bcp (3)	
22	Su.	29.73	29.86	38	40	37	42	N	N	4	5	b	bc	
23	M.	30.04	29.97	34	44	31	45	SW	SW	2	3	osr 2)	od (3)	
24	Tu.	30.10	30.19	48	50	44	52	NW	N	2	2	bc	bc	
25	W.	30.38	30.38	37	42	33	46	NE	E	3	2	bc	bc	
26	Th.	30.42	30.38	29	38	27	39	E	NE	2	2	bf	b	
27	F.	30.39	30.37	26	37	25	38	SE	E	1	2	bf	b	
28	S.	30.37	30.32	26	31	24	32	E	E	1	1	f	f	
29	Su.	30.27	30.23	24	37	22	40	E	SW	1	3	f	bc	
30	M.	30.05	30.03	48	51	41	53	SW	SW	4	4	o	od 3)	
1	Tu.	29.93	29.96	51	52	48	56	SW	W	3	2	o	o	
2	W.	30.17	30.20	43	44	42	46	NW	NW	2	3	bc	bc	
3	Th.	30.50	30.49	31	35	30	36	N	SW	2	2	b	b	
4	F.	30.45	30.41	29	34	27	36	SW	SW	2	1	b	o	
5	S.	30.34	30.27	37	40	35	41	SW	SW	1	1	o	o	
6	Su.	30.16	30.07	38	39	36	40	W	W	1	1	o	o	
7	M.	29.81	29.65	36	35	30	37	SW	S	4	4	bc	o	
8	Tu.	29.24	29.24	37	41	31	42	SW	SW	5	3	o	or (3)	
9	W.	29.70	29.81	33	40	30	41	SW	SW	2	2	b	b	
10	Th.	29.94	29.92	40	41	32	42	SE	SE	2	2	bc	o	
11	F.	29.92	29.92	36	35	31	36	E	E	4	4	o	o	
12	S.	30.08	30.13	36	36	33	37	E	E	3	2	o	o	
13	Su.	30.24	30.24	32	32	31	33	E	E	4	3	o	o	
14	M.	30.20	30.18	23	28	22	29	NE	E	2	2	bc	bc	
15	Tu.	30.22	30.21	25	25	22	26	NE	NE	2	3	bcp (2)	bc	
16	W.	30.10	29.95	26	28	19	30	N	NW	3	1	os (2)	os (3) (4)	
17	Th.	29.72	29.75	30	20	17	30	NE	E	2	1	os (1)	bcs (4)	
18	F.	29.60	29.50	26	34	16	35	NE	E	2	5	bc	os 4)	
19	S.	29.53	29.53	29	33	25	34	E	E	2	2	o	o	
20	Su.	29.80	29.92	33	34	31	35	NE	NE	4	2	o	o	

NOVEMBER—Mean height of the barometer = 29.599 inches : mean temperature = 42.7 degrees : depth of Rain fallen = 2.70 inches.

H.M.S. FAIRY.

It is with painful feelings that we find ourselves at length obliged to acquiesce in the prevailing opinion, respecting the loss of her Majesty's sloop Fairy. The return of her Majesty's steamer Salamander, to Leith, after having visited Flekeroe, Stavanger, and Bergen, and other intermediate places, as well as the Shetland Islands, in search of her, annihilated our last hope of hearing of her safety in one of the numerous northern ports. In our next number, we shall place on record the facts which are known concerning her. Although the loss of such an accomplished officer as Capt. Hewett, is irremediable, yet, we feel great satisfaction in announcing to the maritime world, that the major part of his noble survey of the North Sea is on the copper, and will be published forthwith.

We have indeed lost the fruits of that comprehensive experience which Captain Hewett had been for eight years maturing, and which he was about to embody in the shape of sailing directions; but his positions of all the banks, and the result of three hundred thousand of his soundings, our readers will rejoice to learn are safe.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MUSQUITO COAST

The bay of Cape Dios is the north-east extremity of a projecting point at the mouth of the Rio Negro (Rio Segovia of the Spaniards) which bears north-west from the Cape. There is a shallow bar for a mile N.N.E. from the Cape to the deepest part, which is the mouth of the river.

A narrow strip of land covered with mangrove from the Cape, forming a spit of land of which is up in the bight of the bay to the western shore. There are three fathoms reaching for about the rest of the harbour has only from the Cape. This harbour has been formerly used to cut mahogany up the bay nearly one mile and a half in length, into what was at that time the eastern side, since which the new cut on the western side of the harbour, has given it the name of the bay of Cape Dios.

The bay of Cape Dios is a bay of nearly dry mud that is nearly dry formed by the sea. The bay of Cape Dios is sheltered from N.E. by a round by no means regular from six to three fathoms depth for vessels that cannot go in and a half fathoms, with the bay west, and the eastern extreme of the bay.

There are a few Europeans living at the mouth of the harbour, about half a mile from the natives for tortoise-shell, sandalwood and a few other articles. The mahogany canoes are formed rough at the mouth of Belize, and to Jamaica for sale.

The king of the Musquito Indians at the mouth of the river. He was educated at Jamaica and benefited by any thing that I saw of the Musquito Indians though but favorable, and does not at all given of them. They were in a wretchedness. Their huts are made of a few rough poles driven into the ground, the sides being entirely covered with Europeans I was prepared to find them in a state. They are not a numerous tribe.