

COWELL OF BALLAUGH AND THE PRESS GANG

(1848) *



A RELIC OF WAR

Some forty years ago, a man in Ballaugh, of the name of Cowell, headed a number of men to resist and attack a “press gang” that was patrolling the country to bear off to the “the scene of action” the sturdy sons of Mona, and during a scuffle received a leaden bullet in the thigh. Means were resorted to, to extract the ball, but without effect, and in a short time the man died of mortification, and was laid in the resting place of his fathers. About a month since his widow, being ill, requested her friends to search for the ball in her husband’s grave. She has since died, and her friends on opening her husband’s grave to deposit her remains, found the very ball which had caused his death, while his body was mouldered to dust. This relic of war has been examined by many in the parish.—*Ramsey Times*.

“A Relic of War.” *The Manx Sun* 22 March 1848: 4c.

This is one of the many items that one comes across in the newspapers that distract one from whatever other piece of research is being worked on. The Press Gang was the institution by which the British Navy manned its warships, and especially during the period of the Napoleonic Wars when demand for seamen was at its height. Fishermen were vulnerable, not because they were mariners, but because simply they were out at sea, or were gathered together in ports when awaiting their next voyage out. In other words, they were vulnerable and ideal targets as a result. What is of interest here is not so much as the activity of the press gang in the Island, though still interesting to note, but that there was resistance to it, and moreover it was organised. In this case, Cowell, we do not have his first name, was the ring leader and he paid with his own life in what reads as a hand-to-hand struggle. Indeed, one of “the sturdy sons of Mona,” and one from Ballaugh.

STEPHEN MILLER, 2017



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