



## Taranaki shipwreck

# Last survivor tells of tragedy

The only living survivor of an English barque shipwrecked off the Taranaki coast in 1901 has just celebrated his 106th birthday.

Charles Milton was a 19-year-old sea cadet when the Lizzie Bell, carrying a cargo of coal from Wellington to Newcastle, hit rocks off the coastal settlement of Oeo.

Only six of a crew of 18 survived.

Today, living quietly in an old people's home in Southampton, Mr Milton said that his recollections of the tragic night were a little unclear.

"I wasn't aware of much except

LEFT: The anchor of the Lizzie Bell marks the graves of eight crew members at Pihama Cemetery.

trying to save my life," he said.

The man on the lookout was an Irishman called Flanagan who always kept a bottle of Irish whiskey in his pocket to keep the cold out.

"Every half hour he was supposed to yell out, 'All's well, bright lights.'" Just before the Lizzie Bell hit rocks he didn't make one of his calls," he said.

Two of the crew were thrown overboard in the collision and were found dead jammed among the rocks.

The rest of the crew scrambled into the only lifeboat, which overturned twice before reaching shore; drowning six more crew members.

After landing, four more crew

members died from the cold before rescuers arrived.

An inquiry in New Plymouth found that the Lizzie Bell was wrecked through negligent navigation, and the master had his certificate suspended for 12 months.

The Lizzie Bell was the first and last ship that Mr Milton sailed with.

On his return to England he became a gas engineer in his home town of Torquay.

Mr Milton was married in 1919 to a nurse, and she died in 1982 at the age of 97 when he was 99.

Asked for the secret of his longevity he said: "I walk a lot, read a lot and pray a lot. The Almighty will call me when he thinks fit." NZPA

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