

The lolaire – Norman MacLeod, Quidinish, Isle of Harris

When the ropes were cast off and it sailed out of Kyle, the lolaire was the fastest, despite the stormy sea and wind. There were many carefree youths on board who never thought then that their sojourn in this world was going to be as short as a few hours.

Everything went favourably until midnight when it struck rocks of the most dangerous kind. The lolaire received a death blow and its body screamed. Although land was near them, there was no means of escape.

Its hull did not long survive the sharp Beasts of Holm and the lolaire sank with them in the dark and stormy night. It was a horrific sight to see hundreds of strong lads struggling to survive in the storm and wild sea.

That night across in Stornoway a large crowd had gathered waiting for the youths who were on leave from the sea. There were fathers and mothers and happy young children, sisters and brothers, all eager to greet them.

Alas, to our great sorrow, the joy turned to grief. Before the sun rose next day many had lost their lives. Word went round the place that the heroes who were expected were lying on the shores of their native island, having drowned in the sea.

I wouldn't have thought it so sad had it been ordained by God that they would die in combat. Instead, when they thought they were free from danger, death caught them unawares on the fearsome Beasts.

Many a beautiful young woman has lost her loving sweetheart, many a sister has lost her brother, many a mother her son. Women with young children mourn those who left and won't return and who won't hear their sighs of sorrows.

Today Lewis and Harris are sad and low in spirit. Many are heartbroken and many weep. I knew two of the heroes who drowned in the sea – Niall Choinnich's son from Leverburgh and the son of Donald from Northton.

Now I'll conclude what I have to say as my verse is unpolished, I am no poet although I've made an effort. Those alive today must tell the young who come after them what happened to those heroes who were on board the lolaire.

