

Book/ United Kingdom**Turning the Tide**

We carry the Foreword of the book 'Turning the Tide: The 1968 Trawler Tragedy and the Wives' Campaign for Safety', by Rupert Creed, edited by Sara Hawkins, and published by Back Door Press (1998). The Foreword is by Rt. Hon. John Prescott MP.

“In the months of January and February 1968 three Hull trawlers sank with the loss of fifty eight men. The tragedies came in quick succession, hitting the Hessle Road community with the force of a tidal wave. For the immediate relatives, the loss of a father, brother or son was devastating, but in such a close-knit community it affected everyone. It was a mass bereavement. The women of Hessle Road had lived with the tragedy for generations, but in 1968 they refused to accept that the loss of their men was an accident of nature or fate. They knew that the industry that provided their living was at the same time killing their men. And something had to be done about it. Out of their grief came anger and an unstoppable force for change. This book is the story of their campaign and their achievement.

I am proud to have played a part in this story. In 1968 I could see parallels between the circumstances of seamen and the conditions of work and terms of employment under which fishermen laboured, which were much worse. I was amazed to discover that fishermen had to take their own mattresses to sea and lived in quarters much worse than those in prison. Moreover, safety in working conditions carried little priority. The Merchant Shipping Act placed them both under a yoke of servitude which enforced such conditions—most unacceptable in the modern age. It was an anachronism from the previous century and a group of us from Hull began to lobby for its reform.

I was present at the wives' meeting in Victoria Hall on Hessle Road that cold night in February 1968. It was not the kind of political meeting I was used to attending. Outside were prams, and inside the hall was packed with women holding children and babies. Their grief was almost unbearable to witness. This was a meeting where political struggle was being experienced not as theory or ideology, but at the level where it mattered most—in the heart of a community that saw itself under threat and was determined to effect change.

This book gives an insight into a way of life that has almost disappeared. It tells the story of a specific period of a community's history, but it is local history with national significance. The Hull wives' campaign of 1968, epitomized by that wonderful character Lil Bilocca, marked a crucial turning point in the fishing industry of this country. Although the wives did not see themselves as a women's movement as such, their story is also a significant chapter in the long march towards equality between women and men.

This book draws on a wealth of research and personal testimony. It has been written with the help and advice of people from the community it portrays. It offers the first-hand experience of the women and men who lived through the events. It is their story. Their achievement.”