



The *Otago Witness* reported on the aftermath of a major tragedy in Otago Harbour:

A sad catastrophe occurred in the Harbour on Monday, 25 December 1871, Christmas Day, viz. , the drowning of a boating party at Macandrew's Bay. Seven young men left early in the afternoon on a boating excursion in Mark Webb's *Golden City*. Those who left in her were Alfred **Pricitor** (a plumber in the employ of Messrs A. and T. Burt), three of the Scrymgeour family, and two other young men the sons of Mr Drew, tailor, Mr Bruce (a plumber at Messrs Burt's).

On the *Maori* reaching town news was brought by her that a man was seen pulling off from the shore towards what was found to be a boat that had sunk, and which was under water, the top of the mast only being visible. It was lifted on to the *Maori* and brought to town. Half a dozen or so of caps and hats were seen floating on the water from the deck of the *Maori*, and one cap was recovered, The *Maori* came up about ten minutes too late to be of any assistance.

The accident occurred between the beacon and the point below Macandrew's Jetty, at some time between three and four o'clock, and was not witnessed by His Honour the Superintendent, as was commonly reported. A steamer went to the spot later in the afternoon, and Sub- Inspector Thompson and several members of the police force left to take part in the work of searching for the bodies.

The bodies of five of the young men drowned by the upsetting of a boat on Monday last, were recovered yesterday. It may be mentioned that on Tuesday evening, 26th December, Mr Webb lifted one of the bodies to the top of the water, when it broke off the hook and sank again. A buoy was then placed there to mark the spot. The first body was lifted between 11 and 12 o'clock yesterday, by a dredge worked from the boats of Mr Webb and Mr White, of the Peninsula, and was that of Alfred Pricor. Soon after, that of James Drew, the younger of the two brothers lost, was lifted by the Police boat. The drag worked from Messrs Webb's and White's boats was the next to bring up a body, which proved to be that of the youngest Scrymgeour. The Police boat's dredge next raised **Bruce**'s body, and the last body recovered — that of the elder Drew — was lifted at about one o'clock by Messrs Webb and White's boats. As a gale rose shortly afterwards, operations had to be suspended for a time. The space within which the whole of the bodies were recovered was not more than 20 yards square, and was round the buoy laid down on the previous night. On this buoy being lifted and the bottom under it being dragged, there was found the body of the elder Drew, in the trousers of which was the hook that came off Mr Webb's drag on the night before. The bodies, as fast as they were lifted, were taken ashore. The eyes were eaten out by crabs, and much blood ran from the sockets, but, otherwise, the features were easily recognisable. On the Peninsula's downward trip to Port Chalmers, Sub-Inspector Thomson informed the master of the finding of the bodies, and requested him to call for them at Macandrew's Jetty on the steamer coming back, which he did. The bodies were placed on board, and brought to town — the steamer arriving at 6.30 p.m., and having her flag hoisted half-mast high. The police had conveyances in waiting for them, and they were sent to their friend's houses. It may here be remarked that **Bruce** has no relations here, but has a widowed mother residing in Edinburgh. The bodies that have yet to be got are those of **John** and Peter Scrymgeour. We have heard from one of their acquaintances that both of them could swim, and from another that one was a particularly good swimmer. The boat sank at about 150 yards from highwater mark, and it was high tide at the time of the accident. Two swimmers — most likely those two brothers — were seen by Mr Edwards as near as 30 or 40 yards off the shore. They were then swimming across the tidal current, and making for the nearest point. When they left the boat they were not more than ten feet from one another, and all the time they were observed they kept as close as that, or closer, to each other. Mr Edwards lost sight of them in running for the boat, and on again looking at where he had last seen them they had disappeared. It has been supposed that on one coming to the assistance of the other on his getting exhausted, both were drowned. All the movable articles belonging to the boat — the rudder, pump, side seats, and two ash paddles — have been picked up on a point about half-a-mile below where the accident occurred.

John Bruce was aged 28 years and 9 months, and is buried in Dunedin's Southern Cemetery. His gravestone also records that he was a native of Leith, Scotland, (though the stone is engraved 'Scotlad'). He was also a plumber by trade, and had only been in the Colony for 18 months.

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand (www.cemeteries.org.nz)

From information in the Otago Witness on the PapersPast website.