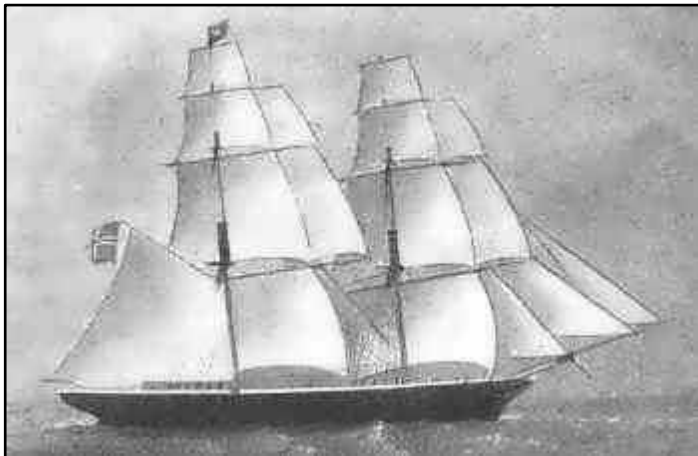




Sue Gresham Research

THE LOSS OF THE ESRAS



**Researched
Updated**

**December 2024
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FOREWORD

The image of a mariner being rescued by breeches buoy from a ship in distress – the *Estras* – is one quite often found, not least because the page from the publication “The Sphere” of 30th March 1901 appears quite frequently on online auction sites! The image suggests a dramatic rescue of the ship’s crew but what was the full story?

Unlike other wrecks along our coast, nothing remains of the ship itself, only newspaper reports tell of the circumstances of her loss and the outcomes.

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ESRAS

The Ship

Newspapers in the latter part of March 1901 – the “East Anglian Daily Times” of Friday 22nd March 1901 in particular – reported that the East coast had suffered very much from severe storms and high tides over two or three days. There were many instances of coastal erosion and in some places, where the seaboard had been washed away almost to the foundations, houses and buildings were in danger of being undermined. Shipping disasters “of a distressing character” were also reported. One of these was the Norwegian wooden barque *Estras*.

The *Estras* was built in Staubo, Tvedestrand, Norway in 1869. The ship’s dimensions were: Length 100’ 0” x Breadth 26’ 0” X Depth 14’ 8”. Her gross registered tonnage was 282 and net registered tonnage 271. Her initial homeport from 1870 was Eidbo, Tvesestrand, then from 1885 to 1900 Kragerø, and from 1900–1901 Kristiansand.

The *Estras*’s owners were Lars Pedersen from 1870, John P. Pedersen from 1879, K. Olsen & P. Thommesen from 1895 to 1900, and from 1900 to 1901 H.A. Kvaase. Her Captains were H. Martinsen from 1888, Pedersen from 1888, and K. Olsen from 1895. In 1901, the Captain of the *Estras* was Gunder Emil Hellevig.

The Final Voyage

The *Estras* left the port of Kristiansand on Monday 18th March 1901 carrying a cargo of timber and was destined for Paimbœuf, a port on the south bank of the Loire estuary upstream from Saint-Nazaire and downriver from Nantes.

She was first seen, in distress, off the Norfolk coast on Wednesday evening, 20th March, when the Coastguards at Caister saw flares from the direction of the Haisborough Lightship.

Despite the hurricane force of the wind and the very heavy sea, Caister’s independent lifeboat *Covent Garden* was launched and made for the direction of the ship. The lifeboat remained in the area for some time but was unable to find any sign of a vessel needing assistance. The lifeboatmen attempted to get back to Caister but the heavy seas compelled them to put into Yarmouth Harbour.

Both the Cromer and Sheringham lifeboats were summoned and stood by but weather conditions made it impossible for either of them to launch.

The *Estras* had been on Haisborough Sands for the whole of the Wednesday night, 20th March, before, being dismasted, she came off.

ESRAS – East Runton, March 21, 9.20 a.m. – Norwegian barque *Estras*, Captain Christianshon, cargo timber, wreck on sand West Runton, masts gone; crew exhausted, but not yet off.

ESRAS – East Runton, March 21, 9.30 a.m. – *Estras*, Captain Christianshon, tonnage 266, sailed Monday, bound for Paimbœuf; wire any early instructions; owner cargo, L. Garion, L. Ushrud.

The Shipping Gazette and Lloyd’s List – Thursday 21st March 1901

Newspaper reports of the Captain’s name being Christianshon were incorrect; he was Gunder Hellevig, not Christianshon. Christianshon was also, evidently, a misspelling of Kristiansand, the *Estras*’s port of origin.

The following morning, Thursday 21st March, the *Estras* was seen to be lying off Cromer, almost opposite East Runton. She was, by this time – about six o’clock – riding at anchor about a mile from the shore and her position was one of danger to the crew. The Cromer and Sheringham Rocket Brigade was immediately summoned but was unable to assist.

The Cromer lifeboat *Benjamin Bond Cabbell II* was manoeuvred past the newly built pier, along the promenade and past the (then new) West Esplanade at Cromer, with a view to landing if that were possible. The Sheringham lifeboat was also brought by road as far as the Runton Gap but efforts to utilise her proved futile.

Named and christened on 29th September 1884, the *Benjamin Bond Cabbell II* was launched only thirteen times and saved twenty-six lives during her service at Cromer.



Manoeuvring the Cromer Lifeboat
Norfolk Museums Collection

In the meantime, the *Estras* was quickly approaching the shore. The ship had been battered by large breakers but almost two hours later, just after eight o'clock, she broke from her moorings and was driven ashore between East and West Runton where she eventually came broadside onto the beach within about 500 yards from land.



Rescue of crew from the *Estras*
"The Sphere" – 30th March 1901

Hundreds of spectators had by now gathered on the beach and on the cliffs above, from where they could see the crew huddled on deck with the strong waves breaking over them.

The Cromer Rocket Brigade, under the direction of a Chief Officer McArthur, quickly began their rescue efforts.

The 1901 Census shows Gordon McArthur, 51, "Chief Officer, Coast Guard, Royal Navy", living at 1 Surrey Street in Cromer with his wife and four children. He was a former Able Seaman in the Royal Navy.

The ship's mast had fallen to within a few feet of the deck and the thicker line, the hawser, was made fast. Initial rescue attempts failed but the fifth rocket fired was successful. The life-line fell over the stern of the ship and the Brigade were able to get a connection with the ship. "

"Amidst great excitement" the crew of the *Estras* were rescued. They comprised eight (some reports say nine) men, including the Captain, but two were "mere lads". The first to leave the ship was the cabin boy, described as "a sickly-looking youngster of about twelve years of age", who was cheered by those assembled on the beach and cliffs.

This sequence of events was repeated until only the Mate was left on board. It was reported that, when his turn came to be rescued, "he soon entered the breeches and after a rough journey joined his comrades". He was brought ashore at about 9.15 p.m.



Rescuing *Estras* crew members by Breeches Buoy
Norfolk Museums Collection

The Captain and crew of the *Estras* were said to be in an exhausted condition and were looked after at the Lifeboat Inn before a Captain Kennedy of the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society arranged for the men to be taken to Cromer.

The "Shipping Gazette and Lloyd's List" reported on Friday 22nd March that the *Estras* would become a total wreck and that the Master and crew were at Cromer, where the men rescued were presumably offered lodgings in or around the town.

(h.) Wrecked.								
(Under this heading are included vessels lost through stranding, or striking rocks, sunken wrecks, &c.)								
No. in Reg. Book. 1900-01.	Vessel's Name.	Tons (Net.)	Nation-ality.	Descrip-tion.	Voyage.	Cargo.	Circumstances and place.	Date.
645	Estras	266	Nor.	W. Bg.	Christiansand— Paimbœuf.	Timber	At West Runton	21st Mar

The Captain and part owner of the ship, a man named Hellevig, related that his ship was the *Estras*, a Norwegian vessel bound from Kristiansand to Paimbœuf, France with a cargo of timber.

He described how the *Estras* had struck on the Haisborough Sands on Wednesday evening and her mast had broken at eight o'clock. The ship had been badly buffeted about and the crew could see no lights but they were pleased to find during the night that her anchor would hold. When dawn broke, they found themselves in sight of land and showed a distress flag.

The 1901 Census – taken on 31st March, shortly after the loss of the *Estras* – shows Gunder (Gunda sic) Hellevig, a Ship's Captain, aged thirty-six, a Boarder, lodging at 12-14 Chapel Street in Cromer with Walter Spalling, a bricklayer, his wife and two children. Gunder Hellevig was described as being married and a Norwegian subject. He was doubtless remaining in the town to oversee the dispersal/salvage arrangements for his ship.

12th Mar	da	1				Walter R. Spalling	decs	3m	32		Bricklayer	Worker	da Brunton	
						Sophie M. da	Wife	3m	31				da Brunton	
						Walter R. G. da	Son	4m			Schooler		da da	
						Arthur L. da	Son	2					da da	
						Gunder Hellevig	Boarder	3m	36		Ship's Captain	Worker	Norway (Norwegian subject)	

1901 Census

Salvage

The Lloyd's Agent, a Mr Carter, was soon on the scene and making arrangements for the sale of the wreckage.

Rowland Wilfred William Carter was born in 1876. The 1901 Census, taken shortly after the rescue from the Esras, on 31st March 1901, shows him living in Cabbell Road in Cromer with his wife and mother-in-law; he was an Auctioneer and Architect and an Employer.

**SALE BY R.W.E. CARTER
ON TUESDAY NEXT
SALE OF THE BRIG ESRAS
Wrecked on
EAST RUNTON BEACH NEAR CROMER**

R.W.W. CARTER is favoured with instructions from Captain Hellevig to Sell by
Auction, on the beach, on TUESDAY APRIL 2ND 1901

THE HULL ESRAS

and sundry Spars, Mainmast, Foreyards etc.

Also THE STORES etc on Mr Dennis' Field, Church Farm (opposite the Church), and which will include the following: Ten Sails, Running Rigging, Tow Ropes, Side and Masthead Lights, Fog Bell, Two Ship's Boats, and Four Oars, about 30 fathom Small Chain, 100 fathom Cham Cable, 60 fathom Wire Hawser, 15 fathom Bass Hawser, Large and Small Anchors, Wire Rigging, Blocks, Hemp and Manilla Ropes, Three Riding Lights, Copper Boiler, Copper Kettle, Iron Boiler, and Water Cask, Deep Sea Lead; also one tub Salt Beef, two tubs Butter, one sack Potatoes, etc; in all about 300 Lots.

The Sale to commence with the Hull on the Beach at Twelve o'clock sharp, and
Stores to follow.

Possession of the Hull to be taken after the cargo is discharged, but the
Purchaser will be responsible for same after fall of the hammer.

R.W.W. Carter, Auctioneer and Lloyd's Agent, Auction and Valuation Offices,
Cromer and Sheringham.

The Eastern Daily Press – Saturday 30th March 1901

**AT EAST RUNTON, NEXT CROMER
TO TIMBER MERCHANTS, BUILDERS, AND OTHERS**

NORFORD SUFFLING has received instructions to sell by auction, on Thursday the 18th April 1901 at 11 o'clock in the forenoon, in lots to suit the convenience of purchasers, the cargo of about 140 STANDARDS OF RED AND WHITE WOOD DEALS, salvaged ex "Esras" from Christiansand, and recently stranded at East Runton, and comprising 3 x 9, 3 x 8½, and 3 x 8 in. red and white wood deals of various assorted lengths, and of excellent quality.

The cargo lies upon the cliff in a very handy position for carting, being in close
proximity to a good road.

Catalogues will be duly published, and further particulars may be had
upon application to Messrs. T. Small & Co, French Vice-Consul, Great Yarmouth;
M. Raefort, Red Lion Hotel, Cromer; or of the Auctioneer, Great Yarmouth.

Eastern Daily Press – Saturday 6th April 1901
Shipping Gazette and Lloyd's List – Monday 15th April 1901

A newspaper item several months after the loss of the *Estras* suggests a possible dispute about financial recognition of the local beachmen's efforts in recovering part of the ship's cargo.

SALVAGE CLAIM SETTLED

The claim made by Mr A.F. Clowes, solicitor, of this town, of behalf of the East Runton beachmen, who salvaged a cargo of timber realising £1,056 in March last, from the Norwegian vessel *Estras*, bound from Christiansand to Paimbœuf, and which ran ashore on the Hasboro' Sands, has been satisfactorily settled out of Court.

Yarmouth Gazette and North Norfolk Constitutionalist - Saturday 20th July 1901

Rowland Wilfred William Carter - Postscript

Rowland Carter was, by inference, a successful young Auctioneer and Agent, with offices in Cromer and Sheringham but his circumstances were to very drastically change.

Newspapers in April 1903 reported a case (*Carter v Buxton*) heard in the King's Bench Division of the High Court in which Rowland Carter took an action against Sydney Buxton, M.P. relating to the alleged non-payment of a 2½% commission on the sale of the M.P.'s house and furniture.

The judgement was for the defendant with costs although an appeal by the plaintiff was granted. The result of any appeal, if one was made, was not reported.

The financial and reputational implications of the court case evidently resulted, less than a year later, in a ruinous outcome for Rowland Carter.

In the Matter of a Deed of Assignment for the Benefit of Creditors, executed on the 29th day of August, 1903, by ROWLAND WILFRED WILLIAM CARTER, of Cromer, Auctioneer.

ALL Creditors who have not already sent in their Claims are required to send particulars thereof to me on or before Saturday next, the 5th March, in default whereof they will be excluded from the First and Final Dividend about to be declared.

ERNEST A. BRACEY,
6, Bank Street, Norwich,
Solicitor for the Trustee.

29th February, 1904. (2743)

Norwich Mercury - Wednesday 2nd March 1904

In 1904, the Register of Electors shows him living in a tenement in Church Street, West Runton. Subsequent ("Lunacy Patients Admission Registers") records show that he was admitted as a Pauper to the Brentwood Asylum on 2nd November 1905; he died there twelve years later on 17th October 1917.

The Captain

Gunder Emil Isaksen Hellevig was born on 22nd May 1864 in Høvåg, a village situated about seven miles from the town of Lillesand in Norway. The 1875 Census shows him, aged 11 and the elder of two sons, living with his parents and three sisters.

He was married on 2nd December 1889 at Hisøy, Aust-Agder to Konstanse His, who was born on 21st July 1867. Shortly after their marriage, the 1891 Census shows Gunder, described as a Seaman, and Konstanse living in Hisøy, Arendal, Norway.

Passenger Lists and Immigration records show that Gunder Hellevig was making regular journeys as a passenger to New York and probably more than the number for which records are available. The earliest one found shows him, aged 39 and described as single, sailing to New York on 16th March 1904.

Also in 1904, Gunder's wife Konstanse Hellevig, 37, whose last place of residence was Hisøy, Arendal, was sailing on the *SS Oscar II* from Kristiansand on 12th August and arriving in New York ten days later. She had not been to the United States before and was emigrating in order to join her husband at Number 195, 31st Street, Brooklyn. The time she spent in America was sadly very short for she died in Kings, New York on 19th April 1905.

Two years after his wife's death, records show Gunder Hellevig, aged 42, a Sailor, sailing from Liverpool on the *SS Ivernia* on 14th May 1907 bound for Brooklyn, New York where he arrived nine days later. His last permanent residence was shown as his home town of Høvåg, Norway. The Passenger List shows that he had previously lived in New York for three years from 1904 to 1907 and on this occasion would be staying with a friend on 40th Street, Brooklyn.

Gunder Hellevig, now 43, was married to Maren Johanne Knutsen, aged 21, on 18th September 1907 in Kings, New York. Subsequent records suggest that he was not living permanently in America.

On 25th June 1920, Gunder Hellevig, 56, was sailing from Southampton to Brooklyn, New York on the *SS Olympic*. His last permanent residence was Arendal in Norway where his wife was living. In 1921, he is shown as leaving the Port of Immingham on the *SS Tancred* and arriving in New York on 17th October.

On 5th May 1923, aged 58 and described as a Boatman/Seaman, Hellevig was sailing on the *RMS SS Celtic* from Liverpool to Brooklyn, New York. His last permanent address was his birthplace, Høvåg in Norway. However, Hellevig's closest relative in the country from which he had come was given as Hanna Hellevig of Trøe, Høvåg, his wife. He had been to the United States a number of times and on this occasion would be staying in Brooklyn with a friend, Mr O. Henriksen.

Two years later, on 31st October 1925, Hellevig, now 61 and described as a Boatman, was again sailing from Liverpool to Brooklyn, New York (shown as his last permanent residence) on the *SS Cedric*, arriving on 10th November. His wife was again shown as a Mrs Hanna Hellevig of Høvåg. The record shows that he had lived permanently in the United States and his intention was to secure citizenship.

In June 1928, Gunder Hellevig is shown as sailing on the *SS Mauretania* from Southampton and arriving in New York on 8th June 1928. The Immigration Record shows his age as 64 and his occupation as "Barge Master", married, and describes him as being 5'8" tall, with a fresh complexion, blond hair and blue eyes. He had lived in the United States before - in 1912 and 1928 - and he was returning to Third Place in Brooklyn, apparently to settle permanently.

Gunder Hellevig died on 28th May 1943, aged 79, and was buried at Vestre Moland in Aust-Agder, Norway.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCE SOURCES

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- Genealogical records – Ancestry, Family Search
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- Seilskipsregister – Norwegian Maritime Museum

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