WESTPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MEMORIAL TO THE CLEW BAY TRAGEDY, WESTPORT QUAY

On June 14th 1894 the *S.S. Elm*, en route to Glasgow, lay aground off Westport Quay waiting to float on the incoming tide. Three Hookers from Achill carrying passengers for the journey were approaching. As the first, the *Victory*, approached, with 126 people aboard (mostly young women), her passengers rushed to one side to get a better view of the steamer. The heavily laden boat capsized throwing those on board into the water where they were trapped by the sails. There were several small boats in the vicinity that went to the aid of the stricken. Many were saved but the final death toll was 32. Two 17 year-olds, Edward O'Malley and Daniel Burke were later to receive the Gold Medal of the Royal Humane Society for their part in the rescue.

Twenty eight of the dead were brought to Achill Sound by a special train running for the first time on the new Westport to Achill branch line. They were buried in Kildownet graveyard.

Ironically, after the official closing of the line in 1937, ten young victims of a bothy fire in Kirkintilloch, Scotland were brought on a special train to Achill. This was regarded in local folklore as the fulfilment of an ancient prophecy.