

AN ORIGINAL STORY BY ROB PATTERN

Robert Pattern remembers this day too well. In 1989, Robert was due to be part of the lifeboat crew but has taken his daughter and nephew to the pantoin Eastbourne. Just as they got back, Robert's pager went off. By the time Robert had dropped the kids off, a complete crew had been assembled. He grabbed his bad-weather gear from the boathouse and along with good friend Steve Kent, they went to the buck to give the Coast Guard a hand.

Due to a heavy summer storm and getting hit by the cliffs, the trawler (The Whitehorse) had managed to get a trawl wire and anchor down that initially held it off the beach. The plan was to wait for the tide so the lifeboat could get closer to put a tow on and take her to deep water. Leaving the coastguard Brian Sims to monitor the situation on the beach, the rest of the crew retired to the buckle for some refreshment. Then the wire parted, the trawler was up on the beach banging around violently in the surf and the crew wanted to get off.

There were no breaches by then, (retired by the ministry) so they managed to get a line over to the boat. With half a dozen bodies pulling on it, the crew kept it tight as they shimmied down one by one to drop onto the beach.



The White Horse washed ashore after a summer storm in July 1989



The White Horse destroyed ashore on Seaford Beach, east of Sussex (UK).

Robert Pattern, Steve Kent and Mark Cottingham (all lifeboat crew) were dressed in their foulies. They stood in the surf to grab them as they fell. It worked well for a while, but then one crew member fell into the surf and was swept under the trawler as it drifted into a swell.

Without thinking, Robert grabbed onto the crewmember's collar and disappeared with him into the water. He remembers breaking the surface and as he looks up, he notices that he's still holding tight onto the collar and sees the bottom of the trawler coming down. Luckily for them, their buddy Steve Kent worked for Charringtons as a drayman and he was very strong. Steve Kent grabbed Robert, who was still holding on to the trawlerman, and dragged both of them up out of the surf and onto the beach.

Robert remembers breaking the surface and he looks up, still holding onto the collar of his crewmember, and he sees the bottom of the trawler coming down. When you can't think straight, you do stupid things. Dick Willis, the coastguard chief, was as white as a sheet, and the decision was made to wait for the helicopter to arrive to winch off the remaining crew. Eventually they took the trawlerman to rooms at the Sheffield to recover and dry out. Luck was definitely on their side that day.



The destroyed bow of The White Horse

“I REMEMBER BREAKING THE SURFACE AND LOOKING UP, STILL HOLDING ONTO HIS COLLAR, AND SEEING THE BOTTOM OF THE TRAWLER COMING DOWN.”

– ROBERT PATTERN