

### THE WRECK OF THE TOMMY NORTON.

The following particulars of this event are given in the *Bairnsdale Courier* of Wednesday:—

We have seldom long to wait for an opportunity of producing fresh and forcible argument upon the immediate necessity for telegraphic communication with the Lakes' Entrance. During the past year or so scarcely a month has slipped by without some mishap or another occurring there and affording fresh proof of its indispensability, if it be the public wish to maintain the establishment of easy and regular water communication with the metropolis. And now the latest proof is the complete wreck of the steamer *Thomas Norton*, the most useful vessel the Gippsland Steam Navigation Company possessed for the navigation of the lakes between Sale and Bairnsdale while the Entrance was closed, and as a pilot boat while the channel was open. She has now gone to pieces at the Entrance, and her remains, whatever may be left of her, belong to some insurance society. While we are not in a position to say that a telegraph line could have been of any material avail in an endeavour to save the little steamer from wreck, being entirely past help shortly after striking, the establishment of an office within sight of the Entrance might have been the means of sending early assistance to those on board of her, who spent the whole night in terror and suspense, momentarily expecting the little steamer to go to pieces and they to be cast adrift at the mercy of the rough cruel waves, which were furiously dashing her backwards and forwards on her sandy bed. The facts of the unfortunate affair appear to be somewhat as follows:—

Between six and seven o'clock on Friday evening last, after piloting the steamer *Murray* and schooner *Nowra* safely outside, the *T. Norton* returned to re-cross the bar, and in the attempt was caught broadside on by the wind and heavy sea running there, and driven on to the western spit. At once refusing to answer her helm, she canted over on one side and remained so with the sea beating over her until about eight o'clock, when the locks that connect the boiler with the ship's side were carried away and she immediately began to fill, the water putting out the engine fires, and the little vessel remained on the spit gradually falling to pieces owing to the immense strain of water that was breaking over her side. In a very short time the companion was washed away with the lee paddle-box, and had the other experienced a similar fate, the living freight which took shelter behind it would have been washed clear off the decks, and it would doubtless now have been our painful duty to record the death by drowning of some if not all of those on board the *Tommy Norton* at the time she struck; for it was the only protection slight as it was that they had, the hold and cabin were full of water, and the deck was being washed by a merciless sea. The steamer *Murray* remained at hand outside the Entrance for some time, and sent a boat to see if it could be of any assistance, but the

Entrance for some time, and sent a boat to see if it could be of any assistance, but the captain warned the men in her to keep off and return to the *Murray*, so rough and dangerous was the sea at the time that had the boat reached the side of the vessel it also must have gone to pieces. In this condition of excitement, terror, and anxiety, all hands, consisting of the captain and four of a crew, with Mrs Rigney, a lady on a visit to Bairnsdale, who had been brought from Sale by the *Murray* and transhipped by her into the *T. Norton*, remained on board until daylight. Without a murmur of complaint the lady continued in that position the whole night through, and when asked to go below for fear of being washed overboard she begged to be allowed to remain on deck, stating that while she could see her fellow sufferers still alive it gave her hope. Serious as was the position of each man on board, it was materially saddened by the appearance of the lady companion, who, though evidently terrified, still suffered nobly in silence. As day-light broke, Captain MacAlpine and Brown, the engineer, succeeded in getting ashore and securing the boat of the *Maffra*, which was lying in Reeves River, by which they rescued the remainder of the crew from the wreck. They at once abandoned the vessel, which was fast breaking up, and after leaving the lady at Mrs Roadnight's, where she was most kindly treated, at once proceeded to row up to Bairnsdale, where they arrived between three and four o'clock p.m. to tell the sad tale of the loss of the *T. Norton*. Nothing was saved belonging to the company or the crew, except the clothes the latter wore at the time the vessel struck.