



Deputy Lieutenant Catriona Whitfield with ESRA chairman Neil Dalton. The ESRA lifeboat crew took the floral bouquet she is holding offshore and laid it in the water.



The gathering was told the story of the Nancy by Professor Bell.



A service of commemoration was given by Rev Graeme Muckart.



Kara Mackay read out a poem and sang Fear a Bhata.



The event at Dornoch beach top car park was open to members of the public. Pictures: Willie Morrison

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Brig's tragic voyage tribute

IT set sail from the Dornoch Firth on September 17, 1773, with some 280 migrants on board, keen to leave the privations of life in the Highlands behind and hopeful of new opportunities in America.

But by the time the sailing brig Nancy docked in New York, around 80 passengers had died, including all but one of seven pregnant women, after a voyage scarred by hunger, the brutality of the captain and crew and the ferocity of the weather.

Details of that tragic voyage had been lost in the mists of time until it was brought to life again through research undertaken by one of the founders of Dornoch museum Historylinks, the late Jim Bell, and later his son, Professor David Bell.

And those passengers aboard the Nancy were finally commemorated at a poignant 250th anniversary ceremony at Dornoch beach top car park on Sunday.

Pipe Major Willie Fraser played as members of the public assembled at the car park in drizzly weather which seemed somehow fitting to the occasion.

Dornoch Provost Paddy Murray, wearing his chain of office, gave the welcome.

The gathering was told the story of the Nancy by Professor Bell who said much of his information had come from the Scots Magazine which was established in 1739.

He said: "We do not know what happened to the survivors - it may be we need to take a trip over to New York to see if there are any records over there, but there was no retribution to anyone."

"The event disappeared from people's knowledge until I came across this card on which my father had written the 'Nancy', and I followed it up."

A service of commemoration was given by Rev Graeme Muckart after which young Dornoch girl Kara Mackay read out the poem Although I am Hidden in the Forest and sang Fear a Bhata (The Boat Man).

Provost Murray handed Deputy Lieutenant Catriona Whitfield a bouquet of flowers which she in turn gave to the crew of the ESRA lifeboat, which was waiting at the water's edge. ESRA members took the wreath offshore and laid it in the water in a touching tribute to those who had lost their lives.



Provost Patrick Murray gave the welcome.