The Royal Humane Society was established by Dr William Hawes and friends in London in 1774 (then called the Society for the Recovery of Persons Apparently Drowned) with the primary aim of reducing the unnecessary loss of life from drowning.

In an essay written in 1799 by Dr Fothergill from Bath, he answers three questions set by the Society about the best ways to save lives at sea. He recommends that ships should carry lifeboats and lifejackets, that lifeboats be stationed at readiness to rescue on the coast, and describes fully the sea rescue schemes established in the late 1700s on the north east coast of England at Bamburgh and Shields.

The Royal Humane Society gave Dr Fothergill a Gold Medal for his essay and had it published.

Another example of the important work of the Royal Humane Society is its setting up of a network of ‘receiving houses’ – firstly local inns, then purpose-built stations – where the bodies of ‘persons apparently drowned’ in the River Thames could be brought to be resuscitated by trained medical assistants.

1. Why do you think the Royal Humane Society set questions on the problem of shipwreck as part of a competition?

2. Looking at the essay’s contents pages, why do you think Dr Fothergill won the competition?

3. Looking at pages 36 and 37 of the essay:
   a. make a list of the problems outlined
   b. make a list of the solutions he offered to these problems.

4. What do you think this essay shows about how people viewed the problem of shipwreck in the late 1700s?