

### THE SS ROUMANIA By a member

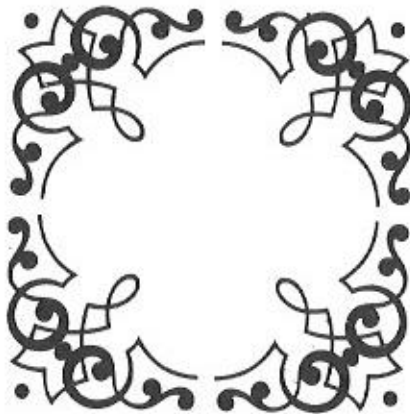
The above commemorative plaque must have, over the years, caught the attention of worshippers at St. George's Church in Lisbon, and made them wonder as to the cause of the disaster and if there were any survivors.

The Roumania was a 3387 ton two masted schooner, built in 1880 on the Clyde, for Henderson Brothers and was a connecting link between Glasgow and Bombay.

In mid-October of 1892 she sailed from Glasgow and proceeded to Liverpool where she was to pick up 55 passengers and load an assortment of cargo, mainly cotton goods consigned to William Graham & Co. of Glasgow and Manchester, with trading houses in India and, nearer home, in Lisbon and Oporto. She also carried a large cargo of sewing machines and barrels of beer, the latter to quench the thirst of the British Raj.

Captain Young was an experienced and veteran commander with Anchor Line, having served on the Columbia on the India run, and previous to that on the California, sailing to New York.

The crew was made up of 16 British officers, one Portuguese, Francisco Marena and 50 Lascars.



On Saturday, October 22, the activity on the quayside fitted the usual pattern of India bound liners; with the arrival of carriages bearing passengers, friends and relatives to see them off, while the grinning and good natured Lascars, bent double under the weight, carried cabin trunks on board, all bearing the name of the passenger in bold white letters.

To name a few: Captain Hamilton of the Indian Army had been granted special leave to get married and was returning to India with his new bride who proudly displayed two very large diamonds on her finger.

Mr. James Nicol, son of the City Chamberlain of Glasgow, had been a brilliant student at Kevinside Academy, followed by an apprenticeship with Grahams. He was on his way to take up a position with the Company in Calcutta.

Lieut. Charles Sandford, of the Indian Staff Corps, had not long returned from his honeymoon. The marriage had been a big social event in Chester and the ceremony in Trinity Church had been conducted by the uncle of the bride and groom, Dr. Sandford, Bishop of Gibraltar.

Also boarding the Roumania was Mrs. Burgess, accompanied by her infant child and ayah. She had brought the child home to meet the grandparents and was returning to join her husband. \*

Mrs. Boutflower who was travelling with her four children was returning to the North West Provinces to join her husband, who was yet to meet Marjorie, the youngest member of the family.

During his home leave, Lieut. Rooke had not contracted matrimony and was therefore travelling alone to rejoin his unit with the Bombay Cavalry.

On Saturday evening, amidst cries of farewell and the waving of handkerchiefs, Captain Young gave the order to cast-off and the Roumania started on the short journey which was to claim the lives of all, but nine, of those that travelled on her.

The trip across the Biscay was uneventful but on rounding Finisterre the ship was buffeted by strong S. Westerly winds

which, within 48 hours, were to increase to gale force.

There was no written rule that ships should steer west of the Berlangas but, considering the late hour, the mountainous seas and that the beacons of Cabo Carvoeiro and the island, were obscured by the raging storm, it remains a mystery why Captain Young ventured into the channel. On the evening of 27th, while below deck passengers prepared for a restless night, on the bridge the Captain and officers of the watch desperately tried to fix their bearings, while lead soundings gave them no indication that the ship was off-course and dangerously close to land. At 11 PM the Roumania struck rocks a couple of hundred yards from shore opposite the cliff-top fishing hamlet of Gronho. Struck broadside on, the tremendous waves swept the bridge and those on it into the raging sea.

Below, the panic stricken passengers fought to get on deck and into the life boats, but their efforts were of no avail as the Lascars had lost their heads, with the result that the boats became waterlogged and useless.

Captain Hamilton made a heroic effort to get his wife on deck and managed to support her until the sea wrenched her from his grasp. During the night, badly bruised and more dead than alive, he was cast on the beach.

Lieut. Rooke had a similar and miraculous escape, having struggled in the water for several hours, exhausted, cold and naked he was washed up on the beach and managed to reach some rocks which afforded some shelter from the storm.

On Thursday 28, when cargo and bodies were washed up on the beach at Foz do Arelho, the alarm was raised and a messenger carried the news to Caldas da Rainha from where it was relayed to Peniche and Lisbon.

From Lisbon, the Minister of Marine, ordered the gun boat Zaire to proceed to the scene of the disaster, but the gale blew with such force that only on Friday could she sail on her mission.

From Caldas, Obidos and Peniche search parties set off on mules and ox-carts to scour the coast for survivors, but the site,

except for goat tracks, was almost inaccessible.

Only on Friday did Lieut. Rooke venture out from his shelter to search for help and, in due course, he sighted in the distance a group of men huddled together. On closing the distance he recognised his fellow-passenger Captain Hamilton, six Lascars and Francisco Mareno, like himself they were all dazed, cold and naked.

The two officers decided to go in opposite directions and Captain Hamilton and other survivors who walked south, were soon picked up by a search party moving up from Peniche. Lieut. Rooke was only found on Saturday and, like the others, was taken to the fort at Peniche where the garrison doctor was prepared to render every possible assistance.

In the meantime many bodies had been recovered and sent to Caldas for possible identification before burial.

News of the valuable cargo being washed ashore travelled fast and far and drew crowds that went on the rampage, as they looked on the cargo as their legitimate booty. Four overzealous beachcombers who waded into the sea, were swept off their feet and drowned.

The plunder reached such proportions that a contingent of mounted troops had to be sent from Alcobaça and shots were fired to restore order.

The inhabitants of Ferrel were the worst culprits and at one point the cavalry surrounded the village and carried out a house-to-house search to recover loot.

At Peniche the garrison doctor thought fit to discharge the two officers who moved into the local hotel. They were visited by the Governor of Peniche and senior officers of the garrison who called to express their sympathy. The spokesman for the delegation was Tenente Ferraz who could speak some English as his mother was of British descent. The two officers were deeply moved and expressed their gratitude.

The other survivors were kept in a ward at the fort and during their stay caused problems in the kitchen as, in accordance with

their religion, they refused to eat meat of any sort.

Dr. Sandford, Bishop of Gibraltar, happened to be in Lisbon to hold a confirmation and the news of the disaster came as a great shock; with the Lisbon Chaplain, Rev. Canon Pope he immediately left for Peniche in the hope that his close relatives might be amongst the survivors.

They stayed at the same hotel as the two officers and from them heard a first hand account of the tragedy.

The two clergymen drew up a careful description of the bodies recovered and of items of personal belongings which might assist in identification. Amongst the items found was a photograph mounting on which the following could still be deciphered: "To my daughter Lilian Burgess, from her affectionate father-Edinburgh, 14 October, 1892." Also recovered from the sea was the Boutflower family bible. The Boutflowers were no strangers to Portugal and one might even suspect that the same bible might have been in the possession of Charles Boutflower, when early in the century he travelled Portugal on a mule, as an army surgeon.

With the passing of time, identification of the bodies became an impossible task and the identity of the four interred at Peniche on November 1, was in doubt. One was Katherine, the eldest of the Boutflower children, whereas the others were described as two children aged about seven and four, and a man believed to be Mr. Roper, a tea merchant of Bombay.

November 1, was declared a day of mourning and church bells tolled throughout the day. The funeral and memorial service was conducted by the Bishop of Gibraltar who was assisted by Canon Pope.

In the long funeral procession following the four coffins, draped with Portuguese flags, there were military and civil dignitaries, Mr. Cowper, the British Consul, Mr. Norton, representing Anchor Line, and many members of the British community from Lisbon. The local band was present and played funeral marches.

The news in Glasgow created much painful interest throughout the City as Captain Young and majority of officers, were natives of west Scotland. From Cathedral Street, Grahams telegraphed their Lisbon office instructing a member of the staff, who had known James Nicol at the Glasgow office, to proceed to the scene to assist in identifying his colleague.

During the next few weeks burial services were held in Caldas, Obidos, Peniche and Vau, but many of the 113 that perished, have no grave.

The official enquiry into the disaster was held at Westminster on February 25, 1893 and it was recorded that the disaster was due to the vessel having probably over-run her distance, to her having been set off-course by an unusually strong easterly current and to the weather having prevented the Burlings light from being seen. The court recommended that the Burlings light be altered to a quick flashing light and that more than four European quartermasters should be carried so that look-out duties in cold weather should not be done by Lascars.

The plaque in St. George's Church remains as a memorial to some, but one might ask, why do a number of un-named ayahs feature on the plaque yet, no reference is made to the 44 Lascars that perished? All official records give the date of the disaster as October 27, whereas the inscription on the plaque gives the date as 28.

**Sources:** Dispatches from correspondents on the scene.

