

# The Tragedy of the Royal Charter: A Victorian Maritime Disaster

On October 25, 1859, the Royal Charter, a British passenger steamship, sank off the coast of Anglesey, Wales, in one of the deadliest maritime disasters in British history. The ship was carrying over 450 passengers and crew, and only 39 survived.

The Royal Charter was a paddle steamer built in 1840. She was 322 feet long and weighed 2,720 tons. The ship was powered by two steam engines that drove her paddle wheels. The Royal Charter was considered to be a fast and reliable ship, and she was often used to transport passengers and mail between Britain and Australia.



## THE GOLDEN WRECK: THE TRAGEDY OF THE ROYAL CHARTER by Tim Tyler

★★★★☆ 4.1 out of 5

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On October 22, 1859, the Royal Charter left Liverpool bound for Melbourne, Australia. She was carrying 459 passengers and crew,

including many families who were emigrating to Australia. The ship's captain was William Tarn, an experienced mariner who had commanded the Royal Charter on many previous voyages.

The voyage began smoothly, and the Royal Charter made good time across the Atlantic Ocean. However, on October 25, the ship encountered a severe storm off the coast of Anglesey. The storm winds reached hurricane force, and the Royal Charter was battered by huge waves. The ship's engines failed, and she began to drift towards the shore.

The Royal Charter struck a sandbank near Moelfre, Anglesey, at around 2:00 AM on October 26. The ship broke up on the rocks, and the passengers and crew were thrown into the raging sea. Only 39 people survived the disaster, including Captain Tarn.

The tragedy of the Royal Charter shocked the nation. It was the worst maritime disaster in British history since the loss of the Titanic in 1912. The disaster led to major reforms in maritime safety. In 1860, the British government passed the Merchant Shipping Act, which required all passenger ships to be equipped with lifeboats and other safety equipment.

The wreck of the Royal Charter is still visible today. The ship's remains lie in shallow water off the coast of Anglesey, and they are a popular destination for divers.

## **Causes of the Disaster**

There were several factors that contributed to the disaster of the Royal Charter. These included:

- **The storm:** The storm that struck the Royal Charter was one of the worst to hit the British Isles in decades. The winds reached hurricane force, and the waves were immense.
- **The ship's design:** The Royal Charter was not designed to withstand such a severe storm. She was a wooden ship with a flat bottom, which made her vulnerable to being overturned by waves.
- **The ship's condition:** The Royal Charter was not in good condition at the time of the disaster. She had not been properly maintained, and her engines were not working properly.
- **The captain's decisions:** Captain Tarn made several poor decisions during the storm. He failed to take shelter in a safe harbor, and he continued to sail into the storm even though he knew that it was dangerous.

## **Aftermath of the Disaster**

The tragedy of the Royal Charter had a profound impact on British society. The disaster led to major reforms in maritime safety, and it also raised questions about the adequacy of the Royal Navy's rescue services.

In the wake of the disaster, the British government appointed a commission to investigate the sinking of the Royal Charter. The commission's report found that the disaster was caused by a combination of factors, including the storm, the ship's design, the ship's condition, and the captain's decisions.

The commission's report led to the passage of the Merchant Shipping Act of 1860. This act required all passenger ships to be equipped with lifeboats

and other safety equipment. The act also established the Board of Trade as the government agency responsible for regulating merchant shipping.

The tragedy of the Royal Charter also led to the establishment of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI). The RNLI is a charity that provides lifeboats and rescue services around the coast of the United Kingdom.

## **The Royal Charter Today**

The wreck of the Royal Charter is still visible today. The ship's remains lie in shallow water off the coast of Anglesey, and they are a popular destination for divers.

The Royal Charter is a protected wreck site under the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973. This means that it is illegal to dive on the wreck without a permit from the Welsh Government.

The Royal Charter is a reminder of the dangers of the sea and the importance of maritime safety. The disaster also serves as a testament to the courage and dedication of the men and women who serve in the RNLI.

## **Image Gallery**



THE MAGNIFICENT STEAM CLIPPER  
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F. TROYER, CHARTERER.

IN ANSWER TO THE ADVERTISING FOR

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