

TRAVELLING TO TRAGEDY

Great Transport Disasters

Dr Rudi Newman

Disasters have grabbed the human imagination since antiquity. Whether for heroism or arrogance, folly or fate, these tales show the best and worst of humanity when faced with extreme danger.

This book introduces seven events of tremendous importance, yet while some have risen to legendary proportions – cloaked by myth and error – others have become all but forgotten despite their shocking details.

All are a warning from history:

The two 'unsinkable' ships
Britain's deadliest railway error
The torpedo that changed warfare
An engineering nightmare
The darkest day on the Thames
The English Hindenburg

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

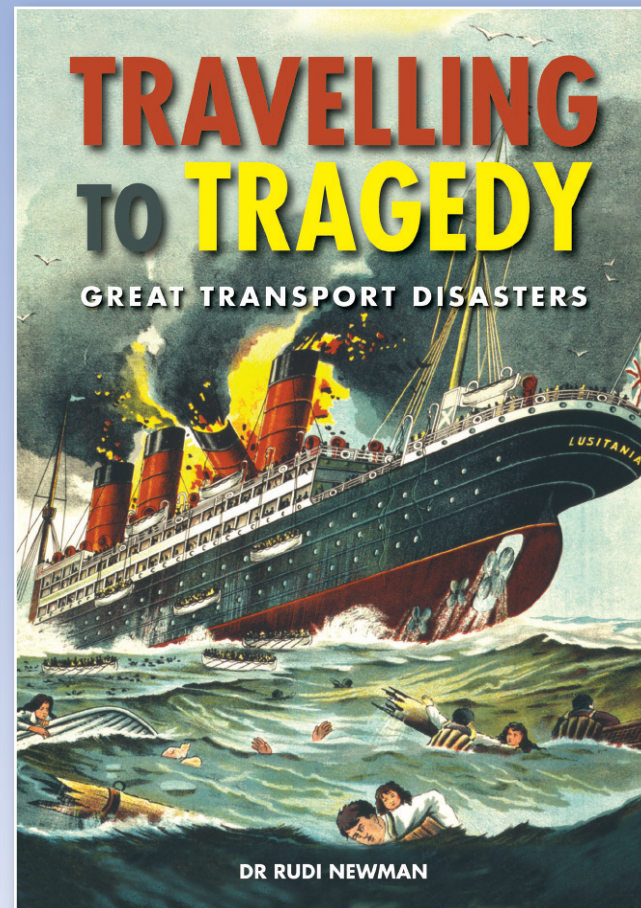


Dr Rudi Newman has a long-standing passion for all things historical, particularly in his specialist field of transportation. Having previously researched various maritime themes, his PhD centred on Victorian railways and their early impacts. A collector of transportation ephemera supporting his historical research, he has assisted with museums and exhibitions on a range of related subject matters and has presented numerous lectures and articles on transportation themes. Currently the Honorary Secretary of the British Titanic Society, he has also acted as an advisor for several media interviews and documentaries.

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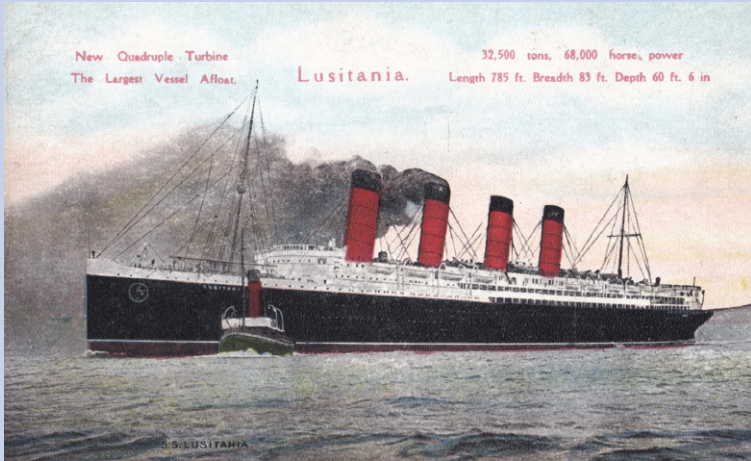
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TRAVELLING TO TRAGEDY - GREAT TRANSPORT DISASTERS



Period postcard of the newly-completed *Lusitania*. David Lean collection



The severed bow of *Princess Alice* once salvaged.
© Illustrated London News/Mary Evans Picture Library



Period postcard of *R101* flying over St Paul's Cathedral, one example of the publicity surrounding the airship. Author's collection

Example of a double-page spread.

TRAVELLING TO TRAGEDY

covered by international media. Her story has all the perfect ingredients: the rich and poor, famous and obscure, arrogance and horror. It was an extreme case of pride coming before a fall – mankind's greatest achievement falling victim to one of nature's simplest entities.

Conversely, some now wonder how other ships of her time may have coped in those conditions, suggesting that perhaps it is unfair to criticise so emphatically. Taking longer to sink than even her own designer expected, remaining stable and upright throughout, these factors gave precious time towards the evacuation. Therefore perhaps *Titanic* was indeed a safe ship, potentially saving lives even during her own demise. A highly contentious idea, this is just one of many aspects that will be debated long into the future.

Whatever the debates, one thing is certain. *Titanic* was a symbol of progress: social, technological but also quite literally a symbol of hope for those seeking a new life overseas. Faith, however, was shattered – not just faith in technology, but in a more general sense. *Titanic* heralded a change in era, the end of confidence and the start of more troubling times. To quote survivor Jack Thayer:

"There was peace and the world had an even tenor to its way. Nothing was revealed in the morning the trend of which was not known the night before. It seems to me that the disaster about to occur was the event that not only made the world rub its eyes and awake but woke it with a start keeping it moving at a rapidly accelerating pace ever since with less and less peace, satisfaction and happiness. To my mind the world of today awoke April 15th, 1912."

DEATH ON THE RAILS
The Quintinshill Fiasco

The period of World War One was full of tragedy, spawning events that remain in the collective imagination for their horror: Gallipoli, Flanders, the Somme. With troops marching across Europe, unprecedented zeppelin raids and the war at sea costing countless ships, civilians were increasingly in the crossfire. Of these, none would be more sadly infamous than those aboard RMS *Lusitania* when she was torpedoed and sunk in 1915. But scarcely three weeks after this act shocked the world, an incident occurred that was just as terrible – one that wiped out half a battalion in a matter of minutes. Astonishingly though, this major military loss had nothing to do with enemy action and, far from occurring in the heat of battle on foreign soil, it happened within earshot of the famed Scottish blacksmiths at romantic Gretna Green. A tragedy caused and worsened by forgetfulness, this was a disaster so startling that for the most part it was uncensored during the War. Still holding to this day the grim title of Britain's worst railway disaster, its name stands as a warning of the perils of distraction: Quintinshill.

Prior to the 1921 Grouping Act that formed the famous 'Big Four' railway

Period (pre-sinking) postcard of *Titanic* departing from Southampton. Author's collection

