



## *SS Clan Macduff*



The sinking of the steamer *SS Clan Macduff* was the topic of discussion during the end of 1881. The reason for this, is its treacherous master, Captain William Webster.

The *Clan Macduff*, a 2319 tonne gross British steamer left Liverpool for Bombay on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1881, with 19 passengers and 46 crew members.

The ship sprung a leak as the weather worsened off the coast of Wales on the night of 20<sup>th</sup> October. The Captain at the time was busy playing cards, below deck with some ladies. He did not attend immediately to the calls of the first mate.



THE COWARDLY CAPTAIN WEBSTER  
FLEEING FROM THE SHIP



The ship had 6 lifeboats, but it was difficult to lower them due to the rough waves, due to which some of them were smashed to pieces. The Captain on witnessing this, jumped into one of the boats, without thinking about the ship, passengers or the crew he left behind. One survivor recounts the despair on the faces of the passengers and crew as they saw Captain bail, leaving them behind to perish.



ESCAPE FROM THE CLAN MACDUFF



THE LOSS OF THE "CLAN MACDUFF"—THE BOATS LEAVING THE VESSEL.  
SKETCHED FROM THE DESCRIPTION OF THOMAS INGRAM, ONE OF THE SURVIVING SEAMEN

However, as fate would have it, the boat carrying Captain Webster threw the passengers into the vicious waves, but all of them were pulled back except the Captain, who was nowhere to be seen, and assumed to have drowned.

The next morning the steamship *Upupa*, came to the rescue. By that time, the water was at the level of the deck. 32 lives were lost that day, and the *Clan Macduff* was seen for the last time at 9 pm on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1881. During the inquiry, it was established that Captain Webster was to blame for not having to get the ship afloat again, and for abandoning her while leaving 17 people still onboard.



This ship carried a lot mail for the British Army in India. It had 3516 letters and 2314 newspapers, all of which were lost and could not be recovered. This information is mentioned in Postal Circular number 8687 of the Director General of The Post Office of India.

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From F. R. Hogg Esquire.  
Off. Director General of the Post Office  
of India.

To The Adjutant General of the Army.  
Simla.

Simla the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1881.

Sir,

I have the honor to forward for your information copy of a telegram dated 2<sup>nd</sup> October from British Post Office, intimating the loss of 3516 letters and 2314 newspapers for soldiers and seamen with the wreck of the steamer "Clan Macduff". There seems to be little or no hope of the recovery of this mail.

2. From the newspapers you will have noticed that the steamer "Clan Macduff" — bound for Bombay was totally wrecked off the coast of Wales on the night of October 20<sup>th</sup>.

3. Doubtless you will deem fit to make the fact of the loss of this mail known through out the British army in India.

I have you.  
F. R. Hogg.  
Off. Director General  
of the Post Office of India.  
Circular

(This circular is a part of The Rudraksh Collection)