

*A wee bit
of maritime
history... 21*

FREE



Mystery of the *Mountstewart*



Just before Easter on 11th April 1895, Lady Theresa, 6th Marchioness of Londonderry, was due to travel to Belfast from her house, Mount Stewart, on the Ards Peninsula, to launch the Arts and Industrial Exhibition. She gave permission to a group of senior domestic staff to use her boat, *Mountstewart*, for a picnic outing while she was away. Little did they all know that the day would end with what is possibly the single greatest loss of life within Strangford Lough, before or since.

Picnic party and Boatmen:

Joseph Grainge (43) - House Steward. The most senior member of domestic staff. The home he shared with his wife, Kate and five children was in Battersea, London. Had worked for the Londonderrys for 12 years.

Eliza Taunt (46) - Head Cook. From near Kilwinning, Ayrshire. She had worked for the Londonderrys for 20 years.

Elizabeth Dougal (43) - Housekeeper who had taken up her post just two weeks previously. From Leith, Edinburgh.

William Rowe (32) - Valet to Lord Londonderry. He grew up in Somerset but had married about five weeks previously and now lived with his new wife, Emily, in Upper Teddington, West London.

While Elizabeth was based at Mount Stewart, Joseph, Eliza and William moved around with the Londonderrys as they travelled between their various houses.

Jane Cheshire (19) - Lady's Maid to Lord Enniskillen's daughter, Lady Kathleen Cole, who was visiting from Florence Court. It is thought she came from a street behind Paddington Station, London and had been orphaned at the age of 15.

William Start (26) - Lord Enniskillen's Valet. He was also based at Florence Court. Origins unknown.

William Hagan (46) and his son **Robert** (17) - Boatmen from Kircubbin. William was known as a very experienced boatman. Robert was the eldest boy in the family of seven.

The boat

Mountstewart was built in Cowes in about 1892, made of wood, clinker built and undecked with a standing lug mainsail and a foresail. 22 feet (6.7 m) long, 6.5 feet (2 m) wide and carried 6 cwt (305 kg) of ballast.

Weather and tide

Temperature	8 ⁰ C or 9 ⁰ C with 7 hours of sunshine
High tide	approx. 2.15pm
Wind	NW light

The picnic

At about mid-day they headed down with their picnic baskets to the jetty where they were met by William and Robert on board *Mountstewart*. They sailed south to Kircubbin, around a new yacht



launched only that morning, and then headed half way across the lough to Bird Island (above right) to enjoy their picnic.

Onward journey

Heading for home they will have had to tack (sail in a zig zag fashion) because of the NW wind. The boat was seen by a farmer at work on Rainey Island, off the lough's western shore. To his surprise, when he looked up a short time later, there was no sign of *Mountstewart*. He was the last person to see the boat and its occupants.

Aftermath

When they didn't return, anxiety concerning their fate gradually developed. Extensive searches were carried out. Some articles of clothing and parts of the boat were found but there was no sign of *Mountstewart* or its occupants. It became clear that this highly regarded group of servants had all been lost.

Over the coming months the bodies of four of the eight victims - Joseph Grainge, William Hagan, Jane Cheshire, William Start - turned up at various points around the lough but there was no sign of the others *or Mountstewart*. The reason for the tragedy and the wreck location remain a mystery.



Research undertaken by the *Mountstewart* Research Group
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