

May 24, 1881...



...is a day that has forever marked London's history. Many Londoners were out celebrating Victoria Day in the park and boarded the steamer *Victoria* as it made its last voyage of the day towards downtown. The boat was overloaded with over 600 people trying to make their way home. Captain Rankin made his scheduled stop at the wharf at Woodland Cemetery but refused to let any more passengers on, to the discontentment of many ashore. Only a few moments later, disaster struck.

Due to a combination of factors, including people jokingly rocking the boat back and forth and a boiler coming detached, the *Victoria* flipped onto its side, the upper deck collapsing onto the lower one. Many were instantly killed or drowned, and many others suffered fatal injuries. Nearly 200 lives were lost.

As soon as the news reached the rest of the city, family members, neighbors, and friends rushed to the riverbank to help with rescue efforts and to clear the casualties out of the water. Bodies lined the riverbank, waiting to be identified by family members. Some people lost a spouse and all of their children. Every household knew somebody who had been killed in the wreck of the *Victoria*. For years later, Victoria Day was a dark day for London's community.

Today, 135 years later, we are here to commemorate those who lost their lives or their families on that horrible day, and to share their stories, bringing an important piece of London's history into the present day.



IN THE NEWS

"The scene that followed baffles description. All were struggling together in one heterogeneous mass of humanity. There was a crash, a general shriek and nearly all were immersed. A silence of the grave followed. Gradually one after another rose panting to the surface, and the more thoughtful at once set to work to rescue the people, but despite all exertions full two hundred fell victims. The work of taking up the bodies went on all night, and today and this afternoon the internment of the dead began. There is a wail in every household of deep stricken grief. The entire population is personally affected by the loss of relations or friends." - The Cleveland Herald

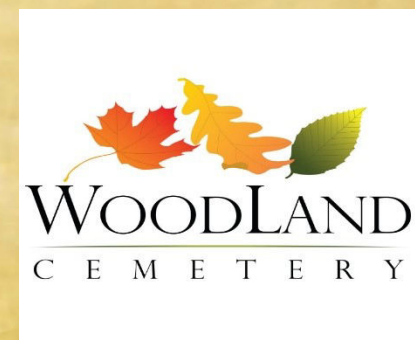
"The bodies as fast as transferred from the steamer were laid out in rows on the grass by the riverside, all in their holiday attire, and with the aid of torches their faces were eagerly scanned by hundreds of anxious friends looking for their missing ones. A goodly proportion of the drowned are men in middle life and many are children of tender years. Many were the wails of sorrow which followed the identification of a relative - perhaps it is the mother who discovered her child or the children a parent. One man was heard inquiring for four children." - The Associated Press



"A great many heartrending scenes were witnessed on the river bank as the bodies were received from the water, and one man who had lost his whole family was with difficulty prevented from throwing himself in the water. A woman who had escaped had her babe torn from her breast by the falling of some of the timbers from the upper deck. She was taken to shore and in a few minutes saw her child float on top of the water. With a wild shriek she threw herself into the stream and saved the child, when she was with difficulty revived a second time herself." - The Associated Press

"...the boat suddenly collapsed like an egg shell, and became a total wreck level with the water's edge. All the passengers were instantly plunged into the stream, more than half of them under the debris. The first news that reached the city was brought by survivors who struggled through the streets, wet and weary. The news spread like a thunderbolt, and a stampede took place for the spot. Arriving there a horrible sight met the view. Fifty or sixty bodies had already been recovered and were lying on the greensward, some distance up the bank... The wail of anguish that arose at the sight of the victims was heartrending." - The Associated Press

VICTORIA DAY DISASTER



Section R

Map

Section Q

Walking Tour:

1. William H., Margaret, and Albert "Bertie" Dyer

William (45) was born in England. His wife, Margaret (47), was born in Ireland. Their son Bertie (5) also drowned.

2. Dolly Tatham

Dolly (7) was born in England and she was a member of St. Paul's Cathedral.

2. Adalina McIntosh

Adalina (17) was on the *Victoria* with her first cousin, Dolly Tatham.

3. Elizabeth Smart, George Smart, Laura Smart, Jane Swazzie, and Edward Charles Coughlin

Elizabeth (26) perished along with her two children. Her younger brother Edward also lost his life, as well as her sister Jane, who had been married the day before.

4. Henry, Mary Jane, and William Henry Hayman

Henry, a bricklayer, immigrated to Canada in 1874.

5. Eloisa Mercy Lawson

Eloisa (21) was the first victim to be brought ashore. She was named for her mother and was a member of Memorial Church. She lived with her mother and siblings.

6. John Alfred Wastie

John (17) was the assistant purser and ticket-taker on the *Victoria* that day. His father, Thomas Wastie, was an engineer, steamboat manager, and former owner of the *Victoria*.

Not included in tour:

7. Mary, Ellen, Thomas, and Margaret Mary Stevens

Mary Stevens (34) was survived by her husband Thomas. They had six children, three of whom died.

8. Elizabeth, Fanny Elizabeth, Samuel, George William and Albert Ernest Evans

Elizabeth (35) was the wife of George Evans. Her daughter Fanny (9) was known for her golden hair. Her brothers Samuel (6), George William (2), and Albert Ernest (1) were also victims.

9. David Harper

David (46) was a hostler and labourer at the Western Hotel.

10. James Short

James (13) was born in London.

11. Charles Edward Major

Charles (12) left behind a widowed mother. He studied at the Sabbath School in the Wellington Street Church.

12. Annie and George William Matthews

Annie (23) was the wife of Charles A. Matthews, and died with her son George William . Charles had reached the shore and managed to save their other son, Charles Jr.

13. John Charles Siddons

John (13) was son of John and brother of Roderick, both of whom survived the disaster.

14. Mary Craddock

Mary's (18) body was brought back to London aboard the *Princess Louise*.

15. Alice Mary Deadman

Alice (20) and her two friends Julia & Janet had been picnicking at Springbank Park.

16. Frederick Roe

Frederick (17) was a labourer born in Canada.

17. James Robertson

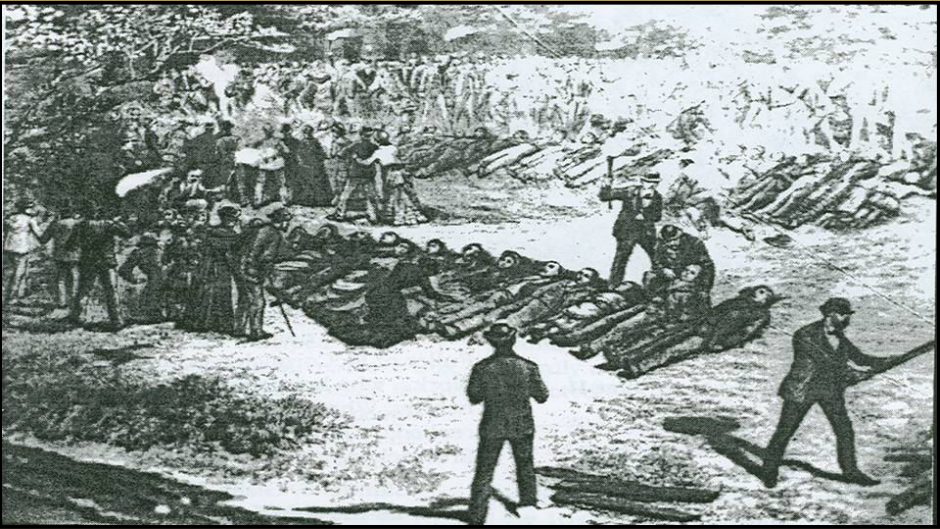
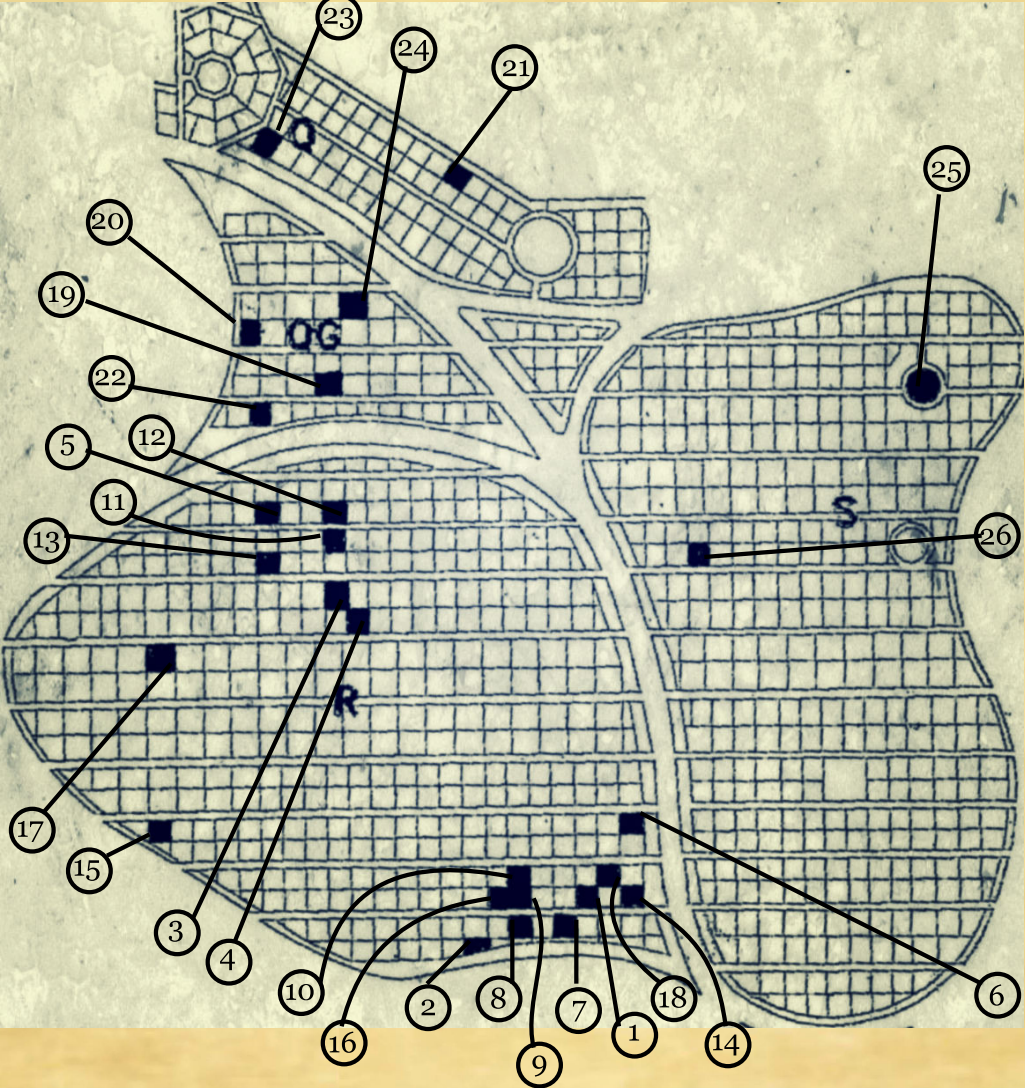
James (40) was a bank manager and an active member of St. Andrew's society.

18. Gertrude Mackey

Gertrude (18) was born in England.

Red Flag = Adult

White Flag = Child (Under 16)



Walking Tour:

19. William, Ontario, and Turville Millman

William (39) was a travelling agent. William's head had been struck by falling timbers after he secured Ontario (8) and Turville (6) in his arms.

20. John LeClair

John (15) was a member of the Bible Christian congregation.

21. Harry Abey

Harry (12) resided near Elm Street, east of Rectory, in London East.

21. Lotticia Swanwick

Lotticia (21) was a spinster.

21. John Kelly

John (24) was a newly immigrated labourer from England, and was originally from Ireland.

21. Glenville G. Wiseman

Glenville (16) was a confectioner, born in England. He was most likely skinny-dipping when he saw the disaster, and may have attempted to rescue the passengers.

21. Alice Williamson and Edward Williamson

Alice (29) was the wife of Henry Williamson, a labourer, who was saved. Her son Edward also drowned.

Not included in tour:

22. John (or Thomas) Wallace

John (16) was a tobacconist, labourer, and a pupil of the London West School.

23. Maria E. Kendrick

Maria (24) was a dressmaker and spinster.

24. Emma Jane Box

Emma (22) was going to be married that day had the wedding not been postponed for one month.



Section S

Walking Tour:

25. John Walsingham Cooke Meredith

J.W.C. Meredith (72) belonged to the prominent Meredith family. He was one of the oldest passengers to drown. He was a clerk of the Division court, a justice of the peace, and an agent of the Phoenix Fire Insurance Company of London, England.

Not included in tour:

26. Simon Peter Jr. and Mary Jane Graham

Simon Jr. (12-13) and Mary (10) were the children of Simon Peter Graham Sr., a machinist, who was saved.