

The Princess Victoria

Words and Music: Nigel Harbron

The musical score is written on four staves of music. Each staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The notes are: Staff 1: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 2: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 3: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 4: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The lyrics are: Jan - u - ar - y, nine - teen fif - ty three, an - oth - er year. Days of snow - fall, days of rain - fall, days for some to fear. Out of Stran - raer, bound for Bel - fast, the Prin - cess Vic - tor - ia sailed, Not sus - pec - ting, for one mom - ent, what for her fate had pre - vailed.

January, nineteen fifty three - another year.
Days of snowfall, days of rainfall, days for some to fear.
Out of Stranraer, bound for Belfast, the Princess Victoria sailed,
Not suspecting, for one moment, what for it fate had prevailed.

Boilers burning, engines turning, time to leave the port,
Carrying passengers, cars and lorries safely stowed on board.
A deep depression o'er the North Sea, lashing rain and fierce gales,
The Captain quietly thanking God that he did not rely on sails.

Ten miles out from Stranraer port a mighty wave arose.
Ripped Victoria's stern doors open, never more to close.
Seamen battled down below deck, tried in vain to stem the flow,
Using buckets to shift water from the vehicle deck below.

The wireless operator - David Broadfoot was his name -
Sent out Mayday messages, the ship's state to proclaim.
Her Majesty's Ship Contest set out to the ferry's aid that day,
But failed to spot the vessel in the crashing waves and flying spray.

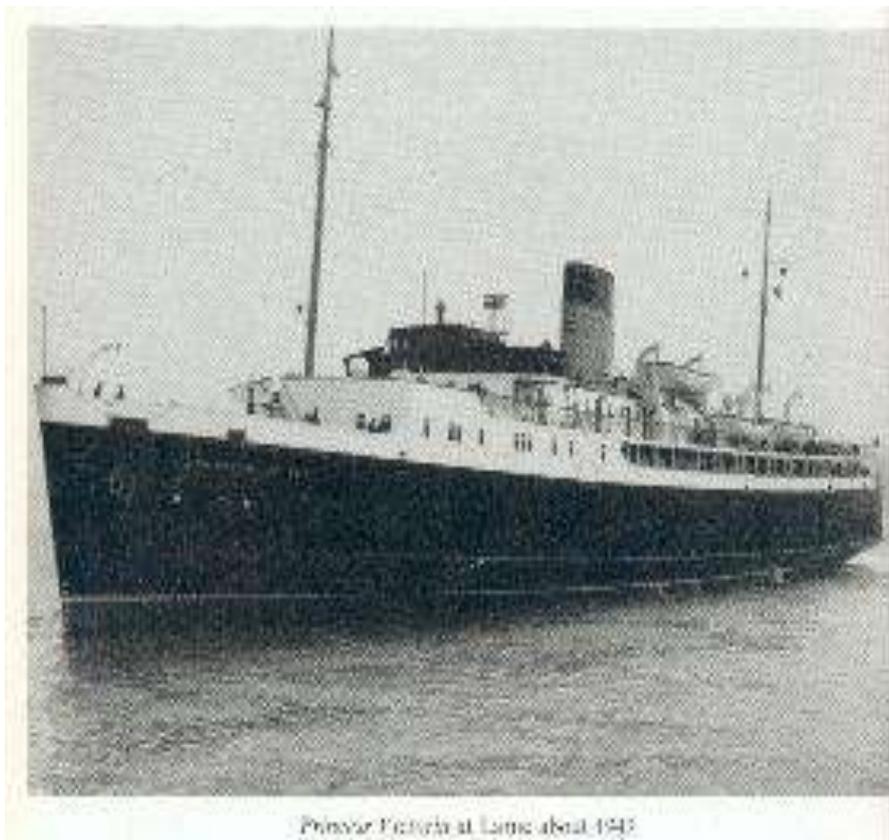
The lifeboat from Portpatrick braved the swell that dreadful day,
She had the ferry's bearings, and from them she did not stray.
But when she reached the spot she thought the Mayday message had come from
Victoria was six miles away, her throbbing engines still turned on.

All that day the sailors fought to keep the water out,
But as the ferry listed, more and more were filled with doubt.
At last the orders to launch lifeboats, women and children first to go,
But the boats upturned their contents into crashing waves below.

Not one woman, not one child survived to tell their tale.
Only forty-four men lived to triumph o'er the gale.
The lifeboat from Donaghadee took twenty-nine brave souls on board,
And took them on to Belfast Port unto the safety of the shore.

Captain Ferguson, the ferry's Skipper, took the blame.
Had he launched the lifeboats earlier, more would have been saved.
Yet he tried to steer the ferry to Mew Island's sloping shore,
Had he done so, he'd have lived to sail across the sea once more.

The thirty first of January in the year of 'fifty three,
Will never be forgotten by those who venture on the sea.
However new the vessel, and however good the vessel's crew
Tide and weather will conspire man's best creations to undo.



*I've travelled on the Stranraer-Belfast/Larne ferries quite a few times, but - so far -
have lived to tell the tale.*