

ROYSTON GRANGE

(Ron Baxter et al)

Tune: Ross Campbell

You men that sail the ocean, come listen to my song;
And find a lesson, if you can, in a voyage that went wrong.
For when you leave the land behind, your luck may quickly change -
Sit down, I'll tell to you the tale of the vessel "Royston Grange".

Her cargo it was frozen beef, sent from the Argentine;
Her crew they hailed from London, from Glasgow and the Tyne.
Off the River Plate they met the fog, and in that lies the blame;
For through that fog there came a ship - the doom of the "Royston Grange".

The RADAR was revolving, for an echo could be seen;
Coming fast, but it would pass by on the starboard beam;
But that heavy-laden tanker, for reasons never found,
Put her helm to starboard and the "Royston Grange" ran down.

Though the Captain called for "Full Astern" and the wheel was spun around,
The tanker's bows drew nearer, and through her sides they ground;
No explosions lit the sky, no tanks went up in flames,
But silent as a marble tomb, lay the "Royston Grange".

For her Phreon tanks had ruptured and the gas had quickly spread;
And all within a minute, the whole of the crew was dead.
And though they searched from stem to stern, no-one was left alive;
More than eighty men were dead, not one of them survived.

So let's drink to their memory, as another song we sing;
But don't forget today, lads, what tomorrow it might bring;
For Death, she stalks silent, and she strikes both swift and strange,
As when she took into her arms the crew of the "Royston Grange".

Notes (RJC) The Royston Grange

Approaching each other in a narrow channel of the River Plate, seven miles from the port of Montevideo, Uruguay, two freighters collided on May 11, 1972. A violent explosion devastated both ships and killed eighty-four persons. Destroyed were the Houlder Line's Royston Grange, a British cargo ship carrying grains and refrigerated meat to London, and the Liberian-flagged tanker Tien Chee carrying 20,000 tons of crude petroleum.

How the collision came about was never determined; all aboard the Royston Grange, ten passengers and sixty-three crew members, were killed; ten on the Tien Chee were never found. The ships locked bows, and the Liberian ship's holds were ruptured, causing tons of oil to spill into the Plate and spread out for miles onto the Uruguayan beaches. Fire then erupted, and the oil-coated water was soon aflame.

No time was available for either ship to lower lifeboats, and only thirty-one of the Chinese crew on the Tien Chee managed to jump overboard and swim through the fiery waters before the two ships disappeared in a titanic explosion. One of the desperate swimmers was so badly burned that he died only minutes after being dragged from the flaming water. Despite the immense damage, both ships remained afloat and were later towed away to be scrapped.

See also [Wikipedia: STV Royston Grange](#) for fuller details and a crew list, and <http://www.shawsavillships.co.uk/royston.htm> for a couple of pictures.

The British Merchant Navy website has a picture of the ship, a poem by Capt. J.S. Earl, and a picture of the memorial window:- <http://www.merchant-navy.net/Pictures/royston%20grange.html>

Captain Earl's poem:-

S.T.V. Royston Grange

Worse things happen at sea they say, worse things happen at sea,
In '72 this came true with the tanker `Tien Chee`,
Within dense fog near the River Plate, she collided with a freighter,
Crude Oil gushed from shattered tanks exploding seconds later.

The other ship the `Royston Grange` in fatal rendezvous,
Lost seventy four razed on her - all passengers and crew,
Full cargo holds of butter ignited overall,
Fused in mighty fireball that left no chance at all.

Ten thousand tons of vessel went up in lethal blaze,
No time then for rescue or warning sound to raise,
Montevideo close at hand, bodies still entrapped,
The Houlder`s ship towed away and later on just scrapped.

By the Tower of London in All Hallows Church,
There is a stained glass window - if carrying out research,
In commemoration colour with burning red repands,
Depicting Royston Grange in memory of all hands.

Worse things happen at sea they say,
Worse things happen at sea.

Capt J S Earl
2005

The BBC World Service was an important link to the wider world for the crew on board a tramp ship. Ron was at sea when the initial reports came through of the Royston Grange disaster. He and some colleagues (he can't remember any names) put some verses together based on what they heard. Later investigations showed things happened slightly differently, but we have left the song in its original form.

Ross