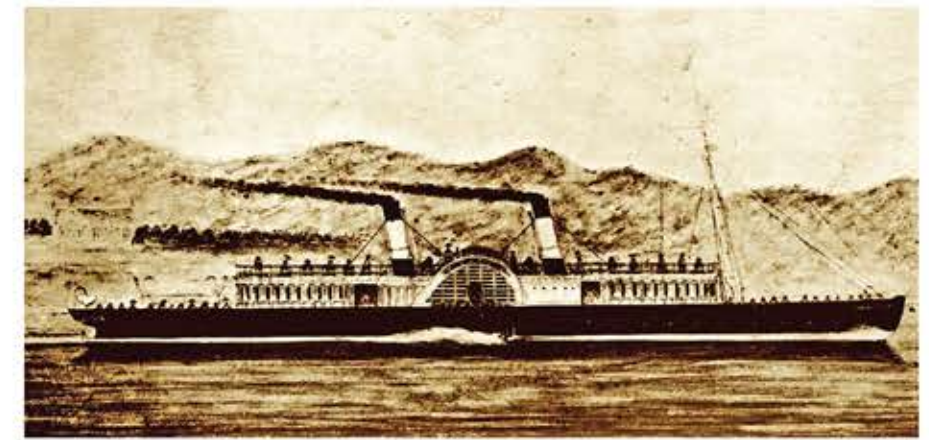




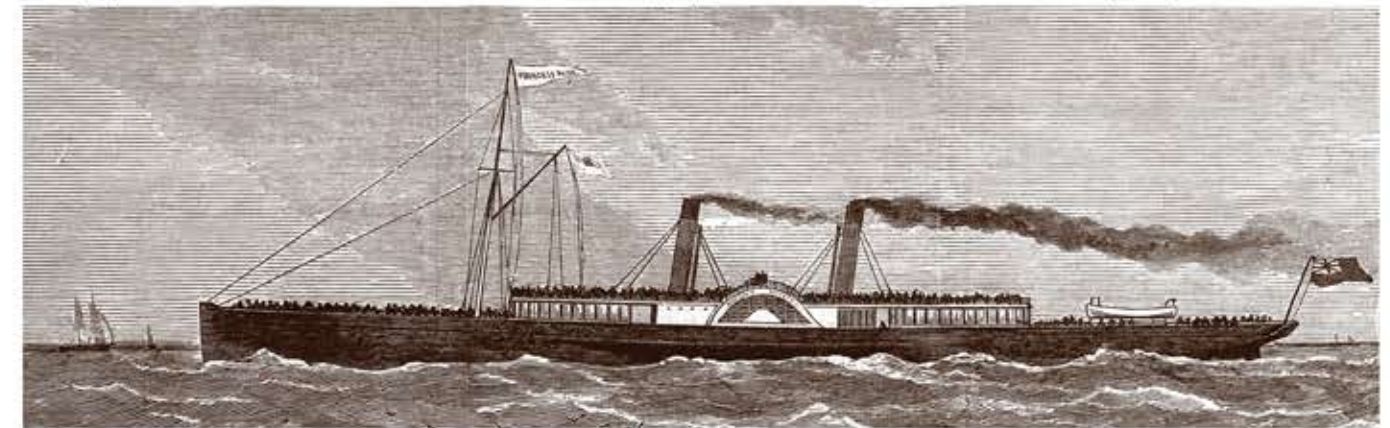
The late afternoon of 3 September 1878 had taken on a rather ghastly aspect for the over 700 passengers and crew of the SS *Princess Alice*. There was an inversion layer hanging over London and the south of England and the thousands of coal fires were contributing to a layer of pollution that had become known as a “pea-souper.” Mistaken as fog, a pea-souper was anything but. Rather, it was a layer of rank air imbedded with a variety of pollutants that could quickly become the equivalent of poison gas. The weak setting sun streaked the sky with yellows, grays, and purples as the passengers on deck viewed the compacting level of foulness. However, there was worse to come — much worse.

On 29 March 1865, Caird & Company of Greenock, Scotland, launched the passenger paddle steamer SS *Bute*. She was 219.4 feet in length, 20.2 feet at the beam, and measured 432 gross registered tons. *Bute* was built for the Wemyss Bay Railway Company. The vessel entered service



The ship was originally built as SS *Bute*, on 1 July 1865 with the goal of carrying passengers between Wemyss Bay and Rothesay. However, this was short-lived for she was sold in 1867 to Waterman’s Steam Packet Company. The ship was renamed *Princess Alice* in honor of Queen Victoria’s third child and she began traveling up and down the River Thames. Sold once again in 1870, the new owner was the Woolwich Steam Packet Company but this would change to the more agreeable-sounding London Steamboat Company.

With the new owner, the vessel was modified with upgrades and improvements. New boilers were installed while five of the ship’s bulkheads were made watertight. The Board of Trade inspected *Princess Alice* and declared her safe. In 1873, the Shah of Persia was carried by *Princess Alice* up the River Thames to Greenwich and became known locally as “The Shah’s Boat.” Further work was carried out and an 1878 Board of Trade survey upped the number of passengers that could



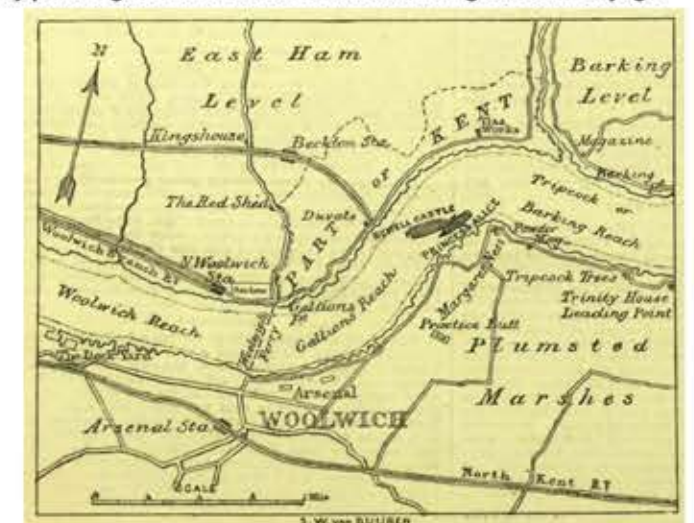
Rather primitive illustration of *Princess Alice* showing how many passengers would remain on deck during the river voyage.

# DEATH ON THE THAMES

COLLISION BETWEEN A COLLIER AND A HOLIDAY PADDLE-WHEELER WOULD RESULT IN ONE OF BRITAIN’S DEADLIEST MARITIME ACCIDENTS  
BY SAMUEL WINSTON



SS *Albert Edward* was the sistership to *Princess Alice* and she is seen leaving Rosherville Pier. Note the overcrowding.



Location of the collision.

An artist’s impression of the collision between *Princess Alice* and *Bywell Castle*.