



The Riddle of the Tay Bridge Disaster

The Tay Bridge Disaster

David Swinfen

On the evening of December 28th 1879, a Sunday evening, a terrible storm had blown up effecting the whole of Dundee and the surrounding countryside. Within the city chimney pots were blown off, slates ripped off roofs and people finding it difficult even to walk upright through the streets of the city.

This, of course, was the festive season, it was between Christmas and New Year and many of the passengers on the train had been paying social visits to their friends and relatives in Fife. Most of them were travelling alone. There was one small family, the Watsons, a father and two sons. There was Mr Neish and his daughter, Bella. He was the school master. And there was the rather tragic pair of sweethearts; the boyfriend had joined his girlfriend simply to cross the bridge to be in her company. And in the context of that, the train crosses the bridge.

Eleanor Simpson

I grew up next door to this lady. She was very, very old - to me she was, as a little girl – and she used to put me on her knee and tell me the story of what happened the night that the railway bridge went down.

She had been a downstairs maid in a large house over in Newport but she managed to get a job in Broughty Ferry as an upstairs maid, so she had to catch the last train back over the river. But her mistress, who was very difficult, she wouldn't let her away until the last minute. So, eventually, she did get to the station only to see the train pull out of the station. So she stood there crying, watching the train going over the bridge and then the next thing, she said it just seemed to be like a big blackness went over over the side of the bridge but she could see the lights of the train and then she watched it plunging into the water.