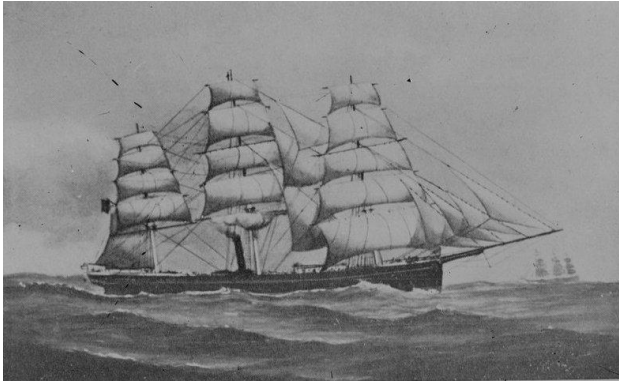


# Tears



## Routine

I collect unusual things, some would say that it's a bit of an obsession of mine - something I had sought for my collection for many years was a real lachrymatory or 'tear bottle'.

Prince Albert died in 1862, and Queen Victoria began a 40-year period of mourning, wearing black up until her own death. This also began an obsession throughout Great Britain with all things relating to death.

One item that was long thought to be used is a lachrymatory or tear bottle. Mourners would supposedly capture their tears in a small glass vessel that used a special stopper that allowed the liquid inside to slowly evaporate. The vessel was placed by the graveside or on display in the house of the deceased. When the tears had finally disappeared, the mourning period would be complete.

Recent research has cast doubt upon whether lachrymatories actually existed, or if they are merely an urban myth and in fact these glass vessels were just small disposable perfume bottles.

But then I purchased this beautiful old display box at an auction a few years ago. It was sold as empty, but when I arrived home and opened it for the first time, I found that it contained these items: a small glass bottle wrapped in a black silk handkerchief, and a letter.

This is the bottle, as you can see it is empty, have a look but please be careful, it is extremely delicate. Please wrap it back up in the handkerchief and place it back in the box.

Please open the letter and read it out loud:

"Dearest Elizabeth—An order has just arrived for our ship the *SS London* to sail immediately for Australia, where it is probable we shall remain for several months but notwithstanding this, my dear girl, be assured that neither time nor absence will make any alteration in the affectionate heart of your devoted sailor. Keep up your spirits, then, my dear, and fear not on account of your lover, for

'There's a sweet little cherub that sits up aloft,  
To watch for the life of poor Michael.'

And be assured that whatever may be our course, you will be the pole towards which the needle of my affections will constantly turn. I have got my half of the coin which we broke between us and will preserve it as a sacred deposit; and should I fall among the glorious dead, it shall accompany me to my watery grave. Remember me, dearest Elizabeth, and I trust that Fortune with her smile will soon enable me to return with wealth and honour, to lay them at your feet. May fair winds and a prosperous voyage attend you through life and, in expectation of an early answer, I am, dearest, lovely Elizabeth, Your affectionate lover."

After I read the letter out loud, I unwrapped the bottle again to look at it and to my surprise found that it was as you will now discover... Full.

Every time anyone reads the letter out loud the bottle becomes full again and it takes about a month for the liquid to evaporate completely. I had it tested, and it is apparently a mixture of tears and sea water. With a little bit of research, I discovered that the *SS London* was a British steamship that sank in the Bay of Biscay on 11 January 1866. The ship was travelling from Gravesend, England to Melbourne, Australia, when she began taking in water. The ship was overloaded with cargo, and only 19 survivors were able to escape by lifeboat, leaving a death toll of 220. I've not been able to find out who Michael or Elizabeth were yet, but I will continue to try to do so and hopefully one day I will be able to pass these items on to their relatives.

## Method

This is an idea that I have had for a while, and I am still expanding on. You can purchase "lachrymatories" on e-bay for as little as twenty pounds, but some can go for hundreds of pounds. With a bit of patience, you should be able to find two identical bottles at a reasonable price. Simply have one bottle filled and the other empty. This routine should work with any switch box or bag of adequate size. Alternatively, the vials are small enough to palm and ditch reasonably easily and could be used with any suitable antique box. I am told by Dan that Lebanon Circle's stunning Vitrum Ostium should work with it depending on the size of bottles that you find. If required, you can easily place wooden risers painted black inside the box on the left and right sides to create a suitable gap. If anybody has suggestions for suitable switch boxes I'd love to know.

The sinking of the *SS London* was indeed one of the worst maritime disasters of the Victorian age. A quick Google will bring up newspaper headlines, pictures and more and there are several other fascinating aspects of the event that could be easily built into a much longer séance type routine:

As she sank, all those on deck were driven forward by the overpowering rush of air from below, her bows rose high till her keel was visible and then she was "swallowed up, for ever, in a whirlpool of confounding waters". The *London* took with her two hundred and forty-four people. It was reported that the last thing heard from the doomed ship was the hymn 'Rock of Ages'.

*The Wreck of the Steamer 'London' while on her way to Australia* is a poem by Scottish poet William McGonagall, one of his many poems based on disasters of the time.

Bottles containing farewell messages addressed to friends and relatives in England from some of those who were lost in the sinking were apparently found on the French coast of the Bay of Biscay.

The messages included:

"The ship is sinking," "no hope of being saved."

"Adieu, father, brothers and sisters, and my dear Edith. Steamer London, Bay of Biscay. Ship too heavily laden for its size, and too crank. Windows stove in. Water coming in everywhere. God bless my poor orphans. Storm not too violent for a ship in good condition."

In his monograph *Governor Phillip in Retirement* Frederick Chapman, whose mother, two brothers, and a sister died in the wreck, wrote as follows:

"In December [1865] my mother opened out to my amazed eyes such a mass of diamonds as I had never seen before. This was the property which "Aunt Powell" had left or given to her niece my Great-Aunt Fanny, who at the age of ninety-one had given them to my mother, the wife of her nearest heir. Less than a month later (11th January 1866) the disastrous foundering of the S.S. London carried this collection to the depths of the Bay of Biscay. In that disaster perished my mother, my eldest and youngest brothers, my only sister, and many of our friends."

The loss of the *London* increased attention in Britain to the dangerous condition of the coffin ships, overloaded by unscrupulous ship owners, and the publicity had a major role in Samuel Plimsoll's campaign to reform shipping to prevent further such disasters. The disaster helped stimulate Parliament to establish the famous Plimsoll line, although it took many years.

Notable people lost on the *SS London* include:

John Debenham, son of William Debenham, founder of Debenham and Freebody's department stores.

Gustavus Vaughan Brooke, Irish stage actor.

Thomas Maxwell Tennant, Bowershall Engine Works, Leith (buried in Grange cemetery, Edinburgh).

James and Elizabeth (née Fly) Bevan, parents of the first Wales rugby union captain James Bevan.

John Woolley, first principal of the University of Sydney, Australia.

Rev. Daniel James Draper, Methodist missionary, and his wife, Elizabeth Shelley Draper.

Catherine Brewer Chapman and three children, Henry Brewer Chapman born 10 April 1841, Catherine Ann Chapman born 18 October 1850 and Walter George Constantine Chapman born 12 July 1852, the wife and three children of Henry Samuel Chapman, first puisne judge in New Zealand, former Attorney General of Van Diemen's Land, Attorney General of Victoria, Member of the Victorian Parliament and responsible for the introduction of the secret ballot.

The letter is actually almost word for word taken from "The Parlour Letter-writer, and Secretary's Assistant: Consisting of Original Letters on Every Occurrence in Life, written in a Concise and Familiar Style" Which was published in 1845. The letter I have used is entitled "From a Sailor to his Intended Wife." I merely changed the names, added the *SS London* and substituted East Indies for Australia.

The reference to a coin was already there but was a sixpence – this is one of those lovely pieces of serendipity that occur in our ever surprising field of magic and does of course allow this effect to perfectly accompany one of my previous entries for the Bizarre Collective "Ran's Coins."

I'll be publishing the pdf of this effect on my <https://www.oakdigitalsolutions.co.uk/grimalkin> website at some point and will continue to add to it and test the best methods. I would love to hear feedback/suggestions from anyone who gives it a go.