

Sharon Slater's **Secret H**

The Great Storm of Christmas Eve 1852

SHARON SLATER

On Christmas Eve 1852, the city was hit by a tremendous storm. The Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator reported: "Precisely at a quarter to twelve o'clock, while the bells of the Catholic Churches and Protestant Cathedral were tolling the joyous chimes announcing the arrival of the festive time of salvation, the breeze sprung up from S.S.W., increasing in violence at every gust, which obliged perambulators to betake themselves to their homes, in terror, as they could not retain an equilibrium. The gale continued for three hours without intermission, and when at its height blew tremendously from N.W. Our principal quays for shipping are situate south, and the vessels in port were therefore exposed to the violence of the storm. The tide rose quickly- in half the ordinary time- and although not within four feet of the quay wall, the billows were so tremendously convulsed as to dash the spray over the roadway, and into the windows of the houses in the vicinity.

"The ships moored at the quays broke from their moorings, and in some cases pulling out the mooring posts, tearing away the entire masonry, and wrecking the groundwork. One ship the *Tiley*, of South Shields, Durham snapped the chain cable, and was carried along the west side of Wellesley (Sarsfield) bridge where she shattered to pieces, the bridge remained relatively unscathed by the crash.

"Another ship, which was moored on Russell's Quay the *William and Joseph* had her masts and riggings snapped and nothing remains but the hull. The remains of this ship made contact with a vessel belonging to Sir Francis Spaight though his ship *Jessie* received little damage." Spaight became infamous, as he would use the poor of Ireland as ballast when sending his ships to America to collect wood.

One of his ships set the scene for the cannibalism of the Unlucky Cabin boy, Limerick's own Patrick O'Brien in 1835.

Another nine ships were damaged during the 1852 storm while their small boats were shattered to pieces. It was thought that the total cost to the shipping industry reached £4,000 which in today's money would be the



Limerick Boat Club which lost its roof during a storm



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equivalent of approximately half a million Euro.

The destruction on land was also intense with a large section of the roof of the Waterford and Limerick Railway (Colbert Station) torn away along with its gaslights. The chimney of the Club House (next to the Augustinian Church) fell in taking with it the roof and

top floor. Chimneys were also lost in Baker's place, in all cases the occupants escaped without injury. The large chimney shaft built to a height of 160 feet, of the then flax factory, erected by Messrs. Russell and Sons, at North Strand (today we know this site as the Cleeve's factory and the chimney was quickly replaced and has remained in situ ever since), fell with a tremendous

crash causing £500 worth of damage. Although this storm was fierce there was no report of major injury or death as a result of it.

This storm came only thirteen years after the famous Night of the Big Wind a hurricane that swept without warning across Ireland beginning in the afternoon of 6 January 1839,

causing severe damage to property and several hundred deaths including sixteen in Limerick Port alone.

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Sharon Slater is a respected historian, whose popular blog, www.limerickslife.com is an expert compendium of local historical quirks, facts, and stories.