



Ship Fact Sheet



CARNATIC (1863)

Base data at 18 April 1863. Last amended November 2008

* indicates entries changed during P&O Group service.

Type	Passenger liner
P&O Group service	1863-1869
P&O Group status	Owned by parent company
Former name(s)	Was to have been named <i>Mysore</i>
Registered owners, managers and operators	The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company
Builders	Samuda Brothers
Yard	Poplar
Country	UK
Yard number	
Registry	London, UK
Official number	47298
Signal letters	VNCF
Classification society	Lloyd's Register
Gross tonnage	2,014 grt
Net tonnage	1,776 nrt
Deadweight	
Length	89.79m (294.7ft)
Breadth	11.61m (38.1ft)
Depth	5.36m (17.6ft)
Draught	5.64m (18.5ft)
Construction (if not steel)	Iron
Engines	Tandem compound inverted direct-acting steam engines (Wolf's double-cylinder design)
Engine builders	Humphrys, Tennant and Dykes
Works	London
Country	UK
Power	2,442 ihp
Propulsion	Single screw
Speed	12 knots (service); 13.9 knots (trials)
Passenger capacity	
Cargo capacity	
Crew	
Employment	Suez/India service

Career

- 06.12.1862: Launched.
- 24.03.1863: Registered.
- 18.04.1863: Completed as *Carnatic* for The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company.
- 25.04.1863: Ran trials in Stokes Bay.
- 27.04.1863: Maiden voyage Southampton/Alexandria.
- 27.06.1863: Left Southampton via the Cape for Galle and Calcutta, for Calcutta/Suez service.
- 1864/1865: Bombay/Suez and Bombay/Hong Kong services.
- 09.09.1865: Permanently on Bombay/Aden/Suez service.
- 13.09.1869: Wrecked on an uncharted reef 5km (3 miles) north of the island of Jabal at the mouth of the Gulf of Suez, southbound for Aden and Bombay. As the weather remained calm and she appeared to be firmly aground it seemed the best policy to keep all hands on board, but she suddenly parted amidships and sank in deep water, and 5 European passengers, 11 Asian crew and 10 European crew were lost.
- 14.09.1869: Survivors rescued by P&O's *Sumatra*. Salvage operations were commenced and a large part of the cargo was recovered, including specie worth £40,000.
- 03.1870: The wreck slipped off the reef and sank into deep water.

THE WRECK OF THE CARNATIC.

"Illustrated London News", 16 October 1869

The wreck of the Peninsular and Oriental Company's steam-ship *Carnatic* - having struck, on Monday, the 13th ult, an hour after midnight, upon a reef of coral off the desolate isle of Shadwan, or Shadooan, at the mouth of the Gulf of Suez - has been related in former accounts. We have been favoured by one of the passengers, Major J U Champain, RE, with a sketch of the position of the wreck and the people, some clinging to the foremast, others standing up to their waists in the sea, after the vessel broke asunder, on the Tuesday. Major Champain also contributes to our Journal the following narrative, which will be read with interest :-

"At ten o'clock on the morning of Sunday, Sept. 12, the steamship *Carnatic*, a magnificent vessel of 1,700 tons, commanded by Captain Jones, left Suez on her way to Bombay. There were on board, altogether, some 230 souls and a valuable cargo. The weather was lovely and, with a fair breeze, we went at ten or twelve knots an hour. About one o'clock on Monday morning we were roused from our sleep by a smart shock, and, going on deck, we saw what had happened. The night was brilliantly clear, though the moon had set. The Ushruffi lighthouse, which we had passed an hour before, on our starboard side, showed brightly on our port quarter. Close under our bows was a long line of white surf, apparently extending at right angles to our direction several hundred yards on each side of the ship, and high in front of us loomed the

island of Shadooan, some 600 ft. above the sea at its most elevated peak. At night the passengers were of opinion that the island was not more than a mile or a mile and a half distant; but when day broke it was evidently much farther, and I shall not be very wrong if I say it was three or four miles from us in a direct line. On examining our position, we found that the vessel, running before the wind at about eleven knots, had struck full on a large coral reef (plainly marked on the chart), and had forced herself into a most critical position. The reef itself lay exactly ahead of the ship, and was about a square mile in extent; nearly out of water at low tide, but about 4 ft. under at high water. Its surface was almost level, though here and there a few small rocks rose above the water-line when the tide was out. The wind was moderate and the sea by no means rough; but, lying on the weather side of the shoal, the vessel was bumped about rather ominously. From the moment of striking every effort was made to get the ship off into deep water, there being at the time about 4 ft. under our bows, 8 ft. or 10 ft. abreast the engines on the starboard side, deep water just above the foremast on the port side, and any depth under our stern. The whole ship, besides sloping steeply from bow to stern, lay over considerably on her starboard side. The passengers were quiet and collected from first to last; many of us were accustomed to the sensation, having been on board the *Pera*, which, on the previous Saturday, had been bumping for three hours and a half on the Alexandria bar. Every one did his utmost to help the crew, by hauling at ropes, throwing cargo overboard, and working at the capstan; anchors having been laid out astern, to drag the ship from an awkward position into what seemed to us one of still greater danger. We were nearly all convinced that the leaks, after a few hours' bumping, would have sunk the ship had the captain's first attempt to get her off been successful; but the general belief of the passengers was that the *Great Eastern* herself would scarcely have sufficed to drag the *Carnatic* from her place on the reef. Our meals went on as usual, and we even amused ourselves with angling unsuccessfully for the fish, of dazzling colours, that swarmed beneath us. Towards mid-day on Monday, some of those on board appeared their anxiety to hear from the captain what measures he proposed to adopt. Most of us, however, felt it would be better to remain passive and await his instructions. At half-past five in the evening Captain Jones came aft, and spoke to us for the first time, thanking us for our behaviour, and asking us to nominate a committee, to whom he would explain his views, and the condition of the vessel. Three of us, having been chosen, went forward immediately, but, as the sun had set, and the boats, though alongside, were utterly unfurnished with stores and provisions, we agreed with the captain that, under the circumstances, the weather being calm, it would be advisable to remain on board for the night, and go ashore in the early morning.

"I for one went below at eleven o'clock, undressed completely, and slept till one in the morning. At that hour a man awoke me, and told me that, as the water had gained on us so far as to extinguish the fires and thus stop the engines pumping, everyone on board was to proceed at once to the fore-castle. There, consequently, we assembled; and, as the wind gradually freshened with the coming day, it proved to be a rather exposed situation. The passengers, however, employed themselves in helping the crew to get cut another anchor forward and to set foresail, foretopsail, and forestaysail, to prevent the ship slipping backwards into deep water. At last, too, the victualling of the boats was commenced.

"In the mean time, the angle at which the vessel lay was slowly but steadily increasing,

and the rising tide was washing the quarter-deck nearly up to the companion. Some of us, after waiting hours for orders to take to the boats, went below out of curiosity, and were witnesses of a very remarkable sight. The saloon was full of water, which poured in with amazing violence through the shattered skylights, every advancing wave threatening to carry away the whole after part of the ship. Tables, chairs, and benches were careering about, washed hither and thither by the swirling water. On returning to the fore part of the ship, a climb of some difficulty, we found that the only women on board (two passengers and the stewardess), with a little girl about three years old, had just been placed in the life-boat and some of the passengers were on the point of following. It was ten minutes before eleven in the forenoon. At this instant the vessel suddenly fell back, a frightful crash told us that she had parted amid-ships, and we were all plunged with terrific force into a whirlpool. The ship had been, as I mentioned above, lying over on her starboard side, but after the shock she fell completely over to the port side; so that luggage, cargo, mail-bags, and men, with one eighteen-pounder gun in their midst, slid together at lightning speed down the deck until sucked under by the gigantic wave which had already swallowed up half of the ship. Bruised, bleeding, half stunned, and battered by the luggage, we were carried under till all seemed dark. On coming to the surface the sight that presented itself was one which I shall never forget, but which I find it absolutely impossible to describe. Heads, arms, and legs, bales of merchandise, boxes, sheep, fowls, and things of all sorts were being tossed backwards and forwards, up and down, by the rushing water. Drowning men were clutching at each other in their frantic struggles to reach a resting-place, which too many found only at the bottom of the sea. I myself was thus dragged under three times, but, being a good swimmer, I finally got hold of the foretop, which was half above water, and crawled up into the crosstrees, to take breath. In a short time, mutually assisting each other, all the men that could be seen in the water were hauled up. Being now in a safe position, we could look about us; but the foretopsail prevented our seeing the boats, or the men who had escaped direct to the reef, from the starboard side of the ship, as she went under, and for about two hours we knew not the state of affairs on the other side. At length a boat came off to us; we fastened those who could not swim and those half-stunned by a rope about their waists, and let them down. We were all taken off in three or four trips. Many of the survivors, who had struck out for the surf, and had somehow or other got through it, were standing on the coral up to their waists in smooth water. Happily, no sharks showed themselves, though in these parts they abound, and I am told a large one had been seen the day before. The bodies of Captain Pope, of the purser, and, I believe, of Mr. Warren, were dragged from the surf and laid on a bale of cotton. In each case endeavours were made to restore life, but without avail.

"We were busily engaged during the next few hours in dragging the boats across the reef to the deep channel, which was about three miles broad, dividing us from Shadooan; then pulling across to the island, landing the stores there, and getting the boats over the cruel coral fringe to the sandy beach, where they lay high and dry. It was about eight in the evening when, after this fatiguing task, the wet and weary remnant of our company found themselves at last fairly ashore. The island is totally devoid of fresh water, and we had brought but little with us. Many of the casks were empty, having been placed unbunged in the boats, and some had been idiotically emptied by the African stokers to make unnecessary rafts for coming ashore. We knew that the next passing ship would be either the *Sumatra* or the *Neaera*, which might be expected at any moment. There seemed at first to be no possible means of making a signal in the

dark. It was therefore decided that the chief officer, two of the passengers, and three Chinamen of the crew should launch a boat, make for the usual channel, and lie off all night, in hopes of stopping a ship. If no ship came in the night, the boat would try to beat up or pull up eighteen or twenty miles against current and wind to the Ushruffi lighthouse and obtain all the fresh water that could be spared. One rocket only could be found, and this, with half the only dry box of matches was placed in the boat. But, most providentially, several hundred huge bales of Manchester calicos and cotton cloths had floated, the day before the final break up, on to the island, having been thrown overboard, when we first struck the reef. These bales, very tightly pressed, had remained dry inside, and were of inestimable value in a variety of ways. From their contents we made ourselves turbans, most of us having lost our hats, as well as coats and bedding to lie on the sand. But the grandest notion of all was to collect an immense pile and set it alight. It was found to blaze gloriously, and one of our greatest anxieties was at once dispelled.

“Before this discovery, however, we had commenced to launch the cutter, when a Chinaman ran down the bank, shouting that the lights of a steamer were visible. We strained every nerve to haul the boat out over the coral, and got away about nine o’clock at night. There was a doubt whether we should sail fast enough to reach the ship before she got by on her way to Suez; but, after putting a quarter of a mile between ourselves and the land, we looked back and saw the bonfire flaring most conspicuously. By the position of the steamer’s lights, it was evident that her attention was attracted, and at the critical moment we succeeded in firing our rocket. This settled the matter; the ship hove to, and we were soon alongside and on deck of the Peninsular and Oriental Company’s steamer *Sumatra*, from Bombay, with Lord Napier and other passengers on board. Boats were at once lowered, and, with the one in which we had arrived, went back for the *Carnatic*’s company. The wind had, however, risen, and all were not on board the *Sumatra* till ten o’clock on Wednesday morning, when we started on our return voyage to Suez. I cannot overrate the kindness and attention shown to us by all on board the *Sumatra*, and, in truth, we sorely needed help. Of all the baggage in the *Carnatic*, one small dressing-bag alone had been saved. We displayed our whole property on our persons, and, as we were all nearly alike, I may state, for example, that my costume consisted of a pair of tattered trousers, a shirt, and fifteen yards of Manchester calico gracefully wreathed round my temples.

“The loss of life was fifteen Europeans and as many natives; of the former were five first-class passengers-viz., Captain Pope, R.A; Mr. Cuppage, 35th Regiment; Mr. Warren, Dr. Thomson, and Mr. Pidding, the ship’s purser, Mr. Gardner, and his clerk, Mr. Mackintosh, and the doctor, Mr. Ransford, with two engineers, a steward, and others. A more complete wreck than that of the ill-fated *Carnatic* has rarely taken place.”

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