

Wreck: Isleworth



Chebucto Head – Halifax Harbour Approach

Lost: March 13-14, 1912

The Event

The *Isleworth* was not lost in a single moment, but through a chain of events that began days earlier in the ice. While en route from Boston to Louisburg under charter to the Dominion Coal Company, the vessel encountered heavy field ice. During this passage, **three of her four propeller blades were torn away**, leaving her severely crippled.

Unable to continue safely, she diverted toward Halifax for repairs. Approaching Chebucto Head in dense fog on March 13, 1912, the crew misidentified the fog alarm as another vessel's whistle. Believing they were still offshore, the ship continued forward.

At approximately 5:00 PM, *Isleworth* struck a rocky ledge just below the lighthouse.

The Ship

Built in 1911 by **Ropner & Sons**, Stockton-on-Tees, England

- Steel-hulled cargo steamer
- Length: ~390 ft
- Beam: ~52 ft
- Tonnage: ~3,000 net / up to ~4,800 gross (reported)

A newly built **tramp steamer**, designed for bulk cargo transport across the North Atlantic.

Why It Was Lost

The loss of *Isleworth* was the result of **compounding factors**:

- Severe propeller damage in heavy ice
- Reduced speed and maneuverability
- Prolonged exposure during transit
- Dense fog at harbour approach
- Misinterpretation of navigational signals
- Close proximity to a lee shore with submerged ledges

The grounding was not an isolated error, but the final stage of an already compromised voyage.

The Wreck Event

- Vessel struck broadside on a ledge near Chebucto Head
- Hull plates breached within minutes
- Sea conditions described as rough, with waves breaking over the vessel
- Crew of 39-40 men
- Five trips made by boat to shore
- All hands successfully landed

The crew sheltered overnight in the lighthouse and fog alarm buildings.

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Final Loss

Between 8:00pm and 10:00pm, the vessel – already weakened – slipped off the ledge.

- Stern extended over deep water
- Structural stress increased with wave action
- Ship rolled free and sank into ~ 15 fathoms

By morning, nothing remained visible.

The Wreck Today

Depth: ~90 ft Located in a high-exposure Atlantic environment

Diver Notes

- Offshore, exposed location
- Subject to swell, current, and visibility limitations
- Scattered structure

Requires:

- Advance planning
- Proper vessel support
- Strong situational awareness

Why This Site Matters

- A new vessel lost within her first year
- Clear, well documented sequence of events
- Direct link between ice damage and final loss
- Located at one of the most critical harbour approaches in Atlantic Canada

Represented a classic North Atlantic casualty: **environment, machinery failure, and navigation intersecting at the worst possible moment.**

Final Thought

This is not a wreck claimed in open ocean. It happened within sight of land – less than a hundred yards from safety.

A ship built for decades of work was lost in a single evening, after a slow approach that never quite reached the harbour.