

Cutty Sark

The 19th century was a period of great technological development in Britain, and for shipping, the major changes were from wind to steam power, and from wood to iron and steel.

Clippers, three-masted ships meant to transport goods around the world, although some also carried passengers, were the fastest commercial sailing vessels of all time. From the 1840s clippers dominated world trade, until the 1869 opening of the Suez Canal, when steam propulsion replaced sail. Only the Cutty Sark, which is now on exhibit in Greenwich, southeast London, has survived relatively unscathed although many were built.

The name Cutty Sark comes from the Scottish poet Robert Burns's poem 'Tam O'Shanter'. A farmer named Tam, is chased by a witch called Nannie, who is wearing a 'cutty sark' – an old Scottish name for a short nightdress. Witches cannot cross water as per the legend and Burns's poem, so this was a rather strange choice of name for a ship.

Cutty Sark was built for a shipping company owned by John Willis in Dumbarton, Scotland, in 1869. To carry out construction Willis chose a new shipbuilding firm, Scott & Linton, and ensured that the contract with them put him in a very strong position. The firm was forced out of business, and the ship was finished by a competitor in the end.

Between China and Britain, Willis's company was active in the tea trade, where speed could bring shipowners both profits and prestige. So to make the journey more quickly than any other ship Cutty Sark was designed in such a way. In 1870, on her maiden voyage, she set sail from London, with huge amounts of goods to China. In 4 months on the journey back to London she returned laden with tea. As a result of bad winds and various misfortunes, Cutty Sark never lived up to the high expectations of her owner. In 1872 on the same day, the ship and a rival clipper, Thermopylae, left the Chinese port. Cutty Sark gained a lead of over 400 miles crossing the Indian Ocean, but then her rudder was broken in stormy seas, making her impossible to steer. Cutty Sark reached London a week after Thermopylae since the ship's crew had the difficult task of repairing the rudder at sea.

As the speed and cargo capacity increased, steam ships posed a growing threat to clippers. Opening the Suez Canal in 1869 had a serious impact because Cutty Sark was launched the same year. The steam ships could make use of the quick, direct route between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. But the canal was of no use to sailing ships, which needed the much stronger winds of the oceans, and so had to sail a far greater distance. Steam ships could reduce the time to travel between Britain and China by almost 2 months.

By 1878, tea traders weren't interested in Cutty Sark. She then took on the much less prestigious work of carrying any cargo between any two ports in the world. In 1880, violence in the ship caused the replacement of the captain with an incompetent drunkard who robbed the crew's wages. He was suspended from work, and a new captain was appointed. Transporting wool from Australia to Britain marked a turnaround and the beginning of the most successful period in Cutty Sark's working life. In just under 12 weeks, one journey was completed beating every other ship sailing that year.

Richard Woodget, the ship's second captain, was a skilled navigator who made the most of his ship and crew. Cutty Sark was a sailing ship that relied on the southern hemisphere's strong trade winds, and Woodget took her further south than any previous captain, pushing her dangerously close to icebergs off South America's southern tip. His bet paid off, and for the next ten years, the ship was the quickest in the wool trade.

Cutty Sark became less profitable as steam ships became more competitive in the 1890s as she neared the end of her useful life. Her name was changed to Ferreira once she was sold to a Portuguese company. She travelled the world for the following 25 years, transporting various cargoes.

In 1922, she was severely damaged in a gale and was towed to Falmouth Harbour in southwest England for repairs. Retired sea captain Wilfred Dowman, and owner of a training vessel, recognised her and attempted to purchase her, but failed. She returned to Portugal and was purchased by yet another Portuguese firm. Dowman, on the other hand, was adamant, and he proposed a high price, which was agreed, and the ship was returned to Falmouth the following year, with her former name restored.

Cutty Sark served as a training ship for Dowman, and she continued to do so after he died. In 1954, she was transported to Greenwich Dry Dock for public exhibition because she was no longer required. Cutty Sark was damaged by fire in 2007 and again in 2014, yet it now receives a quarter-million visitors each year.

Cutty Sark IELTS reading questions

Question 1-4

Do the following statements agree with the information given in the Reading Passage?

Write

YES if the statement agrees with the claims of the writer

NO, if the statement contradicts the claims of the writer

NOT GIVEN if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this

1. Clippers were the fastest commercial sailing vessels of all time.
2. The name Cutty Sark comes from the Swedish poet Robert Burns's poem 'Tam O'Shanter'.
3. Richard Woodget was Cutty Sark's second captain.
4. Cutty Sark weighed 2 tonnes.

Question 5-9

Look at the following Questions 5-9 and the list of the statements below.

Match each statement with the correct one

*Write the correct letter **A-F** on your answer sheet.*

NB You may use any letter more than once.

5. Opening of Suez Canal
6. Clippers dominated the world trade
7. Cutty Sark started its voyage
8. Cutty Sark was severely damaged in gale.
9. Captain of Cutty Sark was replaced.

- A 1878
- B 1922
- C 1869
- D 1870
- E 1840
- F 1880

Question 10-14

Complete the sentences using **NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS** from the passage for each answer.

10. The _____ was a period of great technological development in Britain.
11. Cutty Sark was built for a shipping company owned by _____ in Dumbarton, Scotland, in 1869.
12. In 1872 on the same day, the ship and a rival clipper, _____, left the Chinese port.
13. Transporting wool from _____ to Britain marked a turnaround and the beginning of the most successful period in Cutty Sark's working life.
14. Cutty Sark served as a _____ for Dowman, and she continued to do so after he died.

Cutty Sark IELTS reading answers with explanation

1 Yes

Explanation: *Clippers, three-masted ships meant to transport goods around the world, although some also carried passengers, were the fastest commercial sailing vessels of all time.*

2 No

Explanation: *The name Cutty Sark comes from the Scottish poet Robert Burns's poem 'Tam O'Shanter'.*

3 Yes

Explanation: *Richard Woodget, the ship's second captain, was a skilled navigator who made the most of his ship and crew.*

4 Not Given

Explanation: *The answer is not given in the passage.*

5. C 1869

Explanation: *From the 1840s clippers dominated world trade, until the 1869 opening of the Suez Canal, when steam propulsion replaced sail.*

6. E 1840

Explanation: *From the 1840s clippers dominated world trade, until the 1869 opening of the Suez Canal, when steam propulsion replaced sail.*

7. D 1870

Explanation: *In 1870, on her maiden voyage, she set sail from London, with huge amounts of goods to China.*

8. B 1922

Explanation: *In 1922, she was severely damaged in a gale and was towed to Falmouth Harbour in southwest England for repairs.*

9. F 1880

Explanation: In 1880, violence in the ship caused the replacement of the captain with an incompetent drunkard who robbed the crew's wages.

10. 19th century

Explanation: The 19th century was a period of great technological development in Britain, and for shipping, the major changes were from wind to steam power, and from wood to iron and steel.

11. John Willis

Explanation: Cutty Sark was built for a shipping company owned by John Willis in Dumbarton, Scotland, in 1869.

12. Thermopylae

Explanation: In 1872 on the same day, the ship and a rival clipper, Thermopylae, left the Chinese port.

13. Australia

Explanation: Transporting wool from Australia to Britain marked a turnaround and the beginning of the most successful period in Cutty Sark's working life.

14. training ship

Explanation: Cutty Sark served as a training ship for Dowman, and she continued to do so after he died.