

MARITIME ARCHIVES & LIBRARY

INFORMATION SHEET 41

RMS *TITANIC*

RMS *Titanic* and her sister ships *Olympic* and *Britannic*, were built at the Harland & Wolff Shipyard, Belfast in 1911. *Titanic* was launched on 31 May 1911, and at 46,329 g. tonnes, she was the largest ship of her time. She sailed on her maiden voyage from Southampton on 10 April 1912, on the Southampton-Cherbourg-Queenstown (Cobh)-New York route, under the command of Captain Edward J. Smith. Aboard were Thomas Andrews, managing director of Harland & Wolff and the *Titanic's* designer, Thomas Bruce Ismay, head of the *Titanic's* owners, White Star Line, and some 1,320 passengers and 892 crew.

At 9.00 am on 14 April, *Titanic* was following an international course which generally avoided fog and ice, when *Caronia* sent out the first of many ice warnings about the pack ice field across the recognised route. None of the following numerous messages mentioned icebergs until 21.40 hours when the *Mesaba* radioed the presence of a "number of large icebergs", however, despite this broadcast being received by *Titanic* and acknowledged, it was never delivered to the bridge. At 23.40 hours on the 14 April, lookout Frederick Fleet reported an iceberg (90 ft / 27.43 m high) half a mile dead ahead. First Officer Murdoch ordered the helm hard a starboard and the engines full astern. However, this evasive action was too late to prevent the *Titanic* striking the iceberg at near full speed. Despite only striking the berg for a mere 10 seconds before her bows swung to port, a series of six small gashes were opened just below the waterline, and aft of the foremast, which cut across five consecutive watertight compartments. The "unsinkable" *Titanic*, had been designed to float with any four of her watertight compartments flooded and Thomas Andrews, upon assessing the damage, gave the ship only 90 minutes to live.

The number of lifeboats aboard *Titanic*, although complying with the Board of Trade's regulations of the time, catered for only 1,178 of the 2,208 persons aboard. At 12.04 hours on the morning of 15 April, the lifeboats were swung out and the CQD signal was sent out by Radio Officer Phillips, and the new SOS signal was also transmitted. The *Carpathia* was the nearest vessel at 58 miles and Captain Rostron headed for the *Titanic* at the fastest speed the ice would permit, but it would take the *Carpathia* four hours to reach the scene. Fourth Officer Boxhall fired distress flares in the hope of alerting an unidentified vessel whose lights were visible eight miles away, but it offered no assistance before sailing away.

At the later Court of Enquiry, the *Californian* under the command of Captain Stanley Lord, was accused of being the unidentified vessel. The *Californian* was stopped for the night in ice 20 miles away from *Titanic* and despite seeing the distress rockets and the distant lights of a "small" steamer, assumed that the steamer had sailed away when the lights disappeared. The radio officer had signed off for the night before the *Titanic* began to send out her distress transmissions. The *Californian* took two and a half hours to steam to the scene of the sinking which was taken as evidence to confirm that the *Californian* was at least 20 miles away. Other sources claim that the mystery ship was a sealer, *Samson*, which was fishing illegally in the area. The identification of the unknown vessel remains a mystery to this day. From the 2,208 people on board *Titanic* only 705 survived and 1503 lost their lives.

Original Archives

The majority of White Star records have not survived, however, the Maritime Archives & Library holds a number of small, significant collections. These include:

- Photographs of the *Titanic* and other White Star liners in the McRoberts photographic collection, which includes one of *Titanic* and her sister ship *Olympic* being fitted out at Belfast, and one of the *Titanic* leaving Southampton on her maiden voyage. (McR/Vol. 82)
- Archives of Miss Mildred Brown, survivor (N.B. not the "unsinkable Mrs. Molly Brown!"). Includes a letter giving a description of the disaster and its aftermath, written aboard the *Carpathia*, 1912, and a volume, re the formal investigation into the loss of the *Titanic* and *Lusitania*, 1915. (D/BRW)
- Papers relating to the case of Captain Stanley Lord, of the SS *Californian*, many collected at the time of the disaster with the intention that they would be used to clear his name. They include an affidavit of Captain Lord, telegrams, statements of evidence, and press reports, letters, etc., re *Titanic* disaster and the official report of the Inquiry, c.1912-1963. (D/LO)
- The *Titanic* Signals Archive comprising of two albums of telegraphic messages sent from the *Carpathia*, including ones sent by J.B. Ismay, in April 1912, announcing the news of the tragedy. (D/TSA)
- A collection of books, newscuttings, pamphlets and magazines, compiled by Teresa Beddoes, c.1911-1980. (D/Ti)
- In the Cunard technical archives, there is a plan of the *Olympic/Titanic's* lifeboats.

A large number of ephemeral items can be found in the SAS/DX collections. These include:

- A first-class passenger ticket for the *Titanic* belonging to a clergyman whose wife became ill the day before the *Titanic* sailed, forcing him to cancel his voyage, 10 April 1912. (DX/1063/R)
- A telegram sent by survivor Esther Hart to relatives, informing them of the loss of her husband and the return of herself and her daughter, Eva, on SS *Celtic*, 20 April 1912. Also two Xeroxes of a letter home, describing the disaster. (DX/1549/R)
- Memorial serviette to commemorate the sinking of the *Titanic*, with local list of crew (Liverpool and Birkenhead), King's sympathy message and events of the sinking, c.1912. (DX/1193)
- Souvenir issue of the *Shipbuilder* devoted to the *Titanic* and *Olympic*, 1911. (DX/1745)
- Transcripts of survivor Gladys Cherry's three letters home, written on board the rescue ship SS *Carpathia*, describing the events of the sinking in graphic detail, 17-19 April 1912. Also two issues of the *Daily Mail*, 16 and 22 April 1912. (DX/1522)
- Newscuttings, including one with a chart showing where the *Titanic* collision occurred and the first official list of survivors, from the *Liverpool Echo*, 15-16 April 1912. (DX/873) Also a supplement to *The Sphere* with an artist's impression of the interior of the vessel and iceberg, 25 May 1912. (DX/919)
- Photograph of the centre anchor for *Titanic* being despatched by railroad from N. Hingley & Sons Ltd., Dudley, Ships' Anchor-Makers. (DX/1291)

- A photocopy of the official passenger and crew list for the maiden, and only voyage of the RMS *Titanic*, is available in the Reading Room.

Select Bibliography

For a comprehensive bibliography, see:

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- Loss of the SS Titanic - Court of Inquiry, Report Evidence*. Reprint of the 1912 British Inquiry (ed.). London: Public Record Office, 1997.

Periodicals

The Titanic Commutator, 1987 to date.

Atlantic Daily Bulletin, 1993 to date.

Voyage, 2007 to date.

Records Held Elsewhere

The National Archives holds Board of Trade Passenger Lists for outward going passengers. These lists are now available online at www.findmypast.com. BT 27/780B refers to passengers embarking at Southampton. BT 27/776 refers to passengers embarking at Queenstown. There are no full lists for passengers embarking at Cherbourg. For further information, please write to:

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For further information about the history of the *Titanic*, please write to:

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Father Brown was a passenger who took photographs on board the *Titanic* on the first leg of her maiden voyage, Southampton to Cherbourg and to Queenstown, Ireland. The collection has been catalogued and placed on a database, and reprints are available. See www.fatherbrowne.com for details.