

## TABLE TALK / TO THE POINT :

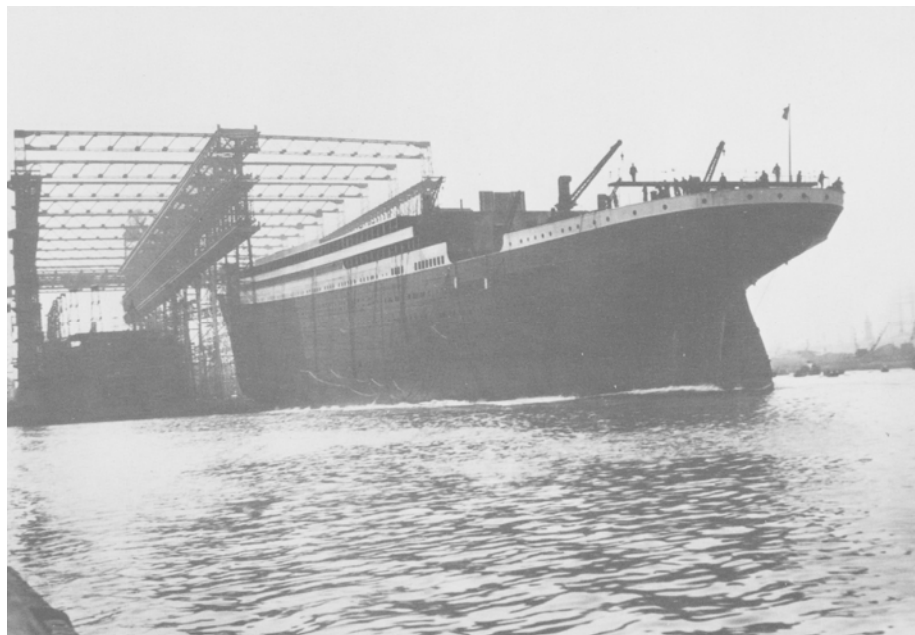
MARCH 2011

**THE “UNSINKABLE” TITANIC :** The White Star Line’s unsinkable Royal Mail Ship *Titanic* sank at 02:20 on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 1912 after striking an iceberg. Britain’s Daily Mirror appears to have been the originator of misinformation when it reported on April 16<sup>th</sup> 1912 :

“World’s largest ship collides with iceberg during maiden voyage. Every one on board safe.” “Passengers taken off.” “Helpless liner being towed to port by Allan Liner”

How wrong could they be?

Titanic was built by Harland and Wolff’s Belfast yard at a cost by today’s prices of \$ 400 million. The normal crew was 885 and she had a total capacity for passengers of 2687. On board on her maiden voyage was a crew of 991 plus 1324 passengers a total of 2315. It is surprising that she wasn’t full on her maiden voyage but this was very fortunate in view of what transpired.



THE LAUNCH OF RMS TITANIC FROM THE HARLAND & WOLFF YARD AT BELFAST IN 1911. – PHOTO : HARLAND & WOLFF/DOVER PUBLICATIONS INC.

*Titanic* was on a voyage from Southampton to New York when at 23:40 on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 1912 an iceberg was sighted dead ahead. Although avoidance was attempted a collision occurred and the starboard side forward was opened up below the waterline flooding five spaces. She sank at 02:20 the following day, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1912, having only stayed afloat for 2 hours and 40 minutes, and sinking at a position 1000 miles east of Boston and 375 miles south east of Newfoundland.

Only 706 passengers and crew survived with 1517 having perished. The Cunard liner RMS *Carpathia*, which was only 58 miles away, arrived at 04:10 on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1912 and picked up survivors together with their life boats.

Three hundred plus bodies were collected by ships chartered by White Star line and other ships in the area and these people had all died of hypothermia because of a water temperature of minus 2 degrees Centigrade. Because of health regulations only embalmed bodies could be taken to Newfoundland with embalmers and church officials being on board the recovery ships. When embalming fluid ran out bodies were buried at sea.

Enquiries were held on both sides of the Atlantic and the major failings in *Titanic* appear to have been design faults.

*Titanic* was 882 feet long with a draft of 34 feet and had a gross tonnage of 46, 328; not a particularly big ship, and propelled by two reciprocating steam engines driving the two outer propellers and a Parsons turbine driving the centre propeller, which developed 46,000 horse power in total. Steam was generated by 24 double ended boilers and 5 single ended boilers which consumed 855 tons of coal a day.

She was registered in Liverpool but most of the crew came from Southampton where there is a memorial to all of the engineering staff who were lost having stayed by their posts to the bitter end. It has always been accepted that the royal purple behind the gold braid of engineer officers was awarded to them by King George V for their efforts in trying to keep *Titanic* afloat. Sadly this is not correct.

There were 16 water tight compartments but the water tight bulkheads only went up to F deck which was not high enough as it transpired when 5 compartments were opened to the sea. The ship had been designed to stay afloat with only four spaces open to the sea.

The rudder design was as per the Board of Trade rules of the day as were all of the designs but it was a very old design and too small to give a fast efficient turning circle necessary in the event of possible collisions. It is said that had she hit the iceberg head on she would have only opened one or maybe two compartments and thus stayed afloat. The steel/iron plates in the hull were also brought into question as to their suitability in sub zero temperatures.

*Titanic* was designed to have 32 lifeboats but only 20 were fitted as the owners thought they spoiled the look of the ship. Even so there were only life boats on board for 1178 persons which was actually in excess of the rules of the day.

*Titanic* was designed for 23 knots but at the time of the collision her speed was said to have been 20.5 knots.

Morse code was in use between ships and ship and shore but only within a distance of 500 miles. Marconi supplied the two wireless operators who appeared to have been more interested in sending and receiving messages for first class passengers than in taking ice notices. Reports of ice had been received by Captain Edward J Smith but a lot of updates had been ignored by the wireless operators and *Titanic* continued at an excessive speed until the inevitable happened. Immediately prior to the collision a ship in the area sent:

“We are stopped and surrounded with ice”

*Titanic*'s reply was:

“Shut up! You are jamming my signal. I am working Cape Race. (The radio station in Newfoundland). The senior operator was too busy with messages for passengers to take an ice message, which was quite disgraceful.

As has been seen in many movies covering the sinking of *Titanic* the ships orchestra played to the bitter end and all members perished.

The loss of *Titanic* was the worst shipping casualty at that time. Although it has since been eclipsed in terms of human casualties by the *Donna Paz* (4386 lives lost in 1987) and *Neptune* (1700 lives lost on 1993), the loss of 1517 passengers and crew on that ice-cold night in the North Atlantic ninety nine years ago still grips the public imagination. Let us pray that a similar casualty never happens again. – ***Our Globe-Trotting Travel Correspondent.***

*The Law of the Theater & Rugby Stadium - At any event, the people whose seats are furthest from the aisle, always arrive last. They are the ones who will leave their seats several times to go for food, beer, or the toilet & who leave early before the end of the performance or the game is over. The folks in the aisle seats come early, never move once, have long gangly legs or big bellies & stay to the bitter end of the performance. The aisle people also are very surly folk*

**SIMON'S TOWN TOURIST ATTRACTION :** Simon's Town's latest tourist attraction, the submarine SAS ASSEGAAI, was officially opened to the public on 1 March 2011. Visitors join a tender operated by Dave Hurwitz (Simon's Town Boat Co.) for a trip across the yacht Basin to the submarine, moored ahead of the former cable ship CABLE RESTORER.



Visitors aboard SAS *Assegai* ex SAS *Johanna van der Merwe* . - Photo : Simon's Town Boat Company

*The Coffee Law - As soon as you sit down to a cup of hot coffee, your boss will ask you to do something which will last until the coffee is cold.*

**THE CRUEL SEA :** Nicholas Monsarrat wrote his epic novel “The Cruel Sea” at Hermanus, in the Western Cape and Johannesburg, in the former Transvaal, between April 1948 and May 1950.

This is the story of the Battle of the Atlantic when Germany’s underwater navy, the dreaded U-Boat wolf packs, tried to break Britain’s lifeline from Canada and the USA. The defeated armies of Britain, France and Belgium had been brought back to England from Dunkirk in an armada of small boats and Britain would have starved had it not been for food supplies being sent from North America.

The Battle of the Atlantic went on for nearly five and a half years and the cost was enormous with 30,000 merchant seaman losing their lives, 3000 ships sent to the bottom and 780 U-Boats destroyed.

There was also the loss of battle cruiser *Hood* and the battleship *Bismarck* with their thousands of naval personnel of both navies.

The British Royal Navy with her allies used destroyers, frigates, corvettes and even armed trawlers to guard the convoys carrying food and armaments to Great Britain and because of their size they suffered severely from the cruel sea.

In the novel, HMS *Compass Rose* is only 200 feet long and is literally a floating depth charge disposal unit which lasted nearly three years before being torpedoed in icy seas.

The replacement ship for Captain Ericson was a more modern 300 foot long frigate (River Class) HMS *Saltash* which survived the rest of the war in the Atlantic plus convoys to Malta and Murmansk. This is a book well worth reading. – ***Our Globe Trotting Travel Correspondent.***

*The South African Navy’s third SAS Protea, a Survey Vessel which operated in South African waters in the late 1940s and early 1950s was built as the “Flower” class Corvette HMS Rockrose and would have been a sister to the fictitious HMS Compass Rose.*

**SIMON’S TOWN DOCKYARD LAUNCH :** The waterjet-powered Nigerian fast crew boat *OPS 301*, which was constructed in No. 2 Refitting Shed at Simon’s Town Dockyard, has been carrying out speed trials in False Bay on the few days when the South Easter was not making everybody’s life miserable.

*111,111,111 X 111,111,111 = 12345678987654321*

**A BLAST FROM THE PAST :** RMS OLYMPIC was the first of three super-liners built by Harland & Wolff Ltd. at Belfast for the White Star Line service from Southampton to New York. Her sisters were to be named TITANIC and GIGANTIC but after the tragic loss of TITANIC in 1912, the third ship was renamed BRITANNIC.



RMS OLYMPIC ALONGSIDE THE PIERHEAD AT LIVERPOOL JUST AFTER THE END OF WORLD WAR I. THE TALL STRUCTURE IN THE BACKGROUND IS THE 567 FT. (173 M) TALL NEW BRIGHTON TOWER. THE TOWER, WHICH WAS THE TALLEST BUILDING IN BRITAIN AT THE TIME, WAS DEMOLISHED BETWEEN 1919 AND 1921.

OLYMPIC survived a collision with the Cruiser HMS HAWKE in 1911 and had to be fitted with one of TITANIC's shafts, delaying the completion of the ill-fated liner. OLYMPIC operated on the Trans – Atlantic service from 1911 to 1935, serving as Troopship during World War I. Her sister, BRITANNIC, went straight from the builders' yard in Belfast to serve as a Hospital Ship in World War I. BRITANNIC struck a mine and sank on 21 November 1916, never having carried a fare-paying passenger.

*Law of Mechanical Repair - After your hands become coated with grease, your nose will begin to itch & you'll have to pee.*

*Law of Gravity - Any tool, nut, bolt, screw, when dropped, will roll to the least accessible corner.*

*Law of Probability - The probability of being watched is directly proportional to the stupidity of your act.*