A QUIET SEA

RMS TITANIC

THE BONDS OF SERVICE

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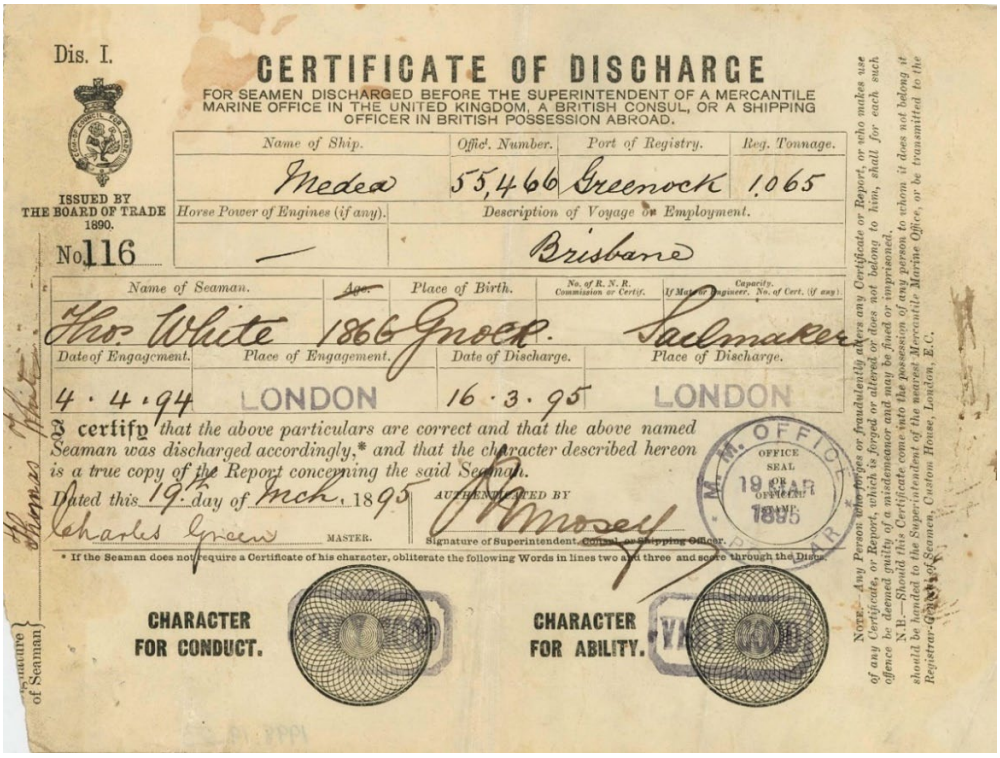
INTRODUCTION

Like every other vessel under British registry, RMS Titanic's 900 crewmembers were subject to the rules and regulations of the British Board of Trade (BoT). Dating back to the late 17th century, the BoT kept track of crews, regulated construction, and oversaw safety and navigation rules.

As a result of the Titanic disaster, the BoT played a prominent part in the first Safety of Life at Sea conference in 1914. The BoT ruled that every person serving as crew aboard a merchant vessel had to sign the Continuous Certificate of Discharge, otherwise known as Ship's Articles. The Articles were by necessity long and complicated and endeavored to address fair treatment for crews. It was a benevolent attempt to protect mariners from being exploited by greedy shipowners. All members of a ship's crew—seamen, firemen, stewards and stewardesses—also carried a discharge book, a record of their employment history that also served as a passport. Basic information included age; place and date of birth; position on board ship; dates joined and left ship; and the reason for leaving, such as legally discharged at voyage's end, deserted, or drowned.

Those looking to join a ship applied at the BoT offices, where clerks assigned to sort them out struggled through the various languages. (A ship could be manned by a dozen or more nationalities.) After passing a health examination by the company's doctor, a health certificate was issued to male crew members; female applicants were simply asked about their health histories. The shipping master read aloud the Articles of Agreement to those accepted. English speakers could scrutinize the Articles, but most left it to luck. Men shipping on passenger steamers took it upon themselves to watch over female crew in the name of chivalry, sometimes a disguise for more lascivious behavior.



Dis. I.

CERTIFICATE OF DISCHARGE

FOR SEAMEN DISCHARGED BEFORE THE SUPERINTENDENT OF A MERCANTILE MARINE OFFICE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM, A BRITISH CONSUL, OR A SHIPPING OFFICER IN BRITISH POSSESSION ABROAD.

ISSUED BY THE BOARD OF TRADE 1890.

No. 116

Name of Ship.	Offic. Number.	Port of Registry.	Reg. Tonnage.
Medea	55,466	Greenock	1065

Horse Power of Engines (if any).	Description of Voyage or Employment.
—	Brisbane

Name of Seaman.	Age.	Place of Birth.	No. of R. N. R. Commission or Certif.	If Master or Engineer, No. of Cert. (if any).	Capacity.
Thos. White	1866	Gnock.			Sailmaker

Date of Engagement.	Place of Engagement.	Date of Discharge.	Place of Discharge.
4.4.94	LONDON	16.3.95	LONDON

I certify that the above particulars are correct and that the above named Seaman was discharged accordingly,* and that the character described hereon is a true copy of the Report concerning the said Seaman.

Dated this 19th day of March 1895

Charles Green MASTER.

AUTHENTICATED BY J. R. Mosely

Signature of Superintendent, Consul, or Shipping Officer.

M. M. OFFICE SEAL OF OFFICE 19 MAR 1895

* If the Seaman does not require a Certificate of his character, obliterate the following Words in lines two and three and score through the Discharge.

CHARACTER FOR CONDUCT.

CHARACTER FOR ABILITY.

Signature of Seaman

NOTE.—Any Person who forges or fraudulently alters any Certificate or Report, or who makes use of any Certificate, or Report, which is forged or altered, or does not belong to him, shall for each such offence be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and may be fined or imprisoned to whom it does not belong it should be handed to the Superintendent of the nearest Mercantile Marine Office, or be transmitted to the Registrar-General of Seamen, Custom House, London, E.C.

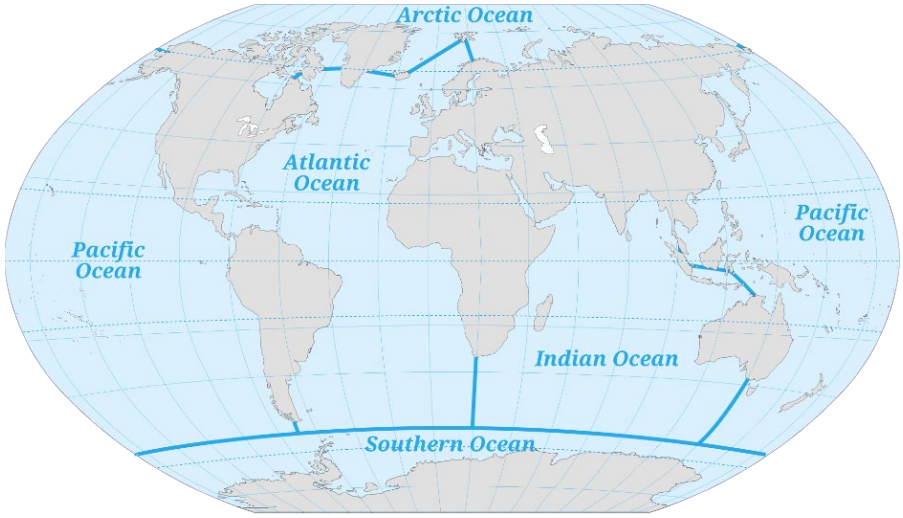
Certificate of Discharge, Mr. Thomas White (March 19, 1895)

Credit: Collection of the South Street Seaport Museum, New York (note: original image slightly cropped)

THE MARINERS' LOT

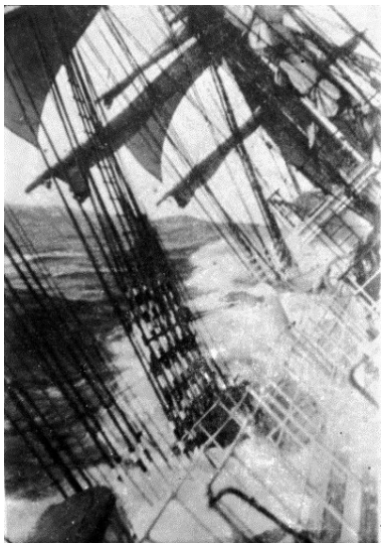
The history of seafaring is intimately meshed with trade, scientific discovery and the voluntary or involuntary migration of peoples. Commercial vessels began as team efforts, in which partners and crew provided funds to get the enterprise underway. Returns were based on the number of shares individuals held in the business. Those who worked the ship but did not contribute funds were given basic wages, food, housing, medical care and a ration of alcohol. This arrangement was originally just a verbal agreement, but by the 1800s, even illiterate seamen wanted some type of written contract. The popular image of adventure and romance belied the hardship and exploitation imposed on the average seaman.

Once a ship cleared port, round-the-clock watches were set to steer, navigate and work the ship. The British system divided up the 24-hour period into seven watches, with crew divided into two watches, port and starboard. The first watch was from 8 pm to midnight; the middle watch midnight to 4 am; the morning watch 4 am to 8 am; the forenoon watch 8 am to noon; the afternoon watch noon to 4 pm. Then the dog watches; 4 pm to 6 pm (first dog watch) and 6 pm to 8 pm (second dog watch). The dog watches allowed the hours to be staggered, so crew wouldn't be in the same watch on consecutive days. During each 4-hour watch, the ship's bell was rung eight times, every half hour. Beginning with the afternoon watch, one bell would ring at 12:30 pm, then two bells at 1:00 pm and so forth, until 8 bells at 4 pm. Then the bells would cycle in the same manner for the next watch; i.e., one bell at 4:30 through eight bells at 8 pm. Because of their physically demanding work and tough conditions, firemen and stokers were divided into three rather than two watches, working 4 hours on, 8 hours off.



Southern Ocean
Credit: Wikimedia Commons

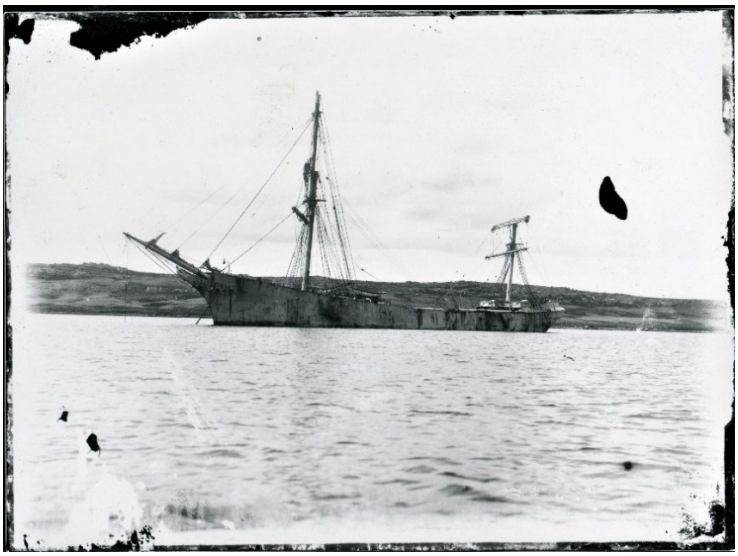
By the late 19th century, trade routes were served by thousands of windjammers and steamships. Ships sailed across the globe and as far north and south as the ice would permit. Trade from Europe to the west coast of South America required an east to west rounding of Cape Horn, at the southern extreme of South America. The passage was commonplace but difficult, as ships battled great ocean swells and fierce winds. In the winter of 1905, some 200 ships with 5,000 seamen rounded Cape Horn for South American ports. Accurate navigation was required to get the ship far enough west from 50 south latitude in the Atlantic, before turning north to arrive at 50 south latitude in the Pacific. Not enough "westing" would jam the ship toward land, piling her up in the vicinity of the Magellan Straits, or further up the Chilean coast.

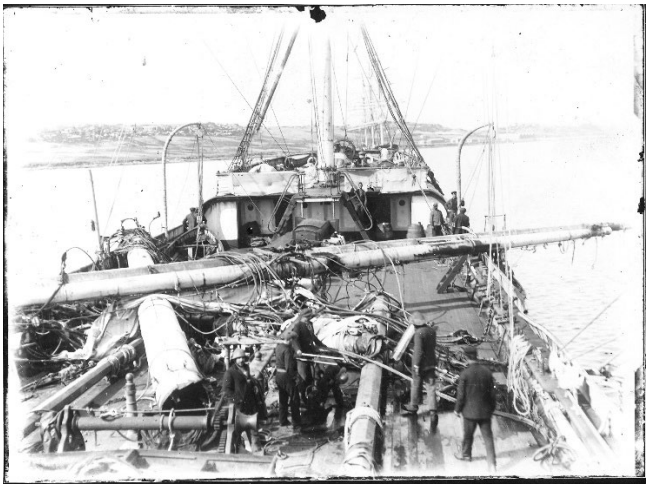
Cape Horn and an unidentified vessel nearing the Horn
Credit: Wikimedia Commons (L) and Wikipedia (R)

Ships' hulls rarely suffered structural failures, but damage to the spars or rigging, or a hatch stove in by the sea, could doom a vessel. One such struggle was that of the British ship Wavertree. On an east-west passage around Cape Horn in 1910, the ship sustained serious damage to her spars and steering gear that forced her to retreat 1,500 miles to seek safety and repair in Montevideo, Uruguay. On her second attempt, with a fresh crew, the ship ran into a hurricane. This time, she was severely dismasted, and some of her crew were badly injured. She limped into Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands, her sailing career over. Wavertree became a floating warehouse for wool, then was converted into a coal barge and moored in Buenos Aires. The windjammer was saved in 1970 by the South Street Seaport Museum, where she remains on display.

Ship Wavertree in San Francisco (1899)
Credit: Courtesy of the South Street Seaport Museum Archives, Thomas Herman Wilton (Swedish-American, 1850-1928), photographer.



Wavertree dismasted in the Falkland Islands (1910)
Credit: Courtesy of the South Street Seaport Museum Archives



Wavertree dismasted in the Falkland Islands, view aft (1910)
Credit: Courtesy of the South Street Seaport Museum Archives

An east to west rounding of the Horn in a windjammer could easily take 3 months or more. Most windjammers made it around Cape Horn with only minor damage. And there were exceptions to the long ordeals. In 1938, the German Adolf Hauth, Master of the bark Priwall, rounded the Horn in 5 days and 17 hours. She was the last commercial sailing vessel to round Cape Horn.

German bark Priwall (1917)
Credit: Wikipedia

Although powered vessels had been operating successfully throughout most of the 19th century, some shipowners stuck with their big windjammers. These floating, slab-sided warehouses needed no fuel, and operating expenses were minimal. Crews were small in number and poorly paid, and some tight-fisted masters doled out reduced rations. Fresh water was expensive in foreign ports, so ships had to carry enough water for a roundtrip voyage. If the supply ran low at sea, rainwater was collected; when it became brackish, the crew was expected to make do.

Bark Dunkirk (1888)
Credit: Wikipedia (State Library of Victoria)

Crew numbers were augmented by indentured apprentices, who intended to make the sea a career as officers. These young boys were cheap labor, and parents paid a premium for their apprenticeship. Apprentices could be gone from home for years. Under the tutelage of the officers and seamen, their professional education, such as basic navigation, could be sketchy and their lives rife with abuse. Many shipowners weren't keen on the apprentice system, as the boys had to be fed and housed even when the ship was idle. They found new apprentices to be worse than useless and treated them with disregard. Some British apprentices naively deserted to American ships, where conditions could be equally harsh. Those who could stand the life eventually attended a shore-side school and sat for their examinations. Britain had some stationary training ship hulks, but the Scandinavians, Americans and Japanese used custom-built, well-run training vessels beginning in the 1870s. This provided a sound environment for training and filled the need for skilled officer candidates to man the ever-growing fleets of steamships.

Officers fared somewhat better in terms of creature comforts and food, but the strain of sailing a windjammer around the world took its toll. The ship's master had to ensure that the ship was properly loaded and trimmed (the horizontal level with the stern deeper to aid in sailing), either with cargo or ballast; that his officers and crew were competent; and that the ship was supplied with paint and rope to keep her in good sailing condition. Once the ship embarked on a voyage, the captain was "Master under God." He was the ultimate authority, and the crew had little recourse but to obey. Even experienced mates who became masters faced a steep learning curve. Burdened with absolute command, they were ultimately responsible when men deserted or were lost overboard. The biggest offense was losing a ship, but even the best seamanship came to naught if the sea dictated otherwise. Some couldn't take the strain and vanished into their cabins to seek refuge in a bottle.

BREAKING THE MOLD

MARY PATTEN

The cost of keeping a house ashore and the lengthy separation imposed by a life at sea made it practical for a captain's family to make the ship their home. Wives signed no articles and were listed simply as "the Master's wife." The families lived in the stern saloon area and shared the demands and dangers of going to sea. Children were forbidden to go forward and fraternize with the crew, although older boys were sometimes permitted light chores. Daughters in their teens kept a low profile and had to comport themselves with dignity and avoid all contact with the sailors.

Wives occupied themselves with domestic duties but also did clerical work, kept pay records, cared for the sick and tended to injuries. Some masters taught their wives navigation. Those who became erudite in navigation and ship handling could take command, like Mary Patten. Her husband, Joshua Patten, was Master of the clipper Neptune's Car. They married when Mary was 16. At age 19 and pregnant, she was aboard when the ship left New York for San Francisco in 1856. During their time together, Joshua taught Mary navigation and piloting. When Captain Patten had trouble with his arrogant first mate, he relieved him of responsibility. Then, as they approached Cape Horn, Patten's eyesight and hearing became impaired. Since the Second Mate didn't know how to navigate, he and the crew followed Mary while she ran the ship and tended to Joshua. When Neptune's Car finally reached San Francisco, Mary had been in her clothes for 50 days. The ship's company and underwriters, impressed and appreciative, honored Mary with a

$1,000 token of thanks. She and Joshua returned to New York, where their son was born. Sadly, Joshua passed away in February 1857.

Mary Ann Brown Patten (1837-1861)
Credit: Wikipedia

ELEANOR CREESY

A contemporary of Mary Patten was Eleanor Creesy (1814-1900). Her husband, Josiah Creesy (1814-1874), was master of one of the largest and fastest clipper ships afloat, Flying Cloud. Eleanor first learned her skills from her stepfather and uncle, John Prentiss. At a time when women were expected to pursue traditional domestic duties, many thought it odd that Prentiss would school his niece in the ways of ships and the sea. Eleanor became a superb navigator but could only use her skills if she married the captain of a ship.

After refusing many marriage proposals, Eleanor met Josiah Creesy; they wed in 1841 and went to sea. By 1846, they had sailed around the world on the packet Oneida. In 1851, Creesy took command of the new extreme clipper Flying Cloud, and the couple planned to undertake a record-breaking trip from New York to San Francisco. Eleanor and Josiah laid out their courses, and Eleanor perfected the route using the latest hydrographic data in oceanographer and naval officer Matthew Maury's (1806-1873) "Sailing Directions." In 1851, Using Eleanor's meticulous calculations, Flying Cloud broke the existing record by 11 days. Three years later, they did it again, this time breaking their own record by 13 hours.

This spectacular achievement was heralded in the San Francisco newspaper "Daily Alta California": "The clipper ship *Flying Cloud* arrived at San Francisco from New York, having accomplished the voyage in 89 days, 8 hours. This is the quickest passage recorded as having been made by a sailing vessel between the ports named. On a former occasion, *Flying Cloud* made the same voyage in 89 days, 21 hours. The story of *Flying Cloud* is exciting in itself, but equally intriguing is the fact that the navigator was a woman – the Captain's wife, Eleanor Creesy. Remarkable for being a functioning female member of the clipper's crew, she was also an inspired navigator. Her skills are considered to be a major factor in the ship's safe and swift passages. A native of Marblehead, Mass., Mrs. Creesy learned navigation from her father, a successful captain in the coastal schooner trade. When she married Josiah Perkins Creesy in 1841, he was master of the *Oneida*, plying the China trade and wishing for a faster vessel. Eleanor

sailed with him throughout his long career.” Eleanor Creesy and Mary Patten showed a skeptical world what women could do.

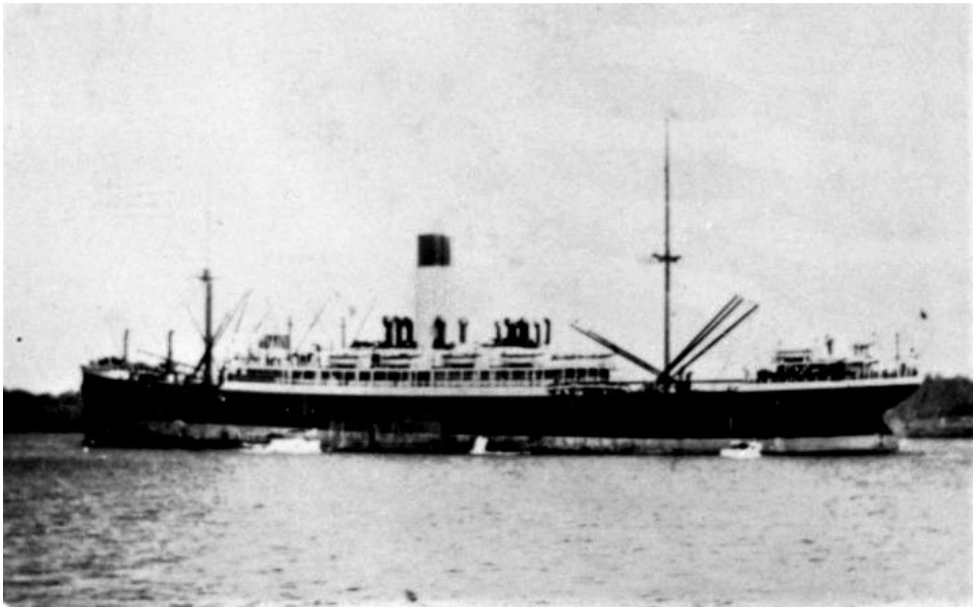
Clipper ship Flying Cloud
Credit: Wikipedia

VICTORIA DRUMMOND

While it was impossible for a woman to go to sea on her own in the 19th century, a glimmer of progress appeared in the first decades of the 20th century. The first woman to take advantage of this change was Victoria Drummond. Born in Perthshire, Scotland by the River Tay, Victoria was educated at home and with her two sisters and brother lived a privileged life. Her godmother was Queen Victoria, and her father Malcolm held a post in the royal household as one of eight grooms in waiting. In 1906, the Drummond household suffered financially when her grandparents lost their fortune. Curious about machinery, Victoria visited Robert Morton and Sons, an engineering factory that made lorries, and became an apprentice. Wanting to become a marine engineer, she first apprenticed in a garage but with the encouragement of her foreman was directed to Dundee Technical College to learn math and engineering.

Victoria Drummond (1894-1978)
Credit: Wikipedia

By 1926, she had earned her stripes as second engineer, but no steamship company would sign her on. She eventually found a job aboard the Blue Funnel liner Anchises for 2 years as 10th Assistant Engineer, at a lesser wage than if she were a man. With a firm grasp of machinery, she tested for higher grades, taking the BoT examination for Chief Engineer numerous times, but she failed to pass.



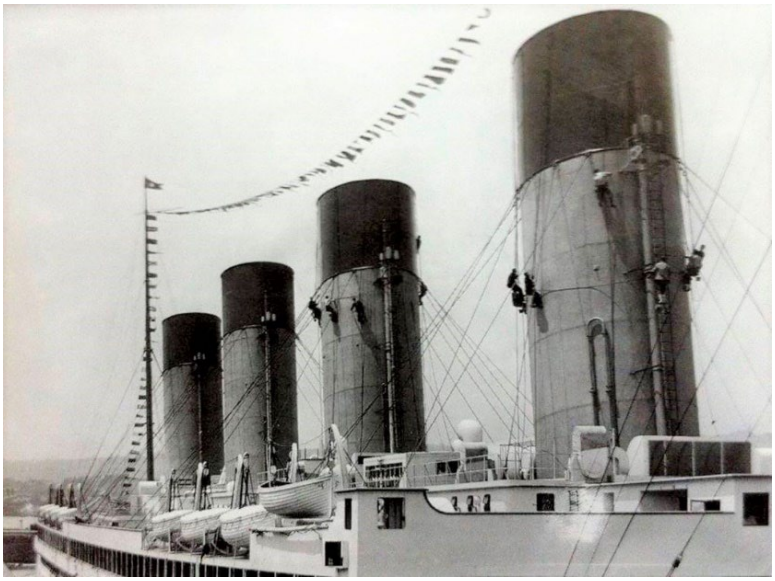
SS Anchises (1911)
Credit: Wikipedia (John Oxley Library)

Her inability to earn an increase in grade, along with the Great Depression and lack of shipping work, kept Victoria ashore for 11 years. Still, she persevered and retook the exam for Chief Engineer. When she failed once again, a foreman for whom she had apprenticed in Dundee confronted the BoT examiners. It turned out that she had been failed because she was a woman. To cover their tracks, they had failed anyone sitting for the examination with her.

In the end, Victoria served on more than a dozen ships, sailed around the world, and served throughout World War 2. She worked for 40 years doing everything men did, standing up to rampant misogyny and prejudice. The first female Marine British Engineer, she is honored by the Victoria Drummond Room at the Institute of Marine Engineers.

SEAMEN & STOKERS

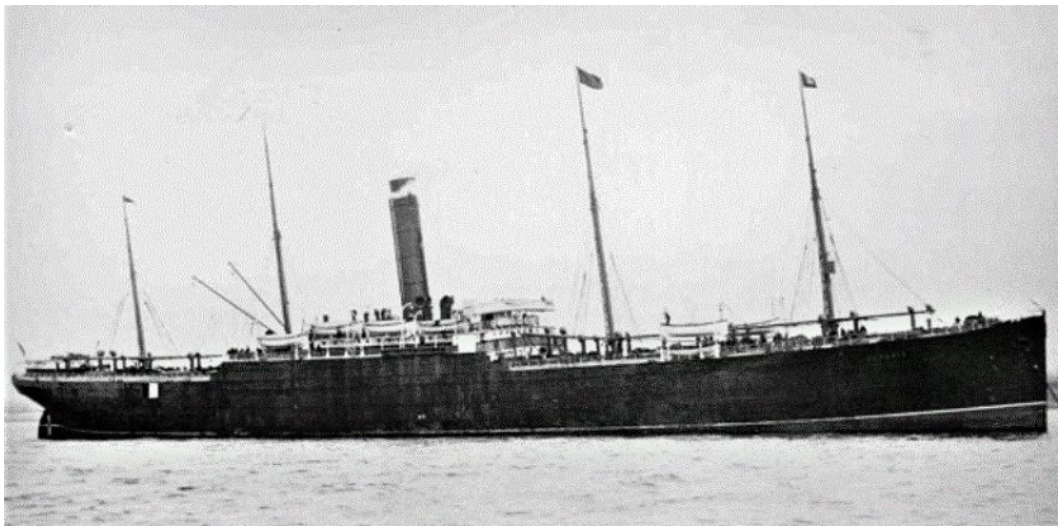
Conditions in steamships were an improvement compared with those in sailing vessels. With no need to struggle on a flooded deck or deal with thrashing sails aloft, the steamer routine provided regular rest for the deck crew. Rather than maintaining lofty masts and rigging, sailors now had cargo booms and superstructures to care for, with an endless round of chipping rust and painting. Their quarters were relatively secure and less prone to flooding. Navigating bridges and steering stations remained exposed, however. It was thought that standing watch out in the open kept those on duty awake, a guarantee during winter in the North Atlantic. In coal-fired steamships, conditions were equally oppressive for those who fed the insatiable boilers. Stokers who provided the brute force that turned the propeller and moved the ship, pitching coal into hungry furnaces, worked in a world of coal dust and searing temperatures.



Olympic deck seaman painting forward funnels
Credit: Ship Nostalgia

Ship stokers on USS Massachusetts
Credit: Wikipedia

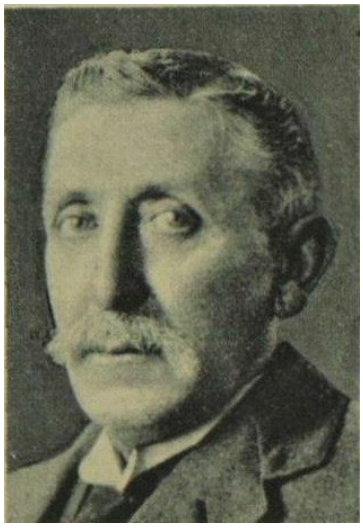
The brutish work resulted in several mutinies. Stokers in smaller vessels were mostly Irish, Austrians and Italians. In June 1905, “The New York Times” reported a mutiny aboard the 8,800-ton Cunard ship Ultonian while carrying immigrants from Italy to New York. With the ship just 2 days from New York, the stokers’ working watches were increased from 4 to 6 hours. They ran wild, breaking into the liquor stores and attacking the officers. Order was restored at gunpoint, and the mutineers were confined to their quarters. The ship limped into New York with the deck crew feeding the furnaces; she barely made it.



SS Ultonia (1898)
Credit: Wikipedia

UNIONS

Slowly, seamen began to successfully form unions. Havelock Wilson began his career for the rights of seamen with a fledgling union established in Sunderland, England in 1879. Elected president of the union in 1885, he attempted to rapidly spread the union’s influence, but this led to friction within the membership. He left Sunderland to begin The National Amalgamated Sailors’ and Firemen’s Union of Seamen in 1887, near the ocean port of Tyne, England.



Havelock Wilson (1859-1929)
Credit: Wikipedia

Membership swelled to 80,000 by 1889, and the union led successful strikes. Shipowners responded by establishing the Shipping Federation to break the union. Compelled to defend itself and drained of funds due to unwise litigation, the union lost considerable membership and was liquidated in 1893. The following year, it morphed into the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union (NSFU), even though financial troubles remained and rebuilding the membership was difficult. Still, a series of strikes yielded results, and membership and operating funds slowly increased.

Shipowners, seeing the futility of holding out, agreed to many of the union's demands of humane working hours and increased pay, and the union became a force to be reckoned with. A rival, the British Seafarers' Union, emerged but did not displace the NSFU. The many strikes of the NSFU made it despised by shipowners and big business in general. Yet, Havelock Wilson believed that cooperation between shipowners and seamen was essential. He was elected as a member of the Parliament representing the Liberal Party, but his time in Parliament tarnished his reputation among the rank-and-file union membership, who came to see him as little more than a "bosses' man." Nevertheless, his long-term struggles paid off; the unions were here to stay.

DESERTERS

Many who shipped out in the mid to late 19th and early 20th centuries were rootless men, working from ship to ship, deserting when conditions became intolerable or they wanted to start a new life in a foreign country. Unscrupulous shipowners relied on notorious "crimps" to recruit anyone they could find. Men were "Shanghaied" (kidnapped), drugged in bars or beaten and dragged off the streets only to find themselves expendable in a brutal environment with no end in sight. Some harsh masters would send their crews to jail when a ship arrived in port, to keep them on hand for the next voyage. Nevertheless, with the ship at anchor and land not too far off, an enterprising seaman on board could slink out on the jib boom on a dark night, quietly release a jib downhaul (used to lower a headsail for furling), ease it into the water, silently slip down the line and swim to shore. Escaping in this manner was called "paying off the jib downhaul." If the escapee was lucky, he wasn't missed until daybreak.

Mass desertions were not unheard of. In 1849, many seamen, officers and masters, seduced by the California gold rush, abandoned their vessels as soon as they anchored in San Francisco. With the vessels idle, no passengers or cargo left port, and the harbor became cluttered with a

forest of masts and ships. Some were turned into hotels and bars. Decaying over time, others were scuttled or used as warehouses, until they fell apart and sank. Many ended their days as landfill under the streets of San Francisco.

Abandoned windjammers in San Francisco (1849)
Credit: Wikimedia Commons

MEDICAL CARE

Significant breakthroughs in identifying the underlying causes of disease came during the latter part of the 19th century. Antiseptic protocols, anesthesia, the science of microbiology and Wilhelm Roentgen's discovery of the X-ray in 1895 were the cornerstones of medicine at the cusp of the 19th and 20th centuries. The challenge for mariners lay in providing ships with some form of medical care.

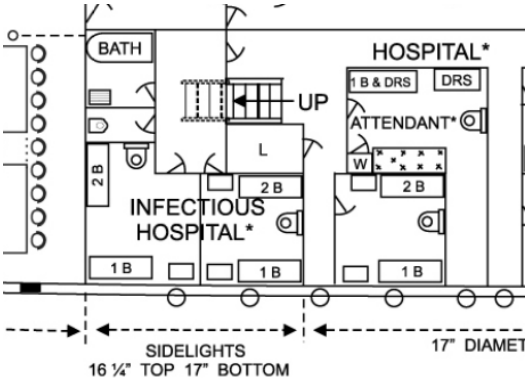
Although in the mid-19th century, the larger British merchant and passenger sailing vessels carried practically trained surgeons (not a physician, who required a degree), only basic care was provided on most vessels. On ships without a surgeon, medical care fell to the captains and mates, who were provided with rudimentary medical kits stocked with ointments, medicines and comfort supplies like alcohol. No other pain relief was provided. (Passenger vessels were supplied with laudanum for pregnant women.) "The Ship Captain's Medical Guide" instructed the captain and officers to (among other things) keep the ship clean, easier said than done. When sailors were afflicted with diseases like tuberculosis or malaria, little could be done other than isolation, difficult on any but the largest ships. Hernias, broken bones and other work-related injuries were common and treated as best as possible.

Crowded immigrant ships offered fertile ground for the spread of measles, diphtheria and other illnesses; young children suffered greatly. Surviving a ship-borne illness was a matter of luck. As ships grew larger to accommodate the swelling numbers of immigrants, concern grew about communicable diseases in ports of entry like New York and Boston. Ports had quarantine anchorages where the ship was held until passengers passed medical examinations. Those who failed the medical exam were returned to their port of embarkation at the expense of the steamship company. It therefore behooved the shipping companies to examine passengers at the port of departure. The Hamburg America Line set up an Emigrant Village near the river Elbe. When new emigrants arrived, they would be bathed, given a physical exam and their luggage fumigated. Those who passed muster would wait in clean accommodations prior to departure. This ensured that they would pass the medical examination once they reached America.

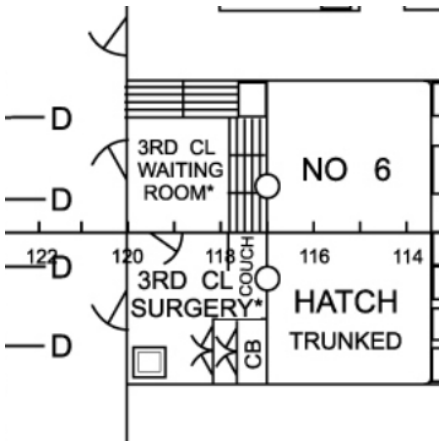
The medical exam
Credit: Wikimedia Commons

TITANIC

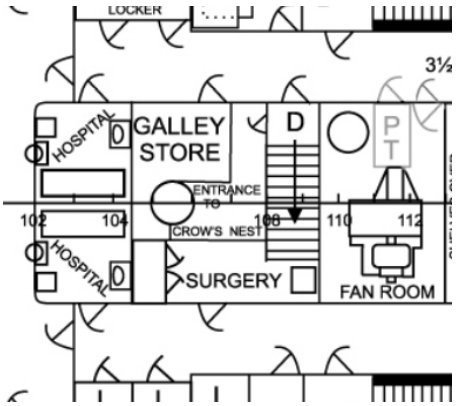
By 1912, surgeons on transatlantic liners were equal to doctors ashore. Many sought steamship service, so companies had their pick of the most skilled. Those who got berths on liners had long hours and were on call around the clock. In addition to the latest surgical tools, they were equipped with an up-to-date library, so they could stay abreast of the latest medical procedures. Dispensaries were well stocked, and clinics were of a high standard. Medical care was segregated by class. Medical facilities for First- and Second-Class passengers were on the starboard side of D Deck, adjacent to the Second-Class dining room. Those for Third-Class passengers were near the stern on D Deck. The crew's medical facilities were on C Deck, near the seamen's and firemen's quarters under the forecastle, near the bow.



First/Second-Class hospital
D Deck aft



Third-Class hospital
D Deck stern



Crew hospital
C Deck forward

Source: Titanic Deck Plans

The First- and Second-Class hospital also could be reached via a stairwell from C Deck above. Four separate wards were provided, along with an infectious disease hospital, baths and water closets. There was one surgery room and two hospital wards. One padded room served as a brig, or jail. When Titanic departed on her maiden passage, she carried two medically trained individuals, Surgeon Dr. William Francis Norman O'Loughlin and Assistant Surgeon Dr. John Edward Simpson. The medical staff also included a hospital porter and attendant, each with basic first aid and medical knowledge, two nurses and a receptionist.

DR. WILLIAM FRANCIS NORMAN O'LOUGHLIN

William Francis Norman O'Loughlin was born in Tralee, Ireland on October 19, 1849. His parents died when he and his older brother were very young, so the boys were raised by their maternal uncle, a customs official. By age 21, O'Loughlin earned his first medical degree from the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and a year later achieved his second medical degree from the Royal College of Physicians in Ireland. In poor health from an early age, he took a position with a steamship company in the belief that the sea air would improve his health. He joined White Star Line in 1870 and spent the next 42 years at sea, highly respected by his peers. Prior to joining Titanic, O'Loughlin served in the White Star liners Majestic and Titanic's older sister Olympic. He was also affiliated with St. Vincent's Hospital in New York and would send his patients there if they needed additional care.

Dr. William O'Loughlin (1849-1912)
Credit: Find a Grave

Friends said he had misgivings about leaving Olympic for Titanic. He was getting on in years and did not look forward to a transfer. However, when Captain Smith teased him about being shiftless, he packed his bags. On the night of the collision, Dr. O'Loughlin took stewardess Mary Sloan into his confidence, quietly saying, "Child, things are very bad." However, rather than put on a lifejacket or seek a place in a lifeboat, he tended to and soothed those entering the boats. About a half hour before Titanic sank, he went below and encountered Chief Baker Charles Joughin, who was seeking alcoholic sustenance against the cold night and thought O'Loughlin was doing the same. Returning to the boat deck, O'Loughlin was joined by the purser, assistant purser and Dr. Simpson. Nearby, Second Officer Lightoller was hard at work clearing lines and launching the last boats. As the well deck filled with water and washed against the superstructure, the four men shook hands and said their goodbyes. A large crowd attended the Requiem Mass held in Dr. O'Loughlin's honor. In February 1914, St. Vincent's Hospital dedicated a new treatment wing named for Dr. O'Loughlin.

DR. JOHN EDWARD SIMPSON

John Edward Simpson was born in Belfast, Ireland on March 1, 1875. He earned his medical degree at Queen's University in Belfast. Simpson married Annie Peters in 1905, and the couple had a son in 1907. Simpson served in the Royal Army and by 1911 attained the rank of Captain in the Royal Army Medical Corps. Suffering from poor health, he too thought that going to sea would help, so he asked to be detached from his regiment. He joined the P&O Line, then transferred to White Star, which sent him to Olympic as assistant to Dr. O'Loughlin. On April 9, 1912 he asked to be allowed to join Dr. O'Loughlin aboard Titanic. As on Olympic, Simpson was the Second- and Third-Class doctor and Assistant Surgeon.

Dr. John Simpson (1875-1912)
Credit: Find a Grave

When Titanic arrived in Queenstown, Simpson wrote his mother that he had found his trunks unlocked and was missing some money. He also noted that his cabin on Titanic was more spacious than the one he had occupied on Olympic. On the night of April 14, he left his cabin after feeling the force of the collision and came across two stewardesses, Evelyn Marsden and Mary Sloan. Simpson told them that letters were floating about in the ship's mail room and gave them a little whisky to calm them down. Heading to the boat deck to help out, Simpson saw Fifth Officer Lowe preparing to lower boat 14 and handed him his electric torch, saying, "Here's something that will be helpful to you." As the situation worsened and those on board knew they were doomed, Simpson joined Dr. O'Loughlin, Purser Herbert McElroy and Assistant Purser Reginald Barker on the boat deck. Second Officer Lightoller was nearby and sweating profusely from the hard work of launching the boats. The always lighthearted Simpson quipped, "Hello, Lights, are you warm?" The little group laughed, although Lightoller did not. Titanic sank into the sea, taking Dr. John Simpson and the other three with her. His widow, Annie, never remarried. A brass plaque at Royal Belfast Academical Institution memorializes his service.

MISSING THE BOAT

There are numerous reasons a crewmember may miss a vessel's departure time: illness, family tragedy, a last-minute transfer, a premonition of doom, dislike for other crew or officers, drunkenness and just plain not wanting to go. Perhaps the most consequential individual who missed Titanic's maiden voyage was David Blair, who was Second Officer when Titanic left Belfast

for Southampton. At Captain Smith's request, Chief Officer Henry Wilde was transferred from Olympic to Titanic to be Chief Officer for the maiden voyage. The other senior officers were then placed in lower grades: William Murdoch, who was Chief Officer, became First Officer; Charles Lightoller, who was First Officer, was demoted to Second Officer. Blair was considered too experienced to be Third Officer so was transferred off Titanic on April 9, the day before departure. He left to act as navigator aboard White Star's RMS Oceanic. Blair was displeased about leaving and wrote to his sister-in-law, "This is a magnificent ship, I feel very disappointed not to make her first voyage."

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Second Officer David Blair (1874-1957)
Credit: Wikipedia

When Blair left, he neglected to leave the key to the box that held binoculars with Lightoller. During the post disaster inquiries, lookouts Frederick Fleet and Reginald Lee testified that they asked for binoculars but were denied. They said that having binoculars would have helped them see the iceberg sooner. (With its broad field of vision, the naked eye is more efficient in locating an object, but binoculars help identify it.) Not having the key should not, however, have hindered opening the box. (Blair's daughter later donated the key to the International Sailors Society.)

Twenty-three others missed Titanic's departure. Some had been discharged, while others left by consent, deserted or never reported for duty.

Among them was John Coffey, a fireman who fed and tended the coal for fueling the boilers as part of the engineering crew. Coffey was 23 when he shipped aboard Titanic at Southampton on April 6. He deserted 5 days later at his hometown of Queenstown, Ireland. After a short spell at home, he signed on with Cunard's Mauretania, the fastest liner afloat. Coffey remained at sea as a fireman his entire career and lived to the age of 68.

B. Brewer was a trimmer from Southampton. Trimmers, part of the engineering crew, moved the coal from the bunkers to the fireroom floors so the firemen could shovel the coal into the furnaces. They had to work carefully, so the ship stayed level as the coal was consumed. Brewer had transferred from White Star's Oceanic to Titanic on April 6 and had signed articles but failed to join the ship.

C. Blake, another trimmer, had worked on Titanic's sister Olympic and also had signed articles to join Titanic on April 6. However, he failed to arrive when Titanic departed on April 10.

Titanic was 28-year-old Alfred Penny's first ship. A trimmer, he joined her on April 6 as part of the engineering crew. On the morning of sailing day, April 10, he and other crew members gathered on board for muster at 8 am. About an hour later, firemen and trimmers who were off watch were permitted to go ashore; they were expected back at sailing time. Penny joined his watch mates at a local hotel bar, then stopped at the Grapes, another waterfront pub, leaving themselves 10 minutes to get to Titanic. Walking to the ship, they saw a long passenger train that would soon block their path. Penny and a friend ran ahead of the train and boarded Titanic, the others missed the departure. Although he boarded, Penny is listed as a deserter. Where he left Titanic seems a mystery. Queenstown is most likely, in terms of convenience in finding another ship.

Assistant cook F. T. Bowman was 38 when he signed articles on April 4 as part of the victualling crew but did not join Titanic at the time of departure. He had worked as assistant cook aboard Olympic.

Twenty-nine-year-old W. Burrows, a fireman, signed on as part of the engineering crew on April 6. He left by consent, although it is not known when or the circumstances of his departure.

E. di Napoli, born in Italy, had been part of the restaurant staff aboard Olympic and signed aboard Titanic on April 6. He was to serve as an assistant waiter in the a la carte restaurant but never boarded.

W. J. Mewe joined Titanic on April 4 as a sauce cook. Approximately 35 years old, he too had worked with the victualling crew aboard Olympic. However, he too was missing when the ship sailed.

Frank Holden's previous ship was White Star's Adriatic. He reported to Titanic on April 6 and signed on as a fireman as part of the engineering crew. After muster on April 10, the day of departure, Holden joined a group of firemen having drinks in the Grapes pub. Second-Class passenger Lawrence Beesley observed: "Just before the last gangway was withdrawn, a knot of stokers ran along the quay, with their kit slung over their shoulders in bundles, and made for the gangway with the evident intention of joining the ship. But a petty officer guarding the shore end of the gangway firmly refused to allow them on board; they argued, gesticulated, apparently attempting to explain the reasons why they were late, but he remained obdurate and waved them back with a determined hand, the gangway was dragged back amid their protests, putting a summary ending to their determined efforts to join the Titanic. Those stokers must be thankful men to-day that some circumstance, whether their own lack of punctuality or some unforeseen delay over which they had no control, prevented their being in time to run up that last gangway! They will have told—and will no doubt tell for years—the story of how their lives were probably saved by being too late to join the Titanic." The men were considered deserters.

Three Slade brothers, Bertram (28), Alfred (25) and Thomas (28), signed aboard Titanic on April 6 as part of the engineering crew. After morning muster, they joined Alfred Penny, William Nutbean and John Podesta for a drink ashore. When, on their way back to Titanic, Penny, Podesta and Nutbean ran to beat the passenger train that would block their way, the Slade brothers decided to wait and let the train go by. The decision cost them their jobs but saved their lives. Podesta and Nutbean survived Titanic by being ordered into lifeboat 3 by First Officer Murdoch. The boat, with over 70 on board, stood close by as the lights went out, followed by the sounds of Titanic breaking up and sinking.

John (or James) Shaw was 40 years old when he signed articles to serve as a fireman aboard Titanic as part of the engineering crew. His previous ship was White Star's Oceanic. Never reporting on board on April 10, he was listed as a deserter.

Twenty-seven-year-old F. Carter also failed to report on board when Titanic departed on her maiden voyage. He had signed on as a trimmer on April 6 as part of the engineering crew.

W. W. Dawes, who had worked on White Star's Majestic, was 38 years old when he signed on as First-Class saloon steward aboard Titanic, part of the victualling crew. However, his stay was brief. He joined Titanic on April 4 and was discharged on April 9. It is not known why.

P. Dawkins joined Titanic as an assistant cook at age 24, another member of the victualling crew. His previous ship was White Star's Oceanic. He failed to join Titanic when she departed Southampton.

Thirty-one-year-old Peter Ettlinger signed aboard Titanic on April 4. He was both a member of the victualling crew and a Second-Class steward. His previous ship was SS St. Paul of the American Line. For unknown reasons, he was discharged from Titanic just before she departed.

B. Fish, 38, had also worked on the SS St. Paul. He signed aboard Titanic on April 4 and would have been a First-Class steward and part of the victualling crew, but he did not report for duty when Titanic departed on her maiden voyage.

R. Fisher's previous ship was White Star's Oceanic. Twenty-four when he signed aboard Titanic on April 4, Fisher would have been part of the victualling crew and a plate steward. Plate stewards maintained the passenger cabins in good order and ensured overall cleanliness. They also served food and drinks and made sure plates, cutlery and glasses were clean. And they assisted passengers with their luggage. He too failed to board Titanic before departure.

A. Haveling did not join Titanic until April 9. At 26, he signed on as Junior Assistant 4th Engineer. He had previously served on White Star's Majestic. He was transferred off Titanic shortly before departure. His replacement, 26-year-old Henry Dodds, did not survive the sinking.

P. Kilford, 29, signed on Titanic on April 4 as First-Class steward and member of the victualling department. He became ill and was discharged on April 10, shortly before Titanic got underway. Kilford's previous ship was the American Line's New York. When outbound, Titanic passed New York, and the suction from Titanic's large hull broke New York's mooring lines. Quick action on the part of Titanic's pilot, captain and assisting tugs averted a collision.

Another former crew member of White Star's Oceanic, 23-year-old A. Manby (or possibly Manly), signed aboard Titanic as a Third-Class steward on April 4 as part of the victualling crew. However, when Titanic's sailing day arrived, Mr. Manby failed to join the ship.

W. Sims, 30 years old, had last worked on the Royal Mail Steam Packet liner Asturias, built in 1908. He signed aboard Titanic on April 6 but left Titanic with consent; the specifics are unknown.

With no shortage of skilled personnel in Southampton, 15 replacement crew were signed on, including a Junior Assistant 4th Engineer, six firemen, five trimmers, one assistant cook and one scullion.

EPILOGUE

Operating any vessel can be daunting. After the complications of construction and sea trials are solved, the hard work of operating and maintaining the ship for 30 or 40 years begins. And not with just anyone. Officers and crew have to be trained, experienced and certified by the BoT. In Titanic's day, officers served in sailing vessels before heading to powered ships; some crew did as well. But regardless of their position, each crew member was a specialist of sorts: engineers, firemen and trimmers provided skills for the machinery; officers, deckhands and seamen kept watch, steered and maintained the ship; waiters, stewards and stewardesses ensured that passengers were safe and comfortable. Up to 1,000 individuals were needed to run a ship like Titanic.

For a transatlantic liner, efficiently resupplying the ship weekly was paramount. Vast amounts of coal were needed. Thousands of bottles of liquor; enormous amounts of eggs, vegetables and meats; 200 pounds of butter; and 25 tons of potatoes were consumed daily along with coffee, tea, chocolates and a multitude of other items. Passengers and their luggage had to be loaded and unloaded. The liner had to be cleaned after coaling and the machinery closely watched for optimum performance. And the ship had to leave the harbor without incident. Once at sea, the crew had to keep a sharp lookout, handle the ship through storms and ice, and stay alert to the time of arrival. When the ship docked, passengers disembarked with their belongings and the cycle began again.

Twenty-four individuals, including Second Officer David Blair, missed or deserted Titanic. Some, like Blair, were initially disappointed by missing the maiden voyage, only to feel a heavy sense of tragedy and relief. Those who deserted may have felt a tinge of guilt for abandoning their mates. Tragically, their replacements endured a grim fate.

Sources: The South Street Seaport Museum; The War with Cape Horn, by Alan Villiers; NY Times Machine, 1905; Historic Naval Fiction; A Night to Remember, by Walter Lord; Royal Museums Greenwich; Maritime Belfast; Wikipedia; London Evening Standard; Henry Aldridge & Son; Titanic Officers; Encyclopedia Titanica; Christies; Titanic History Website: Trove Newspaper Search; The Seaman; Project Gutenberg; Titanic's Officers; Smithsonian Magazine; Wiki Fandom Geni; Medical Economics; Find a Grave; G & G Archives: Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland; Naval Medicine; The Old Operating Theater; Gender and the Sea; Taylor & Francis; Heritage Open Days; Medium: National Park Service; Seamen and the Law (Phd thesis paper, by Conrad Hepworth Dixon); eBay; The National Archives; Flickr; The University of Warwick; APS Advancing Physics; National Library of Scotland; Historic England.

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