A QUIET SEA

RMS TITANIC

DECK GANG

TITANIC: DECK GANG

INTRODUCTION

The arts of the sailor likely began when the first Pesse dugout canoe shoved off a riverbank sometime during the Mesolithic period 8,000 years ago. Using stone, flint and bone tools, these novice boatbuilders fashioned the ancient watercraft by hollowing out a felled log through burning and scraping. Then came the paddle and push pole to propel and maneuver the vessel. A simple craft, to be sure, but one that led to knowledge of current and wind. Waterborne craft quickly showed their worth. The ability to transport people and cargo forged solidarity and trade between communities and expanded fishing and hunting areas. Long before the Pesse was invented, rope spun from stinging nettle plants, coconut and hemp fiber was used to bind hut framing and make hunting weapons. Rope became the indispensable partner to watercraft.

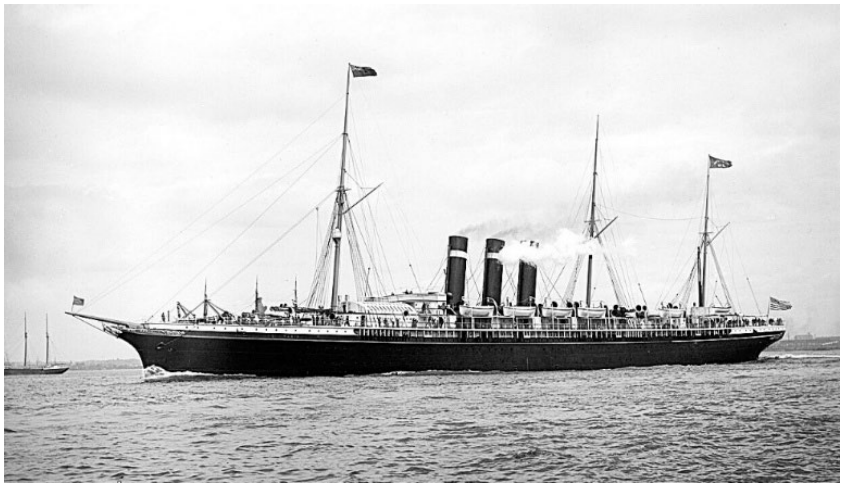
Pesse dugout canoe
Credit: Drents Museum, Netherlands, Creative Commons

Urtica dioica (nettle plant)
Credit: Dr. Otto W. Thomé (1885)

Worldwide exploration and trade drove the development of larger and increasingly complex vessels more capable of crossing the seas. Phoenicians, Greeks, Arabians, Chinese, Indians, Malays, Polynesians, Venetians, Vikings and, later, Northern Europeans began ranging the world's oceans in search of land, trade and wealth. Local conditions dictated the pace of progress, a somewhat difficult proposition for Northern Europeans, who had to contend with westerly winds, the stormy North Atlantic and the Gulf Stream. By the late 1400s, navigational skills were such that Portuguese explorer Vasco Da Gama became the first to sail around the Cape of Good Hope, at the southern tip of Africa. This feat paved the way for a sea route to India, marking the beginning of international trade. For his accomplishments, he was recognized as Governor of India in 1524. It took another two centuries for explorers and cartographers to survey and map the watery surface of the earth for scientific exploration and to plant imperial flags on continents and islands.

Following in the wake of ever more sophisticated late 19th century shipbuilding and design, steel and steam inevitably took over, and ships developed into complex machines. The proficiency and experience required to operate a deepwater sailing vessel, tramp steamer or premier transatlantic liner combined old and new disciplines. Piloting, celestial navigation, weather knowledge, cartography, sail making, sail handling and marlingspike seamanship were integrated into a modern institutional hierarchy of officer and seaman. Apprenticeships were developed to permit newcomers and common sailors to develop their seagoing expertise and rise in rank to become masters of their own ships.

Potosi, German bark 1895
Credit: Wikipedia



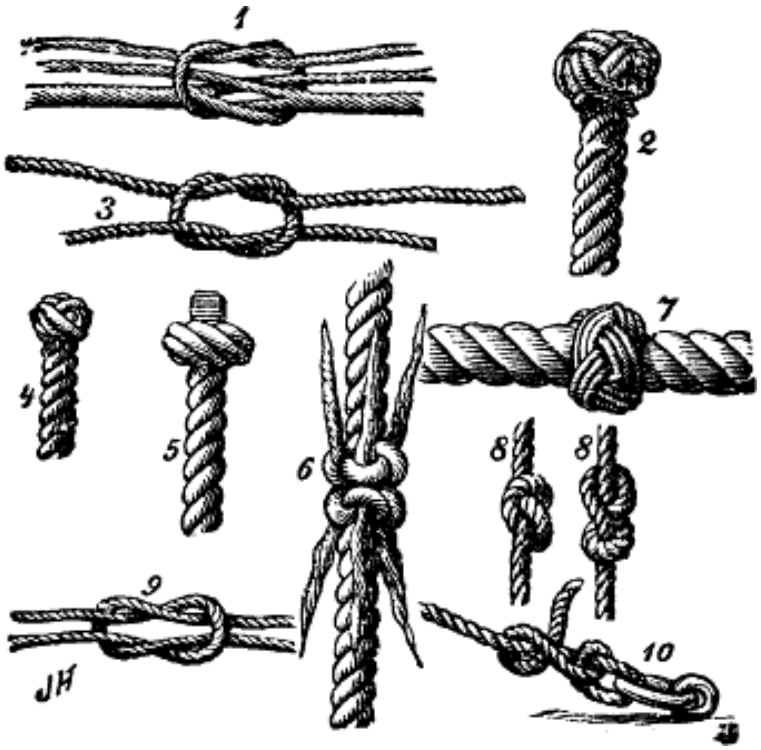
SS City of Paris 1885
Credit: Wikipedia

But the bone and sinew in every ship was the able seaman, who learned a profession that was handed down through generations. Marlingspike seamanship was the bedrock trade, and it was incumbent upon the sailor to learn every foot of his ship's rigging. A poorly done splice or knot could have fatal consequences. The seaman had to have a good head for working aloft and on deck in all weather, day or night.

Ship Grace Harwar
Credit: Wikimedia Commons

He had to keep a compass course and adjust his heading ever so slightly to accommodate slight shifts in wind and sea. A good bo'sun (boatswain), who was usually also the sailmaker, sewed new sails and repaired damaged ones with his assistants. Keeping the ship fit, handling sails and taking care of the rigging were 24/7 responsibilities when the ship was at sea. Should the wooden spars fail, it was the carpenter and selected seamen who fashioned new ones and sent them aloft by tramping around the deck capstan. Damaged ironwork was renewed by the blacksmith. If the ship was dismasted, it took all hands to jury rig what was left and get her to port. It was said that the windjammer sailor had to be as strong as an ox and as agile as a cat.

Seamen who sailed the world were shellbacks who crossed the equator many times manning merchant ships and whalers. Along the way, they refined the art of knot making and the whaler's art of scrimshaw. The 19th century seaman spent most of his time at sea; few had homes ashore. Yet, as vital as the professional seaman was to earning a profit, owners and captains routinely exploited their most valuable commodity through poor pay and living conditions.

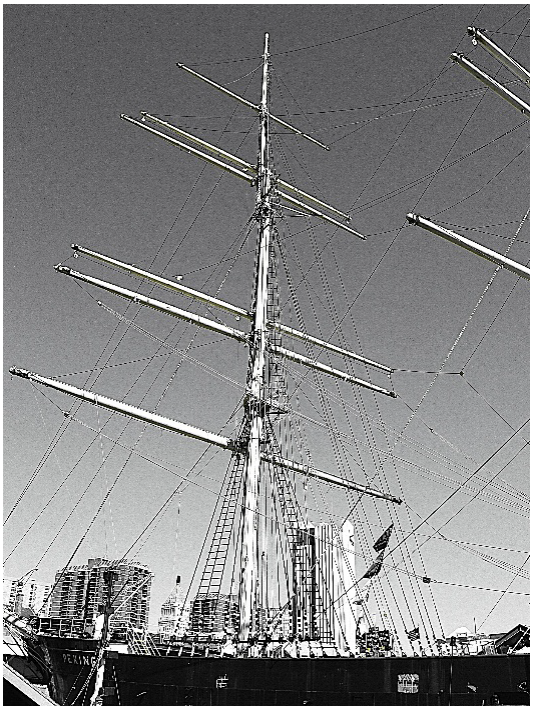


Some mariner ropework:
1.Yarn knot, 2. Manrope knot, 3. Granny knot,
4. Wall & crown, 5. Matthew Walker, 6. Shroud knot,
7. Turk's head, 8. Overhand knot, 9. Reef or square knot,
10. Two half hitches
Credit: Wikipedia

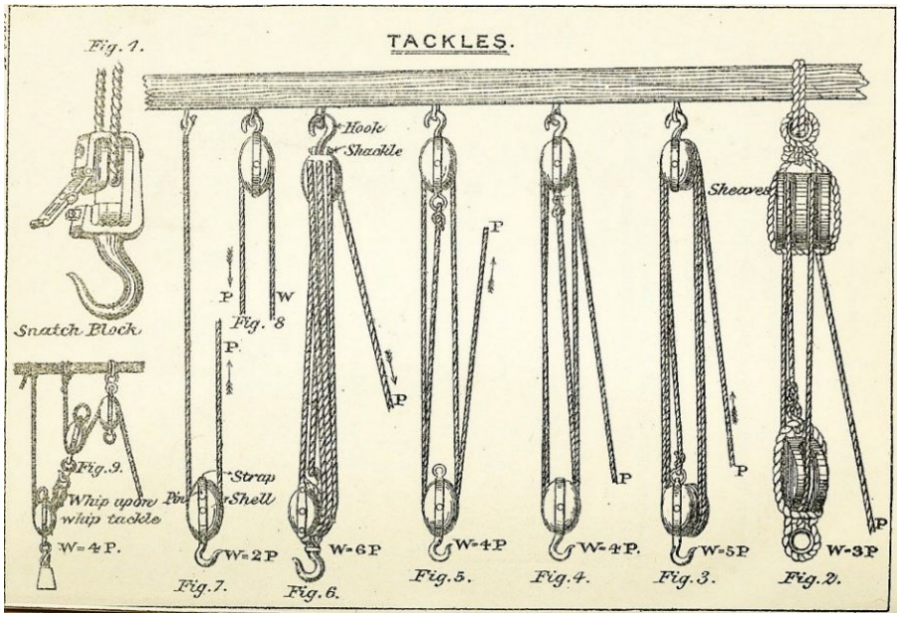
Whaler's scrimshaw depicting the whaler Susan off the coast of Japan
Credit: Wikimedia

MARLINGSPIKE SEAMANSHIP

Marlingspike seamanship is the all-encompassing care and maintenance of the ship's complex standing and running rigging where a close knowledge of rope and how it behaves is essential. The heavy standing rigging, as its name implies, is fixed and supports the masts in three directions: port, starboard and ahead. The pliable running rigging is lighter and is traditionally made from manila or hemp fibers. It "runs"; that is, it goes through blocks with sheaves (pulleys). Rope is referred to in one of two ways. Finished rope is received from the rope walk, where the fibers are spun and twisted and compacted into a tight, stacked coil. Once the coil is "broken." a portion cut from the coil is a length of line. The lines are "made up" and rove into tackles that provide mechanical advantage. Filled with wind, and with the ship running heavily, the crew's muscles need all the help they can get to handle and "trim" the heavy spars.

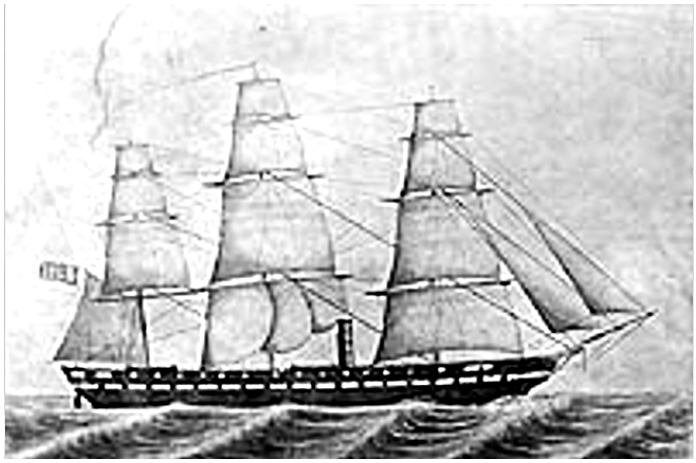


Wire rope standing rigging, 1911 German bark Peking. Note yards that carried sails crossing the vertical mast
Credit: Author

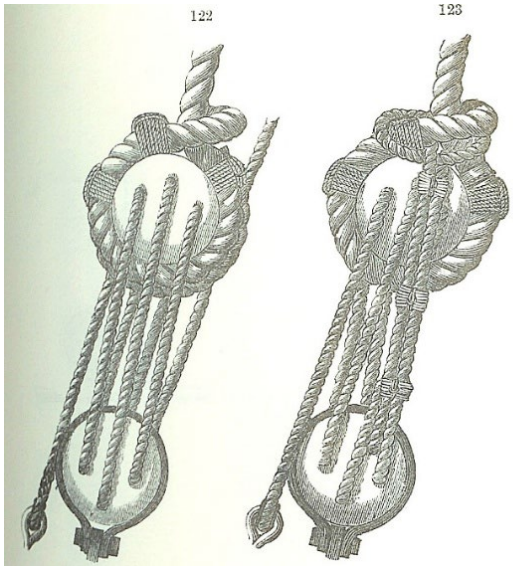


Running rigging (blocks & tackles)
Credit: British manual of military engineering (1905)

Standing rigging is divided into shrouds, backstays and forestays. Shrouds are provided with ratlines tied between the shrouds for the crew to climb aloft. Forestays and backstays support the mast fore and aft, respectively. Fiber rope was used for standing rigging for centuries, the ends secured to the side of the ship by deadeyes and lanyards. These were round wooden blocks with holes to accept several parts of hemp rope working together as a lanyard. In 1831, German mining engineers perfected wire drawing and developed spiral stranded wire rope for use in their silver mines. Wire standing rigging was immensely strong and was one-third lighter than hemp rigging for equivalent strength. In America, John Roebling (civil engineer who designed and built the Brooklyn Bridge) and his mechanics launched a series of experiments with machine-made ropes, looking for a way to make strands that were stronger and more efficient. In the 1850s, seeking to expand the use of his product, he tried to have the U.S. Navy rig its new steam screw frigates, Minnesota and Merrimack, with his wire rope. The Navy, traditionally conservative, had little interest in substituting wire for hemp rigging, but by 1865, tests showed the superiority of wire rigging. By the next decade, nearly every ship in the Navy and new merchant ships were rigged with Roebling wire.



Screw frigate Merrimack
Credit: Wikipedia



Deadeyes and lanyards for hemp standing rigging
Credit: Textbook of Seamanship

Steel standing rigging with seized ends (seizings picked out in white)
Credit: Author

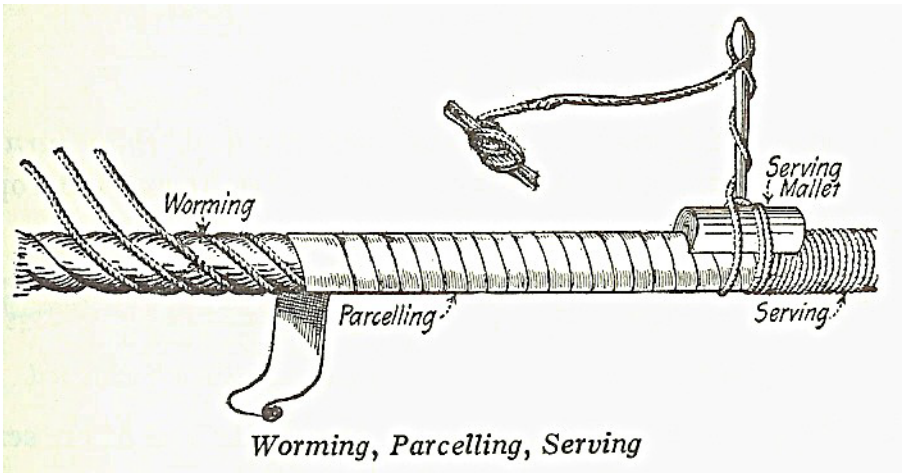
In both hemp and wire rope rigging, the lengths were simply looped and seized (bound together) around the mast. The terminal ends of the wires need special attention. Wire rope ends were generally secured in one of two ways, seized or spliced. Seizing secures the wire back to itself using smaller steel “seizing” wire. Splicing, on the other hand, weaves the strands back into each other.

Seizing wire to itself
Credit: Mr. John Atkinson

Splicing, weaving the wire into itself using a marlinspike
Credit: Mr. John Atkinson

To protect steel standing rigging, the wires are served (or serviced); that is, prepared with tar and wrapped with tar-soaked canvas and small fiber line continuously wrapped tightly around the wire. Once tightly served, all was coated with tar or blacking, a mix of tar and black paint. If the wire is

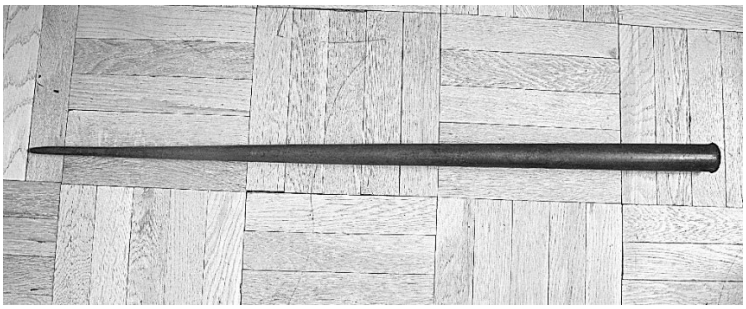
seized, the seizings are picked out with white paint to be visible at night in case they begin to shift or give way.



Process of worming, parcelling and serving
Credit: Sea Officer's Sheet Anchor

Serving with a mallet
Credit: Mr. John Watson

To splice heavy wire rope, a 42" long steel marlingspike is needed. The spike has a specially shaped tip, somewhat flat and tapered, so the built-in tension of the wire won't "spit out" the spike. The spike is inserted between the strand of the wire in a certain pattern and the loose, or working, strands worked in and "rolled" down and seated against the preceding strands. When completed, the splice is tapered and protected, as is the rest of the wire with worming, parcelling and serving.



42" steel marlinspike for large wire rope
Credit: Author

Sending aloft a spliced wire rope cap stay with throat seizing and service
Credit: Author

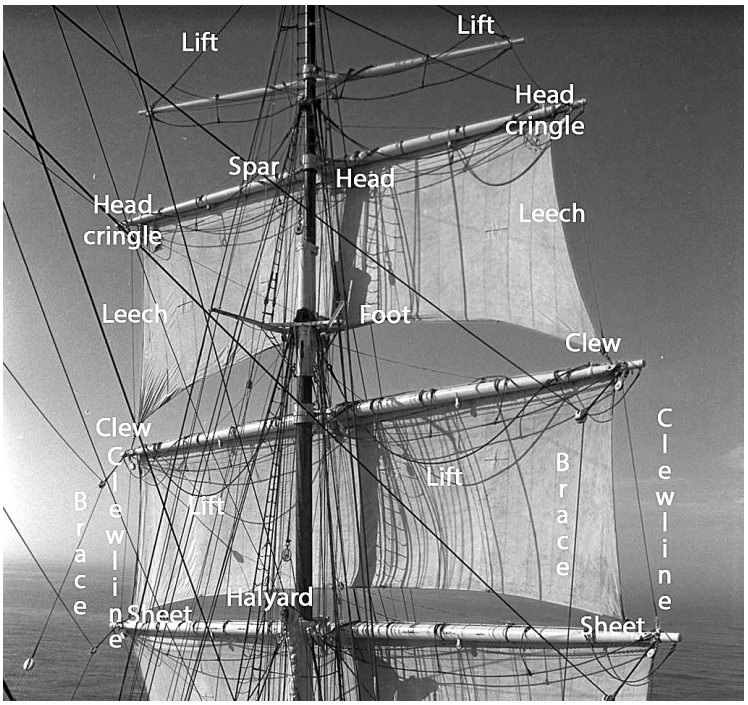
The skills acquired by the windjammer seaman served him well when, or if, he shifted to steamships. With the rapid change in technology and economics, the transition from sail to steam was inevitable. Those who made the change when windjammers were still holding their own were said to be "leaving the sea and going into steam" by their shipmates. The long twilight of

deepwater sail lasted until the first world war, when over 2,000 were sunk, mostly by submarines. By the late 1930s, their numbers dwindled to 13, and several lingered until the end of World War 2. No longer economically viable, the demands these ships put on their crews were considered essential to make good sailors. After the war, former commercial windjammers were converted into training ships to teach a new generation of deepwater sailors.

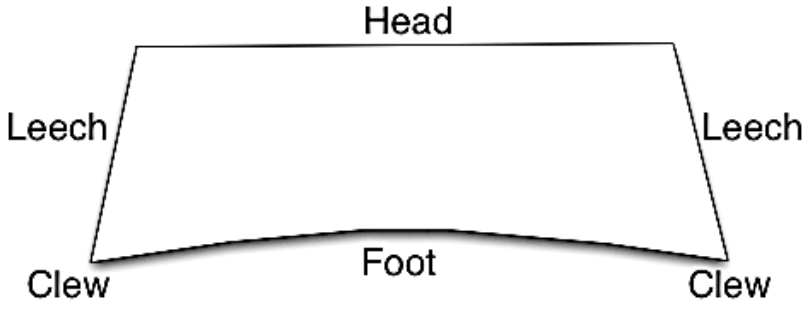
SAILMAKING

Hand in glove with marlingspike seamanship was the practical art of sailmaking. A windjammer's sails propelled ship and cargo through the seas of the world and needed constant attention and care. Newer sails were set for harsh conditions found in stormy northern and southern latitudes while older canvas was set in the more placid Trade Winds, areas of the globe just north and south of the equator. The entire suit of sails was usually swapped out as the ship approached and departed these areas.

Much of the canvas material for sails was supplied by Francis Webster & Sons of Arbroath, located on the northwestern corner of Scotland. Webster's 24 (24 inches, the width of the cloth) standard flax cloth was used to make new sails and repair damaged ones. The canvas came in various widths and 40-yard bolts, or lengths. When using Webster's 24, the sailmaker had to calculate how many vertical cloths, or panels, the sail would require. The edges of each cloth and the perimeter of the sail (called the skirt) were hemmed or tabled. This tabling strengthened the canvas to accept the bolt rope, also sewed into the sail's perimeter, that further bolstered the canvas. Steel or iron rings were fitted to the lower corners or clews and to each end of the head of the sail. The head of the sail was fitted with grommets, or eyelets, to accept robands (lashings made from strands of fiber line) to lash the head of the sail to jackstays, steel bars that ran along the top of the yards. The vertical cloths had the lower ends cut to an angle, or a gore, the longest side of one cloth being the shorter side of its neighbor. This gave the sail its horizontal curve or roach at the foot of the sail. The largest flax sails on a big windjammer could weigh more than a ton, and much more when wet.



Windjammer foremast and yards
Credit: Wikimedia Commons

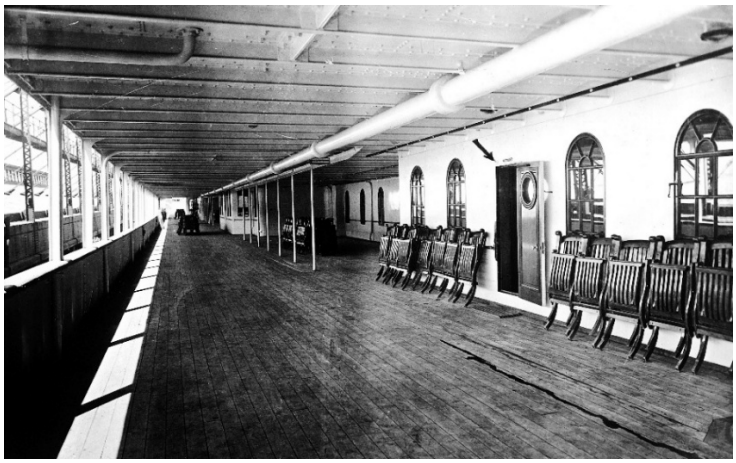


Parts of a square sail
Credit: Wikimedia Commons

NEW RESPONSIBILITIES

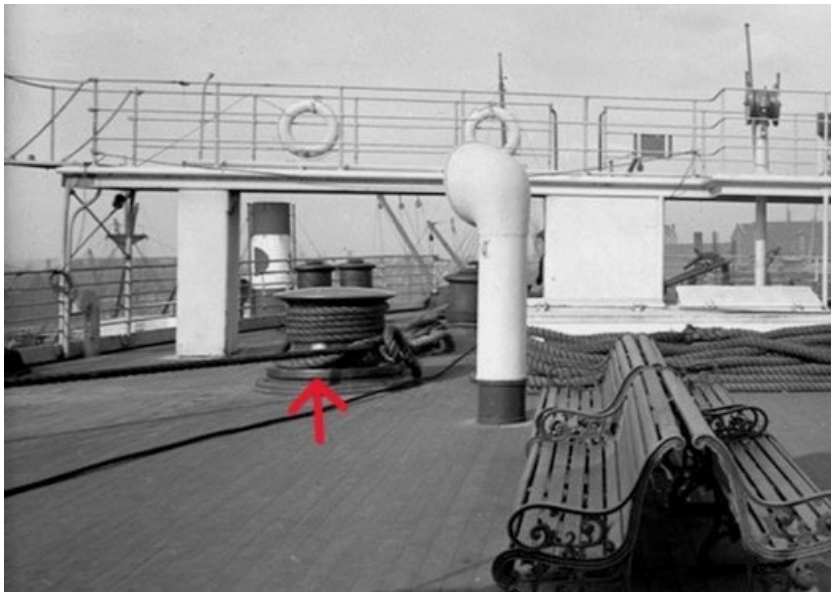
Steamships had different working arrangements and labor needs than the deepwater sailing vessel. No longer required to go aloft and handle sails, seamen sewed and installed canvas awnings to provide shade, rigged cargo booms, kept rust at bay, painted the ship and, on the large liners, maintained a spotless environment.

Cargo ships 1927 Port of Adelaide
Credit: Wikipedia

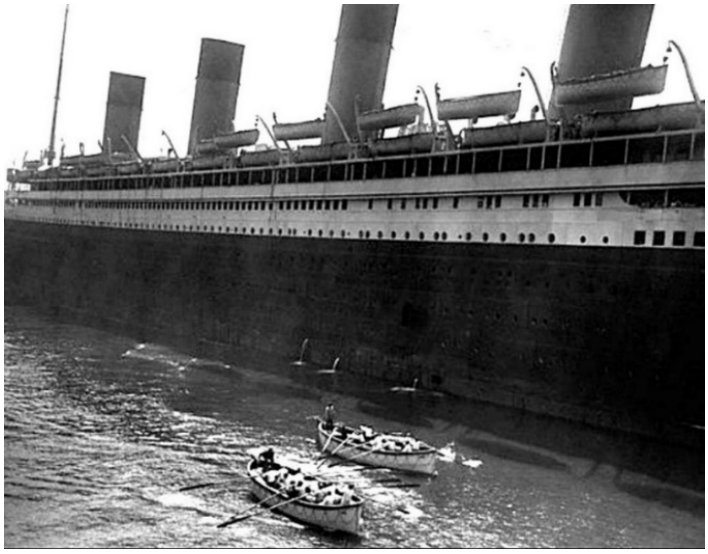


RMS Olympic promenade deck
Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Upon entering and leaving port, the deck seamen had to send over heavy dock lines and, when fast to the shore, take them up on powerful steam capstans, essentially a vertical winch, to secure the ship in her berth. In the event of trouble, under direction of the officers, they had to load, lower and handle lifeboats filled with passengers, keeping them calm and safe until rescued—the most important duty they had to fulfill.



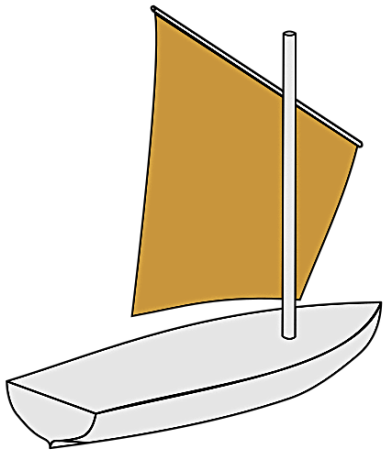
Olympic quarter deck. Starboard side capstan (red arrow) with mooring line around capstan barrel
Credit: Wikimedia commons



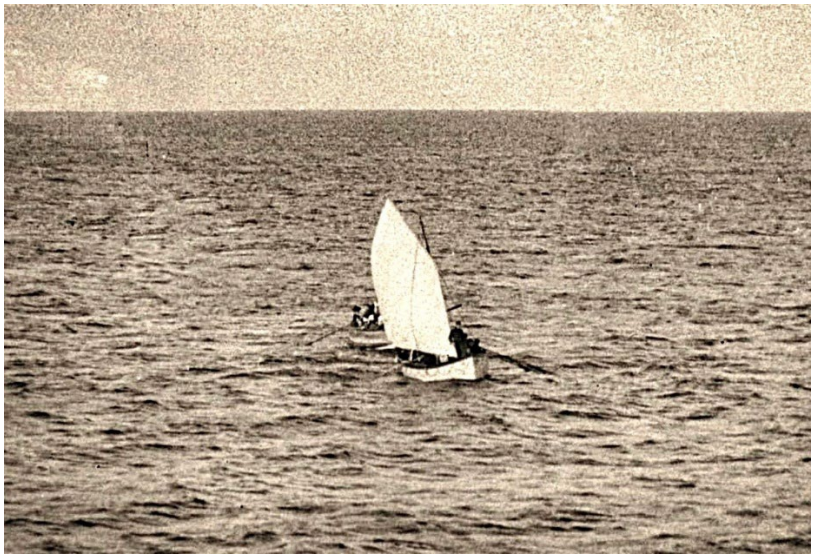
RMS Olympic lifeboat drill (post Titanic)
Credit: Unknown

To retrieve the lifeboats, deck winches were placed at strategic locations about the boat deck. Titanic's lifeboats were equipped with oars, mast, lug (spar) and sail, a sea anchor to hold the

boat into the sea during rough conditions, bailers, a long tow line called a painter, boat-hook, freshwater tanks, a compass, a lantern, and a watertight box for provisions like biscuits. The boats had to be provisioned prior to launching. The tool they worked with was the new Welin davit.



Lug rig
Credit: Wikimedia Commons

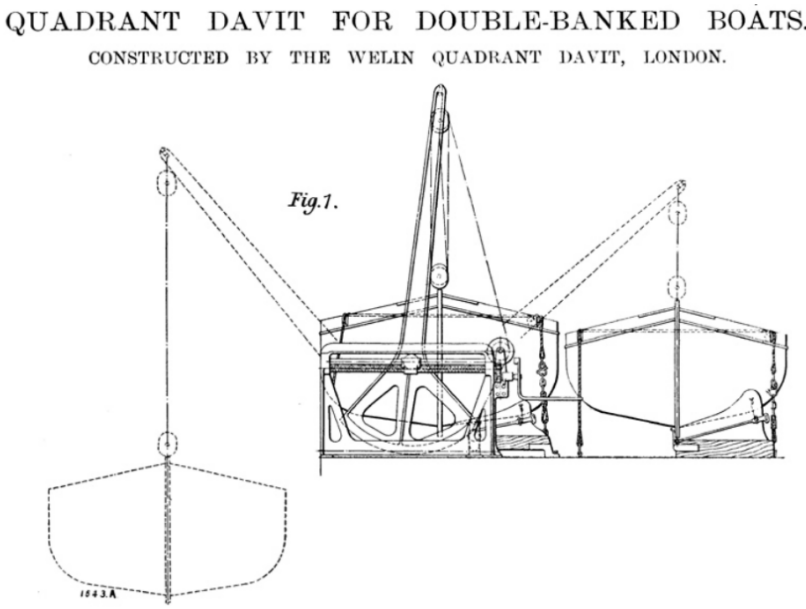


Titanic lifeboat #14 showing lug rig
Credit: unknown

ALEX WELIN

Swedish-born Axel Welin (1862-1951) was a weapons designer for Thorsten Nordenfelt, builders of the widely used Nordenfelt quick-firing naval rifle. He graduated from the Royal Institute of Technology in 1884 and in 1889 founded his engineering company. That same year, he wed Agnes Hedenström (1844-1928). Agnes wanted to be a missionary, but illness prevented her from going to China. She became prominent in London as a missionary to seamen and opened the Scandinavian Seamen's Temperance Hostel in 1888.

Axel Welin
Credit: Wikipedia

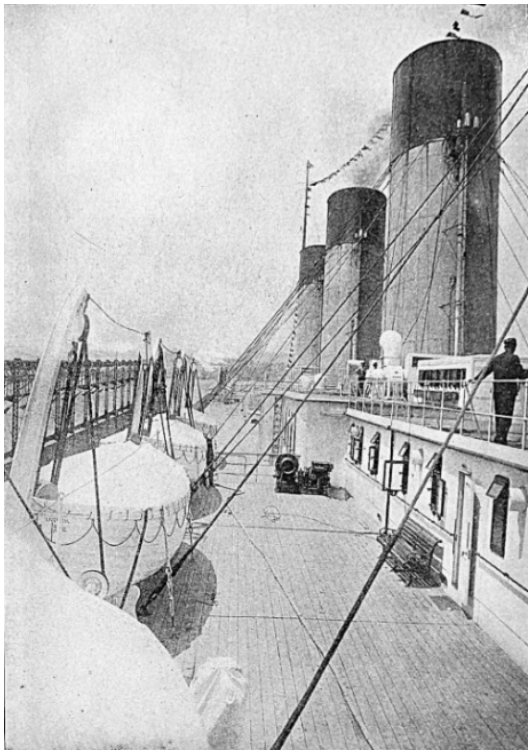


Welin davit showing two boat operation
Credit: Engineering 1910

Famous for designing the Welin breech block for heavy artillery, Welin also had an interest in ship davits. The existing radial davits were cumbersome and time-consuming, as the boats had to be pushed and pulled to clear the side of the ship. Welin's new design could stow and launch multiple

boats. However, the new device was expensive, and many shipowners declined to install them; why bother, when there was no existing Board of Trade rule requiring lifeboats for all? Still, the Union Castle Line saw advantages and had the foresight to fit the new davits to their new RMS Balmoral Castle, launched in 1909. Soon, the davits made a larger, yet somewhat limited, appearance on Titanic's sister ship Olympic in 1911. After Titanic sank, demand for Welin's product soared. He was honored by the Franklin Institute and received the John Scott Award in 1911 for inventions that improved the welfare of mankind. Welin returned home to Sweden to retire in 1932.

Welin davits on Balmoral Castle
Credit: Royal Museums Greenwich



Welin davits as fitted on Olympic. The black object is the winch for retrieving the boats.
Credit: Wikimedia

TITANIC BO'SUN, ALFRED NICHOLS

The longstanding quarrels and competition between sailors and engineers from the early days of steam abated and morphed into cooperation. Officers came from the ranks of the seagoing apprentice, shore schools and training ships. The option for those not engaged as an apprentice was to join the Royal Navy to gain seagoing experience and discipline. Those seamen who showed skill and grit rose to be bo'suns. They ran the deck gangs, seamlessly meshed their old traditions into steamships and served with pride in the new express liners crossing the North Atlantic.

Nicknamed for his burly and solid build, Alfred "Big Neck" Nichols (1864-1912) was Titanic's boatswain. Born on July 16, 1864, he was the son of Thomas and Mary Nichols from New South Wales, Australia. Thomas commanded the whaler Aladdin, and the family lived on the small, volcanic and sparsely populated Island of Lord Howe, nearly 400 miles east of the Australian coast. Thomas drank heavily, while Mary was the strict disciplinarian, depriving her sons of a formal education. The aggressive couple dictated how their small community should be governed.

Mary Nichols
Credit: New Australia

Thomas Nichols
Credit: New Australia

The governor of New South Wales appointed retired Royal Navy officer Richard Armstrong to govern the island, but the reaction of the island's inhabitants was anything but welcoming. A crusade led by Alfred's parents and supported by the islanders filed false charges of misconduct, and Armstrong was removed from office. Young Alfred felt strongly that this was an injustice and stood against his parents' plot. Mary assaulted her son with a shovel and threatened to shoot him. The turbulent and dangerous atmosphere was unbearable, and Alfred's brother George helped him escape on a passing ship bound for Sydney. His mother pursued him to the mainland, but Alfred was resolute and stood fast against her threats to make him return home. He entered night school and secured work on the inter-island ferries. Over the next 10 years, Alfred went to sea, eventually arriving in England in the early 1890s. In April 1893, he married Jane Porter (b. 1870), a 23-year-old Scots woman, and the couple had three children. Alfred established himself as a professional seaman and joined White Star. When the company opened their new Southampton ocean terminal in 1907, Alfred and his family relocated. The following year, he joined the Royal Navy Reserve. Recognized for his outstanding abilities and command of his seamen, White Star assigned him as bo'sun aboard their new premier liner RMS Adriatic.

Thrilled with his new assignment, he wrote his aunt and uncle in 1909, "This ship is such a monster that it takes me all my time to keep her in order. Just think, a ship 725 feet long and carrying 25,000 tons it takes me very near the watch to go all around her. I do not know what you people would think if you were to see a ship like this out in Australia." He knew that White Star was building two ships twice as big and wrote, "We have got two new ones, the largest in the world, they are to carry 40,000 tons and be 800 feet long and their names are Titanic and Olympic. I suppose that I shall be transferred to one of them when they are ready so I can say that I am the bosun of the largest ship in the world." Nichols became bosun on Olympic in 1911. He joined Titanic on April 6, 1912, when he was 48 years old. In addition to supervising the deck gang, he was designated an "able officer" and assisted Harland & Wolff's guarantee group and naval architect Thomas Andrews to made certain that all ran smoothly. Nichols's bo'sun's mate was Albert Haines.

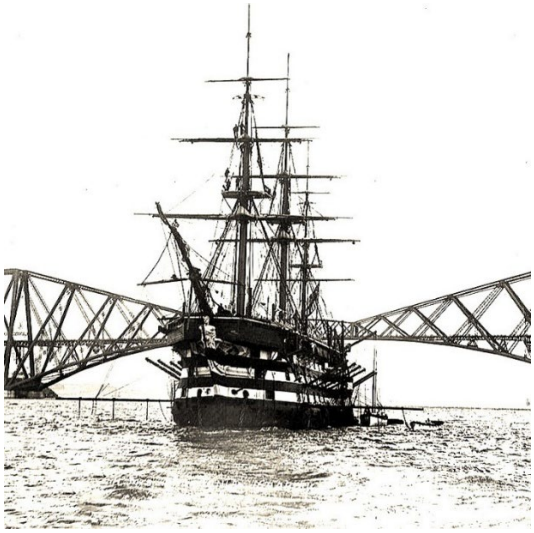
Bo’sun Nichols, Adriatic
Credit: New Australia

RMS Adriatic
Credit: Wikipedia

ALBERT HAINES, BO’SUN’S MATE

Born in 1880, Albert Haines was the son of constable Emmanuel Haines (1853-1914) and Mary Hallett (b. 1847). The couple had a large family; Albert had 10 siblings. He grew up in Kent and joined the Royal Navy in 1896. Albert spent nearly 8 years in a number of stationary training vessels and was discharged in 1904. (The reason is not given, although it may have been a medical issue.) His performance was said to be exceptional, and he became a seaman in the merchant service. He was well disciplined and steady and sported anchor and heart tattoos on his arms.

Bo’sun’s mate Albert Haines
Credit: BoT identity card



Royal Navy training ship HMS Caledonia (ex-Impregnable). Credit: Wikipedia

He joined White Star and, along with Alfred Nichols, was assigned to Olympic as bo’sun’s mate. Haines was transferred to Titanic a week before she began her trials at Belfast and made the ship’s first passage to Southampton. He officially signed articles for Titanic on April 6. Haines was second in command of Titanic’s 31 seamen, seven quartermasters, six lookouts (keen eyesight

was a requirement), two window cleaners, a storekeeper, lamp trimmer and carpenter. The deck gang also had two mess stewards. There were two master-at-arms, basically policemen who worked with Chief Officer Henry Wilde. They had access to the ship's firearms and kept troublemakers in line. While entering or leaving harbor, Haines was stationed aft on the quarterdeck with his men to handle docklines and capstans and take lines from the berthing tugs. The deck seamen were divided into two watches, port and starboard. Haines ran the starboard watch. Along with Nichols, Haines readied the crew for their duties, their medical inspections and test-lowered the boats under the purview of the Board of Trade inspectors. They then busied themselves with keeping a watchful eye on the stevedores loading cargo, boarding passengers and loading the last of the provisions for the maiden voyage.

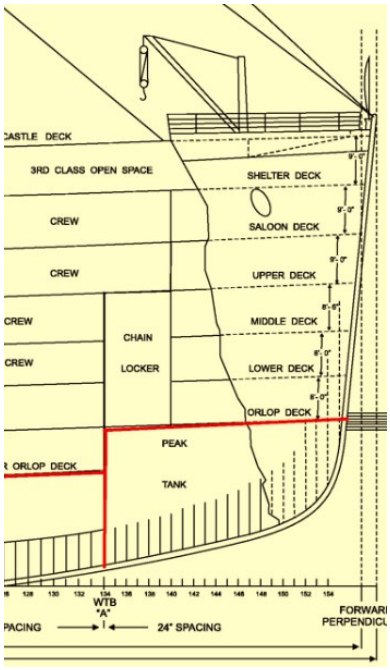
Unidentified seaman on Titanic's A deck under the navigating bridge
Credit: Wikimedia Commons

After stops in Cherbourg and Queenstown, Titanic set a course for New York, expecting to arrive on April 17, 5 days away. Settling into their new ship, the next several days were taken up with round-the-clock duties and watchkeeping. Each morning, the crew leaders would meet with Captain Edward Smith to learn of the day's events and duties. On Sunday, April 14, Smith led religious services for the first-class passengers, followed by a boat station training drill for the crew. The drill never happened.

THE MAIDEN VOYAGE

On the night of April 14, the starboard watch was on duty from 8 pm until midnight. Being a quiet Sunday night, their duties were relaxed and included staying awake in case they were needed. Midnight was approaching, and with their watch nearly over, they looked forward to turning in. Along with his mates, Haines was under the raised foredeck, likely in the crew's mess or galley.

A loud bang and heavy shudder shattered the quiet and stunned the crew. Almost immediately, Haines heard a hissing sound and traced the source to the forepeak tank vent; water was entering so fast, it was rapidly displacing the air.

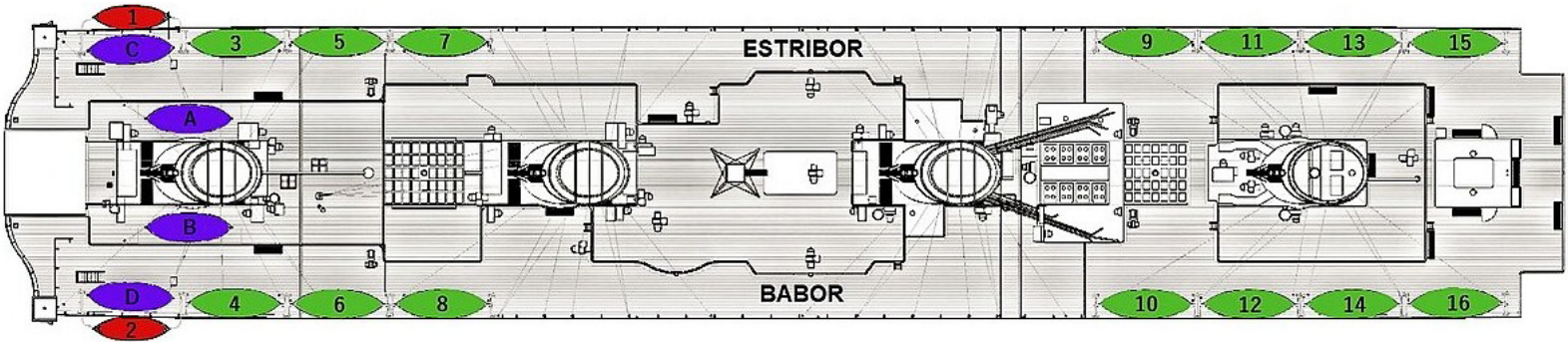


Forepeak tank
Credit: Titanic deck plans

In a few moments, Chief Officer Wilde and lamp trimmer Samuel Hemming began their inspection, then returned to the bridge to report to Captain Smith. The forepeak, the space above the peak tank, was still dry. When Haines turned to check No. 1 hatch, he saw the tarpaulin cover ballooning out from the air being forced out from the rush of rising water below. He went to the bridge, informed Wilde and was told to muster the crew, uncover the boats and swing them out.

Bo'sun Nichols wasn't timid about rousing out those off watch. Flinging open the door to their quarters, he bellowed, "Turn out, you fellows. You haven't half an hour to live. That is from Mr. Andrews. Keep it to yourselves and let no one know." Having a close working relationship with Thomas Andrews, he likely was aware of the severity of the damage.

STARBOARD



PORT

Bo'sun Nichols was assigned to boat #7; Bo'sun's mate Haines was assigned to boat #9
Credit: Wikimedia Commons

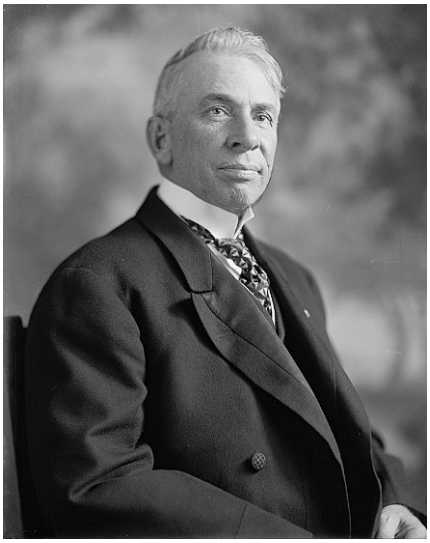
Nichols appeared to be everywhere at once. Knowing he was in a race against time to get boats loaded and launched, he rapidly assigned his crew to man the boats and get them provisioned with biscuits. Chief baker Charles Joughin had his staff gather up loaves of bread to augment the lifeboat rations. Lamp trimmer Samuel Hemmings put lanterns and oil into the boats.

Although assigned to take charge of starboard side boat #7, Nichols loaded and launched boats #3 and #5 5 minutes apart, although the boats were not loaded to capacity. He worked with First Officer William McMaster Murdoch, who organized the starboard side boat evacuation. Of the 18 boats launched (collapsibles A and B floated off the ship, and Second Officer Charles Lightoller took charge of overturned collapsible B while in the water), only three had junior officers in command: 3rd Third Officer Herbert Pitman, Fourth Officer Joseph Boxhall, and Fifth Officer Harold Lowe. The rest were run by quartermasters and seamen. Launching the boats commenced at about 12:45 am, more than an hour after the collision. Fourth Officer Boxhall and Quartermaster George Rowe began firing distress rockets from a special launching socket on the rail between #1 boat and the starboard bridge wing.

A little after 1:00 am, Nichols went to the port side to assist Second Officer Lightoller. Confusion reigned with where to load the boats. Lightoller, apprehensive about the load-bearing capacity of the lifeboat davits, falls and the strength of the boats themselves, wanted to lower partially filled boats and send them to one of the gangway doors in the ship's side. He dispatched Nichols and six seamen to open the E-Deck gangway door, now very close to the water. Lightoller also lowered boat #4, the second boat aft on the port side, to A Deck, one deck below the boat deck, to load it there. The forward half of A deck side screen was fitted with slide-down windows, but passengers had to climb up, over and out to reach the boat. All this took time, and passengers stood about waiting and baffled. This was the last time Lightoller saw Nichols.

In the post disaster American hearings, Lightoller's less than forthright testimony came under suspicion by Senator William Smith. Unlike those who conducted the British Inquiry, Smith wasn't charmed by Lightoller and felt he was covering for White Star. Smith's mistrust was justified. In his autobiography, "Titanic and Other Ships," Lightoller stated that "It was very necessary to keep one's hand on the whitewash brush" and wrote, "Sharp questions that needed careful answers if one was to avoid a pitfall … leading to a pinning down of blame onto someone's luckless shoulders." He added, "I had no desire that blame should be attributed to the Board of Trade or the White Star Line, though in all conscience it was a difficult task."

Charles Lightoller in naval uniform
Credit: Wikipedia



Senator William Smith
Credit: Wikipedia

Nichols was later seen by saloon steward Johnstone (aka Johnson). While preparing boat #2, the port side emergency boat, Nichols encouraged Johnstone and others to watch for and stay under a certain star to help hold their position. This was more than 30 minutes after Lightoller ordered

Nichols below to open the gangway door. Johnstone helped prepare the boat, making sure the bottom drain plug was screwed in. Fourth officer Boxhall completed firing rockets and took charge of the boat. With the forward boats nearly gone, Nichols went aft to continue in the evacuation. He was purportedly seen by fireman Fred Barrett helping lower aft starboard boats #13 and #15. Nichols was not seen by any survivors after launching these two boats. By this time, Titanic was well down by the bow and people began their retreat to the rising stern. His body was never recovered, and his obituary in an unidentified newspaper read: “NICHOLS--April 15th, 1912, on the s.s. Titanic, Alfred Nichols, the deeply beloved husband of Jane Porter, Mauchline, Ayrshire, Scotland. Deeply mourned by his sorrowing wife and children. Gone but a little time before us. Scotch (sic) and Australian papers please copy.”

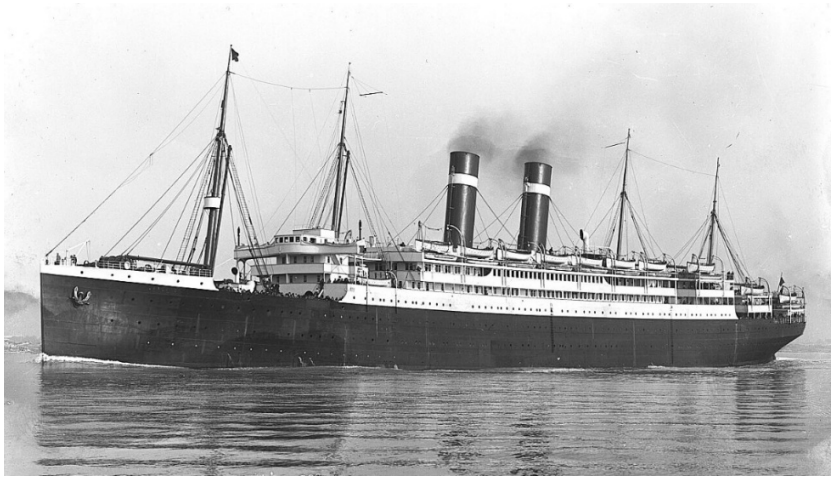
TAKING CHARGE

Once the forward boats were swung out ready to take passengers, Haines manned his station at boat #9 along with his two crew, James McGough and William Peters. First Officer Murdoch gave the order to load and gathered passengers for boat #9. But people were reluctant to leave the bright decks of Titanic to spend a few dark hours in an open boat in the middle of the ocean. Some retreated, and Murdoch loaded a few men when the women refused to budge. The boat was launched, and Haines had the daunting task of keeping his passengers and crew safe in the midst of horrors to come. Haines estimated that he had around 60 people in his boat, but the witness numbers varied greatly. Later records indicated between 30 and 35, far short of its capacity of 65. Chief Purser Hugh McElroy and First Officer Murdoch, assisted by Sixth Officer James Paul Moody, loaded the boat with as many female passengers as were in the area. Murdoch asked, “Any more ladies?” When none came forward, some husbands and crew, mostly stewards and cooks, were allowed to board. Haines felt that more could have entered the boat but said nothing, as he may have been intimidated by the armed Murdoch. Boat #9 was lowered around 1:30 am, and Murdoch ordered Haines to stand by near Titanic in the hope that the boats could soon be retrieved. But once afloat, Haines and his passengers were taken aback by what they saw. Here was the biggest ship in the world, brightly lit, crowded with people and well down by the bow. He prudently took his boat further away, as he knew his ship was doomed.

As Titanic upended, broke up and sank, the cries of those in the water seized Haines. Torn between going back or not, he called his two sailors aft, saying, "There is people in the water." "Do you think it advisable?" "We can't do nothing with this crowd we have in the boat." He later explained to the American Inquiry: “Because we had no room to row, let alone do anything else, sir; and it was no good of our going back. By the time we got back there, we could not have done anything. We could not move in the boat, let alone row. I thought it unsafe to go back there, sir, having so many in the boat." Asked if any of the women in the boat urged to return to the scene, Haines said they did not and the boat lay still. Thinking it futile to row anywhere, Haines felt that letting his boat drift in the vicinity of the disaster would increase their chances of rescue. He kept the boat’s lantern illuminated. The first hints of a pale, mauve dawn appeared and with it the lights of Carpathia. Haines gave the order to row, and boat #9 made its way to the rescue ship. The rising sun illuminated Carpathia and the many large, pale blue icebergs that embraced the sea where Titanic had come racing through only hours earlier.

Titanic’s crew was held in New York pending the US Senate Inquiry. Eager to get them back to England, and resenting American questioning, White Star engaged the Red Star liner Lapland

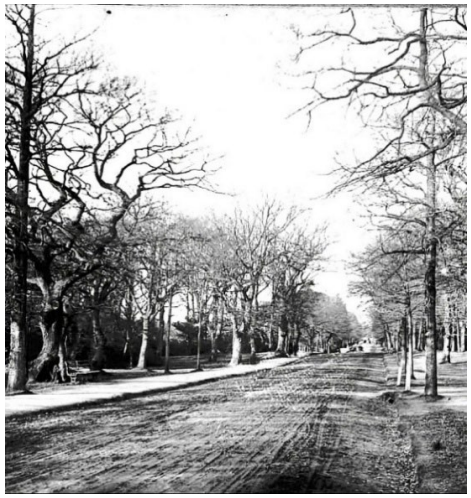
and their own Adriatic to return crew members home. Lapland left New York on April 20, carrying not only crew but the mail bags Titanic was to deliver on the eastward leg of her maiden voyage.



SS Lapland
Credit: Wikipedia

Haines's testimony was taken by US Senator Smith on April 25, and he likely returned aboard Adriatic when she departed New York on May 2. Haines married Florence Southwell (b. 1890) in 1914, and the couple had a son, Ronald Jesse, in 1917. Haines continued serving in the merchant marine until the early 1920s.

On June 6, 1933, when crossing The Avenue in Southampton, Haines was hit by a car and sustained serious injuries. He died in a fire department ambulance on the way to the hospital. He was first buried in an unmarked grave in the Old Common Cemetery in Southampton, but eventually, the plot was identified by a wooden cross. He was 53 years old.



The Avenue in Southampton in the 1800s
Credit: Unknown

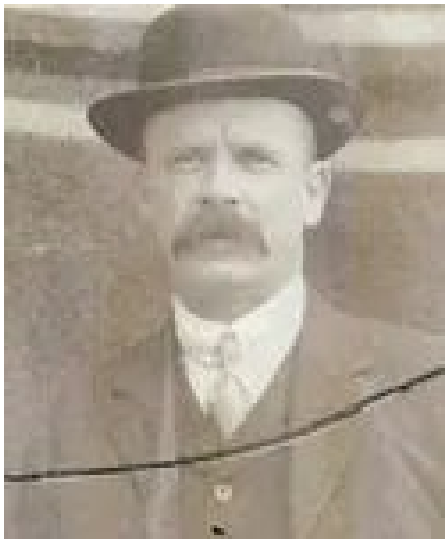
EPILOGUE

On April 15, 700 people found themselves afloat in small boats on a black ocean. It took but little time after Titanic sank for animus to take center stage. Women who had lost husbands resented male passengers and crew (although ordered into the boats) and considered them incompetent cowards, while lauding those men who went down with the ship as heroes. It was a lot for the surviving men to live up to. Women complained of smoking and drinking and in one case snatched away a fireman's whiskey bottle, tossing it overboard. In boat #13, bickering broke out between

a quartermaster and a male passenger as to who was in charge. The women wouldn't have it, asserted themselves and summarily ridiculed and silenced both men. But there were glimmers of chivalry. Fireman Beauchamp, shivering violently in his wet boiler room shirt, was offered a coat but insisted it go to a young Irish girl instead. Expected to exercise command, yet criticized as bungling fools, the crew, with rare exceptions, were as frightened as anyone. Yet, as counterpoint to all the blaming, only two boats, #14 and #4, responded to the haunting wails of those dying in the 28-degree water. Boat #14 reorganized and returned, while #4 was conveniently nearby. Only a pitiful few were retrieved. Those safe in the boats couldn't imagine that more than twice their number were dying within earshot.

A different story played out in boat #8. Two people from very different backgrounds formed a bond that not only saw them through the night but blossomed into a lifelong friendship. Able seaman Thomas Jones spent time in the Royal Navy and became a merchant mariner in 1901, serving for 6 years on White Star's Majestic. Boat #8 had 38 persons on board, including Jones, a steward, one seaman and 35 female passengers. Propelling the boat depended on everyone chipping in. But Jones was in luck. Among his passengers was Lucy Noelle Martha, Countess of Rothes. Lady Rothes was a philanthropist and a generous supporter of the Red Cross and other charities. She had boarded Titanic at Southampton, accompanied by her cousin and maid. They were bound to Vancouver, BC, Canada. Lady Rothes was a skilled yachting sailor and informed Jones that she could steer. There was a shortage of hands available for rowing, so Jones swapped places and placed her in charge of the tiller. Such was his admiration that he later wrote, "I was in command, but I had to row, and I wanted someone at the tiller. And I saw the way she was carrying herself, and I heard the quiet, determined way she spoke to the others, and I knew she was more of a man than any we had on board." He shared the oar with another woman who pulled for hours and suggested singing to keep sprits up. Some women fell into despair and began screaming for their husbands. Lady Rothes gave the tiller to her cousin to comfort a woman in need and later wrote, "When the awful end came, I tried my best to keep the Spanish woman from hearing the agonizing sound of distress. They seemed to continue forever, although it could not have been more than 10 minutes until the silence of a lonely sea dropped down. The indescribable loneliness, the ghastliness of our feelings never can be told… poor woman! Her sobs tore our hearts and her moans were unspeakable in their sadness." Jones, Lady Rothes and two others wanted to return to the scene and attempt a rescue but were overruled by the rest of those in the boat.

Lucy Noelle Martha, Countess of Rothes
Credit: Wikipedia



Able Seaman Thomas Jones
Credit: Wikipedia

Once launched, boat #8 rowed towards the lights of what appeared to be a ship in the distance. Their progress was futile, and they became separated from the other boats. When dawn came, they saw Carpathia steaming to Titanic's position, changed course and headed in her direction, getting picked up around 7:30 am. It was a long night at the oars.

The graceful and elegant Lady Rothes shied away from the limelight, giving all credit to Jones and the other women in the boat. To note their time together, she gave him a silver fob watch with the engraving: "April 15th, 1912, from the Countess of Rothes." He responded with a thank you letter appreciating the honor of the gift and, "May I say how much service you rendered myself and others by your example and courage under so heart-rending circumstances. I shall always treasure your kind gift as my priceless possession."

For his part, Jones removed the "8" from lifeboat #8, mounted it on a wooden plaque and sent it off to Lady Rothes. Her cousin, who also was in the boat, expressed her thanks for his courage. "I feel I must write and tell you how splendidly you took charge of our boat on the fatal night...The dreadful regret I shall always have, and I know you share with me, is that we ought to have gone back to see whom we could pick up… but everyone forward and the three men refused; but I shall always remember your words: "Ladies, if any of us are saved, remember, I wanted to go back. I would rather drown with them than leave them.' You did all you could, and being my own countryman, I wanted to tell you this. Yours very truly, Gladys Cherry."

Thomas Jones and Lady Rothes corresponded until her death at age 77 in 1956. Jones passed away 11 years later at age 89. To keep alive the story of the sailor and the countess, Lady Rothes's great granddaughter Angela Young preserved the correspondence between the two friends and visited Jones's daughter Nell to share the collection. In 2021, The Liverpool Maritime Museum exhibited a permanent memorial to able seaman Jones.

Sources: British and American Wreck Inquires (1912); Nicholl's Seamanship and Nautical Knowledge (1959) by Capt. H. H. Brown, Extra Master; Venetian Navigators (2011) by Andrea Di Robilant; The Way of a Ship (1953) & The War with Cape Horn (1971) by Alan Villiers; The Last Grain Race (1956) & Windjammer (1968 photographic record) by Eric Newby; The Tall Ships Pass (1937) by W.L.A. Derby; Guide to the Crew of the Titanic (2017) by Gunter Babler; Manual of Military Engineering (1905, British text book) Wikipedia; NY Herald; Titanic and Other Ships by Charles Lightoller; Drents Museum, Netherlands; The Young Sea Officer's Sheet Anchor (1760) by Darcy Lever; The Liverpool Echo (newspaper); The Only Way to Cross by John Maxtone-Graham; A Night to Remember by Walter Lord; Anglo-Swedish Society; BBC. Photographs of Mr. John Atkinson & the author

In memory of Lars Hansen, Edmond Moran and Steven Giese