

## Tragedy at Sea: Southampton's Connection to the Titanic

**Intro:** Welcome to Hampshire HistBites. Join us as we delve into the past and go on a journey to discover some of the county's best and occasionally unknown history. We'll be speaking to experts and enthusiasts, asking them to reveal some of our hidden heritage, as well as share with you a few fascinating untold stories.

**Julie:** *Southampton's Great Sorrow*. This was the headline of a newspaper on 17th of April 1912, and it refers to the tragedy of the Titanic which sank only a couple of days before.

Hello and welcome to this week's episode of Hampshire HistBites. I'm Julie Dypdal and my guest today is Mary Taylor, a Southampton tourist guide. Photos, and other resources such as a map can be found on our website, [www.winchesterheritageopendays.org](http://www.winchesterheritageopendays.org). In today's episode, we will explore Southampton's Titanic connections by taking you on a trail through the city, exploring places and stories linked to the Titanic. But let's start with a reminder of the events that occurred in April, 1912.

**Mary:** So Thursday the 4th of April 1912, the Titanic arrives from Belfast shipyard. The first captain of the Titanic was Captain Haddock. Now don't you think that's a lovely name? He was a local man. He actually lived in Southampton, he lived in the Bitterne area.

**Julie:** Oh, okay.

**Mary:** So the crew sign on and it's Easter weekend, so everybody's really happy. There'd been a coal strike and many of the men had been out of work for many months. And the people that worked on the ships were normally very poor people, so to have a new ship arriving and sailing out was amazing.

So Wednesday 10th of April 1912 it's 12noon sailing. But when the Titanic left, she displaced so much water that when the engine started up the SS New York was nearby and she broke her mooring and she swung out. And literally she was between four and six feet away from the Titanic, for a collision. So that was so fortunate, however, that was seen as an unlucky omen.

**Julie:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Mary:** It did delay the departure by an hour. Again, that wasn't good because they were sailing late. So the 10th of April at 5:13, they stop in Cherbourg and they're picking up the Europeans that are going on to the New World. And then the 11th of April, they stop at Queenstown. Now, Queenstown was the old name for Cobh, which is COBH, in Ireland and that's where all the Irish immigrants actually boarded. And then Sunday the 14th of April at 11:40, the ship strikes an iceberg. And on Monday the 15th of April 1912 at 2:20 the Titanic sinks.

Now you might think that's quite quick. It's not quick at all for a ship to go down, in all honesty. There is a local ship, which was the SS Stella and that sank within 30 minutes.

**Julie:** Really?

**Mary:** Yeah. So we had two and a bit hours, really, didn't we? Before the ship went down. Approximately 1,517 people lost their lives out of 2,223 passengers and crew. There were approximately 706 survivors and they were rescued by the Cunard ship, the Carpathia, and that was at 4:10, so it's about two hours after. You've got to remember the waters are very cold, they're very icy. So if anyone had gone into the water, they would get hypothermia and they would die quite quickly.

Over 550-ish of the crew who died were Southampton residents.

**Julie:** The Titanic trail begins at Holyrood Church, located in the High Street of Southampton. The name Holyrood actually means Holy Cross. The church was bombed during the blitz of World War II, and today the ruins serve as a Memorial to the Merchant Navy.

**Mary:** We're standing at Holyrood Church now, and this is one of the oldest churches within the town walls. There were five original churches. To your right, you can see a water fountain. It's a stone water fountain, and at the top you can see in relief the figure of the Titanic, and this was actually paid for by the wives and the female members of the families of the stokers, the firemen and the trimmers that went down with the ship, but they wanted a memorial to actually commemorate, you know, those lives that were lost.

It wasn't actually sited in Holyrood originally, it was sited in Shirley. Because of vandalism, they had to move it. Also, we can see where the altar would have been. It's a rood screen. But this rood screen is beautifully decorated with storm petrels. And it said that they're taking the souls of the sailors up to heaven. There are listening posts there to do with the Titanic because the Lottery Heritage Fund actually financed some listening posts, and they are either the survivors of the Titanic or family members who lost others within the ship but memories of the time in Southampton when the whole town stopped. If we were in 1912, and just after we received news the Titanic had sunk and we've lost many of our townsfolk, the town was silent. All the shops were closed. All the shutters were down. There were flags at half-mast. Nothing was open and it was eerie, eerily quiet, because we didn't know quite what had happened and who had survived, but the town was devastated by losing so many of their own people.

It used to be in the Northern School, that if your father had gone down with the ship, you received a little doll to commemorate this. But because there was so many children who had lost their fathers, they didn't have enough dolls, so they couldn't do that.

**Julie:** That's actually really heart-breaking.

**Mary:** Oh, that is absolutely. Something else, which you may or may not know is that when the ship goes down the salary stops, and that's only just recently changed. That's maritime law. That's always been maritime law as soon as the ship went down, so at 2:20, everybody's wages stopped.

**Julie:** In 1912, there was no welfare state, so the Titanic Relief Fund was created. This meant that widows received half wages plus extra for their children. The Southampton office was located in

Portland Street, just up the road from the High Street in Southampton. Mary tells us a story about the lady in charge of the relief fund.

**Mary:** There's a lady called Miss Ethel Maude Newman and she was put in charge of the Fund. And she lived in the Hawthorns Cottage on the Common, now it's a Hawthorns Study Centre, but she had a little cottage up there, but she was very draconian. Basically, if you were a lady, and you'd lost your husband, you know, with the sinking of the Titanic and you happen to start up a friendship with another gentleman, she stopped your money. If you were a lady and might have frequented one of the many public houses or inns or taverns in Southampton, she would stop your money. She was very much black and white.

The actual Titanic fund was only wound up in 1959. So it went for a long time, so the direct descendants, you know, like the children of those that perished, and she was paid a hundred pounds a year plus expenses.

**Julie:** That's quite a lot for that time.

**Mary:** It was, and she died in 1940.

**Julie:** Moving on from Holyrood Church, we continue down the High Street, discovering that heritage is still present, if we just look up.

**Mary:** If we walk down the High Street, you go past a public house on your left-hand side, which is called the Red Lion. Next door but one to the Red Lion is an Indian restaurant and if you look above the Indian restaurant, you will see some beautiful tiling. It's green. It's white. It's burgundy and there's fruit in the tiles. So there's grapes, there's bananas, and there is also the initials O and W, and this stands for Oakley and Watling, and they were fruiterers, and they supplied the fruit to the Titanic.

So the cost of actually going on board the Titanic, if you wanted a first-class cabin, you would pay in 1912, £30 and the approximate cost would be £2,500<sup>1</sup>. And if you wanted a second-class cabin, you would pay £12 in 1912, and that's about a thousand pounds in today's currency. And if you wanted a third-class cabin, you would pay between £3 and £8, and that's the equivalent to about £250 to £600.

**Julie:** That's quite a lot of money.

**Mary:** It's a lot of money, but the suites were beautiful, absolutely beautiful.

**Julie:** You can find several monuments and memorials linked to the Titanic. But there's one in particular, which carries an interesting tale.

**Mary:** Now, I can talk about the wonderful James Cameron, Leonardo DiCaprio, Kate Winslet film. Now we know James Cameron came to Southampton. He was the director. So there's a wonderful one

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<sup>1</sup> Conversion to current prices can only ever be approximate, but these figures give an idea of the relative costs for the different grades of accommodation. The cost of a suite would have been in the region of £65,000.

at the top of the Above Bar, near the Cenotaph, and that is in Andrews Park. It's for the Engineer Officers, not the engineers, but for the Engineer Officers. It's a beautiful memorial and has got a beautiful angel in the front with outstretched wings, and we say that James Cameron saw that particular memorial, looked at it and thought that'd be lovely, what we'll do is we'll get Kate to stand at the bow of the ship. Well, if it's not, if they didn't pinch that idea, I don't know, but I think it's a good story anyway. There is also, whilst you're up there, and you might not have seen it, across the road, so you've got London Road and then at the corner of London Road you've got the Musician's Memorial. That's been re-sited a few times because of all the bombing in Southampton. But yes, so it's a memorial to the musicians because they were playing as the ship went down.

**Julie:** From the High Street, we take a left turn into what is today known as Briton Street, where J. Dawson once lived. You might recognize the name, but here's Mary's story.

**Mary:** So across the road was where Joseph Dawson lived. Across the road there's some flats, and they've got names of ships and one of them is called Carpathia Court. So the Carpathia was the Cunard ship that came to the rescue of the Titanic and it was captained by Captain Arthur Rostron. And he was a local man. So the call went out. So it was CQD was the distress signal first, 'cause that was the usual maritime signal to say ship is in distress, but they used the Morse code signal, the SOS for the first time. That was the very first time it was used. But the Carpathia wasn't the nearest ship. They were actually travelling in the other direction. So obviously the Titanic's going towards the States, the Carpathia is coming from the States. So they're not near, so that's why it took them another two hours to get to them. But there was another ship called the SS Californian. So the Californian was sending messages to the Titanic saying there's icebergs ahead. And the Titanic radio operators were saying "Don't tell us about the icebergs. We're trying to send these telegrams to the States." So all the first class passengers were saying to the telegram operators "Send this telegram."

In 1912 news wasn't instant. In 1912, the first news was the Titanic has had a little bit of an accident, but nobody was hurt. Then it was, the Titanic's had a bit of an accident and there's a few people hurt. And then it was, maybe it's a little bit more serious than we originally thought. So it was days before people knew the exact extent of the ship sinking with so many of the town's they were sending out the messages saying there's icebergs in the area and the Titanic said, "Stop, stop sending us messages, 'cause we're trying to get messages to the States to say, for example, Benjamin Guggenheim will be arriving at midday. Please make sure his car's at the dockside, et cetera." So it was that type of message they were sending for the first-class passengers. So it didn't really get picked up that the Titanic was sailing towards the icebergs, they were too busy doing other things, shall we say?

But the other thing was that the maritime law at that time was once the radio operators say 10 o'clock at night, would go to bed. So it wasn't manned 24 hours. So the captain said, "Have you told the Titanic there's icebergs?" They said, "Yes." "Okay. We can't do any more then." And then they saw some white fireworks, they said. And it wasn't white fireworks, it was flares, and they thought that must be the Titanic letting off fireworks. But no, it was the Titanic saying we're in trouble. This is a flare, please come and help us. So they went to bed and then in the morning they realized, they found the SOS message, they realized there's a problem. They're already nearly in Canada. They turn around and come back, but they arrived, I think it was about an hour after the Carpathia.

As soon as the Carpathia received the rescue message, they turned the ship around really quickly and they sailed as quick as they could and put all the power towards the engines. They told all the passengers onboard, this is what we're doing. We're going to try and save as many as we could. Captain Arthur Rostron was actually knighted for his bravery by King George V and he became Sir Arthur Rostron.

Now, James Cameron always said that the character Jack Dawson wasn't based on a real character or a real person from the ship. However, there was a gentleman called Joseph Dawson and he was a medical orderly. He was from Dublin. He'd come over to work in the Royal Victoria Hospital in Netley. And the chap that he was lodging with said, "You know, there's a new ship coming in. You'll make more money if you actually go on board as either a trimmer or a stoker. So why don't you sign up?" So he signed up and he went down with the ship because he was obviously in the engine room when the ship went down. And when his body was recovered, he had all his papers on and the paper said J. Dawson. So when the body was found, if they had the names they made you a gravestone and they put J. Dawson on it. So that's where the J. Dawson comes in and that's in Nova Scotia obviously. And lots of people do visit that grave thinking it is Jack.

**Julie:** Yeah, because there's no actual graves in Southampton or in the UK, which is quite interesting because there's lots of gravestones and memorials around Southampton, but there's no physical remains.

**Mary:** No, there's no physical remains. But when you go into Sea City Museum, you will see lots of artifacts that have been given by family members which are in the cases. And talking about bodies, when the ship went down, the Mackay Bennett, and that was a White Star ship, that was sent to the area to pick up the bodies. But it didn't have enough embalming fluid for everyone. So they could only take some bodies. So the bodies that they picked, and they did pick those bodies, were the ones that were well-dressed and they knew they were wealthy because they knew it might make the handling of the estate better when the wills were read, you know, they've got the body. Yeah. So, basically, most of the first-class passengers were picked up, shall we say?

**Julie:** Our journey has now taken us to the end of Briton Street, where you will find Queen's Park, which is located near the Southampton docks.

**Mary:** In 1912, as the Titanic was due to sail it was a very busy area. There are loads of people really happy because they were working, so the family was saying goodbye to them because they were going to be working on the ship, bringing back some money. Great. There are also people a little bit sad because their family members were leaving to start a new life in a new world, either in America or Canada. But it was a very joyous occasion, very joyous, very jolly. And you can actually see the Titanic from Queen's Park. So if you look at Dock Gate 4, there's a big crane there on the left-hand side and that is approximately where the White Star dock was. So while we're in Queen's Park, we can see a Victorian building across the road in Canute Road. And there's a big red brick building. It's now been turned into apartments, but it was the dock's post office building. And there were five postal clerks. There were three American, two British, and one of the two from Southampton. And I know it sounds silly, but the Titanic was RMS and RMS stands for Royal Mail Ship. So their priority was the mail. So when they heard that, you know, this ship had struck the iceberg, they hauled all the mail from the lower decks onto the top decks, because the priority was to get the mail out to the States.

That was the priority. They were doing what they were paid to do. Which was to look after the mail. There is a plaque that's made from a spare propeller that was left at Belfast, which is now outside the door of the Council Chambers in the Civic Centre and it does say to those, the postal clerks that actually went down with the ship. And in recent news we actually had a set of stamps in memoriam to them as well, which I thought was quite a nice thought as well.

**Julie:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Mary:** But yeah, I mean, it sounds silly: "Why are they getting all the post up?" But that's what they were paid to do, and that's what they knew they had to do.

**Julie:** Next stop on our Titanic journey, is Oxford Street, located one street above Queen's Park, a street which holds several connections to the Titanic.

**Mary:** So in Oxford Street, a few things we'll see. First of all, we'll see the Sailors' Home. 1908, built for the seafarers and the facade is absolutely right. But I was there when they renovated it a few years ago. So everything on the front is correct, and everything behind is modern. It's so clever.

So we know that there were onboard an average of 70 seafarers actually stayed there per night, but 17 men on the ship gave them their address. 15 of them survived. If you were an able seaman, so those were the ones that actually survived. So an able seaman means literally you are able to row a boat.

And then, opposite the Sailors' Home on the corner is the White Star Hotel. But if you look really carefully above there's a doorway on the left-hand side, you'll see Alliance written on it. It's in black paint, they painted over the door. And then if you look underneath those three doorways, 'cause it was three buildings put together, and it was called the Alliance Hotel and that was a third class hotel. So the third class hotel was the Alliance, and we know that there was a gentleman called Lewis Braund and he'd come up from the West Country with some of his family members. And also a lady, a woman friend, I think is what we're saying. A woman friend. And his brother had gone over to Canada a few years previously, and then came back to Southampton, came back to England, and said "You've got to go to Canada because you will make, you know, make your fortune there, you'll do so well."

So that's what he did. And he paid for his ticket, the grand sum of £7.25. So he had a third class ticket. And he came from a big family, but he went down with the ship and the only one of the party that actually survived was the lady and her name was Susan Webber. She stayed and lived in Canada for the rest of her life.

**Julie:** Across the street from the White Star, we find the Grapes, one of the many pubs where sailors frequented in 1912, and which holds an interesting story.

**Mary:** We've got the lovely pub, the Grapes. And you see the lovely painting outside of the Titanic, and that's exactly how it would've looked in 1912. Now it doesn't make any sense to us today, but what people thought was, you needed to stoke your bodies with lots of beer, if you're going to be a



stoker or a trimmer or a fireman. So a trimmer is, the coal comes in great big pieces. So a trimmer is literally trimming the coal to a proper size so we can get it into the furnace, to stoke the boilers.

So the stokers are literally stoking the coal, trimmers are cutting it. The firemen are making sure that the fire is at the right temperature. So, in the Grapes, which was there in 1912, as was many pubs in Oxford Street at that time. So the seafarers are actually going to stoke their bodies with lots of beer, because that makes sense. Obviously. There were three Slade brothers, Bertram, Tom and Alfred, and they were with some others drinking in the pub. Suddenly they realized it was 10 to 12 because the hooter sounded, which meant that they had 10 minutes to get on board the ship. Now we will be approaching the railway lines in the next part of our journey. And, there was a train coming across. So some of the party actually got round before the train went through, but the Slade brothers didn't. So they missed the ship, and the others went on and they all went down with the ship.

**Julie:** Towards the end of Oxford Street, we approach the old railway terminal.

**Mary:** So we've come to the bottom of Oxford Street and across the road we can see the facade of a station. And that was the Terminus Station, that was the main station in Southampton. We do now have Southampton Central Station, which is further inland, but this was the main station and this was opened in 1839. And it was designed by a chap called Sir William Tite. He was a prolific designer of train stations, and this is one of the few examples from the Victorian era. So obviously we got the facade, now it's been turned into a nightclub, casino, et cetera. There's none of the original features in there. But if you look to the side of it, you can see where the trains would have come in. And the trains would have come in and the red carpet would have been rolled out and the passengers would disembark from the train and they would have their luggage taken away from them by the liveried staff<sup>2</sup> of the Southwestern Hotel, 'cause that's the first-class hotel that they're going to be staying in.

**Julie:** The Southwestern Hotel is a grade two listed building built in 1865. The hotel houses many stories, but mainly the stories of the first-class passengers of the Titanic.

**Mary:** So you have the Guggenheims, you have the Astors, you have Thomas Andrews who's the designer of the Titanic, all staying in the Southwestern Hotel. Beautiful hotel. Thomas Andrews was designing right up to the last minute, you know, putting all the final touches and because he stayed in Southwestern Hotel, it has a magnificent staircase. Now, as we go past the hotel, if you look through this window, you can see that staircase. Have you seen it?

**Julie:** Yeah, I think so. Yeah. If you go, is it on Canute Road, and then you see it in there, then yes. It's beautiful.

**Mary:** It is beautiful. So allegedly, that is the design of the Titanic's main staircase. So Bruce Ismay, now he's the director of White Star Line, he and his family motored down with his valet and his private secretary, and the family didn't go onboard the ship, the private secretary and his valet did. I don't know if you've seen any of the films of the Titanic? There are many, *A Night to Remember* is one of the most authentic ones, and that was the 1940s. And there is one in every film, it shows a man

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<sup>2</sup> In 1912, liveried staff were servants who wore a special uniform (a livery) and looked after people. So you knew they were not thieves stealing your luggage and they looked smart and professional.

in a lifeboat with a scarf or a shawl over his head, pretending that he's not a man. This is Bruce Ismay. Okay. So he got into a lifeboat, even though it was women and children first, he got into a lifeboat because he didn't want to die. So the American inquiry castigated him, "You should not have done that." The British inquiry said, "Well, actually, you know, all the other men went down with the ship."

The saddest story I think is Isidor and Ida Strauss and they owned Macy's department store in New York.

**Julie:** Really?

**Mary:** And they were onboard the ship and they were, they were a couple of a certain age, I think they were in their 80s. They were definitely older, an older couple. So there was a place in the lifeboat for Ida. So she got in and she said, "Can my husband come too?" And they said "No, it's women and children only," she said, so she got out of the lifeboat and got back onto the ship so she could stay with her love, her lovely husband.

**Julie:** From Southwestern Hotel, we move along Canute Road where we will find Canute Chambers. It was here that the devastating news eventually broke about what was then seen as the greatest disaster Southampton had known at the time.

**Mary:** This was previously the White Star offices and you've got the steps up to the doors and on the side, you've got the railings. Now, in 1912 news wasn't instant. So it was days before people knew the exact extent of the ship sinking with so many of the townspeople. It just took days. So outside in Canute Road, and remember there wouldn't be the traffic there is today because you still got a horse and carts. We still, we did have cars, obviously in 1912, but not so many. So the whole of Canute Road was filled with women and children, women with their, mainly with their prams. Some men, but mainly the women because their menfolk had gone on the ship and they didn't know if they survived or not. So on the railings they wrote the names of the people that went down with the ship. However, a lot of the people from poorer areas were illiterate, so they couldn't write. So they could only make their mark. So they put an X. So my example is always, it might be John Smith that went down with the ship or it might've been Smith, or it might've been Smyth, or it might have been Smithe, because we know ourselves that Shakespeare wrote his name like half a dozen different spellings. So literacy, you know, wasn't the main thing for them. So they didn't know.

So until the people came back or didn't come back, you didn't know who had survived and who hadn't. So the whole town fell into a deep shock. So the crowds were there for ages. The local papers were filled with obituary notice. But we had world attention was focused on Southampton, not for the right reasons.

**Julie:** We have come to the end of the trail and Mary shares the outcome of the Titanic tragedy, including the captain's swan song.

**Mary:** Now you've heard the story possibly of the missing binoculars. Captain Smith, bless him, I think was 68 and this was going to be his swan song, so that means it was going to be his last ship. He wasn't going to captain any other ship after this. So he wants his own officers in charge, so Blair was the lowest officer. So Blair had the key to the binoculars in the crow's nest on him. But then when he



was told that he wasn't going to be on the ship, he forgot to give the key to the next officer. So that Fred Fleet, who was the lookout at the time could have seen a bit further ahead and maybe have missed the iceberg altogether. One of the outcomes was that there weren't, first of all, there wasn't enough lifeboats for everyone. But if all the lifeboats had been filled, they would have put another 300 people in it. So the outcome for maritime law now is that you have to have enough sufficient lifeboats for passengers and crew. I think sometimes they just did it for the passengers. Ice patrols, we never had ice patrols before and they started in 1914. So specifically because of the Titanic.

**Julie:** And that brings us to the end of this week's episode. Thank you to Mary for sharing Southampton stories of the Titanic, and thank you to the Star Hotel for providing us with a historical location to record this podcast. If you want to know more about the Titanic's links to Southampton, then do visit our website where you will also find photos and additional resources for you to explore further.

Thank you for listening.

**Outro:** We hope you enjoyed listening to today's episode. If you would like to find out a little bit more about what we've been talking about, then please visit the website, [www.winchesterheritageopendays.org](http://www.winchesterheritageopendays.org), or click on Hampshire HistBites, and there you'll find today's show notes as well as some links to more information.

Thank you.