

# A wee bit of maritime history... 3



## TITANIC LINKS

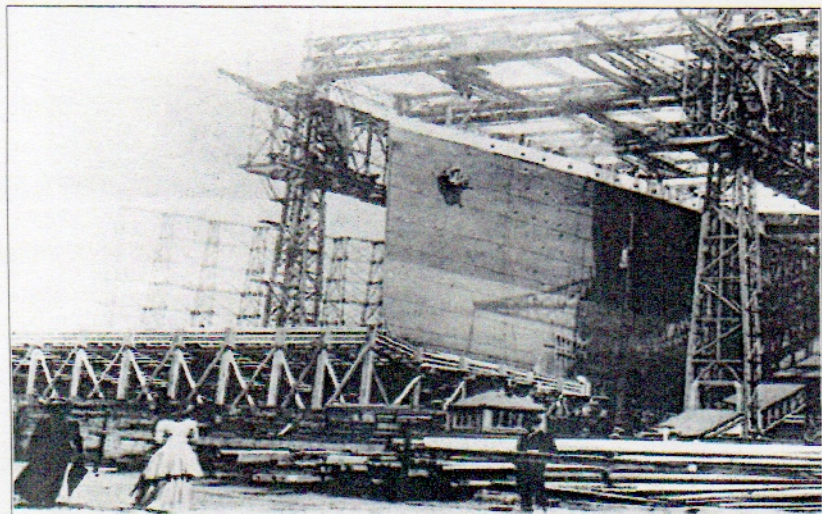


*Artist's impression of Titanic in Strangford Lough now.*

On 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1912, to the cheers of thousands of spectators, the world's then largest man-made moving object left the city of its birth, Belfast. Just thirteen days later *Titanic* lay at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean and now, over one hundred years on, she is arguably the world's most famous ship. At first glance there do not appear to be a great many connections between *Titanic* and the little village of Portaferry but a closer examination reveals that indeed there are many.

**Thomas Andrews**, *Titanic's* designer, was a regular visitor to Portaferry and his brother, Sir John Andrews, was the first President of Portaferry Lifeboat. Thomas perished as part of the Guarantee Group on *Titanic's* maiden voyage, as did **Artie Frost**, grandfather of a Portaferry resident.

## Titanic Timbers



Huge amounts of wood were used in the building of *Titanic* and the timbers used to shore her up on the slipways before her launch were gathered up and sold on. The firm of Hamilton Bodell had the right to salvage the staging wood from the Lagan after the launch. F. Wood then auctioned the timbers and some of it was bought by W & A McMullan, Portaferry. Jim Lawson, the lorry driver, drove it down to Portaferry. The timber was then used as roof beams in W & A McMullan's store for grain and potatoes in High Street.



The roof was constructed by local carpenters, James and Sandy Beck. Until a few years ago these timbers could be found in a building in High Street, Portaferry. (left)  
(Information courtesy of Harry Murray.)

## The Portaferry Launch Ticket

TO-MORROW.  
BELFAST HARBOUR.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, THAT ON WEDNESDAY NEXT, the 31st instant, from 10 o'clock a.m. till after the Launch and Berthing of the S.S. "TITANIC," the VICTORIA WHARF, on the County Down Side of the Harbour, WILL BE CLOSED TO TRAFFIC.

W. A. CURRIE, Secretary of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners.

Harbour Office, Belfast,  
29th May, 1911.

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In May 1911 the *Belfast Newsletter* carried an advertisement stating that the Victoria wharf would be closed for all shipping movements on 31 May 1911 from 10.00 a.m. For the launch of *Titanic*. Tickets to attend the launch could be purchased for one shilling and guaranteed holders a

place in an especially reserved enclosure at the Albert Quay, from which they would have a clear view of the proceedings. Extra trams and ferries were provided to accommodate the thousands of spectators who were expected to watch this momentous event for Belfast, Harland & Wolff and the White Star Line. The tickets were perforated and numbered, and the White Star flag was printed on them in red. Proceeds from the sale of tickets went to the Queen Street Hospital and the children's hospital at Templemore Avenue, Belfast. After the launch Lord and Lady Pirrie, who that day were both celebrating their birthday, invited guests to lunch at Queen's Island. Other less distinguished guests had lunch in Belfast's premier hotel, the Grand Central in Royal Avenue. Since that day, the launch tickets have become highly sought after and command a high price at auction. In 2012 a ticket was sold in New York for £37,000. Another has been in Belfast for over 30 years, the property of a private *Titanic* collector.

A few years ago a launch ticket, the property of the Beck family in Portaferry since 1911, came to light. The original owner hadn't been able to attend the event but had kept the ticket (seen here) that so many others would have thrown away. In 2014 it was sold at Henry Aldridge and Son's auction house for £34,000.



The small town of Portaferry was a centre of shipbuilding in the 1800s in the same way as Belfast was to become in the 1900s. Portaferry produced its own biggest ship in Ireland, the *Bess*, launched on the 6<sup>th</sup> April 1802, to mirror *Titanic* launched in Belfast in 1911.

**Filson Young**, born 1876, whose family came from Portaferry where he spent his childhood summers, and who became a world famous journalist, attended the launch that day and later, to great acclaim, wrote the first book on the sinking that rocked the world, published just weeks after the disaster.



Portaferry's favourite son, **Joseph Tomelty**, was one of the most important cultural and artistic figures in Northern Ireland after the Second World War. He was an actor, playwright, novelist, short-story writer and theatre manager and the home in which he grew up in Portaferry is now graced with a blue plaque to commemorate such an achievement.

His father 'Rollicking James' had also painted ships and was engaged in the squad of painters that painted both *Olympic* and *Titanic*. To bring the *Titanic* connection full circle Joseph Tomelty acted Dr. William O'Loughlin in the best *Titanic* film that has ever been made, *A Night to Remember*. The producer was County Down man, William McQuitty.