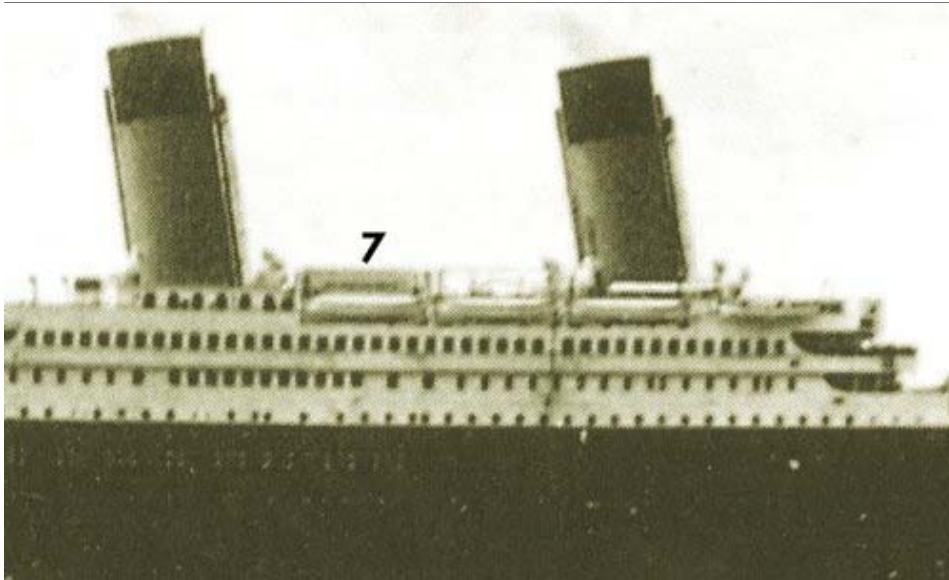


12.45am – A Time to Go!

by Senan Molony

ET Research

Monday 10 March 2008



WHAT time did the first lifeboat depart the *Titanic*?

Many will immediately offer: '12.45am.' But this response should be thought through a great deal more, as it seems terribly late.

This article argues that the conventional time for departure of the first *Titanic* boat (commonly agreed to be number 7) has no good basis and should be discarded.

The first lifeboat likely left much earlier. And certain things flow therefrom.

Let's remember the bookend times of the entire drama: **11.40pm** for the collision, with a **2.20am** sinking. These are the parameters on which most witnesses are agreed. It makes sense to accept them.

11.40pm

Titanic Second Officer Charles Lightoller: 'About 20 minutes to 12, I believe' (US p.432); Steward George Crowe: 'About 11.40... a little impact...' (US p.614); passenger James McGough: 'I was awakened at 11.40' (US p.1143); W/o Harold Bride: 'Twenty minutes to twelve' (US p.905). Senator Smith concludes: 'At 11.40; everybody seems to be agreed on that' (US p.905).

All that is known is that the ship has struck. It takes time to assess the situation and realise how badly.

It seems that at about midnight, twenty minutes after the collision, Captain Smith fully knew (from *personal* inspection, reports and advice) that his ship would sink.

Barber **Gus Weikman** wore a wristwatch:

"I was sitting in my barber shop... at 11.40pm, when the collision occurred. I went forward... on G deck... Water was coming in the baggage room on the deck below...



I then went upstairs and met Mr [Thomas] Andrews, the builder, and he was giving instructions to get the steerage passengers on deck. I proceeded... to my room on C deck. I went on the [forward well deck] and saw some ice lying there. Orders were given, "All hands to man the lifeboats, also to put on life belts."

[US p. 1099]

Mr Dodd, second steward, gave these orders, indicating the seriousness of the situation was grasped at an early stage. Earlier, on E Deck, Weikman said he "met the Captain returning from G deck... with Mr Andrews."

Stewardess **Annie Robinson**, also on E Deck, saw the Captain too:

13282. "The mail man passed along first, and he returned with Mr McElroy and the Captain and they went in the direction of the mail room."

Albert Haines, bosun's mate, was already dressed when the collision occurred. He heard air escaping and ran forward to the forepeak tank. There he found Sailor Hemming and Chief Officer Wilde – specifically identified.

Haines: The Chief Officer then went on the bridge to report.

Senator Smith: What time was that?

Haines: The right time, without putting the clock back, was 20 minutes to 12.

Smith: What was done then?

Haines: I went down to look at No. 1 hold... I went on the bridge and reported to the Chief Officer... He gave me an order then, to get the men up and get the boats out.

[US p.656/7]

Samuel Hemming stated in both America and Britain that he was alarmed within ten to 15 minutes of the collision:

17739. [The bosun] told us to turn out, that the ship had **half an hour to live**, from Mr Andrews; but not to tell anyone, but to keep it to ourselves.

(17740. Repeats same)

17741. When was this? how long after the jar which you heard? —

About ten minutes, I should say.

"The bosun came, and he says, 'Turn out, you fellows,' he says; 'you haven't half an hour to live.' He said: 'That is from Mr. Andrews.' He said: 'Keep it to yourselves, and let no one know.'"

Senator Smith: How long was that after the ship struck this ice?

Hemming: "It would be about **a quarter of an hour**, sir, from the time the ship struck."

[US p. 664]

Second class steward **John Hardy** says:

"I went among the people and told those people to go on deck with their lifebelts on..."

[US p.587/8]

Smith: What did you say?

Hardy: Just, "Everybody on deck with lifebelts on, at once."

...**That was early... it was about a quarter to 12**, I should say. [US p.593]

Senator Fletcher: You began giving this alarm about what time after



August H. "Gus" Weikman
Daily Mirror



Thomas Andrews Maunsell



John T. Hardy
Daily Sketch



the collision?

Hardy: I should think about between 20 minutes and a quarter to 12. I sent for all hands at once.

Fletcher: That was immediately after the collision? - Yes, sir...

Fletcher: Your recollection is that you had the order to give the alarm to put on lifebelts immediately after the collision?

Hardy: Yes, sir; **within five minutes after the collision.**

Smith: How did that order come?

Hardy: From Purser Barker; that is Purser Barker brought it himself personally to me.

Smith: How was it transmitted, do you know? Did it come from the Commander?

Hardy: Yes, sir; to the two pursers. There is a first class purser and a second class purser. **They would get it direct from the bridge, I presume.** They are our superiors aboard the ship, and we take our orders through them.

[US p. 594]



George Alfred Moore
UK National Archives

Hardy and Hemming agree on an early alert, but Steward **F Dent Ray** answered differently when asked about the order to get to the lifeboats:

Smith: How long was that after the impact?

Ray: As near as I could make out, it was about 20 minutes. It was around about 12 o'clock.

[US p.802]



Frederick Dent Ray
Philadelphia Evening Bulletin

Yet able seaman **George Moore** supports his fellow AB, Hemming, in that *sailors* were first ordered on deck, and this came extremely early:

"About **10 minutes to 12** the bosun came and piped all hands on the boat deck, and started to get out boats. ...So far as I can say, all the seamen from the forecabin were ordered up to clear away the boats... [US p. 559]

Lookout **George Symons** said:

11356. What time was this? — By the time I got on [C] deck, it must have been about one bell, a quarter to twelve.

11357. After you had this order from the bosun? — Yes.

11359. — I came on [C] deck and went into the mess room... From there I heard the water come into No. 1 hold... hardly had I looked down there when the order came for 'All hands on the boat deck.'

...

11418. What time it was when you noticed this water? — I should think, roughly estimating it, it would be about five minutes to twelve, because, as I was on my way to the [boat] deck, they struck eight bells in the crow's nest. [Midnight]

Lawrence Beesley went on deck immediately after the collision. The ship had stopped. "I stayed on deck some minutes, walking about vigorously... The ship had now resumed her course, moving very slowly through the water...



Bruce Ismay *Contributor*

"I soon decided to go down again, and as I crossed from the starboard to the port side to go down... I saw an officer climb on the last lifeboat on the port side - number 16 - and begin to throw off the cover..."

This evidence all shows that it was long *before* midnight when sailors were sent to the boat deck to prepare the boats. Orders had already been given by

the high command to prepare a full evacuation.

There is much evidence that the decision was taken at the most senior level before filtering down the chain of command, as Hardy indicates.

Bruce Ismay said he went on the bridge within ten minutes of impact and found Captain Smith, who was afraid the accident was serious. This would mean taking all necessary precautions.

Accounts by passengers, arriving on the boat deck, do not accurately record when lifeboats began to be readied. Smith gave that order to senior crew within a very short time, according to the evidence of subordinates.

Officer **Joseph Boxhall** went below a second time (after a fruitless earlier inspection) and found water rising rapidly. He reported this disturbing fact to Captain Smith, who had already heard similar bad news from Chief Officer Wilde, carpenter Maxwell, and others.

Boxhall afterwards roused officers Pitman and Lightoller.



Fourth Officer Boxhall *The Graphic*

15379 Could you form any opinion as to how long that [rousing the officers] was after the impact?
Boxhall: “No, but as near as I could judge, I have tried to place the time for it, and the nearest I can get to it is approximately 20 minutes to half an hour.

15380. I think those are the times which are given by Mr Pitman and Mr Lightoller. After calling those officers did you go on to the bridge again? — Yes, I think I went towards the bridge. I am not sure whether it was then that I heard the order given to clear the boats or unlace the covers. I might have been on the bridge for a few minutes and then heard this order given.”

Elsewhere Boxhall said:

15610. Did you hear the Captain say anything to anybody about the ship being **doomed**? — “The Captain did remark something to me in the earlier part of the evening after the order had been given to clear the boats. I encountered him when reporting something to him... [about water rising rapidly?]”

“I said, ‘Is it really serious?’ He said: ‘Mr. Andrews tells me he gives her from an hour to an hour and a half.’ ...Evidently Mr. Andrews had been down.”

15611. Can you tell us how long it was after the collision that the Captain said that? — “No, I have not the slightest idea.”

15612. Did you say, as a matter of fact, in America, that it was about 20 minutes after the collision? — “No, I do not think so.”

15613. You could not fix the time? — “I cannot fix the time; I have tried, but I cannot.”

Let’s assume this conversation occurs at midnight - conservative in light of both Hemming’s account of an early Andrews warning and Weikman’s prompt sighting of the builder and Captain together.

At midnight then, Smith learns the *Titanic* has from 60 to 90 minutes to live.

It is not clear whether this refers to when Boxhall or Smith was told, or from when the *Titanic* began rapidly taking water (11.40pm).

But as far as Smith should be concerned, he has - practically speaking - an hour from midnight to get his boats in the water. He cannot know his vessel will linger as she did. To the Master, it could even be that Andrews’ estimate is too optimistic and the time available is *less* than an hour.

Assuming that the *Titanic* has an hour to live, Captain Smith’s overriding imperative must be to get some lifeboats in the water as quickly as possible, no matter how well or poorly filled.

These are dire straits... and simply not compatible with the first lifeboat being launched at 12.45am – which is no less than an hour and five minutes after the collision!

Smith could not know his ship would live that long.

So why do we accept 12.45am for the first boat's departure?

And think about this: No-one, in the entire canon of *Titanic* press reports, and not one single person in evidence at the American and British Inquiries, complains about the length of time taken if 12.45am is a correct time. Take this imaginary quote:

"It was a disgrace. The ship struck at twenty minutes to midnight, and it was over an hour later the first boat was lowered. Imagine! You call that a prompt evacuation? They should all be ashamed of themselves."

Not a single person said it. Instead, the *Times* of London reported John Kuhl, a passenger on the *Carpathia*, on what he gleaned from discussions with survivors:

"They tell him that it was *half an hour* before a boat was launched."

[The *Times*, April 20, 1912, p. 10.]

That it is unclear whether this 30mins runs from when passengers were roused - or from the time of impact - matters not a jot. Both points are absolutely incompatible with a 12.45am launch of the first boat.

What is the absence of 'long delay' complaints saying to us?

~~doubled up in the middle and went down. Most of the passengers did not believe that the boat was going to sink. According to their stories it was fully half an hour before a lifeboat was launched from the vessel. In fact, some of the passengers keenly questioned the wisdom of Captain Smith's~~

The *Times* of April 20th, 1912 indicates half-an-hour, not over an hour, to launch boats

OFFICER Pitman, roused by Boxhall (citing 12-12.10am), was asked:

14949. How long do you think had elapsed between the [collision] and Mr Boxhall coming...? — I should think it must be 20 minutes.

[Midnight: Pitman said he was first woken by the jar of impact.]

Later he was asked:

14992. ...What [do] you think was the time between the striking of the iceberg and your getting to boat No. 5? Was it an hour, do you think? — No, I should think it would be about 12.20am.

14993. — It was being uncovered then, yes.

14994. Did you see Mr Ismay close to this boat? — I did.

14995. Was he... doing anything? — He remarked to me as we were uncovering the boat, "There is no time to lose."

There is no time to lose. It has long been speculated (although the basis is hard to divine) that Ismay was privy to the Andrews forecast.

We can surmise that a hasty conference took place on the bridge when the scale of the crisis was grasped. Emergency orders were certainly given, but any briefing did not involve Lightoller or Pitman, who were later summoned by Boxhall. Boxhall himself may have been absent on his second inspection, or in rousing his fellow officers.

Lightoller and Pitman were certainly not aware of the Andrews forecast. As far as they knew, the ship was



Herbert John Pitman
Lloyds Weekly News

holed, yet she still appeared steady. They had every reason to believe a localised problem would be contained by bulkheads. Others knew differently.

Pitman said in America that “It was near my watch [from midnight], so I started dressing, and when I was partly dressed Mr Boxhall came in and said... there was water in the mail room. I said, ‘What happened?’ He said, ‘We struck an iceberg.’ So I put a coat on and went on deck, and saw the men uncovering the boats and clearing them away.”

Officer Pitman accounts for the gap between being his called and reaching boat 5 [he estimated at 12.20am] by the fact he first walked along to the after end of the boat deck, met Officer Moody, and heard of ice on the forward well deck. “So, to satisfy my curiosity, I went down there.”

He then went further, to the forecastle head, to see if there was any damage. There he saw a crowd of firemen leaving - since water was entering their quarters. “I said, ‘That’s funny.’ I looked down No.1 hatch, then, and saw the water flowing over the hatch.”

Pitman said he then immediately went to the boat deck, and assisted in getting boats ready. He finally stood by No. 5. “In the act of clearing away this boat a man said to me... very quietly, ‘*There is no time to waste.*’ I thought he did not know anything about it at all. So we carried on our work in the usual way.” [US p. 276/7]

If Pitman’s 12.20am time seems, if anything, a little late by his account of his actions, we nonetheless accept it. Now he continues that his boat was quickly lowered level:

”I had about five or six men there, and the boat was out in about two minutes.”

[US p. 277]

“The boat went out in two or three minutes...”

[ibid]

This brings the time to 12.23am. “I got her overboard all right, and lowered level with the rail... Then this man in the dressing gown said we had better get her loaded with women and children. So I said, ‘I await the Commander’s orders,’ to which he replied, ‘Very well,’ or something like that. It then dawned on me that it might be Mr Ismay... so I went along to the bridge and saw Captain Smith, and I told him... So he said, ‘Go ahead; carry on.’

Pitman’s lack of urgency contrasts with Ismay, but the Captain backs the latter - and another two minutes may have elapsed by the time Pitman returned and stood in No. 5, saying “Come along, ladies.”

We stay with Pitman, because boat 5 determines the departure of boat 7, commonly cited as the first to go.



Lifeboat Seven (detail from Fr Browne photograph. Copyright Society of Jesus)

Pitman specifically says there was no reluctance to board. “I filled my boat fairly easily” [US p.277]. This important point is supported by others.

Mrs F. M. Warren, saved in boat 5 and cited by Gracie (p. 246 original edition) wrote: “People came in so *rapidly* in the darkness that it was impossible to distinguish them.” At boat 5 there were many, according to testimony, ready to embark. This willingness to go is amply demonstrated by the well-attested few who jumped from the deck as Pitman’s boat was lowering.

Pitman had climbed out a moment before, but Murdoch told him: ‘You go in charge of this boat.’... ‘Go away in this boat, old man, and hang around the after gangway.’ Pitman: “I did not like the idea of going away at all, because I thought I was better off on the ship.”

Pitman does still not know. But Murdoch evidently does. “I quite thought we would have to return to the ship again, perhaps at daylight,” said Pitman, but here was Murdoch strangely shaking his hand and saying ‘Goodbye, good luck.’

Senator Smith: When you shook hands... did you ever expect to see him again?

Pitman: “Certainly I did.”

Smith: Do you think, from his manner, he ever expected to see you again?

Pitman: “Apparently not. I expected to get back to the ship again, perhaps two or three hours afterwards.”

[US p. 282]

Murdoch, who worked frenetically all night, must have been aware of the Andrews assessment. Indeed he had already lowered a lifeboat – the first one to get away, number 7:

Senator Smith. Was it lowered at the same time yours was lowered?

Pitman: “**Two or three minutes previously.**”

[US p. 289]

We have already seen that it was possibly 12.25 when Pitman arrived back at No. 5. With no trouble or reluctance, the loading might have taken the two minutes he suggests elsewhere – bringing the time to 2.27am.

Senator Fletcher: How long did it take to lower the boat after you got the people into it?

Pitman: “It may have been a minute and it may have been two minutes.”

[US p. 304/5]

It is now 2.29am, and lifeboat 5 has been lowered into the water.

Boat 7, according to Pitman, had been lowered “two or three minutes previously.” Thus number 7 might have reached the water as early as 2.26am – virtually twenty minutes in advance of the time ascribed to it by the British Report.

Pitman was even more specific in Britain than he had been in America:

15036. ...How long do you think it was between the time of striking the berg and your boat reaching the water...?

Pitman: “Well, I should think it would be about **12.30** when No. 5 boat reached the water.”

And

15041/2. Did you see any other [life]boat on the water anywhere near you after your boat had reached the water? —Yes, No. 7 was quite close to me.

15043. Was No. 7... in the water before yours or after? — No. 7 was before. It was the first boat launched on the starboard side.

If Boat 7 was lowered “two or three minutes previously” and boat 5 hit the water at 12.30, then No. 7 was away from the ship at 12.27 or 12.28am at the latest.

And Pitman, it should be said, was wearing a wristwatch.

15096. When you gave evidence in America you... were asked: “Can you fix the exact moment when the *Titanic* disappeared? — ‘Two-twenty exactly, ship’s time. I took my watch out at the time she disappeared, and I said: “It is 2.20,” and the passengers around me heard it.”

15097. Do you remember giving that evidence? — That is true, yes.

15098. That is correct? — Yes.

There is something of a fetish among modern researchers for imagining that *Titanic* officers put back their watches at midnight to accommodate a planned adjustment of the ship’s clocks to reflect the likely noon of the following day.

Senator Smith: I neglected to ask you whether, in fixing the time when the *Titanic* disappeared beneath the water, you gave me ship’s time?

Pitman: Yes; that is ship's time.

Smith: You had the accurate ship’s time? – Yes, sir.

Smith: When were the ship’s clocks set...? – They are set at midnight every night.

Smith: And were they set at midnight Sunday night?

Pitman: **No; we had something else to think of.**

Smith: Exactly; so that you got the ship’s time ...from midnight **Saturday**?

Pitman: Yes.

Smith: And your watch -

Pitman: Was correct.

Smith: Was correct?

Pitman: Yes, sir.

[US p. 294]

Look carefully at this. Pitman agrees that his watch ran on from midnight on the Saturday. He says his watch was correct from then, not “corrected” on Sunday night.

Stewardess **Annie Robinson**, quoted earlier, did put back her watch:

13302. Can you remember at all what time it was when your boat left?

Robinson: — Well, I looked at my watch when the ship went down and it was twenty minutes to two. That was by altered time. [1.40am, forty minutes back from run-on time of 2.20am.]

She put her watch back, but Pitman had “something else to think of.”

Consider the excitement of Ismay at boat 5. Contemplate the dread desperation in “Goodbye, Good luck.” Remember the Andrews’ assessment the Captain told Boxhall about, but of which Pitman was unaware... and see that Pitman’s account, with its careful estimates, and precision in relation to the bookend times, reflects a prompt lowering of lifeboat 5.

Pitman says his boat left at **12.30**, and the first boat, No. 7, two or three minutes *earlier*.

WHAT is the basis for a 12.45am departure of boat 7?

Here is another epiphany: Just one *Titanic* passenger, at the American Inquiry, cited such a time for the first boat.

American passenger **Dickinson H. Bishop** said:

“I cannot tell, exactly. I imagine the time the boat [7] was lowered was about a quarter to 1.”



Annie Robinson
Southampton City Collection

[US p.1003]

Yet immediately afterwards came this:

Senator Smith: ...Lifeboat No. 7, in which Mrs Bishop and yourself left the *Titanic*, was the first boat lowered on the starboard side?

Bishop: It was. We had been on the boat deck in the neighbourhood of 10 minutes, watching them prepare the boats for lowering. At that time there were very few people up on deck..."

[ibid]

Ten minutes! Very few people on deck!

Contrast his wife's testimony. **Helen W. Bishop** gave precise intervals in her initial evidence of their being re-awakened at midnight and arriving early on top.

"We went up onto the boat deck on the starboard side. We looked around, and there were so very few people up... my husband and I went to the port side to see if there was anyone there. There were only two people... and they followed us immediately to the starboard side.

By that time an old man had come upstairs and found Mr and Mrs Harder... [he] told us ...he would be back in a moment. We never saw him again. About five minutes later the boats were lowered, and we were pushed in. At the time our lifeboat was lowered I had no idea that it was time to get off."

Dickinson H. Bishop
(University of Michigan)



About five minutes later and I had no idea that it was time to get off - how does this square with her husband's time? Both were saved in the same boat! One of them is wrong.

Mrs Bishop repeated her early-sounding phrase:

"We had no idea that it was time to get off, but the officer took my arm and told me to be very quiet and to get in immediately."

[US p. 999]

Note that Mrs Bishop had ten days earlier told her hometown newspaper, the *Dowagiac Daily News* [April 20, 1912]: "We were afloat in the lifeboat from about **12.30** Sunday night..."

Passenger **George Harder** saw the Bishops, and was saved in boat 5, launched after boat 7.

What impression of time does he convey to the American Inquiry?

"I saw Mr and Mrs Bishop, and I saw Colonel and Mrs Astor, and they all seemed to be of the opinion that there was no danger. A little while after that an officer appeared at the foot of the stairs, and announced that everybody should go to their staterooms and put on lifebelts.

Senator Smith: How long was that after the collision?

Harder: ...A little after 12 - about 12 o'clock... roughly. So, we immediately went down to our stateroom and took our lifebelts and coats and started up the stairs and went to the top deck. There we saw the crew manning the lifeboats; getting them ready; swinging them out. So we waited around there, and we were finally told 'Go over this way'... So we followed and went over toward the first lifeboat, where Mr and Mrs Bishop were. That boat was filled, and so they told us to move on to the next one."

Passenger **James R. McGough** was saved in boat 7 -

“I was awakened at 11.40pm, ship time; my stateroom was... shared by Mr Flynn... Soon after leaving our stateroom [it was] suggested that we go back to bed, which we did not... It was our intention to go up... but before doing so I rapped on the door of the stateroom opposite mine... Mr. Flynn and I then ascended to... deck A, and after being up there about 10 minutes were notified to put on life preservers... We then had to go all the way... back to our stateroom, which was on E deck.

After procuring our life preservers we went back again to the top deck, and after reaching there discovered that orders had been given to launch the lifeboats, and that they were *already being launched* at that time.

They called for the women and children to board the boats first. Both women and men, however, hesitated... thinking the larger boat was the safer. I had my back turned...and was caught by the shoulder by one of the officers, who gave me a push, saying, ‘Here, you’re a big fellow, get into the boat.’”

[US p. 1143]



James Robert McGough
Philadelphia Inquirer

How do either of these brisk accounts square with Dickinson Bishop’s quarter to 1 (12.45am)?

Bishop admitted that he could ‘not tell exactly,’ and was *imagining* the time. **Mrs Thomas Potter**, in a letter to Archibald Gracie, told how she too was saved in No. 7, and wrote of watching from the lifeboat “for upwards of two hours the gradual sinking of the ship.”

[p. 233, *The Truth About the Titanic*, 1913.]

For upwards of two hours. *Titanic* sank at 2.20am.

And **Archibald Gracie** himself wrote: “From my own conclusions, and that of others, it appears that about forty-five minutes had now elapsed since the collision when Captain Smith’s orders were transmitted to the crew to lower the lifeboats...” [11.40 + 45 = 12.25am]

(*ibid*, p. 25)

Archie Jewell, the lookout man, spoke of the haste to get boat 7 in the water:

323. Could you tell how long the boat you were in took to prepare and lower? — Half an hour at the most, I should think.

324. Half an hour at the most? — Yes, we were all in a hurry; I could hardly judge the time.

But half an hour from when? It would seem from the time the order was given to prepare the boats. We have seen that this was before midnight.

Boxhall has a moment of clarity, suggesting a pre-midnight order:

Mr Boxhall (continuing): “And bags of mail floating about. I went right on the bridge again and reported to the Captain what I had seen.”

Senator Smith: What did he say?

Boxhall: “He said all right, *and then the order came* out for the boats.”

Smith: You mean the order was given to man or lower the lifeboats?

Boxhall: “To clear the lifeboats.”

[US p. 232/3]

Jewell knew No. 7 was his listed boat. He was summoned with others by the bosun, as seen earlier. Jewell and his fellows cleared the boats. “I helped to clear away No. 7, cleared away the falls, and got them all ready, and the First Officer, Murdoch, told us to lower away the boats to the level of the rail.”

[Br. 89]

Q. 93. ...What were the orders then? —“Women and children in the boat.”

Jewell stayed at boat 7 and did not clear away boats elsewhere. His half an hour, however vague, is thus not consistent with a 12.45am launch.

Bedroom steward **Henry Etches** appears – at first glance - to offer indirect support to Dickinson Bishop.

He says he last saw Thomas Andrews “about 20 minutes past 12.” Etches met Andrews on B deck, and they went down to C deck. Etches roused passengers there, then went along to the purser's office. Here he was told: “It is necessary to go up on the boat deck. Tell all the other bedroom stewards to assemble their passengers on the boat deck and stand by.” Etches went on the boat deck “and they were just loading boat No. 7.”

[US p.812]

From the above, it might appear that Etches first met Andrews at 12.20am, and then performed a series of tasks before later seeing Boat 7 loading. But Etches makes it clear in other testimony that he was specifically answering the question – and that 12.20am was when he *last* saw Andrews:

“We [Etches and Andrews] walked along C deck together. The purser was standing outside of his office, in a large group of ladies. The purser was asking them to do as he asked... Mr Andrews said: ‘That is exactly what I have been trying to get them to do,’ and, with that, he walked down the staircase to go on lower D deck. That is the **last** I saw of Mr Andrews.”



Henry Samuel Etches
Southampton Pictorial

So Etches is ordered by the purser to the boat deck at about 12.20, and went directly. Here they were just loading boat 7. This is entirely consistent with Pitman, and entirely contradictory of Dickinson Bishop.

Steward **Andrew Cunningham** went to C deck and closed five rooms at about "**half past twelve.**" He had been told to do so "forty-five or fifty minutes" after impact. [11.40 + 45 = 12.25am. Alternatively 11.40 + 50 = 12.30am]. Heading topside, he found his assigned boat had already gone!

Senator Smith: No. 7 had gone?

Cunningham: **No. 7 had gone.**

[US p. 797; 792/3.] (This is significant support for Pitman.)

Passenger **George Rheims** stated in his November 1913 deposition to the US limited liability hearings:

“I went out on the A deck first, about ten or fifteen minutes after the shock.”

Later did you go on another deck? – “I went up on the boat deck.”

That was say how many minutes after? – “About 25 minutes.”

That is altogether from the shock? – “Yes.” [12.05am]

State what you saw with reference to lifeboats at that time? – “When I got up there, they were lowering one of the lifeboats on the starboard side.”

Elsewhere Rheims stated that he was on the boat deck “twenty or twenty-five minutes after the shock,” and saw a boat launched on the starboard side, which may have been the first boat, although he could not be sure. His account is late in 1913, but it goes to an early evacuation.

Lookout **George Hogg**, saved in No. 7, had this to say:

Senator Perkins: What time did she strike this iceberg?

"I woke up about 20 minutes to 12. I rushed up on the deck, and... went below again... I asked the time, then, of my mate Evans, and he said, 'It is a quarter to 12. We will get dressed and get ready to go on the lookout.' I dressed myself, and we relieved the lookout at 12 o'clock....

"We stopped about 20 minutes... and I saw people running about with life belts on."

They rang the bridge, got no answer, and came down. "I went straight to the boat deck. I assisted in starting to uncover the boats."

Next he was sent for a Jacob's ladder by the bosun. Bringing it from the forecandle, he was told to drop it. "As I got past the No. 7 boat on the starboard side, Mr Murdoch... said: 'See that those plugs are in that [already loaded] boat.' I put the plugs in, and... jumped out again.

"...I jumped out to assist with the falls; and he said: 'You step in that boat.' I said, 'Very good, sir.' Mr Murdoch lowered one end, and... Evans lowered the other."

[US p. 577/8]



George Alfred Hogg
UK National Archives

AN INTERLUDE WITH LAWRENCE BEESLEY

Lawrence Beesley was confined to the second class section of the boat deck, cut off from where boat 7 launched. Nonetheless he had an eye for detail and is often hailed for his accuracy.

Beesley says in Chapter Three of his book:

"I was now on the starboard side of the top boat deck; the time about **12.20**. We watched the crew at work on the lifeboats, numbers 9, 11, 13, 15.... As we watched, the cranks were turned, the davits swung outwards until the boats hung clear of the edge of the deck...

But if there was anyone who had not by now realised that the ship was in danger, all doubt on this point was to be set at rest in a dramatic manner. Suddenly a rush of light from the forward deck, a hissing roar that made us all turn from watching the boats, and a rocket leapt upwards to where the stars blinked and twinkled above us... And presently another, and then a third...

The crew were now in the boats, the sailors standing by the pulley ropes let them slip through the cleats in jerks, and down the boats went till level with B deck [sic]; women and children climbed over the rail into the boats and filled them; when full, they were lowered one by one, beginning [where he was] with number 9, the first on the second-class deck, and working backwards towards 15. All this we could see by peering over the edge of the boat-deck, which was now quite open to the sea, the four boats which formed a natural barrier being lowered from the deck and leaving it exposed.

...A report went round among men on the top deck - the starboard side - that men were to be taken off on the port side... it was acted on at once by almost all the men, who crowded across to the port side and watched the preparation for lowering the boats, leaving the starboard side almost deserted.

Soon after the men had left the starboard side, I saw a bandsman - the cellist - come round the vestibule corner from the staircase entrance and run down the now deserted starboard deck, his 'cello trailing behind him, the spike dragging along the floor. This must have been about **12.40am**...

Looking forward and downward, we could see several of the boats now in the water, moving slowly one by one from the side, without confusion or noise, and stealing away in the darkness..."



Lawrence Beesley
(Courtesy of Pat Cook)

This is Beesley's chronology. Its meaning is obvious. Several boats already in the water at around 12.40am, and rockets fired before that time too.

Consider, also, the opening of his next chapter, about the sinking seen from his own lifeboat, when he links the lowering of No. 13 with the time assigned by Dickinson Bishop to No. 7:

“Contrast conditions with those obtaining that Monday morning at **12.45am**, and it is impossible not to feel that...the lowering crew... did their duty in a way that argues the greatest efficiency. I cannot help feeling the deepest gratitude to the two sailors who stood at the ropes above and lowered us [in No. 13] to the sea: I do not suppose they were saved.”

Beesley repeats this 12.45am timing for the departure of his boat in Chapter Four (p. 114 original edition) when he writes:

“At about 2.15am I think we were any distance from a mile to two miles away. It is difficult for a landsman to calculate distance at sea but we had been afloat an hour and a half...”

[2.15am less one hour is 1.15am; less a further half hour is 12.45am, as he previously cites.]

Beesley had also made clear the early departure of his own boat within five days of the sinking!

In the London *Times* edition containing his famous letter, he is quoted as saying that No. 13 was in the water looking back at the enormous *Titanic* at 1 o'clock. [The British Inquiry, drawn into error, would later ascribe a departure time of 1.35am to Beesley's boat.] He also says, as we know, that other boats preceded his.

Beesley is widely regarded as a faithful scrutineer and recorder of events. A science teacher trained in that very discipline, he imparted it to others. His book is littered with instances of thoughtful and painstaking observation.

There was, furthermore, a wristwatch in his boat. He writes at the start of his Chapter Five: “All accounts agree that the *Titanic* sunk about 2.20am; a watch in our boat gave the time as 2.30am shortly afterwards.”

Why do we ignore Beesley and Pitman's specific timings, and prefer Dickinson Bishop's 'I imagine' for the moment a lifeboat first hit the water?

There is more evidence for the early launch of boat 7 from some of those cited previously as to the promptness of their being summoned to duty.

Bosun's mate **Albert Haines**:

I worked on the boats, sir; got all the boats swung out.... we were turning out the after [starboard] boats while they were *filling* the forward ones.

As soon as we finished turning the boats out I went to my own station. I got to my own boat [No. 9] just in time, as they filled my boat. The boatswain missed his boat, No. 7. No. 7 was gone before he got there.

[US p.656/7, 659/60]

AB **George Moore**, ordered on the boat deck at about 10 minutes to 12, snappily declares:

... I went on the starboard side of the boat deck and helped clear the boats; swung three of the boats out; helped to lower No. 5 and No. 7. When we swung No. 3 out, I was told to jump in... we had 32 in the boat, all told, and then we lowered away.

[US p. 559/60]

Lookout **George Symons**, who arrived on deck at midnight [eight bells], also



Albert Haines
UK National Archives

gives the impression of quick and urgent work:

11417. — The order I got on the boat deck from Mr Murdoch, and also the bosun, was... to uncover the boats and get the falls out. I assisted generally in the boats on the starboard fore end, 3, 5, and 7...
11426. Was there any difficulty ...in getting out these boats...? — None whatever. They never worked better or more comfortably. I have never seen them work better in any ship I have been in. [Etches separately twice talks of 'perfect' lowering.]

...
11444. Speaking of boats 3, 5, and 7, did you see seamen placed in these boats under the order of Mr Murdoch? — Yes... They were given an order to get in, get the plugs ready, see everything was right in the boat, and told to stay there and take the women and children.

...
11450. I assisted generally, and they lowered down. I do not know whether 5 or 7 went first, I could not say for certain. I was at No 5; whether No. 7 went before it. I could not say.

...
11457. I mean there was plenty of room in your boat for more than you were carrying? — Yes, but the order was, "Lower away," and you had to obey orders

Murdoch, it appears, wanted to get some boats in the water as quickly as possible – clearly reflecting the onus on Captain Smith. There was a parallel belief that launched boats could be topped up from the gangway doors, using jacob's ladders, such as that brought up by Hogg.

Symons was confused as to whether boat 7 went away or boat 5, as was first class steward **Edward Wheelton**, who mistook one for the other.

Wheelton's words deserve careful consideration:

"I had just come off watch. I went to bed. I was awakened between 10 minutes to 12 and a quarter to 12 by a shock... I got out of bed... went to the door... spoke to some of the men... got back into bed again. I was roused next by someone shouting... I came outside. The order was, "Get your lifebelts. Get up to boat stations."

I went back. I put my pants on over my pyjamas, put my slippers on, and my overcoat. I went down [sic] to the deck. They were just getting away No. 5 then. I assisted in getting away lifeboat No. 5."

'Getting away' means lowering, rather than loading. This is actually boat 7, and both points will be clarified in a moment. Wheelton continues:

"I was ordered to the storeroom... As I went along B deck I met Mr Andrews, the builder, who was opening the rooms and looking in... I used... the accommodation staircase... went down to the storeroom and I got a bottle of biscuits, and I carried them up to the main dining room, through the reception room, up the main staircase.

I got onto the deck. The boats had gone. [Probable a typo for 'boat,' referring to the first boat.] They were working at No. 7. I mean No. 5 had gone. I went to No. 7 and assisted in lowering... Mr Lowe told Mr Ismay to 'Get to hell out of it,' because I was the steward who stood back of Mr Lowe.

We worked at No. 7 and got her down, and then No. 9. Mr Murdoch was there, and Mr Ismay... **They were lowering No. 5 when I left to go to the storeroom**, and I saw No. 7 and No. 9 [lower]. I went away in No. 11...
[US p.543/4]



George Symons
UK National Archives



Edward Wheelton
UK National Archives

Senator Newlands: So far as your observation went, [when] were boats No. 5, No. 7, No. 9, and No. 11 loaded?

Wheelton: As soon as I started - I did not see the finishing of the loading of No. 5, because I was sent to the storeroom. I arrived on the deck when No. 7 was lowered, sir.

[US p. 545]

Wheelton has transposed lifeboat 5 and lifeboat 7. Officer Lowe makes it clear the first lifeboat he worked on was No. 5, and that it was at this boat, not the already-departed No. 7, that he had his famous altercation with Ismay.

Bath steward **James Widgery** supports Wheelton, right down to the box of biscuits:

"When I heard the noise, it woke me up. That was about 25 to 12. I looked at the clock hanging on the bed.

Senator Fletcher: You mean 25 minutes of 12? - Yes, sir. [11.35pm]

...It woke me up... We were talking amongst ourselves for a little while... I ...turned over and started to go to sleep again. An order came up that all men had to take their lifebelts and go up on deck. I went down to F deck... there was nobody there but our bedroom steward. All the passengers had gone. I went up on deck to my boat, No. 7.

Senator Fletcher: Which side?

Widgery: The starboard side. When I got up there, it [No. 7] **was just about to be lowered.**

The purser sent me along to No. 9. They had taken the canvas off of No. 9 and lowered it [to the rail], and just then some biscuits came up from the storekeeper. I helped him put one of the boxes into the bottom of the boat, and the purser took hold of my arm and said, 'Get in the boat.'

[US p. 601/2]

All of these accounts are pointing us to an early launch time for lifeboat 7.

Saloon steward **William Ward** was in the same room as Widgery, amidships on E deck. Ward opened a porthole after the crash, and Widgery and others complained because it admitted cold air. Ward says:

"When I felt the shock, sir, I got up. I went to the port and opened it. It was very bitterly cold. I looked out and saw nothing. It was very dark. I got back into my bunk again.

...I lay there for about 20 minutes, and in the meantime the steerage passengers were coming from forward, coming aft, carrying lifebelts with them... Still I did not think it was anything serious, and I lay there for some time, a little while longer, when the head waiter [William Moss] came down - and said we were all to go on deck...

With that I think most everybody... got dressed and went on deck... We went up the 'midship companionway, up to the top deck; and meeting Mr Dodd on D deck, he told us to go forward to the saloon and see if there was anyone about... I went forward and did not see anyone around there and came back, and I got seven life belts on my way up. When I got on deck, I adjusted preservers on people that hadn't got one... I went to my boat - I was stationed at No. 7 - and she was already lowered to the same level as the deck... They called for the ladies to get in. Some got in, and there were a few men got into it... They did not want me for that boat... Then I went aft to No. 9 boat... and assisted to take the canvas cover off her.

[US p. 596/7]

No. 9 is the lead boat in the aft starboard quadrant, and we know that work was first concentrated on the forward quadrant.

LEAVING aside Dickinson Bishop (whose 12.45am 'I imagine' timing is contradicted by his wife and others), the failure of any reliable occupant of boat 7 to testify a time for its departure has left us working from boat 5, the next boat to lower.

We have seen what Pitman said: that his boat was lowered at 12.30am. Let us see who else supports Pitman.

Fireman **Alfred Shiers** saw boat No. 7 lowered. He was standing at his own station, boat 3, when he was ordered to get into boat 5 by an officer [not Pitman]. Shiers was asked:

4709. Can you tell me how long elapsed from the time of the collision until you got to your boat No. 5? — Over half an hour. [i.e. later than 11.40 plus 30, which is 12.10am]

4710. You got into the boat half an hour from the time of the collision?

Shiers: “I should say about three quarters of an hour.” [12.25am getting *into* boat 5.]

4711. That is to say you got into the boat three quarters of an hour after the collision? — Yes.

This is boat No. 5! And, importantly, Shiers also said:

4613. Did you help to get No. 7 away? — I helped to clear the falls.

4616. Did you see that boat lowered down? — Yes.

4617. Where did you go to after that? — I came along the deck towards my own boat.

He was finally ordered into No. 5, likely by Murdoch. Thus he agrees independently, and virtually perfectly, with Officer Pitman about No. 7 leaving before No. 5. More importantly, he agrees the time.

His own boat, the second boat launched, was loaded at around 12.25am and must have soon reached the water – long before anything like 12.45am.

Here a contra-indication must be declared for boat 5, from the testimony of **Alfred Olliver**.

Senator Burton: What time did your boat get to the water?

Olliver: I do not know the exact time. I cannot say the exact time.

Burton: About when was it, do you think?

Olliver: I should say it was near on 1 o'clock.

[US p. 536]

It could be mentioned that Olliver ran four urgent errands from the time of the collision.

The first was an immediate order from the Captain to tell the carpenter to take the water draught. Olliver found him already doing it.

As soon as he got back on the bridge he had another order. He took a sealed message down to the chief engineer, waiting two or three minutes for an answer - which was that the instruction would be carried out as soon as possible. Arriving back on the bridge, the Captain next sent him to tell the bosun “to uncover the boats and get them ready.” [before midnight]

Olliver delivered this order, too, came back, and “no sooner did I get on the bridge than the sixth officer told me to go and get the boat’s list, so that he could muster the men at the boats.” He obtained the sailors’ boat list [the nearest one] and brought it. “Then I went to my boat [5] to muster them.”

Olliver’s account, in light of we already know about the bosun, does not seem to support his impression that his boat, No. 5, was lowered nearly *one hour and twenty minutes* after the collision. Such does not fit with a succession of quick orders from early on. And Shiers, Cunningham, Pitman, et al, are all against him.

Steward **F. Dent Ray** further critically damages claims for a 12.45am departure of boat 7. It will be remembered that Ray was told to get to the lifeboats “around about 12 o'clock.”



Alfred Shiers
UK National Archives



Alfred Olliver
Daily Mirror

Ray dressed himself, put on his lifebelt, and went along the working alleyway to a stairway, waiting his turn to ascend with about 20 others. They went straight up to C deck.

“I saw [Mr Dodd] up there and he asked me to get [him] a lifebelt. I went through five staterooms... found a life belt in the fifth and took it to him, and proceeded on up to the boat deck, to No. 9 boat, which was my boat, allotted to me.” [No. 9 was uncovered by this time, and was “just being swung out.” There was an officer and eight or ten men standing around, with one or two passengers.]

Q. What took place?

Ray: I went to the rail and looked over, and saw the *first boat leaving the ship* on the starboard side...

[US. p. 802/3]

What time was this? Could Ray have really taken three-quarters of an hour to get up to C deck and search five rooms for a lifebelt for Dodd? That is what a 12.45am departure for boat 7 necessarily means. Yet Steward **Andrew Cunningham**, as previously cited, ascended shortly after 12.30am and found boat 7 already gone. [US p. 797; 792/3.]

Again we see efficiency in the evidence of steward **Edward Brown**:

10505. Were you awakened by the shock? — Yes.

10567. And then, after some 20 minutes had passed, were you told that you were wanted on the boat deck to help with the boats? — That was the time I thought it was. You cannot judge time very well. I thought it was 20 or 25 minutes. [Midnight, or 12.05am]

10508. Did you go on the boat deck, and do what you were told? — Yes.

10509. ...Did you first help with boat No. 5? — Yes.

10510. Did you help the women and children into the boat? — Yes.

10511. Those were the orders? — Those were the orders.

Restaurant secretary **Paul Maugé** said:

20092. I saw Captain Smith had been to the engine room. He came back [after] two minutes. After that I [went] to the first-class passenger room by the staircase, and I saw Captain Smith again at the first lifeboat. He said to a lady, ‘It is all right, lady.’

20093. It was for her to get into the boat? — Yes.

20094. ...encouraging a lady to get into the boat? — Yes, because no lady or gentleman would like to go, everybody thought it would be quite safe.

...

20119. The first time I tried to go [forward], just to see what had happened, but there was a rush of people sent me back to my cabin. I went on...deck and I saw there Captain Smith.

20121. Did you have a difficulty? — No, because we had a staircase... [to the forward boat deck] a private staircase only for the staff.

20122. Then you did get there? — Yes.

20123. Did you see women and children being put into the boat? — Yes, but not many, because that was only the first one.

20124. Only the first boat? — Yes, the first boat.



Edward Brown
Southampton City Collection

Maugé’s account is totally inconsistent with a 12.45am time for the first departure.

Again and again, witnesses are indicating that a boat was in the water at an early stage, and not within 15 minutes of 1am after an 11.40pm collision. That’s too late.

Even the much-maligned **Sir Cosmo Duff Gordon** is in accordance with others:

12450/1. My wife woke me ('about a quarter to 12?' – 'I think so').
12453. Did you get up? - Not at first.
12454/5. As soon as I got up, I went out on the deck... the next time I went up, it was dreadful - the noise.
12463. Did you then go back and tell your wife to dress? - Yes.
12464. Did you remain there while she dressed, or did you go up again? – I went up again later.
12465. Did you see whether anything was being done with the boats? - Yes, I saw men stripping the lifeboats.
12466. Did you go down to your cabin again?
- I went down again then, and I told her, and I began to dress myself.
12473/4. Miss Francatelli joined us in the cabin just at that time. We went up to the boat deck together. To starboard.
12475. Did you see lifeboats being lowered?
- Yes, when we got up one was being either filled or lowered - the furthest aft of those three - (Pointing on the model.)
12476. That is boat No. 7? - Yes, I suppose so.
12479. You saw it being lowered? - I think it was just being filled as we got there, **and it was lowered almost immediately.**



Sir Cosmo Duff Gordon
Daily Sketch

Persons familiar with cruise ships know it takes only a few minutes to ascend several decks, and less than a minute in any self-respecting elevator... which of course the *Titanic* had.

The very limited descriptions of *activities* by witnesses prior to their seeing a boat or boats lowered on the starboard side (forward) shows that the time that elapsed before these departures was itself very limited.

Bedroom steward **Alfred Crawford** was in one of the first boats lowered on the *port* side, forward. He stated that he had previously helped lower a very full No. 5 (to starboard).

Crawford estimated that No. 8, which he commanded, went after 1am (Br 17892).

But he also said in America:

“No, sir; the starboard boats were lowered before ours were. We were on the port side; No.8 boat...”
[US p. 113]

Crawford was not asked enough questions about these starboard boats, in the plural. At one point [US p. 117] he seems suggest that three boats were lowered there before he crossed to port.

And so to Rowe!

George Thomas Rowe was the Quartermaster stationed on the after docking bridge at the time of impact. And he was wearing a watch.

“I felt a slight jar **and looked at my watch**. It was a fine night, and it was then **20 minutes to 12** [11.40pm]. I looked toward the starboard side of the ship and saw a mass of ice. I then remained on the after bridge to await orders through the telephone. No orders came down, and I remained until **25 minutes after 12**, when I saw a boat on the starboard beam.
[US p. 519]



It can be immediately grasped what the import of this evidence is. Rowe saw

a *Titanic* lifeboat in the water at 12.25am.

After Docking Bridge (*Olympic*)

Before the headlong rush to “correct” Rowe’s time, think of the mass of the evidence assembled and adduced heretofore. See that Rowe matches Pitman [who also wore a watch and said boat 5 went down at 12.30am, and boat 7 “two or three minutes previously.”]

Note that Rowe, in the same breath, mentions the exact time of the collision, and then the time that he saw a boat in the water. He treats these times as being on a normal plane.

Rowe makes no mention of having put his watch back! Not like Annie Robinson’s explanation of what her watch signified “by altered time.”

And if he *had* put his watch back, such that it really was now 12.45am, wouldn’t Rowe say that he remained for ***over an hour*** before seeing a boat – instead of saying that it was 12.25am?

“I telephoned to the fore bridge to know if they knew there was a boat lowered. They replied, asking me if I was the third officer. I replied, ‘No, I am the quartermaster.’ They told me to bring over detonators, which are used in firing distress signals.”
[ibid]

The man he spoke to was Joseph Boxhall, who testified:

15592. I never heard an order for any boat to be lowered, or even for women to be put in. The only order I heard was clearing the boats, and then I was employed the greater part of my time with these rockets on the bridge. I know very little about it.

15593. Except the order for clearing the boats, which came very early in the proceedings? — Yes. I knew one of the boats had gone away, because I happened to be putting the firing lanyard inside the wheelhouse after sending off a rocket, and the telephone bell rang. Somebody telephoned to say that one of the starboard boats had left the ship, and *I was rather surprised*.

15594. At their doing it so quickly? — No; I was rather surprised. I did not know the order had been given even to fill the boats...

Boxhall denies that he was surprised that it had been done quickly. He was surprised that it had been done at all. That does not exclude secondary surprise that a boat was in the water at a ‘very early’ stage. Mention of surprise, twice, would surely not be applicable to a 12.45am departure, when Boxhall knew from the Captain that Andrews had given the ship a short time to live.

Boxhall was another wearing a watch (Br. 15603), but did not look at it until after the sinking.

But he has mentioned firing ‘a rocket’ [not necessarily the first] before receiving the telephone call. He is using a box of rockets that was stored on the bridge.

It is often assumed that this was the first rocket, shackled to a 12.45am first lifeboat claim. But if this were right, it would mean *Titanic* waiting over an hour since impact to visibly and audibly signal her distress! Yet Boxhall is now asking for more rockets...

Rowe now takes a box of detonators out of a locker on the poop and brings it to the bridge, where he meets Boxhall. He does not mention **Quartermaster Arthur Bright**, who also brought up a box of rockets at the same time.

Bright, who slept through the iceberg encounter – unlike Rowe, watching it open-mouthed – is key to the whole question.

Bright was woken by fellow Quartermaster **Walter Wynn**, who had gone up and seen ice on the well deck. Wynn chatted a while, then descended and woke Bright, who was due on duty at midnight. (Wynn Br. 13394.) Bright rushed to get dressed – being slated to relieve Rowe at the stern, and it appears he was a little late:

Bright: I went out to the after end of the ship to relieve the man I should have relieved at 12 o'clock, a man by the name of Rowe. We stood there for some moments and did not know exactly what to do, and rang the telephone up to the bridge and asked them what we should do. They told us to bring a box of detonators for them - signals. Each of us took a box to the bridge.
[US p.832]

Here is the proof – Bright arrived apologetic and a little late. He and Rowe stood there *for some moments* before telephoning the bridge.

This cannot be 12.45am! It must be 12.25am. Rowe's wristwatch has run on normally, and no surprise, for this is the strangest spell of duty he has ever stood.

The evidence thus indicates that rockets were being fired much earlier than previously imagined, but also – when common sense is consulted – at a time when they *ought* to have been fired. (There is no reason to delay, and no passenger 'reluctance' impinges - especially when there is a box of rockets already on the main bridge.)

Rowe says he brought his box of extra rockets forward, and "assisted the officer to fire them, and was firing the distress signals until about five and twenty minutes after 1."

In Britain he was more specific about when he started:

17684. How long do you think it was from the time you commenced firing the rockets till you finished firing the rockets? —From about **a quarter to one** to about 1.25.

Here is 12.45 again... yet some people would ask us to believe it is actually five minutes past 1, under the theory that Rowe put his watch back twenty minutes.

(If true, the lack of urgency on a ship given perhaps an hour to live – more than an hour before – would be of truly staggering proportions!)

Of course, since Rowe himself specified both 12.25am for a boat in the water, and then 12.45am, there is a twenty-minute gap in any case – watch adjustment or no - from his telephone call until he himself began firing rockets... And yet Boxhall had been firing them earlier.

That 20-minute break, prior to a 40-minute period of rocket-firing by Rowe, exists whether his watch is left alone or tampered with. Rowe was also tasked with working the port side Morse lamp to try to signal the ship seen ahead... and while it may be that he personally started firing rockets late, there does not seem to have been a lapse in the middle of their firing. Nobody testifies to that.



Arthur John Bright
Southampton Pictorial



Walter Wynn *The Sphere*

(All this, incidentally, wreaks terrible damage on the theory of only eight rockets fired, but that is a separate matter. As separate as the third box of rockets that Bright brought to the bridge.)

The Rowe watch adjustment is often postulated, in an apparent wish to reconcile his specific evidence (12.25am boat in the water) with 12.45am, being the uncorroborated Dickinson Bishop estimate for the time of departure of the first boat...

This is a case of discarding everyone else, but stubbornly keeping Mr Bishop - who self-admittedly couldn't tell the time but 'imagined' what it might have been. It particularly means casting away no less a figure than Third Officer Pitman, who echoes Rowe, but necessarily 'must have been mistaken,' along with Shiers, Beesley, Cunningham, Etches and all the others.

Such an approach is a spectacular case of putting the cart before the horse, in preferring a single passenger version to that of two senior crew who both wore watches! (There is no evidence Dickinson Bishop did so, and he strongly indicates he did not, since he took the time of the sinking from others.)

Rowe, at least, had a watch – yet unlike Annie Robinson, did not say at either Inquiry that he adjusted it backwards. It would be a salient thing to point out to investigators when specifying times, would it not?

And if he had inadvertently misled the Americans, wouldn't his fellow crew have pointed out the 'correct' time, so that he could adjust the record in London? But that didn't happen. No adjustment took place, in evidence or otherwise.

Titanic's time, moreover, was due to go back 47 minutes to reflect the likely Monday noon. Stewardess Robinson put her watch back virtually the whole amount, so the time of the sinking (2.20am by run-on time) was close to twenty to two by her adjusted watch.

So if Rowe was putting back his watch, why would he only put it back by less than *half* the due amount, especially since he was immediately going off duty (and would ordinarily have been asleep for the second retardation)?

(QM **Robert Hichens**: "The clock was to go back that night 47 minutes, 23 minutes in one watch and 24 in the other." [US p. 451])

The most likely explanation of all these considerations, and of what Rowe said in evidence, is that he did not put back his watch, but let it run on. Ship's *clocks*, after all, were nothing to do with crew wristwatches, which could be easily adjusted – by the ship's clock – the next day.

But there is claimed "justification" for interfering with Rowe's chronometer as a result of a remark he made in evidence.

Rowe left the *Titanic* in charge of Collapsible C, saying:

"It was 1.25 when I left the bridge to get into the boat. When the boat was in the water the well deck was submerged [but not the forecastle head, as he later made clear]. It took us a good five minutes to lower the boat... [becomes 1.30am]

Senator Burton: She [*Titanic*] must have sunk soon after you left?

Rowe: Twenty minutes, I believe. [US p. 524]



Robert Hichens *Gaumont*

This is 1.30am plus 20 = a sinking supposedly at 1.50am.

But we realise that Rowe's "twenty minutes" is inherently unreliable, because if it really was 1.50am (instead of 1.30am) then the extra 20 minutes allotted to Rowe's watch (to compensate for his supposedly having put it back by that amount) still only gets us to 2.10am for the sinking...

Thus the "twenty minutes" remark is not a proof of anything, just evidence that Rowe underestimated the time that elapsed between the time his lifeboat left the *Titanic* and when the vessel sank.

But here's another problem for the claim that it was "actually 1.50am" when Rowe left, because another occupant of Collapsible C testified that the boat departed ten minutes earlier – at 1.40am – with Rowe in charge.

Albert Victor Pearcey, a humble third class pantryman, was saved in Rowe's boat [C]. He arrived on the boat deck at "nearly half past one" (Br. 10385), saw two babies on deck and brought them to the boat. He was told by an officer to get in with them. Pearcey says:

10456. Can you give us any idea of how long it was after you had started rowing away from the *Titanic* before she sank? — No, I cannot. It was 20 minutes to two when we came away from her. [1.40am]

10457. That will help us. It was 20 minutes to two, you remember, when you started rowing away from the ship's side, is that right? — Yes.

10458. That's what you mean, is it? — Yes.

10459. Not when you came up on deck, but when you started rowing away? — Yes, when we got away. It was just in time. ["just in time" – same impression as Rowe.]

10460. How do you remember it was 20 minutes to two? — Because **I looked at the time.**

10461. That is what I wanted to know. Where did you look at the time? — One of the passengers had the time.

10462. And it was 20 minutes to 2? — Yes.



Albert Victor Pearcey
Daily Sketch

This was a passenger, whose watch agrees with QM Rowe's timing for when he broke off firing rockets. But it cannot agree with Rowe if the latter's time should arbitrarily be wound forward (at the behest of modern theorists anxious to 'explain' his 12.25am being 'actually' 12.45am!)

Only if Rowe's watch runs on normally will he, Pearcey, and the watch-wearing passenger be in harmony. (It is surely unlikely that a passenger would put his watch back too?)

Both Pearcey and Rowe evidently felt they were "just in time" when they got away, but Pearcey's was a 40-minute escape, whereas Rowe did offer that 20-minute comment.

Ismay, also saved in this boat, suggested it might have been an hour! (Br. 18543)

Let us consult commonsense: No weight can be placed on estimates of how long it took for the ship to sink once a particular witness has gotten away. It seems natural human psychology to always imagine that one 'barely escaped.' Many impossibly short estimates could be cited.

Back to actual timings - **Weikman**, the barber we met at the beginning, was wearing a watch. He gave the 11.40pm collision time, and it is noteworthy that Weikman actually helped to launch the boat containing Rowe, Pearcey and Ismay [Collapsible C]. Then, after it had gone:

I was proceeding to launch the next boat when the ship suddenly sank at the bow and there was a rush of water that washed me overboard... This was about 1.50am...

How do you know it was 1.50am?

Because my watch was stopped at that time by the water. [US p. 1099]

Weikman does not mention putting his watch back. He exactly supports Rowe's iceberg time, and supports normal run-on time for Rowe after midnight, which is supported in turn by Pearcey, whose own timing supports the 1.40am statement of the passenger in Collapsible C.

And Rowe effectively contradicts his "twenty minutes" (and his watch-botherers) in other testimony:

Senator Burton: How far from the ship were you when she went down?

Rowe: About three-quarters of a mile, sir.

[US p. 520. Exactly the same exchange and distance is repeated at US p. 526]

In other words, his craft had rowed three-quarters of a mile in "twenty minutes." In a boat containing 39 people

and four stowaways. More likely they did it in 40 minutes.

While there is this contradiction in Rowe, there are none in Pitman. And the weight of all the other evidence supports Pitman.

(Note, however, that those who disbelieve aspects of Rowe's evidence, would cherry-pick one of his remarks as 'proof' of a highly dubious contention that he put his watch back, while rejecting the *prima facie* meaning of the rest of his account in its entirety.)

But the entire question can now be resolved! Because there is *actual proof* that Rowe did not put back his watch, and it comes from Rowe himself.

In 1963, Leslie Harrison, General Secretary of the Merchant Marine Services Association (MMSA) was indirectly in touch with Quartermaster Rowe.

Harrison asked the MMSA's District Secretary in Southampton, where Rowe still lived, to interview him. When the officer, John Powell, reported that he had done so, Harrison wrote back:

"There is only one other question, upon which I should like to be absolutely clear, and that is whether he put his watch back the twenty-three minutes which was originally scheduled for navigational purposes [in the middle watch] that night."

Powell responded on May 18, 1963, with a devastatingly clear answer:

M.S.A., Head Office, "NAUTILUS HOUSE," 6, RUMFORD PLACE, LIVERPOOL, 3.	FROM J. POWELL, SOUTHAMPTON. Date 18th May, 1963. Ref. No. LW/BG. Our ref : JP.
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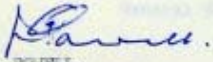
Dear Mr. Harrison,

M. S. A.
20 MAY 1963

"TITANIC".

Thank you for your letter of 10th May. I have now been able to speak with Mr. Rowe again (by telephone) and, in answer to your question - **NO**, he definitely did not adjust his watch. I asked this question over the 'phone as it was not convenient to him for me to visit him at that time, but he suggested that we meet again next week. If there is anything further, therefore, on which you feel that Mr. Rowe could be of assistance, then please let me know and I can discuss it with him at that time.

In passing, my copy of the report on the loss of the "Titanic" is one of the originals and, if you feel that you would like to have this during the present inquiry then I shall be only too happy to post it to you.

Yours sincerely,

J. POWELL.
District Secretary.

"I have now been able to speak to Mr Rowe again (by telephone) and, in answer to your question – **NO, he definitely did not adjust his watch.**"

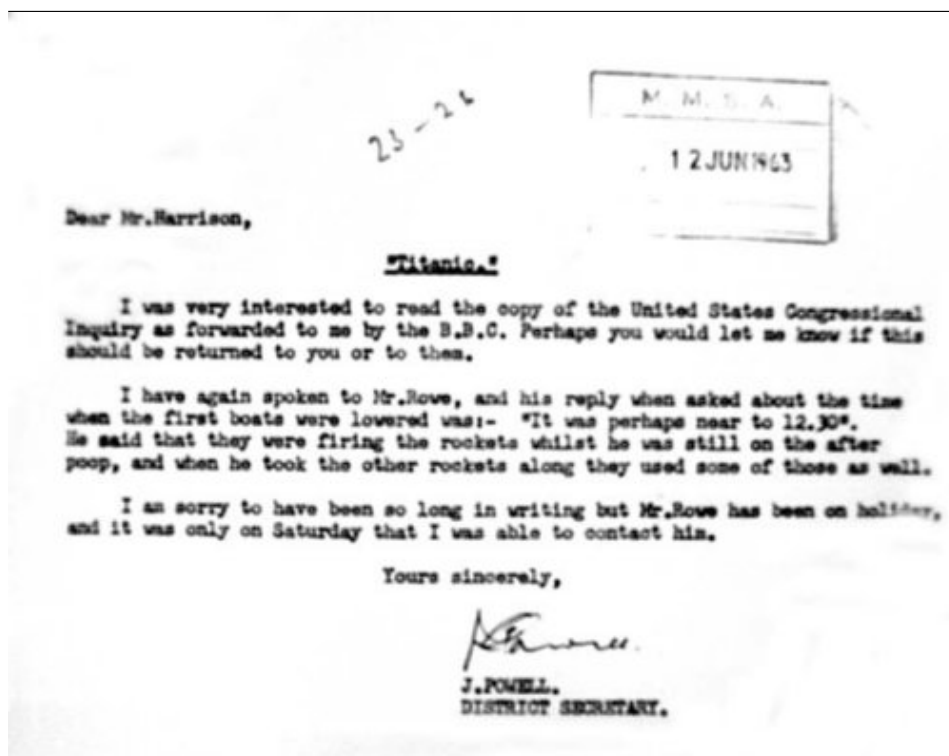
This reply, stamped in receipt by the MMSA, is now in the files of the Merseyside Maritime Museum, reference **D/LO 3/4/24**. (Publication permission granted by Nautilus, successor organisation to the MMSA.)

Rowe did not adjust his watch, it is now clear. Meanwhile, according to a further missive from Mr Powell, dated June 1963:

“I have again spoken to Mr Rowe, and his reply when asked about the time the first boats were lowered was:- ‘It was perhaps near to 12.30.’ **He said that they were firing the rockets whilst he was still on the after poop,** and when he took the other rockets along, they used some of those as well.”



George Thomas Rowe in old age
Southern Evening Echo



Thus it is that Dickinson Bishop, in ‘imagining’ the time of departure for the first lifeboat, (and aside from a guesstimate from Olliver) cannot have an ‘adjusted’ Rowe in corroboration of his suggestion of 12.45am.

Yet on the other side of the argument, in favour of an earlier launch for this first boat, are all the witnesses cited here, importantly including Pitman and Rowe.

And it is evident that Rowe’s 1912 testimony, even without his emphatic clarification in 1963 (which came long before any modern theory evolved), is amply supported by QM Bright, the man who stood alongside Rowe "for some moments" on the docking bridge.

SO WHY did the British Inquiry publish a 12.45am departure time for boat 7, the boat it said was the first to leave *Titanic*?

The short answer is because it suited them. No witness at the British Inquiry gave this time – none at all – but of course the British already had the American transcripts. Many witnesses in London were asked about their prior US testimony.

It seems likely that a folder of guidance for counsel was prepared about each lifeboat, since the British Inquiry specifically concerned itself with adducing evidence for Lord Mersey about each boat in turn.

It would be no surprise, therefore, if the Dickinson Bishop evidence – untested – would simply be institutionalised for boat 7.

It has recently been claimed that “the investigators of the British Inquiry, while compiling their table, realised that Rowe’s sighting of a boat at 12.25am was a mistake from Rowe’s setting his watch back 23 minutes and they corrected 7’s launch to 12.45.”

(*The Titanic Commutator*, Vol. 25, No. 155, 2001.)

This is nonsense. How could the British ‘realise’ such a thing?

Furthermore, if there was a difference of '23 minutes' with Rowe after midnight, why did the ‘correction’ of his 1.25am time come to 1.45am and not 1.48am? Can’t the insightful British count?

Let the plain truth now be told – the British Inquiry didn’t realise anything. It had likely written Dickinson Bishop’s time onto its boat 7 briefing material, and that’s where it stayed. Since Rowe was never in boat 7 (the British called *occupant* witnesses for each boat), his timing was irrelevant to their compilations.

This, mark you, is the Inquiry that did not realise that the *Titanic* and the *Californian* had different apparent ship times, and outrageously treated nominal time on one as identical to that of the other.

And this leads us to another reason why the British Inquiry clasped the extremely late 12.45am time to its bosom...

Because Second Officer Stone, on the *Californian*, first saw a light in the sky ‘at about 12.45am’ by his ship’s time!

But these ships’ times were simply not the same.

There is evidence from Boxhall and Lightoller (and in the testimony of Pitman) that the *Titanic* officers agreed that their ship sank at 2.20am run-on time, which was 12.47am in New York (5.47am GMT).

[Lightoller and Pitman, US p.294, Boxhall US p.918]

Importantly, such a time was transmitted by the *Carpathia* to the *Olympic* - at 4pm on April 15, long before any inquiry ever convened.

[US p. 1128]

This would mean the *Titanic* was 1h33 ahead of New York (00.47 plus 1h33 = 2.20am).

The *Californian*, by her evidence, was 1h50 ahead of New York.

Therefore she was 17 minutes ahead of *Titanic*.

Thus a *Californian* time should have 17 minutes subtracted to get the time on *Titanic*.

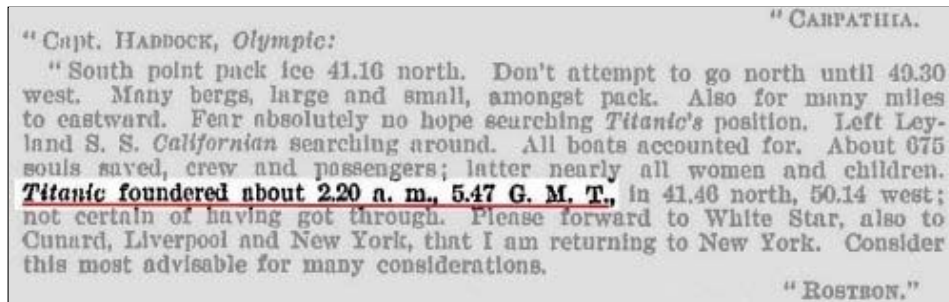
This truth has been ‘hidden in plain view’ since 1912. It is the sworn evidence of surviving officers, and the independent statement of the *Carpathia*.

The British Inquiry claimed to have established that the first CQD was sent at 12.15am ship’s time, through first equating *Titanic* directly to *Californian* time and then applying that ship's difference to the New York time kept in the wireless logs of other ships.

But 17 minutes should be subtracted, so that 12.15am actually becomes 11.58pm. If anyone doubts this, Harold Bride's US evidence is categorical that it was five minutes to twelve a moment before Captain Smith came into the wireless shack and demanded a call for assistance be sent 'at once.' It was 'immediately' complied with. [US p.144-6]

A *Californian* time of 12.45am (about the time the first 'light' or rocket was seen) thus becomes 12.28am on *Titanic*. And even before this, several 'shooting stars' had also been noticed...

Such a time reflects almost perfectly the testimony of Boxhall, Pitman and Rowe – plus the chronology of Lawrence Beesley [op. cit.] - and of course it meets with common sense about the need to indicate distress as soon as danger is realised.



" Capt. HADDOCK, *Olympic*:
"South point pack ice 41.16 north. Don't attempt to go north until 49.30 west. Many bergs, large and small, amongst pack. Also for many miles to eastward. Fear absolutely no hope searching *Titanic's* position. Left Leyland S. S. *Californian* searching around. All boats accounted for. About 675 souls saved, crew and passengers; latter nearly all women and children. *Titanic* foundered about 2.20 a. m., 5.47 G. M. T., in 41.46 north, 50.14 west; not certain of having got through. Please forward to White Star, also to Cunard, Liverpool and New York, that I am returning to New York. Consider this most advisable for many considerations.
" ROSTRON."

**The U.S. inquiry records a wireless message sent by *Carpathia* to *Olympic* that demonstrates how *Titanic* time related to Greenwich Mean Time. (New York five hours behind GMT).
Officer Lowe had GMT on his wristwatch.**

Beesley, in a statutory declaration made on February 21, 1963, swore:

"While still on board the *Titanic* I saw eight rockets fired from her. I left the ship in Number Thirteen lifeboat and I am quite confident that the last of these rockets had been fired before this lifeboat cleared the *Titanic's* side after being lowered into the water." [Underlining as in original.]

This agrees with Rowe's amplified account of the same year.

Thus, to say that the first rocket was fired at 12.45am on *Titanic* because the first boat was launched at that time - and the first rocket seen on *Californian* noticed about then (by another ship's clock!)... amounts to triple fallacy that has no coherent basis.

Furthermore, realisation that *Californian* time was 17 minutes ahead of the *Titanic* helps establish that these two ships were simply not in sight of each other.

Charles Victor Groves, third officer of the *Californian*, stated that his ship's nearby visitor stopped at 11.40pm. But it was still only 11.23pm on the proudly surging *Titanic*...

THE British Inquiry certainly did realise something...

But it is a measure of their contempt for the proper pursuit of their duties that they decided to ignore an obvious fault of reasoning.

Sir Rufus Isaacs, British Attorney General, on the 35th day of the British Inquiry, found himself in the crux of the difficulty:

"The order to lower [sic] the boats was given within some 20 minutes of the impact, which would bring us to 12 o'clock. In point of fact, no boat was lowered at the earliest till 12.45. That was boat No. 7...

Of course, by that time, as your Lordship observes, more than an hour had elapsed. She struck at 11.40 and the first boat is put into the water at 12.45.

No doubt there are those who will assist your Lordship who are more familiar with the time that it

*ought to take to get a boat ready and to lower into the water in an **emergency** such as this than I, but it does strike one as a long time.”*

The mistake is realised.

But it was not investigated and corrected. Any inquiry that learned a ship's Captain had been told by her builder that the vessel could have an hour to live - and who then spent three-quarters of it before getting the *first* of his 20 boats into the water - would surely be castigated like no other mariner has ever been castigated before. And it would be richly deserved.

Yet the Mersey final report concluded as follows:

“At about 12.30 the order was given to place women and children in the boats. This was proceeded with at once and at about 12.45 Mr Murdoch gave the order to lower No. 7 boat (on the starboard side) to the water.”

[Br. Rpt, p. 37/8]

Look carefully at the above. It is absolutely contrary to all the evidence that the order to place women and children in the boats was given at 12.30. No-one testified to that. But Mersey uses it as the starter gun so that the order was complied with *at once*. There was no unpardonable delay!

[Third class steward John Hart said at Br 9926: “The vessel struck, I believe, at 11.40... It must have been three parts of an hour before the word was passed down to me to pass the women and children up...” (12.25am). A perverse declaration that *would* be unpardonable, if generally true.]

The British Inquiry's 12.30 claim flatly contradicts its own answer to Question 16 (b), asking *How long after the casualty was its seriousness realised by those in charge of the vessel?* Lord Mersey declares “about 15-20 minutes,”[p. 65] - indicating 11.55pm or midnight.

Thus Lord Mersey's later denial of the great weight of testimony in a shameful somersault.

But behind the appalling handling of this tragedy and related issues by the British Inquiry, there remains what actually happened.

And the truth is that it must be extremely likely that the first *Titanic* lifeboat departed the vessel long, long before 12.45am.

Such a realisation calls into question such modern-day myths as Captain Smith's supposed vacillation, and the claim that Bruce Ismay departed amid scenes of chaos and shooting – when none of the occupants of his boat (collapsible C) testified to any disorder. It was not the end time.

Of course there are other knock-on effects of the evidence, argument and new proofs from 1963 produced in this article. Let the chips fall where they may.

But the 'starting point' for modern lifeboat-departure calculations surely stands destroyed.

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Acknowledgements

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