

## Asquith and the Conspiracy to Sink Titanic

by Senan Molony

### ***Titanic Research***

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&#8220;The architect, the owner, and the Captain were partners in an infamous conspiracy to repair their desperate fortunes by sinking the ship and sharing the insurance money.&#8221;  
, February 1914.

But it is everything to do with what some would like the public to think.



**Asquith as a  
lawyer at the  
British  
Titanic  
Inquiry**

*Daily Sketch*  
May 2, 1912.

RAYMOND Asquith was a junior counsel for the Board of Trade at its Inquiry into the sinking of the RMS *Titanic*.

He knew enough to thoroughly despise monstrous inventions and &#8220;fantastic impossibilities.&#8221;

A letter from Asquith to *The Times* in February 1914 mocked the dire predictions of *The Times* itself, among other notables, that civil war would surely follow if Ireland were to be granted Home Rule.

The letter was subtitled *"A Titanic Analogy"*; and it is remarkable in that it unwittingly debunks in advance the claims of modern conspiracy theorists that the White Star Line would sink a vessel in order to reclaim the insurance.

In that respect, it might be said to be a prognostication in itself.

It is *The Shtick of Robin Gardiner Foretold!*

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The leader on page nine of *The Times* on Monday, February 23, 1914, noted that the House of Commons was to begin the business of a momentous session that would finally clear the way for Home Rule for Ireland.

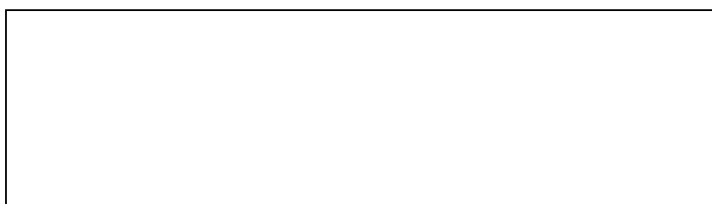
The newspaper, a bastion of the Establishment, hated the idea - and had championed the cause of the naysayers for decades. Now it pronounced in its columns that the Opposition - the Conservative party in the main - was charged with a duty of the "utmost seriousness."

It warned: "Unionists are convinced that the country is drifting into a danger that is so great that many people are unable to believe that it is real." The Home Rule Bill was "bad in itself and without popular backing."

*The Times* opined: "The certainty of civil war as a result of it raises the natural function of an Opposition to an imperative duty."

It continued by maintaining that if the public were still apathetic to Home Rule, it was only because they did not believe in the possibility of civil war.

"People would not believe in the Balkan War until it happened. They did not believe in the Spanish-American War, nor in the Russo-Japanese War. If anyone had foretold the foundering of the *Titanic* on her maiden voyage, it would have been laughed aside as an impossibility. Two years ago people would not believe that the Coal Strike would ever take place, even when it had become plainly inevitable to those who could see what was going on.



## PUBLIC APATHY AND CIVIL WAR.

### A TITANIC ANALOGY. TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir -

In your leading article this morning you admit, deplore, and seek to explain the prevailing apathy of the public in the face of the appalling and imminent prospect of civil war.

The admission and the regret I can understand, but not the explanation. This apathy is ascribed by the ingenious writer to an alleged Constitutional inability of our countrymen to conceive the possibility of disaster until it is actually upon them, and is illustrated by a reference, inter alia, to the loss of the *Titanic*

No-one, he says, before the melancholy event, would have considered it possible that the *Titanic* should founder on her maiden voyage. He may be quite right.

I have often been warned not to expect too much of analogies, but may I, without undue pedantry, suggest some circumstances which prevent this one from being entirely persuasive?

Suppose that for a period of two years, from the day on which the keel of the *Titanic*

**the architect, the owner, and the captain were partners in an infamous conspiracy to repair their desperate fortunes by sinking the ship and sharing the insurance money :**

Suppose also that while the vessel was still under construction, 100,000 men in Bowler Hats had assembled in Belfast, and there, with the blessing of the Church and the approval of the Conservative leaders, had sworn a Solemn Oath and Covenant that if the *Titanic*

Suppose that the democracy of Ireland had subscribed a million pounds or so to finance this project, that the project itself was warmly applauded by the greater part of the British press, and that such sober and respected organs of opinion as *The Spectator* and *The Times*

And, finally, suppose that Mr Joynson-Hicks M.P., had stated with a full sense of his responsibility that the stars in their courses were fighting for those who desired the *Titanic* to sink, and that the God of Battles entirely shared their views.

Upon these presuppositions, all of which appear necessary to make the suggested analogy legitimate, I cannot but think that public opinion would have been adverse rather than indifferent to the projected voyage and would have missed no opportunity of manifesting its opposition.

If the writer of your article holds that, despite these premonitory circumstances, the public would still have regarded the wreck of the *Titanic* as a "fantastic impossibility," I concede that he overrates what he calls the "placidity of modern life."

It is not improbable that some members of our race have too little imagination, but is it impossible that others have too much?

Yours Faithfully,

Raymond Asquith

(*The Times*, February 25, 1914, p. 9)

Home Rule went through at last for Ireland in that spring of 1914. There was no immediate civil war.

But there was no Home Rule either. The British Government promptly prorogued the measure owing to a worsening international situation. When war broke out in August, Home Rule was once more placed back on the shelf.

Ireland was fated never to get Home Rule, although soon she would set about taking her Independence.



**Lieutenant  
Asquith**  
*The Sphere,*  
*September*  
*23, 1916*

Raymond Asquith, meanwhile, was once more following the patriotic cause as he saw it in what the newspapers would soon be calling "the titanic struggle";

They put him on the general staff, for Asquith was an educated man.

Born in 1878 and educated at Winchester, he carried all before him at school, won an open scholarship at Balliol in 1896, and came up to Oxford with a reputation practically made - and assuredly justified - as the most brilliant man of his year.

He easily won first class honours, as well as the Ireland, Craven, and Derby scholarships, became President of the Union Society, and in 1902 was elected a Fellow of All Souls.

"But the mere record of his academic distinctions give us no picture of his university life. His cleverness was so astonishing that his triumphs seemed lightly won: and indeed they probably cost him as little effort as similar successes have ever cost anyone. It was not that he was a less hard worker than others, but that his brain was amazingly quicker than theirs. His scholarship was unflinching brilliant, his intellectual interests catholic and perpetually alert, but his studies never kept him from the fullest enjoyment of the life of the university and the society of his friends."

Asquith wrote in one letter home.

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He was called to the bar in 1904, and had laid the foundations of a fine practice. To mention only two of his important cases, he was engaged as junior counsel in the North Atlantic Fisheries Arbitration at The Hague and in the Inquiry into the loss of the steamship *Titanic*.

As a rising lawyer and as a future politician - he had been adopted as a prospective Liberal candidate for Derby - he was following in his father's footsteps when the war broke out.

He had been seconded for staff duties, but was always anxious for the work of the trenches. He pressed to be allowed to return to his battalion, and obtained his wish before the beginning of the present Great

Offensive (The Somme).

He was married in 1907 to Katherine, younger daughter of Sir J. and Lady Horner, and leaves a son and two daughters.

(*The Times*, Tuesday September 19, 1916, p.10)

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King and Queen  
telegraphed

The Prime Minister had no intention of repatriating his son's body. "Mr Asquith prefers that his son, who met a soldier's death, should have a soldier's burial."

It is tempting to think that something in Asquith's poem *The Volunteer* reflects a sentiment of his sibling:

*Here lies a clerk who half his life has spent*

*And now those waiting dreams are satisfied;*

Another brother was Arthur Asquith, a close friend and comrade-in-arms of the famed soldier-poet Rupert Brooke, who was on Lemnos when the latter died. It was Brooke who had penned the lines:

*If I should die, think only this of me:*



**The grave of Raymond Asquith at Guillemont**

A plain stone, among many, was in time erected over the Asquith grave at Guillemont by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

It affirms the only plot that Raymond Asquith - coruscating wit and foe of all false prophets - had ever believed in.

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