

Kate Phillips' daughter's story (Conceived on Titanic claim)

Submitted by Senan Molony

As a young girl, my mother worked in a sweetshop in Worcester owned by a man named Henry Morley.

He was married and nearly 20 years older, but they eloped on the *Titanic*. Mr Morley sold two of his shops and left the other two to support his wife and 12-year-old daughter. Then he booked a passage for San Francisco.

I don't know what my grandparents thought. But they did go down to Southampton to see my mother off.

Of course my parents never had a chance to make a new life. Only women and children were allowed into the lifeboats. My father didn't want her to go and tried to cling onto her, but the sailors threw her in the boat. My father couldn't swim. His body was never found.

My mother was in the lifeboat for eight hours. All she had on was a nightgown, but one of the sailors wrapped his jumper round her. She went on to New York and stayed there for three or four months.

Apparently she was very beautiful and an American couple offered to take her in. But then my mother discovered she was pregnant. The couple didn't want a baby as well, so my mother came back to my grandparents' home in Worcester.

It was a disgrace to be born without a father, but in my early childhood I was protected from the shame.

I was born in my grandparents' house on January 11, 1913, nine months to the day from when the *Titanic* called at Queenstown.

The house backed onto the river Severn and my earliest memory is of sitting in the family punt while my grandfather strapped me in. "Well make sure you won't drown," he would say. But I didn't know what he meant.

For the first nine years I was brought up by them. Once a year this woman would arrive from London and cuddle and smother me in kisses. I couldn't bear it. I had no idea who she was.

That all changed when my mother remarried. I was sent to live with her and my stepfather in South Ealing, London. I suppose it must have been a bit of a shock to find this stranger was my mother.

The first thing my mother said was: "You're not a lady now so you won't have clothes like that." I had to wear black stockings and boots.

The shock of the *Titanic* must have disturbed my mother's mind. She had been on her way to another land with the man she loved. You'd think that she would love his child. But instead she rejected me and used me as a sort of servant.

I did all the housework while she spent her time in bed with imaginary illnesses.

If I so much as broke a cup I was given a hiding. My grandparents would come and stay every August and my mother would hit me while they were there.

At other times she would lock me in a room all day, only coming up to give me dry bread. I didn't cry or complain, I just accepted it.

She used to cane me on the back of my legs as I walked upstairs. We had fleece-lined knickers down to the knees and the fluff would stick to the cuts. I kept pulling at them and one day my friend Elsie asked what the matter was.

Elsie's mother reported it to the authorities. I went to school and the headmistress called me up to her office. I cried. I was so worried about what my mother would do, but the headmistress said: "She'll never touch you from this day." And she didn't.

There was a court case, although I didn't find out until much later.

My mother seemed not to want to think about Henry Morley at all. I don't think I even knew my father's name until I was 12 or 13, when one of my aunts told me.

Throughout my teens they continued to mention bits and pieces so that gradually I discovered what had happened.

Once when I was 14 or 15, one of my aunts found a photo of Mr Morley which she gave me. It was the first time I had any idea what he looked like. I hadn't it very long when it disappeared.

I suppose my mother must have taken it, but I never confronted her. It's my deepest regret that I didn't make my mother tell me about him. Perhaps if she'd talked about him, she wouldn't have been so disturbed.

My stepfather was kind, but he wasn't educated and couldn't read or write. He worked as a window cleaner.

My real father must have been a millionaire and half his fortune went down on the *Titanic*. I'm sure he and my mother would have married and she would have had every luxury.

Throughout my life I thought of getting in contact with my father's remaining family. His wife died four years after he left her.

He had a daughter, Doris, my half-sister, but I never went to see her because I was always afraid she would say: 'Your mother stole my father.' That would have killed me.

My mother became more and more disturbed. Once she swallowed some acid and burned the walls of her stomach. She was put in an asylum at Watford and my stepfather finally left her.

In the end we lost contact and I didn't even find out she'd died until months after her funeral.

In 1989 I moved back to Worcester and one day someone gave me a local item on the *Titanic*. It had pictures of people from Worcester aboard - and a photograph of Henry Morley.

I cried and cried and cried. It was the first clear picture I'd seen.

The older I've got the more I've wanted to be recognised as Henry Morley's daughter. His money is all

gone and there may be no relatives left, but I want my father's name on my birth certificate.

I was conceived on the *Titanic*. It means so much.

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Courtesy of Senan Molony

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