

Human tragedy of the Titanic

by Neil Hotson

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Mrs Saunders, a widow, was walking down Bridge Street in the direction of Southampton Docks railway station. She was carrying her handbag, which contained six shillings.

John Dixon was also walking in Bridge Street. He had arrived from Belfast on *Titanic*, working his passage as a fireman's help. Being short of money he snatched the bag and ran into the nearby crowd, but was caught by a lad. Tuesday, April 9th, 1912, seemed an unlucky day for him as he was sentenced to 14 days' hard labour.

That same day Irishman Michael Rogers arrived in Southampton and signed on as a Steward in *Titanic's* Marconi department. Rogers wanted his fiancée to marry before the journey, but Miss Harris, of Winchester, preferred to wait as her family had suffered several recent bereavements. Her brother, Edward, was a steward in *Titanic's* plate pantry.

The next day, Charles Stride, of Chantry Road, was using a lame horse to pull a trolley laden with ice through Southampton. A short distance away the *Titanic* slipped her moorings and set out for New York. Ice of a different nature was to be her downfall.

On board was steward William Ward, an Australian living in Southampton, who was making his first trip with the White Star Company. He had been wrecked five times, on one occasion drifting two days in an open boat under tropical skies.

Saturday evening came and, at sea, the ship's designer, Mr. Thomas Andrews, visited the first-class stewardesses' mess to ask if there were any improvements in the ship that they could suggest. A few hours later his priorities had changed. The starboard side of the ship stove in as it collided with an iceberg, the impact breaking the leg of third engineer Shepherd.

Steward Percy Keen roused steward Butterworth from his sleep, leaving him only when he saw he had begun to dress. Percy Keen survived but his shipmate was lost.

Mr. Andrews returned to the stewardesses' mess to tell Mrs. Gold and Mrs. Martin to hurry up on deck. The messenger could not save himself.

Chance again showed its hand when a box of "biscuits" hurriedly put into a lifeboat was found to contain rockets, some of which were fired off.

A large crowd assembled outside the White Star offices in Canute Road, hungry for any news. John Foster, a stevedore from Itchen, jostled for position in the throng. His work colleague was standing near him and found it easy to steal his silver watch and chain.

Steward Ward's son had the news he wanted. He rushed into the newspaper office exclaiming, "Please I've got a cable from my dad. He's saved." But Miss Harris at Winchester would not see her fiancée or brother again.

The first contingent of survivors arrived at Southampton's West railway station, from Plymouth, shortly after 10 pm on Sunday, April 28th. The second contingent, of stewards and stewardesses, arrived the next evening. Large crowds greeted the homecomers and both trains

went on to the docks station, where there were some very emotional reunions.

In Winchester, George Williams decided to knock at the door of Southgate Lodge and ask for work. He falsely claimed to be a *Titanic* survivor. The magistrates took a dim view and he was given 14 days' hard labour for begging alms.

The Titanic disaster was a very human tragedy.

Courtesy of Neil Hotson

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