

# On the Trail of 'Lucky' Tower

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## *ET Research*

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Is this the face of *Titanic* legend's most elusive man?

'Lucky Tower' is the moniker given to a fireman who reputedly escaped triple shipwreck, surviving in turn the *Titanic*, *Empress of Ireland* and *Lusitania*.

Revisionist assessments dismiss him as a character from Ripley's '*Believe it or Not!*' - with the obvious emphasis on the *Not*. Few entertain the story beyond its entertainment value, pointing out that there was no Tower on the *Titanic* Crew Agreement. Perfectly true.

And yet there is much more to 'Lucky Tower' than meets the eye.

First of all, his name was not Tower, but Toner. And Toner, in turn, may be bound up with a fireman named William Clark, who certainly survived the *Titanic* and *Empress of Ireland* sinkings.

A "Bizarre Unified Theory" could hold that 'Lucky Tower' is in actual fact William Clark, in the last of his disasters posing as a 'Frank Toner.'

Because Frank Toner and William Clark were both Irish, of a like age, and living in Bootle, Liverpool. They had a similar turn of phrase - and both sported a grey moustache. Quite a few coincidences for a coincidental man.

If William Clark was 'Frank Toner' - and there is a further reason why it might be so - then he indeed survived the three great wrecks of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, being *Titanic*, *Empress of Ireland*, and *Lusitania* in turn.

This story works backwards, and starts with the *Lusitania*.

Mention of a lucky man named Tower appears in the *Irish Independent*, on Monday May 10, 1915, on page six:

### **HIS THIRD ESCAPE**

A Fireman's Thrilling Experience

Was in *Titanic* Disaster

Frank Tower, fireman on board the *Lusitania*, who was amongst those rescued and brought to Kinsale, tells a thrilling tale. He is a Liverpool man whose home is at 23 Craton Street. "This is the third big shipping disaster I have been in," he said to our special representative, "and if I am in another I think it will be my last," he added good-humouredly.

Tower is middle-aged, strongly built, cool and courageous. He was a fireman on the *Titanic* when that great vessel went down in 1912. His next experience was with the *Empress of*



*Ireland*, which went down last year [1914] in the St Lawrence River and over 1,000 passengers and crew were drowned.

"I was down below at my work when the *Lusitania* was struck," said Tower. "The torpedo created a great shock and I immediately went on deck. I didn't hear a second torpedo strike the vessel, but there must have been a second, for there was a terrible explosion. As a result of that many firemen were killed."

There was no stoker named Tower on the *Lusitania* articles, any more than with the *Titanic*. But there was a Francis Toner, and a real individual gave that name to the police when he was landed from the scene of the wreck at Kinsale. The Lucky Tower myth flows from an error in citing Toner.

It may be notable that the first reference to this survivor was in the *Times* of London on Saturday, May 8th – the day after *Lusitania*'s sinking. This first report of the tragedy named a fireman called 'Touer' among the saved.

Someone familiar with the "hot metal" printing then employed (in which compositors had to read upside down!) can instantly decipher a common printer's error here. The 'n' in Toner was transposed as 'u' because of the upside-down effect.

Essentially the compositor's brain lapses momentarily when reading both upside-down and right-to-left, and returns to traditional left-to-right reading when selecting a letter. Because it still looks right upside-down, the printer does not notice his mistake. But the effect of 'Touer' on a reader is a sound like 'Tower.'

'Lucky Tower' has thus been conjured, although another newspaper, the one closest to the scene of the *Lusitania* sinking, was correctly identifying a man named Toner who was employed in *Lusitania*'s stokehold on the same day as the *Times*.

The *Cork Examiner* was a newspaper of outstanding quality for 1912, by far the best Irish broadsheet of its day. It reported Toner in the same context, indicating that the London newspaper was getting a local feed when it made a mistake with 'Touer.'

On the following Monday morning, in only its second edition since the *Lusitania* was sunk (since a non-publishing Sunday intervened), the *Examiner* carried a spread of disaster photographs on page three.

In the middle of this page the following picture appears, entitled "Firemen Survivors."



### Firemen Survivors.

*“The man with the grey moustache in the centre of the picture is Toner, a fireman. He had been a hand on the Titanic, was in the wreck of the Empress of Ireland, and lastly the Lusitania.”*

Toner appears to be talking to a reporter who is writing on a pad. The reporter might be expected to get the man’s name right... and the newsman’s presence in the photograph may be significant, for on page nine of the same edition, filled with accounts by *Lusitania* survivors, there is a short piece entitled “FIREMAN’S VERSION.”

It features an interview with none other than fireman Toner:

“Frank Toner, a fireman on board the *Lusitania*, was amongst those saved and landed at Kinsale. In an interview with our representative on Saturday he said he was below at the time of the explosion. The torpedo hit the vessel at the bow end of the bridge and tore a great hole in her side. Immediately he called out to one of his mates. ‘Come on, get up to the top. This torpedo has done us in all right!’

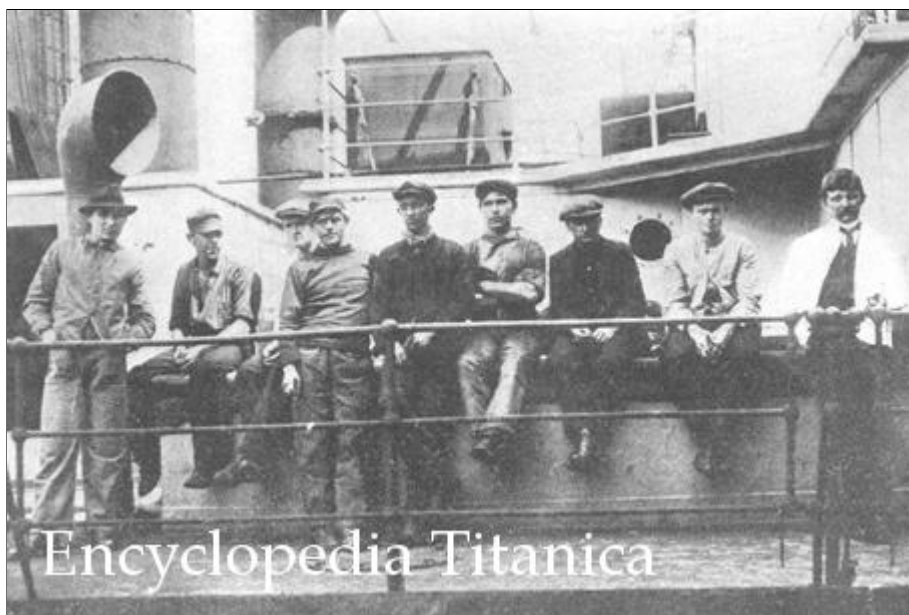
“They climbed on top and found that the vessel was already sinking fast. ‘We made a jump for it,’ he said, ‘and I was pulled onto an upturned lifeboat and remained there with nine others.’ He further explained that six of those were women, but before they were met by any other boat, two of those had died.

“Questioned as to the speed, etc, of the *Lusitania* at the time, he said she was going about 15 knots. The weather was beautifully fine and clear, the sea was calm, and under the instructions of the Captain everything had been got ready for an attack, but he could not say why she was going so slowly at the time.

“The saloon passengers at the time he jumped were, he said, on the saloon deck and nearly all of them must have been drowned because they did not seem to make any attempt to escape, perhaps with the idea that the *Lusitania* would not sink so quickly, or perhaps with the idea that rescue was close at hand.

“He was perfectly satisfied that the ship sank within twenty minutes, as from the first moment she was struck she began to go down – just like a flat stone thrown into a pond, the fore-part being immediately submerged.”

And that’s that. There is no mention of the claim displayed prominently some six pages earlier that Toner “had been a hand on the *Titanic*, was in the wreck of the *Empress of Ireland*, and lastly the *Lusitania*.”



## Rescued Crew of the Empress of Ireland

There is no Toner listed on either of the two earlier vessels that met with tragedy. But the name does appear on all relevant *Lusitania* documents, including a detailed abstract produced by Cunard a year after the disaster.

But why would a bona fide *Lusitania* escapee make up a story about being on the *Titanic* and the *Empress* within one day of surviving a major disaster?

Why would he gild the lily?

Especially when the man named Toner actually **did not boast** or exaggerate in other respects?

In a separate piece in the same edition, the *Cork Examiner* reported that 'One of the survivors, Frank Toner, who was employed on board the *Lusitania* as a fireman, attracted a considerable amount of attention, and though he could not be induced to refer at any length to the prominent and plucky part he played in the disaster, some of his companions in the military hospital gave accounts of the great bravery he displayed.'

This is startling material, as it conveys the very opposite of the braggart that a man must be in order to fabricate stories of his involvement in two other gigantic disasters!

The extract continued:

"He has a unique record, having gone down on three liners within a couple of years, but on each occasion his life was spared. He was one of the crew of the *Titanic* which sank on her maiden voyage with such disastrous results, but he was rescued. He was also employed on the Canadian Pacific liner *Empress of Ireland*, which sank in the St Lawrence with a heavy loss of life, but Toner was again fortunate enough to be saved. On Friday afternoon he was rescued for the third time.

He was a fireman on board the *Lusitania*, and when the liner began to settle down, he came on deck and worked untiringly in helping women and children into the boats, but he never gave any consideration to his own interests. As the *Lusitania* listed to starboard and her masts were lowered towards the water, he climbed one of the masts but soon got into difficulties.

He became entangled in the wireless apparatus, but succeeded in setting himself free as the ship disappeared. He was precipitated into the water, but was quickly pulled onto an upturned boat where he remained until rescued by the patrol boat *Heron*. During the time that he was on the upturned boat he rendered valuable aid in helping parties struggling in the water to the boat, and his actions throughout were certainly most heroic.

Another very brave member of the crew, who was also not inclined to mention his own deeds, was Bernard Livermore..."

So now we have a modest man named Toner, not inclined to trumpet his triple salvation... and the mystery deepens.

One of the survivors—Frank Toner, who was employed on board the *Lusitania* as a fireman, attracted a considerable amount of attention, and though he could not be induced to refer at any length to the prominent and plucky part he played, in the disaster, some of his companions in the military hospital gave accounts of the great bravery he displayed. He has had a unique record, having gone down in three liners within a couple of years, but on each occasion his life was spared. He was one of the crew of the *Titanic* which sank on her maiden voyage with such disastrous results, but he was rescued. He was also employed on the Canadian Pacific liner *Empress of Ireland*, which sank in the St Lawrence with a heavy loss of life but Toner was again fortunate enough to be saved. On Friday afternoon he was rescued for the third time. He was a fireman on board the *Lusitania* and when the liner began to settle down he came on deck and worked untiringly in helping women and children into the boats, but he never gave any consideration to his own interests. As the *Lusitania* listed to starboard and her masts were lowered towards the water he climbed one of the masts, but soon got into difficulties. He became entangled in the wireless apparatus, but succeeded in setting himself free as the ship disappeared. He was precipitated into the water, but was quickly pulled on to an upturned boat, where he remained until rescued by the patrol boat *Heron*. During the time that he was on the upturned boat he rendered valuable aid in helping parties struggling in the water to the boat, and his actions throughout were certainly most heroic.

Another very brave member of the crew who was also not inclined to mention his own deeds

It will deepen further, because to have also been on the *Titanic* and the *Empress*, the man Toner must have given a false name at some stage of the process.

Did he also give a false address? There is evidence that Toner may have fabricated an address to the police at Kinsale, where he first landed.

A tiny proportion of *Lusitania* survivors were landed at this port – the large majority went to Queenstown.

In his evidence at the Kinsale inquest into five *Lusitania* bodies landed there, District Inspector Alfred Wansborough of the Royal Irish Constabulary cited an encounter with Toner on the evening of May 7th, 1915:



**District Inspector Alfred Wansborough**

“Last night at eight o’clock the naval patrol ship ‘*Heron*’, commanded by Captain H. Ives, Royal Naval Reserve, anchored in this harbour and was flying an urgent signal and had the ensign at half-mast,” Wansborough testified.

“I went off to her at once in a row boat. I found on board the five dead bodies that have been viewed by the jury – three men and two women. The Captain told me that he was on duty down east of Queenstown when he heard of the accident. He made all speed to the scene, and at about 5.30 o’clock picked up the bodies then on board. I could not say whether they were alive or dead at the time.

“As near as the Captain could say it was 12 miles south-south-west of the Old Head (of Kinsale). In addition to the five dead on board I found the following survivors, rescued from the wreck of an upturned boat to which most of them were clinging - ...Francis Toner, 23 Crichton Street, off Wareham Street, Liverpool...”

Toner’s story of the upturned boat and rescue by the *Heron* is thus confirmed. There can be no doubt that Frank Toner was a stoker on the *Lusitania* and did survive in that manner.

But there seems to have never been a Wareham Street in Liverpool, proper. The City Council maintains that there was no Crichton Street either in 1915. Toner’s address, given to the police, is a complete puzzle.

While considering this new problem, deal also with the following:

### **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

To the Editor, “*Evening Echo*.”

SS *Wayfarer*, Queenstown,

Monday, 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1915

Sir – In the “*Examiner*” of yesterday appears a copy of a photograph purporting to picture survivors of the *Lusitania*’s firemen. I enclose said photo, and beg to point out to you that it is a mistake. The man described as Toner is certainly a fireman on this ship, named Ralph. On his right, with close buttoned jacket, is Longmore, also a fireman on this ship. These men have asked me to write you upon the matter, as they do not wish to be represented as survivors of the *Lusitania*, being quite well known by sight in the streets of this town, and will be pleased if you will rectify this mistake if possible – I am, yours faithfully,

H. L. Pritchard,

Chief Officer S.S. *Wayfarer*.

(We regret if in advertently we misdescribed the *Wayfarer*’s men, who were evidently in company with a number of the *Lusitania*’s crew – Editor, C.E.)

[*Cork Examiner*, May 12, 1915, p.3]

By now the average person might be inclined to throw up their hands in despair! Who is lying to the newspapers?

Who is who? It must all be a tissue of untruths...

To deal with the *Wayfarer* spanner in the works -

It cannot be that *Wayfarer* crew are inventing the story and then hurriedly rowing back when seeing their picture in the newspaper. They could not know of the reality of a man named Toner, nor could they influence the *Lusitania* crew detained in the Military Hospital who told of Toner and his three ships.

It seems that the objection could have stemmed from the original headline to the photograph - *Firemen Survivors* - or the original caption: “*The man with the grey moustache in the centre of the picture is Toner...*”

It is evident from the photograph that the man intended to be identified as Toner is the prominent man to the right of centre, talking to the reporter. But that’s the point – he is to the right of centre. There is a face in the centre.



**Ralph**

This youthful face, when magnified, can be seen to be a man with a light moustache. The man to his right – Longmore (pictured below) – is indeed buttoned up. But the man talking to the reporter has no-one to his right; only men standing immediately behind.



## Longmore

It appears from the note by the Editor of the *Cork Examiner* that he has satisfied himself that the picture also shows *Lusitania* crew – which means Toner in this instance. A reporter would have no reason, after all, to interview a crewman from the *Wayfarer*, a vessel which had put into Queenstown a few weeks previously after a small explosion on board and which had not been involved in the *Lusitania* rescue.

But if this is a picture of Toner, then why has another man been subsequently identified as the triple survivor?



**The latterly-claimed Lucky Tower**  
[Note absence of moustache.]

To set the scene to this second identification:

The *Cork Examiner* was first on the scene of the *Lusitania* tragedy – yet Queenstown would soon be swamped with an arriving legion of British reporters anxious to convey every vivid detail to their readers across the Irish Sea. The lucky stoker was too good a yarn to miss.

But *he* may have missed *them*. Most surviving crew left Queenstown by train on Saturday afternoon and evening. Many were crossing the Irish Sea while Fleet Street's finest were steaming hurriedly in the opposite direction...

A *Cork Examiner* reporter later wrote:

*"The London contingent arrived and re-wrote our work in Cork or just 'lifted' it and put it on the wires..."*

There is a book on the disaster which came out within a month of the sinking. "*Horrors and Atrocities of the Great War*" features the 'tragic destruction of the *Lusitania*.' A photograph opposite page 96 shows "**The Man Who Cannot Be Drowned.**" It is a very different man from the *Cork Examiner*'s Frank Toner.

The caption continues: "This stoker was saved from the *Titanic*, the *Empress of Ireland*, and lastly from the *Lusitania*." He is not identified by name. Perhaps this 'oversight' is its own clue!

On page 40 of the same work the strange entry appears: "L. Tonner, a County Dublin man, and a stoker on the *Lusitania*, who was one of the survivors landed at Kinsale, said: "There must have been two submarines attacking the *Lusitania*. The liner was first torpedoed on the starboard side, and right through the engine room a few minutes afterward the *Lusitania* received a second torpedo on the port side. The *Lusitania* listed so heavily to starboard that it was impossible to lower the boats on the port side."

This 'Tonner' might only serve to confirm the name Toner, and this crewman's Irishness.

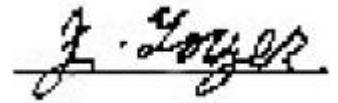
[The Robert Ballard collaboration "Exploring the *Lusitania*" (1995) afforded brief coverage to the 'Lucky Tower' story. The man identified in a 1915 instant book was called Turner, it insisted. This is another surname to juggle with – but this one has overtones perhaps of the *Lusitania*'s captain, William Turner. There was no fireman Turner on the crew agreements for the *Titanic*, *Empress of Ireland*, or *Lusitania*.]

So where are we?

Certainly there was a Toner on the *Lusitania*. Meanwhile on the *Titanic* there is a perplexing entry for a

fireman hitherto identified as “Tozer.” Could Tozer, who is listed as having been lost, be Toner?

“J. Tozer” was a 30-year-old greaser with an address at 6 Challis Street, Southampton. His first initial, when scrutinising line 7 of the sign-on lists for greasers in the *Titanic* crew agreement, certainly looks more like an F with its clear cross-stroke. This anonymous crewman is down as ‘Lost.’

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Tozer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent cross-stroke on the letter 'F'.

It is not necessary to make a case for Tozer. There exists a bona-fide stoker who both the *Titanic* and the *Empress* disasters and who was initially slated as ‘Lost’ on the *Titanic* – until he turned up to collect the balance of his wages.

His name was William Clark. Clark was saved in lifeboat 15, according to a reference at the British Inquiry.

The Clark family lived in Peter Street, Drogheda. The father was a ship's engineer, drowned in a shipwreck when William was a young boy. The junior Clark is alleged in local folklore to have survived a third wreck after *Titanic* and the *Empress*... Might it have been the *Lusitania*?

Leaving that difficult connection to one side for a moment, it is amazing to consider “Charmed” Clark’s personal story of deliverance from two shipwrecks in two years.

This is from *The Times* account of interviews with *Empress of Ireland* crewmen on their return to Britain on the *Corsican* in June 1914, a year before *Lusitania*. Submitted by the newspaper’s Glasgow correspondent -

### **A Comparison with the *Titanic***

Much the most interesting of the personal statements given in answer to questions was made to me by William Clarke, (sic) a fireman of Liverpool - actually a survivor of the *Titanic* disaster - a quiet, matter-of-fact old man with a **grey moustache** and kindly eyes, rather toil-worn. He said:

"I was a fireman on both the ships. It was my luck to be on duty at the time of both accidents. The *Titanic* disaster was much the worst of the two. I mean it was the most awful. The waiting was the terrible thing. There was no waiting with the *Empress of Ireland*. You just saw what you had to do and did it.

"The *Titanic* went down straight, like a baby goes to sleep. The *Empress* rolled over like a hog in a ditch. I was shovelling coals when the *Empress* was struck. I heard the engines stop. I ran up to my boat, No. 5. We swung her down, but the list of the ship threw her out from the side into the water, and then the hooks of the davits loosed off and she floated away.

"I had to dive into the water to catch her. By that time the ship was just going. I heard screaming and then helped to pull people out of the water. We were picked up by the *Storstad*."

(*The Times*, June 10, 1914, p.7)

This man Clark has a colourful turn of phrase. He says the *Titanic* went down straight, like a baby going to sleep. The *Empress* rolled over like a hog in a ditch. And then one is reminded that the man Toner, the one with the grey moustache, spoke of the *Lusitania* going down “like a flat stone, thrown into a pond.”

Curious.

A major follow-up interview with Clark appeared less than a fortnight later in an Irish newspaper. It revealed amazing new details about how he had cheated death before.

From the *Dundalk Democrat* of Saturday June 27, 1914. Page 9:

If ever a fireman bore a charmed life it is Fireman William Clark, of the ill-fated liner *Empress of Ireland*.

An insatiable thirst for adventure has carried him all over the world. He has heard the thunder of big guns on the warships of Britain's fleet; he has been wounded by sniping Boers on the blood-stained veldt of South Africa; he has been given up for lost when suffering agonies on a sick bed in a military hospital; has been carried to almost certain death in the mighty *Titanic*; hurled from the torn deck of the *Empress of Ireland* when she plunged to her doom in the dark waters of the St Lawrence - and, fit and well in spite of it all, he still survives to tell the tale.

### FLIRTING WITH DEATH

Ever since he came to man's estate, William Clark, the quiet, unassuming fireman of the lost *Empress*, has flirted with death. Not once in generations is it given to a man to face peril after peril in this way and come practically unscathed through it all. Yet, if you ask William Clark whether he has not tired of adventure and intends to settle down to a quiet life, he will answer you quietly: "I shall go down to the sea again when I am ready and as soon as I can get another ship!"

I found Clark at his home in Bootle yesterday. Let me describe him to you.

In appearance he is a typical Irishman, with the soft dark hair and big blue eyes which have earned for the lassies of his race a reputation for beauty that is known throughout the world. There is a look of fearless honesty in those blue eyes of his, and when you talk to him you get the impression of a calm, quiet man, calculated to keep his head and act with coolness even in moments of the greatest excitement and danger.

A full dark moustache hides the lines of his mouth, and he strikes you as being too kindly of disposition to be what one would describe as a "firm man." But there is an air of quiet courage about him, and you feel instinctively that this is a man you could rely upon in any emergency involving danger. He is about 43 years of age and unmarried.

When I saw him he was still wearing the clothes cut on the American style, which were supplied to him after the *Empress* catastrophe, in which he lost everything he had with him. He looks grotesque, and it is almost amusing to see him walking in the square-toed, dome-capped boots beloved of the Yankee - brown boots with soft felt uppers.

They are very small, and it is a strange thing about this remarkable man that one of his few vanities is an abounding pride in the smallness of his feet.

William Clark could tell of many hairsbreadth escapes on land and sea if he would, but though he has come safely through them all, the horror still clings to them and has left its mark upon him. He does not like to talk of these things, and it is with difficulty that one can persuade him to unfold the pages of the past. [*A similarity to Toner?*]

Except in his appearance one can hardly call him a typical Irishman. He lacks much of that spontaneous gaiety and vivacity of bearing - that quick impulsiveness which has set a kind of trademark on Irishmen all the world over. But his looks stamp him as Irish beyond question, and that craving for adventure may also be counted among the attributes conferred upon him by his nationality.

### THE LURE OF THE SEA

Clark was born at Greenore, County Louth, about 43 years ago. What he did as a lad, I do not

know, but the love of roaming, coupled with a passionate longing for the sea, asserted itself early in life and before he was twenty he left his native land and came to Liverpool to seek his fortune.

As may be imagined, he found his way down to the docks. The big ships called to him and the restless tides of the Mersey sang an eternal song of invitation, luring him out to stormy seas and strange lands. But he loved the sea not only for its own sake, it was the adventure, the excitement, and the change of a seafaring life which called to him with an insistent attraction that would not be denied, and before long he found himself on a British warship.

But life in the navy nowadays lacks much of the charm of olden time, and for the bluejacket of today there are no wild adventures on the Spanish Main, no exciting chases after French privateers in the Bay of Biscay, no gold to be wrested from the Indies, and no prize money. All that sort of thing belonged to the days of the wooden walls now gone for ever, and now the navy man gets plenty of discipline, not a little monotony and no fighting.

It was hardly to be wondered at that Clark's restless temperament soon tired of the necessary restrictions of a modern warship and before long he made up his mind to quit. He deserted and got clear away, but the lure of the sea still held him and he shipped as a fireman on board a merchant steamer.

A knock-about time in many oceans followed, and eventually Clark found himself on a ship in Durban port when South Africa was seething with the unrest which culminated in the war.

The thirst for adventure and excitement was too much for him. There was going to be fighting, and men were needed. He left his ship, gave himself up to the naval authorities as a deserter, and in the height of the war fever was let off lightly when it was understood he was anxious to volunteer for the front.

## FIGHTING THE BOERS

He went to the military riding school in Pietermaritzburg and learned to ride like a cowboy. Then he joined Brabant's Horse and went right through the war in the army of Lord Methuen.

He had many exciting adventures, but shot and shell and bayonet, which laid so many of his comrades low, left him for a long time untouched.

At last his luck changed a little. During a fierce scrap at Blackfontein Clark was wounded; but here again he got off lightly. A bullet struck a bit of woodwork and one of the splintered fragments struck him arm and opened a nasty cut along the wrist. It was a little affair; Clark's time had not come.

The hardships of the campaign, however, did not altogether pass him by. Towards the end of the war he was stricken down with disease, and for eighteen months he lay in hospital hovering between life and death. But his splendid constitution stood him in good stead, and he was discharged from the hospital fit and well.

Again he took to seafaring, and eventually he shipped aboard the huge *Titanic* and helped to keep her fires going on that first and last voyage, the awful end of which remains one of the most terrible incidents in our history.

Clark went down in the ship when the mighty iceberg ripped her side open and hurled her to her doom.

How he escaped he does not know. He was caught in the swirl of waters as the vessel plunged down - dragged down into the ocean depths with the crippled leviathan as she sank to her last

resting place. Even then his abnormal luck did not desert him. He never thought to come up again, but the force of the boiler explosion lifted him and rushed him up to the surface. He struck out vigorously; was pulled aboard one of the boats, and came home to tell the tale.

This awful experience did not cure him of his craving for the sea and he continued to serve in the stoke-hold of various liners, among which was the *Empress of Britain*, the sister ship to the one of which he has again had a miraculous escape from death.

#### TITANIC AND EMPRESS COMPARED

It was his first voyage on the *Empress of Ireland*. When the crash came and the vessel's stokehold filled with water, his thoughts instantly went back to his awful experience of the *Titanic*.

The scenes on the *Titanic* were the worst, he said, because there was more time to realise the full horror of the situation. On the *Empress*, death came more swiftly.

Clark was on duty in the stokehold of the *Empress* when the collision came. The water came pouring in, driving the firemen higher and higher up the vessel, like rats trying to escape rising water in a well. His lifeboat station was No. 5, and somehow or other he got there, but he cannot remember how she was launched. His mind is a blank concerning some of those awful moments spent on the canting decks of the doomed liner.

They had to crawl on hands and knees on the sloping hull in order to get the boat clear, and then their best chance of escape was to plunge into the water in the hope of being able to scramble aboard. Clark was drawn under several times before he got into the boat, and afterwards, he said, they were able to pull about sixty men into her.

And so this man who has faced death time after time was again snatched from the grave. He came home in the *Corsican* and is now once more in Liverpool.

In spite of all he has passed through he is still well, although he complains that sometimes he cannot sleep for thinking of the terrible experiences he has just come through. He is grateful for his good fortune and realises how close he has come to death.

#### HAD ALL THE LUCK

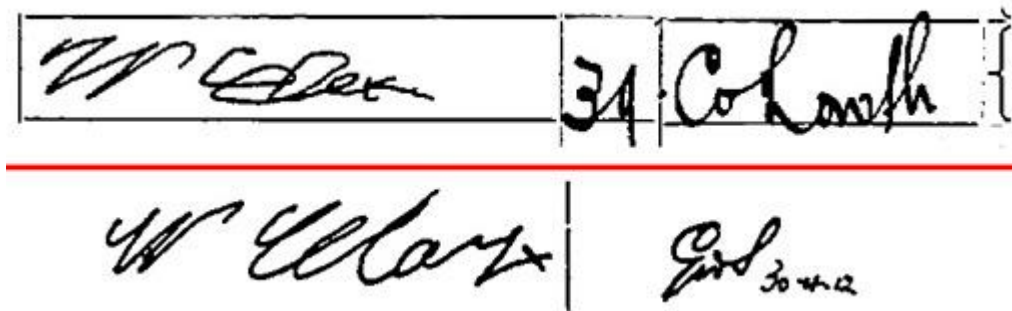
"If there is any luck on the sea, surely I have had it all," he says.

But he still intends to follow a seafaring life, and until he gets another boat he is spending his time ashore with old friends and comrades, in true sailor fashion.

Clark is a Roman Catholic and has a great regard for religious observances. Often after a heavy voyage he returns home late at night tired out; but he is up again first thing in the morning to attend Mass.

He is the luckiest sailor afloat.

He has come face to face with death on land and sea - but death has passed him by.



CLARK was indeed signed aboard the *Empress of Ireland* as a fireman when she collided with the *Storstad* and sank on the foggy night of May 29, 1914.

Only 36 out of 167 stokers aboard the *Titanic* lived - and Clark was one. The above signatures are from the *Titanic* crew agreement, and from the sign-off lists, showing that Clark (signing his name in a surely inimitable way, and without an 'e') received the balance of his wages on April 30, 1912. His conduct was 'good.'

The *Empress* took 1,014 of 1,477 lives aboard, and again the stokehold watch was all but wiped out.

Factorial mathematics suggest that Clark's odds of surviving both disasters, quite apart from the improbability of his being in both sinkings, were of the order of twenty to one against.

To be in two disasters is unfortunate. To be in a third suggests carelessness, as Lady Bracknell might observe. But Clark wanted to get back to sea as soon as he could get another ship...

Of course the 'Bizarre Unified Theory' advanced at the start of this article may be highly improbable. Perhaps many firemen had grey moustaches, a quiet unassuming manner and deeply impressive eyes. Many were certainly Irish, and a goodly number were in their forties.

For Clark to be Toner would require his using Toner's discharge book. Changing identity could be desirable for a man likely to be labelled a 'Jonah' because of his previous experiences. Sailors would never ship with a Jonah.

Singing-on under false names was common, and was the very reason the Discharge A book was introduced in the first place. Sometimes these documents, being work permits, were stolen - but equally they were often sold.

A man leaving the sea could sell on his 'Dis A.' A man with a bad name wanting to stay at sea might be in the market to buy. But this is speculation in this case, unsupported by a shred of evidence... except that British Army deserter Clark might have had prior experience of changing his name.

Lucky Toner, rescued from at least the *Lusitania*, melted away from Queenstown.

Lucky Clark's story of being twice saved is unimpeachable.

It was claimed within hours of the *Lusitania* sinking that a stoker had survived three major shipwrecks. The rapidity of this disclosure is most unusual. Such hoary tales typically evolve only weeks after the event. The men at their centre are not instantly photographed.

Lucky Tower may have created his own momentum. In my new book on the *Lusitania*, I cite the case of a 'Lucky Dunn' who claimed to have survived the *Titanic*, *Empress of Ireland*, *Florazan* (torpedoed March 1915) and fourthly the *Lusitania*.

But that's another story.

And sailors do tell good stories.

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**‘Lucky Tower’ and William Clark compared**

	<i>Irish Independent</i> on <i>Lusitania</i> man, 1915	<i>Cork Examiner</i> describing Frank Toner in 1915	<i>The Times</i> on on Clark 1914	<i>Dundalk Democrat</i> on Clark 1914
<b>Age</b>	Middle aged	see pic	old man	about 43
<b>Hair</b>		see pic		soft dark hair
<b>Eyes</b>		see pic	kindly eyes	big blue eyes
<b>Facial</b>		grey moustache		full dark moustache
<b>Build</b>	strongly built	see pic		splendid constitution
<b>Bearing</b>	cool		quiet, matter-of-fact	calm’ quiet, unassuming
<b>General</b>	courageous	plucky	toil-worn	kindly disposition, fearless honesty, air of quiet courage
<b>Interview</b>		could not be induced [to talk about self]		difficult to persuade [to reminisce]

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