

by Senan Molony

Titanic Research

Thursday 11 March 2010

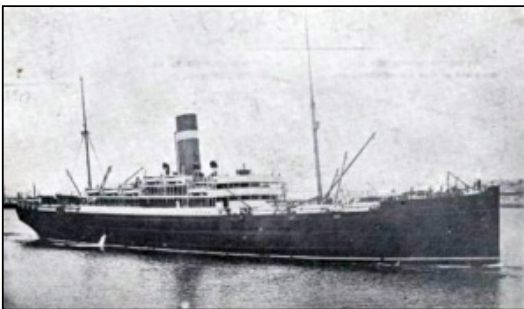
Marconi chart offers insight into Titanic interlocutors

WHO talked to *Titanic*?

It is a most interesting question, but one infuriatingly unanswered.



RMS Adriatic



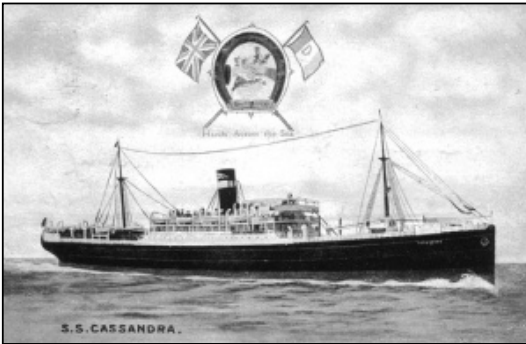
RMS Bavarian



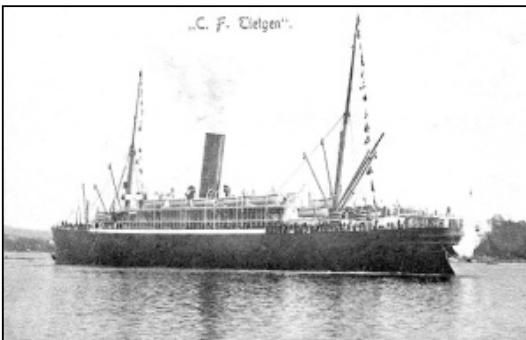
RMS Caledonia



RMS Canada



RMS Cassandra



CF Tietgen

The *Titanic's* brief service history is still clouded by large gaps, or lacunae, even though it lasted less than half a calendar month.

The British Inquiry catalogued *Titanic* traffic thereafter as she began to sink, reconstructing her exchanges through the wireless records of other ships. The White Star vessel's own PV went to the bottom, despite a determination among operators Harold Bride and Jack Phillips during the crisis that it should be saved.

Bride wrote in a letter to the Marconi company (on April 27, while in New York) that at the end of the drama:

"I had upto this time kept the PV entered up, intending when we left the ship to tear out the lot, and each to take a copy, but now we

could hear the water washing over the boat deck, and Mr. Phillip said, "Come, let's clear out."
(Letter cited in US Inquiry report, p. 1, 053)

It is certain that not all the *Titanic's* transmissions in her death throes have been restored through the reconstruction work of the London inquiry.

But there is a much larger 'invisible archive' of missing messages, which predates the time when the demise of the maiden voyager began to unfold.

Harold Bride testified: "When we had finished with Cape Race, we had transmitted 250 telegrams, just about, since leaving Southampton."

He repeated himself immediately, for the sake of clarity: "From leaving Southampton to the time we had finished with Cape Race, we had got through about 250 telegrams."

These 250 messages are virtually all missing. And while Phillips had a substantial accumulation of messages to send to Cape Race that evening, it would seem that this outgoing pile, while never specified numerically, would have been unlikely to far exceed 25, and certainly not 50 because of the transmission time involved.

While these were passenger transmissions, North America having come within range for the first time on the voyage, it may have been that Bride was not talking of passenger 'telegrams' exclusively.

It seems clear that most of the messages sent since Southampton would have been from the *Titanic* to other vessels, and it is not conceivable that many ship-to-ship communications would have involved passenger messages, with one from a *Titanic* passenger to another on the *Carpathia* early on the night of the collision.

There is also a number of pre-collision Marconigrams from the *Titanic* recorded in the book by Booth and Coughlan. But their paucity raises questions about what might be missing.

Bride testified at Br. 16422: "There were messages coming through for Captain Smith all the time, but they did not affect the navigation of the ship." They were not ice or obstruction warnings therefore, just messages of greeting and routine weather descriptions. The *Titanic* would have responded in kind.

Additionally, there would have been TRs, or time rushes, with other ships – mere courtesy exchanges of modest value, which might have been the precursor to conversation between operators.

Bride revealed that on Monday April 1, the day before sailing from Belfast to Southampton on the positioning trip for the maiden voyage, he and Phillips had been involved in testing their new Marconi apparatus.

It was the day of the *Titanic's* sea trials. She exchanged signals with Malin Head (call sign MH) and Liverpool (Seaforth, call sign LV). It seems that the station at Malin, on a Donegal headland known as Banba's Crown, received the first seaborne greeting from the brand new vessel. Malin is ironically now a major marine rescue centre.

Titanic likely spoke, or at least those vessels with similar installations who may have received some of her many messages.

Here is the
Titanic

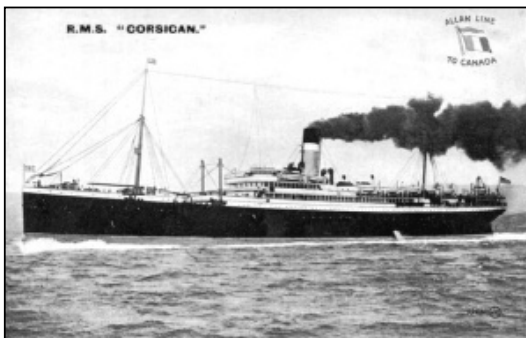
Sailing Day, Wednesday April 10

The *Titanic*, although busy with pre-voyage preparations and with possibly some last-minute messages from seasoned passengers to friends ashore, could have been in contact with quite a number of incoming ships.

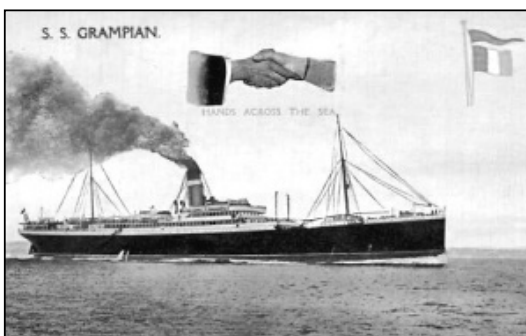
These include the of the Hamburg-Amerika Line, a passenger vessel, of 6,000 tons, the North German Lloyd's *K* (18,000 tons, interned by the USA during WW1 and later converted to the troop transport USS *Amphion*), and the of the Allan Line.

Also inbound were the *Batavia* of Elder Dempster and the *Dominion* of the International Navigation Line.

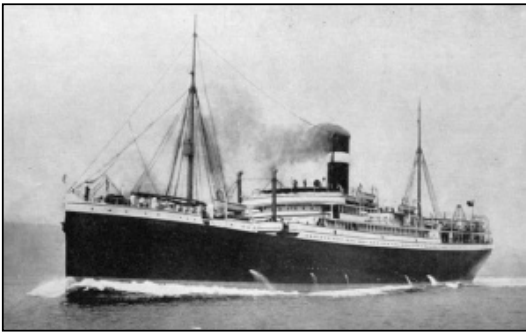
On sailing at noon, the *Titanic* could have spoken to the *Nieuw Amsterdam* (call sing MHR), which is the first vessel to get a mention in disaster inquiry records.



RMS Corsican



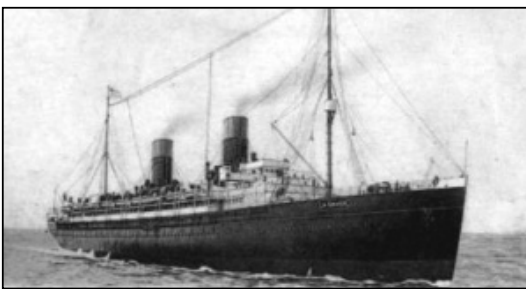
SS Grampian



RMS Hesperian



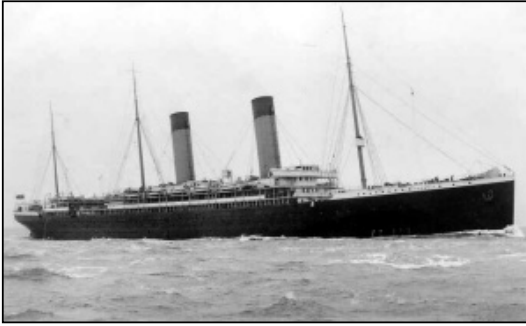
SS Champlain



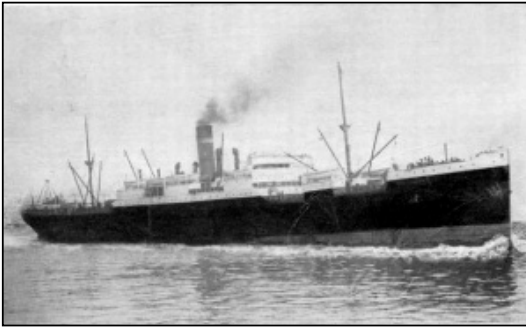
La Savoie



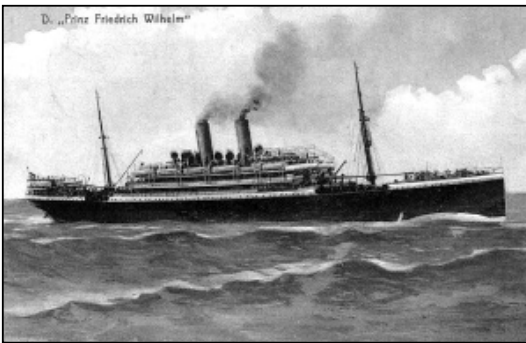
SS Noordam



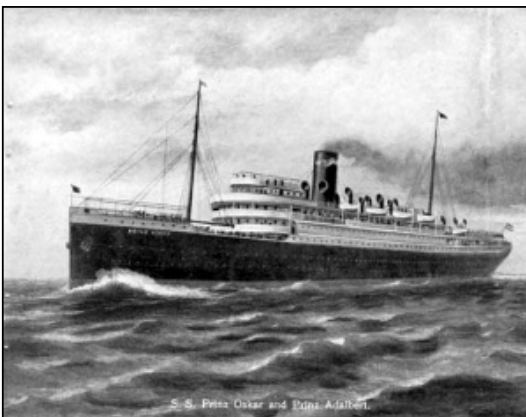
RMS Oceanic



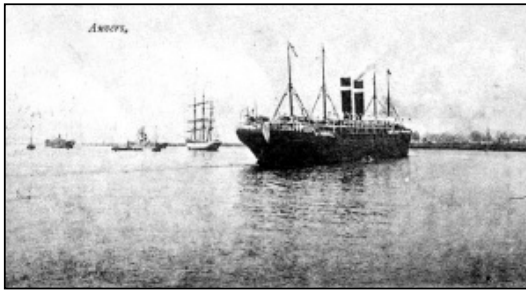
MV Pretorian



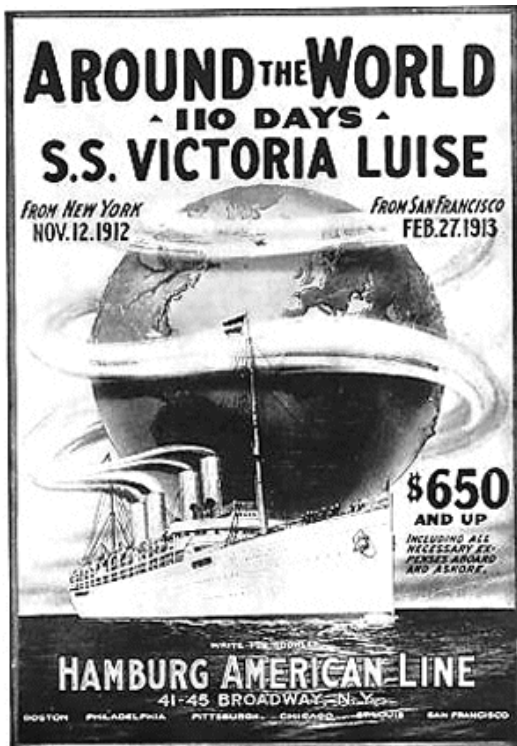
Prinz Friedrich Wilhelm



Prinz Oskar



SS Finland



On April 9, the *Nieuw Amsterdam* told the *Californian* *Titanic* would initially have been interested in such details.

Outward bound, she ought also to have had the *La Savoie Majestic* of 10,000 tons, Captain Smith's former command. She almost certainly exchanged signals with the latter.

Bride might have taken an especial interest in communication with the *Haverford*, as he formerly served aboard her. The INL vessel, arriving from Philadelphia, would soon be left in *Titanic's* wake as she crossed to Cherbourg.

On leaving Cherbourg for Ireland in the hours of darkness, the inbound of the Allan Line (call sign MSN) would have been available as both neared the Irish coast on closing courses.

Next in range would have been another former command of Captain Smith, the RMS *Adriatic*, once one of the Big Four. It is possibly unlikely that the *Titanic* spoke to the German *Konigin Luise* of the North German Lloyd after she left Queenstown. But she was indicated to be within range.

Towards evening of that day, the first outward leg from Europe, the CPR Line's *Empress of Britain* (Captain James A. Murray) would have been within hail of a wireless exchange.

We know from the evidence of operator Stanley Howard Adams of the Atlantic Transport Line's *Mesaba* (Captain Clark; call sign MMV) that she had been in contact with the *Empress of Britain*, but the date is not known.

The *Empress* replied to a *Mesaba* transmission with the words: "Many thanks for your kind message from all here."

The *Mesaba*, eastbound, would later send an ice warning to the *Titanic*.

It was still Thursday night, however and later in the evening the *Oceanic*, inward bound, would have been nearby. The *Oceanic*, on her return trip westward in May, would find the *Titanic*

At about midnight, long out of contact with the last of Europe, she hove into the ether horizon. Two days before, Captain Fairfull had sent a message to Richard Jones, Master of the *Canada*, reporting pack ice nearly 100 miles north of where the *Titanic* struck, and very considerably west.

The *Canada*

Friday April 12

The Marconi chart indicates that the maiden voyager's next major contact could have been with the of the Scandinavia American Line, returning from New York to Kristiania (Oslo).

Formerly the *Rotterdam* of the Holland-America Line, she was 8,173 tons and 485 ft. in length. The original Mr Tietgen was one of the forces behind the industrial revolution in Denmark, and was involved in establishing companies such as the makers of Tuborg beer.

Six years on from possibly greeting the *Titanic*, the *C. F. Tietgen* would join her on the bottom. On June 18, 1918, the ship was torpedoed while on her way to France from Newport News. Destruction at the hands of the U-151 came 400 miles NE of Bermuda. Six of the lifeboats arrived safely after up to ten days at sea, but a seventh, with 22 men board, disappeared for all time.

On Friday the *Titanic* could also have interacted with the Dominion Line steamer *Cassandra*, sailing home from St John, via Halifax, for Glasgow. Or she could have spoken with the *Caledonia* of the P. & O. Line, as well as the Inman liner *St Paul*, captained by Frederick Passow.

After midday the Marconi chart indicated that the (Captain Tannock) was available. The *Titanic* could subsequently have picked up a message that the *Corinthian* originally received from the *Corsican*

This message was sent the next day from *Corinthian* to *Mount*. It defined the box in which the *Titanic* would strike her berg.

In the evening there would have been opportunities with the *Victorian* (sister ship to the Allan liner *Virginian*, which was later to pick up the *Titanic* distress messages) and the aforementioned *Canada* of the Dominion Line, which had received an ice report from the *Tunisian*.

The of the Hamburg Amerika Line, the Atlantic Transport Line's (call sign MMA) and the Red Star liner *Finland*

This box was southeast of where the *Titanic* later struck. The night after sighting these ice mountains, the *Finland* passed "several other bergs," as is mentioned in testimony. She could have told the *Titanic*, had they been in contact, that the ice was alarmingly far to the south.

But the *Titanic* could not have spoken to any of these steamers that evening. Her wireless equipment suddenly went out of commission, and Bride and Phillips had to work the whole night to locate the fault.

The *Finland* could have sent an important warning, but fate had conspired against any communication with the mighty *Titanic*.

Saturday April 13

About midday, Harold Bride could have met the through the ether. She was a great rival, one of the Cunard ocean greyhounds, but a vessel on which Bride had served as second operator.

This would have been a quiet day for wireless traffic. The Marconi communication chart for April 1912 indicates only two lines intersecting with *Titanic's* own course line for this day.

The other, due to be reached in the afternoon, belonged to the *Victoria Luise*. Formerly the *Deutschland*, she too was a four-funnel vessel, operated by the Hamburg America Line, making this Saturday an unusual occasion when three four-stackers were within hailing distance of each other.

Only fourteen four-funnel liners were ever built. This particular conjunction could obviously never been repeated. Even if it was literally an ethereal event, it is a wide-overlooked curiosity in the story of the *Titanic*

Sunday April 14

"We had a lot of traffic on Sunday," said Harold Bride in evidence, referring to the routine exchanges before tragedy unfolded, and indeed the Marconi chart indicates a forest of intersections for this day, quite unlike the day before.

Shortly after midnight, signals could have been expected from the Holland America Line's (Captain Krol), sailing from New York to Rotterdam. And indeed the transcript shows that a message was received from the *Noordam*, mentioning ice, and that the *Titanic* responded in a low-key fashion, commenting that she had experienced moderate, variable weather.

Another message, received at 9am, was from the *Caronia* of the Cunard Line. It declared: "Captain, *Titanic*

The *Titanic* responded nearly three-quarters of an hour later, with the *Caronia* message having been taken to the bridge in the interim. Captain Barr received back: "Thanks for message and information. Have had variable weather throughout—Smith." It was 9.44am. Three hours later, Captain Smith would show the *Caronia* warning to Second Officer Lightoller.

A further hour later, two important ice warnings, well canvassed at the subsequent inquiries, were received by the *Titanic*. At 1.42pm a wireless message from the *Baltic* (Captain Ransom, call sign MBC) declared:

"Captain Smith, *Titanic* —; Have had moderate, variable winds and clear, fine weather since leaving. Greek steamer *Athenai Deutschland Titanic* all success—; Commander."

This cited ice location was very close to where the *Titanic* struck. But Bride seems to have regarded the *Baltic Baltic* on Sunday afternoon, and compliments were exchanged between the two commanders, and the state of the weather."

Captain Smith famously handed the *Baltic*

Three minutes later, at about 1.45pm, a message was received from the German steamer *Amerika*, intended ultimately for the Hydrographic Office in Washington, but passed to the *Titanic* for onward transmission because she was nearer to Cape Race.

It said: "*Amerika*

This was a position south and west of the point where the *Titanic* subsequently struck. Bride may have gone to lunch, as the *Amerika* message was received by Phillips, who put it aside to wait until Cape Race was within range. The junior operator was never told about it, and neither, apparently, was the bridge.



Two other messages conclude the known ice warnings. At 7.30pm a fourth such message was received, and was said by Bride to have been delivered to the bridge. This message was from the Leyland liner *Californian* (call sign MWL) to the *Antillian* (MJL; Captain Japha) of the same line, picked up by *Titanic*

"To Captain, *Antillian*

Bride does not remember to what officer he delivered this message. A final ice warning was received at 9.40pm from the *Mesaba* of the Atlantic Transport Line (call sign MMV, Captain Clark):

"From *Mesaba* to *Titanic*

As stated subsequently, this message clearly indicated the presence of ice in the immediate vicinity of the *Titanic's* course and provided the oblong in which she collided. "If it had reached the bridge would perhaps have affected the navigation of the vessel." It does not appear to have been delivered to the Master or any officer, and may have ended up under a paperweight.

But these were not the only messages received by the *Titanic* that day, when Bride cited a lot of traffic. The Marconi chant indicates that the Allan Liner *Grampian* could have been in contact, being eastbound from St John and Halifax for Liverpool.

Similarly a vessel of the Compagnie Generale Transatlantique (CGT), the *La Provence* (Captain Vesco; call sign MLP), was within range. Her PV shows that she received one of the first distress signals later sent by the stricken *Titanic*.

Also within reach that Sunday was the North German Lloyd's *Prinz Friedrich Wilhelm* (call sign DFK) bound for Southampton.

This vessel was told to observe silence early the next morning by Marconi inspector Gilbert Balfour on the *Baltic* after she and the *Amerika* called up, ignorant of the sudden crisis. "We had to tell them to stand by, to give us a chance of getting at the *Titanic*," Balfour testified.

"At 2.10am the *Prinz Friedrich Wilhelm* called CQ. I told him to stand by on phones for [the] CQD call, and not to touch the key."

In the unclouded hours of the early evening, while operators Bride and Phillips were waiting for Cape Race to come within range, they could have come across the *Scotian*, of the Allan Line, at about 5pm. Formerly the HAL's *Statendam* and later destined to become CPR's *Marglen*, she was of over 10,000 tons and bound for Liverpool.

It is because of the Cape Race traffic that *Titanic* likely passed up later evening opportunities to talk with the Canadian Pacific's *Lake Champlain* and her sister, *Lake Michigan*, the latter being later the subject of a mystery-ship tip-off to the Board of Trade, which concluded she was too far west and north of the *Titanic* at the time.

The *Titanic* probably also failed to talk to the ss *United States*, while at midnight the (call sign MGU), from New York for Rotterdam, the *Brandenburg* and the would all have been within range.

Much further away would have been the *Olympic*, *St Louis*, *Columbia* and (MZC). Nearest among the westbounders, who had departed European ports days before *Titanic*, are shown to be the *Saturnia* and *Mongolian*, and the *Mount Temple*, along with the *Parisian* and the

If only the *Titanic* PV had been saved, how interesting it would be.

Courtesy of Senan Molony

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