

Zoom Talk: The Sinking of the Titanic

Delivered on: 12th May 2021

Haywards Heath & District Probus Club

Given By: Rupert Matthews



The Sinking of the Titanic

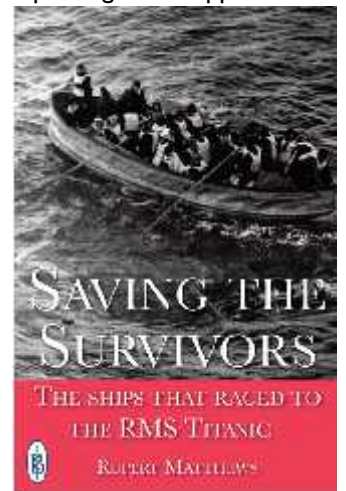
Members of the Haywards Heath & District Probus Club and others were treated to another splendid talk via Zoom by historian Rupert Matthews on 12th May 2021. The talk was about the sinking of the *Titanic*.

The sinking of *RMS Titanic* on her maiden voyage is one of the most dramatic stories in maritime history ("RMS" stands for Royal Mail Steamer). She was the largest passenger steamship in the world at the time, fitted with more advanced safety features than any of her rivals, and was proclaimed to be virtually unsinkable. More than 1,500 people perished when the *Titanic* went down - many from drowning but more from hypothermia on one of the coldest but most beautiful April nights in the North Atlantic that anyone could remember. The survivors of the disaster brought home tales of heroism and cowardice, of calmness and panic, of honour and disgrace.



Picture Credit: "The Titanic Sinking," by Jimmy Big Potatoes is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)

Author of "*Titanic: The Tragic Story of the Ill-Fated Ocean Liner*", Rupert Matthews pieced together a complete picture of what happened on that fateful night in 1912. He explores witness accounts and evidence gathered at the inquiries, along with more recent discoveries. The terrible disaster rocked the shipping world, was the subject of an intensive inquiry and has subsequently been featured in numerous books and films. Most of the talk concentrated on the ship's final voyage, explaining what happened on that fateful night, and why.



'Saving the Survivors: The Ships that raced to the RMS Titanic'

A free E-Book, written by Rupert Matthews is available for download - click [here](#) for a copy of the PDF. The E-Book was first published in 2020 Text Copyright © Rupert Matthews 2020. Rupert Matthews asserts his moral rights to be regarded as the author of this book. All rights reserved.

Was the Titanic already on Fire?

The following (updated) was written by Martin Pollins and appeared in the April 2020 edition of *Nil Desperandum*. The picture (right) is a screenshot from a British Pathé video *Did Titanic Really Sink*, which you can view by clicking [here](#).

Another video, [here](#), also from British Pathé, captures some of the only genuine footage available of the *Titanic* prior to it sinking, the rescue of survivors, and *The Mackay Bennet* leaving Halifax in search of the dead.

The transatlantic *Titanic* was the largest ship of its time, but its life was very short. The first and only voyage of the ship began 10th April 1912 and ended 4 days later. This tragedy occurred on the night of 14th/15th April 1912. After the *Titanic* smashed into the iceberg, over 1,500 people died, making this disaster one of the largest shipwrecks in history. Among the passengers of the ship were some of the richest people in the world, as well as immigrants from Ireland, Great Britain and Scandinavia, who were heading to the United States in search of a better life.

[Michelle Kiisa](#) wrote on Quora.com that the *Titanic* was on fire for days before it sank. Almost everyone knows about the claims beforehand that the massive cruise liner ship was deemed "unsinkable". The company that built it was so sure it wouldn't sink that they didn't bother with the necessary number of lifeboats. The popular explanation for the sinking is that the ship hit an iceberg. But new information came to light in 2017 that the *Titanic* was on fire for days as it was sailing, possibly longer than that, according to *The New York Times*, [here](#).

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The information about a fire is supported in an article in *The Independent* on 1st January 2017, [here](#). A coal fire was burning below deck for days and the crew was unable to put it out. The ship sailed anyway with a fire burning in the hull. The fire was known about before the ship left Belfast with five men trying to put it out yet the only way to put out a coal fire in a bunker like this was to put the burning coal into the ship's furnace.

Coal fires are not the easiest to extinguish - take for example, the coal fire in [Centralia, Pennsylvania](#), a coal seam fire which broke out in a mine in the Northeast United States and has proven impossible to put out and it's been burning since at least 27th May 1962.

The Titanic had several bulkheads designed to keep sea water from spreading in case of a hull breach and quite coincidentally, the fire broke out right next to the main bulkhead with temperatures reaching around 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit causing it to be severely damaged. Yet by the time the fire was noticed, it could have been burning for weeks. The ship had been known to travel at full speed regardless of the warnings of icebergs, this could have been because of the excess coal being shovelled into the furnace non-stop for three days but we can't be too sure - yet this could explain why it hit the iceberg at full speed.

When the *Titanic* hit the iceberg, the ship's designer was aboard the ship and evaluated the strike damage. Even at that time, he seemed to think the ship wouldn't sink—as long as the bulkheads held up. If the *Titanic* could have stayed afloat for a few hours longer, the magnitude of the historic tragedy may have been averted with the bulkheads as the ship's prime defence against the ocean. The ship's lack of lifeboats was rationalised because the *Titanic* itself was thought to be a lifeboat.

Now if you're wondering as to why it left port in the first place with a fire raging below, Michelle Kiisa says that the company operating the *Titanic* was in deep financial trouble. The introduction of the *Titanic* had already been delayed and with her sister ship damaged, *the Titanic* needed to sail on schedule otherwise the company might have imploded financially. Despite all the evidence and rumours that are bandied about, nobody can deny that the story of the *Titanic* is a tragedy that could have been avoided and the people onboard died needlessly horrible deaths. In the end, the only thing the new evidence indicates is a new level of negligence and risk-taking by those in charge.

About the Book: 'Titanic: The Tragic Story of the Ill-fated Ocean Liner' by Rupert Matthews

The book picks out dozens of facts which shatter your preconceptions and make you re-think the entire disaster. Here are the questions (based upon a reader's comments, published online) to which you'll find detailed and fascinating answers in Rupert Matthews' book:

Why did early lifeboats leave half-full?
What were the engineers doing while the ship was sinking?
Why didn't the centre propeller reverse when the engines were put on full astern?
What was special about the lookouts on duty?
Why wasn't the iceberg visible?
Was Joseph Bruce Ismay (the chairman and managing director of the White Star Line) the coward he is portrayed as being, or was he really a hero?
Why were there so many third class passengers aboard?
Were third class passengers really locked below until the first class passengers boarded the lifeboats?
Did you know that the *Titanic* departed Queenstown with a fire burning in a coal bunker?
Was the *Titanic* going at full speed, trying to make some type of record?
How did the coal strike contribute to the loss of life?

Why didn't the *Titanic* have sufficient lifeboats for everyone on board?
Did the passengers really panic?
Why did many women refused to go on the lifeboats?
How many men bravely faced death in calmness and masculine resolution?
What of Mr. and Mrs. Strauss? They stayed together on the sinking ship, but escorted their maid to the lifeboats to make sure she was saved.
John Jacob Astor (the richest man on board) left his pregnant wife in a boat and then picked up a young Irish third class passenger and pushed him into the last seat.
What of the two men who were shot trying to board a boat?
Did Captain Smith shed tears as the last lifeboat pulled away?
Did all the lifeboats refuse to rescue swimmers?
How could anyone possibly sleep through the alarms and commotion?

The book is available for purchase from Amazon [here](#).

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Designated as an *international maritime memorial*

National Geographic ([here](#)) has aired programmes about the *Titanic*. Dr Robert Ballard, who discovered the *Titanic* wreck, returned to the site to look at the damage caused by nature and man. Below are some screenshots from the programme aired on 24th April 2021.



More than 1,500 passengers and crew died on *Titanic's* maiden voyage. The most famous shipwreck in modern history still fascinates us, almost a century after her fatal collision with an iceberg.

Now the *Titanic* faces a different fate. The destructive combination of nature and human intrusions threatens to force the complete collapse of the wreck into the ocean floor. In 1997, an international agreement to protect the RMS *Titanic* wreck site was negotiated by the four nations that are most closely associated with the *Titanic* - the United Kingdom, France, Canada, and the United States.

Under the agreement, the *Titanic* is designated as an *International Maritime Memorial*, recognising the men, women and children who perished and whose remains should be respected. The agreement will also protect the scientific, cultural, and historical significance of the wreck site by regulating, within their jurisdiction, dives to the *Titanic* shipwreck, including the hull, cargo, and other artifacts at the wreck site.

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Forty-four (not so well-known) facts about the *Titanic*

1. The reason the *Titanic* is often referred to as '*RMS Titanic*' is because the RMS stands for Royal Mail Ship.
2. The *Titanic* had 7 decks.
3. The Gross (46,329), Net (21,83) tonne *RMS Titanic*, the pride of the White Star Line, was built in Belfast by the Harland and Wolff ship builders. It was made out of steel with a reinforced double bottom.
4. It took 26 months and 3,000 men to construct. Three million rivets were used to build the 26,000-ton hull, a combination of iron and steel.
5. The ship was 270 metres long and was tall as the 11th floor of Chrysler Building in New York.
6. The interior of the *Titanic* was modelled after the Ritz Hotel, with first-class cabins finished in the Empire style.
7. The accommodation on the *Titanic* was luxurious and spacious. In first-class there were many new attractions such as squash courts, a Turkish bath, a gymnasium, a barber shop and also the first swimming pool on board a ship. Even the less expensive third-class cabins were of a better standard than those on most other liners. Nevertheless, there were more luxurious and spectacular liners in operation at the time.
8. *Vinolia Otto Toilet* soap was the soap provided to First Class passengers on the *Titanic*. It was an expensive soap for its time and cost about three times as much as the price of a regular bar of soap. It was first produced in 1910.
9. The *Titanic*'s engines generated around 46,000 horsepower - equivalent to around 500 cars.
10. Only three of the *Titanic*'s four funnels worked. The fourth one was used for ventilation purposes and added a certain majestic aesthetic to the ship.
11. The *Titanic* was nowhere near full capacity - it could have held more than 3,300 people.
12. The *Titanic* was able to carry 64 lifeboats but only carried 20.
13. The lifeboat drill scheduled for the day of the crash was cancelled by the captain for reasons that remain a mystery today.
14. The *Titanic* was a big ship, but she was also fast as her top speed was 23 knots (more than 26 miles per hour).
15. Fully laden, the ship could carry 735 in First class, 674 in Second class, 1026 in Third class (Steerage) and a crew of 885.
16. The 706 third-class passengers carried on *Titanic*'s fateful journey paid an average of £5 to £6, but only had two bathtubs between them.
17. The iceberg made a 300-foot gash in the hull of the boat.
18. Of the many speculations as to why the *Titanic* sank, these two stand out: (1) The captain was trying to better the Atlantic crossing time of *Titanic*'s White Star sister ship, the *Olympic*; (2) Engineer Robert Eszenhigh (see details [here](#)) speculated that efforts to control a fire in one of the ship's coal bunkers could have explained why the *Titanic* was sailing at full speed through a known iceberg field at night.
19. The ship started sinking at around 2:15 am and took more than two hours to sink.
20. All 30 engineers on board the ship perished.
21. Only 23 of the crew on board were female, only three of whom did not survive the collision. Of the male crew members, 685 went down with the ship.
22. The loss of life in the *Titanic* disaster was a total of 1503 people: 815 passengers and 688 crew.
23. The sea water temperature was below freezing (28 degrees Fahrenheit) when the *Titanic* sank, according to Captain Stanley Lord of the *SS Californian* (a ship near the *Titanic* when it sank. The human body can survive up to 45 minutes in freezing water, according to the Life Jacket Association.
24. After the collision, the *Titanic* broke in two, and the gap between the bow and the stern on the sea-bed is about 2,000 feet.
25. Male second-class passengers fared the worst in terms of survival, with less than 10% surviving the sinking of the *Titanic*. Across first-, second- and third-class passengers, the total survival rate for women was 74% and males only 20%.
26. It is estimated that 80% of third-class passengers did not speak English and may therefore not have understood the escape directions being announced when the ship hit the iceberg.

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27. Just two hours after the *Titanic* sank, the Cunard liner *RMS Carpathia* arrived at the scene and rescued about 70 survivors. In all, there were about 20 ships that responded to the *Titanic*'s SOS messages.
28. After the *Titanic* sank, the bodies of around 80% of the 1,523 people killed in the disaster were never found.
29. The captain of the *Titanic* (Edward John Smith), and the ship's architect (Thomas Andrews), both perished with the ship along with mining magnate Benjamin Guggenheim, and the co-owner of Macy's department store Isador Strauss.
30. Those who held tickets but (luckily) chose not to sail, include Theodore Dreiser, Milton S. Hershey, Guglielmo Marconi, John Pierpont Morgan, John Mott, and Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt (who was to die when the *RMS Lusitania* sank on 7th May 1915).
31. Thirteen newlywed couples were honeymooning on the *Titanic* and were among those given preference for the lifeboats. Some of the new grooms perished.
32. The wreck of the *Titanic* lies at a depth of about 12,500 feet, about 370 miles south-southeast off the coast of Newfoundland.
33. Of the nine dogs on board, only two were rescued: a Pomeranian and a Pekinese.
34. The richest man on board the *Titanic* was John Jacob Astor IV, said to have been worth \$2.2 billion in today's money.
35. In *Titanic*'s store were 20,000 bottles of beer, 1,500 bottles of wine, and 8,000 cigars – not much you might say for 2,435 passengers but 14,000 gallons of drinking water were consumed each day on the ship.
36. It took 176 men to hand-shovel a reported 825 tons of coal per day into *Titanic*'s 159 furnaces which heated 29 boilers.
37. There was a coal strike in Wales around the time of the launch of the *Titanic* in 1912, which caused a coal shortage. To ensure the launch of the ship happened as planned, coal was taken from sister ships and loaded onto *Titanic*.
38. The *Titanic* published a daily newspaper called the *Atlantic Daily Bulletin*. It provided news, advertisements, stock prices, society gossip, horseracing results, and the menu of the day.
39. It is said that the *Titanic*'s musicians played for more than two hours as the ship went down.
40. Just hours after the tragedy and a few miles from the location of it, a photograph of the iceberg that purportedly sank the *Titanic* was taken by the chief steward of the German ocean liner *SS Prinz Adalbert*. The iceberg's identity was seemingly confirmed by a red streak of paintwork scraped across the iceberg's base, an indication that it had collided with a vessel in the previous 12 hours or so. However, that confirmation is completely debunked (see [here](#)).
41. The captain of the *SS Prinz Adalbert* ordered his crew to make soup for the survivors, although it was not used.
42. The remains of the wreck of the *Titanic* were not found until 1985, some 73 years after she sank.
43. The *Titanic*'s rudder may have been too small for a ship of its size which contributed to its inability to move quickly enough to avoid a collision with the iceberg.
44. A book, '*The Wreck of the Titan*' was written 14 years before the sinking of the *Titanic*. The author, Morgan Robertson, described fictional events which eerily mirror what actually happened to the *Titanic*: (1) The fictional *Titan* was the largest ship in the line; (2) it was considered to be unsinkable; (3) it was roughly the same size as the *Titanic* with about the same number of passengers; (4) it was not provided with enough lifeboats for all of its passengers; and (5) half of the passengers died when it sank after hitting an iceberg in the Atlantic Ocean on its maiden voyage on a misty April night.

NOTE: Where possible, facts and data have been checked against information published by Royal Museums Greenwich at: <https://www.rmg.co.uk/stories/topics/rms-titanic-facts>

You can watch the British Pathé video ("Facts from real life Titanic survivors") hosted on the Royal Museums Greenwich website at: https://youtu.be/_xKDRmhp6IQ

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The Inquiries

The sinking of the *Titanic* on 15th April 1912 resulted in an inquiry by the British Wreck Commissioner on behalf of the British Board of Trade. Sydney Buxton, President of the Board of Trade, requested the Lord Chancellor appoint a Wreck Commissioner to investigate the disaster. To fill that position, Lord Chancellor Robert, Earl Loreburn, appointed John Charles Bigham, Lord Mersey of Toxteth, President of the Probate, Divorce & Admiralty Division of the High Court. Bigham was a lawyer with experience in shipping cases. The inquiry was held in London from 2nd May to 3rd July 1912 at Wreck Commissioner's Court, Scottish Drill Hall, Buckingham Gate, Westminster. You can read their report at:

<https://www.titanicinquiry.org/BOTInq/BOTReport/botRep01.php>

An inquiry by a sub-committee of the Commerce Committee of the United States Senate, chaired by Senator William Alden Smith (a lawyer by training), began in New York on 19th April 1912 - there were a total of 18 days of official investigation. You can read the committee's report at: <https://www.titanicinquiry.org/USInq/USReport/AmInqRep01.php>

Subjects covered at both inquiries included the ice warnings received, the inadequate number of lifeboats, the handling of the ship and its speed, *Titanic's* distress calls, and the handling of the evacuation of the ship. The recommendations of the inquiries, led to changes in safety practices following the disaster.

The British inquiry's major contribution may have been its list of 24 recommendations for making sea travel safer. While the American report had made similar recommendations, the powerful British shipping companies seemed more likely to take them seriously, coming from their own government.

Details of the British Board of Trade Inquiry into the *Titanic* disaster can be viewed at:

<https://www.titanicinquiry.org/downloads/BritishInquiry.pdf>

Details of the United States Senate Inquiry into the *Titanic* disaster can be viewed at:

<https://www.titanicinquiry.org/downloads/USInq.pdf>

You can watch a video about the inquiries at: <https://youtu.be/Glg0EEJWMTw>

About the Speaker



Rupert Matthews is an established public speaker, school visitor, history consultant and author of non-fiction books, magazine articles and newspaper columns. His work has been translated into 28 languages (including Sioux). He was appointed as Police and Crime Commissioner for Leicestershire at the elections on 6th May 2021.

Rupert has written over 170 books, appearing on television and radio as a presenter and consultant. These have mostly been on history or military subjects, though in recent

years he has been writing about ghosts, cryptozoology, UFOs and other paranormal subjects. He was born in Dorking, Surrey, England, in 1961 and was educated at his local Church of England junior school, then at his local grammar school. He later took up a career in publishing as an editor and writer. He went freelance in 1988 and since then has worked mostly as a writer, columnist, and TV presenter. Rupert has established himself as a leading speaker at lunches and dinners, speaking on subjects as varied as *RAF Bomber Command at War*, *St Valentine*, *How Medieval women led society*, *How the publishing industry works*, *The Arrowstorm*, *The Yeti!*, *The real King Arthur*, and *The Biography of Father Christmas*.

Rupert twitters under the name of "HistoryRupert" and blogs about history at: <http://thehistorymanatlarge.blogspot.com/>

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