

TV historian
By DAN SNOW

ALMOST exactly a century since she sank on her maiden voyage, Titanic still holds as much fascination as ever. The truth is the whole world was talking about her even before April 15, 1912.

She was the largest ship afloat and everyone expected her to break the record for a crossing from Europe to America. She was hailed as unsinkable. Parts of the port in Belfast had to be demolished just to build her — it was literally a titanic undertaking.

The passengers were from all walks of life . . . from some of the richest people in the world to those without two pennies to rub together, looking for a better life in America.

We know so many details because there were lots of survivors and because she sank fairly slowly. People had time to take it in. Some even documented the events in journals. The survivors were interviewed straight away afterwards and all the stories were published in the papers.

The juicy details and lurid rumours started coming out, about the cowardly chairman of the White Star Line leaping into a lifeboat, millionaires bribing women to take their spot in the lifeboats, and the tragic image of the musicians playing on as the old girl went down.

Titanic actually had more lifeboats than a ship officially needed under the law as it stood then. But the tragedy marked a turning point in safety at sea and new statutes were introduced which are still in place today.

The disaster's legacy has endured because we have pictures of the people involved and because since the 1980s we have seen artefacts dredged up from the ship — and that eerie picture of it lying on the seabed.

I think our fascination with Titanic will continue. It will always serve in the public's imagination as the doomed ship.

TURN OVER TO READ THE FULL STORY

THE SURVIVORS



SAVED: Radio operator Harold Bride. Right, last survivor Millvina Dean, who died in 2009. Inset, Millvina as a baby around time of disaster in 1912

A CLEAR, moonlit night, a calm, serene sea peppered with icebergs the size of buildings — and hundreds of screaming people dying in the freezing ocean as the giant ship went down. The memories of the survivors make harrowing reading.

Marshall Drew, eight, said: "When the Titanic upended to sink, all was blacked out until the tons of machinery crashed to the bow. As this happened hundreds of people were thrown into the sea. It isn't likely I shall ever forget the screams as they perished."

Honeymooner Mary Marvin, 18, got into a lifeboat as her new husband Daniel, 19, stood on deck. She said: "He cried to me, 'It's all right, little girl. You go. I will stay'. As our boat shoved off he threw me a kiss, and that was the last I saw of him."

Milvina Dean, from Southampton, was the last survivor, nine weeks old that night and 97 when she died in 2009. She said: "We headed for a lifeboat, said goodbye and said 'hope to see you later on'. My father was never found. I wouldn't watch the film. I'd worry what my father was doing. I would wonder if he was jumping overboard. Was he going down with the ship?"

Robert Daniel, an American banker, said: "Not until the last five minutes did the awful realisation come that the end was at hand. Ever so slowly, the surface of the water seemed to come towards us."

"I was far up on one of the top decks when I jumped. It was icily cold. My first glance took in the people swarming on the Titanic's deck. Hundreds were standing there helpless to ward off approaching death. I saw Captain Smith on the bridge. The water was to his waist. I saw him no more. He died a hero."

US Army Colonel Archibald Gracie jumped from the top deck and scrambled on to a makeshift raft. He said: "Dying men and women all about me were crying piteously. Soon the raft became so full it seemed as if she would sink. The crew had to refuse to permit any others to climb aboard. This was the most pathetic and horrible scene of all."

"Many of those answered as they went to their death, 'Good luck — God bless you!'"

2,228
Total number on board, comprising 1,343 passengers and 885 crew

THE VICTIMS



TYCOON: John Jacob Astor was killed when a funnel fell on him. Right, Captain Edward Smith went down with his ship

JOHN Jacob Astor IV was one of America's richest men — and perhaps the most famous Titanic victim. The Astor family had made a vast fortune in furs, hotels and property and he himself was an inventor, ex-army officer and sci-fi author. He had fled to Europe after scandalising American society aged 47 by marrying a girl of 18. They were heading home for their baby to be born in America.

Astor got his wife into a lifeboat but was barred from joining her. He is thought to have been crushed to death by a falling funnel.

Another aristocrat to die was Benjamin Guggenheim, son of a mining tycoon. He spent most of his time in France and was travelling back to New York with his lover. He saw her into a lifeboat before returning to his cabin to change into evening wear to "go down like a gentleman". His body was never found. His brother Solomon was an art lover who commissioned New York's famous Guggenheim Museum.

Isidor Straus, owner of Manhattan's most famous department store Macy's, died with his wife Ida. She was given a lifeboat place but refused it, saying: "Where you go, I go." They died together.

A British campaigning journalist, William Thomas Stead, was another victim. Stead was famous for exposing child prostitution by "buying" a girl of 13, for which he was briefly jailed. He also campaigned for peace and women's rights. Stead wrote two fictional articles that appeared to predict the Titanic disaster.

One, in 1886, described a steamer sinking in the Atlantic and there being too few lifeboats. Another, in 1892, described a ship sinking after hitting an iceberg.

Stead met his doom apparently reading a book, having ushered women and children into lifeboats.



DESIGNER: Thomas Andrews knew ship backwards and was first to realise it was doomed. Right, Benjamin Guggenheim

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THE VILLAINS



HOPELESS: Stanley Lord (left), captain of the Californian, failed to act. Right, Titanic boss Bruce Ismay, condemned for cowardice

THE boss of the White Star Line which owned the Titanic emerged as the chief "villain" — and was vilified for cowardice for the rest of his life.

J Bruce Ismay conceived the idea of the great ship, its high speed for transatlantic crossings, its huge capacity and its breathtaking fittings.

To accommodate more luxury he ordered the lifeboats be cut to the bare minimum allowed by law — a decision that while not illegal ultimately cost hundreds of lives.

During the doomed voyage, Ismay, then 49, is alleged to have urged Captain Edward Smith to go faster and to have scoffed at an iceberg warning.

His reputation was destroyed when he survived the sinking on a lifeboat, apparently deserting the ship while women and children were still aboard. He is said to have turned his face away as the ship went down.

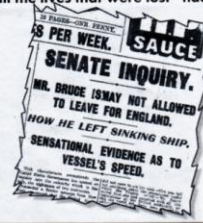
Reports about Ismay's cowardice are disputed. It is argued that in fact he ushered many women and children into lifeboats and only got in one when there was no one else around him. But the official report into the disaster did blame excessive speed.

The aristocrat Sir Cosmo Duff Gordon lived for the rest of his life with rumours of his callousness that night. He is said to have tried to bribe the crew of his lifeboat not to return to the Titanic to pluck more survivors from the sea in case the sinking ship took them down too. He was exonerated later — but his clubs snubbed him.

Another "villain" was not even aboard the Titanic. Stanley Lord was captain of the SS Californian, which was near enough to the stricken liner to have seen its distress flares. But Lord went to bed, and the Californian's only radio operator had switched his machine off and gone off duty. The Californian arrived at the scene hours too late to rescue anyone. The British inquiry said it would have saved "many if not all the lives that were lost" had Lord responded earlier.

DAMNING: Headlines after disaster are grim for Ismay

1,517
Total who died, comprising 130 first-class passengers, 166 second, 536 third and 685 crew



882
Length of ship 92ft

THE HEROES



RESCUERS: Carpathia's skipper Arthur Rostron and Titanic's brave second officer Charles Lightoller. Both saved many lives

THERE were many heroes of the Titanic disaster. Perhaps chief among them was Charles Lightoller, then 38, who was second in command and took charge of securing lifeboat places for women and children. He even waved a revolver to evict men from one boat.

Then, after diving into the icy sea, he remained calm enough to organise survivors as they clung to an upturned lifeboat before being rescued. He was the last man taken aboard the Carpathia. Years later he was decorated for bravery in First World War.

American socialite Margaret Brown, then 44, distinguished herself by ushering other passengers into lifeboats. After finally boarding one herself she insisted the reluctant crew row back towards the Titanic to save more survivors. She was later nicknamed the "unsinkable Molly Brown".

Titanic's designer Thomas Andrews made every effort to save others.

He was first to realise the ship was doomed and rushed around urging passengers to put on lifebelts and get up on deck, desperate to fill the lifeboats. There were also reports that he threw deckchairs into the sea as flotation aids for survivors.

Many owed their lives to the truly heroic efforts of Arthur Rostron, captain of the ship Carpathia, which steamed to the rescue. Carpathia was 58 miles away but Rostron raced through a treacherous ice field at three knots faster than his ship's official top speed to reach Titanic in 3½ hours, maximising his engines' steam by switching off heating. Carpathia rescued 710 people. Rostron was showered with awards.

Other heroes include the eight bandsmen who attempted to calm passengers by playing jaunty ragtime tunes even as the ship was sinking and their own doom was approaching fast. All were killed.

Heroes too were the postal crew of five men who died trying to save millions of letters and parcels instead of themselves.

Captain Edward Smith died nobly with his ship.



PLUCK: 'Molly' Brown

£4,680,000
Total cost of building Titanic. It would cost an estimated £500,000,000 now