

Titanic Collection

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What's it all about?

For having entered history in the way it did because of its sinking, the *Titanic* is a well-known element in Pop Culture, a celebrity to which James Cameron's film greatly contributed. The commercial exploitation of the ship's memory has also resulted in fierce marketing. The mythical liner takes on the appearance of derivative products. These range from simple boxes and perfume bottles to clocks and coat racks.



Figure 1: Le Titanic est dérivé sous une forme marketing le décrivant en objets dérivés comme ici avec ce porte-manteau et cette horloge.

The Collection

The *Titanic*-related Philippe Chevalier Collection is a humble collection, by no means rivaling those of great collectors. But we consider ourselves fortunate to have such objects and relics at our disposal.

Made up of a variety of items, including some heterogeneous objects, the Collection includes period newspapers and books. They were written to inform readers in 1912: the paper, anchor and cover date from that time. Who held this book or newspaper in their hands? By mentally setting the scene with the advanced technology of the time, you can imagine a likely scene.



Figure 2: Display case dedicated to the Titanic, featuring a number of period objects, some of which helped make history.

They may not be actors, but such objects are nonetheless extras in history. They were present at that time, in that place, playing that role.

This story is like a visit to a museum, presenting extracts from a humble collection dedicated to the *Titanic*.

L'illustration

L'illustration was a weekly newspaper published on Saturdays. It devoted a long article to the sinking of the *Titanic* in its April 20, 1912 edition. It was published on the very day the liner *France* set sail on her maiden voyage. In its coverage of the sinking, particularly in the following issue, the paper set out to use authentic photos of the *Titanic*, including the Café Parisien and the Café Veranda.

The present volume is part of an edition of *L'illustration* covering the first six months of 1912. It was probably published in mid- or late 1912, or even in 1913.



Figure 3: The newspaper *L'illustration* from Saturday, April 20, 1912, when the sinking was still news. The photos show the *Titanic* setting sail for her trials in Belfast, and Captain Smith on the *Titanic's* officers' promenade on the morning of April 10, 1912.

Le Naufrage du Titanic

Published in Bruxelles on May 5, 1912, this special issue of *Le Soir* was produced for the benefit of "widows and orphans". It includes numerous articles on the *Titanic*, as well as some survivor testimonials. Photos and diagrams illustrate the book.



Figure 4: Almost a month after the events, *Le Soir* newspaper published this special issue.

The press through time

These magazines are more recent and were published in the century following the shipwreck. Some of these articles, which were news items at the time, have since become period testimonials.

When *Historia* magazine, featuring an article written by Hanson W. Baldwin appeared on newsstands in April 1969, Neil Armstrong had not yet set foot on the Moon.

The August 1980 issue of *Science & Vie* bears witness to a dream that was based purely on the imagination: that of refloating the *Titanic*. At the time, it was widely imagined that the wreck was lying on its underwater bed in one piece.

In its September 12-18, 1985 issue, *VSD* reported on this pivotal event in the history of this great liner, with the discovery of her wreck. It was now established that the ship had broken in two during the sinking.

In its November 1987 issue, *Science & Vie* reports on the operation to raise the relics of the *Titanic*.



Figure 5: *Historia* magazine, April 1969, reconstructs the sinking in an article by Hanson W. Baldwin. *Science & Vie*, August 1980, reports on a proposed expedition to recover the wreck. *VSD*, from September 12 to 18, 1985, talks about the news surrounding the discovery of the wreck. *Science & Vie*, November 1987, reports on the first expedition to recover *Titanic* relics.

Nomadic

The Collection has previously unseen photos and a VHS film of the *Nomadic*, when she was moored in Paris. These shots were taken on November 4, 2000.

The *Nomadic* had been built at the same time as the *Titanic*, as it was to operate in Cherbourg by transferring passengers from the quay to the ship anchored in the harbor.



Figure 6: Photo and excerpt from a VHS film showing the *Nomadic* moored to a Paris quay, November 2000.

The Sinking of the Titanic and Great Sea Disasters

The Sinking of the Titanic and Great Sea Disasters est un livre édité par Logan Marshall quelques semaines après le naufrage. C'est ce genre de livre que dénonce Lawrence Beesley au début de son récit *The Sinking of the Titanic : its Story and its Lessons*. Le livre édité par Marshall propose une qualité inégale : certains témoignages sont authentiques tandis que d'autres sont douteux.

The Sinking of the Titanic and Great Sea Disasters is a book published by Logan Marshall a few weeks after the sinking. It's this kind of book that Lawrence Beesley denounces at the start of his account *The Sinking of the Titanic : its Story and its Lessons*. The quality of the book edited by Marshall is uneven: some accounts are authentic, while others are dubious.

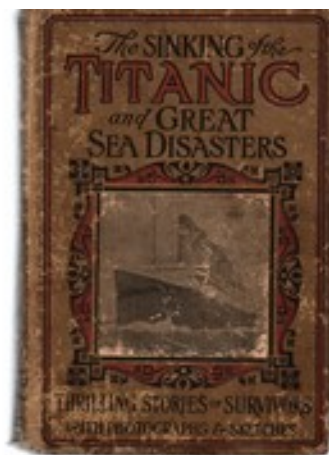


Figure 7: The book *The Sinking of the Titanic and Great Sea Disasters* was published a few weeks after the sinking, to capitalize on the topical interest of the event.

Titanic relics

Above all, the Collection boasts a few authentic *Titanic* relics, made of pieces of wood, cloth or coal. More than just part of the famous liner's history, these relics *are* the *Titanic*.

Piece of fabric

This dark green burlap fabric, known as Green Fabric Find, was on board the *Titanic* when she was still in Belfast, during her fitting-out phase. A merchant seaman who regularly crossed the Atlantic Ocean was able to visit the ship and snatched this fabric as a souvenir. He gave it to his sister, who used it as a curtain. She passed the Titanic Fabric Curtains on to her daughter-in-law, Mrs. E. Ralph, in the United Kingdom in the late 1940s, where they remained until 1998.

Expert Gary Robinson rediscovered the fabric, examined it and authenticated it as actually coming from the *Titanic*. Put up for auction, the fabric was sold in August 2005. It has since been deposited at the Ronald Reagan National Library in Simi Valley, California, and at the National Geographic Museum in Washington D.C¹.



Figure 8: This simple piece of fabric is an extract of green burlap from the *Titanic*'s first-class smokehouse.

It should be noted that there is some debate as to the authenticity of this artifact.

Piece of coal

It was because this coal was burnt that the ship had the steam energy it needed to make headway on the ocean's waves. The coal was burned in the boiler rooms to provide steam power for the engines. This piece of coal probably comes from boiler room no. 1 or no. 2, as no. 1 never operated during the voyage. It was located opposite boiler room no. 6, which was damaged by the collision with the iceberg. To read the testimony of a boiler room man, like Beauchamp or Barrett, is to follow a story that sends us alongside this lump of coal, into the depths of the *Titanic*.

Anthracite², and having long rested in the abyssal depths, this simple lump of coal is the mute witness of an entire history! There had been a social struggle before the disaster at sea. A major miners' strike had hit England in 1912. The consequences were felt³, as early as March⁴, seriously compromising maritime traffic⁵.

1 Kevin Saucier : *Certificate of Authenticity*.

2 Paul-Henri Nargeolet : *Dans les Profondeurs du Titanic*, Harper Collins, 2022.

3 L'illustration : *La grève noire en Angleterre*, 23 mars 1912.

4 L'illustration : *La crise minière anglaise*, 2 mars 1912.

5 Bibliothèque Universelle et Revue Suisse : *Chronique politique*, avril 1912, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.



Figure 9: This simple lump of coal is a witness to an incredible story: first a social struggle, then the most famous shipwreck in history.

In April, to supply the *Titanic*, it was decided to requisition coal from other ships. The *Titanic* had left Belfast with 1,880 tons of coal. It was supplied with 4,427 tons in Southampton. She was to consume 415 tons in the week she spent in port alone⁶.

Le *Titanic* était équipé de 29 chaudières réparties dans six chaufferies. Chacune de ces chambres de chauffe occupait respectivement l'emplacement d'un compartiment.



Figure 10: Typical boiler room layout on a ship of the period: boilers on the *Mauretania*.

A large quantity of coal was released from the bunkers when the *Titanic* broke in two on April 15, 1912. In the dark, the many blocks began a 3,800 m plunge into the abyssal depths. The largest parts of the wreck had already reached the bottom when the coal settled on the sedimentary soil.

The coal lay there, just as it had landed, for 82 years. One day in 1994, the submersible *Nautilus* set out to recover a large quantity. A total of 2,340 kg of coal, divided into 170 pieces, were brought up from the depths. A block of coal could weigh up to 50 kg. After chemical treatment to preserve them, the blocks were fragmented into 400,000 small pieces and put up for sale in autumn 1995⁷.

Piece of wood

This piece of yellow pine wood seems to have come from one of the decks, part of a plank that was ejected from the ship when it broke in two that night⁸.

This piece of wood represents the ship itself: its architecture, its construction materials. All the elements were installed at the Harland & Wolff shipyards. The deck planks were installed after the hull had been launched, while moored alongside.

6 John P. Eaton & Charles A. Haas : *Titanic : Destination Disaster*, Patrick Stephens Limited, 1987 ; 2nd edition, 1996, éd. française : *Titanic Destination Désastre*, Marcel-Didier Vrac, 1998.

7 Paul-Henri Nargeolet : *Dans les Profondeurs du Titanic*, Harper Collins, 2022.

8 Certificate of Authenticity, Kevin Saucier, president & curator Gem Mint, Inc./TitanicItems.com

The plank from which this piece of wood came drifted for several days in the area of the wreck. It was recovered by the steamer CS *Minia*, chartered by the White Star to recover the bodies of victims.



Figure 11: Piece of wood from one of the decks. It was separated from the rest of the ship when it broke in two. If the plank began to float, the liner would sink to a depth of 3,800 m. This piece of wood is the Titanic!

Minia carpenter William J. Parker used several pieces of wood to transform them into various objects, such as furniture. He integrated the pine plank with other salvaged materials to make a liquor cabinet⁹.

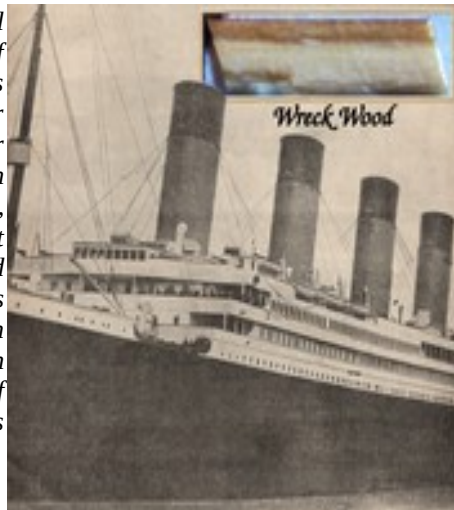
It should be noted that there is some debate as to the authenticity of this artifact.

The symbolism of relics

If we use our imagination, these three types of relics represent the liner and its history.

The piece of wood was torn from the ship when it broke in two. It comes from a pine plank that was probably located on the decks and may have been walked on by illustrious passengers? It was recovered by one of the ships that came to the scene a few days after the sinking.

Figure 12: An exceptional relic: because it was part of one of the ship's decks, this piece of wood is the Titanic, or at least an extract! The liner was photographed here on Wednesday, April 10, 1912, shortly after midday, as she set sail from Southampton. She had embarked passengers and was embarking on her maiden voyage across the North Atlantic. The framed piece of wood was on one of the decks when the photo was taken.



The fabric symbolized the opulence of the ship, with its rich first-class decorations. Intended for the upper class, the fabric was stolen from the smoking room while the ship was still at Harland & Wolff, otherwise it might still have been there when Major Butt and Clarence Moore played a card game against George Widener and William Carter on Sunday evening. Perhaps the quartet had

⁹ Kevin Saucier : *Certificate of Authenticity*.

discussed politics or coursing hunts? Earlier, Mr. Widener had hosted a dinner given in Captain Smith's honor in the à la carte restaurant on the floor directly below.

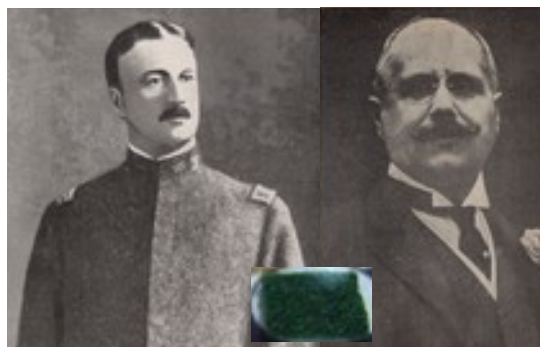


Figure 13: Had it not been stolen from Belfast, this piece of cloth would probably have been in the same room as Major Butt and George Widener, the first-class smoking room, on Sunday evening, when the collision occurred.

Then the ship collided with an iceberg. Legend would have it that the architect Thomas Andrews, who had helped to design the ship - a design mainly due to Alexander Carlisle - arrived in the smoking room, removed his life belt and planted himself in front of a large canvas: Norman Wilkinson's *The Approach to Plymouth Harbour*. Other witnesses describe a different end for the architect. One thing seems certain: this fabric would have been lost at sea on April 15, 1912, had it not been stolen while the liner was still in the shipyards. Although it wasn't actually there, this humble piece of cloth bears witness to what took place in the *Titanic* smoking room that Sunday evening.

As for the lump of coal, extracted from the mines, it had provided all the energy the ship needed to complete its crossing. It was this energy that enabled the lights of the great ship to be switched on and wireless distress calls to be sent out that night. He was freed from the hull when the liner broke in two. It then plummeted 3,800 m to land in the abyssal depths of the North Atlantic, far from human life. In the vicinity, the ship's immense hull, broken in two, had already congealed, while other relics continued to settle here and there. The place was plunged into eternal night. Eighty-two years later, the coal was put under the spotlight by a submersible, a tool of new, advanced technology, which set about bringing it to the surface.

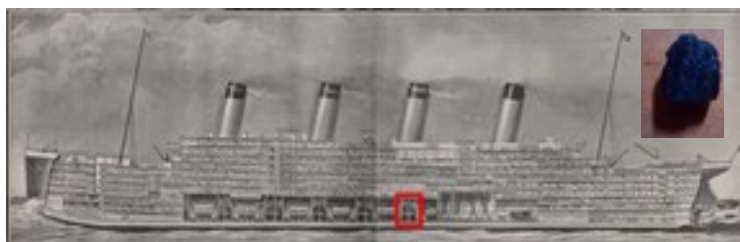


Figure 14: Probable initial location on board the Titanic of coal recovered from the wreck site. The coal was located at the injunction between boiler rooms no. 2 and no. 1, below the third-class galley. It was released from the hull when the ship broke in two.

Saved from being dispersed and doomed to disappear, these simple, seemingly innocuous objects are a physical extract of a historical event that has become embedded in people's memories. Even if the event took place far in the past, these relics are still mute witnesses, silently guarding their history.

These relics must be treated with respect. They are the fragmented remains of a sumptuous ocean liner that sank on its maiden voyage across the North Atlantic, with terrible consequences. The latest figures put the death toll at 1,496, with 712 survivors.

As witnesses, these objects link us with the past. Coming from a bygone era, they have traveled to us through time. While books like *The Sinking of the Titanic and Great Sea Disasters* or newspapers like *L'Illustration* were produced in a bowler-hatted society, relics like the piece of wood taken from the *Titanic* were in the sinking Atlantic, as the ship's orchestra gave a final concert.

Witnesses to the past, relics such as the relics of the *Titanic* are the closest thing we have to time travel. They take us back to the North Atlantic, to the night of April 14-15, 1912.

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