

A QUIET SEA
RMS TITANIC



CHIEF OFFICER WILDE

TITANIC'S CHIEF OFFICER



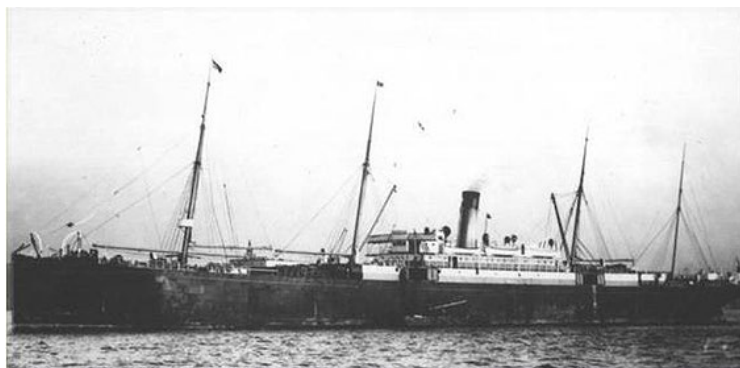
Henry Tingle Wilde
Credit: Titanic officers

Henry T. Wilde was born to a middle-class family in 1872, north of Liverpool, England. He never met his father; the senior Wilde died several months before he was born. Wilde went to sea in 1889 aboard the windjammer Greystoke Castle, spending his 4-year apprenticeship on international voyages. He was promoted to Third Officer in 1893. After applying to the Board of Trade for his Second Officer's ticket, he passed his examinations and shipped as Third Officer on the iron square rigger Hornby Castle.



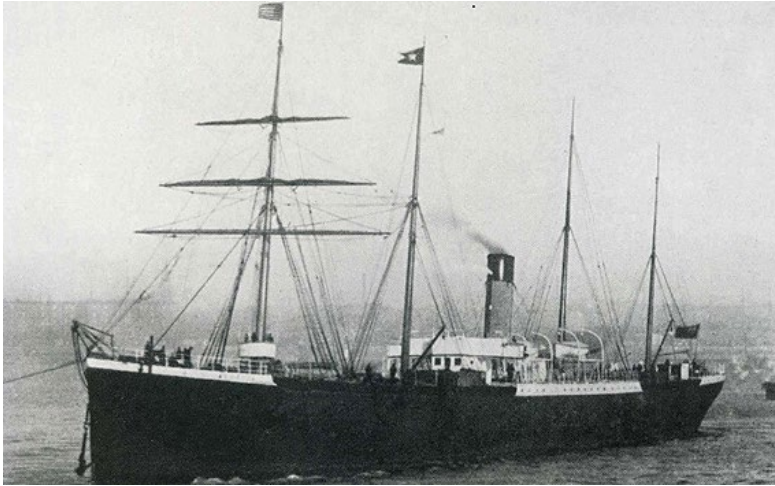
Hornby Castle
Credit: Titanic Officers

Wilde switched from sail to steam shortly after, serving as Second Mate on a number of steamships before successfully passing his Master and Extra Master's examinations. Having earned these credentials, he applied to White Star Line in 1897 and joined the SS Cevic, a cargo and cattle carrier, as Fourth Officer.

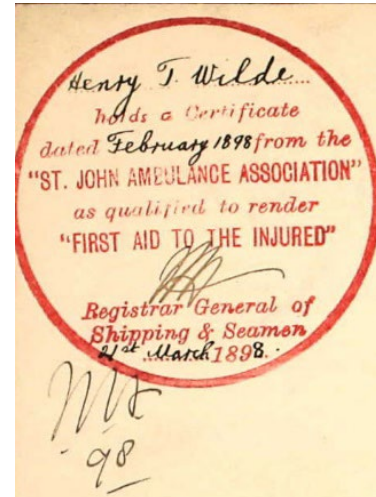


SS Cevic
Credit: Titanic Officers

Cevic was a large vessel and could transport 1,000 head of cattle. Wilde stayed with her for about a year before transferring to a smaller and older White Star vessel, SS Cufic, White Star's first cattle carrier. Cufic was on loan to a Spanish shipping company and carried horses between Spain and Cuba during the 1895-1898 Cuban War for Independence. While in Cufic, Wilde received first aid training, not a commonly held skill at the time.

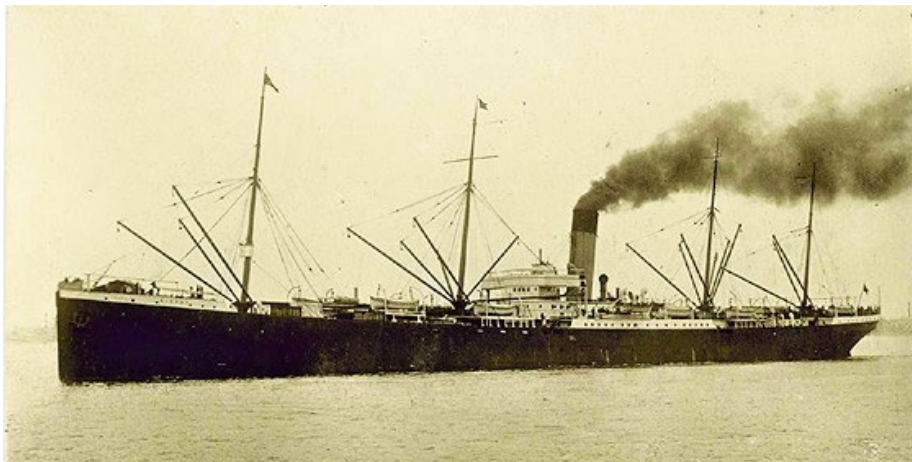


SS Cufic
Credit: Titanic Officers



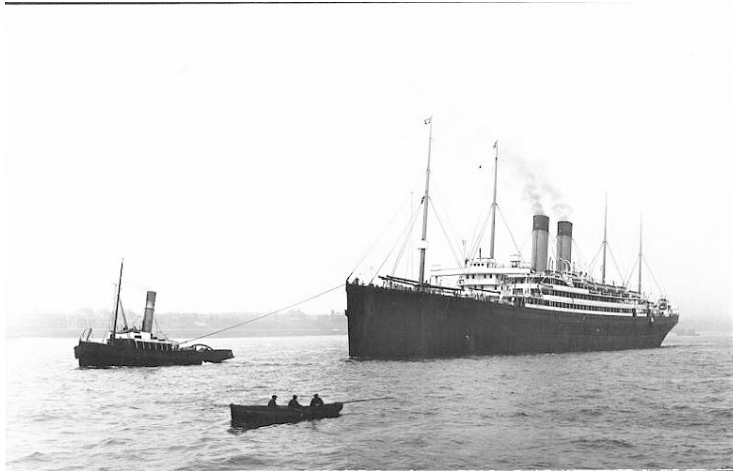
Wilde's St. John Ambulance Association
Credit: Titanic Officers

Wilde's considerable aptitude as an officer prompted a promotion from Fourth to Second Officer while on his next ship, SS Turic, a passenger and cattle carrier. His future with White Star looked bright, and he was anxious for command. Transferred to the New Zealand run aboard the SS Delphic, he stayed with her for over a year, before returning to Cufic. Eager to get on board larger vessels, Wilde's next ship was SS Persic, on the Liverpool—Cape Town—Sydney run. A passage took about 6 weeks. On the Cape Town—Sidney leg of the trip, Persic transported Australian and New Zealand soldiers wounded in the 1899 Boer War. On her homeward trip to Liverpool, Persic carried a varied cargo of wool, coconut oil, tallow, tin, chrome ore, sheepskins, furs, over 16,000 carcasses of mutton and lamb, butter and 100 passengers.



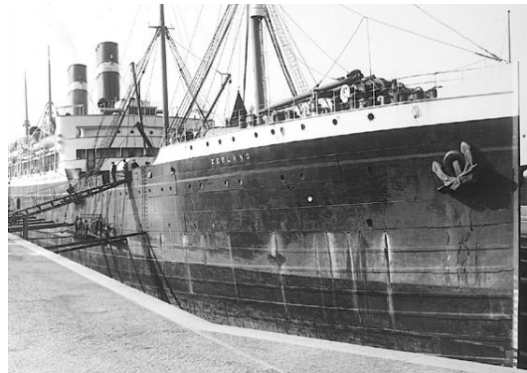
SS Persic
Credit: Titanic Officers

Wilde became an officer in the Royal Naval Reserve in 1902, specializing in gunnery and torpedo tactics. He served on a number of warships, garnering high praise for his professionalism. Widely considered an exemplary officer, he served as Second Officer on the liner RMS Cedric, the largest ship in the world, in 1903. Transferring again to the Australian route, Wilde continued gaining rank and returned to Cedric as Chief Officer in 1910.



White Star liner Cedric
Credit: Royal Navy log books

At this time, Wilde suffered an unbearable personal tragedy: the death of his wife and twin sons from complications of childbirth. Despite this, he had to report for naval training. He wrote his sister-in-law about his depression and apathy in carrying out his naval duties. Gravely concerned about the well-being of his four surviving children, he fell into deep despair. Returning to sea in February as Chief Mate aboard the liner Megantic, he wrote his sister-in-law of his inability to function. He decided to establish a trust, and asked her to be the children's guardian.



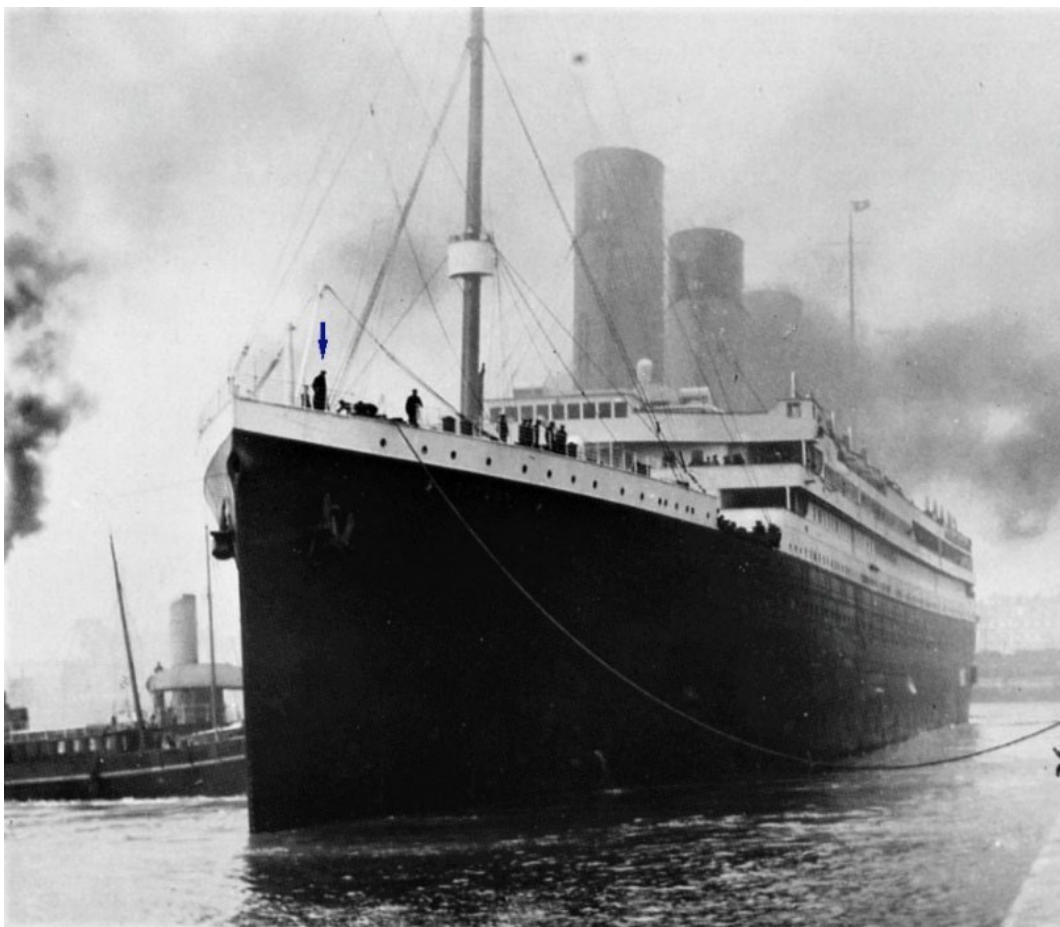
SS Zeeland
Credit: Titanic Officers

Wilde was then given command of the SS Zeeland, a vessel chartered by White Star. Unable to escape his sorrow, working at sea became a burden. Fellow officers on RMS Teutonic, where he was sent as First Mate, described him as very quiet and efficient. Soon after, in July 1911, he was transferred to the largest ship in the world, RMS Olympic, where he was to serve as Chief Mate under Captain Edward J. Smith.



Wilde on board Olympic. Capt. Smith seated center
Credit: Titanic Officers

Wilde was on board Olympic when she was rammed by HMS Hawke while leaving Southampton and gave testimony to the courts. He returned to the ship after her repairs and stayed until March 1912. He was expecting to visit his family and receive command of the White Star liner Cymric. However, he was abruptly shuffled to Titanic at the request of Captain Smith. Wilde had misgivings about his new assignment. Arriving on April 7, he was to be on Titanic only for her maiden voyage. Longing to see his children upon his return, he posted his last letter to his sister when Titanic stopped in Queenstown, Ireland. Expressing his unease, he wrote, "I still don't like this ship, I have a queer feeling about it."



Chief Officer Wilde on the bow of Titanic (blue arrow)
Source: Encyclopedia Titanica

MAIDEN VOYAGE

On April 14, Wilde was on watch from 2pm to 6pm. At the end of his watch, he executed the course change to New York ordered by Captain Smith. Wilde then turned in, as his next watch began at 2am. Awakened by the collision, he went to investigate. He was seen returning from the bow before proceeding to the boat deck to prepare the lifeboats for launching. After a quick word with Captain Smith, Wilde began loading lifeboats 40 minutes after the collision. He stayed on the boat deck, urgently loading eight boats. Shortly after 1am, fearing that panicking male passengers might rush the boats, he distributed revolvers to the other officers. Wilde then returned to his task, launching a boat every 10 minutes. Officers who witnessed his actions said he was everywhere, doing everything. His last moments are unclear. It has been said that as Titanic began her final plunge, he was struggling to launch the last two lifeboats. One officer heard him say he was going to put on his lifebelt. Some said he was killed by falling debris, perhaps when the forward funnel collapsed. Others said that he was smoking a cigarette on the bridge. A steward who worked on one of White Star's New York piers and knew Wilde later recalled a conversation before Wilde joined Titanic, saying, "He didn't care particularly how he went or how soon he joined his wife." Wilde's body was never recovered.

Sources: British and American Wreck Inquiries; Wikipedia; Henry Wilde letters; A Night to Remember by Walter Lord; Crew of the Titanic by Gunter Babler; Titanic Officers; Titanic and other ships by Charles Lightoller