

A QUIET SEA
RMS TITANIC



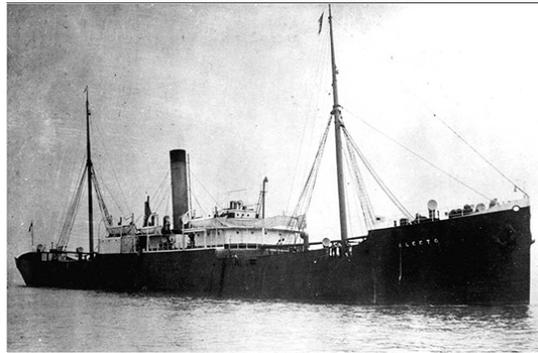
FOURTH OFFICER BOXHALL

TITANIC'S FOURTH OFFICER



Joseph Groves Boxhall, Jr.
Credit: Wikipedia

Joseph G. Boxhall was born in Hull, England in 1884 to a well-respected seafaring family. His father, Master of a vessel sailing between England and Scandinavia, took Boxhall and his sister on a transatlantic voyage, when Boxhall was 11. He later wrote, "...my Dad took my Sister and I from Hull to Boston MASS. I was sea sick really all the journey. Father was master of a steamer called '*Alecto*'. We stayed with English friends who lived in Orange Street or Avenue, Chelsea and we had the pleasure of being there 4th July celebrations."



SS Alecto
Credit: Titanic Officers

Despite his seasickness, young Boxhall became infatuated with ships and the sea and followed in his father's footsteps. He began his training at one of the nautical schools, and after 12 months, apprenticed aboard the three-masted bark *Cambrian Warrior* in 1899.



3-masted bark, *Cambrian Warrior*
Credit: State Library of Victoria

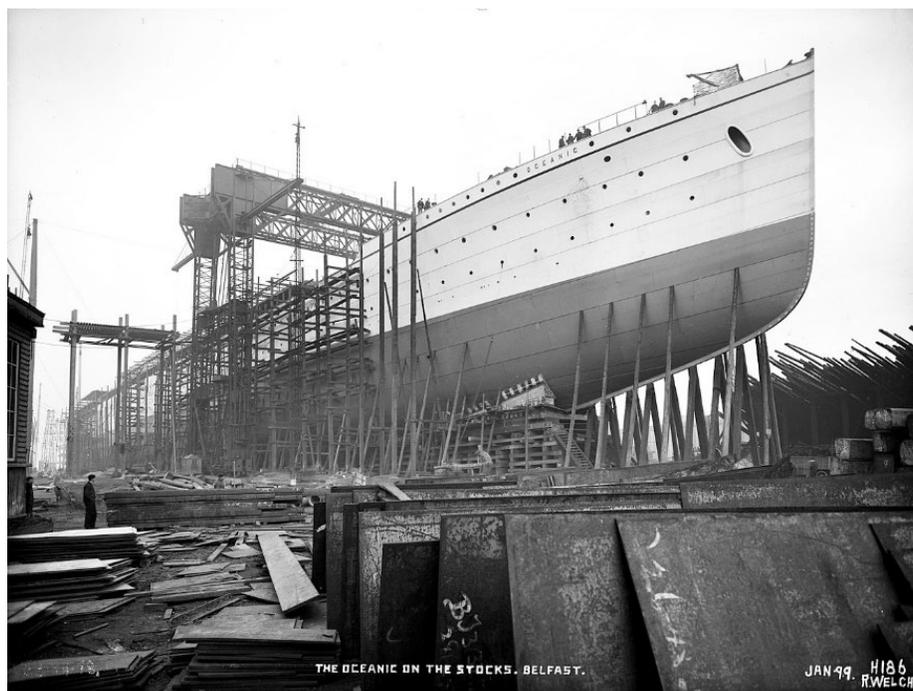
SEAFARING CAREER

Boxhall kept a journal of his experiences while sailing to Russia, the Americas, Mediterranean ports and Australia. He described rescuing a sailor who fell overboard and an improperly secured sail that blew out and trailed behind the ship "like a wedding gown." During his final year as an apprentice, he transferred to the steamship SS Hemisphere. Shortly after completing his apprenticeship, he passed his Second Mate's examination. From 1903-1905, he served as Third Officer on six steamships, sailing to India, then transferring to transatlantic routes. While sailing as Second Officer, he became ill, was unable to ship out and spent the first half of 1906 recuperating, finally joining SS Scipio in June 1906.



SS Scipio
Credit: Titanic Officers

Focused on advancing his career, he passed his Extra Master certificate in 1907 and within 2 months joined the White Star Line. His first berth with the company was aboard RMS Oceanic, where he served with Charles Lightoller, future Second Officer of Titanic.



RMS Oceanic, building in Belfast
Credit: Wikipedia

Transferring briefly to the Australian route in 1911, Boxall returned to Atlantic service aboard White Star's Arabic later that year, serving with William Murdoch, Titanic's future First Officer.



RMS Arabic
Credit: Wikiwand

TITANIC'S MAIDEN VOYAGE

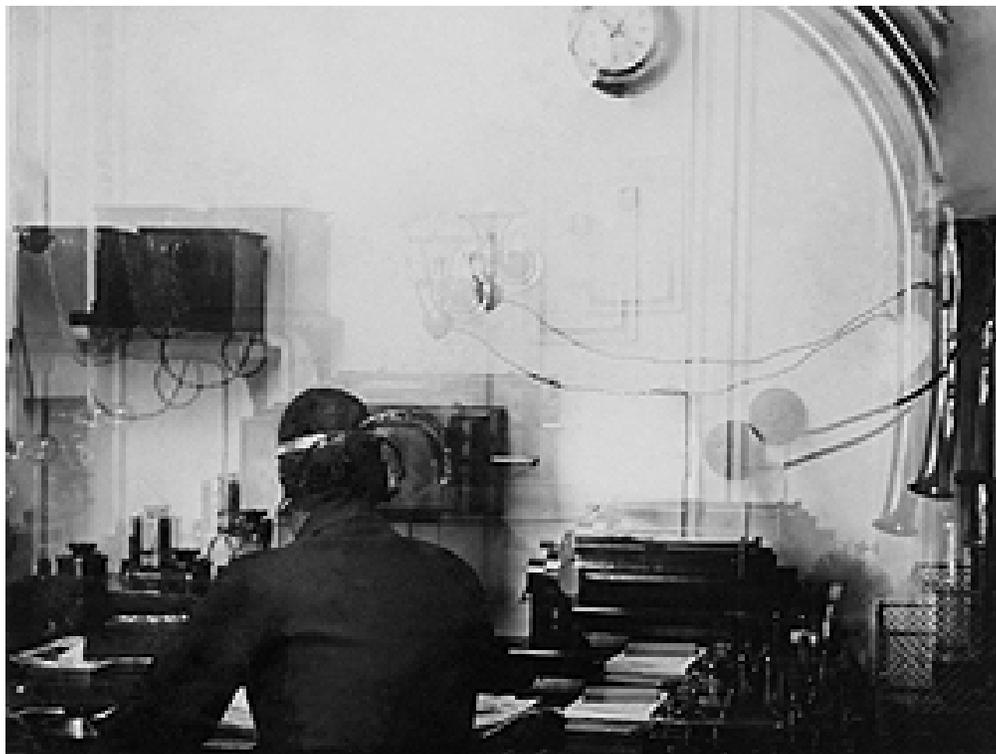
Boxhall was 28 when he received orders to report to Belfast and Titanic, and made the trip with other junior officers bound for the new liner. The ship was being readied for sea trials, and Boxhall was assigned to Harland & Wolff's staff to provide support with the finishing touches. He inventoried the portside lifeboats to ensure that they were fully equipped with masts, oars, water tanks, full biscuit lockers and other supplies. He helped test the davits and the lowering and retrieving of the boats, as required by the Board of Trade surveyors. Titanic returned to Belfast from her builder's trials the evening of April 2 and soon departed for Southampton, arriving at 2am on April 3. Taking some brief time ashore, Boxhall assisted with a final lifeboat test the morning of April 10, before Titanic's noon departure.

Once at sea, Boxhall settled into his routine of watches and navigation duties, assisting the senior officer of the watch, interacting with crew and passengers, and conducting routine ship checks. He began his last watch at 8pm on April 14 and spent a great deal of time in the chartroom, evaluating previous navigational data and stellar fixes from Third Officer Pitman. Boxhall updated Titanic's position and submitted the information to Captain Smith at 9pm. He stated, at the US Inquiry, "I saw him (Captain Smith) frequently during the watch... Up to the time of the accident... On and off, most of the watch. Sometimes out on the outer bridge. I would go out and report. I was working observations out, if you understand, most of that watch working out different calculations and reporting to him; and that is how it was I came in contact with him so much... Sometimes in his chart room and sometimes on the bridge, and sometimes he would come to the wheelhouse, inside of the wheelhouse... I would see him pass through [the wheelhouse]." About 10pm, Boxhall updated Titanic's position again and determined that any ice remained north of her track. However, because the wireless operators were dealing with a backlog of passenger messages, Boxhall, like other officers, did not see the latest ice messages that arrived less than 2 hours before the collision.

Near the end of his watch, returning to the bridge from his routine inspection tour, Boxhall heard the lookout bell ring three times, signaling danger ahead. Shortly thereafter, he felt the boat deck

tremble. He arrived on the bridge as First Officer Murdoch gave the order to steer hard to starboard, rang the engine room for full astern, then ordered hard to port, in an attempt to go around the iceberg and clear the stern, simultaneously ordering watertight doors closed. When Captain Smith came to the bridge, Boxhall heard Murdoch describe his evasive maneuvers. Boxhall, on his own initiative, went forward to check for damage. He went into the lowest steerage passenger spaces forward and saw no damage or open portholes. Returning to the bridge, he noticed light ice scattered about the well deck rail.

Boxhall reported his reassuring findings to Captain Smith, the last good news he would receive that night. Still concerned, Smith told Boxhall to find the carpenter and have him sound the ship, to determine if water was entering the hull. Barely off the bridge, Boxhall ran into the carpenter (Hutchinson) rushing up from below, saying, "She's making water fast," then a mail clerk with news that the mail room was flooding. Another inspection confirmed the alarming news. He was ordered to rouse the off-duty officers and assist with the lifeboats, when the lookouts reported a vessel's lights. Taking a telescope, Boxhall saw a steamer seemingly underway and coming towards them. Using the morse lamp light on the top of the bridge wing cab, he tried to raise the unknown vessel but saw no response. Boxhall returned to his calculations; if a distress call was to be sent, an accurate position was needed. Beginning with the stellar position taken earlier that evening, Boxhall calculated Titanic's location by dead reckoning, estimating the distance traveled using time multiplied by the ship's speed. He took that data to Titanic's wireless operators.



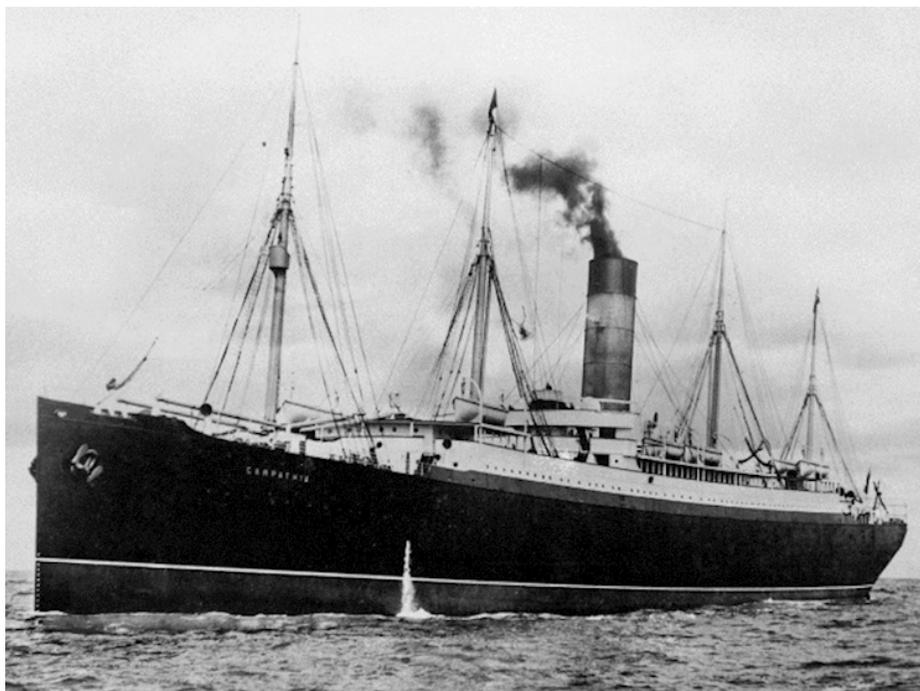
Titanic wireless room; operator Harold Bride at the key.
Credit: Maritime Radio Professionals

Still perplexed by the mystery ship, Boxhall returned to launching the lifeboats. Captain Smith then ordered him to fire distress rockets from the starboard bridge wing to try to raise the distant ship. When Boxhall asked the captain about Titanic's condition, he was told she would sink in an hour.



Starboard bridge wing, sister Olympic. Note Morse signal lamp atop wing cab
Credit: Pinterest

While lowering the portside boats, Boxhall was ordered into boat No.2 (a small emergency boat) by Captain Smith and told to pull for the starboard aft gangway doors. The boat had only one trained seaman, so Boxhall had Mrs. Mahala Douglas steer, so he could row. Rounding Titanic's stern, he could see her propellers rising above the sea; fearing suction, he was dubious about getting closer. Rowing about 2 miles off, Boxhall saw Titanic's lights go out but didn't see her sink. The boat's passengers heard cries for help but didn't want to assist, because they feared being swamped—and Boxhall complied. So, a boat that could have saved 40 held only 18. Boxhall burned green flares in the hope of gathering some boats together and making them easier to rescue, but none joined. Nevertheless, the flares alerted Carpathia to the disaster.



Carpathia
Credit: History Press

Boat No. 2 was picked up about 4am, and Boxhall immediately went to Carpathia's bridge and reported to Captain Rostron. Shaken from his experience, and with an unsteady voice, Boxhall said Titanic was gone, and that while all the boats had gotten away, hundreds remained on board.

After arriving in New York, suffering from pleurisy and in pain, Boxhall's health deteriorated, and he was excused from testifying at the American Inquiry after being examined by a doctor. About a week later, he was barely well enough to testify. Holding his trembling hands and speaking in a subdued voice, he was pressured to speak up and clarify his answers. Six hundred attended the hearing, at which Boxhall first mentioned the mystery ship that he had tried to hail.

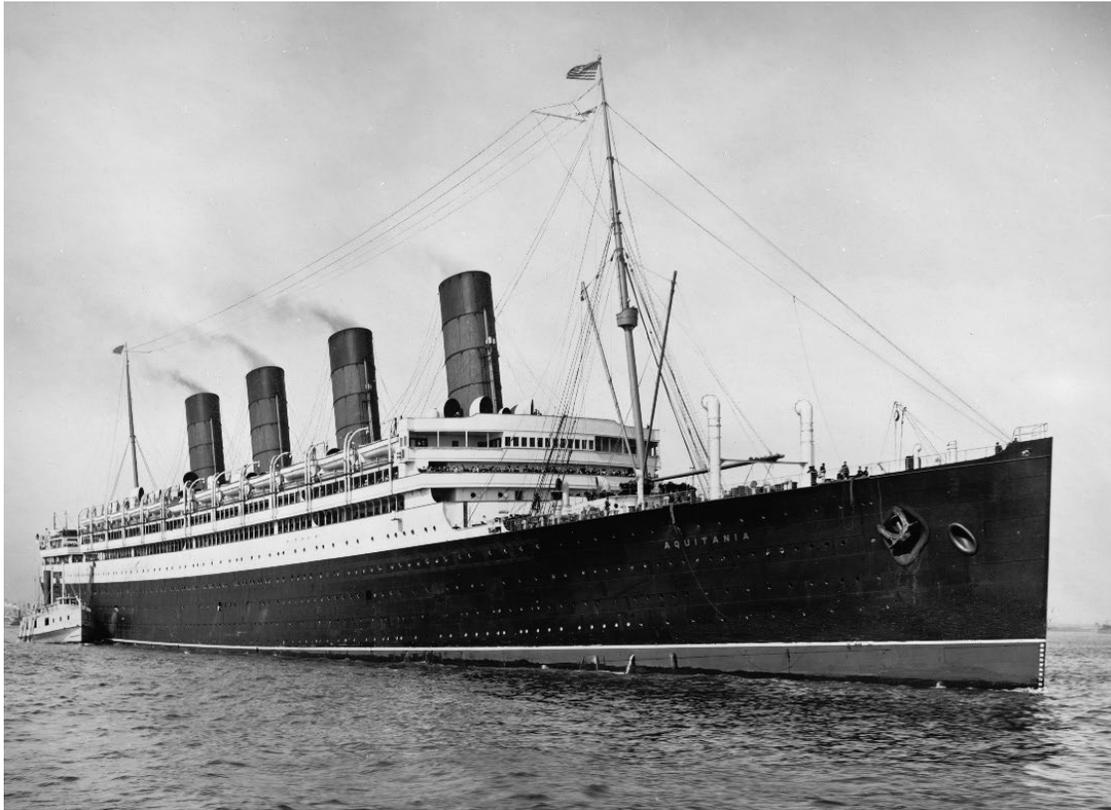
Boxhall returned to England with the surviving crew to attend the British Inquiry, where he was asked about icebergs drifting south with the Labrador current. Initially responding that it was possible, he revised his answer, stating that the Gulf Stream would prevail in that latitude. This was enforced by the belief that ice had never drifted that far south. However, a message from the liner Caronia 14 hours before the collision warned of ice about 10 miles north of Titanic's track. The southerly drift of the ice was later confirmed by Boxhall's mystery ship, Californian, which lay ice-bound, presumably in sight of Titanic's ordeal. Protective of White Star and Bruce Ismay, Boxhall and Second Officer Lightoller avoided answering questions they considered damning to their employer and blamed the disaster on unusual weather conditions.

Boxhall returned to sea, making transatlantic trips and a voyage as a passenger to Australia. The outbreak of World War I found him assigned to the battleship, HMS Commonwealth.



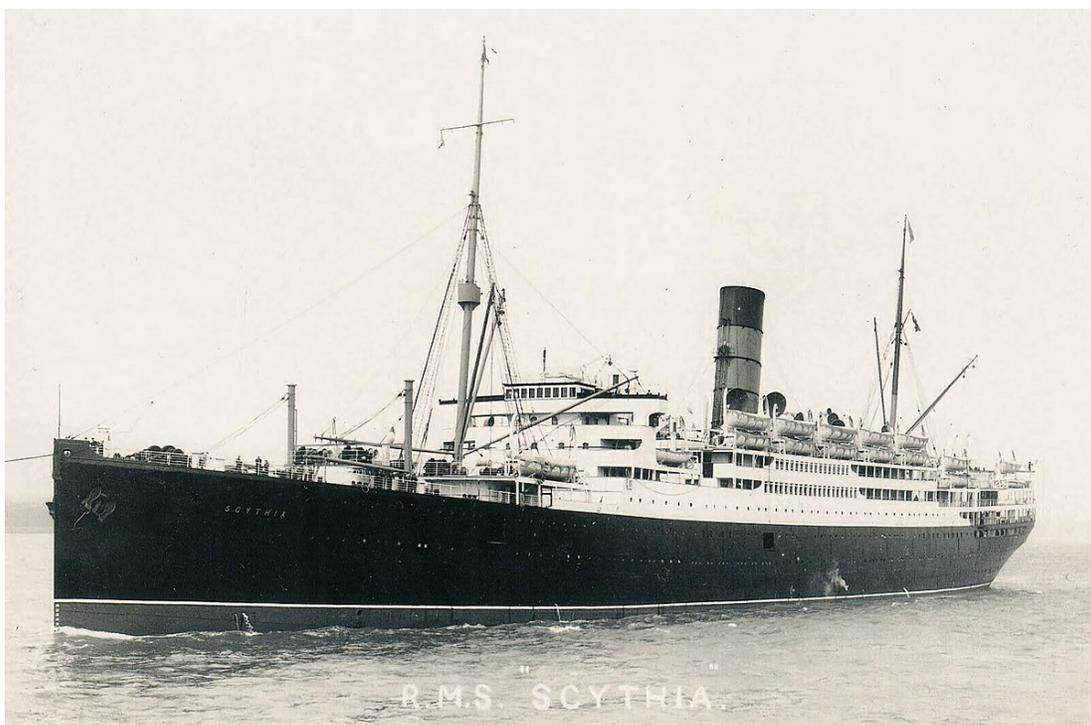
HMS Commonwealth
Credit: Wikipedia

He then took command of a torpedo boat in Gibraltar. When the war ended, Boxhall married and returned to White Star. He was eventually assigned as Second Officer to Olympic, Titanic's sister. In 1934, compelled by the harsh economics of the Great Depression, the two great transatlantic rivals, White Star and Cunard, merged. Boxhall was now Chief Mate on Cunard's RMS Aquitania, the Cunard liner built to rival Titanic.



RMS Aquitania
Credit: Wiki Commons

Boxhall remained with Cunard and served as Chief Officer in one of his last ships, RMS Scythia.



RMS Scythia
Credit: Wiki Commons

Retiring in 1940, Boxhall never spoke of Titanic; he spent his years quietly. However, that changed in 1958, with the British film production of Walter Lord's book, "A Night to Remember."



Boxhall with Titanic set model of A Night to Remember
Credit: Titanic Officers

Boxhall wanted the sets to be as accurate as possible, and the experience seemed cathartic for the old seaman, whose name was prominently featured in the credits. Within 10 years, in declining health and experiencing financial difficulties, Boxhall was the last surviving Titanic officer. Following his death in 1967, his remains were cremated and scattered at $41^{\circ}43N$ $49^{\circ}56W$, the latitude and longitude he he had calculated as Titanic's last position.

Sources: British and American Wreck Inquiries; A Night to Remember, by Walter Lord; Titanic Officers; Titanic and other ships by Charles Lightoller; Joseph Boxhall letters; "A Talk by the Fourth Officer of the Titanic", May 1959 The Nautical Magazine, pages 262 - 264