

A QUIET SEA
RMS TITANIC



THOMAS ANDREWS
NAVAL ARCHITECT



Thomas Andrews

Managing Director, Harland & Wolff Shipbuilders

Photo credits: Thomas Andrews portrait - Wiki Commons

“A naval architect should be able to design, draw, calculate, lay down, cut out, set up, fasten, fit, finish, equip, launch and send to sea a ship out of his own head. He should be able to tell beforehand at what speed she will go, what freight she will carry, what qualities she will show in a sea, - before it, athwart it, against it, - on a wind, close hauled, going free, - what she will stow, and carry, and earn and expend. On his word you should be able to rely, that what he says, his ship will infallibly do.”

John Scott-Russell 1865

Civil Engineer, Naval Architect, Shipbuilder

Thomas Andrews was born in 1873 in County Down near Belfast, Ireland. His father was a member of the Privy Council of Ireland, which exercised executive power in conjunction with the governor. Young Andrews became fond of boats at an early age, and his friends nicknamed him “Admiral.” He attended The Royal Belfast Academical Institution, a progressive and ambitious grammar school where both young men and women received instruction in the natural sciences, classics, modern languages, English literature and medicine. When he was 16, he left school to become an apprentice at Harland & Wolff Shipyard.

The 5-year apprenticeship was exacting; apprentices were expected to become proficient in all aspects of shipyard work. They started their

workday at 6am and labored at every task. Andrews became well-liked among the shipyard's employees; his kindness, generosity and humility were well-known. After finishing his apprenticeship in Harland & Wolff's drawing shop at the age of 20, Andrews was entrusted with the construction duties of his first vessel, the small cross-channel ship *Mystic*, in 1893. His duties included supervising men in the various shops. The respect he had garnered as an apprentice, served him well. He was known as big-hearted, loved to exchange stories with the other men, and took the time to listen to their problems and concerns. These same attributes came to the fore on the terrible night of April 14, 1912.



Apprentice Thomas Andrews, standing second from right
Apprentice photo – Mrs. Thomas Andrews

In 1907, Andrews had begun work on the new Olympic class liners. The three ships were designed by Andrews along with William Pirrie, Alexander Carlisle, and Edward Wilding. These ships were to be the largest and safest ships at sea, and Andrews immersed himself in every detail, ensuring that all was in perfect working order. He wanted to make significant improvements to the original designs, insisting, for example, that modern davits be installed that could handle up to 48 lifeboats. (The davits were installed, but only 20 lifeboats.) He also wanted to improve survivability of the ships and suggested a double hull and watertight bulkheads that

extended higher in the hull. However, these suggestions were overruled. Ironically, they were incorporated into Titanic's sister ship, Olympic, when she was rebuilt after the disaster.

When Titanic collided with the iceberg, near midnight, Andrews was so absorbed in his work that he learned Titanic was damaged only when he received a message that he was needed by Captain Edward Smith. A quick tour was enough to tell Andrews that the ship had very little time to stay afloat, and he passed that unbelievable news to the captain. In the remaining hours of his life, Andrews went from lifeboat to lifeboat, urging women and children to board them; he searched staterooms for stragglers and made sure that the crew, especially the stewardesses who were looking after passengers, were wearing their lifejackets. He and his Guarantee Group of shipyard professionals did all they could to keep Titanic afloat by closing open portlights and assisting the engineers and deck crew.

The last moments of Thomas Andrews are unconfirmed. According to one steward, Andrews was standing alone in the first-class smoking room in the latter stages of the sinking; he did not respond to a question about saving himself. Others say he was last seen on the boat deck and leapt over the side as the stern reared up. Speculation as to his last moments is fruitless. What does seem to be an appropriate epitaph for Thomas Andrews is that he was a sincere, professional and compassionate man.

Sources:

"A Titanic Hero" Thomas Andrews, Shipbuilder by Shan F. Bullock 1912
A Night to Remember by Walter Lord 1955