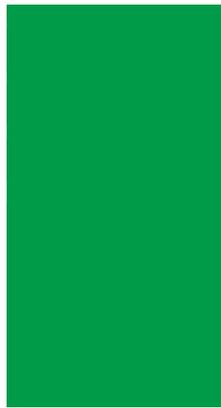


A QUIET SEA

RMS TITANIC



TURBULENT TIMES

TITANIC: TURBULENT TIMES

POLITICS AND RELIGION

In 1707, Great Britain and Scotland were joined by the Acts of Union and the Treaty of Union and “United into One Kingdom by the Name of Great Britain.” When, toward the end of the 18th century, Britain was engaged in fierce territorial competition with France and concerned that Ireland would align with France, the “United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland” was established. The Irish resented the merger and immediately tried to repeal the act.

A leading figure in returning Ireland to self-rule was Daniel O’Connell. A follower of the Enlightenment and staunch abolitionist, O’Connell—known as The Liberator—led the effort to establish joint representation of Ireland in Britain. Concurrently, he strived to maintain a mutually convenient relationship with England. He helped Catholics gain emancipation and earned a seat in the Houses of Parliament. Criticized for his compromises, O’Connell failed in his efforts to repeal the Act of Union and died during the Irish Famine in the mid-1840s. During the Young Irelander Rebellion in 1848, an attempt was made to end quarrels between Catholics and Protestants but with dubious results. A group of French women concerned with the conflict introduced the Irish tricolor as a symbol of Protestant, Catholic and Unity (Orange, Green and White, respectively).



Daniel O’Connell
Credit: Wikipedia



Flag of Ireland
Credit: Flag World

In 1870, the Home Government Association (superseded 12 years later by the Irish Parliamentary Party) was established to return home rule to Ireland yet maintain representation in the British Empire. The purpose was to keep Irish nationalists as members of Parliament in the House of Commons and gain a degree of legislative autonomy for Ireland. Liberal British ministries made several attempts to reconcile the situation, and a number of Home Rule Bills were passed. The 1905 Ulster Unionist Party, alarmed at being ruled by Dublin Catholics (and by extension, the Pope), wished to remain with Britain; it opposed the Home Rule Bills and formed the armed Ulster Volunteers in 1912. The situation was further complicated by the formation of opposing militias that supported Home Rule and perpetuated the sectarian violence. The reverberations were felt throughout Belfast, where Harland & Wolff was building the RMS Titanic.



Home Rule Unification
Credit: WorthPoint



No Home Rule
Credit: Irish Posters Word Press

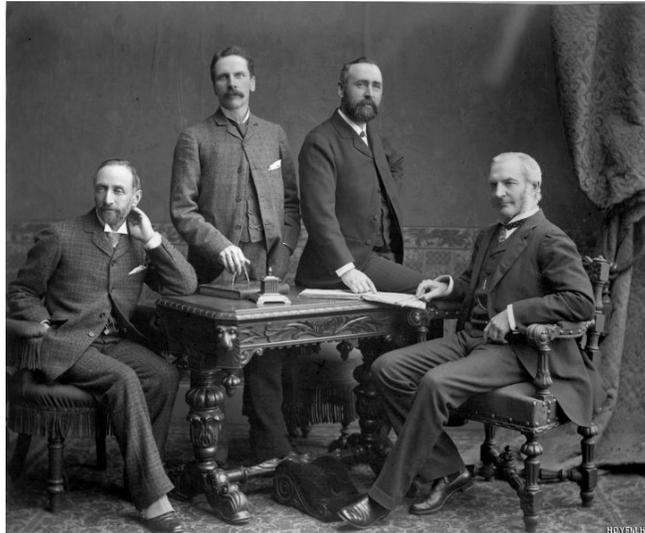
HARLAND & WOLFF

The United Kingdom that created Titanic dominated the world during the first decade of the 20th century. The wealthy island nation controlled 25% of the earth's land surface through colonization and military power, including areas tightly linked to Great Britain through trade. By 1912, the British Empire, under King Edward VII (known to encourage flamboyant displays of wealth), was the largest empire in history. To protect and maintain her vast holdings, Britain needed the largest, most powerful navy and foremost merchant marine. In 1912 alone, Britain launched 12 big-gunned dreadnought-type battleships for the Grand Fleet and still had the capacity to build several battleships for foreign powers. Harland & Wolff led the way in worldwide shipbuilding and contributed mightily to Britain's dominance of the seas.



Harland & Wolff 1911 workforce with Titanic under the gantry, far background
Credit: Wikipedia

Edward James Harland and Gustav Wilhelm Wolff established Harland & Wolff in 1861. Harland, previously employed as yard manager by shipbuilder Robert Hickson, bought Hickson's small firm in 1858. When Harland assumed control, he brought on Wolff, and they renamed the new business Harland & Wolff. They improved shipbuilding methods, increasing ship strength and reducing building times through the use of wrought iron. They also modified hull shapes to increase cargo capacity. Gustav Wolff's uncle, Gustav Christian Schwabe, was a wealthy financier with interests in a number of shipping companies, including White Star Line, resulting in Harland & Wolff becoming White Star's exclusive shipbuilder. Other partners' personal associations increased the number of contracts. William James Pirrie (Baron Pirrie) became Chairman of Harland & Wolff when Harland died in 1895.



Harland & Wolff partners (L to R: Gustav Wolff, W. H. Wilson, William J. Pirrie, Edward J. Harland)
Credit: National Museums NI

Pirrie, who was Presbyterian/Protestant, initially opposed Home Rule, which would allow the Irish Parliament in Dublin to tax businesses in Northern Ireland. But, by meshing business and politics, he came to see advantages in supporting the 1912 Third Home Rule Bill. Many saw this as a threat, as it raised the specter of Catholic control from Dublin. Pirrie's close British shipping associates, John and Owen Philipps, of the Royal Mail Line, wanted to do business with Harland & Wolff, and Pirrie saw J. P. Morgan's International Mercantile Marine (IMM) as a lucrative customer. The IMM was 60% American-owned, and Morgan's intent was to buy up as many North Atlantic steamship companies as possible, thereby creating a monopoly and a threat to other British shipping lines like Cunard.

Pirrie wanted the White Star shipbuilding contracts exclusively for Harland & Wolff. He acted as the liaison between the British government and IMM's purchase of White Star Line. This blatant act of self-interest, working with a majority American-owned company seeking control of the North Atlantic, and cooperation with Britain, caused an uproar. This alliance with the British government (Britain also wanted the political support) resulted in prosperity for Belfast and the surrounding counties, and Harland & Wolff completed twice the tonnage of their shipbuilding rivals. Because of his "turncoat" position, Pirrie became wildly unpopular and was pummeled with rotten eggs and assaulted in public. To alleviate some of the rage against him, Pirrie's unspoken policy was to limit the number of Catholics at Harland & Wolff and turn a blind eye to the abuse and threats visited upon them. (At the time Titanic was built, the shipyard employed about 15-20,000 workers, but only about 300 were Catholics, usually hired for the most menial positions.) Sectarian violence that punctuated the previous 50 years, was guaranteed to continue with Pirrie's silent consent.



Olympic (L) and Titanic at Harland & Wolff
Credit: Wiki Commons

TITANIC

Harland & Wolff's Protestant hierarchy hired family members. This included Pirrie's nephew, Thomas Andrews, managing director and head of the drafting department.



Harland & Wolff drafting shop
Credit: National Museum NI

Pirrie was closely involved with the construction of the new liners and was scheduled to travel on Titanic but was recuperating from prostate surgery and didn't make the trip. IMM founder J. P. Morgan also was scheduled to travel on Titanic, but cancelled for health reasons and a dispute with France over removing art pieces to America.



Lord Pirrie (L) and Captain Smith aboard Olympic in 1911
Credit: History by Day

Beginning in 1907, Andrews was absorbed with the initial design of a new class of giant passenger liner, the Olympic class. (Titanic was second ship of the class.) A Scot Presbyterian, he considered himself British. Catholics, on the other hand, considered themselves Irish. Unpretentious and wholly dedicated to his work, Andrews was respected in both Belfast and Dublin, something rare at the time. He was convinced that unity with Britain was important to Ireland but only if established upon mutual respect. He supported social reforms to improve living and working conditions and advocated for the state to provide workers with decent homes. Andrews was progressive in his dealings with labor problems at Harland & Wolff, encouraging honest relations and improved working conditions between the yard hierarchy and the workers. His even temper and friendly personality transcended sectarian feuds; he disavowed such prejudices. After he was lost on Titanic, his wife, Nellie Andrews, wrote that he always referred to those in the yard as “my friends.”



Thomas Andrews
Credit: Wiki commons



Violet Jessup
Credit: Wiki commons

EPILOGUE

Titanic's crew was mostly Protestant. One of the few Catholics was Stewardess Violet Jessup, who had a high opinion of Andrews. After the disaster, Protestants claimed credit for building Titanic, while blaming Catholics for the tragedy. Catholics considered Titanic a wholly Protestant debacle. Little is known of crew members' personal or religious relationships during Titanic's short life. Officers were mostly Anglican, with one, Second Officer Charles Lightoller, a confirmed Christian Scientist.

The eight priests and ministers crossing the Atlantic on Titanic's maiden voyage included a Methodist, three Catholics, a Lutheran, an Anglican, and two Baptists. Whatever differences existed meant nothing; all ministered to the faithful at the time of their death.

Sources: Wikipedia, Thomas Andrews; A Titanic Hero by Shan Bullock, 1912; BBC News; Irish Central; History Ireland Magazine; The Irish Times; Reuters; RTE Boston College Century Ireland; Schoolshistoryorg.UK; At Swim; Two Boys annotations by James O'Neill; Patriot Wood; National Museums NI; Harcourt; History Hub Ulster; Counterfire; Historia; Syracuse.com; Soul Surmise; America the Jesuit Review; Independent.ie Kevin Myers; Project Gutenberg ebook; Christians for Social Action