



THOMAS ANDREWS' *OLYMPIC* NOTES, 1911

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When the *Olympic* was making her successful maiden voyage in the summer of 1911, Thomas Andrews was aboard to record notes for possible improvements. Some of these would be applied to *Olympic* as she continued her run of great success in 1911, while others would be incorporated in time for the *Titanic's* completion by the following spring 1912. It is probable that many of these changes would have been born in mind and included in the specifications of *Britannic*.

There were reportedly three sets of copies of Andrews' notes taken on the *Olympic's* maiden voyage – a copy for the White Star Line, a copy for Harland & Wolff, and Thomas Andrews' personal copy. I was fortunate to come into possession of some of Andrews' notes in the summer of 2004 (courtesy of that 'nice guy from Texas !'). Some of them have been summarised before,¹ but to the best of my knowledge the full text has never been published either in article or book form. This page partially corrected that oversight when it was published in July 2005 and then its content appeared in the revised and expanded edition of

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The *'Olympic' Class Ships: Olympic, Titanic & Britannic* (History Press; May 2011), however a number of Andrews' recommendations were missing:

- Notes 1 to 4;
- Notes 21 to 56.

Update:

Work to reassemble the entirety of Andrews' notes is ongoing. This has included obtaining notes 1 to 4; 21 to 27; and 56. This leaves numbers 28 to 55 inclusive missing. (March 2021). If you are able to shed any light on this or are aware of the missing notes, please contact me through my site.

For the notes available below, the original spelling and grammar have broadly been retained, although there are a number of unreadable words. Andrews also had a habit of referring to the cane furniture onboard *Olympic* as 'caine' furniture. My particular thanks to Bruce Beveridge for his kind efforts in sending me his transcript. Several 'assumed' words are in capital letters, and some of my own comments are provided in **red**:

Thomas Andrews Notes:

5) In Liverpool when docking or undocking stern first, the Pilot is always on the Docking Bridge aft, think this practice should be carried out in Southampton .

6) Would suggest propeller notice boards being permanently fitted on outside of ship's side rails in way of after Docking bridge, as is the practice in other Company's Steamers. Thus saving the placing & stowing away of these boards every voyage with corresponding destruction to the painting and printing.

7) Propose ACQUIRING SOME additional Accomd. In officers' acc. As per plan for [unreadable]. And [unreadable]. Converting their present Accomd. into staterooms.

Note: *Olympic's* officers' quarters were extended during the 1912-13 refit, and additional first class cabins were provided at the after end of the officers' quarters deckhouse. Similarly, *Titanic's* officers' quarters were enlarged and improved over her sister. Andrews' notes reveal that the changes to *Olympic* and *Titanic* were already being considered as early as June 1911, as *Olympic* was making her maiden voyage, and not merely after several months' service.

8) Propose dispersing with 1st class stateroom C 144-146 placing the Chief Steward in this position & enlarging the Asst. Doctor's room.

9) The hat and cloak room on C deck 1st class entrance is not sufficiently used to warrant this loss of earning power space, would suggest substituting SAME to berth as staterooms with athwartship passage, as per plans fitting hooks for hats & cloaks across the bulkhead facing

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elevators on D deck.

10) Would propose fitting eleven additional four seated tables in 1st class restaurant as per plan, this room being short of table accommodation.

Note: Since *Olympic's á la carte* restaurant proved to be very popular, it was extended in 1912-13; *Titanic's* restaurant was likewise larger than her elder sister's when she was completed; and *Britannic's á la carte* restaurant was designed to be the largest onboard the three ships. It was expanded at the expense of losing the Café Parisian, which had proved so popular on both *Olympic* and *Titanic*.

11) A screen to be an improvement if fitted on the side of the restaurant/buffet SUPT entrance door so as to prevent passengers from seeing behind the buffet.

12) The two single serving doors P & S from the pantry to the 1st class saloon do not appear to be necessary for service and are better kept shut owing to noise. The space in way of these doors will provide accommodation for one additional four seated table P & S in the saloon.

Note: By August 1911, if not earlier, *Olympic's* first class dining saloon had been altered accordingly. Its seating capacity was increased from the original 532 seats to 540 seats, the first of several changes that occurred throughout her career.

13) The 1st class Reception Room being the most popular room in the 1st class passenger accommodation being more or less crowded after lunch & dinner also for afternoon tea 4.30

Below: Olympic's first class dining saloon ca. 1911. Thomas Andrews' suggestions on increasing seating capacity were implemented quickly. (Library of Congress)



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p.m. It was found necessary to bring up all the spare caine [sic] chairs from the baggage room to provide temporary seating accommodation, would strongly recommend additional permanent caine [sic] furniture being ordered. As smoking is allowed at all times in the Reception Room an exhaust fan drawing from the fore and after girder P & S as in the saloon.

Note: Andrews' observations as to the first class reception room's popularity were echoed by Leonard Peskett when he was onboard *Olympic* later in 1911. Even in summer 1911, it is known that there was a plan to enlarge the room by reducing the size of the first class entrance halls on either side of the grand staircase, and in this respect *Titanic's* reception room was improved over her sister's.

During her time at Harland & Wolff in October and November 1911, *Olympic's* reception room was enlarged accordingly; yet by 1928-29 the room's size was reduced slightly as the after bulkhead was moved forward nine feet to extend the first class dining saloon. The installation of a dance floor in the middle of the saloon reduced the seating capacity, and by extending the saloon a number of additional tables could be installed. Even in the late 1920s, *Olympic* was carrying first class passenger lists that compared well with those that she achieved at the height of her popularity (prior to the war and in the early 1920s). By the time of the 1932-33 refit, however, the slightly reduced size of the reception room was of little disadvantage due to the decline in passenger traffic owing to the depression.

14) Captain Smith strongly recommends protective windows with round bulls eye lights to be fitted in way of square windows on centre shelter navigating bridge as in *Adriatic* .

15) To prevent the excessive draught in the steward's stairway leading from 1st class pantry to working passage on E deck which is also used by the stewardess on E deck, suggest a fore & aft wood bulkhead with sliding doors be fitted at foot of stairs as shown on plan.

16) The numbering of the promenade dk. chairs to be altered in accordance with the terms on lithographic plans. H&W to enquire if any change was made on the numbering of the approved plan to which they were supposed to work.

17) Linoleum tiles not to be fitted in Captain's sitting room in which a full room carpet has been provided.

18) Sponge holders to be fitted in the private bathrooms on B and C decks where these have been omitted.

Note: These comments, in particular, are interesting because Bruce Ismay felt that cigar holders needed to be installed. It seems that cigar holders were not the

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only fittings that were absent in the private bathrooms that served the finest first class suites.

19) The mirrors in the wardrobe doors adjoining the entrance doors into inside staterooms on C deck to be dispensed with as when the entrance doors are left open on the deck anyone in the passage can see the occupant of the room dressing or undressing.

20) Back plates for electric reading lamps to be fitted over beds etc. in Suite Staterooms on B and C decks same as ordinary staterooms.

The following year, Andrews was onboard the *Titanic* to make similar notes for improvement. If anything, the new ship appeared to be performing even better than the *Olympic* the year before. The engines were performing well, she was making excellent time, and passengers' comments praised the new liner's luxury, safety and comfort. Even so, Andrews busied himself trying to improve the smallest of details. Shan Bullock writes: 'For more than a week he had been working at such pressure, that by the Friday evening [April 12th 1912] many saw how tired as well as sad he looked: but by the Sunday evening, when his ship was as perfect, so he said, as brains could make her, he was himself again.' Later that evening, *Titanic's* collision with an iceberg sealed the ship's fate, and that Andrews and two-thirds of the people onboard.

One Stewardess saw Andrews shortly after the collision and thought that he looked 'heartbroken.' Upon advising Captain Smith of the ship's situation, Andrews assisted with the evacuation. Bullock records a popular legend, writing that after 2 a.m. : 'an assistant steward saw him standing alone in the smoking room, his arms folded over his breast and the [life] belt lying on a table near him. The Steward asked him: "Aren't you going to have a try for it, Mr. Andrews?" He never answered or moved, "just stood like one stunned.'" There is no evidence that he tried to save himself.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bullock, Shan F. *Thomas Andrews: Shipbuilder*. London: Maunsel & Company Ltd.; 1912. Pages 64-73.

ENDNOTES

¹ Lepien, Ray. 'Westward Crossing.' *The Titanic Commutator* 2003; Issue 162: Pages 110-115. An outstanding article on *Olympic's* maiden voyage.