

HMHS *BRITANNIC*: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

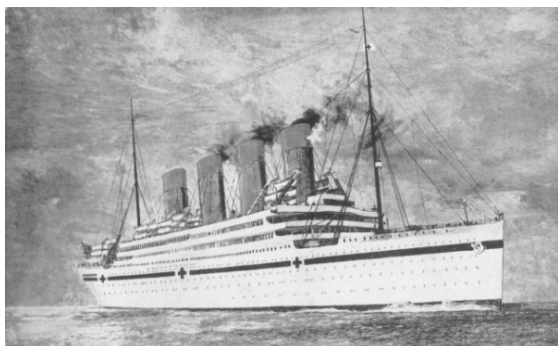
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Q: How long was *Britannic*?

A: Contrary to popular belief, *Britannic's* overall length (and her length between perpendiculars) was the same as her two sisters. Although the incorrect claim that her overall length was increased to 903 feet has appeared in various sources, perhaps this figure emerged from a contemporary newspaper article. The article stated, incorrectly, that she would be about twenty feet longer than her sisters and so, if their 882 feet 9 inches can be rounded up to 883 feet, then perhaps that is where this figure came from.

However, as early as the 1960s researchers such as Charles Dragonette had examined the ship's plans and concluded that she was the same length as her sisters. Similarly, all of Harland & Wolff's documentation is in agreement that she was the same length. Although it was not until 1910 that the White Star Line confirmed officially *Olympic's* dimensions, in *Britannic's* case there was even more mystery. At the time of her launch, her length was given as 'about 900 feet' overall. While the statement was entirely true, perhaps a result of

Mark Chirnside's Reception Room



Left: Britannic's service as a hospital ship, portrayed by a contemporary postcard. Although, as depicted in her hospital ship colours, her hull looks gleaming white, in reality it did not take long for the usual coal dust and dirt to spoil the clean look of the paintwork. (Author's Collection.)

the HAPAG ships (and Cunard's *Aquitania*) then entering service which were in excess of 900 feet long, it has misled some into believing the figure of 903 feet.

Q: What was *Britannic's* width?

A: When the order for Yard Number 433 was confirmed in June 1911, she was intended to be the same breadth as her two sisters: 92 feet (moulded) and 92 feet 6 inches (extreme). However, by October 1911, the ship's width was confirmed at eighteen inches greater: 93 feet 6 inches (moulded) and 94 feet (extreme). The greater width contributed to increasing her gross tonnage and displacement.

The difference between the two measurements – of moulded and extreme breadth – is that the extreme measurement includes the outer extremities of the hull plating, while the moulded measurement, in Thomas Andrews' words, measured from 'heel to heel of frame.' Therefore, while some confusion has arisen due to the use of both figures for *Britannic's* breadth, they are simply different methods of measurement. *Britannic* was not made wider due to the modifications after the *Titanic* disaster, for her increased breadth of eighteen inches had already been confirmed.

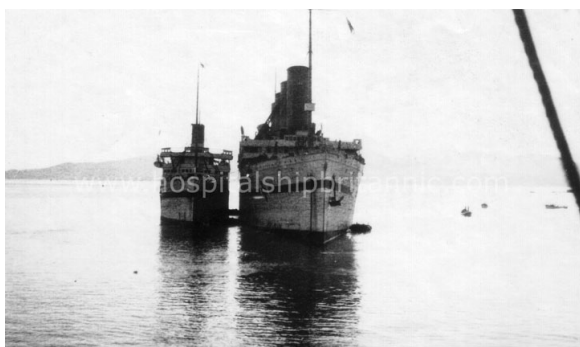
Q: Was the ship, as Yard Number 433, originally going to be called *Gigantic*?

A: The *Gigantic* dossier on this website directs readers to a comprehensive article examining all aspects of this debate, 'The Gigantic Question,' which was co-authored by Mark Chirnside and Paul Lee and published in the *Titanic* Historical Society journal in 2008. The article's origins date back to 2003, when Mark was compiling a complete listing of all published references to the third sister's name, and it came to include newly discovered documentation which surfaced in 2007. It is Mark's view that the name *Gigantic* may have been considered for the planned third sister at an early stage, but it seems unlikely that it would have been used once the order was confirmed formally. As an example of changing circumstances, she was the only one of the ships not to become the largest in the world when she entered service.

Q: As a hospital ship, was *Britannic's* identification number G.608 or G.618?

A: The answer is both. The question surfaced after the publication of *The 'Olympic' Class Ships: Olympic, Titanic & Britannic* in October 2004. On the back cover, a photo taken early in

HMHS *Britannic* FAQ



Top: A photo of Britannic showing her original number, G.608. (Photo courtesy J&C McCutcheon collection/The 'Olympic' Class Ships: Olympic, Titanic & Britannic by Mark Chirnside.) Above left: This photo, taken later in the ship's career, shows the ship at Mudros. An enlargement (above right) shows that her transport identification number had changed to G.618. (Michail Michailakis Collection, Courtesy J. Kent Layton)

Britannic's career showed clearly the number 'G.608' on her bridge front, which contradicted documentary evidence that her number was assigned as 'G.618.' (It did, however, support Captain Bartlett's report into the ship's loss, which gave the number 'G.608' and had been regarded as a simple mistake.) In light of the photographic evidence, it seemed clear that the number 'G.608' was assigned to *Britannic* and displayed; however, in another twist a photograph taken later in *Britannic's* career, October 1916, came into researcher Michail Michailakis' possession later in 2005. This photograph showed the number 'G.618' on the bridge front. (Incidentally, sometimes the number is written with a full stop after the G; sometimes without one. The number was displayed with a full stop on the bridge front.)

In a nutshell, the available evidence indicates that *Britannic* used the number 'G.608' earlier in her career, as verified by the photograph taken in early 1916, and then the number 'G.618' later in her career, as verified by the later photograph from October 1916. It would seem plausible that this change occurred by the time she returned to service after her lay up in the summer of 1916, however the exact date of the change has not been determined, nor has the reason for it. *HMHS Britannic: A Mystery of Numbers* (an article published in the *Titanic Historical Society* journal in 2008) examines all the relevant information, and it will eventually be made available online.