



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE *GERMANIC/HOMERIC?*

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The first White Star liner *Germanic* (1875) had left the company's fleet by the time *Titanic* was completed, and so the name was available to use for another liner once again: in the same way that the company had reused the name *Oceanic* for their beautiful liner of 1899. It is asserted sometimes that the second *Germanic* was intended as a replacement for *Titanic*, but this was not the case.¹ What we do know is that she was intended, instead, as a new vessel for the company's secondary Liverpool to New York service, as the IMM annual report for 1913 explained:

Your directors have authorised the construction of a steamer of about 33,600 tons and 19 knots speed for the New York-Liverpool service of the White Star

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Line, to be named *Germanic*, and to be of the *Adriatic* type, with such alterations and improvements as experience has suggested and as are made possible by her greater size. It is expected the *Germanic* will be completed in time to enter the service in 1916, and that she will be an exceedingly attractive steamer.²

Further confirmation came from Harold Sanderson in June 1914. Sanderson, by that time the company's chairman and managing director, explained that the new steamer would be about 746 feet in overall length: a 'larger ship than *Adriatic* but would be smaller than the *Olympic*'. We also know that the vessel was assigned the yard number 470 by Harland & Wolff, indicating she was ordered after *Britannic* (yard number 433), and with a length between perpendiculars of 720 feet, a breadth of 88 feet, and propelling machinery consisting of triple expansion reciprocating engines working in conjunction with a low pressure steam turbine driving the central propeller.

While significantly smaller than the 'Olympic' class ships, she was nonetheless expected to have a greater gross tonnage than *Lusitania* and *Mauretania*. *Adriatic* was already an enlarged and improved version of her sister ships, introducing features such as a gymnasium, plunge bath and Turkish Bath establishment, and *Germanic* would undoubtedly have seen



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Figure 1 (below left) and Figure 2 (below): Two images, among those submitted by Harland & Wolff, with 'SS no. 470 on No. 1 slip, 19/9/1917' written on the reverse. There is a problem with that caption, because Germanic/Homeric was not laid down on that slipway at all; it is known that she was laid down, on both occasions, on slipway number 3. Her keel was laid on 9 July 1914, then subsequently dismantled; it was re-laid on 27 May 1916; work was stopped on 3 April 1917; and dismantling began on 30 August 1917. Another image in the file bears the familiar designation of Robert Welch (1859-1936): 'H2123. R. W.' When we look at the numerical sequences, we know that photo 'H2149. R. W.' was taken on 3 July 1914 and showed one of Britannic's funnels 'leaving shop on rail buggies towed by steam crane'. Although that particular photo was taken a few days before Germanic/Homeric's keel was laid the first time, even though it was twenty-six numbers later, it does tend to raise the possibility that the other images were actually from 1914 and not 1917. (Courtesy the National Archives of the United Kingdom)

Update: It now appears the images do, in fact, date from September 1917. The slipways were renumbered towards the end of the war. On the basis of the pre-war numbering scheme, No. 1 slip was the easternmost slipway in the North Yard and the remaining slips under the Arrol Gantry were numbered 2 and 3, with the third to the westward. However, during the war, the numbering scheme of these slipways was reversed so that the original No. 3 slipway was renumbered as No. 1 and the original No. 1 slipway was renumbered as No. 3. (This update follows information received from Ralph Currell, October 2019.)



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further improvements to her accommodation. It would be logical to suppose that her first class accommodation would have included greater private bathrooms in first class and even finer staterooms, as well as a larger swimming pool than *Adriatic's* mere 'plunge bath' – perhaps like that on board *Britannic*.

The ship's keel was laid on 9 July 1914 but, with the outbreak of war, the name *Germanic* was hardly suitable. The indications are that she was renamed *Homeric* and she was among a number of steamers listed as 'under construction' as at 31 December 1915. Payments against her account of £103,041 14s 5d were listed – quite substantial and amounting to more than a sixth of the entire cost of *Celtic* (1901).

Following the war, IMM, the White Star Line, and Harland & Wolff went to the War Compensation Court:

The claim relates to two steamships identified as No. 469³ and No. 470 which were being built for the claimants in 1914 by Messrs. Harland & Wolff upon two slips in their shipbuilding yard in Belfast. They were being built under a running agreement dated the 4 February 1902 under which Messrs. Harland & Wolff had built several large ships for the claimants between 1902 and 1914. The agreement was between Messrs. Harland & Wolff and J. P. Morgan and Company of New York, the well known bankers and financiers, and was made in consideration of the formation of the 'Parent' Company [IMM]. The 'Parent' Company gave orders for the building of both ships and allocated the second of them, No. 470, to the White Star Line Company, and in respect of No. 470 the payments to the builders were made, as the ship progressed, by the latter company.

The claimants complain that, when these two ships had reached a certain stage in the progress of building, the Admiralty obliged the builders to dismantle them in order to make room for government work – in the case of No. 470 the ship was dismantled twice. They claim £104,197 being the cost of work and materials thrown away and the cost of dismantling after deducting the amounts realised by sale of materials...

The two ships were being built under the usual understanding with Harland & Wolff, including a 'commission on the whole as the builders' profit' which was 'to be reckoned at five per cent' on the ships and their machinery:

Under the terms of this agreement these two vessels were laid down in 1914[:] No. 469 in March on slip No. 2 and No. 470 in July on slip No. 3. The building progressed until November 1914 when the condition of the vessels respectively was as follows... - of No. 469 the keel and tank centre plating had been erected and hydraulically riveted; the vessel had been framed to the height of the double

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bottom; the tank sides had been plated and almost entirely riveted; and the tank top had been half plated; the stern posts and boss arms castings has been erected - £80,000 had been paid...

No. 470 had not progressed so far – she had her keel and centre plate riveted, and was framed to the height of the double bottom. The cost down to November was about £40,000 of which £35,000 was for cost of materials, and two payments had been made, £25,000 in October and £25,000 in November [for] a total of £50,000. The ship [recte: slip] on which 470 was being built (slip 3) was released in May 1916, but after the keel had been re-laid and work had proceeded for about twelve months 470 had to be again dismantled in September 1917 by order of the Deputy Controller of Auxiliary Shipping. In respect of this second building 470 had cost £35,000 and the dismantling cost £8,000.

Plates – marked with each ship's yard number – were 'delivered from the rolling mills'. 'All materials were procured and purchased and paid for by Messrs. Harland & Wolff from outside, except the rivets which were supplied out of their own stores', and immediately charged to the White Star Line's account. The understanding with Harland & Wolff ensured that the builder had 'no motive to resort to cheap or inferior materials or work. They were given carte blanche, within the limits of reason and of bona fides, to procure the best materials and workmanship; and the purchasers, who were closely allied in business with the builders, seem to have been justified in regarding themselves as safe in dispensing with supervision or tests'. The claim for compensation succeeded, with compensation being paid for both vessels in the mid 1920s.

The company did eventually have a liner called *Homeric*, but she was not the ship conceived before the war and ordered for the Liverpool to New York service. Instead, she was a German vessel, transferred as war reparations, renamed and employed on the Southampton to New York express service from February 1922. Ironically, her size and speed were similar to the plans for *Germanic/Homeric* in 1913, and she was arguably more suited to the Liverpool service. The war disrupted the company's longer term planning, but it is interesting to ponder the career of 'Yard Number 470' if she had been completed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ENDNOTES

¹ See 'Appendix Nine – *Germanic: Titanic's Replacement?*' in: Chirnside, Mark. *The 'Olympic' Class Ships: Olympic, Titanic & Britannic* (History Press; 2011). Pages 353-54. The appendix

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examines in detail the issue of whether the new ship was intended as a replacement for *Titanic*, concluding that she was not, and includes much of the direct source material upon which this article is based.

² 'Eleventh Annual Report of the International Mercantile Marine Company, for the Fiscal Year Ended December 31st 1913'. Office of the International Mercantile Marine Co., 51 Newark Street, Hoboken, N.J. [New Jersey]; June 1913. New York Public Library. The document, which has been referenced by researchers such as Mark Baber, is very clear on this point. It is unfortunate that this documentation is sometimes overlooked.

³ Yard Number 469 was the steamer *Nederland*, being constructed for the Red Star Line. Although she was not a White Star liner, nonetheless she was intended for the wider IMM fleet.